

ARABIAN NIGHTS

by Dominic Cooke

directed by Diane Robinson

original music by Liz Ryder-Weldon

NVT
NEW
VENTURE
THEATRE

Bedford Place,
Brighton BN1 2PT

Friday 20th - Saturday 28th March 2026 at 7.30pm
Matinee: Sun 22nd March at 2.30pm

www.newventure.org.uk
www.facebook.com/NewVentureTheatreBrighton

Registered Charity No. 268607

This amateur production of 'Arabian Nights' is presented
by arrangement with Nick Hern Books

Arabian Nights

'I can change the story because I am the story' - Jeanette Winterson

Many will be familiar with the name 'Arabian Nights', yet few realise that its true title is 'Al Layla Wa Layla', or 'One Thousand and One Nights'. This remarkable collection of stories originated in the Middle East and Europe, and has been passed down through generations as fireside tales.

All these narratives are intricately interwoven by the overarching story of Shahrazad, a courageous woman who recounts these captivating adventures each night. She does so not only to preserve her own life, but also to protect the lives of other young women, demonstrating the profound power and significance of storytelling.

'1001 Nights' is still relevant, for it reveals questions and answers that are still important today - who should we trust? Is love the most important thing in the world? Does it matter if we are honest? What makes us happy?

The performance you will see today, first performed by the RSC and written by Dominic Cooke, features live and specially created music, beautiful puppetry, dance, and wondrous storytelling - to bring the magical world of Arabian nights to life on stage.

At its heart, the play celebrates the enduring power and beauty of storytelling. It highlights the universality of stories and how important it is for us, as humans, to keep sharing them. It is also an invitation for us to look at our own stories and imagine the world anew.

This adaptation tells the following tales:

Ali Baba, The Story of the Little Beggar, Es-Sindibad the Sailor, How Abu Hassan Broke Wind, The Story of the Wife who wouldn't eat, and The Story of the Envious Sisters

Listen...

Diane Robinson
Director

CAST

Sophoulla Gibson - Shahrazad, Talking Bird & ensemble

Maria Sturt - Dinarzad, soloist & ensemble

Chris Phipps - Shahrayar, King & ensemble

Andy Grant - Vizier & ensemble

Achala Matthews - Marjanah, youngest Sister, Armina & ensemble

Sam Razavi - Ali Baba, Kasim, Haroun & ensemble

Sapphire Samiullah - Es-Sindibad, middle Sister, soloist & ensemble

Elizabeth Kroon - Ali's Wife, Ghoul, Parizade & ensemble

Ollie Wilson King - Executioner, Cook & ensemble

Finlay Brooks - Baba Mustafa, Tailor, Sidi 1, Perviz & ensemble

Yasmine Bendimered - Queen, Tailor's Wife, Rukh, eldest Sister & ensemble

Elaine Larkin - Kasim's Wife, Mother, Dervish & ensemble

Tom Bryant - Captain, Little Beggar, Abu Hassan, Sidi 2, Bahman & ensemble

Dr Leon Baruah - Drums & Percussion

CREATIVE TEAM

Director - Diane Robinson

Original Music by - Liz Ryder-Weldon

Choreographer - Alice Healey

Production Manager - Tamsin Mastoris

Stage Manager & Props - Moon Berglind

ASM - Anne-Marie Harrison, Natalie Sacks-Hammond, Claudia Ezraeelian

Set Design - Simon Glazier

Set Build - Simon Glazier, George Walter, Sam Deards, Sean McGrath, Ally McDermott, Wiktoria Piatowska

Set Painting - Simon Glazier, Annie Sheppard, Anita Sullivan Fearnside

Special Props - Judith Berrill, David Brownings, Katie Brownings

Costume Design - Lindsay Midali

Costume made by - Lindsay Midali and Jackie Jones, with thanks to Achala Matthews and Gladrags

Costume Assistance - Lindsay Midali, Katie Brownings, Joanna Joy Salter, Carol Croft, Eleanor Moy

Puppets - Anita Sullivan Fearnside

Lighting Designer - Strat Mastoris

Lighting Operators - Sabrina Giles, Leah Mooney, Eli Acedo Pozo

Sound Design - Chris Dent

Sound Operator - Chris Dent, Sean McGrath, Jim Prior

Poster & Programme Design - Tamsin Mastoris

Publicity - Elysa Hyde

Photography - Strat Mastoris

Health & Safety - Ian Black



Sophoulla Gibson

The first story Sophoulla remembers being told is that of Adam and Eve - a tale that seemed to say one thing hearing it as a child, but after growing up and learning about life, realising it tells another story entirely.

