



# The Bancroft Players

Newsletter  
June 2019



A moment of joyful freedom for Hannah Morgan as the bed-bound Bea. Photo: Julian Newman Turner

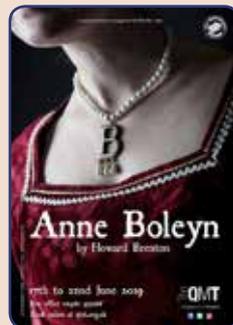
## Dates for your diary:

Audition: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, June 24 & 27

Bancroft Players AGM, June 26 at 8pm  
in The Studio

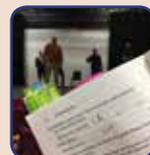
Audition: *Radiant Vermin*, July 2 & 4

Big Spirit July Production: *Brenda Bly*  
- *Teen Detective*, July 4 - 6



## Anne Boleyn

June 17-22, Main Theatre  
Box Office 01462 455166  
/ qmt.org.uk



The QMT



The Richard Whitmore  
STUDIO

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

# "We should have more evenings like this"

We had a great night at the New Season Launch recently.

It was a chance for all ten directors of next year's shows to tell about their vision for the production they will lead. See Andy's article for all the details. Superb jazz too from our very own Gabriel Taylor - it was a wonderful social event!

Someone said "we should have more evenings like this", and so we shall take that on board. Wouldn't it be nice if, say, every Thursday was a bar night with the bar open from 8-10.30pm? What are your thoughts?

I don't know if you caught *Bea* in the Studio? It was a superlative production directed with panache by David Lester. I called in on a rehearsal for *Anne Boleyn* the other day - that is going to be our cracking June show that closes the BP season. Please do get your tickets soon, I can't recommend it highly enough.

Actually the very last show of the season is, by the logic of the BP year, the first show of next season - That's *Brenda Bly - Teen Detective*. It's a rollicking 50s musical directed by the best show choreographer in the area, Katie Milward.

So now we bend our minds to 2019-2020. The first shows are now casting: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Oscar Wilde's last and greatest play, starts us off in late September. The auditions are 24th and 27th June and scripts are now available from the box office.

We want every one of you - yes and that means you - to come along and join in the fun. There are so many shows coming up - so look at the season and just come along. That's what it's all about.

Rory

## New season launch event



Top left: Gabriel Taylor (blue shirt) and vocalist Joan Ariel led the musical entertainment, performing a mix of standards and their own compositions.

Top right: Brian Seal (standing) sets out his plans for the June main house show, Sara Pascoe's adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Bottom: A lively buzz fills the Queen Mother Theatre bar as members gather to hear the directors pitch their shows

and to enjoy the chance to socialise. All photos by Christine Neal. Full details of all the shows, including a timetable of audition, rehearsal and performance dates, appears later in the newsletter.



## Anne Boleyn: Our fascination with a woman born out of her time

**Helen Ashworth previews 'Anne Boleyn', the current show in the Main House.**

**Performance dates: June 17-22.**

*Photo: Terri Hyde as the doomed Queen Anne in a rehearsal for Howard Brenton's 'Anne Boleyn', directed by Nicki Pope.*

**A**t a time when this country is riven by dissent and division, and is facing an uncertain future, the story of Henry VIII's notorious second wife, Anne Boleyn, looks back to an earlier convulsion in our nation's history.

But why are we still so fascinated by Anne? Is it because she appears to be a woman out of her time – sexy, feisty and utterly compelling, in a world where women were meant to be meek, to defer to men and to produce babies?

Howard Brenton's play starts in the early 1600s, when James I has claimed the English throne following the death of Elizabeth I, daughter of Anne and Henry. It is a witty look at how Anne changed this country forever, acting as the catalyst for the overthrow of Catholicism as state religion.

Anne was born in Norfolk around 1501. Her father was a successful diplomat and ambassador and this helped her obtain places as a maid of honour in several European courts. These were renowned for their culture and sophistication, and Anne may also have developed

ideas about religious reform from her friendship with Marguerite Queen of Navarre.

Anne was a follower of William Tynedale, who translated the New Testament into English. This was illegal, as Latin was the official language of the church. Ironically, not three years after both Tynedale's and Anne's deaths, Henry VIII would order every church in England to have an English-language bible.

