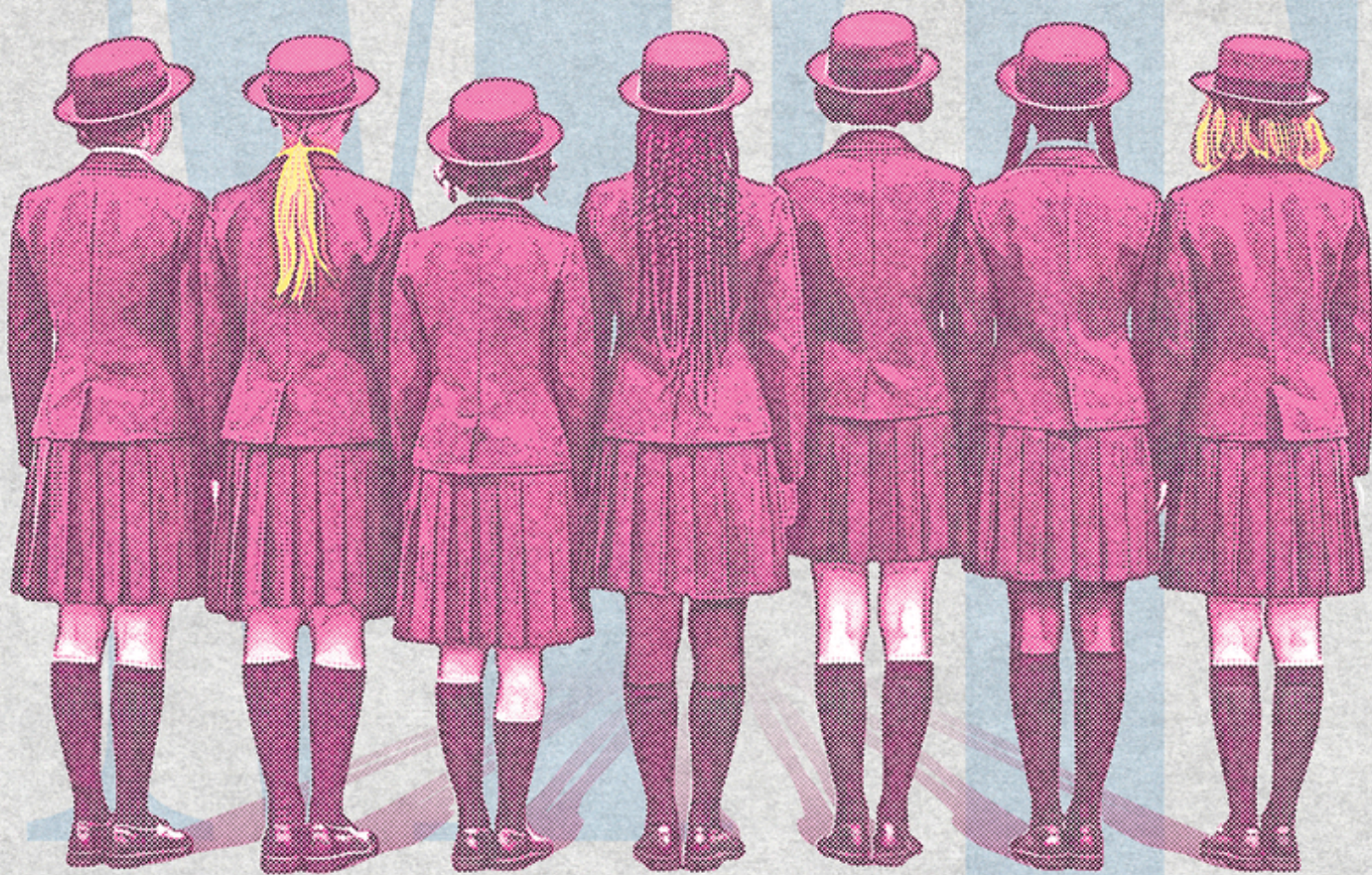


Enid Blyton

MALORY TOWERS

Adapted & Directed by Emma Rice



EMMA RICE
COMPANY

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EDUCATION PACK

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Welcome to Malory Towers

“The windows shone. A green creeper climbed almost to the roof. It looked like an old-time castle. ‘My school!’ thought Darrell, and a little warm feeling came into her heart. ‘How lucky I am to be going to Malory Towers!’”

