

Oxfordshire Drama Network

Newsletter

AUGUST 2020

EDITOR'S BULLETIN

This is quite a different issue this time, I hope some of the items interest you all. Do check out the "On-Line" links to see what some of our groups have been up to on the "Virtual" scene. It is amazing what can be done these days.

Let's hope we can get back to what we really enjoy soon.

Mike Davies



WHAT'S ON DIARY (details inside)

What's On-Line

What's On in 2021 (Covid Permitting!)

24-27 Mar	The Henley Players	
	Saturday Sunday Monday	
April	Abingdon Operatic Society	
	All Shook Up	
28Apr-1May	Compton Players	Beyond A Joke
5-8 May +	Jigsaw Stage Productions	
20-22 May	The Sound of Music"	
1-5 June	Oxford Operatic Society'	My Fair Lady
June	Dorchester ADS	The Haunted Cabin

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Page	
1-2	Chairman's Letter + Drama Festivals
2	British All-Winners Festival
3	Little Theatre Guild & Covid 19
3	Spelthorne Virtual Drama Festival 2020
4	Batholomew Players
4	Corn Exchange Wallingford+Snodun Players
4-5	Oxford Theatre Guild, Wychwood Players
6	Thame Players – book launch
7	Writing, Zoom and Beating the Devil
8	Help for first time 'Virtual' Directors
9	Review (Watermill outdoor)
9-10	What's On-Line
10-11	Forthcoming Events in 2021
12	Your ODN committee

Facebook www.facebook.com/groups/1324585987569767

Email: info@OxfordshireDramaNetwork.org

Instagram: www.instagram.com/oxfordshiredramanetwork

ODN website: www.OxfordshireDramaNetwork.org

CHAIRMAN'S LETTER

Well, what a strange few months it's been! I'm really hoping that we are over the worst now and can finally get back to doing what we all love most – be it acting, directing, staging or simply being around people again socially.



We finally have some guidance on when the performing arts can resume safely. If anyone hasn't seen the guidance as yet then you can find it on the Government website here:-

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/performing-arts>

They have developed a five-stage roadmap:

- **Stage One** - Rehearsal and training (no audiences)
- **Stage Two** - Performances for broadcast and recording purposes
- **Stage Three** - Performances outdoors with an audience and pilots for indoor performances with a limited socially-distanced audience
- **Stage Four** - Performances allowed indoors and outdoors (but with a limited socially-distanced audience indoors)
- **Stage Five** - Performances allowed indoors / outdoors (with a fuller audience indoors)

We are currently at **Stage 3** and I was delighted to see on Facebook recently some of our members enjoying the very first open-air theatre show at the Watermill Theatre near Newbury – "The Hound of the Baskervilles". Obviously, this is all subject to continued scrutiny and could change at any moment so each group will have to weigh up the risks and ultimately do what is best for their membership. We are certainly not out of the woods yet.

One Act Festivals

I do have some festival dates for your diary – The **ODN festival** next year has been booked for **7th -12th June** in the Unicorn Theatre, with a tech rehearsal on Sunday 6th. I can also confirm that Louise Manders, the adjudicator who was due to be with us this year, has agreed to adjudicate for us. I have worked with Louise before and have found her to be full of enthusiasm and encouragement and I'm sure we will all learn a lot.



The other festival that I would like to draw your attention to is the **British All Winners Festival (BAWF)** which is a national drama festival and next year will take place in Coventry **18th-24th July 2021**. (There is an article by next year's BAWF organiser in this newsletter which will give you further information about this event.)

You may not realise that the ODN Festival is now a member of the National Drama Festivals Association (NDFA) who run the BAWF. Any winning play from a member festival is eligible to be considered for selection for this national competition, providing that they have scored over 80 points.

Although we are a non-competitive 'friendly' festival with no overall winner and scoring system, the NDFA have agreed that if there is a recommendation from our adjudicator that one of our entering plays, in their opinion, meets the required standard, then that play will be put forward for possible selection.

There are only 12 slots for one act plays, with a further 3 each for youth plays and full length plays. There are around 40 member festivals so the competition for selection is very high – but it would be great if one of our member groups could be one of them, so get your thinking caps on start looking for festival plays. I've been drafted in on the BAWF organising committee and it looks set to be a fantastic event with lots of interesting talks and workshops running alongside the plays.

The great thing is that the Corn Exchange Festival in Wallingford, which follows the ODN festival in June, has also become a member of the NDFA this year so you wonderful people get 2 opportunities for selection.

Virtual Festival

I know that Panto season will shortly be upon us – some of you may be hoping to go ahead as planned but I suspect that many won't. We have run the panto competition for a number of years now and recently we have discussed the possibility of running a virtual festival this year instead. We know that many groups have been meeting on platforms such as Zoom, play reading and socialising, and publishing recordings of your events to your social media platforms. With this in mind one of our committee members thought that some groups may be interested in recording a play online with your members (yes you'll still have to learn your lines...unless you have an auto cue handy!) and entering a virtual festival that we could publicise and watch the entries over a number of nights on the Facebook Group. Ideally it would be a short play (around the same length as for a one act festival) – anything longer than that would, I suspect, be somewhat wearing to the online viewer. Maybe your group already has recorded something suitable?? If this is something that you think you would like to happen then please let us know and we will start planning it.

The next newsletter is due out in October so please do send in details of your forthcoming plans, articles, letters or words of wisdom – or just let us know how your group is faring – all contributions warmly welcomed.

