

# On the Fringe



An occasional newsletter from the Spring Grove Fringe – September 2023

Registered Charity Number 1150982

## Donations

It has been so long since the last issue of *On the Fringe*, and we need to update you all with some of the messages from charities we have supported since then.

Anna Hoggett from *Refugee Action Kingston* wrote:

Thank you so much for supporting our work with your recent donation of £500. Your gift will make a real difference in the lives of hopeful refugees and asylum seekers

As you know, refugees and asylum seekers are some of the most resilient individuals we know. With the right support, they go on to lead fulfilling and independent lives as integrated members of our communities, building businesses, raising families, and reinvesting in local economies.

Every year, supporters like you help us:

- provide helpline advice
- distribute devices to overcome digital exclusion
- run playscheme programmes

Your donation ensures our services remain inclusive and accessible to diverse communities in need.

Leo, Emerald and Rollo wrote about our donation in memory of *Nick Sheldon*:

Thank you very much for donating to the National Brain Appeal following *Camelot – The Panto*. We are touched and grateful for you doing this. Nick in particular and as a family, we are involved in the rare dementia research and family support, which they fund.

Nick thoroughly enjoyed the antics of SGF through many productions. This was usually in ‘support’ roles such as Tree, Skeleton ... and so on. Emerald and Rollo followed him in their early munchkin days onto the stage at the hall with Dexter and Beabea tredding the SGF boards too.

SGF was a lovely part of Nick’s Spring Grove life for about 30 years. Thank you again for all you bring to our community, it really is special.



Knowing us, knowing you – Here we go again! Our next production on 6th & 7th October will be an Extrava-ABBA-ganza! You can sing along to the movie, with the Spring Grove Songsters to help you. That’s the Name of the Game! A supper evening with a Greek menu, so Gimme, Gimme, Gimme ... whatever is to your taste after Midnight. You can join in the sing-along and we’ll Take a Chance on You. Who knows? There may even be a Dancing Queen!!

Tickets £17.50 to include supper. There will be a range Greek-style food to suit all tastes on your table. Licensed bar (cash or card).

Rob Aldous, Director of *Kingston Hospital Charity* wrote:

I wanted to acknowledge receipt of the Spring Grove Fringe’s £300 donation following your ‘Famous Names’ quiz night and supper. Please pass on our thanks to all your members who took part and helped raise these funds in support of our hospital.

Our key priority over the next 12 months is to develop a two-story extension of the Bernard Meade Wing to help transform the care environments for children with cancer and for the growing number of patients with age-related macular degeneration and other conditions affecting the back of the eye.

# Falstaff

In the dullest November evening of 2021, we did come upon a wandering band of players performing a most entertaining pageant concerning the great and tragical character, Falstaff; he of whom many bawdy tales are told. It was an entertainment most welcome and pleasing after long years of pestilence, plague and discontent.



That most practised actor, David Hamilton, did portray the fat knave most ably and was supported superbly by Mistresses Smith and Boyle as the ladies upon whom the old love-monger did so



ungallantly fawn. They most cunningly did outwit him and their husbands too and we delighted in the performances of Masters South and Milligan as the peevish spouses.



That comely thespian couple, Master and Mistress Glenny, entertained us greatly with their portayals of the sullen innkeeper and the scheming Mistress Quickly, a most quick and nimble wit whose plotting nearly ruined the fair Anne Page, daintily played by Mistress Ramnarain. She was won most gallantly by the scholar, Fenton, a studious performance by Master Treloar.



Much mirth was to be found in the duplicitous character of Justice Shallow given us by Mistress Birley, a doyen of the comedic arts, and the dullard relative, Slender, a most affecting performance by the large stage presence of Master Brooks. Falstaff's scoundrel henchmen, played by troupe stalwarts, Master Rollason, Master Bellwood and Mistress Robson, were admirably knavish and our ears did delight in the preposterous faux French utterances of Master Tresigne whose travels to that perfidious land did not appear to have improved his mastery of their language. The page Robin was played by the charming youth, Master Sexton, and the laundry boy by another, even more youthful, Master Sexton. Laundry indeed had a substantial role in this play and was masterfully controlled by honest Mistress Shaw.



This most happy entertainment was directed most gratifyingly by Master Duffin, recently seen in much glory at the Lord Chamberlain's Globe Theatre. We must congratulate the Technicals and Mechanicals for the magical scenery, and the players' finery, the plentiful victuals and ale, all of which did delight our senses. Indeed we found the performance altogether most charming, "pleasant without scurrility, witty without affectation, audacious without impudency, learned without opinion, and strange without heresy." A veritably triumphant return for this merry band of players.





