

The Lifeblood

Written and Directed by
Glyn Maxwell

£150



'Courtroom drama at its
very best'

THE SCOTSMAN

★★★★★

'It feels like the history play
Shakespeare never wrote'

THE STAGE

★★★★

THE LAST DAYS OF MARY, QUEEN OF SCOTS

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

Welcome to a very special production from the Barn. A rare event indeed when we're able to produce a play written by one of our own. Perhaps known most widely as a poet, Glyn Maxwell has also written many scripts, libretti, novels and a number of plays, including *The Lifeblood* which has been presented on both sides of the Atlantic over the last 21 years since its premiere at the Hen and Chickens in London. In dealing with the last days of Mary Stuart, it gives a detailed examination of this fascinating period in our history.

After all the trials and tribulations of the last two years it's a delight to be able to continue our comeback season with a play that was awarded British Theatre Guide's 'Best Play' on the Edinburgh Fringe in 2004 - even more exciting that it has been directed by the author himself!

Sit back then, and see for yourself the story of a woman who, having been engaged to be married at the age of five, found herself the victim of plot, counter-plot and fighting for her life.

Simon

Simon Parr
Chairman, Barn Theatre Club



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to our local business supporters.

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GLYN MAXWELL

Glyn Maxwell's latest book of poetry, *How the Hell Are You*, was shortlisted for the T S Eliot Prize of 2020. *Pluto*, *Hide Now*, *The Nerve* and *The Breakage* were all nominated for national awards. His book-length poem *Time's Fool* is in development as a feature film with Fox Searchlight. In 2012 he published *On Poetry*, a popular critical guidebook, and in 2016 its fictional sequel, *Drinks with Dead Poets*.

His plays include *Liberty* (Shakespeare's Globe, 2008), *The Only Girl in the World* (Arcola, 2007), and *The Lifeblood*, which was British Theatre's 'Best New Play' at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2004, having premiered at the Hen and Chickens in 2000. It was revived by Phoenix Theatre Ensemble in New York City in 2008. *The Best Man* was written for Danny Swanson in 2000, and its revival in the virtual Welwyn Drama Festival of 2021, performed on film by Danny, won Overall Winning Production.

He is also a librettist, in which capacity *The Firework Maker's Daughter* (2013, to be staged at the Minack this summer) was nominated for the Oliviers, and *Nothing* (Glyndebourne 2016) for the Sky Arts Award. His new libretto for Wagner's *The Flying Dutchman* will premiere and have a national tour in the autumn of this year.

During a ten-year spell in the USA Glyn taught at Amherst, Princeton, Columbia and NYU, and in the UK has taught at the Universities of Warwick, Essex and Goldsmiths. He is currently Head of Studies on the MA at The Poetry School at Somerset House. He was this year's Chair of Judges for the T S Eliot Prize.

He was born and grew up in Welwyn Garden City, and staged his first three plays in his parents' garden in Guessens Road, starring many Barn luminaries, in the summers of 1991, 1993 and 1995. His acting credits at the Barn stretch from A Ferret (*Toad of Toad Hall*, 1977) to Brick (*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, 1989) to Dr Wilson (*Terra Nova*, 1993), which was directed by his mother Beth, and featured his late father Jim as Roald Amundsen...

CAST

Mary Stuart, formerly Queen of Scotland

CELIA ROBERTS

Claudine Arno, her secretary

FRANCINE ROSS

Dame Edith Paulet, their warden, a Puritan

HANNAH SAYER

Sir Thomas Gorge, an agent

DANNY SWANSON

Sir Francis Walsingham, Queen Elizabeth's spymaster

GLYN MAXWELL

The play takes place in and around Chartley House, Staffordshire in 1586, and Fotheringhay, Northamptonshire, in 1587. Winter.

Mary Stuart arrived in England eighteen years ago, having been deposed as Queen of Scotland. Though assured of safety and protection by her kinswoman Queen Elizabeth I of England, she has remained under effective house-arrest ever since, in a succession of smaller, shabbier houses, with fewer servants and less freedom. As a Catholic, and former Queen of two hostile crowns – France and Scotland – she is regarded by Elizabeth's Protestant ministers as a growing threat to the security of the Realm. A plot is hatched...

CREATIVE TEAM

DIRECTOR	Glyn Maxwell
PRODUCTION MANAGER	Wendy Bage
ASSISTANT DIRECTORS	Danny Swanson, Siobhán Elam
STAGE MANAGER	Sharon Francis
ASMS	Tori White, Natalie Fox-Connor
SET DESIGN	Rosemary Bianchi
SET CONSTRUCTION	Ian Bage, Bob Cameron, Keith Collingwood, Keith Lambert, Norman Merry, Martin Moore, Nigel Rive, John Sear, Edward Washington
SET PAINTING	Rosemary Bianchi, Colin Hickey
STAGE DIRECTOR	John Cude
LIGHTING	Clifton Hoyle, Devi Smart, Maia Smart
SOUND	Rob Wallace
PROPERTIES	Sheila Grimmant, Sue Hantke
WARDROBE	Wendy Bage
FILM AND TRAILER	Glenn Wylds
PHOTOGRAPHY	John Davies, Glenn Wylds
REHEARSAL PROMPT	Janet Lloyd
POSTER AND PROGRAM	John Cook, Clive Weatherley

With special thanks to Linda Croston and the Lacemarket Theatre,
Nottingham; Farm Factory Studios; Margaret Wallace; Wylds Film.

