

"There was a good deal of wet, damp, cheerless weather; there always is in February, you know, and we could not do half that we intended. Now will be the time."

– Jane Austen, Emma

24 drummers drumming...

A team of tiny timpanists and a sound-and-light saunter through our upcoming season were among the highlights of our season celebration event earlier this month.

The little drummers were from East Ayton School, and have been enjoying samba drumming workshops with our Creative Engagement Co-ordinator, Ernie Acquah for the last few weeks. And Ernie has a sideline as a sound designer – he was responsible for the beautiful soundscape in last year's *These Majestic Creatures* – and teamed up with our Technical Manager Tigger Johnson to create a mini son-et-lumiere illustrating all our SJT productions this year.

The main business of the day was, as ever, our panel of invited guests who, ably chaired by Kate Fenton, took us through the coming months.

Sheffield-based Paul Allen, who adapted the stage play from Bridlington-born Mark Hermann's screenplay, talked about *Brassed Off*; Namoo Chae Lee travelled up from the Orange Tree to chat about *Northanger Abbey*, on which she is assistant director; Nick Lane shared some insights into our next Christmas show, *Aladdin*; and, of course, our Director Emeritus, Alan Ayckbourn, joined us to discuss his 90th new play, *Show & Tell* (and to share a tale or two about cricketing legend Sir Len Hutton with Paul Allen).

If you weren't able to join us on the day, you can catch up with all the action [here](#).



Northanger Abbey

We can't wait to welcome our first SJT production of the year, *Northanger Abbey*, at the end of March. It's a four-way co-production with the Orange Tree in Richmond, London, Bolton's Octagon Theatre and Keswick's Theatre by the Lake.

The show opened in London in January and plays there through February, then moves to Bolton for the first three weeks in March. It's with us over Easter (opening 27 March and playing until 13 April), before finishing its tour of the north at Keswick in late April/early May.

That means that, by the time it reaches us, it'll have been extensively reviewed – the London run attracted nearly 30 reviewers at last count! But we've chosen three of our favourites below.

Veteran critic Susannah Clapp, writing in *The Observer*, gave the show four stars, saying: *"What a whirligig of talent there is in the Orange Tree's Northanger Abbey. Of all kinds: writing, acting, directing... [it] may not tread the Empire line but it will make readers and audiences think twice and hear better."*

The *Times*' lead critic, Clive Davis, also judged it to be a four-star show, saying: *"It's time to deconstruct another Jane Austen novel. But don't be deterred: Zoe Cooper's adaptation of the story of gothic longing sets about its task with the same sense of mischief that Laura Wade brought to her hilarious rewrite of Austen's unfinished work The Watsons... three excellent, quick-witted actors carry us through the story of young Catherine Moreland's obsession with tales of dark and stormy nights and her adventures in the speed-dating circus in Bath."*

And we can round that star tally up to 12 with four more from *The Stage*'s Dave Fagnoli, who says: *"Staying true to the satirical spirit of Jane Austen's classic romantic comedy, Zoe Cooper's incisive adaptation approaches the tale from a fresh contemporary angle... exuberantly, unashamedly silly, heightening Austen's comedy of manners to outrageous levels."*

Appetite suitably whetted? Book [here](#).



In like a lion...

We've a bumper month of visiting work and cinema coming up in March, with a something-for-everyone programme of drama, music and comedy, plus all – yes, every single one! – of the films that have been nominated for Best Picture at this year's Oscars.

If it's drama you're after, look no further than an evening with SJT favourite and former Artistic Director of Northern Broadsides, Barrie Rutter, and his personal take on *Shakespeare's Royals* (Friday 1 March). We're promised coronations and conflicts, infighting and incest, regicide and parricide, mortal and immortal – quite the evening, then!

That's followed by the latest from Townsend Productions, *Behold Ye Ramblers* (Tuesday 5 March) – the fascinating story of the Clarion Movement, which, amongst other things, campaigned for the Right to Roam.



