

**America & Canada**

<b>Design for Living</b>	17 Jan to 16 Feb March/April	Theater Rhinoceros - San Francisco. Directed by John Fisher Rock, Paper, Scissors—10th Anniversary show. Co-production with Presentation House. 990-3473 for tickets. www.rock-paper-scissors.com
<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	25 Jan to 24 Feb 21 Feb to 24 Mar 12 Apr - 19 May	Aurora Theater, 3087-B Main Street, Duluth, Georgia, 30096. Tel: 770-476-7926 or www.auroratheatre.com American Conservatory Theater. Directed by Charles Randolph-Wright at the Geary Theater Directed by Tim Vasen. Center Stage's Pearlstone Theater. Center Stage, Baltimore, email: rgorelic@centerstage.org
<b>A Suite in Two Keys</b>	5 to 7 Apr 5 - 17 Mar	St. Vital United Church, 937 St. Mary's Road, Winnipeg, MB Walnut Street Theatre, Independence Studio on 3 will be producing Noël Coward's compilation, Directed by Richard M. Parison, Jr.
<b>Hay Fever</b>	March 31 Jul to 24 Nov	Domino Theatre, Kingston, Ontario. The Shaw Festival, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Website: www.shawfest.sympatico.ca Directed by Christopher Newton who is one of the world's leading directors of Noël Coward's plays. He has chosen this production to end his 23 year run as Artistic Director of the Shaw Festival.
<b>Private Lives</b>	2002 5 to 21 Sept	Duncan Weldon Productions/Iron Mountain Productions, Broadway Domino Theatre, Kingston, Ontario.
<b>Long Island Sound</b>	13 May	This forgotten Noël Coward play will have its world premiere off-Broadway in May. (See article in Home Chat)
<b>Waiting In The Wings</b>	16 Sept to 5 Oct	Ottawa Little Theatre, 400 King Edward Avenue, Ottawa, ON

**Australasia**

**Design For Living** Nov - Dec State Theatre Co of South Australia, Adelaide

**Europe**

**Present Laughter** 31 Jan to 16 Feb Holland Civic Theatre in Holland. For more information, see their website at www.hollandcivictheatre.org  
17 May to 14 Jun English theatre, Frankfurt

**United Kingdom**

<b>Pass The Port</b>		The next production is at the Vera Fletcher Hall in Thames Ditton, Surrey Box office: Helen Hughes on 020 8224 6934
<b>In Celebration of the life of Noel Coward</b>		Rexton Bunnett
<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	12 & 13 Feb 20 to 23 Mar 2 to 5 May 24 May to 15 Jun 19 to 22 Feb 13 to 16 Feb	2.30pm in the Grand Theatre Studio, Blackpool Barton Drama Group, The Village Hall, Barton, Cambridge St. John The Divine D.S., St. John's Church Hall, South Croydon, Surrey Queen's Theatre, Hornchurch Denton Wilde Sapte DS, Denton Wilde Sapte Auditorium, London St. Cross Drama Group, St. Faith's Hall, Winchester, Hampshire
<b>Present Laughter</b>	27 Feb to 2 Mar 1 to 30 Apr 23 to 27 Apr 16 Feb 15 to 18 May	The Hurlingham Club, Fulham, London. The Loft Theatre, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire Giffnock theatre Players, The Eastwood Theatre, Glasgow The Cuddington Players, The Nork Community Centre, Banstead, Surrey The Midland Players, Sheffield University, Sheffield, Yorks
<b>Star Quality</b>	Current	Apollo Theatre, Shaftsbury Avenue, West End, Telephone 020 7494 5070 Mon-Sat 20:00. Mats Thurs 15:00 and Sat 16:00 Prices: £11.50 to £35.00
<b>Still Life</b>	22 Feb	St. Mary's School performing at The Concert hall, Ascot, Berkshire
<b>Private Lives</b>	Current to March 8 to 13 Apr 20 to 23 Mar	Albery Theatre, St Martin's Lane, WC2N 4AH. Tube: Leicester Sq. Louth Playgoers Society at the Playgoers Theatre, Louth, Lincolnshire Nailsworth Dramatic Society, Town Hall, Nailsworth, Gloucestershire
<b>Fallen Angels</b>	19 to 23 Feb	Ilkley players, The Wildman Theatre, Ilkley, West Yorkshire
<b>Design for Living</b>	18 to 23 Mar	Talisman Theatre, Kenilworth, Warwickshire
<b>Brief Encounter</b>	Sep	Noël Coward / Andrew Taylor - Middle Ground Theatre Co UK Tour
<b>The Vortex</b>	Spring	Crucible Theatre, Sheffield
<b>Relative Values</b>	28 Jan to 31 Mar	Theatre Royal Bath Productions UK Tour (See article in Home Chat)
<b>Nude With Violin</b>	21 to 23 Mar	St. Mary's Drama Group, St. Mary's Church Hall, Hampton, Middlesex
<b>Waiting In The Wings</b>	21 to 23 Mar	The Marlow Players, The Shelley Theatre, Marlow, Buckinghamshire
<b>Hay Fever</b>	18 to 20 Apr 11 Apr	The Good Companions, John Keble Hall, Edgware, Middlesex Maidenhead Drama Guild, The Norden Farm Centre, Maidenhead, Berks

**Planned**

**The long awaited Masterpieces is now due to take place at the Birmingham Rep. some time around May-June 2002.**  
**The Marquise** Bill Kenwright has this in his future programme.



Welcome to this new 'laser-printed' eight page Home Chat - find out what is on offer for you in 2002 and beyond!

**FLOWERS FOR THE MASTER 2001**



Lindsay Duncan and Alan Rickman lay flowers on 'Noel' at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane just prior to The Master's birthday.

**Saturday 15th December**, with the sun shining through the crisp cold air and Covent Garden packed with seasonal shoppers and buskers giving their all in the commercial run-up to the festivities, members and guests came to celebrate the life and work of The Master at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane. At 12.00 noon Lindsay Duncan and Alan Rickman arrived and joined one of our vice-presidents, Moira Lister with Robert Gardiner - discussing Coward past and present - and gave us a marvellously restful and reflective interlude away from the West End rush outside. Our star guests spoke of their work on the play and the joy they both shared in performing one of the great Coward classics. Alan made it clear that what might at first appear to be a gift for an actor delivering such wonderful lines was in fact no easy task. To bring the play to its darkly comedic best had required considerable work. It was clear that both stars enjoyed being involved in such a successful revival. After laying flowers from the Society and the 'Estate of the Late Noël Coward' they stayed and chatted to members and guests over a drink in the foyer bar. The morning's event ended with a photocall outside. Our thanks to them and the Theatre Royal for their willingness to support this annual ceremony ... and so into the sunshine for a gentle walk along The Strand to the

Members & guests gather outside the Theatre Royal for the 'photocall.'

