

JANUARY 2018

## Diary of Events for January - March

Weds 17th Jan	<b>Reading for “Abigail’s Party”</b> 7.30pm
Sat 27th Jan	<b>“Strings &amp; Songs for Hope”</b> (Ukulele Concert) 7.30pm
Weds 31st Jan	<b>Auditions for Abigail’s Party</b> 7.30pm
Sat 3rd Feb	(Screen at the Phoenix) 7pm
Sat 17th Feb	(Screen at the Phoenix) 7pm
Weds 7th Mar	<b>Members’ Evening</b> featuring entries for the Hereford One Act Festival 7.30pm
Fri 9th - Sun 11th Mar	<b>Phoenix Youth Theatre Showcase</b>
Sat 17th - Sat 24th Mar	<b>“Gaslight”</b> by Patrick Hamilton (Phoenix Theatre Company) 7.30pm

(Members’ calendars for January and February are at the back of this Newsletter.)

## Season’s Greetings

On behalf of the committee may I wish you a happy Xmas and prosperous New Year. After a very successful year, 2018 promises to be a another full calendar of events at the Phoenix.

**Alison Clarke**

## Subscriptions

Thanks to Catriona Pearson for taking over as Membership Secretary. Our paid up membership currently stands at 111 with a few more due to renew. If anybody has not renewed, please complete a renewal form and send it, together with your remittance, to the theatre.

**Graham Russell**  
(Newsletter Editor)

## Production Co-ordinator's Column

Our November production of **'Arsenic and Old Lace'** by Joseph Kesselring was an outstanding success. We filled 95% of seats and received much positive feedback. Congratulations to David Pollard, his cast and crew. Reviews of the show follow in the Newsletter.

**'Gaslight'** by Patrick Hamilton and directed by Brian Jackson will run from **17<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> March**. The play has been cast. Amanda Smith, Gareth Wigg, Ray Smith, Jacky Bedford and Michelle Cooper are taking the roles. Rehearsals begin on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> January and will be on Tuesdays and Fridays.



**The Phoenix Theatre Singers Xmas Show** took place on 7<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> December. All three nights were sold out and thoroughly enjoyed by all our audiences. The Singers were accompanied by Richard Watson on piano and Davi Griffiths on drums. Congratulations to Mary Brigg and all involved.

**The Theatre Xmas Party** took place on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December. There were 25 present. We had a buffet supper and danced and performed karaoke to a disco provided by Rob from Area Entertainments in Hereford. A great evening enjoyed by all. Many thanks to all who made this a super start to the Xmas season.

There will be a **concert in aid of the Hope charity on Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> January, entitled 'Strings and Songs for Hope'**. The evening will include performances by the Ukulele Troupe, and songs and sketches, many performed by Phoenix Theatre members. Contact George Tait for more details on 01989 767609. **Tickets are available on our website and from Rossiter Books.**

Renée Field wishes to direct **'Abigail's Party'** by Mike Leigh from **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> to Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> June**. There will be a **reading on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January** at 7.30 pm in the foyer. Do please come along to read or listen to the play, to see if we like the play and feel it would be a successful production. There will be **auditions on Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January at 7.30 pm in the rehearsal room**. Renée would like to invite any members wishing to learn directing skills to be her assistant director for this production. Please contact either Renée on 01600 750488 or Suzanne Hill at [suzannefredericks@hotmail.com](mailto:suzannefredericks@hotmail.com) if you are interested.

The Phoenix Theatre are entering the **Herefordshire County Drama Festival in March** with three entries. **"Coffee Break"** by David Tristram, directed by Renée Field; **"All through the Night"**, by Frank Vickery, directed by David Pollard and Tim Betts and a Youth Theatre entry entitled, **"Who's Playing Juliet?"**, written and directed by Zoe Hutton.

We are holding a **Member's Evening on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> March** at 7.30pm when the three plays will hold their dress rehearsals prior to the festival which runs from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> March at The Market Theatre, Ledbury.

