

BACKSTAGE – May 2019

My year as President has flown by, yet at the same time feels so long.

The Friday Dress Rehearsal of Communicating Doors is to be a Charity Night for Motor Neurone Disease. A collection will be held throughout the play week so if you feel able please donate generously. As always the Stage Set looks as though it will have even more than our usual WOW factor, so book tickets if not already done so.

Concerning socials I must confess I was full of enthusiasm and we have had fun, incidentally raising money. However its the same people who play hard having worked at the theatre led by the one and only William Nolan. In the Nearly New Clothing Sale we raised £100 but if more had come down it could have been so much more. A Charity Shop will have raised hundreds from the rails we had left. The Promise Auction had the potential to be hoot, Steve Pratt was ready to be an excellent Auctioneer selling the proverbial ice to an Eskimo. (See more below)

The **end of season BBQ will be on 9th June** and the Executive have approved there being **no charge** this year as a token of appreciation and thank you to all of the membership who have helped make the roof project and the season a great success. We still would appreciate any contributions of salads and cakes as in previous years but the meat and buns will be free! As a bit of fun and to test Steve's auction skills we will have a mini auction at the end of season BBQ for about 20 minutes using a small selection of the items promised last year. So bring some cash and bid away.

A Ladies Afternoon Tea will be held in June so please book early as there will be limited spaces. A £10 deposit will be required on booking and tables for 4, 6, 8 or 10 can be reserved. Once I have checked the date I have men ready for bar duty who are prepared to make cocktails and flirt outrageously. A bottle of bubbly for the Best Dressed Lady. Tickets will be available from the opening of Communicating Doors, or phone me on 0161 485 1888

On a positive note seeing new people help Front of House and on teas/coffee even set building is encouraging. There is a but or however ... we still need people to man the bar/ticket office and sound/lighting. If you see someone you don't know introduce yourself making them feel wanted.

At one point Thursday evenings and Sunday lunchtimes seemed to be popular again but numbers have dwindled. As we have so few bar stewards it is not fair to expect them to repeatedly give up their time for such small numbers. Every single member can help by either coming down for a drink and chat, ideally volunteering to do a bar duty for a Thursday or Sunday. The Stewards would then only have to cover play runs, still an onerous task when some of us do more than one role. Following on from this we are considering only opening the bar once a month with lunches, unless the situation changes.

Don't miss the Cricket/Croquet weekend on 6th and 7th July with Stockport Garrick. Details will be notified once finalised with the Garrick.

The summer break this year is going to be devoted to creating a design/detailed plan for refurbishing the foyer/bar area which desperately needs doing. One of those jobs put on hold whilst the roof was done. Another job potentially is a radical sort through of our furniture/carpet/chair store so look out for further details, probably an email from William Nolan.

(cont)



Throughout my term Robert Jewell has also put in hours of work creating our colourful flower beds, but there is still an enormous amount of work to be done. To some it could appear unnecessary but our comment would be the approach is the first view people have of our fantastic theatre so the first impression is important. Thanks to those who have complimented our hard work. If anyone needs to employ a gardener don't forget it's actually what I do professionally, or come down and help.

Totally unrelated to CHADS the road I live on has recently set up a WhatsApp Group following a spate of burglaries. It's working very well and the Police were all in favour. The advice they gave was to not leave doors open/unlocked - obvious but some thefts are opportunists. Leave car keys downstairs but not on show - avoids the risk of personal confrontation. Since our break in we have fitted sash jammers to the French Window and some opening windows - cheap and easy to fit plus the police recommended these as they struggle to break down doors with these fitted. Another tip would be to stipulate anti snap locks on all new UPVC window and doors, they certainly were not on our old ones!

Janine (President)

Dates for your diaries:

Saturday 18th –
Saturday 25th May

Communicating Doors, by Alan Ayckbourn

Sunday 9th June

End of Season BBQ

Saturday 6th &
Sunday 7th July

Charrick Weekend

SET STRIKE SUNDAY LUNCHESES

It seems that Sunday lunches have had their day! Recently there has been little take up and our chefs have prepared food that has not sold. So, it feels like time to call it a day.

There will be one more lunch, on the day after *Communicating Doors* ends, but that will be the final one.

