

Kevin Spacey toasts the Bard!



Kevin Spacey kneels to toast the Bard

It was a beautiful spring afternoon when members of the *Vic-Wells Association*, and their guests, gathered at the Old Vic for the annual celebration of Shakespeare's Birthday Party. We were delighted to be joined by the Artistic Director of the Old Vic, Kevin Spacey and by Dame Eileen Atkins, who was accompanied by her husband, Bill Shepherd. Our Vice-President, Nickolas Grace, conveyed the apologies and best wishes of Lady Olivier who, regrettably, was unable to attend.

**“Dame Eileen said that
theatres should
always be
managed by actors”**

However, Dame Eileen entertained us wonderfully with memories of her Shakespearean debut as an understudy, at the age of 19, to the part of Maria in *Twelfth Night* at the Regent's Park Open Air Theatre. She spoke of overhearing the director, Robert Atkins, (who also acted and directed at the Old Vic), wondering who to cast in the part of Hippolyta in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He was concerned that while she had the *voice* she didn't have the *body* for the part. When he *did* cast her in the part, Dame Eileen questioned him about her “lack of a body”, only to be told; “Not to worry my dear. We will build you *up and OUT!*”

There was more laughter as she and Nickolas Grace reminisced about working together in Stratford; apparently they enjoyed a good gossip in the wings before going on stage, so much so that, one night, Nickolas followed her on stage to hear the rest of the, “very wicked,” story she was telling him!

Dame Eileen then spoke about her love for Shakespeare, how fortunate she has been to have played so many of his female characters and how, despite the huge changes to the English language in the last 400 hundred years, she believes his plays will constantly be performed and never forgotten. We then joined her in raising our glasses as she proposed the toast to, “*The Bard - William Shakespeare*”.

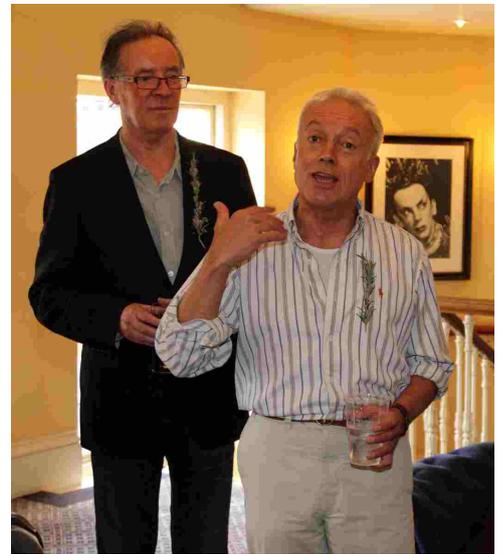
Following the toast and a round of applause, our Chairman, James Ranger, introduced Kevin Spacey, who is well known for his love of Shakespeare's works and who will, in fact, be acting in The Bridge Project's performances of two of the plays in 2012. Mr Spacey spoke of being in Paris in April as the Bridge Project's production of *The Tempest* opened. He said how wonderful it was to see how Shakespeare's words transcend all languages and how the emotions his plays contain are, and always will be, universal. He then treated us to a wonderful performance of



An animated Dame Eileen entertains the guests



Kevin Spacey and Jim Ranger laughing at Dame Eileen's amusing speech



Bill Shepherd (left) with Vic-Wells Vice-President Nickolas Grace

Shakespearean insults, which we hailed with much laughter and applause.

Dame Eileen then offered her congratulations to Mr Spacey for the wonderful work he is doing at the Old Vic and said that, in her opinion, theatres should always be managed by actors - cue a huge cheer from everyone!

Our Chairman then thanked Dame Eileen, Mr Spacey and everyone for attending and bade us, "Eat, drink & be merry!" The excellent buffet was supplied by members of the committee and was enjoyed by all. Everyone had a lovely time and it was a delight to hear so many theatre stories.

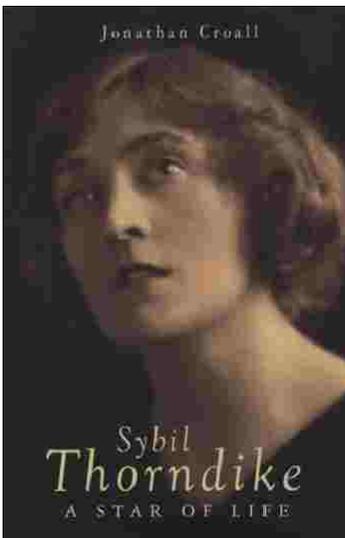
On behalf of the Chairman and committee, I would like to thank everyone who attended our celebration and also thank the staff of the Old Vic Theatre for making us so welcome.

