



# The Bancroft Players

Newsletter  
July 2018



Emily Miles and Gabs Rodriguez-Cleary seek non-verbal methods of communication in the thought-provoking two-hander 'Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons', written by Sam Steiner and directed in The Studio by Russell Hurn. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.

## Auditions

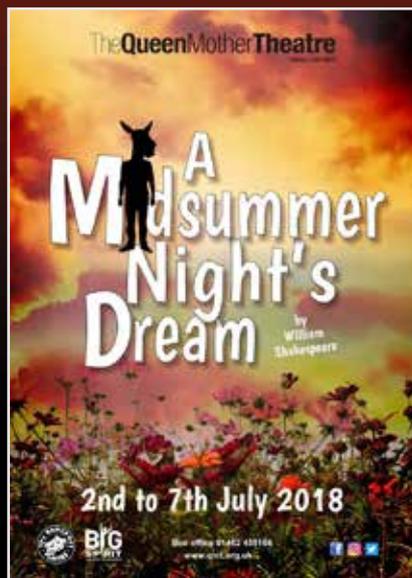
*The Father*  
June 25 & 27

*Bette & Joan*  
July 9 & 11

*The Nutcracker  
and the Mouse  
King*  
September 4 & 6

Audition dates for the two short plays in the 'One Act Bites' event in September will be announced shortly and circulated by email, social media, and on the website.

## A Midsummer Night's Dream



*A Midsummer Night's Dream*,  
July 2-7, Main Theatre  
Box Office 01462 455166 / qmt.org.uk



## Tickets on sale now

The QMT

TheQMT

@QMTweeters

@TheQMT

qmt.org.uk

The Richard Whitmore  
STUDIO

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

Rory Reynolds

# 'Let the good times roll!'

So we swing into action for another cracking season!

By an odd quirk of tradition the Bancroft Players year is out of joint with the real year, the school year and the tax year. Yes it's the BP Year!

And like Rome always measured time from its founding, we should do the same here - so let's welcome in Year 73 BP.

So what's in prospect?

Well, the first play of the season is in fact the last play of last season but it falls in this season as the new season starts on 1 July. Got that?

So that show is *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - obviously.

But the REAL first play of the 2018-19 season is *A Bunch of Amateurs* in September under the capable direction of David Lester. It's all now cast and you'll find the details elsewhere in this learned organ.

Look, there's just lots of shows on the stocks for the coming BP year awaiting casting so there's many, many chances to be involved.

If you don't fancy appearing onstage then Emma and the backstage crew are always

## Artistic Director's blog

welcoming while the Front of House team can cast you immediately in a starring role welcoming audiences to our lovely theatre!

We like to think of the Bancroft players as a family and the QMT as our home. It's a big family but there's always room for more and we'd love to see all of you down here enjoying yourselves.

Now, who wants to see some lovely pictures of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in rehearsal? Here they are!

Rory



Clockwise from top left: Titania (Claudia O'Connell) and her entourage - Violet Morris (Moth), Emily Smith (First Fairy), Tia Shenton (Hemlock); Lovers in waiting - Charlie Preston (Lysander), Ewan Morris (Demetrius), Seb Creasey (Demetrius); Saul Bailey as Puck; Ylana Schafer-Thomson (Hermia) and Georgia Head (Helena); Quince (Charles Plester) tries to keep the Mechanicals in order - Leo Stewart (Snug), Tige Burns (Flute), Louis Bailey (Snout), Emma Fisher (Starveling); Molly Hughes (Helena); Gareth Martin (Bottom) impresses Thisbe (Tige Burns).





Carlyss Peer directs Divyesh Thakerar (Oberon) and Claudia O'Connell (Titania) in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

**Rosemary Bianchi sat in on a rehearsal of the QMT's summer Shakespeare treat, and afterwards spoke to director Carlyss Peer about what inspired the production. Performance dates: July 2-7 in the Main Theatre.**

## 'A Midsummer Night's Dream': a fun playground where anything is possible

Sitting in on a rehearsal of the upcoming production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, I was struck by the clarity and attention to detail of the performances unfolding before me, writes *Rosemary Bianchi*.

