

BARN THEATRE

NEWS

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PACEY, POLISHED, PROFESSIONAL AND SUCH GOOD FUN TOO, THE BARNSTORMERS THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE



Sadly I didn't get to see the Donmar Warehouse production of the award-winning *25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* in 2011. It was therefore, a huge relief that my first experience of this hilarious musical comedy was produced to such a high standard for the amateur stage this week by Richard Allen's exceptional Surrey-based company, The Barnstormers.

Formed just fifteen years ago The Barnstormers enjoy sharing their productions with Oxted's splendidly equipped and aesthetically gorgeous Barn Theatre – as is the case this week – and Cornwall's legendary Minack Theatre, where the group was the first-ever touring company to win the 'Minack Trophy' (outstanding Minack production of the year) on consecutive visits (*Jesus Christ Superstar* - 2010 and *Parade* - 2013).

A successful production always starts with a visionary Director. The next step, which was supported after the show by *Spelling Bee's* Director Richard Allen, is in the casting – in fact he would rather cite the assembling of a good cast as the MOST important factor. Either way, there is no question that he's pulled out all the stops putting together this week's talented line-up. It's not everyday you sit down to an amateur show only to read in the programme notes that nearly half the cast are graduates of some of the country's top drama/dance schools. But that only brings me back to my earlier comment and the attraction of working with a good Director.

Of course, the show's got to be good too. *Spelling Bee*, not surprisingly, was first produced on Broadway and focuses on the curiously popular and competitive American phenomenon of children's spelling competitions. Such events have been popular in the States for years and are organised with strict rules on a national scale. *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee* sees half a dozen dysfunctional 12-year-olds competing for the local competition which has been organised and run by an ex-spelling bee champion (now the town's top realtor), and the Vice Principal of the Putnam Valley High School where the competition is being held. Throw in a local tearaway to help out as part of his Community Service and your cast is complete.

William Finn's funny and, at times, touching music and lyrics make good companions to Rachel Sheinkin's witty book offering an eclectic mix of characters and comedy for any group of intelligent performers to dive into. The result, from The Barnstormers, is nothing short of genius and was given even more added value when four members of the audience were press-ganged into swelling the numbers of onstage competitors to ten – blushes almost turned to fear when the unfortunate quartet even had to join in and compete, with hilarious results as the organisers made fun of them through a mix of ad-libbing and the show's script.

I would easily turn this review into an essay if I gave all nine actors the mentions and plaudits they all thoroughly deserve, so you'll have to take it from me when I say the onstage chemistry between the whole ensemble (and it is very much an ensemble piece) is wonderfully evident in a display of great performances across the board ...But I would be doing a real injustice if I didn't at least mention the talents of Elizabeth Skinner and Paul Longhurst as the Spelling Bee organisers, Rona Lisa Peretti and V.P. Panch – as well as some very funny moments both together and individually, Skinner in particular also brings a lovely vocal performance to her role.

Secondly, I loved watching Dominic Binefa and Emma Saunders as young spelling bees William Barfée and Marcy Park. For me these two really stood out with two incredible and completely believable characterisations. Binefa's portrayal of the over-confident smart-alec Barfée had the audience in stitches throughout the entire evening. This is the third time I've seen and reviewed Binefa now and each time he's impressed in completely different role types. As with Binefa's natural talent for comedy, Saunders' professionalism and versatility shines through in everything she does and it was no surprise to read this performer has graduated from Epsom's prestigious Laine Theatre Arts with a Trinity Diploma in Professional Musical Theatre.

A final word goes to MD Colin Warnock's highly polished five-piece band who delivered a faultless and thoroughly professional accompaniment throughout.

Good work, Barnstormers. I'm very much looking forward to seeing lots more in the future.

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Bless Em All

The New Foxtrot Serenaders, "the hottest little big band in the South East", return for their annual visit to the Barn Theatre on Friday 20th March 2015 at 7.45 pm. **Bless 'Em All** is a celebration of the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II featuring songs that helped win the war. From artists such as Glenn Miller, Vera Lynn, Flanagan and Allen to Al Bowlly, Gracie Fields and George Formby, the New Foxtrot Serenaders will perform some of those famous wartime hits. **With special guests, BBC Radio Kent's Harmony Night presenter, Bill Rennells as co-compere and Alice Ellen Wright as vocalist** (see page 2).

