

Pulse Records Limited in association with Bill Elms present



HELEN FORRESTER'S SMASH-HIT 'TWO PENCE TO CROSS THE MERSEY' RETURNS IN A BRAND NEW STAGE PRODUCTION

It's back, bigger and better than ever!
UK premiere tour to visit 15 venues during Autumn 2022

The brand new stage production of **Helen Forrester's Twopence To Cross The Mersey** is embarking on its first major UK national tour this Autumn.

Twopence To Cross The Mersey UK Premiere Tour 2022 will open on **Tuesday 6 September** at the **New Brighton Floral Pavilion in Wirral** and then go on to tour a further 14 venues nationwide through to mid-November. Venues include: **Rhyl, Stockport, Crewe, St Helens, Blackpool, Warrington, Darlington, Halifax, Croydon, Coventry, Lichfield, Bolton, and Southport, before closing in Liverpool.**

The new touring production of **Twopence To Cross The Mersey** is produced by **Rob Fennah and Lynn McDermott** for **Pulse Records Limited** in association with **Bill Elms** and **Directed by Gareth Tudor Price.**

Full cast to be announced.

About the show: Twopence To Cross The Mersey is a stunning period drama set in the early 1930's in the midst of the Great Depression.

In 1931, Helen's spendthrift father was declared bankrupt forcing the family to leave behind the nannies, servants, and beautiful middle-class home in the gentler Southwest of England. With nothing more than the clothes they stood up in, the family of nine took the train to Liverpool where they hoped to rebuild their shattered lives. It came as a terrible shock to find the thriving, wealthy port Helen's father remembered as a boy, the place his own father made his fortune, had long since gone.

While 12-year-old Helen's inept parents searched unsuccessfully to find work, she was taken out of school to look after her six younger siblings and the full burden of keeping house fell on Helen's young shoulders. Having never had to manage a family budget in their previous life, the Forrester's found themselves relying on meagre handouts from the local parish, charity organisations and the kindness of strangers.

At the age of 14, Helen had finally had enough of her miserable existence and so began a bitter fight with her mother and father to attend evening school in an effort to educate herself and make her own way in the world. But Helen's parents had no intention of releasing their unpaid slave. They had other plans for their selfish daughter.

Millions of people around the world know **Helen Forrester's** life story told through her **best-selling volumes of autobiography, Twopence To Cross The Mersey, Liverpool Miss, By The Waters Of Liverpool, and Lime Street At Two.**

Helen's literary achievements were celebrated in 2020 when an iconic **Blue Plaque** was unveiled at the **late author's family home in Hoylake, a place which featured heavily in her work.**

Playwright and Producer Rob Fennah said: *"In 2020 we embarked on a UK tour of By The Waters Of Liverpool, its sister show, which was brilliantly received, but forced to cancel after just two weeks due to the pandemic. We tried to reschedule it a couple of times but COVID restrictions kept getting the better of us. It was during this period of inactivity I decided to rework the Twopence To Cross The Mersey script; include some new scenes and give it a fresh look. Helen's army of loyal readers will be interested to know that, when she was still with us, Helen and I shared many letters and lengthy telephone conversations about her life story. There were some real gems in amongst those conversations which I have now written into the new scenes; fascinating memories of the late author that didn't find their way into her books."*

Helen Forrester's son, Robert Bhatia added: *"The partnership between playwright Rob Fennah and my mother Helen, and her legacy, has been outstanding. I saw the play during its last tour and the portrayal of my mother was utterly convincing."*

Co-producer Bill Elms said: *"Twopence To Cross The Mersey is one of those very special pieces of theatre which is just a real pleasure and absolute privilege to be part of. Helen Forrester's books are gritty but so heart warming at the same time. Her life story really captures audiences and we are incredibly excited to take the play on its very first national UK tour. Theatregoers who may have seen earlier versions can look forward to a new set and we'll be announcing the cast very soon. For fans who have never experienced the stage production, this is a chance to really feel Helen's words brought to life from the page to the stage."*

Co-producer Lynn McDermott concluded: *This new adaptation of Twopence To Cross The Mersey also features a sizeable chunk from Liverpool Miss, Helen's second volume of autobiography, so newcomers to Helen's story will get a complete picture of her early years in Liverpool."*

This year's premiere national tour of Twopence To Cross The Mersey will also be followed by a tour of By The Waters Of Liverpool – the next chapter of Helens' life story – in Spring 2023.

