

## Join Us

If you enjoy theatre, why not join us and benefit from membership:

- ✓ Half price personal tickets for Questors productions\*
- ✓ Discounted Guest tickets when you bring friends to Questors productions\*
- ✓ Children's FREE tickets†
- ✓ Opportunities to be actively involved in our productions
- ✓ Opportunity to audition to join our company of actors
- ✓ Exclusive or discounted training courses
- ✓ Access to *iQ* – the members-only website: [members.questors.org.uk](http://members.questors.org.uk)
- ✓ Access to exclusive news on *iQ* and email newsletter
- ✓ Receive the regular programme leaflet
- ✓ Membership of The Grapevine Club
- ✓ Special invitations, events and offers not available to the public
- ✓ Ticket reservation facility\* (conditions apply)
- ✓ Voting rights in the company

*\*Reduced prices exclude certain events. †Under 18, excludes certain events, maximum four per event. Must be collected at the performance and accompanied by the member.*

### Getting the most from your membership

We have a wide range of opportunities for you to become actively involved front-of-house or backstage. Volunteer help is always needed for selling programmes or stewarding, and training is provided if you'd like to work in Box Office with our computerised system. To meet members in a social setting, volunteer to help behind the Grapevine bar. Backstage staff including stage managers, prop makers, set builders, sound and lighting designers and operators, painters, wardrobe and costume and set designers are always welcomed; whatever your skills, we'll find a place for you. We also have courses for those wishing to direct.

The Questors has a high standard of acting and, to maintain this, everyone wanting to act must first take an audition. These are held every month – call the Theatre Office for details of forthcoming auditions.

### The Questors Youth Theatre – QYT

Our Youth Theatre, QYT, runs weekly drama classes for all ages from 6 to 18. Younger groups meet on Saturday mornings and older ages at weekday teatime. There's often a waiting list for membership, so put your name down now! Details are online at [questors.org.uk/qyt](http://questors.org.uk/qyt).

The Questors Theatre  
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Registered Charity No. 207516

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The Questors  
THEATRE



# Little Dorrit

by David Hovatter  
after Charles Dickens

The Judi Dench Playhouse  
20 – 28 January 2023

## Fields at The Questors

Fields at The Questors serves Italian coffee, fine teas, snacks and handmade cakes, and is the perfect spot for a pre-theatre café stop or interval ice-cream.



Place your interval order before the show to beat the crowds.

Open before and during the interval of all Judi Dench Playhouse evening and matinee performances.

Find **Fields** on **Facebook**.

## The Grapevine Bar

The Grapevine is our friendly club bar open to Members and Friends of The Questors Theatre and their guests, as well as audience members on show nights.

The club is open six nights a week and Sunday lunchtimes, and is managed and staffed entirely by volunteers.

We are the proud holders of a Cask Marque award for the quality of our real ales, we appear in the 2023 edition of The Good Beer Guide and we are **CAMRA West Middlesex Club of the Year**. A choice of at least three real ales is usually available, including Fuller's London Pride. We also provide a range of draught lagers and ciders, as well as wines, spirits and soft drinks – all at very reasonable prices.

Opening Hours (subject to change):

7:00 pm – 11:00 pm (Monday – Saturday)

Sunday lunchtime: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

See [questors.org.uk/grapevine](https://questors.org.uk/grapevine) for more details.

**Fields and the Grapevine accept payments by card.**



image: Evelina Plonyté

## Little Dorrit

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# LITTLE DORRIT

Dickens' novel is set in London around the 1820s when the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison still existed (where Dickens' own family were imprisoned for a while) and which plays a vital part in the novel. The titular character is born there and, twenty years later, after her family are released from the prison, returns there to nurse her friend, Arthur Clennam (who has been important in helping her family restore their wealth), who has himself been imprisoned there for debt. The book feels very Victorian in its austerity and seriousness.

So why relocate the story to 1904 and to a hill station in India?

Originally I was going to do a straightforward adaptation of the novel, but it was seeing *India Gate* (the joint enterprise between The Questors and the Punjabi Theatre Academy) in the Playhouse last year and being impressed at how expressive and sensitive the Indian actors were that made me want to work with Indian actors, and try to work out how to combine Dickens and Indian culture. It's not that well known that both his sons served in the army in India, one of whom is buried in Kolkata (Calcutta). After the Indian Mutiny in 1857, Dickens wrote extremely inflammatory remarks about India and its people, and consequently is seen by some as having racist views.

