PROGRESS
THEATRE

**27 – 30 September 2023**
www.progresstheatre.co.uk

# 17th Annual WriteFest

Progress New Writing Festival
Six short plays by local writers

# Welcome to Progress!

## Founded in 1946, we're the oldest producing theatre in Reading.

A self-governing, self-funding theatre group, run entirely by volunteers. We are members of the Little Theatre Guild and the National Operatic and Dramatic Association, and are a registered charity in England (no. 1182798). Our patron is Sir Kenneth Branagh.

LITTLE THEATRE GUILD

noda
Be inspired by amateur theatre

## The artwork on display in the foyer was created by Frances Lewis

Frances has always loved colour, pattern and texture, experimenting with different media. Since retiring from primary school teaching she has had more time to develop her skills in many areas but lately focuses on painting and printing. Her work is very varied, reflecting her interest in trying new techniques. She continues to learn from many talented people which she finds interesting and exciting. All her work is unique, only the Lino cuts are repeatable but will never be identical. Wanting to keep her work affordable, most of her frames are from charity shops.

frances.j.lewis@gmail.com

# 10 Shows per year

We put together a varied and challenging programme of shows every season, including our traditional Open Air Shakespeare production at Reading Abbey Ruins each Summer.

We also host regular 'Jazz at Progress' evenings, in association with Jazz in Reading.

# An Intimate Venue

Our intimate 96 seat venue has a fully licensed bar. There is wheelchair access and a hearing loop, and we are committed to making further improvements in the coming years to make our building more accessible.

# Youth Theatre

We have a vibrant and happy Youth Theatre, split into 4 groups by age. Regular workshops involve theatre games, improvisations and skills development. Youth Theatre shows are often challenging and always performed to a high standard. Many past members maintain an interest in theatre and numerous aspects of performance art as adults, some of them professionally!

# Award Winners

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

In June 2020, we were very honoured to receive the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service.

This award is equivalent to an MBE (Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire), and is the highest award given to volunteer groups across the UK, to recognise outstanding work done in their own communities.

# War Games

## by Liz Carroll

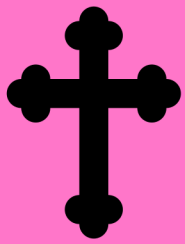
### Directed by Matthew Beswick

**Tom - Laurence McNaughton** **Emily - Pixie Nash**

When the call out was made that WriteFest was looking for directors I emailed and signed up straight away. My previous directing endeavour was *Angels in America Part I* and *Part II* last year. After such a huge production, I was keen to do something much smaller and more intimate. Liz Carroll's *War Games* fit my needs perfectly.

It is a two-hander and an intimate portrayal of what it was like to experience World War II as children when your innocence lends a sense of fearlessness, and what happens when those childish traits meet some of the hard realities of war. It has been a joy to direct with two talented and switched-on cast members portraying multiple roles at the drop of a hat, sometimes literally.

# The Execution Chamber



by Arthur Burke

Directed by Tom Ripper

**Priest - Paul Gallantry**

**Man - Neil Padgen**

**Executioner - Flora Paulo**

**Doctor - Emma Kellow**

I knew it would be an interesting challenge to unpack The Execution Chamber's peculiar sense of humour. Each character disintegrates from artificial characterisation to full naturalism as the play approaches total collapse, and the actors are required to act both against and through the fourth wall, giving three distinct performance styles each. I took early inspiration from other media in conceiving the tone, from the bland sincerity of American reality television to characterisation shifts in David Cronenberg's eXistenZ. I am proud to have worked with a cast of such varied experience and high ability, and the result is very much a collaboration of ideas about how to achieve the drama. And thank you to the writer; my cast and I have had many laughs with your wonderful experiment!

# The Debt

by Liz Carroll

Directed by Aidan Moran

**Brenda Sharpe - Ali Carroll** **Sgt. Wainwright - Pixie Nash**

*The Debt* is a wonderfully written play exploring how one person deals with grief, intimidation and injustice whilst being presented in a funny and engaging way. We have had a lot of fun at rehearsals looking into these characters' past histories and learning how they have arrived at this point in their lives.

Knowing who these people are and what motivates them is essential for such a short piece. I was very fortunate to have two amazing actors who were happy to experiment with the characters and their backgrounds, ultimately discovering the people you will see on stage tonight.

