



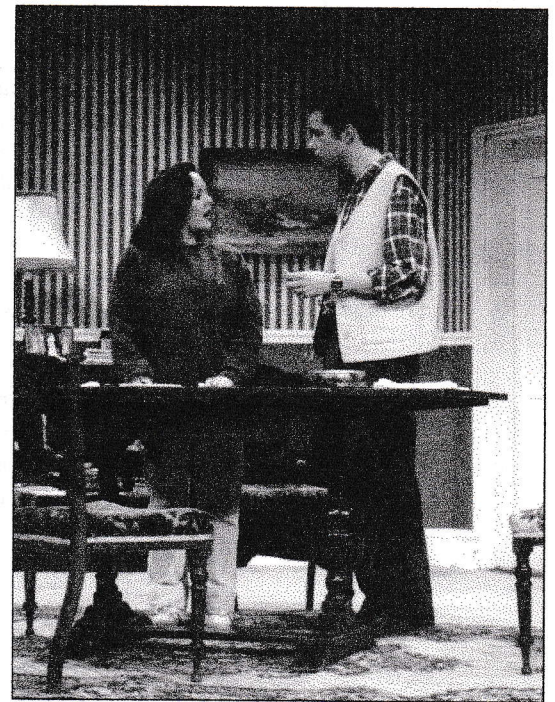
AMATEUR PLAYERS OF SHERBORNE

Newsletter

APRIL
1998



"Annie's just decided she's not going away for the weekend, Tom."



"Tom, what on earth made you think I wanted to go off and sit in some dreary hotel room on my own?!"

I really enjoy being associated with The Players. To belong to an amateur group that puts on productions of such a professional standard and to be part of a team that really seems to care about getting things right is indeed a great pleasure.

Table Manners exceeded all expectations. The cast played to a total audience of just over 370, a figure that approaches that we expect for an average autumn production and exceeds by a considerable margin the number we normally get in the spring. The overall profit for the production is about £425. Credit for this must go in large part to the excellent publicity arranged by Robert Doling and Patricia Stewart; the poster design was a particularly eye-catching. Other factors, of course were the excellent choice of play (*Table Manners* clearly had good box office appeal), the fact that the weather was not sufficiently good to keep people in their gardens, and the quality of the production itself—I'm sure that word got round after the brilliant Thursday night performance and that this helped to swell numbers on the Friday and Saturday.

Of the play itself, what can one say. People have been kind enough to say they liked the set—thanks, incidentally, to all those who helped, and particularly Chris Jessiman and Stuart McCreadie who between them did most of the wallpapering. The choice of furniture, costumes and make-up were all exactly right for the piece, the lighting and sound complimented it all nicely, and the scene changes were efficiently handled by Stuart and his team. But, of course, it was the performances that really made it work. It would be invidious and wrong to single out any one member of the six-strong cast. There were no weak links in this team, and they all performed magnificently, each with his or her well-defined and totally believable character that made a contrasting foil for the other five. Each of the characters had some wonderful moments and the laughter in the auditorium showed that these were much appreciated. Congratulations to (in order of appearance) Suzanne, Mally, Kieran, David, Steve and Anthea.



Prompt Corner

Thursday 23rd April

Bless the Bard

a salute to Shakespeare on his 434th birthday
compiled by Vivian Vale
The Crown Inn, 7.30 p.m.

Friday 15th May

Views From The Gallery

Dorset Through Poets' eyes
espied by Kathy Messinger and friends
The Crown Inn, 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday 3rd June

Round and Round The Garden

A rehearsed playreading of this the third play
in Ayckbourn's Norman Conquest trilogy.
Arranged by Kieran Millar, with, as far as
possible, the same cast as *Table Manners*.
The Crown Inn, 7.30 p.m.

Friday 19th June

AGM and End of Season Party

The Crown Inn, AGM starts 7.00 p.m.

The Actors

This season's last contribution comes from Lance Salway, one of our most experienced actors. Lance joined *The Players* in 1976 and appeared first in the 1978 production of *Tess of the Durbervilles*. His most recent role was that of Dr Sloper in *Vivian Vale's* 1993 production of *The Heiress*. He has also directed two plays-- *Wait Until Dark* (1979) and *A Murder is Announced*--and in 1982 he dramatised Hardy's novel *The Woodlanders* for *the Players*.

