



Forthcoming read-throughs, auditions & other production stuff

- 'The Thrill of Love' auditions: Sunday 3 November, 2.30pm in the auditorium
- 'When We Are Married' read-through: Monday 11 November, 7.30pm in Hancock House
- 'When We Are Married' auditions: Sunday 24 November at 2.00pm in the auditorium

Remember: a read-through is not an audition!

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEXT ISSUE:

Wednesday 11 December

Other diary dates (more info on the website)

Coffee mornings	Every Saturday, 10.00-12.00
Drama workshop	Wednesday 6 November 7.00pm to 9.30pm
AGM of the Apollo Theatre Players	Saturday 30 November 7.30pm
Melodic Choir does 'Mamma Mia'	9 & 10 November (in aid of the Wight Brains Bunch)
'An Evening with Judy Garland': Hannah Nixon	15 November 7.30pm
Alex Watts: 'Something Slightly Different'	16 November

apollo

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

Issue no. 274

October 2019

Jeeves & Wooster in
PERFECT NONSENSE

It's hard to know where to begin to describe the process of bringing 'Perfect Nonsense' to the stage, says *Fiona Gwinnett, director of 'Perfect Nonsense', the second show in the current season.*

Let's start with the script: a wonderful adaptation with a very small, all-male cast—perfect in a theatre community that seems to be eternally short of men. Next we needed a director, and I was nominated for the task by the redoubtable Di Evans. To know Di is to know that you can't say no to her! I needed an assistant, and chose Susan Simpson. We have been in many plays together; I have been her mother and her sister so she's almost family. She also is a mine of ideas. With those pieces in place, the machine that is the Apollo whirred into action.

I am first and foremost an actor; I realise that in many ways that is the easiest bit of

putting on a play and of course it tends to be the actors that mop up the glory. My experience of directing this show has proven to me again that the glory and recognition should be more equally shared.

The departments all did their thing, and how marvellously they did it. The set-building team were phenomenal, approaching the task with vision, enthusiasm and tremendous skill. I was so impressed by the many hours of work they put in and their obvious pride in their work. Paul Jennings designed the set and led the team and I could not be happier with what was achieved. I do have to single out Nigel Coley, who I think we should probably clone. I had not met him before he started building the 'Spodemobile' but I have been amazed by his commitment, attention to detail and 'can do' attitude. Peggy and team, as ever, rose to the challenge of creating costumes that could be changed in the blink of an eye. Props were in the very safe hands of Teresa, David and Di, and they were quite unfazed by the unusual activities this sometimes re-

quired. Watching Di taping two inflatable men together was a sight that will stay with me for some time.

I would like to extend my thanks to every single person that has contributed to bringing 'Perfect Nonsense' into being. You are all amazing and we actors should tell you that more often. Oh goodness! I still have not mentioned the cast. It has been my absolute privilege to spend so much silly time with Pete, Joel and



Robbie with mad ideas being chucked in by Susan. Rehearsals flew by, often littered with laughter and mayhem. I like to work collaboratively and this has been one of my favourite collaborations ever. I could almost be tempted to do it all again!

Fiona



It is with pleasure—and I'm sure an element of relief—that Amy Burns, who will be directing this year's Christmas show, 'Dad's Army', can confirm that she has been able to complete her cast. As you can see from the cast list, this was no small achievement! However, the auditions were well-atten-

ded, and the cast is as follows:
 Capt. Mainwaring: Peter Gale
 Sgt. Wilson: Paul Gwinnett
 L/Cpl. Jones: David Stradling
 Frazer: Danny Carmichael
 Godfrey: Colin Ford
 Pike: Robbie Gwinnett
 Walker/Mr Gordon: Nick Turvey
 Warden Hodges: Mark Duffus
 the Verger: Mike Groves
 the Vicar/U-boat captain/serviceman: Paul Stevens
 Cheeseman/Colonel: Graham Brown
 Sponge: David Pratchett
 Hancock: Dave Talbot
 Mrs Pike: Julie Stonestreet
 Edith Parish: Maggie Cardew

Mrs Gray/Mrs Hart: Ginnie Orrey
 Mrs Fox: Glynis Lloyd Williams
 Waitresses: Eileen Connelly
 Mrs Prosper: Peggy Harcourt
 Miss Inroside: Helen Clinton-Pacey
 Ivy Samwise: Ellen Blossom
 The show consists of three 'episodes' from the popular TV show, plus a musical interlude, and from the read-through it will be great fun. So sign up for the rota now!

Production dates are 13-21 December.