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to lunches for their support over the years. It has never been a huge money spinner but we have raised a little for Chads' coffers and having a communal lunch was part of the social fabric of the theatre. Perhaps 'Bring Your Own Butty Club' will take over!

Ann Quaiife



Our Next Production

Communicating Doors

by Alan Ayckbourn

Saturday 18th - Saturday 25th May

Just over a month ago, Sir Alan Ayckbourn celebrated his 80th birthday. 2019 also marks his 60th anniversary as a professional playwright. It is extraordinary to think that, in that time, he has completed over 80 full-length plays. It is therefore appropriate that we should close our 2018/19 Season with his most ingenious comic thriller, *Communicating Doors*, just as we will open our 2019/20 Season in September with another wonderfully observed comedy of his, *Table Manners*.

Communicating Doors is a great example of his ingenuity and craft as a playwright and story teller. The plot twists and turns through time with each of the six characters clearly drawn and undergoing transformative and life-changing experiences. Ayckbourn has an uncanny knack of keeping his audiences guessing. As he has remarked, one of the nicest things people can ever say to him, having seen one of his plays for the first time, is "Well, I never saw THAT coming!"

There are countless works of fiction in which time travel is central to the plot - *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens, *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells, *Tom's Midnight Garden* by Philippa Pearce; for TV viewers, *Dr Who* and *Outlander*; and J.B.Priestley's Time Plays such as *An Inspector Calls* to name but a very few.

It is no surprise then that Alan Ayckbourn would become interested in exploring the use of this device. Assuming the availability of a suitable time 'machine', would we be able to not only travel back in time but also influence events which would impact on our present and future? How might we change as individuals? These are questions which this play raises and, in its own very entertaining way, answers.

Combine elements of a science fiction story, a thriller and a comedy and you find the principal ingredients of *Communicating Doors* craftily interwoven to produce, with all its twists and turns, a plot which will keep you on your toes (if not, the edge of your seat) and guessing till the end.

Without giving too much away, it is fair to say that the play has provided everyone involved in the production with some considerable challenges and I have been extremely fortunate to work with a very talented and committed cast, technical team and backstage crew.

The six characters will be played by Joan Taylor-Jones, Nigel Westbrook, Kathryn Way, Chris Rogerson, Mary Ellis and William Nolan.

Hamish Lawson

Newsletter Contributions

This is the last newsletter of the season. Thanks for all the contributions over the season. Backstage will return in September.

E-mail: andyandjulie@tiscali.co.uk (PLEASE PUT "CHADS NEWSLETTER" IN SUBJECT).



Eulogy for Derek Slater (1925 - 2019)

Derek was born in Stalybridge, but shortly afterwards the family moved to Helensburgh on the Clyde. His father was in calico printing, but in 1930 the cotton industry collapsed, and soon the family were back in Stalybridge, living with the grandparents. Derek and his mother had travelled back in advance, and one of Derek's most precious childhood memories is that of his father suddenly turning up, and the family being reunited. They later moved to Stockport, and by something of a fluke, got hold of a piano, and a piano teacher. Learning to play was a highlight of his early years.

At the start of the war in 1939 the government encouraged people to take 'holidays at home'. London theatre companies started to visit the provinces. Derek was now at Stockport School, which was to be the summer quarters for the Ballet Rambert. Amazingly, the headmaster put him in charge of the keys and asked him to see to it that everything went smoothly. He was fascinated; he watched the rehearsals, presided over by the terrifying Dame Marie herself. He got on well with Tony the lighting technician, who taught him a great many bad music hall jokes.

In 1942, now a sixth former, Derek expected to be called up, and so he'd allowed himself to get behind in his academic work. He was therefore surprised to be referred to an eye specialist. I quote:

'What do you do for a living?

I'm a student.

You would be more use as a student than in the bloody army'.

And thus our hero was forced to quickly catch up on all the work he had neglected. There was fire-watching to be done by the able-bodied. Some incendiaries fell in a field behind the family home, and Derek raced over with his bucket and hand pump. Incendiaries were usually the prelude to heavy bombing, but on this occasion there was none – and he didn't know whether to be disappointed or relieved.

