



Abigail's Party

Written by Mike Leigh

Produced by the Royal Exchange Theatre



This visual story is designed for visitors to the
Sensory Adapted performance of Abigail's Party

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Information about the Royal Exchange Theatre

The Royal Exchange Theatre is open to audiences from 11:00 am everyday.



If you're coming in a wheelchair, you can use the lift to enter the building from St. Ann's entrance.



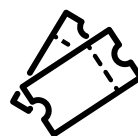
If you are walking, you can use both the St. Ann's entrance and the Cross Street entrance.



When you arrive, you might be asked by a member of the security team if they can look inside your bag. This should only take a few minutes.



You will also be asked to show your ticket.



You will then go into the Great Hall, which can be quite noisy and busy.



You will also see areas where you can buy souvenirs and refreshments.

You can put your coat in the cloak room for £1.



The theatre will open at 5:45 pm.



Lighting & Sound information

Lighting & Sound

For this sensory adapted performance, the sound and lighting effects will be reduced, and the house lights will be kept on. The house lights are the lights above the audience seats.



During the performance the doors will be kept open, and you can leave and come back at any point. Staff will be around to help you, should you need any assistance. You can identify staff as they wear black t-shirts or jumpers with the Royal Exchange logo on them. Staff also wear red lanyards.



There is a quiet space called The Lounge that staff can direct you to, should you need it.

Lighting



Most of the lighting of this play is very natural, like the kind of light you might have in a living room at home.

However, right at the beginning of the play, there are many coloured lights covering the entire theatre, and there are disco balls that shine onto all the surfaces of the theatre.

When the first act ends there is a blackout on the stage, which means that the stage gets much darker quite quickly. As it is light outside and the theatre has glass walls, it will not actually be totally dark in the theatre, just darker than it was before.

Right at the end of the play, there is another blackout . While the stage gets darker, there is also a blue light similar in colour to that of an ambulance, but it does not flash.

The big golden light in the middle of the stage changes colour, however, it never flashes and never becomes very bright suddenly.

Sound



There is a lot of music played in this production. Before the show starts there is music playing in the theatre and in the hall. The music is quite poppy, and it is from the 70s.

As soon as the show starts a disco song called 'Love To Love You Baby' by Donna Summer is played. In the first act, two other songs are played; they are both quite slow and jazzy. In the distance, you can sometimes hear punk and rock music coming from outside the theatre; this is supposed to sound like music coming from the party that Susan's teenager daughter Abigail is having down the road. Sometimes you can also hear the excited shouts and laughs of the teenagers.

At the end of act 1 during the blackout, a noisy punk song comes on that includes a long scream, loud guitar and drums. During the interval (a 20-minute break) punk and rock music continues to play in the theatre and hall.

Act Two starts with another song from the 70s which is quite slow and features guitars. It is called 'Sound and Vision' by David Bowie. Throughout the act, a few slow jazzy songs are played. One is called 'California Dreaming' by José Feliciano and one is called 'Forever and Ever' by Demis Roussos. There is also a slow song by Elvis Presley called 'Don't'. Right at the end of the play, Laurence puts on a loud and busy piece of classical music by Beethoven called Symphony No.5. While this music is playing, the actors shout over the top of it.

In the final blackout before the end of the show another punk song called 'Marquee Moon' by Television quietly plays. It continues to play louder in the theatre and the hall when the show finishes.

Movement



The set is on a revolve, which means that the stage rotates. Whenever a song is played on the record player the set will rotate. Most of the revolve movements are quite slow, apart from when Beethoven is put on right at the end of the play.



Content warnings for this show

Themes:

The potentially emotionally triggering themes are:

- Abusive relationships.
- Domestic violence.
- References to sexual assault and rape.
- Illness and death.
- Heavy drinking and vomiting.

Please read on if you would like to know more about how and when these themes come up in the play. This next section contains spoilers.

Abusive relationships are shown onstage. Tony is very controlling of his wife Angela, and in the play, we hear some of the emotionally abusive things he says to her. Beverly and Laurence also say unkind things to one another.

