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2013-2014 Season

Newsletter 3: November 2013

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Our Next Production

A Cricket Match

By Alan Ayckbourn Directed by Carole Lovett

November 28th, 29th, 30th December 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th at 7.30 pm
also matinée December 7th at 2.30 pm

The comedic script for 'A Cricket Match' has been extrapolated from an extraordinarily complex and inventive series of storylines written by Alan Ayckbourn and contained within two volumes of a work with the overall title of 'Intimate Exchanges'. Within this framework Ayckbourn plots out the difficult dynamics concerning the romantic relationships between men and women and he also considers how our lives are affected and controlled by seemingly random and trivial choices of action. Needless to say, the series of events that we have decided to follow has a cricket match at its heart and, although we never see the actual match, it is whilst it is being

played that our four main characters play out their own games concerning their emotional relationships and moral codes. As ever with Ayckbourn, the trials of the human condition are presented to us as a cause for laughter as we observe the twists and turns of Celia and Miles' attempts at a 'fun' extra-marital relationship and the very different reactions to this doomed affair evinced by Toby, Celia's husband, and

Rowena, Miles's wife. We also observe the budding relationship between Sylvie, who cleans the house for Celia, and Hepplewick, the cricket pitch grounds-man which is also, in my opinion anyway, doomed.

All eight of the characters that Ayckbourn presents to us are played by the same two actors, Mandy Kiley and Nick Laurence. As you can well imagine, the practical logistics of timing, characterisation and wardrobe changes are proving to be somewhat

challenging. Fortunately I have two excellent actors and a crew who are both supportive and, at times, quick on their feet. We are all finding that the 'need for speed' backstage is contributing to a fast-paced scenario on stage.

Several people have queried the reasons why only two actors are involved in a play about eight people. We are coming round more and more to the idea that possibly all the characters are facets of the same two personalities and therefore it makes perfect sense to use the same two people to portray them. However, the question is most easily answered by quoting from Ayckbourn himself: 'These plays were written originally for a cast of two. They could of course be performed by a larger cast but the end result would, in my view, be infinitely less satisfying'

I hope that the people who come to see the performances will get as much fun and enjoyment from watching them as we are having as we work through the rehearsals.

Carol Lovett



Our Previous Production

I have had two pieces sent to me about *Festen*, I thought you might like to read them both.

Festen

Going to the theatre to see a play which is new to you but whose somewhat negative reputation has preceded it can feel like a daunting undertaking. It would be fair to say that a Danish drama concerning child abuse and incest might not have been my first choice as regards a night out at the theatre if it had not been included as part of the Sewell Barn's programme. However, all my misconceptions proved to be completely baseless. I found the production profoundly moving as well as intelligent and thought-provoking.

I was impressed by the disciplined and focussed performances of the actors who gave us a fine example of ensemble theatre, something that I always feel is very important within the Sewell Barn Company. Indeed, it would be invidious to pick out any actors as being particularly good because there really was not a weak link in the cast from start to finish. Within a stylish and starkly Scandinavian set (replete with more doors than I have ever seen on the stage before!) the sad and sordid tale of an adult child confronting his abusive father was played out with a breath-taking and direct simplicity. At times the actors had the courage to let silence play its part whilst at others the juxtapositioning of party celebrations and singing served to underline the incipient horror that was incrementally being revealed to us.

Michelle Montague was quite right to include this play in the Sewell Barn season, not just because the issues under discussion should not be ignored but because of its integral artistic excellence. For Miche's fellow directors the bar has now been set very high for the rest of the season.

Carole Lovett

And another view

I saw this show on its opening night. I'm delighted to report that my enthusiastic urging to see it was, in my opinion, wholly justified: it was a startlingly impressive show.

First, a few comments from other audience members:

"I would like to publicly congratulate Michelle and the cast and crew of *Festen*. I saw the production yesterday and I can truly say it is a most engaging and atmospheric performance. The language was at times a bit 'strong' but that was not a problem. I felt involved in the ghastly revelations at what, on the face of it, was a happy dinner party celebration. The audience were all equally enthralled, there was the occasional short sharp intake of breath which convinced me they also were involved with the dysfunctional family. Comments during the interval and after the performance were among the most enthusiastic I have ever heard."

"Awesome production: loved the Michael Douglas charm of the father, superb acting from every character, a complex set of characters and perspectives brilliantly portrayed. They captured all the emotional tension; loved the 'silent scene' and very clever use of the limited space, thoroughly enjoyable night out and one which will be remembered for a long time."

"Amazingly successful, engaging production. One audience member said she had seen it at the Theatre Royal a few years ago and our production was just so much more atmospheric!"

"Just back from seeing *Festen*... It was just fantastic, it's left me feeling a bit speechless, the actors are utterly professional to the very end, an absolutely tremendous production as always. Thank you for a great evening."

"Big Congratulations to all the cast of *Festen*, James Thomson, Jesse Kirkbride and all. A brilliantly directed and expertly written piece of theatre. Challenging and direct with distinct and believable characterisation. A breath of fresh air at The Sewell Barn Theatre."

And my favourite review so far, from David Shaw:

"What a play!! What a production!! Brave, corrosive, coruscating. I can't remember being so involved in a production. You were there, weren't you? and frequently wishing you weren't. When they sang that song at the end of act one I felt disgusted, dirty and ashamed.

