

Lewes Little Theatre



Introducing
Lewes Little
Theatre's latest
production:
Press Cuttings
by George
Bernard Shaw

No. 87

June 2020

Are we nearly
there yet?

What might have
been,
and still will!

Newsletter

While preparations are taking place to see the theatre open again and stage productions as normal, we have taken the opportunity to work on a slightly different project, one that lends itself to the current way of life. George Bernard Shaw's short play *Press Cuttings* is going to be rehearsed remotely and performed as a radio play.

utilises so that you can listen and enjoy the show at home. You can read more from page 6 including the read through and audition dates and contact details for the Director Chris Bowers.

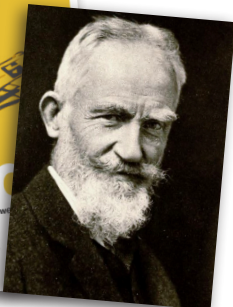
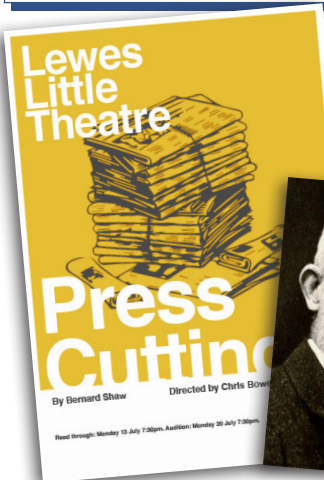
Also, in this newsletter, Artistic Director Tony Bannister talks about what the 2020-21 season would have looked like including the scheduled plays and the ones that we still intend to stage in the near future.

In other news, the theatre's closure has presented a good opportunity for some building renovation. The front windows of the theatre are currently being rebuilt to a high standard and the Board is looking into the refurbishment of the auditorium. This ongoing renovation work is essential, and I am looking forward to once again seeing the theatre back on its feet and looking better than ever.

James Meikle

The story is set just after the time it was written, 1909, and directly references contemporary social issues detailed in press cuttings from newspapers and magazines.

The play will be auditioned, r e h e a r s e d and performed remotely and online. The idea is to then publish the play through the online channels the theatre already



Are we nearly there yet?

That plaintive cry from the back seat of the family car has a different ring from stalwarts of the Lewes Little Theatre audience: ‘How much longer before we can come and see plays again?’

Well, none of us really know. The will is there, but government regulations are awaited, and it might be a while yet. Like all theatres, we have a duty to ensure that all reasonable steps have been taken to safeguard the health and safety of all users of the building, and we are awaiting the guidelines we need.

The Culture Secretary has established a task force to develop guidelines for all sectors of the leisure industry, and it would be unwise to try and second guess them. However, there is a lot we can do to prepare. The first phase will be reopening to volunteers to get the theatre ready. We are currently finalising a detailed Covid-related risk assessment covering all areas of activity, so we will be ready to start work as soon as we get clearance. We also hope that work to upgrade the front of the building, postponed from April, will be allowed to start in July.

As for the resumption of performances, things are a little more complicated. We have already decided that we will reopen with *Jeeves and*

Wooster In Perfect Nonsense, which was four days away from its original first night when we closed in March. It is possible that, at first, performances will be subject to some form of social distancing. Detailed risk assessments will need to be undertaken for each production covering front of house, the auditorium, onstage, offstage and in the

