

PRESENT LAUGHTER

by Noël Coward

**Monday
28 February -
Saturday
5 March 2022**



**Altrincham Garrick
PLAYHOUSE**

NEW EDITION
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
 by Ken Kesey
 with an introduction by Kesey
 and a new afterword by the author
 PLACEDON

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WIELCOMIE

...to Altrincham Garrick Playhouse, and our production of Noël Coward's *Present Laughter*.

The theatrical era in which Noël Coward shone so brightly may be long gone, but just over one hundred years after his West End debut as a playwright, his legacy lives on. The best of his plays – *Private Lives*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Hay Fever*, *Present Laughter*, *Design for Living* – are still revived all over the world, and his intricately constructed songs continue to delight successive generations.

Everything about Coward was carefully cultivated: his voice, his writing, the way he dressed and the way he lived his life. One of the sharpest and most spontaneous wits of the 20th century, he nevertheless put a lot of energy into creating a very particular image of himself. He was, as the playwright John Osborne once pointed out, his own greatest invention.

Coward both parodied and personified a particular between-the-wars stratum of English society with such verve and dexterity that, several generations on, we are still enjoying the fruits of his wit and imagination, with ongoing revivals and reinventions of his best work. Sir Alan Ayckbourn, Britain's greatest living playwright, said that "*Coward had a great capacity for living and he was an all-round theatre man. He was not only the most successful dramatist, he was the most successful actor, and he became the most successful lyricist. He was a child of the 1920s, when life could be accepted as fun.*"

When, in the 1950s, his popularity as a playwright began to wane, the middle-aged Coward took this message of frivolity-at-all-costs to the public in person, giving acclaimed cabaret performances at the Café de Paris in London and the Desert Inn, Las Vegas. If the public no longer wanted Coward the Playwright, he would give them Coward the Performer instead.

Coward's admiration for talent above everything would often trigger some unlikely friendships. Despite his disdain for Beckett and what he called "*the kitchen sink brigade*" of the Royal Court, he had a lot of time for Harold Pinter, and the two men entered into a mutually respectful correspondence in the early 1960s. Coward wrote: "*You cheerfully break every rule that I was brought up to believe in, except the cardinal one of never boring for a split second.*"

Like *Hay Fever*, written twenty years earlier, *Present Laughter* is a comedy about the theatricals that Noël best knew and cherished in his public and private lives, but this time written as a star vehicle for himself. The central character, Garry Essendine, is in many ways the world-weary, middle-aged projection of the dilettante, debonair persona first accorded to Coward by the media after *The Vortex* back in 1924. He's a witty, self-obsessed, dressing-gowned figure who struts through the play like a well-educated peacock; but at the end of the first act, when Essendine starts to instruct a young dramatist in the art of theatre, one can hear the true voice of Coward more loudly and clearly than almost anywhere else in his work.

"*A potent mixture of self-exposure and self-celebration*" was Noël's own verdict on Garry and the play in 1972, a year before he died. Somewhere in this comedy is a lot of the truth not only about Coward in mid-career, but also about the group of friends, secretaries, managers and lovers with which he had surrounded himself. No play he ever wrote was more autobiographical, but if *Present Laughter* is, in the end, about anything very philosophical, it is surely about the price of fame and the cost of charm.

I sincerely hope you enjoy this evening's performance. Thank you for joining us, and we hope to see you back at the Garrick soon.

Joe

Joseph Meighan Artistic Director, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse.



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A CHARMING CONSTELLATION OF GOSSIPY LITTLE PLANETS CIRCLING AROUND THE GREAT GLORIOUS SUN

Present Laughter, Act 2 Scene 2

Out of control celebrity culture. Stalkers who invade the homes of the famous. A sense of impending doom brought about by fear of a global catastrophe. Not 2022, but 1939 when, on August 31st, the cast and writer-director Noel Coward went to the final dress rehearsal of *Present Laughter* in preparation for its première in Manchester in September...

The parallels of this brilliant play to our own time are clear enough...

Social media, to which many of us have become addicted, has globally amplified the concept of celebrity. Like Roland Maule and indeed all of the 'gossipy little planets' in *Present Laughter* there are those on Facebook, TikTok and Twitter who believe they 'know' a star just from having seen a post or watched them perform 47 times or so... Social media 'influencers' have millions of 'followers', a term with clear religious connotations, and the most 'followed' 'celebrity' on TikTok is a dancer called Charli D'Amelio with 124 million devotees. She has amassed over a billion 'likes'.

Garry Essendine's journey in *Present Laughter* is a direct precursor of our celebrity-obsessed times, which is why the play holds such a fascination for audiences 82 years after Noël Coward wrote it (along with *This Happy Breed*) in a frenetically creative six week period for him in the summer of that fateful year. Of course, the main protagonist in *Present Laughter* is also his most autobiographical character – and there are very few authors in English literature who have so mercilessly lampooned themselves on stage. Even his name, Essendine, is an anagram of neediness. 'Every play you appear in is exactly the same – superficial, frivolous, without the slightest intellectual significance' opines the Chekov-loving character Roland, in surely one



Two photographs of Noël Coward in the original production of *Present Laughter* (far right).

A re-coloured image from the programme cover of Chichester Festival Theatre's revival production, staged in 2018.

