



HOME CHAT

March 2000

The Newsletter of The Noël Coward Society

Coward comes in 2nd – Twice!

The Stage Newspaper (the UK equivalent of Variety) held a millennium poll. Not surprisingly, William Shakespeare came in as Number One. Noël Coward came second. The first twelve winners were:

1. William Shakespeare
2. Noël Coward
3. Andrew Lloyd Webber
- 4= Bertolt Brecht
- 4= Sir Henry Irving
- 6= Laurence Olivier
- 6= Cameron Mackintosh
8. Konstantin Stanislavski
- 9= Henrik Ibsen
- 9= Oscar Wilde
- 11= Stephen Sondheim
- 11= George Bernard Shaw

In a separate poll, the British Film Institute asked 1000 constituents to name the greatest 100 British movies of all time: *The Third Man* (1949) directed by Carol Reed came in as Number One. Then *Brief Encounter* (1945) directed by David Lean came second.

Coward chose well when he chose David Lean for *In Which We Serve* (which came 92nd incidentally), as Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* was third, his *Great Expectations* was fifth, his *Bridge of the River Kwai* came eleventh, *Doctor Zhivago* was twenty-seventh and *Oliver Twist* was forty-sixth.



Hello,

*I've had plenty of interaction with members, and thank you for that, but (with the exception of one letter to the Editor) no one has written any articles for this edition of **Home Chat**. So, I will wing it with some of the other things that have hit my desk.*

That means this edition seems to have a bit of a film bias, and is none the worse for that!

Gareth

Does Anyone Know?

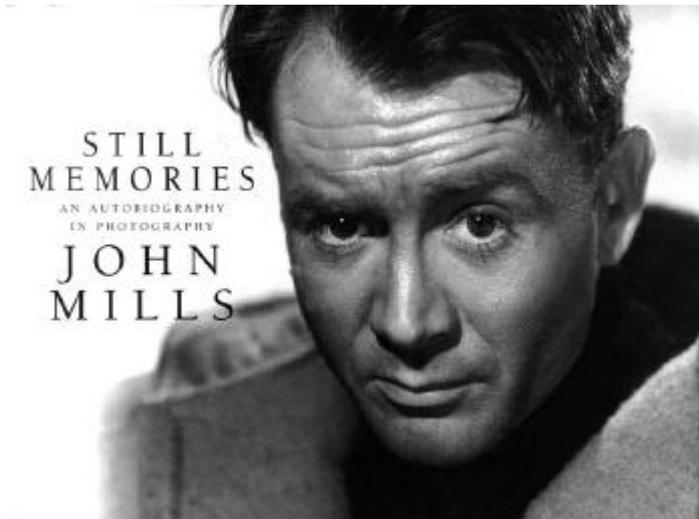
One of our members came across this quote from Sir John Gielgud about Coward. It is obviously recent, but where and when did he say it?

"My memories of Noël from 1923 when I first got to know him, are far too many, with nostalgic events in both our versatile careers. It was hateful to begin to see him falter as I watched him slowly, but inevitably begin to age.

His impeccable sense of timing never completely left him. His manners were always impeccable and his enthusiasm for everything to do with the theatre never failed to charm and enthral his audience, right to the very end."

-Sir John Gielgud 1999





Books on Offer

So far no one has made any offer for the “*Amazing Mr Noël Coward*” by Patrick Braybrook or “*The Privilege of his Company*” by William Marchant, both offered in the February *Home Chat*. No offer that covers the postage refused.

Member, Ray Dutton, has offered to give any interested member his spare copy of “*Star Quality*”. Again, pay for the postage.

Hon. President’s Life in Photographs

Sir John Mills, with his son Jonathan, has written an autobiography in photographs. Published by Hutchinson, London at £20.

Always a keen photographer, John Mills just took photographs wherever he went, working or at leisure. Many of them were thought to be lost, when his son discovered a cache of over 5000 transparencies in two mouse eaten boxes in the attic of his parent’s home. Many of the slides were damaged beyond hope, but some survived. That discovery led to the two of them putting together this unique record of over 60 years of working in cinema and theatre.

In his time, Sir John has worked with many of the great names. Of course, from our point of view, Noël may be the one that takes our attention. But they are all there; Laurence Olivier and Vivien Lee, Rex Harrison, David Niven, James Mason, Frank Sinatra, David Lean, Walt Disney, Douglas Fairbanks, Errol Flynn, Montgomery Clift, Richard Attenborough, Danny Kaye, Bob Hope, Tyrone Power, John Gielgud, the list goes on and on.

For anyone who has memories of at least some of those years, this book is wonderful nostalgic trip through our yesteryears.

For some of us, the last time we saw Sir John on stage was at the Centenary Celebrations at the Savoy Theatre in London. On that occasion, he was wearing the dressing gown that Noël wore in 1930 on stage in *Private Lives*. In the book he tells its story:

*The first time I met Stephen Fry was on my eighty-fifth birthday. A lot of people came to my party at Hills House. Stephen arrived and put a package on the hall table with the other presents, and I thanked him. We had a very good party and, as always, the actors were the last to leave. Stephen was the very last. On the way out, he said “Would you like to open your present now?” I thought it would be a bottle of something, but I opened the bag and it was Noël Coward’s dressing gown, the one I’d seen him play *Private Lives* in, back in 1930. I couldn’t believe it. It had been in an auction of his memorabilia and Stephen must have paid a packet for it. It was such a thoughtful thing to do. Noël was the single most important person in my career. Anyway, Stephen asked what I was going to do with it and I said I was going to put it in a glass case. Right now it is hanging on the back of the loo door!*

I have asked Hutchinson’s if they could offer a special deal on the book for members. They said “NO!” So, sorry, there is no discount on this one. However, they did give us one free copy, which is the prize for the crossword competition in *Conversation Piece*.

GCP





Relative Values

The film is due for release in June of this year. The Society is in touch with the production company, and we are beginning to exchange some ideas on how we might be involved in the release of this film, so important in our world. Some of the publicity material is beginning to trickle through. From it I have taken these Production Notes:

Relative Values is director Eric Styles' second feature. The screenplay by Paul Rattigan and Michael Walker is an adaptation of Noel Coward's classic theatrical production of the same name. Rattigan, an ex-actor, actually played the role of Nigel, the Earl of Marshwood in a West End production of the play, which was when he first realised its great potential for film. "We started work on the screenplay in 1996, once we had ascertained that the rights were still available from the Coward Estate. We then took the script down to the Cannes Film Festival 1997 and sold the idea to the Overseas Film Group."

Whilst in Cannes they bumped into the producer of **Relative Values**, Christopher Milburn. Rattigan was already acquainted with Milburn having starred in one of his previous films, *Caught in the Act*. Milburn loved the script and was determined to get the project off the ground. He felt that "Coward's writing was as relevant today as the 1950s. **Relative Values** is funny and witty and doesn't feel dated even though it is a period piece."

He approached Eric Styles with whom he had just completed their last film *Dreaming of Joseph Lees* for Fox Searchlight, to direct it. "Eric is an extraordinarily talented director. He has a great visual talent as well as being able to work with actors and make them achieve exactly what he wants."

For Styles, directing Coward's heightened satire of the British class system "was a voyage of discovery. Most of my previous work has been more gritty and realistic so making a film about this crazy, implausible situation happening in a country house in Kent with aristocrats in the fifties was a wonderful challenge. Once we began to attract our fantastic cast, the whole thing snowballed and became a really exciting project."

Styles knew he could make the material relevant to a modern day audience. "The film works for a contemporary audience because the madness of the whole situation is so appealing - it doesn't have any of the stuffiness you'd normally associate with this sort of piece."

Relative Values has an incredible all-star cast which includes (in alphabetical order) the legendary Julie Andrews, Edward Atterton, William Baldwin, Colin Firth, Stephen Fry, Sophie Thompson and Jeanne Tripplehorn.

Styles and Milburn spent a long time in conjunction with the casting director Celestia Fox ensuring they had the perfect actors and actresses for the roles.

...cont

The Cast List

Felicity – Julie Andrews
Moxie – Sophie Thompson
Nigel – Edward Atterton
Miranda – Jeanne Tripplehorn
Don Lucas – William Baldwin
Peter – Colin Firth
Crestwell – Stephen Fry
Alice – Anwen Carlisle
Lady Hayling – Gaye Brown
Lord Ludmurrey – Michael Culkin
Caroline – Katy Stephens
Elizabeth – Stephanie Beacham
Mrs Crabbe – Kathryn Dimery
Frank – Richard Nichols
Amy – Lauren Stocks
Philip Bateman-Tobias – Charles Edwards

Director – Eric Styles
Producer – Chris Milburn
Assoc Producers/Writers – Paul Rattigan & Michael Walker
Costume Designer – Nicolas Ede
Production Designer – Humphrey Jaeger
Director of Photography – Jimmy Dibling
Editors – Caroline Limmer & Ian Seymour

The Original London Cast

Felicity – Gladys Cooper
Moxi – Angela Baddeley
Nigel – Ralph Michael
Miranda – Judy Campbell
Don Lucas – Hugh McDermott
Peter – Simon Lack
Crestwell – Richard Leech
Alice – Renee Hill
Lady Hayling – Dorothy Batley
Adm Sir John Hayling – Charles Cullum



Styles was delighted when “Julie Andrews became one of the first actresses to commit to the project. This was entirely due to the fact that the script was very good. The writers had worked on it for nearly two years to turn what was a good play into a really rich, vibrant, playful, dynamic screenplay which all of the actors loved. Once Julie was on board it became an amazing magnet for all the other cast. The whole mystery and intrigue that surrounds Julie’s iconic status was irresistible. At first I found it a little intimidating but she is so incredibly generous and giving, with an energy and enthusiasm that just knocks your socks off, that I soon forgot about my initial nerves. As a director I was blown away by the level of insight she had, not only into her character but the whole piece.”

The second member of the cast to come on board was Sophie Thompson who plays the pivotal role of Moxie, the Countess of Marshwood’s personal maid. “*Relative Values* is Moxie’s story”, says Styles. “It’s about a woman who is going through a huge amount of pain because she is being forced to leave her employer and the family that she loves. Moxie plays a very central role in the film and hence finding the right actress to play her was of great importance. We needed someone who was both engaging and endearing so that the audience would feel for her predicament. When we saw Sophie Thompson we knew that she was perfect for the role. She had all the qualities we required in addition to a lightness, sincerity and humility that just added to the character.”

For the roles of Don Lucas and Miranda Frayle, Styles chose American actors. “The Americans were very interesting casting. It’s difficult to get big American stars to work on moderate budget British films, so you have to find actors who are really committed to the project and enter into the spirit of things. We were incredibly lucky getting Jeanne Tripplehorn and William Baldwin, who had an energy and a way of working which differentiated them from the British cast and gives the piece a real edge and dynamism. They were absolutely great and not at all afraid of sending themselves up which was important with a piece about the craziness of actors, their vanity and their self-importance.”

It was not only the casting that required a great deal of time and effort. The Marshwood House location and the set and costume design had to evoke the perfect atmosphere and style of post-war Britain.

The Nunnery, an imposing mansion on the Isle of Man was chosen as Marshwood. The site was originally a nunnery in the eleventh century and the beautiful house that now stands there, was designed by the Bath architect John Pinch in the 1820’s.

Production Designer Humphrey Jaeger and Costume Designer Nick Ede were chosen for their skill and ability to make Styles' ideas reality.

Filming was completed on September 10th 1999 after a six-week shoot on the Isle of Man.



Michael Imison, our Chairman, has seen the film. He tells me that they have expanded the story, but that this has strengthened it (and, in fairness, it wasn't one of the Master's strongest plays).

He also told me that Sophie Thompson is the best Moxie he has ever seen.

We will all be able to judge if he is right in June.

GCP



Letter to the Editor:

From Thomas Allen:

Having been to see several pieces of 'modern theatre' recently one could not help but long for the dignified and glamorous style of Coward to make more of a prominent come back to the West End stage. The current thirst for gritty realism and crudity seems to be wearing a little thin. In short, I am tiring of seeing bad mannered young people strutting about the stage uttering profanities and making graphic references to their 'private lives'. Alternatively, we are bombarded with ordinary daily lives with all the domestic routines in the form of soap operas, where we are given \ rendition of our own lives in a fart away place. It strikes me that, for the time being at least, much of drama has lost its escapist quality, its ability to take people on extraordinary adventures. As Sir Noël once said "the stage should be a place for extraordinary people"!

One hates to sound prudish but is it necessary for so many new plays to be so vulgar, so explicit and so crude? I seem to find out more about the inner self" of the characters that I need to or want to. In my experience, few people feel the need to use constant bad language to express themselves, despite the popular belief that this is what is needed to capture 'real people'. Indeed, I am sure that much of the theatre going public does not always want to see 'real People@ like themselves but would prefer to see somebody quite different.

I am not so narrow minded as to think that such work does not have its place in today's theatre. It manages to give us all an insight into others and ourselves and by doing so, helps us to get along together. However, there are times when Sir Noël's reference to the dangers of a diet made solely of tripe and onions springs to mind. By desperately grabbing for theatre's furthest boundary modern dramatists will, I fear, find that the boundaries are not as far away as they hoped and they will soon have to come to an abrupt halt.

One craves for the more subtle, tasteful and sophisticated theatre that Sir Noël was so accustomed to, to provide us with a more amusing evening's entertainment – just every now and then. What's more, I feel that *I* should start to make the change!

Yours sincerely,

Thomas Allen
Bickley, Kent.

I don't have everyone's date of birth, but I believe Thomas is our youngest member. GCP

Inscriptions

Henry Porde Books is advertising on the Internet a sale of four W Somerset Maugham books that were presentation copies from Coward to Joyce Cary. The inscriptions are wonderful:

The Narrow Corner: I like to think of Zasu Pitts, Kid Berg and H.B. Warner. But I like best to think of Joyce reading 'The Narrow Corner'

Ah King: Please love me Joyce and come what may / I'll be Ah King in a day!

Cakes and Ale: Your mind will take an upward scale/ when you have finished cakes and ale

The Gentleman in the Parlour:
Dear Joyce I see you at your ease/
With firelight and Marsala/ Some
dirty looks/ and a few good books/
And a gentleman in the parlour.

Each book is for sale at £200.
Contact Henry Pordes.

*At home with the
impossible Bliss's and the
unsuspecting weekend
guests.*

HAY FEVER

**At The Tower Theatre
Islington**

Sat April 29th and Tues May 2nd – Sat
May 6th at 7:30pm
Matinee: Sun April 30th at 3:00pm

Box Office: 020 7226 3633
2:00pm-8:00pm



Amateur Production News

Listed below are the forthcoming Coward productions known to us.

UK:

The Vortex	The Lace Market Theatre	5 th –10 th June
Present Laughter	The Village Hall, Pattingham, Staffordshire	17 th -20 th May
Hay Fever	The Gatehouse Theatre, Stafford Civic Theatre, Leeds, West Yorkshire Tower Theatre, Islington, London	4 th –8 th April 15 th -17 th June 29 th April-6 th May
Blithe Spirit	St Michael's Church Hall, Wilmington, Kent The Castle Hall, Hertford Coronation Hall, Ulverston, Cumbria Village Hall, Bramley, Nr Guildford	10 th -13 th May 1 st May 29 th March-1 st April 13 th -15 th April
Relative Values	Village Hall, Chideock, Dorset	13 th -15 th April
Private Lives	The Little Theatre, Leicester Brookdale Club Theatre, Bramhall, Cheshire The Theatre Royal, Workington, Cumbria	27 th March-1 st April 10 th -15 th April 4 th -8 th April
Bittersweet	The Playhouse, Norwich	September
Shadows of Evening & Come into the Garden Maud	Harlequin Players, Northwich, Cheshire	5 th -8 th April
Cowardy Custard	The Stag, Sevenoaks	14 th -17 th June

