

## WHAT'S ON? ACROSS THE GLOBE ...

(Where known - Professional companies are shown in blue and amateur companies in black)

### America & Canada

<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	<b>24 Apr to 10 May 2003</b>	Whitby Courthouse Theatre, Whitby, Ontario
<b>Hay Fever</b>	<b>7 to 19 Jun 2003</b>	The New Harmony Theatre Opening, New Harmony Indiana.
	<b>24 Jun to 31 Aug 2003</b>	Utah Shakespeare Festival in Cedar City, Utah, USA. Web: <a href="http://www.bard.org">www.bard.org</a> .
<b>Private Lives</b>	<b>8 to 17 May 2003</b>	Gateway Theatre Guild, North Bay, Ontario

### Europe

<b>Nude With Violin</b>	<b>Entity Theatre Workshop</b>	
	<b>23 Jan to 1 Feb 2003</b>	The Aula Theatre, Munich, Germany
	<b>15 Feb 2003</b>	Black Box Theatre, Gasteig, Germany

### Australasia

<b>We Were Dancing/Shadow Play/Red peppers 2</b>	<b>7 to 26 Jul 2003 (Press Night 10 Jul)</b>	Queensland Theatre Co. Optus Playhouse, Brisbane
<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	<b>28 to 31 Aug 2003</b>	Tropic Line Theatre Townsville, Queensland, Australia
	<b>15 Nov to 20 Dec 2003 (Press Night 19 Nov)</b>	Melbourne Theatre Co Victoria then national tour 2003

### The Rest of the World

<b>Private Lives</b>	<b>Current</b>	Pieter Toerien Productions, Cape Town, Grahamstown, Jo'burg, South Africa
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### United Kingdom

<b>Elaine Stritch At Liberty</b>	<b>1 Oct 2002 to 25 Jan 2003</b>	The Old Vic theatre, London.
<b>Hay Fever</b>	<b>2003 (To be announced)</b>	New West End production starring Penelope Wilton
<b>Nude With Violin</b>	<b>7 to 14 June 2003</b>	Stockport Garrick Theatre, Stockport, Cheshire
<b>Present Laughter</b>	<b>Jan 2003</b>	Theatre Royal Bath Productions UK Tour
	<b>17 to 22 Mar 2003</b>	Romsey O&D Society. The Plaza Theatre, Romsey, Hampshire
<b>Brief Encounter</b>	<b>Sep onwards</b>	Noël Coward / Andrew Taylor - Middle Ground Theatre Co UK Tour
<b>Fumed Oak</b>	<b>13 &amp; 14 Dec</b>	Phoenix Players, Village Hall, Abertin, Glamorgan
<b>The Vortex</b>	<b>5 Dec to 15 Feb 2003</b>	The Donmar Theatre (NCS event see cover page)
	<b>Began in October</b>	Theatre Royal Bath Productions UK Tour (6-8 weeks)
	<b>6 &amp; 7 Dec</b>	The Little Theatre in Dunstable.
<b>Brief Encounter</b>	<b>Current and 30 Nov 2002 to 30 Apr 2003</b>	Noel Coward / Andrew Taylor - Middle Ground Theatre Co UK Tour
		Theatre Royal Bath Productions UK Tour (6-8 weeks)
<b>Design for Living</b>	<b>Oct to Dec</b>	
<b>A Song at Twilight</b>	<b>24 Jan to 8 Feb 2003</b>	Perth Theatre Company Box Office 01738 621031 <a href="http://www.perththeatre.co.uk">www.perththeatre.co.uk</a>
<b>Red Peppers</b>	<b>3 to 7 Dec</b>	Folkestone, Hythe Operatic and Drama Society. Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent
<b>Relative Values</b>	<b>31 May to 7 Jun 2003</b>	Halifax Thespians at The Playhouse, Halifax, West Yorkshire
<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	<b>12 Dec to 4 Jan 2003</b>	Brewhouse Theatre Somerset
	<b>6 Jun to 31 Oct 2003</b>	Cumbria Theatre Trust, Theatre By The Lake, Keswick, Cumbria
	<b>Jan 2003</b>	Torquay Operatic and Dramatic Society at The Little Theatre, Torquay
	<b>17 to 22 Feb 2003</b>	Folkestone & Hythe O&DS Little Theatre, Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent
	<b>12 to 15 Mar 2003</b>	Playhouse Theatre Co, Studio Theatre, Harlow, Essex
	<b>4 to 7 Dec</b>	Argyle Players, Tovey Hall, Bath, Somerset
<b>Private Lives</b>	<b>27 Feb to 29 Mar 2003</b>	Octagon Theatre, Bolton
	<b>19 Sep to 11 Oct 2003</b>	Theatre Royal, York
	<b>24 Jan to 15 Feb 2003</b>	The Attic Theatre, Hertfordshire
	<b>5 to 8 Mar 2003</b>	Harrogate Amateur Dramatic Society, Harrogate, Yorkshire.
	<b>13 to 29 Mar 2003</b>	Mercury Theatre, Colchester
	<b>21 to 25 Jan 2003</b>	Hospital Players, Plowright Theatre, Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire
	<b>24 Feb to 3 Mar 2003</b>	Erith Theatre Guild, Theatre Playhouse, Erith, Kent
<b>Semi-Monde</b>	<b>27 Jan to 13 Feb 2003</b>	British School for Performing Arts & Technology, Main Theatre, Croydon
<b>Waiting In The Wings</b>	<b>30 Sep to 4 Oct 2003</b>	The Old Market, Brighton

(\* denotes Premiere, TBC = To be confirmed)

The contact details for any aspect of the Society, items included or for Home Chat and news of forthcoming Noël Coward productions, television showings, video releases, film or other events please contact:

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 Email: [membership@noelcoward.net](mailto:membership@noelcoward.net)  
 Tel: +44 (0)1603 486188 Fax: +44 (0)1603 400683



## ELAINE STRITCH AT THE MASTER'S BIRTHDAY

14th December 2002 10.30 am Annual General Meeting at The Theatre Museum,  
 12.00 noon Elaine Stritch laying flowers on Noel Coward's statue at Drury Lane,  
 1.00 pm Lunch at the Cafe des Amis 2.30 pm 'The Vortex' at The Donmar

Some forty members are booked to attend this year's celebration of The Master's birthday on Saturday 14th December. The event has been heightened by the presence of Elaine Stritch from her extended run of 'Elaine Stritch At Liberty' at The Old Vic, London. Dominic Vlasto reviews her one-woman show below as part of his interview with the star in November. This Society event has produced the largest response from members this year and marks a year of steady growth in membership numbers and interest in the work of the Society. The event will be attended by one of our representatives from the US and promises to be a day full of delights for Coward lovers.

### "I DO NOT THINK I COULD FORGET ANYTHING ABOUT NOEL..."

Elaine Stritch met Dominic Vlasto backstage at the Old Vic, to talk to the Noel Coward Society about what Coward meant to her.

In the printed material that comes with the CD of the show, John Lahr describes the process of working with Elaine Stritch, gradually knocking into shape the material that was to become *At Liberty*. He likened the process to a baseball game, where "she was the pitcher and I was the catcher." Stritch was, he says, "at her best when she was seething and sour, and she had (as anyone who knows her work knows) a capacity to be breathtakingly forthright ... revealing conflict, failure, and the emotional price of Broadway survival." The show is certainly "a vivid gallimaufrey of anecdotes." Much of the sharpness of Stritch's performance comes from its brutal honesty about her life, not least a frankness about her long-

term alcoholism, which she cracked, and the telling of which she manages to turn into many moments of high comedy at her own expense. She says "I know I'm not always easy to work with," and even Coward had his reservations when preparing the first production of *Sail Away*: "I forsee leetle clouds in the azure sky."

Our meeting at The Old Vic gets off to a difficult start, since someone has given me the wrong date and Stritch has a physio in attendance for back problems and thought she'd cancelled all interviews until next week; but it's about Coward, whom she adored, and so she manages to squeeze me in between the physio, a quick bowl of cereal and a strict deadline one-hour before the show starts. This is not a comfortable interview environment, but we do get to see Stritch at her gutsy, crap-cutting best!

