

## **Issue No 7 – Autumn 1999**

### **CHAIRMAN'S NOTES**

The prelude to the start of the season began with the April gathering of the Friends at Walberswick, when a full village hall listened to Gerry Hinks tell us about his acting career (see the article on page 3). Gerry is a regular member of the Company and we all enjoyed his presentation and the opportunity to talk and to greet new Friends over refreshments afterwards.

The annual June party at Westons, the home of Lady Freud, took place on a perfect summer's evening when 150 Friends were present to meet our hostess and members of the Company, as well as to enjoy the "goodies" contributed by all the Friends.

The 1999 Theatre season must surely be voted one of the very, very best? As I write this I recall so vividly all the plays, the lunchtime performances and the children's shows, which have contributed to the varied entertainment and enjoyment of the past two months.

Our congratulations must go to Jill and her team. Not only have there been full houses but also the excellence of the productions has been circulated by word of mouth far and wide. It has been good to have seen so many "old" friends return to take part and to have met "new" actors too.

The lunchtime performances at The Crown were brilliantly performed and will be long remembered; particularly "Amber" by those of us who have beach huts!

John Veitch tells me that we now have a very healthy balance and we shall be able to provide certain needs which the Company has identified for the future. We hope you all were able to enjoy the 1999 season – at Aldeburgh and Southwold – to the full. Our sincere thanks for your loyal and practical support. We shall now look forward to the year 2000's productions and seeing you all then.

*Margaret Chadd*

### **JILL WRITES**

Dear Friends,

It is hard to write about the 1999 season without appearing self-satisfied. Five sell-out plays, amazing sets, a brilliant company and enough praise to turn our heads - if only for a short time until we recover and wonder 'how do we follow that?'

On my first evening back in London, as I sat down with my dear husband for a well earned (I thought) glass of wine he said, 'Well, it was "Maurice's" season". I fear my first (silent) reaction was, 'Hang on a minute, what about the rest of us?' But given that we are essentially a team and always will be, there was still a lot of truth in his comment.

16 years ago I could not have imagined that we would one day have not one but two revolving roofs complete with actors on that tiny stage, to say nothing of a transformation from cottage to grand parlour that earned a round of applause every evening. And these were followed a week later by a swimming pool, so convincing that one reviewer

complained that she could not see enough of it - just as well as it consisted of a mattress covered with blue plastic and two students throwing: cups of water.

The season was full of excitement - **Julian Harries** and **Doreen Mantle** raised the temperature in *A Passionate Woman*; **Rebekah Janes** stood on a submerged **Andrew Powrie** in *Man of the Moment*; **Caroline Wildi** appeared to be poured into her costumes and **Clement Freud** cooked 230 dinners for the audience to eat during his show in Aldeburgh - and thereby raised £1000 for the Actors Charitable Trust. Then **Griff Rhys Jones** followed with another charity show for us in Southwold.

There were many lovely performances and memorable moments but the run-away success of the summer was *The 39 Steps*. For those who sadly missed it, one can only say that 4 actors with no more than a few assorted ladders and some unusual props, recreated the splendour of the Forth Bridge, a 1930's biplane in action, a flock of sheep, and all the fun, tension and excitement of John Buchan's book, combined with Alfred Hitchcock's film.

If you ask me 'how is that possible?' I can only reply that it is the magic of the theatre - which is why we are all here and sometimes achieve miracles.

And now what on earth are we going to do next year?

*Jill*

\* **Maurice Rubens** - who designs our sets.

### **ON FREUD'S FOOD**

The audience on Sunday 1 August at the Jubilee Hall, Aldeburgh had a splendid evening. **Clement Freud** entertained us with the story of his life; a life that has had so many facets it seems pointless to pick out one or two examples. Let me simply relate that during the evening we found out where he first learnt the rudiments of the art of public speaking and heard for ourselves - although the matter wasn't in doubt - that he is master of the art.

The evening raised £1000 for the Actors Charitable Trust, so the audience also had cause to feel they had done something praiseworthy.

But, above and beyond being entertained royally and involved in charity work, we spent the interval drinking Alsatian Sylvaner and feasting on delicious food prepared by our speaker and his band of helpers: Carol Carey, Chris Clarke, Erica Fawcett, Katie Mountain, Rachel Smyth and Mark Sterling. Once our trays (they, together with the cutlery and crockery, had been supplied by Caledonian Airlines) had been collected, we settled back to hear more, especially of Sir Clement's political life. The evening concluded with a raffle and I'm delighted to be able to report that I won first prize: a bottle of Champagne Pommery vintage 1982! A memorable evening.

