

Puss In Boots
Dir. John Bale

JANUARY 2024

SCENE

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE LEICESTER DRAMA SOCIETY

The
Little
Theatre

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Editor's Letter

This latest panto was the best I've ever seen and it made me so proud to be an LDS member. Trustee for membership Jackie Caunt and her family put together a wonderful review of *Puss in Boots*, which is a joy to read and reminisce over.

Marketing trustee Tom Young has put together an infographic presenting the impressive work everyone has contributed to at The Little in 2023. I was very

interested to see the number of productions in which someone appeared on stage in just their pants!

The Little Theatre brings you many new shows for you to see this new year, and one of my resolutions is to see more of them! The rest of January showcases improvised comedy from *The Same Faces* and John Godber's *April in Paris*. A taste of 70s nostalgia follows soon after with

The Good Life in early February.

By the time you read this, the first rehearsal of LDS's Easter musical *The Secret Garden* will have taken place in the Moira Haywood studio. The first month of rehearsals will focus on learning the harmonies as musically directed by Grace Bale, supervised by Paul Timms.

Wishing everyone a happy new year and I hope to see you on stage or in the audience soon!

Kerry

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Scene

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Contributions to Scene are invited. To ensure your submissions are used, please send them in by the 15th of each month for inclusion in the next month's issue. If you have a story, let us know before then to guarantee that we reserve space for you. Contact us via email on hello@thelittletheatre.co.uk.

200 Club Winners

The winners of December's draw:

1st Prize (£250) – 16
 2nd Prize (£100) – 39
 3rd Prize (£50) – 57

Join the 200 Club

for a chance to win up to £250 every month

The Little's big cash-prize lottery

Donate £25 to The Little Theatre to enter the remaining 5 monthly lottery draws for 2023-24.

The next draw takes place at the end of January.

Call us to enter:

0116 255 1302

hello@thelittletheatre.co.uk
thelittletheatre.co.uk



Member Profile

Victoria Kirk Words by Jackie Caunt

Victoria is a Leicester Girl who attended Folville Primary School and Fullhurst Community College. Victoria then attended Leicester College studying Film and Media, before going to Coventry University, and gaining a BA in Communication, Culture and Media, followed by an MA in Media Production.

After University, Victoria joined a film group named 7/5 Productions which were based at the Phoenix. She worked on short films while there, one being *The Cause*, which Victoria wrote and directed. It was entered in to the short film corner at the 2014 Cannes Film Festival, and is available to view online (youtube.com/watch?v=TO8TeZJD_-0).

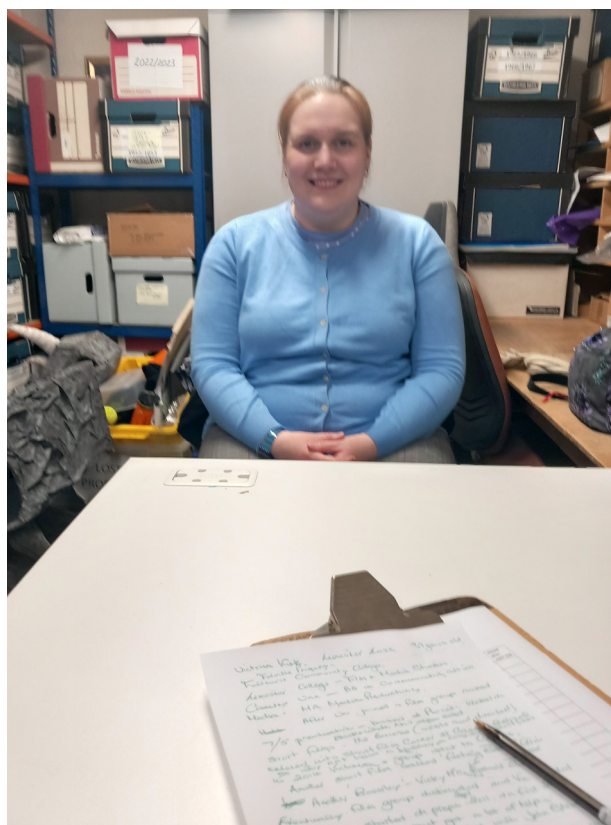
Victoria also worked as production manager on the short film *Finding Richard* (which also went to Cannes and can be viewed at vimeo.com/95039756). It's about a young boy who begins his own archaeological missions after the remains of Richard III are found. This short film starred Colin Baker of Doctor Who fame.

