

SPOTLIGHT



Newsletter of the Geneva English Drama Society
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Springing forward

Spring is sprung and the grass is riz, but we're not resting on our laurels just yet! The last few months of the season promise to be packed with excitement. Coming up in April, we will be voting in a new committee and possibly starting a revolution within the society (who knows?!) Then in June we

have our next full production, *Popcorn*, coming hot on the heels of the huge success of *Dancing at Lughnasa*, and all throughout we will have our usual bi-weekly playreadings, finishing on 27 June with *A Laughing Matter* by April De Angelis, to be performed in Sue & Alan Leather's idyllic garden in Chevry, France.



GEDS AGM – have your say!

This society belongs to you, the members, and our friendly, informal AGM is your chance to make your voice heard. Find out more about how your society is run, ask the committee questions, give us your comments and suggestions, and vote in next year's committee. The meeting starts at 8pm on April 21st at the English Church Hall.

Remember, any member can occupy any position on committee. If you are interested in running for a position, please let us know by April 14th by emailing geds@geds.ch

Our next production...

Popcorn by Ben Elton, directed by Neil-Jon Morphy, 16–20 June 2015, Théâtre Pitoëff, Geneva

Ben Elton is one of the most successful comedic writers and stand-up comedians in Britain today, with many highly successful TV series to his credit (*The Young Ones*, *Blackadder*, *The Thin Blue Line*), as well as 15 novels, four plays and several musicals.

Popcorn is a dark comedy that deals with the question of how much violence in art influences violence in society. Bruce Delamitri is a famous director who glorifies violence in his films. Wayne and Scout are two of Bruce's biggest fans, but they have gone on a real killing spree inspired by his work, earning them the nickname "the Mall Murderers". The action of the play takes place in Bruce's family home, where he has a violent confrontation with the killers while Bruce's ex-wife, teenage daughter, producer and a Hollywood actress are all caught in the crossfire.

Popcorn was first produced in London in 1996 and won the TMA Barclays Theatre Award for new play and the Olivier

Award for best comedy. The Paris production of *Popcorn* ran for a year and was nominated for seven Molière awards.

Help wanted for *Popcorn*

Director Neil-Jon Morphy is looking for a Front of House Manager and backstage assistants for the show. If you are interested, contact him directly at: morphyn@bluewin.ch

Help us build the future of GEDS!

Are you interested in the more technical, hands-on aspects of theatre? Want to learn about lighting, set construction or sound? We're looking for motivated, enthusiastic apprentices to shadow our tech teams and learn the ropes. Email geds@geds.ch to sign up.



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DANCING AT LUGHNASA

Review by by Loulou Stirrup

Lughnasa is not a place but a time, a moment of ritual celebration in the old pagan calendar which marks the end of summer. Likewise the Ireland symbolised by Friel's Ballybeg, the Ireland which disappears before our eyes through the disintegration of the Mundy family is no longer a place, but a moment in time, half-remembered and increasingly fictionalised. It is already in the past, and, the past, as we know, is

"We laugh and suffer in equal measure as we watch them tentatively explore and attempt to free themselves"

another country, they do things differently there. The Mundys, without knowing it, have already become exiles in their own country and it is their struggle with the dawning realisation of this fact that we are watching through this extraordinary and moving play.

For all its entrenched Catholicism, Ireland has not yet managed to rid its people of their pagan spirit, as evidenced by the enduring popularity of the festivities performed in honour of the Celtic god Lugh, from whence the Lughnasa of the play's title. What's more, it now has another force to reckon with, one that has little to do with spiritual aspiration or appeasement in any form, and everything to do with material

Colin Paterson as Michael Paterson. Below: Beibhinn Regli as Rose



gain at any cost. Similarly, the Mundy women, haunted by their own past and already estranged from a future that they have no idea how to begin to inhabit are, to paraphrase Pope, placed on an isthmus of a middle state and in true Irish theatrical tradition exhibit instances of both dark wisdom and rude greatness.

