

Issue No 6

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

This is now our 6th Friends' Newsletter and again I must express our gratitude to Jack Clayton for being our Editor and ensuring that it is produced on time.

As well as the new theatre season, we have much to look forward to in 1999. We are having the Spring Friends' meeting on Friday 30 April at 7.30pm. The venue will again be Walberswick Village Hall. There will be news of the new season's plays and players before our guest speaker is introduced. I am delighted to be able to announce that this is to be that very popular regular member of the Company, **Gerry Hinks**. (There is more about Gerry below.) We can promise a splendid evening, so do come along. Don't forget to complete the enclosed form and send it to John Veitch, our efficient and hardworking Treasurer.

On Thursday 24 June we look forward to welcoming all Friends at Westons, the home of Lady Freud. This is our opportunity to meet the company and those actors who are taking part in the first productions, as well as getting together with old and new Friends. More about this later.

At the end of 1998 we had over 460 paid-up Friends, and we hope to increase this number significantly during 1999. Within this Newsletter you will find an invitation to pay the 1999 subscription which falls due on 1 April. Please help us to continue to give practical support to Jill Freud and Company by completing the form promptly and sending it with your cheque to our Treasurer.

Last January, Radio Suffolk invited six representatives to take part in a programme about Southwold, and I was invited to talk about the *Friends of the Suffolk Summer Theatres*: how and when they came about and what we did. The programme was recorded in the Sailors' Reading Room and I also spoke about using the Southwold Railway. Others who took part included the Town Mayor, the Town Recorder, representatives from the lifeboat and Southwold Hospital, and a director of Adnams Brewery. It was transmitted on two subsequent days, so some of you may have heard the programme.

Thank you for your continued support. I'm sure we are all looking forward to another enjoyable and stimulating Summer Theatre season.

Margaret Chadd, Chairman

JILL WRITES

Dear Friends,

We are well into our preparations for the 1999 season and look forward - as we hope you do - to all the plays.

Our main London office was necessarily closed for a month while we moved a mile up the road - a more complicated manoeuvre than you might think - but Tony Falkingham held the fort in Earls Court and we are more or less on course once again.

Later, we face another big move from Walberswick to Brampton with all our equipment, props and scenery. This begins at 10 a.m. on 6th April - helpful volunteers will be welcomed and kept supplied with cups of tea and biscuits.

As for the essential workshop in Southwold - we are still working on it but time is running out. I hope to see you at The Friends' do on April 30th and perhaps we will have more news then.

Jill

Tony Falkingham, the Company's Associate Director, brings us news about plans for

THE 1999 SEASON

A year to go before the millennium and big changes are afoot. In March we begin the long and difficult move from our workshops in Walberswick to temporary premises in Brampton.

Phase one will be to sort the accumulated stock of scenery from eighty-odd plays, the seating rostra and a couple of thousand props; re-house everything we feel we are going to need again and dump the rest. We estimate the job will take five men and a tailgate wagon a week to accomplish. The manoeuvre is made more complicated because our designer has to work out what scenery can be reused from previous years. Then we have to have it transported to the scenery builders in Stowmarket where it is put together with all the new pieces to make the sets for the plays for this season. Then the whole lot has to be shipped back to Maurice's workshop in Walberswick to be painted.

Next year the wardrobe and paint shop will be moved to Brampton so that the whole operation will be on one site once more. Jill has been in training for this by master-minding her own domestic move from Wimpole Street, where she and Clement have lived for twenty years, to a new flat just a mile away. She knows what packing means!

But we will all be in fine fettle by the time the curtain rises at 8.15 on Monday 12th July 1999 on the sixteenth season. And you are in for a treat with the opening play **Sailor Beware** - to see Jill doing the dead ferret business alone is worth the price of the ticket!

We are thrilled to be able to bring you **John Buchan's 39 Steps**, which is less an adaptation of the novel, more a homage to the Alfred Hitchcock film. The ingenious way the journey to Scotland - with its trains, bridges, crofter's cottage and highland castle - is realised will amaze you.

Richard Frost, who for the last two years has given you a lot of laughs with his productions of "Joking Apart" and "Taking Steps", is this year directing **Hindle Wakes**. This was first presented by Miss Horniman, the tea heiress, at her theatre in Manchester, a theatre that was to launch the whole of the repertory movement in Great Britain.

With **Passionate Woman** I am lucky in being able to direct a funny and touching new play by an outstanding woman writer that has a wonderful part for an experienced actress in a setting that marks another first for the company.

Finally *Alister Cameron* who has been in the company many times as an actor returns to repeat the success he had last year with "Shirley Valentine" and "Nobody's Perfect" by directing Alan Ayckbourn's **Man of the Moment**. Just when you thought you had seen everything from the master of comedy he comes up with a marvellous new surprise!

With a new season of lunchtimes at the Crown, children's theatre, a new venture of lunchtime music at the Swan and concerts on Sundays, 1999 promises to be as much of a whirlwind as ever.

Anthony Falkingham

PS: Don't forget Saturday Matinees are now at 5.00pm.

