



## Music Hall: Sickert and the Three Graces

16 March 2013 – 5 January 2014

This immersive installation created by an award-winning creative team of theatre makers, video artists and designers will explore the rise and fall of 'Music Hall', a lost genre of popular entertainment. Film, music and objects will come together in a theatrical narrative, spotlighting the Bedford Music Hall in Camden Town to examine the world of Edwardian Music Hall.

In 1895, when Sickert finished 'Gallery of the Old Bedford,' entertainment by and for the people was at its zenith. Across Britain, the trade and the literati jostled, boozed and sang-along in 500 music halls. By 1929, when a young Peter Sellers was sleeping upstairs at the Bedford Music Hall in Camden, as his mother performed, Music Hall was a spent force; eclipsed by 'talkies' and radio.

Nine remarkable oil paintings and sketches of the Bedford by Walter Sickert, whose studios were located close to the theatre, will be displayed together for the first time. Alongside these will be objects from the V&A's rich collections, including beautiful Victorian song sheets, original programmes, comic caricatures and delicate cartes de visite.

At the heart of this intimate installation are filmed extracts from a specially commissioned play, *'The Boy I Love'*, written by playwright Tanika Gupta and directed by Katie Mitchell. The play takes its title from one of the most celebrated songs of the Music Hall, *'The Boy I Love is Up in the Gallery'* written by George Ware in 1885 and made famous by star performer Marie Lloyd. The narrative centres around an old lady experiencing the early stages of dementia who remembers fragments of the 1905 music hall where she performed with her two sisters. Gupta researched the play using the V&A's Theatre and Performance Archives held at Blythe House and listening to oral histories recorded by the Museum with people who remember the Bedford first hand.

Tanika Gupta, said of the project: "*Walter Sickert's obsession with the New Bedford music hall in Camden and his beautiful paintings of the stage, performers and indeed the faces of the audience was all the inspiration I needed to write a play on the subject. Like Sickert, I was fascinated by the glamour and in turn grimy reality of the performers and I was struck by the fact that the Edwardian era ended with the Great*

*War which would change British lives forever. Using Music Hall as a metaphor for a changing society and a slowly dissolving way of life I decided to write something involving the songs and acts of Sickert's beloved Bedford through the eyes of three young female performers at the turn of the century."*

Katie Mitchell, said: "I was brought up with stories from the music hall told to me by my granny and my dad. My great grandmother, Lillian, was a tiller girl and my great grandfather, Fred, worked as a comedian for Fred Karno, the music hall impresario. I have thought for many years about making a piece built around the music hall but could never find a form for my investigation. The delightful interplay of museum objects with filmed images and reconstructed rooms makes this installation very special – and challenging! I love the way in which the play text focuses in on how the last fragments of an old ladies' memory store the past of the music hall tradition in much the same way the museum holds its trust with the past of the music hall in its exquisite collection of posters, photographs and cartes de visite."

Focusing on the often untold story of its female protagonists, *Music Hall: Sickert and the Three Graces* takes visitors into the heart of British Music Hall and reveals a fascinating era when women were at the forefront of a changing society.

**ENDS**

#### **Notes to Editors**

- *Music Hall: Sickert and the Three Graces* will be shown in the V&A's Theatre and Performance Galleries from 16 March 2013 to 5 January 2014
- Admission is FREE
- Canova's sculpture *The Three Graces* is jointly owned by the V&A and National Galleries of Scotland. It is returning to the V&A in February for display after being shown in Scotland since October 2005
- Former Prime Minister, John Major will give a talk at the V&A on 26 February 2013 exploring the richly colourful story of British Music Hall and his own family's connections

#### **About Tanika Gupta, MBE**

Gupta is an award winning British scriptwriter for theatre and television. She began writing drama in the early 1990s and was appointed Writer-In-Residence at the Soho Theatre Company (1996-98). Tanika was awarded an MBE in 2008.

Current Theatre projects include *The Empress* (RSC) and *Anita and Me* (Birmingham Rep, based on the novel by Meera Syal). Her work for television includes *Sugar Mummies*, *Banglatown Banquet* and *The Lives of Animals* (BBC); *Flight* (BBC – Winner of the FIPA D'Argent Prize and Ethnic Minorities Media Award) as well as several episodes of *Eastenders* and the comedy drama *All About Me* (BBC). Tanika has also written many original plays and adaptations for radio, most recently an acclaimed adaptation of *A Dolls House* for BBC Radio 3.

**About Katie Mitchell, OBE**

Mitchell is an award winning British theatre director and has been an Associate Director at the RSC, The National Theatre and the Royal Court Theatre. She was awarded an OBE in 2009 for services to drama. In 2011 she collaborated with the V&A on *Five Truths*, an immersive video installation which explored how five different directors (Constantin Stanislavski, Antonin Artaud, Bertolt Brecht, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook) represent truth through performance.

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