

The Petrified Prompt

It's a sad and slippery slope, sliding down from being a leading lady, the star of many shows with your own hairdresser and dresser, to being the prompt. Tucked away behind the emergency door, cramped, barely room to move, draughts down your neck, wearing long johns and thermals, your feet moulded into lumps of ice.

The worst part of being a prompt is that you become invisible. No one knows you. If two members of the cast say hello, wow, that's a big event. Once, somebody thanked me (help me off the floor, please, I'm in shock!). Afterwards, you slink away into a wet night like one of the Barn ghosts, reliving the scary bits of the show that you have marked in the margins. Hoping that some of the actors will learn their lines in the right order and not give you a heart attack.

For Eliza Doolittle I had my own hairdresser, David Lynne, who created an Embassy ballroom style based on Audrey Hepburn's hair in the film. Professor Higgins and I often rehearsed till 1am as the director, Peter Butler, was a perfectionist. Nothing escaped him. Every detail was important. He's now Head of Australian TV Opera programmes.

Nellie Forbush had a hairdresser to dry her off and restyle as I did wash that man right out of my hair with real water and shampoo on stage. Doreen stood on a stool with a hairdryer while I changed from a soaked swimsuit into a cocktail outfit in minutes. Kate's brocade wedding dress weighed over two stone but I still managed to sing a cadenza in *Kiss Me Kate*. I had less than thirty seconds to change into another wedding dress in the wings for the finale of *Guys and Dolls*, plus veil and tiara.

After dozens of leading parts, age and injuries began knocking on the stage door, and I took cameo roles, the last ones in *Gypsy*, *Crazy for You* and *Honk*. My favourite part was Mrs Bumble in *Oliver!*, which I played twice, once with Leighton Camden and once with David Clubb. The song, "I Shall Scream", was such fun to sing.

Now I prompt, still mentally willing the cast on, often singing, once saying a whole part out loud (*Viola* and *Twelfth Night*), always one hundred per cent on their side. But don't look through me. I am real, thinking flesh and blood, not yet a ghost. That day will come.

And please don't say: "You had an easy night." That 'easy night' might have been lurching from one panic to another. I'm not incarcerated in the prompt corner knitting a scarf or reading *Gone with the Wind*. My remit is to read every single line of the show, every single performance. Alert. Anticipating. Concentrating. Pass me a paracetamol.

Last night I got a custard pie in the face during *Mack & Mabel*. Perhaps they know I'm there, after all.
Stella Thomas

Southern Counties Drama Festival

The Southern Counties Drama Festival once again had a very successful week in February at the Barn Theatre. The result was in the balance until the final play on the final evening on Saturday, giving this year's festival a nail-biting finish.

Before announcing the results the Adjudicator, Arthur Rochester, summed up the week and praised the festivals organisers for the

superb and buoyant festival so different to when he last adjudicated at the Barn in 2005. He praised all the teams for their contribution towards some memorable performances. He also congratulated all of the youth entries for rising to the challenge of entering a competitive festival and hoped that they took on board his comments which he hoped they found constructive.

Thanks to the continued support from the Gatwick Airport Community Trust the festival was able to give a cheque for £100 to the two teams, Barfield Players and Young Oxted Players, who represented SCDF at the Quarter-Final of the All-England Theatre Festival of One-Act Plays. The Semi-Finals are on 15th May at The Chequer Mead Theatre, East Grinstead, box office 01342 302000.

July Sunday Club Cancelled

Sadly, the Sunday Club scheduled for Sunday 4th July will have to be cancelled as there is a show in the theatre starting at 3pm that day and the logistics become too complex to try and carry on as normal. So we will all look forward to seeing you at the August Sunday Club on Sunday 1st August. Please warn all your friends and put the date in your diaries.

The Barnstormers head to the Minack

After almost 15 months of planning, there are now only a few weeks remaining before The Barnstormers head off down to Cornwall with their spectacular production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* to be performed at the world famous open-air Minack Theatre. Final rehearsals and preparations are proceeding well with a cast of 50 performers, who together with a large number of crew, technical team and other helpers, bring the total company size to around 100 people. *Jesus Christ Superstar* is likely to be one of the largest scale productions The Barnstormers and the Barn Theatre have ever staged, and with the news that their week at the Minack Theatre looks like heading towards a sell out, the excitement amongst the company members grows daily. We wish them all the very best with their final rehearsals and week of performances down in Cornwall, and hope they are blessed with fair weather throughout. We look forward to hearing more of their Minack experience on their return, and no doubt there will be a full review of their tour week in the next issue of BTN. The Barnstormers perform *Jesus Christ Superstar* at the Minack Theatre in Porthcurno (www.minack.com) from Monday 31st May to Friday 4th June and tickets are available from 01736 810181.

A new look for the auditorium

There is never a quiet moment at the Barn and recently, when there was nothing going on for a week, the painters, carpenters and electricians got to work making a difference which has met with acclaim from all our patrons. The ground floor walls now match the colour of the bar area, additional lighting has been provided to the side aisles and safety lighting installed to the step risers leading to the raised seating areas. The difference is stunning and our thanks to Malcolm LeCoisette, one of our trustees, who almost single handed was responsible for the new décor.