



The Queen Mother Theatre

Newsletter

January 2019

Welcome to an exciting new year of great theatre at

THE QMT

Beacons

By Tabitha Mortiboy.

January 16-19

"A story about hope and love - the audience will leave with spirits lifted."



The Drums of Mbongo

By Linda Stephenson and Alison Hudson.

February 6-8

"The BJ Juniors meet the Queen of the Jungle - but who can the children trust?"

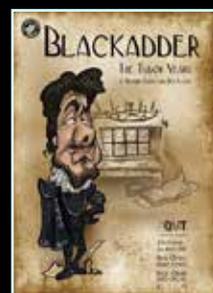


Blackadder: the Tudor Years

By Richard Curtis & Ben Elton.

Feb 25 - Mar 2

"Madness and mayhem across Elizabethan England - book fast as it will sell out!"



Terri Hyde led festive crowds through the Cakehole and into the magical world of Candy Land, in Rosemary Bianchi's Christmas extravaganza 'The Nutcracker and the Mouse King'. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.

The QMT



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



Doug Brooker, Alison Hancock and Kelsey Duffy in rehearsal for 'Beacons'. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.

'Beacons': On the edge with hope, joy and a 99 Flake

'Beacons', written by Tabitha Mortiboy, runs in The Studio from January 16-19. Andy Darley spoke to director Vivien Kerr about what drew her to the play and what the audience can expect.



When Vivien Kerr was offered the chance to kick off 2019 for the Bancroft Players by directing *Beacons* in The Studio, saying 'yes' was not a decision that needed much thought.

"It's an absolutely wonderful play that grabbed me the first time I read it," she said. "The language in it, the way the writer puts the words together for each of the characters, is quite wonderful.

"It's funny in places, there's some lovely dialogue and some joyous moments, and the audience will come away having seen something that lifts their spirits."

A three-hander set on the cliffs of Beachy Head, *Beacons* takes an optimistic approach to a dark topic: "It's a story about hope and love," she said.

"That might not seem immediately obvious from the subject matter, which is suicide and people getting to the stage where they feel the only option is suicide. However, while some of the scenes are challenging and emotional, there's a feeling of hope throughout and the characters never give up.

"It's a serious subject, but not depressing – it's not one of those plays where you come away thinking 'that was

interesting, but did I enjoy it?' I think people will love it."

Realising the power of the play, she chose to dispense with The Studio's raked seating and instead use a thrust stage. She said: "There is some lovely, lovely work coming from the cast, it's a joy to watch. So I wanted them to be able to come out and be close to the audience, who should really be with them. I didn't want someone stuck up in the last seat at the top feeling they weren't into what's going on."

Beacons runs in The Studio from January 16-19.

Beacons is a gentle, compelling story of three lost souls who find a kind of family at an ice cream van on the cliffs of Beachy Head - a noted beauty spot but also a place where people go to meet their end when life seems to offer nothing more.

Julie is the van owner, selling 99s by day and patrolling the cliffs by night as a volunteer reaching out to help the hopeless. Young Skye, who works in the van with her, has a knack for changing the subject when anyone asks about her past. The

recently homeless Bernard is rebuilding his life and clearly wishes Julie could be part of it. She, though, is looking for romance online and sees her future elsewhere.

This beautiful, hopeful play weaves their stories together with deceptive simplicity, building to a moving, powerful but above all optimistic climax as we learn how their lives are already deeply intertwined, and why they are drawn to the serenity and danger of the cliff edge.

What works for me... AS SEEN ON TV

In this month's look at techniques used by Bancroft Players actors, the cast of 'Blackadder' explores the challenge of bringing a character to the stage that the audience knows and loves from TV. Where is the balance between giving the public what it expects and creating something fresh?

