



The Bancroft Players

Newsletter
February 2018



Rory Reynolds

Artistic Director's blog

A grand year almost behind us, a humdinger ahead

Plus ça change! Somewhere in the 1970s it was all the rage for directors to insist the cast learned their lines BEFORE they started rehearsals - but somewhere in the privatised 80s and the Major-Blair 90s it all got lost.

Well, it's back again! And do you know what? It makes directing a breeze and frees the actors to learn their character unencumbered by text. Yeah, interesting that.

February is traditionally the month the play selection committee meets to ponder its great - er - ponderings. I think we have a cracking season in prospect. No decisions yet, but there are some real humdingers in the shortlist. More next month.

Not that this season has been any slouch - well done to all our great directors and actors and our backstage, technical and front-of-house heroes for keeping the show on the road, the wheels on the wagon and any other transport-based metaphor.

It's been a grand year by any measure - and, of course, we're only in February so we've got a way to go yet.

Plans are afoot to make changes to the fabric of the theatre.

Such changes go subtly on all the time of course - the bar is in its *n*th iteration, for instance. But these will be more noticeable adaptations to make the stage areas and the use of existing space much

more user-friendly. Keep an eye out for more news in future editions.

Remember that auditions for *Quartet* happen shortly, and those for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are in March. A bit nervous about auditioning? Hey, don't be. We're ever so friendly and we want to cast you.

Just sign out a book from behind the Box Office, note the audition dates and turn up. We've had some great new actors join our corps de theatre in the last couple of years and some of our best actors started with tiny parts. You'll soon get the hang of it - go on, give it a go!

Hope to see you all soon.

Rory

Cameron Fraser and Heather Stuckey in 'Sex With a Stranger', directed by Cliff Francis in the Studio.

COMING SOON:

Queen Mother Theatre

Whats



To Catch a Unicorn
(BP Juniors)
7-9 February,
Richard Whitmore Studio



A View From The Bridge
26 February - 3 March,
Main Theatre

January to July

The QMT

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The Richard Whitmore STUDIO

Queen Mother Theatre, Woodside, Hitchin, SG4 9SP. 01462 434875, box office 01462 455166. Reg charity no: 283439.

Audition notice

Main Theatre

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The QMT summer production is normally a show for allcomers. We like to field a large cast and this year it is a co-production between The Bancroft Players and our famous Big Spirit Youth Theatre.

If you've always wanted to work with Big Spirit, and see how they do things, this is a great opportunity. Big Spirit, for their part, always love working with the adult society and these co-productions are always very joyous affairs.

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare of course needs no introduction - it's by far The Bard's funniest and most summery piece of work. The show will take place in the QMT as The Dell is not open to us. However, we will bring the warmth of a lovely summer evening into the Theatre with a very special and magical production.

This show will be co-directed by actress Carlyss Peer who has appeared in a number of classic plays at the Globe Theatre in London (including as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) as well as TV series and West End shows. This is a unique opportunity to work with a Shakespeare expert who will also offer workshops about performing and speaking Shakespearean text.

Come along and join in the fun of the auditions - we are making it a little event in its own right in keeping with the play.

By: William Shakespeare, directed by Carlyss Peer & Rory Reynolds
Auditions: Mon 12 & Wed 14 Mar

Performances: July 2-7
Rehearsals: Mon and Wed
Scripts: Available behind Box Office

THE ROLES:

Lovers

Lysander: A lover
Demetrius: A lover
Hermia: Egeus' daughter
Helena: Her friend

Court

Egeus: An old courtier
Theseus: Duke of Athens
Hippolyta: Betrothed to Theseus
Philostrate: Master of Court Revels and other member of the court

The 'Mechanicals'

Nick Bottom: A weaver
Peter Quince: A carpenter
Francis Flute: A bellows-mender
Robin Starveling: A tailor
Tom Snout: A tinker
Snug: A joiner

The Fairy Folk

Puck
Oberon
Titania
Fairies: Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed and other members of the fairy band

Auditions

Unfortunately we are having to replace *The One* in our schedule. The auditions in last month's newsletter will therefore not happen. The new play for the June slot will be announced very shortly.

