

FORUM THEATRE BILLINGHAM TEESSIDE

Tuesday, 4th April, and Saturday,
8th April, 1972

SADLER'S WELLS OPERA

THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO

Mozart

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Tuesday, 4th April, and Saturday, 8th April, 1972

Sadler's Wells Trust (Coliseum) Limited

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Sadler's Wells Opera

presents

The Marriage of Figaro

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SADLER'S WELLS OPERA

This visit by Sadler's Wells Opera is part of its extensive annual tour, in which two separate companies are this year visiting fifteen centres throughout the country from April to June. From August to March the company gives a continuous season at the London Coliseum, its London home.

Sadler's Wells Opera really started in 1931 when Lilian Baylis re-opened the Sadler's Wells Theatre as the "Old Vic of North London". The opera company shared the theatre with her drama company, which moved permanently to the Old Vic in 1934, and then with the Sadler's Wells Ballet. The pre-war years saw both the opera and the ballet companies flourish, with over fifty productions of opera being presented, but then in 1946 Sadler's Wells Ballet moved to Covent Garden, becoming the Royal Ballet, and was replaced by another ballet company, the Sadler's Wells Theatre Ballet. In 1957 this in turn became part of the Royal Ballet, and Sadler's Wells Theatre was used solely by Sadler's Wells Opera.

In 1959, with the passing of the Carl Rosa company, then called Touring Opera 1958, Sadler's Wells Opera was asked by the Arts Council to take on the prime responsibility for touring opera in the United Kingdom; two companies of equal strength were set up which shared their activities between touring the regions and seasons at Sadler's Wells Theatre.

With this expansion of the company the inadequacies of Sadler's Wells Theatre became increasingly acute, and in 1968 the company moved to London's largest theatre, the London Coliseum, where it had previously given seasons of operetta in 1959 and 1960, but which had been used as a cinema since 1961.

The next development in the company's history came in 1970, when the two companies were merged into one large company and the present pattern of touring was evolved.

Sadler's Wells Opera repertoire covers a wide field of interests and it has been especially praised for its productions of operetta and many modern works such as Janàcek's *The Makropulos Case*; because is it a permanent company Sadler's Wells Opera is distinguished by a spirit of ensemble that suits the works of Mozart and Rossini, yet at the same time the formation of one large company has served to strengthen its reputation for Wagner. It is company policy that only singers with British or Commonwealth passports are employed and that almost every opera is sung in English.

The Story

ACT 1

A room in the palace. Morning. It is the day of Figaro's marriage to Susanna, and Figaro is measuring the floor of the room that has been assigned to them. Despite the fact that the Count has abolished the old feudal custom of the *droit du Seigneur* (the right of the lord of the manor to the maidenhead of a female serf on her wedding night), his disposition to philander is unchanged, and at the moment his roving eye has settled on Susanna. Susanna warns Figaro of their master's designs, which he resolves to thwart.

Marcellina and Bartolo, both of whom have old scores to settle with Figaro, discuss a plan of getting their revenge. Figaro has unwisely signed a contract agreeing to marry Marcellina if he fails to repay a sum of money that he once borrowed from her. She proposes to enforce the contract and Bartolo agrees to help her. Susanna and Marcellina exchange acid compliments, Susanna getting the better of the older woman.

Cherubino, an amorous young page, arrives in disgrace because the Count has discovered him in a compromising situation with Barbarina, the gardener's daughter. Hearing the Count approach, he hides, and overhears the Count trying to make love to Susanna. Basilio, the music master and an arch-intriguer, comes in and the Count has to hide in his turn. Basilio, supposing himself alone with Susanna, begins to gossip about Cherubino's love for the Countess. Outraged, the Count emerges from his hiding-place, vowing to dismiss Cherubino; the next minute he discovers Cherubino and is even further incensed. Figaro enters with a chorus of peasants, singing the Count's praise for having abolished the *droit du Seigneur*. Hoping to frustrate his master's schemes, Figaro asks the Count to place a white veil on Susanna's head as a symbol of her unspoilt virtue, but the Count postpones the ceremony until later in the day. The peasants depart. The Count, realising that Cherubino has overheard his indiscreet conversation with Susanna, relents, and gives him a commission in his own regiment. Figaro tells Cherubino that his new life as a soldier will be very different from the girl-chasing larks he has enjoyed in the palace.