# Lump

by Melanie Roan

Directed by Ali Howarth

**Woman - Emily Browne  Lump - Paul Gittus**

**All other roles - Juliet England and Declan Gray**

I was immediately drawn to this play when considering which one I would like to direct. In theatre one of the most effective ways to touch an audience is to first make it laugh. *Lump* is the real-life experience of its author. Like so many others, Melanie was shocked to find herself facing her own mortality. *Lump* is her wonderfully creative coping mechanism.

Horrified that her healthy lifestyle has still led to a cancerous lump in her breast, a woman confronts her lump.  She finds ways to cope with her trauma by talking to 'it' and together they ponder - should she fight it? Or should she follow the advice of her meditation for cancer app and make friends with it?

# Scotty

## by Phillip Mannion

## Directed by Ali Carroll

**Fancy - Freddie Meader** **Kit - Paul Gallantry**

**Waitress - Donna Collins**

I love WriteFest with all its opportunities for playwrights, directors, cast and crew and am always excited to be involved. When I put myself forward to direct, *Scotty* appealed to me. Someone once said of me: "She's not afraid of a challenge, is she?" and I think it was that part of me that drew me to directing *Scotty*. Since starting work on it I have continued to love its challenges: combining the Shakespearean and modern feel; managing the language; teasing out the meaning. But I have also grown to love other elements: lots of humour with real laugh out loud moments; touches of pathos; age old themes love, rejection, addiction, mental illness. It is also a joy to have a cast eager to explore all these elements and to bring all their talent and enthusiasm to developing this fun and intriguing piece.

# Pie

by Adam Wells

Directed by Imogen Lilley

Mentor - Liz Carroll

**Chef - Damien Passmore** **Steward - Imogen Haley**

**Sommelier - Juliet England**

Loosely based on one of Shakespeare's greatest tragedies *Titus Andronicus*, *Pie* follows the unlikely pairing of an impassioned Chef and nervous Steward as they take on the gruesome task of baking human remains into a pie. Despite its morbid narrative, *Pie* is a deeply satirical piece that intertwines gore with comedy to explore the highs and lows of working in hospitality. I was immediately drawn to *Pie* for several reasons: I was fascinated by the evolving and dynamic relationship between the Chef and Steward, the witty word play and the logistical challenge of baking people into a pie onstage. I feel extremely fortunate to have such a wonderful, hard working and collaborative cast. They have been so passionate and dedicated to the whole process. Thank you also to the amazing Liz Carroll who has been such a supportive and insightful mentor.

# Production Team

| | |
|---|---|
| **Producers** | Sam Bessant, Jo Metcalf |
| **Producers' Mentor** | Chris Moran |
| **Stage Managers** | Millie Charlesworth, Amy Talbut |
| **ASM & Stage Managers' Mentor** | Alex McCubbin |
| **Compere** | Tony Travis |
| **Lighting Design & Operation** | Arlo Haigh |
| **Lighting Mentors** | Lawrence Bird, Steph Dewar |
| **Sound Design & Operation** | Lauren Boys |
| **Sound Mentor** | Tom Ripper |
| **Set Build & Painting** | Aidan Moran, Cast & Crew |
| **Costume** | Wendy Hobson, Cast & Crew |
| **Props** | Shannon Martindale, Cast & Crew |
| **Photography** | Emily Goode, Aidan Moran |
| **Filming** | Aidan Moran |
| **Marketing** | Ken Deeks, Cast & Crew |

**WE THANK YOU TO:**

- not smoke
- keep the aisles of the auditorium clear at all times
- not take photos or recordings of the performance
- turn off your mobile devices during the performance

# Biographies

**Samantha Bessant -** Producer

While this is Sam's first foray into producing, she's no stranger to Progress Theatre and has been a member for well over ten years. You may have spotted Sam playing the wonderfully awful Paige in *Dinner* earlier this year, or in previous productions such as *Liars' Teeth*, *Steel Magnolias*, *Teechers* and previous WriteFest productions. Co-producing has certainly been a learning curve for Sam but this year's line-up of plays is fantastic and she's really looking forward to seeing them come to life on the stage.

