

Welcome to this introduction of Proteus Theatre Company's *The Bloody Chamber*, directed by Mary Swan. The following introduction, written by Megan Shaw, will take about 17 minutes to listen to and includes information about *The Bloody Chamber*, the set, characters and costumes.

The show is adapted by Mary Swan from Angela Carter's book *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*. Carter's collection of feminist fairy and folk tales was first published in 1979, and in this staged retelling, an all-female cast bring a selection of her strange and fantastical stories to life.

The show lasts approximately 80 minutes with no interval.

Please note there is a loud gunshot towards the end, at about 75 minutes in.

An opulent stage, lit by golden clam shell footlights awaits a troupe of women who will tell their stories upon it. The set is a theatrical jumble of different periods; remnants of long-forgotten props and sets that have been found and thrown together. The overall feel is Gothic- endless gilding and opulent, rich-coloured fabrics.

At the front corners of the stage are two large gilded oval frames, mounted on black wallpapered panels. Painted in flowing script inside are the words 'Carter's House of Love'.

The stage itself is largely covered by a white square floor cloth, set on an angle so that one corner meets the front central point. Painted on it is a huge pink and black lily in the vulvic style of Georgia O'Keeffe, its soft folds of petals reminiscent of a woman's labia.

To the front left of the stage is a wooden dressing table with black and yellow striped legs and a square, gold-painted stool in front of it. On top of the table are two upright metal poles of about 50cm or 20 inches in height, fixed into a thin wooden base. They each have a slim, rectangular, hand-sized wooden block attached to the top, which hold short wigs; one white, the other red.

Behind the table, a cylindrical metal frame dominates the space. Painted gold, it stands around 9ft/2.75m tall and 6ft/1.8m wide. The tower is made of 8 upright struts strengthened by horizontal bars $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way up. The spaces between the upright struts form doorways, whilst the spaces above the horizontal bars are much smaller. The top of the tower is flat- formed by more struts. From these crowning bars a golden trimmed trapeze has been slung. It hangs low inside the tower so that a performer can sit on it with their feet still on the floor. The trapeze ropes narrow at the top where they are fastened together at a single point.

Also dominating the space are some white aerial silks. They are fixed from the theatre's rigging towards the back-centre of the stage and have been tied at the top to make two long tails and a loop, or aerial hammock, which droops halfway down into the space. The long tails have been split and tied off loosely to bits of set on the left and right, leaving the hammock hanging alone. The silks are used as a screen for projection as well as for aerial routines.

A black, flock-papered wall defines the back of the stage. It is about 6m or 20ft in diameter and is divided into thirds, with the central section jutting out into the space. In the left section of wall an oblong hole has been cut and covered by a black gauze cloth. Opaque until light is shone from behind; the gauze becomes a screen used for a shadow puppet and is encased in a large mauve frame.

The prominent central section of wall contains a small platform at around head height. The platform is open at the front and edged by a two-dimensional, gold square frame with swooping edges which has a home-made feel. A minimalist sunflower on a canvas; short yellow petals around a large golden head, hangs on the wall behind. From the front it appears to be held by the frame.

On the final section of wall, at ground level, is another golden plywood frame. Rectangular, and almost tall enough for a person to stand upright in, it is built slightly prominent from the wall, allowing a tasselled table lamp to sit on top. The frame holds a loose cloth on which is an image of The Priestess tarot card; a black outline of a long-gowned woman with a moonlike headdress. The cloth can be swept aside for a character to appear within the frame.

The rest of the wall space is filled with various picture frames; some ornate, others simpler in design. They contain images of tarot cards, words quoted from the stories, and a small, inset shelf which holds a rotary dial telephone.

In the right-hand corner, a free-standing clothes-rail carries a vast array of costumes.

A large screen, surrounded by a baby pink two-dimensional picture frame, sits on small castors in front of the clothes rail. On one side a golden, shiny surface represents a mirror. It is large enough to obscure two performers standing behind it.

Towards the front right of the stage is an empty artist's easel, also painted in baby pink. In front of it, at the edge of the stage is a silver 1950's-style microphone, held on a stand.

Nestled around the edges of the space are small tables, battered suitcases, trunks and chairs. They are covered in costumes, props and the occasional, dimly lit lamp.

