

Kneehigh

Brief Encounter



Memory Aid for Students:
Don't write notes, watch the show!

Contents

Introduction	3
Why Do We Do Theatre?	3
A Very Grown-up Fairy Tale	4
Kneehigh.....	6
Synopsis of the Play.....	7
Characters.....	9
Credits – Australia Tour	11
Company Biographies.....	12
Background Information.....	18
Brief Encounter: The Film.....	18
Sir Noël Coward	19
1940's Britain.....	22
Discussing Brief Encounter.....	23
Further Information.....	24

I n t r o d u c t i o n

Why Do We Do Theatre?

By Mike Shepherd, Joint Artistic Director, Kneehigh

We do theatre because it's live.

The components of performance and audience create a different chemistry each and every night, there is no formula. On a good night we might "gel" an audience, take them on a journey and leave them somewhere they never expected to be. On a good night the auditorium can crackle with enchantment and excitement, it's all a delicate and indefinable balance to be lost or found every night.

Theatre is live – it's not like cinema where, sadly, most of the audience need a bucket of coke and a trough of popcorn to enjoy; it's not the casual channel flipping experience of TV – it aims to engage and transport so please: **watch rather than take notes.**

Why do we do theatre? Because anything could happen and leaps in the dark are imperative.



A Very Grown-up Fairy Tale

By Emma Rice, Director and Adaptor, and Joint Artistic Director, Kneehigh

In *Still Life*, later to become *Brief Encounter*, Noel Coward wrote a play about an affair. Not a sordid affair but a love affair between two married people. An impossible affair, a painful affair, an unacceptable affair. It is written with such empathy, such observation, and such tender agony. This man knew what he was writing about. Imagine being gay in the 1930s and you begin to understand *Brief Encounter*.

Imagine the impossibility of expressing the most fundamental of human needs and emotions. Imagine the enforced shame, lies and deceit. Imagine the frustration, imagine the loss, and imagine the anger. Each of these emotions is delicately and Britishly traced through the meetings of our lovers. They experience a micro marriage, a relationship from beginning to end in a few short hours – and how many of us cannot relate to this careful and painful liaison? Not many, I'm sure. Can many of us go through a lifetime without meeting someone and feeling a spark of recognition that we shouldn't, an attraction that goes beyond the physical? And what a terrible world it would be if our emotions and spirits and psyches were amputated at the altar.

And here is where real life ends and folk tales begin.

In the language of stories, we are able to examine the bargains that human beings make. We see how we bargain our own needs, the needs of the self, for various reasons.

These reasons will be familiar to us all: the fear of being alone or of being excluded from 'normal' life. In the language of folk stories the price of this bargain is often physical. A part of the body is chopped off - a hand (*The Handless Maiden*) or feet (*The Red Shoes*). We literally cut a part of ourselves off in order to conform or to be accepted. In *Brief Encounter*, both our lovers have chopped off part of themselves. It is delicately referred to, but Laura talks of swimming wild and free and of playing the piano. Both of these are forms of personal expression - not pleasing anyone but exploring the deep waters of the soul. Alec turns into a child when he talks of his passions, and fears that Laura will be bored. These are people trapped by the bargains that they have freely made - they have bargained their inner lives for stability, family and love. Oh yes, love. I don't for a moment believe that their marriages are all bad or that they are in any way victims. Presumably, their respective partners are as trapped by their own bargains and by the rules of society itself. None of us are victims, but we can review the bargains we make and escape in a profound way.

I have been reading many Selkie stories whilst making this piece. In these stories, a fisherman falls in love with a Selkie - or Seal Woman - whom he sees dancing on the

rocks having slipped out of her sealskin. She too, falls for him. He takes her home and hides her skin. He cares for her and she for him; they have children and live a life of contentment.

One day, she finds her old skin in a cupboard. She washes and dresses the children, kisses them goodbye, puts on her sealskin and dives back into the sea. She never returns but sometimes the children will see a beautiful seal swimming far out at sea. This teaches us about our true self. No matter how much we try to repress our feelings or how much we wish to conform, our true self will always emerge. There can be no happily ever after until this true self, or nature has been accepted and embraced.

In the language of folk tales, in order to find one's true self, it is often vital that there is a near-death experience before our heroes and heroines can begin to heal and to reform. In *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White* our heroines are unconscious, almost dead, for long periods of time. In *Brief Encounter* our lovers also die spiritually when they part. 'I never want to feel anything again,' says Laura. This deep depression is an essential part of the process of change. It is something to be endured, understood and then moved away from. The end of the affair is not the end of hope or of love. It is part of the process of change. Alec will travel and see the world in a wider context. Laura will have to re-imagine herself, not just as a 'respectable wife and mother' but as a person in her own right.

My hope is that, like the Seal Woman, Alec and Laura escape. Not with each other in some idealistic romantic way but an escape provoked by the profound and personal awakening they felt when they met. We humans are fearful by nature - it is often somebody else who provides the catalyst for change but they are not the cause. Change can only happen from within. After our story ends, I like to think that our lovers will change. I imagine that Alec will make a real difference in Africa and find an expanse of spirit that seems untouchable in our story. I hope and dream that Laura will take up the piano again and perform on the world's greatest and most awe-inspiring stages.

As I write this, I wonder if these are, in fact, my dreams? That is the power of a great and enduring story; we can all own it and feel it and find something of ourselves in it.

Kneehigh

Kneehigh are a UK based theatre company with a local, national and international profile. For over 30 years Kneehigh have created vigorous, popular and challenging theatre and perform with the joyful anarchy that audiences have come to expect from this ground-breaking company.

Kneehigh tell stories. Based in Cornwall in breath-taking barns on the south coast the company create theatre of humanity on an epic and tiny scale. They work with an ever-changing ensemble of performers, artists, technicians, administrators, makers and musicians and are passionate about their multi-disciplined creative process.

