**Programme Notes: The Woman in Black**

Author Susan Hill’s acclaimed ghost story comes dramatically alive in his ingenious stage adaptation by Stephen Mallatratt. This gripping production, directed by Robin Herford, is a brilliantly successful study in atmosphere, illusion and horror.

**Characters and Costumes:**

There are two actors in the production and they play almost all of the roles.

David Acton plays the acting tutor. He’s all tall, upright man of about 30 years old, with neat sandy hair. When he first comes on stage he is wearing a white shirt with the sleeves rolled up and a waistcoat opened loose over it. He wears neat, dark grey slacks and shiny black shoes. He later takes off the waistcoat and reveals a pair of braces holding his trousers up.

Matthew Spencer plays Mr Kipps, the man whose story this is. He is an older man, tall, thin, with a receding hairline. When he first comes on stage he is wearing a black trilby with a wide brim and a heavy black overcoat that reaches all the way down to his calves. The coat is buttoned up and all we can see under it is a white shirt collar and dark tie and the bottoms of grey trousers and shiny black shoes. Later, when he takes his coat off, he is wearing a formal suit with a dark waistcoat and matching jacket with the gold chain of a pocket watch visible underneath. Through the rest of the play his clothes only change with different hats, coats and props.

In the show, the acting tutor assumes the role of Mr Kipps. Throughout the ‘play within the play’ he is the Kipps character, and so in the audio description when we say ‘Kipps’ what we are talking about is really the acting tutor who is playing Kipps. And the real Mr Kipps plays all the other characters, so we call him by their names or we call him ‘the actor’. This is the way Stephen Mallatrat wrote the script, and as he says it sounds crazy but it will all make sense in the show and you’ll know who’s who because they sound quite different.

KIPPS: When the acting tutor starts to play Kipps for the first time his waistcoat is buttoned up, he has a tie in a neat Windsor knot and a dark suit jacket with a white hankerchief in his pocket. He wears a dark Trilby hat and carries an umbrella and a leather briefcase. He looks very much a young professional, and wears these same basics throughout the play.

For the train journey to Crythin Gifford the Kipps character wears a black great coat and hat, and carries a large battered looking travelling case. When crossing to Eel Marsh House Kipps is in his suit with a big woolen scarf wrapped round his neck. Later at Eel Marsh House when Kipps returns with the dog he dresses in a more casual grey jacket and carries a rucksack across his shoulder.

The ACTOR: As Mr Samuel Daily the actor wears a long, brown coat and a brown bowler hat and carries a cane. Later in his study Daily wears the standard black suit of the actor.

As the landlord he has a long bar-tenders apron wrapped round his waist and tied in a knot at the front. As Mr Jerome, the agent, the Actor wears a black knee length coat with a pair of black framed glasses and a top hat when he is at the funeral. As Keckwick the Actor wears a long, grey oversize coat and a flat cap with a long scarf wrapped round his neck.

A dog named Spider is mimed.

The only other character is The Woman in Black herself. (I can’t describe her outfit yet as I can’t see it in the DVD provided. We’ll read out updated notes before the shop on Saturday 11th, or why not come along to the touch tour at the Opera House that morning).

**Set:**

The action takes place in an old Victoria theatre. It is sparsely furnished with props that are used in various ways and moved around the stage as the play requires.

On the right is the wing of the old theatre where the actors will stand either narrating the story, or acting parts of it. There is a light coloured wooden door with two arched panels in the upper section, and a single arched panel below them, its handle is on the right. This door is used as the exit from the old theatre, the door of a solicitor’s office, a living room, and a bedroom door in Eel Marsh House.

 At the back of the stage is a grey gauze curtain, tattered at the hem, onto which light is projected portraying the lighted carriages of a passing train, the arched windows of a church, and the façade of Eel Marsh House with its bay windows.

Behind the gauze sometimes are the outline shapes of old grave stones of differing highs and sizes, some leaning over. Later behind the gauze there is a child’s bedroom, furnished with a red velvet rocking chair with a studded back and seat. Other items in the room are a decorative cupboard with two glass fronted doors on top filled with toys such as stuffed animals and toy soldiers, there is children’s clothing in the drawers beneath. A bed made is up with sheets, pillows and blankets. There is a music box on a small bedside cabinet.

The capital T-shaped stage consists of rough pine boards, with the long leg of the T stretching centrally into the audience, which will act as a causeway across water and marsh. Both sides of the causeway slope gently downwards towards us and are covered in a black cloth, later suggesting a graveside.

To the left is a prop cupboard for the old theatre containing outdoor clothing, a walking cane, umbrella, a torch, and articles left over from a former production.

A large wicker trunk or basket with a lid is utilized at various times as a solicitor’s desk, a seat on a train, a table in a hotel lounge with a decanter, a pony trap, chest containing bundles of yellowing documents, and a bed with the addition of a pillow and a blue checked blanket.

Also on stage is a brown leather chair with arms, a high pine stool with four legs, and a bentwood chair in dark wood.

The lighting is mainly subdued and changes to suggest different times of the day, it also signals the end of those parts of story where the actors practise parts of the script. During the first act it cleverly casts shadows of trees on the stage floor to give the illusion of a leafy cemetery beside a church. At times wisps of mists are blown onto the stage known as “frets”.

**Audio Description:**

Your audio Describers are Florence Stewart for Act One and Amy Stewart for Act Two for NI Sightlines. Enjoy the show!