

# FORUM THEATRE BILLINGHAM CLEVELAND

**21st to 26th November, 1977**

**Romeo and Juliet**

# Freeman



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Produced by  
Arthur Guinness

# Getting Back to That Grid

by **Eric Shorter**

O for a muse of - eh? Not fire? This isn't Henry the Fifth? But it's Tuesday. It must be. Wednesday? Oh, dear. That's Macbeth. Ah, yes. "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow . . ."

Acting plays in rotation, especially Shakespeare's plays, has always been hazardous. Many a green room tale is told of Shakespearean players sliding from one play into another and having to be winked at and nudged, hissed at and mugged (not in the hooligan sense but the mimetic) before they could be brought back along the right soliloquy and safely into that night's play as scheduled.

Today most repertory actors know which play they are in; and most playgoers at theatres with repertoires know which play they are at. Repertoires are confined to the non-repertory companies, like the Royal Shakespeare and the National and Prospect.

Outside those leading subsidised companies it is a job to maintain an actual repertory of plays, impossible to maintain it for any length of time, and perhaps no longer desirable, because apart from the problems of storage and striking scenery, keeping one company together and three or four plays in every actor's head, such a company is apt to get bogged down and not to want to leave base.

Moreover, everything it does is done for in a month. Productions cannot hope to endure for any longer in a provincial city. And that seems to me to be a waste. Suppose for example that Liverpool turns out a good revival of one of the Manchester school of plays apart from the inescapable *Hobson's House*. Why shouldn't the rest of the country be allowed to see it?

If Hull digs up a rarely acted play by Ibsen or Glasgow something unheard of by Noel Coward (which Glasgow did only the other day), why cannot the playgoers of Sheffield or Birmingham, Exeter or Guildford, Newcastle-on-Tyne or Stoke-on-Trent share in Glasgow's luck or enterprise?

The answer, traditionally, is that regional theatres ought to serve their regions by establishing a local policy and a local company which feels that it has an identity. The idea then is to bring on local authors (Peter Terson at Stoke-on-Trent, Henry Livings at Oldham, Alan Bleasdale at Liverpool) and drum up a community feeling.

So, there are temptations for regional theatres to remain as autonomous as possible. And you can't blame them, if they can afford it. But can they? Can the country? Is it making the most of what it has got?

It has certainly got a lot of reps - between fifty and sixty. Not all of them are first-rate. Not all of them have policies which would suit spectators elsewhere. That is to say, they don't all stage stuff that would travel. But suppose they had to. Suppose they were required to consider not just local tastes, local needs, local fancies, but national tastes, national needs, national fancies. What then?

Wouldn't everybody benefit more? Wouldn't more productions be properly exploited? Wouldn't each city get a greater variety of what the managers call "product"? There are already signs of a growth in successful touring for its own sake.

*continued overleaf*

## GETTING BACK TO THAT GRID — *continued*

Not by the National or the RSC but by Prospect and the Oxford and Cambridge theatre companies; and lately (and even more encouragingly) by Triumph Productions, several of whose shows have lately reached the capital after starting in the regions without London as their immediate aim.

So there is no doubt, that given attractive productions, provincial playgoers will turn out. Were the general run of reps to ponder my proposition (which is as old as the hills and full of technical objections) there are signs that playgoers would welcome it.

The name of the scheme is a grid. It used to be mooted in the 1950s when the Arts Council was urging more and more reps to take the plunge and keep their shows on for two weeks instead of one.

The idea was that a grid would encourage the exchange or touring of regional productions. Instead of a show packing up after a fortnight it would trundle round the country, perhaps for months, giving the company longer to play it in, and giving audiences a taste of what other towns were up to.

And the objections? Well, in the 1950s they were not so great as they might be today when reps are becoming so autonomous. But even then it was feared that Coventry wouldn't give a hoot for Nottingham's new effusion, or that Bristol would be bored by what excited them at Stoke, and that Guildford simply wouldn't understand what Liverpool was trying to do - and vice versa.

Today however the technical objections are more considerable, not only because touring is relatively more costly and theatrical landladies very scarce but also because the rash of new provincial playhouses which has

transformed the face of British theatre in twenty years has been a rash of architectural whims which make each stage as particular as the style of its director.

Just try shunting something from the Sheffield Crucible round, say, to the Birmingham Rep, the Chester Gateway, the Colchester Mercury, the Royal Exchange, Manchester and the Theatre Royal, Bristol, and you will see what I mean. It would need a new designer for each show, not to mention the new staging. There are so many shapes and sizes to be encountered.

But assuming that Leatherhead is no longer suspicious of or utterly indifferent to Guildford's activities and that Manchester no longer looks askance at Leeds, I should have thought that the objections would be of minor importance compared to the major advantage of the national grid. There is much to be said for the individuality that has sprung up among our reps in recent years with justifiable artistic pride.

They deserve (and often get from critics) national attention. But they would get it more effectively with a grid by touring more of their shows which, as things stand (and static is the word) fizzle out so soon unless they are picked for a visit to the Cottesloe or a foreign festival.

