BREAKING DAY

A passion play
By Les Ellison

DIGITAL PROGRAMME
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As day begins to break on Good Friday, the occupying Governor’s tenuous grip on authority is slipping. It’s festival time in Jerusalem but his wife is plagued with disturbing dreams. Amid the demands of the Sanhedrin and the murderous cries of the mob, the lines between personal and political in Pilate’s house start to blur. The teacher at the centre of it all remains silent.

Confused by the hopes and fears of her people, a Jewish servant in the Praetorium clearly knows more than she should. Pilate wrestles with a quandary of his own devising, while outside momentum is gathering – the power of the Capitol in tension with the will of the people.

Created during the lockdowns of early 2021, Breaking Day is a virtual passion play, filmed and edited remotely, which speaks right to the heart of Easter in our modern world. With start intimacy, it casts a surprising light on the death of Jesus from inside the Governor’s household, immersing us in the decisions that led to crucifixion.
CLAUDIA PROCULA | GRACE COOKEY-GAM

Grace Cookey-Gam is delighted to be working with Riding Lights, having been inspired to start training as a professional actor by their 2011 Summer School!

Since graduating in 2013, theatre credits include: Richard III, Romeo & Juliet (Shakespeare’s Rose Theatre, Blenheim Palace); Othello, Macbeth (Lyric Hammersmith & HOME); Kiss of the Spiderwoman (Menier Chocolate Factory); Di & Viv & Rose (Stephen Joseph Theatre/New Vic); #Hashtag Lightie (Arcola).

Television & Film includes: Soulmates (AMC), Dawn (Hulu/ MGM), Tyrant (Fox), Saved (ITV), Justice League (Warner Bros).

For BBC Radio: Things Fall Apart. She has also been a reader for Words and Music.

Grace is also a singer, with a music degree from Birmingham University and a background in arts education. She is represented by Rebecca Singer Management.

HANNAH | RACHEL HAMMOND

Rachel graduated from Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts in 2018, where she trained as an Actor Musician. She first worked with Riding Lights in Autumn 2018, touring the libraries of York as Smidge in Surprise Ending.

Other credits include: Swallows and Amazons (York Theatre Royal); Much Ado About Nothing (Northern Broadsides); Babe, the Sheep-Pig (Mercury Theatre, Colchester); A Christmas Carol (TNT Theatre); Macbeth (Wilton’s Music Hall); On Hope: A Digital Song Cycle (The Other Palace); Hear No evil (Prodigy Film Festival).

Theatre at Mountview includes: Rita O’Grady in Made in Dagenham, Luce in The Comedy of Errors, and Hermione in The Winters Tale.

PONTIUS PILATE | TOM PETERS

Tom trained at The Rose Bruford College in Sidcup. He has worked mainly in theatre and the odd commercial. In ‘normal’ times, he also busks on the London Underground. Tom has worked with Riding Lights for many years, touring The Narrow Road in 2010 and performing in The Winter’s Tale in 2012, The Alchemist in 2014, and as part of the Living Stones trips to Israel and Palestine.

He’s hugely grateful to be a part of Breaking Day, during strange times for all involved in the arts!
CREATIVES

LES ELLISON | WRITER

The product of a long association with Riding Lights Summer Theatre Schools, credits for Riding Lights include Saving Grace, Redemption Song and co-authorship of Crosslight together with sketches for Add Drama to Christmas and the company’s Living Stones tours of the Holy Land. Published work includes Red Star – The Yuri Gagarin Story, Sacred Spaces – Short Plays for The Church Year, a modern re working of Everyman and The Dark before the Dawn for RADIUS, Away From The Manger for Moorleys, Utter Garbage and Space Junk environmental plays for children for Samuel French.

PAUL BURBRIDGE | DIRECTOR

Paul is the Artistic Director of Riding Lights. He has directed a number of passion plays for the Company, including Inheritance, Redemption Song and Crosslight (co-written with Les Ellison and available on DVD and download). In 2012, he also co-directed the acclaimed 2012 York Mystery Plays with a 500 strong cast. Other recent directing includes the satirical show Baked Alaska, calling for urgent action on climate change, All’s Well That Ends Well, The Alchemist (Belgrade Coventry), Simeon’s Watch and The Selfish Giant. Projects in development include a one-act play about Artificial Intelligence and My Place, Bridget Foreman’s new play to be produced in partnership with the fostering and adoption charity Home for Good.

