Heavy rain in the preceding weeks had saturated the soil around the diverted bed of the Ebbw River, to the point that the pressure collapsed the piles holding the trench in place. The work of constructing the lock had been undertaken by civil engineers Messrs. Easton Gibb and Son on behalf of the Alexandra Docks and Railway Company, the idea being to attract the class of huge new cargo ships designed to pass through the newly-opened Panama Canal. The subsequent enquiry was evidently unwilling to let blame for the incident reach anywhere near the top of the chain of command and rounded instead upon a certain Ratcliffe, a site supervisor. Ratcliffe, whose duty was to physically inspect the timbers, had been hurt in the collapse but bizarrely, after being treated for broken ribs and other relatively minor injuries had been sent home where he chirpily sat up in bed and gave interviews to reporters.

Then, within hours and for medical reasons that are unclear, he died, his name added to the list of 38 others who had perished. Although there were the conventional expressions of regret at his death, there was no disguising the relief felt in certain quarters at the timely expiry of a man upon whom much of the blame for the loss of life could plausibly be heaped.

The monarch who had pinned the medal to Tom's chest came to Newport and saw for himself the obscene gash in the ground where once the ordered dock workings had been and the rail trucks and cranes that had slid into the subsidence. The genuine grief of a monarch for his people may also have masked another piece of cynicism. Documents which passed between civil servants suggested that a 17-year-old boy who had been written off as tear-away, but who went on to display great bravery, could be used as a good example for other erring youths—an early attempt at positive spin. In fact, the Argus delivery boy, who only weeks before the disaster had been convicted for stealing lead, was to make further appearances at Newport's magistrates' court before once more passing into the background of public affairs.

Today, those who died are remembered by an obelisk at St. Woolos' cemetery. The name of Tom Toya Lewis, the faulted hero of the Newport docks disaster is remembered by surviving family members and in the name of a public house.

The courage of a boy who took his own life in his hands and made a decision no 17-year-old should ever have to make as a fellow human being lay trapped and in pain, will always burn bright in the city's history.

DANIEL LLEWELYN-WILLIAMS

Writer and Performer



From Newport in South Wales, trained at LAMDA. Awards: Best Performance in the English Language (Wales Theatre Awards 2015), Best Solo Show (San Diego Fringe Festival), Artistic Excellence, Encore Award, Best Performance by an Actor (Hollywood Fringe). Theater: ***The 39 Steps*** (West End), ***Cyrano De Bergerac***, ***Hamlet***, ***Not About Heroes***, ***Arms and the Man***, ***The Winslow Boy***, ***As You Like It***, ***The Taming of the Shrew***, ***Arden of Faversham***, ***Suddenly Last Summer***, ***An Inspector Calls***, ***Troilus and Cressida***, ***Brassed Off*** (Theatr Clwyd), ***The Comedy of Errors*** (Regent's Park), ***Carrie's War*** (West End and national tour), ***Tintin*** (West End/ national tour), ***Romans in Britain*** (Sheffield Crucible). Film: *The Machine*, *Vanity Fair*, *Charlotte Grey*, *The Gigolos*. Television: *Doctors* (BBC), *Midsomer Murders* (Bentley), *EastEnders* (BBC), *Torchwood* (BBC). Founder of Flying Bridge, now producing several big projects for National and International Touring.
www.flyingbridgetheatre.co.uk
www.daniellewelynwilliams.co.uk

JOSH RICHARDS

Director



Josh was born and bred in Tenby, South West Wales and attended the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama. Theater: Three seasons of world touring with the RSC, plus thirty years of stage work at the highest level. International critical acclaim for his portrayal of Richard Burton in his one-man show ***Playing Burton***, also a BAFTA Award-winning feature film. He has also devised, designed, produced, and directed the Fringe First winner ***Rosebud -The Lives of Orson Welles***, Edinburgh 2004 and 2007. Film: Playing Burton, Rancid Aluminium, Very Annie Mary, Dr. Sleep, Troy, Devil's Bridge, Panic Button, and The Darkest Day.

