

Circular October 2020

Welcome

Hello and welcome to the October 2020 issue of the Circular, the newsletter just for our Circle members. In this month's issue, you can learn a bit more about the rest of our shows for 2020, and (it is Halloween, after all) take a tour through all things 'macabre, supernatural and grotesque' at the SJT...

The Snow Queen



Set and costume designs by Helen Coyston

We can't tell you how excited we all are about our Christmas production this year!

It feels so important to be offering a bit of sparkle and excitement to round off what's been, let's face it, a year somewhat lacking in both. And our team is RIGHT ON IT!

First, the Snow Queen herself: you'll remember Polly Lister if you saw either *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* (in which she plays Mari), or *Di and Viv and Rose* (she was Di) – she's hard to forget...

Polly says: "I'm making an effort to get fit enough to have the energy to do Nick's script justice! It's going to be exhausting. I love the diversity of characters Nick has written for me and they are so beautifully crafted it's going to be a joy to get into a rehearsal room and explore them."

But despite all that apparently boundless energy (we think Polly is probably already rattling with multi-vitamins), she won't be able to do every single show – enter our 'alternate', Jacoba Williams. New to our stage, Jacoba is a former member of the National Youth Theatre, and has been busy since she graduated from drama school in 2016 – this time last year, she was playing the lead in Eleanor Tindall's darkly comic *Before I Was A Bear* at The Bunker in London.

Writer Nick Lane displays his usual off-the-wall approach: "Will it be ridiculous? Will there be brilliant songs? Will you look at hedgehogs in the same way again? Yes, yes and possibly not. In that order."

And those brilliant songs are written, as usual, by the brilliant Simon Slater, a multi-talented actor and musician who some of you may have caught earlier this month in our reading of *Hansard*, which he performed with Jemma Redgrave, and in his one-man show, *Bloodshot*.

Director Paul Robinson says: “There’s going to be reindeer and ravens, twinkling trees and the Northern Lights, some jokes to keep the whole family in stitches and some amazing new surprises – the perfect Christmas package, in fact!”

And because our audiences will be carefully socially distanced, we have a few less seats than usual – so we recommend you book as soon as possible to make sure you get the seats you want: https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1015/the_snow_queen

Try something new!



Deborah Tracey

One of the most (or should we say, few?) pleasing outcomes of the current situation is that people have discovered the great night out that our play readings provide.

We’ve been doing regular readings of new plays – it’s where *Build a Rocket* started its life – for some years, and they’ve slowly built an enthusiastic, but small, following. We figured that only die-hard drama fans would want to come along to hear a play in development, albeit performed by professional actors!

But the great joy of these performances is that they focus your attention very much on the words – it’s a bit like attending the recording of a radio play, really. And we’ve seen a real uptick in audience numbers since we re-opened our doors in early October with a reading of Sarah Gordon’s *The Underdog*, a play about The Brontës.

Interested? We’ve still got a few to go this year, including Alison Carr’s *Dogwalker*. This new play from the writer of *Caterpillar* and *The Last Quiz Night on Earth* (a show which was due to visit us the week after lockdown and had sold out) is something we’re interested in developing for a possible run at a future Edinburgh Festival – and you can see it first!

A one-woman show, it will be performed in our Round on 6 and 7 November at 7.30pm by Deborah Tracey, who was in the sell-out *Standing at the Sky’s Edge* at Sheffield Crucible last year, and directed by our Carne Trust Associate Director Chelsey Gillard: <https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1066/dogwalker>

Also coming soon in our play reading season:

- *Tapped* by Katie Redford, a comedy drama about three colleagues who attend a failing self-help group (3 November)
- *Canton* by Rebecca Jade Hammond, which explores relationships between strangers and how their interactions can be a catalyst for change (10 November)
- *Worldy* by Rachel Horner, a show about religion, family and unlearning everything you once knew (17 November).

For more information, and to book: <https://www.sjt.uk.com/whatson>

My Favourite Summer



Nick Lane ©Tony Bartholomew

A couple of years ago, the staff at the SJT received an invitation to attend a rehearsed reading of a play by Nick Lane, the writer of our Christmas shows.

It turned out to be an unforgettable afternoon. *My Favourite Summer* is in many ways a traditional rom-com, but mainly set in a factory during one long, hot summer, so with some reasonably robust humour. It had our team helpless with laughter...

