**MAMMA MIA!**

Theatre Royal Plymouth

Saturday 29th January 2022 @ 7.30pm

Good evening ladies and gentlemen and welcome to the Theatre Royal Plymouth for this much anticipated return of **Mamma Mia!** - A musical based around the songs of the 1970’s pop group, ABBA. The music and lyrics are by Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus, with some songs by Stig Anderson. The book is by Catherine Johnson, and the production directed by Phyllida Lloyd.

Mamma Mia is a romantic comedy, contrasting the dreams and aspirations of a girl in the 70s and one in the 90s. Through the story-telling magic of the well known and much loved songs of Abba we meet Donna, a feisty, independent single mother, who doesn't think she needs a man to make her life complete, and her twenty-year old daughter, Sophie, who wants romance, a big white wedding and to be given away by her father. Only one problem - who is her father?

The performance lasts for approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes including a twenty-minute interval. I am Veryan your audio describer for the first half, with my colleague, Penny describing Act two.

There now follows a brief synopsis of **Mamma Mia,** descriptions of the set, characters and costumes followed by the cast and credits.

The story takes place in the 1990s on a tiny Greek island situated in the iridescent blue of the Aegean Sea and centres around a simple taverna with a courtyard bar. It is a short walk from the harbour and a focal point for locals, guests and discerning tourists alike. The action opens near the beach then moves between there, the taverna's central courtyard, and a couple of identical bedrooms within.

As the audience take their seats, the stage is screened from view by a front cloth - this is streaked all over with horizontal ripples of blue light, giving the impression of the bright intensity of the Mediterranean as might be seen reflected on a whitewashed wall by the sea.

When the front cloth lifts it reveals a deceptively simple set. The sides and back of the stage echo the front cloths' wavy blue lines, again suggesting the endless blue of sea and sky. Facing us, centre-stage is a simple whitewashed Mediterranean style building - the outside walls at the rear of the taverna. This building is created by the grouping together of several sections of high, roughly plastered, white-washed walls, all overlapping and so creating the appearance of a solid building. The walls are in differing sizes and heights, some with small window-sized openings, whilst the tops of the walls are level, indicative of a flat roof, and, wide enough to be sat on.

The facing section of wall curves gently round from a blue door on the left - this doorway is accessed by three steps. The section of wall to the right of the door has an inset alcove with a ledge at the base, which is used as a seat. Set into the wall further to the right is a letterbox, edged in rusting metal and beyond that another partially hidden doorway. The acute angles of the dazzling white walls stand out in sharp relief against the brilliant blue in the background.

The first person we meet, is **Sophie Sheridan**, daughter of Donna, owner of the taverna. Sophie is a pretty 20 year-old girl of medium height, with tendrils of honey coloured hair that hangs below her shoulders. Lithe and tanned, Sophie is girlish and unaffected, with a frank open gaze, who's equally at ease flirting with the older men, or giggling with her friends. However at times, particularly when we first meet her, she can be withdrawn and thoughtful. She often wears beach clothes, but first appears in a pale green blouse worn with a flowing blue and green skirt with bare feet. Later she will change to black flares with a white blouse, which in turn will be changed for a green top. It is here, by the post box that we also first meet Sophie's two best friends, **Ali** and **Lisa.** They have just arrived on theisland at her invitation to be bridesmaids at her forthcoming wedding. Lisa is tall and olive skinned with untidy tumbling dark locks, whilst Ali is smaller with dark hair worn in bunches. Both arrive carrying backpacks and are casually dressed in jeans or dungarees with Tee shirts, trainers and with dark glasses pushed up on their heads.

When the action moves to the courtyard within the Taverna the versatile walls of the set divide and open out to create the internal courtyard. Each section of wall curves around on either side leaving a gap through which a cobbled path leads in from the jetty beyond. In the middle of each wall is a door made from wooden planks - they were once bright blue, but the paint has faded unevenly in the sun and salt air. The raised double doors on the left are accessed from the courtyard by a couple of steps - this is the main entrance into the Taverna. To the left of the door is another ledge. A tree growing just beyond the walls casts a welcome shade into the courtyard with its leafy branches.