I suppose I have to thank a small boy called David Simmons for my lifelong addiction to acting. About 50 years ago, when we were both Mixed Infants in Hove, he was cast as the Troll in our class production of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. On the eve of the first (and only) performance of this dramatic masterpiece, David was abruptly struck down by chicken pox and so, in the best showbiz tradition, I was hastily promoted from my humble non-speaking role as Second Tree from the Left to play the much more rewarding part of the Troll. From that day onwards I was hooked, and during the years that have followed my unexpected rise to infantile stardom, I have played countless parts in numberless productions, from Coward and Cooney to Aeschylus and Shakespeare—even, amazingly, Hamlet, though this was in a musical comedy pastiche of my own devising so perhaps it doesn't really count. I never had the face of a *jeune premier*--even at twelve I was playing grandfathers, colonels and bishops—but,

looking back across the years, I seem to have impersonated a pretty varied range of characters even so. For the APS alone I have played, among many others, an Austrian refugee, a medieval French cleric, a Mayfair man-about-town, a Victorian detective, a Broadway playwright, a Yorkshire alderman and a Dorset Yokel.

So what have I learned about the craft of acting from all these parts and so many productions? Is there anything more to acting than simply learning the lines and taking care not to bump into the furniture? There is a great deal more, of course, but I am firmly convinced that actors are born and not made. Either you can act or you can't—it's not a skill that can be learned. Formal drama training may teach you the finer points of voice production and tap-dancing, and texts by theorists like Stanislavsky and Strasberg can suggest ways of developing and exploring character, but, if nothing else, I learned over the years that acting is a purely instinctive art. After all, many of our finest performers had no formal training at all, but started their acting careers in amateur companies like our own. When all is said and done, the only real difference between amateur actors and professionals is that the professionals do it more often (if they're lucky) and get paid at the same time.

Still, after fifty years on stage, surely I must have *some* handy hints to offer on performance techniques. Surely after all this time I must have acquired one or two short cuts to learning lines and conquering stage fright. But there *are* no short cuts. Learning lines is a hard slog that doesn't get any easier as you grow older. Mind you, some parts

are easier to learn than others—playwrights who have themselves been actors, Noël Coward, for instance, and John Osborne and Alan Ayckbourn, tend to write dialogue that is easier to speak and to remember than lines by writers without stage experience. And first night nerves don't disappear with age either—in fact, they get worse.

One thing I *have* learned from the scores of directors and hundreds of players I've worked with over the years is the importance of an actor's complete commitment to a production, and the need for every member of the cast to give the director and their fellow actors the consideration and respect they deserve. We've all worked with actors who think only of themselves: the leading player who considers himself too talented to attend rehearsals; the actress who suddenly remembers that she's booked a holiday for the week of the production; the small-part actor who believes that the whole thing is a joke and can't be bothered to learn his lines or remember his entrance cues. An actor who couldn't care less can destroy at a stroke the rapport and confidence of an entire cast and ruin an otherwise successful production. And it's not just our fellow players who deserve our full-enthusiastic participation. The director deserves the best we can give, too, and so does the playwright and, ultimately, the audience. Those loyal supporters who have left their warm homes on a cold night to pay money to watch us act deserve the very best performance we can give, whether we're playing the Troll or the Second Tree from the Left.

Lance Salway

All of this was carefully created, and whenever possible controlled, by Chris Jessiman. *Table Manners* is not an easy play. All too often he had to contend with the fact that he had to direct two people having a conversation on a large set. However, one never got the impression that the play was too static or that movements were forced. The whole thing seemed to flow naturally and my attention, at least, never wandered. Chris had clearly helped to create a bond between the members of the cast, and this was particularly



SALAD DAYS

Personae Dramatis

Total cast of about 22, including:

A pair of young leads (early 20s)

A pair of young supporting roles:
an aristocrat and a deb (early 20s)

A pair of supporting roles
(about 25?)

About 16 other roles,
males and females (15-60)

Auditions at

Lyon House, Richmond Rd, Sherborne
8th, 9th, 13th, 14th July at 7.30 p

Be prepared to sing a number from any show;
bring your own music if possible

"Sarah, you have talked at me since I got up this morning....and ever since we got here, you haven't stopped for a second. Now for the love of God, SHUT UP!"



noticeable during what for me was one of the highlights of the play, the dinner-party scene in Act II, in which the 'musical chairs' sequence had audiences in fits of laughter throughout. Congratulations Chris on a fine production.

The Dorset Drama League Festival was a disappointment. Not, I hasten to add, that our contribution, *See If I Care*, was disappointing in any way. On the contrary, Jessica and her team put on a really professional production that deserved better recognition than it got. The set, although minimalist (just a bench, a sign and a section of iron railings) and thus probably not in the running for the Ana Lyle award, was perfect—we knew exactly where we were, and it deserved more than just the passing remark that it got from the adjudicator. Again the cast presented us with some nicely observed characters and the two leading ladies, Barbara Shepherd and Elsie Lombard, both produced fine performances. In our minds, Barbara was clearly in the running for the award for Best Actress, and thus we were amazed when the adjudicator spoke of the play 'dropping' at what was actually the most poignant and beautifully acted part. In the end the award went to the lady in the Shaftesbury Arts Centre play, *Big Cats*, whose performance while being quite good had contained for most of us some irritating features.

