



# homeCHAT

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## Graham Payn - Patron and Friend

25 April 1918 - 2 November 2005

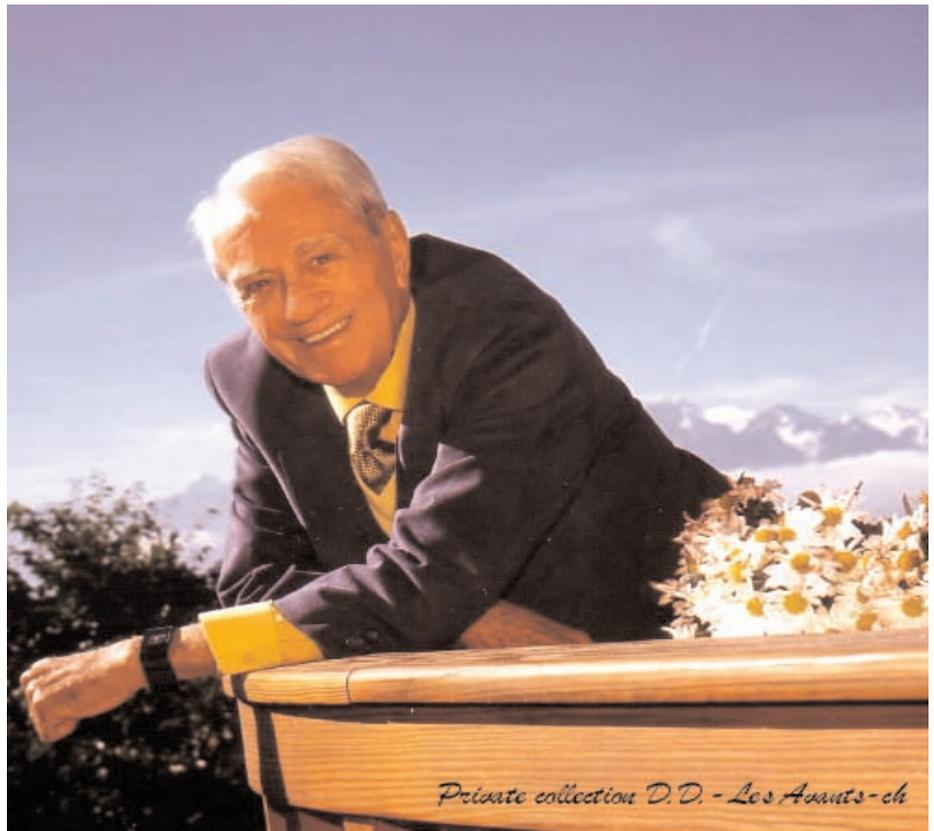
Graham Payn, lifelong friend of Noël Coward, and sole remaining Executor of Coward's Estate, died in Les Avants near Montreux, Switzerland on 2nd November 2005 at the age of 87.

Payn, who was born in South Africa on 25th April 1918, was brought to England as a young boy by his opera singer mother. There, he found early success as a boy soprano. It was at an audition for Coward's 1932 revue, *Words and Music* where he first met the man himself. Even the world-weary Coward had never before seen a 13-year old sing 'Nearer My God To Thee' while doing a tap dance and his stunned reaction was reported to be simply, 'We've got to have that kid in the show!'. It would be the first of his many Coward shows.

During the war years Payn, who was by now a professional singer and dancer specialising in West End revues, was signed by Coward for his own post-war revue, *Sigh No More*, where he achieved great success with 'Matelot', a song that was associated with him for the rest of his life. The show had another lasting legacy, as Coward's nickname for his new found friend, 'Little Lad' was derived from another song which was featured in the same revue. Following his personal success in *Words and Music*, Payn was welcomed into the Coward 'family', which included Cole Lesley, who was Coward's personal assistant, Lorne Loraine, his secretary, the designer Gladys Calthrop and actress Joyce Carey. Payn was to survive his friends by many years.

The post war years brought continuing success for Payn as he appeared in many more Coward shows including *Pacific 1860* with Mary Martin in 1946, which reopened the bomb damaged Drury Lane Theatre, *Ace of Clubs* in 1950 and *After the Ball*, Coward's musical version of Oscar Wilde's *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1954.

Although he was now enjoying a degree of professional success, Payn was



not an ambitious man and commented that, 'Funnily enough, it mattered more to Noël than it did to me. He longed for me to be a success'. He was now playing the parts Coward was too old to play, and felt that his friend's constant desire to push him into the spotlight was an unconscious desire for reincarnation.

In 1965, after playing a supporting parts in the 1960 production of *Waiting in the Wings* and the 1965 production of *Present Laughter*, Payn retired to play what would become his permanent casting - supporting actor to 'The Master'.

When Coward died peacefully at his home in Jamaica in March 1973, both Payn and Cole Lesley were with him. Much of his Jamaican property was handed over to the Jamaican Government but Payn and Lesley returned to his Swiss chalet from where Lesley administered the Coward Estate with his customary efficiency. When

Lesley died in 1980, Payn took on the role of Executor, a role he had never anticipated and always felt himself ill-qualified to play. It was a role that would gain him no column inches in the newspapers but for the next twenty five years he quietly succeeded in managing a complex estate with charm, tact, firmness and an unwavering sense of 'what Noël would have wanted'.

Throughout his stewardship of the Estate, Payn never wavered from making difficult decisions nor did he hesitate in allowing some experimentation where appropriate, believing that Noël himself would want his work to speak to today's generation. Passionate about spreading the word to future generations, he was instrumental in setting up the Noël Coward Society, as well as the Noël Coward Charitable Foundation which gives grants to artistic organizations and promotes educational projects. Payn also

promotes educational projects. Payn also campaigned for many years to have a theatre in London's West End (which he regarded as Noël's spiritual home) named after Coward. Although he did not live to see the name up in lights, he died knowing that his campaign had finally been successful and that Noël Coward's name will be attached to a West End Theatre for years to come.

*Obituary by Barry Day  
Photograph by Dany Dasto*

## Funeral Address at the Funeral of Graham Philip Payn

in St John's Church Montreux  
on Monday 7 November 2005

It is my privilege, as priest of St John's Church, to officiate at the Funeral of Graham Payn who died on the 2nd November. I am grateful to Dany Dasto for all he did in making the arrangements, to Monsieur Yves Scyboz, the Funeral Director, and to Mrs Sandra Darra, the honorary British Consul for drawing my attention to books about Noël Coward, Graham and Cole Lesley.

I believe that a Funeral has to have three elements at least.

1. A Funeral needs to be a realistic occasion, when we bring our sadness to God as well as our memories associated with a much-loved person. We do that today for Graham. All of you here will have known Graham and will have a sense of loss because of his death. Graham's death is also a reminder that one day we shall all die. We need to be realistic about that truth too. But now we shall miss Graham while our hearts are also full of thanksgiving for him. Someone once said: "The greater the love, the deeper the loss." That is true of those who knew and loved Graham best.

2. This needs to be a human occasion, when we remember Graham and all he has meant to us. We remember his personality and friendships, and his gifts as an actor, and his devotion to Noël Coward and, since Noël's death, his devotion to the Noël Coward Society and Foundation. He became a member of Noël Coward's "family," and this "family" remained at the heart of their lives and friendships. Cole Lesley in his biography "The Life of Noël Coward" has wonderful descriptions of how Graham

came to be part of the "family" and I rely heavily on that work for the comments that follow.

