

# the GIFT



PROGRAMME

  
**CRITERION**  
THEATRE  
[www.criteriontheatre.co.uk](http://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk)

# YOU AND CRI



A very warm welcome to you all and, if it's not too late to say it as we approach the end of January, "Happy New Year!"

Well here we are, moving forward as best we can and keeping everything crossed that our best efforts enable us to have a successful run of *The Gift*. We have been, and will continue to be, extra careful with our precautions and protocols around Covid to benefit our audiences and volunteers. The cast and crew have worked so hard in following the rules and limiting social interaction in every way they can since rehearsals began, to give us every chance of getting the show on without any interruptions; I would like to say a huge thank you to them all for their diligence and hard work.



With the return to plan A in progress we are still asking that everyone does their best to stay safe, keeping a social distance and wearing masks where appropriate. We took the decision to open with a 50% capacity to support this and we, as a board, think this is the way to go.

On that note, we would always welcome any volunteers willing to give up a few hours to enable us to continue. Our Front of House teams really require support and signing up to a bar shift, Front of House Manager or Box Office support would really contribute to us continuing to stay open and do what we do best; putting on shows! If you've not been involved with the theatre before, why not come along to one of our new members nights to find out how you can be involved. Further details on the next event are featured in this programme.

So once again, welcome to our wonderful theatre this evening, I hope you enjoy the show and will continue to support us through this continuing difficult time.

# DIRECTOR'S NOTES

I didn't see *The Gift* when it was first performed at The Belgrade in 2020. When it was sent to me to read, with a view to directing it, I was intrigued. I had no idea what a surprise I was in for!

Here is a modern play that deals with a big theme - racism - very much in tune with the current Equality and Diversity and Black Lives Matter zeitgeist. It is sharp, witty, laugh-out-loud funny and jaw-droppingly shocking in places. And daunting. How could I, a retired middle-aged white woman, do justice to a play dealing with the lives and experiences of black British people across two centuries? Discovering that the central character, Sarah Forbes Bonetta, was a real person whose story is on record, added to my qualms. I read it three or four times before saying "Yes", but it has been a real gift in itself for me to direct.



It is always a pleasure to bring new people into our theatre family and, by virtue of the cast heritage requirements, we have four new talents on our stage, one of them making her acting debut. It has been a joy to work with a diverse cast and discuss the issues and layers in the play, especially with people who have their own black British experiences, and can comment on the play's representation of past and present lives.

The play is set in two different time periods - the 1860s and the present - but three different locations. I could have opted for three sitting rooms each inside a black box. But I chose to have indicative, painted backdrops in order to support the period and the ambience, including the surreal setting for Act 3.

Music: Act 1: Michael Nyman's score for *The Piano*, 'Dreams of a journey.'  
Act 2: Four Tet Pause, 'Untangle.'  
Act 3: Ennio Morricone's score for *Moses the Lawgiver*.

It has been an honour to direct this ground-breaking new play. My heartfelt thanks to the talented cast and crew who will bring it to life for you.

Christine Ingall  
January 2022

For all the latest updates from the theatre, check out the website

[www.criteriontheatre.co.uk](http://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk)

# Your Players

## **Sarah Bonetta – Nicola Brome**

Nicola is a Birmingham-based actor and model who trained at Birmingham Theatre School, IDSA and Inspire Actors Studio. She has appeared in several national and international film, TV and commercial projects, including the recent John Lewis 'Unexpected Guest' Christmas Campaign and Netflix's Sex Education.

Further credits include: Stargazer; The Hanged; How Scared She Was; Burt Bassett's Life Satisfaction Survey and Strawberry Jam.



## **Mrs Waller – Lilian McGrath**

Lilian trained at The Coventry School of Drama and was a Post Graduate Student at the Birmingham Theatre School. Following a twenty year absence from any acting, concentrating on bringing up her family, she moved back into the area and rejoined the Criterion in 2017.

Lilian has since become an active member of the theatre and recent credits include: Flare Path (Mrs Miller); Wind in the Willows (Fox); Love Song (Margaret); Three Women (Eleanor).