The overall winners of the event were, once again, Weymouth Drama Group, with an interesting play entitled *Laughter in the Shadow of the Trees* by James Prideaux. Their leading man deserved the award for Best Actor, but the award for the set, to our minds should have gone to *Big Cats* or *See If I Care* rather than this play, with its curious painted backdrop of trees, poorly placed trellis sparsely covered with greenery, and the horribly artificial tree stump at the front.

In the end *Big Cats* was the runner up and also picked up the award given at the adjudicator's discretion. The remaining awards, including the Producer's Trophy went to other plays, and although *See If I Care* was awarded a Certificate of Merit (awarded to all plays scoring over 70 points), this was all Jessica came away with. I have to say that I, and others I have spoken to, were not very impressed with this particular adjudicator. His adjudication, delivered, it seemed just to the front row, was filled with fairly meaningless metaphors and there was very little constructive criticism.

However, we should not get discouraged. We all know in our own minds that Jessica's production had great merit, even if it did not receive any wider public recognition at the time. And just doing these one-act plays has its advantages. It gives more of our members the chance to act, and to do something a little different to the normal run of productions. More than one person has since suggested that in future we should play Weymouth at their own game and choose pieces with a little more element of 'psychological drama', as these are clearly the kind of plays that appeal to some adjudicators.

As a footnote to this, the Southern Division Final (the second round in this competition) is to be held at the Digby Hall on the afternoon and evening of Saturday April 25th. A few APS members will be involved backstage and front of house during the proceedings and this is important—if we can be seen to provide a satisfactory level of support, enthusiasm and commitment, I have it on good authority that the organisers of the DDL will once again feel able to use the Digby Hall as the venue for the first round. Similarly, these occasions need a good audience; so, even if you are not involved, do please come if you can.

"No one in this house is speaking to you ever again, Norman"

"Oh I see. I see. That's the way the Swiss rolls."

Whats On

All-England Drama League Southern Division Final

Saturday 25th April, 2.30 (?) and 7.30 p.m.
at The Digby Hall, Sherborne.
Tickets (£5 per session, or £8 for both sessions if booked in advance) may be on sale at Forget-me-not and/or on the door.

Under The Greenwood Tree

by Thomas Hardy
Bristol Old Vic Theatre School
Friday 22nd May, 7.30 p.m.
at The Digby Hall, Sherborne
Tickets £5.90 (with concessions for OAPs, students and families)
Contact Sherborne Arts Centre
01935-813433

My Three Angels

A comedy by Sam and Bela Spewack
SNADS spring production
Thur. 7th, Fri. 8th, Sat. 9th May, 7.30 p.m.
Sturminster Newton Hall
Tickets £3.50 and £3.00
(concessions less 50 p)
On sale at Petticoat Lane, Stur. Newton
from Tue 28th April

A Boy With A Cart

Benedictine Millennium Celebration production, directed by Margaret Field
At the Tithe Barn, Wyke on June 24th-27th.
Enquiries, or offers of help,
contact Margaret on 01935-815427

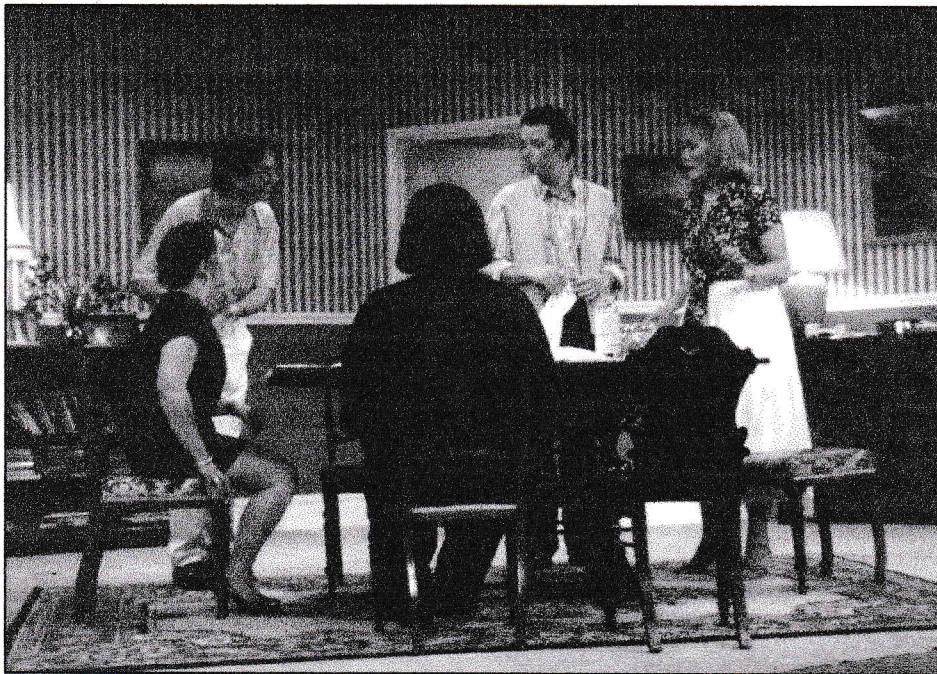
"We had planned a weekend together"