Kirsten Sheridan

The First Vic-Wells Shakespeare's Birthday Festival

I have been reading *Sybil Thorndike, A Star of Life*, by Jonathan Croall, and thought you might find the following passages most interesting:

At the end of the season (in 1915), when the Old Vic organised its first Shakespeare's Birthday Festival, Sybil played eight roles in a fortnight. The festival - she described as, "a kind of stew after the joint and cold meat of the season" - quickly became an annual event. It included a programme of scenes from the plays, featuring many leading lights of the West End theatre, who would dash across the river in taxis to fit in a scene



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or two while appearing in the West End. Sybil was able to watch Ellen Terry as Portia in scenes from the Merchant of Venice - "a glorious lovely person, all sunshine and beauty, a glorious light seemed to shine from her, and the absolute truth that came from every word, her enunciation perfect".

Sybil had lent her support, together with Olivier, Gielgud and Edith Evans to an appeal to fund the extension of Sadler's Wells and to clear the debt of both the Wells and the Vic and had spoken with Guthrie, now the Old Vic's director of drama, at a fund raising supper at the Dorchester. In November Lilian Baylis died suddenly of a heart attack. Sybil wrote to Guthrie, "I know how you will be feeling Lilian's death, I saw it in the paper and I feel heart broken. I loved her so and in very difficult years because of the struggle and the war life then. She was great and really simple and really good". For the memorial service she and Russell put together a biography of their mentor, "a humble tribute to the memory of the most courageous woman that was ever associated with the theatre".

James Ranger

WENDY TOYE CBE

1917 - 2010

Wendy Toye, who was our President for many years, has died at the age of 92. She was charming, inexhaustible, energetic and tough. Her long career as a dancer, choreographer, producer and director began at the age of three dancing a polka at the Royal Albert Hall and at twelve appeared at the Old Vic as Peasblossom in *Midsummer Nights Dream*. She received her professional dance training from Karsovina, Ninette de Valois and later from Anton



Dolin. She danced with the Vic-Wells Ballet before joining the Markova Dolin Ballet where she was a successful choreographer as well as dancer.

After an operation which stopped her dancing Wendy continued to choreograph and produced or directed many

plays such as *As You Like It* at the Old Vic with Judi Dench, musicals such as *Bless the Bride*, reviews, operettas, TV, films where she became one of the first film directors in Britain, working with Alexander Korda. In 1957 at Sadler's Wells she staged the one act operas Menotti's *The Telephone* and Bartock's *Bluebeard's Castle*. Wendy's professionalism was held in high respect and affection by many theatre people and she was asked to organise and direct some 150 theatre professionals for a midnight matinee to celebrate Noel Coward's 70th birthday. I well remember her production of *The Sound of Music* at Sadler's Wells in 1992, attended by the Queen Mother as her birthday treat. She loved to help young would be performers and became the Patron of a new vocational theatre school, Millenium Performing Arts. Wendy was made a CBE in 1995.

At her funeral, Sophie Thompson made one of the moving tributes describing her courtesy aunt as being, "just the right amount of dotty". Afterwards at the reception Sophie told me she was with Wendy as she died and so sang 'Lord of the Dance', Wendy's favourite hymn (and one of the hymns we sang at the funeral). There will be a service of thanksgiving at the Actors' Church in Covent Garden.

James Ranger



My friend Wendy.....

I first met Wendy when I was Personal Assistant to Evelyn Laye, who I looked after for many years. She and Wendy were great friends, and both had enjoyed very long careers in show business. Wendy was with me at Miss Laye's funeral in 1996 and, during the ensuing years, I often went to have tea with her in her flat in Lower Sloane Street, which was surrounded by photographs and play bills of all the various shows Wendy had either directed or been in over so many years.

About 10 years ago, when her health started to deteriorate, she moved to the Actor's Home, Denville Hall, in Northwood in Middlesex, where I visited her many times. It's a haven for pro's when they reach a certain age and need some home comforts or are not well enough to cope on their own. Whenever one visited one always met several famous stars who had become resident there. At Denville Hall, Wendy always loved having visitors and especially liked hearing all the current theatre news and gossip.

Wendy had an amazing career, doing literally everything in show business. As a Director, she could be very strict and demanded discipline from her artistes - there was no messing about when Wendy was in charge! But she was looked on with enormous affection and gratefulness for what she taught them - and this is what she will be most remembered for.

Wendy was a supportive and understanding friend and a truly remarkable woman who will be greatly missed. At the end of her recent, well attended, funeral the round of applause as the curtain slowly drew on her coffin ensured that Wendy certainly left us playing to a Full House!

