



The Bancroft Players

Newsletter
March 2018



Rory Reynolds

If life gives you lemons – make theatre

Remember the old saying that March ‘comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb’? Well the first part is holding true what with ‘The Beast from the East’ throwing the beginning of the month into some confusion.

It could have hit *A View from the Bridge* audiences but in fact attendance was high - even on the Friday night when the Beast was at its worst. This just proves that we Brits love a bit of adversity if only because it gives us something to overcome.

Hope you managed to get to see it, by the way. Congrats to Edith and her fine cast onstage, backstage and

technically for making it all work so well.

Russ Hurn is directing *Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons, Lemons* in the Studio at the end of the season. Despite the five lemons in the title it’s a two-hander play so do come along and audition. Rob Hughes called it ‘the best play I saw in the Edinburgh Fringe in 2016’.

Not only but also... the hugely talented Carlyss Peer is co-directing *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* this summer.

Auditions are soon (Mon 12 and Wed 14 March at 7.45pm) so do come and join the fun. We are having a blanket cast

Artistic Director’s blog

policy so everyone will be in it in one way or another and you’ll be with Seb, Molly and the crazy youth theatre mob too. Grand!

Oh and there’s news of the long-promised members’ nights in this edition. Do come along and make the theatre your go-to point for social events. Bit by bit, the QMT will take over your life until you become like Edith, Nicki, Keith and I - denizens of the place! (PS ‘denizens’ is a good word, isn’t it - let’s keep it alive by using it a bit more in everyday conversation!)

See you all soon at the auditions!

Rory

Keith Swainston and Lauren Tillbrook in *A View from the Bridge*, directed by Edith Pratt. Photo: Julian Newman Turner.

COMING SOON:



The Effect

14-17 March,

Richard Whitmore Studio



I Don't Like Mondays

(*Big Spirit*)

25-28 April

SAVE THE DATE:
Bancroft Players AGM
8pm, Thursday 14 June
The Studio

The QMT



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

Audition reminder

Main Theatre THE ROLES:

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The QMT summer production is normally a show for allcomers. We like to field a large cast and this year it is a co-production between The Bancroft Players and our famous Big Spirit Youth Theatre.

If you've always wanted to work with Big Spirit, and see how they do things, this is a great opportunity. Big Spirit, for their part, always love working with the adult society and these co-productions are always very joyous affairs.

A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare of course needs no introduction - it's by far The Bard's funniest and most summery piece of work. The show will take place in the QMT as The Dell is not open to us. However, we will bring the warmth of a lovely summer evening into the Theatre with a very special and magical production.

This show will be co-directed by actress Carlyss Peer who has appeared in a number of classic plays at the Globe Theatre in London (including as Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) as well as TV series and West End shows. This is a unique opportunity to work with a Shakespeare expert who will also offer workshops about performing and speaking Shakespearean text.

Come along and join in the fun of the auditions - we are making it a little event in its own right in keeping with the play.

By: William Shakespeare, directed by Carlyss Peer & Rory Reynolds
Auditions: Mon 12 & Wed 14 Mar

Performances: July 2-7
Rehearsals: Mon and Wed
Scripts: Available behind Box Office

Lovers

Lysander: A lover
Demetrius: A lover
Hermia: Egeus' daughter
Helena: Her friend

Court

Egeus: An old courtier
Theseus: Duke of Athens
Hippolyta: Betrothed to Theseus
Philostrate: Master of Court Revels and other member of the court

The 'Mechanicals'

Nick Bottom: A weaver
Peter Quince: A carpenter
Francis Flute: A bellows-mender
Robin Starveling: A tailor
Tom Snout: A tinker
Snug: A joiner

The Fairy Folk

Puck
Oberon
Titania
Fairies: Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed and other members of the fairy band

AUDITIONS AND CASTING

The cast for *Quartet* is as follows:

Wilf: Charles Plester
Reginald: Brian Seal
Cissy: Helen Huson
Jean: Alison Hancock

Audition notice

The Studio

THE ROLES:

Oliver: A young musician and activist (approx 25-35), part of the movement trying to oppose the 'Hush' Bill. He loves Bernadette but is somewhat insecure with her. He has a secret.

