

# KNEEHIGH

T · H · E · A · T · R · E

*Firing the imagination*

PLYMOUTH  
THEATRE ROYAL

# THE KING OF RUSSIA

by  
**NICK  
DARKE**

**BT**

Member of the  
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COUNTY COUNCIL**

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# THE CATCH



In 1982 I wrote a play called *The Catch* about a share fisherman called Swiddles who can't make ends meet catching shellfish. At the behest of his son Leadwell he takes to the import-export trade and runs a consignment of cocaine for a shadowy offstage

drug-dealer called Goggo. The enterprise comes to grief and the play ends with Swiddles activating a powerful fan and covering the audience with powdered chalk whilst singing *The Road to Mandalay*.

John Carter, the King of Prussia, was a drug-runner. He imported brandy. His drug was more acceptable than cocaine and he and his brothers were heroes. It was an activity that young men aspired to and practised openly whilst the authorities and the gentry (by and large the same thing) colluded. Everyone was at it. The prosperity of the community was built on uncustomed goods. To be a 'free-trader' was a social calling. Cornwall was a very different place. The coastline wasn't 'managed' (I don't know whether Carter would have thought a beach looked prettier after it had been divested of its strandline and raked, my assumption is that his opinion would have been the same as mine - unprintable), there were no roads to speak of and houses were built to be lived in and not left empty for nine tenths of the year. Of course times were hard and life was cheap but in *The King of Prussia* Edward, John Carter's kid brother, abandons smuggling to go fishing. For Swiddles in *The Catch* its the other way round.

**Nick Darke, 1997.**

*I arn't sure if there's a God,  
E never showed isself to me  
But I shall keep an open mind  
So long as lobsters swim the sea*

*It might be Neptune or Poseidon  
I don't care what name E's got,  
So long as I can stand beside'n  
When I'm haulin' up that pot*

*The King of Prussia* toured the country last year playing to packed houses and attracting enormous popular and critical acclaim. The company were invited to the Donmar Warehouse to take part in their Four Corners Festival of theatre from Celtic countries alongside renowned companies from Scotland, Ireland and Wales. This was Kneehigh's first visit to London's West End. *The King of Prussia* sold out at the Donmar within the first week, an extraordinary achievement.

Richard Eyre, outgoing Director of the National Theatre, immediately commissioned Nick Darke to write a new play. Kneehigh hope that this will develop into a co-production at the National Theatre in the near future and are currently in discussion with Richard Eyre's successor, Trevor Nunn.

### What the press say...

"...a rare chance to see a real company at work in the West End." Michael Billington of the Guardian.  
 "A real gem...a classic...brilliant!" The Observer.  
 "This much fun must be illegal." The Times.  
 "A marvellous piece of theatre" The Guardian.  
 "A delight." The Independent.

# CAST

**Mike Shepherd**  
**Giles King**  
**Bec Applebee**  
**Mary Woodvine**  
**Charlie Barnecut**  
**Carl Grose**

**Nick Darke**

**Mike Shepherd**  
**Bill Mitchell**  
**Jim Carey**

Additional Singers on play-out version of *The Lobster Song*: Trevor & Pam Ternouth, Gary Mitchell, Geoff Pollard, John Pearce, Terry Truscott, Ron Hocking, Jack Rowe, Alison Hall and Nick Darke.

**All other parts will be played by the company**

Sean Donohoe  
 John Voogd  
 Sue Hill  
 Allan Drake  
 Jon Oram,  
 Richard Bonehill  
 & Emma Rice  
 Hilary Garnham, Julie  
 Smith & Jane Sutherland  
 Jane Sutherland, Mike  
 Gilmore, Fred Still &  
 Becca Gregson  
 Graphic Design &  
 Sue Hill  
 Steve Tanner  
 Tony Crosby  
 Ali Firth, Trudi Stallard

John Carter, The King of Prussia  
 Harry Carter, John Stackhouse  
 Bessie Busow  
 Suzanne Stackhouse  
 John Knill, Charlie Carter  
 Edward Carter

Playwright  
 & Assistant Director  
 Director  
 Designer  
 Musical Director

**Costume Maker**  
**Set Maker**  
**Props Maker**  
**Lighting & Stage Management**  
**Training**

**Administration**

**Publicity**

**Poster**

**Photography**  
**Programme**  
**Catering**

**The action of the play takes place in Cornwall, France and the seas between.**

John Carter, The King of Prussia, was originally played by Tristan Sturrock, who is currently working with the RSC.

