

Newsletter

August 2019



NORTHERN REGION

CENTRAL REGION

SOUTHERN REGION

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The Little Theatre Guild represents 114 member theatres that control and manage their amateur theatre companies with an annual audience of over 650,000 patrons, and a turnover of approximately £4 million.

Visit us at www.littletheatreguild.org

LTG Diary of Events

Northern Conference
Nantwich
 25 – 27 October 2019

Central Conference

Norbury, Droitwich Date - To be confirmed

Southern Conference

Stables Hastings

20 – 22nd September 2019

National Conference in 2020

Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

17 - 19th April 2020

Good Luck Everyone as Season 2019-2020 Gets Underway

Eight directors – all looking remarkably cheerful and energetic – who will be responsible for Bolton Little Theatre's eight productions this season. They were planning to be photographed climbing the ladder... reaching for the stars??? But health and safety intervened – probably wisely on this occasion.

Craig Harris, looking very relaxed in the foreground couldn't meet the photo shoot date so had to be added on – and consequently bagged the best spot!

'A Bunch of Amateurs' - a directing debut for Craig - will be the first show of the season.



Techies Alert

Having recently refurbished their sound preparation area, **Teddington Theatre Club** {Hampton West

London) are offering a Soundcraft Spirit desk in good condition. It has 24 input channels, with 1 foldback and 8 auxiliary sends, 8 groups and a stereo input. More information? Email: Harry Jacobs at sound@teddingtontheatreclub.org.uk

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The contents of this newsletter are not necessarily the official views of the Little Theatre Guild.

Articles for the LTG Newsletter November 2019 deadline for copy: October 20th.



Letter from the Chairman



Scorching temperatures and torrential downpours! It must be Summer in Britain. Don't worry I'm not about to write a polemic on climate change.

It does though provide a backdrop for our Summer theatrical activities.

Most of our theatres don't schedule productions for August and take a well-deserved break.

There is something about the summer that make it a challenging period for attracting audiences. The June/July period is tricky with competition coming from the great summer sporting events, holidays and the allegedly warm and balmy evenings. Going to the theatre can be seen as the last thing on people's mind.

My own theatre, Durham, has long noted that June is a difficult month to attract decent audiences unless it is a "sure fire hit". In our case *Private Lives* and *My Cousin Rachel*. This year we struggled with *Theft* and our near neighbours *Royalty* in Sunderland with *Emma*. Even Bill Kenwright noted the difficulties. I suspect we are not alone.

As I'm writing this in the "silly season" it is perhaps no surprise that the old "hoary chestnut" of bad behaviour in theatres rose its ugly head again. It does of course have more than an element of truth but fortunately it does not seem to be particularly prevalent in our theatres but does cause concern in the West End. Some of those theatres now have their ushers wearing bodycams to record and reduce incidents.

Tom Stoppard neatly summed up one of the key issues when he said "if someone could come up with a device that would put all phones in the vicinity on silent that would be good". I think that is a sentiment we would all have sympathy with.

We can be grateful that we have not suffered the fate of a Broadway production of Hand to God when one of the audience leapt on stage to try and plug his phone into a charger.

**RSC Writing for Theatre
Saturday 13th July 2019
RSC writers, directors and dramaturgs: a day of workshops on the craft of playwriting.**

Steve Pratt and I had the pleasure of being invited to attend this event. We were privileged to listen and to learn from Richard Bean (*One Man, Two Guvnors*) and David Edgar (*The Life*

and *Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, *Maydays*, *Written on the Heart*), all about the craft of playwriting, including insider writing tips, techniques and skills used by successful writers.

The day was aimed at amateur, part time and student playwrights or those wanting to begin a career in writing, and it was gratifying to see budding writers of all ages in attendance, and some from our LTG theatres.

Measure for Measure - RSC

As promised the Editor did look out for Alexander Mushore, who played several minor roles in his first season with the RSC. Alexander's first venture onto the stage had been with

Affordability of tickets

An interesting debate is beginning to emerge on the affordability of tickets, particularly in the West End.

The amateur theatre magazine *Sardines* compiled an interesting table of the most expensive seats in the West End (June 2019). The most expensive was for *Hamilton* at £250 with the cheapest being £100. Even plays were expensive with tickets for *Mousetrap* ranging from £29.50 to £95.

This is in sharp contrast with what our theatres are charging. Robert Gill has done some analysis from our annual yearbook and it appears our average ticket price is in the region of £10.50 with many charging less. I think we should make the point loud and clear in our marketing that we provide good quality affordable theatre. Our audiences know this already but we should perhaps trumpet it louder.

LTG Conference Season

We are rapidly approaching the LTG conference season and if you have not attended one before you are missing a treat and an uplifting experience. Over one weekend you can enjoy thought provoking workshops, great plays and an opportunity to meet fellow thespians in a convivial atmosphere.



It kicks off the Southern conference hosted by the Stables Theatre, Hastings from 20 -22 September and it will form part of their 60th anniversary celebrations. This will be followed by the Northern conference hosted by the Nantwich Players from 25 – 27 October. The Central conference will follow in the new year. The feedback we receive from delegates is always very positive. Details of all our conferences can be found on our website. I urge you to attend, you will not be disappointed.

Finally, may I wish all our theatres a very successful and enjoyable season.

Mike Smith

The day included tickets to the RSC's latest new writing production *CROOKED DANCES* by Robin French, lunch, a theatre tour and access to *THE PLAY'S THE THING* EXHIBITION.

Kevin Spence

The Priory Theatre. There was a chance to relive that June production again when it was streamed several weeks later in the cinema. My party enjoyed it just as much the second time -with the advantages/disadvantages of close-ups.



