



# NOISES OFF

MSND SPECIAL

*This edition of "Noises Off" is largely devoted to the recent performance of "A Midsummer Night's Dream", regarded by everyone who spoke to, or contacted us, as an unqualified success. As the show also marked the official opening of our new Theatre, this was truly a turning-point in the history of the Players, and we hope you will forgive us if there is a self-congratulatory tone in much of this. On a more sombre note, we also include Mark Lambert's obituary for David Smith, whose sad death was announced in the previous edition.*

*The date of the AGM has not yet been fixed, but will take place before the end of August. As soon as the date is settled, you will of course be notified.*

## A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM JUNE 19TH - 23RD 2018

### WHAT THE DIRECTOR SAID.....

It seems hard to believe that at the time auditions and early rehearsals of the play took place, the country was in the throes of one of the coldest, snowiest springs for many years with our actors wrapped up in hats, scarves and anoraks and shivering in their thermal underwear. Ten weeks later, performances took place in flaming June temperatures with players (and audience) in danger of serious dehydration.

Ever since the first stages of the renovation of the Chapel, as it then was, had been finished, I had felt that once the work was complete, it would be exciting to open the performance space as a theatre with a major, large-scale production. As a director who enjoys a challenge, I saw that potentially, The Dream offered the group an ideal opportunity to display not only its new theatre but to tackle one of Shakespeare's most popular plays – and on Midsummer Night itself.

Every potential director of a play by Shakespeare approaches it with 'a concept' which he or she endeavours to communicate – initially to the company – and then hopefully to the audience. Mine was that it should be presented in modern dress, should have a limited amount of scenery, a minimalist lighting design and should have a cast of no more than 14 actors. Using this as a basis, I hoped to explore the blending of reality and fantasy in a darker world of dreams.

Casting a classical play is not an easy task, but the company already had a number of actors experienced in 16<sup>th</sup> century drama; Martin Williams, Sylvie Lord, Adrian Harding, Bev Taylor-Wade, Rachael Alexander and Richard Culham were all seasoned Shakespeareans, but finding young players to fill the parts of the lovers, Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia and Helena was never going to be easy. However, I was fortunate to secure four keen, young people who were eager to tackle Shakespeare's text, grasping the meaning of the archaic language, fighting their way through iambic pentameters and creating believable three-

dimensional characters. Their energy and enthusiasm was quite remarkable.

Having decided that it would be interesting to follow Shakespeare's own practice of doubling many of the roles, I asked four of the Mechanicals to double as Fairies. Aided by masks and suitable other-worldly costumes (drawn from our own wardrobe by costume supervisor Helen Smith) they made a formidable bunch of weird and wonderful sprites. Added to this we had the benefit of assorted multi-tasking door-openers, attendants and spare fairies.

Lighting a play which requires several different settings was a challenge for lighting designer Adrian Hole, but he responded positively to my every request, even anticipating some, and creating a beautiful and luminous background to the action. Likewise, Mark Lambert's sensitive handling of the sound design enhanced many of the play's visual aspects. It was also an advantage in having Annabel Thornton's specially composed music to complement some of the more ethereal moments.

One of the joys of having one's own theatre is that all rehearsals can take place on the stage on which the play is to be performed, and this we found a great convenience. Actors became familiar with the space, could time their entrances and exits and began to use the width and breadth of the stage to considerable advantage. Also, when it came to the performances, having a dressing room close to the stage was also of great benefit, and it has to be said that over the week of performances, with 14 people in the cast, they all got to know each other extremely well.

Looking back on the last ten weeks, I have to say they have been some of the happiest I have spent in the theatre. This was very much a team effort and there was a constant sense of sheer enjoyment, enthusiasm and all-round good fun running through the company. We had some good times and a lot of pleasure was had from exploring the play and its language. We have made new friends and furthered older friendships and for me, and I hope, the rest of the cast and crew, not to mention our capacity audiences, it was a labour of love.

**John Crabtree**



John and Adrian (Egeus and Bottom)



Lucy, Jake, John and Rosy (Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius and Helena)

## WHAT THE CRITICS SAID....

"It is always a pleasure to witness a production in which the Director (John Crabtree) has a sound understanding of both the play and the characters within it, leaving him free to add his own comic touches and interpretation. There were some lovely comic moments and interesting ideas which enhanced the meaning and delivery of the

show...Congratulations APS - this was an enchanting performance with which to celebrate the opening of the Sherborne Studio Theatre."

"...full of invention and fun, and a perfect opening for the new performance space in the week of Midsummer's Day..."

