

**TRON
THEATRE**

**Additional
Resources**



Trot Theatre Company presents Ben Jonson's

The Alchemist

Adapted by GARY McNAIR

PREVIEWS: FRI 4 & SAT 5 OCT 2019, 7.45PM
TUE 8 – SAT 19 OCT 2019, 7.45PM

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WELCOME TO THE TRON

This information may be particularly relevant when considering the director's intentions and our intended audiences with regards to our 'house style' and programme of work – all Tron Company productions will respond creatively to these goals and ambitions.

The Tron is one of Scotland's leading mid-scale producing and presenting theatres, set in the heart of Glasgow's Merchant City.

Housing three performance spaces, rehearsal space, offices and a dedicated Tron Participation workshop space, the building is a vibrant creative hub that bustles with activity year-round. The building is also home to Tron Theatre Company, which stages its own productions as well as presenting co-productions and collaborations with other leading theatre companies, alongside a busy programme of high calibre visiting company work.

Tron Theatre has been a major player in Glasgow's cultural scene for over twenty years. Producing and presenting an eclectic collection of new writing, reinvigorated contemporary classics, dance, comedy and music, the Tron occupies a spot in Glaswegian hearts as unique as the building that houses it-- the 16th century Tron kirk, survivor of over 500 years of cultural change and social upheaval.

Tron specializes in staging new and contemporary classic theatre across our two theatre spaces—our Main House theatre and the smaller Changing House studio—curating an eclectic programme of work throughout the year which responds to the cultural interests and needs of the diverse community of Glasgow and beyond. Tron's Christmas pantos have achieved something of cult status and each May they present Mayfest, a 'festival within a theatre', which packs in three weeks of agenda-led new and provocative work each.

Outside the theatre walls, Tron's Participation team take the arts out into communities, partnering with local schools and groups to deliver workshops, courses and master-classes, as well as presenting the host of classes that run in the Tron's Education Suite every week for adults and young people of all levels.

Tron is also working to develop co-productions with other theatres and companies, and in recent years have reached even further afield, working with collaborators in the UK and across the world to bring the best of Scottish theatre to a new international audience.

THE TRON THEATRE'S GOALS:

- **Creating exciting and brilliant theatre for our audiences:** Through engaging the talent primarily of the Scottish-based theatre community the Tron aims to present exciting and provocative new and contemporary classic theatre of the highest quality for the people of Glasgow, the West of Scotland, and on an international scale.
- **Continue as a point in Scotland for developing new and emerging talent:** To programme work, mentor, enable and provide space for new talent, including emergent theatre companies, emergent producers, writers, performers, designers, and other theatre makers—artists primarily from the West of Scotland but also with a national remit. The Tron CREATIVE segment of Tron's work includes many important new initiatives in this direction including BUILD + MAKER, Outside Eyes, LabWeek and Mayfesto Artist Residencies.
- **Become a key contributor to the Scottish touring infrastructure:** Tron Theatre intends to keep developing a number of strategies for taking work elsewhere in Scotland - through co-productions and through enabling companies premiering their work at Tron Theatre to be equipped with the necessary mechanisms, practical support and mentoring to go on to tour their work around the country.
- **Respond to the very special theatrical interest not only in Glasgow but throughout the West of Scotland.** We do this through a combination of in-house productions and a wide range of visiting companies. We stage the more experimental and new work being largely confined to the studio space and the more accessible but still cutting-edge work staged in the main auditorium. All the work has been new or contemporary with the exception of the occasional classic play and the aim has been to predominantly employ Scotland based artists - performers, musicians, designers, directors, and writers. During this time, we have in particular pursued our aim of supporting emergent artists and theatre companies by giving them space and resources to develop new work and present it to the public.

STAGING THE ALCHEMIST

BACKGROUND

- *The Alchemist* is a comedy by playwright Ben Jonson. First performed in 1610 by the King's Men, it is generally considered Jonson's best and most characteristic comedy.
- The play's fulfilment of the classical unities (time, place and action) and a vivid depiction of human folly have made it one of the few Renaissance plays (except the works of Shakespeare) with a continuing life on stage.
- The Tron commissioned Gary McNair to adapt Jonson's original script to reflect the house style and vision of the company. Douglas Maxwell is also on board as dramaturg.

ORIGINAL SYNOPSIS

With his master LOVEWIT resting in the country to avoid an outbreak of plague in London, a clever servant named FACE develops a scheme to make money and amuse himself. He gives SUBTLE, a charlatan, and a prostitute named DOLL COMMON access to the house. SUBTLE disguises himself as an alchemist, with FACE as his servant; DOLL disguises herself as a zealous Puritan. Together, the three of them gull and cheat an assortment of foolish clients. These include SIR EPICURE MAMMON, a wealthy sensualist looking for the philosopher's stone; two greedy Puritans, TRIBULATION WHOLESOME and ANANIAS, who hope to counterfeit Dutch money; DRUGGER, a "tobacco man" hoping to marry the wealthy widow DAME PLIANT; DAPPER, an incredibly suave, fashionable, good-looking 17th century gentleman, and other minor figures looking for a short-cut to success in gambling or in business. The play takes place over the course of one day in the house of FACE'S master. The three rogues are forced to increasingly frenetic manoeuvres first to manage all their simultaneous scams, and then to fend off the suspicious KESTREL, DAME PLIANT'S brother. At last, LOVEWIT returns; quickly perceiving what FACE has done in his absence, he devises a scheme of his own to allow all to end well. DOLL and SUBTLE escape unpunished but empty-handed; MAMMON'S goods are restored to him, but the Puritans' are not. The smaller victims either flee or are driven from the stage. LOVEWIT himself pledges troth to DAME PLIANT, with KESTREL'S approval. FACE is restored without punishment to his original place as LOVEWIT'S butler.

THE CREATIVE TEAM

GARY MCNAIR - WRITER

Gary is an award-winning writer from Glasgow. His work has been translated and performed around the world with work recently performed in Portugal, Turkey, Russia, Italy, Germany and Japan. He is an Associate Artist of the Traverse Theatre. Recent works include McGonagall's Chronicles, After the Cuts, Locker Room Talk and Square Go (co-written with Kieran Hurley).

He is a three-times Fringe First winner and is currently under commission from The National Theatre of Scotland and Audible.com.

ANDY ARNOLD - DIRECTOR

Andy became Artistic Director of Tron Theatre in 2008 following many years as Artistic Director of The Arches, a venue and theatre company he personally established in 1991. Productions Andy has staged for Tron Theatre Company include The Drawer Boy by Michael Healey, the Scottish premiere of That Face by Polly Stenham, Valhalla by Paul Rudnick (UK premiere), and world premieres of Sea and Land and Sky by Abigail Docherty, Plume by J.C Marshall, and Edwin Morgan's Dreams and Other Nightmares by Liz Lochhead.

Most recently he directed Enda Walsh's Ballyturk, Martin McCormick's Ma, Pa and the Little Mouths, Stephen Adly Guirgis' The Motherf**ker with the Hat, Anthony Neilson's The Lying Kind, Martin McDonagh's The Lonesome West, Peter Arnett's Shall Roger Casement Hang?, Megan Barker's adaptation of Ibsen's Ghosts, Samuel Beckett's Happy Days starring Karen Dunbar, a new adaptation by John Byrne of Chekhov's Three Sisters, another Byrne work Colquhoun and MacBryde, as well as the first stage production of James Joyce's Ulysses adapted by Dermot Bolger, which toured to Ireland after its premiere at the Tron. Ulysses was revived in 2015 to perform in four cities in China. While in China Andy also staged a devised piece with Chinese actors entitled A Journey Round James Joyce, translated into Mandarin and has recently returned to direct The Selfish Giant for Beijing Children's Theatre Company.

OGUZ KAPLANGI – COMPOSER / SOUND DESIGNER

Oğuz won Best Music and Sound at the Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland 2018 for his work on Rhinoceros (a co-production between the Royal Lyceum Edinburgh & DOT Theatre Istanbul, for the Edinburgh International Festival). Other recent theatre credits include: A Museum in Baghdad (Royal Shakespeare Company). The Monstrous Heart (Traverse Theatre), The Duchess of Malfi (Royal Lyceum & Citizens Theatre), #WeAreArrested (Royal Shakespeare Company), Incendies, Let The Right One In, Meet Me At Dawn, How to Hold Your Breath (all DOT Theatre). Recent screen work includes: Wahlburgers, Donnie Loves Jenny, Nightwatch, Lock Up, Sexy Beasts, According to Alex, Killer Kids, Young Marvels and Big Brew Theory.

CHARLOTTE LANE – SET AND COSTUME DESIGN

Charlotte is a Set, Costume and Production Designer. She is a graduate of the National Institute of Dramatic Art (Australia), and a member of the Australian Production Design Guild. Charlotte has worked between Australia, China, and the UK, designing for companies including Shanghai Opera, Beijing Children's Art Theatre and White Light Theatre in China, and Sydney Chamber Opera, Darlinghurst Theatre, The Old Fitz, La Mama and Life Like Touring in Australia. In Scotland, she designed Scotties for Theatre Gu Leòr, and for Tron Theatre, she designed Ulysses for which she received a 2012 CATS nomination, Beowulf and Under Milk Wood as part of the Commonwealth Games Home Nations Festival, Three Sisters in collaboration with John Byrne, and most recently, Ma, Pa and the Little Mouths which received the ACS Award for Design for Live Performance 2019 by the APDG. Her work has toured internationally, including to the Edinburgh Festival, Belfast International Arts Festival, Adelaide Fringe Festival and Cannes Film Festival. Charlotte was the 2016 recipient of the Thelma Afford Award for Costume Design. Her design for The Tempest (Xinchan Theatre, dir. Andy Arnold) was nominated for the Jennie Tate Award for Costume Design and won the AIT Award for Set Design for Live Performance 2017 (APDG).

DAVE SHEA – LIGHTING DESIGN

Dave has worked in Scottish Theatre for 24 years as a Lighting Designer, Production Manager and Technical Manager. He has designed lighting for Tron Theatre Company, 7:84 Theatre Company, Borderline, Suspect Culture, Complete Productions, Sounds of Progress, East Glasgow Youth Theatre, Tricky Hat Productions and Random Accomplice. Previous designs for the Tron Theatre include – Monaciello (Teatro Napoli Festivali), A Slow Air, Edwin Morgan's Dreams and Other Nightmares, Scenes Unseen, Bandwagon, Under Milk Wood, Colquhoun & MacBryde, Andromache, A Present State, Miracle on 34 Parnie Street, Cock, Bunny and Ma, Pa & The Little Mouths. Dave is also the Tron Theatre Head of Production.

THE DIRECTOR'S INTENTIONS (ANDY ARNOLD'S INSPIRATION)

“One of my bedside companions has always been *A View of The English Stage* by Kenneth Tynan (Methuen, 1984). Tynan was an extraordinarily eloquent and perceptive theatre critic and this compendium contains his first reviews from the middle of the last century, and often, first reviews of plays which are now classics - *Waiting for Godot* et al. Last year I read his criticism of a 1947 production of Ben Jonson's original version of *The Alchemist*. Tynan's opening paragraph read:

It is hard to over-praise this play. It mingles together sweet dirt, smart gulling and coxcomby into a wonderful theatrical confection. It thrives on malice and savagery and makes them palatable. This is the heart of our native humour, a vein of bitter, harsh venom.

Tynan was only twenty years old when he wrote it and I thought possibly it had been overpraised by youthful enthusiasm. Either way, it prompted me to read the play and I was struck by the very contemporary feel it had-albeit written at the beginning of the seventeenth century. It had an absurdist style unlike any other work of the time. Its problem though - and the reason I suspect it is so infrequently staged - is that the language is extremely dense and convoluted for a modern audience and many scenes are overwritten, Nevertheless, I thought it was a gem, and luckily, the wonderful writer and performer Gary McNair thought the same. Gary has shed some of the load, transformed the setting from London to Glasgow and taken a few liberties - all in rhyming couplets of course.

We are managing to stage it with six actors - quite a feat in the present theatrical climate - and it has been a joy to work with them, the rest of the artistic team, and with Gary in delivering his new version of an old classic.”

Andy Arnold

Director

Further extracts of Tynan's review are included here:

Jonson's angry caricatures take a central place in our comic literature, and project themselves by homespun craft into the work of all our indigenous satirical artists,

blazing up furiously in Swift and Hogarth, and finally rekindling in Dickens, whom, in their last weak days, they strengthened.

And there is such a thing as a good episodic play: The Alchemist is such a thing. Like bead after bead, the episodes click together upon the connecting string, which is chicanery and chiselry. Singly or in pairs, the gulls are drawn to the chisellers to be shared and trimmed. What is piquant, they like it: humble and gladdened, they depart penniless, sometimes upon a servile errand for their cheaters. They have come in search of panaceas, of the Philosopher's Stone, and they are beguiled by three glorious impostors: the exuberant Janus, Face, the shadow-conjuror, Subtle, and the female spiv. Doll. So far you laugh sporadically; soon you can hardly stop, for by Jonson's art the hoaxes start to react on one another, wires cross, gull is involved with gull, and there is a buzz of entrance and exit, accompanied by a fine slamming and slamming of doors. The peak of the hubbub comes, I suppose, with the belated release of Dapper, locked blind fold in a privy, and freed after a whole act in smoking darkness.

...Of the gulls: there are the rich who come out of greed, and the poor who come out of a need for illusions...

Andy has directed several absurd/existential productions, most recently Martin McCormick's *Ma, Pa and the Little Mouths* (2017) and *Ballyturk* by Enda Walsh (2018):

"I always get frightened when people ask me about my vision because I haven't what a clue what it is. I like to do absurdist pieces, I like to do new plays, contemporary classics."