# Outside Edge

In May 2022 we were treated to the long awaited production of *Outside Edge*, originally planned for 2020.

The play is an ensemble piece which develops the relationships of five members of a local cricket team and their wives and girlfriends, set to the background (and sometimes foreground!) of a Saturday afternoon match.

The stage was cleverly transformed by Jenny into a 1980s cricket pavilion – think red Formica – and props gathered by Helen before she got stuck in France!

The multiple entrances and exits were used by the energetic cast to great effect – many of them even at the right time!



The team was led by David who gave a true captain's performance as Roger, i.e. ordering everyone around (chop, chop!) and not actually doing very much – an excellent piece of acting, totally convincing!

His long-suffering wife Miriam (she of the renowned teas) was perfectly played by Sandie who proved that she really could manage, expertly wielding a cricket bat at her husband after he admitted to naughties in Dorking. Thank-you-so-very-much!

We were treated to a 'spirited' performance from Laurie as the elusive and increasingly inebriated Bob. (*Director's comment* – he told me he'd filled that whisky bottle with coloured water!) Bob's (second) wife Ginnie was played by Val, who had the luxury of delivering her witty one-liners whilst sitting in the sun (thanks to Nigel for conveying the changing weather conditions!) When she eventually got the deck chair open, that is.

Scott gave us a great portrayal of Dennis, whose view of the



fairer sex was totally outdated, even for the 1980s, and who spent most of his efforts trying to 'bowl a maiden over' (sorry, promise just the one cricket joke) His wife, Shirley, is never actually seen or heard but makes her presence very heatedly felt at the end of the play!

The roles of big Maggie and little Kev were played to hilarious effect by Sarah and Matt.

Much rolling around was required as Maggie soothed the hapless Kev's injuries and the audience were delighted to imagine

what was going on under the all encompassing fur coat gamely worn by Sarah.



The final pairing was pompous public schoolboy Alex and his new date, the socially inept Sharon – "I'm from East Molesey" – and yes, that was in the original script! Adrian and Karina were perfectly cast. Adrian could have a new career as a stuntman after his

antics involving a folding chair and a ladder. And Karina's enthusiasm as she beat him about the head with her handbag seemed totally genuine.

The audience was treated to a delicious interval tea – the best in the whole South Western League – provided by Amanda and her team. The menu was in celebration of the, now sadly late, Queen's 70th Jubilee – Platinum Chicken and Windsor Whip.

The technical team of Nigel and Mark ensured that everyone in the hall was part of this hilariously chaotic cricket match.

And the final mention must go to Jo in her starring role as prompt – "Jo, we've done that bit, where are we?"

**Howzat?** I think that superb director, Janice Smith, and her team knocked 'em for six!!



# Camelot – the Panto!

So .... did you take the Tripadvisor 5 star reviewed mini-break to Camelot in February? If you did, you were doubly fortunate to have not only visited this most 'congenial spot' but to have also seen that most excellent performing troupe, the Spring Grove Fringe, bringing their mediaeval magic to the tale of King Arthur and his Guinevere.



The usual SGF ensemble of wandering players brought a tale of evil and sorcery with Lynn Charlton as the witch, Morgan Le Fay, and Matt Sexton as Mum, mother to useless Vladimir the Vicious (more useless than vicious) played by the rising Comedy Club star, David Hamilton.

Juvenile actors (in SGF terms), Adrian Treloar and Karina Ramnarain, played the would-be lovers, supported by a wonderful cast showing their depth of experience gained over the past 30+ years of iconic performances (nothing before or after has been their equal).



In typical and extravagant SGF fashion, TWO Merlins were available: choose between the dramatic Vronnie Birley and the Musicals star



Daisy Jones. In this critic's view, however, comely Suzanne Nail stole the show as 'The Head' causing gasps of amazement at the technical skills (for the Middle Ages) of this troupe. Ever mindful of making full use of costume and props, Jenny Robson and Jo Need squeezed a large chicken and a chicklet into the cast, hopefully providing a good supper in the pot afterwards.

Much ale was served by the wench, Jayne Britten.



So take note of the passing seasons and look out for these wandering players again in the Autumn – nothing better will be afforded to you until then.