In 1945 Graham was invited to take part in Noël's revue, *Sigh No More*, and Cole describes him as follows: "Everyone who knew him liked him, and his innate good humour and sense of fun were infectious. His looks and personality were charming, he had enough height and his figure was good. On stage he used his light baritone voice well and appealingly and his dancing combined vigour with grace. He was quick and intelligent although his I.Q. as such was not spectacularly high; Noël more than once (I hope I can be forgiven for quoting this out loud in church!) calling him an illiterate little sod to his face. Noël's circle of friends was bright, open and candid enough, but Graham brought even more fresh air into it." It is also an interesting fact associated with *Sigh No More* that Noël wrote the famous song 'Matelot' for Graham which, "with its haunting plaintive melody and nostalgically tender words, proved to be one of the high spots and best-remembered songs" in that revue. After their coming together Cole wrote later about Graham: "All the qualities glimpsed at first – his enthusiasm, honesty, generosity of spirit and pocket, his kindness and his love – have increased and remained steadfast for thirty years."

In Richard Briers' *Coward and Company* there is a further delightful description of that production of *Sigh No More* where we read: "Graham Payn was asked by Coward after one performance to give a little more charm to one of his numbers. The following night he really went to town with it and had barely finished and reached the wings when the pass-door flew open and Coward burst through to tell him wittingly, "I said a little more charm wouldn't hurt – I didn't ask you to be Mary Rose on skates!" "

It is important to mention how Noël Coward and his "family" came to have a house in Switzerland. It was in 1959 that the discovery was made of their house in Les Avants. "We had house-hunted sporadically for five months but had, if we had known it, got off on the wrong foot at the wrong end of the lake. Because of 'U.N.O. What,' as Noël called it, prices had rocketed all around Geneva and towards the end of May in near despair we settled for a house in the village of Céligny, in gently sloping

fields just above the lake. True, we have Richard and Sybil Burton as near neighbours, which was a pleasing prospect, but the house wasn't really "Noël" and was in such spanking fine condition – somebody else's good taste – that it would have been no fun at all to move into. . . . On the morning when Noël had promised to give either a Yes or a No, a cutting from the Daily Telegraph arrived unbidden through the post from Leslie Smith, Sir Dingo's second in London, of a chalet for sale above Montreux at the extreme other end of the lake, with ten bedrooms, four and a half acres, and going for twelve thousand pounds.

So it was that Noël and the "family" "caught the tiny toy railway-train that twirls up and up from Montreux to Les Avants. . . . The little village drowns in the hot spring sunshine in a blanket of Alpine flowers spread over the lower slopes of the mountains which half encircle it, and above the village stood the massive chalet. Scenically it was sensationally well placed; Lac Lemman lay two thousand feet below and on the far side of the lake the French Alps towered. The terrain of the chalet consisted of four large terraced gardens, filled with wild strawberries, lilacs, gooseberry and blackcurrant bushes and a burgeoning English herbaceous border." Of the chalet itself, Cole Lesley was a little dubious. "Although not exactly ugly, it was after all 1899 Swiss, but the more perceptive Noël quickly whispered, 'The rooms are very well proportioned and the ceilings lovely.' The staircases were built with the gentlest, shallowest tread. 'The house seems solid to me and we shall never find anything better for the money. Let's say yes.'"

All of these descriptions tell us something of Graham as well as of Noël and Cole, and they tell us something also of the remarkable life they established in Les Avants. We thank God for Graham and for his life and personality.

3. This also needs to be a joyful and hopeful occasion. Graham died last Wednesday (2nd November – All Souls' Day) in his 88th year having just had lunch with Dany. It is good to remember that Graham had had Dany's company that day, and they had enjoyed lunch together – possibly the best meal he had had for some time. After lunch he had a nap and it seems just went quietly "to sleep." That is the best way to go! The last words Noël spoke to Graham and to Cole, the day before he died in Jamaica,

last words Noël spoke to Graham and to Cole, the day before he died in Jamaica, were as simple and for them as touching as he could have wished. He called – ‘Good night, my darlings, I’ll see you tomorrow.’ Noël was buried there in Jamaica. Subsequently, on May 24th, 1973, a Service of Thanksgiving for the life of Noël Coward was held at St Martin-in-the-Fields, with its ages of traditional association with the Royal Navy and the Theatre. The Service was conducted by another Williams, the Reverend Austen Williams (no relation!) then Vicar of St Martin’s. “To quote Sir John Betjeman, ‘this beautiful, great eighteenth-century theatre of a church in the heart of London. Cheerful, wide, wel-

coming English baroque; it is precise, elegant and well-ordered. Like Noël.’ The two hymns sung then were ‘For all the saints, who from their labours rest’ and, as a token of Noël’s fifty year ties with the United States, ‘The Battle Hymn of the Republic’, with its many ‘Glory Alleluias’.

After the Service Cole and Graham returned to their hotel to find the telephone was ringing. “It was Dame Rebecca West, her voice eager and happy with enthusiasm. ‘Wasn’t it lovely,’ she said. ‘Do you know what I liked best of all? That packed congregation of friends, all singing Alleluia for Noël at the tops of their voices.’”

Well, I cannot put it better! We thank

God for Graham and we have Alleluia for him in our hearts. “Good night, my darlings, I’ll see you tomorrow.” To put it in the words of St Thomas More (the words are printed on the back of the Order of Service): I paraphrase – “Pray for Graham, and for Noël and for all their friends, that we may merrily meet in heaven.”

Quotations from “The Life of Noël Coward” by Cole Lesley (Penguin Books 1976) and from “Richard Briers’ Coward and Company” by Richard Briers (Futura Publications 1987)

*The Venerable John Williams  
Archdeacon of Switzerland  
Chaplain of St John’s Church,  
Montreux*

# ‘Little Lad’

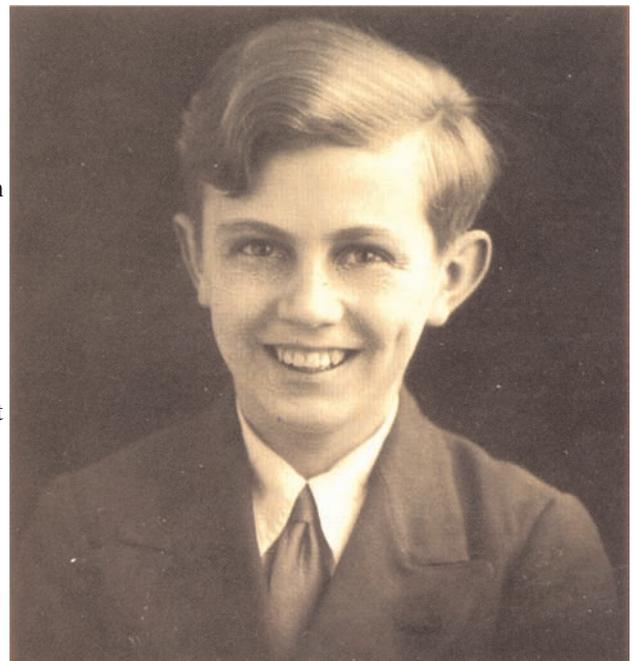
by *Dominic Vlasto*

You may say that the phenomenon of the boy treble as a professional performer is stronger in England than anywhere else in the world, and this is largely due to the fact that boys have had a semi-professional musical role in this country in a tradition stretching back unbroken for over four hundred years. Music-making in the cathedrals and collegiate chapels has involved boys working to a high musical level in the very midst of the most “traditional” part of our religion and culture, and there is no getting away from the fact that this has given British choral music, generally, the highest worldwide profile. Nowhere else in Europe do they do it so much or so variedly or to such generally high standards.

I can speak with enthusiasm of my own personal experience of having been a choirboy at King’s Cambridge. At the time, it quickly becomes the most normal thing in the world, just what we do, all that dressing up in Eton suits, presenting yourself in funny clothes day after day in public and being expected to use your wits and your voice in performance. You certainly don’t care much why you are doing it, but you know that you are always going to have your best expected of you. And there’s a lot of stimulation in stuff like concerts, touring, TV and radio broadcasts with all its attendant technical paraphernalia.

