

Twelfth Night Party



Dame Monica Mason cuts the cake, watched by Vic-Wells Members

This year's party was held, as usual, at the Old Vic by kind permission of their management. Unusually, it was held on a Friday afternoon (January 8th) during very inclement weather. Despite this, a sizeable number of dedicated Members greatly enjoyed the event eating the delicious buffet and drinking the wine provided by Ruth Jeayes, Francis Cowan and Committee Members whom we greatly thank.

The splendid cake, baked and decorated by Yvonne Hickman, was cut by our guest of honour, Dame Monica Mason who spoke about *another* cake cut each year after the last matinee of the Royal Ballet season. This is the Taglioni cake baked to a special recipe belonging to that great ballerina and discovered by 'Madame', Dame Ninette de Valois.

We were also pleased to see Sir Peter Wright who will shortly be visiting Japan to mount his ballets once again. The time passed in a flash with everybody



Dame Monica Mason with Sir Peter Wright and James Ranger

mingling and chatting about every topic to do with the 'Arts' past, present and to come. Finally our thanks go to the most helpful staff at the Old Vic who provided tables, glasses, crockery and coffee.

Tim Rooke

Mary-Jane Burcher's entertainment news.....

New Years Honours List

This year the entertainment world didn't get much of a look in on the latest Honours List: in the theatre world, actor Patrick Stewart received a Knighthood as did Nicholas Hyter, the Artistic Director of the National Theatre; The actress Margaret Tyzack and theatre director Phyllida Lloyd received a CBE, and National Youth Music Theatre Director, Jeremy James Taylor also received a CBE. In the ballet world, David Nixon, Artistic Director of Northern Ballet Theatre received an OBE and Pineapple Dance Studios founder Debbie Moore also received an OBE.

Bristol Old Vic

The Theatre Royal is now up and running, though I am given to understand there are still many renovations to be done before it operates fully. Tom Morris, the new Artistic Director, has great plans for the future of the theatre. The Appeal to fund these renovations is still ongoing. This last Christmas Kneehigh Theatre presented a version of the immortal Grimm story of *Hansel and Gretel*; the Redgrave Theatre's forthcoming productions include *The Tempest* and the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School will present *The Country Wife* in February. There are many exciting plans for play productions in the future.

Theatre Royal, Bath

I was delighted to be able to organise once again our annual visit to see our old friend Chris Harris in pantomime at the Theatre Royal in Bath. First we had lunch at the old Garrick's Head pub, adjoining the theatre, which brought back happy memories of my touring days! *The Sleeping Beauty* is not a favourite subject with pantomime managements, mainly because the story is apt to finish in the first act. It is really up to the imagination of the writer as to how to extend the story-line to make it realistic. The writer, Andy Ryan, and the ever imaginative Chris Harris, who also directed the show, did a wonderful job. The relatively small cast was excellent – as were the dancers and children. A delightful 'Fairy Godmother' was played by the vivacious Lisa Goddard, and the evil Carabosse was wonderfully portrayed by Gemma Bissex.

There was a lot of boisterous fun and high jinks from the comics, led by Chris Harris as Beauty's nurse. Chris always amazes me with his seemingly never ending source of first class comedy material, as well as some of the old favorites. This pantomime had a bit of everything - it looked beautiful, had a strong story-line, and was very funny! The children in the audience, excited and noisy, loved it - some experiencing their first visit to the theatre.

OBITUARIES

GEORGINA PARKINSON 1938 - 2009

Georgina Parkinson, who died in December aged 71, was a principal ballerina with the Royal Ballet, before spending three decades as the acclaimed ballet mistress of New York's leading



company, American Ballet Theatre. She was much prized by choreographers, particularly Kenneth MacMillan, for her elegance and support in moments of crisis. She also brought a wit and style to her characterizations which caught the eye of Frederick Ashton. Another highlight in a varied career was with the renowned modernist choreographer Bronislava Nijinska, who featured her in many of his ballets.

MOYRA FRASER 1923 - 2009



The actress Moyra Fraser has died aged 86. She originally studied at Sadler's Wells Ballet School, and spent eight years with the company at the start of a long career. However, growing to 5ft 10inches, she found few ballet roles open to her, and slipped into revue, pantomime and then plays. She was a big hit in the musical Camelot as the sinister Morgan Le Fay.

