



The Bancroft Players

Newsletter
January 2017



Phoebe Harrison (left) and Violet Morris were among the cast of 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe' to bring the magic of Narnia to the Christmas Tree Festival at Holy Saviour Church. Photo: Gillian Chidgey

Rory Reynolds

We live the dream - let's help others do it too

Well done to all those involved in the magical Christmas production of *The Lion, The Witch & The Wardrobe*. The kids loved it - and it made a handsome profit too. Brilliant!

The new QMT *What's On* is so chockablock with goodies that we couldn't fit another thing in. I'm going to start advertising this place as having a bigger season than the National Theatre if we carry on like this. But that's how we always wanted the QMT to be when it opened 34 years ago - a thriving hub of theatrical creativity.

In this way we're living the dream, but it makes me sad to see the struggle to find suitable venues faced by so many amateur groups without

their own theatrical home. The closure of town halls and rocketing commercial theatre hire prices affect many amateur dramatic and light operatic groups - Edith tells me that requests to hire the QMT far exceed our ability to meet even local needs.

At a time of booming interest, and given the UK's rich theatrical heritage, it's so worrying that there are apparently fewer and fewer affordable spaces. I think we all have a responsibility to raise the profile of amateur theatre nationally and I would want us to work together with other societies to do this and think of effective solutions.

As we take down the tinsel and sail through January, it's

Artistic Director's blog

time to turn our attention to the 2017-18 season. We need to find 10 cracking shows: six in the main house and four in the Richard Whitmore Studio. Planning starts in early February, and we need your help.

Please, please, please get in touch and submit ideas, scripts and even dreams for us to sort through and mull over. Nearly all the plays of any season are submitted or suggested by our members. You, in fact. So drop a script off marked for my or David Lester's attention. Or simply email me directly at bigspirittheatre@hotmail.com.

Anything else? Oh yes - HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Rory

COMING SOON:



Proof
18 - 21 January,
Richard Whitmore Studio.



Double Trouble
(Juniors production)
8 - 10 February,
Main theatre.



The Ghost Train
24 February - 4 March
Main theatre.



That Christmas showtime feeling

Baya Salmon-Hawk played Professor Kirk and Maugrim the Wolf in the QMT's Christmas show, 'The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe'. Here she explains the highs and the lows of being in the seasonal show.

For me, every November, the great doom descends. I mutter darkly to myself (and, to be fair, to my long suffering nearest and dearest), "why, oh why, did I ever decide to sign up for the Christmas show? It's too much work / not enough work. Too many rehearsals / not enough rehearsals. I told you to stop me, why didn't you?"

It's always the same story, wherever I am, whichever play it is. So why is it that, come August, I gallop off to the auditions for the Christmas Show, raring to go? No, I am not (entirely) mad or suffering from memory loss - not yet anyway. What is it then, you cry?

When I think back to last month's visit to Narnia, it is first of all the chance to work with the three companies: the so-called adults, the youth theatre and the very young theatre. I love working with the kids, big and little - their enthusiasm, their passion, their potential. We



Baya Salmon-Hawk (right) with Violet Morris and Darcie White in The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Below: The death of Maugrim.

have such fun together, bouncing off each other on the stage (sometimes literally).

Then there are the other kids, the ones in the audience. The Christmas show is often their first experience of live theatre. This year the QMT, packed to the rafters, rocked with laughter and sometimes shook with a little bit of fear. Dizzy-making!

And finally, it is the chance to stretch myself like never before. I got to be a wolf and worked

with his puppet head and that was absolutely wonderful, totally magical!

So lead me to it, the next Christmas show, and join me. We always need more actors, more backstage staff, more more more!



Audition notice

Steel Magnolias

A great opportunity for six strong female actors.

Truvy Jones runs a successful beauty salon in Chinquapin, Louisiana, where all the ladies in the neighborhood have a standing Saturday appointment.

Along with her anxious and eager assistant, Annelle, Truvy styles the hair of many of the women about town: wealthy widow and former first lady of Chinquapin, Clairee Belcher; local curmudgeon Ouiser Boudreaux ("I'm not crazy, I've just been in a bad mood for forty years"); intelligent and compassionate career woman M'Lynn; and her daughter Shelby, the prettiest girl in town.

