

Tnoda TODAY★

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Be inspired by amateur theatre



Someone is
happy theatre
is back!

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NODA Today

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Contents

8

We're going to need considerably bigger buns!

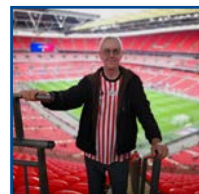
Calendar Girls - the evolving story that keeps on giving. Grassington Players share their role in the tale



14

Getting to know your New National President, Gordon Richardson

A look back on the life of National President Gordon Richardson.



20

Why Basingstoke is Talking About Jamie!

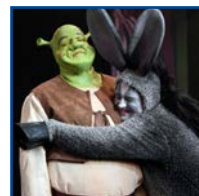
The film version of the hit West End musical, *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* starring in the lead role Max Harwood from Basingstoke!



24

Someone is happy theatre is back - cover story

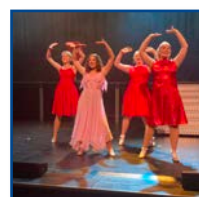
From the sudden closure back in March 2020, this small theatre tells its story.



28

NODA Youth

Catch up on all of the news from NODA Youth



34

NODA Presidential Gala 2021

Find out about NODA's first in person event since March 2020



42

NODA Theatre Summer School is back!

It's back and bigger than ever before. Have a look at all of the courses available in 2022.





Welcome

Ian G. Cox
Chairman of Trustees

It is my pleasure to welcome you to this latest issue of NODA Today for the first time as Chairman of Trustees.



This exciting edition is packed full of feel-good stories and articles. We have the première of *Calendar Girls The Musical*, how a small theatre fought and won the fight to survive the pandemic and the dream story of hitting the 'big time' - how one former member of a NODA society makes his way to the big screen in the film of *Everybody's* talking about Jamie. 130 years is quite an achievement and one notable society is celebrating this fantastic anniversary with a published book documenting their journey and NODA family roots. All this and more, demonstrates how societies and groups across the UK are showing healthy signs of recovery and going from strength to strength.



Our National AGM and Presidential Gala was held in September in Durham, and what a joy it was to be able to meet in person. NODA President, Gordon Richardson, was inaugurated at the AGM in the afternoon and Middlesbrough Youth provided a fantastic evening's entertainment performing moving extracts from *Come from Away* - most fitting as our AGM was on 9/11. It was a fine celebratory weekend and, for some, an opportunity to experience the first live entertainment seen in 18 months.

NODA Theatre Summer School is back on track in 2022, with a physical experience - so valued by attendees. It will provide residential training from high quality professional tutors and we have a fabulous venue at Yarnfield Park in Staffordshire. Bookings for places opened earlier this month - so have a look at our website to see what sparks your interest. Please note that bursaries are also available.



NODA has its very own special anniversary approaching and in 2024, will be celebrating 125 years of helping and supporting amateur theatre - we will be planning something special !

On behalf of us all in NODA, Season's Greetings and good wishes for the New Year.

Ian G. Cox
Chairman of Trustees



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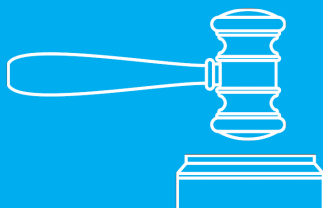
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Councillors' Chat

A quick note from your Regional Councillor



Tessa Davies - East Regional Councillor

It is so lovely to see societies are beginning to perform again. I have been delighted to be invited to musicals, plays and pantos (oh yes I did!) in the past couple of months and I am looking forward to seeing many more in the near future.

As societies are coming out of the enforced hibernation, I wish everyone the very best for whatever productions they are rehearsing and I would encourage you all to get back out there and sock it to 'em!



Nigel Hancocks - East Midlands Regional Councillor

When I hit the ground running in September this year, having been accepted as Regional Councillor for the vastly differing region, I didn't expect to have to replace three Regional Representatives as well as witness the rapid return to some sort of performance normality. Fortunately, the two Regional Representatives for Lincolnshire have been found. However, EM07 around the Kettering area is still vacant. Any offers! Apart from that welcome to the activity region!



Pam Armstrong - London Regional Councillor

A frenzy of activity has got the London region off to a cracking start with societies at full throttle to get the new season underway. Some societies were rehearsing (under great challenges in the past months) to have their show 'performance ready' as soon as restrictions were lifted. Others have had intense rehearsal periods to present their initial show early and other societies, having planned their full year of activities through to next summer, are ready for 'curtain up' this autumn. We have a superb season ahead of us and we really are now in the realms of 'your 5 minute call'.



Peter Oliver - North Regional Councillor

It has been a very busy couple of months as the curtains finally open in theatres across the North, and it's been so nice to be able to attend so many shows with both the NODA President and members of the North Committee. The diary to the end of 2021, is certainly filling up and it's amazing to get out and meet our NODA North family. The Committee has been working throughout this period and I am pleased to confirm that our AGM and Gala weekend at Scotch Corner is planned for 11th to 13th March 2022, and we have our special Performance Awards night booked at the Grand Hotel at Gosforth Park on 17th September 2022. Keep well and I look forward to seeing many members over the festive period.



Leslie Smith - North East Regional Councillor

I am really pleased to be writing this as now we are seeing many productions starting to take place around the region.

Many productions have started via Zoom and only managed to have physical rehearsals in the final stages. These, however, have been able to result in brilliant final shows.

Information about our 2022 Gala Weekend will appear in your inbox very soon.

Andy McNicholas - North West Regional Councillor

It's been wonderful these past two months seeing so many societies getting back into rehearsals and finally getting to see some shows again!

The NW Committee are busy putting together plans for our 2022 AGM and Awards where we look forward to seeing so many of you in person. Full details will be released in the New Year but for now keep 30th April 2022 to 2nd May 2022 free ;-). I'd like to take this opportunity to wish everyone all the very best for 2022.



Stuart McCue-Dick - Scotland Regional Councillor

It was fantastic for the first time in 2 years to have been able to return to Peebles Hydro for the NODA Scotland conference. Once again, the weekend included a range of workshops, numerous networking opportunities as well the AGM and results of the Programme & Poster competition.

In addition, it was heartening to hear about clubs returning to rehearsals and performing, and members are reminded to ensure that future productions are listed on the NODA website to ensure valuable free publicity.



Kay Rowan - South East Regional Councillor

Like me, many of you will be delighted to be back in the theatre - all those late nights and stressful times learning lines, steps and notes. The last month has been so exciting, getting in the car and travelling to far flung corners of the region, to witness first hand the results of your labours. The diary is getting quite full, so if you would like to invite either your local rep or myself please do so early. Every good wish to you all for a successful theatrical season. Early wishes for a happy Christmas and New Year when, hopefully, we can all meet up again in Guildford for our South East Region Celebration Day on Sunday 27th March 2022.



Graham Liverton - South West Regional Councillor

Things are beginning to happen and getting back to normal, as normal as we can get !

I have seen quite a lot of shows and all of a high standard! I am so proud of the societies in the Southwest region, of how you have coped under difficult circumstances, and your strength, courage and energy. Sticking together is second to none. Please don't forget to invite the National President to your show and indeed your local Rep as well as me. We are only too pleased to attend and we are always here to help.



Sharon Davies - Wales & Ireland Regional Councillor

Well, at last societies have been able to start planning for a future, albeit with some restrictions, and invitations are starting to trickle in for both myself and my district reps. We are all looking forward to catching up with you all again.

I am pleased to announce that we have a new rep for District 7. Dianne Hayes has been my assistant on District 7 for several years and therefore already knows some of the societies in the district.



Andy Brown - West Midlands Regional Councillor

It's been an absolute joy to finally begin to see theatres in the West Midlands open up and put on productions once again! I have had the privilege of attending performances across the region and have noted with interest, how there are still some differences in restrictions in some areas and the difficulties some societies are still facing.

It is my sincere hope that we will all soon be back to doing what we love and I hope that in 2022, I can meet with many more of the fantastic societies we have here in the West Midlands.





We're going to need considerably bigger buns!

The Grassington Players Calendar Girls by Heidi Marfitt Photography.

Calendar Girls – the evolving story that keeps on giving. Grassington Players share their role in the tale

It was a privilege and a challenge to present *Calendar Girls: The Musical* in Grassington, as the story returned home to Wharfedale having travelled the globe as a calendar, film, play and finally this show.

The *Calendar Girls* story has 'come of age', 21 years on from the 2000 calendar, and we were honoured to stage the world amateur première production of the show in celebration of those first remarkable ladies. The seven night run drew 1680 people including many societies from around the country keen to see how it was staged, raising in excess of £3,000 for Blood Cancer UK.

The original *Calendar Girls* have raised almost £6 million for blood cancer research since their calendar was conceived in 1999, in memory of dales devotee and Yorkshire Dales' National Park Officer, John Baker. Capturing the attention and imagination of the world, it's worth revisiting how those first brave and unsuspecting ladies' inspirational stunt gathered such momentum.

When Angela Baker lost her husband to non-Hodgkin lymphoma in 1998, naturally fellow members of the Rylstone & District Women's Institute rallied round to support her. Her close friend and neighbour, Tricia Stewart, came up with the idea of a charity fundraiser calendar with a difference to celebrate John's love of life. Lynda Logan's artist and photographer husband, Terry Logan, was on hand to turn the concept into reality.

Photographed at the Logan's idyllic cottage in Threshfield, each of the middle-aged ladies was depicted tantalisingly naked with their modesty discreetly and tastefully hidden by the props of various traditional WI-themed activities, from jam-making to flower arranging. The soft sepia shots were all characterised by pearls and a colourful yellow sunflower and witty caption. The resulting 'Alternative WI Calendar' was a simply stunning revelation showing beauty does not begin and end with youth.

The original fundraising target for the subtly cheeky calendar was £5000. It actually raised more than £300,000 before the year 2000 was over, as the story hit the national press and the world's spotlight turned upon them.

In 2003, with backing from Disney, Harbour Pictures released their film *Calendar Girls*, featuring a star-studded cast headed by Helen Mirren and Julie Walters and with a dash of artistic license embellishing the story. Among the extras appearing in the film were some of the original girls and several members of Grassington Players.

The associated fundraising went to a whole new level, with six of the 'real' girls becoming stars in their own right. Always smartly attired in black and displaying their distinctive sunflower emblem, they tirelessly attended functions far and wide to support the charity - including jet-setting to the States to appear on Jay Leno's chat show.

Just a few years later, the stage play was released in the West End in 2009 with another spin on the story by the same script writer, Tim Firth.

To mark the tenth anniversary of the original, Terry and the girls produced a new calendar in 2010, featuring the remaining fundraising ladies; a decade on and still beautiful.

In 2012, Grassington Players staged the amateur world première of the play to much acclaim. It then went on to be performed more than any other play by amateur dramatic societies across the world, with more than 500 productions, all raising funds for the charity.

Eventually (thinking it was all over) the charity staged a glamorous tribute event at the Royal Albert Hall to thank the 'real girls' as they officially retired from the fundraising work that had dominated their lives for more than twelve years. But then, when they'd barely had time to hang up their sunflowers, Tim Firth had a chat with his old school pal, Gary Barlow of Take That fame, and suddenly it was very far from all over.

Bringing the story to life again, Barlow and Firth brought their cast and stage set to Burnsall village hall in March 2015, to perform a pilot version of a new musical to an invited audience. Afterwards, those guests – including the original girls and several Grassington Players members, were asked to provide feedback on our favourite songs to help shape the final professional show.

The Girls opened at Leeds Grand in 2015, went on to the West End in 2017, and was then adapted for touring the provinces as *Calendar Girls: The Musical*.

Grassington Players' links to the original girls go back a long, long way. Beryl Bamforth, aka the real Miss January, joined the amateur dramatic society in 1970. She is now its longest serving member. John and Angela Baker were former members and Beryl fondly recalls directing Angela in *There Goes the Bride*, a production they took to a Drama Festival, where she was "dressed as a dolly bird". You could say the stage was set for their future exploits.

Beryl was 65 and the oldest of the original girls when the 2000 calendar was made. Her am dram confidence meant she was not in the least bit fazed. Her equivalent character, Jessie, in the fictional adaption, was played in Grassington by Jennifer Scott, herself even older at 77. She also played the character nine years ago when we staged the play.

Alongside a few new faces and professional directorial talent drafted in, in the form of Anita Adams and Mike Gilroy, our cast of nineteen featured seven of the same members from that production. Among them, Beryl's son, Mark Bamforth, played



Rod while his partner, Jane Ellison-Bates, reprised the role of Annie, the fictional character representing Angela Baker (played in the film by Julie Walters).

COVID challenged our production, as it has countless others. Originally, we auditioned and rehearsals were underway for performance in May 2020. Eventually, with the show rescheduled for this September, we were only able to restart rehearsals in July, with a few cast and crew adjustments due to changes in availability. Initially working on Zoom and then only permitted to meet in groups of just six, it was a difficult start.

As we all begin to emerge into the new post-lockdown world, the uplifting nature of this show was all the more meaningful for the audience and performers. There was added poignancy and irony in that cancer had directly impacted on our production too. Cast member Paula Vickers, originally reprising the role of Chris, had to drop out of rehearsals early last year to undergo gruelling treatment for throat cancer. Happily, eighteen months on, she has recovered sufficiently to drop into the role of Cora for this year's revised show dates. Tragically, however, the original set designer, Andrew Jackson, died of lung cancer in March. A retired GP, he had also been John Baker's doctor.

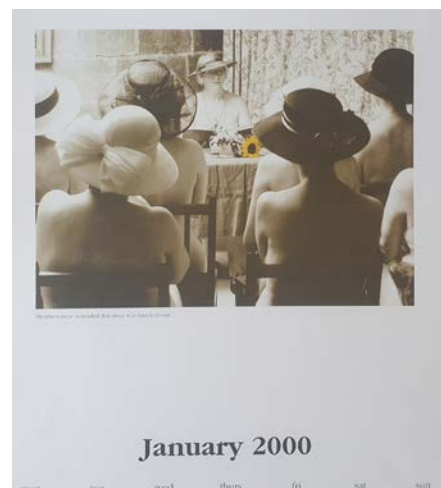
Then, during rehearsals, cast member Lottie Cuerden (playing wayward teen, Jenny) lost her mother, Bev Cuerden, another Grassington Players member who had fought the disease for four years. Penny Hart-Woods, who played the Helen Mirren role in the production, recently underwent treatment for breast cancer – so to be baring all now was particularly brave.



"We're going to need considerably bigger buns"



"I can do this!"



Beryl Bamforth Miss January 2000

The show must go on

NODA North West



The past two years has not been easy for any of us, but through the dark clouds comes a rainbow. Lights are being lit, curtains are opening and boards are being trod once again. For many groups, getting a show onto the stage has been a long and arduous affair. But through all the challenges that we have been up against, there are five infamous words that have never left...