But the food! I tried to persuade Sir Clement to let me print the recipes here; he responded co-operatively that, being a professional chef, he does not use measures; however the menu was on these lines:

**Fresh salmon:** it is important to remember that salmon takes on the taste of the liquor in which it is cooled; so it was brought to the boil and left to regain room temperature in a pre-boiled court-bouillon of water + cider vinegar flavoured with herbs + spices + chilli peppers + onion + juniper. The homemade mayonnaise contained minced anchovies + dill and lemon curd.

**Rice salad:** Basmati rice, tins of small French Peas, vinaigrette based on puree of sweet red peppers.

**Sieved Apples,** topped with 10% fat Turkish Yoghourt, served from the refrigerator.

*Jack Clayton*

*The job of editor of the Friends' Newsletter would be impossible without the help and support of Jill and members of The Company. No matter how busy or exhausted they are, they always turn up trumps before deadlines (which suit the Friends' needs) with articles, advice, photographs and answers to queries of all kinds. Bless 'em all!*

*Like **Jay Neill** who was the Production Assistant before her, **Carol Carey** has willingly put pen to paper. She shares with us some memories of the 1999 season.*

*The Editor*

### **39 PASSIONATE SAILORS WAKE!**

(Play titles scrambled by my post-season brain!)

This year, my first nervous year as Production Assistant, I became aware of stepping into a well-trodden, organised, extraordinary formula, and that I was surrounded by a cushion of support - from Peggy in the Box office and Ian at the Southwold Press to the young, highly talented team that Jill and Tony put together (which is a skill in itself). Having worked with the Company for two seasons during the summer, it had never occurred to me that the small heart of the company, consisting of just three people out of season, quickly swelled to at least 80. Add to that, the huge support network of the Friends and volunteers - like the credits of a film, the names roll on and on.

Certain moments over the last three years define Jill Freud & Company for me. One, was at a performance of Simon Williams' *Nobody's Perfect*. I glanced around at the audiences' laughing faces and thought, "This is special, I'm part of this - I am helping to create this." Another moment involved watching Maurice's incredible sets grow from tiny production models into the 'real thing' – Miss Haversham's 'melting grandeur'; the multi-storey *Taking Steps* and that 'Olympic' pool!

Looking back over this summer, my overriding feeling, apart from 'phew!', is one of pride. My lasting memory is one of total teamwork: from the student who came for a week's work-experience to one of our leading actresses performing on a roof top; from the ladies who help front-of-house to the unsung heroes who turn up at ungodly hours of the night to help us achieve the slick change-over between plays.

I began to realise that the Summer Theatre is like a wonderful roller-coaster ride. It has highs and lows, unexpected twists and turns and, though occasionally you may even feel like screaming, you get spectacular views for your money. The links that join the carriages of this particular attraction are hard work, talent and conviction.

As we go into 2000, I hope that we can all play a part in continuing the ride.

Carol Carey

## THE FRIENDS' SPECIAL INSERT

Last summer Maurice Rubens offered me an article – which I accepted - about his time “in prison”. The article soon arrived together with other material. The project he wrote about was – to me – an eye-opener. The material clearly merited a lot of space, so we have tried to do justice to it by devoting two A4 sides to it. This is our first *Special* insert. Please do study it carefully, it tells an impressive story.

### ***The Editor***

*Set Designer **Maurice Rubens** doesn't take it easy once the Summer Theatre season is over. At the start of the last summer season he offered me an article – which I accepted – to be entitled “What I did in the Holidays”. When it arrived - together with other material – I found it concerned a project in a prison near Hull. The material was fascinating and clearly merited a lot of space, so we have tried to do justice to it by publishing it as our first Special insert. In this illustrated article, Maurice explains what he - and others - got up to last winter.*

## WHAT I DID IN THE HOLIDAYS

At the end-of-season party last year, began one of the most remarkable experiences of my life.

In ten, intense minutes **Headley Aylott** convinced me with slender and far-fetched fragments of synopsis that I was to design the costumes and setting for a Rock Opera, to be devised, composed, constructed and performed in public in one of Her Majesty's prisons, by a cast and crew of inmates. Hedley's enthusiasm ignited a series of visual images, environments and atmospheres so vivid that, before I returned to Percy (my caravan), I had in my mind the complete design concept that was only minimally modified in the next seven months before the world premiere of what had become "**SUBTOPIA**".