Savoy for lunch. Twenty of us entered the hotel, many for the first time, and felt a sense of history - it was after all one of Noël Coward's favourite hotels and dining places. We were extremely well-received and seated around a large oval table in the middle of the dining room. Christmas Lunch was served with style and everyone relaxed and talked about all matters 'Coward.' Thanks go to Moira Lister for sharing so much with us and to everyone who attended and made the lunch such a special occasion. The food was excellent and the wine flowed - certainly an occasion to treasure!



## Theatre Visits

The long awaited *Masterpieces* is due to be produced by the Birmingham Rep around May-June 2002. We are having discussions with Birmingham University and are looking at a possible one day event on a Friday that includes a guided visit to the Coward Archive, dinner, evening performance and an overnight stay (Friday night) for those who wish it. If you are interested please indicate on the enclosed interest form. We will also be keeping an eye on other major productions between January and June 2002.

### Save The Date! Saturday March 16th

#### "A Stroll With Noël"

- \* Walk to see the houses where Noël lived in Belgravia!
- \* Lunch at The Antelope Pub!
- \* Viewing video clips at the Theatre Museum!

A letter with more details and booking arrangements will soon be on its way to you!



### Residential Weekend Portmeirion - 2003

The Society is planning a major event in 2003 that will offer a residential weekend in the village where Blithe Spirit was conceived and written. Our thoughts are to have a weekend that combines an opportunity to find out more

about the man and his work, to listen and work with renowned speakers and star guests and become involved in the music, drama, theatre and comedy of the Master. This prestigious event will be planned during the course of



2002 - we will keep you informed of developments.

### "Dolls house" was often visited by Noël Coward

Concealed behind an extravagant double fronted period facade is a delightful 'dolls house', for many years the home of actress Joyce Carey and known affectionately as *The Baby Grand*, due to its deceptive size and shape, by Noël Coward, who was a regular visitor. The unique property is situated on the east side of Chesham Street, SW1 and is within walking distance of Sloane Square and all its amenities. Offering 760 square feet of living space, the house is arranged over three floors with dining room and kitchen on the ground, the reception room and second bedroom on the first and the master bedroom and bathroom on the second. The house runs laterally, offering the maximum natural light and, it has to be said, such a pretty exterior is a rare sight indeed. Agents Chesterton Residential are offering the freehold at £725,000. (We include this house in our 'A Stroll With Noel' day event on March 16th)



You can see why Joyce Carey loved it so much

## Edward Woodward & High Spirits from the Internet - an interview with Michael Aspel

**Aspel:** On the Broadway stage, you did a show for Noël Coward. It was a musical. How did you meet him?

**Edward:** I was in a play in London called *Rattle of a Simple Man* at the Garrick Theatre, with Sheila Hancock. And he came to see it one night. It was only a two-hander with a small part in the middle of the play and the actor was always impersonating people, knocking at doors impersonating people. And on the odd occasion, he did the Noël Coward. On this particular night, there was a knock at the door and I said, 'Who is it?'

And the voice said, 'Noël Coward.' And I said, 'Yes, Go away, you silly bugger,' thinking it was Danny. And he said [Edward impersonating Coward], 'I don't think I'll do that.' So I went to the door and opened it. And there he was, standing there with that wonderful American director, Mike Nichols.

And I said, "Oh, I'm sorry!" He said, "No, no, no. Why should you be sorry? It's just me." [Edward gives a short embarrassed laugh] Just li'l ol' Noël Coward come to say hello. [small groan and grimace] So, he came to say hello and then he invited me sometime later to do this musical on Broadway.

**Aspel:** Did he know you could sing?

**Edward:** No, I auditioned --well, yes, he DID know because he'd read it in the programme of *Rattle of a Simple Man*. But he hadn't heard me. So, I went along and auditioned for him. Anyway, I walked in there and there was a beautiful white grand piano and sitting behind it was a guy called Al. He said [as Noël Coward], 'This is Al. Al plays the piano.' I thought that was pretty obvious, I mean, he's sitting behind it.

And he said, 'What are you going to sing, dear boy?' And I said, 'Well, I haven't brought anything.' And he said, 'I hope you brought your voice!' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Because you're going to use it. What are you going to sing?' I said, 'I don't know. I haven't prepared anything.' He said, 'Al, make a few suggestions.' So, Al said, 'How about this and how 'bout that.' I said, 'No, I don't know it. I don't know the words. No, I don't know that. I don't know that.' And I suddenly said, 'The only words I know are *Three Blind Mice*.' He said, 'I'm not going to sit here and listen to you singing *Three Blind Mice*. Never. Never.' So, I finally came up with *O' What a Beautiful Morning*. And I started and I sang, 'O' what a beautiful morning ...' [voice cracking]

And he said, 'Too high.' I said, 'Yes, it IS a bit too high.' So, I sang it down there and it was too low. I finally hit the medium. I hit the middle and I sang it through.

And he said, 'Well, well, well. You sing, as well. A little.' And he offered me the lead in his musical, *High Spirits*, in New York, which ran for fourteen months.



## Corporate Membership

Those companies or public institutions who wish to join the Society as a corporate member can offer their employees a range of benefits. The cost of corporate membership is £100 per year and provides the following entitlements and services:

- all of your staff will enjoy the benefits of membership in regard to attendance at events and entitlement to discounts and purchases;
- you will receive one copy of all publications that may be photocopied and/or distributed to all your staff;
- you are entitled to a free banner advertisement, to your own design, placed on the home page of the Noël Coward Society website (the website currently receives over 78,000 'hits' per month).

Only one person may vote on behalf of your corporation at meetings of the society and be eligible for membership of the committee as a representative of the corporation although individual members of member corporations may become full individual members of the society, by paying an individual subscription.

If you are interested please contact us by email at: [membership@noelcoward.net](mailto:membership@noelcoward.net) or write to the address shown at the bottom of page 12.

## The Noël Coward Society Committee

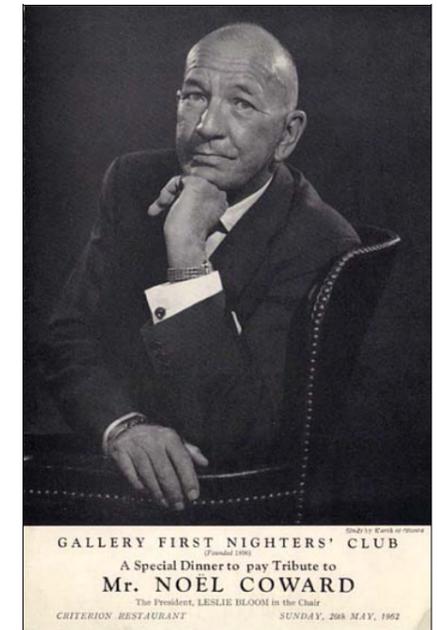
For the benefit of new members we include details of the Society's Patron, Honorary Officers and Committee who are:

- Patron** - Graham Payn
  - Honorary President** - Sir John Mills
  - Honorary Vice-Presidents** - Judy Campbell, Joan Hirst, Moira Lister and Sheridan Morley
  - Consultants** - Philip Hoare and Joel Kaplan
  - Tracy Cutting** (Chair & Warner Chappell)
  - John Knowles** (Secretary & Director NC Ltd.)
  - Graham Martin** (Blinkhorns) Hon. Treasurer
  - Robert Gardiner** (Director NC Ltd. & a trustee of the Noel Coward Foundation)
  - Michael Imison** (Past Chair & Director NC Ltd.)
  - Geoffrey Skinner** (Samuel French)
  - Barry Day** (Coward historian and US Consultant)
  - Gareth Pike** (Past Secretary)
  - Stephen Marshall** (Member)
  - Jane Finch** (Member)
  - Ali Howarth** (Alan Brodie Representation)
  - Ned Chaillet** (BBC)
  - Peter Tummons** (Publisher, Methuen Drama)
- The members of the Committee are always interested in hearing from NCS members. Please let us know if you would like a particular activity or event to take place. If you would like to be a regional representative of the Society in your area then please get in touch. As the Society grows in the next few years the need for volunteers to join the committee or help in regions of the UK and across the globe also grows. Keep us informed of Coward happenings in your part of the world. We try hard to keep our information on forthcoming productions up to date on both the website and in Home Chat - we rely heavily on you letting us know!



## Committee Spotlight STEPHEN MARSHALL

Stephen is a member of the Society's committee and knew Noël Coward. His background is theatre - through and through and with the exception of *Nude With Violin* and *Song at Twilight* he has played all the major Coward roles. He was trained at the Northern School of Drama by Esme Church - and had a short period with the Harry Hanson Players prior to RAF service - after which he worked with the BBC before moving to New York where he did off-



Broadway shows before returning to London. He worked with BEA/BA until returning to acting in 1990, since when he has toured extensively in Germany and Austria. He first met The Master in 1943 and on many occasions afterwards. He was the Secretary of the First Nighters' Club. Amongst many other memorable occasions, the club arranged a special dinner on Sunday 20th May 1962, attended by Noël, to pay tribute to him.

## Membership Drive in the US Hey!

When we look at the website figures for each month it is no surprise to see that over 85% of all those people seeking information on Noël Coward on the Internet hail from the US. In fact mainly from Virginia. Our US members will no doubt have an explanation for this - it's a mystery to us - but it does emphasise that any society attempting to celebrate the work of such a major 20th century figure needs to recognise where the main interest lies! Elizabeth Sharland and Barry Day have already started the ball rolling in the Eastern states with events and contact with friends and the theatrical community at large.

On the West Coast Alan Farley, broadcasting in San Francisco, regularly features Noël Coward in his Arts programming and represents our interests there.

If you are reading this in the US then please give us a hand and find a friend to join our work. If we get it right we should start to see a regular programme of Coward events in the US. If you would like to be a US representative (for the Noël Coward Society I mean ...!) then email: [membership@noelcoward.net](mailto:membership@noelcoward.net). We are happy to send membership application forms anywhere in the World! Just email or call +44 (0)1603 486188!

## A Ballet including Noël Coward's Songs

News from the US on a dramatic ballet featuring 11 of Noel Coward's songs—full details below of this unusual event

### "POP"

A full-length dramatic ballet on three New Year's Eves  
Choreography by Francis Patrelle

The Kaye Playhouse at Hunter College, 68<sup>th</sup> Street between Park & Lexington Avenue - April 11<sup>th</sup> 7:00pm, April 12<sup>th</sup> 8:00pm, April 13<sup>th</sup> 2:00 & 8:00pm - for tickets contact the box office, 212-772-4448

### A Synopsis

"POP" a full-length dramatic ballet continues Mr. Patrelle's interest in the interdisciplinary relationship between music and drama as interpreted through the medium of ballet. It also highlights his interest in popular music from the 1930's - 1950's (See Bio and Dances Patrelle Repertory).

The ballet is staged on three separate New Year's evenings at three different nightclubs. Each evening, or act, will encompass one epoch with period music and costuming.

The company will use different footwear for each act, heels for Noel Coward, Pointe Shoes for songs about New York, and sneakers for Jerry Lee Lewis, each being emblematic of the period style. The drama will involve three separate couples on those new years evenings.

The title "POP" pertains to both the sound of a cork exploding from the bottle from the unleashing of unseen forces and also relates to the popular music that is being played to accompany the ballet and popular culture which is being portrayed through dance.

The three epochs that will be explored vis a vis the music will be London, 1930's, music by Noel Coward, New York, songs about New York, 1945, and New York again during the late 1950's, with a medley of songs performed by Jerry Lee Lewis.

The ballet will reveal both popular tastes, social undercurrents and the differing relationships of the three couples through period movement and music using the ballet vocabulary. Dances Patrelle will use live music, piano and voice, for the first two pieces. For the incomparable Jerry Lee Lewis, most recently named one of the 100 most influential American Musicians of all time, we will use taped music.

"POP" should offer something for everybody. It also continues Dances Patrelle's belief that art should be both visually and intellectually accessible. Our resident design team will help make this belief an elegant reality

Music used in the production is shown in the next column >>

### The Setting and Music

Act I: A New Year's Eve 1930's,  
(Café de Paris- London)  
"Mad Dogs & Englishmen" a medley  
of songs by Noel Coward

Music:  
You Were There  
Dance Little Lady  
The Stately Homes of England  
A Room with a View  
Poor Little Rich Girl  
Mrs. Worthington  
Private Lives  
Any Little Fish  
Nina  
Dialogue  
We Were Dancing  
Mad Dogs & Englishmen

Act II: A New Year's Eve 1940's,  
(The Stork Club- New York City)  
"I Happen to Like New York",  
a medley of songs about New York

Music:  
New York/New York -Composer: Bernstein, Comden & Green  
12<sup>TH</sup> Street Rag -Composer: Bowman  
Sidewalks of New York - Composer: Traditional  
Broadway Medley - Composer: Dubin & Warren, Dubin & Warren, Porter, Brown  
Harlem Nocturne - Composer: Robin & Hagen  
Latin from Manhattan - Composer: Dubin & Warren  
Brooklyn Bridge - Composer: Cahn & Styne  
Autumn in New York - Composer: Duke  
Down in the Depths on the 90<sup>TH</sup> Floor - Composer: Porter  
I Happen to Like New York - Composer: Porter

Act III: A New Year's Eve 1950's,  
(The Statler Hilton Hotel)

"Great Balls of Fire!",  
a medley of songs sung by Jerry Lee Lewis

Music:  
Overture, Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On  
High School Confidential  
How's My Ex Treating You  
Hang up my Rock'n'Roll Shoes  
Hello Hello Baby  
Ubangi Stomp  
I Am What I Am  
Great Balls of Fire  
Epilogue- American Pie  
Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On



## Long Island Sound at the American Theatre of Actors

314 West 54th St.—Tel: 212/645-8228 - May 10 - 25th.

The Actors Company Theatre have provided the following information on the forthcoming production of Long Island Sound:

A quiet weekend in a beautiful home on Long Island's North Shore ... what could be more relaxing? That's what Evan Lorrimer, the best-selling British novelist, thought. Oh, dear ... He'd have been better off trying to take a nap in Grand Central Station at rush hour. Never performed and forgotten for over 50 years.