The **Phoenix Youth Theatre** will hold their **Showcase** from **9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> March**.

**Suzanne Hill**

## Reviews of Arsenic & Old Lace

The November production of the classic comedy *Arsenic & Old Lace* at the Phoenix Theatre, performed by the resident amateur group the Phoenix Theatre Company, was very well received and played to full houses. Set in a quiet neighborhood of Brooklyn in the early 1940s live two old ladies - Abby and Martha Brewster. Underneath their air of respectability lies a dark secret. Twelve bodies in the cellar! These are their gentlemen, single elderly men who are given a glass of elderberry wine laced with a cocktail of poisons to help them on their way.



The Brewsters were played to perfection by Suzanne Hill and Jane Bovell who brought their vast range of acting talents to their roles. Orchestrating the disposal of bodies in the cellar was Teddy Brewster who thinks himself to be Teddy Roosevelt. This was a cameo role played with extreme enthusiasm by Les Davis. Some sanity does exist in the Brewster family in the form of Mortimer a sometime theatre critic

played by Tony Hearn making a welcome return to the Phoenix. Tony has good stage presence and a range of facial expressions that can reflect an extreme range of emotions. The look of incredulosity on his face as he discovers the bodies in the window seat was a treat.



The play takes a menacing turn at the entry of long-lost cousin Jonathan Brewster. Jonathan is a gangster who has his identity protected by frequent face lifts carried out by his side kick the german Dr Einstein. The portrayal of Jonathan by Gareth Wigg as a very nasty piece of work was the highlight of the play. Shaven-headed with a couple of operating scars and eyes that pierced through the audience, Gareth commanded the stage. His measured delivery and menacing threats covered Dr Einstein into submission to his deadly plans. Performed with a stoop and a spot-on accent Tim Betts had a lovely time as Dr Einstein. Where there are villains there are also cops and quite a lot of them! On came some of the dumbest officers you are likely to see, played by Nigel Patrick (again returning to the Phoenix), Sam Callen

and Tom Lee-Hynes overseen by Lieutenant Rooney played by Jacky Bedford, another nice cameo. I was pleased to see Gordon Brigg on stage as one of the Brewster ladies potential victims. Gordon is a vastly experienced actor and director. Brian Jackson makes an entrance towards the end of the play as Mr Witherspoon, the director of a home for the mentally ill, and being single, elderly and unattached - he is last to be seen holding up a glass of elderflower wine! The play opens with the Rev Dr Harper played by Roger Williams and we are soon introduced to his daughter Elaine played by Zoe Hutton. Zoe has come into the senior ranks as a product of the Phoenix Youth Theatre and has a promising acting career ahead of her. It is a joy to watch her face reacting to every changing situation on stage.

If there is to be any criticism of David Pollard's direction, then it has to be the inability to see all the actors when a large cast is on stage. If an actor is on stage then they must not be masked. Difficult with a large cast I know. For me the set was a slight disappointment. I appreciate how much effort goes into staging a play, particularly in a tight space such as at the Phoenix, but the set lacked character and didn't suggest a room occupied over many years by a couple of old ladies. There should have been more clutter and memorabilia in my view. I also felt the overhead blue light which outlined the tops of the actors heads quite distracting, a point made by others sitting near me.

Overall an excellent production with great performances that delighted the audiences.

### **Rachel Divine**

I was almost not looking forward to attending this production, as it is one of my all-time favourite films. In addition to its being a film it was a Broadway play, so I was anticipating a different interpretation to my much-loved film. I needn't have worried, as the Phoenix Theatre Company kept it very true to the version I know and love so well.



The set was absolutely amazing, with every door and window used as working entrances; the furniture was of the period and the props were the icing on the cake. Although the set remains the same throughout the play, this did not stop the additional props used emphasising every stage of the day. The costumes were fabulous, and the three lady's outfits were gorgeous. The stairs leading to the upper landing were good. However, I did feel that if the door had opened the other way around it would have allowed it to be slammed better, thus giving more credence to Teddy's battle cry.