Welcome to the education pack for Emma Rice Company’s *Malory Towers*.

This high-energy musical adventure was first bought to the stage in 2019. It has been remounted and re-imagined to tour Enid Blyton’s stories of friendship, resilience and kindness around theatres in 2026.

This pack is a veritable (midnight) feast of information to help you discover more about the production and the people who make it happen.

Dive in!

Emma Rice Company x



Synopsis



First Term at Malory Towers, published in 1946, was Emma's main inspiration for the show *Malory Towers*. However, you will also experience moments, action and characters cherry picked from across Enid Blyton's six book series.

The show begins with six modern day schoolgirls outside the Head's office. A timid girl is dressed as the fairy queen from the school show *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and being pursued by a bully. The bully goes through her bag and pulls out a *Malory Towers* novel. The other girls get involved and there is a scuffle as a bully tries to get the book off her. As the timid girl falls, she summons help from the characters of *Malory Towers*.

The stage is lit up as it transforms into a 1950s train station. We meet the girls travelling to Malory Towers School for their first term. As spoilt **Gwendoline** pleads with her mother to send her to a finishing school instead of Cornwall, the other girls board the train. **Darrell**, **Sally**, **Irene** and **Alicia** are joined by **Mary-Lou**, our timid schoolgirl from the opening.

The journey to Cornwall is full of songs, scenery and a little drama, when Gwendoline tries to steal Mary-Lou's seat. The girls arrive at their new school to be welcomed by the Head, Miss Grayling.

'I count as [Malory Tower's] successes those who learn to be good hearted and kind, sensible and trustable; good, sound women the world can lean on.'

The girls settle excitedly into their dorm intrigued by the one, unclaimed bed. The next morning they are unable to resist the charms of the swimming pool. Everyone dives in except Mary-Lou and Gwendoline. When Gwendoline realises that Mary-Lou is even more scared of the water than she is, she tricks her into getting into the pool, and then holds her down under the water.

Darrell comes to Mary-Lou's rescue and loses her temper with Gwendoline. Unfortunately for Darrell, the other girls only witness her slapping Gwendoline and Mary-Lou is too scared to tell them all what really happened. The girls decide to give Darrell the silent treatment.

Synopsis continued...

'That's settled then. Darrell is an animal and must be treated like one. She is in the doghouse!'

In French class the girls continue to ignore Darrell and begin to plan their school play. They decide to do *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and that Sally will take the lead as the Producer. Gwendoline is cast as Titania, the Queen of the Fairies. As they come to cast Oberon, Bill (or The Honourable Wilhelmina Robinson), arrives on the horse Thunder. The girls rush out to meet Thunder and Mary Lou takes the opportunity to tell Sally what had really happened in the swimming pool.

That night, as they have a pillow fight, a storm rolls in. Sally and Darrell confront Gwendoline and try to get her to change her ways. A furious Gwendoline sneaks into Mary - Lou's bed and scares her so badly that she runs out into the storm. Darrell follows and finds Mary-Lou hanging precariously over a cliff. Darrell climbs up and helps her to hold on until help arrives.

'Batten down the hatches! It's going to be a wild night!'

- Interval -



Synopsis continued...

Bill, Thunder and the girls, except Gwendoline, arrive just in time to save Darrell and Mary-Lou. They celebrate by having a midnight feast in and Mary-Lou reveals that it was Gwendoline who had frightened her out into the storm. The gang head back for retribution, however when they arrive, they decide to try and understand Gwendoline. They show Gwendoline kindness, but she rejects their forgiveness.

'You don't need them Gwendoline Lacey. Or anyone else for that matter. The only person you can trust is yourself.'

