

March 2016

Editor

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WORLD PREMIERE NOW GALA NIGHT

Mayor, Bishop and authors invited to special opening night in aid of Guide Dogs charity

FROM THE EDITOR

It has been three months since the last edition of *Masques*, and I suspect that this might become the pattern for the future, and rather than a monthly newsletter, we shall become a quarterly.

This issue has exciting news about the current and summer productions, and an unusual social evening taking place in April, a request for volunteers in a variety of important areas, and a very considered and thoughtful review, by Tony Newton, of *All My Sons*. We are very grateful to Tony for so consistently providing excellent reviews, and I think that he has covered everything I might have looked at had illness not prevented me from seeing the show.

As you can see left of this column, *All Gas and Gaiters* is coming along apace in rehearsal. This show might not be new, but it's certainly still funny, and, when not acting, the cast laugh at the jokes as though they've never heard them before – and you might not have.

Please do send in news items, articles, letters, and comment pieces, and remember: I am, as ever, very happy to publish items which are critical of the Board, of *Masques*, and of me; they might provoke the kind of discussion which has been absent for too long.

David Brown
Editor

WORLD STAGE PREMIERE!

All Gas and Gaiters

by Pauline Devaney and Edwin Apps

New Park Centre, New Park Road, Chichester, PO19 7XY

Wed 6 April - Sat 9 April 7.45 p.m. Matinee Sat 9 April 2.45 p.m.

Tickets from Chichester Cinema Box Office
<http://chichestercinema.org> 01243 786650

Gala Opening Night £12.00
(includes donation to Guide Dogs for the Blind Association and 7.00 pm reception with canapés and wine)

Other Performances £9.00
(clergy in clerical collars £8.00 on the door)

In support of
GUIDE DOGS

CHICHESTER PLAYERS
1933

Affiliated to *uoda* the National Operatic and Dramatic Association

The postcard version of the poster for *All Gas and Gaiters*, which will premiere in April.

Having previously held charity gala opening nights for *Dad's Army* and *The Accrington Pals*, Chichester Players is to continue the tradition with the world stage premiere of *All Gas and Gaiters*. Whilst few attendees have been confirmed, *Masques* can reveal that those invited include the Bishop, Dean and Mayor of Chichester, and the authors of the show, Pauline Devaney and Edwin Apps. The Mayor is being asked in grateful response to the City Council's grant of £500.00 towards improvements to technical equipment, including backstage blinds and a renewed stage relay, which will first be used for this production.

Previous beneficiaries of the generosity of the Players and their audiences have included Sussex Snowdrop Trust (several productions), Help for Heroes (*Dad's Army*) and the Royal British Legion (*The Accrington Pals*); this time it has been decided to support the local branch of the Guide Dogs for the Blind Association, and in addition to the official donation from the gala, collecting tins will be provided throughout the run, so those wishing to give to this very worthwhile cause will have plenty of opportunity, whichever performance they choose to attend.

The evening will commence at 7.00 pm with a reception in the Jubilee Hall, at which wine, canapés and a splendid cake will be served; the performance will start at 7.45 pm, as will the evening shows for the whole run; the Saturday matinee is at 2.45 pm. These times are slightly later than the Players' usual curtains.

The three episodes being performed, "Only Three Can Play", "The Bishop Learns the Facts" and "The Bishop is Hospitable", have all been wiped by the BBC, and are no longer known to exist, so this is likely to be the only opportunity to see them, at least in the near future and the local area.

The cast includes familiar names Melville Wilson as the Archdeacon and Vic Holloway as the Dean, and newcomers Nick Witney as the Bishop and Peter Jones as Nootie. Other roles are taken by our chairman Gillian Montgomery, Jane Blackford (having a complete change from *All My Sons*), Kylie Blackman, Gaye Douglas and Abigail Ockwell (*The Regina Monologues*), who takes a different small but important part in each of the three episodes. The stage manager is Steve Thomas.

BLEAK CRUELTY OF AMERICAN DREAM

by Tony Newton

This review is the opinion of the author, and does not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Board; future submissions are invited from interested members; Masques reserves the right to edit all articles.

This searing story, produced by the Chichester Players in Arthur Miller's centenary, ended their year on a high dramatic note. This review missed the last *Masques* due to timing, but even now the production deserves attention as one of the most significant plays of the last century.

All My Sons exposes the papered-over cracks in a shaky family edifice, and in the collapse there are significant suggestions of the destructive ruthlessness of capitalism and the American Dream's vulnerability to greed. The Players should be proud that they can rise to this challenge and emerge with flying colours. This production caught all the nuances and emotions – the tension, pent-up and finally exploding resentments, deep differences, ruined lives and finally that fell sergeant death. I found much to admire in the efforts of the cast – David Young's bluff but guilty father Joe Keller, Jane Blackford's troubled, complacent mother still grieving in 1947 for a son lost in 1944; Matthew Blyther's pacific, moral but finally furiously vengeful second son, and Georgina Jackson a rather awful interfering neighbour – all created a group of people you could recognise and understand. Georgina should have won an award for the best 1947 look. Angela Barber's Anne, a very demanding role as the dead son's fiancée, now loved by the second son and the daughter of the poor man who takes the rap for the father's criminal negligence, was outstanding. Chris Armstead, Steve Fitcher and Jasmine Millen as neighbours were solidly supportive.