To further suit the style of the Tron Theatre, Andy was keen to ensure the characters, plot, time and location all best reflect the audience we serve, and worked with Gary McNair to ensure the piece would appeal to a modern, contemporary audience whilst keeping the absurdity of the original text. Some changes were inevitably required:

In Jonson's text, a third con artist named Doll Common offered the only female protagonist role. However, the objectification of this character as a prostitute was problematic, not least in the representation of women on stage, but also in the language used. 'Prostitute' has connotations of criminality and immorality (admittedly not outwith the overall world of the play) but is more widely regarded nowadays alongside trafficking and forced interactions, rather than a 'sex worker' who may choose sex work as an occupation. As one of only two female characters within the play, the decision was made to cut this character completely, and present FACE as a female lead, who should have equal or greater status than her male counterpart (SUBTLE). This decision also altered the ending of the play, where the con artists were originally left without their takings. FACE finding the diamond encrusted codpiece (perceived to carry significant monetary value) ensured that the female character was successful in her own right, rather than staying 'trapped' by the workings of the upper-class male, LOVEWIT.

The characters ANANAIS and TRIBULATION WHOLESOME in the original text as Anabaptists, a fairly radical Christian movement. The roles were written in many ways to mock or scorn religion, largely attributed to Jonson's own experience of having a minister as his father, however within a Glaswegian context, this could quickly escalate into sectarian territory. The roles and costumes are therefore more 'diluted' than the original text to represent signifiers and indicators of their characters, rather than belonging to any specific religion or faction.

Abel Drugger was originally a tobacconist – again, not an unfitting character in Glaswegian history, however he is not as ruthless as some of these lords and merchants would have been, allowing a more seamless transition to the more modern coffee vendor. This also gives license to the design of the 2019 character – a hybrid approach between hippy and hipster for creative interpretation.

THE WRITER'S INTENTIONS (GARY MCNAIR'S TREATMENT NOTES)

Gary's broad aim was to give the audience a fun and touching version of this classic. One of the main challenges of interpreting the play for a modern audience was the antiquated language and convoluted structure, so Gary saw it as his responsibility to reimagine the piece. Gary and Douglas had already experimented with some different approaches, but this only hardened Gary's resolve not to lose sight of the original play and that the key to modernising it was to understand the truth of it. To bring *The Alchemist* into 2019, he needed to focus its central theme on class, taking into consideration the multi-faceted approach regarding social mobility, distribution of wealth, greed, power and moral constructs.

To Gary's mind, in the original, while everyone was trying to get ahead at any cost, there was no one for the audience to champion, no 'us' in the play, and he set out to provide an ally for the people.

FACE (the maid), who has been left in charge of the house, became the cleaner of the house. She had not so much been left in charge, but rather no one thought to tell her they were going away, so she had been diligently returning to the house every day to clean. Eventually, with no one making a mess, there was nothing in the house left to clean, so she turned her attention to the books in the library and was particularly taken by some books on alchemy.

When SUBTLE (the con artist) arrived at the door selling clearly quite dodgy goods, the two of them were suspicious of each other at first but decide to team up to help each other take themselves out of their poverty and into a stable life they deserve. Gary wanted us to root for them as we had at least seen FACE prove herself to be honest and hardworking, and her trust of SUBTLE would be good enough for us.

As for the 'marks' in our version, Gary planned to update some of the characters. These characters were not set in stone and grew and changed as the writing advanced. They were all true to the original: out for their own selfish means at the expense of, or in spite of, others.

At the plays resolution when the homeowner returned and scooped all the money earned from their alchemy and trickery as a form of rent payment for FACE having stayed in his house, it was a classic example of the ruling class cheating money from the working class. We saw here that the workers were doomed into their standing in life rather than just a jape gone awry as was the conclusion of Jonson's text.

As for the time and setting, the language was to be modern Glaswegian with the freedom to make references both modern and ancient, but the time and the time and location had to be non-specific. This was essential for it to speak to our times but buy into a world that was happy to accept the magic of alchemy, whilst recognising that the story stands the test of time – what was ‘true’ in 1610 should be just as relevant in 2019.

Gary was present for some of the rehearsal process, and as such, some of these ideas were developed fully, refined or edited in a new direction.

GENRE: SOME GENERAL NOTES

COMEDY – FARCE

THE MAIN PURPOSE OF A FARCE IS TO ENTERTAIN THE AUDIENCE AND EVOKE LAUGHTER.

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: The comedic elements of the staging of this script should be evident in the laughter and audiences' experiences. As humour is subjective, it is understandable that perhaps some individuals may find particular aspects more entertaining than others, however 'finding the funny' against some of the darker moments was integral for directing each scene. Andy Arnold set out to explore a much darker version than presented, focusing more on the highs and lows experienced by each character and playing against the humour at times, however the casting, acting styles, writing and genuine comedy of the piece established itself so quickly that it was hard to play anything other than the farce.

A FARCE SHOULD BE SITUATIONAL, NOT CHARACTER DRIVEN.

This means we are not following the arc of any particular character(s), more the plot and action (the situations) that take place. Personalities should be fairly one-dimensional, stereotypical and show limited character development – it is the highly exaggerated, extravagant and seemingly improbable actions and situations that provide enjoyment. We will rarely be laughing at a character; we are more likely to be laughing at the ludicrous situation they have found themselves in or are trying to escape from.

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: Each character was introduced as they appeared – the audience are told as much as they need to know at that point before the character leaves again. They may reappear many times throughout the play, but other than FACE and SUBTLE, we don't need to know or see the characters in any more detail. The actors play the farce of the situations to find the best character choices.

THE UNITIES OF DRAMA ARE REAL

It is important to recognise that in spite of the farcical situations and contexts, the unities of drama (time, place and action) are all real, as are the characters. The plot unfolds in real time, the interval resumes where we left it, and situations that may seem absurd to an audience should be real for the

particular characters. It is the speed at which these notions are presented that brings comedy, intrigue and doubt. Comedic timing is central to the farce.

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: The location (LOVEWIT's house) should be recognisable as an eccentric upper-class household, and the characters (cleaner, coffee-shop owner, schoolboy etc.) are recognisable as real figures, however everything is over the top, exaggerated, stereotypical versions. The house is built upon a low truss stage. Traditionally, a Tron Theatre production will play on the flat surface of the stage area and a raised stage is only normally built during panto. This is for similar reasons – to create a physically bigger, more exaggerated world for the performance.

THE CHARACTERS ALL HAVE POWERFUL CENTRES OF DESIRE

These are desperate wants or needs that act as motivators to overcome the presenting jeopardy – the bigger the jeopardy, the more ridiculous behaviour that can be justified.

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: As an example, DAPPER is so infatuated with the idea of meeting the Faerie Queen that he is willing to undertake SUBTLE's bizarre list of demands (wear shoes of wood, a shirt of lace, eat a slug and some soil and wear a ten-gallon hat made of premium tin foil etc.) and brings a collection of valuable objects (late father's leather bound chronicles, a golden bust of a cockerel, a fine old painting of some haddock and mackerel etc.) to ensure the process is underway. Similarly for FACE as LADY DOCTOR, she has to succumb somewhat to SIR EPICURE of MAMMON's sexual advances at SUBTLE's request, in order to accrue more money in lieu of the Philosopher's Stone.

FARCE OFTEN RELIES ON MISTAKEN IDENTITY OR A THREAT TO A CHARACTER'S TRUE IDENTITY.

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: The multirolling characters, use of varying costumes and range of exit strategies should be fairly obvious as to how the notion of mistaken identity within farce was executed.

THE PLOT IS LIKELY TO MOCK SOCIAL CODES

Characters will use wit as a creative way to circumvent the 'right' way to act or respond. The audience are likely to be familiar with these social codes and can take joy from the characters 'wrong' decisions. Characters can be bound by the established virtue (what we as society may deem

to be the 'good' and moral way to respond) however the characters who hold true virtue will not succeed in their intentions.

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: ANANAIS and TRIBULATION WHOLESOME represented religious characters that in society we should deem to be of higher status, upstanding members of the community, trustworthy and sacred. ANANAIS can hold true the virtue of his character, questioning the legitimacy of alchemy with SUBTLE and reflecting the church's beliefs. However, when he is joined by TRIBULATION WHOLESOME, we hear his 'hehehe' laughter at ANANAIS' misfortune and learn how he is corrupted by the promise of coin casting. As ANANAIS is still trying to portray the virtue of the church, his status is reduced, and he physically becomes a table for the others to lean on. In another example, when SUBTLE gives his share of the money to FACE, he can in theory leave the story with the love of his life, DAME PLIANT – once he has done the right thing, his character can go no further. Even with SURLY, holding tightly to the belief that he will reveal the truth of the scam, we know that will never be the one who unravels the story, not in disguise as THE SPANISH DON, nor with the POLICE OFFICER, again whom we may expect to hold high moral status but would rather sing karaoke.

THERE WILL BE MANY DOORS!

When it comes to farce, there will usually be any number of doors in the set to provide multiple possible entrances and exits, giving license for close calls with character identities at risk of being revealed, places to hide and things to slam!

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: There are eight possible entrances and exits. From Upstairs to Downstairs, Stage Right to Stage Left – (1) THE ALCHEMIST's room upstairs (2) FACE's room upstairs (3) the front door (4) the curtained door to the kitchen (5) the orange door, presumably to the bedrooms (6) the revolving bookcase (7) the door to the garden and external gate (8) the cupboard under the stairs.

This gives license for the multirolling characters to have a close call with mistaken identities as described above and for actors to exit one side of the stage and reappear moments later somewhere on the other side of the stage in a completely different costume. These moments have been planned and rehearsed with precision – members of the stage management team are backstage, ready for quick changes, or indeed to play moments of these characters themselves. (As LOVEWIT's character exits through the kitchen to get a drink, actor STEPHEN CLYDE removes the hat, adds the TRIBULATION hat and beard whilst another member of the team wears the robe and holds the ecclesiastical staff in his place, as there isn't enough time for a full costume change.)

MORAL SATIRE

As a dramatic form, satire encourages human vices and shortcomings to be held to censure by means of ridicule, parody and caricature, particularly with intent to inspire social reform. Ben Jonson is widely recognised as a satirist, and whilst *The Alchemist* is known as a Jacobean farce, the satirical elements of the story and performance cannot be ignored.

DURING THE ALCHEMIST: FACE and SUBTLE would break the 'fourth wall' and speak to the audience in direct address. This Brechtian technique ensures the audience does not sit passively watching the action but asks us to consider the issues in question. When Brecht is acknowledged as having said 'art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it', we can consider the design elements of this production; with no specific time period, the writer, director and designer recognise that con artists have been around since before the original text was written in 1610, and nothing has changed.

FACE knows what she is doing is wrong, and we, the audience, knows what she is doing is wrong, but she seeks to appease her actions by asking us to recognise the marks' behaviours and attitudes of being deserving of such wrongdoing, and also suggests SUBTLE is capable of even worse behaviour. Later in the production, she also tries to redeem herself when LADY DAME PLIANT makes xenophobic remarks, hinting that she has gone too far, even by FACE's standards. By involving the audience in these conversations, we subconsciously rate her behaviour on a scale of acceptability and consider our own moral compass. This is further emphasised at the end of the play when LOVEWIT takes the money for himself – we want her to succeed despite knowing her crimes. We, the audience, are complicit in her wrongdoings and those like her in society, when really, we have the capacity to change it for the better.

The Tron Theatre main stage is ideal to present such work. It is a mid-scale sized auditorium, ensuring there are no 'bad' seats in the house. With the ability to create a fairly intimate performance, everyone should feel involved in these moments; reflecting on our own beliefs and behaviours and looking at those around us to provide a satirical view of society.

THE CAST and their ROLES

STEPHEN CLYDE	LOUISE McCARTHY	ROBBIE JACK
SURLY	JEANNIE / FACE	DAPPER
TRIBULATION WHOLESOME	CAPTAIN FACE	ANANAIS
SPANISH DON	LUNGS	LADY DAME PLIANT
LOVEWIT	THE FAERIE QUEEN	
	THE LADY DOCTOR	



NESHLA CAPLAN	JO FREER	GRANT O'ROURKE
ABEL DRUGGER	SIR EPICURE OF MAMMON	SUBTLE
POLICE OFFICER	KASTRIL	THE ALCHEMIST
		THE WEDDING CELEBRANT

CAST BIOGRAPHIES

STEPHEN CLYDE

Stephen graduated from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland (RSAMD) in 1993 and has worked consistently with companies such as National Theatre of Scotland, Tron Theatre, Perth Theatre, Mull Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, The Traverse, The Arches, Rideout Theatre, Pilot Theatre, Warehouse, Common Guild, Pitlochry, Shows On A Shoestring. Stopwatch, Theatre Babel, Adam Smith Theatre, Borderline, Wildcat and the Citizens Theatre.

Film and television work includes: Outlander, Blood of the Clans, Taggart, The Old Guys, Harry and the Wrinklies, Stone of Destiny, Chasing the Deer and River City.

LOUISE MCCARTHY

Theatre credits include: The Steamie (SSE Hydro), Mamma Mia in London's West End (Prince of Wales Theatre London), Yer Granny, Men Should Weep, My Left/Right Foot The Musical (National Theatre Scotland), Cuttin' A Rug (Citizens Theatre), for which she was nominated for Best Actress at the 2017 CATS awards, Much Ado About Nothing (Bard In the Botanics), Three Sisters, Peter Panto and the Incredible Stinkerbell, Sleeping Betty, The Snow Queen (Tron Theatre), The Trouble with Double, Role Shift (Oran Mór), Jacaranda, Sleeping Beauty (Perth Theatre), Bingo! The Musical (Stellar Quines), Jack & The Beanstalk (Qdos Entertainment), The Dolls Abroad & The Dolls Dragged Up (UK and Scottish Tour).

Television credits include: Stacey Stone, Raptures (CBBC). Sketchland, What's Funny About the Indyref (BBC Scotland), Scot Squad, Only An Excuse (BBC Comedy Unit), Two Doors Down (BBC), In Plain Sight (ITV Drama) and Aldi Midges Advert (ITV), Squire & McGill Scot Squad spin-off series (BBC Scotland).

Film credits include: Amanda in Wild Rose (Film 4, British Film Institute, Creative Scotland & Three Chords Productions) written by Nicole Taylor and directed by Tom Harper.

