

JANUARY 2022

# newsletter

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**Wishing all our friends a very happy and healthy 2022!**

## Our next production: *Woman in Mind*

by Alan Ayckbourn | directed by Peter Wood

**20-22, 26-29 January (matinee January 29) 2022**



Photography: Barry Parsons

*Woman in Mind* is Alan Ayckbourn at his best: there is no shortage of laughter throughout the play, but it is also thought-provoking and disturbing. We are taken into the mind of Susan, a middle-aged woman in a loveless marriage, who has created an imaginary family to cherish and adore her. As the play progresses, she finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between real people in her mundane life and the increasingly bizarre figments of her imagination – with devastating consequences for herself.

While the play reflects many of Ayckbourn's recurring preoccupations, mental health issues are of special significance. This theme arguably resonates much more with audiences today than when the play was first performed in 1985, initially to a mixed critical reception. Subsequent revivals have, however, recognised its strengths, confirming the play as one of Ayckbourn's strongest and most enduring works.

Director Peter Wood commented: "When I read *Woman in Mind*, I was immediately drawn to its subject matter. I was also fascinated by Ayckbourn as an adventurous innovator, not afraid to experiment with theatrical styles and push the boundaries of possibility. Conveying a sense of two competing worlds – fantasy and reality – presents many challenges, not only for the actors but also for set design, lighting and sound. The part of Susan is enormously demanding; in fact, I would suggest it is one of the great female roles in modern theatre."

We are fortunate in having the accomplished Mandy Kiley to play the title role. The rest of the cast includes experienced Barn regulars Kevin Oelrichs (as clerical husband Gerald) and Alexandra Evans (his sister, Muriel), together with newcomers Brad Mercer (the disaffected son, Rick), Jasmine Warne (Lucy)

and Ben Allen (Tony). Susan's fantasy husband (Andy) is played by Lee Johnson, last seen at the Barn in *Private Lives*. Sadly, our original Bill (the clumsy GP and friend of the family), Garrick Bradman, has been forced to drop out due to injury, and we are very grateful to our good friend John Griffin for taking over at very short notice.

Tickets available at [www.ticketsource.co.uk/sewellbarn](http://www.ticketsource.co.uk/sewellbarn) or on 0333 666 3366.

## Keeping us all safe

High priority is given to ensuring the safety of audiences, cast and supporting crew for performances at the Sewell Barn Theatre. A wide range of Covid-security measures were implemented when we returned to performing in June 2021, and these were well-received by our audiences. We continue to take a precautionary approach through the following:

- **Audience numbers will be limited to 60% of our maximum capacity** (i.e. 60 tickets) until further notice. This will allow a space of at least one empty seat between different groups, whilst also reducing crowding in the foyer and elsewhere in the theatre.
- Audience members who are not double-vaccinated are **strongly encouraged to take a lateral flow Covid test** before coming to the theatre.
- **Anyone with Covid symptoms should not attend productions**, and a refund will be given in those circumstances.
- **Hand sanitiser** will be available in the foyer, Front of House stewards and bar servers will continue to wear **masks**, and **additional cleaning** will be carried out in all public areas of the theatre.
- **Pre-ordering of interval refreshments** before the start of the performance is encouraged. Card payments will be accepted as well as cash.
- **Online booking is encouraged**, and (because of reduced numbers) there is no certainty that tickets will also be available on the door.

## Our previous production: Three Russian Encounters

**THE YALTA GAME & AFTERPLAY** by Brian Friel (after Chekhov)

**SWANSONG** by Anton Chekhov translated by Marian Fell

Director: Tony Fullwood

**25-27 November, 1-4 December**



Photography: Sean Owen

What happens to fictional characters when the stories they are in come to an end? Might those from one play mix with those from another, resuming their lives through a different author? Themes of illusion and theatrical conceit abound in **Three Russian Encounters**, providing a novel combination of three one-act plays – by Russia's most famous playwright, Anton Chekhov, and the much-acclaimed modern Irish dramatist, Brian Friel. In **The Yalta Game**, adapted by Friel from Chekhov's story, The Lady with the Lapdog, a couple meet, begin an affair and, as they play the game of imagining the lives of those around them, they invent their own story. **Afterplay** brings together two of the characters from Chekhov's Uncle Vanya and Three Sisters. Twenty years on, they share their stories, their 'fictions' and seek the 'fortitude' to keep going. **Swansong** finds an ageing actor alone on the stage of a country theatre. His cries wake the Prompter with whom he reflects on past triumphs and his doubtful future.

On a simple set, our three pairs of actors presented fascinating and absorbing vignettes, which were very much appreciated by our audiences.