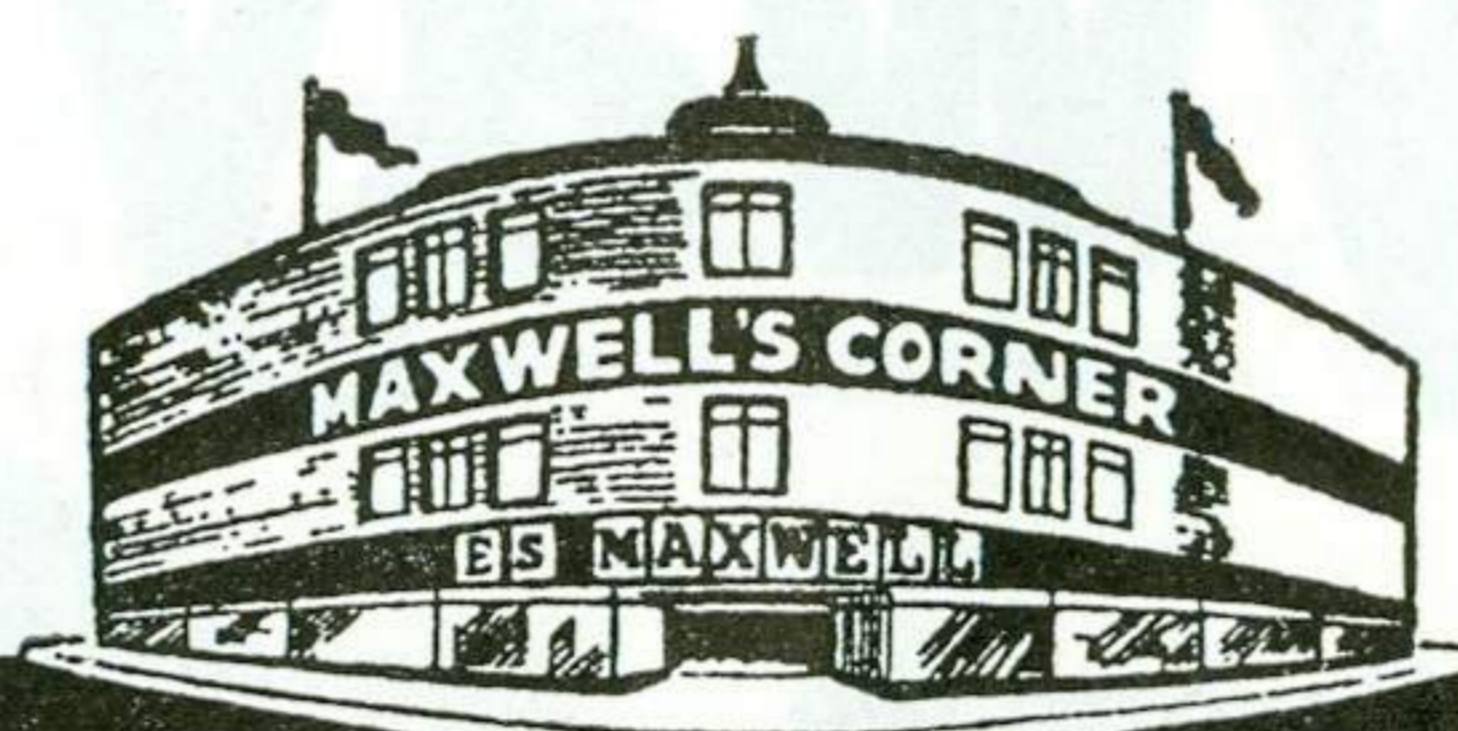
All that stands in the way of such a national theatre system (more national than the National itself) is lack of will and the shapes of stages. Are they insurmountable obstacles?

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Well, at the Evening Gazette we do. That's why Keith Newton, our theatre critic writes a special column every Saturday. He talks about the personalities, the productions and reviews, what is coming up. And during the week we regularly review the first nights. We think it's important to keep in touch. Agreed?



KEITH NEWTON

Your complete entertainment guide  
from Monday to Saturday

Evening  
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# FORUM THEATRE

**BILLINGHAM - CLEVELAND**

Theatre Director and Licensee : LES JOBSON  
Theatre Administrator : JEAN RANSOME  
Theatre Tel. : Stockton-on-Tees 551389 & 556444  
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The Theatrical  
Management Association*

Vol. 2 No. 7

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DUNCAN C. WELDON & LOUIS I. MICHAELS  
For Triumph Theatre Productions Limited  
and The Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford

present

**Michele Dotrice  
Doris Hare  
Edgar Wreford**

**Clive Francis  
John Stone  
Mark Wynter**

in

## ROMEO AND JULIET

by

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

with

**Robin Wentworth**

Elliott Cooper  
Jon Iles  
Raymond Skipp

Liz Daniels  
Michael Leighon  
Anthony Talbot

Anthony Dunston  
Robert Lister  
Jessica Turner

Peter Honri  
Michael Logan  
Wendy Williams

and

**Frank Barrie**

Directed by **PETER COE**

Designed by **MICHAEL KNIGHT**

Financially Assisted By Arts Council Touring

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## FROM THE THEATRE DIRECTOR

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As our plans for Spring and Summer 1978 begin to take shape, our excitement grows and we believe, when we are in a position to announce the full programme, so will yours.

