

LEWES THEATRE CLUB
Newsletter No.55 MAY 2015

THE THRILL OF LOVE

by Amanda Whittington directed by Miles Jenner



Saturday 16 May
to Saturday 23 May 2015
at 7.45 pm except Sundays
Matinee
Saturday 23 May at 2.45 pm

www.lewestheatre.org

Editor's notes

In the next three months the BBC's *Gardeners' Question Time* and a one night stand of songs from Flanders and Swann will be presented in Lancaster Street. In November we had one of the stars from *Only Fools and Horses*.

Over the last few years we have seen much greater access to productions for non-members with a positive impact on audience numbers and theatre finances. For a time we had the cinema in the theatre – again with welcome revenue to the theatre and the possibility of a new audience seeing what it is we do. Let's hope this positive trend continues.

Mike Palmer

DIARY DATES

PERFORMANCES

The Thrill of Love

16 - 23 May

Flanders and Swann

6 June

Inherit the Wind

4 - 11 July



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Rehearsal *The Thrill of Love*

REVIEW

THE WEIR



In 1997 at the age of 26, Conor McPherson wrote what is hailed as a contemporary classic. *The Weir* was first performed at The Royal Court, winning the Laurence Olivier Award for Best New Play. Additionally McPherson won the Critics' Circle Award as the most promising playwright in 1998.

The Weir was voted one of the 100 most significant plays of the 20th Century in a poll conducted by the Royal National Theatre, London. It tied at 40th place with Eugene O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, Samuel Beckett's *Endgame* and Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*.

McPherson's past relationship with alcohol has been widely spoken of and many of his earlier plays contain the theme. It was just about the time of writing *The Weir* that he realised his personal relationship with alcohol had turned antisocial.

The play is set just outside an isolated Irish town in Brendan's pub. On a seemingly ordinary, dark and windy night a group of local men gather for their daily tittle with the usual banter.

Describing the play as "It's just people talking" McPherson conjures up a beautifully crafted, funny and emotionally arresting play full of tiny nuances that magically reveal the inner life and pain of his characters. The appearance of Valerie, a woman from Dublin who has just moved to the area, injects fresh and raw experience from the world outside into their lives. This prompts the unlocking of the emotional sluice gates of these men, all isolated in their various ways. The recounting of seemingly innocent ghost stories entices the characters and the audience alike into a powerful relationship with souls past but still very much present in the physical and spiritual world.



REVIEW

THE WEIR

Although the night ends up being difficult and painful for all concerned the audience are left feeling that something has shifted, and that emotional centres of these poignant characters have been touched and enlivened after years of denial and stasis.



It's a gift of a play for actors. From the start Sandra Tomlinson's cast meshed completely believably with each other, particularly crucial in a slow burn of a play like this where relationships, personal history and subtext are the life blood of the piece. Nigel Sharpe brought the melancholic, grumpy Jack to life so perfectly and poignantly that you felt you were eavesdropping on a life rather than watching a performance. Mark Pelham as Brendan, the younger man who still has the potential to grasp a life less emotionally barren than his older friends, was perfectly cast and moved through the beautifully placed emotional shifts with warmth, assurance and truthfulness. Derek Watts as Jim who has cared for his controlling, deteriorating 'Mammy' for years had the poignancy of an innocent and private man who had never really grown up or into himself and brought a lovely stillness to the part. Simon Hellyer, the bombastic Finbar, really

added depth to this role giving us a man who, despite his business success and family money is really a lost, precocious 8 year old desperate to impress. Victoria Brewer as Valerie, seemingly initially warm and uncomplicated, carefully unravelled her recent hidden, ongoing tragedy with authenticity and delicacy.

I have no doubt that Sandra Tomlinson's careful direction was nurturing and empowering for her actors. The atmosphere of camaraderie as though woven over many years was palpable. Her direction of their personal stories of each character was detailed and sensitive enabling the actors to inhabit their long, mesmeric monologues while doing full justice to the music and magic of McPherson's language.

