

# THE BLUESTOCKING

Book, music and lyrics by Alex Thomas

## SUMMARY

A book musical about one young woman's battle to fend for herself at Oxford University in 1920. Communist agitators, debates in the union, May balls, punting escapades and more! A light-hearted but moving musical with a serious message at its heart.

Roles: 4m, 4f, large chorus (including 8 other speaking roles)

Music: 22 songs, orchestrated for 12-piece band

## SOLO SINGING ROLES

### **Mary Mason (female, 18)**

A plucky young working-class woman from Stepney. Requires strong character acting. Characterful rather than demanding singing.

### **Lord George Waverley (male, 20)**

A charming but wayward son of an Earl. Challenging singing role.

### **Eric Redburn (male, 20-25)**

A passionate communist party member, Mary's boyfriend from Stepney. Requires a forceful presence and a strong voice.

### **Freddie Upton (male, 20)**

A pompous and often obnoxious undergraduate, friends with Lord George. Captain of the University rowing team. A fun, larger-than-life, character part.

### **Trixie Fawcett (female, 18-19)**

A socialite 'undergraduate', glamorous and flirtatious, but with an unpleasant streak. Needs a convincingly jazzy singing voice.

### **Miss Dorothea Bussle (female, 40-45)**

The formidable and kind-hearted head of St Winifred's Hall. Requires a commanding presence and a powerful singing voice.

### **Mr Mason (male, 45-50)**

Mary's father, wounded in the Great War and old before his time. Needs to convey depth of character.

### **Angela Arbuthnot (female, 18-19)**

Trixie's best friend, somewhat superficial. Supports Trixie in a jazzy song.

## **OTHER SPEAKING ROLES**

### **Professor Kipling (male, 50-55)**

Miss Bussle's confidante and friend, a rather bumbling donnish type.

### **Chair of the Union (male, 20-25)**

A serious-minded undergraduate. Commanding presence.

### **Proposition Speaker (male, 20-25)**

Earnest and passionate defender of women's right to a place at Oxford

### **Tramp (male, any age)**

A down-at-heel veteran of the Great War. Turns up in London and Oxford, along with his cheeky wit.

### **Woman speaker (female, 40-45)**

A 'speaker's corner' regular, who doesn't believe in modernisation

### **Bunting (male, 20-25)**

Eric's faithful sidekick from the Communist party. Not averse to a fight.

### **Larry (male, 12-14)**

Mary's younger brother, keen on playing soldiers.

### **Ben (male, 8-10)**

Mary's youngest brother, follows Larry's lead.

### **Chorus of blues (male) and bluestockings (female)**

## **ORCHESTRATIONS**

Reed 1: Flute

Reed 2: Clarinet/Tenor Sax

Reed 3: Alto Sax

Trumpet 1

Trumpet 2

Trombone

Violin 1

Violin 2

Viola

'Cello

Bass

Drum kit

Piano

## **MUSICAL NUMBERS**

|                                    |                       |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Overture                        | Orchestra             |
| 2. Fly the red flag!               | Eric and chorus       |
| 3. I thought I knew you            | Eric and Mary         |
| 4. Do it for us all                | Mason and Mary        |
| 5. Bluestockings!                  | Miss Bussle and women |
| 6. Oxford Blues                    | Freddie and men       |
| 7. Undergradurette                 | Trixie and Angela     |
| 8. Letter home                     | Mary                  |
| 9. The life of a Lord              | George                |
| 10. This girl                      | Mary and George       |
| 11. Model student                  | Miss Bussle           |
| 12. The pleasures of punting       | Chorus                |
| 13. A class of her own             | Eric and George       |
| 14. Act 1 finale                   | Company               |
| 15. Entr'acte                      | Orchestra             |
| 16. Hoping                         | Eric and Mary         |
| 17. If you love her                | Miss Bussle           |
| 18. Undergradurette (reprise)      | Trixie and admirers   |
| 19. The Fairer Sex!                | Freddie and men       |
| 20. The debate                     | Men                   |
| 21. Do it for us all (reprise)     | Mary                  |
| 22. Oh, what a night!              | Chorus                |
| 23. I can't afford to fall in love | George and Mary       |
| 24. Finale                         | Company               |