Much of the content of *At Liberty*

consists of Stritch talking and singing about her work in musicals with Rodgers, Sondheim and Coward. Coward has the best stories, and she tells them with affectionate mimicry. Coward heard about Stritch from Leonard Bernstein, and came to see her in a show called *Goldilocks*, which despite a very strong production team just wouldn't play right. "At 11.30 pm Noel Coward was at my dressing-room door. 'Stritchie? Your attempt to keep it light, keep it gay, keep it fragrant ... impossible, I'm afraid. But take heart, Stritchie: any leading lady who doesn't do a double-take when a nine-foot bear asks her to dance is my kind of actress.'" Any biographical show about Stritch would be incomplete without a generous serving of Sondheim. Stritch has effectively 'branded' some of Sondheim's material so convincingly that it seems that songs were created for her. She maintains



this impression by very careful attention to musical detail: both *Company* and *Follies* were orchestrated by Jonathan Tunik, and for *At Liberty* she specified the Tunik orchestrations. She also specified her MD: "I asked for who I wanted, and I wanted Rob Bowman very desperately because he's terrific, and we had worked together before." She gives us *Broadway Baby*, *Little Things You Do Together*, *The Ladies Who Lunch*, and, of course (now that she is sixty years old and able to bring some real experience to bear on it!) *I'm Still Here*. It was in the subtle harmonies and complex rhythms of the Sondheim songs where the crystal brilliance of Tunik's orchestrations and the precision of Rob Bowman's band were made especially clear. Elaine Stritch just knows what works in a show. For example, the endings of both halves of the show are very nicely judged. No going out on big brassy comedy numbers for Stritch: the first half trickles to a gently emotional close with a seamless medley of *But Not For Me* (Gershwin) and *If Love Were All* (Coward). This is not a Coward song that we've heard Stritch perform before, and she does so here with almost raw intensity and a wrenching catch in the throat at the 'Heigh-ho,' and with very sympathetic piano accompaniment from Bowman, which made it, for me, the most moving sequence of the entire show. This in itself is quite a tribute to Coward. The second half 'closer' is a gentle rendition of *Something Good* from *The Sound of Music* - it is (pace *Edelweiss*) the most melodic piece from that much-maligned show, and certainly Rodgers at his melodic best. Stritch's work with Coward is well-represented by the inclusion of *If Love Were All*, *I've Been to a Marvellous Party* and *Why Do the Wrong People Travel* - but only one of these actually came from *Sail Away*. But it's not supposed to be an accurate catalogue of her involvement in

specific shows, more a metaphor of a life of stage and musical performances. She would have liked, she says, to include *Something Very Strange*: "It's a great song - it's almost poetry! - one of my most favourite songs I've ever done in my life...but there was no place for it. Oh, the wonderful stuff that we had to cut - well, not cut exactly, but which we couldn't even think of including. Like, when I get to *I've Been to a Marvellous Party* I'd love to do all the verses, the whole number, but it is a bit late in the show for that." And it was not possible to include *Useful Phrases*, which Stritch thinks "was an absolutely terrific song - it worked every single time - great humour." She emphasises her belief that "every truly funny song has also got a great melody," and starts singing snatches of *Zip!* in illustration. We talk about the extraordinary process of her taking on a largely comedic role in *Sail Away* and emerging from the tour as the show's main lead. "I remember when they told me in Philadelphia they wanted to talk to me after the show Saturday night, I thought I was going to get the sack - that's how insecure actors are at times. And there I was being handed the whole ball-game." No memory of that extraordinary two days learning, effectively, an entirely remodelled show ("I'm a quick study!") can pass without remembering what Peter Matz contributed to her and the show's success. "One of the greatest gifts I've ever had in my life was the fact that Peter Matz was in the pit. I was a youngster, I was talented, but Boy! I needed help. And Peter Matz was a godsend to me. Aside from the fact that he was brilliant - he was really, really talented - more than that, I thought he was the most attractive man I'd ever met in my whole life. In Philadelphia I'd had a few Heinekens in the Variety Club, and I went up to Peter's room afterwards and knocked on the door, and I said, 'Can I come in? Can we have a

nightcap?' Imagine the gall of me! And he said, 'No, you can't. And I'm going to tell you something Elaine: you had a supporting part in this musical, and now you've got the lead, so go home and go to bed!' What an adorable guy he was. People that you care about and admire 'leave the building,' and you're sad, of course, but a few of them that have gone away and left all of us here for a while, a few of them you really miss. And Peter Matz is one of them." She understands, now, a comment that Coward made to her towards the end of his life that he was "so tired of performing." "It got to the point where he felt that he was absolutely required to entertain. He couldn't go to a party unless he gave them Noel Coward. And you shouldn't have to do that, you should only have to do that on the stage. But - you can't! Sure, you like to go to a party and have fun, but if you're not the life and soul of the party they ask you if you don't feel well. You cannot sit back and relax socially, if you have that kind of persona. And ... well, Noel Coward, so much was expected of him - they expected a show every time he arrived any place, and that's really a killer. They expect a show from me, too, so I don't go! I can't, I don't have the energy for that!" She admits, however, to having "extraordinary energy," and certainly this is borne out by her performance of *At Liberty*. An 'existential problem in tights' maybe, but a problem with much heart and guts, and the ability to communicate the depth and power of great material. "I'm always ripe," she says, "for the complicated things in life, not the easy things," and this is what makes her testimony so telling. We feel that Rodgers, Sondheim and Coward all recognized her capacity to communicate the complex. "They were all great in their own way. I would never judge who was the better - how can you compare greatness?"

**Dominic Vlasto**

**COMMITTEE - 2003** *At the Annual General Meeting of the Society on 14th December the directors of Noel Coward Ltd. will announce changes to the officers of the Society. Listed below are those currently involved in the Society plus the known changes as from January.*

**Patron:** Graham Payn  
**Honorary President:** Sir John Mills  
**Honorary Vice Presidents:** Judy Campbell, Moira Lister & Sheridan Morley  
**UK Consultants** Philip Hoare & Joel Kaplan  
**Chair - John Knowles**  
 email:johnknowles@noelcoward.net  
*John is a Director of NC Ltd.*  
**Secretary - Geoffrey Skinner**  
 email: geoffrey@samuelfrench-london.co.uk  
*Geoffrey is also a representative of Samuel French*  
**Treasurer - Graham Martin** email: graham.martin@blinkhorns.co.uk  
*Graham is a partner of Blinkhorns (Accountants)*  
**Michael Imison**  
*Michael is a director of Noel Coward Ltd. and is the immediate Past Chair of the Society*

**Robert Gardiner**  
*Robert is a Director of Noel Coward Ltd. & a trustee of the Noël Coward Foundation.*  
**Gareth Pike**  
*Gareth is a Past Secretary of the Society.*  
**Claire Osborne**  
*Claire represents Warner Chappell music publishers*  
**Stewart Nicholls**  
*Stewart is a Theatre Producer/Director*  
**Barry Day**  
*Barry is an established author and Coward historian and US Consultant*  
**Stephen Marshall**  
*Knew Noel Coward and was the Secretary of the First-Nighters*  
**Jane Finch**  
*Jane is very active in the world of drama in the West Midlands*

**Ali Howarth**  
*Ali represents Alan Brodie Representation who administer the Estate of the Late Noel Coward*  
**Ned Chaillet**  
*Ned is from BBC Drama*  
**Peter Tummons**  
*Peter is the director of Methuen Drama publishing*  
**US Representatives**  
**Ken Starrett in New York** email: ken.starrett@csfb.com  
**James O'Brien in Philadelphia** email: jimobrien0909@aol.com  
**Walter Smyth in Trevoise near Philadelphia** email: smyth\_w@msn.com  
**Alan Farley in San Francisco** email: alannoel@earthlink.net  
**Jeff Bierig Chicago and the Midwest** email: prjeff@rcnchicago.com

## WHO KNOWS THE ANSWER TO ...?

Contacts for those questions that have been puzzling you for ages plus 'where to go to get...?' contacts.