Frank Guy made the lobster pot from withies grown in his back garden in Gorran Haven. He was born in the village in 1913 and, apart from a brief spell at sea in the Navy, has lived there ever since.

Running time approx. 85 minutes with no interval.

In the Kingdom of Prussia  
 There lives a great clan  
 Of Free Trading brothers  
 Who don't give a damn

# THE KING OF PRUSSIA

by  
**NICK DARKE**

**BT**

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# BIOGRAPHIES



Bec Applebee



Charlie Barnecut



Carl Grose



Giles King



Mike Shepherd



Mary Woodvine

**Bec Applebee** trained at Liverpool Poly. Co-founded Bedlam Theatre and has worked extensively with Kneehigh for eight years. Shows include *Peer Gynt*, *Windfall*, *Ship of Fools*, *The Bogus Ravenheart* and *Ghost Nets*. She has also worked recently with *Desperate Men*.

**Charlie Barnecut** A founder member of Kneehigh in 1979. He has a long association with Nick Darke's plays including *Ting Tang Mine* and *The Bogus*. When not acting he spends his time farming and finds the tractor a useful place to learn his lines.

**Carl Grose** is a founder member of Grinning Gargoyle Theatre. Achievements include performing in *Hell's Mouth*, directing *The Body* and writing *Scorched*, which won the Questors Theatre Student Playwright Competition. Other plays include: *Bile*, *The Marshmallow Maidens*, *Cinnamon's Splinter* and the forthcoming sequel to *Scorched*, *Trinity Street*.

**Giles King** left Dartington in 1986 and has performed almost exclusively in Kneehigh shows since then. Taking time out to tour the coast of Britain in Europe's first theatre ship and featured in Radio 4's adaptation of *My Cousin Rachel*.

**Mike Shepherd** is the founder of Kneehigh. He has worked both as actor and director on previous plays by Nick Darke; *Ting Tang Mine*, *Hell's Mouth*, *Danger My Ally* and *The Bogus*, and is pleased to develop this relationship further. He has recently played the role of Jean Paul Marat and worked as movement director in Bristol Old Vic's production of *The Marat Sade*.

**Mary Woodvine** left the Welsh College of Music and Drama in 1989. Her wide variety of work since then includes productions with Kneehigh, Orchard and The Gate, London. Mary's TV credits include *Eastenders*, *Heartbeat*, *Casualty*, *An Element of Doubt* (over Christmas) and soon to be seen as the new WPC in *Pie in the Sky*.

**Nick Darke** was born and bred near Padstow, he's written over twenty plays including *The Body*, *The Dead Monkey* and *Landmarks* which have been produced throughout Britain and the world. He is currently under commission to The National Theatre.

**Bill Mitchell** is a designer and director from London who has worked on most projects with Kneehigh since 1988. He still finds time to work in London, Birmingham and Nottingham. He is currently working on the forthcoming Nottingham Playhouse/Kneehigh co-production of *The Arabian Nights*.

**Allan Drake** is a founder member of Kneehigh Theatre, and has performed, played music, plotted the lighting or generated the sound in most productions since then. He also works with many other companies and performers.