ROBERT JACK

Recent theatre includes: The Dark Carnival: Unplugged, Striptease/Out at Sea (Vanishing Point), Ulster American (Edinburgh Traverse – Fringe First Award 2018), Rhinoceros (Royal Lyceum/DOT Theatre-Best Actor 2018 CATS Award), Flight (Vox Motus), Bluebeard's Castle & The 8th Doon (Vanishing Point/Scottish Opera), A Steady Rain (Theatre Jezebel), Much Ado About Nothing (Dundee Rep), Charlie Sonata (Royal Lyceum).

Television roles include: Nicky in The Last Czars (Nutopia/Netflix), Peter Smart in In Plain Sight (TV), Shug in the BBC series River City, as well as Ted Williams in Till Death Us Do Part and Mario in

Hancock's Half Hour (both part of the BBC series Lost Sitcoms). Robert was also Jacko in all three series of Gary: Tank Commander, made by the Comedy Unit for the BBC.

Recent radio credits include: Faking It, Melanie Sputnik, Hope is The Thing With Feathers, Measure for Measure, The Poet and Echo, The Tragic History of My Nose, Rebus: Fleshmarket Close and Brothers (BBC).

NESHLA CAPLAN

Neshla graduated from the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland in 2014. Theatre credits include: Arctic Oil (The Traverse), Sunshine on Leith (Leeds Playhouse/UK No 1 Tour), Adam (National Theatre of Scotland), Toy Plastic Chicken, Wee Free the Musical, Voices in Her Ear (A Play, A Pie and A Pint), The Sunshine Ghost (Festival Theatre Edinburgh), Secret Show 1 (Blood Of The Young/Tron Theatre), Shark in the Park (Macrobert/Assembly Rooms), The Choir (Citizens Theatre/ATG), Arabian Nights and The BFG (The Royal Lyceum Theatre, Edinburgh).

JO FREER

Jo trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. Recent theatre includes: The Cheviot, The Stag and The Black, Black Oil, Let the Right On In (National Theatre of Scotland), Bingo! The Musical (Stellar Quines/Grid Iron), Seanmhair (The Other Room), The Witches, Midsummer (a play with songs), Much Ado About Nothing (Dundee Rep).

Television credits include: Scot Squad (BBC Scotland), Doctors, River City, Mighty Midge (BBC), Emmerdale (Yorkshire Television).

Film credits include Time Teens: The Beginning Dreamcastle Production and Fast Romance (Ickleflix).

GRANT O'ROURKE

Most recent theatre includes: Tartuffe (Assembly Rooms), Ballyturk (Tron Theatre), What Girls Are Made Of (Traverse Theatre), The Belle's Stratagem (Lyceum), Monarch of the Glen (PFT), Jocky Wilson Said (Oran Mór / Gilded Balloon) - Winner Best Actor, Sunday Herald Culture Awards, The Venetian Twins (Lyceum) - Winner Best Actor, Critics Awards for Theatre in Scotland, The Agony & Ecstasy of Steve Jobs (Gilded Balloon), shortlisted for the Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award.

TV/film credits include: Outlander, In Plain Sight, A Long, Long Crime Ago, Bob Servant, Still Game, High Times, How Not to Live Your Life, Crying With Laughter and Up There.

Tron Theatre Company presents Ben Jonson's

The Alchemist

Adapted by GARY McNAIR

WORLD PREMIERE

*"Douse your hair in treacle, it will act as a thickener.
Fill your underpants with sodium bicarbonate and vinegar.
Swallow a live goldfish, make sure it's a wriggler.
You will be nervous, but no drink, not even a stiffener.
If you do these things you are bound to impress.
And the fairy queen's magic will take care of the rest..."*

So instructs the artful Subtle as he tricks another victim with talk of fairy queens and with his very own 'Philosopher's Stone' at hand to change base metals into gold. His accomplice, the conniving Face, is cleaner of the house and these two rogues set themselves up as confidence tricksters while the master is away. As money and gullible victims start rolling in, it all starts to go very horribly wrong...

Acclaimed Scottish writer Gary McNair (*A Gambler's Guide to Dying, McGonagall's Chronicles*) has taken on Ben Jonson's Jacobean farce, re-writing it in rhyming couplets and relocating it from London to Glasgow with brilliant comic effect.

"Surely they'll pull it off, oh they're gonnae...But the whole thing goes up the swanny!"

Adapted by GARY McNAIR from the original play by Ben Jonson

Directed by ANDY ARNOLD

Designed by CHARLOTTE LANE

For details of *The Alchemist* schools programme contact Creative Learning Officer,
Debbie Montgomery on 0141 559 5310 or debbie.montgomery@tron.co.uk

PREVIEWS: FRI 4 & SAT 5 OCT 2019, 7.45PM, £9

TUE 8 – SAT 19 OCT, 7.45PM, £11 – £17

MATINEES: THU 10, SAT 12 & SAT 19 OCT, 2.30PM, £15 (£11)

FRI 11 OCT, 7.45PM & SAT 12 OCT, 2.30PM 🍷

WED 16 OCT, 7.45PM 🍷

THU 17 OCT, 7.45PM CAP

Tron Theatre

63 Trongate

Glasgow

G1 5HB

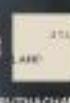
Box Office:

0141 552 4267

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ALBA | CRUTHACHAN

THE CHARACTERS

Six actors played 18 'named' characters and so all actors were multi-rolling, if only for short, deceitful moments as 'a play within the play', using physicality, voice, facial expressions, gesture and costume to switch between characters.

FACE (JEANNIE) – THE MAID

At the start of the play, FACE presents as JEANNIE, a housekeeper who has been left in charge of her master's house while he is away and takes the opportunity to execute a money-making scam on the side. However, as the story unfolds, we learn that this is also part of the sting and that SUBTLE has been unwittingly recruited. FACE has created the JEANNIE character to fool LORD LOVEWIT (SUBTLE only knows her as FACE). She has multiple 'faces' (as her name suggests) to also help fool the guests she has invited to meet THE ALCHEMIST – CAPTAIN FACE, LUNGS, THE FAERIE QUEEN and LADY DOCTOR.

Despite her urgent desire for money, FACE reveals to the audience that she wants the money to pay off her husband's debts and set him free, suggesting she is driven by love. She also is willing to give her half away to SUBTLE so that he can be with LADY DAME PLIANT as her share alone won't be enough to achieve her goals. This could be a nod to her feeding SUBTLE's ego, encouraging him to commit to the scam further; a double bluff in the hopes he will give her the full amount or indeed the recognition of his love for LADY DAME PLIANT.

Using direct address, FACE attempts to win the support of the audience by revealing her reasons for running the scams. She asks us to consider the character and motivations of the 'marks' in the hope we will agree they deserve to be gulled, whilst comparing her actions to those of SUBTLE as being less heinous than his. She sees other more vile, vindictive characters around her with more riches and success than she could dream to achieve, and therefore sees her actions as more inconsequential, believing that if she can pull off a few small tricks without hurting anyone, what's the harm? It's no worse than some of the other debauchery going on in society.

This belief underpins her relationship with SUBTLE, both of whom tell us they would ditch the other to run off with the takings, despite needing each other for maximum success. SUBTLE and FACE have an improv-style 'say yes' relationship with each other; a shorthand in which they can expect the

other to step in at any moment with just the right thing to do or say that will give them the best outcome. This can be seen when FACE must meet with LADY DOCTOR at SUBTLE's request, or when she screams during SURLY's SPANISH DON reveal scene to distract attention and instigate chaos.



Photography: John Johnston

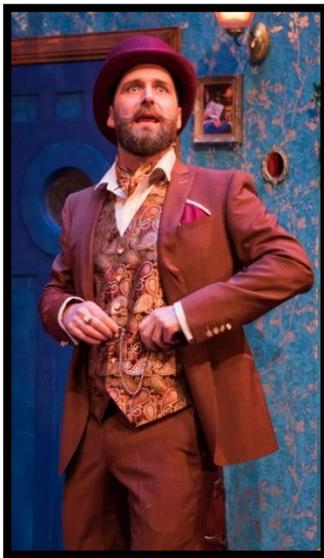
SUBTLE – THE ALCHEMIST

SUBTLE is a down-on-his-luck conman who has previously experienced the benefits and pitfalls of his devious behaviour. He has already established THE ALCHEMIST character (conning FACE and giving freedom for the whole story as a revenge plot), but has also since been found raiding the bins, presumably for his own survival. He will do anything to stay out of poverty and quickly succumbs to FACE's scheme.

SUBTLE relies on bottles of alcohol and pills to keep him 'topped up' throughout the show, perhaps suggesting that he needs this false confidence to pull off such a grand scheme, or needs a level of ambiguity to believe his own lies and deceit in this make-believe world he is creating, or perhaps even to keep him from crashing down and facing the harsh reality of his situation and behaviours. Once he starts receiving the cash he thinks will change his life, he will do almost anything to fulfil 'his' plan. As his name suggests, SUBTLE is crafty and cunning and will use clever methods to succeed. He is willing to con everyone for financial gain, even hinting that he would double cross FACE and leave her with nothing. He doesn't realise he is actually looking for love, or believe that it would be possible for someone like him, but it is his new found love with LADY DAME PLIANT that will keep him out of poverty as he can marry into her bourgeoisie lifestyle, reap the benefits, and have his own 'happily ever after'.

DAPPER – THE GAMBLER

DAPPER is a law clerk, willing to risk it all for help gambling, however if he is truly looking for money, there are many other approaches that would guarantee success; gambling won't automatically make him richer. He has a stereotypically uninteresting job and is ultimately looking for a thrill or excitement. He is perhaps the most gullible of all as he has limited cash, but plenty of material wealth and investments, and willing to forgo everything for the chance to meet the FAERIE QUEEN. As the name DAPPER suggests, he is neat, trim and smart looking to start with, then appears wearing a ludicrous outfit before being stripped half-naked and bundled into the cupboard under the stairs.



Photography: John Johnston

ABEL DRUGGER – THE COFFEE SHOP OWNER

DRUGGER is starting his own business to prove to his dad that he is capable of such success and ultimately worthy of attention. He asks for THE ALCHEMIST's help in the design and layout of the new store, able to pay with his dad's money. He is perhaps the least 'greedy' of all marks in terms of what he is looking for. He reveals his cousins LADY DAME PLIANT and KASTRIL are also looking for THE ALCHEMIST's guidance and are willing to pay handsomely.



ANANAIS and TRIBULATION WHOLESOME – THE RELIGIOUS CHARACTERS

ANANAIS has been sent on behalf of the church to check the progress of the Philosopher's Stone which has been promised to bring wealth, power and success to the church. He is concerned about being conned and the church being brought into disrepute. The more he tries to upkeep the sanctity of his beliefs, the



more his character will struggle. Conversely, the figure Ananais from the New Testament was struck dead for lying whereas our ANANAIS seems determined to prevent a similar fate. He is overshadowed by his superior, TRIBULATION WHOLESOME, who, as his name suggests is a cause of great suffering (tribulation) despite supposedly being characterised by moral well-being (wholesome). TRIBULATION WHOLESOME is far more easily gulled and becomes further indebted to the schemes to satisfy his more devious side with promises of growing an army and coin casting.

Photography: John Johnston



SIR EPICURE OF MAMMON – THE SENSORY-DRIVEN OLDER MAN

'Epicure' describes a person with refined taste, especially concerning food and drink. 'Mammon' traditionally means money or wealth in relation to greedy pursuit of gain and evil / false worship. The oxymoron of this character's name helps describe the true nature of his personality and behaviour.

MAMMON has also been promised the Philosopher's Stone, believing it will make him rich, powerful and attractive to the multiple ladies he believes will be part of his future. However, MAMMON has been knighted and is called SIR. We would expect someone of this status to already have some or all of these qualities, but it is evident from

his costume (ill-fitting, food stains, fly undone), facial expressions and gestures that this would be far from his reality. He is easily distracted by LADY DOCTOR and spills the 'secrets' of the Philosopher's Stone to her in an attempt to woo her, dismisses SURLY's doubts and seeks to satisfy his desires at all costs.



Photography: John Johnston

SURLY – THE DOUBTER

SURLY arrives with SIR EPICURE OF MAMMON, but unlike his acquaintance, he is not impressed by what he sees. He is traditionally a card shark type, and quite possibly recognises some dodgy dealings when he sees them.

His full name, PERTINAX SURLY means obnoxious, persistent, stubborn – all the negative qualities of the character that will ensure his true virtue (revealing the truth) will never succeed. He goes as far as disguising himself as a SPANISH DON to 'infiltrate' the proceedings, and bringing a POLICE OFFICER to the scene, neither of which can help his quest.



KASTRIL – THE SCHOOLBOY

The youngest child in his family, KASTRIL is teased and tortured by his older siblings and seeks THE ALCHEMIST's help in standing up for himself through witty comebacks.

Money is no object for him and he returns, with his sister, LADY DAME PLIANT, to begin his lessons. He has barely been reading a book when he is pitted against SURLY, chasing him out of the house in an apparent 'win'.

LADY DAME PLIANT – THE GLAMOUROUS LADY

LADY DAME PLIANT arrives to seek THE ALCHEMIST's help in finding a husband. If she doesn't marry soon, she will become estranged from her family and lose her fortune. However, she doesn't want to marry just for money and wants help finding true love. This is in direct contrast to the expectations of a woman from the 30s time-period and hints at the misogyny in comparison to the expectations of her brother, KASTRIL.



MASTER LOVEWIT – THE OWNER OF THE HOUSE

When LOVEWIT returns, not only are we already rooting for FACE, but his attitude and behaviours are intentionally nauseating to alienate the audience further from the pomp and ceremony he surrounds himself with, ensuring the class



divide becomes more evident.

THE POLICE OFFICER

When the SPANISH DON seeks to bring the authorities to LOVEWIT'S house and reveal the truth of the scam, the POLICE OFFICER is more interested in karaoke, further dispelling SURLY's role in the final reveal.



Photography: John Johnston

The following characters are created 'within the play' to deceive others and therefore exist only to further the scam.



Photography: John Johnston

FACE as: **CAPTAIN FACE – THE DECORATED SOLDIER** – a high status character to lure similar status customers with his sense of authority.

