

Dates for your Diary

May 20th

Auditions for Three Sisters
See page 4 & 5

May 11th

Play reading – Equus
Pack Horse at 8pm
See page 6

June 15th

Play reading – Absent Friends by
Alan Ayckbourn
Pack Horse at 8 p.m.
See page 6

July 4th 5th 8th & 9th

Charley's Aunt
See page 3

November 12th – 14th

Three Sisters
Merlin Theatre
See page 4&5

December 7th

FDC Christmas Party

NOISES OFF -

Bob (Gooding), who played a memorable Selsdon Mowbray in *Noises Off*, sent me a very nice note at the end of the run to say how much he had enjoyed himself, and thanking me for getting him involved in "this extraordinary play".



Several other people described it afterwards in a similar way and I think "extraordinary" is a rather apt way to sum up the whole experience.

It was certainly extraordinarily clever and well-written, but you would expect that from Michael Frayn, who is a highly respected playwright and novelist, as well as being regarded as one of the world's finest translators of Chekhov. It also had the benefit of 20 years of re-writing. In fact he says in his foreword that he was still revising it well into the

wildly successful National Theatre tour in 2002, until the cast insisted that he stop!

It was also extraordinarily funny, as our audiences will attest. They were coming out into the foyer afterwards exhausted with laughing, and quite prepared to accept the pre-show hype that "this is the funniest play ever written", reckless though that may have seemed sometimes in rehearsals.

But mainly it was extraordinarily difficult. I don't think any of us realised quite *how* difficult until we started rehearsing that manic Act 2, which essentially requires two plays to be performed at the same time, one spoken on stage and one silent backstage, but intersecting with split-second timing. We had one enormous advantage, in that at least we had the shell of our new house to work in, and could put up two temporary staircases, but even so it was mayhem. Tracey (Ashford),

bless her, came to our rescue when I despaired that we would ever make sense of it, and with her enormous experience in physical comedy gave us some simple pointers over the course of two rehearsals which clarified the problems and provided solutions, and in the end the cast made it work.

That was another extraordinary thing – the way the cast worked together. I can take very little credit for this, except possibly for having assembled them in the first place, and given them a bit of encouragement, but it was their energy and their commitment, and their sense of fun, which lit up the auditorium and made the whole thing so entertaining. I never

tired of watching them, and admiring the skill with which they brought the play to life.

And of course there was the set – what an extraordinary feat of design and construction!

The sight of that enormous structure revolving like a great ship to the strains of The Blue Danube each night was really wondrous, and very moving. Steve (Hooper) and his hardworking crew, not to mention Trixie (Collin) and Mike (Witt) who were responsible for all those props, were very properly rewarded every night by the audience's enthusiastic applause.

I am so grateful to Bill (Jacques) for having the imagination and determination to create such an exciting and impressive

piece of work and to Jim (Boyd) and Andrew (Bryant) for building the elements of it so painstakingly week after week.

But it was the get-in crew, who spent the whole weekend, and much of Monday, piecing it together and making it strong and safe, and then came back the following Sunday to dismantle it in just under 4 hours, who demonstrated what a wonderful Club this is and how much it relies on team-effort to create its successes.



The Get Out

Quite extraordinary... Hats off, and thank you, to you all!

Philip

NOISES OFF – what you thought – Ticket sales indicate how well a show has sold but it is the feedback from audience members which gives a real feel for how well a show has been received.

Noises Off has been a resounding success all round (although your Treasurer keeps wondering when the set build invoices will cease!). Here is a selection of comments received from our audiences. **MH**

Just felt we had to tell you how much we and our friends enjoyed the play. You must be heaped with

congratulations, but it really was one of the best we've seen at Frome, if not the best and so professional. The set was amazing as well. Great to see Bob Gooding on the stage too. Must be 30 years since we saw him last! Thanks to the Club for a really memorable evening.

It was a great show - we all laughed liked drains. It was so energetic & felt like you were all enjoying it too, so it made for a relaxing as well as exciting experience. The set turn was wonderful - what a fabulous moment. Your silent team-efficiency brought home every cliché in the book about those who do all the work behind the scenes but never get seen or praised....every play should have a moment like that.