## **Reverend Venn – Andrew Tyrer**

Andrew trained at Theatre Workshop Edinburgh and The Acting Lab Dundee. Theatre credits include Oh! what a lovely War; Speaking in Tongues; Holy Ghosts; Great Expectations; Single Spies; Falstaff; and Pressure (Criterion); The Thrill of Love (second thoughts Stratford) Larkin about Jazz (Criterion/Jazz Coventry) Flowers for Algernon (Greg Cole/Heartbreak productions) and A Few Good Men (Talisman)

Film credits include Mr Diablo comes to Town(Theatre Workshop/WEA)



## **James Davies/James (Cheshire) –**

### **Maxveal McLaren**

Maxveal trained at Identity Acting School and has appeared in various television and film productions including Ted Lasso, The Midwich Cuckoos and Silent Witness.



## **Mrs Schoen/Queen Victoria – Emma**

### **Whewell**

Emma was involved in Criterion drama classes as a teenager, and performed in youth performances including The Canterbury Tales (2005) and Daisy Pulls It Off (2006). After living in London for some years, Emma returned to Coventry in 2017 and was keen to reacquaint herself with the Criterion. Since moving back to Coventry, Emma has performed in three productions: Jumpy (2018), The Wind in the Willows (2018) and The Railway Children (2019). She also helps organise the Criterion's monthly Coffee and Cake mornings on the first Saturday of the month.



## **Sarah (Cheshire) – Nyasha Daley**

Nyasha is a multi-disciplinary artist, including poetry/spoken word, singing, song-writing and visual digital arts. Much of her work involves the exploration of identity, including her own. Nyasha is an accomplished producer and founder of annual arts festival iDENT, which solely celebrates artists from the African diaspora. She is an emergent film producer, currently working on an Arts Council funded commission for Coventry Pride, exploring the representation of Black LGBT+ creatives in the Arts and Media. Nyasha is one of fifteen creative leaders being mentored and developed as part of Coventry City of Culture Trust's legacy programme. Her role as Sarah (Cheshire) in The Gift will be her acting debut.



## **Aggie – Bernadette Baretto**

Aggie is my first role at The Criterion. I trained at Morley College Evening Theatre school in London 1990-91. I found my acting bug again in 2018 when I performed in the chorus of Health Care Professionals and Scientists in the sell-out Edinburgh Fringe show : The Mould that changed the World . At Rugby Theatre I have performed in Cinderella, The Sound of Music and in Five Star theatre's production of Hairspray. Professional work includes a regular Supporting Artist for the BBC in Doctors, and the film My Name is Leon, plus a supporting artist role in Mission Impossible 7 (both to be released in 2022).



## **Harriet – Anne-marie Greene**

Anne-marie was last onstage as Alice in 'Queers' and directed 'Glorious'- one of our last shows before Covid changed everything. She is Artistic Director of the theatre and cannot wait until things return to normal!



## **Ben – Rob Lord**

Rob began acting at 16 in Guys and Dolls at Coundon Court school. He has since appeared in plays, musicals and pantomimes with The Wheatsheaf Players and The Criterion in Coventry, the Maidenhead Drama Guild and Red Hot Theatre in Maidenhead and Shiphay, Torquay and Brixham in Torbay. Notable roles include Dick Barton (Dick Barton Trilogy), Scrooge (Scrooge - The Panto), Curly (Oklahoma!), Tin Man (Wizard of Oz), Willoughby (Sense and Sensibility), the photographer (Calendar Girls), Jeffrey Fairbrother (Hi-De-Hi) and Robinson Crusoe (Robinson Crusoe and the Pirates). He has won best supporting actor (as Richard Coaker in Farmer's Wife) and reached the semi-final of the all England drama festival for best play in a three person play (Tissue). He is happy to be back with the Criterion in this unique play, working with a stellar cast and crew. In his spare time he likes to sample fine liquors from around the globe.