*This performance is dedicated to Hazel Woodvine.*

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## THEATRE ROYAL

The Theatre Royal, Plymouth, is one of Britain's leading producing theatres. The Theatre Royal Plymouth has generated such highly acclaimed drama productions as *The Seagull*, *The Winslow Boy*, *Shadowlands*, *The Provoked Wife*, *What a Performance*, *A Long Day's Journey Into Night*, *Blue Murder*, alongside many other successful musicals which have transferred to the West End and national tours. During 1996 Theatre Royal productions won both an Olivier Award and an Evening Standard Award.

In the Spring and Summer of 1997, the Theatre Royal produced two world premieres, *A Soldier's Song* by Hugh James and *Korczak* by Nick Stimpson and Chris Williams and the European premiere of *Tiger Tail* by Tennessee Williams.

The Theatre Royal is proud of its collaboration with Kneehigh Theatre on the *King of Prussia*. The support of new writing by companies within the region is vital to the development of theatre in the South West. The Theatre Royal looks forward to further collaborative ventures with Kneehigh and other regional companies.

Both Kneehigh Theatre and the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, are members of the South West Theatre Consortium.



## TOUR

**Jan. 28th - Feb. 8th** Plymouth Theatre Royal 01752 267222

**Feb 13th - Feb 15th** Truro College 01872 75741

**Feb 18th - Feb 22nd** Salisbury Playhouse 01722 320333

**Feb 27th - Mar 1st** Warwick Arts Centre, Coventry 01203 524524

**Mar 4th - Mar 5th** Canterbury-Gulbenkian Theatre 01227 769075

**Mar 7th - Mar 8th** The Acorn, Penzance 01736 65520

### And look out for...

**The Arabian Nights** A Kneehigh co-production with Nottingham Playhouse, opening at The Playhouse 14th-26th April. Then touring outdoor venues at home and abroad this Summer.

**The Riot** Nick Darke's new play for the National Theatre and Kneehigh.

**Telling Tales** A probable re-tour of the very popular production.

**Innovatory Plans** From Bristol Design Company Springboard and Kneehigh for a mobile theatre to take us into the new millennium.

## THANKS

Kneehigh is grateful to Plymouth Theatre Royal for the co-production, Sylvia Roskilly, Captain George Hogg and Joanna Mattingly at Falmouth Maritime Museum, Hazel Burston & Roger Penhallurick at The Royal Cornwall Institute, Richard Winkworth, Penrose Marquees, Penrose Sailmakers, Donald Hill, Hilary Larson, Davis Automatics of St Austell, Richard Marlowe, Delia Lancaster, Frank Carter, Robin Davies, Bristol Old Vic, Natasha Buckley, Brad Caine, Gary Rowe, Philippa Kersey and Dave Luck of Charlestown Harbour, Martin Parker for underwater photography, Lynn Miller for French translation, Lew Jones St Austell Brewery, Sean Hooper Performing Arts Cornwall, Richard Marlowe, Tony Davies, Dave Hunter, Sharon at Deborah Services, Steven Horsecroft, Bit Computers, English Partnerships, Richard Ternouth, The Cornwall Studies Institute, Cornwall Youth Theatre, Roger Vinton/DRV, Jan Ruhrmund & Morrab Library, Mo Imms, Dave Mynne, Graham Mills, Adam & Barry Honeyman, Don Wilkins and all our families and friends.

## HISTORY

*The King of Prussia* is loosely set in the late eighteenth century ... a time of revolution! George III was King. America claimed independence. The French Revolution sent a shudder through Europe. Desperate to raise revenue, the Government of William Pitt the Younger placed heavy duty on almost everything. People were desperate. Free-Trading, or 'smuggling', flourished.

*'In the Kingdom of Prussia ... There lives a great clan Of Free Trading brothers ... Who don't give a damn...'*

John Carter lived in Porthleah Cove, Cornwall. He was one of eight brothers who were renowned Free Traders. As a child he called himself the 'King of Prussia' after Frederick the Great - a hero at the time. The name stuck and Porthleah is now known as Prussia Cove.

