

The Bancroft Players

Newsletter
November 2018



Above: Olivia Gatliff, Charles Plester and Doug Brooker in *The Father* by Florian Zeller. Collections after each show raised £272.89 for the Alzheimers Society. Director Brian Seal said: "The play is extremely powerful, as could be judged from the audience's reaction as they left, and this contributed to them giving so generously: on average, £1 per person."

TICKETS ON SALE NOW FOR:



Bette & Joan

By Anton Burges.

October 31 - November 3.

"Looks like the gloves are off and the talons are out. Who will win?"



AUDITIONS

Beacons

Mon 29 & Wed 31 October



The Belles of St Clements

By Rob Hughes.

November 21 - 24

"Brilliantly funny classroom warfare with songs, magic and everything."



SOCIAL DIARY

Thu Nov 29: Poems, Pints & Performance (bring along some poetry or a piece from a play and share it with the group)

Tue Dec 18: The Famous Christmas Quiz!! - yes you get your fave quiz-master and lots of jolly japes in a must-attend Yuletide Celebration!

The Nutcracker and the Mouse King

December 7-9 & December 14-16

"A Christmas Classic."



The QMT



The Richard Whitmore
STUDIO

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

'Changes on the horizon as we build for a future where theatre is ever-more popular'

Hi QMT-fanatics! So let's launch straight in. Theatre has never been more popular - did you know that?

The number of seats sold in professional theatre has been going up and up (have you tried to get seat for a London show recently?) and the number of plays presented has never been higher.

We know this because we have struggled to get licences for even commonplace shows only to be told by the rights-holders '*there's a commercial touring version of that so the amateur rights are suspended*'.

Well that's good news and bad news of course. Good news that the appetite for theatre is growing so much that there are plays all over the place and bad because we have to try extra hard to book rights early before they're taken up by the professional companies.

Well we want to plug into that demand and that means we have to make some changes. So first off the bat, we will change the way we choose plays next year (2019-20). We are also attentive to the fact that we have to appeal to a new generation of theatre-goers and indeed younger people generally if the BPs as a society is going to thrive through the 2020s.

You'll be relieved to know we have a plan for that. So what is it?

CHOOSE THE SEASON EARLIER

We are looking to announce the next season much earlier than we have in the past and we would like to do this by January each year. Keep coming up with your suggestions by the way, we definitely need your help to suggest plays you would like to see or even direct but no time to waste - today would be good!

I have been approaching rights-holders since the summer trying to track down windows of opportunity because the availability of rights comes and goes. I want to grab them when I can!

SEEK OUT NEW DIRECTORS

It's great that we have new director's slots in the Studio and a certain number of new directors certainly come through this scheme. However, looking further afield is another way to bring new talent in too.

Those of you involved with *A Midsummer Night's Dream* valued working with the brilliant Carlyss Peer who is very committed to the QMT and brings her own distinct spin to any production she is involved in.

I think we will be looking to have at least one outside director working at the QMT over the next season - someone who will bring something unusual.

CHOOSE AT LEAST ONE PLAY PER SEASON THAT APPEALS MAINLY TO YOUNGER ACTORS

The 20-35 year age group is one we really must encourage if the theatre is to grow and become a real hub of dramatic endeavour over the next 20 years.

That is not to deny those older actors (such as me) who will still get many chances with the programme of shows on offer, but carving out a protected space for young talent to spread its wings is vital.

MAKE ROOM FOR NEW WRITING

I want to link the QMT up to the creative writing courses in the area so that we get a chance to read and possibly stage new works that show merit. This is becoming increasingly popular in commercial theatre and nearly every Fringe venue as well as the major companies are doing this.

There is something refreshing about presenting great new writing - it has to be of the right quality of course and produced by a confident director - but the outcome should be exciting for the cast and thrilling for our audiences.

Okay - so changes on the horizon. I hope you like 'em! Our aim, as always, is to make the Bancroft Players and the QMT the most exciting drama company in the area.

Rory

Help out at the theatre and enjoy free tickets to shows

Anyone who volunteers to help with the Bar, Coffee Bar, Front of House and/or Box Office will earn a Front of House Voucher entitling them to free entry for any one of our amazing Bancroft Players productions. You will be able to come on any 'concession night' - i.e. Monday to Thursday - you just need to get your ticket from the Box Office.

The scheme began with *A Bunch of Amateurs* and is already proving popular with volunteers, so we hope it will encourage new helpers among members and friends who can spare a little time to help our theatre thrive. You can contact us by emailing qmtmembs25@hotmail.com and letting us know what you would like to do - we're so looking forward to hearing from you.

Vivien Kerr

THE *Hollywood* OBSERVER

OCT-NOV 1962

TODAY'S FILM NEWS TODAY

WITH PRUNELLA LARSON

HOLLYWOOD ROYALTY IN BETTE AND JOAN

*Gossip from a
Hollywood insider!*

'Fasten your seatbelts! It's going to be a bumpy ride!' The divine Miss Bette Davis laughed as she described the plot of 'Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?' the film in which she stars alongside the legendary Miss Joan Crawford.

