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IT'S THE 2013 PERI'S...

...AND THE WINNERS ARE:

Peridot's Annual End of the Year Celebration, the **Peri Awards Night**, was held at the Unicorn on Sunday December 1 and everyone who had contributed in some way to this year's presentations, the directors, production assistants, casts, backstage and technical crews, the sets, costumes and props people, those hardworking and lovely Front of House people and more, were invited to come along for our big night to celebrate another fine year of theatre.

The high point was the presentation of the Awards and, with another four excellent, very well-received and varied productions, it was not an easy task for our three adjudicators **Marion Egerton, Doug Bennett** and **Raleigh Robinson**, and our thanks go to them for their hard work.

As a reminder, the four plays this year were "**Busybody**" by Jack Popplewell, directed by Loretta Bishop (February), "**Nunsense**" by Dan Goggin, directed by Frank McCarty (May), "**The Wisdom of Eve**" by Mary Orr, directed by Annette De Boer (August) and "**Easy Virtue**" by Noël Coward, directed by Horrie Leek (November)

And the Awards:

****For the Graham Fletcher Award for Excellence from an Actor in a Leading Role**, the nominations were:

Glenn Baker (*Busybody*), Michael Knowles (*The Wisdom of Eve*), Chris Hodson and Blake Stringer (*Easy Virtue*); and the winner was **Michael Knowles**

****For the Billie Russell Award for Excellence from an Actress in a Leading Role**, the Nominations were:

Pat Alcock (*Busybody*), Phillippa Adgemis, Angela Ellis and Jenny Kellaway (*Nunsense*), Julie Arnold, Amy Jenkins and Denise Wellington (*The Wisdom of Eve*), Cate Dowling Trask and Alayne Wright (*Easy Virtue*); and the winner was **Julie Arnold**

****For the Award for Excellence from an Actor in a Supporting Role**, the nominations were:

Damian Clancy and Michael Knowles (*Busybody*), Peter Fowler and Gary Rens (*The Wisdom of Eve*) and Andrew Ferguson (*Easy Virtue*); and the winner was **Andrew Ferguson**

****For the Award for Excellence from an Actress in a Supporting Role**, the nominations were:

Fiona Carter and Claire Hanley (*Busybody*), Kirsten Page (*The Wisdom of Eve*), Jackie Fraser, Nicky Neville-Jones and Asja Sarajlic (*Easy Virtue*); and the winner was:
Claire Hanley

ADJUDICATORS TECHNICAL AWARDS

The Nominations were:

Busybody –

Set Dressing - *Chris Bartle and Helen McIntosh*

Nunsense –

Choreography – *Di Crough*

Costumes – *Helen McIntosh*

Musical execution and performance by the band – *Martin Pascal-Murray, Ian Carlsson, Andy Griffith and Michael Taylor*

The Wisdom of Eve –

Costumes – *Helen McIntosh and Chris Bartle*

Lighting – *Jason Bovaird and Deryk Hartwick*

Sound Design - *Simon Ulrich*

Easy Virtue –

Costumes – *Chris Bartle*

Set Design, Realisation and Dressing – *Horrie Leek and Helen McIntosh*

...and the winners:

** Execution and performance by the band (good musically and good integration of their performance into the show) in **Nunsense** - *Martin Pascal-Murray, Ian Carlsson, Andy Griffith and Michael Taylor*

Excellent lighting defined the set areas and made the set work, changing from dressing room, the house interior and outdoors in **The Wisdom of Eve – *Jason Bovaird and Deryk Hartwick*

Authenticity and attention to period detail in the costumes worn in **Easy Virtue – *Chris Bartle*

And the Big Ones...

**The Gaye Gay Award for Excellence in Direction:

Horrie Leek - Easy Virtue

**The Peridot Award for Excellence in Production

EASY VIRTUE

The following Awards were also presented:

Management Award For outstanding contribution to Peridot in 2012: Bill Rendall

Paragon Award Awarded to one of our wonderful volunteers for an exceptional contribution during 2012: Marion Egerton

The Billie Russell Encourage Award: Lachlan O'Connor

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE WINNERS AND NOMINEES AND TO EVERYONE WHO HELPED MAKE IT ANOTHER GREAT YEAR AT PERIDOT. LOOKING FORWARD TO ANOTHER BIG YEAR IN 2014!

Review: "Easy Virtue" by Noël Coward

Congratulations, Peridot!

