

APRIL 2021

newsletter

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Greetings from the Sewell Barn! We hope that all our friends and supporters are keeping well and safe. There is much to report in this issue, including our **upcoming June production**; audition details for an **exciting show planned for July**; feedback on our fourth online session of **Sewell Barn Shorts**, presenting short works from local authors, performed by our own actors; **requests for help** at the theatre, now that we are hoping to reopen in the near future; **news of some of our friends** past and present; and details of a **local church theatrical project**. Grab a cuppa and read on...

Put Your Shorts On!



As mentioned in last month's newsletter, we are now actively working towards presenting the above show. The cast returns to Zoom rehearsals at the beginning of May; from 17 May, under the 'rule-of-six', we can finally meet again to rehearse in our much-missed theatre; and we plan to present the show to a socially-distanced audience (25 per performance).

All being well, the performances will take place on **Wednesday 9 to Saturday 12 June** inclusive at 7:30pm, plus a matinee at 2:30pm on the final day. The audience can sit in their own household groups, and will be separated from other groups by the appropriate distance; masking (unless exempt) will be required. Full details of all measures and arrangements will be available when you book your tickets, which we expect will be possible via Ticketsource from **Monday 17 May**, if not before (recipients of this Newsletter will be alerted as soon as online bookings re-open).

We're tremendously excited to be returning to the theatre and to be able, all being well, to entertain you once more. It's been a long and difficult year for us all, and to be able to present a show written by several very talented local authors, brought to life by an excellent cast and crew, brings us great hope and happiness. Your Artistic Directors, Clare Williamson and Cassie Tillett, are now starting to consider plans for the 2021/22 season; and **we also have plans for a show in July...** see below for details!

NB: we are well aware (having had our hopes dashed last winter) that the shows described above and below may or may not happen. We rely on the 'roadmap' to go ahead as planned, for restrictions to lift, for vaccinations to continue to be effective in keeping the spread of the virus under control, and so many more unknowns. However, we can only work with optimism and pragmatism, assuming the best outcome while being aware that life is not as it was. All appropriate safety measures will be taken for cast, crew and audience alike; and if circumstances should turn against us once more, we will simply plan for the future. Please support us as we work hard towards our goals, and all our friends, locally and across the theatrical world.

Audition notice: Private Lives by Noel Coward

If our plans for 'Put Your Shorts On!' come to fruition on the dates for which they are planned, we feel that we have space at the end of this 'season' – which has been otherwise empty – for one more show. As such, we will be holding auditions for the above play during May. Cassie Tillett will direct this iconic play, and is keen to hear from as many auditionees as possible.

Cassie writes: 'Private Lives' was last seen at the Sewell Barn in 1999, directed – appropriately – by Jeff Davies (so this production will be a tribute to his memory). The four main characters all have substantial amounts to do and learn, and Elyot and Amanda carry the whole of the second act between them. The roles are not for the faint-hearted but are tremendously rewarding, full of hilarity, bitterness, elegance, passion, innocence and manipulation in equal measure.

A note on the playing style. While Coward's brittle style is always a joy to play, the performances should not in any sense be mannered or pastiche; these are real, vivid, passionate and troubled people, and we must believe in them as such. I also intend to simplify the physical setting, making it far more stylised than literal; to make it much less specific to the period in which it was written; and to remove all references to smoking. Additionally, please note that while Coward's music will be important, no characters need to perform a song (only to hum along on occasion); and that Elyot will not need to play the piano!

Performances are planned for **Monday 19 to Saturday 24 July** inclusive, with a matinee on the final day. Please note that this does not follow the usual Barn performing pattern (to allow enough time after the previous show). Performers should be prepared for a technical run on Saturday 10 July, and final runs and dress rehearsals most evenings between 12 and 18 July. **Rehearsals will begin on Monday 14 June.** As it's a small cast, rehearsal dates will be agreed after casting. Generally Saturdays are avoided and Sunday afternoons and evenings are possible.

Auditions will be held on **Wednesday 19 May at 7:30pm**, with additional auditions / recalls taking place on **Sunday 23 May at 3:00pm**. If any interested actors are unable to make either of those dates, we will do our best to arrange an alternative. **If you'd like to audition, please email cassie@tillett.org.uk and you'll be sent full details of the audition pieces.** The script being used is the current (red-and-white cover) version available from Concord Theatrical (previously Samuel French).

A brief synopsis if you're not familiar with the play: Amanda & Elyot are divorced, and each has married again (to Victor and Sibyl respectively). They find themselves, on their respective honeymoons, in adjacent rooms at the same hotel. The reasons for their original attraction and for their parting rapidly become very clear, and equally clearly haven't changed. The emotional and practical repercussions are both predictable and surprising, hilarious and painful, and the characters move through a myriad of anger, passion, amusement, cynicism and manipulation. It's described as a 'comedy of manners', but I see it as having a great deal more depth than that implies.

