

# LAUGHTER A PLenty AT THE COURT THEATRE



As the weather starts to cool down, warm yourself up with some comedy at The Court Theatre this Autumn.

Norway and New Zealand couldn't be further apart, but in The Court Theatre's upcoming programme, they sit side by side.

In February, critically acclaimed Norwegian comedy *Elling* will take the stage, followed by a brand-new Christchurch play, *EQ F@#%ING C*, making its world premiere in March.

*Elling* follows two middle-aged misfits who have been given a final ultimatum: make it work living together in a state sponsored apartment in Oslo or return to the institution where they met – this time for good.

The duo taking on this odd couple are comedy double act Mark Hadlow and Ross Gumbley, reuniting for the first time since 2010 for this whimsical production.

"This play is quirky and magical as well as the most spectacular star vehicle for the undeniable talents of Ross Gumbley and Mark

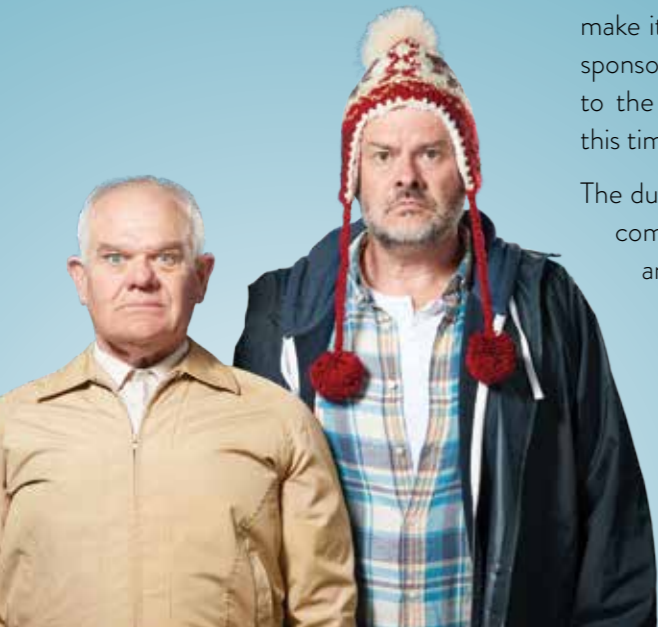
Hadlow. It's such a delight," says director Lara Macgregor.

Similarly delightful is Christina Stachurski's *EQ F@#%ING C*, shaking things up at The Court from the 30th March.

*EQ F@#%ING C* will take audiences back to 2015 as a young married couple become fed up with E.Q.C delays and decide to take matters into their own hands, kidnapping Gerry Brownlee!

Talking about why she wanted to write this story, Stachurski says, "John Vorhaus tells us that good comedy is based on the truth and pain of the audience's shared experience. In that case, post-earthquake Christchurch has to be prime material for a play to make you scream with laughter – and feel a lot better afterwards."

***Elling* begins at The Court Theatre from the 23rd February, with *EQ F@#%ING C* starting on the 30th March.**



## COMING UP AT THE COURT



### ELLING

BASED ON THE NOVEL BY Ingvar Ambjørnsen  
ORIGINAL STAGE ADAPTATION BY Axel Hellstenius  
IN COLLABORATION WITH Peter Naess  
IN A NEW VERSION BY Simon Bent  
DIRECTED BY Lara Macgregor

SHOW SPONSOR



23 FEBRUARY - 16 MARCH 2019

### EQ F@#%ING C

WRITTEN BY Christina Stachurski  
DIRECTED BY Ross Gumbley

SHOW SPONSOR



30 MARCH - 27 APRIL 2019



## love and loss in the wild

Having ridden horses all her life, Charlotte Howard set off to honour her mum on the ride of a lifetime: the Mongol Derby.

WORDS Róisín Magee

Finishing fifth in most races doesn't mean much, but the Mongol Derby is no ordinary race. Recreating the famous horse telegraph of the Mongol Khans, riders gallop 1000 kilometres across the open steppe on semi-wild horses, navigating their own course, changing horses every 40 kilometres at urtuus (horse stations) and surviving on what the organisers euphemistically refer to as 'wit and skill'. Having ridden the race myself a few years ago and worked in the Mongol Derby HQ in 2018, I'd suggest 'good cheer and a sore backside' would do just as well.