TACT is proud to announce the World Premiere of Long Island Sound, a lost comedy by The Master: Noel Coward. The play follows the hilarious ordeal of a successful British novelist at the hands of his wealthy hosts and their eccentric friends at a Long Island house party during a weekend in 1947.

Never performed and forgotten in the archives for over fifty years, it was recently brought to light by TACT friend and Coward expert Barry Day and we are honoured and delighted to be presenting this treasure in its first ever full production at the ATA Theatre, in May.

This is a unique opportunity to be among the first to see what will undoubtedly take its place among his most popular plays. And the first time to see TACT spread its wings in a fully mounted production with an extended run.

This forgotten Noël Coward play will have its world premiere off-Broadway in May. Revolving around an Englishman's experiences with Long Island's elite, it's unusual as it features only one Briton. The play began as a 1947 short story 'What Mad Pursuit?' and was tracked down by archivist Barry Day. The Actors Company Theatre production will open on May 13th at The American Theatre Of Actors.

Email: [info@TACTnyc.org](mailto:info@TACTnyc.org)  
Website: <http://tactnyc.org/tactnyc/>

**Don't miss what this unique event. A large cast will give only 18 performances of this forgotten play.**

Please complete our "Interest Form" sent with this copy of Home Chat if you are interested in coming along to one of our future events. These events have become increasingly popular. The number of things happening in the U.S. at the moment and the growing interest in the Society bodes well for 2002.



## 'Relative Values' UK Tour

Susan Hampshire was interviewed last weekend in the Mail On Sunday - prior to her tour as the Countess in *Relative Values* in the UK. The first performance is at The Festival Theatre, Malvern from January 29th to February 2 at 8.00pm with other

dates throughout the UK . Box Office 01684 892 277 Susan says, "And in *Relative Values* I'm playing the Countess and I did the part ten years ago, and I know it's absolutely knacker." She is known by younger people in the UK for her part in the fairly undemanding TV comedy drama *Monarch of the Glen* where she stars with Richard Briers an admirer of Coward who wrote a recollection entitled *Coward & Company*.

## REMEMBERING NOEL COWARD ...

On February 24, 1980 at an evening with the *Friends of the USC Libraries* a group of friends and contemporaries of Noel Coward met to recall their memories of him. They included: Mary Martin, Hermione Baddeley, Murray Matheson, Jeremy Brett, Patricia Morison, Ron Husmann, Moira Lister, Graham Payn, Mary McCarty, Lynn Redgrave, and Roddy McDowall. A question was asked of Lynn Redgrave about what she knew of the fourth member of the original *Private Lives* cast Lord Olivier - she replied:

"As a matter of fact, when I worked with that fourth member of the cast, who is, of course, Lord Laurence Olivier, I had the great good fortune and pleasure and delight of being in Noel Coward's *Hay Fever* with Dame Edith, and we talked about it before and he was absolutely wonderful. You know, he sent down this edict from Switzerland, from the top of the mountain, that we must all be word perfect before we came to rehearsal and we were all very, very frightened, because, you know, here was the Master himself, coming to direct us.

So I went off to Majorca on a holiday with some friends and I learned my entire part and I thought, "What shall I do - I've got to - how do you impress Noel Coward at the first reading?" He hadn't seen me since I was very, very little, and I decided that Jackie who I was playing, should have a lisp, because she has to say "Mrs. Bliss" so many times and to pass up that many sibilant S's was really too much of a chance. So we got to the first rehearsal and I said, "Yeth, Mrth. Blith, ith abtholutely ekthrdinary" and "appendithith" and everything like that (Laughter) and afterwards, Larry told me that Noel came to him and said, "The little Redgrave girl is very clever, but has she got a speech impediment?" (Laughter) He was absolutely adorable. He did discover that, in fact, I hadn't got a speech impediment and I was terrified tonight that he would look down and think, "Yes, she really has."

## The Membership Form Included in this month's Home Chat ...

If you know of someone who might be interested in joining The Noel Coward Society then please give them this form - further copies are available on request from the usual address. We can send larger numbers to your local theatre or amateur dramatic society if you wish. We are always looking for venues where our membership leaflets can be left for potential members to pick them up - please let us know of any such venues.



10 *Afterthought* : what started out as an 8 page edition has become 12 thanks to the arrival of extra items - ho hum!!

## Fact, Fiction or Fantasy ....

### ... A Book Review from the UK Daily Express Noël Coward the very first 007

Two old friends were talking. It was the Summer of 1940, after France had fallen. Noël Coward, the internationally famous British actor, playwright and composer for the stage and film, was pleading with Prime Minister Winston Churchill to let him join an intelligence service.

"No, no," Churchill replied, jabbing the air with his lighted cigar for emphasis. "You're far too well known to be a spy." Coward responded: "But Winston, that's the whole point. I'll be so well known nobody will think I am doing anything special."

Churchill kept shaking his head and emphasising that a face known around the world could never make a spy. Finally Coward wore down the British Bulldog's resistance and the global celebrity was launched into the murky, often lethal field of secret intelligence. He would be a real-life spy. During the Thirties, Coward had become known for his sparkling dialogue in such sophisticated stage comedies as *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives*, *Tonight at 8.30* and *Bliethe Spirit*. His best-known songs were *I'll See You Again* and *Someday I'll Find You*. His exceptional skills in acting and singing were limited mainly to the leading roles in his own stage plays. Coward travelled the world, in South America (a hotbed of Nazi spies), Asia and what was left of unoccupied Europe. He sang his songs and charmed his hosts. His disguise, he would say, was his reputation as a bit of an idiot.

When it was suggested that Coward send back reports by invisible ink, he quickly shot down that scheme: "I can't even read my own handwriting when it's visible!"

Just as Coward had insisted to Churchill, his show-business celebrity status did indeed provide him with remarkable cover and direct contact with influential figures in neutral countries, few of which were truly neutral. He shrewdly reported back to his British controllers the opinions of these top foreign leaders and the political climate among the people of their countries and deftly planted fake rumours as part of a "global mosaic of information."

*Top Secret Tales of World War II* by William B Breuer is published by John Wiley, price £11.95.

