

What's On? – productions across the globe

Is your production or event shown here...? If you want your item items to be included here please send us the details.

(* denotes Premiere, TBC = To be confirmed, BO = Box Office) Professional companies are shown in blue

In the United Kingdom

WEST END REVIVAL of HAY FEVER

Starring Judi Dench and directed by Sir Peter Hall.

Theatre to be announced. First preview - 6th April 2006;

Press Night - 19th April 2006.

Fallen Angels

25t to 29 Oct - Hen and Chickens Theatre, Highbury & Islington, London. Tickets £11, concs. £9. BO 020 7704 2001

Blithe Spirit

3 to 5 Jun 2006 - Mulberry Theatre Co., Village Hall, Doveridge, Derbyshire

27 Oct to 5 Nov - Sutton Arts Theatre, Sutton Coldfield

2 to 4 Nov - Reigate ATS, Harlequin Theatre, Redhill, Surrey

13 to 15 Oct - Sherbert Prod. Charles Cryer Theatre, Carshalton, Surrey.

11 to 15 Oct - Sidmouth ADS, Manor Pavilion, Sidmouth

26 to 29 Oct - Colwall players, Village Hall Colwell, Worcs.

Semi-Monde

9 to 11 Oct - Oundle School. Oundle, Peterborough, Cambs.

Waiting In The Wings

25 Jun to 2 Jul 2006 - New Venture Theatre, Brighton

Hay Fever

28 Nov to 3 Dec - Qu. Elizabeth's Grammar Schl. Ashbourne

27 to 29 Oct - Gosforth ADS, Public hall, Gosforth

7 to 11 Feb 2006 - Exeter Uni. Theatre Co., Northcote Theatre, Exeter

31 Oct to 5 Nov - Chipstead players, Courtyard Theatre, Chipstead, Surrey

13 to 25 May 2006 - Whitefield Garrick Soc. Garrick Theatre, Whitefield

20 to 22 Oct - Matchbox Theatre Co., Village Hall, Rainhill, St. Helens, Merseyside

Private Lives

7 to 12 Aug 2006 - Dawlish Rep. Co., Shaftesbury Theatre Dawlish, Devon

Relative Values

7 to 18 Jun 2006 - Highbury Theatre Centre, Highbury Little Theatre, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

27 to 29 Oct - Orpen Players, Orpen Hall, West Bergholt

25 to 26 Nov - Braishfield M&DS, Village Hall, Braishfield

The Vortex

11 to 15 Oct - Huddersfield Thespians, Laurence Bailey Theatre, Huddersfield

Still Life

22 to 29 Jul 2006 - New Venture Theatre, Brighton, E. Sussex

This Happy Breed

1 to 12 Jun 2006 - New Era Players Theatre, Newbury, Berkshire

In North America

Hands Across The Sea

Food for Thought Productions, New York City

Wed, October 19, 2005, Thur, November 10, 2005

Info & BO: 212/362-2560

Fallen Angels

April to November 2005 - (in repertory) Stratford Festival Theatre - Stratford, Ontario - Canada

Design For Living

4 Sep to 23 Oct - Circle Theatre, 7300 (Marengo) W. Madison StreetForest Park, Illinois. (This is a theatre in the suburbs of Chicago - the play is being directed by Society member, Jim Schneider.)

Blithe Spirit

11 to 20 Nov - Dunnville Community Theatre, Dunnville, Ontario

Oct 21 to 23, 28 to 30, Nov 4 & 5 Fri & Sat at 8 pm, Sun

Matinees at 2 pm - Town Players of New Canaan Powerhouse Theatre, Waveny Park New Canaan, Connecticut. BO: (203)

966-7371 www.tpnc.org Director NCS member, Scott R. Brill.



The Comedy of Coward Festival 2005

supported by

The Noël Coward Foundation

SUNDAY 9 OCTOBER 14.00 - 15.30

THE NOËL COWARD COMEDY ROUNDTABLE 'PLAYING COWARD'

A lively panel discussion chaired by Gyles Brandreth on the various experiences of actors and director in playing Noël Coward's plays. Guests include: Richard Briers, Penelope Keith and Thea Sharrock.

SUNDAY 23 OCTOBER 14.00 - 16.30

"NOËL IN LOVE"

A masterclass led by Christopher Luscombe, a trustee of The Noël Coward Foundation with professional actors looking at The Master's views on love, romance and relationships by exploring scenes from the plays of Noël Coward.

SUNDAY 6 NOVEMBER 14.00 - 16.30

TUESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 19.00 - 21.00

The Comedy of Coward Festival:

"NOËL COWARD FROM A to Z"

A new musical entertainment devised by Dick Vosburgh with Denis King and others

Dick Vosburgh's pocket revue begins alphabetically with Astaire and ends with 'Ziguener' from Bitter Sweet.

BO: 020 7943 4750 Theatre Museum, 1e Tavistock St., London WC2E 7PR

With thanks to Samuel French UK and Canada (Play Publishers and Author's Representatives), Ken Starrett (US), Lisa Foster at Alan Brodie Representation (Professional Productions) and other NCS members.

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homeCHAT

FREE TO MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY
Price £3 (\$5)

The President of The Noël Coward Society

His Royal Highness The Duke of Kent

The Society is delighted to announce that His Royal Highness, The Duke of Kent, KG, GCMG, CVO, ADC, has accepted our invitation to become the Society's President, succeeding the late Sir John Mills, CBE.

This is a fitting tribute to the long friendship of His Royal Highness's parents, the late Prince George, Duke of Kent and Princess Marina, with Noël.

Prince George was the fourth son of King George V, and Princess Marina was the daughter of Prince Nicholas of Greece. The couple married in 1934 and were regarded as the most attractive, popular and, above all, stylish royal couple of their generation. Prince George met Noël in 1923, just as his career was taking off. Both men had immense charm and astonishing good looks and represented the crème de la crème of the glittering 1920's London Society. On reading the terrible news of Prince George's death in an air crash, in August, 1942, aged only 39, Noël wrote in his diary:-

"A dreadful morning. Headlines in the papers saying that the Duke of Kent was killed in an air crash. I can hardly believe it, but of course that is nonsense because I believe it only too well. It is never difficult to believe that someone young and charming and kind is dead. They are always dying.....Well, there goes a friendship of nineteen years. I shall miss him most horribly....."

Noël's friendship with the elegant Princess Marina continued throughout her life. His diaries written from the 1940's onwards, and his journals for the 1950s and 60s were liberally sprinkled with references to Princess Marina. On June 25th 1951, he wrote *"Went with the Duchess of Kent to Covent Garden to hear Bohème – Victoria de los Angeles sang well but looked like a musical bun.....Took the Duchess to dine at the Ivy, and then on to the Palladium for the*

Sid Field Benefit.....Highest spot – Judy Garland."

As the years passed there were other references, some more fleeting than others: *"Lunched with the Duchess and Princess Alexandra", "had tea with Princess Marina",* and so on.

