

AUGUST  
STRINDBERG'S

# THE FATHER

Directed by ABBEY WRIGHT

A new version by LAURIE SLADE



EDUCATION PACK

# THE FATHER

## RESOURCE PACK FOR TEACHERS

### A USER'S GUIDE TO THIS PACK

The resources, research and information in this study pack are intended to enhance our audiences' enjoyment and understanding of *The Father* and enhance the learning of Strindberg's work which can easily be linked to the current syllabuses currently set for AS, A Level and GCSE.

Along with exercises throughout the pack, there are classroom activities containing visual and contextual information and resources that can be used to help build your own lesson plans and schemes of work based on *The Father*. These resources are aimed at anyone with an interest in theatre and literature wishing to gain a deeper understanding of this exciting new production.

This play and the associated classroom and live workshops and exercises will help with the following examinations:

- **AS level drama – Practical performance**
  - Unit 1 – DRAM1 - Live Theatre Production Seen
  - Unit 2 – DRAM2 - Presentation of an Extract from a Play
  - Unit 4 – DRAM4 - Presentation of Devised Drama
- **AQA AS level English – Further reading**
  - Section A - Marxism and Feminism
- **GCSE Drama – Evaluating a theatrical performance**
  - Unit 2 - Evaluation of live theatre

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## THE REACTION TO STRINDBERG



August Strindberg

Strindberg was aware of the literary discussions regarding what constituted naturalism in drama, and particularly the theory of Emile Zola, who was naturalism's chief proponent. Zola felt that the naturalistic playwright should observe life very carefully and render it in a documentary fashion. In creating character, the playwright should be scientific and show that character is determined by heredity and environment. And the playwright should apply understanding of psychology and physiology. Sets and costumes should be realistic. The long expositions and complicated intrigues of romances and the "well-made play" should be avoided. Zola felt that the French drama had not achieved true naturalism, and Strindberg felt challenged to succeed where others had not. Because of blasphemous comments, Strindberg found it hard for his work to be published and produced in Sweden.



Emile Zola

*The Father* had its premiere in Copenhagen in 1887, and was a triumph in Paris in 1894, hailed as the first indisputable victory there for Scandinavian literature! It marked a turning point in the evolution of western drama. Strindberg was ahead of his time, anticipating modern trends in theatre. He dispensed with naturalistic detail and conventional backstories, insisting that the essence of a play lies in the intensity of the action onstage and

the psychological truth and interaction of the characters.

### Strindberg's Legacy

Tennessee Williams, Edward Albee, Maxim Gorky, John Osborne, and Ingmar Bergman are among the many artists who have cited Strindberg as an influence. Eugene O'Neill, upon receiving the Nobel Prize in Literature, dedicated much of his acceptance speech to describing Strindberg's influence on his work, and referred to him as "that greatest genius of all modern dramatists."

A multi-faceted author, Strindberg was often extreme. His novel *The Red Room* (1879) made him famous. His early plays belong to the Naturalistic movement. His works from this time are often compared with the Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen. Strindberg's best-known play from this period is *Miss Julie*. Among his most widely read works is the novel *The People of Hemsö*.

Strindberg wanted to attain what he called "greater Naturalism." He disliked the expository character backgrounds that characterise the work of Henrik Ibsen and rejected the convention of a dramatic "slice of life" because he felt that the resulting plays were mundane and uninteresting. Strindberg felt that true naturalism was a psychological "battle of brains". Two people who hate each other in the immediate moment and strive to drive the other to doom is the type of mental hostility that Strindberg strove to describe. He intended his plays to be impartial and objective, citing a desire to make literature akin to a science.

Following the inner turmoil that he experienced during the "Inferno crisis," he wrote an important book in French, *Inferno* (1896–7) in which he dramatised his experiences. He also exchanged a few cryptic letters with Friedrich Nietzsche.

Strindberg subsequently ended his association with Naturalism and began to produce works informed by Symbolism. He is considered one of the pioneers of the modern European stage and Expressionism. *The Dance of Death*, *A Dream Play*, and *The Ghost Sonata* are well-known plays from this period. His most famous and produced plays are *Master Olof*, *Miss Julie*, and *The Father*.

The Swedish Composer Ture Rangström dedicated his first Symphony, which was finished in 1914, to August Strindberg in *memoriam*.

## EXERCISE: Improvisation of Scenes Relating to the Play

In small groups, create an imaginary scene from the Captain's childhood. Think about how he would have interacted with the Nurse and possible other siblings.

What was he like as a child?

Did he get along with his family?

Were there conflicts between him and the extremely religious Nurse?

What was it like being raised by her?

What do you think it would have been like to grow up in 19th Century Sweden?

## AUGUST STRINDBERG

1849 – 1912

Strindberg made his name as a writer with his novel *The Red Room* (1879), said to be the first modern Swedish novel, and in its time a bestseller. He continued to be a prolific essayist, political commentator and writer of fiction throughout his life. But theatre was a major focus of his irrepressible creative energy. After a disastrous attempt to make a career as an actor, he wrote more than 60 pieces for the stage, redefining the possibilities for European drama in terms of both content and stagecraft.

He was in his late 30's when he came to write *The Father* (1887). Along with *Comrades* (1886), *Creditors* (1888), and *Miss Julie* (1888), *The Father* involved a departure from the historical settings of Strindberg's earlier work. He opted instead for the immediacy of a contemporary setting, focusing with increasing intensity on the destructive power struggles between men and women which love and sex may precipitate. At an intellectual level, *The Father* can be viewed as a variation on the theme of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (1879),

starting from the same premise in terms of a husband and wife locked in a claustrophobic domestic conflict, but moving towards a very different outcome. But Strindberg had already been through that exercise, with his play *Sir Bengt's Wife* (1882). What other motivation did he have for revisiting the subject?

While writing *The Father*, *Creditors* and *Miss Julie*, Strindberg was also writing a novel, *The Confession of a Fool* (1887-89). This was a barely disguised description of the painful disintegration of his relationship with Siri von Essen, whom he had married in 1877. *The Father* reworks themes from *The Confession of a Fool*, particularly the theme of a husband tormented by doubts as to his wife's fidelity. Though less explicitly autobiographical, *The Father* is clearly inspired by the distressing situation Siri and Strindberg were in. This doesn't mean Strindberg was simply venting his angst in *The Father*. He was using his suffering in a truly creative way, to illuminate the wider themes of gender identity and the corrosive effects of bourgeois convention on a natural, loving relationship which he felt compelled to explore in the play.