All the cast were excellent. I particularly liked the maid, her naivety, her freshness, and was so relieved that she gave us a glimmer of hope at the end. Shadows of Casablanca "at least we will have Paris!!" And she was such a contrast to the chef who was malevolently terrific. Faultless, everyone.

And I want to be directed by that woman!!"

And from me?

Well, this is not a light-and-fluffy evening at the theatre. It's dark, emotional and intense. There is strong language, and there are 'adult themes'. But then, if you want light-and-fluffy, there's plenty of chewing-gum entertainment available on the goggle-box.

Every one of the characters was consistent. No matter how much or how little they had to say or do, they remained steadfastly within their creation, never dropping their alter-ego for a moment. Given that the experience of the cast ranges from a teenager to an octogenarian, this was impressive. Every single one of the actors was focused and impressive, and I could mention every single one by name; but I have to especially commend Terry Cant for the strength, charm and vulnerability of an extraordinarily difficult creation; and Matthew Buck for an intense and passionate performance that, at times, literally took my breath away.

The direction of this complex piece was excellent. Working in the confines of the intimate Sewell Barn, which is both a huge benefit and a potentially tricky limitation, the interaction of characters (sometimes with three scenes superimposed over each other) was kept clear and strong. The brave use of silence and discomfort was deeply affecting and effective. The set was elegant and sophisticated without being intrusive. The use of music - both as performed by the cast and as incidental mood-setting - was haunting and atmospheric.

As I've already expressed on Facebook: if either caution or apathy prevented you from seeing this play, it is Your Serious Loss.

Cassie Tillett



Wednesday Performances

Don't forget that if you are in the audience for a Wednesday performance and you show your current membership card at the door, you will receive a free drink voucher for the bar!!



Front of House Workshop

The evening was very well attended and Robert and Jo did a brilliant job of informing us about the very important role of the Front of House staff. Stewards are the first people our audiences see on entering the theatre and it is important that those faces are friendly and welcoming.

It was suggested by some of the stewards that we consider a sash or some form of front of house uniform. The committee will discuss the practicality of this, in the meantime it was requested that stewards and bar staff are smartly dressed and if possible wear something black (we appreciate that this is not always possible ... I for one, possess nothing black!).

Jo has made a new document for checking the fire exits and extinguishers. We all had great fun trying it out and it was universally agreed that it made the job so much easier than the old plan which many people found daunting to try to follow!!!

There will be a check list of duties for stewards which will be kept behind the box office desk and one for bar staff to be kept behind the bar. If you are front of house, please read the list, to keep up with current developments ... what is required of us is always changing!!!

It would be most helpful to Jane (our Front of House Manager) if all stewards could let her have their email address and/or phone number as often a Christian name appears on the list and Jane is not



sure who it is. It would also make it possible for her to contact someone if there is a gap to be filled at the last minute. (Jane's email: bernardpage@ntlworld.com)

In all, the evening was very successful and informative. Our thanks to Robert and for Jo their organisation.

Jill Fuller

Company News

Prompts

Although we no longer have a prompter at our performances, we do still need people at rehearsals. Peter Wood organises a rota for this and would very much like to hear from you if you could spare an evening occasionally to sit in on a rehearsal. Peter can be contacted on tel: 01508 538678

or email: peterdwood@hotmail.com

Please support the Barn in this way if you can. It is also a great way to get to know a few more people.

Workshop:

December 11th 7.30 pm at the Barn

"So, what did you have for breakfast?" – building your character's back story

"Always work from the inside out; if you work from the outside in, all you have is a dry husk." - Meryl Streep.

Ever thought about how to bring your characters to life? This workshop will look at some fun ways to think about a character's back story and build depth and interest.

Do you sometimes go to the theatre and say, "Well that was OK, the story was good but the characters didn't really grab me"? That might be because you are just seeing the actors say the words and act out the emotions they are supposed to be feeling at that moment.

Another time you might say "Those characters were really three-dimensional" – but that isn't just down to good writing. You're seeing more than just the words on a page or the situation presented to you. You are understanding what led to the action and what has made the characters who they are.

So where did your character come from? What experiences have made them the person they are at the time of the play? What do they care about? And what were they doing just before they came on stage?

Even if you don't act yourself it will be a fun evening and will give you some insight into what goes on behind the scenes. There'll be some games, some exercises and the chance to work on text, so the next time a director asks you'll be able to say "I know what I had for breakfast!"

John Holden

Please let John (jaholden@barbersfarm.fsnet.co.uk) or Michelle Montague

(michelle.montague1@ntlworld.com) know if you are intending to attend the workshop.

Next newsletter

The next newsletter will be due to go out between Christmas and New Year. If you have anything to be included, please let me have it by December 14th. Sorry it has to be so early but it is a busy time..

Many thanks

Jill

What else is on in the Area?

The Maddermarket Theatre:

'The Seagull' by Anton Chekhov: November 21st – December 1st Time: 7.30pm; also matinée December 1st at 2.30 pm.

Norfolk Contemporary Craft Society's 2013 exhibition.

On 22nd November, 6.00 – 8.00 pm, at The Hostry, Norwich Cathedral.

NCCS President Laurel, Lady Walpole will open the second annual exhibition to be held at the Hostry.

Members of the Society mix both the traditional and contemporary to produce their crafts.

You will be able to meet them this evening.

An invitation to the Preview is sent with this newsletter.

The exhibition runs from 22nd November - 1st December 2013

Monday – Saturday 9.30 – 4.30. Sunday 12 – 3.00pm