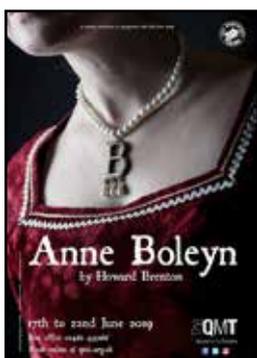
The work was continued by James I, who commissioned the still-current King James version, largely based on Tynedale's translation. In his play, Brenton finds humour in a scene where James gathers a group of clerics to discuss the new bible.

Whatever the legacy of Anne's religious views, her impact on the Royal court was immediate. She returned from the Continent in 1522, and soon became maid of honour to Catherine of Aragon. Her French education and her association with confident powerful women gave her a sophistication apparently lacking in Henry VIII's court.

She was also intelligent, witty and flirtatious. No traditional beauty, she nevertheless had charm, allure and beautiful dark eyes, which she knew how to use. Henry succumbed around 1525-26, and they married seven years later.

No one knows why it went so wrong for Anne in May 1536. Despite a miscarriage, her marriage seemed happy and her position secure. Brenton suggests former ally Thomas Cromwell turned against her, but all we know for certain is the May Day tournament was the turning point and she never saw Henry again. Events moved swiftly and she was executed on May 19.

Brenton's play moves between the courts of Henry VIII and James I, capturing a host of strong and colourful characters. Some, like Wolsey, Cromwell, Jane Seymour and Robert Cecil, are famous (or infamous); others, like Lady Rochford, Tynedale and Dean Lancelot Andrewes, may be less well known. Either way, the cast have taken the bit between their teeth and are relishing bringing them to life for your enjoyment.



# 2019-20 season: play-by-play guide

Want to know more about the shows in the new season? Earlier this month each director shared their plans for their show at a special evening in the QMT bar. Andy Darley was there to take notes... and also present his own show.

Show	Dates	Director	Venue	Auditions	Rehearsals
<i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i>	23-28 Sept with Saturday matinee	Rory Reynolds	Theatre	24 & 27 June	Mon & Wed
<i>Radiant Vermin</i>	15-19 October	Matt Gray	Studio	2 & 4 July	Tue & Thu
<i>Mojo</i>	30 Oct - 2 Nov	Katie Milward	Theatre	19 & 21 August	Mon & Wed, some Sun PM
<i>Cinderella</i>	6-8 & 13-15 Dec, matinees Sat/Sun, no Sun eve	Dee and Richard Lovelock	Theatre	2 & 4 Sept	Mon & Wed adults, Sat PM children
<i>Commencing / Nine</i> (two plays)	14-18 January	Andy Darley	Studio	28 & 30 Oct	Mon & Wed
<i>Macbeth</i>	21-29 Feb (8 performances)	David Lester	Theatre	22 & 24 Oct	Tue & Thu
<i>The One</i>	10-14 March	Rob Hughes	Studio	16 & 18 Dec	Mon & Wed
<i>Urinetown</i>	4-9 May (possible Saturday matinee)	Julian Newman Turner	Theatre	21 & 23 Jan	Tue & Thu, some Sun AM
<i>Airswimming</i>	2-6 June	Harry Harding	Studio	24 & 26 March	Tue & Thu
<i>Pride &amp; Prejudice</i>	15-20 June	Brian Seal	Theatre	2 & 4 March	Mon & Wed

## The Importance of Being Earnest

by Oscar Wilde,

directed by Rory Reynolds

Rory kicked off the evening by pointing out his play needed no introduction: "You all know this play and can recite chunks of it to me. It's impossible to cut anything out of it, it all works - it's the most wonderful dialogue."

Describing it as a "genteel, English farce", he explained his plans to stage it very simply, with sets that the cast will be able to turn around as required and no "swinging from the rafters".

He said: "It's a comedy, so we all know it ends well. It's a classic play, it's for the adult company who will love doing it, and I think it will work very well."

## Radiant Vermin

by Phillip Riley,

directed by Matt Gray

Matt's Studio season-opener is a three-hander that, he said, suits the space well: "It's an interesting piece

with no set whatsoever, just plain white walls and carpet. No props. It's done very much to the audience and is about consumerism."

The play tells the story of a couple who are given a new house: "They are offered the chance to participate in a new programme the government has put together. It seems too good to be true. It is."

