

# MURDER, MARGARET AND ME

by Philip Meeks

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-11023-8

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Murder, Margaret and Me was first performed at the  
York Theatre Royal on 17th February 2017.

The cast was as follows:

Margaret Rutherford **Susie Blake**  
Agatha Christie **Nichola McAuliffe**  
The Spinster **Andrina Carroll**

Written by **Philip Meeks**  
Directed by **Damian Cruden**  
Designed by **Dawn Allsopp**  
Lighting design by **Prema Mehta**  
Sound design by **Yvonne Gilbert**

## CAST

### SUSIE BLAKE

Theatre credits include: *Grumpy Old Women* (UK Tour), *Handbagged* (UK Tour), *Aladdin* (Yvonne Arnaud Theatre); *The Importance of Being Earnest A New Musical* (Riverside Studios); *When We Are Married* (Garrick Theatre); *Pygmalion* (Chichester Festival Theatre); *Grumpy Old Women Live 2* (UK Tour and Novello Theatre); *Boeing Boeing* (UK Tour); *Snake in the Grass* and *Life and Beth* (Stephen Joseph Theatre and UK Tour); *Wicked* (Apollo Victoria); *High Society* (UK Tour); *Noises Off* (National Theatre); *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *A Funny Thing Happened On The Way To The Forum* (Regent's Park); *Virtual Reality* (Stephen Joseph Theatre); *The Shakespeare Revue* (RSC); *Absent Friends* (West Yorkshire Playhouse & Lyric, Hammersmith); *Prin* (Lyric, Hammersmith); *Blithe Spirit* (Royal Exchange, Manchester).

Television includes: *Midsomer Murders*; *Great Night Out*; *Wild At Heart*; Beverley Unwin in *Coronation Street*; *April Fools Day*; *Wake up with...* (ITV); Cuckoo (BBC Three), *Murder on the Homefront* (Carnival Film and Television); *Mrs Brown's Boys* – series 2 & 3; *The Crossing*; *Doctors*; *Roger Roger*; *Sunburn*; *A Prince Among Men*; *A Year in Provence*; *The Victoria Wood Show* (BBC); *Parents* (Sky); *House of Rooms*; *Eleven Men Against Eleven* (Channel 4); *The Wail Of The Banshee* (Central TV); *The Darling Buds Of May* (YTV); *Blore* (BBC 4); *Singles* (YTV).

Film includes: The Woman in Red in *Fierce Creatures* with John Cleese.

### NICHOLA McAULIFFE

Nichola won the Olivier Award for Kate in the RSC's production of *Kiss Me Kate* at the Old Vic, and was nominated for an Olivier Award for her role as The Baroness in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* at the London Palladium. Other awards include The Clarence Derwent Award for Queen Victoria in the RSC's *Poppy*, the MEN

Award for Gina in Peter Hall's production of *The Wild Duck* and the Edinburgh Stage Award for Alan Bennett's *Bed Among the Lentils* & her own play *Maurice's Jubilee*. Nichola was also nominated for a TMA award for her performance in Bryony Lavery's *Goliath*.

Stage work includes: *Waiting for God* (2017 UK Tour), *Murder, Margaret & Me* (York Theatre Royal, 2017), *I Killed Rasputin* by Richard Herring (Edinburgh, 2014), *Blithe Spirit* (York Theatre Royal), *Fault Lines* (Hampstead Theatre), Katy in *Maurice's Jubilee* (Edinburgh Festival 2012 and 2013 UK Tour) and Miss Shepherd in Alan Bennett's *The Lady in the Van* (Hull Truck Theatre & two UK tours).

Other theatre credits include: her own plays *National Hero* and *A British Subject* (Edinburgh Festival, Brits off Broadway, NY & Arts Theatre, London); Judith Bliss in *Hay Fever* at the Rose, Kingston; The Duchess of Windsor in *Untitled*; Marjorie in David Storey's *Home* for the Peter Hall Company; Katisha in the West End run and National tour of *The Mikado* (Carl Rosa Opera), Sybil Thorndike and Vera in *Plague over England* (Finborough), Miss Fellows in *The Night of the Iguana* (Lyric Shaftesbury Avenue); Katherine and Portia in Jude Kelly's productions of *Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merchant of Venice*; Maggie opposite Leo McKern in *Hobson's Choice* (Chichester/Lyric Shaftesbury Avenue) and Catherine in the Chichester production of *The Heiress*. Arnold Wesker wrote the plays *Caritas* and *Annie Wobbler* for her.

TV Credits include: *Doctors* (BBC); *Agatha Raisin* (Sky), *Blandings* (BBC) and with Russell Kane in *The Only Way Is Shakespeare* for his new series of Live at the Electric. Nichola has also appeared as Anita Scott in *Coronation Street* (ITV) and in guest roles in *Dr. Who*, *My Family*, & *Randall & Hopkirk* (Deceased). She is probably best known as Sheila Sabatini in seven series of ITVs *Surgical Spirit* and will soon appear as the Duchess of Cumberland in *Victoria* (ITV).

