



AFTER THE BALL

Barry Day writes ...

The historic Custom House on Battery Park was the setting for the New York Premiere of the concert version of *After The Ball*. The Standing Room Only audience of some 400 - with almost as many turned away - cheered the cast to the echo at the end of the performance.

Prior to professional commitments of the cast - most of whom were singers from the Metropolitan

Opera and giving their services free - meant that the piece was played without an intermission. Seeing it done this way for the first time in its new life of three performances to date convinced me that what we have here is not so much a musical as a 'chamber opera.' The lack of sets and décor - and, in this case, full orchestration - reveals the essential intimacy that Wilde and Coward have created. Anything else is cosmetic - not harmful but not essential to the playing piece.

At the heart of it lies Noel's subtle lyrics and simple melodies, which, in two previous productions, had to compete with a full orchestra for the audience's attention. In this stripped-down version, they literally sang out.

Irene Worth (now in her mid 80s) has lost none of her magic and played the Duchess of Berwick with impish aristocratic charm. Her asides to the audience had them eating out of her hand and her rendering of "Something On a Tray" literally stopped the show.

Nor has the score been better sung. When the glorious voices of sopranos Ellen Lang (Mrs. Erlynne) and Constance Green (Lady Windermere) were blended in their joint arias, one could feel a positive *frisson* go round the hall.

As the audience lingered to talk to the cast, the talk was all of the surprise at finding this ambitious piece. "I thought I knew my Noel Coward inside out," said one Coward aficionado. "Why have you been hiding this from us?"

After almost 50 years it is good to have *After The Ball* back in the Coward canon.

The book and score of AFTER THE BALL are now available for professional and amateur performance from Samuel French.

An Associated Press review of this production can be seen for a limited period on the Internet at:
<http://wire.ap.org/>

FRONTID=HOME&SITE=CTBRP&enter=Go



In Conversation with Joan Hirst

by Gareth Pike

Until this year when Birmingham University took over responsibility for the London based part of the Coward archive its guardian had been Joan Hirst, the Society's new Vice-President. In Coward's lifetime she ran his London office and mindful of the precept of her predecessor Lorn Loraine that they were there to support Noel and never to take the limelight from him, she was reluctant to be interviewed. Finally I persuaded her.

"When and why did you come to work for Noël?"

"It was after the war. I was alone with a son to bring up, and I needed the work. At the time I was working for Michael Redgrave, and as Michael and Noël knew each other, it wasn't surprising that Lorn got to hear of me. It was agreed that she needed an assistant, especially one who could type, because she didn't type, and I was there."

"I didn't know that you had ever worked for the Redgraves'?"

"Oh yes. Michael was writing some books, so I used to spend my mornings there, in their house in Chiswick. They were a lovely family, I remember little Lynn peeping around the door at me as I typed."

"So, in the morning you worked for Michael, and then, in the afternoon, you came up to Belgravia and worked for Lorn. That would have been at Gerald Road?"

"Yes. Mind you, I was only the 'step and fetch it'. Lorn was in charge. I was there just to help her"

"But Noël and Coley were around, and you saw lots of them?"

"Coley was a lovely man. He and Lorn made a wonderful team. There was no jealousy. Coley looked after the private things and Lorn looked after all the business matters. But, if something needed doing, then anyone could get on and do it. Noël would lose his temper sometimes, but it was because he was so much faster at thinking things out than the rest of us. He was ahead of us, and could see where things were going. He was fussy about some things. He was such an intelligent man. So, it wasn't surprising that he could flare up and call us names, but he never meant anything by it, and it was forgotten just as quickly. No one let it worry them."

"What happened when Lorn Loraine fell ill?"

We then had a few minutes trying to find the right words to describe Lorn Loraine. I suggested 'proud'? *"No, she wasn't proud, she was private and you didn't talk about things like that in those days. She just struggled on, and didn't discuss how ill she was."*

"By then, she had her own house where she kept all the papers in an office. She lived alone, her family had grown up and left home. So she had a tenant who lived there with her, a Jane Armitage. Now she was matron - I think - of the South London Hospital for Women at Balham. And she saw how ill Lorn was."