Before long they've accidentally killed a local vagrant, and the house mysteriously acquires a new kitchen. Matt said: "They realise the more people they do away with, the more things they get. It will be an exercise for the actors in story-telling, and a real challenge for them as they play lots of parts."

## Mojo

by Jez Butterworth,

directed by Katie Milward

With Katie unable to attend, James Kirwen outlined the 1950s gangland London of Butterworth's play, where the boys gather at the club and the action covers one room, one office and one night. He said: "We did

it here in 2001, we also did *Jerusalem* which was his next big play as well. I love the writing. It's really quick and energetic, really fun."

## Cinderella

directed by Dee and Richard Lovelock

Pantomime veterans Dee and Richard are bringing a wealth of experience and a proven script to the QMT as we venture into unfamiliar territory in this year's Christmas show.

Richard said: "When we first got asked to do it, our initial thought was that, because you're not used to doing pantomimes, the one to do is *Cinderella*. It's the number one everywhere. Dee wrote the script and it's tried and tested."

As well as the familiar named characters, they plan to have a busy chorus and involvement from the Juniors. They said: "It's open to everybody if you want to come along and have some fun. Pantomime character ages are very, very fluid - whether somebody's 70 or 17, it doesn't matter."

## Commencing / Nine

two plays by Jane Shepard,  
directed by Andy Darley

Andy introduced the collection *Kick-Ass Plays for Women*, and the two one-act plays from it that he'll direct in the January Studio slot.

In *Commencing*, a straight woman and a lesbian are bounced together on a blind date. It's a fast-paced, funny play shot through with moments of quiet tragedy as they pick apart each other's lives and loves. *Nine* sees two women held prisoner, chained by the neck in a cellar, using words as challenges to keep each other from losing hope.

He said: "What connects the plays is the theme of women finding ways to communicate and support each other in circumstances that might initially seem impossible. These are two powerful plays that will give four actors a terrific opportunity to develop unique characters - then go kick some ass with them."

## Macbeth

by William Shakespeare,  
directed by David Lester

Mostly avoiding the supposedly-unlucky title of the play, David painted a vivid picture of its continuing relevance: "Backstabbing. The enemy. Blood on their hands - all words used in modern politics. The Scottish play is a very political play about the corrupting power of unchecked ambition and turns those words into actions.

"As with many of Shakespeare's plays, its themes are timeless. For our production, imagine a modern setting in the Scottish Parliament as Macbeth gets advice from a strange group of pollsters. I'm aiming for a stylish political thriller using the original text but trimmed down to about 100 minutes so that it's fast paced. We'll bring some surprises to it, and I have ideas on how to bring the battlefield into the Parliament. It will need a large cast and some traditionally male roles will be played by females."

## The One

by Vicky Jones,  
directed by Rob Hughes

"It's a play about love and relationships and testing each other," said Rob about his show, which is for three characters and was originally on in 2017 at the Soho Theatre with Phoebe Waller-Bridge.

"A lot of people will probably find it quite offensive at points, which I don't think is a bad thing. It's quite hard, some of it, to take - the drunker the characters get, the more intense the conversations get. Secrets come out and, as the audience, you wonder who is telling the truth, and I think the characters do too."

He said the set will be minimal - just a sofa and possibly a table. As for props: "Six bottles of wine and you're there."

## Urinetown

musical by Greg Kotis,  
directed by Julian Newman Turner

With a backing soundtrack and a supporting cast, Julian brought the audience in for a splash-landing in *Urinetown*, where everyone has to use the public bathroom to conduct their private business.

He said: "All the toilets have been privatised so everyone has to save their pennies to use the loo - that's the central conceit of the show. It's topical, with an environmental message. It's also a very silly, fun, in-your-face dark gritty musical. It's not massively well-known and it's an unusual one for us to do down here, but I think it's going to be fun."

He plans a technically-ambitious show with a large cast: "All the parts are great parts, there's a handful of principals but everybody will be busy through the show. It's a gem for comedy actors with parts to get your teeth into, it's quite a physical piece and it favours actor-singers, rather than singers who act, because the parts are big character parts. But if you can hold a tune and sing a bit, come along."

## Airswimming

by Charlotte Jones,  
directed by Harry Harding

David Lester previewed this play for the absent Harry, explaining that the aim is for a "dark, black production with minimal set - a bath filled with water, a rusty staircase, to make the Studio feel like an asylum where the audience are visitors given exclusive access".

