

Oxfordshire Drama Network

Newsletter



October 2009

CHAIRMAN'S BULLETIN

Hello everyone!

I am sure you are all back to work and things after our changeable summer although I guarantee that on 1st October we shall be told that this was the driest September since whenever ah well, such is life in England: no wonder we always talk about the weather!

I have seen that there are some super plays and shows coming up on the ODN circuit and I do hope that all the Groups can get together and go to see each others' work.

I went to see *Dr Faustus* recently and was so pleased to see the imaginative set and use of technology in what is a place with Shakespearean style. Young people are really bringing theatre to life with new ideas and I feel it is to be encouraged so "us oldies" can move with the times too. Well done and thank you to ADC for a very thought-provoking evening. (No disrespect to anyone intended!!)

I was very sad to hear that a fellow Actor/Director from my days at Didcot Phoenix had recently passed away. Kevin Tarling was a very special guy with a heart of gold. I shall never forget the fun we had in Pantomime and in the *Lighthouse Keeper's Lunch*. It was so good to see him at the Festival and to present him with one of the prizes for last season's Pantomime competition. I know he will be sadly missed by Didcot and I would like to send, on behalf of the ODN, our condolences and best wishes at this sad time, to his family.

I hope that everyone will send in their forms for the Pantomime Competition and I hope that all ODN contacts are up to date so we are not sending out paperwork and e-mails to people who do not want them anymore?

Lots of luck to anyone who has a show coming up soon and I hope to be able to see some of them.

Susi

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- Acting Skills course: a personal view
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ODN QUIZ NIGHT

23rd OCTOBER at 7.30pm

DIDCOT CIVIC HALL

Teams of four people

£5 per person includes
ploughman's meal

Entry form on page 4

Deadline for December issue
November 17. Contributions
to Carol Evans,
beagrove@btinternet.com

EDITOR'S NOTES

It's autumn, everyone's back at work, the kids have gone back to school and the amdram circuit is beginning to buzz.

Just look over the next few pages and you'll see that the run-up to Christmas is packed with some great drama productions. Oxfordshire is a huge county and it may seem a long trek from, say, Sonning Common at the southernmost tip to Charlbury in the north, but visiting other groups is always worthwhile. Apart from enjoying the show, you often go home with good ideas for your own society.

Also in this newsletter is a thoroughly readable and enjoyable account of Angela Myers' experiences at the NODA Acting Skills course she attended this summer. Angela was the winner of this year's ODN Bursary and, judging by her enthusiastic article, a worthy recipient.

Sally Lacey of the Kingston Bagpuize Drama Group has also written an amusing tale of how this small village and its residents spent several weeks over the summer in the movie business.

There are two items I need to plug. The first is the ODN's annual quiz night which is being organised this year by Didcot Phoenix Drama Group on October 23 at Didcot Civic Hall. The entry form is on page 4.

The second is the annual Panto/Children's Play Competition. This popular event really is a labour of love for the ODN team of judges who get to see a huge number of seasonal offerings from all over the county. The winner receives a shield which is presented at the AGM in March and there's also a special adjudicators' prize. The entry form is on page 6.

A word about play reviews: there are none in this issue – because I didn't receive any. Any member group of the ODN can ask to have its production reviewed and one of the ODN review team (if available) will be assigned the task – just contact Susi Dalton; details on the Contact List at the end of this newsletter. However, reviews are accepted from anybody, i.e. not necessarily from the 'pool,' provided they are independent and unbiased.

The next newsletter will be published on December 1. The deadline for contributions is **November 17**. I look forward to receiving your articles, letters, previews, reviews or anything else of interest..

