

GUILD NEWS

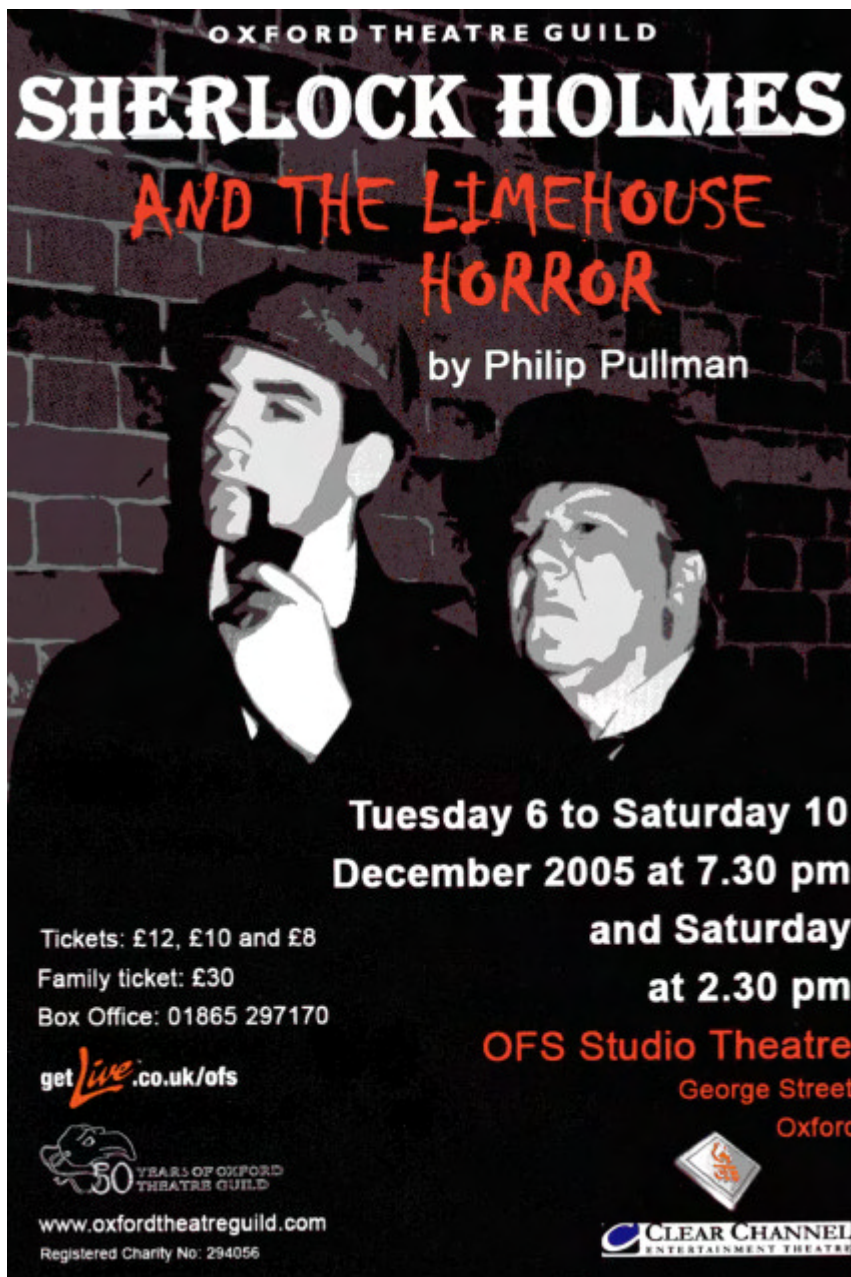
★★★ The Newsletter of the Oxford Theatre Guild ★★★

November / December 2005
60p (€0.88 / \$1.03)



IT'S A *RAT*-TLINGLY GOOD *TAIL* AT THE OFS

CHRISTMAS FAST APPROACHES, LIKE a runaway train full of presents and elves, and the Guild's Christmas production is speeding along with it. Local (and award-winning international) author Philip Pullman wrote the tale of *Sherlock Holmes and the Limehouse Horror* as an affectionate spoofodrama of the classic Conan Doyle sequence. Director Jackie Keirs is marching the cast through their paces, costumes are being gathered, and giant rats are being irritated with a pointy stick for life-like sound effects. And on Tuesday night, the author himself will be there for a question and answer session! So deer-stalk on down to the OFS for a pipe-smokin' production!



