



The Bancroft Players

Newsletter
January 2018



Jon Brown as Scrooge receives an unwelcome visitor in the shape of Keith Crook, in the Bancroft Players' production of 'A Christmas Carol', directed by Alison Hudson. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.

Rory Reynolds

'So much great theatre going on here at the QMT'

I hope you caught the great Big Spirit show *Earthquakes in London* at the end of November? We should be so proud of our Youth Theatre for being able to take on such a complex piece as Mike Bartlett's rambling script about global warming and create something so strong and moving from it.

Congrats too to Alison for breaking all box office records with an excellent *A Christmas Carol*. Everyone who saw it had such fun and - hurrah - it was bit scary to boot!

There's so much great theatre going on here at the QMT at the moment.

I hope this comes out in time to encourage you to go see *Sex With a Stranger* in the Richard Whitmore Studio. And with *A View From the Bridge* coming up in February, you are having your cake and eating it, you lucky people (whose catchphrase was that?).

Audition-wise we have Ronald Harwood's *Quartet* coming up early in February (see notice in this newsletter)

Artistic Director's blog

and the big open-air event for senior BPs, Big Spirit and Juniors alike - *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which auditions in early March.

And so yet another theatre year comes to an end. It seems only yesterday we were going on about the start of the new season!

By the way - hope you've all got the new What's On? Congrats to Jules and his team for pulling it all together. Looks great!

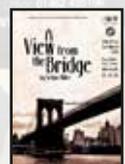
Rory

COMING SOON:



Sex With a Stranger
17-20 January,
Richard Whitmore Studio

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



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

The QMT



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

Clear-up crew blitz backstage clutter

Behind the scenes, the theatre looks a lot tidier for the New Year.

On the afternoon of Saturday 6th January a group of us met to have a good sort out at the QMT.

We tackled the dressing rooms, Green Room, props stores (both the main store upstairs and the 'working props' cupboard for shows currently in rehearsal, which is located by the workshop) and even the dreaded furniture store!

As well as being a very productive afternoon, it was a lovely social event catching up with friends and chatting while working.



You've never seen it so tidy - the Green Room post clear-up

Everyone enjoyed themselves - and got a free workout to help get back into shape after the festive period!

Massive thanks to those who helped - Julie and Audrey, David B, Helen, David H, Luke, Charlotte, Louis, Emma, Amanda, Clive and even Charlotte's mum Andrea (who did a fantastic job in the Green Room)!

The amount of items removed and broken down / binned / recycled was impressive and also kept Clive and Keith C busy in the workshop for several days after the event.

As a very busy theatre, it is easy for areas to become messy and full of left over props, set, costumes etc. Meeting just one or two times a year to have a good sort-out makes a massive difference - and ensuring the theatre is left tidy after each show helps too.

If you would like to be involved in future clear outs/events like this, please email emmajosaunders@hotmail.com to be included in emails detailing future sessions.

Emma Saunders





The night is yet young for Cameron Fraser and Heather Stuckey in 'Sex With a Stranger'.

'Sex With a Stranger': Behind the provocative title lies a simple, funny and poignant story

Next up in the Studio is 'Sex With a Stranger' by Stefan Golaszewski. Rosemary Bianchi talks to director Cliff Francis about the play and why he wanted to stage it. Show dates: Wed 17 – Sat 20 January at 7.45pm.

Sex with a Stranger is the forthcoming attraction in the Richard Whitmore Studio.

This play, which achieved critical acclaim in the West End, is written by Bafta Award winning Stefan Golaszewski. A former president of the Cambridge Footlights and member of the comedy group 'Cowards' he is well known as the writer of the TV series *Him and Her* and *Mum*.

The plot follows Adam (played by Cameron Fraser) in his relations with two women, one his girlfriend Ruth (Amy Walker), and the other, Grace (Heather Stuckey), a casual fling.

Director Cliff Francis says: "Originally the play was recommended by Sam Powell who had been to see it and I've been trying for ages to get it produced.

"We even thought of hiring the Studio ourselves and putting it on as a touring

production, so I was delighted when it was selected for this season.

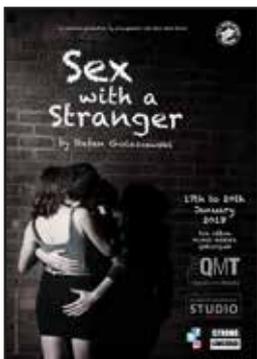
"What really excites me about the play is that it is a very funny, simple, poignant story that rattles along with great pace. It's a familiar situation but tells the story from a different angle.

