

BEAUTIFUL THING

BY JONATHAN HARVEY

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DIRECTORS NOTES

Beautiful Thing by Jonathan Harvey premiered at the Bush Theatre in 1993 and quickly became one of the most celebrated plays of its generation. Following its critical success it was later adapted by Harvey into a BAFTA winning feature film directed by Hettie Macdonald in 1996. Both the play and film version which are now iconic have helped thousands of gay teens to 'dream a little dream' of their lives being better for having watched Jamie and Ste dance their way out of the closet, giving them hope and making them feel a little less alone. The reasons for the success probably lie in the way Harvey delicately blends a sense of realism – allowing his audience to identify with the characters and their situation – with an upbeat, optimistic view of what life should be like. For gay theatregoers in particular, the combination has become irresistible.

At the time of writing in 1993 the age of consent for gay male relationships in the UK was still 21 (it was reduced to 18 in 1994, and finally equalised with that for heterosexuals – 16 – at the end of 2000) and the play highlights the preposterousness of the law as it stood then. But Beautiful Thing is a play about people, not politics. The prejudice suffered by gay people of all ages, and the fear and loneliness it can cause – particularly to gay teenagers. 'I set out for positive imagery, a happy ending – a little rose-tinted, so it would give people some hope,' Harvey said. Sixteen year-old Jamie is in most respects an average teenager, living with his single mum on a south-east London estate. But what nobody knows except Jamie – indeed at the start of the play he barely knows it himself – is that he is slowly but surely falling in love with Ste, the boy next door, who lives with his drunken bully of a father and equally violent older brother. One night Ste takes refuge in Jamie's room – and life for both of them will never be the same again.

I have to confess a real passion for the rehearsal process and this has been a wonderful play to rehearse. The atmosphere at rehearsals has been happy and collaborative and working with such a talented and responsive cast and crew has been an absolute pleasure.



STEVE WOOLDRIDGE

BEAUTIFUL THING

BY JONATHAN HARVEY

JONATHAN HARVEY

I wrote *Beautiful Thing* quickly in the summer of 1992. It came from the heart. The age of consent debate was going on – back then, gay men had to be 21 to have sex. The rhetoric used in parliament was so archaic, with words like “buggery” and “sodomy”. I wanted to write a play about two boys falling in love, and give it a happy ending. During the Aids crisis, it was unusual for a gay character to still be alive at the end of a drama. Class was important, too. Gay characters in Merchant Ivory films went punting, but if you were working class on screen, you would end up becoming a rent boy and selling your arse for 20 Woodbine cigarettes. My own experience, however, was that tolerance and acceptance were not just the privilege of the upper and middle classes.

I'd already had some plays staged but was still teaching, working near the Thamesmead estate in London where the play is set. My agent had just got rid of me, saying I wasn't taking my writing seriously. That gave me a kick up the arse. I spent the first two weeks of the summer holidays writing *Beautiful Thing* in longhand, the second two typing it up and the last fortnight sending it out. By the end of the summer, I had a new agent – Alan Radcliffe, the father of Daniel, who played Harry Potter. I left my teaching job at Christmas.

All the new writing venues turned the play down, except the Bush in London. Dominic Dromgoole, who ran the theatre, told me: “It's a really weird ending.” I said: “What, the dance?” He said: “What dance?” It turned out the agent's assistant had sent it out to everybody with the last 40 pages missing. Dominic said: “I thought you were just being elliptical.”

They got Hettie Macdonald in as director, which was important because it needed some fine-tuning. It was on stage by the end of July 1993. People said we had the graveyard slot – all the reviewers were up in Edinburgh – but it sold out. The Bush was this tiny space above a pub: it seated 80 and was quite claustrophobic. But the play is about people living on top of each other, so when the two boys, Jamie and Ste, were in bed talking, you really felt as if you were in there with them.



