

Playhouse Creatures

*by
April
De Angelis*

directed by Gaby Bowring

NVT
**NEW
VENTURE
THEATRE**

Bedford Place,
Brighton BN1 2PT

Friday 17th - Saturday 25th April 2026 at 7.30pm
Matinee: Sun 19th April at 2.30pm

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

Registered Charity No. 268607

This amateur production of 'Playhouse Creatures' is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals Ltd, on behalf of Samuel French Ltd.

Playhouse Creatures

It's 1663, and after being closed for 18 years, public theatres are now open and flourishing under the reign of Charles II, with the London elite particularly enjoying the latest 'novelty' to hit the English stage: the actress.

In *The First English Actresses*, Elizabeth Howe describes how these first female players "made women an unstoppable presence onstage, creating a foundation on which succeeding generations built, and are still building" – in a word, they were pioneers. Yet to audiences of the Restoration era, an actress, and her perceived role in society, was more commonly associated with two somewhat different words: seductress and whore.

The lives of early Restoration actresses were undoubtedly precarious, and although both were poorly paid, their profession never secure, the social standing of an actress was comparatively low to an actor. Contending with sexual exploitation was inevitable, both off and on the stage, as Restoration theatre would use an actress's sexuality, and potential availability to male audiences, in such a way that it often came to define her professional identity more than the roles she played. By the end of the era, many prominent women in Restoration theatre were thankfully empowered by money and status of their own; yet for the first stage actresses, the extent of their independence was firmly controlled by the men around them – be it the theatre managers and playwrights who defined their onstage roles, or their rich and powerful 'keepers', who showered their theatrical mistresses with gifts after the curtains closed.

April De Angelis' play never shies away from the risks the actresses took in their pursuit of personal and creative freedom, nor the fierce rivalries that came between them. The camaraderie of the actresses, however, is at the heart of *Playhouse Creatures*: how intimately they must have shared both the comic and tragic turns of their lives, all imagined in a way that is warm, witty and undeniably moving.

From jigs and sword-fights to Shakespeare and Restoration comedy, *Playhouse Creatures* offered up an exciting number of challenges, and the production wouldn't have been possible without the collaborative efforts of so many talented people. I'm immensely thankful for the creativity, commitment and enthusiasm of the backstage team, and that of the brilliant cast – from the start, they've been so dedicated and passionate about sharing these actresses' stories, and a complete delight to work with too! We hope you enjoy the show.

Gaby Bowring
Director

CAST

Mrs Mary Betterton - Sarah Donnelly

Doll Common - Jack Morris

Mrs Rebecca Marshall - Amelia Leigh

Mrs Elizabeth Farley - Holly Morran

Nell Gwyn - Zarrina Danaeva

Elizabeth Barry & The Wit - Amelia Jackson

Thomas Otway & The Earl of Rochester - Thomas Dee

CREATIVE TEAM

Director - Gaby Bowring

Production Manager - Ian Black

Stage Manager - Moon Berglind

Assistant Stage Managers - Carol Croft, Ayshen Irfan, Elaine Larkin & Anne-Marie Harrison

Costumes - supplied by Gladrags & Wick Theatre Company

Hair & Make Up - Richi Blennerhassett & Laura Scobie

Dressers - Mary Weaver, Marion Dean, Bo Svilvagy, Lulu Belle Harrington, Matilda Kundle,

Natalya Hickey, Margaret Parkes, Janine Geater-Davis, Evie Dixon & Hannah Seers

Set Design - Gaby Bowring & Simon Glazier

Set Build & Painting - Simon Glazier, Ally McDermott, Chris Tew, Lulu Belle Harrington, Wiktoria Piatkowska & Pete Ranson

Lighting Design - Ewan Cassidy

Lighting Rigging - Ewan Cassidy, Peter Meekings & Liam O'Sullivan

Lighting Operation - Alex Epps, Tamsin Mastoris & Jim Prior

Sound Design - Ian Black

Sound Operation - Ian Black & Christine Hauschild

Props - Carrie Hynds

Poster & Programme Design - Strat Mastoris & Tamsin Mastoris

Publicity/Headshot Photography - Strat Mastoris

Publicity & Social Media - Elysa Hyde

Health & Safety - Ian Black

Stage Combat Training & Choreography - Chris Connah from Noble Science of Defence

THANK YOU

Many thanks to Katie Brownings, Elaine Larkin, Chris Connah for his superb sword fight training and choreography, Vania and Idgie & Team at Gladrags, Jackie Jones for the costume alterations, Margaret Parkes for the stage curtain alterations, Maggie Pierce of Wick Theatre Company and Samantha Howard for lending additional costumes, and, as always, to the Front of House and Box Office teams, without whom no show would ever go on.



