



apollo

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

Forthcoming read-throughs, auditions & other production stuff

See page 3 for information about production plans

Remember: a read-through is not an audition!

DEADLINE FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE NEXT ISSUE:

Sometime in September ...

[Other diary dates \(more info on the website\)](#)

Watch this space!

Issue no. 279

July 2020



In 1606 a devastating pestilence swept through London; the dying were boarded up in their homes with their families, and a decree went out that the theatres, brothels and bear-baiting yards be closed. It was then that Shakespeare wrote one of his very few references to the plague: 'The dead man's knell/Is there scarce asked for who, and good men's lives/Expire before the flowers in their caps/Dying or ere they sicken.'

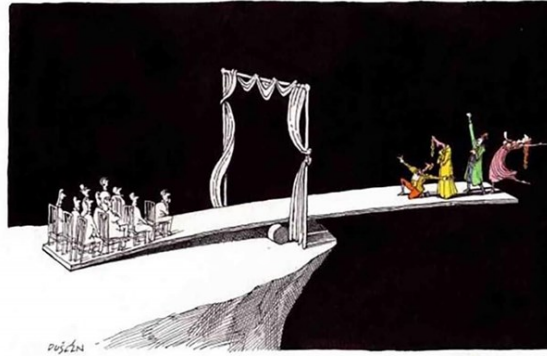
In the 2020 version of the plague, theatres everywhere (and probably brothels too) are in crisis following lockdown. The Old Vic—which receives no government funding—warned that it is only hanging on by a thread. The show is certainly going on online—see *Rambling Rose* on the subject on page 6—but nevertheless all theatres are suffering in one way or another. The Royal Lyceum Theatre in Edinburgh has an-

nounced that it has had to choose between 'hibernation' and permanent closure, will not be staging any productions this year and has put all its staff on notice of redundancy. [I think 'hibernation' is a great way to describe where we and other theatres are at present. Hunkered down, nose in paws, waiting for the storm to pass.] The Nuffield in Southampton—where you may remember I saw the premiere of Nick Dear's remarkable play, 'Dedication', in 2016, and on whose stage at least two of our members have recently appeared—has already gone into administration. Many other theatres, including the Globe in London, have warned that they will not be able to survive without more financial support. We are hanging on in there at present; obviously amateur theatres have fewer outgoings than professional, principally because we don't employ

anyone, but nevertheless just keeping our three buildings going has costs attached to it. It's the future that we must consider, and when things are likely to change.

It's also interesting to remember that during the last war almost the entire theatre world was shut down (and they had bombs to contend with, not just a virus!). I happened to do my degree thesis on Theatre in Britain in WWII, and whatever else the experience taught that generation, it was that however frightful things got, they got better eventually. After the war, the arts came back stronger—and they can do so again. My mother remembered going to the West End during the Blitz and seeing a burning bus—but they still went! We have to hope that those who announce gloomily that 'the heart of the West End has stopped beating' are wrong—and I do think they are.

Editorial: the view from the Editor's chair



One thing this current unpleasantness is certainly generating is a selection of pithy and brilliant cartoons, of which the one above is an example. The very best cartoonists have that remarkable skill of encapsulating a situation graphically without the need for words; here, our very theatrical existence depends entirely on the audience at the other end

of the gangplank. If too many of them up and leave, we fall into the abyss—and who knows whether there's a ladder up the side of the chasm? Still, being positive—I make it my objective in life to be as positive as possible, which some people find frightfully irritating—one of our members has composed a song entitled 'Ghost Light', inspired by

the front cover of the last issue of 'Apollo-nius'. It's on YouTube; if you fancy having a look and a listen clicking the link below (you may have to copy and paste into your browser): https://youtu.be/j_EyxpZJgjI (you could even 'like and share', as I believe the hip cats say ...)

This is a slightly bigger issue than usual, partly as a result of the sad passing of two of our much-loved members, Evie Watts and

David Vince (see pp7-8). However, the theatre is beginning slowly to come back to life—see age 3 and also our website.

And a small but gratifying piece of news—'Apollonius' is quoted not once but twice in [the current issue of the LTG magazine](#). Hoora!

News from the Apollo Theatre Trust



There has been very little progress since our last report. We are still awaiting the completion of the survey so that the architects can start work, but the team carrying out the survey seem very reluctant to return to work, which is disappointing as there is only one day of work left at the theatre. We have however received a quote for a good deal of electrical work at the theatre to increase and improve the provision of power sockets around the theatre (the current arrangement "trips" regularly when power tools are used) and install the long awaited hot water heater in the FOH toilets.

Provision is also being made to improve safety both at The Theatre and The Unit. The spend has been approved and the electrician is being asked to start as soon as possible. Please note that access to the

theatre will be restricted throughout the day and evenings while the work is carried out and details will be published in the Theatre Diary and by email.

Work on drafting the revised constitution should be completed by the end of August ready to be submitted to our solicitor and presented to the membership. In the current climate the Trust and the Players are already working closely together to plan for the future reopening of the theatre for members and the public.

The unit is soon to be declared "open" for use for rehearsals and possibly workshops. We still need to remove the trailer to a safe location and dispose of the roller blind fabric. There is still a need to decide what to do with the eclectic collection of items we have acquired over the years which, while they may have value, we

have no apparent use for. Hence we hope to reactivate Martin's team to deal with this and complete the cataloguing of the furniture.

The preparation of the accounts has been completed and a virtual GM will be scheduled shortly.

