

Full casting and extra performances announced!

The Finborough Theatre is now FULLY AIR CONDITIONED

Part of the Finborough Theatre's
Celebrating British Music Theatre
series

Evergreen Theatrical Productions Ltd in association with Neil McPherson for the Finborough Theatre presents

Ivor Novello's
GAY'S THE WORD

The Happiest Musical of the Year!

Book and Music by **Ivor Novello**

Lyrics by **Alan Melville**

Book Adapted by **Richard Stirling**

by special permission of Samuel French Ltd on behalf of the Ivor Novello Trustees

Directed and Choreographed by **Stewart Nicholls**

Music Direction by **Ben Stock**

with

Frank Barrie, James Bentham, Helena Blackman, Anna Brook-Mitchell, Daniel Cane, Valerie Cutko, Sophie-Louise Dann, Amy Hamlen, Doreen Hermitage, James Irving, Josh Little, Lindsey Nicholls, Eileen Page, Jonny Purchase, Myra Sands, Elizabeth Seal, Sophie Simms, Paul Slack, Sebastian Smith

The Finborough Theatre's acclaimed 'Celebrating British Music Theatre' series follows its sell-out success *Perchance to Dream* with **Ivor Novello's** last and wittiest musical. *Gay's the Word* opens a strictly limited run of seven Sunday and Monday performances on Sunday, 5 February 2012 (**Press Night: Monday, 6 February 2012 at 7.30pm**). This is the first professional revival of the 1951 smash hit, which starred **Dame Cicely Courtneidge**.

Novello sends up his own Ruritanian extravagances in this backstage musical comedy. Former stage star Gay Daventry opens a drama school and finds that what is needed to get her back on top is, to name the show's hit song, **Vitality!** Other numbers include *If Only He'd Looked My Way* (subsequently recorded by **Frank Sinatra**), *Bees Are Buzzin* and the enchanting *On Such A Night As This*, all combining Novello's melodic talent with Alan Melville's sharp wit.

The cast is sensational: West End favourite **Sophie-Louise Dann** stars in the title role of Gay, fresh from her critical sensation in last year's *Lend Me a Tenor*. Her co-star is **Helena Blackman**, one of the UK's fastest-rising musical performers. The remarkable 19-strong cast features Tony Award winner **Elizabeth Seal**, whose career began in the chorus of the original production, as well as RSC and West End stars **Frank Barrie, Valerie Cutko, Doreen Hermitage, Eileen Page** and **Myra Sands**.

Welsh-born composer, author and actor **Ivor Novello** (1893-1951) was one of the most eminent British entertainers of the last century. His West End musicals include *Glamorous Night*, *The Dancing Years* and *King's Rhapsody*. As an actor, he was Britain's first major male film star, appearing in over 20 silent features including Alfred Hitchcock's classic *The*

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Press Information

Lodger. As a West End matinee idol, he appeared in many of his own plays and musicals. The Ivor Novello Awards, honouring excellence in British music writing were established in 1955 in his memory.

Alan Melville (1910-1983) was one of the most popular playwrights and lyricists of the postwar years, and later a television personality. His sketches and lyrics featured in many West End revues, including the *Sweet and Low* series which together ran for almost 2,000 performances. His long-running plays include *Dear Charles* and *Simon and Laura*.

Frank Barrie is one of the UK's most experienced actors, with theatre appearances ranging from four years at the National Theatre under Sir Laurence Olivier, to major roles in many Shakespeare plays including *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Richard II*, *Richard III* and *Romeo and Juliet* (his Broadway debut). He is the author of his one-man show *Macready!*, which transferred to the West End in 1981 after a triumphant run in New York, and was filmed in USA and for Channel 4. This is the most popular one-man show ever, playing in 65 countries to date and winning Frank a *Plays and Players* award as Best Actor. His other writing includes *The Other Woman*, starring Dame Thora Hird (BBC) and the acclaimed book *Acting Shakespeare for Auditions*, available from www.stageplays.com and www.amazon.co.uk. Television includes over one hundred appearances, including the lead in *Coriolanus* and *EastEnders* (as Edward Bishop).

