



NEWSLETTER



JANUARY 2001



A very Happy New Year to you all. It is devoutly to be hoped that 2001, the true Millennium Year, whatever else it brings, will be drier and warmer than 2000.



Country Life

On Saturday 2nd December a couple joined some friends in a Sherborne restaurant, sat down and announced that they had just been to a “stonking good play” in the Digby Hall. A tribute, I am quite certain, to the dedication and professionalism of everyone involved in *Country Life*. The couple’s friends, incidentally, have now been added to our mailing list.

It was obvious from the start that Geoff Lewis had worked for a long time on this play and knew exactly what he wanted from his cast. He worked them hard, with the result that they had plenty of time not only to learn their often complex lines but also to explore and bring out the subtleties of the characters. They quickly formed a close-knit team with an understanding of their own and other characters and the result was a play steeped in very real emotion. Congratulations to all the cast for a range of very fine and highly tuned performances.

The production team were no less dedicated and as Production Manager I was extremely grateful for the way in which everyone took on their allotted task and quietly went about achieving what they had to do. Publicity (Tony-Birks-Hay), costumes (Kathy Messinger), props (Margaret Field), lighting (Adrian Hole and Lucy Kneller), stage management (Kevin Beer, Tamsin Lambert and Steve Evans) and front-of-house (David and Sylvia Smith) were all accomplished most efficiently. Thanks, too, to all those who helped us move pallets, flats, furniture etc into the Digby Hall, build the rostra, paint flats and then move everything out again the following Sunday.

The result of everyone’s efforts was a virtually flawless production. Those who came to see it (altogether about 230) appeared to be greatly appreciative. It was a pity, I know, that audience figures were not higher, but Chekhov is for some reason known not to be particularly good box office material. We have the satisfaction, however, of knowing that we put on a production that both we and the audience greatly enjoyed, even if we did

Reviewing the Review

I have met a few people recently who have given me serious and sympathetic looks and have spoken to me in hushed tones on GP-W’s piece in the BVM. I am grateful for their concern and their kindness, but I’m not sure why they are so agitated, as a less than close reading reveals the review to be positive both in terms of the performance and of APS. The only area that troubled GP-W was the transference of the setting from 1900 Russia to 1950s Dorset and that I’m afraid was down to me—and me only.

As a prefatory note I would like to state that I respect GP-W’s reviews for they are invariably informed and enlightening. Indeed, we are fortunate to have a critic of such quality regularly reviewing our productions. She gives constructive criticism that provokes discussion, whether one agrees with it or not. My only quibbles relate to one or two points. “Apart from Nanny, the characters rang false bells throughout.” As she does not qualify this statement, apart from a contextual reference to the professor, I’m not quite sure what she means.

We are faced in *Uncle Vanya* with a situation and not a plot in its conventional sense (a situation given contemporary emphasis to some degree, I’m told, by the radio programme *The Archers*). Therefore the play is character-driven. GP-W goes on to concede that the “impact was undiminished” and that the characters’ emotions are timeless and universal. She concedes, too, that the doctor, with his views on the environment, is a man of today (or for the 1950s or for all time), and I further contend that Jack’s frustration with his unfulfilled potential and sense of a wasted life, the professor’s pomposity and self-seeking nature, Helen’s boredom and Sonia’s need to work and get on with life are all conditions we recognise as we go about our lives, whether in Russia one hundred years ago or in any place at any time before or since. I accept that Horace was more of a Russian phenomenon than an English eccentric, but his impact on the whole piece was not as substantial as the other characters. I accept, too, that ‘fervid lethargy’ was dominant and that it is essentially a Chekhovian trait, but the pervading gloom and isolation of the characters was equally Hardy-esque and therefore not so very ‘un-Dorset like’. I do also accept that I should have been far freer with my red pen and bolder in my re-writing. A less timid approach and a more imaginative re-structuring to fit the new setting might have served to wrench it away from its original roots.