Let us look first at our immediate presentations. Following this week's great love story, we turn to a period much later than Shakespeare's time. In 1773 came the first night of Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer* and those present found themselves watching a revolutionary idea in stage plays. Following many years of so-called 'sentimental comedies', here was a play with real characters and real fun. Today we love this play for its superb entertainment value, and theatregoers have taken into their gallery of memorable characters the Hardcastles, Young Marlow, Hastings and Tony Lumpkin. Nothing has been spared to make this production of the highest quality. Director Clifford Williams and Designer Ralph Koltai are at the top of their respective professions, and an absolutely top-line cast led by Phyllis Calvert, Martin Jarvis and John Savident will ensure a memorable evening. This Billingham production then leaves us to play the famed O'Keefe Centre in Toronto, Canada, and on to open at the Hong Kong Arts Festival on 6th February. I always find this kind of itinerary exciting — Billingham — Toronto — Hong Kong. It serves to illustrate the international quality of our product. Your support ensures continuance of this quality.

On to *Aladdin* with Bobby Dennis as Widow Twankey, again providing the children (and hence their parents) with the traditional fun. Advance bookings suggest packed houses for the run from 22nd December to 7th January. A short break for preparation of the new musical *Carrots* written by Peter Canwell, the Stokesley headmaster, and opening 16th January. Based on episodes in the life of Dr. Barnardo, this is a very warm moving story with very singable music, a real family show. To complete the local associations, we have cast it with some of Cleveland's talent. I believe you will love this musical. It is an amateur production with full orchestra.

Syd Lawrence and His Orchestra play two concerts on 22nd January, and then by way of complete contrast, a week with Dave Allen, already a phenomenal sell-out.

And so we could go on — London Contemporary Dance Theatre, Bruce Forsyth in the Bricusse and Newley Travelling Music Show, a new production of Rattigan's *The Sleeping Prince*, a big Broadway musical never before produced in Britain. All these and many more great nights in the theatre for 1978. Stay with us.

LES JOBSON



## MICHELE DOTRICE (Juliet)

made her first stage appearance in traditional style when she was "carried on" at the age of three weeks in *Johnny Belinda*. Born in Cleethorpes, Lincolnshire, she spent her childhood in Guernsey where her father, actor Roy Dotrice, ran a repertory company. She trained at the Corona Stage School and subsequently joined the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1964. During two years she portrayed Katharine in *Henry V*, Abigail in *The Jew of Malta*, and opposite her father in Brecht's *Puntilla*. Other stage roles include Mathilde in Christopher Hampton's *Total Eclipse* at the Royal Court and opposite Tommy Steele in Goldoni's *The Servant of Two Masters* at the Queen's. She toured in *Odd Girl Out* with Sylvia Syms and played in Alun Owen's *The Male of the Species* at the Piccadilly and in Australia. Well known to television audiences, Michele starred as Betty opposite Michael Crawford in the BBC's successful series *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*. Other television appearances have been in Turgenev's *A Month in the Country*, *Three Sisters*, *The Sextet* and guest appearances on *The Morecambe and Wise Show* and *Celebrity Squares*. She recently received personal acclaim for her performance as Catherine Winslow in the BBC Play of the Month — *The Winslow Boy*. Her film credits include *And Soon the Darkness* and *Not Now Comrade*. Last year she played Viola in Keith Michell's production of *Twelfth Night* at the Chichester Festival, and, more recently, she starred with Michael Crawford in *Same Time Next Year* at the Prince of Wales Theatre.

## CLIVE FRANCIS (Romeo)

went into Rep at the age of 16, and later to RADA. On leaving the Academy he toured for Prospect Productions and played in Rep at Worthing, Leicester and Derby. His first TV appearance was as Traddles in *David Copperfield*, which led to his West End debut in *There's a Girl in My Soup* at the Globe Theatre. He then went on to appear in *The Servant of Two Masters* at the Queen's Theatre, *Three* at the Fortune, *The Mating Game* at the Apollo, *Bloomsbury* at the Phoenix and *The Return of A. J. Raffles* by Graeme Greene at the Aldwych. In 1976 he was at Chichester in *Monsieur Perrichon's Travels* with Rex Harrison and in *The Circle* by Somerset Maugham, which transferred to the Haymarket Theatre. He left this to appear in *The Deep Blue Sea* for the Cambridge Theatre Co. Clive's numerous TV credits include *Entertaining Mr. Sloane*, *Middlemarch*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *A Walk With Destiny*, *Churchill's People*, *Ten from the Twenties*, *Caesar and Cleopatra*, *Poldark*, and the current series *Rough Justice*. He will soon be seen as Roberto in *Saturday, Sunday, Monday* with Laurence Olivier and Frank Finlay. His films include *The Man Who Had Power Over Women*, *Villain*, *A Clockwork Orange* and *Girl Stroke Boy*.

