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STUDIO
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LAURISTON

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by James Fritz



Altrincham Garrick
PLAYHOUSE

Tuesday 17 –
Sunday 22 May 2022

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The Trust's aim is to promote the arts in all its forms, primarily to young people in Trafford and Greater Manchester.

Among the groups to have benefited are the Altrincham Creative Theatre School, The Lauriston Studio at Altrincham Garrick Playhouse, Trafford's Youth Philharmonic Orchestra and the Lauriston Gallery at the Waterside Arts Centre in Sale, as well as individual beneficiaries. Altrincham violinist Tom Rowan-Young was able to attend summer schools in Italy which helped further his musical studies, while concert violinist Sophie Rosa, a student at the RNCM, was helped with funding for her place on the International Artist Diploma course in solo performance.

"We can help by offering grants and financial support to individuals or organisations. The grants may not always be large, but we have a receptive mindset and if we can help you make something happen..."

Anyone interested in finding out more should visit

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This production of **Ross And Rachel** is sponsored by:

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Welcome

Welcome to Altrincham Garrick Playhouse, and our production of James Fritz's *Ross And Rachel*.

To a certain generation of people, the names "*Ross and Rachel*" will conjure up memories of countless evenings spent in the company of David Schwimmer and Jennifer Aniston, and all of the other brilliant characters - Joey, Chandler, Monica, Phoebe, Janice, Gunter the barman and everyone in the classic 1990s sitcom *Friends*. Ross and Rachel coupled up and broke up several times over the course of the show's 10-season run. First they were "*on a break*." Later, he accidentally said her name at the altar instead of his fiancée's. Then, they got drunk-married in Vegas and were forced to get a divorce. And by the end, they finally got together, presumably for good. But did they stay together?

That's a question playwright James Fritz is exploring in *Ross & Rachel*. This look at modern love through the lens of television's definitive "meant to be" duo premiered in 2015 at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, where it was a sell-out. Though Fritz didn't want to write a specific sequel to *Friends*, these two iconic figures were a way into the material that was too good to pass up. But it's not about them. The unnamed couple in Fritz's play are in their mid-40s, a prom queen and a geek, stuck in a marriage that seemed meant to be - only no one told them life was gonna be this way. This is the one where they stay together for the kids. It's the one with the brain tumour. The one that rubbishes the very idea of 'The One'.

The playwright is adamant that *Ross & Rachel* isn't "a sequel to *Friends*", nor is it written from an entirely cynical place. "I love *Friends*," he protests. "I've seen every episode several times. Growing up, it was the ultimate background noise, so it's in my bones and in a lot of other people's bones." While writing, he swore not to rewatch a single episode to avoid alienating audiences with in-jokes. After the Edinburgh run, however, he allowed himself a Netflix binge. "I felt really guilty for co-opting these people I knew so well."

No knowledge of the TV series *Friends* is required to enjoy this show. For those devotees, this is "*The One That You Didn't See Coming..!*" For this dark, uncompromising play about the myths of modern love, I'm absolutely delighted to be able to welcome **Fiona Primrose** back to the Lauriston Studio and - under the astute, assured and inspired direction of **Carole Carr** - I'm sure that our final production in this space this season will be received equally as well as were *The Shape of Things*, *Constellations* and, most recently, *Piaf*.

Later in this programme, you will find details of the Lauriston Studio Season 2022/2023 - A Season of LGBTQ+ Stories. Five amazing plays which are everything including hugely entertaining, thought-provoking, moving, hilarious, surprising, tragic, compelling... and unmissable! Meanwhile, in our Main Theatre next week there is an opportunity to see '*House of Ghosts*', a rarely-staged murder-mystery based upon characters from another hugely successful TV series from the 1980s and 90s, Inspector Morse. Additionally, with an abundance of concerts and one night stands in early June before our final staging of this season, the must-see smash-hit musical comedy by Gary Barlow and Tim Firth, '*Calendar Girls - The Musical*', there really is something for everyone to enjoy at Altrincham's favourite community theatre.