The rehearsals for their end of year play begin in earnest and the part of Titania is taken from Gwendoline and awarded to Mary-Lou. Producer Sally turns into a power-mad dictator as she tries to control everything and everyone, but she calms down when she sees the play start to come together. Finally ready to present their *A Midsummer Night's Dream* they raise the curtain, only to find that their set has been destroyed by Gwendoline.

Again, they try to forgive Gwendoline and this prompts her to lose control. She reveals that her father had returned from the war changed; distant and unapproachable. Gwendoline is summoned into Miss Grayling's office. The Head then informs the other girls that Gwendoline's father has passed away and that Gwendoline will have to leave the school. The girls comfort Gwendoline, helping her to pack and they promise fun, songs and feasts will be waiting when she returns.

The show WILL go on.

After waving Gwendoline off, the remaining girls transform themselves and the space, and perform part of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ending with Titania (Mary-Lou) lying in her fairy bower to sleep. With a flash and a thunder clap we are returned to the modern-day school, although Sally remains watching over Mary-Lou. The modern schoolgirls help Mary-Lou up, worrying that they hurt her. The show ends as Mary-Lou assures the girls, the audience and herself, that she will be fine.

'Strong young women that the world can lean on.'



Credits

Spring Tour 2026

CREATIVE TEAM

Director & Adapter

Emma Rice

Associate Director

Laura Keefe

Set & Costume Designer

Lez Brotherston

Composer

Ian Ross

Sound & Video Designer

Simon Baker

Lighting Designer

Malcolm Rippeth

Choreographer

Alistair David

Puppets

Lyndie Wright

Puppetry Consultant

Sarah Wright

Additional Vocal**Arrangements**

Nigel Lilley

Fight Director

Kev McCurdy

Dream Sequence**Animators**

Beth Carter &
Stuart Mitchell

CAST

Mary-Lou Atkinson

Eden Barrie

Alicia Johns

Molly Cheesley

Gwendoline Lacey

Rebecca Collingwood

Irene Dupoint & MD

Stephanie Hockley

Musician & Understudy

Emily Panes

Darrell Rivers

Robyn Sinclair

Bill Robinson

Zoe West

Sally Hope

Bethany Wooding

Voice of Miss Grayling

Sheila Hancock



Credits continued...

PRODUCTION TEAM

Producer

Sian Weeding

Head of Production

Jay Jones

Production Manager

Cath Bates

Associate Sound & Video

Charlie Simpson

Production Sound Engineer

Charlie Simpson

Lighting Programmer & Associate

Victoria Brennan

Production Lighting

Laurence Russell

Costume Supervisor

Diane Williams

Production Carpenter

Gabriel Bartlett

Production Photographer

Steve Tanner

PR

Kate Morley PR

Graphic Design

Simon Baker

BACKSTAGE

Company Manager on the Book

Aime Neeme

Assistant Stage Manager

Benji Mowbray

Head of Sound & Video

Jimmy O'Shea

Deputy Head of Sound & Video

Harriet Hollinshead-Lee

Head of Lighting

Merlyn Pip Salter-Ling

Head of Wardrobe

Brooke Bowden

Technical Trainee

Caleb De Jager

EMMA RICE COMPANY

Artistic Director

Emma Rice

Executive Director

Poppy Keeling

Creative Director

Simon Baker

Head of Organisation

Steph Curtis

Associate Director and Head of Training

Laura Keefe

Head of Production

Jay Jones

Head of Finance

Ben Parker

Associate Producer

Rhys Bugler

Associate Producer

Sian Weeding

Participation Producer

Riddell Erridge

Fundraiser

Helena Price

Artistic Associate

Katy Owen

Fellows

Simon Baker, Vicki Mortimer, Etta Murfitt, Malcolm Rippeth, Ian Ross & Steve Tanner

Education Pack

Helen Comerford

Rehearsal Photos

Steve Tanner

Creating Malory Towers

Malory Towers was originally staged in 2019. In 2026 eight cast members and a roster of brilliant production and creative brains were bought together at The Lucky Chance in Frome to breathe new life into the show. As the team prepared to move from the rehearsal room into the theatre, we managed to steal some time and get some insights into how the magic of *Malory Towers* 2026 was created.