## DORIS HARE (Nurse)

made her first stage appearance when she was carried on stage at the age of three weeks! She has appeared in Variety, Cochran-Coward Revues, Films and TV. Her first New York appearance was in *Night Must Fall*, and London successes include *Lights Up*, *1066 and All That*, *The Water Gypsies* and *Valmouth*. During the war she compered the radio series *Shipmates Ashore* and was awarded the MBE. From 1963 - 65 she was under contract to the RSC, and on loan to the National Theatre, Chichester, for *Trelawney of the Wells* and *Black Comedy*. Doris plays Mrs. Butler (Reg Varney's Mum) in the TV series *On the Buses* and in the successful films with the *On the Buses* team. She has recently finished a successful run in *No Sex Please, We're British* at the Strand Theatre.

## JOHN STONE (Friar Laurence)

started his acting career at the old Q Theatre, and after extensive Repertory experience appeared on the West End stage in *One Wild Oat*. He has since played in London in *Keep in a Cool Place*, *A View from the Bridge*, *And Suddenly it's Spring*, *Signpost to Murder* and *Relative Values*. John has appeared in many films, and first became a familiar face on TV in *Quatermass II*. Subsequently he starred in an early spy series *Destination — Downing Street*, and in Peter Shaffer's first TV play *The Balance of Terror*. Apart from leading roles in many plays, he has made guest appearances in series ranging from *The Avengers*, *The Saint* and *Sergeant Cork* to *Doomwatch*, *Softly, Softly* and *Warship*. For three years he played Dr. Ian Moody in the series *Justice*. For the most part of 1977 John has toured extensively with the highly-successful *Quadrille* which also starred Margaret Lockwood and Richard Todd. This was a Forum Theatre Billingham Production, toured by Triumph Theatre Productions.

# ROMEO AND JULIET

by William Shakespeare

## Capulets

Sampson	MICHAEL LEIGHTON
Gregory	ANTHONY DUNSTON
Tybalt	MARK WYNTER
Capulet	EDGAR WREFORD
Lady Capulet	WENDY WILLIAMS
Nurse	DORIS HARE
Juliet	MICHELE DOTRICE
Peter	ROBIN WENTWORTH

## Montagues

Abraham	ELLIOTT COOPER
Balthasar	ANTHONY TALBOT
Benvolio	RAYMOND SKIPP
Montague	PETER HONRI
Romeo	CLIVE FRANCIS
Mercutio's Woman	LIZ DANIELS
Abraham's Girl	JESSICA TURNER
Balthasar's Girl	YVETTE DOTRICE

## Peacemakers

Escalus, Prince of Verona	MICHAEL LOGAN
Paris	ROBERT LISTER
Guard	JON ILES

## Churchmen

Friar Laurence	JOHN STONE
Friar John	PETER HONRI

## Poison Pedlars

Mercutio	FRANK BARRIE
Apothecary	MARK WYNTER

Directed by	PETER COE
Designed by	MICHAEL KNIGHT
Fights and Dance by	JOHN BROOME
Lighting by	ANDREW BRIDGE
Sound Designer	MALCOLM BLACKMOOR

*There will be one interval of 15 minutes*

**For FORUM THEATRE BILLINGHAM  
CLEVELAND**

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Theatre Administrator  
Young People's Theatre Organiser  
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Box Office Manageress  
Box Office Assistants

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JEAN RANSOME  
TOM SPENCER  
ERNEST JOBSON  
DOROTHY WILSON  
AUDREY ROBERTS  
CORA ROBINSON  
MARY WOMPHREY

**Production Staff**

Production Stage Supervisor and  
Foreman Carpenter  
First Stage Dayman  
Stage Dayman  
Chief Electrician  
Electrician

LES ROBINSON  
BOB BASFORD  
PETER ROSS  
ERIC DUNNING  
ROBIN JOHNSON

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Production Manager  
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Production Assistants

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RICHARD TODD  
GRAEME D. SINCLAIR, ACIS  
GILBERT HARRISON  
BILLY JAY  
ROBIN CARR  
YVONNE BARLOW  
GINA BARLOW  
SUE NESBITT  
JOHN WHITE

**For 'ROMEO AND JULIET' COMPANY**

Company Stage Manager  
Deputy Stage Manager  
Assistant Stage Managers

Wardrobe

BRYAN SULLIVAN  
JOHN KNOX  
JON ILES  
YVETTE DOTRICE  
JOANNA GUERITZ  
DINO DI LIBERO  
GARRY McDERMOTT

**CREDITS**

Set built in the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Workshops  
Costumes made in the Theatre Wardrobe  
Leather supplied by Gomshall Tanneries  
Wigs by Wig Creations  
Shoes by Anella & Davide (Shoes & Apparel)  
Hats by Pat Pope  
Weapons by Rent-a-Sword  
Metalwork by Beaconsfield Forge, Woking  
Backcloth by Mick Tomlin  
Sound Equipment by Dick Lock

### **EDGAR WREFORD (Capulet)**

was trained in the Old Vic School and has played leading roles in a wide repertoire of modern and classical plays in all the main companies and theatres throughout England, besides leading a number of prestige tours for the British Council in Europe, Africa and the Far East. He appeared in Guildford playing Macbeth under the direction of Bryan Bailey, and he played Banquo in Peter Coe's *Macbeth*. For a while he was a Director of Plays with BBC TV, and as an actor he has played more than 200 TV roles, most recently in the Zeffirelli production of *The Life of Christ*. In his spare time he teaches, putting on productions in the main drama schools, at universities and with overseas students.