The wall facing us on the right also has a couple of steps up to the door, which leads to unseen rooms within the main building.

A Table and several old wooden chairs with peeling blue paint stand in front of the doors on the left.

This is where the local men meet to drink and play dominoes, usually accompanied by an old woman who sits on a chair behind them, her head bowed over her knitting. Propped against the wall on the ledge behind the woman is a guitar. In other scenes, groups of small scrubbed tables and chairs are placed around the courtyard. The ground inside the taverna is made up of large flagstones of uneven shapes, like huge cobbles. They’re usually grey, but can change with the light.

It is at the taverna that we first encounter Donna.

**Donna**, in her youth had been part of a pop group called 'Donna and the Dynamos' but has long since opted out and is now the owner of the taverna. She is a striking woman of forty with shoulder length blonde hair, sometimes tied up in an untidy knot. Her attractive face with its strong features glows with a healthy tan. Her everyday clothes are comfortable rather than glamorous; when we first see her she's wearing a pale blue cheesecloth top under a pair of baggy navy linen dungarees, which give little hint of her svelte and shapely figure. She happily engages in DIY, wielding a drill when necessary, with her only concession to glamour on a daily basis being, an assortment of rings and a gold chain around her neck, however as we will see, she is more than capable of over the top rock-star glitz when called for. Donna appears relaxed and exudes confidence; that is until the unexpected arrival of the love of her life, who she hasn't seen for twenty years.

From the courtyard we move to a bedroom inside the taverna. For the bedroom the walls revolve and are set side by side leaving a gap, which is used as an entrance. The blue double doors in the left hand wall stand open, forming a tall window, though, which the leafy branches of the tree can be glimpsed. To the left, is an iron-framed double bed covered by a blue and white bedspread with a tasselled fringe. On the right stands a small dressing table, chair, and wooden stool. Underneath the bed is an old trunk, which when open reveals items from the days when the Dynamos were touring. On top of the bed is a blow-up li-lo

When we return to the beach, the prow of a wooden fishing boat juts out from the wings on the left hand side of the stage. The boat is painted in bands of white, light blue and dark blue. Its name, Waterloo, painted on the prow.

Amongst the people gathering on the sun-soaked island to celebrate Sophie's wedding are Donna's friends and former members of her 'Dynamos' pop group, Rosie and Tanya.

**Tanya,** about the same age as Donna, is tall and slim. Her jaw length light mahogany hair is styled to frame her striking face, with its fine features and high cheekbones. She is heavily made up and her appearance shrieks of high maintenance. Tanya, like a nervous greyhound is highly strung and waves her hands as she talks. And, like Donna, Tanya is athletic and dances easily, still able to perform high kicks and the latest fashion in dance steps. Unlike the others, Tanya definitely dresses for glamour rather than comfort; she has an array of smart, sophisticated clothes, and is first seen staggering in over the cobbles wearing a fitted cream trouser suit and gold high-heeled sandals. Later she dons a tight white dress with turquoise trim, fastened up the front with gold buttons and slit up the slide revealing the full length of her long legs.

The final member of the trio is **Rosie** andwhat she lacks in height she makes up for with her curvaceous figure and bubbly, fun loving personality. Her russet coloured hair hangs in a sleek shoulder length bob. Rosie's jolly with a self-deprecating sense of humour. She pays less attention to her appearance than Tanya, but still looks stylish. When she arrives on the island she's wearing lose fitting cream linen trousers and a long cream patterned jacket and leather sandals. Later she will wear a loose shirt in bold stripes with trousers.

Amongst other guests arriving for the wedding are three men, all in their mid forties.

**Harry Bright**, a banker**,** is a tall man of average build with the pallor of a city man. He has dark hair, dark eyes and his cheerful, good-looking face is clean-shaven. Although, initially rather formal, and obviously uncomfortable in the heat, he soon relaxes. He arrives on the island wearing a formal dark jacket with a white linen shirt and beige slacks and carrying a brief case.