Watching director and actors gradually unpeeling the layers of meaning behind the words and finding the truth in the relationship between Oberon and Titania, the individual nature of each fairy, and the wildly different objectives of each of the lovers was fascinating. The focus was intense, but there was also a great sense of fun and lots of laughter. Everyone was obviously having a great time.

Talking to Director Carlyss Peer after the rehearsal, she described how they were creating this other world, that the dark woods were the fairies' "fun playground" where anything was possible.

She said: "Because the play has been done so many times by the Bancroft Players, including several outdoor productions, we asked ourselves what could we do in an indoor theatre that couldn't be done outside?"

"Our inspiration came from many sources but especially from Tim Burton, whose use of images is very strong.

"After lots of discussion with set designer, Keith Warren and lighting designer Dan Barnicott, we settled on dividing the space into very different areas with the front rows of the audience virtually on stage.

"It's created a really dynamic feel, there's an edge to the production and audiences who are accustomed to Shakespeare will find it

different but hopefully relate to it as contemporary and exciting."

Carlyss is being assisted by actor Matt Beveridge, who has recently moved to Hitchin and is immersing himself in what is happening locally. They agree that working with an integrated company of adult BPs, new members and Big Spirit Youth Theatre has been exciting.

"The fusion has worked," says Carlyss. "It's lovely to have the breadth of experience of the adults and the energy of the Youth Theatre. Big Spirit are very used to working as an ensemble, while the adults are more used to working as individuals, and so they challenge each other and this adds to the community, family feel of the show."

Audiences are in for a real treat from the moment they enter the auditorium and find themselves in Oberon and Titania's magic woodland where nothing is as it seems and love is all around!

*Below: Mechanicals Bottom (Gareth Martin), Quince (Charles Plester), Snug (Leo Stewart) and Snout (Louis Bailey). Charles said that the fusion between adult company, Big Spirit and new members provided a real energy boost to the production.*



# Bancroft Players 2018 AGM report



## Annual meeting welcomes new secretary, treasurer and bar manager, looks to the future with optimism

*Rosemary Bianchi reports on a positive and productive AGM that saw pride in the year's achievements and lots of ideas for the months ahead*

The Annual General Meeting of the Bancroft Players was held in the Richard Whitmore Studio on Thursday 14 June.

Welcoming everyone, Chairman Les Edwards was happy to note the gathering was larger than the year before. President, Chairman and Secretary sat framed by the giant speech bubble painted on the wall behind them, a reminder of the recent production of *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons*, a play about the power of words.

### Treasurer

**Tim Hallas** thanked Keith Crook and Fay Worboys for their tireless work. Shows brought in £45,000, but alongside this headline figure other departments generate income, raising the total to £50,000. With expenditure of about £25,000, the society is in a healthy position. Audited figures will be available on the website.

The Society congratulated Tim and Harriet, who are expecting their first child. Tim is therefore standing down as Treasurer, but assures everyone that he remains fully committed to the Society.

### Theatre Manager

**Chris Lane** drew our attention to the plaque outside showing the QMT had been here for 35 years. When it first opened, the local council predicted we wouldn't last two years!

The biggest change in the theatre this year has been the altering of the rostra making up the stage floor, allowing more flexibility of staging. In addition the Green Room has been refurbished, with a new sink unit and hot water (Cue enthusiastic cheers from the members).

Chris asked departments to let him know as early as possible to put into an early budget so that money for projects can be set aside. Big thanks to Keith, Clive, Mark and Dave and to Emma and her work parties. It was really appreciated.

### Artistic Director

**Rory Reynolds** celebrated another great year. The variety of work in the QMT's spaces really makes the theatre live. He reviewed the five very successful Main House productions, and looked forward to the forthcoming *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. With the

new programme recently launched, his goal is to encourage directors to find new ways to present shows.

He said: "There is great diversity of opportunity within the society, not only in acting and directing, but in technical, FOH, design and making, and the writers' group is flourishing under the tutelage of Sally, a professional writer with the BBC."