Victoria and several members of 7/5 went to the 2014 Cannes Festival to promote these short films.

Lastly, Victoria was a production assistant on *Beverley* (youtube.com/watch?v=6vbibz40Usw), which starred Vicky McClure.

Victoria has also worked as a runner on *Bargain Hunt*, *Dickenson's Real Deal*, helped on the producers' auditions on *The Voice*, and did two-weeks' work experience on *This Morning*, meeting many different celebrities.

Eventually the 7/5 group disbanded, and Victoria found her way to The Little Theatre and started working on props. She told me in September 2011 that she did her



first 'strike' and hadn't got a clue what she was doing, but was met with kindness and a lot of help from backstage.

After assisting with props on a few studio shows, Victoria worked with John Ghent and Lisa Thirlby on *The History Boys*. Victoria worked a lot with John, and she eventually progressed to deputy stage manager (DSM) on *Doubt*, with Lisa's help. Victoria has DSM'd quite a few mainstage shows since. I asked her if she would like to stage manage too, and she said she prefers to DSM as she finds it more interesting, and it keeps her on her toes.

Victoria loves theatre and goes to London quite a lot. She also really likes horror films!

She lives at home with mum, dad and older sister, Amelia, whom she is very close to. Let's not forget the cat, Stella who turned out to be a fella, but was originally thought to be a lady. I know from Facebook that this is one very loved and spoilt cat.

Victoria's day job is at County Hall, where she works in payroll and HR. I met her at The Little quite a few years ago, when she helped as a door person on *Front of House* for a time. I knew what a kind person she is, but I only learned all this about her while doing her profile. It just goes to show you how we have so much talent at the theatre, and they shouldn't be hiding their light under a bushel!

Thanks to Victoria.

Obituary: Mike Dack (1938-2023)

A colleague, a friend and a very funny man Words by John Ghent

It's with great sadness I heard of the death of my theatre friend and colleague Mike Dack. Anyone who was lucky enough to know Mike will remember a lovely, gentle man, who could bring his talent for comedy to many Music Halls and plays for the Leicester Drama Society at The Little Theatre. His Max Miller act and his comedy stand-up routines brought him legions of fans. He has been much missed in the past few years, but he will be lovingly remembered by anyone lucky enough to have seen him in his prime.

Mike was born in Luton, went to Dunstable Grammar School and set his sights on RADA. His father, a Vauxhall employee and devout Methodist, insisted that he take a secure job and Mike became a teacher, taking an English degree in Leeds. He did his teacher training in Nottingham and returned to Leeds to teach English and Drama at Foxwood Comprehensive School, Seacroft. It was during this period that he became a successful football coach.

Mike coached football at the school where he taught, and they won the Leeds schools' cup five years in succession. Four of his boys turned professional; one kept goal for Scotland and was voted best goalkeeper in the 1974 World Cup. After that he coached the Leeds and District FA under 15 team that reached the Yorkshire final and the sixth round of the English Championship.

In his late twenties, Mike left the Methodist chapel, but kept his faith. "All my ancestors preached and sang for all they were worth. Father played the organ, Mother was in the choir and I went to chapel for two services and Sunday School every week. Once on the way back from chapel, when I was about seventeen, I stopped

to boot a football around for a few minutes and I felt guilty for days! Quite frankly, I think I had religious indigestion."

Mike moved to Leicester to become head of English at Mary Linwood School. In Leicester, he coached the EMGAS women's team and saw them reach the semi-finals of the women's FA cup in the seventies but lose to Queens Park Rangers.

Mike joined the Leicester Drama Society at this time. "My mother passed on her love of acting and singing to me. I competed in music festivals as a boy soprano and acted from quite an early age. I played Fagin in the Grand Theatre in Leeds. I have been in every music hall at The Little Theatre since I joined twenty years ago. Sometimes I've been chairman, but I most enjoy impersonating the old comedians like Jimmy Durante, Jimmy Knox, Max Miller, Rob Wilton and Frankie Howerd."

For relaxation, Mike liked listening to jazz and swing, took his holidays in Sheringham where he soaked up the peace and quiet and avoided flying away on holiday, which he refused to do, but thought that one day he might risk the tunnel.

