

NOISES OFF

BACK AT LAST!

What a pleasure it is finally to be able to send a newsletter full of nothing but good news and optimism for the future. Our AGM this Friday (August 27th) will mark the beginning of a new era in which - we fervently hope - we will be able to plan our future shows and continue to develop our theatre free of the fear of interruptions, closure and uncertainty. Plans for our winter production of *The Witness for the Prosecution* are already firmly in place, and further shows are being pencilled in beyond that. With an influx of new members, with the welcome receipt of a legacy, and with exceptional profits from our last two outdoor productions, our finances are on a good footing. And the sound of the audience's laughter and applause is still ringing in our ears from the hugely successful *Shakespeare In*

(and Out of) *Love*, where we successfully picked out two of the only dry days of the summer in which to perform to full houses in Paddock Garden.

Happy reading!

AGM AND SUMMER PARTY

We would like to remind all members that the AGM will take place this Friday, August 27th, at 7.30pm in the Sherborne Studio Theatre, followed by the annual summer party. All members are warmly invited to attend.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please remember that APS membership renewal is due on September 1st. Subscriptions remain unchanged at £15 for adult membership. Details regarding arrangements for payment have been sent out by email.

A GENEROUS LEGACY

Members will no doubt be pleased to hear that the APS have benefited from a very generous legacy from the estate of Meg Whittingdale, former member and Chair of the Players, who passed away last year.

THE WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

You are reminded that auditions for "Witness for the Prosecution", performance dates December 6th - 11th, will take place in the Theatre on Wednesday 25th August and Wednesday 1st September, from 7.00pm. Details of the show and of the characters have already been emailed out - if you require further information please contact John Crabtree. (jcrabbers@aol.com)

"SHAKESPEARE IN (AND OUT OF) LOVE"

Like many great things, it started with frustrated questions dictated by circumstances. "When can we put on our next production?" "How many people can we allow in the theatre?" We didn't have any answers to these questions at the time....But we had to do SOMETHING! We were going crazy after a year of lockdown.

"How about outdoors, again, in Paddock Garden, like we did with *Godot*? That worked well". Agreed. Something outdoors, something positive, popular, familiar, engaging, light-hearted but thought-provoking. And it must involve lots of APS members of all ages.

It had to be Shakespeare. Probably a comedy. But which one? "What about all of them?" The germ of an idea was in place. With creative juices flowing, Martin Williams and

John Crabtree got their heads down and pored through the collected works of the Bard to extract the best bits of his take on the timeless theme of love.

True love is always uplifting, but not always very amusing. We needed humour as well. What happens to love when others get involved? The in-laws, the well-meaning friends, the meddling outsiders and even the cross-dressing twins? They were all there in the works, so Martin and John set about choosing all the best parts on the theme of love; when it goes well, and when it goes badly. They linked them all together with a clever running commentary delivered by a narrator. This would provide the audience with a seamless insight into the romantic mind of Shakespeare, rather than a random

compilation of his "Greatest Hits".

And so *Shakespeare In (and Out of) Love* was born.

Next step was the ubiquitous Zoom call in May, which attracted 20 APS members and friends to try it out. At the end of a thoroughly enjoyable evening, we gave it a unanimous thumbs up. Our two dedicated writers made some tweaks and edits, changed the running order a bit, and declared the script complete. They invited the faithful to casting auditions.

Some of the original Zoom cast members weren't able to participate, due to holidays and prior commitments. That was a shame, but it also presented an opportunity, as it encouraged us to trawl for



the best available talent in the area, some of whom had never worked with APS before. This included talented youngsters who were back from drama college for the summer, and past members of the group who had drifted away but were now keen to renew their acquaintances. There was no arm-twisting needed here. Every single member of the cast and crew was an enthusiastic and willing participant.

Our previous forays into Paddock Garden (*Shakespeare in the Garden* in 2016 and *Waiting for Godot* last September) had been unaccompanied. Martin, who by now was the director and mastermind behind the whole production, decided that a musical backdrop would lift the emotions and set the tone of the age. He invited David Grierson to provide a live harpsichord musical accompaniment, emphatically setting the production in Tudor and Jacobean times.