Members evenings have started up again, and Rory encourages members to participate, to "Come down and have some fun, to feel that this is your home".

### Main House

**Nicki Pope** thanked everyone involved in the season's shows, including Alan Bailes and his tech crew, who successfully pair up experienced people with newcomers to pass on skills. The set department with Rosemary, Clive, Dave and Co is doing great work, as is amazing Emma and her backstage team. She thanked the Props department, headed by Audrey and Julie, and Wardrobe, under the guidance of Sally, Maureen, Nicola and team. Andy Darley was praised for his innovative video work.

# Bancroft Players AGM report (continued)

## The Studio

**David Lester** is pleased that, in his second season, the Studio continues to develop new directors, actors, designers, backstage and technical crews. Q&A sessions have been introduced after Thursday shows, engaging audiences for feedback. He hopes to extend shows to tour other venues and stressed the importance of digital media in selling shows.

## Business Manager

**Julian Newman Turner** made us all laugh with his vision of 'Bums on Seats'. His role is the voice of the FOH departments, and all is going well although more people are needed to train for the Bar. Paula has an excellent team of FOH managers and stewards and a ticket initiative will be introduced to encourage volunteers. The QMT is now on Instagram.

He thanked Louise for the website, Keith for proofreading and working on the What's On, Chloe and Keith Warren for distribution and Rosemary and Andy for the Newsletter and especially Andy for promoting shows. He reminded us of the BPs stall at the Hitchin Independents Event in the Market Square on 7 July.

## Big Spirit Youth Theatre

Big Spirit is thriving, as **Rory** reported. Members love coming to the theatre and derive good value from their subscriptions. Plays must be challenging, with a 30+ cast. This season a specially commissioned play by Rob Hughes, *I Don't Like Mondays*, about US school shootings, was a landmark piece of theatre and will be the group's Edinburgh production.

Mindful of the many musical members, *Spring Awakening* was staged in the Studio. Rory thanked Dan Writer for his technical expertise and the Hallas brothers, without whom the show could not have been done. Big Spirit has its own writers' group, with small-scale Friday evening performances of work. Members are



Ewan Morris and Amy Shields as the ill-fated lovers Melchior and Wendla in Big Spirit's production of 'Spring Awakening'. Photo: Paul Seaby.

also looking forward to working with the adult society on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

## Bancroft Players' Juniors

The Juniors, under the care of **Alison Hudson** and her team, also go from strength to strength and had a very productive year. *To Catch a Unicorn* by Linda Stephenson introduced the young members to the skills of puppetry and was performed in the Studio with a small live band. Former members, now with Big Spirit, love to come back to work with the Juniors. All money raised from shows is ploughed back into the Junior BPs.

## 200 Club

**Paula Downes** appealed for more 200 Club members. Each year the club makes a donation to the society for a much-needed item. This year it has donated £510 towards moulded booster seat cushions. These will replace the present cushions which are prone to deflate, leaving young viewers with that sinking feeling!

## Chairman

Summing up, **Les Edwards** thanked all departments of the society, and welcomed Christine Neal who is taking over running the Bar. Exciting ideas are being discussed by the Executive, and a young husband and wife team of architects have offered their expertise in proposing developments to the theatre. A qualified interior designer will get to grips with improving the

foyer area. Elliott was thanked for the Theatre's response to GDPR and for his tireless work on Oscar.

## Elections

Keith Crook was voted in as Treasurer, Vivienne Kerr as Secretary, and Matt Grey joined the Committee. All other members were re-elected. Les thanked Sue Mellor, who stepped down as Secretary after long and valiant service, and Emma Saunders who left the committee but is still committed to running the stage management department. Special praise went to Lyn Briars, who is retiring after managing the Coffee Bar for 12 years. No one has volunteered to take over from Lyn and a replacement is desperately needed!