MEG COX

Composer

Meg has been playing and performing since age four, starting with the bodhran (traditional Irish drum), moving on to mandolin, guitar, tenor guitar, banjo, and fiddle. As fiddle player, first coached by Dana Conlin and now a student of master fiddler Mike Lease. Meg plays with a host of musicians of all ages and musical genres, including Morfa, Band Nantgarw—a young group of Welsh musicians, Rogora Khart, The Hay Band, and Celtic sessions all over South Wales.

NEXT IN THEATER B — JANUARY 11 - FEBRUARY 4



59E59 THEATERS STAFF

VAL DAY Artistic Director
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JAMES SPARNON Production/Facility Manager
JESSICA HART Finance Associate/Office Manager
SPONDEE House Guy
JOHN D. IVY Theater Technician
KIRSTY GAUKEL Director of Marketing
KAREN GRECO Press Representative
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NATHANIEL CLARIDAD Box Office Associate
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STEVEN MEEKER JR. Box Office Associate
MARTAVIUS PARRISH Box Office Associate
IAN PRINCE Box Office Associate
LLOYD MULVEY Box Office Associate/Front Desk

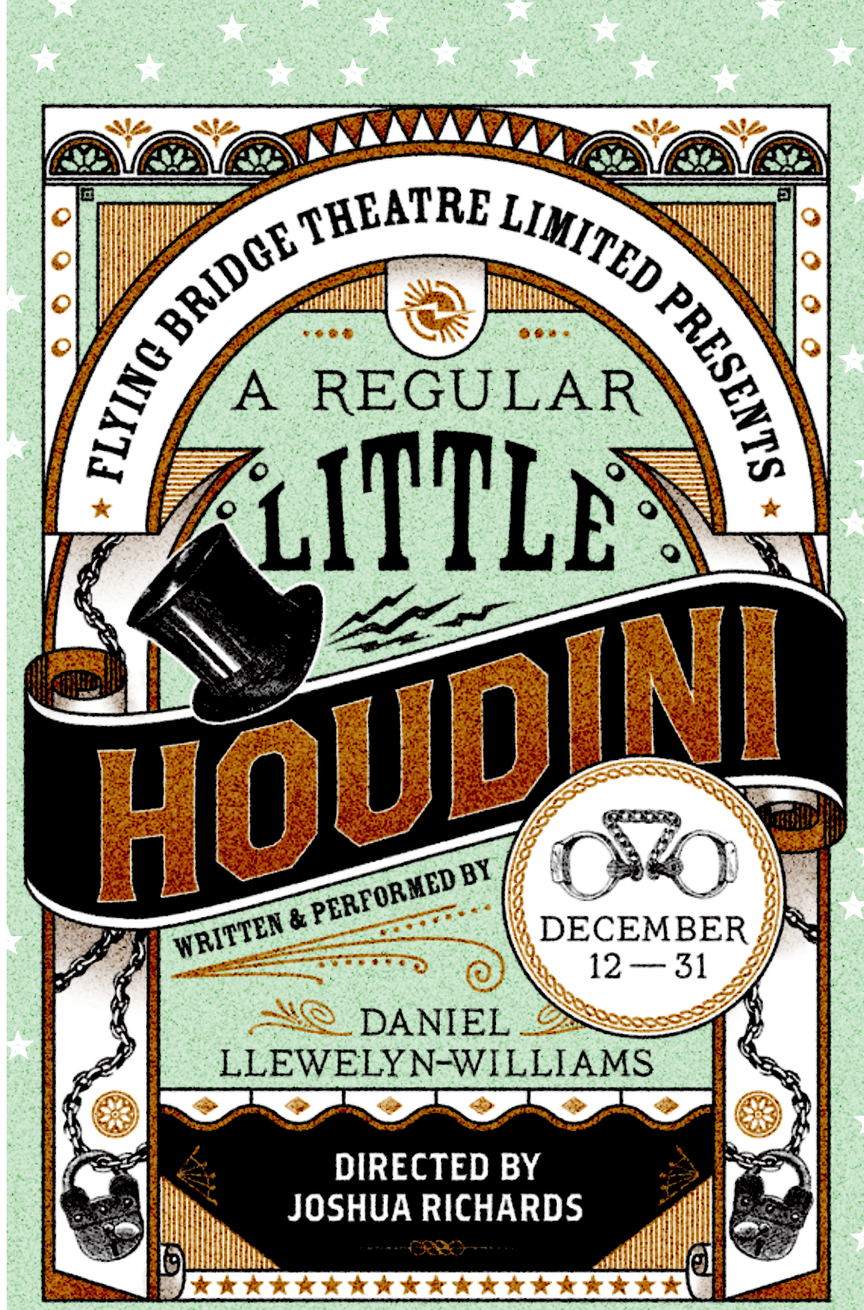
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ALICE JOHNSON E:BAR Staff
LINDSAY WALKER Theater Manager
ERIK DE JESUS House Manager
JASMIN MORALES Front of House Assistant
RICARDO ANTONIO Usher
DEVON AUSTIN Usher
MICHAEL DEVINE Usher
BRANDON JOHNSON Usher
JOHN KARCHER Usher
KAILAH KING Usher
CHRISTOPHER (ACE) LANTIGUA Usher
MEGAN MILKO Usher
JOSE RONDON Usher
GIRAULT SEGER Usher
BENJI SILLS Usher
TORIA STERLING Usher
EDGARD TORO Usher
JESUS RIVERA Facilities Manager
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JOHNATHAN PRICE Facilities