In 2010 Kneehigh launched The Asylum, a beautiful and flexible nomadic structure, which means the company now has a venue to call home as well as being one of the leading touring theatre companies in the UK. The company have now presented three seasons in The Asylum in Cornwall, and will continue to reinvent the space and explore new locations in future years

Alongside their national and international touring and Asylum seasons, Kneehigh run their Connections programme aiming to engage creatively with communities in Cornwall and beyond through event and adventure

Kneehigh productions include *A Very Old Man With Enormous Wings* (in association with Little Angel Theatre, UK tour 2013), *Steptoe and Son* (UK Tour 2012/13) *The Wild Bride* (UK Tour, San Francisco, New York, New Zealand 2011/12/13); *Midnight's Pumpkin* (The Asylum, Cornwall 2011, Battersea Arts Centre, 2012); *The Red Shoes* (UK Tour 2001/2, Winner of TMA for Best Director 2002, UK Tour, USA and Australia 2010/11), *Hansel & Gretel* (UK Tour 2010/11), *Don John* (UK Tour 2008/9), *Brief Encounter* (West End 2008, UK Tour and USA Tour 2009, Broadway 2010, Australia & US tour 2013/14), *A Matter of Life and Death* (Royal National Theatre 2007), *Rapunzel* (BAC, UK Tour and New York 2007/8), *Cymbeline* (UK and International Tour 2007/2008) and *Tristan and Yseult* (Royal National Theatre and UK Tour 2006, UK and US tour 2013/14).

Forthcoming productions include a radical new version of *The Beggar's Opera* which will open in 2014

Synopsis of the Play

Brief Encounter is a romantic drama set in 1945, during World War II. The action takes place around Milford Junction railway station, a fictional station where the main characters Laura Jesson and Doctor Alec Harvey meet by chance in the refreshment room. Both characters are married to another, but there is a strong attraction between them and after a couple of chance meetings they soon become more than just friends.

Laura is married to Fred whom she describes as 'not at all emotional' a description we later understand to mean lacking in passion. They have two children and appear to lead a financially comfortable life. Every week Laura travels to town to do some shopping and to go to the cinema, and it is on one of these trips that she meets Alec. Laura has some grit in her eye and goes to the refreshment room for help; it is Alec who offers assistance. Through their feelings for each other the couple soon realise what is missing from their lives and the story then follows their anguish at discovering that neither of them is truly happily married.

Alec is keen to meet regularly with Laura and soon they are spending every weekly meeting engaging in a form of courtship – going to the cinema together, boating on the lake and dining in restaurants. Before long, it is clear that Laura and Alec have a strong desire to take their affair further.

Laura is hesitant, constantly ridden by the guilt, but eventually she agrees to Alec's suggestion that they meet at his friend's flat, presumably to consummate their relationship. Their plan is spoiled however as Alec's friend returns home early and Laura, riddled with shame, scurries away hurriedly.

Alec later catches up with Laura and they face the harsh reality that their affair cannot continue. Alec breaks the news to Laura that he has accepted a post in South Africa where he can pursue his passions as a doctor. They arrange to meet for a final goodbye the following week. As they agonize over their parting and the end of their affair they are interrupted by a friend of Laura's. Their final goodbye is then spoilt as they fight to conceal their feelings in front of this intruder. Alec's train arrives and Laura is left with her friend, wondering what might have been. In a moment of despair she runs to the bridge over the railway line and looks as though she is going to end her life by jumping in front of the express train. Something stops her though and she returns home to Fred, the children and her marriage.

Throughout the play, juxtaposed with Laura and Alec's love affair are the affairs of Myrtle, the tea room manageress with Albert, the station master; and Beryl, the tea room waitress with Stanley, the cake seller. In stark contrast to Laura and Alec, both of

these couples are free to love and pursue their affairs. Myrtle and Albert are somewhat jaded by love, but are not romantically linked to any other and Beryl and Stanley are finding love for the first time.



Characters

Dr. Alec Harvey

Good looking, kind and flirtatious Dr. Harvey feels an instant attraction to Laura after getting some grit out of her eye at Milford Railway Station. He is married with two children and a successful career.

'if you'd die, you'd forget me. I want to be remembered.'

Laura Jesson

Gentle, attractive and mild mannered, Laura Jesson thinks she is happily married until she meets Dr. Harvey. She has two children and a husband, Fred, whom she feels guilty betraying.

'This can't last. This misery can't last....Nothing lasts really. Neither happiness or despair.'

Fred Jesson

Husband of Laura: is a dependable, unemotional and reliable man. He is a creature of habit and routine.

'You've been a long way away.....Thank you for coming back to me'

Albert Godby

A jovial, fun loving man who enjoys flirting with Mrs. Baggot in the refreshment room.

'...you look wonderful when you're angry....., just like an avenging angel'

Myrtle Bagot

Mrs. Bagot likes to appear to others as a strict, upstanding lady who commands respect from others. She is in fact just as fun loving as Albert with whom she enjoys regular liaisons!

'If you don't learn to behave yourself - there won't be a tonight'

Beryl, Waitress

Beryl is a wonderfully naïve young woman who works for Mrs. Bagot in the tearoom. She fancies Stanley the cake seller and enjoys flirting with him.

'Mother will be waiting up'.

Stanley, Cake Seller

Happy go lucky Stanley fancies Beryl and spends most of his time winking at her and playing the fool to make her laugh.

'Are you walking home?'