Bottom: A programme (cost 6d - 2½p!) from London's Theatre Royal, Haymarket, 1947.



of the most punishing pieces of self-criticism delivered on any stage. When the play did première, Coward played the lead, and audiences saw the man himself taken down in his own play. *Present Laughter* may be a truly great comedy, but as you will see, it is far from light.

The Lord Chamberlain in the 20th century saw fit not to allow depictions of homosexuality on stage, and not only that, of course – having sex if you were ‘gay’ (a term coined in Coward’s time) was illegal. *Present Laughter* serves us the clearest and most subtly subversive view of human sexuality that Coward could muster under those restrictions, but still comes to the stage with a candour and vibrancy which we may even shy away from now. ‘I believe now, and I have always believed that there’s far too much damned nonsense talked about sex.. I enjoy it for what it’s worth, and what is more, I fully intend to go on doing so for as long as anybody’s interested’, says Garry, as he reveals the affairs and sexual predilections of all of his followers in Act III.

Indira Varma, the actress who won an Olivier Award for her portrayal of Liz in the Old Vic’s 2019 revival of the play, says that “Coward’s plays are pure entertainment but with something more substantial underneath. He writes incredibly funny dialogue and he writes really well for women. If you dig into the subtext, he definitely weaves in the stressfulness of being gay at a time when it was illegal, as well as sexual vanity, the idle rich, and the moral restrictions of the time. They’re still all themes we’re interested in now.”

The title originally chosen for the play about Garry Essendine and his entourage was *Sweet Sorrow*, an oxymoronic quotation taken from Act II Scene II of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*:

*Parting is such sweet sorrow,
That I shall say good night till it be morrow.*

However, at some stage during the original rehearsals, the title was changed to *Present Laughter*, taken from a song – commonly known as *O Mistress Mine* – sung by Feste, the clown, from Act II Scene III of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, as he urges a spirit of *Carpe Diem*:

*What is love? ‘Tis not hereafter;
Present mirth hath present laughter;
What’s to come is still unsure.
In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty;
Youth’s a stuff will not endure.*

Coward wrote *Present Laughter* at his Kent home *Goldenhurst* in the April and May of 1939. He later recalled that the play was “written with the sensible object of providing me with a bravura part”: the lead role of Garry Essendine. Coward wrote to Jack Wilson “*Present Laughter* is not so much a play as a series of semi-autobiographical pyrotechnics” and many of the other characters in the play are reminiscent too of Coward’s own entourage. Wilson himself can be seen in the roles of Henry and Morris (perhaps



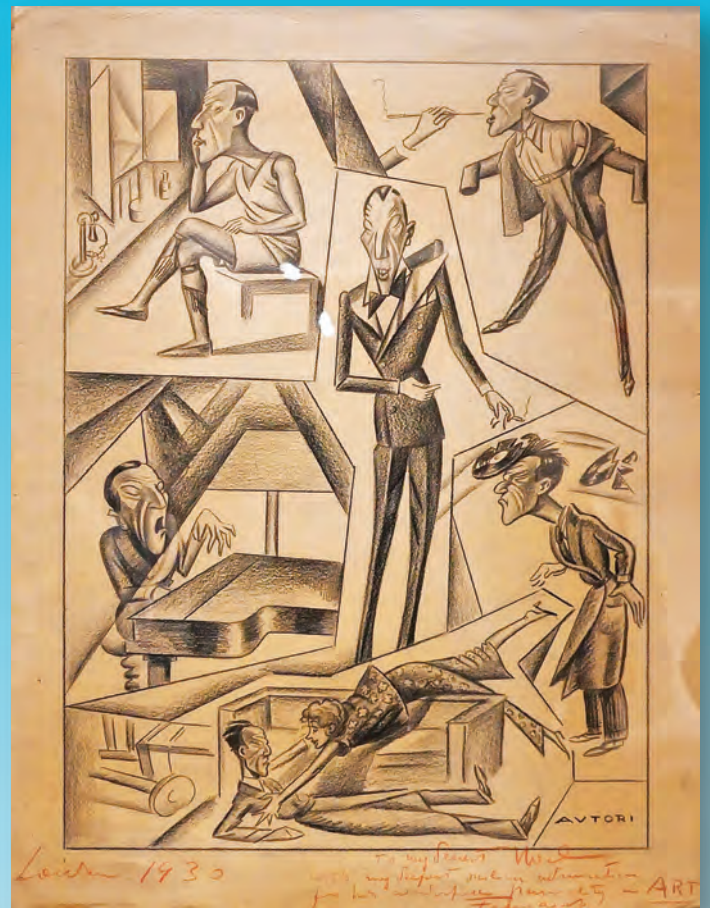


alongside Binkie Beaumont). Monica, Garry's down-to-earth secretary who's smarter than him, knows all his slightly schoolboyish ways and can deal with him brilliantly, was modelled on his Noël's own Lorn Loraine, while the character of Garry's estranged wife, Liz, rather mysterious, very strong-willed, very witty woman who is more than a match for him, certainly has element of his closest friend Joyce Carey (who would play the role in 1942).

Very soon, *Present Laughter* was in rehearsals. During this time, Coward would disappear off to top secret meetings about setting up a 'Bureau of Propaganda' in Paris if and when war broke out between Britain and Nazi Germany. Prior to rehearsals, he had undertaken a personal tour of Northern Europe, but the rumour was that he was already engaged on an informal reconnaissance mission, in which he met Sibelius and stayed with Somerset Maugham.

