

On the Fringe



An occasional newsletter from the Spring Grove Fringe – February 2015

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Kitchener lets his hair down at SGF

As we approach the Award Season this critic reflects upon the undisputed theatrical triumph of 2014 which was the revival of 'Oh! what a Lovely War' by the exclusive, niche, even secretive company, Spring Grove Fringe. I am fortunate to count myself amongst the few specially selected theatre goers familiar with the work of this most fringe of all fringe theatre companies and, as such, I was trembling with anticipation ahead of this brave production. Friends, I was not disappointed!

This was an ambitious undertaking which could have failed under the direction of any but the experienced warrior of many a SGF production, Anthony Tresigne. He marshalled his troops with vision, courage and leadership into this new battle with text and song and came through triumphant with remarkably few casualties.

The cast rose admirably to the challenge of history and satire and, if the audience did not completely follow the action, it was entirely their fault for not having studied the First World War sufficiently ahead of their visit. For those of us with a firm grasp of history the varied accents and hats made the events perfectly clear and here a special mention must be made of several cast members who valiantly swapped sides in the conflict every few minutes with mostly the correct headgear: Gavin Chaplin masterfully attacking French (the language not the general), Roger Chown superior as French (the general and the language) John Hackett equally persuasive as German and English officers and the commanding Scott Milligan who led the whole troupe from behind the lines. The audience was amazed at the ferocity of verbal exchange, battle and hat changing in this fast-moving performance.



As ever the musical strength of this company shone through under the direction of the wonderful Jackie Steinitz and the military precision of the songs and dance routines was unparalleled in any theatre in the past year. The female members of the cast were particularly tight under the brilliant choreography of Suzanne Jones, convincingly transforming themselves from aristocracy to rabble with nothing but a change of shawl, such is the acting talent on display here. Amanda Shaw excelled as Ms Pankhurst, strident and forceful in a role she was born to play.

Of course one of the greatest strengths of SGF is the staging of their productions and here was an inventiveness rivalled only by the National Theatre in its complexity and dexterity. The sets depicting the home front, the trenches and the command posts were superbly imagined by the designers, if not the audience. We particularly felt the pain and anguish of the actors buried deep in the trenches only their heads and hats visible (an appropriately existential homage to Becket of course).

Ultimately this is a shockingly satirical play and the triumph of this production was in its ability to shock even this audience familiar with the emotional depths of Spring Grove performances.

The poignancy of Linda Rhead's nurse, the hubris of the generals, the slaughter of the French soldiers, and the final realisation that the survivors could never convey the horror adequately left us all close to tears and quite literally speechless for *The Last Post* which was exactly the director's intention and why this was an impressive piece of theatre. White feathers and shame on you for missing it!

Sir Peter says 'Turn again!'



Sir Peter Hall: Well Boris, was that the best 'Dick' you have ever seen?

Boris Johnson: Undoubtedly, Sir Peter. Daisy's handling of the part was both deft and rigorous – attributes that Ms Jones may have in many aspects of her life .



didn't appear really, there were far too many extraneous politicians already, although the audience enjoyed pelting them – very good touch that.

SPH: No, I meant the dynastic composition of the cast; we share the same nepotistic tendencies that I have when casting dear Rebecca.

BJ: Ah, you mean Nails and Ryans, Treloars and Hamiltons?

SPH: And what about the Rat?

BJ: You have to remember that I triumphed over one of the greatest and most accomplished political sewer rats in London's history, so this 'Green King' was really rather mild and less bitter by comparison.



Having said which, I doubt whether the SGF has ever seen such an accomplished costume and make-up combo by King Rat Extraordinaire. I have to say that Rattus Rattus was well represented in this pair.

SPH: Did you spot the happy family feel-good factor?

BJ: Hard not to really. By my count most of the audience were Mill Street Lib Dems and – I half-expected Ed Davey to appear at the mention of 'paved with gold' but I expect he was too busy trying to create extra energy from hydro-electrics on the Hogsmill. Just as well Davey



SPH: Quite.

BJ: Well Adrian Treloar is clearly a sharp operator – he managed almost single-handedly to destroy thirty years of SGF pantomimical incompetence in one show. I mean, what is the point of having a reputation and then ruining it by enhancing it?





Nail and Ryan senior are without doubt the largest customers that Fabric Land has ever known and their offspring look headed in the same direction getting, it has to be said, more accomplished each time they appear on stage.



As for those Hamiltons, well! As Tommy, Olivia was even more cool than Nicole Shirtlifter in that other 'Cat' show in the West End and although David's Loose Elastic looked a bit dicky from the start, he did seem to know most of what was going on.

SPH: Alice Fitzwarren?

BJ: Does she indeed? I am so glad. She was very good and deserved her reward.

SPH: Did you spot any scene stealers?

