

# The Bancroft Players

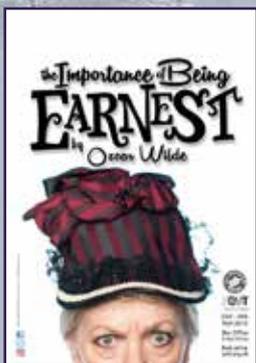
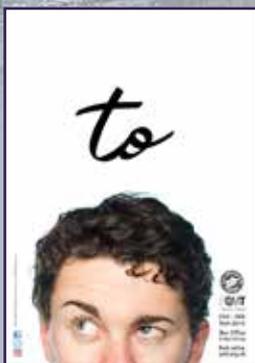
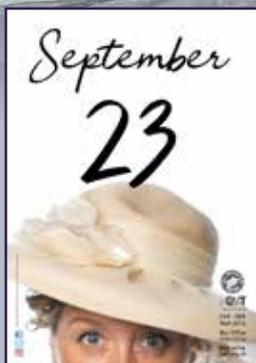
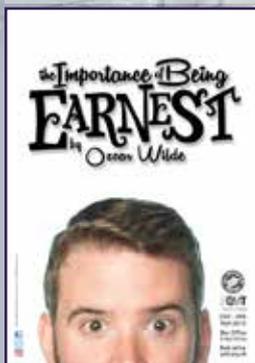
Newsletter

September 2019



Big Spirit spread the word for their show 'Downton Shabby' at the Edinburgh Festival. Photo: Rory Reynolds.

Tickets available now for *The Importance of Being Earnest*, September 23-28 in the Main House, and *Radiant Vermin*, October 15-19 in The Studio.



The QMT

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The Richard Whitmore STUDIO

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

# Welcome back to the QMT - the new season is here and it's time to spread the enthusiasm

It's wonderful to welcome you all back to another cracking season here at the Queen Mother Theatre!

What laughs we shall have, what drama there will be (onstage of course!) and what pleasure we shall have in all being together doing the one thing that makes our lives really special - theatre!

And even before this September issue of the Newsletter hits your metaphorical doormats, all the plays before Christmas are cast and rehearsing away: *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Radiant Vermin*, *Mojo* and *Cinderella*.

There are still many plays to be part of though - in October we have auditions

for Andy Darley's productions of *Commencing & Nine* and for our February main house show - *Macbeth* produced by David Lester.

We would urge you all to come along and be a part of the team. We can guarantee you lots of fun and where else in life do you get a round of cheering and applause for all your hard work?

I'm linked by Facebook to a number of other theatres around the world, by the way.

I particularly like the sound of a mob called The Dartmouth Players - not in Dartmouth UK but Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada.

They seem to me to be a very similar group to us: loving their acting, putting on as many plays as they can, infecting the whole town with their enthusiasm.

You can catch them on [www.dartmouth.ns.ca](http://www.dartmouth.ns.ca) if you want to look see. I don't think amateur theatre (called Community Theatre in North America) is quite as popular as in the UK but it's definitely flourishing throughout the Commonwealth.

Make sure you come down to the theatre soon, everybody. It'll be great to see you!

Rory

## Time running out to grab an early-bird discount on your Bancroft Players membership renewal

It's that time of year when BP members need to renew their annual subscriptions - and if you're quick you can claim an 'early bird' discount for paying promptly.

Anyone who takes part in one of the society's productions must be a full member. There is also a club membership level for the volunteers who help keep the theatre running but don't want to venture anywhere near the stage itself.

### Period covered

1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020

### Fees and discounts

**Full Membership:** £40. £30 if paid before 30 September.

**Under 18\*, unwaged, Student, Over 60s:** £20. £15 if paid before 30 September.

*\*Please Note: this does not include BP Juniors or Big Spirit Members*

**Club Membership:** for those who do not participate in productions. This applies to someone who *only* carries out the following duties, Box Office, Duty Theatre Manager, Steward, Coffee or Bar. The subscription is £20, with an 'early bird' discount of £5 if paid before 30 September, making £15.

