

SCOTCH VERDICT
SCREENPLAY BY SUZANNE STROH

An idealistic young husband's fight for justice and survival tests the limits of power, control and gender in SCOTCH VERDICT, imagining the true 1810 trial story behind three hits of stage and screen.

It's a lush, mysterious and intelligent period drama set in Bombay 1796 and Edinburgh 1810 that demands skill and range from its ensemble cast to pull off the 'CRYING GAME' twist that will leave audiences speechless.

A dramatic reading of SCOTCH VERDICT brings together an inventive director and more than a dozen actors, queuing up Handel's *Solomon*, music that drives the plot as in *AMADEUS*.

There are strong roles for women of all ages. The astonishing lead role of Archie (20s) is one of two illusionists. Actresses also play an Italian courtesan (20s) and other counter-culture fortune seekers (20s) infiltrating bastions of the Scottish upper classes. There is a docile English wife by day with an active (and highly unsuitable) nightlife (20s). There are roles for Indians, including a bitter child ghost (7) and a teenage rebel (15). There are typical 19th century witnesses in the dock (15-60), both truthful and un; two closeted headmistresses in love (30s); and the narcissistic matriarch (50s) who enjoys driving them into penury.

There are memorable male parts. Actors will bring to life characters as diverse as two 7-year-old boys and three young bucks—all court clerks with personal dilemmas (20s) who must keep their seven difficult justices (40s-60s) in check and take action to save the day; dueling celebrity solicitors (40s); Scottish lairds in trouble (50, 70); tragic male lovers keeping a deadly secret (40, 50); and powerful villains (40s-50s).

Uncommonly beautiful Lord Justice Clerk **Archie** Hope has inherited vast landholdings, a title and a fortune, yet the aloof idealist and brilliant jurist still goes to work as the youngest ever to preside in Scotland's highest court. At 21, Archie struggles for control over a lurid lesbian trial with the power to send him to prison.

His best friend on the divided bench, **Meadowbank**, 40, is a libertine without enough influence to sway their corrupt colleagues, whose personal and financial interests all lie with the rich defendant. Meadowbank can't even get Archie transferred. Archie knows he's in over his head. His tropical fever returns under the stress. Determined to stand for justice in his courtroom, he inadvertently creates a black market in pornography when he locks up the scandalous transcript and closes the trial. Whom can Archie turn to for help?

Archie's father and only confidant, the **Earl of Kilchrenan**, 70, lays dying 140 miles away, too late to explain why his mysterious couriers have begun stalking Archie's courtroom, shadowed by unknown rough riders.

Even the great and powerful **Lord Polkemmet**, 70, Archie's staunch supporter since childhood in Bombay, refuses to set foot in court during the trial, even though he must cast the deciding vote.

Two ruined schoolteachers, **Miss Pirie** and **Marianne Woods**, 30s are suing Scotland's richest woman—**Lady Gordon** of Gordonstoun, 60s—for libel. The ladies are represented by society solicitors **Cranston** and **Clark** (40s). The sworn enemies must decide whether to join forces to avert disaster when Lady Gordon's mixed race granddaughter, **Jane**, 15, is called as a witness. Born illegitimate, orphaned in India, then disinherited in Scotland, Jane is the teenage rebel with the power to destroy them all.

Racing alone against the clock while his spirited wife, **Ollie**, 20s, minds "her sphere," Archie descends into madness, searching the Indian childhood he shares with Jane for assets that can end the spectacle without ruining lives. Why is he being menaced by **Solomon**, 50s, the mysterious London banker, and why does an even more frightening Englishman from Bombay want Archie's father dead? Is Archie in danger? If so, why?

Fifty years after Shirley MacLaine won the Oscar for Best Actress playing Marianne Woods in *The Children's Hour*, SCOTCH VERDICT unmask Scotland's corrupt justice system in the days before the jury trial, looking at the many injustices in this famous legal case from a different angle: through a glass darkly.