Set in Avernus, Virgil's 'birdless place', an underground city peopled by a community of survivors of a chemical warfare disaster that rendered the earth's surface uninhabitable, the piece called for an environment that would convincingly represent domestic, civic and industrial spaces and convey a believable life-style in the subterranean future.

It had to fill the immense space of the prison's gym, be feasibly constructed in the prison's workshops (usually producing welded ironwork, concrete gnomes and flight cases). There were also sixty costumes to be created. Victoria Clark, co-director of *Summit Arts* had found a book on producing musicals. The first rule was 'don't set it in

the future'. I too was determined to avoid cut-price space-fantasy. What evolved was a three-tier structure with a central control tower that evoked an industrial fossil. Corroding ironwork (rivets were 80 bungs from Adnam's Brewery) formed a honeycomb of arched openings backed by further layers giving an illusion of even greater depth and labyrinthine complexity. The set would have filled St. Edmund's and left no room for spectators.

The costumes were basic trousers, t-shirt and plastic clogs, topped by variations on a protective carapace-like tunic. These were enthusiastically made in the tailoring unit, usually concerned with overalls and track suit, then paint encrusted with even greater enthusiasm by a team of 'the lads', by the simple and direct method of wearing them and being bombarded with paint.

Designing an ambitious production under conditions of high security had problems and lighter moments. Hitherto harmless commodities such as graphite ('a well known bomb making ingredient') or rubber bands ('a potential suicide risk') had to be tactfully and ingratiatingly eased past the daily x-ray, sniffer dogs and body search.

Rehabilitation is hard to measure. The seventy or more convicted criminals who had committed themselves to an eight month project demanding a vast range of new disciplined professional and personal skills and responsibly seeing it through to a week of public performances, will, I am convinced not be unchanged. "Subtopia" gave me great professional satisfaction, pride and oddly enough, a very much enhanced faith in human nature.

***Maurice Rubens***

#### **POWERFUL SONGS OF FREEDOM**

*As atmospheric venues go, there can be few to rival that which plays host to Summit Arts' futuristic rock opera **Subtopia** – the inside of HM Prison Wolds. What adds more potency and gravitas here is that the subject matter revolves around freedom, while many of those involved are inmates. . .*

*So many times, theatre fails to stir the emotions – but the parallels with present-day society and songs of escape in this production have a powerful, thought-provoking resonance.*

*Dave Windass*

(Opening and closing words of the review in *The Stage* dated 25 March 1999.)

#### **SOME COMMENTS ABOUT SUBTOPIA**

#### **A VIEW FROM THE PRISON MANAGEMENT**

"Since the tremendous success of our inaugural opera *Liberty Street* in 1997, we have continued to develop our use of the creative arts as a rehabilitative tool within the Wolds

. . . . We strongly believe that self-expression through creative composition and drama provides an opportunity to explore different facets of offending behaviour.

“The benefits to everyone involved in *Subtopia* are all too obvious. Not only in the technical skills learned, of which there are many, but also in the ‘softer’ skills. Participants learn self-discipline, teamwork and concentration, and gain a deeper understanding of themselves and their capabilities.”

*Dr Rose-Quirie* (at the time Director of HMP Wolds).

### **Comment 1**

“Aged thirty-four, I’m from Cleethorpes, currently serving nine years in the Wolds for robbery. I have never been interested in anything like this before, but . . . I have fully enjoyed every minute of it.”

*Carl Smith* (played *Sid* – maintenance - in the production).

### **Comment 2**

“I’m currently serving 3 years but this part in *Subtopia* has given me a more positive outlook. I’m hoping to gain some qualifications while I’m in prison and, hopefully, get to college on release.”

*Chris Steel* (*Hale* of the *Subtopia* Group).

### **Comment 3**

“ . . . it has been a new venture and experience for me. I have met some good people and would hopefully like to be in something like this when released from prison.”

*Marc Rogers* (*Oscar* - Communications).

*Friends who attended the meeting on 30 April at Walberswick were entertained by **Gerry Hinks** who regaled us with stories of his acting career. Gerry agreed to supply a copy of his script so that this newsletter could contain a summary. But he provided so much fascinating material that, even after editing, it will appear in two parts.*

### **GERRY HINKS - THE AMATEUR ACTOR**

I was born in Rugeley Staffordshire on 7 July 1939. The news of my birth must have spread very quickly across the English Channel because 64 days later Hitler declared war.

