

Circular September 2021

Welcome...

...to the September issue of the Circular, the newsletter exclusively for members of the Stephen Joseph Theatre's membership scheme.

This month, we bring you news of our shows for October, plus what we've been up to behind the scenes this last month or so.

First things first...



Here's what you can look forward to at the SJT in October:

The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde: this production, from Blackeyed Theatre (30 September to 2 October), comes with a great pedigree. It's adapted and directed by the talented Nick Lane, who also adapted Blackeyed's version of *The Sign of Four* which visited us a couple of years ago. It's been selling really well – we advise booking quickly if you want to see it!

Sunny Side Up! This one's close to our hearts, as it was the show that John Godber wrote last year for us to present in October (in between lockdowns), making us one of the very few UK theatres that was actually presenting live work at the time. It's now embarking on a short UK tour, and will visit us – complete with original cast of John G, Jane Thornton, and their daughter, Martha Godber (other daughter Elizabeth completes the family line-up as stage manager) – from 7 to 9 October.

The Princess and the Pea: This charming show set in the Museum of Forgotten Things is from the pen of Mike Kenny, who you might know better as the author of that brilliant version of *The Railway Children* that played at York Theatre Royal, Waterloo and King's Cross Stations, and the National Railway Museum a few years ago. There are just two performances, on 27 October.

Josephine: Josephine Baker was the little girl from Missouri who became an original 20th century icon. Dancer, actor, activist, campaigner, spy and mother to the multicultural Rainbow Tribe, Josephine broke the mould and high-kicked the pieces to the kerb. Find out more on 28 and 29 October in a show suitable for eight years old and upwards.

Jacaranda



We're delighted to welcome a new company, Pentabus, to our autumn schedule - they're bringing their show *Jacaranda* to us on 16 November. It's the story of Olivia, who has recently moved into her great uncle's farmhouse. She's not local, but she knows her way around. Matty is a gamekeeper, but he doesn't often tell anyone. He's wary of newcomers. These unlikely strangers find themselves beside a stream on the longest night of the year. This brilliant new drama from award-winning playwright Lorna French explores loss, love, prejudice, race and belonging.

As a Circle member, you have priority booking until Friday 24 September at 10am:
www.sjt.uk.com/event/1242/jacaranda

The Offing



Our Scenic Artist, Rich Marr painting the set for The Offing

And, of course, that's not all – we're also presenting our own production this autumn – a new adaptation of Benjamin Myers's much-loved novel, *The Offing*. At time of writing, this show is rapidly heading towards a sell-out – we've added an extra matinee at 1.30pm on Wednesday 20 October (and this one performance is our first non-socially-distanced show in a long time). We are enormously grateful to a very generous anonymous donor for their support of *The Offing*.

Have fun and learn!



Left: Eastfield Gala Right: Fuse Youth Theatre ©Tony Bartholomew

Of course, we're about more than just shows – our Outreach department runs a busy programme of workshops, courses and more. If you or your family are looking for new skills or interests, why not check out our programme of Rounders classes, with courses suitable for age groups from five to 15+; Fuse, an inclusive youth theatre for young people with learning disabilities (ages 14-25) and those from mainstream education (age 14-18); or join a choir – we have three to choose from! You can find out more on our What's On page:

<https://www.sjt.uk.com/whatson>

Life's a beach



We thought you might enjoy seeing our recent staff outing to Scarborough's North Bay. Having all been at home for so long, and having missed out on our Christmas party, we thought it would be fun to have a day out on the beach while the weather was nice – but some staff couldn't resist bringing work with them, and ending up building an SJT sandcastle!

Huge thanks to our friends at Eat Me Café for providing the delicious picnic.

Beans, beans...



Fee-fi-fo-fum! To tie in with our Christmas production of *Jack and the Beanstalk*, our Outreach team have been hard at work delivering 'magic bean bags' to local schools. These little hessian sacks contain a handful of magic beans that children can grow plus an activity sheet based around the much-loved story of Jack and the Beanstalk.

Out Late

You may remember that in the last issue of the Circular, we talked about how we try to help other companies who may not have access to rehearsal space or other crucial aspects of the making of a show. In mid-September, we welcomed one of our Associate companies, Voxed, to the building during development for their new work, *Out Late*.

Out Late is in the round, which is unusual for a dance piece, so it was useful for Voxed to spend time in our auditorium before they perform the show at The Place Theatre in London (19 and 20 November) and here on 25 and 26 November.

Out Late follows fiercely closeted Sebastian as he falls in love with ex-army officer Vinnie, a charming but volatile out-and-proud gay man. Sebastian tries to hide his new relationship whilst his controlling wife Fifi secretly watches them fall in love. Unravelling Vinnie's murder take us through a twisted story of jealousy, shame and manipulation.

Alumni news

We always love to find out what's happened to those we've worked with in the past, especially our Rounders – so many people have kickstarted a theatrical career by joining one of our youth groups.

The latest news to reach us is of Rounder and former front of house assistant Ruth Allison, who has just joined Richmond's historic Georgian Theatre Royal as its youth theatre officer – you can read more here: <https://www.richmondshiretoday.co.uk/new-leader-takes-helm-of-georgians-youth-theatre-group/>

Dates for your diary

Our popular Circle Cafés bring you, our members, the exclusive opportunity to meet our casts, crews and SJT staff for an insight into what happens behind the scenes. Our fascinating August event looked at the technical side of things and was presented by our Chief Electrician, Paul Stear, and our Broadcast Coordinator, Dan Abell. We'll be confirming more guests later, but for now, pop the following dates in your diary...

Thursday 21 October – meet members of *The Offing* team.

Thursday 18 November – our literary co-ordinator, Fleur Hebditch, will discuss her work (this is part 2, but you don't need to have attended part 1 to enjoy it!).