Special Evening at the British Embassy in Paris for Tower Theatre Company



Ten members of The Tower Company led by Martin Mulgrew, Artistic Director.

To celebrate the Queen's birthday, The British Embassy in Paris hosted an evening of British Culture. The Tower Theatre Company were invited to present a short sequence of some of the best known scenes



from Shakespeare's plays. The British Ambassador, Ed Llewellyn was delighted with the Tower's contribution. He said, "Wow! One of the highlights of our Queen's Birthday in Paris was Shakespeare in the garden, including a scene from Romeo and Juliet from the Residence Balcony. Thank you to a very talented troupe. You created a real Midsummer Night's Dream in Paris".

More from Kevin Spence THINKING ALOUD...

1. AMATEUR PERFORMING RIGHTS FROM 'NON MAINSTREAM' AGENTS

Those of you who attended the recent National Conference at Highbury will recall that I mentioned this in our Open Forum session. We all happily continue to get our performing rights for most LTG shows through Samuel French, Nick Hern, Josef Weinberger - and the National Committee has worked hard over the years to forge and maintain good relations between LTG theatres and our good friends in these agencies.

However, I am becoming increasingly aware that lurking in the theatrical undergrowth out there are some fantastic plays which have enjoyed success on the professional stage and which, for whatever reason, are not handled by the major agents. I am in the process of trying to tease out a more complete understanding of what smaller agents might have to offer us. Often they are the agents representing particular writers, for example, who have not made some plays available to Samuel French etc - for whatever reason- but who will consider an amateur production when approached. I have had recent experience of a couple of these, and I have had a successful outcome with both.

If you have had dealings with smaller agents yourselves, I would love to hear from you - both good experiences and bad! Just email me the details, please! It would be really helpful to get a more comprehensive picture of what is actually going on.

2. PRO-AM NETWORKS

We are exploring the benefits of setting up more formal regular links between LTG theatres and regional professional producing theatres in their vicinity.

I know some LTG theatres are geographically not close to professional theatres, but many of you are. Thanks to Ian Wainwright at the RSC, we think we can start exploratory conversations between Stratford and the LTG theatres within striking distance of the RSC. Obviously it is early days, but please contact me or Jackie Blackwood at Birmingham Crescent if you have useful suggestions or would like to know more. Equally, if you are lucky enough to have useful links with your local professional theatre, please let us know about them, so we can all benefit from the work you are doing together.

3. YOUTH MATTERS!

a) YOUNG TECHNICIANS AWARD

Many of you will know that at our recent conferences we have proposed the establishment of an LTG award for young people aged 18 to 25 who are making a significant contribution to your theatre in any skill area other than ACTING. We all know the importance of such skills both within the context of the work of our theatres and the future of theatre in general. There has been a good deal of media discussion recently about the potential for shortages in all technical areas of theatremaking because of current curriculum pressures in schools and colleges. The LTG is looking for individuals who you feel have the potential to make a significant technical contribution to theatre, or the creative arts in general, in the future.

If you have a wonderful young person currently working as a member in your

theatre, we would love to hear from you. THE LTG would like to give a cash prize to the individual that we select from this process - but, perhaps, most importantly, facilitate at least two weeks professional work experience for them at a leading professional theatre. The RSC has already expressed an interest.

Please email me for further details as to how your theatre can apply for this award.

b) YOUNG AMBASSADORS SCHEME

Most of you will know that last year we launched a more formal consultation with our young people about their role in your theatre, how they see their future in theatre generally, and their relationship with the LTG.

The young people we met from your theatres were fantastic, and they came up with some brilliant ideas. It is now time to push on with the agenda they gave us. So we would not only like to catch up with them again if possible for another meeting at the Crescent in Birmingham - this venue seems to work best because of its central location in the UK - but invite more young people aged between 16 and 25 from all LTG theatres to join us for the day. Obviously, we want to fix a weekend date that is convenient for as many of our delegates as possible. If you have a young person or persons in your theatre who would like to get involved, I would be grateful if you could email me asap, please! I will reply giving you further details - but I will be striving to fix a date which suits as many young people as possible - and of course our kind friends at the Crescent!

CONTACT DETAILS FOR ALL THE

ABOVE: Kevin Spence - email: kspdonlit@mac.com

The Phoenix heralds a new chapter for The People's Theatre Newcastle

At the end of July this year a new incarnation of the phoenix appeared on the walls of the People's Theatre, Newcastle, which is one of the founder members of the Little Theatre Guild.

The phoenix has been the symbol of the People's Theatre since 1929, when the company moved to new premises in Rye Hill, in the west end of Newcastle. The theatre was founded in 1911, and had occupied several premises in the city, but this move coincided with a change of name to the People's Theatre, and the creation of a symbol that matched the idea of the theatre being born again. In the intervening years, including the move in 1962 to the current premises in Heaton, the phoenix has been through many forms, reflecting the design ideas of the times.

About ten years ago the theatre realised that the building was ageing, and needed refreshing as well as a renovation of services infrastructure if it was to survive as our home. A redevelopment project was launched, which is now nearing completion. This cost was in the region of £1.7 million, and as well as the work on infrastructure it has provided a new, attractive frontage to the building, a modern foyer and gallery area, and a fully accessible, dynamic and flexible studio theatre at ground level. This has been open since February, and has proved a great success with audiences and players, and a great space for performances by our vigorous

youth theatre company. Each production so far has played in different audience layouts. We still need c£25,000 to complete the studio dressing rooms, but apart from that the project has achieved its aims.