Audition reminder

Quartet

The setting is a retirement home for musicians. Three elderly former opera-singers, who often worked together, are sitting out on the terrace. Reginald is quietly reading a serious book, but Wilfred is chuckling about sex as he regards Cissy, who is lying back and listening to music through her headphones. They are about to be joined by newcomer Jean, who was a major star in her day and to whom Reginald was once unhappily married. Is there any chance that these four will ever sing together again?

A gala concert is to take place at the home to celebrate Verdi's birthday. Three of the four are keen to recreate the third act quartet "Bella figlia dell'amore" from *Rigoletto*. One is not. But the play eventually moves to an uncertain conclusion when they don costumes and lip-synch to their own retro recording.

Harwood took his inspiration from a documentary about Verdi called *Tosca's Kiss*. In the last years of his life the composer built a mansion for himself and stipulated in his will that, when he died, it should be used to provide a place to live for all the opera singers who had once played La Scala, and for the musicians living on hard times - as so frequently happens.

If you have any questions please get in touch either via Facebook Messenger or email. I look forward to seeing you at auditions in February.

Main Theatre

THE ROLES:

Playing ages all over 65:

Wilf: Confident, cheeky. A bit of a ladies' man!

Reginald: More timid, particular in his manner. A little OCD.

Cissy: Forgetful, suffers from dementia.

Jean: Typical leading lady. Confident, bolshie - but with a hidden insecurity from having fallen on hard times.

THE DETAILS:

By: Ronald Harwood, directed by Elliott Bunker

Auditions: Tue 6 & Thu 8 Feb, 8pm

Performances: 15 - 20 May

Rehearsals: Tue & Thur

Further information: Contact Elliott via Facebook Messenger or elliottbunker@outlook.com.

Elliott

'A View From the Bridge': a classic family tragedy

Arthur Miller's powerful tale of love and betrayal in Brooklyn's Italian-American community is our next Main Theatre production. Here, director Edith Pratt explains what she loves about Miller's writing, while Helen Ashworth looks at the story behind the play.

“I like the way Miller writes and the relationships he creates,” says *A View From the Bridge* director Edith Pratt. “This play in particular is a good example because the relationships between the three main characters - Eddie, Beatrice and their niece Catherine - are quite complex.”

In the play, longshoreman Eddie Carbone and his wife Beatrice have raised their orphaned niece as if she were their own daughter. But with Catherine on the brink of womanhood and a handsome young illegal immigrant hidden in their apartment, Eddie must face some difficult truths.

Edith said: “It’s true what the family lawyer Alfieri says: you have a daughter or niece and you love them, but there comes a line you don’t cross. Eddie doesn’t realise he’s crossed it, but he has. He only sees it when Rodolpho comes onto the scene and he realises he will lose her. It’s Eddie’s inner conflict that causes all the trouble. He can’t understand why he feels the



Catherine (Lauren Tillbrook) only has eyes for Rodolpho (Seb Creasey) as he talks to Beatrice (Sian Spencer) and Marco (Matt Gray).

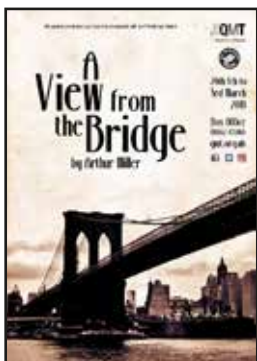
way he does. He tries to fight it. It’s a struggle and it gets worse.”

She sees family relationships as the key theme running across Miller’s work: “I like the construction of his plays and how they explore the dynamics of the relationships. I also directed *All My Sons* and, again, that was relationships within the family - with the son, and with the son that was left because the other one died.

“That’s partly why I chose not to use a box set, I just want it to be the emotions in an open space, so the audience is concentrating on that and not on the set. They are able just to see this family with all its good points and bad points.”

Although the play tackles the topical subject of immigration, she was not tempted to highlight that aspect: “I don’t know that it’s got a message – it’s not actually preachy, saying ‘we should be doing this or that’, because New York has always had immigrants, illegal or otherwise. It’s set in the 1950s but it could be today.