The Show Must Go On

That is exactly what happened with Salt & Pepper Productions from Nantwich as they worked tirelessly to make *Calendar Girls the Musical* transform from a dream to reality.

Come RAIN or come SHINE the garden rehearsals took place. The stage was a gazebo, and the pianist took cover under an umbrella. Tea and coffee were supplied together with biscuits and cakes and all restrictions were followed.

Salt & Pepper Productions, a recently formed local theatre company were proud to bring this new vibrant musical to the stage in November, and were very excited to be the first company in the North West to do so.

Auditions took place by Zoom, which was a new experience for the group, but the criteria of bringing a cast together to have fun and put some enjoyment into their lives was achieved.

Joanna Milborne-Chatt, with her very dear friend Helen Mayne, are working together to create a great show - two local girls held in the highest esteem for their productions. Both the girls are schoolteachers and have had much success, over the years, for assisting students to further their talents to the professional stage.

With theatre being on hold for such a long time, this company wanted to put the SALT back into Northwich and add a little spice of PEPPER to all who needed it.

Garden rehearsals were just the tonic and even the neighbours enjoyed a sneak preview before the curtain opened in November.

With a very talented cast, *Calendar Girls The Musical* is a production not to be missed. Come along to the Grange Theatre to see the show and have a most enjoyable evening.

All profits will be divided between Headway and Blood Cancer UK.



Helen & Jo with refreshments

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Queen's award for voluntary service awarded to Sharnbrook Mill Theatre, Bedfordshire

NODA East



Sharnbrook Mill Theatre

On the 17th September a rare and highly prized honour was bestowed on one of Bedfordshire's flagship drama groups when The Sharnbrook Mill Theatre Trust was awarded The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service by HM The Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis. Equivalent to an MBE, it is the highest award that can be bestowed on a voluntary organisation. A truly remarkable achievement!

The award recognises the work the volunteers have undertaken to transform the former redundant, historic water mill into a thriving community theatre, for more than 40 years. Originally awarded in June 2020, the ceremony was delayed because of the pandemic. It was one of only 230 charities and voluntary groups to receive the award that year.

Situated on the River Great Ouse in rural North Bedfordshire, records about The Mill itself date back to a mention in The Domesday Book when it was originally referred to as Stoke Mills and was owned by Countess Judith, a niece of William The Conqueror and Hugh de Beauchamp. It was subsequently improved and updated throughout the Middle Ages and the Tudor period. Today the oldest part of the building still standing dates back to 1703. It continued as a working mill until 1969, when more modern production methods made it economically uncompetitive, and it was closed. Acquired by the Sharnbrook Mill Theatre Trust in 1975, under the Presidency of Lord Luke, it opened its doors in 1979, after 4 years of renovations,

with a production of the musical *Salad Days*.

Originally founded as 'Sharnbrook and North Beds Operatic Society' by Bill and Poppy Lilley, Bunny Marks and Betty Benson in 1943, Sharnbrook first performed at the local village hall and apart from a short spell at the Ritz in Rushden in the mid 70's have been providing local community theatre continually ever since.

The evening of the award itself was incredibly special, not least because it was the first time an audience had been in the auditorium since the beginning of the pandemic in March 2020. The atmosphere was palpable with anticipation and excitement. I'd almost forgotten what a buzz it is to sit in a live audience as, after a superb sit-down supper platter and a glass or two of liquid refreshment, we were ushered into the auditorium. That alone was worth the visit!

HM The Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis then presented to Douglas Pope, Chairman of the Trust, the scroll signed by Her Majesty and the domed crystal glass to Robert Hart the most senior member with 68 years membership. In his acceptance speech, Douglas Pope paid tribute to the many volunteers who had put in all the hard work over the years, particularly the late Brian Woodrow, '...who inspired us to feats of fundraising we never thought possible.'

After the speeches we were royally treated

to an evening of entertainment hosted by Tim Jackson-Waite, with snippets of past plays and musicals and even a taste of their first post pandemic production performed at the end of October, *Duets*. I can't emphasise how good it felt to see live theatre again and I still had a smile on my face the next day just thinking about it.

The whole ethos of Sharnbrook Mill Theatre was for me perfectly summed up in this part of Douglas Pope's speech:

'The last 18 months have been extremely difficult, certainly different in every respect and presented us with challenges never experienced before. A dark theatre without the buzz of rehearsals or performances, no music, no audience - just a very silent shell. Well, actually, we seized an opportunity and decided to install air-conditioning. We also embarked on re-decorating the auditorium and refurbishing the bar and foyer with the help of volunteers. Our production, marketing, governors and fundraising teams met regularly via the wonder of Zoom to make plans for as far forward as the end of 2022. I believe this represents the spirit I was referring to earlier.' - It does indeed Douglas!

So, my personal congratulations to Sharnbrook Mill Theatre Trust, you are a true inspiration to amateur theatre everywhere and fully deserve this award. And my personal thanks for a superbly well organised and presented evening.

Richard Fitt
NODA East District 2 Representative



Chairman Douglas Pope (left), HM The Lord Lieutenant of Bedfordshire, Helen Nellis and the longest serving member of the Trust, Bob Harte

Queen's award for voluntary service awarded to Sinodun Players and Corn Exchange Wallingford

NODA London

Volunteers from the Corn Exchange in Wallingford and the Sinodun Players, were at the theatre to witness the presentation of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service by Brian Buchan, Vice Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire to Gloria Wright, chair of the Sinodun Players.

Because of the pandemic the numbers of volunteers in the theatre were limited, but the event was streamed live to other volunteers using the theatre's video link. The recording will be available to the public soon on the Corn Exchange website.

Afterwards there was a reception in the garden of Bridge House by the Thames.

Lynda Atkins, Deputy Lord Lieutenant spoke about the work she had done in sponsoring the award and although she knew about the Corn Exchange before, she was amazed at the dedication of so many volunteers over the years. She will now be in charge of the Queen's Award for Voluntary Services in Oxfordshire, taking over from Brian Crossland.

Dr. Kate Tiller, Deputy Lord Lieutenant, spoke about the formal process that had been undertaken, but also the delight in finding out about all the activities that were carried out behind the scenes at the theatre.

In presenting the award, Brian Buchan commented on the small number of these awards compared to the individual awards, which meant that they were really significant, and complemented the volunteers on the persistence in coming through the pandemic unscathed.

Gloria Wright, chair of the Sinodun Players received the award and thanked the volunteers for their support from the early days through to the current times. She said that there had been many a crisis to overcome recently, but the effort from everyone had succeeded and we were now open again.



Brian Buchan Vice Lord Lieutenant



The Queens Award



Dennis Wood-President and John Jeskins-Trustee



Gloria Wright with the crystal





Getting to know your new National President Gordon Richardson

Like the Tokyo Olympics and the Football Euros perhaps it should have been named by reverting to the year the event was supposed to have taken place?

Sadly, we all know with great sorrow of the last 18 months or so, a period that has devastated our great hobby - but we will rebuild, of that I'm certain. It is fitting possibly that the last regional NODA event to take place in the country was NODA North's 'weekend' March 13-15th 2020, (a few days before 1st lockdown) and the first National event in the country after restrictions have been eased, that took place in Durham.

The result of lockdowns was that NODA Council made the decision that I would not accede to the presidency last September, (a decision I fully, but disappointedly, agreed with). Instead, my good friend and colleague, Christine Hunter Hughes would remain in the post of president for two years until this weekend. I have the upmost sympathy for Christine in that she has only had the full 'president experience' of visiting societies throughout the country as ambassador for five months in total out of the 24 months she has served. I sincerely hope she may get the experience again at some time in the future.

NODA's strapline is 'be inspired by amateur theatre' and this is quite fitting given my journey through this wonderful hobby of ours, for many people have inspired me throughout our journey together.

My home society, Murton TG (Murton AOS at the time), had just completed a Production of *Castles in Spain* at the end of October 1952 - my parents are named in the programme as having various functions within the production. It evidently was an inspirational show, as nine months later I arrived into this world...

My family, consisting of parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents, that by the time of their passing had amassed over 250 years

of service to amateur theatre just assumed that myself and my brother would continue the tradition. My brother did a walk on part in one show as a 13-year-old and found it not to his taste. I did a year as a 12-year-old rehearsing and performing in *The King and I* and, whilst being enjoyable, I had no intention of making it a lifelong hobby. Despite that lack of interest I did attend each and every one of their productions (even from birth in a pushchair). As a teenager, I helped my dad out on the side of the stage where he was one of the stage managers and it was this that was to prove pivotal in my life as, at the age of 18, I was performing what I considered was the important job of hanging onto the rope to draw in or out the half tabs in our production of *Call Me Madam*, quietly singing/humming along to the chorus numbers taking place a few feet away on stage. We had, at the time, a director who was a lovely

lady, but was very intimidating with a vocabulary that could make a sailor blush. She said in guttural tones, in a stage whisper much louder than my singing, "What the @@@@ do you think you're doing?" I replied very chastened, "Sorry" she responded, "No you A@@@, if you can sing in the wings you can sing on the stage. That's your audition. You've just joined Murton AOS". I'm not sure whether that counts as inspirational or fear, but a week later I started my first rehearsal and the rest as they say is history.

Once joined, I quickly realised that I enjoyed AGM's (strange I know) and very soon I found myself on the committee in a role my mother had occupied a few years before me; as membership

secretary. One of our founder members was a gentleman called George Hall, who, by that time was in his 80s and very frail. His mind however was as sharp as a tack, and I found it fascinating to chat to him and learn about the origins of the society and his experiences of NODA. He was the person that inspired me to find out more about the association and its aims. Hence, when a position came up for a Regional Representative in my district back in the early 2000's, I put my name forward - only to find myself defeated in an election. Not deterred, when the position



The Thenardiers - Credit David Brennan

came up again a few years later I applied again – only to once again be defeated. George had inspired me though, and a few years later at the start of 2010, I once again applied and this time was successful in yet another election.

During my ‘career’ in amateur theatre I found myself in love with drama and was drawn to plays whether tense, straight, comedy or surreal. I often think this is because I know my limitations and strengths, and singing isn’t one of my strengths...

Despite that, I have performed in many musicals over the years, including performing in *Me and My Girl* three times in the space of 10 months with three different societies; playing ‘Gerald’ twice and ‘Sir John’ once. Perhaps one of my favourite roles was playing ‘Jigger’ in *Carousel* against long time friend, Anne Malpass as ‘Mrs Mullens’. Anne and I loved hurling insults at each other on stage with such vigour and venom that there are children from the show, now grown up, that would cross to the other side of the street rather than meet me. The show cost me a fortune in purchasing sweets for the children just to prove I wasn’t an ogre in real life...

Perhaps my favourite role was that of ‘Jeff Douglas’ in *Brigadoon* – a cynical American who didn’t believe in anything – no acting required...

In the life away from the stage, I have had a lifelong love of Sunderland AFC despite her proving a fickle partner. Also, a lifelong interest in Amateur Radio with a ‘Ham’ license – yes I’ve heard the joke before – “You can’t be a Ham, they can cure ‘Hams’”.

Overriding all the other interests was NODA and I’m immensely proud of the Association. I did my upmost to serve my district well as Regional Representative and back in 2013, at the Cardiff National I found myself awarded the President’s Cup for services to theatre by outgoing President Fred Piggford, an act that inspired me to put in for the vacant post of Regional Councillor in our region – a post I have proudly held until last year, when I relinquished it assuming I was going into the presidency in 2020.

Like some form of mental GPS, I will forever remember how I spent my inauguration weekend, for the pride I felt in taking on the presidency of the Association. The weekend was also the 20th Anniversary of the Twin Towers falling in New York. All that witnessed that incident on TV will have them similarly remembering exactly where they were at the time. Despite the worst time in the US’s history, in recent times the incident inspired the true story of the ‘Come from Aways’ and the ‘humanity’ of the small town of Gander in Newfoundland that took in the ‘plane people’. One of those ‘plane people’ was a gentleman called Kevin Tuerff who was instrumental in helping a campaign of ‘Paying it Forward’ by doing small random acts of kindness for strangers.

For all the people that inspired me throughout my 50-year journey, I want my legacy to be aligned with that of the NODA Strapline – I want to ‘pay it forward’ because NODA has indeed allowed me to ‘Be inspired by amateur theatre’.

Gordon Richardson
NODA National President



Blitz



Edelweiss - The Sound of Music



The Wizard of Oz



In a Kilt! - Brigadoon



Half a Sixpence



Summer School Swiss Night



My Fair Lady - Murton Theatre Group 2020



NODA Patron Connie Fisher



3 'Wise' Monkeys

Chatsworth House Theatre

NODA East Midlands



Sylvia Jackson at The Chatsworth House Theatre

A talented theatre group has been treading the boards at the private family theatre at Chatsworth House for well over a decade. With a reputation for quality drama, the Chatsworth Players describe themselves as an amateur group with professional aspirations.

The theatre was originally built as a ballroom complete with minstrel gallery before the 8th Duke of Devonshire commissioned William Hemsley, a leading London theatrical designer, to convert it into a theatre in 1896. This added a permanent stage, painted proscenium arch and a number of sets – the majority of which still survive. However, the space is not without its limitations – it's small with tiny wings and only one entrance and exit.

But it is perfect for staging classics which have included *Blithe Spirit*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Gaslight*, *Hobson's Choice*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *An Inspector Calls*, *Jane Eyre*, *A Man For All Seasons*, and *Pygmalion*. The Chatsworth Players normally perform two shows a year. In July this year, to ensure Covid safety, they did their first outdoor performance with the French play, *Heroes*.

The group was founded by Sylvia Jackson – the daughter of a Derbyshire miner who trained at the prestigious Central School of Speech and Drama in London in the early 1950s, and went on to appear in many West End productions before choosing



Charley's Aunt dress rehearsal

family life back in Derbyshire. Sylvia was approached by Chatsworth for her advice on bringing the theatre back into use after having been used as a storage space for many years. She was captivated by it and decided to bring together ambitious local actors to perform there. The Chatsworth Players' first production was Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* in 2007.

Today the Players boast a passive membership list of 130. Performers come from a twenty-mile radius and a considerable number of them are professionally trained.

Current chair Lindsay says, "Performing at

Chatsworth is special for us and our patrons. From travelling to Chatsworth as the evening mist is descending and seeing the deer and sheep in the headlights, to pre-theatre drinks in the sculpture gallery, and the black-tie dinner on Saturday evening before the show starts."

The Players were devastated by Sylvia's death in 2020, from COVID-19. It was her love for the theatre that led her to found the Chatsworth Players and her legacy lives on through the group as it looks forward to once again stepping out onto the stage of one of the most intimate of grand theatre settings.

