



Meopham Players Newsletter

www.meophamplayers.co.uk

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Ghosts of our fathers

Dame Kurtan Razor

Critic Of The Year
reviews *Snake in the Grass*



Sir Alan Ayckbourn is perhaps best known for his numerous comedies, but in *Snake in the Grass*, we have blackmail, murder and ghostliness. Filled with suspense, the play should keep you on the edge of your seat until the final curtain' says Eileen Bush the Director of *Snake in the Grass*.

The undisputed master of the modern farce gives his trademark humour an unexpected twist to produce a creepy tale full of wry humour and an ethereal sting in its tail. *Snake in the Grass* may appear to be a departure but look closely and you will find all the usual Ayckbourn preoccupations – close knit claustrophobic families, dysfunctional relationships and an almost morbid interest in long departed characters that exert unsettling influences on those that survive them.

'Set in the garden of a dilapidated house somewhere in England on a warm summer day, we are led through the trials and tribulations of the three characters. We feel sympathy for each character in turn as we witness the power shifting between them. But who triumphs in the end?' asks Eileen with a twinkle in her eye

This quirky play with an almost entirely female cast, has one of the most



Saturday nights for drinking & falling over...

intriguing and ambitious sets that the Players have ever designed. Littered with the detritus of modern day existence, it providing a powerful portent to the menace and the weariness just around the corner. There are two sisters, Annabel and Miriam – one aggressive and the other passive – with the former returning from Tasmania after the death of their father. Add an assertive former nurse blackmailing the family and Ayckbourn with assured deftness ratchets-up the tension between the three protagonists to fever pitch: a tension relentlessly echoed by the twanging of tennis balls in the background.

'I have been very fortunate in having three very strong and talented actors to perform in this difficult and complex play. Little did they know just what they were taking on in terms of the emotions they needed to portray and the huge amount of line learning required. Plus of course the physical effort required as you will see' Eileen told the **Newsletter** in an exclusive interview.

The hottest ticket in town is a spooky treat lightened by a sprinkling of macabre humour of how the ghosts of our fathers can reveal insights into human nature. *Do not miss it!*

Snake in the Grass, Meopham Vill. Hall
22, 23 & 24 October

Box Office 0844 288 9708

email: meophamplayers@aol.com



In rehearsal, the sisters lock horns with the nurse

'I say, I say, I say my dogs got no nose...'

Terry Fairhead



The Players' Arts Correspondent ruminates on an early brush with life on the boards

Have you ever wondered what courage it must take to be a stand-up comedian; to go on stage knowing that if the audience doesn't like your act you could be walking off to the sound of your own footsteps?

It is certainly a level of courage I do not possess although, during the war when I was just a lad of twelve or thirteen, I did find myself alone on the stage of the Wood Green Empire in front of a full house, dressed as a world famous entertainer. How did that happen you may ask, how indeed?

It started in the summer of 1943 (I

think) at a time when the government needed all the rolling stock it could lay its hands on. Civilian travel on the railways was consequently discouraged so to compensate, local councils all over the country were asked to promote events under



the general title of Holidays at Home.

Our council in East Barnet decided to put on a talent competition for school children; a sort of X Factor writ small which was enthusiastically embraced by many mums in the area including mine. Though it is hard to recall now exactly how I felt about performing in front of large audiences, I did have a sort of raw talent for impersonation which meant I could use the catch phrases of the various entertainers of the time.

Anyway, to cut a long and painful story short, I actually won the competition and was subsequently enrolled in an amateur concert party which was why I eventually found myself at the Wood Green Empire prancing around the stage in a South American dress, high heels and a bowl of fruit salad on my head in a grotesque impression of Carmen Miranda.

Oddly, it went down well – I even got a few whistles – but that was enough for me. I'd been there; done that and I wasn't going back to it again. It took too much courage.

What to see, what to do and how to help

Ima Starstruck



Our Showbiz Correspondent with her ear glued to the keyhole

70th Anniversary Dinner

An Anniversary Dinner to celebrate 70 Years of the Meopham Players is being combined with our traditional Christmas Party on Wednesday 2 December at Bartellas restaurant when we take over the Orangery.

John Ogden has arranged for a three course meal including coffee for £25 a head plus a 10% service charge making £27.50 per person. This does not include drinks which will need to be paid for separately.

Menu details with a choice of each of four starters, main courses and desserts which include traditional Christmas fare are available from John.

There is a number restriction of fifty so you need to book early to avoid disappointment.

Please email John with your reservation details as soon as possible at:

john@looking-forward.co.uk

In Short

Brick Lane Panto

Lesley Boycott is once again arranging the annual pilgrimage this time to see 'Jack and his Stalk' on 6 February 2016. Tickets for the dinner and the show are £49.50. Please email Lesley direct to book a place.

Monthly Meetings

November 4 – decision/auditions for February production. Make sure you are there to appear in the May show.

December 2 – social dinner and anniversary celebration at Bartellas (please see above).

Your Ideas & May Production

An open air production is planned for May and any ideas for a show you may have will be most welcome.

We would also like to hear from you with suggestions of plays you would like to see, or be involved in, as "rehearsed" play readings at monthly meetings.

STOP PRESS!

