

## JANUARY 2024

2023 has been a very successful year for the Phoenix with a full and varied programme of excellent productions, including some from visiting performers, all of which have been much appreciated by our audiences. The talent shown by our own members has been amazing both on stage and behind the scenes. Our cinema has also gone from strength to strength with the inclusion of National Theatre Live. Our Youth theatre is blossoming.

The reintroduction of our popular members evenings of rehearsed short play readings and quizzes has been well supported. We have all enjoyed these informal occasions where we can be entertained, socialise with friends, and have a drink and a chat.

Next year we have an equally ambitious and enticing programme of productions and members evenings planned with something for everyone, details of which can be found later in this newsletter.

As usual , I am putting out my annual request for help to support all of the above ventures. If more members could offer their time for Front of House, box office, bar or backstage roles, we would love to hear from you. It's a great way of getting involved and being part of a production even if you are not actually performing. Who knows? You may even enjoy it. I know I do.

I thank you all for your continued support and look forward to welcoming you to the Phoenix Theatre again during 2024. Happy New Year to one and all.

**Pat Fitzpatrick (Chair)**



*The Phoenix Theatre Singers at the Xmas Concert*

## Production Co-ordinator's Column

Our November 2023 production was a comedy about the four horsemen of the apocalypse, entitled '**Crazy Horses**' by Mark Norman, directed by Maurice Thompson. It was a great success, achieving 95% seat occupancy. Congratulations to Maurice, his cast and crew.

**Our Phoenix Theatre Singers Xmas Concert**, which ran for three nights in December, was a delight. Full of talent and variety. It achieved only 65% seat occupancy, due in part to the number of other events taking place at the time. Congratulations to Mary Brigg and all concerned.

**Our Phoenix Theatre Xmas Party** was held at the theatre on Friday 15<sup>th</sup> December. Bob Houghton provided the disco and Lynn Tait organised a buffet supper. Many thanks to Amanda Barrett for running the bar. A great time was had by all!

**The Phoenix Youth Theatre** run by our facilitator from the Courtyard Theatre in Hereford, **Kate Ross**, meet every Saturday in term time, and restart in the New Year on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> January. There are three sessions each Saturday, Phoenix Kids, ages 4-7 years, from 9.30 to 10.15 am, (£41/term) and two groups of Phoenix Juniors, ages 8-14 years, from 10.30 am to 12 noon and 12 noon to 1.30 pm. (£45/term). Kate will be directing a **Youth Theatre Production on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> April 2024**. Title to be confirmed.

### Members Social Evenings

The committee is planning a series of Members' Evenings.

Our January event will be a **40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Black Tie and Posh Frock Event** at the Royal Hotel on **Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> January at 7.30 pm**. There will be a disco and buffet supper. It is to celebrate the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the building of the Phoenix Theatre on the site of the old fire station. Ticket price £30. Please let Mary Brigg know if you will be attending, on [wbrigg@btinternet.com](mailto:wbrigg@btinternet.com), when Mary will let you know how to pay.

Our February event is '**An Improvisation Evening**' on **Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> February at 7.30 pm**. There will be a panel and chairman, and the evening will be based on the television panel game, 'Whose Line Is It Anyway', with inspiration from 'I'm sorry, I Haven't a Clue'. Tony Hearn, Richard Watson, Nathan Cole and George Dixon will be the panelists, with John Spencer as chairman. More about the evening elsewhere in this newsletter.

### Peter Gill presents 'The Comedy Songbook'

His show on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> February is SOLD OUT. For followers of Peter Gill, he has booked 2 other dates in 2024 for new shows. Do get your tickets early!

### March production

This will be '**Maggie May**' by Frances Poet, directed by Brian Jackson. Performance dates are **Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> to Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> March, excluding the Sunday**. The cast includes Jane Bovell, Steve Doidge, Suzanne Hill, Tudor Smoleanu and Lori Weber. This is the story of Maggie; her husband, Gordon; their son, Michael; his girlfriend, Claire; and Maggie's friend, Jo. It is a heartfelt and inspiring story of hope when dealing with the surprises that life throws at us. Not to be missed! Tickets now on sale.