There is also a tradition of Boy Actors, whose great flowering was of

course in the Shakespearean age. Much of the humour and tension, not to mention the precise language, of *Twelfth Night* is predicated on the knowledge that the girls’ parts are actually played by boys, and you get the situation of a boy playing a girl playing a boy. Of course, we know (perhaps too well?) that being a boy actor was Noël’s training, and that he often celebrated its influence. In modern times one thinks, perhaps, of those boy actors who have made their biggest impact in film. Of these, I would single out River Phoenix as an exceptional talent throughout the sadly brief span of years his presence graced the earth. There was never



*Graham Payn*

anything false in any of that boy’s performances, and if you don’t already know the film *Stand By Me*, may I urge you to go get the DVD?

In both cases, the musical and the film-theatrical, one is conscious that there is a special richness in a boy’s voice in those last years of childhood, which in itself bespeaks a sort of tragedy, since an adult audience knows that this beautiful instrument is ephemeral, and doomed to and by puberty. And of course there is no guarantee that in adulthood there will be any instrument worth using, or charm remaining.

His voice was the reason Graham Payn came to England, aged 11. His mother had apparently accepted that the boy’s voice was



*River Phoenix and Wil Wheaton*

accepted that the boy's voice was their best chance of fame and fortune. And there was success, often in the shape of concert work, including at the Kingsway Hall and Queen's Hall; but in those days they used to put on a stage show in between the films, and Graham also did a lot of cinema work. "I often did three, sometimes five, shows a day doubling at a different cinema", he recalled in 1999: "The audiences loved it because they liked my voice and it was quite a rare event for them to see a boy soprano on the stage. I would go on to a great round of applause in my Eton suit and white collar. I also appeared in the variety shows and it all used to go down very well. With my mother as manager, I was singing like mad!"

Several boy sopranos active in the 1930s, including Graham, are featured on a recent Amphion CD, 'The Better Land Volume 2'. Graham is by a good lick the oldest of these boys, having been at least fifteen when the two tracks, 'The Hymn That I Sang As a Boy' (very "churchy") and 'Meadowsweet' (with a feeling of rural folksiness about it) were recorded, a year or two after his appearance in *Words and Music*. His technique certainly compares well within the norms of those days – a straining towards vibrato and a "full on in your face" approach is evident in all these boys, almost as if they were aiming towards opera. This is a clutch of boys whose styles range from the light and popular (Graham) to the comparative emotionlessness of the church musician (Thomas Meddings); but every single one of these boys sounds wonderfully confident about what they're doing, despite their obvious differences in timbre and technique and control.

It would be unfair to stand these lads



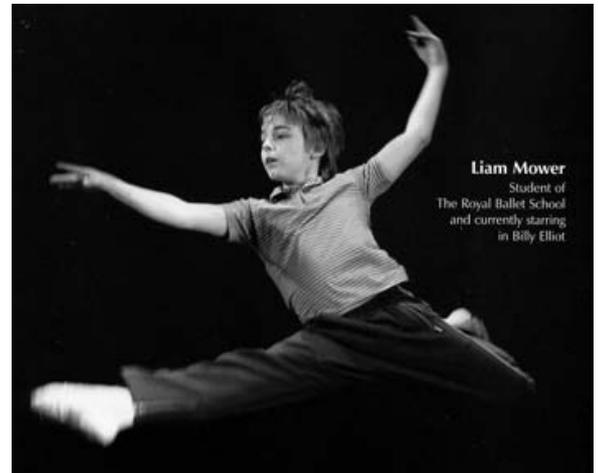
*Billy Gilman*

up to more recent competition, when the quality of the original recordings is so limited, and sometimes still horribly obscured by hiss and crackle. What you do end up realising is that there was plenty of confident showmanship and charm and lilt and naturally unforced good pitch sense in these boys' voices, long, long before Aled Jones was thrust upon an unsuspecting mass-media market in the 1980s.

If forced to choose the two most outstanding boys voices I've heard in my lifetime, I would pinpoint two extremes: in a pop style, Billy Gilman in the US (recording in around 2000); I'm afraid the music is formulaic and more-or-less banal, if very professionally produced, and the lyrics often much worse, sometimes disgracefully kiddie-sentimental, but the boy has a truly sensational voice with incredible control and perfect pitch. At the other end of the stylistic scale, I would single out Paul Phoenix. Many will remember his voice singing the theme music for the TV spy series, 'Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy' in the late 1970s. He was one of the choristers at St. Paul's at the time, under Barry Rose, and when adult became one of the King's Singers. He had a wonderful alto register towards the end of his boyhood, but throughout it he was truly pure-voiced, and with an uncannily mature and controlled approach to the classical repertoire, backed up with astonishing pitch sense. Barry Rose knew perfectly well that, in Paul Phoenix, he had a voice and talent heard only once in a lifetime if one is lucky, and took pains to ensure the boy was well-recorded, as indeed he did over a period of time with the entire boys' choir; but this led to horrible ructions with the Cathedral authorities on account of their feeling that Rose was going too commercial, and spotlighting the boys in a way that was not thought compatible with their primary function. I'm with Rose on this one.

Graham as a boy is not in the Gilman/Phoenix league, and lacks the extra, "special", ill-defined something that can only be called a natural sense

of musicianship which marks out these exceptional talents; but he is certainly well-placed in the "second" tier of competence and accomplishment. There's a touch of frail magic in his voice and an instinctual expressiveness which makes it easy to understand why he was loved by his audiences. It's certainly a shame that so little of his soprano work is available –



*Liam Mower as 'Billy Elliot'*

though more exists in the archives of Pathe Gazette, for whom he filmed several pieces.

It is apposite indeed, in the context of this discussion, that the hottest theatrical ticket in Town at the moment is *Billy Elliott*. It pushes all the same emotional/theatrical buttons that have always made good performances by kids into easy 'hits'. Like today's young Billy Elliotts, Graham's good fortune was that he was encouraged by his mother, given excellent training and put into a position where he could shine. He shone in the right place and the right time, and in adulthood it brought him continuing work of the most fascinating and rewarding nature, without him ever being conceited or pompous. I am sure that both Noël and Graham would join in with the refrain, "Long live the boy performer!"

Graham Payn: Amphion PHI CD 159 (2000): 'The Better Land Volume 2'

Paul Phoenix: Guild GRCD 7024 (1988/1994): 'Jubilate! Golden Favourites from St. Paul's Cathedral'

Billy Gilman: Sony CD 670550 2 (2000): 'One Voice'

*Dominic Vlasto*

## Noël and The Lunts

Noël and the Lunts were reunited at Ten Chimneys on November 3rd.



Jim Pickering, Angela Iannone, Barry Day, Richard Halverson

Ten Chimneys – the Lunts' family home in Genesee Depot, Wisconsin – has been lovingly restored and opened to the public as an historic site. Next door a conference centre and performance space has been constructed and it was here that an audience of some 150 saw the premiere of Barry Day's entertainment, "Dear Noël ...". "Dear Alfred ...", "Dear Lynn ...". The piece tells the story of their 50 year friendship, drawn mainly from their correspondence.

Noël, Alfred and Lynn were played by local actors from Milwaukee. Richard Halverson played Noël, Jim Pickering was Alfred and Angela Iannone was Lynn. Barry Day was the Narrator.

On the following day there was

a dinner for forty Board members of the Ten Chimneys Foundation and friends.

Before the meal Barry Day made a short presentation on Noël's life and works.

The Foundation intends to mount a Coward exhibition, probably in 2006.



Ken Starrett

## FIVE FLOWERS IN A COWARD BOUQUET

On October 6, 2005 Society members were treated to another in a series of screenings at New York City's Museum of Television & Radio. The evening consisted of five television programs featuring Noël Coward, his friends, and his work.

The first program of the evening was a portion of *The Lunts: A Life in the Theatre*. This was a 1980 interview by television director George Schaefer with Lynn Fontanne who shared her memories of Coward. Following was Coward's surprise appearance as a mystery guest on the popular game show, *What's My Line?* This was in January, 1964 during the Broadway run of *The Girl Who Came to Supper*. Next was two numbers featuring Coward and Norman Wisdom from Richard Rodgers' 1967 television special, *Androcles and the Lion*. Coward played Caesar in this musical adaptation of the Shaw play. The evening continued with a segment from the extraordinary 1970 interview on *The Dick Cavett Show*.