Siri and Strindberg had been wildly in love when they got together, and determined to achieve a free marriage which honoured their independent spirits. But reality intruded in the shape of their continual struggle to further their careers; crippling financial hardship, the

death of their first child when only a few months old, the birth of 3 more children, Siri's poor health, and the debilitating effect for them all of a life constantly on the move. Then the publication of Strindberg's collection of short stories *Getting Married* resulted in his being charged with blasphemy (1884).

He was a radical and outspoken thinker, so it was probably inevitable he would come into conflict with the establishment of the day. He defended himself

robustly in court, and was acquitted, but he was embittered by the experience and the stress of his trial on both Strindberg and Siri seems to have been the last straw. They lurched through recrimination,



Strindberg in his study, 1903

estrangement and attempts at reconciliation until they separated and were divorced in 1892. Siri returned to Finland, and they never saw each other again. They maintained a desultory correspondence for a while, mostly about money, but in later years they communicated only through their children.

Soon after his break up with Siri, Strindberg married his second wife, Frida Uhl. On their honeymoon Strindberg showed Frida a photo of Siri, which he kept with him. 'She is beautiful,' he said, though the woman Frida saw in the photo was by then thin and careworn and a mere shadow of the beauty Siri once was. During his time with Frida, Strindberg wrote little. Instead, he painted and experimented with photography. Perhaps he needed Frida, more than anything, to help him work through his grief. Frida had a child with Strindberg, but their marriage did not last and they parted amicably after only 4 years together.

Strindberg's third wife, Harriet Bosse was an actress (as Siri had been), and a great inspiration for his writing, which he returned to with renewed energy. In one year alone, 1900-1, he wrote 6 plays for Harriet to appear in (Easter, The Dance of Death II, The Crown Bride, Swanwhite, Kristina and A Dream Play). But that marriage, too, was relatively short-lived.

In his final years Strindberg formed one last attachment, to Fanny Falkner, a teenager 40 years younger than he was. She adored him and he became increasingly infatuated with her, but she resisted his proposals of marriage, and they drifted apart. By then Strindberg was at last free from financial worries, and his reputation as Sweden's greatest writer was secure. When he died in 1912, more than 4,000 people followed his funeral cortege through the streets of Stockholm.

Siri, who never remarried, died only 3 weeks before him. 'Was I in love with Strindberg? My God, how I loved him,' she once said, and it seems for him too there was never really anyone else.

Strindberg called *The Father* 'a tragedy'. The failure of his marriage to Siri inspired this masterpiece, but it was the great tragedy in their lives.



Photomontage of some of the roles Strindberg created, 1908

## THE FATHER

“It is a play that demands complete attention”

New York Times



*The Father* performed at The Intimate Theatre, 1908

NOBODY has been able to report from the front lines of the war between the sexes with the vehemence of August Strindberg, the Swedish writer whose naturalism so shocked Western thinking at the turn of the century. The battle lines are clearly delineated from the opening lines and the action never relents.

The unique power of this play has gained a reputation as a misogynist drama. The challenge is to blow these preconceptions out of the water - Laurie Slade's astounding new version does that. He is exploring the tragedy of a relationship disintegrating, which makes it utterly, vibrantly contemporary. Despite being written over a century ago it has extraordinary resonance now.

Strindberg is exploring marriage as an institution, and the way it can corrupt a natural, loving relationship with the stereotyped roles it creates for husband and wife. Distorting the realities of where the power would lie if society did not dictate on these matters - through law, religion, education, convention and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes.

A book by Eivor Martinus called 'Strindberg and Love', explores Strindberg's relationships with the important

women in his life. It is clear Strindberg was no simple misogynist. He campaigned for equality for women, in all sorts of ways. He adored women, but he was also troubled by them and feared and distrusted them, because of his dependence on them - sexually and emotionally - as many men do. The Roman poet Catullus famously wrote about his feelings for his mistress 'I hate and I love'. That's Strindberg. That's the Captain. And that's Laura.

*The Father* is often compared to *A Doll's House*. Ibsen and Strindberg were archrivals. But *The Father* is something else. Ibsen's Nora walks out on her husband, but Strindberg's Laura tells the Captain that he is the one who must go. It is something which demonstrates how far ahead of his time Strindberg was.

Men and women haven't changed. Relationships haven't changed. The challenges of parenting haven't changed. Elements of our society are

radically different from 1890s' Sweden, but the power struggle that dictates most relationships, and the core of this play, is vital and absolutely current.

### This Production

Returning late, fuelled by party spirits, a recurring argument simmers between Adolf and his wife Laura. By insinuating that her husband might not be the father of their child, a series of events start with an impact that goes further than either could have imagined.

A flirtation with power turns into the brutality of possession, the irreconcilability of broken trust and the question of love. It is a battle of the minds but the real question is - is it a battle either party can win?

### EXERCISE: Discuss

**In a group discuss what changed after the release of the play with theatre styles in Europe. feelings be for each other, and why?**



## CAST AND CHARACTERS

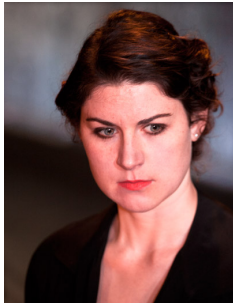


### **THE CAPTAIN** *Alex Ferns*

Christian name, 'Adolf', 'The Captain' is an authority figure, a soldier, a scientist and a rationalist. He's hot-headed emotionally and physically expressive, as opposed to buttoned up. He has a wit throughout, however and can see absurdity of his trajectory and ultimate downfall. He is driven in his work and can be tender, stubborn, sexually passionate, competitive, playful, and capable of causing and enduring great heartbreak.

### **LAURA** *Emily Dobbs*

The wife of the Captain and mother to Bertha. A woman of deep Christian faith, a major point of contention with her free-thinking husband. A bold woman, strong willed and determined, but imprisoned in the conventional role of dutiful wife. Society has given her husband all the cards in terms of economic and political power, but she is psychologically the stronger. An instinctive opportunist who can be a bit prickly, defensive, but with wry humour. She finds in herself a surprising capacity for ruthless action in the interests of her child and for her own survival. In her efforts to prove her husband mad, she resorts to forgery and to misrepresentation of his scientific interests, which in fact she does not understand.



### **BERTHA** *Millie Thew*

13-year-old daughter of Laura and The Captain. A wholesome girl, witty, hopeful, uncorrupted, generous of spirit with a real sense of youthful vitality. Bertha is close to her Father and when they're together she can become quite tomboyish. She's playful, independent, and curious, her eyes and ears are fully open and she's learning about adult things fast. Like any child in a family with warring

parents, she is conflicted as to who is right, and is gradually finding her own way of seeing things.