**Peter Gill presents 'Talbot House – A Home from Home', on Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> March at 7.30 pm**. Details below. Tickets are now on sale.

**Keith James is to perform 'The Music of Yusuf – Cat Stevens, on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> April at 7.30 pm**. Tickets £16. There is a link on our theatre's Upcoming Events page (<http://www.phoenix-theatre.org.uk/upcoming-events/>) for you to book tickets.

**Suzanne Hill**

## February Members Evening

On Wednesday 21st February at 7.30pm we are going to bring you a members' evening with a difference: a comedy improvisation evening based on the kind of games you might have seen and heard on TV's *Whose Line Is It Anyway* and Radio 4's *I'm Sorry I Haven't A Clue*.

The panel will be made up of Richard Watson, Nathan Cole, George Dixon and myself. In the chair will be John Spencer. Most of you will know Richard as pianist for the Phoenix Singers, and he was Musical Director of *Venice Revisited*. The rest of us all appeared in the recent production of *Crazy Horses*.

Don't expect us to be as good as the professionals, but we can confidently predict that we will have you laughing and thoroughly enjoying the evening. We look forward to seeing you.

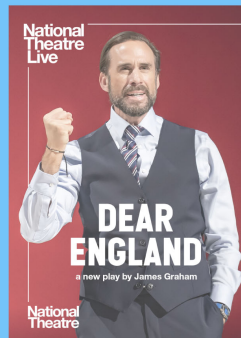
**Tony Hearn**



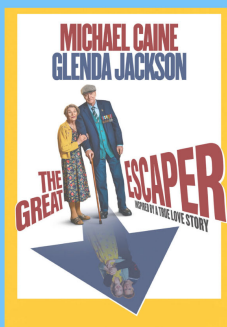
### January & February 2024 programme



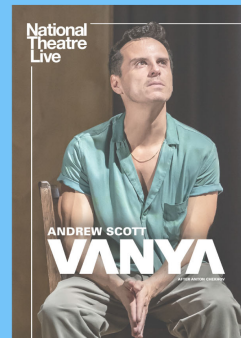
Oppenheimer (15)  
Sat 13th January 7.30pm



Dear England (NT Live) (15)  
Sat 27th January 7.30pm



The Great Escaper (12A)  
Sat 10th February 7.30pm



Vanya (NT Live) (15)  
Sat 24th February 7.30pm

Tickets from the Phoenix Theatre website:  
<http://www.phoenix-theatre.org.uk/cinema/>

The cinema programme continues with:

30th March - **Past Lives**

20th April - **NT Live tba**

4th May - **Mrs Harris Goes to Paris**

1st June - **NT Live tba**



## Crazy Horses Review (NODA)

The action takes place over a period of several weeks in locations on Earth, in Heaven and in Hell. Heaven is in chaos and God shakes things up a bit by swopping roles of the Horsemen, Death and Famine. Unhappy with the idea the Horsepeople meet and scheme to call on Satan to stage a coup.

I would have described the staging as simple, with plain walls and 2 entrance doors at the rear of the playing area, but soon appreciated that with 14 changes in location, parts of the scenery were cleverly hinged, enabling the stage crew to completely change each set including the pictures on the walls. The wait whilst this was done was worth it.



The scene opens in God's office (left) when the swop is arranged, but it does not go well when Famine (acting as Death) goes to the wrong address – one of many amusing scenes initiated by God (John Spencer), Death (Tony Hearn) and Famine (Steve Doidge). Also involved are Plague played by Jacky Bedford and War played by Phil Field and both add to the action well.

*(left to right) John Spencer & Tony Hearn*



Moving to Satan's Office (left) we find Satan well played by Nathan Cole, although dressed in tank top and open sandals (with red painted toe nails) he needs his megaphone to sound sinister. We learn that the real power behind the office is Satan's Mum, also played well by Jenny Spencer.