Karen

PS. You can now find us on Instagram which we will be using to promote your productions alongside our Facebook site, so please do follow us if you have an Instagram account:-

www.instagram.com/oxfordshiredramanetwork

Karen Carey (Chair)

British All Winners Festival

Coventry 2021

In 2013 the Lighthorne Festival of One-Act Plays, a new south-Warwickshire Festival, was founded with what turned out to be a unique formula. Firstly, it is unpretentiously set in a village hall. Secondly it works cafe-style with the audience seated convivially at tables, and thirdly a hot meal is served in the interval. It also offers the biggest prize in the British festival calendar - £1,000 which must be split 50/50 between the winning group and a registered charity of their choice. The Lighthorne Festival became an instant success and has gone on from strength to strength.

When the first Festival ended, the founding adjudicator, Mike Kaiser, gave advice on a number of points, including joining the National Drama Festivals Association which runs the week-long British All-Winners Finals, held in a different theatre each year and featuring one-act, youth and full-length plays. As an affiliated Festival our winner would be eligible to be considered for these national championships.

I rapidly discovered that it was over 30 years since the All-Winner's had taken place in central England. I determined to rectify this omission. Coventry in 2021 is the UK City of Culture. It also happens to be where I was born and raised. Enquiries identified the recently-restored Albany Theatre as a thriving venue which runs a packed programme of amateur and professional shows.



It is a stunning Art Deco theatre with a 500-seat auditorium. It is very different to the intimate 80-seat

Lighthorne Village Hall. Nevertheless, our aim is somehow to transfer the sociable atmosphere and community-feel of Lighthorne to the bigger stage down the road. To do that we need to sell tickets - lots of tickets. We also needed a special Sub-Committee to deliver it - a group of doers with, collectively and individually, outstanding theatrical talents and a wealth of Festival experience. I am delighted that ODN Chair, Karen Carey, from Didcot Phoenix Drama Group, who in 2017 directed the winning Lighthorne Play which went on to win the NDFA Finals, is among those who have agreed to join the team.

A special needs theatre group is always invited to participate in the All Winners and the Side By Side Theatre Company of Leamington Spa will be taking part. There is a competition for new work with a publishing contract included in the prize. Youth Theatre is also very important and opinion is being canvassed for a parallel local schools competition, which could provide legacy, with the winner guaranteed a performance at the All-Winners. We believe the Coventry All-Winners will stimulate an already-vibrant amateur theatre scene, locally and regionally, and provide a template for other All-Winners in this area. It would be wonderful to think that an Oxfordshire theatre could - for the first time ever - host the event in future years.

Rod Chaytor

Chair, The Lighthorne Festival of One-Act Plays.

Member, National Council, National Drama Festivals Association.

The "Little Theatre Guild" and COVID 19

The Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain (LTG) is the umbrella organisation for its 115 member theatres across the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland. Each of their theatres is a local community asset, run entirely by amateurs, with seat capacities ranging from 48 to over 300.



A large proportion of those theatres are part of our cultural heritage that were set up and have been in existence for over 150 years, with others from the early 20th century. Some occupied historical buildings from a 13th Century church, ancient Corn Exchanges to Railway Arches and Purpose-Built theatres. During the last year, our member theatre's income was around £7.3m, playing to 638,496 audience members through 942 productions over 5,800 performances.

The chairman of the Guild has written a letter to the Minister for Digital and Culture demanding to know why amateur run theatres are not allowed to open when professional ones are! In it he says:-

".....we are however at a loss to understand the difference between an Andrew Lloyd Webber owned theatre and a Little Guild Member theatre that could open and give live productions both outside and now according to the latest guidance inside." "We would ask you to reconsider this policy and allow non-professional theatres to re-open in line with the professional sector. The LTG is an associate member of UK Theatre and do not understand why our members are being treated differently to every other member of UK Theatre....."

LTG Website www.littletheatreguild.org

We have a number of amateur run theatres in Oxfordshire, some run by our member groups. If you feel strongly that they are being unfairly jeopardized, please lobby your MP, or write to Boris! (Ed)

Spelthorne and Runnymede 2020 Virtual Drama Festival

In light of the uncertainty regarding live events, Spelthorne and Runnymede Drama Festival have decided to make this years event a Virtual Festival.

They have abandoned the normal festival rule book and are opening the festival to a wider range of entries from any individuals that are affiliated to a Drama Group. Entries must be submitted as a video, up to 10 minutes long, and can include as many or few people in the video as you wish. In addition to performed pieces, they will welcome :-

- Monologues and duologues
- Mime
- Puppetry
- Stop-motion animation
- Poetry readings

There is more information in their Virtual Festival Guide on their website:-

www.spelthornerunnymededramafestival.co.uk

The closing date for completed submissions is Thursday 1st October 2020, when they will open their YouTube Channel and ask you all to vote within a number of award categories. They will then host a number of live video streams in the run-up to the final awards broadcast on Saturday 24th October 2020.

To submit your entry email:

entry@spelthornerunnymededramafestival.co.uk

Bartholomew Players, Eynsham

Members of Bartholomew Players, Eynsham, got together to perform a short lockdown play for some light relief. It features 4 scenes spread over a few months of lockdown of a cast rehearsing remotely a murder mystery, with all the hilarity and frustrations that involves. We had great fun performing Tess Townsend & Marie-Jose Zuubier's play Zoom! which was written especially for lockdown. This was just what we needed to cut through the gloom of social-distancing and not being able to get properly together to perform. Can't wait for the sequel!



The Corn Exchange, Wallingford

Well, what a year it has been. Everyone at the Corn Exchange in Wallingford hopes that you are keeping safe and well and now that lockdown is easing, we want to update you on our plans.



The Government authorised cinemas to open from 4th July 2020, but there is still no date for when theatres will be allowed to re-open for live performances. Because we provide both cinema and theatre, this means we will only show films when we first re-open.