Credits - Australia Tour

Stanley	Damon Daunno
Myrtle	Annette McLaughlin
Beryl	Kate Cheel
Laura	Michelle Nightingale
Alec	Jim Sturgeon
Fred/ Albert	Joe Alessi
Musicians	Dave Brown
	James Gow
Director	Emma Rice
Associate Director	Simon Harvey
Original Music	Stu Barker
Designer	Neil Murray
Lighting Designer	Malcolm Rippeth
Projection & Film Designers	Jon Driscoll & Gemma Carrington
Sound Designer	Simon Baker
Associate Sound Designer	Andy Graham
Musical Director	Ian Ross
Producer	Paul Crewes
Company Stage Manager	Steph Curtis
Technical Stage Manager	Richard Barlow
Lighting Operator	Ben Nichols
Sound Operator	Jay Jones
Wardrobe & Wig Supervisor	Nicola Webley
Projection Technician / Sound No. 2	Alex Shenton-Parkin
Production Manager	Dominic Fraser
Projection	Stephen Parkinson

Company Biographies

Joe Alessi / Fred/Albert Theatre credits include: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Royal & Derngate, Northampton); *The Wind in the Willows* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (Rose Theatre, Kingston); *Wonderful Town* (Royal Exchange/Hallé Orchestra/Lowry, Manchester, UK tour); *Tartuffe* (Liverpool Playhouse/ETT UK tour); *Absurd Person Singular* (Curve, Leicester); *Brief Encounter* (Kneehigh UK tour, USA tours and Broadway); *Assassins* (Union Theatre, London); *Dick Whittington* (Salisbury Playhouse); *Privates on Parade* (West Yorkshire Playhouse & Birmingham Rep); *Tartuffe* (Liverpool Playhouse & Rose Theatre, Kingston); *The Drowsy Chaperone* (Novello Theatre, London); *Antony & Cleopatra*, *Julius Caesar* & *The Tempest* (RSC & Novello Theatre, London); *Jerusalem* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (West Yorkshire Playhouse & Playhouse Theatre, London); *The Story of Io* (Aldeburgh Festival & Almeida, London); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, London); *The Play What I Wrote* (UK tour); *Romeo & Juliet* (Liverpool Playhouse); *The Accrington Pals* (Minerva Theatre, Chichester); *The Front Page* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Polygraph* (Nottingham Playhouse); *The Taming of the Shrew* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester); *Light* (Théâtre de Complicite, Almeida & UK tour); *Animal Crackers* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester; Barbican Theatre & Lyric Theatre, London); *The Colour of Justice – The Stephen Lawrence Enquiry* (Tricycle Theatre, London); *The Rivals* (Basingstoke & Greenwich Theatre); *The Taming of the Shrew* (Leicester Haymarket Theatre); *A View From The Bridge* & *Romeo & Juliet* (Royal Exchange Theatre, Manchester); *Arsenic & Old Lace*, *Tovarich* & *Henry VIII* (Chichester Festival Theatre) and *The Comedy of Errors* (RSC, Barbican Theatre & world tour). Films include: *The Other Woman*, *Family Business*, *Bridget Jones' Diary*, *London Kills Me*, *The Institute* *Benjamenta* and *Chaplin*. Joe was nominated for an Olivier Award for his role in *Animal Crackers*

Simon Baker / Sound Designer Most recent credits include *Matilda The Musical* (RSC and Cambridge Theatre – 2012 Olivier Award for Best Sound), *My Fair Lady* (Sheffield), *Merry Wives of Windsor* (RSC), *Steptoe and Son* (Kneehigh Theatre/UK Tour), *Loserville* (West Yorkshire Playhouse/Garrick Theatre), *Hedda Gabler* (Old Vic), *Wah Wah Girls* (Saddlers Wells), *Angus Thongs and Even More Snogging* (West Yorkshire Playhouse), *Batman Live* (World Arena Tour), *Me and My Girl* (Sheffield), *The Umbrellas Of Cherbourg* (Lyric Theatre), *The Real Thing* (Old Vic), *The Norman Conquests* (Old Vic and Broadway), *Late Middle Classes* (Donmar), *La Bete* (Comedy Theatre and Broadway), *Lord Of The Rings* (Theatre Royal Drury Lane and Toronto – 2007 Olivier Nomination Best Sound), *Deathtrap* (Noel Coward Theatre), *Boeing Boeing* (Comedy Theatre and Broadway - 2007 Tony Nomination for Best Sound), *Di Viv and Rose* (Hampstead Downstairs). *Bridge Project* for BAM/Old Vic Theatre 2009, *The Birds* (Dublin), *Closer To Heaven* (Arts Theatre). For Kneehigh Theatre work includes *Brief Encounter* (London, WYP, UK and US Tours, Broadway and St Anns Warehouse NY – 2011 Tony Nomination for Best Sound), *Don John* (RSC and International Tour), *The Red Shoes* (International Tour), *The Wild Bride* (International Tour), *Midnight's Pumpkin* and all three years of Kneehigh's *Asylum Season*.

Stu Barker / Original Music Stu has worked extensively as composer/musical director with Kneehigh over the last sixteen years. Shows as composer/MD include: *A Matter Of Life And Death* and *Tristan & Yseult* (National Theatre); *Brief Encounter* (Broadway/West End); *Cymbeline*

and *Don John* (RSC); *Hansel And Gretel* (Bristol Old Vic); *The Bacchae* and *The Wooden Frock* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Nights At The Circus* and *The Red Shoes* (Lyric Hammersmith); *The Wild Bride*, *Rapunzel* (BAC); *Pandora's Box* (Northern Stage); and *Midnight's Pumpkin*. Other composer/MD work includes for: Shakespeare's Globe, Bristol Old Vic, Donmar Warehouse, Welfare State International, Contact Theatre, Liverpool Lantern Company, Travelling Light and Horse And Bamboo. Recently Stu has been touring as trombonist with *C. W Stoneking & His Primitive Horn Orchestra*.

David Brown / Musician David has worked as a professional musician all his life playing jazz, folk, bluegrass, eastern European and gypsy swing in various bands and in various countries. His previous Kneehigh work was *Tristan & Yseult* in Sydney and Wellington, *Cymbeline* in Brazil and Columbia, and *Brief Encounter* on its UK tour. He currently performs with six-piece jump jive swing band *The Fabulous Swinging Chandeliers* and lives on a narrow boat on the Kennett and Avon canal.