Another of Mike's phobias was dogs. Ever since he was bitten on the shin as a child, he had gone to extraordinary lengths to avoid them, even taking a taxi past a playing field where he knew a mongrel used to lie in wait.

"Even my sister's dog, Barney, scares me to death. If only pet lovers would teach cats to bark, they would be just as much fun as dogs and the cats would have the advantage of a second language!"

When Mike's parents became ill, they moved to Leicester. Mike retired early, as many teachers do, and was



able to take more care of his mother, who died in 1999.

"Thursday was the day we usually went out to do her shopping and so on. Some time after she died, I realised that I had a free Thursday. I was driving around, saw the Coffee Stop sign and decided to call in. I was given a friendly welcome and so I became a helper. Then I joined SWORD and offered my services as a lesson reader. It feels good to be going back to my roots."

As I mentioned earlier, Mike was a lovely, gentle man, who never failed to bring you a hearty helping of Dack humour whenever he was around. One abiding memory of Mike was in *Underneath the Arches*, when he played one of the Crazy Gang for me and spent the entire interval walking around the auditorium intent on a conversation he was having into the disconnected hose of a vacuum cleaner. Daft and totally surreal. A sweet, sweet man. God bless him!

Connections Report

Words by Jackie Caunt

December 5, 2023

We had a very good turnout in December, with nine folk attending, and all the membership team turned up to help, including myself, Kane Gray, David Taylor, Kat Lenthall, Charlotte Brown, and not forgetting the Tuesday Connections co-ordinator, Richard Payton.

We had a disappointment at the beginning when we found out that the cast for our panto, *Puss in Boots*, weren't in rehearsal that night, so we had to find a way of giving the potential newbies an enjoyable evening, and I think we managed it.

Kane did a bit of advertising for new bar volunteers, highlighting the 25 performances of panto we had on the horizon. Richard explained some of the pitfalls we have experienced due to covid. David talked about working on front of house and I talked about the box office. Kat and Charlotte provided a view of acting and musical theatre.

We then began the tour, starting at the props room. David, Kat and Charlotte took them down into the cellar where all the props are located. No rats down there, so 'Puss' can remain on the stage! I briefly took the

group into the office, as we had one would be volunteer looking to work in there.

The group took a seat in the studio, where Kat and Charlotte spoke passionately about their enjoyment of acting. Kat had recently done a stint in the studio, performing in a one act play and has recently been cast in *Dangerous Corner* (April 29 – May 4, directed by John Ghent). Meanwhile, Charlotte has been cast in LOPs' production of *Legally Blonde*, coming to The Little for April 16-20 – just a little advert! Both girls talked the group through how to apply for auditions and how to obtain scripts from the office.

The group had a quick look in the workshop, though most of its most recent output had already been taken to the stage in readiness for



the panto. We led the group up to the auditorium, looking in on the dressing rooms, which were filled with costumes, all ready for the show. Then off they went to look around backstage, during which time Andy Crooks gave the group a talk about lighting and sound. Thanks to Andy for taking time out of his busy schedule.

Eventually, we headed back to the bar and everyone took an application form. This was the last Connections of 2023, so on behalf of all the membership team, we hope you all had an amazing Christmas and wish you a happy 2024.



CONNECTIONS DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES:

January 16

January 30

February 27

What's On



April in Paris By John Godber
January 22-27, 2024 An LDS Production
 Directed by Leigh White

Al and Bet have been married for several years and the cracks in their marriage are beginning to show. Al has lost his job and loves to paint. Bet works in a shoe shop, and dreams of a better life.

When Bet wins a romantic night for two in Paris, the city of love, Al wonders who she'll take with her. Resigned to taking her husband, Paris reignites their relationship as never before...



The Same Faces: Improvised Comedy
January 13, 2024

Friends of the theatre and Leicester's longest running improvised comedy group, The Same Faces, return to our main stage following last season's successful debut.

The two-time Leicester Comedy Festival award finalists deliver their unique blend of sketches, songs, and one-liners – all made up on the spot and based on your suggestions! If you've ever seen Whose Line Is It Anyway?, you'll know what to expect.

This is The Same Faces' flagship show that's been running for close to 11 years; come and enjoy this night of improvised hilarity!

REMINDER
£10
TICKETS
 FOR LDS
 MEMBERS

Don't forget that LDS members are entitled to one ticket (per member per show) at the discounted rate of £10 for the five LDS plays in our spring/summer season. These are available to purchase within a month of the production.