Reviewed for the VDL's Theatrecraft by Bruce Cochrane

If you are not a Noel Coward fan, please read on. At the age of 25 Noel Coward had written his first play in what was to become one of the most prolific and acclaimed careers in theatre and film. When writing his second play *Easy Virtue*, he said that it was intended "to compare the déclassée (liberated) woman of to-day with the more flamboyant demi-mondaine (loose morals sophisticate) of the 1890s". So although seemingly light years ahead of its time as a feminist statement, this play was actually reflecting a movement well underway in some circles which made for really interesting female characters.

Despite not being considered a comedy I found this to be a 'laugh out loud' piece interspersed with some combative dialogue that produced an entertaining two hours and some unexpected pleasures. It would be easy to say that, as a period piece, it was a visual treat with sparkling dialogue and leave it at that, but Director Horrie Leek had added many tasteful touches to this production. Delightfully bookended by the butler (Ron Paddon) who opened the show from front of house and closed it from the same, there was a freshness and spontaneity about it. Working from Horrie's design, he, Helen McIntosh and Damian Jones had fashioned as beautiful a box set as you could hope to see with just the right balance of set dressing. Chris Bartle's costumes represented many hours work resulting in well-fitted authentic clothes including some beautiful dresses, particularly for the party scene. The result was quite spectacular and was complemented by a fine choice of music (Bruce Parr) and a lighting plot (Gordon Boyd) which produced some colourful and mood-changing effects

The principal character, Larita (Alayne Wright), arrives to a largely hostile reception from her much younger new husband's family and proceeds to engage in verbal sparring with Mrs Whittaker (Cate Dowling Trask) and sisters Hilda (Asja Sarajlic) and Marion (Jackie Fraser.) The exception is the father, Colonel Whittaker, played with aplomb by Chris Hodson, who, as result of his refusal to join the condemnation of Larita's background and outspoken views, is at odds with the women in the family. Later as guests arrive we find that John, the immature son (Blake Stringer), is in two minds about former fiancée, Sarah (Nicky Neville-Jones), while she is surprisingly supportive of Larita who may have been a cause for disdain. Hence one of the main pleasures in the writing is the unpredictability of attitudes that defy the stereotypes often portrayed in comedy or satire.

Alayne Wright, as Larita, gave a well-judged performance, shifting mood from extroverted society girl to troubled outsider. Her expression, gestures and delivery were those of an experienced and suitably confident actress who truthfully takes on her character. Cate Dowling Trask projected with strength and precision as the mother who has always been over-protective of her son, and Cate ensured that she was never just reciting. In the family argument with Larita, these two plus Chris as

the father with a liberal philosophy, provided a spirited war of words. Jackie Fraser was suitably uptight as the older sister, and Asja Sarajlic had an appealing naiveté as Hilda, the younger sister. As John, the only son who the women of the family want to protect, Blake Stringer looked more awkward and uncomfortable than necessary with hands in pockets a lot and tentative when kissing his wife. With more experience Blake will be able to claim his space more confidently. Nicky Neville-Jones was pert and assertive, and Andrew Ferguson carried off his 'lounge lizard' persona convincingly.

In a cast of 17 there were many supporting roles, some non-speaking but all of which were well executed, providing an even representation of events and characters. Congratulations to all concerned for a successful production of what has been a mostly neglected play.



Cate Dowling Trask and Alayne Wright, the two combatants in "Easy Virtue"

Photo by Annette De Boer

We'll have a few more photos next month,

A couple more comments:

"We just wanted to say how much we enjoyed the production of "Easy Virtue" and to comment on the magnificent set. Looking forward to 2014!

Al & Maggy Morris".

*

"We liked to say how much we enjoyed the last play, we all thought it was one the best performances we had been to by everyone in the play. The sets were fantastic; we don't know how you do it, well done to all who helped to put the show on".

A message from Stephen Clifton who regularly organizes a large group to come and see our plays.

Behind the scenes at Peridot

“That’s a Lovely Set...!” we often hear from our audiences. But how did it get there? Alison Knight explains...



Over the last couple of months, we’ve been trying to give our Gems readers some insights into what goes on at Peridot in addition to the productions we all enjoy watching, such as the Directors’ Forum and the Play Readings. This month, let’s take a look into the world of set building.

A cleverly designed and well-built set enhances a production. So, how does it all come about? To find out, I put some questions to our doyenne of all things practical, Helen McIntosh, who, along with the multi-talented Damian Jones, oversees the set builds.

First of all, the set needs to be designed. Generally, the director comes up with a concept and then may engage a set designer to create a scale drawing or model to bring that concept to fruition. Obviously, the set needs to reflect the period and social setting of the play. However, the design also has to take into account other factors, such as the size of the stage (the Peridot stage is wider than average) and the number of entry and exit points required for the cast. It’s also important to look at “sight lines” – making sure that the audience can see the actors on stage but not those waiting in the wings! Additionally, the design has to take into consideration any scene changes and how these may be effected as quickly as possible in order to retain the momentum of the production. The set for “*Easy Virtue*” was relatively simple. “A Chorus of Disapproval”, on the other hand, required multiple settings which were achieved by the use of revolving flats, with different scenery painted on different faces. And who could forget the full sized caravan we had in ... what was it called? ... ah, yes! ... “*Caravan*”?

