

COMING UP AT THE BARN



9TH - 17TH FEBRUARY AT 8PM

Funny, tender, brutal and ultimately devastating.

It's a summer's morning in 1988 and Tory politician Robin Hesketh has returned home to the idyllic Cotswold house he shares with his wife of 30 years, Diana. But all is not as blissful as it seems. Diana has a stinking hangover, a fox is destroying the garden, and secrets are being dug up all over the place. As the day draws on, what starts as gentle ribbing and the familiar rhythms of marital sparring quickly turn to blood-sport.

21ST - 24TH FEBRUARY AT 8PM

A powerful psychological drama.

The play is set in a women's prison. Josie is seeing her mother Fay for the first time in fifteen years as she serves a life sentence for murder. With no memory of the events at that time, Josie is seeking answers from Fay who has spent the last fifteen years trying to forget them.

This is a powerful psychological drama between mother and daughter, made more intense when two of Fay's prison guards are drawn into the encounter.



BARN STUDIO

4TH - 9TH MARCH AT 7.30PM

The very best of youth drama from Hertfordshire and the Home Counties.

It's their 80th year of presenting a wonderful week of entertaining competition that attracts young people from Hertfordshire and beyond. They compete for various awards for junior and senior sections. There are two or three short (one-act) plays each night. Adhering to festival rules teams will be awarded marks by a professional GoDa adjudicator for acting, production, stage presentation and dramatic achievement.



BY TOLSTOY AND ADAPTED BY HELEN EDMUNDSON

WAR & PEACE

DIRECTED BY STEVE THOMPSON



AN UNMISSABLE THEATRICAL EVENT

 **BARN THEATRE**

£1.50 | Season 2023-2024

WWW.BARNTHEATRE.CO.UK

WAR & PEACE

A BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The story focuses on the lives of three Russian families: Bolkonsky, Bezuхов and Rostov...

Napoleon marches east across Europe, staining the map with blood. The lives of ordinary Russian families are torn apart as their sons march out to face the enemy and turn them back...

Wounded at the battle of Austerlitz, Andrei returns home to his family to be greeted by tragedy – his wife has died giving birth to their son. Andrei retreats from the world, a broken man, but... at a ball in St Petersburg he meets the captivating young Natasha Rostova. They begin a secret engagement, planning to marry in a year, but at the opera one evening Natasha meets the cruel and amoral Anatole Kuragin who seduces her and she breaks off her engagement to Andrei. Kuragin, it transpires, has a wife already; Natasha's reputation is ruined. Finally, she and Andrei are reunited after the battle of Borodino: as he lies dying she begs his forgiveness...

Andrei's sister Maria, a shy and devout young heiress, is pursued by unscrupulous fortune-hunters. Instead she devotes her life to bringing up her nephew, but as they flee from the marauding French army, she begins an affair with a young Russian officer – Natasha's brother Nikolai Rostov. Meanwhile, Pierre Bezuхов, Andrei's best friend, is tricked into a sham marriage with Hélène, Anatole's beautiful but ruthless sister. She is having multiple sexual affairs behind his back, forcing Pierre to fight a duel to defend his honour... When Napoleon invades Russia, Pierre resolves to assassinate him, but in the attempt he is captured by the marauding French army. He finally escapes and is reunited with Natasha, still mourning Andrei. Pierre declares his love for her and they are married – the three families of Bezuхов, Rostov and Bolkonsky finally united on that day.



BREATH TAKING & BREAKNECK

Some years ago, during an enforced absence from work, rather than binge-watching *Breaking Bad* like a normal person would, I decided to give *War and Peace* one last go. I didn't regret it. The sheer scope, scale and ambition of it is breathtaking. Once you get the hang of the fact that everyone seems to have about ten names it envelops you like a bearskin rug on a winter's troika ride.

At almost 600,000 words in length, with 500 characters, it's a massive doorstop of a thing which Tolstoy originally envisaged as longer. That anyone would consider adapting such a behemoth for the stage seems insane, yet Helen Edmundson has managed it by cunning use of stagecraft, physicality, language and insight into the essence of the novel. She immersed herself in the subject, reading the book twice, visiting Russia and researching the period in which the play was both written and set. She has teased the main threads of the story of three families intertwined with the grand sweep of European history to pose the questions of the rights of man, the legitimacy of warfare, land ownership, religion, belief, the nature of love, poverty, wealth and man's helplessness in the face of 'events'. She does this while keeping the feeling of something vast, deep and unknowable, the spirit of Russia itself. All of that she manages to put into a dramatic piece that runs at less than 4 hours and once it starts goes at the breakneck speed of a charging Cossack.