ELIGIBLE FOR THIS DISCOUNT ARE:

The Same Faces (January 13)
April in Paris (January 22-27)
The Good Life (February 5-10)
Dial 'M' For Murder (March 4-9)

Review: One Act Plays

Jackie Caunt reviews the LDS showcase for new directors

The studio is back! Yay! And what an inauguration - two one-act plays, and both very well received by the audience. I must begin by mentioning Russell Hughes, who stage-managed the whole event and gave us all an enjoyable evening.

Breaking and Entering by Mark Davenport

We started the evening with *Breaking and Entering*, brilliantly directed by Tom Young.

Let me introduce you to the characters: first on to the scene was burglar Gary (Allan Smith), stealthily – or so he thought - entering a cosy living room to merrily steal valuable items. In doing so, he wakes up the occupant of the house, Mike (Joe Allen), who confronts Gary with cricket

bat in hand. Gary puts Mike off the idea of calling the police by informing him that his accomplice is in the house; a big strong individual who could basically do him in. On cue, the accomplice arrives in the shape of Kirsty (Laura Heybrock) with tights over her head that rendered her practically blind and causing her to knock over a vase.

Once the tights were removed, she immediately recognises Mike, to whom she was previously engaged, and it seems she'd been seeing Gary at the same time. The final entrant was Jan (Emma Bamford), Mike's short-fused wife, but also Gary's ex, and again, she was seeing both of them at the same time.

Nothing in this play was what it seemed, and I couldn't have predicted the ending in a million years. This was a very strong cast, and I particularly loved the interaction between Jan and Kirsty, as the former hovered around with the cricket bat and the latter's eyes followed it with every swing. Then we had an awkward silence between the two women, and their movement and gestures made it clear that they were not sure how to continue. Jan was a force to be reckoned with and Kirsty was a little afraid. This was pure theatre in my book.

I enjoyed the fact that Gary acted like a rottweiler towards Mike, but when challenged by either of

the women, became a kitten and we realised he hadn't got an aggressive bone in his body. On the other hand, the same couldn't be said for downtrodden Mike. It seems he and Jan weren't actually happily married at all. Curious or what!

During the interval before the second play, I had the unexpected bonus of meeting the playwright, Mark Davenport, who'd come up from London. I asked him what he thought, and he said he loved it; he thought the pace and acting was good, and it was the best version of his play that he'd seen produced to date! He was very pleased.

Anyone Can Dance by Sean Baker

Goodness! What a clever piece of theatre this was, so amazingly directed by Nikki Favell.

As above I'll set the scene: The play opens on a double bed with clothes scattered around it. All a bit messy, but as we travel through this play, we see the importance of the mess.

We start in darkness, with Sam (Kat Lenthall) and Joe (Richard Hitchcock) having "a bit of fun" between the sheets, so to speak. We see snippets through David Moore's excellently timed lighting.

Sam comes across as mouthy and a bit caustic at times, while Joe is a bit gentler and more romantic. We learn Sam and Joe have been together for five months and a bit (though Joe knows exactly how long, to the day).

They begin discussing "what if they had met years ago", which becomes the basis of the play. The sound coming – again, brilliantly timed by Tom Brooks – was like a science fiction film, taking us back to probably the earliest time they could have met.





As we move on to other scenarios, we begin to see the importance of the clothes scattered around the bed, with the cast changing into them for each flashback.

How they managed to know what to wear, remember their lines, and keeping the characterisation going would be beyond me, but they did it wonderfully. T

he movement through various

stages of their lives began to explain Sam's defensive attitude; she had previously been in an abusive relationship and finds it hard to trust. We also realise that Joe is introverted, and that's the reason he doesn't dance. I felt this showed the poignancy of the play and why Sam and Joe were the perfect foils for each other. The acting throughout was superb.

Cast Announcements

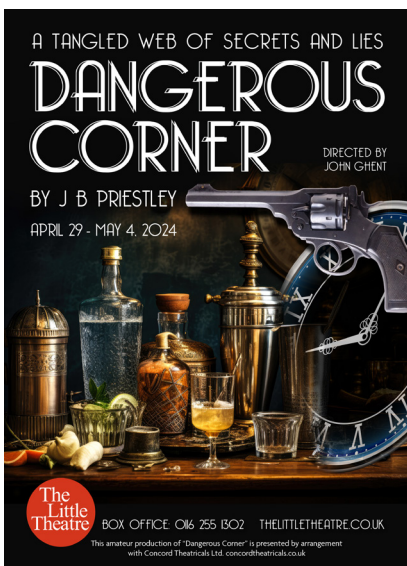
Dangerous Corner

by J B Priestley

April 29 – May 4, 2024

Directed by John Ghent

We're delighted to announce the cast and crew for our April/May production of *Dangerous Corner*.



