



LEWES THEATRE CLUB
Newsletter No.54 March 2015

THE WEIR

by
Conor McPherson
directed by
Sandra Tomlinson

**Saturday 21 March
to Saturday 28 March 2015
at 7.45 pm except Sundays
Matinee
Saturday 28 March at 2.45 pm**

www.lewestheatre.org

Editor's notes

Thanks to Mike Turner for his editorship of the newsletter and for his help in the hand over. Eight years and fifty-three editions is a real and constant contribution to the life of Lewes Theatre Club. This, in addition to the many plays Mike has directed, is testament to his focus on Lewes Theatre. I offered to take over if the vacancy remained; on mentioning this to Mike Palmer he offered a job share between the two of us. We worked on the recent Lewes Theatre Club Exhibition together and decided to approach the task in this way.

The Hound of the Baskervilles and *Alice in Wonderland* productions were very successful, with many new to Lewes Theatre turning up to see the plays. This is exactly the new participant and potential membership that the Youth Theatre is so good at reaching out to.

Many thanks to James Firth-Haydon and Tim Rowland for all their positive enthusiasm.

Paul Myles

DIARY DATES

PERFORMANCES

The Weir

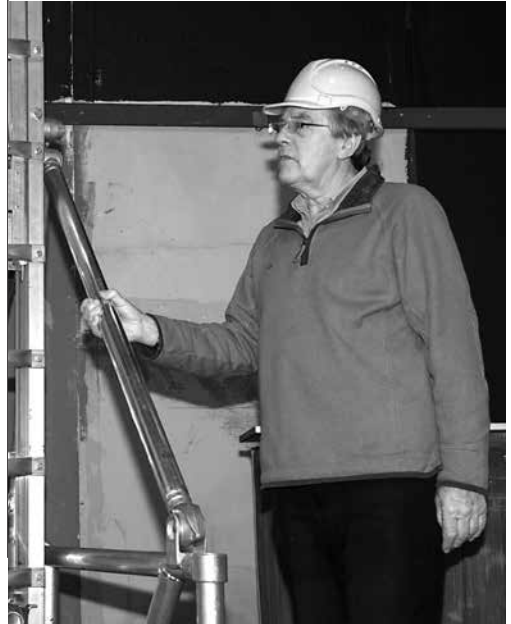
21 - 28 march

The Thrill of Love

16 - 23 May

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Backstage at The Weir

PREVIEW

THE WEIR

by Conor McPherson, directed by Sandra Tomlinson

Last year when Pat asked me to direct again, we discovered that her choice of play was unavailable. An intense period of play searching ensued. I looked for a play that was out of the ordinary and had never been performed at Lewes Little Theatre. After weeks of trying to find something inspiring, I came across *The Weir*, described as a modern classic and on its premiere in 1997 it won The Evening Standard, Critic's Circle and Olivier Award for Best New Play and established McPherson's place as one of our greatest living playwrights.

It is a play with humour and depth which showcases the rich heritage of Irish writers and demonstrates the gripping power of storytelling and the fascination with the supernatural.

A small remote Irish pub is the setting for our talented cast to bring to life ordinary people dealing with issues that touch us all. Nigel Sharpe, Derek Watts, Simon Hellyer and Mark Pelham are all familiar actors to Lewes audiences and

I am very pleased to welcome Victoria Brewer in her first role at the theatre. Just four men and a woman telling ghost stories deep in the Irish countryside but this is a play that could never be called simplistic.

I was drawn to the detailed, realistic characters, the sense of community and strong emotive themes. It is a multi-layered drama dealing with loneliness, loss and regret, companionship, life and death and the unknown beyond death. The quality of dialogue is outstanding as McPherson moves the characters seamlessly from the inconsequential to the profound.

Sometimes uncomfortable, *The Weir* is captivating, moving, haunting and funny and I strongly feel that this is a theatrical experience that you will never forget.

Sandra Tomlinson
Director

Rehearsal - The Weir



THE WEIR

Cast comments

This is a marvellous play, open and jovial one minute, intense and claustrophobic the next. A real roller coaster for the emotions.

Mark Pelham

Working on an intensely lyrical script with experienced and dedicated colleagues has been a richly rewarding experience. McPherson's writing evokes the musicality and cadences of Irish speech - so much so that I went to Sligo to learn for myself during the rehearsal process! Working with a small cast creates a special bond and has been totally enjoyable. I hope our audiences feel the same!

Derek Watts

I feel the play is about friendship and the different forms in which it can take. Within this small, rural pub, the audience is given an insight into how the different friendships work, and the affect that a new member can make on the dynamic of the group. There is great trust and affection between the characters, even when there are moments of tension, and that trust and affection has clearly been evident between us from very early on in rehearsals.

Conor McPherson's script is dark and intense and yet very funny as well; one normal evening - no big event, just the characters talking together in this tiny pub. And so, when you are drawn into the possibility of something beyond the norm, it becomes all the more believable. That's the challenge for us as actors, to ensure that we are authentic. Sandra's gentle (but also super organised!) guidance is enabling us to do this as she supports and nurtures us within our roles.

I saw this play when it first went on tour in 1999. The powerful effect it had on me then has stayed with me since, and I hope that we can move the audience in the same way.

Victoria Brewer

I think this play is a study of loneliness. Well that is not going to make you rush to see it, is it? But, crafted by Conor McPherson into a beautifully comedic 90 minutes of real-time wrapped around haunting fairy stories, it's a treat.

Some theatre critics called this play "a modern classic" and even "the best play of the twentieth century". Although, on the face of it, an unassuming play - even the playwright was quoted as describing it as "just people talking" - it won the Olivier Award for Best New Play in 1999.

Our small theatre has the intimacy that should suit this play well so that you feel you are actually eavesdropping on conversations, where the language is as you would imagine when four blokes meet up in an Irish pub but guided by McPherson into a very humane but unsettling intensity that is still full of laughs. The catalyst is the arrival of a woman. Isn't it always!

Nigel Sharpe

Feared for its long learn, this deceptively conversational play really gets crackling when everyone is firing off their cues.

Each meticulously crafted "ah" and "em" has its part in this slow burning Irish classic. Like a pot of stew constantly on the heat the characters spooky stories weave and meld together until the spine does be tingled and the hairs be on their ends. That's the plan anyway. What is it about? Loss, loneliness, humility and the warmth of drunken camaraderie, sheltered from the cold, cold night.

Simon Hellyer

THE WEIR

Backstage pictures



THE WEIR

Backstage pictures



Win Tickets



Win 2 complimentary tickets for the production of your choice

Now that we are coming to the end of our 75th anniversary season it is time to look ahead.

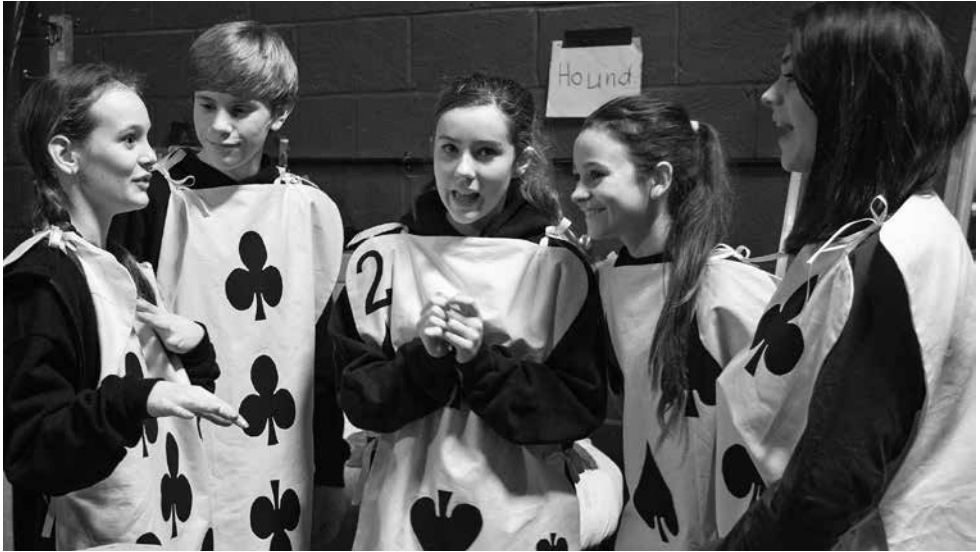
You can win these tickets, simply by sending a letter with one suggestion in answer to the following question.

What single innovation would improve your experience of Lewes Little Theatre?

Practical suggestions please, to
The Editor
The Newsletter
Lewes Little Theatre
Lancaster Street
BN7 2PX

REVIEW

Alice in Wonderland



One of the most famous and heavily analysed novels in English Literature, Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* has had many theatrical and screen outings since it was first published in 1865. Lewes Theatre youth director Tim Rowland chose the Eva Le Gallienne and Florida Friebus script, first produced in 1932, that lovingly retains the rich Victorian language and imagery. This is a very successful adaptation that returned to Broadway in 1983 with Eva Gallienne revisiting the piece, as an actress, playing the White Witch alongside Kate Burton (daughter of Richard Burton) as Alice.