Editorial: the view from the Editor's chair

You know, being editor of this august organ is quite a challenge sometimes. Take this issue. Once an issue has been published I usually start work on the next one straight away: a Thought has occurred to me, or something has happened that I want to make sure I refer to before I forget all about it, so as the weeks progress, slowly the pages start to fill up and all I need is the regular articles to complete the issue. At other times I suddenly find myself with empty pages and a week to go, and I'm frantically calling in favours or hoping for the

Muse to strike and give me an earthshaking subject for an article. This month, though, I seem to have two problems at once. Space to fill? No problem—Joel Leverton steps into the breach and gives me the longest article it's ever been my pleasure to publish (and where he found the time in between learning Bertie Wooster's lines and commuting to the mainland I can't imagine!). However, suddenly the all the things I had ready for this issue were jostling for position on the remaining pages, which meant I had to add two pages and then

find enough content to fill at least one of them. Good grief! Still, a nice problem to have, I suppose—primarily because being the Editor of 'Apollonius' is my absolute favourite job on the committee, or possibly in the world.

So this is a roundabout way of saying do please keep those thoughts coming. Thank you from my heart to my regular columnists; and to those of you wondering whether to commit a thought to paper—just go for it! Members love to hear what their fellow Thesps think about things—and I know I certainly do!

News from the Apollo Theatre Trust



We have finally managed to engage a firm of architects to help finalise the plans for joining Hancock house to The Theatre. They propose to draw up a fresh set of computerised plans which we hope will be beneficial in the future. We will be careful to ensure we maintain ownership of the files to avoid past problems when the electronic plans were lost when the previous architect ceased trading. The new firm is currently producing an estimate for the work necessary to make a submission

for building control approval once the plans of the current state of the buildings are completed.

In case people haven't noticed, the props room has had a facelift. Working long into the nights Roger has fitted new kitchen units, opened up the space and improved the lighting. It's a great improvement and also provides a good space for props, costume and stage crew to wait during a show.

Martin Ward is continuing to attempt to reorganise

the storage of furniture at the unit, dividing the stock into 'keep', 'chuck' and 'pending'. Most of our furniture is of a period and we struggle to furnish contemporary productions. Rather than collecting more modern furniture we have negotiated a deal with the British Heart Foundation shop in Newport, whereby we can borrow stock in exchange for a small fee and a mention in the programme.

Paul Jennings, Chair, Apollo Theatre Trust

'Theatre's great asset is that it can afford to take risks'

Regular readers of this organ will know that the 'Guardian' is often a springboard for my editorial thoughts; and once again I've been moved to share something I've read with you. As so often, it was by Michael Billington, the 'Guardian's' theatre critic, whose remarks are always so apposite and enviably well-expressed (and as I may well have told you before, I had the enormous privilege of meeting him at the Northwood House Literary Festival a few years ago and had the time to discuss

'The Selkie Wife', which I was directing at the time, with him). Anyway, this article was about the continuing necessity for a vibrant and responsive artistic and cultural scene in a country which is going through turmoil—and I think the national situation at present could very well be described as 'turmoil'! Of the future of the theatre in the UK he said, and I quote, 'the communal pleasure of theatre will become ever more seductive in an age of atomized, hi-tech isolation; ... the theatre will increasingly

oscillate between the epic and the intimate; ... and even if we face a future of ongoing uncivil war, of creeping autocracy, of disruption of all the things that we take for granted, someone, somewhere will still be putting on a play about it.' I wish I'd written that; but surely at a time when we're contemplating a new season and a new Arts Manager, it's time to consider the vast range of intelligent, interesting, thoughtful, responsive drama out there that we are so lucky to be able to draw on.

News from your Committee

Notes from the Committee meeting 28 October 2019

THEATRE DIRECTOR

Things are going well at the theatre, I'm pleased to report. Just a couple of points: we have lots of our theatre cotton bags still available—they'd make fabulous Christmas presents! And a gentle reminder: if you're doing a customer-facing duty during a production, do please remember that we're 'on show' to our customers and make sure you dress appropriately. 'Smart' is the watchword!

Thank you to all members who attended the EGM. The updated Players' Handbook will be published on the members' page of the website shortly.

As you may know, work is ongoing to sort out the stuff at the Unit. Soon the pile of objects which are no longer needed will be ready for disposal, and before that happens we'd be very happy for members to come along and take away anything that takes their fancy—even if it's only for firewood! A date will be confirmed soon.

