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newsletter

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A very happy 2023 to all our members and supporters!

Our next production: **Queers**

curated by Mark Gatiss | directed by Michelle Hutchings

19-21, 25-28 January at 7:30pm / matinee 2:30pm on 28 January



Photography: Sean Owen

Now we have pride; then we had shame and social stigma. Much of the past century was not an easy one for the UK lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (+) community. The tipping point was arguably 1967, when the Sexual Offences Act decriminalised male homosexual acts between consenting adults in private. To celebrate that anniversary, Mark Gatiss brought together eight monologues for BBC Four's *Gay Britannia* in 2017. The Sewell Barn Theatre presents six of these personal accounts of repression and liberation over the decades - together with extra material to bring these stories of passion, joy and fear fully up to date.

The Gatiss monologues have a common setting of a traditional English pub. They start with Perce, a young soldier who tells us how he found love in the trenches of the First World War, and end with Steve's same sex marriage. All provide poignant insights and "exquisite moments of happiness in lives otherwise marked with despair". Nevertheless, Michelle Hutchings, the director of this production, felt there was something missing: there was no representation of the trans experience. So with the help of Clare Williamson (joint Artistic Director of the Barn) and actor Jen Alexander (previously seen at the Barn in *The Tempest* and *Three Russian Encounters*), an original piece was created to fill that gap.

Michelle commented "When I first read the scripts, I was touched by each of the characters and their stories in this highly original piece of theatre. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community myself, I learned a lot of history that I was unaware of. Each cast member has put some of their self and their experiences into bringing their characters to life. The play is delightfully funny, but also has very sad and emotional undertones."

In addition to Jen's role as Vi, the actors comprise: Dean Kenneth as Perce (UEA Drama Student, new to the Barn); Poppy Hiscox as Bobby (*Three Russian Encounters* and *Under Milk Wood*); Zanna Foley-Davies as Alice (well-known at the Great Hall and Maddermarket); Jonathan Cooke as Jack (*Edith* and *The War That Still Goes On*); Ben Turner as Phil (*These Shining Lives*, also the Great Hall Players and Rackheath Players); and Sean Bennett as Steve (experienced actor from outside Norfolk).

Mark Gatiss' inventive range is impressive, with his writing and acting work for television including *The League of Gentlemen*, *Sherlock*, *Doctor Who* and *Inside No. 9*. His co-authors for the *Queers* texts performed at the Barn are Matthew Baldwin, Jon Bradfield, Jackie Clune, Brian Fillis and Gareth McLean; together they provide "an unbeatable series of monologues – funny, filthy, mournful, celebratory, predatory, bathetic, heroic – of the travails and, yes, fun had in the days before this particular love could speak its name" (The Guardian).

Contains themes of a sexual nature, homophobic/transphobic language and mental health issues including suicide.

Tickets are available at www.ticketsource.co.uk/sewellbarn or on 0333 666 3366.

Our previous production: Betrayal

by Harold Pinter | directed by Clare Howard

24-26 November, 30 November-3 December



Photography: Andrew Evans

We were delighted to welcome the return of Clare Howard (long time acting and directing member of the Barn, as well as Artistic Director between 2005-2011) to direct Pinter's classic and evocative play. With imaginative setting by Lucinda Bray and a first-rate cast (Steven Scase, Verity Roat, John Davis and Robin Watson), the show was appreciated and generously praised by audiences.

"...congratulations to Clare and her superb cast. I had decided long ago that Pinter was not for me having seen a couple of his plays. This time I was totally absorbed by the dilemma and was pulled back and forth by the multiple betrayals. All I can say is, **it was excellent and memorable** and you should all be incredibly proud of yourselves." *Zanna*

"This was the Barn at its best! **Superb acting** - every little pause and glance was beautifully timed. I loved the way the actors were so much 'at home' in every move. Lovely work, Clare and cast!" *Robin*

"The Sewell Barn Company have created a beautifully crafted and memorable production of this popular work **which comfortably bears comparison with professional productions with a hundred times their budget**. Every component, including set design and costumes as well as the performance create a whole greater than the sum of the parts, and I recommend that you book and enjoy this show." *Julian Swainson, Norwich Eye*

For more reviews of this and other productions, please visit <http://sewellbarntheatre.blogspot.com>.