Maureen Nobes (Nursie)

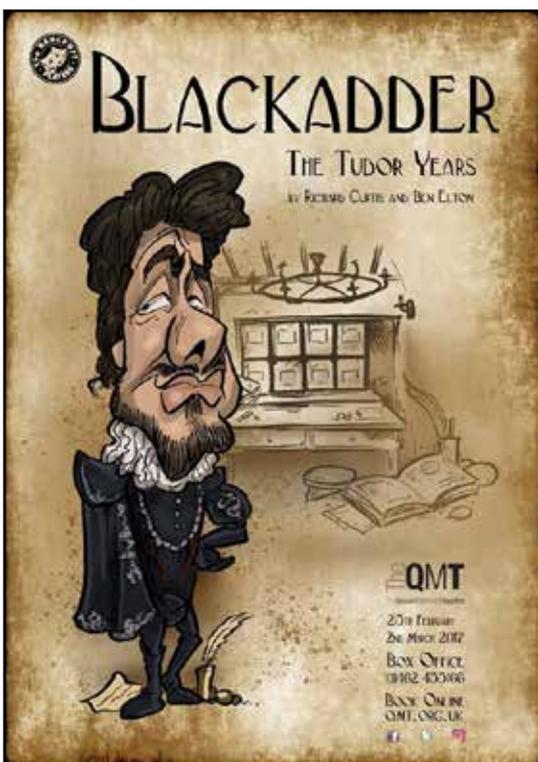
Our audience will expect us to look as close as we can to the original character. I have done TV adaptations before and, when we get audience feedback, people say 'I saw you as so-and-so and you were so like what we saw on television'. That for me is a big part of it - to get as close as I can in mannerisms and voice.

Claudia O'Connell (Queenie)

I have been a fan since I was a child so I knew the character anyway - but recently I've watched DVDs lots and lots and lots. I try and mimic her as closely as I can because obviously that's what people want.

Zara Schafer

This isn't the type of theatre to put your own spin on - the audience will come expecting to see what they have seen and will probably know the script inside out.



'Blackadder: The Tudor Years': Feb 25 - Mar 2 in the Main Theatre.
Tickets from Box Office on 01462 455166 or www.qmt.org.uk

Rory Reynolds (Blackadder)

Being on television, the original is frozen in time and people want to see what they expect to see. What we give them will be similar to that, but it can't be a rip-off otherwise it's not worth doing. You could go for a photographic version but, unless you can do an absolutely perfect Rowan Atkinson, you've got to bring something to it yourself - you have to give your own version of it.

James Kirwan (Baldrick)

I'm trying to get how the character sounds. Everything's flat and played down which is very difficult because when you're on stage you try to play everything large for the laughs. I want to sound and look like him because that's what people expect when they turn up but there's no extra pressure because it's from TV - it's just a character. I'm trying to get the voice right and go from there.

Adrian Laycock (Melchett)

I impersonate the character, not the actor. I can't be a better Stephen Fry than Stephen Fry is, but I can give people sufficient of what they expect, mixed with my take. Everyone associates Melchett with Fry's braying 'Baaaah' - the over-the-top manner and clipped vowels - so I have used that, even though it actually comes in the WWI series, not this.

Saul Bailey (Percy)

You can't divert too far because this is *Blackadder* - people know it and love it. That being said, I can add my own little actions while remaining true to the original. The question as an actor is how good is your listening - if you listen to the performances around you, it will be easy to react in character, rather than blindly copying off the TV.

Fay Worboys (Bob)

In a television adaptation people know exactly what the character is like, and you have to learn your lines exactly. When I played Alice in *The Vicar of Dibley* there was one passage about butter and I watched it over and over again. You audition knowing that's what's expected - if you want to craft your own character, this is not the type of show.

Matt Gray (Bishop of Bath and Wells / Lord Flashheart)

Having watched this since its first run and worn out countless videotapes, this is the first play where I haven't had to learn any lines. My two characters are very, very different. The Bishop is very recognisable, but the actor is not so well-known. Playing Flashheart is more difficult because Rik Mayall is such a comedy icon, so I've not tried to do anything other than emulate his genius.

