



Top Girls Audition Pack

AUDITION PACK

Top Girls is a fascinating play about who wins when you put yourself first and who loses. Set in the early 1980s, the play features a fascinating fantasy dinner party with attendees from women from culture and history celebrating Marlene's achievements. In this scene, which is the whole of Act 1, Marlene is the only "real" character and we assume the party is fueled from her imagination. The rest of the play explores her life in the agency and her relationship with the world outside of work, one which seems to have been sacrificed, and it isn't only her sacrifice that has been made but one that the women around her have also had to make.

Set in the early years of Thatcher's Britain the play examines what it takes for a woman to succeed, asking whether the uncompromising strive for personal achievement is really to be held above a more socialist form of feminism which favours collective gain and celebrates women's instinct to care, and want the best for, those around them.

Performance Dates: Tuesday 2 – Saturday 6 May 2017

6 performances over 5 days at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff.

Performances every evening from 7.30pm and a matinee at 2.30pm on Saturday 6 May.

Rehearsals will continue from Monday 27th February onwards.

Rehearsal days: Monday and Thursday evenings, some Saturday afternoons and Sundays.

Additional rehearsal days may be called nearer production period.

THE PLAY

Top Girls is one of Caryl Churchill's most well-known plays. It premiered at the Royal Court Theatre in London on August 28, 1982, and won the Obie Award for Best Play of the Year. In its first run at the Royal Court, the cast included Gwen Taylor as Marlene; Deborah Findlay as Isabella Bird, Joyce, and Mrs. Kidd; Lindsay Duncan as Lady Nijo and Win; Carole Hayman as Dull Gret and Angie; Selina Cadell as Pope Joan and Louise; Lesley Manville as Patient Griselda, Nell, and Jeanine; and Lou Wakefield as the Waitress, Kit and Shona.

Cary Churchill wrote Top Girls as a response to Margaret Thatcher's early years in government in 1981, and serves as an illustration and commentary on the change of the societal values from a more inclusive social justice environment to one where if you worked hard enough, you could achieve anything. Thatcher of course served as Prime Minister in total from 1979-1990. A later revisit of the play which resulted in a film version on the BBC was staged by the same director and many of the same actresses. At this point, the full period of the Thatcher era was passed and there are interesting differences that the actresses picked up on, including reminding themselves how far women had come in 10 years. The actress who played Joyce both times, for example, had found magazine clippings of the time in 1982 when they had staged it and the difference in the advice women were being given in 1991.

The play is set in London during the early 1980s, and tells the story of Marlene, a successful entrepreneur. In the famous first scene, she hosts a surreal dinner party featuring notable proto- feminists from different moments in history. Their stories present common themes of women struggling against an oppressive patriarchy. They also seem to all have struggled in a very female sense; in their ability to have children and keep them, and the impact that motherhood has had on their lives.

Right before she wrote Top Girls, Churchill had visited America and met many women excited by the new opportunities available to them as a result of feminism. Churchill embraced this idea but was also sceptical of whether or not these opportunities would actually be a victory for feminism. In Top Girls, she criticises the extreme individualism and hyper professionalism that capitalist society valued. The play is particularly concerned with the tendency of 1980s feminism to equate liberation with financial and professional success, especially since this archetype often excluded working class women. Top Girls was a critical success from its opening run, and has been staged by many prominent theatre companies in London and New York over the past 35 years.

In the play, Marlene visits her sister who has also adopted the baby she had fifteen years before. She returns to visit Joyce in East Anglia. I will be staging the play as though she is returning to Cardiff. This presents interesting new angles; whether or not Joyce, Angie and Kit have Cardiff accents will be decided based on the actresses who audition, however I feel at the time these women would have been from working class backgrounds and therefore would have some South Wales affectation to their voices.

It also presents some new angles when it comes to thinking of the pressures the South Wales Valleys were experiencing during the late 1970s and early 1980s. In many ways the times in which we are living are very comparable to those of the early 1980s, and I will be encouraging the actresses who are successful to involve themselves in research of the period and trying to uncover how different their lives are today with their counterparts in 1981.

