



Bournemouth Little Theatre News



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1999/2000 Season

Friday, 2 June 2000

BLTC invites you to



ABIGAIL'S PARTY

A comedy
by

Mike Leigh

Directed by Jack Snell

Six evenings only at 7.45 pm
Monday, 26 June to Saturday, 1 July, 2000

SUBURBANITES Laurence and Beverly invite their new neighbours, Angela and Tony, for drinks — and to welcome them to the neighbourhood. Laurence and Beverly also have a friend called Susan. Susan's teenage daughter, Abigail, is having her first 'grown-up' party, at which Abigail hints that her mother is definitely not welcome. So Laurence and Beverly invite Susan to their party to meet the new neighbours. You know how these parties go — bags of goodwill and bonhomie, clichés and fatuous small talk abound — until the marital strain between Laurence and Beverly, never far from the surface, begins to emerge. Angela and Beverly chatter away with their tactless remarks and innuendoes, seemingly ignorant of the embarrassment they are causing to Tony and Susan, and unaware of the tension their inane party conversation is creating. That tension builds up through the evening, with disastrous results at the end of the play.

Abigail's friends and relations



Michelle Newton



Denise Nippard



Mike Satchell



Director Jack Snell



Ginnie Waters



Matthew Meehan

A bit about the playwright

“A BRITISH GEM, A once seen/never forgotten experience. Yes, *THAT* good.” So said an American reviewer of Mike Leigh’s play *Abigail's Party* on the Internet on 27 February 2000. A play with considerable humour, both light and dark, *Abigail's Party* was written for British television in 1977, but has been seen worldwide. For the last 35 years Mike Leigh has been writing for the performing arts with an unusual approach. He will give his actors a basic concept and let them develop their characters as they would be in real life, without the usual stage emphasis. Then he takes what they have evolved and hones it to a final producible play. In this manner, his productions seem to be more reflective of 'real life', than most plays these days. For some people this is a wonderful experience, while others find it somewhat unsettling. One reviewer said he found considerable self-knowledge in various plays of Mike Leigh, who has written for stage, television and films. Indeed, Mike has been the recipient of a number of film festival awards over the years, including two from the Cannes Film Festival (in 1993 and 1996). Sure to be a funny, memorable and thought-provoking experience. Don't miss this one! Book your seats today.

ADVANCE TICKET BOOKINGS (price £6, with concessions)

1. WRITE enclosing cheque and S.A.E. to
Box Office, BLTC, 11 Jameson Road, Bournemouth BH 9 2QD OR
2. CONTACT Sue at home **ONLY between 7.30 pm and 9.00 pm** Monday 12 June
To Friday 16 June on her home number **01202 424640** OR
3. BOX OFFICE OPENS Monday 19 June to Friday 23 June
between 7.30 pm and 9.00 pm. For personal callers at the Club
OR by telephone on **01202 513361**

PLEASE NOTE

Tickets for early bookings (with money and SAE) will be dispatched within two weeks before the show in the order in which the bookings were received.

The Great Hall — An English Icon

IN January he delivered four lectures on drama and opera in Cambridge. In February he began to rehearse a play that opened on the London fringe in March. In the same month, those lectures were published and his diaries were reissued by Oberon Books, along with his updated autobiography. He then left for a six-month stay in Denver, where he is directing a cycle of ten plays set in mythic Greece, making side-trips to Houston, where he is a visiting professor – and, no doubt, doing what early work he can on the three plays and two operas he hopes to stage in late 2000 and 2001. Is he a blend of Kenneth Branagh, Richard Branson, David Frost and Daley Thompson? No, he is Sir Peter Hall, an *enfant terrible* of the 1950s, and now an OAP *terrible*.

The fringe production is Giuseppe Manfredi's *Cuckoos* now playing at the Gate, and is the first play he has directed on the London fringe since he introduced Beckett's *Waiting For Godot* to the English-speaking world at the Arts in 1955; and it, too, may disturb its audiences. Manfredi is an exponent of "the Theatre of Excess", which means putting outrageous situations into bourgeois settings. "Like sitting next to someone at dinner and he suddenly says, 'My problem is, I'm sleeping with my mother!'" explains Hall. "It's startling and outspoken and very funny, and I'm much encouraged by the fact it's been rejected by every new writing stage in London, not because they don't like it, but because they don't dare do it."