ARTS MANAGER

Every play presents challenges ... maybe some more than others! I think it is fair to say that 'Perfect Nonsense' challenged every department of the theatre and all have risen to that challenge, resulting in a splendidly silly production. All was running smoothly

when I last saw it at the second Dress and I am sure that, under Fiona's eagle eye, it will continue to do so. 'Dad's Army' is well into rehearsal and Amy tells me all is well. Chris Hicks is super organised for 'The Thrill of Love' and can't wait to get started.

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

The Saturday coffee mornings continue to be a popular meeting place for members and non-members. One of our new younger members, Kira, is now a regular helper, not only with the coffee but also assisting David Barnard in the Box Office and proving herself a great asset. The Macmillan coffee morning was an overwhelming success, the Youth Theatre really did us proud and £300 was raised for the charity. A New Members' Evening is well overdue but will have to wait until after the AGM, as I'm going on holiday.

HOUSE MANAGER

The rotas for J&W were less challenging to complete this time. Fortunately volunteers came forward well in advance which was very welcome. Box Office has also been less of a problem this time thanks to one or two more new volunteers. A new Contactless payment system is now in place to replace Stripe, which should speed up card payments. I

have fielded a number of letting requests over the last few weeks. Availability is dwindling as the diary fills up. I'm aware that getting members to volunteer for Apollo plays is difficult enough at times, so persuading members to work for outside lettings is an even bigger challenge and needs to be borne in mind when booking external hire. It's important that the burden of manning the theatre doesn't fall on the few all the time. Bar prices have been revised and the change seems to have gone through successfully. Sales for Suddenly at Home peaked at 741, which was an 83.4% uptake, and on the last night we had to put out the House Full sign.

BUILDINGS MANAGER

A few outstanding jobs have been completed recently: as has been noted, the props room has been refurbished and is now a much easier place to work; and a new bar water heater has been fitted. Some electrical work is next to be dealt with.

A reminder to all users of the dressing-room: please DO NOT TURN OFF THE HEATERS! They're a bit temperamental at the best of times; by all means turn them up or down, but do not turn off the pilot light. This happened recently and we had to call out a gas engineer.

YOUR COMMITTEE

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

Arts Manager (elected annually in Nov for season beginning following Sept)	Di Evans (2019-20) diandclem@hotmail.com	2 Members' Representatives (elected annually)	Tom Hilton (2018-19) thilton1@hotmail.co.uk Mike Crowe (2018-19) mike.crowe1@btopenworld.com
Business Manager (elected biannually)	Ginnie Orrey (2018-20) gginnie@googlemail.com or info@apollo-theatre.org.uk	House Manager (elected biannually)	Steve Reading (co-opted 2018-19) steverreading104@btinternet.com
Marketing Manager (elected biannually)	Maureen Sullivan (2018-20) msullivan58@me.com	Technical Manager (elected biannually)	Dan Burns (2017-19) dan@masexodus.co.uk
Players' Secretary (elected biannually)	Mike Whitehead (2018-20) michaelwhitehead@yahoo.com	LTG rep	Cynara Crump cynara.crump@virgin.net
Membership Secretary (elected biannually)	Carole Crow (2017-19) carolecrow9@gmail.com	Apollo Trust Buildings Manager (co-opted)	Roger Simpson roger.dodger45@yahoo.co.uk

'When We Are Married': read- through reminder

Don't forget—the read-through for 'When We Are Married' will be held on Monday 11 November at 7.30pm in Hancock House. That's not far off, now! Do come and find out how funny this comic masterpiece really is, with its large cast of beautifully crafted characters, 7 men and 7 women, ages ranging from 18-70s. Full details were given in the last issue of Apollonius, no.

273. Remember, the read-through is NOT an audition, it's just for fun. If, after the reading, you should wish to try for a part, the auditions will follow on Sunday 24 November at 2pm in the theatre. Rehearsals begin on 2 January and the performances will run from 3 – 11 April. If you have any queries, would like a script to read or are interested but can't

make the audition date, contact the director, David Vince, on 07760 172818 or d_f_vince@yahoo.co.uk Here's hoping to see a good turnout on Monday 11 November!
David Vince

Audition reminder: 'The Thrill of Love'



A heartfelt 'thank you' from Chris Hicks, the director of 'The Thrill of Love', to everyone who came to the read-through for the play on 8 October. Chris says, 'It was heart-warming to see so many faces.' He is now reminding every-

one that the auditions will be held on Sunday, 3 November, at 2.30pm in the auditorium.

Just to remind anyone who missed the last issue of 'Apollonius', 'The Thrill of Love' was first performed in 2013. It tells the true story

of Ruth Ellis, who was hanged in 1955 for murdering her lover, David Blakely. Her execution caused a public outcry and eventually led to the abolition of the death penalty, making her the last woman to hang in Britain.

