

SCENE

The Newsletter of the Leicester Drama Society

Autumn–Winter LDS Season announced

After a more difficult than usual process of choosing plays and obtaining rights because of you-know-what, the Production Committee has finalised the autumn–winter season of LDS shows. During the theatre’s closure, there had always been a desire to pick up the baton again with the show that played for only one night in March 2020, prior to premature closure, and that has now come to fruition. The new season thus opens with *Blue Stockings* in September (see p. 8). We’re delighted that we can open our first full season post-pandemic with this show, enabling as many of the 2020 cast who wish to and are able to take up the mantle once more.

The season continues in October with *My Mother Said I Never Should*, a play is about the relationships between mothers and daughters that explores the themes of independence, growing up and secrets. Until recently, this was the UK’s most performed play by a female playwright. Auditions are announced on p. 7.

We continue in November with a 1930s classic

comedy from Noël Coward, *Private Lives*, supposedly written in just four days.

Cinderella then takes over the theatre for the best part of six weeks; postponed from Christmas 2020, doubtless there will now be plenty of opportunities for gags about masks and social distancing...

We open in January 2022 with *Constellations*, a two-handed heart-breaking romance about a bee-keeper and a quantum physicist that explores the decisions we make that could lead to different lives.

The first half of the season concludes with a play that explores the strained relationship between The Queen and Margaret Thatcher in the eighties. *Handbagged* opens the clasp on the antipathy between these two giants of the twentieth century...

Audition notices will appear in future editions of *Scene* and on our website:

www.thelittletheatre.co.uk

Blue Stockings
(27 Sept–2 Oct 2021)

By Jessica Swale
Directed by Jane Towers

My Mother Said I Never Should

(18–21 Oct 2021)
By Charlotte Keatley
Directed by Nadine Beasley

Private Lives

(8–13 Nov 2021)
By Noël Coward
Directed by John Ghent

Constellations
(17–22 Jan 2022)

By Nick Payne
Directed by Jane Durant

Handbagged
(31 Jan–5 Feb 2022)

By Moira Buffini
Directed by Russell Hughes

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Theatre Manager ▶ **Graham Muir** (from 12th July)

Leicester Drama Society Ltd Board of Trustees
(elected unless otherwise stated)

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**Development Programme Director &
Co-opted Trustee** ▶ **Jenny Harding**

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Contributions to *Scene* are invited. Our deadline is a week before the end of each month – but if you have a story let us know before then to guarantee that we reserve space for you.

Contact us via email using the email above.

All photos in each edition of *Scene* are by the fabulous Sally Evans, unless otherwise stated. If members use any images of Little Theatre productions in any social media post please give a photo credit to the person who took the photo. In most cases, for production photos, this will be Sally Evans.

Andy Crooks

Editorial

Welcome to this latest edition of *Scene*. I must begin by thanking Colin Hide for his sterling work as co-editor of *Scene* with Emma Bamford for the last 18 months: his enthusiasm and commitment were greatly appreciated by the Trustees and members alike. Emma will continue in her role in August; this month's issue was put together at the last minute by Jeremy, our Marketing Trustee.

Thanks must also go to Mary Jayne Harding Scott, who stepped into the role of Acting Theatre Manager & Temporary Premises Supervisor in May. She will be leaving the post later this month when Graham Muir joins us as our new Theatre Manager. We wish him every success in his new role at The Little.

A production of *Class* in May was our first staged play after lockdown and since *Blue Stockings* in March 2020 – enjoyed by a socially-distanced audience. You can read a review opposite on p. 3. Our next LDS production is *Chariots of Fire*, starting on 12th July – please come and see it if you can.

We were very pleased by the response to a recent appeal for volunteer bar staff; our new bar system is developing well, thanks to the co-ordination by our temporary Theatre Manager, Mary Jayne Harding Scott. You can read about the recent upheavals in the bar that now make it a more efficient and attractive place in which to have a pre-show drink on p. 5. Details on how to volunteer for the bar (which is an excellent way of getting to know your fellow members) can be found on p. 7.

We were very fortunate during the pandemic to receive two grants from the Arts Council. These enabled us to keep the theatre 'ticking over' while dark, but now we need to build back our audiences. Our new autumn–winter season has just been announced (see page 1), but now we need to work doubly hard to get our audience to return after being out of the habit for 18 months. All members can play a part in that, by helping to publicise our shows through their social media accounts or by attending as audience members themselves. In whatever way you support our theatre, your support is invaluable: thank you.

Class – A Review

It was a great joy to be back at The Little to watch *Class* – coincidentally the last show to have a full run before the theatre closed due to lockdown. I would like to acknowledge firstly the great lengths that all the team at the theatre have taken to ensure the safety of their staff, cast and audiences. The COVID-19 procedures were slick and caused little disruption to the running of the event or, indeed, the enjoyment of watching the show.