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MILFORD JUNCTION

By Laurie Gimbrett of Leigh-on-Sea

(Laurie's last article for us was in the Sept-Nov 2000 edition of HOME CHAT and was entitled 'Words and Music')

Someone once described *Brief Encounter* as, "A nostalgic film when people spoke with plummy accents and the trains ran on time." Maybe, but it is still rated as Noël's greatest contribution to British cinema and a new generation has discovered it all over again and taken to their hearts the story of two tormented strangers portrayed by Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard who meet and fall in love during a chance meeting at Milford Junction Station. Their suppressed love made more intense by the haunting strains of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto that runs through the film, which Noël had insisted on using and has since become synonymous with it.

Our enthusiasm for this classic was heightened by such events as the Lyric production starring Jenny Seagrove and Christopher Cazenove, the newly released collectors video and the discovery of Carnforth Station alias 'Milford Junction.' Devotees of *Brief Encounter* travel from as far afield as Australia and Japan to seek out the location of Noël's 'Milford Junction.' They are often seen posing under the famous Carnforth Clock that still dominates the stations skyline whilst sadly surveying the rubble and decay around them. Years of neglect by B.R. and later Railtrack have left the station in such a serious state of disrepair that demolition was contemplated. Thankfully in 1996 a local group came to the rescue in the guise of 'Friends of Carnforth Station' a charity trust that has so far raised £1.6 million.

Their dream is to recreate a 1940's station with a *Brief Encounter* themed visitor centre, rejuvenate the platforms and subway, improve the canopy and build a *Brief Encounter* refreshment room.

During the years of the second World War, David Lean, Anthony Havelock-Allan and Ronald Neame were looking for another film to shoot after *Blithe Spirit*. Noël suggested *Still Life*: a half hour play he had written in 1935 as part of the *Tonight At 8.30* series of plays. Within a few days Noël had rewritten *Still Life* into what was essentially the draft for *Brief Encounter* - and in collaboration with David Lean, Anthony Havelock-Allan and Ronald Neame produced the screenplay that fifty six years later still remains a much loved classic. Originally a London railway station (possibly Watford Junction) was to have been the setting, but due to London suffering random attacks from V1 and V2 Rockets during 1944 the Ministry of War Transport suggested Carnforth Station, Lancashire the most suitable and far enough from London to be safe from attack, even with all the film lights. All the team wanted Celia Johnson to play the part of Laura Jesson. Celia still disliked making films, but after Noël read the part to her in October, 1944, she knew that she had to play the part. Celia wrote to her husband "When I am not being sad or anguished or renouncing I am narrating about it. So if they don't have my beautiful face to look at, they will always have my mellifluous voice to listen to. Lucky people." On the 23rd January, 1945, in another letter to her husband she wrote. ... "I will have to go to the North East of England to film on some horrible railway station." She soon changed her mind and a few weeks later in a letter describes how the

atmosphere amongst the film crew was good, and they were having a good time. February, 1945 was bitterly cold and Celia was very impressed with the Station Master, who she describes as an old-fashioned gentleman who raised his hat every time he saw her, and allowed her to warm herself in front of the fire in his office between takes. (This office is now 'The Friends of Carnforth Station' Visitors Room). Work on the film started late in the evening after the last local train had departed, and finishing early morning, before the first local trains started arriving at the station. Trevor Howard, an experienced stage actor but relatively new to films, had been invalided out of the army, and not the first choice to play the Doctor, Alec Harvey. However, when David Lean and Anthony Havelock-Allan saw a rough-cut of the film *The Way To The Stars* in which Howard plays the young Squadron Leader who gets killed at the start of the film, they were instantly taken with his screen presence and showed the scene to Noël who said, "Don't let's look any further."

Celia found it difficult playing opposite Trevor Howard who was having to learn film acting virtually from scratch. At times David Lean thought he had been far too optimistic in hiring him and yet Howard was to prove to be one of the finest and most professional of all British film actors. The 'Friends of Carnforth Station' have kindly provided the following details about the location shots used whilst filming *Brief Encounter*.



The film opens with footage of Express trains racing through Milford Junction Station. David Lean uses a trick with the second shot in the film and flips the negative, so that the train appears to be travelling right to left (or Northbound). The filming at Carnforth took place when the 'black out' restrictions, were still in force. As the express trains approached Carnforth, the drivers, were suddenly met with a blaze of lights. To the drivers, who were used to the 'blackout' this blaze of lights caused concern, and they braked hard, and by the time they were going through Carnforth Station, they were travelling at a walking pace, which was NOT the image that David Lean was looking for, for *Brief Encounter*. A message was sent 'down the line' to the drivers, to tell them that all was well and requesting that instead of slowing down, they speed up. After five years of war, the drivers were happy to help, and for a short time there was some very spirited running through Carnforth. One of the features of Carnforth Station which is closely associated with the film is the Carnforth Clock. A dummy face was used as filming was usually done out of sequence and the time on the real clock face would be wrong and also the dummy face was much larger for the camera to focus on.



David Lean wasn't happy with the real location of the refreshment room at Carnforth Station. He considered it to be too far from the subway for him to be able to easily get the characters to and from the refreshment room. L.P. Williams, the art director, was consulted, and 'flats' were constructed in Denham Film Studios and transported to Carnforth by lorry. These 'flats' were then erected on to the north of the subway, on the centre platform. Although in the film both sides of the refreshment room can be seen, there were actually only two 'flats' made and these were moved on the station as necessary, so that the refreshment room appeared to have depth. All the interior shots were filmed at Denham Film Studios. The real refreshment room was kept open at least some of the time during filming, as Elaine Maudsley, who was the real Myrtle ("*Now look at me Banburys*") remembers handing out cups of tea to the film crew. As she handed out cups of tea they chatted, and this chat got her a place as an extra in the film. At the start of the film, Stanley Holloway crosses the tracks, climbs the platform and enters the Milford Junction refreshment room. As he climbs onto the platform, a young lady can be seen walking up and down the platform, this was Elaine Maudsley.

'Boots' lending library, where Laura changes her library book, is reported to have been the interior of W.H. Smiths in Beaconsfield, Bucks. On the opposite side of the road was a cafe called the 'Five Ways Café' which became the exterior of the 'Kardomah Café'. Inside the 'Kardomah' the ladies orchestra were playing 'Spanish Dances No. 5' by Moszkowski. Many of the street scenes of Milford were filmed in Beaconsfield. The balcony of the Metropole Cinema in Victoria (London) was the location for the seated area of the scene, as were the shots of the organist. Irene Handl who is seen playing *March Militaire* is actually miming, the original recording having been done on the Wurlitzer organ at the same cinema, by James Whitebread, the resident organist. The auditorium was demolished in the early 80's, but the foyer and facade is still there as an 'Ask Pizza and Pasta' restaurant. The outside of the Palidium cinema (Flames of Passion) was a set built near the car park of Denham Film Studios.

The boating lake where Alec Harvey falls in, is in Regents Park, London.

Two cars were used by Laura and Alec. The first Alec borrowed from Stephen Lynn, the second Alec hired. In a letter to her husband, Celia Johnson describes the second car

as being German, with a bonnet that seemed to go on for ever. Apparently the car didn't run, and so it had to be pushed by studio assistants.

The little bridge in the countryside that Alec and Laura drive out to was filmed at 'Middle Fell Bridge' over Langdale Beck, situated close to Ambleside in the Lake District.

Many of the film production team were staying nearby.

The preview of *Brief Encounter* had a very ominous start.

David Lean was down at Rochester, Kent making his next film *Great Expectations* when the first print of *Brief Encounter* arrived. Keen to judge public reaction he made a serious mistake with the location of its very first preview. In those days Rochester was a very tough town frequented by sailors and workers from Chatham. Dockyards. At the first love scene one woman seated in the front of the theatre started to laugh. By the second love scene the situation got worse, mainly because of the woman's unusual laugh and soon laughter in the theatre gathered momentum until they were rolling in the aisles. Devastated, David and his team returned to their hotel fearing the worst for its forthcoming official London preview. They needn't have worried, the critics and the public loved it and the rest as they say, is history.

On the 2nd June, 1945 Noël wrote in his diary "Saw very rough cut of *Brief Encounter*, delighted with it. Celia quite wonderful, Trevor Howard, fine and obviously a new star. Whole thing beautifully played and directed and let's face it, beautifully written!"

All too true, but let's also remember the other star of the film, 'Carnforth Station,' and if you are interested in becoming a 'Friend of Carnforth Station' and finding out more about their impending rejuvenation programme, please send a 'sae' to Michael Chorley, 9 Bowland Close, Carnforth, Lancs. LA5 9UP.

The *Brief Encounter* Special Edition video contains an extra half hour profile of the film including interviews with the producers Sir Anthony Havelock-Allan and Ronald Neame, and the actress Margaret Barton who plays 'Beryl' the young protégée of the 'refained' Myrtle. Also contributions from John Sessions, Sheridan Morley and Celia Johnson's daughter, Lucy Fleming. It is available m Carlton Videos at £10.99. However, we did manage to obtain our copy from the music chain MVC Stores at £5.49.

A website on *Brief Encounter* and *Carnforth Station* can be found at : <http://home.clara.net/gw0hqd/brief/index.htm>

Society Luncheon & Talk on Noël's Paintings

with SHERIDAN MORLEY and PATRICIA HODGE

The Society is planning a luncheon talk on Noël's paintings at *Turner's Hill* which we have pencilled in for Sunday 17 June, The price of the lunch is £40 a head . We hope to have Patricia Hodge and her accompanist with us. We would like to know how many members might be interested (*please remember that the 17th June is Fathers' Day*) A possible alternative date is Sunday July 1st. Please let us know if you are interested by contacting Gareth Pike as soon as possible.

(See address, telephone etc. at bottom of Page 4)

MEMBERSHIP

All applications for membership should be sent to Gareth Pike at: The Noel Coward Society, PO Box 2700, Castle Cary, BA7 7YT United Kingdom email: ncsociety@aol.com, Tel/Fax: +44(0)1963 351 421 - A reminder that it helps both the Society and yourself to arrange to pay by standing order from your account.

APRIL CROSSWORD SOLUTION

(A new crossword will be featured in the June edition of HOME CHAT)

T	I	F	F	E	G	O		
R	E	F	N	R				
A	N	O	U	N	C	E	R	
N	C	R	U	Y				
S	H	A	R	E	M	K		
A	U	O	B	E				
C	A	R	T	W	H	E	E	L
T	C	S	R	L				
S	O	H	I	S	S	Y		



All contributions to HOME CHAT should be sent to:

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NEWS

Fallen Angels is set to return to the Apollo, Shaftesbury Avenue when "The Female Odd Couple" finishes on 16th June, 2001. ... Bill Kenwright has The Marquise in his future programme ... Semi-Monde is continuing to prosper at the Lyric - despite mixed early reviews and is booking to June 9th. . Recent Marvellous Party (the Coward email group) contributions indicate the respect given to this rich production - JK has some 'two for one' ticket vouchers for the show (up to and including May 5th.) ... The Noel Coward Trilogy is being shown on Sky Arts channel at the moment (unfortunately I don't know of anyone who has this channel - I searched all my digital channels and failed to find it! JK) ... STAR QUALITY Chris Luscombe's adaptation of the Coward story will be seen in the West End this autumn after a short tour. Penelope Keith will star. More details later ... *Relative Values* (2000) is out on DVD and video in the US with the UK DVD version due out on June 4th, 2001.