Carol Evans

AT A GLANCE (further details elsewhere in newsletter)

OCTOBER

- 8-10 **Woodcote Amateur Dramatic Society**
Good Deeds, Deadly Deeds, a murder mystery
- 14-17 **Compton Players**
The Unexpected Guest
- 14-17 **Sinodun Players**
Separate Tables
- 20-24 **Henley Players**
The Vortex
- 28-31 **Oxford Theatre Guild**
The American Pilot

NOVEMBER

- 4-6 **The Domino Players**
A Tale of Two Cities
- 4-7 **Wantage Stage Musical Company**
Annie Get Your Gun
- 12-14 **Faringdon Dramatic Society**
Our Town
- 20-21 **Chiltern Players**
Ancient Lights
- 23-28 **Oxford Operatic Society**
My Fair Lady
- 24-28 **Goring Gap Players**
Star Quality
- 27-28 **Chiltern Players**
Ancient Lights
- 26-28 **Kingston Bagpuize Drama Group**
A Brief Encounter with Noel Coward
- 26-28 **Charlbury Amateur Dramatic Society**
Cinderella

DECEMBER

- 2-5 **St Peter's Players**
Little Red Riding Hood
- 4-6 **Thame Players**
Toad of Toad Hall
- 9-13 **Thame Players**
Toad of Toad Hall
- 11-12 **Yarnton Amateur Players**
Aladdin

JANUARY

- 21-23 **ACTS**
Funny Money

AUDITION NOTICE

Oxford Theatre Guild: *Antigone* by Jean Anouilh directed by Jane Bolam to be staged at Oxford Playhouse in March 2010. Open auditions to be held early November. Full details on OTG's website, www.oxfordtheatreguild.com or contact Joanna Matthews on joanna.matthews@oxfordtheatreguild.com, 01865 376478. Auditions are normally held in Summertown, North Oxford.

NODA BURSARY ACTING SKILLS SUMMER SCHOOL

THE TRUE ART OF ACTING by Angela Myers

When Susi Dalton phoned me earlier this year to inform me that my application for the one-week bursary for attendance on the NODA 'Acting Skills' course had been successful, I could hardly believe my luck! My first response was that that I should pass on my good fortune to someone younger in the amateur dramatics arena – someone for whom the course would, perhaps, be more advantageous. However, I had Susi to contend with, and with her encouragement ("it's not going to be all fun and games you know, you've got to write a piece about your experiences there!") I decided to allow myself the gleeful anticipation of attending this course.

How glad I am that I did! By the end of the course, under the supervision of the charismatic Giles Foreman (actor and director of Caravanserai Productions in London), myself and the rest of the group (16 in all) were all agreed that we had experienced one of the most interesting and informative weeks of our lives.

First of all there were, of course, the articulation exercises. So far, so good, I thought. I can do this, even though I am one of the oldest ones here. Little did I realise the extent of the VERY rigorous, aerobic 'warm-ups' that followed. Still, I patted myself on the back when I realised that I was somehow managing to keep up (I lost half a stone in one week - really!).

"No. No. No. You're still acting. Do it again!"

Next - on to the theory of performance. We were asked, in turn, to go to the front and perform a piece. "No", Giles would say, "You're acting – do it again". Bemused glances all round. More attempts. "No, no, no – you're still acting. Do it again!" After several attempts, we

were informed that we must find our ability to be *truthful*, and *not to act*, demonstrate, show or impose, but to *feel* the authenticity of our role. Emotions did not play a part. How to do this?

One way in which we were taught how to find this truth and feeling within ourselves involved what, to most of us, was an extremely revealing and painful exercise – the 'relationship exercise'. We had to think of a situation in the past where we had not said to someone what we had *actually wanted* to say and to draw on real-life experiences, perhaps in settling an issue which bothered us, maybe even from many years ago. We were all very surprised and moved when carrying out our various scenarios. There was no script (just a brief outline of the story having been told, beforehand to our partner in the scene).

We had to find our ability to be truthful and not to act, but to feel the authenticity of our role

The dialogue was completely spontaneous. It was amazing how the *truth* of those moments came out and affected us all. We did NOT act. We became completely involved in our scene - and the results were literally breathtaking. I am happy to say that even Giles was impressed with us, saying that he was on the 'edge of his seat', and that each and every one of these scenes could be made into amazing films. Giles somehow gave us the ability to have trust in each other ("If anyone here judges anyone else, they're out the door," he emphasised.) This all helped us to 'leave ourselves alone'.

