

# SEPTEMBER 2020 newsletter

Editor Jill Fuller [newsletter@sewellbarn.org](mailto:newsletter@sewellbarn.org) | Design Cassie Tillett [admin@sewellbarn.org](mailto:admin@sewellbarn.org)

**sewellbarn**  
THEATRE

Constitution Hill  
Norwich NR3 4BB

Box Office: 01603 626414

[www.sewellbarn.org](http://www.sewellbarn.org)

We hope that you are all safe and well, and have been able to enjoy the summer, despite these difficult and challenging times that we continue to live in.

The rules and regulations have changed with breathtaking speed, and every time we think we've established that we can do something we find we can't – and occasionally vice-versa. The Committee has been doing its best to make plans for the autumn and new year – all of which are subject to change, of course! Watch this space...

## Starting from scratch

When we last wrote to you, we were hopeful that we might be able to pick up the shows from the 2019/20 season that were postponed so abruptly: *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Amy's View*, *Orca* and *Under Milk Wood*. Sadly, the situation has become so unpredictable that we were forced to accept that for the time being none of these plays was likely to happen in the foreseeable future, and the most appropriate approach was to start anew. With heavy hearts, therefore, we have requested refunds from all relevant publishers for these shows (which will at least help our depleted finances!) and the set of *The Love of the Nightingale* (right) will sadly be deconstructed. We send our love and thanks to all those directors who, back in March, were at various points in preparation and rehearsal, and especially to all those who had created the *Nightingale* show, cut short ten days before curtain-up.

It is, of course, more than possible that any or all of these plays may feature in what we're able to present in the future; likewise, that the plays and directors we had lined up for 2020/21 might in time be able to bring their visions to the stage. However, the new limitations on gatherings (at the time of writing, 'the joy of six'...), the need to ensure that the Sewell Barn is a safe and appropriate space for audience, cast and crew alike, and much more, means that we must look afresh at what we are able to offer. We are keeping a strict eye on government guidelines, and are working hard to establish what we can and cannot do safely. We'll report back as soon as we can.



*This poignant photograph shows the puppets, created by Myles Crowder for the production of *The Love of the Nightingale*, sitting around our deserted theatre awaiting further instructions.*

# Sewell Barn Shorts

No, not drinks (the bar is closed!) but short plays.

One delightful output from lockdown, as you may remember from our June mailing, was a collaboration with Margaret Johnson of Norfolk County Council. Margaret was running online Adult Learning courses, and her students were tasked to write short plays.

The resulting Zoom session, on 9 July, was a delight, with seven Sewell Barn actors bringing the directors' words to life across seven plays. Feedback and appreciation were exchanged, and a great time was had by all.

Clare and Cassie were inspired by this to reach out to more local playwrights, and we emailed the Barn mailing list to ask for volunteers – both actors and performers. We were delighted by the enthusiastic response, and to have received nearly two dozen pieces to consider and around twenty actors to perform them. We selected 15, and split these across two evenings: 21 July and 11 August. Performances ranged from 3 to 15 minutes in length and were mostly monologues or duologues (with a couple of three- and four-handers for good measure). Thirty people were involved, as actors or writers, and sometimes both. New faces and old friends alike were in attendance. We agreed that local talent was definitely a force to be reckoned with! The performances were recorded for the authors and performers to review at their leisure.

**We'd very much like to run another session**, and to invite participants once more. Previous performers and authors are very welcome to volunteer again; if you'd like to join the merry gang for the first time, don't hesitate. It's all very relaxed and informal, and previous participants would, we believe, testify to the lovely atmosphere and creative delights – even when limited by the unpredictable behaviour of technology!

So: **our third Sewell Barn Shorts evening** will take place, by Zoom meeting, on **Tuesday 6 October** at 7.30pm. Please volunteer as soon as possible, either as performer or author.

We're looking for scripts of around 10 minutes long. This could be a scene from a one act or full length play or a stand alone duologue/monologue. It may be something you've already written or could be written for this evening.

