

THE SOUTH DEVON PLAYERS THEATRE & FILM COMPANY

Audition information pack – BEN HUR



www.southdevonplayers.com





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Company Contact Details

SECURITY NOTICE:

Please be aware that any correspondence received from a contact address/ name other than those below (or that is not on headed paper and signed by hand, by [a company director as registered with Companies House](#)), should be disregarded and treated as unauthorised impersonation.

Email:

Please send all messages to the company owner, Miss Laura Jury on: southdevonplayers@gmail.com (emails checked twice daily). All messages for other persons in the company, will be acknowledged, and then forwarded to them directly.

Phone:

Call Laura Jury directly, on: 07855 090589 (If no reply please make sure to leave a text message or answerphone message).
If calling from outside the UK, the country code is +44.

Post:

Non-urgent postal mail to our rehearsal venue: c/o Chestnut Community Centre, 1- 3 Poplar Close, Brixham, Devon TQ5 0SA (mail to this address is collected weekly at rehearsals. If you need to send something urgently or with more security, please email or phone us directly for a home postal address)

Website and main social media newsfeeds:

Website: www.southdevonplayers.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/sdevonplayers

Twitter: www.twitter.com/sdevonplayers

Contracts, and agreements in all matters, must be filled out and returned in person or via email (southdevonplayers@gmail.com) to a company director as registered on Companies House, who are the only persons authorised to countersign a contract and make agreements/ reports on a contractual, employment, copyright, financial, legal or employment basis for the company. No other person may recruit/hire/fire, make agreements or sign contracts on behalf of the South Devon Players.

*The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company, is the trading name of The South Devon Players Limited;
Registered at Companies House: Company number [11569166](#)*

Welcome to the South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company

“The power of the final scene was such that the audience sat transfixed in silence, barely able to comprehend the beauty of what they’d just witnessed ”

Rick Stone – Audience member, 2019.

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company, offers a new approach to theatre-making. Involving people of all levels of experience, from beginners to seasoned professionals, the Players create full scale dramatic productions primarily focussing on historical events and classical texts, which have attracted national awards and international nominations, as well as glowing audience feedback both online and in person, for the productions performed at a variety of venues centering on, but not limited to, the region of South Devon, in the United Kingdom.

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company, offers a truly unique experience; taking a pride in creating excellent productions working to the strength of the venues, with painstaking research and attention to detail in perfecting costumes, props and performance, the shows often have a strong interactive element, making the audience feel part of the action.

Based in the beautiful setting of South Devon, showcasing the diverse and considerable talents of local people, our creative use of performance space allows us to create breathtaking, world-class theatre, with our own unique style, while not compromising the production itself. We bring together talented performers, writers, technicians and costume makers, from the Southwest, with enthusiastic, loyal audiences and together, we create magic.



What We Do



At the The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company, we make theatre from some of the world's most powerful history, legends and classical texts; stories that help us see the world in new and unexpected ways, while revisiting both much loved classical texts and known historical events, coupled with also exploring commonly overlooked historical events which are invaluable insights into pivotal events which made our community, and world, as it is now.

With a rehearsal base at Chestnut Community Centre, on the edge of our hometown of Brixham, on the southwest coast of England, we seek to tour our shows out to a variety of exciting performance spaces, mostly to local theatres, but also to museum spaces, churches, and even open-air venues, facilitating accessible, approachable opportunities for people to experience theatre.

Our team members are welcomed regardless of initial experience, sexuality, religion or national origin. What we look for is the desire to create powerful new theatre productions in line with our fundamental values of excellence in performance, alongside personal empowerment; mutual respect between team members and the public; learning and improving new skills; and collaboration with other organisations.

Over the course of a typical year, we produce two to four productions, as well as also collaborating with other theatre & film production companies to help our team members find further work in the area, in the creative industries. We also take our community responsibilities very seriously and support external community events, amateur groups, historical and cultural events with our skills, wherever feasible through time and our team members availability. As we are able to build funds and the organisation, the number of productions and collaborations will be able to increase.

We also seek, funding permitting, to build an educational, training arm to facilitate accessible training to local people, of a wide range of diverse backgrounds, enabling them to develop strong performance skills to seek employment in the creative industries, and alongside that, develop excellence in transferable skills in communication, self-presentation, self-confidence, teamwork, literacy, and technical skills.

Our productions have won national and regional awards including the all-England Epic Award 2017, the Torbay Together: Creativity In The Community Award 2014, with national and international film festival nominations for our film and video projects, including the Los Angeles Cinefest, Miami Epic Trailer Film Festival, UK Screen One International Film Festival. We are also nominated for an international theatre award in New York.

We are passionate and determined to create high-quality theatre featuring local and regional performers, proving that local people can put on world-class performance.

“Consistently high-quality shows and films created by a powerhouse of up and coming local talent ”

Gerard Christiaans - 5 star Google page rating

“It was educational, and entertaining in equal measure ” Simon Parks – 5 Star Google page rating

Our Audiences & Marketing Reach

Awards:

Our productions have won international, national and regional awards including the Theatre Partner Award at the Long Island Theatre Awards New York in 2019, the BrixAward for community contribution in 2019, the All-England Epic Award in 2017, the Torbay Together: Creativity In The Community Award in 2014, with national and international film festival nominations for our film and video projects, including the Los Angeles Cinefest, Miami Epic Trailer Film Festival, and the UK Screen One International Film Festival.

Audience Figures for The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company are growing:

- Between June 2018 and Oct 2019, our physical audiences increased by 490%.
- Online followers on social media increased to over 22,000 from 44 countries.
- Audiences grew with both many new attendees, and a high retention of returning audiences from previous shows.
- Audiences are also building abroad with those who cannot attend our shows in person, viewing our stage productions online. These include private individuals, and schools, primarily in the Americas, Middle East, and Asia.