As you read the interviews consider:

- How research inspired decisions
- The different methods the actors use to prepare for their roles
- The acting choices made by adult actors playing first years at Malory Towers
- How the different departments work together to make the show
- The different stages of creating a show
- The small choices that make a big impact on a show

Cast Interview:

Rebecca Collingwood



Who do you play in *Malory Towers*?

I play Gwendoline Lacey, one of the new students going into the first year of Malory Towers.

What research did you do for your part?

First, I went through Emma's script with a fine-toothed comb to discover everything I could about the Gwendoline she wrote; what she cared about, what pained her, what her passions are and what role she serves within the group. I then turned to the books to get a bit more context and depth as well as looking at the time period as a whole.

Gwendoline is going through a really tough time at home and it's that sadness and desperation that causes her to act spitefully. She has a frantic concern for her own well-being which results in front-footed narcissism and scheming. It's exhausting and damaging to herself and to the people around her. I went to boarding school from 12-18 so I have a good idea about what it means to suddenly have to fend for yourself amongst your peers - it's exhilarating but can be terribly lonely.

What acting and characterisation decisions did that lead you to for Gwendoline?

Gwendoline is starved for attention at home so she is desperately seeking to impress those around her to the point of showing off. She's hyper aware of how she wants to come across, resulting in placed and precise movements.

When her rage gets the better of her, that facade slips and her movements become wilder and her voice deeper. After she connects to the other students emotionally, she's able to stop her performing and plotting and we see something more honest.

How do you want the audience to see your character?

I hope they can fall in love with her like I have! She is a minx, and that chaotic, unpredictable energy is wonderful in a play. However she has a softer side underneath so I hope they can feel warmth towards her too.

Do you have a favourite moment in the show?

So many! Some of them are scenes I'm not in, but I watch from the wings and get goosebumps every time - Ian Ross' music and Emma's lyrics are so beautiful that you have to stop and listen - which isn't very useful when you're meant to be doing a quick change! But I always love it when Bill arrives - it's exactly what the characters, the company and the audience need at that moment of the show, and Zoe pitches it perfectly.

Cast Interview:

Robyn Sinclair



Who do you play in *Malory Towers*?

I play Darrell Rivers - a first year at Malory Towers.

What research did you do for your part?

When I was cast, I listened to the audiobook of *First Term at Malory Towers*. This was really great as it gave me a wonderful overview of all the characters, and a few insights that don't make it into our adaptation, but are still really useful. I learned a little bit more about Darrell's relationship with her parents, and her likes and dislikes, etc.

I watched a recording of the original production, so I could get a more practical overview of the movements of the show. I also worked a little bit on the script - just noting things that are said about her often, things she says about herself and others. How other characters view her is a really helpful way to quickly see how she might carry herself through the world.

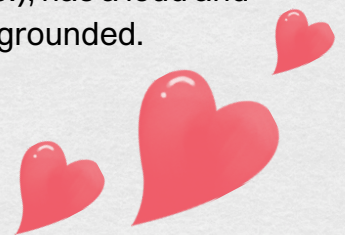
What acting and characterisation decisions did that lead you to for Darrell?

Darrell is a really lovely character to play because she has a lot of big feelings and expresses them all wholeheartedly. From the original text it is clear that she is bright and quick and passionate and really warm. This comes through in our script, too.

She has a temper, and initially I was a little worried about how to portray her anger. I'm not so hot headed myself, so I can't easily relate to the way she expresses her rage.

However, when we started rehearsing, I could really connect to the way that her anger overlaps with a deep sense of injustice, of not being listened to and of feeling left out - I really do personally believe that anger is often a kind of sadness, and that sadness can often be a kind of anger. When I started working with those ideas, her fury became really clear to me and easy to find.

Everything she does is big and open - when she is joyful or excited, that is shared freely, and the same with her upset. Practically, this manifests in her physicality - she's energetic and fidgety, often looking up and out (at the audience and at other characters!), has a loud and clear voice and is very grounded.



