



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### EMMA RICE

Director and Adaptor

There's a refreshing youthfulness and a lack of pretension about Emma Rice, the woman who has master-minded the development of Kneehigh Theatre from its Cornish roots to a much wider stage. In a series of eye-catching productions, often working in tandem with the RSC or the National Theatre, Kneehigh has quickly established itself as an innovative, vibrant force in the British theatre with a growing and a devoted public.

Yet when Emma enrolled as a student at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, there was no thought of becoming an Artistic Director of anything. She was determined instead to make herself a leading actress.

"I was going to play Hedda Gabler, I was going to work at the National, I was going to be very famous. What happened in practice was that I had to take the jobs I was offered. I did a lot of story-telling in schools, a valuable experience which taught me that you have to be very direct with an audience."

Emma arrived at Kneehigh as an actor in 1994 and suddenly she had found her niche.

"It was love at first sight" she recalls. "They were like gypsies and a Kneehigh rehearsal room was like no other I'd ever experienced. It was elemental, it was visceral, it was free and suddenly everything made sense."

It was her colleagues who suggested that she switch sides and take up the director's baton.

"They said that I was so bossy as an actor that it was about time I started directing. I did a production of *The Red Shoes* and that was it."

Part of the particular character of Kneehigh has to be their HQ, located on the coast of faraway Cornwall. Emma is ambivalent about an image that can cast Kneehigh as the Laura Ashley of theatre companies.

"I'm slightly nervous that it all sounds a bit hippy" she confesses. "However, we are certainly all like-minded people and in living in such an isolated location, we do become a temporary community. We work together and we eat together. Living by the sea gives the work its energy and its simplicity, I think. You just have to look at that beautiful grey sea and anything you want in life becomes possible."

Kneehigh is very definitely not a writer's theatre, much to the chagrin of some writers. "I find that some playwrights are very defensive about not being at centre-stage." she observes.

Instead Emma is inspired by stories such as *The Red Shoes*, *The Bacchae*, *Brief Encounter* that tap into our primary emotions and which she describes as 'folk tales' Therefore she kicks off rehearsals with no writer or fixed piece of dramatic work to depend on.

Page one/more follows



## Emma Rice/page 2

"I never start with a script" she says. "I drive actors crazy because I work a lot on instinct and the last thing I want to do in rehearsal is to talk for hours about character motivation."

But this is a high risk strategy. Isn't she apprehensive that nothing of substance will emerge from this journey into the unknown?

"There is a lot of pressure " Emma agrees " But I think I must have something of a pressure by-pass. I most hate the moment when you have to hand over the show to an audience. It's a bit like showing off your newborn baby and having the critics say how ugly it is. One has to be careful to remember how the work was created. Change is the only given and the only rule is not to be mediocre."

Emma is addicted to live performance.

"I love the smell of sweat on a real human body and I love the fact that theatre only happens on one night."

As Emma fears, Kneehigh can appear to be a throwback to the idealistic communes of the 1960s and 1970s living on creativity and complete harmony. Is it always so idyllic?

"Of course, I'd be lying if I said that there have been no tensions and feelings of betrayal and that our actors aren't also interested in their careers. I respond best to people who look outwards rather than inwards, however, and nine times out of ten, actors who have worked with us previously choose to come back for more. I'm committed to ensemble work: there is no star structure at Kneehigh. I cast actors on instinct and there has to be an instant empathy between us. I'm terrified by the prospect of a neurotic actor."

This production of *Brief Encounter* seems to encapsulate many of Emma's artistic preoccupations.

"If you boil it down to its most basic level, I think that my work is often about love, the wonder of it and the trouble it can get us into. It asks how one negotiates the emotions and what happens when you break the rules. "

By Al Senter

**Ends**



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### HANNAH YELLAND

Laura

Perhaps more than in most professions, the actor tends to meet and fall for other actors. After all, an actor's life is spent predominantly in the company of other actors and so you don't have a great deal of opportunity of mixing with 'civilians'. And in the fullness of time actors will marry and raise children who in their turn will often become actors. Hannah Yelland is a case in point. Her father David is a familiar face on stage and screen, often in beautifully-spoken, upper crust roles. Does Hannah believe that she was usefully hardened to the vagaries of the profession by growing up an actor's child?