He said: "It's set in 1920s England and based on the true story of two women isolated in a hospital for the criminally insane and forgotten by their families. By turns it's a very funny and moving play that reminds us of the forgotten women of those generations."

## Pride & Prejudice

adapted by Sara Pascoe  
from the novel by Jane Austen,  
directed by Brian Seal

Brian closed the evening by presenting his plans for Austen's much-loved story, which has received an interesting make-over in its adaptation by Sara Pascoe. He said: "We get the traditional story done traditionally but what she's done is set it as a play within a play. We might be in a rehearsal for a production of *Pride and Prejudice* or a schoolroom where it's being taught for GCSE.

"It needs a large cast with ages all the way through the spectrum. We will use period costume and we'll have a big stage. The script uses a number of sets but we will do it with one, using the floor as *We Happy Few* did to widen and heighten the space."



# Recent shows at the QMT

## We Happy Few

## Bea



All photos by Julian Newman Turner

# Get trained on the theatre's new defibrillator

As many of you might know, I have been trying to acquire a defibrillator for the theatre for some time now. I am delighted to advise that we finally have one and training is currently underway.

We have contacted all Front of House staff and back stage crew to offer them training, which is free. However the trainer (Maggie Hackney) is keen that as many people as possible are trained to use this piece of equipment. So the offer of training is being thrown open to our audiences, actors – indeed anyone who might find themselves in the theatre at some time.

The most recent courses were on June 10 in the Studio and June 15 in the Youth Wing. Obviously, those dates have now passed but, fear not - we will put on other sessions in the future if there is sufficient interest. The course lasts between 90 minutes and two hours and is very informative. If you are interested in attending future courses, please let me know at paula.downes@ntlworld.com or 07778 014428.

The defibrillator itself is in a blue canvass bag and will be placed on a hook by the telephone in the area by the coffee bar. The instruction book will be sited next to the Accident Book on the left hand side of the wooden shelves in the Box Office lobby.

Paula Downes



## Bancroft Players' 200 Club

I appreciate that these brief reports might be getting boring – though I doubt it – but this month I am concentrating all my efforts on another piece for the Newsletter, which I hope you will all read.

Of course there is one other thing I should mention and that is June will be our £50 draw. On that subject if you feel there is anything

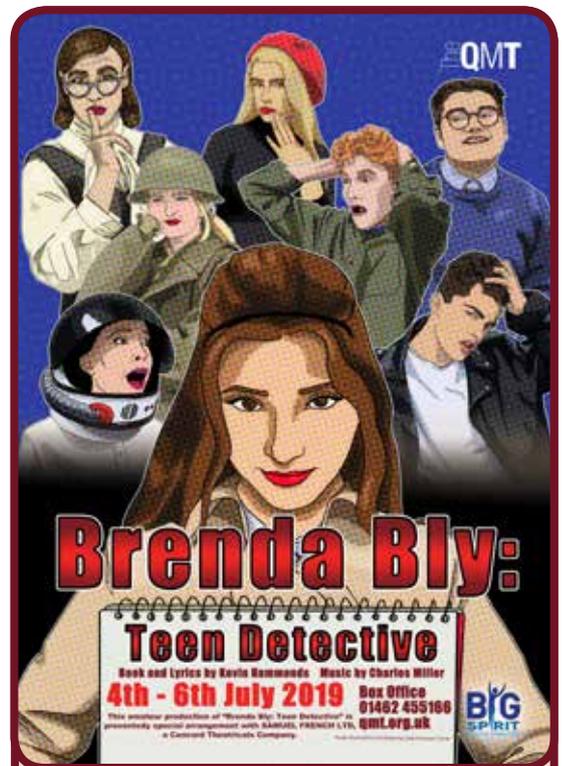
you would like purchased for the theatre, please do let me know as I am casting around for ideas on how to spend this year's £500.

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

### May Winners

- £25: Rory Reynolds
- £20: Leslie Simpkins
- £15: Dan Writer
- £10: Ruth Bird

Paula Downes



## Music and energy as Big Spirit detects a hit

The Big Spirit July production is the great musical - *Brenda Bly - Teen Detective*. Haven't heard of it? Ah well that's because it's a musical written for The National Youth Theatre some years ago.

We put it on when Katie Rallison (Milward) was but a chit of a girl and the leads at that time were taken by Amy Bellwood and Becky Lee.