Winner of an Edinburgh Fringe Festival First Award in 2018, *Class* is written by Iseult Golden and David Horan and directed and staged for The Little Theatre by Simon J. Dickens (Leicester Drama Society). The story, which is set in a deprived area of Dublin, follows a myriad of narratives as it explores the emotions of new teacher Ray McCafferty (played by Robin McFarland) who is very much finding his feet and enduring the many challenges the classroom brings; Donna and Brian, the parents of Jayden (played by Tim Stokes and Nikki Cooper); and schoolchildren Jayden and Kaylie (also played by Stokes and Cooper).



Noticing that Jayden is falling behind academically, but is also having some behavioural issues, Mr McCafferty calls Donna and Brian in for a parent-teacher meeting. Mr McCafferty is desperate to do the right thing as a teacher, but is very much walking on eggshells after realising that Jayden's parents are going through a separation. Brian is very matter of fact and wants answers after being out-of-the-loop in his son's progress, and Donna usually avoids confrontation, but has been pushed to her limits as a mother and the main carer of their children.

The scenes between McCafferty, Donna and Brian are interspersed with time-warped scenes between Mr McCafferty, Jayden and Kaylie. The transition between the scene/character changes is seamless, helped by the clever use of a lighting and sound effect as well as subtle changes in posture and facial expressions from the cast.

Both Stokes and Cooper are chameleon actors and dip in and out of their dual characters with ease – Stokes particularly makes use of great facial expressions in his portrayal of young Jayden and Cooper is brilliant with her comedic timing. McFarland has the balance just right when it comes to levelling with Jayden and Kaylie in his class and navigating the tricky waters as the drama unfolds in the parent-teacher meeting. For the most part, the cast were able to maintain Irish accents, though there were times when they dropped off slightly during the performance.



The set is basic, functional and very fit for purpose. The stark classroom setting allows the audience to focus wholly on the narratives taking place, allowing for plenty of reflection and emotion. There is no need for more 'frills' to be added to this production. I believe that when this was performed last year in The Little Theatre's studio, the setting and audience placement was slightly different and perhaps allowed a little more intimacy. However, this main house setting was fine.

Overall, this was a thought-provoking performance exploring the frailties of human relationships, prejudice, vulnerability and accepting consequences. I highly recommend it.

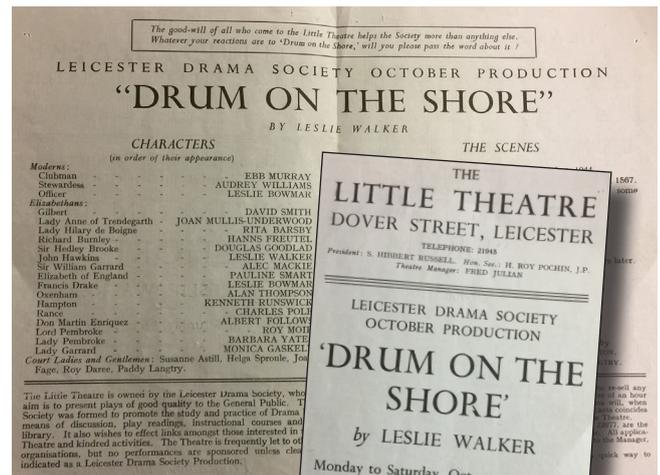
Delving into the Archives

There's a room in our theatre – well, more of a space really – where on Wednesday afternoons you will find our archivists, Jim O'Donoghue, Alan Freckingham and Mavis Roper, beavering away among old programmes, newspaper cuttings and photographs. It's known as The Archive Room, a rather grand moniker for an area through which people pass in order to reach the theatre office. In the array of large storage boxes behind those diligent workers lies the record of our history.

What's the attraction of all those old photographs and fading ephemera? Well, we're very proud of our society and the theatre in which it operates, and these pictures are tangible proof of the hard work, talent and inspiration that make our theatre what it is today. Without all those wonderful people represented in those boxes, we certainly wouldn't be where we are today. Many are long gone, but their influence remains.

Several of those special people are represented in the programme and photographs of *Drum on the Shore*, which was written by LDS member, Leslie (Jerry) Walker and directed by Walter Martin. Leslie submitted his play for production and it was chosen as the October 1945 production. It deals with the relationship of Elizabeth I and Francis Drake before the time of the Armada.

