

# THE CROOKED SPIRE: A NEW MUSICAL WITH A TWIST!

The iconic 'crooked spire' is arguably Chesterfield's most well-known feature. Now an exciting new musical will take audiences back to the time it was being constructed. *Kate Dawson* reports.

**T**HE CROOKED SPIRE, a murder-mystery musical, has been created by Ashgate Heritage Arts, made up of musicians and lyricists Martin Coslett and Peter Gray, who both live in Ashgate, and Mary Hennessy, an award-winning playwright from Buxton.

Set in 1360s, the story follows John, a carpenter, who has travelled from York, having worked on the Minster there, to find work on the new spire in Chesterfield. Before long, the master carpenter at the church is murdered and John is suspected of the crime. The only way he can clear his name is to find out who the real killer is. John discovers that poor workmanship is threatening the quality of the spire and that other dark forces are at play. As he gets closer to the truth, he realises that exposing the real killer will put his own life in danger.

John makes new friends who support him, in particular a young boy called Walter, whose parents have died in the Black Death. Walter's elder sister, Katherine, a local seamstress, has caught John's eye,

but audiences will have to come and see for themselves whether John uncovers the truth and wins the heart of a Chesterfield lass!

There are many theories about how the spire became crooked and the new musical explores one of the most plausible explanations – green wood (which has not been seasoned) being poorly joisted, due to the lack of skilled labour following the plague then, a century later, 32 tonnes of lead was added to the roof and the wooden structure could not bear the bulk. It is also thought that as the sun shone more on the south side of the tower, the lead expanded quicker on that side, causing the spire to twist and lean.

The Crooked Spire musical has been adapted from a thriller written by Chris Nickson. "I'm incredibly flattered that my book is the inspiration for this wonderful new musical.

I lived in Dronfield for a few years and visited the Crooked Spire as I was fascinated by its history; not long after, the story came to me in about ten minutes! I can't wait to see it being brought to life on the stage," he said.

The musical will star Gerard Fletcher

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**Above:** Eddie Waller as Walter. © Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Ste Waller.

**Left:** Gerard Fletcher (left) and John Conway (right) as Sir Henry and Sir Richard. © Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries.



as Sir Henry, whose TV credits include roles in the BBC's *Happy Valley*; Netflix's *The Crown*; the BBC's *Get Even* and the upcoming BBC drama, *Sherwood*; as well as the role of Hud in *Loaded*, with the Reform Theatre Company; and Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, at the Merlin International Theatre, Budapest.

Stephanie Putson, who played Billy's mum in the London production of *Billy Elliot the Musical* (2005 – 2016) will play Martha, John's landlady. Hayley Mitchell who recently starred in *Northern Girls* at the Pilot Theatre and *The Fiesta Fawns*, Middlesbrough Little Theatre, will play Katherine.

Playing the role of Sir Richard is John Conway, who played the Wizard in the *Wizard of Oz* at Trinity Theatre, Tunbridge Wells; and Starer in the film, *The World's End*; among his many acting credits.

The show also features emerging talent



**Left:** Clara Coslett as Beth. © Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries.

**Below right:** From left, Martin Coslett, Mary Hennessy and Peter Gray of Ashgate Heritage Arts in front of the Crooked Spire. © Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries.

such as Adam Stickler who plays John and who has dazzled theatre-goers as Henry Jekyll in a run of Jekyll and Hyde at the Alexandra Theatre, Bognor Regis.

Clara Coslett, who will come fresh from playing the beggar woman in Sweeney Todd at Buxton Opera House, will play the role of Beth, the master carpenter's wife.

Local singing sensation Eddie Waller, 11, from Brampton, has been cast as Walter. Eddie has performed with the Inspirations Theatre Company since 2017. Despite the lead up to the show coinciding with his Year 6 SATS exams, he can't wait to get on stage.

Eddie said: "Walter is a great character – he's very brave and a bit cheeky, but he looks up to John, the new carpenter in town and wants to win his approval.

"I feel very lucky and excited to have got the part. I can learn so much from all the professional actors and it's going to be amazing performing on the stage at The Pomegranate Theatre."

The musical's director is Jake Smith, who has worked on large-scale productions, notably Sting's *The Last Ship*, *The Hounds of Baskerville* for Northern Stage and a tour of *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*.

"After reading the script, I jumped at the chance to be involved as I love staging amazing stories which have a strong sense of place. I'm also passionate about working with community theatre and creating excellent productions outside London," said Jake.

Musical director Harry Style, whose credits include *Godspell* at Bridewell Theatre, London, said: "It's an absolute pleasure to work with such talented performers to create something truly worthy of the West End stage here in Chesterfield."

Ashgate Heritage Arts was formed in August 2019 and aims to bring history to life through musical storytelling. Composers Martin and Peter met on Chesterfield's folk music scene – Peter playing with the



band Jig for a Kiss and Martin with the Brampton Community Band. Martin later met Mary, the company's scriptwriter, through a group called 'Writers in the Peak'.