Just to say, how very much we enjoyed Noises Off. My sides positively ached from laughter. What a tonic, but how HARD you must all have worked to put on such a splendid performance. WELL DONE FDC.

Wow! Saturday evening was just breathtakingly funny I can't stop smiling and laughing to myself. Very well done once again.

Very many congratulations on your superb production of Noises Off - it really was very funny indeed and had Liz and myself it stitches throughout. Please pass on our congratulations to all concerned, the cast (for whom the physical comedy was especially good), the crew (the set was an absolute masterpiece) and the front of house who helped complete a very enjoyable evening. I only hope we can match your quality in two weeks time!

Andrew Carpenter FAOS

What a brilliant play!
Michael Frayn writer

CHARLEY'S AUNT by Brandon Thomas

This is one of the most performed plays, still going strong after its 1982 first production.

Our new FDC production is moving it a little forward in time to the Edwardian era, a bit lighter in style with blazers & boaters for the chaps and pretty dresses for the girls. As we are playing it in two village halls and then Rook Lane we shall dispense with scenery and all the usual technical devices, trying for a bit of a music hall style with some live music.

Our cast includes Alan Burgess as Lord Fancourt- Babberley the bumbling aristocrat, still aiming to get some sort of degree at Oxford after years of trying. He is prevailed upon by his two friends Jack and Charley played by Dan Bolton and Mark Strong to impersonate Charley's Aunt to act as chaperone for their girl friends, Kitty and Amy, (Donna Matthews and Fiona Taylor). But the real aunt turns up (Val Atkinson) as do Jack's father (Robert O'OFarrell) and the girls mentor, solicitor Stephen Spettigue (Brian Williamson)

Chaos ensues as hearing that the aunt is now a widow and a millionairess the older chaps try their luck. But their proposals cause poor Fanny Babbs still dressed as the widow some problems while the real aunt pretends to be someone else. All the proceedings are watched over by Brassett the servant who has more sense than all of them put together. It really is fun all the way.

Friday July 3rd	Beckington Village Hall
Saturday July 4th	East Woodlands
Wednesday July 8th	Rook Lane Chapel
Thursday July 9th	Rook Lane Chapel

The Festival Brochure is due out in the next fortnight and members should check it for full details about venues, times and tickets.

Notes

News & Gossip from around the club

A new Grandchild for Denise Gibbons (*committee member; role in Twelfth Night*) Denise' daughter Syrena and her husband Stone have had a baby - Claudio Jack Bacchis, he was born on 23.02.09 at 10.24am weighing 7lb 2oz. They got married at the end of May in Sardinia last year in Stone's village, so baby Claudio is a honeymoon baby. Denise says the baby is lovely and mum and dad doing very well.

Clowns to the left of me Clowns to the right.....Bill Jacques (*committee member and set builder*) also paints and does pottery. He is having an exhibition of a range of ceramic clowns at the Enigma Gallery, Vicarage Street from May 16th for 6 weeks. The clowns will also be for sale.

New directing Role ... Claudia Peplar Berry (*committee member and role in Streetcar*) is directing The Full Monty for FAOS Wednesday 7th to Saturday 10th October 2009 at the Memorial Theatre.

Can you fill this empty space?

We would like to tell club members of interesting things that are happening to you. Births, Marriages, even deaths, - plays you have seen, plays you are going to be in, anything that you think we would like to know about. Email to migsj@talktalk.net. Next Newsletter is on July 1st – copy by June 26th please.

Auditions for Three Sisters

Robert O'Farrell writes:

For those who don't know the play or its author (shamefully, rather too many of you), it is difficult to give a clear picture of what it is about; you really have to see it – and a good production at that – to appreciate what a truly wonderful play it is.

In the audition, we will read through Act 1, and then some fragments of the later acts. This will give you some taste of the work. If you would like to read the version that we will be using in the production, then contact me on batcombelodge@btinternet.com and I will email you a copy. You could also Google 'Wikipedia – Three Sisters', though there are, as usual, some pretty weird comments. Or you could read on...

