

FINBOROUGH | THEATRE

VIBRANT **NEW WRITING** | UNIQUE **REDISCOVERIES**

Spring Season – March–May 2016

The London premiere

MERIT

by Alexandra Wood.

Directed by Tom Littler. Designed by Phil Lindley. Sound by Max Pappenheim. Lighting by Rob Mills.

Presented by Laughton Productions in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre.

Cast: Karen Ascoe. Ellie Turner.

"A rapacious banker, corrupt, corrupting, you thought he would steal my soul."

The Finborough Theatre's Spring Season opens with the London premiere of award-winning playwright Alexandra Wood's startling new play, ***Merit***, which opens at the Finborough Theatre for a four week limited season on Tuesday, 1 March 2016 (**Press Nights: Thursday, 3 March 2016 and Friday, 4 March 2016 at 7.30pm**).

Spain, 2013. Against all odds, young graduate Sofia has got a job as PA to one of the wealthiest bankers in the country. Sofia's mother questions whether she gave more than just a good interview to get it...

In these times of financial chaos, the bankers are getting filthy rich whilst others are left unable to support their families. A storm is brewing, people are desperate – just what will they be driven to? Suicide? Murder?

In a subtle game of cat and mouse, split loyalties and questionable morals, Alexandra Wood's thrilling new play looks at the complexities of a mother daughter relationship and, in the growing argument between rich and poor, the girl who is stuck in between.

First seen at the Theatre Royal Plymouth where it opened on 29 January 2015, ***Merit*** now receives its London premiere.

Playwright **Alexandra Wood's** previous plays include *The Human Ear* (Paines Plough and UK tour), *Man to Man* (Wales Millennium Centre), *Ages* (Old Vic New Voices), *The Initiate* (Paines Plough – winner of a Scotsman Fringe First), *The Empty Quarter* (Hampstead Theatre), *The Centre* (Islington Community Theatre), an adaptation of Jung Chang's *Wild Swans* (The Young Vic and American Repertory Theater), *The Lion's Mouth* (Rough Cuts at the Royal Court Theatre), *The Eleventh Capital* (Royal Court Theatre) and the radio play *Twelve Years* (BBC Radio 4). She has written short plays for the Royal Court Theatre, the Oxford School of Drama, Rose Bruford College, Dry Write, Nabokov, Curious Directive and she contributed to *Decade* (Headlong). She is a past winner of the George Devine Award for Most Promising Playwright and was the Big Room Playwright-in-Residence at Paines Plough in 2013. She was formerly Literary Manager at the Finborough Theatre.

Director **Tom Littler** returns to the Finborough Theatre to direct *Merit* having achieved a record seven OffWestEnd Award nominations last year for his production of *Martine* by Jean-Jacques Bernard. Other productions at the Finborough Theatre include *Jingo: A Farce of War* by Charles Wood and a season of rediscoveries comprising *The Boatswain's Mate* by Ethel Smyth, *The Mollusc* by H.H. Davies and *The Confidential Clerk* by T.S. Eliot. Tom is Artistic Director of Primavera and Associate Director of Theatre503. Productions for Primavera include *First Episode* (Jermyn Street Theatre and Oxford), *The Living Room*, *Bloody Poetry*, *Anyone Can Whistle* (Jermyn Street Theatre), *Saturday Night* (Arts Theatre), *Origin of the Species* (Arcola Theatre), the premiere of *Shiverman* and European premiere of *Madagascar* (Theatre503), *Antigone* (Southwark Playhouse) and two seasons of *Forgotten Classics* staged readings (King's Head Theatre). Recent directing includes *Measure for Measure* (Cambridge Arts Theatre), the premiere of *Dances of Death* (Gate Theatre), *Good Grief* (Theatre Royal Bath and Tour), *The Glass Menagerie*, *Other Desert Cities*, *Strangers on a Train* (English Theatre, Frankfurt), *Absurd Person Singular* (The Mill at Sonning), *Dear Liar* (Vienna's English Theatre), *The Wind in the Willows*,

118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone 020 7244 7439 e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk
www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk Artistic Director Neil McPherson

Press Information

As You Like It, *Twelfth Night* (Guildford Shakespeare Company), *As You Like It* (Creation Theatre), *Tomfoolery* (UK Tour), *A Little Night Music* (Menier Chocolate Factory and Central Theatre, Budapest), *Murder in the Cathedral* (Oxford Playhouse), *The Twelve-Pound Look*, *Mr and Mrs Nobody* and *One for the Road* (Frinton Summer Theatre). Tom was educated at Oxford University and is studying for a Masters with the Open University. As an Assistant Director, he has worked in the West End and regionally for directors including Laurence Boswell, Peter Gill, Peter Hall, Alan Strachan and Stephen Unwin. He was Associate Director of The Peter Hall Company for three years, and worked four times as Trevor Nunn's Associate Director. Tom's work has been nominated and shortlisted multiple times for OffWestEnd Awards and has received numerous Critics' Choice Awards.

The cast is:

Karen Ascoe | Patricia

Productions at the Finborough Theatre include *Laburnum Grove*.

Trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, where she won the Carleton Hobbs Award.

