

NÖEL COWARD'S

TONIGHT AT 8.30

PROGRAMME



THE
PLAYERS
THEATRE
COMPANY



Ladies and Gentlemen,

The idea of presenting three short plays in an evening instead of one long one is far from original. In fact, if one looks back over the years, one finds that the 'triple bill' formula has been used, with varying degrees of success, since the earliest days of the theatre. Latterly, however, that is during the last quarter of a century, it has fallen from favour. Occasionally still a curtain-raiser appears in the provinces but wearing a sadly hang-dog expression, because it knows only too well, poor thing, that it would not be there at all were the main attraction of the evening long enough.

Its spirit is further humiliated by the fact that the leading actors treat it with the utmost disdain, seldom leaving their star dressing-rooms to glance at it, let alone play it. Therefore it has to get along as well as it can in the hands of small-part actors and understudies who, although frequently far more talented and charming than their principals, have neither the name, authority nor experience to triumph over rustling programmes, banging seats and a general atmosphere of bored impatience.

A short play, having a great advantage over a long one in that it can sustain a mood without technical creaking or over-padding, deserves a better fate and if, by careful writing, acting and production I can do a little towards reinstating it in its rightful pride, I shall have achieved one of my more sentimental ambitions.

From our point of view behind the footlights the experiment will obviously be interesting. The monotony of repetition will be reduced considerably and it is to be hoped that the stimulus the Company and I will undoubtedly derive from playing several roles during the week instead of only one, will communicate itself to the audience, thereby ensuring that a good time be had by all.

All of the plays included in the programmes have been written especially. There has been no unworthy scuffling in cupboards and bureau drawers in search of forgotten manuscripts and no hurried refurbishing of old, discarded ideas.

CELEBRATING 125 YEARS OF
NOËL COWARD



Director's Note

Nine plays over three weekends, 74 characters with 17 actors... they are mad, they said, and perhaps we are - but we like nothing more than a challenge, and the amazing writing and talent of Sir Noël Coward made the job less of a challenge than expected.

His characters literally jump from the page, they are full and rounded and a joy to play and direct. His style of writing keeps your interest from the beginning through to any twist at the end, and the one-act play 'theme' means the evening is full of his wit, songs, drama and fun with not only one play but three!

In the words of Sir Noël himself -

“The primary object of the scheme is to provide a full and varied evening's entertainment for theatregoers who, we hope, will try their best to overcome any latent prejudices they may have against short plays and at least do us the honour of coming to judge for themselves”



NÖEL COWARD'S
TONIGHT
AT 8.30



ThePlayersTC.co.uk

WEEK ONE

FAMILY ALBUM

A Victorian Comedy with Music

JASPER FEATHERWAYS	ANDREW PETER SHAW
JANE, his wife	SARAH HOWELL
LAVINIA FEATHERWAYS	LYNNE MAGENNIS
RICHARD FEATHERWAYS	HAYDN DAVIS
HARRIET WINTER	NIKI LEWARNE
CHARLES WINTER	DAN O'DONNELL
EMILY VALANCE	JANE STOKES
EDWARD VALANCE	ASH BAKER
BURROWS	BEN SOWDEN

THE ASTONISHED HEART

A Play in Six Scenes

DR. CHRISTIAN FABER	PARIS ARNOLD
BARBARA, his wife	SARAH HOWELL
LEONORA VAIL	CONNIE O'DONNELL
TIM VERNEY	ASH BAKER
SUSAN BIRCH	FILIPA GARRIDO
SIR REGINALD FRENCH	DAN O'DONNELL
ERNEST	BEN SOWDEN

RED PEPPERS

An Interlude with Music

GEORGE PEPPER	ASH BAKER
LILY PEPPER	CONNIE O'DONNELL
BERT BENTLEY	BEN SOWDEN
MR EDWARDS	HAYDN DAVIS
ALF	ANDREW PETER SHAW
MABEL GRACE	LYNNE MAGENNIS

