



Meopham Players Newsletter

www.meophamplayers.co.uk

November 2015/issue 15

Review: Snake in the Grass

Terry Fairhead



"This was a production we should be very proud" writes the Players' Arts Correspondent

When I discovered I would be writing the Newsletter review for this production I made sure to avoid any of the rehearsals. Consequently I was able to see the play for the first time at the Saturday performance



"What do we do now, now that we are happy...?"

without any preconceived ideas although, knowing it was written by Ayckbourn and was to be performed by three of our most accomplished actors, I had



Worrying is like a rocking chair...?

high expectations. I was not disappointed.

It was an intriguing and intricate story; not quite a black comedy I thought although it certainly had its amusing moments. But there was a sinister theme running throughout that kept the audience guessing right up to the final act.

This was enhanced by the chameleon character of Miriam who controlled the action from start to finish and who only succumbed to her own demons at the very end. She was played by Brenda Ogden with quite astonishing assurance.

Her elder sister was played by Sylvia Stickings who gave a brilliant, distinctive performance of a woman descending into

hysteria. Alice Moody, the blackmailing former nurse was played impeccably by Terri Horton.

None of the actors put a foot wrong and certainly I heard not a single prompt

during the whole play. The set was imaginative and convincing and was a credit to John Winson and his crew. This was a production we should be very proud of as indeed we are of its dedicated producer, Eileen Bush.



"it's nice out, isn't it?" "Yeah, but you'd better..."

Secret David



We put the Players' favourite under the spotlight and reveal his secret side
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A Jumbo tale from the rich repertoire of a lifetime in the professional theatre
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Spotlight on David Alexander

David Alexander



Herbal tea or stiff drink?

I drink herbal tea in moderation or perhaps out of laziness, not sure which. I can relax with a glass of wine, or the occasional bottle of beer.

What annoys you?

The struggle of getting into and out of London each day.

Desert island record?

I actually keep a list of about 20 songs or pieces of music that mean a lot to me...just in case. If it is one only, even allowing for the miracle of technology, I would have to take Sway by Dean Martin. Why? It makes me happy.

Swanky restaurant or dinner at home?

I don't care as long as I am having dinner with my wife.

What are you reading?

I read a lot, typically via Kindle. At the moment it is *The Brothers Karamazov*.

Best production you've ever watched?

In 1985 the RSC had a Barbican season where I saw Kenneth Branagh in Henry V, and Antony Sher in Richard III. I don't think those performances have been bet-



Once more unto the... Oh! what's next?

tered. Branagh had only just left drama school; I remember that he dived during the wooing scene, turned to one of the cast and said: "Oh! What's next?"

Your greatest luxury?

The most expensive pair of sunglasses I have ever bought, which is a classic pair of Ray Bans: a snip at £120. I wear them for posh sporting events like Wimbledon or a visit to the Globe.

Best Players Moment?

Calendar Girls. You have to admire the sheer cheek of it.



Calendar Girls -Theatrical Viagra or sheer cheek?

What are you listening to?

As I write this Bach's Goldberg Variations; it's an HMV recording from 1986, Maria Tipo is the pianist. I have music for different times of the day, or different days. The Variations was a Sunday morning favourite, but it soothes me at anytime. Jazz is an evening pleasure however.

Anything your mother taught you?

Be curious.

My Five Favourite Things:

1. My wife:
2. My wife:
3. My wife:
4. My Wife:
5. My Wife



"You dancing?", "You asking?"



You

The silence hangs heavy

Bending form and time and memory into new shapes

I listen to the house, my ears straining for the last echo of your laughter

Each room, pregnant with your imprint, your smile, your grace

Radiates a faint afterglow of your presence

How large this void! How shameful!

Yesterday you sat with me here

And we talked, of little things made large by your warmth

Of daunting things made insignificant by your love

My life, my blessed life, is waiting for you to return

So that we may look into each other's eyes

And laugh

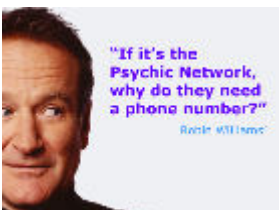
And talk again

By David Alexander

The Wit & Wisdom of Robin Williams 1951-2014

"We had gay burglars the other night.

They broke in and rearranged the furniture."



"In England, if you commit a crime, the police don't have a gun and you don't have a gun. If you commit a crime, the police will say, 'Stop, or I'll say stop again'"



Mrs Doubtfire: 'He was quite fond of the drink. It was the drink that killed him.'

Miranda: 'How awful. He was an alcoholic?'

Mrs Doubtfire: 'No, dear, he was hit by a Guinness truck'

"Ah, yes, divorce ... from the Latin word meaning to rip out a man's genitals through his wallet."



"A woman would never make a nuclear bomb. They would never make a weapon that kills. They'd make a weapon that makes you feel bad for a while"

Witch Theatre?