THE VIC-WELLS ASSOCIATION ANNUAL REPORT 2008/2009

I am sure you would wish to join me in sending our best wishes to our Emeritus Life President, Wendy Toye CBE who is still residing at the theatrical home, Denville Hall in Middlesex. The good news is that Simon Russell Beale CBE has agreed to be our President despite his very busy acting schedule. Our AGM was held at Sadler's Wells on December 1st and after the business we greatly enjoyed a talk from Paul Richardson, the retiring Technical Director at Sadler's Wells. He regaled us with talk of the amazing demands of many of the visiting Company Artistic Directors, such as building a breeze block wall at the front of the stage only to have this knocked down at the start of the performance! His experience covered many years at both the old and the present theatre so there were lots of good stories to hear.

Our traditional *Twelfth Night Party* and *Shakespeare's Birthday Party* were both held in the very pleasant surroundings of the second floor bar of the Old Vic. The *Twelfth Night* cake was cut by David Suchet OBE who was performing in *Complicit* at the Old Vic. David explained how he loved the Old Vic, having as a young man seen many great performances including Sir Laurence Olivier as *Othello*. The guest of honour at *Shakespeare's Birthday Party* was Niamh Cusack who proposed the toast to the Bard. Appearing in *Dancing at Lughnasa* at the Old Vic she spoke to us passionately about Shakespeare's plays, saying how relevant they were today to people in all walks of life. Our thanks go to the many helpers who provided an excellent buffet for both occasions, ably coordinated by Ruth Jeayes. Our thanks also go to the Old Vic for allowing us to host these enjoyable parties there.

Members had the pleasure of going on several visits during the year organised by Committee members. These included a fascinating visit to the Guildhall Art Gallery, the Annual visit to the Bath pantomime and a visit to see the *Merchant of Venice* at the newly opened Rose Theatre in Kingston. Members had the opportunity to attend several rehearsals at Sadler's Wells during the year and I should like to thank Lisa Bowler of Sadler's Wells for persuading so many visiting companies to let us see their rehearsals. These included *Westside Story*, *Morphoses*, the Australian Ballet, the Mariinsky Ballet Company, English National Ballet, Birmingham Royal

Ballet, Rambert Dance Company, *Eonnagata* with Sylvie Guillem, and Northern Ballet.

Your Committee met five times during the year to run the affairs of the Association and plan future activities and I am sure you will join me in thanking them for their support and good work. We were fortunate to appoint two replacement key officers, Kirsten Sheridan as Social Secretary and Marjory Agha as Editor, both of whom have been very valuable additions to our team.

I am very pleased to report that our web site, www.vic-wells.co.uk has been completely updated and is full of useful information.

Having existed since 1923 to be the link between the audiences the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells and their associate theatres, we are planning for a more active future and happily we have achieved a closer link with the Old Vic.

James Ranger
Chairman

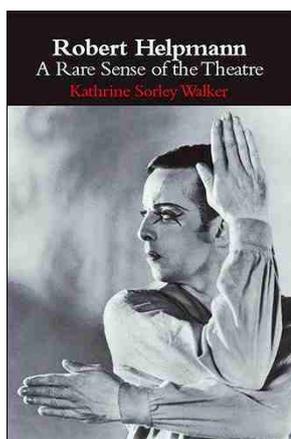
Vic-Wells AGM

Held once again in the Kahn Lecture room at Sadler's Wells on 30th November, the Committee and Members completed the formal part of the meeting before welcoming our guest of honour, the incomparable Gillian Lynne. She came hot foot from rehearsing yet another production of one of the most original musicals, *Cats*. Gillian related fascinating stories of the early days of the Vic-Wells Ballet touring during the war. She told how, after the war, when appearing in Liverpool, they were summoned to the Board Room of one of the city's leading stores and were surprised and delighted to be told they were to be reopening in the Royal Opera House. Gillian remained with the company for several memorable years, leaving to start a second career in the theatre in revues and in west end musicals as a dancer and leading lady before starting her third career as Producer, Director and Choreographer and still going from strength to strength. Her next career is about to blossom as her long awaited autobiography is soon to be published.

Gillian's chat ended with a *question and answer* session. She kept us enthralled for well over an hour - which passed in a trice- and when she apologised for going on far too long we all disagreed, thanking her profusely for all she has given to ballet, films and the theatre.