The icing on the cake is the new phoenix, pictured. The Theatre commissioned Stewart Dives, a blacksmith and one of our members, to design a new version of our historic symbol. The result is a wonderful steel structure which Stewart and his blacksmith partner Rhiannon Wilson, also a member, built in their forge, and which now roosts proudly above our new frontage. The phoenix has risen from the ashes again.



What a wonderful creative symbol for this progressive theatre. Many congratulations to the two blacksmiths. It's magnificent!

Progress Theatre Reading Anyone remember 1968?

This month's publication from the Berkshire Record Office (BRO) describes the theatre in 1968 as known for staging innovative plays. Our present Patron, Sir Kenneth Branagh spent a period of time there as a student member. In 1968 the Theatre did something quite extraordinary. It attempted to beat the world record for

reading the entire works of Shakespeare without stopping. By doing something quite difficult and unusual, they hoped to succeed in raising money to rebuild the theatre which at this time was described as a simple hut.!

A large number of actors were involved, including Dame Judi Dench who was starring in Cabaret in the West End at the time.

The event took place on Nov 15th and

the record they had to beat was 100 hours. They did it in 89hrs, 24 mins and 13 seconds. Sadly though it did not raise much money from the event. The Chairman said: "The profit in terms of hard cash was not staggering - £100. But the publicity, bonhomie and the new friendships we made more than compensated for this".

The Progress Theatre building has had many alterations and extensions since then and now seats 96 theatre-goers.

Ilkley Playhouse and National Theatre Connections 2019



The cast and crew of *Chaos*, by Laura Lomas pictured arriving for their performance at the Theatre Royal in May. The following comments written by Ellie Colman, a cast member, were taken from Ilkley Players Newsletter:

'I remember that feeling: hearing the crescendo in the music, sensing the growing anticipation of everyone's energy, lights exposing silhouettes of audience and finally mouthing good luck to each other while twisting the yellow flowers round and round in our hands. This was the moment the previously busy two months had led up to. *Chaos* gave us a new challenge, something to keep us questioning

and therefore keep the energy fresh within the play. The play offers snippets of scenes in a jumbled up, non-chronological order, giving insight into different peoples' lives and situations. As the play progresses you could see how pieces start to fit like a jigsaw. We all had fun exploring the meaning behind *Chaos* as there were so many ideas and explorations connected to it. That's what made it so special. When asked what the play was about, I had to say, 'Ummm, I'm not really sure. Something about the randomness of life.'

In rehearsal, hard challenges were definitely mixed up with the fun moments. Looking through the script, one scene said, '*Dance. A dance routine. It's really boring. Some-one makes a mistake*'. So we didn't have a lot to go on. The dance especially was a test that meant a lot of devotion and effort to keep it fresh each time we did it and trust me, there were more than a few stompers (me included) after the third time of running it! but once we got it right, it became satisfying.

Taking the final bow and smiling at the audience was a night of true spirit.

Following the performance, the National Connections Observer spoke to us in a really positive manner, allowing us all to breathe a sigh of relief. I remember him saying so clearly how much he had enjoyed it and how unique it was. I loved *Chaos* for that – treating it as a present you had to gradually unwrap during rehearsals. I am so happy I was part of that experience. I will certainly never forget it. I wish all my fellow companions and friends good luck in the future and hope they look back on this play, sharing the same fondness I have for it and all the laughs and memories that came with it.'

Ellie Colman

The Kevin Spence Column Doing it Al Fresco

In the 1970s I had set my heart on playing Rakitin in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*... I was pretty much penciled in for the part - and yes, at an LTG theatre! - and was eagerly anticipating rehearsals when fate lent a hand in proceedings. A job offer I could not refuse suddenly materialised so I had to up sticks and move to Yorkshire. None the less, although the play slipped through my fingers on that occasion, it has always had a fascination for me and I am sorry that it seems to hold little interest for current theatre-makers.



Imagine my delight therefore when I noticed that on one of my sojourns in Edinburgh for the Festival a few years ago, a theatre group had decided to stage this elusive play in the Royal Botanic Garden. How appropriate I thought and what a lovely natural setting! So my friends and I duly assembled our rugs, cushions and picnic and sprawled on the grass to watch a very good company in lovely costumes give us their performance. The first half of the show went really well, the beautiful trees and shrubbery adding a perfect accompaniment to the action of the play! The sky was blue, the wine was excellent - and then...

Out of nowhere, black clouds gathered, a light drizzle gradually turned into something more sinister, and for a while the actors steadfastly kept going as their linen suits and gorgeous dresses succumbed to saturation. Anyone who knows Edinburgh will know, however, that rain has to be taken pretty seriously there, and so two-thirds of the way through the play the actors gave up the struggle - and so did we!



I have always thought that this experience was the perfect example of the highs and lows of performing out of doors. Not even the most brilliant set designer could have provided a better setting for Turgenev than Mother Nature, but equally nor could any human being have contrived a more cruel and relentless end to what had started out so well.

So how gratifying it is to discover that every year some LTG theatres grasp the nettle and put on outdoor performances during the summer months. They deserve nothing but credit for accepting the challenge. Amateur theatres might not have the resources of the Globe, Regents Park Theatre, or the new pop-up Rose theatre which is enjoying its second reincarnation in York and also at Blenheim Palace this summer, but what they lack in scale and budget, they often make up for in energy, enthusiasm and yes, raw talent.