Mary-Jane Burcher

What are Friends For?

Has Birmingham Royal Ballet Friends lost touch with its roots and alienated potential audiences? Richard Reavill gives his opinion.

I recently attended a dance gala in Birmingham to celebrate 20 years of the Birmingham Royal Ballet. I have been a supporter of the company for many years and am also a 'Friend' of Birmingham Royal Ballet.

BRB Friends has, until recently, been a model of how the supporters' organization of a ballet company should be run. This is primarily due to the skill and hard work of their Friends Co-ordinator, Sheila Hitchman. However, recently policies have changed. Members of BRB Friends can no longer invite paying guests to the majority (and the most interesting) of events. I asked the BRB Director of Communications, Keith Longmore, for a justification for this change. He said it was to provide members with, "better value for money". Though the exclusivity of the events for BRB Friends has increased, the withdrawal of the ability to bring paying guests reduces the value of the membership for me. It will also reduce the income received by BRB Friends from guests, and the opportunity to persuade guests to become 'Friends'. No doubt there will be an increase in the subscription next year to make good the reduction in income.

The policy change has affected Vic-Wells members, as we were not invited as guests to rehearsals when the company visited Sadler's Wells last year. Comments received show that almost all our members are very upset about this, feeling that the company is losing touch with its roots, and alienating a major component of its potential audience in London.

The situation does raise some important issues, one of which is the relationship between the visiting major companies, and the support group of the theatres to which the companies tour. I cannot understand why touring companies should not wish to co-operate with the support groups in tour theatres. The local support group works to publicise shows and gain audiences. It is an additional resource at no cost. The Audience for Regional Theatre (ART) organization suggests that some theatres do not welcome the efforts of local groups as it is thought to interfere with the take-up for their group association membership. ART regard such associations as merely a means to generate income. If the management of BRB believes their decision will gain additional membership for BRB Friends, a straw poll of our members indicates that this will not happen. For the one or two weeks per year that the

company perform in London, the subscription would be uneconomical.

Perhaps a more serious issue is the offence which has been caused, the loss of goodwill, and the alienation of potential audience. Thanks to an inept decision by the Arts Council of England, BRB was not seen in London for more than a decade following transfer to Birmingham, and has returned to give very short seasons only in the past few years. The regular audience at Sadler's Wells has largely dwindled away. Rebuilding the London audience should be a priority for BRB, which is an excellent company on the brink of international status. David Bintley has deftly mixed the top-class classical productions of Sir Peter Wright with high quality innovative productions of his own work and that of other choreographers. The level of innovation by BRB is probably the best of any UK classical ballet company. However, London is now the dance capital of the world, with more dance performances than its major competitor, New York, or any other city. BRB needs to compete in London with a wide spectrum of dance, both national and international, and with the eclectic programme at Sadler's Wells. Policies which alienate audiences are quite the opposite of what is needed.

It is important that BRB should put more effort into marketing the company for its London appearances. It has been said that the marketing for the recent Wells season was poor. It would be helpful, if BRB still aspires to international status, for it to have more exposure in London, and to win much larger audiences. The Vic-Wells Association is very keen to help with this. Birmingham Royal Ballet; The Birmingham Repertory Theatre; and The Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, are the three jewels of the culture scene in Birmingham. BRB has the potential to become world recognised, and the artistic resources to achieve this, but its management decisions must be more outward looking. Otherwise it will become an excellent provincial ballet company, but with all the limitations which the word provincial implies.

'Friends' organizations of touring companies need to work together with local support groups. Perhaps an arrangement for temporary membership, similar to that given to visitors at golf clubs, would help achieve worthwhile cooperation. What are Friends for? In this instance the Friends of BRB should be there to support the company, in all its aspirations, not to demand 'better value for money'.

Richard Reavill

NEWS from Sadler's Wells - Shoe Madness!

Shoes..... stilettos, Doc Martens, platforms, winklepickers, slingbacks, ballet flats, Birkenstock, kitten heels, slippers. knackered trainers, Hush Puppies, Mary Janes, Chelsea boots, Ugg boots, Converse All-Stars, Crocs..... Shoes in all their glory and diversity are the starting point for a brand new show commissioned and produced by Sadler's Wells and premiering in September 2010.

"See all the secrets of humanity given away through the language of shoe".