Well, zip forward a decade and now Katie is the director with Violet Morris and Charlie Preston leading the cast. And if you've ever wondered what Charlie would look like as a woman - wonder no more as he'll be donning the drag as the Devil-in-Prada figure of Miss Van Strander.

Yeah, look, it doesn't make much sense on paper so just please come along and watch it! It's got great music, and a comic book storyline you'll have no problem following.

And like all Big Spirit shows, it'll have so much energy in it, we could supply the National Grid.

Rory

**Big Spirit July Production: *Brenda Bly - Teen Detective*, July 4 - 6**

## Audition notice

## Main Theatre

# The Importance of Being Earnest

If there's a better comedy in the English language than Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, well then I've never heard of it! quipped Noel Coward when he was congratulated on American TV for being 'better than Mr Wilde'. Well, whether Coward meant it as a *bon mot* or not, it's certainly very true.

We sort of all know the play and that must be a testament to its enduring charm. We can quote bits from it of course – 'to lose one parent Mr Worthing may be regarded as a misfortune; to lose both looks like carelessness' or 'all women become like their mothers – that is their tragedy. No man does – that is his' and inevitably 'a handbag?' A bit like *Hamlet*, this is a script stuffed with quotable quotes.

So we are looking for a cast who love comedy and want to appear in perhaps the best of all comedies, as Coward described it.

We are open to everyone – there is no pre-casting – so please come along and join in the fun of the audition.

## THE ROLES:

**John Worthing:** A man known as Jack in the town but Ernest in the country, age 20-35

**Algernon Montcrieff:** His chum

**Lady Bracknell:** The formidable mother of Gwendolen

**Gwendolen:** Algie's cousin, a sophisticated young woman.

**Cecily:** Jack Worthing's ward

**Miss Prism:** Cecily's governess. A woman who remains unmarried

**Rev Chasuble:** a reverend gentleman who has romantic feelings for Miss Prism

**Lane:** Algie's servant

**Merriman:** Jack's servant

## THE DETAILS:

**By:** Oscar Wilde, directed by Rory Reynolds

**Auditions:** Mon 24 & Thu 27 June, 7.45pm

**Performances:** 23 – 28 Sept

**Rehearsals:** Mon & Wed

**Scripts:** Available from Box Office

## Audition notices

## Audition notice

## The Studio

# Radiant Vermin

Jill and Ollie are as upbeat and perky as presenters on daytime TV, the kind of show where eager eyes and electrified smiles are mandatory.

This charming young couple has been chosen by pure chance (or perhaps by design) by a government representative, Miss Dee, in order to participate in a wonderful new programme that bears the aspirational title of 'Social Regeneration Through the Creation of Dream Homes'. Via this scheme, the house of their dreams will be theirs if they simply do what comes naturally.

Of course, they may not feel that what's required of them is anything like natural behaviour. But then these dewy-eyed newly-weds, who have been living in a squalid council estate known as "the crime capital of the universe," don't know human nature as well as the playwright does...

The couple enter a Faustian pact within this jet-black comedy that packs a punch, satirising greed, consumerism and our desperate need to climb the social ladder, and asking the question, is a new kitchen worth a human life?

This is a diabolically funny, vicious dark comedy where a government department has found an ingenious solution to the twin dilemmas of housing shortages and homelessness.

Want to know more? Feel free to drop me an email if you want any more information at [mrmattgrayis@hotmail.com](mailto:mrmattgrayis@hotmail.com).

Matt

## THE ROLES:

**Jill:** Female, 20-35

**Ollie:** Male, 20-35

**Miss Dee:** Any age from 40+

This play will be a wonderful challenge for the actors, who will all additionally play other characters within the story.

For those interested in auditioning for Jill or Ollie, please ensure you look at the party scene towards the end of the play.

The plan will be to cast the play early, then come back together for rehearsals in late July/ Early August.

## THE DETAILS:

**By:** Philip Ridley, directed by Matt Gray

**Auditions:** Tue 2 & Thu 4 July

**Performances:** 16-19 October

**Rehearsals:** Tue & Thur

**Scripts:** Available soon from Box Office with sign in/out sheet. Please try not to keep them too long, as numbers are limited.

**Further information:** Matt Gray at [mrmattgrayis@hotmail.com](mailto:mrmattgrayis@hotmail.com).