A lockdown proposal

NODA North



2020 will certainly be a year to remember, albeit not for many positive reasons. However, for one special couple in Sunderland Theatre Company - Mathew Clarke (the 2021 newly appointed Chairman) and Helen Smurthwaite - it is going to be a year to remember fondly.

Like many societies across the country, Sunderland Theatre Company took to weekly Friday night Zoom chats in replacement of their usual rehearsals. However, Friday 23rd October 2020, was to be a Zoom chat unlike any other.

In 2018, Mat and Helen met when Helen joined STCo's production of *Fame*. Through a fictional romance between their characters Nick Piazza & Serena Katz, an off-stage fairy-tale quickly blossomed between the pair. In October 2020, Mat decided to ask his theatre girlfriend to take the leading role as his wife. To help make the night one to remember, Mat asked the rest of Sunderland Theatre Company to assist, in a socially distanced manner.

The proposal began on Zoom, as was usual for a Friday evening, to avoid any suspicion from Helen. While she was entertained by the rest of the group, Mat sneaked off to get the final preparations completed. Eventually, Helen was instructed that she had a game to play. As it was approaching her birthday, she was convinced a birthday surprise would follow. Little did she know, it was much more special than that.

The game involved a large-scale 'treasure hunt' of precious memories, moments and places they had shared around Sunderland and other local areas. Mat sent Helen, in her car, to each special location via clues and riddles she solved to get her from one



place to the next. As Helen arrived at each location, she was greeted by members of STCo who would announce the next set of riddles and clues, all of which was being streamed live for those at home on Zoom. After visiting six different places, the hunt came to an end where their love story had begun: Deptford & Millfield Community Centre.

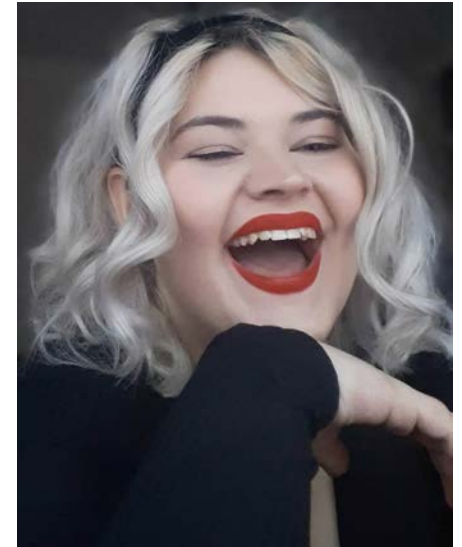
Meanwhile, Mat had been busy transforming the venue with candlelit staircases, rose petal trails, romantic stage lighting and a professional photographer on hand. Helen followed the trails through each room containing different surprises; a photo memory wall covered with 200 photos of the couple, quotes from all their friends and family and a big screen projector which played a video of 'Let's Play a Love Scene' from *Fame*, performed by Mat and many of their friends from STCo.

The final rose petal trail led Helen to 'the room where it happened'. This part of the night was kept private, while Mat finally proposed (with a little written seal of approval from his seven-year-old daughter Lilah) and Helen said, yes! It was certainly a Zoom call that they will never forget, and a night they will both remember and treasure for the rest of their lives.



Theatremask Bursary winner 2021

NODA Wales & Ireland



Following last year's winner, Theatremask Productions are pleased to announce that the 2021 recipient of the Theatremask Bursary Award is Mali Davies.

This bursary of £300 is a financial payment provided to assist with the costs associated with attending a college/university/drama school to advance their study of the performing arts. It is open to anyone under the age of 25 who has taken part in any productions staged by Theatremask Productions

Mali has recently won a place at Trinity Laban to study musical theatre and begins her training this September. Mali first joined Theatremask for rehearsals of *Evita* back in 2017, and has subsequently appeared in *75 years of Tenovus Cancer Care Concert* (2018), *Remembrance Day - Lest we forget* and *Christmas Cracker* both performed in 2019.

In 2018, Mali performed and won The Unawd Side Gerdd (song from a musical) category at the Urdd National Eisteddfod held in Builth Wells, her prize was to perform at a concert in Disneyland Paris.

Why Basingstoke is Talking About Jamie!

NODA South East



Max Harwood

The film version of the hit West End musical, *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* was released on September 17th. Starring in the lead role of Jamie New is newcomer Max Harwood from Basingstoke!

Max's love of theatre was evident from an early age; joining the local youth musical society BATS Next Gen at the age of 7 and performing with them until he was 16. He played various roles with the society; Dick Whittington's cat; narrator in *Three Murders*, *A Suicide* and *a Near Miss*; Rum Tum Tugger in *CATS* and the challenging Roger Davis in *Rent*. He then moved up to the adult society, BATS and on to study at Guildford School of Acting and Urdang. However, Max never dropped his links with BATS Next Gen – working as part of the backstage team for further shows until stardom beckoned. At one stage in his life his dream job was to be Secretary of the society!

Prior to the film's release, Amazon Studios arranged a preview screening at Basingstoke's local cinema and invited those who had played a part in Max's theatre life – from his secondary school music teacher through to Chair, Secretary and committee members of BATS Next Gen.

Max started filming *Maggie* in September, which also stars Tom Turgoose (*This is England*) and Tuppence Middleton (*The*



Max & Shiv in WWRV rehearsals

Imitation Game) so the Secretary of BATS Next Gen will have to continue until he can take over!

Alongside Max's success in the film, fellow Next Genner Shiv Rabheru also appears in the film and plays a huge daily part in the West End musical of *Everybody's Talking About Jamie*.

Shiv joined BATS Next Gen in 2007, and performed in several shows with Max, including portraying the 'Super Yuppie' in *We Will Rock You (School Edition)* 2008. He also danced with M&M Academy, often coming to a WWRV rehearsal straight after having danced for several hours – pure dedication!

Shiv left to study at Bird College and then at The Identity School of Acting. Since leaving, he has performed in several professional productions including *Sweeney Todd* (Liverpool Everyman) and portrayed 'Mr Mistofelees' in *CATS* (UK & International Tour). In 2017, he joined the original cast of *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* as 'Cy', one of Jamie's classmates. Shiv then became the company dance captain and has also worked backstage with the show while on tour. With the theatres now opening up again, he has returned to *Everybody's Talking About Jamie* to take on the role of Resident Director and Choreographer, responsible for keeping the show up to scratch every day. This



Max as Rum Tum Tugger. Credit Rachel Hollis

summer, he will direct a production of *Spring Awakening* at RADA.

Everyone at BATS Next Gen are very proud of what Max and Shiv have achieved so far, and they are both role models for the other young members as to what hard work, dedication and determination can lead to.

Sandie Thomson
Secretary, BATS Next Gen



Shiv Rabheru

Peace in our time

NODA South West

The pandemic did not stop the Cotswold Players and Stroud Arts Groups putting on Noel Coward's Play for a belated 75th Anniversary.

When asked if the Cotswold Players could put on a production to celebrate Stroud Arts Festival's 75th Anniversary, I had no hesitation in saying "yes" and then thought, "Why not put on a play written 75 years ago?" A quick search came up with *Peace in our Time*, a work I had not come across before. It was clearly a play with a compelling and tense story line and not the sort of thing one instantly associates with Noel Coward.

Somewhere in the script, a stage direction stating "A blast of Wagner assaults the ear" made me think - why not use live music throughout the play and, for the festival, ask our local 100 strong choral society and our local orchestra to be involved too? Stroud Arts Festival, Choral Society and Capriol Chamber Orchestra all agreed.

The play is an alternative history play of the Second World War, with the Nazis having won the Battle of Britain. Coward explores how he feels the English would have dealt with occupation rather than war and how resistance to undemocratic imposition of power would grow. He had spent much of the war in France working with British intelligence and had first-hand experience of the French struggle.

Set throughout in the Shy Gazelle pub in Sloane Square, eight short pieces of music would illustrate the passage of time, starting with the Third Reich's permitted composers like Beethoven, Wagner and Bruckner. As resistance grows to occupation more "subversive" English and American composers such as Britten, Vaughan Williams, Gershwin and Holst could be added. With a radio on the bar in the set, it was possible to imagine this music playing to the clientele.

At this point entered Coronavirus. Planning anything became uncertain but planning nothing didn't feel like an option, so online meetings, with the key players from the Orchestra and Choral Society, were maintained. As soon as it was felt the play could be scheduled in, virtual rehearsals started. Zoom choir and Zoom



Peace In Our Time - rehearsing in the garden. Credit John Salter



Peace In Our Time - on stage in the Shy Gazelle. Credit John Salter

orchestra rehearsals are a huge challenge but the teams were up to it. The day after restrictions were lifted, with six people able to meet together outside, we held our first play reading in a local pub garden. Auditions took place in a Covid secure Cotswold Playhouse and then play rehearsals started in my garden using surplus immunisation gazebos as cover from the elements.

Uncertainty about social distancing meant we'd not fit an orchestra, a choral society, 23 actors, backstage crew and an audience into one venue, so we recorded the orchestra, socially distanced, in their rehearsal space. This recording was used for online choral and acting rehearsals and with a week to opening, we recorded the choral society and mixed this with the orchestra to create the music's final "radio

version". Some complex technical wizardry allowed the pub landlord in the play to "switch on" the radio on stage which allowed our lighting technicians to switch the lights up on the choir and off as the music ended.

Our first shows back at our theatre nearly sold out. Significant challenges were overcome by a huge team effort from over one hundred people, making this unique production not only possible but a success. It was an enormous pleasure and privilege to work with so many talented people. Long live collaboration and long live Stroud Arts Festival!

John Salter
Director, *Peace in our Time*
Outreach Trustee, Cotswold Players.

Getting back to rehearsals – Larbert Musical Theatre

NODA Scotland



It's fair to say that we are all rather excited about getting back to rehearsals in some form or another. For us here at Larbert Musical Theatre that means panto time returned with Aladdin in the Dobbie Hall, Larbert, from 23 to 27 November 2022.

With the Scottish Government Guidelines changing regularly my hard-working committee are having to stay nimble and pro-active in keeping informed on the latest protocols and guidance, so that they can be interpreted and put into action for our members to attend rehearsals safely. Keeping our members safe in the rehearsal environment is of key importance to us, so much so, that this year we have appointed a dedicated committee post to keep an overall review on current guidelines and be a contact point for any member queries in relation to COVID safeguarding guidelines.

Before starting back in August 2021, we reached out to our members through the use of online surveys and discussions in our Zoom meetings, to get their feedback and thoughts on what would make them feel safe and secure for a return. We then fed those responses into our plans, combining

them with up-to-date guidance from the Scottish Government. Once we had these in place, we announced that panto rehearsals would return, with our membership being overwhelmingly positive that this was being planned.

Based on the legislation, guidelines and feedback, we chose to issue, in advance to all members, a rehearsal guide setting out what would be happening on our return and that for now this would be the new "normal". This included a "what to expect" section: for example, things such as no entry without a mask, provision of hand sanitiser at the entrances, temperature checks on arrival and seating pre-set out spaced apart in the room.

These were mostly protocols that would be expected of us but we felt it very important to reiterate these to all attendees so they were reassured that it would not be just as before. Our thanks also go to the Dobbie Hall Trust (who run the Dobbie Hall where we rehearse and perform our shows) with whom we have worked closely to ensure a safe return, for their continued support.

We also chose to issue a members' pledge

to all attending, which sets out what we are aiming to achieve and how each individual member can play their part in keeping themselves and each other safe by adhering to the measures in place. We recognise that putting on a show is a team effort and so we felt that it was important to build back the team ethos we had and really highlight its importance at the very start of our rehearsal process.

The committee has also undertaken to review the protocols in place on a regular basis so they can be altered and amended as appropriate, although I am happy to say that a few weeks in these seem to be working well!

We can't be complacent - 'Oh no, we can't!' I hear you say! Well, it is panto time.

After many discussions, hard work and team effort from all involved, it is just great to be back and I wish all other clubs and societies a successful route to return in these strange times!

Stewart Borthwick, President, Larbert Musical Theatre

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New to our musicals catalogue...



This 'chamber' musical by Simon Brett is based on his radio and two times BAFTA Award nominated television series, 'After Henry'.

Principals : 3m, 4f Support : 1m/f (No chorus)

It's easy to stage with a small cast and can be performed either with an orchestra or just a keyboard. The casting requirements involve three elderly actors who provide the majority of the comedy. Add to this the often strained relationship between a mother, her mother, and her daughter.

Sarah often finds herself in the middle of things, not least because her daughter, Claire, lives upstairs and her mother, Eleanor, lives in the basement flat.

Eleanor is ruthlessly cunning and takes every opportunity to get one over on Sarah. Anything told to her will, with her friend Valerie Brown's half sister, Mary's help, add to the local geriatric gossip. Clare is trying to be independent of her mother, but her relationship with her boyfriend is often in crisis. Through all this Sarah is having to come to terms with the death some years ago of her husband, and to find inner strength to face her new life, after Henry.

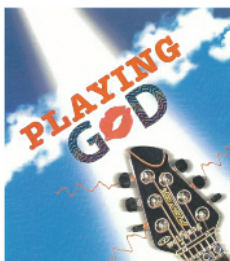
And for the 'D in NODA' people...

Playing God by Laurence Marks and Maurice Gran

(TV Writers: 'Birds Of A Feather', 'The New Statesman' etc)

(2m, 2f) **Full Length Comedy**

Ed is a rock and roll legend. He's married to the beautiful and vivacious Claudia, a travel writer with a guilty secret. Best friend Clive is a man of contradictions. He's married to high-flying Henri, a tough businesswoman with a spiritual side. One night during dinner, Ed makes an announcement that puts them all off their pudding. Suddenly everything's changed. The beat may be the same, but now they're dancing a very different tune.



More plays by Marks & Gran...

Full Length, Drama

Dr Freud Will See You Now, Mrs Hitler

Full Length, Comedy

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Someone is happy theatre is back!

From the sudden closure back in March 2020, this small theatre tells its story of its dark months through to getting live theatre back onto stage, with a few detours along the way!

459 days. That was the length of time The Angles Theatre, Wisbech remained closed. The theatre is located in the flatlands of Fenland, Cambridgeshire, at the time of closure, seating only 102 people in a blackbox studio setting. With thousands of performers, students, audience members and volunteers coming through the doors each year, the sudden closure as with everything in the country, came as a massive blow to the community.

The Angles Theatre is one of the oldest original theatres in the county, built in the 1780s. It's original interior, very similar to the Georgian Theatre Royal in Richmond, has largely been removed over its 200 odd year history. All that now remains on show are two cast iron pillars, an original beam that held up the upper circles and bricked up doorways into the original seating areas. As with most theatres of this era, after closing in the 1850s, the building was utilised for other purposes - in this case, a grain store, two different churches, a tent store, a school and at one point they considered turning it into public baths!