Sarah Donnelly - Mrs Mary Betterton

Sarah has performed in a range of roles at the NVT, since 'A Kind of Alaska' in 2022. Most recently as Dawn in 'Jerusalem'. Sarah is thrilled to be playing one of the first ever actresses to perform on the English stage - that this role incorporates iconic scenes from Shakespeare and some Restoration comedy, is the icing on the cake!

Jack Morris - Doll Common

Jack first performed at the NVT in 'Kill Local' in 2025. She's performed with Godalming Theatre Group ('Calendar Girls', 'Steel Magnolias' & 'Cinderella') and Guildford-based Creaction Theatre ('Macbeth' & 'Twelfth Night'), and was part of Guildford Fringe 2020 and 2022 ('Bombshells' & 'Her Big Chance'). At Sheffield University, Jack spent a lot of time in the Drama department and Drama Society ('The Sea', 'Endgame', 'Richard III', 'Elisabeth: Almost By Chance A Woman' and various student-devised shows). Jack's learning improv, is a published and prize-winning flash fiction writer, and also runs literary magazine 'Neither Fish Nor Foul'.



Amelia Leigh - Mrs Rebecca Marshall

Amelia has trained with National Youth Theatre, The Screen Acting Workshop and Run at it Shouting. Theatre credits include: Anna in 'Anna Karenina' (Wick Theatre Company), Sarah Woodruff in 'The French Lieutenant's Woman' (Brighton Little Theatre & The Minack), Lily in 'Punk Rock' (Mission Theatre, Bath) and The Devil in 'On Her Shoulder' (Burdall's Yard, Bath), plus Regina in Ibsen's 'Ghosts', Nikki/Irma in 'Picnic at Hanging Rock' and Barbara in 'The York Realist' (NVT). Screen credits include: Steph in 'Stuck In' (Crybaby Productions). Directing credits include: 'Six Characters in Search of an Author' (Mission Theatre, Bath). Amelia is thrilled to be playing the bold, ferocious and fiery Mrs Marshall.

Holly Morran - Mrs Elizabeth Farley

Holly is delighted to be making her NVT debut. Having previously performed while studying English Literature and Drama at the University of Kent, her roles included Alice in 'Closer', Anne in 'One Minute' and Cynthia in John Lyly's 'Endymion'. After a long break from the stage, Holly is very happy to be back and grateful for the warm welcome she's received from the NVT community.



Zarrina Danaeva - Nell Gwyn

Her first show at the NVT, Zarrina is delighted to be playing Nell alongside an amazing cast and crew. Recent credits include: Tituba in 'The Crucible', The Artful Dodger in 'Oliver Twist', and Monday in 'The Man Who Was Thursday' for the SPRINT Festival 2026 and Brighton Fringe 2025. She has loved every part of this play, from the cockney accent to sword-fighting; Zarrina hopes you have as much fun as she does!



Amelia Jackson - Elizabeth Barry & The Wit

Milly has always loved storytelling, whether through theatre, books or film. With a penchant for draping curtains over her shoulders for her highly anticipated, critically acclaimed home shows as a child, she has loved dipping her toes into the acting world with this role, and working with Gaby and the gang.





Thomas Dee - The Earl of Rochester & Thomas Otway

Thomas is delighted to be a part of 'Playhouse Creatures' with this fantastic cast and crew. He has lost track of how many NVT productions he has been in over the past four years, but thinks this might be his 7th. Most recently Thomas has appeared as Richard in 'The Lion in Winter' and Rev. Parris in 'The Crucible' at BLT. Most recently at the NVT, he was Hamlet in the '15 Minute Hamlet' (Tom Stoppard) and Father in 'The First Week is 100 Years' (Claudia Ezraeelian). Thomas thinks Rochester and Otway are both great fun to play, and has had the best time being part of it all!

