
◆ Little Theatre News ◆

Bournemouth

Tuesday, 25 November 1997

“The Killing Of Sister George”

Comedy, from Monday 15 to Saturday 20 December

At BLTC, Jameson Road, Winton

To book for show see bottom of this page

FRANK MARCUS was perhaps ahead of his time when he wrote his comedy *The Killing Of Sister George* in 1965, before most of today's TV soaps became “serious” drama. ‘Sister George’ is the name of a popular character in the radio soap *Applehurst*, an everyday story of country folk, not a million miles away from *The Archers*. She is the village district nurse, and the soap revolves around her exploits as she goes about the village on her moped, bringing sage wisdom and medical help to the afflicted. The rôle of Sister George in the soap is played by a well-worn actress called June Buckridge, who reckons (and she believes that her ratings support her) that life in *Applehurst* would not be the same without her. Neither, of course, would life be the same for June. And therein lies the plot's crisis, as we see the actress facing the threat of the ‘axe’, as she suspects that the

BBC is possibly about to drop her character from the show. Her relationship with her friend and flat-mate Alice McNaught, already taut and threatened, is strained even further by the new development, and by the arrival on the scene of Miss Mercy Croft, from the BBC, who may be the bearer of bad tidings. Madame Xenia, a clairvoyant and friend of June Buckridge, is called in to give the actress some advice and hope, but is not too successful in either capacity. Frank Marcus manages to make us laugh at the interplay between these four characters without ever using a sledgehammer, and the result is a delightful piece, full of intrigue and suspicion, with some surprising twists and turns, and many knowing chuckles. The play was originally a huge success for comedienne Beryl Reid, who repeated the role in the successful film, co-starring Susannah York.



Meet the cast of ‘Sister George’

DIRECTOR ANDREW WHYATT had to search far and wide for his perfect female quartet for *The Killing Of Sister George*. And here they are!

Yvette Leahy gets the demanding lead role of June. This ex-convent lady from Poole starred in plays as diverse as *St Joan*, (at age 14) and later in *Loot* and *Entertaining Mr Sloan*, in a 20-year career with the Wheatshaf Players in Coventry, before returning to BLTC where she has played leads in *Steel Magnolias*, *When We Are Married*, and *The Madwoman of Chaillot*. She also appeared memorably on Brownsea in 1995 in *Richard III*.

Rachael De Courcy Beamish, though young, has appeared or worked on productions of so many BLTC shows over the last few years that it is easier to say

what she has not been in! Her rôle as Alice is one that she says is her strongest part to date and a wonderful challenge. Recently you have seen her in *Time And The Conways*, *Sisterly Feelings* and *Arms And The Man*.

Angela Whyatt, as Mercy Croft, brings her warm good looks and stylish acting skills to this tricky rôle. Recently for us she has starred in *A Lie Of The Mind*, *The Sisters Rosensweig*, *When We Are Married*, *Sisterly Feelings*, and *Hotel Paradiso*.

Elsa Jacobs, with BLTC for over 40 years, returns as an actor after many years as a professional voice teacher and director *extraordinaire*. To the rôle of Madame Xenia she brings all the skills that directed *12 Angry Men*, *All My Sons* and *The Master Builder*.

How to Book for *The Killing Of Sister George*

By telephone:

From Monday 1 December to Friday 5 December between 7.30 - 9.00 p.m. on 424640

By telephone:

From Monday 8 December to Friday 12 December between 7.30 - 9.00 p.m. on 513361 (or come in person to the club between those hours) or

By post to BLTC, 11 Jameson Road, Winton, Bournemouth BH9 2QD enclosing payment and SAE for reply.

And remember:

Payment for telephone bookings must be received in full within 48 hours of booking or the seats may be resold.

Prices:

Adults £6 (row K £5), students and OAPs £4.50. Further concessions for members.

A Life in the Theatre

We recently asked our charismatic Irish actor, **Derek Hyder**, to reminisce on his place in the theatre and his thoughts on a life spent in giving pleasure to theatregoers in Ireland, Britain and the United States. We hope you get as much pleasure out of his views, below, as we did.

