



In this issue...



NODA crit -
Time Of My Life



Our Next
Production



Centenary
Celebration



LADS
Website

Message from Cathy



Welcome to the latest and much anticipated edition of Promptings. As usual it contains lots of news and information along with all the dates for your diary so please make a note of them so you don't miss a thing.

Rehearsals are now well underway for 'A Murder is Announced' and are going well, more on that later. It's lovely to have so many new members involved in the production both onstage and backstage, all of who have fully committed themselves to the production and are now invaluable members of LADS.

Our Centenary season had a very successful start with our production of 'Time of my Life'. The production was very well received by our audiences so my congratulations to all involved. Audience numbers were incredibly good so it was a very positive start to the season.

I hope to see you all at the Christmas social but if not, I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and best wishes for 2024.

Cathy



Dates for your diary

Fri 8th December	Christmas Social - 8pm in Buckleys Bar
Sun 7th January	Set Up for <i>A Murder is Announced</i> - from 9:30 am
Thur 11th - Sat 13th January	<i>A Murder is Announced</i>
Sat 13th January	After show shindig in Buckleys Bar - all welcome
Sun 14th January	Set Down - 10:00am start
Mon 15th January	Crit. at 7:30pm in Small Hall followed by curry - all welcome
Thur 18th January	Read Through for <i>The Roundabout</i>
Mon 22nd January	First rehearsal for <i>Death of a Salesman</i>
Sat 20th April	Centenary Celebration

Members news

We are delighted to welcome Tom Draper, Sean McGwyne and Laura Pickering who are all cast in 'Death of a Salesman'. We wish them every success with their roles and hope it will be the first of many for them.

As well as welcoming new members, we were devastated to hear of the death of Sue Bonner. Sue was a LADS stalwart for many, many years, appearing in numerous LADS productions. As well as her on stage talent, Sue was exceptional at finding appropriate props and her attention to detail was unrivalled. She was always welcoming to new members, showing them the ropes and offering her friendship, support and encouragement. Sue was a valued friend to many of us who will be sorely missed and always remembered with love.



Christmas Social-8th December

Our annual LADS Christmas social is on Friday 8th December at 8pm in Buckley's Bar. It's always a lovely evening to catch up with friends so bring your nibbles, Christmas cheer and Santa hat if you have one and celebrate the festive season.

LADS Website - can you help?

Our website currently operates on an out of date platform that we can no longer maintain and therefore we need a complete redesign and re write onto a new platform. Unfortunately this is not an area that any member of the committee has extensive enough knowledge so we're looking for someone with experience in this area for help and guidance. Our website is an excellent tool for us in attracting new members as well as promoting the society and our productions so we need to ensure that it's the best it can be with our limited resources and budget. If this is something you think you could help with, please get in touch.

Centenary Celebration - 20th April 2024



This very special party, at Lopping Hall, will be a wonderful opportunity to catch-up with friends old and new, to reminisce about LADS and (for those still fit enough) to dance the night away.

We can now bring you details of what's in store and how and when to book.

Tickets are £40 a head, which includes:

- ◆ A welcome drink (plus another drink for toasts)
- ◆ 3 course hot buffet (with vegetarian options)
- ◆ Party Photo Booth (in Buckley's Bar) which includes souvenir prints
- ◆ Continuous slideshow of LADS through the decades - plus photos at the table to trip down memory lane
- ◆ Music and dancing

Note: There will be a pay bar (Buckley's Bar) throughout the evening.

Proceedings will begin promptly at 7:00pm - carriages at 11pm.

Dress code is smart casual.

It would be very helpful to us if you could RSVP to confirm whether you are planning to attend, but in any case, all bookings must be confirmed by 31st January.

Please RSVP to Jenny Skinner on jennyskinner24@gmail.com

To book tickets please send a back bank transfer to LADS (using same details as for membership fees or cheque to Martin Howarth.

I really hope that you will be able to join us for this once in a century celebration of all that is LADS.

Cathy

NODA Crit. - Time Of My Life

Thank you for inviting us to see this production of Sir Alan Ayckbourn's *Time of My Life*. Although I've seen and performed in a few of his eighty-nine plays, this was a new one to me. There were many of his familiar themes, such as marital and class conflict within the English lower-middle classes and his fascination with time shifting, which was well described in your programme. *Time of My Life* is a play with complexity around the shifting time and eavesdropping on a family in a restaurant, another of Ayckbourn's favourite settings. The running time of 2 hours 45 minutes, including interval, is a big ask for a modern audience and the cast had to work hard to keep them engaged. So, a difficult challenge to undertake for the start of LADS 2023/24 centenary season.