LUNGS – **THE FURNACEMAN** (pictured above, with **SURLY**) – the working class, everyman character to lure customers with his matter-of-factness and support the premise of a bigger operation with several employees.

LADY DOCTOR – **THE BEAUTIFUL LADY** (not pictured but wearing a dressing gown upstairs and lab coat and stethoscope later) – a high status character to attract a certain type of customer and again, a fuller operation.

THE FAERIE QUEEN – **THE MYTHICAL CHARACTER** – exists in folklore as a symbol of power; enticing the gullible to part with their money.

SURLY as: **THE SPANISH DON** to deceive the con-artists and 'listen-in' to their plotting and scheming.

SUBTLE as: **THE WEDDING CELEBRANT** (above, in group photo) to carry out the false marriage between **LOVEWIT** and **LADY DAME PLIANT**.

THE PLOT

LORD LOVEWIT, an upperclass gentleman flees his home to escape a local outbreak of the plague. He forgets to tell his cleaner, JEANNIE, about his departure and in his absence decides to use his lavish home as the central location for an almighty scam. The first act of debauchery sees her become FACE to enlist local rogue, SUBTLE, who cannot resist the temptation of such a sting, and begins to create his own character (THE ALCHEMIST) to dupe unsuspecting locals and elicit their riches.

- ❖ The play opens with SUBTLE and FACE arguing over the scam they have created, more specifically concerning the division of the riches they will gather, and who is most deserving of the prize. SUBTLE attempts to explain alchemy to escape FACE's ridicule. Each can hold their own but admit they need each other to be successful.
- ❖ Their first customer is DAPPER, a lawyer's clerk who seeks to enhance his gambling ambitions and is quickly fooled by THE ALCHEMIST's promise of help from the FAERIE QUEEN. THE ALCHEMIST creates a series of humiliating rituals that DAPPER must complete, before she will even grace him with her presence.
- ❖ ABLE DRUGGER is next to arrive, looking for help in designing his new coffee shop to establish a profitable business and make his father proud. THE ALCHEMIST takes his money, gives some advice, fools him with the promise of further help and instructs him to return later with more cash.
- ❖ SUBTLE and FACE continue to argue until they are interrupted by wealthy nobleman, SIR EPICURE OF MAMMON, and his doubting acquaintance, SURLY. MAMMON believes the Philosopher's Stone will bring him the status and riches he deserves, whilst SURLY, a gambler in his own right, thinks he knows a con when he sees it and is dubious from the outset. MAMMON is enthralled by the idea of the Philosopher's Stone and cannot be swayed by SURLY's insistence. LUNGS meets them at the front door to delay THE ALCHEMIST's arrival (costume change), but SURLY is on to them. THE ALCHEMIST tries to convince him otherwise before extracting further promises of payment from MAMMON who has been distracted by a brief appearance of LADY DOCTOR (FACE, wearing a bathrobe, obviously between costume changes). He is entirely taken by the whole affair and promises to return.

- ❖ FACE and SUBTLE argue again over who secured the money. FACE goes to change into CAPTAIN to meet with SURLY and convince him of the plan.

- ❖ ANANIAS, a holy figure, approaches the house to seek assurances from THE ALCHEMIST about the 'readiness' of the Philosopher's Stone, having spent a small fortune and been delayed several times already. THE ALCHEMIST feigns anger with ANANAIS to get rid of him, asking him to return with someone more senior.

- ❖ DRUGGER returns to tell THE ALCHEMIST about his cousins-in-need, KASTRIL and LADY DAME PLIANT. THE ALCHEMIST offers some more shop advice and tells him to return with his family members.

- ❖ SUBTLE and FACE argue about the ethics of his romantic intentions, FACE wanting nothing to do with it. She won't have anything to do with affairs of the heart – money only. SUBTLE hints that if alchemy isn't real, she has nothing to worry about. He exits and FACE tells us that she is also playing SUBTLE as a revenge tactic. She leaves as CAPTAIN to meet SURLY.

- ❖ ANANAIS returns with TRIBULATION WHOLESOME, his superior, who makes him apologise to THE ALCHEMIST. They agree to pay more for the Philosopher's Stone, and consider coin casting to raise the vital funds to pay for this.

- ❖ CAPTAIN returns with SURLY a no-show, but having met a rich SPANISH DON looking for a lady.

- ❖ DAPPER is next to return, having completed THE ALCHEMIST's list of demands and wearing the bizarre outfit required (wooden clogs, tin foil hat etc.) DRUGGER and KASTRIL also arrive. FACE asks DAPPER to play along as THE ALCHEMIST convinces KASTRIL to come back later with plenty of money to pay for his first lesson.

- ❖ DAPPER is subjected to a further stripping of his assets and clothing, before being blindfolded in order to 'meet' the FAERIE QUEEN. FACE dresses up as this mythical character, giving DAPPER the thrill he seeks before being pushed into the revolving bookcase to hide from the next visitors. FACE undresses to recreate the LUNGS character.

- ❖ The SPANISH DON appears at the doorway and dances with LUNGS. INTERVAL.

- ❖ The SPANISH DON resumes his dance with LUNGS and announces his intentions, albeit in Spanish which no one can understand. He is shoved into the bookcase as MAMMON returns in the hopes of meeting LADY DOCTOR.
- ❖ FACE is horrified and goes to change so that she can tell him she isn't interested. SUBTLE hints that she goes along with it for a while to secure more money from MAMMON; she tells him she isn't interested and leaves, allowing SUBTLE to further con MAMMON with some 'sex tea' that will make him desirable. MAMMON exits to the garden to drink this.
- ❖ KASTRIL arrives and begins his confrontation with SUBTLE. LADY DAME PLIANT arrives; KASTRIL introduces them and SUBTLE is besotted, hoping to win her heart for himself rather than finding her a true match. FACE returns, protesting at SUBTLE's misuse of the situation. SUBTLE sends LADY DAME PLIANT into a back room, and KASTRIL to the garden with a book on swearing.
- ❖ FACE and SUBTLE argue further as the SPANISH DON re-enters. LADY DAME PLIANT shows her face again, asking for water and as FACE leaves to fetch a glass, SUBTLE comes up with a plan. He will convince KASTRIL that LADY DAME PLIANT should marry the SPANISH DON, allowing SUBTLE to take all the money. He will then reveal the marriage as a sham and hope LADY DAME PLIANT will marry him instead for his cunning and riches.
- ❖ FACE meanwhile convinces LADY DAME PLIANT to reject these advances. SUBTLE, realising the need to re-think his plan, pushes the SPANISH DON into the bookcase and takes KASTRIL aside. FACE pushes LADY DAME PLIANT into the bookcase too, having not seen the SPANISH DON's exit.
- ❖ MAMMON and DRUGGER arrive in quick succession. DRUGGER is swiftly delayed whilst MAMMON reveals that if he collects the Philosopher's Stone, the LADY DOCTOR will change her mind about him. FACE is sceptical.
- ❖ LADY DOCTOR returns and pretends to be interested in MAMMON for him to reveal the truth about the Philosopher's Stone. LADY DOCTOR then feigns a mysterious seizure / spiritual embodiment to attract SUBTLE's attention. She is able to leave, and LUNGS checks on the 'Stone's progress'.

- ❖ A loud explosion is heard and LUNGS reveals the Stone is no more, due to his loose tongue. He could pay some more to have some remnants worked on and sent to him, but MAMMON reveals he has no more cash, having given his last to SUBTLE for the sex tea.
- ❖ FACE tells MAMMON she will do the rest of the work for free and sends him out the back door so that she can argue with SUBTLE, having realised that he was ready to double cross her.
- ❖ DRUGGER returns again. FACE is feeling the pressure and angrily gets rid of him, returning her attention to SUBTLE who is keen to split the money there and then. The SPANISH DON reappears and FACE realises LADY DAME PLIANT was in the same room. Once they are all in the main room, the SPANISH DON reveals himself to be SURLY in disguise.
- ❖ As the SPANISH DON thinks he has caught the con artists mid action, KASTRIL appears, reading from his insult book. They are pitted against each other, SURLY completely baffled by KASTRIL's approach.
- ❖ DRUGGER returns but this time is welcomed in to further denounce SURLY's revelation. KASTRIL continues to address SURLY, chasing him out of the house and down the street. DRUGGER leaves with some more coffee-shop advice and LADY DAME PLIANT is sent to lie down again.
- ❖ As the con artists prepare for one last gull before calling it a day, LOVEWIT returns to the house to discover the madness. SUBTLE tries to escape with the money as FACE tries to convince LOVEWIT that it's all perfectly normal.
- ❖ KASTRIL returns, cocky with confidence looking for LADY DAME PLIANT and shouting at LOVEWIT, who throws him out indignantly. He returns imminently with ANANAIS and TRIBULATION WHOLESOME, and they leave to fetch a POLICE OFFICER.
- ❖ FACE tries to explain as MAMMON returns, apologising for letting the secret out. FACE explains she was trying to find LOVEWIT a wife. He is taken by this idea and goes to freshen up for the proceedings.

❖ DAPPER bursts out having been forgotten about; FACE pretends to be both CAPTAIN and the FAERIE QUEEN to send him out the back, before sending SUBTLE to create a WEDDING CELEBRANT costume.

❖ FACE introduces LOVEWIT to LADY DAME PLIANT, secretly telling her that the whole thing is a sham, just as the POLICE OFFICER arrives. Luckily for all, the POLICE OFFICER is more concerned with singing karaoke in the local pub than revealing any crimes. The marriage takes place, and all leave except FACE and LADY DAME PLIANT.

❖ FACE sympathises with LADY DAME PLIANT's quest for love and gives her some money to keep her right, before sending her on her way. SUBTLE returns to see FACE trying to escape with the money.

❖ FACE reveals to SUBTLE the full extent of her scam and the two argue over the money. SUBTLE recognises the depth of her love and offers her his half too, if it will help release her husband. LADY DAME PLIANT has returned, overhearing this and FACE gives them her blessing to give it a go together. They leave.

❖ LOVEWIT returns from the pub alone, telling FACE he is pleased with his new wife, but that he must charge her 'rent' for having stayed at his home all this time. He takes DAPPER's belongings and the bag of cash left by SUBTLE and heads to his room.

❖ FACE screams into the ether before 'sniffing' out the diamond encrusted codpiece hidden behind a cushion on the chaise. Recognising that all is not lost, she winks at the audience into the blackout.

DESIGN

“The design for *The Alchemist* was inspired by a vast array of references and eras, borrowing from fashion and design from the renaissance to the present day, to create a mad and eclectic world of eccentric characters.



Photography: John Johnston

The design intended to create a luridly vibrant, maximalist world of the play that celebrated excess, and conveyed a sense of wealth, superficiality and pomposity.”

Designer - CL, 2019

Design Concepts: Costume

The costumes for the production intended to heighten the characters, and ultimately make them as funny as possible by means of exaggeration and playing with clichés. Essential to the storytelling and the farce, the costumes had to give an immediate sense of character. Designs were discussed conceptually, researched and initially sketched then developed through the rehearsal process as the physical attributes and characterisations were explored by the actors.

There was no specific time period or accurate representation of period costume - but rather each character took reference from varying eras that were suited to them. For example, KASTRIL took reference from Eton school boys and the 1960s; DAME PLIANT was inspired by the 1930s and old Hollywood glamour; DAPPER took reference from the Victorian era; DRUGGER from the 1970s and Gucci; LORD LOVEWIT from the Elizabethan era (a nod to the original text!)

Many choices were made for comedic purposes rather than with specific concepts to convey. In keeping with the set design, the costumes were similarly based around a rich spectrum of colours, and a textural palette was also used, with silks, satins, shot 'two way' fabrics, tassels and gold trims used to give a sumptuous feel to the world of the play and to display the wealth of each character.

As the actors were playing multiple roles, and some actors were playing one character in multiple disguises, it was important to distinguish these from each other. This was achieved by each character having a full costume change, and then each character 'in disguise' having 'home made' additions or costume elements added to their existing costumes - for example when the actor Stephen Clyde changed between TRIBULATION WHOLESOME, LORD LOVEWIT, and SURLY, he changed costume entirely, whereas when he became SURLY in disguise as the SPANISH DON, he was still evidently SURLY – merely adding a jacket and hat to his existing old baggy suit, pulling pink socks over his trousers and adding a huge moustache.

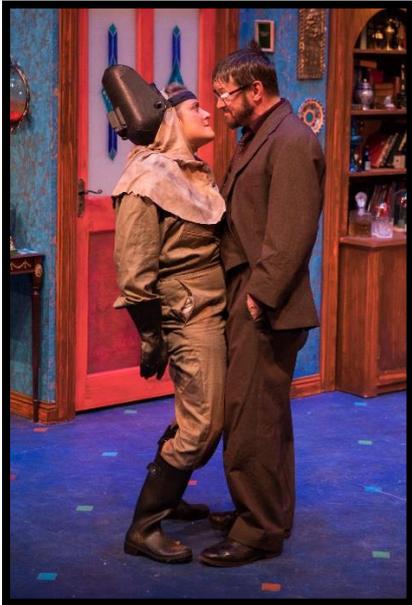


It was important that the costumes had a sense of fun and playfulness - SUBTLE transformed into THE ALCHEMIST with a makeshift 'wizard-guru-scientist' inspired ensemble of scavenged clothes - a dressing gown, pyjama trousers, tool belt of trinkets and vials and some ridiculous headwear. All were collaged together from house-hold objects; his goggles combined makeup compacts, a broken lens from some glasses and some watches; his wreath included a string of garlic, dried leaves and a fish; his ministerial garb for performing the wedding ceremony was merely a plastic drop sheet and a bucket for a hat.



Similarly, FACE transformed from a 1930s inspired maid as JEANNIE, into a variety of characters with disguises all cobbled together from household objects. The 18th century inspired 'CAPTAIN FACE' jacket featured a mop and some grapes as epaulettes, wooden clothes pegs as frogging, a tea towel and curtain fabric scrap as tails, and insignia and medals made from buttons, cords, sweets wrappers, Christmas baubles, buttons, coins and other trinkets. Her hat featured a Tunnock's Caramel Wafer wrapper as a medallion and a wig made from dangling tampons. The monstrous ensemble for the FAERIE QUEEN was made from fabric scraps, fairy lights, wooden spoons and a clothes drying rack.





