

# JB and the Theatre

Although Priestley's scope as a writer was exceptionally wide, his novels, essays and critiques abound with theatrical references, and it is clear that his mind was never far from the world of footlights and greasepaint, even if the relationship he had with the stage was far from settled. From the moment he left "the decent calm of publishers' offices for the gaudy merry-go-round of the Theatre", JB was torn between his passion for every aspect of writing and production and his hatred of the climate and atmosphere in which producers were made to operate to satisfy the hollow demands of audiences after "bland, silly entertainment". He was disappointed by the harsh truth that success and failure "is largely determined by chance and accident", and was more than often frustrated by the whims of his critics who attacked his work from the very beginning. His theatrical debut, *Dangerous Corner*, his first play, had a far from generous reception in the press – "This is Mr Priestley's first play and we don't mind if it is also his last".

The conflict he had with his critics has, for the most part, been exaggerated, for Priestley's response was not retaliatory – he would rather step outside the 'scene' of parties and fashionable talk, disliking "the whole 'show-biz' side of the Theatre, all the razzle-dazzle, glitter and glamour ... I prefer the legitimate stage to be quiet, solid, bourgeois".

*"My plays are meant to be ACTED, not read. They are not literary... but at their best intensely and triumphantly theatrical... Though my plays have ideas in them, I have never regarded the theatre as a medium for ideas – the plays and actors are there to move people."*

Priestley categorised his drama into serious plays – which took, on average, only ten days to write – and comedies, which required far more work. In keeping with his prolific output his plays were written, rehearsed and performed almost immediately, and it was unusual for JB to make any changes to his first drafts.

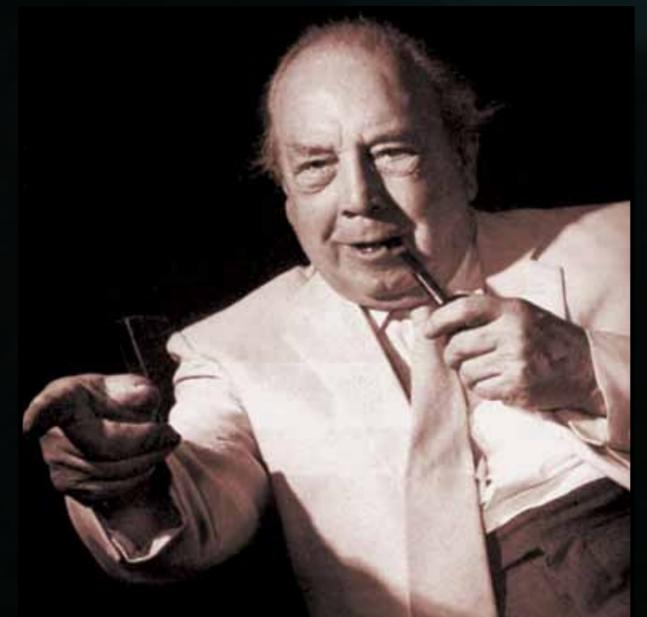
Often criticised for his experimentation, Priestley's most considerable contribution to the stage was his expansion of theatre from the solid traditions of English realism – "I took such dramatic technique as I possessed as far as it would go... trying to make my characters outside ordinary passing time altogether and to create... a four-dimensional drama." His plays are set in dining rooms, sitting rooms and studies, and are populated with recognisable characters using realistic speech in order "to make scenes out of people who don't want to make a scene". He is experimental in the way his ambitious content adapted to the harsh demands of form – his news ideas and theories of life are introduced to a safe, naturalist reality in order to examine how his characters – and how his audience – will react.

*"Drama is close to religion because what it does is enable his audience to enter a state of mind and feelings in which the relationship between what is known, accepted, and what is unknown, strange, apparently unreal, is very close. The dramatic experience occurs at the point where the two worlds meet."*

From J B Priestley - *The Dramatist* by Gareth Lloyd-Evans

Notable among his later dramas are a number of innovative one-act plays, and, in 1952, *Dragon's Mouth*, co-written with his third wife Jacquetta Hawkes. This was an exciting experiment, which placed four characters in formal dress on an unlit stage without scenery in an attempt to establish a new dramatic form to supplement conventional theatre. It failed, and in the remaining 32 years of his life he wrote only another half-dozen plays.

Fiercely proud that "the Nazis banned all my work", JB Priestley once noted that barely a month went by without somebody somewhere performing one or other of his plays. Two decades after his death this continues to be the case.



