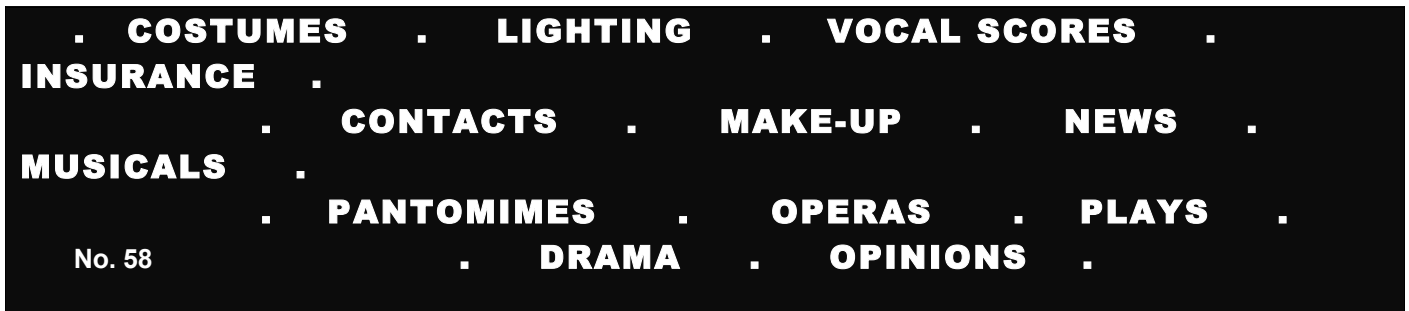


*National Operatic & Dramatic
Association
South West Amateur Theatre
Magazine*

“Lost in the Wilderness”

**district 14
AUTUMN 2008**

**. REVIEWS . STAGE MUSICALS . OPERETTAS .
SCENERY .**



RICH NEWMAN reports on District 14

The Darling Buds of May 'allo, 'allo Tonight on Broadway A Better You The Happiest Days of Your Life Caught in the Net Billy Liar	The Court Players Portishead Players Bath Light Operatic Group Unity Players St. Anne's Players The Court Players Sodbury Players	Sleeping Beauty Tippety Me and My Girl 'allo, 'allo A Summer Duo That's Variety	Warmley Players Keynsham Parish Players Keynsham Youth Theatre Sodbury Players Portishead Players Warmley Players
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THE DARLING BUDS OF MAY	The Court Players	Village Hall, Rangeworthy
<i>Director: Brian Quinlan</i>		<i>15th February 2008</i>

A beautifully crafted set of the Larkins' farmhouse and an amusing film of the family returning from their shopping trip and chasing geese around the farm, welcomed us to this delightful production by the Court Players. When playing such well-known characters, it is easy to lapse into impersonations, and it was to their credit that none of the cast did this; instead showing well-developed characters in their own right, led by a consistent, if a little subdued, Pop Larkin(Peter Harris), and Dee Way as a matronly Ma Larkin, reminiscent of a motherly Stephanie Cole! They were given good support from an effervescent Christine James (Marianne) and Mark Gregory as Mr Charlton, the tax inspector, persuaded to join the Larkins in their luxurious, if fraudulent country lifestyle. The rest of the characters kept the story moving along, particularly the very impressive young Larkin children, and a hilariously over-the-top Carole Vincent as Edith Pilchester. Good countryside sound effects, a spectacular indoor firework display, a beautiful backdrop and many 1950's period props showed the talent and hard work behind the scenes. A very hard-working and welcoming company – just like the Larkins!