### **MARK WYNTER (Tybalt)**

made his professional debut as a recording artist aged 17, and had 11 discs in the Top Twenty before switching his attentions to the musical stage and straight theatre. He played the leading role in *Conduct Unbecoming* for over a year at the Queen's Theatre, and for six months in Australia. He co-starred with Stanley Baxter and Evelyn Laye in *Phil the Fluter* at the Palace Theatre and played Jack in *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the London Palladium, and recently appeared in *Side by Side by Sondheim* in Toronto. Mark has worked extensively abroad — including seven visits to Australia and made guest appearances with Rep companies, playing roles in plays as diverse as *Butterflies are Free*, *Five Finger Exercise*, *Voyage Around My Father*, *Sleuth* and *Macbeth*. He played Roland Haule in the very successful revival of Noel Coward's *Present Laughter* with Peter Wyngarde, a Forum Theatre Billingham Production.

### **ROBIN WENTWORTH (Peter)**

has played in all the media during his long career, and had the distinction of being the first actor to appear on the stage at the Mermaid Theatre when he spoke the first lines in *Lock Up Your Daughters*, a show which he also toured through the USA. He played in the musical *Pickwick* with Harry Secombe at the Saville Theatre and in America. Many TV appearances include *The Nine Pedlars*, *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, *The Pedlar* and *The Duchess of Duke Street*. Robin toured last year in Peter Coe's production of *Macbeth* for Triumph, and has just finished a highly-successful season with the Welsh National Drama Company, playing in *A Man for All Seasons* and *King Lear*.

### **FRANK BARRIE (Mercutio)**

made his West End debut with Paul Scofield in *The Rules of the Game*. After four years as leading man at the Bristol Old Vic he was invited to join the National Theatre to play Mirabell in *The Way of the World* and Bassanio to Laurence Olivier's *Shylock*. He was a leading member of the National for three years, and the first member to star at the Young Vic, in *Byron — The Naked Peacock*. Frank has acted in 14 different countries, and his favourite parts include Hamlet, Richard III, Long John Silver, *Shylock*, Coriolanus (which he played on TV in Ireland) and Lucio in Tyrone Guthrie's *Measure for Measure*. He has made over 50 TV appearances, and on radio was Darcy in the Bicentennial serialisation of *Pride and Prejudice*. He starred in *The Admirable Crichton* at Greenwich this summer.

### **WENDY WILLIAMS (Lady Capulet)**

trained at RADA, and spent the early days of her career playing leading roles at the Bristol Old Vic. She returned to London to work at the Old Vic, and then the Westminster and Royal Court Theatres, also appearing in several productions at Windsor. Numerous TV credits include *North and South*, *The Regiment*, *Thirty Minute Theatre*, *Carnforth Practice*, *Dr. Who*, *Sutherland's Law*, *The Survivors*, *Poldark* and *Angels*. She recently played Patrick Cargill's wife 'Josephine' in *The Many Wives of Patrick*.

### **RAYMOND SKIPP (Benvolio)**

spent eight months in Rep in London after training at RADA, followed by two seasons at Chichester and Oxford. West End credits include *Not Now Darling* at the Strand Theatre, *Anthony and Cleopatra* at the Globe Bankside, *Geography of a Horsesdreamer* at the Royal Court and *Follow the Star* at the Westminster. TV productions include *The Protectors*, *Orson Welles' Great Mysteries*, *Believe It or Not*, *Chinese Puzzle* and, most recently, as Jack Wheelwright in *Holding On*. Last Christmas he played The Pointed Man in *The Point* at the Mermaid Theatre.

### **ROBERT LISTER (Paris)**

is an actor whose versatility keeps him busy. His 'Chairman' is well known on the London Music Hall circuits, where he also appears as a comic and singer of Victorian ballads. Last year Robert toured in Peter Coe's *Macbeth*. He has just completed a national tour as PC Boot in *Salad Days*. In the classical field he has worked for many major companies here and abroad in such roles as Donalbain, Metellus Climber, Aeneas, Philostrate and Horatio.

### **PETER HONRI (Montague, Friar John)**

is a fourth generation performer. He made his debut with Collins Music Hall in 1948, and toured extensively in variety and pantomime until Bernard Miles cast him in *The Bed Bug* at the Mermaid Theatre. Peter has appeared in eight West End shows including *Beyond the Fringe* and *Ride! Ride!* He most recently played Pooh in A. A. Milne's classic, and has also featured as concertinist and pianist in TV and films. His favourite role is Harry Chadwick in Jack Rosenthal's *Polly Put the Kettle On*. He is the author of 'Working the Halls' and 'Monarchs of the Music Hall', and his Music Hall play *Come Back Victoria, All is Forgiven* appeared in the 1977 Edinburgh 'Fringe'.