Domestic violence also comes up in the play. In act two Tony pushes Angela away from him, and Laurence aggressively grabs Beverly's arm. Angela and Beverly also talk about how their dads are abusive towards their mums.

Illness and death are also shown in the play. At the end of the play Laurence suffers a heart attack. Angela tries to save his life through CPR, but he dies right at the end of the play. Angela works in a hospital, and in act one she talks about one of the sick children she looked after.

A racist slur is used by Tony in the first act. The character Beverly also refers to a Chinese person in a prejudicial way.

Sexual assault and rape are discussed in a very light-hearted and outdated way. Beverly and Angela make a joke about Tony being sexually assaulted. Beverly later on makes a similar joke about Laurence.

Information about the show

Abigail's Party is performed in two acts, with a break in the middle. The first act is about 1 hour and 5 minutes. The second act is about 40 minutes. The break is about 20 minutes long.



This means the show will end at around 9:35pm.



The play is performed 'in the round' which means that the audience sits in a circle around the action on stage.



Mobile phones and tablet devices are permitted inside the theatre, but must be turned to silent. You can take pictures before and after the show, but not during.



Hot drinks are not allowed inside. Cold drinks can be taken inside if they are in a plastic cup.



You can come and go from the show. If you need to leave, it is okay to go and come back. During the play, there will be people around who you can ask for help if you need.



You are allowed to make as much noise as you like. The actors really enjoy it when you clap and get excited.



For this sensory adapted performance the intensity of sound and the lighting effects will be reduced, and the house lights will be kept on.



Entering the Theatre

The Theatre is where the audience sit and watch the performance.

The theatre is made up of three levels.

The round stage in the middle is where the actors perform. If you are sat on the ground floor you may have actors walking past you during the show.



Information about the cast

List of the actors:

Five actors perform in Abigail's Party. They play the roles of: Beverly, Laurence, Tony, Angela, and Susan. There are also two cover actors. A cover actor is an actor who goes on when one of the other actors is sick or cannot do the show for any reason.



Tupele Dorgu
Susan



Graeme Hawley
Laurence



Kym Marsh
Beverly Moss



Kyle Rowe
Tony



Yasmin Taheri
Angela



Darren Jeffries
Cover Laurence, Tony



Rachel Marwood
Cover Beverly, Angela,
Susan

More information about the creative team



Director
Natalie Abrahami

List of the creative team who worked on the show:

Writer: Mike Leigh

Designer: Peter Butler

Lighting Designer: Jai Morjaria

Sound Designer: Melanie Wilson

Movement & Intimacy Director: Anna Morrissey

Voice Coach: Emma Woodvine

Associate Sound Designer: Marie Zschommler

Birkbeck Assistant Director: Elizabeth Laurence

Stage Manager: Sarah Barnes

Deputy Stage Manager: Amy Bending

Assistant Stage Manager: Olwen Barnes-Archer

Information about the set design

In Abigail's Party the stage looks like the inside of a house, without the walls. There is a living room, a toilet, and a kitchen. The design of the house is very 70s with typical orange and brown colours from that time.

Before the show starts, the skeleton structure of the whole house is shown. Right at the beginning of the play this structure is lifted up so that you can see into the space better.

The living room has two armchairs and a sofa, as well as a coffee table, a dining table, and another table for the record player. There is a bar in the living room, where the characters spend a lot of time making drinks. There is also a staircase with only the first few steps showing.

The stage is on something called a revolve. A revolve is a platform that rotates. In the play, when a record goes on the stage starts rotating. The inner parts of the stage are all on a rotating platform, whereas the outer parts (closest to the audience) stay still. This means that the house becomes very mixed up. For example, at one point half of the kitchen is on one side of the stage, and the other half of the kitchen ends up on the other side. It is supposed to show how, as the characters get more drunk, the world around them becomes more muddled.



What is the story about?

The play is set in the late 70s in the UK. It was originally set in the south of England around London, but this version of the play is set in the Northwest near Manchester.

Abigail's Party takes place at Beverly and Laurence's house. They are hosting a drinks party. Beverly has invited the neighbours: Angela, Tony, and Susan. Angela and Tony have been married for nearly three years and have only just moved into the neighbourhood. Susan has a fifteen-year-old daughter called Abigail who is also having a party at the same time at Susan's house .