Film credits include the Stephen Frear's film *Cheri*, and she was the voice of James Bond's BMW in *Tomorrow Never Dies*.

Her novels *The Crime Tsar* and children's book *Attila Loolagax and the Eagle* are published by Bloomsbury and *A Fanny Full of Soap – the story of a West End disaster* by Oberon. She also wrote the plays *The Incomparable Witness* and *My Brother's Keeper* for Radio 4 and has appeared in a number of radio plays and comedies for the BBC.

## **ANDRINA CARROLL**

Andrina has worked extensively in theatre, film and television and is thrilled to be returning to York Theatre Royal.

Her theatre credits include: *One Last Waltz* (Black Coffee Theatre); *Beautiful Thing* (Pilot Theatre); *A Game of Golf*, *One Man Protest*, *Affairs In A Tent*, *Enjoy*, *The Nutcracker* and *When We Were Married* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hobson's Choice*, *The Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, *Accrington Pals*, *The Bright and Bold Design* and *Twelfth Night* (New Victoria Theatre), *Oliver Twist*, *Twelfth Night* and *September In the Rain* (Hull Truck) and *The Railway Children*, *iShandy*, *Forty Years On*, *Peter Pan*, *The Crucible*, *The Photographers Portrait*, *Brassed Off*, *Educating Rita*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Blue Room*, *The Snow Queen* and *Jane Eyre* (York Theatre Royal).

Her television and film credits include: *The 4 O'Clock Club*, *55 Degrees North*, *Doctors* and *Casualty* (BBC), *The Knife That Killed Me* (GSP Studios), *Between Two Women* (North Country Pictures), *Emmerdale*, *Heartbeat* and *Peak Practice* (ITV) and *North Square* (Channel4).

Andrina recently reprised her role as Mother for a feature film taping of the Theatre Royal's *The Railway Children – Stage to Screen* (Genesis Pictures).

## CREATIVE

### DAMIAN CRUDEN - DIRECTOR

Damian has been Artistic Director of York Theatre Royal for the past 17 years. He trained at the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama between 1982 and 1986.

He has directed many productions, including: *Sherlock Holmes: The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Brideshead Revisited*, *In Fog and Falling Snow*, *The Railway Children*, *The Restoration of Nell Gwyn*, *Blithe Spirit*, *The Legend of King Arthur*, *The Guinea Pig Club*, *The York Mystery Plays 2012*, *Laurel and Hardy*, *Forty Years On*, *Peter Pan*, *My Family and Other Animals*, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, *The Wind in the Willows*, *Up the Duff*, *The Homecoming*, *The White Crow (Eichmann in Jerusalem)*; *Death of a Salesman*, *Patient No. 1*, *Enjoy*, *Bouncers 2007 Remix*, *The Dumb Waiter*, *The Hare and the Tortoise* (in York and Japan); *Pygmalion*, *Broken Glass*, *East Is East*, *Hay Fever*, *Macbeth*, *A Cloud in Trousers*, *Brassed Off*, *Caitlin*, *A Taste of Honey*, *Habeas Corpus*, *Up'n'Under*, *Frankenstein*, *Noises Off*, *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Othello*, *Closer*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *Bedevilled*, *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*, *Behind the Scenes at the Museum*, *Kafka's Dick*, *Man of the Moment*, *Having a Ball*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Getting On*, *The Three Musketeers*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *All My Sons*, *Piaf*, *Dead Funny*, *Educating Rita*, *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, *Neville's Island*, *Multiplex*, *Abandonment* and *Private Lives*. He has co-directed the last 17 York Theatre Royal pantomimes with Berwick Kaler.

Before York, Damian worked for various regional theatres as a freelance director. He was Associate Director for Hull Truck in the early '90s and prior to that Co-Artistic Director of the Liverpool Everyman Youth Theatre. He worked for the Tron and TAG in Scotland and was a tutor for the Scottish Youth Theatre.

## DAWN ALLSOPP - DESIGNER

For York Theatre Royal: *Brassed Off*, *Betrayal*, *Can't Stand Up For Falling Down*, *40 Years On*, *Peter Pan*, *Two Planks and a Passion* (set), *The Crucible* (set), *Twelfth Night*, *The Homecoming*, *Death Of A Salesman*, *A Taste Of Honey*, *Private Lives*, *Abandonment*, *The Blue Room*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *The Three Musketeers* and *Closer*.

