

# The Bancroft Players

Newsletter  
February 2019



*Doug Brooker and Kelsey Duffy in Vivien Kerr's production of 'Beacons' by Tabitha Mortiboy, which brought the cliffs of Beachy Head to The Studio. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.*

## Auditions

*We Happy Few*  
6 February

*Anne Boleyn*  
5 & 7 March

*Bea*  
25 & 27 March

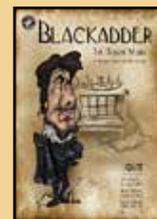
## 2019-20 season revealed

Turn to p3 to see what the Bancroft Players have planned for the Main House and Studio - and start planning your ticket-buying & auditions now!

Tickets on sale now at [www.qmt.org.uk](http://www.qmt.org.uk) for:



*Drums of Mbongo*  
6-8 February



*Blackadder*  
25 February - 2 March



*Constellations*  
13-16 March

The QMT



The Richard Whitmore  
STUDIO

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

# Why shaking everything up is a cunning plan

You may have heard - there's been a bit of a hoo-hah about the re-staging of *Les Miserables* recently.

Yes apparently the original director, Trevor Nunn is a bit pissed off (his words not mine) that Cameron Mackintosh, the producer, is ditching the original RSC staging after 25 years and going for what has been dubbed 'the touring version' instead.

A brave move, some may say - after all *Les Mis* in its traditional format has been packing 'em in and is the longest running musical ever in both London and Broadway.

Got to hand to Cameron M though - his attitude is 'it's all got a bit stale'... So of course, he gives the thing a brisk make-over.

Bad news for the RSC (no more production royalties which have given

them some £25m over the last quarter of a century) but probably good news for the public.

I mention this as we are announcing the QMT's new season in this issue of your favourite newsletter. There's some well-loved shows on the list but I think what we're hoping for is exciting new productions rather than re-stagings of what the National Theatre (or whoever) did with it when they put it on.

If you love theatre then I can heartily recommend *Home I'm Darling* at the Duke of York's until the end of February. It's the new play by Laura Wade about a husband and wife who live 'the 1950s life' until the modern world comes bustling in.

There were many scenes and a number of set changes to be done which were all accomplished by

the actors themselves who jived their way through it. Brilliant! It's often just a small thing that elevates something from the ordinaire to the extraordinaire.

I hope you're already clutching your tickets to *Blackadder* - they're going fast. I've personally been along to every single rehearsal for reasons I won't go into and it looks great.

If you don't laugh yourself silly then - well - you're probably silly enough all ready.

And just before I bid you cheerio - don't forget the casting for *Anne Boleyn* and *Bea* which start next month.

So get your scripts from the Theatre, read avidly and then come along and have fun auditioning. You know it makes sense.

Rory

## Audition notice

### Bea

*"A cunningly constructed play. For a show about death and the limits of compassion, Bea is Surprisingly joyous. At times it is killingly funny..." Lyn Gardner, The Guardian*

*"Direct and frank... unlike any other play I've seen this year, and beautifully played" Michael Coveney, Whatsonstage.com*

An exploration of the expanse and limits of our capacity to understand one another. Bea is lively, naughty and full of life. When she asks something of her mother that no parent would want to be asked, and of her only friend Not Gay Ray, they are both forced to challenge the boundaries of their own compassion.

In a play about relationships, empathy and humanity. the most important thing is the relationships between the characters and the way the actors click and connect on stage. The dynamic between the three actors needs to be strong, with spark and nuance throughout will be needed between the bright, brilliant, but physically paralysed Bea, her carer, and best friend, the Northern Irish Not Gay Ray, as well as Bea's standoffish and realistic barrister mother Catherine. Bea and Not Gay Ray will need to be physically fit and able to jump, lift with physical theatre.

The play will be performed on a thrust stage, much like that used in the recently performed *Beacons* in January, so the audience will see the actors from three sides of the stage, and the actors can interact fully with them. While we never leave Bea's room, she is shown internally - so, although physically paralysed, she will be required to fully use the stage, and be joyous and full of life.