Sourcing, budget and time restraints also played a part in the decision-making process, and special considerations were made to ensure that the costumes allowed for quick changes and practical concerns. The broken-down coveralls and wellies for LUNGS formed the base layer for most of FACE's characters, so that her costume changes could happen rapidly and give the feeling of each costume being thrown together and on top of each other in haste. DAPPER's costume for meeting the FAERIE QUEEN posed many challenges as it needed to conceal a variety of obscure and inconveniently shaped props, whilst adhering to the description specified in the text, so the resulting bizarre ensemble of his costume became a joke in itself. As a final reveal, DAPPER's diamanté (later changed to diamond-encrusted) codpiece became a shimmer of hope in the final despairing moments of the play.



14-12 - TABLETTE	14-11 - TABLETTE	14-10 - TABLETTE	14-09 - TABLETTE
14-12 - TABLETTE	14-11 - TABLETTE	14-10 - TABLETTE	14-09 - TABLETTE
14-12 - TABLETTE	14-11 - TABLETTE	14-10 - TABLETTE	14-09 - TABLETTE



14-13 - TABLETTE	14-12 - TABLETTE	14-11 - TABLETTE	14-10 - TABLETTE
14-13 - TABLETTE	14-12 - TABLETTE	14-11 - TABLETTE	14-10 - TABLETTE
14-13 - TABLETTE	14-12 - TABLETTE	14-11 - TABLETTE	14-10 - TABLETTE





FACE - CAPTAIN









SUBTLE- ALCHEMIST



SUBTLE - CELEBRANT







SIR EPICURE OF MAMMON

© PUBLICITY PIC





Getty Images Europe



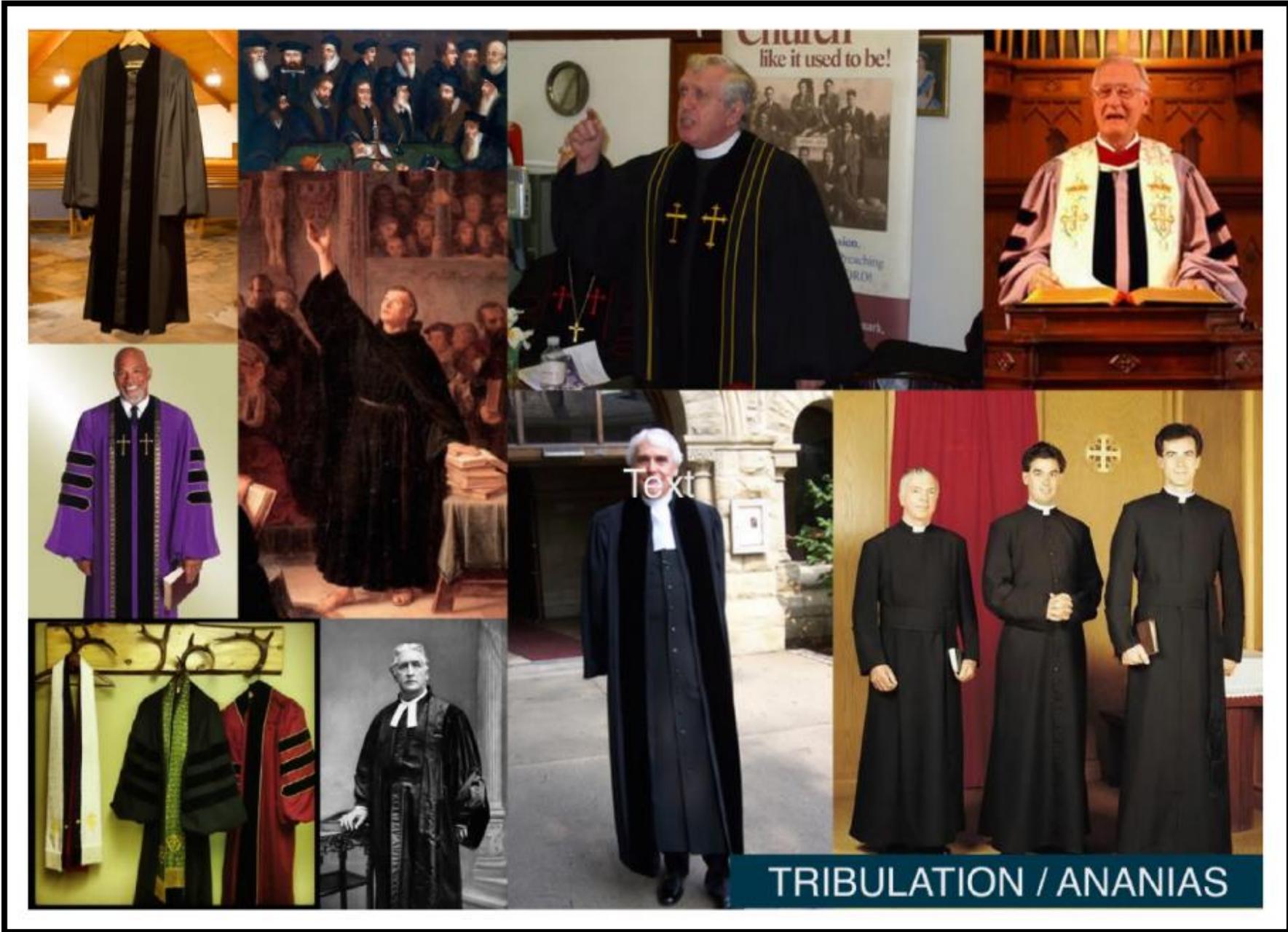
SURLY - SPANISH DON









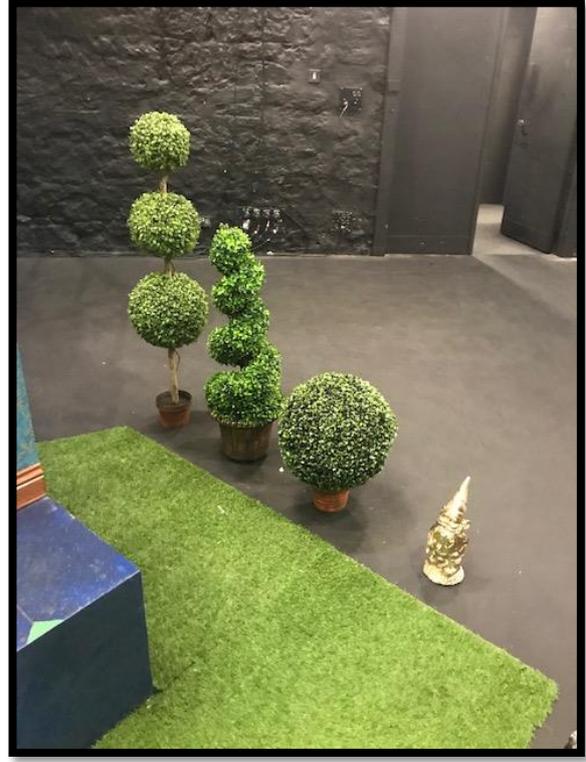






Design Concepts: Set

Centred in the black box of the Main House at Tron Theatre, the set functioned as an island – an interior world in itself that sat within a black void and was orbited by the characters who appeared and disappeared from nowhere and circled around it on the garden path.



Images: Laura Walshe

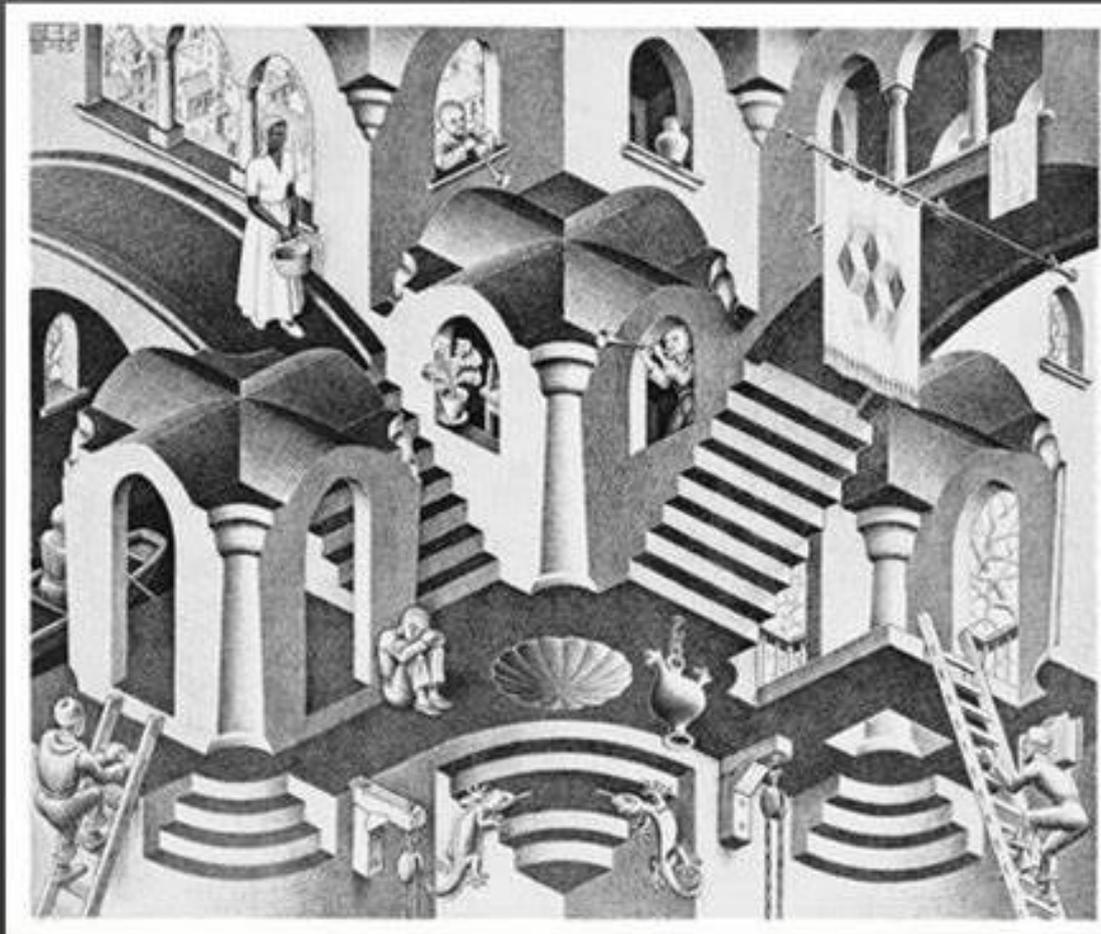




Images: Laura Walshe



Face's orbit was more vertical - she ran up and down the stairs and in and out of doors as if she was trapped in a labyrinth. The set was largely composed of right angles and zigzags, inspired by the drawings of M.C. Escher, a Dutch graphic artist known for his detailed realistic prints that achieve bizarre optical and conceptual effects. Escher depicted landscapes and natural forms in a fantastic fashion by using multiple, conflicting perspectives. Prints combined meticulous realism with enigmatic visual / optical illusions. Working in lithograph, wood engraving, and woodcut, he portrayed with great technical virtuosity impossible architectural spaces and unexpected metamorphoses of one object into another.



Hol en Bol, M.C. Escher, 1955.

These ideas were translated using the doors and passageways; designed to allow for fast transitions between spaces so that characters could exit through one door and quickly appear again in another, making access and costume changes manageable. Surprises revealed themselves as the madness escalated – the frames hinged open and the bookcase revolved so that characters could appear and disappear.

The set was developed to be constructed as a façade in itself – black void is seen behind the flats when the doors are open, proving the architecture of the space is as fake a front as Subtle and Face’s disguises.



Images: Laura Walshe

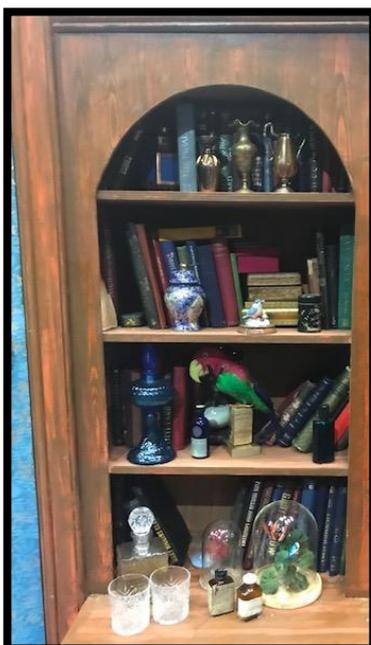
Behind the flats

The wings are normally used for character entrances and exits; however for *The Alchemist*, they were completely cleared and plunged into darkness to further highlight the island style staging and the farcical elements of the world of the play existing in its own 'contained realm'. Actor entrances and exits were in a concealed upstage centre doorway behind the set, so they had to travel the full distance if not supposed to be somewhere in the house. This could represent the lengths some characters would go to, to achieve their goals.

The colours and textures of the space intended to provide a luscious, decadent and exotic atmosphere. Surfaces, props and furnishings were inspired by bohemian interiors, orientalism and exotica, cabinets of curiosities and kitsch retro prints. The colour palette was based around the rich hues of peacock feathers with touches of iridescent and metallic details, and as much gold as possible was incorporated - particularly using ornate frames and the metallic wallpaper.