Eva said of the original production "in 1932, we had *Peter Pan* in repertory, and I wanted to do another play that would be attractive to both children and grown ups, Miss Friebus suggested *Alice*. We wanted to make the book

come alive, a heavy responsibility, and there's not a word in the play that's not Lewis Carroll's. It's extraordinary how much of it is very much of today. Think of the upside down math, the chopped-up logic."

The Youth Theatre rehearsed this production twice a week and it was really encouraging to see that Tim Rowland felt his young cast were up to the challenge of developing and portraying the fantastical gallery of characters and tackling the richness of the original, dense language. So successful were they in fulfilling the task that it was very easy to forget they weren't using language immediately familiar to them. The large cast covered 32 parts between them. All, apart from the wonderfully assured Becky Clark as Alice, played multiple parts.

Shows such as this are only successful if the actors are confident, committed

REVIEW**Alice in Wonderland**

and brave in what they are doing – however unnatural the narrative, language and physicality. It was clear that all the cast had been given the right kind of imaginative training and foundation to achieve this.

So we were treated to the enigmatic, spaced out Caterpillar and gorgeous Dormouse - Philly Hunter, the mad bad and dangerous to know Queen of Hearts - Mel Henderson - also strong as the lugubrious Humpty Dumpty, Henry Fouch's charismatic Crab and quicksilver Mad Hatter, Rowan O'Clarey's bonkers cook who juggled with pans, Connie Pike's endearing White Rabbit, great physical work from Leon Capparucci as Dodo and Fish Footman, Flo Winter as Duck, Maisie Curren's Duchess and Kezia Scripps's Knave of Hearts. There were absolutely no small parts or blank moments. This is not an easy show to pull off and all the cast contributed brilliantly to the whole in the spirit of theatre as a rich group experience.

Modern cultural references included numerous contemporary musical links with sound by young member Charlie Pope, Lucy Zara and Evie Flynn relishing the opportunity to play Tweedledum and Tweedledee as gangster rappers and Lola O'Donoghue hilariously creating a celebrity culture airhead to play the White Queen. Special mention needs to be made of the many detailed costumes that were essential to the richness and enjoyment of the show. Clearly all the stops had been pulled out for the young cast. The colourful characters had the perfect

backdrop in the cleanly designed and executed set. Along with the imaginative lighting, young member Cameron Wallis assisted by Mike Batchelor, used gem-like colours and gobos to create location and atmosphere. As well as artfully designed props and furniture, the show had high and effective production values.

In the absence of a pantomime at Lewes Theatre this production lent itself very well to filling that slot as borne out by the family audience reaction.

It's clear that Tim Rowland had worked very hard and with a lot of commitment. This was not only a really well produced show but a testament to the development of the Youth Theatre and the young performers it trains and nurtures.

Lucie Fitchett



Photographs by Keith Gilbert

REVIEW *The Hound of the Baskervilles*



This hilarious adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's classic gothic novel, directed by the Youth Theatre's James Firth-Haydon, appears as number four on the list of play publisher Nick Hern's 10 most performed plays of 2013. There have been many adaptations of Sherlock Holmes most famous adventure, but this one by Stephen Canny and John Nicholson for the highly successful Peepolykus Theatre Company melds their trademark inventive physical theatre and verbal comedy while cleverly retaining an ironic respect for the original. It doesn't feel like a send-up but like an affectionate and deliciously funny tribute to the gothic detective genre.

The play is performed by three actors taking multiple parts who come in and out of character at times, addressing the audience and each other. This 'breaking of the fourth wall' is a theatrical device that audiences love to be part of, and the first night crowd at Lewes Theatre appreciated and entered into the spirit and the style of the piece.

The material looks and sounds improvised as would have been the case when the writers developed the original Peepolykus production. The trick of this genre is to make it feel fresh and as though the audience has stumbled across a delicious accident.

Three older members of the Youth Theatre - Owen Daughtery as Sherlock Holmes (and Stapleton, Cecile, Mr and Mrs Barrymore and Yokel 3), Dan Hardwick as Watson (and Yokel 1), and Rupert Flowers as Sir Charles Baskerville, (and Sir Henry Baskerville, Mortimer, Cabbie, Yokel 2, Wise Yokel) pulled it off with aplomb. Well cast and directed by James Firth-Haydon they confidently threw their individual brands of comic ability into the pot. Working together tirelessly they accessed the style of the piece well. Picking up cues, retaining a strong hold on the overall structure, and being able to react moment to moment with crucial madcap speed and imaginative input is the key to this vaudevillian style. James and his cast had clearly worked very hard on the physical and textual elements needed to

REVIEW**The Hound of the Baskervilles**

pull this off.