SOME GOOD NEWS – IN behalf of The Trust, Martin Ward (with the help of Dan Burns) applied for and received a £10K grant from the council to compensate for loss of earnings during the lock down. This is not seen as "Trust" money but is very welcome to support the activities of the wonderful enterprise which is the Apollo Theatre. It should ensure that when some sort of normal returns we will be back doing what we do best—staging great theatre for the Isle of Wight.

Paul Jennings, Chair, Apollo Theatre Trust

There's a light at the end of the tunnel!

The committee met last week to discuss how we can move forwards to re-opening the theatre both to members and our audiences. There was (as I'm sure you can imagine) a lot to discuss and consider, although I've tried to summarise as much as I can – to give you an idea, I think the last document I circulated to the committee was similar in length to a standard edition of Apollonius ... if anyone wants some light bedtime reading, I'll be happy to forward it upon request!

First and foremost, although there have been announcements of theatre returning from 1 August, it's not as simple as 'let's put on a show on the 2nd!' The guidance isn't yet correct or complete – indeed the current version I'm working to states that no live performance is permitted under any circumstances – and this is the document that dictates how we're supposed to return to live theatre! There are also a lot of caveats in the guidance. We are not alone in not re-opening to audiences immediately.

Instead, we have agreed several points which I'll cover briefly here – and as rules and guidance change for better or worse, the committee together with the Trust where appropriate will be updating as we can.

Firstly, the remaining 3 productions of the season, and Di's intended season for 2020-2021 will all be moved a year on, meaning *When We Are Married* is planned to start on Friday

2 April, with *Liselotte in May* and *A View From the Bridge* following in their respective slots. The Youth Theatre's planned production of *Peter Pan* will take place in Summer 2021, and Di's season will start in September 2021.

Secondly, as we don't know when the restrictions will be lifted for amateur performances (or to what extent they will be lifted) we will be planning a series of productions for either online streaming or live performance – depending on the rules in force at the time. This will start shortly – and anyone with any ideas on what we should be producing is asked to contact Kate Fysh whose contact details you will find elsewhere in this issue. The idea of this is that we can continue to produce drama – which for many people is one of the main reasons for joining a theatre company.

Thirdly, we will be working closely with Mish to plan the return of the youth theatre – with the possibility of the Unit being made available as their temporary 'home' to allow them regular access to a safe space.

We are planning to re-open the theatre to members on 1 August with a coffee morning – exact details are being finalised as I type! It is important that we all follow the rules – otherwise we are not following the current guidance and will be forced to return to closing the theatre to all (which we don't want to do – we're trying to return to get back to some sense of normality).

This **does not** mean we can

return to access by anyone at any time. We are currently working with 3 'slots' which allow for certain pre-booked activities. There is a time between each slot to minimise the risk of transmission of the virus. These are bookable via the diary, although some flexibility will be required as we also have to factor in access by external tradesmen. It is intended that Monday nights will be work-nights – for maintenance, work on items such as flats and preparing the theatre for re-opening. Wednesdays will be available for rehearsals or live streams, and Saturdays for coffee mornings. At the moment, all events are for **members only** and will be subject to cancellation should there be any outbreak. We will not be able to allow members to use the theatre outside these slots.

In addition there are a few simple rules we are asking all members to follow. These will be signposted around the theatre but the basics are:

- No access for anyone who has had, or has been in contact with someone with, COVID-19 symptoms;
- No access for anyone who has been told by the Test & Trace system to self-isolate;
- Please use hand sanitiser when entering the building;
- You must sign in using the signing-in book on the foyer **even if you are only in the building to check post**;

- Please observe all one-way notices and other signage
- Please take your rubbish home with you – and leave the theatre as you wish to find it;
- Please do not access the theatre if you aren't booked or part of an authorised activity;
- The front doors are to be **left locked** – if people need access, please ring the doorbell;
- If you develop COVID-19 symptoms, please tell either Paul Jennings, Amy Burns or me;
- Please don't complain that we're being restrictive or ridiculous with our requirements. This isn't how we want to return, but it's the best we can do at the moment given the guidance.

Please remember this isn't a free-for-all – we still need to adhere to social distancing, as well as common sense. But, with the support of the members, we'll be able to re-open as quickly as possible. If you see something you think is wrong, please tell us – and if you've got a suggestion to resolve it, that would be even better! So, perhaps not quite the news that members have been looking forward to, but we can now confidently say there is light at the end of the tunnel. It may take us a while to get there, but it's definitely on the way.

Dan Burns

YOUR COMMITTEE

Theatre Director & Chair of management committee (elected 3-yearly): **Amy Burns** (2019-22) amy@masexodus.co.uk

Arts Manager (elected annually in Nov for season beginning following Sept)	Di Evans (2020-21) diandclem@hotmail.com	2 Members' Representatives (elected annually)	Kate Fysh (2019-20) katefysh@gmail.com
Business Manager (elected biannually)	Ginnie Orrey (2020-22) gginnie@googlemail.com or info@apollo-theatre.org.uk	House Manager (elected biannually)	Steve Reading (2019-21) steverreading104@btinternet.com
Marketing Manager (elected biannually)	Maureen Sullivan (2020-22) msullivan58@me.com	Technical Manager (elected biannually)	Dan Burns (2019-21) dan@masexodus.co.uk
Players' Secretary (elected biannually)	Mike Whitehead (2020-22) michaelwhitehead@yahoo.com	LTG rep	Cynara Crump cynara.crump@virgin.net
Membership Secretary (elected biannually)	Carole Crow (2019-21) carolecrow9@gmail.com	Apollo Trust Buildings Manager (co-opted)	Roger Simpson roger.dodger45@yahoo.co.uk

Ideas for a more theatrical life

INVENTIONS

by

Louis Lawrence



1) Read out loud. Find a text that interests you and read it to an imaginary audience. Shakespeare is particularly good for this, but any monologue or poem will do. Have fun trying out different performance styles. You might even want to commit your chosen passage to memory.

