

## MRS SHAW HERSELF

### A glimpse into the life of Charlotte Payne-Townshend

Devised and performed by ALEXIS LEIGHTON and HELEN TIERNEY

The text of MRS SHAW HERSELF is almost entirely drawn from her letters and diaries and those of, amongst others, Shaw, Beatrice Webb and T.E. Lawrence. Charlotte Payne-Townshend (1857-1943) was an Irish heiress and in her early 40s when she married the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw. Both had previously taken a firm stance against marriage: Shaw was a notorious philanderer and she herself was terrified of physical intimacy and child-bearing, yet their unconventional marriage survived until her death. Although Shaw's views on their relationship remained ambiguous, there is no doubt that in many ways the marriage was a success: Not least, her fortune gave Shaw domestic comfort and stability which enabled him to write so prolifically. MRS SHAW HERSELF aims to bring Charlotte Shaw out from behind her husband's shadow, and explore her thoughts, ideas and considerable legacy.

#### Who's Who

##### MRS SHAW HERSELF

**Charlotte Payne -Townshend** Irish Heiress, philanthropist and wife to G. B. Shaw.

**Axel Munthe** Swedish doctor. Charlotte's failed romance with him led her to consider philanthropy.

**Beatrice Webb** Founder member of the Fabian Society and London School of Economics.

**Ellen Terry** Leading actress who exchanged many loving letters with Shaw

**George Bernard Shaw** Internationally famous Irish playwright who uniquely won an Oscar and a Nobel prize for Literature. Bob Dylan is the only other artist to have been awarded both.

**Mrs Patrick Campbell** Actress and lover of GBS who was the first Eliza Doolittle in Pygmalion. She later published Shaw's love-letters to raise money.

**Erica Cotterill** Young infatuated fan of GBS who actually moved to Ayot St Lawrence to be near him and who would stalk him around the village.

**T.E. Lawrence** AKA Lawrence of Arabia. Author of the Seven Pillars of Wisdom, a work which Charlotte not only championed, but helped edit. Lawrence joked about the fact people assumed he was Shaw's illegitimate son as he spent so much time visiting the Shaws and actually changed his surname to Shaw in his pursuit of anonymity. His friendship with Charlotte was a very intimate one.

**Alexis Leighton** Alexis trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland, where she played among others, the title role in St Joan by George Bernard Shaw. She has appeared at The Citizens Theatre, The Traverse The Tron Theatre as well the Edinburgh International Festival. Alexis played Elsie in Elsie and Norm's Macbeth for Northampton Theatre Royal and performed her one-woman show Miss Margarida's Way in theatres in Edinburgh, Glasgow and London. In Lilly and May by Australian playwright Patricia Cornelius, Alexis played Lilly performing at The Drill Hall and at The Kings Head, London. An active supporter of up and coming playwrights, she has performed as part of new writing initiatives at Southwark Playhouse, Soho Theatre and Theatre 503. Alexis played the lead role Harriet in Key for Two performed at The English Speaking Theatre in Vienna.

**Helen Tierney** Helen Tierney studied music at Oxford University and works in music education and community music with a special interest in music and dementia. She has worked with music in prisons, Alzheimer's units, eating disorder clinics and homeless shelters alongside mainstream music education and is a Rhinegold Education author. She is a co-founder of Music, Memories and Me- an arts engagement project designed for residential care homes. She has performed at the Edinburgh Festival, Glastonbury, Royal Variety Performance and as a singer has participated in 25 Proms seasons with the BBC Symphony Chorus.

**MRS SHAW HERSELF has been performed in various Shavian settings, notably the Shaw library at the LSE which Charlotte financed and also in the church at Ayot St Lawrence where Shaw himself occasionally played the organ. The UK Shaw society sponsored a sell-out performance at the Tristan Bates Theatre and the play has had performances at festivals including the Edinburgh Fringe, Bloomsbury, Bury St Edmunds and Crouch End, Herstory, Nottingham Irish and Watford Fringe. It was also performed at the Conway Hall library as part of London History Day.**