ACT 2

The Countess's boudoir. Later the same morning. The Countess hears the whole story from Susanna and bewails the fact that the Count no longer loves her: Susanna points out that he loves her enough to be jealous of Cherubino. Figaro tells them that he has sent an anonymous letter to the Count, warning him of an assignation, that night, between the Countess and a lover. This plot is then developed further. Susanna is to agree to the Count's importunate demands for a rendezvous, but Cherubino, disguised as a girl will go in her place; then the Countess can catch them redhanded.

When Cherubino comes in, the Countess first asks him to sing a song that he has just written. Then, taking the precaution of locking the door, Susanna tries one of her own caps on him. Suddenly the Count is heard knocking at the door, and the terrified Cherubino hides in an inner closet. Since the Countess refuses to yield up the key to the closet, the Count decides to get tools to force the lock and insists that the Countess accompany him. He locks all doors behind him. However, he has reckoned without the hidden Susanna who has overheard everything. She now releases Cherubino (who makes his escape through the window) and takes his place in the closet. When the Count and Countess return they are both astonished to find only Susanna, and the Count is forced to beg his wife's forgiveness.

Figaro joins them and denies all knowledge of the anonymous letter when the Count taxes him with it. Further complications arrive in the shape of Antonio, the drunken gardener, who complains that a man has jumped through the window and

damaged his flowers. Figaro claims that he was the man and, prompted by the Countess and Susanna, manages to answer all the Count's suspicious questions — even when Antonio produces Cherubino's commission, which the page, in his flight, had let fall.

Bartolo, Marcellina and Basilio enter and demand that Figaro either repay the money he borrowed from Marcellina or marry her as he agreed. Figaro, Susanna and the Countess are greatly dismayed. The Count promises to give his decision shortly.

ACT 3

A hall in the palace. Afternoon. The Count is pondering the events of the morning when Susanna, at the Countess's bidding, enters and hoodwinks him into believing that she will meet him in the garden that evening. The Count is delighted ; but doubts assail him when he overhears Susanna tell Figaro that they are now sure to win their case. He vows to thwart them.

The Count's lawyer, Don Curzio, judges that the contract is legal : Figaro must either pay Marcellina or else marry her. However, it now emerges that Figaro is the natural son of Marcellina and Bartolo who, rejoicing to rediscover their long-lost child, agree to get married themselves. The Countess reflects on her past happiness and her present wretchedness and humiliation. She reveals that she will take Susanna's place, in disguise, at the evening rendezvous. At her dictation, Susanna writes a letter to the Count, confirming the meeting in the garden, and seals it with a pin, which he is to send back as an answer. Meanwhile, Cherubino has been dressing up again. At Barbarina's instigation, he now appears as one of a group of peasant girls presenting flowers to the Countess. With Antonio's help, the Count penetrates his disguise, but Barbarina contrives to soften her master's displeasure. To celebrate the double wedding there is singing and dancing, during the course of which Susanna unobserved, hands the letter to the Count. The Count promises an evening of feasting and fireworks, and the peasants sing the praises of their liberal and enlightened master.

ACT 4

The garden. Evening. The Count has given Barbarina the pin to take back to Susanna, but Barbarina loses it, and when Figaro asks her what she is looking for, she innocently blurts out what has happened. Figaro leaps to the conclusion that Susanna has made a genuine assignation with the Count and, though both Marcellina and Basilio are disposed to take a more philosophical view of the incident, he is beside himself with jealousy. He launches into a bitter tirade against female duplicity.

The Countess and Susanna enter, each disguised in the other's clothes, and in the darkness a series of mistaken identities now ensues. Susanna perceives Figaro lurking among the trees and, to pay him out for suspecting her, sings of her rapture at the prospect of the Count's embraces. Next, Cherubino makes advances to the Countess (supposing her to be Susanna) and, under the same delusion, the Count pours out his passionate longing to his own wife.

Susanna, disguising her voice, pretends to Figaro that she is the Countess, but he is not taken in for long and, in his joy and relief at finding the whole thing a hoax, he affects to believe her and protests his love for her in extravagant terms. After the enraged Susanna has boxed his ears and after they have tenderly made it up, they see the Count approaching and pretend to continue their high-flown love-scene. The Count is foxed and summons everyone to the spot so that he can expose the treachery of his wife and valet.

Now the true state of affairs becomes clear. The Count acknowledges that he is in the wrong, and the Countess gracefully yields to his entreaty for forgiveness. The opera ends in general rejoicing.