The Derby is famous for the injuries riders sustain (broken bones, lost digits, concussions...) and a bad year can mean only 50 per cent of starters finish. In fact, it took a while to organise this interview because two weeks after finishing the

race, Charlotte Howard (25) discovered she had fractured two vertebrae in her back. On the third day of the race. When she explained what had happened I raised an eyebrow. It seemed hard to believe even for the Derby, which draws a pretty tough crowd.

We didn't hear much of her in HQ, but in a field of horse professionals (jockeys, polo players, eventers, horse trainers and racehorse trainers), she still stood out. The herders who own the racehorses are Chinggis Khan's [Ghenghis Khan in the West] literal and spiritual descendants and each time Charlotte arrived at a horse station, they picked the best of the herd for her to ride. She told me she didn't sit on a slow horse once. Taking the faster, wilder horses she was offered might make her sound

ABOVE / The horses used on the Mongol Derby live out on the steppe year-round in all weathers and know how to look after themselves. Here they are cooling down on a hot day, photo Laurence Squire.

*She had the misfortune of being chased by wild dogs who were fast enough to catch her; she had one hanging off each stirrup before her horse managed to shake them off.*



reality had sunk in? 'No. I was just thinking of the next horse.'

By this point, I was starting to wonder if an elaborate joke was being played on me. Apart from bright red jodhpurs, there was nothing to indicate a hard-bitten, hard riding cowgirl. Her house smelt beautifully clean and fresh. There were no dirty boots, no horse hair, no grubby rugs – just a neat row of stilettos and a photo board of attractive people doing delightful things. She made me another cup of coffee and explained that her current plan is to expand her business to generate more profit and free her up to spend more time on her four young horses. She is in the process of hiring more staff to that end. Great idea, if it works, I suggested. 'It *has* worked and it *is* working,' said Charlotte, looking me straight in the eye. And there it was. She really is lovely, but Charlotte

LEFT / Charlotte and Angus; photo Laurence Squire

BELOW / The start of the Mongol Derby 2018, photo, Laurence Squire. BOTTOM LEFT / An ovoo (holy mound of stones) surrounded by the skulls of much loved horses, photo Louise Crosbie BOTTOM RIGHT / A horse line at one of the horse stations, photo Laurence Squire.

crazy, but while prospective riders worry about the horses that gallop fast and uncontrollably, past riders know they're the easy ones. It's the slow pokes everyone dreads – long, miserable hours on a jogging pony when your backside is red raw and you're bone tired are hard work.

I was still wondering about Charlotte as I drove up to Glentui one afternoon late last year (2018). Just out of Oxford on the road north from Christchurch, this is the point where the Canterbury plains rise up to join the Southern Alps. Charlotte's property is set in a dip in these hills. Her parents' mud house is set back from the road, but Charlotte lives in a smaller house which currently has a building site for a front garden. 'New boxes for the horses,' she said. What a great view for them, I thought. Some people might think it was wasted on horses, but not Charlotte.

Charlotte was just as I remembered her from the rider briefing before the race began. Her hair was still pink and she sat cross-legged on her sofa eating chocolate biscuits and chatting happily about the race, the wonderful Mongolian horses and the hospitality of the nomadic herders who the riders stay with along the course. She had some of the usual stories to tell: horses that bolted with no brakes or steering; children who saw her and galloped their horses alongside her, laughing; of beautiful landscapes – sand dunes, salt

flats, mountain passes and lakes and riding through storms watching lightning strike the steppe ahead of her.

Some of her stories I hadn't heard before. She rode the first part of the race on her own and had the misfortune of being chased by wild dogs who were fast enough to catch her; she had one hanging off each stirrup before her horse managed to shake them off. On the third day of the race, about 400 kilometres in, she was riding towards a herd of cattle. Thinking nothing of it, she looked down at her GPS to work out her route and she had reached the herd before she looked up. When she did, she was horrified to see that the 'cows' were in fact giant vultures.