Tim Rooke

BOOK REVIEW



Robert Helpmann
A Rare Sense of the Theatre
by Kathrine Sorley Walker

Paperback 222pp. RRP £10.00 ISBN: 978-1852731335

Many Vic-Wells members will remember Robert Helpmann as dancer, actor and director, though they would need to be in the more senior ranks to remember him as the leading principal dancer of the Sadler's Wells Ballet. Kathrine Sorley Walker's biography demonstrates the very wide range of his achievements in the theatre as dancer, choreographer, actor, stage director, and finally ballet company director. Born in 1909 to an Australian family of English origin, he first trained as a dancer. In Australia he acted, danced in musicals, and even appeared with a touring company led by Anna Pavlova. He came to London in 1933, and quickly became a member of the fledgling Vic-Wells Ballet. His skill at mimicry and his ability to amuse allowed him to establish himself quickly in the company.

The biography is well written, thorough and very well researched, with *Appendices* listing full details of the

chronology of his activities in the theatre – but with little of his life outside the theatre. There are some details of his close relationship with his family, but little else. Talking about his role as Lord Alfred Douglas in a play concerning Douglas' relationship with Oscar Wilde, Helpmann comments that the play was, "about relationships generally, and about how we can destroy each other. The tragedy of human beings is the incapability of two people loving equally at the same time – the imbalance of it". He says of himself, "I had two very long relationships in my life, so I know. Yes, the balance did come finally, but one had to wait for it. Loving at the same pitch is rarely possible. I've known a few good marriages, but one has to think..."

The author has followed the lead of her subject concerning his view of the artist and the media. "Personally I don't want to know what age Miss So-and-So is, or what Mr So-and-So uses on his hair or how Madame X cooks her meals for her 17 children – it has no interest for me," says Helpmann. "All I'm interested in is what they do when the curtain goes up; that should be the only interest that the press in general have in the artist... Thinking about my life, I see that there is nothing that has not been partly or entirely influenced by the theatre. I adore it and live by it, and that is why I feel so strongly that its magic should not and must not be dispelled." In these days of over-exposed so-called 'celebrities', and the invasive scrutiny of anyone in the public eye, one can have sympathy with the author's circumspection, and her adhesion to the principles advocated by her subject. Even so, what emerges from the biography is a splendid picture of Helpmann, the theatre polymath, but a rather less clear picture of Helpmann, the man. That could well be as he would have wanted it.

Richard Reavill

Annual Accounts of the Vic-Wells Association 2008/2009

The Annual Accounts of the Vic-Wells Association were presented to and accepted by the recent Annual General Meeting. Included with this issue of the *Broadsheet* is a copy of the Income and Expenditure Accounts and Balance Sheet for the year ended 30th June 2009. An examination of the accounts required by the Charities Commission was carried out by a Chartered Accountant, Mr Kenneth Wilson. A copy of the duly certified and signed accounts may be obtained on request from the Treasurer. Please enclose an stamped self-addressed envelope.

LATEST PRODUCTIONS

Richard Reavill reviews Birmingham Royal Ballet at Sadler's Wells

For its brief autumn season at Sadler's Wells, BRB presented an excellent adventurous and innovative triple bill, and a superb three-act story ballet, both with some outstanding performances. It should have performed to sold-out houses. Sadly it did not, but more of that anon.

The triple bill, under the general title of *Quantum Leaps* started the week with three ballets new to London, one a premiere this season. Stanton Welch's *Powder* was the opening ballet to Mozart's A major Clarinet Concerto. The costumes, lightly decorated underwear, contrasted with the 18th century architecture of the scenery. The classical style choreography for the seven men and seven women gave many opportunities for smooth and athletic dancing, and for Natasha Oughtred's musicality to shine.

The final work *The Centre and its Opposite* was also by an Australian choreographer, Garry Stewart, and was in the style of William Forsythe, both choreographically and in the choice of an electronic score by Huey Benjamin. It was danced with speed and great attack by a cast of mostly younger dancers from the BRB team, with fine performances by Dusty Button and Aaron Robison.

The newest work, $E = mc^2$ by David Bintley was the centre piece of the programme, and proved to be a fascinating work which needs extended viewings to reveal all its aspects. It is challenging, as one would expect for a work that takes Einstein's equation as its point of departure. The commissioned score was by Matthew Hindson. 'Energy' is represented by a furious interaction between the large cast, a hornet's nest of activity, contrasted by a tense duet for Elisha Willis and Joseph Caley. In 'Mass', a mysterious tripled pas-de-deux uses slow descents to show the power of gravity. A strong contrast follows. To sounds of an atomic explosion a kimono clad dancer with a red fan slowly laments the 'Manhattan Project', and the downside of Einstein's discovery. Speed is the essence of the final section, 'Celeritas²', with

BRB's young dancers delivering waves of acceleration, culminating in Carol-Ann Millar and Alexander Campbell still dancing, isolated like the ultimate winners in a dance marathon. This is an impressive and original piece, a league above the other works in the triple bill, and Bintley deserves great credit for his originality and daring.



