



# HOME CHAT

DECEMBER  
2001

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NOËL COWARD SOCIETY

## CELEBRATE CHRISTMAS WITH THE MASTER

*The Master's Birthday – Flower-Laying & Lunch at The Savoy*

*Saturday 15th December at 12 noon – Theatre Royal, Drury Lane*

The stars of the successful revival of *Private Lives* running in the West End and due to go to Broadway in January, Lindsay Duncan and Alan Rickman, will lay flowers on the statue of Noël Coward at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane to mark the birthday of The Master on Saturday 15th December at 12 noon. Complimentary drinks for members and their guests will be available afterwards at the theatre bar. While our actor guests slip back to the Albery for the matinee, members and their guests can enjoy

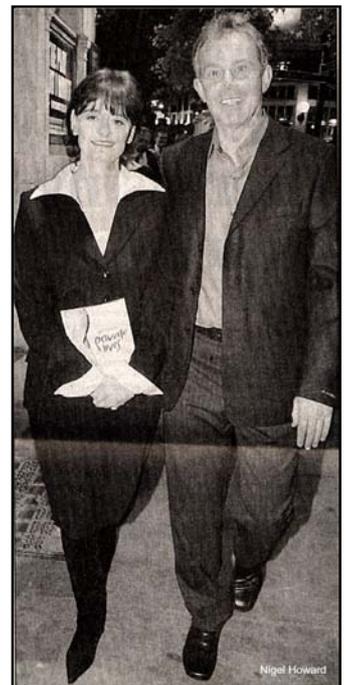
### PRIVATE LIVES for PM – Star Quality has a Mixed Reception

Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan explore their successful *Private Lives* at the Albery seen by Tony and Cherie Blair stepping out in the West End to enjoy Noël Coward's revival. The production has won praise from virtually all the critics and is set to



move to Broadway in January. *Star Quality* has had a more mixed reception: **Mail on Sunday** says ... *'Nothing about Christopher Luscombe's new version of the backstage drama Star Quality persuades me that this distinctly lesser Coward merits its rescue from neglect'* ... **The Express** ... *'But she (Penelope Keith) is actually spot on as the actress-from-hell in this crisp, vicious and very enjoyable play, adapted by*

*Coward from his own short story about theatre folk sniping and snarling on tour' .... The Evening Standard ... 'Popular Penelope Keith, making a valiant return to the West End stage after a long absence and required to play a beglamoured theatrical grande dame, struggles to cope with a part outside her normal comic range. Coward's satire at the expense of early 1950s West End theatre, before the angry young Osborne generation, is limp and leaden' ... Michael Coveney in the Daily Mail is more fulsome 'The superb prose, bitchy and heartfelt by a playwright who felt the tide turning against him, was reworked as Coward's last play in 1967 ... Well Miss Keith is truly magnificent. And she is well supported by Marjories Yates as an*



*hilarious maid-cum-dresser, Peter Cellier as an old reliable and Russell Boulter as the new-breed director. Best of all is Una Stubbs as an incompetent sidekick whom Lorraine (Penelope Keith) insists in having in her cast ... Luscombe's production wittily designed by Tim Goodchild, evokes a world of scenic flats and mannerisms best represented by Nick Waring's camp and all-knowing director's assistant.' ... On the international scene the Herald Tribune says ... 'At the Apollo Star Quality is a fascinating Noël Coward rediscovery from the 1950s. Written at first as a short story and then an un-produced play, it has been adapted by Christopher Luscombe as a vehicle for Penelope Keith, playing yet another old stage star having more than a little trouble with reality. Just as in his last produced play Song at Twilight, Coward proved amazingly and sharply prescient about the gay outings that lay 20 years ahead, so here he brilliantly nails the power shift that was taking place backstage just after the war, one in which the stars who had always called the shots were finding themselves on the losing side of a power battle with the young, leather-jacketed directors and writers who were very soon to take charge, first on the fringe and subsidized theater and then of their West End strongholds. So here we have an actress loosely based on three of Coward's favourites (Gertrude Lawrence, Margaret Leighton and Vivien Leigh) fighting for her starlight against Russell Boulter as the*



# THE NOËL COWARD SOCIETY

## Annual General Meeting

### 17<sup>TH</sup> November 2001

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

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

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

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

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

Tracy began by thanking Michael once again and wishing him an enjoyable break.

As Michael had spoken about the beginning and current stages of the Society, Tracy spoke about the future of the Society and some initial changes the Committee had planned for the New Year in order to improve services to the members. The first change will be the introduction of a bi-monthly edition of Home Chat, to be supported by interim

mail-outs to promote special events/offers etc. It is hoped that by following this new format a 'meatier', more informative edition can be produced. The interim mail-outs will also allow the Committee to advertise events ahead of time, thus allowing members more opportunity to respond and book events. This scheme has already been put into use with the past couple of events (AGM/Flower Laying) and seems to have been well received by those present at the meeting.