Please send your scripts and/or notify us of your interest in performing by **Monday 21 September** to Cassie Tillet and Clare Williamson on **[artisticdirector@sewellbarn.org](mailto:artisticdirector@sewellbarn.org)**. We will read everything that's sent to us and choose a selection for performance. Playwrights: there will be an opportunity for feedback on the scripts at the end of the meeting. You can, of course, be both a writer and a performer – just let us know what you would like to do.

If you do not wish to perform or to contribute a piece of writing, but would like to attend as 'virtual audience', please email us as above, and we'll include you on the list when we send a link to the meeting.

# Real performance at last!

This is written just a day after the first bit of 'live' theatre that many of us had seen for six or seven months. The tireless Sabrina Poole (well known as actor, stage manager, director and much more across all three of the Norwich community theatre groups) co-ordinated a splendid open-air Shakespeare entertainment in the grounds of St Martin-at-Palace Church on a happily beautiful September Sunday afternoon. She was joined by Barn stalwarts Kevin Oelrichs, Anne Giles and Jane Keidan, who treated us to some glorious renditions: ranging from Hamlet's most famous soliloquy and Jaques' observations on the seven ages of man to the less familiar Henry VIII. Every performance was created with professionalism and love, and we were reminded just how much we'd missed them!

The photograph shows the merry band in various delightful guises: Kevin as the Porter in *Macbeth*; Jane as Hecate from the same Scottish Play; Sabrina as Aaron in *Titus Andronicus*, and Anne bidding farewell in time-honoured Puckish fashion.

The performances were given in support of the Norwich Historic Churches Trust. Huge congratulations and thanks for keeping the flag flying!



## A word about membership

Dear members and friends

We hope you are all keeping well and looking forward to returning to the Barn in the not too distant future.

At last year's AGM we said we would be putting up the membership subs ... but in the current circumstances we have decided to leave it at £10 for a single member and £15 for a couple. However, we do still have considerable expenses.

If you are an annual member, it would be lovely if you could renew your membership (Thank you so much to those who have already done so... it is much appreciated at this time when we have no income from productions).

If you are a life member or a patron, a small donation would be very much appreciated.

We are hopeful of being able to welcome you back to the theatre soon... we can't wait to see the Barn lively again.

In the meantime, please keep safe

Best wishes

*Jill Fuller*

(Chair and Membership Secretary)

membership@sewellbarn.org

## How to pay

If you're not yet a member and would like to be, please [visit this link](#) on our website, and complete and return the form.

Payments, whether for new members or renewal, can be made in any of the following ways:

### **BACS direct into our account**

Sort code 30 96 17 account 02167536

(please use your surname followed by MEMBERSHIP as a reference)

### **DIRECT DEBIT**

To make a regular donation (any amount, large or small) to our funds just email to [treasurer@sewellbarn.org](mailto:treasurer@sewellbarn.org) to request a mandate, and indicating your preferred email address, amount to donate and how often (eg monthly, yearly)

### **CHEQUE OR POSTAL ORDER**

By post to Kate Anetts 10 Ninhams Court Norwich NR2 1NX. Please do not send cash through the post.

We had, shortly before lockdown, set up a new page on our website explaining various ways in which you could assist us financially. If you feel you could help, please visit [www.sewellbarn.org/supportus.html](http://www.sewellbarn.org/supportus.html) for details. Thank you!

## Local community theatre

We know what a vibrant city Norwich is for entertainment, and we have a particular affinity to our colleagues at the Maddermarket and the Great Hall. Artistic Directors Cassie & Clare have been staying in touch with Mark and Jeremy (Great Hall) and Paula and Jez (Maddermarket) during the last few difficult months, and we are doing our best to support each other with information, motivation and our plans for the future. We intend to continue to respect and celebrate the wonderful variety between our venues and our companies, and to share our resources (including actors, directors, crew, props, costumes) whenever we can.

