

MERCURY



The Manningtree Witches

Social Story

Written by Ava Pickett

Based on the novel by A.K. Blakemore

Directed by Natasha Rickman

Relaxed Performance

Mercury Theatre

Welcome to Mercury Theatre Colchester

This visual story is designed for visitors for the Relaxed Performance of **The Manningtree Witches**.

This visual story contains photos and information about the performance and the Mercury Theatre spaces to help prepare you for your visit.

If you need any assistance when you are in the Mercury Theatre, please ask a member of our team and they will be happy to help.

For relaxed performances, ear defenders will be available on trestle tables outside the auditorium doors.

If you require ear defenders while watching a non-relaxed performance, please ask a member of the Box Office team.

Where is the show?

The play is being performed at the Mercury Theatre in Colchester.



Entering the Theatre



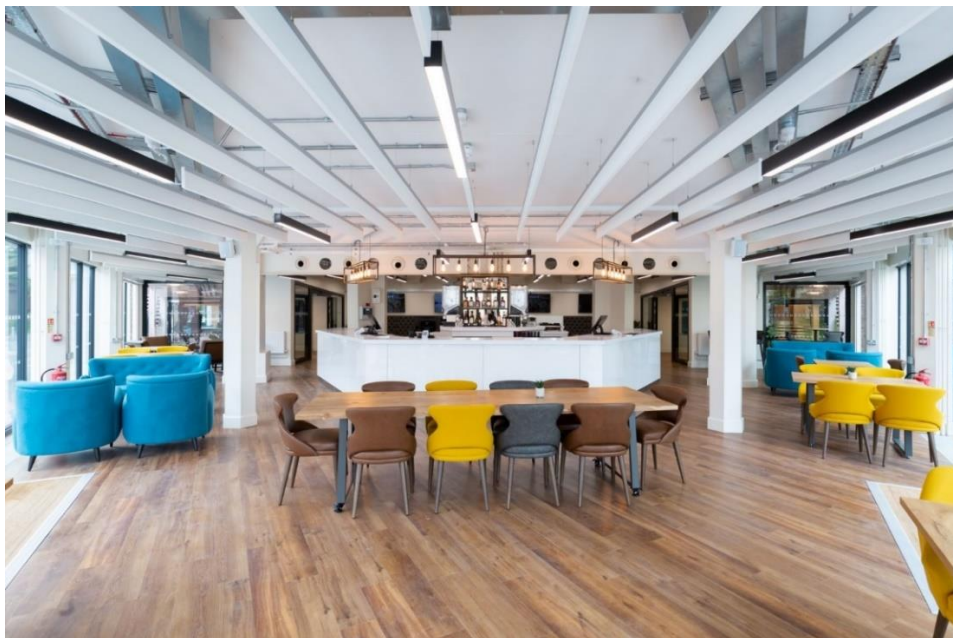
You enter the theatre via the doors above. The doors are automatic and will open in towards the Box Office.

Box Office



When you enter the theatre, you will be able to see our Box Office desk. This is where you can collect your tickets, buy snacks and your programme. It can sometimes be busy at this desk, especially before a performance starts.

Café Bar



In the Café Bar you can purchase drinks, slushies, popcorn and snacks.

It may be very busy here before the performance starts, during the interval and at the end of the performance. If you would prefer a quieter area you can go to the breakout spaces in the upstairs bar or the Creative Engagement space.

Toilets

The main toilets are on the ground floor. The female toilets are located just outside the box office, and the male and accessible toilet are at the opposite side of the café bar.

If you have any issues finding these, please ask a member of our Customer Experience team who will be wearing Mercury branded t-shirts.

Upstairs Bar



The upstairs bar is located on the first floor and will be accessible throughout the show. This is also our break-out space.

There is a TV in the space, which will be live streaming the show so you can still watch even if you need to leave the auditorium for a bit!

There is also a new accessible toilet in the upstairs bar area.

The upstairs bar will not be open so any drinks or snacks will need to be bought downstairs in the main café bar instead.

Auditorium



The show will be taking place in the auditorium. When you arrive at the auditorium doors, a member of our Customer Experience team will scan your ticket and direct you to your seat.



The Actors



Gabriel Agha plays Thomas Briggs



Fiona Branson plays Bess Clarke



Amy Cudden plays Mrs Briggs/Leah Miller



Gavin Fowler plays John Edes



Jack Gogarty plays John Stearne



**Gina Isaac plays Anne “The Beldam”
West**



Mia Jerome plays Margaret Moone



Maria Louis plays Liz Godwin



Lucy Mangan plays Rebecca West



Sam Mitchell plays Matthew Hopkins



Chileya Mwampulo plays Judith Moone

The cast is also joined by a community chorus of making up the villagers. The exact composition of the chorus changes from performance to performance.