**John Knowles** email: johnknowles@noelcoward.net  
*General knowledge of Coward, editor of Home Chat and the Website.*  
**Michael Imison** email: imisonplay@hotmail.com  
*Has a detailed knowledge of the plays, UK and US productions.*  
**Dominic Vlasto** email: vlasto@lineone.net  
*Specialist in Coward musicology & performance, songs & lyrics and recordings.*  
**Geoffrey Skinner** (Samuel French) email: geoffrey@samuelfrench-london.co.uk  
*Membership and all sales of CDs and books.*  
**Gareth Pike** email: ncsociety@aol.com  
*Student, general and biographical queries - has an extensive collection of Coward theatre programmes*  
**Stephen Marshall** email: stephen.marshall26@btopenworld.com  
*Has detailed knowledge and archives of information on the recordings, programmes, tributes plus extensive collection of newspaper cuttings.*  
**For enquiries about amateur rights for plays please contact the following.**  
 Samuel French Ltd, 52 Fitzroy Street, London W1T 5JR, United Kingdom Tel: 020 7255 4302 for the UK  
 Samuel French Inc., 45 West 25th Street, New York, NY 10010, USA  
 Phone (212) 206-8990 Fax (212) 206-1429  
 Samuel French Ltd., 7623 Sunset Boulevard, Hollywood CA 90046 USA  
 Samuel French (Canada) Ltd., 100 Lombard Street - Dept. W, Toronto, Ont., Canada M5C 1M3  
 Phone (416) 363-3536 Fax (416) 363-1108  
**For professional rights to the plays and all other written work, and queries about the Estate of the late Noel Coward contact:**  
 Alan Brodie Representation, 211, Piccadilly, London, W1J 9HF, United Kingdom  
 Tel: +44 (0) 20 7917 2871 Fax: +44 (0) 20 7917 2872  
**For enquiries and rights regarding music, sheet music and scores contact:**  
 Warner Chappell Music Group Ltd., Griffin House, 161 Hammersmith Road, London, W6 8BS, United Kingdom  
 Phone: 44-208-563-5800 Fax: 44-208-563-5801  
 or Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., 10585 Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90025-4950, U.S.A.  
 Tel: 1-310-441-8600 Fax 1-310-470-6399

In the last edition of Home Chat Dominic Vlasto wrote an obituary for Peter Matz. At Dominic's request we sent a copy of the newsletter to his widow Marilyn Lovell Matz. Here is her reply:

*How wonderful of you to send me The Noel Coward Society newsletter! Dominic Vlasto's obituary about Peter Matz is a treasure. I'm so pleased to have it and to see such a happy photograph attached to it. I'm very honored and grateful. I wish the Society endless and successful responses in all its endeavours.*

*Marilyn Lovell Matz*

One of our French members, Professor Hélène Catsiapis, has organized a conference on British drama in the 20th century. The sessions took place at the University of Paris IV-Sorbonne on Saturday November 9<sup>th</sup> and at the Studio-Theatre of the Comédie



*Comédie Française, Paris*

Française on Sunday November 10<sup>th</sup>. The guest of honour was the British critic Michael Coveney who spoke at length of the stylistic innovations brought by Noel Coward to the theatre of his time. He also mentioned the unveiling of Noel Coward's statue by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother in 1999 in the foyer of The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Hélène Catsiapis gave a lecture on "the well-made play" in England, in which she dealt with the originality of Noel Coward's comedies and their place in international drama today.

Hélène also writes about a French translation she has made of *Still Life* the piece from *Tonight at 8.30* that



*Paris et ses Merveilles Theatre de L'Opera (1862-1875). Académie Nationale de Musique. La fosse de l'orchestre et le Grand Rideau de la scène.*

was turned into the film *Brief Encounter*. Do you think, she asks it would be possible to have it performed in France? That is something for others to think about but this year saw *Song At Twilight (Poste Restante)* at the Palais Royal, Paris - so Coward's presence in France continues from his appearance as Max Aramont in *Joyeux Chagrins (Present Laughter)* at the Theatre Edouard VII, Paris to the present day. We include a picture of the Theatre de L'Opera sent in by Hélène.

We are not often accused of printing material that allows us to 'blow our own trumpet' but the following letter is of interest as well as being a congratulation.

**From Lance Salway, it reads...**

This is really just a note to tell you how much I have enjoyed the latest issue of *Home Chat*, which seems to go from strength to strength. I do congratulate you on producing such an excellent newsletter - it's a hard task, and sometimes a thankless one too, as I know only too well. I certainly enjoy and appreciate every issue. I was very moved by the perceptive *Times* obituary of Noel. As coincidence would have it, I've just been reading *The Nantucket*

*Diary* by Ned Rorem, the eminent American composer (and an ex-lover of Noel's, as it happens). His entry for 27 March 1973 reads as follows:

*Noel Coward died this morning, making me feel more bereft than seems fitting. He was among the golden few who, though seen but rarely, are so giving, so volatile, so there (not looking beyond you at someone more important), that their brief presence is more memorable than certain dear friends enjoyed daily. The quality can't be faked, can't be bought.*

A marvellous tribute, I think.

Thanks again for *Home Chat*. All good wishes, Lance Salway

If you have something you would like to say about *Home Chat*, the world of Coward, your own interest in *The Master* or on any related issue then please get in touch. We would also like to hear from anyone on improvements you would like to see the Society make in the services it offers you the members. We always welcome volunteers to help on committee or in any other capacity for that matter - so please get in touch!

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE NOEL COWARD SOCIETY

The Society holds its 3rd Annual General Meeting at 10.30 am on Saturday 14th December 2002. The agenda for this year's meeting will provide an opportunity for all members to participate in discussing the future structure and operation of the Society. Members of this year's committee will be on hand to respond to any questions and to take up issues raised by members. If you are unable to attend but would like to record your views or raise an item to be discussed at the meeting then please write to the present secretary at the usual address or to: agm@noelcoward.net. The documents for this year's AGM are included here and include the annual reports of the Chairman, Michael Imison and the Secretary, John Knowles.

### AGENDA:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1. Welcome from the Chairman: Michael Imison and the appointment of a minute secretary for the meeting. | (This item will look at every aspect of the Society including:                                    | changing the number, venue, dates and times of committee meetings to enable more members to become involved; |
| 2. Reports:   | a. how the Society might be better organised and structured;                                      | f. Society events and special offers   |
| - Chairman  | b. the development of regional and worldwide representation, programmes and affiliated societies; | g. managing membership   |
| - Secretary   | c. the Society's website, joining online.   | h. any other issues raised by members.)  |
| - Finance including Sales   | d. Home Chat and other Society communications   | 4. Minutes of the Annual General Meeting 17th November 2001  |
| - Noel Coward Ltd.  | e. the Society's committee - including  | 5. Matters arising from the minutes.   |
| - Officers for 2003   |   | 6. Conclusion  |
| 3. Discussion on the involvement of members in the work of the Society.                                 |   |  |

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

This was not a report that I expected to be making, having resigned the chair at the last AGM. I was succeeded by Tracy Cutting, who proceeded to organise an excellent Birthday Celebration last December, with flowers being presented by Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan which was followed by lunch at the Savoy. However in March Tracy left Warner Chappell, whom she had represented on the committee and moved to Glastonbury and felt in the circumstances that she should not continue. The committee reluctantly accepted her resignation and Chappells is now represented by Claire Osborne.

I returned from winter in the Southern Hemisphere to find myself back in the chair, although I was anxious to make it clear that this should only be a temporary arrangement. It did however enable me to steer through the committee the amended version of our constitution which has now been distributed to members. Under it control of the Society still vests in the Directors of Noel Coward Limited but in practice all day-to-day business is conducted by the committee. We look forward to the day when more members who are

not professionally involved in promoting Coward and his works come forward to join us and the business of electing the committee can be handed over to the AGM. Events during the year have included a very enjoyable *A Day with the Master* in his London haunts, organised by Robert Gardiner, and a Society visit to the touring production of *Masterpieces*, planned originally for Birmingham but, when that failed to get enough support, postponed to its final date in Guildford. Our programme was accordingly still very much aimed at the London membership and the committee would very much like suggestions from the membership about how to change this.

Two activities are however enjoyed by members throughout the world and they are the website and *Home Chat*. Both are almost exclusively the work of John Knowles who will I am sure deal with them in more detail in his report. Nevertheless I want to go on record as saying how much they are appreciated. A visit to a small gathering of other appreciation societies showed that our publications were head and shoulders above everyone else's. Looking back it is hard to believe

that we started the year with a four page *Home Chat* with a single sheet insert. Now 16 pages are the norm. I am now looking forward to retiring again, not complacent, for there is much still to be achieved, but confident that for the future the Society is in good hands.