THE ART OF THE PLOT

by Martin Ward

One thing that I constantly struggle with when I am creating the latest magnum opus is the plot, and how the characters that I have created contribute to that plot. This may seem a basic problem to overcome but it can be surprisingly difficult to achieve. I am always on the lookout for a convincing plot. It is said that only seven basic plots exist, covering every story, film and play script ever written. Certainly, there are similarities between A Christmas Carol and Groundhog Day (events force the main character to change their ways and become a better person) and between Raiders of the Lost Ark and Lord of the Rings (the main character and his friends set out to obtain something or get to a specific location and face any number of obstacles on the way). Plots can be easy to follow or complicated. However, if the characters behave in such a way as to constantly contradict their

previously established personalities the premise becomes incredible. I find it a constant battle maintaining the integrity of my characters in the face of where I want the plot to take the audience. Does the plot drive the characters or is it the other way round? I usually start with a basic plot; one or two lines that describe the essence of the play. After that the story is 'fleshed out' and I start to think about characters. Having decided where I want the story to go, it needs to have the right human components to keep the consistency of the plot. Will the audience believe in what they are witnessing? Having written what I might otherwise have considered to be a pretty good play, to be then told that my hero would not have performed the deed that the play hinges on, because it was out of character, can be difficult to reconcile. This may seem obvious but such traps are

easy to fall into. I find myself constantly analysing films and television dramas, contemplating whether such and such a character would really have said this or done that. Murder mysteries, always a favourite, come in for particular scrutiny. Where dead bodies are involved, motives and behaviour can be all over the place and present a real challenge to the audience. Maybe one day someone will write a play in which all the characters change over the course of the play and do things contrary to what we would otherwise expect. The result would probably be a complete mess, unless there was some prior comic intention.

In the meantime, I will keep striving to make sense of my own creations in the hope that the audience does not leave the theatre asking themselves what they have just spent two hours sitting through.

The AGM of the Apollo Theatre Players

The AGM will take place at 7.30pm on Saturday, 30 November (followed by a social evening in the bar—see below). The AGM is the time when some—but not all—posts on the Committee come up for re-election, depending on the date when they were first elected. The posts are listed on the attached nomination form.; for the current postholders, see the list on page 3.

If you would like a copy of the job description for any of the posts that are coming up for election, please contact the Business Manager, Secretary or Theatre Direc-

tor or check the members' area of the website, where they will be published.

If you plan to stand for election—and we hope lots of you will—you will need to complete a nomination form and write a 'manifesto', explaining to the membership what you would bring to the role, if elected. Voting this year will once again be online; if you would like a postal vote, please let the Secretary know by 9 November to allow plenty of time for sending it out to you.

The timeline for the AGM is as follows:

9 November: last date for manifestos and nomination forms to be sent to the Secretary. Last date for requesting a postal vote.

11 November: manifestos and postal voting forms to be sent to the membership.

15 November: online voting available.

29 November: last date for online voting and for postal votes to be received by the Secretary.

30 November: AGM

You will find a nomination form attached to this copy of 'Apollonius'.

A short note to say that there will be a social evening after the AGM. As it falls on St Andrew's Day, who is the patron saint of Scotland, there will be a Scottish theme. Wear something tartan, and there will be an indoor Highland Games for you to join in, plus a 'what do you know about Scotland' quiz, and 'make the best model of the Loch Ness Monster' using our remaining stock of plastic straws and plasticine. It's going to be fun, so don't miss out.



From your membership secretary

There are lots of opportunities to get involved with life at the Theatre. If you're in Newport on a Saturday morning pop in for a coffee and chat—you're guaranteed a warm welcome! Michael's stagecraft workshops are great fun and an ideal way of integrating into 'theatre life'; the next one will be on Wednesday 6 November, open to members and non-members. Do come along to future production read-throughs: they are not auditions but a good way to get a feel of a play and there is no obligation to 'read'! There will shortly be a New Members' evening; an invitation will go out as soon as a date is agreed. In the meantime please welcome new members Garry Smith, Heather Coysh, Francis Gill, Christine Smith, Gareth Jones, Mike Anderson, Inge Holder, Sally Sears and Holly Squires.

Updated access details

Members' area of the 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 a drop-down box will appear 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; if you can't find it check with the Membership Secretary;
- once you've done that, you should get straight into the members' area. If not, there's a problem and you need to let Ginnie Orrey (webmistress) know, but try these steps first.

