

PROSCENIUM

The Memory of Water

By Shelagh Stephenson

The Memory of Water

Wednesday 18th to Saturday 21st May 2022
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

The Memory of Water

The Cast

Mary.....	Clare Wooster
Vi.....	Nicola Bielicki
Teresa.....	Isabelle Cartwright
Catherine.....	Denise Bone
Mike	Robert Ewen
Frank.....	Mark Sutherland
Directed by.....	Janet Harrison
Stage Manager.....	Mike Williams
Set Design	Janet Harrison
Properties.....	Crystal Anthony
Lighting and Sound Operation	Paul Davis
Costumes	Evelyn Moutrie Anne Gerrard
Sound Recording.....	Mark Sutherland
Rehearsal Prompt	Angie Sutherland
Programme Compilation	Mark Sutherland

The action of the play takes place in what was formerly the family house,
built close to cliffs outside a seaside town in the North of England.

The time is winter, in the 1990s.

Act 1.....	Early morning
Act 2 Scene 1	Shortly after
Act 2 Scene 2	Shortly after
Act 3.....	The following morning

There will be one interval of 15 minutes between Acts 1 and 2.

Many thanks to Hampstead Theatre, JT Management, Paul Ewen,
Jenny Glover, East Lane Theatre, and Angela Evans.

Particular thanks to Hannah Lester, who worked so hard on this production - much
love and appreciation from all the company.

Director's Note

After its world premiere at Hampstead Theatre in 1996, *The Memory of Water* transferred to the West End where it won the 2000 Laurence Olivier Award for Best Comedy. This was Shelagh Stephenson's first stage play. As was the case with Caryl Churchill, initially her favoured medium as a writer was radio, firstly as a scriptwriter on BBC Radio 4's drama series *Citizens*, and subsequently as an author in her own right. Of the many original plays broadcast perhaps the best known is *Five Kinds of Silence*, 1996, which received the Writers Guild Award for Best Original Drama.

After years of separation three sisters return to the family's Yorkshire home for their mother's funeral. As they revisit their past it becomes clear that their memories are both subjective and unreliable exposing hidden lies, self-betrayal and personal, unresolved crises. Their mother's death impacts on the sisters in different ways but each is forced to face unsettling and often poignant home truths that challenge their current lifestyles and ambitions. Stephenson's personal circumstances prompted her to write this play. She is one of five siblings spanning over twenty years and, like so many families of size, impressions and memories of past events are often at odds. Whilst discussing the themes of this play the cast and I were no different. In many respects we acknowledged that often we could no longer differentiate between fact and fiction, witnessed and assumed, accurate and amended. We suspected that we, too, may have adopted others' memories and later presented them as our own. Interestingly, our actors hail from families of varying sizes, backgrounds and eras, yet we all recognised how some of our memories could be inventions or distortions of the truth.

This has been a demanding piece to work on. Like so many companies, we have had to amend performance dates due to ever-fluctuating COVID restrictions. People's availability has changed, schedules have been disrupted but, above all, the roles in this play demand honesty and integrity in performance if the piece is to resonate with audiences. The roles are complex and ever-changing but I am confident that our interpretation of both characters and themes will affect all who come along to sample our efforts and will, hopefully, prompt audiences to re-examine their past with fresh vigour!

Shelagh Stephenson

- 1955 Born in Tynemouth Northumberland, middle child of five sisters, brought up Catholic.
- 1974 Studies drama at Manchester University.
- 1977-1987 Works as actor in theatre and tv, including one season with the Royal Shakespeare Company (1981).
- 1989 Lethal Cocktails, a play for radio, broadcast.
- 1990-1996 Five radio plays broadcast – *Eating in our Dreams*, *Darling Peidi*, *The Anatomical Venus*, *Bonjour Tristesse*, and *Five Kinds of Silence*. Last of these wins Writers Guild Award for Best Original Play.
- 1996 July – *The Memory of Water* produced at the Hampstead Theatre. Writes two episodes of BBC's *Casualty*.
- 1997 Wins Peggy Ramsey Award for *An Experiment with an Air Pump*.
- 1998 *The Memory of Water* tours Britain. Also has its American premiere at New York's Manhattan Club.
- 1999 Touring production transfers to London's Vaudeville Theatre.
- 2000 *The Memory of Water* wins the Olivier Award for Best Comedy. *Ancient Lights* premieres at the Hampstead Theatre.
- 2002 Film version of *The Memory of Water* opens, retitled *Before You Go*. *Mappa Mundi* is produced at the Cottesloe Theatre. Writes first episode of tv serial *Helen West*.
- 2003 Wins the Sloan Commission Award in New York. Writes *The Affairs of Men*, a two-part series for a US film company.
- 2004 *Life's a Dream* and *Through a Glass Darkly* broadcast by BBC Radio in May and June.
- 2005 *Enlightenment* produced at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. *Not a Love Story* (film) commissioned by Channel 4.
- 2006 *The Anatomical Venus* (film) for Pacificus Productions.
- 2008 *The Long Road* produced at the Soho Theatre.
- 2010 Co-writes episode of *Downton Abbey* (Series 1 Episode 4).
- 2010-2018 Writer of an occasional therapy comedy series on BBC *Woman's Hour* called *How Does That Make You Feel?*
- 2021 *The Memory of Water* is produced at the Hampstead Theatre, twenty five years after its premiere.
- 2022 Writes episodes of BritBox TV series *Murder in Provence*.