Nick says: "I can't tell you how pleased I was when Paul asked to bring *My Favourite Summer* to the SJT as part of this special season. I wrote it originally for Hull Truck in 2007 – it toured nationally but never made it up to Scarborough. Having got to know the audience here for the past five years I'm chuffed that they'll finally get to see the play. I really hope they enjoy it.

"It's mostly based in reality – I did work at a scaffolding warehouse in my early twenties, I was crazy about the same girl I'd been crazy about since school and I did work with a bloke called Melvin who terrified me on an hourly basis. Having said that of course, and since the majority of what he says in the play is pretty much what he actually said at the time, I owe him a debt of gratitude – he ended up giving me plenty of material for the show.

"Not that I want to seek him out to thank him – I'm sure he's just as terrifying now!"

Book here for this semi-staged performance, which the Telegraph called 'a blissfully funny rites of passage comedy': https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1068/my_favourite_summer

Orpheus & Eurydice



Serena Manteghi, *Orpheus & Eurydice* © Sam Donnelly

Serena Manteghi has established herself as one of the SJT's favourite actors in recent years, with powerhouse turns in *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* and *Build a Rocket*.

So we're delighted that she's back with us this autumn, in The Flanagan Collective's gorgeous *Orpheus & Eurydice*. This modern day retelling of the Greek legend is, in their words, 'the story of a lad, told by lads [Alexander Flanagan-Wright and Phil Grainger]' and 'the story of a lass, told by lasses [Serena and Casey Jay Andrews]' in spoken word, poetry and music.

We recommend you get a sense of the show by watching their short video here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tMlefikjXk&feature=emb_logo

And Alexander has written a lovely and rather uplifting blog for us, which you can find here: <https://thesjt.tumblr.com/post/633219077599625216/orpheus-eurydice>

You can book for the show here: https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1069/orpheus_&_eurydice

A haunting experience...



Haunting Julia, 2020



Alan Ayckbourn © Tony Bartholomew

We know from your feedback that a few of you have had problems booking for Alan Ayckbourn's audio version of *Haunting Julia* (in which all the three roles are played by Alan himself!).

It's one of the drawbacks of our box office system that it's not really set up for digital work. Apologies for that – we hope we've sorted it now. If you want to book, all you need to know is:

- You can book any time from now until the show ends on 5 January 2020, but can only listen from 1 December to 5 January
- You only need to book one ticket at a cost of £12, but as many people as are in your household or bubble can listen in – and as many times as you want from 1 December to 5 January
- If you book in October or November, you'll be sent a code which will allow you to access the show on 1 December. After that date, you'll be sent the code at time of booking.

If you still have any queries, do please contact our box office on 01723 370541 – they'll be happy to help! The box office is currently open for calls from 11am to 4pm, Tuesdays to Saturdays.

And look out for an in-depth feature on the show from Alan's Archivist, Simon Murgatroyd, in next month's Circular.

You can book for *Haunting Julia* here: https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1078/haunting_julia

Fright Fest and Eat Me at the SJT

SJT
STEPHEN JOSEPH THEATRE
SCARBOROUGH

EAT ME @ THE SJT
GREAT FOOD COCKTAILS CRAFT BEER

Fright Fest
By THE SEA

Pie of the Damned
A blond and wicked chicken pot pie with a spicy twist!
The Village of the Damned
Fri 23 Oct, 2pm & Sat 24 Oct, 7pm

Slaughtered Lamb Diablo Curry
Mutton and sweet potato curry just like David's mom used to make - don't eat it during a full moon, it may bring out the animal in you!
An American Werewolf in London
Fri 23 Oct, 7pm, Tues 27 Oct, 7pm & Wed 28 Oct, 2pm

The Addams Family sharing plate
The family's vile and venomous favourite - choose four of five options (but the one left behind may not be happy...)
The Addams Family
Sat 24 Oct, 2pm, Tues 27 Oct, 2pm, Wed 28 Oct, 5pm, Thur 29 Oct, 2pm & Fri 30 Oct, 2pm

The 'frying tonight' burger
Odd Bod's Thai-inspired fish fingers on a kaffir puréed pea bed with roast garlic mayo.
Carry On Screaming!
Thur 29 Oct, 7pm, Sat 31 Oct, 2pm

Here's Johnny...
The ultimate bad boy Jack's brunch burrito - eggs, bacon, fries and chorizo spicy ketchup - just how Jack likes it!
The Shining
Fri 30 Oct, 7pm, Sat 31 Oct, 7pm

We're thrilled with how well our Fright Fest by the Sea mini festival for Halloween (23 to 31 October) has gone down with our audiences! At time of writing, quite a few of the screenings for *The Village of the Damned*, *An American Werewolf in London*, *The Addams Family* and *Carry On Screaming!* are nearly full; *The Shining* is sold out.

