

15 February 2010

Calendar Girls by Tim Firth



AUSTRALIAN CALENDAR GIRLS ANNOUNCED

Leading Australian theatre producer John Frost today announced the all-star cast of women who will bring the British hit comedy **CALENDAR GIRLS** to life on the Australian stage, with the Australian Première at QPAC's Lyric Theatre, Brisbane.

Australia's "Calendar Girls" are **Lorraine Bayly, Rachel Berger, Rhonda Burchmore, Cornelia Frances, Jean Kittson, Anna Lee and Amanda Muggleton.**

John Frost said, "We searched far and wide, talking to nearly every actress of 'a certain age', and have found an incredible group of woman to bring the most successful British comedy of the past decade to the Australian stage. *Calendar Girls* is not only hilarious but also profoundly moving and uplifting. UK audiences couldn't get enough of the show and we're sure Australian audiences are going to fall in love with it too."

CALENDAR GIRLS is based on the very successful film of the same name starring Helen Mirren and Julie Walters, which in turn was based on an uplifting and inspiring true story that is quirky, poignant and hilarious. A group of ordinary middle-aged women, members of a very ordinary Yorkshire Women's Institute, do something quite extraordinary. They spark a global phenomenon by persuading one another to pose for a charity calendar with a difference! As interest snowballs, the Calendar Girls find themselves revealing more than they'd ever planned...

CALENDAR GIRLS has played to sold-out audiences on the West End for well over a year, and is the fastest selling regional tour in British theatre history. It has recently been nominated as "Best New Comedy" at the 2010 Oliver Awards. Audiences have been effusive in their praise for the play and its ensemble cast. Critics have said:

"A marvellous, uplifting night at the theatre"
Daily Mail

"A show whose feel good factor is sky-high"
The Guardian

"One of the most enjoyable evenings recent theatre has produced"
London's Evening Standard

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CALENDAR GIRLS opens in Brisbane on April 8 at QPAC then transfers to Sydney's Theatre Royal from April 29 and to Melbourne's Comedy Theatre from June 17. Single tickets are available now for the Brisbane season, and go on sale in Sydney and Melbourne on February 22.

www.seecalendargirls.com.au

BOOKING DETAILS

WHERE: Lyric Theatre, QPAC, Cultural Centre, South Bank
Cnr Grey & Melbourne Streets, South Bank

WHEN: 8 - 25 April 2010

TIMES: Tuesday – Saturday 7.30pm, Wednesday and Saturday matinees 1.30pm,
Sunday 3pm

PRICE: \$60.90 - \$99.90

BOOKINGS: www.qpac.com.au or 136 246
Groups of 8 or more (07) 3840 7466
VIP, Stay and See® and Dining Packages 1300 4 SHOWS

MEDIA ENQUIRIES:

Cindy Ullrich, Publicity Manager, QPAC ~ 07 3840 7589 or 0434 366 038 ~

cindy.ullrich@qpac.com.au

Inga Tracey, Publicity Coordinator, QPAC ~ 07 3840 7984 ~ inga.tracey@qpac.com.au

HERE IS HOW THE STORY BEGAN...

It is bitterly ironic that the story of the Calendar Girls, that has generated so much pleasure and enjoyment, should have opened with the kind of shattering news which we all dread. John Baker, an apparently fit and healthy 53 year-old “who’d never had a day’s illness in his life” according to his wife, Angela, was diagnosed with Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma in February 1998. John’s many friends in the close-knit picture postcard village of Cracoe were shell-shocked and they rallied round Angela and her family, determined to do something positive to help.

“John was the first of our group to contract a serious illness,” recalls Angela. “We were all members of the WI and the subject of the WI calendar would come round every year. We were talking about it one night over supper, before John became ill, and I remember one very funny half hour when Tricia suggested that we do our own calendar in the style of the Pirelli one and we all discussed which months we would be. So we went back to the idea, thinking that it would raise funds for the Leukaemia Research Fund and entertain John at the same time. Not that he believed we would do anything about it. ‘You’re all talk’, he’d say. ‘It will never happen.’” In the event, the rapid decline in John’s health – he died only five months after receiving the diagnosis – added to the sense of unreality which Angela felt.

Then one day, a few weeks after the funeral, she received a visitor. “There was Tricia, armed with her clipboard. ‘Come on’, she said. ‘Are we going to do this calendar – or not? Even if we don’t sell any, at least we’ll have tried to do something.’”

The whole village wanted to do its bit and Tricia and Angela recruited volunteers from the WI – one lady who “only came to the meetings if there was a good speaker” found herself enlisted. They had originally planned a modest print run for the calendar of a mere 1000 but the printer pointed out that this was not a financially viable proposition and he persuaded them to increase the order to 3000. Donations from individuals and local businesses took care of the printing costs.

All that remained was for 11 good women and true to bare all in a noble cause. Accordingly, on a dark October night in 1998, ten shadowy figures arrived at the home of local artist Terry Logan and his wife Lynda, who was due to pose as Miss July. Although Terry was better known as a landscape painter, he’d worked in advertising for J Walter Thompson in Canada and therefore he knew precisely what was required. “I’d set up everything in advance and had worked out what I wanted from each photograph. I tried to match each lady to her strengths. Angela played the piano, for example, and so I shot her at a piano. If the lady had good legs, I made sure that we saw her legs. At first the ladies stood around in their dressing-gowns, drinking red wine and I knew that if I waited any longer, some of them would try to bottle out. So finally I said to them. ‘This is it, ladies, let’s get to work.’”

Angela sums up the extraordinary story of the Calendar Girls: “I think that we’ve all coped really well with what has happened. We’ve done the most amazing things but we’ve kept our feet on the ground and we’ve never forgotten why we did what we did. We didn’t do the calendar because we wanted to be famous but because we wanted to raise money in John’s memory. It has been the most marvellous experience.”

