



# apollo

The in-house magazine of the Apollo Theatre Players, Newport, Isle of Wight

### Forthcoming read-throughs, auditions & other production stuff

- 'The Weir': auditions Sunday 16 December, 2.30pm in the auditorium (see p.11 for the audition piece)
- 'Natural Causes': read-through on Tuesday 15 January, 7.30pm in Hancock House
- 'Natural Causes' auditions: 17 February (location to be confirmed)
- 'White Rock' play-reading: 22 January, 7.30pm in the bar (see p.4 for more info)

**Remember: a read-through is not an audition!**

### DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEXT ISSUE:

Wednesday 30 January

### Other diary dates (more info on the website)

Coffee 'n' Chat mornings	Every Saturday morning, 10.00-12.00
12th night social evening	Saturday 5 January 2019 7.30pm in the bar
Drama workshop: 'Page to Stage'	Friday 22 February 2019, 7.30-9.00pm
RedTie production: 'Goodnight Mr Tom'	28 February-2 March 2019
Apollo Youth Theatre production	Date changed: to be confirmed

Issue no. 268

47th season

December 2018



A message from the director of 'The Vicar of Dibley', Dan Burns:

'When Maggie offered me 'The Vicar of Dibley' to direct, I was really excited as it's a production I have wanted to direct for some time. It was fantastic to see so many faces at the audition, which made for some difficult casting decisions at the start (I could have cast a different cast every night and still been happy with the result—some of the competition was that strong!). Rehearsals have been great fun—and this is reflected in the performances on stage as well as the audience response. Just about everyone I have spoken to thoroughly enjoyed their evening out. Many of the audience had not been to the Apollo before—I know it's

not a yardstick we should measure our success by, but I am just a teensy bit proud of a completely sold out show!

On a production of this size, there are many 'thank-you's that must be said. Before that, I'd like to thank everyone involved for their patience while I've not been as 'energetic' as usual! A big 'thank you' to the cast for their energy and dedication. We've had a few new members on stage, including a couple who are completely new to public performance. I've thoroughly enjoyed working with you all. Carole and her props team have excelled themselves (and in true Apollo style, somewhat of a baptism by fire!) as have Peggy and her

wardrobe team. In both cases, it looks quite a simple production—until you read a bit closer—especially with some of the quicker fast changes! To everyone backstage—Maureen, Emily, Ian and Tom as well as all the set builders and painters—thank you. You've been stars (and put up with me—I think that deserves an award!). None of this would have been possible without my assistant director—Abbi's enthusiasm and endless energy have been a fantastic morale booster during rehearsals, and her baking skills have been evident in abundance! Thank you—and I look forward to working with you all again soon!



Carol Simpson and Matt Osborne in 'The Vicar of Dibley'

Di Evans, who will be directing the first show of 2019, Polly Teale's fascinating reimagining of the Bronte legend, is delighted to confirm that she has been able to cast the play.

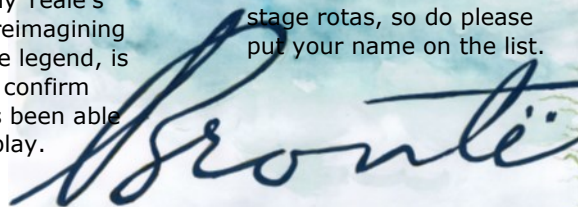
Remember, there will always be spaces on the front of house and backstage rotas, so do please put your name on the list.

The cast for 'Bronte' is as follows:

- Charlotte** Fiona Gwinnett
- Emily** Abbi Leverton
- Anne** Susan Simpson
- Cathy/Bertha** Maria Wilkinson
- Patrick/Rochester/Heger/Bell Nicholls** Peter Gale
- Branwell/Heathcliff/Arthur Huntingdon** Chris Hicks

The production dates are **8-16 February 2019**.

For new members, it's a great way to get to know the theatre and other members.



## Editorial: the view from the Editor's chair

Well, first and foremost, I must thank all of you who responded to my heartfelt cri de coeur in the last issue and have sent me your thoughtful and interesting contributions for this 12-page issue (!). It's great when members share their views, and I look forward to receiving more!



This month we mourned the passing of Cicely Berry, the voice coach whose book 'Voice

and the Actor' was one of the required texts for actors

in training (I still have my dog-eared copy). As voice director of the RSC for 45 years she transformed the way actors work, using a physical approach to speaking lines, believing that great writers—Shakespeare above all—conveyed meaning in rhythm as much as words, and that actors should act as much from the gut as from the head. Anyone who has had to learn any Shakespearean or his contemporaries' texts will know that the rhythm leads the learning of the lines; if you misremember a line you immediately know, because

the flow and the rhythm tell you so. Berry said that rather than engaging with a script intellectually, actors should feel its rhythm in their bodies, and she was absolutely right; and this is true just as much for Pinter or Ayckbourn as for Shakespeare. She also believed passionately that theatre was a place not just for entertainment, but for social change, and how right she was (see Rambling Rose's response to Alan Bennett's latest play on page 10). In these turbulent times, is there a place for any song-or playwright who doesn't protest?

Personal accident insurance has now been incorporated in our policy and as a result of moving insurance companies the additional cover has been obtained with little additional cost.