"It's very helpful, although it's very different when you become an actor yourself and you're no longer looking in from the outside. I think that a lot of an actor's life must have filtered through to me in my childhood. I did a lot of performing at university and I just happened to fall into the profession. Something in me wanted to try it."

Almost inevitably there'll come a time when parent and child will find themselves working together. And so it proved when Chichester Festival Theatre decided to revive their very successful production of *Nicholas Nickleby*, with Hannah reprising her role as Kate, the hero's feisty sister.

"They asked my father to play my uncle Ralph and before he gave them an answer, he came to me first. 'Did I mind awfully if he were to accept the offer?' - I told him to go ahead. We had a completely fantastic time acting together and I think he saw me in a different way. It was a little confusing at first to know what to call him. Was it Ralph? David? Or Dad? Mostly I kept it strictly professional but there was one point during rehearsals when I called him Dad before quickly adding David."

Hannah's decision to follow her parents example and go up to Cambridge to read English suggests that she was thinking of an academic rather than a dramatic career. She dismisses such talk.

"My brother's the academic: I have very poor self-discipline" she retorts. Yet at the same time she claims that the thought of being a professional actor rather "crept up on her". She went straight from Cambridge into the business and her lack of formal drama-school training does not seem to have held her back.

"I did find it quite hard to break into the theatre at first. " she says " and that might have been the reason. But once you do your first television job, the rest of it starts to snowball and you tend to go from one thing to the next."

With Laura in *Brief Encounter*, added to Kate Nickleby and Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Hannah discerns a definite pattern.

Page one/more follows



## Hannah Yelland/page two

"I seem to be playing a series of women who appear to be relatively weak but who develop into much stronger people during the course of the play. Nora in *A Doll's House* is not a popular character because she takes the decision to leave her husband and children. Laura, by contrast, chooses not to abandon her family. If it was not acceptable for a wife to walk out in the 1930s, it was even more of a scandal fifty years earlier."

Hannah had gone to audition for *Brief Encounter*, having already seen the West End production. "I absolutely loved it" but without knowing much about Kneehigh's history or ethos.

"I was very green about the company but Emma [Rice] and I chatted very pleasantly and then Emma asked me very directly if I would do 'a turn'. I had to think on my feet and I suggested singing a folk song that had been composed by a friend of mine. I thought that it had all gone horribly wrong and so I was caught completely off-guard when my agent rang me with the news that they wanted me to play Laura."

At this stage of rehearsal, Hannah was erring on the cautious side and was wary of coming to any premature conclusions about the character.

"I'm trying to find out about Laura." she remarks. "There is a tremendous sub-text in what she does and says and my job is to show that sub-text without sign-posting it. There's a lot of physicality in rehearsals - I even do a bit of acrobatics. We do a lot of exercises in group dynamics as well as a fair bit of improvisation. We did a lot of impro in *Nicholas Nickleby* so I wasn't starting from scratch. But I'm quite a shy person really and I was terrified at the prospect. But there are worse things than falling flat on your face in rehearsal. It's great to have fun."

Rachmaninov is of course inseparable from *Brief Encounter* and he has even pursued Hannah out of rehearsals.

"I was driving back through the fog the other night to where I've been staying and I switched on the radio. Guess what came blasting out at me- the Second Piano Concerto, of course."

Hannah has had mixed fortunes with her stage work. Her *Doll's House* in Dublin was directed by an excitable Hungarian "who reduced me to tears every night by shouting at me. I wasn't able to shout back then. I wonder if I could do it now?"

Playing Vivie in Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession* was a much happier experience with 1960s icon Twiggy playing her mother.

"We got on terribly well and one night before we were due to go up, Twiggy invited me to come to her dressing-room to meet a friend after the show. She particularly wanted me to meet her friend Paul who'd be in the house that night. I didn't think that much about it and so I walked casually into Twiggy's dressing-room and there was Paul McCartney."

