

MEDIA PACK
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'CREATIVES' AND CAST

Artistic Team

| | |
|-------------------|-----------------------------|
| Director | Martin Jady |
| Designer | Victoria Spearing |
| Costume Designer | Hannah Gibbs |
| Lighting Designer | Charlotte McClelland |
| Producer | Adrian McDougall |

Cast

| | |
|-----------|------------------------|
| Stressler | Jamie Hinde |
| Baer | Tim Daish |
| Solly | Chris Westgate |
| Beck | Spencer Cummins |



Press Release: 10 October 2011 - For immediate release

World Premiere of Auschwitz Play

Award-winning new play by ex-prisoner receives premiere at South Hill Park

Director **Martin Jady** - Designer **Victoria Spearing** - Lighting Designer **Charlotte McClelland** Costume Designer **Hannah Gibbs**

Cast: **Jamie Hinde, Tim Daish, Chris Westgate, Spencer Cummins**

Blackeyed Theatre Company, based at South Hill Park in Bracknell, will be presenting the world premiere of **The Beekeeper**, a new play by Michael Ashton, at (venue) on (dates).

Ashton, who learnt to become a playwright courtesy of the Synergy Theatre Project while serving time in prison, is enjoying growing success for his work, including his previous play, **The Archbishop and the AntiChrist**, which is to be adapted into a film directed by Roland Joffe (Director of **The Mission** and **The Killing Fields**) and starring Michael Caine, Sidney Poitier and Gary Oldman, to be premiered at Cannes in 2012.

The play explores the relationship between a German Kommandant and a Jewish prisoner at Auschwitz in 1944. Amidst the desperation and inhumanity of the Holocaust, an incredible power struggle develops between Kommandant Richard Baer and one of his prisoners, Manachem Stressler, a German Jew who survives by harvesting honey from the camp's bee hives for his captors. With Russian tanks advancing to liberate the camp, Baer's growing despair pushes both men to their limits as they seek redemption and a return to their humanity. Based on real life events, **The Beekeeper** is the incredible story of two men, the nature of power and the strength of the human spirit.



Ashton, who was a human rights lawyer and served in the army before being sent to prison in 2007, where his inspiration for **The Beekeeper** materialised, said "The Beekeeper is a special project for me, and I am very happy that Blackeyed Theatre and I have come together". He continues, "I deserved to go to prison, but my punishment wasn't imprisonment. It was being trapped and confined and losing everything I loved. Trapped, helpless, redemption, forgiveness, the search for what it means to be human, these are the themes which pepper my work."

The Beekeeper will be performed (Dates and times) at (Venue). Tickets at (Ticket price) can be booked by calling the box office on (Tel number) or online at (Website).

Blackeyed Theatre is a nationally-renowned producer of challenging mid-scale touring theatre. Audiences can find out more at www.blackeyedtheatre.co.uk .

The Beekeeper is supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England

Ends.

Press Night: (Date)

For further press information please contact:
(contact details)



BROCHURE COPY

Blackeyed Theatre, in association with South Hill Park presents

The World Premiere of:

The Beekeeper

By Michael Ashton

Winner of PULSE, Blackeyed Theatre's new writing initiative.

December 1944. Monowicze, one of the labour camps at Auschwitz. Amidst the desperation and inhumanity of the Holocaust, an incredible power struggle develops between Kommandant Richard Baer and one of his prisoners, Manachem Stressler, a German Jew who survives by harvesting honey from the camp's bee hives for his captors.

With Russian tanks advancing to liberate the camp, Baer's growing despair pushes both men to their limits as they seek redemption and a return to their humanity. Based on real life events, **The Beekeeper** is the incredible story of two men, the nature of power and the strength of the human spirit.