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

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

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

#### Matters Arising

1. It was suggested that maybe an event could be organised around a screening of a/some Noël Coward Films and the Chair confirmed that this is something the Committee will look into for next year, possibly in conjunction with the British Film Institute / NFT and The Theatre Museum. A number of members mentioned various footage such as the David Frost Interview and Patrick Garland Interviews, as well as those held by the Theatre Museum and Society members.
2. The question of a 'central database' was raised where a list of video clips, films, recordings etc could be held in order that Society members can locate items if necessary. The Committee representatives suggested talking to Birmingham about such a database, as they are now the main archive for Coward material.
3. The Committee representatives displayed copies of the new membership leaflets for members to look at / take away. It was suggested that maybe we could arrange for the web address to be printed on new Coward



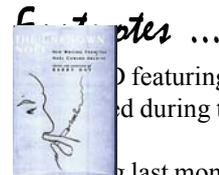
- books/folios etc. The Committee representatives agreed to look into this for next year to see whether it was a possibility.
4. Noël Coward Tour. It was suggested that a 'tour' of Noël Coward Sites could be organised. The Theatre Museum did organise such an event during the Centenary and the Committee will look into this with the TM next year.
  5. Goldenhurst – members enquired as to whether a trip to Goldenhurst could be arranged. Gareth reported that he has, in the past, tried to contact the current owner of this property who has not responded to his letters. We understand that Goldenhurst has now been made into a number of separate accommodations and so a trip here may not be possible.
  6. Port Meirion. Michael Imison is keen to organise a weekend trip to Port Meirion where 'Blithe Spirit' was written. This is quite an ambitious project but is something the Committee will look into for late 2002/2003, as the trip will include talks/presentations etc that will take some time to organise.
  7. Spring Trip – Tracy mentioned that the Committee will be looking at organising a day trip to the Archives at Birmingham to be followed by some evening entertainment, possibly by a local society, or to tie in with the production of Masterpieces which is due to open in Birmingham next year.
  8. Members commented that they enjoyed the theatre trips and the Committee agreed that they would continue to organise these but, hopefully, with more lead-time although this can be difficult when relying on production companies for information! Members also commented that they liked the new 'order form' system for events.
  9. Some members questioned the accurateness of the theatre listings for amateur societies. Geoffrey Skinner from Samuel French Ltd confirmed that the lists are sent to John in time for the Home Chat publication date and that, to the best of their knowledge, they are correct at the time of printing. This said, however, he did confirm that SF can only provide details of confirmed bookings and these do not always arrive on time at the SF offices! Michael also added that an improvement in the reporting of overseas/professional productions should be forthcoming in the New Year, as Ali Howarth from Alan Brodie Representations has now joined the Committee.

10. Tracy raised the idea of organising Hotel Discount schemes for members, which was well received. This is something the Committee will look into next year.

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

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

*Tracy Cutting*



*Concerts ...* featuring works by Coward and Novello and will be performed during the first half of 2002 on the EMI Classics

Following last month's announcement about Elizabeth Sharland's new book 'A Theatrical Feast' the launch event for this book will take place in the New Year. For those wishing to purchase the book details are as follows: '**A Theatrical Feast**' ISBN 0-9531930-2-0, price £12.95 publisher: Barbican Press, published on 15th November 2001.

*The Unknown Noël ...* There are still some copies

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### *Favourite Coward Quotes ...*

"I love the weight of American Sunday newspapers. Pulling them up off the floor is good for the figure."

"Time's winged chariot is beginning to goose me."

"I believe wholeheartedly in pleasure. I am very light-minded and extremely serious."

"When you've lived 63 years you are bound to pick up a bit of sophistication here and there. But I was probably sophisticated when I was five."

"The only way to enjoy life is to work. Work is much more fun than fun."

*Asked if there was anything he couldn't do, he replied:*

"I must rack my brains about that. I can't perform on a trapeze or saw ladies in half, though I've often wanted to do that."

*Someone wondered how he thought he would be remembered by future generations.*

"By my charm," he replied airily.

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## Current & Planned Productions – Professional and Amateur (All 2001 dates unless stated)

### America & Canada

**Blithe Spirit** 12 Apr – 19 May, 2002 Directed by Tim Vasen. Center Stage's Pearlstone Theater. www.centerstage.org  
Center Stage, 700 North Calvert Street, Baltimore, MD 21202 email: rgorelic@centerstage.org

**A Suite in Two Keys 5 – 17 March, 2002** Walnut Street Theatre, Independence Studio on 3 will be producing Noël Coward's compilation, Directed by Richard M. Parison, Jr. We are very excited about this production. Walnut Street Theatre is America's oldest continuously operating theatre in the English-speaking world...since 1809. Producing Artistic Director: Bernard Havard.