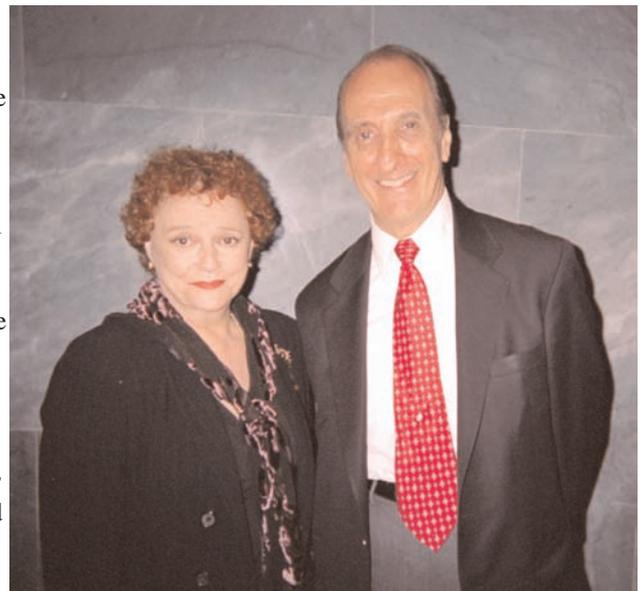
The last selection was two half hour programs from the 1976 series, *Camera*

*Three*.

*Mad About the Boy:*

*Noël Coward – A Celebration*, starred George Rose, Carole Shelley, Jean Marsh and Kristopher Tabori performing musical and dramatic excerpts from the works of Noël Coward.

Our special guest for the evening was Ms. Carole Shelley, who has had a distinguished career in the theatre with appearances in such plays as the current hit musical, *Wicked*, *Noises Off*, *Norman Conquest*, and *Cabaret*. She won the Tony Award for her stunning performance in *The Elephant Man*. No stranger to the works of Coward, she has been seen on Broadway in *Noël Coward's Sweet Potato* and a production of *Hay Fever*. She graciously spoke with the audience about her experiences in the theatre, about George Rose, and *Mad*



Carole Shelley and Ken Starrett

*About the Boy*. She told of a telegram Coward sent her on the opening night of *The Odd Couple*.

"From one limey to another ..."

She treasures it to this day.

Ken Starrett

### Heather Hooper

The Society was saddened recently to hear of the death of our member Heather Hooper. She was married to the distinguished Judge Anthony Hooper, and had been a life-long friend of Norman

Hackforth. Indeed, it was Heather and Tony who provided love and support, from their nearby Kentish home, to Norman through his bereavement of his beloved wife, Pammie, and his own subsequent ill-health and death eighteen months later. Heather had been delighted

to join the Society at our Steve Ross event at Pizza-on-the-Park two years ago, and to hear some of Norman's music being performed there. She will be sadly missed by all who knew her sunny, positive, loving and forgiving disposition.

# THE COMEDY OF COWARD FES-

October/November, 2005 at The Theatre Museum, Covent Garden

The Noël Coward Foundation supported this festival, consisting of three events at the Theatre Museum, arranged by Malcolm Jones.

1. 'Playing Coward', Sunday 9th October, 2005

A roundtable conversation with Gyles Brandreth (Gyles) in the Chair and guests Penelope Keith (Penelope), Thea Sharrock (Thea) and Richard Briers (Richard). I hope the protagonists won't mind my referring to them by christian name in this article.

The studio theatre was packed for this discussion on the challenges and pleasures of playing and directing Coward's plays.

Gyles began by introducing Penelope, who has played in eight Coward plays and Richard, who appeared in the 1965 production of *Present Laughter*, as the young author, Roland Maule with Nigel Patrick as Garry Essendine. He is also the author of the anecdotal book *Coward and Company*. Thea "one of the hottest directors around", who directed the Theatre Royal, Bath, production of *Blithe Spirit* in the Summer of 2004, with Penelope as Madame Arcati, which later transferred to the Savoy Theatre and also the Bath production this year, of *Private Lives*. She has also directed *Heroes* currently playing at Wyndham's Theatre.

Gyles explained that the Theatre Museum was a part of the Victoria and Albert Museum and that we were here to

talk about Noël Coward, whose own history was in many ways also the history of Twentieth Century theatre. Coward had put his stamp on each decade. It was important to remember he was foremost a performer who wrote plays, frequently with a marvellous part for himself.



People today, who were not even alive when Coward died, know what a Noël Coward person is. One hundred years from now NC will be up there with the likes of Congrieve, Sheridan, Shaw and Wilde – as one of the great playwrights.

Richard told the story of the 1965 production of *Present Laughter*. Noël came along to watch a run through. Richard was terrified and wary of being given notes, which Noël had said would be "only tinies". They played the scene between Garry and Roland Maule at 170 mph. Afterwards Noël did the famous finger wagging and told Richard "you frighten me to death". Noël demonstrated the part where Garry (Nigel Patrick) eagerly throws his arms around

Joanna and says "My darling". ..... looking at his watch, behind her back as he does so. Richard said it was a privilege to have seen the great man in action; he performed with such a light touch, "but became somewhat irritable with me, I think I was too nervous for him".

Richard told a story about an actress Noël didn't like, of whom he

remarked – "She fell on her head when she was 40".

Penelope said she longs for the sort of wit that existed in the past and which seems to be missing in the present day. Her favourite story was when Noël got off the plane in Australia and one of the reporters asked him to say something funny. "Kangaroo" he replied.

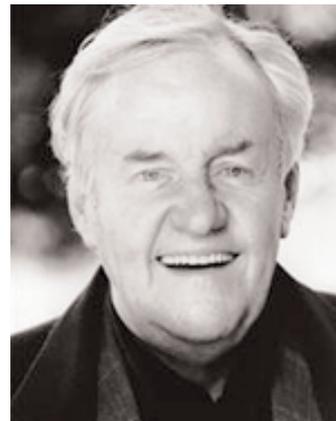
Gyles said that wit should be served lightly, like caviar and remarked that Coward's

writing is not epigrammatic. The single words in the plays are more important.

Thea was asked about her approach to directing Coward. What was the greatest challenge? How to handle the wit, was her reply. Thea had not seen any Coward plays before she was given

the job of directing *Blithe Spirit*. She had thought that the plays were "not for her generation". However, on reading them she realised that the wit comes off the page immediately. How wonderful it was to work with someone who really understood wit and comedy. Also, she appreciated the well made play, with a beginning, middle and an end. Thea had found it amazing that just one word in Coward's dialogue could do so much – Budleigh Salterton – as in "nobody but a monumental bore would have thought of having a honeymoon at Budleigh Salterton". Thea felt that sometimes a whole scene could hang on just one word and that ultimately Coward wanted to entertain.

Penelope commented on the word 'comic' and that sitcom was now a pejorative word. To say nowadays that Noël was a great comic playwright was to devalue him. He was a great playwright.



Gyles said that all the characters are real believable people and not just vehicles for the witty lines. Gyles asked us if Noël was a victim of his own versatility. There was a unanimous "no" - his other extensive gifts, including his great musical talent do not devalue the currency, but "add to his genius".

Gyles took us back to *The Vortex*, the angry young man. Does *The Vortex* still stand up? Coward concentrated on light comedy as that was his metier. However, considering his serious plays, *Still Life* was considered a masterpiece and the film it turned into *Brief Encounter* – one of the most popular films of all times.

What do Coward plays demand that the others don't? Thea said the rhythm and pace is all consuming and all important. One must get the rhythm right.

She had seen the film, starring Rex Harrison, before her production and had not liked it, particularly because "it had spliced the text and altered the rhythm".

