ALL CHANGE
Big reshuffle in Chichester Players boardroom

FROM THE EDITOR
This edition of Masques follows quite rapidly on the heels of the last, and that is as it should be, especially as we have so much news for you this month.

As you can see, we’ve had some drama off stage in the Board, but I think most members will agree that the end result of that is not to the detriment of the society.

There are two reviews of the recent production of Joseph Andrews, one by myself, and another, received after that was completed, from external critic David Storey, who compares it favourably with the best that the West End has to offer.

There are important announcements about auditions for the December production, and the AGM, which will not, after all, be at the Four Chesnuts, but in the Jubilee Hall.

David Brown
Editor

NEW CHAIRMAN

James Allen recently announced his resignation from the Chair and the Board due to changes in circumstances; ten days later Michaela Cooke also unconnectedly resigned as a company director. Vice-Chairman Gillian Montgomery was automatically promoted to Chairman, an office she has held in the past. Whilst there is no requirement in the Articles of Association to fill the resulting two casual vacancies immediately, it was felt desirable to co-opt Michael Ryder and Richard Kinder, the latter a past Board member who has agreed to become the new Vice-Chairman. Lower down the table, Kylie Blackman became Social Secretary, with assistance from Vanessa Merrett, in place of Romayne Brown, who moved to the new post of Child Protection Officer. Sharp-eyed readers will have noticed her removal from the head of this newsletter as a consequence of that. Howard Morgan and Pammi Haylett retain their positions as Treasurer and Membership Secretary, respectively.

It is anticipated that all the current Board will stand for election, but nominations are, nonetheless, invited from any full adult member, over the age of sixteen, seeking to stand down, and to the existing Board of Directors.

ALL MY SONS AUDITIONS

by Judith Porter

The auditions for All My Sons will be held on Tuesday 28 July in the Jubilee Hall at 7.30 p.m.

This is a spirited, dramatic play. Please come along to the auditions; if you are unable to attend on the above date, please contact Judith Porter on 01243 792482, and she will arrange another time. Do not worry about American accents. Yet, the roles are as follows, with playing ages:

Joe Keller 50-70 years
Kate Keller 45-62 years
Chris Keller twenties
Anne Deever twenties
George Deever twenties
Dr Jim Bayliss early twenties
Sue Bayliss thirties
Frank Lubey forties
Lydia Lubey thirties
Bert eighties

ALL GAS AND GAITERS

Members with long memories, like the editor, may recall this popular BBC situation comedy of the late 1960s and very early 1970s, set in a cathedral close. In 2011 a member of Chichester Players emailed one of the authors and asked whether they had ever considered publishing the scripts for amateur performance.

This summer the first volume of scripts was published, and given the involvement of Chichester Players, the writers, Pauline Devaney and Edwin Apps, have graciously granted the society permission to mount a royalty free production.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of Chichester Players will be held, as previously announced, on Friday 18 September, but contrary to previous provisional statements, will be in the New Park Centre’s Jubilee Hall.

The meeting will be followed by a start of season party, which is purely optional, but those member who wish to remain for that are asked to bring nibbles and a bottle. Nominations for the Board are invited using the attached form.

New Chairman of the Board of Directors of Chichester Players, Gillian Montgomery.
A NIGHT TO REMEMBER
by David Storey

What a great choice for Chichester Players’ Festival of Chichester production this year! The stage adaptation of Henry Fielding’s eighteenth century frolic, Joseph Andrews, is a joy too infrequently performed.

The company deserves enormous credit for pulling out all the stops with a full blooded performance that belied all the difficulties they had experienced during the rehearsal period. I attended the first night aware that in the circumstances it was not going to see a fully polished and finished performance but fascinated to discover how the cast would respond to the challenge.

I never doubted my pre-performance hunch that this could prove to be a memorable evening as the cast attacked the opening scenes with great energy and the audience responded with enthusiasm. The humour may not be subtle but the laughs come thick and fast. It was a masterstroke getting Pammi Haylett to prompt, at the same time as playing Mrs Wilson and acting as the Narrator, as those first night memory lapses far from detracting were incorporated so as to enhance the general merriment.

There wasn’t a weak member of the cast but one character stood out, dominating the stage whenever she appeared. Michaela Cooke was generously endowed by nature in the role of Lady Booby, her imperious manner constantly undermined by her uncontrollable yearnings for the young Joseph Andrews – a comic masterpiece. Steve Jupp also demands a special mention for his extraordinary elongated blackguard and top, Didapper, whose pursuit of young flesh was as desperate as her ladyship’s.

The crowning glory, the late appearance of Andrew Saunders, doubling up as the Gypsy, a hilarious villain who sent certain members of the audience, myself included, having already been softened up by the earlier proceedings, away from the theatre with tears of laughter streaming down our cheeks.

Just occasionally the zest and enthusiasm of AmDram can surpass the most professional West End performance. This was one such memorable occasion.

