

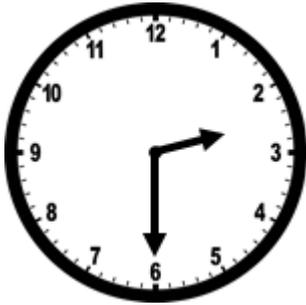


QUEENS OF THE COAL AGE

By Maxine Peake

Play Synopsis

TODAY'S TIMETABLE



The play will start at 2.30pm



There will be an interval at 3.30pm which will last for about 20 minutes.



The play will end at approximately 4.55pm

CAST



Kate Anthony
ANNE



John Elkington
DES/ RAMSEY/
JAMES



Theo Thompson
MICHAEL



Jane Hazlegrove
DOT



Danielle Henry
LESLEY



Eve Robertson
ELAINE

SYNOPSIS

1993. It is nearly ten years on from the mining strike and John Major has just announced a fresh wave of pit closures. However, it's barely making the news now, and the battle seems well and truly over. But four members of Women Against Pit Closures are not going down without a fight. Anne (wife of Arthur Scargill), Dot, Elaine and Lesley are cooking up a secret plan that will hopefully get the Nation's attention and remind everyone of the importance of protest.

We meet the women the night before their mission, and all we know is... IT.IS.ON. The next morning, they arrive at Parkside Colliery for an educational tour of the Pit, posing as a bunch of teachers from St Cuthbert's. Anne, in disguise, has dyed her hair and is wearing a pair of Arthur's old reading glasses and the others have stuffed tissues, wet-wipes, stickers and Nicorette into their bras and knickers. They are roasting from all the layers of clothes they are wearing, as they are planning a little stay...

They are met by Des, the Undermanager and Michael, a miner, who will be taking them on the tour. After getting them into overalls, helmets and belts they arrive at the lift, and make the 2000 ft journey beneath the ground, much to Dot's horror. But they've done it, they are down.

Des wants to start the tour, but the women, giddy with excitement, refuse to move. You see, they are Women Against Pit Closures and they are occupying this pit! After a stand-off, and Des' repeated pleas for them to go back up top with him, he makes a clumsy attempt to grab Lesley. The women respond by running off through the tunnels of the mine away from him, with Anne shouting "WE'RE GOING TO RUN AMOK IN THIS PIT!"

Breathless and totally lost, they stumble into what looks like a manager's office. Now they're here, they are all thinking the same thing...what now? Well, first things first, tidy it up, it's a tip! After making it more homely - including creating some flowers out of newspapers - Anne sets about stitching some coal sacks together using Lesley's hair combs, to make blankets. It's freezing down here and the prospect of spending their first night on the pit floor, isn't particularly appealing, especially as they don't have food, drink...or a toilet.

As the hours go by and they get colder still, they try to huddle up together for warmth. It is in the dark of the pit and the dead of night that they can all allow their humour to drop for a minute and talk about their fears and experiences. Dot is missing her husband Billy and the

girls, Anne is sick of being in Arthur's shadow, Elaine is concerned with the breakdown of her marriage and Lesley is petrified for her husband Perry and her young children, as their livelihood is being destroyed. Anne reminds them of the fight, and how the Strike has made them all stronger. They sing the Women Against Pit Closures anthem "We are women we are strong" at the top of their lungs, before trying to get some sleep.

The next morning, they wake, with sore backs and not much sleep, to a knocking at the door. It is the Pit Manager, Peter Ramsay and a physically intimidating miner by his side as 'muscle.' After initially trying to charm them and persuade them to come out, Ramsey bursts through the door and demands that they leave. The women stand firm and refuse, and Anne reminds him that if any one of them are so much as touched, she will get her Barrister Michael Mansfield QC to deal with him. Ramsey instructs his muscle to back off before telling them that no one cares, and the men are embarrassed about what the women are doing in their name. He promises to "starve the stupid cows out, or worse." After throwing personal insults at Anne about Arthur, he leaves saying that they don't know what they have started. The women are shaken but not deterred. Shortly after there is another knock at the door, but this time it is Michael again, who comes bearing supplies! Hot tea, water, sandwiches, Easter eggs and, incredibly, notes of support and thanks from the miners...that lying git Ramsay – the men do care! Michael is also shocked to find out they've been "peeing in a dark corner" as there is a portaloo just around the corner! Lesley, Dot and Elaine immediately run out of the door in a race to get to the toilet first!

Left alone with Michael, Anne asks him about his family. His Dad was a miner but went back to Jamaica after the Strike, and after a bit of probing, Michael tells Anne that people were racist to him, and it got to him over the years. Anne asks him how he finds it, and he tells her that not much has changed. They also realise that they both have the experience of getting stopped by police for no good reason and form an unspoken bond with each other.

When the other women return, they all read the letters and crack open the tea – but not before Michael has tried some first. That's the rule with Anne after receiving dead rats, human poo and envelopes with razor blades through her letterbox during the Strike...he obliges and after pretending to be poisoned they set about enjoying their brew!

A few hours later, the women and Michael are playing snap together and discussing the future of the industry, when Ramsey comes over the tannoy demanding that he comes back up immediately. Michael concedes he's scared of him, as he's a "nasty piece of work" and swiftly disappears. Ramsey then comes back on the tannoy and demands the women come out, as he's provided them with food and water. As a tactic to help this, he plays a constant

high-pitched screeching noise, that pierces their ears. Elaine attempts to distract them with a game of eye-spy, and as they are trying to guess “D” Anne declares that she is taking the dog for a walk – the imaginary dog she’s just invented! – as she can’t stand this. Despite Elaine’s warning of possible snatch squads, Anne (and Rover) leave the office. The remaining women then later hear Anne herself over the tannoy directly addressing Ramsey, telling him they have no intention of leaving, to which he threateningly retorts that mines can be very dangerous places, and he won’t be responsible for their safety.

During the evening of the second night, and several horrendous hours of hearing the high-pitched noise later, spirits are low amongst the women. Michael arrives and tries to lighten the mood with more goodies and newspapers with them in it! But initial excitement is dampened as they realise they’ve only made the Bolton Evening News and the Wigan Observer, and none of the Nationals – not quite the impact they were hoping for. Dot observes that she hopes they haven’t done all this for nothing. The atmosphere improves after the women quiz Michael on his passions, and they find out he loves Soulful House music and DJing! He tells them what ecstasy does, and they all pretend to take some and have a rave and a dance!

Twenty-four hours later, in the middle of the night, the women jump out of their skin when old miner Jim, appears in the office without any warning. However, he brings blankets and homemade meat pies! They aren’t entirely sure where he came from, but he’s a comforting presence, and assures them he’ll look out for them.

Another whole day goes by, and they have now been occupying the mine for four nights and five days. During a quiet period, Dot suddenly says what perhaps other people have been thinking – she can’t do this anymore. She misses Billy and her kids, and this place is really getting to her now. Lesley does her best to comfort her and convince her to stay, but she’s made up her mind. Anne asks them to vote, and Elaine is also unwilling to go. However, after a heated and emotional discussion, they decide to go out united as they came in united. They call for James and ask him to call the lift to take them to the top.

As they wait for the lift to carry them to the surface, they have no idea what’s waiting for them, but they agree that it has been a pleasure and an honour. Seconds before they start their journey, Elaine tells them that the ‘D’ from the eye-spy game was ‘debris’ – it only took 72 hours! The lift cranks into action, and to their astonishment, they are met by thousands of people cheering and singing, wide-spread news and TV coverage and the respect and thanks of the men. They might not be able to save the pit, but their action has been a source of pride and inspiration, and who knows the effect of this in the future.