

Audition notes

THE CHALK GARDEN

by Enid Bagnold

to be directed by Jenny Buffle

this play will be presented from 1 to 5 June, 2010 in the Théâtre Pitoëff

AUDITIONS WILL BE HELD ON 24th MARCH
IN THE ENGLISH CHURCH HALL, RUE DU MONT-BLANC, GENEVA
AT 19H00

The play

In an English country house an elderly lady struggles to control both her garden and her granddaughter, who has taken refuge from her mother's second marriage. A governess is engaged to look after the girl and, with a dark secret in her past, which swells like a mushroom cloud all through the play, she tries to counteract the unhealthy influence of the once all-powerful butler who is bedridden from a stroke. The garden is, of course, a metaphor for the growing adolescent and the play, while reflecting the brooding atmosphere of unseen power and hidden secrets, moves towards the sunburst of restored relationships and a brighter future for the garden.

This is almost a period piece, though it was written in the mid-1950s and so bridges the gap between « classic » drawing room comedy and modern theatre, and it has been recently revived to great acclaim in the West End. The theme is serious, but there are many lighter moments and it could be described as dramatic comedy, or light drama according to your viewpoint! The characters are complex and interesting and offer great scope for personal interpretation, they are :

Miss Madrigal - the governess, an enigmatic woman who can be both secretive and direct. She is a strong personality with great charisma and could be any age between 35 and 50. She has a great understanding of the human spirit, her own having been forged by fire, and though her experience of life is mostly second-hand, she has a great affinity for all growing things.

Maitland - the manservant, who tries to hold the unravelling threads of the household together. He is unsure of himself and easily intimidated but has a real affection for the wayward teenager. Having once served a prison sentence for being a conscientious objector, this experience has unsettled him and given him a strange fascination for crime. A complex and interesting character « unhandy with life », as the playwright describes him, but with a passion for the right - he can be almost any age.

Second Applicant – one of the three who apply for the post of governess, this is a very small role in the first scene only. She is timid and fluttery in manner but this is probably a disguise for a petty thief ! Any age.

Laurel - the wayward teenager around whose development the play revolves. This is a wonderful part for a very young woman. She has picked up her

grandmother's interest in Freudian psychology and plays with it to her own advantage. Having wound her grandmother and the manservant firmly round her little finger, she gradually recognises that she has met her match in the new governess. Age 16 or able to play to that age.

Third Applicant - another very small cameo role in scene 1, this woman is the complete opposite of the Second Applicant, very self-assured and a bit « showy ». Any age.

Mrs. St. Maugham - an elderly, over-powering, once-beautiful ex-hostess of London society, she is totally incapable of truly understanding or controlling her granddaughter and seeks refuge from old age and helplessness in a feverish, and ignorant, passion for her garden. She struggles, too, with her relationship with her daughter. The respect for, and measured friendship which slowly develops with Miss Madrigal will be her salvation. Age 60-ish

Nurse - a brisk, efficient woman who cares for the unseen, de-throned butler and disapproves of anything not approved of by him. She flits in and out throughout the play, the butler's last link with the household and symbol of his waning powers. Any age.

Olivia - Laurel's mother, who is expecting a child from her second marriage to an Army officer. She regrets the breach between herself and Laurel and is anxious to bring the girl back into her life. She is aware of not having lived up to her own mother's expectations and does not wish to be drawn back into old quarrels. An attractive woman in her early 40s.

The Judge - He is elderly, wise and a figure of authority, though we see him only in relaxed mood as Mrs. St. Maugham's guest. He was also once her lover, so we are aware of a certain complicity between them. Age 60-ish.

None of the ages given above are, of course, mandatory, but are an indication of what the audience should see !

(Rehearsals will begin after Easter and will follow the usual GEDS pattern of Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights).

Anyone who is interested in helping with this production in any way – backstage or elsewhere – will be warmly welcomed onto the production team. Please contact Jenny. Contact her also if you would like to be considered for a part but are unable to attend auditions on 24th March.

Email her on jjbuffle@gmail.com or telephone 022 776 48 37 for any further details.