

Noda South-West Magazine Spring 2010
District 15 – Gloucestershire – Frankie Telford

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

“Open a New Window”

SPRING 2010

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FRANKIE TELFORD reports on District 15

Ladies Night	The Cotswold Players
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Celebration	Manor Players of Tewkesbury
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Cinderella	Thornbury Musical Theatre Group

LADIES NIGHT	The Cotswold Players	The Cotswold Playhouse
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Director: Terry Clifford

September 2009

The play, written in 1987 by New Zealand playwrights Anthony McCarten and Stephen Sinclair, is played out against a backdrop of economic recession and explores what happens to personal relationships under the stresses of unemployment. The Full Monty came later. This was a brave choice for a novice female director with all those naked men! The set was well designed and depicted the seven locations convincingly. Scene changes were slow, perhaps to give time for costume changes. I felt Karen May (Glenda) and Tony Raybone (Graham) did not seem entirely comfortable in their roles. The short scene between Cath Roberts (Disc Jockey) and Dave Kilminster (Barry) was a little gem. The timing was perfect, supporting the old adage 'there's no such thing as small part'. We really saw how poor Barry was at communicating and understood why his wife had left him. The other characters were played confidently, even with no clothes on. Anthony Young (Gavin) really came into his own when he donned dress, wig and heels to comper the show for the lads at the end. It played to full houses and certainly the mostly female audience, on the night I attended, entered into the spirit of things.

BLYTHE SPIRIT	Cheltenham Operatic & Dramatic Society	The Playhouse
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Director: Rod Morris

September 2009

Malcolm White reports:-

When you are going to see a Noel Coward play, you are guaranteed quick wit, well defined characters and a glimpse of 1940's middle class Britain. 'Blythe Spirit' is my favourite. The set for this production was superb. Painted in a relaxing, classic green and cream, and beautifully dressed. The props and furniture had been carefully chosen, and even the glow in the fireplace looked realistic and warming. I would have liked to see the time change on the mantelpiece clock to show the different times of day for each scene, particularly as the time was mentioned in the last scene and the clock was wrong. The costumes looked correct for the period; however I did feel that Elvira should have been in a far lighter material and a very

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light pastel colour to make her float more ghost like. She might not have fiddled with quite so much then. The subtle lighting design truly made us feel that we were observers of someone's drawing room, and the cues were carried out smoothly. The sound effects of the knocking during the séance could have been quieter. It did sound as if Elvira was trying break in, rather than make her presence known. There were some excellent performances from this talented cast. Congratulations to the Director and his team on a very entertaining production.

18th July 2010

SOUTH-WEST REGIONAL AGM & AWARD CEREMONY

Holiday Inn, Taunton at 10:45 a.m.

Lunch also available at £12 a head.

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CALIFORNIA SUITE

Dursley Operatic & Dramatic Society

Lister Hall

Director: Chad Staddon

October 2009

Malcolm White reports:-

Heartbreaking decisions, infidelity, inflated egos and strained friendships all went to make up a thoroughly entertaining evening at the 'California Suite'. Dursley Operatic and Dramatic Society's production of Neil Simon's quartet of short stories was slick and thoroughly entertaining. It tells of four different occasions that Suite 203 is used in a Californian Hotel. Each reservation is for a different reason; parental concern between a divorced couple, a family celebration, an award ceremony and a vacation with close friends. The talented cast bounced Neil Simon's witty script from one complication to another and demonstrated the vulnerability of relationships and the need for security in them. D.O.D.S certainly did this play justice and each of the 4 casts was strong and well matched. Emma Hitchings and Craig Hewlett, as Hannah and Billy respectively, made a confident couple and portrayed the differences in their lifestyles with clarity and ease. Chris Lewis's ever suffering Sydney was delightfully sympathetic against Carol Hutton's neurotic, attention demanding Diana. An energetic Mark Withers as the remorseful cheating husband complemented Pippa Robinson's Millie. Director, Chad Staddon, utilised the two tier set to its best advantage and created some wonderful moments of both comedy and pathos. The set was excellent and well dressed to depict the style of the period. I did like the idea of the stage crew dressed as hotel staff when changing the scenes... a nice touch. There was pace, clarity of diction and an abundance of talent in this production, and those who didn't 'check in' missed an enjoyable evening's theatre.