J B Priestley early 1970's

# An interview with director Stephen Daldry



Hard to imagine this, but just over 12 years ago Stephen Daldry was desperate to direct a certain play and he couldn't find anyone to hire him. "I'd done a production of *An Inspector Calls* in York a few years earlier," he explains "and had got very interested in JB Priestley. I became really hooked on him and the more I read, the more I realised I wanted to put the play on again, but no theatre wanted me, they just kept turning me down. It was only Richard Eyre, who was then running the National Theatre who let me have a go." Those theatre managements must be kicking themselves now – his production at the National exploded onto the stage in 1992, was hailed as a revolutionary piece of theatre, won 19 major awards and has become the longest running play in the company's history – and Stephen Daldry, well he hasn't done too badly for himself either. He smiles at the memory of how frustrated he was that no-one would let him direct it.

"I had a passion for this play and couldn't understand why none of these theatres wanted me to do it, they said they didn't want the play or me or both!" He was, in his own words "just a little kid of 29 from the tiny Gate Theatre, so I guess I can understand why no-one would have me." But then his luck changed, when Richard Eyre invited him to come and direct at the National. When asked what he'd like to do, he had no hesitation. "Yeah, I'd like to do *An Inspector Calls*, I've got this idea that the play's really all about 1945, not 1912, and I'd like to set it in two different time periods, put it in this

house high up on stilts and set the whole thing in a big weird filmic landscape. Yes that's what I want to do. And Richard Eyre looked slightly perplexed, but said 'oh, alright, go right ahead then,' which was a great leap of faith on his part."

And go ahead he did. Working alongside his regular collaborator, designer Ian MacNeil they created a groundbreaking production that is as potent today as it was 10 years ago. The director wanted to get away from the image of Priestley as "the rather safe pipe-smoking playwright that's been handed down to us. He was, of course far more radical than that politically and was a really experimental dramatist." The reviews for Daldry's production were beyond ecstatic, the audiences were spellbound and the production took on a life of its own, transferring into the West End, travelling all over the world before returning for another hugely successful run in the West End. Oh, and winning more awards than any other play – not just at the National – but ever in the history of theatre. Not bad for a "rather over-confident" 29 year old director who'd been turned down by so many theatres.

Similarly, when Priestley wrote *An Inspector Calls*, back in 1945 he couldn't find a theatre in London to stage it. "The official line was that there were none available," explains Daldry, "but it was also a very controversial piece of writing. So it received its first production in Moscow and Priestley travelled out to see it." It was only later, when it was put on in London by the

British director Basil Dean, that it was staged in a more conventional way, with a naturalistic Edwardian drawing room and that's the 'normalised' version of the play which we've inherited. Daldry and MacNeil went on a mission and tracked down the original stage manager of the London production. "He told us that none of the stage directions that are in the printed text today were written by Priestley, but were simply a notation of the way Dean had staged it. So what's been passed down to us is not Priestley at all, but Basil Dean. We'd heard that Priestley wasn't a fan of the naturalistic way of staging it and decided to try and find a way of approaching it that Priestley himself might have liked. The play itself is pretty radical, at the time of writing it the author was engaged in trying to create a new Britain and the play was a campaigning piece of theatre, urging us not to slip back into Edwardian sensibility; it was a plea for us to look forward and asking what sort of Britain did we want. It was a plea for a brave new world."

When Daldry first staged the production, Britain was living under Margaret Thatcher who was, as the director says, "arguing in a similar way to one of Priestley's characters for a return to Edwardian values. It was hot on the heels of her infamous remark that 'there is no such thing as society, only individual men, and women and families.' A shocking statement and just the kind of values that this play is attacking, so it did seem a particularly pertinent time to stage it. When Mr. Birling, the well-to-do head of the family in the play talks in a very similar way about individual responsibility, it almost could have been Thatcher speaking. Some people even thought I'd re-written the lines because it was so shockingly similar, whereas I'd actually only edited them very slightly. It really struck a chord with the audience and created a real frisson. But, what I love about the play is how it reinvents itself with time. Everything Daldry did, however bold it may seem, comes from the playwright, as the director is keen to point out. "In a way it seems strange to me that it is normally staged and studied in such a conventional way, that it is often seen as a rather dreary and didactic piece of writing, when really the play is pretty out there, pretty radical and bold. That was what I responded to and wanted to get across to the audience."

Despite his busy schedule 12 years on – as he flits back and forth across the Atlantic – Daldry still finds time to stay in touch with his production. "I have a huge fondness for it," he says, "but there is something rather odd about watching it now, because I do see it as the work of a 29 year old. I have a terrible tendency to want to fiddle with all my work - films and theatre – and this production's no different in that sense. I have to tell myself to leave it alone; it works as it is. The fact that I was fearless and young at the time maybe has something to do with its success. I was brazen and shall we say over-confident, as only a very young man can be. What I love

about seeing it now is that when it's really working it still sends shivers down my spine and I can feel the same happening to the rest of the audience. I get a real kick out of that."

