



Bleak Expectations



Monday 29
September –
Saturday 4
October 2025

altrincham
garrick
playhouse

WE ARE A CHARITY...

...but what does that mean?

All of the income we receive goes directly back into the work on our stages, and into our projects with the community.

Altrincham Garrick Playhouse receives no public funding from any official organisation, regional or local council.

Therefore all of our income is generated by ticket sales for our own productions, hiring of the theatre for concerts and one-night stands, and donations.

Just like all non-profit making charities, we fund-raise all year round to keep our work in the community going. Our projects include:



**altrincham
garrick
academy of
performing
arts**

Our hugely popular academy offering exciting, fun-filled drama workshops for students aged 6 – 18. Music, movement, monologues and much more!

**altrincham
garrick
show choir**

Joy, laughs, music and harmony – singing together and creating music in a relaxed, fun and social environment. A no-stress and no-audition Community Show Choir.

**altrincham
garrick
play reading
club**

A relaxed, no-pressure way to read plays alongside like-minded people who love theatre, drama, comedy, musical theatre, poetry and much more...

Friday 3rd October
The Diary of Anne Frank
by F Goodrich/A Hackett

Friday 7th November
Hedda Gabler
by Henrik Ibsen



Play YOUR Part!

You can support us in a number of ways – by making a Donation, becoming a Friend, Member or Volunteer, 'sharing a show', sponsoring us or leaving a legacy. As a Registered Charity, any donations we receive can be supplemented by gift-aiding. Simply scan the QR Code to find out more... **Thank you!**



Many of our stars aren't actually on the stage!

Our brilliant volunteers are vital members of the Altrincham Garrick Playhouse team. They share our love of theatre and generously give their time to support our performances in many ways.

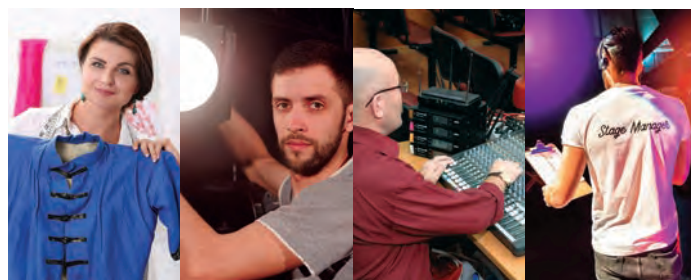
We couldn't do what we do without our amazing team of passionate and dedicated volunteers, and we're always on the look out for more fantastic people to join us!

Our hugely-valued front-of-house volunteers support us with the opening of the theatre, welcoming patrons, selling programmes and refreshments, checking ticket bookings and showing audiences to their seats, making people feel comfortable and excited for the performance ahead!



Volunteering at the Garrick not only helps our theatre to thrive, but is a great way to meet new people, develop new skills, gain experience and become part of our theatre community. We welcome people from all backgrounds and levels of experience and expertise.

There are many opportunities to volunteer at the Garrick, and we welcome your involvement at any level. Whether it's designing or helping to build one of the many sets we create each year, working backstage on productions, using your expertise on props, lighting, sound, make-up or costumes, whatever your niche, we'd love for you to join our family!



Interested? To find out more, simply scan the QR Code (right) or e-mail admin@altrinchamgarrick.co.uk



Making 'em Laugh!

For much of the late twentieth century, audiences heading to their local theatre could almost guarantee an evening of door-slamming farce or lighthearted bedroom comedy. Writers like Ray Cooney became synonymous with the form. His works – *Run for Your Wife* (1983) being the most enduring – set the standard for an entire genre of West End and touring theatre. These plays thrived on clockwork timing, mistaken identities, and escalating chaos, with actors darting through a forest of doors as they struggled to conceal an affair or a lie. For decades, this style of comedy dominated repertory theatres, summer seasons, and provincial playhouses. Yet today, Cooney's farces and their ilk are rarely staged. The shift reflects broader cultural changes in comic taste, in what theatre audiences expect from a night out, and in how comedy itself is produced across media.

One reason farce has waned is that its preoccupations no longer chime with contemporary sensibilities. The sexual politics of the "philandering husband" plot, once treated as harmless fun, now feels outdated at best. Meanwhile, the television sitcom, which borrowed heavily from farce's structures, has long been able to deliver similar antics more cheaply, instantly, and to wider audiences. Theatre can no longer compete by offering the same gags TV perfected decades ago. Instead, stage comedy has needed to reinvent itself, finding fresh ways to exploit the immediacy of live performance.

One strategy has been to draw directly on the sitcom tradition itself by adapting beloved TV comedies for the stage. Productions such as *The Vicar of Dibley* and *'Allo 'Allo!* have sought to capture the nostalgia of audiences who grew up with these shows, restaging familiar plots with affectionate fidelity. In these adaptations, much of the humour derives from recognition: the audience delights in hearing much-loved catchphrases brought to life once again. There is also an element of cosplay in the performances, as actors channel familiar characters while winking at the impossibility of fully recreating them. Productions of these legendary shows remind us that the sitcom and parody remain fertile comic sources for theatre, but they also risk becoming exercises in nostalgia rather than genuinely innovative comedy.

More exciting, perhaps, are the wholly original stage comedies of the twenty-first century, which use the live

medium in ways television never could. Mischief Theatre's *The Play That Goes Wrong* (2012) is the most obvious and successful example. Drawing on traditions of farce, slapstick, and metatheatricality, it stages a fictitious amateur dramatic company attempting to mount a murder mystery, with results as catastrophic as they are hilarious. Sets collapse, cues are missed, and the line between the fictional company's ineptitude and the real company's skill in orchestrating chaos becomes delightfully blurred. Here, the comedy depends not on who is hiding in which bedroom but on the precariousness of live performance itself – something only theatre can deliver. The show's enormous international success, spawning sequels and a Broadway run, testifies to audiences' appetite for inventive physical comedy that reinvents tradition.

Another striking recent hit has been *Operation Mincemeat*, created by the theatre collective SpitLip. First staged in 2019, this musical comedy reimagines the extraordinary true story of a Second World War deception campaign, in which British intelligence used a corpse carrying false documents to mislead the Nazis. On paper, the subject seems far from comic, yet the company's irreverent, fast-paced style – combining contemporary pop influences with historical satire – turns it into a riotous, genre-defying show. It exemplifies the boldness of contemporary theatre-makers who are unafraid to mix pathos with parody, history with absurdity, and musical theatre with sketch comedy. Where farce once sought only to raise a laugh, shows like *Operation Mincemeat* pursue humour while also commenting on history, gender roles, and national identity.

The difference between these modern works and Cooney's farces lies not only in subject matter but also in form. Today's comic playwrights and collectives often foreground theatricality itself, making the audience complicit in the joke. Comedy now arises from the ingenuity of theatrical invention, not just from narrative contrivance.

Moreover, contemporary comedy theatre often reflects a broader diversity of voices and subjects. Where Cooney's plays centred on middle-class domestic farce, today's comic stage embraces everything from spoof musicals to political satire. Productions tour internationally, appeal to younger



audiences attuned to meta-humour, and incorporate the high-energy aesthetics of sketch shows and improv comedy. This shift reflects a generation of theatre-makers influenced as much by *Monty Python* and *The Office* as by Georges Feydeau or Ben Travers.

That is not to say that traditional farce is entirely dead. Am-Dram societies still mount Cooney plays, and their structure remains a useful training ground for actors learning timing and physical precision. But the mainstream stage has moved on. Comedy today is more self-aware, more formally inventive, and more varied in its targets. The farce of slamming doors has given way to the comedy of collapsing scenery, satirical musicals, and postmodern parody – as with Mark Evans' *Bleak Expectations* which, drawing upon the source material of Charles Dickens and Victorian Literature, gleefully lampoons both the text and the heritage industry that surrounds it.

