

## The Season

November 15, 16, 17, 18  
Twelve Angry Men  
by Reginald Rose  
Compass Theatre Ickenham

January 24, 25, 26, 27  
John Gabriel Borkman  
by Henrik Ibsen  
Travellers

March 28, 29, 30, 31  
As You Like It  
by William Shakespeare  
Travellers

May 23, 24, 25, 26  
Dancing at Lughnasa  
by Brian Friel  
Travellers

### Company contacts

**Secretary:** Crystal Anthony,  
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**Proscenium Box Office** 0208 422 0400  
Compass Theatre for Twelve Angry Men  
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This season supported by  
**HOGARTH RECRUITMENT**

# PROSCENIUM

**77th SEASON**  
**2000-2001**

P R O S C E N I U M

J O H N G A B R I E L B O R K M A N

B Y

H E N R I K I B S E N

Music for this production of John Gabriel Borkman arranged composed and played  
by Vincent Eavis

# PROSCENIUM

**John Gabriel Borkman**

**By Henrik Ibsen**

*Translation by Nicholas Wright*

**17th, 18th, 19th and 20th January, 2001  
Travellers Theatre, Harrow Arts Centre**

**John Gabriel Borkman**

## John Gabriel Borkman

by Henrik Ibsen

In a translation by Nicholas Wright.

John Gabriel Borkman, formerly Chairman of a bank .....David Pearson  
Mrs Gunhild Borkman his wife .....Linda Hampson  
Erhart Borkman, their son, a student .....Vincent Eavis  
Miss Ella Rentheim, Mrs Borkman's twin sister .....Evelyn Moutrie  
Mrs Fanny Wilton .....Ellen Moutrie  
Vinhelm Foldal, a clerk in a government office .....Duncan Sykes  
Frida Foldal his daughter .....Olwen Mears  
Malene, Mrs Borkman's Maid .....Nicola Bielicki

Directed by .....Jeanne Hawkes  
Stage Managers.....Crystal Anthony  
.....Janet Harrison  
Assisted by .....Nicola Bielicki  
.....Charles Anthony  
.....Pauline Patterson  
Set Designed by .....Colin Tufnell  
Set Constructed by .....Peter Wilton  
Lighting designed by .....Colin Tufnell  
Lighting operated by .....Paul Davis  
Sound .....Paul Ewen  
Costumes .....Evelyn Moutrie

The action takes place during a winter evening at the Rentheim family estate outside the capital.

Act I: Mrs Borkman's sitting room.

Act II: The drawing room upstairs.

Act III: Mrs Borkman's sitting room.

Act IV: The courtroom outside the house; and a part of the forest.

There will be an interval of 20 minutes between Acts 2 and 3.

## Henrik Ibsen: A Chronology.

- 1828 Born at Skien, south-east Norway, eldest son of a merchant.  
1834 Father's business collapses.  
1844 Apprenticed to an apothecary in Grimstad. Badly paid and overworked.  
1846 Fathers an illegitimate child by a maid in apothecary's house. Pays maintenance for the next 14 years.  
1849 Writes his first play, 'Cataline', in verse.  
1850 Enters Christiania University to study medicine. Becomes involved with the Socialist movement. Leaves after a year.  
1851 Engaged as dramatist at National Theatre in Bergen: writes, designs, directs and keeps the books.  
1857 Appointed Artistic Director of the Norwegian Theatre in Christiania.  
1858 Marries Suzanne Thoreson.  
1859 Birth of Sigurd, their only child.  
1864 Directs 'The Pretenders', his first real success. Leaves Norway and lives abroad for the next 27 years, in Italy and Germany.  
1866 'Brand' is published to great acclaim but not performed for 19 years.  
1867 'Peer Gynt' published to a divided response. Staged 7 years later.  
1873 Completes 'Emperor and Galilean' last of his epic plays. His fame grows in Germany and England.  
1877 'The Pillars of Society', the first of his 'sociological' prose dramas, widely staged in Germany.  
1879 'A Doll's House' causes an immediate sensation in Scandinavia and Germany.  
1881 'Ghosts' provokes scandal and controversy.  
1882 'An Enemy of the People' meets with a mixed reception.  
1884 'The Wild Duck'.  
1886 'Rosmersholm'.  
1888 'The Lady from the Sea'.  
1890 'Hedda Gabler'.  
1891 Ibsen returns to Norway, settling in Christiania, where he lives until his death.  
1892 'The Master Builder'.  
1894 'Little Eyolf'.  
1896 'John Gabriel Borkman'  
1899 'When We Dead Awaken'.  
1906 Ibsen dies, aged 78 and is given state funeral.