Things have changed so much for Daldry since he bounded into Richard Eyre's office at the National Theatre, stating that he simply must direct *An Inspector Calls*. He has more reason now to be confident, but success and time has mellowed the man. He's relaxed and easy-going. As this, his first production at the National Theatre changed his career and really put him on the map, so his first film *Billy Elliot* was a knockout success winning the young man an Oscar nomination. And the roller-coaster continues. His all-star film *The Hours*, about the life of Virginia Woolf, won yet more gongs and more acclaim, and he is currently working on *Billy Elliot – The Musical* \* with Elton John writing the music and Lee Hall, the book and lyrics for Working Title and Old Vic Productions. It seems he can do no wrong. The first taste of this kind of success came with *An Inspector Calls* and he acknowledges that "it changed my career totally," and he's not looked back since. But he's not lost that energy and vitality and still grins from ear to ear when he remembers what it felt like when the show became such a hit and won so many awards. "It was just fantastic," he beams, "I have a lot to thank Richard Eyre, my great benefactor, for. If it hadn't been for his faith in me, I'd never have got this production on and things might have been very different."

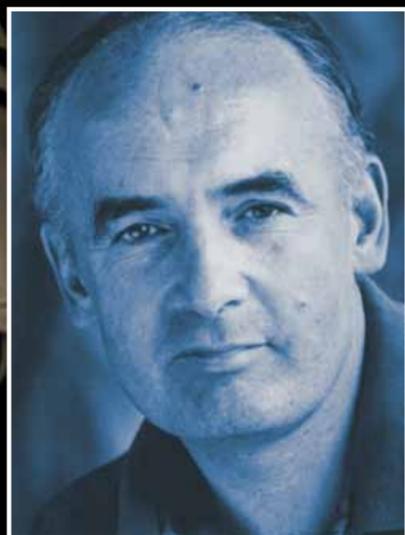
Despite his success in film and becoming hot property in Hollywood, Daldry remains true to his roots and continues now to work in the theatre. "It's all I've ever known," he says simply. "I've spent my life in the theatre, it's my prime means of self definition and, more than anything else, I enjoy it far too much to give it up."

So, luckily for theatre audience it looks like Daldry will continue to knock on those theatre doors for some time to come. Only difference now is that he probably doesn't have too much trouble getting hired.

\* *Billy Elliot - The Musical* opened at the Victoria Palace London on May 11, 2005 recently winning an Evening Standard Theatre Award for Best London Musical.

PIP DONAGHY

# INSPECTOR GOOLE



Pip has played many leading roles on stage and television. For the RSC parts include Sir Harry Wildair in *The Constant Couple*, Medley in *The Man of Mode* and Freeman in *The Plain Dealer*.

For the Royal National Theatre: Jesus Christ in *The Passion*, Clytemnestra in Peter Hall's *The Oresteia*, Napoleon Pig in *Animal Farm* and, more recently, Mr Sartorius in *Widowers' Houses* and Aslaksen in Trevor Nunn's production of *An Enemy of the People*.

In the West End he played the title role in *An Inspector Calls* and Kipps in *The Woman in Black*.

On television he has played the title role in *The Invisible Man*, the Mad Hatter in *Alice in Wonderland*, Monks in *Oliver Twist*, Job Trotter in *Pickwick Papers* – all BBC classic series – and more recently starred as the Denis Neilson character in Kevin Elyot's *Killing Time*.

Born in North Yorkshire of Irish descent Pip trained at the London Drama Centre and lives in Brighton, married with 3 children.

SANDRA DUNCAN

# SYBIL BIRLING



Sandra trained at RADA.

Recent theatre credits include: Jennifer in *Bones* for Mama Quillo Productions at the Leicester Haymarket Studio (dir: Kay Adshead), Mrs Birling in Stephen Daldry's production of *An Inspector Calls* (dir: Julian Webber), Flora Humble in *Humble Boy* and Kate Keller in *All My Sons* (Northcott, Exeter; directors: Kate Saxon & Ben Crocker, respectively), Beatrice in *Rebecca* for the English Speaking Theatre in Vienna, Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Mrs Dearth in *Dear Brutus* (Nottingham Playhouse; director: Richard Baron), Donna Lucia D'Alvadorez in *Charley's Aunt* (Sheffield Crucible; director: Deborah Paige), *The House of Bernarda Alba* (Shared Experience, director Polly Teale, tour and Young Vic), Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (director: Clive Perry), Judith Bliss in *Hay Fever* (director: Clive Perry), Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (director: Richard Baron) (all 1998 season at Pitlochry Festival Theatre).

