

FINBOROUGH | THEATRE

VIBRANT NEW WRITING | UNIQUE REDISCOVERIES

August–October 2014 Season



A season of plays at the Finborough Theatre to coincide with the Scottish Independence Referendum

LITTLE RED HEN

by John McGrath

Directed by Jennifer Bakst.

Presented by Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre.

'There's two Scotlands, hen ... there's the Scotland that's you and me, that's been robbed and cheated and worked to the bone when it suits or thrown on the queue at the burroo when it dosnae suit – that's one Scotland; and there's a Scotland that owns factories like yours and sweat shops like I worked in, and grouse moors and mountains and islands and stocks and shares, and says what goes – and there's only one of them can be free at a time.'

Commissioned by the Finborough Theatre as part of its Scotland Decides/Tha Alba a'taghadh2014 season to coincide with the Scottish Independence Referendum on Thursday 18 September 2014, a staged reading of John McGrath's seminal **Little Red Hen** plays at the multi-award-winning Finborough Theatre for one performance only on the day of the Scottish Independence Referendum itself – Thursday, 18 September 2014 at 7.30pm.

Glasgow in the 1970s. The battle for Scottish independence is underway, and young Henrietta wants to join the activist movement fighting to free Scotland from English rule. Until her ancient, cantankerous and spirited grandmother interferes: 'aye, but do you know which way you're goin'? Or how you're gonnae get there? Do you buggery.'

Old Hen recounts to her granddaughter the story of The Red Clyde, when government fear of a workers' revolution in Glasgow led to the deployment of 10,000 English soldiers and tanks in the city... The Red Clydeside movement comes alive before our eyes with poetry and song as we hear how John MacLean, Jimmy Maxton, John Wheatley, Willie Gallacher and many others fought capitalism and parochialism, when Old Hen was not so old, but young and full of zeal, at the epicentre of a doomed revolution...

Originally written in the run-up to the failed Scottish devolution referendum of 1979 and unseen in London since 1976, John McGrath's sweeping history of Red Clydeside explores what it means to be free, and whether political self-determination is achievable without economic independence.

"In Little Red Hen, we try to take a look at that earlier time of high hopes, and at the present moment of aspiration, through the eyes of one of that older generation. What went wrong with the first period – which ended in the misery of the '30s – may be of interest to people today who are working, as she did, for a better future for the people of Scotland."
– John McGrath

Playwright **John McGrath** (1935-2002) was a prolific writer best known for his work with the 7:84 Theatre Company and for his extraordinary commitment to the importance of popular theatre. Born in Liverpool and raised in Wales, his writing career began at the BBC, where he wrote and directed many of the early episodes of *Z Cars*. He continued to work in television and film throughout his career including writing the screenplays for the films *Billion Dollar Brain* (1967) and *The Bofors Gun* (1968), but his chief passion was for the theatre. In 1971, he founded 7:84 Theatre Company, deriving its name from the statistic that 7% of the UK population own 84% of the wealth, dedicated to taking popular, political theatre far and wide, particularly to towns and villages usually considered to be off the cultural map, and often presenting plays specially written for the company by McGrath. His plays include *Random Happenings in the Hebrides* (1970), *Events While Guarding the Bofors Gun* (1966), revived at the Finborough Theatre in 2012, *The Cheviot, The Stag*

118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED Telephone 020 7244 7439 e-mail admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk
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Press Information

and the Black, Black Oil (1973, and subsequently televised), Fish in the Sea (1972), The Game's A Bogey (1974), Little Red Hen (1975), Yobbo Nowt (1975), Out of Our Heads (1976), Joe's Drum (1979), Blood Red Roses (1980), Mairi Mhor (1985, and subsequently televised), Border Warfare (1989), Watching for Dolphins (1992) and Hyperlynx (2001). He also wrote two seminal books on popular political theatre – A Good Night Out: Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form (1981) and The Bone Won't Break: On Theatre and Hope in Hard Times (1990). He received Lifetime Achievement Awards from both BAFTA and the Writers Guild of Great Britain, and Honorary Doctorates from the University of Stirling and the University of London. John McGrath died in 2002. Michael Billington wrote in his obituary: 'No one since Joan Littlewood did more to advance the cause of popular theatre in Britain than John McGrath'.

Director **Jennifer Bakst** is an international director working in theatre and opera across the UK, USA and Germany. At the Finborough Theatre, she directed the critically acclaimed world premiere of Armstrong's War as well as Hate Radio as part of Vibrant: A Festival of Finborough Playwrights. Jennifer is the former Resident Assistant Director at the Finborough Theatre where she assisted on Stewart Conn's Glasgow play I Didn't Always Live Here, ROOMS: A Rock Romance, and Nothing is the End of the World (Except for the End of the World). Jennifer also worked as an Assistant Director at the Deutsche Oper Berlin and the Royal Academy of Music. Theatre and opera directing includes L'elisir d'amore (Fine Arts Theatre, USA), Bash (Etcetera Theatre), Selkie and Now We Are Three (Southwark Playhouse), Everything Happens at the Starlight Lounge (Vault Festival), The Collectors (Courtyard Theatre), Tiny Dynamite (Cockpit Theatre) and Fallen Angels (Theatro Technis). She will be directing Bong Hits 4 Jesus at Theatre503 and Acis and Galatea at the Arcola Theatre in 2014. Jennifer also translates dramatic texts from German into English, and is currently translating Rolf Hochhuth's Sommer 14 for performance at the Finborough Theatre and publication by Oberon Books in August 2014.



