

RED BULL THEATER

JESSE BERGER | FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

JIM BREDESON | MANAGING DIRECTOR

PRESENTS

THE BELLE'S STRATAGEM

BY HANNAH COWLEY

DIRECTED BY GAYE TAYLOR UPCHURCH

FEATURING

CECIL BALDWIN | JASMINE BATCHELOR | MARK BEDARD | NEAL BLEDSOE

LILLI COOPER | PETER JAY FERNANDEZ | SANTINO FONTANA | TONY JENKINS

LAUREN KARAMAN | AARON KROHN | HEATHER ALICIA SIMMS

CHAUNCY THOMAS

ORIGINAL SCRIPT ADAPTOR | DAVIS MCCALLUM

PRODUCING DIRECTOR | NATHAN WINKELSTEIN

ZOOM COORDINATOR | BETSY AYER

OBS COORDINATOR & SOUND DESIGNER | JESSICA FORNEAR

DRAMA LEAGUE DIRECTING FELLOW | EMMA ROSA WENT

PRODUCTION INTERN | SARAH PRESTON

READINGS ARE MADE POSSIBLE WITH THE SUPPORT OF

THE AXE-HOUGHTON FOUNDATION

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2021 | A LIVESTREAM PRESENTATION

A RECORDING OF THE LIVESTREAM WILL BE AVAILABLE UNTIL 7:00 PM EST ON
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26- THEN IT DISAPPEARS.

RED BULL THEATER WISHES TO EXPRESS ITS GRATITUDE TO THE PERFORMERS' UNIONS: ACTORS' EQUITY ASSOCIATION, AMERICAN GUILD OF MUSICAL ARTISTS, AMERICAN GUILD OF VARIETY ARTISTS, AND SAG-AFTRA THROUGH THEATRE AUTHORITY, INC. FOR THEIR COOPERATION IN PERMITTING THE ARTISTS TO APPEAR IN THIS PROGRAM.

RED BULL THEATER IS SUPPORTED, IN PART, BY PUBLIC FUNDS FROM THE NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY COUNCIL, AND THE NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS, WITH THE SUPPORT OF GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO AND THE NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATURE.

ADDITIONAL MAJOR FUNDING HAS BEEN GENEROUSLY PROVIDED BY THE ACHELIS AND BODMAN FOUNDATION, THE AXE-HOUGHTON FOUNDATION, THE AMERICAN THEATRE WING, ROBERT BOYETT, DAVID DESJARDINS AND NANCY BLACHMAN, THE JAMES AND JUDITH K. DIMON FOUNDATION, FUND FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK, THE HOWARD AND MARCIA OWENS CHARITABLE TRUST, HOWARD GILMAN FOUNDATION, THE MARTA HEFLIN FOUNDATION, THE KAM FOUNDATION, NOAH MILLMAN AND CAROLYN SCHIFF, EVANGELINE MORPHOS, THE NOËL COWARD FOUNDATION, THE OFF-BROADWAY ANGELS, THE PRINCESS GRACE FOUNDATION-USA, BETTY AND MICHAEL RAUCH, PETER N. RIGBY, THE SHUBERT FOUNDATION, THE MICHAEL TUCH FOUNDATION, AND STEVEN AND JOAN YOUNG.

RED BULL THEATER IS A PROUD MEMBER OF THE ALLIANCE OF RESIDENT THEATERS/NEW YORK, THE OFF-BROADWAY LEAGUE, AND THEATER COMMUNICATIONS GROUP.



**Council on
the Arts**



DONATE TODAY TO SUPPORT RED BULL THEATER AND INVEST IN THE VITALITY OF CLASSICAL THEATER FOR A CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCE. FOR NEARLY TWENTY YEARS, RED BULL THEATER HAS TRANSFORMED THE CLASSICAL THEATER EXPERIENCE WITH SPECTACULAR, HIGH-OCTANE PRODUCTIONS OF SHAKESPEARE AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES, RAUCOUS READINGS OF RARELY-PRODUCED PLAYS, AND VIVID REIMAGININGS OF ICONIC WORKS.