design: musemanhattan.nyc

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59 E 59

THEATER C

DECEMBER 12 - 31, 2017

Flying Bridge
Theatre Limited

presents

A REGULAR LITTLE HOUDINI

WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY

DANIEL LLEWELYN-WILLIAMS

DIRECTED BY

JOSHUA RICHARDS

The running time of ***A Regular Little Houdini*** is 85 minutes with no intermission.

THANKS TO

The Riverfront Newport, Monty and Tom Dart, Dave and Jane Cox,
David Evans, Kimberly Williams, Deirdre Williams,
and finally to Dan's dad Alan who was the inspiration for
the main character and who sadly passed earlier this year.

For details, please visit the website
www.aregularlittlehoudini.co.uk or www.flyingbridgetheatre.co.uk

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Dedicated in
loving memory to
ALAN JOHN
WILLIAMS

HARRY HOUDINI

Harry Houdini or Ehrich Weiss, a Hungarian-American magician noted for his sensational escape acts, was born in Budapest on March 24, 1874. From an early age, he performed as a trapeze artist in circuses.



Harry Houdini

Around 1900, Houdini began to earn international reputation for his amazing feats of escape from locked containers whilst shackled and handcuffed. When Houdini first visited Newport in 1905, he was already a star on both sides of the Atlantic.

April 17, 1905: Houdini began a week-long engagement at the Lyceum Theatre in Newport, South Wales, where he was challenged by four carpenters to break out of a packing crate they had constructed. Houdini agreed, once air holes had been drilled in the crate stating, "Even I need air… sometimes."

Houdini later accepted the challenge of the Chief Constable to try and break out of Newport jail. In front of huge crowds, Houdini left his clothes in one cell and was secured in another, completely naked.

After three minutes, the Chief Constable announced, "We'll keep him there for three days." With that, Houdini appeared fully dressed. He'd escaped from one cell, broken into the other, and dressed in 3 minutes. He then insisted on opening the locked gates of the corridor, followed by a double-locked gate.

Eight years later, in 1913, Houdini returned to Newport. He announced his intention, if given permission by the authorities, to leap from Newport Bridge, manacled, into the River Usk where he would free himself underwater. Permission was not given but Houdini dodged the police to leap from the bridge anyway.

On the appointed day, there were huge crowds. The police were there to control them and prevent the jump. A car containing an assistant, resembling Houdini, was a decoy, with Houdini bringing up the rear. With the police distracted, Houdini climbed onto a buttress. Manacled and feet shackled, he dived from twenty feet into the river, surfacing at a distance, free of his cumbrances.