From 6 to 9 March, we welcome the return of our old friends Blackeyed Theatre. This year, the company that brought you thrilling adaptations of two classic Sherlock Holmes stories (*The Sign of Four* and *The Valley of Fear*) and two seminal gothic horror novels (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Frankenstein*) are treating us to an absolutely stunning version of Joan Littlewood's blistering anti-war satire *Oh What A Lovely War*. The critics have loved this one – here's what *The Stage* had to say: "Magnificent... Any assumption that [it's] a period piece is shot to shrapnel. Forty years on, we need Littlewood's vision more than ever. Blackeyed Theatre restore it to us with astonishing power. Catch it if you can."

The following week brings Middlesbrough's Rachel Stockdale to our stage with an unconventional show about weight loss, weight gain, and trying to have it all – catch *Fat Chance* on Wednesday 13 March.



On Wednesday 13 and Thursday 14 March, you can catch some potential stars of the future celebrating 75 years of the amazing NHS in *Nurse, the Screens!* – expect heart-warming stories and terrible jokes in this new show written by our Head of Creative Engagement, Rob Salmon, especially for our Youth Arts Festival.

And finally (in the drama category, at least), those of you who came to our season celebration event two years ago might recall the delightful John Rwothomack, who describes himself as 'Ugandan born, London trained, and Sheffield bred and based' – he was one of our panel members. His new show *LINEs* (Saturday 23 March) explores the connection over five decades of five prisons in Uganda, Palestine and the UK.

March also brings great music – Scottish folk duo Aly Bain and Phil Cunningham are in our Round on Sunday 17 March, and selling fast (just a handful of tickets left at time of writing); and world class sax player Snake Davis plays with his band on Friday 22 March (that's sold out already, but do add your name to the waiting list – you never know!).

Finally – could we have timed it better? – Thursday 21 March is World Poetry Day, and we're marking it by welcoming the great Brian Bilston to the SJT (and again the following evening). At time of writing, the Thursday was all but sold out, and the Friday is rapidly heading that way – do hurry if you want to catch the self-described 'poet, philosopher and failure' (sorry, Brian, but that last is patently untrue!).



Meanwhile, in our cinema, there's the chance to catch all ten of this year's Academy Award Best Picture Nominations: *Oppenheimer* and *Barbie* (both 1 March – our own little *Barbenheimer* Day!); *Poor Things* (4 to 7 March); *The Holdovers* (8 to 16 March); *Maestro* (8 and 9 March); *The Zone of Interest* (18 March); *Past Lives* (19 March); *Anatomy of a Fall* (20 March); *American Fiction* (25 and 28 March); and *Killers of the Flower Moon* (30 March).

All this alongside the latest from NT Live, *The Motive and The Cue*, starring Mark Gatiss as John Gielgud and Johnny Flynn as Richard Burton (29 and 30 March); dementia-friendly entertainment with *The King and I* (1 March) and *Hairspray* (22 March); cult cinema in our Moviedrome strand (*Aguirre, The Wrath of God*, on 1 March and *Two-Lane Blacktop* on Friday 29 March); the latest from Exhibition on Screen (*Painting the Modern Garden: Monet to Matisse*, on 14 and 15 March); the second in our season of Big Screen Musicals, *My Favorite Things – The Rodgers & Hammerstein 80th Anniversary Concert* (15 and 16 March); and ROH Live's stunning film of *Madama Butterfly* (26 March). Phew!

As always, [book here](#) or call Box Office on 01723 370 541.

Backstage secrets: Check one, two, check one, two

Our Company Stage Manager, Fleur Beeley, on the importance of a good list...

I'm sure it's never crossed your mind – and why would it? You're coming to watch a piece of theatre, not to think about how any of it happens. However, there's an awful lot of work that goes into getting a performance ready on a daily basis. I won't talk about the laundry that needs doing, the costumes that need resetting, the lights that need checking, etc, etc, etc...

