

ALICE OSEMAN is an award-winning author, illustrator, and screenwriter. She is the creator of Medway-based LGBTQ+ YA romance webcomic HEARTSTOPPER, and the writer, creator, and executive producer for the Emmy Award-winning television adaptation for Netflix. Alice has written every episode and been involved at every stage, from casting to music.

Alice is the author of several YA contemporary novels about teenage disasters: SOLITAIRE (published when she was 19), RADIO SILENCE, I WAS BORN FOR THIS, and LOVELESS (a *New York Times* bestseller). Her books have won, been shortlisted or nominated for a number of awards, including the YA Book Prize, the Inky Awards, the Carnegie Medal, and the Goodreads Choice Awards.

Alice was named the *Attitude* Person of the Year 2023, and The British Book Awards Illustrator of the Year.

BEN RODDY is a stage and TV actor, director and producer. He has appeared in over 100 productions, including 28 consecutive pantomimes as 'Dame' – 14 of which have been at the Marlowe Theatre in Canterbury.

Ben trained at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art. He has worked extensively in all areas of the profession, directing and producing. His roles include: Return of the Unknown (Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury); Tom in Table Manners; Cassio in Othello; Mr Collins in Pride and Prejudice; Wayne Hudson in Popcorn; Guy Haines in Strangers on a Train; Brian in A Day in the Death of Joe Egg; Freddie in Deep Blue Sea; Clive in Season's Greetings; Peter in Blue Remembered Hills; Bernard in Boeing Boeing and Don't Dress for Dinner; Colin in Absent Friends and Marvel in The Invisible Man at the Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne. Tom in Round and Round the Garden, Dr Watson in Hound of the Baskervilles in Canterbury Westgate Gardens and Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus with Dominic West (Marlowe Sessions, Malthouse).

Ben also appeared at The Swan Theatre (Stratford upon Avon) for the Royal Shakespeare Company in The Provoked Wife and Venice Preserved.

His film and TV appearances include Absolutely Fabulous: The Movie, Disney's Patrick and Call the Midwife.

He has twice been awarded Best Dame at the National Pantomime Awards in 2019 and 2024. He has now clocked up 1000 performances at the Marlowe.

Ben is also proud to be Captain of Kent Cricket Community Trust. He moved to Canterbury ten years ago with his wife and sons and is delighted to call it home.

RACHAEL BURFORD is a retired English rugby union player.

Rachael began her career at the age of six at Medway Rugby club and has gone on to enjoy a remarkable career for club and country for over 30 years. Since gaining her first cap for England in 2007, she has gone on to gain 84 caps in the 15s side, represented England in four world cups in 15s and two Sevens World Cups. Rachael became a World Champion in 2014, winning the world cup with England in France.

She has also achieved eight Six Nations titles, seven of which were Grand Slam wins.

She most recently played club rugby for Harlequins, before retiring at the end of the 2024 season.

Rachael was awarded the Rugby Players Association England Women's player of the Year award in 2014. In 2017 she was awarded the Special Merit Award by the International Rugby Players Association for her commitment on and off the pitch for services to rugby.

She became the first female professional player to be elected to the RPA Players' Board in 2016. She won the International Rugby Players' Association merit award alongside All Black legend Richie McCaw at the end of 2017. In May 2021 Burford captained Harlequins to Allianz Premier 15s glory, beating Saracens at Kingsholm. Off the pitch, Burford is also a respected pundit working for BBC and Amazon Prime amongst others.

Rachael is also the founder of Girls Rugby Club and Head of Women's Rugby at International Rugby Players.

JENNY SEALEY OBE is the Artistic Director of Graeae, the UK's flagship disability-led theatre company.

Jenny has been the Artistic Director of Graeae since 1997. She has pioneered a new theatrical language and coined the term 'the aesthetics of access' where sign language, creative captions and audio description are embedded within all productions. The 'aesthetics' are now used widely by theatre makers in UK and internationally.

Her credits for Graeae include: Self-Raising (in association with Soho Theatre and Theatr Iolo. Developed with The Incubator at The Egg, Theatre Royal Bath.), The Paradis Files an opera (commissioned by The Stables for IF: Milton Keynes, in partnership with BBC Concert Orchestra and Curve Theatre); Reasons To Be Cheerful a musical (2010 co-produced with New Wolsey and Theatre Royal Stratford East); Sarah Kane's Blasted (in association with RADA); Kaite O'Reilly's peeling, The House of Bernarda Alba (co-produced with Manchester Royal Exchange); Blood Wedding (co-produced with Dundee Rep and Derby Theatre); 'The Threepenny Opera' (co-directed with Peter Rowe, co-produced with New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, Nottingham and Leeds Playhouses and Birmingham Rep). Plays for young people include Diary of an Action Man and Whiter than Snow both by Mike Kenny. Outdoor productions include Against the Tide, The Iron Man, The Garden, The Limbless Knight – A Tale of Rights Reignited and for the WW1 Centenary This Is Not For You with disabled veterans.

Jenny has directed productions, run workshops and given presentations internationally in Japan, India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Brazil, Russia and across Europe.

She co-directed the London 2012 Paralympics Opening Ceremony alongside Bradley Hemmings (GDIF).

In 2022 Jenny was awarded an OBE for services to disability arts and has also been awarded the Liberty Human Rights Arts Award.

CAROL STEWART is the current Chair of the Medway African and Caribbean Association (MACA) and Chair of Creative Medway. MACA established the annual Young Black Achievers (YPU) Award, Young People United Diversity Awards and Inspirational Awards, the latter established in memory of Carol's daughter Safiya Stewart, one of the founders of YPU who sadly passed away in 2015.

At the age of 14, Carol joined her local youth club and quickly became an active, member advocating for young people in her hometown of Wolverhampton. She studied to be a part time youth worker and worked part time at the African Caribbean Cultural centre in Wolverhampton, and eventually was invited to be on the management committee. She was part of a group that established the first Windrush awards in 1999 which was supported by BBC West Midlands and received regional coverage on TV and local radio.

She qualified as a social worker in 1994 and since then has dedicated her life to helping others.

She was introduced to MACA when she moved to Kent in 2000 and MACA quickly became a part of her family life, finding it a lifeline for her and her young family, as there were very few Black children in their school at that time. She was elected to the MACA management commitment not long after she moved to Kent and was elected as Chair a few years after she moved to Kent, and then re-elected in 2018.

Carol was recently elected as Chairperson of Creative Medway, having been involved in shaping it from the beginning, and is proud to be part of a team of dedicated board members who are passionate about Medway and promoting arts, culture, creativity and heritage.

She is an active contributor to ensuring that Black History, Anti racism and Diversity are integral across all sectors and the school curriculum.

She was a chair of the Kent Police Independent Advisory group and was previously vice chair of the National advisory group. She has been a finalist for Woman of the Year in 2022, as well as finalist in the Pride of Medway awards. She is also a proud ambassador for the Chatham Historic Dockyard.