We are totally committed to the health, safety and well-being of our fantastic volunteers and our loyal and supportive audience, and are working hard to ensure we make the Corn Exchange as safe as possible for all our visitors. We are taking professional Health & Safety advice on how best to modify our unique building, create Covid19-safe procedures and ensure everyone is fully trained. We will also be using this enforced shut-down period to complete our annual maintenance tasks.

As we are all volunteers, this will take us some time, so we will not be re-opening until at least the beginning of September 2020. Re-opening will also depend on the status of the virus and government guidelines at the time. We will update you on any further developments as and when we have them. We will also be eagerly awaiting advice from the Government on when we can resume live performances and theatre.

John Evans, Marketing Director, Corn Exchange Wallingford.

The Sinodun Players

The Sinodun Players have been busy during the current lockdown situation, with a number of initiatives currently running whilst utilising web technology.

Chez Toi

This was started by our SP member Ginny Avery messaging a group of actors who she thought might be interested in reading through plays together via Zoom.

The idea is that we Zoom together every Monday evening, or as often as we can. Anyone can suggest a play and it is then up to them to source the script online (only plays that are out of copyright or are available without paying a licence). One of the group members has a full licence for Zoom so they set up the meetings which can run for as long as we like.

On a Sunday afternoon people confirm whether or not they'll be available for the following day. The person who has chosen the play puts the names into the "virtual casting hat" and then lets us know who is reading which role. Casting is gender blind, which has led to some very amusing readings!

With a full length play it usually takes a couple of weeks to read all the way through; one act plays are done in an evening. We try to go for plays with a large cast and sometimes move the casting around, so everyone gets a turn. We've had a couple of "audience members" as well. So far, we've done "Charley's Aunt", "The Real Inspector Hound", "Granny Must Die", "Under Milk Wood" and "The Admirable Crichton".

Oxford Theatre Guild

Getting to grips with new scripts.

Last year, OTG launched our first ever playwriting competition. Unfortunately we were not able to progress things through to the 2020 drama festivals – but we were able to host online readings for each of the shortlisted pieces during May.

The writers had a chance to engage with the actors and to hear their words come to life. There was plenty of opportunity to talk about the scripts and the writers have now had the opportunity to revise their work ahead of the final judging in October.

This marked the start of OTG's journey into online play-readings. Many companies, locally and globally, have also experimented with this way of making theatre happen during these difficult times. For us, it is a great opportunity for actors to get to grips with new scripts, new characters and new styles of drama.

We decided to carry on with a monthly series of Saturday Afternoon Dramas. Our first production was The Recruiting Officer by George Farquhar and

aired on Saturday 1st August. The performers were all on Google Meets and the audience could watch via YouTube.

Unlike our competition readings, the cast met up for some online rehearsals first – to better understand the script and their character. We were also able to incorporate some live singing, sound effects and music to enrich the experience. Hats off to Ruth Readshaw for co-ordinating and directing this first performance, thanks also to the technical work by Will and Jeannie and, of course, to the cast – two of whom were online from the US!

We will be continuing with monthly readings for at least the next six months – and maybe even beyond.

So watch out for details on our social media – whether you want to be one of the readers or to be part of the virtual audience.

Links:

The Recruiting Officer -

<https://youtu.be/CXnLXY4SPMY>

OTG: Facebook:-

<https://www.facebook.com/oxfordtheatreguild>

OTG: YouTube:-

<https://www.youtube.com/user/OxfordTheatreGuild>

As You Like It

OTG's first foray into film-making

Like many other local companies, we had plans to stage an outdoor show this summer – Shakespeare's bucolic comedy “As You Like It”.

Rehearsals were just about to get underway in March when all of our theatrical endeavours ground to a halt. However the cast and crew of AYLI were undeterred.

The first read through happened online and it soon became apparent that the cast wanted to continue rehearsing – just in case things opened up again. So a full rehearsal schedule was implemented and everyone got stuck in to working with webcams and microphones.

As the weeks went on, it became apparent that live theatre this summer was looking unlikely – at least for the time frame for which we could assemble the cast and so Alex, our director and James, the production manager, proposed turning the stage version into a film.

The committee investigated the idea and a lot of time went into exploring how we could make that happen. Around this time, the possibility of people meeting up socially in groups of 6 became a reality and this started a series of carefully managed garden and park based rehearsals allowing cast members to meet one another for the first time since auditions.

A plan soon emerged for how to make filming possible – using locations in and around Oxford.

Costumes were hired from the fantastic team at the Oxfordshire Drama Wardrobe, lots of hand sanitiser was acquired and the filming schedule drawn up.

With only six people allowed on set at any one time – including the crew – working out how to handle the bigger ensemble scenes was tricky. But a shot list was created and everything got under way.

Incredibly, it only took 8 filming sessions to get all the shots in the

can and much of the credit for that is down to the hard work and organisation from Dominic and Edward who took on much of the technical work behind the scenes. Now we have a team of editors beavering away to produce a trailer and the full film.



Was this what we thought would happen when we set out on this journey? No – who could have foreseen how 2020 would play out! But with detailed planning, a lot of creativity and a cast who were willing to accept the challenge, we have made a film. It is amazing what theatre-makers can achieve when they can't make theatre!

Simon Tavener Chair – Oxford Theatre Guild

The Wychwood Players

We have held 'Zoom' committee meetings, regular play reading evenings plus quiz nights every two weeks which have proved really popular. Two members have written plays during the lockdown. John Drew has written four and Ralph Wears one. The Players have enjoyed reading these and we have encouraged members to consider writing more plays to read.

