

Sisters Starts

As this copy of the FDC Newsletter goes to press, rehearsals are beginning our Autumn production; Chekhov's *Three Sisters*. The production dates are November 12 -14 (put those dates in your diary now).

The sisters of the title of Chekhov's bitter-sweet masterpiece are the Prozorovs – Olga, Masha and Irina - who, together with their brother Andrei, live in a provincial backwater. They are sustained by the company of the officers from the local garrison, and by their dream of returning to live again in Moscow. In the first half we observe the rather jolly and genteel social life of the Prozorov household, but off stage, adulterous affairs, reckless gambling, drunkenness and duelling all combine to frustrate the sisters' plans for a better future.

Chekhov's plays are always about educated, enlightened people hoping for a better future, and the problems they faced in finding any purpose or meaning in their lives in a Russia that seemed incapable of progress. Dr Chekhov had a role curing peasants' ailments and being Russia's best-loved writer of short stories and plays; life presents the Prozorovs with no such opportunities. On the other hand, we wonder how much Chekhov really expects us to sympathise with the sisters: was their life really so bad? Why didn't they just buy a ticket and take the next train to Moscow?

Three Sisters is quite a challenging play to put on. It has a cast of 14 (of which 9 can be said to be 'big parts' with around 200 lines). There are familiar names among the actors – David Holt plays the wordy Colonel Vershinin, Philip de Glanville the decadent Dr Chebutikin and

Jade Taylor - Masha, the middle sister. They are joined by a number of newcomers to FDC: Paul Laville plays the pompous schoolmaster, Kulygin, while Richard Thomas debuts as the idealistic Baron Tuzenbach. The two remaining sisters are also played by newcomers; Olga by Sarah Richards and Irina by 16-year old Naomi Parnell.

The play calls for sets, props and costumes that must evoke late Nineteenth Century provincial Russia. Three different sets will be required, with a garden scene following two interiors (featuring some more revolving set trickery). Costumes are coming from a specialist supplier of military costumes. Trixie Collin (who has visited Chekhov museums all over Russia) is already scouring eBay for authentic period bits and pieces. Fortunately we already have the samovar.

Robert O'Farrell

Dates for your Diary

September 6th

The Big Clear Out - Rodden Farm

August 27th

Talking Newspaper

November 12th – 14th

Three Sisters Merlin Theatre

See page 1

December 7th

FDC Christmas Party

April 18th – 24th 2010

Spring Production Habeas Corpus

See page 4

FDC – My Extended Family

Donna Matthews writes

I first came across Frome Drama Club back in the summer of 2006. I was fresh out of sixth form college with the whole of the summer stretching before me. Of two things I was sure; firstly, I had to get a job, and secondly, I had to find something to fill the void that was left after I'd finished my last school show. I'd been involved in some great productions at college; *Death and the Maiden*, *Comedians*, *Little Shop of Horrors* and *The Crucible*, and I hoped I could find something interesting going on with local groups... I wasn't disappointed.



Donna in Noises Off

After noticing some publicity in a local paper I went along to The Griffin one Sunday night and saw *Lunch*, which Emily Lewis had directed as part of the Festival. Suitably impressed I went the very next night to a play reading of *Habeas Corpus* at the Packhorse where I met a few of the FDC regulars. Although I was too late to audition of the upcoming production, *It Runs in the Family*, Philip de Glanville told me to come along to play readings and the casting for *The Crucible* at the end of the year. I duly did and the rest, as they say, is history. Philip took a chance of a complete stranger and offered me a small part in *The Crucible*, but more importantly, asked if I would be willing to act as Assistant Director for the production. I have to thank Philip for this opportunity. I learnt so much, and it is probably one of the

reasons that I'm now leaving to go off and study technical theatre and stage management at Drama College.

Over the next few years I worked with a number of groups including The Bradfordians, The Warminster Athenaeum and The Woolstore in Codford, but I always felt most at home with FDC. After *The Crucible* I was involved with Philip's "Frome Fringe" production of *Can't Stand Up for Falling Down* for the 2008 Festival and since then, *Twelfth Night*, *Noises Off* and *Charley's Aunt*. I've also been lucky enough to be involved in two shows for the Merlin

Panto Company, and more recently I asked Trixie and Mike if I could help out backstage with Claudia's community production of *West Side Story*. I joked with Trixie that they would probably have to drag me kicking and screaming from the Merlin, which has become like my second home.