Page two/more follows



**Hannan Yelland/page three**

Laura and Alec meet by chance and fall in love in what the French call 'un coup de foudre', a thunder-clap. Does Hannah believe that such instant attractions are possible? She quotes from her own experience.

"My other half's an American lawyer and we met at a mutual friend's wedding. I saw him across the proverbially crowded room and our eyes met. But he made the first move, coming over to me. Now he's back in Washington DC so thank heavens for Skype. It's wonderful, when it works!"

By Al Senter

**Ends**



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### MILO TWOMEY

Alec

Actor Milo Twomey has been enjoying the research he's undertaken in preparing to play the role of Alec in *Brief Encounter*. He was already a committed fan of director David Lean. "I love David Lean's films: I know a lot of his work" but he's also been delving into Noel Coward's three volumes of autobiography.

"I'm a massive fan of Noel Coward and I'd love to play Garry Essendine in his play *Present Laughter* one day." says Milo. "It's very much a self-portrait. I'd love to have met him. You could call him the Emperor of repressed emotion. Coward can articulate emotions in a way that very few writers can and even if his plays don't last, which they have done so far, his brilliant dialogue will survive him. I'm sure that as a gay man Coward poured something of his own frustration into *Brief Encounter*, a frustration which he felt because he was unable to love freely. I'm sure that everybody can relate to that. And I also think he was asking in the piece if it's better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

Milo is making his first appearance with Kneehigh and he is relishing the experience at the half way point in rehearsals.

"If I had to describe the Kneehigh ethos in four or five words, I'd suggest generous, naughty, with a sense of wonder. They care a huge amount about the work and their attention to detail is incredible. In a Kneehigh show, something is always going on: the stage is full of life. And it's fun, fun, fun. They are a physical theatre company with a strong use of music and yet they are essentially story-tellers."

For his audition 'turn', Milo chose to give a rendition of Cole Porter's *Night and Day*, finding in the lyrics "that kind of obsessive love that keeps you awake and which grips Laura and Alec in *Brief Encounter*."

Milo emphasises the Englishness of *Brief Encounter* and links it with the immediate post-war world into which the film was released in late 1945.

"I get a real sense of England from the play-of Coward's England where, as he describes 'the tarts are everywhere in their high heels and furs'. *Brief Encounter* depicts the feeling of fragility around at the time and I'm sure that a modern audience, especially at the moment, will appreciate that sense of fragility."

Milo is of Irish extraction and having, as a boy, felt rather embarrassed by his unusual moniker, now feels rather different.

"I grew up quietly cursing my parents' taste in names. Now I rather like it."

He cites several key performances which he feels pointed him in the direction of the acting profession.

Page one/more follows



## Milo Twomey/page two

"I remember seeing Paul Eddington in Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* and Simon Russell Beale as Marlowe's *Edward II* at Stratford and feeling totally inspired. Above all it was George Cole doing The Modern Major General in *The Pirates of Penzance* at the Drury Lane Theatre. He was so brilliant that the place was in uproar and he had standing ovations all over the theatre. I remember thinking that one day I'd love to be able to do the same."

Milo feels that there is some progression in his career path, fourteen years after he became an actor. He's accumulated several appearances, as different characters, in such television perennials as *The Bill*, *Casualty* and *Holby City* "if you hang around long enough and they think you're suitable, they'll put a different hat on you and hire you "

In addition to these workaday credits, Milo also found himself in *Band of Brothers*, the Steven Spielberg/ Tom Hanks produced miniseries following the Allied advance from D-Day to VE Day in 1944/45. An unexpected transfer to the West End meant that he could not take up a substantial offer but he still managed to fit in a smaller role and to meet one of the illustrious producers.

"I ended up doing a couple of scenes and I did get to hang out with Tom Hanks at the Groucho Club. I was as nervous as a cat and so they kept telling me to calm down and be as relaxed as Tom. Then Hanks himself strolled in and he was, of course, impossibly relaxed- more relaxed than I could ever hope to be."