My thirty years with BLTC have provided me with some of my most treasured times. Without BLTC I would never have had the opportunity of extending myself in the rôles I have been fortunate enough to play. My only reward over the years has been the knowledge that the paying audience has gone home satisfied that it has been entertained.

But where did I start? Well, I was 12 years old in Dublin during World War II. I won a talent contest at the seaside, and was offered the summer season with a company run by one Connie Ryan, and I became, God help me, one of *Connie Ryan's Cute Kiddies*. My wages were 2/6d per week for June, July and August 1944, but I only got 7/6d for the season, because Connie Ryan was usually too far gone with drink to remember that I was there. While I was there I joined three brothers to form a quartet. One of them became Dave Allen, the famous comedian, and we still keep in touch to this day. I shared a dressing room with a comedian, a ventriloquist, and a young Irish dancer. This was the university of life, and where I learned to 'act'. The comedian would make up the sketch to be done that night, and I was pushed on as the stooge. That's how I learned to move on stage and how to time my line so that the comedian got the laughs. I would have paid them 7/6d just for the education, and I was totally hooked.

At the end of the season, Connie got me an audition with the Gate Theatre in Dublin, in front of Hilton Edwards and Micheál MacLiammóir. I was cast as the lead in a play called *Tomorrow The World*. Unfortunately, as it was wartime, the German Embassy objected to the theme, and the play was withdrawn, as Ireland was officially neutral. So we did Lillian Hellman's play *Watch On The Rhine* instead, and I made my professional debut at the Gaiety Theatre in Autumn 1944. Later I toured Ireland with the show and did some radio work. I did another juvenile rôle in 1948, but I then reached an age when I was either too young or too old. Still I did get another rôle at the Gaiety Theatre working with Cyril Cusack, but then my 'day job' intervened and my professional career in the theatre was nipped in the bud. Well, almost; I did play for four years in an Irish show band, 'The Woodchoppers'.

I was out of the theatre for about ten years, when I was working in the day job in Swindon and was asked to help out with Irish accents in an amateur production of *The Quare Fellow*. I ended up playing a rôle, and from that day on I never stopped working in the amateur theatre. Then my job took me to Bournemouth on August 1, 1967. That same day, in the evening, I joined the best club in town, Bournemouth Little Theatre Club, and was cast in a small rôle in *Dark Of The Moon*, directed by one Keith Rawlings at the Palace Court Theatre. Keith was very kind, and a director who knew what he wanted from his actors. He still does, thirty years later: in 1997 I have just played in his production of *The Sisters Rosensweig*. The Palace Court was one of the best I had ever played in, and I knew I had come home at last because of the professional approach to the work and the discipline, which was akin to my early training. I played in nine shows there before we sold the place. One was *Who's Afraid Of Virginia Wolf?* in which I played the rôle of 'George' over thirty times. My longest run, and it nearly killed me!

We had no theatrical home after closing the Palace Court. We played small rooms for members only, then formed a touring group which went into the countryside to perform for ten years. I became

tour manager and sometimes player. We played as far away as Weymouth, Frome, Warminster, Shaftesbury and Lymington. During this time we moved into our present home in Jameson Road in 1975 where we opened with *Lloyd George Knew My Father*, a great hit both at home and on tour. In 1973 we started to enter festivals, and by 1983 we won the British Final with an excerpt from *Little Eyolf* which was directed by Elsa Jacobs. This was a great landmark for BLTC, which I regret has never been repeated. Our standard started to drop as others gathered pace.

But new challenges beckoned. With a bit of brass neck, and some good contacts, we got an invitation in 1984 to perform in the Dundalk International Maytime Festival. The play was *Trap For A Lonely Man*, again directed by Keith Rawlings. For the first time in 28 years I was playing before 'my own' and as I heard the Irish National Anthem before the curtain — well I can still feel the tingle factor to this day. BLTC has been so welcomed by the people of Dundalk that we played for them again in 1984, 1989, 1992 and 1997. We won the festival in 1989 with *Danger Memory* directed by Barbara Warde. This in turn led to our first visit to America in 1990, as the representative of England with *Staircase* at the American Association of Community Theatre International, in Des Moines, Iowa. There followed a week's work in Florida with *An Inspector Calls*, again directed by Barbara Warde. Since then we also played in two festivals in Aruba, Netherlands Antilles. So there is a theatre life beyond Jameson Road. In my long association with BLTC I have been in over 60 plays, my favourites among them being mostly plays by Arthur Miller, including *Death Of A Salesman*, and *All My Sons*. I also have fond memories of *The Dresser* and *On Golden Pond*.

