**Brief Encounter Introduction**

Hello and welcome to this audio-introduction to Brief Encounter, which will be described at the Royal Exchange Theatre on Saturday the 13th of January at 2.30pm. The show is adapted for the stage by Emma Rice, from Noel Coward’s screenplay for the classic 1945 David Lean film, which starred Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard. Sarah Frankcom is the show’s director and Rose Revitt its designer, with lighting design by Simeon Miller and sound design by Russell Ditchfield.

Matthew Malone is the orchestrator, musical supervisor and musical director. From his piano he heads a quartet of musicians who play double bass, drums and guitar.

The show will last approximately 2h20, including an interval of 20 minutes. Just to make you aware, it does feature the use of smoke and haze effects, as well as scenes of an intimate nature and states of mild undress. My name is Anne Hornsby and I will be describing to you on Saturday for Mind’s Eye. For information about forthcoming audio-described shows and exhibitions, please visit the website at mindseyedescription.co.uk, or follow us on Facebook and Instagram.

**Blurb**

Coward’s screenplay for *Brief Encounter* was adapted from one of his earlier works – a one-act play named *Still Life*, which debuted in 1936 as one of ten short plays in the cycle *Tonight at 8.30*. Released in 1945 to critical acclaim, the film went on to become part of the canon of classic British cinema, and in 1999 ranked at number 2 in the BFI’s top 100 British films.

This stage adaptation pays tribute to the film, and through masterful set and costume design, and music, conjures up the fashions and the zeitgeist of 1930s England.

The protagonist is Laura Jesson, a respectable middle-class Englishwoman who finds herself in an affectionate, yet perhaps stuffy and dull marriage. On the weekends she visits nearby towns for shopping or light entertainment. Returning from one such excursion, she enters the refreshment room of a train station in search of assistance when a piece of grit gets stuck in her eye. A dashing physician named Alec Harvey comes to her aid. As the story unfolds, we get to know Laura and Alec, and catch a glimpse into the lives of the rail station employees.

**Characters**

Laura

In her early 30s, Laura is of mixed heritage with a light brown skin tone and dark brown eyes. Her dark brown hair is worn up in neat, rippling finger waves. Her face is slender and finely featured, with rosy cheeks and a timid smile. She wears subtle golden stud earrings, and her tall, slender frame is clad in a Donegal tweed coat of midnight blue mottled with flecks of white. Under this her dress sense is prim and sober, first appearing in a sandy light brown cardigan, embroidered with small pink flowers and worn over a smart white blouse. With this she wears a long sky-blue skirt, flecked with cloudy white, and mocha brown high heels.

She carries a small square brown leather handbag with a gold clasp, and sometimes a small wicker basket when returning from the shops. She carries herself upright and slightly rigid, with reserved mannerisms and facial expressions which give little away.

Hannah Azuonye plays Laura Jesson.

Alec

Alec Harvey is in his mid-30s, and is black with a dark brown complexion. Under his black felt Trilby hat, his short black hair is receding over a high forehead, he has a neatly kempt moustache and full lips. His double breasted trench coat is grey with faint olive undertones, draped over a broad-shouldered yet lean and slender frame. His 3-piece suit is slate grey with faint white pinstripes, and is worn fully buttoned up. His tie is a muted greenish-grey with faint reddish brown polka dots, and his black Oxford shoes shine impeccably.

A general practitioner, Alec carries a chestnut brown leather briefcase fastened with a brass clasp. Like Laura, his bearing is upright and mannerisms reserved, but he smiles keenly and his dark eyes seem to drink Laura in when gazing at her.

Baker Mukasa plays Alec Harvey.

Fred

Laura’s husband Fred is aged in his forties, and is white with a pale complexion, dull mousy blond hair bryl-creamed into a neat side parting, and a trim strawberry blond moustache.

He wears a mustard yellow cardigan over a light duck-egg blue shirt, and a tie of a faint reddish brown. His flannel trousers are a muted grey-brown, and his shoes are dull brown, seeming to have lost their lustre.

Fred Jesson is played by Richard Glaves

Albert

Richard also plays ticket inspector Albert Godby. In this role, his moustache is a little darker, and he wears a dark navy uniform consisting of a cap with a peaked brim and “ticket inspector” written on the front in golden thread, a double breasted jacket with brass buttons, navy trousers and shiny black shoes. Dangling from his front pocket is a golden pocket watch and a whistle attached to a gold chain.

Myrtle

Albert has an eye for Myrtle Bagot, the manager of the station’s refreshment room. In her late 30s, she is white, with glossy chestnut brown hair coiffed into meticulous curls. She has brown eyes, a light olive complexion, and a shapely build. Her pinafore dress features a white cherry blossom print, and is otherwise a shade somewhere between burnt-orange and a rusty reddish terracotta brown. With it she wears a beige apron and greyish-brown tights. Her high heeled shoes are chestnut brown, matching her hair.

Generally thin-lipped and matronly, a good natured smile occasionally breaks out across her face.

Christina Modestou plays Myrtle.

Beryl

Waiting tables in the refreshment room is Beryl Walters, a girl of about 17 with mousy blonde brown hair with sun lightened highlights at the front, a left side parting and a halo of curls at the back. She has a pale complexion and a slender, birdlike build with slightly bony limbs; and her full-moon, horn rimmed spectacles give her a studious, perhaps even slightly gawkish air. Her narrow shoulders are tightly bunched up as if nervous or scared to take up too much space, her head slightly bowed and her neck stooping forwards slightly.

