

CRITERION



PLAYERS

PRESENT

*'An Italian*



*Straw Hat'*

*SOUVENIR*

*PROGRAMME ONE SHILLING*

Thursday 25th February 2021

Online Bookings: [www.criteriontheatre.co.uk](http://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk)

CRITERION  
THEATRE

[www.criteriontheatre.co.uk](http://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk)

# YOU AND CRI



'Italian Straw Hat' will be the first event in our planned celebrations for our 60th Anniversary Year. Recreating the first show performed, 60 years on from the actual night the Criterion Players took to the new stage, in the new building, is a wonderful way to mark the occasion! Although, in these Covid times, and bearing in mind our reliance on Zoom, it may have proved easier for us if it had been an intimate two hander instead of a farce!

We have several events planned throughout the coming months to mark our anniversary, including online interviews with members and online exhibitions, and we will be communicating more about these and all our other plans as we move forward; please keep an eye on the website for all the news, events and information

I am so proud of what we have achieved at the theatre during these difficult times and would like to say thank you to you all for your support, love and commitment. I also want to thank everyone who has donated, time or money, to the theatre, we have survived because of you. Every little bit helps and now you can contribute through online shopping! Here's the link to Amazon Smile where you can select the Criterion as your chosen charity: <https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/1161430-0> It has never been easier to support us! Please pass the word around!

Finally, I am full of optimism that things will start to get better over the coming months and at some point we can all see each other again properly and we will return to a theatre life of challenging and exciting live shows, social events, and a chance to experience that intangible magic that makes the Criterion what it is. Until such a time, stay safe!

Jon Elves

# SHINE BRIGHT LIKE A DIAMOND

**Celebrating 60 Years**

Find out about upcoming events at [www.criteriontheatre.co.uk](http://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk)

## **An Italian Straw Hat – Take 2**

An Italian Straw Hat was the first production that took place in the current theatre building. It followed a mammoth effort by the founding members of the theatre (and their families) to make the former Methodist Church Sunday school building into a viable venue, having only acquired it in November 1960.

The opening night sounds like a gala evening, with the Lord and Lady Mayoress in attendance, and 'Midland News' there to film the event. However, behind the scenes, things were very different. The "Players" had been working through the night to ensure everything was in place, including the much-disputed bar; when negotiating for the purchase of the building, the Methodist Deacons did not want alcohol to be sold on the premises. However, the Players knew that a bar would be a necessary source of income to make the building viable – still very true today! – and fortunately the Deacons relented.

One of our remaining founder members, Christine Murly remembers that first night in the building;

"I remember the Lady Mayoress asking, "Where are the toilets?" I was mortified! The way round the back then was along a very muddy plank and I was praying that the light worked in the loo when she finally reached it.

Denzil (Pugh), as Chairman, and I, as Secretary, were the welcoming party for the main guests and then we had to dash backstage to change and make up before going on the stage.”

Christine’s experience of the first production, exemplifies the variety of roles that people played in its success. Another member, who had worked in the building until 3am to get it ready, was playing a soldier in the production; he was so tired that he kept nodding off in his sentry box! The choice of An Italian Straw Hat, was in part due to the fact it had many parts, which meant that it gave those who had worked so hard to get the building ready the opportunity to be in the production too.

The achievement of those early years cannot be overstated, and Christine reflects of that first performance:

“I remember looking out at the audience when making our final curtain call and thinking - the audience are still there — the floor hasn't given way and they are not sitting in the foundations.”

60 years on, those foundations are proving extremely solid indeed.

**“This week sees the realisation of a five year dream; a three year possibility; a two year probability; eighteen months planning; and three months hard labour: we now have our own theatre.”**

**Geoff Bennett**  
**An Italian Straw Hat programme, 1961.**

# DIRECTORS NOTES

CRITERION

PLAYERS

The ability to have a building of your own is such a privilege for a theatre company - it means you do not have to constantly search out and pay for venues and it offers such liberation in terms of artistic freedom to put on exactly what you want, when you want to. But our building is also more than just bricks and mortar - it is the heart of our company, and the structure around which we build our community. It is the hub of our activities, the place in which we create, learn, and grow as artists and people, socialise with good friends and family, share stories, and cry and sing and laugh and dance. We have felt the loss of our 'place and space' so keenly during the pandemic and it has made us all the more eager to make the most of it when we can finally get back inside its creaky, wonky double front doors and start to make live theatre on stage again.

This is why we owe such a debt of gratitude to those founder members of the Criterion Players who worked so hard to achieve their own theatre building sixty years ago. That we are not only still here, but are thriving as a theatre company, is testament to the foresight, tenacity, enthusiasm, and commitment of that small group back in 1961. They were willing to take the risk (including in some cases, raising money against their own houses) to make their dream happen - a theatre company that would hold itself to the highest of artistic quality standards-The Criterion Theatre.

It seemed a perfect idea, and right and fitting therefore, to honour and celebrate that great achievement, by producing the same play that opened the Criterion Theatre building on the very same night as sixty years ago. Back then, the French farce, 'An Italian Straw Hat' was specifically chosen as the first play because it had sufficient parts to involve all of the Company. While our Company is considerably larger now, I similarly wanted our new production to be something that sought to involve as many people as possible. Even in these strange Covid-19 conditions, with everything online and at a distance, it has been a joyous rehearsal experience, mixing very experienced Criterion stalwarts, with some people who are 'on stage' for the very first time, and who we might usually have seen building sets or working in wardrobe and props teams. The online form as it always does, has set us new challenges. For example, how to make a farce come alive without any

onstage action? Characterful acting of course, some use of illustrations and music, and the addition of a narrator, whose job it is to bring the stage directions alive and keep the audience up to speed with what is going on.

I would like to thank the whole 'Straw Hatters' team for coming on this zany adventure with me. The cast for all their energy and gusto within their Zoom boxes. Sally and Erica for their beautiful props created at home to be used by actors all over Coventry. Pam for coping with our lockdown conditions, by showing me costume pieces from the door of the theatre while I waited to select them, masked up in the car park. Dave for putting together the music clips and slotting them into the action. Special thanks to Keith for helping me select which of the many adaptations of the play would be most suitable, for some good advice to a novice director of the farce genre, and for once again widening my musical knowledge.

Here's to another sixty years!

*Anne-marie Greene*  
Director



ONE SHILLING

# CAST

Fadinard  
Nonancourt  
Bobin  
Vizinet  
Helene  
Felix  
Virginie  
Clara  
Anais  
Emile  
Duchess  
Achille  
Tardiveau  
Beaupertuis  
Butler  
Maid  
Trouillebert  
Constable  
Constable  
Cross Man  
Narrator

CRITERION



PLAYERS

PRESENT

Jon Elves  
Keith Railton  
Andrew Sharpe  
Mike Tooley  
Natalie Harratt  
Paul Forey  
Helen McGowan  
Gennie Holmes  
Jan Nightingale  
Ted McGowan  
Helen Withers  
Peter Gillam  
Jamie Firth  
Alan Fenn  
Karl Stafford  
Judy Sharpe  
Fenella Kelly  
Simon Sharpe  
Karl Stafford  
Simon Sharpe  
Erica Young

# CREW

Director Anne-marie Greene  
Artwork Design Chris Firth & Verity Gillam-Greene  
Sound Designer & Operator Dave Cornish  
Props Sally Patalong & Erica Young  
Wardrobe Pam Coleman

# 3 WOMEN BY KATY BRAND

We have great pleasure in advertising the reading and opportunity to audition for this forthcoming production.

The production run will be (hopefully!) between July and September 2021. The dates of performance are to be confirmed in accordance with assessment of the Covid-19 situation and subject to performance rights availability.

## **Reading**

This will be held online at 7:30pm on Sunday 7th March 2021 and is a relaxed and informal chance to read the play.

Please contact Bill at [wab16a@gmail.com](mailto:wab16a@gmail.com) for the private link to the reading.

Auditions will take place online commencing 15th March.  
Full details on the website.





# SET DESIGNERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!



Ever wondered how a set is designed? Do you fancy having a go? You may have thought "I could do better" but never been bothered? Or just "been there/done that... but it was a long time ago". Or even simply, "there's nothing else to do during lockdown!"

Now is your chance to have a go!

We are going to fill the time between now and when we can actually do something IN the theatre with a competition to design a set for Katy Brand's "Three Women". This is not just a bit of fun (OK, it is) or an academic exercise. The play will be one of the new 2021 season plays (just as soon as we can) and Bill Butler, who will be directing the play, has kindly agreed to be chair of the judging committee for our competition to design a set.

**NO EXPERIENCE IS NECESSARY.** The winning entry need not be (and most likely will not be) detailed drawings. You can do a drawing or a plan, a model, or anything you want. You can build it out of Lego for all we care but most importantly it must be built by your imagination.