The tour of *Brief Encounter* will occupy the rest of the first half of the year and so it is important that everybody in the company lives and works in harmony with each other.

"Emma has picked a very lively bunch of people" says Milo. "Part of her job as Artistic Director is put together the right elements in the chemistry set. We've all been in companies that haven't gelled and what really interests actors is to be in a great show in which you have faith. And this is what we have in *Brief Encounter*."

By Al Senter

**Ends**



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### ANNETTE McLAUGHLIN

Myrtle

London theatregoers who have grown accustomed to seeing Annette McLaughlin in such West End musicals as *Chicago*, *Anything Goes* and *High Society* may notice when they see *Brief Encounter* that a certain part of her anatomy has mysteriously changed shape.

"We're going to give Myrtle a very curvaceous figure along the same lines as Jessica Rabbit and so I'll be wearing padded cycling shorts to give me extra bottom" explains Annette with a laugh. "Whenever I've been leaving the theatre to smoke a cigarette outside in the street, the men at a nearby building site have been showing their appreciation. I went out again this morning but minus the enhanced backside and they couldn't understand what was going on."

Annette is a stalwart of the West End musical, having danced since she was a three-year-old. In her younger days, she was passionate about becoming a ballet dancer but sadly she committed the cardinal sin of growing taller than the accepted standard height.

"The taller I became, the further my dreams receded" says Annette sadly. "I was heart-broken when I was thrown out of ballet school. The dancers in the corps de ballet all have to be the same height and I towered over them. I was probably the wrong type. I was a bit of tomboy and after playing football with my brothers, I'd go into school with scabs on my knees. The teachers were horrified."

Annette was not downcast for long. At the age of sixteen, she made her West End debut in *Crazy For You* and she seems to have been in constant employment ever since. Unusually she divides her professional time between the musical theatre and the Classical theatre. When she's not playing the slinky Velma Kelly in *Chicago*, a part she's tackled no fewer than four times, you'll often find her at the Open Air Theatre performing Shakespeare in London's Regent's Park.

"I had a teacher who was passionate about Shakespeare and she passed on a love of his work to me. I have a habit of sitting in the audience and making promises to myself that one day I'll play some of the parts I see on stage. I always wanted to have a shot at Velma in *Chicago* and I always wanted to play Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in the Park and now I've done both."

It's an unusual but not an unknown combination. Shakespeare and the musical theatre can seem to be miles apart but a world-class director such as Trevor Nunn manages to work in both with equally spectacular results. This was underlined a couple of years ago when he assembled a company at the National Theatre to stage productions of both Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* and Cole Porter's *Anything Goes*. For Annette, the chance to play in both shows must have been a dream come true.

Page one/more follows



## Annette McLaughlin/page two

"It was like having a masterclass in Shakespeare" she recalls. "I made sure that I was in the rehearsal-room at ten o'clock each morning and we'd all crowd around Trevor who'd take us through the play. I'll never forget the sound of Joe Fiennes speaking the verse as Berowne: it was just beautiful. Playing Jacquenetta in *Love's Labour's Lost* and Erma, the gangster's moll in *Love's Labour's Lost*, was the perfect job for me."

Joining a company such as Kneehigh represents something of a change of direction for Annette. She had seen the West End production of *Brief Encounter* and had been greatly impressed by it but she was completely oblivious to the fact that Kneehigh were about to make her an offer. "I was in a cardshop in Muswell Hill when the mobile rang and it was my agent with the news that I was up for the part of Myrtle. I literally screamed with excitement. "

Annette had already met Kneehigh Artistic Director Emma Rice when auditioning for *A Matter of Life and Death* which the company was presenting at the National Theatre.

"I did a song from Chicago called *I Can't Do It Alone*, complete with high kicks and doing the splits. I think Emma was a bit overwhelmed. I'd heard nothing but good things about Kneehigh and so I knew that I wanted to work with them some day. Now I've seen for myself in rehearsal that they're inventive, innovative, quirky - a real ensemble."

Annette is very much enjoying her exploration of the character of Myrtle, the terror of the tea-room.