### **EXERCISE**

**Take the 6 adult characters in pairs and imagine them talking to each other. What would they agree on? What would they disagree on? On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong would their feelings be for each other, and why?**

### **THE PASTOR** *Robert Wilfort*

Laura's brother. A man of faith, a bureaucrat rather than a fighter, pedantic, intelligent, observant, not unkind, but limited by his religious convictions. He uses dogma to keep others at a distance. Unlike his sister, he is judgmental rather than compassionate.

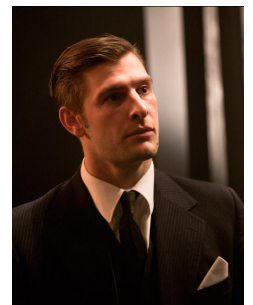


### **THE NURSE** *June Watson*

Margaret is the Captain's old nurse. She is sensible, practical, strong, humorous, big-hearted, trustworthy, but deeply religious. Sure and certain of herself, she has lived a full life and brought up many children, not just her own.

### **THE DOCTOR** *Barnaby Sax*

The Doctor is competent, conscientious and sincere, with an empathetic understanding of humanity. But he has recently been widowed. A lonely man newly arrived in the community, which makes him vulnerable. His journey through the play sees him finding a new strength to assert himself for the sake of what he believes to be right.





**Nojd  
Thomas Coombes**

A young soldier. Attractive, bit of a 'lad'. He behaves like he is 'free' enjoying the escapism and fun of sex - but not the idea of responsibility or potential fatherhood. Un-malicious but irresponsible,

laid back, easy to talk to and carefree - but of all the adults in the play he proves to be the least corruptible.

**EXERCISE**

**Reading the character breakdown, do you recognise these character on stage?**

**Is the casting choices correct?**

**Do you see the character you imagined in this production of the play?**

*“Like Ibsen’s Nora, Laura is unfulfilled as a woman but Strindberg makes his heroine more intelligent and therefore more dangerous. Unlike Nora, however, Laura realises that there can be no life outside marriage for her as long as she has no money of her own. The only way she could survive is with her husband’s income – whether he’s dead or alive. And then the obsession takes hold of her: as a widow she would be free and financially secure.”*

Eivor Martinus – Strindberg and Love

**EXERCISE: Storyboarding**

**Imagine you are adapting this play for the big screen. Sketch a storyboard for one scene. Be prepared to explain your directorial choices.**

## Laurie Slade Talks About Strindberg and *The Father*

The moment I read the play I was struck with how urgently it addressed something that is still very much with us, which is this question: within a conventional middle class marriage, where does the power lie between the husband and the wife? And how does that power struggle work out? In *The Father* it is worked out through the child of the marriage, which is often the flashpoint with any troubled marriage - the parents fight over who 'owns' the children.

It was my friend Joe Harmston who introduced me to *The Father*, which he had been wanting to direct for ages. He invited me to come up with my own version. I used a literal translation by N. Erichsen (1898) as my starting point, and then looked at more recent translations. Convergences between them highlighted what was clear-cut in Strindberg's original, while the differences pointed me to what was more nuanced and elusive, enabling me to find my own line through the play. Then I began making bolder decisions, whether to cut or amplify Strindberg's text, or break up some of the big speeches to give a more conversational flow. I wanted to give Joe and his actors a text which honoured what was essential in Strindberg's original, as I understood it, while creating something fresh and dynamic - a modern play which happens to be set in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. I felt it was true to the spirit of the man to be adventurous.

Joe and I were thrilled when the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry commissioned my script and produced it there in 2012, the centenary of Strindberg's death. They gave us the main stage for what became a spectacular production. Coming to Trafalgar Studios for a fresh production with Jagged Fence, in association with Making Productions, has proved an equally exciting prospect - to see the play come alive in a very different space, a small black box with not much more than a table and two chairs, the sort of space which Strindberg envisaged in his time as representing the future of theatre - and which we take for granted now.

Strindberg made his name as a writer with his novel *The Red Room* (1870), said to be the first modern Swedish novel, and in its time a best-seller. He continued to be

a prolific essayist, political commentator and writer of fiction throughout his life. But theatre was a major focus of his irrepressible creative energy. After a disastrous attempt to make it as an actor, he wrote more than 60 pieces for the stage, redefining the possibilities for European drama in terms of both content and stagecraft. In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in 1936, Eugene O'Neill paid tribute to Strindberg as 'the greatest genius of all modern dramatists.'



Portrait of August Strindberg by Richard Bergh, 1905

Strindberg was in his late 30's when he came to write *The Father* (1887). It was quickly followed by *Creditors* and the evergreen *Miss Julie*, a mainstay of contemporary theatre. In 2012 I counted at least 3 major productions of *Miss Julie* in this country alone!

All three plays involve contemporary settings, focusing on the destructive power struggles between men and women which love and sex may precipitate - but *The Father* is often dismissed as the least of them, a misogynistic rant.

I feel that's a superficial response. Yes, the Captain and Laura hurl a lot of gender-laden abuse at each other, but it cuts both ways and couples going through a marital crisis often do that. Strindberg's real target is middle class marriage as an institution, and the way it can corrupt a natural, loving relationship, with the stereotyped roles it creates for husband and wife, distorting the realities of where the power would lie if society did not dictate on these matters - through law, religion, education, convention and the persistence of patriarchal attitudes.

Researching my version of the play, I read a book by Eivor Martinus called 'Strindberg and Love', about his relationships with the important women in his life. More recently, Sue Prideaux has published her award winning biography of Strindberg. It's clear he was no simple misogynist. He campaigned for equality for women, in all sorts of ways. He adored women, but he also hated them and feared and distrusted them, because of his dependence on them - sexually and emotionally - as many men do.

*The Father* was inspired by the breakdown of Strindberg's first marriage, to Siri von Essen. What had started as a love-match ended in a dismal cycle of recrimination, estrangement, and attempts at reconciliation, until they separated and then divorced. When he saw the first production of *The Father*, Strindberg felt profound regret for having vilified Siri through the character of Laura – as well as concern about the craziness of the Captain, as a reflection of himself.

But these characters have their own lives for us. The Captain is a far cry from Strindberg, and as for Laura – well, she terrifies me, but I'm in awe of her. This apparently conventional middle-class woman is gradually driven by the frustrations of her social situation, the unbearable tensions of her marriage, and protectiveness for her child to reveal herself as a ruthless predator. It's like watching a lioness on the kill. She makes several feints at her prey until she gets it by the jugular – then you're shocked to see this gorgeous, graceful creature has blood on her chops!

I first saw Ibsen's *A Doll's House* 50 years ago. It blew me away. I've never forgotten the impact it had. But *The Father* is something else. Ibsen's Nora walks out on her husband, but Strindberg's Laura tells the Captain that HE is the one who has got to go! How's that for feminine empowerment! Of course it doesn't end there, for Laura. Like the Captain, she is a complex and tragic character.