An excellent and detailed set by Dudley Ward and his crew transported you straight into the ramshackle world of an unchanged country bar in the middle of nowhere. Lighting (Roy Gooderham) was skilled and impressive carefully underscoring the emotional and dramatic moments of the piece. In a play where the imaginative senses are to the fore, sound is central and the radio transmissions of words and music were perfectly executed by Gareth Budden. We mustn't forget, also, the crucial voice of Niamh (Logan Brewer) that so chillingly ends this magnificent play. Sadly I missed the revival of *The Weir* in London in 2013, so I was really looking forward to seeing it. This was a very strong and carefully crafted production that will stay with me, and I am sure the rest of the audience, for a long time. Like a perfect novel that engages your emotions, imagination and senses to the full I was sorry when it came to the end.

Lucy Fitchett

THE WEIR

Production pictures



OBITUARY

Nesta Harmer 1922- 2014

Nesta died aged 92 on the 22 December and she is remembered as a very talented actress by fellow actors and directors. During the war she and her husband served in the RAF, but sadly they hadn't been married for very long when he was killed. She married again and lived in the Bahamas, however she felt her husband didn't treat her as well as he ought, so she ran away from him and returned to England.

Nesta lived at Burwash near Kipling's house, running a successful B&B business, which is why her friends say "she was a wonderful hostess" whenever they were invited to her home. Finding the long journey home from the theatre rather arduous especially at night, she gave up acting with us, but retained her membership and her interest in all that we did. She loved the work of Alan Bennett and was hoping to see *Enjoy* last season, but sadly was too ill to make the journey. Nesta, a tall elegant lady was an experienced actress with a beautiful voice.

Directors have said that she always took notes about the characters she played and had a great understanding about what was required. She was a delight to direct and was always appreciative of the work of her fellow actors. Nesta appeared in some of our memorable productions. She was always up for a challenge and eager to



take on unusual roles. In *End Game* directed by John Fisher in 1975, Nesta said she "spent the entire play in a bucket". Actually it was a dustbin! Then in 1977 she appeared in *Happy Days*, a foyer production directed by Joyce Fisher, this time "spending the entire play" in a mound of earth. In Act One the earth reached her waist and

in Act Two it was up to her neck! Other productions remembered by friends are *The Killing of Sister George*. *Mother Courage*, again directed by John, *Stevie*, directed by Joyce and *Cider With Rosie* directed by Stella Stone.

I am grateful to Joyce and John Fisher, Stella Stone and Joan Skeet for giving me this information and I leave you with the last of their comments.

"A very genuine lady" "interested in everything to do with the theatre" "I have very fond memories" "always encouraging others" "always saw the good side of things" "her performance was the best I have seen in this theatre" (Lionel Green)
"a lovely lady..... I have very fond memories"

The photograph, supplied by Joan Skeet, shows Nesta playing the aunt in *Stevie*

Pat Shrimpton

PREVIEW

THE THRILL OF LOVE



Ruth Ellis was hanged for the murder of David Blakely in 1955 - exactly sixty years ago. She was the last woman to be executed in England, a decade before Sidney Silverman piloted the Murder (Abolition of the Death Penalty) Bill through Parliament, and the public outcry following her death had remained audible during the intervening years.

The Thrill of Love is well constructed and well written. Like numerous other tragedies that are based on fact it depicts the human condition, in all its frailty, and is not one dimensional. Stranger 'heroines' emerge in drama and the passage of the years provides a comforting perspective. The audition was extremely well attended and this spoke volumes for the worth of Amanda Whittington's writing. The cast of five was chosen to create balance and authenticity.

Eve Costello (Ruth Ellis) and Bella McCarthy Sommerville (Vickie Martin) are, like the real life protagonists, women in their twenties. The characters played by Jenny Lloyd Lyons (Sylvia Shaw), Nick Reason (Jack Gale) and Rebecca Warnett (Doris Judd) are representative of the time and the events that occurred rather than specific individuals but they are well drawn and very real. During rehearsals we have researched the historical facts relating to both the individuals and the events portrayed. We have also looked back to the 'Fifties' and the prevailing attitudes of society at that time. Assisted by a dedicated technical team, we have worked to create truthful performances that interact and provide an insight to how domestic circumstances can tragically spiral out of control and reach a world audience.

