

JANUARY 2020

Diary of Events for January - early April

Sat 4th Jan	Late Night (Screen at the Phoenix) 7.00pm
Sat 18th Jan	Yesterday (Screen at the Phoenix) 7.00pm
Weds 22nd Jan	Reading of The Weekend by Michael Palin 7.30pm
Weds 29th Jan	Book Launch with David Pollard 7.30pm
Sat 1st Feb	Sometimes Almost Never (Screen at the Phoenix) 7.00pm
Weds 5th Feb	Auditions for The Weekend 7.30pm
Sat 15th Feb	Judy (Screen at the Phoenix) 7.00pm
Sat 29th Feb	Old Time Music Hall 7.30pm
Sun 1st Mar	The White Crow (Screen at the Phoenix) 7.00pm
Mon 2nd Mar	Members Coffee Morning 10.30am
Sun 15th Mar	Downton Abbey (Screen at the Phoenix) 7.00pm
Sat 14th Mar- Sat 21st	The Lady Killers by Graham Linehan 7.30pm
Sat 28th Mar	Official Secrets (Screen at the Phoenix) 7.00pm
Sat 4th Apr	Oscar Night Party 7.30pm

In This Issue

Reviews of Night Must Fall and the Singers' Xmas Concert, Screen at the Phoenix winter programme, David Pollard's book launch, plus the latest news of our productions and forthcoming events from Suzanne Hill.

Graham Russell (Newsletter Editor)

Production Co-ordinator's Column

Visiting Companies

We welcomed the following visiting companies to the Phoenix Theatre last autumn.

11th & 12th October – Our Star Theatre Company performed ‘Rebecca’ by Daphne du Maurier. The show sold out on both nights and was very well received. This group will be returning on 8th & 9th May with ‘Death at Sea’, a new comedy by Eleanor Catherine Smart.

Sat 30th Nov – ‘Strings and Songs at the Phoenix’, by Steven Sproat and his guest, Elias Sibley. Proceeds of over £300, from this sellout show, go to The Wilton Bridge Petanque Club.

‘Night Must Fall’

Our November production of ‘Night Must Fall’ by Emyln Williams and directed by Brian Jackson was a great success selling 91% of seats. Congratulations to Brian and his cast and crew

Performathon and Gala Concert

Mary Brigg and the Phoenix Theatre Singers held their annual Performathon and Gala Concert on Saturday 19th October. The day raised £1,105.96. Congratulations to all concerned.

‘The Lady Killers’

Our March 2020 production will be ‘The Lady Killers’ by Graham Linehan and directed by Tom Lee-Hynes. The play will run from Sat 14th to Sat 21st March. There were 18 members at the reading. The cast comprises 6 men, 1 woman plus small parts for several more ladies. Rehearsals start on Tuesday 7th January.

Phoenix Theatre Singers Xmas Show

The Phoenix Theatre Singers Xmas Show was enjoyed by all. 92% of seats were sold. Congratulations to Mary and her team. £318 was raised for the Ross Lions Xmas Lunch Appeal. Singing will re-commence on Thurs 9th January.

Phoenix Theatre Xmas Party

Our annual Xmas Party took place on Friday 13th December. There were 33 members and friends present and the evening was enjoyed by all. Thanks to Mary Brigg, Sue Nicholson, Amanda Smith, Trevor Jones, Lyn & Alan Smith for organising the event.

‘The Weekend’ by Michael Palin

This comedy will be our May production in 2020. Directed by Renee Field, there will be a reading on Weds 22nd January and auditions on Weds 5th February. More details elsewhere in this newsletter.

Book Launch Event with David Pollard

On Weds 29th January, David will be launching two recently published books at the theatre. More details elsewhere in this newsletter.

Old Time Music Hall

Roger Williams will be holding an Old Time Music Hall in aid of the Wilton Bridge Petanque Club on Sat 29th February. He is also hosting an Oscar Party Night on Sat 4th April for the same cause.

Herefordshire County Drama Festival 2020

This will take place at the Market Theatre, Ledbury, from 19th to 21st March. The Phoenix Theatre will not be entering this year. Our member, David Pollard, is the new chairman of the HCDF.

'Illusion /Delusion' by Hand to Mouth Productions

David Pollard will be bringing his production company to the Phoenix on Friday 24th April with a series of one act plays he has written.

Suzanne Hill

The Weekend by Michael Palin (May production)

For our May production, I will be directing The Weekend by Michael Palin.

A play by Michael Palin must guarantee some laughs, and indeed, 'The Weekend' does not disappoint on the comedy front. But bubbling below the surface is a family close to meltdown after decades of communication problems.

