

Vic-Wells News

Instagram

If you are on Instagram, please follow us at @vicwells, where you can like and comment on the posts which include news about the VWs and upcoming events at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells. We would love to hear from you about your own personal favourites. Pictured here, in a new posting, is our Vice-President, Wayne Sleep with Freddie Mercury and Elton John. Did you know, Freddie Mercury danced for the Royal Ballet? He performed in specially choreographed versions of *Bohemian Rhapsody* and *Crazy Little Thing Called Love* at a charity gala in 1979. A few years later, as a kind of cultural exchange, the Royal Ballet danced for Freddie Mercury, in the video for Queen's *I Want to Break Free*.



The Merry Wives of Windsor

Our very own Liz Schafer will be giving a talk at a Study Day at Shakespeare's Globe - a day of talks, workshops, seminars and lively discussion on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This is an opportunity to meet like-minded audience members and explore the key themes and interpretations in the play with Globe artists and leading Shakespeare scholars. Professor Liz Schafer will run a session on 'How to become a Merry Wife and Influence People'. She will explore how the shrewd women in the play are able to be both merry and honest as well as disciplining the wayward men that surround them.

Nickolas Grace

Over the summer VWs President Nickolas Grace and Una Stubbs performed together as part of the Gillian Lynne Memorial at the West End Theatre named after her. An amazing evening of love and adoration for one of our greatest choreographers and a supportive friend of the Vic-Wells. In September, Nickolas Grace was MC for the annual E.F. Benson, Friends of Tilling gathering in Rye, read one of his short stories, and conducted the Quiz for the enthusiastic aficionados.



And our busy President was also invited by SAS, University of London, to film and record some newly-discovered Charles Dickens extracts. They formed the outline of what would have been Dickens' final novel, dictated to and written down on Gad's Hill paper by Wilkie Collins. They were shown at the annual Dickens' Conference in Eastbourne and will be part of the exhibition opening at Blackburn Museum on January 31st 2020.

Vic-Wells Association's Annual General Meeting is at a NEW VENUE

We hope that a major celebrity will be our guest at the AGM on November 4th 2019. This is always an interesting - not to be missed - event where you can have your say about the future of our Association. Our 'special guest' will be interviewed by Nickolas Grace. The meeting will be held in the **Dench Studio** at the **Royal Central School of Speech and Drama** (62-64 Eton Ave, London NW3 3HY - close to Swiss Cottage Underground station on the Jubilee Line). Arrive between 6.30 and 7pm for a prompt start for the AGM at 7pm.

You are encouraged to attend to support our association.

Save the Date!

As ever, a well known guest is guaranteed to attend and speak at our VWs parties in 2020. Our 12th Night Party is on January 4th and the VWs Shakespeare Anniversary Party will be on April 25th 2020. Both to be held at the Old Vic Theatre.



Vic-Wells Highlights

We welcome a new face to the Vic-Wells - Elle Flynn - who will be offering her personal recommendations and opinions about a select few of the new and exciting productions you might be thinking of attending at The Old Vic and Sadler's Wells.

There are infinite individual interpretations of what one might consider as a beautiful and mesmerising piece of theatre or dance. It is also one's own individual response to a particular story and image that will likely evolve over a lifetime. In each edition of the Broadsheet I will be highlighting productions that might interest Vic-Wells members. There are, of course, countless productions that are very deserving to see. So the views expressed here in no way mean the other productions are not equally as good. I merely aim to put the spotlight on my favourites so far. In this issue, I have rounded up two highlights coming up soon - one from Sadler's Wells and one from The Old Vic.

Summer might well be over but The Old Vic and Sadler's Wells cultural calendars are still just hotting up!



Elle Flynn

Lungs, Old Vic Theatre... from 14th Oct 2019

Featuring *The Crown's* lead actors, **Claire Foy and Matt Smith**, this is set to be the hottest play this Autumn in London.



The duo will bring their on-screen chemistry to the stage with Duncan Macmillan's upcoming production *Lungs*. Directed by Matthew Warchus, *Lungs* will see the two actors reunited as a married couple, but this time in complete contrast to their privileged lifestyle in *The Crown*. The Old Vic's Artistic Director Matthew Warchus has directed award-winning productions for all the major British theatre companies (including a debut with the RSC as the youngest director ever on the Stratford main stage).

