

## MRS SHAW HERSELF

### A glimpse into the life of Charlotte Payne-Townshend

Devised and performed by **Alexis Leighton** and **Helen Tierney**.

The text of *Mrs Shaw Herself* is almost entirely drawn from her letters and diaries and those of, amongst others, Shaw, Beatrice Webb and T.E. Lawrence. Charlotte Payne-Townshend (1857-1943) was an Irish heiress and in her early forties when she married the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw. Both had previously taken a firm stance against marriage: Shaw was a notorious philanderer and she herself was terrified of physical intimacy and child-bearing, yet their unconventional marriage survived until her death. **Although Shaw's views on their relationship remained ambiguous**, there is no doubt that in many ways the marriage was a success. Not least, her fortune gave Shaw domestic comfort and stability, which enabled him to write so prolifically. *Mrs Shaw Herself* aims to bring Charlotte Shaw out from behind **her husband's shadow**, and explore her thoughts, ideas and considerable legacy.

### WHO'S WHO IN *MRS SHAW HERSELF*

#### Characters

**Charlotte Payne-Townshend**; Irish Heiress, philanthropist and wife to G. B. Shaw.

**Axel Munthe**; Swedish doctor. Charlotte's failed romance with him led her to consider philanthropy.

**Beatrice Webb**; Founder member of the Fabian Society and also London School of Economics.

**Ellen Terry**; Leading actress whose passionate, if unconsummated, love affair with Shaw resulted in much correspondence and detailing of Shaw's marriage.

**George Bernard Shaw**; Internationally famous Irish playwright, who uniquely won an Oscar and a Nobel prize for Literature. Bob Dylan is the only other artist to have been awarded both.

**Mrs Patrick Campbell**; Actress and lover of George Bernard Shaw who was the first Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion*. She later published **Shaw's love-letters** to raise money.

**Erica Cotterill**; Young infatuated fan of George Bernard Shaw who actually moved to Ayot St Lawrence to be near him and would stalk him around the village.

**T.E. Lawrence**; AKA Lawrence of Arabia, author of *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, a work which Charlotte not only championed, but **helped edit**. Lawrence **joked about the fact people assumed he was Shaw's illegitimate son**, as he spent so much time visiting the Shaws. He actually changed his surname to Shaw in his pursuit of anonymity. His friendship with Charlotte was a very intimate one.

#### Performers

**Alexis Leighton** Alexis trained at the *Royal Conservatoire of Scotland*, where she played -among others- the title role in *St Joan* by George Bernard Shaw. She has appeared at *The Citizens Theatre*, *The Traverse*, *The Tron Theatre* as well the *Edinburgh International Festival*. Alexis played Elsie in ***Elsie and Norm's Macbeth*** for *Northampton Theatre Royal* and performed her one-woman show ***Miss Margarida's Way*** in theatres in Edinburgh, Glasgow and London. In *Lilly and May* by Australian playwright Patricia Cornelius, Alexis played Lilly performing at *The Drill Hall* and at *The Kings Head*, London. An active supporter of up and coming playwrights, she has performed as part of new writing initiatives at *Southwark Playhouse*, *Soho Theatre* and *Theatre 503*. Alexis played the lead role Harriet in *Key for Two* performed at *The English Speaking Theatre* in Vienna and she also played Kit in, *Giving Up Marty* at *The Vaults Festival* this March.

**Helen Tierney** Helen Tierney was born in Merseyside and studied music at *Oxford University*. She works in music education and community music with a special interest in music and dementia. She has worked with music in prisons, **Alzheimer's units**, eating disorder clinics and homeless shelters alongside mainstream music education and is a *Rhinogold Education* author. She is a co-founder of *Music, Memories and Me*, an arts engagement programme for residential care. She has performed at the *Edinburgh Festival*, *Glastonbury* and the *Royal Variety Performance* and -as a singer- has participated in over 20 *Proms* seasons with the *BBC Symphony Chorus*.

*Helix Productions* has another show running, ***The Secret Garden of Frances Hodgson Burnett***, online as part of *The Bloomsbury Festival 23-24 Oct 2020*

<https://bloomsburyfestival.org.uk/event/in-the-secret-garden-of-frances-hodgson-burnett-helix-productions/>