### How to pay

**QMT Website Booking System** - if you open an account, or already have one for booking tickets, then you can pay your sub through this system. There should be a Membership category. If you try this and have any difficulties then please let me know.

**Cheques** - should be made payable to The Bancroft Players, placed in an

envelope marked for my attention and left in the Box Office, or send to **Bancroft Players (Membership), FREEPOST, ANG6544, Hitchin, SG4 9YA. (no stamp required).**

**Debit or Credit Card** - Can be paid via the Box Office during opening hours.

**Standing Order** (paid on the same date each year). If you would like to take up this option then please let me know and I will send you the necessary banking information.

**Internet Banking** if you bank online let me know and I will give you the necessary information for you to pay this way.

Many thanks,

*Edith Pratt, Membership Secretary*  
07874 025501  
[qmtmembs25@hotmail.com](mailto:qmtmembs25@hotmail.com)



Craig Maddox (Jack) and Saul Bailey (Algernon) in rehearsals for *'The Importance of Being Earnest'*

# The Importance of Being Earnest: The genius of Wilde is as sharp as it ever was

Coming soon to the QMT's main stage, Oscar Wilde's biting comedy of manners opens the new season with wit and satire. Director Rory Reynolds explains its appeal.

In a world that often seems perilously short of laughs, director Rory Reynolds believes *The Importance of Being Earnest* is just the antidote we need: "The times being what they are, we need all the comedy we can get - and this is all the comedy that you can possibly get."

It's a play that has retained its popularity despite the passage of time. "It is perhaps the most-performed text outside of Shakespeare in the English language," he said.

"It remains a comedy that works in the modern world, even though it was written in 1894 and first performed at the St James's Theatre in 1895. Each character is a recognisable stereotype of British society, not just of the Victorian period but today.

"It's a play that satirises in a gentle way the manners and people of that period, particularly in the middle- and upper-middle classes.

And because Oscar Wilde was initially an outsider in English society, coming as he did from Irish gentry, he of course was the perfect observer of English manners."

For Rory, it has been a happy production to work on, with cast and crew combining well and valuable input from visiting director Carlyss Peer.

He said: "We have assembled a great cast and Christine Neal is doing a fantastic set as her first main house design. And, as all the best Bancroft Players plays do, the cast has become like a family, never a cross word.

"I am very much enjoying working with the text because it is full of Wilde's greatest epigrams. Watching Carlyss work on it has been a university course in itself."

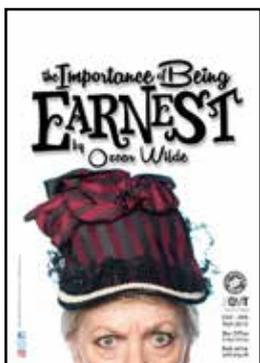
He said well-known television productions, such as that starring David Suchet, were useful references but not to be imitated: "We do it very

differently from the Suchet version, we bring much more light and shade to the characters. For example, I have made Cecily much more knowing. She's the sort of girl who would have frightened me at school. She is 18 going on 42 and she has to be a match for Gwendolen."

September 23-28, tickets from the Box Office or [qmt.org.uk](http://qmt.org.uk).



Christine Neal shares a moment of reflection with the nattily-dressed armchair she has created as part of the show's set.



# Commencing / Nine

These two short but powerful plays tell unforgettable stories of women connecting and finding strength in the face of circumstances that might initially seem impossible.

Each is a one-act play for a cast of two women, and both plays will be performed each night of the run with an interval between them. The plays will have separate casts, so there are four roles to be filled at audition. Each is a strong leading role with plenty of opportunity to develop the character.

## Commencing

Straight Kelli and lesbian Arlin are bounced together on a blind date: the result is a sharp, funny encounter shot through with moments of quiet tragedy as they pick apart each other's lives and loves. It needs a cast who can handle the pace and the comedy, but also find the truth in the silences.