## Henrik Ibsen: the Dramatist.

Ibsen once remarked, "With pleasure I will torpedo the ark." As a young writer, he was discontented with everything. He found himself unable to identify with any existing forms of drama, so he set out to create his own.

Along the way, Ibsen experienced multiple shifts in dramatic form and philosophy as he gradually came to terms with the intellectual, emotional and spiritual forces that were at war within his complex psyche. But throughout, his plays are characterised by their rebellious spirit and their unforgiving scrutiny of Ibsen's own faults and virtues.

Ibsen's early plays are wild and epic, utilising an open form and concentrating on mystical, poetic visions of the rebel figure in search of an ultimate truth which is always just out of reach. In 'Peer Gynt', for example, a young man rebels against society by choosing to live a life of waste, only to find himself, ultimately, living in a world of lost opportunities.

With 'The League of Youth', Ibsen begins his 'modern' phase - an eleven year period during which he would consciously suppress his Romanticism along with his poetry and mysticism and focus instead on the problems of modern society. These plays are characterised by their realism, a self-imposed discipline which the playwright hoped would help audiences to digest more easily his radical views: but 'Ghosts' and 'Hedda Gabbler' suffered harsh attacks from his critics.

In his final period, Ibsen returned to the more mystical subjects of his youth, tempered now by the Classical restraint of his middle period. Richard Eyre suggests that, "By the time of 'John Gabriel Borkman' Ibsen was writing the same way that Munch was painting - a form of Expressionism".

## John Gabriel Borkman: the Play.

The most powerful winter landscape in Scandinavian art.  
*Edvard Munch.*

The drama moves from naturalism to extraordinary poetic intensity, from icy hatred and resentment to a sense of transcendent reconciliation.

*Charles Spencer.*  
*Daily Telegraph.*

Ibsen's later plays, from 'The Master Builder', are withering self-indictments in which cold-heartedness is seen as the ultimate crime.

*Michael Billington*  
*The Guardian.*

The trio of protagonists at the emotional heart of 'John Gabriel Borkman' are each

brought to the knowledge that they have wasted their lives either through immoral choices or destructive obsessions and stand, as they have always done, alone. They have all mortified their natural feelings so effectively that they have joined the ranks of the unburied, living dead.

*Michael Coveney.*

Ibsen's play is about the need for - and the death of - feeling. It is both an indictment of bourgeois callousness and its own woe-on-woeful parody. Thus it needs to be performed with a sense of irony, as befits a play in which the father of the 'hero' was an iron miner and in which Borkman dreams of extracting its wealth from the earth and dies feeling his heart constricted in a 'hand of metal'.

*Frederic Raphael.*

Irony is the key to this haunting masterpiece in that dreams are constantly subverted by reality. Borkman's would-be Napoleon of capitalism dreamed of having 'power over power' and for eight years has paced his room in demented vulpine solitude. Gunhild and Ella fight tooth and claw for emotional and physical possession of Erhart - only to lose him to a seductive widow. But Erhart, in his bid for freedom, becomes the toy-boy of Mrs Wilton, who will hand him on, when she is ready, to a bank clerk's daughter.

*Michael Billington.*

All three main characters are human wraiths obsessively haunting their own pasts.  
*Benedict Nightingale*  
*Times.*

It is by his present and his future that a man can atone for his past.  
*Borkman.*

## John Gabriel Borkman: the Characters.

**Borkman** himself has been compared variously with Lear, Faust, Prometheus, Napoleon, Milton's Lucifer and Robert Maxwell.