## FULL SYNOPSIS

### Act 1

The year is 1920. The Great War is well and truly over, and England is roaring into the '20s. (*Overture*) Flappers and their young men strut their stuff in Town, determined to enjoy life to the full. But London's poorest families are finding times tougher than ever, and as the curtain rises communist firebrand Eric Redburn is launching a diatribe against the privileged elite from Hyde Park's 'Speakers' Corner'. His girlfriend Mary Mason is by his side, a spirited and fiercely intelligent girl of eighteen. Lord George Waverley and Freddie Upton, both dandified Oxford students, stroll past and become the target of Eric's wrath. Upton – captain of the Blues rowing eight and a conservative stalwart of the Oxford Union – flings back his opinion of the socialist movement and a tussle ensues: Mary belts Upton in the eye, and the crowd unites in her support as Lord George drags Upton away (*Fly the Red Flag!*). We now meet Mary's father in the tiny kitchen of his Stepney home. Mr Mason, injured in the war and a widower since the 'flu carried off his wife, is struggling to support his family. Only his clever daughter provides any spark of hope. Eric and Mary return exultant from their Hyde Park victory to find a letter waiting from St Winifred's Hall, Oxford – offering Mary a place. She is stunned. Eric is disgusted at the thought of her going off to the city of dreaming spires when the Revolution is just getting off the ground (*'I thought I knew you!'*) He storms out, leaving Mary distraught, but Mr Mason gently tells Mary she must take up the place for all their sakes, even if it means sacrificing Eric's love (*'Do it for us all'*).

Up she goes to St Winifred's, terrified at the prospect of her new life, and meets Trixie and Angela, two wealthy flappers who confide that they're chiefly interested in the fact that post-war Oxford is one of the few places with a favourable ration of men to women. The formidable principal of 'Winnie's', Miss Bussle, addresses her new intake of 'bluestockings' in no uncertain terms about the challenge before them, not least as the university still refuses to acknowledge the existence of the women's halls and still denies degrees to female undergraduates (*'Bluestockings!'*). Nor are the male undergraduates particularly enamoured of sharing their domain with women, Freddie Upton least of all (*'Oxford Blues'*). Lord George Waverley, on the other hand, is delighted at the prospect of meeting the new Winnie's girls. Late that evening in Mary's new room, Trixie and Angela scandalise Mary with their talk of jazz music, parties and sex (*'Undergraduate'*). The party breaks up as Trixie is expecting a nocturnal 'visitor'. Mary is going to bed (*'Letter home'*) when into her room bursts Lord George (Trixie's visitor), desperately seeking a hiding place as Miss Bussle is on the prowl. Against her better judgement she lets him hide beneath her bed and in return Lord George offers to introduce her to the delights of Oxford (*'The life of a Lord'*). The two quickly fall in love, despite their differences (*'End of letter home/This girl'*), and Mary – who is also dazzling her tutors with her intellect (*'Model student'*) – begins to make George a better man. But returning from a blissful punting trip (*'The pleasures of punting'*) Mary finds Eric waiting for her in college with the news that her father has worked himself nearly to death to pay her fees. Eric and George

come to blows (*'A class of her own'*) and Mary is recognised by Freddie as his assailant from Hyde Park. She and Eric flee (*'Act 1 finale'*).

## **Act 2**

(*'Entr'acte'*) Life has settled back to normal in Stepney (*'Hoping'*), but Miss Bussle disturbs their lives once again as she travels down to persuade Mary to return to Oxford, offering a full scholarship so that her father doesn't have to work (*'If you love her let her go'*). Eric fights to keep her in London but Mr Mason insists Mary return to Oxford. Eric, realising her future is not with him, lets her go. George's delight when Mary arrives back in Oxford turns sour when she reveals she mustn't see him for fear of being distracted from her work. He storms off, and Trixie - sensing her opening - persuades him to ask her to the end of year ball (*'Undergradurette - reprise'*). But George has been made to think, and in a high-profile Oxford Union debate on whether women should be awarded degrees he leaps into action against Freddie Upton, incurring his own father's wrath (*'The debate'*). Mary is meanwhile working against the clock with exams looming (*'Do it for us all - reprise'*). Upon hearing of Lord George's gallant gesture she finds herself once more drawn to him; at the ball (*'Oh, what a night!'*), however, she finds the strength to resist his declaration of love as she realises how much her family - and other women - are depending on her (*'A change of heart/I can't afford to fall in love'*). As George departs Oxford for the unknown, Miss Bussle tells Mary that she has excelled in her exams and that the governing body have decided to award St Winifred's college status: the girls will get their degrees after all! (*'Finale'*).

## **PRODUCTION HISTORY**

*The Bluestocking* was originally written for and performed by a cast of thirty sixth-form students at Magdalen College School, Oxford, in November 2013. *The Bluestocking* performed to 1,200 people over 3 nights and received significant attention in the local press.