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May 2004

GOOD CLEAN FASCIST FAMILY FUN

From Peter Morris and Sir Arthur Sullivan

An 11 year old Girl Guide called Margaret Thatcher shot Winston Churchill under the mistaken impression that he was the famous bum bandit TE Lawrence who had secretly married the lead performer from a touring agit-prop Marxist theatre company run by Jessica Mitford.

Mitford caused a riot in a soup kitchen by preaching communism instead of distributing kedgeriee, Charles Laughton starred in a BUF propaganda movie directed by Alexander Korda and scripted by Enid Blyton in return for gay sex, Oswald Mosley ran the country, TS Eliot was the Archbishop of Canterbury and Virginia Woolf had her tongue cut out before being shot by a firing squad.

This was the world according to Diana Mosley, as constructed by her luridly fascist imagination during her final fevered hours in a hospital bed in Paris in 2002. Well, it might have been, and even if it wasn't, it has now been faithfully rendered for the stage in the world's first heavy light opera - *A MILLION HEARTS FOR MOSLEY*.

The music has been shamelessly ripped from *THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD* by SIR ARTHUR SEYMOUR SULLIVAN. The libretto is by PETER MORRIS, and the plot and lyrics violently abuse WS GILBERT's twee originals. Yet simultaneously this is a show that will appeal to Savoy opera purists who will delight in *A MILLION HEARTS FOR MOSLEY*'s adherence to the spirit of absurdity so central to G&S's classic work.

At 31, American-born MORRIS, a Yale and Oxford graduate, and twice winner of the *Sunday Times* playwriting prize, is one of the fastest-rising writing stars of the theatre scene in both the US and the UK. His controversial play *THE AGE OF CONSENT* at the BUSH (2002), attracted tabloid contempt and critical plaudits in equal measure. It was *Admirable urgent, compassionate* according to the *Daily Telegraph*, and *provocative in the best ways theatre can and should be* according to the *Financial Times*. MORRIS is an associate writer with The Civilians Theatre Company in New York where his latest play *PRO BONO PUBLICA* has just been read at Lincoln Center Theatre with a cast that included RICHARD DREYFUSS. He is currently under commission to the BBC, adapting John Lanchester's novel *THE DEBT TO PLEASURE*.

A MILLION HEARTS FOR MOSLEY is the result of a year-long collaboration with the LONDON ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMATIC ART (LAMDA). As Writer in Residence, MORRIS together with director STEPHEN JAMESON - has workshopped the production with the academy's 30-strong post-graduate course.

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LAMDA graduate JAMESON is an established actor/director/writer who has co-directed international tours with Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company. He's directed at the Globe Theatre in Neuss, for the Shiller Theatre Berlin, and for the Frankfurt Theatre Festival. In the UK, he's directed his own adaptations of *THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER*, *THE CLOCKWORK ORANGE* and *DAVID COPPERFIELD*. He's led the MORRIS project from the outset.

MORRIS is a writer of major standing and a number of previous productions developed by LAMDA students have transferred to the National Theatre. They include Di Trevis *REMEMBRANCE OF THINGS PAST* and most notably Mark Ravenhill's *MOTHER CLAPS MOLLY HOUSE*.

All of these large-scale productions were experiments that could only have been devised in this kind of environment. Theatre-goers and promoters owe a significant debt to LAMDA Principal and ex-Lyric Hammersmith Artistic Director PETER JAMES for his visionary approach to the generation of radical new writing, and producers looking for the next big thing are well advised to look to LAMDA.