

**VENUS
OBSERVED**

by

Christopher Fry



THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY



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First performance: September 15th 1979

VENUS OBSERVED was first produced in 1950. It is the fourth in the season of Five English Comedies, each one chosen from a decade of The Questors existence. These five plays form the opening part of the Golden Jubilee Season in the Main Theatre.

'The American critic, Lionel Trilling, once remarked, in his book *The Liberal Imagination*, that, in the future, "people will eventually be unable to say 'They fell in love and married', let alone understand the language of *Romeo and Juliet*, but will as a matter of course say, "Their libidinal impulses being reciprocal, they activated their individual erotic drives and integrated them within the same frame of reference" '.

'We may smile at the fate promised us here, but the parody serves to indicate the direction of our thinking as well as of our speech. And that direction very broadly speaking, is a deterministic one. At the back of our thoughts, there rests the supposition that men can be studied and known like things; that history is only extended natural history and that nature is reducible to chemistry and physics.....

.....'It is by a reaction from this point of view that I would explain the all-round success of Fry's plays. In a universe often viewed as mechanistic, he has posited the principle of mystery: in an age of necessitarian ethics, he has stood unequivocally for ideas of free-will. In theatre technique, he has gaily ignored the sacrosanct conventions of naturalistic drama; and in terms of speech, he has brought back poetry on to the stage with undoctored abandon.'

DEREK STANFORD

Writers and Their Works: Christopher Fry

VENUS OBSERVED

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THE CAST

in order of appearance

THE DUKE OF ALTAIR PETER CARISS
EDGAR, *his son* DUNCAN ROWBERRY
HERBERT REEDBECK, *his agent* JOHN ROBB
BATES, *his manservant* ROBERT HINES
DOMINIC, *Reedbeck's son* IAIN REID
ROSABEL FLEMING JO ARUNDEL
JESSIE DILL SYLVIA ESTOP
HILDA TAYLOR-SNELL CILLA BAZLEY
PERPETUA, *Reedbeck's daughter* JUDY LANE

Directed by TONY HILL

Designed by BRIAN RICH

The action takes place on the Duke's estate at Stellmere Park.

Scene 1 : The Observatory Room

Scene 2 : The Temple

Scene 3 : The Observatory Room

Scene 4 : The Temple

THERE WILL BE AN INTERVAL OF FIFTEEN MINUTES BETWEEN
SCENES 2 and 3

Stage Manager LEON HENRY

Deputy Stage Manager ALAN B. SMITH

Assistant Stage Managers KAREN BECKITT, CAROLE BEGENT,
JANE FESSEY, BETH MILLWARD,
SUE RICHARDSON, SUE SOTHERAN

Lighting MALCOLM ROBERTSON

Lighting Operator ALISON LAKE

Sound MARTIN UDALL

Assisted by MAURY HORWICH

Construction GRAHAM COOTE, COLIN BROWN

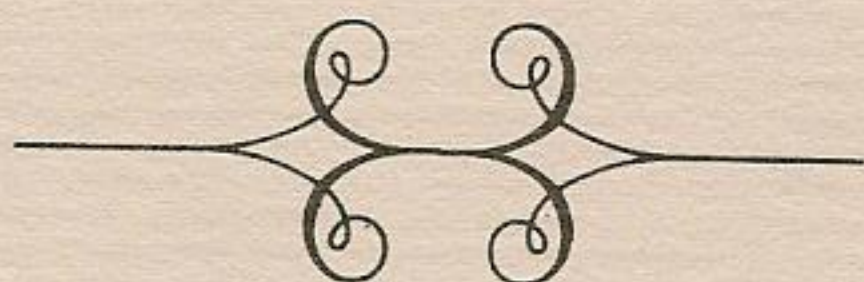
Wardrobe GRACE LACAILLE

Properties JOAN CURRY

Champagne by courtesy of Moët et Chandon

Sunglasses by courtesy of Bentalls Ltd.

Metal construction by B.C.M. (Woodworkers) Ltd.



COMING TO THE DISCUSSION?

As usual, there will be an Open Discussion on this production in the Bernard Shaw Room on **TUESDAY, 25th SEPTEMBER** at 7.45 p.m.