**Hay Fever** March 2002 Domino Theatre, Kingston, Ontario.

**Private Lives** Jan 2002 Duncan Weldon Productions/Iron Mountain Productions, Broadway

### Australasia

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

### United Kingdom

**A Talent to Amuse** *Blakeney Players Christmas show – Thursday Dec 13* 8pm £5.00 adult £2.00 child

*Thursday Jan 10* 8pm £5.00 adult £2.00 child *Saturday 5 and 12 Jan* 6.30 for 7pm supper followed by the show £15.00 *Tickets on sale from Monday 3rd Dec. Box office: 01263 712023 Open – 0900–1230 & 1400–1630 Monday – Friday. An hour with Noël Coward: A Room With a View, I'll Follow my Secret Heart, That is the End of the News, Chase Me Charlie, London Pride, The Swiss Family Whittlebott, The Piccola Marina, I Wonder what Happened to Him, Has Anybody Seen our Ship, I've Been to a marvellous Party, Someday I'll Find you, I'll See You again.* Licenced bar open before and after the show, no interval .

**Blithe Spirit** 3 to 8 Dec Chesil Theatre, Winchester

8 to 9 Dec Village Hall, Laleham

20 to 23 Mar 2002 Barton Drama Group, The Village Hall, Barton, Cambridge, Cambridgeshire

2 to 5 May 2002 St. John The Divine D.S., St. John's Church Hall, South Croydon, Surrey

24 Jan to 2 Feb 2002 Swan Theatre Company, The Swan Theatre, Worcester, Worcestershire

**Present Laughter** 28 Nov to 1 Dec Ditchling Players present at The Village Hall, Ditchling, East Sussex

27 Feb to 2 Mar The Hurlingham Club, Fulham, London.

**Hay Fever** 19 to 26 Jan 2002 Caxton Players, The Caxton Theatre, Grimsby, N.E. Lincolnshire

14 to 17 Nov The Shoreham Village Players at The Village Hall, Shoreham, Kent

**Star Quality** Current Apollo theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, West End, Telephone 020 7494 5070  
Mon–Sat 20:00. Mats Thurs 15:00 and Sat 16:00 Prices: £11.50 to £35.00

**Still Life** 5 to 8 Dec As part of Double Bill with A Chip in the Sugar by Alan Bennett. Garden Suburb Theatre. Both plays deal with much that is left unsaid in human relationships. The Director is Mandy Ribekow Evans. The venue is Upstairs at the Gatehouse, a studio theatre at the Gatehouse pub, Highgate, West Hill. Tickets are £7 Thursday and Friday 6th and 7th, and £9 on Saturday 8th December, Concessions are £2 less. Box office 020 8340 3488, leave message stating clearly which play – Coward and Bennett Double Bill by Garden Suburb Theatre.

22 Feb 2002 St. Mary's School performing at The Concert hall, Ascot, Berkshire

**Ways & Means** 21 & 22 Feb 2002 St. Mary's School performing at The Concert hall, Ascot, Berkshire

**The Marquise** Bill Kenwright has this in his future programme.

**Private Lives** Current to 6 Jan 02 Times: Tues – Sat 8pm, Sun at 4pm, Sat Mat at 3pm at: Albery Theatre, St Martin's Lane, WC2N 4AH. Tube: Leicester sq Telephone: 020 7369 1740 – with Alan Rickman (Elyot), Lindsay Duncan (Amanda), Emma Fielding (Sibyl), Adam Godley (Victor). Director Howard Davies. Design Tim Hatley. Costume Jenny Beavan. Producer Duncan Weldon & Paul Elliot for Triumph / Azenberg / Pittelman / Nederlander

8 to 13 Apr 2002 Louth Playgoers Society at the Playgoers Theatre, Louth, Lincolnshire

20 to 23 Mar 2002 Nailsworth Dramatic Society, The Town Hall, Nailsworth, Gloucestershire

**Fallen Angels** 19 to 23 Feb 2002 Ilkley players, The Wildman Theatre, Ilkley, West Yorkshire

**Design for Living** 18 to 23 Mar 2002 Talisman Theatre, Kenilworth, Warwickshire

**Brief Encounter** Sep 2002 Noël Coward / Andrew Taylor – Middle Ground Theatre Co UK Tour

**The Vortex** Spring 2002 Crucible Theatre, Sheffield

**Relative Values** 28 Jan to 31 Mar 2002 Theatre Royal Bath Productions UK Tour

**Noël & Gertie** 12 Dec – 15 Jan 2002 Noël Coward / Sheridan Morley, Salisbury Playhouse Walton and Weybridge  
Amateur Operatics Society