In the end, the evolution of stage comedy reflects the theatre's need to remain distinct in an entertainment landscape saturated with screen-based humour. Contemporary productions succeed not by imitating television but by offering what only live theatre can: the thrill of watching things go wrong in real time, the inventiveness of small companies transforming history into hilarity, and the shared joy of an audience laughing together at the unrepeatable moment. Farce may no longer dominate, but comedy on stage is far from finished – it is thriving in new and surprising forms.

Joe

Joseph Meighan

Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.

**altrincham
garrick
playhouse**

Barrington Rd, Altrincham WA14 1HZ
www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk
Box Office Phone: 0161-928 1677



/AltrinchamGarrick



@AltrinchamG



@altrinchamgarrick_playhouse/

Board of Trustees:

Hugh Everett (Chair)
David Mazurkiewicz-Citrine
April Millar
Trevor McKie
Nick Sample

Theatre Management Team:

Artistic Director Joseph Meighan
Operations Director Sarah Reilly

Front-of-House Management:

Front-of-House Manager Neill Walker
Deputy Front-of-House Manager /
Studio F-o-H Manager Eileen Smith

Theatre Administrators:

Finance Manager Siobhán Linnett
Diane White Patsy Newhouse
Judi Quirke Diane Ashton
Lauren Groves

Theatre Membership:

Secretary John Gibson

Productions:

Heads of Stage Mark McEwan
Paul Simpson
Head of Lighting James Merrington
Head of Sound Position Currently Vacant
Head of Wardrobe Mike Shaw
Head of Design Barry Purves
Head of Props Claire Eddleston-Rose
Workshop Manager and Maintenance Supervisor
Steve Cox
Scenic Artist Amanda Cooke

House Keepers:

Sandra Smith Janine Barratt
Kim Riley

Garrick Academy of Performing Arts:

Principal Peter Birch
Principal Helen Lawrence
Senior Tutor Dean Sumner
Assistant Tutor / LAMDA Tutor Grace Gonet
Assistant Tutor Olivia Walsh
Assistant Tutor Lottie Warburton

Altrincham Garrick Society Limited is a Registered Charity. Registered in England, No: 1034690 Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in England, No. 2899281

Programme written, designed and produced for the Altrincham Garrick Playhouse by Nick Sample Creative Graphic Design 07950 332 645 njcsample1@mac.com www.nicksample.co.uk

Victorian Comic Writers

Victorian fiction is often remembered for its social criticism, moral seriousness, and weighty engagement with the industrial, political, and religious issues of the age. Yet alongside the era's reputation for earnestness runs a rich seam of comic writing that delighted contemporary readers and continues to amuse modern audiences. Writers such as Charles Dickens, Jerome K. Jerome, Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell, among others, explored the comic potential of everyday life, eccentric characters, and social absurdities. Their humorous works helped to broaden the scope of the novel, not only as a moral or realist form but as an entertainment deeply rooted in wit, satire, and farce.

Charles Dickens: The Great Comic Visionary

Any discussion of Victorian comic fiction must begin with **Charles Dickens**, whose novels are as famous for their comedy as for their pathos and social critique. Dickens' humour lies largely in his creation of vivid, exaggerated characters, whose speech, manners, and obsessions produce a blend of caricature and satire.

Comic Characters and Situations

● **The Pickwick Papers** (1836–37): Dickens' first novel is arguably his most consistently comic work. **Samuel Pickwick** and his companions – **Tupman**, **Snodgrass**, and **Winkle** – embark on misadventures filled with drunken escapades, mistaken identities, and eccentric figures such as the verbose **Alfred Jingle**. Its episodic structure allowed Dickens to showcase his gift for situational comedy and character-driven humour.

● **Nicholas Nickleby** (1838–39): Though often remembered for its melodramatic elements, it also features comedic grotesques like the foppish **Mr. Mantalini** and the pedantic schoolmaster **Wackford Squeers**.

● **Martin Chuzzlewit** (1843–44): Here Dickens satirises selfishness and hypocrisy, most famously in the comic figure of **Mrs. Gamp**, the gin-swilling nurse whose malapropisms became proverbial.

● **The Old Curiosity Shop** (1840–41) and **Bleak House** (1852–53): Even novels with tragic or socially critical reputations include comic subplots and characters, from the braggart **Dick Swiveller** to the endlessly litigious **Jarndyce** and **Jarndyce** lawyers.

Comic Technique

Dickens' comedy blends verbal play (puns, malapropisms, overblown speeches), farcical situations, and grotesque exaggeration. His caricatures anticipate later comic traditions, influencing writers such as **Jerome K. Jerome** and **P. G. Wodehouse**. Yet Dickens' humour often has a moral edge: his laughter exposes folly, greed, and hypocrisy, inviting reform as much as amusement.

Wilkie Collins: Comic Subplots within Sensation Fiction

Wilkie Collins is chiefly known as a pioneer of sensation fiction and detective narratives, particularly **The Woman in White** (1859) and **The Moonstone** (1868). Yet within his intricate plots lie streaks of humour, often in the form of eccentric secondary characters.



Above: Charles Dickens.
Centre: A contemporary caricature of Wilkie Collins...



● **The Woman in White** features the comic lawyer **Mr. Fairlie**, whose hypochondria and self-absorption provide comic relief amid the novel's gothic intrigue.

● **Armadale** (1866) includes the garrulous character **Major Milroy**, whose effusiveness resembles Dickens' **Jingle**.

● Collins also collaborated with Dickens on several theatrical projects, including the play **The Frozen Deep** (1857), where both authors explored dramatic storytelling with touches of humour.

Collins' humour is less widespread than Dickens', but it reveals the flexibility of comic elements even within ostensibly serious, suspense-driven fiction.

Anthony Trollope: Comedy of Manners and Satire

Anthony Trollope's novels are admired for their realism and subtle social observation, yet he is also a deft comic writer. His funniness is more restrained than Dickens', but it emerges in wry narrative commentary and ironic depictions of clerical and political life.

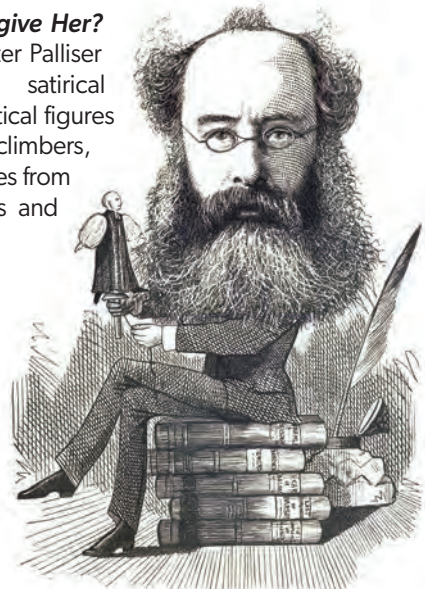
Comic Examples:

● **The Warden** (1855) and **Barchester Towers** (1857): The early Chronicles of Barchester novels contain some of Trollope's best comic writing. Characters like the pompous **Archdeacon Grantly**, the obsequious **Mr. Slope**, and the scheming **Signora Neroni** are portrayed with sharp wit and ironic detachment.

● **Can You Forgive Her?** (1864–65) and later Palliser novels contain satirical portraits of political figures and social climbers, where comedy emerges from the clash of personalities and ambitions.

Style

Trollope's comedy is rooted in irony rather than farce. He does not caricature his characters to the extremes Dickens does; instead, he highlights their vanities and contradictions with amused detachment. In this sense, Trollope's humour resembles



...and (above), Anthony Trollope. All three authors looking very bewhiskered and particularly glum.

that of Jane Austen more than Dickens, offering a comic realism that influenced later novelists of manners.

Elizabeth Gaskell: Humour within the Domestic and Industrial Novel

Elizabeth Gaskell is often remembered for her socially engaged fiction, such as *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854–55), which treat industrial unrest and class conflict with earnest sympathy. Yet she also displayed a talent for whimsy, particularly in her shorter fiction.