Lungs is a hilarious emotional roller-coaster of a play about a couple wrestling with life's biggest dilemmas. "The ice caps are melting, there's overpopulation, political unrest; everything's going to hell in a handcart - why on earth would someone bring a baby into this world?"

Suitable for ages 14+.

Giselle with ENB, Sadler's Wells

18 - 28 September 2019

Following a return to London, after touring in Auckland, Dublin, and Hong Kong last season, Akram Khan's *Giselle* continues to enthral international stages with its emotional power. With beautiful and spellbinding choreography, I strongly recommend you get tickets for this.

In just over eighteen years, Akram Khan Company has established itself as one of the foremost innovative dance companies in the world. Embracing an artistic vision that both respects and challenges Indian kathak form and contemporary dance, Akram Khan has created a substantial body of critically acclaimed work that ranges from classical and modern solos to artist-to-artist collaborations and company productions. Combined with the English National Ballet, this is a stunning production you would definitely want to see.

Suitable for ages 14+ (With adult themes)



Tamara Rojo & James Streeter in *Giselle*

Photo: Dave Morgan

Theatre and Christianity

Marjory Agha reviews Professor Liz Schafer's new book *Theatre & Christianity* - a new addition to the *Theatre &* series of short books which explore connections between theatre and some aspect of the wider world.

Professor Schafer begins her exploration into *Theatre and Christianity* by introducing us to her 5 year old self. She is playing the Virgin Mary in her infant school nativity play. They are in rehearsal. "Stop!" her teacher shouts, "you do *not* hold a real baby by the neck!" Mortified, she promises that, in future, she will carry baby Jesus like a 'real' baby. This incident has coloured her notion of the real and realistic in performance every since. She focuses her study on three areas of investigation: Women, Amateur Performance and Offence. Very early on she declares her own faith position in a footnote which, she tells us, "you can choose whether to look at or not". (I looked!)



Judi Dench playing Isabella in *Measure for Measure* (1962)

She explains that she has chosen 'women' as a theme to counter the long history of misogyny and marginalisation of women in both Christianity and theatre and presents a study of Isabella from *Measure for Measure* (1603). As Shakespeare's most controversially Christian character Isabella has, over the years, become increasingly problematic for theatre practitioners to portray and her chastity and Christianity can appear eccentric and out of touch with today's theatre audiences. Schafer dissects various productions of this play and their portrayal of Isabella variously as a spoilsport, or a tease, or a frigid, puritanical hardliner (which would not have been the case in Shakespeare's 1603 Protestant England).

Schafer reminds us that theatre and Christianity have been intertwined for two millennia but the relationship has veered between respectful co-operation to "an abyss of loathing and condemnation". In the early nineteenth century, all performances were banned during Lent, which meant that theatre families spent

"For 2000 years theatre and Christianity have been dancing together, borrowing from each other and telling stories together, as well as attacking, offending and upsetting each other"

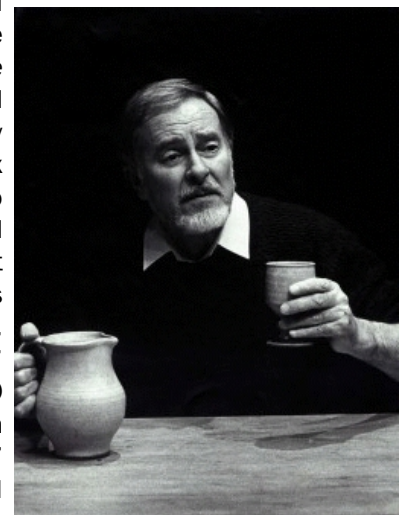
40 days without any income. Nuggets of information are sprinkled throughout the book such as the fact that the Victorians outlawed impersonating the Holy Family (it was considered blasphemous) and that during the First World War Lilian Baylis staged Philip Ben Greet's production of *Everyman* every Tuesday in Lent.



Wintershall Estate's Nativity Play (2017)

On the amateur performance front she vividly describes attending the annual nativity play held on the 1000-acre Wintershall estate in the Surrey countryside, "the 'real' was there in the smells of hay, sheep and sheep poo".

