

Out and About with the Vic-Wells

AN EXCLUSIVE INVITATION

We have arranged an exclusive visit for Vic-Wells Members to witness the ancient Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London

on Thursday November 13th at 9.30pm.
Early application is advised as tickets are limited

Members must arrive by 9.20pm
as late comers will not be admitted



For Tickets (£10 - advance only)
Please send a cheque payable to Vic-Wells Association (and SAE)
to Tim Rooke at 302b Park Road, London N8 8LA



The Vic-Wells Association

is looking for a

Social Secretary

We urgently need a sociable, friendly person
to help organise VW's parties and
to suggest and arrange visits to places of interest for outings

If you think you can help please contact:

James Ranger, VW Chairman on 0143 886 1318 or jim@ranger.com

ADVANCE NOTICE !

The Annual 12th Night Party will be held on Saturday, 10th January 2015

from 5.00pm to 6.30pm in the second circle bar area of the Old Vic

Tickets are £6.00 for Members and £7.50 for Non-Members

Please write for tickets, enclosing your cheque payable to the Vic-Wells Association
and a stamped, self-addressed envelope, to:

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

Vic-Wells Association

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The AGM of the Vic-Wells Association will take place on **Monday, November 24th 2014**
starting promptly at 7pm at Sadler's Wells (ask at the stage door for directions to the venue)
An item for discussion will be "The Future of the Vic-Wells Association"

Anne Boleyn

Bill Boyd writes about his experience of playing Cardinal Wolsey in Howard Brenton's *Anne Boleyn* staged by Putney Arts Theatre

Putney Arts Theatre is one of London's top amateur theatre companies and their current Artistic Director, Ian Higham, directed this production. I was lucky to be working with Ian and a company of twenty-two fine actors. Brenton's *Anne Boleyn* was commissioned by the Globe and opened in 2010 to high acclaim from critics and audiences.

The play begins with the ghost of Anne Boleyn. She addresses the audience and then the action moves to 1603 when James I arrives in London for his English coronation and finds a chest containing Anne Boleyn's coronation dress and, crucially, in a secret compartment, the book by William Tyndale.

The play moves back and forth from the court of King Henry VIII to the court of King James I. The central character is, of course, Anne Boleyn and we were very fortunate to have Kate Kenyon as Anne. Brenton's play shows us an Anne who was very strong willed, very much in love with Henry (Matthew Flexman) and very religious - *but* a Protestant and risking death for her beliefs. She refused to sleep with Henry for seven years. During this time she was at war with Wolsey. A war she, cleverly, won. It was Anne who helped bring about the Church of England. After being abandoned by Henry - for not bearing a son and heir - she was at the mercy of the brutal Cromwell (Michael Rossi) and was beheaded on the trumped up charges of treason, adultery and incest. A very demanding role not least because of the many costume changes.

James I is an important character in Brenton's play. Transvestite and bi-sexual James, played by Kirk Patterson, tried, unsuccessfully, to unite the Catholics and Protestants. Brenton's writing and Kirk's performance showed a very lively James.



Cardinal Wolsey was a great character to play. A dogmatic bully - though not without humour - he clearly suspects Anne of being a Protestant. The book by William Tyndale is discovered in court and Wolsey conducts a scathing, sarcastic and bullying cross examination of Lady Rochford, one of the ladies in waiting. Anne appears and demands the return of her book. A fiery exchange occurs with lines such as, "I have long suspected you to be infected with bad religion. And now I know you are, Madam. You stink of it, you drip with the syphilis of Luther's teaching. This book is the proof."

Later, when Wolsey takes the book to the King he finds that Anne has got there first and the tables are turned. The King is angry with Wolsey and takes the book from him. Henry and Anne depart with the book, leaving Wolsey alone. At that point, it is possible to feel sorry for Wolsey as he describes his feelings knowing that his power has been taken from him. He is led off by Cromwell, never to be seen again.

"Cardinal Wolsey was a dogmatic bully - though not without humour"

The play ends, in 1603, with Anne's ghost talking with James about the Protestant Reformation. But the play begins and ends with the dancing of the ladies and courtiers. And our outdoor performances were accompanied by four musicians in costume.

What next? Howard Brenton's new play, *Doctor Scroggy's War*, opens at the Globe on 13 September 2014. Check out Putney Arts Theatre: www.putneyartstheatre.org.uk for future productions. ...and I will be playing a clergyman again in Balham (www.southsideplayers.org.uk) at the end of October in *A Clergyman's Daughter* - an adaptation by Aidan Steer of George Orwell's novel.

Joan Littlewood and the Old Vic

Reviewed by Professor Liz Shafer



Joan Littlewood in 1963

Photo: Daniel Farson

This year sees the centenary of the birth of Joan Littlewood (1914-2002), the maverick theatre director who made a career out of doing the unexpected. She spent years building up *Theatre Workshop* before walking out on them (twice). She canvassed for democratic theatre practices but, in many ways, ruled her theatre autocratically. She hated all the West End stood for but allowed her productions to transfer there. Joan Littlewood was also famous for hating interviews, and yet in 1996 she granted one to me. Perhaps because she was slightly (only slightly) chastened as she had just, not for the first time, left a bath running and flooded her friend Peter Rankin's flat. Littlewood allowed the interview to run for well over an hour. The discussion ranged very widely but one thing that came across clearly was how important Lilian Baylis's Old Vic was to Littlewood.

Initially this was because productions at the Old Vic fostered Littlewood's early love of theatre. In particular she remembered seeing Ernest Milton, "a marvellous old actor" playing Shylock. She remembered when Milton's Shylock, "left the trial scene. He held the balance scales that he'd come to weigh the pound of flesh with and he let them fall with a great clang". She added, "I

clapped uproariously; I thought it was great". Littlewood went to the Old Vic often because it "was walking distance from where I lived. I knew the bloody place by heart. You could get in for 5d, I think, with all the old tramps in the gallery. It was a bit Edwardian really but much better than anything that came later; you'd have Wolfitt playing Laertes".

Littlewood admired what Baylis was doing at the Vic. She said, "I went to all the shows when the old Baylis was doing them; it was very simple then. I had such a shock when they gave me a ticket to go to a West End play; it was Johnny Gielgud without his trappings and I thought, my God, he needs his long robes. It was a terrible shock to me; it didn't look good, it didn't sound good, and the production was quite a famous affair". Littlewood preferred the Old Vic - where it was "God and Shakespeare and old Baylis was frying sausages in the wings and they did it all with only four costumes".

"Littlewood preferred the Old Vic where 'old Baylis' was frying sausages in the wings"

Later, during the 1950s, a period many see as a golden age in the Old Vic's history, Littlewood came to see the Old Vic as the opposition: she deliberately pitched her production of *Richard II*, starring Harry H. Corbett, against an Old Vic production starring John Neville. Under the artistic directorship of Michael Benthall, the Old Vic was flourishing but the style of theatre, especially the beautiful costumes and stage compositions, was anathema to Littlewood.

Although Littlewood had very different views from Lilian Baylis, especially on the subject of religion, the two women had a lot in common: they both fought to ensure that even the poorest in society had access to the classics; they both produced theatre on a shoestring, with little scenery and make-do costumes, and they both regarded West End success with the greatest of suspicion. Perhaps those early Old Vic Shakespeares might claim some credit for inspiring one of the most significant theatre practitioners of the 20th century.

Netherlands Dance Theatre 1 at Sadler's Wells

Reviewed by Richard Reavill

NDT 1, the major company of the Netherlands Dance Theatre, paid a brief visit to Sadler's Wells in the summer, bringing the UK premier of two works by the Anglo/Spanish choreographic combo of Paul Lightfoot and Sol Leon. I missed the rehearsal, being in Paris to see the Paris Opera Ballet in *Dances at a Gathering*, but caught the last performance. Lightfoot is now the Artistic Director of the company, and his works with Sol Leon have long been a major contribution to the company's repertory. Two of their works were presented as a double bill for the short Sadler's Wells season.

First was *Sehnsucht*, an untranslatable German word meaning "intense longing". It was set to music by Beethoven, with one movement from each of two piano concertos, and two movements from the familiar Symphony No. 5. The set has a small box-like room with a table, chair, window and door, but not arranged in a logical positioning. From time to time the box rotated, and its contents were used to support the two dancers, Parvaneh Scharafali and Medhi Walerski, as they danced out their developing and changing relationship. Outside the box, a man in white trousers (Silas Hendrikson) moves, observes, and emotes. Is he thinking of the relationship in retrospect? Does he have the "intense longing" of the title? The double work of the two dancers within the cube is strong, and tightly controlled despite the rotations of the cube. All three dancers project well, especially Walerski, who I recall from his time with NDT2. Then, though young, he had strong stage presence. Now, a mature dancer, he has it in spades. In the middle of the work, some dozen dancers appear, four women, eight men, all topless in unisex dark trousers. This energetic passage has homogeneity and interesting movement, but its relationship to what has gone before, and after, is unclear. At the end Hendrikson is left crouched at the front of the stage, a pose from the start of the piece.

"The unisex card was played rather too strongly"

He stayed in this pose as the lights went up for the interval, and for a long time afterwards while scene-changing activity occurred behind him. He was joined by two more dancers, but this was only observed by those audience members who eschew the theatre bar or are not addicted to ice-cream. While this served as a linking passage between the two ballets, and supplied something to watch for those unwilling to abandon their seats, its meaning was not apparent.



Schmetterling by Nederlands Dans Theater

Photo: Tristram Kenton

The second ballet was *Schmetterling* (Butterflies), set to songs from a Magnetic Fields album and music by Max Richter. The programme talked of "the transitional nature of existence and the continuous crossing of paths between life and death". Despite the weighty subject matter, the ballet was quite quirky and often funny. Dancers in similar loose black smocks moved in a style which was reminiscent of early silent films. Again relationships are portrayed. One character is an elderly woman who interacts with a younger man

(mother/son?; old/young?). The set is a black wall with a series of receding open doorways through which dancers appear and disappear. There is a glimpse of a sky-scape of which more is seen as the doorways are withdrawn in turn. At the end an intense pas-de-deux is danced, again with Walerski, and the whole sky-scape is rolled-up like a curtain.

So, a summary. Sets ingenious and interesting. Music good, though recorded. Dancing excellent. Choreography original and interesting. Costumes, so-so, with the unisex card played rather too strongly. A high level of theatricality. Audience reaction, very positive from a full house. But is an art-form a process in which meaning is transmitted from artists to audience? If so, what the work had in originality it lacked in clarity.

Rooke's Reviews

Tim Rooke reviews the Old Vic's *The Crucible* and *Clarence Darrow*



Richard Armitage as John Proctor in *The Crucible*

I have a confession to make - I am not an admirer of Arthur Miller – so I thought this evening's performance of *The Crucible* would be a bore. I was wrong.

Richard Armitage's portrayal of John Proctor - a man who would rather die than live a compromised life - was deeply felt. Anna Madeley played his wife with uptight rightness and Samantha Colley as Abigail was truly vengeful. This was an excellent cast that included the ever excellent William Gaunt and I must say that the dialect was excellent throughout.

Oddly enough, this play seemed to work better in the round than in a proscenium arch theatre – but I still think the only place for the round is in Richmond. Yael Farber's direction was excellent though the second half worked better than the first. She handled the 'crowd scenes' with the hysterical girls with great finesse as the innocents were bullied into false confessions. The designs of Soutra Gilmour were adequate. The lighting by Tim Lutkin passable. But the evening belonged to Mr Armitage.

Kevin Spacey has done some great things while he's been running the Old Vic – but nothing to match this monumentally powerful performance in *Clarence Darrow*. Darrow died in 1938. He was a crusading lawyer and during the course of this shock play of under 2 hours Mr Spacey was nothing less than a driving force against the death penalty. His energy was contagious, moving around the set consulting files and papers, exploring contents of boxes and frequently mopping his brow *a la Pavarotti*. He recounts cases of horrific injustice. It was not all high octane lawyer though - Darrow also flirts outrageously with a very attractive young lady. We, the audience, felt like the jury and given to believe we would have to deduce some sort of verdict – fortunately we didn't. His account was far more effective than the recent film version. It was directed with razor edge precision by Thea Sharrock and there was a good set by Alan Macdonald. If this had been Spacey's only production at the Old Vic his tenure would still have been worthwhile.



Kevin Spacey in the title role in *Clarence Darrow*

So, Kevin Spacey - our gratitude and thanks and best wishes for the future.

“Your” (re)View

by dedicated Promenader, Jill Sheridan

Prom is short for promenade concert. In the context of the BBC Proms - *Promming* now refers to the use of the standing areas inside the hall (the area and gallery). “Promenaders” buy full season tickets to every concert in the season. As a dedicated *Promenader*, of average height, my view is often of the backs of heads, ears and T shirts! There is a vast array of clothing to be scrutinised, from the three-piece suits with polished shoes to the teeniest shorts and skimpy vests – and that's just the men! I see, before me, cyclists still in their lycra, with padded derrieres, and neon tops!

