Best Of Enemies – Introduction Young Vic December 2021

Welcome this introduction to the audio described performance of Best of Enemies, the bold new play by James Graham directed by Jeremy Herrin, inspired by the 2015 documentary of the same title by Morgan Neville and Robert Gordon.

The Young Vic’s website says – ***‘1968 – a year of protest that divided America. As two men fight to become the next President, all eyes are on the battle between two others: the cunningly conservative William F Buckley Jr., and the iconoclastic liberal Gore Vidal. Beliefs are challenged and slurs slung as these political idols feud nightly in a new television format, debating the moral landscape of a shattered nation. Little do they know they're about to open up a new frontier in American politics, and transform television news forever.’***

The audio described performance is on the 18th December at 7.30pm. We regret that due to current Covid protocols there will be no touch tour for this production. Best of Enemies will be described by Eleanor Margolies and Miranda Yates. The performance lasts for 2 hours and 30 minutes, including a 20-minute interval.

The Young Vic website warns that ***‘this show contains themes of racism, homophobia and violence. There is occasional use of homophobic and racist slurs as well as misgendering. There are references to murder, antisemitism and frequent strong language.’***

The audience wraps around three sides of the space on raked bench seating on stalls and balcony level. The seats descending steeply to a dark stage floor.

This creates the feel of an arena, with the action taking place mainly on the flat stage floor which, with the additional of minimal props, comes to represent various locations including a TV studio sound stage, an apartment and the streets of Chicago. On an upper level, a long, narrow TV control room is set into the fourth side of the auditorium, set back behind a row of three large square windows with rounded corners, each about two metres square.

Throughout the performance the windows can serve as giant tv screens as still and moving imagery and video is projected over them, for example black and white news footage, network logos or programme titles, or close ups from the interviews being filmed on the sound stage below. Occasionally imagery fills the stage floor and spills out across the audience. At other times the control room windows are semi-transparent, giving a view of the space behind, and allowing staff inside the room to look down on the sound stage.

Inside the control room, desks are pushed up to the wall at the back, and on them are various bits of electronic equipment, including a bank of black and white monitors, a sound desk, telephones and analogue display meters. In the centre on the back wall are several clocks displaying the time in different time zones. On the wall to the right is an ON-AIR sign that lights up when broadcasting begins.

There are doors at either end of the control room, to left and right, with steep flights of about twenty steps leading down from the doors to stage level. Beneath the control room, at stage level, there are pale grey curtains. When pulled back, they reveal a dimly lit backstage area. Here, a few metres back and pushed up to the back wall is a sturdy double bed on casters, and two brown leather button-back chairs fixed to a low rostrum also on casters that’s a step up from the floor and about 3 metres wide. These items can be wheeled swiftly in and out to create new locations in the central area.

During the tv interviews, the two protagonists sit on the leather chairs on the rostrum, their backs to the control room above, while two cameras on tripods are pushed in from the opposite end of the space to film them.

There’s a cast of 10 actors of mixed heritages with several playing a number of different characters, based on real people, the casting does not always reflect the ethnicity of the real-life characters. Many of the costumes worn reflect the formal style of the 1960’s with the men in dark suits, white shirts worn with neatly knotted ties, or toning jackets and trousers. Some women wear more formal office style clothing and others are influenced by the emerging hippy culture.

The 2 main characters we follow are writers William F Buckley Jr. and Gore Vidal, hired by the ABC TV network to comment on the presidential race.

**William F Buckley Junior** is in his early 40’s with brown skin and short cropped black hair. He’s tall with an athletic frame his face often fixed in a tense and serious expression, eyes narrowing as he leans in to listen to others. He wears pressed cream chinos with a belt, and a white shirt and dark red tie. Over this he adds a pale grey suit jacket and he wears polished black leather lace ups.

**Gore Vidal,** like William Buckleyis in his early forties and tall with pale skin. His dark blond hair shorter at the sides with a longer fringe that he occasionally runs his fingers through to smooth down. He has a trim physique and wears smart black double-breasted suit, white shirt and tie or at other times he adopts a casual look in dark trousers with a snug jersey with a polo neck in a soft brown fabric. His shoes are polished black loafers.

**The family and friends of the two writers also appear.**

**Patricia Buckley** William’s wife is slim with pale skin and neck length reddish hair in a wavy bouffant style. She dresses stylishly, initially more formally in a neat pencil skirt that finishes just above the knee, she is often seen poised with her wrist cocked as she holds a cigarette.