The play will be staged in a minimalist style to mirror the style of the age, and to help the quick changes between scenes. The characters have often been doubled up by the actresses in the other roles which is explained in the next page. This can lead to a cast of upwards of 7 actresses, although there are 16 parts in the play. I would not want to offer only small parts to actresses; however Churchill herself has said there is no real reason to the pairing, therefore if you are interested in a particular part then please do state this on your form.

THE CHARACTERS

Marlene (early 30s) The central protagonist of *Top Girls*, who has just been promoted to managing director at the employment agency where she works. Marlene's career ambitions have led her to abandon her family, including her daughter, Angie, who was instead raised by Marlene's sister, Joyce.

Isabella Bird (30s-40s) An English woman who lived from 1831-1904. She was an avid explorer and travelled all around the world between the ages of 40 and 70. She wrote extensively about her experiences abroad. Bird married late in life because of her professional aspirations, but her husband died short of their 5-year anniversary. She is one of Marlene's dinner guests in Act I. **This character is usually paired with Joyce.**

Lady Nijo (20s-30s) A concubine to the Emperor of Japan in the 13th Century, and later, a Buddhist nun. She had 4 children, all of whom were taken away from her. She is one of Marlene's dinner guests in Act I. **This character is usually paired with Win.**

Dull Gret (20s-30s) The subject of Brueghel's famous painting called Dull Gret, which depicts a woman in an apron and armour leading an army of women in battle against a horde of demons in Hell. She is one of Marlene's dinner guests in Act I. **This character is usually paired with Angie.**

Pope Joan (30s-40s) A legendary Englishwoman believed to have disguised herself as a man and served as the Pope from 854-856. Joan is brilliant and well-versed in philosophy, theology, metaphysics, and poetry. Her reign as Pope ended tragically - she revealed her gender when she gave birth during a public procession and was subsequently stoned to death. She is one of Marlene's dinner guests in Act I. **This character is usually paired with Louise.**

Patient Griselda (20s-40s) She is based on the character of the obedient wife in the "Clerk's Tale" from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In Chaucer's story, Griselda marries a Marquis who tests her fidelity by taking her children from her. She remains obedient, and the Marquis eventually rewards her by reuniting her with her children. She is one of Marlene's dinner guests in Act I. **This character is usually paired with Nell and Jeanine.**

The Waitress (20s-30s) This character doesn't speak in the first Act but serves food and is central to the scene's progress. **She is usually paired with Kit and Shona.**

Jeanine A twenty-year-old woman who Marlene interviews at Top Girls. Jeanine wants to save money for a wedding and eventually have children. Marlene takes this to mean that Jeanine lacks career ambitions and therefore, Marlene treats her as an inferior.

Joyce Angie's adoptive mother and Marlene's sister. Joyce and Marlene do not get along well. Joyce raised Angie because Marlene wanted to escape Ipswich and pursue a career. Joyce represents the perspective of the working class. However, she is not a particularly sympathetic character and is very resentful of her sister.

Angie Marlene's 16-year-old biological daughter who was adopted by Marlene's sister, Joyce. She is aggressive and unintelligent and spends most of her time with her younger neighbor, Kit. Angie makes an unexpected visit to London to see Marlene (whom she believes to be her aunt) because she aspires to be like her.

Kit Angie's younger next-door neighbor and closest friend. Kit is a bright girl with academic ambitions.

Win One of the female employees at Top Girls. She is focused on her career.

Nell One of the female employees at Top Girls. She is also career-driven and is jealous of Marlene's promotion.

Louise A forty-six year old woman interviewing at Top Girls. She wants a new job after twenty-one years at a firm that does not truly value her experience, but Win feels that her age will make it difficult to find her a new position.

Mrs. Kidd The wife of Howard Kidd, Marlene's co-worker. Mrs. Kidd visits Marlene at the Top Girls office to request Marlene to give up her promotion since Howard has worked at the firm longer and has a family to look after.

Shona A young girl who interviews with Nell. Nell is impressed with her until she discovers that Shona has falsified her background and actually has no experience at all.