Theatre wifi

UniFi (WiFi Administration system) Dan Burns, Amy Burns, Steve Reading All members are able to access the apollo_public network without use of a password. The password protected 'apollo_theatre' network is now for devices owned/used by the Apollo such as the box office PCs, Bar payment tablet and technical equipment. This is to ensure the security of data held on them as required by GDPR.

Apollo Diary Admin Rights granted to: Dan Burns, Amy Burns, Carole Crow, Mike Whitehead All members have access to add and edit their OWN entries. The above can over-ride and delete other users' entries and reset passwords.

Your letters

Thoughts on directing at the Apollo

I have directed many productions but have resisted directing at the Apollo and it may be worth exploring this a little further.

There are departments within the theatre that all know exactly what they are doing and how they interact with each other. To the uninitiated this can present some challenges. I was unsure who to speak to about what. Of course I was able to ask around and gradually muddled my way through but we were working with some pretty tight timescales. I therefore found it really helpful that Wardrobe, led by the wonderful Peggy, provided me with clear instructions about her expectations. I'm a reasonably competent human but we all

need guidance at times. If I were to direct again I would like clear timelines from all departments on how their processes work and what input is required from the director/assistant director. I think that would be helpful for any new or prospective directors too but I am open to debate about any of the above.

Fiona Gwinnett

Style over substance?

Our constitutional aim has always been to 'promote art in all forms at the Apollo Theatre ...' In the early days, finances dictated that our ambitions were often restricted, but our focus remained on staging art. Over the years we have certainly upgraded our FOH facilities with the purchase of Hancock House, a beautiful bar, luxurious lavatories,

posh programmes, etc. However, it is clear that our stage has not enjoyed a similar upgrade. The current play's amazing set was achieved through the considerable time and effort of a dedicated team using aged, heavy home-made staging and shabby flats. No voluntary society should ever waste available resources and the Apollo Players' most valuable resource is time. The recent visit of the Mitre Players clearly demonstrated the real advantages of buying purpose-made professional equipment. I therefore propose that such an undoubted expensive upgrade be included in the future financial planning by the Players and Trust.

Michael Arnell

DRAMA WORKSHOP

Wednesday, 6 November 2019, 7.00pm to 9.30pm

Leader: Michael Arnell

We are planning to stage a short play entitled 'The Audition' at a 'Party Pieces' social evening in Spring next year. Some workshop members already have part of the proposed script and will each be learning a few lines. However, because it is about an audition, the majority will be reading from 'issued audition pieces' so will have nothing to learn.

Please wear comfortable clothes and sensible shoes. Coffee/tea/biscuits provided.

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

NOTE DATE & SPACE: because of theatre bookings, rehearsals, etc. we have been obliged to 'surrender' the time and space initially agreed for these workshops.

An appeal from the Wardrobe department

We are currently sourcing uniforms for Dad's Army but at present have no forage caps and have been unable to find fabric to make them. If any member has unwanted army uniform or khaki trousers which can be cut up, Peggy Harcourt on 882 031 would be most grateful.

A message from the House Manager

As many of you may already know, we have a policy on the bar to charge different prices for members and non-members. We also have new members working in the bar who are unfamiliar with 'who's who' among the membership. Therefore, when buying drinks from the bar the onus is on members to make themselves known to the bar staff. There is a list of current membership behind the bar, but a good plan is to bring your membership card along with you to prove your membership.



Regular readers may remember that a couple of years ago now (where does the time go??) I took the liberty of writing a piece about novels which are set in, or are otherwise concerned with, the theatre (I keep hoping someone will do the same for plays set in the theatre—there's a challenge for someone!). I very much hope that the list I mentioned in that article spurred some of you on to read some of the novels, as they were all absolutely remarkable, by authors including Thomas Keneally, Jane Austen and Beryl Bainbridge. I thought I had exhausted the seam of books on this subject, but in the couple of years since then I've discovered a whole new set by some rather less well-known authors, so I thought I'd take the opportunity (and the unexpectedly spare space!) to share them with you.

First of all, I was recently recommended a novel by the now almost impossibly ubiquitous Julian Fellowes. The book, **'Snobs'**, is his only novel and is equally impossibly readable, as you'd expect from someone as skilled in dialogue as he is. It's a lightweight book but actually an absolute delight and completely unputdownable—an interminable railway journey would go by in a flash (I file it under 'Tosh, but good tosh'). Fellowes had obviously just read 'A Dance to the Music of Time' as the unnamed protagonist has a very similar style; but as you'd expect he comes out with some wonderfully apposite remarks on the world of the theatre. He describes 'stage people' as 'a sleazy crowd of oiks, all plastered in make-up, falling in and out of other people's beds and getting drunk in restaurants',

'sobbing in dressing-rooms' and carrying on 'anti-director cabals' and 'mid-night telephone calls of reassurance'. While this is obviously a bit over the top, it perhaps gives a flavour of Fellowes' irresistibly enjoyable style.