Recent theatre credits include: *Northanger Abbey* (Bury St Edmunds and national tour); *Our Country's Good*, *Treasure Island* (Bristol Old Vic Theatre School); *Giant's On The Hill* (Centric Theatre and tour); *Kiss Me Quickstep* (New Vic, Stoke, Oldham Coliseum and The Winter garden Ballroom, Eastbourne). *Dancing Through The Shadows* (Hull Truck); *The Winter's Tale* (Northern Broadsides); *Much Ado About Nothing* (Stafford Festival Shakespeare); *Mrs Warren's Profession* (Cheltenham Everyman Theatre and national tour); *Noises Off* (Mercury Theatre Colchester); *Alice* (Theatre In The Quarter); *The Rise And Fall Of Little Voice* (Derby Theatre); *Midsummer Songs* (New Wolsey Theatre); *Inherit The Wind* (New Vic ); *Drummer Hodge* (Dorchester's 6th community play); *Ugly Duck* (Claybody Theatre); *Three Witches*, *The Night Queen* (Hoopla and Belgrade Coventry); *Hay Fever* (Oldham Coliseum); *Dangerous Corner* (Salisbury Playhouse); *Private Lives*, *The League Of Youth* (Nottingham Playhouse); *The Grand Gesture*, *A Government Inspector*, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (Northern Broadsides)

Television includes: set designs for *Cbeebies*; *Tortoise and The Hare*, *The Ugly Duckling* and *Jack and The Beanstalk*.

## PREMA MEHTA - LIGHTING DESIGN

Prema Mehta graduated from The Guildhall School of Music and Drama, and is now part of the executive team of the Association of Lighting Designers.

She has designed the lighting for over one hundred and fifty drama and dance productions across the UK including: *Maaya* (Westminster Hall); *Bells* (Mayor of London's Showtime); *Wipers* winner of Best Stage Production at The Asian Media Awards 2016 (Leicester Curve Theatre and UK tour); *Lady Anna* (Theatre Royal Bath); *Coming Up* and *Jefferson's Garden* (Watford Palace Theatre); Paines Plough 2016 Roundabout season including *Love, Lies and Taxidermy*, *Growth* and *I Got Superpowers For My Birthday*; and *Dhamaka* (O2 Arena). She is looking forward to returning to York Theatre Royal later in the year to light *Suffragettes*, *Everything Is Possible*.

Prema's design for the A-List party area at Madame Tussauds, London, is now open to the public.

Further details are available at [www.premamehta.com](http://www.premamehta.com)

## YVONNE GILBERT - SOUND DESIGN

Yvonne Gilbert is a Sound Designer with over 20-years experience in theatre sound.

*Romeo and Juliet* (The Rose Playhouse); *The Nativity* (St James Church Paddington); *Romeo and Juliet* (Clywd, New Theatre Cardiff); *84 Charing Cross Road* (associate) (Cambridge Arts Theatre); *Macbeth* (associate) (Shakespeare's Globe); *Much Ado about Nothing* (Rose Playhouse); *Brideshead Revisited* (York Theatre Royal, ETT); *Long Days Journey into Night*, (associate) (Bristol Old Vic); *Honk*, (Guildford School of Acting); *Jacques Brel is Alive and Well* (Mountview); *Ghost* (The Ivy Arts Centre); *Man of La Mancha* (Bridewell Theatre); *Singer Bernie* (Grants Arts Centre); *Touched Bernie* (Grants Arts Centre); *The Eighth Wonder of the World* (Brunel Museum); *Carousel* (Royal Academy of Music); *Legally Blonde* (Bridewell Theatre); *Just Jim Dale* (associate) (The Core at Corby); *American Idiot*, (Bridewell Theatre); *On the Town* (Ivy Arts Centre); *Addams Family Musical* (Ivy Arts Centre); *Lift the Musical* (Ivy Arts Centre); *Frankenstein the Metal Opera* (soundscape) *The Space*; *Twelfth Night* (Regents Park Open Air Theatre); *Rent* (Ivy Arts Centre); *Twang* (Ivy Arts Centre); *Peter and Alice* (associate) (Noel Coward Theatre); *A Chorus Line* (associate) (London Palladium); *Privates on Parade* (associate) (Noel Coward Theatre); *Finding Neverland* (associate) (Leicester Curve); *King James Bible* (National Theatre); *Juno and the Paycock* (associate) (National Theatre); *Auricular* (Theatre 503); *Breed* (Theatre 503); *Hotel Follies* (Arts Theatre); *Smith* (British Museum); *Paradise Lost* Southwark Playhouse; *Statement of Regret* (National Theatre).



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Before being developed into a full length play with Damian Cruden at York Theatre Royal, *Murder, Margaret and Me* premiered in 2012 at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe as a play for one actor, Janet Prince, and was directed by Stella Duffy. This version was a sell out success in Edinburgh and subsequently the New York Fringe, had a short West End run (Ambassador's Theatre) and a UK tour, and has also played in Mexico.

