



HOME CHAT

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

President: HRH The Duke of Kent, KG, GCMG, GCVO, ADC
Vice Presidents: Barry Day OBE • Stephen Fry • Tammy Grimes • Penelope Keith CBE

STEPHEN FRY AND JIM DALE - HONOUR THE MASTER

LONDON AND NEW YORK CELEBRATE THE 110th ANNIVERSARY

Each year the Society celebrates the life and work of Noël Coward at the site of two of the three statues sculpted to celebrate the centenary year of The Master's birth. In London our Vice President Stephen Fry honoured us with his 'svelte' presence and a great speech about Noël who he confessed was someone he never met but who had shaped so much of his approach to life. Stephen admits he is a huge admirer of Noël's diligence - something he endeavours to emulate in his own life. Barbara Longford welcomed Stephen with a resumé of the statue's history: "This statue, by Angela Conner, was commissioned at the behest of the late Graham Payn, for the Centenary Celebrations of Coward's birth, in 1999. It was unveiled by Sir Noël's friend, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother, on 8th December, 1998, in the presence of Graham and an illustrious gathering of devotees. Two other casts are situated at Sir Noël's grave at Firefly in Jamaica and also in the Theater Hall of Fame, at the Gershwin Theatre in New York and every year, on the Saturday nearest to his birthday, members of the Noël Coward Society gather, in London and New York for a flower-laying ceremony. In the centenary year, Vanessa Redgrave laid the flowers and she was followed in 2000 by our late President, Sir John Mills. A most eminent array of artists have continued the tradition ever since, including Elaine Stritch, Lord Attenborough, Dame Maggie Smith, Anna Massey and last year, Sir Donald Sinden. I think these names speak for themselves about the high esteem in which the late Sir Noël is held. The man we still call 'The Master' feared that he might be forgotten, but here we are 36 years since his death and his works are performed constantly all over the world and the Noël Coward Society has over 700 members.



Stephen Fry lays flowers on the statue of Sir Noël Coward at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, London

PHOTO: Alma Robinson

This is the Society's 10th anniversary year and we are happy and honoured to welcome our much respected and much loved Vice President – Mr Stephen Fry.

Stephen responded by claiming that he was, "...probably the first person to have had the honour of presenting flowers to The Master who never knew Noël Coward... and that inevitably will become truer and truer as the years pass ...I played court to Firefly a couple of years ago and looked around and was pleased to see... looking at the working methods of one of the most famous polysyllabic rhymers in English songwriting history... he had three rhyming dictionaries at Firefly. I am delighted to know that even Noël had to look things up...I met him in the truest sense of the word as an artist when I discovered in an attic that my father, at one point, had the Phillips microgroove LP of 'Live at Las Vegas' one of his triumphs after a disappointing period for him after the

Jim Dale lays flowers on the statue of Sir Noël Coward at the Gershwin Theatre, New York



PHOTO: Kathy Williams

second world war when his plays were not working very well and he had appalling tax difficulties. He was helped by, of all people, the Labour politician Nye Bevin who pointed him in the right direction. Noël gave Nye a portrait of himself by Dame Laura Knight. Everyone was very surprised by this, 'Noël you cannot abide Laura Knight's work.' He replied, 'I know, but I wanted to say that Knight was drawing Nye.' He was even prepared to sacrifice his artistic taste for a good line. I think the reason why we respect Noël Coward in the theatre today was that he absolutely embodied the nature of professionalism which has much to do with companionship, respect, and a high doctrine of the art of theatre - which means that hard work is a privilege rather than a chore. It is something that anyone in the theatre has to emulate. You cannot be a Noël Coward by taking it easy. You can if you are a man of style like Noël Coward appear to take it easy. Everything appears so natural, so dignified, so light in his hands - like a swan, all that serene grace on the surface is belied by the furious paddling underneath.

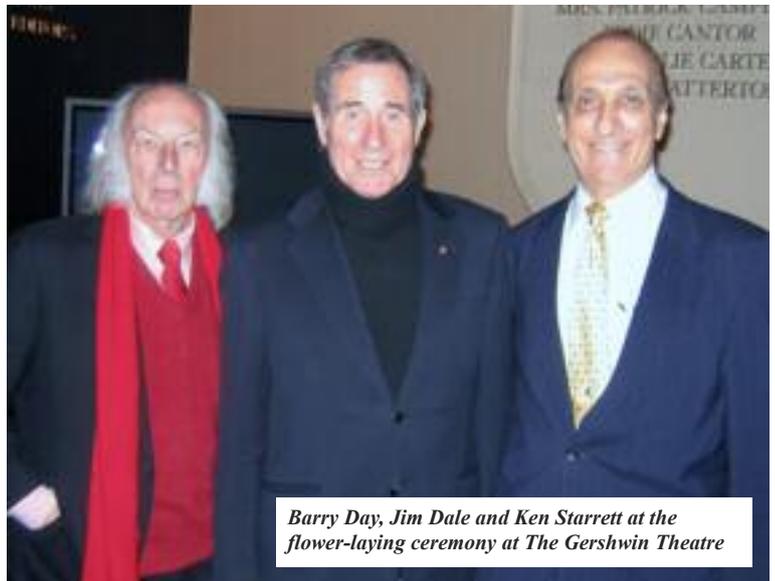
(A video of Stephen's speech in full and his meeting with members in the Drury Lane bar can be seen on YouTube and on the NCS website together with a short interview at the theatre, PLUS his highly entertaining speech at The Garrick Club and extracts from the readings of Noël's verse given by Robert Gardiner.)

From New York, Ken Starrett reports on the Flower-Laying at the Gershwin Theatre

Each year in celebration of Noël Coward's birthday, flowers are placed on his statue by a special guest in the Theatre Hall of Fame at the Gershwin Theatre. To honor Coward's 110th birthday and the tenth anniversary of The Noël Coward Society, this year's special guest was the extraordinary actor, Mr. Jim Dale. He spoke with great warmth, charm and humor. At the outset he mentioned his stiff movements because of the neck brace he was wearing (cleverly disguised by a turtleneck sweater) owing to a recent injury. He spoke of his and Coward's life in England before coming to America. Mr. Dale at one point lived near Coward in Kent. He always hoped he might have a puncture as he drove past Coward's home on his bicycle and that 'the Master' would come to the rescue. Speaking reverently of Coward's work, he finished his tribute with a recitation of the lyrics to 'I Like America.'

Mr. Dale made his debut in America on Broadway in *Scapino* in 1974. He has received many awards over the years for his work, including a Tony for his performance in the smash hit musical *Barnum*. We are thrilled to announce that in January Mr. Dale was inducted into the Gershwin Theatre Hall of Fame for lifetime achievement in the theatre. This is a richly deserved award for a much loved and respected actor.

Following the ceremony at the Gershwin, guests gathered at the Manhattan Club at nearby Rosie O'Grady's for cocktails and luncheon. Many long-time members attended this event, including, Shirley and Tom O'Brien, Jo Baslow with her husband, Larry Tarantino and one of the "original 32," Tom Gerrity from

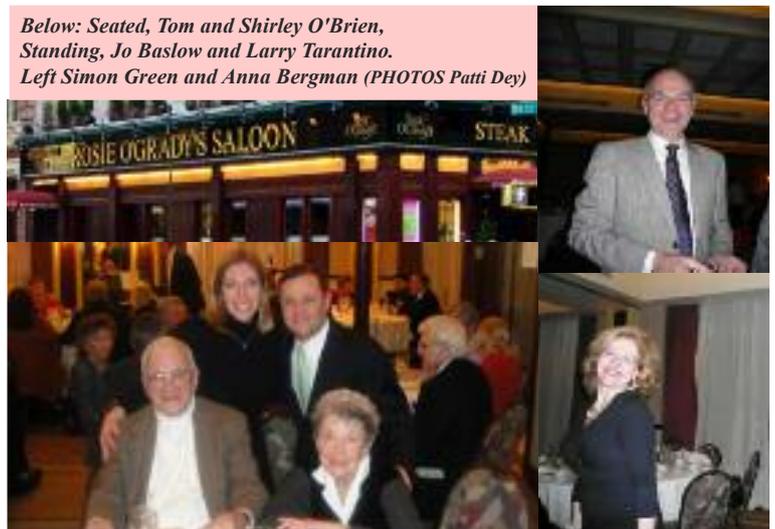


Barry Day, Jim Dale and Ken Starrett at the flower-laying ceremony at The Gershwin Theatre

Scranton, Pennsylvania

The entertainment following the luncheon is usually made up of musical selections. This year for the first time we included a dramatic presentation. We were extremely privileged to have Jim Dale give an absolutely marvelous performance as Henry Gow in a monologue from Coward's *Fumed Oak*. The wonderful stylish singer Simon Green delighted one and all with his performance of Coward songs, 'What's Going To Happen To The Tots?,' 'Three Theatrical Dames,' 'Time And Again' and 'Wait A Bit Joe.' Mr. Green was followed by the lovely soprano Anna Bergman whose warm voice charmed us with her renditions of 'Zigeuner,' a medley including 'A Room with a View' and 'I'll Follow My Secret Heart' and 'Someday I'll Find You,' and finishing with 'I'll See You Again.' We are very happy and give our thanks to the many members attended this event. Without the support and interest of such loyal members there would be no Noël Coward Society. The day ended with Anna Bergman and Simon Green leading everyone in singing what has become our signature theme, 'I'll See You Again.'