WE'RE DEDICATED TO REVITALIZING THE CLASSICS FOR TODAY'S AUDIENCES, AND WHILE WE TREASURE THESE CLASSICS, OUR APPROACH IS ANYTHING BUT PRECIOUS. YOUR SUPPORT IS.

WE'RE COMMITTED TO CONTINUING CONNECTION DURING THIS HISTORIC TIME.
YOUR SUPPORT WILL HELP MAKE THAT POSSIBLE.

REDBULLTHEATER.COM/makeagift

CAST

Letitia Hardy..... LILLI COOPER
DoricourtSANTINO FONTANA
Old Hardy.....PETER JAY FERNANDEZ
Sir George Touchwood CHAUNCY THOMAS
Lady Frances Touchwood JASMINE BATCHELOR
Saville TONY JENKINS
Mrs Racket..... HEATHER ALICIA SIMMS
Miss Ogle/Kitty Willis..... LAUREN KARAMAN
Villers NEAL BLEDSOE
Flutter.....AARON KROHN
Courtall MARK BEDARD
Silvertongue, etc.....CECIL BALDWIN

—THERE WILL BE ONE 10-MINUTE INTERMISSION—



THIS THURSDAY

FEBRUARY 25, 2021

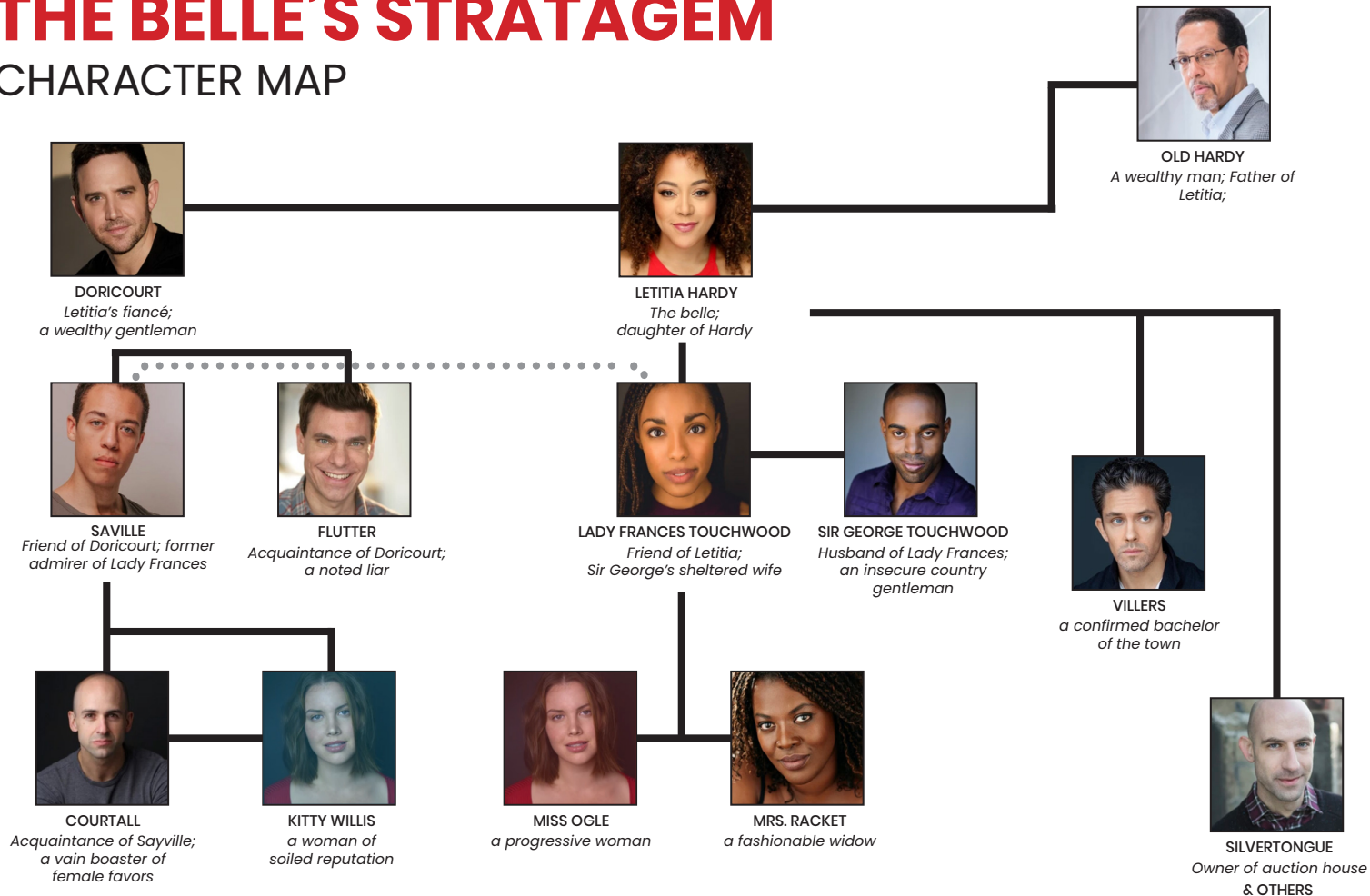
7:30 PM EST | LIVESTREAM

Join an interactive discussion with
director **GAYE TAYLOR UPCHURCH**,
scholar **DUSTIN D. STEWART**,
and some of the artists involved.

REGISTER at REDBULLTHEATER.COM

THE BELLE'S STRATAGEM

CHARACTER MAP



ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHTS

HANNAH COWLEY (1743–1809), playwright and poet, was born in Tiverton, a town in the southwest of England that owed its prosperity in the eighteenth century to the wool industry. Her father had become a bookseller after being denied a career in the church, and his local connections apparently helped his daughter attain a literary education.

After marrying Thomas Cowley (probably pronounced “Coo-lee”) in 1772, she made her way to London and anonymously sent a script titled *The Runaway* to David Garrick, the great actor and manager, who was impressed by it and decided to stage the play at Drury Lane. It opened on February 15, 1776, and proved a surprise hit. Later managers were less supportive than Garrick, and the next several years brought Cowley struggles and setbacks, including a public spat with fellow author Hannah More. *The Belle’s Stratagem*, which opened at Covent Garden in early February 1780, marked a breakthrough and was praised by audiences and performers alike.

