



OPEN AUDITIONS

By Frances Hodgson Burnett, adapted by Elizabeth Newman

Directed by Janet Podd and Faith Turner

Auditions: 27th and 29th February 2024

Rehearsals: 2nd March – 10th June 2024, evenings and weekends

Performances: 11th – 15th June 2024 at the Roman Theatre of St Albans

OVO is seeking 4 adult actors and up to 11 child actors for its forthcoming production of THE SECRET GARDEN which will be performed as part of the 2024 Roman Theatre Open Air Festival in St Albans.

About the Roman Theatre Festival

2024 marks the tenth anniversary season of OVO's Roman Theatre Open Air Festival.

The Festival has become a highlight of the summer cultural calendar, attracting diverse audiences who are drawn not only by the allure of the ancient ruins, in the UK's oldest producing theatre, but also the high-quality award winning and critically acclaimed productions presented by OVO and visiting theatre companies.

Renowned for its bold, imaginative and surprising spins on classic plays and stories, in this landmark year OVO will present brand-new adaptations of English classics as well as the return of some iconic audience favourites. Other in house OVO productions this season include The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Merchant of Venice, Gawain and the Green Knight, Sense and Sensibility, The Cherry Orchard // Seagull and new British musical The Highwayman.

About the OVO Community Ensemble

This production marks the launch of OVO's new community ensemble, aimed at giving local people the chance to perform in high quality productions in a professional environment. The ensemble is part of our new education and outreach strand, which will open up a range of participation and training opportunities for children, young people and adults across St Albans and surrounding areas.

The story

It is 1912.

At the beginning of the play, the central character, Mary Lennox, is an unprepossessing girl, orphaned by a cholera epidemic in the Indian outpost where she was born. Mary is sent to her only living relative, a reclusive uncle who Mary has never met. He lives on the Yorkshire Moors in a huge house called Misselthwaite Manor.

Gradually Mary learns to make friends in her new home; first with her servant, high spirited Martha. Soon Mary is out in the gardens and then out onto the wild moor. She meets Dickon, Martha's brother, who works in the garden but also enjoys time out on the moor where he has made friends with many of the birds and animals which he loves.

Mary unlocks two of the house's secrets. First, she solves the mystery of the crying she hears at night, discovering Colin, her uncle's young son, who has convinced himself that he is ill having been ostracised by his father. Secondly, she hears about the Secret Garden which was locked by her uncle many years ago, after his wife died. On finding the key she and Dickon nurse the garden back to life.

But it's not only the plants and animals which thrive there. Colin and Mary's uncle are also transformed by the garden's healing power just as Mary has been.

About the Directors

The production will be co-directed by Janet Podd who has directed numerous productions for OVO since 2012, including *Playhouse Creatures*, *The Crucible* and *Hedda Gabler* as well as co-directing many classic plays at the Roman Theatre with OVO's Artistic Director, Adam Nichols. Janet began her performing career in a number of roles in Oxford including Sonya in *Uncle Vanya* at the Playhouse, and Liika in *The Promise* at the Burton Rooms. Her directorial debut was Pinter's *The Birthday Party* which toured Oxfordshire Schools where she also led workshops with students. She began the Drama Department at the North London Collegiate School where she prepared students for both GCSE Drama and A level Theatre Studies. She directed over 40 productions there, including two at the Edinburgh Fringe. Her work in Opera includes *Dido and Aeneas* for the Scottish Music School and *The Marriage of Figaro* for Prior Park College in Bath. She is also a Drama Consultant for Maru-a-Pula School in Botswana.

Janet is joined by Faith Turner who has performed with OVO for over a decade – most recently as Jenny in *Mosquitoes*, the Professor in *Little Women* and the title role in *Hedda Gabler*. Faith is an experienced Drama teacher and practitioner who has worked with young people for the past 14 years. Formerly Deputy Director of Drama at St Paul's Girls' School, London, she has worked in a range of schools and theatre companies devising new work and directing young people in numerous productions, with highlights including Sarah Ruhl's *Eurydice*, Kneehigh's *946: The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips*, Rachel Cusk's *Medea* and *The Permanent Way* by David Hare.

Janet and Faith are delighted to be working together on this charming play which celebrates the power of transformation and healing through nature. It is a play of gentle wonder, set among the grassy banks of a 2,000 year old theatre; a near perfect summer theatre experience for children, and a salve to the souls of adults too in these troubled times.

The way we will bring the play to life

Rehearsals provide an opportunity for the entire company to work imaginatively, testing ideas out playfully.

We enjoy working physically and aim to build an expressive movement vocabulary to enforce meaning and create atmosphere. Children will create the ensemble and be involved throughout the play; guiding us through the narrative as observers and narrators, multi-rolling other spoken roles and creating the overall world of the play. The ensemble will also be working with animal puppets, infusing them with life and character. Music will be very important in the show and there are songs for the whole company as well as for single voices but you do not need to be an expert singer to audition!

We are looking for individuals who are creative, collaborative, kind and responsible. We're interested in working with people who are excited about being a part of the creative and collaborative process of making theatre. Given the prominence of the ensemble, we are looking for people who are ready and able to make the time commitment that is needed for this project.

Casting: adult roles

N.B. We are open to all characters being played by either male or female actors.

Ben (playing age 35-65)

He is the oldest serving gardener of Misselthwaite Manor - a real salt of the earth. He has a very strong Yorkshire accent. Very kind to Mary at first but gets upset and angry when Mary wants to get into the Secret Garden. Potential for comedy.