I first went on stage at the age of 8 at the Junior Boys' School in "Robin Hood and his Merry Men" - I was one of the "merry men". It was a somewhat cheap production, I recall; we all wore shawls of varying shades of green. A female teacher played the Sheriff of Nottingham and the school bully was Robin Hood and, as such, possessed the school's only bow. No arrows, just the bow.

At a critical stage of my education I went into hospital and convalescent homes for a couple of years. On my return it seemed that everyone else had some idea of what they were going to do when they left school except me. I was too busy trying to catch up the two years' missed schooling. I don't recall telling myself to get stuck in but somehow I managed to pick up the school prizes for Music, Science, and the leavers' special award for achievement.

During my last few months we were summoned to the school hall for a lesson with our English teacher Donald Nutter who also directed the school productions. I had a book thrust into my hands, was lifted bodily onto the stage and informed that I was now playing Casca in the school's production of Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar".

"What do I have to do, sir?" I asked. "You read all Casca's lines and, at the line "Speak hands for me", you stab Julius Caesar with your sword." It was exhilarating to play a murderer.

In no time at all my school days were behind me and I was a wage earner serving an apprenticeship as a grocer. How I came to be in this career still remains a mystery but I had no regrets. I, an only child, was doing my bit to help the family. I had a job and a hobby - acting!

Oh yes, the acting bug had bitten! I quickly joined the Youth Drama Group. Though I enjoyed the socialising - sharing bags of chips and bottles of pop on rehearsal nights - my particular highlight was the theatre: putting on a costume, applying the make-up, listening to the noise of an expectant audience.

I just couldn't wait for the day when I would have my own make-up box, spirit gum, crepe hair, powder' removing cream and astringent lotion! My very first make-up box, I remember, was an old cutlery box without the mouldings so that the sticks of make-up could lie side by side. The bottles and tins I carried in a separate bag.

Before I was twenty I had played a staggering variety of roles in a substantial number of productions. I was having the time of my life but I had no time for girlfriends. I was out of one production and straight into the next.

During the rehearsal period of one play, being helpful, I turned up carrying some costumes in my arms and with a guitar slung across my back. As I strolled towards the wide expanse of lawn where we were rehearsing and where we would finally perform, I spotted a couple of young girls sitting together on the far side whom I did not recognise. Even if they were new members, they should be making attempts to get to know everyone instead of sitting on their own? My thoughts went no further. I tripped over the edge of the lawn, the costumes floated through the air, and the guitar made a hideous noise as it disintegrated underneath me. The two girls I discovered later were sisters. Five years later I married one of them, and this year we are celebrating our 35th wedding anniversary.

I wanted to form my own company and did so with my friend Terry Fyffe. Terry should have been a professional actor. His mother and father were both actors, his sister sang and his brother Patrick is better known as Dame Hilda Bracket! In my opinion Terry had

more talent than all of them put together. He should have been a star but preferred to be an optician!

Our company became renowned in mid-Staffordshire for the high quality of productions which attracted the larger regional newspapers. Though a lot of the reviews were a joy to read, even this did not satisfy my need for acting. I was delighted to accept invitations from other drama groups and operatic societies, and was given opportunities to play roles in musicals, especially my favourite musical role - Professor Higgins in "My Fair Lady" - which I had the good fortune to play in three different productions.

On the work front I was now employed in the airline industry. In 1983 my employer, Kuwait Airways, decided to join the computer age and no longer needed offices in Glasgow, Manchester, or my own office in Birmingham. I was made redundant. Little did I know that this was the beginning of the end and the start of a new beginning.

This new beginning included a visit to London for an interview with an airline. I was then told I was a little too old for what they had in mind! That weekend I kept looking into mirrors at the 48-year-old man who was too old to be employed. On Sunday the family was all assembled for lunch when I announced that I would not be getting another job; I was too old. There was a silence for a few moments and then Teresa, my wife, said "There's only one thing you can do, and one thing you're good at, and you've been doing it for years. Become a professional actor."

"But 90% of actors are out of work at any one time" I replied.

Her response was simple, to the point, and extremely logical. "You may as well be an out of work actor as an out of work airline sales manager". Was I ready for such a demanding profession? There was no doubting the answer. I had served a 40-year apprenticeship!

**Gerry Hinks**

*To be continued.*