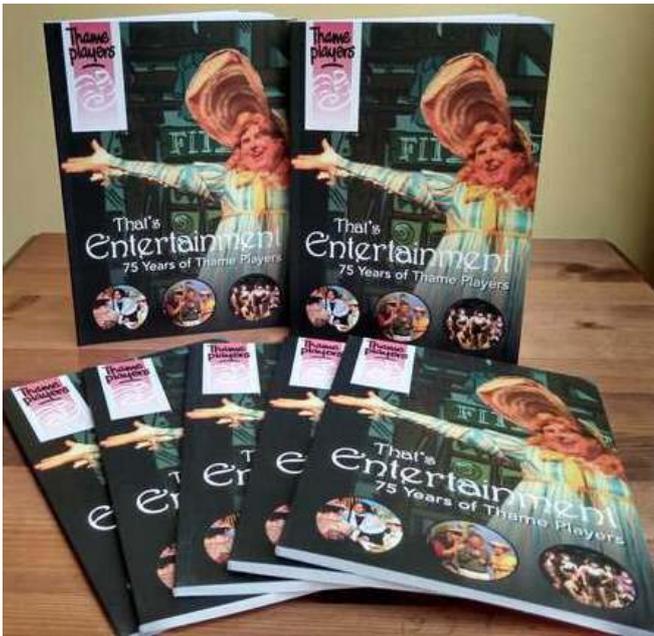
The Wychwood Players have decided to upgrade their website and are currently working with external providers to achieve this.

In addition, an upgrade to our lighting is being implemented which will give us a lot more options for future productions including the use of coloured lighting and other effects.

That's Entertainment!

75 years of Thame Players

Thame Players Theatre Company has been performing in the market town of Thame, Oxfordshire, for over 75 years. This week, a new book about the history of Thame Players, "That's Entertainment", is being released. The book was written by Tony Long, who has been an active member of Thame Players since 1982, and was chairman for a dozen years until 2012. He has also played the Dame in Thame Players' annual pantomime 26 times to date.



The book covers the development of the group from its earliest beginnings to the present, over 75 years later. The first performance staged by the group under the name of Thame Players was in 1944. Throughout their history, Thame Players have become ever more active and ambitious, progressing from just one or two productions a year to five of their own productions a year today – more than 30 live performances. The theatre, in Nelson Street, is a former church hall, owned by Thame Players for over 40 years, and also the venue for some 30 visiting shows each year, including musical acts, comedy and drama. It also houses Thame's only public cinema, run by Thame Cinema For All.

The book is illustrated with dozens of photographs from the earliest post-war performances through to Dick Whittington, the most recent pantomime, performed in December 2019.

Incorporating a 1984 account of the first 40 years written by Bob Norman, "That's Entertainment" tells the story of Thame Players from the post-war years, through the period when productions were staged in venues such as the Town Hall and the Wenman School (now Lord Williams's), to the times when Thame Players first leased the Players Theatre in 1977 and subsequently acquired the freehold in 1997. The book also recounts the substantial

development work since undertaken, including the installation of raked seating, a bar, a foyer, enlargement of the stage, improvement of lighting and technical facilities, and much else besides.

Tony Long said, "We are justly proud of our history and our theatre, which has developed into the modern, well-appointed venue we have today. The Players Theatre entertains over 10,000 people a year from the local area and farther afield and is also used by community groups. None of the achievements would have been possible without the generous support of our town and district councils, local businesses, grant bodies, members and friends of Thame Players, and the many volunteers who keep the theatre running. Having achieved this much in the first 75 years, we look forward to the continuing success of the group in future years".

Cllr Ann Midwinter, Mayor of Thame, said, "Thame Players and the Players Theatre are together one of the jewels in our crown. They have occupied this position for over seventy years through their members' dedication and hard work. Embracing the challenges of modern technology along the way, they continue to provide live entertainment in a well-equipped theatre that benefits the people of Thame and surrounding area. I am sure the live performing arts will prosper in our town for years to come, building on the foundations laid by Thame Players".

"That's Entertainment" will be on sale at £6.99 per copy through various retail outlets in Thame. For details of outlets stocking the book please email thameplayers@gmail.com or call 07881 688895.

The Players Theatre, home of Thame Players, is currently closed due to the corona-virus lockdown restrictions and all shows have been cancelled until at least September, pending further government advice. Updates will be announced on the Thame Players' website: www.thameplayers.co.uk.

Book Review

"That's Entertainment - 75 Years of Thame Players"

This book is an intriguing history of how a Drama group was formed and flourished, especially interesting to anyone who has been to any of the Thame Players' performances.

It has dozens of great photographs of their plays and pantomimes from 1949 to the present day, showing the extensive costumes and elaborate sets even in their early days.

It is also an insight into the efforts needed to buy and run their own theatre as they did, achieved mainly due to the dedication of a group of people who raised the funds and converted it into the wonderful venue they now have.

Mike Davies

ODN

What happened when all the Queen's Men came to Thame

Acting was a dangerous, even violent, profession back in the sixteenth century, says Bruce Alexander, the well-known actor and patron of Thame Players' Theatre Company, in a new video just released on [YouTube](#).

In the video, *The Death of Big Knell*, Bruce tells the dramatic story of how William Knell, a leading actor with the Queen's Men, met an untimely death in Thame. The Queen's Men were formed in 1583 at the express command of Queen Elizabeth I and were directly responsible for providing entertainment at court. Amongst their leading actors was William Knell, dubbed an 'Absolute Actor' in the phrasing of the time – he would undoubtedly have been equivalent to a Hollywood star in today's terms!