I had a feeling it was good, but to see the rapturous response was like drinking your first glass of champagne: it was effervescent. Philip Glenister was laugh-out-loud funny as Tony, the boyfriend of Jamie's mum Sandra, played by Patricia Kerrigan. Patricia was scary but warm and full of heart. I had a panic the night my mum came to see it. She is nothing like Sandra but there are conversations I had with her that are in the play. After she saw the film version, she said: "Please don't stop writing about the little people." That really moved me. The play helped me find my theatrical voice. It was the first time I had been honest in my writing and it gave me the confidence to keep going.

PHILIP GLENISTER, writes - I was three years out of drama school and Beautiful Thing was my first proper London theatre job. I was living near Jonny Lee Miller, who played Ste, the classmate Jamie falls in love with. He was sharing a flat with Jude Law and they would come round to mine for a drink after the show and we'd put the world to rights. Obviously the play is about two boys falling in love but it didn't feel risky, just funny and very moving. The use of the Mamas and the Papas' music was great: It's Getting Better and so on. There was a message there.

The theatre was packed from day one. A lot of gay men came to see it. I remember most of them wore very white T-shirts. You'd be on stage staring out at this Daz-white sea of brightness. The play was set in summer, and it was warm outside, those lovely long evenings. Everything seemed to click. It became the sort of show everyone wanted to see.

Jonathan had written Tony as a middle-class guy but I fancied him as more of a geezer. He thinks he's all that when socially he is a bit awkward. He's got a heart of gold, though. When they transferred to the Donmar Warehouse, I was busy doing a film so Hugh Bonneville was Tony, and he played him the complete opposite way to me, which worked great. Then Rhys Ifans had the role next. It's like the part had a sort of Midas touch.

There is a line in it that is one of the great lines in theatre. Sophie Stanton used to deliver it perfectly each night as Leah, a neighbour. There would be a row between Jamie and his mum, then Leah would light a cigarette, leave a long pause and say: "Kids are cunts." It brought the house down every time. To this day, I still quote it. It's as good as any Shakespeare.





MATTHEW HALL

Beautiful Thing is a fantastic play, and Ste is a character that I'm really grateful to have been given the opportunity to perform. He's a really complicated character, as his life outside of his home is vastly different to the one inside of it. Ste is a very transformative role as he has to tackle the masculinity norms and internationalised homophobia of the time, while trying to seek permission to exist as himself. The way Jamie is the emotional refuge for Ste is really powerful and something that's been quite moving to work on. Their relationship is the catalyst to Ste's development, as for him, it is the first time that physical contact is tender, rather than violent.

It's been a pleasure to have been part of this process, and everyone involved have been brilliant from the start. Exchanging ideas and hearing everyone's interpretation of the play has been truly fascinating, and we've had a great laugh throughout. It's been so easy to feel comfortable around everyone and that's really helped in developing and experimenting with our own characters.



ALEX BULLEN

Jamie is a teenager living in a working-class area of London. He's not into football or typical "lad" stuff, which makes him an outsider on the Thamesmead council estate. Jamie has a lot to deal with:- he is at odds with Sandra - his single parent mother, he is refusing to attend school, he is being bullied, and he doesn't fit in. The reasons behind this are twofold - that he is discovering his sexuality and falling in love with his classmate, and next door neighbour, Ste, who has problems of his own including an abusive father.

Jamie is defensive and sometimes uses humour to hide his insecurities. Through the course of the play, Jamie grows more confident in himself and his feelings for Ste develop deeply. Both boys discover their sexuality and take solace in each others company.

This is my first Gallery Players show and I have really enjoyed the rehearsal process, working with such a talented cast and being able to delve into such an interesting character.



EMILY WATT

Working on Beautiful Thing has been such a joy. It's a play full of warmth, humour, and those beautifully awkward moments of growing up. At its core, it's about love, identity, and finding your place, even if that place happens to be a slightly chaotic South London estate in the middle of a heatwave.

Sandra is an absolute force of nature. She says exactly what she thinks, when she thinks it (whether anyone asked or not), and somehow manages to be both hilarious and deeply caring at the same time. Stepping into her shoes has been an adventure, she's bold, loud, and unapologetically herself, which is both incredibly fun and slightly dangerous!