WEEK TWO

HANDS ACROSS THE SEA

A Light Comedy in One Scene

LADY 'PIGGIE' GILPIN	NIKI LEWARNE
CDR. PETER GILPIN	ASH BAKER
CLAIRE WEDDERBURN	SARAH HOWELL
LT. COL. ALASTAIR CORBETT	ANDREW PETER SHAW
MAJOR 'BOGEY' GOSLING	BEN SOWDEN
MR WADHURST	HAYDN DAVIS
MRS WADHURST	SONYA BOYCE
MR BURNHAM	DAN O'DONNELL
WALTERS	ISSY BLADEN

FUMED OAK

An Unpleasant Comedy in Two Scenes

HENRY GOW	BEN SOWDEN
DORIS, his wife	JANINE WALL
ELSIE, his daughter	MATILDA DOWDALL
MRS ROCKETT, his mother in law	JANE STOKES

SHADOW PLAY

A Musical Fantasy

VICTORIA GAYFORTH	CONNIE O'DONNELL
SIMON GAYFORTH	ANDREW PETER SHAW
MARTHA CUNNINGHAM	LYNNE MAGENNIS
GEORGE CUNNINGHAM	HAYDN DAVIS
LENA	ALISON MOORE
SIBYL HESTON	NIKI LEWARNE
MICHAEL DOYLE	PARIS ARNOLD
YOUNG MAN	ASH BAKER
HODGE	DAN O'DONNELL

WEEK THREE

WAYS & MEANS

A Light Comedy in Three Scenes

STELLA CARTWRIGHT	CONNIE O'DONNELL
TOBY CARTWRIGHT	BEN SOWDEN
OLIVE LLOYD-RANSOME	SARAH HOWELL
LORD CHAPWORTH	ANDREW PETER SHAW
NANNY	SONYA BOYCE
MURDOCH	HAYDN DAVIS
STEVENS	ASH BAKER
PRINCESS ELENA KRASSILOFF	ALISON MOORE
GASTON	DAN O'DONNELL

WE WERE DANCING

A Light Comedy in Two Scenes

LOUISE CHARTERIS	NIKI LEWARNE
HUBERT CHARTERIS	ANDREW PETER SHAW
KARL SANDYS	ASH BAKER
CLARA BETHEL	JANINE WALL
GEORGE DAVIES	PARIS ARNOLD
EVA BLAKE	ALISON MOORE
MAJOR BLAKE	HAYDN DAVIS
IPPAGA	ISSY BLADEN

STILL LIFE

A Play in Five Scenes

LAURA JESSON	CONNIE O'DONNELL
MYRTLE BAGOT	LYNNE MAGENNIS
BERYL WATERS	JANE STOKES
STANLEY	BEN SOWDEN
ALBERT GODBY	ANDREW PETER SHAW
ALEC HARVEY	PARIS ARNOLD
WOMAN IN CAFÉ	ALISON MOORE
BILL	DAN O'DONNELL
JOHNNIE	HAYDN DAVIS
MILDRED	ISSY BLADEN
DOLLY MESSITERS	SARAH HOWELL

NÖEL COWARD'S
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AT 8.30

Directed by **SARAH JONES**

Musical Director **PETER DODSWORTH**

Choreographer **CONNIE O'DONNELL**

Stage Manager **JO LIVINGSTONE**

Assistant Stage Manager **JAY WHITE**

Set & Lighting Design **SARAH JONES**

Audio Production **ANDREW PETER SHAW**

Set Construction **ADRIAN MAGENNIS**

LYNNE MAGENNIS

DAN O'DONNELL

Furniture & Props **LYNNE MAGENNIS**

SARAH JONES

DAN O'DONNELL

Wardrobe Mistress **NIKI LEWARNE**

Hair & Makeup **CONNIE O'DONNELL**

NIKI LEWARNE

Posters and Creative **SIMON HOWELL**

Programme Design **BEN SOWDEN**

Stage Photography **DANI BAILEY**

Rehearsal Photography **THE COMPANY**

OUR PRODUCTION IS DEDICATED TO

PETER SHAW beloved father of Andrew Peter Shaw

DUNCAN BROWN beloved father of Niki Lewarne

and **DOREEN ELSIE HARDY** beloved mother of Lynne Magennis

and grandmother of Dan and Connie O'Donnell

AND TO

ANDY FABER our original George Pepper, whose illness has prevented him appearing.