"She's a brilliant character. I love her grandness and her hoity-toityness, if there's such a word. She's been married before but she left her husband and then he died. Myrtle's very independent and she rules her tea-shop with a rod of iron. You could say that she has ideas about her station!"

Annette has also gamely been learning to play the ukulele. "It's been going quite well" she says cautiously. "With all this practice, I'm suffering from numb fingers. "

Such a condition must be common to all actors who work at the Open Air Theatre in London's Regent's Park. There are both drawbacks and advantages to working alfresco.

"I remember when I was doing *High Society* and I had a line about the stars and as I said it, I looked up at the sky and nodded to the real stars. And the audience did exactly the same. When I was playing Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, we'd always have good weather for the first half of the play. Then, for some reason, just as things went wrong in the world of the play, so the rain would set in."

Annette doesn't believe that she's suffered from any prejudice towards musical theatre performers from actors in a different tradition, although there have been moments of tension.

" I enjoy doing lots of different things and I enjoy going down different avenues of theatre. Mind you, when I was appearing in *Lenny* in the West End with Eddie Izzard, directed by Sir Peter Hall, I did rather slope away when the conversation turned to the work which people had done most recently. I was too embarrassed to admit that I'd just finished playing a feather-duster in *Beauty and the Beast!*"

By Al Senter  
**Ends**



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### JOSEPH ALESSI

Fred, Albert, Stephen

Actor Joseph Alessi is certainly a man of many parts. In *Brief Encounter*, he plays no fewer than three characters; Albert, the station official who romances steely Myrtle, mistress of the tea-shop, Fred, the decent, steady chap who is married to Laura, and Stephen, Alec's best friend whose flat is borrowed for an assignation by the central couple.

This versatility extends to Joe himself. His command of an American accent, in addition to an Italian surname often fools casting directors in believing that Joe is the real McCoy, straight from *The Godfather* or *The Sopranos*. But, in reality, Joe is a proud Lancashire lad, the son of Sicilian immigrants, who grew up in Accrington and who supports the recently rejuvenated football team, the Stanley, although he admits that his first love is Burnley.

A glance at his extensive CV further underlines Joe's expertise in all forms of theatre, although he has also been careful to avoid any hint of ethnic stereotyping.

"I told my agent one day that I didn't want to play any more Italian parts, such as the waiter who just has the single line - your cappuccino, Sir. On the other hand, when I was asked to play Chico Marx in *Animal Crackers*, I jumped up the chance."

Joe reveals that he's been an unofficial member of Kneehigh for some time. How can this be? He takes up the story.

"I was appearing in a show at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds at the same time as Kneehigh were there rehearsing *The Bacchae*. So I'd see the Kneehigh actors about the place and one day I noticed that one of the company had a skateboard. I'm very interested in skateboards and so we got chatting and through this guy, I gradually got to know the rest of the Kneehigh actors. Since then, wherever I've been working - with the RSC or at the National - Kneehigh have coincidentally also been around and so I've made a point of seeing the shows."

*The Bacchae*, Joe's first experience of a Kneehigh production, "was spell-binding. I was completely bowled over. So I'd always hoped that one day, our paths would cross professionally. Then last September, my agent rang me with an offer to do *Brief Encounter* and so I went to see the production that was then running in the West End. I sort of knew what I was in for but I didn't expect this. I knew that it wouldn't be a recreation of the film but this show took my breath away. What I especially loved was the production's way with visual metaphors and its brilliant use of multi-media."

To an extent, playing Albert, a man who works for the railways during their Golden Age, is a labour of love for Joe.

Page one/more follows



## Joseph Alessi/page two

"I'm a bit of a closet anorak" he confesses. "Since I was a boy, I've been fascinated by the railway industry. And whenever I hear the name of Dr. Beeching, who butchered so much of the railway network in the 1960s, I spit."

Until *Brief Encounter*, Joe had unusually managed to avoid Coward's work. How? Why?

"Blame the chips on my working-class shoulders. I thought that Coward, like Wilde, only wrote plays for posh actors and not for people like me. Now I'll be perfecting my Received Pronunciation to play Stephen."