As rehearsals got closer to the opening night in Manchester on September 11th, so did the shadow of war. Dress rehearsals completed on August the 30th and 31st, the play was ready to go, but only days later war was declared, the production abandoned and Coward found himself at the Ritz in Paris.

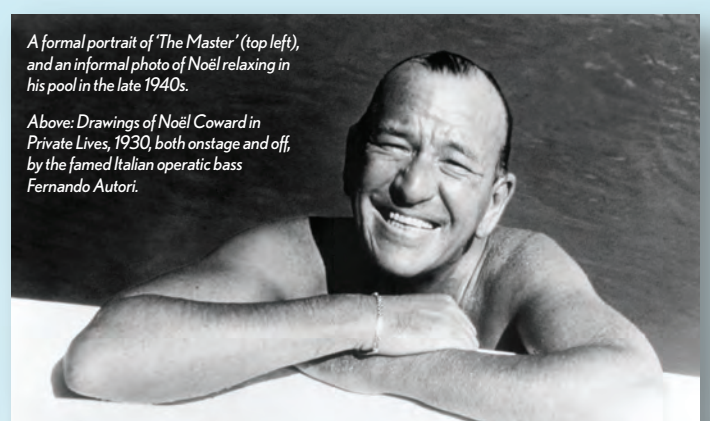
With the original production having been postponed owing to the outbreak of World War Two, Noël finally made it to the stage with *Present Laughter* nearly eighty years ago, on 20th September 1942, in a national tour alongside *This Happy Breed* and *Blithe Spirit*, the trio presented as *Play Parade*, promoted to 'lift the spirits of the nation'... Noting the irrelevance of the title, the reviewer from the Daily Telegraph considered that '*Present Laughter*' aptly described the reaction of the audience. No doubt Coward expected that all along. When the play was finally published, he dedicated it to Clemence Dane who, between the First and Second World Wars,



was Britain's most influential, versatile and successful female writer and arguably the most complete and versatile female creative force: novelist, playwright, screenwriter, journalist, sculptor, painter, broadcaster, lecturer and pioneering feminist. She was the first British woman screenwriter to win an Oscar.

In the final analysis *Present Laughter* is a play about acting. And over-acting - something that the author encouraged from his performers at times in this play. It's about how we all play a variety of parts, sometimes well, sometimes badly. And it's a play about the theatre. In some sense, every play about the theatre - in particular, Michael Frayn's brilliant comedy *Noises Off*, and even elements of Ronald Harwood's *The Dresser* - is a sort of send-up, even if they're quite serious ones; you can't help but hold the mirror up to the vanity and self-regard that are a stock-in-trade of actors. Audiences seem to love seeing behind the scenes, whether in films, books or plays, and these days people like reading about showbiz personalities.

Present Laughter is a play that's stood the test of time and delighted people for 80 years. Hopefully it will be a tremendously entertaining evening in the theatre. Of course, if we do provide present mirth, then please follow us on Facebook or Twitter!



A formal portrait of 'The Master' (top left), and an informal photo of Noël relaxing in his pool in the late 1940s.

Above: Drawings of Noël Coward in *Private Lives*, 1930, both onstage and off, by the famed Italian operatic bass Fernando Autori.

THE MASTER

Noël Peirce Coward was born on 16 December 1899 in Teddington, Middlesex, England to Arthur Coward (sometime piano salesman) and Violet (soon to become the archetypal 'stage mother').

He made his professional stage debut as *Prince Mussel* in *The Goldfish* at the age of 12, which led to many child actor appearances in the next few years, amongst them *Slightly* in *Peter Pan* – which later caused critic Kenneth Tynan to remark – “Forty years ago he was *Slightly* in *Peter Pan* and you might say that he has been wholly in *Peter Pan* ever since.”

Several of his own early plays reached the London stage briefly but it was the controversial *The Vortex* (1924) that proved to be the breakthrough. With its overt references to drugs and adultery, it made his name as both actor and playwright in the West End and on Broadway.

Noël seemed to epitomize the spirit of the frenzied 1920s and a string of successful plays ensued – *Hay Fever* (1925), *Fallen Angels* (1925) and *Easy Virtue* (1926), as well as several intimate revues for which he wrote words and music such as *London Calling* (1923) and *This Year Of Grace* (1928). He also wrote his first 'book' musical *Bitter Sweet* (1929) which was a huge hit in the West End and on Broadway

The momentum continued into the 1930s. *Private Lives* (1930) saw him appearing with a childhood friend, Gertrude Lawrence, and that partnership continued professionally with *Tonight at 8:30* (1936). *Cavalcade*, produced at Drury Lane in 1931 was adapted for film and won a Best Picture Oscar in 1932. His revue *Words and Music* was produced in London in 1932 and introduced a young John Mills to the London stage.

Writer, actor, director, film producer, painter, songwriter, cabaret artist as well as an author of verse, essays and autobiographies, he was called by close friends '*The Master*', a title of which he was secretly proud.

As World War II broke out he had two plays waiting to be produced – *This Happy Breed* and *Present Laughter* – but they would have to wait until 1942. Meanwhile, there was *Blithe Spirit* (1941), a subversive comedy that ran longer than the war.