The Marriage of Figaro

Opera in Four Acts by WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Text by LORENZO DA PONTE after BEAUMARCHAIS'S *La Folle Journée*
or *Le Mariage de Figaro*

English Version by EDWARD J. DENT

Le Nozze di Figaro was first performed in Vienna on May 1st, 1786.

The first performance in England was at the King's Theatre, London in 1812.

The first performance of this production took place at Sadler's Wells Theatre on April 9th, 1965.

Characters in order of appearance :

Figaro, servant to Count Almaviva	TOM McDONNELL
Susanna, maid to Countess Almaviva	ELIZABETH TIPPETT
Doctor Bartolo	DENNIS WICKS
Marcellina, the Count's housekeeper	JANICE CHAPMAN
Cherubino, page to the Countess	BARBARA WALKER
Count Almaviva	GEOFFREY CHARD
Don Basilio, organist and music master	JOHN DELANEY
Countess Almaviva	ANNE EVANS (April 4th) LOIS McDONALL (April 8th)

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Coffee is available during the interval in the restaurant area.

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

Antonio, a gardener, uncle to Susanna	HARRY COGHILL
Don Curzio, a lawyer	MALCOLM ST. JOHN
Barbarina, daughter of Antonio	SANDRA DUGDALE (April 4th) PHYLLIS GLAVIN (April 8th)
Peasant girls	BRENDA GALE GILLIAN ASHBY
<i>Servants, peasants, etc.</i>	

Conductor	NOEL DAVIES
Producer	JOHN BLATCHLEY
Designer	VIVIEN KERNOT
Lighting	CHARLES BRISTOW
Choreography	OENONE TALBOT
Staff Producer	CHRISTOPHER DE SOUZA

ACT ONE

An unused room. Early morning.

ACT TWO

The Countess's room. A short time afterwards.

ACT THREE

The large hall. Afternoon.

ACT FOUR

The palace gardens. Evening.

Charles Mackerras on 'The Marriage of Figaro'

A familiar masterpiece like *Figaro* has been performed, with such a variety of interpretations over the centuries that we have lost certain characteristic features of 18th century performance. The most important of these is ornamentation, particularly in the solos arias. All composers understood that the tunes of their arias would be embellished with extra notes and runs, and it was not until the middle of the 19th century that composers adopted the now accepted practice of writing down their music *exactly* as it was to be performed. We know from certain embellished versions of his own and other music that Mozart approved of improvised ornamentation.

An attempt has been made in this production of *Figaro* to incorporate some ornaments typical of the period. The most frequent of these is the appoggiatura, a note added or substituted by the singer above or below the note written by the composer to accentuate certain syllables, thereby giving grace to the melodic line. The appoggiatura was practised for two-and-a-half centuries and should obviously be applied to Mozart's music. This of course makes a big difference to the actual melody, and because Mozart's tunes have more distinction than those of his contemporaries, one has to be particularly careful, when adding embellishments, not to rob them of their special flavour.

Modern singers are not used to improvising, so we decided to use ornamentation which by chance had been written down. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, singing teachers and arrangers have indicated the prevailing manner of interpretation and we have seized upon these versions of the famous tunes in *Figaro* as being living evidence of interpretation of the time. The beautiful cadenza added to the Countess's aria in Act III comes from a series of cadenzas written by Mozart himself, and the variations in this aria are taken from an almost identical tune in the Coronation Mass, in which he wrote out the desired embellishments. Similarly, the very high-lying variants in the Count's aria in Act III are taken from the second version of the opera made in 1789. Variations introduced into Susanna's aria in Act IV are those which occur in copies of the aria from Mozart's time, and I think we can assume that this was the way the aria was sung. We have also made occasional use of cadenzas, and variants by Domenico Corri and Sir Henry Bishop, two musicians who made attempts to write down music of the day as it was performed.

It may be observed also, that Mozart's original intentions in the Trio in Act II have been followed, allotting the upper part with the coloratura line to the Countess.

Edward J. Dent on 'The Marriage of Figaro'

... The German opera at Vienna was given up in the spring of 1783 and its place was taken by a season of comic opera in Italian. Mozart expected that this too would come to grief, but he was mistaken. Salieri, who was in command of the Italian opera, was not merely a favourite of the Emperor, but was a very capable composer; he had secured a capable company of singers and an unusually capable poet as well. This was Lorenzo da Ponte. Mozart met him first in 1783 at the house of Baron Wetzlar, a rich Jew with whom the Mozarts were then lodging. Da Ponte promised Mozart a libretto; 'but who knows (wrote Mozart) whether he

will be able to keep his word — or be willing either ? As you know, these Italian gentlemen are very polite to one's face — we know all about them ! If he is in league with Salieri, I shall get nothing out of him as long as I live' . . .

