

# NOISES OFF

## HEDDA GABLER

A SENSITIVE PORTRAYAL OF A LIFE OF DESIRE AND DESPAIR

Ibsen's '*Hedda Gabler*' is a classic of dramatic literature, and it takes courage to bring something fresh to a play that will be familiar to many. Director Graham Smith had that courage and crafted his vision of Hedda from a script sensitively adapted by Robert Brydges - who also played Judge Brack in this production. Although written in 1890, the APS production brought the narrative into the modern day and cleverly avoided any hint of nineteenth century social mores or melodrama.



The stage was set in Graham's recognisable signature style – modern, stark, minimalist and painted white, just like '*Betrayal*' and '*Art*' before it. It worked as an almost blank canvas to focus our eyes onto the actors, especially the enigmatic protagonist played by Sarah Nias, who embodied the complexities and contradictions of a soul in turmoil. She was intelligent, manipulative, and profoundly dissatisfied with her life, even her recent marriage to academic, Jørgen Tesman.

One instinctively knew that this relationship would not last much beyond their ill-tempered, ill-fated



honeymoon. Tesman's well-meaning and stuttering naivety was played to perfection by Freddie Wopat. It was clear from the outset that he was oblivious as to what he had taken on and, inevitably, where it was going to lead. Hedda's yearning for status, freedom and control was never going to be satisfied, and her frustration manifested itself in contempt for all who shared her world. This was directed in turn at Bertha the maid (Fiona Holt), at Aunt Juliana (Sally



Matthews) - or, more accurately, at her hat! and at her hapless old schoolfriend Thea, whom she could barely remember despite the gentle girl having been the frequent victim of Hedda's bullying. Mary Flanagan was convincing as the loyal, caring friend reduced to a snivelling wreck by the acid tongue and cruelty of her tormentor.



The arrival of Eilert Løvborg, Tesman's academic rival and Hedda's former lover, set the stage for a series of events that unravelled Hedda's plans and exposed her self-destructive jealousy. Alex Scrivenor was totally credible as the brilliant but troubled writer, whose reformed alcoholism and subsequent relapse – only when tempted by Hedda – led to an inevitable tragic outcome.



The only person to fall willingly for Hedda's charm was Brack, a self-serving and amoral judge who enjoyed the pleasures she offered without succumbing to the dangers of her coercive control. The judge, played with haughty arrogance by Robert Brydges, was almost her match, entering into a partnership of lust, devoid of romantic idealism, with eyes wide open.

The role of Hedda must be particularly challenging for actors, demanding a nuanced portrayal of her inner conflict and complexity. If she was simply the manipulative, cruel narcissist we know her to be, we would scarcely find it credible that everyone in her orbit could be so easily seduced by her. But this



totally plausible portrayal by Sarah Nias captured the duality perfectly – convincing us why everyone is captivated by Hedda, like moths to a flame, despite being fully aware of her barely concealed malice. This was a masterclass by a very talented actress demonstrating how perfectly she could interpret the Director's vision.



One looks for redemption in tragedy. One can hope that with Løvborg's fragility and Hedda's ruthlessness gone in an explosion of self-destruction, the way becomes clear for romance to blossom between Tesman and Thea. One can hope.

Once again, APS has punched above its weight. APS shows how a small amateur group of talented actors and creatives in the hands of a visionary director can put on a performance which could rival that of seasoned professionals. I overheard one patron clearly stating that she had enjoyed this performance much more than one she had seen previously on the London stage. And that is well-earned, well-deserved praise indeed.

**Adrian Harding**

# EXPLORE YOUR INNER IBSEN:

## ARE YOU A HEDDA, A THEA OR AN AUNT JULIANA?

It's late, you're tired and there is washing up in the sink. Do you:

1. Ignore it and go to bed?
2. Wash the dishes on autopilot?
3. Guilt yourself into washing up?

You are at a reception for the opening of a new art gallery. Do you:

1. Corner the coolest-looking artist and tell him where he's going wrong?
2. Go carefully round the works on display and try to make sense of them?
3. Wait in a corner and hope that somebody takes an interest.

You've made an important life-choice and later realise it was wrong. Do you:

1. Regret it, but feel it's too late to change?
2. Shrug and make the best of it.
3. Reverse the decision, whatever the consequences.

What is your sense of self-worth based on?

1. An innate sense that you are special, from birth?
2. How much you can help other people?
3. A particular person who made you feel valued and worthwhile?

Whom do you tease?

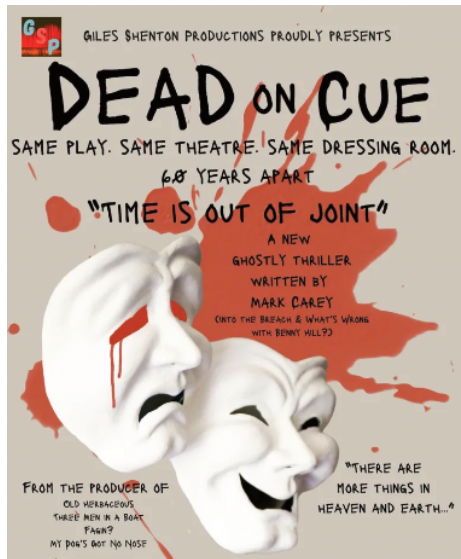
1. People you like (affectionately), and people you don't (mischievously)?
2. Only people you like, and only affectionately?
3. You're not really a tease.

If you won the lottery, what would you do with the money?

1. Splash out on a butler, a horse and a villa on Mustique.
2. Invest some for the family and give the rest to worthy causes.
3. You don't buy lottery tickets – and anyway, money can't buy you love.