“I could have given it a modern setting and it would have made no difference because it’s like a Shakespearean tragedy – it’s got the same things. Betrayal. Tragedy. Love. It’s a complete and utter tragedy, and it doesn’t have to be like that. Everyone’s love and loyalties are tested, not just those of Eddie, Beatrice and Catherine.”



**'A View From the Bridge',
26 February to 3
March, Main Theatre.
Tickets from qmt.org.uk
or the Box Office.**

The background to 'A View From the Bridge'

A View From the Bridge is set in Red Hook, part of Brooklyn, in the early 1950s. Then one of America’s busiest ports, it was a dangerous place ruled by the Mob and described by one character as “the slum that faces the bay on the seaward side of Brooklyn Bridge”.

None of the action in the play takes place on the bridge, which connects Brooklyn with Manhattan across the East River, but it acts as a symbol - a promise of a better life on the other side in wealthy Manhattan.

By the time the play is set, Italian immigration to America had been going on for almost 100 years. Between 1880 and 1920 an estimated 4 million Italians, mainly from Sicily and the south, arrived in the United States, encouraged by government in order to fill shortages in manual labour following the Civil War.

After World War 2, conditions were difficult in Italy and the economy was slow to recover especially in the south which was far less industrialised, so many young men decided to try their luck in wealthy America.

Continues on back page

'I Don't Like Mondays': strong feelings and mutual support as Big Spirit tackle a tough topic

Big Spirit Youth Theatre's next show is a brand new play that explores the contemporary topic of school shootings. Here, Seb Creasey explains how the cast are looking out for each other's wellbeing as they work with the difficult material, while some of his colleagues share why they feel so strongly about the topic.



'I Don't Like Mondays' runs in the Main Theatre from April 25 to 28. Tickets available at the Box Office or from qmt.org.uk.

The newest Big Spirit show is April's *I Don't Like Mondays* by Jack Stacey, a hard-hitting piece of theatre about the contemporary issue of school shootings in America.

The subject has great current relevance, so it is important to treat it with respect - but it's also vital to make sure everyone in the production is doing well from an emotional standpoint. The rehearsals can be emotionally draining, not only due to the subject matter but also because many of us in the production are passionate about the theme and want people to leave the theatre with a different outlook.

A subject as horrific and yet unchanging as school shootings is something a lot of our members feel strongly about, and we often get emotional just thinking or talking about it. One of our top priorities for the piece is therefore to make people think about it.

The play is written in a verbatim style, using extracts from genuine interviews with survivors of the Columbine High School shooting as well as others affected by the subject. This writing, while effective in giving the play a certain realism, can really start to affect the actors as they think about their characters, or about what they themselves might do in a situation like that in the play.

Because of this, it's important for us to stay healthy during the rehearsals and production, while still being respectful of the source material and subject matter.

We achieve this by separation. We attempt to keep rehearsals and character at the theatre and - apart from character research - ourselves at home. This does help but, as the play is so heavy, we still need to look after each other.

Luckily at Big Spirit we are all very close and treat each other like a family, so we can be there for each other if needed. This is especially important for me as I have the difficult role of the shooter himself, so the separation between character and actor needs to be clear. Thanks to my friends it is easy to do.

We plan for the show to pull no punches and to be something that changes the audience, so be sure to come and see *I Don't Like Mondays* as it will be something fresh, new and - most importantly - relevant.

Georgia Head

There were 11 school shootings in just the first 24 days of January. We didn't hear about any of them - they became commonplace. A small amount of ignorant people appear blind to these atrocities and continue to give their families presents of guns. Imagine giving your 15-year-old daughter a murder weapon as her birthday present. Laws must change - there can be no counter-argument to saving thousands of children's lives.

Ewan Morris

Shootings in America have become normalised. There's an argument that guns don't kill people, people kill people, but it's much easier to commit mass murder with a semi-automatic rifle than with a knife. When mass shootings happened in countries such as the UK, Germany and Australia, gun laws were put in place and nothing like it occurred again - so this is the obvious solution for America's problem.

Isabel Lawther

In my lifetime I can recall just one mass shooting in the UK: Cumbria in 2010. The USA, over the same period, has seen 13 of its 20 most deadly shootings - four of them in a school or college. The media is quick to blame violent films or games, but the UK has the exact same things. The difference is that we don't have easy access to firearms. Restrictions would not solve the problem instantly - but they would be a good start.