Gemma Carrington / Associate Projection Designer Gemma studied Animation at the National Film and Television School, and at Norwich School of Art and Design. Theatre: Projection design credits: *Finding Neverland* Leicester Curve; *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* for the Royal Ballet; *Birdsong* (Comedy); *Earthquakes In London*, *The Power of Yes*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Gethsemane*, *A Matter of Life and Death* (RNT); *Separate Tables* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Brief Encounter* (London West End, UK tour, US tours and Broadway); Associate Projection Design credits: *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Theatre Royal Drury Lane); *Chaplin the Musical* (Ethel Barrymore on Broadway), *Phantom of the Opera 25th Anniversary* (Royal Albert Hall), *Ghost the musical* (London Piccadilly and on Broadway); *The Wizard of Oz* (London Palladium); *Love Never Dies* (London Adelphi); *Dirty Dancing* (London Aldwych, and in Holland, Chicago and Berlin). Awards: OBIE for Projection Design, Olivier award nomination for Best Design for *Brief Encounter*, and Olivier award nomination for achievement in dance for *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Kate Cheel / Beryl Kate graduated from the Adelaide College of Arts in 2011. Throughout her training, she appeared in college productions of *As You Like It*, *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, *The Laramie Project*, *Richard III*, *Underground* and *Familiar Lies*. While still in her final year of study, Kate made her professional stage debut in the State Theatre Company SA production of *Three Sisters*. She has since worked for the company in productions of *Hedda Gabler* and *The Glass Menagerie*, for which she was awarded 2012 Emerging Artist of the Year by the Adelaide Critics Circle. She has recently completed work on her first feature film, *One Eyed Girl*. Kate is currently working with Windmill Theatre Company on their new work, *Big Bad Wolf* and will soon join UK company Kneehigh in their Australian tour of *Brief Encounter*.

Paul Crewes / Producer Before working with Kneehigh, Paul worked as Producer at the West Yorkshire Playhouse, Leeds, where he set up over 40 productions including collaborations with Kneehigh, Improbable Theatre, Teatre Romea, National Theatre and with commercial & West End producers. Other work includes Associate Producer for the Lowry, and working for Metal with Jude Kelly. Paul has worked for Kneehigh since 2005 and has produced; *Tristan & Yseult* (UK, Sydney & New Zealand & US) *Cymbeline* (UK, Columbia & Brazil; *Rapunzel* (UK & US) *Don John* (UK & US), *Hansel & Gretel*, *Brief Encounter* (US tour, Australia tour 2013), the launch of the Kneehigh Asylum (featuring *The Red Shoes*, *Blast!*, *The King of Prussia*), the 2010 tour of *The Red Shoes* (UK, US & Australia), *Midnight's Pumpkin* (Kneehigh Asylum 2011 & BAC

2012), *The Wild Bride* (Kneehigh Asylum 2011, UK & US tours) and *Steptoe & Son* (UK tour 2012).

Damon Daunno / Stanley Damon is an actor/musician from New Jersey with a BFA from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He is thrilled to be working with Kneehigh again following the Broadway run of *Brief Encounter* and US tour of *The Wild Bride*. Other credits include: (Regional) *Fly By Night*, *Jesus in India*, and *The Last Goodbye*; (TV) *The Following*. His original music can be found on iTunes and Facebook. He loves you very much. Thanks to Abrams.

Jon Driscoll / Projection Design Jon Driscoll studied Cinematography at the National Film and Television School, Beaconsfield and Theatre Design at Croydon College of Art. He is a technical associate of the Royal National Theatre. Theatre: *The Effect*, *The People*, *Last of the Hausmans*, *Travelling Light*, *Earthquakes In London*, *The Power of Yes*, *Nation*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Observer*, *Gethsemane*, *Her Naked Skin*, *Fram*, *A Matter of Life and Death*, *The Reporter* (National Theatre); *ENRON* (Headlong); *Separate Tables*, *The Last Cigarette* (Chichester); *Richard III*, *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*, *Complicit* (Old Vic); *The Lightning Play*, *Whistling Psyche* (Almeida); *Frost/Nixon* (Donmar); *Finding Neverland* (Leicester Curve); *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Ghost - The Musical*, *The King's Speech*, *The Wizard of Oz*, *Love Never Dies*, *Dirty Dancing*, *On the Third Day*, *Glorious*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Our House*, *Up For Grabs*, *Dance of Death* (West End); *Chaplin - The Musical* (Broadway). Dance: *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland* (Royal Opera House, Covent Garden). Concerts/Events: *The Phantom of the Opera* (Royal Albert Hall); *Blade Runner* (Secret Cinema). Awards: Drama Desk award and Tony award nomination for *Ghost - The Musical*; Drama Desk nomination for *Chaplin*; Obie award and Olivier award nomination for *Brief Encounter*; Olivier award nominations for *Enron* and *Alice's Adventures In Wonderland*.

James Gow / Musician Multi-instrumentalist James has performed extensively across the UK and further afield, particularly as part of a New Orleans style traditional jazz band, playing Sousaphone and Bass. He is currently involved with various bands in the East Kent folk scene, especially as trumpeter for *Cocos Lovers*, as well as a genre-crossing horn led jazz-fusion group, *Blind Thug Orchestra*, in London. A former principal cellist of Kent County Youth Orchestra, James has been a member of the University of London Symphony Orchestra for the past three years. His future interests include exploring the uses of music in education and therapeutic outlets, in particular through improvisation. James has recently graduated with a degree in Music from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. *Brief Encounter* will be his debut with Kneehigh.