**Matthew Beswick -** Director (*War Games*)

Matthew has been a member of Progress Theatre since 2016. He has directed once before for WriteFest (*The Last Bus*), as well as *Recovery Position*, *Blood and Ice*, and most recently, *Angels in America Parts I and II*. He's has enjoyed taking on a smaller and more intimate piece with *War Games* after a year's break from directing.

**Lauren Boys (they/them) -** Sound Design & Operation

Lauren has been a member of Progress Theatre since 2019 and is slowly trying every role! They have been an assistant stage manager on *Romeo and Juliet* (2021) and *Catch-22* (2022), stage manager on *Life is a Dream* (2022), Assistant Director on *Silver Lining* (2023), Director in 16th Annual WriteFest (2023) and will be Producer for *Albion* in January. They enjoy being part of really great and meaningful theatre and especially enjoy bringing new writing to the stage for WriteFest!

**Emily Browne -** Woman (*Lump*)

Emily has been treading the boards for as long as she can remember... and comes from a long line of dramatic women, or so her father says!! Emily has been involved with various productions over the last ten years and did her first professional play last year as Diana St Partridge (*A Double Bill of Cuthbert Masterstroke*; Cold Turkey Entertainment). She is very excited to be doing her first play at Progress Theatre, and hopes this is the first of many to come.

**Ali Carroll -** Brenda (*The Debt*) & Director (*Scotty*)

Ali has been with Progress for twenty-two years as an actor, director, mentor, youth leader, writer, Inclusion Officer and Chair. She was most recently in *Dark Sublime* (Kate/President) (Jan 2022); *A Shot At Life* (Susan) (15th Annual WriteFest, Feb 22); *Great Expectations* (Miss Havisham ) (Jul 2022); *The Welkin* (Sarah Hollis) (Jan 2023). Ali is very excited to be involved in another WriteFest. She is proud that Progress supports new writing and has been involved in Showcases, Premieres, WriteFests and Scratch Nights.

**Millie Charlesworth -** Stage Manager

Millie has been part of Progress Youth Theatre for a year and has had a great time. She has been in *Life is a Dream* and been an ASM for *Dinner* and *Twelfth Night* which she loved! She has also done everything from hair to stage management in school shows and is hoping to stay in the world of theatre a while longer.

**Donna Collins -** Waitress (*Scotty*)

This is Donna's first time on stage as an adult with her only previous experience being in a school play at the age of ten! (Also a singing part!) Donna has had a lifelong interest in theatre and musicals, being brought up with the music of the shows, she often sang and danced at home, and got her first and only big role in a school play! Since then Donna has had a love of singing and music however she has no formal training. Donna has recently joined Progress Theatre is and thrilled to be part of WriteFest this year.

**Juliet England -** Various (*Lump*)

Juliet has been treading the boards at Progress (and Reading Abbey ruins) for some five years. Open-air shows have included *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Great Expectations*. Among her indoor credits are *Blood and Ice*, *Catch-22*, *Silver Lining* and two previous WriteFests. As a child, she was bitten in Colombo, Sri Lanka, by the pet monkey of sci-fi writer Arthur C. Clarke, but she has since recovered from the experience.

**Paul Gallantry -** Priest (*The Execution Chamber*) & Kit (*Scotty*)

Paul has been killed numerous times on the stage at Progress and still hasn't taken the hint. He first started lurking in the theatre in 2016 and has been in several previous WriteFests, as well as stints in previous productions such as *Betrayal*, *The Haunting of Hill House* and *Angels in America*. He was also in the open-air productions of *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Romeo and Juliet*. In his spare time he is a voice artist, and English Language teacher and lecturer.

**Paul Gittus -** Lump (*Lump*)

Paul has previously played John London in *Angel with One Wing* in last year's WriteFest, Valene Connor in *The Lonesome West* earlier this year and Joe Gargery in last year's open-air production of *Great Expectations*. *Lump* is possibly the most malignant character Paul has played to date.

**Declan Gray (he/him) -** Various (*Lump*)

Declan joined Progress Theatre two years ago after lockdown ended, after finding an interest in theatre. He spent the first year doing youth theatre workshops before first appearing on the progress stage as Astolfo in *Life is a Dream* last December. Then in April this year he appeared in *Chaos* before going off to Reading Rep to do *Rock of Ages.* Now in this WriteFest Declan is playing: consultant, oncologist and waiting room occupant 1 in *Lump*.

