

Lewes Little Theatre

80 years

Introducing
Lewes Little
Theatre's new
Artistic Director



No. 88

August 2020

The end of an era -
time for a change

The original
'Mrs America'

Newsletter

The big question on everyone's lips is when we will be able to reopen as a theatre. There is no answer to this yet – some indoor entertainment venues are being given clearance, but with all the requirements on theatres we are not there yet, and it remains likely that our first full production will be in the new year.

However, there has been no lack of activity to make use of the hiatus. Since we closed to the public, the front of the theatre has now been fully upgraded, including the replacement of the foyer windows and exterior doors. We are also using the closure period to carry out essential repairs and interior upgrades, as well as planning the changes that will need to be made to enable social distancing to be accommodated safely and comfortably if it is still

required when we re-open. We also intend to redecorate the auditorium at the earliest possible opportunity.

The absence of business as usual hasn't meant an absence of artistic and dramatic activity either. Our first radio play, *Press Cuttings*, has allowed us to embark on the kind of venture that was always possible but never seemed necessary until now. And our new Artistic Director Shaun Hughes is already considering a possible follow-up, as well as

a range of other opportunities which could include video, live link and streaming.

The theatre has been incredibly fortunate to have had Tony Bannister as Artistic Director for the last four years. Tony has been a driving force for the organisation, from an operational and structural point of view indeed, but mainly artistically. Tony's primary aim has been to continue and improve upon the theatre's formidable reputation for quality, but the behind-the-scenes aspects of the theatre's management that audiences never see is near unrecognisable compared to what it was before. It has been a pleasure to work alongside Tony in this role and while we are all looking forward to what is next, we owe Tony an immense debt of gratitude.

James Meikle

End of an era - time for a change

Nearly four years ago, I was appointed as Artistic Director with a brief to reorganise and update the process of commissioning productions and bringing them to the stage. It has involved a lot of hard work for a lot of people, but the progress we have made has been, to say the least, encouraging, and I would dare to say impressive. Things are now better organised and regulated, and our procedures far more robust. Those who have worked so hard for our theatre for many years have been joined by new members, both onstage and behind the scenes,

including several new and talented directors.

There is still a lot to do, but I think my original brief has been discharged. The lockdown came as a blow to us all, particularly as we were in the middle of another very successful and enjoyable season, but the theatre is in good shape, and once the current uncertainties have been resolved we will be able to look forward to a bright future: in other words, a new era.

This is therefore the right time for me to step aside in favour of someone with fresh ideas and the energy to lead us forward into that new

era. I am delighted that the Board have appointed Shaun Hughes to be our new Artistic Director. I have known Shaun for many years and am a great admirer of his work. A glance at his CV will show the breadth of experience, knowledge and talent that he brings to our theatre. He certainly has my full support.

By the way, I have been co-opted to head up the theatre's Executive Committee until a permanent appointment is made to the post of Operations Manager. So I won't be going far. Not just yet, anyway.

Tony Bannister

A message from the Membership Secretary

August 1st. is here, as I write, - the renewal date for membership of Lewes Theatre Club. But of course this is no ordinary year, when all theatres are closed due to the pandemic. It is not possible to say when the theatre will be able to reopen. In the meantime we still need to maintain our theatre buildings and equipment and make improvements so that we may offer you another season of dramatic entertainment as soon as we can.

Without the lifeblood provided by productions of plays, Lewes Little Theatre's only income is from the membership fees. I hope you agree with me that a theatre is a vital part of a community and I would ask you to help us through this difficult time by renewing your membership fee.

With your support the theatre will survive. It will look forward to opening its doors to welcome everyone again and, as a

member you will be able to enjoy reduced ticket prices and printed newsletters.

Maybe you are not yet a member and would like to help? A membership application form is included in this newsletter for new or existing members. You may pay by cheque made out to Lewes Theatre Club or by bank transfer to:

Lloyds Bank
Sort Code: 30-95-01
Account Number: 00080305

Please use your name or existing membership number as reference.

You may print out the form or simply write providing the information required by the form, by post or by email.

Thank you friends and members.

Nigel Sharpe

Introducing the theatre's new Artistic Director; Shaun Hughes

Lewes Little Theatre has a new Artistic Director. Four years after Tony Bannister answered the theatre's call after the sudden death of Cathryn Parker, he has now moved aside to take up another role in the theatre, making way for Shaun Hughes. And Shaun has some exciting ideas – which you could say involve making a bigger drama out of a coronavirus.

"The theatre is an arts facility in the broadest sense of the word, so why don't we look for opportunities to broaden the arts that find expression in the theatre? I see no reason why we can't have other types of performances – we should be looking to host other events, perhaps live music, exhibitions of photos or paintings. Anything to get people through the door, because once they're in, there's a much better chance of them coming back to see a play."

Shaun has been immersed in theatre for most of his life. He grew up in Cheam, near Sutton, south London, and was interested

in art at school, a subject his grandparents encouraged. That led him to design the set for a school pantomime; he was then roped into building it, before being dragged on stage for the performances.