Sophoulla took a long break from acting between school and starring in her first film, 'Luna', which is premiering at Brighton Rocks in June. Her previous productions at NVT include 'Macbeth' and 'Eurydice'. She's thrilled to be portraying Shaharazad in this dark yet beautiful tale of pain, love and redemption.

Maria Sturt

The earliest, most prominent story I remember was 'We're going on a bear hunt'. It was probably the repetitive rhyme that made it stick in my head but I loved the illustrations and how thrilling the plot was to me back then.

Most recently, I've appeared in the new writings evening: 'the first week is a hundred years' (NVT), 'Eurydice' (NVT) and a college production of 'Hadestown' the first we. I'm currently training in musical theatre with BN1 Arts and am part of a contemporary dance company called Entasi.



Chris Phipps

The first story that really made an impact on me was George's Marvellous Medicine. I loved how gleefully subversive it was, cheerfully breaking all the rules children are usually told to follow, and its diabolical deeds and vivid characters, especially the spectacularly horrible grandmother (thankfully, mine was lovely). That mix of mischief and imagination probably explains why I'm drawn to theatre. Recent stage credits include 'Heresy of Love' (NVT, 2025) and Chekhov's 'The Proposal' (NVT, 2023). I am delighted to be part of 'Arabian Nights' and its world of stories.

Andy Grant

I've attended the NVT acting class on and off for many years and have appeared at the NVT in 'Full Beam' and '1984'. Years ago, I played in a production of 'The Merchant of Venice' directed by our very own Ali Baba.

As a child we had a set of eight encyclopedias. The yellow one contained illustrated stories. I loved the story of the contest between the sun and the wind to make the traveller take his coat off.



Achala Matthews

My Granny told me the first story I remember; 'The Boy Who Cried Wolf'. Even as a young child, it spoke to me of the importance of truthfulness, and appealed to the natural human fear of social ostracisation.

I was enchanted by the Arabian Nights TV mini series from 2000, and watched it more times than I can count throughout my childhood, so was thrilled to have the opportunity to be involved in this production.

It is my first time performing at NVT.



Sam Razavi

I remember reading 'The Magic Faraway Tree' at an impressionable young age and often make excuses for my odd behaviour, blaming the influence of Moonface and Saucepan Man.

I am an actor, director and composer who trained at ACT Brighton. I toured Germany for a year with White Horse Theatre and have produced and directed four seasons of National TIE tours of Italy for Milan-based Palkettostage. Most recently, I directed 'The Merchant of Venice' (WTC, 2023) and played Victor Frankenstein in 'Frankenstein' (WTC, 2022) also directed by Diane Robinson.





Sapphire Samiullah

I remember loving the Greek myths as a child, in particular Orpheus and Eurydice, which broke my heart in Year 8! These stories have led me to enjoy both reading and writing fantastical tales ever since. I enjoyed acting at school and university but haven't performed onstage for 15 years, so this will be my first foray into theatre in some time! Arabian Nights was the perfect tale to inspire me to return to acting and rekindle my love of storytelling.

Elizabeth Kroon

My first memories of stories are bedtime readings by my mum of Narnia, beginning a love for escapist fantasy and imaginary worlds. As a result, I am now an actor, musician, one-time comedian, and writer. Since 2014, I have performed in plays such as 'Great Expectations' and 'Grapes of Wrath' (2017), stand-up at Edinburgh Fringe 2018, 'Paradise Rocks' (2019/2022), co-wrote/ produced/ performed in original, award-nominated musical, 'Idle Women' (2023-2024), and 'Frankenstein' with Wick Theatre (2022). Other NVT credits include: 'Be My Baby' (2018), 'It's a Wonderful Life' (2022), and 'Kill Local' (2025).



Ollie Wilson King

My earliest memory of storytelling is being told 'The Parable of the Prodigal Son' during my First Communion preparation. A fascinating tale!

