

# 10 ~ 14 October 2023

Stoke Repertory Theatre Leek Road | Stoke-on-Trent | ST4 2TR



elcome to our theatre —
here is some information
that may be of interest to
you...

The Stoke Repertory Theatre is supported and run by volunteers who regularly donate their valuable time — and without whom we could not deliver the standard of production and customer service our patrons have come to rightfully expect.

Some of these people you will meet on your visit today, others fulfil less visible, but no less vital, roles behind the scenes.

We are deeply indebted to our exceptional backstage crews, wonderful Front of House helpers, bar and coffee staff and to all wonderful members and friends who help run the theatre.

The bar is open from 6·45pm until shortly after the end of the performance. Drinking up time is 20 minutes.

Coffee, tea and confectionery are available from the coffee bar from 6.45pm.

Interval refreshments may be ordered before the performance to avoid queuing later.

The car park is open from 6·30pm until 11pm on performance evenings. Overspill parking is available in Staffordshire University's car park further along Leek Road — this is free Monday to Friday and £1 Saturday matinée and evening. Neither The Repertory Theatre nor the University can accept any responsibility for damage to, or loss of, vehicles from their car parks.

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The true story of Florence Foster Jenkins, the worst singer in the world.

by PETER QUILTER

# The Players

In order of appearance

**Florence Foster Jenkins** Rosemary Gresty

**Dorothy** *Justine Cope* 

Maria Nicci Jae Chirnside

Mrs Verrinder-Gedge Beverley Richardson

Cosmé McMoon James King St Clair Craig Wood

Our action takes place in New York in 1944.

Please refrain from smoking or vaping in any part of the theatre. Please ensure your phones are turned off. Thank you.

This amateur production of 'Glorious!: The True Story of Florence Foster Jenkins, the Worst Singer in the World' is presented by arrangement with Concord Theatricals Ltd. on behalf of Samuel French Ltd. www.concordtheatricals.co.uk

# A Word From The Director

genuinely cannot remember when I first heard the two epic CDs, ironically titled 'The Glory (????) Of The Human Voice' and 'Murder On The High Cs' but I have known of the so called 'Diva of Din' for many years now. I'm sure I spent much of that time listening to those classic recordings, laughing like a drain as you no doubt will during this production.

However, when you are given the privilege of telling a story sub-titled 'The True Story of the Worst Singer in the World...' you have an onus to ask those questions that allow you to get beyond the laughter to the truth. Particularly when you are depicting the lives of real people.

The play you are about to watch, or have just watched, tells the fascinating story of Florence Foster Jenkins, a Pennsylvania born socialite whose life was, in the words of Lady Bracknell, "crowded with incident," and whose story went far beyond the 'appalling' concerts for which she is remembered.

Luckily since Peter Quilter wrote Glorious! for the UK stage, much has been discovered and written about 'Madam' as she preferred to be called. Moreover, her popularity took another boost in the form of the movie Florence Foster Jenkins starring Meryl Streep.

During my research for this production, I wanted, more and more, to 'be kind'; to tell the truth of an ebullient and resilient lady who having survived personal and familial problems, still strove to be a benefactress to others and spread her 'joy' of music to all.

I think it pertinent to point out that, as a child, Florence performed piano recitals and

even played at The White House. Therefore, she was, I believe, born with a musical ear. In 1883, nearing the age of 15, our heroine married Dr Francis Thornton Jenkins. However, little more than a year later, they separated, Dr Jenkins sadly leaving Florence with not only his name but also syphillis, the symptoms of which she suffered up until her death in 1944. The recognised treatment for the disease then was mercury, with inherent side effects both for the brain and, more pertinently, the hearing.

For all the cruel laughter and comments directed at Florence over the years, decrying her as a joke and a fraud, I fully believe that she was blissfully unaware of how her voice sounded to others, still thinking that she sang as tunefully as she played the piano. Her raison d'etre was to spread joy through music and in many respects, she succeeded in that. For the most part she was genuinely loved by many and ultimately by me.

I would only ask, as you undoubtedly laugh at her operatic efforts this evening, that you also remember her kindly as a lady of indomitable spirit and courage. As she said herself, "Many people say I couldn't sing... but no one could ever say I didn't sing...!"

