



Creatives

Biographies.

Noël Coward

WRITER

Noël Peirce Coward was born in 1899 and made his professional stage debut as Prince Mussel in *The Goldfish* at the age of 11, leading to many child actor appearances over the next few years. During that time he began to write plays, often in collaboration with his friend Esmé Wynn. His first West End play, *I'll Leave It to You* (1920), had a short run at the New (now Noël Coward) Theatre. Other plays written around that time included *The Rat Trap* which was written in 1918 but not produced until 1926.

Coward's breakthrough as a playwright came with the controversial *The Vortex* (1924) which featured themes of drugs and adultery and made his name as both actor and playwright in the West End and on Broadway. During the 1920s and 1930s, Coward wrote a string of successful plays, musicals and intimate revues including *Fallen Angels* (1925); *Hay Fever* (1925); *Easy Virtue* (1925); *This Year of Grace* (1928) and *Bitter Sweet* (1929). His professional partnership with childhood friend, Gertrude Lawrence, started with the musical revue *London Calling!* (1923) and was followed by *Private Lives* (1930) and *Tonight at 8.30* (1935).

During World War II, he remained a successful playwright, screenwriter and

director, as well as entertaining the troops and even acting as a spy for the Foreign Office. His plays during these years included *Blithe Spirit* (1941), which ran for 1997 performances, outlasting the War (a West End record until *The Mousetrap* overtook it); *This Happy Breed* and *Present Laughter* (both 1942). His two wartime screenplays, *In Which We Serve*, which he co-directed with the young David Lean as well as starring in, and *Brief Encounter* quickly became classics of British cinema.

However, the post-war years were more difficult. Austerity Britain – the London critics determined – was out of tune with the brittle Coward wit. In response, Coward re-invented himself as a cabaret and TV star, particularly in America, and in 1955 he played a sell-out season in Las Vegas featuring many of his most famous songs, including *Mad About the Boy*, *I'll See You Again* and *Mad Dogs and Englishmen*.

This was followed by three live television specials on CBS including *Together With Music* with Mary Martin. In the mid-1950s he settled in Jamaica and Switzerland and enjoyed a renaissance in the early 1960s becoming the first living playwright to be performed by the National Theatre, when he directed *Hay Fever* there. Late in his career he was lauded for his roles in a number of films including *Our Man in Havana* (1959) and his role as the iconic Mr Bridger alongside Michael Caine in *The*



Italian Job (1969).

Writer, actor, director, film producer, painter, songwriter, cabaret artist as well as an author of verse, essays, autobiographies and a novel, he was called by close friends 'The Master'. His final West End appearance was *Suite in Three Keys* in 1966, which he wrote and starred in. He was knighted in 1970 and died peacefully in 1973 in his beloved Jamaica.

Bill Rosenfield

REVISER

Bill Rosenfield is a UK based playwright whose play *Another America* was presented at the Park Theatre in 2022 and is published by TRW scripts. His other plays include *46 Beacon* (Trafalgar Studios, published Samuel French); *Sunshine and Shadow* (Blank Theatre, Los Angeles); *Let Me* (Asolo Theatre, Sarasota Unplugged Series) and *Bridal Terrorism* (Samuel French). He is the author of "*Unleashed!*" (currently under option from Grove Entertainment and Frank Marshall). His adaptation of Frank Loesser's *The Most Happy Fella* was produced as part of the City Center Encores! Series in New York City. In an earlier career he was responsible for over 65 Original Cast recordings (25 of which received Grammy nominations) including *Assassins*; *Chicago* (revival); *Cabaret* (revival); *Ragtime*; *The Last Five Years*; *Parade*; *The Full Monty*; *Titanic*; *The Who's Tommy*; *Guys and Dolls* (revival); *The Color Purple*; *Legally Blonde*; *Passing Strange*; *Curtains*; *Songs for a New World*; *The Wild Party*; *Marie Christine*; *Caroline, or Change*; *Hair* (revival) and most recently was pulled out of his self-imposed retirement to co-produce the recording of Stephen Sondheim's final musical *Here We Are*. He was featured alongside his late husband Gary Gunas in the popular web series *Old Show Queens* (oldshowqueens.com). He has been honoured with two Drama Desk Awards as well as a Richard Rodgers Award and an SDC Foundation Governor's Award.



Ashley Cook for Troupe

PRODUCER

Ashley Cook founded Troupe in 2013, which presents new plays and stage adaptations, alongside rediscovered work by classic writers. Troupe's latest work at Park Theatre includes *The Forsyte Saga Parts 1 and 2* by Shaun McKenna and Lin Coghlan, based on the books by John Galsworthy, and a commission of a new adaptation of Christopher Isherwood's *A Single Man* by Simon Reade.

Other recent work includes *The Sweet Science of Bruising* by Joy Wilkinson at Southwark Playhouse, which transferred to Wilton's Music Hall and *Rasheeda Speaking* by Joel Drake Johnson at Trafalgar Studios, which starred Tanya Moodie, Elizabeth Berrington, Sheila Reid and Bo Poraj. Other productions at Southwark Playhouse include the centenary year revival of *Dear Brutus* by J. M. Barrie and *The Cardinal* by James Shirley, directed by Justin Audibert, which starred Stephen Boxer and Natalie Simpson for which she won the Ian Charleson Award. It was supported by an inaugural MGC futures Bursary Award. Troupe's previous rediscoveries at the Finborough Theatre include Rodney Ackland's *After October*, Robert Bolt's *Flowering Cherry* and R. C. Sherriff's *The White Carnation*, which later transferred to Jermyn Street Theatre. Ashley is a previous Stage One Small Scale Commercial Investment recipient, a Stage One Bursary Award winner, and Troupe has been nominated for a total of fourteen Off West End Awards.