Members of the audience are cordially invited to join director and cast in a wide-ranging discussion of play and performance, whether to express their own views or just to listen to the views of others. The Discussion will be led by

ROBERT GITTINGS

Robert Gittings is probably best known for his definitive work on John Keats. He has published a number of books on Keats' life and work and has edited volumes of his letters and poems. In addition to this, Robert Gittings is himself a poet and playwright and, as well as his own *Collected Poems*, has published a number of verse plays, including *The Makers of Violence*, the Canterbury Cathedral Festival play of 1951. As a poet-playwright himself, he is exceptionally well qualified to talk about the work of a fellow poet-playwright, especially one with whom he is particularly familiar.

NOTE THE DATE:

TUESDAY 25th SEPTEMBER at 7.45 p.m.
in the BERNARD SHAW ROOM

CHRISTOPHER FRY

Christopher Fry was born in Bristol in 1907. His father had forsaken his career as a building contractor to become a lay preacher in one of the poorest districts in the community. He pursued his new vocation with such zeal and passion that it finally broke his health and he died when Fry was only three years old. Yet even at this early age he retained powerful impressions of his father; the man's self-sacrifice and whole-hearted commitment to an ideal, together with the predicament of those to whom he ministered, seem almost to be touched on in Moses's lines from *The Firstborn*:

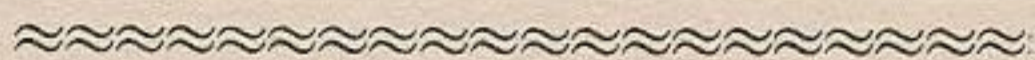
'I do not know why the necessity of God
Should feed on grief, but it seems so.....'

Fry was educated at the Bedford Modern School. He has spent his life working in one area or another of the theatre, except for two brief spells as a teacher. Apart from having been a director of the Repertory Players, Tunbridge Wells, and also of the Playhouse, Oxford, he has acted, worked as a cabaret entertainer, lyricist and stage-hand – an unusual background for a poetic dramatist, who, one might have thought, hailed from 'the groves and grooves of Academe'.

While employed in these various ways, he wrote several plays, the first of which to be published was *The Boy With A Cart* (1939). He was called up in 1940, but returned after four years to the Oxford Playhouse. The text of *The Firstborn* was published in 1946, and by 1948, with the presentation of two plays, *A Phoenix Too Frequent* and *The Lady's Not For Burning*, he became established with both critics and audiences.

In the late fifties and early sixties his work tended to lose favour (or, rather, go out of fashion) since a new breed of playwrights had emerged onto the theatrical scene. It is perhaps possible now to look at their work in perspective and to see that while the Osbornes and Weskers depicted accurately the climate of their time, Fry's work is written for all time.

Fry now lives in Chichester.



The Plays of Christopher Fry:

The Boy with a Cart (1939)
A Phoenix Too Frequent (1946)
The Firstborn (1946)
The Lady's Not For Burning (1948)
Thor, With Angels (1950)
Venus Observed (1950)
A Sleep of Prisoners (1951)
The Dark is Light Enough (1954)
Curtmantle (1961)
A Yard of Sun (1970)

Fry has also translated a number of plays by Anouilh and Giraudoux.

COMING IN THE MAIN THEATRE.....

Concluding the season of Five English Comedies
OCTOBER 13 - 20

WHEN WE ARE MARRIED by J. B. PRIESTLEY

During the run of *When We Are Married* the Annual Gift Stall and Book Sale will be in progress in the Foyer. Don't forget to visit it! All proceeds go to the Development Fund.
Gifts for the Stall are still needed.

AND THEN, THE JUBILEE PRODUCTION.....
NOVEMBER 10 - 24

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA by JOHN GAY

FOLLOWED BY—
DECEMBER 8 - 15

ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
by DALE WASSERMAN
(from the novel by Ken Kesey)

AND THE CHRISTMAS MELODRAMA.....
DECEMBER 29 - JANUARY 12

THE VAMPIRE, or The Bride of The Isles
by J. R. Planché

AND IN THE STUDIO.....
OCTOBER 4 - 7

DUSA, FISH, STAS AND VI by PAM GEMS

NOVEMBER 1 - 4

THE SHREW by CHARLES MAROWITZ
*(after Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*)*