Below: Seated, Tom and Shirley O'Brien, Standing, Jo Baslow and Larry Tarantino. Left Simon Green and Anna Bergman (PHOTOS Patti Dey)



THE TENTH ANNIVERSARY Screening at the Paley

On Saturday, December 12th at the Paley Center for Media another screening in our ongoing series was held to honor Noël Coward's birthday. This has been an annual occurrence, but this year was different. We would not only be celebrating 'the Master's' 110th birthday but also the tenth anniversary of The Noël Coward Society!!



Lynda Watson, Ken Starrett and Lynne Rogers



Carleton Carpenter, Richard Holbrook and Stephen Lundvall



Richard Holbrook and Patti Karr



Ken Starrett, Kathy Williams, Dan Putman

This meant that we had to present something very special. We were able to acquire what is possibly one of Noël Coward's rarest television appearances - a two-hour tribute to him on NBC's *Today Show* presented October 3, 1963. This is the first time it has been seen in 46 years. The show was usually a live telecast, and a kinescope was thought to be lost. In 2007 NBC informed us that it was not in their library. There are several unusual aspects in the production of this show. It was virtually unheard of that a two-hour tribute would be done to a single person. NCS Member Pat Higgins who was secretary to Hugh Downs, the host of the *Today Show*, confirmed this. Because of his upcoming Broadway show *The Girl Who Came to Supper* opening in Boston on September 30th, Noël Coward would not be in New York to do the show live. The decision was made to film the show in advance. This unusual process worked in our favor. After an extensive search, nine rolls of negatives were found stored in cans in a warehouse in North Bergen, NJ in perfect condition. The guests on the show were Sally Ann Howes, Skitch Henderson and the NBC orchestra, and Beatrice Lillie in one of the few television appearances she ever made with Coward. None of this would have been possible were it not for the extraordinary efforts of NCS member Richard Holbrook who first contacted NBC and with diligence and patience continued for a year and a half until the project was completed. He deserves a great vote of thanks!!

When the Society first started here in 2002 there were only 32 members all across America.

Many of the "original 32" are still loyal members. It is amazing to realize that from a small beginning the Society now has grown to be 700 members worldwide. In the large audience of more than 120 members, we were happy that two of the "original 32" joined us for the first time - Susan Peters from Galveston, Texas and James Daugherty from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Also attending was our Vice President, Tammy Grimes, acclaimed Broadway actress, NCS Member, Dana Ivey and NCS Member, M-G-M film star, Carleton Carpenter. Kathy Williams, our West Coast Liaison, and her husband, Dan Putman came from California. From Massachusetts new NCS Members Kenneth Happe and Stephen Lundvall joined us, as did new NCS Member Alexander Rice from Pittsburgh. Following the screening, members had a chance to socialize at a reception held in the Dan Rather Gallery.

BRIEF ENCOUNTER IN NEW YORK

The Kneehigh Theatre production of Noël Coward's film *Brief Encounter* (based on his play *Still Life*) created by Emma Rice, is an inventive mixture of theatre and film techniques. The actors not only create characters in the play, but entertain the audience at the beginning of the evening as musical performers.

This production clearly involves the audience. After a successful engagement in London's West End, a tour of the UK followed. The eagerly awaited production made its way to our shores, opening at American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco on September 11th to rave notices. (See October Home Chat) The sold-out engagement was quickly extended. New York was the next stop. A trendy venue known as St. Ann's Warehouse at DUMBO (Down Under Manhattan Bridge Overpass) in Brooklyn was the location for the opening on December 2nd.

More glowing notices greeted the production.

“Captivating ... I felt enlivened, enlightened and seriously moved.” - *NY Times*

“A charming, meditation on that dangerous phenomenon called love.” - *NY Times*

“The most blissfully entertaining and inventive show in town.”- *NY Daily News*

“Just go and let the considerable enchantment of (Emma Rice's) ingenuity wash over you.” - *Associated Press*.



Instant popularity meant extending the engagement by two weeks to January 17th.

During the show's run two events were provided by The Noël Coward Foundation. The first on Monday, December 7th was a performance of *Private Lives Revealed*, based on *The Letters of Noël Coward*, devised by the book's editor, Barry Day. The show has now been performed in various venues in both the UK and the US. The cast consisted of Broadway actors Dana Ivey, Patricia Conolly (NCS members) and Edward Hibbert, with cabaret stars, Anna Bergman and Steve Ross (NCS member). Barry Day was the narrator.

Following the matinee on Sunday, December 13th, fellow Foundation Trustee, Geoffrey Johnson hosted a panel “*Acting Coward*.” Mr. Johnson writes:

“This exposure to the play, *Brief Encounter*, was actually my fourth viewing of it since I first saw it in England at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in Leeds in 2007. This time we were offered those very special cucumber sandwiches as we watched the very talented cast sing a medley of nostalgic songs after the performance in the Warehouse lobby.

Immediately following, I had the opportunity to moderate a Panel of four unique actors who were well versed on acting Noël Coward. It was a fitting Sunday afternoon tribute to Sir Noël, the man who one critic had said, “has given us this play of a very special affair....” with Emma Rice's wonderful adaptation and direction of his short play, *Still Life*, which was eventually turned into the classic 1945 film, *Brief Encounter*,

by the playwright.

Onstage, after the songfest, Tammy Grimes shared her memories of her friendship with Noël when she first worked for him in *Look After Lulu* after he ‘discovered’ her at Upstairs At The Downstairs. He immediately offered her his new play, an adaptation of a French Feydeau farce. It was not a great success but cemented their relationship for years to come.

In her next Coward vehicle she played Elvira in *High Spirits*, the musical version of *Blithe Spirit*, directed by its author, and with Beatrice Lillie as Madame Arcati. She followed this with a very successful revival of *Private Lives* with Brian Bedford as Elyot for which she won a coveted Tony Award for playing Amanda. She told our audience that, as director/author, he never forced his direction on her or the rest of the cast but he always knew exactly what each character in every scene should achieve. He was also concerned with actors re-writing his dialogue because so often the rhythm and phrasing of his words could be damaged by an actor who rewrote them.

As we further discussed *Brief Encounter*, I had to tell everyone how I was at a complete loss for words when I was introduced to the original Laura, Celia Johnson, at Noël Coward's 70th Birthday party at London's Savoy Hotel during “Holy Week,” as he called it. She was very natural, honest, and down-to-earth and never in any way acted like the incredible actress she was!

Simon Jones, our next panelist and a Coward veteran, was most recently seen on Broadway in *Blithe Spirit* with another multiple Tony winner, Angela Lansbury, and before that, with Rosemary Harris and Lauren Bacall in *Waiting in the Wings* and in yet another revival of *Private Lives* with Joan Collins. Of interest to all was the debut performance of an un-produced Coward play, *Long Island Sound*, which his off-Broadway company, TACT, presented recently. He discussed its brief history and the fact that it was based on a Coward short story called *What Mad Pursuit*?

Along with Tammy and Simon, the Laura and Alec from *Brief Encounter*, newcomers to our shores, held their own with great charm, knowledge, and intelligence. Tristan Sturrock has performed with Kneehigh for over twenty years and discussed his rehearsal process beginning at the theatre and then playing his role pre-London, in the West End, on tour, and now here. He filled us in on his technical problems and, in particular, the difficulties of the stage-to-film portions of the play, the replacement or additions and eliminations of the Coward music along the way, etc.

Hannah Yelland said she had seen the original film more than once before rehearsal because she felt it was important to be true to the quality of that outstanding cinematic work. Afterward, she went on to play Laura in her own way. When asked if she felt the addition of Coward's music helped her characterization and was it distracting, as somebody in the audience thought it might be, she replied it helped her and was in no way distracting. Hannah also said some very perceptive things about the play *Still Life* but, ultimately, felt *Brief Encounter* was a fuller piece of work.

All in all, the symposium was very successful because the four participants were so articulate and informative about the elusive process of acting Noël Coward.”

Following the engagement at St. Ann's Warehouse, *Brief Encounter* will open at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis where it will play from February 11th through March 21st.