Bintley's *Cyrano* was presented in the latter part of the week, now in a revised and much improved version with a completely new score by Carl Davis, but retaining the excellent original designs by Haydn Griffin. This is a superb three-act story ballet with humour, drama and pathos. There were fine performances from Elisha Willis and Ian McKay in the first cast, and from Joseph Caley, Alexander Campbell, Ambra Vallo and Natasha Oughtred in other casts, but the outstanding performance of the season was by Robert Parker as the first cast *Cyrano*. He created the role in this revised version, and his performance was both compelling and moving.

So, why were these excellent shows not better supported? Some performances of the previous week's mediocre Diaghilev programme were full, and the Mark Morris programme later in the month sold-out. However, for BRB there was news of price-reductions and special deals with newspapers, suggesting that the Box Office had to work hard to sell the tickets. At both of the performances I attended there were many empty seats. BRB deserves better, and some of our members most knowledgeable about the London theatre scene are asking serious questions about the way BRB is marketed in the UK's dance capital.

Do YOU have an opinion on a production you have seen recently? Please send your review to: marjory_gha@hotmail.co.uk

NEWS from Sadler's Wells

Sadler's Wells Presents: The First Global Dance Contest Winner

At the launch of the Global Dance Contest in February 2009, dancers and choreographers from all over the world were invited to produce an original piece of choreography, film it, and upload the clip onto a specially created website. The response was enthusiastic – professionals, amateurs and students entered dances that ranged from the beautiful to the technically brilliant to the most wildly eccentric. Ballet, hip hop, contemporary dance and dance theatre were all represented, with entries from dozens of countries from all five continents.

Once the deadline closed, over 170 dance films were available to be watched on the website. The three judges entrusted with the daunting task of short-listing the entries were Arlene Philips (with plenty of experience in judging dance due to her role in *Strictly Come Dancing* and *So You Think You Can Dance*), the writer and broadcaster (and Newsnight Review regular) Miranda Sawyer, and Alistair Spalding, Artistic Director of Sadler's Wells. What they were looking for above all was the quality of the choreography and originality of the idea, as well as an interesting and theatrical use of space. Although the main emphasis was on choreography there was of course also some very impressive dancing to be seen. The final shortlist comprised of ten entries from Israel, Australia, Taiwan, USA, South Korea, South Africa and the UK. Once the judges had agreed on this shortlist the public were invited to vote for their favourite.

It was an exciting, utterly unpredictable race, as the pieces were hardly comparable, featuring hip hop, contemporary dance, group pieces, solos and dance theatre. Towards the end of the voting period things became clearer as one definite favourite emerged: *1875 Ravel and Bolero* by choreographer Shu-yi Chou from Taiwan, to Ravel's famous Bolero music. Performed on a pile of green foam resembling grass, among



1875 Ravel and Bolero

fans and outfitted in costumes all borrowed from his mother's clothes collection, it is a piece of dance theatre very much inspired by an artist especially close to the heart of everyone here at Sadler's Wells, the wonderful Pina Bausch. This, together with the fact that it is a group piece for 12 dancers particularly delighted Alistair Spalding, who had been keen to present something suitable for a large-scale stage like Sadler's Wells.

After a congratulatory email to Taiwan in November, the flights were quickly booked, and on 27th January 2010 a group of young Taiwanese dancers landed at Heathrow on a plane from Hong Kong to perform in *Sadler's Wells Sampled* (which completely sold out!). For many of them it was their first visit to London, even to Europe. While in London they were followed by a film maker who has created a short film documenting their experiences here. To get an impression of their first visit to the theatre, their first glimpse of the daunting stage, the hours of technical rehearsals, the presentation of the award by Artistic Director, and finally the day of the first performance, please visit the website of the new Global Dance Contest 2010, www.globaldancecontest.com

And, as the current winner is still performing on stage, the search for the *next* Global Dance Contest winner has already begun. The excitement starts anew as we offer once more the chance to perform at *Sadler's Wells Sampled* in 2011. For all of you out there with a talent in making up steps - start choreographing, get dancing!

NEWS from The Old Vic

What a busy start to 2010 it's been at The Old Vic with our new production *Six Degrees of Separation* opening at the start of January. David Grindley and the stellar cast which includes Anthony Head, Lesley Manville and Obi Abili, have had some great reviews and the show runs up until 3 April so there's still plenty of time to see it for yourselves.



