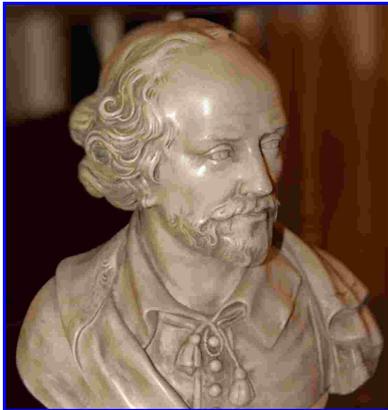




## SHAKESPEARE'S BIRTHDAY PARTY



*The event not to be missed!*

Our annual party celebrating the birthday of The Bard will take place at the Old Vic on Saturday, 21<sup>st</sup> April 2011 from 5.00pm to 6.30pm in the second circle bar area.

A member of the cast of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Old Vic's current production, will be invited to propose the toast.

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

Please write for your tickets, enclosing a stamped, self-addressed envelope, to:

Ruth Jeayes, 185 Honor Oak Road, London SE23 3RP

## Shakespeare's Birthday Party

Liz Schafer reports on a historic Vic-Wells event

It was during the First World War under the management of Lilian Baylis that the Old Vic became "*The Home of Shakespeare*". In fact the Old Vic did a whole range of plays by playwrights other than Shakespeare, but Shakespeare was regarded as the *house playwright*, and once Baylis had the words *The Home of Shakespeare* put up in huge letters outside the theatre, no one was going to argue. It is true that at the time no other theatre in London was regularly performing Shakespeare's plays; and at Stratford-upon-Avon most Shakespeare productions appeared as part of the Benson company's annual summer season there. In fact, it was actually a wartime trip to Stratford, for the 1916 quarter centenary of Shakespeare's death, that inspired Baylis to begin celebrating Shakespeare's birthday, traditionally identified with St George's day, in style. The very next year the Old Vic Birthday Festival began.



Ellen Terry

The first Shakespeare Birthday Festival took place on Monday 23 April 1917. This Birthday Matinee included guest appearances by Ellen Terry, Lilian Braithwaite, Edith Craig, Ben Webster, Lady Forbes-Robertson, and the actor managers who had really kick started Shakespeare at the Vic, Matheson Lang and his wife Hutin Britton. Music was provided by Nellie Chaplin and Co; Nellie Chaplin was a then a major mover and shaker in the revival of Renaissance music and dance. Later on the Birthday Festival featured favourite scenes from Shakespeare, such as the so-called 'kitchen' scene from (continued on page 3)

**"Ellen Terry attended the party in 1917"**

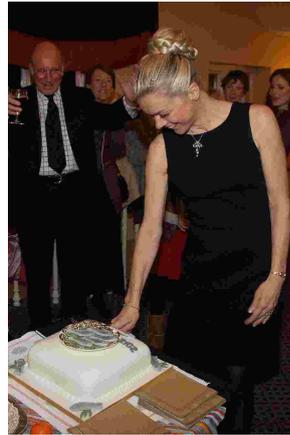
# Vic-Wells Association's Twelfth Night Party 2012



The Cake !!! Prop sardines appear in the play!



Janie Dee cuts the cake!



Members and guests enjoy the occasion



What a swell party it was!

The cast of *Noises Off*, who were performing at the Old Vic, joined us in the celebration and, despite a star performance by Janie Dee, the pièce de résistance was... the cake! One guest described it as the "star attraction". You can examine the photo but the artistry had to be *seen* to be believed. A fabulous spread of every food imaginable was provided by Ruth Jeayes and her band of volunteer helpers. Janie Dee spoke eloquently about her theatre experiences and was delighted to have met, at the party, two people who had taught her.

And as for the cake? Yes! It *tasted* just as good as it looked.



Celia Imrie and James Ranger inspect the cake

Party photography by Nick Panagakis ©

*Twelfth Night*, or famous soliloquies or set pieces such as Launce and his dog from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. Extracts from popular productions of the year would be reprised and Sybil Thorndike described these celebrations as, “a *Hotch Potch of scenes, a kind of stew after the joint and cold meat of the season – everything in the pot*”. Old Vic favourites like Sybil and Russell Thorndike, if they were playing elsewhere on the night of the Birthday Festival, would make a dash across London, as soon as the curtain came down on the show they were in, so that they could to do a turn at the Old Vic at the end of the night.



