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Cleveland



9th to 14th April, 1979

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The famous comedy by
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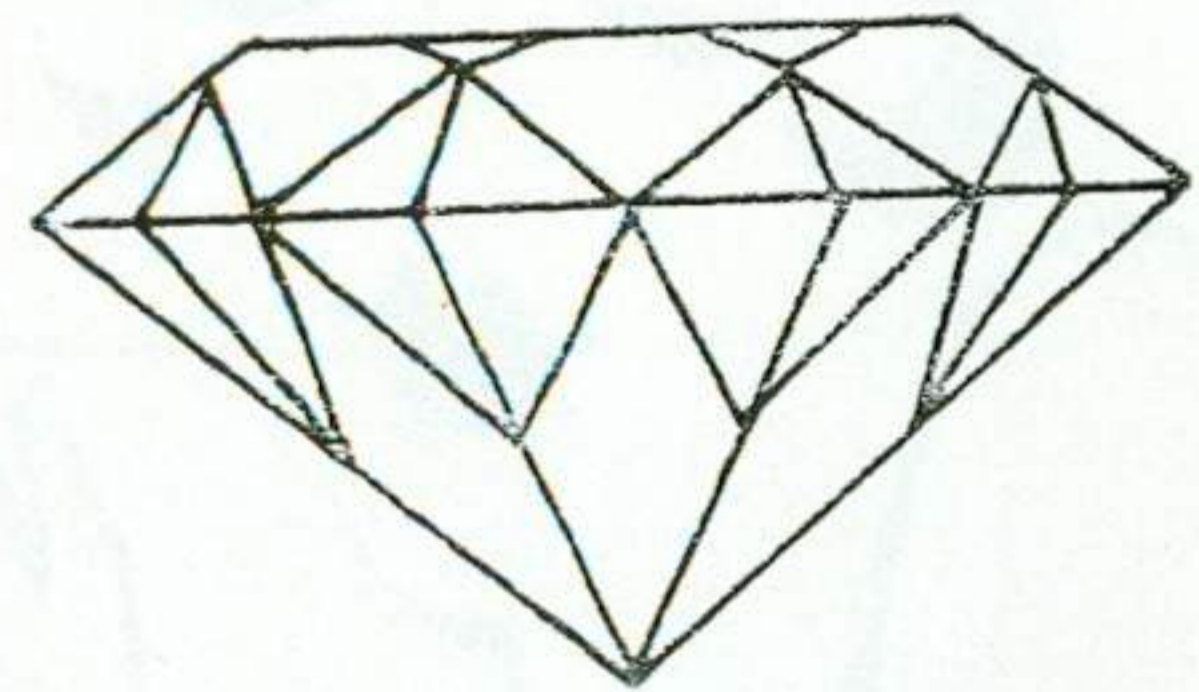
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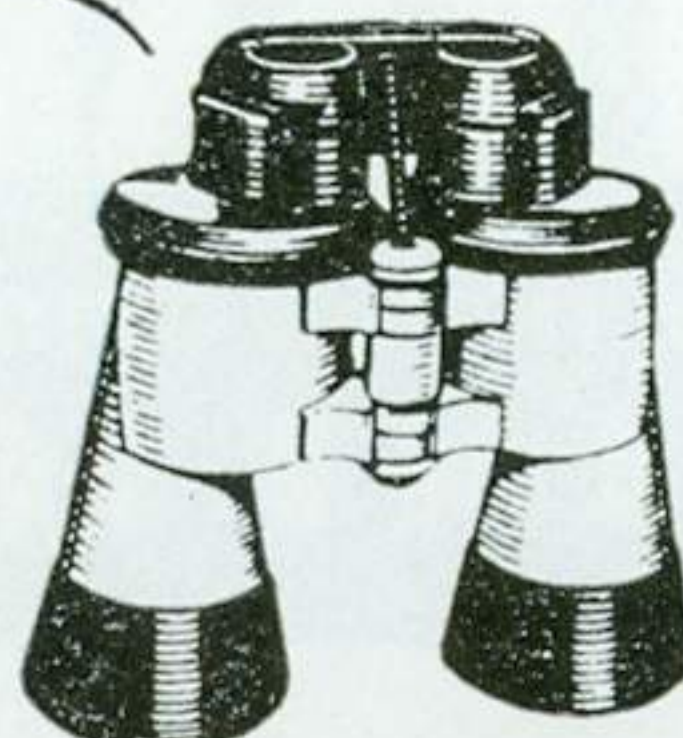
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THE THEATRES OF ASIA MINOR

by Eric Shorter

Everything beyond Hyde Park was considered as a desert by smart persons in the late 17th century. We have Sir George Etherege's word for that. It comes up in his play *The Man of Mode*. A character declares: "Whate'er you say, I know all beyond High-Park's a desart to you".

Note not only the pronunciation of desert but also the insistent tone which anticipates and demolishes all chance of denial in "Whate'er you say," as if there were something shameful even then in admitting to a preference for town over country. And I suppose it was ever thus.

"Would you mind visiting a few of the country theatres for us?" I was asked when I moved from Manchester to London as a theatre critic twenty years ago. Country theatres. The provinces. A desert. Sorry, desart.

A few decades earlier there had been a classical exchange of notes between a critic and his London editor who had sent him tickets to cover a play at a theatre in the London suburbs and well beyond Hyde Park.

"Sir," he replied, "I beg leave to remind you that I am your dramatic critic for London and not for Asia Minor".

If the London suburbs were Asia Minor, what would he have called today's regions which (perhaps euphemistically but perhaps with some truth) is the label we now attach to the repertory theatres which flourish as they have never flourished before?