SLEEPING BEAUTY [Leonard H. Caddy]	Warmley Players	Warmley
<i>Director/Producers: Lewina Phillips & Joan Weeks</i>		<i>8th January 2008</i>
		<i>Choreographers: Julie Price & Genna Breakwell</i>
		<i>Musical Director: Joan Weeks</i>

The Players had chosen to use the script provided by Noda Pantomimes this year. It was, as ever, a bright and colourful show. Right from curtain up we could see lovely beaming smiles that welcomed us in. We also saw some magnificent costumes. Queen Maria (Tim Mayo) looked particularly splendid in her various outfits. The comedy moved nicely throughout. Bubble and Squeak - The Prince's servants (John Sibley and Julie Price) had a great partnership, with some lovely comic moments. There were good performances also from the Georgina Tyler as the Prince and John Bragg as the Wizard. Genna Breakwell was very bubbly as Princess Beauty and I particularly enjoyed her singing in “Losing My Mind”. Although I’ve singled out some roles, everyone in the cast played their part. The set was effective and nicely painted. The lighting and sound effects were just right. A real team effort! It was a packed audience and as they left at the end you could tell their

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enjoyment from the comments heard.

'ALLO, 'ALLO	Portishead Players	Somerset Hall, Portishead
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Director: Kate Strong

February 2008

There was a great feeling of excitement as we took our seats for this show. The welcome by the foyer team, all dressed in character together with a pianist playing on stage set the scene perfectly. This production of the original stage play, based on the famous TV series, succeeded admirably in recreating those well-known characters. It was particularly well cast. In fact it was a very polished production. It had all the ingredients one would expect from the TV show. The set was simple and very effective with hinged flats opening downstage left and right to create various scenes. The main action, of course, takes place in Rene's café. The scene changes were done swiftly. Kevin Harrington played the part of Rene and his voice, movement and timing were superb. He was supported excellently by the rest of the cast. There were many hilarious moments like Edith's very good bad song and Rene's radio parrot, to name but two. The pace was very good and the whole cast's business, when not involved in dialogue, looked very natural: not overdone and never underdone. We had a very strong performance from Tony Tween as Bertorelli: so many polished touches to this well thought out character. The costumes and makeup were just right. Our earlier anticipation didn't lead to disappointment- 'and I will say this only once'- we all had a thoroughly entertaining evening.

TIPPETY	Keynsham Parish Players	St. John's Church Hall, Keynsham
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Directors: Sue Sprague & Caroline Hughes Music: Owen Cole & Natalie Morton

Graeme Savage reports:-

It is always a warming sight to see organisations pull together and put on shows that are well supported for charity, and community spirit was in full force for the Keynsham Parish Players production of 'Tippety'. KPP have donated more than £7,000 to various charities, and a full house here will ensure that this good work can continue. It is refreshing for a company to choose a relatively unknown show, and this Bristol-based musical tale and its many local references certainly appealed to the audience. Young leading couple Lottie Sprague as Melody Berkeley and Tom Stanford as Tom Cabot - two young performers who grew in confidence as the show progressed - set sail to find the treasure which their families have been feuding over for centuries. Using a stowaway Time Machine, they lead us on an entertaining journey to the court of Henry VIII, the Wild West and to the first settlement on the moon. The cast were enthusiastic, and didn't let the first night hiccups of wardrobe malfunctions and dropped lines put them off their stride too much, although the pace did begin to flag towards the end. The Tudor period costumes had been well sourced, and some good, if at times hesitant, singing voices were well supported by the piano accompaniment, although hampered by some inconsistent balancing of the radio mics. The time machine itself was a lovely contraption, with working lights, and some well-painted backdrops helped with the story-telling.

TONIGHT ON BROADWAY	Bath Light Operatic Group	The Guildhall
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Director: David Tucker Musical Director: Matthew Finch

April 2008

Malcolm White reports:-

For this year's evening of songs from the shows, Bath L.O.G treated us to a selection of productions that have appeared on the other side of the Atlantic. It included some old favourites, but also introduced us to some of the new hits that we may not have come across. It was a smaller ensemble than previous years, but they still provided a delightful evening's entertainment and some new voices were able to demonstrate their abilities. The Director made some interesting choices for the programme and brought some nice bits of humour to the proceedings. He also made an excellent host, linking each section with an interesting insight into the chosen shows. The Musical Director had obviously put the cast through their paces, and the result was some beautiful harmonies with a controlled choral balance. There were some cases where the diction could have been better, but generally the words could be heard. There were some nice lighting plots to enhance the ambience of the pieces and the ladies gorgeous gowns added to the glamour of the evening. Gentlemen, you looked stunning too. A production like this is very much a team effort, and that came across throughout. However, there were a

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couple of highlights for me. Rob Dallimore's rendition of 'Not while I'm around' was sensitive and heartfelt; and Ray Morrison and the boys gave a fun and polished performance of 'Can't take my eyes off of you' from 'Jersey Boys'. This was yet another successful visit to the world of musical theatre and a very pleasant evening was had by all.