**Adapted by Rob Fennah · Directed by Gareth Tudor Price
Produced by Pulse Records Limited in association with Bill Elms
Fully endorsed by the Helen Forrester Estate**

Website: www.twopencetocrossthemersey.com
Facebook: www.facebook.com/TwoPenceThePlay

LISTING INFORMATION

**HELEN FORRESTER'S
TWO PENCE TO CROSS THE MERSEY**

FLORAL PAVILION

Tuesday 6 September – Sunday 11 September 2022

Marine Promenade, New Brighton, Wirral, CH45 2JS

Website: www.floralpavilion.com

Box Office: 0151 666 0000

RHYL PAVILION

Wednesday 14 September – Friday 17 September 2022

East Parade, Rhyl, Denbighshire, LL18 3AQ

Website: www.rhylpavilion.co.uk

Box Office: 01745 330000

STOCKPORT PLAZA

Monday 19 September – Tuesday 20 September 2022

Mersey Square, Stockport, SK1 1SP

Website: www.stockportplaza.co.uk

Box Office: 0161 477 7779

CREWE LYCEUM

Wednesday 21 September – Saturday 24 September 2022

Heath Street, Crewe, CW1 2DA

Website: www.crewelyceum.co.uk

Box Office: 0343 310 0050

ST HELENS THEATRE ROYAL

Tuesday 27 September – Saturday 1 October 2022

Corporation Street, St Helens, WA10 1LQ
Website: www.sthelenstheatreroyal.com
Box Office: 01744 756000

GRAND THEATRE BLACKPOOL

Tuesday 4 October – Thursday 6 October 2022

33 Church Street, Blackpool, FY1 1HT
Website: <https://www.blackpoolgrand.co.uk/>
Box Office: 01253 290190

WARRINGTON PARR HALL

Saturday 8 October – Sunday 9 October 2022

Palmyra Square, Warrington, WA1 1BL
Website: <https://parrhall.culturewarrington.org/whats-on>
Box Office: 01925 442345

DARLINGTON HIPPODROME

Tuesday 11 October – Wednesday 12 October 2022

Parkgate, Darlington, DL1 1RR
Website: www.darlingtonhippodrome.co.uk
Box Office: 01325 405405

HALIFAX VICTORIA

Thursday 13 October – Friday 14 October 2022

Fountain Street, Halifax, HX1 1BP
Website: www.victoriatheatre.co.uk
Box Office: 01422 351158

CROYDON FAIRFIELD HALLS

Monday 17 October – Tuesday 18 October 2022

Park Lane, Croydon, CR9 1DG
Website: www.bhlivetickets.co.uk
Box Office: 0300 500 0595

COVENTRY ALBANY

Wednesday 19 October – Friday 21 October 2022

Albany Road, Coventry, CV5 6JQ
Website: www.albanytheatre.co.uk
Box Office: 024 7699 8964

LICHFIELD GARRICK

Saturday 22 October – Sunday 23 October 2022

Castle Dyke, Lichfield, Staffs, WS13 6HR
Website: www.lichfieldgarrick.com
Box Office: 01543 412121

