

NOISES OFF

Welcome to this, the first edition of "Noises Off" for over six months. But although our theatre has now been "dark" for nearly a year and a half, we have been doing our best to keep things ticking over, as this article will attempt to demonstrate.

We had just finished performing *Table Manners* in February 2020, when the first lockdown was imposed, thus preventing our performance of *Waiting for Godot*, planned for April 2020. The director and cast continued rehearsing "virtually", courtesy of Zoom, throughout the summer, and they created a 5-minute digital creative record of their experiences, which has been entered for a special Rose Bowl Lockdown Award. The live show was finally brought out into the open, and the real world, in September, on two gloriously sunny Saturdays in Paddock Garden. It was very warmly received by sell-out audiences, and attracted glowing reviews.

As winter drew on, we once more retreated to our firesides and computer screens, taking solace in virtual playreading, and, in some cases, playwriting. A loyal band of Zoomers logged on regularly, as we shared readings of *The Dressmaker* - a French farce by Georges Feydeau, superbly translated and re-imagined by John Crabtree, in

WELCOME BACK!

November. This was followed by *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* by Brian Clarke - a candidate for future live performance in the theatre - in December. January brought us the bizarre world of *Cold Comfort Farm* by Paul Doust and Stella Gibbons. In February and March, we looked at *Villainy* - Martin Williams's experimental exploration of Shakespeare's bad guys, and, in similar vein, April saw *Stepping on my Shadow* - Adrian Harding's dramatisation of his experiences and memories of the Camino de Santiago de Compostella, framed in the manner of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

By this time, we felt that the end of lockdown was in sight, and the Production Committee decided to focus on a strategy flexible enough to adapt to whatever came along in terms of the easing of restrictions.

Our next playreading, therefore, was a trial run for an autumn re-opening of the theatre, and Agatha Christie's *The Witness for the Prosecution* won everyone's approval. Meanwhile, John Crabtree and Martin Williams were given strict instructions to prepare a project for an outdoor performance in

August, once again in Paddock Garden. More of that, below.

So, as we revel in the light that is so surely now visible at the end of the tunnel, we reflect on the two big positives to come from APS's lockdown. Firstly, that there is the will, the enthusiasm and the loyalty among us to keep things afloat and never to forget the power and the wonder of live theatre. Secondly, that even while we have been separated, we have been able to keep in touch with old friends, and, best of all, to welcome new ones, some of whom are already firmly committed to our latest projects.

GEORGE PEARSON

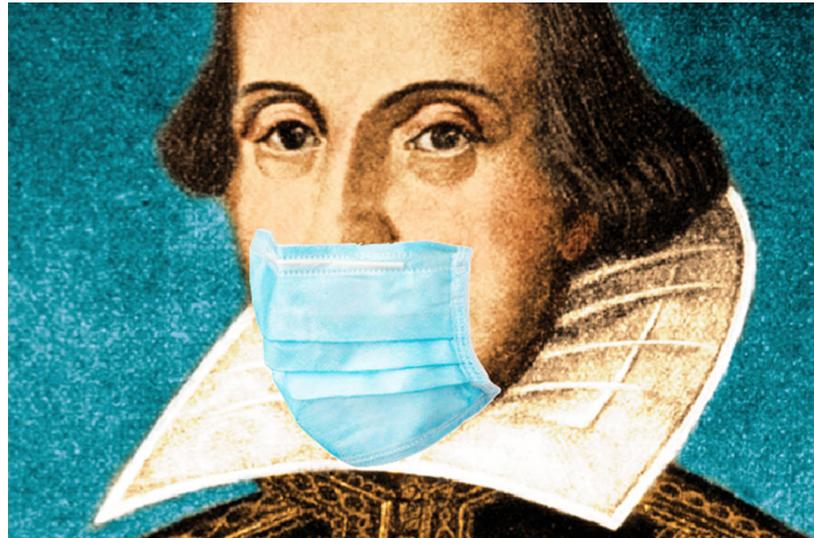
We were very sorry to hear that, in May this year, George Pearson died in the Yeatman Hospital. George and his wife Jean never appeared on stage, but they were loyal members of APS for a number of years and they were nearly always to be found helping front of house for Digby Hall productions. George also served as Membership Secretary from 2004 to 2010. Our condolences go to Jean and her family.

THE WITNESS FOR THE PROSECUTION

We are firmly committed to presenting Agatha Christie's *The Witness for the Prosecution* in late November or early December. John Crabtree has designed a stunning set, once again, construction of which is already well under way. We are both honoured and excited to have heard that the performance will be watched by Gordon Richardson (National President of NODA) and Nick Lawrence (recent former President). Details of the auditions process, will, of course, be circulated as soon as they become available.



SHAKESPEARE IN (AND OUT OF) LOVE



Following the success of *Waiting for Godot*, and mindful of the popularity of *Shakespeare in the Garden* in 2016, the Production Committee wished to put forward a proposal for a happy, summery experience for audiences to enjoy, and to help banish the memories of the past 18 months. Given the enduring popularity of Shakespeare, we decided on another miscellany of extracts from the plays and sonnets, not chosen at random, but under the unifying theme of Love. John Crabtree and Martin Williams spent a number of weeks researching and exploring texts, finally settling on a suitable selection, which they then made into a coherent whole by writing a connecting script for a narrator. The end result was entitled

Shakespeare In (and out of) Love.

There are extracts - sometimes edited and re-shaped - from around a dozen plays, including, of course, *Romeo and Juliet*, but also *The Winter's Tale*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* to name but a few, as well as two of the most famous sonnets. These, and others, make up Part One of the performance.

It would not be realistic to try tell the full stories of all these plays, of course, merely to reflect the differing light that Shakespeare shines on Love. In Part Two, the focus is on the fun that Shakespeare has with this theme, and we focus in more detail on just two plays: *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.



Richard (Petruccio) posing for pre-publicity photograph

There is a cast of nearly twenty, but even so, nearly everyone is taking on two, three or even more roles in different plays. Helen Smith is working minor miracles in producing costumes which are adaptable enough to work for each actor's differing roles,

given that there are no changing facilities in Paddock Garden.

It has been a special pleasure to welcome many new performers, as well as to welcome back old friends who had left the Players, but could

not resist the call of this opportunity. We are especially delighted to have secured the services of David Grierson, the renowned pianist, who will be providing musical accompaniment.

The performances will be on **Sunday 15th and 22nd August at 2.30pm**. Tickets will cost £10, which includes a free drink. It does not, however, include a chair! You are more than welcome to bring your own garden/picnic chair, or deckchair, or to sit on the grass. Tickets will go on sale through the APS website on Monday 26th July, or through the Box Office phone line (07585 278722). An email reminding you of the sale of tickets will be sent out just before that date, and, as always, you are urged to get your order in early.

SHAKESPEARE IN (AND OUT OF) LOVE

By John Crabtree, Martin Williams and William Shakespeare

2.30pm Sunday 15th and Sunday 22nd August 2021

Paddock Garden, Sherborne

Rachael Alexander
Linda Catchpole
Marie Field
Sylvie Lord
Graham Smith
Austin Wookey

Lisha Allen
Jessica Colson
Adrian Harding
Sarah Nias
Rob Stephens
Connor Wookey

Liam Beard
Richard Culham
Patrick Knox
Eloise Salisbury
Sarah Webster

Production Manager/Publicity:	Mark Lambert
Musical Director:	David Grierson
Stage Manager:	John Crabtree
Wardrobe Manager:	Helen Smith
Directed by:	Martin Williams