Comic Works:

- **Cranford** (1851–53): Perhaps her most beloved work, *Cranford* is a gently comical depiction of life in a small Cheshire town dominated by spinsters. The comedy arises from the ladies' rituals, genteel pretensions, and mild hypocrisies. Unlike Dickens's grotesques, Gaskell's characters are treated with affectionate irony.

- **My Lady Ludlow** (1858) and **The Moorland Cottage** (1850) contain similarly light comic touches amidst domestic themes.

Approach

Gaskell's humour is often understated and rooted in everyday domestic details, closer in spirit to Trollope's realism than Dickens' exuberance. Her affectionate mockery of Cranford society also influenced later comic portrayals of provincial life, from E. F. Benson's *Mapp and Lucia* series to television adaptations.

Above: A miniature portrait of a young Elizabeth Gaskell.

Below: Jerome K. Jerome.

Jerome K Jerome: Lightness and Laughter at the Century's End

By the late Victorian period, humour had shifted from Dickensian exuberance to a lighter, more conversational style epitomised by Jerome K. Jerome.

Key Works

- **Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog)** (1889): This comic travelogue follows three friends (and a dog) on a boating holiday along the Thames. Its wittiness lies in mock-heroic narration, digressive anecdotes, and the contrast between the characters' grand intentions and their bumbling incompetence. Unlike Dickens' moral satire, Jerome's comedy is rooted in absurdity and self-deprecation.

- **Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow** (1886) and **Diary of a Pilgrimage** (1891): Collections of humorous essays in which Jerome refines his genial, observational style.

Influence

Jerome's light-heartedness reflects the changing tastes of late-Victorian readers, who craved relief from the heavy moral earnestness of mid-century fiction. He acknowledged Dickens as an influence but pared down the excesses of caricature, moving toward a subtler, more anecdotal form of humour that directly anticipates twentieth-century comic prose.

Other Notable Victorian Comic Writers:

While Dickens, Jerome, Trollope, Collins, and Gaskell stand out, other Victorian authors also made significant contributions to comic fiction:

- **Thomas Love Peacock** (early Victorian, though he began writing during the Regency): His satirical dialogues, such as *Crotchet Castle* (1831), influenced Dickens and Trollope in their use of eccentric conversationalists.

- **William Makepeace Thackeray**: Known for satire, especially in *Vanity Fair* (1847–48), where Becky Sharp's manipulations are portrayed with biting wit. His parody *The Book of Snobs* (1848) helped define Victorian social satire.

- **Edward Lear** and **Lewis Carroll**: Though primarily remembered for nonsense verse and children's literature, their comic inventions – Lear's *Limericks* and Carroll's *Alice* books – illustrate the Victorian appetite for absurdity and wordplay.

Collaboration and Influence

Victorian writers were deeply interconnected through personal friendships, periodicals, and theatrical projects. Their comic styles often influenced one another:

- **Dickens and Collins**: Close collaborators, they co-wrote plays and short stories. Dickens' comic exuberance influenced Collins' secondary characters, while Collins' structural discipline helped temper Dickens' plots.

- **Dickens and Gaskell**: Gaskell published *Cranford* and other stories in Dickens's periodical *Household Words*. Though their comic sensibilities differed, Dickens encouraged her lighter, more domestic humour.

- **Jerome K. Jerome and Dickens' Legacy**: Jerome's *Three Men in a Boat* owes much to Dickens's tradition of comic travel, particularly *The Pickwick Papers*. Yet Jerome modernised this style, emphasising self-deprecation over caricature.

- **Trollope and Dickens**: While Trollope often distanced himself from Dickens's theatricality, the two shared readers and critics. Trollope's realism can be seen as a counterpoint to Dickens' comic exaggeration, suggesting the diversity of Victorian humour.

The Functions of Humour in Victorian Fiction

Victorian comic fiction served multiple purposes:

1. **Entertainment**: Serialised publication required writers to capture and sustain reader interest. Comic episodes, eccentric characters, and humorous digressions ensured popularity.

2. **Satire and Social Critique**: Laughter was a tool for exposing hypocrisy, vanity, and injustice, from Dickens' Mrs. Gamp to Thackeray's snobs.

3. **Relief from Serious Themes**: Even novels dealing with industrial conflict or political intrigue often included entertainingly funny



LOVE THEATRE? LOVE SAVING? JOIN US!

For just a small Annual fee,
you could save a small
fortune every year.
For example:

friends of the
altrincham
garrick
playhouse

GOLD Friends



£35 ANNUAL FEE,

giving you **UNLIMITED** discounted-priced tickets per production... So, for example, as a 'Gold' Friend, if you were to purchase 4 tickets for every Garrick Main Stage and Garrick Studio show each year, and the NT Live & Musicals Live Screenings announced (to date), you would be able to

SAVE OVER £300!

SILVER Friends



£25 ANNUAL FEE,

giving you **TWO** discounted-priced tickets per production... So, for example, as a 'SILVER' Friend, if you were to purchase 4 tickets for every Garrick Main Stage and Garrick Studio show each year, and the NT Live & Musicals Live Screenings announced (to date), you would be able to

SAVE OVER £150!

25U Friends

for 16 to 25
Year Olds



£0 ANNUAL FEE – IT'S FREE! –

giving you **ONE** discounted-priced ticket per production... So, for example, as a '25U' Friend, if you were to purchase 4 tickets for every Garrick Main Stage and Garrick Studio show each year, and the NT Live & Musicals Live Screenings announced (to date), you would be able to

SAVE OVER £75!

GOLD and SILVER discounts apply to all Altrincham Garrick Playhouse Main Stage and Studio productions, Altrincham Garrick Cinema and National Theatre Live screenings, and some visiting shows! Garrick Friends save £4 per ticket on Garrick Main Stage Plays, Musicals and Family Shows, £4 per ticket on the Pantomime, £2 per ticket on Garrick Studio productions, £3 per ticket on NT Live Screenings, £4 per ticket on Musical Theatre Show Screenings, and £1 per ticket on Cinema Screenings. There are no other ticket discounts available.

Simply enrol online at www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk or speak to our Box Office, either in person or by calling 0161-928 1677 to become a member of our Friends of the Garrick audience loyalty scheme.

Victorian Comic Writers

interludes, balancing pathos with amusement.

4. Characterisation: Humour allowed writers to bring characters to life, whether through Dickens' grotesques, Gaskell's affectionate portraits, or Trollope's ironic observations.

Legacy and Conclusion

Victorian comic fiction left an enduring legacy. Dickens' exuberant grotesques influenced later humourists like **Jerome K. Jerome**, **George Grossmith** (*The Diary of a Nobody*), and **P. G. Wodehouse**. Trollope's ironic realism paved the way for the twentieth-century novel of manners, while Gaskell's *Cranford* became a model of gentle, affectionate comedy. Collins demonstrated that even the sensation novel could be enlivened by comic eccentricity. Together, these writers demonstrated the breadth of Victorian humour – from the broad farce of *The Pickwick Papers* to the conversational charm of *Three Men in a Boat*.

Although the Victorian era is often associated with moral earnestness and industrial gloom, its comic fiction reveals a culture that delighted in laughter, absurdity, and the playful subversion of social norms. Dickens, Jerome, Trollope, Gaskell, Collins, and their contemporaries ensured that humour was not marginal to Victorian literature but central to its vitality. Their novels remind us that comedy can coexist with critique, and that laughter has always been as much a part of the Victorian imagination as solemnity.