PREVIEW

THE THRILL OF LOVE

In her book *The Cat-Walk*, Cherry Marshall, Head of a Modelling School where Ruth had enrolled shortly before the shooting, recalls the morning of the execution:

“No one could quite grasp that she was going to die and a deep gloom was felt everywhere...I thought I'd be unable to read the reports of her last hours but I felt compelled to. It seemed important to follow her story through to the very end and never to forget it.”

Frederic Raphael wrote in his diary that day:

“I daresay she was a vulgar little tart... but to sentence her to die at such and such a time, and in that way, is to make her into a dying goddess. London shuddered in the heat, and so it should.”

The play has a lot of humour and is not devoid of hope. Above all, it is a story worth telling. Please support the production by booking now.

Miles Jenner



THE THRILL OF LOVE

Cast comments



Eve Costello and Isabella McCarthy Sommerville are both graduates in their twenties. Eve completed her degree in Theatre Studies at the University of Roehampton last year and Isabella graduated from Royal Holloway with a degree in Drama and Theatre Studies in 2013. Both are now working locally and joined Lewes Theatre Club. They met at the audition for *The Thrill of Love* and were cast as Ruth Ellis and Vickie Martin. As they move onto the stage for the final five weeks of rehearsal we asked them about their journey ...

Has it been an enjoyable experience so far?

Eve

I am thoroughly enjoying being in local theatre. It's great to be working on such an interesting production with an extremely talented and experienced cast.

Isabella

This will be my second production at Lewes (she was in *Richard III* last year). I love the sense of community at LLT

and the opportunity to work with so many friendly, talented and passionate people – actors, directors, technicians, backstage crew alike – spanning a wide range of ages.

How have you approached the task in rehearsals?

Isabella

It has been a real collaboration. From early on, Miles has encouraged us to contribute our own thoughts, to suggest ideas to one another and to workshop these ideas even if we don't end up using them in the final production. This has allowed us to experiment, discover our characters and ensure that we interact truthfully with one another in performance.

Eve

It is a really refreshing and hardworking approach. We have immersed ourselves in the era and the characters. We have also worked on movement and rehearse in shoes similar to those worn in the Fifties. Research is essential. We have read extensively about Ruth's life and times. At one rehearsal we worked on

THE THRILL OF LOVE

Cast comments

a transcript of a tape recording that she had made and later listened to part of the actual recording. It was strange hearing her voice – and very moving. She was far better spoken than people assume.

Is it daunting to play characters that were real people?

Isabella

I'm really enjoying the challenge. Vickie is feisty and strong-willed but she also has a playful, teasing side to her. I admire her determination to succeed and her fearlessness. She develops during the course of the play and gets swept up in the glamorous lifestyle she has begun to lead but she remains a loyal friend to Ruth. It has been interesting researching the information that is available about her and using this insight to compliment the way she is portrayed in Whittington's script.

Eve

It took me a while to get my head around playing Ruth. She had so many

different levels and personality traits. I really want to portray her truthfully and do her story and the play justice. Rehearsals have been extremely helpful in connecting to Ruth and her past.

Isabella

We have researched more deeply into the era and lifestyles of these young women than perhaps I normally would and this, together with the freedom to experiment in rehearsals, has been hugely valuable.

Eve

Ruth wrote to a friend on the eve of her execution and said she was not happy about the way her story was told in court. She said there was so much people didn't know about her. The play tells her untold story and it is thrilling to be a part of it.



PREVIEW

Inherit the Wind

by Jerome Lawrence and Robert Edwin Lee, directed by Cathryn Parker

The genesis of Lawrence and Lee's iconic play was the Scopes "Monkey Trial" which took place in Rhea County Court House, Dayton, Tennessee in 1925 when a High School teacher was prosecuted under an infamous state law which made teaching Darwin's theory of evolution a criminal offence.

The Butler Act, which gave rise to Scopes prosecution, remained on the statute books until 1967. Similar laws still exist in other states. We still live in a world where fundamentalism seeks to crush opposition and to dictate how people think and behave. This play's themes are therefore as chillingly relevant to us today as when it was written.

The play first opened in Dallas in January 1955. It was an immense success and was swiftly followed by an acclaimed Broadway run with a star-studded cast on 21 April 1955 which ran at the National Theater, New York for 806 performances. There have been several theatre revivals, most notably, Trevor Nunn's outstanding production

at the Old Vic in 2009 starring Kevin Spacey and David Troughton as the clashing lawyers in this titanic courtroom battle that puts the individual's right to think on trial. Spencer Tracey and Frederick March portrayed the antagonists in the 1960 film classic and I have been lucky enough to assemble a fabulous cast of over 40 to bring this epic, amusing and thought-provoking play to the Lewes stage.

Whilst ostensibly rooted in the facts of the Scopes Trial, Lawrence and Lee were adamant that this was not an accurate historical representation of well documented events. In fact, the play was written as a polemic against McCarthyism which hysteria swept through America largely unabated in the 1950s. In their words: *Inherit the Wind* does not pretend to be journalism. It is theatre. It is not 1925. The stage directions set the time as "Not long ago." It might have been yesterday. It could be tomorrow.

Cathryn Parker
Play Director.

Inherit the Wind

4-11 JULY 2015

There are still some opportunities to be involved in the last production of the season. Men and women of all ages required for townsfolk and jury members - some speaking, some non-speaking roles. Minimal rehearsal commitment.

Interested?

Also, if there's anyone out there who can play an instrument - marching band trumpet, cornet etc, could they too contact Cathryn Parker. Contact Cathryn Parker 07900 350726 or email loneoakgeo@aol.com

Club Director's notes

The *Weir* set in a remote Irish pub was mainly centred around the cast swapping ghostly stories.

Although this synopsis shows little action within the play, the actors created an evening which gave the audience a glimpse of their characters, their beliefs, their lives past and present, their humour and their place within the small community. The cast consisted of four men, Nigel Sharpe, Derek Watts, Simon Hellyer and the barman Mark Pelham. The "newcomer" to the village, Victoria Brewer, was also a newcomer to the Lewes stage making a most welcome debut.

Sandra Tomlinson's production was meticulous. The camaraderie of the men was so natural it seemed as if they had been friends for years, and yet during the story-telling the atmosphere created became sombre but riveting. They all worked hard at the Irish accent with Derek going so far as to travel to Sligo for authenticity. To show how the "Irish" became part of the actor's speech, when Simon auditioned for *Inherit the Wind* during their rehearsals, on reading the script he kept lapsing into Irish instead of deep south American.

Dudley Ward's set design was hailed by many as "excellent" and "superb". The backstage crew worked hard to achieve the realism of an old pub. I believe this is the first time we have had "beams" on a set and Dudley's innovation worked so well, you may be seeing them in the future! This was a well-directed, well-acted play which was well-received by

audiences on the three nights I was at the Theatre.

The Thrill of Love is now on stage for rehearsals and these are going very well. Whenever I go up to the Wardrobe department and see the costumes hanging on the rails it takes me back to my teens!

I hope you'll come and see this production. To be truthful, I wasn't too sure about it as a play until I read it! Then I was captured.

There are still some spaces in the Jury Box for *Inherit the Wind*. All men, I'm afraid. Any man who would like to be an extra: no lines, no movement, no money, - please apply to Cathryn Parker. See page 3 in this Newsletter.

Costume Department

The ladies of the wardrobe have a request.

For *Inherit the Wind* we have a large cast of men who need braces - the sort that hold up trousers. We have some but not enough of the type we require. As this is a period play, we need the type that fix over buttons - not the clip-on ones. If anyone has this sort and would be willing to let us borrow them, we would be very grateful. Please contact the theatre.