## The Studio

### THE DETAILS:

**By:** Mike Gordon, directed by Seb Creasey

**Auditions:** Mon 25 & Wed 27 March at 7.45pm

**Performances:** 5-8 June

**Rehearsals:** Mon & Wed

**Scripts:** From Box Office

**Contact:** Seb Creasey on 07975 956375 or at [USUKproductions@googlemail.com](mailto:USUKproductions@googlemail.com)

### THE ROLES:

**Bea:** Playing age early-mid 20s A physically disabled girl who is brimming with energy on the inside, wanting more from her life and existence.

**Not Gay Ray:** Playing Age mid-late 20s, Bea's Northern Irish carer and best friend, must be able to do a Northern Irish accent.

**Mum/Katherine:** Playing age 45-60, Bea's no nonsense Barrister mother, must be commanding, strong, and mean when needed.

# Bancroft Players 2019-20 season

*Regular readers will remember a blog from Artistic Director Rory Reynolds a couple of months ago, explaining how and why the decisions about next season's shows were being made earlier than in previous years. True to that promise, we can now lift the lid on the shows that will be coming to the QMT main stage and the Richard Whitmore Studio next season.*

## MAIN HOUSE

So here we are. These are the shows but we are still negotiating with the directors so they'll be announced next month.

We have tried to put something for everyone in there cos we want you to be part of the show. We will announce a big launch event in the late Spring so the directors can come along and tell you all about the shows and how they visualise their production. We've asked them all to think a little bit out of the box, so who knows what they'll say?

Anyway this is the programme:

### SEPTEMBER

**'The Importance of Being Earnest' by Oscar Wilde.**

Perhaps the best comedy of manners ever written which is enjoying a great new run in the West End at the moment.

### NOVEMBER

**'Mojo' by Jez Butterworth**

This is the first and arguably the best play by a writer whose credits include *Jerusalem* and *The Ferryman*.

### DECEMBER

**'Cinderella'**

They said it would never happen at the QMT - but here it is! A classical panto with a dame, special effects and everything. Are we happy? Oh yes we are!

### FEBRUARY

**'Macbeth' by William Shakespeare**

Ripe for a big makeover, the Scottish play should be a huge draw in the early Spring.

### MAY

**'Little Shop of Horrors' (musical)**

Every song in this show is catchy! So open your heart to a big plant, a nasty dentist, poor old Seymour and de-lovely Audrey. You gotta love it!

### JUNE

**'Pride & Prejudice' by Sara Pascoe**

In this brand new version of the beloved Jane Austen novel, there is an excitement in the writing that screams 'put me on stage now!' Okay, okay - we will.

*Rory Reynolds, Arts Director*

## THE STUDIO

As with the Main House, directors will be announced when they have all been finalised.

### OCTOBER

**'The One' by Vicky Jones**

Harry and Jo are up all night drawing the battle lines of a relationship based on desire, dependency and dirty games. *'Truly astounding... frank, edgy dialogue and biting wit... hypnotic to watch' Telegraph.* Cast: 2F, 1M.

### JANUARY

**'Commencing' & 'Nine', from 'Kick-Ass Plays for Women' by Jane Shepard**

Two one act plays. *Commencing*: Kelli can't wait for her blind date to arrive - until it turns out to be one very disappointed lesbian named Arlin. Mutually appalled yet appallingly intrigued, they pick apart straight and gay women's culture to find common ground in the search for love and self. *Nine*: Two women imprisoned in chains, and the mind games they play to keep one another alive. With only words as currency, a single one can mean life or death. A harrowing, funny and tender account of the psychological price of survival. Cast: 2F + 2F.

### MARCH

**'Vincent in Brixton' by Nicholas Wright**

A moving portrait of the young Vincent van Gogh - a hit in the West End and on Broadway. Brixton, 1873. A brash young Dutchman rents a room in the house of an English widow. Three years later he returns to Europe on the first step of a journey which will end in breakdown, death and immortality. Cast: 3F, 2M.