Bernadette: Similar age, she is training to be a lawyer when she meets Oliver at a pet funeral and their romance begins. She is smarter than Oliver and knows it.

THE DETAILS:

By: Sam Steiner, directed by Russell Hurn
Auditions: Mon 26 & Wed 28 Mar
Performances: 6 - 9 June
Rehearsals: Mon & Wed
Scripts: Available from Box Office
Further information: Russell Hurn (russell.hurn@virginmedia.com)

Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons

Yes, there really are that many lemons! This demanding two header award-winning play about relationships and communication originally premiered at the Edinburgh Fringe and explores the impact of the government's controversial 'Hush Law', which imposes a rationing of spoken words to 140 per person, per day.

The value of the things you say to loved ones and the conversations you have become major new considerations for Oliver and Bernadette. We follow their relationship through the course of the introduction of the law and the way they manage the new restrictions on their freedom of speech. The scenes focus around their early developing relationship, their preparation for the "Hush" Law and how they cope with the restrictions it then places on them.

The play is demanding and will require early learning of lines to enable work on the multiple timeline jumps. As a two header there are a lot of lines, some very short in keeping with the theme of the play. It is expected to run in one act over about 75 mins.

'The Effect': Is it love, or just the drugs working?

Up next in *The Studio* is *'The Effect'* by Lucy Prebble, with first-time director Sam Powell in charge. Christine Neal spoke to her about the difference between acting in a show and directing it. Performance dates: 14-17 March.

For Sam Powell, director of *The Effect*, the magic of the theatre was not something she learned at an early age.

"I grew up in Malaysia and came to a boarding school in Bedfordshire," she said. "Theatre wasn't part of my world. I only discovered quite late in life that you could just buy a ticket and go to the theatre."

But once she had made the discovery, she knew she wanted to be a part of it: "I wanted to get involved with good amateur theatre. After being at The Settlement, my first QMT experience was painting the set of *The Wizard of Oz* and my first play was the Greek tragedy *Medea*. That was some six years ago."

Moving into directing was not something she had planned: "I never wanted to direct before but I read *The Effect* by Lucy Prebble, a play that stood out for me. It is said 'life begins at the edge of your comfort zone' so I thought, why not?"

"I thought about all the times as an actor when you think to yourself 'Why don't they do it like



Top: Joe Fallowell and Hannah Wilce play medical triallists Tristan and Connie. Below: 'Well, the book says...' An early rehearsal of an intimate scene. Photos: David Hillelson.

this?' and here was my chance to influence the performance of the play."

And she took that chance, saying her acting experience had "hugely" influenced how she directed *The Effect*.

"I thought hard about what it is that I want as an actor, particularly understanding the characters and what motivates them, and I hope I gave that to the players. I use the cast's experience for input as I would want as an actor.

"I have learned such a lot. I never knew just how many departments are involved with a play with their own responsibilities. I learned how to work with them, how to communicate the way they speak and to rely on them; very different from the Mum role."

Would she repeat the experience: "Ask me on the 18th of March!"



Uptight psychology student Connie and happy-go-lucky drifter Tristan think they may be falling in love, but both are volunteers in a medical trial, so could these exciting new feelings simply be the drugs at work?

And yet, would it truly matter if they were? If something feels like love, perhaps nothing else counts?

That's the question at the centre of *The Effect*, a play about the brain and the heart and the connections between them.

Its writer Lucy Prebble had scored success with *Enron*, in which she skewered the financial crisis. But the dry subject matter left her uncertain she'd proved she could write convincingly about emotions.



The result was *The Effect*, inspired by a disastrous drug trial that left several participants with catastrophic health problems. The play explores complex ideas about medical ethics, mental health and neuroscience, but remains first and foremost a love story.

Through Tristan's and Connie's romance, and the history shared by the doctors supervising them, it asks what it means to be in love and how far we should trust our feelings.

