

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

### America & Canada

<b>Hay Fever</b>	<i>31 Jul to 24 Nov</i>	The Shaw Festival Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario Canada <a href="http://www.shawfest.sympatico.ca">www.shawfest.sympatico.ca</a> Directed by Christopher Newton
<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	<i>20 Sep to 4 Oct</i> <i>18 Oct to 2 Nov</i> <i>24 Oct to 9 Nov</i> <i>25 Oct to 2 Nov</i> <i>1 to 2 Nov</i>	Burlington Little Theatre, 770, Drury Lane, Burlington, Ontario, L7R 2Y2 Binbrook little Theatre inc. PO Box 74, Binbrook Ontario, L0R 1C0 North Vancouver Community Players, North Vancouver, BC On Kew Players, Toronto, Ontario Daysland Little Theatre Company, PO Box 325, Daysland Alberta, T0B 1A0
<b>Waiting In The Wings</b>	<i>24 Apr to 10 May 2003</i> <i>16 Sep to 5 Oct</i> <i>2 to 19 Oct</i> <i>15 to 19 Oct</i>	Whitby Courthouse Theatre, Whitby, Ontario Ottawa Little Theatre, King Edward Avenue, Ottawa, ON Nanaimo Theatre Group, Nanaimo, BC Saskatoon Gateway Players, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
<b>Hay Fever</b>	<i>7 to 19 Jun</i> <i>24 Jun to 31 Aug</i>	The New Harmony Theatre Opening, New Harmony Indiana. Utah Shakespeare Festival in Cedar City, Utah, USA. More info: <a href="http://www.bard.org">www.bard.org</a> .

### Europe

<b>Song At Twilight (Poste Restante)</b>	<i>9 Sep continuing</i>	Palais Royal, Paris
<b>Nude With Violin</b>	<i>Entity Theatre Workshop</i> <i>23 Jan to 1 Feb 2003</i> <i>15 Feb 2003</i> <i>Sept 2003</i>	The Aula Theatre, Munich, Germany Black Box Theatre, Gasteig, Germany Edouard VII Theatre, Paris

### Private Lives

### Australasia

<b>Design For Living</b>	<i>Nov - Dec</i>	State Theatre Co of South Australia, Adelaide
<b>We Were Dancing/Shadow Play/Red peppers</b>	<i>2003 (TBC)</i>	Queensland Theatre Co. Optus Playhouse, Brisbane
<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	<i>28 to 31 Aug 2003</i>	Tropic Line Theatre Townsville, Queensland, Australia Melbourne Theatre Co Victoria then national tour 2003 TBC

### The Rest of the World

<b>Private Lives</b>	<i>Current</i> <i>26 Sep to 26 Oct</i>	Pieter Toerien Productions, Cape Town, Grahamstown, Jo'burg, South Africa King & Taylor, Durban, South Africa
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### United Kingdom

<b>Elaine Stritch At Liberty</b>	<i>1 Oct 2002 to 25 Jan 2003</i>	The Old Vic theatre, London.
<b>Hay Fever</b>	<i>2003 (TBC)</i>	New West End production starring Penelope Wilton
<b>Nude With Violin</b>	<i>7 to 14 June 2003</i>	Stockport Garrick Theatre, Stockport, Cheshire
<b>This Happy Breed</b>	<i>30 Sep to 5 Oct</i>	The Nottingham Theatre Club at The Lace Market Theatre, Nottingham
<b>Cowardy Custard</b>	<i>26 Nov to 1 Dec</i>	The Playhouse, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey 01424 222 801 OR 01932 845 616
<b>Present Laughter</b>	<i>14 to 17 Oct</i> <i>24 to 26 Oct</i> <i>31 Oct to 2 Nov</i> <i>17 to 22 Mar 2003</i>	Gawsworth Hall, Cheshire Roydon Players at The Village Hall, Hatfield Heath, Essex Roydon Players at The Village Hall, Roydon, Essex Romsey Operatic and Dramatic Society. The Plaza Theatre, Romsey, Hampshire
<b>Brief Encounter</b>	<i>Sep onwards</i>	Noël Coward / Andrew Taylor - Middle Ground Theatre Co UK Tour
<b>The Vortex</b>	<i>w/b 19 Oct</i> <i>15 &amp; 16 Nov</i> <i>22 to 23 Nov</i> <i>6 &amp; 7 Dec</i> <i>5 Dec to 15 Feb 2003</i>	Theatre Royal Bath Productions UK Tour (6-8 weeks) Queen Mother Theatre, Hitchin, Hertfordshire Queen Mother Theatre, Hitchin, Hertfordshire The Little Theatre in Dunstable. The Donmar Theatre (NCS event see page 1)

<b>The Young Idea</b>	<i>20 to 23 Nov</i>	Herald Players at the Electric Theatre, Guildford, Surrey Tickets £7.50 (concs. £6) available from box office tel: 01483 444789
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<b>Fumed Oak</b>	<i>9 Oct</i>	Pyrford Little Theatre at The Rhoda McGaw Theatre, Woking, Surrey
<b>Brief Encounter</b>	<i>Current and 30 Nov 2002 to 30 Apr 2003</i>	Noël Coward / Andrew Taylor - Middle Ground Theatre Co UK Tour

<b>Design for Living</b>	<i>19 Oct</i>	Theatre Royal Bath Productions UK Tour (6-8 weeks)
<b>A Song at Twilight</b>	<i>24 Jan to 8 Feb 2003</i>	Perth Theatre Company Box Office 01738 621031 <a href="http://www.perththeatre.co.uk">www.perththeatre.co.uk</a>
<b>Red Peppers</b>	<i>3 to 7 Dec</i>	Folkestone, Hythe Operatic and Drama Society. Sandgate, Folkestone, Kent
<b>Relative Values</b>	<i>31 May to 7 Jun 2003</i>	Halifax Thespians at The Playhouse, Halifax, West Yorkshire
<b>Blithe Spirit</b>	<i>25 Oct to 2 Nov</i> <i>12 Dec to 4 Jan 2003</i> <i>Jan 2003</i>	The Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama Cardiff. 029 20 391391 <i>23 to 31</i> Brewhouse Theatre Somerset Torquay Operatic and Dramatic Society at The Little Theatre, Torquay, Devon

<b>Private Lives</b>	<i>27 Feb to 29 Mar 2003</i> <i>5 to 8 Mar 2003</i> <i>13 to 29 Mar 2003</i>	Octagon Theatre, Bolton Harrogate Amateur Dramatic Society, Harrogate, Yorkshire. Mercury Theatre, Colchester
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(\* denotes Premiere, TBC = To be confirmed)

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## SOCIETY EVENTS 2002/2003

As the Society's calendar moves towards the end of the year when we celebrate the birth of The Master, we need to be aware of the significance of the year 2003 to Coward devotees. March 26th will mark 30 years since Noël Coward's death and September 6th, 50 years since the loss of his lifelong friend Gertrude Lawrence. The Society plans to mark these anniversaries with a number of events that we hope will be of interest to you and your friends.

