

Other Desert Cities - audio introduction

Welcome to this audio introduction to the Old Vic's production **of Other Desert Cities**, written by Jon Robin Baitz and directed by Lindsay Posner.

The audio described performance will take place on Tuesday 13th May at 7.30pm. There will be a touch tour at 6pm. The introduction will start at 7.15pm and the performance itself at 7.30. The performance lasts approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes, including a 20 minute interval. Your describers are Alison Clarke and Roz Chalmers.

Please meet in the foyer for the touch tour. Touch Tours are completely free and last about 20 minutes. They give you an opportunity to explore the set and handle some of the props. There will also be an opportunity to meet some members of the production team who bring the play to the stage. It is essential to book, so please call 020 7981 0981 to reserve your place. If you're coming to the tour on your own we can arrange for a member of staff to accompany you. Please also let the box office know if you'd like to bring your guide dog into the auditorium and we will try to offer an aisle seat if one is available. The Front of House staff will be happy to take care of your dog during the performance if you would prefer.

Fifteen minutes before the performance starts we will repeat an edited version of these introductory notes live, so that you can listen to them through the headsets in the auditorium. We will be able to give you an update if there have been any last minute changes to the production, and this will also give you an opportunity to familiarise yourself with the headset controls.

There now follows information about **Other Desert Cities** divided into two further tracks.

Track 2: Set, characters, cast and production credits**Track 3: Our next audio described performance****Track 2: Set, characters, cast and production credits**

For this production of *Other Desert Cities* the Old Vic Theatre has been transformed into an 'in the round' space. The conventional proscenium arch and stage have disappeared as have the rows of raked seating. Instead, the acting area is a low raised platform. It's surrounded by banks of seats on all sides, bringing the front rows of the audience so close they can almost reach out and touch the actors. Four walkways lead off the platform, two at the front and two at the back, allowing the actors to walk through the audience to the stage.

The action begins on Christmas Eve 2003.

When we enter the theatre we face the established, comfortable home of Polly and Lyman Wyeth in Palm Springs, California, The location is suggested by three huge palm trees, standing behind the audience on the left and right of the platform, two on the left and one on the right. Their huge canopies of fronds spread just below the balcony. The palm trees are decorated for Christmas, strings of small white fairy lights are wound around their trunks.

At the rear of the space, on the left and right, two pillars about five feet square, soar high above us. These suggest the walls of the house; constructed of irregular blocks of light sandstone. The floor is of small, square, brown ceramic tiles, immaculately maintained with spotless white grouting.

The main focus of the set is the Wyeth's elegant living room. An enormous, round, cream rug covers a large amount of the floor, leaving only a border of tiles. The rug is patterned with the outlines of circles each about one metre in diameter radiating from a central circle. These are muted shades of beige and brown.

A square, suspended ceiling, constructed of small, open, square, wooden boxes hangs above the living room. Small spotlights are mounted on these frames.

The furnishings in the living room are minimal and muted. Two right angled seating units stand diagonally opposite each other in the front left corner and right back corner of the room. These are low banquettes formed of large cream upholstered cubes. The cubes are joined by a square wooden table of identical size. A simple, cream shaded lamp stands on each table, a heavy glass ashtray on one of them.

In the back left corner of the room is a free standing, low, log burning fireplace. It's circular, constructed of irregular grey rocks. Above the fire basket is a low, sharply angled, stainless steel canopy, attached to a long, slim stainless steel chimney.

The fireplace stands on a low stone hearth. On the hearth are a set of neatly hung fire tending implements including a shovel and a poker and a semi circular, metal log holder. In the front right corner of the room, diagonally opposite the fireplace stands a rectangular, two tier glass drinks table. It's well stocked with bottles of spirits, there's a filled glass water jug and a supply of empty glasses stand ready

The remaining item in the living room is a huge, perfect Christmas tree, about ten feet high. It stands behind the seating in the back right corner. It is perfectly conical and festooned with numerous baubles in white and

silver and red and white candy canes. Bright white lights glow from among the decorations. On the top of the tree a red and gold angel looks down on the scene.