We'd like to wish Jez Pike every success as he moves on from the MMT to fresh fields. Jez has created some marvellous theatre for our city, and will be much missed.



# Behind the scenes

Our last newsletter showed the stalwart work being done to tidy and redecorate our costume store at Ropemaker's Row. During August, it was time our usual 'dark theatre' clearout. Thanks to the hard work of Anne, Phil, Clare and Selwyn, we've a shiny new coat of paint on the front door; gutters were cleared outside the building; the scenery dock stash of paints and other construction items has been radically tidied; and the theatre quietly awaits our return.

In the meantime, our lovely tech lead, Chris Jones, has dealt with the installation of a new monitor in the rehearsal room, which will enable actors to see the stage during a performance (as we're very likely to use that room for a dressing-room to help with social distancing plans) as well as sorting a much better mount for our projector.

Huge thanks to all who have worked so hard during this extended 'dark period' to prepare for our return.

## AGM

In the current limited circumstances, we have decided to hold this using Zoom. We would very much welcome as many members as possible to attend. Please make a note in your diary: Sunday 18th October, at 3:00pm. Further details, the agenda and a joining link will be circulated in the near future.

In such challenging times, your support and help is needed more than ever. Please come!

## Congratulations, Rebekah!

We're delighted to hear that our young friend Rebekah Oelrichs will in the New Year be starting an MA course in acting at London's Rose Bruford college. Rebekah has delighted audiences at the Maddermarket (Shelby in *Steel Magnolias*) and here at the Sewell Barn (Juliet in *Romeo & Juliet*, Molly in *The Female of the Species*) with her mature and sensitive performances; we will miss her very much, but are tremendously excited to see what she achieves in the future. We're proud to have been part of her journey!

*[Rebekah Oelrichs as Juliet in Romeo & Juliet, May 2018]*



# Messages from lockdown

We like to stay in touch with our members and friends during these difficult times. Here are a couple of updates...

"Some Sewell Barn folk will know that the Sessions family has run workshops for children (and now adults) for many years and each year we have produced a full length play in the first week of the summer holidays with the youngsters. Next year will mark our 40th anniversary of this 'Drama Week'. Determined to have a 39th event in 2020 but feeling unable to involve young people within the existing restrictions, we hosted a socially distanced week of drama for adults and school leavers in our garden. With a party tent in case of rain, pints of sanitiser, a loo outdoors and a complicated schedule for just 6 folk at a time, we indulged our love of theatre with activities ranging from 'talking heads' style pieces to a movement sequence reflecting an imagined board meeting. 'Searching for Drama Week 2020' became the title for the week. It was far less exhausting than our usual marathon, but we all appreciated the distraction and the opportunity to be creative. There was no performance and no audience but we filmed many of the activities and hope to piece them together in the coming months."



**Mel Sessions** [seen here with daughters Pip and Jo during Mel's production of *The Female of the Species*, February 2020]



"I enjoyed the quiet of lockdown for about a month before I started to itch for something vaguely dramatic to do! I've been lucky to have the opportunity to run two readthrough groups discovering new plays and working with actors on techniques online. Most recently I ran the return of Summer Shakespeare at St Martins for our most successful year, raising well over a hundred pounds for the Norwich Historic Churches Trust. Last month I found myself down south with the wonderful people at the Centre for Horseback Combat on a stunt riding day learning a whole host of amazing skills including trying out some Russian trick riding. I'm hoping to return soon to try out Horseback archery. My theatre company Hard-Nosed Cow was due to launch with our remounting of *The Devil at Midnight*, unfortunately as with so many others

we've been postponed till March next year, however! We have 'in the works' an evening of local legends for October/November. Performed amongst the atmospheric settings of two city churches, *Footsteps in their Shadows* will take you on a journey into Norfolk's dark heart."

**Sabrina Poole** [seen here learning stunt riding! We don't think we can fit a horse onto the Sewell Barn stage, sadly...]