### JUNE

**'Airswimming' by Charlotte Jones**

Set in 1920s England, *Airswimming* is based on the true story of two women incarcerated in a hospital for the "criminally insane" for having borne illegitimate children. Forgotten by their families and not released until the 1970's, Dora and Persephone adopt alter-egos, Dorph and Porph, to enact their fantasies and survive the silence of incarceration. By turns very funny and moving, *Airswimming* reminds us of the forgotten women of these generations in both Britain and Ireland. *'The structure and writing - admirably clear and unsentimental - both trip the light fantastic too, effortlessly gliding from the desperately funny to the desperately sad.'* Guardian. Cast: 2F.

# Anne Boleyn

Hunting through an old chest, the newly crowned James I discovers the controversial legacy of Anne Boleyn, Henry VIII's notorious second wife.

Time jumps back 70 years, when the witty and flirtatious Anne was not only in love with Henry, but also with the most dangerous ideas of her day. Conspiring with the exiled William Tyndale, she plots to make England Protestant – forever.

A celebration of a great English heroine, *Anne Boleyn* leaps between generations to reveal the debt the outrageous but scholarly James owed to Anne when he shrewdly reconciled England's religious factions by creating his common, 'authorised' Bible.

Howard Brenton's radically revisionist work argues that Anne was more Protestant martyr than sexual predator. It challenges received wisdom and bulges with theatrical vitality.

This "rollickingly good drama", full of huge characters, offers a compelling portrait of a woman contentiously described by James I as "the whore who changed England".

If you have any questions, please do get in touch. I think this will be great fun to rehearse, and really delve into the history and characters!

*Nicki*

## THE DETAILS:

**By:** by Howard Brenton, directed by Nicki Pope

**Auditions:** Tue 5 & Thu 7 March at 7.45pm

**Performances:** 17-22 June

**Rehearsals:** Tuesdays and Thursdays with some Sunday mornings in final month, and full commitment the week before we go up!

**Scripts:** Available from Box Office

**Contact:** Nicki Pope (nicki@bigredfunbus.com) or via Facebook

## THE ROLES:

### *Court of King Henry VIII*

**Anne Boleyn:** Anne Boleyn was 35 when she died – so actress needs to look around this age. Spirited, well spoken, educated, intelligent and wilful. Would probably be a feminist if around these days – polarising. I think similar to Meghan Markle – breaks rules, love or loathe. Auditionees need to have studied her opening speech.

**King Henry VIII:** Statuesque! Playing age 30 to 40ish give or take. Henry VIII was 6ft 2in and of athletic build – incredibly fit and sporty. It is thought he was incredibly friendly, kind and caring until he suffered a fall when jousting which turned his personality to dangerous and brutal, this Henry covers both personalities...

**Thomas Cromwell:** Chief Minister to Henry VIII – a lawyer who came from poverty. Scholarly, intelligent and manipulative – 50 plus

**Cardinal Wolsey:** Religious, scheming and pious – 50 plus

**Simpkin:** Cromwell's man - any age, servant

**Sloop:** Wolsey's man, then Cromwell's – any age, servant

### *Anne's women*

**Lady Rochford:** Aristocratic, intelligent, a beauty. 20-30 years. Married Anne's brother George, had a part in Anne's and George's downfall. Stayed in the royal household and was executed with Catherine Howard

**Lady Celia:** Small part. Lady in Waiting, well spoken, high spirited! Any age

**Lady Jane Seymour:** A noblewoman, lady in waiting - will be Queen after Anne. Young and pretty. Must be younger than Anne!