She wears a simple dress of a reddish pink with a faint white floral print and a greyish blue apron, with brown tights on her slender calves and brown soft-soled shoes.

Ida Regan plays Beryl.

Waitress

Ida also plays a waitress at a local restaurant. For this role she wears a lacy white cloth cap and a black dress with a white apron.

Stanley

Stanley is a youth of 19 who works as a porter at the station, often selling snacks from a wicker tray worn on his front with leather straps over the shoulders. He has a pale complexion and a youthful boyish face with rosy chubby cheeks which dimple when he flashes his cheeky smile; there is a twinkle in his baby blue eyes, which tend to dart after Beryl wherever she goes.

He is short in stature and has an ever so slightly chubby build. His thick brown hair – cropped short on the back and sides and swept back into a quiff on top, is tucked away under a navy woollen cap with a peaked leather brim. The rest of his uniform consists of a navy double breasted wool jacket with brass buttons, matching trousers and black round-toe boots “with laces that he likes to wrap around the boot too many times because they are too big”.

Stanley’s movements are brisk and cheerful.

Georgia Frost plays Stanley.

Bill

Georgia also plays Bill, a member of the Royal Air Force who pays a visit to the refreshment room. Bill swaggers about, arms behind his back and chest proudly puffed out, chin tilted into the air as if challenging the world to come and have a go. A bluish grey woollen cap with the RAF emblem in gold thread is worn at a slant on his head. He also wears a bluish grey tunic with badges sewn into the front and RAF armbands; and matching woollen trousers.

Jonnie

Bill enters the refreshment room with fellow RAF squaddie, Jonnie, in tow. White with a pale complexion, Jonnie is short in stature and slight in build, with soft, downy blonde hair hidden under his cap. His face is slender and boyish, with graceful bone structure, high cheekbones and light grey-blue eyes. He too wears a bluish grey uniform - his with epaulettes on the shoulders - and like Bill, he struts about with a cocksure swagger. This, combined with a subtle black eye, could hint at a pugnacious temperament.

Jonnie is played by Matthew Allen.

Bobbie

Matthew also plays Bobbie, Laura and Fred’s young son. In this role his fine blond hair is no longer hidden beneath a cap, and is slightly tousled and ruffled. He wears a long checked dressing gown of a minty shade of pale green, over white and light blue-striped pyjamas.

The couple also have a daughter, Margaret, of whom we hear tell without actually meeting her.

**Set**

The show takes place in theatre in the round, with the surrounding audience seating blocks broken up by 7 walkways leading onto the circular performance space. Many aspects of Edwardian rail station architecture have been deftly woven into the set design. High overhead are 6 girders, their ornate floral metal work painted an industrial lead red. They join in the centre, where they attach to a clock. Box-shaped, the clock is lit from the inside, and features a swirling paisley floral pattern in gold leaf around the edges, and 4 faces, with black hands. The hands do not run continuously, but do change from scene to scene to give us the time of day. There are 4 ceiling lights which descend once the show begins – they hang on chains and their lampshades are a matte gun metal grey.

On the side of the auditorium opposite St. Anne’s square, the girders attach to posts (also led read, with lattice shaped metalwork) which descend to the ground and frame the refreshment room’s counter. The counter is made from wood in a rich dark shade of brown – perhaps oak or mahogany – and is dotted with cakes, buns, scones, plates, and twee little china teacups in a pale shade of teal. Refreshment room manager Myrtle Bagot often stands behind this counter, pouring tea and rustling up baked goods. Beside her is the musicians’ area. There are music stands, a large wooden double bass, and an electric guitar in the archtop semi-acoustic style often used in jazz. The guitar is glossy black with mother of pearl detailing on the fretboard. There is also a soundproof oak booth from the drums, and an upright Schimmell piano housed in dark mahogany or oak. Sitting atop the piano is an art-deco style lamp which emits a warm yellow glow through its frosted glass lampshade. At an adjacent angle to the piano is a modern electric keyboard. The musicians are dressed in a period-appropriate style. Musical director and keyboardist Matthew Malone, for instance, wears a black velvet waistcoat over a white shirt and wine-red tie.

Underfoot in this area are tiles in a diamond pattern – dark brown wood juxtaposed with light grey stone. Otherwise the floor is laid with glossy wooden boards, decoratively arranged to form a crisscrossing star shape in the centre, directly below the clock. Along with the floorboards, parallel metal grooves reminiscent of train tracks are built into the floor, leading in from the 7 walkways, crisscrossing to add to the star shape in the centre. The grooves are inlaid with strip lighting, which can light up these “train tracks” and cause them to glow in the hazy darkness.

Opposite the musicians’ area is an entrance, wider than the other 6, which features wooden tiles in light blonde and dark brown wood, creating a lattice effect.

Tables and chairs are sometimes carried in in scenes set in the refreshment room and other cafes and restaurants. The two-seater tables are small and circular, made from wood with a grey marble effect on the table tops. In a scene set at a restaurant, one of them is laid with a white and blue gingham check tablecloth, and a golden leaf-shaped ashtray. At each of the tables is a pair of hard-backed wooden dining chairs with curved backs and plain thin legs.

That’s all for this audio-introduction to Act 1 of *Brief Encounter*, we look forward to seeing you at the Royal Exchange on Saturday*,* the touch tour will be at 1.30pm – please meet Anne by the Box Office. *There* will be a brief introduction to Act 2 (on the day of the performance), shortly before the interval ends.