Plans to join the Theatre with No 124 are to be taken to an architect and structural surveyor for finalization. This may involve the architect producing a full computerised model of the entire theatre before final approval can be obtained, but we still hope to be going out to tender early in 2019.

The rigging over the stage has now been completed to our satisfaction and despite the lost work nights the double bill was completed in time—just! However, a new requirement has been identified. The tab track used to fly the black curtains used for hirings is very heavy and must be considered a health and safety risk when being raised and lowered. A winch is to be installed when 'Dibley' is over.

We are looking for people with an interest in the theatre but not actively involved to become Guarantor Members of the trust. Amy has identified a couple of possible candidates but if anyone knows of any more please put them in touch with the secretary of the Council of Management (Cynara).

We have finally received a quote for the outstanding electrical work in the theatre. Given the age of the wiring which has been installed over many years, often to an ever-changing set of regulations and sometimes not compliant

with any, bringing the electrics up to an acceptable state is likely to be an ongoing task. It is understood that bringing up the power in the theatre is not straight forward but anyone attempting to do so should obtain guidance. In particular it is vital that any time the theatre is occupied the emergency lights are switched on from the control box in the foyer. They are marked!

News from the Unit: the heater is now working properly and we have been compensated for the delay with a year's free servicing. Concern has been expressed at the noise of the fan. The planned mode of operation of the heater is that it is programmed to come on at a time before normal rehearsals. Directors should let Roger know if they plan rehearsals out of normal hours. We have had a number of intruder alerts there which appear to be caused by someone leaving the rear fire exit open. Please be aware that it is only to be opened in the event of an emergency. The installation of CCTV has been delayed following Dan Burns' injury, but this has given Dan the chance to identify a cheaper solution.

Both the Players committee and the Trust are concerned about the state of the Unit. When it was purchased it was to be a multi-purpose area for set-building, rehearsals and storage. Not much set-building has gone on down there: people find it easier to use the theatre and the heating issues have limited the amount of rehearsals. However the storage of material

and furniture has been growing steadily. It is very kind of members to offer us their unwanted furniture but we must be more selective about what we accept. In addition there are lots of pieces of scenery which are being kept 'just in case'. There are of course plenty of stories of things being destroyed just before a similar item is needed which has to be made afresh but we must think long and hard about what we keep and what we chuck! One significant issue preventing flats being built or repaired at the unit was that we no longer had access to a vehicle which could tow the trailer. This currently makes the trailer redundant as well as one of the two big benches built for working on flats.

**If any member has a vehicle capable of towing a fairly large trailer please let us know. Alternatively, has anyone got any dry area (barn?) where we could store it?**

A concern raised at the Players' AGM and discussed by the Trust is the workload of the Buildings Manager, Roger Simpson. Not only does Roger carry out almost every piece of maintenance and improvement at all our properties, he is also the primary driver for all our planning applications, and despite his best efforts this inevitably has an impact on the speed with which we can get things done. The Trust and the Players are to get together to explore solutions. If you are interested in being involved in the debate or even joining a 'buildings team', please contact me or Amy.

## News from the Apollo Theatre Trust



From the  
Chair of the  
Trust, Paul  
Jennings

# News from your Committee

Notes from the Committee meeting 10 December 2018

## THEATRE DIRECTOR

First of all, my sincerest thanks to everyone who came along to the AGM and contributed to the discussions. Sadly, though, the turnout—32 members—wasn't as good as I could have hoped, even allowing for the weather. So please, tell me—if you were one of those who couldn't get there, what would make you come to the AGMs in future? It's your theatre—I want to make sure everyone is getting as much as possible out of it.

My congratulations to the Wardrobe team for producing the brilliant costumes for 'Vicar of Dibley'.

In the absence of a candidate for the post of House Manager this time round, Steve Reading has stepped forward; he has been co-opted onto the Committee for 2018-19 and all being well will be able to stand for election for 2019-21.

## ARTS MANAGER

We have a sell-out production on our hands in 'The Vicar of Dibley', which is fantastic, for both the actors and the business. 'Bronte' is well into rehearsals and we look forward to Di's innovative staging ideas, and the read-through and auditions for 'Natural Causes' will be happening soon (see elsewhere in this issue).

## TECHNICAL MANAGER

Nothing much to report—everything is going well. Dibley's set was completed

and painted with time to spare; and Paul Jennings is busy drawing up plans for Bronte. On the Health and Safety front, training is currently being drawn up and is nearing completion—this forms part of the ongoing H&S assessments at the theatre and will be shared with both the Players and the Trust. Other than that, we've had 2 new faces in props for backstage; and as at last meeting, I would like to thank everybody for their help whilst I'm still incapacitated (hopefully not for much longer however!).

## MARKETING MANAGER

Publicity for the V of D went well; not that we needed much as we have a sell-out on our hands (we took the decision not to place an advert in the CP for obvious reasons). Thanks to Dan Burns for producing the programme. The IW Observer has carried our press release for the show and has asked for my review, so hopefully this will be published next week in their paper. The CP have again not sent a photographer to the dress rehearsal, so I have emailed a dress photo along with my review offering the use of this in lieu of being able to offer their reporter a seat this time.