# Present Laughter

Laughter was present indeed, in May 2023, as the Spring Grove Fringe staged two fabulous performances of Noël Coward's timeless comedy *Present Laughter* to full and delighted audiences.

The plot centres on a few days in the life of the self-obsessed, egotistical and not-quite-sosuccessful-as-he'd-like-to-think actor, Garry Essendine, as he prepares to travel to Africa for a touring commitment. David Hamilton, donning a dazzling array of dressing gowns, gave a wonderful performance as Essendine: a mixture of petulant child, vain friend, louche roué and tiresomely needy yet demanding employer. Lurching from flouncing peacockery and waspish acerbity, to genuine bemusement via gesticulating frustration, Hamilton pouted and flounced across the four acts warding off unwanted lovers and overeager playwrights while attempting to, somehow, hold together the imploding clique of chums essential to his self-worth.



Olivia Boulton gave an outstanding performance as the ingenue, Daphne, both determined and desperate. Sandie Glenney was superb as Essendine's long-suffering secretary, Monica Reed. Calm, shrewd and unfazed by Essendine's shenanigans, Sandie's portrayal of Monica skilfully mixed loyalty and tolerance with a rebellious determination to brook no nonsense from Essendine and his continual dramatics. A firm approach echoed by Janice Smith's excellent rendition of Essendine's ex-wife, Liz. As Liz, Janice dealt with Essendine as one would a little boy, alternating indulgence with admonition. With some of the most wonderful observational lines of the play, Janice bursts



Garry's self-important bubble, accusing him of 'scampering about' whilst also pandering to his love of flamboyant dressing gowns. When she tenderly rescues him at the end of the play, Janice's Liz is an indulgent mother taking an over-tired toddler home for a much-needed nap.



Against the backdrop of a tastefully designed 1930s living room (expertly recreated here by Gavin and Helen Dawson) Noël Coward cleverly sketched the romantic entanglements of the people in Garry Essendine's orbit imploring him to love them, behave better or simply keep earning the money that keeps him, and them, afloat.

Daisy Jones, wonderful as the silky, predatory Joanna Lyppiatt, seduces Essendine by pandering to his infantile vanity; yet is, in turn, wrongfooted by Monica and Liz who refuse to allow her to upset the cosy (if dysfunctional) apple cart of the gang of friends and send her packing to the Continent.



Matt Sexton was wonderfully funny as Roland Maule of Uckfield, the aspiring playwright with a lunging intensity who – like his handshakes – just will not quit. Laurie South, as cheater-turned-cuckold Henry Lyppiatt, and Adrian Treloar as love-struck, unknowing Morris Dixon, played

Essendine's desperate friends, both expertly showed the trials of being needed so much that you are swamped.



And let's not forget Essendine's 'sassy' servants, spiritualist Miss Erikson (Karina Ramnarain) and Fred the valet (Scott Milligan), who do not shy away from pointing out their employer's insecurities and hilariously putting in their two cents of social commentary on the increasingly farcical situations Garry finds himself in.

Similarly, the persistent Daphne (Olivia Boulton) and majestically imperious Lady Saltburn (Amanda Shaw) both engage in a snappy jousting of words and egos with Essendine, skilfully balancing wonderful one-liners and welltimed quips without missing a beat.

Present Laughter was a triumph for the Spring Grove Fringe and a delight to watch thanks to the excellent performances of the cast, and the skilled and tight direction of the talented Sandy Gavshon who managed to ensure farce never descended into frenzy, and wit and one-liners were never over-played.



A special mention too for the props, costumes and sound teams. From the ringing rotary dial telephone (which plays such a key role in the play), to the chic dresses and silk pyjamas, the 1940s were recreated with authenticity and ease; and the actors' caustic put downs, muttered asides or, in Essendine's case, dramatic monologues were projected effortlessly for all to enjoy.



Coward admitted that *Present Laughter* was basically a self-parody: a lost boy who has never really grown up. Yet the play also gives us glimpses of life's fragility too. Aging actors, friendships crumbling, times changing and relationships evolving as a bohemian world is threatened by a host of invading forces ... just as the world, at the time, was on the brink of a second world war that would change life for everyone.

## Murder Most Foul

November 2022 saw no less than two murders in Spring Grove, as *Death at the Deanery* played. Fortunately, the mystery was solved by Miss Marbles, and audience members were in no danger of poisoning during supper – they had to be kept alive and kicking (well, writing at least) for the Murderous Quiz which followed.