OXFORD THEATRE GUILD
**SHERLOCK HOLMES
AND THE LIMEHOUSE
HORROR**
by Philip Pullman

**Tuesday 6 to Saturday 10
December 2005 at 7.30 pm
and Saturday
at 2.30 pm**

Tickets: £12, £10 and £8
Family ticket: £30
Box Office: 01865 297170

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THEATRE GUILD

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OFS Studio Theatre
George Street
Oxford

**CLEAR CHANNEL
ENTERTAINMENT THEATRE**

ALSO WITH THIS ISSUE OF GUILD NEWS you'll find a number of flyers for the show – please use them if you can to publicise the show wherever you can – help us to make the show as much of a success as possible! THANKS!

SEE INSIDE FOR REVIEWS OF TRUTH OR DARE AND ALL THE LATEST PERFORMANCES NEWS...

Review Record

Truth or Dare by Mike Coleman, directed by **Aldyth Thompson**, 1st to 6th November 2005, O'Reilly Theatre, Keble College.

WHAT THE PAPERS (BOTH REAL AND VIRTUAL) SAID...

DO YOU LIKE GOING TO OLD SCHOOL and college reunions? Or do you avoid them like the plague?

Either way, Mike Coleman's play *Truth or Dare* will certainly focus your mind on the subject. The plot follows three couples in their fifties, who meet up again for the first time since they left university 30 years before. As students, they were practicably inseparable. The reunion is to be a themed event: everyone is required to dress as they did at university, and appropriate student food is served – spag bog, of course, with the spaghetti dyed bright blue.

When that dish appeared on the table, several members of the first-night audience laughed loudly in recognition. They continued to laugh, but sometimes more uneasily, as events unfolded. For the long, embarrassing pauses (well observed by director Aldyth Thompson) that punctuate early exchanges between the three couples soon give way to downright rows, and revelations about who slept with who in those far off days. "The self-fulfilment, it's all coming back," announces rather mousy-seeming Ruth.



◀ Colin Macnee, Barbara Neville and Steve Wright in *pensive air* (photo: Mark Brome)

So far, so predictable. But what about Maggie, the crisply bossy lady who is running the reunion? Why do her expressions range from the faintly amused, to the supercilious, to the downright hostile? Suffice it to say that *Truth or Dare* moves from well-worn early Ayckbourn territory into something more sinister.

**The
Oxford
Times**

The cast of this Oxford Theatre Guild production all deliver convincing performances, although on opening night more projection was sometimes required. Particularly memorable are Helen Taylor's enigmatic Maggie, and Joe Kenneway's defensive and humourless Robert – he was known as Red Robbo at university, but now he drives a 4 x 4 and runs a chain of clothing shops. Cue swipes about his employment of Far Eastern sweatshop labour.



◀ Helen Taylor and Joe Kenneway (photo: Mark Brome)

But there's good work too, from Colin Macnee, Barbara Neville, Cathy Oakes, Steve Wright, and Louise Jones. Aside from sex and drugs, what else concerned these couples in their university days? The War (Vietnam) and the American President (Nixon), says playwright Coleman. And that's the really sobering thought that you take away from this play. **Giles Woodforde**

Theatre- World Internet Magazine

What happens when a group of old university friends encounter each other again in mysterious circumstances after thirty years? As you might expect, old passions resurface, secrets are outed and they remember why they had organised a reunion before. Perhaps not the most original premise, but Mike Coleman's new work deals well with complex issues about memory and identity, spoiled only by a Priestley-esque descent into melodrama and supernatural intervention. This entertaining ensemble piece from an accomplished cast has some great one-liners and is worth seeing for its intriguing middle section alone. Ultimately, however, more could have been made of the play central preoccupations had a different course been pursued.