## Comments and Suggestions

A plea was made for somewhere for the audience to hang coats: the corridor at the back of the auditorium was suggested. Dedicated programme sellers are needed on performance nights, as stewards must focus on helping the audience. Chris Lane pointed out the Theatre Manager job had changed radically due to new legislation and may need to be filled by two people in the future. Elliott asked for a concentrated membership drive, as the number of paid-up members needed to be increased.

Thus ended a productive and positive meeting, with pride in the achievements of the past year, and lots of ideas for the year ahead.

Rosemary Bianchi

## Audition notice

## Main Theatre

# Bette & Joan

By 1962 two of the silver screen's great leading ladies, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, were has-beens. The women - both famed for playing strong independent characters, both with difficult personal lives and both a long way past 40 - had been replaced by a new breed of perky blonde stars.

Then they got an unexpected opportunity: playing opposite each other in what was to become a cult classic, *Whatever Happened To Baby Jane?*

The play is set in the adjoining dressing rooms of Davis and Crawford on the back-lot of the Warner Bros Studio where "Baby Jane" was being filmed. It uses autobiographical accounts and gossip-column rumour to build up a picture and story of what really happened between the women off-screen.

If you've seen the recently televised *Feud* by Ryan Murphy, this play charts a similar period of time, but in a heavily condensed way.

### THE DETAILS:

**By:** Anton Burge, directed by Elliott Bunker

**Auditions:** Mon 9 & Wed 11 July

**Performances:** 31 Oct - 3 Nov

**Rehearsals:** Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings

**Scripts:** From Box Office.

## THE ROLES:

**Bette Davis:** Hollywood actress, 54. A star with nothing to prove. Brisk, no nonsense to the point of abruptness, caustic, brittle, difficult, vulnerable and funny. At the time of filming, a low point in her life and career. Has worked steadily through the '50s, though often with unrewarding results. Angry at the state of the business and her position within it. A professional to her fingertips. Four times married, recently divorced, mother of three (two adopted). All that matters now is the work.

**Joan Crawford:** Hollywood star, admits to 54 though is actually 58; as an actress has much to prove. Glamorous, neurotic, moody, vulnerable, generous and alcoholic. Desperate for approval. Comfortable playing the star, though there is always an uncertainty about this, stemming from a childhood that lacked education and love, from which she struggled, reinventing herself, to survive in the toughest of businesses. Four times married, recently widowed, mother of four (all adopted). Throughout her life, in spite of adversity, the image of Joan Crawford, star, continues to shine.

## Audition notice

## Main Theatre

# The Nutcracker and the Mouse King

Here we are in midsummer, and we're already thinking about the Christmas Play!

It's Christmas Eve. Marie and her brother Tom are out in the snow, watching guests arriving for a Christmas party. The house is large, the people are rich, they don't notice the two children shivering outside.

Through the window they see the great Christmas tree, wonderful food, merriment. Dr Drosselmeyer is handing out magical presents, one of which is the Nutcracker of the title. But later it lies discarded, broken, thrown out in favour of more glamorous presents. Marie rescues it and promises to look after it. But on the stroke of midnight it comes alive, and a battle ensues between him and the Mouse King, who is ransacking the house.

With great characters, exciting action and comic twists, this version of the well-loved story brings the spirit of Christmas to life.

### THE DETAILS:

**By:** ETA Hoffman, directed by Rosemary Bianchi

**Auditions:** Tue 4 & Thu 6 Sept at 7.45pm

**Performances:** 7-9 Dec and 14-16 Dec

**Rehearsals:** Tue & Thu evenings from mid-Sept, plus some extra rehearsals to be agreed with cast closer to the production.

**Scripts:** Available from Mid-July

**Contact:** Rosemary at [rosebianchi12@hotmail.com](mailto:rosebianchi12@hotmail.com)

## THE ROLES:

**Marie:** Age 10 but played by an adult/teenager. Brave, forthright and steadfast.

**Tom:** Her brother, 7, played by an adult/teenager. Easily led, boastful, bit of a joker.

**ETA Hoffman:** The storyteller, doubling as Dr Drosselmeyer the toymaker/magician. Any age/gender. Mysterious, sees everything, knows everything, appears everywhere.