They have changed their name - from the provinces to the regions - because they have changed their function

artistically by being funded by both the Arts Council and local authorities; and because most of them are new or recent civic conversions, they are more closely bound to the tastes of the community.

At the same time these regional theatres are more independent than ever in the 70-year history of the repertory movement. So we have come to regard them as separate enterprises, each with its own policy, director, audiences, atmosphere and level of achievement.

The theatres are also different in individual shape.

In London you will find half a dozen which resemble one another so closely that it's a job to tell the difference once you get inside. Who could undertake to say which one he was in if he were led blindfold into, say, the Globe or the Strand, the Lyric or the Apollo?

Of all the regional theatres, I know of only two which are hard, once you are inside, to tell apart. They had the same architect. But who could be deceived elsewhere?

Compare the Oldham Coliseum with Bath Theatre Royal, or Swindon Wyvern with Crewe Theatre, or the Cambridge Arts and Harlow Playhouse, or the Bromley Churchill with the Croydon Ashcroft, the Chester Gateway with the York Theatre Royal.

And yet, despite their different characters and aims, their varying comforts, standards and tastes, the regions are not wholly free of that dismissive 17th century label.

People are still surprised to realise what good things go on in theatres

continued overleaf

outside London, and many theatre lovers still suppose that if something really good is going on in the regions it will inevitably earn the capital's final blessing.

In fact not all theatrical roads still lead to London; and it makes more nonsense than ever in the annual distribution of theatrical prizes when the judges pick only what they happen to have seen when they haven't (of necessity) seen everything.

Of course, prizes are good for the theatre in general but they mustn't be taken as indicating artistic value. And so when you see these prize-giving ceremonies for the best this and the most promising that, remember that the field is very much wider than the judges could survey.

Let us therefore look back briefly on last year to recall some shows which came out in the regions. First and triumphantly foremost: the American musical comedy *Chicago* which Peter James staged brilliantly at Sheffield. It comes to London very soon.

Second, John Barton's intensely well-played revival of *The Merchant of Venice* at The Other Place, Stratford-on-Avon, in which Patrick Stewart's Shylock was as good as any I have seen.

Third, Alan Ayckbourn's *Joking Apart*, tried out at Scarborough, and possibly his best play yet (it reached London this spring).

And lastly a reminder of some of the things which the West End owed the regions last year - *The Matchmaker* and *The Unvarnished Truth* (from

Cambridge), *Clouds* and *Gloo Joo* (from Hampstead), *Vieux Carré* (from Nottingham), *Under The Greenwood Tree* (from Salisbury), *Ten Times Table* and *Bedroom Farce* (from Scarborough) and *Mary Barnes* (from Birmingham).

But who needs reminding of the growing dependence of London on the regions for much of its best drama?

Oddly enough, Bristol, which used to supply the West End regularly until Val May moved to Guildford and began supplying stuff from there, has been lately keeping itself to itself. In a way, that proves Bristol is doing its regional job.

For if a theatre always has one eye on London it is liable to lose its local concentration and to suffer dissipation as its talents are snapped up by the mercenary-minded capital.

It isn't all that long since the West End virtually brought to an end Joan Littlewood's work at her old theatre in the east London suburbs by transferring much of it to a world of bright lights and smash hits. Money was made, but the artistic price was high.

What cannot be doubted is that since the start of subsidies for out-of-London theatres the general level of work has reached heights undreamed of twenty years' ago. Many of the best things are how to be found well beyond Hyde Park.

If we don't venture out to taste them, they cannot be counted on to come in from Asia Minor to suit today's men of mode.



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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
Gazette

FORUM THEATRE

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Vol. 3 No. 14

DUNCAN C. WELDON & LOUIS I. MICHAELS

for Triumph Theatre Productions Ltd
and the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre, Guildford

present

LESLIE PHILLIPS

NYREE DAWN PORTER

BARBARA LEIGH-HUNT

RICHARD EASTON

in

CANARIES SOMETIMES SING

A Comedy

by

FREDERICK LONSDALE

Directed by **FRANK HAUSER**

Designed by **ANDRE LEVASSEUR**

Lighting by **JAMES BAIRD**



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FROM THE THEATRE DIRECTOR

Tonight we welcome the members of *Canaries Sometimes Sing* Company, and wish them a happy and successful run at Billingham. Leslie Phillips was last here in our production of *To Dorothy a Son*, since when he has had a very long run in a West End play which opened under the title *Sextet* at the Criterion Theatre in 1977.

Our last play of Frederick Lonsdale's was *On Approval*, which we produced in 1975. The cast of Edward Woodward, Geraldine McEwan, Jennie Linden and Edward Hardwicke then played with great success at the Haymarket Theatre, London.

For those who like musicals I think we can promise a delightful evening with our new production of *The Boy Friend*. Sets and costumes are being specially made for this presentation, and with a bright young talented cast, the stage is set for entertainment plus. The original stage version of *The Boy Friend* is not the same as the film produced by Ken Russell which basically was a story about a production of *The Boy Friend*. Sandy Wilson's highly successful work, first produced in 1953, is an affectionate look at the flapper era, and features songs like 'Won't You Charleston With Me?', 'A Room In Bloomsbury', 'I Could Be Happy With You', 'It's Never Too Late To Fall In Love' and, of course, the title song. The dancing, too, will set your feet tapping. We advise early booking for this May presentation.

By way of complete contrast, we have two dramatic plays on the way : *The Duchess of Malfi* with Janet Suzman and *The Elder Statesman* with Paul Rogers, and a Shaw comedy *Misalliance*, also with Paul Rogers.

