

The Thrill of Love

by Amanda Whittington
directed by Peter Shore

Play Reading: 22 June 2021 at 8pm in the Studio

Auditions: 4 July 2021 at 2pm in the Theatre

Rehearsals Commence: 30 August 2021

Performance: 21-30 October 2021 at 8pm, Matinee 30 October at 2.30pm

The Thrill of Love was first performed in 2013 and dramatises the true story of Ruth Ellis, the last woman to be hanged in Britain. Set in 1955 in the months leading up to Ellis' execution, the play evokes the hidden world of Soho nightclub life, where there is more than just a drink on offer. Forget any notions you had about Britain being straight-laced and respectable in the 1950s. The 'girls' work hard, play hard and dream of a movie-star life. It is in the midst of this demimonde that Ruth Ellis, a 28 year old divorcee with a young child to care for, forms an obsessive and abusive relationship with David Blakely, whom she eventually shoots dead on a London street.

Why does their relationship end in murder? Why does she plead not guilty but offer no defence? Why does she show no remorse? And who is she trying to protect? The provocation at the heart of this play is one about our society's perception of women, and particularly women who kill, and how this affects the justice meted out to them.

Ruth made her mark on popular culture at the time, just as Christine Keeler would some five years later. Described in the tabloid press as a "blonde bombshell", her passionate and tragic affair with an upper class racing driver was a Fleet Street reporter's dream. Her lifestyle helped to condemn her in court, as did her apparent lack of remorse.

The play also features another true life character, Ruth's one time best friend, Vickie Martin, whose chaotic life style as a nightclub hostess and minor film actress leads to her own tragedy. Two fictional characters, Sylvia Shaw and Doris Judd, help us to explore the emotional truth of Ruth's world. Finally, the fictional Inspector Jack Gale observes and seeks to understand the sequence of events that leads to Ruth's tragic end and helps to knit the narrative together.

The bluesy music of Billie Holiday weaves in and out of the play and contributes to a dramatic atmosphere and mood akin to *film noir*. Ruth is not simply a hero, a villain or a victim. "They're ordinary girls", says Sylvia of the hostesses she manages. "I'd say they're anything but", replies Gale.

The Characters

All five roles are strong and substantial in terms of dramatic range and depth, as well as time on stage.

Ruth Aged 28, glamorous and sexualised, 'platinum blonde bombshell' describes her character as much as her hair (you do not have to be blonde to play the part, wigs are available!), drinks heavily and recklessly; but also, in a more hidden side of her character, wears glasses, has vestiges of a Catholic belief and cares for her young son.

Vickie Aged 24, vibrant and excitable; craves the glamorous life of rich men, fast cars and movie-stars and uses sex to get what she thinks she wants. She dies in a car accident half way through the story but her character reappears briefly to 'play' the role of the judge in a short dream-like representation of Ruth's trial.

Sylvia No age given but, from context, probably about 45. Has the cynicism that comes from seeing the seedy side of life from the perspective of a woman making her own way, she runs a night club and the hostesses that work there. She seeks to look after them in a benevolent way, whilst recognising she cannot prevent their individual tragedies.

Doris around 20. Apparently just a cleaner in the club but in fact much more than this. Kind and uncorrupted and wiser than her years, she seeks to advise, support and befriend Ruth and steer her to a different path but she too is powerless in the tragic unfolding of events.

Gale Probably late 40s/early 50s but could be older/younger, a careworn Detective Inspector whose personal life seems empty, he seeks to understand what really happened to cause Ruth to shoot her lover and thus to try and overturn her death sentence. He (literally) stands in the shadows of the play – imagine trench coat and trilby hat.

A note on accents: all the characters should speak in the London/Southeast accents of the street at that time. So definitely not middle class RP but not "Mockney" either.

Audition Pieces

Ruth: (1) from P.21, beginning of Act One, Scene Five to P.24, Sylvia's entrance; **(2)** from P.63, beginning of Act Two, Scene Four to P.69, Doris' exit.

Vickie: from P.21, beginning of Act One, Scene Five to P.24, Sylvia's entrance.

Sylvia: whole of Act One, Scene Three, P.8-13.

Doris: from P.63, beginning of Act Two, Scene Four to P.69, Doris' exit.

Gale: whole of Act One, Scene Three, P.8-13.

Contact

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