

"Witness" Special!

NOISES OFF

ANOTHER TRIUMPH!

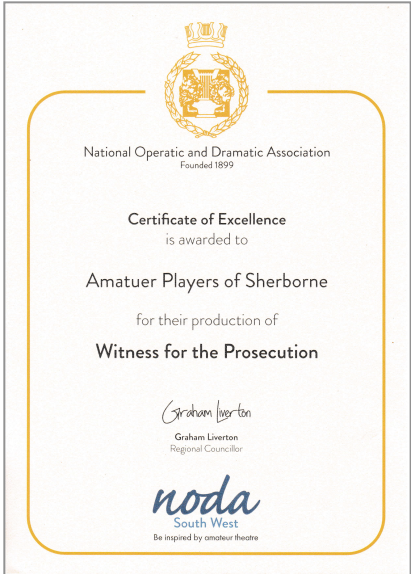
It was a long wait, but our first post-lockdown production to take place in the Sherborne Studio Theatre finally hit the stage last week. After being "dark" for 22 months, we were delighted to throw open the doors to capacity audiences for all six performances of Agatha Christie's *Witness for the Prosecution*. There can be no doubt that the show was an absolute triumph. Audience members were unstinting in their praise as they left the auditorium at the end of the evening. The first reviewer to be published wrote: *The director keeps the pacing just right and the tension high. It's a terrific production of a play that still has the audience guessing right to the final curtain.* Another reviewer, Mr Graham Liverton, the adjudicator from the National Operatic and Dramatic Association (NODA), was so impressed that he used his prerogative as Regional Councillor to award the performance a Certificate of Excellence. We can't help thinking that this must bode well for the show's prospects in next year's Regional Awards.

So here was yet another APS show that seemed to press all the right buttons and delight our audiences, critics, adjudicators and

reviewers. It was, of course, wonderful to have audiences once more warming the seats of our theatre for the first time in nearly two years, despite the necessary imposition of mask-wearing rules, rules which were accepted and followed with grace and good humour by everybody. We experimented (successfully) with



new arrangements for the bar - a different orientation, the provision of mulled wine upon arrival, and snacks, and we have now finally implemented a system allowing payment by credit/debit card.



It is never wise to single out individuals for plaudits, especially given the towering performances of each of the four main characters. But it does seem right to pay particular attention to some of the unsung heroes of the show. Firstly, Rachael Alexander, who was due to play Greta and Mary Clegg. After loyally driving long distances to attend rehearsals for many weeks, usually directly from work, Rachael was cruelly robbed of her chance to perform only days before the opening night, by having to self-isolate. What could we do? The show must go on. A few weeks earlier, Isabella Franco, a brand-new member of APS being innocently shown around the theatre, had been whisked onto

the stage and asked to read in a part. Before the evening was over, she had accepted a non-speaking role in the cast. In our hour of need, with Rachael absent, Isabella willingly took on the role of Greta, and learned the lines, it seemed, almost immediately. In a similar vein, newcomer MillieAnne Hyde was recruited as wardrobe, hair and make-up assistant on her first visit. Millie is a full-time nurse and juggles her APS attendance around her night shifts, but now she had no hesitation in agreeing to step in for three nights as Miss Brogan-Moore. This left three other nights to cover, and APS regular Jane Pitts responded to our SOS for the "other" Miss Brogan-Moore. It should be mentioned that Marie Field and Jemima Cheleda (yet another APS debutante) were also more than willing to help out.

Rarely can a director have breathed such a sigh of relief as John did when it transpired that one of our leads, Cameron Thrower, who had been involved in the Salisbury train crash, let it be known was determined to carry on rehearsing despite his injuries. We are delighted that Cameron recovered so quickly, and are so thankful that he was not more seriously hurt. As well as more seasoned actors, we also welcomed a number of APS first-timers onto the stage - Andrew Middleton, Kate Kirkpatrick, Georgia Holder and Siân Spencer (who produced a Scottish accent and a stare penetrating enough to split diamonds) - welcome to you all. While not a newcomer, Graham Smith also agreed at the 11th hour to drive many miles each night to

take on the silent but necessary roles of Mr Barton and the detective - thankless, unglamorous, and necessitating, as he put it, the wearing of an itchy wig! All undertaken in an uncomplaining spirit of teamwork. Front-of-House was also beset by problems as bar manager Jane Williams was called away on family business, leaving Linda Catchpole and volunteers Richard Culham, Janice Nast, Marie Field and Lynne Harding to take up the slack. The aim of this piece has been to give a flavour of the tremendous feeling of teamwork and co-operation that went into making this production a success, in spite of the challenges faced. By the time the next *Noises Off* is published, we expect to be able to bring you further reviews of the production.