Rehearsals have been filled with laughter, and a missed line of two! I have loved working with such a fab cast and production team.

I feel so lucky to be part of this production, bringing Sandra and this wonderful story to life. I hope you enjoy it as much as we've enjoyed creating it.

Favorite line: "The leopard never changes its spots and the slapper never changes her knickers, be told"



ROMAN CROWTHER

I first performed Beautiful Thing back in 2021, and developed a great fondness for both such a wonderful play, and the unique character of Tony. I had always felt there was so much more to unpack and explore with such an interesting (and slightly odd) character, so when Steve offered me the opportunity to reprise my role, I felt extremely grateful to have the chance to once again dive into the mind of Tony and see what more I could find.

The rehearsal process has been exceptionally fun, and it has been such a pleasure to work with Steve, who has made sure to create an atmosphere that inspired exploration and collaboration. My wonderful castmates have also made the experience extremely special, as- despite the fact that I was not able to join rehearsals until later into the process, they welcomed me to the cast with warmth.

It has been truly wonderful getting to explore the play once again. It is such a special blend of warmth, vulnerability and humour, and it has been a joy to explore how we can balance so many contrasting themes and dynamics.



BECKY LINGE

Beautiful Thing is a play that I have loved for many years. I first encountered it during my A-Level Studies back in 2017 and instantly fell in love with it. Although the play is rooted in a specific time and place, its heart is universal: the longing to be seen, to be loved, and to feel safe enough to be yourself. Jonathan Harvey writes with such tenderness and humour that even the most ordinary exchanges carry enormous emotional weight. Playing Leah has been both a gift and a challenge. She is dramatic, romantic, hilarious and has a real capacity for hope. She believes that somewhere beyond the block of flats, life is cinematic and expansive. Underneath her bravado, there is someone who just wants to be seen, to be heard and more importantly, to be loved. Finding that balance between her vulnerability and her self-involvement has been one of the most interesting parts of exploring her character.

Rehearsals have been a genuine joy. Working within a small cast has allowed us to really listen to one another and dig into the subtleties of the text. It has been a privilege to work alongside Alex, Emily, Matt and Roman. We have shared a great deal of laughter, and as always, it has been a pleasure to be guided by Steve's direction. He has an instinct for uncovering the hidden layers within each scene, while still giving us the space to discover those truths for ourselves.

I hope audiences leave not only remembering the warmth of the play but also recognising something of themselves within it.

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Re-use Shop, Ipswich

BEAUTIFUL THING

BY JONATHAN HARVEY

CAST

(in order of appearance)

