



# HOME CHAT

Free to members of the Society  
Price £2 (\$4)

President: HRH The Duke of Kent, KG, GCMG, GCVO, ADC  
Vice Presidents: Tammy Grimes • Penelope Keith CBE • Barry Day OBE • Stephen Fry  
**2009 • The Year of the Society's 10th Anniversary**

## 'Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage'

### The Society's 10th Anniversary at London's Hurlingham Club



Barbara Longford presents Equerry, Andrew Palmer with the Scroll, marking the Presidency of His Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent.

The Society's main event in its 10th anniversary year turned out to be spectacularly successful. The reason, we believe, is that so many of our members made significant contributions and had put in an enormous amount of work and time towards the project.

The evening began in the magnificent Palm Court, re-built during the past few years since its wartime bombing. Our hosts, Barbara Longford and Stephen Greenman, were waiting to greet us and to present us with a copy of the special Commemorative Brochure; its pink cover taken from an original USA sheet music copy of the title song. The Originator and Arranger of the evening, Barbara Longford, had insisted on a formal dress code which greatly enhanced the special nature of the celebration. Eighty members and guests attended and whilst they were enjoying the drinks reception, special guest Vice President, Mr. Barry Day, OBE., accompanied by his wife, Mrs. Lynne Carey Day, signed copies of his latest book – *The Essential Noël Coward Compendium*, published by A & C Black Limited, for Methuen Drama.

The main events took place in the Mulgrave Theatre, which had been transformed by Rob Mills's skilful lighting and Dominic Vlasto's set into an intimate cabaret setting. Stephen Greenman welcomed our distinguished guests, Mr. Andrew Palmer, CMG., CVO., Equerry to His Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent and Mrs. Davina Palmer; Barry and Lynne Day

and, representing the Estate and the Noël Coward Foundation, its Chairman, Mr. Alan Brodie and his wife, Mrs. Alison Brodie. Stephen also welcomed the Society's Representative for France, Ms Hélène Catsiapis and several new members. Our Special Guest Star, Simon Green, was not welcomed at this point, as his identity was to remain a secret until he rose to perform the title song. However, Dominic made up for this later in the proceedings with a fulsome introductory speech to Simon's performance.

Our editor and webmaster, John Knowles, prepared a special film *A Pictorial Coward Compendium* designed to support the publication of Barry Day's new book. As John was in New York and unable to join us, Stephen Greenman introduced the film which provided a series of scenes and images including Noël's life in America, Paris and London, in Wartime, and on his world travels, his relationship with Gertrude Lawrence and Marlene Dietrich and other friends. Members enjoyed the film hugely and several of them asked later if they would be able to obtain a copy.

After the film, a brief musical interlude led directly into the 'Members' Revue,' an entertainment from the works of Noël Coward, compiled and directed by the Society's Music Expert, Dominic Vlasto. Dominic and Celia Cologne, had been working devotedly for many months preparing for this show and today was the first time the entire cast had ever been together for a rehearsal. Here is Denys Robinson's review of it:

*Dominic Vlasto's revue 'Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage,' staged at the Hurlingham Club's bijou Mulgrave Theatre on 10 October, had a title which risked giving hostages to fortune. Coward famously had it in for people with more*



L to R: Martin Amherst Lock, Liz Donnelly, Clive Montellier, Rebecca Hamway and Judy Shakespear performing in 'Don't Put Your Daughter on the Stage'



Table left: Barbara Longford talking to Stephen Greenman, Lynne Carey Day, Barry Day, Alan and Alison Brodie.  
Table Right: Reggie Musgrave, Bo McInnes, Rosalinda Zazzera, Carol Jones and Eileen North

ambition than talent.

As far as I know, no member of the Society 'put their daughter on the stage' in this revue. Even if they did, 'the son of a bitch' could certainly sing and dance. The standard, in a show using Coward songs and poems to reflect on the challenges and predicaments of performing, was impressively high.

The cast included professional actors, notably our special guest artist Simon Green, who gave the title number with style, poise, deft timing and rising rage culminating in a bravura finish. Rebecca Hamway, fresh from a UK tour playing Shakespeare in country houses, invented a knowing, world-weary and cynical 'big sister' character for her singing role in 'Try to Learn to Love' which gave real focus and point to a relatively unfamiliar

Coward number. Elizabeth Donnelly, who has just won a scholarship to the Central School of Speech and Drama, and given us spirited interpretations of Judith Bliss in 'Hay Fever' and Amanda in 'Private Lives' in Cambridge, created an amusing cameo of the anguished movie queen 'Louisa' in an acid double-act with Dominic Vlasto.

Coward's creative genius, in his songs as much as his play-scripts, is to enter convincingly into the mindset of an invented character and to see the world through their eyes. That 'character' is no more Coward himself than Shylock or Richard III were Shakespeare. Successful Coward performers discover that character and bring him - or her - to life. Each insight will be new. No-one should be imitating Coward.

Martin Amherst Lock balanced touchingly wistful childhood memories in 'Personal Reminiscence' with the distinctly adult exasperation of 'Why Must the Show Go On?' and the more than mildly irritated observer of ethnic folly in 'Bali'. Patrick Hibbin, a reader with projection, range and character, was more rugged and ruthless battling with the bastards of Batavia, and lent the production a polished finish with well-judged commentaries. Judy Shakespear clearly understood both the pain and the foolishness of the elderly actress who "got in a rage about age." Each had a sense of the character of the narrator. Wendy Montellier, dressed to kill, captured the gauche spirit of 'That is the End of the News' very well, but perhaps needed more projection in what proved to be a very unhelpful acoustic. (It is extraordinary that so much money could be spent on a purpose-built theatre with such little result!)

For me, the most moving sequence of Vlasto's revue was Clive Montellier's re-creation of the nightly bombing raids in the early years of the Second World War in Coward's poem 'Lie in the Dark and Listen' - emerging from the dark in RAF uniform while technical director Rob Mills brought us the drone of Lancaster bombers overhead. Montellier accurately caught the bitter disdain of the aircrews night after night taking their lives in their hands so that "soft, hysterical little actors" could sleep safe in their "warm, civilian beds."