We hope you are recovering well and are looking after yourself! We have missed you and look forward to having you back - hale and hearty - for Love's Labours Lost!



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Acknowledgements...

Mark Rutherford and the staff of the Library Theatre, Leighton Buzzard

The partners and children of members of the cast

who have put up with a missing person in their house during the long hours of rehearsal

Mary and Clive Richards for your rugs

Sir Noel Coward for your talent

The Noel Coward Foundation for your support

Oliver Soden - author of *Masquerade*, the latest blockbusting autobiography of Sir Noel Coward - for your support

Kim Clark at **Tring Radio**, **Caz Tricks** at **Stony Radio** and **Simon Tuck** at **105.5 The Point** for the airtime

Colin Horsfield and everyone at Halton Community Combined School

for rehearsal space, stage hire and your support of our group

Edlesborough Parish Council

...and a very special thank you

We met by chance a lovely lady, Angela, who had been selflessly caring for her elderly neighbour for many years. Unfortunately the neighbour passed away with no next of kin and the council were due to remove all her belongings from her property. Angela told us a bit about Josie and how she would have loved the idea of her jewellery, furniture, and bits and bobs helping a local group and more so, that she would have loved the idea of them appearing on stage! To this end, we helped clear the property and were amazed at the lovely and sentimental items we found. Her furniture today appears on stage in its appropriate 1930 setting, her jewellery appears around the necks and wrists of our actresses and some of her 'bits and bobs' make up costumes and props. We are immensely proud that we have been able to use her property the way she would have wanted it used and we will treasure it and look after it for use again and again, by us and other groups. There are even some items that we will be forwarding to the Tring Museum for posterity. We didn't know you in life, Josie, which is a shame as we have heard lovely things about you. But we hope that wherever you now may be that you know that we send our thanks and our love to you and that your precious items are now in safe keeping and at times are on show for others to admire. Thank you, Josie, from our hearts xxx

Josephine Janet Beaumont

16th November 1935 - 27th November 2023



PARIS ARNOLD

Paris has been acting since he was a child, including a memorable early performance as an alien, covered in gold face paint.

A childhood English teacher inspired a love of Shakespeare, and Paris has subsequently appeared in dramatic performances (including multiple Shakespeare productions) across the UK.

These have involved live donkeys, lively audiences, love, death, comedy and despair.

After a time working abroad (in a non-theatrical career) he's thrilled to be back in England. Last year he returned to a world of Shakespeare, appearing with The Players Theatre Company as Oberon in an outdoor production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. At the end of 2023, he was regularly murdering and being murdered as Macbeth with Berkhamsted Theatre Company.



ISSY BLADEN

Issy is a Year 13 student at Aylesbury High School where Drama has played a big part in her studies. She has written a dissertation on European Theatre Practitioners, undertaken a project on the French playwright Ionesco, and has completed her LAMDA Grade 7 Acting Exam, where she performed the characters Juliet in *Romeo & Juliet* and Rita in *Educating Rita*.

Aside from studying, she is a member of the school choir, and also played the role of Mrs Pressman in her school's musical *Our House*. This is Issy's second production with the Players - last year, she performed in their version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* playing First Fairy/Cobweb. Now, she is delighted to be participating in their adaptation of Noel Coward's *Tonight at 8.30* and is looking forward to be playing Mildred, Ippaga and Walters. After A-levels, she hopes to study English Literature at University.