**William Tyndale:** Leading figure in the Protestant Reformation, transcribed the Bible into English – 40ish but could be older. Religious, intelligent, multi-lingual

### *Court of James I*

**King James I:** Son of Mary Queen of Scots, succeeded after Elizabeth I. Regal, handsome, gay... Larger than life, dramatic, and a little bit camp! Playing age 30-40ish

**Robert Cecil:** King James' man. Previously Elizabeth I's Chief Minister. Political, scheming, intelligent, powerful! Spymaster - he uncovered the Gunpowder plot. Playing age 50ish

**George Villiers:** 1st Duke of Buckingham - the King's "favourite" Young, handsome and playful, fashionable. Playing age 20s

**Parrot (Cecil's man):** A servant / assistant – any playing age. Not particularly intelligent

**Dean Lancelot Andrewes, Doctor John Reynolds, Henry Barrow:** Leading Anglicans and Puritans. Any age.

**Country Men and Women (followers of Tyndale):** Small parts, will be doubled with main cast

There will be doubling up of characters – as much as possible e.g.

- Lady Jane / 2nd Country Woman
- Simpkin / Parrot
- George Villiers / 2nd Country Man
- Lady Celia / 1st Country Woman
- Cardinal Wolsey / Henry Barrow

**Peasants and Servants:** We will work these out when rehearsing



# Blackadder

## The Tudor years

**The scene:** Queenie, her advisor, Melchett and her nurse, Nursie are in her private chamber. Lord Melchett is reading the latest missive from the local playhouse.

**Queenie:** This is strangely troubling, Melchy. You say that our very own Edmund is performing on the stage of this – oh, what's it called?

**Melchett:** The Queen Mother Theatre, Ma'am.

**Nursie:** Named after your own dear Mummy, my little cherry pip.

**Queenie:** Shut up, Nursie. You know what Daddy said he'd do if we ever mentioned her name again. And anyway, she's on in the last show of the season, or so it says here. Edmund's play is called 'Blackadder, The Tudor Years'. That's a very silly title.

**Nursie:** Indeedy. He should have called it 'Little Elizabeth, or how Mr and Mrs Spank pay a short sharp trip to Bottieland.'

**Queenie:** And it says that there are going to be 'three iconic scenes!' There'd better be an execution. I do love a good beheading.

**Melchett:** My esteemed friend, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, has whispered that he displays his canonical virtues in one scene

**Nursie:** And Lord Flashheart shows his and all!

**Queenie:** Ooh, I've got such a crush on him! Do you think that he and Edmund will be wearing very, very tight tights and doing unspeakably naughty things? Come on, Melchy, Nursie, let's go and see what Edmund gets up to.

**Melchett:** Well, I do believe that you are in it, Your Bountifulness.

**Queenie:** Oh goody! Then it's bound to be super. Come on, before they sell all the seats and I have to show them who's Queen!

*(With apologies to Richard Curtis and Ben Elton )*

### Did you know..?

Sally Hull, who is directing Blackadder for the Bancroft Players, is the veteran of six previous stage adaptations of much-loved TV classics. Here's a reminder of her past hits:

*The Vicar of Dibley*  
(2016)



*Fawlty Towers*  
(2014)



*Hi-de-Hi!*  
(2011)



*Dad's Army*  
(2008)

*Allo 'Allo*  
(2005)

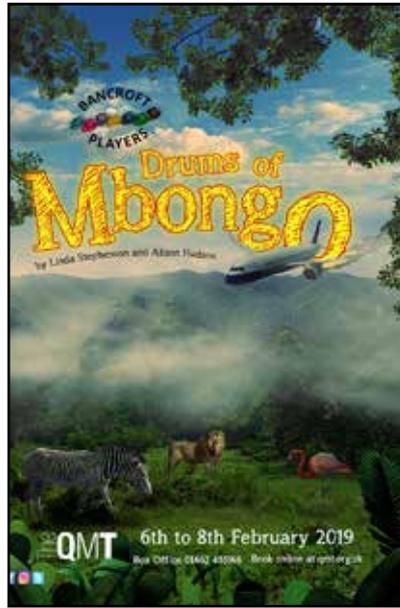
*The Darling Buds of May*  
(2004)

# Jungle adventure for BP Juniors

As the drums pound out their message through the jungle, the animals listen, poised and ready for action. It is the birthday of the Queen of the Jungle, the lioness Rabia and her subjects are summoned to festivities. But all is not well in the pride, and tensions are mounting.