Cast Interview: Robyn Sinclair

continued ...

How do you want the audience to see your character?

I really hope that they find her relatable and see her for the bright and complex person she is. One of Darrell's great strengths is that she is very reflective and quite self-aware. There is a lovely scene where she talks of how she wishes she could 'tame' her temper, and how things would be better if she could. Whether this is true or not for her, I think we all have aspects of our personalities that we wish we could change, but find it very hard to. I hope audience members can see themselves in her in those moments. I hope they also see Darrell's lightness, her open warmth and her passion.

Do you have a favourite moment in the show?

I think my favourite moment is the opening number 'Sing, Sing, Sing'; it's a big musical tune, involving singing and dance and chairs and all sorts. I love it because it sets us up for this slightly fantastical world in which girls can break out into song and dance and it's so satisfying to get all the steps in the right places! I'm not a dancer per se, so it always feels very exciting and a little bit scary. It's a real challenge for me and such a treat for the audience.



Cast Interview:

Zoe West

Who do you play in *Malory Towers*?

I play The Honourable Wilhelmina Robinson (but you can call me Bill, everyone does.)

What research did you do for your part?

I try not to do too much research before playing a part - I always want to learn and discover through the text and rehearsals. It's a way to liberate yourself and really play with who the character is. So, I read the script and listen to the music and look for clues - then I let that build and develop as we rehearse. There's always so much to find in other characters too - feeling people's energy and how you react to each other, you can't really prepare for that, but once you tune in it can be incredibly useful. (I did actually go and spend a bit of time with some horses, because I know nothing about them and Bill is completely obsessed!)

What acting and characterisation decisions did that lead you to for Bill?

Bill has seven brothers, and lives miles out in the country, so straight away I knew they needed to be playful, wild spirited and confident. Shoulders back - eyes wide. They're very privileged too, so have a freeness, and a playfulness which lets them disregard the rules. This is really fun on stage, because when all the other girls are conforming to the rigidity, Bill gets to be free and bold and courageous and boyish. What joy! They're also only 11, so there's a beautiful innocence and naivety that comes with that, the world



hasn't told them which box they need to fit into yet, or which clothes they need to wear or how they're expected to behave - it's so liberating to be allowed to experience this again, it reminds me of when I was a kid.

How do you want the audience to see your character?

I want the audience to feel like Bill is a breath of fresh air. This brand new, bright energy that puts everyone at ease. I also want young people to see that being a "girl" doesn't mean you have to behave in a certain way - we shouldn't be told where our edges are, or what the boundaries of our existence have to be. You can be anything, but you have to see it to believe it, I really hope Bill can be that for some young people. I certainly needed that when I was a kid.

Do you have a favourite moment in the show?

My favourite moment has got to be my first entrance - I absolutely love getting to jump through the window and feeling the girls swoon around me. Makes me feel like a bit of a rockstar, and who wouldn't love that!?

Cast Interview:

Eden Barrie



Who do you play in *Malory Towers*?

I play Mary-Lou Atkinson!

What research did you do for your part?

Our show uses stories from a few of the *Malory Towers* books, so I began by reading as much as I could. I spent a lot of time working through the script, finding out all the things Mary-Lou says about herself and what others say about her, paying attention to any facts about her life. This allowed me to fill in any gaps about her story myself and make some decisions about what my version of the character would be like!

What acting and characterisation decisions did that lead you to?

The writing is very clear that poor Mary-Lou begins the show as a timid mouse, who really struggles to stand up for herself and be brave. Physically, I focused on her anxious disposition, sometimes trying to be as small as possible, or displaying terrible posture, like she's trying to not be seen. This gives a nice opportunity to stand taller as her confidence grows. As the baby of the group, I decided she also doesn't get most of the jokes or realise some of the things she says are really funny. She's very gullible but honest and has a great story arc to play with.

How do you want the audience to see your character?