# The Crew



<b>Director</b>	<b>Christine Ingall</b>	
<b>Assistant Director</b>	<b>Deb Elves</b>	
<b>Stage Manager</b>	<b>Frances Dixon</b>	
<b>Wardrobe</b>	<b>Pam Coleman</b>	<b>Rowena Tye</b>
	<b>Diana Slocombe</b>	<b>Nancy Silvester</b>
<b>Props i/c</b>	<b>Sally Patalong</b>	
<b>Props</b>	<b>Bill Young</b>	<b>Erica Young</b>
	<b>Rebecca Mason</b>	
<b>Prompt</b>	<b>Claire McDermott</b>	<b>Judy Sharpe</b>
<b>Set Paint</b>	<b>Judy Talbot</b>	<b>Paul Chokran</b>
	<b>Linda Gregory</b>	<b>Paul Tate</b>
<b>Set Designer</b>	<b>Christine Ingall</b>	
<b>Set Build</b>	<b>Terry Rahilly</b>	<b>Simon Sharpe</b>
	<b>Michael Waterson</b>	<b>Frances Dixon</b>
	<b>Abigayil Tandy</b>	<b>Joe Tandy</b>
	<b>Robyn Rainbow</b>	<b>Chris Heron</b>
	<b>Paul Tate</b>	
<b>Stage Operator</b>	<b>Terry Rahilly</b>	<b>Simon Sharpe</b>
	<b>Michael Waterson</b>	<b>Paul Tate</b>
	<b>Michael Hammond</b>	<b>Chris Heron</b>
<b>Sound Designer</b>	<b>Dave Cornish</b>	
<b>Lighting Designer</b>	<b>Karl Stafford</b>	
<b>Design</b>	<b>Laura Dean</b>	

# The Play

The story at the heart of this play is that of a young, black African Princess of the Yoruba people, orphaned when her family was slaughtered and her people conquered by the Dahomeyans. When Royal Naval Captain Forbes arrived to negotiate the end of the Atlantic slave trade, King Ghezo of the Dohomeyans refused, but offered up instead the seven year old Princess as a gift to Queen Victoria. The Queen was so impressed with the girl, renamed Sarah Forbes Bonetta, that she adopted her as her goddaughter. This is a true story: Sarah, born Omoba Aina, was educated and raised like a Princess as the ward of a series of trusted guardians within royal circles, under the Queen's patronage. The Queen and her daughter Princess Alice had a genuine relationship with Sarah in person and by letter, and the Queen showered Sarah, with gifts. Sarah married James Davies, a businessman and they lived in England and, briefly in Africa. When Sarah died of tuberculosis in her forties, The Queen provided for her daughter Victoria.

Janice Okoh weaves Sarah's story throughout the play, by imagining Sarah herself as a young, educated, married woman, or revealing snippets of it told by other characters in her lifetime and more than a century later. By setting the play in both the 19th century, at the height of Imperial colonialization, and in a present society still riven by racial prejudice, Okoh begs the question, "What, if anything, has changed?" This is under-scored by Okoh giving the black British couples in the 19th and 21st centuries the same names (James and Sarah), the equivalent status of being well educated and well off, and similar problems. By setting each of the play's three Acts in comfortable sitting rooms at tea time, and by introducing unexpected guests, Okoh spears racism in its many guises, through the experience of black Britons then and now, from colonial/Imperialist attitudes that still linger, through cross-racial adoption, racial identity, cultural appropriation to casual, unconscious, everyday prejudice. She has created a parlour-piece that delivers a kick in the backside to polite, white society with biting satire, dark humour and plenty of shocks along the way. The Gift premiered in January 2020 in a co-production between The Belgrade Theatre, Coventry and Eclipse Theatre, followed by a UK tour of six cities.

## The Author

Janice Okoh is an award-winning playwright, who is also an established radio and TV dramatist. Her first play Egusi Soup won a Channel 4 playwrighting award and her second play Three Birds was shortlisted for a number of awards and won the Bruntwood Playwrighting Prize. She recently completed a 30-minute drama for Channel 4's diversity scheme 4 Stories.

## The Production

ACT 1 1862: the Davies household in Brighton  
ACT 2 Sarah and James' house in Cheshire, present day. Contains partial nudity.  
ACT 3 1867: Windsor Castle, one of the Queen's private rooms, as imagined by present-day Sarah.

There will be intervals of 15 minutes after Acts 1 and 2



Ever wondered how people got involved with the Criterion?

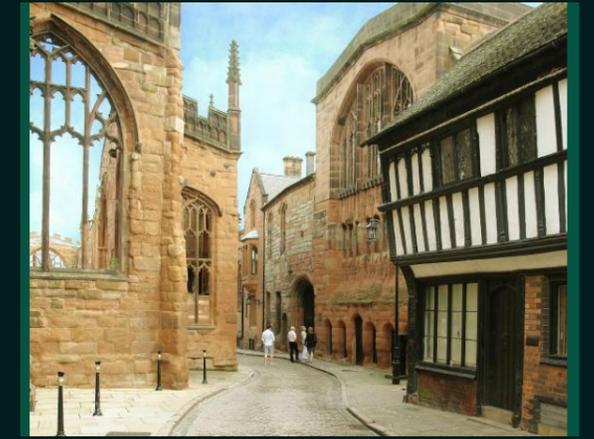
As we come toward the end of the 60th Anniversary Year, Jamie Firth has been busy interviewing people from the Criterion's past and present, finding out about their involvement with the theatre. The hope is to build a living memory of the Criterion, documenting the impact that it has had on people's lives.