This club has given me much to be thankful for, not the least of which was the number of great friendships I have forged. The greatest has been my wife, Sue. We met through the club and were married in 1981. Sue joined our club and became a Props person with great dedication and commitment. She became, and still is, the best Props person I ever worked with. Her eye for detail and professional approach to the job I cannot fault, and long may she continue to berate me when I get things wrong on the night. Now, of course, she is better known to the club and all the playgoers as the manager of our box office. This is also a demanding job, which she carries out with thoroughness and great ability.

If I have to state my 'philosophy' of acting, then I do not consider what I do to be 'fun'. I do believe it to be a labour of love, and I have always tried to give my best, and will always continue to do so as long as I can work, or am asked to work. When people ask me what I get out of acting, I can only quote the great actor-manager Sir Donald Wolfit: "Being an actor is like being married and going out every night to be with your mistress."

Editor's note: Derek was too modest to note that out of four shows at Dundalk he was 'Best Actor' three times, a record. From Curtain Call Awards he was 'Best Actor' 1993 and 'Best Supporting Actor' 1997. In the Isle of Man Easter Festival 1997 he was the first winner of the Saga Award for a performance by an over-60 year old! Wow!



OPINION

It was the Fifth of November and as the Committee members assembled to debate the future of BLTC, I expected a few fireworks: but as it happened, most members' touchpaper was damp, and some even forgot to bring their matches, but a few sparkling rockets saved the day. There was strong support for emphasis on quality productions. Expansion was desirable, for the number of plays to be performed to accommodate an increased membership, but the majority feeling was that 'we should proceed with caution and aim at sustainability'. We next discussed the lottery application, the recognised priority being to refurbish the Theatre and no one spoke in favour of appointing a paid manager/artistic director to oversee the Club's development during the next three years. I believe that we need to steer the club forward and to completely restructure and take a fresh look at the way we manage the club, otherwise the theatre will continue to slowly decline. I guess that unless you take on one of the offices at the club, chairman, studio, stage director or whatever, it is difficult to appreciate what is involved. One of the comments that was made to unanimous support was 'that we need to regain the element at BLTC that makes members queue up just to want to be a part of a successful production'.

I believe that the aims of 'continuous successful productions' and the aims of 'proceeding with caution to attain sustainability' are incompatible with one another. I also now accept that the direction I wish to see the Club take is not shared by many, and not supported; that a loose framework to enable us all to do our am dram in our own ways is more desirable than an organised structure that we all must follow. I got it wrong.

David Weeks, Chairman

Committee news

Tony Orman, as editor of this newsletter, has been co-opted on to the Committee of BLTC, and has also assumed the post of membership secretary. For news or membership issues please call him on 554291.

Ibsen's *A Doll's House*: World Amateur Première! Major coup for BLTC

The Club is proud to announce that Frank McGuinness has agreed that we are to be the first amateur group to perform his splendid new version of Henrik Ibsen's famous classic. At first we were told by his agents that the version, which gives new insights relevant to our own times, was not available for amateurs. Director Barbara Warde would not take "no" for an answer. Mr McGuinness, busy working at the National Theatre, was finally reached and persuaded that we should be given our chance to show what amateurs can do.

The theme of the play is as follows:

Nora Helmer, wife to Torvald and mother of three children, appears to enjoy living the life of a pampered, indulged child. But as her economic dependence becomes brutally clear, Nora's acceptance of the status quo undergoes a profound change. To the horror of the bewildered Torvald, himself caught in the tight web of a conservative society which demands that he exert strict control, Nora comes to see that the only possible true course of action is to leave the family home.

Ibsen's classic play was greeted with shock on its first production in 1879, with both its style and subject matter being seen as radical and subversive. One critic at the time wrote, "With the slamming of the door behind Nora, the theatres of Europe woke up."

Frank McGuinness's lucid version of *A Doll's House* received its West End première in October 1996.

Barbara Warde will direct the production. The play reading will be on Friday, 28 November at 7.30 p.m.