She gives a cool, considered assessment of the offensive to some *Jerry Springer: The Opera*. And cites successful theatre and Christianity alliances such as Alex McCowan's solo performances of the Gospel of Mark. I laughed out loud at the anecdote she recounts about the 'wonderfully, spectacularly awful' production of the 1990 musical *Bernadette* which



Alex McCowan's solo performance of St Mark's Gospel (1990) Photo: Sheila Burnett

lasted just a few weeks in London's West End. And I like her assertion that some of Jesus' actions were not entirely divorced from theatrical performances. (He also displayed impressive voice projection when preaching to large crowds!)

This is an easily digestible, no illustrations, slim 80 page book with original and insightful observations on the complex dynamic between the theatre and Christianity with a wide range of examples from the very origins of Christianity, through medieval times right up to today.

Other topics covered in the *Theatre &* series of books, published by Macmillan International, include *Race, Empire, Islam, Politics, Sexuality* (and many more). Each book is written by a leading theatre scholar. Elizabeth Schafer is Professor of Drama and Theatre Studies at Royal Holloway, University of London.

The Vic-Wells Archive in Egham

A standard item on the Vic-Wells Association (VWs) accounts "Films, paintings, playbills etc" has always piqued the interest of Professor Liz Schafer. "Especially the etc", she says. Here Professor Schafer unveils more treasures.

As part of my exploration of the subject of the Vic-Wells archives and "etc" I have been giving some thought to my office at work where there is a stash of Vic-Wells associated material in one of the filing cabinets. But would anyone be able to identify the Vic-Wells items? There's no catalogue, but a quick survey this afternoon indicates that the Egham archive includes:

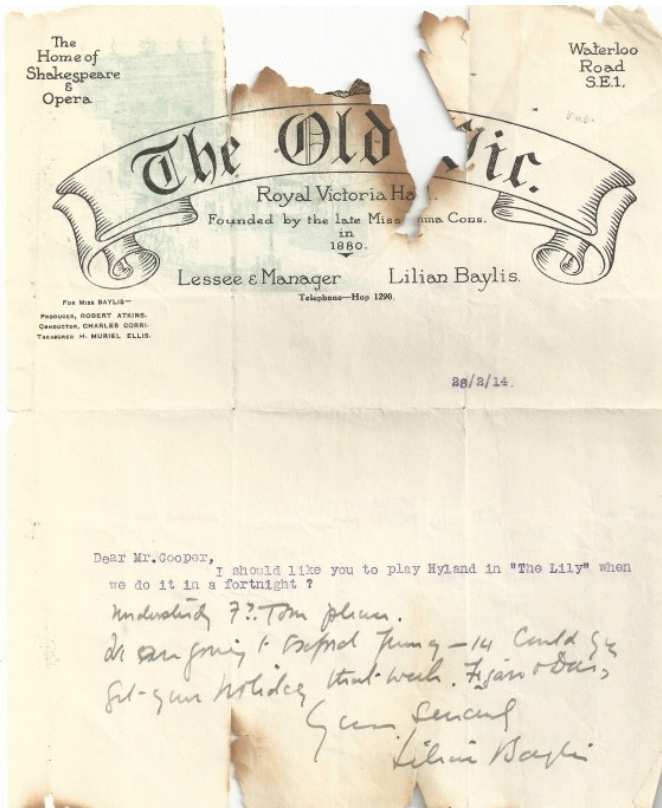
- Large quantities of programmes from the Old Vic.
- Large quantities of programmes from Sadler's Wells.
- A collection of long-playing records of plays, mainly Shakespearian, by stars of the stage including John Gielgud, Paul Scofield and Flora Robson.
- Large quantities of Vic-Wells newsletters.
- Two autograph books from 1916-18.
- Some ancient newspapers (1884 onwards).
- A couple of Old Vic Magazines.
- Lots of souvenir brochures marking important moments such as the centenary of Lilian Baylis's birth.
- Records of membership of the Vic-Wells Association.

Perhaps I should mount a little exhibition one day?

