

PERFORMING
ARTS EVENTS
LENT TERM
2022

WHITGIFT



NOT ABOUT NIGHTINGALES

Wednesday 23 – Friday 25 March | 7pm | Performing Arts Centre

www.whitgift.co.uk/events



Please note that this production includes brief disturbing scenes, infrequent depictions of racism and occasional strong language. Suitable for audiences 14+.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I first read *Not About Nightingales* when I was in Sixth Form, just after it premiered at the National Theatre in 1998. I was absolutely thrilled by it! Here was what theatre should be, I thought. It was passionate, furious, and bold, seemingly more akin to the campaigning plays of Clifford Odets and Bertolt Brecht than the domestic and sensuous southern dramas with which Tennessee Williams made his name. When choosing a script for the first Sixth Form play in two years, I found myself looking for a piece which might provide the smaller cast with the opportunity to explore something powerful and take on characters who went through extreme experiences and who were confronted by impossible choices. I immediately thought of *Not About Nightingales*. Williams' inspiration for this play came from the news of the day, the fury that he felt when reading about prisoner abuse in distant Philadelphia. We are all very familiar, perhaps more so now than ever, with that feeling of hopeless anger that comes with reading about distant injustice. *Not About Nightingales* is an epic canvas, a love story, and a tale of unspeakable brutality. It is not as subtle or as multi-faceted as *The Glass*

Menagerie or *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but it is the brilliant early attempt of an enormously talented young playwright to reach for a suitable and moral response to truly horrific events. This generation of outstanding young performers find themselves with the same challenge. How do you communicate the human spirit of endurance in the face of cruelty and injustice? How do you communicate the spark that ignites resistance, and which nurtures hope for the future? How do you do all of this in a way which respects the suffering of those who have lived the experience?

I have enormously enjoyed working with such a fine company and crew, many of whom will be appearing on our stage for the final time in illustrious school careers. I know that they have approached the challenge with unbridled enthusiasm and dedication. Whether they have answered these important questions will, of course, be up to their audience. Enjoy the show!

JC Hammond
Director of Drama



THE WORLD OF NOT ABOUT NIGHTINGALES

Infamous 20th-century playwright, Tennessee Williams, sets his 5th play, *Not About Nightingales*, amid the vicious plume of economic cataclysm and social catastrophe that suffocated 1930s America following the Great Depression. His Tony-award winning production rigorously interrogates the malpractices of the prison-industrial complex, as well as exploring those who have been ostracized as a result of the financial crisis and subsequently reduced to outcasts of Depression America.

Williams wrote the three-act play in late 1938 as an early protest for prison reform after reading in a newspaper that inmates of a Holmesburg, Pennsylvania jail had been struck, tortured, and beaten by prison guards in August, earlier that very year. A *Newsweek* report from the 5th of September 1938, reads: 'inside the wall of a Philadelphia County's model prison at Holmesburg, PA, sits a small building resembling a cowshed equipped with a bank of steam radiators nearly sufficient to heat a skyscraper. Into this oven last week were crowded 25 rebellious prisoners, alleged ringleaders of a hunger strike...windows had been closed; water in the cell basins had been cut off and shrieks of torture filled the night'. Four men died. Consequently, the Philadelphia prison within Williams' play is intended to serve as a microcosm for the torturous oppression the American prison population experienced in the 1930s, while also illuminating to the audience the obscure, sinister goings-on behind prison walls in hope of provoking reform.

The prestigious playwright not only touches upon the negligence of the American prison system but also explores the outcasts of Depression America. At the height of the

Depression in 1933, 24.9% of America's total workforce, (12,830,000!), were left unemployed, and the annual wage income for those who were lucky enough to have kept their jobs fell 58%, between 1929 and 1933. Within this same time period, the GDP of the United States plummeted 30% and over two million became homeless. It was and still is the worst economic downturn in the history of the industrialised world. As a result, of this financial destitution, Williams aims to convey the deprivation and hopelessness many members of the working class are subjected to as they austere pursue jobs in unfavourable sectors of employment such as Eva, who begs Warden Whalen for a job

as his secretary within a prison. Despite the Warden stating that "a business executive is not interested in your personal misfortunes", she is given the job and thus engulfed in a hellish melting point of brutal living

conditions and cruel oppression.