The Effect opened at the National Theatre in 2012, with Billie Piper and Jonjo O'Neill as Connie and Tristan, and Prebble said: "When I saw people visibly moved by it, that was profound for me because I'd never done that before. I'd written shows that amused people, perhaps annoyed people, but I had never moved anyone before that play."

Members nights dates and activities announced

We want to get going with regular members nights again. This will be a chance to meet together while at the same time doing something theatre-related.

Each session aims to last about two hours at most, so hopefully you will begin to put the date in your diary ahead of time and look forward to it. I've chosen a range of activities that should appeal to everyone taking us through the next three months.

Entry for each one is FREE, and each also includes a free glass of wine to fire up those creative juices and make the evening go with a swing.

So please come along everyone. Bring friends too and make a night of it. We want you to have lots of fun and enjoy being together with like-minded people!

Rory

Friday 13 April: Desert Island Discs

You bring down the two tracks (on a USB or CD) you would take to your desert island and we ask you about why this music is important to you etc. It's all very gentle and respectful but you won't know the questions upfront. You also get to take a book and a luxury to take along so think about that too. If you've ever wanted to be on Desert Island Discs (and who hasn't!?) this is your big chance.

Friday 25 May: Inside the Actors Studio

You remember this programme from a few years ago where James Lipton asked big stars about their background, their inspirations and their thoughts on acting? Well this is a bit similar - we've invited two professional actors to join us plus two experienced amateur actors. You get to ask most of the questions and then you get a chance to chat informally with our guests after the show.

Friday 15 June: Whose Line is it Anyway?

Another TV format. If you've ever wanted to learn precisely how to improvise and improvise well, this is the night for you. An expert improviser will be showing you simple tricks that'll have you improvising like a pro in no time. Then we'll be asking some of you (those that want to - the rest can be the audience) to play 'Whose Line is it Anyway?' You are as welcome to watch as to participate!

Actors needed to perform QMT writers' work at new monologue-fest

Fancy having the spotlight all to yourself? The theatre's two writing groups are looking for actors to take part in a monologue event in May. Rory Reynolds tells all. (If you're interested, contact bigspirittheatre@hotmail.com as soon as you can!)

You may not be aware that we have two thriving writer's groups here at the QMT.

The adult group meets on the last Tuesday of each month under the guidance of scriptwriter and script-writing guru, Sally Abbott (*Eastenders*, *Casualty*, *Coroners* etc. etc.).

The youth version meets on a Tuesday too - mostly in the Green Room.

Now there is absolutely no point in writing scripts if you

never get to hear your words in the mouth of an actor - so we've come up with this idea of a MONOLOGUE-FEST.

Something similar is immensely popular up and down the country so for the very first time we're bringing the event to the QMT. In front of a panel of (friendly) judges, the audience will see and hear actors giving one minute and three minute monologues from the pens of our writers.

Of course we will need actors, and this is where you come in - we're looking for actors of all

ages. You'll be performing in front of members, your family and friends and everyone else who is supporting this inspiring event.

Get in touch now if you'd like to be an actor - we'll give you a speech and then some help in preparing it for presentation.

Date of the MONOLOGUE-FEST: Saturday 26th May at the QMT (7.45pm start) We'll put out ticket details in the next newsletter but at this time it's actors of all ages that we're after.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Audition: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
12 & 14 March
The Effect
(Richard Whitmore Studio)
14-17 March

Audition: *Lemons Lemons Lemons*
Lemons
26 & 28 March
QMT Writers' Group
March 27