Gore’s friend, writer **James Baldwin** is in his 40’s with brown skin and short afro hair. He has an air of poise and moves gracefully, and speaks eloquently, with a measured tone, always with a cigarette in hand, he wears a dark suit, white shirt and black tie and black leather shoes.

We also meet friend to Vidal, the artist **Andy Warhol**. A man of few words, with pale skin and neck length bleached blonde hair, wearing pale framed glasses. Warhol has a thin frame and slinks about with a small video camera aimed at others in the room. He wears loose dark trousers with a pale shirt and dark canvas jacket.

**Matt** Gore’s researcher is in his 20’s with light brown skin and thick shiny black hair and a toned physique. We meet him initially in a hotel room wearing just a luxurious silk robe and boxer shorts. Later he wears dark trousers and a short-sleeved shirt.

**Howard Austen** Gore’s long-term partner is in his 40’s and tall with a softer fuller frame. He has short cropped dark hair and strong brows and wears dark trousers and loafers and a casual short sleeved shirt worn open at the collar.

**Among the staff of the ABC TV network are four smartly dressed men:**

**Howard K. Smith** is the ABC news anchor, often just off camera, but attuned and watchful to Vidal and Buckley**.** He is in his 60’s, tall with pale skin and neatly combed grey hair. His dark suit is smart, his tie fastened with a silver tie pin.

ABC President **Elmer Lower** is white and in his 60’s with grey hair and a bald pate, he wears a dark suit, crisp white shirt and dark striped tie fastened with a silver tie pin.

**William Sheehan** ABC news producer has light olive skin and heavy brows, his dark hair is cut short and thinning on top. He wears dark trousers with a pale shirt and plain tie, his beige jacket has a large plaid design.

**George Merlis** ABC marketing man has brown skin, and short afro hair and is in his early 30’s, he wears a short-sleeved white shirt without a tie and black trousers.

Other real-life public figures from 1968 include **Walter Cronkite** CBS anchor with pale skin and thick framed black glasses. **Aretha Franklin** has brown skin, her glossy black hair is piled up into a beehive hairdo. She wears an elegant soft pink 2 piece with shiny embroidered details embedded into the fabric – a straight skirt that finishes above the knee with a matching cropped jacket.

**Mayor Daley** Mayor of Chicago is a brusque white man with a stern expression. He stomps about brimming with stress.

**Frank Meyer** is William Buckley’s publisher. He’s slim with pale skin and neatly combed fair hair and round framed glasses. He has an old-fashioned look wearing suit trousers and a matching waistcoat and a pale shirt worn with a dark red bow tie.

**Towards the end of the play, we meet Brooke Gladstone** an academic. She has brown skin and black bobbed hair and wears neat glasses. She wears a dark patterned calf length dress tied at the waist with a fabric belt and flat black shoes.

Other characters will be described live during the performance.

**Cast and Production Credits**

**Charles Edwards** plays Gore Vidal

**David Harewood** playsWilliam F Buckley Jr

**Clare Foster** plays Patricia Buckley

**Emilio Doorgasingh** plays William Sheehan, Howard Austin and Chet Huntley

**Joh Hodgkinson** plays Howard K Smith, Bill Mc Andrew and Mayor Daley

**Kevin McMonagle** plays Elmer Lower, Walter Cronkite and Senator Ribicoff

**Syrus Lowe** plays James Baldwin, George Merlis and Martin Luther King Jr

**Sam Otto** plays Tariq Ali, and Matt

**Tom Godwin** plays, David Brinkley, Andy Warhol, Frank Meyer, Enoch Powell and Bobby Kennedy.

**Justina Kehide** plays Aretha Franklin and Brooke Gladstone

Adaptation by **James Graham**

Director **Jeremy Herrin**

Design **Bunnie Christie**

Lighting **Paule Constable**

Sound **Tom Gibbons**

Video Design **Luke Halls**

Composition **Benjamin Kwasi-Burrell**

Movement **Shelly Maxwell**

Associate Movement Director **Sarita Piotrowski**

Voice and Dialect **Hazel Holder, Gurkian Kaur and Salvatore Sorce**

Jerwood Assistant Directors **Annie Kershaw**

Jerwood Assistant Designer **Amy Finch**

Boris Karloff Trainee Assistant Director **Sabrina Richmond**

That’s the end of this audio introduction to ***Best of Enemies***. If you have further questions please contact the Young Vic box office on 020 7922 2922.