BJ: I most certainly did! Scene stealing was hugely in evidence every time Idle Jack was around and the overt competition between Messrs Milligan, Tresigne, Lloyd and Brookes was only won by the latter by having the largest hat ever built!

SPH: The Plot?

BJ: I'm not sure I really spotted one or indeed a spotted dick either. I did think that Alderman Fitzwarren thoroughly deserved her trip to



Morocco, so hard had she worked and was also pleased to see that King Rat's team got their teeth into their parts. As I have said, the Great Sewer Rat Livingstone sought his fortune in Libya and much good it did him. He should have followed the clearly financially competent Fitzwarren on the Road to Marrakesh.

SPH: So do you think that young Whittington has any chance of remaining in office (after he takes over from you of course)?

BJ: I do. Given his great new international (Welsh, American, Brazilian, French and Esher) 'backstage' team and a fine liquidity ratio provided by the less athletic Charlton, the chances of a long stay look good. He will clearly be well lit up and looks set fair for a lively term. He will need to improve the competence of his policemen and guards (although they gave a finely nuanced performance), if he is to be entirely rat free and I hope he will only require the delights of the Fairy Bow Belles for Rhead-Only purposes.

Young Treloar's team in the lighting, music, design, stage management and costume department are second to none and ensured Dick's triumph, or as we Johnsons say 'Per Ardua ad Astra'.

The only advice I can give him is not to go building skyscrapers on football pitches.

Charity Donations

One of our charity objects is to raise money for donation to other local or national charities as determined by the trustees. We have recently made donations as follows:

£300 to the Perthes Association, following *The Canterbury Tales*.

£500 to Myeloma UK, following *My Night at the Celtic Fringe*.

£500 to British Legion Poppy Appeal, following *Oh what a lovely war*.

If you have suggestions for a local charity, or perhaps one in which you have a personal interest, please let Jonathan or one of the Committee know.

Staging

Spring Grove Fringe has purchased a third 2m x 1m staging unit, at a cost of about £600, which will increase the flexibility of staging arrangements for our productions. As with the original two, it can be fitted with legs of different heights. It made its first appearance in the First World War trenches.

My Night with Imelda

I am not sure whether it was the Irish Whiskey or the craic (or do I mean crack?), but *My Night at the Celtic Fringe*, by local writer Imelda Topping, left a misty recollection of a phantasmagorical fairy tale in my mind.

Lynn was characteristically commanding as the landlady of Harvey's bar, but what a crazy crowd of regulars she had! Cian, her son, played with simplicity by Adrian, PJ (you'll not get a dram out of him!) by Jeremy, the blustering Shay by Chris.

Also on the west side of the Irish sea was the Council worker, played by Karina with some of her wonderfully energetic histrionics.

Apparently fallen from high office, in a very topical, political fashion, was Tony's cab driver, who seemed to have, not just the 'Knowledge', but the 'Supernatural Knowledge', scarily told.

From even further west, the USA, came Val's complex character, her back story musically and artfully conveyed.

Their small-town intrigues were multifaceted and portrayed in commendably 'non-English' accents. To add some clarity and obfuscation in equal measure, Bethany's Folklorist was ideally suited.

Just when you thought it was safe to join in the small talk at the bar, over from England came the Spring Grove Fringe, cueing a self-referential mind-spasm. Jacqui, Julia and Allan were playing themselves, apparently. Allan crooned for the 'ladies'; Jacqui and Julia displayed a fine and unexpected grasp of Gaelic.

I may have over indulged during the interval, but I had a vision of an unexpected bath in the middle of the hall and the cast undressing and unburdening themselves of their insecurities.

Thank goodness Veronica, as the Rambler, appeared before things got too steamy, but she was a dark horse and brought more complication.

Oh! I forgot to mention the tree. We have actors who are very experienced at playing trees, but, in



this production, all the branch and twig action was off-stage. Probably just as well, because Adrian appeared at the end with bits of the tree, so now it will not be possible to nominate it for an Oscar.

But the star of the show must surely have been our guest director, Peter Case, travelling all the way from Mill Street, who brought an eye-popping facility with the local skips and tips to generate a fairy tale rural Ireland from just rubbish (and that does not mean the cast!).

Also in the wings ...

15/16 May 2015 – A very exciting musical event, directed by Amanda and Daisy. In fact, it is so exciting, that details are embargoed at present. So, when you receive your invitation, you will feel especially privileged.

2/3 October 2015 – Two one-act plays, directed by Jacqui and Gavin.

27/28 November – *Marry if you must!* – the working title for Sandy and Nigel's version of *The Beaux' Stratagem*, a Restoration comedy by George Farquhar.

Christmas Party

The Christmas Party was stylishly hosted in Grove Lane fashion by Jenny, with the most amazing and lavish recycling effort on the part of the cooks.

The Dick Need Memorial Trophy was won by our very own Beverley Sisters – Amanda, Gavin and Sandy. See if you can identify them from the photo.