Emma Fisher

People in America live in fear, encouraged by the media's list of tragedies as reporters move from one crime scene to another. They try to control their fear by owning guns which, as an outsider, only seems to create more fear. Despite precautions to stop the shootings they have failed to take away the one thing that actually enables people to commit these unthinkable events. This irony is so hard to understand.

Emily Ilott

It's incredible that right wing America can call itself 'Pro-Life' but still condone the mass slaughter that is an inevitability of its gun laws - hypocrisy at its finest.

What works for me... MONOLOGUES

The BPs Newsletter's new series 'What Works for Me' asks QMT performers to share some of the techniques they find useful. This month, the cast and director of 'The Effect' give their take on how to prepare for and deliver monologues.

Sam Powell (director)

I learn them in a cumulative way, literally one line and then a second. It takes me forever. I just travel the journey when I'm learning it so, if I struggle, I can think 'what am I doing here, I'm standing at a gate' and the words come. I want it to be absolutely perfect but, unlike a scene with other people, if everything goes pear-shaped you can use your initiative to pass on the baton and, in some ways, that's quite enjoyable.



Joe Fallowell

I do enjoy monologues - I prefer them to dialogue. I learn key points I have to hit, and the end line, and I feel free to play around with the rest, which I'm sure a lot of playwrights wouldn't like. For an audition the approach is different because directors are looking for accuracy and also, obviously, at that point you haven't got the meaning as fully developed as you will later on. I don't really see delivering a monologue to an audience as very different to regular dialogue, except that in theory they are hanging on your every word, which is nice.



Hannah Wilce

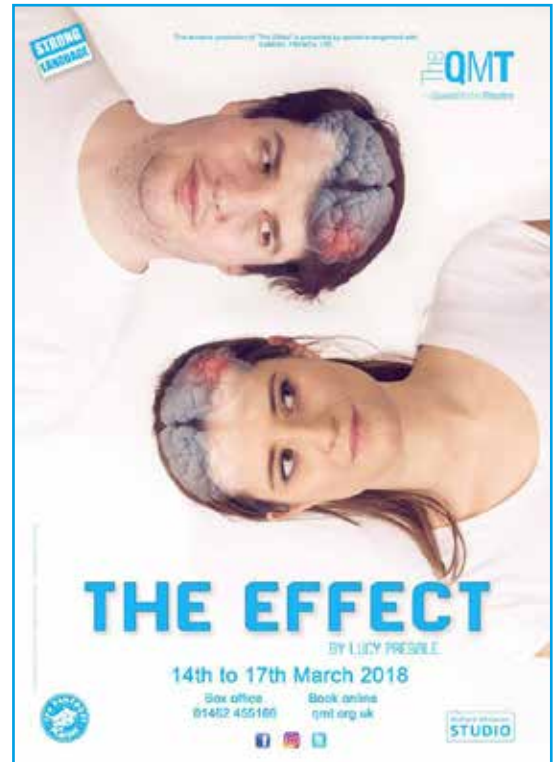
Auditions are more difficult because you've not had any direction - when you perform, you have a long time to get to know the character so words or sentences that looked strange suddenly make sense. It's also much scarier to be in front of two people who decide whether or not you get to be in a show rather than a theatre full of people who have paid to be there. For performing, just think about what you're saying and why you're saying it. People in real life don't normally speak uninterrupted for that long, so you take it slowly and think about what it's meant to mean, because every line should be in there for a reason.

Doug Brooker

Usually monologues have their own narrative flow so, if you put aside the volume of text, they can be easier to learn. I break them down into paragraphs, because each will cover a topic and hopefully have a narrative sense - like in *The Weir*, where they were stories. The one late in *Godot* was pretty bloody bonkers. They can be easier than the general run of the script as you only have to learn your own lines and you dictate the pace. You're on your own with an audience and just have to worry about keeping it interesting for them. In *The Effect* my character is a public speaker and has to keep the audience engaged, so he's got a couple of gimmicks and it's quite light-hearted.

