

QUESTOPICS

THE QUESTORS THEATRE · MATTOCK LANE · W5 5BQ · 567 0011 · Box Office 567 5184 No. 222 CHRISTMAS 1982

Our Christmas Production!

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE

by Joseph Kesselring

So that you may share with me yet another infrequent letter from the 'Two Old Ladies', the editor of 'Questopics', surely straining the spirit of good will etc. to its limits, has most kindly allowed me to introduce their letter that concerns us all.

In order to clarify matters for newer members, I should explain that these old ladies were some years ago regular, and highly critical contributors of not always identifiably relevant letters to 'Questopics'. They elected me to the role of go-between twixt them and Alan Drake, the editor at the time.

Here is the letter:

Dear Mr. Wall,

May we inform you just how delighted we were to learn that The Questors is going to perform *Arsenic and Old Lace* as part of its Xmas celebrations. My sister, who, as you are aware, is of literary bent, informs me that others,

perhaps less sensitive than we, might consider that a play centrally concerned with multiple murders, poisons, burials, and stupid but charming policemen to be slightly irrelevant to the season's sentiments. It is also American.

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Mary Hodlin and Barbara Hutchins

WHAT'S NEXT

STAGE MANAGEMENT OPEN MEETING December 14 at 7.45 pm in the Foyer.

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH

December 16-19
in the Studio at 7.45 pm.
All tickets £1.40.

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE

December 31; January 1, 4-8
at 7.45 pm.

January 2 at 5.00 pm.
in the Theatre.

Tickets: Sun. £1.50;
Tues. Wed. Thurs. £1.80;
Fri. Sat. £2.20.

WILFRED AND THE WIZARD-HUNT

January 1, 2, 3, 8 at 2.00 pm.
January 1, 8 at 4.30 pm.

in the Theatre.
All tickets £1.50.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
January 10 at 7.45 pm in the Shaw
Room.

GLASSHOUSES

January 13-16
in the Studio at 7.45 pm.
All tickets £1.40.

EXILES

January 22, 23, 25, 26, 28, 29
in the Theatre at 7.45 pm.

Members FREE.
Guests: Sun. £1.50;
Wed. Thurs. £1.80; Fri. Sat. £2.20.

THE ART OF COARSE ACTING

January 30 at 7.45 pm.
in the Theatre.

All tickets £1.50.

OPEN MEETING for non-members
and new members. Information and
tour.

EVERY WEDNESDAY at 7.45 pm.

EVENTS

ARSENIC AND OLD LACE

continued from page 1

However, we think that this play will be a much wished for relief from the ceaseless violence portrayed on T.V. over the festive season.

Our lamented dear father, as was his custom on birthdays and at Xmas, always took us to the theatre as, he hoped, a treat. A major and pleasurable memory for us therefore is seeing this play at the 'Vaudeville' theatre nearly twenty years ago. We were enthralled to see a play where the dictum that the end justifies the means was clearly demonstrated. The two elderly ladies in the play, the Misses Brewster, impressed us so much that we determined then to emulate them in their kindnesses and charities in almost every respect, even though we did not wholly approve of all the services they rendered to the lonely and miserable old men they so genteely poisoned with their rather toxic elderberry wine. Such happy releases were much to be desired – but then to bury them beneath even an imaginary Panama Canal, without regard to the damply cold and insanitary conditions in such a last resting place, was a little inconsiderate. We imagine they were able to console themselves by believing they were confirming their nephew Teddy's belief that he was President Theodore Roosevelt.

These two ladies were rendered life-like by the flawless performances of Sybil Thorndike and Athene Seyler. Splendid actresses! One of our extremely diligent nephews at The Questors informs us, much to our enthusiastic approval, that in the forthcoming production Barbara Hutchins and Mary Hodlin are to play the elderly ladies. Once again, splendid actresses! We are concerned though that possibly these actresses are too youthful in appearance. Comfortingly, the same nephew states that everyone who has been involved with an Xmas show knows that the punishing schedule of work over Xmas puts years on everyone.

