



MARY

RONA MUNRO



June 2026 Production

Synopsis

'Mary' is an explosive political thriller, the sixth instalment of Rona Munro's theatrical exploration of Scottish history *The James Plays* and is inspired by a key event in the life of Mary, Queen of Scots.

The play is set in Edinburgh in 1567. Just three months after the murder of her second husband Lord Darnley, the Queen is set to marry the devious and dangerous Earl of Bothwell. It's an unpopular match with the Scottish lords and public and no one is clear if Mary is implicated in the murder of Darnley or if the relationship with Bothwell is forged out of passion, political desperation, or forceful coercion.

Three characters argue for and against the Queen's actions. James Melville, the Scottish diplomat, memoir writer and loyal courtier to the Queen is shaken to the core by what he has recently witnessed in the court. He is convinced that Mary has been raped and coerced. Agnes, a domestic servant and devout Protestant, has little to say for Mary, condemning her as Bothwell's consenting partner. Thomson is the coming man, initially bloodied by Bothwell's thugs, he quickly learns that this time of turmoil in politics and society provides the chance to climb to the top of the new political order.

As these three examine Mary's relationship with Bothwell from every angle, their positions shift. The actual and apparent truth collide, and this is where the play has modern relevance; examining why bad things happen to women and why good men stand by and let it happen. So has a woman been raped if she takes the blame of the trauma on herself? If she says she has been, should she be believed? And, once the truth is known, what should be done with that information, if anything?

'Mary' premiered in 2022 at The Hampstead Theatre but has yet to be performed in Scotland.

Characters

James Melville (Male 30 - 60)

A career courtier from a noble family with a patrician bearing. At the outset he is sure of his power and status and fierce in defence of the Queen. As the play progresses he is compelled to compromise his principles and face a life of regret. Aged 32 at the time of the play, he would have been considered 'middle aged'; the important thing therefore is his age relative to the other characters.

John Thompson (Male 18 - 30)

A young man looking to make his mark in new realities of post-Reformation Scotland. He sees Melville as the old guard to be swept aside and understands the militance of Protestantism, which Agnes represents, as a vehicle for his ambition. Outwardly naive at first, his self interest and cynicism come to the fore as the play unfolds.

Agnes Turnbull (Female 18 - 30)

Born to a family of domestic servants to the royal household, Agnes has embraced the Reformation as a vehicle for long needed social change and equality. She's a zealot - a street corner preacher for the new order - and in the play she is the voice of the people of Scotland, hungry for a new order, as well as the voice of women who are kept down and wronged by powerful men.

A note on accents: The play is not written in the Scots language, but does use Scots pronunciations of words, therefore all three characters require a Scottish accent.

Press Quotes from the 2022 production

"A psychological and political thriller which pulses with excitement... Munro brilliantly interrogates historical fact, and her account of sexual violence is stunningly intense. At the end, she comes up with an equally impressive coup de théâtre... an excellently taut and satisfying account of intrigue and betrayal"

The Arts Desk

"An engaging debate drama with some thrilling exchanges"

The Guardian

"A chamber piece about political power and the deals men do in back rooms... a brilliant depiction of political persuasion... fascinating and truly unsettling"

Time Out

"A tight, incisive political drama... keenly focused and fiercely relevant"

The Stage

"A complex dissection of power dynamics coupled with tense and dramatic storytelling"

The Reviews Hub

Production information



- **Auditions:** 19:00 Tue 24 Mar, Greenbank Parish Church
- **Rehearsals:** w/c Mon 19 Apr
- **Move in, tech, dress:** Weekend of 13 & 14 Jun
- **Performances:** Mon 15 - Sat 20 Jun
- **Runtime:** 85 mins; two scenes, no interval
- **Venue:** Hill Street Theatre
19 Hill Street, Edinburgh EH2 3JP
- **Capacity:** 50

Creative Team

John Lally (Founder / Director) John has been active in Edinburgh's creative community since 1998, gaining a broad range of experience as an actor, director and stage crew. John took up directing in 2001 and has worked on a dozen productions with a focus on contemporary and modern drama including works by authors including Peter Arnott (*Tay Bridge*), Yasmina Reza (*Art, God of Carnage*), Terry Johnson (*Insignificance*), and Rona Munro (*Iron*).

Rob Shields (Founder / Technical Director) Rob has been involved in numerous backstage and technical roles for several Edinburgh theatre companies and Arkle from 2001, including production management. Rob's theatrical highlights include the sound design for *Forgotten Voices*, props & sound for *The Thirty Nine Steps*, and lighting design for *Age of Arousal* and *Pressure*.

Phil Barnes (Founder / Producer) Phil has been active in Edinburgh's theatre scene since the early 1990s, working with companies including Edinburgh People's Theatre and Arkle Theatre Company. After establishing himself as an actor, he expanded into directing in 2010, with notable productions such as *A Madman Sings to the Moon*, *The Venetian Twins*, and *Cyrano*.

Hannah Bradley Croall (Founder / PR) Hannah is a PR and communications expert, specialising in the arts, entertainment, and tourism industries. Based in Edinburgh, Hannah has worked with a number of high profile venues and events, including Assembly Festival, Edinburgh's Hogmanay, the Scottish International Storytelling Festival, Granite Noir, and Hippodrome Silent Film Festival.

Gregor McElvogue (Founder / Producer) An alumnus of drama and film, acting and business, Gregor returned to Edinburgh in 2018 after twenty years in the US. While there he was on the board of two regional theatre companies and managed his own company presenting new works from Commonwealth writers. Gregor has produced, directed and acted for six decades; most recently for Arkle, EGTG, and Screen Academy Scotland.

Union Theatre Company is an Edinburgh-based independent theatre company that believes in the power of grassroots. Founded in the wake of Arkle Theatre Company, Union Theatre looks to continue the former's spirit of collaboration to create a diverse and lively fringe theatre community 52 weeks of the year.

Vision To forge a year-round fringe theatre industry in Edinburgh through support of grassroots artists and theatre practitioners.

Mission To support Scotland-based artists at all stages of their career through the production of challenging, engaging and thoughtful theatre.

For questions or further information, email uniontheatreco@gmail.com