Members' Visit to NOEL COWARD TONIGHT *at the Jermyn Street to Saturday 19th May at 8.00 pm.*
The production is a double bill of RED PEPPERS from TONIGHT AT 8.30 and SHADOWS OF THE EVENING the seldom performed "third" play from SUITE IN THREE KEYS. The director is Sheridan Morley and the show is produced and choreographed by Gillian Lynne. The actors are ANNABEL LEVENTON, JANE HOW, JEREMY CLYDE, JEREMY NICHOLAS and PETER LAND. Tickets for members and their guests will be £16-00 each to include drinks with the cast afterwards. This performance is exclusively for the Society - we have 60 seats available! Applications should be made directly to Gareth Pike with cheques attached to reach him not later than Saturday May 12th (see address below). Supper is available beforehand at the Italian restaurant next door from 6.00 pm please indicate if you want space(s) reserved.

... continued from Page 1 **In Conversation with Joan Hirst**
 Eventually, between her and the Doctor, they persuaded Lorn to go to the hospital. In the end, she went in and I visited her almost every day. One day, I was there with my new husband, Geoff, and we sat with Lorn until about 3 a.m. Then we came home. Later that morning we got a telephone call to say Lorn had died."
 "Well, Noël with Graham and Coley were coming to London, knowing that they were coming to say goodbye to Lorn, that she was going to die. But it was too late they never got to see her. I had to go over to the Savoy Hotel. I told Coley. He had to tell Noël. They had come in vain."
 "Then Coley phoned me, from Switzerland, and asked me to take over from Lorn. Well I said I couldn't. We had a lovely little flat, but it just wasn't big enough for all the papers. Anyway, they convinced me, and we found this flat, with two rooms that are devoted to all the papers. We had to move in quickly and get everything set up as, naturally, Lorn's family wanted her house emptied of everything."

"Did that mean that you got to see more and do more things?"
 "Well I don't know about that. My job was all the office work."
 "Well, did you go down to Goldenhurst?"
 "Only once, with Joycie. She was a lovely lady."
 We then chat about our memories of Joyce Carey; of seeing her on stage, and the wonderful parts that Noël wrote for her. This period, after Lorn's death on 21 November 1967, was a time when Joan did become an essential member of the team. A year later, in his Diaries, Noël recorded that Joan Hirst had been staying at Chalet Coward: 'She is such a dear, and what wonderful chance that she spent all those years with Lornie watching the wheels go round.'

Now Joan is enjoying a well-earned rest from her labours but she has not lost interest in Coward affairs. She is an indefatigable attender at new productions of the plays and promises that her role in the Society will not be a mere formality.

Current & Planned Productions - Professional and Amateur

US and Canada:	Design for Living	Now to May 13th	Roundabout Theatre Co., Broadway
	Noel & Cole - Together With Music	23rd May	Don't Tell Mama, 343 West 46th, NY
	Blithe Spirit	1st to 9th June	East End Theatre, Orleans, Ontario
		3rd to 14th July	Theatre Collingwood, Collingwood, Ontario
	Present Laughter	4th to 11th August	Playhouse, Halifax
	Relative Values	27th March to 14th July	The Alabama Shakespeare Festival
United Kingdom & Ireland:	Blithe Spirit	16th to 19th May	St. John's Church Hall, Leeds
		24th to 26th May	Methodist Church Hall, Great Bentley, Colchester
		Early July	Dublin Gate Theatre
		9th to 18th August	The New Theatre Royal, Portsmouth
	Present Laughter	15th to 19th May	The Moser Theatre, Oxford
		14th to 19th May	The Swan Theatre, Yeovil, Somerset
	Private Lives	1 Mar to 1 May	Volcano Theatre Company tour of Wales
	Semi-Monde	Booking to June 9th	Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue,
	Still Life	30th April to 2nd May	The Civic Centre, Whitchurch
	Waiting in the Wings	16th to 19th May	Theatre, Harrogate
	Hay Fever	16th to 19th May	Harrogate Theatre, Harrogate
		28th to 30th June	Village Hall, Broad Hinton, Wilts
		2002	Oxford Stage Co. plan a UK tour next year.
	Nude with Violin	10th to 19th May	Phoenix Theatre, Ross-on-Wye
	13th to 19th May	Players Theatre, Northenden, Manchester	
Noel Coward Tonight	9th May to June 9th	Jermyn Street Theatre Box office 020 7287 2875 Directed by Sheridan Morley	

