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ST MICHAEL'S PLAYERS
PRESENT

THE LONG



ROAD



A SINGLE ACT PLAY
BY SHELAGH STEPHENSON

WARNING: CONTAINS EXPLICIT LANGUAGE

THE LONG ROAD

*“It’s a rare play that hits the news with such cruel topicality... Stephenson offers a powerful, illuminating piece of dramatic fiction” **Evening Standard***

When eighteen-year-old Danny is fatally stabbed in a random attack his family struggles to find meaning and forgiveness. His mother’s determination to understand the atrocity brings her face to face with his killer and forces the family to confront the bitter senselessness of their loss.

The Long Road evolved out of a period of research with prisoners by Synergy Theatre Project, in collaboration with The Forgiveness Project and award-winning playwright Shelagh Stephenson. It premiered at Soho Theatre on 19 May 2008.

*This play was written to be performed in prisons as well as in theatres, and so I chose to write it in a particular heightened style in which the audience is often addressed directly. Much of the background understanding came from visits to prisons where, with people from The Forgiveness Project and Synergy Theatre Project, we talked through notions of forgiveness and restorative justice and prisoners. Like most people, I had little prior knowledge of the prison system – well, none, to be precise. But I came to realise that almost all the people I met inside had been profoundly damaged, long before they ended up in jail. We all know this somewhere at the back of our brains but the actual reality of it is shocking. None of the prisoners I met come from an even vaguely stable background: they were all bred from a chaotic and toxic mixture of familial neglect, criminality and varying degrees of violence. Many of them had spent large proportions of their adult lives in jail, and many of them moved me profoundly as they struggled to acknowledge and understand the effects of their crimes. They also made me laugh, and being the sort of playwright I am, this was something of a relief. I dedicate the play to all those prisoners taking their first faltering footsteps towards redemption and understanding, and all those victims who choose to meet them on the road. **Shelagh Stephenson***

WHO ARE WE

St Michael’s Players is one of the longest standing drama groups in London. We have been staging plays in West London since 1949.

We are a very friendly group and aim to entertain as well as stage high quality productions. Our repertoire is varied and we look to present 3-4 shows a year, which includes our famous ‘Panto’ in December. We are constantly on the lookout for new members to act, produce, direct, help backstage, help with front of house and with costumes and make up. We rehearse twice a week – rehearsals and performances take place at St Michael’s Centre, 60 Elmwood Road, Chiswick, W4 3DZ. Please contact our Chairman Alastair Dewar alastair.dewar@cgi.com if you would like to get involved – **WE’D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU!**

NEWS

Next year; 2019, is a very very special year for us as we turn 70! Watch this space - exciting things are afoot so as to celebrate this amazing achievement – will be back with more news soon.

WELCOME

It’s a big welcome to St Michael’s Players for Louis Bricusse and welcome back to Fleur de Henrie Pearce who sloped off for a year or so to get married 😊

WHAT’S NEXT

9th May: Play Reading

11th-14th July: Summer Production

10th-13th October: Spirit Level by Pam Valentine

10th-11th November: My Darling Boy – revived especially to mark the centenary of the end of WW1

5th-8th December: PANTO TIME! Jack and The Beanstalk

WHERE TO FIND US

www.stmichaelsplayers.org

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SHELAGH STEPHENSON

Stephenson worked as an actress with the Royal Shakespeare Company and in bit parts in television.

Stephenson's stage plays include *The Memory of Water* (1997), *Ancient Lights*, *An Experiment with an Air Pump*, *Five Kinds of Silence* (radio play 1996; stage play 2000), *Mappa Mundi* (2002). *Harriet Martineau* and *The Long Road* (2008), which were written in collaboration with the UK-based charity, The Forgiveness Project, to critical acclaim.

Her plays frequently deal with new advances in science, such as the concept in the title of her first stage play, and including commentary on possibly pseudoscientific fads like urine therapy or phrenology in her play *on Harriet Martineau*. Methuen Publishing Ltd published a collected edition of all four of these Stephenson plays in 2003.

An Experiment with an Air Pump was revived in 2009 at Hampstead Theatre, where the original production appeared in 1998 after premiering at the Royal Exchange, Manchester; the play has been since revived at the universities of San Diego and New Orleans, the English Theatre, Berlin, the University of Waterloo and the Giant Olive Theatre Company, in London.