FREDA CAPLAN – Joy Brankin Frisby

MAUD MOCKRIDGE – Angela Hil

BETTY WHITEHOUSE – Rachael

Humphrey

OLWEN PEEL – Kat Lenthall

CHARLES STANTON – Paul Beasley

GORDON WHITEHOUSE – Stuart

Bryan

ROBERT CAPLAN – John Moulding

Director: John Ghent

Set Designer: Gem Greaves

Costume Design: John Bale

Stage Management: Simon Dickens

Lighting Design: Jeremy Thompson

Sound Design: Andrew Northcote,
assisted by Dave Morris

Stage Manager: TBC

DSM: Victoria Kirk

Props: Jon Worthy

Prompt: Graham Austen, assisted by
Jenny Page

Tickets are available now from our box office (0116 255 1302) and at: thelittletheatre.co.uk/whats-on/dangerous-corner

Review: *Puss In Boots*

Words by Lynette Watson

A dazzling Christmas cracker of a show bursting with glitz and glamour plus an upright, walking talking feline clad in magical red boots has arrived at Leicester's Little Theatre, delivering their ever popular and always traditional pantomime. This year being – yes, you've guessed it – Puss in Boots.

This classic tale, adapted by the man of many talents, John Bale, follows the journey of two millers' sons who have been stripped of their inheritance by the evil wizard Malavort (Joe Middleton). Having been left with only with their faithful cat, the poor eldest brother Tom (Simon Butler) struggles to gain the hand of Queen Camilla's (Bale) daughter, Princess Lilly (Alice Marshall), in marriage. Pantoland collides with Catland in this beautiful, colourful show, as the Spirit of Catland (Natasha Carr) grants Puss with magical powers to save the day.

The entire cast ensure the pace never drops throughout. In true



What the kids thought

We also received reviews from two children who'd travelled up from Somerset to see the panto!

"I thought the panto was brilliant and was very funny, especially the one who said: "Why is your phone wearing glasses?... Because it's lost its contacts." My favourite part was the 'Mr Who, Mr What, and Mr I-Don't-Know' where Billy didn't understand – that was so funny. I cannot describe how funny that was. In the second half there were a few mistakes, but they made them feel like part of the panto. I'd rate it 4¾ out of 5. Thank you for producing such a good panto."

Zoe (Aged 10)

"It was good when the Wizard became a lion – the light made it look like he was spinning around and around, and you couldn't really see him; it looked magic. I enjoyed the '12 days of parcels' and loved it when he ate all the marshmallows. I think that Billy and Tom could act more like brothers and the Princess and the Dame more like mother and daughter as both of them didn't. I thought overall it was good."

Loralie (Aged 12)

pantomime style, it's packed with the usual corny jokes, clever plays on words, and a plethora of panto staples, including the 'convenient bench' making its annual appearance. It never fails to have the kids absolutely going mad... they loved it, cheering and booing from the start – their enjoyment was palpable!

In the title role, Rose Bale strutted around with confidence and her vocals were pitch perfect. Butler and Marshall made an endearing couple as Tom and Princess Lilly, and were well countered by the manic-laughing of Joe Middleton, suitably evil as Malavort.