One of the common themes is the concept of friendship that people have found by being involved in the Criterion, with more than a fair share of relationships starting out from a meeting at Berkeley Rd South. Whether they are long-lasting friendships, or have helped introduce the next generation into the theatre family, it's an interesting insight into the way this place has shaped those who've participated in its longevity.

And of course, there are great tales of where things have gone wrong, an embarrassing moment saved by some quick witted thinking. Or how about a Criterion buffet afternoon which was attended by armed guards?



You can view all the videos as they are uploaded on our [Youtube channel](#), or on the [Theatre website](#). And don't forget that you can also add your own memories about individual plays through the [Criterion Archive](#), which includes details of all productions since 1955.



St Mary's Guildhall sits next to Coventry's Cathedral and dates back to 1352. A £5.6 million redevelopment programme is underway with the aim of ensuring that the Guildhall takes its place in the city's visitor offer for residents and tourists, and grows its reputation and customer base.

The Guildhall is home of the significant "Coventry Tapestry", Mary Queen of Scots was held there in 1569, and the building miraculously survived the blitz of 1940 which devastated much of the city centre.

Given the context of this wonderful historic building, the Criterion Theatre was only too pleased to accept an invitation to help create some soundscapes, film-work and audio recordings for the new museum there once it opens to the public.

The recordings took place in Birmingham at The Mushrooms recording studios. Those involved with this project were Anne-Marie Greene, Pete Bagley, Paul Curtis, Gennie Holmes, Cathryn Bowler, Hattie Bowler, Verity Greene, Angel Holmes and myself. The day consisted of us experimenting, rehearsing and recording soundscapes from scenes such as Medieval and Victorian kitchens and busy traders at market stalls selling their goods and services.

The St Mary's Guildhall Project is re-opening to the public in the coming months and I know everyone involved is very excited to have been able to use their time and talent to help tell the story of this amazing place and its part in the history and culture of our city.

Ted McGowan

# WHEN FRIENDS MEET... (and have a sing-song)

“Christmas Carols at the Criterion” has been a mainstay in the calendar for a number of years and has become a hugely important marker in many members’ festive preparations.

Such was the disappointment at the cancellation of the 2020 edition (due to the COVID lockdown), the introduction of further restrictions in the lead up to the 2021 Christmas period, caused great concern that we would again be left without our singalong tradition.

And whilst some of the usual staples could not be safely delivered - the annual raffle of previous years’ unwanted gifts, for example - our first ever “Carols in the Car Park” went some way to warming the festive cockles.

With Lynne Adams performing miracles on the piano despite a continuous wet mist (fortunately she’d put on her wet treads!), the gathered throng were able to shout their way through all the old classics in a scene Dickens himself would have been proud of.

Chris Firth added his usual retelling of all the finest Christmas cracker jokes - to the usual derisory howls of protest - as the mulled wine and mince pies attempted to keep both body and soul warm on what was in the end a rather chilly affair.

And despite one of the greatest performances of everyone’s favourite Christmas Classic “Bohemian Rhapsody”, the Police were not called to break up what is now known as the last Criterion work event of 2021.



# CRITERION FRIENDS

We are so grateful to our current Criterion Friends who continue to give us small, and larger, donations on a regular basis to help us keep going into our seventieth decade!

You can join this list - there is real power in lots of people giving us small amounts on a regular basis. And you can gift-aid your pledge too. Gifting the cost of a double gin and tonic every month will make all the difference to your local theatre!

So what are you waiting for? Contact Helen McGowan on [friends@critteriontheatre.co.uk](mailto:friends@critteriontheatre.co.uk) or visit [www.criteriontheatre.co.uk/join/friend](http://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk/join/friend) to find out more.”