Penelope agreed with Thea about the rhythm – "don't forget Coward was a musician as well. The Coward rhythm dictates itself to you if you give full value to the text". Richard added that the plays are very difficult to act. Penelope agreed



dictates itself to you if you give full value to the text". Richard added that the plays are very difficult to act. Penelope agreed and said that many good light comedy actors could play *Hamlet*, but few Hamlets could do the light comedy.

Thea also thought that the plays should be played as period pieces. The costumes look marvellous and the actors hold themselves differently when wearing them. As a director she follows Coward's own intentions for the play and in *Blithe Spirit* there are whammy stage directions at the end. Thea decided to really go for them and to go for exactly what Coward wanted. He was a master craftsman. Penelope agreed that one cannot change the period. They are comedies of manners. We now have different manners. Gyles added that this meant manners in the broadest sense – the whole social mores and behaviour have changed.

Stefan Bednarczyk and Gyles had done a gay production of *Private Lives* many years ago. Richard was aghast, but not wishing to use an expletive in front of the audience, he turned to Gyles and exclaimed "BUDLEIGH SALTERTON".

Gyles told Moira Lister's story about an experience of playing with Coward himself.

A knock on the door was expected in the script, but it failed to happen. Noël was furious, but continued, in character, speaking to Moira – completely away from the script – "I understand you were brought up in South Africa" Yes, yes, (sotto voce – "keep in character"). Tell me about Afrikaans. Moira had to talk to him about Afrikaans for about six minutes. Eventually the knock on the door came – Noël said: "I am so sorry I am busy. I am having a wonderful lesson in Afrkaans."

Penelope said she thought *Blithe Spirit* and *Hay Fever* have survived the best. *Hay Fever* was most difficult as it is about absolutely nothing, but nonetheless a brilliant play. She compared plays to food. A light soufflé could be just perfect if the moment was right. Richard added that in *Hay Fever* the theatrical main family were monsters, but the real people were boring. Monstrous central character family compared with boring real people. Penelope said that it would be difficult to cast Sorel and the boy now. It was hard to find actors with that precociousness, but who still retain the innocence which one had before the

Second World War.

Gyles said that only 30 years ago Nigel Patrick had told him what the star would be wearing to the first read through. "Dame Celia will not be wearing a hat on the first day". Everyone in the cast was introduced in their pecking order. The girls were told not to wear jeans to rehearsal. Thea added that the ladies in *Blithe Spirit* had rehearsed in skirts and high heels.

It was now about 3.p.m. and we had been entertained with such panache by our panel for about one hour. The audience was loving the spontaneity and fun of the afternoon. Gyles then opened the proceedings up to the floor for question and answer.

Someone asked what the panel considered to be the weakest play. Penelope said *After the Ball* and told the story about Mary Ellis, which Dominic Vlasto wrote about in *Home Chat*, dated August 2003. Ken Sephton (NCS member) wished to defend Mary Ellis. "Yes, some of the music had to be cut as her voice wasn't up to it, but the audience on that first night enjoyed it and did not think anything was wrong".

Paul Webb, (NCS member and author of *Ivor Novello – A Portrait of a Star*) reminded us that Ivor and Noël had been great rivals. Noël was bitchy about Ivor. In 1951 Ivor was gone and Noël felt free to experiment with a musical play – *After the Ball* and even used Ivor's own leading ladies – Mary Ellis and Vanessa Lee.

Gyles's favourite read was the *Diaries*. After a terrible day he loved to turn to them and read Noël saying that he had "decided to rise above it". Gyles had visited Chalet Coward. It was so cosy. There were several pictures of Kings and Queens – and royalty too.

Richard's wife, Anne Briers, was in the audience. She recalled a party after *Present Laughter*. Earlier in the evening she was at *The Killing of Sister George* and Noël too was in the audience. He had behaved so charmingly to Anne when they both went backstage to see the cast and had put his arm around her shoulder and taken her down to his car to escort her to the other theatre. Anne said he oozed charisma and star quality and by the time they reached his car, she had fallen in love with him. She recalled a wonderful, kindly side to Noël.

Michael Imison and Alan Brodie talked about the re-naming of the Albery, where Coward had played in *I'll Leave it*

to *You* in 1920 (then The New Theatre). Several people had not heard that the Albery was to become The Noël Coward Theatre, in 2006 and were delighted.

This wonderful afternoon ended with two amusing stories. Gyles described the incredibly gory scene in the 1955 Peter Brook production of *Titus Andronicus* at the RSC, with Vivien Leigh as Lavinia, who had had her hands cut off and her tongue too, to silence her. She tries to write the names of her attackers with a staff in her mouth, guided by her bloody stumps. On the night when Noël was in the audience, Vivien had dropped the staff into the orchestra pit. Noël went round briskly afterwards. Vivien was somewhat mortified, but Noël's first words were – "tut, tut, butter stumps".

Richard told us about playing in a Feydeau Farce when Noël had gone round to see him afterwards.. "You know, you are very, very very funny. Probably one of the best farceurs we have, because you never hang about". Not quite the attribute Richard had hoped for. A huge welcome from the Society to Richard, who is now our very youngest member of NCS – in terms of joining date!

Malcolm Jones summed up and thanked the Panel for giving us a wonderful afternoon.

**Barbara Longford**

*Barbara will be writing about the other two events in this series - 'Coward in Love – a masterclass with Christopher Luscombe', Sunday 23rd October, 2005 and 'The A-Z of Coward' (a pocket review, devised by Dick Vosburgh), in the next edition of Home Chat.*

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## Theatre Museum Covent Garden

For those unaware of it - it is worth recording that the Coward collection at the Theatre Museum contains a selection of The Master's personal and professional items most of which were donated by Graham Payn. Entrance to the museum is free. It contains a number of collections of theatre material available to browsers and researchers. Aside from its programme of activities it boasts *The National Video Archive of Performance* a viewable video collection of past theatre productions. It also contains a range of exhibition items and educational facilities for students young and old.

## THEATRE ITEMS FOR THE 'NOËL COWARD THEATRE'

## Sir Cameron Mackintosh Seeks Coward Items...

Sir Cameron Mackintosh is asking for your help in finding theatre posters, paintings and photographs from the following theatres that could be copied and reproduced as facsimile items in the newly created 'Noël Coward Theatre'. He is looking specifically for items from those theatres managed by *Delfont Mackintosh Theatres*. Listed below are the productions and plays that are being sought.

If you can help please contact  
Lisa Foster at:

Alan Brodie Representation,  
6th Floor, Fairgate House,  
78 New Oxford Street,  
London WC1A 1HB  
Tel: +44 (0) 20 7079 7990  
Fax: +44 (0) 20 7079 7999  
email:lisa@alanbrodie.com

**Globe/Gielgud Theatre**

*Fallen Angels*, 21 April 1925 (158 performances) with Tallulah Bankhead  
*Biography*, play by S.N. Behrman, produced by Noël Coward, starred Laurence Olivier, 25 April 1934

*Fumed Oak*, revived for a special matinee in aid of the Actors' Orphanage, 5 July 1940 with John Gielgud as Henry Gow

*Hands Across the Sea*, revived for a special matinee in aid of the Actors' Orphanage, 5 July 1940 with John Gielgud as Commander Peter Gilpin and Beatrice Lillie as Lady Maureen Gilpin  
*The Globe Revue*, Coward wrote lyrics and music for 'Kingston by Pass' and 'Bad Times Are Just Around the Corner', opened 10 July 1952 (235 performances)  
*After The Ball*, musical play by Noël Coward, 10 June 1954 (188 performances)

*Nude with Violin*, 7 November 1956, directed by John Gielgud and Noël Coward (painting used when the play opened in Dublin caused a sensation and was replaced for the London opening)  
*Blithe Spirit*, 23 July 1970 with Patrick Cargill, Phyllis Calvert and Beryl Reid  
*Private Lives*, 2 July 1973 (transfer from Queen's)

*Design for Living*, 4 August 1982 with Ian Ogilvy, Maria Aitken and Gary Bond  
*Present Laughter*, 23 June 1993 with Tom Conti & Jenny Seagrove (212 performances). Photographer: Tristram Kenton

*Design for Living*, 20 February 1995 with Rupert Graves

*Song at Twilight*, 12 October 1999

**New/Albery Theatre**

*I'll Leave It To You*, 21 July 1920 (Coward's first produced play. He also played the leading role of Bobbie Dermott) (37 performances)

*The Constant Nymph*, 1926 (Coward played Lewis Dodd for a month. His role was taken over by John Gielgud when NC became ill prior to leaving for NY). Photographed by Lenare.