Self-righteousness and self-deception are united in an imperial figure who lacks an empire.

*Frederic Raphael.*

A man who put the dream, the mission in life, the power and the glory before life and love.

*Professor Edvard Beyer. Oslo.*

He's fallen for the dynamics of money, and lost out on human instinct.  
*Nicholas Wright.*

Borkman may have affinities with Robert Maxwell in his illicit use of investor's savings, but the hero of Ibsen's late symbolic play is altogether a larger and more

ambiguous figure than Cap'n Bob. He's at once a loveless, power-obsessed capitalist and a visionary idealist who hears the iron ore singing in the veins of the earth and dreams of creating an industrial kingdom of entrepreneurial philanthropy. He is also a self-projection of Ibsen, a way of questioning the cost of his own artistic dedication.

*Paul Taylor*

A miner's son who has clawed his way to the top, fallen off and still awaits the call of the nation. He measures out his life in short, sharp steps. He cannot live with the consequences of over-reaching ambition, dwindling power, the guilt of wasted opportunity.

*Michael Coveney*

### **Gunhild and Ella.**

The dualism between the twins would be quintessentially Romantic were it not that these two have had the misfortune to grow old.

Gunhild's drained need to possess is pitted against Ella's implacable capacity for understanding.

*Jack Tinker*

*Daily Mail.*

Foldal's sudden lack of self-pity in a play that's awash with it is like a little chink of sunlight in enveloping gloom.

*Paul Taylor*

A good person who thinks no harm of anyone, which makes him absurd.

*Nicholas Wright*

Erhart makes an exit as life-saving as Nora's from her doll's house.

A young man having sex for the first time; in a winter landscape of emotional permafrost you suddenly have this molten force of sexual love.

*Richard Eyre.*

### **The Miner.**

A poem written by Ibsen when he was 23 and which anticipates many of the sentiments he was to put into Borkman's mouth nearly half a century later. It tells of the fascination the poet felt for the darkness of the pit, and his conviction that the answer to the secrets of life lay there.

Groan and thunder, mountain wall,  
Before my heavy hammer blow.  
Downwards I must carve my way  
Till I hear the iron ore ring.

Deep in the mountain's desolate night  
The rich treasure beckons me.  
Diamonds and precious stones  
Among the red branches of the gold.

And in the darkness there is peace.  
Peace and rest for eternity.  
Heavy hammer, break me the way  
To the heart-chamber of what lies hidden there ....

When I first entered here  
I thought in my innocence:  
'The spirits of the dark will solve for me  
Life's endless riddles'.

Was I wrong? Does this path  
Not lead to the light?  
But the light blinds my eyes  
If I seek it in the mountains.

No. I must go down into the dark.  
Eternal peace lies there.  
Heavy hammer, break me the way  
To the heart chamber of what lies hidden there.

Hammer blow on hammer  
Till the last day of life.  
No ray of morning shines.  
No sun of hope rises.



This season has been generously supported by Hogarth Recruitment, providers of administrative, commercial and managerial staff.

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If you are interested in supporting Proscenium, please contact  
Crystal Anthony on 020 8954 2761

## Proscenium

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924. The company's first production was the now little-known *The Tide* by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945. In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

If you would like to find out more about Proscenium, please contact :

The Secretary, Proscenium, 020 8954 2761

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## As You Like It

By William Shakespeare

*'O Coz,' says Rosalind, 'that thou didst know how many fathoms deep I am in love.'*

So many of the characters in the play are, in their different ways, in love: madly, hopelessly, unrequitedly, passionately and - in one case - with himself. It is in this comedy that Shakespeare reveals the nature of love with wisdom, humanity and amusement.

Directed by Colin Hickman

Wednesday 28th to Saturday 31st March, 2001

7.45 pm, Travellers Studio Theatre,

Harrow Arts Centre

Tickets : £6.00

Concessions : £5.00