Photography: John Johnston



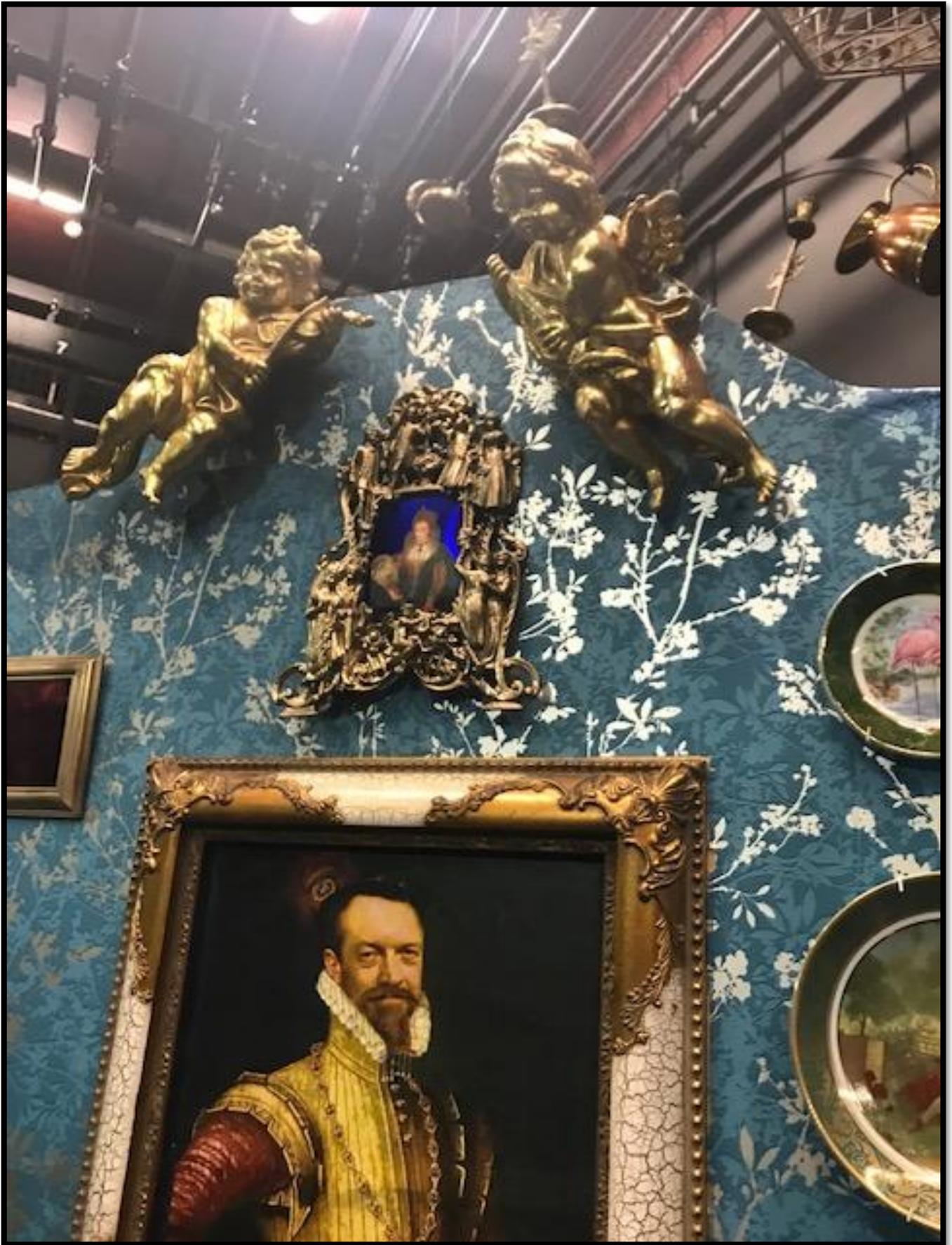
FUN FACT!

These pictures – hidden in plain sight – are of writers Gary McNair (top) and Ben Jonson (bottom)



Images: Laura Walshe





Images: Laura Walshe



The floating objects were intended to provide an abstraction to the design, so that the house, and its contents, fragmented as it ascended upwards. It was important that the set could function practically but also give a sense of a heightened reality - with the interior becoming increasingly non-naturalistic and mad.



(From the model box)

The suspended props were metals that ascended into gold, and as a whole shape, the set was composed to form a triangle as a visual depiction of the process of alchemy beyond the reach of the characters. Parallels may be drawn with a house of cards – usually pyramid shaped, relating to taking a gamble and the risk that it could come crashing down at any moment. The metallic objects hanging could be turned into gold if the process of alchemy is achieved, but as it never will, these are always just out of reach. It could be argued that this symbolised the unattainable wealth that Face and Subtle pursued, or that the tip of the pyramid was representative of economic inequality.

Design Concepts: Sound

“My inspirations were the characters themselves. They were brilliantly exaggerated/caricature types so that I wanted to underline these with the expected music styles. I tried to keep the music in a diverse, colourful style. “

Composer, OK, 2019

 1. Opening Theme.mp3	 2. Subtle (Alchemist Theme).mp3	 3. Druggier (Theme).mp3
 4. Mammon (Theme).mp3	 5. Tribulation and Ananias (Theme).mp3	 6. Thunder Clap V1.mp3
 7. Thunder Clap V2.mp3	 8. Fairy Queen (Theme).mp3	 9. Surly (Spanish Don Theme).mp3
 10. Dame Pliant (Love Theme).mp3	 11. Lady Doctor (Love Theme).mp3	 12. Subtle & Dame Pliant.mp3

Design Concepts: Lighting



Photography: John Johnston





From the model box



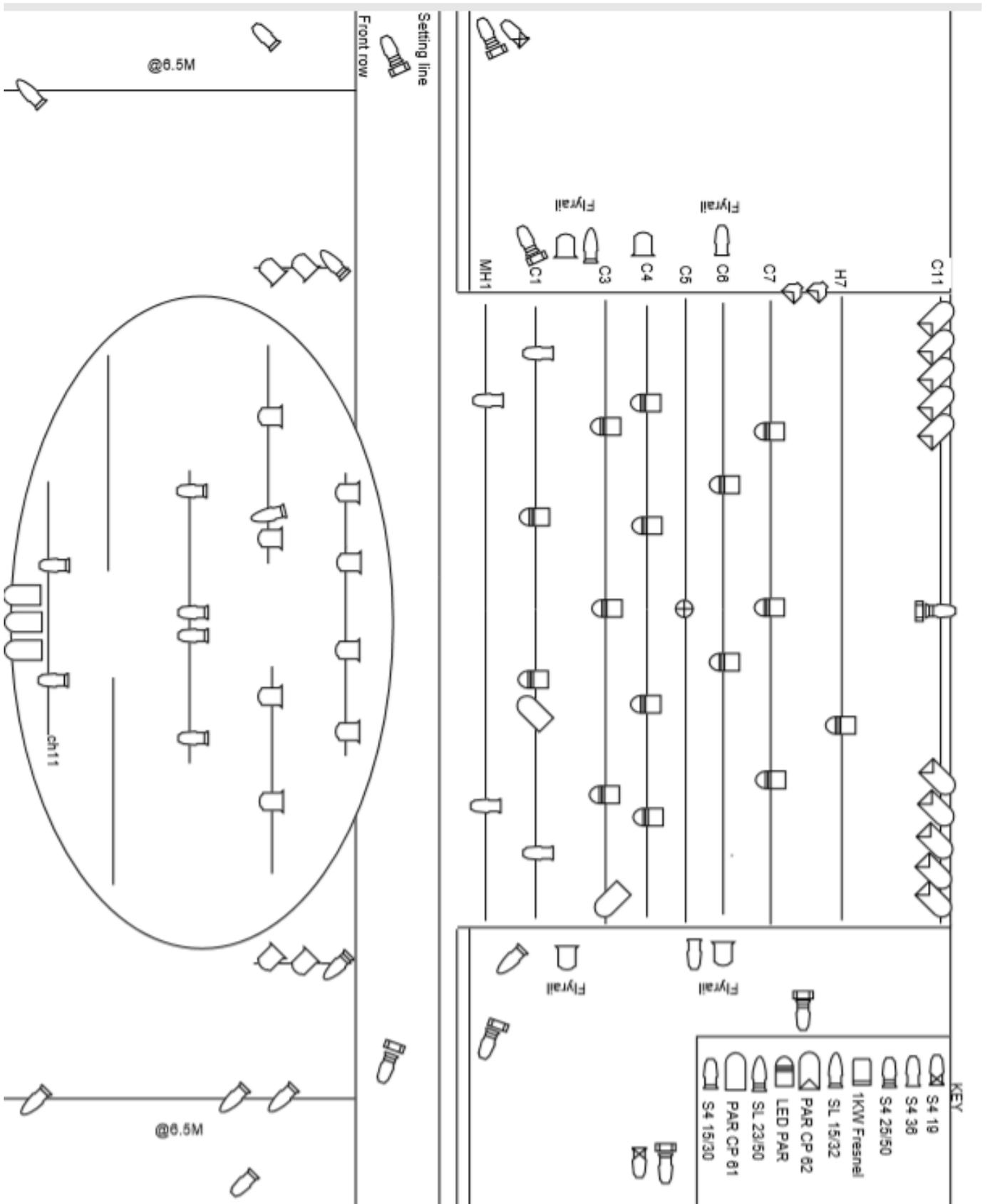
Photography: John Johnston





Photography: John Johnston

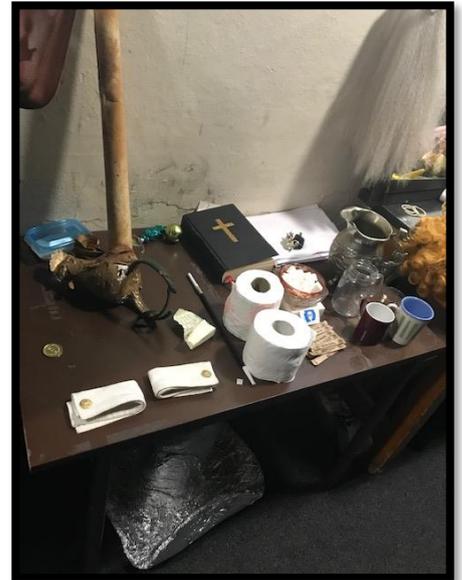




PRODUCTION TEAM

STAGE MANAGER

The Tron's Stage Manager is Laura Walshe. Part of Laura's job involves the making and sourcing of props. During a show, she can be found backstage for scene changes, costume changes (sometimes done by dressers in larger theatres), operating tabs and pyros etc., but before the show she will check the props table and costume rails with an Assistant Stage Manager.



Images: Laura Walshe

Props: Making a Statue of Jesus by Laura Walshe

We needed as a prop a statue of Jesus. From rehearsal notes they wanted it to be at least 3 ft tall. After researching online, we found out that an actual statue of that size would be at least £1000 and would also be heavy to lift. This was important as we always intended it to magically appear as if from nowhere, but this would involve lifting it through a small hatch from behind. We decided to make it from a mixture of wire, papier-mâché and air-drying clay.



I started with a board and a central wooden pole. Round this I made the form with chicken wire, stuffing with some bubble wrap at the base to give it some structure. The wire was stapled to the board at the bottom.



I then used papier-mâché, just a simple solution of PVA glue and water, with newspaper dipped in and applied to the wire form. I used masking tape to help with the shape of the head. After two coats of the papier-mâché I left it all to dry.

I then added the facial detail and hair used air drying clay. I also used clay to add definition to areas of the clothing too.



After a couple of days drying, I added a final layer of clay, smoothing out the features and finishing with a coat of PVA all over. This was all left to dry before painting.



I then painted him, according to the traditional colours. After this some final gold paint was added and then the whole thing was varnished to make it look aged.

The final result... We added a wig as the line was “a statue of Jesus with real follicles”



Photography: John Johnston

DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER

The DSM for the The Alchemist was Suzie Goldberg. In the first few weeks, Suzie would run the rehearsal room. This involved updating the script, keeping the director to time, making requests of the other departments, creating the call sheets to ensure only the necessary cast members were called at the right time, and making notes to share with the wider team.

A sample call sheet may look like this:

TRON THEATRE

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL FOR INTERNAL CIRCULATION ONLY

REHEARSAL CALLS

Production Name	The Alchemist
Director	Andy Arnold
Deputy Stage Manager	Suzie Goldberg
Date	.09.19

Time	Cast Members Called	To Rehearse	Where
10.00 – 13.00			
13:00 -14:00	LUNCH		
13.00 – 17.30			

Additional Notes:

As only certain members of the team needed to be in the rehearsal room at any given time, it was important to keep the wider team, who were working elsewhere in the building or indeed off-site, up to date with any key developments.

The Rehearsal Notes may look like this:



<u>REHEARSAL NOTE:</u>	<u>DATE: .09.19</u>
<u>DESIGN & SET</u>	
1. No notes today, thank you.	
<u>STAGE MANAGEMENT & PROPS</u>	
1. All props for the Dapper moment will come from his costume apart from the figure of Christ. The pocket watch has been cut from this section, so only one pocket watch is required for the show. Ideally the following things should come from the following places: ☐ Monocle – a pocket ☐ Leather bound chronicle (Ideally A4) – from his back ☐ Golden bust of cockerel – under his hat ☐ Painting of haddock and mackerel (rolled up canvas) – down his trouser leg. ☐ 2 shillings and 3 crowns – pocket ☐ Figure of Christ (as large as possible with real chest hairs) – through the door to the SR of the dresser ☐ Bacterium – a pocket ☐ Golden sand (just a loose pile) – a pocket ☐ Rare stamp collection (concertinaed up, so it unfolds into a long strip) – a pocket	
<u>LX</u>	
1. No notes today, thank you.	
<u>SOUND</u>	
1. Can we have some Spanish music for Surly’s Spanish Don, please?	
<u>WARDROBE</u>	
1. No notes today, thank you.	
<u>GENERAL</u>	
1. No notes today, thank you.	

After each performance, she would also create a Show Report to highlight any issues that needed attention before the next performance. This was also circulated to Front of House and Box Office teams to ensure the smoothest collaboration throughout the building.

A Show Report may look like this:

The Alchemist

**TRON
THEATRE**

SHOW No.:

DATE: .10.19

HOUSE:

	<u>TIME UP</u>	<u>TIME DOWN</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Act 1	19:45	20:53	1:08
Act 2	21.15	22:06	0:51
		TOTAL PLAYING TIME:	1:59

SM:	SND:
DSM:	LX OP:
ASM:	FoH:

Comments:

1. This evening's show was audio described.
2. A new piece of toast is required for tomorrow's show, please.
3. Sound operators swapped at the interval.
4. A very pleasant audience. Plenty of laughter, good final round of applause. 2 bows.

