

Issue No 9 – Autumn 2000

FROM THE CHAIRMAN

We shall all remember the Millennium Year programmes at the Summer Theatres at Southwold and Aldeburgh. The *Friends'* year began, as usual, with the spring meeting at Walberswick Village Hall (which was filled to capacity). **Andy Powrie** made a delightful contribution, telling us about his acting career and experiences (see the review on page 2).

The summer evening garden party at Westons was enjoyed by all present, in spite of the damp weather. Our new Publicity Officer, **Peter Roberts**, introduced himself and we were able to talk to those taking part in the first production, *Mr Cinders*, as well as partaking of the delicious food which the *Friends* themselves contributed.

We all enjoyed the selection of plays that followed. I, in particular, was enthralled by the magnificent performance of *Jane Eyre*. The lunchtime shows were well attended and popular. So too were the Children's shows. As usual they delighted the young and, especially on wet afternoons, were much appreciated by parents and grandparents!

During the season our membership has continued to grow, and we are most grateful for all your contributions. These have enabled us to donate £3,000 to *Jill Freud and Company* this year: £2,000 towards the refurbishment of their storage premises at Brampton, and £500 each towards the cost of the Children's shows at Aldeburgh and Southwold.

My own personal thanks must be recorded, yet again, to **John Veitch**, our Treasurer, and **Jack Clayton**, Editor of this newsletter.

We shall look forward to another exciting and stimulating season in 2001. Best wishes to all readers, and I look forward to meeting you again at our social events.

Margaret Chadd

JILL WRITES

Friends,

We have survived another hectic season and happily the company is going from strength to strength. The importance of the *Friends'* organisation increases at the same rate – for instance we are now installed in our good new wardrobe store and office at Brampton, thanks mainly due to your contributions. We are immensely grateful and hope to invite all members to the complex before long.

Of course the most important help any *Friend* can give to the two theatres is to distribute posters and programme cards – especially at those times when the company is totally committed to rehearsing and playing. This help every year is vital to the success of the season and I would ask you to liaise closely with Peter Roberts to ensure that your own corner (it need not be a large one) is well covered throughout July and August.

You will read in this newsletter of the introduction of the new gift voucher scheme, which should be a fun way of giving a present. Do please stress to the lucky recipients how important it is to book the actual seats well in advance.

No news yet on the 2001 season but we are busily reading plays and look forward to telling you about the programme at our get-together in April next.

Jill

MY LIFE IN ART **(or heigh diddley-dee, an actor's life for me)**

The Associate Director's recollections on making the big time.

Just for a change I directed the opening show of the season, the musical: *Mr Cinders*, and what a happy time it was working with Sidi and Derek and such a talented company. This left me, unusually, twiddling my thumbs in the middle of July. So Richard Frost, the director of *Out of Order*, suggested I play the Hotel Manager in that particular oeuvre.

Although I had trained as an actor, I had not put my training to use since leaving the National in 1981 – apart from the odd excursion upstairs at the Crown, a brief appearance as the Doctor in *The Miracle Worker* when I first joined company, and the part of Ruy, the gardener in the 1999 production of Alan Ayckbourn's *Man of the Moment*. One thing I knew for certain was, with advancing years, the first thing to go is the ability to recall dialogue at a moment's notice: i.e. on cue and repeat it in a reasonably understandable fashion. So, six weeks before the start of rehearsal, I recorded all my cues on tape and went through the play for an hour each morning before getting up.

This was reasonably successful. What I had pushed to the back of my mind, however, was that in farce what you do is as important as what you say. So an actor working in that kind of play has not only to remember his lines but also to come through a door, fall through a window, be pushed through a cupboard while speaking them – and at seemingly twice the speed of normal life.

The way an author plots a farce involves devising as many repeats of the same gag as is credible. It is the cumulative effect of this and how the characters react to it that gives the audience something to laugh at. This repeating of business can make it difficult for an actor to know where he is in the play when the conditioned reflex – which usually gets him through the play – packs up.