Alternatively, take the letters page of a newspaper or magazine, and declaim each section in a way which enhances the content. It is often worth imagining the personality and mind-set of each correspondent. (For example, Reverend W A Forthright's piece on Christian fortitude is going to have a very different tone from the missive from Mabel Clithero on the merits of cat litter.) If there is more than one person in your household, turn the exercise into a sort of party game and take it in turns to read.

I doubt if anybody realises that most of the significant inventions of the latter part of the 20th century were devised in a kitchen in Bow, London. This doesn't mean they were actually made and took shape; just that they were conceived as possible by a group of men meeting in the kitchen of my grandparents' house in Merchant St in Bow. These men were my uncles and my father who all lived in this large house with their families, and on many such evenings they sat round the table presenting their ideas.

My memory is a little hazy about this since at the time I was just five or six years old, and mostly I recall these gatherings happened in the evenings while I was being bathed before bedtime in a large enamelled bowl on the kitchen table. I did not know what it was all about till many years after but still have memories of arguments and discussions. I suppose you could not really call them inventors; more like 'non-ventors'; certainly for many years I

2) Write a letter. Following on from the above, send a letter to the County Press using a pseudonym. Award yourself extra points for extolling eccentric views on any given subject. Publication is a bonus but the real aim is to generate a sequence of impassioned communications on any obscure and irrelevant topic. Be creative. There's no kudos to be had from further comments on Coppins Bridge or the fixed link.

3) Dress up. Reinvent yourself for the day. Go through your wardrobe, selecting clothes that make you feel extrovert or different in some way. This might simply be your Sunday best or it could be something rather more exotic. I'll leave the possibilities to your imagination, but when did you last wear a jaunty hat, a flower in your button hole or your partner's underwear?

4) Sing. It doesn't matter if you sound like a cat in a tumble drier, the important thing is to put your whole heart and soul into this exercise. Choose a favourite album, then clear a space in the front room, turn up the volume and belt out two or three tracks as if you were centre stage at Eurovision. Don't forget to do all the moves. After all, when you're performing to an audience of millions, you've got to give the punters their money's worth ...

PS: The Management cannot be held responsible for any members detained under the Mental Health Act as a result of following this advice.

[Editor's note: this piece was contributed but for the life of me I can't remember by whom! So if it was you, please forgive a senior moment and remind me who you are so that you can get a credit in the next issue!]

listened to them complaining that they had not been credited with the original ideas when new inventions appeared. I suppose what really happened was that dad and uncles worked through all the unpractical approach to inventions and thus left the real inventor to get on and do the real thing. Most remarkable were those inventions which relied on electricity, since the house only had gas.

My father was very keen on inventing a machine that would play gramophone records then turn them over to play the other side. The problem was that the machine he devised tore all the discs in half. You can imagine how distressed he was when the Wurlitzer juke box made its appearance.

My Uncle Harry claimed to have invented the Splade, a cake eating fork/knife, and I did remember seeing him bending my Nana's spoons into all sorts of strange shapes (which got him a cuff round the ears) only to find that Wilkinsons got

there before his researches were finished.

Uncle Joe said he invented the Hovercraft while watching me being bathed and the toy duck I played with. He said he must have mentioned it at his club and somehow many years later the idea came to the notice of Christopher Cockerill who pinched it.

Uncle Lou was very miffed when Frank Whittle came up with the jet engine. Lou was in the motor business and always claimed he had been working on a new kind of motor but got side-tracked trying to find a way to turn water into petrol and missed the opportunity.

This inventiveness continued into the next generation: I recall my own idea of a flash gun comprising a flat tray with a heap of magnesium fired by a spark from my mothers gaslighter. I overdid the chemical and after I had almost blinded myself and burnt all the hair off my eyebrows and arms I gave up and then I saw later that someone had invented the electronic flash. Bugger!

On Friday 10 July, our dear and long-serving Evie Watts had a fall on her way to her doctor's and bashed her head. The doctor patched her up and phoned her friend Sue to fetch her; Sue was alarmed by the head wound and took Evie straight to St. Mary's A&E, where a bleed on the brain was diagnosed. Evie's nephew Trevor Smith arrived from Epsom on Saturday. Initially Evie appeared fine but gradually deteriorated and was transferred to Wellow end-of-life unit on Sunday. She died peacefully with Trevor and his wife at her bedside at 3pm on 14 July. She was 94 years old and had been in good health and spirits. Her funeral will be at Holy Cross Church, Binstead towards the end of August after the Coroner's report. Numbers will be restricted but the service will be streamed live and a memorial service is planned for April 2021. See p7 for more about Evie's Apollo career.

Mumblings from your Membership Secretary!