Andy Graham / Sound Designer Andy graduated from Mountview Theatre School in 2001 with a BA (Hons) in Technical Theatre. As a sound operator, credits include *The King & I*, *The Full Monty*, *Contact*, *Jerry Springer The Opera* (Olivier Award for Best Sound), *Guys And Dolls* (Olivier Nomination), *The Lord Of The Rings* (Olivier Nomination), *Our House*, *Loserville* and *Once - The Musical*. For Kneehigh, Andy has worked as an operator and Associate Sound Designer on three seasons of *The Asylum*, *Brief Encounter* (UK Tour, USA Tour & Broadway - Tony Nomination for Best Sound), *The Red Shoes* (UK, USA and Australia), *The Wild Bride* (UK, USA and New Zealand), *The King of Prussia*, *Midnight's Pumpkin*, and *Blast!* Solo design work and collaborations include *Oedipussy* for Spymonkey, *Mary Rose* for Dog Orange, *Allegro* for LSMT and *Jekyll and Hyde* for Vienna's English Theatre (Vienna and European Tour). Andy was also a sound operator for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Simon Harvey / Associate Director Simon is a director, performer and producer based in Truro, Cornwall. As Kneehigh's resident Assistant Director his recent work includes *Steptoe and Son*, *The Wild Bride*, *Midnight's Pumpkin*, *The Red Shoes* (National / International tour), *Hansel and Gretel*, *Brief Encounter* (UK / US Tour), *Rapunzel* (UK/US) and *Cymbeline*. Simon has performed in number of Kneehigh shows including *Rambles* (2012) *BLAST* and *The King of Prussia* (Asylum 2010) and *Wagstaffe the Wind up Boy* (2005) and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth*. (2006) Outside of Kneehigh, Simon is the Artistic Director of o-region a theatre and film production company for whom he has directed *Laughing Gas*, *One Darke Night* and *The Dead Monkey*. He also produced and performed in the show *Superstition Mountain*. He also produced the feature films *The Midnight Drives* (wr/ dir: Mark Jenkin) and award winning *Weekend Retreat*. (wr/dr Brett Harvey) .

Annette McLaughlin / Myrtle Training:- London Studio Centre and Meisner Technique with Scott Williams at The Impulse Company. Theatre credits include; Mrs Wormwood in *Matilda The Musical* (Cambridge Theatre), Lady Aletta Carey in *Written on the Heart* (Duchess Theatre and RSC), Mistress Overdone in *Measure for Measure* (RSC), Ilona in *She Loves Me* (Chichester festival theatre), Myrtle in *Brief Encounter* (UK and US Tour, St Ann's Warehouse Brooklyn, and Studio 54 New York) Belinda in *Noises Off* (Birmingham Rep), Velma Kelly in *Chicago* (five times in the West End and 10th Anniversary), Erma in Trevor Nunn's production of *Anything Goes* (National Theatre and West End); Jaquenetta in Trevor Nunn's *Love's Labour's Lost* (National Theatre) Mema in Peter Hall's production of *Lenny*, Betty in *Damn Yankees* (with Jerry Lewis), Babette in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast*, and Tess in *Crazy for You* (All West End), Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Lady Percy in *Henry IV Part 1*, and Tracy Lord in *High Society* (all at Regent's Park Open Air Theatre), Singin' in the Rain (National Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse), *The Women* (The Old Vic), *The Vagina Monologues* (UK Tour), Catherine in *Tomorrow Morning* (New End Theatre), Queen Anne in *5/11* and Hedy La Rue in *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* (TMA award nomination, Chichester Festival Theatre), Baker's Wife in *Into the Woods* (Derby Playhouse), Amanda in Alan Ayckbourn's *Dreams From a Summerhouse* (Newbury Watermill Theatre), Louise in *Horse and Carriage* and Andy in *Stepping Out* (West Yorkshire Playhouse). Television and film credits include *Heartbeat*, *The Frank Skinner Show*, *Legionnaire*, *Lunar IV* and *Law & Order UK*. Cast albums include *Anything Goes* and *Tomorrow Morning*. Concerts include; THE RSC; *A Musical 50 years* (RSC), BBC Proms *Sondheim at 80* (Royal Albert Hall), A Tribute to Trevor Nunn, and a tribute to Cy Coleman (Royal Albert Hall), and the opening of The Welsh Millennium centre.

Neil Murray / Designer For Kneehigh: "Pandora's Box": "Brief Encounter"(Evening Standard, Critics Circle, Outer Critics Circle, Obies, & Olivier Award nomination for Best Design) "Steptoe and Son". For Northern Stage (Associate Director/Designer 1991 – 2012) as Designer including "A Clockwork Orange", "1984", "Wings Of Desire", "Animal Farm", "Homage To Catalonia"(Design selected for inclusion in UK stand at Prague Quadrennial of Scenography in 2007 – subsequently at the V&A); and as Director/Designer including "The Threepenny Opera", "Octopus Hotel", "Carmen", "They Shoot Horses Don't They" (with Emma Rice), "Therese Raquin", "The Tiger's Bride", "The Bloody Chamber". For Dundee Rep (Associate Director/Designer 1980 – 1991) as Director/Designer including "Tis Pity She's A Whore", "Phantom Of The Opera", "Sweeney Todd", "Dracula", "Midsummer Night's Dream", "The Tempest". For Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh. as Designer including "Mary Queen Of Scot's Got

Her Head Chopped Off”, "Mr's Warren's Profession", "Romeo And Juliet", "Vanity Fair", "Copenhagen"; and as Director/Designer "Beauty And The Beast". Other Design includes – "1001 Nights Now", "Wings Of Desire" for Betty Nansen Theatre, Copenhagen. "Tutti Frutti" for National Theatre Scotland. " A Tender Thing " for RSC, "Like Water For Chocolate" for Theatre Sans Frontiers. Neil is currently designing "My Granny Is A Pirate" for New Writing North and "The Threepenny Opera" For Wolsey, Ipswich/Birmingham Rep and Nottingham Playhouse/Co-Prod with Graeae For Spring 2014.