Non-UK

Blithe Spirit	Langley, British Columbia, Canada Emerson, Manitoba Lac Du Bonnet Snt School, Manitoba, Canada Little Theatre, Simcoe, Ontario, Canada Greenfield Park, Quebec, Canada	April 5 th -6 th May 17 th -20 th April 1 st -11 th June 14 th -16 th April
Fallen Angels	Metropolitan Theatre, Vancouver, Canada	17 th June-15 th July
Private Lives	Theatre Collingwood, Ontario, Canada	6 th -15 th July

BOOK OFFERS

Firefly – Noël Coward in Jamaica: by Chris Salewicz and Adrian Boot (Victor Gollancz pub. price £17.99)
Order through the Littlehampton Book Service's mail order department, on +44 (0) 1903-828800, quoting reference NCS2000. You will receive the book for £11.70 (instead of publisher's price of £17.99). Postage will be charged at £2.50 for UK and £3.50 for Overseas.

Noël Coward – A Life in Quotes: compiled and introduced by Barry Day (Metro Books pub price £9.99)
Order by telephoning the publisher's credit card sales line (+44 (0) 1476-541080) and claim a £1 discount as a member of the Society (UK members £8.99, p&p free; Overseas members £8.99 but postage £4).

Noël Coward – The Centenary Celebration at the Savoy Theatre London, 12 December 1999. We still have a few copies of the beautiful programme of this special event. £10 inc postage.



Professional Production News

Listed below are the forthcoming Coward productions known to us.

Volcano	Palace Theatre, Westcliff	22 nd May–10 th June (We hope to organise a Society trip)
Present Laughter	Birmingham Rep	23 rd June – 22 nd July
Private Lives	Shaw's Corner, Hertfordshire	30 th June – 2 nd July
	Hever Lakeside Theatre, Hever, Kent	4 th August-19 th August
Blithe Spirit	Gawsworth Hall, Macclesfield	2 nd August–5 th August
	Palace Theatre, Watford	16 th June-8 th July
	State Theatre Company of South Australia	14 th April–16 th May
	Indiana Rep Theatre, Indianapolis	25 th April-20 th May
	Grand Theatre, Lancaster	12 th -16 th Sept
Waiting in the Wings	Walter Kerr Theatre, New York	Current
Hay Fever	Court Theatre, Christchurch, New Zealand	10 th June–16 th July
Design for Living	Broadway, New York	November 2000
Easy Virtue	The Shaw Festival, Canada	31 st March-21 st July
Still Life	The Shaw Festival, Canada	17 th June-10 th Sept
A Suite in Two Keys	Lucille Lortel Theater, New York, USA	In Preview. Opening 10 th April

Also:

At the New York Library for Performing Arts:

An Evening with Sheridan Morley		3 rd April
If Love were All	The Lives & Loves of Noël & Gertie	5 th April
Coward & Porter	Performance by Songfellows	29 th April

Films:

Relative Values	In post production	Opening June
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Gossip:

Films of *Blithe Spirit*; *Hay Fever* and *Quadrille* are being planned (there was talk that *Quadrille* would star Madonna, but it looks as if her schedule will not allow it, so we now have to hope that a replacement can be found). Elaine Stricht may reprise her concert production of *Sail Away on Broadway* (currently being negotiated).

The Theatre-Basel, Switzerland are planning a series of 13 concerts featuring '20th Century Blues'

Love from Shakespeare to Coward

Elizabeth Sharland, a member, has devised the show at the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden, London on 22nd April at 3:00p.m. Admission is free with entrance to the Museum.

The show has been produced twice before, at the National Portrait Gallery and at the Kings Head Theatre, Islington.

The show includes Judy Campbell and others, and is an anthology of British theatrical legends, in prose and verse.

Design for Murder

Design for Murder, the radio play by Marcy Kahan has been praised on these pages before. Noël Coward, Lorn Loraine, Cole Lesley and Clemence Dane are all characters in this 1930's murder mystery. Marcy now tells me that it will be broadcast on the BBC World Service (in their Play of the Week slot) on Saturday May 20th, and repeated on Sunday May 21st.