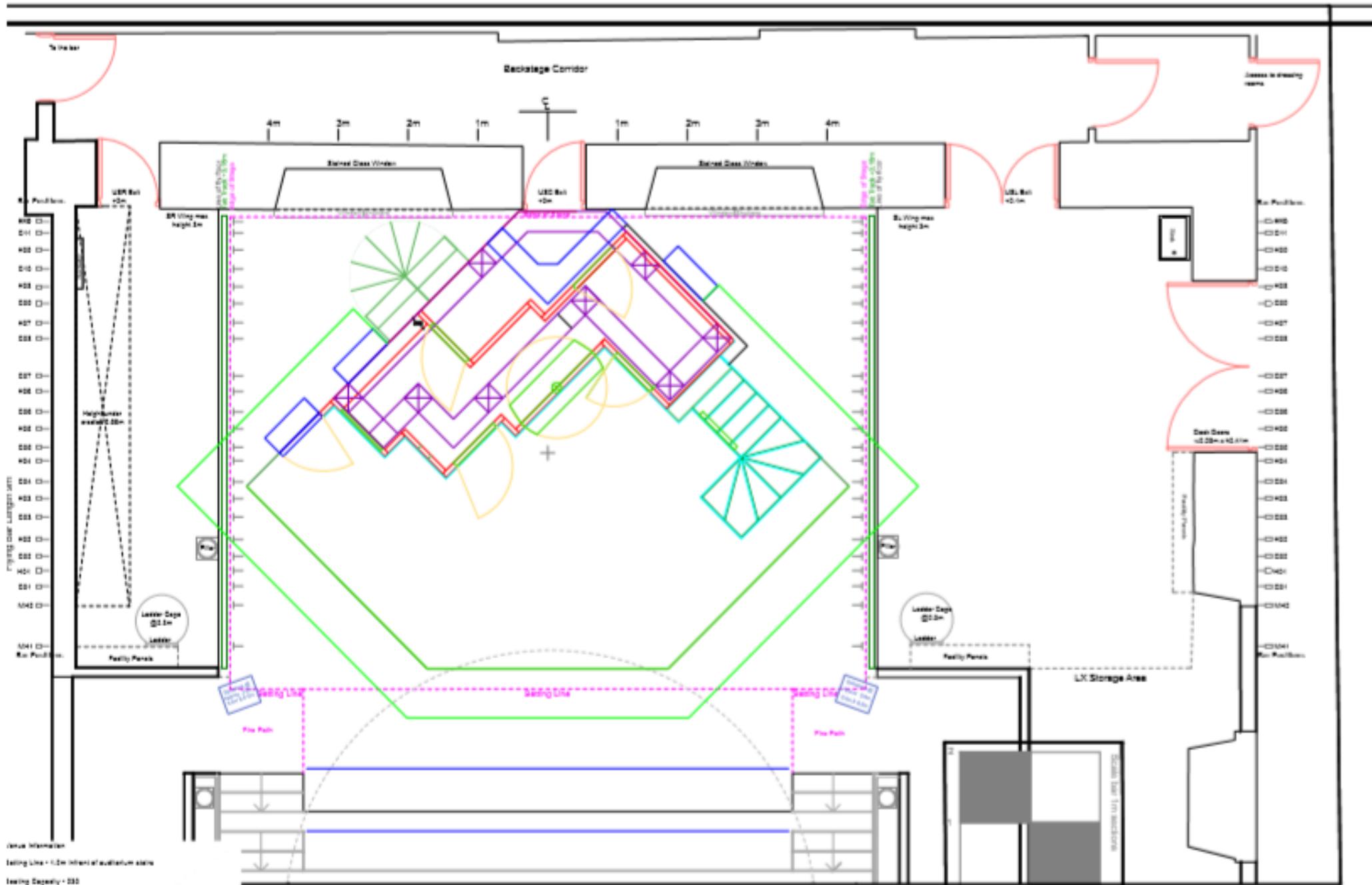
Thank you
Suzie Goldberg
DSM

TECHNICAL STAGE MANAGER

The Tron's Technical Stage Manager is currently Richard Lyons. Richie takes the model box and creates the plans for the full-size set. These are fully costed before building commences to adhere to the production budget. Plans are usually prepared at 1:25 scale.



Photos: Debbie Montgomery



Notes Information
 Seating Lines - 1.0m behind of audience seats
 Seating Capacity - 230
 Letter House - 110 Rows L&R
 Side Seats - 20 Rows L
 Upper House - 20 Rows J&K (not shown on Plan)
 Plan 2 is recommended - to be agreed at rehearsal stage
 Please note: Plan 2 is also used for rehearsal positions
 Central Position -
 Central Row at back of Auditorium with reasonable clearance
 Auditorium Bound Positions -

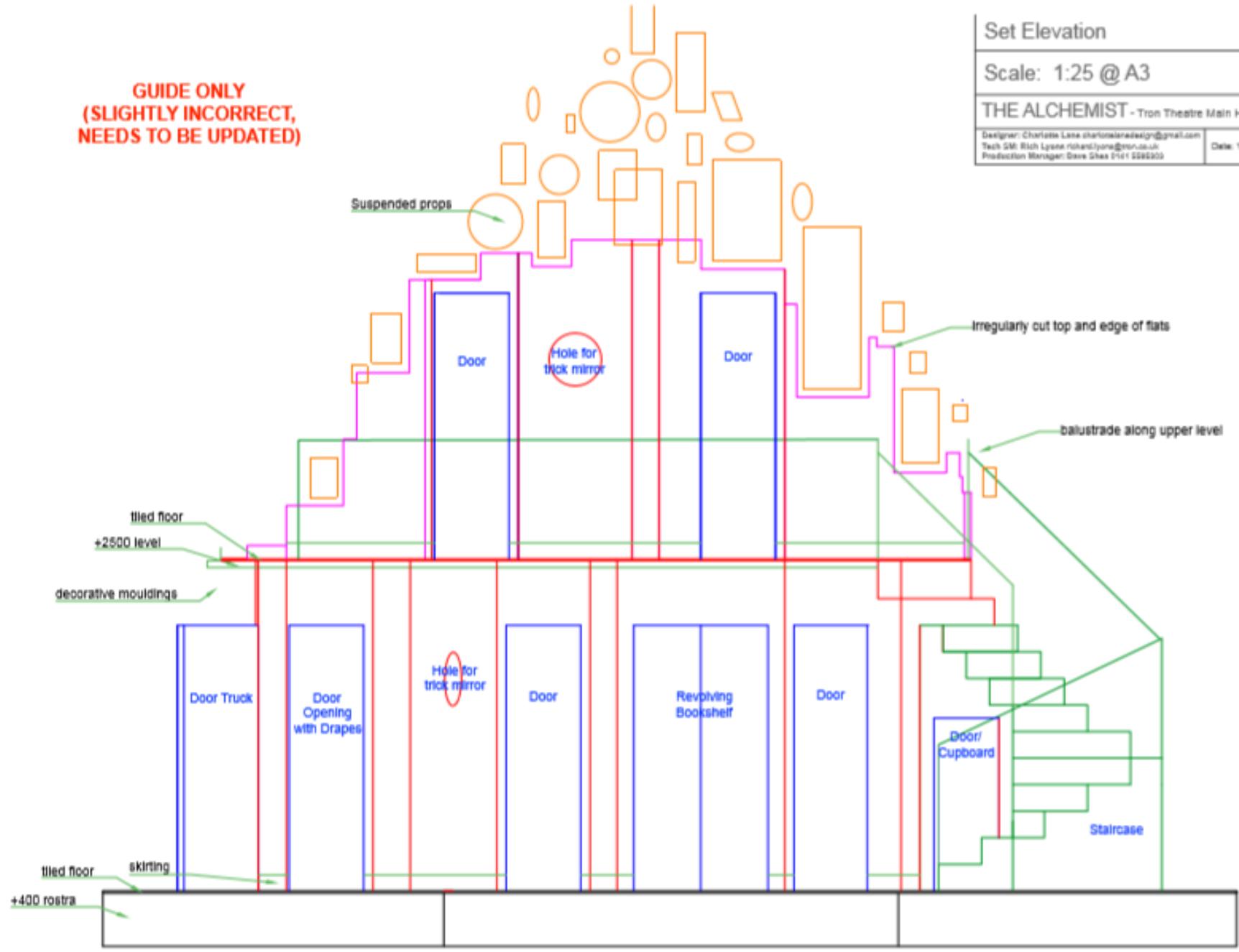
Notes
 ALL DIMENSIONS TO BE CHECKED ON SITE
 Tron Theatre Ltd 83 Turgate Glasgow, G1 5HE
 Box Office 0141 202 4207
 Bar/Kitchen 0141 202 2027

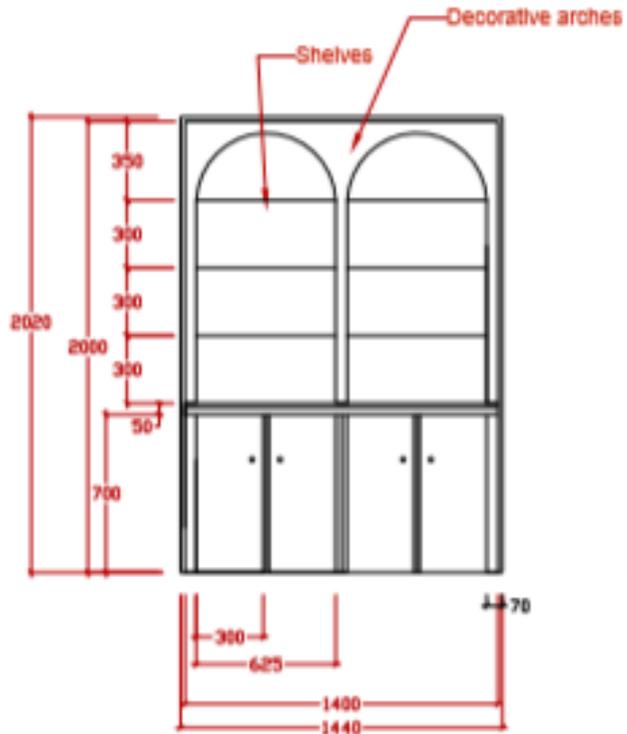
TRON
 THEATRE
 Main House

SCRIPT - 1.5H - 1/21
 Tron - Main House
 Ground Plan - Stage
 M Hughes
 28/05/20

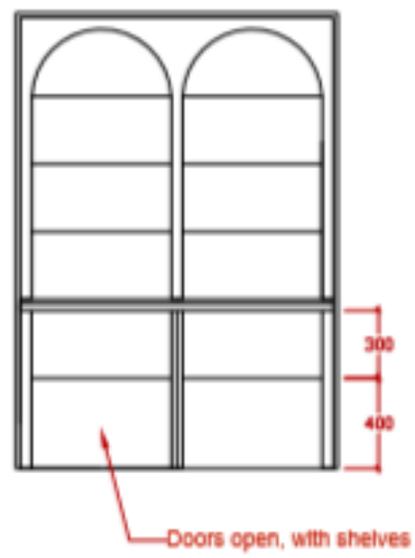
**GUIDE ONLY
(SLIGHTLY INCORRECT,
NEEDS TO BE UPDATED)**

Set Elevation	
Scale: 1:25 @ A3	
THE ALCHEMIST - Tron Theatre Main House	
Designer: Charlotte Lane charlotlanedesign@gmail.com Tech SM: Rich Lyons rich@tron.co.uk Production Manager: Dave Shea 0141 5285300	Date: 18 / 10





Elevation



Elevation

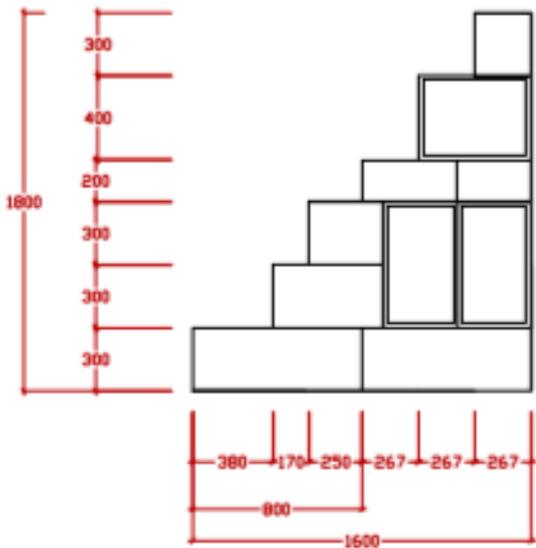


Side Elevation



Example

Revolving Bookcase	
Scale: 1:25 @ A3	
THE ALCHEMIST - Tron Theatre Main House	
Designer: Charlotte Lane charlotlanedesign@gmail.com	Date: 18 / 10
Tech SM: Rich Lyons richard.lyons@tron.co.uk	
Production Manager: Dave Siles 0161 2266200	



Elevation



Example



Plan

Stepped Shelf	
Scale: 1:25 @ A3	
THE ALCHEMIST - Tron Theatre Main House	
Designer: Charlotte Lane charlotlanedesign@gmail.com Tech SM: Rich Lyons richandlyons@tron.co.uk Production Manager: Dave Sheas 0141 5282303	Date: 18 / 10

REHEARSAL IMAGES by OLIVIA CARR



Inside the rehearsal room: Assistant Director and DSM inspect the mark up.



Actors Robbie Jack (as Dame Pliant) and Grant O'Rourke (as The Alchemist) discussing their scene.



Actor Stephen Clyde (as Lord Lovewit) mid scene.



Actors Stephen Clyde (as Lord Lovewit) and Jo Freer (as Sir Epicure of Mammon) between scenes.



Actors Stephen Clyde (as Lord Lovewit) and Louise McCarthy (as Jeannie) mid scene.



Actors Jo Freer (as Kastiril), Robbie Jack (as Ananais) and Stephen Clyde (as Tribulation Wholesome) mid scene.

PRODUCTION SHOTS by JOHN JOHNSTON

























PRESS REVIEWS

The Stage ** David Pollock 9 October 2019**

Director Andy Arnold was first drawn to Ben Jonson's 17th-century play by a review from the critic Kenneth Tynan, which noted the way it takes "malice and savagery and makes them palatable."