As Germaine Greer commented in relation to *Creditors*, when it was done at the Donmar a few years ago, in a Strindberg play everyone behaves badly. I love the care with which Strindberg locates the battle between the Captain and Laura in a circle of flawed characters who all have their own trajectories through the play: The Pastor, trying so hard to remain outside the conflict, the Doctor, inevitably drawn into it, the Nurse, whose final betrayal of the Captain's trust remains shocking 130 years after it was written. And I must confess I have a special affection for Nöjd, the orderly. His may be the smallest part in the play, but his peccadillo at the outset proves to be the catalyst for all that follows, he remains a constant presence throughout, and in the end he is the only character who has not been corrupted by his involvement.

Strindberg wrote amazingly well about the relationship of the parents – but when I was working on my version of the play, I felt he understated the position of the child. When the parents argue over the future of the child, at what point should the child have a say? In *The Father* we have Bertha – a young teenager. Nowadays a young teenager would expect to have a major say in her future. Back in the late 19th Century it was different – but I've tried to reflect some of the teenage issues Bertha might have had even then. The vulnerable child, with conflicted loyalties to warring parents, is unhappily a constant.

Strindberg was interested in the psychology of his characters, how they affect each other – how our passions shape our ideas and how both determine the way we experience and act in relation to others. At the heart of the play is the Captain's mental breakdown. Would he be sectioned today? Perhaps temporarily, for safety. But much of what the Captain says when he starts losing it makes sense emotionally, in its own terms. He's communicating his distress powerfully and movingly. A writer's contribution – like that of a therapist – is to engage with that distress and understand it, not pathologise it – so that an audience can understand it too.

The Polish writer Arnold Zweig wrote a beautiful tribute in 1949, for the centenary of Strindberg's birth. Zweig said Strindberg will confront future generations with the question 'For what purpose do you live?', and will give us the courage to find our own answers, as we come away from

the theatre 'full of fire, ready to take up arms against the warping of man by man.'

Strindberg himself never provided easy answers. But for as long as we wrestle with the perennial difficulties of how to reconcile love and sex and gender identity and power-sharing and personal fulfilment and the responsibilities of child-rearing in our intimate relationships, this play will continue to move us with its powerful depiction of what was once a loving marriage coming to grief, and Strindberg will leave us with this challenging thought – have we found a way yet to do it better?



Strindberg as alchemist in the 1906 edition of *Antibarbarus*

## 5 QUESTIONS WITH DIRECTOR ABBEY WRIGHT

### Why did you want to become a director?

First of all I wanted to be an actor or maybe a singer. I went to university to study English and then to drama school to train to be an actor. After University I was living with my parents and working on a farm, and someone gave me an advert for a youth theatre director. I went for the job and got it and worked as a youth theatre director for two years. It was a fantastic experience. We met a few times every week. The kids were amazing, very creative and passionate. We did 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', 'Widows' by Ariel Dorfman and devised and toured a Commedia dell'Arte pantomime. I had no idea what I was doing. We just had fun and made it up as we went along. That gave me my first taste for directing. I enjoyed it. Personally, I found it more creative than acting because you are making a whole thing. I stayed up all night thinking about the props and the music and so on. And I still do now.

### What does theatrical directing entail?

Directing for the theatre can entail all sorts of things. Different directors approach projects in very different ways, I think. It's quite a catch-all role, so you can be a director who is very good at working with people, or choreography, or text work, or creating powerful theatrical moments onstage technically. There are lots of ways in, and ways to create different sorts of good work. For me, the work always starts with the play itself. I read the play and hope the play will tell me what to do. I guess I work quite instinctively. I will get a feeling that pop music might work well in a show or that it would work well in the round and then often, I realise after I have had the feeling, why. And it will always come from the play. Casting is very important and working with a happy and brilliant team - so putting people together is part of the job. Someone once said to me that being a director is a bit like being a host of a long, weird party.



### Why did you choose to direct *The Father*?

I was asked if I wanted to direct *The Father* by Emily Dobbs. And I definitely did! I am drawn to Strindberg and find him terrifying. I think he writes from the unconscious and from a place of being lost, where anything can happen. I think, for Strindberg, the mind is a trap, and we are all trapped in our own way. And that relationships bring pain and claustrophobia - there is no way out. This is a frightening view of the world - but I

think it is essentially true. We are all alone. This version, by Laurie Slade, is very funny. And we have a brilliant cast who can deliver the comedy and pain of the journey. Strindberg's tireless and childlike study of the world and existence fascinates me too. He is heroic in his search for structure and meaning; he brewed gold, recorded his dreams, captured the spirits of the dead in cemeteries, injected apples with morphine to see if they had morphine systems, experimented with electricity, magnetism, the occult - looking to find an answer to the mystery of existence and the nature of the self. He took photographs of the night sky with a camera he had made himself with no lens so that the picture would be truer. The Captain in *The Father* has a similarly searching and exacting imagination. His study of

meteorites seems like a cry of wonder into the void. The play is at once a brutally real and absurdly poetic study of life and destruction.

### Where do you see yourself 5 years from now?

It's hard to answer where you will be in 5 years' time in this line of work because anything can happen. Hopefully still making work that I find exciting, with brilliant people.

### What would you say to anyone who wanted to make a career as a theatre director?

I would say, there isn't any one route to being a theatre director. Some people assist, some people make their own company and work their way up. Most people create work on the fringe on small-scale budgets to begin with. The thing about being a director is that

your work is your audition for more work, so you need to work as much as you can. Also, that way you learn and you grow in confidence and get better. But it's hard to find opportunities when you're starting out and you may find you need to make a lot of these opportunities yourself. You need to find your identity as a director and this can be hard when there are so many practical influences on your work. You should only do work you love. It's a tough career so make sure you really want to do it - otherwise do yourself a favour and do something else. Keep steady. Remember why you want to be a director. Don't get flustered by competition. Keep focused on the work you want to make and remember why you want to be doing it when you're sixty - so make long-term decisions. Enjoy it - and remember how lucky you are to do something so wonderful.

Abbey's most recent production of *Mrs Lowry and Son* was Critics' Choice in The Times and in The Telegraph.

Abbey was Resident Assistant Director at the Donmar Warehouse for 18 months from 2008-09, during which

time she worked with such notable directors as Michael Grandage, Alan Rickman, Jeremy Herrin, Peter Gill, Sean Holmes, Jamie Lloyd and John Tiffany. She was Staff Director to Danny Boyle on *Frankenstein* at The National Theatre 2010/11. Abbey read English at Oxford University and studied Acting at East 15 Acting School.

