

PROSCENIUM

Going Straight

By Richard Harris

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Wednesday 14th April to Saturday 17th April 2010
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Going Straight

By Richard Harris

Cast:

Michael..... Michael Gerrard
Ray Colin Hickman
Brenda Shirley Wootten
Francine Hannah Lester
Polly Lynette Shanbury

Directed by..... David Pearson
Stage Manager Crystal Anthony
Assisted by Anne Gerrard
Properties Sheila Harvey
Lighting Design Joe Cohen
Sound Recording Vincent Eavis
Lighting & Sound Operation Mark Sutherland

The action takes place in the main sitting room of Michael and Francine's villa in Southern Spain.

Act I : September, early afternoon.

Act II : Later than evening.

Time : The Present

The Playwright

Richard Harris was born in London in 1934 and is one of the few popular writers in this country who combine a successful career in both theatre and television.

He began writing for the theatre in 1979 with “Two and Two Make Sex”. This was followed in 1984 with “Stepping Out” which was first presented at the Thorndike Theatre, Leatherhead and subsequently produced by Bill Kenwright at the Duke of York’s: it won the Evening Standard Comedy of the Year Award, and the Moliere Award for the Paris production. In 1985 “Outside Edge” transferred from the Hampstead Theatre to the Queens and also won the Evening Standard Comedy Award. All these early successes are very English comedies with settings – an evening class and a club cricket match – which enable him to highlight the eccentricities of the English class system, but he has also had success with writing thrillers. “The Business of Murder” ran for seven years from 1991 at the Duchess and Mayfair theatres and in 1998 “Dead Guilty” played at the Apollo. Richard Harris proved his versatility and scope as a dramatist with a platform production at the National Theatre of his play “Visiting Hour” and a translation of Ibsen’s “Ghosts” performed at the Comedy theatre in 2001 starring Francesca Annis and Anthony Andrews. “Going Straight” was first produced at the Theatre Royal, Windsor in 2004: set in the Costa del Crime it is both comedy and thriller with its plot twists and turns at the end.

He began writing freelance episodes for British television in his mid-twenties. His first was in Sydney Newman’s 1960

series “Police Surgeon”, followed by several episodes of “The Avengers” and “The Saint” and contributions to mystery programmes like “The Edgar Wallace Mystery Theatre” and situation comedies like “Hancock”. He has helped to create several standout programmes of the crime and detective genres, such as “Adam Adamant Lives”, “Man in a Suitcase”, “Shoestring”, “A Touch of Frost” and most recently “The Last Detective”. He also won, in 1994, the prize for the best situation comedy from the Writers’ Guild of Great Britain for “Outside Edge”, adapted from his stage play.

Richard Harris has been an enormously successful, prolific and popular dramatist, writing comedies and thrillers which have a wide audience appeal; but he is also a serious artist, always writing sharp, witty and authentic dialogue which reveals a shrewd and sympathetic analysis and understanding of human relationships – a quality much in evidence in “Going Straight”.

Cultural Background

Richard Harris gave substance and authenticity to his two fictional villains first by conversations in which they linked themselves with members of the London criminal underworld of the 1950s and 1960s, and secondly by references to a particular branch of the celebrity scene which included criminals, show business personalities, boxers and politicians. Mickey and Ray’s recollections of this 1960s scene is a mixture of fictional and real characters including:

‘The Twins’

Reginald and Ronald Kray. Born in 1933 they ran a protection racket in the East End of London which, from 1955-68, exercised control over criminal gangs, pubs and clubs, sustained



by violent extortion and murder. Their world expanded in the 60s to include West End night-clubs with a more glittering celebrity clientele. Both served short prison sentences but witnesses were always too frightened and intimidated to give evidence until police finally assembled enough evidence to convict them of three murders and they were sentenced to life imprisonment at the Old Bailey in 1968.

Frankie

Frank Mitchell (“The Mad Axeman”) – a particularly violent and unstable enforcer. The Krays helped him to escape from Dartmoor in 1966, but he disappeared soon after. The Krays were later acquitted of his murder but his body was never recovered.

Jack (Spot)

Possibly Jack “The Hat” McVitie, another violent enforcer. Reggie Kray was suspected of his murder.

Lionel Bart (1930-1999).

Son of a Jewish tailor in the East End. Made his name first as a song writer for Tommy Steele and Cliff Richard and then for a series of hugely successful musicals: 'Fings Ain't What They Used t'Be', 'Lock Up Your Daughters' and 'Oliver'.

Alma Cogan (1932-1966)

One of the most popular and successful singers of the 50s and early 60s. Topped the charts with 'Dreamboat' in 1955, had her own television show in the late 50s and in 1960 Lionel Bart cast her as Nancy in 'Oliver'. By the mid 60s she became



celebrated in gossip columns for the wild all-night parties she threw in her Kensington High St. home.

Stanley Baker (1928-1976)

Came to prominence in the 50s and 60s as a film actor, usually cast as a villain – tough, gritty and fiery. His films include 'The Cruel Sea' (1954), 'Hell Drivers' (1957), 'The Guns of Navarone' (1961) and 'Zulu' (1964). He had the reputation as something of a hell-raiser and was a drinking companion of Richard Burton.

Charlie Chester (1913-1997)

Not one of Mickey's (or the Kray's) guests but features in

Ray's story. A comedian who announced himself as "This is your Cheerful Charlie, your Chin-up Boy Chester". Played the music halls in the late 30s with an act reminiscent of Max Miller, which always ended with a song. Established himself in the 40s as a radio comedian in 'Stars in Battledress' and later 'Studio Stand Easy'.

Robert Boothby (1900-1986)

A Conservative politician who was MP for East Aberdeenshire from 1924-58 and Parliamentary Private Secretary to Winston Churchill, Chancellor of the Exchequer, 1926-29. He held a junior ministerial office as Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food 1940-1 but had to resign for not declaring an interest when asking a question. He was a frequent broadcaster on programmes such as Any Questions.

He had a colourful, if reasonably discreet, private life because the press refused – or were prevented – from printing what they knew. He was a somewhat promiscuous bisexual: he had a number of homosexual relationships while at Oxford and in 1963 began an affair with an East End cat burglar, Leslie Holt, who introduced him to Reginald Kray. He also had a long-standing affair with Dorothy Macmillan, wife of the Conservative politician and later Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan.



Our Next Production

Lettice & Lovage

By Peter Shaffer

Lettice Douffet is the daughter of an actress who toured France with an all-female company, playing only Shakespeare's history plays. Having inherited both theatricality and eccentricity she finds employment as a tourist guide in a shabby stately home. Attempting to enliven its dull history with her over-imaginative fantasies, she is caught in the act by Lotte, a stern and sensible Preservation Trust official, and it seems her days as an entertainer are over. But the two have more in common than they first realise...

"...exhilarating new comedy...one of the sharpest, wittiest, most passionate and elegant plays of the year. Shaffer has another hit, and the West End is the richer for it..." Sunday Express

Directed by Mark Sutherland

Wednesday 16th June to Saturday 19th June 2010

7.45pm Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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Chair : Crystal Anthony

Artistic Director : Mark Sutherland

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