Eileen Bush urgently needs a volunteer to assist with Props and Lesley Boycott is still looking for help with FOH for the current production, Snake In The Grass.

If you can help, please contact Eileen and Lesley as soon as possible.

Theatre Dining Experience



Make your visit to our current production Snake In The Grass a night to remember by trying the Players' Theatre Dining Experience and enjoy a two course meal before seeing the show.

There is now a choice of three venues in Meopham to choose from all offering fantastic food in smart surroundings.

We have partnered with Bartellas, The Cricketers and The George to offer you a range of dining experiences at a bargain price of £18 per head for a two course meal - including show admission.

Snake In The Grass Theatre Experience
22, 23 & 24 October.

Tickets from the Box Office Manager

Box Office 0844 288 9708

email: meophamplayers@aol.com

Bijou Tales of Theatre

Les Peters



The latest Bijou story from Les' long and successful career in the professional theatre is 'Snow White's House'

If you have by this point read the one about the Rocky Horror show this is a tale about something that happened the same night in 1980.

We had finished work on getting "Rocky" out of the Kings Road about four in the morning and were booked to start getting in to the Comedy Theatre at Eight. Not much point going home for at best about an hour's sleep.

My friend Phil and I had also been working on and off for a small production company getting a few small panto's ready to go out around the country and still had a bit of work to do in the stores. As it happened this companies scenery store was also in Chelsea, so we decided to pass the time there doing a bit of work.

So we parked the car in a Chelsea side street and hauled our tool bags out and



started to walk down the streets of this fashionable area at 3.30 in the morning with bags containing items such as hammers, crowbars and bolt cutters, what could possibly go wrong?

Now at this point I need to point out that my mate Phil is to use the common parlance "a right wind up merchant" and once he had started would not let it go, whoever he was talking to.

So when the nice policemen came by and enquired where we were going at this early hour with our nice shiny jemmies Phil just had to have a lark and announced "we are off to repair Snow Whites house officer".



Now strange as it may seem the officers did not seem happy with his reply and asked us once again where we were going. Phil's reply was of course the same "we are off to repair Snow Whites house officer". At this point I was trying to hide in the shadows wondering what the breakfast was like in the Chelsea nick.

To my surprise Phil convinced the officers to follow us to the stores just around the corner so that we could show them what we were up to. So we took them to the stores and opened up and as we put on the lights, revealed in all its glory was, of course, SNOW WHITES HOUSE.

So the moral of this story I suppose is when a policeman asks what you are up to, tell him the truth!



"I love acting. It is so much more real than life"



When Alec Guinness was asked what he would have done if he hadn't become an actor, he said, "I would have pretended to be an actor."

Do you want orgasm or suffering? I can only do one or the other" was the distinctive reaction of Helen Bonham Carter to being told by photographers, 'say cheese'.



Groucho Marx explained the title Duck Soup as follows: "Take two turkeys, one goose, four cabbages, but no duck, and mix them together. After one taste, you'll duck soup the rest of your life."



Peter Mayhew (Chewbacca) was required to be accompanied by crew members who wore brightly-coloured vests while in the forests of the Pacific Northwest filming scenes set on Endor, so as not to be mistaken for Bigfoot and shot.



Meopham Players

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It's the little things...

Terri Horton



The Newsletter's Roving Reporter muses on the little things in life that matter

How often have you heard it said, or even said it yourself – it's the little things that matter?

At a conference several years ago I listened to Kerry Cook, a man who had been freed after serving 20 years on Texas' death row, say that the first thing he did on release was to take off his shoes and walk barefoot on the grass – the feeling of soft grass on his skin as opposed to the hard cement floor that he had walked on for the previous 20 years was for him an overwhelming pleasure – it's the little things.....

Kerry Cook



On an entirely different tack, I have always been impressed by how much Meopham Players strives to produce authentic sets, props and costumes for our productions. Whether a period piece or more contemporary, the attention to detail is always there – whether the audience can see it or not. Terry Fairhead is a master at producing reproduction book covers or newspapers and I know that cast members check to ensure they have removed or put on wedding rings or other jewellery items appropriate to their character and or period. The little things again.....

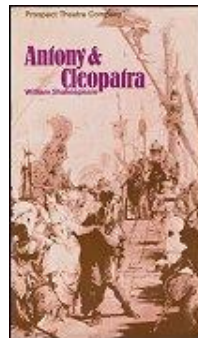
It is sometimes the little things that stay with you most in your memory – I went to see a production of Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra starring Alec McCowen, Dorothy Tutin and Derek Jacobi at the Old Vic in 1977 (yes darling, I know, I must have been a child!!) Well, I have to say that stunning though I am sure the production was, I remember it most



Terry and his little helper

for two little things. Firstly the fact that Dorothy Tutin appeared in platform shoes which might have been practical as she was a petite figure and Alec McCowen considerably taller, but even so it seemed incongruous as she clumped across the stage. Secondly at the very moment our heroine exhorted the asp to "be angry and despatch" her unto death, an ambulance with sirens blaring went past the theatre adding a completely unplanned comic touch. Little things.....

So whether it is the small act of kindness, the amusing moment that only you appreciate or the little extra detail that you notice – hold these in your memory because often these little things can make all the difference.



Pottham Regional Amateur Theatre Society By Matt Dallas



Matt Dallas 2015