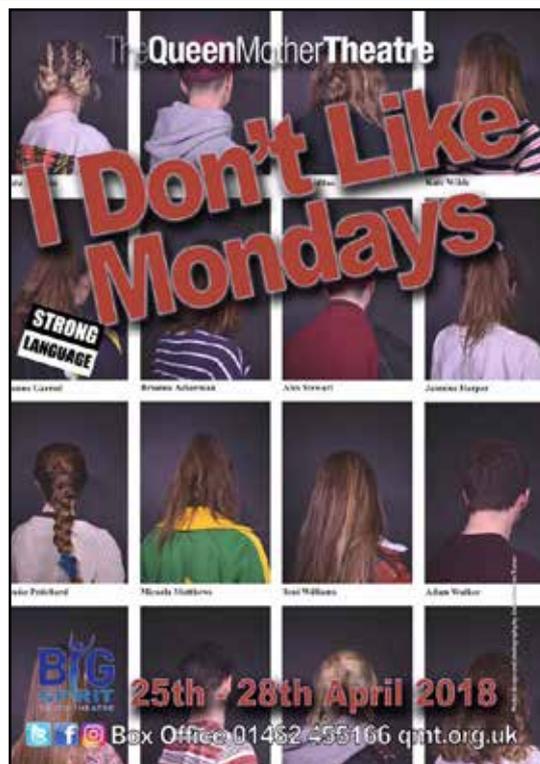
Members' Evening: *Desert Island Discs*
April 13
I Dont Like Mondays
(Big Spirit, Main Theatre)
25-28 April
Quartet

(Main Theatre)
15-20 May
Members' Evening: *Inside the Actors Studio*
25 May
Monologue-Fest
26 May

What works for me... GETTING IN AND OUT OF CHARACTER

Big Spirit's next production, *'I Don't Like Mondays'*, is a hard-hitting examination of school shootings in the United States that uses verbatim dialogue from survivors of attacks. During their rehearsal period, the issue was catapulted back into the headlines by the awful events at a Florida high school that saw 17 people - many of them the same age as Big Spirit's members - shot dead.

Even before then, the cast were working hard on techniques to leave their characters behind in the rehearsal room and not be affected by the feelings and actions they explore in the play. Here, five of them share their tips for getting into and out of character - particularly when that character is flawed or hostile.



Georgia Head

We always try to play a game at the end of a rehearsal - we try to finish a little early so we can shake it all out. The games are always a bit silly and physical, and they bring us all back to each other, and to our friendship.

Ewan Morris

Because the play is set in America, through the whole rehearsal period - even during breaks in dialogue or when the director is giving us notes - I will keep speaking in an American dialect, so I can end it when I need to. At the start of rehearsals I was struggling with coming out of character, so that really helps me.

Seb Creasey

To get into a specific character and out again I tend to have a song to listen to. At the moment it's *Toxic* by Britney Spears, but it changes regularly. That helps me leave it where it is, because I can't listen to that song and not be myself. And then you're ready to be yourself or the character.



Louis Bailey

When your character is hateful, or it's the climax of a dramatic scene, it's nice to go to the person opposite after and hug them, or say something that's 'you', not the character.

Leo Stewart

For getting into character, I find it much easier when you're wearing the clothes your character's wearing. Also, my character's quite big-headed, so I'll be talking about how great I am, and that gives me the mentality so I can save it.

While Big Spirit works to help the young cast of *I Don't Like Mondays* shrug off the negative aspects of their characters, the actors themselves are passionate about bringing what they've learned about the issue of gun violence into their lives outside the theatre.

Georgia said: "We do need to leave the characters behind when we leave here, but not the issue as it is so relevant and important."

And Louis added: "We will move on from the play, but the issue will stick with us. We have such a feeling

of unity with people we'll never meet. Because we're in Britain, we aren't living in fear of guns, but we're living in fear of hearing about it."

They see the activism of the students at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School as one positive to have emerged from the tragedy. Seb said: "This year, in light of Florida, young people have spoken up so much more than ever before, which is so important and necessary because it's getting ridiculous. Everyone is confused and frustrated by this issue. The youth becoming so much more active and rallying against it is a glimmer of hope."

'I Don't Like Mondays' runs from April 25-28. Tickets from qmt.org.uk or the Box Office.

Julian Newman Turner: The business of show business

The QMT's business manager and poster designer was recently the subject of a surprise birthday party at the theatre. It provided the perfect excuse for Andy Darley to interview him about the work he does to publicise the theatre and help the volunteers who keep it running.

Few people can claim to have filled more seats at the QMT than Julian Newman Turner, whose work publicising Bancroft Players productions has provided full houses for countless directors.