Newport Police served two summonses for his defiance; holding an illegal entertainment on Newport Bridge and obstructing a public highway. Houdini sought maximum publicity by announcing the actions of the police from the stage where he performed that evening.

Houdini appeared at Newport Police Court where a verdict of "case dismissed" was delivered. Houdini walked free without any punishment. For the next thirteen years, he continued to thrill audiences throughout the world with his death-defying escapades. He died in Detroit on 31st October 1926 of peritonitis.

NEWPORT TRANSPORTER BRIDGE

A landmark that can be seen for twenty miles or more from both sides of the Bristol Channel. It has been said that the bridge is a work of art and the finest of its type in Britain. Its light, graceful lines have endeared it to the hearts of the people.

Work began in the autumn of 1902 and, without a life having been lost in constructing this colossus of steel and wire, the bridge officially opened in 1906.

The first official trip was a complete success, the crossing being made without the slightest vibration or swaying. That night one of the towers was illuminated and hundreds of people paid the halfpenny toll to cross the river.



Newport Transporter Bridge

NEWPORT DOCKS DISASTER AND TOM TOYA LEWIS



Newport Docks

With a deep rumble and reports like gunfire as 13-inch timbers snapped like matchsticks, the sides of the 45-foot deep trench caved in, immediately crushing a score, at least, of the workers and trapping many more. It was into this demonic scene of screams, destruction, and darkness that Tom Toya Lewis plunged, slipping like a lithe little animal through the matrix of twisted and splintered beams and soil down into the bowels of the trench from whence men cried out piteously for help. Lewis was a gambler on the horses and cards. Now he was taking the greatest gamble of his young life. "Mind how you go, young Tom," an ambulance man said as Tom, already white and shaking, despite his saying that he "wasn't afeared" squeezed himself into an opening and slipped down into the chasm.

By the light of naphtha flares 30 feet above, Tom could see a timber, which appeared to run unobstructed down to the trench's bottom, and slid down it, lighting a candle when at length he reached the bottom. He touched something wet, yet with a stickiness unlike the seawater that before long would flood the trench, and saw that it was blood. Seconds later came the voice of the man who had shed it. "They have come at last." groaned Fred Bardill, a huge baulk of timber across his legs and hands and another forcing his head onto his chest.

"Give me something to drink," Tom shouted out, and a brandy bottle was lowered, the contents of which Bardill sucked at greedily. "Got any tools, son?" Tom called up again and a hammer, chisel, and a saw came down, and soon he was working away by the feeble light of a candle, the eerie shadows making a grim tableau orchestrated by the groans and cracks of tortured timber. "I only started the job today. How's that for luck?" Bardill grimaced as his hand was set free, telling Tom in rambling fashion how he had been climbing out of the trench but had been pitched back into it by the collapse of the ladder. Tom, begrimed and blinded by his own sweat, said nothing, directing his blows at the tough timber. And then he stopped, hammer in mid-air. There came another deep groan as a timber nearby began to give under the immense pressure. "Tom! Little Tom! Get out quickly" the cry came from. The groans and creaks were at a crescendo as the shouts came again. "Don't leave me!" Bardill pleaded and Tom, frightened and exhausted, began to cry. He dropped the tools and scrambled towards the flares, the sounds of the cracking timber drowning out Bardill's cries. He had gambled with his own life and had very nearly lost. Now the life of the hapless Bardill was forfeit.

Back on the surface, Tom, shaken by his underground encounter, was wrapped in a blanket and taken to his home at Wallis Street where he collapsed into bed, later to be woken and told that Bardill had been rescued and was recovering from his injuries.

Another message reaching him some days later thrilled the boy to the core. King Edward VII had summoned him to Buckingham Palace for the award of the Albert Medal for conspicuous bravery. As he pinned the medal on to Tom's breast, the King said "Well done, Tom Lewis. I shall expect to hear more about you." Tom Lewis's story had all the elements of a thriller—death and primeval darkness, hope, abandonment, and fear—and yet even that could not overshadow the wider events of July 2, 1909.