It was great to see such a full house for a Thursday evening and this was followed by similar numbers on Friday and Saturday. LADS manage to retain their loyal following through good productions and a fine reputation.

Set and Staging

Congratulations on a cleverly designed and well-constructed set. It was obvious we were in one of those local Italian family restaurants with archways, wine bottles and Mediterranean landscape pictures on the wall. The external window with the white lettering of the *Essa de Calvi* facing outwards was a clever touch as were the white chairs and table cloths. The main table being initially set to show the family meal in full flow was full of crockery, napkins and good glasses with the all-important red wine already poured. We even had the plastic oranges 'growing' up the shelves, nice detail.



The two walls left and right were at good angles giving good perspective of the room and opening up the scene for all to see. The doors and archways were well constructed allowing us to see the coats hung slightly off.

The positioning of the three tables was complemented well with the three pools of light to focus the audience's attention. I wondered if the main table was a little far upstage. This made the actors at the back in some scenes and their projection needed to be enhanced but it worked well with the other two smaller tables and provided a pleasing triangle.

Direction

This was no play for a rookie director and Karen Rogers' experience showed through in setting the actors in what is a very static play. There wasn't

much scope for movement being sat at tables but opportunities to vary the positioning were found, for example, with the four standing down stage centre for Glyn and Stephanie's good bye and the opening and closing scenes. The chatter at the beginning worked well and gave the atmosphere of a family occasion early on.

There was a mix of experience from the cast and I'm sure Karen worked with everyone to help their performances and characterisation. The past, present and future elements weren't easy to follow but with work and patience I think we got there. Realising that this type of structure isn't easily accessible for an audience in one showing is important and any help to provide the viewers with indications of what is happening is gratefully received, such as the Christmas jumpers and the valentine link.

The problem with the play and Sir Alan's writing, is that apart from Stephanie it was difficult to like or warm to any of the characters. If the characters aren't engaging then the audience doesn't really care what happens to them and sits passively watching without the emotional connection. I do think this was mainly in the writing but I wondered if Karen and the cast had worked through how they would appeal to the audience.

When not in the scene some of the actors left on stage sat with admirable stillness in the half light. I liked this effect of the characters being there whilst being spoken about but not reacting in any way. I'm not sure if this is scripted but it worked very well.

The lines were delivered well with good diction and phrasing but for a comedy there weren't too many laugh-out-loud moments. There were however, plenty of smiles and chuckles. The final scene with the start of the family meal was one of the highlights with energy, life and interest. The awkward introductions were recognisable and the toast to Laura, knowing this was Gerry's last night, was classic Ayckbourn.

Cast

Waiters and Owners

I am going to start with Marcel Kay, whose variety of five characters were a tremendous collection of enjoyable cameos. The play needed this light relief and Marcel delivered it well. He managed to capture the stock Italian waiter with his gestures and enthusiasm for the food. We had contrast with the surly nonchalance of 'cheerful Charlie' and his lack of customer service. Marcel was a cleaner with mop and bucket, a drinks waiter that didn't speak English, an owner who did speak Italian and a frustrated Pavarotti who burst into song at any opportunity. His line "listen to the wisdom of the wine" will stick with me for a long time. Well done Marcel on a good evening's work, you deserved a hefty tip.



Laura and Gerry

Val Jones played the disapproving and unhappy Laura well without any diplomacy around who her favourite son was. Her snobbishness towards Maureen was cleverly played with spite but without malice. The telling of the long ago fling with David was enjoyed by Laura and she made the most of watching Gerry squirm and react. Val was expressive throughout and seemed most concerned at the thought of going broke. A few of the lines were a little sticky but that was probably first night unfamiliarity. Perhaps the character could have been developed further, but this was a good performance.

Andrew Rogers' accent placed the play away from the north in southern England. His estuary English fitted Gerry well and led Andrew to give another excellent performance as the Father with little charm but plenty of arrogance. He was the type of guy that clicks his fingers at the

waiter when wanting attention and enjoys a guest being sick down her dress. He pointed out to anyone who'd listen that Adam was a bit of a loser and that he'd 'never understood him' and told Laura not to be so miserable "it's your birthday". It wasn't easy to imagine him as King of the Punks with Mohican hair but many strait laced 50/60 somethings went through that phase. Andrew has an ability to understand character and convey that through the script. It was a good performance.