Richard Thomas, composer of *Jerry Springer - The Opera*, is currently cooped up in a small room at Sadler's Wells with a piano, writing a cycle of songs and instrumental dance numbers exploring the full spectrum of footwear. He says, *"Not one of you is without shoes. Here in front of me I see row upon row of faces. But if I was lying on the floor at the right angle I would see a shattering emotional mosaic of shoes. Look down at your feet. Look to the right. Look to the left. And then along the row. See all the secrets of humanity given away through the language of shoe. Clean, dirty, rounded, pointy, high, low, matching, random, ravishing, ecstatic, beautiful, odd. The choice is yours. And you've already made it."*

The artistic process of creating this show is joyous and brutal at the same time, a patchwork world of leather and suede, canvas and plastic; a tangle of laces and rubber souls. Songs texts are written, re-written, set to music, discarded, re-instated, tested in front of an audience, re-worked again. So far Richard Thomas has presented his material in three studio sing-through events in front of selected audiences, who were invited to comment and contribute their own shoe stories, shoe memories, shoe highs and shoe lows.

Meanwhile auditions for dancers and singers have taken place, and rehearsals are about to start. The production is directed by multi-award winning choreographer Stephen Mear (*Mary Poppins, Sweet Charity, The Little Mermaid*) and will feature a cast of 12 dancers, 4 singers and a live band. Mear's choreography for the Menier Chocolate Factory's *Sweet Charity* earned him the title "best showbiz choreographer we have" (*Guardian*) and he recently received the Olivier Award for Best Theatre Choreographer for *Hello Dolly!*. His work has also been seen most recently onscreen as part of BBC 1's *So You Think You Can Dance*.

Alongside Mear, Sadler's Wells has invited leading choreographers Aletta Collins (*Bloom, The Tempest, Jesus Christ Superstar*), Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui (*zero degrees, Sutra*), Kate Prince (*Into the Hoods*) and



Hugo Glendinning 'Shoes'

Mark Smith (*Deaf Men Dancing*) to collaborate on the dance numbers. *Shoes* takes inspiration from the glamorous world of the famous Parisian dance revues such as Les Folies Bergère, Le Crazy Horse & Le Lido. During their heyday in the 1950s these venues drew choreographers including George Balanchine out of their usual sphere to choreograph some of their most successful shows. Later other renowned choreographers such as Jerome Robbins and Roland Petit also followed this tradition.

YOUR Shoe Story

There is still time to make your own contribution to *Shoes*: If you have a special shoe memory, a shoe story or anecdote, Richard Thomas would love to hear from you - it might end up in one of the songs!

Please send your shoe memories to Sadler's Wells for the attention of Laura Clark, or email programming@sadlerswells.com with the subject line "Shoe Memory".

Tickets for *Shoes* are on sale now. To book call 0844 412 4300 or visit the website: www.sadlerswells.com

Lisa - Marie Bowler

NEWS from The Old Vic

Tom Stoppard's *The Real Thing* directed by Anna Mackmin and starring Toby Stephens and Hattie Morahan opened at The Old Vic in April and has received critical acclaim across the board with three 5 five star reviews and nine 4 star reviews to date. Described by *The Daily Telegraph* as 'a play that glows with love's warmth and burns with love's pain... a stylish, superbly acted production.

The end of *The Real Thing* (it runs until 5 June) brings the opening of an intriguing pairing of Shakespeare's pastoral comedy *As You Like It* and his late masterpiece, *The Tempest*. Following a critically acclaimed inaugural year, Academy Award-winning film director Sam Mendes again directs a transatlantic company of actors for the second season of The Bridge Project. Currently embarking on an international tour across Asia and Europe, The Bridge Project opens in London on 12 June when both plays will run in repertoire until 21 August.

In 2010, The Old Vic acquired a lease for a series of subterranean tunnels beneath Waterloo Station. The Old Vic Tunnels will be home to innovative and surprising arts events throughout 2010, launching back in February with the premier of Banksy's film *Through the Gift Shop*. The season will feature a range of work to appeal to a diverse audience with runs typically lasting between two and five weeks. From 13 May - 26 June, following the sell-out London transfer of *Stovepipe* in 2009, HighTide Festival transfers *Ditch* to The Old Vic Tunnels for a limited season.

Old Vic - New Voices

The 24 Hour Plays: Old Vic New Voices, an amazing talent search, is going nationwide for the first time. Always popular, we predict 3,000 applicants this year for the coveted 50 places. The Vic-Wells Association gave 5 awards to participants last year.

Other news includes the continuing growth of The Under-25s Club - an initiative to encourage young people into the theatre with over 700 members joining since its inception last September.

For further information and to keep up-to-date with further news 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".

Lucy Faulks

Tim Rooke's entertainment news.....

