

# Noises Off

**A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S  
DREAM**

**Director's Half-Term Report!**

As the rehearsal schedule for The Dream reaches its halfway point, the 14-strong cast are becoming more and more acquainted with the pleasures and perils of performing one of Shakespeare's most popular comedies. Scenes, speeches and situations familiar to many people are being brought to life and there is a sense of discovery, enjoyment and fun in the rehearsal room. One of the joys of rehearsing this play is we are working in the actual performance space



in which the play will be performed which helps the actors immeasurably.

As Director of the play, it is always a pleasure to work with young people and the four actors who appear as the Lovers, Lucy Bennett, Rosy Sargent, Jake Terry and John Robinson are all shaping up give first rate performances. In addition, it is always a delight to welcome new members to the Players and joining the company are



Rachael Alexander, Sarah Webster, Richard Jones and Jeanne Rutherford who are appearing alongside APS stalwarts Sylvie Lord, Adrian Harding (complete with ass's head), Linda Catchpole, Martin Williams, Richard Culham and Bev Taylor-Wade.



Construction of the set and the lighting are well under way under the watchful eye of Adrian Hole, while Mark Lambert is taking care of the sound design, Helen Smith is finding and creating a wide range of weird and wonderful costumes and Production Manager Jane Williams is keeping the whole enterprise on an even keel.

**John Crabtree**



CAST LIST	
Theseus/Oberon	- Martin Williams
Hippolyta/Titania	- Sylvie Lord
Egeus	- John Crabtree
Hermia	- Lucy Bennett
Helena	- Rosy Sargent
Demetrius	- John Robinson
Lysander	- Jake Terry
Puck	- Rachael Alexander
Bottom	- Adrian Harding
Quince/fairy	- Bev Taylor-Wade
Snout/fairy	- Richard Culham
Starveling/fairy	- Sarah Webster
Snug/fairy	- Linda Catchpole
Flute/fairy	- Richard Jones
Attendant	- Jeanne Rutherford
Preview Mon 18th June 7.45pm	
Performances Tue 19th - Sat 23rd June 7.45pm	

## "THE DREAM" – TICKETING INFORMATION

The Committee is pleased to announce that, for this and all future events, we have introduced the capacity to purchase tickets online. Further information will follow very shortly, but we can tell you that, through a very simple process of three or four "clicks" on our website, you will be able to pay by credit or debit card and receive your tickets immediately by email for printing at home, or by presenting a barcode image on your smartphone when you arrive at the Theatre. For those who prefer the traditional route, tickets will also be available to buy through local shops.

## SST AND SOCIAL EVENTS

We would like to apologise for the fact that a number of events planned for the current year have had to be cancelled. We hope members will understand that the construction of the stage and the final phases of refurbishment of the "Sherborne Studio Theatre" (SST) have caused considerable disruption - we are, however, confident that when you see the final result, you will agree that it was worth the pain! Please note, in the meantime, that the quiz scheduled for June 8th has been cancelled, and the AGM scheduled for July 13th has been postponed to a date later in the summer, to be confirmed. Rest assured that next year will see a much more settled situation, and, we hope, a full programme of events for you to support.

## WORK PARTY NEEDED

Once the builders have completed the renovation of the Green Room, toilet facilities and kitchen in the theatre at the end of May, there is a considerable amount of work which needs to be done before we can open the venue to the paying public with **A Midsummer Night's Dream** on 19<sup>th</sup> June.

- In the kitchen, we need to acquire and install a work-surface and cupboards. Our existing fridge will also have to be installed. Tiling and painting also needs to be carried out.

- Outside, the gravel area in front of the porch and front door needs to be weeded and tidied up and a couple of pot plants in tubs might be placed either side of the door.

- In the foyer area, outside the kitchen and toilets, walls needs to be decorated, the floors sanded and perhaps posters and photographs of past productions hung on the walls. Any spare posters might go up on the actual walls of the auditorium.

- The Green Room needs to be fitted out as a dressing room and made ready for occupation by the cast.

- Blinds or blackout material needs to be placed over all the windows in the auditorium.