## BUSINESS MANAGER

Not much to report this month, I'm pleased to say. As those who were at the AGM will have noted, our Treasurer, Alan, is back on his feet after two significant

operations and assures me that he is on the mend. He had been able to complete the 2017-18 accounts, which he reported on at the AGM, and I have nothing significant to add to that except that he recommends that I make our donations to the Trust twice a year, at the time of the interim and the final accounts, which seems sensible. 'The Vicar of Dibley' will, on present showing, be able to contribute a goodly sum to our coffers for 2018-19.

## HOUSE MANAGER

I know I'm a newcomer to this post (though not to the Committee) and I'm looking forward to getting my teeth into the role. I plan to put a programme of training in place to make sure everyone's clear about the jobs the FOH team carry out, and I've got lots of ideas for the future. The rotas were easily filled for 'The Vicar of Dibley'; lots of members have stepped forward and gone 'above and beyond' to make sure the show is a success; my heartfelt thanks to you all.

## MEMBERS' REPS

One of our new Members' Reps, Mike Crowe, has come up with lots of good ideas for different ways of doing things. If you have thoughts you'd like to share with him, Mike's email address is given below. We welcome him and Tom to the Committee.

**MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY'S** report on page 5.

## YOUR COMMITTEE

**Theatre Director & Chair of management committee (elected 3-yearly): Amy Burns (2016-19)** amy@masexodus.co.uk

<b>Arts Manager</b> (elected annually in Nov for season beginning following Sept)	<b>Maggie Cardew</b> (2018-19) cardewmaglet@gmail.com <b>Di Evans</b> (2019-20) di-andclem@hotmail.com	<b>2 Members' Representatives</b> (elected annually)	<b>Mike Crowe</b> (2018-19) mike.crowe1@btinternet.com <b>Tom Hilton</b> (2018-19) thilton1@hotmail.co.uk
<b>Business Manager</b> (elected biannually)	<b>Ginnie Orrey</b> (2018-20) gginnie@googlemail.com or info@apollo-theatre.org.uk	<b>Co-opted members</b>	
<b>Marketing Manager</b> (elected biannually)	<b>Maureen Sullivan</b> (2018-20) msullivan58@me.com	<b>Bar Manager</b>	<b>Paul Stevens</b> postmaster@sleepite.force9.co.uk
<b>Players' Secretary</b> (elected biannually)	<b>Mike Whitehead</b> (2018-20) michaelwhitehead@yahoo.com	<b>Wardrobe Manager</b>	<b>Peggy Harcourt</b> peggy.harcourt@creekside.plus.com
<b>Membership Secretary</b> (elected biannually)	<b>Carole Crow</b> (2017-19) carolecrow9@gmail.com	<b>Apollo Trust secretary</b>	<b>Cynara Crump</b> cynara.crump@virgin.net
<b>House Manager</b> (elected biannually)	<b>Steve Reading</b> (co-opted 2018-19) steveread104@btinternet.com	<b>Apollo Trust Buildings Manager</b>	<b>Roger Simpson</b> roger.dodger45@yahoo.co.uk
<b>Technical Manager</b> (elected biannually)	<b>Dan Burns</b> (2017-19) dan@masexodus.co.uk	<b>Youth Theatre Co-ordinator</b>	<b>Mish Whitmore</b> mish.whitmore@yahoo.com

## News from the AGM

As I'm sure you all know, the 47th Annual General Meeting of the Apollo Theatre Players took place in the theatre on Saturday 24 November. It was sad to see only 32 members there, though given the atrocious weather, it was actually great that so many people did manage to come! The meeting went well; reports had been sent out in advance from the committee members, and there were only a few questions, mainly (as usual) about the accounts of the Players for the 2017-18 year. The Treasurer, Alan Rodway, presented the accounts,

and also took the opportunity to thank members for their support and sympathy during his recent illness. It was great that he was able to come to the meeting and confirm that he is on the mend.

The 'manifestos' from those standing for the vacant committee posts unfortunately had not been circulated, but as it happened only one person stood for each vacant post, so it was possible to confirm that the posts were filled as follows :

**Ginnie Orrey:** business manager 2018-20

**Michael Whitehead:** players' secretary 2018-20  
**Maureen Sullivan:** marketing manager 2018-20

**Di Evans:** arts manager 2019-2020

**Thomas Hilton:** members' representative 2018-19

**Mike Crowe:** members' representative 2018-19

The full committee can be seen on page 3, as usual, along with the co-opted posts.

The Director, Amy Burns, said, 'Thank you to the last committee for all their hard work over the past year, and I look forward to what the next year will bring with the new committee.'

## A MESSAGE FROM THE NEW ARTS MANAGER 2019-2020

It seems like I am wishing my life away thinking about this, but I was asked at the AGM to outline my manifesto or 'mission statement' for my time as Arts Manager. So here goes ...

I think all Arts Managers want to achieve the same thing: that is, to enable a balanced season that will not only engage the public and thus provide income but also provide challenges and fun for all our membership. An impossible task given that 'you can't please all the people all of the time' but that shouldn't stop us trying!

So my first task is to find the plays. I have some ideas but would be grateful for any suggestions from the membership, especially any would-be directors who have a play they are burning to direct. If you do have such a play it would be a great help if you could get a script to me, with some idea of how you would stage it, before 20 December 2018. You can leave it in the theatre up to that time as that is my last rehearsal for "Bronte" before the Christmas break. That will give me enough time to consider your suggestions, with the aim of holding a direc-

tors' meeting early in March 2019 (for those of you unfamiliar with the process, the Directors' Meeting is the opportunity for would-be directors to get together with the Arts Manager and work out the forthcoming season).