Both women are quick-witted, unafraid to say what they think, and love having the last word. Their similarities become increasingly obvious as the play develops.

They are both marked deeply by their past experiences, while still hopeful about the future. To reflect this I want to cast mid-40s upwards. Kelli spends part of the play drunk, so the role requires the ability to portray this sensitively.

## Nine

Two un-named women lie imprisoned in chains, using words as challenges to help each other fight off despair and keep hope alive. Harrowing and sometimes brutal, it's a celebration of the human spirit against the most inhumane conditions.

This play will be more physically challenging, as the characters (1 and 2) are shackled throughout. No explanation is provided for why they are imprisoned, but they have suffered violent interrogation and fear a repeat.

The text can support different readings of the two characters' personalities and motivations, and we will explore this (along with their backstories) in early rehearsals. In general, 1 is more direct and challenging, while 2 is more reactive. 1 seems to have been a prisoner longer and may have seen previous cell-mates die: 2 is less institutionalised and more likely to reject the circumstances they find themselves in.

Either character can be any playing age but I want a visible difference between them so will likely look for a gap of a generation. The material is not suitable for Big Spirit members, but all ages eligible for membership of the adult Bancroft Players are welcome to audition for either role.

## THE DETAILS:

**By:** Jane Shepard, from *Kick-Ass Plays for Women*. Directed by Andy Darley.

**Auditions:** Mon 28 & Wed 30 Oct

**Performances:** Jan 14-18 2020

**Rehearsals:** Mon & Wed, plus informal meet-ups over Xmas / New Year if possible.

**Scripts:** Available from Box Office with sign-out sheet.

**Contact:** Andy Darley, 07905 628554 / andy@andthenhesaid.com.

## THE ROLES:

### Commencing

**Kelli:** Female, playing age 45 upwards. A smart, funny, quick and probably alcoholic straight woman. Prone to rants.

**Arlin:** Female, playing age 45 upwards. A smart, funny, quick and occasionally bombastic lesbian who is in recovery. Fond of diatribes.

### Nine

**1:** Female, any age. Tends to be a cooler personality, capable of remoteness.

**2:** Female, any age. Warmer, with a slight tendency toward dependence.

Both are articulate, resourceful, and capable of humour in the face of adversity.

## Free first aid course

I am hoping to run a Basic First Aid Course (in conjunction with St John Ambulance) during January or February next year.

If you are interested in joining the course, which is free to Bancroft Players members and will be held at the theatre one Saturday afternoon during one of these months, then please do contact me on 07778 014428 or paula.downes@ntlworld.com.

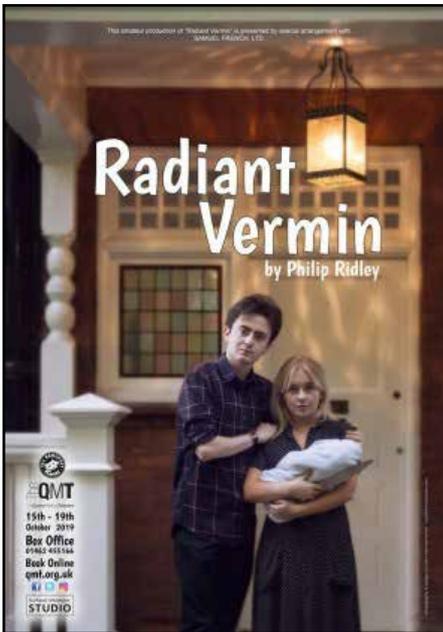
If you were on the last course that was held in 2017, then I will be contacting you automatically.

Paula Downes



Mark Castell helps moves barrels into the backstage roof storage as part of the recent clean-up organised by Emma Saunders.

# Radiant Vermin: A modern morality tale that asks how far will you go?



*Radiant Vermin* by Philip Ridley is coming soon to the Studio, and it is a play unlike anything else you will see at the QMT this season.