Other theatre credits include: Amanda in *The Glass Menagerie*, *Dangerous Liaisons*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Piaf* (Dundee Rep), *A Chorus of Disapproval*, *Cause Celebre*, *Building Blocks* (Pitlochry Theatre), *Abelard and Heloise* (Wyndham's), *The Secretary Bird* (Savoy), *Sign of the Times* (Vaudeville), *Mary Stuart* (RNT), *The Seagull* (tour and Donmar Warehouse), *Private Lives*, *The Norman Conquests*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, *Rose*, *A Moon for the Misbegotten*, *Night of the Iguana*, *Agnes of God*, *Lilian* and *Persona* (one woman shows), *Virginia*, *Bodies* and *Otherwise Engaged*.

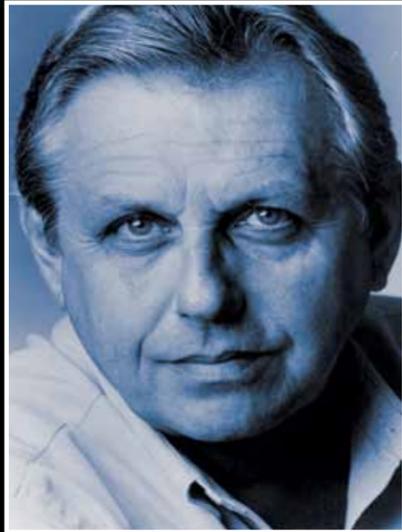
Sandra's television credits include: *Doctors*, *Midsomer Murders*, *Coronation Street*, *The Contenders*, *The Main Chance*, *Parkin's Patch*, *Reluctant Heroes*, *A Perfect State*, and for SATV, *Westgate 1, 2 and 3*.

Radio: Extensive plays, serials, voice-overs including *Persona* for the BBC World Service.

DAVID ROPER

# ARTHUR BIRLING

My original connection with J.B. Priestley goes back over 100 years. No, I am not that old. However, in the early 1900s my paternal grandmother was a mate of JB's at Green Lane Primary School in Bradford, Yorkshire, where JB's father was Headmaster. Grandma Roper's verdict on J.B. Priestley, one of the giants of English literature? "He was a cocky little bugger with his breeches-arse hanging out."



Many years later, I had the opportunity to test her candid assessment of the great man, when I met him at the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of The Bradford Civic Playhouse, which JB had, coincidentally, founded exactly 40 years previously – by 'eck, you can't fault 'em for timing in Yorkshire, can you! Although he had evidently polished up on his social skills, and had thankfully persuaded his mum to sew up his trousers, JB was still unmercifully blunt in his opinions. Frankly, I don't think he was over-impressed by my performance in his play *When We are Married* (the anniversary production), telling me I was too young to be playing Mr. Halliwell, and accusing me of wearing anachronistic whiskers. He was right on both counts.

Also present on that occasion was another Bradfordian, actress Billie Whitelaw. When I proudly announced to her that I was going to drama school that autumn, she replied, "I think you should." With the arrogance of youth, I assumed she meant I was so good that I deserved to go. Years later, it dawned on me she probably meant I was so bad that I needed to go.

After two years at The Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and three years in Rep, at Bristol, Manchester and Exeter, I started work at Granada Television in 1974. My first part was in *Coronation Street* (episode 1,500 to be precise), playing the copper who arrested Eddie Yates for nicking tins of corned beef from the corner shop. It was an undistinguished start to my TV career, it has to be said. Instead of pushing the door to enter Eddie's flat, I pulled and the knob came off in my hand. With only a second to go before the director would shout 'cut!', the floor manager, with remarkable presence of mind I thought, grabbed the offending knob, gave me one almighty shove and I burst in on the unsuspecting Eddie. Afterwards, the director complimented me on such a realistic entrance. Such is the happenstance of acting.

After landing one of the lead parts in Granada TV's *The Cuckoo Waltz* (actors always 'land' parts, don't ask me why), I embarked on a series of knacker national tours; *Funny Peculiar*, *Noises Off*, *Intimate Exchanges*. A settled year at The Royal National Theatre followed, and in 1994 I landed (there we go again!) a regular part in *EastEnders*, playing Geoff Barnes, Michelle Fowler's distinguished, athletic and sexy tutor – well, that's as I saw him. In 2000, I briefly returned to *Coronation Street*, and, without a word of a lie, that same knob-grabbing floor manager, who had pushed me through Eddie's door in 1974, greeted me as I walked into the studio. After twenty-six years, the mind boggles at the size of his pension fund.

