

Lewes Little Theatre



Breaks in Transmission
Stories of times in the past when the theatre faced adversity

No. 85

April 2020

The Lights Have Gone Out, for now

From the Darkness
Tony Bannister reflect on the crisis

Newsletter

This certainly isn't a newsletter I ever thought I would have to put together. It was my intention for newsletter number 85, in line with the Artistic Director's vision, to announce the production lineup for the 2020 - 2021 season, as well as to promote what was to be the next production of this season, *Lust*. Unfortunately, due to the current situation, we have had to postpone all of that. That being said, we will continue to communicate with our members and visitors via the newsletter, which for the time being will be online only.

If nothing else, the crisis of which we are in the midst has shown the world that the internet is far more than just a luxury, these last few weeks it has been relied upon more than ever since its inception.

Some have needed it to continue working from home, to order essentials for delivery, to communicate with friends and loved ones, to keep up to date

with the latest news, or just to remain occupied during lockdown. It is a utility I no longer take as much for granted, and will be using it to keep this publication going, while we do not have the ability to produce the hardcopy newsletter many of you look forward to receiving every eight weeks.

On that point, I would like to thank all the volunteers that

help out with the regular distribution of the newsletter. It's no easy task to turn around a box full of booklets from the printer to around 750 stuffed and labelled envelopes. After that, only a minority of the newsletters make it to the doormats of our members via Royal Mail. The rest are arranged by locality and delivered by hand. This helps to cut the costs of delivery as you can imagine, but regardless of that I am grateful to all those who keep the cogs turning behind the scenes.

We are planning for bright things on the other side of this unprecedented situation, we intend to keep you updated on development in our plans, depending of course on government guidance and advice. I hope you will all remain safe, look after those around you and keep an eye out for the next production at LLT.

James Meikle

The Lights Have Gone Out

Lewes Little Theatre is currently closed, along with almost all of British cultural life, and it will come as no surprise to say that there is currently no date for it to reopen. That will depend on how long the restrictions relating to combatting Covid-19 last, and in what format and timescale they are lifted.

The lights went out at our theatre on Tuesday 17 March. With the production of *Jeeves & Wooster in Perfect Nonsense* just four days away, Artistic Director Tony Bannister and the Trustees had tried to keep the theatre open for as long as possible. But with the government announcing the previous day that it was discouraging people from going to all pubs, restaurants, cinemas and theatres, there was little choice but to close.

It came as a particular blow to the cast and backstage team of *Jeeves & Wooster*, who didn't even get to have their Wednesday rehearsal at which the on-stage photos would have been taken. But if someone had been infected at that rehearsal, the theatre would have looked negligent, so the decision to close had to take immediate effect.

The Artistic Director has worked out several scenarios for when the theatre reopens, but all are dependent on how the restrictions are lifted, and

how much notice we get. The only thing we can say at this stage is that *Jeeves & Wooster* will take place at some stage after reopening, in all probability as the first show.

Meanwhile we are taking to online newsletters to keep theatre club members and other supporters updated. Do please let others know about this newsletter, or let us have any email addresses of people you feel might like to receive it. There may not be much to tell you in terms of news, but this edition includes a message from Tony Bannister, plus a look back to other times when the theatre has faced adversity and come through it.



From the Darkness

Artistic Director Tony Bannister reflects on a theatre that has been forced to close, for now.

You have to feel sorry for Bertie Wooster. There he was, standing in the wings, ready to make his triumphant entrance, only to have the door slammed in his face by a beastly virus. And now the stage, with all the scenery, costumes and props still in position, stands deserted rather like the Marie Celeste in full sail but without a crew.

You actually have to feel sorry for everyone involved in Lewes Little Theatre, past and present. That this should happen in our 80th season feels particularly harsh, but this was a theatre founded before the outbreak of the second world war, and it has always had a spirit that triumphs over adversity. I have no doubt we will do so again.

In fact I wonder if we will come back stronger from this. Working in the theatre is a highly rewarding business, but it can take its toll. Like all 'occupations' (I use the word in its literal sense, not as an alternative to 'profession'), if you're passionate about it you can easily throw yourself into it in a way that dominates your private life and drains your energy. To that extent, maybe the

silver lining to this enforced period of theatrical darkness is that the hard-working people who keep the theatre running will finally get a break. From the point of view of meetingfriends and de facto colleagues, it's tough. But as a way of recharging the batteries, it could be a gift we would never have given ourselves.

For make no mistake, there will be a fair bit of work to do once the restrictions are lifted. I'm working on setting up on a jolly old working party when we're allowed to reopen (and I use the word 'party' in both senses - 'group' and 'celebration'), to get the theatre dusted off and ready to go again. That also means it's important to get more people involved, so we share the load and people don't

find their energy drained to the same extent again.

A massive shout-out to Rebecca Warnett and the cast and crew of *Jeeves & Wooster in Perfect Nonsense*. They were four days away from a truly glittering production that would

have continued what was developing into a really successful season. I promise we will get Tom, Simon and Alan, as Wooster, Jeeves and Seppings, back on stage as soon as we can, and I am also working on various options for putting on a

memorable and triumphant reopening programme.

Most important of all, please stay safe and well during this very frightening time. Bertie Wooster's spirit will not be crushed by a virus - we all need to ensure that we aren't

crushed either, so we are all there to greet him when he bounds onto the stage in the exciting new post-virus era of Lewes Little Theatre.