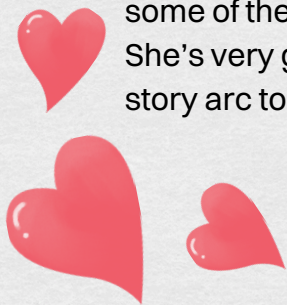
I'd love people to see how hard Mary-Lou tries, whether that's to be kind or to do the right thing. That she's forgiving and gentle and a real encourager.

Do you have a favourite moment in the show?

There are so many moments in the show that are upbeat, busy and ridiculous fun to be a part of. However, my favourite scene surrounds the song 'Hush Now Sally'. It's a real tender pause in the story with beautiful music and I have to hold back tears every time.

How were you first introduced to the Emma Rice Company?

My introduction to the Emma Rice Company was through their Drama School Residency! I spent a week with them in 2023 and it had a huge impact on my artistry. I was introduced to ways of working and devising in a truly collaborative and playful way, that really resonated with me. It has been a joy to be back working with them again on such a special show.



Lighting Designer Interview:

Malcolm Rippeth



How did your initial research for *Malory Towers* inform your lighting design?

The research I did in 2019 has become embedded in the show – it's quite hard to think how the individual ideas developed. But I always start with the story, on this occasion both Emma's adaptation and the Enid Blyton original. What world are we in and what is happening to these characters? Where are they from and what is so eye opening for them in this new place on the Cornish clifftops?

I spent 20 years working in Cornwall with Kneehigh Theatre, meaning I have a strong sense of the place, and remember distinctly how I felt on first arriving there in 2002. As a small child I also fantasised about going to boarding school, and those dreams gave me a sense of what might be so special, liberating and frightening about that. (I'm very glad in retrospect that I went to the comprehensive school which frames our telling of this story instead.)

'...nothing is visible until we get into the theatre just a few days before our first performance, when I can paint all these pictures on the stage.'

How did you work with Emma to create the original design?

We talked about the story and the world we were creating from the off, although those conversations rarely touch on the specifics of light. We've developed a great deal of trust over the years, giving me freedom to explore what I think will work for the show and for Emma. I'm developing these ideas through the rehearsal process, and when I think they could have an impact on the staging I describe how I see them working. But nothing is visible until we get into the theatre just a few days before our first performance, when I can paint all these pictures on the stage. At that point we're communicating every time something doesn't feel right. And of course the staging is also changing as the cast and team use the full scale set for the first time. Those few days are the most collaborative as we all work to synthesise our ideas into the best visual telling of the stories we can find.

Lighting Designer Interview: Malcolm Rippeth

continued ...

How has your design changed from the version staged in 2019 (and why)?

The concepts haven't changed, but the technology has, which opens up many new possibilities. We have more moving lights than in 2019, and all the fixtures which were single colour tungsten are now colour changing LED. I'm writing this at the end of rehearsals, just before we get on stage, so I can't be sure how much this will develop the looks of the show, but I have a bunch of ideas. I think it's fair to assume that the colourful sequences will be that bit more heightened and varied.

The scenic design has changed in terms of the layout of levels and openings on the set, which has meant restaging several sequences. I'll be approaching these from scratch. Brilliantly the video projector is now much brighter, meaning not having to make so much of an allowance for it in terms of how bright the stage lighting can be. This gives both Simon (Baker, video designer) and me much more freedom.

'I love the cosiness of the nighttime dormitory. The set doesn't change, but the light tells us everything about where we are and how it feels for the girls to be there.'

Do you have a favourite recurring state or special for us to look out for?

The framing device of the modern school is a completely different look to everything else, and I hope that when we return to it at the very end of the show it will be instantly recognisable. I also love the cosiness of the nighttime dormitory. The set doesn't change, but the light tells us everything about where we are and how it feels for the girls to be there.

What was your favourite moment in the show to light?

The clifftop rescue is very enjoyable light-wise. It's dark and scary, but also light and funny. The challenge is to reveal the characters without revealing the world around them. As soon as we gave the cast torches to play with they found the language of the chase. The way they are able to distract our attention and then immediately focus it is joyful for me to watch and never exactly the same twice. It's great to be able to give the company something to play with and have ownership of, which doesn't happen with lighting every day.



