

APRIL 2023

We are pleased to announce our involvement with NT Live to bring plays from the National Theatre to the Phoenix Theatre, in addition to our usual films which have recently included “The Banshees of Inisherin”, “Top Gun Maverick” and “Empire of Light”. Our spring/summer programme is as follows:

**Sat 22nd April 7.30pm - Living (12A)** starring Bill Nighy

'Living' is the story of an ordinary man, reduced by years of oppressive office routine to a shadow existence, who at the eleventh hour makes a supreme effort to turn his dull life into something wonderful - into one he can say has been lived to the full. Cast includes Bill Nighy, Alex Sharp and Aimee Wood.

**Sat 29th April 7.30pm - Othello (NT Live)** by William Shakespeare

**Sat 13th May 7.30pm - Life of Pi (NT Live)** by Yann Martel adapted by Lolita Chakrabarti

Puppetry, magic and storytelling combine in a unique, Olivier Award-winning stage adaptation of the best selling novel. After a cargo ship sinks in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean, a 16-year-old boy named Pi is stranded on a lifeboat with four other survivors – a hyena, a zebra, an orangutan and a Royal Bengal tiger. Time is against them, nature is harsh, who will survive?

Filmed live in London’s West End and featuring state-of-the-art visuals, the epic journey of endurance and hope is brought to life in a breath-taking new way for cinema screens.

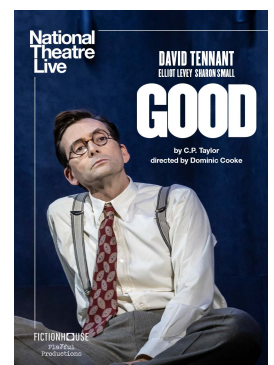
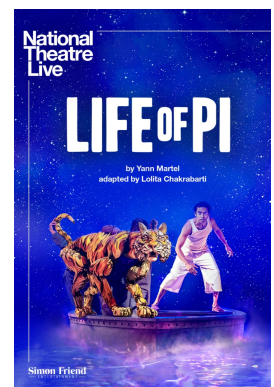
**Sat 10th June 7.30pm - Good (NT Live)** by C P Taylor starring David Tennant

David Tennant (Doctor Who) makes a blistering return to the West End in one of Britain’s most powerful political plays, as an ordinary man who is swept into the Nazi regime.

As the world faces its Second World War, John Halder, a good, intelligent German professor, finds himself pulled into a movement with unthinkable consequences.

**Sat 8th July 7.30pm - Best of Enemies (NT Live)** by James Graham

We hope you will be able support the NT Live screenings which aim to bring quality London theatre to the Phoenix at a modest ticket price of £10. Ticket prices for our usual films remain at £5. If you would be interested in becoming a projectionist, help with the bar or choose films, please contact one of the Screen at the Phoenix organisers (myself, Amanda Barrett and Graham Isle).



**Graham Russell**

## Production Co-ordinator's Column

**The Phoenix Youth Theatre** run by our facilitator from the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford, Kate Ross, includes three sessions each Saturday: Phoenix Kids (ages 4-7 years) and two groups of Phoenix Juniors (ages 8-14 years). There was a **Youth Theatre February Half Term Workshop** on 22nd February with the theme 'Heroes and Villains'. The event was enjoyed by all.

Kate is planning a **Youth Theatre Summer Production on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2023**. It will be an adapted script of **Alice in Wonderland**. A production fee of £10 will be added to the terms fee.

**Peter Gill** brought his one man show '**An Evening of the Wit and Songs of Noel Coward**' to the theatre on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February. Peter also accompanied **Anita Harris** on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February for '**An Evening with Anita Harris**'. Both events were outstanding and played to full houses. Anita Harris was a true star and signed a poster for us to display in the theatre.

**Member's Social Evenings** - The committee are planning a series of Members' Evenings in 2023. The first was a **Social Evening** with drinks and nibbles on 25<sup>th</sup> February, which was most enjoyable. This was followed by a **Members' Black Tie Dinner Dance** held on Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> March at the Royal Hotel which was well attended with over 40 present. A disco and buffet supper were provided. Many thanks to Mary Brigg and Michelle Cooper for organising the event.

**Maurice Thompson** is organising a **Rehearsed Reading for a Members' Evening on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> April**. The one-act play for the evening is entitled, '**Window Pain**' by **Patricia Gay**. The cast comprises Ann Stirrup, Lauren Crouch, Jacky Bedford, Jenny Spencer, John Spencer, Steve Doidge and Bob Houghton.

