

# PROSCENIUM

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924. The company's first production was the now little-known *The Tide* by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945. In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

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**PROSCENIUM**

**The Madness of George III**

**By Alan Bennett**

**24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2001  
Compass Theatre, Ickenham**

**The Madness of George III**



## The Royal Family

King George III	.....	David Pearson
Queen Charlotte, his wife	.....	Susi Thornton
Prince of Wales	} his sons	.....Charles Anthony
Duke of York		.....Paul Davis

## The Royal Household

Lady Pembroke, lady in waiting	.....	Janet Harrison
Fitzroy	} equerries	.....Jake Dodd
Greville		.....Rob Hurcum
Papandiek	} pages	.....James Dempster
Braun		.....Julian Wood
Maid	.....	Jeanne Hawkes

## The Government

William Pitt, the Prime Minister	.....	Mark Sutherland
Lord Thurlow, the Lord Chancellor	.....	Duncan Sykes
Henry Dundas	.....	David Watkins

## The Opposition

Charles James Fox	.....	Rod Moor-Bardell
Richard Brinsley Sheridan	.....	Keith Zealey

## The Doctors

Sir George Baker	.....	Michael Gerrard
Dr Richard Warren	.....	Sam Thornton
Sir Lucas Pepys	.....	Jim MacDonald
Dr Francis Willis	.....	Colin Hickman

Margaret Nicholson.....Jeanne Hawkes

Footman .....Lloyd Davis

Directed by.....Crystal Anthony

.....Colin Hickman

Stage Manager .....Anne Gerrard

Assisted by .....Pauline Patterson

.....June Watkins

Lighting designed by.....Neil Baker

Lighting operated by.....Philip McCusker

.....Michael Kilroy

Sound tape.....Barney Daley

Costumes.....Evelyn Moutrie

.....Jan Morley

.....Theatre Costumes, Shoreham

Wigs .....Studio on Second Avenue

The action takes place in 1788-89 and variously at Windsor, Westminster, Carlton House, Kew and St Pauls.

## George III

### Character and Interests

George III has had a rather bad press. He was often portrayed by 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century historians as a clumsy, boorish, unpopular figure even before his illness, but, in fact, he was well-educated, cultured, with a wide variety of interests. He was extremely well-read: after meeting him in the library Dr Johnson said: *Sir, they may talk of the king as they will, but he is the finest gentleman I have ever seen: his manners are those of as fine a gentleman as we may suppose Lewis the Fourteenth or Charles the Second.*

He was a patron of the newly founded Royal Academy, attended monthly concerts of contemporary music and had a fine collection of medals, clocks and maps. Mrs Siddons said: *The King was a most judicious and tasteful critick both in acting and Dramatick composition, (though this may owe something to the fact that the king found her acting superior to Garrick's).* His interests extended to botany, agriculture, architecture, astronomy, manufacturing ...

He was a very conscientious ruler, reading most carefully all papers submitted to him and writing comments in his own hand. He felt very deeply the loss of the American colonies and wrote: *I cannot conclude without mentioning how sensible I feel the dismemberment of America and that I should be miserable indeed if I did not feel that no blame on that account can be laid at my door.* (History takes a somewhat different view). He had an excellent memory for faces and personal details: the Duchess of Devonshire declared: *he had a wonderful way of knowing what was going forward.*

### The Court

His court was extremely conventional, formal and rigid in its protocol. Audiences were very tiring: both the king and everyone in his presence remained standing - William Pitt the Younger was once kept standing for almost four hours. Fanny Burney, at one time Lady-in-waiting to Queen Charlotte: *All attendants and even guests were obliged to retire to the nearest wall and stand quite still as soon as any member of the Royal Family appeared in sight... You must not sneeze; if your nose membranes feel a great irritation you must hold your breath; if a sneeze still insists on making its way, you must oppose it by keeping your teeth grinding together.* And she also, on a more human note, describes: *The King's unnerving manner of conducting a conversation, his habit of walking restlessly about the room to ask a question of one person, followed by a "What? What?" in a tone of voice at once good-natured and hectoring, and then hurrying away to repeat the answer to someone else.*

### His Children

He was a loving and indulgent father when his children were very young:

he was deeply distressed at the death of four year old Octavius: *Heaven will be no heaven to me if Octavius is not there.* As his sons grew older he became more severe. The Prince of Wales, in particular, showed early signs of excessive fondness for food and clothes and the king decreed that at the first signs of laziness, laxness and untruthfulness he must be beaten: his sisters were distressed to see their eldest brothers being held by their tutors and thrashed with a long whip. The king was also given to lengthy homilies: *You are now launching into a scene of Life, where You may either prove an Honour or a Disgrace to Your Family ...I strongly recommend the habitual reading of the Holy Scriptures.*

## Popularity

*When he became ill the king attracted sympathy: the cynical manoeuvres of the politicians evoked repugnance. His homely virtues, his probity, his dedication, his uxoriousness contrasted with the notorious vices of the Prince of Wales.*

Adam Sisman

## Madness

Two hundred years ago, our forebears, doctors and lay people alike, would have found little difficulty in identifying a madman. Some victims were overactive, violent, frenzied, dangerous; others were withdrawn, depressed, suicidal even. But there was no agreement as to what caused this terrible affliction that reduced humans to the level of beasts or helpless infants. Most Georgian physicians opted for a physical explanation. Like other diseases, insanity was the result of some defect of the body. Trendy medics blamed the guts, or, more fashionably still, the nervous system: George III used to insist he was "nervous". But alternative views were in the air. The great British philosopher, John Locke, suggested a mental cause. Madness was deluded imagination. In the end, however, what caused madness seemed to matter less than how it should be treated. London's Bethlem Hospital medicated with bloodlettings, vomits and harsh purges. There was method in this. Cold showers, straightjackets or restraining chairs, like the ones Willis used on George, were intended to pacify patients, make them more tractable, and so amenable to reason.