**Mostly 1s:** You're a born Hedda. If you have any guns at home, hand them in.  
**Mostly 2s:** You are Auntie J: warm, outward-focused, loved and happy.  
**Mostly 3s:** You're a Thea: brave and more talented than you know – let it shine!

**COMING UP AT APS - TICKETS NOW ON SALE**



Mark Carey's new one man show is a ghostly thriller, set in the dressing room of a provincial theatre during two productions of *Hamlet*, 60 years apart. Spooky coincidences begin happening... It's funny, clever, and it will tingle your spine. Don't miss it!

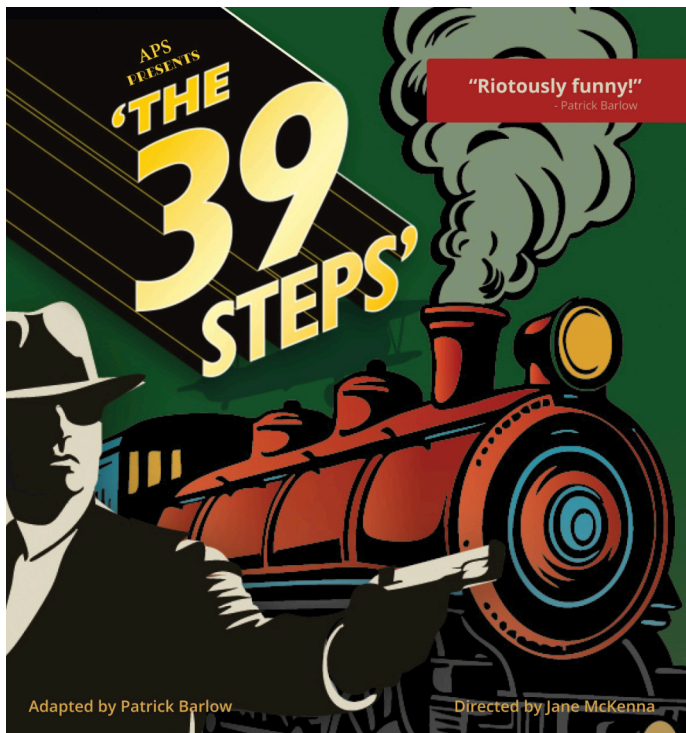
Fri 11<sup>th</sup> April 7.30 pm, Sat 12<sup>th</sup> April 2.30pm & 7.30pm  
<https://www.aps-sherborne.co.uk/dead-on-cue.html>

## O FLOW'RY MAY



Join Tim Laycock and Alastair Braidwood for an evening of words and music from Wessex, evoking May day, Springtime and the lives of local people, past and present. You can expect to hear traditional folk tunes and songs, the words of Thomas Hardy and William Barnes, and plenty of good cheer!

Fri 29<sup>th</sup> April 7.30 pm  
<https://www.aps-sherborne.co.uk/o-flowry-may.html>



*The 39 Steps* is our Summer production - a semi-comic take on Hitchcock's classic film. This will be a bold departure for APS - physical theatre, puppetry, lighting and sound effects all choreographed to the millisecond.

Jane McKenna directs, and has assembled a remarkable cast of four, as lithe and limber as the show demands - Freddie Wopat (Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, Tesman in *Hedda Gabler*), Hazel Perrett (Catherine Howard in *A Wife For All Reasons*), Jeremy Small and Gary Brooks

Mon 2<sup>nd</sup>-Sat 7<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm, Sat 7<sup>th</sup> June 2.30pm  
<https://www.aps-sherborne.co.uk/39-steps.html>

**Sherborne Studio Theatre**

Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> - Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> June | 7.30pm  
Matinée Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> | 2.30pm

# Amateur Players of Sherborne.

## Join our monthly social evening, at Sherborne Studio Theatre.

Last Friday of the month from 7 to 10pm, (unless it clashes with a production or other event).

Come to the theatre for a drink (the bar will be open) and a chat. Meet and make friends, bring ideas and find out what the group is doing.

## 100 CLUB AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

The 100 Club has now reached its third birthday! In that time it has donated over £6,000 towards the upkeep and development of the Sherborne Studio Theatre. Future developments include:

- Replacement of the main door and frame
- Installation of a hearing loop
- Phased replacement of halogen lights with LEDs

The 100 Club makes an invaluable difference to the fabric and facilities of the SST. If you are not already a member, please consider joining.

<http://www.aps-sherborne.co.uk/support.html>

## DIARY DATES SHERBORNE STUDIO THEATRE

### Dead On Cue

Fri 11<sup>th</sup> April 7.30 pm

Sat 12<sup>th</sup> April 2.30pm & 7.30pm

### APS Social Evening

Fri 25<sup>th</sup> April 7.00pm

### Folk Evening: O Flow'ry May

Tue 29<sup>th</sup> April 7.30pm

### Play Reading – Bouncers

Mon 19<sup>th</sup> May 7.30pm

### APS Social Evening

Fri 30<sup>th</sup> May 7.00pm

### The 39 Steps

Mon 2<sup>nd</sup>-Sat 7<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm

Sat 7<sup>th</sup> June 2.30pm

### Auditions – Bouncers

Tue 10<sup>th</sup> June 7.30pm

### APS Social Evening

Fri 27<sup>th</sup> June 7.00pm

### APS Social Evening

Fri 25<sup>th</sup> July 7.00pm

### APS Social Evening

Fri 29<sup>th</sup> August 7.00pm

### Bouncers

Mon 8<sup>th</sup>-Sat 13<sup>th</sup> September 7.30pm

Sat 13<sup>th</sup> September 2.30pm

### Folk Evening: To Yallow Autumn Turn'd

Wed 24<sup>th</sup> September 7.30pm