Placed around the set are 4 large tarot cards, each with a loop of black ribbon tied to the top corners. The cards are:

Wisdom- an image of a black and grey skull, it's top cut off, with white flowers sprouting from within,

Dissolution- A tower of black and grey skulls, with a curved line of black hornets above.

Love- a dissected black and grey heart muscle, surrounded by pink flowers,

Death- black and grey skulls mounted on a scythe, with red flowers at the base.

Light is used to great effect during the show; dark shadows create mystery or lurking terror, table and floor lamps bring a comfortable homely glow and washes of reds, blues or greens

intensify the dramatic points in the stories. Shadow puppets are used in some tales, whilst a projector- housed inside a wooden box, creates striking images across the set.

A cast of five women form an ensemble of showgirls who narrate and perform multiple roles throughout the show. Lightning quick costume changes enable them to portray countless characters, including humans and beasts. If the girls are not in part of a story they sit to the sides of the stage and watch the action. Each showgirl has a base outfit onto which they add extra costume to play a new role. Sometimes they wrap themselves in richly decorated kimonos to play more minor parts.

The cast of The Bloody Chamber are as follows;

Ashley Christmas plays The Madame.

The Madame is a large built white woman in her mid-50's, her dark brown hair swept back into a French pleat with a solid quiff at the front, accentuated by two white streaks running from her temples. She has a round face with humorous dark eyes and a generous mouth coated in red lipstick. She wears a black top under a shiny gold corset and black satin bloomers. Around her waist is fastened a frilly black pannier, or side-hooped skirt, with gold sequined lining which extend her hips into a 17th century silhouette. It reveals her legs at the front. She saunters around the stage in black Victorian boots, with the air of someone who has seen it all.

Madame's characters in the stories include The Mother, The Opera Singer and Grandmother.

Mother wears a Victorian style black hat with large feathered trim and moves with short steps.

The Opera Singer has a gold cloak fastened around her shoulders and wears a golden helmet which has two curved ivory horns fixed at the temples. This is completed by bright yellow plaits that loop up from under the helmet to the tips of the horns, in the cartoonish style of a Wagner Opera Singer. She first appears kneeling in the large frame on the right of the wall, her large bosoms heaving as she sings. She moves around on light, quick feet.

Grandmother is in her late 80's. She peers out from her bed under a large white mop cap and, huddled inside a shawl, clutches a Bible to her chest.

Anesta Mathurin plays the showgirl Wisdom. A petite, lythe woman in her late 20's, Wisdom is mixed-race with dark brown hair that is braided into two plaits; the tails pulled into a bun at the nape of her neck. Her bright grey eyes, heavy with mascaraed lashes, shine with a mixture of excitement and nervous energy. She has a delicate, soft featured face and sharp chin. Wisdom wears a black leotard with a broad golden band around her waist, over which she has a large red and gold trimmed crinoline frame. It swings as she walks, her bare legs and fluffy-shoed feet on display within. Her headdress consists of green and gold ferns and flora, attached to a red headband.

Wisdom plays The Countess, The Bride, The Child and the Girl Raised by Wolves.

The Countess is dressed in a leopard print fur coat that ends at the tops of her bare thighs, a matching hat and large black sunglasses. She moves with graceful flair on fluffy mules, sometimes glaring disapprovingly from above her sunglasses. The Countess first appears posing on her side in the raised central frame of the back wall.

The Bride wears a long 1800s style deep burgundy frock coat with a tight bodice. Upon her head she fixes a small maroon riding hat with a slender brim. She moves with calm serenity.

The Child is revealed with her back to us as a tiny, almost inhuman figure, around 2.5ft/70cm in height. Her hooded, red satin cloak sweeps the floor and she carries a wicker basket. When she arrives at her grandmother's house, she is much taller- the red cloak skimming the tops of her thighs, her hood down revealing a fearless face.

The Girl Raised by Wolves, or Wolf Child, is barefoot and dressed in a simple white cotton playsuit. She moves as lithely on all fours as she does on two legs, stalking her surroundings cautiously, her muscles tense. She never speaks.