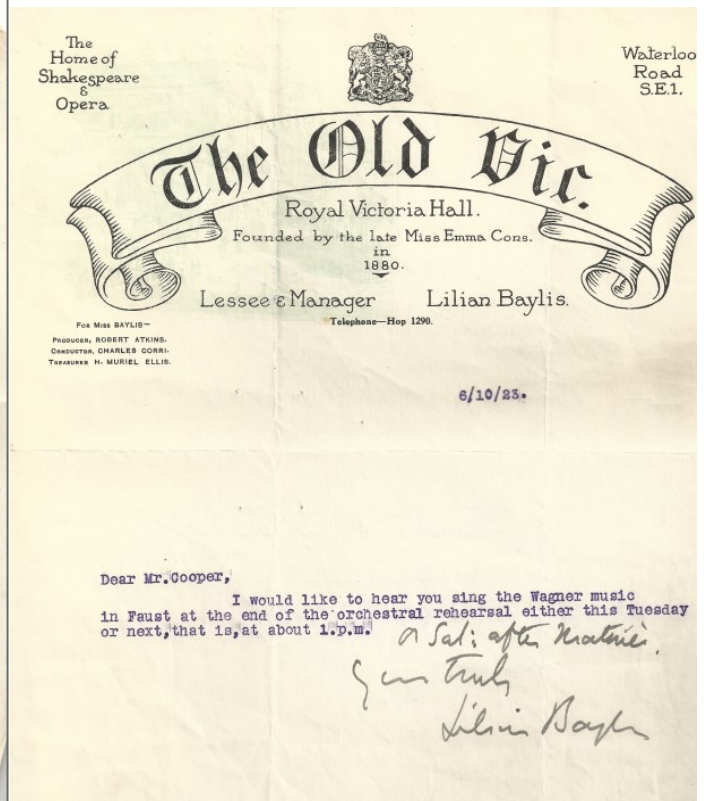
My favourite items in the Egham archive are the letters from Lilian Baylis to the singer Vernon Cooper, letters donated by Patrick Baylis eight years ago. These letters offer a reminder of how hands-on Baylis was in relation to the opera: they record her arranging to listen to Cooper in different parts; informing him he needs to pay a 10/6 refundable deposit if he wants to borrow any scores; and threatening deductions from his expenses if he misses rehearsals or performances because of illness. The letters give a strong sense of Baylis's indomitable personality as, nearly a century ago, she haggles over every penny, wheeling and dealing to try to ensure that her beloved Old Vic always got singers at bargain basement prices!



Lilian Baylis



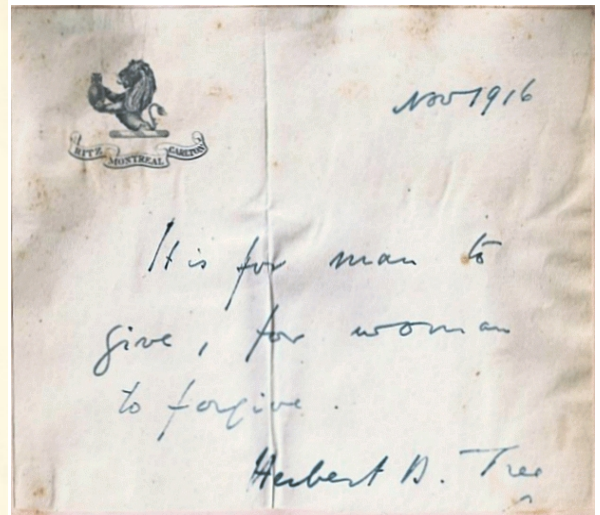
Lilian Baylis writing to Vernon Cooper in February 1914



... and again in October 1923



Invitation to Patricia Page (née Underwood) for a private Royal performance at the opening of the Old Vic Annex on 18 March 1958



Herbert Beerbohm Tree autograph, November 1916



Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1857-1917)

Researching Theatre from your Armchair

Christine Kendell has compiled a list of websites which give information about all aspects of theatre. They are useful resources for those who can't quite remember who played what in a long ago theatre production or who want to glean more information about a play or actor.

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust [<http://collections.shakespeare.org.uk/>] is a treasure trove containing online exhibitions and details, including photographs, of past performances. In the archive section, to give an idea of the variety of items, are A Bill For the Funeral of David Garrick, Esq. and Seventeen Photographs of Flowers Brewery Buildings. A search for RSC performances of Hamlet brought up 111 photographs and cast lists, but the online collections also include music and films, as well as illustrations of the ways in which Shakespeare has inspired other works of art over the centuries.