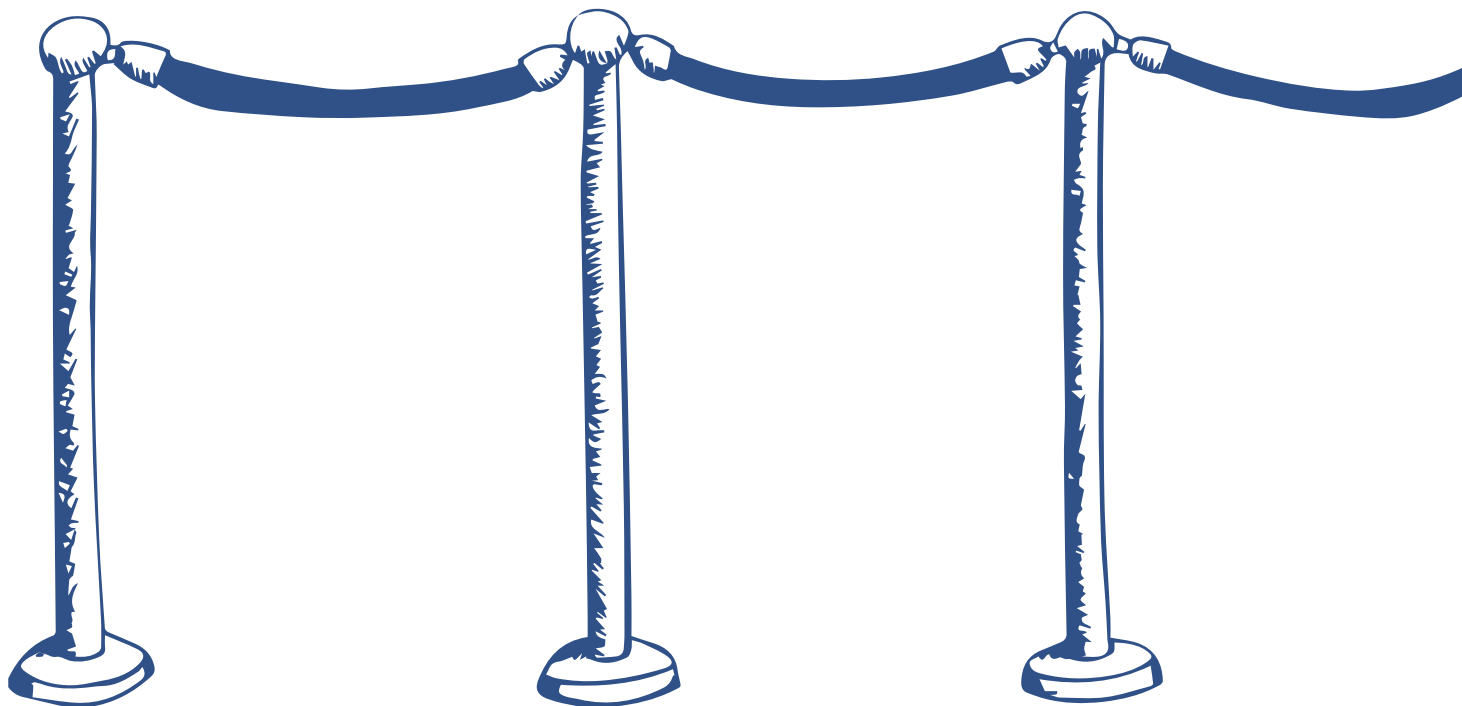
dressing rooms. We have already started work on this for *Jeeves and Wooster*.

Even if social distancing is still needed when we're allowed to reopen for performances, everything will be done to make the experience of coming to the theatre as comfortable and 'normal' as possible, but inevitably there will be

some changes. For example, the seating capacity in the auditorium will have to be reduced. Gathering in the foyer will probably have to be kept to a minimum, and the bar may have to remain closed, so we will have to think carefully about how we can make refreshments available. The Trustees have already invested in a stock of

personal PPE equipment for front-of-house and backstage staff.

We all want live theatre to return to Lewes soon, but we might have to adapt to a 'new normal,' at least for a while. All of this is will, of course, finally depend on the guidelines we receive. We will keep you fully up to date with things as they develop.



What might have been, and still will!

This would normally be the time of year when we reveal the programme for the new season. Tony Bannister explains the thinking that will eventually lead to the next programme of plays at Lewes Little Theatre.

When we were forced to close in March, we were half-way through what was shaping up to be our most successful season in recent years. The opening three productions, *Haunting Julia*, *Psychic Connections* and *A Christmas Carol*, all did very well, and we were confidently expecting the remaining three, *Jeeves and Wooster in Perfect Nonsense*, *Lust The Musical*, and *A Voyage Round My Father*, to be just as successful. But it was not to be. *Jeeves and Wooster* was four days from its opening performance, *Lust* was in its third week of rehearsal, and *Voyage* had been cast and was waiting to start rehearsals.

But it is not just the current season that has been decimated. We had a wide range of exciting productions lined up for presentation over the coming 18 months, and plans were already in hand taking us well into 2022. While some of the projects we have

been planning may not happen at the time we first intended, we are determined to do them all. So, there is a lot to look forward to!

Of the remaining plays from the current season, we have already agreed that *Jeeves and Wooster* will mark our reopening. Rebecca Warnett, the production's director, and her team are standing by, although it is unlikely they will get the green light until later this year. Similarly, we hope to present *A Voyage Round My Father* as soon as it's feasible to do so. Sadly, you will probably have to wait a little longer for *Lust The Musical*: by its very nature, it is not compatible with any form of social distancing, in fact on stage it's quite the opposite! Rest assured, however, that we will bring this inspiring and, for us, ground-breaking production to the Lewes stage as soon as we can.

We had planned to open our new season in October with Patrick Barlow's hilarious adaptation of John Buchan's *The 39 Steps*, with Jacqui Freeman making her very welcome directorial debut at LLT. However, we have

agreed with Jacqui that this will be postponed until later. In December, we had hoped to follow up the enormous success of *A Christmas Carol* with another Gary Andrews adaptation, *David Copperfield*. By the time the theatre closed, Gary and I had done a lot of the initial planning and designing, but once it became clear that the closure would be a long one, I reluctantly decided there would simply not be enough time for the depth of preparation and rehearsal such an ambitious project deserves. So rather than cut corners, *David Copperfield* will be deferred for the time being. Look out for it!