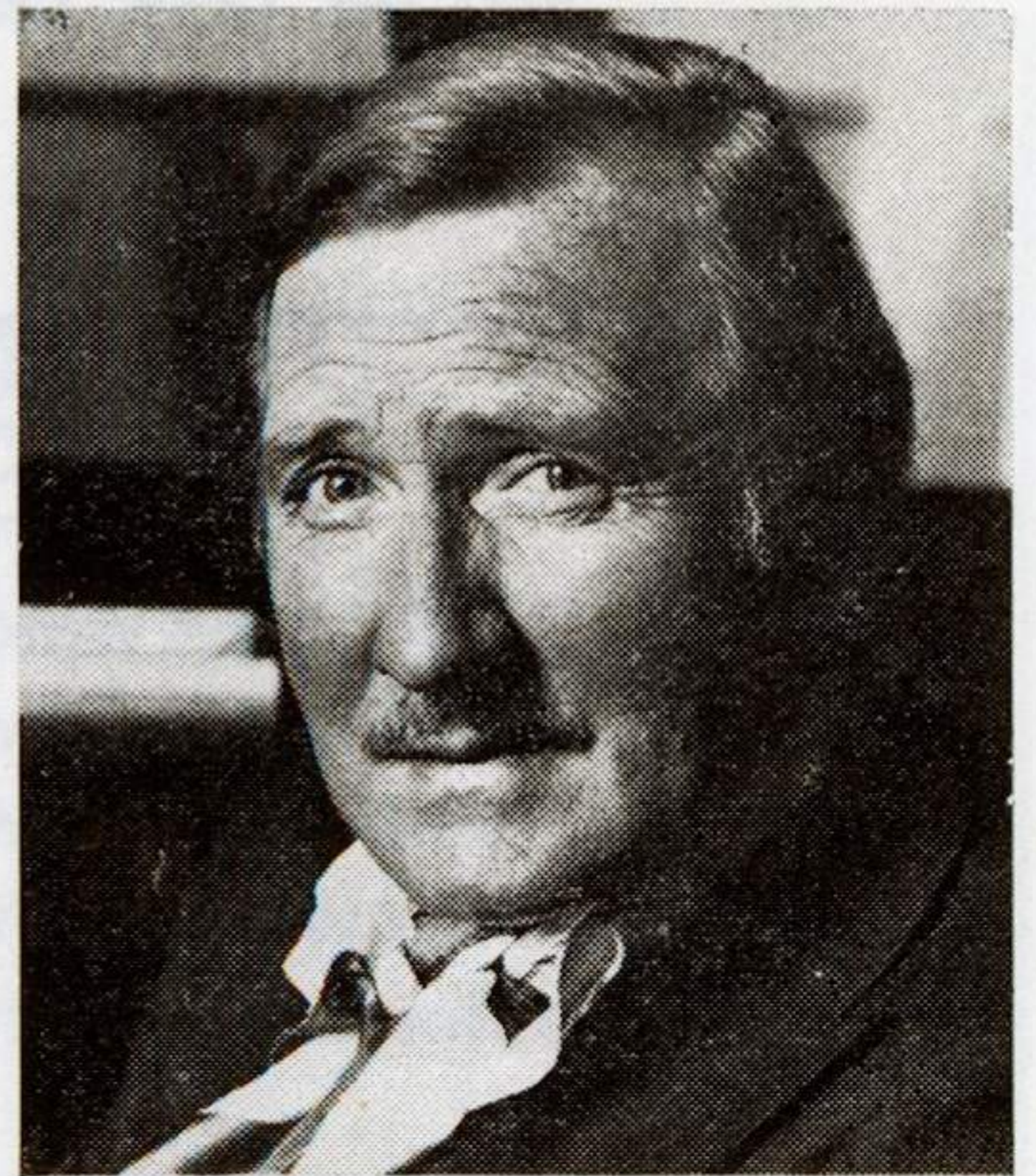
Next week sees a first-rate production of *The Aspern Papers*, written by Michael Redgrave based on a Henry James story. This play was one of the hits of last year's Chichester Festival season. With Gerald Harper, Anne Stallybrass, Barbara Murray and Cathleen Nesbitt we predict another winner.

Until next week, happy theatre-going.

LES JOBSON

LESLIE PHILLIPS

Leslie Phillips started his career at the age of ten playing a wolf to Anna Neagle's Peter Pan at the Palladium in 1935, but graduated to human child roles until the war forced him to do his bit — serving as a Lieutenant in the Durham Light Infantry. Invalided out in 1944, he returned to the theatre — Third Assistant in the Box Office of the Lyric Theatre. He escaped, suffering from claustrophobia, and aired himself in repertory at Dundee, York, Croydon and Windsor. First starring role was in *For Better For Worse* (Comedy, 1952). Starring roles followed in *Lost Generation* (Garrick), *The Whole Truth* (Aldwych), *The Big Killing* (Prince's) and *The Deadly Game* by Duerrenmatt, a serious play this time, which he also directed (Savoy, 1968). Films kept him out of the theatre for seven years: *Pool of London*, *Carry On Nurse*, *Crooks Anonymous*, *Very Important Person*, *The Fast Lady* (all in England), *Les Girls* (Hollywood), *The Longest Day* (France) and *Ferdinando* (Italy). Television: the serious play *The Gong Game*, the Vicar in *Our Man at St. Mark's*, BBC's *Foreign Affairs* and the comedy *The Suit*. *The Navy Lark* delighted BBC listeners for 17 years. During the London run of *Boeing, Boeing* he co-produced *Maroc 7*. Leslie has appeared in eight plays that have run over a year, but his longest run must be *The Man Most Likely To . . .* Most recent television series was *Casanova* (BBC). Further films: *Doctor in Trouble*, *The Magnificent Seven Deadly Sins*, *Not Now Darling* and *Spanish Fly*. He has made over 90 films and appeared in 45 West End theatres. Recently he starred in *Roger's Last Stand* at the Duke of York's and revived *To Dorothy a Son* (his favourite comedy), which played this theatre. He has just completed a two-year run of *Sextet* (Criterion), later called *Six of One*.