Another favourite character of ours is the deliciously dotty nephew Teddy, so unlike anyone we know! We found so charmingly discreet his belief that he was constructing locks on the Panama Canal conveniently receptive to 'yellow fever' victims, who really were the old

In the Studio

GLASSHOUSES

by Stephen Lowe

directed by Richard Halberstadt

The time: 1963. The place: Nottingham. Young Jim dreams of becoming a second D.H. Lawrence and transforming life in Sneinton. Unfortunately he has girlfriend problems, which does not make Jim's task of achieving 'The Great Breakthrough' very simple. His friend and bloodbrother from childhood days, Pete, isn't much help, not is Jim's sister. As for the old folks, the parents of Jim and Pete, well . . . they just don't understand.

Stephen Lowe was born in Nottingham at the end of the Second World War. He has written several plays, the best known probably being *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist*, staged at the Riverside Studios, and *Touched*,

men being buried in the ladies' cellar. We understand that the young Mr. Keith Parry, who last engagingly entertained us as Autolykus, is to play him.

The previously mentioned will, we understand, be accompanied by actors of high talent. The real villainy will rest in the capable talents of Mr. Phillip Clayton-Gore, recently a magnificent Malvolio, and our perennial favourite, Kenneth Ratcliffe. Two stalwarts of old Questors, Bill Rudderham and Neville Bradbury, will also appear after too long an absence. Mr. Geoffrey Webb, who has produced so much that

which was revived at The Royal Court in 1981. Since then he has had several plays produced at The Royal Court and on television.

Glasshouses was first produced in 1981. It is quite a funny play, yet beneath the surface the story is essentially serious and sometimes sad. Jim's plight is like that of hundreds of youngsters – determined not to grow up like his parents, desperate to achieve something, but . . . Above all, there is the need for companionship and the constant threat that he will become imprisoned within his own loneliness – like his parents.

This play is not suitable for children.

we have enjoyed, is fortunate that he is able to attract such talent as this.

We are taking the liberty of sending you, as a seasonal gift, some bottles of 'our' elderberry wine. Would you please pass one one to Mr. Drake – it should help him to forget the past. There are, we know, one or two elderly and shunned men on the Committee of Management; it would perhaps help them too.

Yours, with appropriate season's greetings,
'Two Old Ladies'.

BILL WALL

In the Theatre

WILFRED AND THE WIZARD-HUNT

An original play for children and adults

directed by John Davey

There's an extra attraction in the Theatre this Christmas. As well as *Arsenic and Old Lace* for adults and older children, for the younger ones there's a special children's play.

Want to know what went on in Creaky Castle? Why the Princess never smiled? How the old chest came in so handy? Who won the Masterwiz contest? and above all, why Wilfred whiffled? Come along and find out in this creepy, crazy Christmas caper. Kids – bring your mum and dad and give them a treat.

Full details in *What's Next*

Next in the Theatre

EXILES

by James Joyce
directed by Annie Kimber

To commemorate James Joyce's anniversary, in January 1973 we are presenting his only play, Exiles. He started work on it in 1913, but Bernard Shaw and other critics of the time considered it too shocking to be put on – and this attitude continued until the more daring 1920s.

Exiles is an autobiographical account of Joyce returning after several years in Italy. On meeting up with two friends from the past, he sets about entangling them in a web of passion and betrayal which, he claims, takes the study of jealousy one step further than Othello!

Full details in *What's Next*

THE ART OF COARSE ACTING

Questors members will have an opportunity to see Michael Green's one-man Edinburgh show soon. His lecture *The Art of Coarse Acting or How To Destroy an Amateur Dramatic Society* which ran alongside *Hans Kohlihaas* at Edinburgh is to be repeated in the main theatre on Sunday January 30 (tickets £1.50). The show was described as 'laceratingly funny' by the *Sunday Standard*, Glasgow. Proceeds will go to The Questors. Two days later Mike will open with the lecture at the Eden Court Repertory Theatre, Inverness.