GP-W did not, I feel, enrich her review by reciting the story (for one person only apparently) a device I find especially irritating and of little relevance in a review. Such summaries should be reserved for previews, as those who have witnessed the performance presumably have some idea of what the play is about (this one is not over-complicated) and those who have not seen the show are not interested anyway. Her long précis took up more than a third of her review and I feel the space could have been better used on production and performance values (for good or ill!).

I am grateful for the space to voice my response and I am grateful to GP-W for her comments. Differences of opinion and interpretation are inevitable and they make theatre what it is—a ground for healthy debate.

I was pleased to see the company receive such glowing reviews—they deserved it. I would like to thank again all those involved behind the scenes and on stage for their hard work. The acting company exhibited skill and professionalism at rehearsals and ‘in-the-round’ each night. It was my privilege to work with such a dedicated set of people on what was a demanding play. Their team work was second to none. It’s not often one gets the chance to work with a Chekhov text and proceed to peel away the countless layers of character (at times it seemed as if we were stripping down our own personal emotions to get to the core of the text!) but I am convinced it was a worthwhile experience. I think we learned a little about ourselves in the process—I know I did!

Dear cast; I’m truly sorry for talking and talking until your ears dropped off, but thank you for being so patient—and polite!

Geoff

Arms and The Man

by George Bernard Shaw

Cast

Catherine Petkoff	Jill Hudson
Raina Petkoff	Jan Bridgman
Louka	Tamsin Lambert
Captain Bluntschli	Steve Evans
Russian Officer	Kieran Millar
Nicola	Mark Lambert
Major Petkoff	Stuart McCreadie
Major Sergius Saranoff	Colin Hart

Director: Jennie Ward

Production Manager: Margaret Dixon

not actually make a profit. The BVM review, if you read it carefully, was a very favourable one. The performances of the actors were rightly praised, the direction was described as accomplished and sensitive, and the review as a whole should do much to encourage people to come to future productions or even become members of The Players.

Other APS Events

If you came to see *Speed-The-Plow* in October, you will know what I mean when I say that this was a tour-de-force. Steve Evans, Mark Freestone and Tamsin Lambert gave us a memorable reading of this powerful David Mamet play. The strong language that may have put some people off coming, was in many ways hardly noticeable, as it seemed perfectly natural in the context of the play. Over 30 members attended (a high turn-out for an APS evening) and their applause at the end marked their appreciation for the hard work that had been put in by the talented trio of actors.

Attendance was also high at the Christmas party. Over 50 members enjoyed the nativity play arranged by Jo Freestone. Jo's daughter Nellie narrated the well-known story very ably, with other members of the cast miming their parts. Perhaps the most memorable moments were the exits of the Archangel Gabriel (aka Jason Hepple), who, equipped with illuminated wings created by Fred Collier, was forced to leave sideways.

As in previous years Jessica Colson provided a really excellent meal and the society is most indebted to Patricia and Ian Stewart for their hospitality.

Forthcoming events

First event on the calendar is **Give Us a Clue** on January 9th, this year devised by Peter Thomas and Mally Lambert. Some people hate this annual event and stay at home, but even more people enjoy the chance to perform in this way and on more than one occa-

sion it has revealed talent that had previously remained hidden.

Summer 2001 may seem a long way off, but plans have to be made and so Mark Freestone will be holding **auditions for Hamlet** on January 17th. He hopes to present the play in July before the schools break up for the summer holidays. The venue will be in or near Sherborne, possibly at the Old Castle or perhaps in a barn. Audition details are in the panel on the next page.

This year's **APS Dinner** is to be at The Sherborne Hotel. Dress does not have to be formal on this occasion, but diners are encouraged to be 'dressy'—extravagant is the word being used. At present I am as much in the dark regarding the name of the guest speaker as you are; it looks as though you will have to come to find out who it is. Details and an application form can be found on the accompanying sheet. Do please reply before 17th January; I suspect that forms received after this date may be treated with the contempt they deserve.