In creating this epic production, I am indebted to many. To the incredible stage and technical teams at The Rep whose knowledge and expertise has been pushed to the limits with this project. The unsung crews for props, costumes, wigs and make-up, dressing, prompting, press, marketing, photography, Front of House and any job however small which has added to the smooth running of the play. To those, more

talented than I musically, who have helped with rehearsals and the accompaniment required to stage a play with such a predominance of music.

To a fantastic cast who have been with me for the last eight weeks finding, creating and developing this story with such commitment and passion that it has been a pleasure to rehearse with them and to watch them bring my ideas to life, nightly.

For you, our audiences who take the time and trouble to come out and support live

theatre. I am forever grateful.

Finally, to my partner in direction, designer and one woman support network, Dawn, I can only say thank you for everything. Most of what you see this evening would not have happened without her input, dedication and good humour.

I hope each and every one of you have a *Glorious!* time.

Geoff Legan

# The Director ~ Geoff Legan

eoff began his career as a Director for The Rep with two classic female-led productions, Alan Bennett's *Talking Heads Monologue*, *A Lady Of Letters* and Ivan Menchell's *The Cemetery Club*.

These two beautifully contrasting plays confirmed his love for directing works which encompass the best of comedy and pathos, in one production. Many of the plays he has directed since have followed this path. For The Rep these have included: further Alan Bennett's such as *The Lady In The Van* and most of the *Talking Heads Monologues* in various productions.

Further contrasting productions have ranged from heavyweight plays such as Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man* and Brian Clemens *Holmes & The Ripper*, to lighter offerings of musical plays like: Sue Townsend's *The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole, Aged 13*<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>

and Richard Harris' Stepping Out.

He was also honoured to direct the final ever production for the award-winning drama group Studio One as they mounted a classic from that other great theatrical Alan, playwright Alan Ayckbourn, namely his fabulous pastiche of the machinations of amateur theatre *A Chorus Of Disapproval*.

As an actor, favourite roles at The Rep have included: twins attempting to murder each other, a wayward low rent gangster, a disillusioned preacher, a Spanish dinner guest, a disbarred doctor, a wronged son searching for answers, a closeted gay man living with; and caring for; his mother and one of two Alan Bennetts.

No prizes for knowing the titles of all those plays but I'm sure if you stop him in the bar after the play, he will let you know if you guessed correctly...



# Credits

Director Geoff Legan Dawn Birks **Assistant Director Stage Director** Terry Wright Stage Manager Ray Vernon

**Set Construction** Tony Rogerson, Andy Baddeley, Terry

> Wright, Ray Vernon, Stuart Campbell, Bob Flower, Alan Hulme, Simon Bland, Members & Friends of Rep Players

Dawn Birks **Set & Creative Design Lighting Design** Stuart Campbell Ianet Clarke **Lighting Operation** Sound Design Tina Campbell

**Sound Operation** Alison Moran & Tina Campbell

**Projection Design** Iavne Blake

**Props** Chris Birks, Emma Kirk & Rep Members

Set Décor Dawn Birks & Team

**Set Dressing** Margo Bloor

**Specialist Props** Tony Rogerson & Ray Vernon

Wigs & Make Up John Cumberlidge

Lichfield Costume Hire & Rep Players Costumes

Wardrobe Co-Ordinators Sylvia Wright & Ann Haycock Front of House Manager Nick Bailey

**Company Photographer** Peter Croft Social Media Iohn Stone **Programme** Iavne Blake

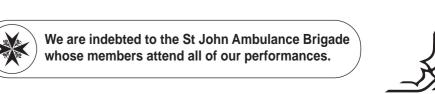
**Specialist Costumes** 

### Thanks also to:

North Staffs Operatic Society.

Andrew Goulding for Radio Announcements. *Lorraine Hunter and Tim Sagar for Musical Assistance.* Lux DeLioux for loan of Feather Fan.





Iane Cronin & Ann Havcock

# The Players' Biographies

Our darling Players give us a little peep into their theatrical history, and in keeping with *Glorious!* they share with us the worst singer or show they have personally witnessed. And to balance this... their best.