I knew that there had been a recent film adaptation of *David Copperfield* with an Indian actor as the lead, but the more I thought about India the more I realised how ignorant I was about how and why Britain ended up colonising it, exploiting its wealth and its resources, and also pretty much shaped the modern India we know of today, laying down its railways and cultivating its democracy. I had also recently watched the BBC series about three hill stations in India and was again intrigued at the legacy of the colonial days that still survive, and wondered what it must have been like when the British travelled by train to these remote places to escape the heat of an Indian summer.

Dickens' novel explores and satirises society in a pre-Victorian London; I wanted to explore and comment on colonial society in Edwardian India. The more I learnt about the Raj and what India was like under British rule, the more I could see how the characters in *Little Dorrit* might adapt themselves from living near the Thames to living 7,000 feet above sea level in the Himalayas.

The biggest hurdle was replacing the Marshalsea prison. Such a prison didn't exist in India and it would be difficult to find an equivalent family of a certain caste becoming imprisoned. Luckily I still had vivid memories of one of Satyajit

Ray's films called *The Music Room* based on the short story by Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, in which an Indian noble, living alone in his large mansion (with only a handful of servants), decides to hold a music concert in his long-abandoned music room to satisfy his jealousy of his nouveau riche neighbour who holds weekly concerts that blare loudly and stir dormant memories of his once illustrious past.

I thought it could work that the Dorrit father was a prince who had lost his inheritance and privileges that would have been handled by the Raj and who lives in a crumbling and gloomy mansion with his family, unable to cope with his loss of prestige and wealth, and relying on his daughter to keep him fed and clothed.

The hero of the book, Arthur Clennam, is a much older man in the book than in my version, and I found myself drawing on Kipling's life in India for much of what has shaped Arthur's character. I've had to drop many interesting characters and, in most cases, slightly alter the personalities of the remaining characters to make them fit more the types of colonial Brits I encountered during my research.

I like physical theatre, so I knew I was going to try to use movement sequences to tell parts of the story rather than words, and I decided to use a mixture of Western music, and a jazz-influenced range of Indian music, rather than the traditional sitar that typically is our access to things Indian.

I was able to invite a number of Indian actors to audition through an Indian casting company that were, by chance, using The Questors one day, to recruit new members. All of the Indian actors you will see tonight are new to The Questors and it has been a great privilege to work with them.

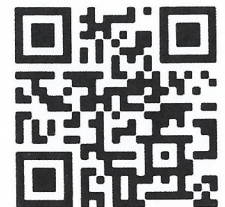
This is a very different, very untypical approach to Dickens, but while I've played around with the style and substance of Dickens' great novel, I've always felt it to be a love story, and, at the end of the day, that is what I hope you will take from our unorthodox telling of *Little Dorrit*.

**David Hovatter, Writer and Director**

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## Show Feedback Form

Your thoughts and opinions are important to us. Please scan the QR code with your camera phone to fill out our anonymous show feedback form. This is so we can continually improve our audience experience and our productions. Thank you so much for coming to visit The Questors Theatre. We hope that you enjoyed the show.



# LITTLE DORRIT

by David Hovatter after Charles Dickens

*First performance of this production at The Questors Theatre: 20 January 2023*

## CAST

in alphabetical order

Mr Merdle	<b>Omar Aga</b>
William Dorrit (Little Dorrit's father), Derzhi (tailor)	<b>Adil Akram</b>
English Lecturer, Dhobi (laundry woman), Mrs Casby, Woman at the Club, Clerk at the Circumlocution Office, Handmaiden to Fanny Dorrit	<b>Kitty Armstrong</b>
Bobajee (Affery), Courtesan	<b>Brinda Bhandari</b>
Mr Meagles	<b>David Erdos</b>
Mrs Clennam (mother of Arthur Clennam)	<b>Carol Fullilove</b>
Little Dorrit (Maya)	<b>Sweta Gupta</b>
Arthur Clennam (son of Mrs Clennam)	<b>Adam Keenan</b>
Gai-Wallah (milkman), Station Master, Flora Casby (daughter of Mr and Mrs Casby)	<b>Yvonne Monyer</b>
Edward Dorrit (brother of Little Dorrit)	<b>Aditya Mysore</b>
Bearer (Flintwinch)	<b>Nitish Raj</b>
Mrs Merdle	<b>Victoria Smith</b>
Pancks (rent collector for Mr Casby)	<b>Ben Sura</b>
Daniel Doyce	<b>Simon Taylor</b>
Fanny Dorrit (sister of Little Dorrit)	<b>Shilpa Varma</b>
Rigaud	<b>Vkin Vats</b>

