

September-December 2022 season at the Finborough Theatre

The first London production since 1926

DISTINGUISHED VILLA

by Kate O'Brien.

Directed by Hugh Fraser.

Designed by Mim Houghton.

Presented by Andrew Maunder in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre.

"I seem to be hurrying always, hurrying through things that must be done so as to get back to something – something that isn't there."

In a production commissioned by the Finborough Theatre, Kate O'Brien's ground-breaking 1926 drama *Distinguished Villa* opens at the Finborough Theatre for a four week limited season on Tuesday, 6 September 2022 (**Press Nights: Thursday, 8 September 2022 and Friday, 9 September 2022 at 7.30pm**).

Brixton, 1926.

Mabel Hemworth rules her home and husband with a rod of iron. She expects others to follow her 'nice' example of domestic life. But this rule-bound world is turned upside down by the arrival of Frances, a new lodger who holds modern views about what life can offer. And Mabel's own sister, the mercenary Gwen, a typist obsessed with the cinema, has her own plans to escape.

Independence, romance and a life beyond stifling suburbia beckon. The consequences will be life-changing for everyone...

Both a humorous study of suburban manners and a serious look at the limits placed on young women in the roaring twenties, *Distinguished Villa* was the debut play of the distinguished Irish writer, **Kate O'Brien**, now rediscovered for a contemporary audience. When it premiered in the West End in 1926, the play was a hit despite being censored for its outspoken views.

Playwright **Kate O'Brien** (1897-1974) was working as a secretary in London when *Distinguished Villa* was first staged in 1926. It was the start of an immensely successful career as a playwright, novelist and travel writer which lasted fifty years. Born in Limerick City in 1897, O'Brien wrote other plays including *The Silver Roan*, *The Bridge* and *Set in Platinum*, but was best known as a writer of fiction. Her novel *Without My Cloak* (1931) won the 1931 James Tait Black Prize. It was followed by *The Ante-Room* (1934), *Mary Lavelle* (1936), *The Land of Spices* (1941), *That Lady* (1946) and *Music and Splendour* (1958). Following the pattern set in *Distinguished Villa*, O'Brien dealt with issues of female identity and empowerment, often in a subversive way. It is no coincidence that when in the film *Brief Encounter* (1945) Celia Johnson's stifled middle-class housewife visits a library to choose a book, she asks for 'the new Kate O'Brien'. The rebellious element to O'Brien's work is also apparent in the way she explored gay themes, something which led to some of her novels being banned in both Ireland and Spain.

Director **Hugh Fraser** has directed *Tiger Tail* (Drum Theatre, Plymouth), David Mamet's adaptation of *Uncle Vanya* (Wilton's Music Hall) and *Hamlet* (Royal Academy of Dramatic Art). He is best known as an actor, including playing

PRESS INFORMATION

Captain Hastings in the television series *Agatha Christie's Poirot*, as well as extensive credits across theatre, film and television. Theatre as an actor includes *Cloud Nine*, *Traps* and *The Genius* (Royal Court Theatre), *Filumena* (Lyric Theatre), *Teeth 'n' Smiles* (Wyndham's Theatre) and many roles with the Royal Shakespeare Company. Film includes *Patriot Games*, *The Draughtsman's Contract*, *101 Dalmatians*, *Firefox* and *The Man in the Iron Mask*. Television includes *Sharpe*, *Edge of Darkness*, *Edward and Mrs Simpson* and *The Insurance Man*.

Producer **Andrew Maunder's** productions at the Finborough include the world premiere of Robert Graves' *But it Still Goes On* and the first London production since 1944 of St John Ervine's *Jane Clegg*. He also teaches at the University of Hertfordshire. He is the author of *British Theatre and the Great War 1914-1919* (2016), *R.C. Sherriff's Journey's End, A Guide* (2017) and *Enid Blyton. A Literary Life* (2021).