### **ANTHONY DUNSTON (Gregory)**

trained at the Webber Douglas Academy, and made his debut carrying an enormous syringe at the Aldwych Theatre. After a year in Rep he toured as 'Giles' with Jeremy Hawk in *The Man Most Likely To*, followed by 'Chino' in the West End production of *West Side Story*. He toured in *Ride! Ride!* and *Macbeth*, both directed by Peter Coe, and most recently appeared in *One Friday* at the Westminster Theatre. TV work includes *This Sporting Land*, currently on ITV, and film work includes *The Great Gatsby*, and *First Lieutenant, Submarines*, in a film for the Admiralty.

### **MICHAEL LOGAN (Prince of Verona)**

first appeared on stage as 'Court Page' in *St. Joan* with Sybil Thorndike, and has since appeared in most theatres in the country and in the West End. Latest appearances include 'The Host' in *Canterbury Tales* at the Phoenix Theatre and 'Waymarsh' in *Ambassador* at Her Majesty's Theatre. He played 'Burgess' in *Candida* for Peter Coe in Vienna. More than 300 TV credits include the series *The Many Wives of Patrick*, *No Appointment Necessary* and *Target*.

### **ANTHONY TALBOT (Balthasar)**

trained at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He began his career at Greenwich Theatre with the Tramshed Music Hall, followed by Jonathan Miller's season of *Ghosts*, *Seagull* and *Hamlet*. He went to Chichester for Keith Michell's first season, playing in *Tongiht We Improvise*, *The Confederacy* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*. At the Vienna English Theatre he played 'Marchbanks' in Shaw's *Candida* for Peter Coe. He appeared in *Churchill's People* for the BBC, and was in the Liverpool Playhouse production of *French Without Tears*. He has worked with a number of fringe productions, most recently *Double Glazing* at Hampstead in which he played 'Jesus Christ'.

### **ELLIOTT COOPER (Abraham)**

started acting while at university. He then joined the Phoenix Theatre Company in Leicester before training at the Central School where he met Jessica Turner who is now his wife. He played 'Pilot Officer Wade' in the film *Aces High* and 'Freddie Churton' in *Across a Crowded Room* with Glynis Johns for Yorkshire Television. He recently partnered Basil Brush in a variety tour.

### **JESSICA TURNER (Abraham's Girl)**

was trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama 1972/75. On leaving she joined the Village Company in Hemel Hempstead, touring a Ken Campbell Roadshow, and played the title role in *Pinocchio* at Christmas. She then worked at the Midland Arts Centre in Birmingham with Warren Jenkins, playing 'Alison Porter' in *Look Back in Anger* among other parts, followed by a Summer Season at Frinton with Jack Watling. She then played 'Jill Mason' in *Equus* at the Albery Theatre and various parts in *In Order of Appearance* at Chichester this summer. Immediately prior to starting rehearsals for *Romeo and Juliet*, Jessica played Lady Mabel in *The Castle Builders*, her first television for the BBC. She is married to Elliott Cooper.

## **PETER COE (Director)**

has divided his career between the West End with *Lock Up Your Daughters*, *The World of Suzie Wong*, *Oliver!*, *The Miracle Worker*, *Pickwick*, *Caligula*, *In The Affair of Robert Oppenheimer*; the Chichester Festival Theatre with *An Italian Straw Hat*, *The Skin of Our Teeth*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Peer Gynt*, and *Tonight We Improvise*; Sadler's Wells Opera with *The Love of Three Oranges*, *The Angel of Fire*, and *Ernani*; and the United States where he directed *The Rehearsal*, *Oliver!*, *Next Time I'll Sing to You*, *On a Clear Day You Can See Forever*, *Golden Boy*, *Six*, and *Pickwick*. He has mounted international productions of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in India, *Julius Caesar* in Israel, *Macbeth* in Stratford, Ontario, *The Black Macbeth* at the Roundhouse, a Modern Dress *Hamlet* at the Globe Playhouse, and *Richard III* in Denmark. In 1968 he directed the film version of *Lock Up Your Daughters*. Recently he has concentrated on directing his own plays *Woman of the Dunes* in America, *Story Theatre* for India, *Decameron '73* in London, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* for the Oxford Festival, *Treasure Island* for Chichester, *Lucy Crown*, and *Macbeth*. *Lucy Crown* was produced at Billingham.

## **MICHAEL KNIGHT (Designer)**

has designed extensively for films, theatre, opera, revue and exhibitions. He has done many productions with Peter Coe before, from *Kiss Me Kate* and *Tom Brown's Schooldays* to *World War 2½*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and *Macbeth*. His most recent production was *Cyrano de Bergerac* at Pitlochry, and he is currently working on *Brand* for the Oxford Playhouse.