Running time: 100 minutes approx plus interval

Suitable for ages 14+

Contains some strong language

Supported by the National Lottery through Arts Council England





MICHAEL ASHTON

Before discovering his interest in writing after attending a playwriting course courtesy of Synergy Theatre Project, Michael was a human rights lawyer and served in the army before being sent to prison in 2007. Whilst at Hollesley Bay Prison, his inspiration for 'The Beekeeper' materialised when he used to work outside of the prison at a Mind drop in centre in Stowmarket.

In the last couple of years since leaving prison, Michael has been a guest speaker at the National, the Royal Festival Hall, Hampstead Theatre, and at Amnesty. His play 'Mirrors' was selected for last year's Lost Festival and both 'Peter Chamberlen's Case of Conscience' and 'For Queen and Country' won Koestler awards last September. Ashton has been commissioned by Kontreal, an American film company, to write an animated series highlighting ecological issues, and his previous play, 'The Archbishop and the Antichrist', is to be made into a film directed by Roland Joffe and starring Michael Caine, Sidney Poitier and Gary Oldman, to be premiered at Cannes in 2012.



THE WRITER AND THE PLAY

Michael describes the time he spent serving time in prison, when he was given the opportunity to learn about scriptwriting thanks to the Synergy Theatre Project. "There was a man who visited the centre every day, just having a coffee, playing a bit of chess with me and generally chatting. He was fascinated by bees and would talk about how bee society so closely mirrored human society; organization for specific purposes, hierarchical, acquisitiveness, greed, violence in defense of territory, hoarding, etc."

Ashton was asked by Paul Rhys to write something specifically for him to take into Danny Cohen at the BBC, but as it transpired Paul didn't want a story based on the Holocaust, so 'The Beekeeper' was temporarily put to one side. He continues, "I was keen to write something about the Holocaust which highlighted the fact that certain elements of the German psyche were as much trapped by the situation they found themselves in as were the inmates of the camps. It is the old analogy about being bitten by an angry dog - don't be surprised if the dog behaves like a dog. Richard Baer, the Kommandant, can be only as he is, and it is the same for Stressler. But I didn't want the story to be just yet another Holocaust horror story. Tedious. People are inured to violence these days and if you want to see death just watch the news or go on YouTube. No, it had to be a different angle. Hence 'The Beekeeper'."

Michael continues, "When I was sent to prison I was abandoned by everyone and I often used to ruminate on why I couldn't be forgiven. Am I so terrible? So wicked? It also helps that my first degree is in philosophy, so I have a strong leaning towards trying to decipher what goes on beneath the surface of the human psyche. Menachem Stressler is trapped in a situation that has become his life, his world, and in most respects, as a survivor, he is utterly selfish. He does not begin to focus on the fate of his loved ones until it seems that he may even survive the camp. Richard Baer is also trapped, by politics and ideology, and in the end only martyrdom is how he perceives freedom. I deserved to go to prison, but my punishment wasn't imprisonment. It was being trapped and confined and losing everything I loved (e.g. I haven't seen my little boy for years) and being utterly helpless to affect the course of events that were happening about me and to me when I was in prison for 18 months. Trapped, helpless, redemption, forgiveness, the search for what it means to be human, these are the themes which pepper my work."



BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

'The Beekeeper' is set at Monowitz, a concentration camp established in October 1942 to provide slave labour for Buna Works industrial complex, built by the IG Farben company. As it developed it held up to 12000 prisoners, mostly Jewish, but also political and non-Jewish prisoners. Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Weisel, and renowned writer Primo Levi were amongst the prisoners who survived, despite the average life expectancy of 3 months in the labour camp.

The camp was situated so the labour camp was close to the factory. The standards of the complex were improved to meet German worker standards, so the life expectancy for prisoner factory workers was much longer than the other camps in Auschwitz. However, due to the lack of food and poor living conditions, there was an increase in sickness as the demand for labour grew, and eventually the prisoners who failed to meet work requirements were executed.

On January 18, 1945, just as the arrival of the Soviet Red Army was impending, all prisoners in Monowitz who were deemed healthy enough to walk were evacuated from the camp and sent on a death march to the Gleiwitz, a subcamp near the Czech border. The remaining prisoners were liberated on January 27, 1945 by the Red Army along with others in the Auschwitz camp complex, among them the writer Primo Levi.