Because the Plague was raging in London, the Queen's Men decided to go on tour in 1587, with their first stop being the prosperous market town of Thame. They were performing *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (a precursor to Shakespeare's play *Henry V*) at the White Hound Inn – thought to have been where the War Memorial Gardens now are in Thame. Following the afternoon performance, a fight broke out between William Knell and another actor, John Towne, as a result of which Towne was injured but Knell was sadly killed. It seems that violent occurrences were not that uncommon amongst actors at the time: the famous playwright Ben Jonson, initially working as an actor with the Admiral's Men, was briefly imprisoned for killing a man in a duel in 1598, but subsequently freed using a legal ploy.

The Queen's Men travelled on to Stratford-on-Avon after this episode and it is rumoured that, being a man down, they went back to London taking the young William Shakespeare with them. Whether this was true we shall probably never know. When you watch the video, you will hear there was another connection between William Knell and Shakespeare – you'll have to look to find out what it was!

Bruce Alexander is probably best known for his portrayal of Superintendent Norman Mullett in the ITV series *A Touch of Frost*, where he plays the superior to David Jason's Jack Frost. Other TV appearances include parts in *Love and Marriage*, *Doc Martin*, *EastEnders*, *Midsomer Murders* and *Gentleman Jack*, whilst on radio he has played in the BBC dramatisation of Le Carre's novel *The Honourable Schoolboy*, amongst many others. He has worked with the Royal Shakespeare Company for over a decade,



playing parts in plays such as *All's Well That Ends Well*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and more. He has also worked many times at the National Theatre. He is one of two patrons of Thame Players Theatre, the other being Sir Tim Rice. Bruce is currently writing a history of Thame.

The Death of Big Knell can be viewed by going to the Thame Players' website:- www.thameplayers.co.uk and clicking on the YouTube button.

Writing, Zoom and Beating the Devil



Bring out the drum let the Oxfordshire Actors come, let's beat the devil from within and share out there.

So, here we are as Amateur Dramatic bods waiting for our veil or curtain to lift from Covid 19. We all know the performing arts has been one of the hardest-hit sectors, with theatres and concert halls fighting for their very existence. Most of us through experience know that we need the income from pantomimes to help us to get through the year. But I hear that the doors are being knocked and letters written on our behalf, perhaps even begging to let our sector be open again.

When not acting I read with interest that David Hare one of our British Writers who suffered seriously after contracting Corona-virus at the beginning of the lockdown measures has written a monologue. He has called it "Beat the Devil", it is said he will recall the "delirium of his illness", which mixes the onset of the symptoms, with fear, dream, honest medicine and dishonest politics. At 73 years of age this must have been very frightening for him. He uses this monologue as a platform to share his fury, urgency, and power to make his writers voice and experiences be heard. He has persuaded the star Ralph Fiennes to perform this at the "Bridge Theatre" London. Check dates online folks.

<https://bridgetheatre.co.uk>

Let's hope that Ralph can get David's thoughts over to explain how he felt about the mishandling of the information shared and our protection against the virus, because according to David Hare it was all worse than the handling of the Suez crisis or Iraq. And how he felt there were no apologies to the dead and dying British public. I do agree in part with this, because as we watched the news nightly, we were waiting for a glimmer of hope and a decent structure to get us all though relatively unscathed.

As a fellow writer in the world of drama and books I did have a flash back to contracting malaria twice

and feeling totally helpless and at the mercy of an African Doctor who kept swinging a bag of blood around and asking me if I would like to buy this and use it with the quinine to make me better!!! Very scary - but the substance of many a play I reckon. It's funny how we use not only our own experiences but the experiences of others to create our story and share it with the world. No experience is ever wasted, just keep a note book and write it down I say.

Yes, the show must go on. I have personally taken this quiet time to write my second book and now am considering my next play. I am sure many of you have re-discovered your creativity and have been re-thinking how we can move forward in our amazing field. The ODN Drama Festival has been moved back to next June where one or two of you had written or chosen plays to act. I had written one about the Women's Institute, and I know many of you were in mid rehearsals with dates set before this came upon us all.

Hey, resilience I say - because I notice that many of our members have been using Zoom and watching the computer forever to get their fix of entertainment, teamwork, friendship and virtual treading of the boards. Some groups have rehearsed and sung, even done quizzes together to get that buzz again. Also, I have been told they danced together on Zoom. But in the midst of chaos there is hope and plays & musicals galore, not to mention panto jokes perhaps?

Ah well at least we can get a cheap meal on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday nights with the "Rishi Meal-Deal". Be nice if we could watch some actors performing in our restaurants though huh!

But if I can go into market places and coffee shops amongst others why can't I get my group of Drayton Players to perform for them? Ahh! another idea..... where is my pen?

By Sue Hadley - Author/Life Coach/Tutor/ and ODN Committee member

Help for the First-Time Virtual Director

By Kevin Stone

Editor's

note:

No matter how experienced a director you are, the upcoming production season is bound to be a year like no other, with so many new guidelines, restrictions, and rules in place. Directing within these limitations will be a new experience for everyone and will no doubt be incredibly challenging. And yet, it still can be a period of intense growth and vivid discovery for you and your actors, to create a final production of which you can all be proud, despite all the obstacles.

Several years ago we published an article by Kevin Stone full of tips for new directors. We have taken the liberty of modifying Kevin's advice to fit this new world in which we all find ourselves. Whether your performance will be traditional, live-streamed, or virtual, we hope you find inspiration and courage within these suggestions.

Don't Panic.

There may be moments of panic in putting together a production, but don't let panic become your default setting. One of the many benefits of directing a play is the honing of problem-solving skills, so meet those difficulties with a clear-headed, can-do attitude. Let your actors see your coolness under pressure. You can do it!

Get Organized.