'Noël's War' was an active one... troop concerts at home and overseas... touring in plays... producing classic films such as *In Which We Serve* (which he co-directed with a young David Lean as well as writing the score and playing the lead) and *Brief Encounter*... and he also acted as an unofficial spy for the Foreign Office!

The post-war years saw his star in temporary eclipse. Austerity Britain – the London critics determined – was out of tune with the brittle Coward wit. His plays enjoyed only modest success, but Noël responded by 're-inventing' himself as a cabaret and TV star, particularly in America. In 1955 he played a sell-out cabaret season at the Desert Inn, Las Vegas which led to a live TV spectacular on CBS with Mary Martin – *Together With Music*. He performed many of his hit songs written from the 1920s onwards, including *Mad About The Boy*, *If Love Were All*, *Mad Dogs And Englishmen* and *I'll See You Again*. All in all he wrote over 600 songs.

He left the UK in the mid-1950s and settled in Jamaica and Switzerland. In the early 1960s critical opinion in Britain turned yet again. He became the first living playwright to be performed by the National Theatre when he directed *Hay Fever* there. '*Dad's Renaissance*' – as Noël gleefully dubbed it – was under way, and has never faltered since. He and his work are more popular today – and on a worldwide scale – than ever before.

His final West End appearance was *Song at Twilight* in 1966, which he wrote and starred in. Late in his career he was lauded for his roles in a number of films, including *Our Man In Havana* (1959) and for his iconic role as Mr Bridger alongside Michael Caine in *The Italian Job* (1968).

In 1970 came the long overdue knighthood. In 1973 he died peacefully and was buried in his beloved Jamaica.



One of the features that enriches Present Laughter is the equivocal nature of Garry himself.

There is a persistent suggestion that there is more to him than the extravagant showman that he is playing most of the time. His wannabe lovers would like to think that they will bring out his true character hidden beneath the showy exterior; a man who will be honest and sensitive, and most of all, faithfully loving to them. As Joanna puts it: *"I want you to be what I believe you really are, friendly and genuine, someone to be trusted. I want you to do me the honour of stopping your eternal performance for a little, ring down the curtain, take off your make-up and relax."*

And Daphne similarly confuses when he is acting and when he is not. Although she claims to *"know when you're acting and when you're not"*, she pointedly gets it completely backwards, believing that *"it was the real you"* when he first makes love to her, and that he is acting when he tells her he does not want her to come to Africa with him.

Of course it is Liz who knows him best: *"He's not nearly as flamboyant as he pretends to be."* She and we know that Garry is always much more in control than he lets on, aware of the stakes he is playing with and what is required to sustain both his pleasures and his position. There is a sense of his potential vulnerability when ironically having complained about his lack of peace from the demands of all around him, he is unhappy when he finds himself alone on the eve of his departure to Africa. And he is certainly dependent on Liz for practical and emotional support – Coward is partially playing with this by conjuring Garry's surname as an anagram of 'neediness'.

Garry himself proclaims that he has a clear-eyed view of himself and his behaviour: *"I always have believed that there's far too much damned nonsense talked about sex. To me the whole business is over-rated, and always has been. I enjoy it for what it's worth, and what is more, I fully intend to go on doing so for as long as anybody's interested. And when the time comes that they're not – I shall be perfectly content to settle down with an apple and a good book!"* His great speech perfectly captures the contradictions of his character: it is overly-dramatic, it contains some truth, and it is deluded – it is virtually impossible to imagine Garry settling for the apple and a good book!

CASUAL SCAMPERING

Garry is determined that his persistent philandering does not *"do any harm to anybody"*, but Liz is less sure: *"You do harm to yourself and to the few, the very few who really mind about you."* There is an ongoing

debate through the play as to the morality of casual sexual relationships, what Liz neatly labels *"casual scampering"*, though judging by the behaviour and views of most of the characters, and the final results, it is far from a serious moral contest. For Liz, Garry's *"buccaneering"* is *"rather undignified"*, and most injudicious only when it really threatens to unsettle the professional team that keeps the whole Garry Essendine show on the road.

Both of Garry's seductresses, Daphne and Joanna, are happy to settle for what Joanna calls the *"fun of love"* without the *"pangs of love"* or strings attached. *"It's an adult point of view"*, one which Daphne is also content to go along with: *"I don't want to marry you or anything like that. I'll just be there when you want me, when you're tired and lonely and want someone to put their arms around you."*

Henry and Joanna's marriage appears to accommodate his multiple affairs, and Garry's valet Fred prefers to conduct a non-exclusive, long-term relationship with Doris the dancer at the club he frequents in Tottenham Court Road. (Although touchingly we learn that she will be coming to see him off at the quayside when he departs for the tour of Africa). Garry professes to be outraged by all of these *"immoral"* attitudes, a stance which is clearly pretentious and hypocritical, as confirmed by his big speech reaffirming his determination to continue to pursue his pleasures *"for as long as anybody's interested."* It is hard not to hear Coward's own voice behind Garry's final proclamation on the matter: *"I'm an artist, am I not? Surely I may be allowed a little licence!"*