Register now to get your briefing pack (a synopsis of the play, details of how to submit your entry etc) by emailing [secretary@criteriontheatre.co.uk](mailto:secretary@criteriontheatre.co.uk). To encourage you to enter there is a prize of a drink at the bar (when we can do it) for every 9th person to register. All entries must be submitted by Saturday 21st March with winners being announced shortly after that.

# PLAY READINGS

Finding ways of keeping creative during the lockdown has been a challenge, but the Criterion's Play Reading Group offers another way of enjoying the magic of theatre in your own home.

The group have a range of plays lined up, for which all are welcome to attend online through Zoom. The theatre is paying for the rights to "perform" the plays, which helps ensure that playwrights, who've endured a lean time over the last year, are supported to continuing creating.

Your involvement can be as much as you would like – if you would like to read in, please email Lucy Hayton prior to the reading on [lucyhayton@hotmail.com](mailto:lucyhayton@hotmail.com). Alternatively you are welcome to come along and listen, with an option to discuss the play afterwards.

Links to the readings are available direct from Lucy on the email above and details of each play are available on the theatre website.

"The Gift" by Janice Okoh  
Wednesday 3rd March @ 7.30pm

"The Welkin" by Lucy Kirkwood  
Wednesday 31st March @ 7.30pm



# CRITERION FRIENDS

The Criterion Theatre is grateful to the following supporters for being Criterion Friends.

If you would like to become a Friend to the theatre and make a regular annual or monthly donation to enable us to keep going into the future please visit our Friends page on the website at [www.criteriontheatre.co.uk/join/friend](http://www.criteriontheatre.co.uk/join/friend) or e-mail [friends@criteriontheatre.co.uk](mailto:friends@criteriontheatre.co.uk).

Criterion Friends making generous financial commitments through donations or regular giving since June 2019

Anonymous

John and Wendy Baxter

Pete Gillam and Anne-marie Greene

Ruth Miller and Bill Butler

John and Kate Purcell

George and Alex Rippon

Zoe and Rob Wartnaby

Margaret Barwick

Mick Forey

The McGowan Family

Chris Murly

Jane and Keith Railton

Judy and Simon Sharpe



Earlsdon has always been a warm and friendly community. Mr Harryga Gabriel took over Hazelwoods chip shop in July 1961 and was one of the first businesses to support the opening of the Criterion in 1961 by placing an advert in their programme.

The relationship between these two long running Earlsdon establishments has continued to this day, as the current owner Mr George Gabriel continues to support the theatre, not just attending plays, but also putting up posters and even providing food for cast and crew during productions; the food has even featured in several plays! All of the Gabriel family have contributed to the theatre, volunteering time and help and even star in some productions.

We hope this tradition and close community spirit will continue in the years to come.

The Gabriels

**The Law Firm That Puts Clients First....**

**Penmans**

**SOLICITORS LLP**

**Proud to be sponsoring  
THE CRITERION THEATRE**

Contact our Lawyers for professional, practical and confidential advice. Initial ½ hour consultation free.

**COVENTRY - Tel: 024 7622 6575**

**17a Queens Road, Coventry, CV1 3DH**

**and at**

**KENILWORTH – Tel: 01926 858222**

**WELLESBOURNE – 01789 470022**

**[www.penmanssolicitors.co.uk](http://www.penmanssolicitors.co.uk)**

We provide legal services for Residential & Commercial Conveyancing, Family & Divorce, Wills & Probate, Powers of Attorney, Estate Administration, Inheritance Tax & Trusts, Personal Injury, Criminal Defence (24 hour police station attendance)

# 'An Italian



# 'Straw Hat'

**If you have any comments about your experience with The Criterion Theatre, please email us at: [customerexperience@criteriontheatre.co.uk](mailto:customerexperience@criteriontheatre.co.uk)**

**Video and/or audio recording of performance by any means whatsoever are strictly prohibited**

**Registered Charity 1161430**



We believe that it is important as an organisation that serves the people of Coventry to speak out against racial injustice and prejudice.

**We want to be clear - Black Lives Matter**

We are listening, and we are learning about how we can serve our communities better together.



**WE'RE PART OF  
COVENTRY'S  
STORY**  
PROUD SUPPORTERS OF



**20  
21**

COVENTRY  
UK CITY  
OF CULTURE



@criterionearlson  
@the\_criterion  
@criteriontheatre