Marketing Reach:

- Online newsletters and social media posts reach over 23,000 people internationally, directly, and many more with shared posts and forwarded messages.
- Printed theatre programmes for each show reach all audiences, around 63% of audience members purchase one. They are often shared when people make group bookings.
- Online sales have increased year on year although box office sales “in person” remain popular.

Audience Profile:

- We have a local physical audience based on regional demographics.
- The average local age is 44, with a higher number of retired people
- An average of 91% of residents are UK born, however in the summer we see an increased footfall from people on holiday due to being a high-tourist area.
- We have a large international following, who follow our shows online using such tools as YouTube or social media feeds. Our current social media following is over 22,080, before counting an organic reach.

Location & physical footfall:

While our rehearsal venue is a small community centre out-of-town, we ensure that our performances take place at central locations in towns and cities, close to public transport as well as parking.

Show / project advertising in physical locations is centred on, though not in any way limited to, the town centres & city-centre locations where the shows are taking place. Current shows typically tour South Devon, and then go on to Bristol. We are hoping to expand further as funding and venues permit.

Our work during Covid-19 & looking to the future

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have continued to work, moving our productions online, using digital broadcast software and Zoom to create exciting new forms of theatre and performance, to ticketed “online” streamed events and projects.

As a result during the pandemic, working from our home studios, we have created, and continue to create, a high number of our own online productions on a profit share basis (equal shares of ticket sales), as well as additional fully funded pieces that our team were commissioned to create, continuing to create paid work for actors and crew, even during the most challenging time that the theatre industry could face.

This is also allowing us to look ahead to the future, and explore technologies, where, increasing potential accessibility as for those who cannot visit venues in person, and audience numbers by reaching people on a global basis, we are looking towards being able to provide (paid) streaming access to our future shows when we can return to theatre stages.

When we are able to return safely to the stage, we have 18 months of exciting stage shows planned, and many more under consideration.

We will be looking to expand on our production teams, crew and actors, in the South Devon area when this pandemic is abating.

"What an ingeniously devised and wonderfully performed piece. It really made our Halloween. Looking forward to the next one. "- I.K"

Where it all began: Brief history & Background of the South Devon Players

We were founded during the winter of 2005-2006, by four local actors. Struggling to find opportunities beyond those offered by annual amateur musicals, we decided to start our own.

We started with very little; one of us, who owned a car, was recruited to transport as much as the rest of us could “clear out” at home to a car-boot sale. This gave us starting funds of £80. In the meantime, we also found a small rehearsal space at the local Royal British Legion social club. Researching local history and discovering the court records of a 17th Century scandal in the nearby town of Totnes, provided material for our first script. And thus we began our journey.

Over the years we have encountered many challenges. Despite good reviews for our work, we found it very difficult, as a new organisation, for many years, to find good venues, and were heavily limited by public perceptions of what the quality of a show in a church hall would be like, thus finding ourselves usually performing to audiences of around 10 or 12 people, and unable to attract the programme managers of actual theatres so that they could see our work.

The first big change came in 2013, when we first performed our production of Les Miserables; The Memoirs of Jean Valjean; a script we wrote ourselves, based on Victor Hugo's novel. During our tour to local church halls, a producer from London came to see our show. Within 24 hours, he had emailed us, telling us how impressed he was with the show and how more people should see it. He paid for us to take the show to the Palace Theatre in Paignton. We reprised the show, to excellent full-house audiences, who now willingly came, now that they could see us in a theatre instead of a church hall.

The glass ceiling of finding venues was broken. We were slowly able to move away from church halls, and into theatres. More and better venues began to accept us, although some continued to avoid us until more recently, due to our small beginnings, and we continued to slowly grow.

While we have never been able to successfully obtain grant funding to expand as we would have liked, we have survived and managed to grow with scrimping and saving from having stands of plants & bric-a-brac at table top sales, sponsored activities, etc, and learning how to recycle and repurpose clothing and items obtained from charity shops and on websites such as Freecycle.

We have worked on films, creating our own Arthurian feature film centring on the “dark knight” Mordred, which is now in post-production, and have now completed our production of William Shakespeare's Macbeth, to unfailingly strong reviews, some likening the quality of our productions to those at the Globe Theatre.

We have won national awards such as the All- England Epic Award winner in 2017, a national award which celebrates innovation in grassroots arts, as well as local awards like Torbay Together's Creativity In The Community award.

We have worked with a number of other local organisations, providing actors, historical recreations, photographers, voiceovers, and anything that we could help with, towards a shared goal of increasing participation and opportunity in the local arts.

The ultimate aim is to continue to grow into a successful self - sustaining regional theatre company which is not only providing work for local creatives, but also provides a significant contribution to the creative community of our home region. We welcome anyone who would like to join us on this journey.

What to expect when working with us

We are committed to following best practice guidelines; you are able to read our inhouse policies, as well as union (Equity/ BECTU) guidance which we follow and regularly review, on our website, in the Policies section.

Our senior crew regularly familiarise themselves with the latest guidance in best practice. Ultimately, we are a safe, supported space where we expect all of our team to feel safe mentally & physically, and when we are working with outside companies, venues, productions, etc, for them to have the very best collaborative experience possible.

Our cast and crew (everyone working with the company, on a regular or one-off basis), are required to have the ability (and desire!) to work seamlessly in a professional, calm, and supportive team, where everyone is respected regardless of their previous production experience, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, racial background, religion, political beliefs, or disability.

There is very little day to day hierarchy in the team; we work under the belief that whether you are making the tea, directing, rigging the lights, playing the lead role, or in one crowd scene at the back, you are equally critical to the show's success and quality, and equally important. Equally, the actions of each person in the team, reflect upon the company as a whole.