Owen Daughtery clearly relished the chance to explore the spikey and neurotic part of Holmes. Having seen Owen in rather straight-laced parts before it was great to see him developing his acting range and imagination so successfully. The catalogue of eccentrics he conjured up for the small parts was inventively tongue in cheek.

Dan Hardwick brought a really nice weight, warmth and twinkle in the eye humour to Watson - the innocent abroad. As an actor he was adept at flagging up the comic moments for the audience. This part acts as an engine for much of the action and he never dropped concentration, keeping the balls up in the air with strong commitment. Rupert Flowers was very funny. As a performer he is really arresting with a unique mix of droll sophistication and vulnerability. If he is anything like his stage persona I would not be surprised to see him turning up on a panel show like *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* in years to come. Wandering round the stage in various states of undress he added a puckish element to the trio of actors.

In an evening full of funny moments and set pieces a couple stand out. The train journey made by Watson and Sir Henry Baskerville to Dartmoor and the breakneck speed potted rerun of the whole of the first half at the beginning of Act 2. A really clever theatrical device by the writers and pulled off well by the cast. However, the piece is really so packed with inventive humour that I found myself with a grin on my face for the duration.

Not only does the Youth Theatre provide an opportunity to develop acting talent and interests in drama it also enables young people with an interest in the wider aspects of theatre to learn their craft. Young theatre members Charlie Pope and Cameron Wallis have been assisting Lighting and Sound Designer Mike Batchelor with his work. The night I saw it they ran the show and were, seemingly, cue perfect. This was impressive in a show that relies heavily on those technical elements to punctuate the comedy and to create suspense.



It would be nice to think that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle would have appreciated the inventive fun that both the performers and audience experienced in this adaptation rather than being startled by it. This was a very funny and affectionate take on one of the great classics of English Literature. It was a good choice by the Youth Theatre affording the cast a perfect showcase for their developing talents.

Lucie Fitchett

Photographs by Keith Gilbert

Club Director's notes

The Youth Theatre opened the 2015 part of the season with *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Alice in Wonderland*. Both plays were extremely well done and we are very pleased with the progress made by the Youth Theatre's two groups. The three older members in *The Hound* took numerous parts, charging on and off stage changing costumes and moving the set with ease. One member of the audience remarked that it was "the funniest thing" he'd seen here since *Noises Off*. It was an hilarious evening!

The younger members who performed *Alice in Wonderland* were again very impressive, and there were good performances all round. Some were in last year's play *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, as indeed were the three young men in *The Hound*, but many were new to us.

Jo Cull, their Stage Manager was full of praise for both groups. They were always ready to enter the stage before their cues came and she never had to call anyone. She said it was great teamwork and due to both James and Tim who teach and lead the Youth Groups.

I was especially pleased to see that there were many of our members in the audience besides the parents, relatives and friends of the youngsters. According to the Box Office records there were also non-members who came to see both productions following the publicity in various publications.

So thank you for supporting our youth!

The set for *The Weir* is in construction and now the cast is rehearsing onstage so Miles and his cast for *The Thrill of Love* are able to rehearse in the foyer.

The audition for *Inherit the Wind* was held on the 14 February. There is a cast of forty including children so we are again using some of the Youth Theatre group.

The ladies of the wardrobe are hoping to have another costume sale in late September. If you are free during the day to help collect, sort and pack costumes in readiness for this event, could you contact

Alsion Soudain 01273 479471 or
Gerry Cortese 01273 479432

Gerry and Alison often work in the wardrobe during the daytime finding costumes for the productions as they find it easier than working in the theatre during the evenings, especially in the winter! So if you fancy helping out with any sewing during the day, they would love to hear from you.

Hoping you will come and see *The Weir*.

Best wishes to you all.

Pat Shrimpton

LEWES THEATRE CLUB INFORMATION

Committee Chair Mike Pillar

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION £10 Double £16
Over 60s, Student & Juniors £6 Double £10
ADMISSION PRICES Evenings £8.
Matinées £6

ANTHONY JENNER BAR

All are welcome in our bar. It is open before and after all evening performances, as well as during the interval. Interval drinks may be ordered in advance.

THE NEWSLETTER

Published before each production.
Contributions in the form of articles or correspondence are welcomed and should be addressed to The Editor, Lewes Little Theatre, Lancaster Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2PX.

MEMBERSHIP

Applications should be sent to the Membership Secretary. Acting Membership involves no extra subscription. Members wishing to act are invited to attend auditions announced in the Newsletters.