THE CAST

Gary Essendine

Mike Shaw

Liz Essendine

Ros Greenwood

Monica Reed

Lindsey Barker

Daphne Stillington

Eilidh Pollard

Miss Erikson

Carmel Price

Fred

Graham Simmonds

Roland Maule

Dan Ellis

Joanna Lyppiatt

Sarah Kirk

Henry Lyppiatt

Jonathan Black

Morris Dixon

Colin Rice

Lady Saltburn

Karen Foster

PRODUCTION TEAM

Director Val Watkinson

Design Mike Shaw, Barry Purves

Stage Manager Phil Gleave

ASMs Sue Berry, Helen Sallabank

Prompt Anne O'Reilly

Lighting Geoff Scullard

Sound Christine Mills

Properties David Ades

Wardrobe Mike Shaw

Assisted by Stella Blackburn, Betty Farmer

..... Helen Phillips, Lynne Saleh

..... Julie Shaw, Noel Watson

Scenic Artist Amanda Cooke

Production Carpenter Steve Cox

Technical Adviser Paul Simpson

Set Construction Phil Gleave, Paul Simpson

..... Trevor McKie, Nick McKie

..... Mark McEwan, Steve Cox

..... John Murphy, Dave Bailey

..... Bob Green, Andy McHugh

SETTING: The action of the play takes place in Garry Essendine's studio in London.

ACT 1: Scene 1: Morning

Scene 2: Evening – 3 days later

ACT 2: Scene 1: The next morning

Scene 2: Evening – a week later

There will be one interval of twenty minutes

We request that all mobile phones are put into 'silent' mode, or switched off. The taking of photographs, or any kind of filming or recording of the production, is strictly prohibited. Thankyou.

THE COMPANY



Mike Shaw
Gary Essendine

Mike has been with the Garrick for 42 years and fellow members say that the theatre runs through his veins. During this time, he has been involved on-stage as well as backstage for all of their productions.

Mike has directed **Towards Zero**, **A Murder Has Been Arranged**, Emlyn Williams' **Whodunnit** and Agatha Christie's **Go Back for Murder**. He's also set to direct the Garrick's forthcoming Inspector Morse Murder Mystery, **House of Ghosts**. His acting roles have included **Privates on Parade**, **Arsenic and Old Lace**, **La Cage Aux Folles**, **Dick Whittington**, **When We Are Married!**, and he won a NODA Best Actor award for his portrayal of *Dr. Hubert Bonney* in **It Runs In The Family**, Mike's most recent appearance on the Garrick's stage was as one of the Alan Bennetts in **The Lady In The Van**.

When not treading the boards, Mike and his team have been the mainstay of the wardrobe department for over 37 years. They have picked up critical acclaim and recognition for their understated or awe inspiring creations, especially for the fantastic, ornately detailed costumes that won a NODA Award for costumes in the production of **Wolf Hall**.

He hopes you enjoy this performance of **Present Laughter** as much as he has, working with a truly talented team of people both on-stage and the unsung heroes behind the scenes who, with their dedication and commitment, have made this production come to life.



Ros Greenwood
Liz Essendine

Ros has been involved in many Garrick productions both onstage and behind the scenes. Favourite roles over the seasons have been *Pattie* in **Brimstone and Treacle**, *Amanda* in **Private Lives**, *Myra* in **Hay Fever**, *Maggie* in **Outside Edge**, *Monica* in **Daisy Pulls it Off**, *Belinda* in **Noises Off**, *Gail* in **Teechers**, *Helen*

Kroger in **Pack of Lies** and the wicked *Queen Belladonna* in our 2009 and 2015 productions of **Snow White**. Lauriston Studio credits include *Fay* in **Iron**, *Katurian* in **The Pillowman** and *Joan Crawford* in **Bette and Joan**.

Ros directed and designed our 2017 production of **Gaslight** and also **And Then There Were None**. Other design credits are for **Accrington Pals** (Lauriston Studio) and **Phantom of the Opera**.

Ros last appeared as *Elizabeth Law* in **When the Rain Stops Falling**, our final production just before theatres were closed, and is thrilled to be treading the boards once again!



Carmel Price
Miss Erikson

Carmel has been singing and acting for many years, performing roles for several societies.

Previous parts include *Carlotta* in **Follies**, *Nellie* in **South Pacific**, *Anna* in **The King and I**, *Aunt Ella* in **Oklahoma** to name a few.

Carmel is looking forward to being part of **Present Laughter** at the Garrick.

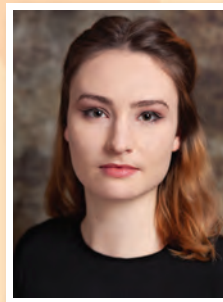


Lindsey Barker
Monica Reed

Having recently performed on the Altrincham Garrick stage as *Pauline* in **The Lady in the Van**, Lindsey is delighted to be back for what will be her second Noël Coward play, with the first being **Blithe Spirit**, in which she performed twice; first as the maid *Edith* and then in the lead

role of *Ruth Condomine*. Lindsey has been performing on stage for over 20 years in various theatres across the North West, and this is her 61st production overall, including musicals, pantomime, one-act plays and full length plays. Her roles have been quite varied over the years – from *Mrs Beaver* in **The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** to *Mrs Betterton* in **Playhouse Creatures** and *Sabrina* in **Business Affairs**. When Lindsey is not acting, she is helping backstage throwing stuffed pigeons from the rafters or pulling curtains in the annual pantomime and musical.

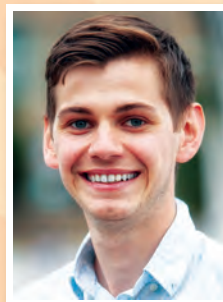
Laughter is the best medicine, so put your stomach muscles through their paces and enjoy!"