*Michael Imison*

### SECRETARY'S REPORT

This report marks a year when I feel the Society came of age. It has taken us some time to share out committee roles in a way that is both manageable and effective. I look forward to the gains this will offer the Society in 2003. The past year has seen some wonderful moments starting with the last AGM when members dined at Joe Allen's restaurant before seeing Penelope Keith in *Star Quality*. In December the flower-laying with Lindsay Duncan and Alan Rickman followed by Lunch at The Savoy was the last event to be organised by Tracy Cutting who worked very hard during the short time she was with us and was responsible for arranging this memorable Christmas event. Michael has mentioned *A Day With The Master* when Robert and Pirjo Gardiner entertained us in their

Eaton Square home and took us on a wonderful walk in Belgravia to see where Noel lived, ending with lunch at The Reindeer and a gathering at the Theatre Museum. Later in the year we saw Christopher Luscombe and Malcolm McKee's *Masterpieces* at the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre at Guildford starring Rula Lenska. In May in New York I was lucky enough to see *Long Island Sound* in the company of Ken Starrett who has since become one of our five US representatives. I suspect most UK and US members saw the award winning revival of *Private Lives*. Another wonderful year for Noel in both the West End and on Broadway. The purchase of a colour laser printer provided a long needed boost to the printing of Home Chat. Like all technology it does not always behave itself but as my mother often said "it is immature to blame inanimate objects." It has provided us with a regular and more stylish house journal of which we can all feel proud. My thanks to all those occasional and regular contributors who have made it such an interesting read. The present 16 page format can seem a little daunting when there appears to be not quite enough copy to fill it but miraculously something always seems to come along at the last minute and very often steals the journalistic show! A special mention here of Michael Imison, Beryl Knowles and Julie Vellacott who have all been excellent proof readers! The cost of communications is always part of the reasoning behind our actions and the use of lightweight plastic envelopes and slightly lighter paper has allowed us to slip under the airmail rate barrier at reasonable cost. The website has served us well this year with between 74,000 and 87,000 hits each month. This means that we have become a recognised resource for all those who study Coward, follow his world or research for their local amateur theatre productions. It is however starting to creak a little and the time needed to keep it up-to-

date has been squeezed by other activities. We are part-way through a rewrite and design change with the aim of making the site fully searchable. This requires us to rebuild it as a database. When this is completed some 95% of the site will be available exclusively to members or those who pay an annual access fee. We hope that the completed archive will be of a quality that will attract the media, academic centres and corporate bodies who will wish to pay to access the site for what it contains. There will be more news on this early in the new year. The directors of Noel Coward Ltd. have accepted the kind offers of help from Geoffrey Skinner, of Samuel French, who will handle membership as well as sales as from January 2003, and Graham Martin, of Blinkhorns Accountants who will take on all of the day-to-day accounting and financial matters. I have accepted the Chair of the Society for 2003 and will continue to manage and develop the website and produce Home Chat as a bi-monthly journal. We do however firmly believe that to keep the management of our organisation 'fresh,' chairing the Society should be regularly shared with others, so we will be looking for someone to take over for 2004! Our thanks to Michael Imison for stepping into the breach when Tracy Cutting sadly resigned and for his continuing high level of commitment to the Society. This year has seen a move towards providing more for our members in America. We are still very much at the beginning of this work. Five US members have agreed to act as representatives. The vastness of the country makes large attendances at events there difficult but this will not stop us looking at what can be done in the larger cities and encouraging members to get together to see Coward productions that take place in the US. My thanks to these representatives for their willingness to become involved. I hope we can build on their interest during 2003 (support packs are on their way!).

A theatre tour in New York is planned, ending we hope with cocktails in the Penthouse apartment used by Coward and remembered by Elaine Stritch as the place she started rehearsing *Sail Away*. The opening of Ten Chimneys, the Lunts house in Wisconsin as an arts and education centre also provides an event opportunity for US members. We also want our representatives help in laying flowers on all three statues of Noel Coward on the same day at this time next year, in Jamaica, New York and London. The growth in the size of the committee this year is a healthy sign that we are beginning to broaden the debate about our activities. The committee is however still concerned that there are not enough members involved in its work. We would like to see a greater involvement of people who have a passion for Coward's work but who do not necessarily work in the industry that results from it. We pay full expenses for attendance at committee meetings. They currently take place at Blinkhorn's, Mortimer Street, London between 4 to 6 afternoons a year, usually midweek. This meeting pattern is not one that is always convenient to those who may wish to join us - so please let us know if a change would allow you to come along on a regular basis. Our thanks go to all those who responded to questions sent by email and post, especially to Michael Imison, Stephen Marshall and Gareth Pike. Thanks to Geoffrey Skinner and Samuel French for supporting our sales of books and CDs and to Warner Chappell for their help on music queries during the year and providing a free promotional CD for new members. A special thank you to Ali Howarth who has often taken the minutes of our meetings and, more significantly, done so much to help promote the Society in the professional theatre. Thanks to Methuen Drama who have agreed to place details of the Society in all future Noel Coward publications... and lastly my thanks to this year's

*Continued on page 7*

"Did he say anything?"  
 "No. But he nodded. Just like he knew us."  
 It's cold by the window.  
 "Were we enough?" I ask. The snow makes my eyes ache. It sticks to the window in lines.  
 "Oh, I'm sure we were," she yawns.  
 "I'm sure that we were plenty."

### INSERT FOR 'MUST CLOSE SATURDAY RECORDS'

Inserted in this edition of Home Chat is a flyer for 'Must Close Saturday Records.' This facility to include a single flyer in Home Chat is open to all members and costs for all UK postings and postings to our worldwide membership depend on the weight and size of the flyer. If you are interested please contact us at the usual address or by email to [inserts@noelcoward.net](mailto:inserts@noelcoward.net) Please note that only suitable items that relate to the worlds of Music, Theatre and Publishing are considered.

### LETTER FROM THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM

#### *In The Mood: an exhibition about wartime entertainment*

You may have heard recently of the opening of the Imperial War Museum North in Manchester. Designed by internationally renowned architect Daniel Libeskind and opened by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, IWM North has already proved to be a resounding success, with 170,000 visitors in its first 10 weeks.

The Museum tells of people's experience of war in the 20th century and its impact on our lives today. It uses the world-famous collections of the Imperial War Museum to startling effect and encourages us to see how war continues to shape all our lives. Alongside the permanent displays charting the major conflicts of the last 100 years, there is an impressive Special Exhibitions Gallery, which hosts a series of major exhibitions on a variety of related themes.

© Janette Jenkins, 2002

Janette Jenkins' latest novel, *Another Elvis Love Child*, is published by Chatto & Windus, price £10.

Janette Jenkins was born in Bolton in 1965. She studied acting in London before completing a degree in

We are writing to you to ask whether you may be able to help us gather material for *In The Mood*, a particularly exciting exhibition due to open in April 2003. As you are well aware, for many people wartime years are the richest in emotion and experience that they will have ever known. War can lead to great fear and trepidation, exultation and relief, resentment and anger. Music, dance, cinema, theatre and comedy can articulate these feelings, or be used to manipulate them. Using the Imperial War Museum's extensive film, sound and photography archives, *In the Mood* will bring together recordings and objects representing a diverse cast of singers, comedians, actors and performers, all of whom have found voice for the emotions of wartime.

Given your own personal interest and those of your members in The Master we were hoping that you might feel that amongst your own personal collection there may be something that you would be interested in lending to the exhibition.

Yours sincerely



Terry Charman, Department of Research and Information, Imperial War Museum London

**Can you help? - then either contact NCS at the usual address or email to: [iwm@noelcoward.net](mailto:iwm@noelcoward.net). or you can contact Terry direct on: Tel 020 7416 5000 Fax 020 7416 5374 email: [mail@iwm.org.uk](mailto:mail@iwm.org.uk) Interesting to note that Terry was born in Teddington!**

literature and philosophy, and an MA in creative writing at the University of East Anglia.

Her first novel, *Columbus Day*, was published in 1999. She has a daughter and lives in Manchester.

### HOW DO NAXOS DO IT AND SO REASONABLY? *The first three volumes of NAXOS' 'Noel Coward - The Complete Recordings' are a 'must have' but what about their West Side Story!!*

Elsewhere in this pre-Christmas edition of Home Chat we read about *Mad About The Boy* the 3rd volume of Noel Coward - The Complete Recordings but it was not until my senses were seized by their *West Side Story* - part of NAXOS' American Classics series that I echoed the growing cry of well done NAXOS! How do they do it one asks? Produce a quality item such as this at under £5 a copy? This crisp, emotive recording of the Bernstein classic has everything that his own concert version with Kiri Te Kanawa does not. (*I do wish that these wonderful classic opera and concert singers would do what they do best and leave theatre and popular music to those with perhaps classic voices but jazz in their bones!*) The Nashville Symphony Orchestra and a cast of lesser well-known performers turn up the heat in this passionate retelling of a true American classic and more than live up to Bernstein's composition and orchestration. Maria (*Betsi Morrison*) and Tony (*Mike Eldred*) lead a committed cast of performers in what must be the bargain of the year. Conductor Kenneth Schermerhorn who became Bernstein's assistant conductor at the New York Philharmonic gives the drive and compassion needed to handle this classic musical version of Romeo and Juliet (*a sight better than a more recent attempted version I hear!*) If you buy your loved one nothing else you will be truly thankful - a joy to receive and listen to, at a bargain price!



## SOMEBODY

Dad liked to daydream about his mystery origins - but had his real life made him happy?