**'Venice Revisited'** by Richard Elgood and Richard Watson took place from 21<sup>st</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> March. The musical is based on Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice', but with a happy ending. Tony Hearn stepped in as co-director due to the ill-health of the author, Richard Elgood, and Mary Brigg was the repetiteur, assisting Richard Watson, who was the accompanist and musical director. Richard Watson composed the score for the show. The production received enthusiastic praise from audiences and achieved 77% seat occupancy over 5 nights. This was an excellent result bearing in mind this a completely new, unknown show by unknown authors. Congratulations to the four directors and their cast and crew.

**Dementia Awareness Week – 15 to 21 May 2023:** There will be a **film showing on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May at 2pm, of 'Love is a Many Splendored Thing'**.

**'Murder in Company'** by **Philip King and John Boland** will be directed by Renee Field. This play will be our May production in 2023, running from **Saturday 27<sup>th</sup> May to Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> June**. It is a thriller set in a church hall, where a theatre group is rehearsing. The cast comprises 4 men and 4 women and the play is set in the 1960s. There are tensions within the society and a prowler is known to be stalking the area. Could it be one of the members? The cast comprise Jane Bovell, Les Davis, Mia Field, Phil Field, Alan Chacon, Tom Lee-Hynes, Lucy Davies and Amanda Barrett. Rehearsals are underway on Tuesdays and Fridays. A production meeting will take place on 5<sup>th</sup> April.

**The Phoenix Theatre Singers Summer Show**, entitled '**Anything Goes**', will run from **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> to Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> June**.

**Peter Gill** will be bringing his show entitled '**The Jerry Lee Lewis Story**' to the Phoenix Theatre on **Friday 28<sup>th</sup> July**.

**Suzanne Hill**

## Review of Venice Revisited by Peter Hall

The idea of a production of “The Merchant of Venice – The Musical”, may seem problematic to many. The purists may ask why you would want to meddle with such a Shakespearean classic; musical theatre fans may shy away from Shylock having been force fed the Bard in their youth, whilst drama lovers may fear a saccharine Von Trapp interpretation of the Play. Theatregoers fear not.

The Phoenix Theatre Company under writer and director Richard Elgood in collaboration with composer Richard Watson, have presented the world premiere of “Venice Revisited”; an uninhibited review of the Play. Whilst being true to the plot, “Venice Revisited” does something that Shakespeare was unable to do due to the strong antisemitic sentiment of his time: it puts Shylock centre stage and gives him a background, a future and humanity. We see how he hurts and how he bleeds and characters merely mentioned by the Bard are fleshed out and new relationships explored.

The audience are drawn into an Elizabethan world by subtle lighting, a versatile minimalistic set and props, and are readily whisked from Shylock’s den to Belmont to courtroom. Accompanist Richard Watson sits at his piano stage right and plays his vibrant scores that dramatise, animate and draw out the plot. La Zingara – the story teller – played by Sandy MacNeill, delightfully keeps us abreast of the tale.



*left to right: Michelle Cooper (Portia) & Lauren Crouch (Nerissa)*

The principal players are outstanding: Michelle Cooper is a joy as Portia and superbly interprets her part in either singing or dramatic roles. Her duet “Just Like Men” with Nerissa, played by the talented Lauren Crouch, is a high point of Act One (see above). Stacey Thornhill also holds the stage and displays her vocal flair and feisty determination as Jessica. Tony Hearn plays the eponymous merchant – Antonio. He is confident, bonhomie, assertive and yet contemptuous, and draws out the hatred between Christian and Jew. Portia’s suitor – Bassanio, played by Andy Doyle, is suitably lovesick and dependable and his duet with Portia “Locked in the Locket of My Heart” is enchanting.



*left to right: Brian Jackson (Shylock), Tony Hearn (Antonio), Andy Doyle (Bassanio)*

At the heart of the plot is Shylock. Brian Jackson captures the essence of the man: his avarice, inflexibility and spite, and yet an underlying vulnerability that has witnessed love and disappointment. Shakespeare left him despised and destitute but we can now envisage another path if circumstances and religious bigotry were different. Richard Elgood explores the possibilities and proves that reconciliation is possible and – to the audience’s satisfaction – love conquers all.