NYREE DAWN PORTER

Nyree Dawn Porter was born in New Zealand where she trained firstly as a ballet dancer, gaining the Solo Seal, then toured with the New Zealand Players Theatre Company, playing in everything from Revue to *The Merchant of Venice* — or vice versa! She came to England in 1958. She appeared in *Look Who's Here!* at the Fortune Theatre; this was followed by leading roles in Murray Schisgal's *Ducks and Lovers*, Connie in Neil Simon's *Come Blow Your Horn*, Nadyezda in *The Duel*, Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, Lady Brute in *The Provok'd Wife*, the title role in *Anastasia*, *The Dragon Variation*, and, more recently, Desdemona in *Othello* and Orinthia in *The Apple Cart*. Her TV work includes the title roles in the very first of the Classic Serials shown on BBC 2 — Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* and Walpole's *Judith Paris*. She once played

17 TV roles in as many months, culminating in the unforgettable Irene in *The Forsyte Saga*, Pervanch in *Hassan*, and too many other roles to remember. In 1970 she was awarded the OBE for services to television, The Sun Television Award for Best Actress, and, in 1973, The Quote D'Oro for the best performance by a foreign actress on Spanish television. Her film work includes *Two Left Feet*, *The Cracksmen*, *Live Now, Pay Later*, *Jane Eyre*, *To Die, To Sleep*, *Perchance to Dream*, and, more recently, *The Martian Chronicles*. *Canaries Sometimes Sing* marks her third production directed by Frank Hauser. She previously worked with him in *Uncle Vanya* and *Saint Joan* during his 1969/70 season at the Oxford Playhouse.

BARBARA LEIGH-HUNT

Barbara Leigh-Hunt trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, and then joined the Old Vic Company playing leading parts. After working in Rep she returned to Bristol as Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Rosaline in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Hedda in *Hedda Gabler*, Queen Victoria in *Portrait of a Queen* and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*. She toured America with that Company, playing Ophelia in *Hamlet* and Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. In the West End she created the roles of Rosemary in *A Severed Head* and Anita Hill in *Mrs. Mouse Are You Within?* Miss Leigh-Hunt joined the RSC to play Madge Larabee in *Sherlock Holmes* at the Aldwych and also on Broadway, and subsequently appeared in the RSC's *A Winter's Tale*, *King Lear*, *Travesties*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Richard III* and *That Good Between Us*.

The TV credits include *The Siegfried Idyll*, *The Search for the Nile*, *Love Lies Bleeding* and *Games*. She played a leading part in Hitchcock's *Frenzy*, Catherine Parr in *Henry VIII and His Six Wives* and *A Bequest to the Nation*, and she took part in Stoppard's *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* at the Festival Hall and on BBC TV. She is married to Richard Pasco with whom she frequently appears in anthology programmes. Recently she played Madame Akardina in *The Seagull* at the Bristol Old Vic, and has just completed three plays for TV: BBC's Play for Today *The Chief Mourner* and Play of the Month *The Voyage Inheritance*, and for Thames TV *Office Story* by Alan Bennett.



RICHARD EASTON



Richard Easton has had a very varied career. He has played in musicals: Fagin in *Oliver*, Timothy in *Salad Days* on Broadway; in modern plays: Nick in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* in the West End; the King in Ionesco's *Exit the King* on Broadway; in classics: Joseph, and later Charles Surface, in *School for Scandal* at the Haymarket Theatre and Alceste in *The Misanthrope* on Broadway. He has played in three Stratford Festivals in Canada, America and Stratford-upon-Avon with Gielgud, Ashcroft and Katherine Hepburn. His recent theatre credits include a tour of *Caught on the Hope*, *Sleuth* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*; and *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Edinburgh Festival. His TV credits include *Hadleigh*, *Kate*, *The Expert*, *The Brothers*, and he played Duke Frederick in the recent BBC production of *As You Like It*.

FREDERICK LONSDALE

Frederick Lonsdale had 24 plays produced in London and America between 1908 and 1959 and at the height of his popularity in the 1930's The Telegraph commented 'He is almost certainly the most popular playwright that has ever lived. Other men have had many successes, but is any of them quite immune to failure?' At that time a Lonsdale play averaged a run of a year, and he had already written *Canaries Sometimes Sing*, *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney*, *On Approval*, and the musicals *Betty*, *High Jinks* and *The Maid of the Mountains*. From poverty in Jersey — he was brought up in a two-roomed cottage, and such a wilful child that he received little schooling — he progressed to poverty and debt on the mainland, struggling to establish himself as a playwright. His first success, reinforced by his charm and eccentricity, was a passport to distinguished company. He became friendly with Gerald du Maurier and Lord Beaverbrook, and in the drawing rooms of London Society the 'Jersey Urchin' found the perfect medium to express his talent.