Despite a career in the arts that saw him run his own theatre company for 10 years, he rarely ventures in front of an audience himself any more. But that changed one quiet evening in February.

For all his many roles at the theatre – business manager, photographer and designer,

actor, occasional stunt man – he was playing the universal role of father to a teenager when he provided lifts to the QMT.

But daughter Jade and her Big Spirit colleagues were just the spearhead of a secretive operation by his partner Zara to lure him into a surprise birthday celebration that filled the main auditorium and placed him firmly centre stage.

“If you’re going to do the fun stuff, you also have to do your bit.”

QMT Creative Director Rory Reynolds introduced Julian's career to friends, colleagues and family against a backdrop painted by Rosemary Bianchi, then the gathering partied into the night as photos from Julian's career vied for space with wall-to-wall food.

“I was gobsmacked,” he said. “I honestly didn't have a clue. Zara did a wonderful secretive job of what must have been a massive organisational task.

“It was moving to see all the work that must have gone into it.”

Like so many others, Julian's time at the QMT began in the youth theatre. He said: “I was one of the original members - I got a leaflet through my door and auditioned. I was in the youth theatre for a few years and then went off and did professional stuff for about 10 years, touring the UK and abroad.

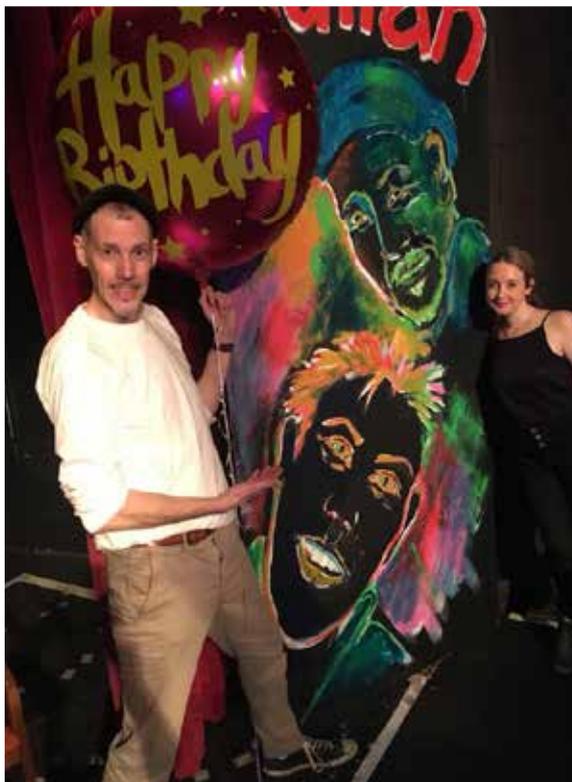
“And then Jade was born, 16 years ago. I was an out-of-work actor bringing up

my little baby and Sally Hull rang to ask me to play the policeman in *Allo Allo*. I thought it would get me out of the house and be a fun small part.

“But, once you're down at the QMT, they get their claws in and you never leave. I always say I don't want to be in shows. I don't plan to be, but I end up being. A good part comes up, or someone asks.”

He counts *Little Shop of Horrors* as the most fun show since his return – apart from anything else, it was the one during which he met Zara – and he has also developed a speciality in violent stunts, with spectacular tumbles in *Noises Off* and *One Man Two Guvnors*.

He said: “*One Man Two Guvnors* was fun, but I don't miss the two hours each night having makeup done. I suppose because of the *Noises*



Surprise! Julian at his party with Zara, and on stage being interviewed by Rory.



Continues on page 7

Julian Newman Turner interview, continued

Off falling-down-the-stairs I was the go-to person for the physical stuff.

“I was very interested in physical theatre at drama school and, when I left, the company I set up did visual and movement-based theatre. I’m not a massive fan of conventional box set theatre. I prefer stuff that’s imaginatively done, rather than people standing on stage talking to each other.”

Julian’s day job is photography, owning Lucid Dream Pictures, and his most visible work at the QMT is the posters and programmes he creates, usually shooting his own pictures as well as doing the design.