Ashton has based one of the main characters of his play on non-fictional figures of history. German Nazi Official, Richard Baer, who was assigned the role of 'Inspectorate of concentration camps', was the third and final commandant of Auschwitz. He played active parts in the killing of Soviet prisoners of war and the selection of prisoners sent for the T-4 Euthanasia programme, which was designed as part of the Nazi's policy of 'racial hygiene'.

Baer fled Auschwitz when the Russians approached, changed his name to Karl Egon Neumann and became a forestry worker near Hamburg. In October 1960, a warrant for his arrest was issued during the course of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials and the first Auschwitz trials in Poland, and he was recognised by a co-worker and confronted by officials in December 1960. On the advice of his lawyer he refused to testify and died of a heart attack during pre-trial detention in 1963.



CAST BIOGRAPHIES



JAMIE HINDE

Theatre includes *The Lion King* (Lyceum Theatre), *An Inspector Calls* (Garrick Theatre), *The Mousetrap* (St Martin's Theatre), *Sherlock Holmes The Musical* (Cambridge Theatre), *Darktales* (Arts Theatre), *The Madness of George III* (National Theatre), *Henry VI Part III*, *Edward II*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Richard II*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Wizard of Oz* (Royal Shakespeare Company) and *Twelfth Night* (Oxford Stage Company), *Alphabetical Order* and *Copenhagen* (New Victoria Theatre, Stoke).

Television includes *Dear Life*, *Casualty*, *Doctors*, *A Chapter of Revelations* and *Grange Hill*. Film includes *A Dance To The Music Of Time*, *The Windmill* and *The Feral Generation*. Radio includes *King Lear*.



TIM DAISH

Tim studied Italian and Politics at the University of Exeter, and later trained as an actor at Scuola di Teatro Colli, in Bologna, Italy.

Stage appearances include *The Winter's Tale* for Propeller, directed by Edward Hall, *A Man for All Seasons* for Bill Kenwright's UK Tour & West End at Theatre Royal Haymarket, directed by Michael Rudman, and in a more recent production for Theatre Royal, York directed by Paul Shelley; *The Taming of The Shrew* directed by Heather Davies for Creation Theatre, Oxford; *Unrelated* at Jermyn Street Theatre, written & directed by Dan Horrigan, *Poor Mrs Pepys* for the New Victoria Theatre directed by Heather Davies, *Privates on Parade* directed by David Harris at Jermyn Street Theatre, *Me and My Girl* at the Northcott Theatre directed by Laura Thomas.

On film he has appeared in *Robin Hood* directed by Ridley Scott, and music videos for Tribes, directed by Dan White & Mickey Voake and for *Jumping Ships* directed by Ryan Mackfall. As a director, he has worked with eg productions for new writing at Theatre503, and directed the music video *Magic Hour* for Franc Cinelli.

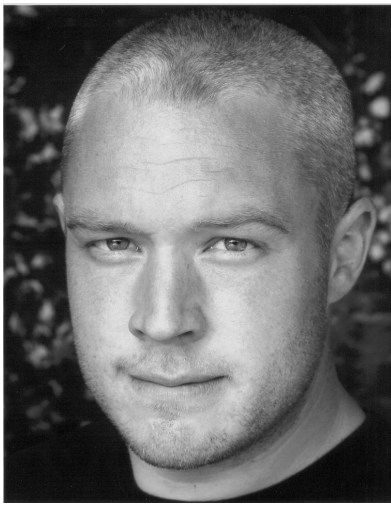


CHRIS WESTGATE



Chris has worked with several theatre companies in the UK and has performed at local and national festivals including both Windsor and Edinburgh Fringe Festivals. His passion for new work has afforded him the privilege of bringing many characters to life for the first time, most notably in 2009 when he was awarded the Sir Michael Caine award for Best Actor, for his portrayal of *Ryan* in Tony Earnshaw's (then) new play *The Door* – a production in which Chris will be appearing in New York in November and December of this year. As well as Chris' work with his own production company, Unfit Productions UK Ltd., he runs a company that perform murder mysteries, also fitting in work as a voiceover artist and taking roles in student and corporate films.