Recommended Reading:

Victorian Comic Fiction Starter List:

- **Charles Dickens – *The Pickwick Papers*** (1836–37). Dickens at his most exuberant and farcical. A picaresque adventure full of eccentric companions, comic misunderstandings, and the unforgettable Alfred Jingle.
- **Charles Dickens – *Martin Chuzzlewit*** (1843–44). Famous for Mrs. Gamp, one of Dickens's greatest comic creations, and a showcase of his satirical humour.
- **Elizabeth Gaskell – *Cranford*** (1851–53). Gentle, affectionate humour in the portrait of a small English town where gossip and frugality rule. A great introduction for readers who enjoy wit without caricature.
- **Anthony Trollope – *Barchester Towers*** (1857). A comedy of clerical politics, vanity, and intrigue, written with ironic understatement and wry narrative commentary.
- **Wilkie Collins – *The Woman in White*** (1859). Best known as a sensation novel, but includes comic relief through hypochondriac Mr. Fairlie. Ideal if you like your humour threaded through mystery and suspense.
- **Jerome K. Jerome – *Three Men in a Boat*** (1889). A late-Victorian classic of self-deprecating, absurd humour. Perfect for fans of travel writing and slapstick storytelling.
- **William Makepeace Thackeray – *Vanity Fair*** (1847–48). A biting social satire, where comedy often lies in the narrator's ironic asides and the audacious Becky Sharp's schemes.
- **Lewis Carroll – *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*** (1865). Non-sense humour and wordplay at their best. Though aimed at children, its wit and absurdity still delight adults.

Where to Begin?

For broad comedy: *The Pickwick Papers* or *Three Men in a Boat*.

For gentle wit: *Cranford* or *Barchester Towers*.

For satire with an edge: *Vanity Fair* or *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

For surreal humour: *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

Enjoy!

A few questions for Mark Evans

How did you first get into writing comedy?

Hmm... that's a long time ago. Originally, I wanted to join the army. But it turned out they don't want asthmatic infantry officers so that plan was abandoned. I'd always written stuff when I was young - running a school magazine, doing sketches at end of year shows, that sort of thing - but when I went to university I thought I'd end up being a lawyer or teacher.

However, at university I had the most fantastic opportunities to do comedy... and I tried to take them, doing as much as I could. Gradually, I began to realise that this was potentially a career. So on leaving university I became a comedy writer-performer. Or at least a starving, unsuccessful version of one (I was much thinner then). Fortunately, there were still shows such as Radio 4's *Week Ending* that let absolutely anyone try to write for them, so I started going to their open meetings and submitting sketches. Through that I met people, made friends, gained experience, started getting jobs for no money, then the odd job for a bit of money, then finally got properly paid for things... and that's what I've been doing for the past fifteen years now. Cripes.

As for early projects... well, one of my earliest paid jobs was one I did with James Bachman, when we were paid a ludicrously small amount of money by a production company to write a treatment for a potential series which was to be a Manga-style animation featuring the Spice Girls. Seriously. Nothing ever came of it, oddly. James and I also worked on some sketches for a potential early morning kids' show where the producers decided they wanted to literally do toilet humour - and we ended up writing for two puppet toilets. Nothing ever came of that either, possibly thank goodness. Finally, James and I landed a commission for *The Very World Of Milton Jones* and a year or so later ended up writing on *The Jack Docherty Show* - those were my first two 'proper' jobs.

How did *Bleak Expectations* come into existence?

In 2005 I read *Great Expectations* - and thoroughly enjoyed it, having been a bit lukewarm on Dickens before. I also read a fantastic book called *The Quincunx*, by Charles Palliser: a massive, brilliant, Dickens-style novel which I highly recommend.

Those books made me go a bit nineteenth century mad for a while, and I thought 'what a great place to set something big, daft and melodramatic'; then when it turned out the BBC were doing *Bleak House* on TV, I thought 'what about a costume drama... but silly.' So I wrote a slightly strange script, in the first instance for television.

Gareth Edwards was one of the producers I sent it to, and he said 'I think this might work better as a radio script...' Because Gareth is right 99.7% of the time, I said 'Yes, sir, Mr Gareth,' rewrote it into a radio show and we pitched it to Radio 4. They commissioned a pilot which we recorded in March 2006; that pilot was originally turned down as a series, but the head of Radio Comedy at the time, Paul Schlesinger said, 'Oh, but I really like it, can't we do it?' and Radio 4 fortunately changed their minds and a series was commissioned in late 2006, which we made in March 2007. So from idea to series... nearly two years.



When you began almost twenty years ago, did you ever dream / hope it could head into other mediums like it has... a book, a TV adaptation, a stage show?

Honestly, when I wrote the first ever episode, I just hoped someone, would like it and maybe want to make it. Luckily, that happened... and then when we recorded the first radio series in front of a live audience they liked it so much that I thought 'hmm, if we added costumes and a bit of set this might make a rather fun play...'

Later on, when I actually read some Dickens - before each radio series I'd read one of his

books for 'inspiration', but really to avoid having to actually start writing - I found myself thinking about putting the radio show into prose form. 'The dialogue's already written', I thought, 'so how hard can it be to add some adjectives and general description in between?' Which meant I wrote a book version.

I'm not sure it's entirely normal to do the same show in different forms, but this one seems to lend itself to that... and each version has different joys to it.

How did the play come about; is it your first? Was this your lockdown project?

It's certainly my first professional play. And it wasn't a lockdown project, because it's actually been bubbling away for a long time. In fact, it wasn't long after the first radio series was broadcast that I thought 'well if people laugh at the recordings in the BBC Radio Theatre, maybe they'd laugh at a play version in an actual theatre...' And then one of my oldest friends, David Wolstencroft - who created *Spooks* amongst many other great things - took me for lunch one day and said "you know what, I think *Bleak* would make a great theatre show...". With me bouncing up and down saying "I was thinking that too!". We shook hands on a deal that we would work together to make that happen. It took me a long while to get round to writing a stage version - things got busy and I was sort of waiting for all five radio series to be finished first - and then we began looking around for production partners. A couple of read-throughs, some rewrites, various negotiations with theatres and a mere fourteen years or so later, it's actually happened - thanks to the Watermill Theatre and Anthology Theatre.

Now all I need to do is return the favour to David by producing *Spooks! The Musical* for him. 'We're coming alive... at M15... eating pies and being spies...' It's a global mega-hit in waiting...



Above: The original company from BBC Radio 4's first series of *Bleak Expectations*.



BLEAK EXPECTATIONS

- ◆ Radio 4 commissioned a pilot which was recorded in March 2006, and the first series was made in March 2007.
- ◆ The cast for the pilot episode featured:
 Richard Johnson – Sir Philip ("Pip") Bin
 Tom Allen – Young Pip
 Joanna Page – Pippa Bin, Pip's sister
 Kellie Bright – Poppy Bin
 Kim Wall – Thomas Bin, their father
 Sophie Thompson – Agnes Bin
 Tom Hollander – Mr. Gently Benevolent
 James Bachman – Servewell, Sir Philip's servant
 Laurence Howarth – Mr Skinflint Parsimonious
 Geoffrey Whitehead – Mr Hardthraher.
- ◆ When the series was first recorded a year later, many of the original performers weren't available, so the changes were:
 Susy Kane – Pippa Bin, Mark Perry – Thomas Bin,
 Celia Imrie – Agnes Bin, and Anthony Head – Mr. Gently Benevolent, and Perdita Weeks – Poppy Bin.
- ◆ Bleak Expectations ran for five series (30 episodes) between July 2007 and December 2012.
- ◆ *The Bleak Old Shop of Stuff*, a televisual spiritual successor to Bleak Expectations, written and produced by the same crew, was first broadcast on BBC Two on 19 December 2011, but was never made into a series.
- ◆ A stage adaptation of the show ran at the Watermill Theatre, Newbury in summer 2022, and transferred to the West End at the Criterion Theatre, running from 3 May to 13 August 2023.
- ◆ Guest stars in the Radio version included David Mitchell as The Rev. Godley Fecund (Series 2 & 4), Martha Howe-Douglas as Flora Dies-Early, Jane Asher as Lady Benevolent (née Malevolent) (Series 3), and Raquel Cassidy as Miss Sweetly Delightful (Series 3).

A few questions for Mark Evans

(...Continued)

How close is the stage show to the original story, as told in the radio series/book?