Tony Bannister
Artistic Director



Breaks in Transmission

A brief look at past occasions when things have not always gone quite as planned

This is the first occasion in peacetime when the theatre has had to close its doors for an extended period. But there have been many times in the past when performances have been disrupted for one reason or another. Nature has certainly played its part: extreme cold, snow, and flood all have taken their toll. Lewes has experienced major flooding on several occasions, notably in 1960, and again in October 2000, when the flood struck just as the new season had begun.

Many people were badly affected, including some directly involved in the opening production, Richard Crane's *Under the Stars*, which was just starting its run. But, true to tradition, the show went on, until the Thursday evening, when we were faced with

the hard fact that the theatre would have to close.

This was not because the theatre itself was flooded, but there was no power due to much of North Street being engulfed. When the theatre was unlocked in the late afternoon, there was no light, no sound, no power, and no prospect of a restoration of

supply until the floodwater had subsided.

So we had to explain to those audience members who managed to arrive that a performance could not be given that night. But even then the Dunkirk spirit prevailed, and

a small but stoic group retired to the bar to enjoy snacks and a few drinks by candlelight! Power was not restored in time for a performance on Friday, but the Saturday matinee did go ahead thanks to some emergency lighting powered by a hastily procured genera-

tor. After sterling work by the energy company, full power was finally restored for the closing, Saturday evening performance - with minutes to spare.

On other occasions, performances have been disrupted by members of the cast or production team being delayed on their way to the theatre or, more than once, simply forgetting there was a matinee. In 1980, for example, a member of the cast of *Peer Gynt* sent a message to say he was delayed on the train from London. An understudy was hastily recruited (several sizes smaller than the costume he would be required to wear!) As the cue for his first entrance approached, however, the actor arrived at the station to be met by two members of the wardrobe team, who helped him into his costume in the back of the car and got him to the theatre with just enough time for him to whisk his cloak from the shoulders of the waiting understudy and make his entrance to an audience totally unaware of the team effort that got him there!

Sadly there have been times when illness has got in the way, but thankfully these have been few and far between. For the routine aches and pains, it is amazing how effective an analgesic Dr Theatre can be! Broken bones, flu, headache, migraine, we've performed through them all. Laryngitis can be more challenging, but even that didn't stop the actor playing The Ghost of Christmas Past in our recent production of *A Christmas Carol*, who became ill and was left without a voice

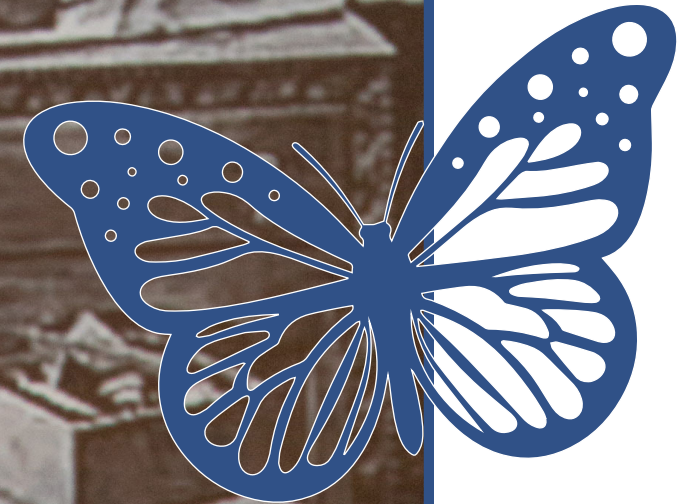
just after the play had opened. Undaunted, she carried on through her illness and mimed with grace and beauty while her lines were spoken from offstage by an ASM with a microphone. Fortunately, the actor's voice recovered towards the end of the week. It was also fortunate that her other role, the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come, was mute!

Of course, it is not all about adversity. As with any theatre such as ours, anecdotes and traditions of all kinds are legion. Stories of the paranormal abound; costumes being moved by unknown hands, doors opening and closing, the backstage housemaid, the mysterious gallery singer.

And there are phenomena that confound all explanation. One is the renowned Theatre Butterfly. For many years, a large, single butterfly was occasionally seen flying over the stage when a performance was under way. Its appearances were random and unpredictable, but were always welcomed, even during *Terra Nova* which was set in Antarctica! Once seen, the butterfly would disappear without trace, and searches of the roof area above the stage offered no clue as to origin or means of entry. It will be interesting to see if the butterfly appears once again to join us as we celebrate the theatre's triumphant reopening. It would be rather nice if it did.



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Emily Feist as The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come

Become a Member

There are a number of benefits to becoming a Member at Lewes Little Theatre. As a Member you will receive a reduced ticket price - £8 rather than the usual £12 and for the matinee performances you'll pay £6 rather than the usual £8.

Members at Lewes Little Theatre also have the opportunity to participate in productions and help out with all aspects of the theatre's operations from set building to running the Anthony Jenner Bar.

All Members will receive the newsletter which is sent out two weeks before each main stage production.

There are four Membership options; Single, Double, Concession and Double Concession.

*Concessions are under 17s, full-time students or seniors.

You can join at any time but membership subscriptions become due for renewal in August.

Membership Form /renewal

Membership no.	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Title	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Forename	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Surname	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>	
Postcode	<input type="text"/>	
Phone number	<input type="text"/>	
E-mail address	<input type="text"/>	

I would like to receive theatre news and updates by email

Membership options (tick one)

Single	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>	Concession	£10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Double	£25	<input type="checkbox"/>	Double Concession	£15	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please send to Lewes Little Theatre, Lancaster Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2PX. Cheques payable to Lewes Theatre Club

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