Despite his enthusiasm for Kneehigh's work, Joe was initially cautious about accepting the offer to join the *Brief Encounter* company.

"I wasn't sure that I should do it, to be honest. The play had already been done and I'd have hated finding out that I had to repeat another actor's performance in some way. But Emma Rice pointed out that it was going to be a brand new cast and that everything about the characters was up for grabs. On the other hand, the advantage of working on a show that's already been performed is that we know that it works. So you don't waste the usual amount of rehearsal time getting things wrong."

Joe describes the relationship between Albert and Myrtle as "a simple love, a love story that works. They are good at love and they represent the optimism in the play. As for Fred", Joe continues "Coward's genius is not to make Fred a bully or a dullard. I wouldn't want the audience to look at Laura and Fred together and think - what is Laura doing with a man like Fred? I think he's funny and sensitive and he knows that something has happened to Laura. Would they have lived happily ever after? Certainly the film ends very ambiguously."

Joe's credits include spells with the RSC, most recently in support of Star Trek's Patrick Stewart in *The Tempest* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, seasons at Chichester and at the Manchester Royal Exchange and a short run in the West End musical *The Drowsy Chaperone*, which failed to repeat its Broadway success. In *Privates on Parade*, Joe slipped into drag to impersonate such stars as Marlene Dietrich and Dame Vera Lynn and made his belated debut in pantomime last Christmas as King Rat in *Dick Whittington* at the Salisbury Playhouse.

"I always try to be artistically fulfilled" says Joe. "I think that it's beholden on you as an actor to push yourself away from your comfort zone. My agent is always trying to persuade me to do more television but since, fortunately, I have almost paid off the mortgage and I don't have any kids and so there are no school fees to worry about, I can therefore please myself. To be honest, I'd rather stick pins in my eyes than go into a television soap or semi-soap. There is a lot of snobbery in this business and if you're seen in the wrong kind of television, you won't get asked to work at somewhere like the Almeida or the Royal Court. I don't enjoy doing television. I hate the camera being shoved in my face and I dislike having to worry about hitting my marks."

Joe's first time in a pantomime was just as traumatic, at least initially.

Page two/more follows



### Joseph Alessi/page three

"I'd always been guilty of being a bit snobbish about pantomime but once Ian McKellen and Stephen Fry started to do it a few years ago, we all decided that it had become respectable. So I thought that I would take the plunge, provided it was good old-fashioned English pantomime at a proper repertory theatre. It turned about to be absolutely knacker - the two-shows-a-day routine is a killer. I had to force myself out of bed early each morning otherwise I'd have lain there all day. When I made my first entrance as King Rat, I was greeted by such a massive wall of sound, of booing and catcalls, that I froze, like a rabbit caught in the headlights. I paused for a moment then said my first line and all went well. I've never known hard work like it."

By Al Senter

**Ends**



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### BEVERLY RUDD

Beryl

There's no chance that perky Beverly Rudd is going to be bored during the lengthy tour of *Brief Encounter* since she has no fewer than five parts to play and therefore ten quick changes to get through at each performance. Whereas her main responsibility is playing Beryl, Myrtle's assistant in the tea-room, she's also playing the Waitress in the restaurant, Hermione and Dolly, the gossipy friend who accosts Laura at precisely the wrong moment.

Beverly - universally known as Bev - has been careful to do her research, prior to starting work on *Brief Encounter*.

"I'd seen the film when I was much younger and so I thought that I'd do a bit of revision by getting out the DVD. I watched the film twice. It's beautiful, especially when you think about the time it was set. I also read *Still Life*, the source of *Brief Encounter*. Coward is amazing; he writes so well that the characters are already formed for you. It's there on the page, waiting for the actor."

Beverly does not believe that today's generation of young theatregoers will find it hard to accept the way the story unfolds in *Brief Encounter*.

"I don't think that it's dated at all," she states. "In any age, the kind of young love that exists between Beryl and Stanley will always be the same. When I auditioned for the show, I chose as my 'turn', the old Lily Morris song *Why Am I Always The Bridesmaid?* because it seemed to sum up Beryl's low status in the tea-shop. Yet I think she's very happy. She has aspirations to be a dancer in London: she has definite plans to do something with her life. Stanley appeals to her, partly because there aren't many other boys around and partly because he makes her laugh."