Tolstoy initially thought to begin the novel with one of his main protagonists, Pierre Bezuхов, returning from exile in Siberia having been involved in the Decembrist rising. He ditched this when he became so engaged with the period surrounding the battles of Austerlitz and Borodino. The character of Pierre though is seen by some as the voice of Tolstoy, the immensely wealthy landowner, troubled by thoughts of whether this is a right and fair way to live.

Tolstoy's original plan, alongside her own experiences of visiting the Hermitage in St Petersburg, gave Edmundson her prologue and so begins this vast, sprawling tale. Sit back and let the world of the court and army of Tsarist Russia embrace you.

WAR & PEACE

THE NOVEL

Count **Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy** (1828-1910), referred to as **Leo Tolstoy**, was a Russian writer, usually regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time. He received nominations for the Nobel Prize in Literature every year from 1902 to 1906 and for the Nobel Peace Prize in 1901, 1902, and 1909. Born to an aristocratic Russian family in 1828, Tolstoy's notable works include the novels *War and Peace* (1869) and *Anna Karenina* (1878) – often cited as pinnacles of realist fiction.

War and Peace is set during the Napoleonic Wars. First published in 1865, the work was rewritten many times and finally published in its entirety in 1869. It's usually regarded as Tolstoy's finest literary achievement and remains an internationally praised classic of world literature.

'In love there are two evils: war and peace.'

Horace

CREATIVE TEAM

Director	Steve Thompson
Musical Director	Rob Wallace
Production Manager	Jacqueline Clayton
Stage Manager	Rob Wallace, Sharon Francis
Assistant Stage Manager	Dave House
Set Construction	Ian Bage, Bob Cameron, Dougle Cameron Dylan Rushin Cameron, Roger Eames, David Fairhurst Robert Gill, Dave House, Stephen Kahn Ian Major, John Sear, Nigel Rive
Costume Design	Tiffany Breeze, Jenny O'Sullivan assisted by Yvonne Bartlett
Props	Sheila Grimmant
Lighting Design	Clifton Hoyle
Lighting	Stephen Kahn, Nick Mogg Eli Thompson, Tristan Cameron
Rehearsal Prompt	Carolyne Mitchell
Chaperone	Yvonne Bartlett, Jacqueline Clayton Linda Miles, Georgie Palmer
Production Photos	Stephen Kahn, Simon Wallace
Marketing	Stephen Kahn, Julia Riley
Poster & Programme	John Cook, Clive Weatherley

CAST

in alphabetical order

General Kutuzov/Bazdeyev	Doug Brooker
Anatole/Boris	Tallan Cameron
Maria	Alice Croot
Anna Pavlovna/French Officer	Natalie Gordon
Nikolai	Joshua Holloway
Natasha	Kizzie Hopkinson
Prince Vasili/Beausset	John Keogh
Lisa/Sonya	Jessica King
Andrei	Gavin Palmer
Countess Rostov/Russian Officer	Julia Riley
Maria Dmitrievna/Theodosia	Victoria Rive
Pierre	Sean Scotchford
Petya	Alice Thompson
Count Rostov/Karatev	David Thompson
Helene/Timohin	Hattie Thompson
The Attendant	Keith Thompson
Little Nikolai	Moses Thompson
Prince Bolkonsky/Dolohov	Des Turner
Mademoiselle Bourienne/French Aide	Lou Wallace
Napoleon/Vicomte	Christopher Wallace

Other parts played by members of the company.

The action takes place in three main locations in Russia: St Petersburg, Moscow, and a private estate in the Bald Hills.

There will be an interval of 20 minutes

We would like to thank CoPs and HDOS Hertford for the loan of chairs and pistols, Veronika Baieva and her mother for their assistance with song translations, and Hertfordshire Players for the loan of some costumes.

