

Director's Notes

Notes from Peter Whelan's preface to the play

"As a child, I was fascinated by a fuzzy snapshot of my mother taken in the first world war. It was the time she volunteered as a female lumberjack . I could hardly credit it. A less likely feller of trees than my mother I couldn't imagine, yet there she was, leaning in a very posed, dewy-eyed Edwardian fashion on the upturned handle of a full blooded woodsman's axe, somewhere in the home counties . . . a million miles from the Salford street she grew up in (an exact twin of (Coronation Street, now bulldozed away forever).

*I suppose what I couldn't believe was that my mother as I knew her then . . . stout, middle-aged and living entirely for her family . . . had ever experienced such release. Doors had once been opened and then slammed shut, as they had been for millions of young women in that war. And through the doors they had glimpsed tantalising freedoms as well as unimaginable horrors. Then I read Martin Middlebrook's *The First Day On The Somme*, a pulverising account of Britain's awakening to machine-age violence.*

One short paragraph stayed in my mind. It concerned the town of Accrington, Lancashire which had raised its own battalion, 'The Accrington Pals', for Kitchener's New Army. After the Somme battle, Middlebrook tells us how the towns-people, driven desperate by rumours of disaster and angered by ludicrously optimistic reports in the press, surrounded the Mayor's house to demand the truth.

For me this was like looking through a pin-hole into the past and finding a whole vista of humanity revealed in a very unexpected way. These mothers, wives, daughters and lovers of the Pals didn't knuckle under sheepishly to authority in the way I had supposed. They realised perfectly well that there was an 'us and them' situation with regard to war information. Soldiers and sailors on leave contradicted the official hand-outs. Those women resented government secrecy then as we do today — and suspected, as we do, that much of it was a cover-up for blundering at the top."

This was Peter Whelan's starting point for 'Accrington Pals'. Mine was talking to my 92 year old mother of her memories of WWII. Of the changes to her city, her life and her perception of life in general. Also cycling down the Foleshill Road on the night of the 14th November whilst German bombers flew overhead raining down incendiaries on the city centre.

Makes you stop and think!

I hope the play grips you as much as it has us over the past 6 weeks and perhaps allows us an opportunity to look at the changes that have been made to our society and people right down to the individual — just trying to survive!

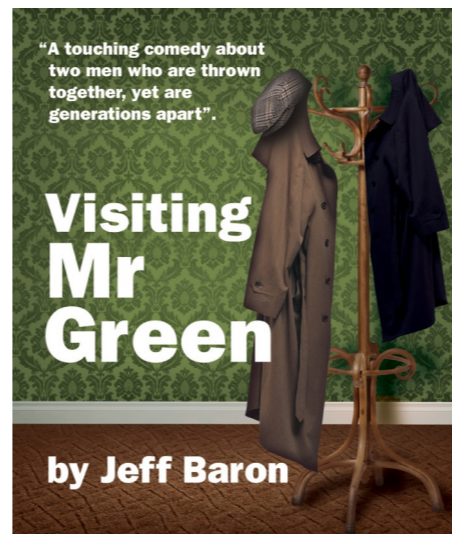
Pete Bagley (Director)



www.criteriontheatre.co.uk



Coming Next



by Jeff Baron

20th - 27th October 2012

Mr Green, an elderly, retired dry cleaner, wanders into New York traffic and is almost hit by a car driven by Ross Gardiner, a corporate executive. The young man is given a community service of helping the recent widower once a week for six months. What starts as a comedy about two men who do not want to be in the same room together becomes a gripping and moving drama as they get know each other, come to care about each other, and open old wounds they've been nursing for years.

Visiting Mr. Green has played in 40 countries, 23 languages and more than 400 separate productions over the last decade and has won numerous awards throughout the world.

No photography or videoing allowed.



The Criterion is a non-smoking theatre.

"A poignant tale of community spirit and comradeship as seen through the eyes of the men fighting at the Front and the women they left behind".

The Accrington Pals

by Peter Whelan

Patrons should be aware that there will be strobe lighting during this performance.

Programme

By arrangement with Samuel French Ltd

The Accrington Pals



ANNE-MARIE GREENE

Anne-marie made her Criterion debut performance in 2005 in another Pete Bagley production - 'The Darling Buds of May', and she has appeared most recently as HMQ in Alan Bennett's 'A Question of Attribution' (Single Spies) earlier this year. While her character in the Accrington Pals comes from the other end of the spectrum as far as social class goes, she is arguably the queen of her own little kingdom. Playing May Hassell has been an immense privilege and she has thoroughly enjoyed working behind her fruit and veg cart, wearing a selection of shawls and doing her best to master those Lancashire vowels.