Tickets £14 from 01959 561811 or online for card bookings at www.barntheatreoxted.co.uk

PRODIGES OF THE BARN THEATRE

FUTURE STARS OF STAGE, SCREEN AND ORGAN, ALL FROM THE BARN



Many readers will remember **Elena Vinall** playing the role of Gretel in *Sound of Music*, Gad's wife in *Joseph* and in the Oliver company. Ten year old Elena has now won the part of Young Fiona in *Shrek the Musical* in February for the Canterbury month of the national tour of the West End show. Young Fiona has the big solo "I know it's today" that introduces Fiona. St Mary's, School student Elena has just finished the Oxted Players pantomime, *Babes in the*

Wood, after last year playing a dwarf in *Snow White* at the Harlequin. She starts a week of intensive rehearsals for *Shrek* immediately after the panto at the Barn closes. Elena made her first stage appearance at the age of two as Cho Cho San's son to her mother Melanie, who was playing the title role in *Madame Butterfly*, and she also won the final of *Tandridge has Talent* at the age of six. Elena also plays the violin and is working to grade four and will return to the Reigate Strings Orchestra when she is less busy. Elena has been called to audition in the West End for *Matilda*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and is up for *Billy Elliott* in the spring.



Justin Thomas-Verweij's last performance with OOS was in *Copacabana* in 2008 at the age of 16. Justin left college in July 2010 and soon got a contract as a swing with *Dirty Dancing*, touring the UK till July 2012 when he was cast in *Wicked* at the Astoria in the West End. He was there for two years as a swing covering 9 parts every night. Last year he went on to understudy for the lead Fyero and played him for the last two months until October 2014 when he decided to move on to do *Aladdin* at the Shaw The-

atre in Euston for 5 weeks. Justin says he had so much fun and sang "Frozen" whilst flying on his magic carpet. This was until his current contract started with *Mama Mia*. He will be playing Skye, the young lead and is really looking forward to all the travelling. He starts in Liverpool in late February for 4 weeks and then goes to Johannesburg in South Africa for 6 weeks followed by Oman, Tel Aviv, Dublin, Derry, Oostende, Belgium and his family plan to spend Christmas 2015 with him in Luxembourg. Justin will be celebrating his 23rd birthday in Johannesburg.



Alice Ellen Wright is part of a family with a very long history of performing at the Barn. So it was no surprise that at the age of 11, Alice joined Kenley Holiday Workshop and performed in *Me and My Girl* at the Barn. This was followed by *Seussical*, *Kiss Me Kate*, *Les Miserables*, *42nd Street*, *Summer Holiday* and *Oklahoma*, playing various roles including Ado Annie. She also played a lead role in OJOS' very first show *Back to the 80's* in 2008 and played Tallulah in *Bugsy Malone* the following year. She has also been dancing since the age of 3 and per-

formed regularly in shows at the Epsom Playhouse. In 2010 she performed in the Barnstormers' *Jesus Christ Superstar* and in 2013 as Monteen in *Parade*, both in Oxted and at the Minack Theatre in Cornwall. At the age of 16 she went to the BRIT school to study Musical Theatre for two years, where she sang live on BBC Radio

2 and on stage at the Leicester Square Theatre. Then, at 18 she successfully gained a place at Laine Theatre Arts in Epsom, to train in Professional Musical Theatre for three years and will be graduating this summer. She recently sang in Stuart Matthew Price's concert in London and last Christmas performed in her first professional shows over panto season. She will be appearing again at the Barn on Friday 20th March, singing with her father, Graham and the New Foxtrot Serenaders as they perform songs that helped win the war, in the show 'Bless Em All'.



Jeremy Lloyd has had some exciting moments at the Barn, having been introduced by his parents, Lynne & Martin, who both have a long association with the venue, as do Jeremy's grandmother, Jill Perry and did his late grandfather Brian Styles. He first took to the stage at the age of eight as Michael in *Peter Pan* in 2001. One night in his debut role, the cast member playing John fell ill and Jeremy took over the lead role with minutes to spare. After a few years of occasional helping out with stage crew and lighting, he was rehearsal pianist for

Sleeping Beauty in 2007. One night he went to watch the show when it was discovered the band were trapped on the M25 in heavy traffic. With a full house, 14 year old Jeremy stepped up once again to play the piano so the show could go on. Jeremy then played the Keyboard in the band for the following three pantomimes, until he left Caterham School and embarked on a degree at the Royal Academy of Music.

Jeremy's other passion in life is the Organ. At the age of eight, he had begun playing services at St. Peter's Tandridge and he first played for a wedding at the age of 10. Many Barn friends will remember his recital at St. Pauls Cathedral in September 2009 - a prize for winning the organ section of the Croydon Music Festival that year.