Beverly mentions that there are overtones of Mrs. Overall in her playing of Beryl. Fans of *Acorn Antiques*, Victoria Wood's merciless spoof of *Crossroads*, the long-running ITV soap, will already know the character of the daily, played so memorably by Julie Walters. It comes as no surprise to hear that Julie Walters is very much a role model for Beverly and that the tour of *Acorn Antiques the Musical* features on her credits. What was it like to work with such a comedy great as Victoria Wood?

"Victoria is amazing" enthuses Beverly. "She's really great. She knows exactly what she wants and she pushes you until you've got to where she wants you to be. She uses different techniques to get what she wants from different actors. Victoria would appear at every date on the tour and see us into each venue. She gave me a few little pointers but I wanted to play my character in a different way from how it was done in the West End and Victoria was happy to go along with that."

With such a multiplicity of roles, Beverly has been having lots of fun choosing voices, accents and personalities for each of her characters.

Page one/more follows



## Beverly Rudd/page two

"Beryl's going to be from Yorkshire but I've decided that the Waitress in the restaurant is a bad-tempered Glaswegian, slamming down the plates when she brings Laura and Alec their food. Dolly, by contrast is very flamboyant and very lively"

Beverly's been busy working in television, most recently in *Massive* with Ralf Little and Johnny Vegas. In stark contrast, she also played Tamora, Queen of the Gods, in *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare's rarely seen gorefest.

"I was worried about playing a character who was much older than me but it seemed to work. In the play, Tamora eats a pie that has been made from the flesh and bones of her sons. She's naturally horrified when she discovers that she's just been tucking into her boys. The pie they gave me was so revolting that I didn't have to work too hard to act disgust."

Talking of food reminds Beverly of an unfortunate incident when she checked into a Leeds hotel prior to her first day's filming on *No Angels*, her very first television job.

"My God, it was terrifying" she says with a shudder. "I checked into the hotel and spent a quiet evening in my room. The next morning, I went downstairs to the restaurant and since it was all included, I decided to have the full English. But because I was so nervous, I threw up everything I'd just eaten in the middle of the breakfast-room, which was full of respectable people in business suits. Yet once I'd reached the location, I was fine. When you're doing telly, as I discovered, you do most of your learning on the job."

Beverly grew up in Richmond, the picturesque North Yorkshire town and after training locally, she joined the National Youth Theatre and then won a place at LAMDA, where her grandmother was so excited by her performance in *Kiss Me, Kate* that she called out to Beverly in mid-action. A lot of her work has been in comedy and one can see in Beverly a future busy comedy character actress. Her idol, Julie Walters, proved herself in comedy before establishing herself in more serious work and one can see Beverly making the same journey.

"What is so great about Julie Walters is that she can do both." says Beverly. "It would be wonderful to do comedy and drama and be accepted in both. I'd love to be able to make people laugh and cry at the same time. For the moment, I'll just keep plodding along, taking each job as it comes. This business is so unpredictable; you never know what's round the corner. Every job I do, I wonder if this will be the breakthrough."

Beverly refers to *A Short Stay in Switzerland*, a BBC film in which Julie Walters played a terminally ill woman, determined to end her life through an assisted suicide.

"She completely knocked me for six" says Beverly. "I was so overwhelmed by it that I had to go to my room and cry. It's all about finding that fine line between comedy and tragedy. Julie does it perfectly and I hope that one day, I'll be able to do the same."

By Al Senter

Ends



## PRODUCTION NOTES

### CHRISTOPHER PRICE

Stanley

For railway buffs, the main attraction of the film of *Brief Encounter* is less the performances of Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard than the depiction of a busy train station during the halcyon days of the steam locomotive. Much of the film was shot on location at Carnforth in Lancashire on the main West Coast route between London and Glasgow. Christopher Price, who plays the amiable Stanley in Kneehigh's production of *Brief Encounter*, is only in his twenties, but he turns out to be something of an expert on steam.