THE SUSPENSION OF DISBELIEF

Reading all the news from Jill of her plans for the coming season stimulated me into musing (if that isn't too inappropriate a word for a few random thoughts) about stage performances.

Any theatrical performance is a form of magic, and Jill Freud and Company have given us many examples of the best kind at Southwold and Aldeburgh. I'm sure we can all quote examples of plays and performances where we were totally captured by events on the stage and, years later, still treasure the memories.

When the event is analysed it is clear that the impact does not come about by chance, but is the result of a conspiracy by the playwright, the director, the actors and the backstage

company members. This is fine in what we know as the legitimate theatre, but audiences are suckers. Quite often, it is long after the event before we realise that we have been conned by some slick piece of show business presentation - be it the work of a stage director, a smooth-tongued salesman, or a conjuror. Let me give you an example of how the audience may be so engrossed in the events on stage that they miss the incongruity of what is put before them.

Forty-five or more years ago my wife and I were invited by an old friend to go to a performance of a pantomime in a nearby English border city. He was the touring director of a Scottish-based company and invited us to go backstage after the show.

It was Cinderella. The matinee house was full and the audience enthusiastic; the star was a well-known Scottish comedian and he was well supported by glamorous dancers and melodious singers.

It was only afterwards, when we were backstage with our friend Alastair, that the light dawned. We had met the cast, toured the back stage facilities and sat quietly with our friend over a cup of tea. He spoke of his job, its highs and lows, and its complexities. He explained that the star had insisted that a particular soprano should be engaged to play the Fairy Godmother because she was so popular with audiences and fitted well into the company. She, in turn, would only sign up to the tour if her husband was also engaged.

The latter had a drink problem which, although it did not affect his performances too adversely, it created a lot of trouble backstage. Anyhow, as I wrote above, the light then dawned.

The audience had been so engrossed in the panto that we had failed to notice the incongruities of the appearances of the husband of the Fairy Godmother. He came on before the interval wearing the kilt, riding a one-wheeled bicycle and playing the glockenspiel which was fixed by some form of harness to his chest. After the interval he made another appearance as the show moved towards the big finale. This time he rode his one-wheeled bicycle and played us a medley of Scottish tunes on the bagpipes. And the audience took it in their stride!

Follow that!

Jack Clayton

FRACTURED ENGLISH - PART THREE

Polish Tourist Brochure: *As for the tripes serves you at the Hotel Monopol, you will be singing its praise to your children as you lie on your deathbed.*

In a Paris hotel lift: *Please leave your values at the front desk.*

Sign at the Concierge's desk in a Greek hotel: *If you consider our help impolite, you should see the Manager.*

Swiss menu: *Our wines leave you nothing to hope for.*

Hong Kong dentist's advert: *Teeth extracted by the latest Methodists.*

Copenhagen airline ticket office notice: *We take your bags and send them in all directions.*

GERRY HINKS

Our speaker on 30 April at Walberswick - subject to availability - will be **Gerry Hinks**. Gerry must be one of the best-known members of the Company. He first came to Southwold in 1993 and has performed here each season since. In 1998 he played Admiral Juddy in *Rookery Nook*, and in other years appeared in *Voyage Round My Father*, *Chilton Hundreds*, *Corpse!* and lots more.

Gerry claims to have been a very late entrant on to the professional stage, although he was a dedicated amateur actor from the age of 12. Before taking up acting professionally, Gerry worked for several airlines on the sales side. He is looking forward to meeting lots of old friends again at Walberswick Village Hall and to joining the Company for his seventh season.

Jay Neill left Jill Freud and Company after two years as production assistant. Especially for Friends, he now writes about his time with the Company and his plans for the future.

A BACKROOM BOY SPEAKS OUT

The actors get the acclaim and the applause. Members of the stage crew get large credits in the programme. The administration staff get . . . a feeling of satisfaction in a job well done. I'm not complaining, by seeking out a career in theatre production I had willingly condemned myself to a life of being an 'unsung hero'.

You are probably asking yourself exactly what being production assistant involves. Please remember to breathe at some point if you are reading this list aloud. The production assistant is dogsbody, typist, barman, cleaner, shoulder to cry on, shoulder to shout at, box office assistant, minder, driver - you name it, we do it.

For 38 weeks in the year the production assistant is tucked up safely in Jill Freud's London flat from where the summer events are plotted. This metropolitan location seems a million miles away from balmy Suffolk nights. However, as winter turns to Spring, Suffolk comes closer and closer until the time comes to load up the entire London office into the back of a Toyota Spacecruiser and rumble up the A12.

Far and away the best part of the Summer is living at Jill Freud's beautiful house in Walberswick. When you are used to commuting for 2 hours to get to work, sauntering to the bottom of the garden in order to start the day is a real bonus. The variety in the job is also a benefit. Administration usually takes up the morning, but the afternoons are a whirl of activity: delivering publicity, setting up the bar, organising the children's shows and so on. When Summer comes round in 1999 I shall sorely miss it.

