

What's playing now

MANCHESTER

CONTACT: Doin' Moon: A unique mix of spoken word, cello, cajo and live vocals. Thu-Sat 7.30pm. £8, concs £5. From Thursday.

Working Title: As part of Contacting the World 2010, Manchester's 10p Mix Up have been collaborating with Working Title 2.0 from Mumbai, India. Fri & Sat 7.30pm. £8, concs £5. Oxford Road (0161 274 0600).

LIBRARY THEATRE: The Importance Of Being Earnest: Comedy by Oscar Wilde. Mon-Thu 7.30pm, Fri & Sat 8pm, mats Thu & Sat 3pm. £10-£15. Central Library, St Peter's Square (0161 236 7110). To July 3.

OPERA HOUSE: George's Marvellous Medicine: An adaptation of Roald Dahl's story. Tue 7pm, Wed 10am & 1pm, Thu 10.30am & 1.30pm. £11.50-£15.50.

In The Spotlight Songs from the Musicals: Faye Tozer performs musical classics. Sat 7.30pm. £21.

The Wiggles: Children's entertainers. See page 2. Sun 1pm & 4pm. £16. Quay Street (0844 847 2484).

PALACE THEATRE: Dinner-ladies: Stage version of Victoria Wood's comedy. Fri & Sat 7.30pm, mat Sat 2.30pm. £17.25-£27.50. Until tomorrow. Oxford Street (0844 847 2484).

RNCM: The Alyson Ljvesey Academy Of Dance And Drama: Inspired: A celebration of the school's 21st birthday. Sat 2pm & 7.30pm, Sun 2pm. £12.50. Oxford Road (0161 907 5555).

ROYAL EXCHANGE THEATRE: Charley's Aunt: Brandon Thomas's classic farce. See facing page. Mon-Fri 7.30pm, Sat 8pm, mats Wed 2.30pm, Sat 4pm. £9.50-£29.50. To August 7.

Love And War: Startling new work by Mark Bruce. Thu & Fri 7.30pm, Sat 8pm. £4-£9.50. From Thursday. St Ann's Square (0161 833 9833).

WATERSIDE ARTS CENTRE: Ruth: Biblical tale told with puppetry, mask and original music. Thu 11am & 1pm. £6, concs £3. Eastern Plaza, Sale (0161 912 5616).



LOVE STORY Amy Nuttall with Kieran Hill in Cumbrian set tale *The Hired Man*. See Bolton

ALTRINCHAM

ALTRINCHAM GARRICK: Mam, I'm 'Er: Feel-good 70s-based musical comedy. Fri & Sat 7.30pm, mat Sat 2.30pm. £13.50, concs £11.50. Barrington Road, Altrincham (0161 928 1677). Until tomorrow.

BOLTON

BOLTON OCTAGON: The Hired Man: Cumbrian set love story. Mon-Sat 7.30pm, mat Wed 2pm. £9.50-£18.50. To July 3. Howell Croft South (01204 520661).

BUXTON

BUXTON OPERA HOUSE: An Audience With Sally Morgan: Psychic show. Fri 7.30pm. Sold out. Water Street, Buxton (0845 127 2190).

PAVILION GARDENS: A Midsummer Night's Dream: The Globe Theatre performs Shakespeare's magical comedy. St John's Road, Buxton (0845 127 2190). Fri 6pm, Sat & Sun 5pm. £15, concs £10. Until Sunday.

OLDHAM

COLISEUM THEATRE: The Road to Nab End: Adapted from William Woodruff's memoir. Tue-Sat 7.30pm, mats Wed & Sat 2.30pm. £5-£18.50. Fairbottom Street (0161 624 2829).

SALFORD

SALFORD ARTS THEATRE: Bluebird: Tax-based drama. Fri & Sat 6.30pm. £7, concs £6. Liverpool Street, Salford (0161 925 0111). Until tomorrow.

THE LOWRY: Britain's Got Bhangra: Bhangra musical drama. Fri & Sat 8pm, mat Sat 2.30pm. £16-£24. Until tomorrow.

CrAIt Del: Show from Salford City College. Mon 7.45pm. £3.

MAPAS Showcase: Local students' show. Mon & Tue 5pm & 7.15pm, Wed & Thu 7.15pm. £5.

Penguin: Children's show. Sun 12pm & 3pm. £8.50.

Romeo And Juliet: Performed by Birmingham Royal Ballet. Wed-Sat 7.30pm, mats Thu & Sat 2pm. £18-£37. From Wednesday.

The Harder They Come: Reggae musical. Fri & Sat 7.30pm, mat Sat 2pm. £13-£27. Until tomorrow.

Toddlr It: A hilarious cosmetic comedy. Fri & Sat 7.45pm, mat Sat 2pm. £5. Until tomorrow. Pler 8, Salford Quays (0843 208 6000).

Seven days of fresh theatre talent

This year's 24:7 Festival kicks off next month. **Kevin Bourke** looks at the line-up of original new plays that will be taking place

ANYONE who's at all interested in exciting new drama and comedy should already have earmarked the week of July 26-August 1, because those are the seven days of this year's 24:7 Theatre Festival.

Now in its seventh year, 24:7 has long since established itself as one of Manchester's landmark cultural events. Driven by actor David Slack, the festival gives new writing talent the chance to shine and bloom. Every year, playwrights are asked to enter one-hour plays on any subject.

This year, hundreds of entries have been narrowed down to an exciting top 10, with four more plays being given a rehearsed reading. None of them last more than an hour and they'll all be performed several times over the course of the week at 24:7's home this year, the Co-operative Society's New Century House. So there's really no excuse to miss out.