Rosemary Gresty

My first play with The Rep was back in 1978 when I played Kitty in the charming Victorian farce *Charley's Aunt*. I was delighted when a photograph of me in this role was selected to be on the front cover of the next season's playbill. At this time, The Rep staged summer shows so despite being at Bristol University, I was able to play Dulcie in *The Boyfriend* in my summer break. My duet 'It's Never Too Late' involved Richard Masters as Lord Brockhurst trying to copy my dance moves although he was supposed to give up when I showed off with a cartwheel. On the last performance, Richard decided to surprise me by managing a cartwheel much to the audience's delight. I couldn't let him get away with that so I responded by going into splits which he didn't even attempt to copy!

Since then I have been fortunate enough to tackle a range of roles with local societies including Blanche in *Streetcar Named Desire*, Lottie in *Mack & Mabel*, Sally Bowles in *Cabaret* and Lady Windermere in *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Playing Florence Foster Jenkins has been an exciting challenge. It is an experience that I have found absolutely... *Glorious!* 



### Justine Cope

I am delighted to be in *Glorious!* particularly as it is an opportunity to share the stage with a four-legged friend (Ricky the dog). Although this is only my second performance with The Players after appearing in *Calendar Girls* last season, I have performed locally in both plays and musicals over the past thirty years.

I am particularly passionate about supporting young performers to develop, teaching drama and musical theatre within the Trinity College Framework and writing and directing youth productions and plays. Like my character Dorothy, I am very creative and enjoy crafting and painting, otherwise you'll find me at home behind the microphone on Blue Sky Radio's *Happy Hour* each weekday evening.

The worst concert I have ever attended was without a doubt a certain Australian 80's soap star/popstar who was performing at a throwback event and appeared to have had too much 'lemonade' before the performance and obviously didn't want to be there, thus heavily relied on his backing vocalist. The best was the Robbie Williams residency at the Wynn in Las Vegas — but I'm sure seeing Florence would have topped that one!









### Nicci Iae Chirnside

I have been a member of The Rep for several years as well as the Assistant Director of The Young Rep Acting School for the past five years. I am also a professional children's entertainer and can often be found performing magic and Punch & Judy. I am currently training at Manchester School of Acting and performing as a member of Scarlet Theatre. I am delighted to be back this season after performing in *Calendar Girls* last year.

Worst concert — I once got thrown out of my own concert! The venue didn't realise I was only 15 and just as I was about to go on stage they told me I had to be 18 to perform. I got a bit cross because I'd travelled to Manchester and I got removed by security!

Best concert — I've been really lucky to have seen most of my favourite bands over the years but one that will stick with me forever would have to be Paul McCartney at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff.



## Beverley Richardson

I have been a member of The Rep for over twenty years and have appeared in several plays. When not on stage you may see me in the foyer, manning a door or serving you tea and coffee.

The singing you hear in this play may strike your ears as not quite what you are accustomed to... I once had the misfortune to have my ears assailed by a group of men who 'sang' by issuing forth oral clicks! Clever, possibly. Entertaining? Definitely not! My husband and I stood it as long as we could and then sneaked out, along with many more in the audience.

One of the best shows I have been to, and I'm going back many years, to the wonderful, and much missed, Jollees — was Neil Sedaka, a consummate and inspiring performer.









### James King

I have been a member of The Rep Players for almost 11 years and currently serve as Chair of the Production Committee here at the theatre. Since my first play (*Holmes & The Ripper* in 2013), I've acted in some 20 plays and Directed or Assistant Directed on a couple of occasions as well. A few of my favourite roles for The Rep Players include Jack Lane in *The Herbal Bed* (2013), Neville Smallwood in *Silhouette* (2016), Jeremy Warrender in *Spider's Web* (2022) and most recently, Nick in *The Last Of The Haussmans* (2023). I am delighted to be playing the role of Cosmé McMoon in this production of *Glorious!* 

My worst ever show — probably some of the more questionable performances I've seen offered up as evening hotel entertainment while abroad on holiday.

Best ever concert — I'd say a gig I went to earlier this year to see Ava Max at the Apollo in Manchester. I'm a big fan of her music and she didn't disappoint!



## Craig Wood

My stage career started at high school at the age of 16 but only really took off when I joined The Moorlands Youth Theatre. From there, I joined the North Staffs Operatic Society and it was here that I made many appearances over the next 10 years or so. I joined The Rep for their last production at Beresford Street in *Journey's End.* Since then, I have appeared in numerous productions making my directorial debut on *Don't Dress For Dinner*.

