

JULY 2018

Diary of Events for July - August

Mon 2nd July	Members' Coffee Morning 10.30am
Sat 7th July	Finding Your Feet (Screen at the Phoenix) 7pm
Weds 11th - Fri 13th July	Decorator in auditorium & corridors
Weds 11th July	Play Reading of Arris in Wonderland 7.30pm
Sat 21st July	Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri (Screen at the Phoenix) 7pm
Mon 6th - Fri 10th Aug	Damp Treatment in Auditorium
Sat 25th Aug	Members' Evening 7.30pm

(Members' calendars for July and August are at the back of this Newsletter)

Annual General Meeting

At the AGM on Wednesday 13th June, the following committee members were elected:

President	Howard Owen
Chairman	Alison Clarke
Secretary	Trevor Jones
Treasurer	Amanda Smith
Production Co-ordinator	Suzanne Hill
Publicity Officer	Michelle Cooper
Building Manager	Graham Russell
Members without portfolio	Mary Brigg Zoe Hutton Alan Smith

Damp Treatment

During the week beginning **Monday 6th August** contractors have been hired to treat the damp in the auditorium. This will involve applying a damp proof membrane to the wall stage right and then a plaster finish. The monthly **coffee morning** has been **cancelled**.

Graham Russell (Newsletter Editor)

Production Co-ordinator's Column

Abigail's Party

The June production of Abigail's Party directed by Renee Field was a great success achieving 85% seat occupancy. See the reviews elsewhere in the Newsletter. Congratulations to Renee, her cast and crew for an outstanding production.

60s Party Night

The 60s Party Night on 4th May was great fun. There were about 25 members present and the disco and karaoke were much enjoyed.

Singers' 10th Anniversary Concert

The Phoenix Theatre Singers annual show entitled 'Celebrate', which ran for 4 nights at the end of June, was well received. The title reflected the fact that the Singers have been in existence now for 10 years. The show ended each night with a rendition of 'Happy Birthday' and a shower of silver confetti. Congratulations to Mary Brigg and all concerned.

Play Reading

There will be a play reading on **Wednesday 11th July at 7.30pm** of 'Arris in Wonderland' written by Brian Jackson. Brian wishes to enter this play into the 2019 Herefordshire One Act Drama Festival. Do come along and see if you would like to be involved in this production which will take place next March.

Members' Evening

We are holding a Member's Evening on **Saturday 25th August** when there will be rehearsed readings of two plays which are "Clause14", written and directed by David Pollard, and "Edwin" by John Mortimer, directed by Tim Betts. Readings and castings were held on June 25th.

Lord Arthur Savile's Crime

From 17th - 24th November, Amanda Smith will direct "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" by Oscar Wilde and Constance Cox. The play has been cast and includes Robin Haig, Alison Clarke, Gordon Brigg, David Pollard, Alan Chacon, Diana Tubb, Jane Bovell, Suzanne Hill, Penny Field and Brian Jackson. Rehearsals start in September.

Suzanne Hill

Reviews of Abigail's Party

Once again, Phoenix Theatre Company opened their small, but beautifully formed, theatre for us to join them in the living room at the home of Laurence and Beverly. My sister actually gasped and commented that we could have been sitting in her first home, as the furniture was practically identical. The iconic drinks cabinet and low light over the dining table also featured in my parent's home and instantly took me back to that era. The layout worked perfectly and allowed the cast to move around freely. The set and lighting designers/technicians must be commended for their attention to detail: I loved how the wall and overhead lights worked, which enhanced the ambience of the set; even the artwork on the walls was indicative of the 70's and added the finishing touches nicely.



Sandy MacNeill played Beverly, the bored wife and hostess of the drinks party, who was resentful of her overworked and stressed husband and was frankly irritated by him. Beverly was looking for something to spice up her life and Sandy's subtle use of body language throughout the play emphasised this frustration. Her long lingering looks at the new man in the close, touching him at every opportunity was brilliant. Even the way in which she spoke to Tony, with inuendo's in abundance, held a seductive note that had the audience tittering. Sandy's prowess at poring fresh drinks every five minutes for each of the cast, whilst continuing her dialogue, was superb. Remembering who was drinking what and in which glass throughout was amazing and had me mesmerised. Not once did she miss a beat or drop the persona she was acting.