Alison Hudson

If you are on your own delivering the lines to nobody, it means either the audience is hearing what you're thinking, or you're mad. You're either talking to yourself or thinking, so you internalise the way you're saying it rather than externalise it. When you talk to someone you look for how they feel about what you say, but when you talk to yourself it's to see how you feel - you're not trying to influence how someone else feels, you're trying to influence how you feel. In *The Effect*, I'm in the process of having a breakdown so I'm internalising feelings.



'The Effect' will be in The Studio, March 14-17. Tickets from the Box Office or qmt.org.uk.

'A View From the Bridge': the background. Continued from page three.

However, by the mid 20th century the US wasn't quite so welcoming to immigrants. Immigration laws set quotas for different nationalities, meaning that for many the only way to enter was illegally. As a result a thriving trade developed, with the Mafia involved in both countries. The immigrants had to pay to get a place on an America-bound ship, with the captain and crew taking a cut, while corrupt dockyard owners were able to get cheap labour, at least until the illegal immigrants had paid for their passage.

The impetus for *A View From the Bridge* came indirectly from a story that Miller heard in the 1940s, when he was actually working in the Brooklyn shipyards, concerning the death of Pete Panto, a longshoreman murdered for challenging corrupt union leadership. During his research into Panto's fate, Miller heard another story, about a Brooklyn longshoreman who had reported two brothers, his own relatives, to the Immigration Bureau. The brothers were illegal immigrants and he was sheltering them, but one became engaged to his niece. The community turned against the man who had broken a code of honour and it was rumoured that he had been killed by one of the brothers. In 1955 Miller returned to the story with the play *A View From the Bridge*.

Meanwhile, Miller collaborated with Elia Kazan to produce a screenplay called *The Hook*, based on Panto's story. The screenplay didn't get written though, because the House Un-American Activities Committee under Senator Joe McCarthy pressured Columbia Pictures to turn the evil Mob on the docks into communists. Miller refused, as he also, in due course, refused to testify to the committee. Kazan however co-operated, causing a falling out between the two friends. *The Hook* eventually became the film *On the Waterfront*, starring Marlon Brando. It is suggested that both the film and the play represent Miller's and Kazan's riposte to each other. In *A View From the Bridge* Eddie Carbone is reviled for reporting Rudolpho and Marco, while in *On the Waterfront* Brando's character is viewed as a hero for naming names.

Helen Ashworth

Students help QMT with the art of puppet-making

Art Students from North Herts College have been doing work experience at the QMT in the past week, helping to create props for the Junior BP's production of *To Catch a Unicorn*.

Yasmin Lee and Elliot Lidgey are pictured working on the head of Liz Boa, the snakey star of the show. Elliot was able to bring some expert knowledge to the job as he actually owns a boa constrictor. Liz will be operated by four actors, much like a Chinese dragon and, although she's pink, we're told she's pure evil!

See the March newsletter for a picture of Liz in action - or come to the show, which runs in The Studio from February 7-9.



Do you know anyone who might be interested in getting involved at the QMT? Then why not bring them along to our 'New Members Evening' for an informal chat and tour of the theatre. Monday February 19 2018, meeting in the foyer at 8pm.

Get involved
@QMT
Front of House
Back Stage
Technical
Wardrobe
Set Building
Box Office
Bar

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Audition: Quartet
February 6 & 8

To Catch a Unicorn
(BP Juniors,
Richard Whitmore Studio)
February 7-9

New Members' Evening
8pm, February 19

Playwriting Group
7.30pm, February 27

A View From the Bridge
(Main Theatre)
Feb 26 - Mar 3

**Audition: A Midsummer
Night's Dream**
March 12 & 14

The Effect
(Richard Whitmore Studio)
March 14-17

Bancroft Players' 200 Club

In considerable haste, to meet the 15th of the month deadline - except it is the 18th as I write this! Congratulations to our January winners. *Paula Downes*

January Winners
£25: Mike Mackenzie
£20: Sue C Mason
£15: Brian Seal
£10: Ann Hudson

Newsletter: Last date for copy

Items for publication should be submitted to the editors at newsletterqmt@live.com no later than the 15th of the month. We aim to publish the next issue by the 26th of the month.