Recent praise for *Mrs Lowry and Son*:

★★★★ 'Outstanding... sliding from comically mundane chat towards poetic lyricism - develops into a finely detailed, psychologically complex, double-portrait.' Kate Bassett, The Times - Critics' Pick

★★★★ 'Staged by Abbey Wright, this little gem of a play deserves a substantial throng.' Dominic Cavendish, The Telegraph - Critics' Choice

Abbey founded tackroom theatre in 2013 to create new work.

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

## EXERCISE: Hot Seating

**Hot Seating is used as a device to explore a character in more depth by creating past events and events outside of the text. One person chooses to be a character in the play and is asked questions about his or her life outside the text. The person being hot seated must form answers that make sense for the character based on the context of the play. Hot Seat one of the more minor characters like Nojd.**

**What insights does he offer about the other characters and the story? Write a diary entry for the character based on the story that materialises from this exercise.**

*"I read your tragedy twice over with deep emotion; it has astonished me beyond all measure, to come to know a work in which my own conception of love – with war as its means and the deathly hate of the sexes as its fundamental law – is expressed in such a splendid fashion."*

Nietzsche – letter to Strindberg about *The Father* – 27.11.1888

## THE THEATRE: TRAFALGAR STUDIOS

Trafalgar Studios is London's most exciting new venue. Formerly The Whitehall Theatre until 2004, in the heart of the West End, it is a unique development with two intimate and dynamic performance spaces- Studio 1 and Studio 2. Trafalgar Studios prides itself as a starting place for new productions to find their home in London

The original Whitehall Theatre was built on the site of the 17th century Ye Old Ship Tavern designed by Edward A Stone, with interiors in the Art Deco style by Marc-Henri and Laberdet. The theatre opened in 1930.

In 1969 a nude revue called Pyjama Tops took over the venue and remained for five years, after which the building was shuttered. After considerable refurbishment that retained most of its Art Deco features, it reopened on March 5, 1986, with a successful revival of JB Priestley's *When We Are Married*. Subsequent productions enjoyed similar success and most recently the Studios have housed the hugely successful Jamie Lloyd seasons, starring James McAvoy, Martin Freeman and Simon Russell Beale.

### Staging this Production in Studio 2

We will be presenting this exciting new version of Strindberg's masterpiece in the smaller studio space at Trafalgar Studios and have brought together an exceptionally talented, highly experienced creative team. We plan to use this unique performance space to create a dynamic, edgy and intimate experience for the audience.



## DISCUSSION TOPICS

### The play is called *The Father*.

What other titles could describe this play?

Why do you think Strindberg chose the title he did?

### Costumes often make a statement about the characters who wear them.

What do you think the characters would wear in this production and what does this say about the characters?

Follow up activity: after seeing the play – how close were your costume predictions to the ACTUAL costumes used?

### This play presents various opinions about what it is to have a good marriage.

What elements do you think create a 'strong marriage'?

Do you think the Captain and Laura have an opportunity to have a strong marriage?

### Love is a strong theme in this play, although as a pursuit it poses many challenges.

Which character do you think knows the most about how to love?

Do you believe the play has a strong feminist message? If so, do you think it's modern? Old fashioned?

Going down the list of characters, try to determine what each person wants most and fears most. Now describe each character in one word.

# Six questions to **JUNE WATSON**

Winner of the 2014 Clarence Derwent Award for her portrayal of Mammy in *The Cripple of Inishmaan* and Nanny in *Before the Party*, June Watson has graced the boards for over 50 years. With all this stage experience who better to answer these six questions.

## **Do you prefer the term actor or actress?**

Well to be honest I don't mind either way, but 'actor' sounds strange to me because it's quite a new term. When I came into the theatre, actresses were actresses, and actors were actors... but I've got used to it. I don't mind.

## **What has been the biggest change in the industry since you started nearly 60 years ago?**

The biggest change has been the end of the repertory movement in this country. When I came into the theatre, you left drama school and you went into a rep, and you stayed there for several years, playing all sorts of parts. You got a huge amount of experience playing so many different parts and you were allowed to make mistakes by trying all sorts of things before you came into London. When I started in the business, the West End was something you aspired to but it was going to be years away, same as TV (which was just starting). Now people come out of drama school and go straight into the West End or the National Theatre, and a lot of the time they can't be heard vocally because they haven't had enough experience to learn the craft. So that's the biggest change for me - the loss of the rep companies.

## **What has been your biggest career challenge?**

Well, in 1986 a new company was formed called the English Shakespeare Company and I was a founder member. We toured all over the world for around 3 years. During that time I think my biggest challenge was playing Queen Margaret in the Wars of the Roses cycle. When Queen Margaret first appears in *Henry VI*, she is 17, but she ends up in *Richard III* as 'Old Mad Margaret', so that was a huge challenge. By then I was 50 and I had to play from 16 through to 70. It was quite scary. The only person who'd done it before me was Peggy Ashcroft who did it at Stratford!

Queen Margaret, *The Wars of the Roses*, UK, Europe, Australia, Asian & US Tour, Michael Bogdanov

## **If there is one role (male or female) you could play at any point in your career, what would it be?**

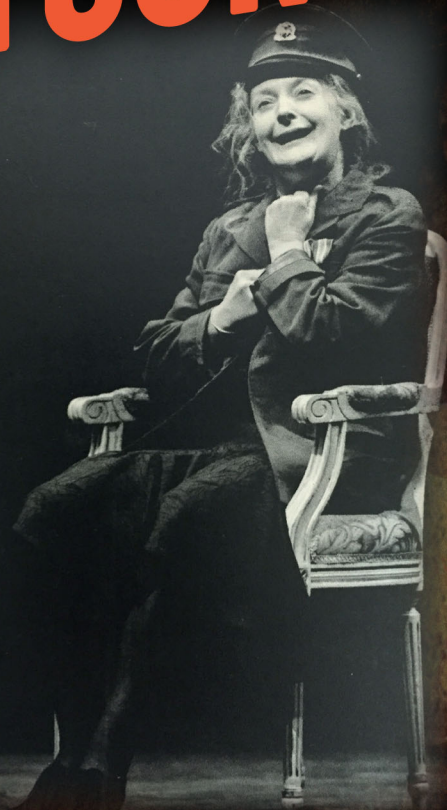
The thing about me is I never played young parts. I was always considered a character actress. As a result I played a lot of parts when I was too young to play them. I'd love to play some of those parts now, as I'm the right age to play them... or perhaps a bit too old now - I've now gone the other way! I would love to play Lady Wishfort in *The Way in the World* now.