The Theatre Archive Project on the website of the British Library contains many interviews with actors, directors, dancers, producers, and other theatre people, including critics, as well as with audiences members. I have listened so far to the interviews with Alfred Burke, Dudley Sutton and Marjorie Mason. The interviews took place quite some time ago and the interviewers are not professionals, but the subjects have very interesting things to say about their careers and theatre history. Go to [<https://sounds.bl.uk/Arts-literature-and-performance/Theatre-Archive-Project>]

More interviews, visual ones, can be seen on **Muse of Fire** [<https://www.globeplayer.tv/museoffire>] on the **Globe Theatre's website**. Two young actors, Dan Poole and Giles Terera, have interviewed a variety of actors about their experience of Shakespeare. Some are more enlightening than others, but all the ones I have seen are interesting. The subjects give a number of answers to the inevitable question, "How do you handle the verse?", and the funniest interview is with Ian Ogilvie, who more or less says that he can't see the point of Shakespeare.

The website [<https://theatricalia.com/>] is a bit different. It is a database of past and future theatrical productions, and anyone can add to it or amend entries. You can also add photos of productions and actors, biographical details about actors, and there's a place for adding anecdotes about particular productions. You can search for a play, a venue or a production, which is useful for the theatrical historian, or anyone who can't quite remember who played what in 1973.

Twitter is a great source of information, and the Vic-Wells Association has had a Twitter account since 2016. Most theatres tweet their news, and then there are all the organisations and people who tweet about Shakespeare. The Hollow Crown Fans are aficionados of the 2012-2016 BBC productions of Shakespeare's history plays cycle. They initiated *Shakespeare Sunday* which works like this: every Sunday there's a theme and people tweet relevant quotations from Shakespeare, often with an appropriate picture. Some ingenious person always manages to find a screen shot from *Star Wars* as an illustration.

It was reported in the last Broadsheet that the Vic-Wells has recently joined Instagram. On **Instagram** you can find theatres posting photos and videos, not only London ones such as The Almeida but provincial theatres as well, like the Birmingham Rep. Ian McKellen's Instagram is great fun, with a huge number of photographs covering his long career. As with any other social network, users can leave comments and 'like' a post.

Wilton's Music Hall

Wilton's Music Hall has been a popular choice for Vic-Wells outings in the past. Here Michael Ellison reviews a show there from an all girl jazz band. Perhaps it's time for another VWs group visit...

With the scent of autumn in the air, it's hard to recollect what the lazy days of August and September held. But I did go to one unforgettable show at Wilton's Music Hall. This is the oldest remaining theatre in London, tucked away in the East End, a proverbial stone's throw from Tower Hill. Unadorned, its boards bare, the walls distressed, it's barley twisted iron columns supporting a narrow balcony sweeping round to the proscenium of a stage lacking depth.

Here on one of the hottest nights of the year, a full house clutching cold drinks, seated themselves for *Tricity Vogue and her All Girl Band*. Inspired by Ivy Benson and her female band of the 1930s, this ensemble, dressed in tuxedos and top hats, playing wind instruments, drums, an oboe and piano, accompanied the band leader, Tricity Vogue. Tricity strummed a ukulele, singing ballads and self composed songs with a powerful voice - a sort of Piaf but without the size or heartache.

Much jazz and loads of close harmony with her band and all dispersed with some amazing tap dancing performed by the hugely talented Josephine Shaker, who appeared to be dancing on a large breadboard and, when not, descended into the audience to sit on the laps of aged gentlemen with anarchic wit and style. The heat forgotten, the audience grew increasingly involved, many dancing themselves and finally forming a large conga, weaving round the stalls in rhythm with the band and lead by Ms Shaker in her skimpy, yet modest, costume. A night to remember.



Much jazz and loads of close harmony with her band and all dispersed with some amazing tap dancing performed by the hugely talented Josephine Shaker, who appeared to be dancing on a large breadboard and, when not, descended into the audience to sit on the laps of aged gentlemen with anarchic wit and style. The heat forgotten, the audience grew increasingly involved, many dancing themselves and finally forming a large conga, weaving round the stalls in rhythm with the band and lead by Ms Shaker in her skimpy, yet modest, costume. A night to remember.

Coming soon to Wilton's Music Hall, 1 Graces Alley, Whitechapel, London E1 8JB

November 5th: *Juliet & Romeo* - A very different story of the lovers who, it turns out, didn't die but lived happily ever after. Well they lived at least.