### Saturday 14th December Annual General Meeting at The Theatre Museum with Flower-Laying at Drury Lane, Lunch and The Vortex

There are four parts to this year's celebration of The Master's birth that will take place on Saturday 14th December. Please join us for all or any number of them. The day begins at 10.30 am at the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden with the Annual General Meeting of the Society. We then take a short stroll to the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane to lay flowers on the statue of Noël Coward at 12.00 noon. Lunch will follow at Cafe des Amis, Hanover Place off Floral Street, Covent Garden WC2E 9JP at 1.00pm. The cost £20 for 3 courses includes 1 glass of wine. Then to the Donmar where we have 20 circle tickets at £23 each (discounted from £25) for the 2.30 pm matinee of a revival of *The Vortex* directed by Michael Grandage and starring Francesca Annis and Chjwetel Ejiofor. This play put Coward on the London theatre map as a writer, director and actor. The pre-Christmas bustle of Covent Garden will provide a wonderful atmosphere for this annual event - do join us! A booking form is enclosed.

### THE VORTEX

The importance of this play in the Coward collection is reflected in Cole Lesley's thoughts on the first night at Hampstead: "The first night of *The Vortex* is theatrical history; never to be forgotten by those present, actors

and audience alike. *Le beau monde*, from Lady Louis Mountbatten to the omnipresent Eddie Marsh, turned out in force and in full fig, braving the icy weather, the hazards of the journey to darkest Hampstead and the discomforts of the tiny, hard-seated theatre. White ties and jewels abounded and the coconut matting went unnoticed, for it could not be seen, so great was the crush. The audience was agreeably shocked by the first-act comedy dialogue and then genuinely startled by the abrupt switch to near-tragedy in the third, and by the highly charged emotional tension of the acting. Lilian's sensational breakaway from drawing-room comedy added greatly to the general excitement; Noël cut his hand when he swept all the bottles off Florence's dressing-table in the last act and it obligingly went on bleeding, the handkerchief that bound it becoming redder and redder during the countless curtain calls. The novelist Stella Gibbons has written:

I was present at the very first performance of *The Vortex* in a little kind of converted drill-hall in Hampstead and remember how shocked I was at the drug-addict boy (he would have been called a Drug Fiend in those days by ordinary people) and ever since I have had so much enduring pleasure and laughter from his songs and jokes. He seems to me to incarnate the *myth* of the twenties (gaiety, courage, pain concealed, amusing malice). Noël Coward had arrived, and was here to stay. Everything about himself that he had unswervingly believed would come true came true in a single night, two weeks before

his twenty-fifth birthday." © Estate of Cole Lesley 1976



Noël Coward & Lilian Braithwaite in *The Vortex*

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

For many of us it has been a lifetime ambition to have lunch at The Ivy the culinary home of Noël Coward's 'Bright Young Things' between the wars and for the glitterati ever since. This event celebrates the life and work of Noël Coward and marks the 30 years since his death on March 26th, 1973. We have planned lunch in the function room upstairs at The Ivy (where John Lahr, Sheridan Morley and Philip Hoare discussed Noël in television's Noël Coward Trilogy). This will be followed by a special event at The Theatre Museum, Covent Garden to celebrate the many aspects of Noël's work. A detailed programme and costs will be provided nearer to the time.

## EVENTS IN THE PLANNING FOR AMERICA ...

The Society has a large membership in the US who currently only receive limited benefit from their membership. We are planning, through our US representatives, to provide some events in the larger cities. There is no easy way, with a membership scattered across this vast country, for us to provide events close to everyone's home but we hope this start may encourage other members to volunteer to organise an event in their part of the US. There is certainly no lack of amateur and professional performances - with Coward plays and cabaret regularly appearing in the US and Canada as recorded on our own What's On? pages on the website and the back page of Home Chat. Three possible events are being looked at - and with the help of our US representatives we hope they will be of interest.

### FLOWER-LAYING AT THE GERSHWIN THEATRE

As stated elsewhere in Home Chat 2003 sees 30 years and 50 years, respectively, since the deaths of Noël Coward and Gertrude Lawrence. Each year in London we celebrate Noël Coward's birthdate with the laying of flowers at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane the home of 'Cavalcade' and where one of the three Angela Conner statues of Noël Coward are sited. During December 2003 we would like to repeat this ceremony at the sites of the two other statues; one at Firefly, Jamaica and the other at the Gershwin Theatre in New York on either 16th (The Master's birthdate), or Saturday 13th December (the closest Saturday) to make attendance easier. Details of this event will be provided when they are finalised. It will be open to members and guests.

### THE OPENING OF TEN CHIMNEYS

In 2003 the Ten Chimneys Foundation are planning to open Ten Chimneys the home of the Lunts, some time around May - depending on the completion of all the restoration

work being carried out there. The Society has already been asked if members would like to attend. Noël Coward had a bedroom suite there that was reserved for his sole use - a design for living one might say! Ten Chimneys is at Genesee Depot, Wisconsin, near Milwaukee. For those who wish to know more about Ten Chimneys, the website can be found at:

<http://www.tenchimneys.org/>

Here is an extract from the website:

"In 1996, Ten Chimneys came perilously close to destruction through commercial development. Since then, the threat that this national treasure might disappear has been all but eliminated. Thanks to the generosity and conviction of numerous volunteers and civic leaders, Ten Chimneys Foundation now owns the estate and all of its contents - debt free.

Saving Ten Chimneys from immediate destruction, however, was only the first step. Due to the fragility and continuing deterioration of the estate, timely action is imperative. We cannot open to the public until significant restoration and preservation has been completed and modest new facilities have been built. The Foundation is in the midst of a capital campaign to raise the funds needed to save Ten Chimneys for future generations.

The vision of Ten Chimneys' future continues to excite a diverse group of individuals. Professionals and enthusiasts in the fields of theatre, history, cultural preservation, decorative arts, gardening, conservation, and education are engaged by the impact a restored Ten Chimneys will have. A team of nationally recognized experts in historic restoration and preservation has helped us develop a comprehensive master plan for restoration and construction. Our program plans and strategies for public access have been developed in collaboration with numerous

experts and organizations from around the country, all of whom are eager to help Ten Chimneys Foundation reach its extraordinary potential. The passion and dedication of these advisors attest to the profound impact a restored Ten Chimneys will have on this region and the nation.

With their continued enthusiasm and leadership, and the added support of new friends, we will open to the public in 2003 and begin a renaissance at Ten Chimneys. Ten Chimneys is in Wisconsin."

### THEATRICAL TOUR OF NEW YORK

Over the last two editions of Home Chat we have tried to give a flavour of the key periods when Noël Coward lived and worked in New York from his early intense discussions at Dr. Rounds boarding House with the Lunts to his early rehearsals for Sail Away in the Penthouse Tower on East 55th Street, during the early sixties. Ken Starrett has a wide knowledge of the theatres and places where Coward lived and worked and is happy to share this with members in walking tours of New York's theatre district. He hopes to offer to members and guests an opportunity to look at the places of significance in Coward's life from his first visit in 1921 to his final appearance in New York.

