Playhouse Creatures

May 13th to 16th 2026

Bob Hope Theatre

Directed by Jennifer Sims

The year is 1669 – a bawdy and troublesome time. The theatres have just re-opened after 17 years of suppression under the Puritans, encouraging a great upsurge in dramatic writing. Of vital importance to the development of drama was the entrance of the first English actresses upon the English stage.

April De Angelis has taken five famous figures – Nell Gwyn, Elizabeth Farley, Rebecca Marshall, Doll Common and Mary Betterton – and given us a fascinating look at the precarious lot of actresses at the time. A moving and often comic account of the true lives of Restoration actresses, with some earthy language!

Our production will use live music to bring a contemporary edge. I’m looking for a committed ensemble of actors who enjoy bold storytelling, strong character work and working together as a company. You will need to be able to sing as part of the ensemble.

This is an opportunity to explore some fantastic roles for women – with a mix of comedy, pathos and high drama – and to celebrate the original ‘playhouse creatures.’

**Some press reviews**

“*With deliciously absurd extracts from the heroic repertory and frantic dressing-room scenes, the prevailing tone is comic but you are not allowed to forget the gutter waiting to reclaim these glittering figures.” Independent on Sunday*

*“…flesh and blood heroines…you’ll come away moved and inspired and with a few more female*

*role models stamped firmly on your heart.” Time Out*

**Audition Information**

Sunday 28th September 2025 at 2pm

Venue: Bob Hope Theatre, Eltham

Auditions are open to anyone. Please let the director know that you intend to audition by emailing jennifersims123@gmail.com

Please prepare:
- One monologue from this pack.

**Characters**

## Nell Gwynn

late teens/20s

Young, spirited, ambitious and witty. Someone with the ability to light up the stage

## Mrs Betterton

50s/60s

Grande dame of the theatre. Older, dignified, grappling with fading fame. The matriarch of the group.

## Mrs Marshall

30s/40s

Sharp-tongued, worldly and fiercely independent. Uses humour to protect herself.

## Mrs Farley

20s/30s

A street preacher’s daughter turned actress, very clever. She goes on a journey from cunning and confident to a tragic figure

## Doll Common

‘Old’ any age from 65 upwards

The world-weary backstage matriarch. Practical, earthy and full of heart

**Audition pieces**

Please choose one of the following:

DOLL

Before this place turned playhouse it was a bear pit. They hated to dance for a whip. My dad was the bear keeper. One day this bear turned on him. The whip came down and down on her and still she came. She slashed his chest, here to here. That night they took out her claws and teeth. Ripped em out, and she howled and screamed and rocked in pain. It woke me and I ran in. There was blood on the floor. “No, dad, no,” I says. And he said “You let one of them get away with it and tomorrow none of them bears’ll dance.” The bear had gone still and her head was hanging and I said “Why should you whip her?” He took my hand and put it in the blood that was on the floor and then he wiped more on my face. “She dances and we eat meat.” He said. “ Never let me hear you speak on it again.” The blood was warm at first and then it started turning cold on me and it seemed turn me cold. I never did say nothing again.

Playhouse creatures they called you, like you was animals.

NELL GWYN

I could not do it. You lot buggered off and left me.

Everything swayed as if it was wind in a forest and people were hissing and

that was like the sound of the wind. And I felt like a small thing that the wind was carrying, carrying somewhere, away, far away… Then a thought came into my head like a shout. It said do something and fucking hurry up about it. So I danced a little jig which I made up on the spot out of my head and slowly all the whistling, hissing, stopped, and then someone started to clap, and then they all clapped. Laughed and clapped. I felt like I had fire inside me or whiskey.

MRS BETTERTON

After that we did it on a regular basis. My fool to his Lear, his Falstaff to my

Hal. And then, of course, the day came when everything hanged and for the

first time we women were permitted by Royal decree to act upon a stage. A

great stir it caused. And I was one of the first ever and when I spoke, a great

hush descended on the house, and it was as if the men and women gathered

there were watching a miracle, like water turning to wine or a sick man coming to health.

It was then I knew I had done a terrible thing and that nothing would ever be

the same for me again. I had tasted a forbidden fruit and its poisons had sunk

deep into my soul. You see, Iago is like a whip that drives the life around him, when Hal makes a choice the whole world holds its breath. I never forgot that feeling. The poison’s still in my blood. Like a longing. I looked for that poison everywhere and couldn’t find it. Not in the Desdemonas or Ophelias. Only in her, the dark woman.

MRS FARLEY

I laughed and laughed and laughed. I couldn’t stop laughing. He drank down a whole flask, and the rest of them beat the tables with their fists, and the noise was deafening, and then this woman came in, and you should have seen the state of her: she had a black eye, and her hair was matted, and she had bare feet, and they got her to sing in front of the King; only, she couldn’t sing a note, and I laughed so much I cried; I don’t know where they got her; off the streets – I think – and I never went home last night – I stayed away all night. What did you do?

MRS MARSHALL

*As Charmian from Antony and Cleopatra, then to an audience member*

In this vile world? Now fare thee well.

Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies

A lass unparallel’d. Downy windows, close,

And golden Phoebus never be beheld

Of eyes again so royal! Your crown’s awry,

I’ll mend it, and then play. (*She applies an asp)*

O, come apace, despatch, I partly feel thee.

It is well done, and fitting for a princess

Descended of so many royal kings. (*she dies*)

Did you hear that?

I’m going to say something.

Bastard! Poxy prick!

You are no gentleman!

Is there no one her who will run him through?

I’ve a fair mind to see his guts!

## In addition to the monologues above, please learn the following short piece for the character you have chosen

## Nell Gwynn

Before the stage I sold oranges… knew how to catch the men’s eye. Sometimes an orange, sometimes a coin, sometimes a kiss… but I thought, why stand outside when I could be inside – on the stage? Take the applause instead of the scraps.

## Mrs Betterton

I was once Cleopatra, Desdemona, Juliet! Now they tell me I am too old by candlelight. 'You’ve had your day.' But who are they to tell me my day is over? The stage is my blood – and they’d cast me off.

## Mrs Marshall

Only two ways for a woman on the stage: be clever or be pretty. You’re both, so use it. Smile, flatter, let them think they own you – but never give them your heart, else you’re finished.

## Mrs Farley

Ruined. A babe in my belly and no man to claim it. Who will want to see me on stage now? I thought he loved me… but for men, love is a game. For us, it’s a sentence.

## Doll Common

I mend their costumes, clean their mess. Girls come and go – bright as fire, gone as quick. The theatre eats you alive. But me? I’m still here, holding the fort while they chase glory.