Harriet Martineau was performed by Live Theatre in November 2016.

Her plays for BBC Radio include *Darling Peidi*, 1993; *Five Kinds of Silence*, 1996, which was awarded the Writers Guild Award for Best Original Drama; *Life is a Dream*, 2004; *Nemesis*, 2005; and *The People's Princess*, 2008. Shelagh was a scriptwriter on BBC Radio 4's drama series *Citizens*. *The Memory of Water* was made into a film called *Before You Go* in 2002 starring Julie Walters and Tom Wilkinson and directed by Lewis Gilbert.

Fun Fact: This is not the first Shelagh Stephenson play St Michael's Players have staged – we presented *The Memory of Water* in 2012

DIRECTOR PAUL SMITH

I feel really lucky to have come across this play - it was recommended to me by one of the cast members, Elizabeth Ollier - and it immediately struck me as a powerful and urgent play. But the thing that persuaded me was how moving it was; it brought tears to my eyes as I read it.

This is without a doubt a hard-hitting play. But it isn't preaching and it doesn't offer answers. It's not even about knife crime per se; that is just the point at which we start off. It simply asks questions, the main one being: how do you make sense of a senseless act? How do you handle the grief of losing someone suddenly and meaninglessly? Whatever road you take is likely to be fraught, even a search for understanding. As one character says

***“Understanding will change how you feel. It always does.
That's the point of understanding, isn't it?”***

And those changes are not even guaranteed to be positive.

As director, I see my role simply as the audience's representative: to present to the cast and crew how it looks through the eyes of the audience, what works, what doesn't. And in the case of this play, my role is minimal. The play is so powerful and I'm lucky to have a cast so strong that I mostly just sit there enjoying their performances.

I have no doubt that anyone who sees this production will remember it for a very long time. It is hard to leave unaffected by it.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN



Alastair Dewar – John

John's carefully ordered world is falling apart. The son on whom he pinned all his hopes has been killed, his relationships with the rest of the family are breaking down, and his whole belief system is under threat. He's lost, bewildered and lashing out at everything and everyone. He desperately wants to forget – but all his wife wants to do is to talk about the girl who did this to him. Trying to bring John to life in this important and relevant production is a hugely emotional experience. I hope I can do him justice. What a privilege to be working with just a fantastic cast and crew!

Elizabeth Ollier – Mary

It's a fascinating and quite daunting challenge playing a bereaved mother but from the start the energy and commitment of cast and crew has built something really quite powerful - fantastic to be a part of, and sadly so pertinent to our times.

Louis Bricusse – Joe

I feel very privileged to be involved in this play. I have found building a character and seeing my fellow actors build relationships with theirs, a very emotional journey. Through my own life experiences I connect with the messages in the play regarding the victim awareness program, the struggle to forgive and the side effects and tragic consequences of early trauma, alcoholism and addiction. It's an honour to play Joe. I'll do you proud mate!

LOOKING DEEPER

THE FORGIVENESS PROJECT is an award-winning, secular organisation that collects and shares real stories of forgiveness to build understanding, encourage reflection and enable people to reconcile with the pain and move forward from the trauma in their own lives. The stories of forgiveness on our website demonstrate that forgiveness is first and foremost a personal journey: a visceral process with no set rules or time limits.

www.theforgivenessproject.com

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE brings those harmed by crime or conflict and those responsible for the harm into communication, enabling everyone affected by a particular incident to play a part in repairing the harm and finding a positive way forward. This is part of a wider field called restorative practice.

www.restorativejustice.org.uk

The Long Road centres on bereavement after the stabbing of 18-year-old Danny, and comes to Chiswick at a time of increasing daily public concern over knife attacks, particularly in the capital.

Data from the Office for National Statistics showed a 47% increase in knife crime in London in the 12 months leading up to October 2017 compared with the previous year, prompting Mayor Sadiq Khan to launch the 'London Needs You Alive: Don't Carry A Knife' campaign

Of the 24 teenage boys who lost their lives on the city's streets last year, 18 were stabbed, including five victims in west London - two in Northolt, and one each in Ealing, Willesden and Wembley.

The devastating effects of such crimes on families are brought into sharp focus through the play's themes.