Shelby's engagement is the talk of the town, but the joy and excitement of her wedding quickly turn to concern as she faces a risky pregnancy and a myriad of health complications. Eventually, when Shelby dies from complications related to her diabetes, M'Lynn has to deal with the most difficult of life's challenges: the loss of one's only child.

As the women of Chinquapin make their way over life's many hurdles together, they find comfort (and a fair amount of verbal ribbing) in one another. "You have no idea how wonderful you are," M'Lynn tells the ladies at the end. Truvy responds, with a smile: "Of course we do."

Main Theatre

THE DETAILS:

By: Robert Harling, directed by Brian Seal

Auditions: Mon 6 & Wed 8 February

Performances: 15-20 May 2017

Scripts: Available from Box Office

Accent: All characters have a Deep South (Louisiana, USA) accent.

THE ROLES:

Truvy Jones: Playing age - 40s. Should be able to convince as a professional hair-stylist

Shelby Eatenton-Latcherie: Playing age - mid 20s. Will need boyish, short hair for Act II

Annelle Depuy-Desoto: Playing age - a little younger than Shelby. Should be able to convince as a professional hair-stylist

Clairee Belcher: Playing age - 60s

M'Lynn Eatenton: Playing age - 40s

Ouiser Boudreaux: Playing age - 60s

'Proof' adds up to a genius decision in the Studio

It happens. No, seriously, it still happens. Younger daughters, with promising careers, do give it all up to look after difficult parents.

This is the choice made by Catherine in David Auburn's Pulitzer winning play *Proof*, which will be performed in the QMT Studio this month.

Her father is a mathematical genius, but he suffers from serious mental health problems – and so Catherine chooses to look after him.

Now her sister is back from New York to look after their affairs. Catherine has not seen Claire for ages, and does not like or trust her. Why is Claire really back?

And then there is Hal, her father's student. Is he in love with Catherine or is he just after her father's notebooks?

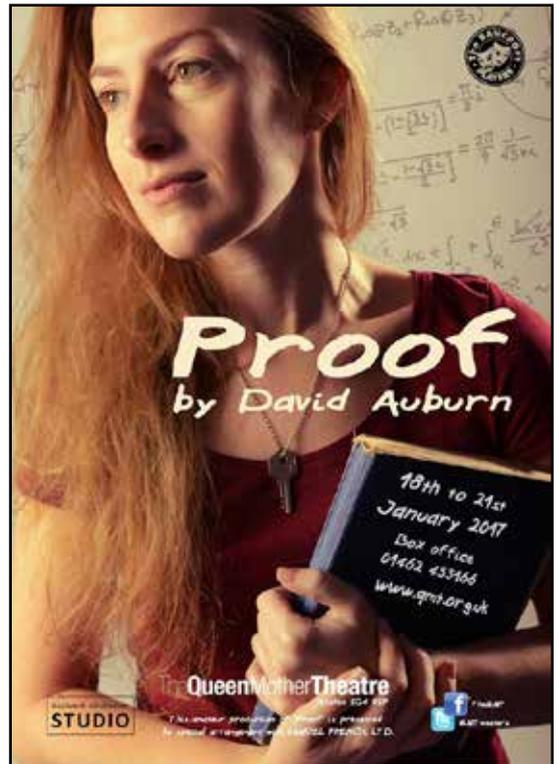
Is this all really happening? Is Catherine imagining it all?

This is a flavour of the play, which explores genius and its possible relationship with madness.

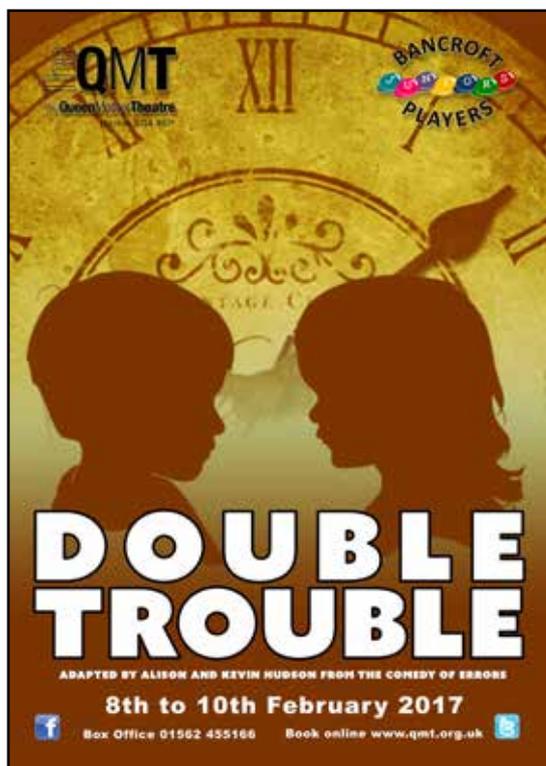
Has Catherine inherited her father's genius? And, if so, does that mean she is also suffering from delusions? Does Hal love Catherine? Is Claire as genuine as she says she is? Whose story is it anyway?