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**Please no smoking or photography in the auditorium.**

**The Management reserves the right to refuse admission to the theatre and to change, vary or omit, without previous notice, any item of the programme.**

**Coffee is available during the interval in the restaurant area.**

**Drinks for the interval may be ordered before the show commences.**

**For quick and convenient exit after the performance theatre patrons are advised to leave by the emergency exits.**

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## **CAR PARKING**

There is ample free car parking space near to this theatre. Patrons approaching from the A19 down Roseberry Road can turn left, or right, at the roundabout to these car parks although the road sign for FORUM indicates left only. Our advice is that if you approach from this direction after 7.15 pm (for a 7.30 pm show start) it is better to turn right as the car parks to the left may well be filled at that time.

Approaching from the east, from Marsh House Avenue and the Causeway, turn left immediately after passing the ten storey Kennedy Gardens flats and this road leads to parking on the south side of the Forum.

We trust these brief notes will be helpful to you.

# Come Again To :-

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# A Stickler for the Classics

by Adam Benedick

RENEE ASHERSON never seems to be her age. Gallantry forbids any attempt at assessment. There is no need for that. Her charm and youthful spirit are forcible enough to make dates of birth and all that precise sort of thing seem uncouth and leadenly prosaic. For Miss Asherson has always been what might be called couth and lightweight, thoughtful and imaginative, and essentially a pretty player.

Prettiness in players is not always an advantage. It may get them a footing. It catches the eye. It catches everyone's immediate attention. But how to hold it? There's the test. Miss Asherson passed it long ago. Long ago? Miss Asherson's date of birth is decently mysterious, but the career of an actress of distinction can hardly be traced without a date or two to guide us.

So let us begin on October 17 1935 when she made her first appearance on the stage at the New Theatre (now the Albery) in John Gielgud's revival of *Romeo and Juliet*. What? You may well exclaim at such good fortune. If all commencing players could first come out in such eminent circumstances, how sweetly tempting would be the

stage for the Miss Worthingtons of this world.

Anyway, having studied at the Webber-Douglas Dramatic School after being educated at Gerrard's Cross, and in Switzerland and France, Miss Asherson found herself starting out in the West End in a production by one of its leading directors and finest Shakespeareans. She was not however playing Juliet. Nor was she even Juliet's understudy. What she was doing was walking-on (an "extra" to filmgoers) and standing by as second understudy for Juliet.

Gielgud played Mercutio to Laurence Olivier's Romeo; and then they switched roles. It was a famous production. It is still talked of by playgoers old enough to remember it; and if Miss Asherson remembers it better than almost anyone, who can wonder? Then came more understudying in the West End and a small role or two before serious training began at - guess where. The Birmingham Rep? Of course. Where else? She spent eighteen months at the theatre (now given over to amateurs since the Rep itself has palatial new premises) which Barry Jackson made so famous as a theatrical training ground and experimental company - doing modern-dress Shakespeare at a time when modern-dress productions were sensationally novel.

After Birmingham came the Malvern festival (Shaw and Sheridan) and a tendency thereafter to stick to the classics which meant sticking to those theatres which staged the classics and they were seldom in the West End.

The outbreak of the second world war brought a season of touring with the Old Vic company (Kate Hardcastle, Maria, Nerissa, Ann Page and Bianca) with occasional visits to London at the New Theatre where Miss Asherson had started and bringing her a range of Shakespearean work which no actress

*continued overleaf*

of her quality could hope to emulate today because touring by Shakespearean companies has ceased - like the Old Vic Company itself - and such a player is inevitably drawn to the more immediate allure of television.

After eighteen months at the Birmingham Rep Miss Asherson spent three years with the Old Vic (exiled from London during the war. But it wasn't until 1945 that Miss Asherson came to my admiring attention in Walter Greenwood's *The Cure for Love* at the Westminster Theatre with her husband (Robert Donat) as Jack Hardacre and herself as Millie Southern; and in the following year - ten years' after walking-on in Gielgud's successful *Romeo and Juliet* at the New - Miss Asherson got her chance to play Juliet with the Travelling Repertory Company. Hers is one of the most charming Juliets in my collection; and the beloved, soft voice and modesty of manner created an equally engaging effect as Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* with Robert Donat as Benedick.

All that however was thirty years' ago. Miss Anderson has done a great deal of even more satisfying work since then - notably at festivals, at repertory theatres, on the fringe, and on tours; and always in plays of quality, if not classics. After yet another spell with the Old Vic at the New in the late 1940s she got a chance to play in one of the most exciting of modern emotional dramas, Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*, though hers was not the most emotional role (Stella Kowalski) and Irina in Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at the Aldwych. Then there was *The Waltz of the Toreadors*, Jean Anouilh's fascinating comedy.

But somehow, despite her gentle and perceptive qualities, her wit and her attractive, winsome manner and sultry

voice, Miss Asherson did not play enough of the leading roles I wanted her to play until she went back in the 1960s to the Birmingham Rep and to the Bristol Old Vic. At the first she played Viola in *Twelfth Night* and Amanda in *Private Lives*; and at the Bristol Royal she was Congreve's Millamant in *The Way of the World*.