Al Senter, Freelance theatre journalist and interviewer

Their fabulous fundraising work continues with personal appearances, endorsements, speaking engagements, photo shoots and much more. To find out more, visit www.thecalendargirls.org.uk. Products featuring their famous photographs and the sunflower (including stage show souvenir merchandise and the latest calendar) are available at www.leukaemiashop.com.

LEAD CAST

LORRAINE BAYLY has had an extensive career in theatre, radio and film but she is probably best known for her two long running television roles, Grace Sullivan in *The Sullivans* and as Jennifer Carson in *Carson's Law*. At the Ensemble Theatre her numerous roles included *Fairytales of New York* by J.P. Donleavy, *The Daughter in Law* by D.H. Lawrence, *We Bombed in New Haven* by Joseph Heller and more recently *Rabbit Hole* and *Birthrights*. Her film credits include *The Man from Snowy River* with Kirk Douglas and Disney's *Ride a Wild Pony*. Lorraine has won three Logie Awards, one Penguin award, two Sammy awards and in 1983 the Lion's Club 'Entertainer of the Year' award. She was honoured on *This is Your Life* in 1979 and received an A.M. (Member of the Order of Australia) in the Australia Day Honours List 2001.

RACHEL BERGER is a highly regarded, adept, and adaptive comedic talent, working variously as a comedian, broadcaster, novelist, columnist, agitator and television entertainer. Political, passionate and armed only with her material, Rachel has been prowling the stand-up circuit like a tigress for 21 years. She's taken four solo shows to the Edinburgh Festival and her dynamic presence and engagingly sharp observations have made her an extremely popular performer both live and on television, across Australia and overseas. Rachel performed her one woman show *Hold the Pickle* at La Mama Theatre, Melbourne to sold-out crowds and high acclaim. She has written for numerous publications including *The Age*, *New Woman* and *Rolling Stone* and has appeared on *Rove-Live*, *Good Morning Australia with Bert Newton*, *Good News Week* and *Hey Hey It's Saturday*.

From television to the big screen, musical theatre to opera, cabaret to the stage, there are few entertainment mediums that multi-award winning **RHONDA BURCHMORE** has not embraced with her wide ranging talents. Throughout her career Rhonda has made a distinctive impression on audiences with her dazzling dance steps, superb comic timing, effervescent personality and her unique and stunning voice. Her credits are many and with unstoppable energy Rhonda has played lead roles in *Urinetown*, *Annie Get Your Gun*, *Aladdin*, *Cinderella*, *Guys & Dolls* and she will forever be remembered for her Green Room Award-nominated role of Tanya in *Mamma Mia*. In October 2008 Rhonda played the title role of *Mame* for The Production Company and last year Rhonda played opposite Steve Bisley in the Australian movie, *Kin*.

CORNELIA FRANCES has been in the entertainment industry for over 50 years. She trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London and has worked extensively across all areas of the industry both in the UK and in Australia. Cornelia's theatre credits include *Boeing Boeing* and *Jane Steps Out* for the Theatre Royal in Bath, *No Man's Land* for Nimrod, *Lie of the Mind* for Belvoir St Theatre and *Diving for Pearls* at The Ensemble. She has appeared in numerous films, notably *The Man from Snowy River II*, *Lost Islands*, *Outback*, *Ned* and *All at Sea*. Cornelia is fondly remembered by fans for her long-standing roles on *The Young Doctors* and *Home and Away* and as the host of *The Weakest Link*.

A multi-talented performer and writer, **JEAN KITSON** is one of Australia's best known and most popular comedians, amusing audiences in theatre, film, print, on radio and television. Jean made her comedy debut at Melbourne's legendary comedy venue Le Joke in a series of solo performances, and then in the stage version of *Let the Blood Run Free*. Jean's theatre highlights include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Night of the Missing Bridegroom* and *Behind the Mask*. She earned national fame through ABC TV's *The Big Gig* and since then has appeared in many feature films, among them Bill Bennett's *The Nugget* and *Hating Alison Ashley*, starring opposite Delta Goodrem. In 1998 she published a collection of humorous observations titled *Tongue Lashing* which became a Penguin best-seller.

ANNA LEE has been performing professionally since she was 14 years of age. She has performed with theatre companies across Australia with such credits as *Travelling North* for Ensemble Theatre, *Rebecca* for Twelfth Night Theatre, *Private Lives* for Peter Williams Productions, *The Recruiting Officer* for the South Australian Theatre Company, and the musical *Nine*. On television, she has had leading and guest roles in *Home and Away*, *A Country Practice*, *The Young Doctors* and *Dynasty behind the Scenes*. Anna was a presenter for Weekend Sydney and as a singer she has supported numerous performers including Billy Connolly and Roy Orbison.

AMANDA MUGGLETON is one of Australia's best-loved and most versatile leading ladies. She has performed for all Australia's major theatre companies, most recently at the Ensemble Theatre,

in Dorothy Hewett's *The Man From Mukinupin* for Company B and MTC, and a reprisal of her acclaimed one-woman performance of Roger Hall's *The Book Club* for the Noosa Long Weekend Festival. Favourite roles include Miss Hannigan in *Annie* (GFO), Germaine Greer in *Female of the Species* (State Theatre) and roles in *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (MTC), the national tour of *Love Child* (Hit Productions) and *Losing Louis* (Ensemble Theatre). Her film credits include *Mad Max I*, *Street Hero*, *Queen of the Road*, *Mr Reliable*, *Feeling Sexy* and *Idiot Box*. Amanda has won a Green Room and a Helpmann Award for Best Actress for her role as Maria Callas in *Master Class* and a second Helpmann Award for her role in the Australian musical, *Eureka!*