

NOISES OFF

"DISPLACED"

In years to come, it will no doubt be a topic of discussion as to which was the first performance to be staged in the refurbished (and re-named) Chapel, as we increasingly made use of it during various its various phases of development. A good contender would be "Displaced" by Jan Pain, a rehearsed reading of which took place at tea-time on 25th February, directed by Adrian Harding.

"Displaced" is a mini-drama about events at



Tyneham, Dorset. It is set in 1943, when Churchill's War Cabinet sealed the village's fate by requisitioning the whole valley for military training ahead of the D-Day landings. Notice was given to the villagers that they would be required to leave within 28 days, which they duly did, in the belief that this was a temporary measure, and that they would return one day. Sadly, that was never to happen.

The play is the dramatic writing debut of Jan Pain, a creative writer and member of the Sherborne Scribblers. On being given the task

of creating the elements of a short dramatic script, Jan drew on her knowledge of the famous Dorset "lost village" for her inspiration.



With a cast of six (Geoffrey Martin, Roy Catchpole, Linda Catchpole, Austin Wookey, Malcolm Cockburn and Daphne Martyn), the story was brought to life on the new (but not totally finished) stage. With period furnishings, costumes and props, and projections of 1940s-style interiors, the piece was a visual pleasure, and indicated how successfully the conversion of the Chapel will allow an audience's imagination to be set free. Nicely lit, and with well-chosen snatches of wartime songs accompanying the scene changes, there was a pervading feeling of both nostalgia and melancholy. The script calls for the actors to bring across a strong feeling of love and loyalty for their village, a deep-rooted history there, and an optimism about their eventual return. The last scene, which "fast-forwards" 60 years, offers a poignant retrospective, combined with a resigned acceptance of what has to be done for the greater good.

All the cast succeeded magnificently in projecting these feelings to the very

appreciative audience. The delivery of the lines was unhurried and thoughtful, and took us back to what seemed, ironically, to be a gentler and more innocent age. A particularly well-chosen moment was the projection of the



words left by the villagers pinned to the church door, and which summed up the impact of the whole piece: *"Please treat the church and houses with care; we have given up our homes where many of us lived for generations to help win the war and keep men free. We shall return one day and thank you for treating the village kindly."*

Many thanks and congratulations to Jan, to Adrian and the whole cast and crew.

APS WEBSITE

Please note that the APS website has been brought right up to date with photographs, both on the home page and in the gallery, from all four parts of "London Suite".

Mark Lambert

"LONDON SUITE"

"London Suite" opened on March 14th, the first full show (rather than rehearsed reading) to be performed in the Sherborne Studio Theatre, on the newly-completed stage. Sylvie Lord directed.

Written by Neil Simon in 1994, the eponymous suite comprises two rooms in a comfortable, old-fashioned hotel overlooking Hyde Park (beautifully implied by Mark Lambert's excellent poster and John Crabtree's splendid set); it also gives a nod to the fact that the work is in fact a suite of four short playlets. The action of each plays out at different times but in the same hotel rooms.



Settling Accounts featured Martin Williams and John Crabtree (bravely stepping in at the 11th hour because of illness). Their story was one of betrayed trust,

theft, deceit and lying. The threat of imminent violence hung over most of the action, although this was lightened by moments of humour; with a classic "twist" at the end, the piece's comic tone was established in retrospect. Unusually, the audience's sympathies appear to swing from one character to the other, both of them showing equal deviousness.

In complete contrast, *Going Home*, with Emma de la Poer and Jessica Colson, is a warm, gentle and touching piece in which a widowed mother is cajoled by her daughter into spending an evening with a superficially-attractive man whom she had only fleetingly met.



The account given of the disastrous evening that transpired is hilarious, but the tone changes when, in another "twist", the mother reveals that she is already in a morally-complex relationship with another man. Emma and Jessica brought the two characters to life beautifully with highly convincing American accents, and showed a warm and loving mother-daughter relationship, the humour realised through the script's gags and the situation's absurdities.

Following the interval, Sylvie Lord, John Crabtree and Linda Catchpole took to the stage in *Diana and Sidney*, in which Diana,

a successful TV star, shows her nostalgia for what she sees (or perhaps claims to see) as her lost youth and faded talent, through her interaction with her PA, and with her ex-husband Sidney. All three combined to create a delightful mixture of warmth and affection, while juggling with the complexities of relationships past, present and wished-for, gay and straight. Both Diana and Sidney are superbly-created, plausible personalities; demanding roles which Sylvie and John did full justice to, while Linda's Grace made the perfect straight-faced foil to her employer.



The final playlet, *The Man on the Floor*, offers the broadest comedy and also the most physical (the other three being quite static). Mark and Anne (Richard Culham and Jane Pitts) are a squabbling couple straight out of a TV sitcom, with Sarah Jane Chapman, playing the oblivious, straight-laced manager Mrs Sitgood in a suitably deadpan manner, whilst Geoffrey Martyn's Dr McMerlin delivered beautifully laconic Irish observations on the rapidly-deteriorating situation unfolding in front of him. Mark's



desperate situation, involving a ricked back and a just-out-of reach telephone was played to full comic effect by Richard, and enormously enjoyed by the audience.