Once the requirements are known, set construction begins and this is where we seek help from the Peridot community. Helen has compiled a check list over the years to ensure that the set build runs smoothly. Generally, she says, you start with the flats which create the walls and any rostra. Once these are in place, you have the basis of your set. Helen and/or Damian assess what size rostra and what width flats are required, and where the doors and windows need to go. Those volunteers with carpentry skills then assemble these as directed. Raleigh Robinson, now in his eighties, is one of our highly skilled volunteers and is seen at many a set build, kitted out with his tool-belt and doing sterling work. Those of us who are all fingers and thumbs (or who would probably be minus their fingers and thumbs if engaged in sawing or hammering) are gainfully employed on other tasks, such as painting the flats and architraves. Heather Maplesden is our “grotting” queen. That’s not a technical term, by the way; Helen coined it to describe the process whereby the freshly painted surfaces are given that “lived in” look.

Meanwhile, appropriate furniture and props need to be sourced. It’s really important to have the right doorknobs and telephones, for instance! Peridot has a good collection of furniture stored at that nearby treasure trove, Fleigner Hall. This furniture sometimes needs attention; for example, a battered table can be given a new lease of life when sanded and revarnished. Brown shoe polish can be used to touch up scratches. Occasionally Helen sources particular items on e-bay and resells them afterwards if no longer required. Anyone interested in purchasing the very nice three-piece suite used in “*Easy Virtue*”?

What goes up must come down. Bump Out occurs on the Sunday morning after the last performance. With the help of the Lions Club of South Vermont, we disassemble the set, stack the flats and rostra in our school store and return the furniture to Fleigner Hall. We clean and tidy the theatre, ready for the next director and cast to start rehearsing.

Set build is such a companionable and constructive way to spend a few hours. Did I mention food? All our volunteers sit down to a good lunch together and share a laugh. There’s a real “feel-good” factor when you contribute to something as tangible as a set for a production which will be seen and enjoyed by many. So maybe when the next show swings into production, you might like to come along and join us? Please do!

There’s “*The Hallelujah Girls*” coming up in February...! Want to help?

...and a bit more from Alison

More Play Readings coming up soon.

Apart from all her other pursuits, Alison is also Peridot’s Play Reading Guru and she wants to let you know that play readings for our second production in 2014, *Heroes*, will be held at the theatre on Wednesday January 29 at 7.30pm when you can enjoy being part of the great Tom Stoppard’s adaption of the original French script by Gérald Sibleyras

Also coming up in February will be readings of the three plays which will form our mid-year One Act Play Season, *In by the Half* by Jimmie Chin, *No Strings* by John Tilbrook and *Peter Stone* by the ubiquitous Alison Knight. Lots of roles to read out loud, this will be held on February 26th at the theatre. All welcome, and no charge!

For more information you can contact Alison on a8knight@bigpond.net.au

Peridot at the VDL Awards.

The Annual Victorian Drama League Awards Night (and End-of-Year Bash) was held on Sunday December 8 and a good time was had by all. Twenty-five theatre companies entered a play in the 2013 awards (our entry was *The Wisdom of Eve*, splendidly directed for us by Annette De Boer) and, in view of the quality of the competition this year, we did very well to receive three nominations:

Best Actress in a Drama for a Lead Role – Julie Arnold

Best actress in a Minor Role – Kirsten Page

Best Lighting Design in a Drama – Jason Bovaird and Deryk Hartwick.

Congratulations and thanks to everyone involved in putting together such an excellent production

Farewell, Anne

In last month's "Gems" we sadly mentioned the passing of our good friend Anne Rendall, a multi talented crafts lady. We have our own brilliant costumer at Peridot in Chris Bartle, a close friend of Anne's for many years, and Chris penned this tribute for the VDL's November "Theatrecraft":



Anne Rendall was a very special lady. She was what every theatre needs: talented in a variety of handcrafting skills such as dressmaking, hat making, doll making, prop making, and being gifted with the best memory of anyone I had ever met – very useful when trying to track down the whereabouts of a lost prop or costume, or an actor whom she had worked with 20 years ago.

She also held very strong views on injustice and prejudice, and would have been perfectly at home chained to railings during the suffragette movement! She did join the Greenham Common protests about nuclear disarmament. She had a very dry sense of humour, which suited my Liverpool-bred habit of reading a double meaning into everything, so a conversation with Anne was never boring!