What I am going to talk about is lists. Stage management runs on lists. We have setting lists and running lists which may then be augmented by quick-change lists. Setting lists are lists of absolutely everything that needs to be checked before a performance. All the hand props on the props tables, any food consumables that may be in the fridge, how the lights are set backstage, even down to where the curtains are set to make sure we are fully masked. Any doors that need to be unlocked or chocked open, any quick changes that need to be laid out on chairs? Has the snow machine been filled? Is the glitter canon set?

So many things: there's no way we would remember them all, so a list is our friend. We go through it, walking as we go, onstage and backstage, usually in pairs: one reads the list, the other replies 'check' or 'yes'. If something's missing, we then write it on yet another list, which we will then cross off as we complete what's missing. Only when the list is complete will we open the house to let you all in and start the show.

Running lists kick in once the show is about to start. We have a list of which actors start where for the show, and we check that they are there, with their relevant props – they can't be trusted!! (Joke.) No, they may have had a costume malfunction, or mislaid their cufflinks: any number of tiny things can delay a show, hence the list.

The running list is personal to the person doing it – it will list in order what needs to be done to help the show run. Moving or hanging up costumes, handing props to actors at speed, quick changes, pouring the tea at a specific time so it's not too hot/cold for the actors onstage. If you need to remind yourself of the line cue when you strap yourself into a giant inflatable tentacle, it will be on your list.

These lists need to have enough information on them that if something happened to one of the backstage team, someone could pick up your list and do the show. It's a thoroughly terrifying experience to be handed a list for a show you don't know very well. Imagine standing in front of a rail of costumes: your list says set the quick change for Beast into Bumtrouser, and you have only seen the costumes in passing. It gets your heart rate going, I can tell you!

It doesn't happen very often; however, you may well have seen a show where someone is either running the backstage track, or indeed cueing the show for the first time. You may not have noticed anything out of the ordinary, and this, I can categorically say, is down to the list!

Spotlight on...



Welcome to a new, occasional Circular feature in which we take you a little deeper into the background of an upcoming show. This month, we're looking at *Oh What A Lovely War* through an academic, yet highly entertaining, lens – that of Professor Mark Connelly, Head of the School of History at the University of Kent.

In his fascinating piece on the Gateways to the First World War blog, he tells us: "I think *Oh What a Lovely War* is brilliant. The way it uses songs and dialogue to provoke audience reaction is, to my mind, amazingly powerful and I have never failed to be moved by it. And in looking at the way people react to it, we begin to discover something about the way we all interpret history."

We enjoyed reading this article; it has added to our appreciation of the show. We hope you feel the same way. You can find it [here](#).

Meet our new Corporate Partner

We're delighted that Bee Line Radio Cars have joined our growing band of Corporate Partners.

Proprietor Carolyn Conlon says:

"Bee Line Radio Cars takes immense pride in joining the esteemed Stephen Joseph Theatre's Corporate Partner Scheme. As a local, family-run business, we are passionate about supporting our community, and partnering with the SJT aligns seamlessly with our values. Embracing our role as dedicated theatre enthusiasts, we find it only fitting to be actively involved with the SJT. This collaboration not only strengthens our commitment to the arts but also reinforces our dedication to uplifting fellow local businesses. Bee Line Radio Cars is delighted to contribute to the vibrant cultural tapestry of our community through this meaningful association."

Peter Laird



We were saddened to hear of the death of SJT stalwart Peter Laird – a lovely actor and a true gentleman. Longstanding audience members will remember Peter from Alan’s shows *Wildest Dreams* (1991); *Body Language* (1999); *House & Garden* (1999 at the SJT and 2000 at the National Theatre), *This Is Where We Came In* (2001) and, probably most memorably, as the charismatic and dangerous Vic Parks in 1988’s *Man of the Moment*, in which he achieved the rare distinction of being one of only a handful of actors (we’re guessing ever, anywhere!) to swim onstage and off again, thanks to Michael Holt’s ingenious swimming pool set.