This Australian tour of *An Inspector Calls* comes just a year after I started six months touring with it in the UK. After the rigours of shivering round my native country through the worst of winters last year, I am delighted to find myself sweating through your country's sun-drenched summer this year. I have brought my wife, Andrea, and our twins, Harry and Jack, along for the ride, so bang goes my salary. Who cares? If only a fraction of what we've heard about Australia is true, we're going to have a fantastic time. We're all really looking forward to it.

MARK HEALY

# GERALD CROFT

Trained at The Welsh College of Music and Drama and the University of Hull. Theatre includes Hamlet in *Hamlet* (The Nortcott, Exeter), The Actor in *The Woman In Black* (Fortune Theatre, West End), as John Shand in *What Every Woman Knows* (Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough), John Willoughby in *Sense & Sensibility* (Northcott Exeter & National Tour), Jack Worthing in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Petruchio in *The Taming Of The Shrew* and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Northcott Theatre, Exeter), Marlow in *She Stoops To Conquer* (Magnificent Theatre Company), Orsino in *Twelfth Night* (Haymarket, Basingstoke), Darcy in *Pride & Prejudice* (National Tour), Coriolanus in *Coriolanus* (Norwich), Emperor Nero in *Britannicus* (Hanged Man Productions), Jackie Jackson in *The Deep Blue Sea* (Mercury Theatre, Colchester), Mettelus Cimber in *Julius Caesar* (Royal Exchange, Manchester), Hamlet (Sheffield Crucible), Sticks & Stones (National Tour), *Henry VIII*, *King Lear* in New York, *Chambers Of Glass*, *Bar & Ger*, *She Stoops To Conquer* (All Chichester Festival), *The Comedy Of Errors* (RSC World Tour), *Twelfth Night*, (Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond), Dr John Bretton in *Villette* (SJT, Frantic Assembly), Jack Absolute in *The Rivals* (National Tour), Dr. John Seward in *Dracula* (Derby Playhouse).



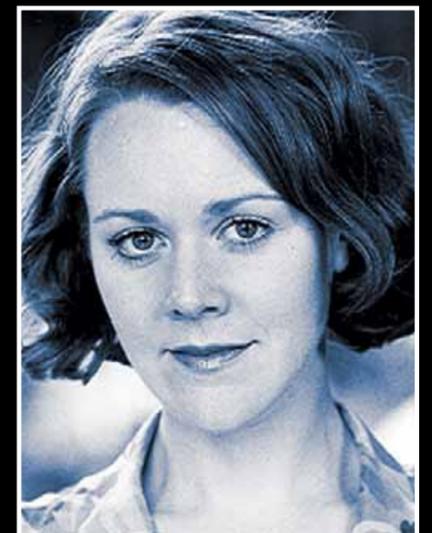
Television includes Greg Campbell in *The Bill*, John Sullivan's *Over Here* for the BBC, Tom Shackleford in *Family Affairs*, Tom Devlin in *Doctors*, *Holby City*, *Ghost Squad*, *Girl's Weekend*, and *A Dog's Tale*.

Writing includes a translation of Racine's *Britannicus*, adaptations of John Fowles' *The Collector* produced by Derby Playhouse and The Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh, Jane Austen's *Persuasion* and *Sense & Sensibility* for The Northcott Theatre, Exeter, and tour; *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, UK tour, and *Dracula* which opens in the US.

EMMA DARWALL SMITH

# SHEILA BIRLING

Emma trained at RADA. Since leaving in 2001, her theatre work has included Rosalind in *We Happy Few* at the Gielgud Theatre, Eugenie Loyer in *Vincent In Brixton*, a tour for the National Theatre; Desdemona in *Othello* and Joan in *Time and the Conways* at the Royal Exchange, Manchester; and Jackie in *Hayfever* for the Oxford Stage Company.



Her television credits include Muriel in *Ian Flemming – A Life In Pictures* for Wall to Wall Media; Mary in *Henry VIII* for Granada television; and Donna in *England Experts* for the BBC.

Her film work has included Susie in *My Tumour & I* for New Age Films; Elizabeth in *Night Call* for Camilla Strom Hendrikson, and Emma in *Just the Ticket* for Little Venice Pictures.

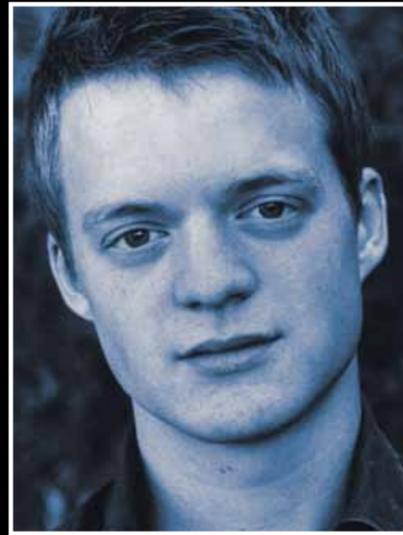
Emma studied film at New York University where she made two short films, *Tupperware* and *The Gallery*.