Eilidh Pollard
Daphne Stillington

Eilidh is an actor and musician with many years of experience performing at local theatres. Her recent roles include *Pegeen Mike* in **The Playboy of the Western World**, *Guard 2* in **Iron**, and *Rhonda* in **The Secret Rapture**. She also acted in, and wrote and performed original music for Wilmslow Green Room's

production of **Whiskey Galore**, for which she won a GMDF award. Eilidh is very excited to be making her Altrincham Garrick Playhouse debut in **Present Laughter**.



Daniel Ellis
Roland Maule

Daniel studied drama at Liverpool John Moores University and has continued to act and direct since graduating in 2011. He has previously performed with Altrincham Garrick as *Muddles* in their 2015 pantomime, **Snow White**, the *Waiter* in **Two Into One**, as *Lockwood* in **The**

History Boys, and most recently he stole the show as *Smee* in our hugely popular smash-hit production of **Peter Pan** last Christmas. With other companies Daniel has been playing the 'comic' character in panto since 2004 and has also had roles such as *Gerald Forbes* in **When We Are Married** and *Alan Strang* in **Equus**.

Daniel is the Co-Artistic Director of Green Carnation Company, a theatre company specialising in LGBTQI+ productions which he co-founded in 2018. Through Green Carnation, Daniel has directed **My Night With Reg**, **The Pride, Fluid** and a number of short films created during lockdown and released online. Elsewhere he has also directed Michael Palin's **The Weekend**, **The 39 Steps**, **Whipping It Up** and **The Complete Works of Shakespeare (Abridged)**.

Daniel has previously worked as an acting teacher for **Theatretrain** and as an extra, popping up in several TV shows, usually as a sickly teenager or a dead body!



Graham Simmonds

Fred

A veteran of the Garrick Playhouse, Graham has been appearing on our stages since 1994, during which time he's undertaken many iconic roles. He has appeared in dramas including *Catherine Howard* and *The Glass Menagerie*, and he's even turned his hand to children's shows with a memorable turn as *Mole* in *The Wind In The Willows*. However, Graham has a knack for comedy, and his numerous appearances include one of John Godber's *Bouncers*, as *Manuel* in *Fawlty Towers*, *Rene* in *'Allo 'Allo*, and his last outing - pre-pandemic - was the role of *Seppings* in *Jeeves and Wooster*.



Sarah Kirk

Joanna Lyppiatt

Theatre credits include *Tzeitel* in *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Isobel* in *Scrooge the Musical*, *Laurey* in *Oklahoma*, *Katie Brown* in *Calamity Jane*, *Guinevere* in *Camelot*, *Nancy* in *Oliver*, *Anna* in *The King and I*, *Sarah Brown* in *Guys and Dolls*, *Nellie Forbush* in *South Pacific*, *Sally Durant* in *Follies*, *Saturday Night at the Crown*, *Lydia* in *A Praise of Love*, *Allo Allo*, *The Importance of Being Ernest*, *An Englishman Abroad*, *Abigail's Party*, *Teechers*, *Salt of the Earth*, *An Evening with Victoria Wood*, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare - Abridged*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, *Hester* in *The Deep Blue Sea*, *Bette Davis* in *Bette and Joan*.

Sarah is thrilled to be back at the Garrick after previously appearing in *Corriel* and *Curtain Up*.



Jonathan Black

Henry Lyppiatt

Jonathan once again is delighted to be back on the main stage in this production of *Present Laughter* after recently appearing as one of the *Alan Bennetts* in *The Lady In The Van* earlier this season.

Jonathan started his Garrick journey back in 1981 appearing in *Privates On Parade*. Through the years other appearances include *Juno And The Paycock*, *A View From The Bridge*, *Whipping It Up*, *Out Of Order*, *Shady Business*, *Anne of A Thousand Days*, *Pack Of Lies*, *Run For Your Wife*, *And Then There Were None*, *Noises Off*, *Two into One*, *Gaslight*, *It Runs In The Family*, *Wolf Hall* and *Business Affairs*. He has also experienced working in TV productions such as *Emmerdale*, *Hollyoaks*, *Coronation Street*, *Cold Feet*, *Clocking Off* and *A Touch Of Frost*.

Jonathan lives in Hale with his wife and children, who are regular supporters at The Garrick Theatre, and has very much enjoyed working for the first time with Val Watkinson as Director.



Colin Rice

Morris Dixon

Colin was proudly born and raised in Liverpool and has been acting for over 14 years, having trained at the Liverpool Media Academy. On stage, Colin has taken on many varied and challenging roles, including as *John Williamson* in David Mamet's *Glengarry Glen Ross* and an acclaimed turn as *Mike O'Rourke* in Joe Orton's dark comedy *The Ruffian On The Stair*. He has both starred and featured in several short films, most notably as a villain in the pilot of science-fiction web series, *The Sleeper Effect*. He also appeared in the post-apocalyptic drama *Drifter*, starring (*EastEnders* and *The Bill*'s) Billy Murray. Colin's musical debut and his first appearance on the prestigious Altrincham Garrick Playhouse stage happened last year when he was one of the company in *Curtain Up*, and he's delighted to be back again working with such a great company.