Friday 9th February will see the **Yeatman Benefit Concert** at Sherborne Girls School. At present, I know very little about this, except that Patricia Stewart has persuaded a number of performers to take part.

On Tuesday 20th February the committee invite all **potential directors** to a meeting at The Crown. Anyone who has any inclination to direct an APS production in 2002 is welcome to present their ideas. The committee would like to hear what it is about the play or plays you have in mind that appeals to you and how you see it or them being presented. If possible, please bring reading copies that can be left with committee members.

LOST AND FOUND

by Jason Hepple

Cast

Peter Clare	Fred Collier
Sean Banks	Kevin Beer
Richard Lawson	Jason Hepple
Lynette Lawson	Jo Freestone
Tracey Everson	Gill Manns
Vera Glass	Daphne Clapperton
Susan Goring	Tamsin Lambert
Catherine (Kitty) Carr	Sue Francis
George Carr	Peter Thomas
Mrs Dalrymple	Elsie Lombard
Court usher	Adam Birks-Hay
Dean	Shane Clothier
Canford Rogers	Tony Birks-Hay

Director: Jason Hepple

Production Manager: Mark Lambert

On March 9th the Crown Inn will once again reverberate to the sound of guitars, violin and, I hope, a double bass, accompanying a variety of folk songs; some familiar other less so. The line-up for **Nightingales Sing** will be much the same as last year, augmented possibly by one or two others. It is our intention to perform a different programme of songs, with perhaps a few repetitions from last year. If anyone would like to hear again any of the songs we sang last year, do please let us know.

Prompt Corner

Tuesday 9th January

Give Us a Clue

Devised by Peter Thomas and Madeline Lambert
The Crown Inn, 7.30 p.m.

Wednesday 17th January

Auditions for Hamlet

Director Mark Freestone
Cheap St Church Hall, 7.30 p.m.

Friday 26th January

Annual APS Dinner

Sherborne Hotel 7.30 for 8.00 p.m.

Wednesday 31st January - Sat 3rd February

Lost and Found

written and directed by Jason Hepple
Newell House, Greenhill, Sherborne
Twice nightly 7.00 and 9.00 p.m.

Friday 9th February

Yeatman Benefit Concert

Sherborne Girls School, 7.30 p.m.

Tuesday 20th February

Meeting for Potential Directors

The Crown Inn 7.30 p.m.

Friday 9th March

Nightingales Sing

An evening of folk music with
Mark Lambert, Amanda McEvoy and friends
The Crown Inn 7.30 p.m.

Saturday 17th March

Setting up for Arms and The Man
Digby Hall, a.m.

Monday 19th - Wednesday 21st March

Technical and dress rehearsals

Thursday 22nd - Saturday 24th March

Arms and The Man

Directed by Jennie Ward
Performances Digby Hall, 7.30 p.m.

Sunday 25th March

Strike Arms and The Man

Thursday 5th April

An Ensemble Acting Workshop

Led by Michael Baatz

Thursday 26th April

An evening with Peter Shaffer

Arranged by Margaret Dixon

On April 5th Michael Baatz, aided by Eve Mell, will conduct another **Ensemble Acting Workshop** in the Digby Memorial Hall. An evening in which to learn or be reminded of some of the techniques of acting. And on April 26th Margaret Dixon will present **An evening with Peter Shaffer**. I know nothing of the intended content of this evening, but Shaffer is a highly acclaimed modern playwright who received a knighthood in this year's honour's list for services to theatre.

Forthcoming productions

Lost and Found and *Arms and The Man* are both cast and under way. The former is a relatively self-contained production and will require no set and minimal setting up. *Arms and The Man*, on the other hand, will have a complex, movable set and the set-builder, Jim Schofield, would like some help. At present he plans to undertake structural work on the set at The Castle Stables on Tuesday mornings. Painting, in particular painting the large back cloth, will take place at Gainsborough House, South Street on Sunday afternoons. Anyone who would like to help, please contact Jim on 01935 812051. Artistic skill is not essential, as the painting will be done, as it were, 'by numbers', following a plan.