Musically the evening had energy, pace and (as before with Vlasto's shows) immaculate comic timing. He has an instinctive grasp of Coward's musical style combined with performing disciplines instilled in his early career as a King's College chorister. Fifty years on from Coward's own cabaret career you are getting quality Coward that is never imitation, but with interpretations you can be confident Coward himself would have admired. In this revue, Vlasto's performance of 'I Travel Alone' stood out for me as entering into a character who has reached the point of making the extraordinary - and moving - admission that in a world where relationships don't last you are driven to care for yourself.

Rob Mills, lately of Cambridge University, who designed both sound and lighting for the show, spent hours erecting the lighting rig, and, with his usual calm professionalism overcame the baffling shortcomings of the venue. His expertise transformed an inherently rather dull venue into an attractive and intimate performance arena.

No Coward Society evening could end without a spirited rendering of 'A Bar on the Piccola Marina', and this was the most successful I have heard. It involved a cast of



Alison and Alan Brodie



Barry Day chats to Davina Palmer

seven, with Rebecca Hamway, Elizabeth Donnelly and Clive Montellier being all too convincingly dull and strapping as the Wentworth Brewster young. Celia Cologne, who adroitly accompanied all the show's musical numbers (including some stylish "originals" by Carroll Gibbons and Norman Hackforth) became Mrs. Wentworth Brewster as Dominic Vlasto narrated her saga on the island of Capri with great relish. It cannot be easy to "totter down the hill" while seated at the piano, but Celia made us believe it.

Inevitably from my own role as heckler from the audience, the line "Thank you dear, no more" which the child Coward so dreaded at auditions will stay with me as the emblem of this revue. Happily, not a single performance in Dominic Vlasto's revue came close to attracting such a withering verdict.

After the interval, Chairman of the Society, Barbara Longford, made a formal Presentation of the Scroll, marking HRH, The Duke of Kent's Presidency of the Society, to Equerry, Mr. Andrew Palmer. This is what she said:

**"Ladies and Gentlemen.** In 2005, members were attending a cabaret at Pizza on the Park and we were delighted to see that His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent and his sister, Princess Alexandra, were dining there and enjoying the performance, with absolutely no 'Pomp and Circumstance.' At about the same time, one of our Committee members, Robert Gardiner, recalled a dinner in St. Petersburg where the Duke had spoken warmly of Noël Coward and the friendship between Noël and his parents.



Wendy and Clive Montellier and Celia Cologne

What a wonderful tribute to that friendship, we thought it would be, if the Duke would agree to become our next President, succeeding the late Sir John Mills. A letter was despatched to St. James's Palace and His Royal Highness replied on 16th September, 2005 to say that he would be "delighted and honoured to accept".

Noël Coward met Prince George, Duke of Kent, (the father of the present Duke) during the run of London Calling in 1923. Noël had a cottage near Fulmer, only a couple of miles from Coppins, the house of the Duke and his glamorous wife Princess Marina and he dined with them frequently. However, 19 years later, in August 1942, Prince George died in an air crash, aged only 39. In his second autobiographical volume 'Future Indefinite', Noël says this:

*"It was an appalling shock and, as often happens at such moments, my mind at first refused to believe it, which of course was foolish, because in those dark years we were all of us learning by bitter experience that it was only too easy to believe someone young and kind was dead. They were dying all the time.*

*My heart ached for the poor Duchess and I could think of no articulate words to write to her. I did my best, but on such occasions there is little to be said or written. Memories of her unfailing sweetness to me ever since I had first met her in London, just after her engagement was announced, flooded into my mind;*

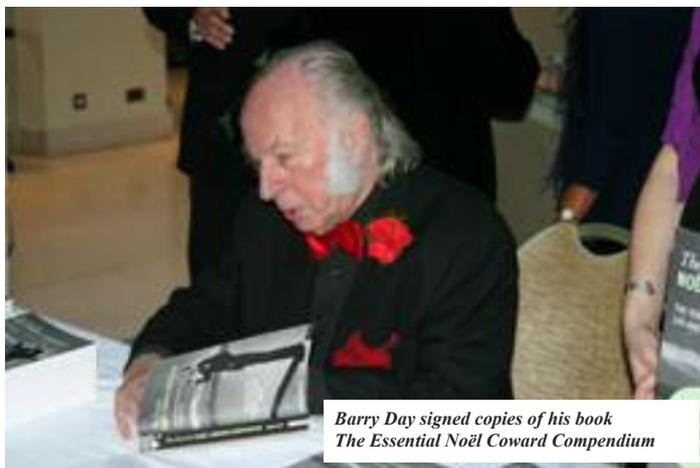
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memories of all the happy times the three of us had together in the following years; the twinkle in the eye suddenly caught and registered on grand occasions; the absurd word games played on quiet evenings in the country; the irrelevant jokes, all the fun, now suddenly tragically over."

I think that if in Noëlley Heaven, he is looking down upon us this evening, Noël will be immensely proud that the connection with the Kents continues to this day. Andrew, on behalf of the entire Society, it gives me great pleasure to present to you the Scroll, marking the Presidency of His Royal Highness, the Duke of Kent.

**Equerry, Mr. Andrew Palmer responded:**

*"Ladies and Gentlemen, it is a huge pleasure and privilege for Davina and me to be here to receive this Scroll on behalf of your President. It is of course regrettable that I am not him - and you even more*



Barry Day signed copies of his book The Essential Noël Coward Compendium



Liz Donnelly, Alison and Bradley Roberts and Rebecca Hamway



Carol Jones and Eileen North

sorry, no doubt. But please be sure that, before leaving for Australia, HRH asked me to emphasize his very warm appreciation of the honour you are conferring on him, and to wish us all a great evening here at the Hurlingham Club.

At my own level, may I congratulate the Society on having a Chairman who is exceptionally charming and practical to deal with in the lead-in to an engagement - and we will all have encountered organisers who fall sadly short of those levels. It is typical of Barbara's thoughtful approach to have let me have in advance the text of her own kind remarks, thus sparing me the trauma of having arrived here proudly keen to read out to you the very same paragraph from Future Indefinite that I too had been delighted to find.

That passage does epitomise so much about the, Kent/Coward relationship. The death of Prince George

on active service came tragically early - at a time moreover, when the present Duke was only 6. But sadness at this is offset by those vivid references to the joy and closeness among a trio of really special friends who had lived life to the full together over nearly 20 years. Also - and here is another thing that the present Duke emphasised to me - Princess Marina, comforted by Noël Coward at the time, continued to delight in his wit, warmth and wisdom for more than 20 further years.

The present Duke himself has wonderful memories of the Master's life-enhancing gifts. The other day he recalled for us an evening when he was serving with the Royal Scots Greys in Hong Kong in the 1960s. Noël Coward spent an evening with the Duke and Duchess - just a small group of friends, as before - and the fun and laughter flowed most memorably.

The beauty of Sir Noël's talents is that their products are at once evocative and timeless. Here we are, approaching the 110th anniversary, of his birth. celebrating his friendship with two generations of the family of HM the Queen - her uncle, aunt and first cousin. In doing so we can also revel in the lasting impact of his work on each of us, and millions of others.

If the Master is indeed looking approvingly down on this gathering, as Barbara suggests, I hope he will not mind my adding that the main affinity I could claim before this evening was to have been for a few years 'Our Man in Havana' in real life. If the late Duke and Duchess of Kent are beside him - and why not? - they will be as impressed as he is, by this superb party.

Meanwhile, in default, of a direct video link to Australia, I think the present Duke would now tell me that the time has come to shut up, but not before telling you once more of his pleasure and gratitude at this recognition of his role as President of the Noël Coward Society - a role that he greatly treasures. The very warmest thanks to you all from the Duke."

The Secretary of the Society, Denys Robinson, was then invited to give a Vote of Thanks, during which gifts were presented to Special Guest Star – Simon Green and to Celia Cologne and Dominic Vlasto. There followed an unscheduled part of the proceedings, when Mr. Alan Brodie made a presentation to Barbara Longford, on behalf of the Estate and the Foundation and thanked her for her achievements this evening and for chairing the Society so effectively for the past six years.

Forty-six members and guests stayed on for fine dinner in the Palm Court, seated at four round tables, called 'Mrs. Worthington', 'Nina', 'Bali' and 'A Bar on the Piccola Marina', with memorable place cards, designed by Stephen Greenman, with photographs of Noël and Gertie. Simon Green proposed a "Toast to Sir Noël" and the evening concluded with carriages at midnight. The Society has been so successful over the past 10 years because absolutely everyone who gives of their time towards running it and participating in events, does so purely on a volunteer basis and out of love for the work of that wonderful man we still call 'The Master'. The Society would like to thank the many members who gave so much of their time to make the Tenth Anniversary evening such a smash hit. They are the following people, listed in alphabetical order. Martin Amherst Lock, Celia Cologne, Barry Day, OBE, Elizabeth Donnelly, Simon Green, Stephen Greenman, Rebecca Hamway, Patrick Hibbin, John Knowles, Barbara Longford, Rob Mills, Wendy Montellier, Clive Montellier, Denys Robinson, Judy Shakespear and last, but only alphabetically, Dominic Vlasto.



Celia Cologne accompanies Dominic Vlasto



Yvonne Stuart Smith, Jane Mallinson, Miles Mallinson and Stuart Stuart Smith

**Text: Barbara Longford, Denys Robinson and John Knowles  
Photographs: Andrew Weeks**

And as a heartfelt 'thank you' to our young performers and stage team at Hurlingham here is some more information about them:

**Rebecca Hamway** has been a lifelong Noël Coward fan, thanks in no small part to Dominic Vlasto. She trained at LAMDA and has a BA in Modern & Medieval Languages from the University of Cambridge. Since graduating from LAMDA in 2008 she has written and starred in *News Revue*, toured with a band of medieval Shakespeare players and risen from the dead as the glamorous, posthumous Dame Hecate Bamway in FlyTheatre's *Sensational Musical Revues*. Rebecca is passionate about cabaret and music hall and regularly writes and performs her own comic songs. She was honoured and delighted to perform for the Noël Coward Society.

**Elizabeth Donnelly**, an Oxford graduate, is currently training at The Central School of Speech and Drama, for which she has been awarded a full scholarship from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. Prior to this, Elizabeth acted at Cambridge and Oxford Universities and The Edinburgh Fringe Festival. Recent theatre credits include: Amanda in *Private Lives*, Judith in *Hay Fever* and Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

**Rob Mills**, (right) lately of Cambridge University, has a long list of credits as a production and lighting designer working in both opera and theatre, including *The Mikado* at the Minack Theatre, Cornwall; *Madam Butterfly* for Surrey Opera at the Harlequin Theatre and the EM Forster Theatre; *Parade* at the ADC Theatre, Cambridge; *Yeomen of the Guard* also at the Minack Theatre –



a photograph of the set was featured as the centre-fold picture in The Guardian. Rob has designed lighting for shows in London, the Edinburgh Fringe, Leatherhead, and at the Cambridge Arts Theatre his design for *Romeo and Juliet* was reviewed by Varsity as follows:

*"The lighting of this show was very impressive: Rob Mills perfectly echoes and theatrically enhances the soft shifts in mood, making beautiful use of colour without garishness and without detracting from the realism of the imagined landscape."*

*Following a very positive discussion with Guildford School of Acting's Senior Tutor Pete Harris, I am hopeful that the Society may be able to collaborate on future educational events which will be of value and interest to both students and NCS members. Yet again it was impressive to see a young cast captivated by a Coward script and finding that it meant a great deal to them right now in 2009.*

**Denys Robinson**

## This Happy Breed at Guildford

In the Second World War era, three plays stand out as Coward seeking to define what it means to be English: *In Which We Serve*, *Brief Encounter*, and *This Happy Breed*. An impressive production at the Guildford School of Acting (GSA) in mid-November strongly conveyed the values Coward espoused, and final year students gave a very moving account of a play that is too rarely seen in the West End.

Director Pete Harris created a production that was very real, very true and had many people in the audience on the verge of tears. Yet there was nothing sentimental about the production. A portrait of a lower middle-class family spanning the twenty inter-war years, the play is a series of heart-wrenching family crises that threatens to make its Shakespearean title ironic. Yet happiness keeps breaking through: and resilience is the watchword.

A major challenge to the young actors was to represent family members ranging in age from late teens to mid-seventies – and to age convincingly throughout three acts. They brought this off with real professionalism: the leads Frank (Wesley Griffith) and Ethel (Annie Gregson) Gibbons had a wholly believable marriage contrasting Frank's forgiving warmth and affectionate nature with Ethel's bible-bound rectitude – a wife who brushed away her man's instinctive embraces.

Coward cleverly contrasts the Gibbons grown-up children against a social background of the General Strike, the slump and the growth of both fascism and communism. Rebellious Reg was nicely caught by Tom Gill showing a truculent pride when facing his dad after getting hurt in a communist demo; reliable dependable Vi (Laura Dixon) was believable without being boring; and Katie Prosser as upwardly-mobile and sexually daring Queenie showed star quality.

Humour will keep breaking in (very English). Coward uses it to make the tragic sequences even more heart-rending. The irrepressible maid Edie (Bruna Napolini) and the hypochondriac Aunt Sylvia turned Christian Scientist (Susanna Gordon) provided a rich vein of very funny moments.

Frank Gibbons' happiest moments in the play – where he is completely relaxed and perhaps really "himself" – are when he has been out drinking with his First World War pal Bob Mitchell – played with great warmth by Alexandros Plaggetis. Coward grasps the importance of an emotional bond between straight men and contrasts it with the tense, inarticulate struggle of the married relationships. Bob's sailor son Billy, the archetypal "boy next door" is perhaps a little too good to be true. That is Coward's fault not that of Timothy Bond, who brought a clean-cut honesty and charm to the role.

There were no weak links in Pete Harris' cast, with even minor roles convincing strongly, and PJ McEvoy's set – the Gibbons' living room – was a credible framework for all three acts, which became perceptibly more bourgeois as the evening progressed. GSA deserves great credit for reviving this very interesting and gripping piece which is stronger on the stage than it can (with the best will in the world) ever be on film. Our "exasperating, weather-sodden little island" and its people came out of it very well.

**Denys Robinson**

# NOTES FROM NEW YORK

**A** charitable organization in Greenwich Village known as The Caring Community provides help to elderly citizens in need. On October 26, 2009 at their annual fund-raising gala, **Tammy Grimes**, who has both lived and worked in Greenwich Village, was honored with the 2009 Greenwich Village Alumni Award. Following dinner, a musical tribute to Tammy Grimes was hosted by theatre critic and writer, Rex Reed. It featured NCS members, **Steve Ross**, **Ken Starrett**, **Joel Vig**, who directed the event, and **William Zeffiro**, who was musical director. Also appearing were performers, Lee Roy Reams, Walter Willison and Sinthea Starr. At the end of the evening the audience was thoroughly delighted by Tammy Grimes performing songs by Coward and as a tribute to Greenwich Village, a song she once recorded, 'Rose of Washington Square.'

We congratulate NCS member **Dorothy Olim-Krone** who was honored by the League of Professional Theatre Women with a richly-deserved award for lifetime achievement. She has had a long career in the New York theatre as a producer and general manager.

A play by Isarel Horovitz called *The Line* is running at the 13th Street Theatre. Currently enjoying performing in the cast is NCS member **Louise Poster**. It is the longest running off-off Broadway show in New York's theatre history, having opened in 1972. Ms. Poster is also known in New York for her cabaret performances.

The star of Noël Coward's last musical, *The Girl Who Came to Supper*, **Florence Henderson** will be making a rare New York night club appearance at Joe's Pub on February 12 - 13, 2010. In her act she tells of her experiences with Coward. For ticket information call 212/967-7555

Various venues in the rich cultural life of New York City will almost certainly find the participation of NCS members. Because of this fact, the name of Noël Coward was very prominent during the month of November. Many organizations throughout the city staged events in celebration of his 110th birthday.

On November 11th, a *Marvelous Party* was presented by St. Peter's Church. This program gave the audience a rich sampling of Noël Coward's music. Appearing was internationally known pianist, Miriam Brickman and her husband, Ronald Senator, who presented biographical notes on Coward. Musical contributions were made by singers Lynne Charnay and Maurice Edwards.

The prestigious Century Club presented, on November 12th, an evening devoted to Noël Coward. The club members and guests were highly entertained by F. Paul Driscoll, the Editor of Opera News, who provided humorous commentary and singers Rick Hamlin and Beth Fowler who presented the delightful musical portions of the program.

Also on November 12th at the National Arts Club NCS member **Elizabeth Sharland** presented an evening in the life and works of Noël Coward were highlighted. Performing were **Tammy Grimes**, along with NCS members, **Steve Ross** and **Leslie Shreve**.

The Lambs, America's First Professional Theatrical Club, was established in New York in 1874. It was named after a club in London, England, which flourished from 1869 to 1879. The club's name honors the essayist Charles Lamb, and his sister Mary, who, during the early 1800's, played host to actors and



Back L to R: William Zeffiro, Ken Starrett  
Front: Joel Vig and Tammy Grimes. PHOTO: Rose Billings

literati at their famed salon in London. Many Lambs are also NCS members. On November 13, 2009 The Lambs presented a wonderful tribute to the words and music of Noël Coward. A delicious selection of 14 songs was presented by 14 members. NCS members participating were **Lynne Rogers**, who joined by musical director **Woody Regan**, put the program together. Both also performed. Other NCS members who gave of their talents to the evening were **Billie Stewart** and **Helen Klass**. At the end of the evening, **Ken Starrett** was invited to speak about Coward and the Society. A lovely evening!!

This year on November 18th is the 100th birthday of composer and lyricist Johnny Mercer. To celebrate this event, NCS members **Robert Kimball** and **Barry Day** have published *The Complete Lyrics of Johnny Mercer*. A book signing was held at Barnes & Noble and Mercer's music was given a sparkling presentation by NCS members **Steve Ross** and **Klea Blackhurst**.