## PRODUCTION

Director	<b>David Hovatter</b>
Costume Designer	<b>Jenny Richardson</b>
Lighting Designer	<b>Andrew Whadcoat</b>
Sound Designer	<b>Russell Fleet</b>
Stage Manager	<b>Harriet Parsonage</b>
Deputy Stage Managers	<b>Sue Collins, Pip Egan, David Emmet</b>
Puppet by	<b>Ella Jackson</b>
Costume Advisor	<b>Carla Evans</b>
Wardrobe Assistants	<b>Anne Gilmour, Sue Peckitt</b>
Lighting and Sound Operator	<b>Colette Green</b>
Get-In Assistants	<b>Jo Matthews, Lloyd Wallis, Rob Willin</b>
Photographer	<b>Evelina Plonytè</b>
Thanks to	<b>Toby Burbidge, Nicola Maddox, Alex Marker, Adam Smith</b>

The play lasts approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes including a 15-minute interval

Please turn off all mobile phones and similar electronic devices. The use of cameras, video cameras and recording equipment is strictly prohibited.  
Thank you.

# Biographies

## **Omar Aga – Mr Merdle**

Omar began acting aged 19 whilst at University, with appearances including *The Jew of Malta* and *Almost an Evening*. He returned to acting last year with KDC Theatre's *The Real Inspector Hound*, followed by further appearances at KDC and the Tower Theatre. *Little Dorrit* is his second Questors production, having appeared in Alan Ayckbourn's *Haunting Julia* last year.

## **Adil Akram – William Dorrit, Derzhi**

Adil trained at ArtsEd and has had experience on stage and screen, including *Aladdin* (Mumford theatre), Dilip/Nazul in *Indian Ink* (ADC, Cambridge), Patol Ray in *Taramandal* (Tara, Courtyard, Cockpit), Naveen Achar MP in *But For Us* (Bush, Old Diorama), Mustafa Khan in *Distant to Lost* (Lion & Unicorn), Dr Langur in *Spy School* (ITV), Nurse Malik in *End-O* (London Film Festival).

**Kitty Armstrong – English Lecturer, Dhobi, Mrs Casby, Clerk, Handmaiden**  
Kitty trained at The Ravenscourt Theatre School (2000-1), followed by part-time courses at Drama Studio London, a clown comedy workshop at The Mono Box, a foundation course with London Meisner and an on-screen camera acting course with director Aurora Fearnley at AMAW. Kitty has appeared here in *The Ealing Club* and *Loveplay* (Student Group 74). Kitty also writes songs.

## **Brinda Bhandari – Bobajee (Affery), Courtesan**

Brinda started her acting career in 2022 and attended Mukesh Chhabra's acting workshop, a famous Indian Bollywood casting director. She appeared in an in-house film for British Telecom, but *Little Dorrit* is her theatrical debut.

## **David Erdos – Mr Meagles**

David is an actor, writer, director, teacher, workshop leader, literary editor, filmmaker and a widely published poet, playwright and critic with 30 years' experience in leading and supporting roles across the theatrical canon. He was O'Brien in *George Orwell's 1984* for The Questors and recently, Cyrano de Bergerac for the Putney Theatre Company.

## **Carole Fullilove – Mrs Clennam**

Carol has been a member of The Questors since 2000, with appearances including *Tongues of Fire*, *The Birthday Party*, *A Memory of Water*, *Playhouse Creatures*, *Look Back in Anger*, *A View from the Bridge*, *The Village Bike*, *The Effect*, *King Charles III* and Janet in *Dead Boy Café* in 2022.