The press on the original production of *Distinguished Villa*

"A masterpiece." *Saturday Review*

"Irish girl typist's play a London hit; Kate O'Brien, author of *Distinguished Villa*, is likely to share fame with Sean O'Casey." *New York Times*

"With quiet, assured mastery of her material...Miss O'Brien makes *Distinguished Villa* a very distinguished play." *The Graphic*

"In the new play...which has brought fame in a night to its young author...theatre goers are provided with a slice of life in the suburbs at first hand." *The Gentlewoman*

"An attempt to give dramatic shape to what is, on the English stage at any rate, new material." *Irish Independent*

"Sordid only in the sense that *Juno and the Paycock* is sordid." *Gloucester Citizen*

"In Miss O'Brien we obviously have a new dramatist of some value." *The Guardian*

"Miss Kate O'Brien's fine play." *Daily News*

"A strong play by a new Irish dramatist, Kate O'Brien." *Tatler*

"Kate O'Brien's clever play of suburban life." *Westminster Gazette*

"The cruelest people in the world are often those who best know their duty. Miss Kate O'Brien realizes this and in *Distinguished Villa*... she has given a delicate study in restrained cruelty." *Daily Herald*

The press on the Finborough Theatre's production of *Jane Clegg*

"It hasn't been seen in London for 75 years but audiences at the Finborough Theatre are being thrilled by its compelling storytelling in a sizzling revival." ★★★★★ *Stage Review*.

"A first class production of a well-made play which thoroughly deserves rediscovery." ★★★★★ *UK Theatre Web*.

"Suffrage-era gem shines again." ★★★ Michael Billington, *The Guardian*.

"This production shines with high values from the start." ★★★★★ *UK Theatre Web*.

"Thanks to the Finborough's excellent new production, it certainly won't be another 75-years until we see this important work again." ★★★★★ *The Reviews Hub*.

"A belter of a play...a still relevant, terrifically watchable and ultimately poignant drama." ★★★★★ *Act Drop*.

COVID SAFE

As one of the most intimate theatre venues in London, we are taking every possible precaution to ensure the safety of performers, staff, and audience members during the current pandemic.

Audience members may be temperature-checked upon their arrival at the theatre, and masks are strongly recommended at all times, including during the performance.

In order to ensure that the Finborough Theatre is still accessible for those who are CEV (Clinically Extremely Vulnerable) or those who would just prefer it, **all Sunday matinee performances are Covid Pass Sundays when we will ask for proof of vaccination as well as mask wearing.**

We have reduced our audience capacity to 85% and adjusted our ticket prices to reflect this. We have been reviewing these protocols every month and will lift them as soon as it is safe to do so. For full information, please see our website.

PRESS NIGHTS: THURSDAY, 8 SEPTEMBER 2022 AND FRIDAY, 9 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 7.30PM

PHOTOCALL: TUESDAY, 6 SEPTEMBER 2022 AT 1.00PM-1.30PM

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

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Registered in England and Wales as a company limited by guarantee, no. 3448268.

Registered Charity no. 1071304. Registered address: 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED. A member of the Independent Theatre Council.

PRESS INFORMATION

Book online at www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Box Office 020 7244 7439

No booking fees

Tuesday, 6 September – Saturday, 1 October 2022

Tuesday to Saturday evenings at 7.30pm. Saturday and Sunday matinees at 3.00pm.

Prices until 18 September 2022 – Tickets £20, £18 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £18 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £20 all seats. Previews (6 and 7 September) £15 all seats.

£10 tickets for Under 30s for performances from Tuesday to Sunday of the first week when booked online only.

£15 tickets for residents of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on Saturday, 10 October 2022 at 7.30pm when booked online only.

Prices from 20 September 2022 – Tickets £23, £20 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £20 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £23 all seats.

Group Bookings for all performances – 1 free ticket in every 10 purchased.

Performance Length: Approximately two hours with one interval of fifteen minutes.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Matilda Russell on e-mail press@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or **07384 379624**

Download press releases and images at <http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk/press-resources.php>

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