After a long career in journalism and PR, I've been acting full time for two years, appearing in a TV mini-series, nine short films, two music videos and two previous plays at NVT: 'The Heresy of Love' and 'Red Peppers'. I've also written my first play, 'Clean Living Under Difficult Circumstances', which is to be staged in May as part of SweetFest, in Brighton.

Finlay Brooks

The first story Fin remembers being told was 'Northern Lights' by Philip Pullman. He has always loved storytelling and its power to change your perspective on life.

Recent experience includes stagehand work in 'The Madness of George III', ensemble in 'I, Joan' (both at BOAT), and a youth production of 'The Laramie Project'.



Yasmine Bendimered

One of my most vivid childhood memories is of my mother reading me Richard Bach's 'Jonathan Livingston Seagull', about a bird who dares to chase the open sky, an image that quietly shaped my path. I grew up on stage, performing from the age of three into adulthood. My theatre work has included playing one of Cinderella's evil sisters in a musical in Brussels and appearing with Steyning Drama Company in 'Chance Encounters'. Most recently, I took the lead in the short film 'See You On The Other Side'.

Elaine Larkin

'The Cú Chulainn Saga', from the Ulster Cycle of the Irish Iliad, is a tale that has enchanted me since childhood. This supernatural story of love, bravery, and tragedy, charts a young warrior boy's rise to be the best until he pays the ultimate sacrifice. Perhaps the epic nature of this legend inspired my love of theatre. After training at The Samuel Beckett Centre, TCD, I performed professionally in Ireland, UK and Europe. Returning to theatre in recent years, I have performed and directed at NVT over the past 4 years.





Tom Bryant

My most memorable childhood story was 'Jack and the Beanstalk', which I watched with my primary school at our Christmas pantomime. It was the first experience I remember that I felt I was truly immersed in the story with the characters.

Over the years, I've rediscovered my enthusiasm for drama and have been involved in both amateur and professional acting with various theatre companies. I joined the NVT recently in October, and this will be my first production with the theatre – hopefully, out of many more to come!

Dr Leon Baruah

The first storybook that enrapt me was about a dump truck that worked in a quarry. Nightly, I learned the sounds my parents made to the rhythm of the page turns... My next-door neighbour once saw me (aged maybe two) in my backyard, book open, making the right noises with the right page turns, and proclaimed I was a child prodigy(!)

Since 2000, I've been a percussionist in many amateur orchestras & musical theatre productions. This is my debut performance with NVT & first time composing a percussion score!



Liz Ryder-Weldon

The first story I remember being told was a song sung to me by my father; 'The Little Boy that Santa Claus Forgot'. The lyrics told a story but I wanted to know more about the "little boy" because the melody also made me feel so sad. Music has been and will always be a major part of my life, in education, work and leisure. Over the past 10 years I have been exploring the idea of storytelling with music since becoming involved in writing and exploring the use of incidental music in drama. Some of the original vocal music I have written for Arabian Nights has no words; a reminder that music can enhance a story but also has its own story to tell.



Diane Robinson

The first story I remember being told was 'Black Beauty'. I absolutely loved it and sobbed so loudly at the cinema when it was first made into a film, that my sister Annie, was forever traumatised by the experience! In an attempt to keep the magic alive, I have trained, acted, facilitated, taught and directed theatre ever since.

Recent directorial credits include 'Anna Karenina' (WTC) 'Picnic at Hanging Rock' (NVT) 2024, 'Frankenstein' (WTC) 2022. Most recent acting experiences have been in 'Heresy of Love', 2025, (NVT,) 'Humble Boy', 2023,(SP).



THANK YOU

There are so many people to say thank you to, but firstly I want to say thank you to my wonderful parents, particularly my mum, Jeane, for instilling in me the beauty and power of stories and storytelling.

I'd also like to acknowledge the unwavering help and support that Annie and Anne-Marie gave to the cast and me on the art of storytelling, Brian for his continuous support and help, Lindsay and Jackie for being my sewing bees, Liz and Leon for their wonderful musical expertise and ideas, Neet for her brilliant puppets and puppetry expertise, Judith for her skill in creating some beautiful props, Alice for her stunning choreography, vision and creativity, Simon for the sumptuous set, David and Katie Brownings for making our horses head mask, Moon for all her support and ideas, Sarah Davies for puppetry assistance, Chris Horlock for the facial hair, Carrie for stepping in with tech help, my PM - Tamsin, who magnificently rose to the challenge of keeping me on task, my incredibly talented and game cast who I have so loved working with, and every member of the backstage crew, without whom the show could not go on.