**More on all of these events later with costs, arrangements etc.**

*If you would like to become a representative for the Society or you know someone who might like to help us in this way then please get in touch. We are looking for more help in the Mid West and the major cities other than New York and San Francisco. We have a detailed information and support pack to supply to representatives with membership forms, back copies of Home Chat and an information booklet on Noël Coward and the Society.*





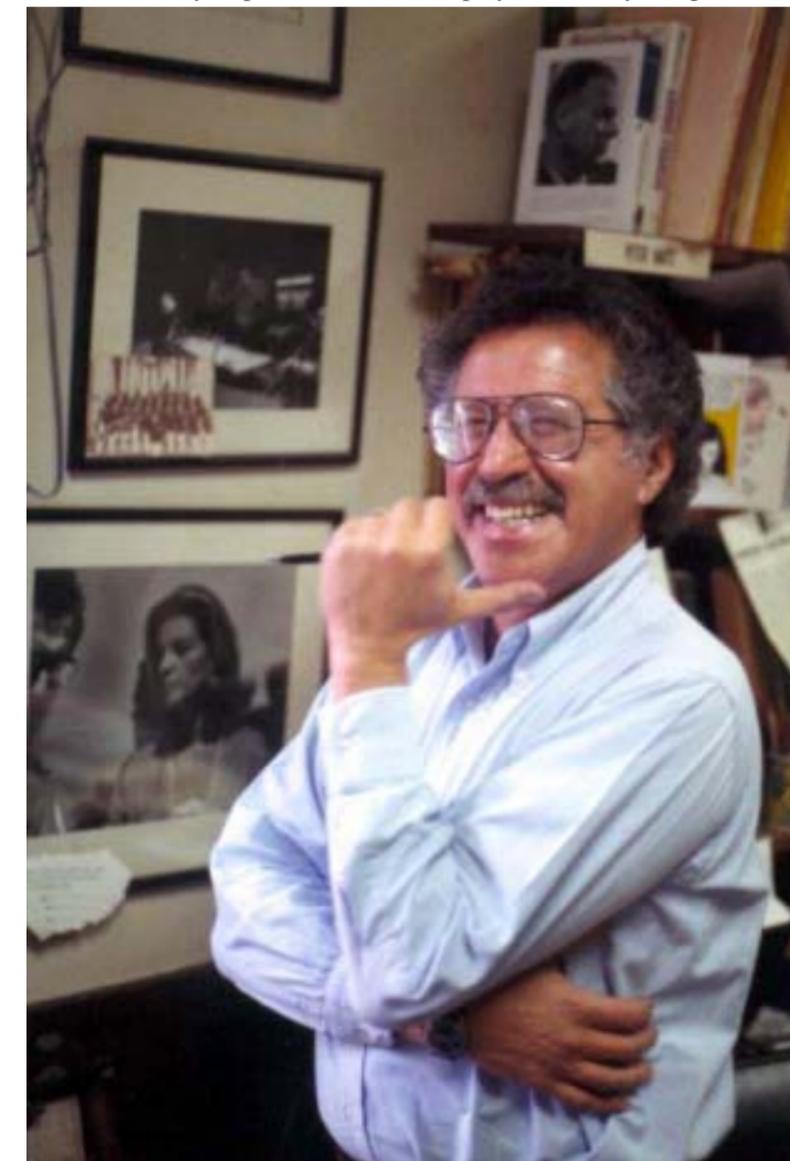
# PETER MATZ 1929-2002

by Dominic Vlasto

Peter Matz's name and musical reputation would have been secured for posterity even if the only thing he had achieved in life had been his accompaniments and arrangements for Noël Coward's cabaret appearances at Las Vegas in 1955. In fact, this lucky break occurred at a very early stage of his career, and he went on not only to do much other notable work with Coward but to maintain a career at the very pinnacle of his profession, making notable contributions to performances and recordings by musicians and singers as varied as Lena Horne, Peggy Lee, Bing Crosby, Liza Minelli, Tony Bennett, Sarah Vaughan, Dione Warwick, Rosemary Clooney, Burt Bacharach, Carol Burnett and (perhaps most notably) Barbra Streisand. Matz was born in Pittsburgh, and during what he later referred to as his "terrible misguided youth" pursued training in chemical engineering, in which field he gained a degree from UCLA. Music was however always a very strong passion, and during his college years he supported himself by playing woodwinds with dance bands in the area. He was already an accomplished pianist, and upon graduation decided to spend two years in Paris, where he polished his pianistic skills with work in nightclubs, cocktail bars and the Folies Bergere. In 1954 he moved back to New York to study music theory and piano, and gained a job as rehearsal pianist for Harold Arlen's *House of Flowers*. His varied musical skills must have been exceptional and obvious, as the job soon expanded to writing orchestrations and vocal arrangements for Arlen's next musical, *Jamaica*, starring Lena Horne. It was Arlen who introduced Matz to Marlene Dietrich, who needed someone to help construct and accompany her act. Matz

recalled that "she was shy", but his work for her clearly impressed: the

test came when Coward asked him to play the Trolley Song in the



*Pete Matz - photograph kindly provided by Alan Farley*

following year when Coward's favourite British accompanist, Norman Hackforth, was refused a work permit for Las Vegas and he was desperate to find a replacement, Marlene urged him to grab Peter Matz at all costs. Coward called Matz from an airport where he was seeing Marlene off somewhere, and came to Matz's apartment to audition him. "I had no idea about his songs or the style of that English Music Hall comedy thing", Matz recalled. The crucial

frightening key of B major, after which he asked, "Can you be in Los Angeles tomorrow?". The answer was 'yes', and rehearsals for Las Vegas started just three weeks before he was due to open. What followed impressed Matz hugely. During the next ten days they worked on the Las Vegas material all day every day, and Matz said that he learned from Coward not only the songs but a whole new style of performance. "He made me

learn, very forcefully, that this was about comedy. A couple of times he screamed, "Don't play when I am making a joke!", [and] I gradually learned that this was a whole other kind of music." At the same time Matz was writing the orchestral arrangements for Carlton Hayes's band, a typical Las Vegas dance band with saxophones and many trumpets and trombones, which needed finesse and much discretion if Coward's lyrics were to be clearly heard. The results were impressive: Coward wrote in his diaries that Matz's "orchestral arrangements and variations are incredible - vital and imaginative. Sometimes they go too far for my personal taste, but I cannot fail to be impressed by the expert knowledge of instrumentation. Peter Matz, at the age of twenty-six, knows more about the range of various instruments and the potentialities of different combinations than anyone of any age I have ever met in England ... very exciting and stimulating." The Las Vegas episode gave Coward "one of the most sensational successes of my career, and to pretend that I am not absolutely delighted would be idiotic." Thereafter, there was no question but that Matz would be asked whenever musical assistance was needed in Coward's burgeoning US arena. CBS had already contracted for the TV spectacular *Together With Music*, and Matz went to Jamaica to work on the songs. "I remember being just in awe of the level of work going on ... a feeling that something kind of historical was happening". Mary Martin remembered "hours and hours of floating around on inflated mattresses under gorgeous skies and shadows of palm trees, singing like crazy". Coward commented that Mary Martin was "wonderful to work with", and that "Pete is being really marvellous. He is not only a fine musician but an enthusiast." In November 1956 Matz provided accompaniments and arrangements for the album *Noël Coward in New York*, which are probably the best