In April, Anna Mackmin returns to The Old Vic to direct Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* following the great success of *Dancing at Lughnasa* in 2009. She will direct Toby Stephens in this multi-award winning modern classic. Deeply moving and startlingly funny, this razor sharp drama brilliantly examines the complex nature of love, art and reality. *The Real Thing* runs from 10 April – 5 June 2010.

Following a critically acclaimed inaugural year, theatre and Academy Award-winning film director Sam Mendes will again direct a transatlantic company of actors for the second season of *The Bridge Project*. 2010 brings an intriguing pairing of Shakespeare's pastoral comedy *As You Like It* and his late masterpiece, *The Tempest*. *As You Like It* has just opened the tour at the BAM Harvey Theatre in New York and will be followed by *The Tempest* in February 2010. It will then embark on an international tour visiting Asia and Europe before opening in London at The Old Vic in June 2010.

The British/American cast includes Michelle Beck as Celia and Ceres in *As You Like It* and *The Tempest*, Christian Camargo as Orlando and Ariel; Ron Cephas Jones as Charles the Wrestler and Caliban; Stephen Dillane as Jaques and Prospero; Alvin Epstein as Adam

and Gonzalo; Juliet Rylance as Rosalind and Miranda; and Thomas Sadoski as Touchstone and Stephano.

To keep up-to-date with news and information for all future productions at The Old Vic you can join our e-subscribers list by visiting www.oldvictheatre.com or become a fan on facebook by searching "The Old Vic Theatre".

WHAT'S ON

Sadler's Wells 0870 737 7737
Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4TN
www.sadlerswells.com

3 - 4 March Richard Alton Dance Company
8 - 10 March English Touring Opera
13 - 17 March & 22 - 26 March Sidi Larbu Cherkaoui & Antony Gormley with monks from the Shaolin Temple - *Sutra*
19 - 20 March Danza Contemporanea de Cuba
2 - 3 April Family weekend - Aracaldanza's *Clouds*
23 - 24 April *Pictures from an Exhibition*
26 - 27 April Akram Khan - *Gnosis*

Peacock Theatre 0870 737 0337
Portugal Street, Kingsway, London WC2A 2HT
11 - 28 March *Blaze*
28 Apr - 15 May *The 7 Fingers - Psy*

Old Vic Theatre 0870 060 6628
Waterloo Road, London SE1 8NB
www.oldvictheatre.com
7 January - 3 April *Six Degrees of Separation*
10 April - 5 June *The Real Thing*

To book tickets for all productions at The Old Vic: 0844 871 7642

Dance at the London Coliseum 0871 911 0200
Booking also available through Sadlers Wells

30 March - 11 April Ballet Nacional de Cuba
14 - 17 April Mark Morris Dance Group
20 - 24 April Birmingham Royal Ballet
27 April - 2 May Ballet Nacional de España

REHEARSALS at SADLER'S WELLS Spring 2010

Once again opportunities to sit in on rehearsals at Sadler's Wells are opening up and listed below are the rehearsal opportunities for March and April which are most likely be in the afternoon. Please check with Richard Reavill, tel: 0149187 2574 nearer the time to check the exact time of the rehearsal. If you are on his email list you will be informed automatically and of any other opportunities that may arise. Please arrive 15 mins before the rehearsal time and pay £5 to the Committee Member present.



**Danza
Contemporanea
de Cuba**

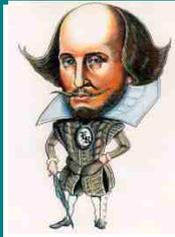
19 March

**Pictures from an
Exhibition
(Sadler's Wells
and Young Vic Co-
production)**

23 April



Illustrations from the Sadler's Wells website are used with permission



Shakespeare's Birthday Party

Saturday, 24th April at The
Old Vic
from 5pm to 6.30pm.

We are delighted to
announce that
Joan Plowright, the Lady
Olivier
will propose the toast to Shakespeare
subject to professional commitments.

Refreshments will be served in the
second upper circle bar of the theatre.
We look forward to seeing many of
you on what is always a very
enjoyable occasion.

£6 for members and £7.50 for guests.

Please apply for tickets to:
Kirsten Sheridan,
626 London Road, Ditton, Aylesford, Kent
ME20 6BX
(enclosing a stamped addressed envelope)

"There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, HAMLET ACT 4 SCENE 5

The Vic-Wells Association

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The copy deadline for the next issue of
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Saturday, 23rd January 2010.

Please send items or letters for
publication to the Editor (details above)
to arrive before this date.