Seat Sponsors Needed

Bristol Old Vic Artistic Director Tim Morris has been explaining how the seating will be reconfigured after the re-development of the theatre. The stage now comes out to the first row of the stalls, which is where it would have been originally when the theatre was built in 1766. The boxes have also been replaced by a door for actor's exits and entrances, as would have been the custom in the 18th century. Other potential plans include opening up the entrance corridors into the stalls to their original width. All in all, a very exciting year ahead with this £19 million re-development.



Edward Woodward Memorial



This took place at St Paul's Covent Garden and was attended by a galaxy of stars. References were made to Edward's most famous roles from *Rattle of a Simple Man* in 1962 to *Goodbye Gilbert Harding* in 2002 and we were shown 'clips' of his work

including his last film, which is still to be released. His wife Michele Dotrice made a very moving and personal speech.

Out and About

See page 8 if you would like to book for one of our Vic-Wells Association outings in June and July.

WHAT'S ON

Sadler's Wells 0870 737 7737

Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4TN

www.sadlerswells.com

- 25 - 29 May Rambert Dance Company
4 - 15 June Kabuki, featuring Ebizo Ichikawa XIoui & Antony Gormley with monks from the Shaolin Temple - *Sutra*
17 - 18 June les ballets C de la B - Alain Platel's *Out of Context* (UK premiere)
24 - 26 June Classical Opera Company - Mozart's *Zaide* (World premiere)
29 June-3 July Paco Peña - *Flamenco sin Fronteras*
6 - 10 July Nedelands Dans Theater - 50th Anniversary Programme
14 - 17 July Hofesh Shechter - *Political Mother*
28 - 31 July Sylvie Guillem/Robert Lepage/ Russell Maliphant - *Eonnagata*
3 - 22 August *Tanguera* (UK premiere)

Peacock Theatre 0870 737 0337

Portugal Street, Kingsway, London WC2A 2HT

18 May - 5 June *The Merchants of Bollywood*

8 June- 27 June *Bounce - Insane in the Brain*

Old Vic Theatre 0870 060 6628

Waterloo Road, London SE1 8NB

www.oldvictheatre.com

10 April - 5 June *The Real Thing*

12 June - 21 Aug **THE BRIDGE**

PROJECT 2010: *As You Like It & The Tempest*



REHEARSALS AT SADLER'S WELLS

SUMMER 2010

Once again there may be opportunities to sit in on rehearsals at Sadler's Wells, see below for those in May and July. They are likely to 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.

Rambert Dance Company

28 May



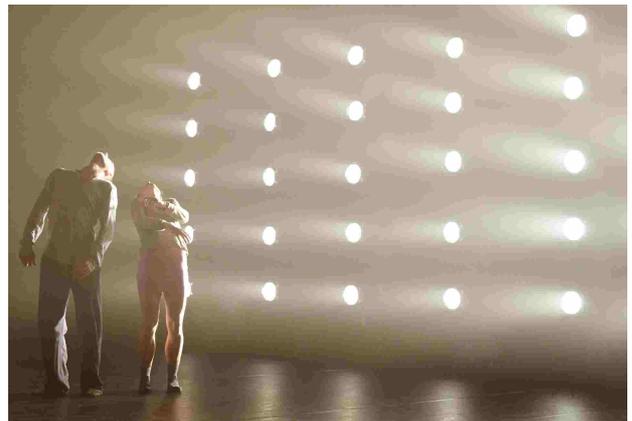
NDT1 and 2

6 July



Hofesh Shechter

14 July



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Shoe Madness at Sadler's Wells

VIC-WELLS ASSOCIATION OUTINGS

Sutton House : Thursday, 24th June at 2.30pm

Join us on a visit to The National Trust's magnificent Sutton House, Homerton High Street, Hackney, London E9 6JQ. Built in 1535 by a prominent courtier of Henry V111, Sutton House retains much of the atmosphere of a Tudor home. Discover oak-panelled rooms, original carved fireplaces and a charming courtyard.
Cost **£5.00.**

The Rose Theatre : Thursday, 8th July at 5.30pm

Pepe Pryke, Artistic Director of The Rose Theatre will be our guide. We will meet opposite the Globe Theatre and Mr Pryke will give us a tour of Bankside pointing out sites of buildings that existed in Elizabethan times, before arriving at The Rose Theatre itself. This visit to London's most historic theatre is highly recommended.
Cost **£5.00.**

If you are interested in either of the above outings please send your cheque and a stamped SAE to:
Tim Rooke, 314B Park Road, London N8 8LA. Tim can be contacted on 020 8352 0492

The Vic-Wells Association

Founded in 1923 by Lilian Baylis CH

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