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Palace Hotel, Torquay

Saturday 25th September 2010 @ 2:00 p.m.

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on the occasion of the inauguration of
our very own Gerry Branton as National President*

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THE SEAGULL

The Cotswold Players

The Cotswold Playhouse

Director: Tim Howard

October 2009

I welcomed the opportunity to see 'The Seagull' by Anton Chekhov as it is less frequently performed than some of his other works. It was billed as a comedy in Four Acts; I think tragicomedy a more apt description, with the themes of a difficult mother son relationship and unrequited love running throughout. Having said that there was much, well pointed, humour in this Michael Frayn translation. Like many of Chekhov's plays the characters are searching for something unattainable. The director was on tenterhooks the evening I attended as Sir Ian McKellen was in the audience, having opened the new extension to the Playhouse earlier in the day. He had no need to worry; this experienced cast kept confidently in character. The set became progressively more complex beginning with blacks, a plain backdrop and garden furniture in Acts 1 and 2 to more detailed interior representations using trucks and screens in Acts 3 and 4. Costumes and hairstyles were all in period and looked wonderful. The play was well cast; characterisations were well defined and developed during the production. Congratulations to Tim Howard on his first venture into directing serious drama.

TRIAL BY JURY & H.M.S. PINAFORE

Cirencester Operatic Society

The Barn Theatre, Cirencester

Director: Anthony Jones Musical Director: David Manifold

October 2009

It was good to return to the Barn theatre after a few years absence and to a double bill of Gilbert and Sullivan with "Trial by Jury" and "H.M.S. Pinafore". "Trial by Jury" opened with a feeling of very busy, overcrowded courtroom, everyone there to support the young lady who had been thwarted. Everyone on the Jury and observers had worked to develop individual characters and no one went OTT. The portrayals by principal characters were good. There was some interesting business between the Judge and the Plaintiff sending notes round the Courtroom. Apart from the opening chorus, diction was good and the principals could be heard over the orchestra. Overall, an excellent production from Anthony Jones in his first directing role. There was a superb opening to "H.M.S. Pinafore", the set was good, and you felt the sailors really were aboard a ship and their movements suitably nautical. Captain Corcoran's entrance was great fun, with him being shaved and dressed on stage. After this the production went into a much more traditional D'Oyly Carte style and became static in places. The Principal singing was generally very good

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although the balance in some of the small ensembles was, at times, poor. The male chorus was strong and well balanced with excellent diction. However, the diction of the ladies' chorus was not as clear, more emphasis on the consonants would have helped. The orchestra was well balanced, and well controlled at all times by MD David Manifold. Technically both productions were generally good with sound effects being on cue. The lighting was atmospheric, but in the effort to create a good nighttime effect there were dark spots on the stage, which would probably have been sorted later in the week.

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ANNIE

Thornbury Musical Theatre Group

The Armstrong Hall

Director: Mark Collins Choreographer: Kara Kennedy Musical Director: Caroline Whitehead October 2009

A full Armstrong Hall was a buzz with excited anticipation when I arrived to see “Annie”, and the audience was not disappointed. The production started well, with good musical numbers from the young cast of orphans, although their diction was not always clear. The whole cast gave sound performances and there were good cameo roles, particularly by the young men in the Radio Station scene. Jo Gayther gave an outstanding performance as Grace Farrell. Kara Kennedy and her assistants had put together pleasant dance routines which were within the company's capabilities. The band was well controlled under the direction of Caroline Whitehead never drowning out the principals. At times I felt the pace was a little slow, particularly in N.Y.C. The set had been well designed and worked well with the limited space available. The stage crew changed the scenes efficiently. The costumes were all good, helping to create the feeling of the period. I felt everything in the Hooverville scene was too clean for their living conditions. Mark Collins rose to the challenge of working with children and animals, neither of which disappointed him, or the audience in this, his directing debut for the Group. Indie (Sandy, the dog) naturally stole his scenes, but behaved beautifully. Overall this was a good evening's entertainment.