THE AUDITIONS for *A Doll's House* will be held on Friday, 5 December, at 7.30 p.m. There are 3 male and 4 female rôles with a wide age range.

This significant production will attract an influential audience and should receive wider press coverage than most amateur dramas.

TWENTY QUESTIONS

This time, it is the turn of Lin Denning, director of *Noises Off*, to answer our questions to her. We asked:

- 1. What is your idea of perfect happiness?**
World peace
 - 2. What is your greatest fear?**
Alzheimers
 - 3. Which famous person do you admire?**
Aung San Suu Kyi (Burmese democrat)
 - 4. Who is your favourite film star?**
Sean Connery
 - 5. Who is your favourite actor or actress?**
Alec Guinness
 - 6. What is your greatest extravagance?**
Christmas
 - 7. What do you always carry on you?**
Cigarettes and lighter
 - 8. Where would you most like to live?**
Where I am now
 - 9. What is your most unappealing habit?**
Smoking
 - 10. What is your favourite smell?**
A forest after rain
 - 11. What is your favourite word?**
'Hello'
 - 12. What is your favourite play or film?**
One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest (the movie)
 - 13. What is your favourite journey?**
Into the unknown
 - 14. What do you dislike most?**
Injustice — on every scale
 - 15. What is your greatest regret?**
Never attempting professional theatre
 - 16. When and where were you happiest?**
Now
 - 17. What single thing which would improve your quality of life?**
Ability to fall asleep quickly
 - 18. How do you relax?**
Meditation, reading
 - 19. What is your favourite quality in others?**
Tolerance
 - 20. What is your favourite animal?**
Unicorn.
- Okay — it may be *your* turn next.

Reminders

Dates to remember for the upcoming few months include:

Fri. 28 Nov. Play reading of *A Doll's House*.

Fri. 5 Dec. Auditions for *A Doll's House*.

Mon. 15 - Sat 20 Dec. Performances of *The Killing of Sister George*.

Fri. 2 Jan. 1998 Play reading of *Noises Off*.

Fri. 9 Jan. Auditions for *Noises Off*.

Mon. 23 - Sat 28 Feb. Performances of *A Doll's House*.

March, Mondays to Fridays, rehearsals every night for *Noises Off* or for Studio production.

Fri. 3 April. Playreading of *Grand National Night*.

Fri. 10 April. Auditions for *Grand National Night*.

Mon. 20 - Sat 25 April. Performances of *Noises Off*.

Thurs. 30 April - Sat. 2 May. Performances of Studio production.

Mon. 8 - Sat. 13 June. Performances of *Grand National Night*.

Theatre Quiz by Daphne Orman

Answers at the bottom of this page

1. Who wrote *The Children's Hour*?
2. "My father is a very hospitable man: he keeps six hotels." Play and author?
3. Which child star of *ET* is named after two of her theatrical ancestors?
4. Which play, by which Irishman, is set in Bath in 1775?
5. What is the meaning of "R.U.R." in Karel Capek's play of that name?
6. Who "hurtle through Shakespeare's 37 plays in riotous style"?
7. "Shakespeare's plays are best read, not performed." Who said this?
8. In which play does the new governess feel evil in the air when she starts work at Bly House?
9. Who is regarded "without too much challenge as the best all-round director currently working in British Theatre"?
10. Who's middle name was Schwenck?

The Cuckoo Flies!

One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest was an undoubted triumph for Director Jack Snell. Our second show of the season was our second big hit, playing to big houses, and being greeted not merely with polite applause but frequently with whistles, cheers and shouts of laughter. Who says the amateur theatre is dead! Not here, it ain't. As they left the theatre, our playgoers told us, "This is great stuff!" We think it is one of the finer ensemble pieces we have done in some years. **David Ross** said in the *Echo* that the central conflict crackled in Jack's 'assured production' as it had in the movies. He also said, "Joanna Dunbar brings us the icy steel beneath the sugar-sweet coating of authoritarian Nurse Ratched, whose therapy sessions are thinly disguised exercises in humiliation. As subversive Randall McMurphy, Lee Payton turns in a performance which grabs the audience by the lapels. There is no doubt Lee fulfils this demanding rôle and packs a real dramatic clout." Ross was impressed, too, with the other players: "Steve Cox brings impressive dignity to his portrayal of Chief Bromden, Mike Satchell is excellent ... Tim Garton is most persuasive ... Neil West almost made me believe I could see his invisible friend. The party scene with Claire Hiscock as the golden-hearted good-time girl and Sally Barrett as her tarty pal, was one of the highlights of a fine production."