When we work in a space, whether that is in our rented rehearsal hall, or touring to a performance venue, or on a promotional event, we take care that the venue, and venue staff, the space and all items in the space are treated with the same respect as we afford our own team and belongings.

We do operate a series of contracts (samples of our in-house contracts are available on our website), for actors, crew, and when touring to venues, agreeing all pertinent details of the project. We are very open about financial (payment/ "in kind"/ expenses) details for our cast and crew, as detailed on our website in the auditions and crewing sections, and downloadable audition packs.

As a condition of involvement, all actors, crew and other staff are required to fill out and return a contract per project, as well as being encouraged to retain a copy for their own records (as well as supplying to any agent, trade union or other body relevant). Those not returning a completed contract within two weeks of a role or work offer, for any reason, will be deemed to be no longer interested, and the role may be automatically re-advertised.

Communication is critical in our team. For each project, we have a Facebook-based locked "project group" where work, resources, information, research, questions can all be put on one central place. We require that cast and crew remain familiar at all times with the contents of these groups, and that nobody involved in a production is barred or made to feel "pushed out". Company directors/owners must also have unrestricted access for oversight.

“Every single one of us working on this project is entitled to work in a safe space: a space free of fear, a space free of bullying and harassment of any kind. We will work together honouring our differences and celebrating the gifts we each bring to the table. We will treat one another with politeness and respect at all times and, if we are subjected to or witness bullying and harassment, we will speak out knowing that our voices will be heard and we will be taken seriously. Together we can create a Safe Space.”

(above) Taken from Equity's "Safe Spaces" policy, which we follow.

People working with us are expected to keep regular notes on their scripts/ work/ roles, work to deadlines/ required expectations of work quality, be fully aware of safety and other production laws, be actively involved in the work, and be pleasant, and respectful of others at all times.

In cases where things have gone wrong, and someone feels bullied, attacked, abused, or that there has been impropriety their way, They are asked to contact the company owners as a matter of urgency, with any evidence available, for investigation, advice, signposting, and if necessary, action to be taken. If unable to deal "in-house" with the issue, the company owners reserve the right to seek union advice/intervention, (and to contact law enforcement authorities if someone is in danger) to resolve the problem.

While we do not cast or crew off resumes or Cvs, we are likely to request a copy of yours, as in applying for production grants (to improve wages to cast and crew) , external funders may request a CV from each person involved as a condition of funding, to understand more about the people involved.

Reviews

More reviews can be viewed at <https://www.southdevonplayers.com/testimonials.html>

Hello you! Not sure where else to post feedback about the Spooky Brixham film? I just wanted to say how good this was. Actually, excellent! The format, the stories, the actors and characterisation, the look and feel, the graphics and background art, the music! It was all just wonderful. Well done to everyone for putting together a little work of art, with humour, poignancy, and some genuine tingles down the spine moments. It was an evocative and atmospheric piece, and to have done this in the middle of a pandemic is a minor miracle. I can see this going down really well in schools and community groups, local residential homes, libraries. Brilliant!



Gillian Sathanandan

I cannot believe it was Kestas first time on stage, he was brilliantly funny and a great actor too. My daughter was so impressed with the whole cast and easily on a par with the Macbeth she saw at the Globe! Well done **Laura** and all involved.

1 h Love Reply



Sophie Bower A brilliant review and one that I whole heartedly agree with! I'm also no Shakespeare expert, I find the plays impossible to read, but then they were never supposed to be read. I have watched many performances though from amateur to professional and this production of Macbeth was outstanding! The whole cast were brilliant & Thank goodness Laura made that call ... Macbeth was absolutely incredible!

Love · Reply · 1d



November 1 at 11:29 AM · 👤

Hi [redacted] Just wanted to say how much [redacted] and I enjoyed your performance on Spooky Tales last night. The show was ingeniously devised and wonderfully well performed. It really made our Halloween. Thank you. Every good wish xx

The show synopsis & background

Based on the famous novel by Lew Wallace, Ben Hur is set in the first century AD. Judah Ben Hur, a young nobleman of Jerusalem, a city under the occupation of the Roman Empire, is framed for the attempted murder of the Roman governor, by his erstwhile closest boyhood friend, Massala, now a Roman commander. Sentenced to life as a galley slave; a sentence which usually led to death within months, Judah survives, and after a pirate attack on the Roman navy in the Aegean sea, travels to Rome a hero, having saved the life of the Roman commander in his escape. He once more returns to Jerusalem, seeking his mother and sister, who were imprisoned for the same attack, and finds no trace of them. He does however, find Massala, and blinded by rage, challenges Massala at the annual Roman "games". Massala is killed in the Games, with his dying breath, reveals to Judah that his mother and sister were in fact released and driven from the city as lepers. With all hope, and all lust for revenge, gone, Judah is lost, but fate is not finished with him. He eventually finds his mother and sister, who are miraculously healed by a preacher, who has recently come to the city.

A historical drama set in Biblical times, interwoven with the life and death of Jesus Christ, who appears twice in the drama, this is ultimately a powerful tale of hope and love, set within the dramatic and often brutal times of the Roman Empire.

The script is brought to life by strong, memorable characters, both male and female, carefully crafted into a show which will not only explore ambitious creative theatre-making, but also a show, that regardless of any religious or political belief of the part of the audience members, will remain a powerful, beautiful memory for years to come.