*'If you call yourself a king there will be no King! Cus we'm all kings. And if we'm all kings there's no Kings don't you think? Long live kings all! Death to all Kings!'*

Suzanne Acton married John Stackhouse and they built Acton Castle on the cliffs just west of Porthleah for him to pursue his studies of seaweed. They were very well connected and extremely wealthy. John Carter was their tenant and held keys to the castle when they were away. There was a tunnel from the basement to the beach ...

John Knill was Collector of Customs in St. Ives. Although a law-abiding man there was suspicion that even he was involved in the smuggling trade.

Harry Carter was a devout Methodist and a first class seaman. He spent time in French prisons and worked amongst slaves in the cottonfields of America. He spent much of his life with a price on his head ... a lifetime's earnings. No-one ever turned him in.

Bessie Bussow ran the Kiddleywink at Porthleah.

*'smuggler; a person who no doubt blameable for violating the laws of his country is frequently incapable of violating those of natural justice and would have been in every respect an excellent citizen had not the laws of his country made that a crime which Nature never meant to be' - Adam Smith, author of 'The Wealth of Nations'.*

## THE SEA

With its 300 miles of coastline, Cornwall has been a trading nation since the Bronze Age. Whether importing coal or exporting pilchards, the sea has been Cornwall's lifeline. The land was too poor to support the population, so many took to the sea, mined underground or both.

Dating back to before the time of the Carter brothers there has been friction between the Navy and other sea-users. A catalogue of arrogance, accidents and near misses which continues into the present day. Since the Royal Navy has moved from Portland to Devonport, there has been an enormous upsurge in military activity in Cornish seas and over Cornish land. The increase in military operations involving the combined Forces & NATO threatens Cornwall's fishing, tourism, shipping, leisure pursuits and identity.

In 1997 the Cornish fishing industry is in crisis. Fish quotas are so low that fishermen are forced to exceed them in order to avoid bankruptcy - hence the market in 'black fish'. Other European fishermen, due to historical precedent, have larger quotas and so can fish more. Cornish fishermen feel morally right in fishing their own waters.

*"The Cornish fishing industry is being given away" a Mevagissey fisherman.*

*'There's no money to be made in building wooden boats anymore ... only in chain-sawing them in half'.*

*Tom Dudley - wooden boat builder.*

*"More than 20 Cornish fishing boats are to be scrapped as owners take advantage of government decommissioning payouts of up to £60,000 a vessel". The West Briton, October 1995.*





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**Egon Ronay**

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For more information  
Telephone: 01872 262465



**KNEEHIGH NETWORK** To receive regular information about Kneehigh's work, just send us your name and address. Please state if you are interested in training courses. In return we ask you to distribute a few leaflets and posters in your neighbourhood.

**KNEEHIGH MERCHANDISE** Also available by mail order from the office.

Cassettes: Ravenheart £6.95, Ship of Fools £4.00, Jump & Moxey £2.00

Videos: Ravenheart £15.00, Tregagle £7.00

Postcards: selection pack of 10 £2.00

Kneehigh 'Any Year' Calendar: £6.00

Please make cheques payable to Kneehigh Theatre and add £1.00 p&p then send with your order to:  
11 Castle Street, Truro, Cornwall TR1 3AF Tel 01872 223159.



## The Arabian Nights

Kneehigh weave a rich tapestry of stories drawn from Oriental and Eastern folklore. Journey to mythical lands, across raging seas, over the highest mountains into the deepest, darkest caverns. Travel to a world of singing trees, talking fish, and fantastical creatures.

*The Arabian Nights* will be at Nottingham Playhouse 14th-26th April, and then on tour from 29th May.

For details please contact Kneehigh Office.  
Tel: 01872 223159.

REPROGRAPHICS: BARNABUS 01872 41185

All enquiries concerning *King of Prussia* ©Nick Darke 1996 should be directed to ICM, Oxford House, 76 Oxford Street, London W1N 0AX.

Kneehigh Theatre is a registered charity (No. 290218)