The play's director, Matt Gray, reveals that at its core it is a modern morality tale, questioning how far you might go in order to achieve the dream of owning a home - something that is becoming ever more difficult for young people in these uncertain and difficult times. However it does not stop there. The play shines a light onto consumerism, social class, and modern family dynamics.

The play itself will be presented by the actors alone. There will be no set, no props, just pure storytelling.

Despite the sometimes shocking events in the play, it is also wickedly funny. It will be an evening of entertainment that will stay with you beyond your post-show glass of wine.

Tickets are already selling fast, so book now... you don't want to miss this one.

*Radiant Vermin*, October 15-19 in The Studio. Tickets from the Box Office or online at [qmt.org.uk](http://qmt.org.uk).

## Not too shabby at all for Big Spirit in Edinburgh

This August, as ever, Big Spirit took a play up to the Edinburgh Fringe. For those who don't know about the best Fringe Festival in the world, the Edinburgh Fringe began in the 1950s as an alternative to the Edinburgh International Festival that started after World War 2 as a way of bringing nations together in performance arts.

This year we asked our writer Rob Hughes (himself an ex-Big Spiriter) to re-write his play about *Downton Abbey* called *Downton Shabby*. This envisages what would happen if the family lost the estate through receiving a major tax bill and so have to go and live on a local housing estate.

Clearly there's a big cultural divide at play here but from this confusion comes the comedy and ultimately the poignant resolution.

It was efficiently directed by Maisie Brooker, who is establishing a reputation as a playwright herself, and the



momentum was kept up by Barney Taylor and Molly Hughes who were our chaperones-cum-directors.

We perform on the Royal Mile too so - it's all going on! Here's some photos of the gang.

Congrats to Sian who received her A Level results in Edinburgh and now she's off to Oxford University to study French, joining Stepan who went up last year.

Rory



## Joan Goodwin



**"A consummate actress and formidable, award-winning director"**

It is with great sadness that we learn of the death of Joan Goodwin, who passed away at Anson Court Care Home, Welwyn Garden City on August 24, aged 87.

Joan was a long standing member of the Bancroft Players and is remembered both as a consummate actress and formidable, award-winning director.

As an actress at the QMT, her moving performance as the mother in *Equus* stands out, while her finely tuned sense of timing meant that as a director she excelled at comedy.

Productions at our theatre include *Boeing Boeing*, *Alfie*, *Put That Light Out* and a blissfully funny version of Ayckbourn's *Absurd Person Singular* featuring among others Rory Reynolds, Edith Pratt and Jenny Rushbrook.

Her last show at the QMT was *Bedroom Farce* in 2002, with her beloved husband John in charge of set building.

Joan moved to Welwyn Garden City, close to the Barn Theatre where she was very active, and was always happy to see old friends. Her love of theatre and indomitable spirit will be remembered by all who knew her.

Her funeral service was due to be held at St Francis Church in Welwyn Garden City on September 16.

## All tooled up with the 200 Club

First, I must say thanks to Dave Borner for his efforts in sorting out the new tools for the Workshop with the 200 Club's 2019 donation. Hopefully he had some fun doing it as well.

I also received a lovely email from Keith Crook: "Just to let you know that the tools you acquired for the workshop from the 200 Club funds are really excellent. I didn't realise how much not having them meant until we had them - even the cordless vacuum cleaner, which is invaluable."

It would be great to have some new members prior to the Christmas £100 draw. You will need to join by the middle of November in order to qualify. It only takes a few minutes to complete a Standing Order form and I do the rest! And remember you can have more than one number.

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

Congratulations to our August and September winners

### August Winners

£25: Janet Houghton  
£20: Alan Hemming  
£15: Anthony Golding  
£10: Pam Chohan

### September Winners

£25: Mr C T Vernon  
£20: Emma Northcott  
£15: Sue Mellor  
£10: Wendy Whitmore



Paula Downes



Photos: Top: the new Makita tools; middle: Keith Crook demonstrates the cordless vacuum cleaner, bottom, the newly-expanded commemorative notice in the workshop. Above, 'My name is Charlie, and these are my Angels...'