In July 2014, after four years of study at the Royal Academy of Music (RAM), Jeremy graduated with a first class Honours Bachelor of Music (BMus) degree. At the beginning of his final year, at the inauguration of the new organ in the Duke's Hall, Jeremy played the opening solo in front of a gathering of discerning, professional organists from across Europe. Earlier this year, he gave an evening recital at St. Peter's Tandridge to raise much needed funds for the church fabric.

In 2011-12, Jeremy was organ scholar at Methodist Central Hall Westminster, where he accompanied and conducted the choir, which included playing for live broadcasts on BBC Radio 4 and Premier Christian Radio, and also appeared on a CD recording of hymns produced on the Priory label.

Jeremy moved from Methodist Central Hall to become organ scholar at the London Oratory, before joining the staff of Peterborough Cathedral as a post-grad organ scholar. Here he will learn the art of cathedral music, and amongst other things, take rehearsals with the junior choir. During Easter 2015, he will be accompanying the cathedral Girls Choir on a tour to The Netherlands.

Jeremy has previously played in concerts in France, Spain, and Germany, and his most recent recital was on the 4th January at Westminster Abbey as part of their regular 30 minute Sunday afternoon recitals. His next solo organ recital will be at Peterborough Cathedral on 15th March 2015 at 5pm followed by Reading Town Hall on 18th March at 1pm. See www.organrecitals.com

Jeremy is an Associate of the Royal College of Organists, and hopefully will gain his Fellowship this year. He is also an Associate of Trinity College London, with a performance diploma in Piano.

Have You Had It Long Madam?

Enjoying art and visiting heritage locations has never been so popular in Britain. Art galleries, museums and heritage sites are busier than ever. Blockbuster exhibitions such as Rembrandt, Turner, Malevich, Veronese and Rubens circulate the world to ever-increasing audiences. Good lecturers are in great demand. Most major TV companies have at least one Arts Channel. Sky HD now has two. The Antiques Road Show is the most popular decorative art show in the world. English Heritage did a survey last month and discovered that taking part in heritage activities makes you happier than taking part in sport.

We are certainly having fun. Our own Limpsfield Decorative and Fine Art Society is one of the largest in Britain. This year is the 40th anniversary of its founding. As part of our celebrations, we have booked the Barn Theatre on Tuesday 2 June 2015 for a special feature. It is called 'Have You Had It Long Madam?' with Hilary Kay and Paul Atterbury, stars of television's Antiques Road Show. It is an affectionate but irreverent insider's view in which Paul and Hilary reveal their favourite behind the scenes secrets and share some surprises including priceless clips and bloomers. Off screen disasters and dramas are exposed and there is a chance to re-live some of the most exciting discoveries from the programme's 30-year run.



We are now opening this wonderful live show to non-members. Tickets are on sale through the Barn Theatre's booking system at £10 each. Allocation is on a first come, first served basis. Come and join us. You will be very welcome. You might decide you would like to join our Society and would be very welcome.

Our Society meets monthly, except in July and August, to enjoy an illustrated lecture on a different arts topic. Recently we have covered painting, sculpture, architecture, ceramics, textiles, art history, archaeology, Japanese garden design, and playing cards – it is whatever takes our interest. We define 'Art' very broadly, decide what we would like to understand better, and choose the best lecturers in the country to talk to us in St Peter's Church Hall in Limpsfield High Street.

We also visit historic houses, gardens, art galleries and museums accompanied by knowledgeable guides. We have occasional Study Days when we want to look at something in more depth and we go on at least one cultural tour/holiday a year, often abroad. Our aim, quite simply, is to explore art and enjoy ourselves whilst doing so!

Note from the Editor

Paul Atterbury is the brother of Frank Atterbury, well known to Barn audiences and winner of Best Actor award at the Southern Counties Drama Festival 2009, the same year that his son Ben won Best Young Actor award too. Obviously a talented lot, these Atterbury's.

Sausage Sunday Again !



Over the last couple of years we have had several Sausage Sunday Clubs which seem to be very popular – all 96 sausages in buns were eaten each time. So, for the April Sunday Club which is also Easter Sunday I shall do the same again and hope we get even more people joining us. Please put 5th April in your diaries now and if you are able to let me (Caro) know you are coming on publicity@barntheatreoxted.co.uk it would be much appreciated so I know how many sausages to buy. If you don't manage to let me know, don't worry, just turn up as I always do a few extra sausages. Veggie sausages are possible as long as you let me know a reasonable amount of time in advance.