At least I think she was referring to the film, or was it perhaps about the ongoing feud between the two stars that all of Hollywood is talking about?

Relaxing in her dressing room between takes, she rolled those famously expressive eyes and refused to confirm or deny the rumours, commenting simply, 'We're two different types entirely.'

'I can't think of a single part I played that Joan could do. Not one. Can you? Why am I so good at playing bitches? I think it's because I'm not a bitch. Maybe that's why Miss Crawford always plays ladies.'

The movie features two sisters of a certain age, so how does Bette feel about the passage of time, fading stardom and retirement? 'Old age is no place for sissies' she said. 'I want to die with my high heels on, still in action.'

But does she worry about what the gossip pages are saying about her? Not a jot. 'If everyone likes you, you're not doing it right. It's better to be hated for who you are than to be loved for someone you're not. Being called very, very difficult is the beginning of success. Until you're called very, very difficult, you're nobody at all.'

I asked if it's true that she hated Joan Crawford? Her reply, 'There may be a heaven, but if Joan Crawford is there, I'm not going.' That sounds like fighting talk!

Later, as I took tea with Joan Crawford in her immaculate boudoir, that actress raised her eyebrows

at the mention of her co-star. 'Of course there's no feud. We're professionals. I'm the quiet one and Bette's explosive. I have discipline, she doesn't.'

'Bette is a survivor. She survived herself. I don't hate Bette Davis, even though the press wants me to; I resent her. I don't see how she built a career out of mannerisms instead of real acting ability. Tomorrow we're gonna do that goddam beach scene, my big scene, but just watch, she'll find a way to steal it. She always does. When you play crazy ladies, you always walk away with the honors. She'll steal it because she looks like a parody of herself. I still look like something of a star.'

Dear Readers, this certainly sounds like a feud to me. Looks like the gloves are off and the talons are out. Who will win? Let's wait for Oscars night and find out!

Bette & Joan, written by Anton Burge and directed by Elliott Bunker.

Oct 31 - Nov 3 in the Main Theatre. Tickets still available - book now to avoid disappointment.

What works for me... ACTING TO CHILDREN

In this month's look at techniques that Bancroft Players actors find useful, we drop in on the QMT's 2018 Christmas show to ask the cast of 'The Nutcracker and the Mouse King' for their top tips on acting to an audience that mainly consists of children and their families.

It has become tradition for the Bancroft Players to include in their exciting season of plays a show for all of the family at Christmas. It's an opportunity for everyone to gather at the QMT and welcome in the Spirit of the Festive Season.

This year's production, *The Nutcracker and the Mouse King*, is a Christmas classic, incorporating all the elements of a good story, from superhero Princes to Superbad Rodents. Add in a fearless girl, a dog, a cat and a Sugar Plum Fairy, with a dash of music and a pinch of dancing, not to mention some Real Magic, and you have the perfect recipe for a great show.

'The Nutcracker and the Mouse King' runs in the Main Theatre from December 7-9 and 14-16. Tickets from the Box Office or qmt.org.uk.



Russell Hurn

It's all about energy, and being prepared to go a little bit over the top to encourage kids to engage their imagination and become part of the story with you. You've got to not worry too much about realism and what is or isn't believable, because that will get in the way of having fun.

Children's imaginations mean that anything is possible, says Terri Hyde (right). Be prepared to go over the top, says Russ Hurn (second right).

Graeme Bussey

It just has to be fun - the whole thing is fun, the spirit of Christmas, so I always imagine playing it to my children. Sometimes when you do the serious plays you can get quite caught up in the drama and the characters but this one's an extravaganza, a real team performance and that needs to come through. You've got to channel your inner child, remember the things you enjoyed and bring that out.

Lisa Hutchins

As we grow up we lose that physicality of being children. The key is rediscovering the willingness to run around and roll about as a kid. Get your knees bruised and your elbows scraped. It helps you connect with the audience and, because it's not what children expect from adults, it puts you more on a par with them.

Terri Hyde

Kids have the weirdest imagination. Within five seconds they can change their minds about what they're seeing - a wooden spoon becomes a wand - and so anything is possible. They love interaction and it's key to maintaining their attention, but it confuses them to have a lot of people coming at them at once, so it's helpful to have focus on one character. And if they are not fine with interactivity you have to allow them to choose and not force it on them.



You have to rediscover the willingness to roll around like a child and get your elbows scraped, says Lisa Hutchins (upside down, with Graeme Bussey and Andy Darley).

Andy Darley

You need to establish your character immediately, so children understand what to expect. Are you brave or two-faced? Should they boo or cheer? After that, you have more freedom. Kids are usually far sharper than adults realise - if they know the ground rules, they can easily pick up nuances.

Andrew Robinson

Just bring that element of fun, so the children can feel it too. You must be aware of the type of show when you think about how your character moves and so on. My roles include a policeman and a border guard, and I have to be careful not to come across too aggressive.



Rory Reynolds previews Big Spirit's next show, the Rob Hughes creation 'The Belles of St Clements' (Nov 21-24), and shares some updates about what former members of the group are now up to.