In 2021 we hope to see the world première of another new play by Philip Ayckbourn, *Who Knows Who Knows Who*. With this play, Philip will be returning to his comedy roots to bring us a riotous story of mistaken identity, misunderstandings and ménages-à-trois, all with an unexpected twist in the tail. Also in 2021 will be a welcome revival of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Wilde's timeless comedy needs little introduction, and Shaun Hughes will be bringing

it back to the Lewes stage in a brand new, lively and imaginative production. We hope also to bring you a new production of another great favourite, *Hay Fever*, Noel Coward's compelling tale of an eccentric family and their outlandish behaviour when guests arrive for the weekend. This will be directed by the very experienced Juliet Hartnett, who did such a great job with *Haunting Julia* last year.

Other future plans include a brand new adaptation of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, and, in complete contrast, a big production aimed squarely at family audiences (details to follow). Add to this Helene Hanff's moving autobiography *84 Charing Cross Road*, and there's a lot waiting in the wings to entertain you, with more on the way. When we reopen, we intend to be bigger and better than ever before, so don't go away. Better still, come and join us and play a direct part in the continued growth and development of Lewes Little Theatre!

Tony Bannister
Artistic Director

Lewes Little Theatre



Press Cuttings

By Bernard Shaw

Directed by Chris Bowers

Read through: Monday 13 July 7:30pm. Audition: Monday 20 July 7:30pm.

Introducing
Lewes
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production;
Press
Cuttings

Despite lockdown, LLT is embarking on a new production over the summer months of a George Bernard Shaw play. The production's director Chris Bowers explains.

You've seen those very moving examples of instrumentalists from some of the world's top orchestras playing some great music from their homes, linked up by headset to a central editor, who edits it all into a totally plausible ensemble recording?

Well, necessity being the mother of invention and all that, Lewes Little Theatre is embarking on the theatrical equivalent. We are going to put on the one play we're allowed to do during lockdown: a radio play. It will be read, auditioned and rehearsed on Zoom, and recorded using personal recording equipment in a recording session, also via Zoom. In other words, it's an authentic Covid-19 production!

The play I have chosen is *Press Cuttings*, a short work by George Bernard Shaw which he wrote in 1909 based on the press cuttings he was reading. It's therefore not about press cuttings but about the news stories of the day, of which the main one was the question of whether women should get the vote.

Shaw actually set the play three years in the future, when he envisaged the suffragettes would have become so rampant that martial law would have to be declared in London. The play therefore revolves around the head of the armed forces, General Mitchener, and the

prime minister, Mr Balsquith, who are petrified of the suffragettes. But they meet their match in the form of the Anti-Suffragette League, a group of women who believe they have far more to gain by influencing their menfolk without the vote than by becoming enfranchised and losing their influence. It's classic scurrilous Shaw.

The play has six characters, and the actors chosen to play the roles won't have to learn any lines (but they will have to learn to read them without rustling their script). The voices will be absolutely crucial in this, but fortunately the six parts are highly contrasting. Three parts are men: Mitchener, Balsquith and a young Cockney orderly who's been conscripted but should really be shaving customers at his family barber's. The other three are women, but one has a very deep voice and there's some doubt about whether she really is a woman; one has to do a very credible Irish accent.

We will have a read-through of the play on Monday 13 July at 7.30pm. If you would like to take part in this, please send me an email (cbowers@gm.apc.org), requesting a script and the Zoom login details. The login details will be sent by email, with the script as a pdf attachment.

We will then have auditions on Monday 20 July at 7.30pm. If you wish to audition, please send an email, again to cbowers@gm.apc.org, saying what parts you would like to audition for (you can wait until after the read-through if you want). You will then be sent the



Suffragettes protesting for their right to vote

login details. All participants in the auditions will stay involved while the sessions take place, but the host will mute the overall sound, so no-one can hear how anyone else reads for a part.

There may also be some sound effects that need collating and performing. Most of the sound will be done by Trevor Morgan, but if you wish to volunteer for an odd-job role, there may well be something that needs doing.

Once the play is cast, we will arrange a rehearsal schedule during July and August based on the actors' availability but on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday evening to fit with LLT custom and practice. We will try and work around holidays, but we will struggle to hide our jealousy if anyone is able to go on holiday. There will be at least two, possibly three rehearsals, before the recording.

The plan is to do the

recording on Zoom, but with all participants using their own recording device. This could be a modern-day smartphone, but we can discuss this on a case-by-case basis (lending a recorder if necessary). All six actors will have to use headphones, so the only sound that gets recorded is their own voice, and nothing from the Zoom call. The recordings will then be sent to a central point for editing into the final sound file. If we have full access to the theatre by then, we might decide to record in the theatre itself, but there might be something to be said for doing the whole thing by Zoom – certainly it will be by Zoom up to the recording.

It sounds complicated, but the play is only about half an hour long, so there isn't masses to deal with. The important thing is that this is a theatrical process – the read-through, auditions, rehearsals and recording are as important as the finished product. We will make every effort to make sure the finished play sounds good, and we will make it available on the internet; we may even manage to have a grand performance of it for all LLT aficionados – by Zoom, of course. But even if it's a bit rough around the edges, it should still be a great project to undertake.

I hope you're excited about this new venture in the theatre's activity. Please send me an email now if you'd like to take part in the read-through on 13 July.

Chris Bowers

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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