It doesn't sound the sort of production you expect from a director regarded by some as an establishment figure, but then Hall has always insisted that, as his memoirs put it, art must "challenge, provoke, illuminate," often in a "revolutionary" way. *Cuckoos* will be

followed by "the biggest thing I've ever done": *Tantalus*, John Barton's cycle of verse plays set around the Trojan war.

When Hall launched the RSC, he brought his college chum Barton to Stratford, where he won a reputation as a gifted director with an unsettling tendency to rejig classic work. Hall calls the cycle, ten plays lasting 14 hours, "a bit of a masterpiece" – simply written, quirky, ironic, and highly contemporary in its view of Helen and Priam. "It asks how an international community deals with an outbreak of violence, how you can get locked into a conflict nobody wants, and a lot else. Politically I find myself in sympathy with its profound scepticism. If we get it right, you'll come out more questioning, more concerned." However, funding negotiations fell through until Don Seawell, the 86-year-old founder of the Denver Arts Centre promised the necessary \$7 million if *Tantalus* rehearsed in Colorado – which is why four British players are about to join an American cast and, after opening in October, will start a tour that eventually lands up in the Barbican.

After that, Hall returns to England to direct Simon Gray's latest, still-untitled play, which involves two brothers. Then come *Romeo and Juliet* in Los Angeles, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Otello* at Glyndebourne, a second *Otello* in Chicago, either *Lenny* with Eddie Izzard on Broadway or another play in London, and, again in LA, *King Lear* with Christopher Plummer. It's all pretty exciting, yet Hall admits to being "very, very sad". Ideally, he would like to be home with his wife and young daughter in England, running a small company specialising in Shakespeare – or, of course, presenting seasons at the Old Vic.

Combining the roles of hyperactive director, world traveller and gigantic gadfly should have taken its toll: yet 70-year-old Hall says his health remains good, his enthusiasm undimmed. A happy fourth marriage, plus what's now a small tribe of children and



Sir Peter Hall, the old campaigner

grandchildren, clearly helps a lot. So, he says, does the only exercise he takes, which is bouncing about working. "I love pressure. This modern idea that you must always relax isn't true of the animal world, is it? What makes an animal spring to life is adrenalin. For me the secret of life is throwing myself into something I have a passion and obsession for: directing."

A decade ago Hall the only blot on his horizon was death. The prospect still chills him, especially after a period that has passed so quickly he feels he blinked at 60 and is about to reopen his eyes at 70. But there will be no voluntary retirement, no willing slowing-down. You can see him expiring, like Zorba the Greek or Elizabeth I, standing up. "Yes," he agrees, "and in the middle of a rehearsal!"

Where Shakespeare walked, and worked



The Globe

Shakespeare lived in London, it was the height of the play house boom at Bankside, in the area where the new Shakespeare's Globe now stands.

The first purpose-built play house in South London was built at Newington Butts, near the Elephant & Castle, in about 1580. This theatre was too far from central London and soon flopped. In approximately 1587 speculators built a new play house, The Rose, at Bankside, and the play house boom began. The Rose is better known for its connections with Christopher Marlowe than with Shakespeare, but *Titus Andronicus* was performed there before the lease expired in around 1605.

With The Rose a proven success other play houses soon followed it into Bankside. A 3,000-seater The Swan, was built in 1595 and closed around 1637. The third play house was The Globe, in which Shakespeare was a shareholder. The final play house, The Hope, was built in 1614 to try to capitalise on The Globe burning down in 1613. The Hope is interesting as it was purpose-built to hold both animal baiting and plays. The Hope was built on the site of an animal baiting pen where seven people had died when a stand collapsed in 1583.

Shakespeare moved to London in 1586 or 1587, and lived there until 1613. Initially he lived in North London, but his involvement with The Globe caused him to move to the Bankside area, probably at a site now partially covered by Blakfriars Bridge. It was during this era that he wrote many of his greatest plays, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest*.