A director is, in many ways, a coordinator and facilitator. Bringing together the many different strands of a play production requires a fair amount of pre-planning and organization. A rehearsal schedule is very helpful. Set deadlines for being off-book, collecting props, and promoting the play. Reserve the first few practices for blocking out the scenes, and make sure to include a tech practice or two. You don't have to keep the schedule with a grim rigidity, but the actors and their parents should have a good idea of what is expected and when. Communicate to everyone that rehearsal time is precious and that, during rehearsal, the focus needs to be on the play.

Visualize the Play.

As Carl Sandburg said, "Nothing happens unless first a dream." Imagine the action of the play. Have an idea of how each scene should look and sound. What lines have a potential for a laugh (or for a gasp)? What sections of the play should move more rapidly than others? What lines should be slowed down? Where are the climatic points? As you develop the "dream" in your mind, directing simply becomes a matter of communicating your vision to your actors.

Focus on the Basics.

You might have a high-tech stage, a phenomenal set, jaw-dropping special effects, and costumes by Versace, but if the acting is flat, your production will suffer. On the other hand, with good acting, you can have a bare stage (or screen, if virtual), with no effects and only thrift-store costumes and still absolutely dazzle the audience. The best productions start with a solid foundation of acting basics.

Vocal projection and articulation are key, *especially* in a virtual theatre format, where something as small as being slightly off-center can cause audio distortion or diminished volume. If the audience cannot hear the dialogue, they will be disappointed, and no one wants a disappointed audience. Plus, all that work on memorization will have gone for naught! Projection involves proper breathing, common-sense phrasing, and clear enunciation. Usually, an inexperienced actor can "turn up the volume" simply by opening his mouth more widely when he speaks and over-enunciating. The audience will perceive clarity as an increase in volume.

Positioning is also important. Many student actors tend to face any which way as they speak, hiding their faces or closing themselves off from the audience. With a little training, any actor can learn to "play to the audience" (or the camera) and let everyone see their wonderful face and the fantastic expressions it holds.

Pay Attention to Detail.

The stage is a magnifier, and that's never been more true than when your show is being livestreamed and watched on somebody's 72" TV. Or when each actor has an individual onscreen frame. Little things can become big things, particularly if there's only one or two actors

onscreen at a time. Even the tiniest distraction can wreak havoc in a big scene. View your production from the vantage point of an audience seeing it for the first time by actually sitting out in the house for a rehearsal or watching video rehearsals closely. Move actors around. Try different angles. *Watch* carefully. *Listen* closely. And then *communicate* to your cast and crew what you saw and heard.

Value Your Actors.

Remember that actors are not chess pieces to be moved around a board. They are thinking, feeling people with complexities and a life outside of rehearsals. Encourage their creativity on stage and/or screen. Help them relax and have fun. (Which means you need to relax and have fun, too!). Be positive and let your actors know that you appreciate their work.

Don't Forget the Support Roles.

A play needs more than just actors. It needs a stage manager, a house manager, a property mistress, technicians, stage hands, set painters, publicity people, etc. This is truer than ever with a virtual or live-streamed show, which can benefit greatly from supporting roles such as a dedicated technical director.

And Finally.

Have fun. The storytelling you oversee will be full of creativity, inspiration and joy, no matter the format.

By Kevin Stone PioneerDrama.com

[Kevin Stone](#) has been writing and directing plays for over 20 years. He has experience as an actor and as a director of community theatre, church plays, high school productions and touring collegiate groups. Besides teaching drama classes, Kevin is the pastor of a church and the managing editor of a ministry website.

Kevin's play [After Hours](#) won the [Shubert Fendrich Memorial Playwriting Contest](#).

REVIEWS

WATERMILL THEATRE THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES

Directed by Abigail Pickard Price

I attended the opening night of *The Hound of Baskervilles* on Wednesday 29th July 2020 at the Watermill Theatre Gardens, Newbury. The play was a new devised version of the great Sherlock Holmes Mystery and was expertly performed by James Mac, Rosalind Lailey and Victoria Blunt. The play starts with the cast coming on the stage and explaining about the social distancing measures that have been put in place throughout the show and it was done in such a humorous way. The cast maintain social distancing perfectly with the passing of paper without anyone else coming into contact with it, the slapping of faces from the other side of the stage and the moving around the stage were all done with expert timing. The three actors played all the roles with cross-overs from male to female done with ease and a fantastic use of the stage and audience area.

I have been itching to go to the theatre since lockdown and was so honoured to be able to go with some friends.

Hound of the Baskervilles is now sold out and it was good to see live theatre again. It showed that with some creative use of space and imagination there is nothing that can stop the arts from being performed. Well done to the cast and crew and a massive congratulation to the Director Abigail whose creative vision made the show.

Karen Carey

WHAT'S-ON ON-LINE

OXFORD OPERATIC SOCIETY CLIMBING EVERY MOUNTAIN!

Many OxOp members were keen to have the chance to sing together and luckily, they have the talent and the technology to be able to do this. After a few Thursday sessions led by the fabulous Bella Brown note-bashing the four part arrangement of *Climb Every Mountain*, with accompaniment recorded by Nia Williams, they were asked to go away and record their vocal on a phone or PC. Bella then mixed the whole thing together to give us a wonderful track to share. They also put some visuals to this, and popped it on their Youtube channel for all to see:-

[OXOPS in Lockdown](#)

OXFORD THEATRE GUILD The Recruiting Officer

OTG's first on-line production was *The Recruiting Officer* by George Farquhar and aired on Saturday 1st August. The performers were all on Google Meets and the audience can watch via YouTube. (See earlier OTG article)

<https://youtu.be/CXnLXY4SPMY>

PHOENIX ON-LINE!

Like many other groups at the moment we are currently meeting on line and entertaining ourselves at least.