recordings Coward ever made, both in terms of the quality of recorded sound and the timbre, tuning and control of his own voice. The last recording session in particular Coward found "exciting", where four songs were accompanied just by Matz and a small group of expert instrumentalists on double-bass, trumpet, guitar and drums. *Half-Caste Woman* and *Twentieth Century Blues* both feature a nice jokey Matz touch - surprising doublings in the tempo for the space of one bar in their second refrains - while *Sail Away*, with Matz's richly chordal piano figurations, produces a surprisingly lush lyricism from such a limited combination of accompanying instruments. *Time and Again* amounts to a completely new interpretation of a superbly well-crafted but otherwise almost unknown song. Here Matz's shafts of jazz piano improvisation add rhythmic and harmonic interest in a deliciously laid-back swing style - beyond question a great accompaniment for a great song and a realisation of its true potential. Things came slightly unstuck early in 1959 over the score for *London Morning*, for which Coward wanted Matz to come to London to do the copying and much more; but Matz was by then doing pretty well in TV work and didn't have the passion for the project that he felt Coward was demanding. "I finally had to say, "Noël, I don't think I can do it". He was pretty upset ... it seemed to him that I was being disloyal, and in a way I guess I was." However, early in 1961 Coward offered Matz the musical directorship of *Sail Away*. "This sort of work represented my whole reason for having gone to New York to begin with ... I was thrilled that he asked me to do it - it was a wonderful learning experience." It led to an offer from Richard Rodgers to MD his next musical, but Matz had to ask Coward to be released from *Sail Away*. Coward's response was generous: "Oh, you have to work for him - Rodgers just pees melody!". Peter Matz continued to work at the

highest level as musical director, composer, arranger, orchestrator and conductor for Broadway, Hollywood and - most prolifically - television. Known for inserting musical jokes into his orchestrations, he made a 50-year career of musical play while earning the respect of singers and audiences and numerous professional accolades. In his long association with Streisand, Matz won a Grammy for his arrangements for her 1964 album *People*, an Emmy for her 1965 TV special *My name is Barbra* and an Academy Award nomination for best original score for her 1975 film *Funny Lady*. He arranged and conducted most of the material on Streisand's first five albums for Columbia, and earned another Grammy nomination for arranging, conducting and producing her platinum recording *The Broadway Album*. Two more Emmys came for his work on the 1970 Kraft Music Hall presentation of *The Sound of Burt Bacharach* and a 1973 segment of *The Carol Burnett Show*, of which he was Musical Director for eight years. There were at least ten other Emmy nominations for his contributions to more than 140 television movies and specials. Matz considered that his lucky break with Coward was hugely influential to the scope and direction of his subsequent career, and remained impressed by how hard Coward worked in preparing his material, and how much he himself had learned about performance from 'The Master'. It is notable that Coward specified bequests in his will to only two musicians - his long-time accompanist and amanuensis Norman Hackforth (to whom Coley presented Coward's own green Morocco leather-bound copy of *The Noël Coward Song Book*) and Peter Matz (who received a silver-mounted conductor's baton). In recent years Matz accompanied his wife, the singer Marilyn Lovell, in a prodigious series of fund-raising concerts to benefit AIDS victims. He also became the engine behind Los Angeles' *Reprise! Broadway's Best*, which since 1997 has staged revivals

## COMMITTEE & CONTACTS...

*For the benefit of all members here are details of the Society's Patron, Honorary Officers and Committee. Also included here are the email addresses of those committee members and representatives who are willing to answer questions on Noël Coward and his work together with their specialism (sp) or interest PLUS useful contact addresses:*

**Patron:** Graham Payn

**Honorary President:** Sir John Mills

**Honorary Vice Presidents:** Judy Campbell, Moira Lister & Sheridan Morley

**Consultants** Philip Hoare & Joel Kaplan

**Chair:** Michael Imison (Noël Coward Ltd.) email: imisonplay@hotmail.com *sp - the plays and productions*

**Secretary:** John Knowles (Noël Coward Ltd.) email: johnknowles@Noëlcoward.net *sp - membership of the Society, Home Chat and the NCS Website*

**Treasurer:** Graham Martin (Blinkhorns)

**Robert Gardiner** (Director NC Ltd. & a trustee of the Noël Coward Foundation)

**Claire Osborne** (Warner Chappell)

**Geoffrey Skinner** (Samuel French) email: geoffrey@samuelfrench-london.co.uk *sp sales of CDs and books.*

**Stewart Nicholls** (Theatre Producer/Director)

**Barry Day** (Coward historian and US Consultant)

**Gareth Pike** (Past Secretary) email: ncsociety@aol.com *sp general and biographical queries*

**Stephen Marshall** (Member) email: stephen.marshall26@bopenworld.com *sp recordings, programmes, tributes & newspaper cuttings.*

**Jane Finch** (Member)

**Ali Howarth** (Alan Brodie Representation - who represent the Estate of the Late Noël Coward)

**Ned Chaillet** (BBC Drama)

**Peter Tummons** (Methuen Drama)

### US REPRESENTATIVES...

**Ken Starrett in New York** email: ken.starrett@csfb.com

**James O'Brien in Philadelphia** email: jimobrien0909@aol.com

**Walter Smyth in Trevoese near Philadelphia** email: smyth\_w@msn.com

**Alan Farley in San Francisco** email: alanNoël@earthlink.net

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or Warner/Chappell Music, Inc., 10585 Santa Monica Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90025-4950, U.S.A.

Tel: 1-310-441-8600 Fax 1-310-470-6399

**FOOTNOTES** - The new CD by Ian Bostridge, accompanied by Jeffrey Tate is *The Noël Coward Songbook* on EMI Classics - 72435573742. Release date (for the UK) is 14 October, 2002 (Guardian Review at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/arts/features/story/0,11710,800449,00.html>) *The Wicked Wit of Noël Coward* by Dominique Engright, is just out see [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). The photograph here shows NCS Vice President, Judy Campbell (middle) at the Theatre Museum during the recent book launch of *A Theatrical Feast* by Elizabeth Sharland - with Susan Travers (left) and Virginia Lester (right).



him, telephoned the news to London.

#### Burial in England

Arrangements were being made yesterday, with the assistance of the High Commissioner's office, to fly the body home to England. It will travel on the direct BOAC flight to London Mr. Leslie said that Sir Noël had seemed "cheerful and active" after dining quietly on Sunday night. He had not complained lately about his health although he mentioned occasionally to friends that what he liked to call "my artery trouble" was giving him some bother. He had retired a few weeks ago to the winter home after making a triumphal visit to New York in January. A celebrity studded crowd honoured him at a special performance of "Oh Coward!," a potpourri of his life's work which has been one of the hits of the present New York theatrical season. Sir Noël, who had celebrated his 73rd birthday on Dec. 16, found the New York visit tiring. When he flew south to Kingston he told friends that he was looking forward to a few months of utter relaxation in the tranquil setting of the Blue Harbour home.