Thanks to all of you for a great show.

Ford of 'The Echo' goes on the record

"I'm not an intellectual," Sarah Ford frankly admits. "I joined BLTC in 1967 at 16 because it was the only way I could see my mother!" Mother was Olive Ford, a prominent member of BLTC from the late 1940s until the Palace Court Theatre was sold in 1970. "She was always in meetings or in rehearsal or on stage." Sarah and her young friends in the Club did one-act plays and thought Harold Pinter and e.e. cummings were "trendy". Sarah now admits she didn't (and doesn't) understand what Pinter was about. But none of her friends would admit that they couldn't understand him either, "like the story of the Emperor's new clothes." So how did she become the Daily Echo's guru on the amateur theatre? "I'd seen Peter Egan in *Hamlet* at the Palace Court in 1968, when I was 17. My teacher at Talbot Heath School persuaded me to send in a review of the show to the editor of the Echo." She also asked him to give her a job. He did. She immediately gave up swotting for A levels and went to work. Twenty-nine years later she is still there. Modestly she says, "It was easy to get jobs in the days of full employment." Her one regret is that her job, which leaves little time for a social life, means that she cannot work in amateur theatre. Her main love is singing, performing for more than 25 years in Bournemouth Gilbert & Sullivan. Today, of course, as a critic she can't do that. People think her whole job is just going out in the evening to see shows. But her main job is as a sub-editor of the Echo who, uniquely, also has three pages a week under her own by-line.

Again modestly, she shrugs off her work at the paper. "Sub-editors write headlines, cut stories to fit space, and put captions on pictures." She sees most of the amateur shows herself, but if there are too many, she asks Echo staffers or outsiders for help. They constitute a loose committee, to suggest nominees for the Curtain Call Awards. Members of the public also make suggestions. She recalls a girl two years ago who sent in exactly 100 nominations for herself, using other people's names. So, who chooses the winners? Obviously Sarah is one judge. There are one or two others, but she won't say who. On the evening, there are only three people in the award ceremony who know who's won, so there are no advance leaks. There can be arguments among the judges at the paper as to the merits of different nominees but usually the winner stands out.

She is genuinely surprised to hear that certain BLTC members believe she is biased against the Club. "If I say 'I don't like it,' people get upset. Everyone wants to be loved. I've performed myself in music festivals, where the adjudicator pulls you apart in public. If I say anything bad in a critique, I try to be constructive. BLTC is one of the six top groups in the region. I judge its shows more critically because BLTC has higher standards than many of the rest." **So, now you know.**

'Noises Off' Audition

Noises Off, by Michael Frayn, is directed by Lin Denning. **The play reading** is on Friday, 2 January 1998 at 7.30 pm, and **AUDITIONS** are on Friday 9 January at 7.30 pm. There are 5 male rôles and 4 female rôles, for varied age groups. This is a truly zany backstage comedy about an appalling touring company. Act 1 is a rehearsal of a melodrama, seen from the perspective of the audience. Act 2 is backstage on opening night, where we see the 'set' from behind, and also see the comic disasters affecting the actors, and Act 3 is again from the front of the melodrama set, one month into the tour when we view the ongoing saga of the touring actors as they struggle with their lines and their collapsing relationships. *Noises Off* is not only a wildly hilarious comedy, but is also famous for the unique set changes, which call for great ingenuity, especially in an amateur production.

NOTE: Lin says that this audition is very early because the words *must be learnt very early!*

1. Lillian Hellman.
2. *Arms and the Man* by G B Shaw.
3. Drew Barrymore.
4. *The Rivals* by R B Sheridan.
5. Rossum's Universal Robots.
6. *The Reduced Shakespeare Company*.
7. Johann Goethe.
8. *The Turn Of The Screw* (Henry James).
9. Trevor Nunn.
10. Sir William S Gilbert.

Answers to Quiz