

JANUARY 2016

## Diary of Events for January to April

Tues 5th Jan	Rehearsals for "Anastasia" start 7.30pm
Thurs 7th Jan	Phoenix Theatre Singers restart 7.30pm
Weds 20th Jan	Drama Club 7.30pm
Mon 1st Feb	Auditions for "The Summer of the 17th Doll" by Ray Lawler 7.30pm
Tues 1st March	Rossiter Books - Carol Drinkwater book signing 7.00pm
Tues 8th March	Preview of PYT Hereford One Act Drama Festival entry 7.30pm
Sat 2nd - 9th April	"Anastasia" production 7.30pm

(please see the Members calendars for January and February at the end of this Newsletter)

## Brenda Smith

Sadly I have to report that Brenda Smith, our president, passed away on Christmas Day. An obituary appears on the next page of the Newsletter. The funeral will be in St Mary's Church, Ross, on **Thursday 14th January at 1.30pm**. This will be followed by a cremation (family only) and afterwards in the Theatre.

**Sue Edwards** (Chair)

## Drama Club

The committee has recently been reviewing the activities within the theatre. As part of that review it has been decided that, for a trial period, we will start up a Drama Club. The purpose of the Club is to provide a focus for those involved with the drama side of the theatre, particularly to give those who are not currently involved in a production, the opportunity to take part in reading or acting a part. The long term aim would be for the Club to meet on a regular basis so as to form a cohesive group.

The first meeting is set for **Wednesday 20th January at 7.30pm** when there will be a reading of the comedy Haywire by Eric Chappell. The play has roles for 2 men and 4 women. Please let me know in advance whether you are able to attend. Myself and Gordon Brigg will be hosting the first meeting. Please let me ([manchester.house@btinternet.com](mailto:manchester.house@btinternet.com)) know whether you are able to attend.

On behalf of the committee, may I wish you all a Happy New Year.

**Graham Russell** (Newsletter editor)

## **Brenda Smith (President)**

It is with great sadness that we have to report the death of Brenda Smith, our President, who passed away on Christmas Day. Brenda became a member of Ross Operatic and Amateur Dramatic Society (ROADS) on returning to her native Ross in the 1970's. She had pursued a teaching career in Birmingham, and returned to live with her brother, Kenneth, in the house where her parents had lived in Camp Road. On her return Brenda immediately took a keen interest in the dramatic society and the project in which it was engaged at the time, namely to turn the old fire station into a theatre. She contributed many hours of her time to achieving this aim.



However, Brenda was to make her mark in other ways. In the very year that the Phoenix opened in 1983 she directed a one act play for the County Drama Festival. She often recalled rehearsing this play in the shell of the new theatre with an oil heater providing the only source of warmth! The play, "The Colour of the Wind", went on to win the festival (with one of the cast being proclaimed the festival's best actor) and progressed to the area finals at the Malvern Festival Theatre.

Brenda directed some memorable plays after the Phoenix Theatre opened and also did some acting, but something she had started earlier was the annual Children's Theatre Workshop each August. This comprised a week of intensive training in various theatre skills, with a production for parents to attend at the end and a certificate of attendance for each participant, presented by the Society's President. This was the seed from which the Phoenix Youth Theatre has grown. Another of Brenda's contributions to theatre life was the monthly newsletter, which she

edited, typed (with a little help) and then organised distribution to members for many years and only reluctantly gave up ten years or so ago.

Brenda was very proud to take over from her friend Mrs Eve Porter as President of the Theatre, and was very keen to preserve the roots from which the Society and later the Company had been created. Her contribution over the best part of forty years has been vast. The Phoenix and earlier ROADS seemed to be in her blood and she remained loyal to the end. A loyalty which will be hard to match and greatly missed.

**Howard Owen**

## Review of “A Night on The Tiles”

The phrase “privy to private information” might lead one to think that the play “A Night on the Tiles”, written by Frank Vickery, was a thriller but this is not the case!