### Lindsay Duncan is dual Olivier nominee

Fiachra Gibbons, arts correspondent, UK Guardian Friday January 18, 2002

There is an old saying in theatre that you can have too many award nominations. In which case, Lindsay Duncan, who has been nominated twice for best actress in this year's Olivier awards, has no chance of lifting the prize. Duncan was drooled over by critics for her performance as Laura, the best friend of an ailing playwright, in Kevin Elyot's *Mouth to Mouth* at the Royal Court, and tickets to see her in Noël Coward's *Private Lives* are as rare as American tourists in London's West End. Her co-star in the latter, Alan Rickman, has also been nominated for best actor, alongside *Humble Boy*'s Simon Russell Beale - now an annual fixture of the Oliver shortlist - although most heads will be turned by the fact that Sean Foley and Hamish McColl, the two men who make up the *Right Size*, have got

the nod together for *The Play What I Wrote*.

The comedy success of the year, this recreation of the magic of Morecambe and Wise is also up for best script, best comedy and best choreography. And it has landed the pair's co-star Toby Jones a shot at best supporting actor. Shockheaded Peter, another show with an Edinburgh fringe pedigree, steamed in with a total of five nominations, including one for best entertainment. The cult show will now be revived at the Albery in April.

Despite the mysterious illness that dogged her run in *My Fair Lady* at the National Theatre and forced her eventually to give up the role of Eliza Doolittle, the former *EastEnders* actress Martine McCutcheon gets a nomination for best actress in a musical. There is also some succour for Ruthie Henshall, nominated for *Peggy Sue Got Married*, which closed after only six weeks.

There were few shocks in the overall line-up, with Gregory Burke, the dishwasher-turned-playwright who was the sensation of the Edinburgh Festival, in the running for best play with *Gargarin Way*, which will transfer from the National to the Arts in March.

Both of director David McVicar's main London productions, *The Rape of Lucretia* at ENO and *Rigoletto* at the Royal Opera House, are in the running for best opera, although Hans Werner Henze's *Boulevard Solitude* is the early favourite.

#### In the running

##### Best actress

Lindsay Duncan for *Mouth to Mouth*, Lindsay Duncan for *Private Lives*, Victoria Hamilton for *A Day In The Death Of Joe Egg*, Zoe Wanamaker for *Boston Marriage*

##### Best actor

Roger Allam for *Privates On Parade*, Sean Foley and Hamish McColl for *The Play What I Wrote*, Alan Rickman for *Private Lives*, Simon Russell Beale for *Humble Boy*

##### Best supporting actress

Brid Brennan for *The Little Foxes*, Emma Fielding for *Private Lives*, Lyndsey Marshal for *Boston Marriage*, Marcia Warren for *Humble Boy*

##### Best supporting actor

Desmond Barritt for *Henry IV Parts I and II*, Ned Beatty for *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, Adam Godley for *Mouth to Mouth*, Toby Jones for *The Play What I Wrote*, Malcolm Sinclair for *Privates On Parade*

##### Best new play

*Boy Gets Girl* by Rebecca Gilman, *Gagarin Way* by Gregory Burke, *Humble Boy* by Charlotte Jones, *Jitney* by August Wilson, *Mouth To Mouth* by Kevin Elyot

##### Best new comedy

*Boston Marriage* by David Mamet, *Caught In The Net* by Ray Cooney, *Feelgood* by Alistair Beaton, *The Play What I Wrote* by Hamish McColl, Sean Foley and Eddie Braben

##### Best actress in a musical

Barbara Cook, *Barbara Cook Sings Mostly Sondheim*; Ruthie Henshall, *Peggy Sue Got Married*; Martine McCutcheon, *My Fair Lady*; Marin Mazzie, *Kiss Me, Kate*

##### Best actor in a musical

Brent Barrett, *Kiss Me, Kate*; Paul Keating, *Closer To Heaven*; Jonathan Pryce, *My Fair Lady*; Philip Quast, *South Pacific*

##### Best director

Michael Blakemore, *Kiss Me, Kate*; Michael Boyd, *Henry VI and Richard III*; Howard Davies, *Private Lives*; Phelim McDermott and Julian Crouch, *Shockheaded Peter*; Ian Rickson, *Mouth To Mouth*

##### Best new opera production

*Boulevard Solitude*, *Jenufa*, *Rape of Lucretia*, *Rigoletto*



## Luxury Is All At Sea

Burgh Island Hotel in Devon has more than a touch of Thirties opulence, as enjoyed by

### RICHARD BRASS

UK Daily Express 5/1/2002

When my girlfriend told me she was taking me for a surprise birthday weekend to a mystery destination I was naturally delighted. But, five hours after setting



off from home, we were still driving and I was beginning to think that perhaps we should have just gone to the pub.

It didn't look

#### Edward & Mrs. Simpson

much better when she pulled over at a phone box in a dark village and said we had to call our hosts to let them know we had nearly arrived. It sounded uncomfortably rustic. What were they doing - clearing out the barn? The pub seemed a long way off.

Then we arrived at Burgh Island - a dot on the map off the Devon coast, 10 miles east of Plymouth.

Less than half a mile across, the island is connected to the mainland by 300 yards of sand that's high and dry at low tide but completely covered when the water is up.

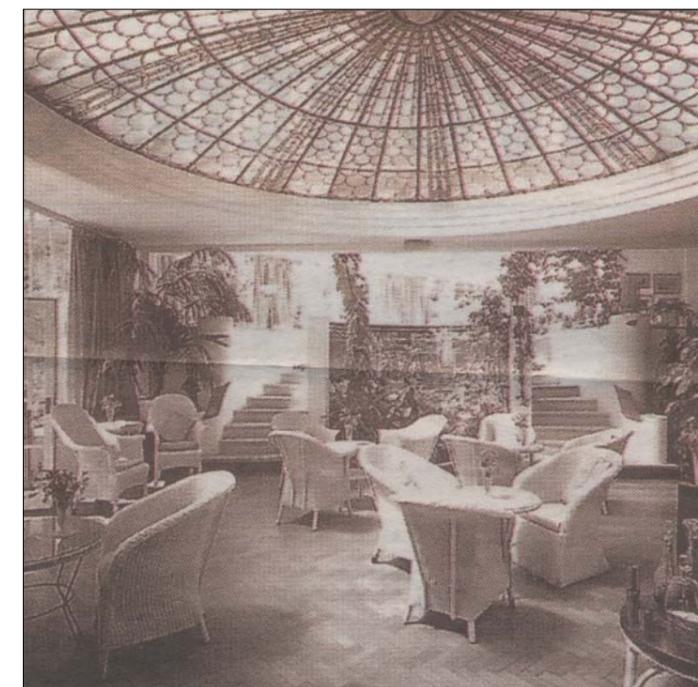
Built in 1929, the Burgh Island Hotel was the place to be seen for the fashionable set in the Thirties. An offshore outpost of flapperdom, its big windows and