ASH BAKER

Ash started performing 14 years ago when he joined his local barbershop harmony choir. Since then, he's placed in the national top 10 quartets twice, won 4 national choir championships and represented the UK twice in international competitions in Las Vegas — he is due to represent the UK again in Cleveland, Ohio, in July this year.

Ash made the jump into theatre 5 years ago and has played various roles since then, including Charlie Price in *Kinky Boots*, Paul Maddens in *Nativity! The Musical* (a project which to date has raised over £100K for charity), Caractacus Potts in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, and most recently Malcolm in *Macbeth*. Ash loves a challenge, and the thought of bringing several characters to life in such a short space of time is one he couldn't pass up — especially when they're as well written and witty as the ones Noel Coward has created here.



SONYA BOYCE

Born in Hampshire, Sonya started her family early with three children in her 20's followed by another in her 40's. She had become the mild-mannered accountant that you see today, but her love of Film and Theatre never left her.

With the encouragement of her daughter, she joined a local amateur dramatic group in Caddington, staying mainly in the background and helping where she could.

She eventually braved the stage in a production of *The Railway Children* and loved the whole process.

She played Philostrate in the Players' production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and is delighted to be returning for *Tonight at 8.30*.

Sonya's next role sees her return to Caddington in April, playing Mrs Wilberforce in *The Ladykillers*.



**HAYDN
DAVIS**

Haydn started acting in 2008 and has performed in venues all over the South-East (as well as in France). Favourite roles include Sherlock Holmes, Scrooge, Antonio (Merchant of Venice), Antonio and Trinculo (The Tempest), Jaques (As You Like It), Antigonus (The Winter's Tale), Otto Frank and Bill Sykes. During 2020 he performed in various venues as the "Rough Sleeper", which was also made into a movie.

Recent performances have been as Andre (The Father), Pod Clock (The Borrowers), the Shakespeare-obsessed playwright John Dryden (Nell Gwynn), an "Angel" (Kinky Boots: The Musical), Denis (Calendar Girls: The Musical), Theseus (A Midsummer Night's Dream) and 'Old Man' (Macbeth). He is delighted to be involved in 6 of the 9 Noel Coward plays The Players Theatre Company will be entertaining you with.



**SARAH
HOWELL**

Performing has always been Sarah's passion and she has played various roles over the years whilst at University, at the Edinburgh Fringe and with several amateur dramatic groups. Favourite roles include Titania in A Midsummer Night's Dream, Rita in Educating Rita, Lady Anne in Richard III and Marlene in Top Girls. A great joy was to work with Berkhamsted Youth Theatre whilst her son was a member and she directed several plays with them.

Her last role was as Peter Quince with The Players and they are such a fantastic group she is delighted to attempt the madness of five roles in nine plays as part of Tonight at 8:30!

She hopes you enjoy the plays as much as she has loved being a part of it all.



**NIKI
LEWARNE**

Niki fell in love with acting at school, appearing in a number of productions including Grease, Joseph, and Mary Poppins. She hoped to go to drama school, however life got in the way, for a very long time. She took a deep breath and joined the Players inaugural workshops in late 2022 and found the passion still burning.

She was thrilled (and a bit terrified) to be cast as Titania in the outdoor, first folio production, of A Midsummer Night's Dream in May 2023. Nothing like jumping in with both feet!

These Noel Coward plays offer another opportunity of new challenges, a range of characters, accents and perhaps some song and dance — one thing is guaranteed, she will give it her ALL, and hopes you have a great time.

Niki dedicates her performances in Tonight at 8.30 to her adored father Duncan, who passed away in January.

***"I'll be seeing you in every lovely summer's day,
in everything that's light and gay,
I'll always think of you that way."***



**LYNNE
MAGENNIS**

Lynne Magennis, based locally in Long Marston, is fresh from her acting debut in A Midsummer Nights Dream and straight into the wonderful world of Noel Coward.