*Then and Now*, matinee in aid of the Sadlers Wells Fund, 26 April '1927.

Coward wrote *Pretty Prattle*, a night club scene and cabaret

*Look After Lulu*, 8 September 1959 (100 performances) with Vivien Leigh as Lulu  
*Hay Fever* with Maria Aitken and John Standing, 24 November 1992

*Private Lives*, award winning production with Alan Rickman and Lindsay Duncan, opened 4 October 2001

**Queen's Theatre**

*All Clear*, revue partially written by Coward, 20 December 1939 (162 performances)

Coward appeared in *Golden Drama The Best of the Modern British Stage* presented by ATC, 31 January 1965

*Present Laughter*, 21 April 1965 with Nigel Patrick, Phyllis Calvert, Graham Payn and Richard Briers. Photographed by Angus McBean

*Suite in Three Keys*, 14 April 1966. The Three Keys were:

*A Song at Twilight* in which Coward played Hugo Latymer for 64 performances, *Shadows of The Evening*, Coward was George Hilgay, 60 performances  
*Come into the Garden Maud*, Coward was Verner Conklin, 60 performances  
*Private Lives*, 14 September 1972 (with Maggie Smith and Robert Stephens)  
*Hay Fever*, 18 October 1983 starring Penelope Keith and Moray Watson

**Prince of Wales Theatre**

Played the role of Cannard in *The Great Name*, September 1911

Played the role of Jack Morrison in *The Happy Family* by Cecil Aldin and Adrian Ross, December 1916

*The Co-Optimists*, opened 12.10.1922.

Coward wrote the lyrics of *There May Be Days*, the song opened part II of the show.

**Charlot's Revue, 1924**

Coward made a number of contributions including: music for 'That'll Be Very Useful Later On'.

Words and music for 'A Scotch Interlude', Miss Fancy Robinson sang a selection of Noël Coward songs, Lyrics and music for 'Specially for You', A sketch called 'Love, Life and Laughter'.

**Charlot's Revue, 1925**

Coward's songs included 'There's Life in the Old Girl Yet' sung by Beatrice Lillie 'Parisian Pierrot' with Gertrude Lawrence 'Sentiment' sung by Peter Haddon  
In July 1925 the sketches were changed and included 'Early Mourning' (sketch from *London Calling*) with Gertrude Lawrence. In Sept 1925 the sketches were changed again and included 'Carrie' (song from *London Calling*) sung by Gertrude Lawrence.

**Strand/Novello Theatre**

Played the role of Courtney Borner in *Scandal* by Cosmo Hamilton, December 1918.

**Wyndhams Theatre**

*Mademoiselle* by Jacques Deval, opened 15 September, 1936, produced by Noël Coward. Starred Greer Garson

"The theatre should be treated with respect. The theatre is a wonderful place, a house of strange enchantment, a temple of illusion. What it most emphatically is not and never will be is a scruffy, ill-lit, fumed-oak drill hall serving as a temporary soap box for political propaganda." - *Sir Noël Coward*

NOËL COWARD BIRTHDAY  
WALK IN TEDDINGTON

Friday 16 December 2005

A correction to the details of this walk given in the last Home Chat - the walk **starts** at Teddington Station - it takes the route to Noël's birthplace in Waldegrave Road and into the High Street to the Landmark Arts Centre then on to Bushy Park and to the Hampton Hill Playhouse for a complimentary glass of sherry.

## THE SOCIETY'S ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

IN LONDON

Saturday 17 December 2005

The Annual General meeting of the Society takes place at The Theatre Museum, Covent Garden prior to the planned Birthday Celebrations in London on Saturday 17th December at the Theatre Royal Drury Lane and afterwards at The Ivy restaurant for our Annual Lunch. The Theatre Museum is in Russell Street, Covent Garden, London, WC2E 7PR. Nearest Tube station is Covent Garden, British Rail Stations: Waterloo, Charing Cross, Buses: to Strand or Aldwych.

Members are invited to join us for the AGM and contribute to the annual review of the Society's activities and to discuss what we might do next year.



The meeting starts at 10.30 am and will be finished in time for members to walk to The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane by 11.45 am to take part in the flower-laying celebration with Dame Maggie Smith. Coffee will be provided at the AGM with wine and soft drinks at The Theatre Royal.

### Agenda for the meeting:

- Chairman: Barbara Longford  
Clerk: Stephen Greenman
1. Welcome and Apologies for Absence.
  2. Reports  
Chairman - Barbara Longford  
General Secretary - Stephen Greenman  
Publications - John Knowles
  3. The Society's Constitution, Committee Structure and Election Process
  4. Minutes of the last meeting, held on Saturday 11th December, 2004
  5. Open discussion on this year's activities and proposals for the future.
  6. Any Other Business

Date of Next Meeting:

Saturday 16th December, 2006

We look forward to seeing you there!

## BLITHE ACTRESS DIES AT 95

Constance Cummings, the Seattle-born actress who made a name for herself on stage and screen in the U.S. and England, died Nov. 23 in Oxfordshire, England, at age 95, newspapers in Britain report.

The actress won a 1979 Tony Award for Best Actress in a Play for portraying a stroke victim whose world — and speech — is broken and fragmented in Arthur Kopit's *Wings*.

Ms. Cummings was born Constance Halverstadt. Her father was a lawyer. Her mother's maiden name was Cummings.

She made her stage debut as the Prostitute in a San Diego stock production of *Seventh Heaven* in 1926. She toured in the chorus of the Gershwin musical *Oh, Kay!* in 1928 and made her Broadway debut in the chorus of the Gershwins' *Treasure Girl*. Other Broadway credits include *The Little Show*, *This Man's Town*, *June Moon*, *Madame Bovary*, *One-Man Show*, *Accent on Youth*. She made her London debut as Alice Overton in the Repertory Players production of *Sour Grapes* in 1934.

Her motion picture credits include

Harold Lloyd's *Movie Crazy*, *Broadway Thru a Keyhole*, *Glamour*, *Looking for Trouble*, *Washington Merry-go-round*, *American Madness*, *The Criminal Code*,

and Noël Coward's *Blithe Spirit*, directed by David Lean, among many other movies and TV appearances. England embraced her work, and she was a major star of the British stage.

She starred as Mary Tyrone opposite Laurence Olivier in a National Theatre staging of *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, which was also seen in a TV version. She was lauded for her work as

Martha in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in England in 1964.

She met her future husband, British playwright Benn Wolfe Levy, while in Hollywood.

She would appear in (and hone her stage skills) in his plays. They wed in 1933 and later had a son and a daughter. Her husband died in 1973. Ms.

Cummings was made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire in 1974.

She is survived by her son and daughter.

Details from [www.playbill.com](http://www.playbill.com)



## Bittersweet and Comic, A Marvelous Party Toasts Coward at Northlight in Illinois

Northlight Theatre is readying its engagement of the world premiere co-production of *A Marvelous Party: The Noël Coward Celebration*, to begin Dec. 7 in Skokie, Illinois.

Geva Theatre in Rochester presented the first bow of the developing work earlier this fall, serving the delicious words and winsome melodies of Coward.



