ASTOR THEATRE

PRESENTS

GERTRUDE LAWRENCE

A LOVELY WAY TO SPEND AN EVENING

BY

LUCY STEVENS

DIRECTED BY

SARAH-LOUISE YOUNG

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— CAST —

Gertrude Lawrence ..... LUCY STEVENS *

Pianist ..... ELIZABETH MARCUS

— CREATIVE TEAM

Playwright ..... LUCY STEVENS *

Director ..... SARAH-LOUISE YOUNG *

Music Director ..... ELIZABETH MARCUS

Costume Design ..... PHILIP SEFTON & JULIETTE BACARESE-HAMILTON

Sound Engineer ..... BEN SMITHERS

— PRODUCTION TEAM —

Production Stage Manager ..... ANT PRIOLA

Sound Engineer ..... BEN SMITHERS

Run time: 75 minutes with no intermission

*Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United Kingdom

The Production Stage Manager is a Member of Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States

GERTIE'S JOURNEY FROM CLAPHAM TO BROADWAY

Gertrude Lawrence was born on July 4th 1898, during a tour of the ***Moore & Burgess Minstrels*** in which her father, a bass singer, was appearing. The show toured England for many seasons and each performance ended with a tableau, in which Gertie's mother was often Britannia or an Angel on a wire.

Gertie wrote:
"I think Mother always regretted losing the world in which she had lived briefly with my father – the world of the theatre. In a slightly discoloured mother-of-pearl card case she treasured a number of visiting cards of actresses she had known in those days. Sometimes, as a treat, she would let me play with them. I would pull a card out of the case, read the name aloud and she would immediately launch into the story of how she and the owner of the card met and where, what her specialty was, and Mother's own opinion of how good she was at it. This parlour game gave me my first inside information on the theatrical profession."

Gertie made her first professional appearance on the stage, aged 10, in Brixton Theatre's Christmas show, ***Babes in the Wood***. She was paid six shillings a week to appear nightly as one of the little Robin Redbreasts. Her mother played one of Robin Hoods' Merry Men and, with several other Merry Men, sang with memorable gusto and hearty thigh slapping.

Gertie was soon taking dance, drama, and elocution lessons at Miss Italia Conti's, a dance school for boys and girls who aspired to stardom which had a studio just off Great Portland Street in London. There she met a boy her age who would become a lifelong friend, Noël Coward. She described their first performance together:

"Noël and I played angels in white robes, gilded wings and sanctimonious smiles."

It was the Christmas holidays and Noël's uncle took Gertie and Noël out for an afternoon.

"He bought us a large box of peppermint creams, which he made us promise to divide with the other children in the cast. Noël and I managed to forget this admonition and to eat most of the sweets ourselves in the taxi on the way home. Soon I began to feel very queer. When we went on in the heaven scene, the other celestial beings seemed to float and bob dizzily around me. I stole a glance at Noël. He was positively green. Presently the audience was permitted an unexpected vision of heaven, in which two small angels were being violently sick."

Eager to forge her career in the theater, Gertie's ambition drove her to leave home aged 12 to live and work with her father, in spite of the fact that he had been absent from her life since she was 2 years old. Arthur Lawrence was a successful singer but also an alcoholic. Luckily for Gertie he was living with Rose, who took Gertie under her wing and no doubt protected her from his drunken outbursts. Gertie lived and worked with her father and Rose, touring Variety and Music Halls until she was 15. Then, with Rose's encouragement, she went to live in digs and work independently in the chorus and as an understudy in touring productions, often returning to London to perform in a run at the Vaudeville Theatre.

Since leaving home aged 12, Gertie hadn't seen or had any contact with her mother.

"What held me back from this, was my own ambition. Whenever I was tempted to go back to Mother, Dad, and Granny, it seemed as though something in me would whisper: 'Don't go yet. You're not somebody yet. Wait till you're somebody. They must be proud of you' ...Mother, however, discovered me. One evening when I arrived at the theatre, to make up for a show, a woman was standing just inside the stage door... To my surprise, Mother took me in her arms. She had noticed the name 'Gertie Lawrence' among the small part people. My dream of impressing the family

was shattered, but at least I had got my mother back, and I realized then how much I had missed her."