Theatre includes *Strangers on a Train* (English Theatre, Frankfurt), *Ashes to Ashes* (Emporium, Brighton), the title role in *Jackie The Musical* (Gardyne Theatre, Dundee), *Mansfield Park* (Theatre Royal, Bury St. Edmunds, and Tour), *How The Other Half Loves* (The Mill at Sonning), *Season's Greetings* (Theatre Royal Bath), *Footloose* (National Tour), *Peter Pan* (Kensington Gardens), *Artefacts* (Bush Theatre and Off Broadway), *The Years Between* (Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond), *The Letter* (Wyndham's Theatre), *Anna Karenina*, *After Mrs. Rochester* (Shared Experience at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, National and International Tours), *Ivanov*, *Much Ado About Nothing* (Strand Theatre), *A Shayna Maidel* (Ambassadors Theatre), *Three Viewings* (New End Theatre, Hampstead), the jazz-theatre piece *Out There* (Riverside Studios), *Adam Bede*, *The Case Of Rebellious Susan* (Orange Tree Theatre, Richmond), *Twelfth Night*, *Rookery Nook* (Mercury Theatre, Colchester), *Perfect Days*, *Extremities* (Derby Playhouse), *Loot*, *Glass Menagerie* (Swan Theatre, Worcester), *Taking Steps* and *If I Were You* (The Mill at Sonning).

Film includes *Paper Mask*, *Loaf and Daisy*.

Television includes *Drifters*, *My Mad Fat Diary*, *Cuckoo*, *W1A*, *Emmerdale*, *Peep Show*, *The Taking of Prince Harry*, *Casualty*, *Doctors*, *Trinity*, *The Bill*, *EastEnders*, *The Armando Iannucci Shows*, *Kid in the Corner*, *Armadillo* and *The Buccaneers*.

Radio includes *Tartuffe*, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Tempest*.

Ellie Turner | Sofia

Productions at the Finborough Theatre include *Hindle Wakes* – for which she received an Ian Charleson Award commendation – and *Drama at Inish*.

Theatre includes *Nordost* (Salisbury Playhouse and Theatre Royal Bath), *The Cherry Orchard*, *Hamlet* (National Theatre), *An Ideal Husband* (English Theatre, Frankfurt), *Bloody Poetry* (White Bear Theatre), *The School of Wives* for which she also received an Ian Charleson Award commendation (Upstairs at the Gatehouse), *Oliver Twist* (Riverside Studios and National Tour), *Avocado* (King's Head Theatre), *La Ronde* (Riverside Studios), *The Lodger* (Arcola Theatre), *Alphabetical Order* (The Mill at Sonning), *The Playboy of the Western* (Riverside Studios and National Tour) and *Henry V* (Riverside Studios and National Tour).

Film includes *The Three of Us*, *Silence*, *Mother No More*, *Black Cab* – for which she received Best Actress in a short film at The Golden Egg Awards, New York City – and *TV Audioville*.

Television includes *Misfits*.

The Press on Alexandra Wood's *Merit*

"Gripping... the moral questions raised...deliver a punch in the age of austerity" *The Guardian*

"An intense episodic 80 minutes of relationships laid bare" *WhatsOnStage*

"Sharp, sardonic wit" *British Theatre Guide*

"A thought-provoking examination of the true cost of decisions made by the men in suits" *Western Morning News*

The Press on Alexandra Wood's *The Eleventh Capital*

"An astonishing talent" Lyn Gardner, *The Guardian*

"This is a play in which every word counts...I long to see what Alexandra Wood will come up with next." Charles Spencer, *The Telegraph*

The Press on Director Tom Littler

"Tom Littler's production of this intimate 1922 drama by Jean-Jacques Bernard is so erotically intense that it's almost dizzying." □ □ □ Four Stars, Sam Marlowe, *The Times* on *Martine*

"Exquisite poignancy...Tom Littler and Primavera's production does rich justice to the play's still, sad music."

□ □ □ Four Stars, Michael Billington, *The Guardian* on *Martine*

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"How stimulating it is to see such directorial invention." □ □ □ **Four Stars**, Fiona Mountford, *Evening Standard* on *Antigone*

"A single false note would ruin everything, but Littler's production has a miraculous assurance." □ □ □ **Five Stars**, Jane Shilling, *Daily Telegraph Critics' Choice* on *Dances of Death*

"Tom Littler's production is detailed and intelligent...." □ □ □ **Four Stars**, Henry Hitchings, *Evening Standard* Critic's Choice on *The Living Room*

"Tom Littler's riveting production..." □ □ □ **Four Stars**, Michael Coveney, *WhatsOnStage* on *The Living Room*

"Tom Littler's lucid production ... is extraordinarily moving. Littler responds to the writing's richness with a production of succulent density ... A work of intricate imagination, immaculately delivered." □ □ □ **Four Stars**, Sam Marlowe, *The Times* on *Origin of the Species*

"Tom Littler's fine, detailed production ensures you hang on every word." □ □ □ **Four Stars**, Charles Spencer, *Daily Telegraph* on *Madagascar*

PRESS NIGHTS: THURSDAY, 3 MARCH 2016 AND FRIDAY, 4 MARCH 2016 AT 7.30PM

PHOTOCALL: TUESDAY, 1 MARCH 2016 AT 1.00PM-1.30PM

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

Box Office 0844 847 1652 Book online at www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Tuesday, 1 March – Saturday, 26 March 2016

Tuesday to Saturday evenings at 7.30pm. Sunday matinees at 3.00pm. Saturday matinees at 3.00pm (from 12 March 2016).

Prices until 13 March 2016 – Tickets £16, £14 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £14 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £16 all seats. Previews (1 and 2 March) £12 all seats.

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

£12 tickets for residents of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea on Saturday, 5 March 2016 when booked online only.

Prices from 15 March 2016 – Tickets £18, £16 concessions, except Tuesday evenings £16 all seats, and Friday and Saturday evenings £18 all seats.

Performance Length: Approximately 80 minutes with no interval.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact

Neil McPherson on e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or **07977 173135**

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

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