ME AND MY GIRL	Keynsham Youth Theatre	Broadlands Schoolm Keynsham
<i>Director: Graeme Savage Choreographer: Natalea Trevor Musical Director: Kerrie Duce</i>		<i>April 2008</i>

Geraldine Branton reports:-

Once again KYT showed us how versatile and adaptable they can be, after the melodrama of last year's "Lucky Stiff" to this most happy of shows set in the 1930's and containing catchy numbers, attractive dance routines and lively humour. A minimal set, with few changes maintained the pace and the young cast slipped easily into their "adult" roles. Playing the vital cockneys Bill and Sally, Tim Cooper and Sophie Baxter respectively, were perfectly matched and delighted us with their impressive portrayals, with Bill, as the new Earl of Hareford frequently showing his barrow-boy roots and Sally displaying a luminous quality and the vulnerable side of the duo. As the "battleaxe", Aunt Maria, Jade Moore had the unenviable task of tutoring Bill into his new aristocratic background and it is to her credit that we easily accepted her role. Tammy Angell (Lady Jaqueline) and Paul Toulson as the Hon. Gerald Bolingbroke shared the comedy honours, extracting every ounce of fun they could, whilst Russell Sage as Sir John, Rob Cottrell as the Family Solicitor gave sterling support and reigning supreme over all, was the impressive Butler, Charles, a great performance by Mark Sellick. The chorus of Guests and Cockneys, most doubling up in other roles, showed the dedication and commitment we have come to expect from this group. The splendid 10-piece Orchestra brought the score vividly to life, enhancing, but never masking the voices, and our enjoyment was upheld by the attractively-dressed cast, complete with authentic 1930's hair styles and footwear. Congratulations to the Production Team and KYT on a great show.

A BETTER YOU	Unity Players	The Rondo Theatre
<i>Director/Producer: Phillip Tucker Co-Director: Lynda Tucker</i>		<i>25th April 2008</i>

Graeme Savage reports:-

It is always admirable to see well-established companies such as Bath's Unity Players being prepared to support new writers and perform new works, as Mark C Bourne's Ayckbourn-esque play received only its second outing in England. Although a new work, and despite the best efforts of the cast, who have amended the script with the writer during rehearsals, this is sadly not a play that I would expect fellow companies to be clamouring to perform. A promising first half in which a group of women attending a self-help programme to find 'A Better You', think that they've accidentally murdered the course leader, and attempt to smuggle her out of local community centre, gave way to an overlong and repetitive second act, almost devoid of any dramatic writing, as the writer's intended twists could be seen almost as soon as they were set up. The cast made a good effort of bringing life to the very one-dimensional characters. Gem Tucker as Josie and Eleanor Wyer as Patricia particularly stood out, making the most of their comic lines and delivering the two most rounded characters, and the experienced Lynda Tucker as Annabella provided a reassuring presence throughout. Philip Tucker's direction kept the action moving even when the dialogue became repetitive, and the simple and well-built set helped to ensure that the cast kept the full attention of a very enthusiastic and supportive audience.