The stage show is essentially the first radio series/the book, plus a bit of the second radio series. That seemed the natural way to do it, as the first series is the most obviously Victorian/Dickensian. (In later series the show goes a bit odder, having things like Martian invasions, zombie apocalypses, people's brains being put into dinosaurs and the main characters surfing a wave of molten brie on a giant cream cracker to escape the cheese mines of France... and that's all a bit too hard to put on stage!)

As to the work involved, I thought it might be relatively easy... but it turns out that wasn't the case! Getting three hours of radio into two hours of stage time meant losing a lot of material and then turning the story from half hour episodes into two one hour acts meant lots of re-shaping and re-inventing.

Plus, while in a sitcom the characters can essentially remain the same in each episode, in a play they do need to evolve a bit... so I had to add emotion where once there was only jokes!

As each series went on, did you deliberately put more puns in the script?

Ooh, I don't know... Um... maybe. 'Train-doori oven' is probably the worst of them. One of my favourites is the one where the brilliant Geoffrey Whitehead has just eaten himself entirely, and Harry says 'that man is so full of himself', which incidentally was actually almost the very last line added to that script. I typed it, sat back and thought: 'that is either excellent or terrible. I just don't know.' Fortunately, the audience loved it.

It's not deliberate if there are more puns. They probably just occurred to me. Puns are odd. In one recording, there were two rather contrived puns a few pages apart: one got a massive groan, the other a massive laugh turning into a round of applause. And I don't know why one was so obviously better than the other – they looked similarly cheesy on paper. I do enjoy the approach of a pun during the recordings, because it makes me feel a little cheap and dirty, but in a thrilling way. I think it was Alan Bennett who said something like 'audiences groan at puns because they're cross with themselves for not spotting them early enough in time to duck.' I love that!

Er, what's the deal with swans?

I honestly don't know. I think large-ish birds are just funny, aren't they? From the chicken upwards, with the swan being particularly hilarious. They're so pompous with their silent grace and only the Queen being allowed to eat them, yet also terrifying with their 'break a man's arm' reputation. Plus, 'swans!' is just a funny thing to say. Isn't it? I also have an obsession with the word 'horse'. But that's less prevalent in the series...

Finally, to end on a political point... shall we just give Gently Benevolent and The Hardthrasers a go of running the country for real. It might work out?

Well, at least Mr Benevolent always has a complex evil plan in mind, as opposed to our current politicians who seem to have no plan at all. And the Hardthraher siblings would certainly help get things done with their mildly violent approach to every obstacle. It's not the worst idea anyone's ever had... shall we start a Bleak Expectations political party before the next election?

Reverentially cobbled together from three separate interviews with Mark Evans by the British Comedy Guide, and a few other internetty places.
www.comedy.co.uk/radio/bleak_expectations/interviews/mark_evans/

The Cast

The Creative Team

Sir Philip Bin
Robert Crumpton

*Agnes Bin /
Flora Dies-Early*
Ros Greenwood

*Thomas Bin /
Bakewell Havertwitch*
Hugh Everett

Pip Bin
Luke O'Hara

Pippa Bin
Ella Muscroft

*Poppy Bin /
Ripely Fecund*
Fiona Primrose

Gently Benevolent
Jonathan Higgs

Harry Biscuit
Tim Cooper

The Hardthrashers
Rob Clyne

*Skinflint Parsimonious /
Broadly Fecund*
Meg Brassington

Director **Pete Brassington**
Set Design **Paula Keen**
Head of Stage **Mark McEwan / Paul Simpson**
Stage Manager **Alan Jones**
Assistant Stage Managers **Louise Hope**

Stage Crew **Cliff Mills** **Lindsey Barker**
..... **Jo Myers** **Meg Dutton**

Lighting Design & Operation **Geoff Scullard**

Sound Design & Operation **Christine Mills**

Rehearsal Prompt **Anne O'Reilly**

Properties **Christine Chrystal**

..... **Claire Eddleston-Rose**

Costumes **Claire Corneill** **Alan Jones**

..... **Mike Shaw & the Garrick Wardrobe Team:**

..... **Stella Blackburn**

..... **Julie Shaw** **Betty Farmer**

..... **Lynne Saleh** **Catherine Phillips**

..... **Helen Phillips** **Sarah Steer**

..... **Noel Watson** **Jen McEvoy**

Production Carpenter **Steve Cox**

Assisted by **Trevor McKie**

Scenic Artist **Mandy Cooke**

Assisted by **Barry Purves** **Trevor McKie**

..... **Jane Milner** **Charlotte Leigh**

..... **Rob Robinson** **Ruth Hetherington**

..... **Holly Cooper**

Set Construction **Paul Simpson** **Steve Cox**

..... **Trevor McKie** **Alan Jones**

..... **Barry Borgen** **Mark McEwan**

..... **Nick McKie** **John Murphy**

..... **Andy McHugh** **John Ross**

..... **Cliff Mills** **Dave Bailey**

..... **Bob Green** **Drew Lightfoot**

..... **Alistair Duffy**

Rehearsal & Production Photography **Martin Ogden**

Publicity & Programme Design **Nick Sample**

Without our incredibly dedicated, enthusiastic team of **Volunteers** and **Staff**, whose sheer hard work often goes unnoticed, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse would simply be unable to continue providing such a range of top quality productions for you to enjoy.

With their continuous commitment to excellence, we owe them a huge debt of gratitude. Thank you everyone!

The Company



Robert Crumpton



Ros Greenwood



Hugh Everett



Luke O'Hara



Ella Muscroft



Jonathan Higgs



Fiona Primrose



Tim Cooper

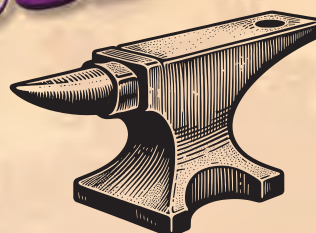


Meg Brassington



Rob Clyne

Bleak Expectations



Robert Crumpton – *Sir Philip Bin*

In 2025 Robert has loved returning to the Garrick Playhouse, having first performed here in *The Winslow Boy* at the age of 13; he played *Pozzo* in *Waiting for Godot* in the Garrick Studio in January, and then several roles in *Vardy v Rooney: The Wagatha Christie Trial* in May. He trained as an actor at Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London.

Robert's theatre credits include: *Henry V* (Oxford Playhouse), *Attempts on Her Life* (Underbelly, Edinburgh Fringe), *Romeo and Juliet* (Nottingham Playhouse), *The Emperor Jones* (The Gate, Notting Hill); five national / international summer tours with the open-air British Shakespeare Company; leads in *Rope* and *Everyman* (The Madrid Players); *Betrayal*, *Crave*, *Miss Julie*, *The Glass Menagerie*, *Present Laughter*, and the title roles in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* (English Theatre Madrid).

Television: *El Ministerio del Tiempo* (HBO/La 1), *In From the Cold* (Netflix), and the Spanish soap opera *Servir y Proteger* (La 1).

Film: *The Vault*, *Cracking the Shakespeare Code*.

Ros Greenwood

Agnes Bin / Flora Dies-Early

Ros has been involved in many Garrick productions both onstage and behind the scenes. Favourite roles over the seasons have been *Pattie* in *Brimstone and Treacle*, *Amanda* in *Private Lives*, *Maggie* in *Outside Edge*, *Monica* in *Daisy Pulls it Off*, *Belinda* in *Noises Off*, *Gail* in *Teechers*, *Elizabeth Law* in *When the Rain Stops Falling*, *Queen Belladonna* in *Snow White*, *Miss 'Tea' Wilson* in *Calendar Girls – The Musical* and *Queen Elizabeth II* in our glorious production of *The Audience*.

Garrick Studio credits include *Fay* in *Iron*, *Katurian* in *The Pillowman*, *Joan Crawford* in *Bette and Joan*, *Kitty* in *Last Summer at Blue Fish Cove*.