CAR PARKING

Limited space at the theatre is available to those with disabilities. Municipal Car Parks, close by in Brook Street and the Needlemakers Centre, are open free of charge after 6pm.

THE WORKING PARTY

This hard-working group undertakes set building, costume, repairs and maintenance, both inside and out, meeting every Tuesday evening.

DISABLED PEOPLE

Members who have difficulty negotiating stairs and steps may enter the Theatre by the former entrance on the east side of the building. Seating close to this entrance is in Rows G9-11, H10-12 and J5-7. We can accommodate one wheelchair at certain performances. For details, ask at the Box Office. A disabled persons' toilet is located between the two main doors to the Auditorium. A fully operational induction loop has been installed. Aids should be adjusted according to the manufacturer's instructions.

OFFICERS

President Joanne Cull
Director Pat Shrimpton
Treasurer Bob Leeds
General Secretary Derek Watts
Membership Secretary Nigel Sharpe

Buying your tickets

Evening performances at 7.45pm.

Matinee at 2.45pm on Saturday 28 March.

THE BOX OFFICE 01273 474826 will be open daily except Sundays from Monday 16 March to Saturday 28 March 10.30 am until noon and from 7pm to 7.30pm.

Postal bookings received before the Box Office opening period will be given priority.

Tickets not paid for 15 minutes before the performance is timed to start may be resold.

In any case seats booked in advance but not taken up must be paid for if not resold.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

THE THRILL OF LOVE

16 - 23 May

We are currently rehearsing Amanda Whittington's outstanding drama *The Thrill of Love*, written two years ago, which examines the life and times of Ruth Ellis. Our production will coincide with the 60th anniversary of her arrest for the murder of her lover, David Blakely.

In an age when sexual exploitation and domestic violence were taboo subjects and the plea of diminished responsibility was not yet enshrined in law, Ruth sealed her own fate when she admitted carrying a gun with the intention of killing Blakely. Ironically, had she been carrying his child, she would have escaped the gallows. In fact, she had miscarried ten days before the murder after he had punched her in the stomach. Thirty-three thousand people petitioned the Home Secretary for a reprieve. Police reinforcements were

called to disperse a crowd of five hundred people who had broken through cordons to beat on the doors of Holloway Prison the night before her execution. She was the last woman to be hanged in England.

The play does not sensationalise. It tells the story of four women who worked in the drinking clubs of central London during the 1950's, dreaming of bright lights but being drawn into a world of vice. The only other member of the cast is the detective who interviews her in custody. Ruth's wartime romance had ended when her Canadian fiance, and father of her son, told her he had a wife and three children waiting for him. She was complex, generous, caring and very brave. However, she was also

ambitious, self-seeking and possessive to a point of violent obsession. We have a memorable play to perform and an excellent ensemble cast, backed by a very talented technical team.

Miles Jenner director



Gardeners Question Time



Gardeners Question Time
comes to Lewes Theatre Club

6.30pm doors open 5.30pm on Monday 27 April 2015

BAMBOOZLED BY BEGONIAS?

Frustrated by Fuchsias?

Defeated by Dahlias?

Don't Worry.

Gardener's Question Time is coming to Lewes Little Theatre and tickets are only £4.50. Tickets can be booked by leaving a message on 01273 474826, through the website www.lewestheatre.org By post at Lancaster Street, Lewes BN7 2PX, enclosing a cheque and SAE or when the Box Office is open prior to the next production of *The Weir* from the 16 - 28 March.

THE WEIR

21 - 28 March

THE THRILL OF LOVE

16 - 23 May

BOOK NOW



NAME

MEMBER NO

ADDRESS

TEL DAY TEL EVE

Please complete the form legibly and send it with remittance and S.A.E. to Box Office, Lewes Little Theatre, Lancaster St. Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2PX. Cheques should always be made payable to LEWES THEATRE CLUB.

TELEPHONE BOOKINGS: 01273 474826. See page 3 for Box Office hours.

PLAYS	Preferred Date	Alt. Date	Matinee or Evening	No. of seats	Preferred Location	Total
The Weir	First night only 2 for 1	X	Evening £8.00			
The Weir			Evening £8.00			
The Weir			Matinee £6.00			
The Thrill of Love	First night only 2 for 1	X	Evening £8.00			
The Thrill of Love			Evening £8.00			
The Thrill of Love			Matinee £6.00			

Grand Total

Please note. If the Box Office is able to fulfil only part of a request, a refund may be collected from the Box Office during opening hours. Alternatively, members may prefer to enclose either separate cheques or an open cheque crossed with a maximum amount.