CANARIES SOMETIMES SING

By FREDERICK LONSDALE

Geoffrey Lymes

LESLIE PHILLIPS

Anne Lymes

BARBARA LEIGH-HUNT

Ernest Melton

RICHARD EASTON

Elma Melton

NYREE DAWN PORTER

Directed by

FRANK HAUSER

Designed by

ANDRE LEVASSEUR

Lighting by

JAMES BAIRD

The action of the play takes place in Geoffrey Lyme's Country House,
somewhere near London, in 1929

ACT ONE

A sitting-room in Geoffrey Lyme's Country House — Evening

INTERVAL OF 12 MINUTES

ACT TWO

The Same — One month later — Afternoon

INTERVAL OF 10 MINUTES

ACT THREE

The Same — One second later

CREDITS

Ladies' costumes made in the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre Wardrobe

Wigs by Simon (Wigs) Studios

Men's costumes by Michael Kennedy, Cardiff

Miss Leigh-Hunt's hat by Pat Dawson

Shoes by T. Savva

Mr. Phillips' hair styled by 'Steiner'

Production photographs by Sophie Baker

Original music by Frank Hauser

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House Supervisor	BERNICE ADAMSON
Box Office Manageress	AUDREY ROBERTS
Box Office Assistants	CORA ROBINSON VERA COYNE EILEEN JOHNSON

PRODUCTION STAFF

Production and Stage Supervisor	LES ROBINSON
First Stage Dayman	BOB BASFORD
Stage Dayman	COLIN DAVIES
Chief Electrician	ERIC DUNNING
Electrician	DAVE ASHTON

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Administrative Consultant	GILBERT HARRISON
Production Manager	BILLY JAY
Technical Manager	ROBIN CARR
Production Assistants	GINA BARLOW SUE NESBITT AMANDA JOHNSTON
Accounts Administrator	JOHN WHITE

FOR 'CANARIES SOMETIMES SING' COMPANY

Company Stage Manager	BASIL SOPER
Deputy Stage Manager	MARGARET STATON
Assistant Stage Manager	SARAH LESLEY
Wardrobe	JULIA BOTTRILL

FRANK HAUSER

Frank Hauser was born in Cardiff and went to Christ Church, Oxford, and then spent 3½ years in the Royal Artillery during the war. He joined the BBC in 1948 as a radio drama producer, and this was followed by seasons at Salisbury and Coventry until 1956 when he founded The Oxford Playhouse Company, and was its Director of Productions for 17 years. Many of his productions transferred to London, including *Dinner with the Family*, *A Passage to India*, *A Heritage and its History*, *The Promise*, *Volpone*, as well as his own adaptations of Sartre's *Kean* and Molnar's *The Wolf*. Then followed *Cinderella* at the Casino starring Twiggy, and the successful revival at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, of Lonsdale's *On Approval*. He recently returned from Australia where he spent a season as Resident Director of the Melbourne Theatre Company, directing *The Beaux Stratagem* and his own adaptation of *Electra*. He has also recently directed operas at Sadler's Wells and Glyndebourne. His association with the Oxford Playhouse came to an end in January 1974 when the Company disbanded, his achievement having been recognised with a CBE in 1969.

ANDRE LEVASSEUR

Andre Levasseur was born in Paris and worked as a designer at Christian Dior for seven years. His first set and costume designs were for ballet: *Grande Ballet du Marquis de Cuevas*, Royal Ballet (*La Péri*, *La Valse*, *Birthday Offering* for Frederick Ashton), London Festival Ballet, Opera de Paris, New York City Ballet and The American Ballet Theater. He started in the theatre with Jacques Charon at the Comedie Francaise in a successful production of Feydeau's *Un Fil a la Patte* which was followed by *Le Voyage de M. Perrichon*, *La Puce a L-Oreille*, *Desiré* and many other classical and modern plays (not forgetting *A Flea in Her Ear* at the National Theatre). He has also spent much of his time over several years working on *Holiday on Ice*. He produced and designed the prestigious Red Cross Galas at Monte Carlo for Princess Grace and Prince Rainier and starring Josephine Baker. *Canaries Sometimes Sing* is a new venture for him — an English play directed by Frank Hauser.

DUNCAN C. WELDON & LOUIS I. MICHAELS

To date some 36 productions have been presented in the West End by Louis I. Michaels and Duncan C. Weldon. Their circuit of theatres consists of the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, the Richmond Theatre, Surrey, the Theatre Royal, Brighton, the Theatre Royal, Bath, the Devonshire Park Theatre, Eastbourne, and the Playhouse Theatre, Bournemouth. Their West End successes are too numerous to detail in the programme space available but recent outstanding successes include John Clements in Ronald Millar's *The Case in Question*, Arthur Lowe, John Le Mesurier and Clive Dunn in *Dad's Army*, Glynis Johns and Louis Jourdan in *13 Rue De L'Amour*, Glenda Jackson in the Royal Shakespeare Company production of *Hedda Gabler*, Edward Woodward and Geraldine McEwan in Frederick Lonsdale's *On Approval*, Janet Suzman in Jonathan Miller's acclaimed production of *Three Sisters*, Alan Bates in Chekov's *The Seagull*, Brian Rix in *Fringe Benefits*, Terry Scott and June Whitfield in *A Bedfull of Foreigners*, John Mills and Jill Bennett in Terence Rattigan's *Separate Tables*, Janet Suzman in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, Kenneth More and Patricia Routledge in Lonsdale's *On Approval*, Glenda Jackson in Hugh Whitmore's *Stevie*, Googie Withers and John McCallum in Somerset Maugham's *The Circle*, Janet Suzman in Brecht's *The Good Woman of Setzuan*, J. B. Priestley's *Laburnum Grove* with Arthur Lowe, Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* with Claire Bloom, Daniel Massey and Michael Aldridge, Bernard Shaw's *The Apple Cart* with Keith Michell and Penelope Keith, Frank Finlay in *Kings and Clowns*, Ingrid Bergman and Wendy Hiller in N. C. Hunter's *Waters of the Moon*, Bruce Forsyth in the Bricusse-Newley *Travelling Music Show*, Paul Scofield and Harry Andrews in Ronald Harwood's new play *A Family*, Geraldine McEwan and Clive Francis in Noel Coward's *Look After Lulu* and Bernard Shaw's *The Millionairess* with Penelope Keith, and currently at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, Keith Michell and Susan Hampshire in Paul Giovanni's *The Crucifer of Blood*, a new Sherlock Holmes mystery. Nine of these shows were produced at the Forum Theatre. Last year Triumph presented three plays for the Hong Kong Arts Festival. They have also presented many distinguished productions in Canada, the United States of America, South Africa and Australia. Triumph are also responsible for most of Great Britain's major touring shows; these range from farce to the classics — a wide spectrum indeed.