What happens during the performance?

The performance is split into two halves. The first half; Prologue, Act One and Act Two; lasts around 1 hour and 12 minutes. The second half; Act Three and Act Four; lasts approximately 1 hour and 3 minutes.

After the first half, there is an interval. This is a 20-minute break in the performance. During this time, you can leave the auditorium if you would like, or you can stay in your seat.

You are welcome to leave your seat at any time during the performance as well if you need to.

In the following pages, we have highlighted any sections which we think you should be aware of in case you are sensitive to a particular stimulus, or just because we think you should be aware of a particular moment before you see it live on stage.

Some of the props/sounds and lighting effects mentioned on the next pages will be played or brought on stage in the pre-show talk.

Pre-show talks occur during Relaxed Performances of The Manningtree Witches at the usual start time of the show.



There will be some tweaks to lighting and sound, and other non-pivotal moments of the Relaxed Performance.

However, there are various text explanations which reveal some surprises.

The Manningtree Witches Visual Story

The following pages outline key moments which may be of interest.

Please note that not all of the scenes are included, as not all scenes have moments of interest.

Key	
	Visual stimulus
	Sound stimulus

SCENE BY SCENE BREAKDOWN

The show contains strong language throughout, flashing lights, haze, physical and emotional violence, scenes of a sexual nature, haze present throughout, a reference to miscarriage, post-natal depression and child death, and depictions of torture, smoking and hanging.

Prologue



Very bright lights, shone directly at the audience, and a soft boom sound effect to indicate the passage of time feature in the opening of the show.



Screeching sounds feature in the score of the prologue and recur throughout the show.

ACT 1



Scene 1 Cannon booms.



Scene 1 A large crowd of people swarm the stage, a brief sword fight occurs immediately between two characters but no harm

comes to either of them. Loud cheers and strong language are featured throughout the scene.



Scene 4 A spoon is thrown suddenly at Rebecca by her Mother.

ACT 2



Scene 2 Muted gunfire sound effects and loud cheers.



Scene 4 A fight occurs in this scene. Thomas Briggs is grabbed by the scruff of his neck by Anne, dragged down stairs and pushed into a bench.



Scene 5 Darker lighting, as if lit by candles.



Scene 5 A ghostly dream sequence. Characters appear behind Rebecca West suddenly.



Scene 7 Thomas Briggs collapses and has convulsions. His movements involve thrashing and coughing. This is not meant as a reference to a specific illness.



Scene 8 There is a reference to post-natal depression. Anne talks about throwing Rebecca into a fire when she was a baby.



Scene 9 Thomas Briggs again suffers convulsions.



Scene 10 Strong language. The C word is used in this scene.



Scene 13 Thomas Briggs is again shown having convulsions. There is much shouting and panic from all characters in the scene and Rebecca is grabbed by the wrist by Matthew Hopkins.



Scene 14 It is reported that Thomas Briggs has died off stage.



Scene 14 A wind effect is used that makes the on-stage corn move.



Scene 15 Snow falls on the stage. No snow will reach the audience.



Scene 16 Stylised intimacy is shown through movement. No clothing is removed. There is a kiss between Rebecca and John.



Scene 16 After the intimacy Rebecca is abandoned by John.



Scene 16 The very bright lights and booms from the prologue return for the final moment before the interval break. These lights are again shone directly into the audience.

Interval

During the interval you may come and go from the auditorium as you wish.

ACT 3



Scene 1 Bess Clarke is examined for the devil's mark. This involves a female character looking between the legs of another woman. The women are fully clothed in this scene.



Scene 1 Bess Clarke is in a state of extreme distress as she is questioned without food or water. This is to be understood as a form of torture.



Scene 3 A large number of chorus members surround the women on a cart making loud noise. At one point a boy who climbs the cart is pushed from it.



Scene 3 Anne West threatens violence on the mob but ultimately does not attack.



Scene 5 Dolls and mannequins are brought out on stage.



Scene 7 A short moment of violence as Matthew Hopkins grabs John Sterne roughly by the face and twists his wrist.



Scene 10 An interrogation scene. Rebecca begins to hallucinate voices and man who is implied to be the devil appears. He is dressed in an all red puritan style dress.



Scene 11 Rebecca West suddenly sits up from sleep in her gaol cell, suffering convulsions and shouting.

WARNING: As the next scene contains an on-stage hanging we suggest that audience members who do not wish to see this leave the auditorium when they hear the line "I love you too, my girl."

ACT 4



Scene 1 A hanging is depicted on stage. Three characters ascend the gallows and are placed with nooses around their necks, stood upon chairs. The chairs are removed, the women thrash briefly, and then hang still for several minutes afterwards. It should be noted that the actors playing these roles are harnessed and have undergone extensive safety training with all equipment involved in this scene.