"You and Annie. Where"

"East Grinstead"

"Oh my God....."





Musical chairs.
"She can't sit there, she's out of order."

In February we had the first (of many I hope) of the revived annual APS dinners was attended by about 30 people and was most enjoyable. The service was a little slow, but this gave everyone plenty of time to chat and the food was excellent.

Our quiz night, which was very ably organised by Stuart McCreadie and Graham Baker, was also a success. Some eight teams competed and the winners deserved their prize as the questions were often far from easy. Other societies had been invited to join us, but in the end the only non-APS team was the one from SNADS, who we hope and believe enjoyed themselves. Some excellent fish and chips were served at half-time and a good time was had by all.

Following this, on April 3rd, APS were once again represented by a team at the SNADS annual fish and chip quiz and I am pleased to report that, for second year running, our team won. This year our team consisted of Michael Baatz, Jennie Harvey-Hull and three Lamberts (Mally, Tamsin and yours truly). It has to be said that the questions were, by and large, much easier than those set in our own earlier quiz, but it was probably the mix of ages and experience that enabled us to answer a greater number of questions than the other teams.

As was indicated in the programme for Table Manners our autumn production is to be a musical, and it has now been decided that Jennie Harvey-Hull will direct Salad Days. Auditions, details of which can be found on page 2, will be held in July at Lyon House. These auditions will be advertised locally and Jennie would like to hear from anyone who can suggest names of non-members who might be interested in auditioning so that she can contact them personally. We will particularly need to recruit more members to fill the younger roles. Contact Jennie on 01935-817567.

The remaining APS evenings are much as given in your treasured (I hope) blue programme. Vivian Vale's Shakespeare evening on 23rd April promises to be highly entertaining, and the venue for this, despite any previous indications to the contrary, is now confirmed as the Crown Inn. On 3rd June Kieran has now decided to present a rehearsed playreading of Round and Round The Garden, which is the third and final play in Ayckbourn's Norman Conquest trilogy. He hopes to use the same cast as for Table Manners, and this will be your chance to come and find out what happened to the characters when they disappeared into the garden.

You will have noticed that this year the AGM and the end of season party are to be held on the same evening--Friday 19th June, 7.00 p.m. (please note the time!). This is in part to encourage as many of you who can to come to the AGM, which will then be followed by the usual convivial get-together. There will, as far as I am aware, be no other form of entertainment, so there will be plenty of time to chat to friends.

One of the items on the agenda at the AGM will, as usual, be the election of officers and committee for the 1998-99 season. At the end of this season our Chairman, Jakki Gregory, will reach the end of her term of office, as will three committee members (as a result of decisions made at last year's AGM, only two new committee members will take their place). Tony Field has again stated that he no longer wishes to continue as Treasurer—and this year he really means it! Thus nominations are definitely required for the offices of Chairman, Treasurer and Committee Members. The President, Secretary and Membership Secretary are all willing to continue in these offices if re-elected, but of course anyone can nominate a member for any of these posts if they wish.

Nomination forms are enclosed with this newsletter. Please ensure that anyone you nominate agrees to stand for election beforehand. Bring completed forms with you to the AGM and hand them to the Secretary at the start of the meeting. I do hope to see you there, and as this will be the last Newsletter of the season, I wish you all a pleasant summer.

M.L.

Officers and Committee 1997-1998

President

Joy Saunders

(standing for re-election)

Chairman

Jakki Gregory

Elected 1996

(retiring)

Secretary

Anthony Stephens

(standing for re-election)

Treasurer

Tony Field

(retiring)

Membership Secretary

Mark Lambert

(standing for re-election)

Committee

Elected in 1995 and retiring

Jessica Colson

Tony Manns

Kieran Millar

Elected in 1996

Jennie Harvey-Hull

Stuart McCreadie

Kathy Messinger

Elected in 1997

Sue Francis

Patricia Stewart