Adapter and Director Interview:

Emma Rice

When did you first fall in love with *Malory Towers*? And do you have a favourite book from the series?

I actually never read *Malory Towers* when I was young, I was a *Famous Five* and *Secret Seven* girl! I discovered *Malory Towers* when I was living in Cornwall and I fell in love with the characters and setting immediately. I had the misfortune of attending a very rough, all girls, comprehensive school in Nottingham. On paper this experience should have been a million miles away from *Malory Towers* and yet I recognised all the characters immediately. I felt Enid Blyton captured the terrors, griefs and delights of being young and away from your parents. My favourite book is (of course) the first one. I loved meeting the characters, getting on the train at Paddington and arriving at Malory Towers. Storytelling gold!

Was there an aspect of the research for *Malory Towers* that you particularly enjoyed?

I wanted to combine songs from the time with originally composed music. I loved researching close harmony female singing groups from both England and the US. There is a sound of women singing together that conjures a pure shot of sisterhood ... and I wanted it! Now the show is created, I love to chart how the musical language grows up alongside the girls. We start with 'Sing, Sing, Sing' - (a 20th Century classic), and end with one of the most complex and



I discovered Malory Towers when I was living in Cornwall and I fell in love with the characters and setting immediately.

emotional contemporary settings of Shakespeare I have heard. My soul vibrates as these brilliant young women display their virtuosic musical skills, create art and understand life.

How did the remount's rehearsal process differ from creating the show in 2019?

I love to remake shows. With the benefits of hindsight and time you can make profound and satisfying improvements. This version is

Adapter and Director Interview: Emma Rice

continued ...



physically smaller, with one less in the cast and the set having only 3 beds and one level, instead of 5 beds and 2 levels. However, what we have created has managed to be more powerful and more impressive. We have been able to distil our ideas, fine tune the script and enhance the design. This deceptively small show packs a really powerful punch. If you are ever given the opportunity, return to work. It can ALWAYS be improved, and it is a fabulous discipline to be open to change and to let ideas go (even if it sometimes feels painful).

Do you have a stage of rehearsals that you particularly enjoy?

Oh, I love every second of rehearsals – it is my truly happy place. I love the bubbling potential, the surprise and the sense of being in a gang – a bit like *Malory Towers*! The only bit I don't enjoy is when actors can't remember their lines. This is the only part of the process that I can't help them with, and it is impossible to play when you are managing a script. The actors who have worked with me many times now choose to learn their lines before rehearsals. They understand that the work grows much faster

and much more meaningfully if you are free and able to throw yourself into the world from day one.

What is your top tip for moving a show from the rehearsal room to the stage?

Confidence and excitement. Actors need to look forward to sharing and expanding the work, so I make sure they know how much I admire and respect what they are doing before we leave rehearsals. Fear is a given in life, but if you can make your excitement stronger than your fear you will have a stage filled with generosity, light and energy. This is when the show dances off the stage and into the audience's hearts.

What are you hoping that audiences take away from the show?

I hope they will remember what it was to be 11 and realise that not much has changed. We are all struggling with our place on the planet, our circumstances and our characters; this show challenges us to use this universal human struggle for good. It challenges us to choose to be good kind people that the world can lean on. Who could possibly argue with that?

'Fear is a given in life, but if you can make your excitement stronger than your fear you will have a stage filled with generosity, light and energy.'



Helpful Resources

The Wise Children podcast with Emma Rice

<https://www.wisechildrendigital.com/wise-childrens-detention>

**Wise Children's Tea and Biscuits
(for more on Emma's rehearsals):**

<https://www.wisechildrendigital.com/tea-and-biscuits>

**Emma Rice Company's Instagram
(for rehearsal snaps and trailers)**

https://www.instagram.com/wise_children

Kneehigh's Archive

(for Emma's past shows)

<https://thisiskneehigh.co.uk/>

