

THE CLAPHAM WONDER

A musical in 2 acts by Sandy Wilson based on *The Vet's Daughter* by Barbara Comyns.

Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury 26 April - 20 May, 1978 (season)

SYNOPSIS

The Vet's Daughter is the fictional tale of Alice Rowlands, the daughter of a South London veterinarian in the Edwardian era. Alice's father is a bully who rules their repressed house through terror. Alice's frail mother dies and is swiftly replaced in the family home by her father's brash and sexually savvy new girlfriend. The confusion and abuse heaped on Alice combined with her ultimate optimism lead to her discovering her own occult powers, with disastrous results.



STORY

Alice Rowlands is the unhappy child of an animal-torturing, wife-beating and abusive father. The family move to London. The new abode is seedy and dark. Mr Rowlands' work as a vet is made up of terrible moments — living animals put into sacks and sold to the vivisectionist; a cat brought half-baked to the surgery because it has got into an oven. Alice's pathetic mother, her body already broken by the vet, dies in agony. Mr Rowlands brings the barmaid Rosa, the strumpet from *The Trumpet*, into the house as his mistress.

As Alice describes her home: 'the dreary brown things in the kitchen would turn into great exotic flowers and I'd be in a kind of jungle, and, when the parrot called from his lavatory prison, he wasn't the parrot, but a great white peacock crying out'

Rosa introduces Alice to a greasy waiter. He tries to rape Alice. Rosa, who seems to Alice like 'a white negress', leaves Rowlands.

Alice's only friends are the deaf-mute Lucy, the servant Mrs Churchill and a young locum, 'Blinkers', who obviously cares about her. She sees his fondness but cannot return the love. Her father turns her out of the house, never wishing to see her again.

Alice goes as companion to Blinkers' kindly but frail mother Mrs Peebles at 'The Burnt House' on an island in Hampshire. Mrs Peebles is known to have failed to hang herself, the marks still on her neck. Alice is besotted with a handsome young man, Nicholas, who exudes an 'easy happiness'. She has slowly developed a capacity for 'floating' — lifting herself into the air, first in her room, then in a wood. When she levitates in front of Nicholas, he is appalled. Mrs Peebles drowns herself, and Alice is sent back to Battersea to live with her father, who recommences his physical and mental abuse of her. Rosa has now moved back in with him.

When Alice levitates in front of her father, he and Rosa realise the commercial possibilities of so freakish a gift and organise a display on Clapham Common. Alice rises above the Common, but falls to the ground. In the trampling of the crowds that have watched the spectacle, and in the melée, she and Rosa are killed.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

1. The Clapham Wonder
2. The Vet's Daughter
3. Someday
4. A Lot More to Life than That
5. The Waterfall
6. The Strumpet from the Trumpet
7. Eh, Rosa?
8. Any Time
9. You Know What
10. Everything, London
11. 'Ow Do You Know If You Like It (Till You've Tried It)?
12. My Little Tin Trunk and Me
13. Mrs Gowley's First Round
14. Don't Change, Lucy
15. Alice's Ball
16. Mrs Gowley's Second Round
17. Come for a Spin
18. Our Golden Afternoon
19. A Wine-Coloured Suit (And a Feather Boa)

CAST

- Sully
- Alice Rowlands
- Mrs Rowlands/Mrs Gowley
- Euan Rowlands
- Lucy
- Dr Cohen/Povey the Carrier
- Mrs Churchill
- Henry Peebles
- Rosa Fisher
- Cuthbert
- Floor Walker/Traveller
- Mrs Peebles
- Nicholas
- Ursula