JAMIE Alex Bullen

LEAH Becky Linge

SANDRA Emily Watt

STE Matthew Hall

TONY Roman Crowther



CREATIVE TEAM

Director Steve Wooldrige

Set Design Dave Borthwick

Lighting and Sound James Aleksic

Wardrobe Emily Watt, Sally Broatch & the cast

Stage Manager Georgie Beard

Lighting and Sound Operative William Herbert

Properties Maggie Mudd

Publicity Design Wade Ablitt

Programme Content Steve Wooldrige

Programme Design Steve Taplin

Set Construction Dave Borthwick, Norman Rutterford, Steve Taplin

Photography Mike Kwasniak

Social Media Wade Ablitt

Soundscape and Music Steve Wooldrige

SETTING

Thamesmead Estate

Mid 1990's

Gallery

rehearsal photos - mike kwasniak





MAMA CASS

Cass Elliot (1941–1974), widely known as Mama Cass, was an American singer and cultural icon of the 1960s. "Mama Cass," was a powerful and charismatic presence on stage in the 1960s, both as a member of The Mamas & the Papas and in her subsequent solo career. Elliot's voice was her most defining asset. She had a distinctive, clear, and powerful contralto that stood out. Her ability to deliver both strong, earthy tones and soaring, harmonious vocals was a major factor in the success of The Mamas & the Papas' sound. She was often credited with being the group's "powerhouse voice," and she was crucial to their layered, folk-rock harmonies. Born Ellen Naomi Cohen in Baltimore, she rose to fame as a member of the folk-rock group The Mamas & the Papas, whose hits included "California Dreamin'" and "Monday, Monday." After the group disbanded, Cass enjoyed a successful solo career, releasing songs such as "Make Your Own Kind of Music." Known for her rich, expressive voice and vibrant personality, she became a regular presence on American television and a symbol of the era's optimism and countercultural spirit. In *Beautiful Thing*, Mama Cass's music plays a central role. Her songs become a source of comfort, empowerment and emotional expression for Leah and, ultimately, for Jamie and Ste. The soaring affirmation of "Make Your Own Kind of Music" underscores the play's message of self-acceptance and courage.



JONATHAN HARVEY

Jonathan Harvey is an award-winning British playwright and screenwriter best known for his landmark coming-of-age play Beautiful Thing. Raised in Liverpool, Harvey began writing for the stage in the early 1990s, quickly gaining attention for his sharp ear for dialogue, warmth of characterisation and compassionate exploration of working-class life and LGBTQ+ identity. After leaving Hull University, Jonathan became a teacher in a sprawling comprehensive school in Thamesmead, experience which would provide him with useful background when he came to write Beautiful Thing. A call from out of the blue resulted in a commission to write a play for the Royal Court Young People's Theatre, which set him on his writing career. In 1993 he gave up teaching for good, by now successful enough to put 'writer' on his passport without feeling self-conscious walking through Customs. His early successes with Babies, Boom Bang-A-Bang and Rupert Street Lonely Hearts Club have been followed more recently by plays such as Guiding Star, Hushabye Mountain and two series of the sitcom Gimme Gimme Gimme. Recent months have seen the openings of two new works: the play Out In The Open and the musical Closer To Heaven, written in collaboration with the Pet Shop Boys. His theatre work has won him an Evening Standard Award, two Manchester Evening News Awards, the George Devine Award and the John Whiting Award. He is currently a core writer on 'Coronation Street' while writing new original TV series and under commission for several new plays. But Jonathan Harvey remains best known for Beautiful Thing – a poignant love story with a fresh and contemporary twist for anyone who ever dared to risk everything for happiness and won.





THE THAMESMEAD ESTATE

Beautiful Thing is set on the Thamesmead Estate, a large residential district in south-east London, spanning the boroughs of Greenwich and Bexley. Developed in the late 1960s by the Greater London Council, it was conceived as a bold project built on former marshland to address London's post-war housing shortage. Designed in a modernist style, Thamesmead featured concrete housing blocks, elevated walkways, lakes and canals. While its ambitious design aimed to create light, space and community, the area became associated with social and economic challenges, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, the east had developed a reputation for social isolation and economic hardship. It became emblematic of urban Britain during that period. By setting Beautiful Thing in Thamesmead, Jonathan Harvey grounds the story in a recognisably working-class environment while revealing the tenderness, humour and resilience within its community. The estate is not merely a backdrop but a vital presence in the play — shaping its characters' lives while also framing a story of love that transcends circumstance.

WHY BEAUTIFUL THING IS SO POPULAR

My Beautiful Thing - The first time I saw the film – back in 96, at the ABC cinema on Tottenham Court Road, with a guy I was seeing at the time – was truly a pivotal moment in my life. Never had a film and a story resonated with me (before or since) in such a hugely profound way as this utter gem. This achingly beautiful love story between two teenage boys touches both the heart and the soul with it's innocence, wit, gritty realism and hope. The most heart warming tale of first love, with a cast of characters to die for, memorable one liners, and all set to a soundtrack of The Mama's and the Papa's. A genuine masterpiece of a story and one I cant wait to see brought to life here in Ipswich. This play will never leave me. And not least because after seeing it, it unleashed a bit of a creative beast in me that had me repeatedly trekking round Thamesmead and over all those walkways, and then going home to write Beautiful Thing 2: The Return. I was young, and I was naïve. I didn't know you couldn't just steal people's ideas and write a story. Though I soon found this out when I sent my manuscript off to Film 4 and they wrote back to me. It was a no.

