



**TALL STORIES:
EMILY BROWN AND THE THING**

Tuesday, March 12, 2019, at 6:30pm
Colwell Playhouse

PROGRAM



TALL STORIES:

EMILY BROWN AND THE THING

Created by Olivia Jacobs, Toby Mitchell, and the Company
A magical, musical adventure adapted from the popular book
by Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton

Something monstrous is keeping Emily Brown awake

One evening, Emily Brown and her old grey rabbit Stanley find a Thing crying outside their window. He's lost his cuddly and absolutely can't get to sleep without it. Emily and Stanley bravely set off into the Dark and Scary Wood in search of the missing cuddly, but on their return they find the Thing can't sleep without hot milk either . . . or his tickly cough medicine The daring duo head into the Whirling Wastes and even into the Whiny Witches' Cavern in search of the lost things, but nothing seems to help. The question is: what is really troubling the Thing—and will anyone ever get to sleep?

Tall Stories (creators of *The Gruffalo* and *The Snail and the Whale* stage shows) are delighted to announce that their highly acclaimed production *Emily Brown and the Thing*, an imaginative adaptation of the much-loved book by the award-winning duo Cressida Cowell (author of *How to Train Your Dragon*) and Neal Layton, will tour North America for the first time in 2019. *Emily Brown and the Thing* is one of a series of four books featuring the irrepressible Emily Brown.

CAST

Emily Brown

Sophie Alice

The Thing

Sam Buitekant

Stanley

Jordan Turner

This performance will be presented with no intermission.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Matt Llewellyn Smith, company stage manager

Olivia Jacobs, director/writer

Toby Mitchell, creative producer/writer

Sam Conway, associate director

Isla Shaw, designer

JollyGoodTunes, music and lyrics

James Whiteside, lighting design

Yvonne Stone, puppet design

Cressida Cowell, book author

Neal Layton, book illustrator

TALL STORIES

Somerset House

West Wing

Strand

London WC2R 1LA

Olivia Jacobs, joint artistic director

Toby Mitchell, joint artistic director

Lucy Wood, producer

Charlotte Lund, general manager

Natalia Scorer, creative coordinator

Lucy Troy, production and digital marketing officer

Sheila McClenaghan, finance officer

This performance is presented through arrangements made by:

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PO Box 49036

Austin, TX 78765

512.477.1859

www.holdenarts.org

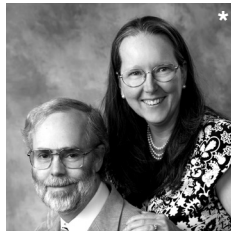
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PROGRAM NOTES

Everyone at Tall Stories loves Emily Brown and her old grey rabbit Stanley. It's great to find a strong, quirky heroine with such a fabulous imagination. But even the irrepressible Emily Brown is scared sometimes—which is OK. If we were never afraid, we could get into all sorts of danger. We'd be doing crazy things like walking into oncoming traffic! Stepping off rooftops! Cuddling poisonous snakes! It's good to be scared sometimes—and it's also good to find a way to conquer some of your fears.

It was slightly scary for us when Cressida Cowell and Neal Layton (respectively, the author and illustrator of the book) came to see Emily Brown on stage for the very first time. Would we have done justice to their creation? Thankfully they loved the show and we could banish our fears and breathe a sigh of relief. Here's hoping you enjoy meeting Emily Brown—and good luck with conquering some of your own fears too!

— Olivia Jacobs and Toby Mitchell

Q&A WITH CRESSIDA COWELL

Are there any children's books that made a big impression on you when you were a child?

I read a wide variety of books: domestic books like Noel Streatfield and Enid Blyton, but my particular preference was for fantasy like Diana Wynne Jones; Ursula LeGuin; Tolkien and Lloyd Alexander.

My favorite book as a child was *The Ogre Downstairs* by Diana Wynne Jones. I loved this book so much that I read it to my younger brother and sister, to my little cousins—to anyone who would listen! It has a wicked stepfather and chemicals that make you fly, turn you invisible, and bring your toys to life. My children loved it as much as I did 38 years ago.