Sisters

“Sisters make the best friends in the world” *Marilyn Monroe*

“I grew up believing my sister was from the planet Neptune and had been sent down to Earth to kill me. I believed this because my sister Emily convinced me of it when I was a toddler...There’s a part of me that still believes it. I have moments when I think, ‘Hmm, could that be true?’ Occasionally I ask my sister about it and she responds by pulling an alien face, which only confuses matters.” *Zoey Deschanel*

“Nobody fights you like your own sister; nobody else knows the most vulnerable parts of you and will aim for them without mercy.” *Jojo Moyes*

“Don’t talk about my sister; don’t play with me about my sister. If you do, you’ll see another side of me.” *Beyoncé*

“For there is no friend like a sister in calm or stormy weather; To cheer one on the tedious way, To fetch one if one goes astray, To lift one if one totters down, To strengthen whilst one stands.” *Christina Rossetti*

“If you don’t understand how a woman could both love her sister dearly and want to wring her neck at the same time, then you were probably an only child.” *Linda Sunshine*

“I would like more sisters, that the taking out of one, might not leave such stillness.” *Emily Dickinson*

“Sweet, crazy conversations full of half sentences, daydreams and misunderstandings more thrilling than understanding could ever be.” *Toni Morrison*

“In a way, I was incredibly proud of her (not that I had any intention of letting it show while I was beating the crap out of her).” *Meg Cabot*

“Sisters, as you know, also have a unique relationship. This is the person who has known you your entire life, who should love you and stand by you no matter what, and yet it’s your sister who knows exactly where to drive the knife to hurt you the most.” *Lisa See*

Memories

“Memories warm you up from the inside. But they also tear you apart.” *Haruki Murakami*

“There are memories that time does not erase... Forever does not make loss forgettable, only bearable.” *Cassandra Clare*

“There are moments when I wish I could roll back the clock and take all the sadness away, but I have the feeling that if I did, the joy would be gone as well.” *Nicholas Sparks*

“The worst memories stick with us, while the nice ones always seem to slip through our fingers.” *Rachel Vincent*

“Memories are dangerous things. You turn them over and over, until you know every touch and corner, but still you'll find an edge to cut you.” *Mark Lawrence*

“Where you come from is gone, where you thought you were going to never was there, and where you are is no good unless you can get away from it.” *Flannery O' Connor*

“But that's how memory works,” Bitterblue said quietly. “Things disappear without your permission, then come back again without your permission.” And sometimes they came back incomplete and warped.” *Kristin Cashore*

“Forgetting isn't enough. You can paddle away from the memories and think they are gone. But they will keep floating back, again and again and again. They circle you, like sharks. Until, unless, something, someone? Can do more than just cover the wound.” *Sara Zarr*

“Memories are killing. So you must not think of certain things, of those that are dear to you, or rather you must think of them, for if you don't there is the danger of finding them, in your mind, little by little.” *Samuel Beckett*



The Memory of Water has been on quite a journey since it premiered at Hampstead Theatre all those years ago. I look back, and I see we were in a more hopeful place then.

So I'm happy it's coming home in these dark, uncertain times. I hope it brings laughter, and despite the subject matter, joy.

*Shelagh Stephenson,
Hampstead Theatre publicity,
September 2021*

Proscenium's 100th Anniversary

In May 2024 Proscenium will celebrate its 100th anniversary. Although it's still two years away we're already planning events and activities to mark this momentous occasion. Among our current ideas, we're planning an exhibition covering our history and a commemorative publication.

An important part of Proscenium over the years has been our audience. For many of you this won't be the first time you've seen one of our productions.

So, we'd like to hear from you about your memories of Proscenium.

These might include notable plays and memorable performances you've seen (for any reason, good or not so good!), our various venues, and anything else that comes to mind. We plan to include some of these in our exhibition and publication, so please send anything you want to add to publicity@proscenium.org.uk

Thank you – we look forward to hearing from you!

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week in Harrow for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary : Marion Chamberlain

Chair : David Pearson

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk