

APRIL 2020

From the President

I hope that everyone is coping well in these difficult times and I would like to congratulate the committee on the prompt and efficient action taken, on the advice of the Government, to cease all activity at the Phoenix for the time being.

I must convey my commiserations to everyone involved in the production of “The Ladykillers”. What a great disappointment it must have been to you all, and particularly Tom, as it was his debut as a director. I am pleased to hear that a revival is planned. In all my fifty-seven years with ROADS/The Phoenix, this has never happened before!

However, with the spirit that exists among our membership, I am sure the Phoenix will rise again, and we must all look forward to that with confidence. Meanwhile, take care of yourselves and stay healthy and I look forward to seeing you all when things get back to normal, which I’m sure won’t be too long.

With very best wishes to you all,

Howard

Past Productions

In the absence of any live theatre at the Phoenix, you may wish to enjoy these past productions from 2017:

Ruddigore

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cb9cx9Yy9k (Act 1)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrOHVuuDQAE> (Act 2)

Phoenix Singers - Their Greatest Hits

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t85C99x_tjc

Theatre on YouTube

National Theatre Live

Weekly live streaming (free):

<https://www.youtube.com/user/ntdiscovertheatre/featured>

For a week from Thursday 2nd April: James Corden in “One Man, Two Guvnors” by Richard Bean.

Graham Russell (Newsletter Editor)

Review of The Ladykillers

Sadly The Ladykillers was on stage for only one night before the the theatre had to close. However there is a review (below) of the play written at the dress rehearsal on the previous Wednesday. As we hope to revive the production when the theatre reopens, the set is to remain on stage.



by the railway. With a lot of the cast on the stage at any one time, and a slick dialogue, the actors and the set need to coalesce and they do: all the characters are exaggerated and Graham Russell's scenery is austere and cleverly suggests a two-tier set.



The leader of the gang – Professor Marcus – played by Tony Hearn (3rd from left), gives a dominant performance and captures the eccentric yet deranged nature of the man as he presides over his disparate group of misfits preparing for a Kings Cross heist. Laughs come from the mixture of slapstick and farcical situations generated by the group. Steve Banner (4th from left) is a delight as ‘One-Round’, a dim-witted ex pugilist. He contrasts with Robin Haig (5th from left) as the bogus Major who is unsubtly revealed as a closet transvestite. Tim Betts (2nd from left) and Laurie Pegrum (1st from left) respectively, make up the remainder of the gang: a Romanian cut throat with an amusing command of the English language, and a pill popping kleptomaniac with a cleaning fetish. The landlady, Mrs Wilberforce, glides serenely through the chaos and Amanda Smith (above centre) captures her refined grit as she inevitably thwarts the Gang. Les Davis as the forbearing constable and ‘the Ladies’, bring some sanity to the mayhem. Ian Godsave's lighting and Trevor Jones' sound accentuate the proximity of the trains and the regular ludicrous demise of the gang members; even their comeuppance brings a smile.

Review by Peter Hall

The Phoenix Theatre March 2021 Production

‘Venice Revisited’, a musical with words by Richard Elgood and score by Richard Watson. Production dates - Saturday 20th to Saturday 27th March 2021.

The March 2021 production is planned to be ‘Venice Revisited’ by Richard Elgood and Richard Watson. It is a musical based on Shakespeare’s ‘The Merchant of Venice’, but with a happy ending where Shylock is not cast out but finds his old love, and two daughters, and the musical ends with all three marrying their lovers.

This will be an in-house production with Mary Brigg assisting Richard Watson on the music side. The musical will be cast from our members where possible, but open auditions will be held.

There will be a reading on Wednesday 2nd September and open auditions on Monday 14th September at 7.30pm at the theatre.

Suzanne Hill

Exciting news from the Phoenix Theatre: coming soon (March 2021), a new musical based on The Merchant of Venice. Featuring strong male and female leads, abundant opportunities for chorus work and non-speaking parts, this is a production that will see the theatre transform into Venice; its duplicity; its grandeur; its style; its illicit love affairs.....but without falling into the canals. But what of the story...

Anti-Semitism was rife in Elizabethan England and Shakespeare knew very well that a play depicting the utter humiliation of a Jew would have huge popular appeal. To do this, he chose to set his play in Venice, the wealthy centre of trade and commerce. Though money ruled, money lenders were much reviled and Shylock, a successful Jewish usurer, became Shakespeare’s play’s prime target.

Imagine then that he found an old Italian folk story and adapted it to suit these prejudices, creating “The Merchant of Venice” that we know today. Imagine that the original was very different in spirit and had been fondly handed down through generations of Italian Jews. One of these is La Zingara, the faithful custodian of the story and our narrator throughout.

Obviously more sympathetic to her race, the heart of her story is Shylock’s second trial. Seeming to the Venetian public to promise a further humiliation to the first, this does anything but and provides the climax to our play. Here one simple truth is revealed to rock to its foundation the prejudices of the Venetian world. Portia and Shylock now see each other, as we see them, in a wholly new light. And our view of Bassanio with his fine sentiments (“All that glisters is not gold”) takes a dramatic turn. After all these years, La Zingara, among others, hopes we will set the record straight as our musical imagines the play Shakespeare dare not write.

With light comedy and dark passion; the venality of naked commercialism and the purity of true love, Venice Revisited promises to be a tremendous addition to the roster of excellence already seen at the Phoenix. With book and lyrics by Richard Elgood; a Cheltenham-based drama teacher who taught a certain young Rowan Atkinson all he knows, and with a score and songs by our very own Richard Watson, the show promises to be a veritable literary and musical feast for the senses...like Venice itself!

Richard Watson

Revised dates

‘The Ladykillers’

We hope to put this play on as the first production after the theatre reopens.

Singers Summer Show - Magic Moments

Mary Brigg says that the show will not be ready for the planned dates at the end of June. New dates will be planned when rehearsals can restart.

‘The Weekend’ by Michael Palin

Rehearsals, which were due to commence on 24th March, are now postponed until further notice. As Renee Field, the director, is only able to direct in the May/June time slot, it is proposed that we put on this play in May 2021, and move all other productions to later dates. The play has been cast and the cast all have their scripts so they will be able to learn their lines in plenty of time during their confinement at home.

Our Star Theatre Company’s production of ‘Death at Sea’

Has also been move from May 2020 to May 2021.

Suzanne Hill

Vandalism

Unfortunately there was a spate of vandalism of the theatre roof in March resulting in slate repairs on two occasions. Following advice from the local police, anti-climb paint has been applied to the roof and warning notices displayed. Thanks to Alan Smith for organising the repairs.

Valuables & Bar Stock

Alison Clarke has donated the food and drink, that was going to go out of date, to the food bank and they were grateful. Notices have been put up saying that all valuables and stock have been removed from the theatre.

Help and assistance

If any member needs help or assistance over the coming weeks, please do not hesitate to contact myself or one of the committee.

Stay safe and healthy everyone and see you on the other side.

Graham Russell

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