#### VERY MERRY Last London visit

Mrs. Joan Hirst, a close friend who used to work for Sir Noël and who handles his affairs in London, said he had been "very merry" recently and was under no strains. His last visit to London was just before Christmas. Winters in Jamaica and summers at his house, Les Avants in the hills above Montreux in Switzerland, have been Sir Noël's regular schedule in recent years. His visits to London have been limited to a fortnight about twice a year. Sir Noël is represented by two shows in London at present: "Cowardy Custard," a musical based on his songs, and "Private Lives," his play from the 1930s. Both went on as usual last night. (*Daily Telegraph* - 27/9/73)

## "Crown Prince of New York Cabaret" Coming to The Stanhope Park Hyatt New York

New York – Fall 2002 –Opening Thursday November 7th, 2002 and continuing through New Year's Eve 2002, Steve Ross will perform at the historic Stanhope Park Hyatt New York. Recognized by the *New York Times* as the "Crown Prince of New York Cabaret," Ross is considered one of the great singer/pianist interpreters of Cole Porter, Noël Coward and Fred Astaire. Ross has performed his music in concert halls, theatres and cabarets around the globe for the last thirty years. According to the *London Times*, "Steve Ross is the smoothest cabaret act in the world."

Steve will perform two shows per evening, Wednesday through Saturday. His first performance will begin at 8:30 pm with a \$35 cover charge (dinner required). The second show will begin at 10:30 pm with a \$25 cover charge on Wednesday and Thursday and a \$35 cover charge on Friday and Saturday (\$20 food and beverage minimum accompanies the late shows). Ross' appearance solidifies The Stanhope Park Hyatt New York's commitment to the establishment of New York's newest premier boite. For reservations call (212) 650-4737.

For those who wish to see Steve Ross in the UK:

He is returning to Larry's Room at the Pizza on the Park.

Herewith the details:

Dates: three weeks – Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> through Oct. 26<sup>th</sup>. Mondays through

Saturdays (except the first week)

Location: 11 Knightsbridge

Telephone: 0207. 235.5273

Shows:

9:15 Strictly Rodgers, Mostly Hart

10:45 the Autumn Collection

#### FREE CD FOR ALL NEW AND RENEWED MEMBERSHIP

This year we are able to offer all new and renewed members a FREE CD containing a collection of Noël Coward songs recorded by various artists. This promotional copy was produced by Warner Chappell in 2001 and not made available for sale. It contains 26 tracks including *If Love Were All* and *Poor Little Rich Girl* sung by Judy Garland; *I'll Follow My Secret Heart* by Frank Sinatra; *London Pride* and *Someday I'll Find You* by Julie Andrews; some recordings by Noël, Mary Martin, Dinah Washington, Jose Ferrer, Shirley Bassey, Danny Kaye and more. Members also have the right to buy copies of the first edition of *The Unknown Noël* by Barry Day signed by Graham Payn at £20 (\$31) now with p&p included in the price.

#### FREE COMPUTER WITH TUITION FOR A MEMBERSHIP SEC.

The Society is looking for someone to take on the work of Membership Secretary for the Society. The work involves managing the Society's membership database that has been developed in FileMaker Pro and is very user friendly. The Membership Secretary would receive a computer with printer and all the software needed to manage the membership details. The database contains the standard letters that are needed to communicate and disseminate membership information. These would be updated regularly by the secretary who will provide tuition and telephone support. All expenses will be met by the Society. Please contact John Knowles on +44 (0)1603 486188 or via email or postal address.



of historic Broadway musicals. Artistic Director Marcia Seligson last year credited much of the series' success to Matz and his attention to historical musical detail. "Music theatre is really a native art form", Matz said during those years, explaining why he devoted such efforts to the series. "It should be preserved for the same reason it's important to preserve a Frank Lloyd Wright building or not let old movies decay in the can".

*Matz died in Los Angeles on August 9th, and is survived by his wife, two sons from his first marriage, Zachary and Jonas, and one grandson.*

#### Memoirs of an Orphan Boy by Hugo Bergström

We all know that Noël Coward became the President of the Actor's Orphanage on the death of Gerald du Maurier in 1934, a role he took very seriously and gave a lot of time and commitment until he gave up the post some 22 years later in 1956. Hugo Bergström was a boy at the orphanage in the early years. He has written and privately published his memoirs. It is a remarkable read. Here is the story of what it was like to be in the orphanage at that time. He was there when they moved to Chertsey. He saw (and benefited from) many of the improvements that Coward encouraged. It gives an insight into the conditions of the time, and some aspects of Noël's life and character. Please do not be misled. This book is Mr Bergström's memories of his life as a child before and during the second world war. It is not about Noël Coward. It is about Hugo Bergström. From descriptions of life at the orphanage, the story rolls on to the War when Hugo Bergström was one of the orphans evacuated to America. There he met Gertrude Lawrence (no doubt taking an interest in the orphans at Noël's

request). Mr Bergström comes through a pretty rough start in life as a well balanced individual, aware of his special story which he shares with the reader.

If any member would like a copy of this book, then do get in touch through the usual Society address. The book is privately published, but I am sure Hugo Bergström will be delighted to sell a copy.

*Gareth Pike*

#### NEW YORK PRIDE

Provided by Barry Day last year and printed now as we remember the tragedy of September 11th, 2001

New York Pride - it's in every face you see,

People come from the ends of the Earth.

New York Pride - it's in every place you'll be

In this city that values your worth.

Brave city,  
Shining like a beacon,  
Like those lights that shimmer  
On the Great White Way.  
Grave city,  
May you never weaken.  
Stay as strong and stubborn  
As you stand today.  
Guts and go  
Are the greatest  
Part of you,  
Chuzpah, wit and  
A spirit that's free.  
They're the stuff  
That's right at  
The heart of you,  
They're the things  
That the whole world can see.

You may be a little down but you're holding steady.  
Someone picks a fight with you - tell them to be ready!  
You've seen bullies come and go,  
They never laid a glove  
On this magic city we all love.

New York Pride means we're all New Yorkers now.  
New York Pride means we stand side by side.

New York Pride means no one can talk us down -  
Or we'll make them regret that they tried.

Rough city  
Firm on feet of granite,  
Hanging touch, how can it  
Ever fail or fade?  
Gruff city,  
Nowhere on the planet  
Are the ties forged tighter than the ones you've made.  
Hand in hand  
Like a band of  
Brothers who  
Face the Future  
What e'er may betide  
Knowing nothing can set aside  
That God-given New York Pride!

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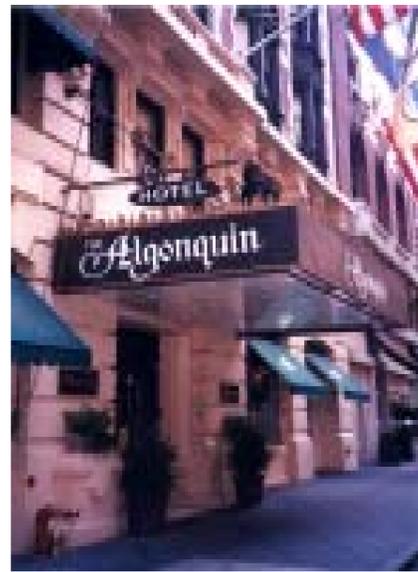
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# NOËL COWARD IN NEW YORK

This second part of our article on Coward in New York has to begin in the 1920s at the Algonquin the first night of the first visit of Noël Coward to New York. He would later have many lunches at the famed 'Round Table' where the



The Algonquin Hotel

literati and glitterati formed a strong intellectual and social elite between the wars - with such figures as Alexander Woollcott, Edna Ferber (Showboat) and Neysa McMein. It was a natural home for Coward - even if it proved too hot and stuffy on this first visit.

It was at the Henry Miller Theatre where Coward appeared on September 16, 1925 in the American run of his first major success, *The Vortex*. (*Look After Lulu* was also produced there and opened on March 3, 1959). In the 1940s Coward stayed at the St. Regis Hotel, a significant visit to the US which lasted from April 29, 1940 to June 9. While here he made the trip to Washington to visit President Roosevelt. In *Future Indefinite* Coward writes, "It is an established rule that no liquor may be

served in the White House and so, fortified by the illicit Presidential whisky-sours, we settled down to pleasant food and delicious iced water. After dinner I obliged with a few songs at the piano, and noted with a pang of dismay the President's marked partiality for 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', which he made me sing twice." Coward dined often at the restaurant called '21' - there is frequent mention of it in the autobiographies and the diaries. It dates back to

the time of Prohibition in the 1920s.

Another legendary dining place for Coward and generations of theatricals is Sardi's. It has survived relatively unchanged since the 1920's and for over 80 years has been the club, mess hall, lounge, post office, saloon and marketplace of the American theater. Situated next to the New York Times it was and is the home of the clichéd frantic search of the press reviews following a first night. Coward is one of many who has dined, scanned the newsprint and been caricatured on the walls of this vibrant restaurant. Coward's last



21 - with its line of race jockeys

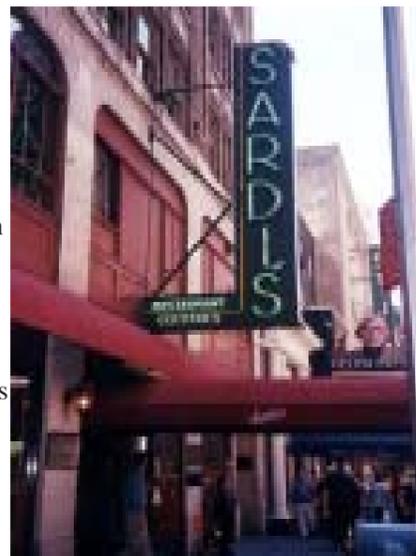
performance was at the Belasco theatre in *Nude with Violin* which opened on November 14th, 1957 and closed on February 8th 1958. The final week of the run saw alternating performances of *Nude With Violin* with *Present Laughter* (with *Nude* cast members and Eva Gabor)! The 1960s saw Coward busily preparing *Sail Away* with the inimitable and dominating presence of Elaine Stritch, who has recently enjoyed such success with a concert version of the musical and her own one-woman show *Elaine Stritch At Liberty*. In August of this year Elizabeth Sharland arranged for the authors to see the Penthouse Tower on East 55th Street where the lessees, John Valentino and Allan France, are using their architectural and interior design skills to preserve this most interesting of rooftop apartments. In its heyday it must have enjoyed even wider



Round Table at the Algonquin



The Henry Miller Theatre



Sardi's - a theatrical dining legend

sentimental patriotism converted to Coward's cause many theatregoers who had distrusted the flippancy, the facility and the witty light-heartedness of his earlier work. Between the two musicals came *Private Lives*, a comedy as beautifully and smoothly made as *Hay Fever*; and no less witty but with a closer relevance to the moral concerns of its day. It exploits with inventive delight its author's gift for the retort discourteous, the comic inflation of the obvious, the urgent pursuit of the wild irrelevancy and his mastery of cleverly economical effect.

In the 1930s he was active in management in England and New York, in partnership with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, and, he continued to create plays and musicals with no less ease and effect, though for a time with less wit. In 1941, however, *Blithe Spirit* broke new ground; admitting the fantastic into his mocking picture of the age; it ran for nearly 2,000 performances. *Present Laughter*, written in the following year, displays moral perplexities like those of *Private Lives* against a theatrical background; the background is beautifully sketched and the problems are worked out with undiminished wit and hilarity. Between these two uncloudedly sunny plays came *In Which We Serve*, Coward's film in tribute to the Royal Navy, which he wrote and directed himself and in which he played the leading role. *This Happy Breed* achieved a working class *Cavalcade* of life between the two World Wars.

His later work, with occasional novels and short stories, a War Diary to link his pre-war autobiography *Present Indicative* to its post-war sequel, *Future Indefinite*, could not always recapture the wit and the tingling contemporaneity of his earlier plays. His musicals remained gracefully made and precise in effect, but they belong to the days before the war, and of his plays,

only *Nude With Violin* and *Relative Values* seemed to awaken his sharp revelatory wit. Never idle, he made Feydeau's *Occupe-toi d'Amelie* into *Look after Lulu*, a typically Coward work even though it seemed unblushingly to allude to earlier effects and to earlier dialogue for effects he knew to be infallible. He appeared in small parts, beautifully observed, magnificently understated and extremely wittily played in a variety of films in the later 1950s and the 1960s. In 1964, a year in which Granada presented four of his plays on television under the omnibus title *A Choice of Coward*, he had the satisfaction of directing the National Theatre production of *Hay Fever* - the second modern play to be included in the National repertoire and the first play ever to be directed there by its author. This was followed by a musical version of *Blithe Spirit*, supervised but not written or composed by Coward and by a revival of *Present Laughter* with Mr. Nigel Patrick playing Coward's old part and directing, which ran for close on 400 performances at the Queen's. Last year Coward attended the first night of *Cowardly Custard* in London - a revue of his revue material. A revival of *Private Lives* with Maggie Smith and Robert Stephens opened in London. He also received an honorary degree from Sussex University. "If and when", Coward had written in 1958, "she (success) chooses to leave me I shall not repine, nor shall I mourn her any more than I mourn other loved ones who have gone away. I do not approve of mourning, I only approve of remembering, and her I shall always remember gratefully and with pride."

By the time he reached his seventieth birthday in 1969, the year in which he was awarded a knighthood, it was possible to see how firmly the best of Coward's work was rooted in the English comic tradition. It is an attack in suitably comic terms on the

insincere inflation of emotion, on the dishonesty of meaningless fine manners and unexamined conventions, and on the hypocrisy which masquerades as moral censoriousness; it rejects the easy-going, the undisciplined and the unprofessional. Claiming no more than, in the words of one of his songs; "a talent to amuse," Coward, his public had come to learn, amused them for their own good as well as their delight. Coward was widely admired and loved in his own profession for his generosity and kindness to those who fell on hard times. Stories are told of the unobtrusive way in which he relieved the needs or paid the debts of old theatrical connections who had no claim on him.