Shakespeare Play Reading

<https://youtu.be/2B1g2RbHV70> or
www.youtube.com/watch?v=2B1g2RbHV70

Bad Connection

A short film by Greg Greetham, recorded during the Covid-19 pandemic, 29th July 2020

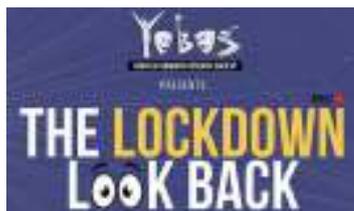
www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIKE7esbT-U

You are not alone, by Emily & b Martin Redhead

www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATIOA_xwDK0

YOUTH OF BANBURY OPERATIC SOCIETY

The Lockdown Look Back



Streaming from Saturday 15th August 2020

After having to postpone our production of In The Heights, we are delighted to present this virtual show open looking back on all our productions since our formation in 2003!

This exciting digital production features hits we know and love from show shows such as Hairspray, 42nd Street, Legally Blonde, Anything Goes and much more! The show will be free to stream, however, we ask you to consider making a donation via our JustGiving page where profits will be split between YOBOS, Katharine House Hospice and Banbury Young Homeless Project. More information on how to donate coming soon.

Please click here for more information & Link:-
www.yobos.co.uk/lockdownlookback

FORTHCOMING EVENTS FOR 2021 Covid permitting

THE HENLEY PLAYERS Saturday Sunday Monday

by Eduardo de Filippo

Marital misunderstandings, a lover's quarrel, and generational conflict escalate as passions flare



during the traditional Sunday dinner with family and friends. Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall adapted Eduardo de Filippo's sparkling contemporary Italian commedia dell'arte, which looks at the trial and tribulations of a well-off family in Naples in 1959.

When: 24th -27th March 2021

Where: The Kenton Theatre, New Street, Henley on Thames, RG9 2BP

Tickets: will be from the Kenton Box Office 01491 575698 or online at www.kentontheatre.co.uk

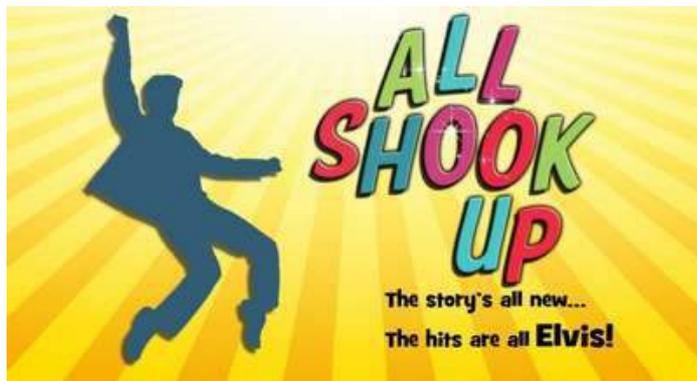
Website: www.henleyplayers.com

ODN website: www.OxfordshireDramaNetwork.org

ABINGDON OPERATIC SOCIETY

All Shook Up

The music of Elvis Presley comes alive in All Shook Up and we're bringing it to the stage of the Amey Theatre in April 2021. This show was originally scheduled for April 2020



Inspired by Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, All Shook Up takes us to a small Midwestern town that is thrown into a frenzy with the arrival of Chad, fresh out of prison, a good-looking, motorcycle-riding roustabout, who travels the open roads with a guitar on his back, blue suede shoes on his feet, and a song in his heart.

Repressed by their conservative mayor, the town begins to come alive once more under Chad's influence. Lovers meet, woo, pursue, and more, all in one zany night that will change the town forever.

All Shook Up is a rocking, heartwarming tale about following dreams, opening up to love, and the power of music, featuring a whole host of hit songs from the Elvis songbook, including *Jailhouse Rock*, *Heartbreak Hotel*, *Love Me Tender*, *Blue Suede Shoes*, *A Little Less Conversation*, and many more.

When: April 2021 DATES TBA

Where: Amey Theatre at Abingdon School

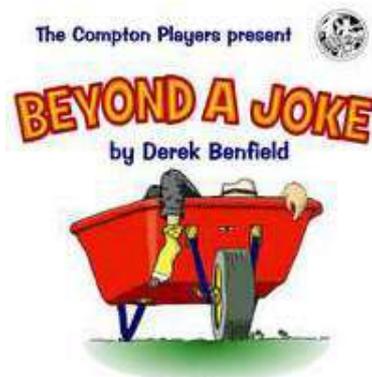
Website: <https://www.abingdonoperatic.co.uk>

COMPTON PLAYERS

Beyond A Joke

By Derek Benfield

Jane and Andrew's pleasant country house is accident prone. Six people have already died there in unfortunate and embarrassing accidents. When daughter Sally's young man Geoff arrives for the weekend unaware



of the house's reputation, he mistakenly deduces from conversational confusion that the deaths were due to sinister circumstances.

When: 28th April - 1st May 2021 at 7.30pm

Where: Compton Village Hall RG20 6NP

Tickets: £9, (£8 Conc) online from:-

www.ComptonPlayers.co.uk

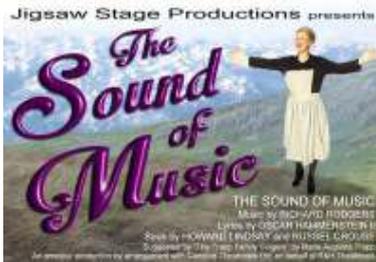
or Tel 07554 842207

JIGSAW STAGE PRODUCTIONS

"The Sound of Music"

by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

The story of Maria and the Von Trapp family will delight you with its award winning score, including, 'My Favourite Things', 'Do-Re-Mi', 'Climb Every Mountain', and 'Edelweiss'.