Ken Starrett

WEB-WIDE NOËL

The World Wide Web's exponential growth is mirrored in the places where information on Noël Coward can be gathered. (All of the website references below forgo the www. prefix). The Coward family of sites include: noëlcoward.com for the professional world of Coward, noëlcoward.org for the work of the Noël Coward Foundation and noëlcoward.net our own website with information on our activities and the amateur theatre world of Coward. noëlcowardmusic.com is a developing website that will contain a lot of audio, video and information on Noël's music and musicals. In addition there is a regular NCS West Coast e-newsletter (see noëlcoward.net for more info).

For those who like video on Coward YouTube has a selection of Coward performances and we now have our own YouTube 'Channel' that can be found at: youtube.com/user/TheNoëlCowardSociety. It is here that we have placed some of the video taken of Stephen Fry at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and at The Garrick Club this Christmas.

There is a FaceBook page dedicated to The Master called The Noël Coward Appreciation Society (the web address is so long that you will need to search on the FaceBook website to find the page). It has 698 members and is a place to share views and links in the Coward World. NCS member Andrew Raymond Barnes is an officer for the page.

Useful web pages for exploring are: playbill.com (news of the theatre world) • thisistheatre.com (database of West End shows) • ibdb.com (database of Broadway shows) • imdb.com (database of films) • the famed wikipedia.org offers detailed pages on Coward and his works with synopses of his plays including cast lists for original and revival productions. thattheatresite.com has a feast of information for 2,750 shows lovingly researched by enthusiastic volunteers and has a wide Coward section. John Kendrick's page, Noël Coward 101 (musicals101.com/noël.htm) was one of the first websites to provide information about Noël. last.fm has audio extracts and a Shoutbox section (chat area) on Noël that is worth a few minutes of your time.

Various websites offer pages of Noël's quotations although none offer even a shadow of those published by Barry Day and others. A favourite page - well it has to be the Internet Broadway Database (ibdb.com) - it's simple, clear and direct and provides a clear line of development of Noël's work on the Broadway stage from 1924 onwards.

John Knowles

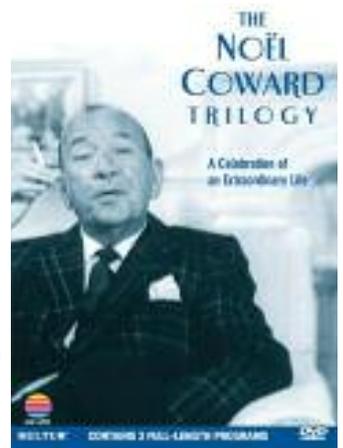
BUYING COWARD ON THE WEB

The Noël Coward Trilogy

This three-part BBC documentary, made for the BBC Arena culture series, traces the life, career and legacy of Noël Coward. 'The Boy Actor' follows Coward's meteoric rise to international fame at the age of 30. 'Captain Coward' focuses on his travels to the Far East with Lord Geoffrey Amherst, and his role as entertainer of the troops during the war years and films 'In Which We Serve' and 'Brief Encounter.' 'Sail Away' follows his cabaret triumphs in London and Las Vegas after the Second World War and his years as a tax exile in Switzerland and Jamaica up to his death in 1973.

It was first seen on British television at the end of Coward's centenary year and illicitly recorded by many of us on VHS that Christmas becoming a token of joy at The Master's life and works. Initially unshown in the US it became a 'most sought after' item for many American fans. Its release in November 2009 provided the ideal Christmas gift - missed it then? Well a great New Year gift then!

It is now available, after a decade of noted absence, on DVD and distributed by Warner Music Entertainment. The catalogue number is: 5144285772 and the barcode 5051442857726. It is available in both NTSC and PAL formats from amazon.co.uk for £9.69 and on amazon.com for \$22.49



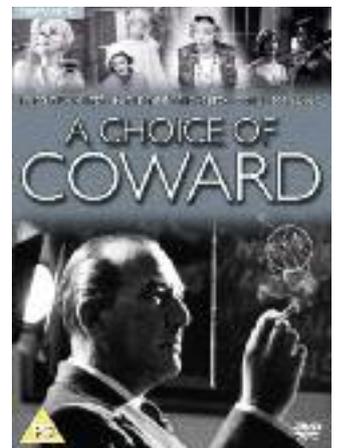
Granada Television: A Choice of Coward

This extract from the blog of FRANK (yes that is how he signs himself) was taken from cathoderaytube.blogspot.com

If you purchased the BBC's Noël Coward Collection a few years ago, then Network's forthcoming release of *A Choice Of Coward*, featuring four of the celebrated writer's acclaimed plays, will make a welcome archive companion. It's also interesting to contrast the production, direction and acting decades apart with versions of *The Vortex*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Present Laughter* and *Design For Living* featuring on both DVD sets.

These four plays, made by Granada and broadcast over a month in 1964 in their *Play Of The Week* schedule, were slotted into an abundance of one off dramas being produced by the regional ITV companies at the time. *Play Of The Week* in 1964 not only showcased dramas made by Anglia, Granada and Rediffusion but also mixed highly acclaimed contemporary dramatists with titles from classic literature. One week you'd get a Noël Coward, the next a John Hopkins or a James Mitchell, then followed by an adaptation of Dostoyevsky.

The Vortex, *Blithe Spirit*, *Present Laughter* and *Design For Living* are very much television adaptations of their time. What does impress is the scale of the production for multi-camera presentation with designer Peter Philips going to town with what



would probably have been a reasonable budget. His sets are impressively designed, ornate with Art Deco and rococo loveliness and in *The Vortex* there's a cheeky male nude dominating one wall of the set. A stylish reference Coward would have admired, no doubt.

The other reason for taking a look at these is because they are also good examples of the work of one of the first women directing drama on television, Joan Kemp-Welch. A former actor, she enjoyed a career in theatre and film before embarking on her television directing career just as ITV and Associated Rediffusion were being formed in 1955. By the time she directed the four Coward plays for Granada, she'd already been praised for her work on adaptations of Wilde, Pinter (a Prix Italia winner for *The Lover* in 1963) and for her large scale presentation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1964, featuring cast members Jill Bennett and Peter Wyngarde, for example, who she would later reuse in the Coward plays.



She continued directing on series such as *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Crown Court*, *Doomwatch*, *Armchair Theatre* and *ITV Playhouse* amongst others.

Her style is crisp and

efficient, suggesting that much directing from the gallery was taking place rather than being 'hands on' on the studio floor. Cameras don't travel very much in these productions but she zooms in for very big close-ups on the actors for specific emotional emphasis in the drama and slickly cues in shots from each of her cameras. She blocks her actors very well, there are some particularly precise uses of physical symmetry in *Present Laughter* and *The Vortex* for instance, and she often gets the camera down quite low, in *Blithe Spirit* particularly, or high above the actors as in *Present Laughter*.

It is highly theatrical, reflecting very much how plays were presented on television in a 'stage it as in a theatre and just point the camera' manner despite major moves over the previous decade to develop work specifically for television where the visual grammar speeds up and becomes more complex in construction. It does dovetail stylistically with Coward's own work. The plays, especially *The Vortex* and *Design For Living*, are 70 minutes of gradually mounting hysteria and Kemp-Welch choreographs the interplay between



characters with visual relish and then goes for huge close-ups at very tense points in scenes, often towards the climax of the plays.

One of the biggest problems the modern viewer will have

here, certainly if you've watched little television drama made pre-1980, is not just with the visual construction and pace but

also with the language, staging and relationships between characters. You could easily dismiss these plays as old fashioned, perhaps unable to articulate anything of relevance to a modern audience. The Noël Coward style will predispose those who are unfamiliar with his theatre work, and may only recognise him by his songs or cameo in *The Italian Job*, to see it as rather shallow comedy. You could be forgiven for not seeing the issues underlying the plots or not finding a subtext beyond easy laughs or, as in these cases, just finding unintentional hilarity from some of the bigger performances attempting to escape off the screen. Yes, Hattie Jacques, I'm talking about you.

However, get beyond this initial resistance and you begin to understand that Coward was reflecting the society in which he was operating. Actor Garry Essendine's plight in *Present Laughter* could quite easily be seen as similar to that which many actors suffer from in the present day: sexual morality and the cult of celebrity. You'll find all the wit, comedy and farce inimical to Coward's work but scratch that shiny surface and



you find searing examinations of real people and their hang-ups. All human frailty and failure is here: amorality, vanity, selfishness.

Coward was also commenting on the milieu he worked in, that

of the theatre and actors/writers who could not see beyond the artifice of their own creations, their own self-love. *Present Laughter* is all about an actor/writer who finally rejects the whirlwind of hangers-on and his own reputation in order to find his true self, the one that his ex-wife clearly empathises with. Peter Wyngarde and Ursula Howells play this to perfection in Gerald Savory's adaptation and ironically we can even look back on Wyngarde's own career as one that became overtly saddled with camp knowingness and a self love that



essentially choked his abilities as a serious actor. He's brilliant in this and it's a role entirely suited to him.

Margaret Johnston is a force of nature in *The Vortex* as a mature woman,

Florence Lancaster, who lives vicariously through her young son and what could be described as her addiction to toyboys. Her own campness and artifice and the brittle relationships she has with younger men is deposited within a country house setting where a party reveals raw emotions and not only a lecture from a well intentioned friend about her love for younger men but also the troubling matter of a son, Nicky, who is a drug addict and is struggling with his own sexuality. The sexuality of Florence and Nicky drives the narrative, and quite explicitly in Florence's attraction to young men. Coward

certainly encourages you to see Nicky as a gay man confused and sublimating his denial through addiction and attempting to



get engaged to an impressionable girl, Bunty, to try and avoid the inevitable.

Kemp-Welch does give her actors a lot of freedom to the point where Hattie Jacques is splendidly

eccentric and athletic in *Blithe Spirit* and Margaret Johnston and Peter Wyngarde push their theatricality forcefully out of the screen. Even a young James Bolam's turn in *Present Laughter* is a little overwrought. They are also terrifically physical performances, Johnston's being fabulously tormented. But there are some hugely sophisticated and subtler performances - Jill Bennett, John Wood and Daniel Massey are the glue that holds together *Design For Living*, Helen Cherry hilarious as Ruth Condomine in *Blithe Spirit*, Barbara Murray sublime as the silky femme fatale Joanna Lyppiatt and Joan



Benham is superb as Wyngarde's secretary Monica in *Present Laughter*.

Design for Living, written in 1933, might be regarded as somewhat tame in this age of

metrosexuality but Coward's comedy of manners is precise about how not everyone should be forced to conform to the traditional mould of 'family life' imposed by society and reflects many of the issues of the day regarding gay marriage, non traditional relationships and alternative families. The 'la ronde' of relationships between decorator Gilda, playwright Leo and painter Otto all settles down in the end when they decide to live with and love each other much to the absolute horror of their 'straight' friends and loved ones. This tryst is set against some of Peter Philips' grandest set designs and delicious performances from Massey, Wood and Bennett. Massey and Wood are, in and of themselves, an amusing double act that more modern versions of the play stridently



code as gay. *Blithe Spirit*, examining as it does the themes of marriage, infidelity and loyalty, climaxes with Charles Condomine's release from the repressing presence of his

two wives. As they become ineffectual spirits he has the burden of the women in his life removed. He cries, "Now I'm free,

Ruth dear, not only of Mother and Elvira and Mrs. Winthrop-Lewellen, but free of you too, and I should like to take this



farewell opportunity of saying I'm enjoying it immensely." Coward returns Condomine to the status of 'bachelor gay' with all the connotations that implies and he obviously sees

that as the true freedom for the man about town who epitomises taste and sophistication.

Coward underwent something of a renaissance in the 1960s which may have had something to do with his and Rattigan's influence on the likes of Osborne and Pinter finally getting due acknowledgement and with the fact that his writing about the changing sexual mores and moralities of his own set gained new significance in that progressive decade. Each play has a filmed introduction from Coward and, ironically, he does have a go at the 'angry young men' of the theatre and their depressing plays in the introduction to *Blithe Spirit*. I'm not necessarily saying he was right, though.

These are fascinating slices of 1960s produced drama. It begs the question of why broadcasters have seemingly abandoned the practice of presenting 20th Century dramatists in prime time and suggests a partial abandonment of the Reithian idea that television would offer culture to the masses whether you wanted it or not. I'd love to see a modern version of *Design For Living* or *The Vortex* on BBC4, or BBC2 for that matter, because they remain as powerful as ever and still have something to say to audiences old and new. And more *Play Of The Week* releases please, Network!

A Choice Of Coward - The Complete Series (Network DVD 7952793 - Region 2 - Released 18th January 2010 - Cert PG)

With thanks to **FRANK** and cathoderaytube.blogspot.com

A TALENT TO AMUSE

Our planned CD of Noël's 70 the birthday celebration at the Phoenix Theatre is finally into production - apologies for the delay! Our thanks again to our sponsors who provided the means for us to proceed with this classic archive recording. Track listing: *The Boy Actor; Early Mourning; I've Been to a Marvellous Party; A Room With a View; Private Lives; If Love Were All; I've Just Come Out From England; Matelot; London Pride; You Were There; Chase Me Charlie; Twentieth Century Blues; Why Do the Wrong People Travel; Mary Make-Believe; That is the End of the News; I'll Follow My Secret Heart; Nina; Time and Again; Melanie's Aria; Mad About The Boy; Noël's curtain speech.*

The CD features *John Gielgud, Irene Worth, Betty Hare, Robert Morley, Danny La Rue, Cheryl Kennedy, David Kernan, Susannah York, Richard Briers, Richard Attenborough, Joyce Grenfell, Celia Johnson, Mark Wynter, Stanley Holloway, Susan Hampshire, Denis Quilley, Pat Kirkwood, Elizabeth Welch, Maggie Fitzgibbon, Jessie Matthews, Avril Angers, Hy Hazell, Stella Moray, June Whitfield, Patricia Routledge, Cyril Ritchard, Anne Rogers, Jeremy Brett, June Bronhill, Cleo Laine and John Dankworth.*

Was Daisy Coward the inspiration for a US fast-food chain?

The GI's were intrigued when they watched colourful "dunking" Daisy dipping biscuits into her cup of tea to soften them in Norwich during the Second World War.

This was eccentric Daisy Coward, the auntie of the one of the most famous entertainers in the land, Noël Coward, and the Yanks just loved it when she turned up at St Andrews Hall during the Second World War. Stories about St Andrews Hall (published recently in the Eastern Evening News) revived memories of dear Daisy for Margaret Haley of Norwich who used to take her to the hall where they would serve refreshments to the GI's, often just boys away from home from the first time... and many of them would never go home.

"Daisy used to soften her biscuits in her tea and the Americans asked what she was doing?" said Margaret.

"Her reply was "dunking" and I often wondered after that if she was the inventor of the name of the fast-food chain in the USA Dunkin' Donuts," added Margaret.

Who knows? It's a nice thought. Dunkin' Donuts - the huge international donut and coffee retailer was founded by William Rosenberg of Massachusetts in 1950 - five years after the war.

Noël's elderly aunt, Daisy, was living with Margaret's family in Norwich during the war to escape the London Blitz. They were friends with Jig Coward, Noël's cousin, who lived in Norwich and worked as a doctor's receptionist.

"She was quite a character. She consumed most of our butter rations on her two slices of bread for breakfast and almost set fire to the house lying on the floor drying her hair," she said.

"She also demanded I went up three flights of stairs in the middle of one of the big air raids to rescue her jewellery while she was tucked up safely in our basement."

And Daisy also startled passengers on the number 89 bus when her alarm clock, which she



War memories: American military policeman, or 'Snowjogs', form an honour guard on parade outside the cathedral. Reader Margaret Haley recalls serving refreshments to GIs at St Andrew's Hall, while living with Daisy, the aunt of Noël Coward, below.

used to carry in a large handbag, went off. "The passengers all stood up in panic thinking it was an air-raid alarm," added Margaret.

In those days young Margaret was one of the local, older schoolgirls serving refreshments to the servicemen at St Andrews Hall.

"All nationalities were very appreciative. It was like a little oasis of relaxation for them and rewarding for us," she said.

"St Andrew's Hall was a meeting place for servicemen from various parts of the world before they went back to the front line. And thousands of young GI's, based at airbases dotted all over Norfolk and Suffolk, died fighting for our freedom."

Salvation Army lasses arrived wearing bonnets and black stockings selling 'The War Cry,' as they did in local pubs on Saturday night.

"All were respectfully treated especially by the US airman from the Bible belt in the Deep South," recalled Margaret.

But it was often larger-than-life Daisy who was the star of the show. They loved her.

With thanks to Judith Elliot-Hunter for spotting this and to Derek James of the Eastern Evening News, Norwich for allowing us to reprint it.

SIMON GREEN - A CHANGING WORLD

"December 16th 2008, New York. It was Noël Coward's 109th birthday and to celebrate, David and I opened "Coward at Christmas - a cabaret for Noël" at 59E59 Theaters. That night the snow fell, the champagne flowed and it was fortunate and fitting for us that one of Coward's legendary leading ladies, Elaine Stritch, proposed the toast and cut the cake. It was a perfect start to a thrilling month's run in a crisp, white Manhattan.



The material of Noël Coward has always played a major part in the work that David and I have performed together over the 13 years of our collaboration and, back in London, we are delighted to have had the opportunity to make this recording of the

New York show, now less seasonally entitled, *A Changing World*.

Tracks:

There Have Been Songs in England • *You Were There Couldn't We Keep On Dancing?* (music Philip Braham) • *Where Are The Songs We Sung?* • *A Room With a View I'll Follow My Secret Heart* • *What's Going to Happen to the Tots?* • *Time and Again Wait a Bit Joe* • *On Leaving England for the First Time* • *London Pride* • *I Travel Alone* • *Sail Away* • *Three Theatrical Dames* • *Why Must The Show Go On?* • *Twentieth Century Blues* • *I'm Old Fashioned* (music Jerome Kern, lyrics Johnny Mercer & Noël Coward) • *Let's Do It* (music Cole Porter) • *Alice Is At It Again* • *I'll See You Again* • *This Is a Changing World* • *Someday I'll Find You* • *Come the Wild, Wild Weather*

Simon's CD can be bought online at: simongreensolo.co.uk

PLAYFUL BLITHE SPIRIT AT THE ROYAL EXCHANGE

John Knowles reviews this Coward classic in the midst of Manchester's Christmas Fayre

On the last day of Manchester's annual Christmas Fayre with stalls set out like Swiss chalets on the snow-covered streets around the Royal Exchange, the latest revival of Coward's comic classic *Blithe Spirit* played in-the-round to a full audience at this unique theatre-setting. For those who have never sat in the Pompidou-like structure set in the centre of the ancient corn hall at the heart of Manchester's shopping district, the experience is a unique treat. Steeply raked seating that echoes a line of bar stools at a stylish wine bar adds élat to an acting space that carefully evokes the upper middle class world of the drawing room where servants slip silently in and out of the daily lives of their masters and betters - or in this case run at great speed!

Noël's most popular comedy always entertains and eager Coward watchers love to see how Madame Arcati is to be portrayed; how the tension between the 'brittle and correct' Ruth and the 'sensual and happy-go-lucky' Elvira is portrayed and whether the actor playing Charles will be able to produce a believable libido that could encompass a relationship with both distinct types of partner.

The show's marketing makes much of the presence of past *Coronation Street* star Suranne Jones who whilst playing an assured and measured Ruth just fails to connect as a real person and takes the brittle nature of the role a little far with a 1930s style upper class tone that may to some seem very 'Coward' but is sadly rather false. Nelly Harker as Elvira is the more relaxed and loveable of the two actors but falls short in my view in the sensuality stakes - a very personal requisite I know but I always feel the need to be stirred by the sexuality of this role - on this occasion I merely admired from afar.

Despite poor reviews in some quarters of the press I thought Milo Twomey gave a superb performance as Charles and looked the most 'at home' of any of the incumbents of the Condomine drawing room. This is not an easy part, despite being the role Noël arguably wrote for himself, and can often be played as a middle-class dullard rather than 'the man in the middle,' not sure which way to turn but quite enjoying the experience!

Katie West as Edith scurried hither and thither with effect but the role was left largely underdeveloped - as with *Fallen Angels* the part of the maid can be so much more with the right direction. Peter Temple and Wendy Nottingham made absolutely the most of the visiting Bradmans but for my money it was the interpretation of the part of Madame Arcati by Annette Badland that is worthy of real note.

We know that the eccentric medium has to exhibit complete conviction in her passion for the occult and be totally engrossed in a lifestyle at total odds with her hosts but often this is either under or overplayed. In this case Annette unlocks the inner child and echoes the immaturity and playfulness of her spirit 'control' Daphne. It is a wonderful interpretation with timing that gets deserved laughs for both Coward's text and the physical humour she brings to the role. To see such an



established character actress produce such a consummate interpretation is a joy.

So on balance the production is a very enjoyable if uneven revival where the stiffness of the main establishment incumbents is offset by the playfulness of the spirit, the medium and the unseen 'control.'

The set and lighting design are excellent with a detailed eye for period furniture and artefacts - and a real surprise for the dying moments as the wrath of the spirits are vented.

It is not easy to perform this gem 'in-the-round' so congratulations must go to the director Sarah Frankcom, the designer Liz Ascroft and the lighting designer Vince Herbert who make the most of the opportunities and minimise the difficulties - to produce a flowing production with player entries from all angles to make best use of this unusual and dynamic space.

Good to note that the Audio Described and BSL Interpreted Performances for *Blithe Spirit* were supported by the Noël Coward Foundation.

John Knowles



NEW COMMITTEE APPOINTMENT MR KERRY HAILSTONE, REPRESENTATIVE FOR AUSTRALIA

On behalf of the Society, I should like to thank Mr Robert Wickham for his contribution as Representative for Australia. Members who attended the 'Present Mirth' event at the National Theatre in 2007 will recall meeting Robert, who became a valuable contact over the years. However, due to the pressure of other commitments, Robert has decided to stand down as our Representative there.

At the AGM on 12th December last year, I was delighted to announce that confirmation had been received that morning from Mr Kerry Hailstone, formerly the President of the Noël Coward Appreciation Society of South Australia (NCAS) that he would like to accept the Committee's invitation to become our next Representative for Australia. I read out Kerry's response, as follows.

"I would be most honoured to be NCS Australian Representative. Whatever I can do I will do to promote the Noël Coward Society and Noël Coward in Australia. I think it is important that Australians are reminded of Coward's visit to the mainland Australian states and New Zealand in 1940 and of his outstanding contribution to raising awareness about the war in Europe. He had a real impact on how Australians responded to the crisis. If I can make that connection with the 65th anniversary celebrations of the end of WW 2 in 2010 I will be very happy. Please convey to the AGM my pleasure at the invitation to become NCS Australian Representative together with hearty congratulations on the ten years success of the Noël Coward Society worldwide."

Subsequently Kerry was asked to provide a profile of himself and some background information about NCAS for all our members to read in Home Chat and here is his article.

Barbara Longford

KERRY HAILSTONE AND THE NOËL COWARD APPRECIATION SOCIETY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In early 1999, two life-long fans of Noël Coward, discussed the centenary of Coward's birth. In our years together in local theatre, Noël Coward had been the acme of wit, glamour and style. Every actor in town wanted to talk, smoke, in fact be Noël Coward. By 1999, however, these days had gone. Since his death in 1973, Coward had quietly slipped from the Australian public consciousness. We decided the centenary offered an opportunity to do something positive about it, so we launched the Noël Coward Appreciation Society of South Australia - membership two - and began writing to theatre companies around Australia to draw attention to the centenary and suggesting revivals of Coward's plays were well over due.

On Saturday December 16th, we threw a birthday party for Noël and invited anyone interested to come. Twenty did. We watched a BBC programme about his life and shared our enthusiasm. We had such a good time we decided to meet again in February 2000. The State Theatre Company programmed *Blithe Spirit* for March that year, and we invited the cast to our meeting extending the invitation to The Friends of State Theatre. 120 people turned up. The Friends brought champagne and we all got very nicely blithe indeed.

The Noël Coward Appreciation Society grew from there. We soon had over 100 members, a permanent home and a newsletter, *Conversation Piece*, to keep in touch. We met six Friday evenings each year - later Sunday afternoons - and for the next 10 years sang, danced and laughed our way through the treasure trove of the Coward legacy. By our last meeting in November 2009, an elegant if rather boozy Champagne Cocktail Party, membership had grown to 170 and NCAS had organized 48 events and presentations celebrating the talents of Noël Coward.

NCAS not so much ended in November 2009 as changed form. The committee retired, but friendships continue as will



opportunities for Coward fans to meet. On Tuesday 27th April 2010, we will be presenting the Governor of South Australia, Rear Admiral Kevin Scarce, and Mrs Scarce, with a Brief Encounter rose for planting in Government House garden. Thirty NCAS members will attend, together with the State Patron of Australian Red Cross. In December 1940 Coward visited Adelaide at the invitation of Australian Red Cross as part of a national tour. His purpose was to raise awareness of the war in Europe and to encourage Australia's involvement. 2010 marks the 70th anniversary of this visit and the 65th anniversary of the end of World War Two. Our presentation at Government House seems an appropriate way to celebrate these anniversaries since Coward was received at Government House in 1940 and sang *The Last Time I Saw Paris* as part of the evening's entertainment, which is rather poignant given what was happening in France at the time.

As president of the Noël Coward Appreciation Society of South Australia I have had the opportunity to collect stories from people who met Coward during those few hectic days in Adelaide in 1940. He arrived in a heat wave, which it seems he loved. On the second morning of his visit, he took a taxi to Glenelg beach (about 20 minutes from the city) to go swimming, returning to his hotel room to assuage the heat by attacking a block of ice with an ice pick. An ABC radio minder who arrived to accompany him to a troop concert in the Adelaide Hills was surprised to be greeted at the door by Coward naked to the waist cooling his neck with a lump of melting ice. The ABC rookie (later a well known radio announcer) was even more surprised when Noël tossed him the ice pick saying, "Do please help yourself." Unexpected behaviour from *the man from Mayfair* but it certainly made people like him.

Thank you for inviting me to be Noël Coward Society Representative in Australia. As a NCS member I am delighted by the Society's international success and you can be sure that whatever I can I will do to promote NCS and an appreciation of Noël Coward down under.

Kerry Hailstone, 10A, Westall Street, Hyde Park, South Australia 5061, Australia.

Tel: (61) 88272 5264. E-mail: khailstone@adam.com.au

Coward on the Coast

This winter along our coast, we can take refuge from El Niño's rains by heading indoors to enjoy works by and about Sir Noël Coward. From Portland, Oregon to Pasadena, California, playgoers will be enjoying west-coast premières and revivals of treasured works by Coward, including *Design for Living*, *A Song at Twilight*, and *Fallen Angels*. In Los Angeles, Coward fans old and new will marvel at the revised and expanded collection of the exhibition, *Star Quality*, focusing on Coward's career in the movies.

Opening in Southern California - Star Quality: The World of Noël Coward

Best known for their spectacular annual presentation of the ACADEMY AWARDS®, (aka the OSCARS®), the Academy



AMPAS Wilshire Building • Courtesy of AMPAS®

of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences features two public galleries in its world headquarters in Beverly Hills. Ringing in 2010 with a new exhibition that opened January 23rd in the Fourth Floor Gallery, the Academy presents *Star Quality: The World of Noël Coward*, which documents Coward's warm and enduring friendships with many of the 20th century's leading artists and film personalities, as well as his contributions to the film world through onscreen appearances



Noël with Marlene Dietrich, 1937. Dietrich first contacted Coward to tell him how much she admired his performance in his first major film role, *The Scoundrel*. He hung up on her, thinking it was a prank. • Courtesy of Photofest

and the numerous film adaptations of his stage plays and other writing.

With unparalleled access to the Coward Archives, and drawing on public and private collections in Europe and the U.S. as well as the Academy's own Margaret Herrick Library, the exhibition brings together dozens of rare photographs, drawings, paintings, original manuscripts, letters, sheet music, posters, playbills, set and costume designs, personal memorabilia, audio and video clips, and original costumes, including several of the silk dressing gowns that became Coward's trademark.

This is the fourth showing of some of these Coward treasures, and the curators have worked diligently to make each showing unique. To prepare the current exhibit, guest curators Brad Rosenstein and Rosy Runciman collaborated with Ellen Harrington, the Academy's Director of Exhibitions and Special Events. In keeping with the thriving modern art scene and movie industry in L.A., curators Brad and Rosy have deconstructed some elements of the previous three exhibitions to highlight new angles and provide a fresh view of the artifacts.

Director Ellen Harrington commented that the L.A. exhibition expands the narrative of the previous exhibits, now focusing on Coward's film career. New items on display are from the Academy's own collection and the British Film Institute (BFI) archives. Of note: the OSCAR® statuette for 'Best Director', awarded to Frank Lloyd in 1933 for his direction of the film *Cavalcade*.

Screenings of some of these films will take place in March and April (titles and dates to be announced later).



Geoffrey Johnson, Alan Brodie, and Brad Rosenstein.



Claire Lockhart, AMPAS Staff Member; Brad Rosenstein; and Ellen Harrington, the Academy's Director of Exhibitions and Special Events, with Oscar® at the entrance to the Academy's Fourth Floor Gallery.



Frank Lloyd received this Oscar® for Best Director in 1933 for the film version of 'Cavalcade'.



One of Coward's last film appearances was in Joseph Losey's *BOOM!* in 1968 with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor. Noël's suit in the film, on display in the exhibition, was by Doug Hayward, Britain's leading bespoke tailor for decades. Coward was so fond of the suit he kept this original in London and had a duplicate made for New York, which he wore to accept his special Tony Award in 1970. All of the accessories on display, from the Bally loafers to the monogrammed handkerchief and cufflinks, are original.

Star Quality: The World of Noël Coward January 23 – April 18, 2010

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences
Fourth Floor Gallery, 8949 Wilshire Boulevard, Beverly Hills,
CA 90211

Public Hours:

Tuesday - Friday: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Saturday - Sunday: Noon to 6 p.m.

Closed Mondays. Admission is free.

For more information: www.oscars.org or (310) 247-3600.

Star Quality: The World of Noël Coward is presented in association with the Noël Coward Foundation and the Museum of Performance & Design (MPD) in San Francisco.

A Brief History of Star Quality: The World of Noël Coward

An evolutionary touring exhibition, *Star Quality* has changed focus and expanded as it traveled from venue to venue. For each of the three previous exhibitions, there is currently a web page about the exhibit, including archival photos or video of the display and its location: **Ten Chimneys** in Wisconsin, the **National Theatre** in London, and the **Museum of Performance & Design** in San Francisco.

Ten Chimneys: Genessee Depot, Wisconsin - 2007

At Ten Chimneys — a museum and National Historic Landmark in the magnificent country home of Coward's friends Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne — Erika Kent and Ten

Chimney's President Sean Malone developed the first exhibit with support from the Noël Coward Estate, the Noël Coward Foundation, and the Noël Coward Society. Titled *Noël Coward in Ten: Ten Chimneys Presents Ten Views of the Master*, the exhibit included "... ten dramatic panels that detail his iconic life and career ... complemented by music, video clips, and a handful of delightful personal artifacts", which were displayed from May 1 – November 10, 2007. See the Ten Chimney's web site for an online view of *Noël Coward in Ten*:

www.tenchimneys.org/exhibitions/2007/ .

The National Theatre: London - 2008

The exhibition next appeared in London at the National Theatre from January 21 through March 29, 2008. Curator Rosy Runciman customized and expanded the set of "delightful personal artifacts" and titled the show *Star Quality: Aspects of Noël Coward*. Drawing on the Coward archives and many other sources, Rosy added numerous items from Coward's life and career, including special memorabilia from friendships with Laurence Olivier and with theatre historians Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson.

To mark this exhibition, The Noël Coward Estate has produced a 15-minute video, available at:

www.noelcoward.com/html/archive.html . To play the video, click on the Tab labeled "Film and Video."

The Museum of Performance and Design (MPD): San Francisco, California - 2009

Curator Brad Rosenstein of the Museum of Performance & Design worked with Rosy to create an exhibition enriched by more detail, with an even larger set of artifacts ranging from a makeup box with toupée to stunning costumes worn by Coward's leading ladies, plus items such as posters advertising his Hollywood films and Broadway shows, which highlighted Coward's career in the United States.

Titled *Star Quality: The World of Noël Coward*, the exhibition ran from April 16 to August 29, 2009, accompanied by almost-weekly special events, including film screenings and celebrity lectures (including Steve Ross and John Lahr) in addition to an opening-night gala with a cabaret followed by a stunning performance by San Francisco's historic Lamplighters Music Theatre in *Bitter Sweet in Concert*, a new adaptation by Barry Day.

For a list of concurrent Coward-related programming in North America and exhibition-related materials in the collection of the Museum of Performance & Design's Performing Arts Library, see:

www.mpdf.org/EXHIBITIONS/COWARD/coward.html .

Kathy Williams

What's On • US West Coast

Oregon

Design for Living

January 5 - February 7, 2010

Artists Repertory Theatre

1515 Southwest Morrison St.

Portland, OR 97205-1814

www.artistsrep.org

BO:(503) 241-1278

California

Blithe Spirit

January 15 - February 13, Theatre

29 - The John Calverli Theatre

73637 Sullivan Rd

Twentynine Palms, CA

92277-3351

www.theatre29.com

BO: 760-361-4151

A Song at Twilight
January 16 – March 7, 2010
The Odyssey Theatre
2055 South Sepulveda Blvd
Los Angeles, CA 90025
www.odysseytheatre.com
BO:310-477-2055

Private Lives
January 28 - February 20, 2010
Bus Barn Stage Company
97 Hillview Avenue
Los Altos, CA 94022
www.busbarn.org
BO:650-941-0551

Fallen Angels

Late February 2010 • Pasadena Playhouse
39 South El Molino Avenue • Pasadena, CA 91101
www.pasadenaplayhouse.org • BO:626-356-7529

JANUARY MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Membership letters for January renewals have been sent out to those of you pay by cheque or Credit Card. Some may have, by mistake, received letters with a JULY renewal.

This is an error and not an early reminder for July! If you have one of these letters please ignore the month and renew as normal for January.

Anyone not sure of their renewal date please contact me:
stephenduckham50@btinternet.com

Stephen Duckham

ALL THAT JAZZ

Dominic Vlasto reviews:

Noël Coward - Mad About The Boy

Once in a while, a performer or a particular interpretation comes along which causes one to stop and think. This happens rather rarely with Coward's music, and when it does happen the effect is usually being measured in terms of lyric impact, rather than the purely musical. Most reissues of past recordings of Noël Coward's music do not teach us anything fundamentally new, but listening to the recent CD Dick Hyman plays the music of Noël Coward, originally recorded in 1952, was not only a voyage of discovery with delightful musicological treats at every turn, but also an experience which caused one to reflect on the essential "jazziness" at the heart of many of Coward's best-known song compositions.

Dick Hyman, born in New York in 1927, is an American jazz pianist/keyboardist and composer best known for his versatility with jazz piano styles. Over a 50 year career he has functioned as pianist, organist, arranger, music director, and, increasingly, as composer. He served as artistic director for the 'Jazz in July' series at New York's 92nd Street Y for twenty years, a post from which he stepped down in 2004. He has recorded over 100 albums under his own name and many more in support of other artists.

Even at this early stage of his career (he would have been twenty-five in 1952), Hyman's classical training and superb stylistic sense allows him to "dress" his interpretations in a bewildering array of musical "costumes". Listening to this CD, if you didn't know the Coward catalogue at all, you might assume you were listening to a succession of recordings of music written by - or at least certainly played by - Gershwin, Billy Mayerl, Scott Joplin, Duke Ellington or Fats Waller - among many others. This is a CD full of nothing but Coward's music, but it doesn't sound as if it is!

If you like jazz piano at all, you will enjoy these performances, if only because you are sure to find one track in which your own favourite pianist's personal style is being convincingly recreated. And not one of these tracks could ever

Ignorance Revealed

It never ceases to amaze me that however much I think I know about our hero I am always being caught out by discoveries of what to others may be the obvious!

Despite having read about the various lyric versions of Coward's take on Cole Porter's 'Let's Do It' in Barry Day's Noël Coward *The Complete Lyrics*, I had failed to realise that an alternative recording to that of the Las Vegas version of this much admired Coward gem had been recorded on an LP entitled *Command Performance - A Night of a 100 Stars* - a recording of the charity show at the London Palladium on 28 June 1956 (midnight to whenever).

Noël sang a version that Barry quotes 'He said that Belgians and Dutch do it, Even Hildegard and Hutch do it...' The recording is not wonderful quality but it exists!

I also discovered Simon Jones' 5-disc audio collection *The Noël Coward Audio Collection* that also includes CD quality versions of Noël and Margaret Leighton performing extracts from *Brief Encounter*, *Blithe Spirit* and *Present Laughter* as well as all the tracks that make up the well-known Caedmon Literary Series LP *The Apple Cart Interlude* and *Poems by Noël Coward*. A late discovery but a welcome one!

Knowledge rather than ignorance is bliss! **John Knowles**

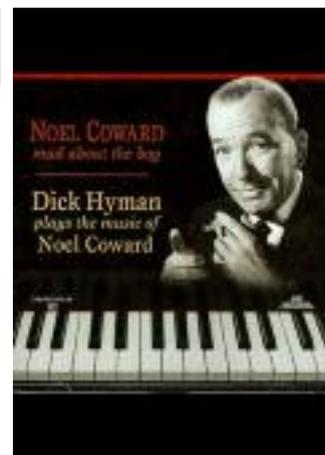
be accused of being a mere lampoon; I would define them more as re-interpretive homages. The treat in listening to this CD is the challenge of trying to identify whose style it is that is being lampooned. They are not all as obvious as the Gershwinesque 'Twentieth Century Blues', which is little more than a redressing of 'Rhapsody in Blue' with Coward's as the main melody, but retaining a lot of direct quotations from Gershwin's original.

The most tightly-controlled lampoon of the entire CD comes, however, not in imitation of one of the light-hearted, deft twentieth-century jazz pianists, but in the guise of the deeply serious Prelude No. 4 in E Minor by Chopin, which serves here for an inspired representation of 'Mad About the Boy'. The pastiche/lampoon is so good that one has to smile broadly at the wit of it, despite the serious un-jazziness of the model.

I wonder whether Coward himself would have heard these interpretations, on an original LP. I can't find any reference to his having done so, but I am sure that someone with his acute ear for musical style would have been both amused and impressed at Hyman's skill and craftsmanship, and also probably rather flattered.

The CD is available through normal retail outlets (e.g. HMV) at £7.99 (UK). Release date 24.04.09: Proscenium Records (New York) PRO O3. Tracks as follows:
Dance, Little Lady • A Room with a View • I'll Follow My Secret Heart • Any Little Fish • Play, Orchestra, Play • Nevermore • Mad About the Boy • Poor Little Rich Girl • Zigeuner • Polka • World Weary • We Were Dancing • You Were There • Ladies of the Town • Twentieth Century Blues

Dominic Vlasto



Awesome, and Then Some

By DICK CAVETT

(Warning: Good friends have refused to believe a word of what I'm about to relate. Your credulity is about to be strained.)

The setting was the Universal lot in Hollywood, and I was preparing a prime-time special to be called "Dick Cavett's Backlot U.S.A." We'd somehow lured Mae West out of her most recent retirement. We had Mickey Rooney and Gene Kelly. We needed another big-name guest.

Someone came in with a message and casually dropped the words, "The Duke is shooting over on the Western street."

I was fairly sure that by "Duke" he didn't mean Edward VIII. Before there was time to even think, "Feets, do yo' stuff," I was all but out the door. My producer, the splendid Gary Smith, didn't need to ask where I was going. He just said, "Get him for the show."

"Sure thing," I said, laughing.

I hit the ground running. A man carrying a fake tree pointed the way. It felt like that heavy slogging one experiences in dreams. I knew I'd be too late. I got through a section of London, the New York street, the New England village . . . and there it was up ahead. The square of an old Western town. "The Shootist," which proved to be John Wayne's final movie, was being filmed.

Somehow — although it seemed I had met all my heroes and non-heroes in the biz — I had always been certain, deep down, that I was not destined to meet John Wayne. It was just not in the scheme of things.

If the word "icon" — used daily now for just about everybody, even me — ever applied in its fullest force to anyone it was to the man embarrassed as a kid by his real name, Marion Mitchell Morrison.

How could I ever hope to find myself standing beside the star of "Sands of Iwo Jima," seen five times by Jimmy McConnell and me in our Nebraska youth? (Later, we'd "play" the movie, taking turns being The Duke, our bikes standing in for horses.)

How could I expect to meet "The Ringo Kid" from "Stagecoach"? Or the man in another one of those great Monument Valley John Ford classics ("She Wore a Yellow Ribbon"?), riding toward the camera, the cavalry column behind him, the storm overhead. Surely this mythic figure could not occupy the space right next to you.

And yet there he was.

Associated Press

John Wayne during a scene from the 1976 movie "The Shootist."

The gods had smiled and arranged for my first glimpse of him to be the ideal one. Mounted and in full cowboy drag: the chaps, the boots and spurs, the neckerchief and the well-worn Stetson atop the handsome head. He was waiting for the scene to begin.

I moved, or rather, was moved toward him. He saw me gazing upward.

"Well," he said — in John Wayne's voice! — "It sure is good ta meet ya."

I reached up to shake the mounted man's proffered hand. It enveloped mine like a baseball glove.

He was instantly likable and, although it seems almost the wrong word for such a fellow, charming. We chatted for several minutes until shooting resumed. I watched him ride off for the next shot. I figured that was it. I was satisfied.

Meanwhile, I had forgotten about the special, and I started to leave. I couldn't wait to phone Jimmy McConnell.

Suddenly, the Duke — preceded by his shadow — came up behind me, on foot now. As with the Great Pyramid at Giza, nothing prepared you for his size. (And there was a rumor that he wore lifts in his boots. I was not about to ask.)

"I'd enjoy talking to ya but I've got a scene to shoot with Betty Bacall," he said. "Do you want to watch?"

The answer came easily. And my new friend led me inside to the set.

It was the old West, and the scene was in the kitchen of the house belonging to Lauren Bacall's character. She was about to serve him a meal.

"Ya wanna run your lines, Duke?" asked an assistant.

"No thanks, I know 'em. Most of 'em, anyway." (Crew laughs.)

I was a few feet from him, in the shadows. They were still setting up and Duke was humming to himself, and — I guess unconsciously recognizing the tune — I began to hum along. He spotted me and chuckled. And the following dialogue took place. On my solemn word. (I went straight home and wrote it all down before it faded.)

Wayne: *Wasn't he great?*

Me: *Who?*

Wayne: *Coward.*

Me [startled, realizing now that the tune was Noël Coward's "Someday I'll Find You"]: *Yes.*

Wayne: *I've always loved his stuff. Remember the scene in "Private Lives" when they realize they still love each other?*

Me: *Yes, and did you know there's a recording of Coward and Gertrude Lawrence doing that scene?*

Wayne: *Gee, I gotta get that. I guess I've read most of his plays.*

Me [still not convinced there isn't a ventriloquist in the room]: *I'll send you the record.*

Wayne: *Well, thank ya. I like the line [he switched to quite passable upper-class British], "You're looking very lovely you know, in this damned moonlight."*

Me: *I did a show with Coward and, as he introduced them, "My dearest friends, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne."*

Wayne: *I sure would love to have seen them in "Design for Living." [Mentally I reach again for the smelling salts.] And, damn, I'd love to see that show of yours.*

Me: *I'll see that you do. [Jesus! Did I? Oh, I hope so.*

Wayne: *That'd be awful nice of ya.*

Me: *Did you ever think of doing one of his plays?*

Wayne: *Yeah, but it never got past the thought stage. I guess they figured that maybe spurs and "Blithe Spirit" wouldn't go together. Can't you see the critics? "Wayne should go back to killing Indians, not Noël Coward."*

As I looked around for someone to pinch me, the mood was shattered by a sharp, barking voice: "O.K., people. Places for 43."

(There is a good bit more to this encounter, including a life-and-limb incident. Interested? Or would you rather have a piece on "Edward Bulwer-Lytton: Man and Boy"?)

It required the common sense of Woody Allen to put the whole thing into perspective. When I bumbled the story to him, he seemed disappointingly un-astonished.

"It reminds you that he's an actor," he said. "Not a cowboy"

Reprinted from the New York Times 23 January 2010

YORK THEATRE AWARDS FIRST

'NOËL COWARD PRIZE' TO DOUGLAS COHEN

It was fitting that on Noël's 110th birthday (December 16th) the York Theatre - that specializes in showcasing new musicals and reviving old and often neglected one - should award its first Noël Coward Prize for what Artistic Director, Jim Morgan calls 'triple threat' creative achievement. The prize was made possible by a grant from The Noël Coward Foundation.

Just as Noël frequently wrote the book, music, and lyrics for his shows, so has winner Douglas Cohen on more than one occasion - most successfully with his show *The Gig*, which will now have a performance at the York. In past the York has presented such Coward works as *Pacific 1860* and *The Girl Who Came to Supper*.

Cohen has also collaborated frequently in the past on shows such as *No Way to Treat a Lady* (Richard Rodgers Award) and the forthcoming *The Big Time*. He has also received several other awards and nominations for his work off-Broadway. His win was a popular one in an audience that contained many eminent Broadway figures such as actress, Jane Alexander, Sheldon Harnick (*Fiddler on the Roof*) Frank Gilroy (*The Subject Was Roses*) and Richard Maltby, Jr. (*Miss Saigon*)

The judging panel that considered more than 60 entries from around the world consisted of Nancy Ford, John Kander, Richard Maltby, Jr., Mel Marvin, Brian Murray, Susan H. Schulman and Tony Walton.

In his acceptance speech a clearly excited Douglas Cohen reverently evoked the spirit of The Master.

"You may not think that a child born near London in 1899, the son of a British piano salesman christened Noël, and a rabbi's son from Storrs, Connecticut would share something of a history before tonight. But when I was 16, my father - who shares the same birthday as Sir Noël - gave me a double record set of Noël performing in Las Vegas and New York in the hopes that I would inject more sophisticated material into my piano-vocal gigs at Cape Cod. To receive an Award bearing this great man's name is an almost incomprehensible honor.

Seven years ago, thanks to a little extra money in my bank account, I bid on a Noël Coward letter and won the item. The content not only amused me but also struck a chord. It's a letter dated January 24th 1935 from Noël to the talented novelist and playwright, Edna Ferber ...

"Darling Ferber,

I tried to telephone you to thank you for the lovely telegram you sent me from Boston, but you beetled off somewhere in your careless way.

The press didn't seem to think much of the play but business is marvelous and, being a dreamer, that's all that matters to me - or is it? Love"

Well, I think the press did matter to Noël. Acceptance, encouragement, and recognition definitely matter. And so does this award. Thank you."

The presentation was followed by a reception on stage. The whole event proved an excellent

springboard for The Noël Coward Prize to become an annual event at the York.

The evening began with a concert version of Max Beerbohm's *The Happy Hypocrite* - adapted by Tony Walton (aided by Barry Day). It tells the story of the raffish Lord George Hell (James Barbour), who abandons his mistress, La Gambogi (Eliza-

beth Inghram) for love of the young singer, Jenny Mere (Georgia Warner). The story is linked by narration of Oscar Wilde (Michael Hayward-Jones). Howard Kissel and Jessica Burrows completed the cast and Mark York acted as pianist and Musical Director.

The unique element of the 50-minute piece was that it used a number of lesser known and some totally unknown Coward, including an early (1917) collaboration with Ivor Novello, 'Isn't There Any Little Thing That I Can Do For You?' and an unused lyric from *Pacific 1860*, 'If Only a Girl Could Be Sure' - music by Steven Litvak.) Other numbers included - 'Love, Life and Laughter' *This Year of Grace*, 'Regency Rakes' *Conversation Piece*, 'Forbidden Fruit' (Noël's first published song), 'Try to Learn to Love', 'Why Does Love Get in the Way?' *Ace of Clubs*, 'Lover of My Dreams' *Cavalcade*, 'Dearest Love' *Operette*, 'The Younger Generation', 'Something To Do with Spring' *Words and Music*, 'Any Little Fish' *Cochran's 1931 Revue* and 'Most of Every Day.'

It is anticipated that the show, directed by Tony Walton, will be repeated in other venues.

Ken Starrett



WHAT'S ON? Details of some productions, publications and events see www.noelcoward.net and www.noelcoward.com for more...



A Marvellous Party! 3rd March, 2010

NCS Member, Michael Law, and his Piccadilly Dance Orchestra are hosting an evening at the Café de Paris *An NCS Special Occasion* 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 and a cabaret of Coward songs Reception 7.30 p.m. Dress: Black tie or "period" preferred. Price: £95 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 Credit cards bookings accepted: please call 0845 370 0178 (please leave your name and number if the answerphone is switched on).

KIM CATRALL and MATTHEW MACFADYEN star in PRIVATE LIVES

directed by Richard Eyre at The Vaudeville Theatre and Supper at Joe Allen

Saturday 17th April, 2010, matinee performance at 2.30 p.m.

Private Lives is opening at the Vaudeville Theatre in March and is running for 10 weeks only. The Society has obtained a discount of £10 off the price of the best seats and has reserved 50 seats at a cost of £39.50 each, for the matinee performance on Saturday 17th April. The matinee begins at 2.30 p.m. and the Vaudeville Theatre is in The Strand and is ten minutes walk from Charing Cross station.

Optional supper at Joe Allen from 6.p.m – 8.30 p.m. 13, Exeter Street, London WC2E 7DT.

www.joeallen.co.uk

Joe Allen opened his restaurant in New York's Theatre District in 1965 and the combination of a great location, informal environment and quality food made it an instant hit with the theatre community as well as theatre-goers.

In January 1977 Joe Allen opened in London and has become a legendary theatre restaurant, often frequented by members of the Noël Coward Society and other notables. It has a great buzz, a relaxed atmosphere and a long bar where you would expect to find a lovely Hepburn/ Golightly figure, with cocktail and cigarette holder. The resident pianist, Jimmy, has been playing there for years and has perfected many Coward numbers. The restaurant is a very short walk away from the theatre. Forty places have been reserved for the supper, which is optional and can be paid for on the night. We shall be seated at tables of ten people and as the restaurant can only take one payment for each group of ten people, one person at each table should be the banker. It might be helpful to bring cash. Please see the website for sample menus.

Tickets and supper places will be reserved on a first come, first served basis. Theatre tickets will be distributed in the foyer on the day from 2 p.m. Please complete the enclosed Booking Form and send it to me as soon as possible, or telephone your debit or credit card details.

Barbara Longford

"WHOSE YACHT IS THAT?" – A Weekend at Deauville.

As mentioned at the Annual General Meeting, the event is being POSTPONED until 2011, to allow time for special arrangements to be made with the Mayor of Deauville. Further details will appear in a future copy of Home Chat.

THE NOËL COWARD SOCIETY ALWAYS WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS!

If you would like to join the Society please contact:

Stephen Duckham: stephenduckham50@btinternet.com.....Tel: +44 (0) 2476 229 502

In North America contact Ken Starrett: cowardusa@nyc.rr.com.....Tel: 00 1 212 877 4259

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Officers of the Society are:
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Please send all correspondence to: The Editors, 29 Waldemar Avenue, Hellesdon, Norwich, NR6 6TB, UK

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 and
Barbara Longford
Music Correspondent:
Dominic Vlasto

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