There are five characters, all members of the same family

Polly Wyeth arrives fresh from a game of tennis. She's a handsome woman in her early sixties, slim and well-preserved. Her honey gold hair doesn't have a strand out of place and despite her exertions her face is still immaculately made up, with bright red lipstick. Polly's skin is webbed with fine lines but she's firm-chinned and youthful. Her downturned eyes seem guarded though, her gaze flicking over people's faces, her lips as quick to press together in disapproval as they are to smile. She's dressed in a white tennis shirt and shorts, with a white jumper draped just so over her shoulders. Polly gets ready for an evening out wearing a well-tailored powder blue sheath dress, adding large pair of sunglasses against the still bright sun. Her jewellery is understated and sophisticated, a silver watch and bracelet and small diamond drop earrings, a string of graduated pearls around her neck. She frequently has a glass in her hand.

Her husband, **Lyman** is an ex-actor turned politician. He's a few years older than Polly but retains his upright bearing and distinguished matinee-idol looks. His neatly combed thatch of greying hair is still thick, curling over his collar, and his blue eyes have a twinkle, but his face is a little pink from his recent exercise. Like his wife, Lyman's dressed in tennis whites – an aertex shirt and long trousers with a knife-edge crease. He has a blue towel draped around his neck and mops his face from time to time. He dresses for dinner in a conservative uniform of navy blue blazer with gold buttons, beige slacks and a blue and white striped shirt with a blue and red striped tie. Lyman looks fondly at his children, Trip and Brooke.

His son **Trip** is a man in his thirties, but with a sunny, open spirit that makes him seem much younger, possibly aided by the pot he smokes. Trip has tufty auburn hair and a wide, wonky smile set in a long face with guileless blue eyes. He bounds in, dressed in white tennis shorts and a turquoise shirt, swinging a tennis racquet. Later he wears an orange and blue checked shirt over knee-length beige cargo shorts, and often stands with his hands thrust deep in the pockets. On his feet are grey Converse sneakers without socks. Despite his cheerful manner, Trip's face sometimes creases in anxiety when he watches the people he loves in conflict.

Trip's older sister, **Brooke** has her mother's straight, tense mouth and a square resolute chin. Her short, tousled light brown hair is streaked with blonde and pushed carelessly back from her solemn face. Shunning formal tennis clothes, Brooke dresses in a navy blue scoop necked T shirt and knee length soft grey trousers. Later she changes into dark grey, ankle length tapered trousers and a soft grey T shirt. A dark blue cardigan is tied around her waist. There's a nervous restlessness about Brooke. She gestures earnestly with her long slim hands, sits cross-legged on the seats or paces the floor. Sometimes though, she stills, staring out with an expression that is lost and bleak.

The last member of the family is Polly's sister, **Silda**. It is never made clear who is the senior of the two, but Silda's reliance on alcohol has left her puffy-eyed and pasty, looking older than her sibling. Her auburn hair straggles messily to her shoulders, the grey beginning to seep back at her centre parting. She has a broad, mobile face, mouthing conspiratorially or wagging her eyebrows suggestively at her niece and nephew. Silda arrives enveloped in a yellow kaftan patterned in red and blue flowers. She makes an effort for dinner, wearing wide black linen trousers and a top patterned in a lurid print of palm trees in lime green, orange, purple

and black. Silda smokes like a professional, surrounded by grey clouds, gesturing with her cigarettes, always ready with a caustic comment.

Cast and production credits

Polly Wyeth – Sinéad Cusack

Lyman Wyeth – Peter Egan

Brooke Wyeth – Martha Plimpton

Trip Wyeth – Daniel Wyeth

Silda Grauman – Clare Higgins

Director – Lindsay Posner

Designer Robert Innes Hopkins

Lighting – Peter Mumford

Sound – Christopher Shutt

Track 3: Our next audio described performance

Our next audio described performance will be *Clarence Darrow* on Tue 10 June at 7pm. **Kevin Spacey** returns to the role of pioneering lawyer Clarence Darrow after the critically acclaimed Old Vic production of *Inherit the Wind* and the PBS film *Darrow*. **Thea Sharrock** directs him in David Rintels' compelling one man tour-de-force in which the larger than life Darrow with his legendary wit relives some of his pivotal experiences, including the infamous Scopes 'Monkey' and 'Thrill Killers' trials which established his reputation as a courtroom giant and civil rights hero