I was wondering how to keep in contact with all our members when I discovered the wonders of Zoom's virtual meeting rooms! Although the programme does require participants to have a laptop, smartphone or desktop computer with a webcam, it is accessible by many of you and has enabled me to re-establish Saturday morning 'Coffee 'n Chat' - I haven't been able to serve coffee and cake but there has been chat in abundance! We've enjoyed numerous quizzes thanks to Dave Talbot, Chris Hicks, Paul Jennings and Ian Moth, and a few weeks ago David Ballard and Abbi Leverton read a brilliant sketch by Joel Leverton. We all long for the day when we can meet up again in person but at present we can only hope for impromptu outside gatherings which is of course weather dependent, hence my numerous emails!

Things change as I write! Following our Zoom committee meeting and the agreement to open the theatre for member 'bubbles' from 27 July I am happy to announce that the Saturday morning 'bubble' is scheduled to commence from 1 August, subject to all Covid safety requirements being in place.

As you will appreciate thanks to your 2020 membership fees, we still have a theatre and the Committee very much hope you will continue your much valued support as we continue to strive to bring 'theatre' to you in other forms. Chris Hicks has written a brilliant short play which is to be recorded from the theatre within a couple of weeks and will be available for you to enjoy...more information to follow! Please email me or Kate Fysh with any concerns or ideas; and most of all, stay safe! *Carole Crow, Membership Secretary*

NEWS FROM THE 100 CLUB

As I'm sure you're all aware, the Apollo Theatre Trust raises some of our funds through the '100 Club'. You pay a fiver a month, and every month a draw is held; the winners receive £50, except in February, when it's £250, and August, when it's £500, and the remaining funds help to support the theatre. The Club is administered by Cynara Crump, who has this message for members:

'I was recently reminded that I have omitted to put the results of the 100 Club Draw in Apollonius for a while. Mea culpa, please forgive me for the oversight, which I will now remedy. During lockdown Dan used a computerised number generator to fit our circumstances, and numbers have been drawn and cheques sent to the relevant people up to the end of April. Here are the lucky winners up to that date:

2019

January: Mrs AD McNeal
February: Dr E Harrison
March: Bill Wills
April: Mrs AD Mc Neal again
May: Rita Boffin
June: Dr Harrison again
July: Ginnie Orrey
August: Alastair Pearson

September: Jill Farrell
October: Mike Whitehead
November: Dr E Harrison (again!)
December: Mrs NW Cross

2020

January: Mr B Snellgrove
February: Paul Stevens
March: Mrs M Bownas
April: Mrs D Dixcey

So my apologies, but that brings us up to date. I promise to do my best to announce the results through the medium of Apollonius, though the draw happens at the end of every month so the announcement won't necessarily coincide with every issue.'

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;

DAVID VINCE 1943-2020

Many of you will know of the sad loss of David Vince, who died in the care of the Mountbatten hospice on 17 June after a relatively short illness. His partner, Julie Ham, gave us this very moving account of his last moments. *'David's decline was incredibly fast from about 2pm. He was surrounded by his loving children, brother and me as his final curtain came down at 5.30pm. It was a beautiful and peaceful moment. I'm pleased for his sake that he went quickly and quietly surrounded by those he loved and who loved him. We encircled him with arms around each other and him as he drew his last few breaths. So much dignity. Just what he wanted.'*

David had previously been a member of the Apollo for a couple of years in the 1980s; the photo is of him



with Barbara Hemmings in the 1989 production of 'The Real Inspector Hound'.

After his return to the Island, David was only a member for a short time and sadly appeared in only one production. 'The Weir', before we lost him, but as

In the Autumn of 2018 I was thinking of actors for 'The Weir' by the Irish playwright Conor McPherson. I had heard of an actor new to the Island who was about to open in a play at Bembridge Village Hall. I sat at the back and heard every word, noted that David used the tiny stage to good effect and reacted well with the cast. Later, after audition I cast him.

Styles of directing vary. I tend to be 'director-lite' and

Julie said, *'David left a huge legacy of happy, entertained audiences and actors and technicians who enjoyed working with him and were proud of their own development under his direction. He was a very special man with a very special creative talent. He had some really funny, happy times with some of you too.'*

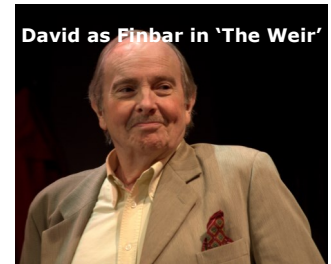
Those of us privileged to be present at David's funeral were astounded at the breadth and depth of his career and achievements. He had an enormously varied life, including a period in the Army (and, I discovered, went to school at the old Carisbrooke Grammar School in the late 1950s), but it was in the arts that he really found his métier.

Everyone who spoke at the funeral—including his nephew, Henry Vince, whom I've known for some time but only at that point made the connection between his surname and David's. Honestly! Dim or what?—referred movingly to his warmth and sense of fun. Even in that sad place we were able to laugh at David's renowned one-liners, such as 'Hedgehogs! Honestly! Can't they just share the hedge?'