Content advisories

(swearing, violence, sex, nudity, strobe lights, loud sounds, religious/political themes, discriminatory behaviour)

- Mild swearing (These are more creative insults than actual obscene words)
- Violence/ blood appears in several scenes including threatening behaviour, manhandling of prisoners, the sea battle, one scene of gladiatorial combat, Massala's wounds after the Games, the Crucifixion.
- There is no sex or nudity in this show. There is one verbal reference to rape.
- Costumes are at minimum tattered tunics. We do not go down to loincloths or similar, for this production.
- Some actors with fast costume changes, may require changing space in the wings or equivalent.
- There will be loud sound effects on several occasions. While we will use some fast lighting changes and lighting flashes, we will be stopping short of using actual strobe lighting.
- The play does contain political and cultural themes of the time, which are pivotal to the events of the story. Ben Hur is widely considered to be a Christian story, due to the intervention of Jesus in the storyline on two occasions, including in the final resolution of the story. However, the production is not aimed at being political or religious propaganda for the modern day, and opinions of the characters in the story, are solely those of the characters, who remain as faithful as possible to those written in the original novel by Lew Wallace.
- Some characters do express opinions which would have been common in the First Century Roman Empire, but which would be considered unacceptable in the modern day. Massala and a few of the other darker characters do make some classist, and antisemitic remarks in-character. Slavery (regardless of a characters race, slaves were a social class as opposed to of a specific ethnicity in ancient Rome) is depicted. None of the characters with offensive viewpoints have their behaviour glorified, or depicted as acceptable.

The show rehearsal, technical schedules and performance dates. (And how our tours work)

(please note that all required cast must be available for technical schedules, and all cast for all performance dates.)

Audition date – August 29th 2021 from 12 midday at Chestnut Community Centre, 1-3 Poplar Close, Brixham, Devon TQ5 0SA.

Rehearsals will take place on Wednesday evenings (arrival 6pm, begin 7pm, finishing around 9.30pm) and Sunday afternoons (arrival 12pm, begin 1pm, finish between 4pm & 5pm) at Chestnut Community Centre, 1-3 Poplar Close, Brixham, Devon TQ5 0SA.

Additional dates: If needed, additional Sunday morning rehearsals for specific fight or action choreography, may be called. The rehearsals will be set to specific scenes and sections of the script, (a detailed schedule will be issued once the show is cast, in line with any availability notes provided by cast).

All cast will also be called to a local (south Devon area) based cast and crew character photoshoot/ videoshoot on location, for show promotion, and for cast portfolio, date to be agreed among the cast and crew; once costumes are available.

There will be a few dates that there are no rehearsals: The non-rehearsal dates will be Wednesdays in November, and there will be no rehearsals between Christmas and the New Year. :

Show dates 2022-

(Dates and performances are still being booked, using Fridays & Saturdays in April & May, excluding Easter week. There is the faint possibility that we will extend into June 2022, depending on demand. The dates below are those fully contracted at the time of creating the audition pack (April 2021) and more are likely to be booked within that timeframe.

Aside from Brixham Theatre, these shows run to our usual tour planning. We arrive by midday at the venues, set up in the afternoon, perform in the evening, pack down and leave after the performance. Due to this heavy turn-around, we do not book more than one venue per weekend.

Brixham (Live show plus filming for future streaming) April 8-9th (three shows).

Brixham Theatre, being volunteer-run/ staffed, also require two rehearsals of the show to orientate the venue staff/ in house technicians; these will be on April 6th and 7th.

Bristol (live show)– April 23

Bodmin (live show) - May 8th

Plymouth (live show plus global live stream) – May 14th

Casting information

It should be noted that our casting attempts to be as flexible as possible. While we mark ideal age ranges, we are happy to see auditions from outside that age range. Age is a general guide. In cases where characters are in a family group in the show, the age differences will be cast to reflect, as closely as possible, that range.

As a company based in Torbay, South Devon, we prioritise casting from the South Devon region. This is because actors will be expected to attend rehearsals in Brixham once or twice a week (depending on rehearsal schedule), and also because we are a company primarily formed to create professional work for actors and creatives in South Devon. We have been known to cast further afield, including internationally, but our priority is the people of the South Devon area.

Diverse casting

We welcome auditions from people of all ethnicities, backgrounds and demographics; and those auditions will be weighted equally. All castings are in line with Equity's Manifesto for Casting. Nobody need provide information that they do not wish to.

Gender blind casting

We are big advocates for gender blind casting; especially in projects like Shakespeare and adaptations of classical literature where the character list may be very "male heavy".

While this does not mean that all roles are cast gender blind, and we may feel that some roles need to be very specifically male or female presenting, we like as many roles as possible to be open to both male and female presenting actors. Roles therefore will state whether they are male, female, or genderblind. Character breakdowns will usually refer to the character by their pronouns given in the original text, with the understanding that these can be altered.

Child actors

It should be noted that we tend not to have many child actors in our shows, unless specifically required for a role. Any child in a show, and their parents/ chaperone, must abide by the company policies, and the law, with regard to child actors and their care. If a person who is a minor wishes to apply for an audition, the contact must be through their parents or legal guardians, and are subject to the national legislation surrounding child actors, which parents and guardians will need to be familiar with.

Doubling

In many shows with large character lists, actors who play characters who only appear for part of the story, may also be asked to take up one or more additional roles in other parts of the play. In most of our shows, this is the majority of a cast.

Accessibility

If you have specific access requirements to attend the audition/ castings, or any questions about same, please contact us to discuss. southdevonplayers@gmail.com / 07855 090589.

To audition

Please read through the list of characters below, and decide which characters you would like to audition for (you are encouraged to audition for more than one). Please email us on southdevonplayers@gmail.com for sides and an audition form.

It should be noted that we cast very much on the raw talent we seen in front of us, as well as good time keeping, and that we set very little store by name-dropping, resumes and showreels, unless there is a demonstration of a specialist skill required for a role. This allows people at all stages of their career to be seen and treated equally. It is very common for us to cast a complete range of people from complete beginners, through to experienced professionals with decades of experience, to work side by side.