I sincerely hope you enjoy tonight's performance. Thank you for joining us, and we hope to see you back at the Garrick soon. Whether it's to see a show, taking part in a workshop or Community event, creating your own work, or simply stopping by to share time with friends, you're always welcome.

Joe

Joseph Meighan Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.



**Altrincham Garrick
PLAYHOUSE**



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**Q&A with
the writer
by the press**

James Fritz

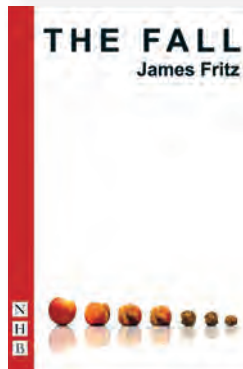


A graduate of both the Channel Four Screenwriting Program and the BBC TV Drama Writers Program, **James Fritz** is a multi-award-winning writer from South London. Fritz mentioned Caryl Churchill as his greatest ideal when his debut play, *Four Minutes Twelve Seconds*, premiered at Hampstead Theatre in 2014. The play received an Olivier Award nomination, and Critics' Circle named him "Most Promising Playwright" of 2015. His next play – the monologue *Ross & Rachel* – was described by Time Out as "a virtuosic piece of writing, playful, post-modern and devastatingly serious". Adjectives, that can also be used to describe his other dramatic works. Fritz always takes up a clearly defined social or political dilemma and treats it with an impressive control of structure, verbal economy and alleviating humour.

James' two youth theatre plays - *Start Swimming* and *The Fall* – were acclaimed by the press as "setting a new standard for youth theatre". In addition, Fritz has written two acclaimed radio plays for the BBC – *Death of a Cosmonaut* and *Comment is Free*.

Parliament Square opened in October 2017 as a co-production between the Royal Exchange Theatre and Bush Theatre, while *Lava*, a funny, moving and profound play about four people looking for healing and connection in the wake of a national tragedy, opened at Nottingham Playhouse in June 2018. It has recently toured the U.K. in a production featuring ex-EastEnders actress Kacey Ainsworth.

"James Fritz's work is current without straining for topicality. His plays have a knack of anticipating the zeitgeist, becoming more rather than less relevant over time." The Guardian.



The One Where James Fritz Uses Friends as Inspiration For His Play Ross & Rachel...

Why did you take the decision to make this a duologue for one performer, rather than a two-hander?

Having been asked to think about an idea for a one-person show, I'd been toying for ages with the idea of doing something about the mythology around love. In a lot of ways the process of solo performance – of taking multiple characters and unifying them in one physical presence – serves as a nice metaphor for the 'oneness' of the language of love. Two parts of a whole, when two become one, my other half, etc. That was the starting point for the show, and once I hit upon using *Ross and Rachel* – the names of probably the most famous fictional couple of the last twenty years – as the title, the whole play started to become a lot clearer.

Were you ever worried that, upon hearing the title of your new play, people would immediately assume it was actually based on the Friends series and not an original work of your own?

Maybe a bit, but I also think that's fine. It's fantastic that people bring their own pop culture experiences and expectations into the room. Whether the play works with or against those expectations, it creates an interesting tension either way.

How did you decide to add in the Friends connection?

I wanted to explore the inside of a relationship and the point that comes after the happy ending. I found loads of early work on the play was being held back because I had to do so much (to sell) this fictional couple and their relationship. Those three words, *Ross and Rachel*, are such a clear signifier of a certain kind of relationship. It gives context and places it inside a cultural framework. It felt like it's all-pervasive; even if you've never seen an episode of Friends, you have an idea of what that means, in the same way as *Romeo and Juliet*. Having that kind of shorthand with the audience freed the play up to not have to do so much legwork. It was very helpful.

Once you settled on the title, did you try to shy away from specific Friends references?

I didn't want it to be a Friends sequel, to specifically be about what happens to Ross and Rachel from Friends so many years down the line. I wanted it to be an every-couple story but use that most famous every-couple as its touch point. I decided to be very careful and try and write something that, if you took that title away, could just be about any two people. But with that title on it, if you want to go hunting for that reading of it, you can get something out of it.