Information is overheard while on the outside “privy” by two brothers, Kenneth and Gareth, which has very powerful consequences on their futures and we are left wondering what might happen next in cleverly woven dialogue about a very Welsh family.

The story is really about a “ménage a trois” between Kenneth, played with hilarious effect by Gareth Wigg, and his brother Gareth, played by Phil Field, whose intensity as an actor came across well. These two are both in love with Shirley, played by Michelle Cooper, who always acts emotional parts so well.



We go through the full spectrum of life with births, weddings and funerals and there are many high spots of both comedy and pathos in the play.

Jane Bovell plays the matriarchal figure Doris with panache. Her over the fence chats with nousey neighbour Mrs Morris, who was played by Jacky Bedford with wonderful comic timing, were a joy to behold!

The little Welsh village in which the story takes place has finely drawn characters. Howard Owen’s utterings as Grandad, played from the privy and in the house were great fun. Roger Williams as Reg, father of the two boys, showed his skills as an actor capable of both serious and comic touches.

Director David Pollard is certainly getting his feet under the table at the Phoenix Theatre. This was a very entertaining play,

well directed and shrewdly cast which the actors obviously enjoyed being in.

The set, cleverly designed by the “construction team” of Catriona Pearson, Trevor Jones and Graham Russell, featured the backs of the two houses reminiscent of miners’ cottages so prevalent in the post war years.

Well done and thank you to one and all.

**Gordon Brigg**

## Production Co-ordinator's Column

The **Performathon** on **Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> October** in aid of **Children in Need**, together with a **Gala Concert** in the evening performed by **the Phoenix Theatre Singers** with guest soloists, was a great success and raised over £1100. Congratulations to Mary Brigg and all involved.

Our November production of "**A Night on the Tiles**" by Frank Vickery, directed by David Pollard was much enjoyed by our audiences. We achieved 74% seat occupancy. Congratulations to David, his cast and crew.

**The Phoenix Theatre Singers Christmas Concert** which ran from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> December was great fun. There were many more comedy sketches this year and audiences were heard to say that it was like going to a party. What more could we wish for! We achieved 88% seat occupancy. Congratulations to Mary Brigg, her cast and crew.

**The Phoenix Theatre Xmas Party** took place on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December. Steve Liddle together with a lady singer and guitarist entertained us. Mary, Amanda and Catriona arranged a mouth watering buffet for us all. There were about 40 members and friends present. A great evening ! Thanks to all concerned.

The reading of "**Anastasia**" by **Marcelle Maurette** was well supported with 22 members present. The play, which is to be directed by **Brian Jackson**, has now been cast and will be our Spring production in 2016, running from **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> to Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> April**. Rehearsals start on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> January. **Details elsewhere in this newsletter.**

**The Phoenix Theatre Singers will restart on Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> January.**

There was a reading of "**The Summer of the 17th Doll**" by **Ray Lawler** on Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> December. This play will be our May 2016 production and it will be directed by David Pollard. Auditions will be held on **Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February at 7.30 p.m.**

Ray Lawler's 'Summer of the Seventeenth Doll' is the first great classic of the Australian theatre. It marks the point where an authentic Australian voice emerges in the theatre. Notwithstanding this the themes of the play - the tensions of dealing with change and transition in relationships and the changes inherent in growth, aging and loss of status- are universal and are powerfully presented.

For sixteen years Roo (Ruben) and his mate Barney who are sugar cane cutters in Queensland have spent the Summer layoff in Melbourne with Olive and her friend Nancy. In this - the seventeenth year - things begin to change. Nancy has got married to a steady guy. Pearl who has been brought along as a replacement companion for Barney isn't that much fun - in fact she's a bit of wowsa! Even Bubba - the kid next door - is turning into a young woman. As the action develops more evidence of unsettling and unwelcome changes emerges...

The characters are:

Olive : Roo's girl - a barmaid heading towards 40

Pearl: Working with Olive at the pub - a widow brought along as a prospective companion for Barney

Roo: Leader of a gang of cane cutters - again heading towards 40

Barney: Roo's mate - a bit of a lady-killer

Bubba: A girl of about 18 who lives next door

Emma: an old woman - possibly she owns the house or maybe she's Olive's mother - it's not specified.