Lorraine Moyneham plays the showgirl Dissolution. A white woman in her early 60's, Dissolution would never admit to being anything over 45 and the other girls would never ask. Her elfin features are set in a round face, with deep dimples just below her cheekbones. Her hair is a curly bright copper, cropped short to the scalp on the right side then graduating in length to just below her left ear. She wears a golden crown with blue and black feathers fastened to it and a navy-blue pinstriped waistcoat over a metallic gold leotard and matching gold hotpants. She moves with precision on strappy, gold, kitten-heeled shoes.

Dissolution also plays The Artist's Muse and The Lady.

The Artist's Muse struts onto the stage covered by a golden cloak which she removes to reveal an outfit that is the navy-blue suit of a male when she stands right side on, but the sexy, golden hotpants and sparkly strappy top of a female when she stands left side on. She moves with ease and grace during her cabaret-style trapeze act, but is highly animated and skittish at other times.

The Lady is dressed in black; a stiff satin skirt that falls to her calves and a sequined, sleeveless top trimmed with feathers which stick out over her shoulders. Her penetrating eyes are hidden behind round sunglasses and she moves with the graceful, practised air of a routine repeated for Millenia.

Rosie Rowlands plays the showgirl Love. A slender, baby-faced mixed-race woman in her late 20s, Love has curly black shoulder length hair worn with the front tied up off her face and the back left loose. Her forehead is covered by a thick fringe parted in the middle and her wide-set brown eyes are framed by dark eyebrows in a heart shaped face. Whilst only of average height, Love is the tallest of all the women. She wears a sequined black playsuit that sparkles as she moves and a black feathered tail-fan, from which sprout floor-length black and grey feather boas- the epitome of a Vegas Showgirl, complete with diamante tiara fixed with swaying black Ostrich feathers. On her feet she wears silver kitten heels.

Love's characters include The Girl and The Vampire.

The Girl is dressed in a silver brushed-velvet V necked tunic with rose-gold lining, cinched at the waist by a golden belt. It has $\frac{3}{4}$ length sleeves, fastens below her breasts, and is short at the front and longer at the back. Her feet are bare and she moves with agility and grace.

The Vampire is the monstrous, savage embodiment of Dissolution's Lady character. A lurking shadow dressed in a black sequinned, figure-hugging playsuit and black satin calottes, she scales the tower in a spider-like manner watching the goings on below through hungry eyes.

Megan Brooks plays the showgirl Death. A white, athletic woman in her early 40s, her brown hair is pulled into a French plait, the back and sides of her head shaved short beneath. Over her natural hair she wears a bright red, jaw-length wig with a blunt fringe. She stares at us with defiant, thickly lined hazel eyes. Her bottom lip is pierced with a silver ring and a thin black pencil moustache has been drawn above her top lip. She wears a white shirt under a red waistcoat topped off with a smart black tailcoat. Shiny metallic gold leggings complete the look. On her feet she wears black gaiters- footwear often worn by aerialists which leave the toes and heels uncovered. They are calf hugging, knee high-affairs.

Death plays all the male characters in the stories including The Marquis, The Valet, The Wolf and The Officer.

The Marquis is in his late 40's and wears black trousers and a white shirt with a taupe embroidered waistcoat, over which he sometimes adds a floor length black satin coat. His brown hair is tied back and he speaks through a sneering mouth. He walks with slow-paced confidence.

The Valet wears gold leggings, a red and gold striped waistcoat and a black bellboy hat. He carries a ginger-haired ventriloquist dummy with a deeply etched leering face, who is dressed in matching attire.

The Wolf wears a black calf length woollen overcoat and the red showgirl wig under a grey trilby. He slinks around the space, posing as he goes and cocks his head as he speaks.

The Officer is in his early 20's and wears black trousers, an oatmeal-coloured tweed jacket, and a matching flat cap. His chest is held high and when he talks he puckers his lips.

All other roles and narration are played by the Showgirls.

The creative team behind the Bloody Chamber consists of:

Adaptation and Direction- Mary Swan

Dramaturg-Saul Jeffe

Aerial Choreography- Charlotte Mooney

Acro-balance Choreography- Silvia Fratelli

Hand Balance Choreography, Aerial and Acro-balance Rehearsal Director- Tamzen Moulding

Designer-Sam Pine

Lighting Designer- Peter Harrison

Musical Director/Composer/Sound Designer-Max Reinhardt

Original Music- Paul Wild

Production Manager-Callum Thomson

Production Support-Turtle Key Arts

Thankyou for listening and enjoy the show.