



PRISM

BY **TERRY
JOHNSON**



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PRISM was first performed at Hampstead Theatre (Edward Hall, Artistic Director; Greg Ripley-Duggan, Executive Producer), London, on September 6, 2017. It was directed by Terry Johnson, the production design was by Tim Shortall, the lighting design was by Ben Ormerod, the sound design was by John Leonard, the composer was Colin Town, the video design was by Ian William Galloway, and the production stage manager was Robyn Hardy. The cast was as follows:

JACK	Robert Lindsay
NICOLA/KATHARINE	Claire Skinner
LUCY/BACALL/MARILYN	Rebecca Night
MASON/BOGART/ARTHUR	Barnaby Kay

CHARACTERS

JACK

NICOLA

also

KATHARINE HEPBURN

LUCY

also

LAUREN BACALL (BETTY)

MARILYN MONROE

MASON

also

HUMPHREY BOGART

ARTHUR MILLER

NOTE

PRISM is a fiction, loosely based on the extraordinary life of Jack Cardiff. Artistic license has been taken, as have a great many liberties.

PRISM

ACT ONE

Scene 1

A large double garage in the village of Denham, which has been renovated into a small museum. An up-and-over door to the back and a skimpy wooden door to the side.

It is a pleasant place to be. It has an elegant chaise, a comfortable old sofa, and a nice armchair. It has a large desk and swivel chair. It is filled to the rafters with memorabilia, barely any of which we can see right now, as the rooms in virtual darkness. Filmmaking equipment. Lights, director's chairs, film cameras, and still cameras.

A Technicolor camera: a magnificent blue-green and chrome original.

Bits of props and costume. Movie posters. Objects recognisable from movies. A wonderland derived from A Matter of Life and Death, The Red Shoes, Black Narcissus, The Prince and the Showgirl, and The African Queen. Prominent on one wall, and lifted by some ambient light through a tiny window at the back, are six large black-and-white studio portraits of movie stars, including Audrey Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Katharine Hepburn, Marlene Dietrich, and Sophia Loren. The posters and the pictures have their own luminescence, which will alter to illuminate the action of the play. We hear voices off.

JACK. (*Off.*) Wherever I'm going I don't want to go.

MASON. (*Off.*) That one there.

JACK. (*Off.*) Wherever you think you're taking me, unless it's the pub.

MASON. (*Off.*) The other one.

JACK. (*Off.*) Is it the pub?

MASON. (*Off.*) It's the other one. Next to your thumb.

JACK. (*Off.*) I don't much like the other pub.

MASON. (*Off.*) The other *button*. Press it.

A mechanical clonk and the self-raising door begins to open onto bright sunlight. It reveals foreground a good pair of deck shoes and Jermyn Street slacks. Further upstage a pair of brogues and corduroy trousers. Further upstage still, black ankle boots and leggings. The door stops a few feet up, creating a shallow rectangular vista of the lane beyond.

JACK. Ahah!

MASON. Keep pressing.

JACK. Polyvision.

MASON. Keep it pressed.

JACK. Only used the once. Needed three projectors. Barnum and Bailey nonsense. Only fit for Disneyland. We're not in fucking Mousewitz, are we?

MASON. No. Push with your thumb.

The door jerks eight inches.

JACK. That's better. Panavision Super wide 70 mil! Aspect ratio 2.76 to one.

MASON. Press the bloody button.

Jack operates the door again, stops it again.

JACK. Now here's a novelty. Cinerama! 2.59 to one. Three projectors, three cameras, so they had to cheat their bloody eyelines. This would be you, this would be me. She'd be out of focus. I'd be talking to the—red thing for letters.

MASON. Pillar box.

JACK. I'd be talking to the pillar box.

MASON. So what's new?

JACK. *How the West Was Won*. Bit of a winner. Brothers Grimm. Grim indeed. Filed for bankruptcy. "We can't afford ourselves, but

This Is Cinerama!” Bloody clowns. That trailer ran for ten years, though; credit where it’s due. Who *is* that?

MASON. Press the button.

Jack operates the door, stops it again.

JACK. Back in the day they used to slide sideways!

MASON. Sideways?

JACK. We’re going to need a bigger soundstage than this.

Jack sits down cross-legged on the drive. Late sixties, cashmere sweater or smart blazer. Jaunty hat.

MASON. Don’t sit there; the paving’s damp.

JACK. You see, now we’re talking. Cinemascope! 2.35 to one. 35-mil stock, but the image squished. Very ingenious, *very* grainy. Image quality was always going to be compromised unless they went 70 mil.

MASON. Get up, for Christ’s sake.

JACK. I could run you through Superscope, Technirama, Cinemiracle, Vistarama but they’re much of a muchness until...

Jack operates the door, stops it.

Todd-AO. Super Panavision. 2.20 to one. Unassailable winners of the widescreen skirmish.