I am lost in admiration, for example, for those theatres who make the trek to Minack to perform in that uniquely beautiful setting. The logistics of taking any show down to Porthcurno seem to me of nightmarish proportions, not to mention the special challenge of acting against that breath-taking backdrop. With the right play in that setting and the weather set fair, I am certain that every year that special brand of theatrical magic will happen. Any company in Cornwall knows that the

chances of being mercilessly upstaged at the Minack by the natural scenery, boats, helicopters - and even passing dolphins - are ever present, so to keep a grip on the audiences attention is a constant challenge - and this is before you even factor in the weather!



Furthermore, I have no doubt that LTG theatre buffs more informed than I, will confirm that, despite the difficulties, outdoor shows can actually make money! I am sure that a bit of judicious merchandising of cold drinks, ices, programmes etc can help to keep the theatre treasurer happy, particularly as the show in question is possibly going to have less expenditure than normal on sets, lighting etc. And, after all, you are not usually confined by the smallish number of seats in your theatre auditorium. But to me, such shows have two other advantages which are hard to overlook. Firstly, they can be tremendous FUN for everyone concerned - and I suspect it is no surprise that for many actors their outdoor appearances stand out in their memory, perhaps because of their unusual setting, their complete unpredictability, or the magic that happens when it goes right - or all of these!

Secondly, working outdoors presents the actor with challenges which just do not arise inside the theatre.

The increased need to absolutely command the audiences attention, to speak clearly and project, and to show resilience in tackling literally anything which might suddenly happen are three which immediately spring to mind. And after all, are our members not joining our theatres to be stretched, to learn new skills, as well as to have fun? That is certainly the constant refrain I have heard from our actors all across the LTG for all the years I have been involved with them.

Having spoken to musicians too who play in bands and who perform outdoors in the summer, I find that their sources of enjoyment, as well as many of the problems they encounter seem remarkably similar to ours. I am not talking Glastonbury here or anything as grand as that, but apart from the scale, some features they mentioned seemed remarkably familiar.

Spilling out of the back of some vehicle or other and having to make your show work, no matter what the location and facilities - or lack of them - seem to be part of the endless fascination of continuing to accept this daunting challenge.

Years ago, I had the enormous privilege of directing a fine cast of young actors in the Rodgers and Hart musical BABES IN ARMS - an exquisite score of wonderful songs, but a terrible book! I especially recall how corny they found many of the lines, but I had to confess to them that my main motive in introducing them to the show had been my missionary zeal to let them work on and discover the fabulous music. However, there was one aspect of the book, which the young performers had no difficulty in relating to. It was that wonderful Judy Garland/Mickey Rooney moment: 'Hey kids, let's put on a show in the barn!'

It seems a perennial sentiment that all us who love making theatre just cannot resist - and long may it continue.

ED: Oh, you're such a romantic Kevin!

Open Air Productions in the Southern Region



As I write it is a glorious hot summer's day: the sky is blue and the sun is shining but it's not been so glorious all summer. The LTG Southern Region Members who braved the elements to stage an open-air production will have kept a wary weather eye on the skies and no doubt prayed for dry weather.

Checking through Facebook, I have found: six groups who braved the elements and between them staged seven full-length open-air production close to their home theatre; one - **Studio Theatre Salisbury** - performed excerpts of Shakespeare; and one has yet to stage *The Mill on the*



Floss at The Minack Theatre 2 – 6 September. Four were Shakespeare plays, two were classics and one was for children.

Travelling West from Richmond-upon-Thames, the Richmond Shakespeare Society performed *Much Ado About Nothing* in the elegant York Gardens on the banks of the Thames in front of the Italian fountain known locally as the naked ladies but more correctly as Cascade, pool and *Oceanides*.

I joined friends on the lawn with wine and nibbles to watch this lovely production with suffragettes marching for women's rights and a Naval theme and very enjoyable it was too.

A few miles upstream, **Progress Theatre** staged *King Lear* in the beautiful Chapter House of Reading Abbey Ruins. (see back page)



This was a return to an old space for the company after holding their annual open-air event for the last seven years at Caversham Court Gardens on the banks of the Thames.

Heading to the South coast, **Brighton Little Theatre** performed *Mary Stuart* at the Brighton Open Air Theatre. A venue built in 2013 by Adrian Bunting as a gift to Brighton & Hove, which presents a

wide range of theatre from both amateur and semi-professional groups. One open-air production is clearly not enough as in September they head down to the **Minack Theatre**, Cornwall to perform *Mill on the Floss*. To stage one open-air production is a challenge, but to stage two is awesome.



A little way along the coast, the **Maskers Theatre Company** performed *Twelfth Night* (see back page) at Townhill Park House, Lord and Lady Swaythling's summer home which is now owned by The Gregg School and boasts listed Gertrude Jekyll gardens.

Here's the marvellous Company enjoying their summer!



Heading a few miles west, **The Plaza Theatre**, Romsey staged *Wind in the Willows* at Island House on an Island in the River Test. Surely a perfect venue for this wonderful play for all the family.

Groups have posted great pictures and reviews on Facebook to use social media to encourage audiences to book and to keep them posted on the weather. The Maskers had some weather issues: "make sure you bring your waterproofs and warm clothing" and thanked those who turned up for their dedication and support in the rain making them M.V P's – Most Valued Players. Progress Theatre noted "Ah, the good old British weather. But just to confirm King Lear IS still going ahead" (see back page) and warned ticket holders that "umbrellas are not allowed once you take your seats" Brighton Little Theatre noted that "the weather is clearing up and even promising some sun."

And finally, heading North West to Gloucester, The Cotswold Players performed excerpts from *The Tempest* as part of the Stroud Shakespeare Festival, an event in its second year held in the beautiful Museum in the Park over four days.