Refounded in the 1970s by a group of local amateur performers looking for somewhere to rehearse, the theatre was reopened as The Angles Theatre, providing performance spaces for amateur and professional companies.

March 2020, the first time in the building's 250+ year life, it was closed with no-one coming through its doors. On the night that Boris Johnson announced the closure of theatres, we left around 10pm, having prepped the building for closure, we were saying, worst case scenario it will be a couple of months

before we are back. We were obviously very wrong.

As a Trustee, our first priority was survival. We are not a theatre that turns a profit very often and had very little in the way of cash reserves. Local government rates relief grants certainly helped in those first few months as did the support of local Charitable Trusts. As more time went by, costs to keep the building closed were increasing and the building itself was deteriorating. Being closed actually gave us time to walk round the building and actually look at it. Normally you are engrossed in the show and do not take the time to notice the state of the toilets or the plasterwork coming away from the corridor walls. It was at that point our 'survival' efforts split into two. The survival of the charity and the survival of the building. During the summer of 2020, the government announced its Cultural Recovery Funding scheme administered by the Arts Council. To say we were out of our depth is an understatement. After many hours of rewrites, the application was sent off and our fate was in the hands of the Arts Council. During this time we were also writing applications for essential building works to bring the venue up to date in not only comfort, but also Health and Safety: replacing fire doors and fireproofing, much needed refurbishment of toilets and replacement of badly damaged lime plaster.

After several months waiting for news, we finally received the announcement that we had been successful in our CRF grant application! The morning I found out, I was literally bouncing off the ceiling! At that point we could breathe a small sigh of relief as we knew we could survive



The stage floor removal in progress

as an organisation and actually come out of the pandemic in a stronger position.

As the building work started to progress, new finds were made including an original doorway into the theatre not on any old plans, another original beam that supported the top of the upper circle and wall ties in our gents' toilets. The auditorium seating was completely replaced, from second hand seats obtained from Salisbury Playhouse in the 1980s to brand new theatre seating that did not have springs poking out!

For every show, we paint our stage floor using standard emulsion. The last time the floor was replaced was back in 1991, and now had many ridges and unevenness. In some cases when trucks were used on stage, you would have to either take a hammer and chisel to a ridge or use the ridge as a break. In what some people may call a stupid move, one day we thought we would rip it up and level it. The two test areas we tried lifted like a dream in a big 'slab', great this will be an nice easy task... famous last words. Three wrecking bars, an industrial sander and a lot of blood sweat and tears, two weeks later the stage was ready for levelling. In some areas there was a 5cm difference in height so vast amounts of packing was needed to try and level the flooring. As volunteers and cast members started coming into the venue and seeing the amazing changes, this was the one that everyone was most excited about!

So we had our reopening date set, and in traditional theatre style, we had huge amounts to do before opening night! The gents' toilets didn't have working toilets, the bar didn't have a floor and an



Old seat bases ready for recycling

entire section of the original wall had been stripped back to bare bricks.

As restrictions eased, we were able to restart in person rehearsals, starting with small groups before bringing in the full company. From July, we had two shows in rehearsals, *Educating Rita* - a two hander and *Shrek the musical* - a big cast show. To ensure everyone's safety, through discussion with the company, everyone agreed to carry out a lateral flow test before every rehearsal. They were just as interested in getting the show onstage as the theatre and without fail before every rehearsal, messages with photos of negative tests flowed in.

Our first performance! I have been trying to get the rights for *Educating Rita* for just over 10 years and to have it as our opening show did mean a lot and even more so that the director, who having been in shows since she was a young child and having just finished university, returned to the theatre to make her directing debut. Opening with a two-hander also meant we could ease back into being open. All of our volunteers

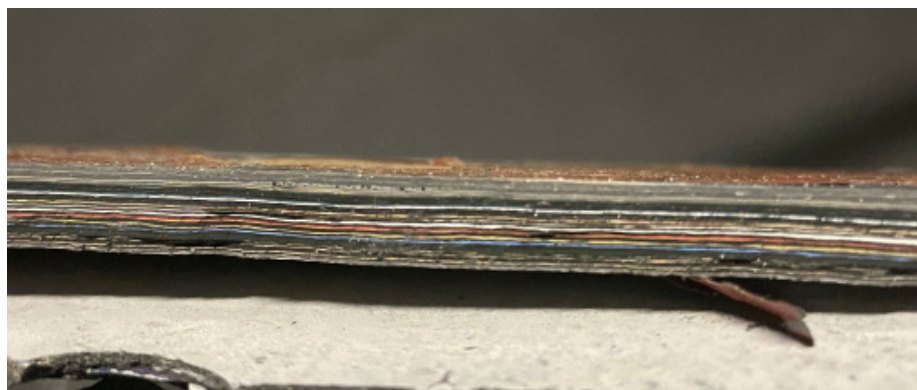


Bar laminate flooring stripped out

needed training on new systems and, after such a long time being closed, a refresher. For those who do not know *Educating Rita*, it is a huge show to learn, not only the script, but also the 'English lessons' throughout, Frank having to teach Rita the intricacies of the English language, on stage, as well as acting the part. One little highlight was Al Duncan, who played the part of Frank, wrote poetry during the show whilst Rita was 'doing her essays'.

The audience loved every second of it and it was electrifying to hear the applause and cheering at the end of every show. We were back!

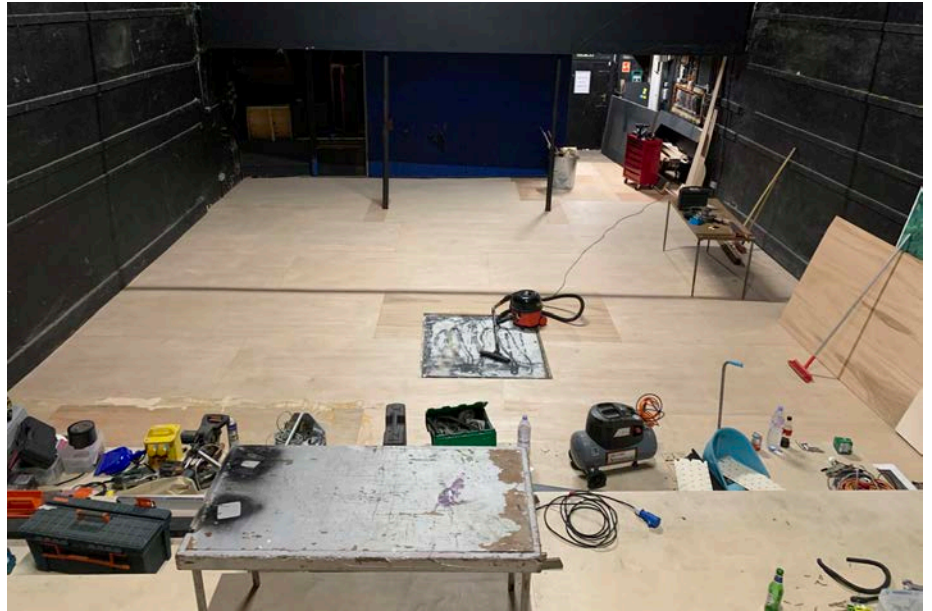
No rest for the wicked, as soon as *Educating Rita* came down, preparation for *Shrek* started in earnest. Being a small theatre, we cannot hire sets or hire full sets of costumes so with our small budget, everything is made from scratch. After a set design workshop from a recent Rose Bruford graduate, a set box was created and a team assembled to build and dress. Costume production was in full swing and soon it was time for dress rehearsal!



20-years worth of paint layers



Georgian doorway uncovered



Nearly completed new stage floor

We knew Shrek would sell well, but we were nervous that customers' confidence in returning to the theatre would not be there yet, especially a very small theatre! Oh, how we were wrong. We sold every single ticket we had a week before opening - this has never happened before! It seemed there was an underground market for returned tickets!

Shrek was the perfect feel good show to have in our opening season and the audience were on their feet during curtain call every night. Young children were experiencing theatre for the first time along with seasoned theatre veterans. It just showed what we have missed for all those months, how tv and online shows could never replace the experience of an up close and personal live show. Live theatre is here to stay...now onto pantomime!

Rob Williams
Angles Theatre Wisbech Trustee



Educating Rita



Shrek the Musical Dragon and Puppet



Shrek the Musical Lord Farquaad

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**If you think you or a child is in immediate danger and needs urgent help,
please call the police on 999**

For non-urgent queries the best place to start is always with your Local Authority -
their contact details can be found online or by calling your County Council / Borough
Council.

For more advice or training
NSPCC - www.nspcc.org.uk
NNCEE - National Network for Children in Employment and Entertainment
www.nncee.org.uk

The Little Shop of Horrors, where it took Audrey over 18 months to grow!

noda youth North East



Photo credit = Annette Crook Photography

Having rehearsed from 2019, the cast and crew of *Little Shop of Horrors* by Rotherham Teachers' Student Academy were devastated when their production was stopped in its tracks at Rotherham Civic Theatre in March 2020. With everything ready to go and the stage literally set as Mr Mushnik's flower shop, a pandemic (not a man-eating plant) brought everything to a halt. Dee Bennie-Marshall, Director and Choreographer, was determined that, despite the disappointment, the show would eventually go on. Keeping in touch with her team throughout lockdown, with online rehearsals and quizzes, she and her production team ensured that this talented group of young people continued to work towards their dream of performing.

Dan Fenwick (22), who played Seymour in the production, spoke with the NODA North East Youth Co-ordinator about his experiences.

Q: How did you feel when the show was cancelled in March 2020?

I was absolutely gutted! It was not a nice feeling but, looking back, it really did make sense as everyone's safety was the most important thing and I feel that the wait to be on stage made the show even better.

Q: What did you do to stay on top of your role during the 18 month gap?

NODA Today - Winter 2021

I will be honest, for a long time I really struggled to listen to the music or even think about the show. It felt like a kick in the teeth every time I did but, when restrictions lifted, I just threw myself into the show, the rehearsal process and the performance. I found that having not been able to perform for so long meant that I just put every bit of energy into the production. I didn't want to take it for granted, or miss out on the opportunity again, or ever think that I could have done something better particularly with the uncertainty of impending lockdowns and isolations. I wanted to be happy with the performance I had given, because you never know when your last performance might be.

Q: How did it feel to be back on stage in September 2021?

It was the most amazing feeling ever, the atmosphere was electric. Performers were itching to get back on stage again and audiences were itching to get back in the theatre, doing what they love, so the appreciation from all parties involved felt much higher than usual. The adrenaline rush from performing is always amazing but, after such a long break, it felt better than ever. The cast, company and all involved with the production were incredible and the show would not have been possible if

everyone had not committed 100%.

In conclusion, Dan summed up his feelings by saying: *"I am so grateful for every opportunity when it comes to performing and feel that it makes my life, and a lot of others' lives, better. My whole life revolves around it, so to be back doing what I love, with people I love, is such a good feeling. I would like to say a special mention to the founders of RTSA for keeping everyone going over the last 18 months, with Zoom rehearsals, online quizzes and talent shows. It has been difficult for so many people, but for everyone from RTSA, it has been made so much more bearable by the support and morale boosters we have received. I have been with RTSA for 12 years now, and I finish next year, and to be honest I don't know what I am going to do with myself. But the academy will always hold a special place in my heart and the friends and family that it has allowed me to meet have been incredible."*

Dee Bennie-Marshall voiced the feelings of everyone involved when she said on opening night: *"We're back where we belong, doing what we were born to do. After all the heartache, frustration and worry we were determined to stick together and keep rehearsing – Tonight We Made It!"*

Jo Sykes, Youth Co-ordinator, NODA North East

Comberton Players Youth – Wind in the Willows



Comberton Players Youth was started in May 2020. Previously our young people had been involved in our annual pantomime, mostly as chorus members and smaller named parts, but COVID prompted the start of some online workshops for our young people. Our first sessions were online play readings, which provided structure and seemed to eliminate some of the awkwardness that sometimes occurs over Zoom, as everyone knew what to say and when to say it. In July 2020, we ran a summer school, producing a short film adaptation of *Alice in Wonderland*. We rehearsed and filmed this in small groups in gardens around Comberton. The Alice stories were a great choice for subject matter, as they are essentially a series of small meetings with amazing characters, with the croquet scene being a favourite with the young people!

Our term time Zoom meetings continued into the autumn, and in January we decided that we needed a project to give a real focus to our Zoom sessions. We started workshoping Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* story in February. At this point Elliott, one of our previous panto leads, joined me in leading sessions.

Each session we would look at the next part of the story, and improvise scenes between characters, mime events, and look for those 'gaps' in the story, where the young people could bring their own

ideas and interpretations to the story. There was a definite freedom to these workshops where any idea was shared, and the young people built on other's ideas with delight. There were lots of giggles, and an unexpected lack of inhibition that came through improvisation via Zoom. The ideas that the young people had were truly original, crazy and fun, and so much better than if I had sat by myself trying to adapt this story for the stage. Through improvisation, a group of Stately And Dignified Herons, (SAD Herons for short) appeared on the river and ended up popping up throughout our version. When improvising Toad's court scene, one character called Mr Toad a 'Frog', to which our Toad replied: 'How dare you use the F word!' (That joke definitely made the

script!) We also developed characterful horses to pull Toad's caravan called Princess, an ex-dressage champion, and Neigh-than, a grumpy horse with a passion for cherries. The puns devised by the children when they were being Wild Wood Weasels planning to eat Mole were fab – Guaca-Mole or Mole-Teasers anyone?

So much content from our Zoom improvisations stuck, and ended up in our final scripts. Once we had improvised the story, many of the children volunteered to write a part of the script. The *Wind in the Willows* story was split in half, and the younger group went on to write, rehearse and perform the first half of the story and the older group the second. Each writer had an overview of what needed to



happen in their scene, some notes from our improvisations, perhaps some extracts from the original book and a word count. They each had two weeks to write and return their scenes, and then we knitted it all together using extracts from the original story as well as further ideas from our improvisations. The improvisations and writing formed the bulk of our project and was all conducted online. The final script was pacey, with well-defined and consistent characters and full of humour. When we started rehearsing in June, we found that our work so far meant that the young people already had a really clear idea of their characters. We rehearsed during June in gardens, and, at the start of July, we had a performance weekend, with rehearsals from Friday to Sunday, culminating in two performances on the Sunday afternoon for families.

Our rehearsals were a collaborative process, with everyone contributing ideas throughout. We decided to go for minimal set and props, but use a few key pieces in multiple ways. So, a pair of stools, some broomsticks, picnic plates and gingham fabric became a caravan, a boat, a car and a prison cell amongst other things!