She is a semi-professional conference chair, technology podcaster and generally enjoys playing the fool. Apart from her interest in treading the boards, she has been active in her local horticultural society for 30 years and enjoys her horses, dogs, cooking and art.



ALISON MOORE

Alison has been on and off the stage since she was in school. As an adult, that has mostly been singing with award-winning barbershop choirs and quartets and she has been lucky enough to represent Britain at events in Ireland, The Netherlands, Spain and the USA.

She has recently got back into musical theatre, appearing in *Anything Goes* and *Sweeney Todd* in the last couple of years. Tonight at 8.30 will be her first plays since appearing as Mrs Cratchit in *A Christmas Carol* aged 16. She's very excited to try out a variety of accents in her roles.

To date, however, her favourite role remains Fagin in *Oliver!* aged 9.



CONNIE O'DONNELL

Connie is relatively new to acting, instead having performance experience ranging across singing, public speaking, and voiceover work.

Most recently her voice has been used for videos across the science and technology industry to explain how complex technologies work for diagnostics and therapeutics.

She is returning to the Players following her portrayal of Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

A spoken-word poet in her spare time, Connie is the 2022 winner of the Emily Dickinson Award for Writers.



ANDREW PETER SHAW

Andrew has been active in local theatre for many years, mostly with Unbound Theatre in Aylesbury on various plays, scripted readings, recordings, comedy sketch shows and pantos.

He has played a plethora of roles; king, soldier, surgeon, evil mastermind and quite a few Shakespeare characters including Oberon, Theseus, and, with the Players, Demetrius.

Andrew would like to dedicate his roles in Tonight at 8.30 to his much-loved father, Peter, who passed away on New Year's Day.

***“Drink to yourselves - to each other -
and to the happiness of us all.”***



BEN SOWDEN

Originally from Leeds, Ben's TV roles include *Children's Ward* and *Jane Eyre*, both for ITV. Film roles include Patrick Bateman-esque northerner Phil Duck in *Yorkshire Nutter*, the Prime President in *Chip Button: Born to Win* and sociopathic humanoid rabbit Baron Bunnyberg in *Captain Christmas All the Way*.

Between 2021 and 2023 he voiced multiple political and media figures in the online soap *The Tories* alongside Henry Morris, Rosie Holt, Con O'Neill and Steve Spiers.

Stage roles include *Bugsy Malone*, *Buttons/Fairy Godmother* in *Cinderella* at the Frazer Theatre in Knaresborough, *Rumpelstiltskin* with Halton Amateur Theatrical Society, *Lysander* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* with the Players, and multiple roles in Ubiquitous Theatre's 2023 tour of *A Christmas Carol*, where he was delighted to be joined in the cast by his children Alex and Thea.

Theatre directing credits include *The Nutcracker* and *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*.



DAN O'DONNELL

Dan's technical expertise was crucial to the Players' production of A Midsummer Night's Dream and this time around sees him treading the boards as well.

Onstage or off, he is an indispensable member of the company!



FILIPA GARRIDO

It's Filipa's second show with The Players, the first being A Midsummers night dream where she played the part of Hermia. Filipa has performed and many shows over the years including musicals, pantomimes and plays and she is very happy to be given the opportunity to perform in this fantastic play, and to share the stage with wonderful actors.



MATILDA DOWDALL

With talent and professionalism beyond her years, Matilda made her Players debut in A Midsummer Night's Dream and is a long-standing member of Toddington Amateur Dramatic Society, where her credits include The Railway Children, Phantom of the Talent Factor, and Aladdin.

Her next role with TADS will be in Trouble in Pantoland this April and she looks forward to working with the Players again in the future.



JANE STOKES

Jane has been into dance and drama from a young age doing ballet, tap, modern, Greek, speech and drama.