The ages of the four main characters are fairly flexible. In the script, Elyot, Amanda and Victor are all referred to as being in their thirties, and Sibyl is distinctly younger (specifically 23); but I feel that it would work well with the three older characters being anywhere between early thirties and (if a fairly glamorous and well-preserved) fifties – with Sibyl simply being 'young' – which

may not be so much in age as in personality; she is clearly less sophisticated and manipulative than Elyot and Amanda.

As such, the *balance* of playing ages of the actors is a far more vital element in the casting than a fixed age range – hence wanting to see as many auditionees as possible so that the ‘cast family’, its dynamic and (vitally) its chemistry, is right and powerful. Incidentally, I might add that a forthcoming professional production (several months hence) features Nigel Havers and Patricia Hodge, who are more than twice the age of Coward’s original concept – albeit still very elegant and glamorous!

There is one more character: Louise, the French maid. She is described as ‘a frowsy looking girl’, but could be literally any age, from very young to very old and all points between. She must be able to speak convincing French. It’s a tiny part, and would combine ideally with somebody who wished to stage manage (unless you are happy with a tiny cameo, in which case my husband is happy to be my SM).

A note about COVID: The play involves a great deal of passion, both in love and in anger. If all social limitations are lifted in June as planned, this may not be a problem. However, it’s also important that the actors are completely comfortable with the performance – and, indeed, the audience. I have contingency plans for this, and will include these ideas in the audition notes.

This will be a very exciting production, which, together with ‘Put Your Shorts On’, we hope will bring us back into the view of our theatregoing public. Please come and join me in creating an extremely special show.

Sewell Barn Shorts on Zoom

It was a real pleasure to welcome another group of skilled actors and authors to share entertainment on Zoom for the fourth time (the previous episodes having taken place in 2020). On Wednesday 21 April, we assembled a dozen actors and seven authors (a couple of whom fell into both categories!) as well as some very welcome friends-and-family, and some participants from previous sessions. A great deal of hilarity, reflection and food for thought ensued, and once more we were delighted with the high standard of writing and performing.

Thank you to our authors (Sue Fulford, Jim Green, Alexandra Evans, David Morrison, Jill Waters, Barnaby Matley and Leah Spencer) and performers (Ayshea Christian, Peter Wood, Jonathan Wainwright, Leah Spencer, Jane Keidan, Jim Howard, Barnaby Matley, Kevin Oelrichs, Jan Farrar, Diane Webb, Selwyn Tillett and Clare Williamson).

If you would like to see and hear the results, you can access the video files (on OneDrive) on the link below. You'll find at the root of the folder the running order and cast lists; then three folders, containing video files, audio-only files, and screenshots:

https://1drv.ms/u/s!AkCt0EAgGgVlJmU_VdZ-2OmLlk3?e=z33Ahc



The videos range between 57-150MB in size, and are in MP4 format, so should be viewable using any standard video software.

Help needed!

With the imminent re-opening of the theatre, we are in urgent need of help in two key areas: an **Administrative Assistant**, and a **Wardrobe Co-ordinator**.

The latter post has been filled for many years by our good friend June Gentle, and she's decided it's time to pass on the baton.

Wardrobe Co-ordinator

June Gentle writes:

"I am stepping down after many happy years of working for the wardrobe team. As Wardrobe Co-ordinator for the Barn, I liaise with the Artistic Directors when they launch the season's productions. I speak to the Directors to find out what costumes are needed for their plays. We have a small team of helpers and we get together to decide who will see which play through production. We all help each other to cover the needs of the play, so that no-one takes on the single responsibility.

The Wardrobe department is an interesting place from which to see the full scope of theatrical experience... if you are interested but not sure of the commitment you could always join our team to try us out!"

For more details, please contact June on wardrobe@sewellbarn.org.

We posted the advert below last month, and sadly haven't yet had any volunteers. The role is a small but vital contribution to the smooth running of the theatre; please give it some thought and get in touch if you feel you could help in this very practical way.