Tom Lee-Hynes played Laurence, the overworked and slightly supercilious husband. Tom was excellent as the Estate Agent who put his house sales first even to the point of leaving Beverly alone just as the neighbours she had invited for drinks and nibbles were about to arrive. He was instructed to get extra drinks whilst he was out and probably one of the funniest moments of the play was when he returned emptied handed only to walk on see the neighbours say 'bugger' and turn around and walk off again. Tom's timing was impeccable and his exclamation heartfelt which had the audience in stitches. Whilst Laurence was not the most likeable of characters, with Beverly as the nagging wife, you could sympathise with him and this was down to Tom's portrayal of the irksome man.

Lucy Davies played Susan, the mother of the never seen Abigail who was having a party! Susan was the very nervous, whilst wanting to be a good mother, type. She wanted to give Abigail freedom but with Beverly's constant unhelpful suggestions about what could be happening, was struggling to remain calm. Lucy played this role with a confidence that had us believing that her daughter really was running riot. When Susan has too much to drink at Beverly's insistence, there ensued a riotous few moments which many of the audience I am sure, could relate to. Susan's discomfort at being in Beverly's home and having too much to drink became more evident as the play went on with subtle facial expressions from Lucy showed her longing to escape.

Phil Field was Tony. For three quarters of the play Tony's interaction with the cast was in monosyllabic responses to comments made by his wife or the seductive hostess. Phil was a master of timing and tone of response! He may only have said one word, but it spoke volumes and did have everyone laughing out loud. His quick interjection of '8 months' was especially humorous. Tony seemed to have fallen into the husband role out of expectation rather than undying love of his wife and became more flattered by Beverly's advances as the evening went on, a change in his responses was proof of this and when asked to go with Laurence to see how Abigail's party was going on, relished the task, in more ways than one.



Michelle Cooper played the final cast member, Angela. Angela was a nurse whose aspirations were firmly fixed on marrying well, having a nice house and rosy future. Although delighted that they had managed to buy their home for two thousand less than the asking price, she was slowly becoming jealous of her neighbours and conscious of her husband's mediocre job. Whilst Angela had a naivety that was mainly due to lack of experience she wanted very much to be part of the Beverly crowd. Michelle had this character off

to a tee. Her quick put downs of Tony were perfectly timed, and her dizzy blond moments were endearing. She desperately wanted to appear as sophisticated as Beverly but didn't quite have it. I loved and admired the way in which Michelle managed to eat, talk and react all at the same time, again without missing a beat. However, the crowning glory for me was when Angela, having failed to revive Laurence, flung herself backwards with her leg in the air suffering from cramp... This too I can relate to and it was hysterical and a fitting and humorous end to what had become a sober moment.

I thoroughly enjoyed the stagecraft of this production, the direction and acting from the cast was perfect as was the characterisation of their role. It was a fabulous production which you should be very proud of. Thank you, Phoenix, for inviting me, it was privilege to be there.

Louise Hickey (NODA)

Last month the Phoenix Theatre Company staged a revival of Mike Leigh's classic play *Abigail's Party*. The play is a satire on the aspirations and tastes of the new middle class that emerged in Britain in the 1970s and made Alison Steadman, who played Beverly, a household name. Beverly, a would-be social climber, and her estate agent husband Laurence have invited new neighbours Angela and Tony over for drinks together with Susan whose daughter Abigail has taken over her house for a party. The gin and tonics and cheesy pineapple chunks are being passed around and Jose Feliciano is on the record player. As the evening progresses tensions escalate exposing the marital strain between Beverly and Laurence. Susan's anxiety surfaces as Abigail's rock music permeates the room. The evening culminates in hilarious and embarrassing revelations.

