

SPOTLIGHT

Newsletter of the Geneva English Drama Society
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(ccp 12-10826-9)
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IN THIS EDITION

SET DESIGN
INTERVIEW WITH
CATHERINE HARARI
pages 2-3

THE IMPORTANCE
OF BEING EARNEST
REVIEW
page 4

GEDS WRITES COMING!
SEE PLAYREADING
SECTION
page 5

Don't miss GEDS AGM

Please note that the Society AGM will take place on Tuesday, April 17th at the English Church Hall preceded as usual by small snacks and drinks. Following the last "Town Hall" meeting, the outgoing Committee will have some recommendations to propose and comments on the way the Society is going for general discussion. AGM documents were sent through a GaaG, so dig up that email if you'd like to see them.



GEDS Directory

The printing of the GEDS directory is imminent, thank you to all who contacted us either to confirm or update your personal details. We realise that not everyone has need of a copy so we will not be sending out to the whole

membership by post. You will however be able to collect your copy at the AGM on April 17th, copies will also be available for collection at playreadings during May and June. If you have been unable to collect your copy during this time and would like a directory you can send a stamped self-addressed envelope (C5 size) to our

adresse d'association: Geneva English Drama Society, 1200 Genève.

Julius Caesar castle tour 2018

For those who missed the garden reading of Julius Caesar arranged

Welcome to Spotlight

Oscar Wilde's wit graced the stage in February with *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and we hope you enjoyed it. While our main production season takes a hiatus, many upcoming events are on the horizon, so peek into this issue to see what's happening in theater.



by Christopher Bailey two summers ago, here is your chance to catch the Shakespeare classic. ADG-Europe will present *The Tragedy Of Julius Caesar* at the most beautiful castles of Switzerland:

Château de Chillon
June 7th, 2018 at 19h30

Château de Prangins
June 8th & 9th, 2018 at 19h30
Schloss Oberhofen
June 20th, 2018 at 19h30

(Open-air performance in English – rain or shine event). Tickets are now available at www.adg-europe.eventbrite.com at Sfr. 27.--/ Sfr. 37.-- and Sfr. 45.



SET DESIGN WITH CATHERINE HARARI

by Rick Vincent

A set is meant to catch the eye, draw an audience into the world of the play, spark the imagination and suspend belief. Catherine Harari has been doing that for many years, designing sets with GEDS for some incredible productions. Some of the spectacular sets she has designed include *Relative Values*, *Dancing At Lughnasa*, *God of Carnage*, *The Little Foxes*, *Blithe Spirit*, *The Rivals*, with more than 20 over the years. Recently, I had a chance to catch up with her and talk about how an idea sparks to life before the hammers begin driving in nails.

Rick Vincent (RV): How did you get interested in set design?

Catherine Harari (CH): I come from an artistic family. I was involved in a lot of things, mostly drawing and painting. Later in life I discovered interior design and took a private course. I got involved with GEDS through my husband who wanted to act. I thought there was good



acting and great plays, but I was not so impressed with the sets they had at the time. In GAOS, there was a gentleman

named George Krasker who was very good at set design and building and taught me the important things about the

stage and the pitfalls you have to be aware of. It's not just about having a good idea, you need to know if you can make

it work and how it can work so everyone is safe. Even though through all my youth I had the opportunity to see everything

that came on stage in Paris, George taught me how to be around the stage.

RV: How does an idea come to you?

CH: First, you read the play and speak with the director to see what he/she has in mind. Then you look at the stage you have to work with. You get all the technical information. If a show needs an impressive staircase, which we cannot have because of the stage dimensions and the height limitations, you have to look for ways to trick the eye. What you must keep in mind, always, is that even though your imagination needs to be free, you have to understand your technical limitations. Once you have a plan ready, and it is agreed, then I make elevation drawings which means each flat drawn with its dimensions. This will help the Chippendales (the GEDS set builders) in their work. Then comes the model which needs to be scaled and accurate. Any problems you may have overlook will show up there. The model can also

SET DESIGN WITH CATHERINE HARARI

by Rick Vincent

help the actors imagine the space they will be moving in.

RV: How do you handle plays with multiple sets?

CH: I try to stay away from those, but many modern plays require this type of staging, so I try to find one space that works for everything, or find a way to use multiple sets without complicating, slowing down the pace of the play.

RV: Where do you come up with some of your ideas?

CH: Oh, many places. Sometimes magazines. Advertisements in magazines are a great source for ideas. Keep looking around you and you'll notice lots of good (or bad) ideas. Of course nowadays, the internet is a great place for looking at past plays. You take any ideas you want but you have to be careful not to just copy. The fun is creating your own designs.