Derek started at Manchester University in 1943. The men and women had separate unions. The men's union had swing doors, an open fireplace and battered leather chairs; it was rather like being a member of an exclusive *but rather seedy* gentlemen's club.

After the war he was made delegate to the councils of the NUS; it was the beginning of his foreign travel, starting with a student festival in Prague.

In 1948 Derek started on a teacher training course. It was relaxed, to the point of shambolic. Crushingly, Derek says the Head had no managerial or educational skills; it turned out he had been chosen for his ability to run a football team. However, it led to his first job – at a day-release college in Dagenham. Many pupils - shop assistants, GPO messenger boys and so on - resented being there. But in an odd sort of way Derek enjoyed it, and settled into what he called 'an amiable truce' with his recalcitrant students.

His next job was teaching English and French in Accrington. While there he discovered the Summer School at Dartington Hall – an unforgettable opportunity to enjoy and perform music in great company. And it was when he moved to Sale Grammar School, that he started to get invitations to adjudicate at Drama Festivals, where he met big names such as Sam Wanamaker.

In 1956 Derek married Dilys Mason. He blamed himself for the eventual failure of the marriage; we will leave it at that. Feeling that he would now like to teach **older** pupils, he moved to do drama at Sheffield City training college. He says it was a dream job. There was no Drama Department; he was expected to teach English Literature and direct plays with groups of volunteers.

In 1961 the British Council advertised for volunteers to work in Nigeria during the summer. Three thousand hopefuls applied, and Derek was one of the very few appointed. Eventually he was offered a permanent post at Ibadan University. For once, he says, I got it right and turned it down. Two years later the Nigerian Civil War broke out.

In 1963 he moved to the new College of Speech & Drama in Hampstead, based in Anna Pavlova's old house. Helen Mirren was a student; Derek points out that she would have made it in the big time without any help from him, or indeed anyone else there. He returned north as senior lecturer at Mather College, perhaps because – yes - Drama had now become a degree subject. And for a blessed, but brief, period Derek tells us that those in the creative arts felt a justified sense of job satisfaction. Then came the Thatcher 80s, and 'rationalisation'. The Drama course disappeared. In its place came a new phase of never-ending paperwork and assessment panels. Staff were immensely frustrated and disappointed, a feeling that remained with Derek up to the time he retired.

But back to the 60s. At this point Derek says he would have welcomed the services of a sympathetic but unsentimental biographer. He dreams up an inaccurate and misleading headline in The News of World: 'Middle-aged college lecturer abandons wife for nubile young student'.....In fact Derek married Margaret Hough after having known her for five years – she had taken a part in his first play at Mather. Helen and Toni were born. Margaret had health problems; she was unable to work, Derek needed an additional income, and joined the newly created Open University. It continued to be part of his life long after he formally retired. Margaret left at short notice, leaving Derek with the two girls, and in a way, he quite

enjoyed the status of single parent. After a while the girls went to be with their mother, although to Derek's great delight, Helen later returned.

In 1983 the Open University Summer School was at Warwick. There was a heat wave, and lecturers and students alike sat outside late into the evening, chatting and drinking. John Rutter conducted a madrigal choir. Derek performed piano duets and rewrote the songs of Gilbert and Sullivan and of Cole Porter. The News of the World – getting its second mention in this memoir – was majoring on 'disgraceful sexual activity at OU residential schools'. And this is how, in a roundabout way, Derek introduces his reader to his meeting Pam. Both were married to others at the time, but only just; the respective spouses accepted the situation, as did Helen and Toni, and Gideon, Becky and Charlie, Pam's children. That the couple have been very happy since their marriage in 1985 is, according to Derek, largely down to Pam.

He had been retired for almost twenty years, and was still doing the things he liked to do. But for us there's a little more to say: many of us here are very grateful for all the time and energy that Derek and Pam have put into Chads and community theatre in general. His encyclopedic knowledge of theatre has been a tremendous resource. On a personal level, I have enjoyed working with him as his sound man, and I have particular memories of the two occasions when he and I performed the songs of Flanders and Swan, me swan-like at the piano, and Derek making his appearance in my mum's old wheelchair as the polio-afflicted Michael Flanders. Thank you Derek, from the bottom my heart, for the fun you brought.

Roger Fletcher