Reprising a well-known play is fraught in that comparisons with the original will always be made even though 40 years have passed since the first broadcast. The Phoenix Theatre Company avoided direct comparison by bringing a fresh interpretation to the play under the astute direction of Renee Field. Key to the originality was the role of Beverly played with absolute conviction by Sandy MacNeill. The dynamics with her down-trodden husband Laurence, played by Tom Lee-Hynes, were in marked contrast with the



palpable sexual chemistry between her and ex-footballer Tony played by Phil Field. Although he had very few lines, his one liners in reply to his socially inept wife Angela, were heavy with sarcasm and had the audience in stitches. Michelle Cooper played Angela to perfection, aided by the simple addition of goofy glasses and heavy lipstick, and had the audience cringing at her naive comments. Abigail's mother Sue, played by Lucy Davies, is in the middle of the sparring couples and has to endure being force fed with gin & tonic, cheese nibbles and a cigarette whilst being quizzed on her divorce. Angela clumsily remarks "So you were getting divorced as we were getting married". Beverly's and Laurence's interests are poles apart. Whilst Beverly likes to swoon to Jose Feliciano and Elvis, Laurence on the other hand, prefers classical music and attempts to engage Sue in a conversation about art much to the annoyance of Beverly. As the evening wears on the tensions reach boiling point when Beverly goads Laurence with an erotic painting he hates. The final scene is superbly played out with enormous energy by Tom Lee-Hynes who eventually collapses with a heart attack. Although a trained nurse, Angela's attempts to revive Laurence are futile and, to the strident chords of Beethoven's Fifth emanating from the record player, the play ends with Sue on the phone shouting "Abigail, Abigail!"

Mention must be made of the set which, with a backdrop of gaudy wallpaper, a room divider and a fibre light, shouted 70s at us. This was a stunning piece of theatre where an old play was brought to life with great effect and further enhances the reputation of the Phoenix Theatre Company.

Rachel Divine (photos Graham Russell)

Review of Singers 10th Anniversary Concert



Last week's concert at the Phoenix Theatre celebrated the 10th anniversary of the Phoenix Theatre Singers. The Singers are the brainchild of their musical director Mary Brigg. Talking with their President Howard Owen during the interval, Howard recalled how it all started in 2008, when as chairman, he had a meeting with Mary, Gordon Brigg & Suzanne Hill. Little did they know that it would flourish into the accomplished singing group that the Singers are today. Immense credit must go to Mary for her dedication, enthusiasm and musical skills in bringing together and nurturing such a talented group which now numbers over 40. To my mind it is the friendship and camaraderie that has developed over the years which shows through by their performances at the Phoenix and in outside charity fund raising. As Sandy MacNeill notes in the programme, the Singers are "a family and a very welcoming one at that".

The anniversary concert was indeed a celebration of that achievement showcasing the full chorus and very creditable individual performances. I was impressed by the range of matching outfits of the chorus and the overall presentation of the stage by the skilled lighting technician Trevor Jones. And what an asset Richard Watson is on keyboard!

The first half of the concert featured a medley from Joseph, Summertime and Old Man River with Ray Smith as the bass soloist. Owen Fitzpatrick's rendition of "The Good Life" was a treat and laid the basis for a medley from "Les Miserables". There were some beautiful solo moments - Michelle Cooper & Jacky Bedford in particular. The line "to love another person is to see the face of God" always brings tears to my eyes.



The second half kicked off with Michelle Cooper's vibrant performance of "This is Me" followed by songs from Chess. Some friends of mine recently saw the show in London, at great expense I might add, and were very impressed by the Singers' rendition. Yes Elvis is in the building! John Haines is their Elvis, this time bedecked in a garland of flowers for "All Shook Up". Jacky Bedford's and Sally Dean's softly sung "You've Got a Friend in Me" was a precursor to some powerful singing of "Feeling Good" by Sandy MacNeill (left) who was Beverly in Abigail's Party.



Not to be outdone, the duet by Di Hughes and Gareth Wigg (left) of "Barcelona" surpassed perfection. I didn't know notes could go that high and be held for such extended periods!

Wrapping it all up we had the audience singing and clapping along to "Dancing in the Street". It was good to see Gordon Brigg back as MC inviting the audience to sing "Happy Birthday" to the Phoenix Singers and then all too soon the show was over apart from a demonstration of keyboard wizardry from Richard Watson.

I raise my glass to another 10 years of the Phoenix Theatre Singers!