## **Sweta Gupta – Little Dorrit (Maya)**

Sweta is a trained theatre actor who has performed a variety of roles in several plays while learning the art at the renowned Asmita Theatre Group in New Delhi, India. She is best known for playing Maa in *Amritsar Aa Gaya*, Bhabhi in *Ramkali*, Shahni in *Kharashein* and Gandhari in *Gandhari Ka Shraap*.

## **Adam Keenan – Arthur Clennam**

This is Adam's first play at The Questors. He has previously taken on roles in student productions such as Edward Ferrars in *Sense and Sensibility*, Landlord in *Two*, Rudge in *The History Boys*, as well as various inanimate objects.

## **Yvonne Monyer – Flora Casby**

Yvonne joined Student Group 68 in 2013, appearing in *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* and *The Young Ideal/Hands Across the Sea*. Since then she has appeared in *India Gate*, *What The Dickens?*, *The Dog & the Scarf*, *Private Lives* and *Diana of Dobson's*. Her work includes hosting the Hindi song chart show *Bolly.Music.Show* on the German TV channel Zee.One.

## **Aditya Mysore – Gai-Wallah, Station Master, Edward Dorrit**

Aditya is an upcoming actor who began his acting career just over a year ago. He has trained at the Metflim School and has featured in various international TV shows and Indian feature films including on Netflix. Aditya is now exploring theatre, debuting on stage with *Little Dorrit*.

## **Nitish Raj – Bearer (Flintwich)**

This is Nitish's Questors and indeed UK debut. He was previously active in a dramatics club in Pune, India where he played various roles in street plays, mime acts and a couple of stage plays with a wonderful cast. He takes a keen interest in short films and has acted in and edited a number of releases on YouTube, a few of which highlighted relevant sociological concepts.

## **Victoria Smith – Mrs Merdle**

Victoria has appeared here as Delia in *Whipping It Up*, five different characters in an Overnight Plays comedy piece by Martin Choules and as Nathaniel Winkle in David Hovatter's production of *What the Dickens?* She also performs regularly with the improv troupe The Slack Captains and has appeared in Questors audio dramas *Persons Unknown* and *Powerplay*.

## **Ben Sura – Pancks**

Ben Sura is a trained professional actor. His recent theatre credits include *Incident at Vichy*, *Hind Da Rakha* and *India Gate*. He is also one of the leads in the recently shot feature film, *Big Trouble in Little India*, to be released on OTT. He has worked with the likes of Martin Freeman, Pierce Brosnan, Keeley Hawes and Hugh Bonneville. He trained at ALRA/Rose Bruford.

## **Simon Taylor – Daniel Doyce**

Simon has been seen in film shorts, Sky's *Britannia* and Catholic TV's *The Tudors*. He has appeared here as Furtwängler (*Taking Sides*), Krapp (*Krapp's Last Tape*), Goldstein (*George Orwell's 1984*), Robin (*The Children*) and Crocker-Harris (*The Browning Version*) and is equally happy to be playing a lovely minor character in this imaginative retelling of one of his favourite novels.

### **Shilpa Varma** – *Fanny Dorrit*

Shilpa Varma is an Indian actor and writer. As an actor her repertoire includes theatre, TV adverts, short films and OTT in India. As a writer she has worked for kids animation channels and National Geographic India. When she isn't acting or writing, she is getting 'curiouser and curiouser' about the world around her.

### **Vkin Vats** – *Rigaud*

Vkin trained at LAMDA as well as in Speech and Drama at Trinity College London and at Drama Studio London amongst other courses. He has since appeared in many productions, including, at the Grange Court Theatre, *Richard III*, *Constellations*, *The Effect*, *Gladiator Games*, *A Doll's House* and, at the Rangam Theatre, *Timli* and *Open Letters*.

### **Russell Fleet** – *Sound Designer*

Russell trained as an actor in the 1990s and joined The Questors in 2006. He has been involved in nearly 50 productions as an actor, sound designer, stage manager and director. Most recent sound designs include *The Letter of Last Resort*, *What The Dickens?*, *Quietus*, *The Browning Version* and *India Gate*.