Adrian Harding



Roger Chadbourne



Kate Kirkpatrick



Cameron Thrower



Alan Morris



Rob Stephens



Wrap party!



Janet Mackenzie (Siân Spencer) giving evidence

CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

All APS members, families and friends are warmly invited to our big Christmas Social Event, to be held in the Theatre on Wednesday December 15th. Doors will open for mulled wine, mince pies, good conversation and great company at 7.00pm.

Around 7.30, we plan to hold the Playreading (postponed from last month), details of which have already been emailed out. *Sing On!*, by Rick Abbott, described as “side-splitting”, “melodious and absolutely lunatic”, promises to be great fun, especially as we hope to keep the wine flowing throughout the evening.

Do come along and join in the fun. You don't have to read (or sing) a part if you don't want to - it's fine just to sit back, listen and enjoy.

Please RSVP to roger@bellorchard.co.uk

NEW MEMBERS

We have recently been joined by two new members, Jemima Cheleda and Harriet St Johnston. We extend a very warm welcome to these two, and hope they will become long-standing and active participants in APS activities.

ROSE BOWL SUCCESS



John Crabtree receives the Rose Bowl Award from Gerry Parker

As noted in the last edition of *Noises Off*, our 2020 production of *Table Manners* had been nominated for the John Coe Award for Best Dramatic Production at the annual Rose Bowl Awards ceremony. The ceremony took place online on the evening of Sunday November 14th, and

we are delighted and proud to be able to announce that APS were winners once again.

The award citation read as follows:

A fantastic example of farce. Throughout, the pace never wavered. Each line was delivered with impeccable timing, and there was a great attention to detail in characterisation and physicality to enhance the comedic value. A testament to the direction, and the cast. The audience were fully invested in the action, and the laughter that rippled throughout the Studio was infectious. What a treat!

Many congratulations to the whole cast and production, and especially to the director, John Crabtree, who, having won the same award in 2018 with “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”, is now rumoured to be on the lookout for a bigger mantelpiece. Special mention should also be made of cast members Bev Taylor-Wade and Roger Chadbourne, who each received individual award nominations.



COMING UP.....

Our next public performance in the Sherborne Studio Theatre will be *Educating Rita*, by Willy Russell, scheduled to take place on March 21st - 26th, and the cast members are already hard at work. The choice of play (which is a "two-hander") reflects the policy decided upon by the Productions Subcommittee, whereby complex, large-cast plays (such as *Witness for the Prosecution*) alternate with

plays requiring much smaller casts. In many ways, such pieces are better suited to the confined conditions within the Studio Theatre. Nevertheless, the set is quite challenging, requiring as it does, very large numbers of books and bottles of whisky. Please bear this in mind - we will be asking for donations of unwanted books (or loans of books which you can spare for a couple of weeks), but

also PLEASE do not throw away any empty whisky bottles over the coming weeks - we will take them off your hands! Please get in touch with the Props Manager, Gilly Savage (gillysavage@hotmail.com)

NEWS FROM THE SWAN

A large group of friends from the APS were at the Swan Theatre in Yeovil last month, to give our support to APS member Sarah Nias, who was playing the hugely-pregnant Pattie in Ayckbourn's classic black farce "Season's Greetings". Sarah's performance was enormously enjoyed by us all, as was the whole, riotously funny (and deeply disturbing) play. We look forward to seeing Sarah again at the Swan in *Di and Viv and Rose* by Amelia Bullmore, on January 17th-22nd (tickets: www.thelittleboxoffice.com/swantheatre). She is joined by Georgia Holder, another APS newcomer, who made her Sherborne debut last week in *Witness for the Prosecution*.

"I want to know... EVERYTHING!"
Provocative and heart-warming
One of the great comedies

educating
Rita

By Willy Russell
Directed by Graham Smith

Mon 21st - Sat 26th March 7:30pm
Sherborne Studio Theatre