However, my two years have finally come to an end and I have handed over to the wonderful Carol Carey who I have been lucky enough to have as my right-hand man (woman?) for the past two Summers. I have also reluctantly decided to leave the front line of the arts.

The more technologically minded of you will have noticed the Jill Freud and Company website, which I am pleased to say, is all my own work. Designing websites satisfies my creative instincts in ways that an admin job never will, and so I have started a website design company - **Tilted Halo Website Design**. * I hope to specialise in arts organisations, but suspect that it will be the local businesses that will pay the bills. We shall see! If any Friends reading this suspect they may benefit from my services, might I suggest they take a look at my company website (shameless plug!).

Sitting behind a PC screen all day is great in the winter, but I know that when the sun starts to shine and the days get longer I shall be thinking jealously of you all in Suffolk. Best wishes to all for a splendid season in 1999!

Jay Neill

*NB Jay is now at jay.neill@compellingminds.com

ANOTHER MILLENNIUM BUG

St. Edmunds Church, Southwold plan 200 new kneelers as a millennium project and the Summer Theatre will feature on one. Our Treasurer, John Veitch, took up needlework about five years ago and got the "bug". He has made many cushions and chair covers, and plans to contribute six kneelers to the church. The aim is that each kneeler should feature a different aspect of life in Southwold and John has already completed five, including one for the Red Cross Youth Club.

The design of this one (it shows theatrical masks either side of the familiar theatre logo) was the work of Jay Neill, and John has almost finished stitching it

Presumably the kneelers will go on show at some future time and we will all be able to see the results of the efforts of Southwold needleworkers. Look out for the Southwold Theatre one!

WHAT THE 1999 PRESS RELEASES SAY

Jill faxed to your editor advance information about the coming season as soon as the press releases had been written. So Friends are privileged to read here what they say about the plays of the 1999 season. Full programme details will be found on the insert.

You could almost say that our opening production of **Sailor Beware** is by public request. A delightful and much loved comedy, it made an overnight star of *Peggy Mount* in 1955 and we have had more requests for it over the years than for any other play - we know you will enjoy Henry Hornett and his ferrets, the alarming Emma Hornett and all the shenanigans in the Hornett family the night before the wedding.

Everyone knows **The 39 Steps**, *John Buchan's* wonderful tale of intrigues and espionage. Join Richard Hannay on his adventurous journey to danger; the story will make you sit up and gasp and so will the staging.

Hindle Wakes; it is Wakes week in the northern town of Hindle and Fanny Hawthorn has spent the weekend in Blackpool with a friend - or so she tells her mother. This vivid play of a strong minded girl and families in crisis shocked the Establishment when first produced in 1912 and it can still provoke - and amuse us - today.

A Passionate Woman, the play by *Kay Mellor*, author of the TV series *Band of Gold*, starred *Stephanie Cole* in a long run at the Comedy Theatre in London. Kay takes as her subject Betty, a middle aged mother who somehow has to survive her only son's wedding day - how she does this is not only funny but startling and requires yet another miracle from designer Maurice Rubens.

Ayckbourn's **Man of the Moment** was a joint winner of the Evening Standard Best Comedy Award for 1990. TV presenter Jill Rillington overcomes every imaginable obstacle while trying to film a "fly on the wall" documentary in the Mediterranean but somehow all the most exciting moments happen "off camera". This is one of Ayckbourn's most delightfully comic plays.

WHO ARE THE FRIENDS?

Our mailing list has been brought up to date and now comprises only paid up members and a few people who receive complimentary copies of our newsletter: a total of 483. Naturally most live in Suffolk (313 or 65%), and others live in neighbouring counties (17%) and London (5%). But we also have Friends in Cumbria, Cornwall and Belgium. Wherever you are based, we hope to see you in Southwold and/or Aldeburgh this season.

HAIL AND FAREWELL

Jay Neill, Jill's production assistant for the last two seasons has moved on. He writes about his time with the Company and his plans [elsewhere in this issue]. Jay made many friends during his time with the Company and I'm sure we all wish him well for the future.

His successor, **Carol Carey** (right), is already well known to Friends. She wrote this especially for us.

Carol Carey trained in Musical Theatre at the Guildford School of Acting. Parts played include Lucy in *The Old Bachelor* for The Great Eastern Stage Company; Dorothy in *A Kind of Alaska* for Jill Freud and Company at The Crown; Dawn in *Steaming*; Tove, a Danish au pair in the national tour of *When Did You Last See Your Trousers!*; Dandini in *Cinderella* and Ugly Sister in *Puss In Boots*, both at the Players Theatre, London. She has appeared in Music Hall with Hiss and Boo and was Mother Christmas in their *Sleighrider*.

When she decided to try life on "the other side", she joined Jill Freud and Company as Assistant Administrator and now, after two summers, is to be the Production Assistant (and hopes to carry on Jay's good work).

Carol has also worked as a receptionist, a cleaner, a tea-lady and as Assistant Editor on a trade beauty magazine. Amongst her other claims to fame, she once sang for nearly six hours in the Ladies' loo at the Piccadilly Theatre helping to raise a substantial sum at a Charity Marathon.