How did you become an author? What was your first book?

I have been writing stories since I was about eight or nine years old. But I was about 33 when I had my first book published. It was called *Little Bo Peep's Library Book*, and it was a picture book.

What inspires you? How do you decide what to write about?

The *How to Train Your Dragon* books were inspired by the summers I spent as a child on a tiny, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland. The island had no roads, houses, or electricity, and I used to imagine that there were dragons living in the caves in the cliffs. By the time I was eight, my family had built a small stone house on the island and from then on, every year we spent four weeks of the summer and two weeks of the spring on the island. The house was lit by candle-light, and there was no telephone or television, so I spent a lot of time drawing and writing stories. In the evening, my father told us tales of the Vikings who invaded this island archipelago 1,200 years before, of the quarrelsome tribes who fought and tricked each other, and of the legends of dragons who were supposed to live in the caves in the cliffs.

A lot of the characters are inspired by real people in my life. For instance, my own daughters gave me the idea for Camicazi. They're not as good at sword fighting as Camicazi, but they're every bit as chatty.

What was the inspiration to create the Emily Brown series?

The inspiration for the Emily Brown series was an incident that happened with my daughter Maisie when she was about three or four. Maisie had this small toy dog called Mr Dog, and wherever Maisie went, Mr Dog went, too.

She and the dog were absolutely inseparable . . . Until one terrible day, when Maisie was about to go to bed, and we couldn't find Mr Dog. We looked everywhere, and I mean EVERYWHERE . . . under sofas, behind chairs, in cupboards, in the garden . . . but Mr Dog was nowhere to be found.

For the first time in her life, Maisie had to go to bed without Mr Dog, and she was inconsolable; she cried herself to sleep. But even the next day, there was still no sign of Mr Dog, although the whole family turned the house upside down looking for him.

A couple of days later, I was cooking supper, and I opened up the freezer, and there, sitting on top of the fish fingers, as cool as you please, was Mr Dog! We'd looked everywhere, but of course, we hadn't thought to check the freezer. So I said to a delighted Maisie, "What is Mr Dog doing in the freezer?"

And Maisie said, "Oh I remember now, he was looking for the north pole"

So that was the inspiration for the book, the extraordinary imaginary adventures that children go on with their toys, and also the strength of the bond between the child and the toy.

I have always been very impressed by the following quote from J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*:

I don't know whether you have ever seen a map of a child's mind . . . the Neverland is always more or less an island, with astonishing splashes of color here and there, and coral reefs and rakish-looking craft in the offing . . . It would be an easy map if that were all, but there is also first day at school, religion, fathers . . . three-pence for pulling out your tooth yourself, and so on, and either these are part of the island or they are another map showing through, and it is all rather confusing, especially as nothing will stand still.

I wanted fantasy and reality to merge in these books, in the way that it does in a child's mind, and Neal Layton captured that beautifully in his illustrations.

Are any of the characters in the Emily Brown books like you?

I have to confess, I do rather identify with Matilda's mummy, the hardworking but anxious mother elephant in *Emily Brown and the Elephant Emergency*. My children are always telling me that I have a tendency to worry too much about things—and I know they're right, which is why I wrote the book.

What I love about Emily Brown is her moral compass—she knows the truly important things in life, and she will not be swayed. In *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*, she will not give up Stanley, even when she is offered the most enormous bribe you could possibly think of: "All the toys you could ever desire" What a bribe! And she turns it down, all for the love of Stanley.

Writing for children is a constant reminder of what is truly important in life, because children are only interested in the truly important subjects.

Why do you like to write for young people?

I love being able to reach kids that wouldn't ordinarily pick up a book to read.

It was very satisfying to write *How to Steal a Dragon's Sword* because in this book, the reader suddenly realizes that things that seemed to happen accidentally in earlier books have a significance that was not clear at the time. This is a very "Hiccup-y" idea. It's also very true to life—often we don't realize what journey or "quest" we are on, exactly, until we are halfway there already.