Although the play was written in 1938, the Group Theatre rejected Williams' submission. It was not until the late 1990s when English actress, Vanessa Redgrave, was performing another of Williams' classics, *Orpheus Descending*, that she unearthed the horrors of *Not About Nightingales* and subsequently made it her mission to find and produce the play. Alongside the director, Trevor Nunn, it made its Broadway debut in 1999 and was nominated for six Tony awards – all of which it won. As we approach the 85th anniversary of Williams' masterpiece, it is important to remember the real atrocities the play is based upon and its significance in highlighting the drastic need for US prison reforms within the early 20th century.

Sonny Hill
Lower Sixth Form

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industrialised world.

CAST

<i>Canary Jim</i>	Damola Amusa
<i>Eva Crane</i>	Sasha Willoughby
<i>Boss Whalen</i>	Harry Hutchinson
<i>Butch O'Fallon</i>	Jack Godwin
<i>Joe</i>	Fraser Murray
<i>Ollie</i>	Nifemi Bankole
<i>The Queen</i>	Bakari Leon
<i>Mrs. Bristol</i>	Elsa Clements
<i>Chaplain</i>	Fletcher Elliott
<i>Reverend Hooter</i>	Jude Keeper
<i>Swiftly</i>	Teddy Homes Summers
<i>Schultz</i>	Gorrav Bains
<i>Sailor Jack</i>	Thomas McMurray
<i>Goldie</i>	Bethany Elliott
<i>McBurney</i>	Ethan Hamilton
<i>Shapiro</i>	Joe Reynolds
<i>Mex</i>	Luke Ward
<i>Krause</i>	Daniel Lindsay
<i>Alberts</i>	Alex Braglewicz
<i>Chick</i>	Daniel Lindsay
<i>The Voice of Lorelei</i>	Henry Gillard
<i>Convicts, Guards & Troopers</i>	Alex Braglewicz
	Kunal Gupta
	Matthew Lee
	Ben Lewis
	Daniel Lindsay
	Oscar Robinson
	Milo Weaver
	Conrad Wojcik

CREATIVE TEAM

<i>Director</i>	JC Hammond
<i>Producer</i>	ICS Jacob
<i>Lighting Designer</i>	DP Jenkinson
<i>Sound Designer</i>	HD Parritt
<i>Stage Managers</i>	AJ Hill & ICS Jacob
<i>Make Up Artist</i>	EO Spedding
<i>Technical Consultant</i>	PJ Crook

A LITERARY LOOK AT TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

Thomas Lanier Williams III was born in Columbus, Mississippi in 1911 to an alcoholic father and religiously devout mother, with a case of diphtheria almost killing the young Williams before his potential materialised; his childhood was hardly uniform. As the 39th anniversary of Tennessee Williams' death has recently passed, it's important that we reflect on his upbringing and writing style which helped shape the play before you. *Not About Nightingales* is the first play where he is accredited as the playwright which indicates a sense of pride and how important its core messages are to him. His love for writing started at a young age, because of his family's move to St. Louis, Missouri when he was a young boy, which he characterised as a way to utilise his reserved nature for good. Since his father was the main breadwinner of the family, he was often neglected by his father since he often chose to prioritise work, which translated into Williams' work subliminally.

Williams not only felt left out in St. Louis as a boy, but his homosexuality drove him further into isolation due to societal attitudes at the time, since homosexuality only – relatively recently – became legal in all U.S. states by 2003. He had attempted to have relationships with women, however, by the late 1930s, he began to explore his suppressed sexuality. We can compare his experiences to creating a prison in his mind towards this secret, therefore reflecting the background of *Not About Nightingales*. Williams experienced a series of heartbreaks, culminating in his partner of 14 years, Frank Merlo, passing away in 1963. This descended him into a deep depression that consumed him in the years after. As he grew older, ostracization dominated his life with only his sister Rose and partner Robert Carroll staying close to him and later receiving a bequest in his will.