SOUTH-WARK, on the South Bank of London's River Thames, was not actually in London in Shakespeare's day, and so was not governed by the strictures of the laws restricting the putting on of public plays North of the River. Accordingly, when

When Shakespeare lived there, Southwark's play houses were far from respectable, but gaining in popularity. Interestingly, theatres were soon banned from performing on Thursdays, the traditional day for bear baiting.

The importance of Bankside as a centre for play houses did not survive much beyond Shakespeare himself. Relations between the theatres and the locals were strained. In 1587 the people of Southwark complained to the Privy Council about the nature of the plays. The local Vestry complained about the Bear Garden in 1596 and the play houses in 1598. A 1597 performance of the lost play *The Isle of Dogs*, at The Swan, was ruled seditious and slanderous. In the immediate aftermath the Privy Council ruled that all theatres should be demolished. Fortunately this order was not implemented. A half-hearted attempt was made to close all but two playhouses in London. The Globe was one of those to be allowed to stay open, but the theatres were closely controlled for the rest of Elizabeth I's reign. In 1642 the Puritans ordered the suppression of the remaining play houses.

The Globe was shut down in 1644. Three years later JP's were given the power to demolish the stage, galleries and boxes of a theatre, whip the players and fine the audience 5 shillings each. The Hope, the last surviving Bankside play house, was demolished marking an ignoble end to a glorious era in Southwark history.



Old Southwark

Film Quiz by David Hinton and Tony Orman

1. What did Tony Curtis compare to kissing Hitler?
2. Who was Isabella Rosselini's real mother?
3. Who is Liv Tyler's real-life father?
4. What was the relationship, on and off the screen, of Arthur Lucan and Kitty McShane?
5. Name three books by 19th century author Alexandre Dumas, frequently filmed.
6. "There is nothing like a dame!" Name two dames created May 16.
7. Mickey Rooney played Andy Hardy in how many films?
8. Which famed British actor successfully portrayed Pope John Paul II in the 1984 film?
9. Which two siblings were *The Krays* and name their pop group.
10. In which film did John McEnroe's wife and his father-in-law famously star?

Free Tickets

THE Editor's favourite film is *Shakespeare in Love*. It was scripted by Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard. The latter was handed a novel by friend Ned Sherrin, and it is alleged, not without justification, that parts of the film were plagiarised from the novel.

We are offering two free tickets to ANY one future BLTC production to the first person who writes to the Editor, naming the book and the two authors. The Editor's decision is final.

Change of plan!

SHARP EYED readers will not have failed to notice that the next show is *not* BLTC Member Tim Garton's rites of passage drama *Chakra*, but is instead the comedy *Abigail's Party* by Mike Leigh. The reason for this change is that the Director, Jack Snell, was unable to cast one of the major roles, so it is a matter of some regret to the Club that we are unable, at this time, to give an airing to Tim's play. As they say, that's show business.

Fortunately, Jack was able to cast *Abigail's Party* with some members of the *Chakra* cast, with additional new cast members, and he still has available to him the backstage crew who had been assembled for the other show.

So, our apologies for the change in the schedule, but we are certain that Jack will bring his usual vast directorial talent to bear on the new production!

Where have all the people gone?

We asked the Daily Echo's Linda Kirkman to explain the reason for declining audiences for provincial theatre and her reply, exclusive to Little Theatre News, is as follows

THESE days, getting those elusive bums on seats can never be guaranteed, and many are the times that I have sat in the Pavilion, or 4,000+ capacity Windsor Hall, and been part of a shamefully small audience – and there have been far too many occasions at amateur shows when the cast has outnumbered the audience. It seems a crying shame that people who want to entertain others should be snubbed like this, so just what has gone wrong?

When I first started my theatre-going back in the mid 1960s, full houses were the norm rather than the exception, whether the performance was by amateurs or professionals. There are probably countless reasons why audiences have tailed off, and everyone has their pet theories. Here are some of mine.

