

The Franz Anton Mesmer Show

David Barry



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A play in 2 acts

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An actor's view of the play...

David Barry takes us into a rehearsal room where a late run through of a play concerning the life of Franz Mesmer is about to begin. As the fascinating story of Mesmer's life unfolds, moving between the Imperial Court of Vienna and Revolutionary Paris, the frequently strained and often combustible relations between the cast begin to unravel and the interplay between epic narrative and thespian skirmishing proves truly mesmerising.

Hugh Fraser, actor & crime writer (Captain Hastings in television's *Poirot*)

David Barry has used his insight and understanding of his subject to bring to life both the back stage drama of bringing a play to the stage, with all the problems a production throws at the creative team? Plus the egos, sensibilities and massaging of its cast, coupled with the history of a science I have long studied and practised, he gives us an insight into one of its founders. A subject many are frightened of, but more fascinated by?

Graham Cole OBE, actor (P.C. Tony Stamp in *The Bill*)

Within the confines of the rehearsal room, as the actors prepare a play, their own lives, trials and tribulations become entwined and are laid bare. A cleverly constructed play from David Barry, where life is imitating art.

Linda Marlowe, actor (Sylvie Carter in *EastEnders*)

The story centres around a group of actors rehearsing for a production of a play about the Life of Franz Mesmer, a Viennese healer. It is a play within a play, but Barry makes it very clear which character, or actor, is speaking. Written by an actor, one can be confident it gives first-hand knowledge of the relationships and often clashes of personalities, artistic thoughts, and patience that an actor goes through from the rehearsal room to the performance. Also a fascinating insight into Franz Mesmer's life and times. Great fun.

Linda Regan, actor & crime writer (April in BBC's *Hi-Di-Hi*)



About the Author

David Barry, was born and bred in North Wales, and has been an actor for more than 50 years. He began working professionally at the age of 12, and a highlight of his early years was touring Europe with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh in *Titus Andronicus*. He also appeared on the West End stage with Paul Scofield in Graham Greene's *The Power and the Glory*. In his early twenties he played Frankie Abbott in the successful television sitcom *Please Sir!* and the film of the same name.

When he appeared in a spin-off of the series, *The Fenn Street Gang*, he wrote one of the episodes which was accepted by LWT and broadcast. In the mid-70s he co-wrote the sketch show *The Lads from Fenn Street*, in which he also toured nationally for 18 weeks with two of his Fenn Street colleagues. Then in 1980, having appeared as Elvis, Stratford Johns' nephew, in *George and Mildred – the Movie*, he wrote three episodes for Thames Television's *Keep It in The Family*.

David always wanted to write novels, and after two failed attempts, his first novel *Each Man Kills* was published in 2002, followed by an American crime novel based on a true story, *Willie the Actor*, published three years later. In 2008 he spent a year in Aberdeen working as a Writer in Residence with children, during which time he completed a children's book, *The Ice Cream Time Machine*.

Since then he has written several crime novels, including *Muscle* and *A Deadly Diversion*. He also wrote the historical novel *Mr Micawber Down Under* which he later adapted into a play which toured south east England. In 2016, he reintroduced his Abbott character in a play *A Day in The Lives of Frankie Abbott*, set in a care home, which played at Edinburgh Fringe Festival and received a 5-star review. His one act-play, *A Friend of Ronnie's*, also toured as a double bill, and in the autumn 2018 played for 12 performances by Newquay Dramatic Society. His latest crime novel, *Walking Shadows* is due for publication in 2019.

David also presents a weekly radio show on the digital station Channel Radio, a live show which broadcasts every Saturday lunchtime, a show in which he has had many great guests, including Tom Baker, Brian Murphy, Glen Gregory of *Heaven 17*, Linda Marlowe and many others.

Because of his early years as a child actor, during which his entire education consisted of appearing in plays by Shakespeare, Wilde and Shaw, and dozens of others, he has himself become an obsessional writer, and storytelling is in his blood. He lives in Tunbridge Wells, and has two grown up children.