In strictly alphabetical order, this year's plays include Paul Osborne's *The Bluest Blue*. Directed by Paul Stonehouse, the play involves two strangers who meet on a bench outside York Minster. The woman is looking for fun



NEW TALENT The Bluest Blue and, (inset) Fading Hum are two of the exciting new plays in the 24:7 Festival

brothers were estranged and the opening scene is the first time they've spoken in years."

This is Charlotte's first theatre play, with her previous experience being confined to television, and has already been short-listed for the Nick Darke Award, a prize to help a young writer finish their piece of writing that is related to the environment.

Colette Kane's *Ways To Look At Fish* was a big hit at the 2008 24:7, with actress Ruth Evans picking up a Best Fringe Performance gong at that year's M.E.N Theatre Awards and the play itself being reprised as part of the Bolton Octagon's Best Of The Bolton event. Colette, and director Nick Moss, are back this time around with *Hatch*, charting the heartbreaking homecoming of an absentee father and his grown-up children.

The *Inconsistent Whisper: Of Insanity* is the latest work from another M.E.N Theatre Award success, playwright/director Ian Moore.

Imagine if you fell asleep at the age of 15 and woke at the age of 76. How far would you be willing to go to find out what happened during those lost years? This play, set in the 1920s during an unsuccessful uprising against the Russian government, asks the question through a fictional account of one young girl's accidental involvement in the events.

The natural world isn't always home to pretty flowers and happy birds flying in the sky. Islanders, a dark comedy by Dick Curran, is "a climate-change love triangle set on remote Northumbrian islands." Warden Peter, an embittered maverick, is nominally managed by his career-minded ex, Ellen. Their stalemate is upset by the arrival of Nicola, a woman who seems completely out of place on the nature reserve.

Make Believe, which is written by Luke Walker and Sally Lawton and directed by Mike Heath, looks at what happens when imagination and real life get

mixed up. In a world where fantasy and fact collide, is it time to stop pretending and join the 'real' world? After all, it's only make believe... isn't it?

"Both myself and Sally had plays in the 2007 Festival," says Luke. "It was a bit later before we began bumping into each other and watched a few plays together. We got on well and discovered that we were actually born just a few hours apart. Apparently that makes us 'Astral Twins', which we are using as the name of our production company for the festival."

Kim Jackson and Rebecca Mahon's play *No View From The Window* turns a decaying WC into a dramatic confessional as Louise, who has returned to her childhood home on the day of her mother's funeral, looks back on her life, her dysfunctional relationships, and exactly what she hid behind the bathroom panel 25 years ago.

Pawn is a new play from ex-policer sergeant Brian March-

Oliver's enjoying playing the Aunt



DRESSING UP Oliver Gomm stars in *Charley's Aunt*

BRANDON Thomas' farce *Charley's Aunt* brings the current Royal Exchange season to a close in a raucous, rollicking riot of comic, cross-dressing capers. Widely regarded as one of the funniest of all British farces, *Charley's Aunt* centres on the antics of Oxford students Charley and Jack.

They want to propose marriage to Amy and Kitty but the proper young ladies refuse to visit without a chaperone.

So the pair blackmail their eccentric aristocrat friend Fancourt Babberley to pose as Charley's aunt from Brazil.

But as the impostor-aunt starts to play fast and loose with his part and the real aunt gets ever closer, the misunderstandings spiral out of control.

The production is directed by Royal Exchange founding artistic director Braham Murray whose recent successes include the world premiere of Edna O'Brien's *Haunted* (which went on a national tour earlier this year and is set for a New York run in December), *The Glass Menagerie* (also starring Brenda Blethyn and also a hugely successful national tour), as well as the acclaimed world premiere of Brad Fraser's brilliant *True Love Lies*.

ward to wearing that dress every night very much, especially with the Exchange's reputation for extravagant dresses! Being in a dress is wonderful and I'm told women find it very sexy!"

"The fact that it is such a well-known play and part is something you have to put out of your head, he believes.

"In fact, I saw this play last year. I thought it was wonderful and immediately thought it was a part I'd love to play.

"I guess every actor does with a part like that, but I haven't gone

into its longevity or its importance or anything like that.

"If you do that with any part, whether it's Hamlet or Archie Rice in *The Entertainer*, if you concentrate on the brilliant things other people have done you can just end up with a tacky, shadow version of what once was good, as opposed to something that is important and coherent and relevant now.

"We've moved it forward in time as much as far forward in time as you can, just because of the protocol of ladies needing to be chaperoned and all of that.

"But I just think it's a really beautiful love story that's totally relevant now.

"The way that the language is and the way that it can be manipulated, often it seems completely modern. I love that you can sometimes think 'when was this written?', because there's all that zaniness and crazy humour, as opposed to that stuffy view that some people might have of the time it was written."

Charley's Aunt is previewing and runs at the Royal Exchange until August 7.

Journey to a dream dance world

THE Royal Exchange Studio hosts *Love & War*, a new production by critically-acclaimed choreographer Mark Bruce.

With a soundtrack that includes *Sparks*, *The White Stripes* and *Queens of the Stone Age*, this new work uses theatre-in-the-round to plunge audiences into a

dreamlike underworld. *Love & War* sees characters from legend, rock stars, mythical gods and warriors jostle with cheerleaders and homecoming queens in a charged dance piece.

Love & War is at the Royal Exchange Studio from Thursday until July 3.

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The 24:7 Theatre Festival runs from July 26 to August 1.