Stephen, the patriarch of the family, is a cantankerous misanthrope whose double whiskies are laced with sarcasm. When his long-suffering wife, Virginia, announces that their daughter is coming for the weekend with her family, and that the neighbours are popping round for dinner, it pushes Stephen to a new peak of world-weary cynicism. This is a social gathering doomed from the very beginning.

The Cast

Stephen Febble (60s - 70s)
Virginia Febble (50s - 60s)
Diana, their daughter (30s)
Alan, her husband (40s)
Charlotte, their daughter (teenage)
Duff, neighbour (male 60s - 70s)
Bridget, wife of Duff (40s - 50s)
Hugh, society chiropodist (60s - 70s)
Mrs. Finlay, a Marxist cleaning lady (40s, 50s or 60s)
A dog!

**There will be a READING on
Wednesday 22nd January and
AUDITIONS on Wednesday 5th
February, both at 7.30 pm.**



Do please come along to read or listen to the play to ensure you, the membership, feel this is a great comedy for the Phoenix Theatre to perform. It is very funny, shades of Victor Meldrew in 'One Foot in the Grave'.

Renee Field

Review of Night Must Fall



On a cold November night, anyone lucky enough to have tickets for the Phoenix Theatre Company's latest production would not have been disappointed. Emlyn Williams' play "Night Must Fall" starts slowly and ramps up the tension over three acts. Trevor Jones' subtle lighting and sound cannot alone create and maintain the suspense. This is left to a strong cast who gradually peel away the layers of their characters revealing the emotions, prejudice, and deceit that inevitably lead to the dark place implied by the title. Transporting an eighty-five year old play to the present day has its problems: dialogue and pace need adjustment. However, director Brian Jackson's deft touch eases the transition and his set creates a sombre and unsettling environment of faded affluence and indulgence. Graham Russell and team's brown and understated set construction is atmospheric: it cements the bungalow in the wood in its decade and fixes its incumbents' morality. This thriller is more psychological than 'who dun it?' Indeed, most of the audience think they know the identity of the killer at an early stage.



But are their assumptions about Dan, the Welsh bell-boy, correct? Dan, played by Tim Betts, oozes charm and menace on demand and the play revolves around how the other characters react. Dan inveigles himself into the confidence of Mrs Branson - well characterised by Suzanne Hill. She plays a wheelchair bound hypochondriac who treats servants and family with equal contempt and is mutually despised. Michelle Cooper plays Olivia, her intelligent, manipulative niece, who also falls under Dan's spell, but becomes suspicious when a girl's headless body is found. Indeed, the chemistry created between Dan and Olivia is compelling but stutters at times. The play has strong supporting roles: Nigel Patrick plays Hubert, Olivia's ever hopeful and pompous suitor with panache; Penny Field is suitably dotty as Dora, the sullied, pregnant maid, whilst the comic relief is provided by delightful performances from Diana Tubb and Amanda Smith as the straight talking housekeeper- Mrs Terence- and quirky Nurse Libby. In addition, the imposing figure of Inspector Belsize played by Tony Hearn provides an air of cynical suspicion and a link to the real world. All these performances counterbalance the three main characters. By the final act, the balance of influence in the household has shifted towards Dan, as the besotted Mrs Branson fails to recognise his psychotic undertones and malignant intent. Cast and audience watch in consternation as night approaches and the inescapable clash between evil and passion takes its course. The audience leave the theatre and move from one chill to another.

Peter Hall

NODA Review of Night Must Fall

Phoenix did it again! This psychological thriller was another brilliant production from the small cast who 'do' these types of play so well. I was not familiar with the piece at all and was delighted by how funny it was, as well as being subtly sinister. As usual the set was perfect: it was supposed to be a bungalow and it definitely had the appearance of one. The furniture and additional props were just right; for example, the flowers being changed between scenes to identify different days was a lovely touch. The costumes too were so appropriate for the period and the nurses costume was identical to the district nurse I recall from my childhood. Amanda Smith (below right) played the Nurse and although not a large role, made her presence felt a no nonsense sort of way, typical of the character she was playing.



The cast of eight had been carefully chosen for their roles and were spot-on with their individual interpretation. Suzanne Hill played Mrs. Bramson, the owner of the home that the story is set in, and she was formidable. Her management of the wheelchair she was supposedly bound to was amazing considering the limited space that she had to circumnavigate. Her ease and professionalism when bumping into doorways and furniture was so natural that it was totally believable. Suzanne's haughty delivery towards her niece and staff was believable but when she became besotted with the attentions from an interloper her giddiness and coyness was also perfectly carried off. Her histrionics leading to her untimely death was balanced and somewhat humorous, but I'm pleased to say that the actual death scene, with protracted, made it truly believable. Extremely well done.