Modern critics have noticed that Cowley drew on the precedents of earlier women playwrights such as Aphra Behn (1640–1689). Yet if Cowley admired London’s theatrical past, late in her career she grew leery of its present and future. Annoyed by comedies she saw as increasingly physical and boorish, and perhaps tired of defending herself from ongoing criticism, Cowley returned to her hometown in 1801. Newly widowed, she became active at St George’s Church in Tiverton, outside of which she was buried upon her death in 1809. Her plays, with their dazzling dialogue and delightful characters, remained popular on both sides of the Atlantic for a few more decades, but widespread concern about the respectability of women playwrights—the same obstacle that Behn had faced back in the seventeenth century—gradually caused Cowley’s works to fade from view in the mid-1800s.

ABOUT THE PLAY

The Belle’s Stratagem (1780) is a sparkling comedy about the interconnectedness of the country with the city and authenticity with artifice. The playwright’s life illustrates these themes of her art. Born in Tiverton in southwest England, Hannah Parkhouse grew up helping her father manage his bookstore and then married Thomas Cowley, another product of a small-town bookselling family. The couple moved to London and, enjoying the cultural scene, took in some plays. After watching a disappointing comedy the wife boasted to her husband that even she could do better, and he dared her to try. She dashed off a script and sent it to David Garrick, actor, producer, and patriarch of the London stage. He read it and championed it, and *The Runaway*, which debuted at Drury Lane in February 1776, became a smash hit. But Richard Sheridan, who took over that theater after Garrick’s retirement, was