Sybil Thorndike in 1972

There would also often be a “*Revel*” which usually meant a comic scene, full of “in jokes” about the Vic, sometimes including impressions of well known personalities such as Baylis herself.

Sometimes the format varied: in March 1920 the *Old Vic Magazine* called on its readers to vote for their favourite Shakespeare production of the season because whichever one received the most votes would be played on 23 April. On the day of the Birthday Festival, queues for unreserved seats in the gallery would start early in the morning, so some people ended up spending almost the entire day at the theatre either queuing, eating in the café, and, finally, actually enjoying the show.

**“Sybil Thorndike would make a dash across London to attend the party”**

The Old Vic company invented a whole set of traditions for the Birthday Festival, some of which are still used today; there is rosemary, for remembrance; a bust of Shakespeare presides over the festivities; and the colours of Shakespeare’s coat of arms – gold and black - were adopted as the colours of the Vic-Wells Association.

After Baylis’s death in 1937 Shakespeare’s Birthday became more of a party than a festival but guests of honour – from the cast of whatever was then playing at the Vic – often turned up in full costume. For example, in 1954 Michael Hordern was dressed as *Prospero* when he cut the cake, and in 1957 Robert Atkins was dressed as *Othello*. I can’t help hoping that not too much of Atkins’ makeup came off while he was munching cake!

## Alexander Grant CBE

22 February 1925 – 30 September 2011

	<p>A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of</p> <p><b>ALEXANDER GRANT CBE</b></p> <p>will be held at</p> <p>St.Paul’s Church, Covent Garden</p> <p>on Friday, 27 April, 2012 at 12 noon</p> <p>to which all are welcome</p>
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*Note from the Editor :*

*Thank you to those who contacted us regarding the photograph published in our last issue with the obituary of Alexander Grant. The photograph was not of Alexander Grant and we sincerely apologise for the error. We publish now a more recent photograph of Mr. Grant.*

# Putrov and Friends

Reviewed by **Richard Reavill**

Ivan Putrov's first essay in a *Putrov and Friends* programme at Sadler's Wells proved to be a rather thin evening. This was not entirely his fault, as two of the three Russian dancers due to appear were unable to get visas. This meant the 15 minute piece intended to end the evening was reduced from short to very short.

The concept *Men in Motion* was to celebrate male dancing, with Ivan and some of his mates providing the bulk of the performance. Elena Glurdjidze of ENB danced the supporting role in *Le Spectre de la Rose* with Igor Kolb from the Mariinsky. Though well danced, this work somehow failed to generate the expected rose scented romantic atmosphere. Perhaps it was not ideal as an opening piece. The large and low French windows of the set did not help, rather weakening the effect of the male dancer's dramatic entry and exit by providing hurdles which a toddler could have managed.

Next up was, Ukrainian, Sergei Polunin fresh from his sudden unexplained and inexplicable decision to crash out of the Royal Ballet. He delivered beautiful dancing in Kasian Goleizovsky's *Narcisse*. Absorption with his

*"Two of the three Russian dancers due to appear were unable to get visas"*

shadow at the end provided a representation of the character's obsession with his reflection, and some memories of *Ondine*. The solo was well received by the capacity audience, swelled by many Polunin fans, aghast at his departure and convinced they were attending his last performances.

It is something of a coincidence that Ivan Putrov, also from the Ukraine, was a principal dancer with the Royal Ballet who departed thence in sudden and unexplained circumstances. Putrov made the first of two appearances in the last item of the first half, Ashton's *Dance of the Blessed Spirits*. This gala piece was made for Anthony Dowell, and suits Putrov well, but is not top-flight Ashton.

By far the best item of the evening, *Afterlight (Part 1)*, opened the second half. This piece has been seen before at Sadler's Wells, but here the music (Satie), the choreography (Russell Maliphant), the lighting (Michael Hulls), and the beautifully controlled dancing of Daniel Proietto combined to make an absorbing and satisfying work.