ERIN BURBRIDGE | ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Erin is a Creative Associate of Riding Lights and directed The Narrow Road in 2019 & 2020. She trained at the University of York in Theatre: Writing, Directing, and Performance. In 2017, she directed An Italian Straw Hat at university and in 2018, Sandi Toksvig’s Bully Boy for York’s inaugural Venture Fest. Erin has worked as a stage manager for York Theatre Royal’s TakeOver Festival and Hull Truck Theatre’s Ugly Duckling, Jack Lear and Peter Pan. For Riding Lights, she has performed in Roughshod: irRESISTible and The Kaleidoscope Tour, and was the movement director for numerous Roughshod tours.
SEAN CAVANAGH | DESIGNER

Sean trained under Ralph Koltai at the Central School of Art and Design. He is a long-standing Associate Director of Riding Lights for which he has designed many productions, including the acclaimed Riding Lights 2012 production of *The York Mystery Plays* and most recently *All’s Well That Ends Well* and *Surprise Ending*. London credits include *The Tempest, The Mikado, The Aspern Papers, Sherlock Holmes - The Musical, Of Mice and Men, Treasure Island, Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, The Rat Pack - Live from Las Vegas, Dancing in the Streets, Dreamboats and Petticoats, The Trial of Jane Fonda and The Rubenstein Kiss.*

PATRICK BURBRIDGE | COMPOSER & SOUND DESIGNER

Patrick trained as an actor-musician at Rose Bruford College. As composer and sound designer for Riding Lights, credits include *The Selfish Giant, All’s Well That Ends Well, Surprise Ending, GospelSTREET, A Yorkshire Christmas, Where Adventure Begins and The People’s Passion*. Other credits include *Clay Fever* for York Theatre Royal and *Taro’r Bar* for S4C. As an actor-musician, credits include *Dreamboats and Petticoats* (UK Tour), *Save The Last Dance For Me* (UK Tour), *Fantastic Mr Fox* (Nuffield Theatre Southampton/Curve Leicester), *Creedence Clearwater Reimagined* (Maple Tree Production), *Godspell* (Queen’s Theatre Hornchurch), *The Selfish Giant* (Riding Lights Theatre Company – Tour & Film).

Patrick also spent four years touring internationally as one quarter of 1950’s style rock and roll band The Bluejays. Patrick’s time with the band saw him record 2 albums and perform with artists such as Brian May. He is now a founding member and lead guitarist of The Boulevards – a brand new 1950’s rock and roll band.

JARED MORE | EDITOR

2020 was a strange year to be a theatre company. For us, the first casualty was 2020’s national tour of Passion Play *The Narrow Road*, cut short after just one dress rehearsal-cum-performance. However by the end of the year, after months of Zoom and furlough and staring at our own walls, we were able to take all the seats out of our theatre and use the space as a studio to make a film of the previous year’s Christmas tour – *The Selfish Giant*.

Buoyed by its success, as the new year arrived, we were ready to make another theatre-on-film offering, this time another Passion Play for Easter. With a script by Les Ellison, we assembled a creative team to come to York and make the show in the studio. Pre-production was halted, however, by the announcement of the early 2021 lockdown. With our three actors stranded across London, and the production team similarly spread out across England and Wales, it seemed we were altogether snookered.

But, if nothing else, the previous year had been full of creative solutions to seemingly impossible problems. Okay, so we couldn’t bring the actors to the studio... But what if we sent the studio to the actors? After some hurried screen tests, we hired three identical Go-Pro cameras and sent them to our actors, along with costume, props, microphones, lights and greenscreens. We rehearsed over Zoom, with directors Paul and Erin sculpting the story and drawing out the characters. We had to adapt the script slightly as we went to
fit the new medium, but soon it was time for Lights, Cameras, Action!

The cast – Grace, Rachel and Tom – did a spectacular job, despite being in a church hall, a spare bedroom and a shed, respectively. They not only delivered powerful and nuanced performances without being able to play off one another in the usual way, they also acted as their own crew, operating lights, camera, sound kit, and managing make-up, props and costume. In rehearsal the actors were able to see each other’s performances but once the cameras were rolling they could only hear one another, with some scenes actually being filmed over the phone due to Wi-Fi issues. The iconic shots of overflowing wine were the only ones shot in York - we thought asking Rachel to ruin her carpet might be a bridge too far!

After a whirlwind six days of filming, it was time to edit. All the footage and sound was sent out by internet transfer and, over the next couple of weeks, was cut together into the narrative of the film. Then, while Pat edited the sound in London, the green backdrops were keyed out and the CG backgrounds, created by designer Sean Cavanagh, were dropped in behind by editor Jared. The whole film was colour-graded for that eerie early morning feeling, and Pat’s score was added along with the finished sound design.

Ongoing restrictions meant we couldn’t roll out the red carpet, but the cast and crew gathered on Zoom after the virtual premiere and to breathe a collective sigh of relief and satisfaction that we had pulled off this mad-cap, skin-of-the-teeth theatrical experiment.

*Breaking Day* is a product of a very strange time, created in a crucible of circumstances we hope never to live through again. The story it tells, however, is timeless. A story of sacrifice, betrayal, upheaval, and grace, and the film remains a powerful testament to this Easter story.
WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED THIS PRODUCTION! If you'd like to know more, there are a number of ways you can get involved and support our company.

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MAKE A ONE OFF DONATION and contribute to our projects. Your donation could pay for a place at our annual summer theatre school, or towards our Youth Theatre for those with additional learning needs, or fund one of our tours up and down the country, or vital prison work.

Contact Us
01904 655317
info@rltc.org

Erin Burbridge | Creative Associate
Jared More | Creative Associate
Ruth Gould | Tour Booker
Rachel Sanders | Tour Administrator
Chloe Oldroyd | Office Apprentice

Riding Lights, Friargate Theatre, Lower Friargate, York, YO1 9SL. Registered charity no. 1070142