

On the Fringe



An occasional newsletter from the Spring Grove Fringe – July 2014

Registered Charity Number 1150982

Next production

My Night at the Celtic Fringe October 3rd/4th

Join us as St John's village hall transforms into Harvey's bar in Ireland as the Spring Grove Fringe goes Celtic!

In *My Night at the Celtic Fringe*, drama is pervaded by storytelling, poetry, dance and song at the expense of Shay, a no-nonsense road builder with a reputation for bulldozing through mountains. This particular evening however, he dithers over a tree on his route through the Irish countryside amidst the folklore and fairy tales of the town festival, Owl Yarns.

His anguish becomes public as he is drawn into a press crisis while trying to impress his old flame home from America and his competitive brother who, unknown to Shay, is taking part in Owl Yarns with – you've guessed it – the Spring Grove Fringe.

Inspired by a true fairy tale from the Irish town of Latoon, join hosts Rose and her son Cian Harvey in their coastal bar and hear some ol' yarns for yourself at your own night at the Celtic fringe.

Also in the wings ...

February 2015 – The annual pantomime

May 2015 – 'Cabaret'

October 2015 – Two one-act plays

November 2015 – A Restoration comedy

Charity Donations

One of our charity objects is to raise money for donation to other local or national charities as determined by the trustees. If you have suggestions for local charities, or perhaps ones in which you have a personal interest, please let Jonathan or one of the Committee know.

Oh What a Lovely War

November 28th/29th

See the Great War presented in songs, battles and a few jokes. This production was devised by Joan Littlewood and The Theatre Workshop and first performed in The Theatre Royal Stratford (that is East London not West Midlands) in 1963.

Starting in the Summer of 1914 and culminating on November 11 1918 the War is performed by a seaside pierrot troupe, largely delivered in songs of the period and contemporary documents. The play gives the views of the ordinary man in the trenches as well as the big brass at HQ and those on the Home Front. Surprisingly in view of the subject matter there is a lot of humour and laughter along the way.

So, if you fancy yourself as a singer or dancer (and who knows, we may even have room for an actor or two) or simply somebody who wants to dig the trenches there is something here for you.

Bridge House

We have taken up the offer of some free storage space for our costumes and props from Centric Community Projects at Bridge House on Twickenham, currently a vacant office building.



Centric Community Projects works with smaller charities and non-profit organisations to help them operate and develop by offering free space.

Canterbury Tales – a truth-telling journey

I began to lose my grip on the twenty-first century when Jenny, as a Spring Grove Minstrel, told us she didn't know what a mobile phone was and proceeded to sing about the things that naughty men can get up to with innocent maidens. Thank goodness we don't have any of those these days!



A folksy tune on bells prepared us for Tony, as Geoffrey Chaucer, to emerge from the curtains and set the scene in his authentic Middle English – 'When that Aprille ...' – well, it was May, but he was coming from a long time ago. It was some relief when the language

moved forward a couple of centuries as the curtains opened to reveal the pilgrims in the Tabard Inn. And what a motley crew they seemed, thanks to the SGF costume department and the SGF casting department, who really turned up trumps with the grotesques they managed to find.

Our Hostess, Sandie, set out the plan for the journey and made it clear she would stand for no nonsense. One to be wary of, I thought, as she shortened the straw for the Wife of Bath when they drew lots. An impression which was to be confirmed later when she had the Pardoner by the short and curlies. The pilgrims came down to join us – we were going together on our journey.



The Wife of Bath (or of somewhere West of Slough) then told her tale. Adrian's naughty knight was sent, on pain of death, to find the answer to a riddle by that so stylish and regal Queen, Suzanne. The knight's answer came from an old woman, bewitchingly played by Karina, but his relief was short-lived when he realised he had to marry her. Fortunately she straightened out his arrogance and it all ended in marital bliss.



The ever-versatile Jenny, sensitively accompanied by Jacky on ... well, to us it was a lute ... then summed up the moral of the tale.

Chris, our Pardoner, was terribly persuasive, but ultimately not very successful, in shifting a mediaeval stock of relics and flummery from his bulging leather satchel. He introduced us to three ruffians, David, Gavin and Karina, who must have rehearsed hard to sing and stumble so drunkenly.