But what really hooked him was when his mother joined Epsom Operatic and was cast in *Hello Dolly*. Shaun, who was 19 and training to be a dancer at the time, went along, was asked if he wanted to dance in the production, and has barely been out of a theatre since.

His day job is in local government, so all his theatre work is amateur, but his range of credits is seriously impressive. He

has performed at various venues in UK and Germany including The London Palladium, Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Stadttheater Minden (Germany). He has produced and directed for theatre companies across London and the South East at venues such as Polesden Lacey, the Ashcroft Theatre in Croydon and most theatre venues on the south-western edge of London.

He lists his most satisfying success as setting up the *Rough Mechanicals Theatre Company*, a repertory company of freelance amateur actors who perform at various venues.

In November 2014, he moved from Mole Valley District Council to take up a post at Brighton & Hove City Council. The date was propitious: 5 November. He had already been scouted by Cathryn and Geoff Parker, who knew he was moving to Sussex, and when Tony

'We have a wonderfully flexible space at Lewes Little Theatre and with doubts about whether we will be able to use the full capacity of the auditorium in the foreseeable future, we need to see this as an opportunity to make the most of the premises'

Shaun Hughes

Bannister got wind of his move, he made sure his first theatrical port of call was Lewes.

Since then he has been an integral part of Lewes Little Theatre, catching the eye with his imaginative productions of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Great Expectations*, and he had a couple of small acting parts in *A Christmas Carol* last December. Backstage he has been a member of Tony Bannister's reference group and was identified some months ago as a potential successor to Tony.

"My aim is to consolidate what Tony has done," Shaun says, "and to build on it. Tony has done a fantastic job. We're now entering a different reality. I want the theatre to be the place where friendships are forged and flourish. That might mean forming an informal rep company of people who want to act more often than there are main productions.

It could mean all sorts of things.

"The potential for Lewes Little Theatre is immense, and the fact that our income is probably going to have to come from lots of smaller sources rather than six productions a year is an opportunity that I'm looking forward to embracing, and I hope everyone connected with the theatre is too."

The original *Mrs America*

Lewes Little Theatre currently has a production in progress – a radio play of George Bernard Shaw's *Press Cuttings*. Adapter and director Chris Bowers gives this update.

If you've been following the recent television series *Mrs America*, you'll have been struck by the slightly surreal spectacle of women campaigning against gender equality. Well, 60 years before the events happened that make up the *Mrs America* story, George Bernard Shaw created his fictitious Anti-Suffragette League, a women-only pressure group determined to stop women having the vote because they thought they did far better without it.

Shaw was of course being scurrilous – he believed that women should have the vote, and he loved nothing better than poking fun at the English. So his six characters in *Press Cuttings* all have their role in making Shaw's point, and because our production is a radio play, that point has to be made by tone of voice rather than by physical characteristics.

I'm incredibly fortunate to have six wonderfully contrasting voices for our production. The two chalk-and-cheese representatives of the Anti-Suffragette League are the coquettish

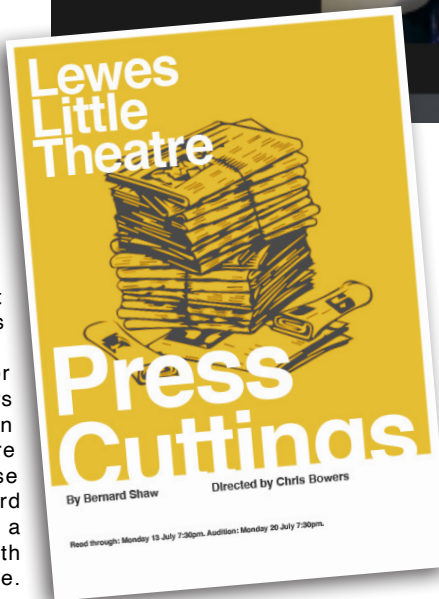
Lady Corinthia Fanshawe, and the bombastically masculine Mrs Banger. Zoë Watson has brought a wonderfully irritating girly-girl sound to Lady Corinthia, while Lesley Boase's sonorous voice suggests you mess with her Mrs Banger at your peril.

Heading the English establishment is the gruff General Mitchener, played by Bob Hamilton. Bob is so good that I've had to tell him to tone Mitchener down a bit, as half the time I fear he'll burst with righteous indignation. He has a clash of cultures with the prime minister, Mr Balsquith, played by a beautifully understated Robert Murdock, who doesn't really mind if the women get the vote or not as long as such voters as there are vote for him.

The real hero (or heroine) of the piece is Mrs Farrell, the Irish charwoman who proves to have more sense than everyone else and who has the last word – Anna Crabtree offers a lovely mixture of warmth with a no-nonsense edge.



Bob Hamilton, Chris Bowers, Bob Murdock, Walter Hall, Anna Crabtree, Zoe Watson, Lesley Boase and Trevor Morgan.



And a quiet sub-hero is General Mitchener's long suffering orderly, played by Walter Hall, who doesn't mind fighting the enemy as long as he doesn't have to suffer the indignity of the self-important make-believe world of soldiering.