## **If you could choose one actor to work opposite, who would it be?**

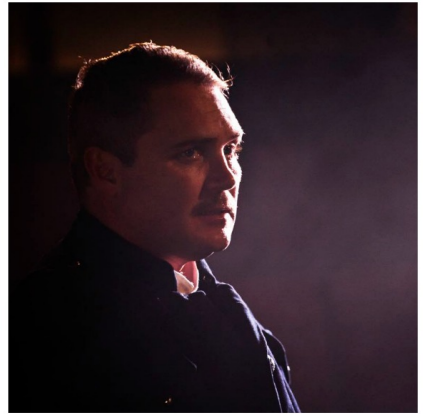
I would have liked to work with Paul Scofield. He was my idol. Oh his voice - he just sounded so sexy! He was so incredibly theatrical and yet so truthful.

## **Any advice to a newbie actor?**

My advice to anyone coming into this business is if you don't want to do it with every fibre of being, don't do it. If you can't take rejection, the knocks, the down times, don't do it. It's the strength of character.



# THE FATHER - PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHY



## LET'S TALK ABOUT THE WOMEN...

Strindberg is often accused of crude misogyny, but his attitude to women was more complex than that. It's true he felt vindictive hatred for women at times, but he also loved and adored and feared and admired them. Three times married, he was never long without a woman in his life. The women who knew him loved him.

*The Father* was inspired by the breakdown of Strindberg's marriage to his wife, Siri. While it is striking depiction of the battle of the sexes, Strindberg's target was not women as such, but the gender stereotyping of a conventional bourgeois marriage, and the corrupting effect this has on what was once a deeply loving relationship.

The play confronts gender inequality in the family and in society, exploring our attitudes toward it and how far we accept it as social construct. Strindberg has written the male protagonist as a dominant man of ideas and intellectualism struggling against the "small and foolish and therefore evil" world of the women, but he has also given us a glimpse of the pomposity and the absurdity of the constructed male world, and the unrealised power of women. Slade's version makes clear that the woman's ruthless fight-back is both understandable and essential, and he underlines the impact of such parental conflicts on a teenage daughter trying to make her own sense of the world.

Domestic Violence to women continues to be tolerated in the UK, demonstrated by the official crime figures that reveal that more than 1.1 million or 7% of women have been victims of some kind of domestic abuse in the past year. Our production will provide the context for a wider engagement with this issue and others raised by this timeless and urgent play, through post show talks, debates and panel discussions.

To extend on this important topic we will be holding three live debates with a panel all experts in their field. The discussion themes will be:

### **Feminism and Fifty Shades of Grey**

How far have women's rights come since the 1880s (when Strindberg was writing) and the 1920s (when this new version of *The Father* is set)? Where does feminism stand in the age of *Fifty Shades of Grey* and *Page 3/No More Page 3*? What do theatre and the arts have to contribute to the debate?

### **Parenting rights: Does mummy or daddy know best?**

In *The Father*, the only way that the mother is able to take control of her life, her family's fortune and her daughter's future is by driving her abusive husband to mental breakdown. Has family law now swung too far in the other direction? What about fathers' rights? Is truly equal parenting ever possible?

### **Women in the arts: What's being done about gender inequality?**

Is enough being done about gender inequality in theatre and the arts? On this year's Stage 100 list, women only accounted for 26% of 'influencers' identified. This caused a flurry of discussion about whether there should be a separate list for women and prompted Stage editor Alistair Smith to write a response, explaining that the list represents how things are currently in the industry not how they should be...

Each panel event will last up to an hour and will start after the evenings performance has finished. You do not need to attend the performance the same evening as the panel, but you will need a valid ticket for an upcoming performance or a ticket stub from a previous performance of *The Father* to be allowed entry to the auditorium and be part of the audience for the panel events. All events are subject to change.

***"It is unlikely that Strindberg intended it as a feminist tract – in fact most people would hold the opposite to be true – but Laura acts in the true spirit of someone who is fighting for her rights and who does not balk at the means to achieve them. She is strong and intelligent and she is a worthy opponent in this battle of brains. She has defeated her husband against all odds. What could she put up against his financial, physical and moral power? Words!"***

Eivor Martinus – Strindberg and Love

The event dates are:

**Monday March 23rd – Feminism and Fifty Shades of Grey**

**Monday March 30th – Parenting rights: Does mummy or daddy know best?**

**Tuesday April 6th – Women in the arts: What's being done about gender inequality?**

Please check the theatre website for all further information on the events. <http://www.atgtickets.com/shows/the-father/trafalgar-studios/>

If you have any questions or would like to register an interest in the panel events please email [darren@makingproductions.com](mailto:darren@makingproductions.com)

All of the post-show Q&A events will start shortly after the evening's performance and will last up to an hour.

NB. These events are free and open to anyone with a valid ticket or ticket stub to any The Father performance, with priority going to patrons attending the performance directly before the Q&A. The Theatre Management reserves the right to refuse attendance. The producers may change details of the events so please keep referring back to the special events page on the booking site for details.

Q&As are produced and chaired by Terri Paddock (@TerriPaddock)

## **THEATRE WORKSHOP ACTIVITY**

### ***Strindberg's 'The Father' and essential elements of play-making***

Linked to a Thursday matinee, we will be hosting a performance-linked workshop at the theatre. This will include a one-hour session pre-show, with follow up after.

In this session Laurie Slade will talk about *The Father* and highlight aspects of it, which in his view illustrate Strindberg's craft as a dramatist. There will be an exercise for participants in which they can improvise a brief scenario bearing in mind the essential elements of a play involving conflict, character, inciting incident, development and resolution, and what is distinctive about theatre as an art form. Sharing the outcomes of the exercise will hopefully be enjoyable and illuminating for all.

After the performance, a feedback session will give participants a chance to share what they thought about the play and discuss what the prior workshop may have contributed to their experience.

Objectives: preparation for seeing the performance to come, gaining experiential awareness of how a play functions as well as what it is about.

### **Thursday March 26th – In session with Laurie Slade**

To find out more details and book a place on this workshop or to create a bespoke workshop at other times or dates please contact Ellen Bott, West End Creative Learning Manager.

#### **Ellen Bott AMBASSADOR THEATRE GROUP**

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# CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

## Letters

This task explores the themes of love and marriage. For some tasks the students are required to write from the perspective of a character from the play.

The following Literacy based activities can be used with your students after seeing the play *'The Father'*.

### Letters to my 'love'

Imagine you are either the Captain or Laura and write three letters to the other – before your marriage, during your marriage and then after your marriage has collapsed.

- How different is the tone in each letter?
- What do you want from the other person?
- Do you still feel the same way?

### Dear Diary – The Captain

Imagine you are the Captain and write a diary entry for the day that Laura tells you that you are not Bertha's father. Be as expressive as you can, bear in mind the Captain's character traits.