On November 19th at The Players Club the organization known as **Food for Thought** presented a reading of the rarely-performed *Shadows of the Evening*. This group frequently presents plays by Coward which have proved to be very popular with their audiences. The fine cast included Lisa Bostnar, Gayton Scott and playing the role of George Hilgay, originally performed by Coward himself, was NCS Member **Jeffrey Hardy**. For information on future productions, call 646/366-9340 or [www.foodforthoughtproductions.com](http://www.foodforthoughtproductions.com).

## Noël Coward Comes to Brooklyn:

Kneehigh Theatre's production of Noël Coward's *Brief Encounter* runs Dec 2-Jan 3 at St. Ann's Warehouse, 38 Water Street, DUMBO, Bklyn. For information and tickets to *Brief Encounter* and the Brief Encounter special events call 718-254-8779 or visit [www.stannswarehouse.org](http://www.stannswarehouse.org)

**Busy, busy month !!**

**Ken Starrett**

# THE CABARET CONVENTION IN NEW YORK

In an age when cabaret may be thought to have died in Europe it is good to see it still thriving in the US and especially in New York City where the efforts of the Mabel Mercer Foundation have ensured an annual revue of the best and the newest of cabaret talent strutting their stuff at the Frederick P. Rose Hall in the new Time Warner building on Columbus Circle.

Three-days worth of talented singers, piano-players, bassists, drummers plus an occasional guitarist and brass player remind us of all that is fine about the songs that make up the American Song Book and that modern jazz and swing composers are around and definitely kicking!

For me this was the 'first time around' at this marvellous gala. NCS committee member Robert Gardiner and his wife Pirjo were present as one of the sponsors of the event. Robert is a member of the Mabel Mercer Foundation Advisory Board, and as a trustee of the Noël Coward Foundation, one of the few unsurprised at the announcement of the **Noël Coward Award** to be presented in future years by the Foundation for new performers. NCS committee member Geoffrey Skinner and Michael Hepworth, who were staying with NCS member Margot Astrachan, took in the three nights and watched several NCS members amongst the performers including Andrea Marcovicci, Sidney Myer (who owns the cabaret bar 'Don't Tell Mama'), Steve Ross, Eric Comstock, KT Sullivan, Craig Rubano and Daryl Sherman. With other NCS members in the audience it was like attending an NCS convention! The club-

like atmosphere was apparent everywhere as old friends touched base, acquaintances saw each other across a crowded room and groups of like-minded souls visited The Metropolitan Room (Marilyn Maye), Don't Tell Mama (Sidney Meyer) and The Granite Room, City Hall Restaurant in Duane Street, where KT Sullivan opened this new venue with a dynamic show - [cityhallnewyork.com/index2.htm](http://cityhallnewyork.com/index2.htm).

Performers at the Convention ranged in age from those in their 80s (Marilyn Maye, Barbara Carroll, Julie Wilson) to 18 (the precociously polished crooner Nicolas King) who asserted the rights of ageless, songs of the jazz and swing era to persist in a modern pop environment.

Marilyn Maye gave her unique take on what is becoming the year of Johnny Mercer (well it is his centenary!), with some of his best compositions. She



*The' Frederick P. Rose Hall - Home of Jazz at Lincoln Center' in the Time Warner building on Columbus Circus, New York*

exudes a calm and assured self-possession remarkable for a performer of any age, and brought down the house!

Barbara Carroll, who has performed at every convention since its beginnings, offered a thoughtful jazz arrangement of 'Somewhere' and talk-sang the Gershwins' witty 'Who Cares?' Both performers exude an insightful professionalism that can only be gained through personal and artistic experience; there are simply no shortcuts!

Encouraging young talent, of course, is essential to the cabaret's survival. And the appearances of a Sinatra-style crooner like Nicolas King and folk-blues singer Carole Bufford, who delivered strong modern renditions of Johnny Cash and Bessie Smith songs, means that the talent is definitely there. King, accompanied on piano by Mike Renzi, sang finely-sanded renditions of 'Where Is Love?' from *Oliver!* and, aptly, 'Blame It on My Youth.'

One of Britain's finest imports to the cabaret scene, Simon Green, who was due to perform was missing due to a recording session in London of his welcome (and long overdue!) CD. He really is one of our greatest modern exponents of almost any songbook, American, musical theatre and importantly Noël Coward. He is opening in New York on the day before Noël's birthday, 15 December through 3 January at 59E59, (59 East 59th Street, New York) - for tickets call 212/279-4200 - online: [www.ticketcentral.com](http://www.ticketcentral.com) - go see!

Back to the Convention where on the first night the rich dark tones of Eric Michael Gillet, a man of both musical and physical stature and a noted circus ringmaster to boot, reminds me of film baritone Howard Keel as he dominates the shiny black stage and receives the Dick Gallaher Award from the mastermind of the Mabel Mercer Foundation, Donald Smith, who with his team of tireless volunteers have sustained this event for yet another year; not an easy task as Donald reminds us in his opening welcome to the three days. On a talented bill Sidney Meyer pleases the crowd with



Mabel Mercer

his comedy rendition of a song that is all about a rabbit delivered in nursery tones to the delight and surprise of an audience expecting another songbook classic. The first evening included a surprise visit by Broadway star Brian Stokes Mitchell with renditions of 'American the Beautiful', and 'Wheels of a Dream', from *Ragtime*. For cool sophistication there was Wesla Whitfield, singing songs from *Fiorello!*, and Mary Cleere Haran (in fine voice), with whom she traded verses of 'The Lady Is a Tramp.' Gliding in chiffon across the entire stage, Andrea Marcovicci, sang 'These Foolish Things,' a reminder of Astaire/Rogers glamour at its most balletic.

Thursday night was family night, 'All in the Family'. Fears that the holder of 'a voice' may only possess relatives who are best disposed on auditorium seats were unfounded as family group after group showed the roots and width of such cabaret talent in parents and siblings. The Sullivan's were there with a sensitive musical reference to the passing of KT Sullivan's much-missed father, earlier this year. The Ben-David family shone with Sheera Ben-David's mother, an operatic star, and father, a cantor of note with a warm rich voice, joining Sheera, the winner of the Convention's Julie Wilson Award for 2009.