Truth or Dare is set over the course of one evening, during which five old university friends (along with the daughter of one) arrive at an old cottage, having received an invitation and unaware that the others would be there. The set is a simple representation of a living/dining room but achieves the rare distinction of using the O'Reilly space well. The theatre has a very large stage proportionate to its size as a venue and



◀ Steve Wright and Cathy Oakes (photo: Mark Brome)

productions generally struggle to fill it adequately. The Oxford Theatre Guild also manages to create a realistic and inviting living space by avoiding a problem that persistently dogs student productions: that of appropriating college furniture to supply a production's props. Use of the balcony for an alternative bedroom set is effective as we feel that we are getting a slightly sordid glimpse into private affairs. Tony and Robert, once inseparable, have grown into the antitheses of each other. Robert sees Tony as the eternal student who needs to move on; Tony struggles to come to terms with the ultimate sell-out of his idol. On the surface, Ruth and Nikki play the dutiful wives, but it soon becomes apparent that all are to one degree or another unhappy and frustrated, as jokes about cheap lager, unwashed plates and copious amounts of sex and drugs give way to insults and the dredging up of unwanted memories. Stand out performances include that of Steve (Steve Wright) as the ageing Lothario whose acute perception still succumbs to the temptation of denial and self-justification, and Cathy Oakes as the shrill alcoholic "beamer beaver" (one cannot help but be reminded of Ange in *Abigail's Party*, a similar drinks party from hell). However, the cast fail to sustain momentum at moments of crisis and this partly contributes to the unsatisfactory denouement.



◀ Louise Jones (photo: Mark Brome)

The production is at its best during the dinner scene where traditional table etiquette is ignored and sex, politics and religion are the staples of an increasingly drunken conversation. Their reminiscences about their student days are some of the funniest dialogue in the play (although delivery was occasionally disturbed by the odd first-night fluffed line), while their clichéd glorification of the swinging sixties is thrown into relief by the voice of the post-hippie generation, Jade. Through her eyes we see the artificiality of their memories as she shoots down their idealised truisms about the past; after listening to them discourse on Lennon "Imagine" and its symbolism of an optimism and hope peculiar to their generation, Jade's laconic observation that the song was a hit from the seventies raises a laugh but forces them and us to admit that they have collective false memory syndrome. Robert's awkward mention of the old joke 'if you can remember the sixties then you weren't there' puts the play's position squarely; it is an examination of our re-imaginings of the past, and the way we use the past as a tool for self-justification in the present.



◀ Barbara Neville and Colin Macnee (photo: Mark Brome)

In the play's last scene, after the recriminations and drunken honesty of the dinner, the role of the Maggie, the mysterious housekeeper, is revealed and the play tackles the wider theme of responsibility and consequence. Maggie has brought them together to confront them with their sexual and force them to realise the significance of the actions they lightly dismissed under the blanket of free love. This is the play's real weakness; it cannot resist spelling out its messages for us. With Jade playing devil's advocate and the over-consumption of Liebfraumilch leading to hasty words, the reunited friends soon show us their true colours. In due course, the characters' hypocrisy and ignorant selves emerge organically from their dinner table discussions, which are very well structured. By contrast with the dramatic subtlety of this scene, the eventual catalogue of sexual misdemeanours and bed-hopping seems like overkill.

The tight structure and unobtrusively realistic dialogue



Joe Kenneway and Cathy Oakes (photo: Mark Brome)

keep it highly watchable throughout and it provides thought provoking insight into our manipulation of our own (collective and individual) pasts to justify our present. Comparisons with Priestley's *An Inspector Calls* are perhaps inevitable but, that aside, this is a play that demands attention.

Theatre Review



Joe Kenneway and Cathy Oakes (photo: Mark Brome)

Programme
Backstage
Front of House

Joe Kenneway
Stephen Ashworth
Members of the Guild

Cast:
Maggie
Tony
Ruth
Robert
Nikki
Steve
Jade

Helen Taylor
Colin Macnee
Barbara Neville
Joe Kenneway
Cathy Oakes
Steve Wright
Louise Jones



Helen Taylor (photo: Mark Brome)



Steve Wright and Louise Jones (photo: Mark Brome)

Credits

Crew:

Director
Production Manager
Lighting
Sound
Props and set
Costumes
FoH Manager
Publicity design and
photography
Publicity

Aldyth Thompson
Zoe Robson
David Long, Matt Boulton
Harry Nixon
Ray Dennehy
Helen Wilcox
Kevin Elliot
Mark Brome

Rainbow Calvert, James
Norris Keiller



Joe Kenneway, Barbara Neville, Cathy Oakes and Colin Macnee (photo: Mark Brome)

Work in Progress

Christmas 2005

Sherlock Holmes and the Limehouse Horror by Philip Pullman, directed by **Jackie Keirs**, 6th to 10th December 2005, The Old Fire Station Theatre, Oxford.