The final performances were a great success. The children often played multiple roles which were clearly defined. Their use of voice, posture, facial expression and movement were fantastic, to tell the story in a humorous, engaging way. The action was fast-paced and the transitions were slick. But above all else, the young people portrayed a sense of fun, they looked so relaxed on stage and the audience loved it! One of the priorities for this project was that every participant should have a voice within it, and this truly happened.

From contributing to set, prop and costume ideas, to creating characters, jokes and scripts, to helping to stage the performance, this was a joyous example of theatrical collaboration, full of laughter and silliness! And Ratty's wisdom rings true...

'There is NOTHING - absolute nothing - half so much worth doing as simply messing about (in boats.) Simply messing!'

Rachel Nielsen - Director and Co-Chair of Comberton Players

A weird and wonderful year for Llandudno Youth Music Theatre



Over the last 18 months, the LYMT community has shone even though we haven't been able to meet in person for most of it. After all...Thursday night is Music Theatre Night!

This year, members have worked on a devised piece, developing amazing skills such as creating characters, a storyline, scenes, monologues, music and lyrics as well as designing costumes, set and deciding on filming locations. We hope to bring together a documentary of everything they have been working on later this year.

Other exciting online Zoom sessions have included a 'Creative Writing' workshop with Chloe Perrin, a 'Performing on Zoom' workshop with Craig Whiteley and a really informative 'Music Programming' workshop from our very own Euan Butterworth. Members put together a fantastic online concert last year and also recorded themselves singing 'The

Day After Tomorrow' from *Blitz!* which was then arranged for social media by Gareth Weedon. We have played games and quizzes galore - Musical Quizzes, Christmas Quizzes, Guess Who...we're all quizzed out! We have all sang along to Mr. Jones playing A B C D E F G backwards in our bedrooms (thanks for the cheat notes Louis!) and Eva and Mr. Jones even spoke to the 'Go Compare' man on the radio!

Returning to live rehearsals has been amazing! We have welcomed our new members in person, played *Wink Murder* and the ever popular *Splat Bang*, had fun with improvisation sessions, worked on *The Seven Deadly Sins* devised piece, sang *The Time Warp* on the tennis courts and *Shine* at St Paul's.

And of course, everyone's favourite Thursday night moment has been Mr. Jones's fabulous joke! Thanks for keeping our lockdowns cheery and fun everyone,



Previous production of *Oklahoma*

Trials and tribulations during the pandemic

red youth North West



John Coates, Director of SONG, recalls the trials and tribulations of putting on a show during the worst pandemic of our times.

Putting on a production at any time of the year we all know can be a rollercoaster of emotions: the drama of casting, the stamina during rehearsals and the pure joy of seeing the production played out to an audience. However, as no doubt we are all aware, those minute obstacles that can hinder a show appear and can cause problems. How I wished we had been blessed with small details, as opposed to the huge chasms we had to cross when SONG took on *Footloose*. We were faced with life imitating art, as not only our theatre community, but the world, was faced with a ban on the arts.

The production was cast in September 2019. Within 2 months into rehearsal, our director at the time had to step aside. This is when I stepped in. In the next few months, the show was in full swing.

The work was clear to see, we had a wonderful show on our hands. Even Jim popped down for a cup of tea and can attest to the fact we were 6 weeks away and our show was good to go. Then Covid came along and stopped the world and, sadly, our production. To be so close to the finish line with a group of talented youth theatre actors was heart-breaking. I was

incredibly proud of them, every fibre in my being could not let them down. They had faith in us, and we would not deny them their show. We held a Zoom meeting with our principals asking them if they wanted to close the book on the show or continue; to my relief it was the latter.

So, we made a new plan. We would move the date from April 2020, to a year later, April 2021. To make this happen we also then had to move our date for *Shrek* from April 2021 to April 2022. This could not have been done without our secretary, Linda Davies, who was also negotiating the fact that a professional production of *Footloose* was due to go out that year. Linda discussed with the rights holders, who told us that we could do the show, but we could only have half capacity. We felt this wouldn't be a problem. This would not have been possible without the support of the rights holders who could not have been more helpful.

Sadly, we lost some of our members to the pressures of the new exam conditions; we lost our leading man to a BYMT course. So, we found ourselves yet again in a tough spot. I looked to something I've used myself in the industry - The Self Tape. We conducted auditions via WhatsApp videos they sent us. By doing this we managed to cast our ensemble members, but we waited until Jan 2021, to cast our Ren as we had two boys who answered our call.

We felt we had to see them. So, under very strict audition guidelines, we invited them down and we selected our leading man. We then had to go back to online sessions (sadly due to lockdown) and April was getting closer and a decision had to be made. We had to once again move our show from April to our August date and we moved our production of *We Will Rock You* from August 2021 to July 2022. This was the absolute final chance we had, it all rested on this date.

We reconvened on Zoom by holding Masterclasses with friends of SONG and industry colleagues of mine. They spoke to people who worked as puppeteers in *Star Wars*, cast members of *Six & Come From Away*, graduates finishing drama school, drama schoolteachers, actors who have worked on Netflix shows, cruise ship performers, we even had a live link to L.A. to chat to an actress who worked in Hollywood & Vegas. We made them informative, entertaining and above all instilled the values of theatre. Each one of them talked about the importance of teamwork and supporting each other. In May, we eventually managed to reconvene rehearsals with the help of our Covid Officer, Gill Corcoran, but with the added task of only allowing 15 cast members in the room at any one time. So, with the use of shields, masks and a lot of hand gel, we finally stepped back into our space.



Finally, the show could move towards its August date. Each time we got closer to freedom day, we were closer to our dream, until a phone call from the technical manager at The Atkinson, informing me that due to guidelines we could only have 8 cast on stage at any one time. It's moments like this you just dig deep, believe in your passion, keep focused and rely on your production team. I must say Musical Director, David Wall, was a huge rock to me and so very supportive. Above all the company believed in us, so we found strength.

I informed the company that we would again have to make some changes, we could not have our company of 28 on stage, but instead we would have to find a way to tell the story while still keeping all the cast involved. I reimagined the opening number, then had to go through every scene and re-block for the third time. This was a huge ask to our company who already had the show postponed twice - they couldn't even bow as a company. Having the support of Hilary Thompson, running scenes for me whilst plotting a new lighting design, was a huge help. We also couldn't use the scenery as we needed the space backstage now for socially distancing. Bev Newton, our treasurer, worked tirelessly trying to keep everything balanced. It was a huge ask for our hard-working committee, yet I can honestly say, through the whole process, not once did I ever hear a single member of the company/committee complain. They kept their heads so high, happy to be back in the rehearsal room.

With just three weeks to go, the production was ready. The cast had worked incredibly hard and it finally looked like it was going to happen. It was at that point the theatre informed us we could only have 6 on stage and only 100 audience members (a quarter of the capacity). This was something we couldn't fix, I needed 8 actors on stage. The determination, hard work and perseverance from the staff at The Atkinson, in particular Si Grainger, who worked tirelessly to see his theatre house open again was inspirational. Our show was in his hands, 18 months of hard work. He did not want to give up, he spoke to the council and pointed out all the safeguards our company was prepared to

do to go on stage: they would test daily and they would wear masks when they were in the wings and backstage. Based on this, the council approved us to have 8 on stage our show so could go ahead. This company of 10-18 year-olds behaved in such an exemplary manner.

What happened in show week was extremely emotional. To see the curtain finally close on our opening night after so much hard work and heartbreak along the way is something I will remember for a long time to come. Having our Regional NODA rep, Jim Briscoe, present on our opening night and being able to have a distanced chat afterwards to the company, I know meant a great deal. It was nice to meet Kit, the North West Youth Coordinator, we look forward to working with him. The messages of support, the feeling of hope and the incredible teamwork to allow theatre to course through our veins once again, will be something I will cherish forever. It simply could not have happened without the passion from a company, dedication of a strong committee and the love of a theatre determined to support a company and relight the stage.

I don't think I'll ever experience a rollercoaster like it again and I hope we don't as a theatrical community. Now more than ever, we must support each other in our love of the arts. We now are into our next production - *ELF the Musical*, to be performed 24th-27th November at The Atkinson Theatre, happy to say we can play to a full capacity and have every cast member on stage.



NODA Presidential Gala 2021

September 2021, saw the first in person NODA event since the NODA North AGM back in March 2020. Having been postponed in 2020, the Presidential Gala in Durham had a lot to live up to. The venue, set upon the banks of the River Wear was the perfect location for the weekend's festivities.

As is tradition, the AGM was held on the Gala afternoon. Outgoing National President, Christine Hunter Hughes, recounted stories of a unique presidential term and outgoing Chairman of Trustees, Micheal Hastilow giving his final addresses to the membership. The President of our sister organisaion The Association of Irish Musical Theatre Societies (AIMS), Rob Donnelly spoke of the future for both organisations and the importance of our shared hobby.

Christine Hunter Hughes's last duty as President was to award her President's Trophy, this year to Axminster Drama Club for their production of *George's Marvelous Medicine*.

Incoming National President, Gordon Richardson, gave an emotional address, pulling from his family history to show that NODA is so much more than just a 'membership organisaion'.

Into the evening, attendees were entertained by the amazing Middlesbrough Youth Theatre, performing songs from *Rent*, *Dear Evan Hansen* and on the 20th anniversary of 9/11 a selection of songs from the musical *Come From Away*. On such a poignant day, this, for a lot of people in the room, including myself, was the first live entertainment they had seen since March 2020.

To sing us into the evening was the swing singer, Alice Grace, who, due to car trouble that evening, was given 1 hour's notice of performing from the original singer! She certainly did not dissappoint, with the audience transfixed by her beautiful tones for the duration of her set.

The National Gala is so much more than an AGM, it is a celebration of all things NODA and more importantly a celebration of our amazing hobby.

Photos courtesy of Signature Times



Outgoing President, Christine Hunter Hughes and outgoing Chairman of Trustees, Michael Hastilow giving their final addresses.



NODA National President, Gordon Richardson



NODA National President, Gordon Richardson with AIMS National President, Rob Donnelly



Gordon Richardson presenting Kirstie Turnbull of Dinnington Operatic Society the best Standard Class Programme award for '9 to 5'.



Gordon Richardson presenting Leigh Conley of Axminster Drama Club, the Best Trophy Award for 'George's Marvellous Medicine'.



Seven former NODA National Presidents with the current trustees.



Alice Grace, our singer for the evening.



Gordon Richardson giving his evening address.



Every party needs a cake!



Cheers!



AIMS President Rob Donnelly and former AIMS President Colm Moules



Entertainment by Brian Pennick and Compere for the evening Douglas Shearer MBE.



The cabaret performance performed by Middlesbrough Youth Theatre including songs from 'Rent', 'Dear Evan Hansen' and the poignant 'Come From Away'.



Axminster Drama Club Wins National NODA Award

NODA South West



Awards for Axminster Drama Club – The club was presented with The President's Award and the top position in the NODA Best Poster Competition.

Out-going NODA President chooses East Devon Club for prestigious award!

Axminster Drama Club has been awarded a trophy by the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA).

Each outgoing president of the organisation has the opportunity to present The President's Trophy to a club of their choice, and, on this occasion, Christine Hunter Hughes chose the East Devon Club to be the recipient for its production of *George's Marvellous Medicine* in December 2019.

In making the presentation at The NODA Gala Evening, she explained that despite the pandemic forcing the abandonment of many productions, she still had a tough decision to make in deciding which society in the whole country should be given the award.

She said: "Even allowing for the reduced number of productions, there were still many contenders for so many very different reasons, but the society I would like to present the President's Award to is Axminster Drama Club (ADC) for its production of 'George's Marvellous Medicine'. I was so impressed with

this Christmas production, which I attended in December 2019, and which, although primarily a show for children, grabbed and kept the attention of the whole audience. I was also impressed with the whole team spirit so clearly displayed right across the group, who made all their own props, scenery and costumes.

The group embodies my vision of our hobby bringing as it does, the feeling of friendship, camaraderie, tolerance, with a sense of belonging and community, as well as great entertainment for their audience."

The award was made at a ceremony held in Durham earlier in September and it was accepted on behalf of ADC by chairman Leigh Conley and fellow member Ellis Holt.

The pair also accepted top award in the NODA Best Poster Competition, which was also for *George's Marvellous Medicine*.

Mr Conley said: "The awards reflect what is a real team effort to stage each production and we were delighted to attend the gala on behalf of the club to accept these national accolades."

The club is now preparing for its next show, which will be *Nativity! The Musical*, which is due to be staged at The Guildhall, in Axminster, on Friday, December 17 and Saturday, December 18.

Leigh Conley



Leigh Conley and Ellis Holt- Club chairman Leigh Conley and fellow member Ellis Holt, attended the gala on behalf of ADC.

Jean Taylor appreciation

NODA North East



Jean became a NODA Representative in 1984, and served for 31 years until her retirement in 2015. During that time she served on various sub-committees, in particular being secretary for the North East Region's programme and Poster competition.

Jean held the NODA Diamond Bar and 65 year long service award and, after 25 years' service as a representative, she was awarded Life Membership at the NODA

National Conference in 2009.

Sadly, Jean passed away on 14 July after a relatively short illness.

Jean was a long serving member of the Huddersfield Amateur Operatic Society from when she was a teenager, joining when the society recommenced productions after WWII. Her first show was *Merrie England*, performed at Huddersfield Theatre Royal, which was sadly demolished in the 1960s, and went on to perform with several Huddersfield societies both in principal roles and chorus. It was here where she met her future husband Stan and they were married in 1958.

Together they performed with various amateur groups, including concert parties, performing in hospitals and old folk's homes.

Her last main production on stage was *The Card* in 1977, which was when her daughter Julia made her debut for the backstage crew. After this, Jean made one more stage appearance with her whole family, Jean, Stan and Julia, in the rock musical *Time in Time Out*. This was written by local school teachers and produced by the Huddersfield Amateur Operatic Society and later taken to Bridlington to be performed at the Region's Gala Weekend Midnight Cabaret.

When Jean finished her performing career, she concentrated on backstage activities forming, along with others, the Huddersfield Make-up Team which now travels the area providing this service for several societies and also trains other people to use the skills with their own societies.

The return of the Florians

NODA Scotland

The Florians originally intended to perform *The Steamie* in June 2020. We auditioned and cast the production in March, and just a week later entered lockdown. We then rescheduled to September 2020, and again to June 2021, before finally performing this September.

Although a couple of the original cast were no longer available, we recast the parts and began rehearsals, somewhat apprehensively, in mid-June.

Restrictions at the time meant the cast had to remain 2m apart which did prove challenging, but with the reduction to 1m distancing the process was made much easier. Fortunately for us, *The Steamie* lent itself extremely well to the distancing imposed on us with each character in their own washing stall.

At this point in time, we still had no idea what size (if any) audience we would be allowed, so we approached the licence holders and acquired online streaming rights.

