

AUDITION NOTICE

HOW TO HOLD YOUR BREATH

by Zinnie Harris

Director: Clare Cooper

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Reading: Monday 9th November 2026 at 7.45pm at the Mary Wallace Theatre

Auditions: Sunday 15th November 2026 at 7.45pm (Dana, Jarron, Jasmine)
Monday 16th November at 7.45pm (all other parts, and possible recalls)
(registration from 7.00pm both nights)

Playing dates: Saturday 13th March 2027 - Saturday 20th March 2027

Rehearsals: Starting from Sunday 10th January 2027, then on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday evenings & Sunday afternoons. Rehearsals will take place in the vicinity of the theatre. Also, a couple of workshops before Christmas.

Synopsis

*What if you refused to sell your soul to the devil? What if Europe were failing and you had to flee to Africa? This fascinating play is essentially about a Europe increasingly dependent on AI and technology, and where everything has become impersonal and transactional. It starts with a scene where a man wants to pay Dana (the main protagonist) for sex. Dana refuses because she saw it as a loving consenting act. He pursues her, claiming to be the devil. Zinnie Harris has created a nightmarish journey as Dana tries to flee him, while Europe collapses. She is accompanied by her sister (Jasmine) and a persistent Librarian, who offers her increasingly bizarre 'self help' books as a solution. In an interesting political twist **How to Hold Your Breath** closes with a startling twist on the current migrant crisis.*

This is an exciting production for RSS. Zinnie Harris is an imaginative writer and creates a world of increasing depersonalisation, distrust and fear. It is fast paced and filmic with scenes and situations recognisable to us all. I intend to give this play a dystopian feel as it merges a number of themes addressing and preoccupying civilisation today. It is also full of wit and packs a very real emotional punch.

This play was written in 2015 but is as relevant today as it was then. Zinnie Harris is a contemporary writer who takes difficult themes and challenges our perceptions of the world order, but with humour and identifiable characters that we can all recognise.

Characters

There are 4 fantastic key parts (Dana, Jarron, Librarian and Jasmine) each offering a real emotional journey. Other parts will also be part of an ensemble but all have at least one significant scene and some characters recur throughout, especially the interviewers. Can be doubled or not as appropriate. Ages are only a guide and I would like a wide age range in the ensemble, and a willingness from all to experiment with movement, possibly masks, and finding an impersonal theatrical approach.

There are scenes and references of a sexual nature between Dana and Jarron, and between Dana and the punter wanting sex. We will block this subtly and with care, working with an intimacy coordinator. There are also references to miscarriage and rape. A fight co-ordinator will be used for scenes of mild violence.

If you are considering any of these roles and would like to know more, please contact the director.

DANA (20s – 40s) the protagonist and on stage throughout. Everything is seen through her eyes and we could play it that this is her nightmare and the world's nightmare. Confident and professional at the start but needs a vulnerability that is always near the surface and battered by the end.

JARRON (30s – 40s) has casual sex with Dana at the start and claims to be the devil. Pursues Dana. He could represent everything that is bad about modern civilisation. Totally charming, lively and persuasive but with a slight edge of sinister.

JASMINE (20s – 40s) Dana's sister, gets pulled into Dana's nightmare but has an emotional story of her own. Often practical but slightly resentful.

THE LIBRARIAN (any age) represents the 'old way' and tries to help Dana. Inscrutable and distant at the start, but equally gets drawn in by Dana's story.

3 INTERVIEWERS interviewing Dana for a job. Impersonal and representing 'faceless' society.

TRAIN INSPECTOR just 'doing their job' attitude.

WOMAN ON EMERGENCY TELEPHONE LINE just 'doing their job' attitude.

DOCTOR professional but with an opinion.

PUNTER WANTING SEX rough and ruthless.

MARTA and CLARA 2 women who abuse Dana.

Audition Pieces

For audition pieces and more information please email the Director at alexclare56@btinternet.com or Assistant Director Caroline Tajesque at caltaj@icloud.com

RSS is committed to inclusive casting and providing fair and equal access to all. Casting will not be constrained by any perceived characteristic of a role, e.g. gender or ethnicity, unless specified by the playwright or a condition of the licence. Our auditions are conducted in the presence of a panel of members of the RSS General Committee; the role of the panel includes ensuring that auditions conform with the Society's Code of Conduct for Members.

While auditions are open to all, any offer of a part is conditional. You must be a member of RSS before the offer can be confirmed.

Audition Applications are online at www.richmondshakespeare.org.uk/acting. Alternatively, forms are available in the theatre or from the RSS website and should be returned by e-mail to secretary@rss-mwt.org.uk.

Dogs: please note that dogs (except trained and insured service animals) are not permitted in any part of the theatre at play readings, auditions, or performances, or other events.