'ALLO, 'ALLO	Sodbury Players	Town Hall, Chipping Sodbury
<i>Director/Producer: Rob Creer</i>		<i>15th May 2008</i>

Attention to detail can undermine even the best professional productions, so full marks to Rob Creer and his team for their incredible efforts on every aspect of this highly entertaining evening. From the fantastic recreation of Café Rene (weeks must have been spent studying the BBC set), to the detailed uniforms, the countless props, the comic timing, even the front of house staff resplendent in their French peasant finery, the hard work of the last few months was clear for all to see, and made for a wonderfully enjoyable evening from beginning to end. Although faithfully recreating the classic TV series, the cast didn't simply give facsimiles of

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the well known characters. In particular, the tireless Julian Hinton, as randy café owner Rene Artois, immediately struck up a strong rapport with the audience, guiding them through a minefield of saucy gags, confusing sausages and swastika-emblazoned underwear, alongside a company clearly relishing every double entendre and deliberately dodgy accent. If the pace dipped a little during the second half, this was only due to the short scenes and frequent scene changes, and if anything, was a credit to the cast's energy in Act One. In a strong supporting cast, Kayleigh Rose (homicidal waitress Mimi), Katie Salt (mistress of disguise Michelle) and Richard Browne (Lt. Gruber) particularly stood out in their cameo roles, and the whole cast deserve enormous credit for a hilarious evening's entertainment. Packed houses, and a matinée added due to demand, are fully deserved reward for this popular company.

THE HAPPIEST DAYS OF YOUR LIFE [John Dighton]	St. Anne's Players
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Director: Judi Smith

23rd May 2008

This is the stage version of the well known film and set in 1946, just after the World War II. It is set at Hilary Hall: a boarding school for boys. As the new term starts they learn that they have to share their buildings with a girls' school. As you can imagine, this causes all sorts of mayhem. The action takes place in the staff room with various doors leading off; the set build for the players here was excellent and worked well apart from one of the doors at the back which wouldn't stay shut. The costumes, hair and makeup were perfectly in keeping with the period. Particularly excellent were the props: great attention to detail with pens, shoes, tennis racket frames, boxing gloves, mortar board, etc, all begged and borrowed for the play and they were spot on. The 'apple for the teacher' music before each scene- just right. Dick Tassell (Chris Wiltshire) and Rupert Billings(Lance Keevil) - two of the boys' masters, played well off one another, keeping the pace moving, and helped to create the mayhem in the play. Juliet Hagan played the 'dragonous' Principal of the ladies' School with aplomb. Boys' Head - Godfrey Pond (Jim Thatcher) tries to keep the proceedings under control, but as various parents turn up from the different schools, he loses his battle to keep them apart, with hilarious consequences. A special mention must go to John Baggott, who played parent Edgar Sowter who saved the day learning the role in two weeks- well done! Congratulations to everyone, this was a most enjoyable evening.

A SUMMER DUO	Portishead Players	Somerset Hall, Portishead
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Directors: Janet Griffiths (Still Life) & Kate Weston (Gosforth's Fete)

24th May 2008

Graeme Savage reports:-

Still Life is probably best known to most as the play which became *Brief Encounter*, and it was a nice touch to hear Rachmaninov's 2nd Piano Concerto, so synonymous with the film, as the curtain was raised on the incredibly detailed train station set. John Fidell as Alec Harvey and Laura Martindale as Laura Jesson made a lovely couple, as Noel Coward's iconic frustrated lovers, meeting regularly at the station for their barely physical affair. In my opinion, although a great creator of characters and observer of life, Coward's dialogue often leaves a lot to be desired, and it was to these actors' credit that they coped well with a lot of expositional dialogue, and the final moments of their relationship were particularly heartbreaking. Julia and Kevin Pearce as Myrtle the tea lady and Albert the station master, had a delightful sparky chemistry, which balanced well with the more restrained Alec & Laura, and the supporting characters really brought the station to life, in particular Kirsty Yeoman as the hard working waitress Beryl.

Gosforth's Fete was the perfect companion piece, Ayckbourn's short farce played skilfully by the whole cast, particularly Andrew Curtain as the eponymous and Basil Fawlty-esque Gosforth. The timing was spot on, and each set-up carefully handled, with some nice touches from the director, particularly the attention to detail, such as the rain-drenched costumes and the exploding amplifier.

The live piano playing during the interval, linked the two plays well, making for a lovely evening in the company of this very welcoming and industrious group.