In playwright Gary McNair's new version – a rapid-fire farce whose language is updated to raw, often swears and blackly hilarious Glaswegian Scots – no cynical con artist or pitiable rube escapes the sharp judgement of the text.

In the stately townhouse of the wealthy but absent Lovewit, a pair of charlatans play multiple confidence tricks with ever-more-frantic degrees of greed. Louise McCarthy is Lovewit's housekeeper Face and Grant O'Rourke is Subtle, the down-on-his-luck master con artist who Face rescued from the gutter.

The pair's mile-a-minute bickering is matched only by their perfect synchronicity in procuring wads of cash from the procession of gullible oddballs who pass through the house via promises of wealth, love and greatness.

The rest of the roles are split between the small cast, including Robert Jack's glamorous, pouting young heiress Dame Pliant; Neshla Caplan's strutting spiv coffee shop owner Abel Drugger; Jo Freer's chortling, greedy toff Sir Epicure Mammon and desperately impudent schoolboy Kastril; and Stephen Clyde's trio of great characters in weaselly cynic Surly, desiccated church elder Tribulation Wholesome and Lovewit himself, who speaks with a nasal middle manager's whine.

Charlotte Lane's set design is stunning – a two-level space filled with hidden hatches, face-holes and goldfish bowls bolted to the walls, she has dressed the characters like 1960s bohemians performing a harlequinade.

As regulars might expect from one of Tron artistic director Arnold's productions, the action is just as luminous. It has a raw and contemporary energy, actors pushed to breathless limits, and a political edge – in this case, showing the desperate effect of poverty – which is palpable.

<https://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/2019/the-chemist-review-at-tron-theatre-glasgow-a-perfectly-pitched-glaswegian-update/>

The Tempo House Lorna Irvine 9 October 2019

Gary McNair has crafted something unforgettable here: a batshit crazy, psychedelic satire on the desperation of poor people forced into scamming for money. It is uproarious, but with a serious seam of hurt and anger poking through. Ben Jonson's original humour is but a dim and distant memory. Led by the frenetic pairing of Louise McCarthy and Grant O' Rourke as con artists Face and Subtle, the aesthetic may be pure 'Mr Benn', but it's haunted by the ghost of Tony Benn.

Charlotte Lane's set is a hippy dream, with 'Rowan and Martin' style portholes from which actors' heads pop out, and the retro chic is a symbol of authenticity as a sideswipe at hipsterdom and urban gentrification. Oguz Kaplangi's score invokes Swinging London, even though the patter is pure Glasgow all the way.

Neshla Caplan, Stephen Clyde, Jo Freer and in particular a brilliantly campy Robert Jack, portray various miscreants along the way, but the delirious action of the first half calms down into the second, as though the lysergic sugar cube wore off, only to be replaced by truth pills.

McNair revisits previous thematic concerns here: identity, bullying, working-class survival, and a fuckload of swearing. Good to hear the return of ‘cockwomble’ and a ‘He- Man’ reference, too. He just couldn’t resist. It’s not a bummer, though, in spite of its scathing satire. McNair has enough smart wordplay and twists to keep it “all too beautiful”, even when the gold the characters seek is simply revealed to be metal.

<https://thetempohouse.wordpress.com/2019/10/09/review-the-chemist-tron-theatre/>

The Wee Review *** Emma McMullen 11 October 2019**

*Gary McNair’s rhyming adaptation of a Jacobean farce is literal poetry in motion. How do you make a London-based, seventeenth-century comedy with notoriously dense dialogue appeal to a modern-day audience? Apparently, the answer is: set it in Glasgow, rewrite it in rhyming couplets, and turn the physicality of the acting up to eleven. This is the formula employed to Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* by acclaimed Scottish writer and performer Gary McNair. Following on from the success of McGonagall’s *Chronicles* at Edinburgh’s Traverse Theatre, it’s safe to say that this experiment proves to be far more successful than those of his con artist characters.*

With her master’s vacant home at her disposal, the scheming housekeeper Face, played with tremendous energy by Louise McCarthy, teams up with the equally energetic Grant O’Rourke as the eponymous “alchemist”. Together, they work to trick their gullible and gaudily dressed victims out of their money with promises of fairy queens, philosopher’s stones and “everlasting Irn Bru that never loses its fizz”.

Throughout this two-hour production, the audience can look forward to several cleverly crafted, and perfectly profane, rhymes which are skilfully delivered by a small but passionate cast. Special attention must also be paid to the intense physical acting – the core comic accompaniment to McNair’s special brand of poetry. Each cast member gives added force and feeling to their lines through highly exaggerated facial expressions, changes of voice and body language. On the whole, the feeling conveyed is one of controlled chaos, and in this case, it’s just what the doctor (alchemist?) ordered.

*To cap off the exceptional performance, a mention must be given to the exquisite attention to detail in the set and costumes for *The Alchemist*. The brightly coloured household setting, with its Wonderland-esque trappings of teapots, trumpets and birdcages hanging from the ceiling, and the vision of Subtle himself in magnificent blue robes and feathery headgear are enough to convince any viewer that they are already under the alchemist’s cosmic influence. Combine this with Face’s numerous and chaotic costume changes for each of her victims, with each persona more outrageous than the last, and what results is a dynamic, devious duo with visible chemistry. Without a doubt, the comedy gold found in *The Alchemist* is the real thing – no lead or elixirs required.*

*In closing, it seems only fitting to sum up the experience of seeing *The Alchemist* in a little poetic nod to the writer: For an evening of rhymes and true comedic flair, there can be no other than Mr McNair.*

<https://theweereview.com/review/the-chemist/>

The Times * Allan Radcliffe 11 October 2019**

When Mark Twain observed that “humour is tragedy plus time” he may well have had The Alchemist in mind. Ben Jonson’s 1610 play about a trio of con artists who commandeer a gentleman’s house for a series of scams is the original riotous farce, complete with door slamming, mistaken identity and characters hiding in cupboards and lavatories. Yet its humour is savage, the language violent and the backdrop — a plague-ridden London — forbidding.

Following Jonson’s claim in his prologue that “no country’s mirth is better than our own”, Gary McNair’s adaptation transfers the play’s action to Glasgow and conflates Jonson’s scheming trio into a delicious pairing: Louise McCarthy’s housekeeper Face and her preening acolyte Subtle (Grant O’Rourke). McNair’s script, written in rhyming couplets that range from the deliberately awkward to the inspired, brings a certain levity that’s lacking in the original.

McNair’s version is written for six actors and the director Andy Arnold makes a virtue of necessity, with the doubling and trebling of roles among the supporting cast really ramping up the production’s sense of bustle and spontaneity. The ensemble also interacts seamlessly with Charlotte Lane’s multi-levelled set, where, like McCarthy and O’Rourke’s confidence tricksters, nothing is quite what it seems. A stuffed bookcase turns into a revolving door; a model of a globe is found to contain glasses and drinks; pictures and decorations pop aside to reveal the tormented faces of the scammed.

There is a genuine sense of organised chaos at work here, particularly as the intrigue gathers momentum in the second half and various props and elements of the set break free from their moorings and roll across the stage.

For all the strong comic timing, gaudy colour and outrageous characterisations, though, Arnold’s production rarely acquires much depth or makes an attempt to rise above the grotesque. McNair’s script is amusing but it lacks the satirical edge that could take it to a darker place. Only McCarthy’s Face is allowed a degree of character hinterland. She provides the one note of poignancy in an otherwise enjoyable but superficial entertainment.

<https://allanradcliffe.wordpress.com/2019/10/12/review-the-chemist-tron-theatre-glasgow/>

The Scotsman ** Joyce McMillan 11 October 2019**

LONDON at the turn of the 17th century; the dawn of modern capitalism, and the sudden emergence of a whole class of nouveau riche types awash with cash, and ripe for exploitation by urban chancers and scam-merchants. So it was that in 1610, the great satirist Ben Jonson sat down to write The Alchemist; an immensely cheeky and preposterous city comedy in which two con-artists called Face and Subtle - one a servant left in temporary charge of a big empty townhouse, and the other with a gift for assuming the pseudo-scientific airs of an alchemist about to turn base metal into gold – pocket piles of cash from a band of foolish clients who range from a witless young aristocrat eager to meet the fairy queen, to a pair of money-grubbing priests from the local church.

Gary McNair’s brilliantly witty new rhyming version transfers the action to vaguely-modern Glasgow in terms of language, but otherwise leaves the atmosphere of the play all but untouched, as the very creme de la creme of Scottish comic acting, led by Louise McCarthy and Grant O’Rourke as Face and Subtle, throw themselves with gusto into the play’s satire on the general idiocy of rich people with more money than sense. That Jonson’s play finds some powerful echoes in our own age of vast accumulations of private wealth is obvious. And although both Jonson and McNair tend to milk the situation just a little too long and repetitively, Andy Arnold’s joyfully frolicsome production is full of laughs from beginning almost to the end, when McCarthy and O’Rourke – fine actors both – get

down to the nitty-gritty of what they really want from life, and confront us with a few bleak and sobering truths.

<https://www.scotsman.com/arts-and-culture/theatre/theatre-reviews-the-chemist-tron-theatre-glasgow-an-inspector-calls-king-s-theatre-edinburgh-1-5022361>

The Herald * Mark Brown 13 October 2019**

Ben Jonson's early-17th century comedy The Alchemist is a classic of pre-Civil War English drama. This new adaptation for the Tron Theatre Company, written by Gary McNair, directed by Andy Arnold and relocated from London to Glasgow, appears to have leapt into the 21st century, whilst leaving a foot in Jonson's 1600s.

In the original play, wealthy Londoner Lovewit flees the city to avoid the plague, leaving his splendid house (re-imagined here with glorious eccentricity by designer Charlotte Lane) in the hands of his butler Face. The servant then assembles a gang of three, including Subtle (the supposed alchemist of the title), using his master's property as the base of operations for a criminal conspiracy to scam the gullible of their cash and valuables.

McNair (as one would expect of the author of the anti-sexist play Locker Room Talk) is clearly not impressed by the fact that, in Jonson's original, the only female characters are a prostitute (Dol Common, the third conspirator) and the unpleasantly named, naive widow Dame Pliant. The former is simply struck out of McNair's version, while the latter (the finest in a series of cross-cast characters) is played, hilariously, by the bearded Robert Jack.

This leaves us with a criminal duo of Face (the superb Louise McCarthy, playing a master of disguise with delicious improbability) and Subtle (the extravagantly ludicrous Grant O'Rourke). The panoply of characters who are "gulled" by the miscreants are played by a cast (completed by Neshla Caplan, Jo Freer and Stephen Clyde) each of whom, in true farce style, tackle two or three roles.

The production, in which characters are pushed through doors or exit the hallway by means of a revolving wall cabinet, is extremely humorous at times. There is also great fun in McNair's bold insertion of modern Glaswegianisms into an occasional, classical rhyme scheme.

Although the play (which, perfectly reasonably, seems to borrow heavily from Blackadder and Monty Python) has many truly funny moments, it lacks both Jonson's satirical sharpness and his unity of dramatic purpose. Jonson was sending up certain well-defined targets of his day: the greedy and lascivious nobleman Sir Epicure Mammon was a recognisable archetype, as were the Dutch Anabaptists and, in line with the particular xenophobia of Jacobean England, a random "Spaniard".

One can't help but feel that McNair has missed an opportunity: for instance, Freer's Mammon, a bawd with a northern English, working-class accent, bears no discernible similarity to any of an array of contemporary political or business figures who seem ripe for satire.

If the production's characterisations are uneven, so, too, is its pace. Despite the Herculean efforts of McCarthy, O'Rourke and a generally impressive cast (including, towards the play's end, the truly Blackadder-esque appearance of Clyde's Lovewit, attired as for the 17th century) there is a sense that, tremendously enjoyable though it is, this adaptation lacks a clear sense of its own identity.

https://www.heraldsotland.com/arts_ents/17957910.theatre-reviews-chemist-tron-stornoway-way-eastwood-park-theatre/

The List ●●●●● Flora Gosling 14 October 2019

A Jacobean farce in rhyming Glaswegian patter: Ben Jonson's seventeenth-century comedy has received a thoroughly Scottish rewrite by Gary McNair. As with any newly-adapted classic (albeit one that hasn't received much attention in recent years), the question is whether the new script is able to preserve the essence of the original while giving it a fresh lick of paint, or whether the cracks will still show through.

The plot sees a pair of bickering tricksters (Louise McCarthy and Grant O'Rourke) swindling the gullible and the rich by promising to create for them a philosopher's stone and grant their wishes through 'the faerie queen' (McCarthy in what looks like a wedding dress festooned with fairy lights and Christmas baubles). Lies pile upon lies, disguises upon disguises, and the 6-person cast perform a whole host of zany and buffoonish characters.

McCarthy and O'Rourke bounce off each other perfectly; O'Rourke as a boastful egotist is frequently brought back to earth by McCarthy as a scathing and scheming sidekick. The cast deliver solid performances, though Neshla Caplan (who plays an anxious coffee shop owner in search of guidance) may be said to come off as slightly robotic compared. Highlights among the jam-packed character list are Robert Jack's sultry and drawling Dame Pliant and Stephen Clyde's impeccable Matt Berry impersonation as Lord Lovewit.

In spite of the (intentionally) convoluted plot, the animated performances and Andy Arnold's slick direction make it easy to follow. At times it gets carried away with its own eccentricities (occasionally a character will sing 'Sweet Adeline' and the portraits will sling open to reveal a face singing along, a wacky touch that slightly over-eggs the pudding). Even so, Arnold's playful vision inserts just enough sincerity for the audience to become invested in the crooked protagonists.

*McNair's script is the star of the show; the sharp rhymes and affectionately colloquial lingo flow naturally through the dialogue. The plot has aged marvellously and is a refreshing reminder that farce comedy needn't be cheap or overacted to be funny. It can be classy and still occasionally crass. The design can be sumptuous and still have costumes that look like they were put together from a collection of car-boot sale left-overs. The joys and quirks are too numerous to list; such is the daft delight that is *The Alchemist*.*

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