If your theatre has not yet taken the step to open-air performances why not get in touch with these theatres to learn about the pros and cons of going open-air.

Anne Gilmour
Southern Region Secretary

The Good News First

"Arts and Culture" has overtaken agricultural in terms of its contribution to the UK economy, according to research from Arts Council England. Sir Nicholas Serota was speaking as ACE published a study quantifying the contribution of arts and culture to the UK's GDP. It showed that the sector added £10.8bn to the economy at the last count in 2016, £390m more than the previous year, more than the agricultural sector and roughly equal to cities such as Liverpool and Sheffield. Serota praised the resilience and commitment of theatres, galleries and other arts organisations that continue to thrive despite receiving less public money. He said the success in the face of adversity 'tells you about the brilliance of the people running these organisations. It tells you about their commitment and determination in spite of the cuts. It also tells you if you had a bit more money they would do something quite wonderful with it. (The Report) shows a very steady increase in the place of arts and culture in the economy as a whole. It is growing and it is growing much faster than the rest of the economy'.

And Then The Bad!

At the same time the report revealed that 74% of arts organisations had been affected by public funding cuts. Birmingham city, for example, slashed its arts budget by £500,000 in February – a significant cut but half the half the original planned £1m reduction. 'Local authorities will say they have no choice', said Serota. 'But there are choices being made and some local authorities are resisting those kinds of cuts more successfully than others. The prime minister declared that austerity was over. Austerity is certainly not over yet and I hope that we'll see some change.'

Memories!

The death in April of the wonderful **Bibi Andersson** aged 83 marks, for me at least, one of those moments of theatrical magic when a performer becomes unforgettable. My memories of her in *Smiles of a Summer Night*, *The Seventh Seal*, *Wild Strawberries* and *Persona* from the 50s and 60s were of some of the most wonderful films of the day, created of course by that magician of the cinema **Ingmar Bergman** as director. In black and white, with subtitles from the Swedish, nevertheless these works remain embedded in my memories, and gratitude.

Before the end of April I noted the death of actor **John McNery**, aged 75. It was in **1964** that I first discovered the work being done at the new and exciting company in Liverpool, by the **Everyman Theatre**; Terry Hands had started the company, and in the team of enthusiasts were Susan Fleetwood, Terence Taplin, Bruce Myers, Stephanie Beacham and John McNery. A livelier team at, this time could hardly be imagined, as I went with friends to watch exciting productions of new plays and classics. (The theatre in 1964 and for a few longer years could not be used on Fridays and Saturdays because of prior bookings

for pop concerts, so alternative venues had to be hired – on two occasions the team came over to Bolton Little Theatre to present both *Waiting for Godot* and a new play by Arnold Wesker). McNery moved on to join the National Theatre, the RSC and The Globe companies, as well as a few films. Michael Coveney writes: He was an intuitive actor in the abrasive style of Nicol Williamson; tall and rangy, with a thatch of blond hair, a default setting of sardonic indifference, piercing blue eyes, and a voice that could rasp like sand paper and dissolved in mildly suppressed emotion. He was the kind of actor you could not see without thinking how very good he was, still and dangerous, ticking like a time bomb. Happy memories in the theatre.

Newsletter Anniversary

For a Newsletter in the Guild to achieve a 200th anniversary is quite an accolade, deserving celebration. The **Miller Centre Theatre Company** marks the occasion with its editor penning one of his witty tirades like this: "A DOUBLE CENTURY FOR THE EDITOR- Tributes pour in from as far as Godstone Road, by Posy Poppet. Yes, the doyen of Cliche House has written an amazing two hundred editions of your favourite rag! Two hundred times he has picked up his weary pen and scratched out another scintillating newsletter. It all began in October 1994 when the editor was snatched from obscurity and installed in the editorial chair. From that moment, a glittering future beckoned and – *I'm sorry, I cannot go on writing this drive!! OK, he has hacked out two hundred editions! You think he did it alone? What about all the workers at Cliche House? And what about me? I have been on the staff for fifteen years and I am still waiting for...* (cont p94)"

The Shape of Things to Come

"We are all geeks now" was the heading in The Guardian on 1st May, covering the recent phenomenal global success in the box-office for *Games of Thrones* and *Avengers: Endgame*. The productions "show that the nerd is no longer an outcast, but instead belongs to the mainstream". So what really is the future for live drama, amateur or professional? Under these pressures, is there still any future for the small, well made play, whether it be by Ibsen, Miller or McDonagh and Butterworth? In a column, Steve Rose commented: "In our speeded-up world, last weekend could be considered uneventful, but in one respect it will go down in human history. This was Peak-Geek Weekend – a moment of unprecedented, unrepeatable pop-cultural excitement – that was global in scale. Never, in the field of human geekdom, has so much geeking out been done by so many, over the long-awaited climaxes of two of the most supremely geeky properties ever made. At the cinema, *Avengers: Endgame* set itself up to become the biggest film of all time, smashing box-office records with a headache. It took more than £920m in its first live days: the biggest movie opening in history by some margin. Meanwhile episode three of *The Game of Thrones* took small-screen

TV to movie-theatre dimensions: the most expensive single episode watched, streamed and pirated series ever. So far, its followers have consumed about 70 hours of violent, labyrinthine Westerosian power politics, and have just three episodes left. Will we ever scale such heights of geekdom again?