**Nutcracker Prince:** Young man, soldier, heroic. Occasionally transforms into wooden toy.

**Lady Doray:** fabulously wealthy, scheming, cruel. Transforms into the Mouse Queen.

**The Hon Charlotte Doray:** 10, played by an older person. Selfish, spoilt, prone to tantrums.

**Pettigrew:** Itinerant purveyor of dubious goods. Shifty, merciless. Transforms into the massively evil Mouse King.

**Snotgrumble:** Pettigrew's sidekick and lieutenant. Female. Sly and slithery.

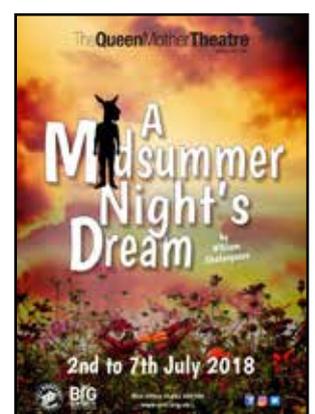
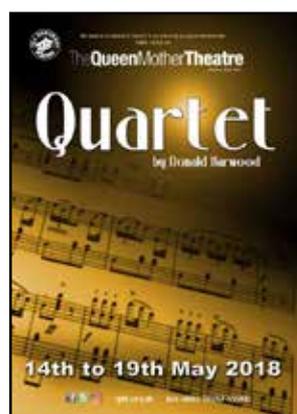
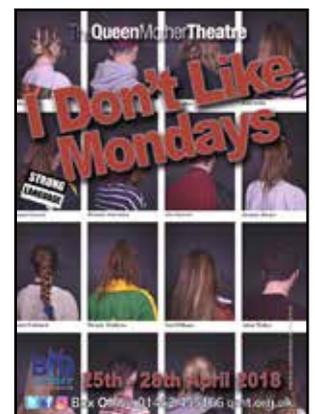
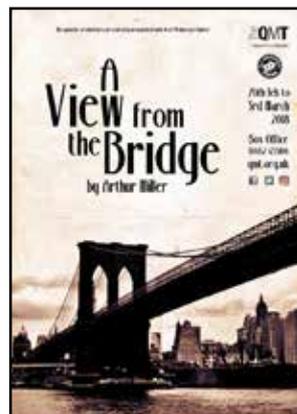
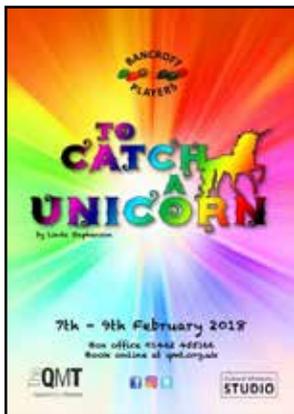
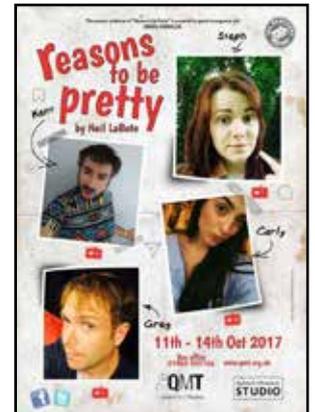
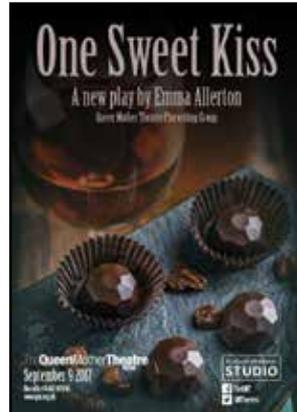
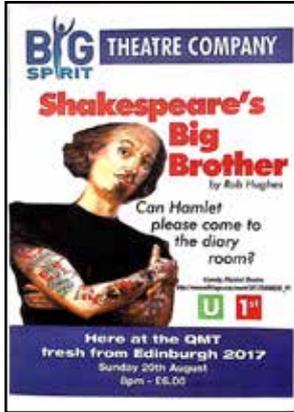
**Escobar:** The Prince's minder. Loyal, watchful, a bit cynical and weary of the world.