And never forget the Front of House, Box Office and all of the other volunteers who keep this theatre running.



While understanding that our play is a collection of stories that reflected the times in which they were written and tell of the bravery and healing influence of women, we also acknowledge the themes of violence in relationships that run through many of these stories. We stand in solidarity with all victims of violence, and are suggesting donations to our local charity, Rise, who work tirelessly and on minimal funding to support victims of domestic violence in our local community.



Call Rise 01273 622 822
www.riseuk.org.uk

<https://riseuk.org.uk/>

RISE is an independent, Brighton-based registered charity that helps people affected by domestic abuse. We offer practical help ranging from direct advice to refuge accommodation for those whose lives are at risk.

Helpline Number - 01273 622822

Booking NOW at newventure.org.uk



17th - 25th April 2026
In the Studio Theatre

Playhouse Creatures

by April de Angelis

Directed by Gaby Bowring

It's 1663, and the London elite are enjoying the latest 'novelty' in English theatre: the Actress. Playhouse Creatures follows the precarious lives of these first female players, as they discover the consequences of their arrival upon the professional stage. Amid lively backstage antics - and fierce rivalries - they each revel in a newfound financial independence, whilst contending with both sexual exploitation and empowerment, onstage and off.



Told with warmth and wit, this moving play rejoices in the camaraderie of these Restoration actresses, embracing both the comic and the tragic in their bold pursuit of personal and creative freedom.

Murder, Margaret and Me

by Philip Meeks



15th - 23rd May 2026
In the Theatre Upstairs

Murder, Margaret and Me

by Philip Meeks

Directed by Bryony Weaver

In 1960, world-famous writer Agatha Christie sold the rights to a number of her books to MGM, who decided to make a few of the Miss Marple titles into films. When they approached character actress Margaret Rutherford to take the role, she at first refused, citing murder as a 'sordid business'. Christie also wasn't happy: Rutherford

was nothing like her image of the lady sleuth. But in later years, she dedicated her book 'The Mirror Crack'd From Side to Side' to Rutherford. What made her change her mind? This comic thriller is set in Elstree film studios, and imagines the conversations the two women may have had. As things progress, Christie realises that Rutherford is not all she appears to be - she has a deep secret which she wants to keep hidden. And Christie is determined to find out what it is.

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Become a Sponsor

NVT is a registered charity and owns the freehold of its theatre, a Victorian listed building. This constantly needs money spent to keep it safe and suitable for modern theatre. We need to raise money every year for this purpose and are seeking support for our sponsorship package which has been designed to appeal to local businesses who want to raise their profile in the community:

£300: This package covers advertisements on our website and in the programme for each production for 2 years. You are also entitled to 2 free tickets per production. If you are interested in sponsorship or want to help us with fundraising in any way please contact us 01273 808353 or by email finance@newventure.org.uk

Supporting the New Venture

We all need a little 'care and maintenance' from time to time and our lovely Grade II listed theatre is certainly no exception. Whether it's fixing the roof or upgrading equipment, it is all increasingly expensive. So any donation you can make to help keep the New Venture alive and kicking will be hugely appreciated, and you can do it either via the donations box by the fireplace in the bar, or using the Donate Button on the homepage of our website - www.newventure.org.uk

Or why not become an Angel, Archangel or even Archangel Gabriel to help us support the current and future improvements to our theatre. For further information, please contact the Angels coordinator Gerry McCrudden: angels@newventure.org.uk

Contacting the NVT

For ticket information only, call the Box Office - 01273 746118. To book tickets or for other information, check our website at www.newventure.org.uk
All other enquiries 01273 808353

NVT Acting Class

Monday evenings at 7.30pm - 9.30pm.
(Acting class runs most Mondays - October to July with breaks in May and Christmas)

Acting classes are open to anyone over 18. It will cost you just £8 per session (£4 for NVT members). You do not need to have any experience. Each month has a different teacher.

Please see website for details about the classes and how to book.

Membership

Membership is open to anyone over the age of 18 and the current cost is £15 per year. There is a discounted rate of £10 for Full Time students and unwaged (on means tested benefit) - (Proof of status is required)