SURROUNDING HISTORY

War and Peace was designed by Tolstoy as a chronicle of the **Russian Empire's** involvement in the **Napoleonic wars** (1805-1812) which were a series of wars with France, interrupted by periods of peace. Russia is still currently under the feudal system, which many associate with the medieval period, inspiring many to support **Napoleon Bonaparte's** reforms brought by the French Revolution (1789-99). As a result, the future of Russia is extremely unpredictable especially during the **1825 Decembrist revolt**, taking place only 5 years after the performance's Epilogue in 1820.

The Russian Empire

An Empire lasting from 1721 to 1917 consisting of multiple ethnic groups due to its large size including Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and the several peoples East of the Ural Mountains in Asia.

Napoleon Bonaparte

A Corsican-born French officer (born in 1769) who rose through the ranks of the French army by breaking up riots for the French Republic during the French Revolution, as well as successfully defeating the British in Toulon and the Austrians in Italy. After a coup in 1799, he would become the leader of France where he was declared Emperor in 1804 (at the age of 35). He would lead a series of successful wars across Europe fighting from Cairo to Madrid, with their nemesis Britain convincing the powers of Europe to form seven coalitions against Napoleon where the balance of power shifted after his brutal loss against the Russians in 1812. Where in 1815 after his defeat in Waterloo he was exiled (for the second time after 1814) to the Island of St Helena where he would die in 1821.

Russia and the Napoleonic Wars

1805-09 (part 1): Russia joins a coalition with predominantly Austria and Britain against France, due to the radical revolutionary reform and aggression of France into the German and Italian states. In two consecutive (1805-1807) wars the coalition was defeated, turning the French Empire into the powerhouse of Europe, and Russia was forced as their ally as well as to not trade with the UK.

The Battle of Austerlitz: the major Battle saw Russia's army almost completely decimated in December 1805 with 30,000 casualties. The retreating Russian army had their men flee across the ice of a nearby river, only for it to be shot by the French cannons, where many drowned.

1811-12 (part 2): the French Empire in 1811 dominated all of Europe, only being truly challenged by Great Britain. This is until the Russians begin trading with the British again to

help its failing economy, where Napoleon begins to raise an army of 600,000 men (only half being French) to invade Russia. In the ensuing invasion of 1812, a million would die with the French leaving with only under 100,000 French returning.

The Decembrist Revolt 1825

5 years after the Epilogue many politicians and former Russian Officers who fought against Napoleon would go on to challenge the new Russian Emperor Nicholas II. Their aims were to abolish serfdom and to introduce a constitutional monarchy. They failed at this, with the revolting soldiers and officers being executed or banished to Siberia.

| Joshua Holloway

'It might not be the best book ever written, but it's definitely in the top one.'

Any play, film or TV adaptation of this epic work inevitably draws comparison with the novel. Rest assured, Helen Edmundson's play is a beautifully written piece of literature that can stand by itself. The play traverses 15 locations from socialite soirées to New Year's Eve balls, from battles and hunts back to quiet tête-à-têtes all in 88 whirlwind scenes, scenes that 'melt into each other like snowflakes'. This is a play with over 30 beautifully drawn, three-dimensional characters with over 60 independent relationships. The characters are all pitifully flawed, but the piece is so cleverly written that we care deeply about all of them. How can we not love the flibbertigibbet but delightful Natasha? Or her mother, the classist but passionately caring Countess Rostova? Or the pompous, aloof Prince Andrei who wants, above all else, to take care of his family. And the uncouth and awkward Pierre, who just can't help himself sometimes. We love 'em: warts 'n' all.

Edmundson tells a huge tale in just a few hours of drama, so not a word is wasted. Plot is delivered on every page at unexpected times, so cast and audience have to be on their respective and collective toes to deliver and pick up the many twists and turns. The pace often changes in a split second. We go straight from a bloody and violent hunting scene to two young siblings sitting peacefully sharing their life dreams.

At our first get-together, Steve Thompson, the director, set us the challenge of turning the wonderful script, these simple words on a page, into a fabulous piece of theatre. We were 20 actors, most of us would play more than one part, everyone would be in the chorus, we'd all be dancing and creating the music live on stage. 'And, in case you weren't paying attention, there are two plays, not just one. And there's Christmas in between. It's incredibly ambitious, but with hard work and focus, I know we can do it.'

So it began. There has been both hard work and focus, but, above all, rehearsals have been intensely enjoyable. There's not been a moment wasted: if you were called, you would be busy. Anyone that wanted tea had better turn up 20 minutes early and get the kettle on...

| David Thompson