CAUGHT IN THE NET	The Court Players	Village Hall, Rangeworthy
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Director: Allan Clarke

12th June 2008

Malcolm White reports:-

You may have thought that Ray Cooney's classic "Run For Your Wife" was the last word in British farce, and that nothing more could possibly befall taxi driver John Smith and his two secret wives in Streatham and Wimbledon, but in this tightly scripted sequel, when his son and daughter, who are oblivious to their siblings, find each other in an internet chat-room, and decide to meet up, the inevitable chaos begins all over again. The highly twisted set-up was skilfully handled by Carole Vincent and Tina Mayor as the Smith wives and Annie Burns and Rob Marlow as the children, especially their timing as we saw both families having the same conversation simultaneously. Bryan Tufnell as John Smith was suitably flustered throughout, although a little more variety in his character's frustration may have helped the pace from flagging a little in act two as the web slowly untangles. Richard Lewis as John's clumsy lodger Stanley and Jerome Way as Stanley's bemused father showed their great physical comedy skills as the evening progressed further into a hilarious mix-up. The set was well-made, showing both living rooms simultaneously, and credit to the director for ensuring the essentially timed entrances and exits were spot on throughout. A big well done to assistant producer Sarah Cole, it was her 'debut' in that role. It is never easy to rehearse a farce without an audience, as their response is so essential to the overall feel of the show, and the cast coped well with the first night audience, and their hard work deserves to have them rolling in the aisles for the rest of the week.

THAT'S VARIETY

Warmley Players

Warmley Community Centre

20th June 2008

What an apt title for this year's summer show: variety there certainly was! Something on the menu for everyone. Some lovely atmospheric music played as we waited at our tables for curtain up. A colourful opening set us on our way. A very humorous sketch called 'Mind The Trains' was followed by an equally entertaining 'By the Light of the Silvery Moon' from the groups 'Directors'. A highlight for me was to see so many younger people taking part. The junior dance as well as the older children were excellent. Taking us towards our delicious ploughman's supper in the interval we had 'I'd like to teach the world to sing' from the Company. This was very effective. The food swiftly served, we filled up our glasses ready for Act 2. The folks on and off the stage obviously enjoyed the company opening to the next half: 'Waddy Atcha', they wore a delightful theme of yellow and black scarves. The orchestra of piano, keyboard and drums always accompanied and never played too loudly. The balance was very good, but at times some of the soloists could have stood nearer the mics for a louder sound. Some of the 2nd half highlights were 'September Song' and 'Waltz of Flowers', so too was 'Kiss the Day Goodbye'. This was a really enjoyable evening. At the finale we had 'It's not where you start' and this member of the audience could have sat through it all again. The people with all those very quick costume changes might not have been so happy to oblige!

GRAEME SAVAGE reports on District 14

BILLY LIAR

Sodbury Players

Town Hall, Chipping Sodbury

Director and Producer: Nicky Shipton

10th September 2008

Billy Liar may have lost some of its impact as a social commentary in the 50 years since it first appeared onstage, but still retains plenty of life as a period comedy drama in this new production. The Director and her stage crew had gone to town with the perfectly tasteless living room, stairway and garden of the Fisher residence, giving the cast plenty of period props and furniture to interact with. The 1950's pop classics played pre-show, as well as the other sparingly used sound effects, and simple lighting helped to set the scene precisely. Grant McCotter as the eponymous Billy took on the role well, never letting the audience sympathise too much with the little liar, but retaining our empathy for his frustration with real life. In a strong all-round cast, Steve Crump was brilliant as the father at the end of his tether, aggression erupting wonderfully in Act 2 balanced with his incredibly poignant monologue in Act 3; his final speech overflowing with the frustration towards a son he loves and hates in equal measure. Maggie Allsopp gave a great performance as Florence,

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literally larger-than-life, but never over-playing the ‘dotty old woman’ character. A few opening night wobbles aside, the cast coped very well with a quite wordy and occasionally repetitive script, and also a small section of the audience who seemed determined to laugh, not always appropriately. A very worthy production of a landmark in British Theatre.