I asked her about the other riders – 'all lovely'. She had enjoyed being around 'like-minded people'. I looked at her as she said this, if only because in my experience the race showed a lot of true colours for better or worse, but no, she really meant it. What about the evening you spent with the five other frontrunners, when the front end of the race was held up overnight? Pretty relaxed. Was she ever frightened? When I rode the race, fear wasn't much mentioned but I had definitely seen it overshadow and even ruin several riders' races. 'No,' she said, but paused for thought before she added with a laugh, 'I'm too stupid to feel frightened of anything.' Not even afterwards, when the adrenaline had worn out and





TOP / Horses are herd animals and this can mean an advantage to riding in a team like Charlotte and Angus, photo Laurence Squire. LEFT / The horse stations where riders change horses are run by local nomadic families. Here Tumbayar Gombosuren and her husband Batbayar Sampilsuren are helping their relatives at horse station 5, photo Laurence Squire.

is no fool and she's definitely no pushover.

People turn up to the start line of the Mongol Derby for all sorts of reasons, but there is always a reason. Charlotte's was the untimely death of her mother Judi in 2017 from cancer that started in her lungs. Judi had always encouraged Charlotte's adventures and risk-taking, so it felt right to do something so much in the style that her mother had always lived. Even in the nine months between her diagnosis and her death, Judi bought Charlotte a Yamaha R3 motorbike and Charlotte signed up for the race two weeks after her mother's funeral. She had a year to prepare, 'in itself a helpful focus', she said. I asked her if the race had been what she had hoped for? 'Yes, and more.'

I suspect the 'more' has a name – Angus Lowe, a 25-year-old professional polo player and student at the University of Pretoria in South Africa.

When the race was held at the end of the second day to make sure riders and horses didn't get stuck in a particularly

dry section overnight, the 'relaxed evening' must have been reasonably sociable, as by the third day Charlotte and Angus were riding out together and they rode the remaining 600 odd kilometres as a team. Charlotte couldn't remember agreeing to team up, but the partnership was such a success that it appears to have spilled over into real life – she has since flown to South Africa for an extended holiday. Oh, and Angus' family rented a yacht and Charlotte joined them for Christmas. Which is handy, because maybe, just maybe, when Angus has finished his degree later this year and provided neither has been distracted by another crazy jaunt, they might buy a boat and sail the world.

Lucky Angus. I thought I was coming to hear about one great adventure, but it sounds like Charlotte is poised on the edge of a lifetime of extraordinary travel. I have no doubt that whatever she does she will do it with the same style and grace she rode the Derby, and after all, you know what they say: if you can ride the Mongol Derby, you can do anything. Ride it like you stole it, Charlotte. ●

*If you'd like to see Mongolia from the back of a horse, but with a bit more time to enjoy the sights, the Derby Chief, Ops Director and Master of the Horse (otherwise known as Katy, Shatra and Unenburen) also run horseback adventures each year in Mongolia. morindoo.com*

### Mongol Derby Facts

- \* If you would like to follow in Charlotte's hoofprints, applications for the 2020 Mongol Derby (2–14 August) are open now. Apply at [mongolderby.com](http://mongolderby.com)
- \* Race entry is £11,375 (approximately \$21,076 NZD). This buys you access to all the horses you will need to get across the finish line, a saddle and the brilliant infrastructure of the race.
- \* The weight limit for riders is 85 kilos. You must weigh in fully dressed (hat, boots, coat and everything you want to carry on your person: GPS, sunscreen, pocket knife etc).
- \* An additional 5 kilos are allowed for gear (including the weight of your saddle bag, which is provided).



TOP / The riders stop every 30 kilometres to change horse. Depending on how keen they are to press on, the families that run the stations also provide cups of salt tea and as much mutton noodle soup, curds and biscuits as the riders can eat, photo Louise Crosbie. ABOVE / Ichinkhorloo Ohintogtokh, age 7, photo Erik Cooper.

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