Ivan Putrov

The final item was a new piece choreographed by Ivan Putrov, and danced by him, with Elena Glurdjidzy and Aaron Sillis, a late replacement for one of the visa-less Russians. A note in the programme quotes from the poem *Ithaka* (1911) by C P Cavafy, a text implying that the journey of life is more important than the destination.

## REHEARSALS AT SADLER'S WELLS - SPRING 2012

Rehearsal opportunities have been thin in the last few months but now look much more promising. Sadler's Wells staff rarely know more than a few days in advance whether companies will be holding a dress rehearsal at all and whether they would welcome our Members to attend, Please check nearer the time with Richard Reavill (Phone 01491 872574) who will confirm date and time if the rehearsal is going ahead. He will inform automatically all those Members who are on the email list but it would be helpful if you would reply if you are coming. If you have an email address but are not on Richard's list please register on [vic-wells@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:vic-wells@tiscali.co.uk).

Here are their best guesses for possible rehearsals:

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> April, Royal Ballet of Flanders  
Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> April, Scottish Ballet  
Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> May, Rambert Dance Company

## News from the Old Vic

John Webster's great Jacobean tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi*, opens at the Old Vic on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2012 and is directed by Jamie Lloyd.

*The Duchess of Malfi* is set in the Italian Renaissance court of Amalfi and tells the dark, bloody story of the recently widowed Duchess (Eve Best) who secretly marries her lover and steward against the wishes of her powerful brothers. As jealousy, madness and bloodshed surround her, the Duchess retains her calm strength and dignity, even in the face of death.

Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* was written for and performed by The King's Men in London between 1612 and 1614, and was published in 1623 under the title *The Tragedy of the Duchesse of Malfy*. Considered Webster's masterpiece, its poetic language and its exploration of female courage in the face of male corruption has earned Webster a reputation as one of England's greatest dramatists. The nightmarish violence and the play's open commentary on women's sexuality and recognition of the power of psychological torment have made *The Duchess of Malfi* a subject for fierce debate since its beginning.



Eve Best

Eve Best last appeared at the Old Vic in London and on Broadway opposite Kevin Spacey in *A Moon for the Misbegotten* in 2007.

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## Sadler's Wells News



Sylvie Guillem

Photo: Lesley Leslie-Spinks

Three of Sadler's Wells' Associate Artists have recently been announced as winners at the Critics' Circle 12th National Dance Awards for 2011. Held at The Place's Robin Howard Dance Theatre in January, the awards were given for performances held in the UK between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2011.

Sylvie Guillem was awarded the title of best female performance (modern) for her latest production with Sadler's Wells, *6000 miles away*, whilst Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, fellow Associate Artist, won the respective male category for his performance in *Dunas*, his collaboration with María Pagés. The award for best modern choreography

went to another Sadler's Wells Associate Artist, Akram Khan, for *Vertical Road*.

Other Sadler's Wells nominations included Javier De Frutos (*The Most Incredible Thing*) and Hofesh Shechter (*Political Mother – The Choreographer's Cut*) for best modern choreography, Alexander Whitley (Wayne McGregor | Random Dance) for outstanding male performance (modern) and BalletBoyz' *The Talent* for the inaugural best independent company award. Congratulations to all our winners!

### Can YOU help the Vic-Wells Association?



Two posts are presently vacant in the administration of your Association.

The role of Hon. Social Secretary would suit someone with the time to spare to help organise our parties and visits. The Association's website is in need of updating and then on-going maintenance and would require a person with sufficient knowledge of computers and website design. Neither post need be very arduous or time consuming.

If you think that you could help, or know of someone that might, please ask our Chairman, James Ranger, for more information. His details are on the back page of this issue.