Thursday 9 December – meet members of the *Jack and the Beanstalk* team (please note that this is at 1.30pm as there's a morning show that day!)

We're also planning an afternoon 'soiree' where you'll get the chance to meet some of our board members– keep an eye out for the date on that one!

Across dales and moors

by Simon Murgatroyd

Next month will see the world premiere at the SJT of a new adaptation of Benjamin Myers's acclaimed and best-selling novel, *The Offing*.

This charming story about a lifelong friendship, set in Robin Hood's Bay in the North York Moors, has been adapted by Janice Okoh, with additional material by Paul Robinson, and is the latest in a long tradition of literary adaptations produced by this company.



11956 *Wuthering Heights* © Scarborough Theatre Trust

These began in the Library Theatre's sophomore year of 1956 when Stephen Joseph, the company's founder, directed a new adaptation of Emily Brontë's classic novel *Wuthering Heights*, which is set in the Yorkshire Dales.

Like *The Offing*, *Wuthering Heights* was adapted by a female writer, although you would have been hard pressed to have realised that at the time.

Wuthering Heights

dramatised by

Jurneman Winch

Joseph	...	...	...	Harry Hancock
Nellie	...	...	...	Betty Cardno
Earnshaw	...	...	...	Walter Hall
Heathcliff	...	...	...	John Rees
Catherine	...	...	...	Shirley Jacobs
Edgar Linton	...	...	...	Peter Bridgmont

Scenes :

- 1 The living room at Wuthering Heights
- 2 At the Bottomless Pool on the moors
- 3 The living room at Wuthering Heights
- 4 The same
- 5 Five years later. The drawing room at Linton Grange
- 6 At the Bottomless Pool

Producer	...	...	...	Stephen Joseph
Stage Manager	...	...	...	Margaret Tabor
Assistant	...	...	...	James Wootton

1956 *Wuthering Heights* Programme

© Scarborough Theatre Trust

Wuthering Heights was credited to Jurneman Winch, a pseudonym for the writer Joan Winch; correspondence suggests she felt obliged to use it in order to attract more attention to her writing, not unlike Emily Brontë whose sole novel was initially published under the name of Ellis Bell.

Joan had met Stephen Joseph during his playwriting workshops in the early 1950s and wrote a play for the Library Theatre's inaugural season, the verse drama *Turn Right At The Crossroads*, also attributed to Jurneman Winch.

It's a sad indictment of the period that Joan felt obliged to do this to forward her career as it was not something Stephen Joseph insisted on. During the first summer, Joan was one of three female writers for the company and the only one to write under a pseudonym.

Despite the fact that Joan's plays were generally well-received and reviewed – or perhaps because of it – there was no correction to any of the reviews that attributed her work to a male writer, such as *The Stage's* introductory sentence to its review of *Wuthering Heights*: "Jurneman Winch is the most powerful of the new playwrights nurtured by Studio Theatre, and his dramatisation of Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*, presented at Scarborough, is shot through with his striking dialogue in verse or poetic prose."

Wuthering Heights was directed by Stephen Joseph – 'with virility' according to *The Stage!* – and starred John Rees as Heathcliff with Shirley Jacobs as Catherine in a cast of six.

The 90-minute play was described as a narrative rather than an adaptation and it appears to have loosely covered the relationship between young Heathcliff and Catherine over a period of five years until her death.

Joan would not write any further plays for the Library Theatre, though there is no doubt she did make an impression, with *The Stage* noting: "Here is, one feels, a playwright of decided promise."

In Paul Elsam's book, *Stephen Joseph: Theatre Pioneer and Provocateur*, he discovered Joan was signed up by an agent shortly after *Wuthering Heights* debuted, but at the same point she suffered writer's block and the relationship between her and Stephen appears to have been affected as a result of this.

The production is also notable for having the first staged publicity photographs of any Library Theatre production. Stephen Joseph took his lead actors onto the nearby North York Moors – presumably on the way up to the Robin Hood's Bay setting of *The Offing* – for a series of dramatic photos; one of which the *Yorkshire Post* took slightly too literally, noting rehearsals had been taking place on the moors themselves!



1960 *Wuthering Heights*
© Scarborough Theatre Trust

That *Wuthering Heights* was a success, though, can be seen by the fact that not only did it do well at the box office, but that Stephen also presented it as one of the Studio Theatre Sunday Club plays in October 1960; for two years, Stephen presented a production in London on Sundays in a bid to draw attention to the company and theatre-in-the-round.

Whilst unsuccessful in those regards, the Studio Club was where Alan Ayckbourn first saw the company perform and was convinced he should join the company.

Alan himself would later take on the role of Heathcliff when Joan's play was revived by Stephen for the Library Theatre's 1960 season in a bid to allegedly attract Yorkshire audiences; this was also the first play to be revived by this company.

The production was directed by Julian Herington, who was allegedly fired by Stephen Joseph for spending the entire season's budget on just his two productions!

Wuthering Heights was just the start of the company's production of new plays adapted from existing literary works. Over the years they would encompass such works as *Frankenstein*, *David Copperfield*, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Three Men In A Boat* and *The Last Train To Scarborough* among others.

Of course, the most famous of the SJT adaptations – and arguably one of the most successful literary stage adaptations of the late 20th century – was Stephen Mallatratt's *The Woman In Black*, adapted from Susan Hill's novella, which debuted at Westwood in 1987.

Which leads us to *The Offing*, an exciting new adaptation by the award-winning playwright Janice Okoh with her first play for the SJT. *The Offing* is a co-production with Live Theatre, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and can be seen at the SJT from 14 to 30 October. Tickets are priced from £10.

Simon Murgatroyd is Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist and administrator of the playwright's official website, www.alanayckbourn.net.