Three Sisters is set in Russia in the late 1890s. The sisters of the title are the Prozorovs – Olga, Masha and Irina – who, with their brother, Andrei, live in a provincial town where their father, a general, was garrison commander. At the beginning of the play he has been dead for a year, and his children dream of returning to live in Moscow, where they were born and grew up. In the meanwhile, they amuse themselves by entertaining the officers of the garrison and, in Act 1 – all brightness and laughter – the characters gather at the Prozorov's for Irina's name day party.

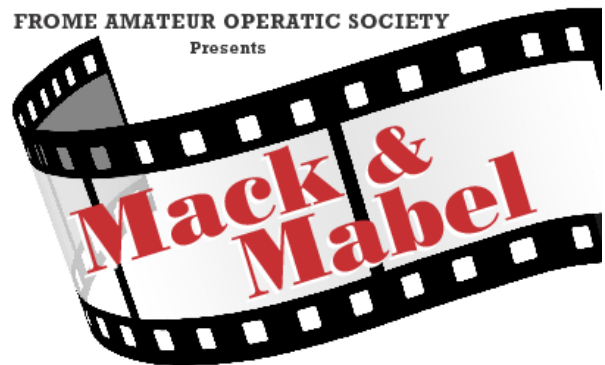
The sister's dreams are not to be fulfilled however; nobody ever gets to Moscow. Andrei's fate is the worst; he marries Natasha, a grasping, ambitious local girl (a wonderful part) who quickly embarks on an affair with the never-seen Protopopov. In the end he mortgages the house to her in order to pay off his gambling debts. Olga, who has had to act as mother to the family, stays unmarried, becoming the unwilling headmistress of the school in which she teaches. Masha embarks on a reckless affair with Colonel Vershinin, which only ends when the regiment is posted away. Irina, so

idealistic at the start of the play, is courted by both the earnest Baron Tuzenbach and by his bizarre, asocial friend, Solyony. Despairing of ever getting to Moscow, she agrees to marry the baron, only to see him killed in a duel by Solyony in the final act.

So, the action of the play is driven by two adulteries and a fatal duel; powerful stuff, you might say, except that we don't see any of this on stage, of course, only the characters' reaction to it and how it affects their lives. That is very much the way with Chekhov. It's not really a tragedy – the sisters' don't end up that badly off and, although there is a lot breast-beating and emoting, there is also plenty of gentle humour in the play. Bitter-sweet is the cliché I like to use. Chekhov actually called it a comedy, although the original cast at the Moscow Arts Theatre were not so sure. One thing is certain, though – nobody takes off their trousers, or any other items of clothing (on stage, anyway). *See next page for characters.*

**Auditions will be held at the Lamb on
May 20th at 8 p.m.**

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The Characters – The Prozorovs.

Olga Prozorov (28 in act 1) Single, now a teacher, she fears that she is stuck on the shelf as well as in a dead-end town (200 lines).

Masha (25) was married off at 18. Childless, intelligent and angry, she rushes into a doomed affair with Vershinin (230 lines)

Irina (20) is full of idealism – she is going to get a job, move to Moscow and then marry – alas, disillusion soon sets in (260)

Andrei (26, maybe younger) is destined (we are told) to be a professor, but ends up working for the local council and married to the grasping Natasha. He is the saddest of all the Prozorov's. (200)

Natasha (23ish) is quite ruthless, & gets what she wants – status, the house, a lover and a compliant husband (170)

Kulygin (mid/late 40s) – a wonderful part. Pompous but decent, he retains his dignity in the face of his wife's adultery (190)

Anfisa (80) the childrens' nanny, now a general servant (37)
(There is also a maid; no lines, but quite busy)

The Military.

Vershinin (50ish): idealistic and wordy. Claims his wife is mad, so happy to have an affair with the married Masha (230).