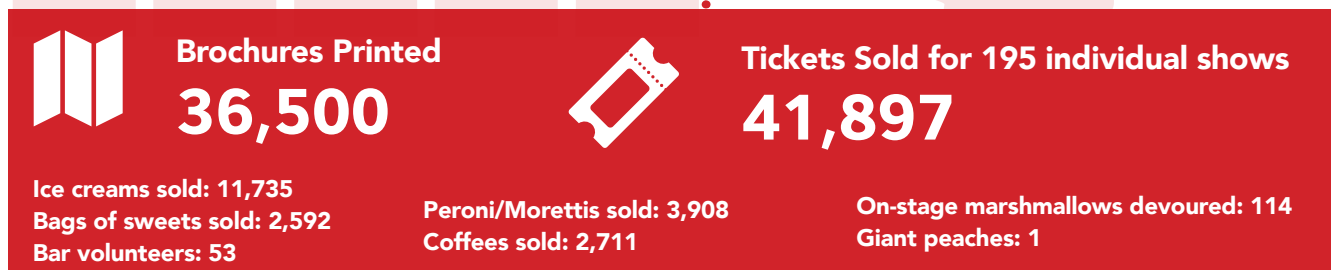
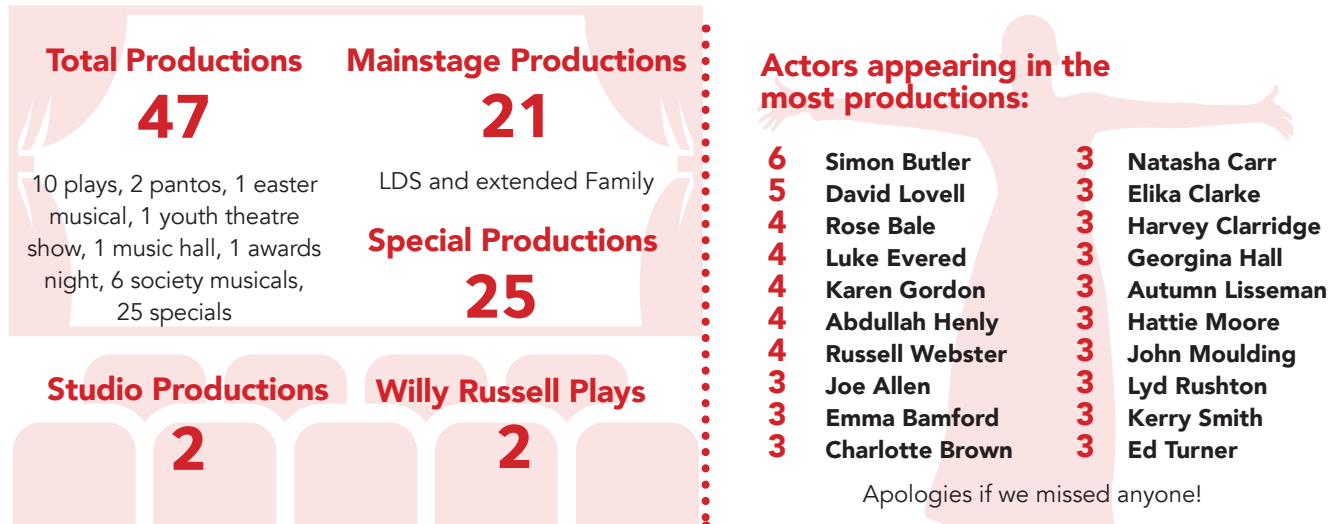
Back to Queen Camilla, and John Bale revels in his role as the dame, superb as ever in the hilarious costumes that evoked applause at every entrance. His double act with Fusspot, the Lord Chamberlain (Russell Webster) was excellent. Their Torvil and Dean Bolero dance was one of the highlights of the show, beautifully passionate but utterly ridiculous.

The spectacular finale is a pure visual delight, and if you can only visit one pantomime this year, venture no further than The Little Theatre. It's a fun-filled, festive family treat, and I guarantee you will love it.



2023 By the Numbers

Aside from 525,600 minutes, how do you measure a year at the theatre? In many ways! Here's a numerical summary of 2023 at The Little!



Recent Photos

Puss In Boots

Our annual, traditional family pantomime was Puss in Boots, once again, devised and directed by John Bale. When the old miller dies, the evil wizard Malavort sees to it that his two sons inherit nothing but the mill's debts and the family's faithful moggy, Puss. With a little help from the Spirit of Catland and some magical footwear, the cat is transformed into the walking talking Puss in Boots, and sets about fixing all their fortunes! Can Tom Miller win the heart of the Princess? Will Queen Camilla finish baking her cake? Will Fusspot, the Lord Chamberlain, avoid getting attacked by a bear? And can you stop being a silly billy, Billy?



"The only pantomimes I have ever enjoyed! The best."



"Another amazing panto to add to the collection! Thoroughly entertained us! Always choose The Little Theatre's pantos – blows the rest out the water! Congratulations everyone – can't wait for next year's already."



"Thirty of us had a fabulous time singing and laughing. Costumes were fabulous. Panto at its best."