Eileen Bush



A consumer guide to the weird world of stage superstitions & facts

The Scottish Play. Never to be mentioned, never to be quoted from. Way back when I was a mere child, this play was performed at Medway Little Theatre in spite of the pleas of our two retired pro actors not to do it. On the first night, one of the swords bent in half during a fight scene causing inappropriate tittering from the audience. Two days later the leading actor's upper denture

went skittering across the stage. He made a dive to retrieve and replace the offending item, secure in the belief that the audience had not noticed. They had. The final performance was curtailed due to a long power cut. The audience left and another unscheduled performance was hastily arranged. It is thought that superstitions surrounding this play are a leftover from when folk believed in witches.



Poltergeist or all done by mirrors?

Pepper's Ghost - an illusion created by the use of a large piece of glass situated at an angle between the audience and the scene. The glass reflects a room or scene hidden from the audience that is built as a mirror image of the scene.



Actors awaiting their entrance sitting on grass under a cart, village green or is it because restrooms were painted green as it considered to be a soothing colour?

Why Green Room? There are several explanations. One dates from medieval times when the all powerful guilds performed mystery plays or illustrated Bible stories from the back of a cart. Actors awaiting their entrance would sit under the cart on the grass (green).

Some maintain that as performances were given on village greens, the actors would sit on the green when awaiting their own entrance.

Yet another theory is that restrooms were painted green as it was thought to be a restful colour. Take your pick.



The play that dare not speak its name

Now there's a funny thing...

Terry Fairhead



The Players' Arts Correspondent explores the art of being funny

Comedy; now there's a funny thing. Or at least it should be.

I have a 20 volume bound set of *Punch* articles and cartoons from the Nineteen-twenties which I occasionally plagiarize – the cartoons that is – when producing a greetings card of some sort. On only one occasion though have I used the original caption; the reason being that the said captions are no longer funny. Nor do I believe anyone alive today would find them so. The same is true for old radio and television programmes.

The first comedy programme to be written for radio in this country was *Bandwagon*. It ran from 1938 to 1940 and

starred Arthur Askey and Richard Murdoch. I was an Elementary schoolboy at the time and I thought it was hilarious but so did most adults. Because of that it sparked other shows like *Garrison Theatre* starring Jack Warner; *Happidrome* which was a sort of audio forerunner of *Sunday Night at the Palladium* and *ITMA* starring Tommy Handley. This last one ran for



Its That Man Again - Tommy Handley

about ten years and had the nation in stitches even at a time when we were losing the war against Nazi Germany. It was a strangely British thing, relying to a large extent on a string of catch phrases like *Can I Do You Now, Sir?*; *Don't Forget The Diver*; *It's Being So Cheerful as Keeps Me Going* and *After You Claude, No After You, Cecil*. When the Americans came to England they were totally baffled by the show and couldn't understand why the Brits fell about laughing whenever they heard it.

But times have changed for us all and I suspect no modern audience, regardless

of race, would be able to raise even a smile listening to those old shows. Even some of the later ones which may have had a tremendous following in their day are probably barely sniggerable now. I'm thinking of *The Goon Show* and *Hancock's Half-hour* on radio as well as *Beyond the Fringe* on stage and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* on TV.

One of their troubles is they've lost their freshness; we've heard it before; we know what's coming. And it shows what a difficult trade laughter-making is. It is far more so these days than it was for the real old-timers of pre- television and pre-radio days for they could go from town to town with the same material for years secure in the knowledge that people didn't travel far and would have been unlikely to have heard it before.

So, let's have a round of applause for all our modern funny men and women who try to keep our sanity at the risk of losing their own.



The Pythons – quintessential British silliness?



Richard Murdoch & Arthur Askey get a helping hand

Bijou Tales of Thea-

Les Peters



The latest story from a long successful career in the professional theatre is 'Get The Elephant'

This is a tale from 1978 in Great Yarmouth. The Event was the Entertainment Artists Benevolent Fund's "Grand Midnight Matinee". As everybody knows the benevolent fund's main event every year is the Royal Variety Performance. But back then when lots of artists were doing summer seasons they held a Midnight Matinee in the two main resorts of Great Yarmouth and Blackpool.

I had the honour of being Stage Manager for three of these, Yarmouth 76 & 78 and Blackpool 78. There was always a star studded bill, this night we had among others: The Black and White Minstrels, Frank Carson, Keith Harris, Little and



Ring-a-ding ding, it's the singing bus driver

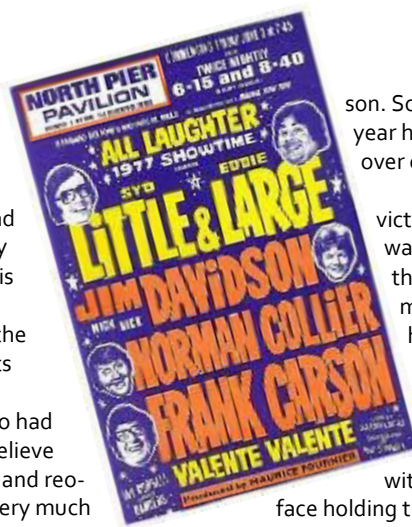
Large, Matt Monro, and Lenny Henry to name but a few.