It was Mozart himself who first suggested turning *Le Marriage de Figaro* into an opera. The idea was partly due to the success which Paisiello had obtained with his *Barbiere di Siviglia* and in all probability still more to the public scandal which the second comedy had aroused both in Paris and in Vienna. It had been produced in Paris in 1784 after three years of the best possible advertisement — prohibition by the authorities. The play was still prohibited in Vienna as politically subversive, but Mozart probably foresaw that it might be possible to get permission for in the shape of an Italian opera, and that as long as the play was forbidden, the opera would be certain to arouse curiosity.

Da Ponte and Mozart have been blamed, on the one side, for depriving one of the greatest of French comedies of all its savour, and turning a prophecy of revolution into a sordid intrigue ; on the other, they have been commended for eliminating all that was political, satirical, and erotic in the original and turning all things to chastity, favour and prettiness. It is easy for those to whom both works are classics to pronounce such judgments. But in 1786 neither Beaumarchais nor Mozart were classics ; to that Vienna audience, *Figaro* was a play of modern life, and although the scene was laid in Spain there was not great effort wasted on trying to obtain local colour.

Anyone who takes the trouble to compare Da Ponte's libretto page by page with the original play will be surprised to see how closely the two correspond. One reason for this is that Beaumarchais himself had had some experience of opera, both as librettist and as composer. *Le Barbier de Séville* was originally intended as a comic opera, with music arranged by the author from his recollections of the songs and dances he had heard in Spain . . .

Beaumarchais's plan was to take an old-fashioned type of comic opera plot as a foundation and embroider satirical dialogue upon it, the conventional stage tricks appearing deliberately ridiculous in their new garb of fine literary artifice . . . The danger of converting a play of this kind into a comic opera was that while the old tricks would remain as the foundation of the work, the flavour of the new dialogue, and, more important still, the new social point of view, would disappear entirely. But what Da Ponte was often obliged to sacrifice, Mozart could to some extent reconstitute in another medium ; and in any case a dozen German translations of the play had been published by 1785, so that the audience which listened to Mozart could easily supply from their own recollection such matter as Da Ponte had thought it more prudent to omit.

Da Ponte as a librettist deserves to be taken seriously. The general tendency of English musicians is to take it for granted that all opera librettos are rubbish, and they can always quote the well-known remark of Figaro himself — *ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit, on le chante*. ('Whatever is not worth the trouble of saying, one sings'.) Historians of literature almost invariably run away in horror from any drama written for the purpose of musical setting, even when the poet is eminent enough to command general respect. The three librettos which Da Ponte wrote for Mozart are masterpieces of their own category, and his work for other composers is no less interesting . . . Da Ponte was evidently quite seriously interested in his task as a librettist and it is quite clear that he selected and planned librettos with a subtle understanding of the different temperaments and abilities of the composers for whom he worked.

About the actual composition and preparation of *Figaro* there is little known. There is a considerable gap in Mozart's letters just at this time, and our principal source of information is the gossiping Irish tenor, Michael Kelly, who had recently been engaged at the Italian opera in Vienna. Kelly . . . deals mostly with those eternal and trivial matters which play so important a part in the autobiographies of all singers and managers ; of what was going on in the minds of Mozart and Da Ponte he can tell us nothing. Da Ponte says that the music was composed in six weeks and that the composition of the opera was kept a strict secret until all was ready ; but Leopold (Mozart's father) in a letter to his daughter, gives us to understand that there was no particular secrecy about it, and that Mozart had some considerable trouble in getting the libretto to his own satisfaction as well as to that of the censorship. The first performance took place by command of the Emperor on 1st May, 1786. Kelly considered that no opera had ever had a better cast, and that no subsequent performance had ever equalled it. The stories of the intrigues carried on by the Italians against Mozart are numerous, but must be accepted with caution. Kelly talks of himself of having been the only singer who appreciated the composer's genius and the only one who did not join the cabal against him ; but Kelly, like Da Ponte, put his reminiscences together at a date when Mozart had become a recognised classic, and was naturally anxious to make the most of his connexion with him . . .