So it was on the evening of Tuesday 15th August, the first act had been going swimmingly. I had begun my last scene before the interval when suddenly I was confronted with a yawning chasm. I either didn't hear my cue or was thinking about my supper after the show, but I became aware my fellow actors were expecting a response that wasn't forthcoming. Tony Smee attempted to rescue the situation by inventing a line that seemed vaguely familiar. Unfortunately my reply catapulted us into a similar scene at the beginning of the second act. Simon Snashall took his cue and exited, leaving us adrift and wondering quite how we were going to get the all-important wheelchair on. The situation was saved by Stephen Hancock – playing the waiter – entering for no reason at all other than to bring on the said conveyance. Thus we were able to finish the act.

Our relief in the dressing room was quickly replaced by horror when we realised that we would have to begin the second act with five minutes we had already presented that night. But with some bravura, a following wind and the odd chuckle of recognition from our friendly audience, we were able to complete the play successfully.

But please remember: even when you think things are going marvellously, first check your flies and don't bump into the furniture.

Anthony Falkingham, Associate Director

Peter Roberts has just completed his first season as the Friends' Publicity Officer. Here is his report.

*Little did I think when I asked **Andrew Powrie**, to put on his other hat as **Creative Director AKT Productions Ltd**, and to write about his corporate work, that he would treat us to nearly a thousand words. Read below how, over the years, actors and other theatrical professionals have used their expertise and ideas to influence the man in the street – and all kinds of other places outside the theatre.*

The Editor

THEATRE AND SOCIETY

Theatre, like sex, is a word which conjures an infinite number of reactions. I would argue that theatre is an extraordinarily potent means of communicating directly to the intellect *and* to the emotions. But how has it been used as an instrument of change?

Fertility seems to have been one of the earliest issues addressed by drama, and it is likely that dance dramas in India, Egypt and Greece were performed in the 10th century BC. Religious and agricultural festivals were attended by ritual enactments to appease the Gods and bring successful crops and good weather. They were probably also a good laugh, since dressing up and showing off don't seem to have lost their appeal in the intervening three thousand years.

The Greeks formalised drama and built large and impressive open-air theatres which were the forerunners of most modern theatres.

In Britain the medieval mystery play was the first well-documented use of theatre as a method of communication. The authorised King James Version of the bible was published in 1611, and until that time the scriptures were usually communicated at mass, in Latin. It is not known who first decided to dramatise events from the Bible and perform them on the back of pageant carts. But the performers were ordinary working folk who belonged to the trade associations, or Guilds.

During the reformation theatres in Britain were closed down. Parliament in 1543 banned 'interpretations of the scriptures on public stages'. The puritans claimed that theatre was anarchic and gave people ideas. It was and it did. The puritans were keen to dictate to their subjects what should be thought and learnt, and quite rightly they realised the subversive power of theatre, the power to inspire and the power to stimulate the imagination. Undoubtedly the puritans thought the imagination was a very dangerous thing and not to be encouraged. But fortunately that's what a lot of people thought about the puritans.

Jumping another couple of centuries, and with regard to theatre, both Stalin's and Hitler's regimes were characterised by repressive censorship. Both dictators understood and respected the power of theatre. They respected it enough to curtail its activities severely.

When the Khmer Rouge took over in Cambodia, Pol Pot and his followers forbade theatrical performance and murdered the performers.

In the latter part of the 20th century theatre became a cherished outlet for political agitation both for and against governments. In politically repressed societies such as Czechoslovakia under communism, the theatre was used to transmit revolutionary notions and discontent. Despite being imprisoned and under surveillance for much of the 1970s and 1980s, playwright Vaclav Havel continued to write anti-Communist plays which were performed in homes and bars, recorded onto cassettes and secretly distributed. The velvet revolution of 1989 was achieved in no small measure through the efforts of playwrights, actors and artists who had always held on to the cherished ideal of freedom, and a playwright became President of the new republic.

Theatre as a learning tool

There is a clear precursor to the use of theatre in corporate training, and that is its use in schools as an educational tool. In Britain during the 1960s theatre moved out of the hippodromes and playhouses and into schools. A movement pioneered at the Coventry Belgrade Theatre became known as theatre in education, or TiE. This was not simply taking a children's story and performing it in a school, it entailed the use of theatre as a means of communicating concepts such as racism, environmental protection and sexism. Crucially it involves the spectators in the drama and encourages them to affect the outcomes. It is not a radical step from here to theatre based training in a corporate environment.