"My father was a great fan of steam and so my parents would take us to see such famous engines as Mallard or the Sir Nigel Gresley. Or we'd go on day trips to such restored lines as the Keighley and Worth Valley Railway. So I'm quite familiar with the 1930s setting."

Despite his comparative youth, Chris is very fond of the film of *Brief Encounter*.

"It's about Britishness, isn't it? It's about emotional reticence. It's about being upright and keeping a stiff upper lip. If we didn't have such qualities, we wouldn't be British, would we?"

Chris is a little vague about Stanley's precise job specification or his place in the station pecking-order.

"He's definitely something of an underdog, a bit downtrodden, perhaps. He certainly seems to have to do everybody's dirty work. But he's also very cheerful. I like playing comedy roles like Stanley who have elements of fun in them. Stanley and Beryl sense a quality in each other. Stanley is definitely up for a spot of romance, even if he's not very knowledgeable about it."

Chris remembers his own adolescent experience of falling in love which he's added to his thinking about Stanley.

"When you first fall for somebody, you say silly things. When you're at school and you fancy a girl, you pretend to be really hard and macho. It's all about male display and Stanley makes his display through the chocolate he offers Beryl. I hope they'll stay together because they're both quite simple, straightforward characters."

Chris has a range of musical skills to add to his other gifts, a range that is reflected in the production in which he plays "ukelele, double bass and some drums". By a strange coincidence, Chris had already seen *Brief Encounter* on a rare visit to London from his home in Newcastle.

"I've always wanted to work with Kneehigh. I love what they do; they create a real ensemble piece of theatre. I like to set myself goals each year and when I saw Stanley in the play, I was hooked. It's a gift of a part and I wanted to play it."

Page one/more follows



## Christopher Price/page two

Among his other talents, Chris is a keen practitioner of improvisation, the theatrical technique of taking a specific situation and using imagination and inspiration to develop the basic situation in extemporised directions. Improvisation became better known through the long-running *Whose Line Is It Anyway?* on Channel 4 and it continues to be a popular form of theatre. Chris is a member of the Suggestible Theatre Company, based in Newcastle, and he is a passionate evangelist for the benefits of improvisation.

"It helps you as an actor and it helps you as a person" he argues. "It also helps you to be a lot more positive about yourself. You don't censor yourself. You're more inclined to say yes and to make bold choices."

Judging by the character of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, improvisation seems to be closely connected to comedy. But there's no reason why the technique could not lead to darker, more serious moments. It must surely be a very stressful way of performing. What happens when your imagination stubbornly refuses to take flight?

"Oddly enough, when you try to be funny, it doesn't come off." says Chris. "It's only when you're totally relaxed that you can do your best work. And if inspiration runs out, you have your colleagues to turn to. You help each other out."

Chris is an open, friendly young man who must have needed all his empathetic skills when as a Mackem, born and bred in Sunderland, he decided to move to Newcastle, the heart of the enemy camp, much to the horror of some of his Wearside pals. Now that his partner is at the time of writing appearing at the National Theatre, he is thinking of making a further move away from his roots.

"Everybody who comes up to Newcastle says how friendly everybody is. But now that my partner and I are both getting a lot of work in the South, we're thinking of moving down to London. You get that buzz in London which is so exciting."

There are several dates on the tour which Chris is especially looking forward to visiting. "The Theatre Royal, Newcastle, of course, the home fixture, you might say. And Brighton which I've never been to and Cornwall which is new to me as well. I've always wanted to see Cornwall."

At the mid-point in the three week rehearsal period, Chris is feeling quietly confident.

"We've got the bones of it and part of the meat" he reports, with a vivid turn of phrase.

Improvisation does not always have to end with a laugh, as Chris recalls.

"We did one improvisation where we brought in some old-fashioned LPs of incidental music and asked the audience to choose which album we should play. Their choice led us into some very dark areas- deep into murder and even horror. Whatever the audience wants, we do it. They are the ones calling the shots."

By Al Senter

**Ends**