Thankfully, by the time of show week in September, we were in fact allowed a



capacity audience and, to our surprise and delight, we played to virtually full houses each night in addition to those who watched online.

It was an incredible feeling to perform in front of a live audience again and to hear laughter ringing throughout the theatre. It was an amazing experience which I'm sure

the cast and crew will remember for a long time to come.

With the further easing of restrictions, we are looking forward to starting rehearsals for our Christmas production, *A Vicar of Dibley Christmas*.

Caroline Nicol, Secretary, The Florians

How we became heroes in lockdown

NODA Scotland

Late in 2019, Elgin Amateur Dramatic Society agreed to produce a play written by one of its members, Ian Glover. The play told the story of a group of four young people and their quest to attend the *Live Aid Concert* in July 1985.

Not long after the play was cast and blocking rehearsals had begun, the news became rife with stories of a pandemic which was causing significant hospitalisation in the Far East. Before we had progressed much further, it was seriously affecting Italy and then, we were in lockdown. “*It will be fine, a few weeks and we’ll all be up and running again*” was the mood in the society!

Little did we know. Time marched on, days became weeks, weeks became months and the future became darker. A decision was taken to cancel the production. Next, we realised that we were going to have to cancel our annual pantomime too; a significant blow as the pantomime is the main income for the society.

Initial frustration became despair as Ian thought all his hard work was in vain. By January 2021, however, a kernel of an idea was growing in his mind: “*Could I convert my play into a radio play?*” Despite never having done anything remotely like this before, the EADS Committee were keen to support Ian and took on the task of helping him to identify how best to get his play out to a listening audience. Chats with friends quickly identified how we might be able to do it as a podcast and Ian furiously began a re-drafting of his work into a series of scenes lasting no more than about ten minutes. Ian wrote it to include mini-climaxes to end each scene and the play was re-cast as not all the original cast were able to participate.

Rehearsing on Zoom started, but it became clear that this would never be a suitable environment to record the play as a one. Some of the actors had the necessary equipment to record their own lines and, when lockdown allowed people to meet, the remainder of the cast were able to interact, sufficiently socially-distanced, to get the rest of the lines into the Bandlab “cloud”. Ian spent hours mixing the various tracks, sound effects and music to create



the necessary ‘final cut’. The early hours of the night became a regular date in Ian’s calendar and he took a massive learning curve to learn the technicalities of creating the recording.

A significant date was approaching: July 13th was the 36th anniversary of the *Live Aid Concerts*. Could we get the first episode out on that date? And that’s how we became *Heroes*!

Heroes, written, directed and produced by Ian Glover supported by Elgin Amateur Dramatic Society, is available now on Anchor.FM

Linda Marquardt, Secretary, Elgin Amateur Dramatic Society





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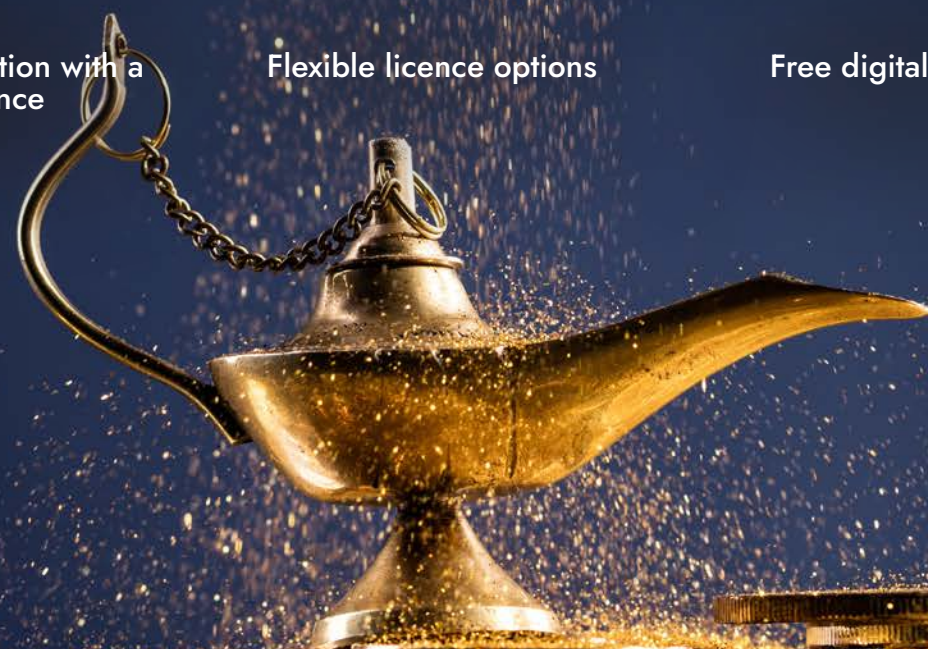
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I must have been Barking MAD...!

NODA London



In 1979, Carole Cable founded the very successful Barking Operatic Society which ran under her wonderful musicianship until 1997, when she died from a massive brain haemorrhage. This left the society floundering, so my husband, who had just become chairman, asked me if I would fill the gap until they found someone else,

since I was a music teacher in several Borough primary schools and taught recorder at the Barking Saturday Music School. So, in January 1998, I became the group's temporary MD, but twenty-two years later, with more than sixty musicals, pantomimes and Christmas carol concerts under my belt, the group having changed

its name to Barking MAD – Barking Music and Drama – and my title humorously re-termed 'Permanent Temporary MD', I am still here!

Unfortunately, last December, I suffered a heart attack and spent my seventy-seventh birthday in Barts Hospital. Luckily I survived, but it made me think that I should perhaps slow down and give someone much younger the opportunity to be MD. The advert is in, but the group have asked me to help out as a voluntary accompanist at least until Christmas so that they can put on a Musical Cabaret (details www.BarkingMAD.org.uk). Now I am the 'Temporary Permanent Temporary'...you know!

I wish them well in their search for a new person who can lead a really lovely group, blessed with talented and generous people, to new heights.

Carol Lucas

Riverside Players get their award!

NODA South West

Successful group presented with award - eventually after lockdown!

The NODA South West Awards for 2019 saw success again for Newton Poppleford based Riverside Players. Over the years, the group have produced many Variety Evenings and One Act Plays, involving adults and youngsters from the village and surrounding area. The panto tradition began in 2009, and they have presented a pantomime every February in the Village Hall – except of course in 2021!

In 2010, they were awarded the June Barker Memorial Cup for the Best Pantomime Production by NODA SW for *Dick Whittington*. In 2012, *Robinson Crusoe & the Pirates* received a District Nomination and, in 2016, their production of *Aladdin* received a District Achievement Award and a nomination for the Peter Wheeldon Memorial Trophy for Homemade Productions, all pantomimes by Alan P Frayn.

The Players were delighted to learn that

they had been awarded the June Barker Memorial Cup for the Best Pantomime "Runner – Up" 2019, for *RED* – the story of Little Red Riding Hood & the Three Little Pigs, written and directed by Gill Coley and Julie Salmon, who recently accepted the award after a lockdown delay, on behalf of The Riverside Players, from NODA SW Councillor Graham Liverton.

The music for *RED* was arranged and recorded by talented local musician John Griswold who has been Musical Director for The Riverside Players from the start.



The Three Little Pigs from RED
Credit: Tricia Barclay



Brian Rees, Graham Liverton, Gill Coley, Julie Salmon and District 5 Representative, Joyce Pomeroy
Credit: Mark Tipping Photography

NODA Today - Winter 2021



It is with great excitement that we can announce that NODA Theatre Summer School 2022, is well into the planning stage and more information on courses and venue information can be found on the NODA Summer School area of the NODA website and Facebook page.

The committee has put together a programme which is unashamedly

celebratory and we hope you will join us as we come together after a two year break. There is nothing 'heavy' and we will not be asking you to search your inner selves this year, but to come along, have fun and enjoy the fact of being together again to experience the sheer enjoyment that comes by learning from 'the best in the business'. Our e-schools were well supported and helped to fill the gap, but

we all agree there is nothing like meeting face to face.

We're aware that some people's circumstances may have changed over the past year, so remember that bursaries are available and please don't let finance be a reason not to attend – we will do all we can to assist.

2022 Courses

Musical Theatre

Drag Queens and Divas

This practical Musical Theatre course is for performers who want to indulge in a week of celebrating all things fabulous!

You'll Never Walk Alone

A celebration of connection through music and words. This course welcomes singers/actors who like to tell stories and portray character in their performance.

Lift your voice and raise your spirits

A singing course that will develop both your vocal skills and fitness and also offer you the opportunity to indulge in the joy of singing – a true celebration of the gift of song. This course is for singers regardless of their experience who want to explore and enjoy a week of singing.

Feeling good

Dance is generally accepted as one of the most happy, feel-good things to do. Its benefits are diverse and significant – physical fitness, flexibility, holistic restoration and mental wellbeing.

This course is aimed at students who have a range of abilities, but who are happy to work as an ensemble and accommodate the different levels of experience.

Drama

A century of plays

As an actor understanding the huge array of genres within playwriting, and the demands playwrights make on performers, is key to unlocking text - this course will give you a whistle stop tour of a selection of plays from across the last century in the expert hands of a brilliant director, as well as providing actors with a toolbox of technique that can be used in rehearsal and performance. This course is for actors who are interested in both performance and contextualising theatre.

Shakespeare - the comedies

In addition to providing us with high drama and wise philosophy, Shakespeare also crafted wonderfully comedic moments of theatre - this practical course will focus on the funny elements of Shakespeare, bringing to life character, text and plot in a riot of Elizabethan high jinx!

Play is play

There is such joy and depth to be found in the craft of performance if you approach it through experimentation, improvisation and play - this course will explore how to create material, realise text and enhance performance through a playful approach.

Make 'em laugh

Creating laughs on stage is tougher than it first appears - this practical, hands on drama course looks at how new directors, taking their first steps into the craft, can work with text and performers to amuse and delight audiences and guarantee laughter.

Multi Disciplinary

Community Matters

Where we make theatre, who with and why can make a big difference to the lives of individuals and communities - this course will look at theatre that serves a purpose including: youth theatre, theatre for disadvantaged or isolated groups, community and sight specific theatre.

A Riot of Rom Com

In this fast paced, packed full course, a “company” of actors, creatives, writers and filmmakers will create a romantic comedy film in a week - taking an idea full of laughs and love from conception to realisation.

On the side of right - Battling for Glory

Audiences love a tale of good conquering evil and an epic battle makes that experience even better - this practical stage fighting course will teach you how to achieve this whether the epic battle is between a panto villain and principal boy or something more on the scale of Braveheart!

Work in Progress

Creating a new piece of theatre is a complicated business - in this course students will work on new scripts with a dramaturg/ theatre maker and playwright to take them through research and development, to their next stage - whatever that might be.

This is your song

If you have ever wanted to learn the craft of song-writing, including lyrics and music, this is the course for you - a practical opportunity to learn the craft, unlock your creativity, find inspiration and trust your potential.

A new kind of role

NODA North



Credit - Signature Times



In 2017, at 55 years of age, I was lucky enough to be in a position to take early retirement from a job with DWP. For the next two years, I was able to enjoy a newfound freedom which allowed me to spend more time doing the things that I love, including with my home society Jarrow Musical Theatre Company and Dryburn Theatrical Workshop. Having more time meant that in addition to learning lines and performing on stage, I was now able to help the production teams with other roles like sourcing or creating props.

But of course, March 2020 saw things change; COVID-19 struck and, like so many other people, I felt my life change. I was currently rehearsing for JMTC's next production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* before it was forced to cancel. I thought I could cope with isolation as there were no rehearsals to go to anyway. Initially, Zoom rehearsals were arranged and attended hoping that the temporary hiatus would soon end, but instead it dragged on and on. As the government announced more restrictions, my recently gained freedom quickly faded and became more like a prison sentence.

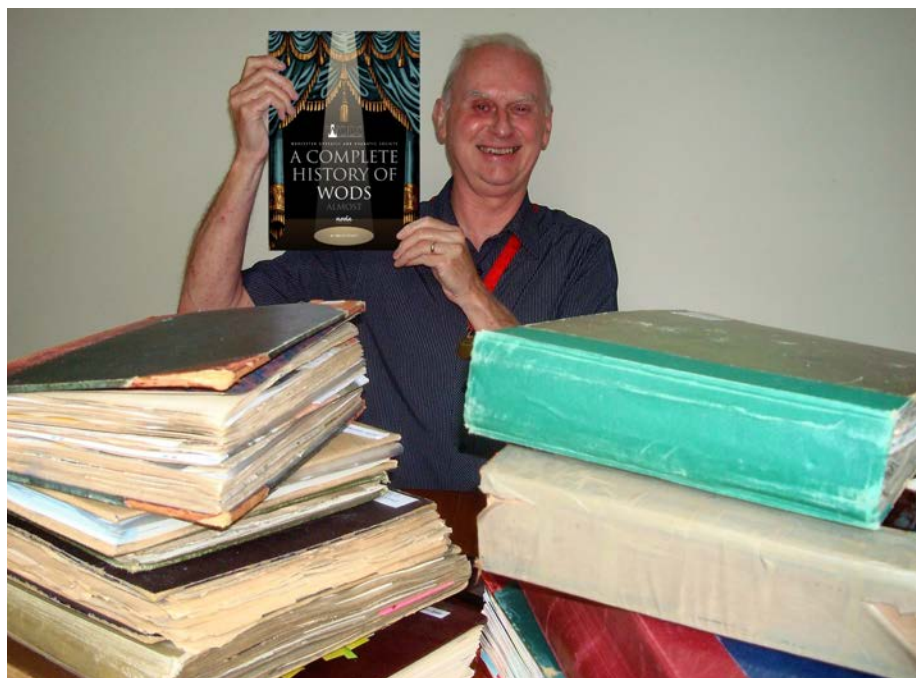
It was then that I decided that I needed to do something. I started an introduction to Adult Social Care online and this helped to give a little bit more structure to my days. Within a few months, I had completed both the Level 1 and 2 courses. In November 2020, I saw a vacancy for a Wellbeing Co-coordinator within a local residential care home. Arts & Crafts and chatting over cups of tea, it sounded right up my street! So, I applied online and within weeks I was invited to attend a Zoom interview – yes, the whole shirt, tie and jogging bottoms ensemble. I must have made a good impression as within the hour, I had been offered the job.

I was soon asked if I would like to attend the home's Boxing Day party, a way of gently getting to meet staff and, more importantly, the residents. Within minutes of arriving, I was handed a microphone and asked to call the bingo numbers. I must say I was apprehensive at first, something akin to opening night nerves. I was about to entertain a group who had been deprived of all face-to-face contact with their families and friends – totally unscripted, no character or costume to hide behind. I needn't have worried as they were a lovely audience.