POST-SHOW Q&A

After the performance there will be a Q&A hosted by Director Paul Smith, and one of our amazing special guests. Please join us after the show for what promises to be an extremely interesting discussion relating to the themes in the play.

Wednesday 25th April

Sandra Barefoot - RESTORE Programme Manager – The Forgiveness Project

Sandra has over 25 years' experience of facilitation and programme management within many diverse contexts, and in particular within theatre and the arts. Sandra is the Programme Manager for The Forgiveness Project's prison programme **RESTORE** and a lead facilitator of this work for over nine years. Sandra is a creative artist working within performance, dance, visual arts, poetry and photography and is passionate about embedding all her practice within **RESTORE**.

Thursday 26th and Saturday 28th April

Sian West – Justice Consultant

Sian is a Kent-based justice consultant, focusing primarily on reducing reoffending and promoting restorative justice, including lecturing on this topic in local universities. She is a trustee of the Chris Donovan Trust, as well as the newly formed offender-rehabilitation charity 2Makelt. Before her recent house-move she was heavily involved as a volunteer in a local domestic abuse support service. After a high level 32 year career in the Prison Service, culminating in becoming Governor of Cookham Wood, then High Down and finally HMP Cardiff, Sian became Director of Why me? a restorative justice campaigning charity; although, is now freelance. Sian's academic qualifications include a BSc in Psychology, a Masters in Applied Criminology and Management (Prison Studies), and a post-grad Personnel Diploma.

Friday 27th April

Maggie Donnelly –Restorative Justice Mediator

Maggie was a secondary school teacher for four years before she joined the Prison Service. Maggie went on to be a prison governor and was the most senior woman in the UK Prison Service when she retired. She is now a qualified mediator and specialises in restorative justice between victims and offenders. Maggie has conducted restorative justice training in a number of places including prisons and is a Trustee for the Restorative Justice Council.

Fleur de Henrie Pearce – Emma

Emma has led a hard life and goes from explosive to vulnerable in seconds. To play a murderer is daunting and to understand why she did what she did is an intense journey. It's hard to see a family unravel when it's you who caused their pain. The Long Road highlights a devastating tragedy and one that is sadly so relevant at the present time. It is frightening to think that in a split second your whole world can change. This is an amazingly powerful play and it has been an emotional production to be a part of.

Leonia Chesterfield – Elizabeth

The life sentence isn't enough. Elizabeth is pivotal in facilitating the family's journey towards forgiveness for their son's brutal murder. With her own brother inside for dealing, Elizabeth understands prison life and sees beyond the prisoners' crimes. As Emma's only visitor, through Elizabeth we gain a deep insight into the murderer's character and toxic childhood of trauma and neglect.

Jane Atkinson – Assistant Director

My job is keeping notes, keeping the director happy, scheduling rehearsals, and watching the amazing cast bring the whole thing to vibrant life. It is a very pertinent play for the times. It deals with difficult issues in a straightforward way. The characters and the unfolding story are so believable. You never want to be in this situation. It is a privilege to be part of the crew for something so relevant.

Bryony Wilman - Producer

As producer rather than actor, I am enjoying watching a hard-hitting and emotion-filled play being brought to life by a great cast.

SHELAGH STEPHENSON'S THE LONG ROAD

Cast in order of appearance:

Danny – Alex Dewar

Joe – Louis Bricusse

Mary – Elizabeth Ollier

John – Alastair Dewar

Emma – Fleur de Henrie Pearce

Elizabeth – Leonia Chesterfield

Director - Paul Smith

Assistant Director - Jane Atkinson

Producer - Bryony Wilman

Lighting Design - Marc Pearce

Lighting & Sound Operator - Utku Er

Publicity – Jon Holmes

Publicity and Social Media – Fleur de Henrie Pearce

Stage Management – Jane Atkinson & Bryony Wilman

Back Stage Assistance – Chris Pease

Poster and Programme Design – Fleur de Henrie Pearce

Front of House and Bar – Members & Friends of St Michael's Players

Running order

The Long Road is One Act: approximately 90 minutes

There is no interval

Post Show – short break followed by Q&A with special guest & director

The bar will be open before and after the performance (prior to the Q&A)

SPECIAL THANKS

Production Photography – Ian Trowbridge

Poster & Leaflet Printing - Brand Reaction