To find out, see *Proof* in the Richard Whitmore Studio from 18-21 January.

Baya Salmon-Hawk



'Proof', written by David Auburn, directed by Tamsin Goodwin-Connolly. Performance dates: 18-21 January in the Richard Whitmore Studio.



'Double Trouble', adapted from William Shakespeare's 'The Comedy of Errors' by Alison and Kevin Hudson. Performance dates: 8-10 February in the Main Theatre.

Shakespeare adaptation is no trouble for BP Juniors

The Juniors are busy with the last few rehearsals before our main production next month.

The play is called *Double Trouble* and is an adaptation of *The Comedy of Errors* by William Shakespeare. It has a challenging storyline and quite a complicated plot, but the Juniors are coping with it brilliantly and giving really excellent and sophisticated performances.

The action takes place over the course of a single day and is interspersed with improvised market scenes devised and composed by our team of imaginative young assistants. These are often accompanied by

the assistants themselves coming on stage in various disguises and are not to be missed, especially the finale song.

The show runs from Wednesday 8 to Friday 10 February starting at 7.30pm. Please come along and support the Junior Bancroft Players - they work so hard and it is great for them to perform to a full house.

If you haven't seen one of our shows before, then you are in for a big surprise - and, if you have seen one, then thank you for your continued support. We promise you won't be disappointed.

*Alison Hudson
and Linda Stephenson*

The train about to arrive in the Main Theatre is not what it seems...

'The Ghost Train' by Arnold Ridley, directed by David Lester.

Performance dates:
24 February - 4 March in the Main Theatre (3-sides).

Regularly nominated by critics as one of the scariest plays performed in the theatre, *The Ghost Train* will be the Bancroft Players' 400th public production.

When a mixed group of passengers is stranded at a remote country railway station late on a stormy night with no hope of reaching their destination, the stationmaster passes the time with a story about a strange death on the line and of a ghostly train.

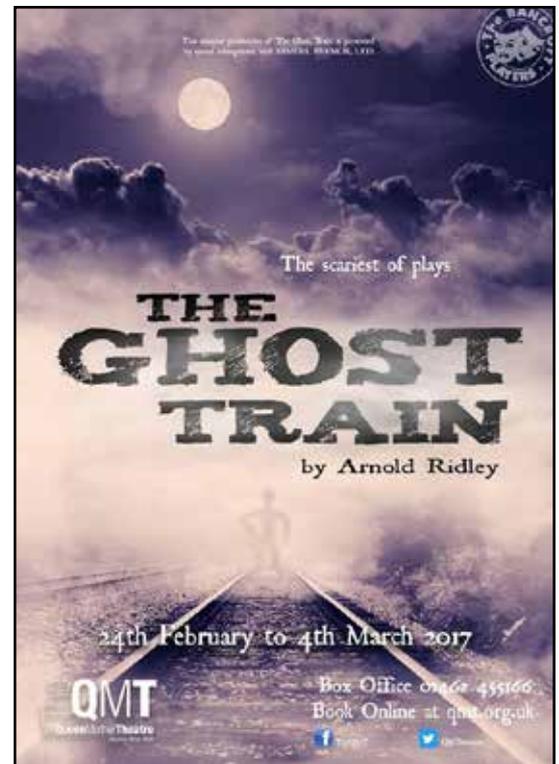
They dismiss the story and prepare to spend the night, but then strange things happen...

It's a production that will set nerves a-quiver - with the audience seated on three sides of the stage, no-one will be far from the action. But how many of them will realise the close connection between this sinister tale and one of television's best-loved series?