Whether you've already bought your ticket or are still planning to buy, you might like to know that between 23 and 31 October, anyone seeing a Fright Fest film can take their ticket to Eat Me @ the SJT and claim a 20% discount on one of five delicious Fright Fest specials. This offer is valid only on the date on your ticket, but you can choose any of the specials, not just the one linked to your film. And throughout Halloween week (26 to 31 October), any child in the café who shouts 'trick or treat' at a member of staff will be rewarded with a bag of sweets. Book your table now – message Eat Me Cafe on Facebook or call 07445 475328.

Raising the Spirits by Simon Murgatroyd

When it was suggested I write something to raise the spirits for this month's Circular, my thoughts naturally turned to the macabre, the supernatural and the grotesque...

It's nearly Halloween after all: what else could have been meant?

A brief moment of self-doubt set in. Perhaps it meant something cheery and bright. But that was only a moment – mere seconds, actually – who wants uplifting when you can have ghost stories instead?

And stories about restless spirits, the undead, unnatural occurrences and haunted houses are part of the fabric of this theatre. At a quick glance, I estimate we've staged in excess of 40 plays relating to the uncanny since 1955.

But whilst researching these plays, it's difficult to get away from some of the fun stories they've created. So, here's some glimpses into our past to raise your spirits whilst raising the spirits...

A Grave Turn: Alan Ayckbourn & *Carmilla*



1972 *Carmilla* © Scarborough Theatre Trust

In 1972, Alan Ayckbourn opened his first season as Artistic Director of the company with the Gothic horror story *Carmilla*. This was an adaptation by David Campton of Sheridan le Fanu's influential story about a seductive female vampire; it's regarded as one of the inspirations for Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*.

Alan apparently went full-on for the production in which Jennifer Piercey played the vampiric seductress, Carmilla, and for which – reputedly – the wardrobe department were less than thrilled by the amount of fake blood gushing onto the costumes.

The evening ended with a true coup-de-théâtre, though – worthy of any Hammer Horror film – except, as Alan recalls, it didn't quite go as planned one evening.

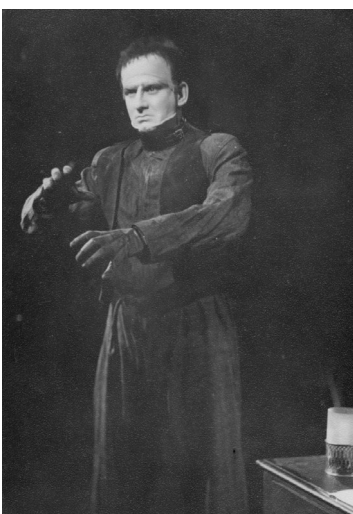
"At the climax, Jennifer toppled back during a stage struggle into a deep stone crypt centrestage, and the hero, having draped a cloth over her, then proceeded to drive a stake through her heart. When the cloth was pulled away, revealed was a shrivelled emaciated skeletal corpse."

"Jenny was meanwhile 'flipped' over so she lay at the bottom of the crypt where she remained hidden through the curtain call and until the audience had all left."

"One night, long after we were all in the bar enjoying ourselves, someone mentioned, 'where was Jenny?'"

"We rushed back into the pitch dark auditorium to the sounds of muffled screams. Not our finest moment!"

It's Alive!: Stephen Joseph & *Frankenstein*



1959 *Frankenstein*
© Scarborough Theatre Trust

The first true horror story to be performed by the company was David Campton's adaptation of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* during 1959.

This short-lived production – pulled from the schedule after a week due to the popularity of Alan Ayckbourn's debut play *The Square Cat* – featured an unlikely and uncredited performance.

The Creature was actually portrayed by the company's founder, Stephen Joseph, making his first stage appearance in 10 years. Stephen, who was an imposing 6'4", was in the make-up chair for two hours apparently for his transformation.