## MARK FIELD

# ERIC BIRLING

Mark was born and grew up Essex. In 2003 at the age of eighteen Mark began his training at The Oxford School of Drama, where his roles included: Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, Malcolm in *Macbeth* (Pegasus Theatre) and Edmond in *Edmond* Directed by Che Walker.

In 2005 Mark was honoured with The Alan Bates Bursary Award for the most outstanding graduate from all the British drama schools. *An Inspector Calls* is Mark's professional debut.



## DIANA PAYNE MYERS

# EDNA

Diana trained as a dancer with Marie Rambert, first dancing with the company in *Les Sylphides* (Nijinsky Gala, Earls Court, 1949), *Swan Lake* and *Giselle*. She also worked with choreographers of the period including Anton Dolin, Walter Gore, Michael Charnley, Peter Darrell and Harry Cordwell.

Through the 1950's, her performances included Ballet Workshop at the Mercury Theatre, Notting Hill Gate; varied experience in Pantomime & Summer Season; Sister Act in Variety theatre, touring the halls for Lew & Leslie Grade; West End Musicals, satirical revue, and resident opera ballet at Sadlers Wells - which became English National Opera from the success of these very seasons.

Diana first visited Australia when her late husband Peter Myers directed the successful Myers/Cass revue *For Amusement Only* for Williamson's (Melbourne, 1958), later he was commissioned to write the spectacular TV *Spells Magic* (1965) for the opening of Channel 7, staying on to work on *The Mavis Bramston Show*.

Her next visit to Australia was for the Sydney Olympics Arts Festival 2000 with Lloyd Newson's DV8 Physical Theatre, performing in *The Cost of Living* (Hong Kong and RFH).

Previous work from the late 1980's and 1990's were with the following choreographers: DV8 – *Strange Fish* and *Bound to Please* London & European tours, Promenade performance at Tate Modern; Matthew Hawkins, Wayne MacGregor, Arthur Pitta, Phillippe Découfflé (France), Bert Von Gorp (Belgium), Angelika Oei (Holland), Quinney Sacks (for director David Pountney's *Faery Queen* at the London Coliseum & Barcelona with English National Opera).

Diana's theatre credits include: Aunt Rose in Tennessee Williams' *Baby Doll*, (Chamber Opera by Andrew Poppy) (RNT Cottesloe); Carol Churchill's *The Skriker* (RNT Cottesloe); Edna in *An Inspector Calls* (Garrick Theatre, UK Tour), The Grand-mother in Daniel Kramer's *Woyzeck* at The Gate Theatre, Notting Hill.

In her 55 years in the profession Diana has been lucky to work with many wonderful people on stage, screen and in the community and honoured to receive an M.B.E. for services to dance in January, 2001.

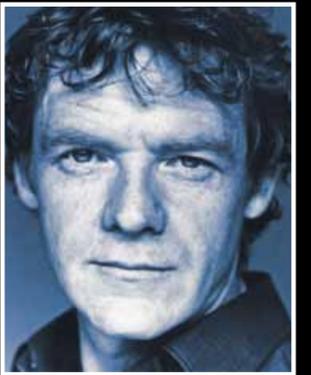


## MARK CARTER

# Understudy for Inspector and Mr Birling

Mark trained at the Academy Drama School. Recent theatre includes: *Inspector Calls* for PW Productions (UK Tour), Federzoni in *The Life of Galileo* at the BAC (Word of Mouth). W/C Geoffrey in *Billy Liar* (Ambassador Theatre Group). Gouffet in *The Face at the Window* (National Tour). Officer in the *Spanish Curate* (Shakespeare's Globe). Three tours as Lacey/Narrator in *The Roy Orbison Story* (Bill Kenwright Ltd.). Edgar in *Poezest* (Na Zabradli, Prague). Gonzalo in *The Tempest* (Touchtone Theatre Company). Albert/Narrator in *The Sound of Fury* (Bill Kenwright Ltd.). Edward/ Ensemble in *Find Me* (Incredible Theatre Co.), Aramis in *The Three Musketeers* (Dreamakers Ltd.), Duke of Buckingham in *Richard III* (Curium Shakespeare Society), Hamlet in *Hamlet* (Academy Company), Dunsey/Squire Cass in *Silas Marner* (Off the Shelf Theatre Company).