Admin support / PRS officer

We have been very grateful for valuable assistance with some key administrative tasks over the last couple of years from Gilly Playford, and thank her very much for all her help. Gilly has taken on some new roles during lockdown and as such is stepping down from the work she's done for the Sewell Barn. With the imminent re-opening of the theatre, and plans soon to be developed for what we hope will be a full 2021/22 season, we would like to get somebody in place as soon as possible. The main support required is:

- **Answerphone messages:** dial in remotely on a regular basis (at least twice a week) to check our answerphone for messages, and either deal with messages or pass them on to other members of the committee / company; and update the answerphone message as required (in more normal times, this usually means giving details of the next production).
- **PRS:** liaison with directors to ensure that our obligations to the Performing Rights Society relating to use of music are fulfilled, completing the end-of-year return (usually one simple form), and obtaining permission if required for use of interpolated music (this happens rarely but is important).
- Occasionally there may be other jobs that will help the committee a great deal, such as **updating online listings**.

The time commitment is usually fairly small, but it is very important and needs to be in reliable hands. If you feel you'd be able to help out, please contact Cassie Tillett (Joint Artistic Director) on cassie@tillett.org.uk to discuss further.

News of Barn members

Many of the Barn family will know **Judi Daykin**, who has performed and directed many times at the Barn and the Maddermarket over the years, as well as running her own theatre company Broad Horizons. Judi's first book, *Under Violent Skies*, is now available in audio, Kindle and paperback format from Amazon, and which has been receiving excellent reviews. Additionally, the book has now been long-listed for The CWA New Blood Dagger - an annual award given by the British Crime Writers' Association for first books by previously unpublished writers. Well done, Judi!



As mentioned in a newsletter earlier this year, a long-time active member of our theatre, **Barnaby Matley**, has created a moving short film called 'Us',



featuring two more of our young performers, Rebekah Oelrichs and Sam Todd, and raising awareness of mental health. (A section from the play featured in our first 'Sewell Barn Shorts' evening.) It has since been selected as a finalist in the Paris International Short Film Festival, as part of the monthly Phoenix Shorts Film Festival in Canada, and as a finalist in the Berlin Short Film Festival. Huge congratulations to Barnaby and his team! If you'd like to watch the film, you will find it on the YouTube channel of Star Crossed Productions here: <https://youtu.be/uhCck9BHIVk>.

Still in the world of film, we were delighted to see the following link to work by the lovely **Charlotte Couture**. Charlotte was very active in the Norwich theatre community a few years back, including taking part in our production of The Shakespeare Revue in 2011. It's wonderful to see her making her mark in the professional theatre world.



From the Suffolk News: "Charlotte Couture founded a film company with a desire to overcome obstacles, but she might not have counted on a global pandemic being in her way.

Not to be deterred, the 30-year-old from Barton Mills had a more productive 2020 than most in wrapping her first short film as a director. Different Day, currently in post-production, focuses on Alicia, an 18-year-old young woman who is looking after her bipolar mother and little sister, balancing her commitments alongside her aspirations.

Charlotte, who is now based in Streatham Hill, got the idea for this, her sixth film project, having read a lot about the plight of young carers and seen documentaries."

To read the full article, please visit the link below:

<https://www.suffolknews.co.uk/whats-on/we-are-making-progress-to-equality-director-charlotte-cou-9193126/>

RIP: Jeff Davies

We brought you the sad news last month of the passing of Jeff Davies, a much-loved member of the Norwich theatrical community who had directed many shows both at the Barn and at the Maddermarket. There is now a memorial page online which you can visit to post memories or photographs, make a donation or light a virtual candle.

<https://jeffreydavies.muchloved.com/>

A church theatrical project

The Artistic Directors recently received this communication, which looks as though it might be a fascinating project. If you're interested in taking part, please contact Susan Rowe direct on hemblington@gmail.com.



Susan writes: "I am the secretary of The Friends of All Saints Church at Hemblington (near Blofield, Norwich) and the church has a unique, magnificent late Medieval wall painting of St Christopher on its north wall, uncovered in the 1930s and conserved by members of the Victoria & Albert museum.

The tale of St Christopher, his life before conversion, his carrying the Christ child over the river, and then the trials, tribulations and eventual death by pagans wishing him to relinquish his new found Christianity, is all to be found in

The Golden Legend. (I have typed this out in both "original form" and a simplified version, if you would like to see this.)

Because of the amazing amount of detail contained within the wall painting, I had wondered whether it might be possible to construct a play, featuring the three aspects of his life, and encouraging local actors, local people and ideally some local children, to take part. I am trying to put together some sort of screenplay for this, but would really appreciate experienced assistance with putting all this together. If it can be organised, I would envisage trying to stage it in the church and churchyard at Hemblington sometime during the summer of 2022.

I should be most grateful if you would consider some sort of voluntary involvement with this ambitious venture. If you would like to discuss this further, please e-mail me and let me know what aspects you might be able to support and any suggestions or views you may have about trying to create this project.

Thank you in anticipation,

Susan Rowe: Secretary: The Friends of All Saints Church, Hemblington

www.hemblingtonchurch.org.uk"