



Metta Theatre's

In The Willows

Education Pack

Metta's

In The Willows

The New British Musical of

The Wind In The Willows

Book & Lyrics Poppy Burton-Morgan

Music Pippa Cleary

Music & Lyrics Kieran Merrick

This spectacular new production from the award-winning Metta Theatre transforms Kenneth Grahame's well loved tale into a thrilling new musical.

About Metta Theatre

Metta Theatre exists to change the world. Established in 2005 by visionary Director Poppy Burton-Morgan and Motley trained Designer William Reynolds Metta Theatre is at the forefront of new work - with a particular focus on the development of new British musical theatre. Known for combining emotionally powerful performances with imaginative theatricality and striking visual style Metta Theatre is one of the UK's leading mid-scale touring companies. We commission, develop and create exceptional mid and large scale new musical theatre, plays and operas that represent and celebrate the diversity of our world. Previous partners and collaborators include the Soho Theatre, Southbank Centre, Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Oxford Playhouse, Manchester Royal Exchange and York Theatre Royal. Metta were artists in residence at the V&A 2017-2018 and an Associate Company at Exeter Northcott Theatre 2016-2019. Story is at the heart of every Metta production - we radically reimagine popular and well-loved narratives using text, music, projection, puppetry, dance and circus. We tell political stories with imagination, putting marginalised voices on main stages. We believe that everyone, regardless of their background, should be able to access bold, innovative and intelligent theatre and should be able to see themselves and their experiences reflected on our stages.

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1. In The Willows vs Wind In The Willows

Exercise

Read through the synopsis below of the original 'Wind In The Willows', and then read through the synopsis of 'In The Willows' beneath it. Make a note of all the differences - why do you think the writers have made these changes? What does it add to the new version of the script?



Wind In The Willows by Kenneth Grahame

One day while spring cleaning, Mole feels a sudden dissatisfaction and leaves his underground home. He soon discovers a small river community out in the country, and makes a new friend in Rat. After a long afternoon boating down the river, Rat invites Mole to live with him. During that adventure, Mole also learns about Badger and Toad, and develops a curiosity to meet them both. Because Badger prefers to be alone, Rat takes Mole to meet Toad, a rich animal with a very short attention span. He lives in a grand house called Toad Hall. Toad has recently taken up a number of different hobbies, and they learn about his newest: traveling around in a horse-drawn caravan. He convinces Mole and Rat to join him on his first adventure, much to Rat's chagrin. On their second day of travel, the caravan is run off the road by a fast-moving automobile. Rat tries to take charge, since the caravan is wrecked, but Toad becomes instantly obsessed with the automobile and its speed. Neither Rat nor Mole can break him from his daze.

Months later, Mole sneaks out from Rat's home into the Wild Wood, despite his mentor's warnings. He hopes to find and meet Badger there. He soon enough gets lost and hides, terrified of various creatures he sees and hears there. Later, Rat wakes from his nap and

realizes what Mole has done. He rushes after him, and finds him after hours of searching. After a nap to recover Mole's strength, they journey back home, but are waylaid by snow. They walk around for hours, until fortunately discovering Badger's front door. Badger invites them into his home, where they rest for a few days. During their visit, Badger tells them his plan to confront Toad over his driving habit, which has become reckless and expensive. Mid-December, Rat and Mole are traveling home from an adventure when Mole senses that his old home is nearby. He and Badger spend an evening there, during which time Mole realizes he still loves the place, but prefers to live out in nature with Rat.

Later in the spring, Badger asks Mole and Rat to help him confront Toad about his dangerous automobile habits. At Toad Hall, Badger tries to speak maturely to Toad, but Toad remains childish and refuses to listen. Thus, they place him on house arrest, guarding him one at a time. Unfortunately, Toad is very cunning and manipulative, and he is able to escape by fooling Rat. He runs to a nearby inn, where he sees an automobile. Unable to help himself, he steals the car and wrecks it. Consequently, he is arrested and sentenced to twenty years in jail. The gaoler's daughter takes pity on the forlorn Toad in prison, and she helps rig an escape for him. He switches clothes with the jail's washerwoman, and uses it to flee. However, he forgets to grab his wallet, so is unable to buy a train ticket. Luckily, he convinces the engine driver to take him. When the police soon start to pursue the train, Toad jumps off and has to resort to walking.

Later in the summer, Rat becomes restless, wondering why so many people leave the river bank for winter. When he meets a sailor named Sea Rat, he almost sets out at sea himself, but is saved from such folly by Mole. Toad comes across a bargewoman, and tricks her into giving him a ride down river. When she discovers Toad is not a real washerwoman, though, she kicks him off the barge. He then steals her horse and finds his way to a peddler. There, he attempts to swindle the peddler by selling the horse for over its value.