Eric Comstock and his wife Barbara Fasano (personal favourites!) gave a great performance that opened our hearts with their sensitive arrangements and the warmth of their musical and emotional partnership. I caught them later at The Metropolitan Room for a wonderful packed-out show. They are a great cabaret pairing where the 'whole is always greater than the sum of the parts,' great, restrained accompaniment with strong individual and harmony singing.

Broadway performer Liz Callaway was joined by sister, singer and songwriter Ann Hampton Callaway and mother, vocal coach Shirley Callaway for a powerful three-some that revealed the sheer class of these family members.

The final evening saw Jennifer Sheehan become the most fêted performer of the Convention at the post-performance gathering in the welcome foyer. This beautiful, Juilliard School graduate has all the poise, performance and poignancy of a star. She is a past winner of the Convention's 'Julie Wilson Award'.

Steve Ross has said of her, "*Jennifer Sheehan is an enchanting performer - she has a beautiful voice and uses it expressively - with considerable understanding and communication of any song she performs. She's certainly easy on the eyes and moves like a dream. Who could ask for anything... well you know the rest.*"

At one point there was complete hush as the tall imposing figure of Nicole Henry crossed the stage in a figure-hugging white evening dress and delivered two songs - 'Teach Me Tonight' and 'The Very Thought of You.' Sheer magic. Ken Starrett tells me that she is becoming a major name with several recent CDs releases and a well-deserved piece in a



Donald Smith and John Knowles



Artie Olaisen and Julie Wilson



Eric Comstock and Barbara Fasano at the Metropolitan Room, New York.



Marilyn Maye and her Trio at The Metropolitan Room, New York

recent edition of 'Billboard.'

It was a wonderful week in my favourite city. Although the signs of the recession were visible on the sidewalks with some boarded-up shops and restaurants and the shortage of work opportunities, here was a celebration of what is almost becoming a unique vernacular institution. Where else in the world could you see so much cabaret talent over three evenings. After her appearance at the Convention Marilyn Maye wowed and expectant crowd at the Metropolitan Room ably supported by her trio (including Jim Ecklof, her drummer for some 47 years). Years of performing have given her an easy assurance that lets her wander from the script and pick up on audience asides and comments. In front of her sits an adoring fan who comes, in worship, to every show she does - she stops and has a special word with him. The act of a performer who knows who she is and what she can do and simply lives and loves it - every second - what a show and what a performer.

I caught NCS member Richard Holbrook entertaining a packed house at Sidney Meyer's 'Don't Tell Mama' in his successful *Richard Sings Burton - the Songs of Burton Lane* - a performance that shows how far Richard has come with this polished and carefully staged compendium of his unsung hero of composition - in a week when a successful revival of Burton's *Finian's Rainbow* opened on Broadway!

A final word on Julie Wilson who sang the only Noël Coward song of the week, Manon's entreaty 'If Love Were All' from *Bitter Sweet*. This star *par excellence* (noted for her role in the premier of the West End production of *Kiss Me Kate* - catch her in a TV version of the musical on 'You Tube'). She not so much sang as spoke the song - but you could have heard a pin drop - the emotion poured out - what a star!

Thanks to all those who made this such a grand week!

**John Knowles**

## THE PLAYERS CLUB - GRAMMERCY PARK



The Players Club, Grammercy Park

Placed like a Greek temple across the way from the verdant pastures and flower beds of Grammercy Park lies The Players Club the result of a dream held dear by actor Edwin Booth, America's pre-eminent Shakespearean actor (and the brother of John Wilkes Booth who assassinated American President Abraham Lincoln).

*"We do not mingle enough with minds that influence the world,"* said Edwin Booth of his fellow actors, *"We should measure ourselves through personal contact with outsiders ... I want my club to be a place where actors are away from the glamour of the theatre."*

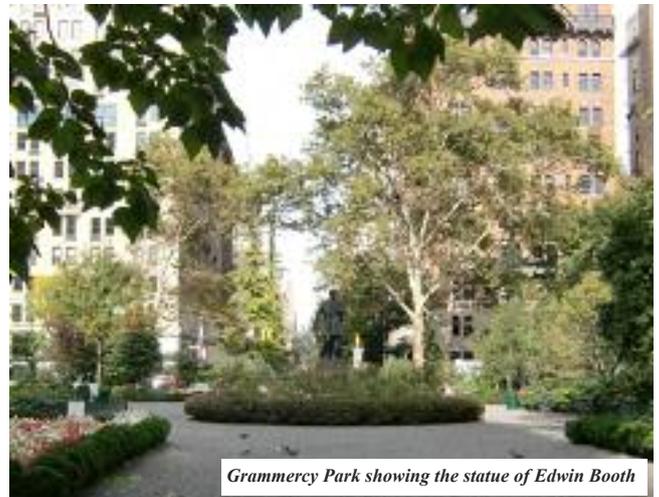
In May, 1888, Edwin Booth paid \$75,000 to purchase a townhouse at 16 Grammercy Park in New York City that had been built in 1847 for banker Elihu Townsend. Booth's vision now had a home.

The club's name was suggested by author Thomas Bailey Aldrich, after one of the lines from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Booth, along with 15 other friends, were the

incorporators of the club. Another close friend, the architect Stanford White, was hired to handle the conversion.

Booth and 15 other incorporators, including Mark Twain and General William Tecumseh Sherman, founded The Players. Modeled after London's famed Garrick Club, The Players was the first American 'gentleman's club' of its kind.