"Absolutely fantastic! 5* Outstanding! One of the best we have ever seen! Brilliant!"

PHOTOS BY DAVID MORRIS

Recent Photos

One Act Plays

In November/December, we had two one-act plays in our studio, performed back-to-back. It was our showcase for new directors to prove themselves, and show what they can do as they start their journey to directing on the mainstage. We were also delighted that both playwrights came to view the productions. Mark Davenport's *Breaking & Entering* was directed by Tom Young – a comedy about a couple of burglars who break into the house of another couple, only to realise that they're all each other's exes. Sean Baker's *Anyone Can Dance* was directed by Nikki Favell – a romantic comedy of Samantha and Joe, who fall into a discussion one night about what might have happened if they had met at different points in their lives



"Really good! The first play was hilarious!"



"Well done to all involved, enjoyable evening."



"Really enjoyed both plays! Well done to all involved!"



"Well done all! A joy to watch."



"Loved the shows"



"Both brilliant shows. Well done Nikki, Tom and all the cast and crew."

In The Spotlight



Name: Steven Feeney

Profession: Agile Coach (like a management consultant but I wear a hoodie)

Upcoming production: *April in Paris*

Noteworthy: I am a half decent poker player and have a gold medal in marksmanship (maybe I was an outlaw in a previous life!). Solo'd Mount Triglav in Slovenia.

What was the first theatre show you saw?

The most memorable was probably the 'in-yer-face' play *You've Had Your Hole* by Irvine Welsh in 1999. We studied it for A-Level and seeing it live was a visceral experience. I recently looked it up due to this question and was quite surprised to find it only had a short run and was poorly received by critics and audiences.

What was the first play/musical you were in?

I only took up acting last year, inspired by my daughter. My first ever play was *Bouncers (Remix)*, here at The Little Theatre in 2023, playing the part of Lucky Eric. It was such a great experience, but it definitely gave me unrealistic expectations of what community theatre is. People in other dramatic societies are still surprised when I say that Leicester's Little Theatre has 349 seats and a dedicated costume department. As Mrs Bale said to me at the Sooty Awards: "The Little is amateur with a small a."

What's your favourite role you've played to date?

I really enjoyed playing Signor Pirelli in *Sweeney Todd* at the Masque in Northampton. One of the actors is a professional prop and mask maker, so he designed razors that squirted blood during the death scenes. On the first night, it even hit an audience member! It was also a lot of fun to play such an over the top and campy villain, making the switch to a broad cockney accent and the death scene was *chefs kiss*.

What's your dream role that you're yet to play?

It would absolutely love to be in a Shakespeare play. If I had my choice, possibly *Henry V*; I mean, who doesn't want to stand on stage and rally the audience? Either that or *Richard III*, just dripping with malice. Or Stanley Kowalski in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Captain Ahab in *Moby Dick*... actually, the list is endless!

What's the best theatre show you've ever seen?

I absolutely loved the re-imagining of Lucy Prebble's *The Effect* at the National Theatre in 2023. The set design was completely minimal using only pools of light to set the mood. It

really showed me what modern theatre was capable of. The performances were flawless. I took my eldest daughter (Darcey, 13) to see it again and she also thought it was amazing.

What's your favourite thing about The Little Theatre?

The standard of production is set so high that you are elevated as a performer. Everything from front of house to the set design, to the stage management and the lighting, audio and facilities are excellent. How many other societies have dedicated rehearsal spaces and their own awards show? It's been a mini apprenticeship being part of LDS this year, learning as much as I can about acting. I have loved every part of it and sometimes slip into the main house to watch the rehearsals just to see what I can learn from others by observing.

Tell us about your upcoming production!

April in Paris, opening on January 22, is a beautiful production. Leigh White has such a strong vision, and the humour and relationship drama is so relatable. Kat Seddon is amazing as Bet. It's going to be wonderful.

At a glance

JANUARY/FEBRUARY



April in Paris
Jan 22-27

The Good Life
Feb 5-10



MARCH



Dial M for Murder
Mar 4-9

**The Secret Garden:
The Musical**
Mar 22-Apr 6



APRIL



Legally Blonde
Apr 16-20

Dangerous Corner
Apr 29-May 4



MAY



**Alice in Wonderland &
Through the Looking Glass**
May 17-18

Grease
May 21-25





Visit our website for more information: thelittletheatre.co.uk