WHY HER, WHY VERSE, WHY NOW?

Why her.

When the subject of Mary Stuart was proposed to me, the details that first struck me related to the strange rooms she was confined in, their unsettling geometry, weird stairs and ever-diminishing space. A very subtle slow Elizabethan torment. As I delved into the history I found the Certainties: that she was Queen of two countries, imprisoned and beheaded by a third, that she wrote poems and made tapestries and had poor judgment of men, that she was generous and red-haired and funny and had too open a heart. That she never once – unlike in the movies – set eyes on Elizabeth, though their tombs lie side by side today. And that the royal line that passes from William the Conqueror to little Prince George Cambridge runs through her and her alone. Lifeblood, indeed.

And I found the Puzzles: how many of the many plots – Ridolfi, Casket, Throckmorton, Babington – was she actually involved in? Did she *know* that the 'design' of Babington and his doomed chums was the assassination of her 'dear sister queen' Elizabeth? How much of all this madness and tragedy did she bring on herself? Like any playwright faced with history, I grow my characters from what is known, add my sense of how humans are, deal in whims and probabilities, set them loose in a space and see what happens.

Why verse.

The Lifeblood is written in blank verse, that is to say: unrhymed pentameters or five-beat lines. This isn't done for reasons of nostalgia or lyricism or trying to sound like the gentleman from Stratford, it's done to create a rhythm of life, a propulsion. It's a metaphor for the regularities in the life of *any* creature, in their Elizabethan age or ours: breath, heartbeat, footfall, day and night, the seasons, the world turning.

I had used that five-beat line in earlier plays – like the ones we did in the garden in Guessens Road (a fairytale, a dystopian fantasy and a local legend) – but then I tried it in a modern setting, for *Broken Journey*, which was staged here in 1996, and then for

this, a 'realistic' history play, so I could voice ancient characters and bygone times in the rhythms of modern speech.

Why now.

In practical terms, because my centenary WGC play *City of Tomorrow* was scuppered by the pandemic three weeks into rehearsals, and the Centenary passed, and there was a still a slot to fill!

In more elevated terms, I read *The Lifeblood* and felt it stood up very well. If anything, it felt more relevant than 20 years ago. A lot has happened to England – not Britain, *England* – in the last few years. Most of it saddens me. And I would contend that any play about the late 16th century that's written (and rewritten) in the early 21st century is a play about the latter. I feel I've depicted a Mary who's not so far from the historical record – most of her best lines in the Trial in Act IV, for example, are *literally* what she said that day in February 1587 and I just versified them – and yet she is also, for me, an expression of a certain kind of timeless spirit: hopeful, generous, merciful, full of *joie-de-vivre*. The England that triumphed locates its pride in a strain that begins with Good Queen Bess and the Empire, the Island People who ruled the Waves. We know what some of these impulses swelled to become, and equally what they've rotted into in recent years. And now we also know what it is to have gross duplicity and deceit enshrined in high office. As Mary said, in life as well as in *The Lifeblood*:

And if her word means nothing, on what grounds are any of you standing?



Edward la Zouche

Forty-nine out of 50 judges at Fotheringhay found Mary Stuart guilty and sent her to her death, as they'd been pretty much commanded to. The other one, a young insignificant baron called Edward la Zouche, dissented, said he was unconvinced of her guilt. How staggeringly brave. He didn't make it into the play but he makes it into this piece.

Glyn Maxwell, April 2022

COMING UP...



16th – 21st May AT 7.30pm

A WEEK OF ENTERTAINING, DRAMATIC COMPETITION.

We are happy to be welcoming the WDF once again. It's their 87th year and they provide a wonderful week of entertaining, dramatic competition. There are two or three short (one-act) plays each night. Teams must adhere to the festival rules and will be awarded marks by a professional adjudicator for acting, production, stage presentation and dramatic achievement.



22nd – 30th April AT 8pm

"I HAVE READ THE PLAY EVELYN! I KEEP READING THE PLAY, BUT THE PLAY KEEPS CHANGING!"

Five neurotic actors, a stressed stage manager, a crazed director, an invisible playwright and an escaped monkey are desperately rehearsing the world's worst play, which keeps being re-written; each re-write more hilariously terrible than the one before. And although it shouldn't really happen, somehow, the show manages to go on.



GREEN ROOM PRESENTS

3rd - 7th May AT 7.30pm

WYLLYOTTS THEATRE POTTERS BAR

THE SHOW WORTH WALKING 500 MILES FOR...IF NOT 500 MORE!

Sunshine on Leith, featuring the songs of The Proclaimers, is an utterly joyous show that also pulls at the heartstrings. It will make you laugh and cry, and could well make you want to get up and dance. See www.wylllyottstheatre.co.uk

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