Its purpose: *"The promotion of social intercourse between members of the dramatic profession and the kindred professions of literature, painting, architecture, sculpture and music, law and medicine, and the patrons of the arts..."*



Grammercy Park showing the statue of Edwin Booth

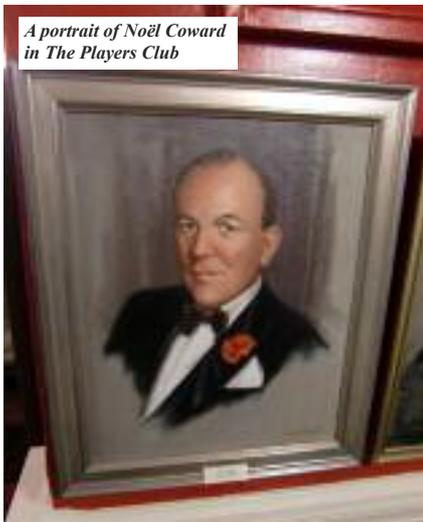
The Players is also home to the Hampden-Booth Theater Library, reflecting Booth's express wish to create *"a library relating especially to the history of the American stage and the preservation of pictures, bills of the play, photographs, and curiosities connected with such history..."*

Today, men and women from a variety of professions in the arts, business, and commerce enjoy The Players' unique spirit of conviviality and tradition that truly makes it a certain club.

During the Coward Birthday celebrations on 2008 NCS Chairman Barbara Longford and Treasurer Stephen Greenman were shown round the club by the Assistant to the Executive Director, Denis Davies who also showed Home Chat Editor John Knowles round in October of this year. These visits arranged and accompanied by Ken Starrett provided a real insight into the difference between the Garrick and Players Club traditions.



The Great Hall at The Players Club



A portrait of Noël Coward in The Players Club

Noël makes his presence felt here with a portrait hanging near the club's Great Hall and a caricature hanging behind the door in the gentleman's lavatories - a position Noël would have undoubtedly applauded. He lined his own lavatory at Chalet Coward with copies of the sheet music of his own works.

It was in the Great Hall in front of the enormous stone mantelpiece that Edwin Booth deeded 16 Gramercy Park to The Players. Above the mantle is a portrait of Booth's father Junius Brutus, the patriarch of the Booth theatrical dynasty, one of two paintings of the elder Booth that hang in the Great Hall. In fact, the room is more of a central gathering place for Players and their guests at the top of the staircase than a "great hall" (being neither particularly great in size nor box-shaped like a hall). During special events, or sometimes of an evening, the grand piano is heard, Players



Caricature of Noël at The Players Club

raise their voices in song, and the spirit of conviviality that is the essence of The Players, is most palpable here. Lining the cream-coloured damask covered walls are portraits of Edwin Booth and other past Presidents of The Players: Walter Hampden, Robert Lansing, Dennis King, José Ferrer in his famous portrayal of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Alfred Drake as Haj from the musical *Kismet*, and at the entrance to the Dining Room, Joseph Jefferson as Bob Acres from Sheridan's *The Rivals*. This full-length portrait hangs opposite a full length

painting of Edwin Booth as Richelieu. Paintings by noted portraitist Thomas Sully and his son, Thomas Sully, Jr. also hang near the entry to the Dining Room. On the opposite end of the Great Hall hangs a small canvas depicting Robert Palmer, purportedly the work of the great English 18th century portrait painter Thomas Gainsborough. The library is a warm and welcoming refuge to club members.



The Library at The Players Club

Overlooking the park, the library houses one of the finest collections in the country of nineteenth century theatrical literature and reference materials. Here, members can relax and read a book or the latest periodicals. It is also the

place where lectures, readings and other club events are often held. Lined with portraits of leading actors and actresses from the nineteenth century, the library also contains tabletop photomontages composed of carte-de-visite immortalising famed actresses from the turn of the century.

The Grill, more than in any other room in the club, is where Players are surrounded by tributes to their own. Nearly every inch of wall space is covered by in-house memorabilia that provides an enjoyable glimpse of the Players' colourful history.

The musty odor seems somehow appropriate when you enter Edwin Booth's bedroom on the third floor. The hardwood floor is partially covered by a well-worn Persian carpet; personal effects seem almost as though they were just used by their owner, who died in his bed shortly after 1:00 a.m. on June 7, 1893. This suite was Booth's inner sanctum. In fact, when he deeded 16 Gramercy Park to The Players, it was with the proviso that he should be allowed to retain his rooms on the third floor where he and his servants could come and go undisturbed.

The room is divided into two areas: the bedroom on the east side of the room, which takes up a little less than half the space, and a living area. Booth's small, canopied single bed, covered by a handmade patchwork coverlet embroidered with the initials "EB," dominates the sleeping area. Adjacent to Booth's bed is the chaise where Booth's daughter Edwina often used to stay, keeping her father company during his last days. **Information and photographs from The Players Club and John Knowles**



Bea Lillie at The Players Club

#### Answers to the Test for Budding Drama Critics

1. Give the names of the four most famous Greek dramatists of antiquity?  
Ans: *Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes*
2. Which of Shakespeare's characters says:  
a. 'Alas poor Yorick' Ans: *Hamlet*

- b. 'Give me the daggers' Ans: *Lady Macbeth*  
c. 'I am a man more sinned against than sinning' Ans: *Lear*  
d. 'Sing, willow, willow, willow' Ans: *Desdemona*  
e. 'I am dying Egypt dying' Ans: *Antony*  
f. 'All the world's a stage' Ans: *Jaques*
3. Name the four principal Restoration dramatists?  
Ans: *Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, Farquar.*

# CBS COWARD GEMS AVAILABLE FOR VIEWING AT THE PALEY

A look at two CBS television versions of Coward Classics available to be seen at New York's Media Archive

Anyone visiting New York for the first time might fail to spot one of its most treasured resources. A place where 'time stands still' as visitors recall their childhood, enjoy again a treasured TV or radio classic, research their favourite performers, directors, musicians, presenters, composers... the list is endless. The Paley Center for Media in both New York and Los Angeles is the archive for the modern age with thousands of video and audio moments just a click away from being relished.

Amongst the collection are of course some wonderful Coward moments including his American television debut with Mary Martin in *Together With Music*. Two recently seen by Robert Gardiner and later by John Knowles are something of a revelation. They are two CBS television programmes in The Ford Star Jubilee series; *Blithe Spirit* starring Noël Coward, Lauren Bacall and Claudette Colbert and *This Happy Breed* with Noël Coward, Edna Best, Beulah Garrick, Norah Howard and a young Roger Moore.



Garrick, Norah Howard and a young Roger Moore.