The 'worst' production I attended was *Jesus Christ Superstar* at the O2 arena. Not because of the performances but because the show started over an hour late and then had to be stopped for around 45 minutes when Judas (Tim Minchin) got stranded on top of the cross during the Superstar number after the mechanism failed. It kind of took the edge of the show.

The best show I attended was last summer when I went to watch my eldest son (Joseph) make his West End debut alongside Samantha Barks in *Chess* at Drury Lane. An unforgettable moment that I wouldn't have missed for the world.

It's been a real pleasure working with this talented bunch both on and off stage bringing this show to life. Enjoy a *Glorious* performance.





# Assistant Director & Designer ~ Dawn Birks

ince her Rep acting debut nearly 30 years ago, Dawn has enjoyed creative and social opportunities on stage, backstage, in the workshop and Front of House — and is still excited to share her passion for theatre with anyone who will listen!

As a Rep actor, Dawn has tackled a wide range of roles in comedy and drama. Wives, girlfriends, aunties, neighbours, social worker, tango-ing socialite, lesbian farmer, Victorian author, murderer's wife, bereaved lover, Cornish housekeeper, tap dancer with hay fever, Princess, washerwoman, singing rabbit and squirrel... she's played them all!

Off stage, Dawn's flair for stage design has been allowed to flourish at The Rep. Notable designs have included a child's artwork building block set for *The Secret Diary Of Adrian Mole, Aged 13*<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>, a rickety, crazy-angled construction for 'Mrs Lopsided' in *The Ladykillers*, a 1960s spit-and-sawdust pub, condemned cell and café for *Hangmen* and last season's crumbling Art Deco revolving house for *The Last Of The Haussmans*.

Moreover, Dawn has lost count of the number of times she's painted floor-boards, tiles and block-paving on that stage! With the design for tonight's production of *Glorious!* Dawn has challenged the sound and lighting creatives to push

the boundaries beyond the usual and has thoroughly enjoyed the teamwork involved in bringing Peter Quilter's little gem to the stage.

Dawn made her directorial debut two seasons ago with Martin McDonagh's *Hangmen* and was delighted to be in the Director's seat again last April to bring you Stephen Beresford's *The Last Of The Haussmans*. She was ably assisted by Geoff Legan on that occasion and has been more than happy to return the favour as his Assistant Director for this production of *Glorious!* 



We are always on the lookout for people to join us at The Rep. Actors are welcome — but there is a warm welcome for backstage crew and helpers, any assistance is always appreciated but we are particularly desperate for help with props and costumes.

No experience required, we'll show you the ropes, and teach you the deep and dark secrets of the trade. If you are interested please contact any member of the theatre or email administrator@stokerepplayers.co.uk for further information.

# The Playwright ~ Peter Quilter



eter Quilter was born in Colchester, England and is an honours graduate of Leeds University. He began his writing career from his home in Greenwich, London where he lived for 14 years before emigrating to the Spanish Canary Islands.

Quilter started his career as a television presenter. He was a presenter of the Children's BBC programme *Playdays* and also appeared as an actor on a number of TV series including *London's Burning*.

His first play was an all-female comedy *Respecting Your Piers* and he followed this with *The Canterville Ghost* a musical adaptation of Oscar Wilde's play, Ron Moody starred in the UK touring show.

In 1999, Quilter made his West End debut with a comedy about the pop industry, *BoyBand*. The show played a summer season at the Gielgud Theatre and later enjoyed success in various countries.

Glorious! was a major hit for Quilter opening in 2005, at Birmingham Repertory Theatre and transferring in November 2005 to the Duchess Theatre in the West End. The production starred the much loved comedy actress Maureen Lipman, was directed by Alan Strachan and produced by impresario Michael Codron.

It was nominated for the Laurence Olivier Award as Best New Comedy. *Glorious!* made its North American debut at Theatre Calgary and had its first foreign language production at the Helsinki City Theatre, under the title *Suurenmoista!* 

Glorious! has since played in over 30 countries to an estimated audience of two million people. In 2008 Quilter created a three-actor version which premièred at the Fulton Opera House, Philadelphia and also played to great success in Rio de Janeiro and Madrid. One of the most popular productions has been in Poland ('Boska') starring the legendary Krystyna Janda.