Meanwhile two children, Lucy and Mark, survivors of a plane crash, are desperately trying to find their way to safety through the remote forest. Will the animals be able to help them, or will the trouble amongst the lions bring danger to both humans and jungle creatures? And still the drums keep sounding.

Written and directed by Linda Stephenson and Alison Hudson, this Junior Bancroft Players production pulls out all the stops, promising comedy, drama and surprises. There is exciting dancing, wild drumming (the Juniors have been given specialist workshops) and larger than life characters. Meet Flavia, the vain Flamingo, Boomer the sly Boomslang, as well as chanting meerkats, brave lions, in fact, all creatures great and small. But will Lucy and Mark make it to safety, and will peace ever return to the jungle?



Find out at the QMT from 6-8 February at 7.30pm.

## Could you help the QMT as a House Manager?

It is a while since I last put out an appeal for members to train as House Managers but, having recently lost two people, I feel it is time to start a recruitment drive.

One of the Managers I have lost actually came to me as a result of our "Get Involved" campaign. It is not easy training someone who does not know the layout of the theatre, but we succeeded and he was very good. However he has decided to devote more time to an Open University course and has given up all his theatre roles.

I am sure everyone reading this knows exactly what a House Manager's duties are and how very valuable they are to the team. So please do give this plea careful consideration.

Contact details: 07778 014428 or paula.downes@ntlworld.com.

*Paula Downes*

## Newsletter: Last date for copy

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

## Bancroft Players' 200 Club

Sadly my December report appears to have "missed the cut" from the last issue, so here is a slightly revised version.

Many congratulations to our lucky £100 winner – who has probably long since spent her winnings! Well done, Amanda Campbell-Phillips. Also I must offer an explanation as to why Pam Chohan's name appears twice – well, Pam does have multiple numbers, a gamble that certainly appears to be paying off for her. I have often put forward the thought of having more than one number in the draw – I have four! So perhaps you would all like to ponder on that.

I am now adding January winners to my list. The draw was made during a break in the *Blackadder* rehearsals – hope you have got your tickets. It is going to be an amazing show!! Somehow Brian Seal managed to draw out his own number!

For further information on the 200 Club please contact me on either paula.downes@ntlworld.com or 07778 014428.

### December Winners:

- £100:** Amanda Campbell-Phillips
- £25:** Pam Chohan
- £20:** Sue Mellor
- £15:** Pam Chohan
- £10:** Ruth Bird

### January winners:

- £25:** Hilary Dade
- £20:** John Butler
- £15:** Geoff Griffiths
- £10:** Brian Seal

*Paula Downes*

*paula.downes@ntlworld.com*

# What works for me... WHEN SCENES REPEAT

*In 'Constellations', coming to The Studio in March, the same two characters experience many different versions of how their relationship could unfold, depending on tiny changes in who says or does what. The result is a series of 'what ifs' where the same scene plays out repeatedly, with subtly important differences each time. The repetition of scenes and cue lines offers a unique challenge to cast and crew alike - here's how they are meeting it.*

## Grace Reinhold-Gittins (Director)

As each alternate universe starts in the exact same way, there needs to be a way to differentiate them from the outset. Before we did anything else, we broke each scene down. For each repetition, we worked out where the end was and where the characters were going. I let the actors develop their own character journeys in each universe, and then went back to tweak things so that each universe builds to its own end and none are too similar. For each rehearsal, we focus on a key moment in the couple's relationship. There can be between five and ten versions, and we only focus on that one scene so that no two versions are the same, even though the dialogue is. I'm

also making the cast change positions with each change of universe. That helps their subconscious differentiate each one, even if we don't ultimately keep the movements.