Philip's first play *Twinkle Little Star*, about the last great pantomime dame, premiered in 2006 starring Tim Healy. It's gone on to have productions at York Theatre Royal starring Kenneth Allan Taylor and The Everyman, Cheltenham.

Philip's other plays include *Kiss Me Honey Honey!* which won a Fringe First at the Edinburgh Fringe in 2013 and the supernatural thriller based on the life of E.Nesbit, *Edith in the Dark*, which was the first play commissioned by Harrogate Theatre in over two decades. *Keeping up with the Joans* was produced by Greenwich Theatre, starring Susan Penhaligon and Katy Manning.

Philip started his career as a writer on *Emmerdale* (ITV), and for *Doctors* (BBC). He has contributed to the Radio 4 legal series *Brief Lives*, which stars David Schofield and regularly contributes to the Big Finish dramas based on the cult sixties horror soap *Dark Shadows*.

Philip is currently adapting a major Yorkshire novel for the stage and is part of a team of writers creating *Outlaws to Inlaws* chronicling the decades of gay life from the fifties to present day. It will premier in London later in 2017 to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act.

*Murder Margaret and Me* and *Edith in the Dark* are both published by Samuel French Ltd.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

*Murder, Margaret and Me* started life as a one-person play performed by Janet Prince at the Edinburgh Festival in 2012. It had a sell out run and it returned the following year. It also was a big hit in 2014 at the New York Fringe. I always intending to extend it into a full length play and the process of doing this at York Theatre Royal has been amazing with director Damian Cruden's guidance and input from three amazing actors any theatre would be lucky to secure individually let alone as an inimitable trio in the same production.

The original *Murder, Margaret and Me* focused purely on Margaret Rutherford's story. This new version has allowed me to explore Agatha's too. Due to her famous vanishing trick in 1926 she was also a woman with a secret. As I researched this mysterious incident I began to realise how much Agatha and Margaret had in common, aside from age, physical appearance and their joint status as leading creative forces in a male dominated industry. Their life experiences and personalities seemed to be so entwined, they felt like the same soul. I began to feel quite sad that I'd only imagined their friendship for the purposes of writing the play.

But I was to discover I hadn't entirely made this up after all. The play was performed by Janet two years ago in Torquay as part of the famous Agatha Christie Festival. The place was packed with fans from across the globe, many dressed as Hercule Poirot. At a question and answer session I discussed the fact that I'd made up the details of Agatha and Margaret's friendship. But I was stopped in full flow by one particularly dashing Poirot called Scott Wallace Baker (who has since become a friend) He stood up and declared my assumption was correct.

It transpires the two great women had forged a relationship beyond their awkward meeting on the set of Marple. Scott supplied me with letters from his Christie collection written by Agatha to Stringer Davis after Margaret had fully succumbed to the dementia that would eventually end her life. In these letters Agatha says how much she admired Margaret's portrayal of her spinster. Thankfully I've been able to refer to these letters in this new version of the play. It makes me feel even more that what I've written is as I intended it to be, a play paying homage to the two great women.

*Philip Meeks*

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Edith in the Dark

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## CHARACTER LIST

### GENERAL NOTE

The play's cast of characters features two larger than life famous women. These however, do not need to be portrayed as impersonations. The play works best when they are suggested. Also the age range of the actors can be broad. The characters have a timeless quality so could easily be played by actors in their late forties and above.

**AGATHA CHRISTIE** – Frustrated by the lack of control she now has over her own work, Agatha turns sleuth to unearth Margaret's past. But will she accept her own in the process? Agatha is sharp, witty and acerbic. She's always been in control. But now she suddenly finds that isn't entirely the case and she has to do something to rectify the situation.

**MARGARET RUTHERFORD** – A complex character struggling with a terrible secret. She's really two characters. Miss Margaret Rutherford an ebullient comic star celebrated for her eccentric ways. But this eccentricity is cleverly manufactured. Beneath its layers is Peggy whose life was crushed at an early age by fear. She has to make you laugh but then ultimately break your heart.

**THE 'SPINSTER'** – A delightfully mischievous woman with a wicked glint in her eye. She communicates with the audience as the narrator of the story, manipulates Agatha and Margaret and drives the action by appearing mysteriously in differing guises throughout. She is their inspiration and their conscious. What they draw upon to create their own unique version of the little old lady detective they're both bringing to the screen. She plays the piano in the first few scenes. Obviously the actor playing the role doesn't need to.

### NOTE ON STAGING

It states in the text that the actors move their own furniture and props to set the scene. As an alternative, as in the York Theatre Royal, this can be done by well drilled stage hands or supporting players. As the setting should evoke an abandoned film lot, they should be dressed as the crew from a sixties British film.