Karen Foster

Lady Saltburn

Karen is a new member to the Garrick and this is her debut acting performance. She has just finished a stint as A.S.M. in the macabre but wonderful production of *Frankenstein* and is now enjoying being on "the other side" in this hilarious comedy.

When not involved on the stage, Karen's other passion is Manchester City Football Club!



Val Watkinson

Director, Present Laughter

Val Watkinson has directed many times for the Garrick in the past, with productions including Noël Coward's *Private Lives*, Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus*, Stanley Houghton's *Hindle Wakes* and Bob Carlton's *Return to the Forbidden Planet*.

She has been a long-standing member of the creative team as well as having appeared in numerous productions, the last one being *Corriel* when she played *Vera Duckworth*.

Val spent twenty years standing behind a bush in the rain stage managing Gawsworth Hall Open Air Theatre and also appeared in many Shakespeare productions there. She has been dragged out of retirement to direct *Present Laughter* and has thoroughly enjoyed working with the talented cast and crew. She would like to thank *Carole Carr* for her invaluable support. After this, she plans to return to her favourite role of DSM on the musical productions with her lighting and backstage mates!

Without our incredibly dedicated, enthusiastic team of **Volunteers** and **Staff**, whose sheer hard work often goes unnoticed, Altrincham Garrick Playhouse would simply be unable to continue providing such a range of top quality productions for you to enjoy. **With their continuous commitment to excellence, we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.**

MANY OF OUR STARRING ROLES ARE BEHIND THE SCENES!



Whatever your interest, the Garrick has a lot to offer!

Come and be part of a friendly and rewarding Theatre... **WE NEED YOU!**

Altrincham Garrick Playhouse is more than just a Community Theatre – it's a cultural and creative hub for the Arts in Altrincham. In the main, the Playhouse is run by volunteers who play a critical role in providing high-quality performances and experiences to our local community. Volunteers of all ages and abilities have discovered a warm welcome as well as new challenges, with many younger members having found the Garrick to be a springboard to future careers.

And, of course, we're always advertising auditions for upcoming productions... Perhaps you may want to be on stage too?!

Why not come and play your part in this vibrant Theatre Community? Open your social circle and meet new friends, gain new skills, and help to build your confidence and creativity. We promise you won't regret it! Altrincham Garrick Playhouse has been a home to volunteers, and has been staging top-quality productions, since 1913!

We have a wide selection of opportunities available:

FRONT OF HOUSE:

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Costume / Hair / Make Up • Props
Set Construction • Set Painting • Set Design
Stage Management • Lighting • Sound

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APPRECIATING

NOËL COWARD

What they've said about The Master

'Coward's verbal dexterity and skill at construction are evident in everything he wrote, but only in some of his plays and movies does his deeply felt compassion for the lower middle classes, which he escaped, come to the surface. The awe in which he is held is due in great part to his protean talents: actor, playwright, composer, lyricist, director, salon wit. His introduction to his book of collected lyrics is charming, pointed and graceful, and should be read by every theatre songwriter.' **Stephen Sondheim.**

"There are probably greater painters than Noël, greater novelists than Noël, greater librettists, greater composers of music, greater singers, greater dancers, greater comedians, greater tragedians, greater stage producers, greater stage directors, greater cabaret artistes, greater TV stars – and so on. If there are, they are fourteen different people. Only one man combined all fourteen different talents – The Master. Noël Coward." **Lord Louis Mountbatten** (at Coward's 70th birthday party in 1970).

"Playing with Noël is like playing with God." **Michael Caine.**

"I spent years avoiding Coward because I've never really related to the class or the humour. What I have come to understand is that Coward actually writes quite brilliantly observed stories about human beings behaving with other human beings; stories that are dangerous and raw and edgy, as well as being laceratingly funny. His work has the complexity of a gay man writing in a time when homosexuality was illegal, which I'm sure is what gives it the surprising and unusual depth, sensitivity and humanity." **Lia Williams.**

"I had the good fortune to meet Noël Coward once, when I was a young actor starting out. He signed a copy of his book *Pretty Polly Barlow* for me – I didn't ask him to, he just decided that he was going to do that. He put, 'Best Wishes, Noël Coward,' and said that he would have written just Noël if he has known me better. And then, underneath, he wrote two simple words. 'Press on.' That has become a motto for me over the last fifty years. What you can't ever afford to do is lose sight of your instinct and think about giving up. Keep pressing on..." **John Hurt.**

"If we wish to understand some of the youth who grew to manhood in the Great War, we must take a good look at Mr Coward in whom the gaiety and the despair of his generation are exactly mingled." **Sir John Irvine**



"Even though I have been able to name a lovely theatre after him, one of the great regrets in my life has been that I never knew Noël Coward. No one today can match Coward's unique style as a performer and actor, but the cream of his writing remains unsurprisingly contemporary, brilliantly observed, exceptionally witty and with an underlying depth that consistently surprises who only knows Coward by repute." **Sir Cameron Mackintosh**

"The wit and wisdom of Noël Coward's lyrics will be as lively and contemporary in 100 years' time as they are today." **Tim Rice**

"He can get into two or three words, just dripped out, such a witty comment on the situation. He doesn't waste words." **Dame Edith Evans.**