## Annabelle Mackinnon-Austin

It is quite an unusual play - there are so many shifts during the show. Each section, I believe, could be a play of its own with different outcomes. The circumstances for each need to be clearly different - it is about making sure each section is completely individual.

The circumstances surrounding the scene are what's important, not the scene itself - the undercurrents around what is happening before, during and after the scene. With research and background knowledge I can create backstory. Something in her universe is completely different, perhaps something from her childhood, or a specific mood, and that gives a different perspective on the scene.



## Scott Henderson

I've done nothing like this before - I don't think there are many plays where you do the same thing five times. Each scene is like a branch, they start the same but can go off in different directions. As an actor, you have the knowledge of what comes next so you

can plan your responses - you have to treat each scene as if you're experiencing it for the first time, but with the foresight of knowing how it will unfold. At the start, I broke the text up and I worked out where it changes and how it changes, and then it's kind of going off impulses of how you think those changes affect the character. You see how a situation unfolds differently, you know the outcome, and you just work it backwards.



## Emily Nellis (Stage Manager)

Usually we rely on sound and visual cues, but this time I will need to remain focused on the script and be much more on it. We are going through each scene looking for changes in motivation - the tiniest changes become very important. It will be about picking up on these small changes, or on a difference in tone, and it will work so long as the crew and I know it well. It is going to require a huge amount of concentration - much more than usual.



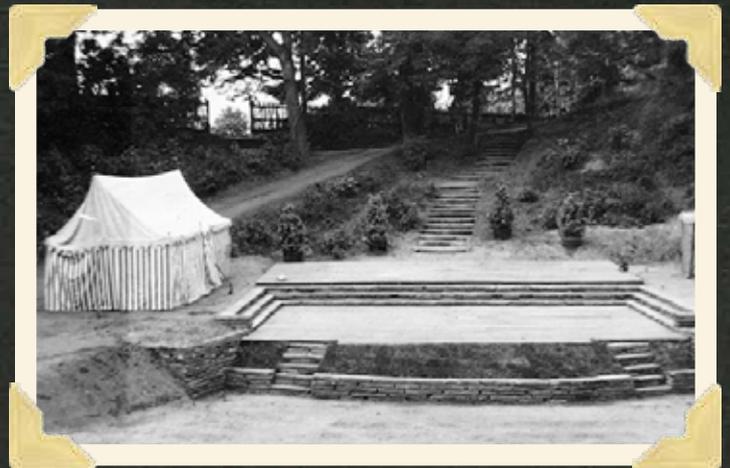
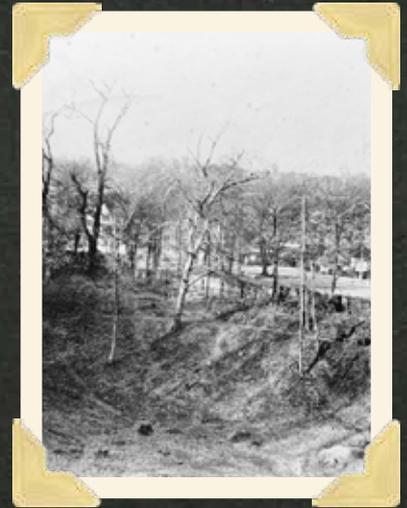
**'Constellations': 12-16 March in the Richard Whitmore Studio.**  
Tickets from Box Office on 01462 455166 or [www.qmt.org.uk](http://www.qmt.org.uk)

# Photo Album

It's fascinating to think that the Dell Open Air Theatre, which is bang next door to the QMT, celebrates its 68th birthday this year. Sadly we don't currently use the Dell for productions as the council is a bit dubious about the safety aspects of it being used as a public arena again. Still, I have a dream.

Anyway - I thought you might like to see these rare photos of it being built by Hitchin UDC workmen in the Spring of 1951 (from Eric Sharp's archive). By the way - it still looks pretty good, the old Dell Theatre, so if you're around the area go and have a look. Oh if only we could use it just once more...

Rory



Eric Sharp  
The Dell, 1951