MY FAIR LADY

Swindon Amateur Light Operatic Society

Wyvern Theatre

Director: Russell Langdown Choreographer: Judith Hockaday Musical Director: Malcolm Webb

30th October 2009

Andrew Carpenter reports:-

Without doubt My Fair Lady is one of *the* musicals, with its superb score and clever libretto, and SALOS did full credit to this masterpiece of a musical. From the moment we first saw Eliza we knew she was going to be the ‘star of the show’ and that's how it turned out. Henry Higgins, too, was also outstanding and I enjoyed hearing some of Higgins' songs sung rather than spoken. Colonel Pickering's performance throughout was good. His quiet and polite manner, always in contrast to Higgins' abruptness, was just right. Doolittle is a gem of a part to play and I thoroughly enjoyed this portrayal of the dustman. Daphne Brakespear as Mrs Higgins is an actress has that ‘presence’ on stage and I thoroughly enjoyed watching this actress. One of the undoubted highlights of this production was the quality of the music as performed by a superb orchestra under the baton of Malcolm Webb. The Ascot Scene was quite beautiful, but what a shame the ‘Matthew Bourne’ style choreography was introduced into this number as it bore no

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resemblance to any other part of the scene. Overall I would say that this was a first rate production from a first rate company.

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THE RISE AND FALL OF LITTLE VOICE

The Cotswold Players

Costwold Playhouse, Stroud

Director: Graham Bill

November 2009

This was a memorable production. The set was well designed and constructed; the two tiers on the truck creating LV's bedroom upstairs, and front door and hall of the house below, leaving the remainder of the stage for the dreary kitchen/living room. It also enabled the action to move into the street by partly rotating the truck. The effect of the dodgy wiring was extremely effective, as was the fire. The set after the fire created a feeling of utter devastation. All helped by the atmospheric lighting. Graham Bill was fortunate to be able to cast the play so well, and obviously gave good direction, as each member of the cast was absorbed in the portrayal of their role and understood their character. Joy-Amy Wigman (Little Voice) gave a touching performance, taking us from initial pathos through anger, as she stands up to her bullying mother, to joy when at last she finds her own voice. Claire Greenwood (Mari) gave a strong performance in the challenging role of the truly awful drunken mother. Lynsay Kyle (Sadie) gave us a master-class in mime. This was teamwork at its best, with all areas working together for an excellent production.

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CELEBRATION

Manor Players of Tewkesbury

Watson Hall, Tewkesbury

Directors: Lin & Doug Willerton Choreographer: Val Lockley Musical Director: Paul Hardy

November 2009

40 years ago Mitton Manor Players was formed, performing plays and pantos at the Watson Hall. As Manor Players of Tewkesbury, 30 years ago they did their first musical and never looked back. Eventually they moved to the Roses Theatre with a great deal of support from Stan Stennett, who managed the theatre

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for a number of years, but unfortunately with rising costs and a decrease in numbers, the society had to make changes and returned to the Watson Hall, also celebrating it's 100 years in 2009. A revue type show was chosen in order to give everyone a chance – no stars, no chorus but opportunities to shine in some numbers and be part of the line-up in others. Some members were making their debut on stage and it was very rewarding to watch new and undiscovered talents develop during rehearsals. Opening with a sketch noting the first ten years, the children were then showcased followed by a big musical opening with the full company. The aim was to perform at least one song from every musical performed over the 30 years, a mammoth task but it worked very well. The atmosphere was enhanced by waiter/waitress service from their tables and a chance to feel a part of the 'celebration' and from feedback, a good evening was had by all.

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SINBAD THE SAILOR

St. John's Players

St. John's Hall, Churchdown

Director: Phil Collins

November 2009

The evil magician Dragunda has abducted Princess Yasmin and in order to release her Sinbad has to travel to three islands to collect the tail feathers from three birds. The script came from a local author and had the novel idea of using Beatles songs, with adapted lyrics, throughout. This was the first Pantomime the Players had embarked on for 8 years and did well to find a cast large enough for the project. The one basic set worked very well, with dressing depicting the different locations. The lighting and sound were effective and well cued, especially the flight of the Orc. The costumes were appropriate, colourful and varied. The principals were confident and carried the action forward at a good pace, particularly Sinbad. The whole cast entered into the spirit of things and looked as though they were enjoying themselves. A great deal of humour came from the Teletubbies. Deli and Beli (slaves of Dragunda) worked well together and had several 'front of tabs' scenes; the timing in the scene with the 'deafness hat' was

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excellent. Director Phil Collins worked the audience well with his cheer, boo and clap cue cards. The audience loved it.

