

# Entertainment & Leisure

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Picture: Gemma Morgan

**Buddies:** Louis Holland, Charlie Thomas and Dominic Deakin in rehearsals for *Loserville*, which is playing at the Kenton Theatre on February 5 and 6

## School production is a 'ticket outta Loserville'

By **MATTHEW WILSON**  
mwilson@henleystandard.co.uk

SHIPLAKE College is taking a thoroughly professional approach to its latest school drama production — by staging it at the Kenton Theatre.

The show — a Seventies-set musical called *Loserville* — is playing for two nights at the New Street venue next month, with tickets on general sale.

Written by Busted star James Bourne and musical theatre veteran Elliot Davies, the story is based on a 2005 album called *Welcome to Loserville* by Bourne's other band, Son of Dork.

A Kenton spokesman said: "It is 1971. Michael Dork is 17. They call him and his friends nerds, geeks, slackers.

"Socially marginalised by the entire school and consistently picked on by Eddie, the coolest boy in school, Michael is desperate to find his 'ticket outta Loserville' and is convinced he can get computers talking to one another.

"Michael has also discovered a girl, Holly. If only he had the courage to talk to her..."

"Chaos ensues when Eddie interferes and blackmails Michael's friends to impress his father.

"Will he get his way or will our band of misfits crack the code in time and save the day?"

"Come to Shiplake College's musical production at the Kenton to find out.

"*Loserville* takes geek to a whole new rock-pop level and is a whirlwind of nostalgia, comedy and good old-fashioned nerd which will have you singing along and rooting for the good guys right from the opening number."

With a cast of 45 and a number of older students involved backstage, the show is very much a whole school production.

Auditions were held back in September and the first rehearsals held in October — all overseen by the school's new head of drama, Emma Farrell.

Mrs Farrell said: "Traditionally



Picture: Gemma Morgan

**Acting up:** the principal cast of Shiplake College's production of *Loserville*

the college did a junior production, which was years seven, eight, nine and 10 — and then a senior production which was years 11, 12 and 13.

"But I have always at my previous schools done full-school productions — I just think it's really important for all of the school to interact with each other and for our younger students to look up to the older students and for those to then become role models for them.

"So we've got students in this production right through from year seven — every year grade right up to sixth form.

"We've got five or six sixth-formers who are working backstage with us and a number of other students have expressed interest.

"I think what brings the cast numbers up as well is that we've got super-enthusiastic year seven and eights, so we've got them in some chorus numbers — which will be really lovely for them to be experiencing that honour on a big stage and in a real theatre."

Shiplake College has its own performing arts space, the Tithe Barn Theatre, and its own theatre company, Scruffy Penguin, which was founded in 2004.

*Loserville* is far from being the first time Shiplake College has

ventured out into the community for dramatic purposes. A production of Orwell's *Animal Farm* was staged on an actual farm, while the Shiplake countryside provided a filming location for a *Bugsy Malone* car chase.

With Scruffy Penguin having taken a show up to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2016, putting a show on at the Kenton is a natural fit for today's students.

Mrs Farrell said: "It's something I've done in the past and I feel like it gives the students a much more professional experience of putting on a production.

"They use the Tithe Barn Theatre we have here for the lessons and for rehearsals, so what I wanted to create for them was a bit more of a professional experience and just put a little bit more onus on them.

"Also, the space we have here isn't huge for a musical production standard. So traditionally they would have done more nights and performing — maybe five or six nights a week of performances — whereas now we're going to do two performances and we should be able to accommodate the friends and family of the cast members.

"It means then it's not eating into a lot of their school time and it's

not eating into every evening for a whole week. So it sort of takes away that pressure but leaves more of a creative pressure for them. So those are my main reasons for taking the show to the Kenton."

Prior to the evening performance on Wednesday, February 5, the cast and crew are staging a special matinee performance of the show for local primary schools.

As part of the build-up to the show, and as part of Shiplake College's community outreach, Mrs Farrell has been running a series of dance workshops for schools in the Henley and Reading area.

She said: "Shiplake Primary came to us here in school and did a workshop, and last week I went out to Nettlebed Primary School. Next week we're going to Caversham Primary and I think we've got Badgemore as well. So yes, an action-packed couple of weeks!

"We've opened up the matinee performance to welcome any primary schools that want to come off the back of the workshops — if they want to come and see the work we've done since we taught them some of the theme dances that our actors are doing."

Set almost half a century ago, five years before Apple pioneered the personal computer, *Loserville* also offers a timely reminder of what things were like before technology took over our everyday lives.