RV: What were your favourite sets to design that came closest to your intended

Model from *Dancing At Lughnasa*



realization? What about the set made it special for you?

CH: I must have designed around twenty sets, so it is difficult to choose. I liked the very first set I designed for *Death and the Maiden*, the various sets for Noel Coward plays as I love the period and the elegance called by

them. The last one, *Relative Values*, turned out to be a real challenge for the Chippendales and they rose to the occasion, building a very elaborate set and making it work on stage. It is always a very special moment when an image you have been carrying in your mind for weeks and months,

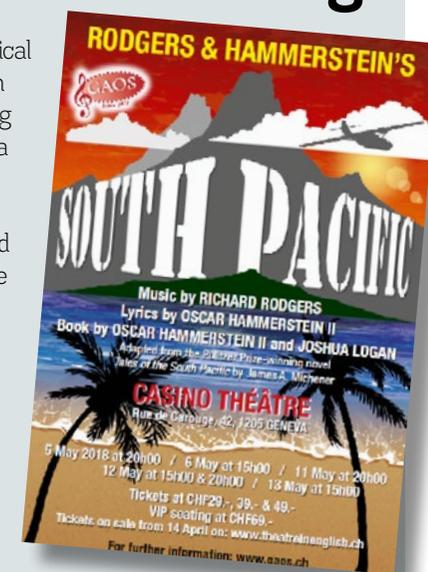
finally becomes reality on stage. You look at it and think "Yes!" It's almost like a magic trick, and it makes me feel like I want to start again on a new project, forgetting all the difficulties we had met along the way. I guess it is what anybody involved in the miracle of theatre feels.

South Pacific coming

On an exotic tropical island in French Polynesia during the Second World War, a young Navy nurse from Little Rock, Arkansas, Nellie Forbush, meets and falls in love with Emile De Becque, a gallant, middle-aged French plantation owner.

However, she has second thoughts upon discovering that he's fathered two children with a Polynesian woman. Meanwhile, a beautiful, innocent Tonkinese girl, Liat, has captured the heart of Lieutenant Joseph Cable, USMC—although he confesses that he could never marry her. Liat's mother is the infamous and enterprising "Bloody Mary". When Emile and Cable set off on a secret mission to an enemy-held island, Nellie struggles to overcome her prejudices—fearing that Emile may not return alive.

Based on James Michener's prize-winning book *Tales of the South Pacific*, Richard Rodgers' and Oscar Hammerstein's masterpiece contains many of their best-loved songs. With a live orchestra, the musical *South Pacific* is brought to you by GAOS.



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST, REVIEW

by Geneva Holloman

The *Importance of Being Earnest* is one of Oscar Wilde's finest literary achievements. Sub-titled "A trivial comedy for serious people," this witty play explores themes of social class and reputation in high Victorian society, which has been updated slightly in this production to the late Edwardian era.

The show centers around two friends, John Worthing and Algernon Moncrief, who attempt to avoid their social

obligations by pretending to be a madeup person by the name of Earnest. In love with a woman named Gwendolen Fairfax, John aka "Jack" proposes (as Earnest), but his marriage is forbidden by Gwendolen's mother, Lady Bracknell, apparently, due to his low birth. Algernon (as Earnest) then proposes to the countryside coquette Cecily Cardew, who is John's lovely ward in the country. After several confusing and hilarious

situations, the truth is revealed: the two men are actually brothers and John's birth name is Earnest, which means that the two couples can be together at last.

Angus Macdonald and Christopher Walters seemed naturals in their parts as John and Algernon; their stage chemistry was delightful to watch, particularly in the 'muffin' scene. Macdonald and Walters' terrific chemistry and comedic timing carried



the show. Gillian Barmes' seductive yet refined Gwendolen gave a nice contrast to Emily Boyle's sweet natured portrayal of Cecily. I particularly enjoyed Mrs. Barmes' "vibrations" speech in the parlor, as well as the coy flirtation between Mary Stuttard's Miss Prism and Tim Goodyear's Rev Chasuble.

Francis Favre gave a wonderful performance as the imperious Lady Bracknell, whose stuffy, opinionated banter poked fun at Victorian standards of love and marriage. Martin Walthall and Stuart Hartley were delightful

as the pair of long suffering country and city servants.

The set is characteristically ornate with porcelain teacups, gorgeous furniture and lush garden rooms. The ragtime music and creative use of spotlighting lighting on the vintage suitcases to signify transition scenes between the city and the country.