Suzanne Hill and Jane Bovell, as sisters Abby and Martha Brewster, were brilliant and their accents strong throughout. They portrayed in equal amounts, their innocence and eccentricity with great comic timing. The part of Mortimer Brewster was played by Tony Hearn and although I felt he wasn't trying to be Cary Grant, he did use some of his mannerisms. His affection for his two elderly Aunts was nicely done and his interaction with his brother Jonathan and his girlfriend Elaine nicely paced and humorous.

Gareth Wigg was a very menacing Jonathan Brewster and his scary face worked very well. Les Davis as Teddy Brewster, the even more eccentric brother, was true to the original character and his use of the word 'bully' and 'charge' were very funny. Zoe

Hutton, though not as mature as the original film version of Elaine Harper, did well. Tim Betts was exceptional as Dr Einstein; he was so like Peter Lorre it was uncanny. Not only with his mannerisms but his voice; it was amazing.



There was great support from all the other cast members, the police officers in particular did very well; Tom Lee-Hynes, as Officer O'Hara, played this with the right amount of complete incompetence; it's a lovely part.

Most of the cast had really good American accents, which they managed to maintain throughout the play which is not easy, so well done to you for the attention to detail. This was a well-directed production; the full use of the 'stage' and the fluidity of movement from everyone kept the audience's attention focussed throughout. This was another great production from Phoenix Theatre Company which I thoroughly enjoyed, thank you.

**Louise Hickey (NODA)**

### **Preview of Gaslight (A Victorian thriller by Patrick Hamilton)**

The play is set in the first-floor drawing room of the Manninghams' 4-storey house in Victorian England. Welcome to a world of swirling fog, shadows and gloomy gas-lit interiors, the troubled world of Bella Manningham. For Bella is a woman beset by fears; afraid of the dark she is terrified by mysterious sounds in empty rooms at night; afraid to assert herself over the servants (particularly the precocious scullery-maid Nancy). Most of all she fears she is descending into madness like her mother who died insane. Grateful for the little kindnesses bestowed by her husband she endeavours to please him but unexplained incidents only serve to come between them and undermine her self esteem as Manningham threatens to call in doctors to have her put away. And then a stranger appears; he seems to know a lot about her... is he friend or foe? What does he want? As the plot unfolds secrets start to reveal that Bella is in extreme danger...

The cast includes Amanda Smith as 'Bella', Gareth Wigg as 'Manningham', Michelle Cooper as 'Nancy', Jacky Bedford as the housekeeper 'Elizabeth' and Ray Smith as the Stranger.

'Gaslight' opens on **Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> March** and runs until the following **Saturday March 24<sup>th</sup>**.

**Brian Jackson**

## **Phoenix Youth Group begin rehearsals!**

### **Showcase Event - March 2018**

The youth group have cast their performance pieces for our March showcase and we have four shows planned for this great event. This is an in-house event to show parents what we get up to during our sessions when we are not rehearsing for our big showpiece! Julie Church is once again directing and has written a sci-fi themed piece for the group. Zoe will be directing scenes from a new version of the BFG with her group and Sarah is directing two pieces with two small groups. One group will be performing the sequel to "The Boy Who Fell into a Book" and the other group will be performing scenes from a well known school themed play. Our cast of 32 are excited about their new projects and we begin rehearsals for this in January when we return after our Christmas break.

We welcome Mel Warner to our PYT team as head chaperone this season as a permanent feature and one of our long term helpers in sessions has made a very welcome return to us. We welcome Lindsey Butler back into the fold and she will be assisting us with costumes for all our performance pieces too.

### **One Act Play Festival Entry - March 2018**

Rehearsals and castings are well under way now for our youth group entry into The One Act Play Festival in March 2018. Zoe Hutton is directing and (with assistance from Julie Church) has written a be-spoke play for the group to perform at the festival entitled "Who's Playing Juliet?". We have six actors involved and the play is set in the dressing room of a modern day Birmingham-based theatre where it is 30 minutes to show time.....with only one question on everyone's minds .... who is playing Juliet? There will be a chance to see this show during a members evening performance - more details to follow.