We Happy Few

Ladies, ladies, ladies and men - your society needs you! The May production is *We Happy Few* by Imogen Stubbs. It follows the story of a group of women as they perform Shakespeare in village halls and schools around the UK during the Second World War

Based on the real-life exploits of The Osiris Players this, at turns, funny and serious piece has some great female roles with the added bonus of getting the chance to perform as Henry V, Macbeth, Hamlet and Julius Caesar.

There are eight females and three males plus several other characters (bureaucrats, auditionees etc) which can either be played by members of the cast or an extra female and male to play all of them.

Books are available from the Box Office now. Alisha, Nicki and I look forward to seeing you.

THE DETAILS:

By: Imogen Stubbs, directed by Charles Plester

Auditions: Mon 4 & Web 6 Feb

Performances: 6-11 May

Rehearsals: Mon & Wed

Scripts: Available from Box Office

THE ROLES:

THE ARTEMIS PLAYERS:

Henrietta (Hetty) Oaks: Any age but old enough to have a grown-up son. The leader of the group - single minded, tough and resourceful.

Flora Pelmet: Over forty, well-educated but nervous and dithery, she is the perfect foil for Hetty.

Charlotte (Charlie) Peters: Any age, a cockney tomboy - originally part of the group because she can change a tyre.

Helen Irving: Over forty, a professional actress, she is cynical, bitchy and great fun to play.

Rosalind Roberts: In her 20s, Helen's daughter, warm hearted and eager to please, struggling to free herself from her domineering mother.

Rosalind Tripp: An elderly eccentric - comic gem!

Ivy Williams: Young Brummie working class girl - ever optimistic and cheerful (despite being clumsy and prone to say the wrong thing). Keeps the group going with her never say die attitude - must be able to sing.

OTHERS:

Joseph: In his twenties, aspires to be a band leader. He and his grandparents are Polish refugees who take rooms with Flora.

Gertrude: Is serious minded and does not approve of her grandson's blossoming romance with Ivy.

Wilhelm: The peace maker as well as (much to Hetty's delight) a pianist.

Reggie Pelmet: Over forty - Flora's cousin - practical, cheerful and useless in a crisis, he is the stage manager of the group.

Various: There are lots of walk on roles. These can be played by the cast, but I would prefer to cast one male and female to take on these parts.

Casting news

The cast for *Constellations*, directed by Grace Reinhold-Gittins, is:

Roland: Scott Henderson

Marianne: Annabelle Mackinnon-Austin

Claudia's come home - but where's Audrey?

I find great pleasure when actors who have been away for some years return to the stage of the QMT, writes Keith Crook.

Most recently was the appearance of Claudia O'Connell as Titania in MND in July. Apart from Youth Theatre events Claudia's first appearance on stage (then Claudia Burt) was as Audrey in *Little Shop of Horrors* 27 years ago.

The most notable effect in this production was the largest plant. Audrey I is a hand puppet, Audrey II is a larger one as the plant grows and Audrey III is the giant man-eater. Two of our accomplished props builders Ron Parrett and Roger Smith built this huge

plant out of fibreglass and it took them 160 man-hours.

It was put on stage in the interval and there was an audible intake of breath when the curtains parted for Act 2. The limbs covered more or less the entire width of the stage.

More remarkable is that in 1991 we had no separate workshop so everything was built in the wing space - including the plant. I've no idea now of how they got Mushkin's shop on and off as well as storing Audrey in the wings. The wing space was larger then since the technical room wasn't there but even so...

The puppeteer who sweated every night concealed inside it was Barry Nixon

and the voice "feed me" was provided by Pauline Pearce who gained some notoriety when she confronted the London rioters many years ago with "you shouldn't be doing this".

After the production we had to dispose of the prop. With help from the Youth Theatre, we got it up the hill into my garage whence it eventually went to the Bob Hope Theatre at Eltham in a very large van. They used it then sold it on.

When we did LSH again in 2007 we asked if they knew where our Audrey had gone but nobody could remember, so we hired in a complete set of props from Twickenham.

Keith Crook