Liz Comstock Smith's beautifully handmade, Edwardian costumes were perhaps the most vibrant and breathtaking part of this production. She nodded to the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act by designing costumes

for the actors by using colors of "The Women's Social and Political Union: White (for Purity), Green (for Hope) and Purple (for dignity,)"

In today's context, where does the GEDS' 2018 production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* push boundaries or limits? Overall, the cast was lovely, and I did recommend it to family and friends. I particularly enjoyed the turn of the century ambiance, costumes and music in the show. I am happy to see Jenny Buffle cast a show with performers of varied ages, but where is the cultural diversity? While I understand that this play is about making fun of the frivolous lives of the Victorian British upper class, why must the Genève theater scene be so conservative and traditional in their casting?

It is my hope that next season will take advantage of the new talent and rich diversity within our GEDS community. After all, a wise man named Wilde once said that "the truth is rarely pure and never simple."



PLAYREADING CORNER

Uptown, Rue de la Servette 2, 1201 Genève.
Doors open at 19:00; performances start at 19:30

PLAYREADINGS IN REVIEW

10 APRIL

GEDS writes

arranged by David Lewis

On Tuesday 10 April, from 7:30 pm, Uptown will witness the premières of six playlets written and arranged by GEDS members.

A Practical Pork Pie - A couple of hungry actors bicker in the Green Room (Richard Penny)

The Breakfast - Gregory's life changes when Laura walks into Nina's Berlin café (Anjishnu Bandyopadhyay)

Money doesn't talk, it swears - A man, a woman, a dollar bill: the Eternal Triangle (Gary Bird)

Generation Gap - Susan brings Antony to meet her parents. Will Rex agree to their marriage? (David Lewis)

Golden Years - Hannah's fear of rejection is reignited by the arrival of a long-awaited letter (Elena Finkh)

The Waiting Room - An absurdist comedy in the waiting room of a London vet (Bill Lloyd).

Come and support our budding Ayckbourns, Albees and Pinters!

24 APRIL

Roundelay

by Alan Ayckbourn

arranged by Beverley Rousset

Ayckbourn explores the ways in which various personalities react to the situation they find themselves in, and we are invited to look at humorous, moving, tense, and hard to believe moments in the lives of a novelist, a politician, a judge and a theatrical agent.

First performed in 2014, Ayckbourn shows he is still looking for different ways of giving the public an evening to enjoy.



Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw

arranged by Frances Favre, February 6

We all know about George Bernard Shaw and his plays: lengthy, verbose and with a strong axe to grind, generally about a social situation which has now become dated. Well, in 1894 he wrote what George Orwell called the wittiest and lightest of his plays.

This is *Arms and the Man*, the nearest he ever came to writing a short romantic comedy whose only message is that war is not a glorious affair. When I set myself the task of arranging a reading of this play I feared that I would have to cut it drastically to fit into our evening, but was delighted to find that it lasts well under two hours. With the benefit of a strong and enthusiastic cast the reading was a great success and much



appreciated by the audience.

Agnes of God by John Pielmeier

arranged by Geneva Holloman, February 20

Agnes of God opened on Broadway at The Music Box Theater

on March 30th, 1982. John Pielmeier's play follows the story of a young nun who gives birth and is accused of murdering her newborn. Dr. Martha Livingstone and Mother Miriam Ruth Superior clash during the resulting investigation. Who killed the infant and who fathered the tiny victim? Dr. Livingstone's questions force all three women to re-examine the meaning of faith, religion and

miracles in the modern world. Starring Viki Lazar, Liz Comstock-Smith and Andrea Ogbonna-James. I first came across this play several years ago when studying theater at Studio ACT in San Francisco. In light of #MeToo, Time's Up and The Women's March on Washington, I became more passionate about women's issues. When selecting plays for the 2018 GEDS play reading series, I was happy

PLAYREADINGS IN REVIEW



to discover that *Agnes of God* passes the Bechdel test. "What is the Bechdel test?" I'm so glad you asked. Bechdel is a widely acclaimed test used by feminists and academics alike to ask if a work of fiction features 1) at least two named women characters in it 2) who talk to each other 3) about something besides a man. There are women on stage and on screen, but the depth of their stories and relationships with each other are very rarely

explored, and women of color are especially marginalized.

Agnes of God is a wonderful play for actresses that asks provocative questions. There is a huge gender imbalance in the arts industry, which contributes to the lack of opportunities for women. It is my dream as a theatre artist to challenge this gender inequality by producing more plays that explore fully rounded, dynamic roles for women of all ages and cultural backgrounds.

A Butterfly Echo by Roderick Vincent

arranged by Roderick Vincent,
March 6th

Warren Buffet once said, "You only find out who is swimming naked when the tide goes out." This was in reference to stock markets,



but needless to say, it applies to presenting one's own play. Now, double the trepidation for a playreading. Will the words come off the page the way intended? Will the acting accurately portray the characters as envisioned? So when the tide went out March 6th, I have to admit, it was with a held breath, as I wasn't exactly sure if I had my pants on or not.