STAGE MANAGEMENT OPEN MEETING

This is your chance to air your views on any aspect of stage management – and maybe get things changed. Whether you do backstage work, are involved in other departments, or are just interested – don't miss it.

We'll talk about how we appoint backstage staff, and any other issues you want to raise. All members are welcome, and we're particularly interested to hear from people who've worked on a few shows as ASMs.

Tuesday 14th December at 7.45 in the Foyer.

DON'T FORGET –

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH IN THE STUDIO SHORTLY.

CALLING

SEASON 1983/84

We will shortly be planning the programme of plays which you will see in the Theatre between September 1983 and July 1984. As usual we are keen to have suggestions from audience and active members for plays (or plays of particular types or periods – or authors) which they would like to see. We are also interested in receiving your suggestions for Studio plays, although these are planned less far in advance. No promises, but it usually proves possible to incorporate several of the suggestions into the Season.

Please write with your ideas to me at the Theatre, before the middle of January – you can always drop a note in during the run of the two Christmas shows.

JOHN DAVEY
Director of Productions

The report of the Committee of Management Chairman's Statement and Annual Accounts for the year ending 31st August are circulated with this edition of *Questors*. The notice of the Annual General Meeting is on page 4.

The 1981/82 season was an extremely busy one. In addition to our usual activities no fewer than four productions went on tour and we hosted our 6th International Amateur Theatre Week. The season also saw an increase in subscription rates and a change in our accounting procedures. Finally major repairs were carried out to Mattock Lodge. Details of all these events can be found in the Annual Report.

The Annual General Meeting is on Monday, 10th January 1983. It is a most important event in the Theatre calendar and as many Members as possible are encouraged to attend to hear how the Theatre is progressing and to add their own comments.

The formal business of the Meeting, as set out in the notice convening the Meeting, will comprise the election of Members of the Committee of Management and the consideration of the Annual Report and the Accounts. Although Any Other Business is not included on the Agenda for the Meeting an opportunity will be provided for Members to express their views on any matters related to the running of the Theatre.

In accordance with Articles 26 and 27 of the Articles of Association the Members of the Committee of Management who have been longest in office since their last election, retire. This year the Members who retire are – Alan Chambers, John Davey, Tony Shipley and Adrienne Talbot. Of these Alan Chambers and John Davey will offer themselves for re-election.

If you should wish to make other nominations for election of the Committee of Management these must be submitted in writing, signed by the proposer and seconder, together with a signed statement of the willingness of the candidate to stand for election and must be received at the Theatre Office, addressed to the Secretary, not later than midnight on Thursday, 6th January. Lists of nominations will be posted at the Theatre on 8th January.

ROGER KELLY

THE RELAPSE

It has happened before with a Questors production. One's previous acquaintance with a play is coloured by a virtuoso performance and slick technique in a professional performance. Here, however, the emphasis is on the play itself, and one sees it differently.

The Relapse is usually described as a Restoration comedy. Yet it hardly has a happy ending and in 1697 the Restoration had taken place thirty-seven years ago. William and Mary had reigned for eight years and the new merchant class was becoming prosperous. Vanbrugh himself was the product of that section of society. It is this background that helps us see a unity in *The Relapse* that at first sight is lacking.

NOTE IT

Notice is hereby given that the **THIRTY THIRD ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of THE QUESTORS LIMITED will be held in the Bernard Shaw Room, The Questors Theatre, Mattock Lane, Ealing W5 5BQ on Monday 10th January 1983 at 7.45 p.m. precisely.

To receive and adopt the Report of the Committee of Management and Accounts for the year ending 31st August 1982. To elect members of the Committee of Management. To consider and if thought fit to pass the undermentioned Ordinary Resolution.