He soon enough hitchhikes, and is picked up by the same automobile he had previously stolen. Still dressed as a washerwoman, he convinces the driver to let him drive, and soon wrecks the vehicle again. Fleeing, he falls into the river and is carried with the current until Rat luckily fishes him out of the water downstream. Toad soon learns from his friends that the weasels and stoats have taken over Toad Hall. Under Badger's leadership, the four main characters develop a plan to sneak into Toad Hall through a secret passageway and surprise the weasels during a party.

The plan is a great success; they chase the squatters away, and immediately start planning for a party. Still arrogant, Toad plans to sing and speak about his great adventures, but Badger refuses to allow it. Influenced by Badger's stoic nature, Toad shifts his personality, and acts like an adult at the party. The characters enjoy the party, and live out their days peacefully along the riverside.



In The Willows by Poppy Burton-Morgan

It's Mole's first day at 'The Willows' comprehensive school. Socially awkward she is placed, by their teacher Badger, with the confident and popular Rattie, her boyfriend Otter and the mischievous chatterbox Toad. Rattie invites Mole to come clubbing at The Riverbank but Mole declines because she has to do a cleaning job to pay her rent. Mole wonders whether she should have said yes, meanwhile Toad has just seen a motorbike and is in love. Mole decides she will go clubbing. She dips her toe in the water of this new street culture, but she's out of her depth and runs away - ending up in the Wild Woods Estate where she remembers her twin brother, now dead, who used to help her in difficult social situations. Rattie overhears her and explains that they're not so different. Mole and Rattie happen upon the Weasels who have captured Otter and Mole distracts Chief Weasel by reminding him they grew up together, so that Otter can escape. They knock on a nearby door seeking sanctuary - it's Badger's house - he welcomes them in. Moments later the doorbell rings again - Carol singing from 3 Drunken Rabbits. Time passes with the Christmas carol morphing into a spring tune, ending back in the classroom, the last choir practice of term. As they leave Mole tries to speak to Otter in sign language but loses confidence. He signs/dances to her. Meanwhile Toad has bought himself a brand new motorbike - but when he runs over a Rabbit's foot at the school gates Badger confiscates the bike and puts him in detention, with Mole sent to watch over him. Toad persuades Mole to help him escape and they shimmy down the drainpipe. Toad steals his classmate Owl's motorbike and the two go for a joy ride ending in a police chase and dramatic crash. In the dock Mole is let off with a warning but Toad is sent down so he gives Mole the keycode to Toad Hall to look after things. In prison Toad is lost, alone and falling apart meanwhile Chief Weasel threatens Mole with a secret from her past and succeeds in weaselling the code out of her to get into Toad Hall.

ACT TWO SYNOPSIS

The Weasels have taken over Toad Hall. Back in school Rattie is feeling stressed about her university ambitions, meanwhile rumours are circulating that it was Mole who gave the weasels the code. Rattie defends Mole but Mole can't bring herself to reveal why she gave them the code. Appalled, Rattie says she can never forgive Mole. Mole runs off and almost gets run over - triggering the memory of when her brother died. She finds herself at Badger's door once more, he consoles her and tells her she mustn't blame herself for the death of her brother. Exhausted and traumatised she starts having visions of her friends as fairytale characters and makes a plan to rescue Toad. The plan becomes a reality and she wheels him out of prison hidden in a washing machine. But the Weasels discover them and steal it with Toad still inside. Mole sneaks away to find Otter. He tells her she must confide in Rattie and share the truth with her. Rattie appears and Mole confesses about her brother and how he died. The friends make up and head off to rescue Toad, through a secret entrance in his wardrobe. In Toad Hall, Toad is appalled by the carnage, and heartbroken that the weasels have even killed his goldfish, Alan. Just as Mole, Rattie and Otter discover and untie Toad they are surrounded by the Weasels. Mole challenges Weasel to a battle. Badger appears through the wardrobe in time to be the judge. Against all the odds the Willows win. The police are on their way and Badger says Toad must hand himself in but Rattie defends him with a searing indictment of the penal system. Badger agrees to turn a blind eye to the break out till after exams. Rattie's outburst inspires Mole who runs out to find Chief Weasel - but she catches up with him in time to see him stripped of his mask and leadership by a junior weasel, she reaches out to him. Back at school the students, including a reformed Chief Weasel, are celebrating their relative exam successes at the Graduation Ball when police sirens are heard. Toad realises his life on the run from the police must end but Owl reveals that she had a change of heart and dropped the charges. Mole has finally found somewhere to belong, and they dance and celebrate.