As further illustration of how characters are usually paired, this is how the characters were paired in the original performance in 1982:

Marlene	Main character; actress playing Marlene plays only one role
Isabella Bird Joyce	} One actress, however certain performances have paired Mrs Kidd with the actress that plays Pope Joan/Louise. This decision will be made based on the actresses that audition.
Mrs Kidd	
Lady Nijo Win	} One actress. The actress could be Asian in looks, but is not necessary. Nijo was played by Lindsay Duncan in the original play who was tall and blonde. No effort at the time was made to disguise this. Similarly an accent may or may not be used.
Dull Gret Angie	} One actress. Dull Gret is a mainly physical character, but Angie is a pivotal young character.
Pope Joan Louise	} One actress. As above, these characters have sometimes been paired with Mrs Kidd too.
Patient Griselda Nell Jeanine	} One actress. Smaller parts, but together make up a sizeable part for an actress.
Waitress Kit Shona	} One actress. The Waitress is silent but important in the dinner scene. Kit and Shona are very different characters and present an interesting challenge for a younger actress.

THE AUDITIONS

Before auditioning, please take a moment to consider the necessary level of commitment.

Take careful note of the rehearsal period and be honest about your availability within it.

Although the rehearsal process takes place over a number of weeks, consistent and punctual attendance is essential, as we will be operating within a very tight schedule, and as there are only eight weeks between Romans in Britain and Top Girls starting we will be auditioning before Romans finishes and rehearsing as much as possible!

A high level of unavailability, persistent lateness and/or no-show will regrettably result in your being asked to leave the production.

- Auditions as group auditions in 45 minute slots. They will be held at **Chapter Arts Centre, Market Road, Canton, Cardiff** on:

Friday 24th February (7-10pm)

7-7.45pm

8-8.45pm

9-9.45pm

Saturday 25th February (11am-4pm)

11-11.45am

12-12.45pm

2-2.45pm

3-3.45pm

Any recalls will be held on Sunday 26th February.

There is a potential for auditions on Monday 20th February, but these will only be held if auditionees cannot make the above slots or if there is high demand.

- If you would like to audition but cannot attend on any of these days, please let us know as soon as possible. Please state which slot(s) you can make. As we need two or three auditionees in each slot, you may be asked to attend a particular slot. Please state if there are any you **cannot** attend.
- When booking an audition slot, please refer to the character breakdown.
- **Please read the section attached to this audition pack before booking your audition slot. The audition process will be a group based read through of sections of the play.**
- Please arrive 15mins before your audition slot and bring with you your completed audition form. **NB. Please attach a photograph.** Spare audition forms will be available on the day.
- Not being recalled does not necessarily mean you are not being considered for a role.

To reserve your place at the audition,
please email
emmaelizabethsands@gmail.com

We look forward to seeing you!

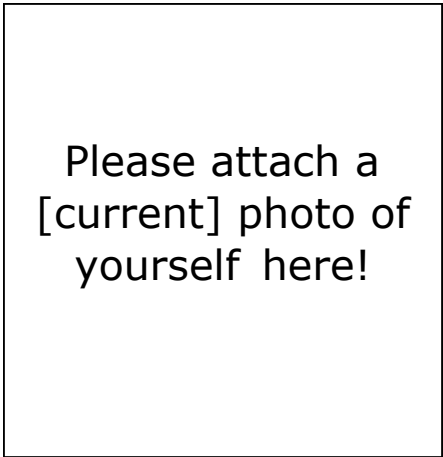
Everyman Theatre Cardiff Ltd.

Audition Form for

Top Girls [2017]

To book your audition time please contact
email emmaelizabethsands@gmail.com

**Please write clearly and don't forget to bring this form
with photograph to your audition!**



Name..... Date

of audition..... time.....

Address.....

Postcode..... email address.....

Tel.no [home]..... [work/mobile]

Date of birth if **under 16** on 2 May 2017

ANY SPECIAL SKILLS – eg, dancing, singing, juggling, combat, etc.....

Please state **any and all commitments** [family/work/holidays/other shows etc] that **may** conflict with the rehearsal period!

PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE [continue overleaf if necessary]

Is there a particular role in which you are interested?

If not cast in a principal role, would you be prepared to join the cast in an ensemble / non-speaking role – yes / no

Are you already a member of Everyman Theatre? yes / no

PLEASE NOTE – everyone cast must become an Everyman member.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

NOTES:

Not cast/recalled/cast as..... written acceptance rec'd **yes/no**