We encourage you to let us know, on the audition form, what characters or type of role you may be interested in.

Please bring your side and your audition form. It is also important to note expected dates that you will be away, because if you are selected for the role, rehearsal schedules for everyone in the team will be built around this information.

We specifically look for

- Excellent timekeeping (a good indicator for future reliability)
- Pleasant teamwork and friendliness (being pleasant & respectful to the other people in the room, etc)
- A skilled performance in the audition (good characterisation, energy, projection etc. It doesn't have to second guess the director, but we need to see something that isn't just an expressionless recital of a list of words)
- Ability to demonstrate any specialist skills required for the role (or willingness to train with us).
- Good preparation for your audition. (while we are also open to people turning up on the day, and will have sides & audition forms available, we do like to see preparedness.)
- Treating the casting as a professional workspace. (adhering to the norms of acceptable social behaviour in a workspace)

We usually do not operate a system of call-backs, unless in specific circumstances. We usually see what we need to, in the main audition day, and cast from that. This may mean that the casting day runs a little longer, but that it all happens within one day.

We aim to let everyone know the results of their audition, within 48 hours of the audition day. Occasionally this may be delayed while we make, and await response from role offers, so the final castings may not be announced for a few days. If we have not received a response to a role offer within 48 hours of the offer being made, we will need to assume that the role is not of interest, and return to our shortlist to offer the role to someone else. This turn-around ensures that everyone's efforts are confirmed as soon as possible.

We do not expect you to have learned the audition sides for the casting day, but we do strongly suggest familiarising with them ahead of time so that you are also able to look up and away from it at times.

What happens on audition day - Normal auditions

On audition day, we ask the actors to arrive for 1pm (doors are open from 12 midday). There is limited parking on a first-come first served basis at the community centre, we ask anyone coming late to not block the driveways of local residents living next to the community centre, and to enquire upon arrival for pointers to other places to park on adjoining streets.

Arrivals will be asked to sign in with an audition form (template available on our website on the audition page). Free teas and coffees are available.

We hold open casting calls, and make every effort to see everyone who attends, however, preference will be given to those who attend on time, or have told us in advance that they will be late, rather than unexpected latecomers, as we look for timekeeping as a desirable part of the audition.

Auditions are held in a group setting, with a semicircle of chairs around the room, using the central space for performance, in front of the casting team's table. The casting panel consist of the show director, stage manager, and production team.

We begin at 1pm, with a brief talk about the project, answering any questions that arise, and then audition by character grouping from the audition sides, in small groups. Usually we are finished by around 5pm, however as we make a point of seeing everyone, it can occasionally go on later.

Once we have seen everyone, the audition panel will withdraw for around 15- 30 minutes, and decide on the castings. Auditionees are most welcome to remain and wait to hear/ discuss casting offers there and then (with free coffee and tea!) or to go home and be contacted later over the next few days.

Sometimes finalising castings may take a few days; we contact those selected as soon as possible, with casting offers, and a request to contact us back to accept or decline. If roles are declined, we may need to re-contact people and re work things, so the final casting can take a few days.

If you cannot attend the audition on the casting date given, please contact us to arrange an alternative time to be auditioned in advance of the audition date for this project. If not all of the panel are available, the audition may be recorded for viewing by the rest of the panel.

Minors must attend in accompaniment with a parent, or a legally licenced chaperone provided by the parents.

We ask that phones and digital devices are switched to silent during the audition session.

Covid Safety

While we hope very much that we will be back to near-normal, we will remain flexible with regards to any changing pandemic situation, or government/ trade union guidance.

- If you are ill, please do not attend in person. Contact us in advance to arrange an alternate method of audition or rehearsal for the duration of your illness.
- Safety guidance, as applicable to the situation at the time of the auditions and rehearsals, will be provided by our production team, and must be adhered to.
- Additional requirements for cleanliness, PPE, etc, may be voluntarily in place for our team, and will be communicated to all involved in the production.

Payments etc

Payments for being involved in our shows can take one of two forms. We always offer an equal profit-share, as the basic guaranteed format. This is an equal share of the profits from ticket sales (less performance venue hire but no other deductions, as rehearsal space, costumes/props/equipment, insurances etc are covered by our market book stall/ ebay shop).

Nobody connected to the production (or the company as a whole) earns more or less than any other person under this model, because everyone is equally important to the show.

In these cases, full screenshots of the ticket sales reports are made available to the cast and crew as well, because we believe in being completely open.

We do however always aim to exceed this. Project funding for each project is sought, inclusive of a union-rate wage as minimum, and should it be secured, everyone is automatically upgraded to that wage.

At the current time, profit share and fully waged projects are equally around 50% each of our output.

Occasionally we may receive a private donation or tip to the company for the actors and crew, and if it does not equate to enough for full wages, it is included in the profit share alongside the ticket sales, so that it is shared equally among the cast and crew.

We also make character photos, and final performance video clips available for actors and crew to use in their personal portfolios. We do ask that the photographer is credited for photos and that the company is credited with any video clips. Copies of show posters and any press articles featuring the name of any of the cast or crew are also made available to those cast and crew members.

Profit-share payments are made via bank transfer to the cast and crew within 7 days of the final payments from ticket sales coming through to the company bank account.

Character breakdowns

Judah Ben Hur - Male

ideal playing age : 25-35 / **swearing involved**: No / **Nudity involved**: No / **Specialist skills involved**: This character will be expected to perform in scenes involving choreographed fight scenes, falling, rowing and heavy manual work. The actor may also be asked to work with well-behaved horses for greenscreen recording and promotional images. This role cannot be combined with other roles. This is one of the leading roles in the show.