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His writing was best crafted during his time at the University of Missouri (Columbia) and Washington University (St. Louis). Despite the devastating impact of the Great Depression, Williams kept writing while he was employed in a St. Louis shoe factory. The Depression can be seen as an inspiration for Williams and contributes to the Gothic style which dominates his writing. The Southern Gothic Style is one adopted by writers of the American South, who include grotesque and macabre incidents as core plot points in their novels.

Southern Gothic was common in the late 19th Century and was also utilised by authors such as Truman Capote and William Faulkner. Not only does the Southern Gothic style highlight the injustices and abhorrent actions of the time, but it also allows Williams to air

his personal demons and difficulties. Therefore, *Not About Nightingales* exudes a sense of reflection. For instance, one of Eva's most impactful lines, when being questioned about a pair of shoes she had from Jim, is: "I picked them up somewhere. I can't remember". This highlights key components of the Gothic style such as deeply flawed storytelling and themes of alienation and violence.

He established his pen name Tennessee Williams in 1939, utilising his father's home state as inspiration. From this point onwards, Williams commences a career that has aided the development of the Gothic style and helped spotlight issues present in *Not About Nightingales*, such as mistreatment and the broken prison system. This adaptation of name epitomises the impact of Williams' life on his literature since he has always had to adapt because of external events or attitudes. Whether it's reflections of his mother and sister in his writings or providing a voice for those affected in devastating times, Williams' writings have a clear human influence which transcends issues and people.

Although *Not about Nightingales* wasn't performed or published until the late 1990s, Williams saw some early recognition from small theatre groups, who produced some of his work. This led him to study dramatic writing at the University of Iowa, transferring from Washington University in 1937 where he earned a B.A. in 1938. His writings often referenced poets and writers, which he admired when he was younger, such as Ernest Hemingway, William Shakespeare, and Emily Dickinson. This wide range of inspiration epitomises how complex and thorough his writings were, accompanied by the weight of topics explored in plays such as *Not About Nightingales*.

Williams passed away in February 1983, at the age of 71; however, his legacy was continued through his plays and their messages. Despite his various accolades such as two Pulitzer Prizes and Tony Award only by 1957, his impact can be immeasurable due to his thoughtful representation of contentious topics and how his personal situation influenced his literature.

Thomas Kiely
Lower Sixth Form



THANK YOU...

Mounting a theatrical production in such a busy school requires the help and goodwill of a great number of people. We would like to thank: the Headmaster and the Governors for their support; subject teachers for their patience and good faith in helping the performers to balance their studies with rehearsals; Lesley Goucher and Jane Williams for helping us to source the many props and costumes; Samantha Vary for sending letters and organising the calendar; the marketing team for advertising the show and Graham Maudsley for designing the poster and programme; the catering team for providing dinners during show week and for organising interval refreshments; Christine Pennicott for managing the box office; the cleaning staff for cleaning up after long rehearsals; thank you to Old Palace School and WAVPA for their support with this production and, finally, the parents of the cast for supporting their children to attend rehearsals, learn lines and commit to what has been a quick and intense process.

NOT ABOUT NIGHTINGALES



WHITGIFT

Forthcoming Events

Wednesday 22 – Saturday 25 June

Billy Elliot The Musical

Music by Elton John,

Book and Lyrics by Lee Hall

7pm, Big School

(booking via WisePay)

Monday 4 and Tuesday 5 July

The Physicists

by Friedrich Dürrenmatt

7pm, Big School

(booking via WisePay)

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Whitgift School

Haling Park

South Croydon

London

CR2 6YT

United Kingdom

www.whitgift.co.uk