



❄️ THE TWELFTH NIGHT PARTY ❄️

Not to be missed! Our annual Twelfth Night Party will take place at the Old Vic on Saturday, 7th January 2011 from 5.00pm to 6.30pm in the second circle bar area.

Jamie Dee, a member of the cast of *Noises Off*, the Old Vic's current production, will cut the cake at this historic celebration.

Tickets are £6 for Members and £7.50 for Non-Members.

Please write for tickets, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope, to:
Ruth Jeayes, 185 Honor Oak Road, London SE23 3RP, or call 0208 699 2376.

Across the Footlights

Liz Schafer outlines a history of the 12th Night Party

The Twelfth Night Party was first introduced by Lilian Baylis in January 1921. It quickly became a very popular event and one of the highlights of the Old Vic, and later Sadler's Wells, calendar. After the performance on, or near to, 6 January rostra would be placed over the orchestra pit and the audience would be invited onstage.

There was much autograph hunting; the Sir Roger de Coverley would be danced and the cake – which sometimes weighed in at around 200lb – was always cut by Lilian Baylis herself. This cake, at least in the early years had Waes Hael (Good Health) iced on it. The idea behind the Twelfth Night party was for friends to be made 'across the footlights'; this phrase was always used as the title for the opening article in the Old Vic Magazine at the time and it very much sums up Lilian Baylis's commitment to making her audiences feel part of her theatre family.

"In 1938 the cake was cut by Vivien Leigh and Ralph Richardson"



Vivien Leigh and Ralph Richardson appearing together in the 1948 film *Anna Karenina*

The Twelfth Night party became so popular that the Old Vic was not big enough to hold it: for example, in 1924 it was held at the Royal Horticultural Hall and in 1923 at Lambeth Baths. In 1925 over 1000 people were present and Robert Atkins was King of the Feast with Muriel Gough as Queen and Andrew Leigh as Jester. Tickets were three shillings and sixpence (17½p) exclusive of refreshment and it was a major fund raising event.

After Baylis's death it became customary to ask stars of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells to cut the cake. So, in 1938 the cake was cut by Vivien Leigh and Ralph Richardson and in 1939 the season's Oberon and Titania – Robert Helpmann and Dorothy Hyson – did the honours. During the war, festivities were cut back but there was a cake in 1943 and the cake cutter was Joan Cross, followed

by Margot Fonteyn in 1944. Ninette de Valois obliged in 1945 and Olive Dyer in 1946. The cake cutting honours rotated around the companies over the next three years with Ralph Richardson representing Drama in 1947, Peggy Van Praagh dance in 1948 and Anna Pollak opera in 1949. The massive cake was made from ingredients donated by members of the Vic-Wells association who turned up at the theatre to donate flour, eggs etc.

The festivities were quite a logistical challenge but they continued to be very popular. In 1949 Dorothy Green and Wilfrid Walter cut the cake whilst the Master and Mistress of the Revels were Angela Baddeley and Michael Redgrave. 1950 saw Peggy Ashcroft cutting the cake with Roger Livesey as Master of the Revels. The next few years had Ursula Moreton, Athene Seyler and Lewsi Casson, James Robertson (the director of the Sadler's Wells opera), Ann Todd, HRH Princess Margaret and Barbara Jefford with Keith Michell as cake cutters: Masters of the Revels included Roger Livesey, James Robertson, Paul Rogers, John Neville and Eric Porter, Frederick Sharp. The parties were held in turn at the Old Vic, Sadler's Wells and the New Theatre.

I am rather relieved that these days the parties are on a somewhat smaller scale and the cake does not weigh in at 200lb but the cake cutters of the last few years – such as Sandi Toksvig, David Suchet and Dame Monica Mason - are keeping alive the Lilian Baylis tradition of connecting 'across the footlights'.