Stephen noted at the time, "I've got a head-start for this part. I look like a monster even without make-up."

As to why he returned to the boards for such an odd role, it wasn't just his physical attributes but a nod to his mother. She was the actress Hermione Gingold and several years earlier had appeared opposite the most famous actor to ever play the Creature, Boris Karloff, in a television film called *The Sting of Death*.

Bumps In The Night: Stephen Mallatratt & *The Woman In Black*



1987 *The Woman in Black* © Scarborough Theatre Trust

The most famous ghost story to be told in this theatre is, undoubtedly, *The Woman in Black*. Premiered at Westwood in 1987 - and revived in 1997 and 2015 at the SJT – this is Stephen Mallatratt's phenomenally successful adaptation of Susan Hill's novella.

Conceived as a low-budget Christmas treat, it subsequently became the second longest running West End show after *The Mousetrap* and has been seen around the world.

But as the late Stephen Mallatratt recalled in 1999, it had the most inauspicious of starts which was almost upstaged by mysterious off-stage sounds.

"I've a vivid memory of the sound desk which was at the rear of the space we grandly called the auditorium, and so much a part of the audience that the kids at the back could stick their chewing gum to it."

"It was a reel-to-reel with great clunking switches that sounded as if we had the timpani section of the LSE in the team."

*"When I watch *The Woman In Black* now, my mind's ear can still hear clunks from the sound desk as it anticipates the cues. A genuine haunting of a sort."*

Coven-Ready: Russ Allen & *Touch, Wood & Whistle*

During 1984, the national press reported on a story in which the Hermetic Order Of The Silver Blade attempted to buy the derelict Heptonstall Slack Baptist Church in Hebden Bridge to convert into a pagan temple. The plan was derailed by objections from local people to a witches' coven setting up in the former church as well as – bizarrely – a financial intervention from Cliff Richard.

This became the inspiration for a 1986 play by Stephen Mallatratt called *Touch, Wood & Whistle*, which had the misfortune of being promoted by Russ Allen, the SJT's press officer.

Russ is one of the oddest figures associated with this theatre and there are numerous tales associated with him, from declaring the SJT was a terrorist target following the US bombing of Libya in 1986 and dinner parties assembled from leftovers found on tips and past-their-sell-by goodies donated by a local supermarket for a non-existent pig he claimed to own, to a marketing campaign which never mentioned the actual play to auditioning garden gnomes.

His 'genius' move here was to put an advert into *Predictions* magazine inviting witches to attend the first night. Ironically, given the play is about tackling intolerance, Allen swiftly withdrew the invite stating he wanted to avoid media harassment of witches at the theatre!

As it was, Barbara Brandolani – High Priestess of the Silver Blade, who had originally tried to buy the Hebden Bridge church – turned up on the first night to see the play wondering if she needed to send out a 'magical circle of protection' to ward off any negativity in the play.

As it was, she enjoyed the play, but when she complained about how Russ had treated her and other witches, the ever-professional press officer publicly responded: "We don't go searching for comments from people we don't know."

As can be imagined, Russ Allen's tenure was short if colourful, culminating in *Private Eye* and the national press reporting on a running spat between him and the ex-theatre manager.

'I am your Number One Fan': Jeannie Swales & *Misery*

In 1995, the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round ventured into the realm of the world's most successful living horror writer with an adaptation of Stephen King's classic, *Misery*.

The two-hander featured Cliff Howells as the author Paul Sheldon and Jane Hollowood playing an unnerving Annie Wilkes, Paul's biggest fan with a penchant for hobbling.

In the press office, self-confessed Stephen King fan Jeannie Swales was looking for ways to promote the production when she discovered a very unlikely connection between Stephen King and the SJT.

"When we staged Misery during 1995, the actor Ian Carmichael was still alive and living in Grosmont and used to come to visit the theatre regularly.

"As you may know, the hero of the book-within-the-book in Misery is called Ian Carmichael. Which I probably wouldn't have noticed if it hadn't been for the fact that I remembered that in Stephen King's The Dark Half, one of the characters expresses admiration for the English actor who plays Lord Peter Wimsey'.