Noël was a genuine friend who adored being with the Duchess, whether entertaining her in lavish style, or merely dropping in for a quiet chat over a drink or two. Princess Marina died in 1968, aged only 61, from an inoperable brain tumour. Noël visited her for tea on the day she returned from hospital and wrote afterwards, *"She was in bed and looked very papery. I am worried about her. She was very cheerful, however, and we gossiped and giggled."*

Our new President was born in 1935 and was styled His Royal Highness Prince Edward of Kent – as a grandson of the British sovereign in the male line, he was given the title Prince of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. However, on the death of his father on 25th August, 1942, Prince Edward succeeded his father as Duke of Kent and later in 1959 took his seat in the House of Lords. As a royal duke, he was destined for royal duties at an early age. Aged 17, he walked behind the coffin of his uncle, George VI at his state funeral in 1952 and in 1953, he attended the coronation of his cousin, Queen Elizabeth II, paying homage at her throne after her crowning.

HRH, the Duke of Kent, has had a distinguished career and made an immense contribution to the work of the Royal Family. He was commissioned from the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, in 1955 as a Second Lieutenant in the Royal Scots Greys, the beginning of a military career which lasted over 20 years. At Sandhurst he won the Sir James Moncrieff Grierson prize for foreign languages and also



passed the French interpretership examination. The Duke retired from the Army in 1976 with the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel and was subsequently promoted to Field Marshal in June 1993.

He has travelled widely and represented The Queen on important occasions such as the independence celebrations in Sierra Leone, Uganda, Guyana, Barbados and The Gambia. He has been a Counsellor of State on The Queen's absence abroad.

One of the Duke's major public roles for many years was as Vice-Chairman of British Trade International, (BTI - formerly the British Overseas Trade Board), a position he held from 1976. The Duke was actively involved in leading overseas trade missions and visiting companies large and small across the United Kingdom promoting Britain and British companies. The Duke retired from this role in 2001, but still retains an interest in British business at home and overseas.

He is a patron of many charities and organisations ranging from the British Computer Society to the Leukaemia Research Fund. He is President of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, the RAF Benevolent Fund, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and the Stroke Association. He is Grand Master of the United Grand Lodge of Freemasons of England.

The Duke is Patron of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Trinity College of Music and the Hanover Band. He is President of the Wimbledon All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club

and President-in-Chief of the British Racing Drivers' Club. The Duke's sporting interests include skiing, flying and tennis. At Eton he enjoyed rowing and in Switzerland he captained his regimental ski team in the Army championships.

Most significantly our President is a lover of opera and the theatre. Members were delighted to see him at Pizza-on-the-Park in May, with his sister, Princess Alexandra, enjoying a performance of Gershwin and Coward music given by Ruth Leon, Michael Law and our Vice President, Sheridan

Morley. Robert Gardiner, Committee member and a Trustee of The Noël Coward Foundation, had the honour of meeting The Duke of Kent at a dinner in St. Petersburg and recalled hearing him speak warmly of Noël and his friendship with the family.

Thus it was that Robert Gardiner suggested that the Committee might invite His Royal Highness to become our president.

We are delighted that he has accepted.

Barbara Longford

Future Definite? – a Celebration of the work of Noël Coward

St. Catherine's College, Oxford Friday 1st – Sunday 3rd September, 2006

“And that sweet city with her dreaming spires, She needs not June for beauty's heightening.....”

Do join us next September in the beautiful and unique city of Oxford at a weekend for members to share their love of Noël Coward's work and gain inspiration from the words of some notable experts on Coward. Other eminent speakers, whose own work may have been influenced by The Master, are also being invited.

Vice President, Stephen Fry, will be addressing us during the weekend as will Barry Day, from New York. They have both expressed their keen enthusiasm and willingness to participate – other professional commitments permitting.

Marcy Kahan has an intriguing session in store for us, as does musical director, Jeremy Sams and our own Coward musicologist Dominic Vlasto, on the music of Coward.

This is the first time our Society has organised such an event, but before we came into being, in 1999, the centenary year, a conference was held at Birmingham University, which resulted in the publication, by Methuen, of *Look Back in Pleasure - Noël Coward Reconsidered* (ISBN number 0 413 75500 2).

With the re-naming of The Noël Coward Theatre in the West End next year and the production of 'Hay Fever' starring Dame Judi Dench, this seems an appropriate moment to provide a forum for the Society to take a contemplative look at Coward's phenomenal contribution to the worlds of music and theatre.

We are hoping that some of our members from the USA and around the world, in particular, will be tempted to

make this conference the reason for a visit. They will receive a warm welcome from all the UK members, nineteen of whom will be in New York this December, for the flower-laying at the Gershwin Theatre.

This conference aims to be fun; we hope to make it an occasion that Noël himself would have enjoyed. For example, after tea and before cocktails on Saturday, there will be a guided literary walking tour of Oxford, followed by a black tie dinner, and cabaret.

There will be a 'Parkinson type' of chat show session, where members will be invited to reminisce about Coward. This will be hosted by Alan Farley who has presented a radio programme about Coward for many years in San Francisco. John Knowles will be presenting an edited version of Coward's home movies that include informal shots of his friends at Goldenhurst and on board ship, including Tallulah Bankhead and Charles Cochran, the only known footage of Coward's mother and father, off and on stage scenes from *Words & Music* and Noël's personal cine travelogue of his trips across the globe.

Our own Coward book shop will be open throughout the weekend with reduced prices on new books as well as archived books and recordings from the Old London Office of Noël Coward.

We are inviting a group of students drawn from the likes of RADA, the National Youth Theatre and LAMDA, to be our guests at the conference and to participate in a Masterclass session and

play-readings. In this way we hope to make the future of Coward's work a 'definite'.

There are other exciting sessions under discussion for the weekend, but before we can go any further with our plans we do need a firm commitment from our members.

Only with an expression of your support, will we have the confidence to approach potential sponsors of the weekend for help with funding for the students, and for a modest honorarium for our outside guest speakers and their expenses.

St. Catherine's became a college in 1963. It is now one of the largest colleges in Oxford and was built between 1960-64 on flat meadowland near the Cherwell, to the designs of Arne Jacobsen, the Danish architect deeply influenced by the masters of the 'International Modern' style, especially Mies van der Rohe. Jacobsen also laid out the gardens and designed much of the furniture, including even the cutlery used at High Table.

When the students are away, this comparatively young college tries to supplement its income, by hosting conferences. It is ideally suited to our purpose, as all the rooms have en suite facilities, the campus is large, with a water garden and a central circular lawn all adding to a feeling of space and freedom.

Unusually, for Oxford – which still retains its medieval street pattern intact – there is parking space at St. Catherine's. Yet, it is just a five-minute walk to the High Street, or "High" - the heart of the

A COWARD CHRONOLOGY

This is the second part of the Coward Chronology that we published in the last edition of Home Chat. It did not in fact come from the old London Office but is a printout of a detailed chronology up to 1952 found on the Internet at one point and printed for use in the office.

1947

Played Gary Essendine in Revival of *Present Laughter* (Theatre Royal Haymarket, London)
Point Valaine produced in London
Directed revival of *Tonight at 8:30* (US tour)
Unproduced play: *Long Island Sound*

1948

Briefly took over male leads in US Tour of *Tonight at 8:30* (San Francisco)
Directed revival of *Tonight at 8:30* on Broadway (National, NY - 26 perfs)
Played Max Aramont in *Joyeux Chagrins*, a.k.a. *Present Laughter* (Brussels)
Private Lives revived on Broadway (Plymouth, NY - 248 perfs)

1949

Film: *The Astonished Heart*
Played Christian Faber in film *The Astonished Heart*
Unproduced Musical: *Hoi Polloi*

1950

Musical: Wrote and directed *Ace of Clubs* (Cambridge, London - 211 perfs)

1951

Cabaret: October engagement at Cafe de Paris (London)
Revue: Song for *The Lyric Revue* (Lyric, London - 141 perfs)
Play: Wrote and directed *Relative Values* (London)
Play: *Island Fling* (Regional, USA)

1952

Revue: Songs for *The Globe Revue* (Globe, London - 234 perfs)
The Vortex revived in London (Lyric)
Cabaret: June engagement (2nd) at Cafe de Paris (London)
Check our website for a chronology that covers the period from 1952 onwards!



Thanks to Margot Peters, Barry Day and my own re-reading of the two biographies of the Lunts the puzzle over this picture is solved!

Margot Peters wrote: Bessie Porter was Lynn's London dresser for many years. See index in my biography of the Lunts, *Design for Living*.

Barry Day added: Sally Ann Howes solved it for me. "Bessie" was a Cockney dresser for Lynn Fontanne in the 1930s (Design For Living etc.) when the group picture was taken. Her name was Bessie Porter and she later became Sally Ann's dresser.

In *Design For Living* Margot Peters writes: On July 17 (1938), the last night (of Amphitryon), Lynn gave Bessie Porter, her dresser, a big tip and hugged her goodbye (from London).

In the war years: Noël's studio had taken a hit (been bombed). Bessie Porter, Lynn's dresser, wrote (to Lynn Fontanne) of 'no coffee, meat or tea, of truning ragged sheets sides to middle. Living in a garret flat, and Bessie had gotten "bounced out of bed up to the ceiling by a bomb."

She (Lynne Fontanne) also sent sympathy: "Just a quick line," she wrote Bessie Porter, "because I've been thinking about your varicose veins." In addition she continued to make ... Bessie weekly allowances of one to three pounds.

Lynn... Told Bessie Porter "I expect to be on the stage until I am ninety."

Thanks to Margot and Barry for their responses!

APRIL IN PARIS - The latest news on our french excursion!

In the December edition of Home Chat members will be able to confirm their interest by sending a deposit for our planned visit to France to explore all things Coward *en Paris*. The outline itinerary is as follows. The cost of the package for members and a booking form will be available in our next Home Chat. Members may also arrange their own travel and accommodation and still access the planned programme.

Thursday 27 April

Leave Waterloo by Eurostar around Noon. Arrive at our Hotel close to the *Gare de Nord*. Dinner followed by a talk on 'Noël Coward in Paris' by Marcy Kahan.

Friday 28 April

Lunch at *Maxims*. Champagne reception followed by 3-course lunch, red and white wines, coffee and petit fours. A pianist and singer will entertain with the songs of Yvonne Printemps, the star of *Conversation Piece* and a close friend of Noël's. This will be preceded by a visit to their Art Nouveau Museum and '1900' Collection.

Saturday 29th April

A short walking tour of *Place Vendome* and the surrounding area where Noël stayed followed by a pre-lunch drink at the *Ritz Hotel*. The tour will be led by Professor Hélène Catsiapis. There may also be a French version of a Noël

Coward play, performed while we are there, if so we will try to obtain matinee tickets. Dinner will be in a restaurant followed (hopefully!) by a group singing Coward songs in French.

Sunday 30 April

Leave Paris around noon by 1st Class Eurostar, which includes lunch and wine. Arrival at Waterloo will be 3.00 pm (approx).

There will be ample time for sightseeing and Hélène will be on hand to advise or guide to places of interest.

More details next time...

Marcy Kahan and Geoffrey Skinner

TONIGHT AT 8:30 AT THE PEARL THEATRE

Ken Starrett reviews...

Noël Coward noted that the one-act play ... "having a great advantage over a long one in that it can sustain a mood without technical creaking or overpadding, deserves a better fate, and if by careful writing, acting and producing I can do a little towards reinstating it in its rightful pride, I shall have achieved one of my more sentimental ambitions." His achievement of nine one-act plays under the title *Tonight at 8:30* would seem to have more than fulfilled his ambition.

The Pearl Theatre in New York is a highly acclaimed classical repertory company which offers a wide range of plays by such authors as Shaw, Moliere, Ibsen, Sheridan and Euripides. Seen during their season in 2001 was a delightful production of Coward's *Blithe Spirit*. As a fund-raising event for their 22nd season opening in September, the decision was made to stage concert versions of all nine one-act plays in the *Tonight at 8:30* collection. They were presented in groups of three plays each on three successive Mondays beginning August 15th. The plays were grouped as they were originally presented in 1936.

This event was attended by many Society members and was a good chance to become acquainted with all nine plays, many of which are rarely presented.

With no real production values, aided by minimal staging and only piano accompaniment, the plays were allowed to stand by themselves. As this project was not in any way conceived to be a star vehicle, each member of the company was seen in a variety of roles. Excellent performances by this talented ensemble proved to many surprised members of the audience how wonderfully entertaining these plays can be. At a reception following the final performance, the audience was able to meet and chat with members of the cast.



THE PEARL THEATRE COMPANY

The full company in a reading of Coward's FAMILY ALBUM at The Pearl Theatre. Spencer Robinson, Rachel Botchan, Russ Anderson, Carol Schultz, Dan Daily, Robin Leslie Brown, Joanne Camp, Dominic Cuskern, Edward Seaman
Photo by Matthew Shane Coleman

BOOKS FOR NEW YORK?

For those UK members travelling to New York it is worth considering what pre-reading one might wish to do. Amongst the variety of travelogues, city guides and general background reading one might wish to take in the books by NCS member Elizabeth Sharland.

They include:

The British on Broadway (ISBN 0-9531930-1-2) and *A Theatrical Feast in New York* (ISBN 0-7509-3719-X)

Elizabeth's latest book is a novel entitled *The Best Actress* (ISBN 0-9531930-3-9) '...an irresistible feast of food, fabulous people and favourite places...'

Thanks to Ken Starrett and Chicago Member Jeff Bierig for the following cast list and review of Circle Theatre's revival of 'Design for Living.'

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

www.suntimes.com

Circle draws Coward's 'Design' to perfection

September 16, 2005

by Hedy Weiss Theater Critic

To get straight to the point: Circle Theatre's revival of *Design for Living* the Noel Coward classic about the ups and downs of the bohemian life, and all matters regarding love, art, success, failure, sexual promiscuity, friendship and morality is sensational on every level. And to be completely frank: I never expected it could be so good.

Getting Coward right capturing that special mix of brittle crispness and suppressed pain, and making the brilliance and speed of the badinage simultaneously clear, meaningful and fun is something that can elude even the most practiced actors and directors. Yet in this Forest Park storefront a place that is frequently full of surprises director Jim Schneider (whose extensive credits include work both in Houston and Chicago) has assembled a bristling young cast that "gets it" on every count.

Not only do they execute Coward's devilishly difficult dialogue and decadent "high life" style with supreme flair, but in the process they deliver a potent reminder of just how delicious, wise, caustic and modern he could be.

CAST

- Gilda – Simone Roos
- Otto – P.J. Schoeny
- Leo – Bradford R. Lund
- Ernest – Peter Esposito
- Miss Hodge – Patti Roeder
- Mr. Birbeck – Eric Lindhal
- Grace Torrence – Carry Wickert
- Helen Carver – Robyn Acetta
- Henry Carver – Scott Strangland
- Matthew - Larry Johnson

Sets by Bob Knuth
Costumes by Elizabeth P. Shaffer
Directed by Jim Schneider - (Noël Coward Society member)

© The Sun-Times Company

city, where there are several historic hostelrys for those wanting a nightcap or two after dinner.

The conference fee provides access to all sessions, activities and conference rooms and offers the following comprehensive accommodation package:

Friday: *afternoon tea, dinner, overnight accommodation in a single room with en-suite facilities/tea and coffee making.*

Saturday: *Full English breakfast, morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea, dinner (black tie, with cabaret), accommodation as above.*

Sunday: *Full English breakfast, morning coffee, lunch. (Lunches and dinners are waiter served.)*

To ensure that we can approach our sponsors with confidence we need an expression of your interest now.

We anticipate that the cost, per member, including everything listed above (not including drinks, other than teas and coffees) will be between £200 and £240. We shall keep the figure as low as we can. There will be one or two double rooms, with en suite, included in our allocation of 40 rooms and the cost for the additional person in a double room will be £120 approx, to include

everything listed above.

We have reserved 50 en suite rooms, ten of these which have to be kept for speakers and students and so we are looking for 40 members to express their firm support at this stage.

If you are interested, please be kind enough to complete the expression of interest form, included in the magazine and send it to me to arrive by Friday 28th October.

Barbara Longford.

"To Conference Or Not To Conference"

For those of you hesitating to sign up for the Conference Marcy Kahan addresses any reservations you may have...

Too academic! "I would get bored listening for hours to a lot of impenetrable theorising." Although the setting is an Oxford college, the tone and content of the presentations will not be narrowly academic. The Conference Committee is composing a roster of speakers who are notable for their lively minds and gifts as communicators – playwrights, actors, directors, biographers, and passionate enthusiasts.

Too expensive! "I can't afford a couple of hundred pounds for a week-end away." Consider the best price of a night's stay in an average UK hotel: £70

per person, double room, including breakfast and dinner. Then consider our Conference price, which includes single ensuite accommodation for two nights; all meals: two waiter-served lunches and dinners, two breakfasts, two morning coffees and afternoon teas; a full programme of stimulating speakers on Coward; a walking-tour of Oxford; a Saturday night cabaret; finally, the chance to meet fellow-members of the Society in a relaxed setting. Indeed, if you cut out a mere ONE cappuccino from your daily routine (eg. Starbucks – one tall cappuccino = £1.85) for the next four months, you will have all the funds you need.

Too claustrophobic! "I won't know anyone; a week-end mixing with strangers is my idea of hell." You will have one massively terrific conversational topic in common with everyone at the conference: the life and work of Noel Coward. You can listen to the speakers, attend the cabaret, retreat to your room, take a stroll in the town; there will be no intolerable "shipboard social agenda" forcing you to participate. The atmosphere will be relentlessly urbane.

I hope I've convinced you to join us. Only a maximum of 50 places available. A not-to-be-missed chance to take a more reflective, in-depth look at Noel.

Marcy Kahan

Sir Noël Coward remembered on the Avenue of Stars at Covent Garden

A ceremony, to honour one hundred celebrities took place in Covent Garden on Sunday 18th September, 2005.



Nicole Kidman, unveiling her Hollywood star in 2003

The first silver stars were placed outside St Paul's, The Actors' Church, in Covent Garden, where many celebrities were invited to attend the launch, and also to perform on a live television programme.

The first 18 recipients include Sir Laurence Olivier, Sir Charlie Chaplin, Sir Alfred Hitchcock, but also Nicole Kidman, who unveiled her Hollywood star in 2003.

Edna Everage, one of the star recipients said it was one of her "favorite places in little old London" and that she hoped to be "laid between Michael Caine and Sean Connery".

Sir Noël Coward will be amongst the first 48 stars to be placed in the famous old wholesale vegetable and flower market now the centre of a thriving general market noted for its craft stalls, cafés, theatre life and buskers.

Others to be included in this first dedication of what will eventually be a remembrance of 100 stars of yesterday

- and today are:
- | | |
|-----------------|------------------|
| Alan Bennett | Trevor MacDonald |
| The Sex Pistols | Judi Dench |
| Michael Palin | Margot Fonteyn |
| Julie Walters | Peter Ustinov |
| Tom Jones | Peggy Ashcroft |
| Lenny Henry | Charles Laughton |
| Bob Geldof | David Niven |
| Victoria Wood | Cary Grant |
| Peter O'Toole | Arthur Lowe |
| Alan Bates | Dirk Bogarde |
| Albert Finney | Tony Hancock |
| Richard Burton | Frankie Howerd |
| Ken Branagh | Ralph Richardson |
| Ian McKellen | John Gielgud |
| Michael Gambon | Peter Cook |
| Errol Flynn | Benny Hill |
| Paul Eddington | Eric Morecambe & |
| Les Dawson | Ernie Wise |
| Bob Hope | Thora Hird |
| Gracie Fields | John Mills |
| Edith Evans | Noel Coward |
| Nigel Hawthorne | Stan Laurel |
| Alicia Markova | and |
| Glenda Jackson | Leonard Rossiter |

MEMBERSHIP and EARLY IDEAS FOR YOUR CHRISTMAS PRESENTS...

2005 has been an excellent year for Noël Coward and for the Society. We've had the wonderful news about The Noël Coward Theatre in the West End and that Dame Judi Dench is going to star in *Hay Fever*, directed by Sir Peter Hall next year. The Society is planning to be fully involved in these two exciting events and we shall keep you posted about the arrangements we are making for members' participation.

Blithe Spirit had a very good run at The Savoy Theatre and *Relative Values* did extremely well in Salisbury. On the NCS front, Celia Cologne arranged an event for us in the Noël Coward Suite at the Hampton Hill Playhouse, when Moira Lister's dress was presented to them. We had a successful event in the West End, viewing the film 'The Scoundrel', when we welcomed Stephen Fry as our Vice President. Geoffrey Skinner is planning a wonderful day for us on 17th December, our AGM, flower-laying, and lunch at The Ivy and nineteen

of us are off to New York on 9th December for all the festivities there.

Our plans for 2006 are also most exciting.

Our irreplaceable North American Director – Ken Starrett – has organised some highly successful events in the US during the year.

I am sure you would all wish to join me in thanking the Editor of this magazine - John Knowles - for producing six editions each year of the highly acclaimed Newsletter and also for his control of the website. Everything achieved by your Society is done by unpaid volunteers.

With so much on offer, it would be so good to recruit more Members. We simply cannot spend our valuable resources on advertising and so we do need your help. If every Member recruited just one other person, our Membership would be very healthy. At present, we have many less members than the Sondheim Society, which we

should like to rectify. We should then have more money to expand our activities.

Christmas Present

Please help us by trying to recruit a friend or colleague. Why not 'gift' a year's membership to a friend as a Christmas present at the special rate of £20 (\$28) for 2006 only. Pay by cheque (UK only) or send credit/debit card details to Stephen Greenman for the UK and Ken Starrett for the US. For the UK cheques should be made payable to The Noël Coward Society, and sent to Stephen Greenman. Please send the name and address of the person to whom you wish to send the gift to either Stephen or Ken.

Early in December a Members' joining pack, together with a Noël Coward Christmas card will be sent to your friend 'from you'. Contact details for Stephen Greenman and Ken Starrett can be found on page 8.

Barbara Longford

... AND NOËL'S CHRISTMAS CARDS TO GO WITH THEM?

Each Christmas Noël sent his friends a card from Les Avants featuring his greatest invention - himself! NC Aventales AG (the Noël Coward Estate) have given us permission to reprint two of the best known cards (A & D) plus a further two designed by Stephen Greenman. These unique cards are available at a cost of £1 each and may be ordered in any amount directly from

Stephen. Some include quotations and a photograph inside - see card details below each picture.

Please indicate the number of copies of each card you wish to purchase and send a cheque for the total made out to The Noël Coward Society or credit card details to Stephen's address immediately above this article in column 3.



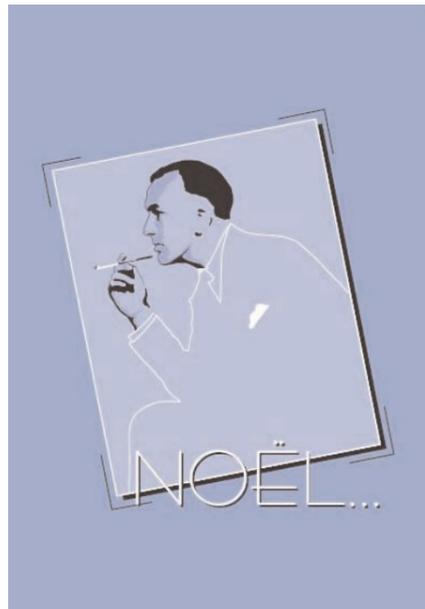
D - Coward with paintbrush



A - Coward by the lake at Les Avants



B - Has a photograph and a quotation inside



C - Has the word Noël! inside

COWARD BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS IN LONDON

Saturday 17 December 2005

Do join us for the planned Birthday Celebrations in London on Saturday 17th December at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and afterwards for our Annual Lunch at The Ivy restaurant.

Following the disappointment of members of the Society last year at the shortness of the flower-laying ceremony in the foyer at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane we plan to provide a ceremony, with drinks, of at least 30 to 40 minutes in length that is *completely free to members*.

A major celebrity guest will talk about their work and reflect on their connection with the life and work of Sir Noël Coward. The programme starts at 11.45 am.

Flowers will be laid on the statue of Sir Noël by our guest on behalf of the Society and NC Aventales AG (the Noël Coward Estate). This will be followed by drinks in the Foyer Bar.

Members and their guests who are attending the Annual Lunch will leave to reconvene at The Ivy Restaurant at 1.00 pm. The cost of the meal including wine/water is £80 per person.

The menu is as follows:

Cullen Skink
(classic soup of smoked haddock, leeks & potatoes)
Pot-roast Partridge with Savoy cabbage, bread sauce, parsnip chips and a game jus
Mulled Winter Fruits with a pear sorbet
Full Roast Coffee, Fauchon Teas and Petit Fours

If you wish to come to either part of the Birthday Celebrations please complete the accompanying booking slip and return it to Geoffrey Skinner :

Geoffrey Skinner
Samuel French Theatre Bookshop
52, Fitzroy Street
London
W1T 5JR

We look forward to seeing you there!

THE NOËL COWARD MUSICAL INDEX

As the NCMI becomes an on-line reality Dominic Vlasto brings us some notable extracts from this exciting resource!

about the Bitter Sweet Valse:

"The music returns for the final scene, in which Sari is forced to dance with the abominable Captain August, who then gropes her, and from which she is rescued by Carl who up until this point has been busy conducting the orchestra, glancing furiously over his shoulder..."

about Bright Was The Day:

"The *Diaries* entry shows clearly that the lyric came first with this song, and the music later and only after a struggle. It was worth the struggle."

about Evermore And a Day:

"A very underrated song, because largely unknown. It would be nice to hear it attempted by real singers."

about His Excellency Regrets:

"The song is relatively unknown on account of being a difficult piece to perform beyond its original context; I have, however, known one performance in a British Ambassador's Residence in the Middle East..."

about I Travel Alone:

"...it is an excellent example of a song whose lyric alone, on the page, lacks shape and impact, even appears a little trite; but when joined with its melody, it becomes poetry of a high order."

about recordings of I Went To a Marvellous Party:

"Bea Lillie's inimitable added laughs and occasional long drawn-out vowels are, on the whole, more sympathetic to the song than NC's own breakneck pacing and over-accentuated interpretation..."

about I Wish I Wasn't Quite Such a Big Girl:

"...the refrain at least of this song is a neglected treasure."

about a recording of Poor Little Rich Girl:

"...it comes with a deft and scintillating swing piano accompaniment by Carroll Gibbons of exceptional grace and musical integrity."

about A Ribbon In Her Hair:

"The song is so little known and of so little direct relevance to anything else that there would seem little chance of it now emerging from obscurity; but it would certainly be a deserving contender to be rescued and aired."

about The Stingaree:

"There's certainly scope for some enterprising musician to include this piece in any forthcoming recording of *'The Unknown Music of Noël Coward'*."

about Sweet Day:

"Norman Hackforth said: 'I originally scored 'Sweet Day'. Vanessa Lee would never have sung it in the published key of B flat – she would have been under the piano!'"

about Tamarisk Town:

"Though undeniably on the "slight" side, this composition has an idiosyncrasy of invention which makes it stand out both from NC's own other early work and also from other people's work of the same period."

about Fumfumbolo:

"...one of the Samolan words sung by the chorus, 'klabonga', means something to do with copulation [ref. Cole Lesley, p.242]. It would be fascinating to have a complete translation of these song lyrics."

about an Lp recording made by June Bronhill and Dennis Olsen:

"June Bronhill is, I am afraid, too warbly in her vocal style, and a bit too belting in her delivery, for all contexts; but at its best this Lp, which was mixed with numbers by Ivor Novello, contains worthwhile interpretations and some notable recorded rarities."

about the Lp 'Noël Coward in New York':

"These are probably the best recordings NC ever made, both in terms of the quality of recorded sound as well as the timbre, tuning and control of his own voice."

Feelings' (1941) is a concise comedy song of pleasing phrases, whose three refrains make a nice conceit of the words 'white', 'blue' and 'red'; the central verse section of 'Something To Do With Spring' (originally sung by John Mills in the 1932 revue *Words And Music*) is a clever and complex piece of lyric /rhythmic interchange writing, where the accompaniment dovetails with and occasionally takes over the melodic continuity from the singer; and it is hard to square the effective romantic lyricism of 'Where Are The Songs We Sung?' with its original setting (in *Operette*, 1938), where at the end of the song the boy kisses and holds the girl in his arms for a moment, before she gives a little laugh and disengages herself, saying: "Darling, this is all very silly and the soup's getting cold!"

Noble sings very tunefully and clearly, and for the most part paces the songs well. For two of the earliest - 'Parisian Pierrot' (1922) and 'Poor Little Rich Girl' (1925) - Noble and Ross allow us the rare luxury of two full verse sections in addition to well-judged restlessly rhythmic moods in the refrains. There is only one moment of poor judgement - a downwards change of key into the refrain of 'A Room With A View', which to my mind leaves Harry Noble in an uncomfortably low register for his own voice.

It felt like a great honour to be asked to write the sleeve notes for this CD, and its production has been very much helped and encouraged by support from NCS and the Coward Estate (a BIG thank-you to Graham Payn!). It would make an excellent Christmas present for members to give to all their nearest and dearest, and I hope that you will all rush out and buy multiple copies of it!

To contact: Adrian Wright at MCSR please write to: Must Close Saturday Records
56 The Street, Poringland, Norwich, Norfolk, NR14 7JT, UK
or email to: enquiries@must-close-saturday-records.co.uk or ring 01508 494371
or buy on-line at: <http://www.must-close-saturday-records.co.uk>

To be sure of your discount please state that you are a member of the Society when placing your order .

membership

For all UK membership matters please contact:

**Stephen Greenman at:
The Noël Coward Society
64 Morant Street
London
E14 8EL**

email:
stephengreenman@noelcoward.net

For North American membership please contact:

**Ken Starrett at:
49 West 68th Street
Apartment 1R
New York
NY 10023**

email:
cowardusa@nyc.rr.com

NOËL COWARD BIRTHDAY WALK IN TEDDINGTON

Friday 16 December 2005

The Hampton Hill Theatre at Teddington will be holding its annual Noël Coward Birthday Walk on Friday 16th December, 10.30am for 10.45am.

The walk is 2.3 miles long and takes the route to Noël's birthplace in Waldegrave Road and into the High Street to the Landmark Arts Centre (St. Alban's Church) - where Noël's mother Violet Veitch met his father Athur Coward during choir rehearsals!

Then on to Bushy Park and to the Hampton Hill Playhouse for a complimentary glass of sherry.

This is a free walking tour provided by NCS member Graham Sawyer who has been arranging and conducting these tours for several years. Why not turn up and join him?

WHAT A SITE!

The Noël Coward Society website progresses and sees two major developments in the run-up to Christmas. The long awaited NCMI will appear in full (access free to members) and new development software means that the website will be able to enhance the quality of its archive offerings with more video clips, pictures and information about The Master.

In addition we are negotiating to provide some short audio clips from previously unheard private recordings.

As part of next year's membership we are looking at the possibility of providing a free DVD on Coward to members that will contain edited extracts from Coward's own home movies linked by commentary to reveal more about Coward's associates and his travels across the globe. We have tracked down a copy of the original details of the Home Movies revealing some of the names of those that feature on film. More on this as the project develops...

The Noël Coward & Harry Noble recordings CD MCSR 3030

I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN

Sung by Noel Coward with Wally Stott and his Orchestra
Norman Hackforth at the piano

1. A room with a view 3.28
2. Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington 2.09
3. World weary 2.51
4. Alice 3.21
5. Someday I'll find you 2.27
6. Mad dogs and Englishmen 2.43
7. Poor little rich girl 2.59
8. Uncle Harry 3.53
9. I'll see you again 3.20

WORLD WEARY: The Songs of Noel Coward

Sung by Harry Noble with Stuart Ross at the piano

10. Nina 4.51
11. I'll follow my secret heart 4.09
12. Imagine the duchess's feelings 2.44
13. Poor little rich girl 4.52
14. Something to do with spring 2.24
15. Parisian pierrot 4.03
16. Where are the songs we sung? 2.52
17. A room with a view 3.28
18. World weary 3.19

Conversation Pieces - the Editor on the 'heritage' of André Charlot



A - Z goes to America in 1923
Gertrude Lawrence, André Charlot, Bea Lillie and Jack Buchanan

If the price for the popularisation of history, whatever my problem with the word, is to call it 'heritage,' it may be a price worth paying by encouraging the Government to put money (even if it is National Lottery money) into history projects and to encourage the beneficiaries to display the results during National Heritage Weekend events across the UK during the nearest weekend to the 9th Sept each year.

For those living outside the UK I should pause and explain that this annual historical bash provides a chance for every stately home, museum and local history society worth its salt, plus hundreds of Lottery funded heritage projects, to dust off their artefacts and put on a show!

For me this year it meant another visit to Lathom, Lancashire to share research about Lord Ned Lathom and his relationship with Noël Coward, Ivor Novello, Gertie Lawrence and Gladys Cooper - and to enjoy a day out at Pilkington's Glass Laboratories where the whole of West Lancashire seemed to have turned out determined to meet the experts and dig at their ancestral roots!

In preparation for this indulgence I read a new book that was finally published in August after the sad death of its author James Ross Moore. It is entitled *André Charlot - the Genius of Intimate Musical Revue* (McFarland & Co - ISBN0-7864-1774-9).

It is the first detailed biography of Charlot to have been written and is based on the collection of personal papers and memorabilia carefully cherished by his daughter, Joan Charlot Midwinter (from Pacific Palisades, California) for four decades in the belief that someday a biographer would come along - thank goodness he did!

Charlot was arguably the creator of the British, and perhaps the American, Revue. A theatrical form that grew from French revue (meaning literally; magazine) and was, at least in the UK,

seen as a theatrical flourish at the end of a Music Hall bill. In some theatres in the US it became an extension of burlesque. More successfully and significantly it was adapted by Florenz Ziegfeld who took the ultra-glamorous evocation of the genre seen at the 'Folies Bergere' (where Charlot was the manager for a year prior to coming to London to manage the 3,000 seat Alhambra music hall) to create the famous 'Follies' shows that dominated Broadway from 1907 onwards. It was but a small jump to take this successful mix of music and sketches, add a 'book,' and produce what became the Broadway Musical.

The book gives further credence to claims of Charlot's 'discovery' of Noël Coward, Bea Lillie, Gertrude Lawrence, Jack Buchanan and Jessie Matthews and describes involvement in the early career of Gladys Cooper - all of which was financed by Ned Lathom's money.

Coward's first participation in revue proper was in Charlot's *London Calling* which followed his first major success *A to Z*, a revue so named because it had 26 parts. The book takes us from this success to *London Calling*:

"Meeting at Lathom's country house in Lancashire, Charlot and Lathom decided that the *A - Z* would be written by three emerging writing stars: Ivor Novello, Ronald Jeans and the Australian Dion Titheradge. As the revue's preparation proceeded apace, Charlot learned that Lathom "wanted everything on an impossibly magnificent scale." The gowns, the first London effort of Jean Patou, another of Charlot's importations, cost £10 apiece, a staggering figure for the time. Charlot tried - or swore that he tried - to put the brakes on Lathom's spending, but to little avail. As it turned out, *A to Z* was a major artistic success, running 52 weeks. Although it never recouped its investment (Lathom lost £15,000), his Lordship said it had been worth it - he had got twice that value in the fun he had. In fact, the show could

have run longer and Lathom might have recouped all his investment, but Charlot had, alas, sub-let the theatre and so the show came off, in a grim foreshadowing of a debacle which, four years later, set his career reeling out of control.

As if to prove that *A to Z*, which he said marked a high point in his life, could be bettered, in December 1922 Lathom invited Charlot to Davos, Switzerland, where Noël Coward was also his guest at the Hotel Belvedere. (In a later memoir, Coward revised the emphasis, claiming that Lathom had "commanded" Charlot's presence.) The idea was to show Charlot what a genius Coward had become.

In the hotel's ballroom late one evening, Coward played and sang "Parisian Pierrot" and other songs for the first time in public. This was pleasing to Charlot, who tried never to put a song in any show unless he had heard it performed by its composer. He later wrote that Coward had "persuaded me of his greatness." He was not quite so effusive about Coward's sketches - which he did not allow the author to read to him. Reading them over in his room, he quite liked the "telephone sketch" (this was later "Early Mourning," a tour de force performed by Gertrude Lawrence) but thought the rest "stank to high heaven."

What happened the day after Coward's "audition" is recalled quite differently by its major players. Charlot claimed that he had told Coward he wanted to use some of his material but added a suggestion that Noël do what George M. Cohan did - write, produce, and star in a whole show of his own. Here, wrote Charlot later, "Coward revealed his lack of confidence - no use arguing, he must have some help." So, according to Charlot, it was Coward's idea to collaborate.

Coward eventually contradicted this interpretation. He recalled that Charlot was "expansive and benign" and that "a series of cigar-laden conferences" followed. He worked on the sketches in the morning and submitted them to Lathom and Charlot in the afternoons.

Within a few days the whole show was roughly laid out. Thus was born 'London Calling' (its title the daily coming-on-air announcement on the BBC)."

John Knowles

STOPOVER

During the war Noël traveled many thousands of miles giving troop concerts, visiting war zones ... Australia, New Zealand, the Middle East, South Africa, Burma - not to mention the then neutral USA. Wherever he went, making speeches and “singing my little songs”, he carried the news of how those at home were fighting on the home front.

On the way home from Australasia in March 1941 he made what was intended as a brief stopover at Canton Island in the Pacific. It was a tiny rocky atoll that was the only point for the Pan-American clipper to break its journey and refuel and in Future Indefinite Noël describes how what was intended as a short and welcome break was forcibly extended over several days by bad weather.

He was immediately struck by the contrast between American and British lifestyle expectations. The two main buildings on the island were a typical American luxury hotel . . . “run by a young American couple called Jack and Lordee Bramham” and, a hundred or so yards away, the British Residency, occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Frank Fleming. Frank “had built the house ... virtually with his own hands. He raised the Union Jack solemnly every morning and lowered it every night.”

Noël was upset to see that the only photograph of the King and Queen they had in the residence was “a framed reproduction from The Illustrated London News, which was buckled, because the rain-water got into the frame during the last cyclone.” He undertook to obtain a better one for them on his return to London and did so by asking the Queen personally. The photo was duly sent but Noël added in Future Indefinite - “I don’t know if they ever received it.”

He later used the Flemings in a short story called “Mr. and Mrs. Edghill” and he never forgot them. Nor they him.

Years later Frank Fleming wrote to him to reassure him on that score ...

“I wish you to know that Lucy and I think and talk of you frequently - that your photograph is peering down at me now as I write this ... we are naive enough to imagine you may sometimes give us a thought.”

And in 1963 from Suva, Fiji, where they were now living ...

“The Portrait arrived ... we have acknowledged it, as you advised ... with what we hope is a correct and seemly letter of thanks but, confidentially, I found it necessary to put a brake on on my long cherished desire to say something which would not, perhaps, be quite correct.

You see, many years ago, I was one of a small body of ‘Returned Sailors and Soldiers’, as we were called, who formed a guard of honour on the jetty when she arrived. As the Duchess (of York, as she then was) passed me, I caught the full glance of her beautiful eyes and have been her devoted admirer ever since. (This is what I was tempted to say but dared not.)

I have felt the urge to write to you sometimes since you were here but - for one thing - I knew you were more-than-usually busy at that time ...

A letter and unpublished Poem by Noël Coward provided by Barry Day who is currently editing a book of Sir Noël Coward’s letters

Thanks for all the work you did over the ‘Portrait’. Do try to send an occasional line to us - you know, even a comic postcard from Sarfend (Southend) - ‘Wish you were here’ would be better than nothing.

A cool Christmas in Fiji - only 85° as I write at noon - sitting in the same chair you did and can look up and see your old photo on the wall - as you did - remember???”

By this time Frank was dying of tuberculosis but his family remember that Noël went out of his way on a South Seas trip he made with Graham and Coley to visit him at Tumavua Hospital. In his diary Frank records that they enjoyed a “freeranging conversation that lasted hours and covered a great many topics”. A photograph (now lost) was taken of the two of them standing outside the front door of the hospital to commemorate the occasion.

During his stay on Canton Island, Noël - never one to be creatively idle - busied himself writing verse. In his Collected Verse are examples such as “Canton Island”, “Onward, Christian Soldiers”, “Open Letter to a Mayor” and “Sonnet to a Hermit Crab.”

But there was one more personal message that went unpublished. It was in the form of a thank you letter to his hosts, the Bramhams -

BREAD AND BUTTER LETTER (March 16th 1941)

Dear Lordee, Dear Jack, How delightful it’s been

To have stayed in this lovely hotel.

The food was delicious. God, what a ‘cuisine’!

(The drink was delicious as well.)

The beds were so soft and the weather so fine,

The water so fresh in the showers,

The service indeed was completely divine.

I could go on about it for hours.

And as for those wonderful movies we saw

(You didn’t because you were busy

Remember you left us just outside the door,

Complaining you felt a bit dizzy?)

And as for the time when the plane was delayed,

What fun we all had with the Flight-Crew.

I’m glad that they only drank iced lemonade.

For Clippers can’t fly with a tight crew.

I’ll always look back on those halcyon days

And a sigh of regret I shall utter

When I think of the many and various ways

You managed to flavour the butter!

Dear Lordee, Dear Jack, when I get to New York

I’ll discuss the whole thing with Ward Morehouse,

For the Waldorf, in spite of the way people talk,

Compared with this place is a warehouse.

So thank you, dear Lordee, and thank you, dear Jack

With my head and my heart and soul.

This is but ‘Au Revoir’, for I’m bound to come back.

Your affectionate ‘stop over’ - Noël

I’ll See You Again and World Weary

Coward’s last British recordings and the songs of Coward sung by Harry Noble

At the discounted price of £8.99 for NCS members

The long-awaited release of this CD sponsored by the Noël Coward Estate, members of the Society and friends and their families takes place on October 1st, 2005. To obtain your discounted copy please contact Adrian Wright whose contact details can be found at the end of this article.

Thanks go to John Knowles who first suggested producing the CD after he accidentally found the original recordings and who worked to secure sponsorship for the project. To Adrian Wright of Must Close Saturday Records for his consistent commitment to the project, ensuring the highest quality sound restoration and record production and for producing the CD at such an amazingly low price. This low price plus the discount to members was only made possible through the generous sponsorship provided by the Noël Coward Estate and the encouragement and enthusiasm shown by Alan Brodie of Alan Brodie Representation. Lastly very special thanks to Dominic Vlasto whose comprehensive recording notes provide a fascinating and detailed journey through Noël Coward’s career in the early 1950s and reveal the hard won results of Alan Farley and Dominic’s research into the largely forgotten world of Harry Noble.

Dominic Vlasto introduces this exciting new Coward compilation:

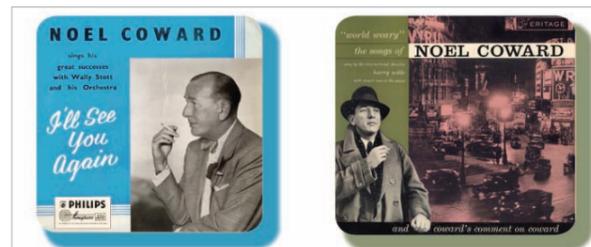
This CD is a sort of Golden Jubilee celebration of the immediate post-war decade, a time when Coward’s output of new dramatic work seemed to lose popular appeal, and when his polymathic talents led to his emergence, “to my own and everyone else’s astonishment”, as a highly successful cabaret entertainer. This element of his formidable achievements had been honed and tested during the war years when he undertook countless troop concerts, for many of which he was accompanied by Norman Hackforth. During 1944 they undertook a marathon series of fund-raising concerts in South Africa, followed by some weeks of troop concerts in Burma, Assam and Ceylon, through the thick of the monsoon and sometimes almost under fire near the front line. South

African audiences were the first to hear the songs ‘Uncle Harry’ and ‘Nina’, and the first recordings of these songs were made with Norman Hackforth a month or two later in Calcutta.

And in 1951 it was Norman Hackforth, then accompanying Beatrice Lillie in cabaret at the Café de Paris, who negotiated Coward’s first engagement there that autumn. It was immediately apparent that Coward’s solo performances of his own songs set a standard which few artists could hope to rival - though there was some criticism of his vocal expertise. One reviewer opined that he “massacred” his own songs, to which Coward replied that, if this was true, “it was the most triumphantly efficient massacre since Saint Bartholomew’s Eve.”

These recordings - the last Coward ever undertook in the UK - were made in 1954, just after After The Ball and not long before the fourth Café de Paris season, and it is no surprise to find that Norman Hackforth is there as accompanist, though this was never acknowledged on the original LP. Indeed, it is doubtful whether this LP made much impact at all; perhaps it was a bit slow in coming out and then suffered in competition with the following year’s release of the LP made from the Las Vegas performances, failing to compete with the vigour and vim of live audience reaction, increased tempi and more “zappy” arrangements. It is certainly true that the tracks remained unknown and unacknowledged, even to specialists in the field, until extremely recently.

Here we hear Coward at an interesting stage, with the polish of three seasons performing at the Café under his belt, and with the comfort of his most experienced accompanist, but with new orchestrations, this time by Wally Stott, musical director of the newly-launched Philips Records company. Stott, as



coward songs

The last British recordings made by Coward

WORLD WEARY
The songs of Coward sung by HARRY NOBLE

must close saturday records

Angela Morley, was subsequently to make a notable career as composer and arranger for film and television in America. Anyone conversant with the Las Vegas recordings may find some of these 1954 tracks sounding vaguely familiar: It becomes clear that significant elements of Stott’s arrangements were re-used by Peter Matz, something particularly noticeable in the more lyrical numbers such as ‘A Room With a View’ and ‘World Weary’. Hackforth’s piano accompaniment is often allowed to take over, including for large sections of the comedy songs ‘Mrs Worthington’ and ‘Mad Dogs’, and for the entire central verse sections of the songs ‘Poor Little Rich Girl’ and ‘A Room With a View’. In ‘I’ll See You Again’ (from Bitter Sweet), the whole verse section - the “duet” between teacher and pupil - becomes a vocal/piano duet.

Meanwhile, at almost exactly the same time in New York, the singer/actor Harry Noble, with his accompanist Stuart Ross, was the first artist other than Coward himself to attempt an entire LP of Coward songs. For some years Noble was half of a vaudeville team with Frances King, who later married the well-known composer-lyricist Sam Coslow and retired. Noble and King had played the top hotels in London, New York, Florida and elsewhere, and in the early 1950s were part of the regular cast of Tony Hancock’s radio shows Happy Go Lucky

It is clear that Noble knew the Coward repertoire better than most. He includes three songs in particular which do not often feature in Coward compilations: ‘Imagine The Duchess’s