I've only been a member of Frome Drama Club for three years but it feels like so much longer. In that short space of time I've made some amazing friends and grown to know the club so well that it's almost like an extended family. I love the drama scene in Frome; it's something I will always feel a part of and I know that I'll soon be back, either to sit back and enjoy a show, or get stuck-in in whatever way I can.

Three Sisters

We still need to cast the part of Ferapont, who is a working man who carries messages about for the local council. He is very much an 'old geyser' who really ought to be bearded, though it is not essential. He has 45 lines (some really good ones) and appears in each act. His presence at rehearsals is not essential until October.

Interested? contact Robert O'Farrell at batcombelodge@btinternet.com

Notes

News & Gossip from around the club

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Andrew Bryant writes;

I have just seen a production that I found truly enchanting. To start with, it was performed in a building that was old when the play was published. And it was performed by just four actors. Clockhouse Theatre Company presented the play as part of the "Henley Fringe" - an imitation of our own beloved Frome Festival. The performance space was in the Chantry House, a fifteenth century multi-purpose building attached to Henley parish church.

A small travelling company must of necessity travel light. Their set, consisting of a large chest, a symbolic tree, and drapes hung on ropes between antique timbers, was an exercise in minimalism. As one intimately bound up with the Phil & Bill merry-go-round demanded by Noises, I found this refreshing. The transformations from Athens to forest and back were effected by a couple of sweeps of Puck's hand - oh for the simple life!

With so few actors in a play with more than a dozen parts, there have to be some lightening changes, and not a hint of a dresser here. The limiting case, as mathematicians would say, was the on-stage transformation of Puck into Helena, with the actor donning a dress to reinforce the change after the first lines were spoken. The audience had to work hard for its money to keep up with the turn of events. As for the play itself, I don't know every line of the original, but I do know that some lines of WS were absent, and some non-WS lines were present. Part of Clockhouse's mission is accessibility: they do not dumb-down, but they do provide hooks that will help those of the 21st Century engage with the world of the 17th Century. And talking of hooks, Oberon's virtual fishing line, that transfixed those on which he would weave his spells, was a very effective device to engage the participation of the youngest member of the audience.

But what of the acting? I hear you cry. *How did they perform?* Well, I suppose a simple indicator for a comedy that is now four centuries old is whether it is funny. I can report that the audience were in stitches at times. There was a Bottom, full of himself as a leading man, and truly asinine in the forest. Hermia was consumed with her suspicions of her friends, while alternating as a Quince determined to make his (her?) play fit for the Athenian court. Flute manfully strove to overcome the gender obstacles, forcing his voice up an octave to become a Thisbe. And then there was Puck, filling the stage as she wove her spells one minute, and cowering, shrivelled under Oberon's force of will the next: a regulation wall and lion in one scene, and a jilted Helena in another. Yes, wonderful theatre. If Clockhouse comes your way, do go and see it. <http://www.clockhousetheatre.com>

Treasurer's Triumph

The Frome Festival this year had the Frome Engineer Sir Benjamin Baker – who helped design and build the Forth Bridge – as the theme this year. The highlight was a re-enactment of his wonderful 1887 Royal Society lecture, 'Bridging the Firth of Forth'. The programme had another actor playing the part of Sir Benjamin – but in fact it was our own treasurer Michael Hoskinson.

I will admit to trepidation – was this going to be a very dry evening with a lot of engineering talk – but no – Michael not only played the part of Sir Benjamin beautifully, with skilful timing, but he had some input into what was said, and brought the full weight of his sardonic wit to the evening. It was a brilliant mixture of real information – I learnt a lot – and fun – I laughed a lot. The evening ended with a showing of the 1935 version of The 39 Steps which was also amusing – although I am not sure it was meant to be. **M J**



Producer found

In the last issue we asked for volunteers to act as Producer for Three Sisters. Denise Hunt and Penny Scotford have agreed to do this and are helping smooth the path for the Director Robert O'Farrell.