Pauline Smart (later Pauline Graham) played Elizabeth and Leslie Bowmar played Drake. Poll, or Polly as she was affectionately known, was a talented actor/director and a really lovely person. She was tall, strong looking, and although she might appear haughty at times, had the most wicked sense of humour. She was still going strong when I first joined the society as a schoolboy, and I was in absolute awe of her. Much later she played for me in several productions and was a joy to work with. I grew very fond of her. Another well-known name in the programme was Douglas Goodlad, the editor of the Leicester Chronicle, a local weekly newspaper. Rita Barsby was very much a *grande dame* of the theatre. Some years before she had worked professionally with the Wilson Barrett Company, but now she was back giving some excellent performances for LDS. Hans Freutel is



another name that leaps off the page. Hans eventually became a professional actor and puppeteer (his first love) and appeared in numerous films and on TV with the professional name of Paul Hansard. Another name many of you will recognise is that of local actor/director Charles Pole.

Sometimes the state of the photographs is poor, but they are still important to us and we try to restore them as carefully as we can. Before anyone is tempted to throw any Little Theatre photographs away, please check with Jim or Alan to see whether they might fill a gap in our collection.

In the meantime, with apologies for the poor condition of the rehearsal photograph, here is a taste of *Drum on the Shore*.



Theatre bar – A Makeover!

I'm sure it won't have escaped anyone's notice, but the last year has been a period of great change. The theatre has been no different, and the latest target of this has been our bar. During closure the decision was made to take the theatre 'cashless', with contactless payments the norm. We chose Square as our Point of Sale provider, and worked out strategies to implement these Front of House (ice creams etc), in the bar and in the office. With new tills to install and a new team of willing bar volunteers to put them to use, it seemed like a good time to give the rest of the bar a bit of a facelift.

Step One: Empty the Counter

Before any real progress could be made, we needed to remove all the existing stock, glassware and 'bits and bobs' that had accumulated over the years. It proved to be a far more involved task than expected! Besides the numerous glasses and pieces of crockery, I found paperwork dating back nearly twenty years, boxes of teabags (well past their sell-by date,) and an assortment of odds and ends destined for the bin long ago. Not to mention some very sticky shelves. Out it all came, and a good deal of stuff was thrown straight in the bin.

Step Two: Remove the Taps and Draught System

Another decision to come out of our closed period was to change from draught drinks to bottled. This is a more sustainable method that makes it much easier for us to manage the bar. So the next step was a visit from the brewery. Monday morning and two men in two large vans arrive to remove the pumps, pipes and pressure units. Suddenly we had reclaimed so much more space!

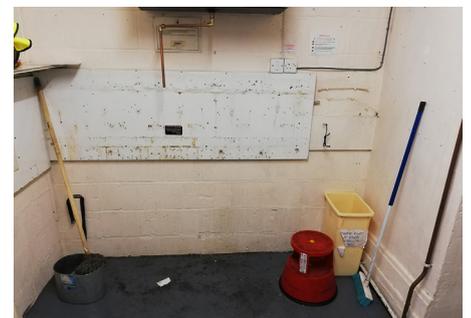
Step Three: Give it all a Good Clean

With everything out of the way, we could really begin cleaning. All the shelves and cupboards were washed down and disinfected, all the mats washed, all the mirrors buffed. The place was really beginning to sparkle. In the cold room, with all the old pressure valves removed, we had room to install some new shelving units to keep all our new stock off the floor.

Step Four: Install the New Till Terminals

Finally, we could install the new Point of Sale units. Tim Neville kindly fitted them to the newly cleaned bar counter. All the cables were neatly tucked away, and everything powered up. All that was left to do was to re-stock the shelves and arrange the display cabinets.

Many hours of hard work, self-assembly furniture and surface cleaning later, it was done. Now everything is all up and running and we are very excited to show it off! It will be even better when we can start serving at the counter again and the new Point of Sale Units will really come into their own.



Members' Notes

► **Car parking** Finding a place on the car park when coming to the Little Theatre is always a problem. But for those a little fitter than others, you can park in the multi storey in East Street, then tell the staff on the front of house desk and they will give you a permit card. Take this with you on your return and when you have put your parking ticket in the slot, you then put the permit in and you only pay a set fee, which is currently £6.50. Obviously, this doesn't apply for short stays if the charge is less. We have had reports of people being charged up to £18, so any saving has to be worth it...

► **Membership renewals...** Understandably, many Society members allowed their membership subscription to lapse during lockdown. As a result, the theatre's membership stood at its lowest in a very long time earlier this year. But thanks to the efforts of a few, notably Jackie Caunt, it has been steadily increasing since May. If you are receiving *Scene* but are not a member, please consider renewing as soon as possible. Simply give the office a call on 0116 254 2266, it takes only a few moments. (Note that if you have a door access card and your membership is not active, then it will not open the stage door or rehearsal room door.)