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PAUL ROGERS in
MISALLIANCE

by Bernard Shaw

Prices : £1.75, £2.00, £2.25, £2.50

14th, 15th, 16th June — Nightly at 7.30 p.m.

PAUL ROGERS in
THE ELDER STATESMAN

by T. S. Eliot

Prices : £1.75, £2.00, £2.25, £2.50

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SHE WOULD IF SHE COULD

by George Etherege

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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.

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 p.m. (for a 7.30 p.m. 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.

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FREE MAILING LIST

If you are interested in the Theatre's future programmes please hand in your name and address to the Box Office.

PARTY BOOKINGS

Price reductions of 5p off per seat for parties of twenty or more are allowed for most shows.

The Forum Theatre, Billingham, gratefully acknowledges financial support from the Stockton Borough Council and Northern Arts.

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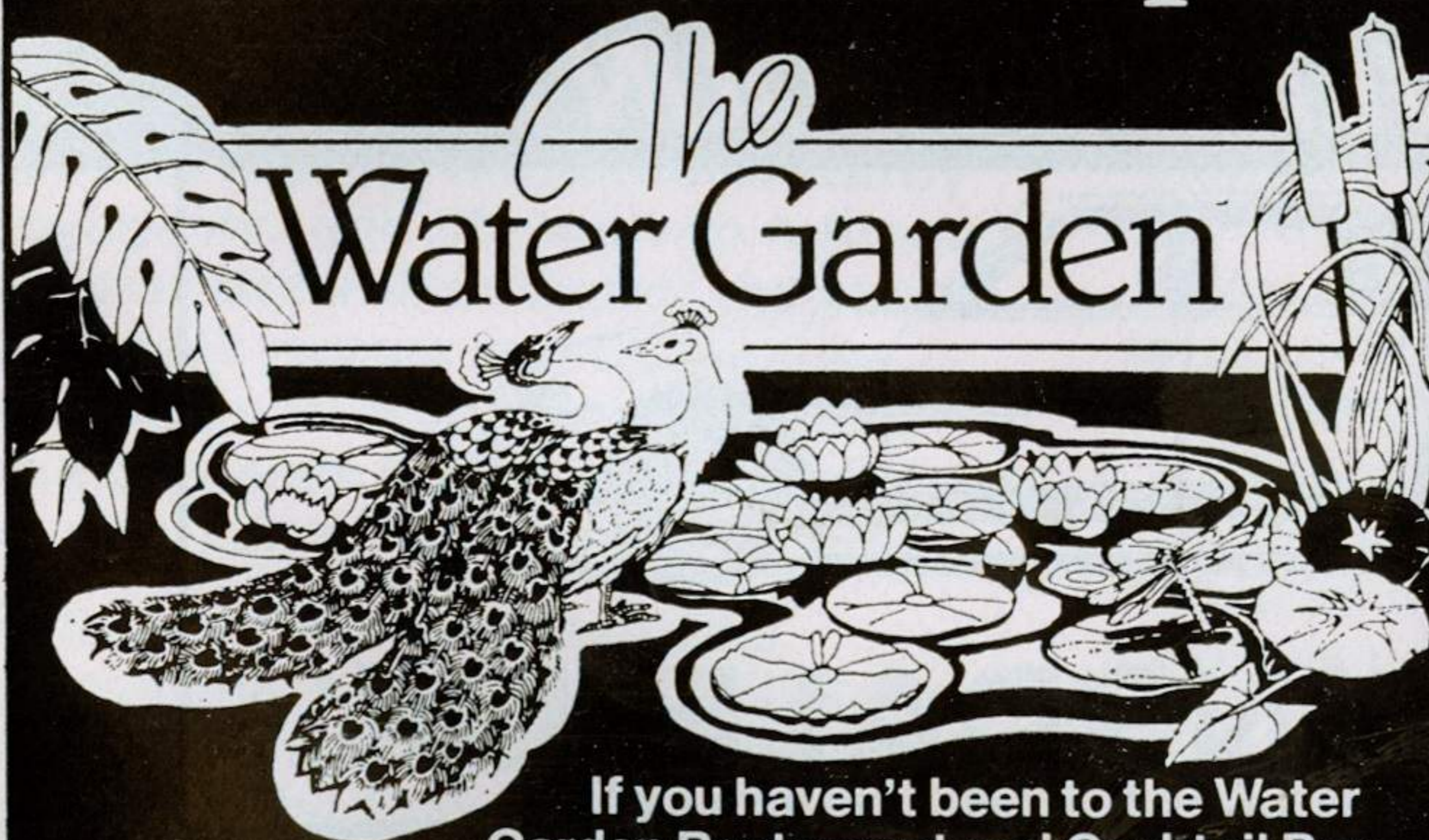
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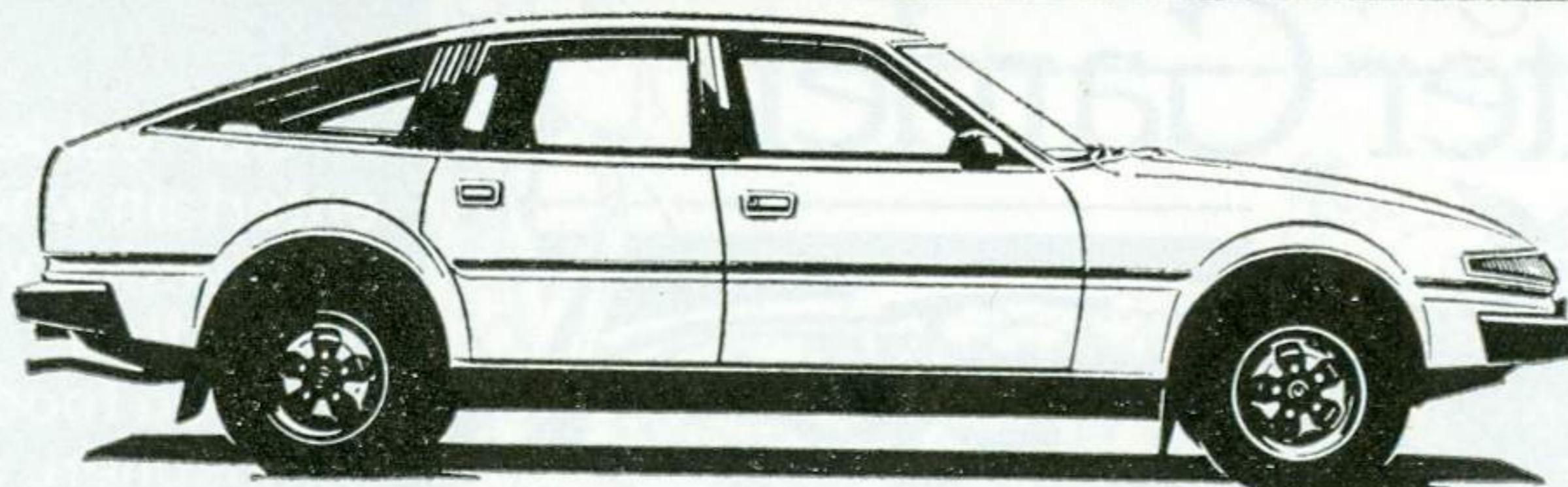
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ANYONE FOR SUPERSTITION?

by Patrick Ludlow

Does anybody care any longer if I stand in the middle of their dressing room whistling, breaking off to quote large chunks of *Macbeth*? Or if the designer insists on a green set decorated with peacock's feathers?

The theatre will always be an uncertain business. How natural then that before the Arts Council, when it was even more uncertain, artists and managers peering into the future and trying to ward the evil eye off their productions, should erect a set of fetishes. Even if only for an excuse after disaster had struck: "Old boy, as soon as I saw her come on in that green dress singing *Danny Boy*, I knew we're done for." Or: "This young idiot, my dear, stood and quoted from it right in the middle of the prop room, so of course I wasn't surprised when the notice went up.

The character actor and the character actress, nearing the end of a sturdy voyage through life with no retirement pension other than that of the state, with their homes and belongings packed up in those large hampers that one only sees nowadays at costumiers, knew all about the buffets of fate.

Naturally they were the chief custodians, seeing that the ignorant did not tempt fate by offending against any of the laid-down rules. Equally it was nearly always the young who upset fate by whistling, quoting or doing any of the other many things it didn't like.

I used to think of fate as being operated by dead and therefore even

more touchy character actors and actresses in a sort of celestial Denville Hall, from which they had all-round visibility and could exact instant retribution. "Harry, look down there". "What, my dear?" "That stupid young ASM at Stockport Hippodrome is putting real daffodils on the stage for *Peg O' My Heart*'. And that awful redheaded woman, who was so rude to you in the season at Paisley, is playing Mrs Chichester".

"Oh good! Let's make the girl who plays Ethel drop the flowers, that red-headed bitch can slip on them and break her leg, which will pay her out for killing my exit round that time.

And the ASM can learn her job properly and make paper flowers next time".

Macbeth of course was the real cruncher. Even today I have seen actors drop their voices and refer to it as "the Scottish play" or "Macfisheries", look round nervously and cross themselves. Highly serious and otherwise sceptical men have told me: "The trouble is Shakespeare picked up a bit of a real spell and by mistake mixed it in with all that Witches' stuff".

All the music from Balfe's opera *The Bohemian Girl* is terribly unlucky.

Probably because the musical director of a Victorian touring opera company dropped dead in the orchestra pit whilst conducting the overture. The music must never be played in any

continued overleaf

outside London, and many theatre lovers still suppose that if something really good is going on in the regions it will inevitably earn the capital's final blessing.

In fact not all theatrical roads still lead to London; and it makes more nonsense than ever in the annual distribution of theatrical prizes when the judges pick only what they happen to have seen when they haven't (of necessity) seen everything.

Of course, prizes are good for the theatre in general but they mustn't be taken as indicating artistic value. And so when you see these prize-giving ceremonies for the best this and the most promising that, remember that the field is very much wider than the judges could survey.

Let us therefore look back briefly on last year to recall some shows which came out in the regions. First and triumphantly foremost: the American musical comedy *Chicago* which Peter James staged brilliantly at Sheffield. It comes to London very soon.

Second, John Barton's intensely well-played revival of *The Merchant of Venice* at The Other Place, Stratford-on-Avon, in which Patrick Stewart's Shylock was as good as any I have seen.

Third, Alan Ayckbourn's *Joking Apart*, tried out at Scarborough, and possibly his best play yet (it reached London this spring).

And lastly a reminder of some of the things which the West End owed the regions last year - *The Matchmaker* and *The Unvarnished Truth* (from

Cambridge), *Clouds* and *Gloo Joo* (from Hampstead), *Vieux Carré* (from Nottingham), *Under The Greenwood Tree* (from Salisbury), *Ten Times Table* and *Bedroom Farce* (from Scarborough) and *Mary Barnes* (from Birmingham).

But who needs reminding of the growing dependence of London on the regions for much of its best drama?


Oddly enough, Bristol, which used to supply the West End regularly until Val May moved to Guildford and began supplying stuff from there, has been lately keeping itself to itself. In a way, that proves Bristol is doing its regional job.

For if a theatre always has one eye on London it is liable to lose its local concentration and to suffer dissipation as its talents are snapped up by the mercenary-minded capital.

It isn't all that long since the West End virtually brought to an end Joan Littlewood's work at her old theatre in the east London suburbs by transferring much of it to a world of bright lights and smash hits. Money was made, but the artistic price was high.

What cannot be doubted is that since the start of subsidies for out-of-London theatres the general level of work has reached heights undreamed of twenty years' ago. Many of the best things are how to be found well beyond Hyde Park.

If we don't venture out to taste them, they cannot be counted on to come in from Asia Minor to suit today's men of mode.



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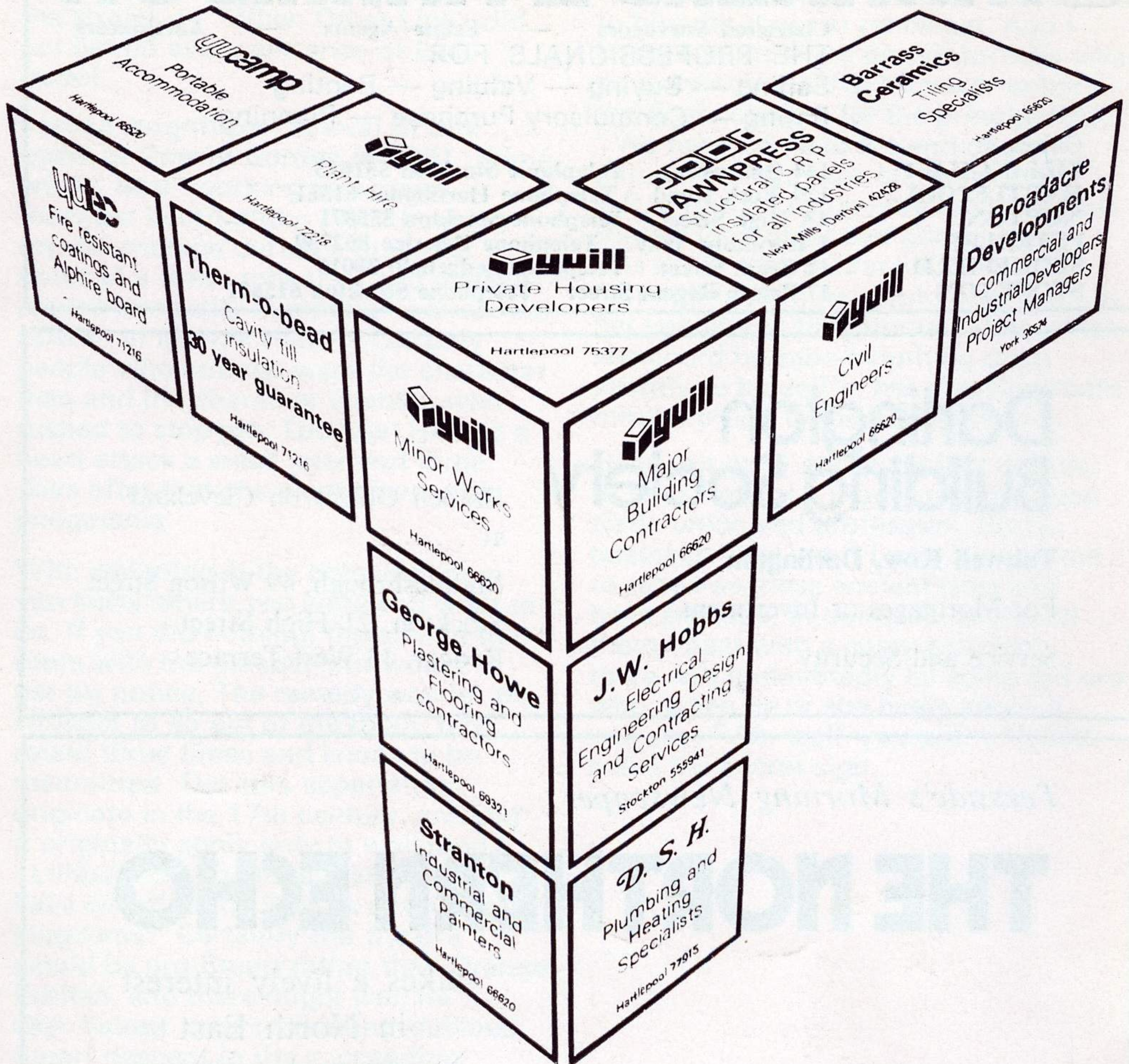
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