Film Stars

Members of Frome Drama Club have been involved in a film being made by Adam and Simon Bowman. Adam looks after the website for FDC and his father Simon is our sound whiz. The film called 'Hair' is set in an alternate future - a story about eternal youth and it's consequences. Gillie Richardson, Felix Byrne and Jade Taylor all have parts and the set has been built by Bill Jacques and Jim Boyd. There will be a showing at The Merlin at a date soon to be announced.

Keely Succeeds

FDC member, Keely Beresford, has just completed her training at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and has already picked up her first job. She is understudying on a No. 1 UK tour of Entertaining Angels starring Penelope Keith. It comes to Bath between 22nd & 26th September - fingers crossed someone breaks a leg or at least catches a cold that week so Keely gets on!

Spring Production 2010

We are dusting off an old FDC favourite for next April's production. **Habeas Corpus**, by Alan Bennett, is having its third outing in 30 years for the Club, this time directed by **Philip de Glanville**.

If Alan Bennett is a National Treasure, then surely *Habeas Corpus* is one of its most precious gems. Written in 1973, it is his satirical swipe at the permissive society of the late 60s in the rather unusual form of a surreal farce – deliciously witty and laugh-out-loud funny, carefully observed, imaginatively constructed and beautifully written, and (I hope) a real joy to perform!

Unlike his later work, in which Alan Bennett focussed on 'ordinary' people, *Habeas Corpus* is peopled with characters who are gloriously larger than life and largely obsessed with sex. So, we have Arthur Wickstead – a GP in Hove, who has reached that point late in his career when his interest in people's maladies has waned to the point of extinction and can only be aroused by nubile young female patients; his wife Muriel, menopausal and frustrated, fantasising about having extramarital affairs; his sister Connie, who is convinced that she would be desirable if only she had bigger breasts, and her 'beau' the virginal Canon Throbbing, whose sexual experience is limited to looking up girl's skirts on trains; Dennis Wickstead, unloved and largely ignored son of Arthur and Muriel whose hypochondriasis finds ultimate expression in his developing an incurable and fatal disease, and whose libido finds unlikely fulfilment in the arms of the delicious Felicity Rumpers, daughter of the redoubtable Lady Rumpers, widow of Major General Rumpers, recently returned from Kuala Lumpur and shocked by slipping standards: "Is this civilisation? I'm only thankful Kenneth Clarke isn't here to see it. I've been in the country three weeks and it's nothing but sex, sex, sex - well, I'm not having any!"

Into this heady mix comes Sir Percy Shorter, the vertically challenged and pugnacious

President of the BMA, and old acquaintance of the Wickstead's, with a very large chip on his shoulder and his trousers perpetually round his ankles; Denzil Shanks, Connie's 'falsie' fitter from Leatherhead ("It's all covered in the £5") who becomes an unwilling victim of Muriel's fantasies, and the lugubriously suicidal Mr Purdue.

Drawing it all together, and cleaning up after them, is the ubiquitous Mrs Swabb – the voice of 'everyman', whose moral commentary gives us some of Alan Bennett's loveliest verbal jewels.

So, eleven in the cast (6M 5F), a good range of ages, plenty of ensemble opportunities, a lot of laughter and enormous fun. I can't wait to get started! Auditions will be in the last week of November, with a follow-up session in early December, casting will be by Christmas and rehearsals will begin early January. More news in November's Newsletter.



Philip de Glanville

**Habeas Corpus will be at the Merlin from
18th – 24th April 2010**

CHARLEY'S AUNT – What a farce about nothing!

Geddit? What a fuss/farce... – oh, suit yourselves. Anyway, where was I? Yes, Charley's Aunt, our rip roaring Festival success deserves a rip roaring review so hang on to your boaters for a whistle-stop tour.

Tour being the operative word as this was FDC's first for some years. It adds both fear and fun to a production and there is a real sense of satisfaction in rising to the challenge of different venues. In this case the tour took in Beckington, East Woodlands and Rook Lane. Next year it is hoped to add London, New York and Nunney.