In 1996 AKT Productions was formed, the first British company whose core business was delivering theatre-based training. AKT has been instrumental in raising the profile of theatre-based training in the UK and developing a range of products which stem from an interactive source. But to what extent can theatre techniques contribute to training initiatives in the business world?

All the issues addressed by AKT are linked to behaviours, attitudes and the relationship between individuals, teams, the organisation and its clients. It will also be seen that the clients are not likely to have invited a 'bunch of luvvies' into their work place to put on an Agatha Christie play.

So how does theatre-based training differ from theatre? Firstly the use of drama is only one element in a training programme which is designed specifically to reinforce the values and vision of the client. Secondly, the writing of any dramatic section is of paramount importance. This is an area where business experience and theatre skills must co-exist.

Theatre is not a substitute for other types of training - it is a delivery method which is combined with consultancy or expert interventions where necessary. What theatre-based training does supremely well is to create a memorable, interactive form of learning which involves delegates in a way which engages the imagination as well as the intellect and the emotions.

As dawn breaks over the 21st Century the training needs of every organisation will change and shift. But the interaction and complexity of human nature will not change. And the necessity to engage directly with the hearts and minds of the people in that organisation will remain.
Andrew Powrie

We were delighted when Jill revealed that she had persuaded one of our favourites to be our speaker at our spring meeting. The Friends who filled the Village Hall at Walberswick, quite correctly and naturally, gave a big welcome to:

ANDREW POWRIE

Our speaker at the meeting last April played many parts and used many voices in telling the story of how Fate brought him to Suffolk. I have neither the space nor the talent to recapture Andy's ability to bring his story to life and delight his audience. So those readers who couldn't attend the Walberswick evening will have to settle for a brief summary, mostly in the third person.

"Geography," he began, "was never my strong point". He was a student when he thought he was auditioning for a comedy. Instead he had strayed into what turned into a rehearsed reading of a new and "significant" play by a greatcoat-clad, cigarette smoking author who took affront at his efforts and forbade him to read any more. However, this experience led, indirectly, to Andy joining a student group that was to write and perform a show at the Edinburgh Festival.

Emma Freud was a leading light of this company and, to the delight of his audience of *Friends*, Andy led us through their tribulations. However, the show – as it must – went on, and Emma's Mum (guess who!) came to see it and encouraged Andy to get in touch after drama school.

Eventually in 1987 he was invited to be in a lunchtime play at the Crown. This, Andy told us, was a defining moment. "What happened was that I fell in love. Not with my fellow cast member who was nice but not my type. I fell for Southwold and Jill Freud and Company in a big way."

Andy went on to explain that the main reasons are "... the extraordinary people I've met and come to know and the importance of theatre to this special community". He went on to elaborate: naming his favourite people and listing the plays he'd enjoyed being in.

Andy concluded by telling us a little of his work in the corporate field: using theatrical techniques to create training programmes for business and industry. This was such an interesting venture that I asked him to elaborate on the subject for this edition of the *Friends'* newsletter. In spite of his other commitments, he obliged. Turn to page 4 to find out more.

About a year ago, Andy bought a home in Halesworth. So the Freud magic has worked again! The theatre-loving community of Suffolk has been enriched, and, perhaps incidentally, I feel another brick has been laid in securing the future of the Suffolk Summer Theatres.

A round of applause for Andrew Powrie please!
Jack Clayton

Carol Carey lifts the curtain on Jill Freud and Company to give us a peek at events behind the scenes. As Production Co-ordinator she has “seen all”, so is in a special position to give credit to some of the unsung heroes of the recent season. Here are Carol’s nominations and rankings.

THE JILL FREUD AND COMPANY AWARDS – 2000

The Catering Awards

Runners up – for their lovingly crafted, hand wrapped and labelled, matinee sandwiches - for the crew and company backstage: RACHAEL SMYTH and DAVIA FITE.