The enthusiasm aroused by the first performance was immense ; but although the opera was performed nine times in the course of the season, its popularity was short-lived. Martin had already made a success with *Il Burbero di Buon Cuore*, and his *Una Cosa Rara*, produced in the following November, soon caused *Figaro* to disappear from the Vienna stage until the appearance of *Don Giovanni* brought Mozart once more into sufficient prominence to make it worth while reviving it.

Joseph Kerman on 'The Marriage of Figaro'

Ordinary opinion is not wrong to regard *The Marriage of Figaro* as Mozart's first great opera. It is the first opera of his maturity. *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* are beautiful works . . . but they can neither of them be called fully developed products of Mozart's imagination . . . Though Mozart's phenomenal sensitivity was very early in evidence, his vision and his sorrow did not grow to meet it until after 1782. He first took full artistic responsibility in the six great quartets dedicated to Haydn, the unfinished Mass in C minor, the Viennese piano concertos, and then in *Figaro*. The emotional maturity reflected in these works came evidently out of several crucial events of a few years earlier : Mozart's escape from Salzburg to independence and struggle in Vienna, his rupture with his father, and especially his marriage to Constanze Weber. In this new atmosphere Mozart faced up to Haydn and Bach, and found his own certain, complete voice. Vienna also meant a widening of intellectual horizons. In *The Marriage of Figaro*, for the first time, Mozart addressed himself to a dramatic problem with full insight and understanding.

For Mozart, *Figaro* was also an initiation in theatrical sophistication. He was working with Lorenzo da Ponte, not with a Varesco or a Stephanie (the librettists of *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung* respectively). An operatic version of *Le Barbier de Séville* had just made a success in Vienna — a bright, innocent play, innocently composed by Giovanni Paisiello, who was a leading *Opera buffa* composer of the day. But Beaumarchais's sequel *Le Mariage de Figaro* was politically and morally so suspect that it could not be staged at all without the sugar-coat of music. *Opera buffa* at that time was gingerly turning towards adult themes. Libertarianism, genuine wit, and humanity : Mozart and Da Ponte must have half-realised that they were creating living comedy out of the traditional simple farce of Pergolesi, Piccinni, and Paisello . . . Everything about *Figaro* is exceptional, advanced, brilliant, alarmingly real ; it was much too clever to succeed in Vienna. Mozart's sense of cleverness, power, and exhilaration remains an actual aesthetic quality of the piece, one that will always fascinate the connoisseur . . .

Beaumarchais's play had social significance in its day, and it is said that Mozart's opera too, in its exaltation of the servant classes, sets forth a cunning criticism of the *ancien régime*. But surely Mozart intended nobility of station as the clear symbol for nobility of spirit. The court may smirk, but the Count and Countess interest us more profoundly than any court intrigues. She is not strong, he is not good, and even their servants can show them up as pathetic or ludicrous — with the help of Mozart's and Da Ponte's instinct for comedy. But the Count and Countess are conscious ; they feel their feelings through, and there is a ground of sympathy between them which Figaro and Susanna cannot ever comprehend. Cruelty and shame have their place in Mozart's picture of human fallibility ; particularly in this context, his drama reveals a view of life that is realistic, unsentimental, optimistic, and humane. Probably no-one has left a performance of *Figaro* without reflecting that the Count will soon be philandering again. But just as surely there will be another reconciliation, another renewal as genuine on both sides, as contrite and as beautiful. Clever Figaro and Susanna are not actually so secure.

Finally, it should be emphasised that the drama of *The Marriage of Figaro* is Mozart's, not Beaumarchais's or Da Ponte's. Music here does not merely decorate what playwright or librettist had designed ; Mozart's music creates a drama that they never suspected. In his serious treatment of the Countess Mozart transcends anything in Da Ponte's verse or in operatic tradition as he knew it, and with the Count, Cherubino, and Susanna he performed famous miracles of characterisation . . . Most important of course, is Mozart's transformation of the ending of the play. With Beaumarchais, the reconciliation is nothing — worse than nothing, it suggests fatally that the intricate plot had beaten the author, and that clemency was the only way he saw to unravel it. As for Da Ponte, here is his contribution :—

Count Forgive me, Countess !

Countess I am more gentle and answer you 'yes'.

All We all are delighted to have it end thus.

With this miserable material before him, Mozart built a revelation, and saw how it could be supported by other elements in Beaumarchais's scaffolding. In opera, the dramatist is the composer . . .

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The Forum Theatre, Billingham, gratefully acknowledges
financial support from the Teesside County Borough Council
Northern Arts and the Arts Council of Great Britain.