NCS members may recall that Philip Hoare a biographer of Noël Coward lent us copies of press images especially shot to publicise the CBS TV production of *Blithe Spirit* (see left). Below you can see a 'frame' from the actual TV recording with Noël and Lauren Bacall eyeing each other up as Charles Condomine gets used to the 'spirit' reappearance of his deceased wife. For those amateur performers who

often ask how Condomine is pronounced... well from The Master's own lips it is 'Condoméen' - so that settles it!

Press critics of this production gave it a luke-warm reception but it is really an extremely good version of Coward's most popular comedy. Given that for most of us our experience of Noël's filmed acting is in *In Which We Serve*, *The Italian Job*, *Our Man in Havana*, *The Astonished Heart* and perhaps *The Scoundrel*, many may feel his performances were a little on the 'wooden' side, this is certainly not the case here! Even Claudette Colbert, who frustrated Noël's attempts to direct her well past the point of the usual finger-wagging, appears assured in what is a thoroughly enjoyable television broadcast. Noël really excels himself in *This Happy Breed*. His playing of Frank Gibbons is simply superb. He plays it just right, slightly underplayed and totally believable. One can understand why he so resented what Robert Newton did to the role in the film version, shades of his later over-acted appearance in 1950 as Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*!



The Paley Center For Media



This production of *This Happy Breed* offers so much. A rare appearance of the wonderful British stage actress Edna Best who acts as the dramatic glue that brings together all the other members of this largely ensemble piece. Patricia Cutts does justice to the wild-spirited girl who lets herself be led astray but returns to the fold as a grown woman with a greater understanding of the true values of life, finally marrying the neighbour's sailor son played so well by a young Roger

Moore. No shades of the suave Saint or Bond and the man who said of his acting range,

"My acting range? Left eyebrow raised, right eyebrow raised."

Norah Howard in the role of the ever-whining mother, Mrs. Flint excels in this character role working well off Beulah Garrick as Aunt Sylvia whose face works overtime as she distorts her mouth and pops her eyes at the impositions she imagines she has to bear.



Two hours flew by watching these television gems. If you are lucky enough to spend some time in New York City in the future, visit the Paley. Apart from the archive holdings it has a programme of activity with major stars in attendance. see: [www.paleycenter.org](http://www.paleycenter.org) for more about this year's programme.

John Knowles

## FUTURE EVENT IN LONDON



**Wednesday 3rd March, 2010**

(PLEASE NOTE change of date since the October edition of Home Chat)

NCS Member, Michael Law, and his Piccadilly Dance Orchestra are hosting an evening at the Café de Paris

DO JOIN SOCIETY MEMBERS FOR THIS SPECIAL OCCASION

### A Marvellous Party!

at the legendary Café De Paris  
3 - 4 Coventry Street, London W1D 6BL  
with dancing to Michael Law's Piccadilly Dance Orchestra [www.pdo.org.uk](http://www.pdo.org.uk) and a cabaret of Coward songs

Reception 7.30 p.m. Carriages at Midnight  
Dress Code: Black tie or "period" preferred

Noël Coward's diary entry for Monday 29th October, 1951 reads as follows:-

"Went to the Café feeling slightly tremulous.

Really triumphant success – tore the place up. Glittering audience headed by Princess Margaret and the Duchess of Kent. All very glamorous – Beattie (Beatrice Lillie) absolutely wonderful to me – all very enjoyable."

Our late Vice President, Sheridan Morley, says in 'The Noël Coward Diaries':

"Noël Coward first performed in cabaret at the Café in 1951 and this was to be the last major development in his career: his emergence – to his own and everyone else's surprise – as one of the most highly paid and highly successful cabaret entertainers of the 1950's. He was already on the road to Las Vegas when Kenneth Tynan, reviewing his debut at the Café wrote, "To see Coward whole, public and private personalities conjoined, you must see him in cabaret, romping fastidiously, padding down those celebrated stairs on black suede-clad feet and baring his teeth as if unveiling some grotesque monument before giving us "I'll See You Again" and all the other bat's wing melodies of his youth".

This is a unique chance to experience the glamour and excitement of an early Twentieth Century evening at London's legendary Café De Paris – with a three course dinner, a cabaret performance of Noël Coward's songs and dance music from Michael Law's world famous Piccadilly Dance Orchestra to whisk you back to a fantasy world of nightclubs, champagne and glorious music. Opened in 1924, the Café de Paris is one of London's last remaining 'high society' night clubs and has a unique and glamorous history of cabaret and dance bands, including band leader Ken "Snakehips" Johnson, who was killed on the fateful night in 1941 when a wartime bomb made a direct hit on the Café de Paris.

**HOW TO BOOK: Price: Early booking special offer, £85 per person, (if paid by 18th January 2010, £95 thereafter) to include 3 course dinner, half a bottle of wine and Reception drink and special Noël Coward Cabaret.**

**PAYMENT BY CHEQUE TO "THE PICCADILLY DANCE ORCHESTRA" 27 CAESAR AVENUE, KINGSNORTH, ASHFORD, KENT. TN23 3PZ.**

**Tel: 0845 370 0178. Paypal payments accepted - to: [mail@thepiccadillydanceorchestra.co.uk](mailto:mail@thepiccadillydanceorchestra.co.uk)  
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### THE NOËL COWARD SOCIETY WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS!

If you would like to join the Society please contact:

Stephen Duckham: [stephenduckham50@btinternet.com](mailto:stephenduckham50@btinternet.com) Tel: 02476 229502

In North America contact Ken Starrett: [cowardusa@nyc.rr.com](mailto:cowardusa@nyc.rr.com) Tel: 00 1 212 877 4259

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Chairman: Barbara Longford  
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Please send all correspondence  
to:

The Editors,  
29 Waldemar Avenue,  
Hellesdon, Norwich,  
NR6 6TB, UK  
[johnhunterknowles@mac.com](mailto:johnhunterknowles@mac.com)  
Tel: +44 (0)1603 486 188

Editors:

John Knowles (UK) and  
Ken Starrett (US)

Design and Production:  
John Knowles

Publication and Distribution:  
Stephen Greenman  
Music Correspondent:  
Dominic Vlasto

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