Mr Craven (playing age 35-45)

He is Mary's uncle who has poor health. He married a beautiful woman who died. The Secret Garden was hers. After she died, in his misery, he ordered that the Secret Garden should be locked and no one should enter. He is estranged from his son owing to his grief, yet very kind to Mary when she eventually meets him.

Mrs Medlock (playing age 40-55)

The dragon of a housekeeper. Not always very tactful, very determined to keep the rules in the house and to do her job well, she takes it very seriously. But really has a heart of gold. Potential for comedy.

Martha (playing age 17-35)

Dickon's sister. Mary's servant. High-spirited and warm-hearted. Forms a close relationship with Mary. Strong Yorkshire accent.

Casting: child roles

N.B. We are open to all characters being played by either male or female actors. All child roles have a playing age of 10-14.

Mary

The main character, she arrives at Misselthwaite Manor as a proud, sulky, lonely girl who has never had the benefits of a loving family. After making friends with Martha and Dickon and discovering the beauty of the surrounding landscape she becomes forceful, passionate and caring.

Dickon

Martha's brother. Passionate about nature and the animals which live in it. Forms a close relationship with Mary. Strong Yorkshire accent.

Colin

Mr Craven's son and Mary's cousin. Mary discovers him. Believing that he is developing his father's illness he has become bitter and taken to his bed. When Mary meets him, he is too weak to walk or sit up. It is his cries that Mary hears at night. Mary encourages him to feel the benefits of the garden and it is she who convinces him that there is nothing wrong with him.

Ensemble

The ensemble is made up of a group of child actors. They are involved throughout the performance and will need to work physically. They will serve as narrators, multi-role as other spoken parts, manipulate the animal puppets, create the world of the play and join in with company songs. We are looking for focus, generosity and imaginative play.

Rehearsal and performance schedule

We ask that you **only put yourself forward for audition if you are available for all the rehearsal and performance dates listed overleaf.**

Please note that you will *not* be expected to attend every rehearsal and you may only be called for parts of the longer rehearsals outlined. A more detailed breakdown of rehearsals will be provided post casting. Rehearsals will primarily be held at The Maltings Theatre until the production week at The Roman Theatre.

However, in order to ensure that we can schedule rehearsals effectively, with the minimum of complexity, we are asking that everyone is available for all dates at the outset.

Remuneration

This production is being performed by OVO's new Community Ensemble. Acting roles are unremunerated.

Auditions

Auditions will take at The Maltings Theatre, St Albans as follows:

Tuesday 27th February

Children (group workshop) from 5.00 – 7.00pm

Adults from 7.30-10.00pm

Thursday 29th February

Children (group workshop) from 5.00 – 7.00pm

Adults from 7.30-10.00pm

To register your interest in the production please email faith@ovo.org.uk with your name and the date you wish to audition stating if you are a child or an adult.

You will then receive confirmation of your audition date, time slot, and details of the format of the audition.

CLOSING DATE FOR EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST: FRIDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2024 AT 5PM

Should you have any issues or queries surrounding the schedule or production, feel free to get in touch - faith@ovo.org.uk.

We are excited about this new project and are very much looking forward to meeting and working with you to bring this production to life at The Roman Theatre.

Best wishes

Faith and Janet

Schedule

Day	Date	Month	Timings	Who
Sat	2	Mar	10.30-12.30pm	All Children
			1-5pm	Full Cast
Thu	7	Mar	5-7pm	Lead Children
Sun	10	Mar	1.30-5.30pm	Full Cast
Tue	12	Mar	5-7pm	Ensemble children
Thu	14	Mar	5-7pm	Lead children and adults
Sat	16	Mar	10.30-5.30pm	Full Cast
Tue	19	Mar	5-7pm	All Children
Thu	21	Mar	5-7pm	Lead children and adults
Sat	23	Mar	10am-3pm	Full Cast
Tue	26	Mar	5-7pm	Ensemble children
			7-10pm	Adults
Thu	28	Mar	5-7pm	All Children
			7-10pm	Adults
Sat	13	April	10am-5.30pm	Full Cast
Sun	14	April	1.30-5.30pm	All Children
Thu	18	April	5-7pm	All Children
			7-10pm	Adults
Sat	20	April	10am-5.30pm	Full Cast
Tue	23	April	5-7pm	Lead Children
Sat	27	April	10am-5.30pm	Full cast
Tue	30	April	5-7pm	Ensemble children
Thu	2	May	5-7pm	All Children
Mon	6	May	10am-2.30pm	Full Cast
Thu	9	May	5-7pm	All Children
Sun	12	May	1.30-7.00pm	Full Cast
Tue	14	May	5-7pm	All Children
Sat	18	May	10am-5.30pm	Full Cast
Sun	19	May	1.30-5.30pm	Full Cast
Tue	21	May	5-7pm	All Children
Thu	23	May	5-7pm	All Children
Sat	24	May	10.30am-5.30pm	Full Cast
Thu	30	May	3-6pm	Full Cast
Sat	1	Jun	10.30am-5.30pm	Full Cast
Sun	2	Jun	10.30am-5.30pm	Full Cast
Tue	4	Jun	4-6pm	Full Cast
Thu	5	Jun	5-8pm	Full Cast
Sat	8	Jun	All Day	Full Cast
Sun	9	Jun	All Day	Full Cast
Mon	10	Jun	3-11pm	Full Cast
Tue	11	Jun	7.30pm	Performance
Wed	12	Jun	REST	DAY
Thu	13	Jun	11.30am / 7.30pm	2 x Performance
Fri	14	Jun	7.30pm	Performance
Sat	15	Jun	2.30pm / 7.30pm	2 x Performance