A book on, I have to say, a completely different and altogether higher plane of being is **'Shadowplay'**, Joseph O'Connor's recent novel about Henry Irving and Ellen Terry, and their stage manager at the Lyceum, Bram Stoker. The gothic style and the exploration of Stoker's inspiration for Dracula make it a wonderful, imaginative read, but for theatricals—and in particular stage managers—the description of Stoker's desperate attempts to make Irving's increasingly unreasonable demands for the running of his new venture, the ageing and decrepit Lyceum Theatre, work are a joy. Highly recommended.

Another novel which has floated to the top of my pile is **'The Wardrobe Mistress'**, by Patrick McGrath; described as 'a brilliant evocation of the theatrical world's seedy glamour' and a cracking good read as well. I'm sure Peggy would warm immediately to the descriptions of the 'costume shop', the girls sewing, the young man standing in the doorway 'clutching an armful of trousers'; and set as it is in the last months of World War II it really does conjure up the cold, bleak world of London and a marvellously chilling ghost story. Brilliantly written and another unputdownable read.

A rather odder book, and more difficult to categorise, is **'The Rehearsal'**, by Eleanor Catton. Set in a drama school, it brilliantly captures the angst, the posing, the

desperate attempts at 'cool' which can shatter at any moment, the adolescent anxieties; and yet it's much more than a rite of passage novel, with a remarkable and unique style. One passage particularly stays in my memory, partly because it does summarise what is happening when acting really works, and partly because it echoes something in Joel's report from the LTG workshops. 'The Head of Movement said, 'if you are a good actor, you will be using *your* emotions, displaying *your* laughter, *your* tears, *your* sexuality, *your* insecurity. There's always this doubleness at play. You and the character you are playing both have to be transparent. You have to look through the one to see the other. That is why being an actor is such a difficult job.'" Sums it up, really, doesn't it?

And finally, for something completely different: Somerset Maugham's dated, melodramatic but somehow nevertheless still enjoyable novel **'Theatre'**. It has to our ears the stylistic faults of its time (1937), but Somerset Maugham was at the time one of the most successful playwrights on the London stage. His almost awe-struck preface about 'hard-working, courageous, patient and conscientious' actors whose 'virtues are more solid than they pretend and their failings incidental to the hazardous and exacting profession they follow' demonstrates an understanding and admiration of what actors put themselves through.

So there you are. It would be great if anyone has a go at any of the books I've mentioned, and even better if you were to write to 'Apollonius' and tell us about it!

Ginnie
Orrey
recom-
mends
some more
novels set
in the
theatre

The Little Theatre Guild Regional Conference 2019

a report from
Joel Leverton

(contd. on p.7)

There comes a time in every person's life where they have to be representative of something: to be ambassador for the family at the wedding that no one wants to go to; the speaker of the church who drew the short straw and had to spend a fortnight in the Amazon Jungle teaching the nomads not to shoot each other with poison darts ...

So Abbi and I in our eagerness and innocence were delighted to be approached to be representatives of the Apollo Theatre at the regional Little Theatre Guild Conference of 2019. You've Cynara Crump to blame for that one. Still, hats off to Cynara as she has a following within the Guild that had people approaching us asking, 'Where's Cynara?', 'How is she doing?' And so, in true form, we bring you a rundown of what we went through and what we can bring back to help us as a community.

Friday 20 September

Abbi and I set forth for pastures new to the Stable Theatre, Hastings, the location of the LTG Conference of 2019. We had been recommended by the theatre to stay at the White Rock Hotel, a stone's throw from the theatre, but sadly we weren't in a position to remortgage so decided on a cheaper option. The 'Minstrel's Rest', billed as a 'medieval-style' guest house, turned out to be a bog standard semi-detached house (with scaffolding) in a bog standard street. Yet on entering we found luxurious tapestries, burning candles, medieval style music and a suit of armour named Cedric. It was, for want of a more fitting word, funky.

We arrived at the theatre for an introductory session, ploughman's lunch (for dinner) and a quiz. Here Abbi was introduced to the various LTG reps while I was told that I wasn't on the list (typical!). Still, they sorted it and even found a spare Stables Theatre canvas bag for me. We sat at a table with chaps called Peter, Phil, Eddie and Mike (who apparently runs the whole LTG thing) and Glenys' sister whose name escapes me (sorry, Glenys). And so we

chatted, and we ate, and we failed the quiz and we (or Abbi) made an impression on the invited representatives that won't go away. That was Friday.