"These three short plays are triumphs of writing and are showcased by some **seriously strong acting talent**. It is an inspired selection of pieces by director Tony Fullwood, and a gem of an evening." *James Goffin* [[click here to read full review](#)]

"This is **theatre at its most powerful**. The performances are finely drawn and very involving, and the atmosphere, and the lighting, I could go on! I found it haunting, moving and beautifully staged. And the final piece gave me goosebumps. All in all, a haunting dream of a production which lingers in the mind long afterwards, and with good reason. Bravo!" *Barnaby M*

"That was **utterly compelling**.... I am moved to silence having been so deeply affected... every performance was totally captivating... please convey to all involved, from two very appreciative audience members... just wow! ... Often folk feel they have to be 'nice', commend the effort... but that was truly something of another order." *Charlotte C*

Visit our blog for more reviews of this and previous shows at <http://sewellbarntheatre.blogspot.com/>.

## Coming soon: The Father

by Florian Zeller, trans. Christopher Hampton | directed by Chris Bealey  
**3-5, 9-12 March 7.30pm, matinée 12 March 2.30pm**

Why do strangers turn up at André's door? Why won't his meddlesome daughter leave him alone? He's perfectly capable, isn't he?

*The Father* plunges us into an increasingly befuddling world, where André's confusion collides with his powerful sense of self and his long-held convictions. As we become immersed in André's reality, time shifts, doubts creep, and loyalties are questioned.



The play confounds with brutal humour and sinister twists, keeping us in its raw, emotional grip as it explores, Lear-like, the power of love between parent and child.

We are delighted to welcome a strong cast of performers for this production – some of whom we haven't seen for quite a long time, but all of whom have worked at the Barn before: John Dane, Jenny Belsey, Trevor Burton, Lauren Baston, Neil Auker and Jo Sessions. Advance booking is highly recommended.





## Audition notice: Edith – in the Beginning

by Karen Forbes | directed by Robert Little

**Auditions: Sunday 23 January 2022 at 2.00pm at the UEA Drama Studio**

**Performances: 21-23, 27-30 April 7.30pm, matinée 30 April 2.30 pm**

Originally written for an outdoor, site-specific venue (Sutton Hoo House, Suffolk) to commemorate Edith Pretty donating the treasure to the British Museum, the play recounts the story of the excavation of the barrows and the discovery of the Anglo-Saxon burial ship. At the heart of the play, set in class-rigid 1930s England, is a very human story about the unusual friendship between self-taught archaeologist Basil Brown and his employer Edith, a remarkable, educated woman in her own right, who served with the Red Cross in WW1 and became a first-time mother at 47. It has now been adapted for an indoor performance and the potential for a larger cast if desired.

EDITH PRETTY (nee DEMPSTER): 50s, singing ability preferred, could play 'young to older'.

BASIL BROWN: 40s

FRANK PRETTY: Dies in his late 50s before play begins. Could play young to older.

CORONER: male, age 40 upwards. Could be double cast eg BASIL.

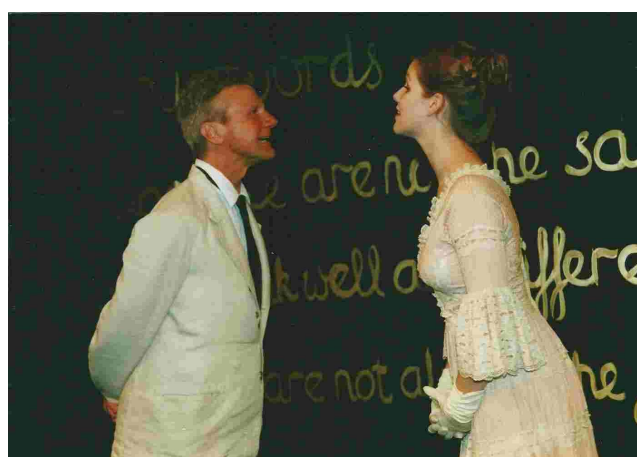
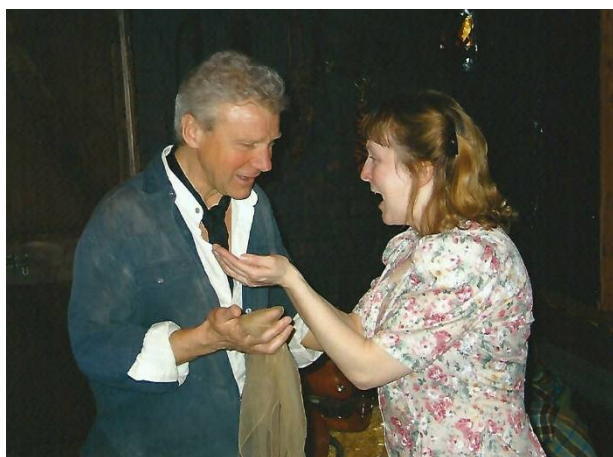
ROBINS: War correspondent, male, any age. Could be double cast eg BASIL.