Please, don't be put off. Such a motley crew is entertaining, to say the least. There is “Boris the milkman” always to be seen drinking a pint during the interval and “Fidget” who, probably, has never stood still in his life and, even if he manages to stand somewhat still throughout a concert, nonetheless “conducts” all the time – whether he knows the piece or not. We have several clever clogs, all male (can I say that?), who know when a piece was written, first performed, the orchestra and the soloists, who by and why (and probably what they had for breakfast!). Have I mentioned the wonderful music? THAT is what it is all about. Don't miss it. The Proms will continue at the Royal Albert Hall until Saturday 13 September 2014.

If you have a VIEW or REVIEW that you would like to be aired in *The Broadsheet* please contact the Editor (address on back page).

News from Sadler's Wells

The world's fourth oldest ballet company, Royal Swedish Ballet performs in London for the first time since 1995. To celebrate its 240th anniversary, Johannes Öhman, the director of the Royal Swedish Ballet has commissioned renowned choreographer Mats Ek to create a full length adaptation of a timeless love story for 32 of the company's dancers. Having created many new interpretations of classics, Ek's *Juliet & Romeo* attracted much acclaim both in its native Sweden and internationally. Making its UK premiere this autumn, Ek brings a quirky twist to this much-loved ballet which will be on at Sadler's Wells from 24th to 27th September 2014. ⇨



⇨ From October 8th to 11th, Matthew Bourne's *Lord of the Flies* will be performed in London for the first time. This thrilling new dance production was inspired by William Golding's classic dystopian novel. The action is transferred from deserted island to deserted theatre, as a group of schoolboys find themselves abandoned. With no adults around, the children make their own rules and create their own civilisation, before order breaks down and the story builds to an electrifying climax. With a cast of New Adventures dancers and remarkable young talent from across London, Golding's iconic characters are brought to life with raw energy, emotional intensity and breathtaking performances.

News from the Old Vic - *Electra*

The Sophoclean classic - when King Agamemnon returns from the Trojan War with his new concubine, Cassandra, his wife Clytemnestra (who has taken Agamemnon's cousin Aegisthus as a lover) kills them. Clytemnestra believes the murder was justified, since Agamemnon had sacrificed their daughter Iphigenia before the war, as commanded by the gods. Electra, daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, rescued her young, twin brother Orestes from her mother by sending him to Strophius of Phocis. The play begins years later when Orestes has returned as a grown man with a plot for revenge, as well as to claim the throne. *Electra*, in a version by Frank McGuinness, stars Kristen Scott Thomas and runs from Monday 22th September until Saturday 20th December.

Vic-Wells Members visit the Theatre Royal, Haymarket

A few lucky members took up the invitation to visit the Theatre Royal Haymarket in May. We had a very thorough, two hour, tour of this old building with its Nash foyer and green and gold interior. We sat in Queen Victoria's box and saw her retiring rooms now used for entertaining. Later we visited the Oscar Wilde room under the front of the theatre which is also used for entertaining. We heard about the fascinating long history of this and its precursor theatre on the site next door and the long fight to have the theatre gain its Royal patent so they could charge for tickets legitimately which involved the Theatre Manager, a rather boastful chap, breaking his leg when riding a skittish horse. We were shown a lot of pictures including one of the theatre's ghost, when alive. The visit ended with our hearing very old 19th century recordings of Beerbohm Tree and Oscar Wilde.

Report by James Ranger



Shakespeare: Greatest Living Playwright

Review by Liz Schafer

The V&A's main contribution to the celebrations marking the 450th anniversary of Shakespeare's birth on 23 April 2014 is an exhibition entitled *Shakespeare: Greatest Living Playwright* which is currently on display in the Theatre and Performance Galleries. The main centre of interest in the exhibition is an installation using archive footage, photography and drawings to evoke a wide range of productions across the centuries. Contemporary Shakespearians including Simon Russell Beale, Sinéad Cusack and Julie Taymor comment on their favourite plays and roles whilst on a dozen or so screens around them a multiplicity of images flash by.

Around the edge of the gallery props, costume items, set models, and design sketches are on display and one in particular held me riveted; the strawberry embroidered handkerchief used by Ellen Terry when she played Desdemona in 1881 at the Lyceum Theatre opposite Henry Irving as Othello. This handkerchief is absolutely exquisite. For the first time in my life I could almost sympathise with Othello getting upset at the thought it might be lost. In my view, the V&A could make a fortune selling copies of this magnificent object which looks as if it could have been designed by William Morris. And the more I marvelled over its beauty and craftsmanship, the more I was struck by the fact that during the performances of *Othello* no one in the audience, not even anyone in the front row of the stalls of the Lyceum Theatre, would have been able to see it and appreciate the workmanship.