Lord Mountbatten

terraces rang out with the sounds of the most glittering parties of the day while, across the causeway, the sheep grazed obliviously. Edward VIII came here with his American lover Wallis Simpson to escape media scrutiny. Noël Coward and Lord Mountbatten were regular guests. Agatha Christie

loved the place. From the comfort of her suite at the hotel-she wrote two novels, *Evil Under The Sun* and *And Then There Were None*, both set on the island. Seen from a distance, the Burgh Island Hotel is a twinkling white slice of art deco elegance amid the deep greens and browns of rural Devon. The building dominates the island and the surrounding countryside and attracts people in search of opulence from all over the world. 'A member of hotel staff comes to fetch you from the shore, either in a four-wheel-drive if the tide is out or, if it's in, you get to ride in the mighty sea tractor. Inside the building, the mood is one of



GLASS HOUSE: Palm Court shimmers under its distinctive dome

exuberant luxury. London fashion consultants Beatrice and Tony Porter bought the island in 1985 and set about returning what had become a leaking, dilapidated hulk into the luxury abode for the famous that it once was. The place shimmers with fountains, mirrors, palms and chequerboard floor tiles. The suites, cocktail bar, ballroom and lounges are all decked out in the same clean, elegant style. The furniture has been carefully chosen to fit the mood, featuring lacquered tables, chrome statue lamps and stained glass, with thick, tasselled curtains trailing the floor. On Saturday evenings, the gents

put on their black ties while the ladies are encouraged to become flappers for the night. By 7.30pm, the hotel is wall-to-wall with beaded dresses, feather boas and headbands. After a few multi-coloured cocktails under the huge, stainedglass peacock dome in the Palm Court, guests proceed to dinner in the ballroom, up a staircase flanked by jet-black glass and



ISLAND FAN: Agatha Christie

pink mirrors. In no time, they're doing the Charleston like they were born to it. The next morning, if you're feeling fit enough, there is an invigorating walk around the island. It is one huge, wild hill surrounded by jagged cliffs. Also for the active, the hotel also boasts a tennis court and a natural swimming pool formed by a deep cleft in the rocks, complete with a little shingle beach and a wooden diving platform in the middle where bands played for the bathers during the hotel's heyday. If you can't be bothered with exercise, you can always while away the morning in the sun lounge. Another Bucks Fizz? Don't mind if I do, Monsieur Poirot.

#### GETTING THERE:

*The Burgh Island Hotel, Bigbury-on-Sea, South Devon* (01548 8105141 [www.burghisland.com](http://www.burghisland.com)) offers half board from £124 pp per night (two sharing) with a twonight minimum stay at weekends.





### Will Stutts

"Noël Coward at the Cafe de Paris"

Elizabeth Sharman has sent in the following press release. Although this performance took place in January we include it in case Will appears in your area.

With Will Status' performance, The Four Arts broadens its

treatment of drama by bringing one-actor performances to its stage. Mr. Stutts has achieved more success in the genre of the one person show than any other actor except, perhaps, Hal Holbrook. He began composing one person shows as a means of financing undergraduate school.

He has since performed more than a thousand engagements in various plays all over the country, many of which he has written. He has also appeared in seven Broadway plays and directed a score of off-Broadway dramas, working with such luminaries as Richard Chamberlain, George C. Scott, Colleen Dewhurst and Agnes Moorehead.



Stutts premiered his play based on the life of Noël Coward in Philadelphia in 1989, after which he toured it around the country with highly successful results.

### Blithe spirits in Singapore

Julie Vellacott - our representative in Singapore wrote in a previous Home Chat article of a planned production of *Blithe Spirit* in Singapore, performed by Singaporeans. Here is a short report on the production.

Blithe Spirit with a Singapore twist worked perfectly. Having heard that director Glen Gooi planned to localise the content, I waited to see the result with some apprehension. I need not have worried; the transposition of wartime London to modern Singapore was smoothly done. The accomplished cast played their parts with energy and ease, the audience of Singaporeans and a fair proportion of expatriates loved the local slant; a reference to the *Straits Times* newspaper in particular was met with heartfelt cheers. Most households in Singapore employ a full-time maid, a concept no longer relevant in London. The supernatural is also taken seriously as a part of everyday life; in fact, the plot could have been designed for audiences here.

For me the only sticking point was the actual speaking of the script. After three years here I still find it hard to follow the inflections and phrasing used by Singaporeans speaking English. A small point, which didn't detract significantly from my enjoyment of the production. The alternative- phoney upper-class English accents - would have been much harder to take.

### The Noël Coward Hotel

In the November Home Chat Gareth Pike wrote of the demise of the hotel that was once Coward's home at 111, Ebury Street. The hotel has now finally closed and no plans are known of its future with Grosvenor Estates - so for now it is an empty building. We are all of course concerned that it should at the very least be retained *in toto* as a building for either domestic or commercial use. As we find out more we will let you know.

### The Everyman Theatre Hampstead

We have been contacted by the designer responsible for creating the new decor for the redevelopment of the Everyman Theatre in Hampstead where *The Vortex* was first produced in December 1924. It is now largely used as a cinema and owned by a small company with a strong commitment to its local community. They have just won a reprieve from possible closure with the granting of an entertainment licence allowing them to develop the theatre into a multimedia centre offering live entertainment, film, music with a bar & restaurant. The designer for the development is planning to adopt a Noël Coward theme for part of the decor of their new areas. The Society is clearly very interested in being involved.

The story so far is told on their website ...

"In recent months it has been fighting for survival. After intense local negotiations over the course of the last year the management of Everyman Media turned up at Camden Town Hall with a small army of supporters in front of the Licensing and sub Control committee, for the final hearing in their battle to win a Public Entertainment Licence for the lower ground floor of the famous Hampstead venue. Squeezing into the small and hot meeting room on their behalf were the actor Ewan McGregor and his wife Eve, together with the personal assistant of Anthony Minghella who read out a prepared statement on behalf of the Director.

'True, this is slightly unusual for a standard hearing but the depth of support for the Everyman is notorious and Ewan and Anthony were both most disturbed when they learned that we would almost certainly close if we lost the hearing - especially Ewan because Eve runs our Kids Club!' quotes Managing Director Daniel Broch.

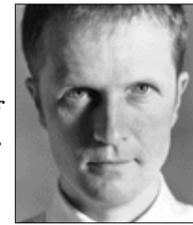
Now the management look forward to the next chapter in the story of the business that refuses to lie down and die, by developing the venue into a bespoke multimedia centre with a mixture of Cinema, live events & music and bar & restaurant - already included in the recent Evening Standard survey as one of the 50 hippest joints in the world the Everyman seems to be moving from strength to strength in its renaissance

Further details available from Richard Nyman:  
Tel: 020 7435 1600 RichardN@everymancinema.com"



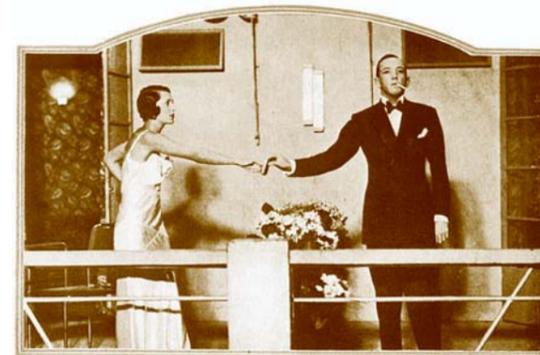
### Private Lives: Cocktails At Dawn

Noël Coward's 'Private Lives' may exude sex and glamour, says his biographer Philip Hoare, but beneath the shimmering surface of the play - revived in the West End - lies the true story of its author's own tortured passions



Can a 70-year old play, written by a cocktail hedonist born in the 19th century (just), really have anything to say to an audience in the 21st century? A good test will be the return to the West End this week of *Private Lives*, Noël Coward's famous drama about Amanda and Elyot, the sparring ex-husband and wife who meet again over an hotel balcony on the honeymoons of their respective second marriages. So successful was the play when it opened in 1931 that it made its writer the highest-earning author in the world.

The mere fact of the play's regular appearance in the repertoire indicates a certain immortality - although it is one which Coward himself almost superstitiously rejected. Indeed, he outraged his critics by declaring, after a three-month London run, that he was closing it, reasoning, "It is, of course, more than possible that I might write and appear



in a play that wouldn't run three weeks. In that bleak moment, age permitting, I shall turn gratefully to a revival of *Private Lives*". Which is what theatre companies have been doing ever since.

The play came at a crucial point in Coward's career. The mid-Twenties scandals of *The Vortex* and *Easy Virtue* had alerted the public to his talent as an acidic chronicler of the Bright Young People generation; he had then confounded expectation with the frankly nostalgic - and massively lucrative - *Bitter Sweet*; while at the same time pleasing Bloomsbury intellectuals with his social acuity. Rebecca West announced that Coward "had a better grasp of what was going wrong in our society than Shaw".

With the turning of the flapper Twenties (with their infantile pursuits, elsewhere satirised by Evelyn Waugh) into the more sophisticated - and ultimately more serious - Thirties, the expectation for a new Coward work was at fever-pitch. Typically, Coward reacted by leaving the country. Touring the Far East, with 27 pieces of luggage, a gramophone, and the aristocrat, Jeffrey (Earl) Amherst, Coward went on a voyage of escape, unsure of his fame, and his friends. He was, however, sure of his love for

Amherst, a dashing officer, war hero, and future BOAC pilot (later Amherst would fly to Germany, just to get a good look at Hitler). But the affection was unrequited -

Amherst was more interested in a New York boxer called Gerry MacCarthy whom he'd left behind in Jersey City - and it is obvious that that tension surfaced in the play which Coward began to write in the Cathay Hotel, Shanghai. Theatrical legend has it that *Private Lives* was written to give Coward and his co-star Gertrude Lawrence "whacking good parts"; but since my biography of the playwright was published in 1995, I have become convinced that the theme of the play - a couple who can live neither together, nor apart - reflects the complicated private life of its author. Frustrated in his affections for Amherst, Coward had subsequently become caught up in an ultimately disastrous relationship with his manager, Jack Wilson - a Yale-educated stockbroker with the looks of a blurred Brando - whom Coward had met and fallen in love with in 1925.

Photographs from private albums show Coward and Wilson together, playing happy couples at Coward's Kentish farmhouse, Goldenhurst. And initially Wilson's business acumen worked in Coward's favour - not least in the fact that five years later, Noël Coward Ltd was earning £50,000 per annum. But Wilson was unfaithful, alcoholic, and bisexual, and in 1936 would marry Natasha Paley, a White Russian princess. The tension between this reality and the idealised love Coward sought with Amherst, underlies the emotional tug-of-war of the play's main characters. And as Amanda declares in Act I, "I think very few people are completely normal really, deep down in their private lives".

I met Earl Amherst (to whom Coward dedicated *Private Lives*) while working on my book. He was then in his late eighties, still active in the Lords, especially interested in the arts (revealingly, a volume on Bruce Weber lay on the top of the coffee-table pile in his Sloane Square house). Diminutive, still handsome with extraordinary blue eyes, he gave little away in our interview beyond his evident and still residual affection for Coward; his own private life was not about to be breached. Later, in New York, I was summoned to an Upper Eastside brownstone for an



audience with Katharine Hepburn; in her characteristic vibrato, she spoke of Jack Wilson, and in veiled terms of his betrayal of her friend, "dear Noël". These stories still lie under the surface of the play; even now, six years after having published my book, they seem unsettled, and elusive, to me.

When *Private Lives* first hit the West End in the autumn of 1931, it was wreathed in the glamour of its creator (who played Elyot) and Lawrence (Amanda). The play opened the brand-new, state-of-the-art Phoenix Theatre on Charing

(Continued on page 6)



(Continued from page 5)

Cross Road. In this glittering art deco interior, with its special noiseless fans and 1,200 coat pegs (one for every seat), people flocked to see the two greatest theatre celebrities of their time. Habituees (as they would be now) of The Ivy, omnipresent in tabloid newspapers, always arriving and leaving from some transatlantic liner, this luminous pair slugged out the astonishing Act II fight



which epitomises the intense sexual passion of *Private Lives*. It is salutary to recall now how outrageous the play was for its time. It was an age in which, as the abdication later showed, divorce was a scandal and adultery beyond the pale. The overtly extra-marital sex of the play, and the apparent amorality of the cosmopolitan Amanda and Elyot (sun-tanned in the style which Coward and Lawrence had made fashionable), provided a delicious frisson of "what if" for their suburban audiences (and it is telling to note that the canny Coward toured the provinces with *Private Lives*, playing Edinburgh, Liverpool, Birmingham, Manchester and Southsea before bringing it into the West End, its track record proven).

Coward also cast a handsome and upcoming young actor, Laurence Olivier, and the glamorous Adrienne Allen, in the other two roles, giving them a weight their parts might not necessarily have suggested; and he cleverly inserted, Lloyd-Webber style, a hit song, "Someday I'll Find You", to maximise the benefits. The package was complete. And then, just as it hit its peak, as his fame could glow no brighter, he decamped to Broadway with the show, leaving everyone wanting more. No one in the inter-war period was more adept at the propagation of his own image and work than Coward.

Since then, the play has become the epitome of that sterling image, an avatar of cosmopolitan sophistication, even when played in a church hall in the Home Counties. As Wilde brought decadence to lowly clerks from Croydon, so Coward could impart a sense of exquisite hedonism to semi-detached homes in Britain's sprawling new suburbs. Indeed, that was the key to his success; a success which time and the vagaries of less demanding directors eroded. Only with the revival of interest in Coward's work in the early 1960s was the play reassessed, with a crucial London production by James Roose-Evans in 1963 which used a young cast and a contemporary setting, and, in New York that year, a less successful attempt by Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton to read their own highly public relationship into Coward's plot. Meanwhile, directors such as Alan Strachan noted that

previous critics had "missed the underlying sadness of these glib and over-articulate people who twist their lives into distorted shapes because they cannot help themselves" – an intellectualisation Coward himself typically fought shy of, calling his most famous play "psychologically unstable" and "as a complete play it leaves a lot to be desired". As he told a reporter in 1969, "No, I have no social causes. I can't think of any offhand. If I could, they'd be very offhand".

The play, voted one of the best British works of the last century in a National Theatre poll, continues to attract directors and actors who feel drawn to its classic qualities in the way they are to Shakespeare or Chekhov (the last major revival was Philip Franks' at the National Theatre in 1999). Such productions indicate that it is not just an historically interesting piece, or a crowd-pleaser brought out to swell slow box-offices (although it is both of these, too). As a product of a modern, mediated age, Coward still speaks to us. The play is a frame for glamour and talent; its thin, almost non-existent plot – described by John Lahr as "minimal as an art deco curve" – is a mere maquette for the leading players to build upon. Its immediacy draws on a sense of improvisation, as though the actors were making



it up as they go along. Of course, this is in itself the product of immaculate timing. And timing is what Coward is all about.

Above all, the power of *Private Lives* lies in its sense of sexual transgression (and at least one 1930s critic saw Amanda as a man in drag). Suspended in their deluxe limbo, Amanda and Elyot play with each other's emotions, toying with their inconstancy. In this, the casting of Lindsay Duncan and Alan Rickman in the new production by Howard Davies (who directed the pair in *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*) is both adventurous and appropriate. Their talents – Duncan's simmering and deceptive calm, Rickman's veiled threat of wickedness – are perfectly pitched to source the faint air of dangerous decadence that troubles the play; a sense of antediluvian hedonism with a paradoxical innocence that now, even more in the light of current world events, seems both nostalgic and contemporary. That lost emotion, the evanescence of their attachment, would seem to be all too apposite in our current state of flux.

The last West End Coward revival, earlier this year, was the deeply decadent and pre-apocalyptic *Semi Monde*, which worked as a reflection of a London which, as William Gaunt wrote, was "awash with a sea of sovereigns". In the same way, just as *Private Lives* was a serious reaction and a coda to the decadence of the



flippant 1920s, so it now seems to stand in our own unsteady era as a monument to a lost time – our own recent hedonism.'

*As an intriguing postscript to the above feature [writes Philip Hoare], I was surprised to receive, shortly after Christmas, a letter from New York State. The writer had read my article when in London last September: 'What particularly caught my attention was the photograph of Jeffrey Amherst and Noel Coward', he noted. 'I first met Jeffrey Amherst in 1952 when I was 17 years old. Over the years he became my best friend and I was one of his executors when he died in 1993 at 96 years of age. He was clear minded until the day he died. I remember him telling me when you interviewed him.'*

*'It was remarkable that there were no letters from NC to JA and very little other evidence of a close friendship', noted the writer, and yet he added, 'You really did get the terms of that friendship correct'. He has also advised me that he has placed Lord Amherst's personal papers at Amherst College, Amherst, Mass., 'as that was what he really wished done'.*

*When I was working with Adam Low on the three-part Arena BBC film on Noel Coward, we tried to locate the whereabouts of the many films made by Noel and Jeffrey Amherst during their travels, without success. If anyone has any leads on these, I'd be very interested to hear them.*



**Philip Hoare**

*Philip Hoare - is the author of: Noel Coward - A Biography Sinclair-Stephenson ISBN 1 85619 265 2*

*Serious Pleasures: The Life of Stephen Tennant Hamish Hamilton,*

*and his latest book (shown left)*

### SIGNED COPIES OF THE UNKNOWN NOËL ARE STILL AVAILABLE!

*The Society will continue to offer 1st edition copies of Barry Day's book, signed by Graham Payn, to members for the next six months. This edition of the book is exclusive to members. If you would like a second copy then please get in touch whilst stocks are available. Email: unknownnoel@noelcoward.net or write to the usual address. Please do not telephone as answerphones can be unreliable and indistinct!*

*Due to a computer failure we have lost some emails sent in the first week of January - if you ordered a book and have not heard from us please get in touch again!*

### Books from The London Office

Some months ago we wrote about the collection of books that was previously held at the London Office of Noël Coward. These books are currently being valued and more news on their disposal through sale or auction to raise funds for the Society will be available soon.



## The Unknown Noel

### NEW WRITING FROM THE NOËL COWARD ARCHIVE EDITED AND ANNOTATED

by Barry Day/Second Opinion Books, NY

Songwriters famously have trunk songs: playwrights also have trunks and it is to Barry Day's considerable credit that, some thirty years after Coward's death, he has found the key to Noël's. It was, admittedly, to be opened with caution: Noël was not a writer with much faith in the wisdom of hiding lights under bushels, and he was a great recycler before the term was coined. If an idea didn't work as a song, it might well resurface years later as a short story, or a poem, even perhaps a play. Even characters could undergo some remarkable changes: the valet first played by John Gielgud in *Nude With Violin* was originally intended as a role for Margaret Rutherford, the first great Madame Arcati.

But again to his editorial credit, Day has followed these lines of loose connection: so instead of a ragbag of half-rejected notes, we get a carefully researched trail of ideas, some of which hit roadblocks while others carry on roundabout routes to an eventual success. Not all the material here is new: prefaces are reprinted, the cod guide to Samolo was in the *Pacific 1860* publicity and yet there are other little pieces of the jigsaw missing if we are to have the "Design For Living" parody, let's also have the "Some Other Private Lives" to contrast and compare.

There is no suggestion here that this is the very best of Noël: but for addicts, collectors and Noël obsessives, as which of us is not, this is a joyous late-Christmas present. A lot of irritating little mysteries get solved here, and some quite major ones too: we suddenly happen upon a 1932 list of the World's Four Richest Writers, though I would dearly love to know where this came from and who was counting. But the four? Kipling, Milne, Shaw and, at the head of the list Noël at £50,000. Per annum, one wonders, or in total wealth; counting property? What about those writers already selling in Hollywood: no JM Barrie? No Americans? No Agatha Christie yet? Edgar Allan Poe? Maybe it's only the living and the British: all the same, here for once is a footnote Day denies us.

But the book is full also of unexpected treasures: who would have thought to read, in 1945, Noël on Victory Day writing a piece not in jingoistic "In Which We Serve" or "Cavalcade" mood but instead a thoughtfully gloomy appraisal of precisely what troubles lay ahead. There were indeed bad times just around the corner but there were still some laughs to come: let's hope we have no worse to plague us, than two shows a night at Las Vegas.

*Sheridan Morley (Sheridan Morley's Spectator At The Theatre is published this month by Oberon; his John Gielgud in now available in paperback and as an audiobook)*