Geek status used to connote a small subsection of society who took an obsessive interest in stuff that mainstream didn't and invariably paid the price of social exclusion. Now you're an outcast if you're *not* into stuff like *Avengers* or *Thrones*. Everyone wants to talk about this stuff – with friends, on social media, in online forums, with colleagues, with complete strangers! And finally, there are the people who take pride in not engaging with any of this stuff and who have no idea who Thanos or Daenerys are – so they talk about that instead". To cut a long article short, Rose concludes: "How much is enough? Will we ever be inclined or able to invest so much time and devotion into such epic series again? And if we do, what will we get out of it? When reaching for epically long texts that have undergone as much analysis and discussion and devotion as our current pop culture properties, the only ready comparisons are religious ones: the Bible, the Koran or the Talmud. Sci-fi and fantasy are like a secular religion now. We congregate in large numbers to watch them, we devote hours to study them, we support them financially, we adorn ourselves with their merchandise and we get very angry when others speak against them. Clearly these worlds must give us more than just popcorn escapism. But what? Spiritual guidance? Transcendence? The illusion of control in a chaotic world? Outside the pop-culture bubble, religious and political hatred divide us; by comparison, stories such as *Avengers* and *Game of Thrones* unite us on a planetary level. It is at least something to value.

Another New Theatre?

This time in King's Cross, not in the provinces. Surprise? Not really, nor disappointed I suppose, when I read that the new adaptable auditorium is the brain of Nicholas Hytner. The new theatre, still un and Nick Starr, and designed by Haworth Tomkins and Tait, originators of the recently built Bridge Theatre near the Tower of London in 2017. The new theatre, still unnamed, will be on the fifth floor of an office block, and have a capacity for 600, and will be devoted to new work and revivals of classics. Perhaps it will be ready by the winter of 2021. "We are looking forward to joining their vibrant King's Cross neighbourhood".

Less Than a Shattering Masterpiece?

Reading their neighbouring little piece about the proposed new London King's Cross small theatre, about the plans for it to be devoted to new work and revivals of old classics, I noticed that when recently I went to the Finborough Theatre in Earls Court, I saw that the programme was proudly claiming that for at least the last ten years, it had been boasting the same policies! I

went to see *Jane Clegg* by St John Irvine, a play from 1913 first presented in Miss Horniman's Manchester Gaiety Theatre, in repertory, and since then lost in obscurity – like so many other plays of its day now only played by either *Hobson's Choice* or *Hindle Wakes* as the sole example of this kind of social realism during the Edwardian period. Over the past 40 years I have lucky perhaps to see so many plays, and have remembered the comments made by Michael Billington in the Guardian back in March 1980 when he was reviewing my production of *Dealing in Futures* by Harold Brighouse, first produced in 1909 and hardly ever seen again afterwards.

I was able to prepare a rival of this play at **Bolton Little Theatre** as part of the **Questors Theatre English Amateur Theatre Week 1980**, when three LTG member theatres joined to present a week in repertoire, with a theme of regional work. In his preview Billington said, In the first two decades of the century, English dramatists often tackled the pitched battle between capital and labour. Alongside Galsworthy's *Strife* and Lawrence's *Tough and Go*, we can now place Harold Brighouse's *Dealing in Futures*. This play

is no world shaker, but at the very least it shows the seeds from which Brighouse's classic *Hobson's Choice* actually sprang. The play is not only a source: it also reminds us of the mutual rancor that is at the roots of modern industrial relations... **But what really hit me was our lack of a small London rep theatre that can put on plays such as this, that are something less than shattering masterpieces but infinitely more than obscure historical documents.**

One used to look to members of the Guild to breach this gap quite regularly, but now it seems rarer than ever to meet some old plays of merit these days that have not really been played to death!!

Congratulations to Sir Ian – Reports are coming in now of Sir Ian's 80th birthday celebrations around the country. Michael Billington in The Guardian found "heartfelt hilarity from a crusader of the stage", and praised him as a worthy follower of Ken Dodd.



Are you just a tad concerned?

I read the review of Shakespeare's Globe's new production of Henry IV Parts 1 & 2 and Henry V (running May to October) and noted: This epic cycle employs gender fluid casting, minimalist staging and lots of leather. Interesting, yet again, I am sure. With women playing Hotspur, Falstaff and Hal, and Kate played by a man to balance things up one assumes, one can perhaps understand the need for leather. The reviewer, Kate Wyver in The Guardian, concludes: As we leave (12 hours later) with numb knees and cold hands, the Globe ensemble have ensured that the story will, on our imaginary forces, continue to work". But for a possibly first encounter with the Bard's greatest drama, is this the best possible introduction to the experience? Is the whole thing just an enormous experiment dictated by the political flavour of the month, when there is a wider duty owed to posterity which meets Shakespeare on the first visit?

(Letter to the Guardian) **"Boris is what you get if you send Trump to Eton"**

From the desk of **Michael Shipley** – who promises to finally retire when there is no space left for his musings!

Exhibitions Worth a Look?



Stockton Globe Encore: The Past The People, The Place explores the story of The Stockton Globe, formerly on the Theatres at Risk list, and the famous acts that played there. Discover the exciting future for the newly restored theatre. Preston Park Museum until 6 October

Ta – ra – ra – Boom – de – ay! Music Hall in Islington explores music hall and variety entertainment throughout a time when Islington was London's undisputed 'Parish of Pleasure'. Islington Museum 22 October

CHECK OUT LOCAL THEATRES ON HERITAGE OPEN DAYS
13 – 22 September

PRESS RELEASE 9 August 2019

From proscenium arches to pop-ups Theatres Trust's conference looks at putting artists and audiences at the forefront of theatre design

Theatres Trust, the national advisory public body for theatres, announces programme details of its 2019 conference **'Centre Stage – artist and audience at the heart of theatres'** to be held on Tuesday 15 October at the Battersea Arts Centre in London.