Film and Television credits include; Frank in *Bait*, Ronson in *The Trial Davros* (Love Productions), Del in *Lucky Twentie* (Lucky Twentie Productions), D.I. Doug Simpson in *The Stretch* (Paul Knight Productions/Sky), Robert in *Vanilla and Roses* (Black Cat Films), Callum in *London's Burning* (LWTV), Robert in *The Knock* (Bronson/Knight Productions), Mr. Walker in *The Bill* (Thames TV), Chapman in *Heartbeat* (Yorkshire TV), Carl in *The Block* (Channel 4), Thomas Allen in *Words From My Father* (Edenbridge Productions/C4), Bishop in *Bishop's Game* (Kintyre Productions), Liam Shay in *a Twist of Faith* (Marion Productions), Master of Ceremonies in *Annie's Bar* (Ardent Productions/Channel 4).



## ANNE WHITE

# Understudy for Mrs Birling and Edna

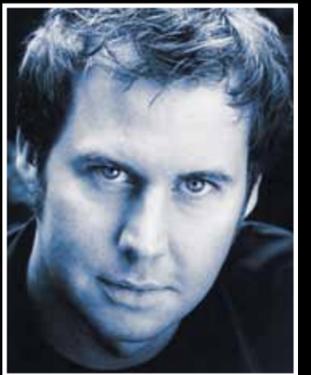
Anne trained at the Webber Douglas Academy. Her work in theatre includes *The Mandate* (National Theatre), *Hamlet* (Old Vic), *Richard III* (Regents Park), *Hayfever* (Savoy), *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *Abigail's Party*, *Miss Bronte & I* (UK tour), *My Fathers House* (Birmingham Rep), *Sir Thomas More*, (Shaw Theatre) and *Voyage in the Dark* (Young Vic). Film and Television include *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Disney Productions), *The Escort*, *In the Beginning* (NBC television,) *Coming Home*, *Peak Practice*, *The Bill*, *God Speed Co-operation*, *Kids* and *Shine on Harvey Moon*.



## BEN SLEEP

# Understudy for Gerald and Eric

Ben was born in Hertfordshire and moved to London to attend Goldsmith's College, where he studied drama and theatre arts. He spent a semester in the USA, studying under Francine Roussel at Muhlenberg, culminating in a performance of *The Lover*, playing the part of Richard. From here, Ben moved back to London to attend the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art. His performances there included *Our Country's Good* (Harry Brewer), *The Way of the World* (Sir Witwood), *As You Like It* (Silvius), *The Cherry Orchard* (Lophakin), *Scenes from an Execution* (Urgentino) and *Ghetto* (Srulik). Since leaving in 2003, Ben has played Henry in *Fatale* at the Bridewell Theatre, Mike in *Salt Meets Wound* at the Hampstead Theatre, The Bird Man/Company in *Sweeny Todd* at the Derby Playhouse and part of the company of *What the Butler Saw* at the Criterion Theatre, London. Television Credits include: *Band of Brothers*, *Sam's Circus* and *Brick Lane*.



## LISA HEWITT

# Understudy for Sheila Birling

Lisa trained at Guildford School of Acting, graduating with First Class Honours in 2001. Whilst at drama school, she was the recipient of the Principal's Award for Acting two years running. Theatre credits include: Susan in *Veronica's Room* and Catherine in *Proof* (Merlin International Theatre, Budapest), Celia/Sylvie in *A Garden Fete* (UK Tour), Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Punchdrunk Theatre Co.), Beth in *Little Women* and Diana in *Anne of Green Gables* (Sadler's Wells, London), Maid Marion in *The Legend of Robin Hood* (UK Tour), Elvira in *Blithe Spirit* (Octagon Theatre, Yeovil), Rachel in *Season's Greetings* (Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield) and Clare Norman in *Murder, With Love* (UK Tour). Television and film credits include: *Coronation Street*, *Fenestral* (November Films) and *The Computer Virus* (Wild Iris Productions).



# THE PHILOSOPHY AND POLITICS OF J B PRIESTLEY

The mellowing effects of time mean that in recent years JB Priestley has been looked upon as being something of an establishment figure, but back in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century he was among the most cutting-edge of thinkers and became a prime mover in the mini-socialist revolution that heralded the immediate post-war labour party victory in 1945. A committed socialist whose father had been equally passionate about the cause, he was greatly concerned about the consequences of social inequality in Britain. The disparity caused by wealth and class divides and unchecked capitalism and unsavoury social consequences that he saw as being a direct result of such a set-up: greed, selfishness, exploitative tendencies and powerlust on the part of the 'haves' and despair, resentment and lack of opportunities the 'have-nots'. Further, he regarded the mistrust and dysfunctionality caused by social inequality, along with a capitalist disregard for working people, as being responsible for the outbreak of two world wars in the first half of the century, directly attributing the causes of the First World War to the social set-up of the day – a point he addresses in *An Inspector Calls* – and the Second World War to lessons not being learned.