The Franz
Anton Mesmer
Show

CHARACTERS

HARRY (40s)

GORDON (Late 50s)

HEATHER (30s)

EMMA (20s)

SANDY (Early 50s)

CARL (40s)

DARYL (Late 20s)

ACT ONE

A rehearsal space; or the setting could be a bare theatre stage set for a rehearsal. There are two tables next to each other, one has papers and a laptop on it – this is the writer’s table - and the other has papers, a script and a CD player – this is the director’s table. There are chairs at the side of the stage and there is another table for props and rehearsal costumes.

It is early September and the actors wear light summer clothes, so that their rehearsal costumes can easily be worn on top.

Sitting behind the director’s table is HEATHER, busy trying to learn lines from a script. She sighs impatiently and looks at her watch.

Sitting the other side of the stage are DARYL and EMMA, DARYL sipping coffee from a Starbucks (or similar) carton.

HARRY enters hurriedly, followed by CARL and SANDY, all carrying cartons of coffee. HARRY has two cartons of coffee, one of which he gives to HEATHER

HARRY: There you go – one latte.

HEATHER: Thanks, Harry. How much do I owe you?

HARRY: Have that one on me. *(She goes to object and he raises a hand.)* No arguments.

HEATHER: Thanks. Any sign of Gordon while you were out?

HARRY shakes his head.

HEATHER: Anyone tried his mobile?

SANDY: I did. He said he was just parking the car. *(Looking at her watch.)* But that was at least fifteen minutes ago.

DARYL: Maybe he had to move it again.

CARL: I think we ought to make a start. I mean, Gordon’s not in the first scene.

HEATHER: But what about the warm-up?

CARL: Oh, sod the warm-up. Let's get on with it. We open next Thursday – less than a week away – and still you want us to play games.

HEATHER: Games!

CARL: Yes, when we agreed to mount a devised piece of theatre – with our illustrious writer (*acknowledging HARRY*) - I didn't think we would spend a whole week playing games.

HEATHER (*Coldly*): They were improvisations, helping us to work together as a team...

EMMA: I thought the first week was fun.

HEATHER: Thank you, Emma.

CARL: But a whole week. It's put us behind. And then we lost Siobhan.

HEATHER: But we didn't know we were going to lose her, did we?

DARYL: Three episodes of *EastEnders*. How bad is that?

HEATHER: Six lines in a soap? How *challenging* is that?

EMMA: But you never know. They might like her character and keep her on.

CARL: Unlikely. She dies in her third episode. So unless they bring her back as a ghost...

EMMA (*Giggling*): Well, you never know. Stranger things have happened.

HARRY: And I didn't envisage becoming involved as an actor.

HEATHER: It's only a few small scenes, Harry. You'll be fine

GORDON enters, full of apologies and large gestures of remorse.

GORDON: Morning, everyone. So, so sorry. The traffic was unbloodybelievable. I do apologise. The only thing that kept me from having a coronary due to stress was the realisation that I'm not in the first scene.

SANDY: Fifteen minutes ago you said you were parking the car. Where the hell have you parked? John O’Groats?

GORDON: Some woman recognised me from years ago. Wanted my autograph.

DARYL: And it took you fifteen minutes to write your name?

GORDON: She wanted to talk about the old programme. One of her favourite telly series she said. Nostalgia, you see.

SANDY: So you found it difficult to resist talking about yourself again.

GORDON stares at her frostily.

GORDON: I found it difficult to ignore her. It would have been rude. And, like I said, it’s not as if I’m in the first scene.

CARL: But Heather was waiting to start with a warm-up.

GORDON (*Huge astonishment*): I thought we’d gone beyond that stage.

CARL: That’s what I said.

HEATHER: Five minutes is all I ask. Just five minutes to get us in the mood.

GORDON: Sorry, love, to disagree. But my warm-up starts with *The Times* crossword. Give us a nudge when you reach scene two.

GORDON goes and sits down, gets his paper out of his bag and starts on the crossword. HEATHER is seething.

HEATHER: I need the warm-up as much as the rest of you. Especially me, since I’ve been forced to take over Siobhan’s roles – in order to save the show. So I think the least you can do is give me some support. You all agreed months back that I would hold workshops, improvisations and direct this devised drama. I never thought I’d have to perform as well.

CARL: Well, I suppose five minutes won’t do any harm.

SANDY (*Glaring pointedly at GORDON*): Might even do us some good.