### **David Hovatter** – *Director*

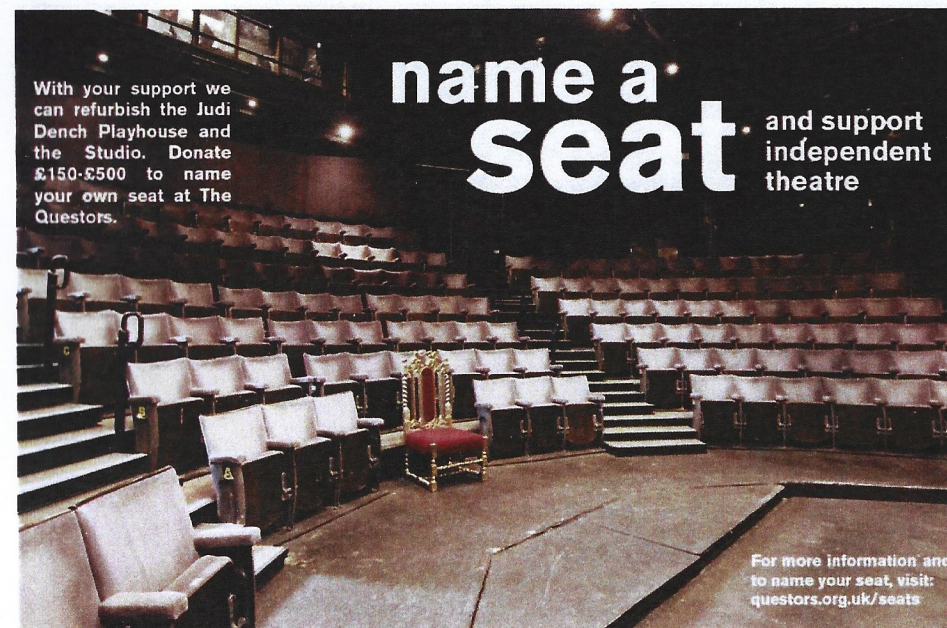
This isn't David's first adaptation of Dickens: *Great Expectations*, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Pickwick Papers* came before, but this is his first in the Playhouse. He's done devised shows, including *Bard In The Yard*, *The Dog & The Scarf*, *The Overcoat* and *The Haunted Kimono*. David has also acted, most recently in *Dear Brutus* and *Rabbit Hole*, as well as all the Overnight Plays.

### **Jenny Richardson** – *Costume Designer*

After many years working in stage management, props and set design, Jenny enjoyed a change of direction to costume design, recently for *Peregrine Proteus*, *Hangmen*, *Apologia*, *The Children*, *First Love is the Revolution*, *Fault Lines*, *George Orwell's 1984* and *Blue/Orange*. Jenny is frequently in demand as an upholsterer.

### **Andrew Whadcoat** – *Lighting Designer*

Andrew has worked in lighting since 2013. Recent lighting designs include *The Dog & the Scarf*, *The Letter of Last Resort*, *Bull & Conditional*, *The Ghost Train*, *Dear Brutus*, *Death and the Maiden*, *Haunting Julia* and *Peregrine Proteus*. He has also designed for AppEaling Theatre, Idle Discourse, Orange Moon and PlayGC Theatre both at The Questors and other venues.



## Next at The Questors

### **ESCAPED ALONE / WHAT IF IF ONLY**

**by Caryl Churchill**

**27 January – 4 February 2023**

#### **The Studio**

Two biting subversive plays exploring human agency, possibility and the future.

**Escaped Alone:** three old friends and a neighbour. A summer of afternoons in the backyard. Tea and catastrophe. This intimate yet vast contemporary play was hailed as 'revolutionary' by *The Guardian*.

**What If If Only:** this short, sharp piece of writing contrasts one man's life with his infinite future possibilities. This cryptic yet poignant play powerfully asks: can we recapture the past?

### **CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF**

**by Tennessee Williams**

**11 – 18 February 2023**

#### **The Judi Dench Playhouse**

This Pulitzer Prize-winning play follows a Mississippi family in America's deep south as they must finally untangle the web of deceit they've created for themselves.

Brick and Maggie reunite with their extended family to celebrate Big Daddy's birthday. But, when faced with the shattering truths of their own marriage, how will they protect their family from falling apart? Sexual tensions, lies, and betrayals boil to the surface in this iconic classic.