## A Trilogy of Multiple Bills

*Richard Reavill reviews three recent UK dance company performances at the Wells*

It was almost a trilogy of triple bills, but Scottish Ballet presented a double bill of MacMillan's *Song of the Earth* and Jorma Elo's *Kings 2 Ends*. Something old and something new. The piece by the Finnish choreographer, Elo, was given first, busy, quirky, and danced with much energy by the company led by an impressive Eve Mutso. The combination of music: Mozart and Steve Reich, could not have provided a greater contrast, but the work rather overplayed the quirky element. *Song of the Earth* was danced with great commitment by the company, and the value of coaching by Donald MacCleary was evident. I saw the second cast, in which the role of the Messenger of Death was ably performed by Victor Zarallo, a young dancer listed last among the company. This is clearly an alphabetical position: he has a light jump and an interesting stage presence, so is one to watch. Ashley Page must be commended for adding MacMillan's masterpiece to the company's repertory in his last season as Director. Indeed, the company has made great strides under Page's direction, but he has been dumped by an ungrateful Board. *Song of the Earth* may be his swan-song.

*"A young dancer to watch out for is Victor Zarallo"*

Variety, contrast, balance

Birmingham Royal Ballet presented a triple bill with the vague title "*Autumn Glory*", and raided its bulging back-catalogue for DeValois' *Checkmate*; Ashton's *Symphonic Variations*; and Cranko's *Pineapple Poll*. In *Checkmate*, Victoria Marr was a powerful Black Queen. Natasha Oughtred and Cesar Morales were particularly suited to the Fonteyn/Somes roles in *Symphonic Variation*. Carol-Ann Millar was a very sparky Poll to match Robert Parker's Captain Belaye, who clearly regarded the besotted state of the women around him as entirely his due. This excellently danced programme of major works by three of the Royal Ballet's most influential choreographers had variety, contrast and balance, and should have been sold-out, but London's ballet audience seems not to value one-act works, remaining fixated with the full evening juggernauts.

With and without pillows

Rambert Dance Theatre provided the most innovative programme, with two premieres and a revival of Merce Cunningham's *RainForest*. Yes, it's the one with the floating silver pillows designed by Andy Warhol. While excited by some of Cunningham's pieces, I have never attained the level of awe that his work inspires in some of his disciples. Although the dancers performed with precision and commitment, I began to hope for the reappearance of the guy who wandered round the back of the stage at an earlier rehearsal, topping-up the pillows from a gas cylinder. The first of the novelties was *Seven for a secret, never to be told*, by Rambert's Director, Mark Baldwin. This also involved pillows, real this time. Were they a linking theme for the evening? No, this work was based on memories of childhood, and the movement and behaviour of children must surely make for interesting dance. Somehow, despite some bright moments and energetic dancing, it did not quite work, and I think this might be due to the choice of music, Ravel's *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* in an orchestral transcription. This music has a strong story-line, admittedly about a child, but the story was not adopted.

*"The violence was repetitive and repressive"*

The final piece (without pillows) was *Elysian Fields*, which also had a literary theme, the works of Tennessee Williams. His combination

with choreographer Javier de Frutos would appear to be a meeting of minds, a marriage made in heaven, or more likely, hell. Themes from *A Streetcar Named Desire* were strongly displayed, with an occasional whiff of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The work had some impressive movement, but its continuing presentation of violence became repetitive and oppressive. Definitely not for the squeamish, but the theatre was full, demonstrating that Rambert supporters want new works.

Congratulations to all three companies: BRB for keeping us in touch with our dance heritage, Rambert for daring to be innovative, and Scottish Ballet for a little of each. To the innovators, keep at it! Reasonable dance enthusiasts do not expect a masterpiece every time, even if the critics do!

## Theatre Reviews

by Mary Jane Burcher

*Dick Whittington* - Theatre Royal, Bath

It was Chris Harris' tenth consecutive pantomime appearance as the Dame at the Theatre Royal and his performance, as usual, didn't disappoint. He is undoubtedly one of the finest 'Dames' in the country – and I should know - having seen more Dames over the years than I would care to mention! Apart from leading the company, he also directs and co-writes the show and he was supported by an extremely talented cast of actors. The show had all the ingredients of a good, traditional pantomime – colourful, funny and romantic with a nasty villain. It was thoroughly enjoyed by the children in the audience – and most of the adults too!