November 12th: *Much Ado About Nothing* - Shakespeare's play is a riotous story of trickery and pretence and a examination of the lies we tell each other and ourselves.

Present Laughter

Both *The Times* and *The Telegraph* gave *Present Laughter* (recently on at The Old Vic) a 5 star review. *The Guardian* and *The Daily Mail* gave it 4 stars. Here, two Vic-Wells members give their opinions...

Review by Liz Schafer

Present Laughter at the Old Vic, directed by Matthew Warchus, was a clever but also very moving production of a familiar play; it offered dazzling new insight into Coward's writing, it re-framed the play and it asked demanding questions of the audience. The production managed to keep Coward's wit as brilliant as ever but dwelt on the tragedy at the heart of the story of star actor, Garry Essendine, played with virtuoso skill and panache by Andrew Scott. By gender swapping the predatory character who is determined to seduce Garry – Joanna became Joe, played by Enzo Cilenti – the production highlighted a gay dynamic that is indubitably there in Coward's original text but which, of course, in a play written in 1939 had to be kept discrete, even sub-textual. I thought the gender swops really made me see *Present Laughter* with fresh eyes, and that this was something really positive, but as I left the theatre, I saw a man ranting at one of the ushers really aggressively, denouncing the production

"A witty but ultimately bleak play"

in no uncertain terms, and clearly very rattled. Gender swops aside, what was really revelatory about the production was the commentary it offered on celebrity culture, something which was underscored by an essay in the programme by Russell Brand, on the subject of fame. The final image of the performance, showed us Scott's Garry and his ex-wife Liz (played with real delicacy by Indira Varma), emotionally exhausted by the shenanigans the audience had been enjoying so much. Here the production moved abruptly from full on farce to deeply felt pathos; Garry was trapped, caught in an endless game of play acting that left him lonely and insecure. The cost of Garry's glittering but toxic fame was plain to see and

it was poignant to behold. The sense of an impending reckoning – perhaps a heart attack, perhaps a breakdown – really found the tragedy at the heart of this witty but ultimately bleak play.

Review by Chris Dillon

This revival of Noël Coward's 1940s play is definitely a production that Matthew Warchus can chalk up as a populist success. It has the very "hot" Andrew Scott playing Garry Essendine delivering the performance that the entire audience is looking for and excitedly anticipating. It updates the play by having gay romance at its narrative centre (possibly as the author might have liked in the original) giving it a fresh angle that is fitting in today's more enlightened times. The cast give their all in high energy, perfectly timed performances that keep the laughs coming as the action reaches ever greater heights of absurdity.

One nice touch of the update is to introduce a soundtrack of classic love songs from the past 50 years. The aching melodies and lyrics of such songs as "Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow?", "Don't Leave Me This Way" and Queen's "Can't Somebody Find Me Someone to Love" entertain the audience as they enter the theatre and during the interval. Whatever the antics and absurdities playing out on the stage, this play does have love, of whatever kind, at its heart. Everyone loves Gerry Essendine, including Gerry Essendine himself in that narcissistic, skewed way of the famous. Mixing up the genders of who's having the affair with who, central to the misunderstandings that play out in the second half, sees enamoured Joe (Enzo Cilenti) and Gerry share a moment of intimacy that allows Scott to show agility and range when changing his emotional pitch from one of raging egoism to one of tenderness and warmth.



Roland Maule, the would-be playwright, idolises Gerry and "worships at the Gerry altar" as Gerry would have it. Luke Thallon, as Maule, captures his doggedness in pursuit of approval, leaving him ripe for Gerry's merciless, excoriating sarcasm. A refusal to be deterred allows Thallon to fully exploit his maddening, inopportune appearances as events spiral into chaos. Sophie Thompson is a delight as the faithful secretary Monica and, together with Liza Sadovy as Miss Erikson in her gruesome comedy wig, are a joy in providing some of the most crowd pleasing comic moments. Indira Varma as Liz Essendine carries her role, as ex-wife and foil to Gerry with the necessary vitality needed to set in motion the confusion that unfolds and engulfs the entire cast. In this, the supporting players, Joshua Hill as Fred the butler, Kitty Archer, Suzie Toase and Abdul Salis skilfully help to keep the whirl of madness moving at fever pitch.