2. Rhyme and Reason

When is a rhyme not a rhyme? In *The Willows*, like a great many musicals before it, employs a lot of rhyme but in keeping with contemporary hip hop - not all of those 'rhymes' are rhymes as we know it...

SOME DEFINITIONS:

Perfect Rhyme - A rhyme in which the final accented vowel and all succeeding consonants or syllables are identical, while the preceding consonants are different, for example:

RATTIE Sister you're not aLONE
 And you don't have to find the answers on your OWN

RATTIE She's so BOSSY
 Wanna know why just ask my POSSE

Perfect rhymes are particularly thrilling to musical theatre nerds when the two spellings of the rhymed syllables are different!

Identity rhyme - a rhyme pair in which the phonological material from the accented/stressed syllable including the onset until the end of the word or line are identical

TOAD Auntie's sitting on a gold MINE
 When she croaks it'll all be MINE

Imperfect rhyme / slant rhyme - a type of rhyme formed by words with similar but not identical sounds, or plural/not plural sounds

TOAD Amphibian living like a KING
 Come with me I'll show you THINGS

WEASEL There's not much we won't underTAKE
 Trapped before, so we lay the BAIT

Assonance - the repetition of a vowel sound or diphthong in non-rhyming words.

TOAD Ribbiting rivetting rhythms

Stress / accent - The idea that in a word with more than one syllable, one (or more than one) syllable will be stressed or accented. And the rest will be unstressed, or, unaccented.

AmPHIBian, UNderPRIVileged

Scansion - The rhythm of a line of verse or song/rap lyric.

Rap - A type of popular music in which words are recited rapidly and rhythmically over an instrumental backing. Rattie's ROW THE BOAT is a rap number.

Song - A short poem or other set of words set to music or meant to be sung. Rattie's YOU'RE NOT ALONE is a song.

Ballad - A song that utilizes a slower tempo. Generally a ballad will contain sustained notes and emphasize longer musical lines and phrasing. Badger's OH CHILD and Mole's I SEE YOU are both ballads

Recitative - A rhythmically free vocal style that imitates the natural inflections of speech and that is used for dialogue and narrative in operas and oratorios.

Types of Musicals

Rapped through musical - constant music, constant rapping or singing: Hamilton, In The Willows

Sung through musical - constant music, constant singing (a mix of songs and recitative): Les Miserables, Evita

Through composed musical - constant music, but some dialogue spoken over music as well as singing. - Sunset Boulevard, The Who's Tommy

Book musical - scenes of dialogue are spoken, songs are sung. Oklahoma, Guys and Dolls, Wicked

Exercise

For the duration of *In the Willows* there is continuous music and/or a beat, and every word uttered aloud is either rapped or sung. This makes a piece a 'rapped through' musical similar to Lin Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton*, or if it were a sung-through musical similar to *Les Miserables* but instead of 'recitative' those sections are rapped.

Musical Theatre purists often wince at an imperfect or slant rhyme (unless it's joyfully acknowledged and playful like prowess and mow-ess [mouse] in *The Wizard of Oz*). Hip hop fans however, and those of pop music more generally have come to accept it, and even relish the ingenuity and lyrical dexterity of a slant rhyme and also an identity. You can't really rap at all if you only use perfect rhyme.

So for *Willows* we've followed the rough principle of adhering to perfect rhyme in the songs and allowing imperfect / slant rhymes and identities in the rap numbers and the rapped book songs. Some characters rap noticeably more than others (Toad, Rattie and Chief Weasel), and some sing far more than they rap (Mole, Badger). **Have a think as to why that might be?**



3. A-Z of the Urban Artforms in In The Willows

Struggling to identify your gospel from your grime, your BSL from your breakdancing. Well here is an A-Z of the diverse urban and classical art-forms used within our hip hop musical In The Willows:

Break-dancing (also known as B-Boy or B-Girl) - A form of non-rhythmic urban dance characterized by acrobatic and gymnastic movements. Chief Weasel and the weasel clan use break-dancing in In The Willows.



BSL (British Sign Language) - A visual means of communicating using gestures, facial expression, and body language. Sign Language is used mainly by people who are Deaf or have hearing impairments. Otter communicates through BSL and his choreography, and much of the choreography of the show fuses hip hop moves with BSL signs and gestures.