*A piece published in the Sunday Express by NCS member Janette Jenkins*

Your father always told me he was Noel Coward's love child."  
"But he went out with men."  
"That's what I said, but he reckoned that Noel Coward only had to change his mind for five minutes. And there you have it. Him."  
We start laughing.  
"But why Noel Coward?"  
Mum sighs. "He overheard something. He wanted to believe."  
The room smells of Dad again. Vicks, musty Persil and Aramis.  
Mum kneels on the rug, surrounded by boxes and bags of his old clothes. The sweaters look familiar, but there are shirts that I've never seen before, and ties; fat and jazzy with "real silk" labels. I hold one up. Mum just raises her eyebrows and snaps a rubber band around the sympathy cards.  
"Forty-six," she says. "I didn't know where to put them."  
We throw things into Oxfam bags. I keep a V-neck sweater. Mum keeps a cardigan, a pair of battered Oxfords and an ancient-looking tie.  
"Fancy it still being here after all these years," she says. "He wore this all the time. In the old days."  
She means the 1950s, when they first met and she was a waitress at the Cosy Corner Cafe. She was 18, with swirly blonde hair and a tiny belted waist. She liked Gene Pitney and a swivelling Elvis Presley.  
"Your dad was different," she says, screwing up her eyes. "He liked books and proper music. Whenever we went dancing, he'd just sit in the corner and scowl."  
"So why did you like him?"  
"Oh, I don't know. He had a lost look about him. And when he told me where he came from, I wasn't a bit surprised."  
Over sherry and bitter in the King George pub, he'd sat on his hands,

and leant in close towards her.  
"I'll come clean, Eileen. There are things that need to be said."  
"What things?" She was nervous. She thought he might have a wife somewhere, and kids.  
"Well," he'd whispered. "I'm a mystery. Even to myself."  
Giggling, Mum felt relieved as he told her how he'd been abandoned as a baby, and left in a cardboard box outside Haringey police station.  
"December 14th, 1936," he said.  
"And my head was covered in snow."  
In the ledger, PC Wilmott wrote that the baby was "Male. Approximately two months old. Gurgling. Well fed".  
In the box with him was a blanket, a *Teddy Tail* annual, and some *Silly Symphony* snap cards. He was dressed in a bonnet and a blue wool coat.  
"It was shop bought," he told us.  
"From a place called Miss Suzette's. It had five pearl buttons and a stain on the collar that looked a bit like lipstick."  
"Everyone must have cooed over him," Mum says, folding up a shirt.  
"Imagine finding a baby like that. And of course, they spoilt him rotten at the home."  
The home was called Red House. A large Victorian mansion on the edge of Romney Marsh. Sometimes we'd drive there on Sundays and we'd park on the opposite corner. We never got out. We'd sit and have our picnic with the windows rolled down, and Dad would point out the tennis courts and chapel, and the window where his dormitory had been. By then the house was empty. There was a barbed-wire fence and Keep Out signs.  
"He was happy there, wasn't he?"  
Photographs show him laughing. He had a fishing rod, muddy knees, and a straggly line of friends.  
"I suppose so. It's a shame he was never adopted. But then we had the war. And the rationing. It was hard enough bringing up your own children. Never mind anyone else's."  
We clear the bags away. Mum makes tea. We try to watch *Blind Date*. A girl called Carol has red and

green hair. "Just like you," says Mum. "Fifteen years ago."  
Looking through the window, I smile and tug my fringe. It's snowing.  
"I wish he could have found out more."  
"Remember when I wrote to Cilla?"  
Mum nods towards the screen.  
"Surprise Surprise. I'm glad I didn't tell him."  
"I rang the Salvation Army. He didn't speak to me for a week."  
"A day."  
"It felt like a week."  
"He was scared."  
"I wonder who she was? I wonder why she did it?"  
Mum sniffs, tidying up the plates.  
"We're doing it again," she says.  
"Going round in circles."  
From my old bedroom window I can see all the houses, curling round the hillside. The Porters had gnomes. The Wilsons went to church. Number nine on the end was where my best friend lived. Cathy McNair went horse riding. She went to Benidorm. She saw Top of the Pops being recorded and David Essex winked at her. When she was 15 her dad went to prison, but she said he was in Florida, working for Walt Disney.  
"Mum tried to stop him," she said  
"But it's always been his dream. My dad had dreams. He wanted see Niagara. To have prize-winning new-breed roses. Dad was a mechanic. He liked crosswords. Mozart, *The Bill*. His favourite restaurant was The Golden Fish Market Street. He liked their spare ribs and the clear chicken soup. Mum comes upstairs.  
"Have you seen the snow? It's coming down in feathers." We kneel on the bed, looking out. The view goes on for miles.  
"We saw him once, you know."  
"Who?"  
"Noel Coward. We'd been to see a show. Something fancy at the Palladium. It was raining. The kind that makes your skin ache. We ran down a side street. And there he was, sheltering in a doorway. Your dad gripped my hand. It was definitely him."

## MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE NOEL COWARD SOCIETY 17<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2001

The meeting commenced at 3.45 as scheduled and began with Michael Imison, Chairman, introducing the new Secretary – John Hunter Knowles.

John presented his report on the issues of the Society he has been dealing with since taking over the role from Gareth Pike earlier this year and thanked Gareth for the work he began for the Society. John concluded his report with heartfelt thanks to Michael for the hard work and dedication he has given the Society over the past two years and presented him with a small gift and card on behalf of the Society and its committee members.

Following on from John's report, Michael spoke of the work of the society over the past couple of years and how he hopes the membership will continue to grow in the future with more opportunities for keen members to join the committee and get involved. He explained the current set up on the society in that it was formed during the Centenary Year by the Noel Coward Estate, who wished to retain a degree of control over the society and that we enjoyed a Charity Status. In order to do this the Coward Estate set up the 'Coward Foundation', a charitable body, which receives income from the Estate in order to promote the works of Noel Coward. The Foundation, in turn, is the only shareholder of 'Noel Coward Ltd', which is the legal body, that runs the 'Noel Coward Society'. Noel Coward Ltd is a non-profit making company and should it ever be in a profitable situation any surplus funds will be given back to the Foundation. The Directors of Noel Coward Ltd invited certain individuals from both professional and amateur backgrounds to form the committee as it currently stands.

With the background to the formulation of the Society explained, Michael also spoke of the draft constitution, which is currently being formulated and will be finalised next year, and of the strategy for electing key committee members on an annual basis to allow for 'new blood' and ideas to flow. Michael is retiring from his current positions in order to enjoy a well-earned break and retirement; however, he will remain a member of the Committee upon his return in the New Year.

Michael also thanked John for his hard work in pulling everything together and for the improvements on Home Chat and introduced the new Chair Person – Tracy Cutting, from Warner/Chappell Music.

Tracy began by thanking Michael once again and wishing him an enjoyable break. As Michael had spoken about the beginning and current stages of the Society, Tracy spoke about the future of the Society and some initial changes the Committee had planned for the New Year in order to improve services to the members. The first change will be the introduction of a bi-monthly edition of Home Chat, to be supported by interim mail-outs to promote special events/offers etc. It is hoped that by following this new format a 'meatier', more informative edition can be produced. The interim mail-outs will also allow the Committee to advertise events ahead of time, thus allowing members more opportunity to respond and book events. This scheme has already been put into use with the past couple of events (AGM/Flower Laying) and seems to have been well received by those present at the meeting.

The other main issue addressed by Tracy was the introduction of 'regional co-ordinators' – an issue that the Committee will be tackling early in the New Year. It is hoped that by forming local groups we will be in a better position to organise regional events, including theatre trips, and will, therefore, be able to offer our members a far better service. Letters will be going out to members in the New Year seeking volunteers!

The other major area discussed was that of member's comments. It is the feeling of the Committee that the ideas of the members are given as much attention as possible and Tracy reported that the Committee would be providing an area for your letters/ideas/comments etc both in Home Chat and on the web site. Tracy reiterated that member's involvement and suggestions are vital to the continued success of the Society and that the Committee would like to hear more of your thoughts on membership issues, events, projects etc.

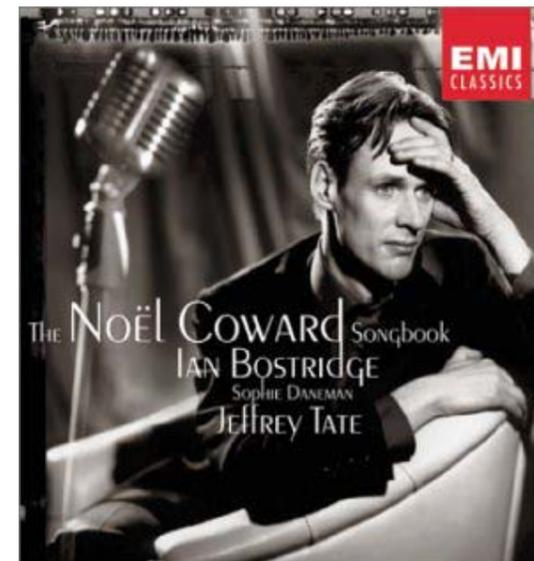
Wishing to allow the maximum time for member's discussion the Chair then opened the meeting to the floor for questions.

1. It was suggested that maybe an event could be organised around a screening of a/some Noel Coward Films and the Chair confirmed that this is something the Committee will look into for next year, possibly in conjunction with the British Film Institute / NFT and The Theatre Museum. A number of members mentioned various footage such as the David Frost Interview and Patrick Garland Interviews, as well as those held by the Theatre Museum and Society members.
2. The question of a 'central database' was raised where a list of video clips, films, recordings etc could be held in order that Society members can locate items if necessary. The Committee representatives suggested talking to Birmingham about such a database, as they are now the main archive for Coward material.
3. The Committee representatives displayed copies of the new membership leaflets for members to look at / take away. It was suggested that maybe we could arrange for the web address to be printed on new Coward books/folios etc. The Committee representatives agreed to look into this for next year to see whether it was a possibility.
4. Noel Coward Tour. It was suggested that a 'tour' of Noel Coward Sites could be organised. The Theatre Museum did organise such an event during the Centenary and the Committee will look into this with the TM next year.
5. Goldenhurst – members enquired as to whether a trip to Goldenhurst could be arranged. Gareth reported that he has, in the past, tried to contact the current owner of this property who has not responded to his letters. We understand that Goldenhurst has now been made into a number of separate accommodations and so a trip here may not be possible.
6. Portmeirion. Michael Imison is keen to organise a weekend trip to Portmeirion where 'Blithe Spirit' was written. This is quite an ambitious project but is something the Committee will look into for late 2002/2003, as the trip will include talks/presentations etc that will take some time to organise.
7. Spring Trip – Tracy mentioned that the Committee will be looking at organising a day trip to the Archives at Birmingham to be followed by some evening entertainment, possibly by a local society, or to tie in with the production of Masterpieces which is due to open in Birmingham next year.
8. Members commented that they enjoyed the theatre trips and the Committee agreed that they would continue to organise these but, hopefully, with more lead-time although this can be difficult when relying on production companies for information! Members also commented that they liked the new 'order form' system for events.
9. Some members questioned the accurateness of the theatre listings for amateur societies. Geoffrey Skinner from Samuel French Ltd confirmed that the lists are sent to John in time for the Home Chat publication date and that, to the best of their knowledge, they are correct at the time of printing. This said, however, he did confirm that SF can only provide details of confirmed bookings and these do not always arrive on time at the SF offices! Michael also added that an improvement in the reporting of overseas/ professional productions should be forthcoming in the New Year, as Ali Howarth from Alan Brodie Representations has now joined the Committee.
10. Tracy raised the idea of organising Hotel Discount schemes for members, which was well received. This is something the Committee will look into next year.

With time pushing on and dinner awaiting those members who had opted to join the Committee representatives at Joe Allen's the meeting came to a natural close at around 5pm with a reminder that bookings for the Flower Laying event must be returned by Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November!

If you can help with any of the points raised above, please do contact either John Hunter Knowles or Tracy Cutting, as we would be delighted to hear from you.

For someone trained in the production of beautiful vocal tone,



Bostridge does not do half badly. He certainly knows his repertoire, and has written intelligently about the melodic subtlety of Coward, knows that Coward's material is remarkably varied in style, and appreciates that his music 'stands at the centre of Coward's art and cannot be ignored as if he were a brilliant playwright who just happened to write a few famous songs.' Well he knows the perils that lurk for him in exploring this material: 'The power of context and of performance itself to lift apparently artless material is often lost.' Bostridge doesn't often lose the power to lift this material from the commonplace, but there are untidy moments. His rhythmic bending, and spoken highlighting of certain words,

is not always comfortable (*Twentieth Century Blues* and *Any Little Fish* respectively). He is, perhaps unsurprisingly, at his best in really melodic numbers such as *World Weary*, but sometimes there is a slight misunderstanding of the tempi variations - as in *Zigeuner*, which he treats as a song of restrained pace and gentle power, where perhaps it needs far more headiness and confused breathlessness.

One of the best things about this CD is the range of material included, some of it unusual. It is very good to have new presentations of songs like *Parisian Pierrot*, *World Weary*, *Mary Make-Believe*, *If You Could Only Come With Me*, *The Dream Is Over* and *Never Again*, which do not figure very much in the Coward discography, and some of the better-known songs such as *A Room With a View* also include rarely-heard second verse sections. As a general comment, there is sometimes a bit too much of the melody in Jeffrey Tate's accompaniments, and instances where none at all would have been preferable (when you have melodic songs sung by such a melodist, sometimes the last thing you want is the tune itself being strengthened in the accompaniment - it can be

very tricky to co-ordinate melodic movement). His jazz style is a bit lumpy in *Twentieth Century Blues*, strangely unrhythmic in *Parisian Pierrot* and downright zany in *Mad Dogs And Englishmen*. As a general rule, in this sort of work the less you are aware of the accompaniment the better, and he does occasionally make himself too noticeable!

I think that Bostridge, with this CD, just about makes the case for Coward as a supremely gifted songsmith. Perhaps you need the occasional trained singer to come along and try to prove that 'Coward may not be Schubert, but he's not a million miles away.'

**Contents:**

- \*with Sophie Daneman (soprano)
- Twentieth Century Blues
- Parisian Pierrot
- Poor Little Rich Girl
- World Weary
- Mary Make-Believe
- A Room With a View\*
- Dance, Little Lady
- If You Could Only Come With Me
- I'll See You Again\*
- Zigeuner
- The Dream Is Over
- Any Little Fish
- Mad Dogs and Englishmen
- Let's Say Goodbye
- Something To Do With Spring\*
- The Party's Over Now
- Never Again
- Someday I'll Find You\*
- I Travel Alone

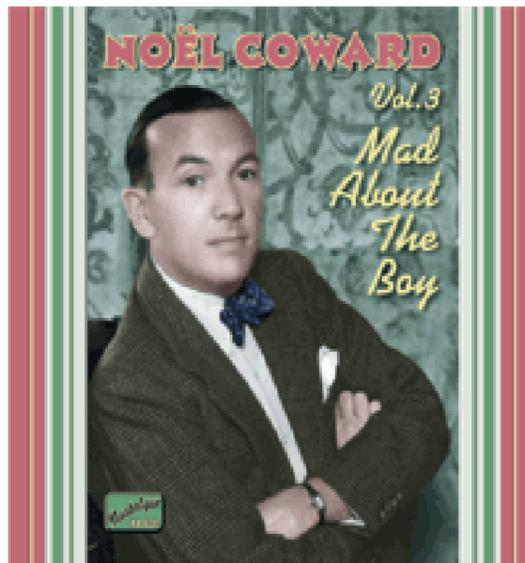
ALAN FARLEY ON INTERNET RADIO  
KALW - San Francisco

If you are connected to the Internet you may have already used the RealOne player to play online music, talking books etc. If you upgrade to RealOne Player Plus you will be able to access some 4,000 radio stations including KALW broadcast from San Francisco. This public service broadcast station features our US representative for the West Coast, Alan Farley. He often features Noel Coward and has an extensive Coward record collection.

RARE TAPED INTERVIEW WITH NOEL COWARD, JUDY GARLAND AND KAY THOMPSON

Member James Mathieson has sent in a copy of a cassette tape he purchased at auction. He writes: "As far as I can judge it was made, presumably on a reel to reel tape recorder with a single microphone (and later transferred to cassette) on the afternoon following the Boston opening of *Sail Away*. Judy Garland, Noel and Kay Thompson have been marshalled to sit, talk and be recorded for posterity. There is at least one other person present but he is too

far from the mike to be heard clearly. Presumably this is the guy with the tape recorder and reference is made to 'Charles' but the sound levels are so erratic I could not determine if he was the host and how many others were present. Whoever managed to assemble these three must have been someone held in high esteem by them all to give their time to such a project especially Noel who was in the midst of corrective surgery on *Sail Away*." (Ed. we hope to clean up the sound on this piece and provide a transcription in the next Home Chat)



Noel Coward Vol. 3: Mad About The Boy (Naxos Nostalgia 8.120623)

**Alan Farley Writes:**

I had been intrigued for years, ever since I saw the following entry in Brian Rust's Complete Entertainment Discography in his list of Noel Coward's recordings: London, September 20, 1932: OB-4211-1 Mad About the Boy Rejected over the years as I interviewed a number of Coward's colleagues and associates, I asked about it, but no one had ever located it. Then one day in January 1993, nearing the end of a visit to London, I was going through the contents of one of Joan Hirst's cabinets when I came across a stack of old 10" and 12" 78's on the top shelf. I looked through them and found one or two recordings of some of Coward's music I didn't have, and noted them. I also found a 10" disc with a white label pasted over the regular label, which bore simply the typed title Mad About the Boy. Could this be the long-lost disc? It would take weeks to find out. I was to leave London the next day, but Joan promised to have the disc transferred to cassette, and let me know. Some weeks later, in a phone conversation, she told me that both she and Graham Payn had listened to the recording, and "we think it is Noel." She sent me a copy of the cassette

with the proviso that it not be revealed that it had been found. After listening to it, it was obvious that it was indeed Noel.

Some years later, approaching the Coward Centenary, Graham relaxed the restriction, and I supplied a copy to the BBC's Arena three-hour Coward special, where it was used to underscore a bit of a scene. Some months afterwards, a remarkable thing happened: I received a call from Eric Bernhoft, partner of the pianist Peter Mintun and a

collector of vintage recordings, telling me that he had purchased a miscellaneous lot of 78s at a sale, and among them was a recording of Noel Coward singing Mad About the Boy. I told him about my discovery, and later comparison revealed that the two 78's were identical recordings.

When I became aware of the Naxos CD series Noel Coward - The Complete Recordings I made contact with the producer, David Lennick, who waseager to include the recording in the series. We just missed the deadline for Volume 2, where it would perhaps have fitted best; but it is now the lead item in Volume 3, just released.

**Dominic Vlasto writes:**

An unfortunate footnote to Mad About The Boy's inclusion in this new Naxos selection is that somehow the liner note states, falsely, that Coward is accompanied by Ray Noble and Orchestra. Ray Noble and Orchestra did indeed work that session with Coward and accompanied four other numbers; but it is obvious that this track only has piano accompaniment. However, the really exciting thing is that this may well be the only publicly-released example we have of Coward accompanying himself at the piano, something he almost never did in public (though I do know of a wartime newsreel film clip which

briefly shows him accompanying himself at a hospital concert). One knows Ray Noble's work as accompanist, of course, from several recordings, and his style is always neat, discreet and pretty polished. The accompaniment for this recording of Mad About The Boy is a bit too waywardly fluid in its harmonic underlay, too sketchy, almost, in places, for it to have been prepared and delivered by a professional orchestrator, bandleader and accompanist of Noble's thoroughness and general neatness; and I feel that the piano accompaniment is also almost too well-matched with the rhythmic fluidity of Coward's vocal delivery for it to be anything other than a self-accompaniment. There is very little to compare it with to be certain that this is Coward the pianist at work on this track, but he certainly possessed the skills to do it, and the very waywardness of the technique (despite its effectiveness) and the liberties that the accompanist takes with the harmonic underlay which the piece is generally given that makes me feel this hunch may have some mileage in it. I'd be interested to hear if any budding Coward musicologist out there has opinions on the matter!

**The Noel Coward Songbook - EMI Classics 72435573742 Ian Bostridge accompanied by Jeffrey Tate**

... a review by Dominic Vlasto This is a very interesting CD - the first time since Joan Sutherland in 1966 that a classically-trained concert-music singer has attempted an entire album of Coward songs. Coward could himself be impatient with trained voices and the formality of concert music performances (we all remember his put-down of a performance of some Mozart as 'piddling on flannel'), and sometimes he had good cause, knowing that in this sort of music the effectiveness of the words is almost always the primary guiding principle rather than the production of beautiful vocal tone.

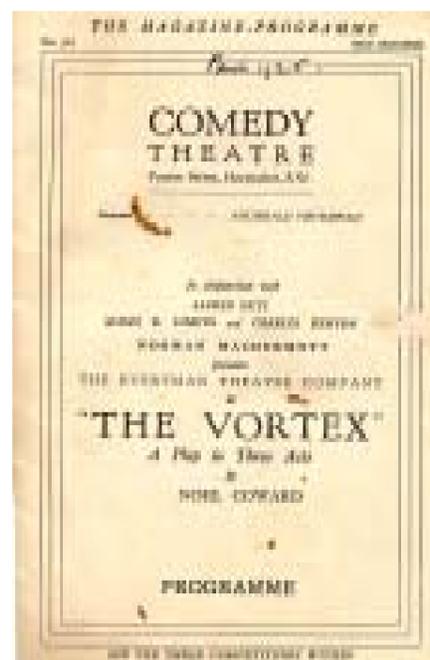
Continued from page 4

committee for their continued commitment to establishing and developing our young society and to the support provided by Alan Brodie and his staff, The Noel Coward Foundation and the Estate of the Late Noel Coward.

A Happy Christmas to everyone and sincere wishes for a very peaceful New Year.

John Knowles

**VORTEX PROGRAMME MARCH 1925**



This programme marked the transfer of The Vortex from the Everyman Theatre, Hampstead via The Royalty. It has been included as a small celebration to mark the revival of this watershed Coward play in the West End. It starred Noel Coward and Lilian Braithwaite with Bromley Davenport, Molly Kerr, F. Kinsey Peile, Alan Hollis, George Merritt, Mary Robson and Kathleen Blake.

**COWARD ON FILM**

Barry Day is about to publish the book that completes the canon of commentary on Coward's work. This long-awaited volume on Noel Coward's film life will contain details of his own film career, films of his works with masses of other information that should keep us all

quiet in the late Spring evenings! Initially this volume will be available to NCS members only at an exclusive price. Members will also be able to purchase both this and The Unknown Noel at a joint bargain price! More later...

**NOEL COWARD'S PIANO**



Barely a month goes by without someone writing to tell us about a piano once played by Noel Coward at their aunt's house in Bournemouth in 1935 or that Noel Coward composed Parisien Pierrot whilst seated at this piano in Lancashire. We have had one query about a piano with a sale label inside saying 'Deliver to Mr. Coward' - did we know if it is was one of his pianos - well we don't but it might be. Noel must have sat at more pianos than most of us have ever seen. There cannot be many stately homes, stylish clubs and select hotels that have not had their ivories tickled (in Eb of course) by The Master. There are of course known 'Coward pianos.' One came up for auction a year or two back at Christie's. Elizabeth Sharman reminds us of another on which Coward composed Sail Away. It is in the Actor's Fund building on West 57th Street New York. The plaque above the piano reads " This piano was

chosen by Noel Coward for Earl Blackwell, Sail Away was composed on it." The photograph on the wall behind it (shown in the photograph here) is of Earl Blackwood with Noel Coward and Cary Grant.

**NOEL COWARD REMEMBERED IN THE ACTORS' CHURCH**

Regular contributor and member, Terence Trimmer, has sent in this picture of a commemorative plaque on the North side of the Actor's Church, St. Paul's, Covent Garden. It sits neatly between those of Terence Rattigan and Charles Chaplin - "three knights in a row," he writes. Terry relates what is given in the broadsheet provided by the church, that it was designed in 1631 by Inigo Jones for the Earl of Bedford as 'the handsomest barn in England.' The connection with the theatre began in



1663 with the establishment of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and later, in 1723, with the opening of the Covent Garden theatre (later the Royal Opera House). The Actors' Church Union has an office in the church. Many services are held to celebrate the lives of actors and others connected with the entertainment world. there are many plaques dedicated to the famous - some in marble others onto wooden screens. Sounds worthy of a visit!

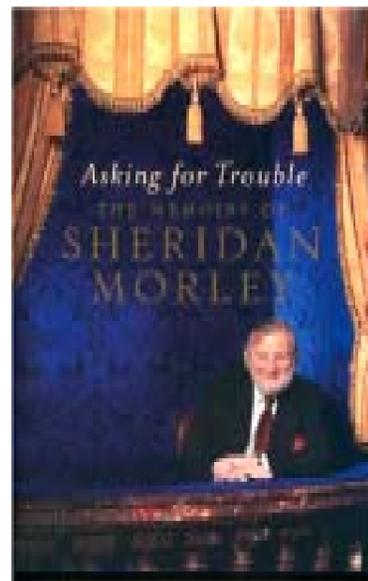
## ASKING FOR TROUBLE - The Memoirs of Sheridan Morley

After Graham Payn, there is probably no-one alive more associated in the public mind with Noel Coward than Sheridan Morley. It is an association of which he is rightly proud. He was named in Noel's will as literary advisor to his estate and, as he hastens to tell us in this new book (p.2), he was the author of the first full-length biography of Coward. It was also the first biography Sheridan had written but it led to a host of others - I make it eighteen to date- the subjects all, like Noel, actors or theatre people. It also led to his editing five other books centred on Coward and his work. Now, as his memoirs record, he is starting a new career as a director and again it is to Coward he has turned. He now directs the revivals of his own theatrical memoir, *Noel and Gertie*, formerly directed by other people, and he has been responsible for a number of Coward related shows at the Jermyn Street Theatre including a moving revival of the rarely performed *Shadows of the Evening*. His West End debut as a director was with Coward's *Song at Twilight*.