BRB's *La Fille mal gardée*

Reviewed by Laura Dodge

“With ribbons, dancing chickens and an adorable live pony – this is an ideal show for children”

Frederick Ashton's 1960 work *La Fille mal gardée*, or *The Wayward Daughter*, is a comic ballet which epitomises its choreographer's style. Ashton loved romance, beauty, humour and fancy footwork and all are evident in abundance here. It tells the story of Lise as her mother attempts to marry her to a wealthy but ridiculous vineyard owner's son. But the young daughter defies Widow Simone, determinedly seeing her poor but handsome boyfriend, Colas, until love finally triumphs.

From the opening cock and hens dance to the lyrical wedding pas de deux, Birmingham Royal Ballet performed with excellence. As the lead couple, Carol-Anne Millar and Joseph Caley were technically-adept and attractive. Both executed the choreography precisely with Millar shining particularly in her delightful Act III mime. James Barton made a pleasingly dry Widow Simone, presenting the famous clog dance with charm and avoiding slipping into a typical pantomimic interpretation of the role for cheap laughs.

But demanding most attention was Mathias Dingman as Alain, the foolish but rich umbrella-loving suitor. His interpretation of Ashton's exaggerated movements invited a sympathy rarely commanded by the character. His Alain was not a village idiot, but instead an unfortunate young man desperate to find love and please his elders, deserving of affection rather than mockery.

Ferdinand Hérold's exquisite score was played exceptionally by the Royal Ballet Sinfonia, under Gavin Sutherland's expert baton. BRB's only failing was in their use of Sadler's Wells' more than adequate stage space. With the production's lavish scenery, it felt overcrowded and company dancers at times appeared uncomfortably squeezed in.

Originally created in the 18th Century, *La Fille mal gardée* is the oldest ballet still in regular performance today. Ashton's version, with ribbons, dancing chickens and an adorable live pony is an ideal show for children. His *Fille* is a true English classic – beautiful, enchanting and tender – and just as enjoyable on the first viewing as on the hundredth.



James Barton as Widow Simone

John Neville OBE CM

2 May 1925 – 19 November 2011

John Neville achieved early renown as a leading Shakespearean actor with the Old Vic in the 1950's and later starred in the title role in the 1988 film *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen*.

Noted for his aquiline good looks, swift intelligence and distinctive baritone voice, Neville dominated, with Richard Burton, the Old Vic stage in the late 1950s. He played many leading roles, including Romeo, Hamlet and an acclaimed Richard III. In 1956 he and Burton performed a memorable double-act alternating the roles of Othello and Iago.

John Neville was born in Willesden, North London in 1925 and educated at Chiswick County School for boys. He left school aged 16 to work as a stores clerk in a garage but his performance as Hamlet in a church drama group production won him a council scholarship to Rada.



John Neville as Baron Munchausen (1988)

He took it up after three years' wartime service as a signalman in the Royal Navy, during which he took part in the Normandy landings and served in the Far East.

In 1949 he was engaged by the Birmingham Repertory Theatre where, among other roles, he played John Worthing in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Moving on to the Bristol Old Vic, Neville soon became the company's leading man.

In 1953 Michael Benthall engaged him for the Old Vic, where early roles included Lewis the Dauphin in *King John*; Orsino in *Twelfth Night*; Macduff in *Macbeth* and Berowne in *Love's Labour's Lost*. It was, however, his performance as *Richard III* in 1955 that established him as the company's front rank. He captured perfectly the beleaguered king's combination of arrogance and pathos, and on the opening night his performance won him 22 curtain calls.

In 1961 Neville moved to the Nottingham Playhouse, where he served as joint director from 1963 and played numerous roles. In 1972 he directed *The Rivals* at the newly-built National Arts centre in Ottawa. He decided to stay and later took Canadian citizenship.

For the next two decades he continued to act and direct the classics. After playing the title role in *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* Neville appeared in numerous film and television roles notably as The Well-Manicured Man in *The X Files*.

Neville was appointed OBE in 1965 and a member of the Order of Canada in 2006.

Alexander Grant

22 February 1925 – 30 September 2011

Alexander Grant was the Royal Ballet's most remarkable actor-dancer in its golden period from the 1940s to 1950s. Grant created such indelible roles on stage as the lovable simpleton Alain in *La Fille mal gardée*, Bottom in *The Dream* (dancing on point), the Pirate Chief with Margaret Fonteyn in *Daphnis and Chloé* and an apparently nude Eros in *Sylvia*.