Saturday 21 September

We arrived slightly late and missed the tour, but met a chap called David who has family in Cowes, so it's a small world [*welcome to the Isle of Wight, Joel! Ed*].



The theatre is a lovely little venue (as we found out on Sunday when we actually did the tour) with parking for twenty or so cars, art gallery, conference room, storage space under the stage, three dressing rooms, cafe downstairs and bar upstairs. And then there's the auditorium—steps down the left hand side of the seating in a room that feels almost like a bowling alley. And then the stage, wider than the seating area, a depth not too dissimilar to the Apollo and about shin height off the floor.

And so to the conference: three workshops in the morning, the AGM and open forum in the afternoon.

Workshop one was led by Dominique, a member of The Stables theatre and a drama student who went on to become a paid theatre director, who went into the intricacies of acting. She spoke of Stanislavski, noted as the first theatrical theorist and the bloke who coined 'The Magic If' which determines to some measure the creation of character (e.g. what *if* Romeo had been rejected by other women? What *if* Madame Arcati had a secret lover? etc etc.). She went on to say that another fella (whose name could be Stensberg or Shawbury ... I can't read my handwritten notes) advocated memory recall to convey emotion. Take 'Natural Causes' for

example: in the scene when a character meets the assassin for the first time, there is a measure of uncertainty and trepidation, so the actor playing the character might recall the time he first met his school tutor, or his long-lost uncle (or an assassin, of course), recall how he felt and use that emotion to fuel his acting. Effectively, Dominique was giving a potted drama lesson, something which Abbi and I have actually studied (except for the Stensberg/Shawbury chap) and she was good and would have been better if not cut short by the time limit. Still, it showed Abbi and me that we as a theatre group would benefit from more of the workshops run by Michael Arnell and others and that we should be pushing and supporting this activity much more.

We then did an ... interesting ... voice workshop with Jane, which was very physical (again, Abbi and I have studied and practised this in the past and know the benefits of it). We were all required to stand up, make some space and start doing breathing exercises, arm swinging and similar. It was around the point of rotating the right shoulder out of joint that I realised Jane wasn't wearing a bra. Suddenly I became less interested in voice exercises (of which we did virtually none) and somewhat focused on other things ...

Bra-less Jane was succeeded by bra-ed Jane, who gave a workshop on Stage Management: in our view the most interesting of the workshops. Asked what a Stage Manager does, multiple people from multiple locations gave multiple answers, but The Stable gave the definitive one—they are the second director. Now this is something that the Apollo do not do. SMs tend to come to rehearsals in the last week before the run (if we're lucky) and do a couple of run-throughs before opening night, at which point they are responsible for what goes on anywhere from the tab line to backstage. The Stables would say (and I will be adopting something similar for my directorial debut next year)

that the SM should be there from the start, attending as many rehearsals as possible, knowing the play inside and out, liaising with the tech, props and wardrobe teams, actors and ultimately the director. They are thus the most crucial element of the play because they know more about what is going on than anyone else in the room. They decide when it goes up, if it goes up, when it comes down, what to do if a cast member calls in sick, what to do if an audience member becomes obstinate or loud; in other words, the director imagines it and the SM makes it happen.

I'm not suggesting we look at this as an option to 'dumb down' the role of director, but to at least have a wider group who know what on Earth is going on. There are people reading this I am sure who will remember when they thought they had a solid backstage team and suddenly it fell flat on its face because the SM pulled out or the director lost interest or something. It was a fascinating workshop and one that we hope we will have the opportunity to elaborate on at the Apollo AGM in November.

Workshops done, we scarp-ered for the fish & chip shop and returned with a view to tackling the LTG's problems at the AGM. We as members and representatives of the Apollo Theatre made our voices heard, though I don't imagine for a second that we helped the world of art and theatre. We were then turfed out of the auditorium while The Stables prepared for the evening entertainment—The Weir, by Conor McPherson.

So we walked into Hastings town centre and back again in the glorious sunshine. In the theatre we were offered free drinks and canapés by multiple people who clearly didn't know where each other was serving, as we were approached more times than I can count on both hands and informed that 'they need eating'.

Abbi had by this point found a friend in the shape of a woman from Hayling Island Theatre who was responsible for making my wife leave me on my own to

'socialise' with people I don't know—and for those of you who know me, you know that this is the worst position to put me in. Eventually I left the bar and the conversation I had finally realised I wasn't in and strolled into the auditorium half an hour early, to be greeted by a little old man with a violin sitting on a stool on the stage. He gave a smile and a wink to the few audience members who were there and proceeded to play a couple of Irish jigs. What a lovely way to start a show.