Nigel Patrick as Hubert Laurie was the archetypal 'gentleman' whose unrequited love for Olivia, the niece, was conveyed in a matter of fact way which belied the landed gentry. His naivety and pomposity were portrayed in equal measure. Penny Field (above left) was the gullible Maid, Dora, who had fallen for the charms of the pageboy at the local hotel and from their one and only encounter found herself in the family way. Penny was so funny and gave a great interpretation of someone who was timid one moment and accepting of the situation she found herself in the next. The way that she moved was subservient and her mannerisms matched the turmoil she was going through.

Tony Hearn was Inspector Belsize and he just looked the part! It was not a huge role, but it suited him perfectly and he had a presence about him that made it obvious from his first entrance that he was in charge. Dianna Tubb was brilliant as Mrs. Terence the housekeeper. Her quick retorts and quips aimed mostly at her overbearing mistress were hilarious and had the audience laughing out loud. Suzanne and Dianna bounced off each other in such a natural manner it was a joy to watch.

Michelle Cooper as Olivia and Tim Betts as Dan must be commended on their performances as these were, by far, the most intense in this slick production. Michelle played the niece whose circumstances meant that

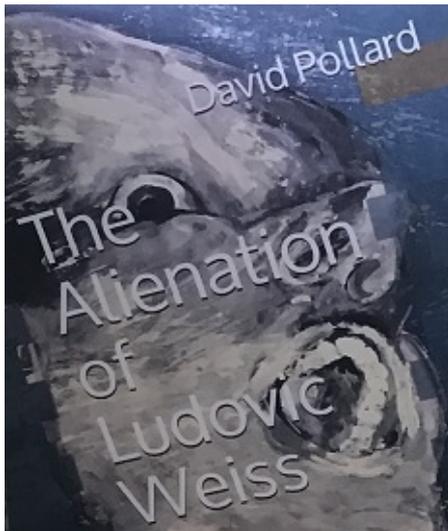
she had to live at the beck and call of her aunt, but who was too proud not to take the easy way out by marrying Hubert. She was more astute than her aunt thought her and whilst she knew that Dan was a 'wrong un' she too was captivated by the mystery that surrounded him. Her breakdown was heartfelt and credible, even though I for one, felt that she should have had more sense. As for Tim, he was amazing. His psychotic moments were very dark, and his body language matched this portrayal accurately. His instantaneous transformation back to the happy-go-lucky Lothario was sinister and creepy and yet, like Olivia, I too felt sorry for him; testament to his performance.

What made this a fantastic production was the pace at which it moved along. There were no uncomfortable silences, the quips came fast and furious in a natural way that made it so believable. I have to say that I felt completely drained at the end of it and felt as if I had been on a rollercoaster of emotions, which is just what this play was all about. Thank you, Phoenix, for another wonderful experience.

Louise Hickey

Book Launch with David Pollard

On Wednesday 29th January I'll be launching not one but two recently published books at The Phoenix. My psychological thriller 'The Alienation of Ludovic Weiss' and a collection of chilling tales, 'His Cat and Other Strange Tales'.



It will be an entertaining evening with some readings and performance based around the books and, of course, a chance to buy the books and get them signed. Apart from anything else it will be an opportunity to get together after the Christmas festivities – the bar will be open and there'll be time to chat among yourselves – or to me!

Ludovic Weiss has already received a four star review from OnlineBookClub.com – you can read it here:

www.forums.onlinebookclub.org/viewtopic.php?f=22&t=118959 and you can get a glimpse of me talking to Michelle Cooper about the book on YouTube by following this link: www.youtube.com/watch?v=nD9_C-AkGds&t=95s



If you like a tale with a frisson of the macabre then 'His Cat and Other Strange Tales' is the one for you. Come along and find out what's behind the black covers of this collection of fifteen short stories.

Doors will be open at 7.00pm and the launch event will start at 7.30pm

This is a FREE EVENT so there's no need to book but I'm sure Suzanne (and I) would like to know if you plan to come along.

David Pollard

NODA Review of Christmas with the Phoenix Theatre Singers

The elegantly dressed singers took to the stage; identical red of the ladies' tops and men's bow ties was just right to get the festivities started.

The mix of old and new songs, some long forgotten, were wonderful. The 'Christmas Lullaby' was gorgeous, so gentle and heartfelt. All solo numbers from crooner Owen Fitzpatrick with 'It's the most Wonderful Time of the Year' and John Haines's 'Blue Christmas' in Elvis guise to Natalie Smith's 'A Little Peace', Rita Bingham's 'Lonely Pup', Michelle Cooper's 'A Spaceman Came Travelling' and Jacky Bedford's 'Coventry Carol' were all well sung, and it was nice that there was a total contrast between them.