Michelle Nightingale / Laura

Michelle is a vocalist, actress and presenter. A seasoned performer, her experiences range from corporate events to cabaret to roles in a number of television programmes. Last year saw her debut into cabaret with her own show called *A Nightingale sings...* and her first performance with the State Opera Chorus. She has been honoured to have been asked to sing the Australian National Anthem on many occasions over the past 20 years on a local, state, national and international level. This year, Michelle will have her own show in the Adelaide Cabaret Festival and is privileged to be one of only two performers who love locally and is proud to call South Australia home. *Born to Run* is a look at the iconic songs of Bruce Springsteen coupled with the story of an Australian woman. At the young age of 16, Michelle started appearing on television for the ABC's music education program *Here's the Beat*. She has gone on to appear on other TV programs, including *the Music Shop*, *McLeod's Daughters* and as the weather presenter on ABC news. Michelle has also had roles in such films as *Closed for Winter*, *Ten Empty*, *The Boys are Back* and *Tale of Obsession*. Michelle was recently heard as the voice of Claire on the SBS series of *Danger 5*. A teacher for over 20 years, Michelle's experience ranges from directing her own music programme for pre-schoolers to vocal coaching and she is currently the singing tutor at the Flinders University Drama Centre.

Emma Rice / Adaptor/Director Emma is the Joint Artistic Director of Kneehigh. Productions for Kneehigh include: *The Red Shoes*, *The Wooden Frock*, *The Bacchae*, *Tristan & Yseult* (2003-6; UK/US tour 2013/14), *Cymbeline* (in association with the Royal Shakespeare Company), *A Matter of Life and Death* (Royal National Theatre in association with Kneehigh), *Rapunzel* (in association with Battersea Arts Centre), *Brief Encounter* (a David Pugh and Dafydd Rogers Production in association with Kneehigh Theatre); *Don John* (in association with the Royal Shakespeare Company and Bristol Old Vic); *Midnight's Pumpkin*, *The Wild Bride*, *Wah! Wah! Girls* (with Sadler's Wells, Theatre Royal Stratford East for World Stages) and *Steptoe and Son*. Emma's other work includes the West End production of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *Oedipussy* for Spymonkey, and *The Empress* for the RSC.

Malcolm Rippeth / Lighting Designer

Malcolm has been working with Kneehigh since 2002, highlights including *The Wild Bride*, *Nights at the Circus*, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, *Wah! Wah! Girls* and *Tristan & Yseult*. His work in Australia has included tours of *Calendar Girls*, Kneehigh's *The Red Shoes*, Headlong's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* and Dan Daw's *Crush: A Solo*. Other favourite work includes *The Empress* (RSC); *The Dead* (Abbey Theatre Dublin); *Spur of the Moment* (Royal Court); *The Promise* (Donmar); *West Side Story* (Sage Gateshead); *Decade* (Headlong Theatre at St. Katharine Docks); *HMS Pinafore* (Guthrie Theater, Minneapolis); *The Birthday Party* (Manchester Royal Exchange); *London* (Paines Plough); *Stones in his Pockets* (Tricycle); *His Dark Materials* (Birmingham Rep); *Refugee Boy* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *The Bloody*

Chamber (Northern Stage); *Copenhagen* (Edinburgh Royal Lyceum); *La Nuit Intime* (balletLORENT); *Tutti Frutti* (National Theatre of Scotland) and *The Devil Inside Him* (National Theatre Wales). His lighting design for *Brief Encounter* was awarded the whatsonstage.com Theatregoer's Choice Award in London, an OBIE in New York and was nominated for an Outer Critics Circle Award on Broadway.

Jim Sturgeon / Alec Jim trained at RSAMD, graduating in 2003 with a BA in Acting. He then moved to London to pursue his career and has been fortunate enough to have performed in theatres north and south of the border with plays including: *The Mill Lavvies*, *Equus*, *A Christmas Carol* – Dundee Repertory Theatre, *Hansel & Gretel*, *Beauty & The Beast*, *LIAR* – Citizens Theatre, *Betrayal* – Harold Pinter Theatre (London), *Whispering Happiness* – Tristen Bates Theatre (London), *Yellow On The Broom* – Perth Theatre. *Attempts On Her Life* - Tron Theatre. Jim also toured The Highlands and Islands with *A Sheep Called Skye* and appeared in *The Cosmonaut's Last Message To The Girl He Once Loved In The Former Soviet Union* at The BAT Theatre in Berlin. Television credits include *Katie Morag*, *Shetland*, *Hope Springs* and *Tinsel Town*. Film credits include *71* and *All You Need Is Kill*, both of which will be out next year, *The Last Piper*, *Will*, *A Demon Within*, *Spare Change*, *Friendly Fire*, *Night People* and *Afterlife*. Jim is delighted to be performing in such an exciting production with such a talented cast.



Background Information

Brief Encounter: The Film

The film *Brief Encounter*, was written by Noel Coward and premiered in 1944. It was based on a one act play that he had written in 1936 entitled 'Still Life' in which a love affair takes place between two married people.

It is no secret that the story parallels the emotions felt by Coward as a gay man living in Britain in the 1930's. Constrained by the judgemental and prudish society of that era, Coward experienced first-hand the anguish of not being able to love freely.

Most of the filming of 'Brief Encounter' took place at Carnforth railway station in Lancashire. It has been suggested that this location was chosen because of its distance from the South East of England. Britain was still at war and blackouts were necessary and Carnforth was thought to be sufficiently far enough away to receive advanced warning of impending attack, thus giving time to turn out the filming lights.

Coward chose the soundtrack for the film, Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto and David Lean was the director. The two co-stars were Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson. Howard was an unknown actor at the time and was not the first choice for the role. Lean originally wanted Roger Livesey but after seeing Howard in a rough cut of 'The Way to the Stars' he changed his mind. Celia Johnson on the other hand was always the director's choice. It was Celia who needed convincing that the film was for her. She didn't enjoy making films and it wasn't until Coward read the part to her that she wanted to do it.

When the film was first released, it was banned by the censorship board in Ireland who felt it portrayed the adulterers in a sympathetic light. Elsewhere though the film was well received and director David Lean received his first Oscar nomination for his work on 'Brief Encounter'.