Playreadings aren't meant to be perfect. Things certainly

won't go perfectly, and really, shouldn't, but it is how they shouldn't which makes all of the difference in my humble opinion. A missed line—okay move on. A flubbed cue, move on, etc.

What I wanted to see was acting, and that meant action and reaction with script in hand, and not so much a static reading of a script with little interaction between the characters. I'm not a fan of mime either. I like props

to help spark an audience's imagination. The main prop this time was a sculpture, and I worked with a sculptor I know on the whole project. A big thanks goes to Agnieszka Gorla for creating this and speaking to me about art, and the craft of sculpture, and in essence, helping me find this play.

But back to the tide. . . I was so proud of my cast March 6th. The rehearsal the night before left me feeling confident

PLAYREADINGS IN REVIEW

I wouldn't be left skinny dipping, but the performance was simply miles above it. It was quite obvious they worked hard on it, and for that, I want to thank them from the bottom of my heart. Each one of them fit into their characters as I intended, and that was extremely rewarding artistically. There were also surprises. Some of their improvisation led to things I didn't expect. There was an absorption of character from the audience, and part of that absorption made it funnier and lighter than I expected.

Even though this is a somewhat dark play, their action created light moments that helped counterbalance it. For example, as the audience becomes to understand Selina's (played by Lena Blohm) character, her grumbings—her eeks and awkkks and “pukes”—became organically funny. While Miles (played by Jona Zeschke) had a funny side in the text, the audience absorbed his objectives, and as they saw right through him, his actions became laughable.

Lesley Sherwood put in a truly emotional performance as Chantal, a woman with cancer slighted by her husband, Thomas. Randy Grodman had the difficult job of taking on a very unlikeable character, and he nailed all of the tricky nuances of 'Thomas' different angles. Lance Newhart played the chip-on-your-shoulder, stepfather Drew (a man unlucky and slighted by the art world's fickleness) boldly and arrogantly, exactly as intended.

The cast has also helped me figure out where changes need to occur, and the script does need editing. So again, thanks guys, you made this an incredibly special night for me, and I hope to work with you all soon.

The Goat by Edward Albee

arranged by Charles
Slovenski, March 20

The *Goat* by Edward Albee opened on Broadway in 2002. Even with a new,



modern viewpoint intersecting with the millennium, *The Goat* pushes all sorts of boundaries posing the question, “what is acceptable?” Bestiality, homosexuality, and paedophilia are all explored.

Larry Wagner played the main character Martin celebrating his 50th birthday as confused and self-reflecting as he recounts the story of how he fell in love with a goat to his wife Stevie (played by

Cathy Boyle). Married for over twenty years, slighted Stevie discovers Martin's transgression into bestiality through a letter sent by Martin's friend Ross (played by David Lewis). Eventually, she goes ballistic and litters the stage with upturned chairs and magazines.

Their gay, teenage son Billy (played by Daire O'Doherty) gets in the middle of it but is childishly sent to his room.

Eventually, Billy confronts his father in a touching scene of reconciliation, but in the confusion, kisses him. Ross walks in on it, and once again liberal boundaries are challenged.

There can only be one resolution to this skein of sexual confusion and distress, and that is when Stevie drags in the trash bag with the remains of “What is Silvia” – Rick Vincent



National Theatre Live at Balexert

Macbeth, Thursday May 10th, directed by Rufus Norris (The Threepenny Opera, London Road), starring Rory Kinnear (Young Marx, Othello) and Anne-Marie Duff (Oil, Suffragette) return to the National Theatre to play Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

See <http://ntlive.nationaltheatre.org.uk/venues/5000004552-pathe-balexert-geneva> for details.

New and Returning Members

GEDS welcomes the following new and returning members signing up recently: Wenona Arndt, Carolann Quart, Will Ramsay, Gurjaint Singh,

Arianna Brambilla, Wouter van Ginneken.

Renegade Saints: Fast, Funny, Made Up.

Thursday, April 12, 8pm (doors open at 7:30), Mr. Pickwick's Pub, 80 rue de Lausanne, 10 CHF. The Renegade Saints perform fast and funny

improvised comedy based on your suggestions, so you direct the show from the comfort of your chair. Join us at Pickwick's to see some familiar GEDS faces onstage - without a script!

If you'd like to give it a shot yourself, why not join the Saints at their next free drop-in, on Sunday, April 22 at 11am at Pickwick's (register here) or plunge right in to a class from mid-April on. For any questions or to sign up, email hello@renegadesaints.ch.

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