JOE FALLOWELL

Following the success of 2010's Not About Heroes in which he played Wilfred Owen, Joe was only too eager to get back into uniform and back to the trenches, so was pleased to be cast in The Accrington Pals, which is an experience he has thoroughly enjoyed. Other recent outings upon the Criterion stage include Guys and Dolls and Arabian Nights.



CALUM SPEED

Calum first appeared at the Criterion in Great Expectations and has since taken many starring roles including Jerry in Zoo Story and the King in Arabian Nights. Most recently Calum could be seen as Tibalt in Rugby Theatres Romeo and Juliet, which was taken to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre as part of the Open Stages. After Accrington Pals Calum will be leaving The Criterion to attend Rose Bruford College of Theatre and Performance.



LUCY HAYTON

Lucy spent over 10 years at David Eden Theatre Company, performing in shows and showcases. Before leaving for London she briefly joined the Criterion and took the role of Lucy in Threepenny Opera at the Loft. After completing her degree in Theatre Arts at Goldsmiths she spent several years in London pursuing her career and further study. Since returning to the Criterion last year she has performed in Guys and Dolls and the Cripple of Inishmaan.



SARA FARMANFARMAI

Sara was awarded an Oscar at the age of three, by her father after making an almighty scene when she didn't get her way. After maturing (a little) she decided theatre was the way to go and joined the Criterion in 2009. Since then she has performed in Whipping it Up, Arabian Nights, Guys and Dolls and is a member of the thriving publicity team.

MAY, a stallholder

TOM, an apprentice

RALPH, a clerk

EVA, a mill girl

SARAH, a married mill worker

BERTHA, a mill girl

ANNIE, a housewife

ARTHUR, her husband

REGGIE, her son

C.S.M. RIVERS

ANNE MARIE GREENE

JOE FALLOWELL

CALUM SPEED

LUCY HAYTON

SARA FARMANFARMAI

SARAH MCDONAGH

GENNIE HOLMES

MICHAEL HAMMOND

PETE MEREDITH

NICK KNIBB



SARAH MCDONAGH

Sarah first started out as part of the Criterion theatre youth group, and is now studying drama at university. Sarah first performed on stage here in 2008, this will now be her sixth performance here.



GENEVIEVE HOLMES

Gennie has been an active member of the Criterion since she was 13. In the many years since then she has put her hand to most things. Some of the highlights have been playing Fanny Squeers in the epic that was Nicholas Nickleby, Mother Peter in Once A Catholic, directing Life X 3, Punk Rock and anything to do with the Youth Theatre, but mainly it's been making some jolly good friends and having a fantastic time.



MICHAEL HAMMOND

Michael first performed at The Criterion in the 1996 production of A Christmas Carol. Various productions followed. Michaels' favourites include; Snoopy the Musical, Nicolas Nickleby, Oh What a Lovely War and Speaking in Tongues. Work commitments meant a break from 'treading the boards', but studying for a BSc. Degree in Occupational Therapy at Coventry University means a welcome return; most recently appearing in Guys and Dolls. Michael can also often be found serving behind the bar at The Criterion.



PETE MEREDITH

Pete has been involved with the theatre for three years but has only become involved on stage recently. He has just completed an acting diploma from Stratford College where he achieved straight distinctions. He is looking forward to spending more time at the theatre in his year out.



NICK KNIBBS

This is Nick's first performance at the Criterion and he's pleased to make the step from audience member to stage. His last performance in uniform was as a Captain in 'Russian in the Woods' at the Loft a number of years ago, but he's more than happy with the change in rank to Company Sergeant Major for this production

The action takes place in Accrington, a training camp in Wales and the Somme between Autumn 1914 and July 1916.

There will be one interval of 15 minutes.

Director: Pete Bagley
 Prompter: Shirley Jobson
 Set Designer: Pete Bagley
 Set Builders: Simon Sharp, Kevin Woods, Francis Dixon, Judy Sharp, Mike Tooley, Terry Rahilly
 Set Painters: Judy Talbot, Doreen Belton, Louise Bagley, Marian McGlone, Carol Mead
 Stage Manager: Olivia Holmes
 Assistant Stage Manager: Becky Cribdon, Ben Lancashire
 Props: Susan Schweitzer, Sue Hadlum
 Costume: Maureen Liggins, Pam Coleman, Candy Waddell
 Lighting Design: Ian Knight
 Sound Design: Becky Bartlett
 Projection Manager: Karl Stafford

Thanks to: The Earlsdon Cobbler, John Simpson and the Accrington Community History Library, Malcolm Cooper