She joined Thame Players as a teenager and has since been part of many companies including Halton, Ubiquitous, Wendover and Preswood to name a few. She helped form a touring company called World End Players and toured the country, competing in one act festivals, managing to win many awards including the British All Winners several times. Her passion is directing as well as performing.

Jane is delighted to return to this talented and friendly group.



JANINE WALL

Janine is an English and Drama teacher at a local secondary school. She has performed in panto and stage plays with the Griffin Players and TADS theatre and had a brief stint as Ross in Macbeth with the Dunstable Rep before it was closed mid run at the start of Covid.

She has recently performed in Broadway Through the Ages with TADS, and will direct their youth company's production of Trouble in Pantoland this spring.

She was delighted to have played - appropriately enough - The Wall in the Players' production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, as she was passionate enough to gain an MA in Shakespeare studies many years ago, and is excited to be back with the Players, particularly with her real life daughter Matilda as Doris and Elsie in Fumed Oak.



**SARAH
JONES
DIRECTOR**

Sarah was a member of a professional theatre company from 15 to 29, performing weekly in theatres, a circus tent, parks, the back of lorries, Germany, a town hall and a bistro area in all styles of productions from self-written sketches, Old Time Music Hall, musicals to pantos, Priestley to Ibsen. She trained at the Academy of Live and Recorded Arts (ALRA) in London. Credits include The Bill (ITV), The Peter Principle (BBC), Abigail's Party, Hello and Goodbye, A Place With the Pigs, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Swell Party, and the News Revue in Little Venice. She performed Music Hall nightly in Charing Cross, was a founder member of the Court Theatre in Ealing and a director of Kinetic Theatre Company before moving into directing with a production of Romeo and Juliet in the UK and Jamaica.

She trained under the OSC in First Folio and thrives on theatrical challenges - of which Tonight at 8.30 is one of her greatest yet! She is so proud of this company and all they have accomplished so far.



**PETER
DODSWORTH
MUSICAL
DIRECTOR**

Peter is a singer, bassoonist, and pianist. He has been teaching, performing and musically directing shows for over 30 years. He is head of one-to-one singing and an academic/dissertation supervisor at Emil Dale Academy and also musical director for their part-time school. He is the founder of How To Sing Ltd, which owns an independent record label, and Chief Executive of Global Theatrics which specialises in the licensing of new writing.

Peter is also a musical theatre writer and his two musicals written with co-writer Carolyn Scott-Jeffs have won four new writing awards. Peter is also a performer, conductor, orchestrator, writer (music, lyrics, book), neuro-cognitive practitioner and a Vocal Health First-Aider. He is currently completing a research Masters Degree in Professional Practice & Voice Pedagogy at Voice Study Centre and University of Wales, Trinity St. David and a second degree in Psychology and Counselling with the Open University.



**JO
LIVINGSTONE
STAGE
MANAGER**

Jo works for Dacorum Council and lives in Pitstone. She has three children, two still at university, who keep her as busy now as when they were at home! She enjoys music and can often be found at gigs around the UK following all types of styles and bands - she is often sporting her latest band t-shirt at rehearsals.

Jo was a member of the Compass Theatre in Hillingdon, following her mum's footsteps into acting. Her first foray into stage management was at the Edlesborough Shakespeare Festival in 2023 and she decided to do it all over again for this epic project!

Although at times she has found backstage roles can be more nervewracking than on stage, she really enjoys working with the company and being part of such a dedicated team.

Jo is also a published poet.



**JAY
WHITE
ASSISTANT
STAGE MANAGER**

Jay has always found comfort on the stage. From a young age she would participate in any performance she could. She did dance shows, singing, piano. It was only when she did a summer camp for acting that she realised she also loved to act. From this point she threw herself into her drama lessons and chose to do it for GCSE.

So far, credits include DNA by Dennis Kelly, Macbeth, and with the Players, A Midsummer Night's Dream.

The company are sure a bright future awaits Jay whether onstage, backstage, or both - she has been a crucial part of this production.