Ros has also directed and designed our productions of *And Then There Were None*, *Gaslight* and *The Jungle Book*, and is looking forward to directing *Hobson's Choice* in the Garrick Studio in the Spring.

Ros last appeared as *Grace Poole* in last season's production of *Jane Eyre* and is a member of the Altrincham Garrick Show Choir.

What larks we have had rehearsing this brilliantly bonkers tale!

Hugh Everett

Thomas Bin / Bakewell Havertwitch

Hugh has been a member of the Garrick, mainly in acting roles, since moving to Cheshire from the south in 1987. He first appeared as *third barrow-boy from the left* in *Oliver!*; as a result he was soon afterwards offered a title role, in *Corpse*. He has performed on our stage regularly since then, with only a brief hiatus a few years ago to start a family. Some of his favourite appearances have been in *Noises Off*, *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell*, *Neville's Island*, *Blackadder the Third*, *Blackadder Goes Forth*, *Frankenstein*, *A Christmas Carol*, and as *Gordon Brown* in *The Audience*. Hugh was most recently on the Garrick stage as *David Horton* in *A Vicar of Dibley Christmas – The Second Coming* last year – his third appearance in Dibley productions, having previously played David's dim-witted son *Hugo Horton* in his first outing...

Hugh says he loves appearing in comedies. "There's nothing better than when the funny lines you've rehearsed for weeks, and have got so used to, are greeted with roars of laughter from an audience. Well, nothing better apart from the standing ovations at the end of each performance, of course... And ensemble pieces like this, where most of us each play a few different characters, are also great fun. I challenge the audience to try to work out if any of us are using our 'normal' voices."

Having been addicted to the original radio comedy *Bleak Expectations* when it first came out, Hugh was delighted that the Garrick chose to include the stage version in this season's programme. "It's very, very silly; it hasn't really got an agenda or a message; it's just a hoot from start to finish. I really hope the audience has as much fun watching as we've had in rehearsals."

Hugh adds, "I love acting at the Garrick, mainly because of the huge support and involvement of so many other volunteers. It's a great venue for all sorts of stage entertainment, with a fabulous mixture of non-professional shows like this one, theatrical screenings and many visiting professional productions."

Hugh has recently retired after nearly 40 decades working for IBM, and is looking forward to decades more of involvement at the Garrick.

Luke O'Hara – *Pip Bin*

Luke is a Manchester based actor who is delighted to be returning to the Altrincham Garrick stage, having previously performed in *The Shawshank Redemption* (2023), *Let The Right One In*, and *The History Boys* (2024). He also performed the role of *James 'Baldy' O'Shea* in the Studio's production of *A Man of No Importance* earlier this year.

His credits beyond the Garrick Playhouse include Richard Bean's *One Man Two Guvnors* and Tristan Bernays' *Boudica*, as well as *A Christmas Carol* with Quantum Theatre.

Luke would like to thank the whole cast and creative team for all their hard work, consideration and laughter throughout the rehearsal process and he hopes you enjoy the show!

Ella Muscroft – *Pippa Bin*

Ella is an award winning scriptwriter and filmmaker and also works as a teacher for young people with special educational needs. Her short film '*How to Avoid Death Forever*' won *Best International Short Film* at *The North Film Festival in New York City*. She is releasing her next short film, '*Killer*', in October and is currently filming her debut feature film '*The Places We Leave Behind*'.

Ella is also the founder of the production company and artistic community Loud Voices Silent Streets. She has performed in shows at MADS (Macclesfield Amateur Dramatic Society) and The Stockport Garrick Theatre as well as producing her own plays in venues across Manchester and London.

This is Ella's first show at the Altrincham Garrick and she has loved getting to work with such an amazing ensemble, and is already eyeing the next production she wants to audition for. After a few years away from acting, Ella is looking forward to stepping back on the stage and bringing this bonkers and truly brilliant play to life.

Fiona Primrose

Poppy Bin / Ripely Fecund

Fiona has been a member of the Altrincham Garrick since she moved to Manchester in 2015, appearing in productions on both the main stage and in the Garrick Studio including *Shakespeare in Love*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Ross & Rachel*, *The Laramie Project* and most recently *Home, I'm Darling*. Fiona is excited to return to the main stage in the delightfully silly *Bleak Expectations* alongside such a fun and hard working cast and supported by a brilliant crew. Enjoy the show!

Jonathan Higgs – *Gently Benevolent*

Jonathan has been honing his villainy since his first appearance here at the Altrincham Garrick earlier this year, when he devised a world-threatening super-weapon, as *J. Robert Oppenheimer* in *Oppenheimer*. Later, he refined the villainy-adjacent skills of disguise, manipulation and wearing black things, whilst pretending to be barrister *David Sherborne* in *Vardy vs Rooney: The Wagatha Christie Trial*.

Years of careful preparation have led to this point, with Jonathan slipping in and out of roles at the Stockport Garrick and other nearby theatres, for instance as *Hamlet*, *Bertie Wooster* and, most relevantly, an evil prehistoric predatory bird that very much wanted to harm David Duchovny. (Not the real David Duchovny.)

Somewhere along the way, Jonathan heard the original *Bleak Expectations* series on Radio 4 and enjoyed it very much, so when its stage adaptation dropped into the current Garrick season, the way forward was clear. Jonathan is delighted that his decades of careful scheming have borne fruit, and that he now has you sitting exactly where he planned...



Tim Cooper – *Harry Biscuit*

Tim is a voice over artist and actor based in Manchester. He is one of the creative leads of the multi award-winning *Time & Again Theatre Company* and has toured around the UK with a variety of shows. Time & Again focus on accessible theatre and exploring themes of disability and mental health in a vibrant historical setting. This is Tim's first show at the Altrincham Garrick after a seven year hiatus. Outside of acting Tim is a keen long-distance runner and swimmer.

Previous Credits include: *VILE, Present Laughter, EARWIG, Much Ado About Nothing, A Midsummer Night's Dream, CLOUDS, Jerusalem, The Winter's Tale, GREYHOUNDS, Around the World in 80 Days, Handbagged, Tommy Boy.*

Rob Clyne – *The Hardthrashers*

Rob has performed in a wide range of professional and fringe productions, tours and festivals, as well as bouncing merrily around the UK comedy circuit with a high energy, wig-infused sketch act. This is Rob's 2nd performance at the Garrick after a turn in Alan Bennett's *People* in 2019. He is delighted to be back with such a talented and amusing team, in a show that delivers so many laughs. Rob has worked for many years as a performing arts and primary teacher, but unlike his character *Wackwell Hardthrasher*, he's actually nice to the kids – promise!

Meg Brassington *Skinflint Parsimonious / Broadly Fecund*

Meg has been a member of the Garrick since childhood and has worked on and off stage many times in both the main house and the studio.

Since graduating university with a BA Acting degree in 2014, her acting credits with the Garrick include *Dick Whittington, The Madness of George III, Nightmare, Stags and Hens, Playhouse Creatures, My Mother Said I Never Should, Shakespeare in Love, Last Summer at Bluefish Cove, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, Merrily We Roll Along* and *Geraldine Granger in The Vicar of Dibley* and *A Vicar of Dibley Christmas: The Second Coming*. Meg's directing credits include *All The Little Lights* and *Little Gem*.

Outside of the Garrick, Meg had an ensemble role in *The Skriker* at the Royal Exchange as part of the Manchester International Festival, and she has also appeared in *These Shining Lives* at the Wilmslow Green Room.

Meg's never happier than when exercising her funny bone, and has loved working on *Bleak Expectations*, which has laughs by the bin-load!