CARRY ON JOSEPH
by David Brown

As this review was completed before that above was received, Masques is publishing both.

P. M. Clepper’s version of Joseph Andrews is surely a very different beast from Henry Fielding’s original novel. Director Barry Jarvis has stated that it is in the style of the rather earlier Restoration comedies, but it has somewhat the feel of a film from the long running series of Carry Ons, for one can easily imagine Jim Dale (who appeared as a gypsy in Tony Richardson’s 1977 cinema version), circa 1965, as Joseph, with Kenneth Williams as Parson Adams, Sid James as Justice Frollick, Kenneth Connor as Didapper, and so forth.

There were some additions to the script, apparently largely to cover set changes, and not only do these sometimes feel laboured, but there are other ways to move furniture on and off stage with minimal interruption to the action; however, the loss of the scene where the parson’s wife bids farewell to her husband, necessitated by the illness of the actress cast as Mrs Adams, was not missed, as subsequent dialogue makes clear the reason for his journey.

Illness plagued this production, as Jarvis was himself admitted to hospital during the course of rehearsals, and was able to attend only intermittently thereafter. By all accounts Peter Waters, an experienced director (A Tale of Two Cities) and actor, both with the Players and other groups, was excellent in the thankless task of being his deputy, where he must polish the vision of another without imposing his own will on the production; he also gave a good humorous turn as a footpad, whose genuine menace was quite properly undermined by Liz Vicary as his comically inept partner in crime. She also displayed promise in that small role, and it is to be hoped that her Players debut will not also be her last appearance at the New Park Centre.

Some of Jarvis’s directorial decisions were difficult to understand. Mention has already been made of the inserted scenes involving Sir Percy Booby’s manservant, George, and his assistant. Whether these scenes were necessary at all is debateable, but that George was played by Chris Harvey, the stage manager, complete with his walkie-talkie and headset, was most unfortunate in a costume drama. This is not a criticism of Harvey’s performance in either role, merely that he should ideally not have been doing both. Likewise, to give the character of Mrs Wilson the task of prompting required her to be on stage in a number of scenes which did not need her, and demanded another, off-stage, prompter for those that did. Equally, one must ask why Mrs Wilson, a gentlewoman in a part of England relocated from the novel’s “Zumersetshire”, to points from up to sixty to forty miles outside of London, but otherwise unspecified, should speak with Pammi Haylett’s distinct Scots accent, and whether that brogue helped those unfortunate enough to have to ask for a prompt, which, even on the last night, a number did; this was funny, but in an uncomfortable way, for it felt that we were being invited to laugh at the actor’s misfortunes. His instruction that the cast should enter from stage right and exit at stage left also led to some peculiarities. For instance, Joseph and Adams go off on one side to reach Didapper’s kitchen, but return to his drawing room from the opposite entrance, which is simply confusing. It might have been better to have used the “one side on, one side off” approach only for the outdoor scenes, and to have reversed the direction once the protagonists set out on their return journey, as this would at least have maintained the pretence of travelling. The use of a digital projector to show appropriate Georgian artwork on the backdrop was much more successful.

Vic Holloway was an affable Parson Adams, but tended to be too inclined to accept potential immorality, rather than roundly condemning it. This was not in the lines, which could have been played either with more subtlety or in the delivery. That some of his facial expressions resembled those that might have been employed at similar moments by Kenneth Williams was perfectly appropriate, and, indeed, might have been done more often without detriment. Angela Barber, joining the Players but returning to the stage after raising a family, was a charming, but suitably calculating, Pamela; she is another actress to watch in future. Other Players included Jed McBride as Joseph and Bethany Sutherland as Fanny Goodwill; both were competent in their roles. Michael Ryder was suave and lively in the role of Sir Percy Booby, and it is always entertaining to see him on the New Park stage. Deborah Addicott made a repulsively compelling Mrs Slipslop, lying, scheming and even blackmailing her boss during the course of the action. Michaela Cooke was a joy to watch as that employer, the lustful widow Lady Booby. Completing the trio of villainy was Steve Jupp, relishing his depravity as Didapper. Those who know the actor might be surprised to note that Didapper is described in the novel as being “about four foot five inches in height”, but this was a composite of more than one character, including the unqualified “lawyer”, Scout. It is hard to think of anyone who might have played the way he did it better, replete with youthful adornments. In the smaller roles, Andrew Saunders shone as Justice Frollick and a gypsy woman (yes, you read that right), and Gaye Douglas was vivacious as inn girl Betty, another of the women to have designs on Joseph’s virtue.

Costumes were generally wonderful, as were wigs and make-up, with this show making an excellent advertisement for the Players’ costume hire service. That Slipslop gained “society” make-up towards the end of the action was most apt.

Overall, this was a very entertaining production, albeit one bearing a few scars from its rather tortured birth.