The Finborough Theatre, well known to their commitment to Scottish playwrights, presents its month long Scotland Decides/Tha Alba a'taghadh2014, a month long season to coincide with the Scottish Independence Referendum on Thursday 18 September 2014. The season includes three classic Scottish rediscoveries and a brand new play, three of which are receiving their English premieres. The sparkling 18th century satire on the Union of Scotland and England, **The Flouers o'Edinburgh** by Robert McLellan plays for four weeks from 2–27 September 2014; the English premiere of the Scots verse drama on the life of 'Braveheart' – **The Wallace** by Sydney Goodsir Smith, plays on Sundays, Mondays and Tuesdays between 7–23 September 2014; the English premiere of leading 'Yes' campaigner Alan Bissett's new play **Jock: Scotland on Trial** runs for four late night performances between 10–13 September 2014; and a staged reading of John McGrath's **Little Red Hen** – a sweeping history of 'Red Clydeside' that asks whether political self-determination is ever achievable without economic independence – receives a staged reading on the evening of referendum day itself - Thursday, 18 September 2014.

The Press on Director Jennifer Bakst

"Tight, focused direction from Jennifer Bakst." Reviewsgate

"I can't see how it can be better served than by Bakst's effortlessly moving production." Partially Obstrued View

"A thought-provoking theatrical gem of a production." WhatsOnStage

"Jennifer Bakst's direction draws committed and honest performances from the actors." British Theatre Guide

"Details and emotional nuances that ring absolutely true, and that Jennifer Bakst's production brings beautifully to the fore." One Stop Arts

"Jennifer Bakst's precise production has some beautifully joyous moments." Bargain TheatreIreland

"Each scene has its own unique pace, tone, and level of engagement, testament to Jennifer Bakst expertly nuanced direction, and refuses to let you make up your mind about the characters before the final words are spoken." What's Been Seen

The Press on the original production of Little Red Hen

"Like a breath of fresh air." The Financial Times

"The latest skirmish in a continuing war against capitalism and the ills thereof – full of vitality, humour, good songs and music, polemical overstatement and home truths." Cordelia Olivier, The Guardian

"Gets cheerfully away from the anti-fun bias of English Socialism." Michael Billington, The Guardian

The Press on the Finborough Theatre production of Events While Guarding the Bofors Gun (2012)

★★★★★ Five Stars, The Guardian, WhatsOnStage

★★★★ Four Stars, One Stop Arts, Exeunt Magazine, Fulham Chronicle

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"As good as anything you will find in London theatre." Michael Billington, The Guardian

"As ever, one leaves the Finborough wondering how its rediscoveries could have been left gathering dust for so long."

Sarah Perry, Exeunt Magazine

"Prolific, impassioned and wonderfully eclectic, the late John McGrath (he was one of the key writers on 'Z-Cars'!) deserves modern reappraisal just as much as his peers Arnold Wesker and Edward Bond." Andrzej Lukowski, Time Out

"And it's salutary to be reminded that McGrath was one of our finest postwar political dramatists." Michael Billington, The Guardian

"Profoundly affecting." Exeunt Magazine

"The Finborough - which has admirable form in reviving the often neglected work of left-leaning 20th-century dramatists - the opportunity to see a well-performed, well-directed staging of a McGrath play should not be wasted." Ciaran Bermingham, Morning Star

"Ten years after McGrath's death and over 45 years since this play was last seen in London this is a worthwhile revival. I hope it we may see more of his plays brought to life again in the near future." Howard Loxton, British Theatre Guide

Finborough Theatre, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

Box Office 0844 847 1652 Book online at www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Thursday, 18 September 2014 at 7.30pm

Ticket Prices £10 all seats

Performance Length: Approximately 2 hours.

For more information, interviews and images, please contact **Neil McPherson** on e-mail

admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk or **07977 173135**

Download press releases and images at <http://www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk/press-resources.php>

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A Little Red Hen lived in a barnyard. She spent almost all of her time walking about the barnyard in her picketty-pecketty fashion, scratching everywhere for worms. She dearly loved fat, delicious worms and felt they were absolutely necessary to the health of her children. LITTLE RED HEN: Who will plant this wheat grain?. PIG: I will not. CAT: I will not. DOG: I will not. TURKEY: I will not. LITTLE RED HEN: Then, I will do it. Clo- clo! NARRATOR: And she planted the little grain of wheat. Soon it started growing, and growing, and growing. LITTLE RED HEN: Who will cut the wheat?. PIG: I will not. CAT: I will not. DOG: I will not. TURKEY: I will not. LITTLE RED HEN: Then, I will do it. Clo-clo!. NARRATOR: And she cut the wheat. Then she asked. LITTLE RED HEN: Who will thresh the wheat?.