Pete Brassington *Director, Bleak Expectations*

Pete graduated from Trinity St David's with a BA in Acting, and after moving to Manchester he made his debut at the Garrick in 2016 playing the over-the-top Prince Regent in *The Madness of King George III*. Further notable main stage performances include *The History Boys, Nightmare, Dick Whittington, The Sound of Music, Shakespeare in Love, The Shawshank Redemption, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* and, earlier this year, he gave an outstanding performance as *Lennie* in *Of Mice and Men*. For the Garrick, Pete has also directed the sell-out shows *The Vicar of Dibley* and *A Vicar of Dibley Christmas: The Second Coming*. Pete has also performed in some brilliant plays in the Studio including *Orphans, The Truth About Blokes* and *Edith in the Dark*, as well as directing *Constellations* and *Pronoun*. Pete recently won a variety of awards including *Best Drama, Best Director* and *Best Lighting and Sound* for his production of *Constellations* at Macclesfield Amateur Dramatic Society.

Pete is so thrilled to be directing *Bleak Expectations*, and if you laugh even a fraction of the amount we have in rehearsals, you're in for a treat!

Pete would like to dedicate this run of *Bleak Expectations* to *Kayleigh Smith and Will Nelson*, who unexpectedly and tragically lost their lives recently. They are sorely missed, and would have loved to laugh with you all tonight.



Next in the Studio: Tues 11 – Sun 16 November 7.30pm

voices of manchester

Six Monologues. Six Mancs.
A Tram. A Pub. The beating heart
of the greatest City. Mad Fer It!

Written & Directed by **Duncan Battman**

Commissioned by **Joseph Meighan**

Rendezvous – Jennifer, an educated lady in her fifties.

Dad – Duncan, a well-spoken man in his sixties.

I Don't Like Coffee – Lillian, an elderly lady.

A Dog in the Road – Mick, a bit of a lad in his thirties.

Gigging – Siobhan, an Irish girl in her early twenties.

The Streets – Jimmy, a man in his forties.



Literary Spoofs

How great works are parodied, updated, and lovingly lampooned by modern authors

Literature has always carried with it a double life. On the one hand, great novels, poems, and plays are revered for their beauty, insight, or cultural impact. On the other, they are also ripe targets for satire, parody, and playful reinvention. For as long as readers have worshipped the classics, others have responded by mocking them – not necessarily to diminish their value, but to engage with them in a new, comic, or subversive light. The result is a long tradition of “literary spoofs,” in which beloved stories and styles are exaggerated, updated, or completely inverted, producing works that are both familiar and startlingly fresh.

The Parodic Instinct in Literature

Parody is as old as storytelling itself. Ancient Greek playwrights such as Aristophanes produced comic send-ups of solemn tragedies. The Roman poet Horace used satire to gently mock the pretensions of his contemporaries. By the eighteenth century, parody had become a well-established mode: Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* both imitated and ridiculed the epic tradition by applying its grandiose style to a trivial incident involving a lock of hair.

Parody often thrives in tension with reverence. To parody something well, one must understand and appreciate it deeply enough to replicate its voice, structure, and tropes. In that sense, spoofs are forms of homage, even when they mock. They draw upon shared cultural knowledge, rewarding readers who recognise the original text and its conventions while adding a new comic spin.

Austen Modernised: *Bridget Jones’s Diary*

Parody need not always involve exaggeration of style; sometimes it operates by updating a story to a new context. Helen Fielding’s *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996) is a classic example of this approach.

Fielding reimagines Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* in 1990s London, with the insecure, self-sabotaging Bridget as Elizabeth Bennet and the aloof but ultimately decent Mark Darcy as Austen’s Mr. Darcy. The parody lies partly in the comic contrast between Austen’s genteel world of Regency Balls and marriage markets and Bridget’s chaotic life of calorie-counting, disastrous relationships, and wine-fuelled introspection. Yet the novel is not a cruel send-up of Austen but a warm reworking that highlights the timelessness of her romantic themes.

The very name “Mark Darcy” signals the parody: it invites readers to see Colin Firth’s performance as Mr. Darcy in the 1995 BBC adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* refracted into the fictional character of Bridget’s love interest. When Firth himself played Mark Darcy in the film adaptation of *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, the parody doubled back on itself in a hall of mirrors.

By placing Austen’s archetypal romance in the messy reality of modern urban life, Fielding demonstrates how parody can serve as adaptation. Rather than mocking Austen, she draws upon Austen’s themes to explore contemporary gender roles, anxieties, and desires.



Rural Romances Skewed: *Cold Comfort Farm*

If *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is parody through modernisation, Stella Gibbons’s *Cold Comfort Farm* (1932) is parody through exaggeration and deflation. Gibbons targeted a particular strain of early twentieth-century English fiction: the overwrought rural melodramas of writers such as Mary Webb, Sheila Kaye-Smith, and (by extension) Thomas Hardy and the Brontës.

These novels were filled with tempestuous passions, harsh landscapes, and brooding characters wrestling with fate, nature, and suppressed sexuality. Gibbons, a sharp and witty journalist, found the whole genre unintentionally comic and set out to lampoon it.

Her heroine, Flora Poste, is a modern young woman who descends upon her eccentric relatives at Cold Comfort Farm. Rather than being overwhelmed by the farm’s Gothic gloom – its sinister woodshed, its tyrannical matriarch, its morose farmhands – Flora treats it all with brisk common sense, reorganising lives and solving problems with practical cheer. The novel is full of mock-gothic description (“something nasty in the woodshed”) and parodied dialect, undercut by Flora’s amused detachment.

Cold Comfort Farm works both as a standalone comedy and as a devastating satire of a whole literary trend. It shows how parody can function as criticism, puncturing the pretensions of a genre while also celebrating its imaginative richness.

Apocalyptic Comedy: *Good Omens*

Some parodies draw less on a single text than on a whole tradition. Neil Gaiman and Terry Pratchett’s *Good Omens* (1990) spoofs the literature of apocalypse, from the Book of Revelation itself to countless modern disaster novels.

The novel imagines the coming of Armageddon but filters it through a deeply comic lens. Its heroes are an angel (Aziraphale) and a demon

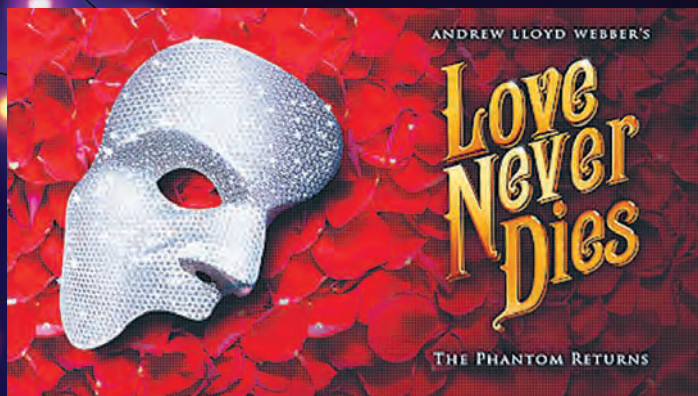


**altrincham
garrick
cinema**

INCLUDING

**National
Theatre
Live**

Sunday 5 October 7:30pm



The year is 1907. Ten years after his disappearance from the Paris Opera House, the *Phantom* has escaped to a new life in New York, where he lives amongst the screaming joy rides and freak-shows of Coney Island. In this new electrically-charged world, he has finally found a place for his music to soar. All that is missing is his love – *Christine Daaé*. Now one of the world's finest sopranos, Christine is struggling in an ailing marriage to *Raoul*. With excitement, she accepts an invitation to travel to New York and perform at a renowned opera house. In a final bid to win back her love, the Phantom lures Christine, her husband, and their young son *Gustave* from Manhattan to the glittering and glorious world of Coney Island... not knowing what is in store for them...

With a score by **Andrew Lloyd Webber**, lyrics by **Glenn Slater**, and a book by **Lloyd Webber, Slater, Ben Elton** and **Frederick Forsyth**, this spectacular musical reunites the masked Phantom with his only true love and musical protégée, the stunning beauty Christine Daaé.