How old were you when you realized you wanted to be a writer?

I was about eight or nine. When I was a child my handwriting was terrible, my spelling was incomprehensible, but I loved writing stories Aged nine I entered a writing competition which, to my amazement, crowned me the winner! It gave me the confidence to think, "I could be a writer one day."

How can we inspire more of our children to love writing?

Well, to start with, inspire them to start from a young age and encourage them to keep going throughout their childhood and make them appreciate that writing is important for their adult lives. I don't mean just writing stories, but writing anything at all! It doesn't matter if they don't finish writing the stories, as long as they're practicing their own stories as much as they possibly can and creating something unique.

Ask them to make up stories about people they know. Some children may struggle to come up with characters' names and personalities, so to resolve this, encourage them to write about their favorite characters from TV or film—or perhaps one of their friends or family.

Reading books to a child is a great way of sparking their imagination, even to an older child. Once children learn to read, you could be tempted to let them get on with it, but if you read a book with a child, you're enjoying the book with them. You're sending a message that books are important, reading is important, and therefore writing is important.

Of course, grammar is essential later in life, but I can't emphasize enough that grammar can't and shouldn't prevent creativity. Quite simply, if a child starts their creative writing by thinking they have to be perfect, they won't express themselves in the way they want to.

Enter competitions. I am a testament to the positive impact they can have on a child's confidence, so when you see any writing competitions, encourage them to enter! You never know when that competitive element might bring out the best in them!

How did you go about becoming a writer, and was it difficult getting your first novel published?

I read English at university, and I took an MA in narrative illustration at Brighton. I won a Highly Commended in a competition for students called the Macmillan Children's Book Competition, and at the awards ceremony, I met an editor who published my first picture book the year after I left the MA. So I was very lucky.

What advice would you give kids who would like to become writers?

My top writing tip would be to read lots, to give you a feel for the way different stories can be told. Also, practice writing as much as you can—write, and re-write—don't worry if you don't finish a story. As long as you are practicing, that's what matters.

What advice would you offer to parents who want to encourage their kids to read more or love books?

Reading a book with a child, even an older child, is the most important thing you can do for improving literacy and communication skills; books read to a child in their parent's voice will live with them forever. Sharing a book with your child, whatever their age, communicates how important books are. I read aloud with my children, even now they're older, both picture books and older books, and we also listen to audio books in the car. I take them to libraries, bookshops, and second-hand bookshops—libraries and second-hand bookshops are particularly good for children experimenting and trying books that they might not have expected to like. I think it's also vitally important for children to see their parents reading so they know that it's a lifelong enjoyment.

Do you ever get writer's block? If so, how do you overcome it?

I have to admit, I haven't had writer's block yet.

If you could be someone famous from history, who would you be and why?

I would love to be William Shakespeare, not only because he wrote those wonderful plays, but also because he wrote them as an actor, performing in the excitement and hurly-burly of Elizabethan London.

Were you encouraged to start writing by anyone in particular when you were young?

Yes, I had two teachers who were very encouraging. In year three, Miss Mellows gave me loads and loads of blank exercise books, and she let me write stories in them, even in maths lessons. Miss Macdonald was my history teacher when I was 12, and she set wonderful homeworks, such as "Write a story about a child living in a village on the west coast of Scotland, who sees a Viking sail on the horizon"

What job would you like to have if you weren't a writer?

Teacher; anthropologist; stand-up comedian.

What do you like about being a writer, and what do you hate about it?

There are so many things that are wonderful about being a writer—the pure pleasure of making things up, the glorious moment when you write something that you feel is poetic or moving or makes you cry, meeting children and parents who read the books together and tell you that the books have meant something special to them

I hate it when I get to the point in the process of writing a book when I have written reams and reams of words but the book hasn't "come together." That is like being lost in a very tangled, dark wood with no obvious hope of rescue, and it can be a very bad moment indeed.