Thank you

Pat

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

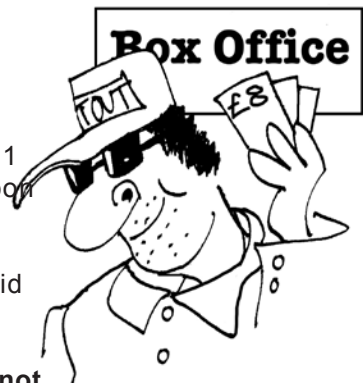
Buying your tickets

Evening performances at 7.45pm.

Matinee at 2.45pm on Saturday 23 May.

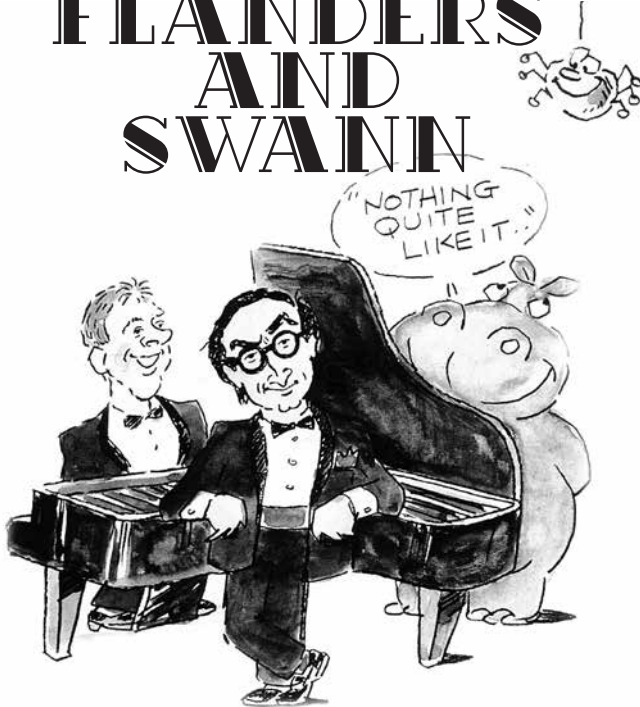
THE BOX OFFICE 01273 474826 will be open daily except Sundays from Monday 11 May to Saturday 23 May 10.30 am until noon and from 7pm to 7.30pm. Postal bookings received before the Box Office opening period will be given priority. Tickets not paid for 15 minutes before the performance is timed to start may be resold.

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



ANNOUNCEMENTS

A CELEBRATION OF FLANDERS AND SWANN



**Starring
Gordon Peters**

**BBC1 - The Gordon Peters Show, My Family, Little Britain
One Foot in the Grave, Dad's Army**

With

David Carter at the Piano

*I'm a Gnu, Mud Mud Glorious Mud, Let's Talk Rude,
The Gas Man Cometh, Madeira M'Dear,
and many more...*



Sat 6 June 7.30 pm. Tickets £10

Box Office 01273 474826

if no answer leave a message it will be responded to

Letters...

Dear Editor

Allow me to congratulate James Firth-Haydon and all his cast and crew on a remarkable production of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. I have not laughed so much in the theatre since *Noises Off*.

I feel guilty that I was only charged £4 for a production in no way inferior to anything produced by the mainstream offerings, so I enclose a donation of £4 to make up the difference.

Yours sincerely

Alan Skull

Seeking a new Treasurer

After many years' invaluable work Bob Leeds has decided to step down as Treasurer at the end of the current season. Bob has had a steady and talented hand on our financial tiller. The fact that the theatre is in good shape is no small part due to Bob's assiduous stewardship, conducted with charm and humour.

We need to find a replacement as soon as possible.

Are you interested?

If not, do you know someone who might be interested?

Please contact Chris Weber Brown.

chriswb16@hotmail.com

or 07588 531888



THE THRILL OF LOVE

16 - 23 May

Inherit the Wind

4 - 11 July



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 Thrill of Love	First night only 2 for 1	X	Evening £8.00			
The Thrill of Love			Evening £8.00			
The Thrill of Love		X	Matinee £6.00			
Inherit the Wind	First night only 2 for 1	X	Evening £8.00			
Inherit the Wind			Evening £8.00			
Inherit the Wind		X	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.