Contemporary - A style of expressive dance that combines elements of several dance genres including modern, jazz, lyrical and classical ballet. Mole uses contemporary dance in the final dance battle between the Willows crew and the Weasel clan.

Graffiti - A style of writing or drawing often sprayed in a public place as a form of artistic expression. The Weasels graffiti over Toad Hall when they take over the place at the start of Act Two.

Gospel / Soul - A kind of music incorporating elements of rhythm and blues and gospel music, characterized by an emphasis on vocals and an impassioned improvisatory delivery, it is associated with performers such as Marvin Gaye, Aretha Franklin, James Brown, and Otis Redding. Badger sings in a gospel/soul style.

Grime - A British subgenre of hip hop music, influenced by UK garage, characterized by machine-like sounds and often the repetition of the same short lyric throughout a song. Chief Weasel raps in a grime style - most notably in his track 'Animal'

Hip Hop - A style of popular music and dance featuring rap with an electronic backing. It is also used as an umbrella term for the many subgenres of urban or street dance. Hip hop styles are used throughout In The Willows.

Locking (see popping) - A style of funk dance, which includes freezing from a fast movement and "locking" in a certain position. Owl's movement is based on popping and locking to show the bird like motion of her flapping wings.

Popping (see locking) - A street dance style which goes hand in hand with locking. It is based on the technique of quickly contracting and relaxing muscles to cause a jerk in the dancer's body.

Rap (see Grime) - A type of popular music in which words are recited rapidly and rhythmically over an instrumental backing, often with a strong element of rhyme. In The Willows is a 'rapped through' musical (like Hamilton) meaning that characters always speak in rhyme over a beat.

Spoken word - An oral art that focuses on the aesthetics of word play and intonation and voice inflection. It is a 'catchall' that includes any kind of poetry recited aloud, including hip-hop, jazz poetry, poetry slams, traditional poetry readings and can include comedy routines and 'prose monologues'. Rattie shifts from rap to spoken word flows throughout In The Willows.

Street dance - A 'street dance' is a dance style that evolved outside dance studios in any available open space such as streets, dance parties, block parties, parks, school yards, raves, and nightclubs. The term is used to describe vernacular dances in urban context, and like 'hip-hop' serves as an umbrella term for many subgenres.

Tap dance - a dance performed wearing shoes fitted with metal taps, characterized by rhythmical tapping of the toes and heels, strongly associated with 'classic' or golden age musical theatre. Toad's backing dancers, who appear in a moment of fantasy where he imagines himself in a west end show use tap dance.

Urban - Any of various dances influenced by the rhythms and techniques of funk and hip-hop music, such as locking, popping, or b-boying.

Vogueing - Dancing to music in such a way as to imitate the characteristic poses struck by a model on a catwalk. Duck uses Vogue Femme (an evolution of Vogueing) to express their feminine identity and to dazzle the other animals in the Riverbank night club dance battle.

4. Meet the Cast!



Star of Tracy Beaker and Musical Theatre legend Clive Rowe leads the cast as **Badger** in **In The Willows**. Poppy Burton-Morgan, our writer and director, recently met up with Clive to discuss all things Willows.

I'm backstage at the Hackney Empire where, between shows, and still decked out in full Dame make-up, national treasure and Olivier award-winner Clive Rowe is catching up with me on all things musical theatre. Clive and I first met in September 2017 when he joined us for a fortnight workshopping my new musical In The Willows - a twenty first century reinaging of Kenneth Grahame's classic story Wind In The Willows - set in an urban comprehensive school 'The Willows'. Fast forward a year and he's still with the show - leading the company in the world premiere and UK tour which opens in February 2019. Clive plays the stern but kindly teacher Mr Badger - keeping an eye on naughty Toad, sassy Rattie and quiet new girl Mole.

In the new British Musical In The Willows you play the stern but kindly teacher Mr Badger - keeping an eye on Toad, Rattie, Mole and the others. Did you ever have a teacher who inspired you when you were growing up? "My home economics teacher Katherine Scholes - she wrote my first CV for me - she was one of their first people that said I should act - she was always telling me to go to drama school. I kept in touch and even invited her to join me when I received my MBE".

With a rapped-through score and beats from hip-hop composer Keiran Merrick will we see any break-dancing from you in the musical? "The only backflipping I'll be doing is vocal - I'll be neither hippping nor hopping in the show - but Pippa [Cleary - the award-winning other half of the composing team, who wrote the smash hit Adrian Mole musical] has written me some beautiful melodies so that's where I get to show off."