John Crabtree assembled all the appropriate props. Helen Smith worked her customary magic with curtains and velvet cushion-covers to dress the



cast in wonderful costumes of the period, bringing colour and style to the production.

The pieces of the jigsaw were in place, and rehearsals began, with little clusters of twos and threes gathering in our lovely theatre to run through their moves and lines. But jigsaws only look like masterpieces when the pieces are put together, so the bigger group rehearsals needed to be undertaken in-situ, on the stone stage in the garden.

And that is where the problems began. Late July and early August in Sherborne were spectacularly un-summery, and it felt that each time a rehearsal was due to begin, the heavens opened. It was frustrating, but spirits kept up. Somehow, we acted under brollies, dodged the cloudbursts and got the job done. Not a moan, not a groan, not a whisper of dissent from anyone. Everybody, young and old, did what they had to do with passion and delight, relishing the language and throwing themselves into the choreography of the occasion.

And the performances on two successive Sunday afternoons? Don't let me tell you. Let's hear what some

independent outsiders said about it:

The Fine Times Recorder said: "The 20+ cast evidently relished director Martin Williams and his co-writer John Crabtree's selection of *The Bard's* thoughts about lurve. And when you listen to these familiar (and not so familiar) snippets from 11 plays and a couple of sonnets, you rapidly realise that there was **NOTHING** about the psychology and reality of love that Shakespeare didn't understand. Congratulations to the entire team for putting on a vibrantly enjoyable entertainment again, in this second year of uncertainty".

The National Operatic and Dramatic Association, NODA, said: "Amateur Players of Sherborne once again create something fresh and energetic, weaving together extracts of Shakespeare's work into a cohesive programme of views of love and relationships. Highly enjoyable, these mini-plays showcase gifted and talented performers from APS, drawing the audience into the plot by developing the full meaning, exploring the character and demonstrating the capacity of



Shakespearean actors to play with humour and a sense of mischief. Concluding with a bright duet and Company song, this is a most enjoyable entertainment for a summer's afternoon".

An audience member said: "Just a brief note to say thanks for a marvellous afternoon's Shakespeare. We all loved it. Vibrant, well-performed and with a real ear for the verve of the language. Some great performances all through. It was joyous to be sat amongst a capacity audience who were obviously lapping up the atmosphere. Congratulations to all the cast and crew for a thoroughly enjoyable afternoon".

Well done, Martin and John. Congratulations, cast and crew. Another triumph in the timeline of APS.

Adrian Harding



Footnotes from the Director: Shakespeare makes it very clear that Juliet is 13 years old, Miranda is 15 and that Perdita is at the ripe old age of 16. We can imagine that their respective lovers are not expected to be very much older. Fearful that we might have to stretch the definition of an “age-blind performance” a little too far, I was eager to find actors and actresses who could fit the bill - and how lucky I was! Directing “In and Out” was full of pleasure, fun and good experiences, but one of the best was welcoming onto our stage half a dozen bright, enthusiastic and enormously talented young people, who gave the whole show a real lift, and blew fresh air and energy over us all. To all of them,

thank you, welcome, well done, keep on acting, and stay with us!

Then there were the newcomers - Sheenu, Sarah, positively oozing experience, talent and class. Again - stay with us!

And the returners - Sylvie and Rob - APS members who had left the area, but couldn't resist coming back to take part: I'm so grateful you made the right decision!

The maestro - we don't usually have live music, but I felt it was an essential part of our vision for the show. Step forward David, jumping at the chance to drive miles, stagger through the park under the weight of his equipment, set it up, plug it in and

watch it get soaked in the monsoons. He also spent hours researching (and composing) the exact authentic scores to perform, juggling sundry sheets of music and playscripts in gale force winds. A real hero - I hope to persuade him to come back, and I even suspect he might be keen!

And the stalwarts - people (both actors and production team) who are regularly to be counted on as the backbone of our shows. There as always, loyal and reliable as ever.

To all of them - my heartfelt thanks for everything you did. But it's someone else's turn next year!

Martin Williams