One further proposed production does not as yet appear in our calendar. You will have seen on the back of your Membership card that the Sherborne Town Festival is due to take place in May. The Players have been asked by Sherborne Arts Link to produce a Revue for this festival on the 9th or 10th May.

It is intended to produce a 1920s Revue with six to eight scenes. If any member of the Players would like to take part (actors, singers, dancers and musicians will be needed), or would like to produce and direct one of the scenes, could they please contact either Lucia Stewart (01935 812762) or Jim Schofield (01935 812051), who are co-ordinating the production.

If you want to be involved, don't delay. If there is an inadequate response to this notice, the project may have to be shelved. ML

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark

by William Shakespeare

Director: Mark Freestone
Production Manager: Gill Manns

Dramatis personae

Hamlet, Prince of Denmark; 20s/30s
Claudius, King of Denmark and Hamlet's Uncle; 40s/50s
Ghost of Hamlet's father; 60s
Gertrude, Queen of Denmark and Hamlet's mother; 40s/50s
Polonius, Lord Chamberlain; 60s/70s
Laertes, Polonius's son; 18-25
Ophelia, Polonius's daughter; late teens/mid twenties
Horatio, Hamlet's friend; 20s/30s
Fortinbras, Prince of Norway; 20s-40s
Marcellus, Barnardo and Francisco - three members of the King's guard
Osric, a foppish courtier; any age
Other courtiers
The grave-digger; 50s?
The grave-digger's companion
The Players (King, Queen and others; any age)
A priest; 40s
A captain in Fortinbras's army

There are both large and small speaking roles and some non-speaking parts. It should be noted that there are probably more opportunities for women than would appear at first glance, as Mark has not ruled out the possibility of casting women in certain male roles. Some doubling is likely, particularly among the smaller parts.

Performances of *Hamlet* will probably take place in July, before the end of the school summer term. It is Mark's intention that the cast will be dressed in period costume.

Auditions will take place at the Cheap St Church Hall on Wednesday 17th January, 7.30 p.m. You may if you wish bring a prepared piece, but this is not necessary, as Mark intends to hold workshop-style auditions. Bring a copy of the play if you have one.

If you cannot audition on this date, but would like to be considered for a part, contact Mark Freestone on 01963 220049 or 07760 311426 (Mobile).

Lost Property A thick cotton jumper, green, blue and white check pattern, was found in the Digby Hall on the Sunday after *Country Life*. The owner can claim this from Mark Lambert (01258 817270).

Organisation of Productions

It appears that my piece about the Production Team in the September Newsletter gave the impression that the role of Production Manager is a particularly difficult one. This is not the case.

Hitherto the Director of a play has usually recruited and supervised the entire production team. In most cases, one of the members of this team was a Business Manager, whose main task it was to arrange for the production and sale of tickets.

The Production Manager's main task is simply to remove from the Director the burden of having to recruit and organise the

production team, as well as directing the play. So the Production Manager is actually doing only a small part of what used to be the Director's job, which is why it seems reasonable to include among the Production Manager's tasks those formerly accomplished by the Business Manager.

It should be noted that the Production Manager or Business Manager has only to *arrange* for the production of tickets and programmes. These things *can* be done by the Production Manager, who may also choose to do other things as well, but this is a matter of choice, not a requirement.

Since I wrote in September a further modification has been made to the production team briefs. In view of the apparent difficulty in finding people to take on the role of Production Manager, it remains open to Directors to take on this role themselves, and recruit a Business Manager as before.

I hope this clears up any misunderstanding. The point is that people should not be frightened of taking on the role of Production Manager. The job does not involve anything that has not been done before and the main purpose is to spread the workload. ML