"That's kind of been our focus for it," says Mrs Farrell. "So in the opening number we've got phones and electrical items with the cast in awe looking at them.

"It took us a while to get the cast to understand how amazing these technologies and inventions were at the time, because they're so used to having everything on hand and having everything so technological for them. So it took a little while for them to get the wonder of that, which will hopefully come through in the performance."

• *Loserville* is playing at the Kenton Theatre on Wednesday, February 5, and Thursday, February 6. Performances start at 7.30pm, with tickets £16 for adults and £13 concessions. For more information and to book, call (01491) 575698 or visit [www.kentontheatre.co.uk](http://www.kentontheatre.co.uk)

## Mum's the word at literary festival talk

THE author of a bestselling book about motherhood is to give a talk at Henley town hall this spring.

Giovanna Fletcher will be in conversation with Steph Douglas from 8pm on Tuesday, March 17.

The event is the latest in an occasional series of "pop up" talks organised by the Henley Literary Festival.

A spokesman for the festival, which this year runs from September 28 to October 6, said: "Join Giovanna Fletcher, author of the number one bestseller *Happy Mum, Happy Baby*, as she talks to Steph Douglas ahead of her latest book, *Letters on Motherhood*.

"*Letters on Motherhood* is a collection of beautiful and deeply personal letters written by Giovanna to her three sons, her husband, McFly's Tom Fletcher, as well as the family and friends who have inspired and supported her to become the mother she is today.

"Giovanna shares the funny and moving personal tales of her own family life while also talking about the deeper universal truths of parenting, from coping with mum guilt, finding a work/family life balance, positive body image, rediscovering a sense of identity and a parent's hopes, fears and expectations for their child's future.

"With Henley Literary Festival regular Steph Douglas of gifting service *Don't Buy Her Flowers* on interviewer duties, this promises to be a warm, funny and heartfelt discussion about



Letters: Giovanna Fletcher

motherhood and the lessons Giovanna has learned along the way."

Tickets are £12. To book, call (01491) 575948 or visit the festival online at [www.henleyliteraryfestival.co.uk](http://www.henleyliteraryfestival.co.uk)

Books will be available to purchase on the night.

■ "BAD Words And What They Say About Us" is the subject of a free author talk at Henley Library on Monday (January 27). Philip Gooden, a novelist whose previous books on language include *Who's Whose?*, *Faux Pas?* and *The Story of English* will be speaking at the Ravenscroft Road venue from 6pm. A spokesman for Robinson, the publisher of *Bad Words*, said: "Philip Gooden shows how and why taboo words and contentious expressions were first used in English. He discusses the ways such words have changed over the years and explores how a single syllable or two may possess an almost magical power to offend, distress or infuriate." The talk starts at 6pm and will be followed by an audience Q&A. Entry is free but attendees are asked to book their place by calling 01865 815278 or speaking to a member of the library staff.

## Choral showcase at St Mary's Church

THE annual Henley Choir Festival is returning to St Mary's Church tomorrow night (Saturday) at 7pm.

The programme includes part one of Haydn's oratorio *The Creation* and will feature contributions from soloists Rebecca Bell, Tom Emlin Williams and James Sticking, the Rector of All Saints, Peppard.

The choirs taking part are those of St Mary's, Henley; All Saints', Peppard; St Nicholas, Rotherfield Greys; St Margaret's, Harpsden; the Hambleton Valley Choir; St John the Baptist, Kidmore End and Christ the King, Sonning Common; and St Thomas', Goring and St Mary's, Stratley.

Now in its 11th year, the



Soprano: Rebecca Bell

2020 festival is being held in aid of Autism Berkshire. Admission is £5 for both audience members and those taking part.

For more information and to book tickets, call the festival organisers David Butler on 0118 972 4065 or Elizabeth Hodgkin on (01491) 573192.

## Eliot's play to mark Becket anniversary

TS ELIOT'S verse drama *Murder in the Cathedral* is to be staged at St Thomas of Canterbury Church in Goring to mark the 850th anniversary of the martyr's death and the 900th anniversary of his birth.

The play dramatises the last month of Thomas Becket's life, leading up to his killing at the behest of Henry II in December 1170.

Performed by the St Thomas of Canterbury

Players, it is being staged at the church in Manor Road next Thursday, Friday and Saturday (January 30 to February 1).

The Thursday and Friday performances start at 7.30pm, with the Saturday performance at 4pm.

Tickets are £10 from Inspiration in High Street, Goring or on the door.

Alternatively, telephone (01491) 873341 or email [nigelfountain@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:nigelfountain@tiscali.co.uk)