Thorough script analysis was also advocated in order to empathise with the character's story. Find anything and everything that will help stimulate

the creation of the character, the time he was living in, where he was living, i.e. was it set in Russia (cold, harsh)? Was there a welfare state? What was the code of conduct? Compile a scrap book, cutting out images of the various characters and objects (this will help to create an atmosphere of the setting, the circumstances and your relationship with them.) If necessary, change the alignment of your spine, your stance, to fit the character. You could perhaps think of the quality/essence of a particular creature (tiger, snake, bird, cuddly bear, etc). Your story is in the way you walk and the audience will make an observation on your character by your physicality – before you've even opened your mouth!

Find the biography of the author, also the politics of the time he lived in, the location, why the play is called what it is called. Read it four or five times before you impose on the character. Although these are all practical facts, they will help you find the 'juice' or the feeling of a character. You can target your character with an essence, remembering that there are inner and outer characteristics of that person, ascribing certain adjectives to them and finding their *truth*. (Read Susan Batson's 'Truth' – can get this from Amazon). Emotions are not to be worked - 'less is more!'

All this may sound as though we've 'done it all before'. However, when you really *delve* into the part, finding out who they are, what they want, what is in their way, how they get it – when you've really done your homework (and your aerobic exercises!) then you can seek the sensations, without acting. You can be adventurous as an artist and **HAVE FUN!!**

(Submitted by a very grateful-to-ODN-member. Angela Myers, Oxford Theatre Guild)

ODN QUIZ 2009

Hosted by Didcot Phoenix Drama Group
at
Didcot Civic Hall

Friday 23rd October 7.30pm

TEAM ENTRY DETAILS

Teams of 4 people
Multiple teams from the same Drama Group allowed
(Individuals wishing to come can join a team on the night)

Submit entry form (found below and on ODN website) to Fraser Norton (fnorton@rim.com) by
Friday, 9th October

Advanced payment by cheque made payable to "Didcot Phoenix Drama Group" can be sent to
Fraser Norton, 102 Lydalls Road, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 7DU
or
Pay at the door with cash or cheque

PRICES

£5 per team member entry fee (cost covers Ploughman's meal & quiz entry)
There will be a bar open all evening operated by the Civic Hall

ODN QUIZ 2009 – ENTRY FORM

Friday 23rd October 2009, 7.30pm at Didcot Civic Hall

Name of Drama Group.....

Number of teams.....

Total Number of Team Members.....
(Max 4 per team)

Total Amount Payable.....
(£5 per team member)

Advanced payment can be made by cheque payable to "Didcot Phoenix Drama Group". Please send cheques and entry form to Fraser Norton, 102 Lydalls Road, Didcot, Oxon, OX11 7DU.

FROM AMATEUR ACTOR TO FILM STAR (I WISH!)

ON LOCATION IN KINGSTON BAGPUIZE WITH SALLY LACEY

I'm going to be a film star! Well, not quite, in fact I may well end up on the cutting room floor but I have now acted in a film.

How did that happen? Well, quite remarkably, on my doorstep. I am a member of Kingston Bagpuize Drama Group and a man called Guy Browning (former *Guardian* columnist, humorist and Radio 4 contributor) lives in the village and decided to make a film.

He had written the script for a romantic comedy (*The Husband Obedience Trials*) and decided the only way for him to direct it was to finance it on a budget, using the Kingston villagers as his main resource.

Professional actors were hired for the main roles but interested villagers and members of village groups were encouraged to audition for 'bit' parts.

I was given the role of 'Po-faced Feminist' – yes, I know I'm hardly going to be the next Gwyneth Paltrow, but it's a start (and probably, end!) to my film career.

The village really got behind the film. The WI provided the catering for the cast and professional camera crew, villagers offered accommodation in their homes for those who needed it and the owner of Kingston House kindly agreed that it could be used as the main location for the film.

Villagers acted as 'runners' for the film crew, worked on continuity, provided transport, acted as extras, took charge of hair, make-up and costumes – in fact it was a magnificent effort and enabled the film to be made for a fraction of the normal budget for a movie.

And how did my filming go? Well, it was a very odd feeling. I am used to being on a stage, knowing my character thoroughly, feeling familiar with the script, being comfortable. And now here I was standing in the middle of a field, surrounded by a crowd of extras, with my two lines (yes, TWO whole lines) of dialogue and a camera staring me in the face.