Conference 19: Centre Stage will look at theatres from the perspective of the people they are there to serve. It will ask how to ensure that the needs of artists and audiences sits at the centre of theatre buildings.

It is fashionable in some circles to say that 'traditional' theatre buildings are not suitable for contemporary artistic practice and that by their nature they are a barrier to wider audience engagement and inclusion. However, it's time to move on from that false assumption. Just as there are many new artistic voices who prefer to make their work in found or pop-up spaces so there is also an exciting young generation of artistic directors now running many of long-established theatre buildings. All of those perspectives will be shared at Conference 19: Centre Stage – artist and audience at the heart of theatres.

Plenary speakers include celebrated sociologist and urbanist **Professor Richard Sennett**, who chairs **Theatrum Mundi**, a network of artists, critics and scholars who explore the relations between stage and street, **Rebecca Holt**, Battersea Arts Centre

and the architect who worked on its recent restoration, **Martin Lydon, Haworth Tompkins.**

David Micklam, 64 Million Artists, Hannah Fox, Derby Meseums and Matt Fenton, Contact, Manchester along with members of the Con:Struct young people's capital project team will offer their thoughts and experience of democratic design.

Taking part in an Artists' Panel Discussion are: **Nadia Fall, Theatre Royal Stratford East, Tarek Iskander, Battersea Arts Centre, Joe Douglas, Live Theatre, Newcastle and Bryony Shanahan, Royal Exchange Manchester.**

Punchdrunk, Theatre Absolute, Theatre Deli and Troubadour Theatres – undoubtedly some of the biggest names in working in non-traditional theatres – will discuss their motivations for working in these spaces and the possibilities they create for artists and audiences.

Devonshire Park Theatres, Polka and Theatre Royal Wakefield will talk about how to adapt and use theatres to make them truly accessible, inclusive and welcoming to all audiences.

A lightning round will give conference attendees a taste of current theatre building trends across the UK and the people considerations informing them. Featured theatres include: **Birmingham Repertory Theatre, Bolton Octagon, Fairfield Halls, Leeds Playhouse, Shakespeare North, Theatr Clwyd.**

Jon Morgan, Theatres Trust Director says: "There's nothing as magical as a full theatre where artist and audience together are engaged in the collaborative process of storytelling. Our theatre buildings are an essential ingredient that make that magic happen – Centre Stage will challenge us to place people at the heart of how we design and use them".

The annual conference, now in its 13th year, attracts a high number of key decision makers and influencers, and provides an unparalleled opportunity for delegates to hear thought-provoking speakers, network and share experiences. Tickets are on sale now at via the Theatres Trust website. Standard Price Tickets £222.

BURSARIES NOW AVAILABLE Thanks to generosity of Sponsors we are pleased to be able to offer places to students, emerging artists, and representatives from small (less than three staff) unfunded theatre organisations. More details – Theatre Trusts website

LTG Archives at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London

The LTG Archives have found a new home at The Questors Theatre, Ealing, London. For many years they were in the safekeeping of Michael Shipley, but when Michael stood down from the LTG Committee, a new home was sought. Sandra Simpson very generously housed them temporarily in her dining room and then garage.

The Questors archive, under the careful stewardship of John Dobson, had moved to a new dry and airy home and he offered to house the LTG archive. A Memorandum of Understanding was drawn up and signed by both the LTG and The Questors and LTG Chairman Michael Smith drew

up a schedule of the LTG Archive contents. On the 9 May, he drove the archive down to The Questors and handed it over to John.

As John catalogues the archive, he will identify documents that are of historical interest and, or relate interesting stories about LTG. He plans to present them to delegates at the 2020 LTG National Conference and AGM to be held 17 – 19 April, enabling them learn more about the long history of the LTG. Perhaps delegates with an interest in archives would be interested in a workshop or discussion on the practical elements of keeping a theatre's archive. If so, do let Anne Gilmour know.



Goodbye to Artspace



We have some exciting news at Dewsbury Arts Group, we have re-named the theatre known as the Artspace, Dewsbury Arts Group have renamed their theatre. It will now be known as **The David and Judith Wood Theatre - the home of Dewsbury Arts Group**, in recognition of the years

of commitment and the driving force of David and Judith.who were both awarded the MBE in 2002 for their services to the arts in Dewsbury. Without them there would be no Arts Group.

Many people may not be aware of the little gem of a theatre that is tucked away in Lower Peel Street, on the Bradford Road coming out of Dewsbury, but this is the home of a thriving and well respected theatrical and visual arts group that has entertained for almost 60 years!

The new naming ceremony consisted of popping bottles of bubbly in the bar area and coffee and cakes in the foyer. There were reminiscences from members and patrons old and new; stories about set building exploits; travelling with the festival play which won the British one act play festival; personal thanks for support and anecdotes about the long and successful theatrical career of these two friends.

It culminated with David Wood giving an amusing and erudite thanks. Then Judith and David unveiled the new sign above the theatre door. It was a truly

wonderful event and a fitting tribute to David and Judith.

*How many times do we hear that! **We had no idea there was a theatre here!***

Our local council have displayed a super new map of the town – minus the smallest dot for the theatre that has been there since 1931!



Roger Davy, Ilkley Players, remembers Minack... Then & Now!

