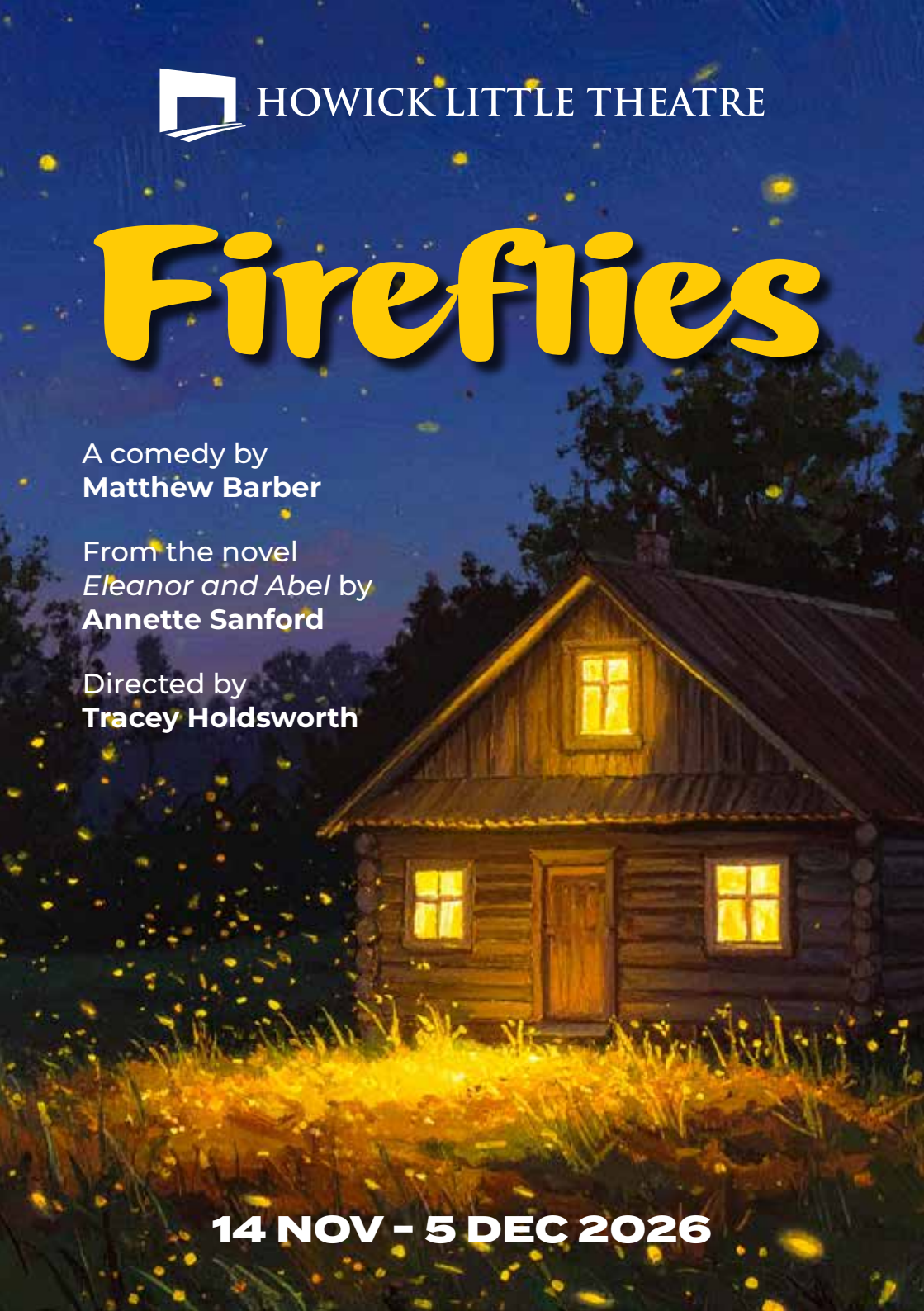
HOWICK LITTLE THEATRE

Fireflies

A comedy by
Matthew Barber

From the novel
Eleanor and Abel by
Annette Sanford

Directed by
Tracey Holdsworth



14 NOV – 5 DEC 2026











Fireflies by Matthew Barber. From the novel *Eleanor and Abel* by Annette Sanford.
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FIREFLIES

SYNOPSIS

Retired schoolteacher Eleanor Bannister lives a life of quiet routine in her small American town until a storm leaves a hole in her roof and brings the charming yet guarded Abel Brown to her door. What starts as a simple repair grows into unexpected friendship and the quiet possibility of love, even after she thought that chapter was closed.

SETTING

Groverdell, population 1742, Jackson County, South Texas,
over the course of a hot week in July 1995.