David's enthusiasm for and commitment to the theatre were boundless. His involvement with amateur theatre spanned over 50 years—though it was only later in life that he actually studied the subject—and he won many awards as both

aim to encourage my actors' creativity and interaction with each other. At first David found this a bit tricky, preferring more precise instruction. Ginnie, Michael, Colin and Robbie soon got him into the swing of thing and with his natural good humour and acting skills contributed a lot to the production. When later he cast Colin and me in 'When We Are Married' I knew rehearsals would be more prescriptive, especially with a bigger

actor and director, including the British All Winners Festival in 1983. Cherished acting roles included Bri in 'A Day in the Death of Jo Egg', The Common Man in 'A Man for All Seasons', the title role in 'Tartuffe' and Professor Higgins in 'My Fair Lady', as well as a wide range of roles including Major Giles Flack in 'Privates on Parade' and Obadiah Upward in 'Poppy'. As part of a long and distinguished directing career he directed a huge range of productions



David as Finbar in 'The Weir'

of all types, notably 'Steel Magnolias', 'South Pacific', 'Carousel', 'The Pajama Game' ... the list goes on. He was a member of the Guild of Drama Adjudicators and officiated at more than 60 festivals throughout the country, including Divisional and Area Finals of the All England Theatre Festival.

In short, we have lost a gem who would, I'm sure, have brought his enthusiasm and skill to many more productions at the Apollo.

cast. Sadly, it never came to pass but Ginnie bravely took up the play and began rehearsals using David's detailed notes. Rehearsals were going well until one chilly evening in Hancock House when perhaps we actors were being particularly stupid, Ginnie lost her way in the maze of notes. She flung away the script and said, 'Oh sod it! Let's go to the bar.' I think David would have had a good laugh at that.

A MEMORY OF DAVID VINCE

By Marylyn Ford

It is with great sadness that we at the Apollo have to announce the loss of one of our most dearly loved members, Evie Watts. Evie was a fine actress and appeared in no fewer than 34 Apollo productions over the years. She had a mischievous sense of humour with a twinkle in her eye, and having been a school teacher, was always ready to help others with sound advice. However, she didn't suffer fools gladly and anyone who upset Evie was bound to be the recipient of an acerbic comment or two. Evie also supported the theatre as a volunteer; the coffee bar was her speciality amongst other tasks.

On a purely personal note, I am reminded of a time when Evie was in full flow on the stage (I cannot now remember which play it was) and I was operating the lighting board. I happened to catch my sleeve on the blackout switch and plunged the whole theatre into inky darkness. During the few seconds that it took me in the dark to find the switch and restore the lights, I was aware that Evie had not faltered for one moment in her speech and had ploughed on regardless. Afterwards I went to apologise in some trepidation and was told with a laugh "I think it went a bit dark somewhere".

Evie's smile and laughter will be sorely missed by all who knew her - people like Evie seem to be few and far between nowadays.

Michael Whitehead

I'm going to begin this very fond tribute to a lovely lady by telling *you* something about Evie that she never knew herself and that I could not tell her. About twenty years ago I was contacted by an elder of Evie's church, a senior Binstead community leader who wanted my help in supporting their recommendation to the Lord Lieutenant that Evie be awarded an MBE. They knew all about her work with local charities in Ryde, her many years tutoring inmates at HMP Parkhurst and Camphill and her legendary tenure as Head of English at Sandown Grammar School. But apart from watching her performances on stage, they wanted an insider's perspective of her life and contribution with the Apollo Players and having seen her as my cantankerous mother in 'Sandcastles', thought I could supply the info. Sadly, I imagine their recommendation was unsuccessful as I heard no more about it, but at least I am now at liberty to tell you all just how highly Evie was regarded by a large section of our Island community.



Of course, I don't need to tell any of you more mature members of the Players what a thoroughly splendid woman

Evie Watts was. However, for you newer/younger members, here is a brief snapshot of a remarkable but thoroughly ordinary woman who was the epitome of what any society member should be.

Evie had a very busy life outside of the Apollo and so only took on jobs she could undertake regularly, so for decades did at least one Coffee-in-Charge duty per play. She never joined any 'cliques' but managed to be friends with anyone and everyone.



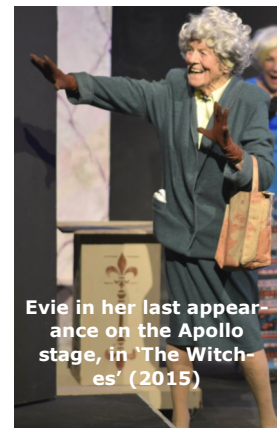
Because of her passion for literature in all its forms she joined the Players back in the 70s after emigrating to the Island from her West Country home. She was keen to be in productions and would scan each proposed season to see if there was a part that she could reasonably play. It is worth saying that Evie knew her limitations and only auditioned for parts that required an understanding of comic timing, characterisation and honesty. I was lucky enough to be in about nine plays with her and direct her in two.

I'm sure many of you have wonderful anecdotes about life on stage with Evie and many were shared at the 'This Is Your Life' we arranged for her eightieth. I will limit myself to one more recent event. I was directing the camp

EVIE WATTS 1926 - 2020

19th century comedy, 'London Assurance' and knowing it had a big cast, Evie asked me if there was any tiny, tiny part suitable for her. In truth there was not and I told her so. However, because I needed a 'running gag' I created the part of Mrs Bridges, the cook, who came on at inappropriate times throughout the play to inform whoever, in her inimitable voice that, 'Sorry to intr'upt. Sir, soup's off!' etc, etc etc. Evie stole the show, of course!!!