Philip Pullman's tale of vilest villainy, cunning contrivances, multiple mannequins and a rampaging rodent will receive its first amateur production as the Guild's December show at the OFS. Will the world's most famous sleuth foil Moriarty's devilish scheme?

Crew:

Director

Jackie Keirs

Assistant director

Kate Belcher

Production manager

Felicity Peacock

Stage manager

Gareth Morris

Sound effects

Bill Moulford

Cast:

Sherlock Holmes

Adrian Porter

Doctor Watson

Yorick Wilks

Mrs Hudson

Sheila McKean

Miss Murray /

Alice Fearn

Kate Moriarty

Colonel Moran /

David Thurston

Giant Rat

Inspector Lestrade

Roger Dalrymple

Sir Henry Murray

Alan Bailey

Reichenbach /

Joseph Adams

Professor Moriarty

Luckett

Graham Cook

Easter 2006 production



Lady Windermere's Fan by Oscar Wilde, to be directed by **Peter Motley**, 11th to 15th April 2006, The Playhouse, Oxford. As Peter writes: "Take a mysterious woman with a past. Add the young Lady Windermere, whose reputation is in jeopardy. Throw in a dashing society rake who 'can resist everything except temptation'.

Decorate with layers of witty epigrams... This is the recipe for one of Oscar Wilde's most brilliant confectations. By turns satirical, cynical and subversive, *Lady Windermere's Fan* combines shrewd social observation with the skill of a master playwright to produce one of the best-loved comedies in the English canon."

And here's the internationally-renowned cut-out and keep audition notice, just as promised last issue...

Lady Windermere's Fan

by Oscar Wilde

Auditions: Tuesday 3rd,
Thursday 5th and Monday
9th January 2006, 7:30 pm

Venue: United Reform
Church Hall, Summertown

Summer 2006 production

The Tempest by William Shakespeare, to be directed by **Colin Macnee**, July 2006, Trinity College Gardens, Oxford. Late-breaking news! This year, we've checked with Creation and Oxford Shakespeare Company to check for clashes and it looks like the all-clear. Watch this space for more news!

Ibsen Year 2006

Next year is the centenary of the death of **Henrik Ibsen**, the playwright regarded by many as the father of modern drama. Many theatrical and other events will take place world-wide to celebrate 'Ibsen Year 2006'. In London in January, for example, the Donmar will present *The Wild Duck*, while the National Theatre and the Riverside Studios will host two lesser-known works: *Pillars of the Community* and *Little Eyolf*, respectively

Remarkably, in its 50-year history the Guild has never presented an Ibsen play. Next year would be an ideal time to do so. The Playhouse slot is already taken by *Lady Windermere's Fan*. Our Henrik is not really the summery outdoor type, nor is he a purveyor of seasonal fun for children of all ages. That leaves the autumn slot. Potential directors might like to consider offering something by the Norwegian master for Autumn 2006. Note that we are not suggesting that an Ibsen is compulsory; far from it, but the time does seem ripe.

You might want to direct one of the best-known classics such as *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, or *Hedda Gabler* – all plays noted for their powerful roles for women. Alternatively, you may think the autumn slot is best suited to the likes of *An Enemy of the People* or *The Master Builder*. Whatever your taste, why not give it some thought?

Fighting for a Place

Aldyth Thompson, director of just-completed *Truth or Dare*, headed off to the south-west for a week-long course in stage combat. Here she tells us of her experiences, and provides an answer to that age-old question: "To beat, or not to beat..."

IT WAS APRIL OF THIS YEAR WHEN I travelled down to Bristol during my school holidays in order to take a course in Stage Combat. I'd found the course on the Internet and decided it was about time, as a Drama teacher, that I found out a bit about Stage fighting skills. I had reservations about going on a course that would use skills I had no idea whether I possessed or not.