- How does this make you feel?
- Can your marriage survive this news?
- Will you be able to forgive Laura?

### Dear Diary – Laura

Imagine you are Laura and write a diary entry for the day you tell your husband he is not Bertha's father. Be as expressive as you can, bear in mind Laura's character traits.

- How does this make you feel?
- Have you done the right thing?
- Do you want to punish the Captain even more?

### Agony Aunt

Imagine you are the Nurse. The Captain needs your advice on his marriage to Laura.

- What would you tell him?
- What sort of questions might he want answered?

### Love and Marriage

Imagine you've been commissioned to write an article for a leading publication about attitudes towards love and marriage in 1921.

- How would you compare your findings to today's ideal of love and marriage?
- Have things changed much between then and now?
- If you could chose which period of time you would like to fall in love and marry, when would it be and why?
- Does marriage alter society or does society alter marriage?

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### The Debate

This activity is designed to get your students debating issues raised by the themes of *'The Father'*. Each student must create a character – this will enable the student to be freer with his or her views that may not be their own.

Start with the following list of issues and then feel free to create your own debate topics with relevance to the themes of the play.

Ask the students to arrange their classroom for a debating session. Then nominate a chairperson/presenter and allow the rest of the class to become the audience and panel experts. The experts need to carry out research to support their argument. The rest of the students form the audience who can be asked for their input.

The topics of the debate are:

- 1) Marriage – Do you believe in it? What are your views on divorce?
- 2) Monogamy – Can we really be happy if we commit to a relationship with just one partner for the rest of our lives?
- 3) Adultery – What do you think about extra-marital affairs?
- 4) Love – Does love conquer all? What would you do for the one you love?
- 5) Sexuality – Does it matter what your sexual preferences are? Should you keep your sexual habits to yourself? When is it ok to have sex?
- 6) Domestic Violence – How far is psychological abuse tolerated and excused in relationships? What is its lasting impact and is it as damaging as physical abuse?
- 7) Feminism – what is feminism? Does it apply to women only? Can men be feminists?

#### Setting up the Debate

It is important to give the students the responsibility for setting up the room as they wish it to be. This will give them ownership of the debate and encourage them to engage. Once the room is organised, introduce each topic for debate.

It is important to stress that you will need people to take on opposing points of view in order to make the debate fair. Asking the students to do this will encourage them to consider other points of view and will help keep them engaged.

#### Let the Debate Begin

Try as best you can to allow the students to manage their own debate but be on hand if it gets personal! Again, be clear when the debate is over and make sure that everyone comes out of role. Add to your list of issues for debate after you have seen the show.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Improvisation & Character Work

The teacher will place signs around the room, each with a main character's name on it.

Ask each student to choose a main character to portray.

In their portrayals, they should think about these things:

- How does their character walk?
- What gestures do they make?
- How does he/she feel emotionally?
- What is his/her focus?
- How would they interact with other characters?

Have one student volunteer to be the observer. The observer will watch the actors and try to distinguish which character each student is portraying.

Have your students walk around the open space as their character. One by one, the observer will tap each student's shoulder and put each student in one of the 7 groups based on which character the observer believes they are playing.

At the end, see if everyone is in the right group. Talk about what movements, gestures, pace, and stance gave clues to the characters. You can repeat this exercise again as much as you'd like with different observers.

#### Further Improvisation

Break the class up into groups of between 3-5 students. Give them 10 minutes to decide what are the main five points or events in the story. The group will create tableau pictures (frozen poses that tell a story) to represent each of their main points. Have one person narrate the caption of each tableau like a living picture book. Have each group take turns with their tableau story and watch each group in turn as they quickly go from one frame to the next, freezing only ten seconds or so between each to let the audience see. This exercise quickly lets us all discuss what we think are the main events or plot points in the play.

#### Exercise: Silent Soliloquy

**A soliloquy is like a monologue in that only one character is speaking. However, it is not directed toward another character. It is the character's inner dialogue (performed aloud) as he is talking to himself about his own thoughts and feelings. For this exercise, choose a character in the play who is present for much of a scene but says very little. Then, write a soliloquy for that character, expressing what he or she is thinking and feeling during that scene. Some interesting choices may be the Doctor, the Pastor and Nojd.**

**For this exercise, you may want to assume the characters can hear/see more of the action than they appear to.**

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Discussing ‘*The Father*’

The following activity is designed to help students develop a critical mind when viewing a piece of theatre or reading a play.

The following questions can be used as a starting point for discussion, an essay or a review.

- What does this translation of *The Father* tell us about marriage in the 1920s?
- How is the sexual tension shown on stage between the two characters of Laura and the Captain?
- What does the fire represent?
- How effective is the use of the sound and lighting throughout the play?
- Was the staging correct to the manner you envisioned after reading the play?
- What do you feel about how women were viewed at that time?
- What do you notice about the speech patterns and mannerisms of Laura and the Captain compared to the other characters in the play?
- What does this tell us about their social standing?
- What do you think will happen to Laura now that the Captain has died?
- If Laura and the Captain were to have met in today’s society what might happen?
- In what ways does the writing influence your opinion of the characters?
- Could the play be set later than 1921? If not, why?

### Exercise: Contemporary Adaptation

*The Father* has been translated and adapted many times in many countries and time periods. This version by Laurie is set in the 1920s when many changes were taking place in society.

Working in groups of 3-5 students, allow them to decide on a contemporary location for this adaptation. Then, choose one scene to rewrite in their contemporary setting. They should use Laurie’s language as a base and create set and costume sketches to create a mini production. If sketches are beyond their skill level, have them cut out outfits, prop options, and furniture from fashion and design magazines or print outs from the internet.

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### What to look out for when studying a play

#### The Staging

Is the staging:

Naturalistic?

Stylised?

Colourful?

Atmospheric?

Simple?

Complex?

Did it add to (or detract from) the atmosphere?

If so, how?

Was the set in any way surprising?

If so, in what way?

Were the actors always on the stage areas?



#### Costume

Were the costumes:

Period?

Colourful?

What sort of fabrics?

Any specific details?

Did the colours/styles add to the effect of the set?

If so, in what way?

#### Sound

Was there music?

Other sounds?

How was sound used?

Did it heighten atmosphere or impact?

How? When? Give a couple of examples.

#### Lighting

Was the lighting:

Natural or dramatic?

(Bright / dim / use of colour / use of other lighting devices)

At what moments did lighting add impact to the action?

#### Characters / Characterisations

Who were the characters?

Who were the main characters?

Who were the incidental / less important characters?

Were the characters believable?

Which of them was strong/weak?

Did any of them have a specific accent?

Did each character respond well using body language?