*(left to right) George Dixon, Jacky Bedford, Tony Hearn, Nathan Cole, Steve Doidge & Phil Field*

To create havoc, Satan sends Frunk a goblin to meet the Horsepeople, who reckons unconvincingly he can hide anywhere. George Dixon (above left) played this with great characterisation. Great confusion ensues when a cleaner – expressively played by Stephanie Piggott – arrives in God’s common room who the Horsepeople believe is Frunk in disguise.

Eventually the plot to overturn god fails and in another twist we learn the ‘family’ link between God and Satan and a proposal for a new 11th commandment!



*(left to right) John Spencer & Graham Isle*

The entire cast were accomplished actors including all in other roles; Graham Isle ( Saint Peter), Bob Houghton (A Man) and Suzanne Hill standing in at short notice for Renee Field (A Woman) who subsequently was able to return to the role.

Congratulations to director Maurice Thompson and the production team and my thanks for the usual warm welcome.

**Bruce Wyatt**



## Peter Gill - Talbot House

# TALBOT HOUSE

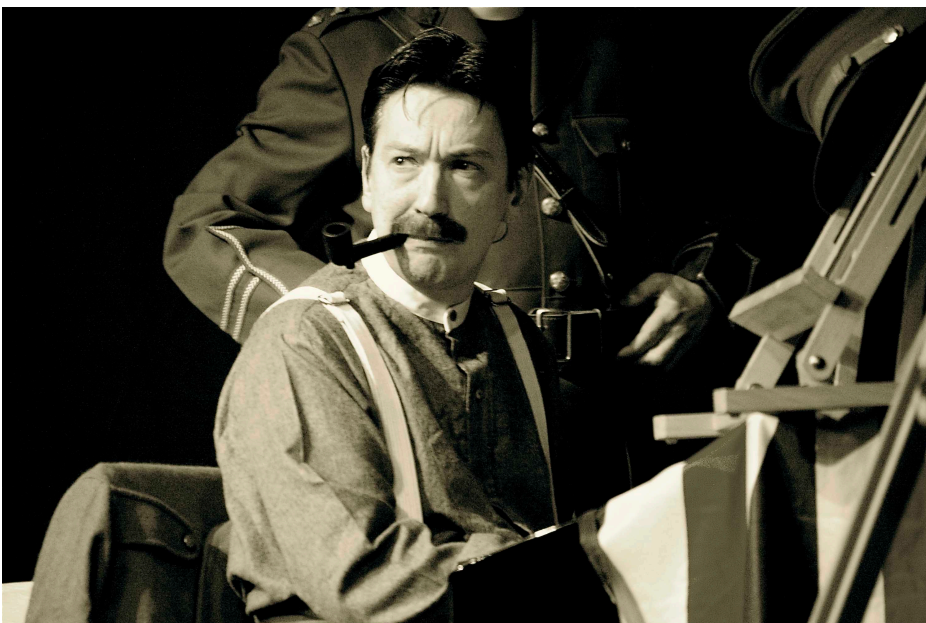
A home from home

The story in words and music of the First World War haven for all soldiers, regardless of rank, which ultimately became the inspiration for the Toc H movement.

Written & directed by  
Peter Gill



During the Great War, Talbot House in Poperinge, Belgium, a few short miles behind the front line, became a haven for thousands of allied troops – a ‘home from home’ where they enjoyed some home comforts and remembered the men that they really were. Run by a diminutive chaplain named Tubby Clayton the house became known by its army signaller’s code of Toc H and ultimately would be the inspiration for the association with that name. This play, written by Peter Gill and aimed at a family audience, recreates the humour, music and wonderful atmosphere of this inspirational house.



My show will be at the  
Phoenix on **Saturday 23rd  
March at 7.30pm.**

**Peter Gill**

*Peter Gill as Arthur Pettifer*