Are you looking forward to rehearsals starting soon? "Yes, that's where the magic happens - I love the script, I'm excited by the music and I'm just really looking forward to working with Poppy [Burton-Morgan, The Writer and Director] properly on it".

How do you prepare for a performance? "I've been doing the same warm up for 31 years. It lasts 16 minutes - that's all you need. Well actually my full routine, which people don't know about - first thing in the morning I do stretching for my core and legs, whether or not I'm performing. Then a vocal warm up in the shower for 13 minutes. Then my 16 minute warm up and then I'll join the company on stage later for the group vocal warm up."

Aside from the rigorous warm up to stay vocally match-fit - what's the secret to your long and illustrious career? "There is no secret. You just keep going. And it's a lot of luck. You just have to turn up, do good work, go home".

You've just finished a star turn in Chichester's Me and My Girl, reprised your Olivier-award winning performance in Guys And Dolls at The Royal Albert Hall, and after Willows you'll head straight into Blues In The Night at the Kiln playing opposite Sharon D Clarke. What made you say yes to this brand new, unknown show? "Back when I got the script in 2017 - it just felt new. I didn't really know the original story - all I remembered was Toad, Rattie, something with a car and Badger - but this version, this musical - it's so effortlessly modern - so relatable, and so brilliantly accessible to kids - without talking down to them. Once I got into the workshop and realised there was a deaf character and integrated British Sign Language - it was beautiful. I'm a big supporter of new musicals generally but I just thought it was amazing - it is amazing - this show really is being made for everyone."

And what's the best bit? "That's hard, there are so many... when the Weasels sing 'Animal' - I don't like rap generally, but the aggression of it is completely right for the characters and I can understand every word. And Toad's big number 'Easy Life' - so catchy, so fun and so funny. Badger's ballad 'Oh Child' is so beautiful - it's a great example of how generational the show is. This soulful, almost Gospel number, is just right for Badger and it's right for my generation, like the rap is right for the younger characters. The music always captures who it's coming from - it's never music for music's sake. And best of all - I don't think the music is like any other musical I've heard."

Exercise

Take a look at the rest of the cast - considering the descriptions and what you know about both 'Wind In The Willows' and 'In The Willows', what characteristics do you think had to be considered for each character? What kind of decisions would you make when casting these characters?



Victoria Boyce | Mole

Mole is an anxious, awkward 17 year old who struggles to fit in. Dressed always in dark grey, she hides in the shadows and stays quiet. She is haunted by a past, traumatic event, for which she blames herself.

Zara MacIntosh | Rattie

Rattie is cool and popular, with a rep to protect. She is also hard-working and caring, though. She dreams of a place at Cambridge, to give her the boost in life to leave the Willows and change the world. She speaks sign-language, usually to her boyfriend Otter, and is great at messing around with beats.



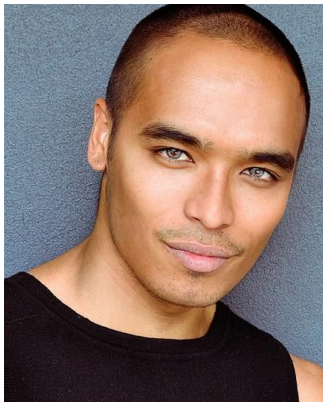
Harry Jardine | Toad

Toad is an extroverted, cheeky, bling-laden rapper. He's a rich kid, spoilt and greedy because he knows he can afford whatever he wants. There's a sadness underlying this though: his dad is in prison and his goldfish, Alan, is his only real friend.



Chris Fonseca | Otter

Otter is easy-going, affable, supportive and strong-spirited. He's deaf, and learnt to dance by feeling the beat when his aunt would play him music. His main style is bashment and lyrical hip hop. He's Rattie's boyfriend.



Seann Miley Moore | Duck

Duck is a flamboyant, extravagant and bold character in the class. They're gender non-conforming and a great performer, a fabulous voguer, with an unshakeable air of confidence and sass.

Abiola Efunshile | Owl

The motorbike-riding, hijab-wearing, cool girl in class. She has dance-battle-winning kind of talent: a popping and locking style that never fails to impress. She's kind-hearted and forgiving.





Matt Knight | Chief Weasel

The Weasels are a thieving, violent gang of break-dancers run by the troubled, harsh Chief. The Chief is a grime-rapper: relentless, a bully, but has suffered a difficult upbringing.

Treasure Iyamu | Twitchy Rabbit

The mean, shallow kids of the school playground. They're a tight group of house dancers and they will pick on anyone who stands out.



Katherine Picar | Bitchy Rabbit