"The title is provocative, but it's a very realistic situation. Although it's set in 2012 about millennials, it could essentially be set at any time,

because I don't think the attitudes portrayed are so vastly different to previous generations.

"The real question the play asks is 'Has social media changed attitudes to relationships and commitment?' Things are evolving at such a pace and the age of dating and chatting up is almost a thing of the past.

"I loved the play from the first moment I read it and in rehearsal it's just got better."



Cameron Fraser and Amy Walker in 'Sex With a Stranger'.

Audition notice

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 about to take place at the retirement 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.

Elliott

Main Theatre

THE ROLES:

Playing ages all over 65:

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

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

Cissy: Forgetful and suffering from dementia.

Jean: The typical leading lady. Confident, bolshie - but with a hidden insecurity from having falling on hard times.

THE DETAILS:

By: Ronald Harwood, directed by Elliott Bunker

Auditions: Tue 6 and Thu 8 February at 8pm

Performances: 15 - 20 May

Rehearsals: Tuesdays & Thursdays

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

AUDITIONS AND CASTING

The cast for *The Effect* is as follows:

Dr Lorna James: Alison Hudson

Dr Toby Sealey: Doug Brooker

Connie Hall: Allie Marie Hunter

Tristan Frey: Joe Fallowell

Audition notice

The One

Winner of the Verity Bargate Award, Vicky Jones's play is a bleakly comic depiction of a couple trapped in a destructive cycle of love and lust, exploring taboos surrounding gender roles and sexual violence.

The action is set over the course of a single night in a lounge belonging to Jo and her older, long-term partner Harry, Jo's former college teacher.

Throughout their ensuing, bickering conversations, it becomes clear that the two of them are locked in a relationship based on desire, dependency and dirty games.

Into this unstable mix walks Kerry, a colleague of Harry's, who thinks she might have been raped by her partner. But perhaps there is more to Kerry's visit than we are initially led to believe...

This play requires the actors playing Jo and Harry to be very physically comfortable with each other so there will be physical workshops on the final audition night (see 'details' box).

The Studio

THE ROLES:

The age of the characters is a guide only. Harry could be 50 and Jo mid 30s, or 30s and 20 etc. Casting will depend on how the characters look together, and how well the actors audition.

Jo: 29

Harry: 39

Kerry: 36

THE DETAILS:

By: Vicky Jones, directed by Keith Swainston

Auditions: Mon 26 & Wed 28 March, plus recall physical audition on Thu 29 March.

Performances: 6 - 9 June

Rehearsals: Mondays & Wednesdays

Scripts: Available shortly from Box Office for loan and quick return.

Further information: Keith Swainston on 07799 803623 or by email at keith.swainston@hotmail.co.uk



BP Juniors learn puppetry in 'To Catch a Unicorn'

We caught up with Linda Stephenson during a rehearsal for the Juniors' February production and quizzed her about the use of puppets in the show.

Show dates: Wed 7 - Fri 9 February at 7.30pm.

Linda Stephenson, writer of the BP Juniors' February production *To Catch a Unicorn*, spent her early years as a professional performer doing New Wave Circus, combining magic, juggling, unicycling and puppetry.

Her new show, directed by Alison Hudson, gives the young cast an opportunity to learn and use one of the most entrancing of those skills.

Linda said: "I loved puppetry when I was a performer as it is such an ancient art form and you can approach situations and characters using puppets that would be too sensitive or impossible to deal with as actors.

To Catch a Unicorn is set in a zoo, with lots of animals, and of course that would be impractical with the real thing. For example one of the main characters is Liz Boa, a boa constrictor that will be animated by four people, much like in a Chinese Dragon Dance.

"We work hard to expand the skills of our actors. Having already tackled radio plays and Shakespeare, we were ready for puppetry. In fact I've wanted to do work with puppets ever since seeing that wonderful production of *Avenue Q* here.

"It is a challenging skill and one of the hardest things to learn is how to forget about

oneself and focus completely on the puppet. You are concentrating on giving it life and all the action is in the hand.

"You have to look at the puppet - if you're looking at the puppet then the audience will too. After a while the personality of the puppet takes over and the audience doesn't notice you.

"If you believe in the character of the puppet, then when it is on your hand it is real."

With fantastic creatures, larger than life human characters and original music by Charlie Preston, *To Catch a Unicorn* promises to brighten a dismal February.