Rachel Divine (photos Graham Russell)

Phoenix Youth Group

Full Steam Ahead for PYT

The youth team are busy getting the wheels in motion for their double bill of productions in October of this year. We have two wonderful shows in store for our audiences to see and over thirty of us are involved across the two shows. The decision to run two shows was a big move for us and the staff team are working doubly hard. It was made to ensure that all of our youth members have a better chance to shine and play larger and more substantial roles so they can show off their talents.

We have selected two class pieces of theatre that we are sure you will enjoy.

The Railway Children adapted for the stage by Mike Kenny. This is the story of three children and their mother who move to the country to escape from their troubles in London. They meet a whole community of people and there is a real sense of railway adventure along the way.

Goodnight Mister Tom by David Wood from the novel by Michelle Magorian. This is the story of an old man and a boy who form an unbreakable bond at a time when life is tough and tragedy comes their way. They find a way through it togetherthrough thick and thin. The age ranges of our performers are from as young as eight right through to eighteen and there is a real breadth and depth to their performances.

The shows run on alternate nights in October and tickets are available via the theatre box office and Rossiter Books.

October performance dates:

Friday 12th at 7pm (The Railway Children)
Saturday 13th matinee 2pm (Goodnight Mister Tom)
Sunday 14th (matinee 2pm (The Railway Children)
Monday 15th 7pm (Goodnight Mister Tom)
Tuesday 16th 7pm (The Railway Children)
Wednesday 17th 7pm (Goodnight Mister Tom)



Members' Calendar for July 2018

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
25	26	27	28	29	30	1
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers Annual Show 7:30 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers Annual Show 7:30 pm	Phoenix Theatre Singers Annual Show 7:30 pm	The Drama Company 9:00 am – 12:30 pm	PYT team to put up black drapes 11:00 am
Readings for Rehearsed Readings on 25th August 7:30 pm					Phoenix Theatre Singers Annual Show 7:30 pm	PYT 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Coffee Morning 10:30 am – 12:30 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm				The Drama Company 9:00 am – 12:30 pm	PYT full day workshop 11:00 am – 5:00 pm
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm					Screen at the Phoenix film showing of 'Finding Your Feet' 7:00 pm	
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm	Decorator in auditorium and corridors 8:30 am – 5:00 pm	Decorator in auditorium and corridors 8:30 am – 5:00 pm	Decorator in auditorium and corridors 8:30 am – 5:00 pm	The Drama Company 9:00 am – 12:30 pm	PYT full day workshop 11:00 am – 5:00 pm
The Drama Company performance to family and friends 5:30 pm – 7:45 pm	Phoenix Committee Meeting in foyer 7:30 pm	Reading for adult HCDF 2019 entry 7:30 pm				
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 5:45 pm	The Drama Company 4:00 pm – 7:15 pm				Screen at the Phoenix film showing of 'Three Billboards outside Ebbing Missouri' 7:00 pm	Setting up for Drama Company Workshops 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
The Drama Company Summer Workshops 9:00 am – 5:00 pm	The Drama Company Summer Workshops 9:00 am – 5:00 pm	The Drama Company Summer Workshops 9:00 am – 5:00 pm	PYT rigging of lights 10:00 am – 4:00 pm			PYT rigging of lights 10:00 am – 4:00 pm
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

Members' Calendar for August 2018

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
30	31	1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Dampcure 8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Dampcure 8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Dampcure 8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Dampcure 8:00 am – 5:00 pm	Dampcure 8:00 am – 5:00 pm		
Coffee Morning 10:30 am – 12:30 pm						
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Rehearsal for Rehearsed Reading David Pollard 7:30 pm		Rehearsal for Rehearsed Reading David Pollard 7:30 pm				
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
		Rehearsal for Rehearsed Reading David Pollard 7:30 pm		Rehearsal for Rehearsed Reading David Pollard 7:30 pm	Members Evening - Rehearsed Readings 7:30 pm	
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
				Read through of 'Lord Arthur Savile's Crime' 7:00 pm	PYT rehearsal for Goodnight Mr Tom 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm	PYT full cast run through for Railway Children 2:00 pm – 6:00 pm

August 2018