**Imogen Haley (she/her) -** Steward (*Pie*)

Imogen has been part of Progress Theatre for over two years after joining Progress Youth Theatre in 2021. Last December she played Rosaura in the youth production of *Life is a Dream*. She has also helped with assistant stage management for Progress' open-air productions of *Great Expectations* and *Twelfth Night*. Imogen is very excited to be back on stage playing the Steward in *Pie*!

**Arlo Haigh -** Lighting Design & Operation

This production will be Arlo's second production at Progress Theatre. He was previously involved with *Twelfth Night* in the Abbey Ruins earlier in 2023 and is excited to work on another show. Arlo has really enjoyed working with the team for the shows, especially the experience of learning about lighting for the first time. He is excited to be involved with more productions later this season.

**Ali Howarth -** Director (*Lump*)

Ali is delighted to be directing her first play for Progress. She appeared earlier this year as the imperious Mrs Cary in *The Welkin*. Previous directing gigs have included the musical *The Matchgirls* and John Godber's *Shakers* and *Teechers*. It has been an privilege to take on the moving and unexpectedly light-hearted tale of a cancerous Lump! Ali has supported her son during his own eight-year fight with leukaemia and knows only too well the sanity-saving power of humour.

**Emma Kellow -** Doctor (*The Execution Chamber*)

Emma has been a member of Progress for many years and has enjoyed acting in a wide range of plays, including *Macbeth*, *Birdsong*, *Dinner*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and numerous WriteFests, to name but a few. She has also dabbled in set building, stage management, prop sourcing, and has had two of her own plays featured in WriteFests in previous years. Outside of Progress she mainly works as a freelance voiceover artist and audio transcriber.

**Imogen Lilley -** Director (*Pie*)

Imogen has performed at Progress a handful of times as an actor, in *Jerusalem*, *The Lonesome West* and most recently Progress Theatre's outdoor production of *Twelfth Night* as Viola. WriteFest will be Imogen's directing debut at Progress Theatre; she is extremely excited to share this piece with the audience and watch everyone's hard work come to fruition. Imogen would also like to thank her wonderful mentor Liz Carroll for all her support and encouragement throughout this process.

**Alex McCubbin -** Stage Management Mentor & ASM

Alex has been a long standing member of Progress Theatre and has previously stage managed many productions including *Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense*, *Radiant Vermin*, *The Pillowman*, *The Lonesome West* and *The Effect*. He has also been seen in productions of *Moonlight and Magnolias*, *No Naughty Bits*, *Birdsong* and *Twelfth Night* to name a few.

**Laurence McNaughton -** Tom (*War Games*)

Laurence attended Leighton Park School before studying piano at the Royal Northern College of Music. He then completed an MMus at the University of Southampton. Laurence has always been involved in theatre and has performed in numerous productions including *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Wiz* and *Hairspray*. Whilst teaching in Bermuda, Laurence played Sky Bentley in *Absolutely Murder!* and Elyot in Noel Coward's *Private Lives*. Most recently he played the part of Hal in Moira Buffini's *Dinner* at Progress Theatre.

**Freddie Meader (he/him) -** Fancy (*Scotty*)

Freddie is a relatively new member to Progress Theatre, only joining just before Christmas. Although new to acting, Freddie has been in various plays with Progress Theatre, including *Twelfth Night* and WriteFest last year, along with others. After finding a real interest in acting Freddie decided to take A-level Drama and to possibly pursue acting as a career. Freddie is really looking forward to working with other talented actors in *Scotty* and creating a fun, but meaningful performance.

**Jo Metcalf (she/they) -** Producer

Jo joined Progress five years starting on the bar using skills learnt at festival beer tents. She trod the boards as the awful Mrs Montague in *The Haunting of Hill House* and was the voice of the computer (and a lobster) in *Dark Sublime* and May in *Silver Lining*. She has directed WriteFest and Scratch plays. During the pandemic she produced *Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons Lemons* on zoom. She is a member of the Outreach Panto group.

**Aidan Moran -** Director (*The Debt*)

Aidan joined Progress thirty years ago and has been actively involved ever since. He has enjoyed directing and set designing many productions, including *No Naughty Bits*, *Hamlet*, *The Weir*, *Getting Over Steven*, *Bold Girls*, *Proof*, *Closer*, *Calendar Girls* and *Dark Sublime* to name but a few. Most recently, he designed the set for the *Silver Lining*. Aidan has been heavily involved in Digital Progress over the last couple of years but is very much enjoying creating theatre on stage once again. He is also passionate about making short films and is a founding member of Workbench Productions based in Reading.