But he also holds the post of business manager, a crucial role in keeping a thriving voluntary organisation running.

He said: “Business manager and marketing/publicity are different things. As business manager I’m the go-to person for front of house, box office and the bar. My role is to support the managers under me - if they have any problems they report to me and I take it to the committee.

“I also took on the role of design and marketing as I think, in any theatre organisation, that’s one of the biggest roles - the publicity manager oversees where the public meets the theatre. Having had experience in professional theatre, I thought the role needed to be much bigger.

“The QMT has got to the level that it’s a proper working business, even though everyone involved is

volunteering. Things are different in a volunteer organisation because people create their own roles - in a professional company everybody would have their role defined.

“One of the nicest parts of the job is Twitter and Facebook, as I’m actually interacting with people. Everything else is administrative, sat in front

of a computer - although I do like designing the posters.

“We do good shows at the QMT. The posters are, in theory, the first thing people see as they walk around town or look on the internet. They represent the shows and have to look smart.

“The theatre has become such a busy place, with so many shows, that marketing and publicity is a full-time job, and of course we can’t do it full time. We are based on an amdram mechanic, but we have grown to be like an arts centre with 14 shows a year and a lot of other things.

“There is always so much more I feel I should be doing. I’ve been in the job for several years and could probably use a break, but I don’t want the work making the place look more professional to come undone.”

Professionalism pays off in high ticket sales, which in turn allows money to be re-invested. Julian said: “The Bancroft Players are obviously an amdram society, but I think we are one of the most successful and thriving in the country.

“That’s a lot to do with how the old BPs, back in the day, had the genius idea of building their own theatre. Because we own our own, we don’t have to rent a venue.”

But the membership of today is different from the society’s founders: less likely to pitch in and do every job, instead belonging to multiple societies so they can specialise in one thing - usually acting or directing. It’s a change that brings problems for the business side of the society, and Julian believes it needs addressing.

He said: “Times have changed since the BPs were a company that met



Physical comedy in ‘Noises Off’ with Alison Hancock and ‘One Man Two Guvnors’ with Greg Jones.

up in the bar every Sunday. We’re all doing different things in different places. But if the theatre is going to survive we need existing members to do the basic, unglamorous tasks too - not just new members.

“I think if you are regularly in shows, you have a duty to do that - if you’re going to do the fun stuff, then you also have to do your bit. If people can get to the theatre for rehearsals, they can get to the theatre to do a shift.

“We’ve got a new set of New Members’ evenings coming up and that’s great - we’re always saying we need more people to do the less creative and less exciting but most important parts of running the theatre. You can’t put a play on without a front of house team.

“But we have many existing members and it would be really nice if just another 20 of them put in an hour a month doing a shift. It would make a massive difference for the existing front of house and bar staff.

“A very small bunch of people do a lot of the work and it’s only because of them that we’re able to survive. If we had a bunch more people getting involved, then everyone would only need to do a little bit.”

“A very small bunch of people do a lot of the work and it’s only because of them that we’re able to survive.”

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.

How the Juniors caught their unicorn

As promised in our last edition, here are two photos from the Juniors' production of *To Catch a Unicorn*, featuring the giant snake puppet Liz Boa in action, plus our Junior puppeteers and the moment when the unicorn is discovered by the zoo manager. This included a really beautiful song composed and performed by Charlie Preston.

Linda Stephenson



Bancroft Players' 200 Club

I feel I should make this a bit longer this month but as the Newsletter is now so full of interesting pieces, mine probably isn't needed to pad it out! (*Don't be so sure! ASD*)

So all I shall say is, don't forget that for just £12 a year, you can help raise money for much needed items around the theatre and also be in with a chance of winning one of our monthly prizes or even

better £50 in June and £100 in December.

I finish with congratulations to our February winners:

February Winners

£25: Keith Johnstone
£20: Alison Hancock
£15: Ann Mulholland
£10: Joan Cherry

Paula Downes
(paula.downes@ntlworld.com)

MEANWHILE, BACKSTAGE...

BY MATT GRAY



THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT BY TRY BREAKING THE FOURTH WALL!!