The Belles of St Clements: Big Spirit's class war in the classroom

When I asked ex-Big Spiriter Rob Hughes to write a play for the youth theatre I suggested something along the lines of St Trinians.

You'll remember these were characters created by the cartoonist Ronald Searle, which transferred to film in the 1950s with Alistair Sim as the Headmistress and more recently with Rupert Everett reprising the role.

However, Rob had never heard of St Trinians so he has given us instead a show with his own spin that builds very much on the skill set of those in Big Spirit.

Here's the story: the rough and ready tykes of St Jude's Boys School have to share premises with the snooty girls

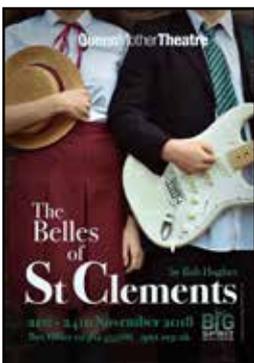
of St Clements. This is like mixing oil and water so the head teacher (the redoubtable Charles Plester) suggests they hold a talent show to decide who has the one posh common room. Initially it's class - if not classroom - warfare but as the boys and girls struggle to get the winning act together some sort of harmony begins to emerge.

It's all brilliantly funny and you get songs, magic and everything! Thanks Rob, it's a great show and we want you all to see it and have fun.

By the way, those who remember Ellie Duckles from Big Spirit may like to know that she is playing the lead in a creepy new drama on the BBC called A-List.

And more news: Jenny Wall graduated from LAMDA this summer and is working with some of the youth theatre on a smaller production in between her other gigs.

It's great that so many of the older Big Spiriters come back and share their talent and enthusiasm with the new generation. That's what it's all about!



Beacons

Julie: It's a funny time of year
Skye: Is it? What d'you mean?
Julie: It's getting colder. Autumn setting in.
Skye: Does it make a difference?
Julie: Sometimes. Some years
Skye: So the Autumn and Winter – they make it worse?
Julie: It's not - they can do.

Intrigued? Come along to the auditions – and do please read the play first! Copies will be available for the auditions – at the moment they are in PDF form so, if you are interested, email me and I will happily forward one.

This is a play which looks at loneliness and aloneness, experienced in different ways by its three characters. It is set on Beachy Head at the end of the Summer and beginning of Autumn. Julie owns an ice cream van, Bernard was homeless and now keeps Julie company, and young Skye struggles to understand why her father left her. The characters are complex but not complicated and will reward any actor with their warmth and sincerity PLUS there are some absolute crackers of speeches! It is a lovely play, sad at times, but with the thread of hope never far away. I look forward to hearing from you all.

Vivien Kerr

THE ROLES:

Julie: Playing age 45-50+
Bernard: Playing age 45-50+
Skye: Playing age 16

THE DETAILS:

By: Tabitha Mortiboy, directed by Vivien Kerr

Auditions: Mon 29 & Wed 31 October

Performances: 16 - 19 January 2018

Rehearsals: Mondays and Wednesdays

Scripts: Will be available at the audition - email Vivien for a PDF copy in advance.

Contact: Vivien Kerr at v.j.kerr@live.co.uk or on 01462 437898 or 07913 500042 (do note that I do not carry my mobile around when at home but I will return your call if you leave a message).

Casting news: Blackadder

The cast for 'Blackadder' is:

Balladeer: Elliott Bunker

Edmund Blackadder: Rory Reynolds

Lord Percy: Saul Bailey

Baldrick: James Kirwan

Queen Elizabeth I: Claudia O'Connell

Lord Melchett: Adrian Laycock

Nursie: Maureen Nobes

Kate/Bob: Fay Worboys

Flashheart: Matt Gray

Dr Leech: Peter Kirby

Kate's father: Ian Mutton

Wisewoman: Edith Pratt

Young Crone: Zara Schafer

Lady Farrow: Shonali Rodrigues

Gaoler Ploppy: Ian Mutton

Mrs Ploppy: Edith Pratt

Earl Farrow: Andreas Georgiou

Bishop of Bath & Wells: Matt Gray

Mollie: Fay Worboys

Mad Beggar: Zara Schafer

Arthur the Sailor: Andrea Georgiou

Mrs Pants: Shonali Rodrigues

Mr Pants: Peter Kirby

Leonardo Acropolis: Ian Mutton

Bancroft Players' 200 Club

A brief report this month, as I am hoping to get it into the November issue.

December of course sees our mega draw of £100 so, to be in with a chance of getting your number into my "hat", I will need to lodge Standing Order forms during November. You have been warned.

Yet again, I am embarrassed to see my name at the top of the list – and yet again, I did not pull it out of my "hat" – John Lambert did the honours for me. Actually it got worse – I did the November draw at the same time and another of my numbers came out first. I did put that one back.

For further information on the 200

Club please contact me on either 07778 014428 or paula.downes@ntlworld.com.

October Winners

£25: Paula Downes

£20: Lyn Bryars

£15: John Butler

£10: Mike MacKenzie

Paula Downes