

JULY 2021

## Latest News

As we move ever closer to the re-opening of our theatre, we held our AGM last month via Zoom. The attendance was somewhat down on last year but the success of the well-attended coffee morning, organised by Alan and Lyn Smith, bodes well for the future of the theatre. We welcome Pat Fitzpatrick as our new Chair and thank Alison Clarke for her hard work, drive and enthusiasm for her four years in the post. There will be a reading of *Abelard and Heloise* in the theatre on Tuesday 20th July at 7.30pm (details below). Sadly I have to report the passing of Peter Terson aged 89. He wrote a number of plays for us and in particular gained a worldwide reputation for *Zigger Zagger*, first performed by the National Youth Theatre in 1967. A full obituary follows.

**Graham Russell** (Newsletter Editor)

## Our New Chair

Firstly, I'd like to thank you for electing me as the next Chair of The Phoenix Theatre. Secondly, I'd like to thank Alison for being such a brilliant Chair for the last four years.

When we moved to the area seven years ago, one of the first things I did was to search for theatres, having been a keen theatre goer and supporter of three amateur theatres near Warwick, where we had previously lived. I was delighted to discover the Phoenix and from our first visit, which was to a Singers Concert, I knew I wanted to get involved and do what I could to support the Phoenix. I volunteered myself for Front of House duties and bar work and my husband, Owen, joined the Singers. Two years ago I joined the committee.

Sadly, theatres have been forced to remain closed during the pandemic, but there is light at the end of the tunnel. The committee has a varied and exciting programme planned as soon as we can safely re-open. We have talented actors and singers, experienced technicians and a range of backup supporters who are all keen to bring our wonderful little theatre back to life.

We face a challenging time ahead but I am confident that, with the help of the committee, the Phoenix will rise again and we will be able to welcome audiences back again in the near future to both live theatre and cinema screenings. I will do my best, along with the rest of the committee, to ensure that we continue to entertain you, with the same high calibre of performances that you have come to expect from The Phoenix Theatre.

I look forward to meeting you all very soon.



**Pat Fitzpatrick**

## Production Co-ordinator's Column

Future events in chronological order are:

### Phoenix Youth Theatre

It is hoped that the Youth Group will restart in **September 2021** with a new facilitator from the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford.

### Our Star Theatre Company's production of 'Sherlock's Excellent Adventure' by James Barry

This will be our first event when the theatre re-opens and will take place from **16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> September 2021**.

### Phoenix Theatre Singers

The Phoenix Theatre Singers are planning a concert on **Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2021** in aid of the Friends of the Ross Cottage Hospital. Rehearsals are to begin on 8<sup>th</sup> July. Contact Mary Brigg for more information.

### Screen at the Phoenix

It is our intention to restart the cinema in **October**.

### 'The Ladykillers' by Graham Linehan

Our next in-house production when we open up will be 'The Ladykillers'. The set remains in place and the cast and crew are keen to get back to perform to our audiences. We are hoping to put it on from **20<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November 2021**. Rehearsals are to start in September.

### Phoenix Theatre Singers Xmas Show

This annual show will run from **9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> December 2021**.

### Wilton Bridge Petanque Club

The Wilton Bridge Petanque Club have hired the theatre for a concert on **Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2022** to raise funds.

### 'Abelard and Heloise' by Ronald Millar

Brian Jackson would like to direct this play in **March 2022**. A Zoom reading took place on 17<sup>th</sup> March. It is a love story set in 1131 in France. A reading will be held at the theatre on **Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> July at 7.30 pm**. DO COME ALONG!

### 'The Weekend' by Michael Palin

This comedy will now take place in **May 2022**.

### Venice Revisited

This musical will now take place in **November 2022**.

### 'School for Scandal' by Sheridan

David Pollard has now moved to Suffolk. Recordings of this play are on hold due to Covid 19 restrictions.

**Suzanne Hill**

## **Synopsis of Abelard and Heloise**

France – the early 12<sup>th</sup> C. High chivalry and the age of Troubadours. The great cathedral of Notre Dame is under construction in Paris, the first Crusade is in full swing. The throne of England is occupied by Henry 1<sup>st</sup>, youngest of The Conqueror's sons and the leading intellectual in Europe is Peter Abelard, cleric, philosopher and principal of the Paris schools. Lionised by his students, Peter is held to be a future candidate for the papacy.

When a friend and admirer, Canon Fulbert offers free accommodation for Peter and his servant in return for lessons for his niece, Peter demurs but his friend is insistent. The girl has a brain and intellect, (Perhaps Canon Fulbert also seeks some personal advantage for himself). Peter agrees and Heloise is introduced. At first Peter ignores her (she is twenty years his junior, he is too busy) but slowly he realises that Heloise is all her uncle claimed. And so the lessons begin.

Peter's respect for Heloise increases alongside her admiration for him until the latent passion growing between them is irresistible and they become lovers. Peter begs Heloise to marry him but she refuses; a cleric with a mistress can be understood, but a wife? – that would end Peter's career. So intense is their public infatuation that Peter's students begin to lose their respect and Fulbert is outraged. He plans to teach Peter a lesson – but how? Peter's servant is vainly pursuing a local 'tart' Belle Alys but can't afford her and accepts Fulbert's bribe to leave the gate to Peter's quarters unlocked. Now Fulbert's ruffians carry Peter off and carry out a dreadful assault on him, leaving him castrated.

But now is revealed the profound depth of Abelard and Heloise's love for each other, revealed in their surviving letters. When Peter dies Heloise survives him by some years as Abbess of a priory and there the play draws toward its close. But so profound is their story that in the early 19<sup>th</sup> C their bodies were disinterred and reburied together in Paris beneath an inscription: 'Abelard and Heloise – together forever'.

**Brian Jackson**

\*\*\*\*\*

### **New Committee**

The new committee elected at the AGM is as follows:

Chair - Pat Fitzpatrick

Secretary - Trevor Jones

Treasurer - Amanda Barrett

Production Co-ordinator - Suzanne Hill

Building Manager - Alan Smith

Publicity - Michelle Cooper

Members without portfolio - Alison Clarke, Mary Brigg & Graham Russell

## Peter Terson

Peter's claim to fame was a play called 'Zigger Zagger', first performed in 1967 for the National Youth Theatre. Against the background of the North East where he was born, the play focuses on the tribalism of football and the poverty of choices faced by young, working class men. It was performed eight times over a period of twenty years, televised twice and became part of the school curriculum. The working class theme was continued in *The Fishing Party* about Yorkshire miners on holiday (with Brian Glover in BBC's Play for Today). *Strippers* in 1980 made the connection between asset stripping of old industries and the wives forced to bare all to make up for the pay packets lost by their menfolk. After going on tour, it was staged at the Phoenix Theatre in London no less! Most of his theatre work was staged at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent in conjunction with director Peter Cheeseman. In total Peter wrote well over 80 plays including the following for the Phoenix:

*The Humanitarians* 2004

*The Murderous Miss Lemon* (co-written with Jane Russell) 2004

*The Black & White Gang* 2005

*The Beauty Island* (co-written with Suzanne Hill) 2006

*The Tump* (co-written with Didi Lodge) 2008

Interestingly Peter was born Peter Patterson but thought it "a bit of a mouthful" so he changed his name to Terson. Our new Chair would not have approved!

I had the pleasure of photographing Peter in his writing shed:



Graham Russell