The course was a five day intensive series of sessions with the aim of passing the BADC Foundation Level of Stage Combat. Run by 'Circus Maniacs' of Bristol, the course tutor was Kate Waters; some may recognise her name as Fight Director for 'Creation Theatre's Romeo and Juliet last year. Starting off gently we got to know each other before spending what seemed like the whole of the next four days in the fencing 'on-guard' position; my knees may never be the same again!

I would regard myself as averagely fit – I walk, cycle and go to the gym... sometimes! But by day three I had aches on my aches and felt like I'd been in a full scale fight instead of a stage fight! We spent six hours each day painstakingly putting together the moves for two unarmed and armed combat sequences. Having tried a number of different weapons on the first day, we decided as a group that we would use quarterstaves for our armed fight.

The time went really quickly despite the aches and pains and by Thursday we were quietly confident about our exam on Friday afternoon. That was when Kate showed us how our routine should really look. She made it seem so much more real than we had been doing and at that point we felt a little silly for being so complacent. However, she explained that this was where acting skills rather than fight techniques came into play and we practised non-stop until our moves did look more natural and convincing.

I will never forget the experience of those five days spent punching, kicking, slapping and pulling people all

over the place. A great release of tension or anger, it was also a calming and focused atmosphere. I did pass the exam and our examiner was a lovely man who shared some of his expertise with us before we finished the course.

I am extremely grateful to Oxford Theatre Guild for funding me on this course, which has not only enriched my Drama teaching and my Directing but has also had a profound influence on my life in general. I hope to go on a course to do the next BADC level at some point next year and would recommend it to anyone interested in acting or directing fight scenes. Thanks again to OTG for their support.

Aldyth Thompson

Committee News

Optical media news: the fantastic DVD of the Guild Archive is still available – FREE to members. To get your copy, please contact Felicity Peacock, but note – it's a PC DVD rather than a TV DVD, so you'll need a Windows monstrosity to play it.

Training directors news: this is an ongoing initiative, to increase the number of directors available to the Guild. Given the flurry of activities required for *Truth or Dare* and *Sherlock Holmes* – we've not had much time to think about this one, but it's high up on the agenda. Watch this space for more news as it arrives...

Exchange companies news: Estelle Buckridge writes: "I've just got the details from our Australian exchange group for a performance in Oxford on Wednesday, 4th of January. They're called the Midnite Youth Theatre Company, and they're based in Perth. They're performing *The Trial of Thomas Cranmer* in the Oxford University Church (St. Mary's, on the High Street). The Midnite Artistic Director, Tony Howes, says that this will be the first tour performance of the play, which had its world premiere in the church in 1956!"

AGM news: don't forget, the Guild equivalent of the Trades Union Congress will be held on the provisional date of Wednesday 26th April 2006 at the Summertown URC. It's your chance to get in an oar about running the Guild, a chance to sack the committee, and a chance to eat too much cheese than can be good for you. It's the best forum for all those burning issues, and also for anyone wanting to stand for a committee post. So make a note in your diaries, and claim your democratic right have a say in the running of the Guild, brothers and sisters. What about the workers? Everybody out!

Classifieds

Still Wanted

Stuff for Guild News: bring out those articles, give 'em a dust off, and bung 'em in an envelope to the Guild News editorial team. We'll make sure they get a good home somewhere in the hallowed pages of this august publication...

Future Attractions

WORKSHOP ROUND-UP

WOULD YOU LIKE TO EXPAND YOUR theatrical skills? The WOT Committee is currently planning workshops for 2006. We usually schedule 8 workshops during the year, avoiding the summer and Christmas periods. The Committee currently has seven members, and we would like to recruit another person onto it who could help plan and organise one or two workshops each year. We aim for the WOT Committee to represent a selection of drama groups across Oxfordshire and, we hope, a range of interests. Would you like to volunteer, or suggest someone to ask? The present WOT Committee members are as follows:

Susi Dalton (also on the ODN Committee) – Northmoor Players, Kingston Bagpuize Drama Group

- Terry Gallager – Banbury Cross Players
- Sue Haffenden – Charlbury ADS
- Julie Kedward – Old Gaol Theatre Company
- Elizabeth Kirkham – St Peters Players, OTG
- Sheila McKean – Domino Players, OTG
- Felicity Peacock – OTG

Workshops planned for 2006 include:

- Darren Ormondy (an ex-member of OTG; played Bottom in Creation's *Midsummer Night's Dream* this summer): "Preparing for a role". To be held March 18th, 2006, to be confirmed.
- Anita Wright: "Read through to run through"
- Stephen North: "Acting for the small screen compared to acting for the stage"
- A Director's workshop with a member of the Creation team
- A master class run by Creation based on one of their summer 2006 productions
- Jan Russell: "Crowds and Chorus Movement"

(postponed from 2005)

- Sue Haffenden: Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* from page to stage (postponed from Nov 2005)
- Using singing to develop your Voice - Using African polyphony, rhythm etc with a leader from Zapmama

Watch out for further details in Guild News and via Guild emails. Any suggestions or offers for future workshops will be gratefully received by Felicity on behalf of the WOT Committee!

EXTRA WORKSHOPS: the alliance with the Oxford Playhouse continues, from time to time generating special offers for members to attend the educational workshops or other events run by the Playhouse. These are often given at short notice, and therefore e-mailed to members.

Booking forms for each workshop will be circulated with Guild News, or can be obtained direct from Felicity. If you have an idea for a workshop that you'd like to lead or participate in or a topic that a workshop might cover, please do contact Felicity.

If you're not on the Guild e-mailing list and would like to receive notification by email of events, requests for actors from other groups, or special offers, etc, please e-mail Felicity (details on the back page) and ask to be added to the email list. If you currently receive such emails and would prefer not to, please let Felicity know and your name will immediately be removed from the list.

A REMINDER OF GUILD GRANTS TO MEMBERS FOR WORKSHOPS

If you want to improve your skills in a particular technical area, you can apply for a grant to cover the cost of the workshop fee. It would be particularly useful to extend the number of members able to help with lighting, sound or make-up, so if you are interested please contact Felicity Peacock, our Workshops Rep (details on the back page).

WOT is supported by OTG and ODN

IMMINENT PRODUCTIONS

St Peter's Players: *The Water Babies* by Willis Hall, Wolvercote Village Hall, 24th November to 3rd December 2005 at 7:30 pm, plus a morning performance at 10:30 am and a matinee at 12:30 pm, both on Saturday 3rd December.

Oxford Theatre Guild: *Sherlock Holmes and the Limehouse Horror* by Philip Pullman, the Old Fire Station Theatre, Oxford, 6th to 10th December 2005 at 7:30 pm. Tickets available from The Old Fire Station on 01865 297170.

Tomahawk Productions: *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, the Burton-Taylor Theatre, 13th to 17th December 2005 at 7:30 pm. *Sometimes you get what you wish for...*

London Shakespeare Workout: in association with LSW Prison Project Executive, *An Xmas Salutation*, St Saviour's Church, Knightsbridge. 13th December 2005 from 7:10 pm. Special guest participants Claire Bloom, Gayle Hunnicutt and Janet Suzman. For more details, visit the LSW

web page on <http://www.londonshakespeare.org.uk/Othello2/xmas.htm...>

Abingdon Drama Club: *The Prince and the Mermaid (a pantomime)* by Eileen Bagshaw, Unicorn Theatre, Abingdon, 13th to 14th and 19th to 21st January 2006 at 7:30 pm, plus Saturday matinees 14th, 15th and 21st January.

Abingdon Drama Club: *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, Unicorn Theatre, Abingdon, 29th March to 1st April 2006 at 7:30 pm.



The Oxford Theatre Guild is a registered charity, number 294056. Guild News is published in singular numerical order. Last issues page sequence 1-2-3-5-6-4-7-8 made entire sense if taken in the context that a number is but a label on a concept of quantity. In fact, it's a cipher in the style of Dan Brown (Deception Point, The Da Vinci Code, etc.), and to make it a little fairer, here's a few extra clues. The first four digits 1-2-3-5 are, of course, the first four prime numbers, as well as being almost the first of the Fibonacci series. The initial 1 is missing, wink wink. The sequence 6-4-7-8 is the access code to a locker in a London underground station, in which will be found the ultimate answer to the meaning of existence in a blue Adidas sports bag. The station? That's for you to work out from the clues left liberally scattered about this issue of Guild News... Good hunting and Merry Seasonal Greetings!