## NOËL COWARD DIES

By IAN BALL in New York

SIR NOËL COWARD, one of the greatest theatrical figures of the century and perhaps the most versatile and innovative playwright-actor-singer-composer Britain has produced, died in Jamaica yesterday. He was 73. He had a heart attack early yesterday at his winter home at Blue Harbour, near Port Maria on Jamaica's North Shore. He woke unusually early, summoned a houseboy just before 6.30 and complained of feeling unwell. The houseboy helped him back to bed and summoned a doctor from Port Maria, four miles away, by sending a messenger because the house has no phone. The local physician, Dr. E. U. Akpabio a Nigerian, dressed quickly and drove up Firefly Hill to the house, but Sir Noël was dead when he arrived. The doctor signed a death certificate stating that death was due to a coronary thrombosis.

Sir Noël's secretary, Mr. Cole Leslie (*sic*), who was staying with

Next year sees the 30th anniversary of Sir Noël Coward's death. Here is his obituary from The Times and the announcement of his death in the Daily Telegraph provided by Terence Trimmer.

## OBITUARY

The Times 27/9/73

# SIR NOËL COWARD

Playwright and actor who was a master of comedy

Sir Noël Coward has died in Jamaica, as announced on another page, at the age of 73. Playwright, composer, director, actor, singer and dancer, he was also on occasion novelist, short-story writer and autobiographer, and he wrote fluent, entertaining light verse. None of the great figures of the English theatre has been more versatile than he. Whatever he had found to do was done with elegantly professional certainty of effect. During his lifetime, his place in the theatre depended on no single vein of achievement but on his complete mastery of all the stage required for whatever work he had undertaken. One or two of his sentimental songs keep their place among the popular classics of light music; others, wittily mocking, are destined for a longer life. He had little voice, but no singer more naturally gifted could project the wit of these songs with half the effect of his own dry, staccato style. As an actor he carried naturalism to its farthest extremes, but in a number of roles like that of Lewis Dodd, the bohemian composer of Margaret Kennedy's *The Constant Nymph* in the 1920s and Shaw's King Magnus, in *The Apple Cart*, which he played in the Coronation season of 1953, he made every necessary effect with a delightful simplicity and punctuality, adding often to their weight by understatement; he was too disciplined and conscientious an artist to essay what was beyond his capacity for effectiveness.

Posterity may reject his musicals as limited by the tastes and techniques of the 1920s and 1930s. His serious pieces - like *Cavalcade* among his musicals, *The Vortex* and *This Happy Breed* among his

plays - may seem too easily sentimental to appeal to later ages, but they reflect the mood of their times with startling clarity. Of all his multifarious achievements, it is as a master of the comedy of manners that he is irreplaceable;



Noël Coward as Captain Kinross in the film *In Which We Serve*.

his work in this special field is precisely written, and elegantly economical; it belongs to the classical tradition of Congreve, Sheridan, Wilde and Shaw. Noël Coward was born at Teddington on December 16, 1899, the son of Arthur Coward, who worked for a firm of music publishers. His formal education was limited, for he made his first public appearance when he was 10 in a children's play *The Goldfish*, at the Little Theatre.

This brought an offer of a page boy's part, in *The Great Name*, from Charles Hawtrey, by whose skill, professionalism and disciplined craftsmanship Coward was permanently and beneficially

influenced. Until 1915, when a mild attack of tuberculosis sent him for treatment to a sanatorium, he played a large number of juvenile parts. Because of his illness, when he reached military age in 1915 he was put into a labour battalion, but transferred from that to the Artists Rifles OTC.

After the war he joined Arthur Bouchier's company; but in 1920 he appeared in his own first play, a light and flimsy comedy, *I Leave It To You*, at the New Theatre; this was later followed by *The Young Idea*, and in 1923 he acted, sang and danced in *London Calling* a revue of which he was part-author and part-composer. Changing his tone, in 1925, he made his first great success with *The Vortex*, a somewhat melodramatic confrontation between a foolish, amorous middle-aged woman and the drug-taking Hamlet who was her son. In it, Coward found an authentic desperation in the self-conscious gaiety of the first post-war period. *Hay Fever*, written in a weekend in 1925, is a more dazzling achievement; like *The Importance of being Earnest*, it is pure comedy with no mission but to delight, and it depends purely on the interplay of characters, not upon elaborate comic machinery. This was followed by a series of musicals produced by C. B. Cochran which culminated in *Bitter Sweet*, probably the best of Coward's work for the musical stage, in 1929, and *Cavalcade*, a magnificently spectacular pageant of English history, from the death of Queen Victoria to the great slump, as it was seen through the eyes of an upper-middle-class family. *Cavalcade*'s sincere,

Part two of an illustrated guide to where Noël Coward lived, ate, performed and directed in New York and the theatres where play revivals from the Coward canon were presented ... by Ken Starrett & John Knowles



The Belasco theatre

views of Manhattan. Even now it still has a wonderful view of the Empire State and the Chrysler buildings and downtown towards Battery Park. It maintains a distinctive place on the New York skyline with its unusual green capped ventilation shaft in the corner of the roof garden. This can be seen from the viewing deck of the Empire State Building. This apartment was used by Coward for the earliest rehearsals of *Sail Away* when Elaine took the small elevator and then trudged up the narrow cast iron staircase across the roof garden that is the only entrance to the penthouse. *Sail Away* had its Broadway premiere on Tuesday, October 3, 1961 at the Broadhurst Theatre, and ran for 167 performances. The penthouse is currently undergoing careful restoration at the hands of John and Allan who were the most receptive of

The view North towards the Empire State Building



The penthouse looking South East (photograph by Elizabeth Sharland)

hosts. As we sat, glowing from large cocktails, we took in the scene from the 12 foot windows across Manhattan from this historic apartment that is being lovingly restored and furnished. The art deco feel of much of the interior has been created by their choice of beautiful furnishings, artefacts and paintings. In recognition of the reception given to us and the Society, we are giving John and Allan a framed and mounted photograph of Noël to hang in the penthouse, together with some books that give some background on this famous tenant. It is not certain that Noël ever lived in the penthouse but we do know he lived in a one-bedroomed apartment (at 15g) in the

Main room



The authors with Elizabeth Sharland and Beryl Knowles in the roof garden

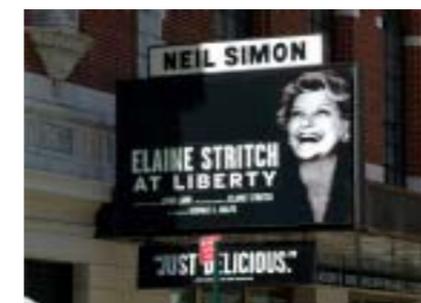


Main room looking South



same building. He certainly used the penthouse as the more suitable room, away from neighbours and interruptions, for these early rehearsals.

(Our thanks to Elizabeth Sharland for arranging the visit to the Penthouse and to John and Allan for their warm hospitality).