Rehearsals were only a couple of weeks underway when everyone was devastated by the sudden death of Bryan Williamson who was to play the part of Spettigue. It was enormously difficult to recover but cast, crew and director did so with great determination, helped hugely by Alex Webb who stepped into the breach with sensitivity and application.

The plot is immaterial, frankly. What matters is energy and pace in bucket loads and the main provider has to be the character of Lord Fancourt Babberley pretending to be Charley's aunt. Stalwart veteran (he loves being called that!) Alan Burgess was like a Duracell bunny whenever on stage and my guess is that he lost several pounds running round in his costume for hours each night.

This production saw the debuts of three new members – Richard Green playing the all-knowing servant Brassett with great enjoyment, and Dan Bolton and Mark Stroud playing the love-struck undergraduates Jack & Charley with all the required impatience of youth. Congratulations to all of them.

Apart from Alan, the glamour was provided by Donna Matthews, Fiona Taylor and Mandy Edwards as the young lovers who combined sweetness and determination in equal measure. I was reminded of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police motto: "We get our man". Sadly, we are losing Donna to the bright lights of London where she embarks on a stage management course in September. She is sure to shine given her talent and commitment. She will be sorely missed.



The senior brigade included the regal Val Atkinson who allowed us to see how much her character enjoyed all the subterfuge; the dapper Robert O'Farrell whose plus fours and penury bedazzled us; and the frock coated Alex Webb whose scheming Spettigue was run ragged by the Brazilian with the nuts (if you get my drift).

Bob Gooding not only directed all the above but also stepped into Spettigue's shoes on the one night when Alex was not available and, on the other nights, played piano accompaniment throughout the action with great skill.

Stage management and props were undertaken with seeming effortless and typical expertise by Trixie Collin and Mike Witt, while costumes and wigs were the domain of Gillie Richardson and they were superb.

I tell you what: Bryan would have loved this production. It was all about teamwork and fun. Everyone rallied to the call and the success was richly deserved. The production was dedicated to Bryan's memory and the profits are to be presented to the Waterhouse Ward Fund at the RUH, Bath who looked after Bryan last year and gave him an extra lease of life. It is expected that such profits will be almost £1,000. Well done one and all.

MH

Play Readings – these are usually on the Second Monday of the Month and from now on will be at the Lamb Inn. However for two months they will be on Tuesday.

‘An Inspector Calls’ J.B. Priestley

On Monday 13th July we met to read J. B. Priestley’s wonderful play, ‘An Inspector Calls.’ After initial concerns over the length of the play, I began to relax as the plot began to heat up and the pace zinged along wonderfully. As always the play was brought to life in the small room above the Packhorse by all those who attended, and it was lovely to see so many people there to enjoy what is a master class in suspense and intrigue.

Tuesday September 15th at The Lamb Inn
Beyond Reasonable Doubt by Jeffrey Archer

On **TUESDAY** (please note NOT Monday) **15th September** at 8.00 p.m. we meet up at our NEW venue which is upstairs at **THE LAMB** situated at the top of Bath Street to read Jeffrey Archer's courtroom drama Beyond Reasonable Doubt. Accused of the wilful murder of his terminally ill wife, Sir David Metcalf finds himself locked in legal combat with his old rival, the cheekily named Anthony Blair-Booth QC. After a tense and gripping courtroom scene, Act I ends just as we are about to hear the jury's verdict. Act II takes us back in time to the fateful night of Lady Metcalfe's death and ends with a surprising twist. Mixed cast of 14

TUESDAY 13th October 8 p.m. at THE LAMB
The Accrington Pals by Peter Whelan

The Accrington Pals by Peter Whelan is a moving and hard-hitting play set in Accrington during the first few years of the First World War. It was first presented in 1981 by the RSC.

Early in September 1914 the Mayor of the Lancashire town of Accrington called for 100 men to form a battalion. Over 1200 men volunteered in only ten days. Near the Somme at 7.30 a.m. in the bright sunshine of 1st July 1916 over 700 Accrington Pals advanced from their trenches. As they came across the 300 yards of 'No Man's Land' they were swept by machine gun and rifle fire. In less than twenty minutes most were dead or wounded. Not one man wavered or turned back. This moving play tells their story and that of their wives and sweethearts.

Mixed cast of 10.

MH