DARLINGTON CIVIC THEATRE

Box Office Telephone : Darlington 65774

Monday, 10th April - Saturday, 15th April

SHILDON OPERATIC SOCIETY *present*

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Tuesday, 18th April - Saturday, 23rd April

BRITAIN'S LEADING INTERNATIONAL PUPPETMASTERS

present a giant sized spectacular of puppets

THE DASILVA TREASURE ISLAND

Sunday, 23rd April

POP CONCERT

— details to be announced shortly

Friday, 28th April

NORTHERN SINFONIA ORCHESTRA

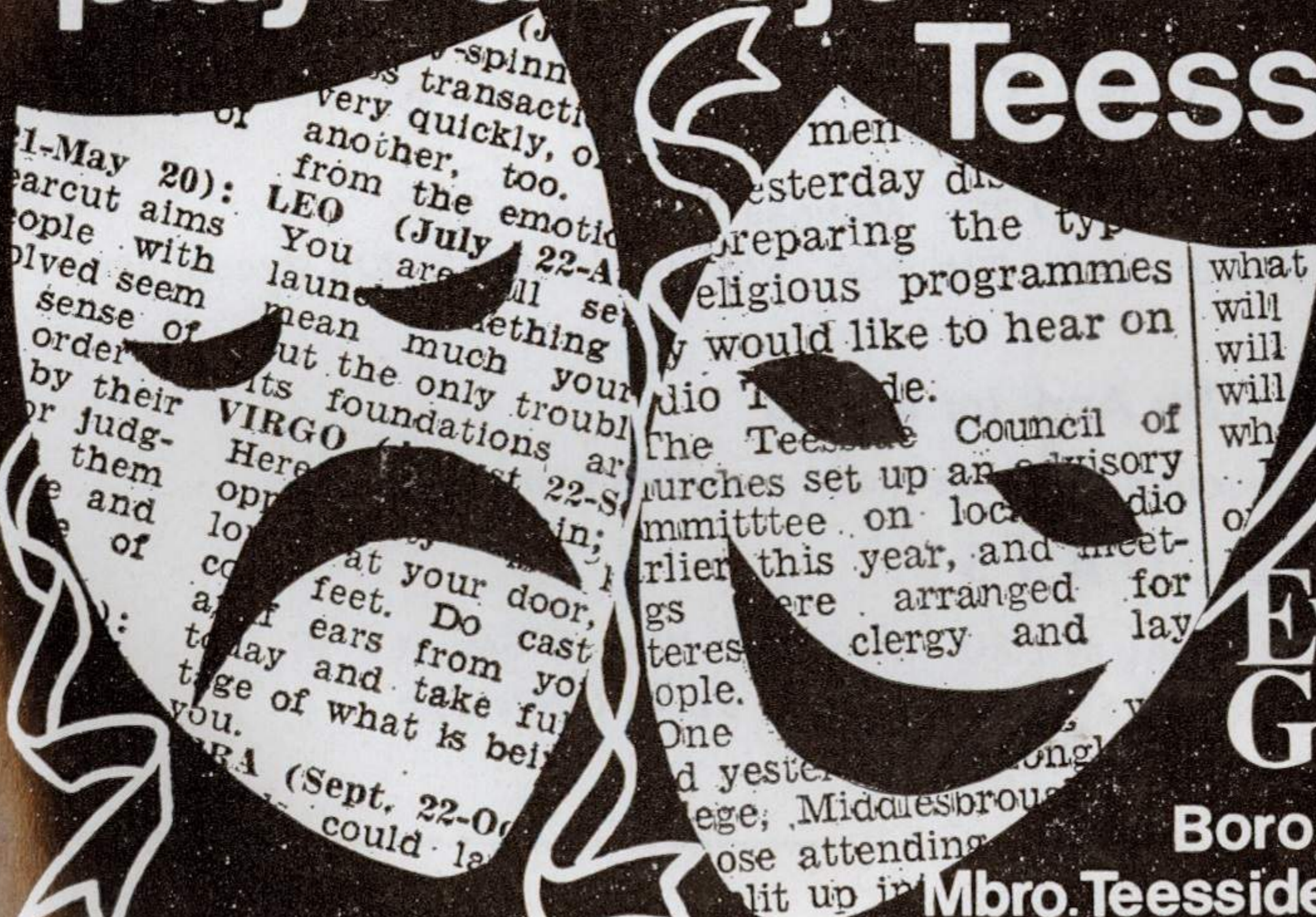
with JULIAN BREAM

Saturday, 29th April

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