One of the camera crew was running round and round the field pretending to be twelve people in fancy dress, undertaking one of the 'Husband Obedience Trials' at the village fete.

Do I project my lines, do I try to act natural, do I look at the camera? It took lots of encouragement from the director and four takes for my two lines. I think I was probably terrible. I certainly felt terrified.

So if *The Husband Obedience Trials* finds a commercial distributor and actually makes it into the cinema next year, look out for my name in lights (well, more likely in very small type at the end of the credits). It was a good experience but somehow I don't think Hollywood beckons.

Sally Lacey

PROPS ALERT! PROPS ALERT!

CHILTERN PLAYERS need a papier-mâché/man-made goose, plucked and oven-ready, as a prop for their November production of Shelagh Stevenson's *Ancient Lights*.

If anybody has such a bird in their props cupboard, please contact Jill Kendal on 0118 972 2201 or kendalwoodbury@supanet.com.

AUDITIONS – ADVANCE NOTICE

OXFORD THEATRE GUILD auditions are open to all comers. For advance information on the group's four annual productions and forthcoming auditions, email david.guthrie@oxfordtheatreguild.com.

PANTO/CHILDREN'S PLAY COMPETITION 2010

Enter your group or its youngsters into this popular competition. Free entry, fair critiques by ODN team of judges.

Entry form on page 6 of this newsletter

DEADLINE!

FOR DECEMBER ISSUE IS NOVEMBER 17.
SEND YOUR CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDITOR
beagrove@btinternet.com

Panto Competition/Children's Play 2010



Please complete this form and return by 19 December 2009 to:-

Mike Lacey, 41 Poplar Grove, Kennington, Oxford OX1 5QN,

01865 736913

Michael_lacey@talk21.com

Contact name, address, tel.no. email

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Panto/play title.....

Author.....

Performance dates & times

Venue (including address and post code.) If the venue could be difficult to find for people unfamiliar with the area, please also send a map or clear directions on a separate sheet.

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Approximately how many rehearsals will you have on stage?

If there are any physical restraints or limitations (i.e. no side or backstage space, not allowed flashes, etc.) which will affect your production, please list.

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The Judges always try to attend the first night. Please arrange for up to three free tickets to be reserved on the door and one programme. Seats if possible should be towards the front in the centre. If it is not possible for the judges to come that night, you will be informed of the alternative evening.

Judges: Susi Dalton, Mike Lacey, Nancy Becker, Barbara Douglas and Karen Whiffen

There will be no entry fee this year

Groups will receive a critique from the judges and reviews will be published in the Newsletter after the results have been announced at the AGM.

Information about judging criteria can be found at www.oxfordshiredramnetwork.org

Please return entry form by 19th DECEMBER 2009. if your panto is before this date please return form asap

PREVIEWS

If you would like your play reviewed, or if you fancy spending an enjoyable evening watching and then reviewing anything from this stunning list, please contact Susi Dalton (01865 820196, susietal@tesco.net)

WOODCOTE AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY

Good Deeds, Deadly Deeds – a murder mystery by WADS member Karen Foster

Somewhere in England is a small village where everyone knows everything about their neighbours. Or do they? Maybe behind those hollyhocks and net curtains lurk guilty secrets and murky pasts? When a stranger arrives threatening to reveal those secrets, then drastic action is needed. Who will be pushed to the limit and beyond? Come and play detective, interrogate the suspects and solve the crime over a dinner served by singing waiters. There are three performances, each with a different ending. Space is limited so book early.

Where: Woodcote Village Hall
When: October 8, 9 and 10 at 7.30pm
Tickets: £14, must be booked in advance. No door sales. Box office 01491 680556.

COMPTON PLAYERS

The Unexpected Guest by Agatha Christie

When a stranger drives into a ditch in thick fog on a country road, he walks to the nearest house for help – only to find a woman standing over a body of her dead husband with a gun in her hand. It looks like an open and shut murder case, but it soon becomes clear that the dead man's wife may be covering up for someone – but who?

With a houseful of suspects with both the motive and opportunity to commit the murder, this play will lead you through classic Christie twists and turns before the true culprit is revealed.