Naomi Wilkinson (Dick Whittington) & Abigail Brodie (The Cat)



*Matilda* - Cambridge Theatre

Apart from the leading role of Matilda herself, a huge part – she seldom leaves the stage, the cast includes 10 young 'school' children and their 'headmistress', the very cruel Miss Trunchbull, who is actually a male performer in drag (both funny and frightening!). The songs are not melodious, but in keeping with the action. It is very well staged but aimed primarily at a young audience and I doubt very much that it will have a long run.

*Noises Off* – The Old Vic

If I had to sum this show up it would be "Pure Joy!" We all know that a farce is the most difficult thing of all to pull off – the precision and timing has to be absolutely spot on and in *Noises Off* the frantic action never wavers and all nine artists work their socks off to get everything right. I advise you to catch it as soon as you can – it is transferring to the Novello Theatre in the West End at the end of March.

Tim Rooke also has something to say...

I first saw this Michael Frayn piece on its original opening – some thirty years ago. At the time I thought it was one of the best new plays for decades. However, in the intervening years, I saw it twice again and both times came away thinking what a dreary dated piece this is. Now I understand why – a poor choice of Director. But here Lindsay Posner has brought the play back to what it was in 1982 – an incredibly funny farce.



Karl Johnson, Janie Dee, Celia Imrie, Robert Glenister & Amy Nuttall - *Noises Off!*

The cast is to die for! Not a single weak link and it would be invidious to name names and leave others out but I must make a special mention of the fabulous Celia Imrie as Dotty Otley, a fading soap star who is having a fling with Jamie Glover's much younger, and hilariously dim, leading man. Having witnessed a great deal of Mr Glover's stage and TV work, I can say that here he surpasses anything he has done yet. And finally, Janie Dee – what can one say apart from – Tremendous!

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# WHAT'S ON



## Sadler's Wells

[www.sadlerswells.com](http://www.sadlerswells.com)

Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4TN

0844 871 0090

### Main Theatre

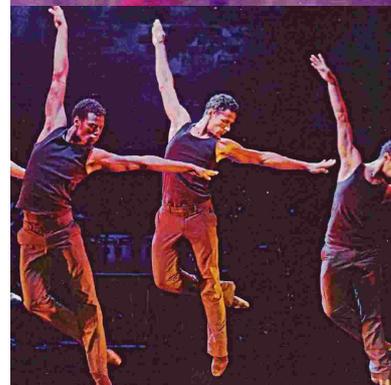
- 25 Mar- 7 Apr. Pet Shop Boys & Javier De Frutos - *The Most Incredible Thing*  
9 - 10 April Family Weekend  
19 - 21 Apr. Royal Ballet of Flanders - *Artifact*  
23 April CONNECT with Sadler's Wells - *Compass*  
26 - 28 April Scottish Ballet - *A Streetcar Named Desire*  
5 - 7 May Breakin' Convention '12 - International Festival of Hip Hop Dance Theatre  
10 - 12 May Ballet Preljocaj - *Snow White* [UK premiere]  
15 - 19 May Rambert Dance Company - *L'Après-midi d'un faune / What Wild Ecstasy*  
21 - 26 May New Adventures - *Matthew Bourne's Early Adventures: Spitfire, Town and Country & The Infernal Galop*  
29 May-1 Jun. Danza Contemporanea de Cuba - *Triple Bill*  
6 June - 9 July Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch - *World Cities 2012*  
[10 productions, each for 2 days at either Sadler's Wells or the Barbican - see Sadler's Wells programme for full details]



Scottish Ballet



Ballet Preljocaj



Ballet Revolución

### Peacock Theatre

Portugal Street, Kingsway,

London WC2A 2HT

- 3 - 13 Apr. English National Ballet 2 - *My First Sleeping Beauty*  
19 - 22 Apr. London Children's Ballet - *A Little Princess*  
25 Apr-19 May *Ballet Revolución*  
24 May -23 Jun *Wah! Wah! Girls* - A British Bollywood Musical  
4 - 8 July New English Ballet Theatre - *Synergies*

## Old Vic Theatre

[www.oldvictheatre.com](http://www.oldvictheatre.com)

Waterloo Road, London SE1 8NB 0870 060 6628

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

## The Vic-Wells Association

*Founded in 1923 by Lillian Baylis CH*

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to arrive before  
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