Stories drawn from Coward's writings are included in the show. Some tweaks and changes will be made to the show before the Northlight bow, Northlight artistic director BJ Jones told Playbill.com.

With the permission of the Coward Estate, the fresh revue was devised by David Ira Goldstein, Carl Danielsen, Mark Anders, and Patricia Wilcox with musical arrangements by Carl Danielsen.

Performances play to Jan. 8, 2006, at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Boulevard, in Skokie. Opening is Dec. 10.

For more information visit [www.northlight.org](http://www.northlight.org) This item was taken from the Playbill website at: <http://www.playbill.com/news/arti->

## The Noël Coward Musical Index

Interview with Dominic Vlasto: Sunday, October 9th 2005 by Marcy Kahan

To mark the launch of the Musical Index on the Noël Coward Society website, playwright Marcy Kahan interviewed Dominic Vlasto, the musicologist and performer who created the Index with Alan Farley. They met on a balmy October evening at the pavement table of a Thai café in St Martin's Lane, diagonally across the road from the soon-to-be-renamed Noël Coward Theatre.

**Marcy Kahan:** How did you first become acquainted with the work and music of Noël Coward?

**Dominic Vlasto:** Schooldays at the King's School, Canterbury, which was quite a strong musical school. When I was about 16 or 17, our house put on an evening of Noël Coward entertainment, two one-act plays and a bit of music, and I got asked to sing one of the songs.

**MK:** Were you immediately attracted by the music?

**DV:** Yes. Before then, I'd done music theatre, Gilbert & Sullivan, and Coward seemed the closest modern equivalent.

**MK:** Then you studied music at Cambridge. Were you supplementing your grant by doing Coward cabarets?

**DV:** In a very amateurish way. You never realise at that age quite how amateurish you are. In my last year, I had to do a dissertation. All this time, I'd come up against the problem with Coward's music that what you get in the printed sheet music version is just not how people would approach the accompaniments on recordings. So I was very interested in how the interpretation of light music (performance, recordings) was quite a different art to how it was published.

**MK:** And the person you approached for clarification was one of Coward's main accompanists, Norman Hackforth?

**DV:** I went first to the publishers, Chappells, who led me to all sorts of bits and pieces in the archives that I never knew existed. Eventually said you'd better go to Joan Hirst (Coward's last secretary). And Joan put me on to Norman Hackforth who said: "I probably know more about Noël's music than anyone alive. Come and see me and I'll see if I can help." And we just sort of clicked from the word go. It all became easier and yet at the same time a much more complex and interesting subject from then onwards.

Norman had retired to a country cot-

tage on the edge of the Romney Marshes, not very far from Goldenhurst. In the years after that, I found that Norman was quietly in touch with a lot of people who trod the same path that I had. It was through Norman that I met Alan Farley, who had written to him and visited him, and Steve Ross.

**MK:** What was the most interesting conclusion you came to about the relationship between the recorded legacy of Coward's music and the scores?

**DV:** It was something I learned very early on from Norman, which was that as a performer, you have to learn the piece of music in such a way that it's in your head and you then re-interpret it from your head. The best way I can illustrate this, as a singer, you have ways of giving emphasis to a piece of song, emphasis of words and subtle nuances and the way you pull rhythms around, and give slightly longer on something and hold a particular note a bit longer, which you can't possibly ever write down. The same applies to Schubert or Wolf or whoever it may be: the artistry, the skill, is in the precise interpretation and nuances that the vocalist will bring to emphasise words or phrases or even just the way you might bring consonantal clarity to certain phrases will give it a flavour. In the same way, a light music accompanist will do the same thing with what they're doing on the piano. And there's less of it that can be written down, there's less of it that can be fixed, because there's that much more which is flexible, there are very few hard and fast rules, one of them is the melody, another one is the larger shape of the overall harmonic structure. Now beyond those two fixed points, there is a huge amount of flexibility.

**MK:** In your essay (in *Look Back In Pleasure: Noël Coward Reconsidered*), you talk about the spaces between the end of a musical phrase – and it's in those spaces – that's where the flexibility is.

**DV:** That's particularly true if you're working on orchestrations or if you're an accompanist who has to provide the fill at that point. A very clear example is "Poor Little Rich Girl". At the end of each line you've got (singing) "Better Beware...3...4...5...6...7...8...Laughing at danger" – you've got that big gap. Well, if you are a pianist or an orchestra

at that point, what you do is very much going to add or subtract to the overall flavour and mood and pacing and characterisation of the song. Now that's what interests me in interpretation, what happens underlying the basic structure. It can be well or cleverly or stupidly done.

**MK:** Similarly, in terms of delivering the lyrics, you can do too much, not trusting the clarity and the rhythm of the line and trying to indicate its meaning with unnecessary emphasis.

**DV:** Yes. Another difficulty with Coward is that his range as a composer is terribly, terribly wide, from the personified punching comic fast numbers...

**MK:** Senorita Nina from Argentina...

**DV:** Or Mad Dogs and Englishmen or whatever. At the other end of the scale, you've got luscious melodic Viennese waltzes, which are as close to one of the Strausses as you can get. You can't approach those two types of music in the same way; you've got to be very flexible.

**MK:** Since your Cambridge days, has your view of Coward's music changed?

**DV:** I'd say it's been strengthened and strengthened and strengthened.

**MK:** What has been confirmed?

**DV:** Two over-riding things. His extraordinary range as a composer. And that ties in with what I think will be the main thrust of what I shall be speaking about at the Conference (in Oxford in September 2006): how peculiarly and extremely and unusually autobiographical his musical output is. More so, very much more so, than Kern, Berlin, Porter, Rodgers – whoever his "competitor songwriters" may have been. There is a huge amount of autobiography, and that includes all the waltzes, because there he's saying, this is the music that resonates with me, this is my heritage, this is where I'm comfortable.

**MK:** Coward wasn't afraid of emotion.

**DV:** Well, sentiment. Not sentimentality but he wasn't afraid of sentiment. He was strong on that. He knew how to make it work, which is more than most.

**MK:** Who got the idea to do the Musical Index?

**DV:** Ah, well this grew out of huge frustration on the part of myself and Alan Farley. When I first met Alan, he was trying to compile a list of all Coward's known recordings, and I was trying to

Farley. When I first met Alan, he was trying to compile a list of all Coward's known recordings, and I was trying to compile a list of all Coward's known musical compositions. And we had both been slightly amazed that neither list seemed to exist anywhere. There were gaps in Joan Hirst's records, and that made us think, we could do it if nobody else has done it. Chappells never had a list. So we started trying to do a complete index, well, roughly fifteen years ago.

**MK:** Good God. So this project predates the Internet.

**DV:** Very much so. And the Internet is uniquely suited for this sort of catalogue, better than a bound printed book, because it can be updated and annotated and corrected – and available online to all Coward obsessives and performers and light music researchers. Alan and I very quickly realised that we were better off collaborating, and when Barry Day decided to do a book on the Complete Lyrics, that was a great relief, because there might be two or three different lyrics, but in terms of the musical index, there's only one song.

**MK:** When our members hit the Noël Coward Musical Index (NCMI) hyperlink on the website, what are they going to discover?

**DV:** The first way you can use the index is if you know a particular song title and you want to find out everything about it, you would simply go to "M" in the main index – for "Mad Dogs" or "Mad About the Boy" – and it will tell

you when it was composed and where –

**MK:** The license number of the rickshaw he was sitting in when he wrote it...

**DV:** Precisely. Absolutely. What show the song was originally composed for, who performed it, what other manifestations it had, where it's been published, all the supporting research and documentation, my commentaries on the song as a piece of music, how it works and so on. Then, at the bottom of the entry, you get a list of recommended or interesting recordings.