- Alan Porter
- John and Wendy Baxter
- Mick Forey
- Pete Gillam and Anne-marie Greene
- The McGowan Family
- Ruth Miller and Bill Butler
- Chris Murly
- John and Kate Purcell
- Jane and Keith Railton
- Judy and Simon Sharpe
- Zoe and Rob Wartnaby



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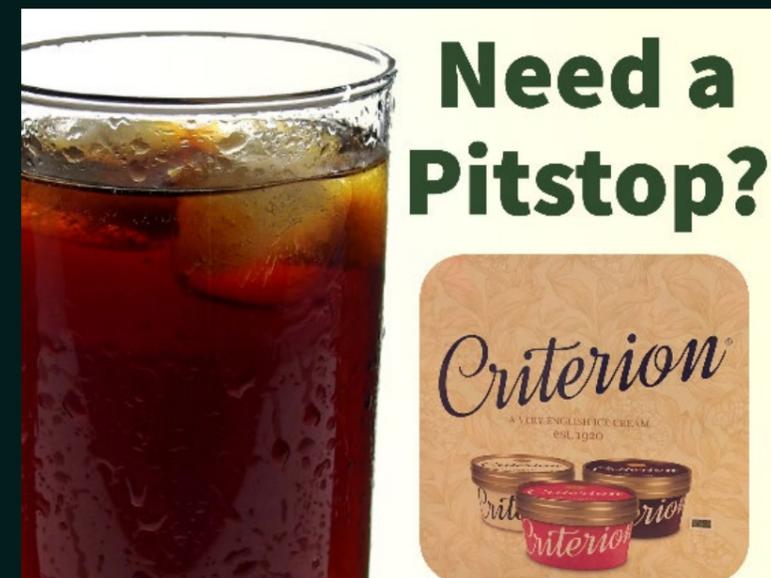
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You can now order your drink and/or ice cream before you even get to the theatre via the Criterion Bar online ordering system.

Collect it on your way into the theatre and enjoy some refreshment at your seat. You can also choose to order for either interval (or both!) during the performance too.

Please be aware that cash payments will not be available at the bar itself - CARD ONLY.

Go to <https://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk/bar> to start your order!

If you haven't used our bar ordering application on the website, it couldn't be easier.

1. Click on "Start Order" at the top.



Start Your Order

Your Name  
Frank Ian Stein

Your Email  
monster@gmail.com

When  
Sat 29th Jan - a performance of: The Gift

First Act

2. Put in your details - name, email, the performance you want them for and which Act you want them for. The click "Choose from the menu"

3. Choose your required refreshments. When you've finished, Click on "Pay"

4. Enter any further requirements e.g "No ice" and enter your card details.

5. Collect your drinks from the Drinks collection point from the Foyer. They will be left under the initial of the surname on the order.

If you are taking your drinks into the auditorium with you, please help our volunteers by either returning your glasses to the bar, or using the bins provided. Thankyou!

# Coming Next

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## Two by Jim Cartwright Saturday 12th March - 19th March 2022

TWO is hilarious, yet heart-breaking, and presents a slice of working-class life in a Northern local pub. With a constantly quarrelling landlord and landlady, and the dozen regulars pulling up a stool, all life is present in this pub. It is the heart of communities. It is where people laugh, share stories, celebrate and mourn.

Through this range of colourful characters, the rich tapestry of their interconnecting lives is revealed. This is a sharp and touching slice of English life in series of short vignettes that skilfully combines pathos and humour.

Jim Cartwright has written extensively for stage, television and radio with his hugely successful plays (including *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice* and *Road*) performed at the Royal Court Theatre, National Theatre, the West End and on Broadway. They have won numerous awards, including the Olivier and Evening Standard awards.

“Two is a reflection of reality, life seen through the prism of a pub. It examines the minutiae of the everyday and makes it heroic and banal and comedic all at once. But it is also a piece of pure theatre, providing a platform for supremely skilled actors to show their trade” (Philip Lowe, [eastmidlandstheatre.com](http://eastmidlandstheatre.com))



If you have any comments about your experience with The Criterion Theatre, please email us at: [customerexperience@criteriontheatre.co.uk](mailto:customerexperience@criteriontheatre.co.uk)

Video and/or audio recording of performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited

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We believe that it is important as an organisation that serves the people of Coventry to speak out against racial injustice and prejudice.

**We want to be clear – Black Lives Matter.**

We are listening, and we are learning about how we can serve our communities better together.

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