News of the Juniors has been sparse lately, so here is an update on what we have been doing.

In February the main production was *Double Trouble*, a cleverly reworked version of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* by Alison and Kevin Hudson. This provided speaking parts and acting opportunities for all the Juniors and was very well received.

In the summer the Juniors performed five original radio plays in the Studio. There were two by Alison and Kevin Hudson, two by Linda Stephenson

and one by former Juniors Charlie Preston and Felix Elliott. This gave everyone the opportunity to act with the voice only. The entertainment was augmented by some dance and singing, as well as original adverts, presented by former Juniors Tige Burns, Marcus Allerton and Ethan Bristow, who also hosted the show.

The main production in 2018 is *To Catch a Unicorn*, an original play by Linda Stephenson, to be performed in the Studio. The show, which is set in a zoo, includes puppets and original music by Charlie Preston

and will give the Juniors a chance to extend their range of performing skills. The show also features singing and dance.

The Juniors team write all their own material and to date four of their plays have been published at www.lazybeescripts.co.uk, with all royalties going to the group. The plays have been performed by various groups in the UK, USA, Canada, Australia and Hong Kong. One production by a youth group in Liverpool won a festival.

The Juniors Team.

In search of the perfect theatre

How does the QMT stack up against the wish-list of one of the UK's most acclaimed playwrights? Rather well, as Rosemary Bianchi discovers.

Recently, in an article looking back on 50 years in theatre, playwright David Hare set out his vision for a 'Playhouse for today'. It is interesting to compare the six aspects of his ideal theatre with the very real entity that is our own Queen Mother Theatre.

1 - Location: For Hare, the ideal theatre will not be in the centre of London, but in a place where people actually live. Bingo! The QMT is very much part of the community.

2 - Playing Space: Hare cites Chichester's Minerva Theatre as one of the UK's best-designed, combining a big playing space and an intimate audience experience. Recent changes to the QMT's main auditorium stage structure are bringing it closer to the original concept of a flexible space, allowing audiences a more immersive experience - while in The Studio the audience is almost part of the action.

But Hare regrets the 'black box' theatre that is - like both our spaces - wiped clean after each production. He feels a playhouse should carry memories of past greatness into its future. At the QMT we have done this by naming spaces after dedicated members who achieved a great deal for the theatre,

so they will continue to be associated with the building for decades to come. In addition, Keith Crook keeps a record of each production and there is a vast box of photographs and programmes in the back corridor just crying out to be archived!

3 - Policy: The primary purpose of Hare's Playhouse would be to do new plays. Well of course! He's a playwright! He asks that plays represent and reflect the society they are performed in, and so, by definition, everything good in the form of gender equality and multiculturalism will follow.

Hare's playhouse will also have a Writer's Room. While we have to wait for performing rights of existing plays to become available our two very lively writers' groups can aspire to have work performed at the QMT.

4 - Site Specific and Touring: Hare would encourage directors to make the case for presenting their plays away from the theatre. At the QMT, plans are afoot to relaunch Woodside Open Air Theatre (The Dell). Many members have happy memories of mad midsummer Shakespeare, with music, dancing and the odd puzzled hedgehog. Meanwhile in The Studio,

its manager David Lester is promoting the idea of productions touring after their run at the QMT.

5 - Restaurants and Bars: 'It's an iron rule that all theatre restaurants are terrible,' says Hare. Well, we don't have to worry as we lack one, but we do have a bar, and Hare advocates a convivial one because 'It's the mix of actors and spectators that brings a theatre bar to life. The conversations that follow are far more enjoyable and informative than any rigidly organised Q&A.'

6 - Effect: No, says Hare, the theatre will not save lives. It is not a hospital. But it will cheer people up, restore spirits, promote the value of cooperative working. And, most of all, it will radiate a confidence in the uniqueness of the stage as a form of art that can do things no other form can. Its staff will believe in the power of theatre and be living examples of how it enriches people's existence.

Do we do that at the QMT? We surely do. Hare's dream of a playhouse that embraces the possibilities, tradition and engagement of the form sums up perfectly our own Queen Mother Theatre and all who are associated with her.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Sex With a Stranger
(Richard Whitmore Studio)
17-20 January

Playwriting group
(John Coxall Room)
30 January

Audition: Quartet
6 & 8 February

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

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

More places to find BPs and Big Spirit online and in social media

Big Spirit Youth Theatre now has its own website, while the QMT has added a new social media channel.

Visit Big Spirit's new online home at www.bigspirittheatre.co.uk to see videos, photo galleries, info on what Big Spirit offers, and even tips for the entry audition.