Also in 2005, Quilter had an international hit with End Of The Rainbow, a musical drama about the final months in the life of Judy Garland. It premièred at the Sydney Opera House in Australia (winning Caroline O'Connor two Best Actress awards), it continued with an award-winning run at the 2006 Edinburgh Festival.

Quilter's Plays: End Of The Rainbow | Glorious! | Once In A Blue Moon | Duets (or Face To Face) | Step By Step | 4000 Days | Snowbound | Autumn | Boyband | The Hill | The Morning After | Just The Ticket | Without A Song | Curtain Up! | The Actress | Saving Jason | Bestseller | Heart To Heart | Celebrity | The Nightingales | Let It Snow | Stardust | The Canterville Ghost | The Morning After | Open Your Eyes | Marilyn & Me

# Florence Foster Jenkins

arcissa Florence Foster was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania on 19 July, 1868 to a wealthy landowning family. As was customary in those days for young girls of her station she was given mucic lessons. She played piano from the age of seven under the name 'Little Miss Foster' — even giving a recital at the White House during the administration of Rutherford B. Hayes; this ignited her life-long interest in public performance.

She attended the *Moravian Seminary For Young Ladies* in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania where she further developed her interest in music. Although not encouraged by her parents, she spent a great deal of money on instruction and sheet music. She did not graduate from the Bethlehem Female Seminary, but after graduating from high school, her hopes of studying music in Europe were dashed when her father refused permission and funding.

In July 1883, eight days before her fifteenth birthday, Florence married Dr Francis Thornton Jenkins, a physician 16 years her senior. (In 1880, the age of consent for marriage in Pennsylvania was ten). He gave her syphilis (which impacted her health long-term) and they split up — leaving her nearly destitute.

PEOPLE MAY
SAY I CAN'T
SING, BUT NO
ONE CAN EVER
SAY I DIDN'T
SING

After an arm injury ended her aspirations as a pianist, and cut-off by her father, Jenkins gave piano lessons in Philadelphia to support herself; around 1900 she moved to New York City with her mother. In 1909 Jenkins met St. Clair Bayfield — a 33-year-old British actor; the two moved in together and began a romantic and business relationship that would continue until Jenkins' death.

Upon her father's death later that year, Jenkins became the beneficiary of a sizable trust, and resolved to resume her musical career as a singer with Bayfield as her manager.

Jenkins began studying voice and immersed herself in wealthy New York City society, joining dozens of social clubs. As the 'Chairman Of Music' for many of these organizations, she began producing lavish tableaux vivants (or 'living pictures'), popular entertainment in upper-crust social circles of that era. In each of these productions, Jenkins would cast herself as the main character in the final tableau, wearing an elaborate costume of her own design.

Jenkins began giving private vocal recitals in 1912 when she was 44 years old. In 1917, she became founder and President Soprano Hostess of her own social organization — The Verdi Club — where membership quickly grew to over 400.

When Jenkins' mother died in 1930, additional financial resources became available for the expansion and promotion of her singing career. Although a proficient piano player, and despite all the vocal lessons, her singing didn't quite hit the mark... according to published reviews she is described as having great difficulty with such basic vocal skills as pitch, rhythm and sustaining notes and phrases.

In recordings, her accompanist Cosmé McMoon can be heard adjusting his playing to compensate for her constant tempo variations and rhythmic mistakes, but he could not hide her inaccurate intonation. She



was consistently flat, sometimes considerably so. Her diction was similarly substandard, particularly with foreign-language lyrics. Jenkins chose to perform difficult operatic arias which were well beyond her technical ability and vocal range.

There are many accounts of how bad she actually was, but nonetheless, she had a regular audience of some notable people including Cole Porter. Her loyal friends endeavoured to disguise laughter from her audiences with cheers and applause.

Jenkins was clearly aware of her detractors and refused to open her performances to the general public — she one said to a friend, "People may say I can't sing, but no one can ever say I didn't sing."

The question of whether Jenkins honestly believed she had vocal talent or was 'in on the joke' remains a matter of debate. She compared herself favourably with renowned sopranos Frieda Hempel and Luisa Tetrazzini and seemed oblivious to the abundant audience laughter during her performances.