What would your school reports have said about you?

They said that I daydreamed a lot and that I was very disorganized. Here is an extract from one of my school reports, written by one of my teachers when I was 16: "To follow up one of Mr Byrom's points, there was at least one examination for which she had very little idea of the exact time until shortly before the examination was due to begin."

PROFILES

TALL STORIES THEATRE COMPANY

Tall Stories brings great stories to life for audiences of all ages. The company is a registered charity which tours the United Kingdom and the world with its exciting blend of storytelling theatre, original music, and lots of laughs. Tall Stories was founded in 1997 by co-directors Olivia Jacobs and Toby Mitchell. Tall Stories shows have played in the West End, on Broadway, and in the Sydney Opera House—as well as all sorts of venues and countries in between.

TOURING COMPANY

SOPHIE ALICE (Emily Brown) graduated from East 15 Acting School with a BA in physical theatre and a love for puppetry, clowning, and storytelling. Professional credits: *Autopsy* (ITV Studios); *Pint-Sized* (Jermyn Street Theatre); *The Gruffalo's Child* (UK, International, West End), *Emily Brown and the Thing* (UK, International, Sydney Opera House) and *Future Perfect* (UK) with Tall Stories; *Deliveroo Summer Social* (Commercial). Alice has her wet-weather wind coat and see-in-the-dark glasses already packed and can't wait to return to Tall Stories to join Emily Brown on her adventures around the United States and Canada.

SAM BUIOTEKANT (The Thing) trained at St Mary's University receiving a degree in drama and physical theatre. This will be Buitekant's third international tour with Tall Stories playing the role of The Thing. When Buitekant is not working with Tall Stories, he is creating shows for his own theatre company Dead Rabbits Theatre. Their most recent show *My Love Lies Frozen in the Ice* received two awards at the Edmonton Fringe Festival in Canada.

JORDAN TURNER (Stanley) trained at East 15 Acting School. Theatre credits include: *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (West End), *The Selfish Giant* (Arcola Theatre), *Alfie White: Space Explorer* (Tall Stories) and *Animal Farm* (Courtyard Theatre), *Now You See Me...* (Immediate Theatre). Film Credits include: *Bittersweet Last Words*, *CRASH*.

Turner is also artistic director and performer with The Outbound Project; *The Mission*, *12 Million Volts* (UK Tour). He is very excited to be returning to Tall Stories and to hop around the US and Canada.

MATT LLEWELLYN SMITH (company stage manager) studied theatre design and production at Trinity College, Carmarthen. In the past year, Smith has stage managed productions of *How to Hide a Lion* (UK Tour), *Kika's Birthday* (Edinburgh Festival, Little Angel Theatre and Orange Tree) and *I Believe in Unicorns* (Hong Kong and UK tour).

Smith works as a freelance stage manager and has worked on over 100 productions. Highlights include Michael Morpurgo's *Why the Whales Came* (UK Tour and Hong Kong), *Wind in the Willows* (London Tour), *Twelfth Night* (Covent Garden), *Just So Stories* (Pleasance, London) and *1936* (Sadler's Wells).

CREATIVE TEAM

OLIVIA JACOBS (director/writer) trained at Central/University of London. Directing includes: *Wilde Creatures* (UK, Australia), *The Canterville Ghost* (UK), *The Gruffalo* (UK, USA, Asia, Australia, Europe, DVD), *The Gruffalo's Child* (UK, Australia, Asia), *Room on the Broom* (UK, USA, Australia, Asia), *How the Giraffe Got Its Neck* (UK, Asia), *William's Monsters* (UK, Poland, Asia), *Something Else* (UK, Poland), *Them with Tails* (UK, Poland), *Mum and the Monster* (UK), *Snow White* (UK, USA), and *Latke Who Couldn't Stop Screaming* (UK). She is co-founder and joint artistic director of Tall Stories.