Rehearsals for **My Fair Lady** are now underway and although it's early days, I feel I can confidently predict that we could be close to sell out on box office with this perennial favourite, so don't miss the opportunity to see this production, book now on 07530 528094 or online at www.barntheatreoxted.co.uk

Our OJOS production from the 22nd to the 25th July 2015 is the exciting new musical "**Dazzle**". Dazzle tells the story of Poppy Pringle who inherits a run-down seaside funfair. Packed with drama, humour and great songs, Poppy leads the colourful band of fairground children to save it from the bad guys and the bulldozers and restore it to its former glory. Mugatroyd Megarich wants to demolish the Fun Palace and turn it into an office block and shopping centre. But, with excitement and thrills on the way, Poppy leads her fairground friends to victory – to save the Fun Palace and win the day. The show raises the roof everywhere it is performed.

Following the initial meet and greet on Thursday 29th January there will be a workshop/audition session on Sunday 8th Feb from 10am until 6pm at the Hurst Green Community Centre. Please note that timed afternoon audition slots are to be advised and that your child must be a member of the society to audition.

TO ALL ASPIRING TO PROFICIENT TAPPERS!

A reminder that our tap classes, run by Fran Newitt, take place on Tuesdays 6.30–7.30pm at St Peter's Hall, Limpsfield. No previous experience is necessary as the class is split into groups from beginners to proficient. Classes cost £5 per session and are especially important if you plan on auditioning for **42nd Street** as Fran (choreographing) will not have time to teach tap from scratch during rehearsals! All are welcome even if you don't want to audition for **42nd Street**. If you are interested, please contact me on chairman@oxtedoperatic.co.uk

Dena Watts



Another triumph for Angie and her team

Jingle Bell Barn, a joint production between the Barn, St Mary's and Downs Way Schools entertained 500 patrons on December 13th and was a huge success, generating funds for the

Barn and the Schools of £2,800 each. The Barn share will go towards DRIP and the schools are investing in new equipment for the benefit of the pupils. Angie Muscio once again pulled together all the team and participants for this amazing day of fun hosted by the genial David Morgan.

Below is a short note from Sarah Lewis sent to Angie, immediately after the show in December.

Dear Angie,

Thank you for the lovely e-card you sent through. I've been meaning to reply all week but I don't know where the time has gone! Taking part in Jingle Bell Barn was an absolute joy. The children enjoyed themselves so much – and Janet and I have been inundated with parents telling us how brilliant it was. It gave a chance to shine for some of my most vulnerable children – and was well worth all the effort.

Thank you for encouraging me to take part and for making it as easy as possible for us. The Barn Team were amazing - please pass my thanks on to them. I hope you have also been basking in the glory of it all and will enjoy a bit of a break over Christmas

Best wishes

Sarah Lewis, St Mary's and Downs Way School.

Dressing Room Improvement Project

Fundraising for DRIP continues apace and those little red buckets have already raised over £4,688 in loose change from retirement collections. We are confident that with additional monies from donations and fundraising shows, together with an input from the theatre's cash reserves we will be able to plan our start of Phase One works for September 2015, as always hoped.



“Because I’m happy, clap along if you know what happiness is to you; Because I’m happy, clap along if you feel like that’s what you want to do.” These are closing lines from the Pharell Williams’s “Happy” song which we performed as the finale of our panto *Babes in the Wood* and without fail the singing and clapping from the cast and audience echoed around the theatre. And what a very happy production it has been. Under the skilful direction of Chris Bassett with Jamie Cordell as MD, Aimee Marie Bow as choreographer and a total cast of 37 including 16 of our Young Players, the production was a resounding success. Youngsters Katie Bartholomew and Elliott Myers were in the title roles of *Jack* and *Jill* and Peter Calver returned as *Dame* to the delight of our audiences; they were supported by an equally talented band of actors, dancers and chorus.



photo supplied by Fran Chalmers

Babes in the Wood waving goodbye after a fantastic show

Unfortunately we do not have the benefit of a NODA review as our local rep was himself appearing in panto elsewhere but throughout the week we have been inundated with compliments and congratulations from our audiences across the age divide, an example being the phone message left by Dave Sparrow who watched on Thursday which says “Absolutely brilliant. All of us golden oldies thoroughly enjoyed the evening and all members of the cast – it was an absolutely terrific show. Thank you very much”.

We must also say a big thank you to all our technical, backstage and Front of House teams. Without all these people the show just wouldn’t have been possible.