Intonation has been particularly important to convey unspoken bits of the story, and the rehearsals – all done via Zoom – have been both fascinating and fun. We've already done some trial recordings, and

among the things we've learned is that the clock in Anna Crabtree's living room is more resonant than she thought, and the seagulls flying past Bob Hamilton's attic room really are very loud.

Instrumental in all this has been Trevor Morgan, whose role as sound engineer is probably the most vital role of all in a radio play.

We hope to record *Press Cuttings* in the week of 17 August, and have it ready by the bank holiday weekend. We will then have a grand opening, when we play it to anyone who wants to hear it on Zoom, after which it will be downloadable from the theatre website. And unusually for this day and age, it's all completely free of charge!

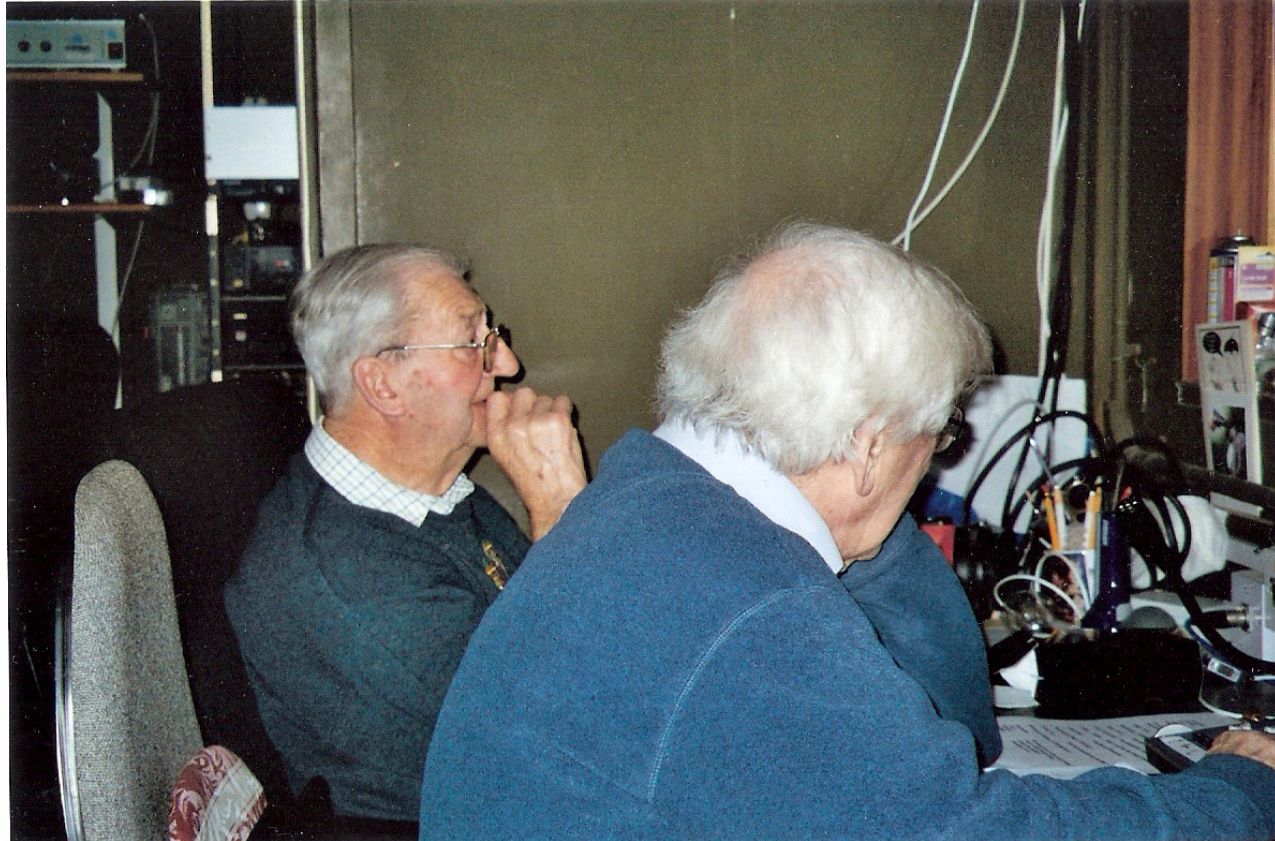
Chris Bowers

Obituary: Arthur Howell

Many friends of the theatre will be sad to learn of the recent death of Arthur Howell, a few weeks short of his 102nd birthday.

Arthur helped with the theatre's lighting in the 1980s and early 90s. Having worked at Glyndebourne – both for its Ringmer Motor Works business and at the opera house – he was brought to the theatre by John Cull, and on Tuesday evenings the two would beaver away in the lighting box, professionalising it to a standard many amateur theatres would envy. Even after he ceased to be a practical contributor, Arthur continued to attend the Tuesday working party to make tea and show support.

Having served in the RAF in the second world war in Italy and the Middle East, he was asked to brief the cast of Lewes Little Theatre's production of *Flare Path* in November 2011, and gave a moving address to the cast and crew.



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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