By contrast **Bill Austin**, a large Geordie and travel writer, is more rugged. He’s tall and broad shouldered with unruly greying hair and beard. His face is cheerful with an open expression and easy smile. He arrives dressed in a crumpled safari shirt and beige combats, with an old broad brimmed hat crammed on his head.

The third of the forty-something men is, **Sam Carmichael.** He's of mid-height and slim with an interesting, expressive face. Sam has short, fair hair and a neat beard. He knows the island well and is un-fazed by the heat as he moves around the taverna with easy confidence. He's an architect, casually dressed in cream linen trousers and a loose short -sleeved shirt.

Sophie’s fiancé, **Sky** is tall with a tanned, well-toned muscular body. He is very good looking with a slim face, dark eyes set into high cheekbones, and short dark hair. Like Sophie, Sky is lively and impulsive with a friendly, uncomplicated manner. He's casually dressed in jeans and T shirts.

Apart from the guests at the taverna, there is a crowd of young people on the island, enjoying the sea, sun and sand. Amongst these are, **Pepper** and **Eddie**, close friends of Sky’s. These young men help-out in Donna’s taverna. Pepper's small and a little chunky with rumpled dark hair, cheerfully cheeky and always ready to show off his spectacular dancing skills, whilst Eddie is taller, lithe and muscular, with curly dark hair, and chiselled features.

The middle-aged locals, including an old woman dressed in black, are dressed in dark colours, whilst the rest of the crowd wear colourful beach clothes; they’re in their late teens and early twenties, the guys in shorts, Tee shirts, trunks or short-legged wetsuits, the girls in sun dresses, flared jeans and mini skirts all in a variety of colours.

For the most part everyone dresses informally to soak up the Greek sun, but when Donna, Tanya and Rosie reunite to perform as The Dynamos they wear spectacular outfits of white and silver lycra and satin - tight fitting tops laced to the navel and skin tight trousers, which flare out at the bottom. Each costume is slightly different and Tanya’s long legs are emphasised by knee-length silver boots with platform soles. Donna has flowing sleeves, a high, wide silver collar framing her face and ruffled flares at the bottoms of her trousers.

Energetic dance routines take place throughout the songs, sometimes quite raunchy, this is particularly so when Sophie and her friends, Ali and Lisa first meet up. The sound levels in this production are at all times very high, and with scenes changing without breaks in the action, it will at times be difficult to keep you abreast of what is happening - however we will do our best to keep you informed without, if possible, speaking over the all important music and songs.

There are 32 highly talented singers and dancers performing in the show, which includes the 12 main characters, but not the members of the live band in the orchestra pit.

As the orchestra concludes the overture the curtain raises to a prologue, a flashback to three months earlier. It is twilight with a hazy full moon hanging over the beach outside the back of the taverna - Sophie is sitting on a ledge contemplating three envelopes - invitations she is about to post.

The light then changes to a bright sunny day three months later, the morning before Sophie and Sky's wedding. Lying on the ledge behind Sophie is a well thumbed diary.

**Cast and production credits**

**Donna** is played by **Sara Poyzer or Sarah Harlington**

her daughter **Sophie** by **Jena Pandya**

**Tanya** is played by **Helen Anker**

**Rosie** by **Nicky Swift**

**Harry Bright,** played by **Daniel Crowder**

**Bill Austin**, by **Phil Corbitt**

**Sam Carmichael,** by **Richard Standing**

Sophie’s fiancé **Sky** is played by **Toby Miles**

**Pepper,** played by **James Willoughby Moore**

**Eddie** by **Corey Mitchell**

**Lisa**, played by **Mariella Mazzilli**

and **Ali,** played by **Jasmine Shen**

**Father Alexander Martin Dickinson**

The production has been designed by **Mark Thompson**

With lighting by **Howard Harrison**

The choreography is by **Anthony Van Laast**

And the director is **Phyllida Lloyd**