Those of you who have enjoyed the happy anticipation of walking across the road at Bolton Abbey, and then as you have passed through the 'hole in the wall' you have had that wonderful experience of seeing one of the best pastoral views of Wharfedale opening up in front of you, may appreciate that far away near Lands End in the south-west of Cornwall you can also have that same excitement as you pass the gorgeous fine soft white sand and the clear turquoise sea of the National Trust Porthcurno Beach, climb the steep hill to a car park and walk down through some low buildings and out on to a high terrace where, unfolding in front of you is one of the most dramatic seascapes you will ever see.

The view looking down across many rows of grass covered seats on to the unique Minack Theatre stage, carved out of the granite cliffs, and then away down to the sea another sixty feet below and across the wide bay to the distant silhouette of the high cliffs of the Logan Rock, creates an almost physical shock. I mean it! No matter how many times you visit this bewitching place you will always have this happy, memorable reunion. For many of us the bi-annual visit to the Minack Theatre has become part of our normal way of life.

After several years of planning, writing numerous letters, sending photographs and playbills and through several visits by our then artistic director David Wildman to meet the theatre's founder Rowena Cade, the Playhouse was finally invited to produce *A Winter's Tale* in Cornwall in August 1975. We won the coveted Minack trophy with *Camelot* a few years later in 1979, with Kay Vann playing Guinevere and Malcolm Pinder as King Arthur.

Since those early days when the theatre facilities were very primitive and the box office was a concrete gun turret left over from the Second World War, there is now a splendid shop, cafe, exhibition centre and 'state of the art' loos!

Our Company has been fortunate to visit the theatre almost every two years with a wide range of musicals and plays. This year with the still currently relevant play, *Blue Stockings*, we shall be making our twenty-second visit. Throughout the years on the Saturday morning following the previous evening's final performance, there is a time of anxiety whilst we wait to learn if we shall be invited back. So far the answer has always been 'Yes, we shall be pleased to see you again!'

Ensemble Theatre at its Best

It is essential though that we continue to produce the very best of non-professional theatre and leave a good impression as there is always huge competition from other companies to visit this prestigious venue. The commitment to a Minack

visit is absolute. It is ensemble theatre at its best with everyone, director, actors, technical staff and family members totally involved. Some are perhaps 'sacrificing' their annual summer holiday to the venture and everyone will be involved from emptying the company van of costumes and props and by being a part of a human chain passing everything down the steep auditorium to the stage and dressing rooms.

The set has to be built, the lighting installed and everything prepared for a 'run' later that day. On the following day, a Sunday 'dress' rehearsal is performed in front of the theatre Trustees and the Friends of Minack and we open on the Monday for seven performances including two matinees.

At the end of a memorable week the final commitment is to the repacking of everything after the last performance and leaving the dressing rooms and all the backstage facilities in an immaculate condition, ready for the next company to use. This is a cheerful chore for everyone, often completed after midnight.

And Cream Teas?

It is very important to say that in all this concentration of theatrical life we have a lot of fun, including a traditional Cornish cream tea for the company. It is a real privilege to be part of any production. My family and I have been involved with fifteen productions over the last thirty years and certain special, happy memories come to mind.

For example, we shall remember a rustic, flamboyant, Andrew Leggott playing Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and during the 'mechanicals' play within the play, Andrew taking an absolute age to die... several times!

We remember the tangible atmosphere created by our actors and Becky Sheldon's piercing scream chilled us to the marrow in the trial scene of *The Crucible*, - that year we won the Minack Trophy for a second time - and of course, there was my friend Tim Mutton being seriously but very tastefully amorous with that lovely actress Lucy Moore and with the aid of a handy kitchen table in the wonderfully rambunctious *Joseph Andrews*.

I played the ship's captain at the beginning of *The King and I* and took great care with my costume and felt I looked completely dapper and authentic for the 1860's in Siam as I strutted the large stage in front

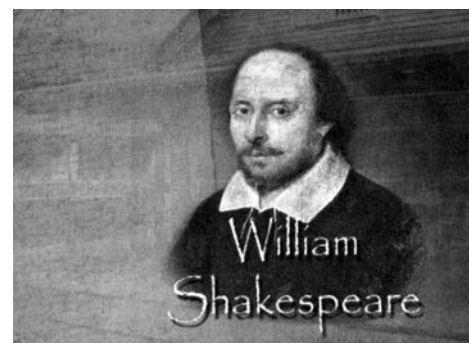


of nearly seven hundred people. One evening as I was about to go on stage David Wildman our Director walked past and loudly exclaimed "B----- H--- Roger, you've got your sideburns on 'oop' side down!"

I still miss the warm comforting tights that I wore as an old lady in Cornwall for *The Lady Killers*.

Perhaps my abiding memory of all is when Richard Speight, our talented lighting designer, flooded the whole of the Minack Stage with an atmospheric, soft green light for the closing scene of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. On cue a full harvest moon rose slowly out of the dark blue sea as Puck addressed the audience with Shakespeare's beautiful words:

"If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon we will mend.
Else the Puck a liar call,
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends."



**GOOD LUCK TO ALL OUR THEATRES
WHO WILL BE AT MINACK THIS YEAR.
Send us those pics!**

Some Recent Production Photos

Maskers Theatre Company - *Twelfth Night*



Progress Theatre - *King Lear*



Bolton Little Theatre - *Ladies in Lavender*



Richmond Shakespeare Society - *Much Ado*

The Questors Theatre - *Charley's Aunt*



Lewes Little Theatre - *Accolade*



Bingley Little Theatre - *Muddy Cow*



Bingley Little Theatre - *Stringer's Last Stand*



Bingley Little Theatre - *Blood Brothers*