These are just a few of the tasks facing the company: there are probably many other jobs of this nature which need to be tackled as well. **If you can offer help of any sort please contact any member of the Committee to arrange a date and time when you would be available to lend a hand.**

We want the Sherborne Studio Theatre to offer a welcoming, pleasant environment to its patrons and the smartening up of the building is essential to achieving this.

## FUNDING NEWS

We are delighted to be able to announce that APS has been successful in applying for a financial donation from this year's Classic and Supercar Show in July. The amount is dependent upon the receipts of the show, but could be a substantial sum.

Please see the information below from the organisers concerning the event:

*The organisers have put together an absolutely first class event, Land Rover 70yrs is the celebrated Marque feature and the show will also include over 2,000 classic and supercars on display in the beautiful grounds of Sherborne Castle. Do go to our website [www.classic-supercars.co.uk](http://www.classic-supercars.co.uk) to get an appreciation of the wide and varied range of vehicles on display and the many attractions for enthusiasts and families alike that will be available at the Show.*

*The greater the visitor numbers the more funds we will be able to donate to charities and we ask that you do your utmost to encourage friends, family and supporters of your cause to be present on **Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> July** for a very enjoyable day.*

*Following the show, cheque presentations to yourselves and other successful applicants will be made at Sherborne Castle on **Friday 26<sup>th</sup> October**, so please put this date in your diary.*

On a similar note, APS would also like to voice their appreciation to Waitrose (Sherborne), who donated the sum of £154 to our funds following April's Community Matters Fundraising.

We were very sorry indeed to learn of the recent sad death of David Smith, a great friend and highly-valued member of APS. We are sure all members would wish to join the committee in sending sincere condolences to Sylvia, and the rest of David's family. A memorial service is to be held at Cheap Street Church at 2.30pm on Saturday May 19th.

## A HISTORY OF THE "SHERBORNE STUDIO THEATRE" – THE MARSTON ROAD CHAPEL

*The following article was written by Malcolm. It has also been submitted to the editor of "The Sherborne Times" in the hope that it will be published in the June edition of that publication, thus creating further interest and publicity for our production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and our proper inauguration of the Sherborne Studio Theatre. Many thanks to Malcolm, not just for the article, but for the Theatre itself, of course!*

The corrugated iron chapel, sometimes called 'The Tin Tabernacle', was built early in the 1880's on land given by the Digby Estate: it had been recognized that no place of worship was available at the North of the town where the stone quarries employed several families living in Coombe. The congregation were Baptist; a four foot square of floorboard can be lifted to reveal a deep cavity near the altar, this may have been the baptismal font. In

1928 a new brick Baptist church further up Coombe was built to replace the Tin Tabernacle. Such corrugated iron buildings could be bought, delivered and erected for a few hundred pounds and it is likely that the Marston Road chapel would have been bought from the catalogue of William Cooper, in London and transported by train to Sherborne Station.

When the new Baptist Church was open, the 'Tin Chapel' was sold to Messrs Easons, (undertakers at Newell close by)

and used for the manufacture of coffins. The sturdy workbench is still in the chapel, but the deeds state that the building should never again be used for that trade. After the second world war it was bought by Dodge and Son, for furniture restoration and then, in the 1980's, by Piers Pisani as a furniture workshop who sold it in 2011.

At that time the Amateur Players (APS) were told to vacate both their rehearsal room at Sherborne House, and the store-room for

from rust, and that was after over one hundred and twenty years.

More recently the main body of the chapel has been cleared of the walls and floors inserted in the twentieth century, and returned to the original space plus a half balcony. A stage has been built. Green room and toilets are in the original vestry.

We now have a studio theatre ready for an audience of up to fifty visitors!



Already this year the APS have held a rehearsed reading of "Displaced" written by Jan Pain of the Sherborne Scribblers (who meet monthly in The Chapel), and in March there were three performances of Neil Simon's "London Suite". At the time of writing, plans are under way to

props. and costumes at the Castle Stables. They had nowhere to go for the first time since their beginning in 1926. The chapel seemed to be a solution. The interior was unsuitable for theatre production, however these always took place at the Digby Hall, Hound Street. The chapel could contain all the costumes, flats and props plus a comfortable club room.