As with most productions, the period leading up to the run was not without some headaches (literally!); in our case these were very virulent incidences of ‘flu’, heavy colds and sore throats which caught up with almost everyone. In fact neither Katie nor Elliott were well enough to appear at the two dress rehearsals and our thanks and congratulations go to Fern Simmons and Isabelle Boorman who stood in to play *Jack* and *Jill* for these important final rehearsals. Even at such short notice their performances were seamless and confident. Fortunately everyone managed to shake off their symptoms sufficiently by first night to face an audience of very excited and loud cubs, beavers, brownies and rainbows - a baptism of fire for those first timers in the cast.

Contingency plans were also in place because of the imminent birth of MD Jamie’s second child. Every time his phone rang it could have been the call to drop everything to get to wife Louisa’s side. On one occasion his phone rang just before the band were about to take up their seats and for once Jamie was grateful and relieved to hear a recorded PPI message! Like the true professional he is, Jamie took all this added pressure in his stride throughout the week and our best wishes go to him and Louisa for when their daughter finally does arrive.

For the second dress rehearsal we were pleased to welcome students from the Orpheus Centre in Godstone who came along as our guests and the cast were able to play to a live and very

receptive audience. After the rehearsal, the students were excited and thrilled to be able to meet up with the cast in costume and to chat to them about the show. Also during the performances we supported DRIP with the red buckets raising £788 and raffles also raised £301 for Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children.

Our adult entry to the **Southern Counties Drama Festival** is *Aunt Matilda Comes For Christmas Dinner*, a comedy by Richard Hills and this will be performed on **Tuesday 24th February**. The arrival of snow has meant that *Gordon* and *Margaret*’s aunt who has plagued them on Christmas days for years has decided not to come. *Gordon* settles down to enjoy a stress free day but then the doorbell rings! Catherine Webber directs Jackie Barrett, Steve Jones and Sally Bosman and they welcome your support.

Our Young Players present a more serious play called “Safe”, specially written by David Rowan. This is a very topical and moving contemporary piece dealing with a young couple’s quest for asylum, the clashes between different ethnicities and the treatment received from the authorities. Directed by Libby Bliss and June Brown, our cast is Rebecca Wilkes, Barnaby Stott, Natasha Rose, Megan Saunders, Archan Mohile and Teddy Stevenson. The play will be performed on **Friday 27th February**. Please come along and support them. **Tickets for both plays are available online at www.barntheatreoxted.co.uk**

Next month rehearsals will begin for our May production (**13th to 16th**), *Boeing Boeing*, a classic farce from the 60’s which has stood the test of time. When provincial *Robert* drops in on his old school friend he gets a taste of the high life. Urbane *Bernard* manages his love life by juggling three air hostess fiancées with the help of his long suffering housekeeper *Berthe*. The advent of the new Boeing jet brings chaos to a well organised, timetabled existence. *Robert*, *Bernard* and *Berthe* are caught up in a whirlwind of circumstances which rapidly become out of control. Tricia Whyte directs the very talented cast of David Fanthorpe, Peter Calver, Dena Watts, Ann Lovell, Catherine Wyncoll and Rhian Lally.

Tickets from 01883 724852 or online for card bookings at www.barntheatreoxted.co.uk



Southern Counties Drama Festival 2015

The Southern Counties Drama Festival makes its annual visit to the Barn Theatre from Monday 23rd to Saturday 28th February.

Peter Calver, well known to Barn audiences, and Chairman of this popular Festival of One-Act Plays will be host to 15

entries, including Sevenoaks Players, Tonbridge Theatre and Arts Club, Heathfield Youth Drama, Mole Valley Players and the Barn Theatre’s resident groups The Oxted Players, Young Oxted Players and Glow Theatre Company. We also welcome new entrants Epsom Players and Off The Cuff, making for an exciting week of drama.

Each play will receive a public adjudication from Jan Palmer Sayer, GoDA, a well known and popular adjudicator.

On the Saturday evening the Adjudicator will select a winner to go forward and compete in the Eastern Area Semi Final of the All-England Theatre Festival. By coincidence this semi final will be held here at the Barn on Saturday May 23rd and the winner of that goes to the English Final in Harrogate on 6th June.

Festival week is always a relaxed and enjoyable occasion and a time to meet fellow thespians. So why not come along and support these groups during a great week of competitive drama.

Tickets £8 from 01959 561811 or online for card bookings at www.barntheatreoxted.co.uk

The Editor of the Barn Theatre News is Bruce Reed and contributions are always gratefully received.

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Press deadline for the next issue is Friday 17th April enquiries 01959 561811