BOLTON ALBERT HALLS

Tuesday 25 October – Thursday 27 October 2022

Victoria Square, Bolton, BL1 1RU

Website: www.alberthalls-bolton.co.uk

Box Office: 0343 208 0500

SOUTHPORT ATKINSON

Tuesday 1 November – Friday 4 November 2022

Lord Street, Southport, PR8 1DB

Website: www.theatkinson.co.uk

Box Office: 01704 533333

EPSTEIN THEATRE LIVERPOOL

Saturday 5 November – Saturday 12 November 2022

85 Hanover Street, Liverpool, L1 3DZ

Website: www.epsteintheatre.co.uk

Box Office: 0844 888 9991

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For more information, interviews or images please contact Erica Dillon at Bill Elms Associates on erica@billelms.com

EDITORS NOTES

Playwright and Producer Rob Fennah talks about his friendship with author Helen Forrester...

How did you first meet Helen?

My background is in pop music and during the late-80s I was given a book called *Twopence To Cross The Mersey* to read while I was waiting to go into a radio interview. In the book Helen referred to her father, a man who had lost his fortune during the Great Depression, as a 'butterfly in the rain', a beautiful image that inspired me to write a song of the same title for an album I was working on. Helen got to hear the track, really liked it, and asked if she could use it when promoting her books around the world.

How did you collaborate artistically?

First and foremost, we got on. There was a picture taken on the day we met; it's a lovely photograph and says everything about the friendship that was to follow. We referred to it as 'when leather met tweed'. Once we'd got to know each other, I asked if I could have a go at adapting her book, *Twopence To Cross The Mersey*, into a stage play. She agreed, but on the strict understanding she had final approval. 'After all Rob', she reminded me, 'this is my life!' During the writing process she would tell me a lot more about the characters in her books and this really helped me bring them to life on stage. I still have a pile of faxes and letters from her describing these people in great detail, and some drawings too. We had a lot of fun doing it. Helen flew from her Canada home to attend the première of 'Twopence' at the Empire Theatre in Liverpool. She loved it. Although Helen is no longer with us, she is always in my thoughts. While I am writing, I always imagine her peering over my shoulder to check all the little details are correct and in order. It's a real privilege to be entrusted with her most famous works, but also a huge responsibility.

More about Helen Forrester

Helen Forrester was born June Huband in Hoylake, Cheshire (now in Merseyside), the eldest of seven children of inept, socialite, middle-class parents who lived on credit. When her father was made bankrupt during the Great Depression, the family was thrown into poverty. Evicted from their comfortable home in an English market town and with nothing more than the clothes they stood up in, the large family took the train to Liverpool where they hoped to rebuild their lives. While Forrester's father

searched unsuccessfully for work, the family were forced to live together in a single room. As the eldest child, the 12-year-old Helen was kept away from school to look after her six younger brothers and sisters. For the next few years the family were forced to rely on meagre hand-outs from the parish, and the kindness of strangers. At the age of 14 Forrester rebelled against her life of drudgery and her parents agreed to allow her to attend evening classes to make up for her missed years of education.

Throughout her teenage years, Forrester worked for a charitable organisation in Liverpool and Bootle, which provided background for her novels *Liverpool Daisy*, *A Cuppa Tea and an Aspirin*, and *Three Women of Liverpool*. After surviving the Blitzing of Liverpool and losing two consecutive fiancés to the Second World War she met and, in 1950, married Dr Avadh Bhatia; her life with him in India provided background for *Thursday's Child* and *The Moneylenders of Shahpur*. The couple travelled widely, eventually settling in Edmonton, Canada, in 1955, where Dr Bhatia became the director of the Theoretical Physics Institute at the University of Alberta. He was a pioneer in electronic transport theory and the study of diffraction of light by ultrasonic waves. The best-selling memoir of her childhood was *Twopence to Cross the Mersey*. It was later turned into a successful musical. Living in Alberta provided background for Forrester's novels *The Latchkey Kid* and *The Lemon Tree*. *Yes Mama*, which takes place mostly in late 19th and early 20th Century Liverpool, also includes a section about Alberta. She died on 24 November 2011 in Edmonton, Alberta.