Elaine Tomlins treated us to another Pam Ayers poem 'Goodwill to Men – Give us Your Money' and Claire Price read the '12 Days of Christmas' by Frank Kelly brilliantly. Both had the audience roaring with laughter, but not as much as when the Really Useless Panto Company performed 'If I were not upon this Stage' which was extremely well rehearsed but didn't prevent the looks of trepidation on their faces when arms were going in all directions, it really was hysterical.

The gentlemen's 'Little Drummer Boy/Peace on Earth was delightful, as was Mary Brigg's and Richard Watson's 'Baby it's Cold Outside' but the highlights for me were 'Follow the Star', sung *a capella* (unaccompanied), and 'Let there be Peace' which had a gospel feel to it and the 'Very Best Time of Year' which was unknown but beautiful.

Well there was something for everyone in this event, and it most definitely put us all in the Christmas spirit: we had a fabulous time.

Director: Mary Brigg
Musical Director: Richard Watson

Louise Hickey



The Screen at the Phoenix "team" has now finalised our 2020 winter programme:

Late Night (15)
Sat 4th Jan 7pm



Emma Thompson plays Katherine Newbury, who is a legendary late-night talk show host, whose world is turned upside down when she hires her only female staff writer played by Kaling.

Yesterday (12A)
Sat 18th Jan 7pm



Academy Award-winning director Danny Boyle joins celebrated screenwriter Richard Curtis for a new comedy starring Lily James, Himesh Patel and Kate McKinnon.

Sometimes Always Never (12A)

Sat 1st Feb 7pm



Alan is a stylish tailor with moves as sharp as his suits. He has spent years searching tirelessly for his missing son Michael who stormed out over a game of Scrabble. With a body to identify and his family torn apart, Alan must repair the relationship with his youngest son Peter.

Judy (12A)

Sat 15th Feb 7pm



Winter 1968 and showbiz legend Judy Garland arrives in London to perform in a sell-out run at The Talk of the Town. It is 30 years since she shot to global stardom in The Wizard Of Oz, but if her voice has weakened, its dramatic intensity has only grown.

The White Crow(12A)

Sun 1st Mar 7pm



It is 1961 and Rudolf Nureyev, not yet the imperious figure of legend, is a member of the world-renowned Kirov Ballet Company, travelling for the first time outside the Soviet Union.

Downton Abbey(PG)

Sun 15th Mar 7pm



The continuing story of the Crawley family, wealthy owners of a large estate in the English countryside in the early 20th century.

Official Secrets (15)

Sat 28th Mar 7pm



Truth is the first casualty of war. Official Secrets reveals the untold true and gripping story behind courageous journalist, Katharine Gun who put her life and career on the line to showcase the lies of the government and change modern history forever.

To book tickets and view a trailer go to the cinema page on the Phoenix Theatre website:

<http://www.phoenix-theatre.org.uk/cinema/>

Graham Russell

Members Calendar for January

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
30	31	1	2	3	4 Late Night (Screen at the Phoenix) 7:00 pm	5
6	7 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	8	9 Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	10 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	11 Phoenix Youth Theatre 10:00 am - 11:30 am	12
13	14 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	15	16 Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	17 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	18 Phoenix Youth Theatre 10:00 am - 11:30 am Yesterday (Screen at the Phoenix) 7:00 pm	19
20	21 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	22 Reading of 'The Weekend', by Michael Palin 7:30 pm	23 Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	24 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	25 Phoenix Youth Theatre 10:00 am - 11:30 am	26
27	28 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	29 Book launch - David Pollard 7:30 pm	30 Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	31 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	1 Phoenix Youth Theatre 10:00 am - 11:30 am Sometimes Almost Never (Screen at the Phoenix) 7:00 pm	2

January 2020

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3	4 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	5 Auditions for 'The Weekend', by Michael Palin 7:30 pm	6 Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	7 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	8 Phoenix Youth Theatre 10:00 am - 11:30 am	9
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24	25 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	26 Private booking by Kyrle Probus Club 2:00 pm	27 Phoenix Theatre Singers 7:30 pm	28 The Lady Killers rehearsal 7:30 pm	29 Phoenix Youth Theatre 10:00 am - 11:30 am Old Time Music Hall, a charity event in aid of the Wilton Bridge Petanque Club 7:30 pm	1 The White Crow (Screen at the Phoenix) 7:00 pm

February 2020

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