Wednesday 5 November 7:30pm



Twenty-five years ago, an earthquake hit Obsidian (formerly known as Manhattan), trapping a band of misfits in a tunnel and freezing their DNA. They became forever young and are known as The Lost. Now the leader of The Lost, *Strat*, and his band of misfits are fighting against the tyrannical dictator of Obsidian, *Falco*, to get their city back. *Raven*, the beautiful daughter of Falco, longs to break free from her parents' controlling grasp and run away with The Lost. Strat and Raven fall in love at first sight, but will their forbidden love survive the test of time?

Bat Out of Hell: the Musical is a non-stop musical spectacular centred around a loose re-telling of Peter Pan. With the music of **Jim Steinman** and **Meat Loaf** as the soundtrack to this epic musical extravaganza, ***Bat Out of Hell: the Musical*** is an event not to be missed!

**World-class theatre from
across the U.K., and brilliant
West End musical-theatre
productions, can now be
seen right here in Altrincham!**

Tickets:

£16.00 Full Price
(Friends £12.00)

(Crowley) who, after millennia of life on Earth, have grown rather fond of humanity and decide to sabotage the end of the world. The Antichrist is misplaced in a baby-swap, growing up as an ordinary English boy in a village, more interested in friends and pets than cosmic destruction.

The parody here lies in the collision of the sublime and the ridiculous. Biblical prophecy and cosmic struggle are undercut by mundane details: an angel who loves rare books, a demon who worries about his car. Like Douglas Adams, Gaiman and Pratchett use parody to humanise the grandiose, revealing both the absurdity and the poignancy of human attempts to make sense of the universe.

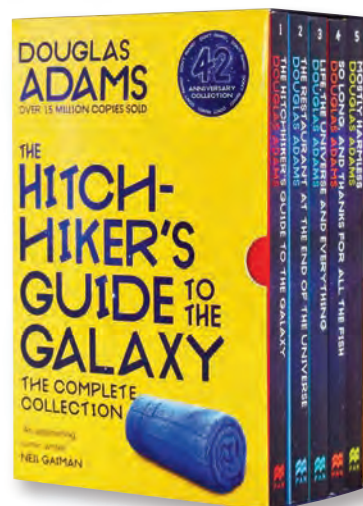
Good Omens has become a classic in its own right, showing how spoof can merge seamlessly with original creation. Its affectionate mockery of religious and apocalyptic tropes makes it both irreverent and strangely uplifting.

Cosmic Absurdity:

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy

If *Good Omens* parodies apocalyptic literature, Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (1979) parodies the entire genre of science fiction.

Adams began with a simple comic conceit: what if the universe were as banal, bureaucratic, and illogical as human institutions on Earth? From this premise grew a sprawling spoof that undercuts every sci-fi convention: spaceships are run by depressed robots, alien species are ludicrously petty, and the ultimate answer to life, the universe, and everything turns out to be "42."



Adams's style is a parody of scientific explanation itself. He mimics the authoritative tone of encyclopedias and technical manuals, only to twist it into absurdity: the eponymous Guide dispenses useless trivia and nonsensical wisdom, presented with solemn authority. The result is both a lampoon of science fiction's pretensions and a celebration of its imaginative possibilities.

Like all great parodies, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* has transcended its original satirical purpose. While it began as a spoof, it is now beloved in its own right, with fans cherishing its philosophy, humour, and imaginative vision as much as its mockery of sci-fi clichés.

Dickens in a Different Light:

Bleak Expectations

Few authors have been so frequently parodied as Charles Dickens. His sprawling plots, grotesque characters, sentimental moralism, and deep concern with Victorian social conditions make his novels both influential and ripe for exaggeration.

Mark Evans' *Bleak Expectations*, which began life as a BBC Radio 4 comedy before being adapted for stage, is perhaps the most affectionate and inventive parody of Dickens in recent decades. The title itself is a playful fusion of *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*, immediately signalling its inter-textual game.

The series follows the absurd misadventures of Pip Bin (whose name recalls Pip from *Great Expectations* and Mr. Binns from Dickens' own education-related tales). Pip's trials mirror and exaggerate those endured by young heroes: tyrannical guardians, sinister lawyers,

ludicrously cruel schoolmasters, and endless brushes with doom. Every Dickensian trope is pushed to its limits: grotesque villains like

Mr. Gently Benevolent embody cartoonish evil, while melodramatic plot twists pile up with ludicrous rapidity.

What makes *Bleak Expectations* so successful is its simultaneous mockery and admiration. Evans lampoons Dickens's penchant for coincidences and sentimentality, but he also highlights the enduring appeal of Dickensian storytelling: the triumph of plucky underdogs, the critique of social injustice, and the joy of linguistic invention. For many, *Bleak Expectations* serves as both a reminder of Charles

Dickens' quirks and a gateway back into the original novels.

The Role and Value of Literary Spoofs

What unites these examples – from *Bleak Expectations* to *Hitchhiker's Guide* – is a paradox: spoofs succeed because they respect the works they parody. The authors know the originals well enough to replicate their style and tropes, and they trust their audience to share that knowledge. In that sense, parody is an act of community, a shared wink between writer and reader.

Spoofs also play a critical role in literary culture. They deflate pomposity, keeping revered works from being placed beyond criticism. They highlight what is peculiar, exaggerated, or dated in older texts, allowing new generations to engage with them afresh. At the same time, spoofs are often works of creation in their own right, extending the imaginative universe of the texts they parody.

Importantly, parody does not necessarily diminish the original. Readers who enjoy *Bleak Expectations* may find themselves drawn back to Dickens; fans of Bridget Jones may rediscover Austen; those who laugh at Cold Comfort Farm may still admire Hardy or the Brontës. Spoof and source exist in symbiosis, enriching one another.

Conclusion

Literary spoofs remind us that literature is not a sacred monument but a living conversation. To parody Dickens, Austen, Hardy, or the Bible is to keep them alive, to test their relevance, and to share in their cultural resonance. Spoofs invite us to laugh with, rather than at, the literary canon. In doing so, they underscore a truth that Dickens himself – a master of comic exaggeration – would have appreciated: that humour is not the enemy of seriousness but its companion. The lampoon and the masterpiece are two sides of the same coin, each enriching the other, each ensuring that great literature continues to speak, surprise, and amuse.



Monday 17 – Sunday 23 November

Evenings at 7:30pm, except Sunday 23

Matinée at 2:30pm, Sat 22. Matinée at 6:00pm, Sun 23

It's a Wonderful Life



A heart-warming story of love,
hope and community

Written for the stage by **Mary Elliott Nelson**

Based upon the classic Christmas movie by **Frank Capra**

Directed by **Barry Purves**

"You want the moon?

**Just say the word, and I'll throw a lasso around it
and pull it down"**

Christmas Eve, 1946, Bedford Falls. Down-on-his-luck banker George Bailey feels life has passed him by, and he's at the end of his rope.

But when George's guardian angel pays him a visit, he's amazed to discover what life in his beloved town would be like without him. Maybe it's a wonderful life, after all?

Based on the critically acclaimed Frank Capra movie, which is arguably the most popular Christmas film of all time, Mary Elliott Nelson's reimagining is a joyful, heart-warming story of love, hope and community.

**A perfect way to begin
the festive period!**

Escape to a world of pure imagination!

ROALD DAHL'S
CHARLIE
AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

Music by Marc Shaiman

Lyrics by Scott Whitman & Marc Shaiman

Book by David Greig

Based on the novel by Roald Dahl
and the Warner Bros. film



Director:

Joseph Meighan

Musical Direction:

Simon Mercer-Murray

Choreography:

Emma Kay

Thurs 23 –
Sun 26 October &
Weds 29 October –
Sun 2 November 2025

Evenings:

7:30 pm (except Sunday 26, Sunday 2)

Sunday 26 October at 6:30 pm

Matinées:

Saturday 25 October at 2:30 pm

Sunday 26 October at 1:30 pm

Saturday 1 November at 2:30 pm

Sunday 2 November at 4:00 pm

altrincham
garrick
playhouse

Box Office: 0161-928 1677

www.altrinchamgarrick.co.uk