Michael Ryder, finally appearing in the pivotal role of Anne's brother, suddenly and shatteringly aware of the truth of Keller's guilt, having spent years disbelieving and avoiding his own (framed) father, delivered well the emotional content of the role that determines how the play will roll out to its tragic end. In short an excellent cast with a marvellous array of American accents, not much of it genuine Ohio, I suspect! We seemed to get Brooklyn, Tombstone, mid-Atlantic and Scarlett O'Hara, as well as Jasmine's own, but no Home Counties, so that was fine.

However, apparent lack of attention to detail in small things irritated me throughout the production. Examples included too many instances of actors standing or sitting in straight lines or blocking each other; it was a mystery

about whose house it was that dominated the set – was it (presumably) the Kellers' – there were no lights on in it during the night time scene, and no door into it from the acting area; the drinks served came with too few glasses; and Anne's outfit did not come from anything like a chic New York dress shop. I felt that that Michael in particular, but not solely, was let down firstly by being expected to make some awkward moves around the set, secondly by a wardrobe decision about his hat (supposed to be his dad's battered loved old thing rather than the jaunty number he actually wore), and also by not being obliged to shave off his iconic beard – a beard being unthinkable for a young man with his history in the US in 1947.

For me the jury is still out of the cheery music during interludes. I would have thought torch songs about lost love and death would have been a more timely and appropriate alternative, to match the moods of the play. A significant play like this, so focused on a specific moment in history, needs an enormous amount of detailed monitoring for authenticity once the director has decided to go for the non-stylised, realistic approach

But quibbles like this apart, none of this affected my appreciation and admiration as the play rose inexorably to its violent crescendo, and then subsided to its bleak and ultimately shocking end.

CHANGE AT THE TOP

Since the Annual General Meeting, further changes have taken place on the Board of Chichester Players.

Treasurer Howard Morgan has unfortunately stepped down, both from that office and from the board, due to ill-health. Existing director Chris Harvey has agreed to take on that vital responsibility.

Howard has worked tirelessly over the years for Chichester Players, gaining us charitable status and pulling the society into the Twenty First Century, including the adoption of Internet banking. Many thanks are due to him, and it is to be hoped that, should circumstances change, he might eventually be persuaded to consider a return to the management of the group.

David Young, whom you may recall from *David Copperfield*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *A Chorus of Disapproval*, has been co-opted to fill the resulting vacancy. He brings a great deal of theatrical experience to the Board.

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VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers are needed in various areas.

All Gas and Gaiters Front of House Manager Michael Ryder requests help, especially for the Friday evening and the Saturday matinee. There is usually a restaurant meal for the cast and crew after the Friday show, and ushers would be more than welcome to attend, although the director wishes *Masques* to stress that those who go all pay their own way!

The get in for *All Gas and Gaiters*, on Saturday 2 April, will require as many people as possible, especially if handy with tools or paintbrushes. Anyone wishing to take part in this should just turn up on the day, at any time after 10.00 am. Any offers to become props manager for the run would also be appreciated.

Both for *All Gas and Gaiters* and in an ongoing capacity, a publicity officer for the Players is needed urgently. Consideration could be given to making this a directorship, with a seat on the Board, subject to discussion with the successful applicant. The work is not onerous, but is hugely important, as without contact with the media, the task of selling tickets to our shows becomes very difficult.

Anyone interested should email the editor, who will pass their details on to the appropriate people.

SHAKESPEARE'S GOT TALENT

To mark the 400th anniversary of the death of William Shakespeare Chichester Players will host a fun evening of excerpts from the works of the Bard of Avon, entitled, with obvious justification, if a little inelegance, *Shakespeare's Got Talent*.

We hope that as many people as possible will attend the Jubilee Hall at 7.30 pm on 23 April, both to enjoy the entertainment and to take part. The editor promises not to run a review of the performances, not least because he hopes to give a rather tangential one of his own.

It is intended to include a fish supper in the price of admission, and details of the cost and who to contact will be circulated separately in the near future.

PROCESS PROGRESS

The Trial, which was originally published in German as *Der Process* (and later as *Der Proceß*, *Der Prozess* and *Der Prozeß*, just to be confusing) is progressing well, with Peter Waters undertaking re-writes on the basis of feedback from the public play reading held last year. He has also managed to cast the show fully, with rehearsals due to start soon; whilst *Masques* has not received a full list, one or two exciting names have been mentioned.