Coward may have written the play to comment on the corrosive effect and emptiness of fame but its success still lies as an enjoyable farce which this production splendidly delivers. As an illustration of Coward's intended theme, embodied in Gerry Essendine, Andrew Scott delivers wit, conceit and rage wrapped up in charm and elegance in a triumphant performance that confirms his reputation as an actor of skill and versatility.

COMING SOON



Sadler's Wells, Rosebery Avenue, London EC1R 4TN 0844 871 0090

www.sadlerswells.com

Main Theatre

Stills from Sadler's Wells website used with permission

- 1 - 2 Nov Birmingham Royal Ballet - *Giselle* ①➡
4 - 5 Nov Rambert2 - Mixed Bill
7 - 9 Nov Rambert - Rambert Event
11 - 12 Nov Emanuel Gat Dance - *WORKS*
14 - 16 Nov Dorrance Dance - *Myelination and other works*
18 - 23 Nov Acosta Danza - *Evolution*
Darbar Festival 2019:
25 Nov Mavin Khoo & Temple of Fine Arts
26 Nov Madhavi Mudgal's *Vistar* ②➡
27 - 28 Nov The China National Peking Opera Company
3 Dec - 19 Jan Matthew Bourne's production of
The Red Shoes — New Adventures

Lilian Baylis Studio

- 1 - 4 Oct Alfred Taylor-Gaunt's *Derrière on a G String*
8 Oct Fabula Collective - *Ley Line*
20 Oct Let's All Dance - *Alice in Wonderland*
23 - 24 Oct Georgia Vardarou - *Why should it be more desirable for green fire balls to exist than not?*
14 - 15 Nov Wild Card: Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome
Darbar Festival 2019:
23 Nov Padam and Javali: *Twin elements of Love*
24 Nov Stories of *Thumris*
28 - 29 Nov Joe Moran/Dance Art Foundation - *Arrangement*
11 - 29 Dec Arthur Pita's - *The Little Match Girl* ③➡
30 Dec - 5 Jan Let's All Dance - *The Nutcracker*
9 - 11 Jan Romancing The Apocalypse - *A Night with Thick & Tight*
16 - 18 Jan Project O - *Voodoo*

Peacock Theatre

Portugal Street, Kingsway, London WC2A 2HT

- 23 Oct - 9 Nov Zonation - *Some Like It Hip Hop*
21 Nov - 5 Jan Birmingham Repertory Theatre - *The Snowman* ④➡
9 Jan - 1 Feb London International Mime Festival



Old Vic Theatre

Waterloo Road, London SE1 8NB

www.oldvictheatre.com

0844 871 7628

14 October - 9 November *Lungs* DIRECTED BY MATTHEW WARCHUS 23 November - 18 January *A Christmas Carol*

Claire Foy and Matt Smith perform in Duncan Macmillan's hilarious emotional roller-coaster of a play about a couple wrestling with life's biggest dilemmas.

The Old Vic's smash hit production fills the auditorium to the brim with mince pies, music and merriment. A unique staging immerses the audience in this uplifting story.

DON'T FORGET!

Make a note in your diary NOW!
The 12th Night Party
will be held on
Saturday, 4th
January 2020
More in the next issue!



The Vic-Wells Association

Founded in 1923 by Lilian Baylis CH

Acting Chairman:
Dr. Richard Reavill
7 Nuns Acre
Goring
READING RG8 9BE
0149 1872574
vic.wells.assn@gmail.com

Secretary:
Mr. Robin Wright
2 Henry de Greys Close
Grays RM17 5GH
01375 398368
robinwright594@btinternet.com

Membership Secretary:
Professor Liz Schafer
372 Stroude Road
Virginia Water
GU25 4DB
0134 484 2836
e.schafer@rhul.ac.uk

Treasurer:
Mr. Neville C Taylor
128 Gloucester Terrace
London W2 6HP
020 7262 5898
neville.taylor@homecall.co.uk

Broadsheet Editor:
Mrs Marjory Agha
18 Pembroke Road
Kensington
London W8 6NT
0774 684 7126
marjory_gha@hotmail.co.uk

Copy deadline for
the next issue of
The Broadsheet is
SATURDAY
7th DECEMBER
2019

Items for publication
should be sent to
The Editor
by this date.