Gertie was playing small parts and understudying Beatrice Lillie at the Vaudeville Theatre. Beatrice was the same age as Gertie but was more established in her career. They became very close, as friends and lovers, and larked around together on and off stage.

In 1918, aged 20, Gertie married Frank Howley, a dance director who was twenty years her senior and within a year they had a baby girl called Pamela.

"I left the nursing home with Pamela and returned to the flat, and tried for several weeks to carry on. I did my housework, bathed, fed, and walked the baby until mid-day. Then Mother would come over and take care of the baby while I went to work. After a while it became obvious that we could not continue in this way."

Gertie took Pamela to live with her mother and as Frank was unsuccessful in finding work, she decided to end the marriage and reclaim her freedom.

Gertie was often absent from her daughter's life and unsurprisingly they were never close. Pamela writes, *"She had never really been around long enough to be my mother... For years I blamed her for my failure as a person, though on reflection I don't think it was actually entirely her fault; I think I inherited also a kind of hopelessness from my father. But mummy and I desperately wanted to get to know each other, to get to like each other, yet we never managed it. She wanted the best for me, wanted me to be a kind of golden girl, and I just wasn't cut out for that."*

Gertie was obsessed with playing pranks, which resulted in André Charlot cancelling her contract. However, being ever resourceful, Gertie established a successful cabaret set at Murray's dining and dancing club. This aspiring, talented young woman from Clapham got herself accepted into London's young aristocratic social scene, with the Prince of Wales as its "leader." Captain Philip Astley, a friend of the Prince of Wales, was introduced to Gertie at Murray's and he soon became her constant companion. Gertie turned down his marriage proposal, but their affair lasted about 10 years, only finally ending when he married another actress. Reading between many lines, fidelity wasn't one of Gertie's strengths; she passionately loved many men and women in her life, regardless of their or her marital status.

After leaving Murray's in 1920, Gertie toured in various revues. André Charlot was preparing his new revue called *A-Z*, starring Beatrice Lillie who became unwell before opening night, so Charlot asked Gertie to step in to take her place.

"Once more Beatrice Lillie's misfortune was the cause of my good fortune. From the opening night the revue was an enormous success."

It ended with a run at The Prince of Wales Theatre in London.

In 1923, aged 25, Gertie was reunited with Noël Coward, who co-wrote and performed in ***London Calling!*** at The Duke of York's Theatre. Following a long and successful run, Charlot incorporated some of the songs into ***André Charlot's London Review of 1924*** which opened in Times Square Theatre in New York starring Gertrude Lawrence, Beatrice Lillie and Jack Buchanan. They set sail for America that Christmas. The revue was a triumph; they played on Broadway for 9 months followed by a 20 week tour of the US. Gertie's star had risen and was now shining brightly on both sides of the Atlantic.

LUCY STEVENS, 2025

Quotes from Gertrude Lawrence's autobiography "A Star Danced" published by W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd in 1945.

LUCY STEVENS

(Gertrude Lawrence)



An actor, singer, and theater maker, Lucy has performed in London at the Old Vic, Young Vic, Arts Theatre, Wilton's Music Hall, Barbican, Opera Holland Park, Sadler's Wells, and the Royal Opera House. Recently creating new work in which song weaves through text drawn from autobiographical writings, touring ***Virginia Woolf: Killing the Angel, Ethel Smyth: Grasp the Nettle***, and ***Kathleen Ferrier Whattalife!*** throughout the UK and internationally and featuring on BBC TV, BBC Radio 3 and 4. Lucy recorded "Dame Ethel Smyth - Songs and Ballads" for Somm Recordings. ***Virginia Woolf: Killing the Angel*** is published by Aurora-Metro Books.

www.lucystevens.com

ELIZABETH MARCUS

(Pianist)