That may seem like a long time but please bear in mind that that during January I will find it extremely difficult to think about any -thing other than "Bronte" and anyway I do think very slowly! I am looking forward to reading your suggestions.

Nadolig Llawn to you all!  
*Di Evans*

## A new play by a new(ish) member: Martin Ward's 'White Rock'

Some of you may not be aware that we have another published author in our midst. Martin Ward, whose article on the trials and tribulations of a playwright can be seen on page 7, has written a play called 'White Rock', which was accepted for publication by Lazy Bee Scripts in

2017. There is to be a reading of the play on 22 January 2019 at 7.30pm in the bar at the theatre, just for fun, and the bar will be open. All are very welcome. See page 10 for a synopsis of the plot.

Martin is also the director of the penultimate play in the current season, 'Natural Causes'; the read-through will be held on Tuesday 15 January, at 7.30pm in Hancock House, and the auditions a month later, on 17 February (time and location to be confirmed).

## FROM THE MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

That year went quickly! Where does the time go? Here I am reminding you all that membership renewals are due on 1 January (I'm pleased to report that subscription rates remain the same). Throughout the year I have done my best to engage with members by being at the coffee mornings and events; coffee mornings have graduated to a weekly 'Coffee 'n Chat' and are already proving a success! Coming up in January we have Martin Ward's play-reading and Michael Arnell's Stagecraft Workshop: a wonderful opportunity for aspiring actors to gain experience as well as 'old hands' to hone their skills. Please come and support these events; and if you have ideas for other members' activities, I'd be delighted to hear from you. If you would like to raise any

matters about the theatre generally, our new Members' Reps, Tom Hilton and Mike Crowe, are the guys to talk to. We have some new members—**Mike Groves, Lucy Benton, Carl Jacobs** and returning member **Matt Osbourne**: a big 'welcome' to you all.

Oh, and our felicitations and sympathy to **Kate Fysh**, currently languishing with a broken leg. We wish her a speedy recovery.

### SAD NEWS

Many long-time members will remember Paddy and Peter Croydon-Fowler. Both were very active in the theatre for many years; but sadly we have to report that Peter (94) died on 19 November (funeral on 10 December) and Paddy (91) is now very frail and being cared for in a nursing home.

## FIRST DRAMA WORKSHOP: 'PAGE TO STAGE' Friday 22 Feb, 7.30pm

**Leader: Michael Arnell**

There are many aspects of stagecraft we could focus on, e.g. projection, movement, spatial awareness, using props effectively, physical violence and comedy, etc. etc. This first one will focus on the basic story-telling skill. Please wear comfortable clothes and sensible shoes. Coffee/tea/biscuits provided.

Bring a non-member friend; they could become acting members too!

**NOTE:** If you would like a future workshop with a particular focus, please contact me ASAP

membership matters



### How to access the members' area of the Apollo Theatre website

- Go on to the website and hover over 'membership' and the 'members' area' tab should drop down;
- click on that and you'll get the message 'We're sorry, the content you are trying to reach is restricted to members only';
- click on 'member login' and you'll get the drop-down box containing the two areas 'username' and 'password';
- in the top area enter your 'username', which is 'firstname.secondname' (remember the dot between the words), and in the bottom box enter your 'password', which is your membership number. Your membership card has your number on it, but if you can't find it check with the Membership Secretary or me;
- once you've done that, you should get straight into the members' area. If not, there's a problem and you need to let me know, but try these steps first.

*Ginnie Orrey, webmistress*

### How to access the online diary

To check the diary, go to <http://diary.apollo-backstage.org.uk> (note there's no 'www' at the beginning, and it's not the normal Apollo website). To just see what is booked in, you do not need to log in - you can use the options on screen to select a view that will either show you a day, week or month for a particular area. Use the mini calendars at the top to choose which day/week/month you wish to view. The **day view** will show you all of the areas together, whereas **weekly** and **monthly views** will show a single room at a time - click on the title of the room at the top left to change the room you are looking at bookings for. To view more information about the booking, including who made the booking, click on the title of the booking which will then take you to the details page.

To make bookings (or change your own - it will not allow you to delete or change other people's bookings), you will first need to log in by clicking on the login button at the top right of the page. This will open the log-in page, which needs you to use the same details as the members' area of the website. If you can't log in, drop me an e-mail ([dan@apollo-backstage.org.uk](mailto:dan@apollo-backstage.org.uk))

**To make a booking**, check to see if the time is free. If it

isn't, the diary won't allow you to make a booking.

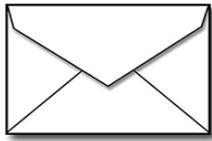
Click the time you wish to start your booking - the page will change to the bookings page, where you need to fill in the details - brief description, room, start/finish times and type are the minimum, although you can provide other information. Remember that if you're booking the **stage**, you'll also need to book the **auditorium**. You can hold down the CTRL button on your keyboard to select more than one room under the same booking.

Once you have entered the details, there is a 'save' button at the bottom of the page with two green ticks to the right. This will save your booking on the diary.

If you go to click 'save' and see a red cross instead of a green tick, this means that your booking conflicts with another. You'll need to double-check the date/times have been entered correctly. If you need to over-ride a regular booking such as work-nights, you will have to contact Dan Burns, Technical Manager, to do this.