Where: The Coronation Hall, Compton
When: October 14-17 at 7.30pm
Tickets: £7 (£5 concs). All £5 on Oct 14 preview. Box Office 07767 268634, boxoffice@comptonplayers.co.uk

SINODUN PLAYERS

Separate Tables by Terence Rattigan

There's both despair and hope in this celebrated pair of one-act plays set in a faded genteel hotel in 1950s Bournemouth. The lives of a handful of lonely residents who are common to both plays become intertwined as secrets, lies and past relationships are revealed. Their presence may help or hinder the fragile recovery of a once loving relationship and the surprising deep friendship between two seemingly desperate guests.

This production uses the revised, recently-found Broadway version modified by the author in 1956. The mention of homosexuality would not have been allowed on the British stage in 1954 when the play was first performed in London's West End.

Where: The Corn Exchange, Wallingford
When: October 14 to 17 at 7.45pm
Tickets: £7 Wed, £8 other nights from Box Office, opens Fri & Sat morning, 10-1pm, or phone 01491 825000

HENLEY PLAYERS

The Vortex by Noël Coward

This powerful drama written in 1923 was Coward's first play and launched his career as a playwright and actor. At the time, it caused a considerable stir and Coward had great difficulty getting it passed by the Lord Chamberlain. When he did manage to get it staged, it received critical acclaim as a daring piece of theatre.

It begins as a frothy comedy but as the play progresses, the mood changes. It's a tale of vanity, self-delusion and obsession with youth. There is confrontation between mother and son as the veneer is stripped from their lives but also reconciliation and hope for a better future.

Where: Kenton Theatre, Henley
When: October 20-24 at 8pm
Tickets: Box office, 01491 575698

OXFORD THEATRE GUILD

The American Pilot by David Greig

A US Air Force pilot crashes into a remote valley in a land riven by decades of conflict. Taken in by villagers and held prisoner by a rebel leader, his fate hangs in the balance.

Commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company and first performed by them in 2005, the play is, by turns, lyrical, funny, chilling and poignant. It explores the way the world sees America and the way America sees the world.

Where: The North Wall Arts Centre, Oxford
When: October 28-31 at 8pm, with Sat matinee at 2.30
Tickets: £12 (£8 concs) Box Office, 01865 319450, open Mon-Fri 10-4 (or till curtain-up on performance days) or book online www.thenorthwall.com

THE DOMINO PLAYERS

A Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens

Dickens' classic tale of doomed and selfless love set in the turbulent years before and during the French Revolution.

Where: Lains Barn, Wantage
When: November 4-6 at 7.30pm
Tickets: £8 (£7 conc). See www.dominoplayers.co.uk

WANTAGE STAGE MUSICAL COMPANY

Annie Get your Gun

Block-buster musical by legendary songwriter Irving Berlin based on the book by Herbert and Dorothy Fields. The story of endearing country girl Annie Oakley who rises to fame by outshooting sharpshooter Frank Butler star of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and then falls in love with him.

The score's numerous classic hit songs include *There's No Business Like Show Business*, *Anything You Can Do (I Can Do Better)* and *You Can't Get a Man With A Gun*.

Where: Wantage Civic Hall
When: Nov 4-7 at 7.30pm, Sat matinee at 2.30
Tickets: Call 01235 767509 or 770087 or email info@WantageStageMusical.co.uk . Tickets from Wantage Museum or Bretts Chemist, Grove.

FARINGDON DRAMATIC SOCIETY

Our Town by Thornton Wilder

One of Wilder's two Pulitzer Prize winning plays, this is an affectionate portrait of small town life in his native America and an attempt to put a value on the little events of daily life. The action follows the lives of some of the town's inhabitants over a period of 13 years.

Wilder felt strongly that theatre was limited by the constraints of the typical boxed set and has deliberately pared the set and props to the minimum, relying on the actors to create the atmosphere to convey relationships and emotions. A challenge for the amateur actor.

Where: Faringdon Junior School
When: November 12-14 at 7.30pm
Tickets: £7 & £5 from The Nut Tree, London St, Faringdon, or contact Peter Webster, 01367 240101

CHILTERN PLAYERS

Ancient Lights by Shelagh Stephenson

Three friends meet up after many years – Tom, a self-obsessed American film actor, Bea, a comfortable earth-mother and Kitty, a neurotic TV journalist – with their partners and friends. The play, which contains strong language, takes a wry and very funny look at their past lives, their successes and failures, with a focus on what they have now become.