Background and character arc: Judah Ben Hur is the lead (and title) character of the production. A young(ish) first century Jewish nobleman, he lives in Roman-occupied Jerusalem with his mother, and younger sister. Naturally a man of peace, he is fiercely defensive of his family. He find new depths of resilience as he progresses through the story, though the things that happen to him and his family leave even him broken and vengeful.

Massala - Male

Ideal age range: 27-37 / **swearing involved**: No / **Nudity involved**: No / **Specialist skills involved?** this character will be expected to perform in scenes involving choreographed fight scenes, falling. The actor may also be asked to work with well-behaved horses for greenscreen recording and promotional images. This role cannot be combined with other roles. This is one of the leading roles in the show.

Background and character arc: Massla is a wealthy young(ish) Roman, who grew up in Jerusalem alongside Ben Hur. Prior to the story, he is taken to Rome by his family, and educated there. He returns to Jerusalem as an adult, changed by his time in Rome. He is conscious of his perceived superiority in being Roman, and is ambitious as well as insecure. He always feels that he has to prove himself the best at anything, and a man to be feared; and is willing to sacrifice even his closest friends to do so. Massala has narcissistic tendencies, and a violent temper.

Myriam - Female

Ideal age range: 50-70, playing age needs to be at least 16 years older than the actor playing Judah / **swearing involved?** No / **Nudity involved**: No / **Specialist skills involved**: None / **Can be combined with other characters** :No

Background and character arc. Myriam is a tough, educated woman, and Judah's mother. Even though her son is the legal head of the household, he still comes to her for advice and discussion. Myriam is as fiercely protective of the family as Judah is, which later sets them at odds. Imprisoned with her daughter (Judah's sister), for a supposed attack on the Roman govenor, Myriam is later released from prison with her daughter, when they are both discovered to have contracted leprosy. Banished from the city, they attempt to hide this information from Judah. They are eventually healed when Jesus comes to the city.

Tirzah - Female

ideal age range: 18- 25 / **swearing involved:** No / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** No / **Can be combined with other characters:** No

Background and character arc: Tirzah is Judah's younger sister. Unmarried, she has always had an eye for Massala (which of course comes to nothing). Gentle and well brought up, there is a streak of unfulfilled adventure in her personality, which gives her a quiet strength, sometimes appearing at odds with her demure exterior. Imprisoned with her mother for a supposed attack on the Roman governor, Myriam is later released from prison with her mother, when they are both discovered to have contracted leprosy. Banished from the city, they attempt to hide this information from Judah. They are eventually healed when Jesus comes to the city.

Simonedes – Genderblind

Ideal age range: 40 – 80 / **swearing involved:** No but plenty of creative insults / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved?** No / **Can be combined with other characters?** Yes

Background and character arc

Simonedes (in the original text, male, but within our production can be played male or female), is an older, well-trusted slave (later freed by Judah) of the Ben Hur family. Simonedes is entrusted with the family's accounts and business transactions with other countries around the Mediterranean. Simonedes is well educated, and astute in business matters, and cautious in his dealing with people. Simonedes is fiercely loyal to the Ben Hur family, and protective of his daughter Esther.

Casworan – Genderblind

Ideal age range: 40 – 70 / **swearing involved?** No but plenty of creative insults / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** Must appear to be very knowledgeable of horses, and is a retired (freed) gladiator who trains others, so should be able to play having good combat knowledge. / **Can be combined with other characters?** Yes.

Background and character arc

In the original text, and most adaptations, this character appears as Sheikh Ilderim. Due to the theatre company being based in a highly non-diverse area of rural southwest England (for demographics, please see the diversity study on our theatre company policies page on our website), it was thought more likely to be able to cast this adaptation of the character, than an older man of Middle Eastern origin whom we would be highly unlikely to find in the local area, though if someone suitable was able to play the role as Ilderim, we would be easily able to adapt the script back with relatively minor edits)

Casworan is originally a Cornish Celt, and prior to the story he was taken prisoner in battle and trained as a gladiator. Rising to fame in the arena in Carthage, he eventually won his freedom. With a love of the Games, he trains gladiators and charioteers. A strong, no-nonsense personality, he has almost a personal vendetta against Rome itself. When he meets Judah, he not only meets a fellow victim of Roman imperialism, but he also meets someone he can train...

Quintus Arrius - male

Ideal age range:– 50-70 / **swearing involved:** No / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** No / **Can be combined with other characters?** Yes

Background and character arc

Quintus Arrius is a high-ranking Tribune in Rome, and commander of one of the Roman naval fleets. Quiet but forceful when needed, Arrius is an astute judge of people, and pragmatic. Judah, sentenced by Rome to be a galley slave for life, ends up as one of the rowers on Arrius's galley. Arrius spots that there is something different about Judah from the other slaves, and interviews Judah about his past. Later, in a battle against Macedonian pirates, Arrius is almost killed when the galley sinks, and is saved by Judah. Following their return to Rome, Arrius, with the permission of Emperor Tiberias, frees Judah and adopts him as his son, giving him the name Gaius Arrius.

Emperor Tiberias - Male

Ideal age range: 35 - 75 / **swearing involved:** No / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** None / **Can be combined with other characters?** Yes

Background and character arc. Tiberias appears for one scene. Tiberias is the Emperor of Rome. Manipulative but pragmatic and intelligent, Tiberias is all too cynical of those who curry favour to further their own interests – possibly at his expense. Tiberias meets with Arrius and Judah upon their return to Rome.