Andrew Marsh - Dial Lane Books

That Moment - I never had 'that' moment Jamie has with Sandra, with my own mum. It's something I still regret." I remember telling Steve that when I worked with him on Beautiful Thing when he directed it the first time. And I suppose in some ways it's why the play resonates with me so much. Add to that, growing up gay whilst living on a challenging council estate this lovely piece of theatre hits home with me on so many levels. The characters and their experiences are so perfectly and beautifully observed then subsequently projected, Jonathan Harvey's script strikes a very powerful chord with anyone who has had to face and accept who they really are. It remains so relevant, even today. Love, and the relentless commitment to fight for the person you love is core to Beautiful Thing but it's also not afraid to explore the hilarious awkwardness in coming out and falling in love for the first time. Be prepared to laugh your socks off in between having a good cry. Enjoy.

Dean Wales - A Gallery Player

CONTEMPORARY REFERENCES

Burly rugby player **Bill Beaumont** was for many years a team captain on the long-running BBC celebrity sports quiz **A Question Of Sport**.

Sally from **Coronation Street**.

Hello Magazine and **Gay Times** are still published today

The renowned film **The Sound of Music**

The former quiz show **Bob's Full House** with **Bob Monkhouse**

University Challenge This long-running academic quiz was cancelled some years before the play was written in 1993. However, by the time **Beautiful Thing** was filmed in 1995, the show had been revived and is still current.

Cagney & Lacey Was an American television series that aired on the CBS television network for seven seasons from March 25, 1982, to May 16, 1988. The show is about two New York City police detectives who lead very different lives: **Christine Cagney** is a career-minded single woman, while **Mary Beth Lacey** is a married working mother.



Gallery Players started back in 1985. *Pat Taplin* decided, with a group of friends, that in order to get the kind of *Theatre* they wanted to see performed locally, they'd have to do it themselves.

Mounting lesser known, rarely produced plays and musicals has always been our forte and we'd like to think we've been doing it rather well for close to 40 years!

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In 2021 we took another 'leap', moving into our very own premises, **The Gallery Studio Theatre**. A dream for a decade had been realised.

The opportunities the **Studio** gives us are immense, no rushed get-ins a couple of days before opening night, the ability to rehearse and build a show in the same space it will be performed in - all huge positives.

The 'flip' side, of course, is paying a 'commercial' rent and all the associated costs that go with running and maintaining the building.

Since 2019 **Gallery Players** has been a *Charity* and every penny we make goes back into the shows and the upkeep and improvement of **The Studio**.

So, we're asking for a little help from you, our dear friends and supporters.

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More details of the scheme and other ways to help, such as 'one off' donations, are on our website (www.galleryplayers.co.uk), scan the QR code below or pick up a leaflet in the Studio foyer .

Our current friends are:-

Di Borthwick, Julian Bradbrook & Liz Stevens, Sarah Caddick, Lisa Cheadle, Chris Dunnett, Tony Flack, Stuart Hume, Teresa & Paul Jennings, Liz Pettman, David Sutton and Brian Theodore Ralph

What a lovely bunch you are!

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Gallery Players are a Charity and operate out of the Gallery Studio Theatre. We are guided by a small 'Steering Group' of (unpaid) theatre 'lovers' and aided by a melee of invaluable volunteers! We don't receive any grants or subsidies for our day to day running and rely solely on tickets sales and kind donations to keep doing what we do, and to maintain and improve our wonderful studio theatre. To find out more about us, how you might be able to help. Please scan the QR code or visit our website. www.galleryplayers.co.uk



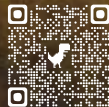
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by Andrew Bovell



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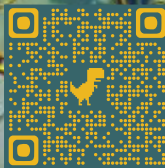


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