### How to access the Apollo Theatre wifi

When you want to access the wifi, you'll see on the list of networks one called either 'Apollo backstage' or simply 'Apollo theatre'. The password is 'apollotheatre'.



## Your letters: *from Louis Lawrence, Michael Arnell and Chris Hicks*

### From Louis Lawrence

I have never set myself up as a drama critic. Being just one of the workers at the theatre. I have sat through many productions over the past few years and what stands out is that a lot of modern plays are more suited to radio than stage. By that I mean that plays which contain dialogue and little physical action are not really suitable for stage presentation. I kept looking at the panel of Olivier's characters and remember how he could bring characters to life and wondering how he would work his magic on the current offering, or perhaps not! Could anyone?

The most recent offering, 'Private Ear and Public Eye', was typical of this style. The most exciting event was when someone banged on a desk. The only other exciting event was a bunch of flowers being brought on and deposited on a coat rack. Oh, how the audience (me and about thirty others) must have longed for the table to collapse or perhaps a dagger to be produced from the blooms and stuck into someone. We waited in vain as yards of script was reeled out by competent actors who might have been wondering what they could do next to inspire the audience; fall off the stage? pull off a door handle? trip over the carpet— for God's sake, anything!

It's not that the plays were not worth doing, it's just that they did not justify the time and work required to stage them. The set was ingeniously constructed for changing at Interval but was it worth all that work? The players could all have sat on comfortable chairs, had a fag, a drink and just chatted through their lines. Well, actually that's just what they mostly did.

This play could have been put out as a radio play on our own Facebook page or website and would prob-

ably have drawn the same or greater audience.

Please, Arts Directors, let us have plays that have movement and activity, even dramatic plots. I expect that the next play, 'The Vicar of Dibley', will bear me out.

### From Michael Arnell

I am very pleased to report that the Players Committee have approved my suggestion of re-instituting a programme of regular Drama Workshops for members.

These will begin in the new year, so I thought it might be useful to give everyone a bit more background to them – and to encourage lots of you to sign up!

Although I have designed, built, painted and dressed many sets, my main involvement with the Players has been acting and directing. I would therefore be very happy to lead some workshops on the many aspects of stage-craft.

It has never ceased to amaze me that inexperienced aspiring actors join us and then are disappointed when they are not cast in a play. Amateur sportsmen and women would not expect to be picked for the team without joining the more experienced athletes practising, demonstrating and improving their skills at regular training sessions.

I realise that you can gain experience by actually "doing", and that by watching, listening to advice and being prepared to learn, you can improve your stage skills. However, members must realise that play-directors do not have the time to teach basic techniques during the limited rehearsal period. The best way to learn is within the non-threatening framework of a workshop.

Of course, it will also encourage other members to become involved with the technical aspects of productions if there are similar regular workshops on set design, building and painting, as well as workshops on lighting/sound design and operating.

Many years ago, on the Fri-

day evening after a production came down, the stage was made available for regular workshops. These were usually very well attended simply because they were regular—so re-introducing them into the Theatre Diary is the way to go. We look forward to welcoming lots of members old and new to the workshops and to getting your feedback on not only what you've attended, but also things you'd like to see included.

[see page 5 for more information about forthcoming workshops. Ed]

### From Chris Hicks

I joined the Apollo Theatre Players a year ago and was immediately impressed by the ambience and infrastructure. I've been involved with numerous theatre companies over the years, and although some have been more adventurous, none have been so well organised and welcoming. However, there is one important area of practice at the Apollo that has vexed me from the word go and, after a year's membership, I now feel in a position to make my feelings known. The Apollo is the only company I have worked with that does not employ a prompt during the run of a show and, although the reasons for this have been explained to me, I remain unconvinced as to the logic behind this stance. I've now been involved with three productions at the Apollo (on and off stage) and on two occasions I've seen actors having to use concealed copies of the text, in order to prompt other members of the cast. I've also witnessed productions where the narrative drive has been significantly impaired by the need for a timely prompt. This is a real pity, when such skill and effort has gone into producing something fine.

Is it time to have a rethink?

It is possible that all of us, at some time or other in our development, have had delusions of grandeur. My own particular moment, when I thought that I had written the play to end all plays, occurred in my late twenties.

It all began with a national playwriting competition, which was being organised by a theatre in Manchester. Having decided that I would enter, I spent weeks coming up with—and throwing out—one idea after another. After several weeks, I suddenly realised that the closing date for the competition was at hand. In fact, it was the following day.

I had toyed with putting pen to paper, or typewriter ribbon to paper, for quite some time. However, the stumbling block was always the same: what 'killer' idea could I come up with? Where could I find, when one thinks of all of the plays that have ever been written, that one idea that would trounce Coward, Shakespeare and Shaffer? The world was my oyster; I had in front of me a blank piece of paper and a small typewriter. This combination was my passport to the Laurence Olivier awards. I pictured myself sitting in the audience at the Cafe Royal, hearing my name being called, striding purposefully to the stage and receiving my award from the man himself.

But all that stared back at me was a piece of white paper. As I sat there, my fingers poised above the keys, the image of Sir Laurence smiling appreciatively at me began to melt like ice cream running down a cone in the heat. All around me was silent, but my mind was a whirl of characters, stories, ideas...they appeared and were rejected almost as swiftly as my

imagination created them.