"From which I surmised that Stephen King was a bit of an Ian Carmichael fan. So I wrote to him – using, as I recall, the address 'Stephen King, Boston, USA!' – telling him about the production, and asking if (a) he fancied writing a programme note and (b) if he might want to come over and see the show and promising (probably very rashly!) that I'd organise for him to meet with both Ian Carmichael and Alan Ayckbourn. The letter reached him and I got a very nice reply...

Dear Ms Swales

Thanks for your recent letter. Stephen appreciated hearing that 'Misery' is going to be included in the forthcoming summer season for St. Joseph Theatre in the Round [sic]. We hope it will do well for you. Mr. King thanks you for the invitation to write a short programme note for the play, but must pass due to his busy writing schedule... but as always, he appreciates the thought.

Cordially

Shirley Sonderegger
Secretary to Stephen King

"Looking back, I can't believe I had the gall..."

The Ghost of 'Enry Albert: Simon Murgatroyd and What The Devil!*



1975 *The Ghost of 'Enry Albert*
© Scarborough Theatre Trust

I'm too young to have seen the revue *What The Devil!* which premiered at the Library Theatre in 1975, and the SJT didn't even have a copy in archive when I first took on the role of Archivist.

Imagine my joy then when I discovered a copy of the play hidden deep in the Ayckbourn Archive, untouched and unread for for 30 years and a rather special Ayckbourn creation.

For Alan wrote two pieces for the review, the one-act sketch *Dracula* and – my favourite – the song, *The Ghost of 'Enry Albert*. It tells of an ample bride whose first husband dies trying to carry her over the threshold. Now whenever she marries again, the ghost of her first husband appears on each wedding night.

The chorus probably gives away why I'm so fond of the little-known treat...

*What's a blushing bride to do upon her wedding night?
How's she ever going to get herself enjoyed
When the bridegroom dims the light and just shrivels up with fright
At the sight of 'Enry Albert Murgatroyd.*

****Editor's note: You'd never guess it, but under that sheet is Malcolm Hebden, once an SJT regular, but now probably best known as Coronation Street's Norris Cole...***

Book Club

Many of us have been reading more recently: if you're keen to talk about your most recent read, the SJT Book Club is keen to welcome you! Upcoming meeting dates (currently by Zoom) are 11 November, when the group will be discussing Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, and 9 December, when the book will be the graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman.

Meetings are at 6.30 and are currently via Zoom. If you're interested in joining, please leave your details at the Box Office and they will be passed on.

Nice Scream: Scarborough's Supernatural Plays

At a conservative estimate, the SJT has staged more than 40 plays with supernatural elements since 1955. Here's my selection of a notable play for each decade.

1950s: *Frankenstein* – David Campton's adaptation of Mary Shelley's famed novel with Stephen Joseph himself playing the creature!

1960s: *Usher* - Another Campton adaptation, this time of Edgar Allen Poe's classic story with Alan Ayckbourn playing the titular role.

1970s: *Carmilla* - again, David Campton but this time with a gore-soaked re-telling of Sheridan Le Fanu's vampire story.

1980s: There's only one thing it can be: *The Woman In Black*, Stephen Mallatratt's extraordinary adaptation of Susan Hill's ghost story.

1990s: Alan Ayckbourn's first dip into supernatural territory with *Haunting Julia*, soon to be streamed by the SJT for Christmas in a special audio play directed and performed by Alan – see below for more information.

2000s: *Haunting Julia* is a play for three men; Alan followed it up with a supernatural thriller for three women, *Snake In The Grass*, inspired by the French film *Les Diaboliques*.

2010s: Ghost stories don't have to be always scary, they can be silly too, and Nick Lane's inspired *A (Scarborough) Christmas Carol* was a huge hit with audiences both familiar and unfamiliar with Charles Dickens' classic story.

2020s: The youth of the decade and the fact that theatre has been a bit of a ghost town this year means I don't have much to choose from yet – but what I have chosen is a real winner in the grand tradition of ghost stories for Christmas. Pour a glass of something warming and gather round the fire to listen to an audio version of *Haunting Julia*, performed by the author himself!

Just £12 will give you unlimited access from 1 December to 5 January via our website (or, if you buy after 1 December, from that date until 5 January), and of course, as many people as there are in your own personal 'bubble' can listen in...
https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1078/haunting_julia

Simon Murgatroyd is Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist and the Administrator of his official website www.alanayckbourn.net