**The making of *Fire!***

We were keen that this project should be historically accurate as well as musically satisfying and dramatically entertaining. In the process of writing the piece we consulted the Museum of London and visited the Pepys Library in Cambridge (where we were allowed to see Pepys’s actual diary, which looked as fresh as though he had just written in it). Co-writer Sarah’s research for her MRes at the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters at the University of London provided valuable insights into the ideas, language and history of the time which enriched the story and produced some lively dialogue between Pepys and his maid Jane.

**Samuel Pepys’s Diary**

All the events in *Fire!* are based on entries from The Diary of Samuel Pepys, which is a wonderfully detailed, chatty and personal account of everything from the politics and gossip of the day to Pepys’s most private domestic life. We have also drawn on other eye-witness accounts such as that of John Evelyn, a writer who was a close friend of Pepys, reports from the London Gazette and contemporary ballads.

Everything that you hear in *Fire!* actually happened, from Jane waking Pepys in the night to raise the alarm, the description of how the fire started, spread and was eventually put out, and the things that Pepys himself was doing such as having a dinner party, going to see the King, playing the recorder or burying his parmesan cheese in the garden.

Where possible, we have used Samuel Pepys’s own words and his descriptions of the events that took place between Sunday 2nd and Wednesday 5th September 1666. Here are some examples of where we have used Pepys’s own words in the narration and songs in *Fire!* The spelling and language here is as it was in the diary in 1666, but in the songs and programmes for *Fire!* we have used modern spelling to avoid confusion.

**Song 2: The London Life**

At the end of the song Pepys tells us that it’s *‘Lord’s Day’*. This is what he calls Sunday, because in London in the 1600s Sunday was believed to be for rest and worshipping God. *‘And so to bed*’ is how Pepys often ended his diary entries.

**Song 3: The Fire Burnt Fiercely**

In his diary, Pepys tells us that on 2nd September *‘….sitting up late last night to get things ready against our feast today, Jane called us up, about 3 in the morning, to tell us of a great fire (she) saw in the City….I thought it far enough off, and so went to bed again and to sleep. About 7…Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses have been burned down tonight by the fire we saw, and that it was now burning down all Fishstreet by London Bridge.’*

**Song 4: Run to the River**

Pepys’s diary tells us that he went out to see for himself how the fire was spreading and what could be done about it. He saw ‘*Everybody endeavouring to remove their goods, and flinging (them) into the River or bringing them into lighters.’* (A lighter is a flat-bottomed boat like a barge).

Pepys could see that Thomas Bludworth the Lord Mayor was not taking charge, so he went straight to see the King and the Duke of York at Whitehall, *‘and the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor from him and command him to spare no houses but to pull down before the fire every way’.*

**Song 6: London’s Burning (reprise) and A Sight so Strange**

Pepys’s introduction to the reprise of London’s Burning and the words to **A Sight so Strange** (sung by Stage Choir) are based on Samuel Pepys’s description of the fire on the night of 2nd September 1666:

*‘All over the Thames with one’s face in the wind you were almost burned with a shower of fire-drops.’*

*‘….we saw the fire as only one entire arch of fire from this to the other side of the bridge, and in a bow up the hill, for an arch of above a mile long. It made me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire and flaming at once, and a horrid noise the flames made, and the cracking of houses at their ruine.’*

**Song 7: Dig in the Garden**

In Dig in the Garden, Pepys buries his precious parmesan cheese. In his diary, Pepys tells us that he and his friends buried important papers, letters and bottles of wine as well as his parmesan cheese, so that their things wouldn’t be damaged in the fire:

*‘Sir W Batten…did dig a pit in the garden… and I took the opportunity of laying all the papers of my office that I could not otherwise dispose of. And in the evening Sir W Penn and I did dig another (pit) and put our wine in it, and I my parmazan cheese as well as my wine and some other things.’*

Later in the song, Pepys’s description of the terrifying spread of the fire, and the sound of the houses being blown up to create fire-breaks, is taken directly from his diary:

*‘….walking into the garden and saw how horridly the sky looks, all on a fire in the night, was enough to put us out of our wits; and endeed it was extremely dreadfull – for it looks just as it was at us, and the whole heaven on fire’.*

*‘Now begins the practice of blowing up of houses in Tower Street… which at first did frighten people more than anything; but it stopped the fire where it was done’.*

**Song 8 Let Water Flow/It’s a Miracle**

Jane and Pepys’s introduction to Let Water Flow comes from Pepys’s diary:

*‘I up to the top of Barkeing steeple, and there saw the saddest sight of desolation that I ever saw’.*

*‘Walked into Moorefields (our feet ready to burn, walking through the town among the hot coles)….. I also did see a poor Catt taken out of a hole in the chimney… with the hair all burned off the body and yet alive.’*

The words to **Let Water Flo**w are from a ballad written at the time called The Londoners’ Lamentation.

**Song 9: Three Cheers for Sir Christopher Wren** is an important moment in *Fire!* At the time, people were superstitious and were looking for an explanation for the fire. Some believed that it was a punishment from God, or that the fire had been deliberately started by the French or the Dutch. We know from his diary that Pepys was a sensible man who was interested in science and did not believe in superstitions, so in the introduction to Three Cheers for Sir Christopher Wren we have imagined a conversation with Jane where Pepys is the voice of rationality, explaining that the fire was none of these things – it was an accident with a clear cause. Pepys reminds us that those in charge must learn from what happened and use their knowledge to build not just a new St Paul’s Cathedral (which is still standing today), but to make London better and safer. Jane also provides a quick-witted reality check for Pepys here, reminding him that the stories of the poor who were affected by the fire need to be told:

*Pepys: London lies in ruins. But only 8 deaths from the fire were recorded.*

*Jane:* ***If*** *you believe the records*

*Pepys: The King provided bread for the homeless.*

*Jane:* ***If*** *they could pay for it.*

*Pepys: Many people looked for someone to blame. Superstitious people said the Fire was sent by God to punish us for our wicked ways.*

*Jane: Some blame the French, some the Dutch.*

*Pepys: But it was none of those things. It was an accident. The baker’s oven caught fire, and a fierce easterly wind spread the flames. The fire fed on the wooden houses, the thatch, and the stores of oil, pitch and coal.*

*Jane: More than thirteen thousand houses and 87 churches were destroyed by the fire.*

*Pepys: We must use our knowledge to stop this happening again, and build a stronger, better London made of brick and stone. Even now my friend the architect Christopher Wren is drawing plans for a new Cathedral to rise from the ashes of St Paul’s. It will be a magnificent construction built to last for centuries to come.*

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