Were there any other rom-coms that particularly inspired you to write the play or influenced your characters?

Yeah lots. I used that title but the show and its development were influenced by all manner of romantic sources. There are as many references to tragic traditional love stories as there are to modern rom-coms, I think. *Love Actually* and other Richard Curtis movies were a big touchstone, as were *Titanic*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Pretty in Pink*, *Twilight*, *When Harry Met Sally*, *Pretty Woman* and *The Holiday*. And the end of *Grease*. Loads of films that I really enjoy: all of which have people doing strange and problematic things all in the name of love.

Continued on page 6...

Cast & Production Team

Ross.....**Fiona Primrose**

Director / Prompt.....**Carole Carr**

Lighting Design**Geoff Scullard**

Sound Design**James Merrington**

Properties & Set.....**David Ades**

Workshop & Set.....**Steve Cox**

Rehearsal & Production Photography.....**Martin Ogden**

Rachel.....**Fiona Primrose**

Featured Music:

Experience**Ludovico Einaudi** (*Piano Solo*)

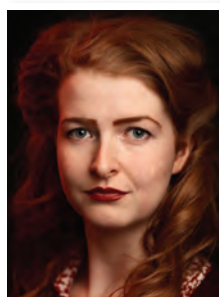
Wedding March.....**Mendelssohn** (*Organ Solo*)

I'll Be There For You ('Friends' Theme) –

.....**Meghan Trainor**

Ross And Rachel is a one-act play that runs for approximately 70 minutes. There is no interval, but the Theatre's Bar will be open both before and after the production.

The taking of photographs and any form of recording is prohibited. We would be grateful if all mobile phones and communication devices could either be turned off or put into 'silent' mode. Thankyou!



Fiona Primrose

Fiona Primrose 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 Lauriston Studio including *Stags and Hens*, *Brief Encounter*, and most recently *A Streetcar Named Desire*. During lockdown, she turned her hand to audio drama with *Time and Again* Theatre Company, and also

performed in a filmed version of *Ross and Rachel*, which was streamed to audiences in the comfort of their own homes. Having grown up watching *Friends* religiously, she was intrigued to see how playwright James Fritz would present Ross and Rachel's relationship (or, a relationship like theirs) long after the show ended. At the time of *Friends*' airing, audiences propelled one of the most famous couples on TV into almost cult-like status - they were each other's lobsters, after all. It's only with the passing of several years that we can now see that perhaps this iconic relationship wasn't as romantic as we thought, and that even Ross and Rachel themselves may not have had the same level of buy-in into the mythologised, mighty Ross and Rachel pairing as each other. These are the themes which Fiona has enjoyed exploring the most, and she hopes will help give the audience an entertaining, moving and thought-provoking evening.



Carole Carr (Director)

"*Ross and Rachel*' has the unusual concept of being a one-woman duologue, and the actor has to flit between the two characters of Ross and Rachel as they navigate their relationship and face their future. The play takes a fictional couple and makes them into a real couple, looking at the not so 'happy ever after'".

Carole is more than happy to be back in the Studio, a space which she loves, and she has very much enjoyed directing this dark, uncompromising two-character one-person drama. A hugely experienced and knowledgeable performer and director, some of Carole's most recent productions on the Garrick's main stage include *Hindle Wakes*, *Handbagged*, *Stags And Hens*, *Brassed Off*, *Things I Know To Be True*, *When We Are Married* and *The Lady In The Van*.

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Next Week!

Monday 23 – Saturday 28 May

Inspector Morse

is on the case...

HOUSE OF GHOSTS

by Alma Cullen

Directed by **Mike Shaw**

Oxford, 1987, and a young actress playing Shakespeare's doomed heroine Ophelia ends up dying on-stage during a theatrical production of Hamlet. A "suspicious death" inquiry is opened, but when a suspect in the case is also murdered, veteran police **Inspector Morse** becomes convinced the two deaths are related to the strange events of a similar student production from 1962 – one that he himself was a part of...