What with four different casts, negotiating rehearsals around another show, contending with the Beast from the East, with illness and with John and Adrian Hole building not only a set, but the stage on which it stood, "London Suite" posed a great challenge. For its undoubted success, congratulations and thanks should particularly go, of course, to the Director, Sylvie Lord.



It was with regret that the Celebration of Easter had to be cancelled at the last minute. Apologies to those of you who were disappointed.

A recent sale of old costumes raised the sum of over £130, and there is reason to believe that we will be able to sell more in the future. On the subject of funds, members will remember that the month of March saw the APS as one of the Community Matters charities supported by Waitrose. At the time of writing we do not yet know what share of £1000 we will receive, but hopefully everyone did their bit with their green tokens!

(FORMERLY)

THE CHAPEL!

We are delighted and excited to be able to announce that full approval has now been granted for the final phase of the conversion of the Chapel. This will entail the refurbishment and reconstruction of the area inside the side entrance. When completed, there will be a new kitchen area, toilets (including a disabled toilet) and Green Room, with direct access onto the new stage. It is hoped that this work will be completed in time for "A Midsummer Night's Dream" in June (although, as we all know, a certain amount of slippage can often be expected!)

The newly refurbished venue both needs and deserves a new name, reflective of the building's changed purpose. After considerable debate, it has been decided that henceforth our venue is to be known as "**The Sherborne Studio Theatre**".

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM -

Cast needed - Are you feeling Puckish?

As you will be aware, our next major production is to be "A Midsummer Night's Dream" on June 18th - 23rd. In order to whet your appetite, John Crabtree, the Director, has submitted below the first part of a detailed and highly erudite overview of the play's history.

However, before we get too carried away, we wish to draw the attention of APS members to a potential difficulty. Although the majority of roles have been filled successfully, we are now **URGENTLY** seeking a male or female appropriate for Puck, and three Mechanicals (at least one to be male). Please either put yourself forward if you can, or rack your brains to think of friends/relatives/contacts who could be persuaded to participate. Contact John at jcrabbers@aol.com or on 01935 814720.

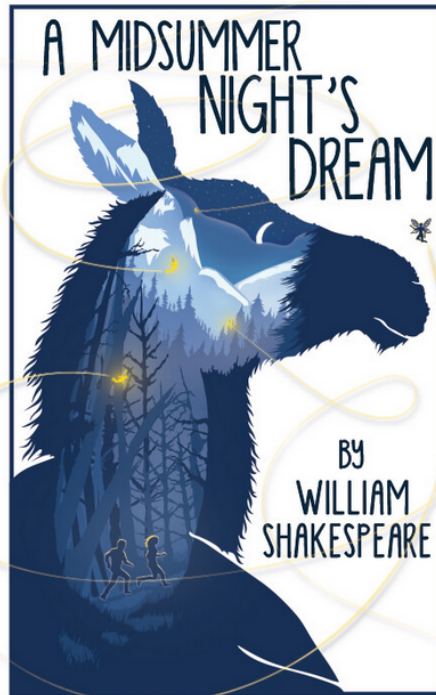
A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

PART I

The exact date and the circumstances under which Shakespeare's most entertaining comedy was first produced are unclear. We know it was the play which he wrote to follow 'Romeo and Juliet', so it is assumed that it was staged somewhere between 1594 and 1596. Whether it was commissioned as a celebratory piece or as an entertainment specifically for the benefit of Queen Elizabeth I is equally hazy.

But the play we know as one of the author's best loved and most performed plays has had a chequered life, since, for some two hundred years it scarcely enjoyed any theatrical life at all, languishing in almost total eclipse in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Samuel Pepys, seeing the play around this time declared it 'the most insipid ridiculous play I ever saw in my life'. In fact, there are only two known performances of the play under its own name between 1660 and 1816.

Salvation from this unfortunate situation came in the form of Madame Vestris, a redoubtable actor, producer and general all-round theatrical entrepreneur. (It should be pointed out here that this was the age of Romanticism; of the poetry of Byron, Keats and Shelley, the music of Weber and Berlioz and



the ballets 'Giselle' and 'La Sylphide'. It also saw the excavation of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome). Recognizing the potential of combining the supernatural elements in Shakespeare's play with quasi-archaeological reconstructions coupled with the opportunity to fill the stage with a vast number of 'accurately' costumed extras, she created a highly successful extravaganza. Encompassing this aspiration to bring authenticity to the stage, the period also saw major advances in stage technology with the introduction of gas lighting and increasingly highly realistic examples of scene-painting which allowed more

sophisticated effects to be created.

Having seen a production of the play in Germany in 1843 which incorporated the famous Mendelssohn incidental music, Madame Vestris introduced the score into her London production and together with increasingly lavish décor and a cast of hundreds, it became a national sensation. This trend for supersized, hyper-realistic extravaganzas with an emphasis on opulence and historical 'accuracy', persisted throughout the nineteenth century, culminating in a famous Beerbohm Tree production at the turn of the century which went as far as introducing live rabbits into the woodland scenes.

But although this mixture proved to be brilliantly successful in many ways, it became both an artistic straitjacket and an economic liability as twentieth century theatres grappled with rising labour costs which reduced the size of mortal and fairy courts as well as theatre orchestras. Needless to say, this situation could not continue, so, with the onset of the First World War, attitudes and approaches to the staging of 'The Dream' began to change.

(To be continued)