Sir Noël Coward

1899 - 1973

Sir Noël Coward, play boy of the West End world, jack of all its entertainment trades and Master of most, was born on 16 December 1899, just before the last Christmas of the 19th century, hence the name Noël. The second son of an unsuccessful piano-tuner-cum-salesman and a doting, dominant mother, he grew up in suburban, lower middleclass South London in what he would later describe as 'genteel poverty'.

When he was ten, his mother answered a Daily Mirror advertisement for 'a star cast of wonder children' to appear in a fantasy play called *The Goldfish* at the Little Theatre. He auditioned successfully, tap dancing violently to a selection of hymns, and within a few weeks was on the stage he seldom left thereafter. Two years later he was Slightly in *Peter Pan* (Kenneth Tynan was to say that he was Wholly in it ever afterwards) and, like his beloved friend and partner Gertrude Lawrence, he then settled through World War I into the life of a fairly successful touring child actor around the British regions: Michael MacLiammoir (then Alfred Willmore and later co-founder of Dublin's Gate Theatre) was another of the 'wonder children' of the time.

In Noël's own view, he was 'when washed and smarmed down a bit, passably attractive; but I was, I believe, one of the worst boy actors ever inflicted on the paying public'. Nevertheless he survived, and by 1917 had already made his first movie, DW Griffith's wartime epic *Hearts of the World*, for which he was paid a pound a day for making up his face bright yellow and wheeling a barrow on location down a street in Worcestershire with Lillian and Dorothy Gish. There followed a brief, uneventful and unhappy spell in the army, for which he was summoned to the Camberwell Swimming Baths for training, another five years in the touring theatre with the occasional very minor West End role, and then an unsuccessful trip to Broadway where he hoped to sell some of the early scripts with which he had already failed to impress London managements.

This plan did not work out too well, not least because nobody had bothered to inform Noël that, in those days before air conditioning, Broadway theatre managements were virtually all closed for the summer. Until taken in by Gabrielle Enthoven, whose theatre collection later became the basis for the Theatre Museum, he was reduced to the prospect of a park bench, but even then Coward's luck did not run out entirely. One evening he was invited to dinner at an apartment up on Riverside Drive by the eccentric actress Laurette Taylor and her husband, the playwright Hartley Manners. After dinner it was the custom of the Taylor clan to play games of charades which grew increasingly acrimonious as the guests began to wish they had never come, let alone joined in;

although countless other theatre writers had been to the parties, it was Noël who first realised there might be a play here, and 80 years later the result can still be seen – 2006's *Hay Fever* with Dame Judi Dench was a resounding hit at the Haymarket.

Then, in 1924 at the tiny Everyman Theatre in Hampstead, one of the very first London fringe theatres, came the overnight success of *The Vortex*, a play about drug addiction written at a time when even alcoholism was scarcely mentioned on the stage. The roughly equal amounts of interest, indignation, admiration and money generated by the play, which Noël had written, directed and starred in and for which he had also helped paint the scenery outside the stage door on Hampstead High Street, meant that at the age of 24 he went from being a mildly unsuccessful playwright, actor and composer to being the hottest theatrical figure in London – a change that came about so fast even he took several months and one nervous breakdown to come to terms with it.

On transfer, *The Vortex* was joined in the West End by *Hay Fever*, *Fallen Angels* and the revue *On with the Dance*, thereby giving Noël a fourhits- in-one-season triumph only rivalled in the 20th-century London theatre by Alan Ayckbourn and Somerset Maugham. But there followed a year of total critical and public reversal, when boos greeted the opening of *Sirocco* and Noël was actually spat upon in the street by disappointed theatregoers, happily not a practice which caught on along Shaftesbury Avenue.

Within the next two years however, as the 1920s ended and the 1930s began, Noël wrote and staged three of his greatest successes – the operetta *Bitter Sweet*, the definitive Cowardly comedy *Private Lives* and the epic *Cavalcade*, so that by 1931 the boy wonder of the 1920s had settled into an altogether more stable pattern of theatrical triumph, one which was best characterised by the partnership he had formed with Gertrude Lawrence. For her he had written *Private Lives*, redolent of Riviera balconies, filled with the potency of cheap music and shot through with the sadness of a couple who could live neither together nor apart, a couple who were in many incidental ways Noël and Gertie themselves. Six years later they played the West End and Broadway together again, though for the last time, in the nine short plays (among them *Red Peppers*, *Shadow Play* and the *Still Life* that became the movie *Brief Encounter*) which made up the three alternating triple bills of *Tonight at 8.30*.

Between those two towering landmarks of their relationship, Coward also found the time to write *Design for Living* for Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the revue *Words and Music* for the producer Charles Cochran, *Conversation Piece* for Yvonne Printemps and soon afterwards *Operette* for Fritzi Massary. 'Throughout the 1930s in fact,' he wrote later, 'I was a highly publicised and irritatingly successful figure, much in demand. The critical laurels that had been so confidently predicted for me in my 20s never

graced my brow, and I was forced to console myself with the bitter palliative of commercial success. Which I enjoyed very much indeed.'

Just before the outbreak of World War II, Coward had been sent to Paris to set up a propaganda operation, and when hostilities broke out he toured the world extensively doing troop shows which incidentally taught him a new art, the one that was to rescue him in Las Vegas and elsewhere when, in the 1950s, theatrical fashion turned against him – that of the solo cabaret concert. By now he had found a place in the sun in Jamaica where he could indulge his late-life love for painting, but his writing output was still prodigious: plays, films, poems, short stories, musicals, even a novel poured out of him, and increasingly he found character-acting roles in movies as varied as *The Italian Job* and *Bunny Lake Is Missing*.

The truth is that, although the theatrical and political world had changed considerably through the century for which he stood as an ineffably English icon, Noël himself changed very little. He just grew increasingly Cowardly, and well into his sixties was ever quick to find new ways to market himself: in 1955 he and Mary Martin starred alone in *Together with Music*, the first-ever live 90-minute colour special on American television.