Helena Blackman trained at the Guildford School of Acting and is known best for her appearances on *How Do You Solve a Problem like Maria?* (BBC). Her credits include Gertrude Lawrence in *Noël and Gertie* (Off West End Award nomination), Lily/Rose in *The Secret Garden* (West Yorkshire Playhouse), Helen in the West End premiere of Sondheim's *Saturday Night* (Arts Theatre), Nellie Forbush in the UK No 1 tour of *South Pacific* (TMA Award nomination), the title role in *Gypsy* (Cardiff Millennium Centre) and Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (Leicester Haymarket Theatre). In concert and on radio, Helena's solo performances include *Howard Goodall's 20th Century Musical Greats* (Channel 4), *Night of 1000 Voices* (Royal Albert Hall), *Friday Night Is Music Night* (BBC Radio 2), *The Alan Titchmarsh Show* (ITV) *Maria Meets Joseph* (BBC), *In Tune* and *The Elaine Paige Show*. Television appearances include *Any Dream Will Do*, *Strictly Come Dancing* and *It Takes Two* (BBC). Helena's debut album *The Sound of Rodgers & Hammerstein* was released to critical acclaim in 2011. As well as co-starring in *Gay's the Word*, she is also touring the UK with her debut show *Journey to the Past*, performing songs from animated movies. www.helenablackman.com

James Bentham has appeared in Leonard Bernstein's *Mass* (Royal Festival Hall) as well as *Boogie Nights* (Crescent Theatre) and *Elegies* (Stage@Leeds).

Anna Brook-Mitchell has appeared in *The Pirates of Penzance* (National Tour), *Follies* (Pleasance Theatre, London), *The Boy Friend* (Her Majesty's Theatre) and *Pirmania! The Swashbuckling Pirate Musical* (Upstairs at the Gatehouse and Edinburgh Fringe). www.annabrookmitchell.com

Daniel Cane has recently appeared in *Thursford Christmas Spectacular 2011*, *The Love of the Nightingale* (National Tour), *Blaze!* (Bridewell Theatre) and *The Snark and How to Hunt It* (Tristan Bates Theatre). www.danielcane.co.uk

Valerie Cutko has previously appeared at the Finborough Theatre in *Lucky Nurse and Other Short Musical Plays* (2007). Her theatre work includes *Grand Hotel* (Broadway), *Cabaret* and *Beautiful and Damned* (both at Lyric Theatre) and *My Fair Lady* (Theatre Royal, Drury Lane), *The Phantom of the Opera* (UK and Ireland tour), *Silk Stockings* (Lost Musicals at Sadler's Wells Theatre and New York), *Alceste*, *The Balcony* (American Repertory Theatre) *How He Lied To Her Husband* and *Sladek* (National Theatre platforms). Film includes *The Phantom of the Opera*. Television includes *Material Girl*, *The Robinsons* and the BAFTA-nominated online drama *KateModern*. Playwriting includes *Eva and Eve* (Westminster Prize, Soho Theatre) and *Windmill Street* (International Playwriting Festival, Warehouse Theatre Croydon).

Sophie-Louise Dann stopped the show last year as the diva in *Lend Me a Tenor* (Gielgud Theatre; "She lands every laugh" – *Variety*), and appeared as Lady Raeburn in the recent smash hit revival of *Salad Days* (Riverside Studios). She has just finished playing Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella* (Hackney Empire). Other West End and London successes include *Forbidden Broadway* (Menier Chocolate Factory), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Open Air Theatre, Regent's Park), *Iolanthe*, *The Mikado* and *The Pirates of Penzance* (Carl Rosa Opera, Gielgud Theatre) and *The Yeomen of the Guard* (D'Oyly Carte Opera, Savoy Theatre). She has also starred on tour in *High Society* and *The Boy Friend*, and appeared to acclaim at Chichester Festival Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse and Clwyd Theatr Cymru in musicals, plays and comedies. Her television appearances include *Patience* and *Sondheim at 80* (BBC Proms), *My Summer with Des* and *Goodnight, Sweetheart*. Her film work includes *The Phantom of the Opera*.