► **Theatre Royal, Leicester** In a previous article we looked at the inside front cover of the booklet *Some Very Personal Memories Of The Theatre Royal Leicester*. I must say at this point that to protect everyone's identity I have only referred to contributors by their Christian names. Now we look at the back cover. "I was fortunate to actually hold



this item in my hand and under the repainting I could see the original cream paint. It is hard to explain the feeling of such a moment. In George's words: "The piece is from the dress circle. You can see where the figure has been painted but not all the area has been covered and there is evidence of the original colour. The face is now a creamy colour and the rest a reddish brown. I went into the

Theatre Royal while it was being demolished and asked if I could have a piece. I was told to help myself! This is what I chose. I admired the repertory companies, they would put on a series of Shaw plays, one after the other. Imagine learning all those lines! My friend's wife married John Barron and Ray Mort married a nurse from the 1st NNEB in Leicester." (Elsewhere in the book are pictures of Ray Mort's wedding.) But we should leave the last word with George: "I believe that presentation is important, but the human element is everything."

► **Safety update** We have been heartened by the feedback as to how safe and protected our audiences have felt since we re-opened. The front of house staff have arrived early before each show to sanitise all the handrails and then repeat the process when the house is in. But some of that is going to change. We are installing a product that attaches to handrails, handles and pushplates, killing 99% of bacteria and 93-94% of viruses for a year. (We hope we won't need it by then, but I have learned not to speculate!) Not only will this measure save time, but it works continually so offers better protection. So if you miss the 'old dear' doing the handrails in the auditorium in the break, she is still with us... but has been made redundant!

**LDS
200
CLUB**

1st prize - £250
Share Number - 35

2nd prize - £100 Share
Number 122

3rd prize - £50 Share
Number - 92

► **Video equipment** The theatre has new HD video equipment with which to record rehearsals and snippets of shows so that we can create promotional trailers, among other things. If you are interested in helping to create trailers or other video content for the theatre, please contact us using the details below.

► **Theatre office** The lights are twinkling and glistening again, performers are waiting nervously in the wings, audiences babble with an air of anticipation. The theatre has reopened and we are delighted to be welcoming people back. But, as we edge ever-closer to post-pandemic normality, there is an increasing number of jobs to be done...

Please can you help?

We need more volunteers to help run the office in the day
As we continue to move forward and get busier, it is

becoming even more important to have a friendly, enthusiastic and reliable team working together to keep the office running smoothly. Could you give a couple of hours a week to help with day-to-day admin and Box Office activities? There are lots of different things to get stuck into, and you don't have to already be trained on the Box Office booking system (Spektrix). Training can be provided if needed.

► **Theatre bar** A great way to meet fellow members and participate in the theatre's activities every now and then is to do a session or two behind the theatre bar! The bar is now entirely volunteer run, with a trained head bar person each session there to take charge and help volunteers. The bar is now entirely a bottle bar, so no drawing pints and changing barrels any longer! And our new contactless payment system is a doddle to use. If the article on p. 5 has whetted your appetite to get involved, then get in touch!

If you are interested in or have any questions about volunteering in the office, bar, wardrobe department, workshop or to help in creating videos, please do get in touch at hello@thelittletheatre.co.uk.

A U D I T I O N S

My Mother Said I Never Should

Show dates: October 18–21 2021

Directed by Nadine Beasley

Auditions will be held for this wonderful play about four generations of women on:
Tuesday 10th and Thursday 12th of August at 7.30pm, 52 Down.

Characters as follows:

Doris Partington, b. Oldham 1900; engaged 1923, m. Jack Bradley in Oldham 1924.

[Age 5 in child scenes in 1905.]

Margaret Bradley, b. Cheadle Hulme 1931; m. Ken Metcalfe in London, 1952.

[Age 9 in child scenes in 1940]

Jackie Metcalfe, b. London 1952. [Age 9 in child scenes in 1961]

Rosie Metcalfe, b. Hulme, Manchester 1971. [Aged 8 in child scenes in 1979]

Ages are not important as the characters play themselves from childhood to, in Doris' case, old age. What matters is the ability of the four actors to gel into a recognisable family group with all the inherent problems that the generations bring.

Books available from 12th July to borrow from the theatre office (please call in advance to reserve a copy as the office is not open to visitors until 19th July). If you have any questions or want to talk about the roles, please text or ring Nadine on 07711 285155.





The
Little
Theatre

Historical Drama

Blue Stockings

By Jessica Swale

.....
27th September – 2nd October 2021

Box Office: 0116 255 1302 Book online: www.thelittletheatre.co.uk

An amateur production by arrangement with Nick Hern Books.

Directed by Jane Towers