Meanwhile, the QMT is now on the photo/video sharing platform Instagram as @TheQMT - come follow us, and tag your own snaps.



What works for me... HOW TO LEARN ACCENTS

At any given time, the Queen Mother Theatre is usually home to at least one production in rehearsal - and, often, many more. With so many actors on hand to give advice, we're launching a new series of articles in which the cast of an upcoming production share their tips on one aspect of the actors' craft. This month: how to learn an accent.

Arthur Miller's classic play *A View From the Bridge* is set in Red Hook, Brooklyn, and calls for its cast to master the local accent - familiar from countless movies - as well as the Italian accents of the two immigrants whose arrival triggers the onrushing tragedy.

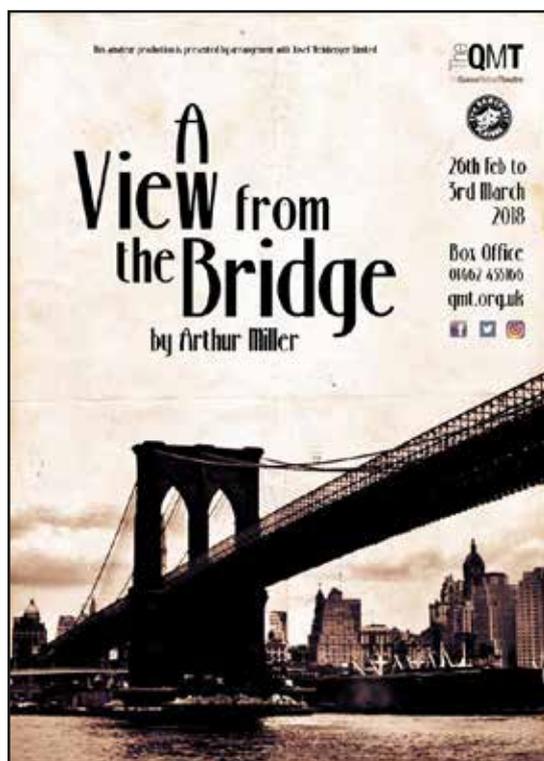
Edith Pratt, directing the forthcoming Bancroft Players' production, is taking the challenge seriously, bringing in an accent coach and working hard to ensure the accents sound unforced and natural, adding to the performances and not distracting from them.

Here some of her cast share their techniques for learning an accent.

'A View From the Bridge' runs in the Main Theatre from February 26 to March 3. Tickets available from the Box Office or qmt.org.uk. Look out for an interview with Edith in the next edition.

Lauren Tillbrook

I have to hear it - I have to do the research. YouTube videos, watch a film where they have the accent, then study certain words.



Matt Gray

I basically watched 'How to speak English with the Italian accent' videos on YouTube. And watched *The Godfather*.

Sian Spencer

Listen to the correct accent and have key words to get you back in. I think it's different for each person, but I just have to say 'Noo Yawk' and I'm back in.



Divyesh Thakerar

Listen to individual words and copy and repeat. I also use YouTube - I don't use accent guides usually, I more try to look for clips from TV and also for people having done that character before.

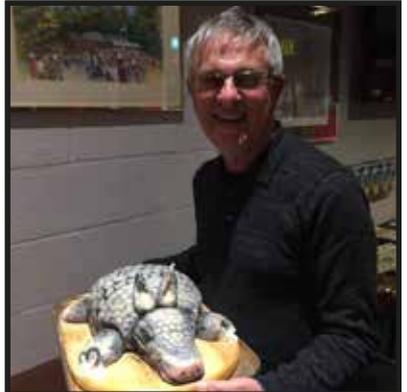


Keith Swainston

I look for key sounds like the rhotic R - only Americans do that stuff - and movies like *Goodfellas* and *The Godfather*, which are both useful for Italian / New York accents.

Seb Creasey

To learn an accent, it's good to have a key phrase that gets you straight into it. Having some words that bring to mind a lot of things in the accent is very helpful.

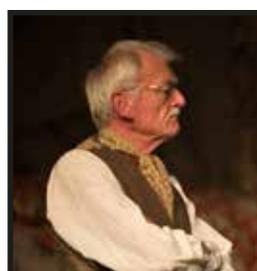


Brian Seal

A Brooklyn accent is required for this play and, although it's not strictly Brooklyn, I've always been a big Sinatra fan. I've always listened to him singing and speaking so a lot of my sounds are based on him.