So the evening show has finished and it is now a mad rush to get the stage ready for the midnight show. This also involved getting costumes and props from all the local theatres whose artists were visiting tonight.

At this time the town also had an indoor circus, which I believe has now been refurbished and reopened, but then was still very much based around animal acts.

The resident Stage Manager there Ian and the Ringmaster at the circus had been working there for many years and were good friends. It had become a bit of a tradition on Midnight Matinee night for Ian to send his newest and greenest stagehand to the circus to "get the Elephant". The ringmaster would tell the boy that the Elephant was sick and send him back, probably twiggling half way back he had been had. On his return Ian would of course chortle and all had a good laugh.

It happened that this year was the Ringmasters last year and he was retiring at the end of the sea-



son. So he decided that this year he was going to get one over on his old mate!

So Ian sent this year's victim of to the circus but was a little surprised when the lad returned about 30 minutes later and asked him where he wanted the Elephant. Ian walked to the dock doors and looked out to see his old pal standing there with a broad grin on his

face holding the reins of the Elephant standing next to him.

Ian and the Electrician there were known to be keen gardeners, you always heard them talking about their gardens. Well I reckon their rhubarb was a triumph that year!



The elephant in the room: a triumph for rhubarb that year?

Pottham Regional Amateur Theatre Society By Matt Dallas



Matt Dallas 2015

Con- fusion of the sens-

Terri Horton



The Newsletter's Roving Reporter explores the effects of sensory deprivation

Those of you who came to see "Snake in the Grass" will have witnessed yours truly disappearing under the stage, down a well, and suffice it to say that it was quite a challenge! Not only for Brenda who had to manhandle me into the hole but also for me, crawling in the dark under the stage to get out (no I did not stay there for the duration!). It made me think of another couple of occasions where the sense of vision has been distorted and how disorientating this can be.

Anyone who went to see Sir Antony Gormley's "Blind Light" exhibition in 2007 will I am sure, like me, have vivid memories of being in that box of dense fog where despite it being bright light, you could not see a thing, even your hand in front of your face. Inside the box with you



Antony Gormley | Blind Light | Southbank Centre 2007

were quite a few other people and the experience of walking round feeling your way with outstretched hands was very disorientating.

At the other end of the spectrum if you have toured the Chislehurst caves you will remember the moment when they extinguish all light and you are standing with a group of other people but again cannot see anything – the blackness is complete and impenetrable. Both very unusual experiences and really quite scary, thankfully they last only a short time, but it is enough to have quite an impact.

Being lost when you can see is also quite unnerving as I found out when I went with a friend for a walk in Burnham Beeches, the most beautiful beech wood which is spectacular in Autumn with the beautiful colours. Well, whenever I meet with this girl friend of mine we talk for England and after strolling for a couple of hours we were feeling peckish and thought that going back to the pub where we had parked for some light refreshment would be a great idea – hmmm only now all the trees looked the same, the paths seemed identical and there were no obvious landmarks, or if there were we had been talking too much to notice them! Well, it took us another hour before we finally chanced on the pub and boy oh boy did that first glass of wine taste good!



Chislehurst Caves – impenetrable blackness

What to see, what to do and how to help

Ima Starstruck



Our Showbiz Reporter with her ear glued to the keyhole

December, 2015

Christmas dinner and 70th Anniversary celebration at Bartellas on 2 December **SOLD OUT**

January, 2016

Paul Doust, acclaimed actor and director will facilitate a workshop on comedy acting at our regular monthly meeting on 6 January. This is an open workshop and all are welcome. We hope members of Hartley Players and Cobham ADS will also attend.

February

An Inspector Calls, one of the most famous works written by JB Priestley, seen as relevant today as when it was first performed in 1945 will be part of a play reading at the monthly meeting on 3 February.

Brick Lane Music Hall-6 February **SOLD OUT**

Going Green by David Tristram, the next

Players' production on 25, 26 & 27 February. Director John Winson has already cast it with mix of regulars and new faces.

April

Luke Taylor, stage director at Medway Little Theatre will be giving a talk on "The Perils of Stage Managing" on 6 April. Given Luke's personality this will be very amusing as well as teaching us a few trade secrets. It appeal to actors and stage crew alike, so make sure you don't miss it!

June 2016

Auditions for the October production on 1 June. Sonia Williams has offered to direct with Anne Horrocks assisting.

Habeas Corpus, by Alan Bennet, to be staged at Nurstead Court in June, (not May as incorrectly reported last month). John Winson and Sylvia Stickings will be directing at a superlative alfresco venue. Dates for auditions and the play to follow.

September 2016

Annual General Meeting on the 7th.

STOP PRESS!

Volunteers for the back stage and technical crew are required for the February production (dates above) -if you are able

to help please contact John Winson.

Thank You from Eileen Bush to the cast, back stage crew & set builders/strikers of Snake In the Grass, which got excellent feedback. Thanks also to the FOH volun-

Meopham Players

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