A professor and fellow at Guildhall School of Music. Elizabeth has performed at the Wigmore Hall, Purcell Room, Queen Elizabeth Hall, St John's Smith Square, and the Royal Opera House. Broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and 4, Classic FM, BBC TV, and Channel 4. On disc, "Cecile Chaminade" with the Tzigane Piano Trio, "South American Songs" with Luciano Botelho and "Dame Ethel Smyth - Songs and Ballads" with Lucy Stevens, for Somm Recordings. Elizabeth has performed throughout the UK and internationally with Lucy Stevens in ***Virginia Woolf: Killing the Angel***, ***Ethel Smyth: Grasp the Nettle***, and ***Kathleen Ferrier Whattalife!***

SARAH-LOUISE YOUNG

(Director)

An actress, writer, director, and internationally renowned cabaret performer. She has appeared in the West End with ***Fascinating Aïda***, ***La Soirée***, ***Showstopper! The Improvised Musical***, and ***Julie Madly Deeply***. The latter played a sold out run at Brits Off Broadway in 2019. Other directing credits include ***Looking For Me Friend: The Music Of Victoria Wood***, ***Jarman***, ***Lynn Ruth Miller: Not Dead Yet***, and ***The Bobby Kennedy Experience***. She is currently touring Australia and New Zealand with her solo show, ***An Evening Without Kate Bush*** and developing a new musical, set in the Grand Guignol of Paris about Paula Maxa.

www.sarah-louise-young.com

ANT PRIOLA

(Production Stage Manager)

Ant Priola is an Equity stage manager and multidisciplinary theater artist proud to be making their Off Broadway debut! Past credits include: various work for the National New Play Network, ***Party?*** (PSM), ***Chesapeake Chicks*** (ASM), and ***Vatican Falls*** (ASM). Many thanks to the staff at 59E59 for giving them this opportunity!

ASTOR THEATRE

A beautifully restored venue in the coastal town of Deal, Kent, sits near the iconic White Cliffs of Dover and has grown into a thriving hub for the creative arts. Serving Deal's diverse community, it hosts an eclectic mix of live music, theatre, literary events, art exhibitions, and more. Originally gifted to the town by the Astor family in recognition of its stoicism during World War II, the theatre operates as a not-for-profit, dedicated to enriching the local cultural scene.

www.theastor.co.uk

SPECIAL THANKS

The Chair of the Astor Theatre, Duncan Cambell, and the Board for all their support and collaboration with this production.

CURATOR'S NOTE

When I connected with Lucy Stevens about Gertrude Lawrence, a trailblazing woman of the 20th-century theater scene, I was instantly impressed by her enthusiastic and rigorous approach to understanding Gertie's life. Stevens' ability to craft so much of the play directly from Gertrude's diaries created a refreshing way to hear her story up close and personal. With the bonus of Lucy's spot-on renditions of these beloved songs, we've got the perfect recipe for a delectable evening at the theater.



Val

VAL DAY
Artistic Director,
59E59 Theaters

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OUR MISSION

59E59 Theaters was established by the Elysabeth Kleinhans Theatrical Foundation in 2004 to grant professional space and expertise to non-profit theater companies premiering their work in New York City. Under the leadership of Val Day, Artistic Director, and Brian Beirne, Managing Director, 59E59 Theaters presents a year-round curated program of Off Broadway plays and musicals that are nurtured and supported by providing performance spaces and equipment as well as production, ticketing, FOH, marketing, and press support. These theater companies receive 80% or more of the ticket revenue and pay no weekly rent to 59E59.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

59E59 Theaters reside on the traditional homelands of the Lenni-Lenape People on the Lenape Island of Mannahatta. We acknowledge the Lenni-Lenape as the original people of the land who were forcefully removed during colonization resulting in erased and excluded peoples and culture. We are grateful for the opportunity to work on the land and honor their elders, past and present alongside future generations for their stewardship and continuing relationship with their territory.

This presentation is not a production of the Elysabeth Kleinhans Theatrical Foundation, Inc., which offers its facilities, when available, for productions by not-for-profit theater companies. For further information regarding licensing this theater or other theaters in this Theater Building, contact Brian Beirne, Managing Director. The use of cameras and other recording devices in the Theater is prohibited by law. There is no smoking in this Theater or any part of the Theater Building.