Nevertheless, humane spirits increasingly repudiated mechanical methods. "Moral management" involved psychological close encounters between the physician and his charge, a battle of wits in which the doctor sought to master madness with a repertoire of persuasion, awe, will power and cunning. Such was the heroic approach favoured by the charismatic Willis, whose forte was an intimidating technique of fixing patients with "the eye".

Like other progressive mad-doctors of the day Willis had faith in occupational therapy and the value of kindness, reason and a civilised atmosphere. But, as his treatment of the king amply shows, he also



King George III



Prince Of Wales



William Pitt



Charles James Fox

believed threats, fear and force were sometimes indispensable weapons in the doctor's armoury.

Roy Porter

## Contemporary Records

From the diary of Sir George Baker:

I was received by His Majesty in a very unusual manner, of which I had not the least expectation. The look of his eyes, the tone of his voice, every gesture and his whole deportment represented a person in a most furious passion of anger. One medicine had been too powerful, another had only teased him without effect. The importation of senna ought to be prohibited and he would give orders that in future it should never be given to the royal family. With a frequent repetition of this and similar language, he detained me three hours. His pulse was much quickened, but I did not number the strokes. Having no opportunity of speaking to the Queen, I wrote a note to Mr Pitt immediately on my return to town, and informed him that I had just left the King in an agitation of spirits nearly bordering on delirium.

From the diary of Dr Francis Willis:

The Waistcoat was taken off at nine - and blisters dressed - discharged well - very sore - Pulse 96 - perspired through the night profusely - but little sleep.

From the diary of Robert Greville:

The physicians appear to shrink from responsibility & to this time they have not Established their authority tho' pressed by Every Attendant. Our situation as Attendants on His Majestys Person, struggling under the Severest Affliction, is a most anxious and a most responsible one. All of us are most desirous to do our best for the good and comfort of our Dear King, but We must be plainly and properly directed in our course.

From the diary of Fanny Burney:

He was given calomel and camphor, digitalis, quinine, and, as an emetic, tartorized antimony, which made him so sick that he knelt on his chair fervently praying that he might either be restored to health or be allowed to die.

## The Politics

### The Constitution

In the English Constitution it was the King who governed the country. He did so with the aid of Ministers whom he generally consulted individually in his Closet, treating them rather as Heads of Department, and

discussing with each Minister only his own subject.

The King had a right to demand his Cabinet's advice on any subject, though it was doubtful if he was obliged to do so. By 1782 Ministers were claiming the right to give advice unasked and George III, while never conceding the principle, did always take his Ministers' advice except on semi-domestic matters such as the Prince of Wales's allowance.

Though it may seem from this that the King was merely the instrument of his Ministers, his strength lay in the fact that he made the Ministers. So long as he did not make an outrageous choice, he was universally admitted to be constitutionally able to choose anyone he wished.

The King not merely made the Ministers, but subjected them to constant nagging supervision. Walter Bagehot declared: *Throughout the greater part of his life George III was a kind of consecrated obstruction*, and Fox was even more forthright: *It is intolerable that it should be in the power of one block-head to do so much mischief.*

All this did mean that the illness and possible incapacity of the king would institute a constitutional crisis.

## The Politicians

William Pitt, 1759-1806, was the younger son of the Earl of Chatham and was called to the bar in 1780, became an MP in 1781 and Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1782. With the fall of the Fox-North Coalition in the following year, Pitt became Prime Minister of a minority government, but gained a substantial majority in the 1784 election and held office until 1801. He was, in both opinions and character, clearly the King's choice for office, being an honest, conscientious, if somewhat cold and distant, man of unexceptionable private life.

Charles James Fox, 1749-1806, was elected MP for Midhurst shortly after his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. His tempestuous spirit rapidly turned him into a critic of the administration, and in 1774 he joined the Rockingham Whigs in opposing the Government's policy on America. The failure of Fox's India Bill in 1783 marked the start of more than 20 years opposition to Pitt. Described by Christopher Hibbert as: *Paunchy, untidy and clumsy but of extraordinary charm and self-confidence: a hard drinker and gambler who was almost constantly in debt for the whole of his life.* His views and his character were clearly unacceptable to George III.



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## 2001/2002 Season

### The Madness of George III by Alan Bennett

24th - 27th October 2001, 7.45 pm

Compass Theatre, Glebe Avenue, Ickenham

### The Birthday Party by Harold Pinter

16th - 19th January 2002, 7.45pm

Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre, Hatch End

### Tales from Ovid by Ted Hughes

Adapted by Tim Supple & Simon Reade

13th - 16th March 2002, 7.45 pm

Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre, Hatch End

### Bald Primma Donna by Eugene Ionesco & The Real Inspector Hound by Tom Stoppard

29th May - 1st June 2002, 7.45 pm

Travellers Studio, Harrow Arts Centre, Hatch End

### Proscenium Box Office : 020 8422 0400

Compass Theatre : £7.50, concessions £6.50

Travellers Studio : £6.50, concessions £5.50

(Concessions are only available on Wednesday)