You may have thought the author's name was familiar and you would be correct. Arnold Ridley, better known as Private Godfrey, the most senior and benignly befuddled member of *Dad's Army*, is less well known as a playwright but in fact he wrote over 30 plays of which *The Ghost Train* is the most famous. As well as being filmed at least three times, the original stage production ran for 665 performances in the West End.

His story of a group of travellers trapped overnight at a remote Cornish station was inspired by his own experience of a missed connection. As an actor on tour with the Birmingham Repertory Company he recalled an uncomfortable night spent at Mangotsfield Junction, near Bristol.

"It was just about as lonely and gloomy a dump as one could imagine... I was awoken by a Bristol-Birmingham express rip-roaring by with a flash of lights and a scream of whistle." This startling image set him thinking about the power of rains to evoke emotions and *The Ghost Train* was born. Ridley said that that when it opened in London, he overheard two impresarios scornfully declaring that 'Mark my words, this will be closed by Saturday'. Yet more than 90 years later it is more popular than ever.



David Lester, directing the play for the QMT, reckons that's down to the skill with which Ridley builds the tension: "*The Ghost Train* is still rated as one of the scariest plays performed in the theatre, even after all this time, and that's because it's so brilliantly constructed to create a really chilling atmosphere.

"The play has humour, but we don't want to overstate it. We want to stay faithful to Ridley's original intention, which was to frighten the audience as well as to entertain them."

The passage of almost a century gives Lester more staging options than Ridley had, but he is determined not to lose the original script's appeal: "When the play was first performed they had wheels running over lathes and thunder sheets. These days we have access to much more modern technology for the effects, but the aim is still to enhance the thrills."

This is an exciting and suspenseful thriller making its first appearance at the QMT on a set designed to give the audience a real chill. Not to be missed.

Rosemary Bianchi,
additional reporting by Andy Darley

Big Spirit's OMG Girls and History Boys command and demand attention

Rory Reynolds looks ahead to Big Spirit's next two productions, 'Legally Blonde - the Musical' and 'The History Boys'.



Oh my God, omigod you guys, it looks like Elle's gonna win that prize! If there ever was a perfect couple, this one qualifies - oh my God you guys!

These unlikely words are on everyone's lips as we sort out the casting for *Legally Blonde - the Musical*. They are of course lines from the opening iconic number of the show. What? You've never heard of it? Never heard the compelling riffs of 'Omigod You Guys'? You don't wear pink and hope to marry Warner Huntington III? Crazy or what?

Yeah, well, we won't bore you with the storyline right now

but just know it's fantastic. If you loved the film with Reece Witherspoon then you'll double-double love this. Promise - with one hand on my heart and the other clutching the sacred shocking pink cardie of Elle herself. Be warned though, tickets are limited and they'll sell out early so buy 'em now and you won't be crying later. Omigod you guys!

In the Youth Theatre we like to to be busy and before we set Elle off on her law career we have *The History Boys* to sort out.

This is in fact a 'playlet' in that it has a very limited

run in the Studio. Not quite just a youth theatre show either as the group are lucky enough to have on board the considerable talents of Charles Plester as Hector, Alison Hancock as Lintott, Ken Torbett as the irascible Headmaster and Cameron Fraser as Hector's nemesis, Irwin.

The whole company are having a blast working together especially as we regularly have poetry readings and old fashioned singsongs as part of the rehearsal process. Glorious! See the *What's On* for dates and again - book early as there are only limited seats available.

200 Club's bonus winner shares her good fortune

A rather belated Happy New Year to everyone. As you all know, December is the big month for the Bancroft Players' 200 Club - the £100 draw. This month I am delighted to tell you that this wonderful prize will be going to Ruth Bird.

Now, I am sure most of you will be saying "Who?". Well, as a result of my Box Office duties, I have got to know Miss Bird - and did ever a name suit anyone so well. She is an incredibly loyal supporter of all our shows so, for loyalty alone, she deserves this prize. But she has also written a charming letter in response to her win.

Here is an extract from it: "It is not hard task to sit through the plays. They are all worthwhile in their different ways. (Sorry, not really meant to rhyme!) Please accept a small token in acknowledgement."

And Miss Bird enclosed a cheque for £10. A lovely letter - long may she continue to support us.