What happens in the first half

At the beginning of the play Beverly gets ready for the party by arranging the snacks, putting some music on, and applying perfume. Laurence, her husband, comes in and is very stressed from a long day at work. He is an estate agent, and he needs to pick up a key for a client that same evening. Beverly doesn't want Laurence to keep working but he says he must. Beverly asks him to get some more drinks on the way back.



Then Angela and Tony arrive. Beverly's house is much fancier than Tony and Angela's house and Tony feels a bit uncomfortable because he is not used to that kind of house. Angela is so impressed by Beverly and the house and really wants to be like Beverly.

Laurence makes them all drinks. They then make small talk about different types of cars, supermarkets, and the fact that Beverly has never passed her driving test. Laurence goes out to get the key. Angela says that Tony does not let her drive, which gives us the sense that he is very controlling of her. Laurence comes back because his car has stopped working and asks Tony to help. When Angela and Beverly are left alone, Beverly gives Angela some tips about her lipstick.

What happens in the first half

Susan then arrives. She has bought a bottle of wine for Beverly and Laurence. Shortly afterwards Tony comes back in from having helped with the car. Early on we get the sense that Beverly finds Tony attractive as she flirts with him quite a bit and tries to get close to him.

They start talking about the party that Susan's daughter Abigail is having. Beverly starts talking about all the things that can go wrong at a teenage party, and this makes Susan feel worried. They then begin to talk about marriage and divorce. Susan is divorced and Angela asks her lots of questions about it which makes Susan a bit uncomfortable. They then talk about children; Angela really wants some, but Beverly doesn't.

Angela and Beverly start talking about how their dads are both very cruel to their mums and how upsetting this is for them. Angela asks Beverly if she would have married Laurence if they had lived together beforehand and she says she wouldn't have. We get the feeling that neither Beverly nor Angela are in happy relationships.



What happens in the first half

Laurence comes back, but immediately remembers he has forgotten to get the drinks and rushes out again. Beverly runs after him. When Beverly gets back, she tells everyone about a couple she has seen kissing in Susan's garden. This makes Susan feel anxious that the party is out of control. Susan tries to go down to see the party herself, but Beverly stops her. Beverly is quite controlling of Susan and doesn't really listen to her. For example, whenever Susan says she doesn't want another drink, Beverly pours her one anyway.



Angela starts admiring different things in Beverly's house, such as the lights and the fridge. Tony is very controlling of her and tells her to stop touching things. Susan tries to leave when no one is watching but doesn't get to the door in time. Laurence enters with the drinks. Beverly asks whether Laurence and Tony would mind going to check on the party, but Laurence doesn't think it will be necessary. Susan also does not want Laurence and Tony to check on the party, but Beverly keeps insisting on it until they agree. This again shows us that Beverly is not very good at listening to Susan.

What happens in the first half

Beverly wants Laurence to put on a record and they disagree on what to listen to. Laurence wants to listen to classical music, but Beverly finally gets her way and they put on pop music from the 60s. During the song Tony joins Beverly at the bar and they have a private moment where they flirt with one another. After this Laurence starts talking to Susan about how he wishes he had a creative passion in his life. Angela turns off the music to share an embarrassing story from her childhood and this annoys Beverly who quickly goes to put another song on.



Beverly dances around the living room to the music and talks about how sexy she finds the song. This makes Laurence very uncomfortable as he is very awkward about sex and doesn't like any suggestion of it. He turns the music off because Beverly's dancing has made him feel too uncomfortable. He rushes out of the house with Tony to go and inspect the party.

Beverly is humiliated by Laurence turning off the music and she decides they should all get drunk. Suddenly Susan feels like she is going to vomit. She has drunk far more than she usually does because Beverly has kept on giving her drinks, even when she has said no. Susan runs to the bathroom just in time to throw up. This is the end of act one.

What happens in the second half

The second half starts very shortly after where we left off at the end of act one. Susan is in the toilet having just thrown up, and Angela and Beverly are making more drinks. The two men are still at the party down the road.