"We're all passionate about telling wonderful stories through musical theatre and using the arts to engage local communities with their local heritage. The



Crooked Spire is our first full production and we're hugely grateful to Arts Council England and Derbyshire County Council for their support," said Martin Coslett, producer and co-writer, Ashgate Heritage Arts.

Scriptwriter Mary Hennessy scooped the accolade of Best Original Writer at the Buxton Fringe for her monologue Sounds Like The NHS in 2001 and rave reviews at Buxton Fringe for her shows Autumn in Picardy in 2019 and Argy Bary in 2020. Mary has also produced all the medieval costumes for the show.

"It's a really great show with murder, mystery and music to keep the audience on its toes, threaded with humour which keeps the characters authentic," said Mary.

*Editor's Note:* The Crooked Spire is at The Pomegranate Theatre, Chesterfield, from May 19-21 at 7.30pm each evening (including a British Sign Language performance on Thursday, May 19). There are 2.30pm matinees on May 19 and 21 (the Saturday, May 21 matinee is followed by a Q & A with Martin Coslett, Mary Hennessy, Scriptwriter and Chris Nickson). To book tickets, visit [chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk](http://chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk) To find out more about Ashgate Heritage Arts visit [www.ashgateheritagearts.co.uk](http://www.ashgateheritagearts.co.uk) ■

Left: Adam Stickler as John. © Ashgate Heritage Arts, credit Tom Humphries.



## 'Catch Me If You Can' at the Pomegranate

DALLAS legend Patrick Duffy (The Man from Atlantis; Step by Step) and Linda Purl (Happy Days; Homeland) fly in from Hollywood to star alongside Gray O' Brien (Peak Practice; Coronation Street), leading the cast in this exciting new production of the classic Broadway thriller.

Inspector Levine is called to a house in the remote Catskill mountains to investigate

the disappearance of newly married, Elizabeth Corban. But when Elizabeth suddenly turns up, her husband seems surprised - and this is only the beginning of a truly baffling train of events, in which nothing is what it seems, and no-one is as they appear. Will this extraordinary sequence of surprising twists and turns lead to a murderous conclusion?

The cast also includes Ben Nealon, who played Captain



Jeremy Forsythe in ITV's award-winning series 'Soldier Soldier,' Hugh Fletcher, Alicia Grace Turrell and Paul Lavers.

Patrick Duffy said, "I've never done one of these wonderful Agatha Christie-type whodunnits before, where the plot isn't solved almost until the curtain comes down. It's a great new rhythm for me to be in. Everyone is telling one level of lie to the other person and the plot gets reconciled in the last few minutes. And it's great fun playing both sides of the character - the villain and the hero - until the audience finds out which side is the real one."

Linda Purl said, "This classic play is full of twists of turns. I remember when I first read it, it just pulls you in right away. You feel like 'I've got this figured out' and then you don't, then you don't, then you don't again. It's challenging for the audience and hopefully we'll have them on the edge of their seats as well as laughing along the way." The production will take place at the Pomegranate Theatre in Chesterfield from Tue 3 to Sat 7 May 2022 and tickets can be booked by calling the box office on 01246 345 222 or online at [www.chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk](http://www.chesterfieldtheatres.co.uk). ■



## WIN 2 TICKETS FOR THE OPENING NIGHT TO SEE 'CATCH ME IF YOU CAN' AT THE POMEGRANATE THEATRE

Starring **Patrick Duffy**, Linda Purl and Gray O'Brien, performances of 'Catch Me If You Can' will take place at the Pomegranate Theatre in Chesterfield from Tue 3 to Sat 7 May 2022. *Reflections* readers can win two tickets for this sensational production. To enter, simply answer the question below, and send your answer on a post card to 'Catch Me If You Can' Competition, Bannister Publications Limited, 118 Saltergate, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S40 1NG. Alternatively, email [jennyk@bannisterpublications.co.uk](mailto:jennyk@bannisterpublications.co.uk). The closing date is on Wednesday 20th April 2022

**QUESTION:** What was Patrick Duffy's stage name in the TV programme, 'Dallas'?

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**PATRICK DUFFY**  
**LINDA PURL GRAY O'BRIEN**

BY JACK WEINSTOCK AND WILLIE GILBERT  
Based on the French play *Trap for a Lonely Man* by Robert Thomas

DESIGNED BY JULIE GODFREY DIRECTED BY BOB TOMSON LIGHTING BY CHRIS DAVEY

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To what lengths is a person prepared to go?

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**PATRICK DUFFY**  
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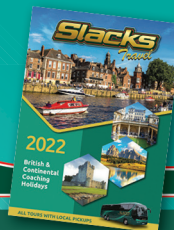
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# Slacks



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\* ADMISSION INCLUDED

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