Priestley's wartime broadcasts were hugely popular, but not with the government of the day.

As a result on 26 July 1941 he joined with similarly minded thinkers, and members of the Labour Party who were unhappy with the electoral truce between the main political parties during the War, to found the 1941 Committee. Led by Richard Acland, Vernon Bartlett and Priestley, this in turn saw the creation of a new socialist Common Wealth Party, which argued for a more egalitarian and progressive political discourse than that offered by any established party. In particular it advocated the three principles of Common Ownership, Vital Democracy and Morality in Politics, of which the first, public ownership of land, led Acland to donate his own 19,000-acre Devon family estate to the National Trust. Priestley himself became the CWP's first Chairman, but resigned shortly afterwards.

The party did not exactly prosper, although many have attributed that to poor recruiting policies rather than a discordant message, but it did win several by-elections, at Eddisbury, Skipton and Chelmsford, beating the Conservatives in each case. However, by the time the 1945 General Election came around, public support had swung behind the Labour Party cause and only one of the CWP's twenty-three candidates was successful – at Chelmsford, where no

Labour candidate was standing the CWP quickly dissolved and most members joined/returned to the Labour Party.

More successful and ultimately enduring was his powerful 1957 *New Statesman* piece, 'Britain and the Nuclear Bombs', which aroused such a response that it led to the formation of CND. Priestley was reacting particularly to the government's abandonment of their plan for unilateral disarmament. In his view, the only way to prevent future wars and conflicts from engulfing the world was through co-operation and mutual respect between countries – a belief which also saw him become an active proponent of the United Nations. And to this end he felt that Britain should set an example to the world by taking the difficult, but morally justified, decision to pursue unilateral disarmament. Although this view was rejected by the government, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, established by Priestley, Bertrand Russell, Denis Healey and the other major figures of the time, endures to this day.

Priestley's political views and stances often resulted in much criticism from the establishment. His stint as presenter of the BBC radio programme *Postscript*, which followed the *Nine o'Clock News* every Sunday evening from 5 June 1940, was so successful that after just a few months it was estimated that 40% of the country's adult population was listening to him, a following second only to Churchill's. Graham Greene described him in *The Spectator* (Dec 1940) as "a leader second only in importance to Mr Churchill. And he gave us what other leaders have always failed to give us – an ideology".

Naturally, this led to great criticism from the Conservative Party, who claimed that he was using his position to spread left-wing views via the BBC, which should remain impartial. Pressure from above resulted in him being removed from the role just after a few months, although exactly who was responsible remains unclear. Priestley himself claimed apropos his removal that "I received two letters... one was from the Ministry of information, telling me that the BBC was responsible for the decision to take me off the air, and the other was from the BBC, saying that a directive had come from the Ministry of Information to end my broadcast."

"A man is a member of a community and the fact that he is a member of a community immensely enlarges his stature and increases his opportunities... But as well as being a member of a community a man is also a person, a unique individual, and it is in fact the business of the community not simply to glorify itself but to produce better persons, to enrich its individual sphere..."

*J B Priestley (Thoughts in the Wilderness 1957)*

"My own personal view, for what it's worth, is that we must stop thinking in terms of property and power and begin thinking in terms of community and creation.

...We want a world that offers people not the dubious pleasures of power, but the maximum opportunities for creation. And, even already, in the middle of this war [World War II]. I can see that world shaping itself."

"...Property is that old-fashioned way of thinking of a country as a thing, and a collection of things on that thing, all owned by certain people and constituting property, instead of thinking of that country as the home of a living society, the community itself as the first test."

*J B Priestley (Postscripts, 1940)*

"In plain words: now that Britain has told the world that she has the H-Bomb she should announce as early as possible that she has done with it, that she proposes to reject in all circumstances nuclear warfare.

We ended the way high in the world's regard. We could have taken over its moral leadership, spoken and acted for what remained of its conscience, but we chose to act otherwise. The melancholy consequences were that abroad we cut a shabby figure in power politics and at home we shrug it all away or got to the theatre to applaud the latest jeers and sneers at Britannia.

Alone we defied Hitler: and alone we can defy his nuclear madness. There may be other chain-reactions besides those leading to destruction: and we might start one. The British of these times, so frequently hiding their decent kind faces behind masks of sullen apathy or some cheap cynicism, often seem to be waiting for something better than party squabbles and appeals to their narrowest self-interest, something great and noble in its intention that would make them feel good again. And this might well be a declaration to the world that after a certain date one power able to engage in nuclear warfare will reject the evil thing for ever."

*J B Priestley (New Statesman, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1957)*