**Peter Hall**

### **Venice Revisited Video Recording**

To view a video recording of the play made during the dress rehearsals, please follow these links:

Act 1:

[https://youtu.be/36\\_J--2SoPE](https://youtu.be/36_J--2SoPE)

Act 2:

<https://youtu.be/DPQNsWuaS9g>

**Graham Russell**

### **NODA Review of Venice Revisited**

I had the pleasure of attending “Venice Revisited”, a new musical written by Richard Elgood and Richard Watson, which was in effect a reworking, updated in some respects, of “The Merchant of Venice” by William Shakespeare. Briefly, Shakespeare’s version involves Antonio, an antisemitic merchant, who takes a loan from the Jew Shylock to help his friend to court Portia. Antonio can’t repay the loan, and without mercy, Shylock demands a pound of his flesh. The heiress Portia, dresses as a lawyer and saves Antonio. In

this reworking, the story is retold but we are invited to feel a greater level of pity for Shylock in his chance to redeem himself. We are also reminded of the grubby trade background of Venice.

The fixed well-built and painted set was impressive, mainly consisting of 6 archways, 4 central and one on either side of the stage, in one of which the piano was located behind a low fence. Centre stage stood a raised coffin. When the scenes switched from Belmont to Venice and vice versa, one side (2 arches) was cleverly folded back and forth to recreate the set for each location. Throughout, the music written and played by Richard Watson on piano was excellent and at times haunting, befitting the piece. The costumes were excellent, well-fitted and well-carried by the cast.



The story is linked together by La Zingara, played with great clarity and strength by Sandy MacNeill (above) who also demonstrated an excellent voice in Act 2 with “A Father’s Bond of Blood”. The ensemble of lawyers made their mark singing “Letter of the Law” with conviction and we soon learn that the coffin did not contain Portia’s real father, as she thought, but another. This scene was handled well by her mother Leah played by Jacky Bedford and her grandmother played by Stephanie Piggott.

Portia was played by Michelle Cooper and maintained a great often bright personality throughout, full of feeling as well as some expressive singing, not only with Nerissa, well played by Lauren Crouch, (especially ‘Just Like Men’) but later with Bassanio (Andy Doyle) who had to overcome all manner of problems to eventually win his bride. Andy fulfills the role with great strength and poise and when he loses all his money is forced to seek a loan from Antonio sympathetically played by Tony Hearn. This has to be facilitated via Shylock who agrees to the loan, although for failure to repay it, he would literally seek a “pound of flesh” from Antonio. Brian Jackson as Shylock provided an excellent characterisation, initially the villain, but latterly a more understanding human being and his final speech in Act 2 was moving.

Shylock’s daughter Jessica played by Stacey Thornhill yearns for a husband and has an eye for Lorenzo played by Tudor Smoleanu, and both fulfill their respective characters very well, the latter often with great energy (see overleaf). In fact there was no weak link amongst the principals with Maurice Thompson



(Lawyer/Duke) and Steve Doidge (Gratiano) providing full support, together with a busy ensemble. I felt throughout, the dialogue was taken at just the right pace in a style that was meaningful and credit must be due to the writing of Richard Elgood. Full of admiration, I conclude this new production deserves to be experienced more widely.



**Bruce Wyatt (NODA)**

# DEMENTIA ACTION WEEK

**15th - 21st MAY 2023**

Join us for a fun-packed week of events around Ross-on-Wye to help raise awareness of dementia

All events are **FREE** and dementia friendly

## AFTERNOON TEA

**Monday 15th May 2pm – 4pm**

at Ross Community Garden  
Old Gloucester Road

To book—

Email: [tim.shelley@haygrove.co.uk](mailto:tim.shelley@haygrove.co.uk)  
or call: 07972624378

## CHURCH SERVICE

**Tuesday 16th May 11am –1pm**

at St Mary's Church

Refreshments after the service

No booking required

For more information contact  
Derek Glover on 01989 565167

## FILM SCREENING

**Wednesday 17th May 2pm**

“Love is a Many-Splendored Thing”

at the Phoenix Theatre

Doors open for refreshments at 1.30 pm

To book visit:

<https://bit.ly/rossfilm>  
or call 01989 313002

## TEA DANCE

**Thursday 18th May 1pm –4pm**

at the Larruperz Centre hosted by

Ross Meeting Centre

To book visit:

<https://bit.ly/rossteadance>  
or call 01989 313002

## Saturday 20th May from 10am

Come and talk to us at our **MARKET STALL** to learn more about how Ross-on-Wye is becoming a dementia friendly town and how you can help.

For more information call Elaine from Ross Meeting Centre on:  
**07506 992971**