With a virtually full house, your man on stage had by half past seven crescendo'd his jig playing to the point where audience members were clapping and stomping their feet in time with the music and he got a hearty round of applause and cheering. If the production was rotten, at least he would have made up for it.

As it transpired, it was not a rotten performance. Hindered only slightly by the fact that the actor playing Jack had sadly smashed his pelvis in a road accident and was replaced by a chap with a script, the performance went fairly seamlessly. It was well acted, well set ... just well done. It was a great evening.

All this said, I think the Apollo did The Weir better. Just saying. [*Thanks! Ed.*]

Sunday 22 September

We were released from the Middle Ages (and we would certainly time travel back there again) and went back to the theatre for the final elements of the conference, plus the tour we had missed the day before.

It is always a nervous feeling, wandering around someone else's theatre. You know you're allowed there, as they're guiding you about. But still, I felt a trespasser and couldn't escape the nagging notion that I should be sitting on a chair in the corner of the room drinking tepid tea.

The Stables, I reiterate, is a lovely space: modern, clean, spacious and comfortable. The members (few in attendance though they were) were lovely, welcoming and went out of their way to help. Afterwards we all sat

through the final seminar about employment in the theatre. This was interesting to some degree, but went over our heads somewhat as we don't know if the Apollo actually employ anyone; however, it did highlight for us an issue that we should be addressing now: responsibilities.

It occurred to us, as we sat there listening to the woes of paying and not paying and having and losing members of theatre staff, that we rely solely on volunteers and that the 'willingly active' volunteers are dwindling in number. As a result—as has been mentioned before—the same people end up doing the same roles. This is no slight on those who do the work—they have to because no one else seems willing. But there will come a point when this needs immediate attention, and by then it may be too late.

But of course this was where we realised the vast difference between our theatre and this one (and others in the region). The Stables Theatre have over 1,000 members from all walks of life engaged in all sorts of aspects of the running of the theatre. We at the Apollo have a couple of hundred.

If Abbi and I had to take one thing away from this weekend, it is the grave but obvious realisation that we are an Island theatre company. We often feel (and are) isolated in what we do for the community here. Hastings has a population of approximately 90,000 people but support from the surrounding towns and villages. The simple fact is that when we hit Seaview, we don't go any further. When you approach Yarmouth, you can't find any active members beyond. We are limited by our shoreline—our beautiful, tourist-attracting shoreline. Yes, of course we have mainland members, but we don't see them championing at the bit to be Assistant Stage Manager, do we? What does this mean? It means that, despite my comments, we are *not* alone or isolated. The LTG chaps were very keen to stress that they are there to help and support its theatres. Yes, where other com-

panies can turn to other theatres within the LTG to support their productions and their theatres as a whole, we will always struggle with this—it is unreasonable to expect someone from Fareham to come to the Island twice a week for rehearsals, for example. But that doesn't mean we can't seek ideas and creative advice on some of the issues we face.

Another thing we took away from Hastings was the inclusivity of the conference. The LTG were keen to emphasise that it is not just open to representatives, but to anyone and everyone who is a member of an LTG theatre (and as there were not many more than fifty people there this time, I should imagine they would more than welcome any takers on the offer).

We felt that the conferences and the help and support were something that we as a theatre for our community could make more of—or at the very least make theatre members more aware of. Above all, we certainly felt that the word 'unity' was one that struck a chord. It is one thing to be united in a production, something else to be united as a theatre, and another thing again to be united as a guild. As an Island theatre (and Islanders ourselves) we rely on those around us, but equally break off into our own little groups and cliques. The strengths of these breakaways are present and their successes can certainly be congratulated but do not outweigh the dangers for us on the Wight. There needs to be solidarity, as with funding cuts, parking charges, increased licence fees and the very real prospect of dwindling memberships among other things, we cannot afford to deny help and scorn the achievements of others.

We were very pleased to have been invited and hope we can apply what we learned to support the future of the Apollo.



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

tel:
01983 527267

ticketline:
01983 210010

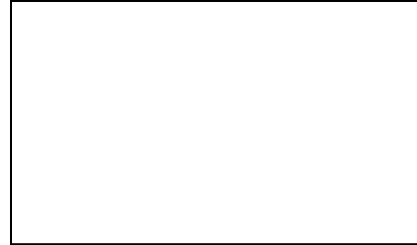
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