It is clear then that he feels an affinity for Coward and it is not difficult to see why. Both share a passion for theatre and musical theatre in particular. Both have an enviable reputation for wit and skill as raconteurs. Coward's fondness for travel is echoed in Morley's life, from his peripatetic childhood to his current penchant for cruising in the QE2, where these memoirs were written. One suspects that, despite his having been in on the early days of television news broadcasting and a prominent member of the ground-breaking *Late Night Line-Up* team, Sheridan would have preferred to share with Coward an era when theatre was the pre-eminent form of drama and his beloved *Punch* magazine still preserved its urbane traditions. Above all, Sheridan, in spite of frequently claiming to be lazy is clearly, like Noel, never happier than when he is working, as is shown by his huge output of books, written

usually while holding down several other jobs as a journalist or broadcaster. This latest book only barely qualifies as memoirs. It contains the salient facts of the subject's life but not in any particular order. Sheridan, whose genuine and beguiling modesty is one trait not shared with Coward, appears to be uncertain why anyone should be interested in him. He makes up for it by his supporting cast. This is a name-dropping book (I should complain - my name is dropped). Here is a sentence about Adrienne Allen (the original Sybil in *Private Lives*) "...she remained a West End actress, frequently replacing Celia Johnson or Wendy Hiller, until 1959 when her old friends John Gielgud and 'Binkie' Beaumont, the H.M. Tennent manager, cast her in Peter Shaffer's first play, *Five Finger Exercise*, with another Tennent veteran, Roland Culver and three starry newcomers: Juliet Mills, Michael Bryant and Brian Bedford." Nine celebrities in one sentence is not bad going. To be fair this is not altogether typical. What the host of theatrical greats, who surrounded him from an early age, provided him with is a fund of marvellous stories. Two stick in the mind, both related to Coward. When *Noel and Gertie* was about to open for its first London run a replacement was suddenly needed for the leading lady. Sheridan remembered that Joanna Lumley was a distant cousin and rang her saying could she play Gertrude Lawrence very quickly at the King's Head? "By that" said Jo, "do you mean I have to say it all very fast or that there's not much time to rehearse?" The second relates to James Pope-Hennessy who following Coward's death was first choice to write a new frank biography of him. Sheridan, who was then working for the BBC television round-up programme *Late Night Line Up*, which was struggling to get audiences, had lunch with Hennessy, only to be rung late that night by the

police who told him Hennessy had been murdered. Sheridan's was the last name found in his diary so he was asked to give an account of his movements after leaving Hennessy. Sheridan replied that he had driven straight to the BBC Television



Centre, parked, and then with Joan Bakewell had written and presented *Late Night Line-Up* on BBC2. It is typical of Sheridan's willingness to tell stories against himself that he found the policeman's next question, "Did anybody see you, sir?" irresistibly funny. Sheridan suffered a broken marriage and two nervous breakdowns and accepts the major responsibility for the former while asking for no sympathy for the latter. In a touching final chapter he even apologises to Ruth, his second wife, for not being quite the husband she expected. But these are almost the only more serious notes in a book which is otherwise resolutely up-beat and richly entertaining. In particular Sheridan conveys the excitement he feels now, in working again as a practitioner, while maintaining a foot in the critical camp. Despite many setbacks he has not lost his enthusiasm and can be seen to start each new enterprise with undiminished relish. In this, again, he is very similar to Noel Coward.

**Michael Imison**

## EVENTS...

Next year we commemorate 30 years since the death of Noel Coward and, to correct the misinformation we gave in the last edition of Home Chat, 50 years this year since Gertrude Lawrence's demise. Much is still being sorted but we can say that the planned events are as follows:

Jermyn Street Theatre presents  
**JUDY CAMPBELL**  
**STEFAN BEDNARCZYK**  
**WHERE ARE THE SONGS WE SUNG?**  
 directed by  
**SHERIDAN MORLEY**



Judy Campbell & Noel Coward in Present Laughter

Tuesday December 10 - Sunday  
 December 22  
 KING'S HEAD THEATRE  
 115 Upper Street, Islington  
 London N1  
 BOX OFFICE 020 7226 1916

Tuesday to Saturday at 8.00pm  
 Sunday matinee at 3.30pm  
 Tickets: Tue - Thursday and Sunday  
 matinee £16.50 (£12.50 concs)  
 Fri & Sat evening £17.50 (no  
 concessions)  
 Dinner available one hour before  
 performance at a set price of £10.50  
 Press Night: Wednesday December  
 11 at 7.30pm (please note earlier  
 start time)  
 Sixty years ago Judy Campbell was  
 the first person ever to sing *A  
 Nightingale Sang in Berkeley  
 Square* in the revue *New Faces*. She  
 subsequently went on to become

Noel Coward's leading lady, playing  
 opposite him in *Blithe Spirit*,  
*Present Laughter* and *This Happy  
 Breed*. The roles of Joanna in  
*Present Laughter* and Ethel in *This  
 Happy Breed* were especially  
 created for her. Now, in her own  
 utterly charming and inimitable style,  
 with a mixture of anecdotes, and  
 song excerpts from various Coward  
 plays, Judy Campbell tells the story  
 of her life in theatre and her  
 experiences of working with Noel.

OFF-BROADWAY STAGED  
 CONCERT VERSION OF  
**PACIFIC 1860**

The US premiere of Barry Day's  
 concert version production of  
*Pacific 1860* has restored *Alice Is At  
 It Again*, which was intended for the  
 original production but which Mary  
 Martin refused to perform on the  
 grounds that it would upset her fans.  
 "And what?" Noel asked her - "did  
 she think *My Heart Belongs To  
 Daddy* had been about - filial  
 affection?" It is to be staged by  
 The York Theatre Company  
 619 Lexington Avenue  
 New York, NY 10022-4610

Dates are:  
 Fri., Jan. 31st — 8:00 PM  
 Sat., Feb. 1st — 2:30 PM \*  
 Sat., Feb. 1st — 8:00 PM  
 Sun., Feb. 2nd — 2:30 PM \*  
 Sun., Feb. 2nd — 7:30 PM  
 \* Audience Discussion Follows Each  
 Matinee.  
 The tickets are \$30 each and can be  
 ordered from Tele-Charge (212)  
 239-6200 (*With thanks to Barry Day  
 and Ken Starrett*)

NOEL & ALFRED AND LYNN  
**DECEMBER 17 NYC Library**

Barry Day's 'Noel & Alfred &  
 Lynn' was performed April this year  
 at Ten Chimneys the home of the  
 Lunts. It brings together Barrie  
 Ingham as Alfred Lunt, Rosemary  
 Harris as Lynn Fontanne and Simon  
 Jones as Noel Coward. This evening  
 is on Tuesday December 17 at the  
 Public Library for the Performing  
 Arts at Lincoln Center - Bruno  
 Walter Auditorium.

**Saturday 29th March**  
 A Celebration of the  
 Life & Work of Noël Coward  
 at the Theatre Museum,  
 Covent Garden  
 with Lunch at THE IVY

The latest on this NCS event is that it  
 will consist of lunch on the 1st floor  
 of The Ivy restaurant with celebrity  
 guests and singer Lorna Dallas  
 hopefully accompanied by Jason  
 Carr with some selections from The  
 Master. We aim to keep costs to  
 a reasonable level and make this  
 event accessible to anyone who  
 wishes to go. After lunch **Rexton  
 Bunnett** will provide a celebration of  
 Noel Coward for us at the Theatre  
 Museum, Covent garden

PORTMEIRION  
 EVENT

The Portmeirion event is on-track  
 with a variety of options to suit  
 members. This will provide an  
 opportunity to see this Italianate  
 village and enjoy a weekend of  
 Coward where *Blithe Spirit* was  
 written.

COWARD ITEMS AT  
 CHRISTIE'S

Coming up in the sale on 17  
 December at Christie's, South  
 Kensington are two interesting  
 Coward lots, one of which we have  
 featured in a past Home Chat:

**Lot 126**  
 A single-  
 breasted green  
 velvet smoking  
 jacket made  
 for Noel  
 Coward by  
 Hawes  
 And Curtis  
 Estimate :  
 £1500-2500



**Lots 127 - 131**  
 A collection of paintings by Gladys  
 Calthrop, Clemence Dane and  
 Edward Molyneux, given by Noel  
 Coward to his secretary, Joan Hirst.  
 Estimates range from £300-500  
 Sale details as follows:  
 Christie's South Kensington, London,  
 17 December, 2PM.  
 Viewing: 15-17 December. Contact:  
 Sarah Hodgson 0207 321 3281