As a dancer, Grant's brilliance was recognised very early at Sadler's Wells. His youthful bravura was enshrined in the scorching leaps and turns as Spirit of the Fire in *Homage to the Queen*, created for him by choreographer Frederick Ashton. As a comic mime, he was generally thought to be unsurpassed, able to invest the most eccentric roles with true pathos.

Born in 1925 in Wellington, New Zealand, Grant resolved to be a dancer at the age of six. He studied ballet at Wellington College and won a scholarship to the Sadler's Wells Ballet School in 1944. Two years later the former Diaghilev choreographer Léonide Massine came to London to stage *Mam'zelle*, decorated by Andre Derain. Massine seized Grant for the central role of the amorous Barber – and it made the young dancer a star.



Alexander Grant and Margot Fonteyn
in *Daphnis and Chloé*

Grant's superb incarnation of the puppet Petrushka and his eccentric Dr Coppélius in *Coppélia* laid the foundation for the two most famous character roles Ashton then created for him: as the capering half-wit Alain in *La Fille mal gardée* (1960) and Bottom the weaver in *The Dream* (1964). When Ashton died he bequeathed the ownership of the *La Fille mal gardée* to Grant, and its popularity kept him busy staging it globally, from the Bolshoi Ballet to the National Ballet of Canada, where he was Artistic Director from 1976 - 1983.

On his return to Britain, Grant was an extremely popular guest, in 1984 dancing the Dago in Ashton's early hit *Façade*. He also played many character roles with the London Festival Ballet.

A rare Vic-Wells Association artefact comes to light!

Richard Reavill, our Secretary was contacted recently by Virginia Surtees, who is in her nineties, and one of our longest serving life-members. She asked whether anyone in the Association would be interested in a small brooch which was issued to members in November 1938. He said that he was sure the Committee and Members would be very interested, so she has sent him the brooch, saying that she was pleased it had found a good home. It is made of brass with black and gold enamel. It is precisely an inch in diameter and has the Association's emblem of two masks, of comedy and tragedy, in gold on a black background exactly as on our letterhead, but with VIC-WELLS above the masks and ASSOCIATION below in gold letters. It comes in a decorated 'pill-box'.



The name of the maker, on the back of the brooch, is not very easy to read, but it thought to be Thomas Fattorini Ltd., Regent Street, Birmingham. Did any other long-serving members acquire such a brooch, and who still has it?

News from the Old Vic

Noises Off at the Old Vic

From December through to February 2012 Lindsay Posner directs a new production of Michael Frayn's irresistible, multi-award-winning backstage comedy *Noises Off*.

Winner of Olivier and Evening Standard awards for Best Comedy, this celebrated comedy serves up a riotous double bill - a play within a play. Hurtling along at breakneck speed it follows the backstage antics of a touring theatre company as they stumble their way through rehearsals to a shambolic first night and a final disastrous performance.

The Independent described *Noises Off* as, "probably the most side-splitting play ever written".