Esther - Female

Ideal age range: 20-35 / **swearing involved:** no / **Nudity involved:** no / **Specialist skills involved:** no / **Can be combined with other characters?** No

Background and character arc

Esther is the daughter of Simonedes, and as such is also born a slave to the Hur family, until Judah frees them both. Intelligent and educated far more than many women in that era, she helps Simonedes keep the accounts. Esther is kind and compassionate, and also outspoken. Ultimately she provides as much care as she is able, to Myriam and Tirzah after they are released from prison, and increasingly falls in love with Judah, who is too wrapped up in his own desire for revenge against Massala, and grief for the supposed death of his mother and sister, to notice. Until the end of the tale.

Jesus Christ - Male

Ideal age range: 30-37 / **swearing involved:** no / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** Action/ violent scenes surrounding the Passion and the crucifixion./ **Can be combined with other characters?** Yes

Background and character arc. Jesus appears twice in the story. Firstly, as Judah is taken to the galleys, and collapses, Judah's continued will to live is given by Jesus, who offers him water. Later, Jesus appears before the then Roman governor Pontius Pilate, after his arrest. The play shows the trial, in a condensed form, and his march with the other two convicted prisoners to Calvary. On the way, he passes Judah, Esther, Myriam and Tirzah in the crowd. Both Myriam and Tirzah are healed of their leprosy, and Judah of his rage and despair. It is due to these aspects of the story that the tale of Ben Hur is seen as a Christian story, and

Drusus - Male

Ideal age range: 20-45 / **swearing involved:** No / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** Sword sparring skills / **Can be combined with other characters:** Yes

Background and character arc: Drusus is a young Roman commander and close friend of Massala. He looks up to Massala as both a friend, and a route to promotion and power within the Roman army. He is a competent soldier, but also easily led by those he sees as more senior in the chain of command. Drusus enjoys the pleasures of life.

Pontius Pilate – Male

Ideal age range: 35-75 / **Swearing involved:** No / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** None / **Can be combined with other characters:** Yes

Background and character arc: Latterly in the story, Pontius Pilate is the Roman governor of Judea, the successor of Valerius Gratus, who appears earlier in the story; and is the man who ultimately sentences Jesus to be crucified. He appears briefly in a couple of previous scenes. While various historical, religious and other sources contradict one another, in our version of the character, Pilate sees Jesus as a common criminal and probable charlatan, who has gathered a following dangerous to the Roman rule. However, when confronted with Jesus himself, he is torn between realising that Jesus is truly who he says He is, and having to uphold his own rule.

Horator - Ideally male

Ideal age range: 18-60 / **Swearing involved:** No / **Nudity involved:** No / **Specialist skills involved:** Will be asked to keep the drum beat for the rowers/ **Can be combined with other characters:** yes

Background and character arc: “Horator” is a title as opposed to a name, and is the person who oversees the galley slaves, keeping time on the drum, and communicating commands to them, as well as information on the galley slaves back to the ships captain. This character needs to have a confident, powerful demeanour.

Valerus Gratus - ideally male

Ideal age range: 40-60 / **swearing involved:** no / **Nudity involved:** no / **Specialist skills involved:** Stage falling /

Can be combined with other characters: yes

Background and character arc: Valerus Gratus, at the beginning of the play, is the newly appointed Roman governor of Judea. Arriving at a time of a lot of unrest between the Roman occupiers, and the native population, he wants to bring the unrest into the open, in order to “make an example” of any insurgents, to frighten the rest of the population into submission. He views himself as guileful and powerful, but is actually less so, than he believes of himself.

Malluch – genderblind

Ideal age range: age: 20-60 / **swearing involved:** no / **Nudity involved:** no / **Specialist skills involved:** Stage falling /

Can be combined with other characters: Yes

Background and character arc: Malluch is a slave, and bodyguard to Simonedes and Esther, though sees himself more as a confidante, where the status of slave is nominal at best. He is both well-educated, and physically powerful, Malluch usually assists Simonedes on errands and business for the international trade, where it would be unseemly for Simonedes to send Esther.

Joseph – Male

Ideal age range: 35-55 / **swearing involved:** no / **Nudity involved:** no / **Specialist skills involved:** no /

Can be combined with other characters: Yes

Background and character arc: Jesus's father, appears briefly in one scene, where Judah is brought through a small village on the way to the galleys as a prisoner of the Romans.

Crowd/ slaves/ townspeople/ minor characters (male and female)

There are a large number of minor characters who have small scenes, as well as these additional “specialist” unnamed roles.

Roman Soldiers (male)

These roles come up through the show, many with scenes of dialogue and action, especially Emperor Tiberia's guards, some of these roles may involve combat skills.

Slaves (male and female)

Various characters appear as slaves to various characters through the play. While most are non-speaking, these are important support roles in the play. Some may involve specialist skills of combat

Gladiators (genderblind)

In the scene preceding the Games match between Judah and Massala, we will have fully choreographed combat before the main scene

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company Artistic Policy

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company team members are in a continual process of studying, researching and improving the work. We believe that it is only by maintaining continuous professional development, that we can maintain excellent quality of our shows.

Based in the historic Devon fishing port of Brixham, on the Southwest coast of England, we have always felt and explored the value of historical and classical narratives as directly affecting our understanding of the current world.

Brixham is one of the three towns of the area of Torbay, which is ranked among the top 20% of most deprived areas in England, and the most deprived area in the Southwest region.

The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company, since the organisation's founding in 2005, have sought to create opportunities for artistic engagement in the Torbay area, as well as allowing a number of local creatives to embark upon, develop and expand professional paid opportunities in the arts, thereby increasing local skills and aspirations.

While classical and historical dramas, or the works of Shakespeare may, at first glance, seem far removed from the modern world and modern relevance, in reality, we strongly believe that many of the issues examined within the stories, both as explorations of the human condition, and as bringing to life events and culture which have shaped the society and world in which we now live, from language, through to buildings, culture, societal conventions, politics and economy.