'That the alteration to Bye Laws 9(a) of the Association effected by the Committee of Management on 26th May 1982 be and is hereby confirmed so that with effect from 16th October 1982 no entrance fee shall be charged for election to membership and from 15th November 1982 the entrance fee for Acting, Club, Joint Club and Associate Membership shall be £1 and for Group Membership £1 per group.'

by Order of the Committee of Management
 ROGER KELLY,
Secretary.
 30th September 1982

The theme that gives the play its title is a simple one. The reformed rake Lovelace having returned to his wife after long absence is enjoying a bucolic and sentimental life until their return to London exposes him to its temptations and he suffers a relapse into a fresh love affair. His wife Amanda resists temptation. It is Berinthia, her cousin, who seduces the husband. Ann Bevan was a perfect foil to Sarah Morrison's anguished and emotional Amanda. Hers was a world of sly looks, well modulated voices and witty repartee leading to the conquest — a smooth and elegant performance. John Hines as Lovelace paired her well. He knew the game too, and could not resist it.

Yet the greater part of the play seems to be taken up with events and people that have little to do with this story! The clever study of Lord Foppington, the reflective beau, his brother's revenge for his lack of help by stealing his heiress bride, the farce derived from the clod-hopping country squire, his hoydenish daughter, the scheming nurse, the hypocritical chaplain and their rustic followers.

Nothing to do with the story? Is this not the explanation for the relapse, for they represent the society to which Lovelace returns — the world of the beau, the rout, the fashionable but heartless round, the marrying for money and complete lack of humanity. Berinthia is part of that way of life. Fashion, the younger brother has no more qualms than his brother in marrying an heiress, however cloddish, without love or sympathy. Foppington

seems at least to have treated her kindly. Miss Hoyden did not care who she married so long as she could get at the fleshpots of London. The church schemed and they were all at the mercy of the pimp Coupler.

Vincent McQueen was an excellent grotesque Foppington, redeemed by his dignity in the wheelbarrow and in his final discomfiture. John Dobson was a very young Fashion. Should they not, however, have been much closer in character and behaviour? The only thing that really separates them is the accident of their birth, Foppington more exaggerated but not so grotesque and Fashion, as the name implies, an incipient beau, only waiting for the cash to be just like him.

The utmost comedy was extracted from the country scenes. Wilfred Sharp's Sir Tunbelly Clumsy was a joy. He was ably seconded by Grace Craddock's Nurse, John Martin's Chaplain Bull and Anna-Lisa Taylor's delectable morsel of a hoyden, who had a sharp eye for business beneath her seeming simplicity.

But it was Tony Rushforth's Coupler that took the honours. Not only did he produce a character complete in all its horrid details but he alone seemed to realise the relation of the sub-plot to the enclosing story — that he was representing and summing up the corrupting relics of Restoration life.

The names and the plot make this clear. Lovelace is a reference to the Cavalier poet of love; the cynical name Worthy is given to the would-be seducer of Amanda. The main situation shows the reformed rake enjoying a period of tranquility until seduced by the widow, an obvious allegory of the early years of William and Mary after the turbulent later years of Charles II and James II (the ten years of Lovelace's shame), and the danger of relapsing into the early corruption of those years. Of course Vanbrugh protested strongly that he had no message but that oddly was in reply to a charge of immorality in his plays. It is this excellent production which set off these thoughts. It was spirited and very well dressed. The trolleys were a fine idea, producing a succession of conversation pieces or Chelsea pottery poses — though a trifle noisy in operation.

There was only one literally discordant note. The music did not seem to fit and was somewhat loud and raucous. It did not appear to fit the director's purposes, let alone the author's.

KITHARISTES

BOX OFFICE NEXT OPEN

6.45 — 8.45 pm

DECEMBER 20, 21
 DECEMBER 28 —
 JANUARY 8

BUT THE BOX OFFICE IS
 NEVER CLOSED TO POSTAL
 BOOKINGS.