Audience behaviour is, for me, the biggest turn-off of all. So many people do not seem to realise that it is unacceptable to talk and eat during a performance, yet those things are so distracting to the rest of the audience who are trying to concentrate. And as for the throat clearers – they obviously didn't go to the school I was at, because our headmistress would stop morning assembly if one of us dared to cough, and lecture us on how rude it was. (Miss Key, if you're reading this, I'd still rather choke than cough in public!)

Theatre is surely about being drawn into another world for a couple of hours, and that is almost impossible when ears are forced to tune into the sound of sweets being unwrapped or someone talking or coughing. Interestingly, audiences of amateur shows do not, by and large, seem to have these habits!

Ambience too is important for me, and if I have to fight my way through a smoky foyer and bar only to find myself sitting in an unattractive auditorium, chances are I won't be back!

Changing work practices mean that many people work longer or more varied hours these days, so the 9 to 5 day is no longer the norm. For some it is simply not possible to go to the theatre in the evenings any more, and the habit is soon lost.



Linda Kirkman

Far from losing the habit of theatre-going, some people never acquire it. I used to go regularly as part of a school party to see the repertory company at the late lamented Palace Court Theatre, but how many teachers these days would even consider such extra-curricular activities? For many children, sadly, theatre begins and ends with pantomime, if even that. Probably it isn't sophisticated enough for today's computer generation.

Of course, since most homes now have multiple TV channels, video and the Internet, people's entertainment comes to them, so they have no need to go out and look for it. Why get dressed up and go out when you can curl up in your dressing gown on your own settee?

Ignoring the West End, which is a different animal entirely, the average age of a theatre audience is rather older than middle aged, and many retired people on a fixed income cannot afford the luxury of regular theatre-going. Plenty also remember the days when a ticket cost about 5 shillings, so they think today's prices are extortionate and will not pay them!

Finally – and I'm talking generally here – some directors and companies are too self indulgent, putting on the productions they want rather than considering what their audiences like. If what's on offer doesn't appeal, the public won't bother to spend their money, will they?

But, for the smaller amateur companies at least, it's not all doom and gloom. It seems to me that out of the 100+ shows I see during the year, those performed by groups who have their own loyal local audience

generally have plenty of support, so look after your regulars and the future. Answers to Quiz

New plans

AS we go to press, our plans for next year are almost complete. At the moment, we have the directors, but not all of the plays have been chosen. Currently the running order is:

1. 18-23 September 2000. A play to be chosen and directed by Keith Rawlings, at the Pier Theatre.
2. 16-21 October 2000. *Donny Boy* directed by Jack Snell.
3. 4-9 December 2000. A comedy to be chosen and directed by Lin Denning.
4. 12-17 February 2001. *I Have Been Here Before* directed by Don Cherrett.
5. 2-7 April 2001. *The Day After the Fair* directed by Pat Gray.
6. 21-26 May 2001. *Separate Tables* directed by Tony Orman.

In addition, Jack Snell will enter a one-act play in the Dorset Festival. More details will follow in our next edition in late June.

No plans

WE have it on unimpeachable authority that at the present time Brownsea Open Air Theatre have not yet chosen a Shakespeare play nor a director for their projected 2001 effort on Brownsea Island. As this production is one of the major events of the Dorset Summer Season, and is always a sell-out, we feel sure that some bright-eyed, innovated soul will present him or herself to the BOAT Committee ere long.

If you think you are the one to put on the biggest, best-funded amateur production in the region, why don't you call BOAT Chairman John Kilduff, on 01202 369660.

WANTED

HUGH Norris is writing a detailed history of BLTC, and would like to hear from anyone who has a story to tell about productions and people past. He hopes to have it ready for 2019 for our centenary.

Call him on 01202 761400.

1. Kissing Marilyn Monroe.
2. Ingrid Bergman.
3. Aerosmith singer Steve Tyler.
4. They were husband and wife.
5. You could try *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *The Three Musketeers*, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, *The Fighting Temeraire*, *The Black Tulip*.
6. Please welcome *Dame Elizabeth Taylor* and *Dame Julie Andrews*.
7. It was 16 schmalzy movies.
8. Albert Finney.
9. Brothers Gary and Martin Kemp of Spandau Ballet started.
10. Child actress Tatum O'Neal and father Ryan O'Neal starred in *Paper Moon*.