Were their voices heard?

#### Units of Action

Moments of impact?

What are your most memorable moments?

Did you engage with the themes of the play?

#### Dialogue

Was it:

Naturalistic?

Stylised?

Formal or informal?

There are many different registers an actor can use in English. Which were used in this production?

Was vocabulary understandable?

Give **examples** of dialogue that stood out for you.

#### Pacing and Timing

Where there many fast or slow-moving sequences?



Were there times when the action was slowed down or speeded up?

Why do you think this was?

What was the effect?

Describe the sequence first.

#### Directors Decisions

Was the:

Casting correct?

Use of text how you would have directed it?

Would you have changed any of the actors around?

Who would be your idea casting for this play?

#### Special Effects

During the play was there:

Smoke, wind, use of gauzes, flying harness, back projection?

How were they used?

Did they add to the tension in the play?

Were they used appropriately?



## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY

### Popular Theatre Vocabulary

**Acting:**

Creating an illusion with behavior attributed to a particular character, project by voice and movement to an audience.

**Black-box theatre:**

A flexible room for theater performances where the audience seating and playing areas can be rearranged in any way that suits the needs of the individual production

**Blocking:**

The movement of the actors onstage, emphasis placed on stage movement, which is either overseen or dictated by the director.

**Characterisation:**

A representation of a character's qualities or peculiarities through dialogue, gesture, movement, costume and makeup

**Cross:**

The movement of an actor from one position on the stage to another.

**Critic:**

Someone whose verbalised responses to the play or script are thought to enrich the experience for others. The response can take the form of newspaper articles, television reviews, or public talks.

**Director:**

In modern theatre, the major interpretive figure, the artistic visionary whose job it is to bring to life the playwright's script. The director's primary objective is to provide artistic meaning to the theatre experience. The director might have a number of professional assistants to work with them: casting director, movement coach, speech consultant (vocal coach).

**Dramaturg:**

A member of a theatre company who acts as a script consultant on a production. He/she is a sort of reader-cum-literary editor to a permanent theatrical company; his/her prime responsibility is the selection of plays for production, working with authors (when necessary) on the revisions and adaptation of their texts, and writing program notes, etc., for the company. During the production

process, he/she works with the director to clarify background detail and interpretation of the script.

**Fourth Wall:**

The imaginary wall filling in the proscenium arch through which the audience can see in and observe the action.

**House Lights:**

The lights that illuminate the auditorium of a theatre; all the lights in the auditorium except the "exit" lights. These lights usually dim and are controlled from the light booth.

**Melodrama:**

A suspenseful, plot-oriented drama featuring all-good heroes, all-bad villains, simplistic and naturalistic dialogue, soaring moral conclusions, and bravura acting. Only when taken to extreme is melodrama laughable. Mysteries and problem plays are two types of drama that fall under this category.

**Monologue:**

Uninterrupted speech delivered by one character in a play, most often to express their thoughts aloud to other characters who are at least present, if not listening.

**Motivation:**

The reason behind an actor speaking a line or making a movement.

**Naturalism:**

A type of theatre performed in the late 19th and early 20th century that revolted against artificialness of acting and playscripts and showed man in all his flaws.

**Soliloquy:**

Unlike a monologue, a soliloquy is not directed at another character. They are the inner thoughts of a character spoken alone on stage to explore the character's private thoughts; often lyric in style and highly emotional.

**Thrust stage:**

A wraparound theatre space where the stage extends out into the audience and the spectators view the action from three sides. The main

advantage to this setup is that more of the audience can be closer to the actors. Scenically, it can be less expensive to mount a theatre piece on a thrust stage than on a proscenium stage.

**Vaudeville:**

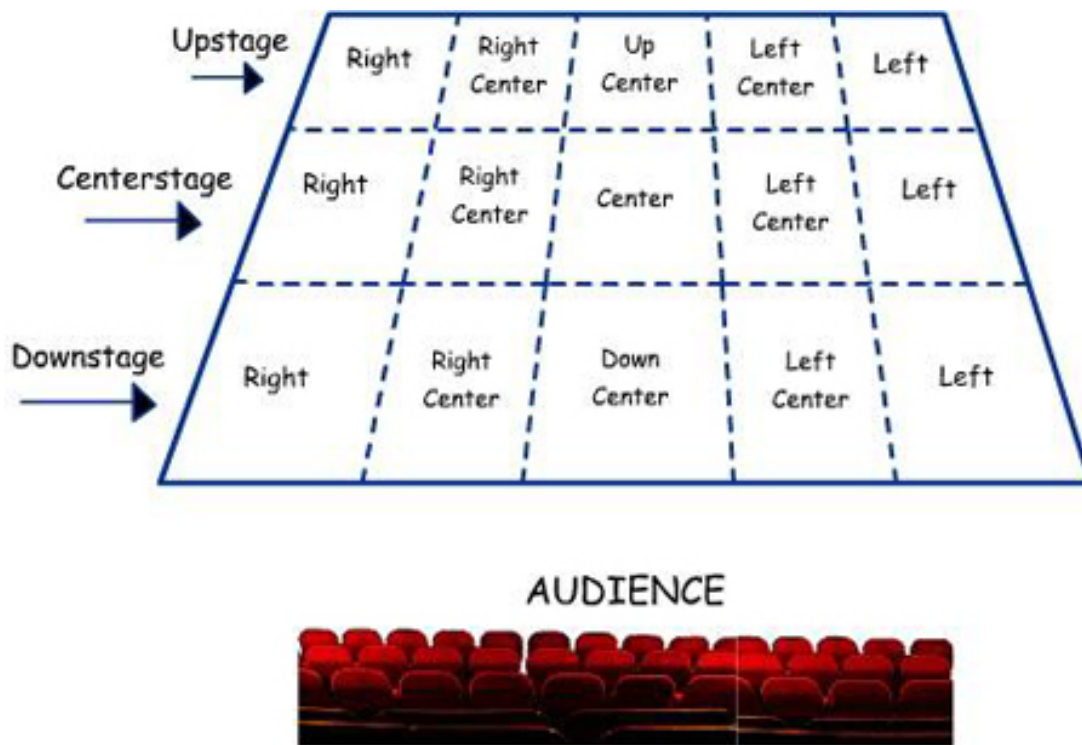
A collection of variety acts also featuring sketches and short plays in which leading actors performed.

Is a production technique where a voice of an unseen narrator is used in a radio, television production, filmmaking, theatre, or other presentations. The voice-over may be spoken by someone who appears elsewhere in the production or by a specialist voice actor.

**Wings:**

Offstage to the right and left of the acting area.

**Voice-over:**



MAKING  
PRODUCTIONS

  
jagged fence