Chris' performances in new work include *Ryan (The Door)*; *Andrew (Falling Apart)*; *Kit Marlowe (Young Shakspeer)* and *Jake (Fit Piece)*. Other mainstream stage credits include *George (Of Mice and Men)*; *Andy (The Office Party)*; *Don Carlos (Don Carlos)*; *Stanley (A Streetcar Named Desire)*; *Leontes (The Winter's Tale)*; and *Hal (Proof)*.



SPENCER CUMMINS

Spencer graduated from GSA in 2005. Previous credits include *Eastenders* and *The Big Scream* (BBC), *Ma Kelly's Doorstep* (Attic Theatre), *The Magic Lamp* (Channel Theatre), *Romeo and Juliet* (RSC), *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* (Producing Partners - UK tour), *Lost Highway* (Young Vic with the English National Opera - UK premiere) and *Women Of Lockerbie* (Lynchpin Productions, Guildford). Spencer will shortly be seen in the feature film *Gambit* which stars Cameron Diaz and Colin Firth. He is looking forward to being onstage again in *The Beekeeper*.



CREATIVES BIOGRAPHIES

MARTIN JADY – Director

Martin is a graduate of Mountview Theatre Academy's post graduate directors course. His directing credits include; Cloud Nine by Caryl Churchill and Bloody Poetry by Howard Brenton at South Hill Park, The Marriage of Figaro by Beaumarchais and Journeys End by RC Sherriff with JD Productions, Disco Pigs by Enda Walsh and Speed the Plow by David Mammet, both directed whilst at Mountview.

Since leaving finishing Mountview he produced and directed Disco Pigs with his own company Pure Theatre, which toured and played at the Pleasance Theatre. It received four stars and was critics choice two weeks in a row in Time Out.

With Blackeyed Theatre he directed Art. He was assistant director for the Surprise Party tour, from the HI-5 television series, through the UK and Ireland.

VICTORIA SPEARING - Designer

Since graduating from Bretton Hall in 2001, Victoria has worked as a freelance theatre designer and maker. Theatre work includes The Queen and I, Buggy Malone, BFG, Whistle Down the Wind, When We Were Married, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Norfolk's Rose, The Caretaker, Around the World in 80 days, Alice in Wonderland, The Wizard of Oz, Blue Remembered Hills, Summer Holiday, House and Garden, The Adventures of Mr Toad, Henry V, Oliver! Fantastic Mr Fox, Brassed Off, Noughts and Crosses, The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe and Billy Elliot (all for South Hill Park Arts Centre), Mort the Musical and Loserville the Musical for Youth Music Theatre UK.

Touring work includes The Caretaker, Art, Misery, The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui, Oedipus, Oh What a Lovely War The Cherry Orchard, Alfie, and The Caucasian Chalk Circle (all for Blackeyed Theatre), See How They Run, Twelfth Night, Dancing at Lughnasa, Shakespeare's R&J, The Importance of Being Oscar, Mallard and Journey's End for Original Theatre, The Madness of George III for Wilde Enterprises and the Go! Go! Go! Show for Shows4kids.

She has also designed South Hill Park's hugely successful pantomimes, Dick Whittington, Sleeping Beauty, Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, Aladdin, Beauty and the Beast, and Peter Pan.

In addition she has designed and made props for use in educational productions in most of the major London museums.



CHARLOTTE MCCLELLAND - Lighting Designer

Trained at Central School of Speech and Drama on an Arts Council Bursary.

Recent lighting designs include:

Angels on High for Guildford International Music festival (vertical dance on Guildford Cathedral), *Carmen* and *The Marriage of Figaro* for Longborough Festival Opera, *Chicos del 21* and *The City Weeps* for Frances M Lynch/electric voice theatre.