The winner, second year running – for patiently catering for a large and hungry company and single-handedly supplementing the students’ food supplies with dishes infinitely more nutritious than pot-noodles and chips: DIANA TRIEFUS.

The Stiff Upper Lip Awards

In the third place – for soldiering on, in spite of rather nasty food poisoning, through two evening shows and a matinee: SIMON SNASHALL.

Runner up – for conducting some hefty scene shifting after a mishap involving a lorry’s back door and his thumb: BEN TURNBULL.

In first place – for turning up at the theatre, in some discomfort, to stage-manage her show after escaping from her car which had overturned into a ditch: ERIN WHILEY.

The Student Competition for Front-of-House Sales

Third - for outstanding results on the Southwold raffle: CATHERINE WALPOLE.

Second – for even more outstanding results on the Southwold raffle: BEN TURNBULL.

First – for selling a record number of the much coveted Southwold Theatre sweatshirts: HANNAH LEE.

The Student Assistant Stage Manager Awards

Runners up – for creating the illusion of an entire army of Thornfield Hall staff whilst effortlessly changing the sets in *Jane Eyre*: AMY BANNERMAN and VICTORIA COLEMAN.

The winner – for being the tenth “unseen” member of the cast in this year’s farce, *Out of Order*: JOHN (The Window) ROLPH.

Carol Carey

PUBLICITY ABOUT PUBLICITY

All too soon, the show is over for another year. The evenings are a little less bustly in Southwold and Aldeburgh, and we are left with that sad circus-leaving-town feeling. Elsewhere in this Newsletter, you will read of the good attendance records achieved this season, and the *Friends* can claim their share of the credit for this. So many people have helped with the publicity this year, reaching towns and villages far beyond the immediate area of the two theatres, and spreading the word to potential new audiences.

So, grateful thanks to all distributors, and even more to those who have sent back the questionnaire form which was included in your carrier bag of programme cards. If you still have your form, I would appreciate its return to assist with planning next year's publicity. Comments, good or bad, on publicity aspects are also welcome.

What can we do for next year? I would quite like to try 'warming-up' our potential audiences a little earlier in the pre-season period, but I would need your help. If you know of any village or town events in your area where you think the *Friends* could usefully have a stand or table, please tell me the date and place, and the organiser's contact details. I would try to get along with publicity material, and if you could be there too, so much the better! And if there are any residential homes, clubs or societies or other places which might welcome a short appetite-whetting talk about the Theatres, just let me have the details and I will do the rest.

And of course, we will be after you again in the early summer of 2001 to distribute cards and posters for what will surely be another superb season. If in the meantime you have any ideas for improvements to our publicity activities, please phone me on 01728 603772 (evenings and weekends) or drop me a line at Meadowcroft, East Green, Kelsale, Saxmundham, Suffolk IP17 2PH. I will always be pleased to hear from you.

Peter Roberts

FRIENDS' FEEDBACK

As our Newsletter is published only twice each year, it is not a very suitable publication for features such as *Reader's Letters*. But your likes, dislikes and your wishes for the future are important.

So, as an experiment, I picked 25 *Friends* at random from our 500+ membership and wrote informally inviting their views and comments. I enclosed a questionnaire and requested its completion and early return. I promised not to publish or pass on respondent's personal details without their consent.

The results were very satisfactory. 12 replied and provided many useful comments and suggestions. Copies of their completed questionnaires have been passed to Jill, in some cases – as requested - without the names and addresses of the recipients. I had planned to include here a summary of the information these 12 *Friends* supplied, but as space is very limited this time, there is room only for two items.

- 6 (of the 9 who saw it) reported that the play they liked most this season was *Jane Eyre*.
- Some Aldeburgh *Friends* asked for a social event in that part of the world. If you agree and would like to play an active part: finding a location and helping to organise such an event, please write to me.

I would also be delighted to receive your ideas and comments about our organisation (favourable or otherwise) – not necessarily for publication. My new address and telephone number are:

Jack Clayton, 5 Old Brewery Yard, Market Place, Halesworth IP19 8AW.

Telephone: 01986 872425

The Editor