Then, suddenly, I had it. My fingers galvanised into action. The letters started appearing on the paper. Characters took shape, like new life springing from the primordial swamp. As more and more words appeared on the paper, the excitement grew within me and I could see Sir Laurence once more, eulogising my work as the best play he had ever read and decrying the fact that he had not been able to get a



part in it. Once I had started, I could not stop. It was like a toboggan going downhill, building up speed as the scenery rushed by. I hammered down on the keys, feeling flushed at the genius that flowed through me.

I paid no heed to the time. Before I knew it the daylight had been replaced by the dusk, and then darkness descended. I paused just long enough to switch lights on, make tea and ponder vaguely why I was so hungry. Pages of typewritten magnificence were piling up beside half-drunk mugs of tea and coffee (of course, I made sure that they were sufficiently far enough away so that I would not spill anything on the precious material).

Before I knew it, it was dawn the next day. A skyscraper of typewritten pages loomed before me on the table. I sat back, a combination of tea, coffee, adrenaline, exhaustion and

dreaminess coursing through me. I looked at the magnum opus, and knew it was a work to be proud of.

I looked at the clock. It was nine-thirty. I swiftly calculated that if I got everything together and made it to Kings Cross (I was living in Chiswick at the time) I could catch a train to Manchester, find the theatre and hand in my play. I dashed out, armed with the address I needed to find, some money and the great work.

All went to plan. I arrived in Manchester, found the theatre and handed in the play. All the way back to London my mind was occupied with—once again—thoughts of success and fame that would enable me to give up my day job and become an award-winning author.

Imagine my feelings, therefore, two weeks later when I received my script in the post, along with a letter from the competition organisers. "Thank you for your submission. I regret to inform you ... "

The disappointment was tangible. Thoughts of returning to the day job, instead of the adulation that I thought would come my way, flooded my brain. I looked at the play I had written and put it back in the envelope. Thirty years later it sits in a box somewhere in the bedroom, and hasn't seen the light of day in all that time.

From time to time I think about that first ever play that I wrote, and wonder whether I should revisit it. On the other hand, because it was the first one, perhaps I should just leave it in all its typewritten glory as a monument to what could have been.

*Martin Ward*

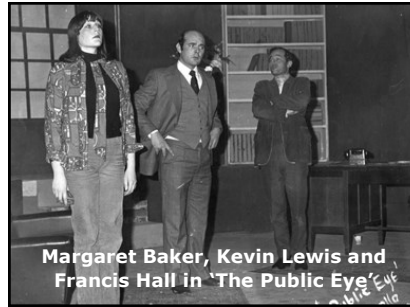
## 'The Art of Coarse Writing':

a  
cautionary  
tale  
by  
Martin Ward

The  
Players'  
first  
production  
of 'The  
Private Ear'  
and 'The  
Public Eye'

A reminis-  
cence by  
Paul  
Jennings

As I was away in October I didn't manage to put up the usual display of photos from a play we've done before, so here are my reminiscences of our first production of 'The Private Ear' and 'The Public Eye'—40 years ago!



Margaret Baker, Kevin Lewis and Francis Hall in 'The Public Eye'



Rod Jones, Susan Baille and Andrew Budden in 'The Private Ear'

The previous production featured two different casts and two very different directors (Joy Osborne and Robin Atkinson). Thanks to Paul Billington, we have pictures not only of the cast but also of the two sets.

I am credited, along with David Spiers (now David Hawes), with designing the sets, but I have absolutely no memory of them or



what looks like a very complex scene change!

**Simon  
Russell Beale  
comes to the  
Island!!**



Yes, you did read that right—on 23 September I watched Simon Russell Beale perform on the Shanklin Theatre stage! Be still, my beating heart! Appearing alongside Lucy Parham, a brilliant virtuoso pianist, he performed a piece entitled 'Reverie—the life and loves of Claude Debussy', in which he read excerpts from Debussy's diaries, interspersed with pieces played by Lucy which Debussy was writing at the time of the diary entries. The piece made few demands on SRB—he strolled on, clearly in the jeans and shirt he'd been

wearing all day, and read from a folder which he might have seen before though I wouldn't bet on it—but on the other hand, quite frankly he could read the telephone directory and I would be gripped. The astonishing thing about the whole evening was that here on stage was one of the greatest actors of our generation, appearing to a tiny audience—Shanklin Theatre was barely a quarter full—who clapped politely after each piece of music but otherwise showed little sign of life. I didn't even see any of our theatrical acquaint-

ance, which being the Island is unusual in itself. The question I asked myself about the evening was—why? Why the Island, why Shanklin Theatre, why did no-one know about it (since I assume that if they had, they would have been there) and most importantly, why aren't we out there getting hirings like this for the Apollo? Our ambience would have been perfect for this type of evening—with the best will in the world, Shanklin Theatre is a bit of a barn when it's not full. A challenge for our Hirings team, I think.

'Looks all right from here!'