When the exterior paint was stripped to bare metal it revealed corrugated sheets entirely free

celebrate the final completion of the work with a Grand Opening and a week of performances of "A Midsummer Night's Dream"

I would like to thank contractors who have helped to make the theatre what it now is:

J. Biskup (exterior), Bamfords of Yeovil (interior transformation) and Timothy MacBean (the essential planning and change of use regulations.)

**Malcolm Cockburn**

## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

### PART 2

In the years leading up to the First World War, as scholarship began to reveal more about the historical nature of the Elizabethan stage, the vast accumulation of musical and scenic conventions that had swamped productions of Shakespeare's play in the Victorian period began to be dismantled. At the same time, new and progressive approaches to theatre in general began to exert their influence on Shakespearean staging in general. In 1914, for the first time, an attempt was made to present the play using a full text (in previous decades, the lovers, for example, had been reduced to virtually walk-on parts and the text shortened by over a half). The emphasis now was on a re-evaluation of the text. In so doing, the complicated scenery and long waits for scene changes characteristic of the



traditional approach were disposed of. Curtains, often painted in futuristic designs and strong colours, which swiftly parted to reveal scene after scene, sped the action along. Those who preferred real woods, Mendelssohn's music and balletic fairies were bitterly disappointed. Simplicity became the watchword.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the decade following the First World War is the sheer number of productions of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, compared to any period before or since; it was staged seven times at the Old Vic between 1918 and 1929, there were three other major London productions and it was on stage at Stratford on six occasions between 1919 and 1928. However, old habits die hard, and before too long the temptation to re-instate the Mendelssohn music, balletic fairies and songs proved too great. This, needless to say, was popular with the public,



but directors, while still retaining the traditional elements, placed greater value on 'interpreting' the play and realising the characters as 'real people'. For the first time, the lovers were seen as three-dimensional figures, the Mechanicals as genuine artisans with real personalities, and for once Oberon was no longer played by a woman – a trend that had been followed since the 1840s.

Throughout the thirties, forties and fifties, many courageous attempts at rendering the play in a new light, some attempting to introduce contemporary insights based on Freudian psychology, went barely acknowledged. A famous Old Vic production in 1954 resolutely used the entire Mendelssohn score (played by a sixty-piece orchestra), the entire Sadler's Wells corps de Ballet and dancers Robert Helpmann and Moira Shearer in the acting (and dancing) roles of Oberon and Titania. The production last nearly four hours. And, in 1958, Peter Hall, in his first production as Director of the soon to be designated Royal Shakespeare Company, tried to see the same fairies as the Elizabethans saw them, not as ballet dancers, but as 'mischievous sprites who behave like naughty children'. Two years later, an Old Vic production entered a cold-war world of dreams, mythology and folklore in which the mortals can find peace only when Oberon and Titania have found it. And fantasies, desires and dreams featured large in a production by Frank Dunlop for his Pop Theatre Company in 1967 which suggested that the play should be seen as sharp and jagged, as opposed to soft and sentimental, referencing its sensual and violent nature in which extremes mirror each other and then converge.

But nothing – nothing – could have prepared the world for what followed in 1970: *The Dream* of Peter Brook.

In a review of the production, the critic Clive Barnes noted 'Once in a very rare while, a theatrical production arrives ... a production that, for good or ill, is going to exert a major influence on the contemporary stage'. Brook's staging was in no way traditional: the permanent set was a white box. Two doors at the back provided the entrances and two ladders at the front edges gave access to a catwalk around the top of the set from which characters could look down on the action. The fairies flew on trapezes, Titania's bower was a flying concoction of scarlet feathers and the trees which snagged the lovers were coils of wire flown in on fishing rods by the fairies on the catwalk. In his concept, Brook had provided what was described as 'the blank page upon which imagination can play its tricks'. This approach liberated the audience's imaginative faculty and allowed it to concentrate on the text where other more traditional stagings had been more limiting.

Using the foundations laid down by Peter Brook, successive directors of *The Dream* have seized the opportunity to do what theatre is there to do, that is, to become more and more creative and to release actors, designers and audience from the straitjacket of previous generations which, to twenty-first century eyes may now appear curious or misguided. In so doing, our understanding of the play's potential will have been enriched by the wide variety of interpretations it has received and will continue to receive.

**John Crabtree**