Working for the Little Sisters of the Poor at St Joseph's Care Home is very rewarding, and it is great to feel appreciated. I never thought I would go to work each day with a smile on my face, especially following the events of 2020. Restrictions have now lifted, and we seem to be slowly getting back to our new normal. I'm happy to be back rehearsing and to soon be onstage once again and doing what I love, but this time alongside a new love, where I'm referred to as "that young lad who works downstairs". – Lawrence Clark

“A Complete history of Worcester Operatic & Dramatic Society – Almost”

NODA West Midlands



With over 50 years involvement in amateur theatre with Worcester Operatic & Dramatic Society (WODS), and as we approach our 130th anniversary in February 2022, I have been inspired by a number of enquiries from members and others interested in the history of the society, to delve into some records and scrapbooks, first created by my late father 'Bill' Wyatt, with some older information he gathered together, to create a record, which I hope some members and our supporters might be interested in reading.

So, with the opportunity provided by lockdown, I have written a book entitled *A Complete History of WODS - Almost*, covering the period from our establishment in 1892, through to the present day, with over 29,500 words and 140 pictures neatly divided in to chapters for each decade!

My grandfather Thomas Wyatt joined WODS, appearing in *The Vicar of Bray*, in 1908, and the family has been associated ever since; my father joined in 1931, a young dancer by the name of Freda joined in 1936, (Following which they were married in 1941) together with my wife Jenny, who also joined over 40 years ago as a dancer. My brother Ray also appeared as the 'Boy King' in WODS 1955 production of *Kings Rhapsody* which all explains why I

have been fortunate in inheriting a wealth of memorabilia and old records.

Several members have provided their own personal memories and funny stories, many of which I am sure would resonate with any theatre lover. During my life with WODS, there have been many memorable moments both on and off stage, but perhaps one that stands out was meeting Tommy Steele after his one man show in Paignton in 1977, shortly before we were due to stage *Half a Sixpence*.

As we know, our national association NODA was formed on 15 February 1899, and since its formation WODS has been

proud to be closely associated over many years. On 6 May 1899, at the WODS committee meeting, our secretary, Mr Howard J Hadley, announced that he, as a representative of the society, had been elected a member of the committee of the National Amateur Operatic & Dramatic Association. He was later elected Hon. General Secretary from 1902 – 1921.

Since then, several members have been closely associated with the work of NODA: Regional Representative Ron Fisk, who was succeeded in 1960, by Kenneth Barnes our Business Manager for 30 years, and who was a local NODA representative, Regional Councillor, Chairman of NODA Limited and in 1982 elected National President. He and my father were the recipients of a special NODA award to celebrate NODA's 80th anniversary. Following in Ken's footsteps as a Regional Representative were Gladys Blackler (also for a period the region's Awards Secretary), succeeded by Trevor Guest, also Regional Representative for 18 years until 2016, when I was proud to become the 5th local representative from our society.

The book will be published this winter if anyone should wish to invest in some strange stories and some happy memories, then please email me at bruce.wyatt@noda.org.uk and I will be pleased to provide more details.

Bruce Wyatt
West Midlands District 10 Representative



Back to the Musical Theatre!

NODA South West



CLOGS Musical Theatre Cast and Crew for "Back to the Musical Future" Credit: Donna-Kate Hargreaves

CLOGS Musical Theatre returned to the stage on 29th and 30th September, after 18 months away. The concert combined both their Senior and their Youth Group (The "Clogettes") in a concert including songs from 1955 to 2015, with a *Back To The Future* type time-travelling story (via a couch as opposed to a DeLorean!).

The society had been lucky in March 2020, that their production of *Sister Act* finished the day before the lockdown started. The society had tried desperately to keep people interested throughout the lockdown period, using the Zoom and in-person options available, though the 2nd lockdown made the prospects of any of the planned show performances in 2021 unlikely.

The idea for *Back To The Musical Future* was to come up with as simple and flexible a show format as possible, trying to maximise the numbers of solos and duets that could be performed. So rehearsals were possible online and people could practice on their own. This started via Zoom in January 2021, and progressed through the winter. The show contents changed in April as news on the lockdown changed. Restrictions eased for the youth group, but were still tight for the adults. Some cast members were unable to continue

and there were interruptions from those needing to isolate. By the planned original performance dates in July, the show was ready and restrictions had eased. Many of the cast and the potential audience were still quite nervous to take part and so the show moved to September.

Even with the date change, a number of the cast contracted COVID the week before, but, with some last-minute shuffling, the show did still go on and was well-received by both the audience and the cast! Society Chairman, Anne Holmes, said: "It was really great to be back on stage together after such a tough time and performing to

an audience. It is something we've all really missed doing."

Thus, the secret to successful productions at the moment seems to be an ability to stay flexible and to have some contingency plans ready, should difficulties arise.

CLOGS are looking to be back on stage in March 2022, with *The Addams Family*, and the Clogettes production of *Annie Jr* in May 2022 – both at the Neeld Centre, Chippenham.

Matthew Heaton



CLOGETTES performing "The Time Warp" Credit: Debi Weaver

It was always meant to be

NODA South East



The Oasthouse Theatre, Rainham closed its doors halfway through a production of *Entertaining Angels* back in March 2020, due to the pandemic and remained dark until we welcomed back audiences, to our charming Grade II converted Oasthouse, with *Flushed and Flushed Again* in September 2021. Audiences were lower than normal, but safety measures were put in place and it was great to hear the sound of laughter and applause in the auditorium again! The group did perform an 'online panto' last January, entitled *Panto Pandemic* which was written by member, Michael Gentry. The group have performed a panto every year since 1964, so they didn't want to break the tradition of panto not being performed at the Oasthouse. The 2 performances were a sell out and 34 members took part in the panto.

Our youth group would normally put on a production in the autumn, but, as they have only just started meeting again, the production has been moved to next year. However, we wanted to offer some entertainment to start encouraging audiences back to the Oast. Thankfully, two loyal and long standing members came to the rescue! Ryan Caston & Alan Godman had been talking for some time about putting on a 'rat pack' style musical show and now seemed the perfect time to 'get the show on the road'. They created a shows entitled *Rats Across America* (RaTS stand for Rainham Theatrical Society) which featured music from across America. The show was originally planned for one night only, but due to Saturday night completely selling out, another performance was added. Audiences were coming back at last!

The audiences were treated to a string of popular songs which ended in a rousing version of 'New York, New York' which had the audience up on their feet kicking their legs in time to the music...well almost in time! Ryan was joined on stage for a duet with his girlfriend, Lauren and the pair sang 'Something Stupid'. At the end of the show, Ryan brought Lauren back onto the stage and proposed to her. Amidst the clapping and cheering from the audience, Lauren said 'Yes!' What a great way to round off the evening.

Ryan chose to propose on stage as they met at the Oasthouse Theatre 16 years ago when they were both 11 years old. When Lauren first saw Ryan on stage, she thought to herself 'one day I am going to marry him'. Well, it looks like that wish will come true! Last year, they bought their first house together. They have performed together in several youth productions including *Peer Gynt* and *The Pirates of Penzance*. In January 2022, they will be performing alongside each other playing Principal Boy and Girl in our annual pantomime *Treasure Island*. So in true fairytale style, this story has a happy ending.

Ryan's parents are both involved in the theatre. Mum, Helen is Chairman of the Oasthouse Theatre and appeared in her first panto when she was just 7 years old. Dad, Dean has been involved with the RaTS for over 45 years. He met his wife, Helen, at the Oast and the couple married in 1990. Their daughter, Charlotte also acts and will be taking part in this year's panto making it a real family affair! Lauren's Mum, Claire will be directing the panto as well as acting as wardrobe mistress.

Helen adds: "This has been a tough year for the Oasthouse but its great to see audiences gradually returning. Next year's productions include 'The 39 Steps' and 'The Vicar of Dibley' so we are hoping that we will be back up to 100% capacity".

Musical for the times

NODA North East

When LIDOS members, James Sidgwick (writer and director) and Robert Sanders (composer and musical director), were cooking up a new musical for their group to present, little did they realise how very appropriate the premise was to be!

They had focused on the 14th century plague, known as the Black Death, as a subject matter way back in 2014, but it only got its first performance in September 2021. As their programme notes stated, it was a story about a pandemic, postponed by a pandemic!

In spite of the subject matter of *Plague* being so close to what the world has gone



through in the past two years, this zany, musical comedy was very well received by audiences at the Carriageworks Theatre in Leeds and comes close to being as successful as their previous offering, *Supertown*, also written by Sidgwick and

Sanders. For amateur historians out there, the plot involved a farmer and his turnips, thought at the time to prevent the plague – so glad we got inoculated this time around!

NODA Today - Winter 2021

Phoenix Theatre.com

NODA Wales & Ireland



'Allo 'Allo

Phoenix Theatre.com was created back in 2001, by a group of enthusiasts in the South Wales coastal town of Porthcawl, filling the void left by the demise of the long standing Porthcawl Little Theatre. The .com was added to the title in a brave attempt to distinguish it from other Phoenix Theatres!

Phoenix is a play society staging, in the early days, two plays a year - one comedy and one of a more serious nature. More recently, however, the company regularly performed only one play every October. The plays are mainly, but not exclusively, comedies. The plays of Welsh valleys playwright, Frank Vickery, have been a constant thread running through the play choices and the company has successfully staged such Vickery classics as *One O'clock from the House*, *Trivial Pursuits* and *Granny Annie* to great acclaim. Examples of more serious offerings have been *Abigail's Party*, *The Anniversary* and *The Graduate* (tasteful nudity included!) In 2013, *Blood Brothers the Play* was an excellent choice as the book was on the GCSE curriculum at the time and a special morning performance for local schools was an instant sell out. Another great success, in the early days, was *Last Tango in Trecco* - a re-write of *Last Tango in Halifax*. Trecco is the local pleasure beach, and lots of local references and even a short video clip went down a storm with local people and those who had come to Porthcawl for their holidays as children.

All productions, apart from the very first, have been staged at the Grand Pavilion on the Porthcawl seafront. Opened in 1932,

and well known for its octagonal dome and striking frontage, it's the idyllic setting for Phoenix.

Founder member, Paul Morgan, who has recently taken over director duties, has always emphasised the importance of the social side to the company. The members always socialise after rehearsals, usually in some local hostelry, and hold regular get togethers, Christmas parties etc. creating close bonds within the society. There have even been organised trips to far flung places such as Milton Keynes and Brighton to view prospective plays and twice to



Granny Annie



Pullin' the wool

Eastbourne to support a previous director, Martyn Knight, in his annual role as Dame in the pantomime at the Devonshire Park Theatre.

Obviously, Covid put an untimely stop to proceedings as with all other societies and it was decided some time ago not to stage a production this October - BUT the venue has already been booked for October 2022 - the front runner being *Family Planning*, hilarious Frank Vickery comedy and the members are chomping at the bit to get rehearsing again.



The Graduate



One o'clock from the house

HATS Melody Makers

NODA East

Whether or not a panto, play or musical is in production, there's rarely a time of year when the Hockwold Amateur Theatrical Society (HATS) in Norfolk is 'resting'. Especially since 2018, when Sue Perry, a HATS management committee member, developed and ran with an idea for an entertainment programme to commemorate two very important UK anniversaries.

Although she couldn't know it at the time, her concept for a one-off programme would turn into much more: a source of new revenue for HATS, a way to keep HATS members engaged throughout non-production periods and also draw those members, who might not participate in the group's stage productions, to a new vehicle for performing. *"I can't really take credit for members joining who are usually behind the scenes, for planning to get them out of their shells," Perry insists. "That was just a happy by-product!"*

And voila! HATS' performing group the Melody Makers was created, making their debut that year by performing variety musical programmes primarily at residential care homes in Norfolk and Suffolk.

Fast forward three years and long spells of COVID-19 pandemic lockdown later,

HATS' Melody Makers are now making music once more, adding new homes and a local church to their informal circuit.

"We all really like singing," Perry says. "And we love it when we get a good response from the audience. A lot of them are dementia patients, so they might look like they're not interested or like they're asleep or they don't smile. But usually we're told, and sometimes patients join in, and it's lovely to see them enjoying themselves and enjoying what we're doing."

In addition to reaping the rewards of their enjoyment of singing and pleasure in entertaining others, the Melody Makers charge an hourly rate to perform, with all proceeds going to HATS. So far, the revenues have helped the group buy basic sound equipment, for instance.

Asked what generated the Melody Makers' start, Perry shared the group's history.

"The centenary of World War I Armistice Day 1918, as well as the 100th birthday of the Royal Air Force stirred an idea: why not put together an entertainment programme in honour of these events that HATS could take outside of their traditional venue, Hockwold's village hall."

I asked the committees if any of them had

any interest, and quite a few of them were interested," Perry recalls. "And it went from there, really."

Perry rang residential care homes nearby to gauge interest, and *"we had about four to start with,"* she says.

Through 2019, and the beginning of 2020, the group was in demand. But the global pandemic shut down operations until this past summer. Rehearsals started up once more in July. And now they're back, having already performed two gigs in early autumn, with more booked.

There are group numbers, solos and some movement, too. Often the programmes have a theme, which will be reflected in their performance outfits. Perry also designs small badges for each theme.

What does the future hold for the Melody Makers? *"We're all enjoying it," Perry says. "I'm hoping we'll improve our sound as we go on, getting used to using the microphones and getting our voices and the music in balance. It is brilliant to see all our singers gaining in confidence!"*

The full corps of HATS will resume performing in spring 2022, with A Royale Variety Show.

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NODA North

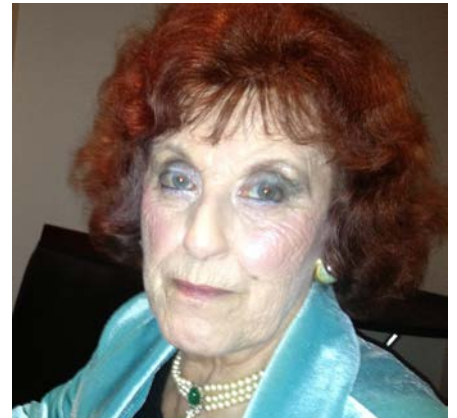
Pauleen Gilbert, Vice Chair of Newcastle Musical Theatre Company, celebrates her 60th year in amateur musical theatre this year and will receive her 60 Years Medal from President, Gordon Richardson, at the *Grease* Civic Night in July 2022, at Newcastle Theatre Royal.

In that time, she has been actor, singer, director, accompanist and musical director with many local groups and societies. These include NMTC, Beaconsfield Operatic Society, The Phoenix Theatre, Tynemouth AOS, Whitley Bay OS, choirs and vocal groups.

She has also appeared as guest singer on radio's *Have A Go* with Wilfrid Pickles many years ago (although she'll probably deny it!).