**Cook:** Transforms into the Sugar Plum Fairy. Cosy and comforting.

**Ensemble:** Extremely important! Mice, soldiers, guests, Candylanders, and advancing the story. All will be active speaking roles.

# Sweet Sixteen: The 2017-18 season at the QMT

From one-off performances for Big Spirit's Edinburgh show 'Shakespeare's Big Brother' and the QMT Playwriting Group winner 'One Sweet Kiss', to July's season-closing 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', no fewer than 16 shows were staged by the Bancroft Players, Big Spirit Youth Theatre and the BP Juniors during the 2017-18 season. That's a lot of actors, a lot of stage crew and technical workers - and even more Front of House volunteers! Re-live the season with this look back at the year's posters - and don't forget, there's still time to book your tickets for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'.



## Bancroft Players' 200 Club funds new 'booster' seats for young theatre-goers

By the time this is published, the AGM will be well and truly over. I am going to cheat at this stage and give you an extract from my report, so if you are "hearing" this twice – then my apologies! writes Paula Downes.

"This year the Club once again donated £500 towards theatre funds plus an additional £10. One of the numbers drawn out in June last year was for someone who had sadly died in February of that year that I had not realised. Her son advised me of this and asked if the £10 could be put back into our funds. So a cheque for £510 has been presented to Keith Crook.

"This year I have been totally selfish and asked that these funds go towards something that will be of great assistance to me personally. Probably unbeknown to most of you (but not Edith) we have a number of "booster cushions" that are used for shows where a lot of children are in the audience.

"They are inflatable cushions and I seem to spend an inordinate amount of time re-inflating the cushions as they deflate fairly rapidly. Although I must add, I do use a rather noisy machine for this task. So we will be investing in moulded plastic booster seats, which will not deflate – I just hope they get returned after each show!"

I hope everyone approves of my decision with respect to the distribution of this year's contribution.

So who won the June £50 draw, I guess you are all asking? I am delighted to announce that Brian Hull won our mega June draw. As I said last month, if you want to be in a chance of winning the December £100 draw, then start thinking about it now.

Finally congratulations to the other June winners.

### June Winners

£50: Brian Hull

£25: Barbara Swainston

£20: Wendy Whitmore

£15: Amanda Campbell-Phillips

£10: Alan Lintern

## Casting news: 'A Bunch of Amateurs'

**Jefferson Steele:** Matt Gray

**Jessica Steele:** Emma McArthur

**Dorothy Nettle:** Emma Northcott

**Mary Plunkett:** Liz Pybus

**Nigel Newbury:** Charles Compton

**Denis Dobbings:** Alan Hemming

**Lauren Bell:** Claudia O'Connell

## BP Juniors plan two July shows

The Bancroft Players Juniors will present two plays written by playwright in residence Linda Stephenson: *Mr. Bennet's Barn* and *Bobby*, each with a full cast.

*Mr. Bennet's Barn*, mainly with the younger players, tells how a group of children sheltering from a storm find an exotic injured bird in a barn. The plot takes them via the vet and the police to a professor from a secret research laboratory, and then towards an unexpected discovery.

*Bobby* is a contemporary piece exploring what happens when a young boy becomes a carer for his mother who has been injured in an accident. The effects on his life, and his relations with teacher, social worker and school friends, make for a thought-provoking one act show with strong performances from the experienced cast.

The plays will take place on Friday July 6 at 6.30pm and Saturday July 7 at 10.30am.

Next term, look out for a play set in the jungle complete with drumming rhythms and an African beat.



## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**Audition: *The Father***

June 25 & 27

**Playwriting Group**

June 26

***A Midsummer Night's Dream***

(Main Theatre)

July 2 - 7

***Mr Bennet's Barn & Bobby***

(BP Juniors)

July 6 & 7

**Audition: *Bette & Joan***

July 9 & 11

**Audition: 'One Act Bites'**

Dates TBC - but soon!