Gravedigger's cap designed by Leslie Hurry
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

ivy creeping over it. Another memorable exhibit – for rather different reasons – is the *Macbeth* design for a showgirl performing at Eve's night club in Regent Street in the 1970s, with the three witches on her shield and a horned skull on her G string.

I've put off visiting the V&A Theatre and Performance galleries for a long time as I still can't believe that they closed down the old Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. And it takes perseverance to locate the Theatre and Performance galleries, which are buried in the middle of 'Materials and Techniques' on Level 3. However, it is worth the effort for, if nothing else, the chance to marvel at that extraordinary handkerchief.

The exhibition runs until 21 September 2014.



Boots worn by Henry Irving in *Richard III*, 1877
Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Shakespeare at the Old Vic is represented in the exhibition by the headdress designed by Oliver Messel for Vivien Leigh's Titania in the 1937 *Midsummer Night's Dream* which also saw Robert Helpmann's crossover (or was it cross back?) from ballet to drama. Helpmann played a striking, otherworldly Oberon to Leigh's beautiful, gauzy Titania. Helpmann's ballet version of *Hamlet* also makes an appearance in the guise of the extraordinary Gravedigger's cap designed by Leslie Hurry; on one side this is a leather cap that could be worn by any gravedigger but on the other it is Yorick's skull with the remnants of a cap and bells

jester's hat with sinister

"I could almost sympathise with Othello getting upset at the loss of Desdemona's handkerchief"

WHAT'S ON

Sadler's Wells, Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4TN

Phone: 0844 871 0090

Main Theatre * UK Premieres

- 12 - 15 Sept. Elixir Festival
17 - 20 Sept. Mark Baldwin & Ladysmith Black Mambazo
24 - 27 Sept. Royal Swedish Ballet - *Mat Ek's Juliet & Romeo**①
01 - 04 Oct. Grupo Corpo - *Triz & Parabelo*
08 - 11 Oct. Lord of the Flies
14 - 18 Oct. Birmingham Royal Ballet - *Beauty and the Beast / Shadows of War*
20 - 21 Oct. TAO Dance Theatre 6 & 7 *
08 - 27 July Brasil Brasileiro
30 Oct - 1 Nov Armitage/McGregor/Pite/Whitley - *Thomas Adès: See the Music, Hear the Dance*
03 - 08 Nov. Akram Khan & Israel Galván - *TOROBKA* *②
10 - 11 Nov. Jasmin Vardimon Company - *PARK*
13 - 14 Nov. Cullberg Ballet (Sweden) - *Plateau Effect* *
18 - 22 Nov. Rambert - *Triptych*
25 - 29 Nov. Sylvie Guillem & Akram Khan - *Sacred Monsters*
02 Dec - 11 Jan. New Adventures - *Edward Scissorhands* ③

Lilian Baylis Studio

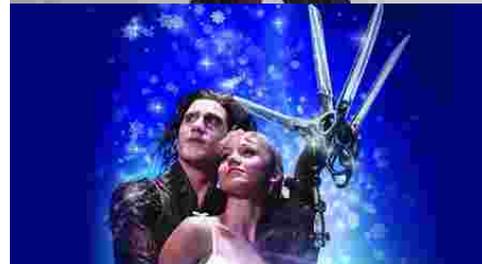
- 02 - 03 Oct. Margrét Sara Guðjónsdóttir (Iceland) *
10 - 11 Oct. Maija Hirvanen (Finland) *
13 Dec - 04 Jan Arthur Pita - *The Little Match Girl*

Peacock Theatre

Portugal Street, Kingsway, London WC2A 2HT

- 16 Sept - 4 Oct The 7 Fingers *Sequence 8*
07 - 25 Oct. Ballet Revolución ④
26 Nov - 04 Jan. Birmingham Repertory Theatre - *The Snowman*

Stills from Sadler's Wells website used with permission



ELIXIR FESTIVAL

12th - 15th SEPTEMBER 2014

Sadler's Well's renowned company of Elders hosts a 4 day festival featuring dance performance, international artists, seminars, master classes and workshops to celebrate lifelong creativity.

“Over 60 is the time to realise your dreams not relinquish them”

For further information contact:

*Vic-Wells
Association Annual
Subscriptions*

*were due for
payment
on JULY 1st.*

*If you have not
done so, PLEASE
RENEW NOW!*

The Vic-Wells Association

Founded in 1923 by Lilian Baylis CH

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Copy deadline for
the next issue of
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**Saturday,
15th November**
Items or letters
for publication
should be sent to
The Editor
by this date.