Noël Coward died, peacefully in Jamaica, on 26 March 1973 but (as John O'Hara said of George Gershwin) I don't have to believe that if I don't want to, and in any case he lives on in constant revival – not only the Haymarket *Hay Fever* but Simon Callow with *Present Laughter* and, at Chichester, several of the plays from *Tonight at 8.30*. It would be difficult if not impossible to summarise his success, the way he caught the mood of the 20th century's successive but often very contrasted decades, the sheer energy of the workaholic output of a man who believed that work was always so much more fun than fun.

I'd be happy to leave the last words though with the man many thought of as Noël's polar opposite, writer of the play which many believed (wrongly, as it turned out) would destroy him, but who in fact was always among his greatest fans. As John Osborne memorably once said, 'The 20th Century would be incomplete without Noël Coward: he was simply a genius, and anyone who cannot see that should kindly leave the stage'.

*Sheridan Morley is drama critic of the Daily Express; he wrote the first Coward biography, *A Talent to Amuse*, and devised the stage show *Noël and Gertie*; he is also a trustee of the Noël Coward Foundation.*

Further information about Noël Coward may be found at www.noelcoward.com

1940's Britain

Brief Encounter provides a great insight into British society, marriage and the role of women in that era. Despite there being a war on, Laura appears to have escaped the hardships of rationing or having to join the war effort, but she is nevertheless a tortured soul. It is clear that Laura's marriage to Fred is a passionless one and that her role as a wife and mother is not fulfilling her. She is however, a typical middle class housewife of the 1940's and in those days, to have an affair was truly scandalous.

In the 1940's women who were married only went out to work if they were poverty stricken or of the right age (20-30) to be conscripted to help with the war effort. Once the war was over they were expected to return to their roles as housewives. It is difficult to imagine now but at that time, women were not welcomed in the workplace and it wasn't until 1946 the post office and civil service allowed women to work for them.

And so, the average housewife's routine revolved around her husband and children and any personal goals she may have she pushed aside in order to carry out what was expected of her as wife and mother.

Laura appears to be relatively content but it is clear that her marriage is more a marriage of convenience than of true love. During her encounters with Alec, she reveals her secret desires and passions, and it is through her attraction to Alec that she reveals her hidden personality.

The British 'stiff upper lip' is brilliantly demonstrated in 'Brief Encounter'. It was a time when emotions were reserved and feelings kept secret so for Laura and Alec to have declared their love for each other was both daring and risky. They both know however that they could not pursue their affair and the guilt that they felt, influenced by society's view of adultery, forced them to go back to their marriages.

Discussing Brief Encounter

These questions may help you to develop a critical mind when viewing a piece of theatre or reading a play.

You could also use them as a starting point for discussion, an essay or a review.

- 1) What does the story of Brief Encounter tell us about marriage in the 1940s?
- 2) How is the sexual tension shown on stage between the two characters of Laura and Alec?
- 3) Compare the courtship of Beryl and Stanley to the affair of Laura and Alec, what are the differences, what are the similarities?
- 4) What does the tide represent?
- 5) How effective is the use of screen projection throughout the play?
- 6) What do the spoof adverts in the interval tell us about how women were viewed at that time?
- 7) What do you notice about the speech patterns and mannerisms of Laura and Alec compared to the other characters in the play? What does this tell us about their social standing?
- 8) What do you think stops Laura from ending her life?
- 9) If Laura and Alec were to have met in today's society what might happen?
- 10) In what way does the writing influence your opinion of the characters?

Further Information

Bailey, Jenna: *Can Any Mother Help Me?* Faber and Faber, London (2012)

When, in 1935, a young woman wrote a letter to the women's magazine "Nursery World" women from all over the country wrote back expressing similar frustrations. This work brings together this collection of personal stories following an extraordinary group of women.

Bettelheim, Bruno: *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* Knopf, New York (1976)

Emma often references this book as a great source of inspiration for her work

The Kneehigh Website

(www.kneehigh.co.uk) Our website has lots of information about past shows, including rehearsal notes, directors' comments, photos and lots more. Kneehigh Friends can access the member's area which contains even more exclusive treats!

The Book

Created for Kneehigh's 30th anniversary, The Book is lovingly researched and beautifully produced, and chronicles three decades of inspiring and groundbreaking work in sections including **Home, Story, Wonder, Love, Bravery, Naughtiness, and Imagine**. It is available to buy on our website, or by calling the office on 01872 267910

Kneehigh Scripts

Brief Encounter Script published by Methuen Drama (www.bloomsbury.com)

The following are available from Oberon Books Ltd (www.oberonbooks.com ;+44 (0)20 7607 3637; info@oberonbooks.com): **Kneehigh's Anthology** - a collection of recent work: **Tristan & Yseult**, **The Bacchae**, **The Wooden Frock & The Red Shoes**; **Hansel & Gretel** – in association with the Bristol Old Vic, written by Carl Grose; **Cymbeline** - produced in association with the Royal Shakespeare Company for the Complete Works Festival; **Rapunzel** - A BAC and Kneehigh Theatre co-production, written by Annie Siddons; **Nights at the Circus** - A Lyric Hammersmith and Bristol Old Vic production in association with Kneehigh.

Useful Links

The Noel Coward Estate: www.noelcoward.com

BBC Radio 4 interviews with Noel Coward:

www.bbc.co.uk/bbcfour/audiointerviews/profilepages/cowardn1.shtml




Kneehigh

15 Walsingham Place, Truro, Cornwall TR1 2RP, UK

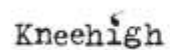
Phone: (+44) 01872 267 910

Email: office@kneehigh.co.uk

Web: www.kneehigh.co.uk

Registered in England Company No. 1792824 VAT Reg. No. 462 9740 23. Kneehigh Theatre is a registered charity (no. 290218) and is supported by Arts Council England and Cornwall County Council

www.kneehigh.co.uk

 Kneehigh



Supported by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**