CAST

Eleanor Bannister
Hannah Thipthorpe

Grace Bodell
Ami Coster

Abel Brown
Ken Morrison

Eugene Claymire
Simon Crook

Museum Announcer & Radio DJ
Steven Logan

CREATIVE

Playwright
Matthew Barber

Director
Tracey Holdsworth

Set design
Tim Skinner

Lighting design
Daniel Wong

Sound design
Matt Poole

Lighting & sound assistants
Crystal Livingston
Vic Leilua
Victoria Poole

PRODUCTION

Production co-ordinator
Victoria Poole

Stage manager
Trevor Hynes

Assistant stage managers
Bruce Wighton
Julia Kellett

Costume co-ordinator
Jenny Connors

Props/décor
Jan Aitken
Tim Skinner

Tech operators
Tiffany Hu
Daniel Wong
Crystal Livingston

Rehearsal prompts
Jasmyn Astill
Ashley Doo

Intimacy adviser
Emma Love

Hair & makeup
Ruby Liu

Set construction crew & painters
Pat Hudson (set foreman)
Jan Aitken
Jenny Connors
Matthew Cousins
Nathan Hey
Doug Johnston
Angela McLaughlin
Laurie Mills
Sue Mist
Hirushi Perera
Tim Skinner
John Sole
June Tong
Dan Vlad
Andrew Walden
Chris Woodhead

Photography
Andrew (AJ) Johnson

Graphic designer
Emma Love

Special thanks to talented HLT member Barrie Graham for providing the guitar and vocal rendition of Steven Foster's "Beautiful Dreamer" in Act I. HLT also acknowledges the work of AV Technician/Supervisor Glenn Horan.

This production is two hours, including a 20-minute interval.
It contains adult themes and is recommended for ages 13+.
This production contains flashing lights and haze.



WELCOME AND DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Being a bit of a hopeless romantic I am naturally drawn to optimistic stories about love, relationships and winning through against the odds. *Fireflies* is such a sweet, hopeful and heartfelt play that when HLT asked me to take it on I couldn't refuse – I mean, it has fantastic characters, romance and a crazy dream sequence! Described as "a humorous and hopeful love story for feisty women" sums up Eleanor and her close friend Grace. When Abel blows into town, we see them reflecting on their lives, questioning preconceived opinions and expectations, exploring trust and ultimately taking a chance to find their next chapters.

Sincere thanks to my small but perfectly formed cast, who have really brought Eleanor, Abel, Grace and Eugene to life. I've also been fortunate to work with a talented and enthusiastic creative and production team who have gone above and beyond to tell our story. An extra special mention to my husband Tim – set designer, problem solver, decorator, cook and stress counsellor – love you lots and it's wonderful to work together on projects like this.

Enjoy the show!

Tracey Holdsworth - Director



MATTHEW BARBER — Playwright

Matthew Barber was born in Los Angeles, and studied film, theatre and literature at UCLA. He had careers as an arts journalist and publicist, and continued work with small theatres and arts organisations. This led to a commission to adapt for the stage the 1922 Elizabeth von Arnim novel *The Enchanted April*, which premiered in 2000, followed by a Broadway run in 2003. It earned the John Gassner Award for Outstanding New American Play and Drama League and Tony Award nominations for Best Play. Looking for his second hit, Barber went to southern Texas to meet 80-year-old retired schoolteacher Annette Sanford, who had written a short story called "Housekeeping". It centred on Eleanor Bannister, a retired schoolteacher in a rural Texas town – living in a house by herself, trying quietly to figure out what to do with the rest of her life while passing the time with nosy friend Grace Bodell. The short story covered a week in the characters' lives, although Sanford later expanded the story into a novel, *Eleanor and Abel*, which followed the same characters for a year. Barber thought about writing a screenplay, but kept coming back to "the week". He says, "A novel you can pick up and put down. A play needs to be clicking at high speed all the time. I needed everything to be happening in dramatic fury – I needed the high stakes that need to happen in theatre so people come back after intermission." *Fireflies,* which premiered in 2017, was the fruit of that examination into the first week in the lives of Sanford's characters. Barber lives in New York City and continues to write plays and develop new works.



TRACEY HOLDSWORTH — Director

Tracey is originally from the UK, but has lived in NZ for about 25 years. She works in the performing arts, marketing the Auckland Philharmonia. Tracey has been involved with community theatre in Auckland for about 20 years, both on and off stage. At HLT she has appeared in *Steel Magnolias, Sitting Pretty* and *California Suite*. She directed her first production, Donald Margulies' *Dinner with Friends*, for HLT Studio in 2021. Then in 2023, she directed HLT's season of Norm Foster's *Old Love*, which jointly won HLT's Best Production of the Year. This was followed in 2025 by the Tony Award-winning comedy *Vanya, Sonia, Masha and Spike* by Christopher Durang.