**Sylvia Coates (NODA) and Gay Pirrie-Weir (Fine Times Recorder).** *Both articles can be downloaded in full from our website.*



Bev, Adrian, Richard, Richard, Sarah and Linda (The Rude Mechanicals)

## WHAT THE AUDIENCES SAID....

"I was bowled over by the evening on Monday and have spoken with many neighbours and friends and all agreed it was everything one could have wished."

*"Speed, colour, slick word perfect, clarity, What a cast What a crew, what a Director."*

"There wasn't a weak performer on stage, the script was delivered in a clear, understandable manner by all, there were some directorial flashes of brilliance and innovation, and I laughed like a drain. Congratulations on a splendid production and the uniformly high standard achieved by director, cast, black gang and technicians."

*"As a a brand-new member of your audience, my wife and I were enthralled. We shall come again - and so will all others who were fortunate enough to see it."*

"The staging was truly innovative, the casting was spot on and the cast were, to all intents and purposes, word perfect which is

astonishing for a first night with a play of this complexity.”

“...such a delightful and entertaining production.”

“...my heartiest congratulations on a superb performance of A Midsummer Nights Dream,



Rachael and Martin (Puck and Oberon)

wonderfully portrayed by a first rate cast, it was funny, colourful and done with great enthusiasm in a super venue!”

“A brilliant, sparkling, ho-so-hilarious show with such gifted and wonderful people.”

“What a fantastic, brilliant night out. The production was flawless and I loved every minute - just wanted to scream and shout and laugh and clap much more but good old English reserve held me back. All of you should be very proud and, as for your Director... No words except Wow! Arise Sir John Crabtree! Thank you for a great show in a wonderful venue.”



Linda, Sylvie, Sarah and Richard (Mustardseed, Titania, Moth and Cobweb)

## WHAT THE CAST SAID....

“Being Helena has been an extremely fun part to play; being a character who is not only under the impression that she can’t be loved but also having all the men stolen from her by her best friend, I was able to just do a lot of ranting and playing the victim which is always an entertaining part to play! I have loved every minute of doing this play. Hats off to all of my fellow actors; WE DID IT!”

**Rosy (Helena)**



Richard and Bev (Snout and Mrs Quince)

“...at times the green room resembled the strangest doctor’s waiting room imaginable... Overheard conversation: perfectly in sequence: “where are my trousers” “get into position” & “I’ll get the cushions!””

**Sarah (Moth/Starveling)**

“It was great fun, hard work, but extremely enjoyable all the way through. I haven’t laughed as much in ages!

Working with a strong cast and crew who are all equally committed to putting on the best show possible is just a brilliant experience!”

**Richard (Snout/Cobweb)**



Rosy, Lucy and Rachael (Helena, Hermia and Puck)



Adrian and Sylvie (Bottom and Titania)

“For me this was a Dream come true! I last did Shakespeare when I was 15 and waited all my life for another Shakespearean role. Miss Snug was the epitome of my desire – a small part but essential to the whole. I loved being Snug, I loved being Mustardseed the fairy (and dancing with Bottom), but most of all I loved being The Lion and being part of a ROARING success! A fabulous cast and crew – every single one of them! More! More!”

**Linda (Mustardseed/Snug)**

“I laughed every night, and am so proud of such a wonderful team of lovely people. Thank you, everyone.”

**Roy (Attendant/Backstage)**

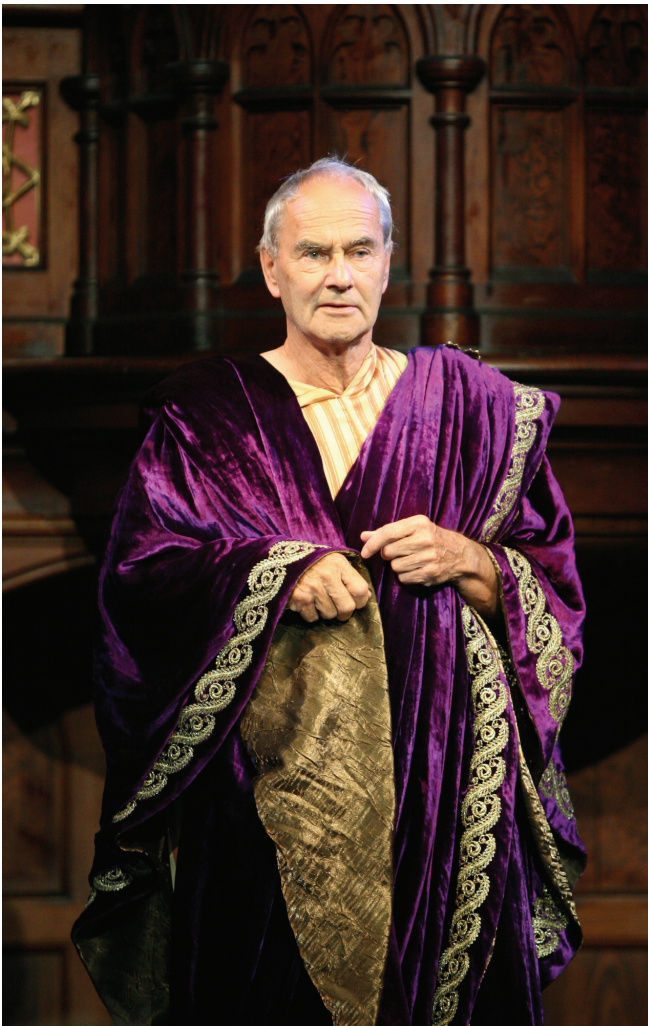
“As well as being part of a cracking team, with a visionary Director, I just felt so honoured and privileged to be allowed to repeat, night after night, the sheer gorgeousness of Shakespeare’s language. It was like being entrusted with the Crown Jewels! So, one last time:

‘...for she his hairy temples then had rounded With coronet of fresh and fragrant flowers; And that same dew, which sometime on the buds Was wont to swell like round and orient pearls, Stood now within the pretty flowerets’ eyes, Like tears that did their own disgrace bewail.....’ “

**Martin (Theseus/Oberon)**

## David Smith

It was with great sadness that I learned of the recent death of David Smith. I have known him as a friend and stalwart member of The Players since the autumn of 1993, when we met in Stuart Vernon's stage version of *The Secret Garden*, in which we both played multiple small parts.



David joined APS in 1992, shortly after he and Sylvia moved to Sherborne. Over the years he appeared on stage in many roles: Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* (1994); Albert Godby in *Still Life* (1995); Rogers in *And Then There Were None* (1996); Telfer in *Trelawny of 'The Wells'* (1996); Reg in *Table Manners* (1998); Colin Holt in *The House by the Lake* (1998); Spriggs in *Theft* (1999); John Middleton in *The Constant Wife* (2000); Duke Frederick in *As you Like It* (2000); Polonius in *Hamlet* (2001); Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night* (2002); Hilary in

*The Old Country* (2003); Mr Watts in *A Busy Day* (2005); A waiter in *Confusions - Drinking Companions* (2006); Julius Caesar in *Julius Caesar* (2007); Bunter in *Busman's Honeymoon* (2011); Joe Stoddard in *Our Town*; (2011); Mr Ames in *A Chorus of Disapproval* (2013); and finally Robert Shallow in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2014).

David directed two plays for APS. One of these was *A Ghost on Tiptoe* in the spring of 2010, which he co-directed with Jennie Ward. But the play for which he will long be remembered was Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* which he directed with huge success in the Cheap Street Church in the summer of 2007. And not only did he direct the play but, due to John Bowles' unfortunate illness, he also ended up taking over the lead part at quite a late stage. And this too he performed to much acclaim, eventually dying at the hands of the Senators most dramatically in the church gallery.

Even so, the part that he will probably best be remembered for was Spriggs, the burglar, in Eric



Chappell's *Theft* (Spring 1999). I can do no better than to quote what I wrote in the Newsletter at the time. "..... the star of the show... was David Smith, who immersed himself in the part of Spriggs, originally written for George Cole, and made it his own. From the moment he made his first entrance from the confines of the window seat cupboard to his final telephone call, he had the audience in fits of laughter and his delivery of the line "I was that little boy in glasses" never failed to stop the show. A brilliant

performance.” Prior to the show we took some publicity photos of David dressed as a burglar, complete with mask and striped shirt, climbing out of the upstairs window at the front of Tony and Margaret Field’s house in The Coombe. At that moment a police car pulled up and two officers got out to ask what we were doing. We explained, they laughed and went on their way, happy to know that they weren’t dealing with a real burglary.

As you can see from the list of his roles above, David was especially fond of Shakespeare. One of his last acts for APS was to produce and direct, together with his wife Sylvia, the ‘Shakespeare in the Garden’ event in the

summer of 2016, an outdoor production accompanied by Pimms and strawberries that was blessed with reasonable weather and much appreciated by the picnicking audience.

When not on stage David was often to be found either working backstage or as a member of the Front of House team. Sometimes he would be helping Sylvia, who never appeared on stage herself, but has always been present in the background, in charge of make-up, props or helping front of house. Both David and Sylvia, who is moving away from Sherborne soon, will be greatly missed.

**Mark Lambert**