QUEEN RAEDWALD : age 30s upwards. Able to sing unaccompanied.

Please visit our website (<https://www.sewellbarn.org/edith.html>) for more detailed character information and further details of rehearsals, and email the director as indicated to book your audition.

## Peter Sweet: In Memoriam

*We are sad to report that Peter died in hospital on 27th November 2021. The funeral was held on 22<sup>nd</sup> December at Colney, and was attended by many of the Norwich theatre family, both in person and online. Thank you to Clare and Becky for their lovely reflections below.*



*Left: as Starbuck in **The Rainmaker**, with Clare Howard (dir: Trudy McGilvray)*

*Right: as Higgins in **Pygmalion**, with Elena Hewett (dir: Clare Howard)*

A vicar's son, Peter's family moved to South Africa when he was a baby, where his parents were actively involved in the fight against apartheid and (probably for safety) the boys were sent to one of South Africa's top boarding schools, which claimed to teach a child how to be British. When he was 11 the family moved back to the UK. Peter remembered the shock of the cold, dark, damp fog as they arrived in Southampton and he went on to discover that public school Britishness was not a good fit in his father's next parish; Welling, South East London.

After finishing his schooling Peter went on to travel and work. Always loving wide open skies, so reminiscent of South Africa, he was particularly happy in Texas and in Norfolk. He did about every job you can name from working as a welder's mate in the Beccles steel yards, to international Tour guide.

In 1976 Peter went to Dartington College of Arts where he gained a BA(hons) in Theatre Studies with Drama Therapy as his specialism. It was at Dartington where he met Rebecca. Their daughter, Sara, went on to have two grandchildren, Foxley and Morgan, to whom he has always been 'Owpa', Afrikaans for Grandfather.

Arriving in Norfolk in 1980, Peter and Becky found Dominic Barber (a friend from Dartington) recently appointed as Assistant Director at the Maddermarket, which became a natural home. Peter's approach to acting, born out of, but not bound by, his grounding in Stanislavski and the Method, brought energy and integrity to productions. Peter became a big part of the local theatre scene, both professional and amateur, continuing until a few years ago when his health made it impossible for him to continue. Peter was an inspiration and caring mentor to many actors he shared the stage with, and to the students in his acting classes and workshops, which included local prisons as well as theatres.

Peter was charismatic and intense, both on stage and off. Audiences loved him for his powerful physicality, his rich voice and total immersion in the role. He was a man of great passions, especially theatre, and particularly Pinter and Shakespeare. He played many major Shakespearean roles including Polixenes, Iago, Oberon, Pericles, Angelo, Petruchio, Claudius and Richard III for the Maddermarket, Coriolanus and Benedick for the Sewell Barn and Macbeth for Loose Cannon. Though he had a reputation for playing heavy roles, he loved the chance to play comedy and found humour in the darkest characters. Peter's memorable appearances for the Sewell Barn included Aston in The Caretaker, Thomas in The Lady's not for Burning, Professor Higgins in Pygmalion, Jonathan Brewster in Arsenic and Old Lace (a great favourite of his) and Starbuck in The Rainmaker. Before his health failed, he was a great support to his partner, Clare, during her tenure as Artistic Director often helping out with cleaning and set painting as well as workshops, accent coaching or helping people learn lines.

He was a Yogi: Iyengar Yoga was an integral part of his daily life (he had spent some years in the mountains outside Florence learning from the best) and he loved to share his skills: some of his students continue their yoga until this day. His physical strength, flexibility and muscle definition made him a sought-after life model and he posed for many local artists as well as classes. His life was infused with poetry and music and dancing, with cycling and walking, and with a great love of the Norfolk countryside. He wrote poetry throughout his life. He was also a music lover: finding pleasure and meaning in Dylan, Springsteen, Johnny Cash and Waylon Jennings amongst many others.

Peter was a great part of both our lives. It has been unbearable to watch someone so vital overtaken by ill-health over many years and we are glad that, at last, he has found peace. Thank you to everyone who has shared their love and memories with us over the last few weeks: we are sorry that we have not been able to respond to all of them but they are all treasured.

*Clare Howard and Becky Sweet*