MASON. It’s a garage door.

JACK. I won’t be able to shoot with anything wider than a fifty in a place that size.

MASON. Just get up and go through it.

Jack operates the door, revealing himself and also Mason, mid-forties. And further up the drive: Lucy, mid-twenties, smart but reserved. A nose piercing.

JACK. 1.77; the curse of fucking television; talk about going backwards.

He stops the door, entranced by the current ratio.

Now look. Look at that. Both of you, whoever she is... Academy ratio. 1.37 to one. Perfection. Yet totally random; 1.37. Why? Because—the round blue thing—water and land—

MASON. The world?

JACK. The world—was no longer silent. They had to make room down the side for the noise. Irrational and arbitrary, but beautiful; Academy ratio.

Mason enters the garage.

MASON. Come inside. Tell me what you think.

JACK. No no; last but by no means least...

He operates the door; it stops at its limit.

Where it all began; three by four. One to 1.33 recurring. Our simple but silent past.

MASON. *Your* past. Why don't you step into it?

JACK. Because I might never get back, old son.

MASON. Please; just come inside.

Jack steps inside. Lucy stays at a distance, watching.

JACK. Call this a sound stage? It's the size of a bloody garage.

MASON. It *is* the garage.

JACK. Is it? Then what's all this bloody stuff? Where's the...thing?

MASON. The what?

JACK. The thing you with your feet. And turn the wheel. The car! Where's the bloody car?

MASON. It's parked opposite the pub.

JACK. Splendid. Mine's a scotch and soda.

MASON. You're not in the pub. You're in the garage.

JACK. (*Astonished.*) Am I?

MASON. Yes.

JACK. Then where's the car?

MASON. It's up the road.

JACK. I don't like the...thing with wings. Big Lizard. Dragon! The George! I'll have a drink here.

MASON. This isn't the pub. It's the garage.

JACK. Is it?

MASON. Yes.

JACK. Where's the car, then? I thought you said we'd meet in the pub.

MASON. That was last week, for Christ's sake.

JACK. Where the bloody hell have you taken me this time? The point of a location Mason is you have to be able to *shoot* in it! There's no height in here. Hang on; you can't fool me. We're under the stage. Where's the Wurlitzer?

MASON. The what?

JACK. Dad said I could go up on it. Look at this Dad. Time step!

Jack tap dances.

Anything Dad can do. Shuffle-ball-change. Eh?

MASON. Very clever, but your dad's not here.

JACK. He promised me we'd go under the stage and up on the Wurlitzer. He's in his dressing room. I saw a chorus girl weeing in the sink. I saw a man in er—penguin. In a hat.

MASON. Evening dress?

JACK. Top hat and tails; murmuring to that chorus girl. "Not even if I gave you this gold watch?" Buffalos. I want to show Dad.

MASON. How old are you, Jack?

JACK. Not as young as I was.

MASON. You're older than your dad was when he died.

JACK. Am I? No.

A tap flourish, but a tired one.

Getting on a bit, I grant you. If I keep practising, Dad's gonna put me in the act.

MASON. He never did, though. In his eyes, you were never good enough.

JACK. You think so?

MASON. I know so.

JACK. Standing in the wings, though, watching him. And watching Mum. Dazzled by the sidelight. I bend my neck to get her head between the light and my eyes. Suddenly she's rim-lit, radiant.

MASON. They died twenty years ago, Dad. You're not in the wings; you're in the garage.

JACK. (*Astonished.*) Am I?

PRISM

by Terry Johnson

2 men, 2 women (doubling)

Legendary cinematographer Jack Cardiff has retired to the sleepy village of Denham, Buckinghamshire. The glory days of working on some of the most famous sets in the world are now behind him, as are his secret liaisons with a number of equally famous women. Despite an abundance of memorabilia from a lifetime of achievement, writing an autobiography proves an impossible task—perhaps due to his insistence on living in the past rather than remembering it. Terry Johnson's witty and poignant play examines the extraordinary life of the cinematic master and two-time Oscar-winner.

"[PRISM] is an affectionate, funny and poignant homage to Jack Cardiff... the dramatist writes with great eloquence... The structure is artful. ...lapses between precarious present and distorted past take us into the jungle of Jack's ailing mind... Exquisitely achieved." —**The Independent (London)**

"Johnson's plot inventively uses Jack's condition to conjure vivid flashbacks. And the transition from Jack's confused present to his triumphant past is superbly realised with the cast doubling or even trebling as Hollywood greats." —**Metro (UK)**

"PRISM offers some striking vignettes and nicely reflective moments. An opening scene in which Cardiff runs through the various movie-making aspect ratios using his slowly rising garage door as evidence is inspired; and Cardiff's final monologue offers a moving reflection on art and mortality." —**Time Out London**

Also by Terry Johnson
INSIGNIFICANCE

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