

# Noises Off

## FROM THE EDITOR

There being, sadly, little else to report, this edition of "Noises Off" is devoted exclusively to our recent performances of *Waiting for Godot*, which finally took place (only 5 months late!) in Paddock Garden on two gloriously warm and sunny days last month. All tickets sold out rapidly, a reflection, surely, of our thirst for live theatre in these strange times. Having been asked (and agreeing) to create for the set, among other things, a dead tree, a mound and a black radish, as well as giving an outstanding performance as Lunar Technician, I am grateful to John Crabtree for the following article.....

## WAITING FOR GODOT - A VIEW FROM THE WINGS

Back in the good old days of 2019, at the time when rehearsals for APS's spring 2020 production of *Table Manners* were about to get underway, thoughts were already turning to the play that was scheduled to follow it – Samuel Beckett's enigmatic and controversial play *Waiting for Godot*. Auditions were held, a cast chosen, a basic set design agreed on and the actors began the formidable task of tackling Beckett's seemingly impenetrable script. By February, stage rehearsals were in full swing, the *Godot* cast often sharing the stage (not at the same time, I hasten to add) with the *Table Manners* cast – *Godot*, 5.30

to 7.30; *Table Manners*, 7.30 to 9.30. It was all systems go.

*Table Manners* came and went with great success. The dining-room set was struck and the weird and wonderful world of *Godot* started to take shape; a simple black



box with a skeletal tree and a mound, the latter constructed from the ever-reliable wooden pallets, chicken wire and plaster. Plastering, I discovered, was a very therapeutic, if messy, occupation. It was like playschool revisited. Over the weeks, a selection of 'distressed' garments, boots, suitcases and bowler hats



started to appear in the theatre, all necessary props for Beckett's play in which 'Nothing happens, nobody comes, nobody goes.' Everything was going according to plan.

And then the pandemic struck ...!

But the story doesn't end there. Always looking on the positive side, throughout lockdown line rehearsals continued on a regular basis via the miracle of "Zoom" and "Houseparty" in the hope that one day the play might, just might, be put before an audience. Keeping Beckett's tortuous text fixed in the brain was essential, an immense challenge for all concerned. But hope, as they say, springs eternal, and as a result of a serendipitous meeting between two members of the company it was suggested that the play might be presented in an open-air setting in Paddock Garden. It was an ideal location for the play, though maybe not quite the dystopian setting that Beckett had envisaged. However, the gnarled tree and the rough

mound sat remarkably well in the sylvan setting.

I had read the play at school and like most 16-year-olds could make neither head nor tail of it, but having attended several rehearsals in the garden, I won't say that the 'meaning' suddenly became apparent to me, but I found myself laughing and enjoying the intricate wordplay and the absurdity of the action, and in Jerome Swan's admirably lucid production, the play was light and airy and very funny. There is often a tendency to be too reverential where Beckett is concerned, but the actors treated the text as it was meant to be played, as a fast-moving, black, absurdist comedy. With the addition of up-to-the minute references to distancing and sanitising, the gags flowed freely.

Having seen the performances in rehearsal and in front of an



audience, I have to say that they were all without exception outstanding. Despite there being no

physical description of the character, the Estragon of Carl Davies brought a fine musicality to his lines. Using the full range of his voice in conjunction with his physicality, he created a formidable yet vulnerable character. Acting as his feed and fall-guy, Martin Williams delivered his Stan Laurel to Carl's Oliver Hardy, a perfect comedy double act, the hat-passing game beautifully played. Puffed up like an absurdist Mr Toad, Adrian Harding



underlined Pozzo's basic vulnerability and his relationship with Lucky suggested that, particularly in the 'blind' scene, Lucky was possibly the more controlling partner of the two. I remember looking at the script and discovering that Lucky had only one speech in the entire play: but what a speech. Two closely written pages of text with NO punctuation. How Graham Smith managed to make sense, learn and retain it in



his brain from last November till September 2020 is an incredible feat. Making up the cast was young Seth Collis as The Boy, a small but vitally important role, and his two short appearances were carried out with confidence and self-assurance. A very promising young talent.



It is often said that out of every disaster comes opportunity and I think, judging by the appreciation shown by the capacity audiences for both performances that what arose from a chance conversation only went to prove that theatre is very much alive and kicking and happening in Sherborne.

**John Crabtree**



Seth Collis, Martin Williams, Carl Davies, Graham Smith, Adrian Harding

## THE REVIEWS

**In the “Last Production” section of the APS website, you will be able to read full reviews from the two professional critics we invited to attend. At the risk of own-trumpet-blowing, we here present a selection of their comments:**

*“...a triumph...”*

*“...delighted not only by the beautiful setting with Sherborne House as its backdrop, but by the wit, skill and ingenuity of the performers.”*

*“... a clever and illuminating production of this extraordinary play, brilliantly performed...”*

*“...a production which was light and airy, the*

*most creative and entertaining I have seen...”*

*“...a fresh and intelligent exploration of the human condition...”*

*“...full of energy, light and shade, with a strong sense of fun and playful physicality, but which addressed the depth and complexity of the text with conviction and integrity.”*

*“An excellent interpretation, most entertaining and thought-provoking...”*

**The website also contains a large gallery of photographs by Mark Lambert, of which a small sample is reproduced in this newsletter.**



**Lucky and Pozzo**



**Vladimir and Estragon**