Susan comes out of the toilet and Angela and Beverly try hard to make her feel better. Beverly offers Susan coffee and perfume, although this makes Susan feel worse. They then start talking about Tony, and Angela reveals some of the very cruel things he has said to her. Susan seems shocked when Angela asks her if her ex-husband was violent. It becomes clear that to Angela and Beverly it seems normal for a husband to be violent towards his wife.



Laurence comes back and he seems very nervous and in his head. The women ask him about the party, but his answers are very defensive. The women wonder why Tony did not come back with him. Laurence starts making himself a sandwich whilst Angela and Beverly laugh about the idea that Tony is being sexually assaulted by teenagers at the party. The way they make fun of sexual assault is very outdated and could be upsetting to some audience members.

Beverly makes a rude comment towards Laurence, and he suddenly points the bread knife at her. Beverly jokes about being stabbed. The moment is funny but the underlying violence of it is also upsetting.

What happens in the second half

Tony returns from the party looking a mess, with his shirt unbuttoned and his hair very scruffy. This makes the women even more suspicious of what he had been doing at the party, even though he claims nothing happened. Beverly notices his shirt is wet, and when Angela tries to touch it, he pushes her away. Susan tries to go to check on the party, but Beverly stops her again. The mood is now very tense, and Beverly puts an Elvis record on to try and calm things down. Beverly goes to the bathroom to collect herself, and when she is alone in there, we can see that she is very hurt and upset by Laurence's behaviour towards her.



Whilst Beverly is in the bathroom, Laurence makes Susan uncomfortable by asking her whether she thinks the area has gone downhill since new people have started moving in. It is clear that he is talking about people from working class backgrounds and that he is directing his comments towards Angela and Tony, who have only just moved into the area. Laurence tries to seem superior by displaying the fancy literature he owns, and by making fun of Tony for a book he has been reading.

When Beverly comes out of the toilet, she and Laurence start bickering again. She tries to turn the record up but Laurence aggressively grabs her arm to stop her. This really upsets Beverly but she tries to recover and to keep it in.

What happens in the second half

Beverly asks Angela if she wants to dance and puts a record on. She starts dancing with Tony in quite an intimate way and this upsets Angela a bit even though she tries not to show it. Tony forces Angela to dance with Laurence, even though she doesn't want to. Angela feels very uncomfortable doing a slow dance with Laurence, so she starts doing a much quicker dance by herself.

After the song is over Beverly pours some more drinks and then starts to dance with Tony again. This dance is a lot more sexual, as Tony and Beverly run their hands down each other's bodies. Angela is very upset by this, especially as Tony has never danced with her that way. Meanwhile Susan and Laurence dance together in a much more formal way, whilst talking about Paris. Susan did not want to dance with Laurence, but Beverly once again pushed her into doing it.

Once the dancing is over Laurence tries to turn the conversation back to Paris and the art world. Beverly finds this boring and tries to put another record on. Laurence calls Beverly ignorant and this sparks a huge argument between them. They both fling insults at each other. Beverly mentions a painting she has to keep upstairs because Laurence hates it for being too sexual. Angela asks to see the painting.



What happens in the second half

At this point Tony, sensing trouble, says they need to go. However, Angela pushes for them to stay and so Beverly rushes upstairs to get it. Tony tries to force Angela to leave but at this same moment Laurence puts on the Beethoven record and shouts at them all to sit down.

Very soon into the record Laurence starts having a heart attack. Angela snaps into nurse mode, whilst Tony calls for an ambulance. Beverly comes downstairs and at first doesn't realise what's going on. Once she realises how ill he is, Beverly feels awful for making him so angry, but also blames him for being so highly strung and argumentative. Angela administers CPR and the kiss of life, but ultimately Laurence dies. Beverly is distraught and collapses into an armchair. Angela goes to try and comfort her but suddenly gets a cramp in her leg at which point the play suddenly ends.



Questions

If you have any other questions please do reach out.

Find information [online](#)



Email us on access@royalexchange.co.uk



Call Box Office **0161 833 9833**



Or come in and **talk one of our friendly Box Office** team members, Monday - Saturday from 11am



We hope you enjoyed your visit to the Royal Exchange Theatre.

See you soon!