envious of the newcomer's rapid success and bent on producing his own work rather than cultivating the talent of women writers. He put *The Runaway* on the shelf and kept undercutting Cowley for years afterward. Although she persisted, writing ten more plays over the next two decades, further controversy dogged her, including accusations of plagiarism and indecency. At every turn, she was reminded that it was painfully difficult for a woman to be recognized as both a serious dramatist and a respectable person. Eventually, Cowley gave up the struggle. She returned to Tiverton in 1801 and set about revising her complete writings and encouraging a new portrait of herself as pious and reserved. In leaving London she appeared to disavow both literary scandal and literary success; she "wore her laurels," one starchy obituary claimed after she died, "gracefully veiled."

Yet this strict separation between city and country—one imagined as a space for art and the other a space for morality, one fake and the other genuine—is just the sort of arrangement that *The Belle's Stratagem* rejects. In the play's subplot, it's because Lady Frances retains her homespun virtue that she needs to remain in town, shining as an example at court. In the main plot, the delightful masquerade scene allows Letitia to put off her traditional English modesty, which her suitor Doricourt has mistaken for blandness, and don a different mask. Her native femininity proves an act, a graceful veil but still a veil, and her true self appears in whatever performance she commits to next. She can, she exults, "be anything—and all!" City values and country values need one another, but both people and nations might become more authentically themselves by deciding to change roles. Given our own nation's ongoing clash between urban and rural sensibilities, now is a propitious time to bring Hannah Cowley back to the big city after her long retirement in the country. But maybe that's not the right way to put it. Perhaps she also took the London stage and its masks, truthful because playful, with her as she went back home.

– **DUSTIN D. STEWART** | Columbia University



RED BULL THEATER

JESSE BERGER | FOUNDER AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

JIM BREDESON | MANAGING DIRECTOR

Red Bull Theater brings rarely seen classic plays to dynamic new life for contemporary audiences. Our work unites a respect for tradition with a modern sensibility.

Red Bull Theater is named for the rowdy Jacobean playhouse that illegally performed plays in England during the years of Puritan rule, and was the first London theater to reopen after the Restoration. This bold spirit is central to our identity. With the Jacobean plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries as our cornerstone, Red Bull Theater is New York City's home for dynamic performances of great plays that stand the test of time. The company also produces new works that are in conversation with the classics.

Red Bull Theater delights and engages the intellect and imagination of audiences. A home for artists, scholars and students, we strive to make our work accessible, diverse, and welcoming to all theatergoers. Educational as well as entertaining, our work keeps a rich and vital tradition thriving.

Red Bull Theater believes in the power of great classic stories and plays of heightened language to deepen our understanding of the human condition. We believe in the special ability of live theater to create unique, collective experiences. And we believe in the timeless capacity of classical theater to illuminate the events of our times.

Founded in 2003 with a production of Shakespeare's *Pericles*, Red Bull Theater has been acclaimed by *The New York Times* as "a dynamic producer of classic plays" and by *Time Out New York* as "the most exciting classical theater in New York."

Red Bull Theater serves adventurous theatergoers with OFF-BROADWAY PRODUCTIONS, REVELATION READINGS, and the annual SHORT NEW PLAY FESTIVAL. The company also offers outreach programs including SHAKESPEARE IN SCHOOLS, bringing professional actors and teaching artists into public school classrooms, BULL SESSIONS, free post-play discussions with top scholars, and MASTER CLASSES in classical actor training led by veteran theater professionals.

In our 17-year history, Red Bull Theater has produced 21 Off-Broadway Productions and nearly 200 Revelation Readings of rarely seen classics, serving 5,000 artists and providing quality artistic programming to an audience of 65,000. The company's unique programming has received ongoing critical acclaim, and has been recognized with Lortel, Drama Desk, Drama League, Calloway, Off Broadway Alliance, and Obie nominations and Awards.

Visit REDBULLTHEATER.COM for more information.

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