Where: Peppard Memorial Hall, Rotherfield Peppard
When: November 20/21 and 27/28 at 8pm
Tickets: £7 on the door or phone 0118 972 3628

OXFORD OPERATIC SOCIETY

My Fair Lady by Lerner & Loewe

Timeless musical based on George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*.

Where: Oxford Playhouse
When: November 23-28
Tickets: £12-£17.50 (concs available) from theatre

GORING GAP PLAYERS

Star Quality by Noel Coward adapted by
Christopher Luscombe

A wickedly funny play – Coward's last - is set behind the scenes of a new West End production. Its gallery of unforgettable characters include a temperamental leading lady, ruthless director, jaded old troupers and, caught somewhere among them, an innocent young playwright. Egos become increasingly and hilariously bloody but what emerges from the mayhem is a startling evocation of that most elusive gift of all: star quality. This adaptation was written in 2001 and first performed at Windsor's Theatre Royal.

Where: Morrell Rooms, Streatley
When: November 24-28 at 8pm
Tickets: From Inspirations, Arcade, High Street, Goring or call 01491 873530

KINGSTON BAGPUIZE DRAMA GROUP

A Brief Encounter with Noel Coward

Kingston Bagpuize's 60th anniversary production is a mixture of all things Coward – a bit about the man, his life and his writing. It will feature a performance of *Still Life*, the play on which the classic 1940s film *Brief Encounter* was based and which was one of the first plays the group ever produced.

Saturday night's show will include a professionally catered Celebration Supper to end the group's Diamond Jubilee with a bang.

Where: Southmoor Village Hall
When: Nov 26,27 at 7.30pm, Sat, Nov 28 at 7pm
Tickets: £8 for 26th & 27th from 01865 820375.
Saturday night, £12.50 must be paid for in advance by November 13 from 01865 736913 or email sally.lacey@talk21.com for details.

CHARLBURY AMATEUR DRAMATIC SOCIETY

Cinderella by Stuart Arden & Bob Heather

First of the season's pantomime for family entertainment promises to be great fun.

Where: Charlbury Memorial Hall
When: November 26-28 at 7.30pm with Saturday matinee at 2.30pm
Tickets: Phone 01608 813028 for details.

ST PETER'S PLAYERS

Little Red Riding Hood by Paul Reakes

Traditional family panto to whet the appetite for Christmas. It's Rosie Rumpole's birthday but gifts are thin on the ground this year. Still, there's always Grandma and her regular present of a red riding hood....and this year there's a mysterious handsome stranger in the village too.

But who is he and can he rescue Pantovia – and Rosie - from the clutches of villainous upstart ruler Count de Cash. What's more, will Rosie's mum get through her exercise class without exploding? And will lovesick Gertrude ever find a boyfriend? And what's that strange howling coming from the wood?

Where: Wolvercote Village Hall
When: December 2-5 at 7.30pm with Saturday matinee at 2.30pm
Tickets: £7 (£5 concs) from 01865 556120

THAME PLAYERS

Toad of Toad Hall by A. A. Milne

Where: The Players Theatre, Nelson Street, Thame
When: December 4-6 and 9-13. Weekdays 7.45pm, weekends 2pm and 5.30pm
Tickets: £8 and £7, concs £1 off, Tickets Anywhere, Greyhound Walk, Thame or 01844 217228

YARNTON AMATEUR PLAYERS

Aladdin by tlc Creative

The usual cast of characters take to the stage in this very funny version of a well-loved tale. Throw in some songs, slapstick, silliness and audience participation and you have a wonderful traditional pantomime.

Where: Yarnton Village Hall
When: December 11 & 12 in evening with Saturday matinee
Tickets: Prices and times to be announced. For info, contact Belinda Davis 01865 372917

A.C.T.S.

Funny Money by Ray Cooney

Witty and humorous play by a master of comedy writing.

Where: Aston Village Hall
When: 21-23 January 2010
Tickets from Aston Post Office from December 1