The fresh-faced Julius told them, plainly speaking, about the nearness of Death, so they went to seek him with determination. Our resident wise old man, Dick, gave them eloquently delivered, sage words, as always. Him they foolishly chose to ignore. The discovery of money and the helpful dispensation of some lethal tincture by the Mill Street Apothecaries,



Amanda and Roger (what were they doing at the bar?), led to a fitting outcome for greedy folk of all ages. These tales are timeless – bankers take note!



David, having come back to life, and presumably sobered up, in this 14th century maelstrom, was now the rather affluent-looking Reeve. His tale certainly introduced me to some new vocabulary, but did not show millers in a very good light (inhabitants of that Street should note). Our Miller Keith had the air of a well-to-do entrepreneur.

Scott and Chris donned mortar boards to become students of Trinity (life long learning – no student loans for them) and their accents were from a Yorkshire of our dreams.



Acknowledgement must be made of our Chaucer, who not only introduced the tales, but acted as stage manager, wardrobe master and chief improviser. He managed to produce all manner of gold coins, swords, crowns, aprons, pears, bedding from his hamper and even, at a push, managed a baby. A 'buxom daughter, with breasts round and high' was always going to be a challenge at the Spring Grove Fringe, but I did think that Gavin showed insufficient reticence in volunteering for the part. I wonder if he realised he would be swyving with Chris. Likewise Val, 'as pert as any pye', danced a merry jig with Scott.



It is just as well that we were nearing the watershed, which, at SGF productions always means a tasty, imaginative and appropriate meal, on this occasion à la médiéval, from Amanda and Jenny.

The layout of the tables and the service by the costumed pilgrims had the feel of an historic banquet, although obviously without the domestic cattle and swine snuffling round our feet and relieving themselves under the tables. Perhaps next time?

It needed Sandie to bring a well-refreshed crowd back to order and call on the Nun's Priest to tell his tale. From the lighting desk rose Nigel – is it a coincidence that his last two roles on stage have been clerical? I think that rumours of his beatification are wildly premature. When you need someone to volunteer to be a cockerel, who leaps forward? – well, Gavin again, following his success



as the miller's daughter. And Lynn proved a most seductive hen to partner him as chief wife. Not that the other pilgrims were left out of the clucking action from the floor. Next from the bestiary, with the help of a

Chaucer-supplied tail, slunk out Adrian as a sleazy fox to cause mayhem in the chicken coop. And could we not all see ourselves succumbing to his sublime flattery? The Priest left us in no doubt of the danger.

After another résumé from Jenny and Jacky, a further moral tale was given us by the Merchant, Scott. The old man's part was taken by Keith and his bride, forty years his junior, by Val – oh! the power of theatre! Their interactions were hilarious. But this relationship was never going to be simple, particularly with the squire, played by Adrian, on the scene. The lesser parts in the marital drama added such telling detail – the boy, Julius, making



excuses for the squire, and the handmaids, Suzanne and Karina, carefully not observing what went on in bed. Star billing in this scene must also go to the two trees, Lynn and Chris, who rustled in a way that was suggestive beyond imagination.



Also in the supporting cast were the wooden cubes, which became thrones, seats, beds: limited only by your imagination. They were lovingly made by Gavin D and Nigel, who, by hand, sewed on each of the 700 sequins – sorry! I mean screwed in each of the 700 screws. With the sensitivity of a post-modern artist, Helen painted them black – the depth of meaning is breathtaking. 'There's many a man believes he's seen a thing, When things are often not the things they seem.'



This had been a thoroughly bawdy evening, our enjoyment increased by the laughter and heckling from the audience pilgrims, not inhibited in their ribald pleasure. So the award for the most subtle performance of the evening must go to the prompt, Jo, whose delicate interventions kept the whole train on track.

How could such an evening of swyving be brought to a close and how could we all be gently led back to the twenty first century? We were left with reminders of our own mortality, 'in the end the mightiest oak must fall', and a suggestion that Chaucer's tales are rich in meaning for us today and have an immortality, 'Our only purpose in these tales was Truth'.