Scene 2 A reference to a dead son. References to killing and more deaths in the War.



Scene 3 A reference to stalking. Matthew Hopkins talks of being obsessed with Rebecca and following her.



Scene 3 Matthew Hopkins, whilst suffering from the effects of "consumption," coughs intensely.



Scene 5 More coughing due to the effects of consumption.



Scene 5 Rebecca smothers Matthew to death with a pillow. She is very emotionally intense both leading up to and after this moment.



As with the beginning of the play and the end of the first half, the play ends with another very bright flash of light directed into the audience and a soft boom sound effect.

The Story

Please note that the text below contains spoilers

Prologue and Act One

After a brief prologue scene set in 1645 The play opens in 1643 in Manningtree. The town is unsettled by the Civil War, religious fervour and economic strain. Rebecca West is a young woman coming of age and navigating a precarious social position. She attends church, quarrels with her mother, Anne “The Beldam” West, and has lessons with John Edes, whom she desires.

A newcomer to the town, Matthew Hopkins, arrives and lectures at church, presenting himself as a man capable of identifying the signs of the devil’s work. He is quick to assume authority, and he takes a keen interest in Rebecca.

Act Two

The season changes, the Civil War rages on, and the town is alert to the signs of witchcraft as Matthew Hopkins’ message begins to take hold.

Anne West becomes embroiled in controversy after a argument and physical confrontation with young Thomas Briggs, whom she witnesses wasting food.

Rebecca and her friend Judith discuss Rebecca’s fixation with John Edes and play a game based on superstition and “divination,” involving feeling a cabbage. Rebecca fears what she has seen and questions if this is the devil’s work that Matthew has preached.

Thomas Briggs suffers from a sudden illness and convulsions, which draw suspicion around the town onto Anne West and her friends, Bess Clarke and Margaret Mooney. Rebecca attempts to make the situation better by bringing Thomas a basket of apples, against her mother’s wishes but in doing so the situation becomes far graver for the women as Matthew correlates Thomas’ illness with the presence of a demon Rebecca has brought into the house.

Thomas Briggs succumbs to his illness and rumours swirl and circulate as the season passes into winter and the misfortunes of the town pile up. One snowy evening Bess Clarke declares a “a pox” on Liz Godwin after she denies her food and shelter. This act causes Matthew to arrest Bess Clarke on charges of being a witch.

John Edes comes to Rebecca urging her to flee before she herself is arrested and they act on their desire for each other, having sex in the woods behind Rebecca's house. By the morning John has gone.

Act Three

Hopkins establishes his process of interrogation. Elizabeth Clarke is examined for the devil's mark and "watched" for signs of spirit familiars and questioned exhaustively. Under sleep deprivation and pressure, she eventually confesses to keeping animal familiars and to consorting with the Devil. She names Anne and the other women. Rebecca, her mother and Margaret Mooney are all arrested under Matthew Hopkins' authority and sent to Colchester gaol to await trial.

While they await trial Hopkins' authority spreads throughout East Anglia and he establishes himself as "The Witchfinder General," profiting off of his expertise in finding witches with John Stearne and arrests are reported throughout the region.

While imprisoned, Rebecca is questioned by Hopkins, sometimes gently, sometimes with implied threat, with the intent of securing her confession. Their conversations deepen and personal boundaries blur. He confides in her about his purpose and ambition, but he does not secure her confession.

To testify against Rebecca's "wicked" nature Matthew seeks out John Edes in Harwich to give his testimony about their night in the woods. Matthew has in his possession John Edes hat which was discarded that night, and John ultimately agrees he will testify.

Anne urges Rebecca to give a false confession, damning her and the other women but saving herself and Rebecca after much persuasion agrees.

Sentences are delivered but Rebecca is spared. The convicted women; including Anne West, Elizabeth Clarke, and Margaret Mooney, are condemned to death by hanging.

Act Four

The condemned women are brought to the gallows. Anne West is given the opportunity to speak before her death. The hanging is then carried out publicly.

After the execution, Hopkins returns to Manningtree with Rebecca as his housemaid. His crusade carries on and more witches are discovered and hanged as a result of his investigations.

After some time, Hopkins is now sick with consumption. A doctor confirms his illness and then Rebecca is left alone with him. While Hopkins is physically incapacitated Rebecca uses this opportunity to tell him her confession was false and rage at him for all the lives that have been lost because of his actions. She smothers him to death with a pillow and the play ends shortly after.

We hope you enjoyed your time at the Mercury Theatre!

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to;

Call us on 01206 577006 and ask to speak to our Creative Engagement team

Email us at taking.part@mercurytheatre.co.uk