HOT MIKADO Cotswold Savoyards Cheltenham Playhouse

Director/Choreographer: Sarah Dyer Additional Choreography: Sara Harwood Musical Director: Allen Gillespie

November 2009

Malcolm White reports:-

As soon as the opening bars of the overture started I knew that this production was going to be HOT, HOT, HOT. The opening number was sassy with an excellent routine, and it set the standard for the rest of the show. The pace was lively and didn't drop at all. The set was crisp, simple and very effective, giving maximum performance space and varying levels to create more interesting pictures. The lighting plot beautifully complemented the set and enhanced the various moods of the piece, and the changes were smoothly executed. The costumes were fabulous. Colourful, stylised and fitting well. Congratulations to the wardrobe team. Musically, this production was thrilling. The harmonies were tight and the diction, particularly in the company numbers, excellent. The six piece band, under the expert direction of Allen Gillespie, bounced from one great song to the next with enthusiasm, whilst still being sympathetic to the performers. Director/Choreographer, Sarah Dyer, can proudly and justifiably pat herself on the back for this production. She created some superb company pieces and added some nice little touches with individual moments. Her choreography was fresh, lively and well polished. The talented cast performed with enthusiasm and immense energy and there were some outstanding performances from the Principals. Hannah Bennett not only looked Yum Yum, but sang with such clarity and confidence. Her rendition of 'The sun and I' was spell binding. Juliette Ascroft was a strong Katisha who sang with gusto and passion. Keith Franklin (Ko-Ko) had excellent comic timing and gave us the funniest 'Tit Willow' I have ever heard. Anthony King as Nanki-Poo, gave a confident and good all round performance, and Jonathon Dyer was commanding as the Mikado. All in all, this was a production that I would have happily seen again and thoroughly enjoyed.

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SCROOGE – THE MUSICAL Gloucester Operatic & Dramatic Society Guildhall

Director: Rowena Davies Choreographer: Val Lockley Musical Director: Jack Smith

December 2009

The story of Charles Dickens' "Christmas Carol" always puts me in the mood for Christmas, and this musical version was no exception. It opened with a typical Victorian Christmas street scene, the opening

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chorus was well balanced and got the show off to a good start. There are many scene changes demanded in this production, and the construction at the back of the stage of a series of double-sided hinged shutters, which were flipped to give interior and exterior scenes, was effective. The lack of rehearsal time in the venue was apparent on the first night, especially on the technical side. I am sure this improved later in the week. The cast were at ease with Val Lockley's choreography, which worked well in the limited space available and added to the feel of the festivities. The Band was not always sympathetic to the performers. The balance between keyboards and brass was, at times, poor with the brass section overwhelming everything. Everyone in this large cast showed enthusiasm and enjoyment, and it was obvious that the Director had worked hard. Unfortunately the younger members could not always be heard, though not through any fault of their own. The show was well cast, giving opportunity for lovely cameo performances. Malcolm White (Scrooge) gave an outstanding performance in this epic role, on which the whole show depends. Well done, everyone, on this challenging production.

JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Promenade Productions

The Bacon Theatre, Cheltenham

Director/Choreographer: Heather Newman Assistant Choreographer: Kate Williams

Musical Director: Helen Harris

January 2010

The village of Peasleby Green was a warm and colourful refuge after the snow outside. The Production had all the elements of a traditional Panto. The opening of this Pantomime by Alan Frayn was cheerful and backed by a superb set from *Scenic and Property Hire*. The costumes by Showcase and the Society were colourful and added to the picture, especially those worn by John Pannett as Dame Dotty Dibble. Sarah Aston as Simple Simon soon had the audience on her/his side and responding well. The singing was a little weak in places, particularly the male chorus, but the length of songs was just right. Rosa Day-Jones sang the Golden Harpists solo beautifully and the duet with Caitlin Gallagher as Princess Primrose was delightful. The company handled the choreography confidently, that of the dance groups was more complex but well executed, if sometimes a trifle long. The dance to open Act 2 was excellent. There was a great deal of humour throughout, I particularly liked Adrian Prewer and James Meekums (The Broker's Men) in the For Sale scene, where the timing was good; and Buttercup the Cow was brilliant. Congratulations to the Director and everyone involved for enthusiasm to make it a lively evening.

RED, HOT & COLE

Cheltenham Operatic & Dramatic Society

The Playhouse

Director: Julia Buck Choreographer: Jodie Carr Musical Director: Dave Whittle

January 2010

This was certainly a 'different' show, blending Cole Porter's music with a biography of his life. The action takes place at a series of parties moving through time and place, from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Almost the whole cast is required to perform solo numbers, and the musical accompaniment is from a single, on stage piano. The set was simple and recreated the feeling of the Palm Court of a Grand Hotel. Dave Whitelock's lighting was atmospheric, and the use of the follow spots was subtle and unobtrusive. The costumes were stunning and again contributed much to the feel of the period. They also helped create the different characters, as most of the actors took on dual roles. The company worked well together, particularly portraying the guests at the parties, maintaining a character whilst not intruding on the scene itself. In the recently refurbished intimate theatre there was no need for microphones, and so the sound was natural. Everyone was vocally strong and had excellent diction; every spoken and sung word could be heard. The choreographer brought well rehearsed routines to the production. The director had worked hard with her cast to produce a very polished show. Congratulations to everyone.

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ALADDIN

Dursley Operatic & Dramatic Society

Lister Hall

Written & Directed: Craig Hewlett Choreographers: Jade Morrissey & Emma Hitchings

Musical Director: Becky Jarman

January 2010

Malcolm White reports:-

It's the time of year when no children's story remains the tale that we all know, and evolves into a fantastic fantasy where anything is possible. DODS 2010 offering was no different. The story and characters started out as we expected, but that was soon to change. There was a Hairy Dogfather, the Genie of the Lamp was a cool feline by the name of Catnip, and Widow Twan Kee was using the laundry business as a cover for the slave trade that she was running by kidnapping young orphan girls. The whole thing ended with everyone being transported to the 1960's by a time machine in the shape of a giant washing machine. The production was of the high standard that we have come to expect from this society. The young company were enthusiastic and energetic, although diction in the full company numbers could have been clearer. The sets were effective and colourful. I particularly liked the clever effect of the flying carpet. The costumes were well co-ordinated and reflected the social standing of the characters. The polished routines were within the abilities of the cast and performed with gusto. The five piece band handled the musical styles well and was sympathetic to the performers. The Director utilised the immense talent of the cast and created a colourful piece of escapism that had pace and imagination.

CINDERELLA

Thornbury Musical Theatre Group

Armstrong Hall

Director: David Wrench Choreographer: Julia Edwards Musical Director: Roger Winter

10th February 2010

"Cinderella" is one of the most popular pantomimes and this one did not disappoint. The opening of this one was a little different as it went straight into a chorus number with no overture. There was then a well-executed freeze while Karen Blount as the Fairy Godmother set the story. The action then continued in the village of Stoneybroke. The set had been carefully designed for this small stage by first time set designer Cheryl Wrench. There was a fine array of well-painted backcloths depicting the many scenes. The Land of Wishes set was particularly effective with the 'pop ups' and the palace scene suitably grand, complete with a clock that showed the passing of time. The costumes were attractive, colourful and well coordinated. The 'transformation' scene was unexpected and very effective as Cinderella led Hagan the horse into the 'mist'. Choreography was simple and well performed. The members of the chorus were enthusiastic and worked well as a team. The principals seemed confident in their roles, but the pace was slow in places. The four-piece band under the direction of Roger Winter was well balanced and never overpowered the performers. The Director had obviously worked hard with his company, as there were no first night gremlins.

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