**The Shark is Broken**

**Audio description notes - Gwen Furniss and Wendy Screech 31st March 2025**

Good afternoon and welcome to Theatre Royal Plymouth for “The Shark is Broken”. Written by Ian Shaw and Joseph Nixon, the play was first performed at the Radio Theatre, Brighton in 2019, going on to the West End in 2021 and opening on Broadway in August 2023. The show is produced by Sonia Friedman Productions, with Scott Landis, GFour Productions and Kenny Wax.

Cast your mind back to 1975, and the hit movie “Jaws”, directed by Steven Spielberg, the story of a killer shark terrorising a small American seaside town. The film’s three lead actors, Roy Scheider, Richard Dreyfuss and Robert Shaw, found themselves stuck on a small fishing boat, the Orca, for 16 weeks, with little to do except drive each other crazy. The animatronic sharks, of which the main one was called “Bruce”, were constantly breaking down and resulting in endless delays to the filming. A visitor to the film set was 5 year old Ian Shaw, son of the actor Robert Shaw. Young Ian saw the mechanical shark and was scared by it. Decades later, he had the idea of writing a play based on the difficulties encountered in making the film. His similarity to his father, Robert, makes him the ideal person to play the part of Robert Shaw in the play.

The action (or lack of it!) takes place on board the Orca, wallowing in shallow seas, about 12 miles off the coast of Martha’s Vineyard. Orca is a small wooden fishing boat with carvel hull, represented on stage by a large model of a boat, cut through from bow to stern, so we see just the port side of the boat from the inside. To the left is the open cockpit at the stern. Moving to the right, a door leads into the boat’s cabin. A table is central in the cabin, with bench seating around it. Cushions line the seats, covered in a purple-red vinyl. The windows of the cabin are salt-streaked and hazy. Above the cabin is the bridge, accessed by a ladder next to the door. There is an exhaust system positioned vertically beside the ladder, because of course the Orca is a motor vessel. To the right of the cabin is an untidy hold full of kit, and further to the right is a door to another cabin, whose interior is not visible but the actors sometimes leave the stage through this exit. The main access to the boat is by way of the deck on the port side, where an unseen launch comes alongside to transport the actors to and from the Orca. We only hear the sound of its engine and a splashing as the launch comes alongside the Orca. To the bow of the Orca is a foredeck with metal pulpit rail.

Back in the cabin, where the actors spend most of their days, there is a cool box containing bottles of beer. A lamp hangs from the ceiling above the table. A couple of tin mugs are on a shelf behind the seat.

At the front of the stage is a cut out wooden shape outlining a boat hull. And behind the boat, along the rear of the stage, are three screens on which the backdrop of the sea is projected, often calm but sometimes wallowing a little. The sky above changes according to the time of day and the weather. An occasional gull flies by and, right at the start, a shark fin is seen, moving from right to left. The three screens give the impression of sections of film, with perforations above and below.

The three featured characters in this play are very distinctly drawn and based on real people- the actors who play them have to imitate them to some degree. We see these characters interact with each other in various permutations- as a trio, in pairs and in short solo scenes. Biographical information is peppered throughout the play - the men gradually bond and squabble as they chat about their lives, backgrounds, fathers and attitudes to acting and filming. They sit and drink on board the claustrophobic Orca, play silly games, read and reminisce as they kill time between takes. Their costumes remain the same throughout- small hand props are quite important to the action.

**Robert Shaw** , played by his son, Ian Shaw (or the understudy Owen Oldroyd ) is tall, lean and imposing. His natural plummy, resonant English accent is in direct contrast to the two Americans’ voices. As Quint, the hired shark hunter, he affects a local Martha’s Vineyard burr, notably in the SS Indianapolis speech in the last scene of the play.