The £10 will be added to the 200 Club's contribution in June. Many thanks to you, Miss Bird.

I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and here's to happy theatre going in 2017. And I cannot close without a heartfelt thanks to my tremendous supportive band of House Managers. The show certainly couldn't go on without you.

December Winners

£100: Ruth Bird
£25: Paula Downes
£20: David Hillelson
£15: Mike Mackenzie
£10: Mrs F Scoresby

January Winners

£25: Doug Brooker
£20: Margaret Johnstone
£15: Mike Wilkinson
£10: Maureen Nobes

Herewith the full list of December and January winners and, honestly, Sally Hull pulled the second December number out of the hat. No fixes in January either as Edith drew all four numbers - but hopefully it will shut up Mr Brooker, who has taken against me because he never wins! Congratulations to all of you.

Paula Downes

Who's who in the Bancroft Players

Executive Committee

2016 to 2017

Richard Whitmore
President Emeritus

Frank Pratt
President

Les Edwards
Chairman

Susan Mellor
Secretary

Tim Hallas
Treasurer

Rory Reynolds
Artistic Director

Nicki Pope
*Production Manager
(Main Theatre)*

David Lester
*Production Manager
(Studio)*

Chris Lane
Theatre Manager

Julian Newman Turner
Business Manager

David Borner
Committee Member

Elliott Bunker
Committee Member

Emma Saunders
Committee member

Zara Schafer
Committee Member

Appointments

2016 to 2017

Vice-Chairman
Chris Lane

Box Office Manager
Vacant

Bar Committee
Frank Pratt, Roger Nobes

Bar Rota
Maureen Nobes

Bookings Manager
*Edith Pratt (evening),
Keith Crook (day)*

Diary Organiser
Keith Crook

Fire Officer
Chris Lane

First Aid Officer
Paula Downes

Front of House Manager
Paula Downes

Health & Safety
Coordinator
David Hillelson

Junior Theatre Group
Alison Hudson

Keys Distributor
Keith Crook

Licensing Manager
Tim Hallas

Membership
Edith Pratt

Newsletter
Rosemary Bianchi

Properties
*Audrey Hawkins,
Julie Chamberlain*

Publicity Manager
Julian Newman Turner

Refreshments /Stewards
Lyn Bryars, Mo Mutton

Set & Design Manager
Rosemary Bianchi

Technical Manager
Alan Bailes

Workshop Coordinator
Clive Hall

Wardrobe Liaison
Sally Hull

Welfare
Vacant

What's On Distribution
Susan Mellor

Youth Theatre Group
Rory Reynolds

200 Club
Paula Downes

Membership news

We welcome the following recent new members: Dorothy Walker; Cameron Fraser; Emily Miles; Daniel Barnicott; Louis Bailey; Darcie White; Roy Danagher; Amanda Franklin; Sofia Hodges; Grace Maynard; Keith Warren; Georgina Bennett; Jacqueline Lord; Jessica Landy; Owen Gifford; Louise Peace.

We welcome back Harry Harding.

Change of Details

Please don't forget to let me know of any changes to your address, telephone number or e-mail. This can be done via the FREEPOST address, or by contacting me at qmtmembs25@hotmail.com.

Edith Pratt
Membership Secretary
07874 025501

First aid training

A successful and well-supported first aid course was run in January with a great deal of help from St John Ambulance. It was good to see a mix of house managers, stewards, backstage and technical crew present.

I will shortly be amending the list of First Aiders that is displayed on the theatre notice board.

If you hold a First Aid certificate for whatever reason (required by your job perhaps) and are happy to be shown on this list, then I would be really pleased to hear from you.

Paula Downes

Casting news: hang

The cast for *hang*, by debbie tucker green, is as follows. The standard was extremely high and casting was not easy, so well done to all who took part.

One: Laura Mead
Two: Kelsey Duffy
Three: Natalie Gordon

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Proof
(Richard Whitmore Studio)
18-21 January

Playwriting group
31 January

Auditions: Steel Magnolias
Mon 6 and Wed 8 February

Double Trouble
(Junior Bancroft Players,
Main theatre)
8 - 10 February

The Ghost Train
(Main theatre)
24 February - 4 March
Playwriting group
28 February

THE QMT

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.