# Design for Living

## The Royal Exchange Manchester

The twenty-two year old Coward met two young British actors, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, on his first visit to New York. They fascinated each other and, such was their



mutual self-confidence, that, then and there, they resolved that Noël should write a play, in which all of them should star. It took eleven years for their careers to advance to the point where this was practical but they never forgot and in 1933 all three of them appeared in *Design For Living* on Broadway where it ran for 135 performances. It was a play much beloved by its protagonists and not surprisingly has challenged many distinguished actors to follow in their footsteps. Versions have varied from the 1930's Ben Hecht film with Gary Cooper and Fredric March, which satisfied the screen censors by denying any possibility of a sexual relationship between the central trio,



to Sean Mathias' revival at the Donmar Warehouse in the early 1990's where Rachel Weisz, Clive Owen and Paul Rhys, taking advantage of relaxed contemporary codes, demonstrated physically what in the original were simply shocking ideas.

Marianne Elliott directing the play's most recent revival (26.06.02) at the Royal Exchange in Manchester went



one stage further and moved the setting to the present day. Coward works do not generally lend themselves to this approach. I remember a disastrous 1974 *Present Laughter* with Peter Wyngarde playing Garry Essendine as an aging pop-star. Here, despite some minor inconsistencies, it served the play well. It allowed Les Brotherston's sets and costumes to be witty parodies of current fashions instead of trotting out clichéd thirties designs. With a very few omissions and alterations the Coward dialogue sounded as up-to-date as when it was written and the explicit sex scenes did not seem out of place in this context. Above all it emphasised that drama dealing with the complexities of hetero- and homosexual relationships is just as relevant now as it was in the thirties. The pain of love and the difficulties of fidelity were constant themes with Coward, here demonstrated with mathematical thoroughness as each possible pairing among Gilda, Leo and Otto is explored before coming to the triumphant conclusion that two and two make three. However, in this production two other strands emerged for me more clearly than they had before. Victoria Scarborough's Gilda started in the first act with some

girlish mannerisms that initially I found irritating. Ernest was able to talk to her like a father. In this and the second act she is clearly seen as an adjunct to whichever man she is with. Otto rather unkindly calls her "the essence of love among the artists" and she finds her lovers' success daunting. It is her immaturity as much as her fickleness that disqualifies her from having long term relationships. Above all she, unlike Leo and Otto, does not have a real job, and for Coward work was what mattered. He is often quoted as saying it was more fun than fun. In this play, in the third act Gilda has become a successful interior designer, her creativity winning her rewards as rich as those for Otto's paintings or



Leo's plays. Paradoxically it is this new found independence that qualifies her to re-enter the charmed circle with which the play began. The second strand was the role of Ernest, often seen as a mere mouthpiece for conventional morality. Ken Bones' performance let us see the real hurt he feels when Gilda finally admits she had made use of him and that their marriage was only a marriage of convenience. He is now the innocent one who failed to grasp reality and the more furiously he denounces all three of them the more he resembles a latter day Malvolio, who similarly had ideas above his station. His final

stumble as he exits is a classic of comic business and entirely justifies the laughter of the trio left on stage. That Coward later said the three characters were laughing at themselves suggests to me an uncharacteristic failure of nerve and fear of being thought cruel. It was in the third act that the production went furthest to distance

**BLITHE SPIRIT** - A new audio production directed by Sheridan Morley reviewed by Michael Imison

In his perceptive sleeve note to this new Naxos recording Sheridan Morley identifies this play, for many years now the most performed of all Coward's works, as a turning point for the playwright. Previously his major comedies, from *Easy Virtue* to *Design for Living*, had each featured a small group of insiders, often artists, temperamentally inclined to reject normal codes of behaviour and deriving most of their amusement from the hidebound attitudes of others. These found a ready audience in the post First World War generation. With the coming of the Second War Coward, whose first reaction was to forswear playwriting altogether, seems to have concluded that a new approach was necessary. *Blithe Spirit*, written in 1941 does feature two writers, Charles Condomine and Madame Arcati, but the books which they are described as having written hardly sound ground-breaking and the one free spirit (no pun intended) in the play, the ghost of Elvira, is finally rejected and banished by an alliance of these same writers. At the same time Coward, who in *Private Lives* and *Hay Fever* had almost dispensed with plot, returned to a more conventional form of dramaturgy with clearly defined conflict and suspense and a denouement worthy of Agatha Christie in the unmasking of the maid Edith as the source of the psychical mayhem. However new the approach may have been, the central situation of *Blithe Spirit* is one that Coward had used twice before. An early play *The Young Idea* featured a man whose marriage to a beautiful temperamental artist had broken up and who had taken as his second

itself from productions in the past. One element that gave it its contemporary feel was the casting of a black actor Clarence Smith as Leo. In the third act he entered as a full blown transvestite to Gilda's amusement and the horror of her conventional guests. There was also the suggestion in Andonis Anthony's performance that Matthew, their

wife a hearty, fox-hunting female with no intellectual interests whatsoever. His children by the first wife, (characters stolen, as Coward freely admitted from Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*) are convinced that their parents still love each other and finally bring about their re-union. More famously, *Private Lives* deals with a couple whose emotions are so volatile as to break up their first marriage and who take new partners with conventional good looks and ideas to match. Here again the second wife is routed by the first who reclaims her ex-husband. The new elements to this situation in *Blithe Spirit* are that the first wife is dead when the play opens and thus has to return as a ghost to make her claim and further that, although she and he initially form an alliance that excludes the second wife, ultimately he rejects them both. It seems clear that even in writing comedy Coward is turning his back on the frivolities of the Twenties to face the new seriousness of the Forties. Morley claims that his production of the play as a sound recording is the first complete one. This is not exactly true. Los Angeles Theatre Works recorded a complete version of their public radio performance of the play for the centenary which is available from Amazon. And Morley's version is not quite complete. I spotted one cut where the producer's ingenuity was defeated by the wordless scene in which the ghost and the maid compete for control of the gramophone. *Blithe Spirit* is a very visual play, hence the successful film version and the numerous other films derived from it where the pivotal action is a spouse returning

servant is gay and this may have been why Ernest chose him. Another circle, an echo of the first is created. Undoubtedly Coward never thought of this but to my mind it is an interesting contribution to a play that warrants re-examining by every generation that revives it.

Michael Imison

as a ghost. A good deal of comedy lies in the reactions of the characters to what is happening and I for one will never forget Simon Cadell as Charles doing a triple take when he first caught sight of Elvira. But the heart of Coward's comedy is in the dialogue and this can benefit from being heard without visual distractions, especially when delivered by the richly distinctive voices of such actors as Corin Redgrave and Joanna Lumley. Joanna has the advantage of having played a much-praised Elvira in the West End but Corin, who is less known for comedy, is also very funny and believable as a writer whose self-absorption never descends into pettiness. Actresses playing Madame Arcati tend to be judged against the wild eccentricities of the first player of the part, Margaret Rutherford, and their success is measured by how funny they are. There is a trap here. It must be remembered that contrary to everyone's expectations Arcati is genuinely psychic, she does summon back Elvira and in the end does send her away again. Thankfully Thelma Ruby realises this and gives as much emphasis to Arcati's professional pride as to her bicycling and fondness for cucumber sandwiches. Equally Kika Markham in the less rewarding part of Ruth resists the temptation to caricature. A huge additional plus for the production is the opportunity it gives between the scenes to hear Coward himself singing some of the songs he made famous.

**BLITHE SPIRIT** An improbable farce NAXOS NA226314 available as a CD or a set of two audiocassettes from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)