Robert has piercing eyes and shoulder length, greying, windswept wavy hair. He is suitably weather beaten and tanned with mutton chop side burns that almost meet his moustache. He sometimes wears a battered beige baseball cap pulled down over his eyes. Robert is dressed in an open neck, mid blue cotton shirt worn out over faded black jeans- the tails hide a leather sheath plus knife attached to the right hand side of his belt. He wears an open khaki Army surplus jacket with epaulettes and many pockets that contain small coins, bottles of whiskey and a pack of cards. He wears beige canvas sneakers and dark blue socks. Robert at 47 is a very experienced and successful classical actor who moves effortlessly between stage, television and film work-he has a large family and several wives to support but despises Hollywood money spinners. He really wants to continue writing his own plays and novels back home in Ireland. Shaw is very articulate, scathing, patronising and aggressive- especially towards the much younger and inexperienced Dreyfuss . His volatile behaviour is not helped by his constant drinking- he hides half bottles of whiskey all over the boat and frequently drinks between takes.

**Richard Dreyfuss** played by Ashley Margolis ( or the understudy Adam Clifford ) is much younger than the other two men. He is just starting out as an actor and so is a threat- he represents the new acting style that Hollywood is enamoured with. He is loud, opinionated, self-obsessed and extremely arrogant – his New Yorker accent is very nasal and he speaks like a Gatling gun, not helped by his use of cocaine and marijuana when off set. Dreyfuss is hyperactive and always fidgeting-at the beginning, he picks up a small piece of junk from the boat’s hold-possibly a weight- and constantly winds and unwinds the string attached to it. He annoys the other two men by tapping his fingers or feet and is prone to panic attacks- he is never still and like an annoying chipmunk. Hanging about, waiting all day to play the part of marine biologist Matt Hooper, really gets to him- he needs constant stimulation. For Dreyfuss the film is all about him- he lacks humility or awareness of his colleagues’ experience and skill. Dreyfuss is obsessed with fame, success and money-this brash attitude really aggravates Robert Shaw . Richard Dreyfuss has a mop of wild, curly dark blond hair and a well trimmed full beard and moustache. He wears small gold rimmed glasses, is quite short and is slightly out of shape. Richard’s costume consists of pale blue battered denim jeans and a matching jacket over a dove grey sweatshirt, with a long sleeved light pink half-buttoned granddad shirt underneath. He wears faded blue socks and matching canvas sneakers.

**Roy Scheider** played by Dan Fredenburgh ( or the understudy Adam Clifford ) completes the trio of main characters- he is a well-adjusted and successful film actor with a New Jersey accent, who strives to remain affable, relaxed and calm under the trying circumstances caused by the delays in filming- he is thus the perfect buffer between Robert Shaw and Richard Dreyfuss. Roy is in his 40s, is tall, lean and looks very fit. He has a prominent, broken nose and is very suntanned (a running joke throughout the play ) with black straight hair swept to the left. As the character, Martin Brody the town police chief, Roy wears large, gold-rimmed aviator style spectacles and neat indigo jeans with navy ankle-length sailing wellies. He wears a pale grey cotton shirt, left open over a long sleeved black tee shirt- both sets of sleeves are carefully folded above his elbows. Roy smokes heavily between takes and always has a fresh daily copy of the New York Times to hand. He is apt to quote from it and relay other interesting facts- he is interested in the real world outside acting.

Other characters are alluded to throughout the play- we hear the disembodied voices and commands of the assistant director and members of the tech crew when filming is finally resumed- a very young **Steven Spielberg** even puts in a vocal “appearance” !

The main character, mentioned in the title of the play is of course **Bruce** the animatronic shark (apparently named after Spielberg’s aggressive lawyer!) He is alluded to many times but never properly seen until the final credits and accompanying original film set photographs. Bruce is responsible for many delays and much chaos- but later rises to iconic status all around the world !

Your audio describers today are Gwen Furniss and Wendy Screech

The next audio described show in the Lyric, at the Theatre Royal Plymouth is the musical “ Dear Evan Hansen “ on Saturday 19th April at 2:30pm. Further information is available on the theatre’s website, at the Box Office or in the present brochure.