HANNAH THIPTHORPE — Eleanor Bannister



Hannah is very excited to be bringing "old Miss Eleanor Bannister" to the stage. While being a bit younger than the intended character, she has still found parallels in her own life around finding later love, thinking you need to take a certain road and the value of friendship and giving back to the community. It's been a beautiful story to explore.

Hannah made her debut at HLT playing Mrs Wallace, Lady Lebanon and others in the production of *The Case of the Frightened Lady* and was lucky enough earlier this year to play the objectionable Alex Whittle in *The Great Divide*. Hannah moved to Auckland in 2024 having lived in Wellington for close to 20 years and was in multiple productions there with Stagecraft and Khandallah Arts Theatres since 2016. Hannah's favourite productions there included *The Revlon Girl, Sense and Sensibility* and *Woman in Mind*.

She says it's been a real pleasure working with another talented cast and crew at HLT.

AMI COSTER — Grace Bodell



Ami is thrilled to be back at Howick Little Theatre in another fun role as Grace. She most recently appeared in *Grand Horizons, Rabbit Hole* and earlier this year in *Howick Little Plays*. When not on stage, Ami enjoys film and TV opportunities, charity work and running her precious hounds off leash around Auckland.

Ami is grateful that our summers are nothing like the ones in Texas, although she is enjoying the figs!

KEN MORRISON — Abel Brown



This is Ken's third performance at HLT after appearances in *The Viewing Room* (2021) and *Howick Little Plays* in 2023. You will also find Ken behind the bar for most HLT shows. Away from HLT, Ken's last appearance on stage was in May as Lennox in *Macbeth* at Factory Theatre. Prior performances include the lead role of George in the Dolphin's *Joyful and Triumphant* (2024) and Freddie at Papakura in *Noises Off* (2023). He says Abel Brown – the Groverdell Stalker – is a great role, and he hopes you will enjoy the play as much as he will enjoy presenting it to you.

SIMON CROOK — Eugene Claymire



It's been a minute. The last time Simon was on stage was in 2011, as Rodney in *Dusty: The Original Pop Diva*. Before that, he had leading roles in *Les Misérables, Cats, The Full Monty, South Pacific,* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, among others. Since then, he has worked part-time as a voiceover artist, voicing ads, video games, instructional videos, and short films. By day, he works in business development, but his real passions are board games, video games, drumming, moving heavy things around in a gym, and spending time with his family. Tēnā koutou rawa atu.

2027 SEASON



20 February - 13 March

Two reporters. One Story. No cooperation.

A chaotic comedy by Norm Foster. Directed by Matthew Cousins.

It's 1938. Jeff Kincaid, star reporter for *The Chronicle*, has been coasting on a reputation he stopped earning some time ago. Mary Hayes is an aspiring journalist with an eye for detail and more nerve than Jeff knows what to do with. When they're both sent to cover the wedding of the newspaper owner's son, neither intends to share the scoop.



1 – 22 May

Prime numbers are easy. People are not.

**Adapted by Simon Stephens from the novel by Mark Haddon.
Directed by Emma Love.**

When fifteen-year-old Christopher Boone finds the neighbour's dog dead in the garden, he decides to investigate and record everything. What begins as a strange mystery leads him towards a difficult discovery about his own family. One he was never meant to find.



3 – 24 July

The genre-defining mystery by Agatha Christie.

Directed by Vic Leilua.

Seven strangers find themselves cut off together at Monkswell Manor, each with somewhere else they'd much rather be. When a police detective suddenly arrives on foot, he brings unsettling news. A killer hides among them and nobody is safe.



4 – 25 September

To have and to hold, 'til the Wi-Fi goes out.

**A comedy of connection by Eric Coble.
Directed by AJ Johnson.**

Karen's wedding is in three weeks and her fiancé is in another country. Their relationship exists largely through calls, text messages, and emails. As the big day draws closer, her family and friends begin asking questions that there are no good answers to.



13 Nov – 4 Dec

You can't choose your neighbours. Unfortunately.

**A comedy of boundaries by Karen Zacarías.
Directed by Ben Egan.**

Pablo and Tania Del Valle have bought their first home next door to Frank and Virginia Butley, who have spent 30 years cultivating a garden that is their pride and joy. When a land survey reveals the fence between the properties is in the wrong place, a dispute escalates well beyond the boundaries of politeness.

HOWICK LITTLE THEATRE

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HOWICK LITTLE THEATRE presents

SCREWBALL comedy

a chaotic comedy by Norm Foster

directed by Matthew Cousins

Two reporters. One story. No cooperation!

20 FEBRUARY – 13 MARCH 2027

HLT.NZ/SCREWBALL

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