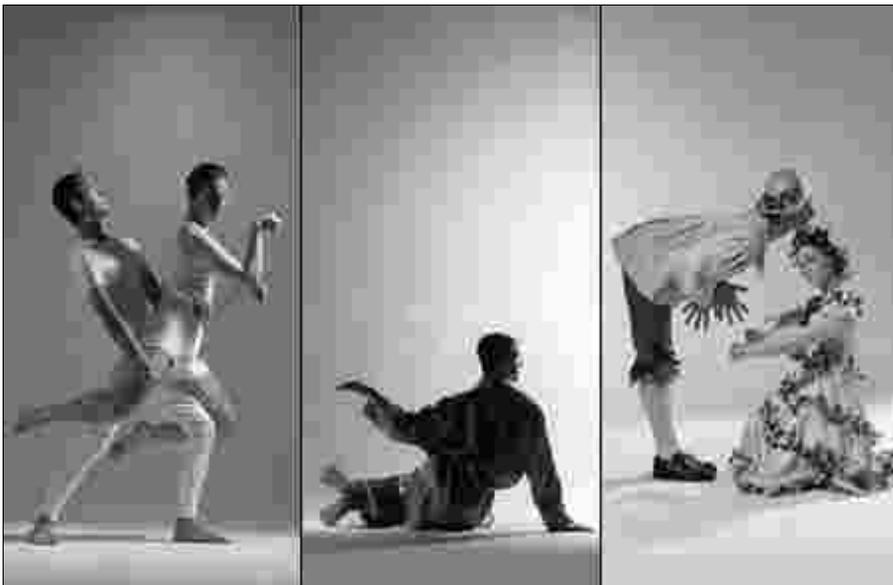


Cella Imlie, Jamie Glover, Amy Nuttall & Jonathan Coy

Sadler's Wells News

The Olympic year with Sadler's Wells

Sadler's Wells has just announced its new season of dance for 2012 and in this Olympic year, the theatre's mission is to reflect the diversity of our city in the diversity of our art-form. We are proud to present everything from classical ballet to hip hop, contemporary dance to flamenco and spring 2012 brings dance for everyone.



Matthew Bourne's Early Adventures
Spitfire, Town and Country & The Infernal Galop

We will be celebrating the 25th anniversary of Matthew Bourne's company New Adventures (formerly Adventures in Motion Pictures). Matthew has been integral to the Sadler's Wells vision over the last decade and as part of New Adventures' 25th anniversary celebrations, Britain's favourite choreographer presents a triple bill of acclaimed early works that launched his career.

And this season the boys are back with *The Talent*, the new company of dancers created by Michael Nunn and William Trevitt of the BalletBoyz. There will also be the chance to see an early preview of Russell Maliphant's new work, a new collaboration

with hip hop dancers, shown as part of British Dance Edition London 2012 opening at Sadler's Wells.

Through June and July, Sadler's Wells presents its much anticipated project where ten of the late Pina Bausch's works are shown in a joint venture with the Barbican. These ten productions were each influenced by global locations in India, Brazil, Italy, Hong Kong, United States of America, Hungary, Turkey, Chile, and Japan. This month-long season will celebrate the global focus of the Olympic year and one of the most influential choreographers in dance.

To book tickets for Sadler's Wells go to www.sadlerswells.com or phone the ticket office on 0844 871 0090.

Out and About with the Vic-Wells

Backstage Tour of the Old Vic

A guided backstage tour of the Old Vic will take place on 16th February 2012 at 2.30pm and will last approximately 1 hour. Tickets are £6, please send a cheque together with a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Mr. J Ranger, Cromer Cottage, Cromer, Stevenage SG2 7QA

A visit to the World's Largest Costumiers

The Vic-Wells is planning to visit Angels - costumiers to the stars – who provide costumes for well known stage and screen productions.

The company started in the West End of London, in 1840, supplying costumes for actors on the Victorian stage, who in those days had to provide their own outfits. They have recently supplied the costumes for *Downton Abbey* and *The King's Speech* and supplied clothes to



over 30 Oscar-winning films. The huge collection of costumes is kept on eight *miles* of hanging racks and is now housed in Hendon in North London. The tour allows the public to see talented tailors and designers at work, and to get a rare view of over 5 million items of clothing from every era.

Spaces on the tour are strictly limited to 12 people (including the group leader) although the full group of 12 may not be able to visit some of the smaller departments. Participants need to be able to walk quite a distance; we will be on our feet for an hour and a half.

Tickets for the tour will cost £25 and, at this time, we are seeking only expressions of interest. So, if you would like to join our tour, please send your details and a stamped, self-addressed envelope to Mr Tim Rooke, 302b Park Road, London N8 8LA. Tim will then forward further information about the date, time etc. so that you can forward the required payment. If there's a large demand places, bookings will be dealt with on a first come, first served basis.