I have to admit that the craft skill which I admired most was her doll-making. No Barbie doll dress-up for her; she went to classes and learned to make the whole doll, down to fine wire inside the fingers, beautifully painted faces and incredible hairstyles. The two I saw her make was an elfin figure and a Moulin Rouge dancer. The elfin doll looked ethereal, like something out of *Lord of the Rings*, and the Moulin Rouge doll even had fishnet stockings and ostrich feathers. I told her many times that she could make a good living out of making these, but to her the joy was in the finished product, then on to something new.

Anne's regular contribution to every Encore production was to make everyone in the cast or the crew a tiny bear dressed in appropriate costume, except for her second-last production, when she made everyone a tiny Kewpie doll in a frilly skirt on a stick for *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* in spite of being very unwell. Even then she didn't give in, and insisted on making lots of little "footie" bears for Encore's last production, *the Club*, not being prepared to give in even then. I shall treasure mine.

Anne Rendall will be very greatly missed by all who knew her. Our hearts go out to her husband Bill, who cared for her so well when she could do longer be her independent self.

Goodbye my dear friend.

...the last word

A few odd little facts about Theatre...

The longest play-title ever is *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis of Sade*, (The Critic Alan Brien claimed to have asked someone if he had seen the play and received the response: 'No, but I read the title'). The play, which became known as *The Marat-Sade* was originally staged by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre in London in 1964. The second-longest play title is *Oh Dad, Poor Dad, Mama's Hung You In The Closet and I'm Feeling So Sad* by Arthur Kopit

In the same year as they staged *The Marat-Sade*, the RSC also presented a play with perhaps the shortest title ever, *Eh* by Henry Livings. However, we should point out that two Peridot stalwarts, Stephen and Michelle Barber, produced, and Stephen

directed, a play staged in the form of a scripted reading by the American writer Dustin Lance Black at the Chapel off Chapel in Prahran last January, which was titled simply '8', so perhaps they can now claim the record!

*

The longest consecutive performance in a single role was given by James O'Neill, the father of Eugene O'Neill, who played *The Count of Monte Cristo* over 6000 times from 1883 to 1891, and he returned to the role again occasionally in later years.

*

The record for opening and closing a door in a West End show belongs to a lady called Julie Rutherford. As Stage Manager of a play called *Anyone for Denis* at the Whitehall Theatre, she had to open and close a sliding door 54 times during each performance. The show ran from May 7, 1981 to 22 May, 1982, so during nine previews and 381 performances, she opened and closed the door 20,592 times. (This proves that working backstage in a West End show does open doors in the theatrical profession!). The *Denis* in the play's title was in fact Denis Thatcher and Margaret Thatcher was also a character in the play, played by Angela Thorne.

*

Everyone knows *The Mousetrap* is the longest running play in theatrical history (now well over sixty years in London) but it is not generally known that it was also the first play to be performed to an audience of entirely deaf people, on May 14, 1981. Interpreters at the side of the stage translated the play into sign language.

*

Bet you didn't know that a play written by a Pope was once staged in London's West End. It was *The Jeweller's Shop*, which opened at the Westminster Theatre on May 25, 1982, three days before its author, John Paul II arrived on a pastoral visit to Britain. Written in 1960 when he was auxiliary Bishop of Krakow, the play was written under his birth name of Karol Wojtyla and consisted of a series of interwoven monologues about marriage. At its opening, there was much speculation about whether the play would get an audience, but apparently it did all right, and was also filmed, in 1989 with Burt Lancaster in the lead role.

Karol Wojtyla was involved with the theatre; as a student of literature, then priest, bishop and archbishop, he acted, directed, wrote dramatic criticism, made a Polish translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, and actually wrote six plays.

*

The smallest theatre in the world (called precisely that) seats an audience of two, with one squatting on the other's lap. It was begun in 1972, designed by Marcel Steiner and built on a 650cc Russian-made Neval motorbike, and has travelled to many countries, with a repertoire including *Ben Hur*, *The Guns of Navarone* and *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. It once played *The Tempest* in the car park of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, while the RSC were performing the same play inside the main building!

*

Then there was this young actor who appeared with the great English actor and director Sir Donald Wolfit in *Macbeth* for several seasons. As the messenger he only had one line, running on and crying 'My lord, the Queen is dead'. After repeatedly, but unsuccessfully, asking Wolfit for a more demanding role, in disgust one evening, instead of his usual one line, he rushed on stage and cried 'My Lord, the Queen is much better and is even now at dinner'

That'll do for this month. I'm out of here