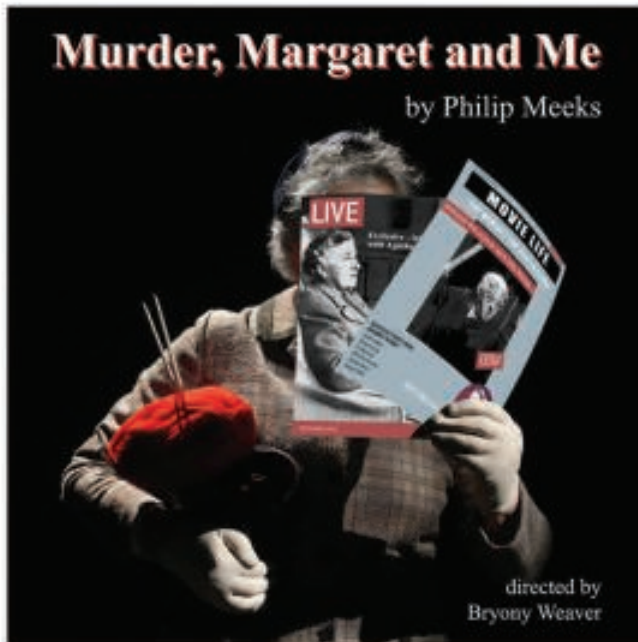
Gaby Bowring – Director

Gaby has previously directed Harold Pinter's 'A Kind of Alaska' for the Short Plays 2022, and co-directed 'The Sweet Science of Bruising' with Bryony Weaver in 2024. As a stage manager, she's worked on a variety of NVT productions since 2017, most recently 'Kill Local', 'Ghosts' and 'Macbeth', as well as with the Wick Theatre Company, Southwick Players, BOAT and the Rialto. It's been such a joy working with the cast and crew of 'Playhouse Creatures', and Gaby is so proud to share their brilliance with you all.



Murder, Margaret and Me

by Philip Meeks



directed by
Bryony Weaver

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.

19th - 29th June 2026

In the Studio Theatre

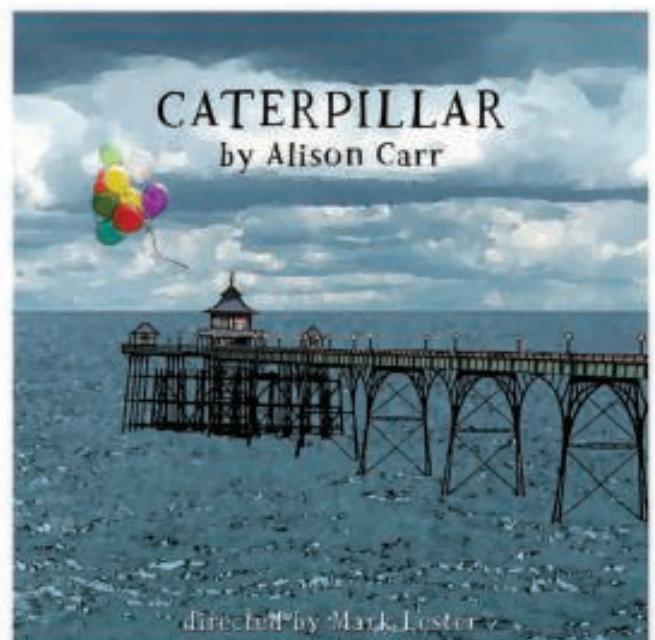
Caterpillar

by Alison Carr

Directed by Mark Lester

Owing to her illness, Maeve's seaside B&B is closed for the foreseeable future. Daughter Claire has been helping out but is she making things worse? Though Simon didn't get Claire's email cancelling his booking, he won't be put off, as he must fulfil a promise to fly in the town's annual Birdman competition. Claire relents and lets him in for the night. Over the course of the weekend, we discover that all three have secrets, and we watch them drop their facades as they attempt to navigate grief and complex family ties.

Caterpillar is a darkly funny, emotionally-charged drama which explores the moments when we find ourselves teetering on the edge.



THE PEBBLE TRUST

Constantinople Bistro

Fusing the tastes of the Middle East, the Balkans,
Greece, the Caucasus and Central Anatolia.

51 Norfolk Square, BN1 2PA 10am - 11pm, Mon - Sun
Tel: 01273 777 355

Philippa Hammond

Training for
Speeches
Presentations
Meetings

Speaking Well
In Public



S

W

I

P

www.speakingwellinpublic.co.uk

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)