**Pixie Nash -** Emily (*War Games*) & Sgt. Wainwright (*The Debt*)

Pixie received ten years of training in Dance, Musical Theatre and Acting before gaining a BA in Theatre & Performance. She has vast experience as a youth theatre practitioner and currently works as a Drama/LAMDA coach. Over the years she has performed in numerous musical productions and in 2017 appeared in two sell out plays, *Peace* and *Hay Fever*. Pixie performed at Progress for the first time in April in *Dinner* and now returns as Sergeant Wainwright in *The Debt* and Emily in *War Games*.

**Neil Padgen (he/him) -** Man (*The Execution Chamber*)

This is Neil's first production with Progress, following productions across West Berkshire with various other companies. Recent highlights include: Pato in *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* and Terry Gilliam in *No Naughty Bits* at Shinfield Players Theatre; John Cristow/Sergeant Penny in *The Hollow* at New Era; Larry in *Men of the World* at Boundary Players; Teddy in *Arsenic and Old Lace* for Newbury Dramatic Society at the Watermill; Swing for Newbury Nomads in *Made in Dagenham, The Musical*; and Mack Sennett in *Mack & Mabel* at Hungerford.

**Damien Passmore -** Chef (*Pie*)

Damien recently made his Progress debut playing Coleman in *The Lonesome West*. Having studied drama and performing arts, he's no stranger to treading the boards as an actor, appearing in college and university productions of *Guys & Dolls*, Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera* and *Fool For Love* by Sam Shepard, amongst others. In 2004 he briefly trained as a pro-wrestler, and in 2013 he played the role of Ulysses Everitt McGill in the *Oh Brother Special* at Woodley Theatre. But to many, he's best known as a singer-songwriter, performing his music in Reading for over twenty years.

**Flora Paulo (she/her) -** Executioner (*The Execution Chamber*)

Flora has been a member of Progress Youth Theatre for fourteen years and has been involved on-stage as well as backstage. Shows include *When They Go Low*, *Great Expectations*, *Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense* and *The Welkin* as ASM and stage manager for *Silver Lining*. Flora has also operated lights for *Life is a Dream*. She has performed in many Progress productions including *Daisy Pulls It Off*, *His Dark Materials*, *The Tempest*, *Maskerade*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Wyrd Sisters* and most recently the open-air Shakespeare *Twelfth Night*. Flora is delighted to be making her WriteFest debut appearance.

**Tom Ripper -** Director (*The Execution Chamber*)

*The Execution Chamber* is Tom's second opportunity to direct, following *Angel With One Wing* in the previous WriteFest. It is also his first opportunity to mentor a sound designer. Previously he has designed and operated sound for Progress shows and acted sometimes too. An individual of limited skill and dangerous enthusiasm.

**Amy Taulbut -** Stage Manager

Amy has been a Theatretrain member since 2016, travelling to New York, Edinburgh and London singing, dancing and acting with them. This is her first time with the backstage crew at Progress. She has a disturbing passion for horror films and forced her mother to watch every series of *American Horror Story*.

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# Our 77th Season

## 2023

**4 – 9 SEPTEMBER**
*The Effect* by Lucy Prebble

**27 – 30 SEPTEMBER**
17th Annual WriteFest

**1 – 4 NOVEMBER**
*Blood Wedding* by Federico Garcia Lorca, translated by A. S. Kline

PROGRESS YOUTH

**7 – 17 DECEMBER**
*Hogfather* by Terry Pratchett, adapted by Stephen Briggs

## 2024

**29 JANUARY – 3 FEBRUARY**
*Albion* by Mike Bartlett

**11 – 16 MARCH**
*The Last Quiz Night on Earth* by Alison Carr

**26 APRIL – 4 MAY**
*Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas

**12 – 15 JUNE**
Progress Premiers Presents:
*Moles* by Sarah Wright and *Dirt* by Caroline White

**3 – 6 JULY**
Youth Week
*Showcase performances from all our Youth Groups*

PROGRESS YOUTH

**17 – 27 JULY**
*The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde
Open Air at the Abbey Ruins

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