TOBY MITCHELL (creative producer/writer) studied at Cambridge and trained at Central. Directing credits for Tall Stories include: *The Snail and the Whale* (UK, Poland, Dubai, Asia), *The Snow Dragon* (UK, USA, Poland, Asia), *Twinkle Twinkle* (UK, USA), *Does a Monster live Next Door?* (UK), *The Owl and the Pussycat* (UK) and *Alice and Mr Dodgson* (UK). Other directing/devising work includes: *Wilde Creatures*, *The Canterville Ghost*, *Future Perfect*, *Monsters Got Talent*, *A British Guide to French Pop*, and *The Island of First Loves'* He is co-founder and joint artistic director of Tall Stories.

SAM CONWAY (associate director) studied drama at the University of Exeter. In addition to *Emily Brown*, he has worked for Tall Stories as an associate director on *The Gruffalo's Child* (The Lyric) and *Room on The Broom* (Sydney Opera House). Conway has also worked as a guest director for White Horse Theatre across Germany and Japan. Credits include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, and *Relatively Speaking*.

ISLA SHAW (designer) trained at Wimbledon School of Art and Swinburne University, Australia. Tall Stories credits include *The Gruffalo* and *The Gruffalo's Child*, *Mr Benn*, and *Snail and the Whale*. Other credits include *Pink Sari Revolution*, *My Robot* (Australia); *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Wipers*, *The Witches*, *Macbeth*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Shakespeare's Globe); *Angelina Ballerina*, *The Wedding Singer*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Jump*, and *Frisky and Mannish—Just Too Much*.

JON FIBER AND ANDY SHAW of JollyGoodTunes (music and lyrics) have composed and recorded songs and sound effects for theatre since 1997. Show highlights include *The Gruffalo*, *Room On The Broom*, *The Gruffalo's Child*, *Mr Benn*, *William's Monsters*, *Them with Frozen Tails*, *Something Else*, *How the Giraffe Got Its Neck*, *Twinkle Twinkle*, *The Night Before Christmas*, *Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late*, *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*, and sound design for *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* and *Spot's Birthday*.

JAMES WHITESIDE (lightening design) has Tall Stories credits including *The Gruffalo*, *The Gruffalo's Child*, *Room on the Broom*, *Snow White*, and *Mr Benn*. West End credits include *Never Forget* at the Savoy; *Footloose* at the Novello and Playhouse; *Holding the Man* at Trafalgar Studios; and *The Female of the Species* at the Vaudeville and *Calamity Jane* at the Shaftesbury. Other credits include designs for the Chichester Festival Theatre, Perth Theatre, the Rose Kingston, and West Yorkshire Playhouse.

YVONNE STONE (puppet design) studied puppetry at Central School of Speech and Drama. Theatre works include *Room on the Broom*, *Mr Benn*, *The Snow Dragon*, and *The Gruffalo's Child* for Tall Stories; Terry Pratchett's *Nation* for the National Theatre, as well as *War Horse* and *His Dark Materials*; *The Lion King*. TV work includes *Space Pirates*, *DoodleDo*, *Mr Bloom's Nursery* and BBC3's *Mongrels*.

CRESSIDA COWELL (book author) is the author and the illustrator of the bestselling *How to Train Your Dragon* book series, and the author of the Emily Brown picture books, illustrated by Neal Layton. *How to Train Your Dragon* has sold over 8 million books worldwide in 38 languages. It is also an award-winning DreamWorks film series, and a TV series shown on Netflix and CBBC. The first book in Cowell's new series, *The Wizards of Once* (also signed by DreamWorks), is a number one bestseller.

NEAL LAYTON (book illustrator) has illustrated more than 60 books to date, working with authors such as Michael Rosen and Cressida Cowell, and won several prizes including a Gold Award for *That Rabbit Belongs to Emily Brown*. He also writes his own books including the pop-up book *The Story of Everything* and the best-selling *Mammoth Academy Series*. His books are currently in print in more than 16 languages worldwide. He now lives in Southsea, Portsmouth, with his wife and two daughters.