She did go to great lengths to control access to her private recitals, which took place at her apartment, in small clubs, and each October at the Verdi Club's annual 'Ball of the Silver Skylarks' in the Ritz-Carlton

Hotel's Grand Ballroom. Attendance, by personal invitation only, was restricted to her loyal clubwomen and a select few others. Jenkins handled distribution of the coveted tickets herself, carefully excluding strangers, particularly music critics.

In 1944, at the age of 76, Jenkins finally yielded to public demand and booked Carnegie Hall for a general-admission performance. Tickets for the event sold out weeks in advance. Since ticket distribution was out of Jenkins' control for the first time, mockers, scoffers, and critics could no longer be kept at bay. The following morning's newspapers were filled with scathing, sarcastic reviews that according to Bayfield devastated Jenkins.

That concert was her last public appearance. Five days after the concert, Jenkins suffered a heart attack while shopping and sadly died a month later on November 26, 1944, at her Manhattan residence, the Hotel Seymour.

Some maintain that it was the terrible reviews that weighed heavy on her — but her friends knew that she died with a 'happy heart'. Jenkins wanted to sing for others, her mission was fulfilled.





# How's Your Opera Knowledge?

Answers on the following page.

- 1. What is often regarded as the first ever opera?
  - A. L'Orfeo ~ Monteverdi
  - B Dafne ~ Peri
  - C. Euridice ~ Caccini
- 2. How many operas did Ludwig van Beethoven compose?
  - A. 7
  - B. 4
  - C. 1
- 3. What was the first opera written in English?
  - A. The Siege Of Rhodes
  - B. Lovers Made Men
  - C. Venus & Adonis
- 4. Schweigt Stille, Plaudert Nicht or Be Still, Stop Chattering is a comic opera by Johann Sebastian Bach about the addiction to what?
  - A. Coffee
  - B. Smoking
  - C. Love
- 5. Which opera was written by Richard Wagner when he crossed the sea to London from Riga?
  - A. The Flying Dutchman
  - B. The Ring Of The Nibelung
  - C. The Mastersingers Of Nuremberg
- 6. Which of the following opera struggled with censorship issues in Austria?
  - A. Lohengrin
  - B. Le Nozze Di Figaro
  - C. Rigoletto
- 7. Which operetta composed by Johann Strauss II is sometimes called *The Revenge Of The Bat?* 
  - A. Die Fledermaus
  - B. The Valkyrie
  - C. Prince Igor
- 8. Also known as La Stupenda, which opera singer was called the 'Voice of the Century' by Luciano Pavarotti?
  - A. Renee Fleming
  - B. Joan Sutherland
  - C. Maria Callas

- 9. The term 'opera' is originated from the Latin word 'opus'. What does it mean?
  - A. Music
  - B. Work
  - C. Art
- 10. Here Comes The Bride is from which 1850 opera?
  - A. Lohengrin
  - B. Die Hochzeit
  - C. Das Liebesverbot
- 11. Which of the following plays by Shakespeare has not been used for an opera libretto?
  - A. Hamlet
  - B. Titus Andronicus
  - C. Romeo & Juliet
- 12. Mario Cavaradossi is the protagonist in which opera?
  - A. La Traviata
  - B. Tosca
  - C. Turandot
- 13. Which Irish playwright created the original version of *Salome*?
  - A. Samuel Beckett
  - B. James Joyce
  - C. Oscar Wilde
- 14. Opera was first developed during which music period?
  - A. Baroque
  - B. Renaissance
  - C. Romantic
- 15. What is the real name of Madama Butterfly?
  - A. Cio-Cio-San
  - B. Geraldine Farrar
  - C. Louise Homer
- 16. What is the common fate of Manrico in Verdi's *Il Trovatore* and Jokanaan in Richard Strauss' *Salome*?
  - A. They commit suicide by poison
  - B. They are beheaded
  - C. They are killed in battle





















**Coming Next...** 



# By Falkland L. Cary A Christmas Comedy 5 Dec ~ 9 Dec 2023



**ARTHUR MILLER'S** 

ALL MY SONS

16 ~ 20 April 2024

BY BOB LARBEY

11 ~ 15 June 2024