It tells the true tale of the world-famous singing family, from their romantic beginnings and search for happiness to their thrilling escape to freedom as Austria becomes part of the Third Reich at the start of WWII.

VENUES:-

The Beacon, Wantage, Wed 5th to Sat 8th May 2021
at 7.45pm + Matinee Sat 8th May at 2.30pm

Tickets £15 (£13 conc) from The Beacon:-

www.beaconwantage.co.uk or tel 01235 763456

AND

Cornerstone Didcot, 20th to 22nd May 2021

at 7.45pm + Matinee Sat 22nd May at 2.30pm

Tickets £15 (£13 conc) from Cornerstone:-

www.cornerstone-arts.org or Tel 01235 515144

OXFORD OPERATIC SOCIETY

My Fair Lady

This adored musical, set in Edwardian London, tells the story of Eliza Doolittle, a young working-class Cockney flower seller. She is taken under the wing of Henry Higgins, a phonetics & linguistics professor who is determined to win a bet to transform her into a successful and respected 'lady of society'. But who will really be transformed once the bet is won?

When: Tue 1st Jun - Sat 5th Jun 2021.

Where: The New Theatre, George St, Oxford.

Tickets: on sale now! From:-

www.atgtickets.com/shows/oxops-my-fair-lady/new-theatre-oxford



DORCHESTER ADS

The Haunted Cabin'

by Matthew Lynch

When Emily, Joe and Danny stumble across the isolated cabin on Shantler's Peak all is not as it seems. Strange noises and sinister apparitions plague the stranded inhabitants, who desperately seek a rational explanation. Will they survive the storm until help arrives, or just become the new eternal residents of the haunted cabin?

A sinister play with a twist that will fool our audience right to the end!

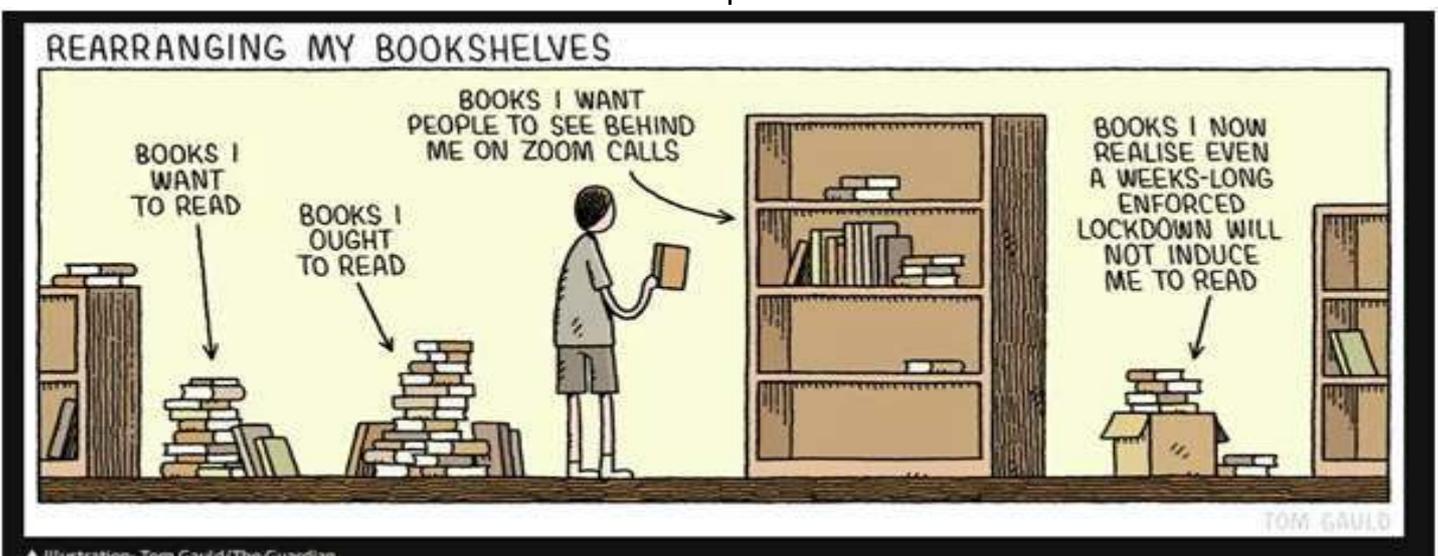
When JUNE 2021 at 7:45pm DATES TBA

Where: Village Hall, Dorchester on Thames

Tickets: £10 from Dorchester Co-op or

www.ticketsource.co.uk

Website: www.dads.org.uk



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FRENCH

ROBOT

RICHARD III

ABOARD A SPEEDBOAT

COCKNEY

ZOMBIE

OTHELLO

ON WALL STREET

STALINIST

HIP HOP

KING LEAR

WITH DINOSAURS

DRUNK

COWBOY

ROMEO & JULIET

IN A CAR PARK

Your ODN Committee

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Secretary	Becki Brewis	(Wootton Players)
Newsletter/Website	Mike Davies	(Drayton Players & Jigsaw Stage Productions)
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Sue Hadley	(Drayton Players)
Sarah Ellner	(Kennington Amateur Dramatic Society)
Jess Ebberson	(Kennington Amateur Dramatic Society)
Teresa Miller	(Wootton Players)

N.B. We have held the AGM in Drayton for a few years now and would really like to move it around the county so that other groups don't have to travel so far. We would really like to encourage one of our member groups to host next year's AGM – the ODN will cover any hall hire expenses – so please email us if this is something you would like to do.

Email: info@OxfordshireDramaNetwork.org