These are the words of Gwen Elderfield, one of the Apollo's founder members who as well as being a talented actor, painted nearly all our sets on the 70s. She would sit in the front row after a busy evening's painting, and apply her test. Was whatever she had produced good enough from the point of view of the audience? This is one aspect of the creative work which takes place behind the scenes to produce the sets for our plays. Whether it's a realistic representation of a faded Victorian mansion or an abstract structure which could be taken to represent many different scenes, it and the lights and sound have to combine in such a way as to support the cast in drawing the audience into the performance without drawing attention to itself. In addition, whatever type of set is being produced, it has to be done as well as possible within budget and time constraints.

Anyone watching a professional production can't help but be struck by the sheer quality of the set and the stage mechanics. Now we don't have the money of the National but we can aspire to the highest quality in all we do and in the same way our actors study the top professionals we should always try and use ingenuity and skill to achieve better results. Directors would do well to note that a set design which doesn't challenge the set design and building team has the potential to be boring and risks losing those people who turn up on Monday and Tuesday for 'work



nights'. Of course we don't always succeed and still produce some sets worthy of 'Crossroads', with doors which, when slammed, ap-



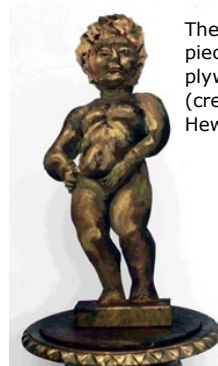
pear to threaten to bring the whole set down. The key to a successful set is to get the design worked out well in advance of the commencement of set building. Some designers produce beautiful cardboard models while others resort to 3D computer models to help directors and cast visualise how the set will work and ensure good sightlines are maintained. Fortunately few directors simply hand over the French's acting edition and say 'that'll do'.

There is a core of regular set-builders and -painters but newcomers are always made welcome and given the opportunity to exercise whatever skills they have. Training/instruction is also available to help volunteers develop new skills. Refreshments are usually provided. Set building usually starts with a preliminary arranging of the flats and any rostra required giving the actors a chance to try out the set design before it is finalised. This can be fairly quick but often looks pretty weird as the flats will have been decorated for previous productions.

Sometimes a more structural engineering approach is required and the challenge becomes one of providing a strong and stable set with due consideration for actors' safety and maintaining sight-lines. After making any alterations following a first rehearsal the set can be stabilized and braced ready

for painting and the construction of any special items, such as fireplaces, windows or any custom-built pieces of furniture.

This is where the skill and ingenuity of the team come into their own. How do you make a piece of furniture basically made of timber and hardboard look like something that would grace a posh sitting-room? How do you make a window appear to have a majestic view outside or a door convincingly lead to another room?



The Boy is a piece of plywood (credit Paul Hewson)

How do you freshly paint a wall so that it looks severely weathered? Obviously the audience need to suspend their disbelief but the trick is to help them as much as possible by ensuring that objects which purport to be real look as real as possible. Sometimes this may be achieved by careful construction. Alternatively a clever artist (and we have a few!) can turn a few brush strokes into what passes for a three-dimensional feature. Whether it's wood or paint, the result must pass Gwen's test and failure at this point should never be dismissed or excused because 'it's just theatre'.



The curtains are plywood and the walls are smooth (credit Michael Arnell)



## BACK-STAGE STARS!

In this issue we highlight the work of the set-builders and -painters, without whose skill, expertise and commitment none of our shows would get off the ground. Paul Jennings gives us some insight into the world of the set-building team

## 'White Rock': a synopsis of Martin Ward's new play

The family firm of Bannerman Publishing has been in existence for many years. The autocratic Sir James Bannerman is the long-time head of the company and is joined on the board by his son, Edward and his daughter, Helen, along with the Finance Director, Diana Foster. When the latest financial results show that the firm is struggling to keep its head above water, the relationship between Sir James and the other board members becomes strained. Sir James' treatment of his son, particularly, and his daughter create resentments that run deep. Ever stuck in his ways, Sir James exhibits a dislike of technological ad-

vances and prefers to rely on past glories and an outdated reputation to get the company out of trouble.

When Sir James is discovered dead on the company premises, an investigation gets under way to uncover the murderer. But with several suspects before him, Inspector Patrick Hilliard must use all his resources and experience to unmask the killer.

There are eight characters (4m 4f) ranging in ages from twenties to sixties. The play was written in 2017 and was accepted for publication by Lazy Bee Scripts in the same year. They estimate the running time at 98 minutes

(without an interval.)

The action takes place in three separate locations: the office of Sir James Bannerman, the company boardroom and a public house. Each of these locations is represented very simply by appropriate furniture.

As you will have seen, there will be a play-reading of 'White Rock' in the bar at the theatre on 22 January 2019 at 7.30pm. All are welcome, and the bar will be open. Come along and support our own 'home-grown' talent!



Chase those Christmas/New Year/winter blues away with the first social event of 2019, our 12th Night Party, on Saturday 5 January from 7.30pm. It will be a 'cheese and wine' do: bring a small piece of a favourite or unusual cheese to share, and wines from around the world will be available in small (50ml) glasses so that you can try a few. We'll provide bread/crackers and entertainment. There is a theme—posh! Bow tie and bling!! And for the ladies—best frocks! Excellent excuse to dress up and enjoy a great evening with friends. Non-members are welcome, so bring your mates too.