Baron Tuzenbach (mid 30s): awkward & ugly (almost), but a genuine idealist, in love with Irina (210)

Solyony (30?): really rather weird - also in love with Irina. (95)

Fedotick & Rode: two junior officers (45/17).
Also

Ferrapont (50 +) messenger from local council (45).

Chebutikin (60ish); the regimental doctor and lodger at Prozorovs. May have been their mothers' lover – rather dissolute (180).

As you can see, there are 8 big chunky parts – 4 men & 4 women – and some nice smaller ones. It goes without saying, of course, that the set will be magnificent (beautiful period interiors) and the costumes splendid.

Please come along to the audition to hear more.

Robert O'Farrell

P.S. This will be my first production as director for FDC. In Batcombe village I have directed the Vale Players in Sheridan's *The Rivals*, a reading of *Under Milk Wood* and a couple of Ayckbourn shorts

Play Readings – these take place every month at 8 pm at The Packhorse in Christchurch Street - all welcome - to read or just listen.

What The Butler Saw by Joe Orton

Due to an unavoidable clash with the first meeting of the *Charley's Aunt* cast, it was a small but perfectly formed group of us who met up on Monday 6th April to read Joe Orton's last play, *What The Butler Saw*.

Serendipity was at hand, however, because the play has a small cast and all who attended had lots of opportunities to read different parts, sometimes regardless of gender. The only problem was getting the lines out during frequent howls of laughter.

I said in my advance notice that, forty years on, the content might be considered tame. Interestingly, after this reading I'm not sure I agree with myself. Despite the absence of the ubiquitous four letter words commonly heard in plays and television nowadays, there is still material in this play which can shock. What allows it to work is the wonderful humour which is aimed at authority and, on reflection, perhaps it was that which shocked sensitivities in the 1960's.

Finally, one of the main reasons for holding monthly play readings is to encourage newcomers who may then decide to join. On this occasion we had two people come along and both read extremely well. It remains to be seen whether they will become members but their contribution on the night justifies the continuation of these readings. For any of you who have yet to attend one, please make the effort as I'm sure you will be pleasantly surprised. **MH**

Monday May 11th Equus by Peter Shaffer led by Calum Grant

In January we had a very successful night reading *Equus* by Peter Shaffer. The only problem was that we ran out of time to read the whole play. So for all those who were chomping on the bit (sorry about the pun) to find out what happens in the second half your dreams will be answered as we are reading the second half at May's Playreading. Don't worry if you couldn't make it in January as below is a brief synopsis. I look forward to seeing people there.

Synopsis

Psychiatrist MARTIN DYSART is beginning to lose faith in his profession when a young man is brought to him from the courts. ALAN STRANG is seventeen (although could be played slightly older) and has recently blinded six horses with a metal spike. The play centres on the relationship between the young man and Psychiatrist, and Dysart's growing obsession with the boy and the motive behind his hideous crime.

The *Longman Literature* version has the following synopsis.

Teenager Alan Strang, fought over by a religious mother and an atheist father, finds release in horses. Then something drives him to blind the horses with a spike. Why? While treating the boy, a psychiatrist discovers his own life is paradoxically in the witness box. A savage, passionate play which pinpoints the modern human spiritual quest.

Cast Detail

Martin Dysart (35-65) M Alan Strang (16-20) M
Frank Strang Alan's father (35-50) M Hesther Solomon A medium sized part, she is close to Dysart F
Dora Strang Alan's mother, a great part with some brilliant speeches(35-50)F
Jill Mason The girl who falls for Alan, confident (17-25) F Harry Dalton Stable owner M
A Nurse F

Monday June 15th Absent Friends by Alan Ayckbourn led by Michael Hoskinson

Synopsis:

Colin's friends are determined to comfort him in his grief over the death of his fiancée - a girl they have never met. They arrange a tea-party for him and are understandably on edge wondering what to say to him as they await his arrival. Their unease, however, has deeper roots as they are all kept together by a mixture of business and cross-marital emotional ties and by the time Colin arrives their tension contrasts dramatically with his cheerfully relaxed air.

Cast: 6 players, 3 men & 3 women