Alan Hemming

It's a matter of observation and listening. I had to do what I hope was a reasonably accurate Yorkshire accent in a production, and one of my daughters-in-law is a Yorkshire lass so I was able to bring that in.



Who's who in the Bancroft Players

Executive Committee 2017 to 2018	Diary Organiser <i>Edith Pratt</i>
Richard Whitmore <i>President Emeritus</i>	Fire Officer <i>Chris Lane</i>
Frank Pratt <i>President</i>	First Aid Officer <i>Paula Downes</i>
Les Edwards <i>Chairman</i>	Front of House Manager <i>Paula Downes</i>
Susan Mellor <i>Secretary</i>	Health & Safety Coordinator <i>David Hillelson</i>
Tim Hallas <i>Treasurer</i>	Junior Theatre Group <i>Alison Hudson</i>
Rory Reynolds <i>Artistic Director</i>	Keys Distributor <i>David Lester</i>
Nicki Pope <i>Production Manager (Main Theatre)</i>	Licensing Manager <i>Tim Hallas</i>
David Lester <i>Production Manager (Studio)</i>	Membership <i>Edith Pratt</i>
Chris Lane <i>Theatre Manager</i>	Newsletter <i>Rosemary Bianchi</i>
Julian Newman Turner <i>Business Manager</i>	Properties <i>Audrey Hawkins, Julie Chamberlain</i>
David Borner <i>Committee Member</i>	Publicity Manager <i>Julian Newman Turner</i>
Charlotte Ryan <i>Committee Member</i>	Refreshments/ Stewards <i>Lyn Bryars, Mo Mutton</i>
Emma Saunders <i>Committee member</i>	Set & Design Manager <i>Rosemary Bianchi</i>
Zara Schafer <i>Committee Member</i>	Technical Manager <i>Alan Bailes</i>
Appointments 2017 to 2018	Workshop Coordinator <i>Clive Hall</i>
Vice-Chairman <i>Chris Lane</i>	Wardrobe Liaison <i>Sally Hull</i>
Box Office Manager <i>Vacant</i>	Welfare: <i>Vacant</i>
Bar Manager <i>Vacant</i>	What's On Distribution <i>Susan Mellor</i>
Bar Committee <i>Frank Pratt</i>	Youth Theatre Group <i>Rory Reynolds</i>
Bar Rota <i>Mark Castell</i>	200 Club <i>Paula Downes</i>
Bookings Manager <i>Edith Pratt (evening), Keith Crook (day)</i>	

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.

Would you Adam and Eve it? 'Late Again' are right on time in Xmas Quiz

December's QMT Quiz Night was a lively, festive but fiercely competitive event which tested everyone's trivia knowledge to the max.

Who knew that if you saw a Turdis in the window, it is not just because you haven't cleaned it? Or that a picture round could reveal that Freddy Mercury was Errol Flynn's lovechild? With our Cockney Rhyming skills boosted, we can say that everyone was 'avin a lark and a right giraffe.

Eight teams battled for the star prize. Throughout, it looked as though "Motley Crew's" winning streak would continue, but team "Late Again" came up from the back to snatch their crown.

With thanks to Quiz Maestro Brian Hull and his team for organising the evening and sharing Christmas cheer.

Christine Neal

Bancroft Players' 200 Club

Another brief report this month, the main purpose being to congratulate our £100 winner, Bev Bollons.

Bev was our licensee for a time, following Noel's death in 2014.

She also proves the point I was making last month that it pays to have more than one number in the draw as she has two!

Congratulations to Bev and all our December winners.

As I write this, Christmas is 8 days away (according to my Advent

Calendar) but by the time you read this I expect the tinsel and baubles will be safely packed away for another year. I do hope you had a good one and all the very best for 2018.

Paula Downes
(paula.downes@ntlworld.com)

December Winners

£100: Bev Bollons
£25: Alan Hemming
£20: Brenda Cundell
£15: Robert Anwyl-Hughes
£10: Keith Johnstone

Newsletter deadlines

Thank you to everyone who answered the call we made in the previous newsletter for help with writing - it's greatly appreciated. More people are always welcome!

Our next challenge is to get back to publishing at the start of the month, not the middle. That means running proper deadlines.

Accordingly, if you have anything that needs to go in the newsletter, please make sure you email it to Rosemary at newsletterqmt@live.com by the 15th of the month. After that, we can't guarantee its inclusion, although we'll try.

The Newsletter Team

February edition deadline is NOW!