Michael Arnell



Evie in her last appearance on the Apollo stage, in 'The Witches' (2015)

Brian Goodwin has died. For those of you who joined the Apollo after 2003 his name will not be familiar. However, both Brian and his wife Judith were keen members of the Apollo for many years and in 2003, they were awarded Best Staged Production at the County Press Awards with their eerie Turn of the Screw. The couple then went to live in Spain where they invited several Apollo members to stay with them from time to time over the following years. In 2010 Judith died and in 2013 Brian had a stroke which left him chair-bound for the rest of his life. He came back to the island, living in various accommodations in the

Ryde area, and although he regained the use of one arm, he gradually succumbed to a whole range of serious ailments which necessitated twenty-five different medications twice daily. Despite his poor health he remained the bombastic, over-the-top Walter Mitty which so often alienated people and it is probably for that reason not one of his former acquaintances ever came to visit him. Yet he was generous and hospitable and could be charming when he wanted to be. Throughout his six miserable years in a wheelchair he remained optimistic and determined to go back to Spain even though he

needed constant, round the clock care. Once back home, as he called it, he was convinced he would find some willing young Spanish girl to look after him for a modest sum. Poor deluded Brian. Yet it was certainly this unfaltering determination, plus the will to live at all costs, that kept him alive for so long. However, some three weeks ago he fell and was rushed to St. Mary's, where he remained in the intensive care unit until he finally weakened and died. There is no funeral. As a final act of charity, his body was bequeathed to anatomical research. Adios Brian.

BRIAN GOODWIN an appreciation by Rita Boffin



Your letters

Just wanted to say Hi ...

It's been some months since I have had the pleasure of your company and I do miss you all. I didn't just run away, a series of crazy circumstances, starting with the house move not working, combined with these crazy times and lockdown, all conspired to force me off the island. Having stayed with family for a period of time I now find myself back in London. I miss the island and of course you lovely folk. I haven't given up the idea of returning to the island, but have hurdles to overcome. I sincerely hope you are all happy and well. I look forward to seeing you all at some stage when the world seems free again. It's a learning curve ... mainly, don't move when everything's good! Love to you all and stay in touch, hope to see you all again soon.

Nigel Coley

From Newport Jazz Club

I do hope that you are all safe and well during this crisis. I think everybody will realise that as far as live jazz is concerned, it is going to be a considerable time before we can get back to our normal concert offerings

at the Apollo Theatre. Nevertheless, an occasional little bright gleam of sunshine appears. **Cass Caswell**, one of our favourite bandleaders, telephoned from Bristol to tell us that there was a very good series of jazz programmes on TV Channel 91, at various times, for over an hour. One night I tuned in at 19.10 and it was the start of the swing era, Ellington, Lunceford etc. I highly recommend this series of jazz history. I am sure we are all looking forward to resuming our concerts, but in the meantime, keep safe and well. Best wishes from **NJC**.

Bill Wills

David Vince

So very sad to read in this issue of the loss of two stalwarts of the Apollo. David and Evie were at opposite ends of the spectrum in terms of their time with the Players—David a couple of years, Evie about 45—but both were highly regarded in their own spheres.

Michael Arnell has told us about Evie's contribution to the Apollo, and I couldn't begin to add to that. However, I wanted to add some thoughts because I feel the

loss of David very deeply despite his short tenure. I didn't know him terribly well, but we worked together on 'The Weir' and I found him congenial company. However, as our conversations progressed I began to get a flavour of what David had done in his professional career and to have an increasing respect for his experience and abilities. I felt honoured to be present at his funeral, and it was then that we realised just how wide and deep his experience really was. My immediate thought was that David had been 'one that got away' in terms of what he could have brought to the Apollo had he been spared.

I was disappointed not to be cast in 'When We Are Married' which David was directing, but when he sadly fell ill and Di asked me to pick up the baton, I didn't hesitate. My brief was to bring David's ideas to fruition; I hope that I shall manage to do that—with some of my own as well—but first and foremost I guess that the whole production will be a tribute to him. A great loss.

Ginnie Orrey

Rambling Rose



Now this column isn't called "Rambling Rose" in error, usually a constant stream of jumbled thoughts, trying to make sense of it all, connecting consciousness to Theatre matters, is how I come to rambling; and you dear recipient, can take it or leave it according to your specific requirements for light reading. I think that is pretty much what the NTLive screenings feel about their audiences too, take it or leave it according to taste. I have been so impressed recently by the standard of production, the

inventiveness of staging, lighting and music, it really is inspiring and uplifting. It is like reading a poem for the first time and realising that this particular collection of words "speaks" to the soul deep inside. Surely what the author wants to achieve ultimately, otherwise why write it? And plays are no different, when this or that particular interpretation brings the words alive and you truly feel the emotions (albeit separated from the action by technological wizardry aka TV) then the author has suc-

ceeded in his goal. Some productions of course inevitably score own goals, but hey they tried. So if you haven't tried the "Live" screenings yet, what is there to lose? We've all got that extra bit of time on our hands to try something new, and we all need inspiration sometimes ... Oh, and "A Streetcar named Desire" with Gillian Anderson as Blanche DuBois was amazing. That character must be up there with one of the most sought after and iconic female leads in Theatre ever!!

A correction: Evelyn Hicks tells me that the poem she submitted for the last issue was in fact by Pam Ayres.

Our members are apparently energised by the challenge to share their deathless verse. Bernard Jordan has written with what looks to me very like a challenge. Here's what he said:

'I was very impressed by the great poetry which brought to mind an evening when doing the box office and during a quiet period, someone suggested that we should try to make up a limerick beginning with 'The girl with the dragon tattoo'. The winning verse was:

*The girl with the dragon tattoo
Has written a song about you
The melody's crude
And the words are quite rude
About most of the things
that you do.*

Utter rubbish, I know but perhaps our poets might find it fun to produce something better?'