**MK:** You won't get the lyric?

**DV:** You won't get the lyric, because you can jolly well go to Barry Day's book and look it up there, but you will be told if there are lyric variants. That's the main part of the index. But along the way, there are all sorts of things you might not know about. You might not know that there was a title called "I Wish I Wasn't Quite Such a Big Girl", which was published in the vocal score of Pacific 1860, I think. And you'll discover that as far as the refrain is concerned, it's rather a neglected treasure. In fact, there are a lot of things that have come out of the archives that most people don't know about, because they've never been in the public domain. Some recent research on unpublished bits of the Noël Coward Diaries has added quite a bit of detail to our knowledge of the circumstances of several songs' inspiration and emergence.

**MK:** So it's a good idea to do some free-range browsing.

**DV:** Absolutely. A lot of the unknown material is linked to the shorter subsidiary indexes, for instance a list of music by Coward with lyrics by another writer. Also, in separate sections, there's a wonderful discography, which is Alan's main contribution. If you're not happy with the list of recommended recordings given on the main index, which is only a subjective selection on our part. The Discography has a list of all the recordings Coward ever made, all the original cast recordings, and a fairly exhaustive listing of all the other people who have recorded Coward's music.

**MK:** Anything else?

**DV:** There is a section tracing everywhere the music's been published in different forms, another section that deals with how popular Coward's music is, so you've got a list of the most-performed songs all the way down to the ones that are never performed, based on an analysis of royalty returns.

**MK:** Is there a section on his orchestrators and accompanists: Elsie April, Norman Hackforth, Peter Matz?

**DV:** No, there is still a musical biography waiting to be written but the place for that is in a different medium, the book about Coward the musician.

**MK:** You must write it immediately. In the meantime, congratulations to you and Alan Farley on completing the Index.

*Marcy Kahan*

## The Opening of the Royalty Theatre - Kingsway

Terry Trimmer provides a Coward view on the event in 1960

The opening of the Royalty Theatre with The Lunts in *The Visit* prompted comments from well known stars that were recorded in the programme. The theatre - now known as The Peacock Theatre still exists (see [www.sadlerswells.com](http://www.sadlerswells.com)).

*"When a theatre was bombed out of existence, the event was at any rate dramatic. When they were turned into cinemas (I did not say 'are' on purpose) it was like a slipping in the social scale, as though they had married a little beneath their station. For theatres to be pulled down and replaced by blocks of offices is just plain dull - unless, of course, you are simply mad about blocks of offices - which I am not! But*

*whatever the cause of its demise, the end of a theatre, for the actors, the staff*

*The opening of a new theatre in London, the first for thirty years, by Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt is a wonderful event, a cause of congratulation to everybody concerned and a signal for general rejoicing." Noël Coward*



The Management reserves the right to refuse admission to the Theatre, and to change, vary or omit without previous notice, any item of the programme.



Programme One Shilling

*and the public who have loved it, is always a melancholy happening.*

Amongst the first-night crowd were the Duchess of Kent, Princess Alexandra, Richard Attenborough, Dame Sybil Thorndike, Sir Lewis Casson, Anna Neagle, Jean Simmons, Robert Mitchum, Stanley Holloway, Julie Christie - and Binkie Beaumont who backed the production.

## What's On? – productions across the globe

Is your production or event shown here...? If you want your item items to be included here please send us the details.  
(\* denotes Premiere, TBC = To be confirmed, BO = Box Office) Professional companies are shown in blue

### In the United Kingdom

#### WEST END REVIVAL of HAY FEVER

Starring Judi Dench and directed by Sir Peter Hall for Bill Kenwright Ltd. at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket. First preview - 6th April 2006; Press Night - 19th April 2006. Judi Dench will play the part of Judith Bliss, the delightfully flighty actress who lives with her writer husband and their talented children in an idyllic countryside abode. Despite this apparently blissful existence (pun very much intended), the lives of Judith and her family are not as marvelous and straightforward as they appear; something which the assorted guests who visit them during the play can't help but notice...

A number of other esteemed actors will be appearing alongside Judi Dench, including Peter Bowles and Belinda Lang.

#### *Blithe Spirit*

3 to 5 Jun 2006 - Mulberry Theatre Co., Village Hall, Doveridge, Derbyshire

1 to 3 Jun 2006 - Wycliff Drama Group, Lutterworth Community College, Lutterworth, Leicestershire

6 to 7 Dec - Immanuel College, Bushey, Hertfordshire

#### *Waiting In The Wings*

25 Jun to 2 Jul 2006 - New Venture Theatre, Brighton

#### *Hay Fever*

28 Nov to 3 Dec - Qu. Elizabeth's Grammar Schl. Ashbourne

7 to 11 Feb 2006 - Exeter Uni. Theatre Co., Northcote Theatre, Exeter

13 to 25 May 2006 - Whitefield Garrick Soc. Garrick Theatre, Whitefield

23 to 25 Mar 2006 - Bovingdon players, The Memorial Hall, Bovingdon, Hertfordshire

11 to 14 May 2006 - The Priory Players, The maltings Arts Centre, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Northumberland

#### *Private Lives*

7 to 12 Aug 2006 - Dawlish Rep. Co., Shaftesbury Theatre Dawlish, Devon

#### *Relative Values*

7 to 18 Jun 2006 - Highbury Theatre Centre, Highbury Little Theatre, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands

#### *Still Life*

22 to 29 Jul 2006 - New Venture Theatre, Brighton, E. Sussex

#### *This Happy Breed*

1 to 12 Jun 2006 - New Era Players Theatre, Newbury, Berkshire

#### *Design For Living*

25 to 29 April 2006 Tower Theatre's production at the Bridewell Theatre, Bride Lane, London EC4

### In North America

#### *Blithe Spirit*

21 Apr to 6 May Niagra Falls Music Theatre Society Niagara Falls, Ontario.

*A Marvelous Party: The Noël Coward Celebration*, to begin Dec. 7 in Skokie, Illinois. Performances play to Jan. 8, 2006, at the North Shore Center for the Performing Arts, 9501 Skokie Boulevard, in Skokie. Opening is Dec. 10.

For more information visit [www.northlight.org](http://www.northlight.org)

#### *Hay Fever*

3 Nov to 4 Dec - CenterStage, Baltimore College

### Coward Trip to Paris April 2006

Details of the programme and costs of the planned visit to Paris in April 2006 are enclosed with this edition of Home Chat. If you wish to attend please complete the booking form and send it together with a cheque, payable to: The Noël Coward Society or credit card details, by December 23rd, to:

G J Skinner , Samuel French Ltd., 52 Fitzroy Street,  
London, W1T 5JR  
Tel: 0207 387 9373

### Afterthought...

A controversial new TV drama production about Princess Margaret - the late sister of The Queen - contains an interesting reference to Noël Coward. On her arrival in uniform towards the end of the war in France she ordered some Canadian troops to drag her car out of a ditch and onto the road. Here is part of the promotional publicity about this incident offered by the producers of the drama:

*"The Princess, however, with what was to become her legendary knack with ordinary people, told a Canadian platoon that if they didn't tow her car on to the road they would all be hanged for treason; so, despite heavy casualties, they did. Her chauffeur, Noël Coward, then drove her towards Caen — where he knew a wonderful little place for lunch — only to be cut off by a squadron of Tigers. Normally more than a match for the statelier Rolls-Royce, the tanks were on this occasion commanded by Oberleutnant "Binkie" von Ginsberg, who had not only played polo for The Sandringham Tiddlepoms in 1934 but had also enjoyed a brief inter-chukka affair with Mrs Simpson after losing his way to the gents.*

*A chivalrous Junker and coward, he instantly surrendered, for which action the Princess was awarded a Distinguished Service Badge, sewn to her uniform by the little French girl who was to grow into a lively soubrette with interestingly close links to the Royal Family."*

*With thanks to The Times newspaper online*

*With thanks to Samuel French UK and Canada (Play Publishers and Author's Representatives), Ken Starrett (US), Lisa Foster at Alan Brodie Representation (Professional Productions) and other NCS members.*

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