Coming soon: Still Life and Red Peppers

by Noel Coward | directed by Cassie Tillett

2-4 & 8-11 March

Alec and Laura are the epitome of middle-class respectability; they find themselves falling into a passionate liaison that is quite beyond their experience or control. Husband and wife George and Lily Pepper have been making a living of sorts 'on the halls' for fifteen years, performing the act that

was originated by George's parents and grandparents - and the cracks are beginning to show...

These two short plays are taken from Noel Coward's play cycle *Tonight at 8.30*. The sharply observed characters and situations still resonate nearly ninety years after they were first written; the challenges of life in the professional theatre, and the timeless pain of an unsought, potentially destructive *amour fou*, remain as relevant as ever.

Director Cassie Tillett is thrilled to once more be blessed with a first-rate cast including friends old and new. In *Still Life*, Alec and Laura are played by Jonathan Redding (most recently seen as Mog Edwards in *Under Milk Wood*) and Kiera Long (making a welcome return to our stage after a long absence to rejoin her first Barn leading man!); the Red Peppers of the title are Andy Lofthouse (whose first outing at the Barn was as Basil in *Edith* last season) and Dawn Brindle (*Talking Heads, Cowardy Custard*). Of the remaining cast, Jan Farrar (*Waiting in the Wings, The Welkin*), Jamie Willimott (*Under Milk Wood*), Brad Mercer (*Woman in Mind*), Sue Newstead (*Waiting in the Wings*), Jose Tarouca (*Love, Love, Love* and others) and Selwyn Tillett (*Under Milk Wood* and others) are well known to our theatre audiences; and new members Lottie Askew and Sarah Haines join us both on stage and as stage management. This promises to be an evening that is variously hilarious and moving, and we look forward to seeing you.

Audition: A Midsummer Night's Dream

Contact details: cwilliamson197@gmail.com | 07742 156686

Performance dates: 1-3 & 7-10 June

Auditions: Sunday 29 January at 2:30pm

Lovers, fairies and working men (aka rude mechanicals) collide in a wood outside Athens on Midsummer Night. Puck works his magic and causes mayhem at the behest of his master, Oberon, the king of the fairies who has fallen out with his queen, Titania and seeks revenge. The lovers are running away from the confines of court life where Hermia has been given an ultimatum – either marry a man she doesn't love, live out the rest of her days in a nunnery or die – a harsh set of choices. The rude mechanicals are keen to rehearse a play which they hope will be chosen to be performed to celebrate the marriage of Theseus, Duke of Athens to Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons who he has won in battle.



This production will take the audience back to the golden English summer of 1910 when there was “honey still for tea” and croquet on the lawn. But during this idyllic time, women were fighting to gain a vote and a voice and the guns of First World War were only four years away. This Shakespeare classic is more than just a romantic fairytale. It’s a darkly comic fable where the rules of society no longer apply and dreams and desires are allowed free rein, just for one glorious night.

Please visit our website at <https://www.sewellbarn.org/dreamcasting.html> for full details of auditions, rehearsals and characters, and contact director Clare Williamson as shown above to register your interest and book an audition slot.

NOTE: We are thrilled to say that, at present, over 30 people have booked slots to audition on Sunday 29 January. We welcome more auditionees but please be aware that, if interested, your audition will now be on Tuesday 31 January at 7.30pm. If you wish to audition, **please contact Clare by Sunday 22 January**.

Wardrobe volunteers required

We welcome assistance in all areas of the theatre; this is a particular shoutout for help with our wardrobe department. Jen Flitton has taken over the role of supervisor and would very much value support as we costume our wide variety of shows. If you can help, please contact Jen on wardrobe@sewellbarn.org.

What’s on in Norwich

Dead Funny by Terry Johnson

The Norwich Players at the Maddermarket Theatre

Tuesday 31 January to Saturday 4 February: 6 performances (inc matinee)

<https://maddermarket.co.uk/event/dead-funny/>



While Eleanor wants a child, her uptight partner, Richard, is too busy running the Dead Funny Society. But in a week when British comedy heroes Frankie Howard and Benny Hill both kick the bucket, the society gathers for a celebration that promises to be full of hilarity and laughter. Well, for everybody except the disgruntled Eleanor, anyhow.

The Norwich Players Theatre Company presents the first In Studio production for 2023, playing to intimate audiences of only 50 people a night. Places are extremely limited, so book early.