[Nice to know that our FOH staff are putting their downtime to good use!! Ed.]

Here's another joyful contribution from our other poet-in-residence, Steve Taverner; inspired, so he says, 'by a minor setback in a rehearsal for 'Don't Dress for Dinner'.

ARMS AND MOUTHS

*I thought that my lines had
been mastered,
And was confident that I
knew all I must say,
I'd even remembered the
cue lines,
So that I could come in in a
slick timely way.*

*But, when told to stop moving
my arms,
Stop flapping about like a
big flying bird,
I stuffed my hands into my
pockets
And suddenly couldn't re-
member a word.*

*My brain must be wired like
a Frenchman,
With extravagant gestures
essential for speech.
In France speaking without
your hands is
A skill that no one's been
able to teach.*

*Is this why teenagers seem
sullen,
Grunting with just one short
word at a time?
With hands always thrust in
their pockets
It's hard to converse like we
do in our prime.*

*If some of our great politicians
Kept their hands in their pockets,
then there'd be some hope
That they could stop spouting
such b*ll*cks,
And might even resist the tempta-
tion to grope.*

And here's a very timely composition, again from Steve, whose creative juices are clearly flowing profusely at the moment!

MONUMENTS

*These days the pressure is im-
mense
To find a cause to take offence,
Disregarding common sense.
And so you need an argument
To show why every monument
Is worthy of disfigurement.*

*So, here on the Isle of Wight
I really feel the time is right
To stir up a self-righteous fight.
Victoria's statue should be first
To suffer our enraged outburst,
For she saw empire at its worst.
Hendrix died of drugs, they say.
Example to our youth? No way!
Let's chuck his statue in the bay.*

*Then there's the cows at Tapnell
Farm,
Causing vegans great alarm,
To bust them up would do no
harm.
Yarborough, up on Culver Down,
Elitist yachty of renown,
His pillar could come tumbling
down.*

*But poets are a special case,
So be prepared to show some
grace.
Tennyson should stay in place.*

Once again, as so often, Dave Talbot has put his finger on a great truth of life.

I must say, I sometimes think Dave must have some kind of awareness of the future. The poem I've chosen for this issue comes from his first volume of poetry, 'Such is Life'. It was written quite a few years ago, but you'd think it had been written

specifically for the current unpleasantness.

Confuseration

I get confused about what wasn't realistic then and what isn't now
I know life does change and it's jolly surprising how
I'd hate to lose my freedom
I love my day-to-day activities, I need them

As I don't know what's in store for me

What I say is, 'we shall have to see'.

**DAVE'S
POETRY
CORNER**

Editor's note: I am breaking with my own self-imposed rule and reproducing verbatim here an open letter from Michael Billington, the Guardian's theatre critic (with whom, as I'm sure you're tired of my reminding you, I had the privilege of discussing 'The Selkie Wife' at the Northwood House Literary Festival a few years ago). He sums up the anger and frustration felt in the theatrical world at the apparent disregard of our cultural heritage; and while things have, as always, moved on somewhat as the government reads the relevant entrails and says the first thing that comes into their heads, nevertheless the points he makes are as valid now as they were a couple of weeks ago (a couple of weeks is, as we know, a very long time in politics).

Dear Oliver Dowden,
You presumably heard Boris Johnson, when asked at prime minister's questions this week about the future of theatre, declare that 'the show must go on'. I wonder what your reaction was. Did you let out a silent cheer? Or did you, like the rest of us, groan at Johnson's hollow bombast at a time when not only theatre but the whole performing arts sector faces decimation by December?

We are in a situation like that in a Shakespeare history play, where messengers arrive hourly with bad news from all ends of the kingdom. The Nuffield Southampton, which combines a new city centre theatre with a long-standing campus playhouse, is closing, with 86 roles made redundant. The Theatre Royal Plymouth has made its entire artistic team redundant and the Royal Exchange Manchester may have to make 65% of its staff redundant. The story is much the same wherever you look, be it Birmingham, Norwich or Perth. Even the big, seemingly well-protected institutions are not immune: the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, was reported in the London Evening Standard to be 'facing closure'.

So what are you and your team at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport doing to reassure the arts community and provide a concrete plan of action? Well so far you have come up with a five-phase roadmap for the

performing arts that is worse than useless. Sam Goldwyn said that 'a verbal agreement isn't worth the paper it's written on' and a roadmap that offers no clue as to how to get to one's destination is positively insulting. What's most alarming is that it reveals a total incomprehension as to how the arts actually work. A Phase 1 stage of 'rehearsal and training' supposedly leads to a Phase 4 and 5 stage of outdoor and indoor performance. But how can any theatre start rehearsing a production when it has no guarantee of financial support nor any idea whether it will even exist in a few weeks' time? Wouldn't that be the height of irresponsibility?

It's time, Mr Dowden, you faced up to a simple truth: artists know much more about the arts than politicians. So far the most practical plan for the theatre has come from Sam Mendes, who has made numerous recommendations: increasing the theatre's tax-relief scheme from 20% to 50%, inviting the government to become theatrical 'angels' by investing in productions, challenging the streaming services to put money into an industry from which they directly benefit. Have you spoken to Sir Sam about his ideas? Have you co-opted him onto the cultural renewal taskforce you have set up? Or are you simply fiddle-faddling while Rome burns?