Her membership of NODA as an Individual Member spans over 50 years. When she first joined in 1971, she recalls the subscription was £1.50. She is a regular at Annual Regional Conferences and recently supported Gordon Richardson at his inauguration as President at the Gala Weekend at the Radisson Blu in Durham. Pauleen's career in administration is extremely accomplished; being a director and trustee for some of the organisations mentioned. She was instrumental in being part of the Board of Directors responsible for the funding and rebuilding of the new Phoenix Theatre in Blyth; securing a large grant from the Lottery Board.

For her sins, she is a lifelong supporter of Newcastle United and was a season ticket holder until recently.



She is still extremely active with NMTC and not ready to hang up her am-dram boots yet. All the best Pauleen. You have served NODA well.

Ken Allan

60 years of service to Sidmouth

NODA South West



NODA Southwest Councillor presents Brian Rees with his 60 year medal. NODA SW Councillor Graham Liverton took the opportunity recently, at a Sidmouth Musical Theatre rehearsal, to present long - standing member, Brian Rees, with his NODA medal in recognition of 60 years of service to amateur theatre.

Brian started in 1959, when he joined Bridport Amateur Operatic Society and since then has been involved in 90 Musicals, 3 Pantomimes, and a multitude of Music Halls. In 1987, he joined Yeovil Amateur Operatic Society and, since moving to Sidmouth in 2000, has for the most part performed with SMT. It was particularly poignant that his 60 year medal had previously been awarded to Larry Jackson, another stalwart of the local stage and long-standing member of the society when it was known under its original name of Sidmouth Arts Club & Operatic Society.

Tricia Barclay

Bouncing Back From The Chaos

NODA East Midlands

Three of our societies comment on their confident return to action post-Covid.

Rutland Musical Theatre member Jenny South writes: “When the first lockdown hit in March 2020, Rutland Musical Theatre were so close to taking to the stage we could taste the greasepaint.” Their planned production of *Fiddler on the Roof* had to be cancelled and, like all performers in the UK, they were left wondering when or if things would ever get back to normal again. “Needless to say, when we returned in August 2021, the mood was joyful, relieved and determined in equal measure.”

Starting back with their traditional winter showcase of *The Sound of Musicals* with an expanded sell-out run, which now includes a Saturday matinee, RMT show their renewed confidence with a cross-county move to the Core at Corby Cube for their production of *Fiddler on the Roof* in April 2022, where they are hoping for their biggest houses ever. Due to delay, a few cast members have been lost, but Jenny says: “We have also gained new talent, who are busy slotting into numbers and enriching the tapestry of the RMT membership.”



Workshop Light Operatic Society were similarly floored by the disaster of Covid, which sent everyone into a totally different way of living...only six weeks away from their show *A Tribute to the WestEnd*. In a frustrating train of events, familiar to many societies, rehearsals were suspended, then the show postponed and finally abandoned.

Janet Marshall, WLOS Secretary, recalls: “Thanks to social media and Zoom, the committee were able to keep the members in touch and eventually, in the spring of 2021, plans could be made for a return to the stage. And, working with anti-virus restrictions, rehearsals began in late July for a concert entitled ‘Back in Lights’.

With a smaller cast than usual and lateral flow testing for all participants, theatre life is starting to get back to normal.” As Janet says: “All over the country amateur societies are returning to what they love best - performing, and helping to bring live theatre to local audiences. The experiences of the last eighteen months have shown how important this is to us all. Let’s hope and trust we never have to be without it again!”



Derby’s Good Companions’ April 2020 production of *Annie* was also cancelled. So it’s good to be able to report that it will now be presented this December. Writing about ‘starting over’ director, Phil Simcox, says: “It’s fantastic to be back. Everything was almost set before the show was postponed so it’s just a case of remembering what we did; something which our young cast have been very impressive at. It’s like they never went away!”

Not only that, but the society has also taken the opportunity to make an important change.

“Our extended break allowed us to reflect and look to the future,” explains company chair, Lisa Scott-Savage. “Our new name (Good Companions Musical Theatre) better reflects what we do; having done musical revues in the past and pantomimes many years ago, we now perform two musicals per year: a small one in spring and then a bigger budget one in the autumn. It also avoids any confusion for hopeful new members expecting straight plays; you will need to sing and dance as well as act.”



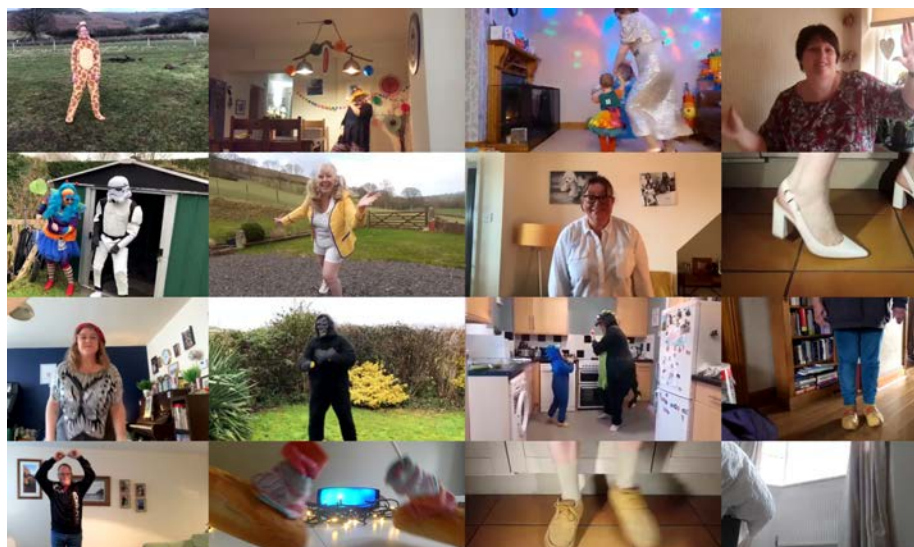
Ruthin takes to the screen

NODA Wales & Ireland,

We were lucky enough to be able to do our *Mother Goose* panto in 2020 as we usually perform during February half-term. Little did we know how long it would be until we could perform together again!

As lockdown arrived, we moved, as did many, to meeting up on Zoom. Before long, the summer was approaching and it felt strange not to be performing at our annual summer carnival here in Ruthin, so we decided to make something for people to enjoy from home instead. Everyone filmed themselves singing and dancing at home and sent it on to us to edit in time for the day that would have been the carnival – it still proves to be a lovely memory of a summer that otherwise felt a bit 'lost'. One great thing about our film meant that previous cast members, who have since moved away, could also be with us – some sending films from as far away as America and convincing their neighbours to join in!

As time went on, it became apparent that we wouldn't be able to perform for our Christmas market either. We have done this for many years now, encouraging more people to visit and support local businesses. This time, however, we were able to meet outside and so a complicated timetable, spread over a full weekend in a neighbouring woodland, allowed us to dress as elves to make our own version of *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*. Everything featured in the film could be bought locally



and so we still managed to support our local businesses after such a difficult year. The added bonus for this film was that we could even include our *Panto Babies* who were completely adorable and stole the show.

Next came Christmas Eve and our tradition of singing Christmas Carols at Ruthin Castle throughout the afternoon. Again, we felt it would be strange not to do anything and so we managed to film ourselves 'singing' carols outside, just a few days before the second lockdown, which we released at the same time as we would usually be singing. It was nice for the town to be able to watch us from home and we're very lucky that we managed to

record it just in time.

A few months later, it would have been time for our performance of *Snow White*, which was sadly postponed so we made another film. This time *Footloose* showing everyone working from home and still dressing up and singing and dancing in their spare time.

For now, we're watching and waiting carefully in full hope that we will be back together again for February 2022. We have songs and costumes ready to go – and will be back into rehearsals as soon as we feel that we can manage it safely for everyone.

Congratulations to Wyn

NODA West Midlands



In September, Wyn Mason was awarded a Honorary Membership of NODA for 25 years' service to the NODA West Midlands Regional Committee. Alongside this, Wyn has also completed 60 years of service to amateur theatre

Wyn was introduced to Stoke-on-Trent Operatic Society by friend Kay Scott. During the sixty years, Wyn has held many administrative positions with the society, the main one being their wardrobe mistress for 25 years. She is now President of Stoke Youth Musical Theatre Company, the successor to the Stoke-on-Trent Operatic Society. Let's also not forget Wyn's vital contribution to The Newcastle Players, covering various roles, including wardrobe, properties, stage management, and box office manager.

In 1985 she was appointed wardrobe manager for the NODA Operatic Summer School, a position she held until NODA closed the school. In 1996, she became the NODA Representative for District 3 in the Midland Area, which subsequently became the West Midlands. She retired from that position in December 2013, taking on the position of Long Services Awards Secretary for the West Midlands Area. Congratulations on your achievements, Wyn.

Ladies' day takes centre stage

Pandemic Memories of Ladies Down-Under

NODA East

Chelmsford Theatre Workshop at The Old Court Theatre, became one of the first amateur groups in the East of England to stage a production in 18 months. We started rehearsals for *Ladies Down Under* in March 2020, but had to suspend them as lockdown began. Rehearsals resumed in July, once restrictions had eased, but were stopped again when four of the eight actors tested positive for Coronavirus. The rest of the cast and crew also went into isolation. Zoom rehearsals followed which, in a strange way, helped the cast to think of their lines rather than moves, so on return it was almost 'books down'.

Back at the theatre, once everyone was clear, we had to use masks, visors and keep distance, between us. Not great when, as a director, I needed to hear projection and see expressions, but we soldiered on. We also needed two new lighting technicians as one could only do four nights and two

assistant stage managers. One of our actors had long Covid and could only do a few rehearsals, another actor caught Covid two weeks before the show and, as a director, I almost gave up as the stress was almost too much.

It was the perfect example of the old stage adage 'the show must go on', and a miracle that we are able to lead the way for amateur productions by actually getting this play on stage. On top of the long shutdown and the Covid outbreak, we lost three of the original actors, including one who is now heavily pregnant and another who won a place at a top drama school, but it was an amazing effort by cast and crew. It was a perfect, joyous and touching play to gladden everyone's hearts as we emerged from this awful last 18 months.

The Mayor of Chelmsford and her deputy came along to support the opening of our



newly refurbished theatre and, much to our delight, we had great audiences who not only loved the show, but helped us raise over £300 for the Helen Rollanson Cancer Charity.

Christine Davidson

Exmouth Players return with Ladies' Day!

NODA South West

Great choice for first post-lockdown production meets with councillor's approval!

Ladies' Day, written by Amanda Whittington and directed by Wendy Groves, was the perfect choice for their return production in July, and had the audience on side right from the "off"!

It was lovely to be back at the Blackmore Theatre and receive the usual warm welcome from the Front of House "Volunteers" on duty for this performance, and to see all the improvements that have been made to the space during the months of closure.

From the opening scene introducing the "ladies", as they set about their daily routine of filleting and packing fish (with the "smell" almost permeating into the auditorium), right through to the York Racecourse, with a stunningly painted backdrop of the grandstand and the

strains of Tony Christie's *Is This the Way to Amarillo*, this was a terrific production. All characters were quickly established and portrayed convincingly, conveying the strong bond and feeling of camaraderie this production needs, creating a piece that was very well-orchestrated throughout, and a totally enjoyable and fun-filled performance all round. The feel-good factor generated by the company spilled out into the audience making for a thoroughly fun-filled and enjoyable evening all round. Most certainly a winner!

Graham Liverton, NODA SW Councillor was delighted to present The Exmouth Players with a Certificate of Congratulations at their recent AGM for this production.

Tricia Barclay



Keighley's happy chairperson

NODA North East

We are Keighley Musical Theatre Company, formerly Keighley Amateur Operatic and Dramatic Society, and have been producing large scale musical shows since 1913, and Pantomimes since 1965, with only a break for WW1 and WW2.

When lockdown came in March 2020, we were in the middle of auditions for *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat*. We were delighted to obtain the licence for this show, but sadly the production had to be postponed and eventually cancelled.

Then along came COVID. Like all other amateur and professional companies, we had to close. Then came the second blow - our performance venue, the Victoria Hall, Keighley, became a COVID test Centre until further notice. On top of that, our rehearsal premises were demolished!

Like everyone else, we had to communicate by Zoom, which proved to be invaluable. Being a positive group with an excellent committee, we decided to produce *The Addams Family*, not knowing when or

even if we would be able to do it. We had to give the message to our members and audiences that we would not give up. It was with great regret that we had also to cancel our famous pantomime.

2020 ended and 2021 followed. Then, at last, some good news. In July, we were offered new rehearsal premises and an email came from Musical Theatre International offering us, and other similar groups, the chance to produce their musical revue *All Together Now* at no cost. This seemed like a dream come true. We had to do it. But where? Keighley Playhouse would be perfect and this long standing company, which produce several plays a year for our town, were delighted to help us.

We are lucky to have an excellent musical director, choreographer and director within our company and so, without further ado, rehearsals began. Attending the second rehearsal, I can only explain the feeling I had when I heard the singing and saw so many happy faces

as... well just wonderful!!! Here we were again rehearsing for a show. I asked the performers to describe in one word how it felt to be back.... these words say it all: happiness, fun, freedom, normality, joy, being home, friends, excitement, anticipation, dancing, singing, being back with like-minded people.

At the time of writing this, we are looking forward to giving three performances of *All Together Now* in November and our thanks go to MTI for offering us, and other companies, this global event.

We have recently received the good news that the Victoria Hall should be available to us in October 2022, so, *The Addams Family*, here we come! But for now, with hearts aglow with excitement, a little fear, and determination THE SHOW WILL GO ON!

From one very happy Chairperson,
Louise Hindle-Barton

The sun did come out tomorrow

NODA North

It was an evening of firsts when Helen Abraham, NODA North District 4 Regional Representative and Peter Oliver, Regional Councillor visited Spennymoor Stage and Song for the very first musical produced in the NODA North Region since the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown ended.

Both Peter and Helen were appointed into their respective posts in September 2020, but neither had the opportunity of visiting any of their societies and groups due to the restrictions placed on us all during the pandemic. Although virtual district meetings had taken place, there had been no performances to attend.

As such, the first NODA North musical to be performed post-lockdown was attended by the regional councillor and the regional representative on both their first official engagements since appointment, to review Spennymoor Stage and Song's performance of *Annie*.



The group were quick to take on board the recommendations issued by the government and to get back to rehearsals to enable their show to go ahead. With a twice-postponed production date, Spennymoor Stage and Song finally took to the stage 5th-9th October 2021. There were two sets of orphans and a full cast of enthusiastic and talented people both onstage and off, welcoming their

audiences back into the place we have missed the most.

The front of house team was kitted out in matching face masks for both their own and the audience's safety, with sanitiser available throughout. Given the show was a full sell-out and supported loyally both locally and beyond, we can all be confident these firsts shall not be the last!

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