We would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

**Sarah O'Neill and the PYT Team**

## **Review of the year in pictures**



**Ruddigore (March)**



**All Things Considered (June)**



**Their Greatest Hits (September)**



**Wendy & Peter Pan (October)**



**Arsenic & Old Lace (November)**



**Singers Xmas Concert (December)**

### **Abigail's Party**

Mike Leigh's black comedy has become a cult success since it was first seen just over 40 years ago and has been a big favourite with audiences ever since. It is the year of the Queen's Silver Jubilee and Beverly, a would-be social climber and her estate agent husband Lawrence, have invited new neighbours, Angela and Tony, over for drinks with divorcee Susan whose daughter Abigail has taken over her home for a party. Jose Feliciano & Donna Summer are on the record player, the cheese/pineapple chunks are being passed around and the gin & tonics are in full flow. During the course of this terrible evening the monstrous Beverly severely criticises the lives of those around her, particularly that of her trembling, weedy husband.

All 5 characters (2 males and 3 females) are very strong and identifiable. The age range can be 30s, 40s, 50s. A **reading** of this play will take place on **Weds 17th January** with **auditions** on **Weds 31st January**.

**Renée Field**

## Members' Calendar for January 2018

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm	PYT 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm	PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm	PYT 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm					
<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm	PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm	PYT 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Phoenix Committee Meeting 7:00 pm	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	Reading of 'Abigail's Party' by Mike Leigh in the foyer 7:30 pm				
<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>28</b>
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm	PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry in rehearsal room 7:00 pm	The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm	PYT 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry 7:00 pm	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm			'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	Strings & Songs for HOPE 7:30 pm	
<b>29</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm	Kyrle Probus film matinee 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry in rehearsal room 7:00 pm	The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm	PYT 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry 7:00 pm	'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm		'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	Screen at the Phoenix film showing 7:00 pm	
		Auditions for 'Abigail's Party' by Mike Leigh in rehearsal room 7:30 pm				

January 2018

## Members' Calendar for February 2018

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
<b>29</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry 7:00 pm	<b>30</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>31</b> Kyrle Probus film matinee 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm Auditions for 'Abigail's Party' by Mike Leigh in rehearsal room 7:30 pm	<b>1</b> Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	<b>2</b> Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry in rehearsal room 7:00 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>3</b> The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm Screen at the Phoenix film showing 7:00 pm	<b>4</b> PYT 3:00 pm – 6:00 pm
<b>5</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry 7:00 pm	<b>6</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>7</b> PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm Private booking for Ross and District Walking Group - film evening 7:00 pm	<b>8</b> Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	<b>9</b> Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry in rehearsal room 7:00 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>10</b> The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm	<b>11</b> PYT 1:00 pm – 6:00 pm
<b>12</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry 7:00 pm	<b>13</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>14</b> PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm	<b>15</b> Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	<b>16</b> Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry in rehearsal room 7:00 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>17</b> Screen at the Phoenix film showing 7:00 pm	<b>18</b> PYT 1:00 pm – 6:00 pm
<b>19</b> Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry 7:00 pm	<b>20</b> 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>21</b>	<b>22</b> Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	<b>23</b> Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry in rehearsal room 7:00 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>26</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry 7:00 pm	<b>27</b> The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>28</b> PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:30 pm	<b>1</b> Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	<b>2</b> Rehearsal for HCDF adult entry in rehearsal room 7:00 pm 'Gaslight' rehearsal. 7:30 pm	<b>3</b> The Drama Company 9:00 am – 2:00 pm PYT 12:00 pm – 6:00 pm Screen at the Phoenix film showing 7:00 pm	<b>4</b> PYT 12:00 pm – 6:00 pm PYT rehearsal for HCDF 6:00 pm