It is no longer the way of the theatrical world to stage Restoration comedy with ease and competence and wit. It is difficult. The style of the late 17th century is elusive. Not many players look at ease in the clothes, for example, or get their tongues round the eloquence of Restoration dramatists Miss Asherson can. She was trained. So it was gratifying to see her in Wycherley's *The Country Wife* at Chichester, in the same season as *The Magistrate* which transferred to London; and it was even more gratifying to see her lately in the Royal Shakespeare Company's revival of *Man and Superman* which was at Malvern last year and moved to the West End in the summer.

Shaw's prose is in many ways as challenging for players as Congreve or Wycherley. It requires elocutionary authority as well as personality. Miss Asherson possesses both in abundance. She was not playing Ann Whitefield. She was playing Mrs Whitefield whom Shaw described as one of those women who are conscious of being treated as silly and negligible and who, without having strength enough to assert themselves effectually, at any rate never submit to their fate.

That seems to sum up Miss Asherson's art as an actress, which has been, to my mind, sometimes underestimated because of her exceptional grace and attractiveness. In that revival of *Man and Superman* she could still have played the daughter with conviction.



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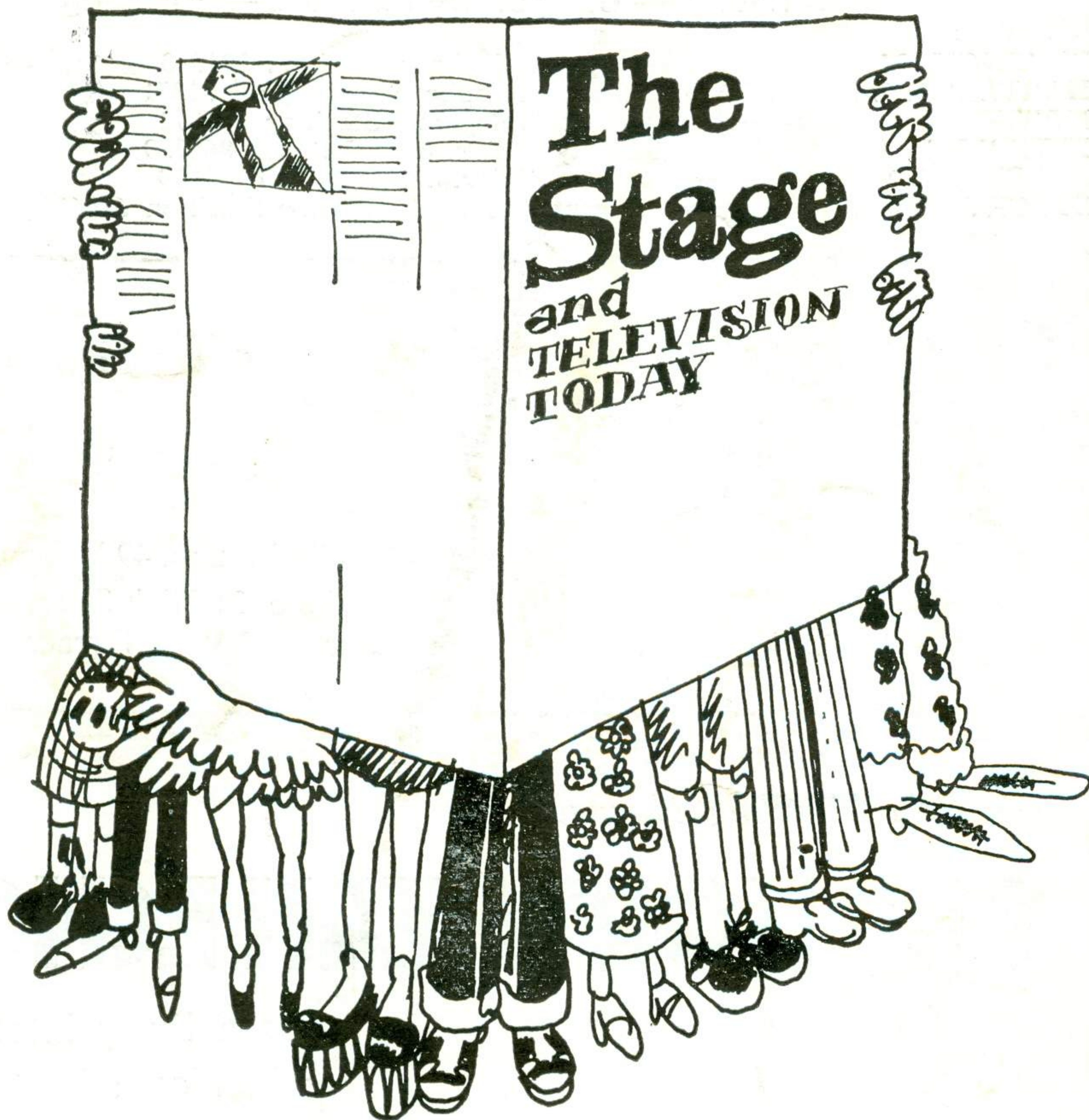
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