## Rambling Rose



Why does it take a playwright to make one sit up and take note of the decline in our social conscience!? Of course this is nothing new and to my mind the epitome of what good writing and drama should aspire to. To make the audience think and evaluate. Whether it be politics or family relationships, or whatever the writer chooses to explore. I have just seen a new play, amazing, poignant, thought-provoking and should be compulsory viewing for anyone in au-

thority making decisions that have long and far-reaching consequences for the populace. Written wittily and intelligently by Alan Bennett, 'Alleluiah' combines so many elements but mainly the effect on the NHS of the many successive governments' insistence on quantifying public service in monetary terms. In other words, profitability overriding all other considerations. ('Is it value for money?') He managed also to include a masterful scene on racism within the

establishment, which I personally found excruciating to watch, as it was totally believable and embarrassingly true to our current obsession with deporting illegal immigrants no matter how talented or hard working.

Now, at the risk of being political, will this play make a difference to the way we cast our vote next time at the ballot box? I hope so but doubt it very much. But it certainly should make us stand up and be counted!

*Rose Kelsey*

'Acting is merely the art of keeping a large group of people from coughing.' *Ralph Richardson*

To Stratford recently to see the RSC's amazing production of 'Troilus & Cressida'. It's one of the Bard's less frequently revived pieces, and indeed my only recollection of T&C was of studying Chaucer's version at 'A' level, which I have to say wouldn't have been too much of an inducement to see Shakespeare's play. However, a friend managed to get us tickets, and O my dear, what a revelation! Firstly, the design, which has been accurately described as 'epic 'Mad Max' post-apocalypse style'. Opening with a thrilling, in-your-face scene of motor-cycles, smoke and thunder, the play unfolded in ways that were both astonishing (a rather dim, Viking-style Menelaus, anyone?) and yet absolutely and directly linked to the script. That, to my mind, is the brilliance of a great director: to pick up sometimes tiny references in the text and develop

them in ways which are perfectly logical in the context of the play. Particularly clever was the descending globe containing Helen and Paris, referencing the deus ex machina of Jacobean masques (see pic right). In the same way, the gender- and colour-blind casting in which the RSC excels worked perfectly in the context of a full-on battle environment. The casting itself was universally perfect, too, in contrast to some of their recent work: the enormous Ajax, about six foot six anyway and entering on eighteen-inch stilts, was not only impressive in his own right but gave rise to some wonderful moments, particularly when he was looking down on the tiny Thersites, the fool figure played with enviable energy by Sheila Reid (last seen in 'Benidorm', of all things! Versatility, thy name is RSC!), who barely reached his knees.

In fact, the play was such a

brilliant ensemble piece that the story of the eponymous characters was almost lost—but not quite, as their sexual chemistry was absolutely believable; not to mention the 'senile prurience' of Oliver Ford Davies's Pandarus. Whenever I go to a pitch-perfect professional production like this I almost—but not quite—lose hope for the amateur theatre. What we have going for us is boundless enthusiasm, a willingness to learn and the ability to do good things on a relative shoestring, not to mention some excellent actors, designers and backstage crew all working towards the same objective. So we're lucky—we get the opportunity to do the thing we love best, which isn't true of everyone. OK, we're not lucky enough to be paid for it—but it's not a bad compromise!

*Ginnie Orrey*



I went out to the hazel wood,  
Because a fire was in my head,  
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,  
And hooked a berry to a thread;  
And when white moths were on the wing,  
And moth-like stars were flickering out,  
I dropped the berry in a stream  
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor  
I went to blow the fire a-flame,  
But something rustled on the floor,  
And someone called me by my name:  
It had become a glimmering girl  
With apple blossom in her hair  
Who called me by my name  
And ran  
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering  
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,  
I will find out where she has gone,  
And kiss her lips and take her hands;  
And walk among long dappled grass,  
And pluck till time and times are done,  
The silver apples of the moon,  
The golden apples of the sun.

'The Song of Wandering Aengus'  
(WB Yeats):  
audition piece  
for 'The Weir'

Oh, and before I forget ... Wishing everyone an exceptionally





The Apollo Theatre Players  
Apollo Theatre  
Pyle Street  
NEWPORT  
Isle of Wight PO30 1JT

tel:  
01983 527267

**ticketline:**  
**01983 210010**

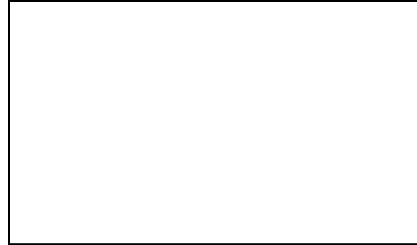
email:  
info@apollo-theatre.org.uk

To book tickets or find  
out more about our  
productions, go to:

[www.apollo-theatre.org.uk](http://www.apollo-theatre.org.uk)

**Any unsigned  
copy in this publi-  
cation is the work  
of the Editor,  
Ginnie Orrey, and  
expresses her  
opinions.  
Contributed copy  
must be signed.**

Bringing good theatre to the Isle of Wight for more than 40 years



## The Apollo Players' next production



*'Bronte'*

**8-16 February  
2019**

In Polly Teale's ingenious and gripping interpretation of the Bronte family legend, the year is 1845 and the once prodigal son, Branwell Brontë, returns home in disgrace, dismissed from his job and plagued by alcohol and drug addiction. His sisters endure their restricted and isolated existence by channelling their intellect, frustrations and buried desires into the creative furnace of their writing, in a production which crosses time and space to tell their remarkable story.