Morse faces dark memories and suspects in a compelling theatrical murder mystery by Alma Cullen, writer of four screenplays for the popular Inspector Morse TV series, and a member of the team of writers who helped to create four series which won all the major TV drama awards.

**An unmissable
murder mystery for all
Inspector Morse
fans and super sleuths!**

James Fritz *continued*

I was really struck by the end of *How I Met Your Mother* a couple of years ago. The show spent ten years moving away from its original proposition of Ted and Robin getting together, actually doing the impossible and introducing a new "mother" character in a way that made us care about her. And then, right at the end, they undid all that good work and threw Ted and Robin together again because that's how they'd decided things should end. We can't help but embrace the idea of destiny winning out, even if it makes no narrative sense.

Are there more challenges in making a one-hander dramatic than, say, a larger piece with more performers and onstage action?

Yeah, I think so. Monologues can often feel easier to write I think, and it's easy to make them full of beautiful, descriptive writing, maybe because it's a lot easier to give someone a florid, wonderfully written speech when there's not another person stood there going 'why are you talking like that?'

But I've also seen some of the most breathtaking, lean-forward-in-your-seat pieces of drama delivered by one person, so it can be an incredibly powerful device. Often it's to do with the form of the play. When solo shows move away from the '*I wake up in the morning and the sky is bluer than the bluest thing I ever saw*' form of storytelling, and do more with the performer or the audience or both, it can be incredibly exciting. I've always seen *Ross And Rachel* as a two-hander written for one performer.

How did you find your way into your current career? Has the theatre always been an area you wanted to work in or have you written for other mediums too, such a film or TV?

I was in my school play and decided I wanted to act. Then I got to university and realised I was a dreadful actor so I started to write. I wrote comedy sketches mostly at first, and then started trying to write longer things for theatre. I did an MA at Central which was incredibly important to my development as it gave me a year to think about what writing was and what sort of writer I wanted to be. I then worked hard for quite a few years writing short plays and longer, terrible plays that were really good practice and I'm very glad never saw the light of day.

I've started to dip my toe in TV waters, but theatre's what I love and the thing I most want to focus on. I find it a fascinating process, and there's nothing I love more than watching my words as part of a live performance that I've helped make with a bunch of other people. It's such a weird, wonderful experience.

What do you think about the current place of pop culture in today's society and the effects it has on modern writing and directing?

I think the more it finds its way into the theatre in different ways the better. It's such a wonderful shared shorthand we all have with each other, and thanks to the internet and meme culture has never been more important to the way we communicate. Theatre is a place of communion, so it seems churlish to leave something that unites so many of us at the door.

I think one of the reasons pantomime is the most popular form of theatre in the UK is because it has always played on this shared sense of cultural knowledge. Everybody goes and can enjoy a reference to the town mayor, or the local butcher, or a celeb from TV. It's inclusive. It's thrilling to see productions at all kinds of theatres now embracing pop culture and bringing an audience together in interesting ways.

Monday 20 – Saturday 25 June 2022

The smash hit musical comedy by **Gary Barlow** and **Tim Firth**

Originally Produced by David Pugh and Dafydd Rogers
and The Shubert Organisation.

Based on the play CALENDAR GIRLS written by Tim Firth
and on the motion picture CALENDAR GIRLS
Written by Tim Firth and Juliette Towhidi

Directed by
Joseph Meighan

Musical Director:
Mark Goggins



CALENDAR GIRLS

THE MUSICAL

The combination of Tim Firth's adaptation of his deliciously funny play, and Gary Barlow's beautiful range of contrasting songs, complete with a dose of Yorkshire grit and wit, tells the now world-famous story in a hugely entertaining way. Comedy counterbalances the tears in this true tale of the heartbreak of cancer, and the triumph of female spirit.



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THE SUN



'IT'S GORGEOUS - IT'S A BEAUT!'

DOMINIC CAVENDISH, DAILY TELEGRAPH

REVIEWS FROM THE
ORIGINAL LONDON PRODUCTION

This amateur production of "CALENDAR GIRLS: THE MUSICAL" is presented by special arrangement with Concord Theatricals Ltd. www.concordtheatricals.co.uk