Previous work for Blackeyed Theatre includes *Oedipus* and *Oh! What a Lovely War*.

HANNAH GIBBS - Costume Designer

Hannah trained in Costume Design and Construction at Queen Margaret University in Edinburgh.

West End credits: *Lend Me A Tenor* (Gielgud Theatre), *Sweet Charity* (Theatre Royal Haymarket)

Other theatre credits: *Stand Tall, Ragtime* (Landor Theatre), *Romeo and Juliet, Twelfth Night* (GB Theatre), *As You Like It* (Rose Theatre, Kingston), *Just So, Stuffed* (Tabard Theatre) *Gilbert is Dead* (Hoxton Hall) *Demi Monde, Richard III, Fool for Love, Romeo and Juliet, A Taste of Honey, Ajax* (Love and Madness), *Duet for One* (Milton Keynes Theatre), *The Time of Your Life* (The Finborough Theatre), *A Latesummer Night's Dream* (Mill Pond Media), *Crazy for You* (The Church Hill Theatre), *The Wind in the Willows* (Theatre Workshop), *Dick McWhittington* (The Brunton Theatre), *Troilus and Cressida* (The Kings Theatre, Edinburgh).

Film credits: *Libertatia, Daniel and Tess* (London Film School).

This is Hannah's first show with Blackeyed Theatre.



BLACKEYED THEATRE AND 'PULSE'

Blackeyed Theatre Company was established in 2004 to create exciting opportunities for artists and audiences alike, and to offer challenging, high quality theatre to the mid-scale touring circuit. The company specialises in reviving modern classics and staging established titles in innovative ways, using small ensembles of actor/musicians to create theatre that is audacious, fresh and far bigger than the sum of its parts. Since 2004 Blackeyed Theatre has embarked on national tours of *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (Bertolt Brecht), *Alfie* (Bill Naughton), *The Cherry Orchard* (Anton Chekhov), *Oh What a Lovely War* (Joan Littlewood), the world premiere of *Oedipus* (Steven Berkoff) and *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (Bertolt Brecht).

In 2009, Blackeyed Theatre became an associate company of South Hill Park Arts Centre in Bracknell. In 2008, the company produced its first Christmas show, *A Christmas Carol*, a year later *Peter Pan* and in 2010 *Beauty and the Beast*.

Blackeyed Theatre is largely self-sufficient and receives limited funding, *The Beekeeper* being its first production to be partially funded by the National Lottery through Arts Council England. It creates innovative, challenging theatre that's also commercially viable. It achieves this by producing work that audiences want to see but in ways that challenge their expectations, by bringing together artists with a genuine passion for the work they produce, and through an appreciation that works of art with a mass appeal do not have to be presented in a dumbed-down way. By offering a theatrical experience that's both artistically excellent and affordable, audiences and theatres are far more sustainable in the long term. And responding to demand ensures that more people see innovative theatre.

The Beekeeper is the first work to be produced through PULSE, Blackeyed Theatre's new writing initiative. The scheme provides emerging writers with feedback about their work and support for their future development. PULSE 2011 received over 80 submissions, narrowed to a short-list of ten plays. *The Beekeeper* was selected for its complex character formation, for its fresh approach to a well-documented subject and for the power of its dialogue.



PRESS ANGLES

- The Beekeeper was written in four days after Ashton served time in prison, so Ashton draws on his own experiences of isolation and redemption.
- The Beekeeper explores how entrapment has evolved since World War Two and its effects in society today.
- Ashton was a participant in the Synergy Theatre Project, which focuses on developing skills to rehabilitate ex-offenders.
- Ashton's previous play will be released as a film directed by Roland Joffe (The Mission) and starring Michael Caine, Sidney Poitier and Gary Oldman. It will be premiered at the Cannes Film Festival 2012.



CONTACT DETAILS

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