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Amy Hamlen appeared in *A Little Night Music* (Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford), *La Bohème* (King's Head Theatre), *Sweeney Todd* (Mill Studio, Guildford). She is about to tour the UK with Dennis Potter's *Blue Remembered Hills*.

Doreen Hermitage appeared as Belle Watling in the original musical production of *Gone with the Wind* (Theatre Royal, Drury Lane) and in the award-winning revival of *On Your Toes* (Palace Theatre). She was a very popular performer at The Players' Theatre and appeared often on *The Good Old Days* (BBC). Her film credits include *Little Shop of Horrors*.

James Irving made his stage debut in Ravel's opera *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* (Barbican Theatre), and is a Principal for Grim's Dyke Opera at Sir W.S. Gilbert's former home Grim's Dyke.

Josh Little is fast emerging as a dynamic musical theatre talent. He has just finished appearing in *Dreamboats and Petticoats* (National tour) and *Children of Eden* (Prince of Wales Theatre), and his album work includes *Stars Sing the Songs of Steven Luke Walker* and *Band Camp: the Musical*.

Lindsey Nicholls has just appeared in *Robinson Crusoe and the Cornish Pirates* (Hall for Cornwall) and *Anthems and Chess in Concert* (both Royal Albert Hall).

Eileen Page has numerous stage, television and film credits, including Emilia in *The Winter's Tale*, Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* and the Duchess of Gloucester in *Richard II* (Royal Shakespeare Company) and *A Long Day's Journey into Night* (National Theatre). In the West End, Eileen has appeared as the Duchess in *Me and My Girl* (Adelphi Theatre), Heidi Schiller in *Follies* (Shaftesbury Theatre) and *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* and *Henry VII* (both at the Mermaid Theatre). On television, Eileen has appeared in numerous dramas, comedies and series. Her film credits include *The Secret Garden* and *The Killing of Sister George*, and she has just finished filming *John Carter of Mars*.

Jonny Purchase is about to appear in the major new film of *Les Misérables*. His theatre includes *Cinderella* (Octagon Theatre, Yeovil), *Sleeping Beauty* (Hall for Cornwall), *West End Glee Club* (Edinburgh Festival) and *Dora: a Gala Concert* (Her Majesty's Theatre).

Myra Sands has many popular West End credits, including *Oliver!* (Theatre Royal, Drury Lane), *Gigi* and *The Boy Friend* (Regents Park Open Air Theatre), Miss Willoughby in *Acorn Antiques* (Theatre Royal, Haymarket), *Summerfolk*, *Honk!* and *Candide* (all for the National Theatre), Madame Thenardier in *Les Misérables* and long-running appearances as Jenny Anydots in *Cats* (New London Theatre) and Miss Lynch in *Grease* (Dominion Theatre). Her television roles include Mrs Horowitz in *Love Hurts* (BBC).

Elizabeth Seal launched her career in the original cast of *Gay's the Word* (Saville Theatre) before achieving stardom as Gladys in *The Pajama Game* and Lola in *Damn Yankees* (both at the London Coliseum) and in the title role of *Irma la Douce*, directed by Peter Brook. Recreating the role on Broadway, she won the 1961 Tony Award for Best Actress in a Musical, beating Julie Andrews, Carol Channing and Nancy Walker. She later took over the role of Roxie in the original West End production of *Chicago*. Other West End shows include Tennessee Williams' *Camino Real* and Julian Slade's *Salad Days*. Her film credits include *Radio Cab Murder*, *Town on Trial* and *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*.

Sophie Simms is a recent graduate, who made her professional debut in *Nine* (Mill Studio, Guildford).

Paul Slack is currently touring his critically acclaimed solo play *Phoenix Rising* (about DH Lawrence) and has appeared in leading roles with the Royal Shakespeare Company and at the Royal Court Theatre, Hampstead Theatre, in the West End including *Breaking the Code*, and Chichester Festival Theatre. His film credits include *Love Actually* and *Bright Young Things*.

Sebastian Smith has appeared in *West Side Story* and *Sleeping Beauty* (Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford), *The Light in the Piazza* (Electric Theatre, Guildford) and just finished *Robinson Crusoe and the Cornish Pirates* (Hall for Cornwall).