Dowd: a younger cane cutter who has been working with Barney and Roo up in Queensland.

Do come along to the auditions to get a part in this gritty, Australian classic.

**Rossiter Books** are holding a book signing event on **Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> March** featuring **Carol Drinkwater**. Tickets available from Rossiter Books. Tel 01989 564464.

The Phoenix Youth Theatre are once again entering the Herefordshire Drama Festival which runs from **10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> March**. Our entry will be "**The Monkey's Paw**" by Brian Jackson. We are holding a members evening on **Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March** for the young actors to perform in front of an audience before the competition. More details nearer the time.

**Suzanne Hill**

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Phoenix Youth Group for the new 2016 season have arrived!**

The Phoenix Youth Group members for 2016 are here!!! There are nearly 40 of us this season and the group is forging ahead already with the several projects we have up and running for the foreseeable future.

#### **The One Act Play Festival at The Courtyard**

Brian Jackson has taken " the famous five" under his wing! Zoe Doughty, Adam Warner, Kieran Haines, Joe Lowen Grey, Edward Poynton (as he affectionately calls them!) and they are busy rehearsing the entry for The Courtyard One Act Play Festival in mid March. There will be a **members viewing night of this performance on Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> March**, so keep the date free! Brian has written the group a bespoke play especially for the event and the group are already working brilliantly together on this special piece. They will be performing a play entitled " The Monkey's Paw" that Brian has especially created and adapted from an original short story for the group of 5 talented actors.

#### **PYT Mini Showcase Review**

The remainder of the group are working on a mini showcase piece to perform to parents in mid March. We have three directors and two acting coaches this year and for three of them, it will be their very first taste of sitting in the director's chair! Billy Jones, Rosie Williams, Sam Callen are all directing small groups and endeavouring to bring the page to the stage! Billy and Rosie have written their own play and wish to try it out with a group of actors to see if it works! Sam and his group are working on a mini Ayckbourn play and Zoe and Katie are working with all groups as acting coaches as and when they are able to be in session. Later in the term, Zoe will be joining us as a leader in training as she is doing an 8 week placement with us as part of her Uni course - Community Drama. We will be coaching Zoe and helping her to gain experience in running sessions.

#### **Tech Training!**

Trevor Jones has very kindly offered once again this season to train some of our PYT Senior members in lighting and sound. Three of our members are interested in learning the ropes and Trevor has given us his full support with this. Zoe, Billy and Sam will receive their training February and March in the hope that they will then be able to offer tech support at some point in the future when it is needed!

## **PYT Extension Group**

Ten of our most experienced and senior members of PYT will be embarking on a separate and small performance piece from March 2016 and this will be performed at The Phoenix Theatre in late July. It is a play entitled "After Midnight, Before Dawn" by David Campton and will be directed by Sarah O'Neill. Sam Callen, Billy Jones, Katie Marriott and Zoe Hutton will also be involved in leading this project. Show dates are **21st July(evening), 22nd July( evening) and 23rd July( matinee).**

## **The Main PYT Show - October 2016 - " Alice's Adventures in Wonderland"**

The group will join together again in March to begin work on our epic and wonderfully vibrant production of Alice and it promises to be a spectacle of delight and enchantment as we take our audience into a magical world! Once again, reserve these dates in your diary NOW!!!! Dates are: **15th and 16th October( matinee) 17th, 18th and 19th October 2016 (7 pm evening performances).**

## **Spotlight on.....**

Ben Butler - currently in the process of applying for drama school and attending auditions. Ben has been successful so far in being invited for call back auditions at Central and Rose Bruford early in the New Year. Good Luck Ben from everyone at PYT!!!

Kieran Haines - currently also applying for drama school and we have everything crossed for you.... lots more auditions to go!

**Sarah O'Neill**

## **Review of 2015 in Pictures**



The Beggar's Opera (March)



The Six Wives of Calais (March)



Day of Reckoning (May)