"Noël and I were in Paris once. Adjoining rooms, of course. One night, I felt

mischievous, so I knocked on Noël's door and he asked, 'Who is it?' I lowered my voice and said, 'Hotel detective. Have you got a gentleman in your room?' He answered, 'Just a minute, I'll ask him.'" **Bea Lillie.**

"Every person I've ever met who knew Coward – among them Graham Payn, Michael Redgrave, Maggie Smith and Hayley Mills – said how nice he was, the best company, ever-witty but never at the expense of anyone who couldn't take it. His discipline, his precision, his commitment to his craft are the reasons theatre people admire him so much". **Gyles Brandreth.**



"The sheer grind of his life is one of the things that anybody who wants to be a success in the theatre has to emulate. You cannot become Noël Coward by taking it easy. If you are a man of style, like Noël Coward, you can appear to take it easy. Everything seemed so natural, so dignified, so light in his hands. But it's like a swan – all that serene grace on the surface is belied by the furious paddling underneath." **Stephen Fry.**

"Noël Coward is the most enduring English playwright of the mid-twentieth century." **Nicholas Hytner.**

"Noël Coward was probably the first man who took hold of me and made me think... he gave me a sense of balance, of right and wrong." **Laurence Olivier.**

Monday 23 – Saturday 28 May

**An unmissable murder mystery for all
Inspector Morse fans and super sleuths!**

HOUSE OF GHOSTS

by **Alma Cullen**

Oxford, 1987, and a young actress playing Shakespeare's doomed heroine Ophelia ends up dying on-stage during a theatrical production of Hamlet. A "suspicious death" inquiry is opened, but when a suspect in the case is also murdered, veteran police **Inspector Morse** becomes convinced the two deaths are related to the strange events of a similar student production from 1962 – one that he himself was a part of...

Morse faces dark memories and suspects in a compelling theatrical murder mystery by Alma Cullen, writer of four screenplays for the popular Inspector Morse TV series, and a member of the team of writers who helped to create four series which won all the major TV drama awards.

Directed by
Mike Shaw



COWARDY COCKTAILS

"It's never too early for a cocktail," remarks the aging but youth-obsessed Florence Lancaster in Noël Coward's 1924 hit play **The Vortex**. This suave utterance, with its characteristic inflection of camp exaggeration and domesticated decadence, signals the highly stylised territory that equally defined Coward's plays and his public persona in the 1920s and 1930s. Commenting on the immediate celebrity (and notoriety) that play afforded him, Noël Coward observed that he *"was seldom mentioned in the press without allusions to 'cocktails,' 'post-war hysteria,' and 'decadence.'"* Over a long career as an actor, director, playwright, and songwriter, Coward certainly received ample media attention, which, as far as **The Vortex** was concerned, was *"very good for business."* Indeed, his status as a representative of the interwar generation has proven durable and influential, with the cocktail figuring as one of that image's defining attributes. According to his contemporary, the fashion photographer Cecil Beaton, *"all sorts of men suddenly wanted to look like Noel Coward— sleek and satiny, clipped and well-groomed, with a cigarette, a telephone, or a cocktail at hand."*

In the world of Coward's plays, modernity consists in being fully (and stylishly) present in the contemporary moment. His era's fashion for the cocktail, it turns out, is reflected in the plays that secured Coward's reputation: Coward even memorably described the critical reception of *Private Lives* (1930) as a list of ingredients that *"connoted, to the public mind, 'cocktails,' 'evening dress,' 'repartee,' and irreverent allusions to copulation, thereby causing a gratifying number of respectable people to queue up at the box office."*

While Noël Coward may have argued that 'a perfect Martini should be made by filling a glass with gin, and then waving it in the general direction of Italy', his breakfast cocktail of choice was the beef-infused **Bullshot**:

1½ oz Vodka;
3 oz chilled beef bouillon,
or beef consommé;
2 dashes of Worcestershire sauce;
2 dashes of Tabasco sauce;
1 dash of lemon juice;
1 Tsp celery salt (Optional);
1 Tsp freshly ground black pepper.
Lemon wedge, for garnish.

Pop some ice cubes into a cocktail shaker, add all the ingredients, shake for six to eight seconds. Strain into a glass, serve.

Rather wonderful on a blustery day (ditch the ice cubes and serve it hot), and, hot or cold, a miracle cure for hangovers!

(Probably not suitable for Vegetarians).

Bottoms up!



A STAR IS BORN: YOU!



You might not have a burning desire to appear on one of our stages.

You may not be passionate about helping out in a crucial role backstage.

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PLAY YOUR PART!

Monday 9 – Saturday 14 May 2022

A hilarious and heart-warming comedy about football, friendship
and finding your way by

Tom Wells

jumpers for goalposts



"Barely Athletic"

are part of a four-team five-a-side LGBTQ+ football league which Viv, their bullish head coach, is desperate to win. Or if they can't win, at least they should try not to lose. Chucked out of the "Lesbian Rovers" for being too bossy, she desperately tries to instil some competitive spirit into the boys. Problem is, Beardy Geoff is coping off with the opposition, Danny is nursing a painful secret, Luke only joined because he fancies Danny, and Viv's brother-in-law Joe is trying to cope with his grief after losing his wife. Together, they might just be able to claw back up from the bottom of the league...

Tom Wells' drama bears the hallmarks of his warm comedic style, which were displayed in his previous hit play **The Kitchen Sink**, and is a paean to the virtues of friendship and love.

Directed by
Joseph Meighan

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