Peter also appeared in some notable non-Ayckbourn roles, including the tragic Joe Keller in Robin Herford’s blistering production of Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* in 1987, and in our 1997 revival of *The Woman in Black*, in which he starred alongside Martin Freeman.



Laila Bradley

We also have fond memories of Laila Bradley, who died last month. A founder member of the Scarborough Decorative and Fine Arts Society, the bubbly and ever-enthusiastic Laila was a huge supporter of the SJT and a member of our board in the 1990s. Her husband, Russell – also a great supporter of ours, as well as being the first chief executive of Scarborough Borough Council – died in 2013, and the family tells us they’re planning to buy a seat in the Round in their memory. We’re most grateful to them.

Dates for your diary

Over 40 intrepid Circle members joined us for the February Circle Café, despite absolutely awful weather on the day – but they were rewarded by a delightful morning with the three young actors from John Godber's latest, *Do I Love You?* The show, following a trio from Hull discovering the joys of Northern Soul, packed out our Round during its run here – and Circle members got extra insights, hearing about the music, the dance moves, and the social aspects of the Northern Soul community.

As you may know, last year we decided that our Circle Café venue, the Boden Room, was beginning to feel a little cramped, so we moved to the more spacious surroundings of Eat Me @ The SJT. It's a much better space, but still has its own small issues, and we need your help to solve those.

Martyn and Stephen kindly push on their usual opening time of 10am to 11am on those days to allow us to take over the place, so it's crucial that we run to time so that they can re-open.

It's also most helpful to both them and us if you can book your free place via the box office in advance – it helps us to predict numbers and make sure we have enough seats, of course, but it's also important from a safety point of view (in the unlikely event of us having to evacuate the building, we really need to know exactly how many people are in there so no one gets left behind!).

Also, it's lovely that so many of you want to linger and chat after the events, but could we ask that you move to the bar end of the room rather than staying at your table – Circle Cafes take place on the same days as matinees, and Eat Me starts getting brunch bookings from 11am, so they need to clear the tables. Thank you so much!!

2024 Circle Cafés (starting at 10.15am, so please aim to arrive between 10am and 10.10am) include:

Thursday 7 March: The company from Blackeyed Theatre's *Oh What A Lovely War* – wildly satirical, visually stunning and deeply moving, Joan Littlewood's musical revolutionised modern theatre.

Thursday 11 April: The *Northanger Abbey* company – writer Zoe Cooper infuses the plot and spirit of Jane Austen's novel with her unique voice, resulting in a play fizzing with imagination, packed full of humour and brimming with love.

Thursday 9 May: Our Creative Engagement team – they are usually busy, busy, busy – so grab the chance to meet them while you can!

Thursday 6 June: TBC

Thursday 11 July: The *Dracula* company – you can't live on the North Yorkshire coast and not be familiar with this great gothic tale – but this is a vision of the vampire as you've never seen him before: hilarious and madcap (think *The 39 Steps*!).

Thursday 8 August: The *Brassed Off* company – adapted by our good friend and former board member Paul Allen from the film by Bridlington-born Mark Herman – with a pedigree like that, we've been wanting to do this show for years... it'll be worth the wait.

Thursday 26 September: The *Show & Tell* company – the 90th play from the pen of our Director Emeritus, who turns 85 in April – he doesn't do things by halves...

Thursday 31 October: The *Whitby Rebels* company – you may remember the almost unbelievable story of Captain Jack Lammiman, the Whitby skipper who in 1991 set off from Whitby Harbour with a very motley crew to place a plaque on an Arctic island honouring whaling captain William Scoresby. This affectionate retelling of the story is by Bea Roberts.

Thursday 14 November: TBC

Thursday 12 December (time TBC, but afternoon): The *Aladdin* company – our annual visit to the strange and wonderful brain of Nick Lane as he retells a traditional tale in his own inimitable style.