I also wonder if you have spoken to your European

counterparts about protecting the arts from economic ruin. I am well aware that you are part of a Brexit-driven government that relies on the myth of British exceptionalism. But it is surely worth noting that the German government has pledged €1bn to support the arts in crisis and that the French have, among other measures, created a fund of €7bn for small businesses, including those that have had to cancel shows and film shoots. By comparison our £160m Arts Council emergency package looks like very small beer.

I've never met you and I'm ready to believe you are well-intentioned. But I wonder if you have even begun to grasp the scale of the crisis facing the performing arts – theatre, opera and dance as well as classical music – in this country. Unless you come up soon with a detailed, precise, properly financed plan of action you will go down in history as the politician who presided over the dissolution of the arts in Britain. The only thing one can say for sure is that the show definitely won't go on.

Yours,
Michael Billington

Editor's note: As all my lovely contributors know, I am always delighted to receive thoughts for publication in this organ. Joel Leverton is one who takes this invitation seriously to heart; his piece this time has risen to heights of insanity even I hadn't expected from him. So enjoy an article truly in the spirit of 'and finally ...'! And Joel—keep them coming ...

Someone said something once – I thought it was the actor and comedian Mike Myers, but I'm stuffed if I can find the quote now, but it went something like this:

"The best actors are the ones who have no character and embody all the others."

That's not how it went, but it's the essence.

[Editor's note: when I read this opening sentence I was irresistibly reminded of the immortal words of Bertie Wooster: 'One of the Georges – I forget which one – said so many hours of sleep a day – I can't quite remember how many – made a man something, which for the moment has slipped my mind. However, there you are.']

Since this whole pandemic began, there has been a drive by people of all walks of life to suddenly be on a screen in order to communicate. I for one have had to embrace this in my work, in my home life, in church life, in music life and in theatre life. And it has increased the realisation in me that I am not comfortable with myself. Trying my utmost to be me, but interesting, is very hard. I was challenged on this some time ago by a woman at the Cowes Ale House who stated that she could not understand how I could perform in front of an audience of over a hundred people, yet struggled to attend the pub.

She then, several months later, informed me in no uncertain terms that it was probably because when I perform at the theatre, I am embodying a character of someone else's creation.

She, in true Sherlock style then said that I clearly am not good at being me. This then begs the question, what is me (or, more accurately perhaps, who am I?).

But that's a philosophical slant that I don't care to explore at this time.

I have a puppet – he is called Gonko. He has a better screen presence than I do myself. I look wooden, affected – some may even stretch to say I have a possessed look about me. But Gonko? He's a natural. He knows which way to look, when to nod or shake his head, he naturally opens and closes his mouth when the occasion calls for it and is a mighty fine dancer. He's also bright orange. He loves the camera, and the camera has built so strong a relationship with him that it's considering getting a joint mortgage.

My relationship with the camera is akin to a date night on my own with sushi that is three weeks out of date.

Gonko is and of himself (if indeed he has a gender) a character before one even inserts one's hand into him. Once animated, he displays a self-confidence that far exceeds anything that I can show. What reliance then I find (I have learned) that I have in scripts, characters, movements, stage sets and scenery. Even now as I write I draw influence from years of reading other famous and prolific writers – it's not really me speaking. Who am I? Am I merely a vessel? A pen to someone's writing, a tennis ball to someone's match, a pa-

padum to someone's curry...?

I digress.

So Gonko is the new me, and I am him...which is a bizarre thing to say of a hairy orange puppet (this is the perfect point to recommend you watch 'The Beaver' with Mel Gibson and Jodie Foster – a lovely exploration of the difficulties of living with mental health issues...with a puppet).

Tis a true irony that actors are tarnished with a character all of their own – the hoity toity, namby pamby, lovey-dovey, limelight stealing, gossiping individual in the room who has no qualms with wearing the brightest clothes or being the loudest person. But I would not describe myself as this – I find it very difficult to describe myself at all – at present I can describe myself as orange, hairy and a good dancer.

It would be interesting to explore how the theatre impacts upon your personality – are you the lovey-dovey thespian? Do you embrace method acting and become 'the character'? Do you emulate others?

Is life an act? This of course, is a dangerous question to ask, but an important one to reflect on.

But not today.

Joel Leverton

IT'S A PUPPET!





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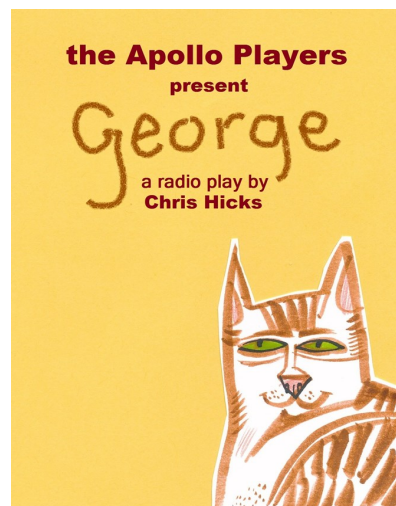
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The Apollo Players' next production



Since we can't at present bring you live theatre, we shall shortly be streaming a recorded performance of Chris Hicks' entertaining play, 'George'. Check out our website, www.apollo-theatre.org.uk, for more info, or go to our facebook page.

On our website you will also find links to radio plays by two of our members entitled 'Cruel Nostalgia' and 'Schmohawk'. Do give them a listen—we hope you will enjoy them.