Stephanie and Glyn

I really enjoyed Sophie Gilbert as Stephanie. We saw good variance in the character from the lows of Glyn telling her of the separation to the confidence of Stephanie asking for the divorce and sending the wrong type of water back at last. Stephanie's slightly forced bonhomie when with the full family was charming and her willingness to take the git of her husband back appeared genuine and gave Stephanie depth that was lacking in some of the others. Sophie was quick on her cues and brought a variety of pace and turn of phrase as well as lightly dusted sarcasm that was lost on Glyn. The break up scene was painful to watch mainly due some excellent acting from both. Sophie's despair and sadness was obvious even with her holding it together. Her hair, face and tears showed Steph's feelings. Sophie didn't once look at Glyn but instead attacked the dessert trolley after his kiss goodbye. Sophie was on top of her part and it resulted in a performance of great quality. Well done.

Jon Gilbert did a good job portraying the horrible Glyn who took all the worst bits of his father into this character. Focused on his own needs and seeking admiration for all that he did (he

thought he was the best boss), Glyn was impossible to warm to. Only when Stephanie broke through his constant talking to announce that she was pregnant, did we eventually see a different Glyn and he began to focus a little more on her. This was a good scene. The "I'm not walking out on you" scene was a tough one to watch as Jon managed to make the "you come first" sentiment seem genuine. Telling Stephanie that "we're handling it really well" just made the pain worse. The scene with Adam saw Glyn brought down and Jon delivered this contrast in the character well.



Maureen and Adam

Maureen came in for quite a bit of abuse from the snobby family, particularly Glyn and Laura; "colour blind hairdresser" 'lives by the canal'. Lizzie Clarke's Maureen was keen to impress Adam's mother from the Stratton clan. She wanted 'to look right, ... to get her approval'. I thought that Lizzie played Maureen with a confidence and air that showed she knew exactly how to behave and actually was fairly worldly wise. Not sure this is what Ayckbourn intended, but maybe thirty years it was a more relevant interpretation.

In his debut for LADS Jason Tucker did well with Adam and probably learned a lot from the experience. He coped well with a lot of lines and formed a relationship of sorts with Maureen. There was good variation in his duologue with Laura and he delivered his lines well. I'm not sure I ever believed that he edited a poetry or local arts magazine but Adam was nicely transitioned at the end as the waiter and budding bass player.

I was left wondering how this couple would ever get together and, in the end, it was proved that Maureen and Adam weren't meant for each other although they did seem to enjoy each other's company as the scenes went on.



I saw from the programme the incestuous nature of the cast with Jason and Lizzie and Sophie and Jon being couples in real life. Not to overlook Karen and Andrew working together once again. I'm sure there's an article for NODA's Curtain Up! here on acting with your real-life partner.

Sound and Lighting

The choice of music was interesting. I think we heard My Funny Valentine by Elvis Costello going into the Valentine Day scene and finished with Turn Back Time by Cher which made me smile. The variety of European guitar music was fun as it took us to Spain, Greece and of course Italy.

Summary

The wide portfolio of Alan Ayckbourn does provide plays of varying quality and personally I'm not sure this was one of his best. However, this cast and production team did well to tell the story through the characters facing the question of what is the best time of your life? The suggestion that it is probably now was a message worth taking away.

Thank you for the evening's entertainment and I look forward to the rest of your centenary season.

Paul Daynes

NODA Regional Representative.

Our next production



The rehearsals have been going really well and everybody is working hard. It's an interesting play, as on the surface it seems quite basic in its characterisation; but there are multi layers to each individual and their relationships with each other. The nuances make the performance. There is a lot of work to do but it's going to be a great show.

Can you help with the following props?

We are looking for a couple of items for props. If you can help, please let me know.

- ◆ An old mantle or wall clock. Ideally we will need to remove the hands so we only want an old one that you are getting rid of or don't mind us butchering!
- ◆ A large, bright flashlight. The play is set in the 1940's so it can't have a modern LED bulb

Christian

Front of House

You should all have received my email about Front of House for the January play. Thank you to those of you who have already offered your help but we still need more volunteers. Please contact Jenny to let her know what you can do.

jennyskinner24@gmail.com

Cathy

Do you remember?

5 years' ago

January 2019: **"The Lion in Winter"** by James Goldman. Directed by Adam Rabinowitz.

Cast included: Andrew Rogers, Melanie Clark, Ian Russell, Alex Roth, Peter Galloway, Karen Rogers, Freddy Parker



10 years' ago

January 2014: **"Why Me"** by Stanley Price. Directed by Babs Oakley

Cast included: Howard Platt, Eileen Stock, Frances Chalkwright, Cathy Naylor, Jon Gilbert, Peter Galloway



25 years' ago

January 1999: **"Rough Justice"** by Terence Frisby. Directed by Marguerite Wheatley.

Cast included: Deborah Denne, Amanda Smith, Andrew Rogers, Roger Barker, Val Parker, Babs Oakley, Foster Barnett, Irene Elkins