Stewart Nicholls has directed and choreographed numerous productions, including *Robinson Crusoe*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Hall for Cornwall), *Hetty Feinstein's Wedding Anniversary* (New End Theatre), *Lunch with Marlene and Noël* (UK tour), *I Love a Piano* (world tour), *Big Bruvva* and *Faith Brown and her Boys in the Buff* (Edinburgh Festival), *Over My Shoulder* (Wyndhams Theatre and tour), *Beatlemania* (Gothenburg Opera House, Sweden), *South*

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Pacific (Birmingham Symphony Hall), *Into Thin Air* (New Players Theatre), *Carousel* (St David's Hall, Cardiff) and *Love Songs* (Bridewell Theatre). Choreography includes *Cowardy Custard* (2011 UK tour), *Noël and Gertie* (Cockpit Theatre), *Cinderella* (Hall for Cornwall), Kelly Brook's tap-routine for the film *In the Mood* and Tim Rice's revival of *Blondel* (Pleasance Theatre). Stewart has directed and choreographed many shows for GSA Conservatoire. He is a leading archivist of British musical theatre, directing and choreographing ten Forgotten British Musicals at the Theatre Museum, including Noël Coward's *Sail Away* (his restored version is published by Warner/Chappell Music) and *The Amazons*, for which he also co-produced the Grammy Award-nominated CD. He has also written sleeve notes for various CDs and the editorial for four volumes of music books entitled *Legendary Ladies of Broadway*. www.stewartnicholls.co.uk

Ben Stock was Musical Director on Caroline Sheen's album *Raise the Curtain*, and in the theatre on *Over My Shoulder*, (Wyndham's Theatre and tour), *Can't Stop the Music* (QE2) and *Five Guys Named Moe* (Roundhouse). Ben is a regular presenter on BBC Radio Bristol's *Good Morning Show*. He has worked as an actor in the West End in *New Edna: the Spectacle* (Theatre Royal, Haymarket), *Grease* (Cambridge Theatre), *Over My Shoulder* (Wyndham's Theatre) and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* (London Palladium). He has appeared often regionally. His most recent London credit was as Noël Coward in *Noël and Gertie* at the Cockpit Theatre opposite Helena Blackman.

Richard Stirling wrote the 2007 *Sunday Times* top ten bestseller *Julie Andrews: an intimate biography* as well as *Love from Ivor* (a tribute to Novello, which played to capacity at the Linbury Theatre ROH Covent Garden and the Lincoln Center New York) and *Over My Shoulder*, the musical tribute to 1930s film star Jessie Matthews. As an actor, he has appeared often on film and television and the West End, regional and American stage. He trained at RADA.

The Celebrating British Music Theatre series at the Finborough Theatre

In 2006, the Finborough Theatre began the Celebrating British Music Theatre series with a sell-out production of Leslie Stuart's *Florodora*. Productions since then have included sell-out rediscoveries of Lionel Monckton's *Our Miss Gibbs*, Harold Fraser-Simson's operetta *The Maid of the Mountains*, A "Gilbert and Sullivan" *Double Bill* featuring Gilbert's play *Sweethearts* and Sullivan's opera *The Zoo*, Dame Ethel Smyth's opera *The Boatswain's Mate*, Sandy Wilson's *The Buccaneer*, Oscar Asche's *Chu Chin Chow*, Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley's *The Roar of the Greasepaint – The Smell of the Crowd* and Ivor Novello's *Perchance to Dream*.

PRESS NIGHT: MONDAY, 6 FEBRUARY 2012 AT 7.30PM

PHOTOCALL: BY ARRANGEMENT. PLEASE EMAIL admin@finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Finborough Theatre, The Finborough, 118 Finborough Road, London SW10 9ED

Box Office 0844 847 1652. www.finboroughtheatre.co.uk

Sundays and Mondays, 5, 6, 12, 13, 19, 20 February 2012

Evenings at 7.30pm

Tickets £18, £15 concessions

THESE PERFORMANCES ARE NOW COMPLETELY SOLD OUT

EXTRA PERFORMANCES BY PUBLIC DEMAND:

MONDAY, 13 FEBRUARY 2012 AT 3.00PM

MONDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2012 AT 3.00PM

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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