As such, we consider these stories timeless, and with the historical settings of “another time”; as providing engaging drama separate from the “day to day” world outside, in line with “escapism”; a popular reason for arts engagement, in our audience surveys.

All of our audience research and feedback has also showed that audiences especially in our home area, feel most confident visiting theatre events where they have a reasonable idea of “what to expect” in terms of narrative content.

Working with historical events, classical literature and Shakespeare, provides that familiarity to engage the audiences, thus serving to reach as wide an audience as possible.

We also ensure that we keep our ticket prices as low as possible, to allow as many people as possible to access our work.

While working with these traditional stories, we also explore new ways of telling these stories, which often include, but are not limited to, creative & adventurous new ways of using the space; theming the audience spaces with décor and actors, use of immersive sound effects/ digital projection or video effects, audience interaction; as relevant to the show itself.

We strongly believe that consumption of artistic content should be able to be both participatory, and a full experience, as opposed to an act of passive consumption, should the audience member wish, and our project designs facilitate exploration of this.

In fostering innovation and pushing the boundaries of creative theatre development, The South Devon Players Theatre & Film Company is committed to :

Develop and present high- quality touring and local professional theatre work from actors and other creatives based in the Devon area, centring on the genres of heavily researched historical events, classical stories re-imagined for the stage, and unabridged Shakespeare.

Develop work of international significance with the potential to tour widely in the UK, and stream work to viewers beyond our borders, using internet/ digital technology

Prioritise the development and presentation of work made by creatives based in the South Devon area, regardless of gender identity, racial heritage, religion, sexuality, disability, in line with our Equal Opportunities Policy.

Work with other established companies and artists who are keen to experiment and develop new approaches to their work; in so doing creating wider opportunities for our team members.

Actively seek to develop new, surprising and engaging performances between artists from different disciplines to engage and delight audiences, both new and existing.

Explore opportunities for artists to experiment with digital and new technology in theatre performances

Create projects that develop new and exciting opportunities for audiences of diverse backgrounds, to experience and/or help create groundbreaking theatre projects, regardless of socio-economic background, gender identity, race, disability; in line with our Equal Opportunities policy.

Continually seek to improve internal experiences for those working with us on short or long term projects, and to improve the artistic output and engagement with wide audiences and participants of all demographics, by listening to and studying feedback, critiques, and input; as well as actively seeking out learning / training for our team in an ongoing process.

Continually work to increase the audience and participant reach of our projects by using a wide range of advertising and points of contact including (but not limited to) our own website and social media profiles on major platforms, reaching out on forums, social media chat groups, events websites, opportunities websites, local press, posters and flyers in local businesses and community spaces, inclusive of outlets with specialist interests for the specific projects.

Promote the highest standards of professionalism, and excellence in our produced work, while recognising that there is always space to develop and improve.

Promote a safe and pleasant working environment for all our team members.

Encourage dialogue and engagement with new and future audiences.

Employ our skills as theatre makers to support ongoing and existing work of under-represented community groups.

Use professional actors, technicians and creatives to create our shows, including mentoring people who wish to embark on a professional career in the arts, as equal members of the team, wherever possible, promoting fair treatment and recognition in a fair wage to those persons.

Advance education for the public benefit by the encouragement of the arts, including, without limitation, the arts of drama, mime, dance, singing and music.

Work with all levels of experience, disabilities, ethnicity or racial origin, gender identification.

Selection of shows

Shows are selected by a number of criteria, in discussion with the senior production team, to fit a range of criteria. These primarily include:

- Theme (content and setting to fit with the genres and style of show that our company is known for.)
- Marketability (it is important for our shows to be easily marketable to a wide range of audiences of different ages and demographics; in line with our researched audience preferences, eg “knowing what to expect”, “escapism”, “a safe option for spending on tickets” “education” & “suitable for family & friendship groups of different ages”, coupled with an adventurous approach allowing for engaging new audiences.
- Creative expression (A show allowing for creative staging, performance and production, leading to an engaging, memorable, and exciting experience for both audience and participants.)
- Increasing engagement (Looking at shows, which we feel from our research, will build participation, as well as engaging both regular theatre-goers, and attract new audiences)
- Accuracy and research. (We expect our historical and classical dramas to be well researched , including historical/ cultural/ scientific research as required. Shakespeare and shows based on classical literature must be produced with an in-depth knowledge of the text and surrounding circumstances to it's setting.)
- Castability and crewability (allowing for actors and crew to be able to participate regardless of gender identity, race, previous experience, religion, disability, etc; without being excluded from the project. We take into account local population demographics, as well as actively reaching out to groups of people who less commonly feel able to participate in theatre due to age, race, socio-economic background, disability.)
- Sensitive content (While many of our shows have strong or dark themes, violence/ action scenes, and mentions of racism, strong language & sex, we tend to keep the strong language and graphic sexual scenes to a strict minimum, with the aim of our shows being suitable for teens and adults; an equivalent to a PG to 12 rating. We do not perform shows where the primary theme or subject of the show is sexual. Detailed guidance as to specific show content is given on our website and show posters. In shows where one or more characters express discriminatory or outdated opinions /actions, these must be depicted as a negative character trait, and clearly challenged within the story. We will not select or create a story which glorifies or promotes discrimination.)
- Impartiality (While our shows will often depict characters of specific religious, political or social-economic affiliations, or explore wider themes involving these aspects, our company remains a safe space for people of all religions, political affiliations, and backgrounds,

and does not promote, as an organisation, any specific bias. Our programming is therefore impartial. Shows which are for the specific purpose of promoting a bias, will not be selected.)