Theatre Reviews

by Tim Rooke

Playboy of the Western World - The Old Vic

My reason for attending this production was that I have been greatly impressed by what Kevin Spacey has done at the Old Vic. Apart from a few turkeys, his choice of plays has been inspired and has restored Miss Baylis' theatre to what it was in the great days of the Old Vic Company!

On previous viewings of this piece, I confess have always come out thinking, "what a wasted evening," but this time, due to John Crowley's lucid production, the play made sense.

The play is too well known to go into the plot but the acting was top class with special mention going to Robert Sheehan's Christy Mahon and Niamh Cusack (yes, another of that clan who seem to be in a lot of Old Vic productions) as the Widow Quin. And last, but not least, Ruth Negga as a very sexy Pegeen Mike. Sterling work was done by the rest of the cast and Scott Pask's revolving pub set enhanced yet another evening at the Old Vic.



Robert Sheehan, Niamh Cusack and Ruth Negga

Hamlet - The Young Vic

I had really looked forward to seeing Michael Sheen as Hamlet. But, oh dear, this was the most stupid, idiotic and silliest production of this (or any other play) I have seen in decades! Why do producers, who don't know the play or who dislike Shakespeare (in this case probably both!) want to assassinate one of literature's greatest pieces?

"A stupid, idiotic and silly production..."



Michael Sheen as Hamlet

Get this – we are in a psychiatric hospital (don't ask me why!) and the play opens with Hamlet hugging his father's coat over his coffin – and from then on things went downhill rapidly. For some unknown reason Rosencrantz and Horatio are played by women. Hamlet delivers the words of the ghost. And Claudius has a double role as the new King of Denmark and Head Shrink of the hospital.

Given the chance, Mr Sheen could be a great Hamlet. Excellent performances came from Sally Dexter as Gertrude and Vinette Robinson as Ophelia. As far as the rest of the cast – it would be kindest to draw a veil over...

I only hope that no-one in the audience was seeing Hamlet for the first time because it would have been a bewildering and off putting experience.

Something is rotten in the State of Denmark...!

WHAT'S ON



Sadler's Wells

www.sadlerswells.com

Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4TN 0844 871 0090

Main Theatre

- 6 Dec. - 22 Jan. New Adventures - *Matthew Bourne's Nutcracker*
27 - 29 Jan. Ivan Putrov - *Men in Motion*
2 - 3 Feb. Wayne McGregor | Random Dance - *FAR*
Candoco Dance Company - *Set & Reset/Reset*
Hofesh Schecter Company - *Art of Not Looking Back*
5 Feb Russell Maliphant Company - *The Rodin Project*
7 - 19 Feb. Flamenco Festival London
21 - 25 Feb. Akram Khan Company - *DESH*
29 Feb. - 1 Mar. Richard Alston Dance Company - *Rough Cut,*
A Ceremony of Carols & Lie of the Land
3 - 4 Mar. BalletBoyz - *The Talent*
6 - 9 Mar. Nederland Dans Theater 2 - *Mixed Bill*
19 - 20 Mar. Wayne McGregor | Random Dance - *FAR*
25 Mar- 7 Apr. Pet Shop Boys & Javier De Frutos - *The Most Incredible Thing*



Flamenco Festival London

Photo: Javier Fergó

Peacock Theatre

Portugal Street, Kingsway,
London WC2A 2HT

- 30 Nov. - 8 Jan. Birmingham Repertory
Theatre - *The Snowman*
31 Jan - 19 Feb. UMOJA (South African
song and dance)
3 - 13 April English National Ballet 2
- *My First Sleeping Beauty*
19 - 22 Apr. London Children's Ballet
- *A Little Princess*



A Little Princess

Photo: Bill Cooper



The Most Incredible Thing

Photo: Hugo Glendinning

Old Vic Theatre

www.oldvictheatre.com

Waterloo Road, London SE1 8NB 0870 060 6628

3 Dec. - 10 Mar. Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*

17 Mar. - 9 Jun. *The Duchess of Malfi*

The Vic-Wells Association

Founded in 1923 by Lilian Baylis CH

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The Editor
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