We laugh and suffer in equal measure as we watch them tentatively explore and attempt to free themselves from the limbo in which they find themselves, for every one of the main female



characters has either wisdom or greatness in some form which we and they can still see the shadows of, but which is impossible to grasp or build on in any meaningful way. They do also bear some responsibility for their predicament. Marshalled somewhat by Kate, the matriarch, played with great humour and pathos by Cathy Boyle, the Mundys have clearly entered into a kind of siege mentality – five sisters bunkered down against the world. Perhaps it was a gradual process, protectiveness towards Rose (played with manic, childlike brilliance by Beibhinn Regli) because of her disabilities, the embarrassment caused by the birth of Christina's illegitimate child, Michael, and the simple isolating effects of poverty itself. (Viki Lazar assumed the role of Christina and brought both depth and vulnerability to the part). Michael is both the narrator, framing the scenes with what

he knows and has learned of beyond them, for these are his memories, and the invisible child, for whom the adult Michael supplies the voice from beyond the periphery of the scene – a lovely device because no-one could inhabit both that world, and the one in which Michael now lives – for he, alone, escaped. Colin Paterson did a great job as Michael, alternating between the adult voice, elegiac but complex, full of longing and relief, and the exasperated, often petulant tones of the little boy still caught up in the thick of it all, with real fluidity and ease. It must be remembered that, however clear and direct Michael's narration is, the scenes we are witnessing are conjured by him in his adult present, and like all of history are shaped and coloured by the imagination and attitudes of the one describing it.

It is probably a combination of protectiveness, embarrassment and poverty that causes Kate to make the catastrophic decision

DANCING AT LUGHNASA

that they will not, in fact, be dancing at Lughnasa when she suddenly turns on the excited plans being made to go to the Harvest Dance, an altogether more acceptable manifestation of this ancient rite, but still too much for Kate. Had they gone would things have turned out differently? Perhaps Aggie and Rosie wouldn't have left. Aggie (played very sensitively by Catherine Monagle) seems to suffer most under Kate's control. Maggie (played by Gemma Parkes who brought a great tomboyish drive and savvy to the role) has her wonderful dry wit and woodbines to get her through and although she labours under her own burden of thwarted desire, appears to both understand where Kate is coming from and to have a measure of equality with Kate so that she is able to put her in her place if needs be. Aggie, on the other hand, is still bristling with a sense of her own potential and determines to get out, even if it leads, as it does, to ruin. Kate is holding things together so tightly that she is crushing them. The cracks, as she fears, are appearing and yet she is unable to let go – it has been her habit to hold on for so long that if she releases her grip she might just lose hold of herself in the process. In the end she loses much more.

At the edges of this complicated family portrait are two male figures: Uncle Jack, newly back from many years in Uganda, played with an almost dreamlike air of bewilderment and a light comic touch by Andrew Brookes and Gerry Evans, the original wild rover,

errant father of Michael and all-round charmer; a role inhabited with consummate ease by Daire O'Doherty. In Kate's eyes these two men represent the best and worst of men, respectively, but serve to illustrate how far she allows prejudice to cloud her judgement as neither one is as upright nor as dissolute as she would have him painted. It soon becomes clear that Uncle Jack's former missionary zeal has been overtaken by other, more liberal, impulses and that he has

been sent back to Ireland not merely to recover his health but to prevent him from becoming any more embedded in Ryangan society. What little prestige the Mundys had enjoyed through Uncle Jack's work is gradually being replaced by a new form of notoriety as rumours regarding his sudden return from Africa seep out into the community. This notoriety compounds the Mundys' isolation, all the more so because it costs Kate her teaching job and the rest of the family their only real source of

income. Gerry, by contrast, is introduced to us as the worst sort of philanderer; but rather than a rebel without a cause he appears to be more of a lost soul seeking a purpose, which is how, with only the vaguest of intentions he drifts off to embroil himself in the Spanish civil war.

Special mention must be made of the set, which was beautifully constructed. The aesthetics of both set and costume, simple, stripped-back but well-loved, was perfectly fitted to the nature

temperamental wireless set, named for his maker, who is only exceeded in unreliability by the other males of the piece). However, the women are really dancing to the music of their own memories and though they dance together the communion of the moment is tenuous and short-lived. The music stops abruptly and the women fall still, embarrassed, chastened, each newly isolated from the others by the sudden revelation of their private passion.



Catherine Monagle as Aggie, and Cathy Boyle as Kate

of what is essentially a memory play, allowing for an element of nostalgia or idealisation, because whatever conflicts are being played out, there is no denying that there is love still within the family and certainly plenty of love that is tended towards Michael.

In spite of the pervasive sadness these are rare, glorious, stolen days and the piece is studded with wild, joyous episodes, like the sudden spontaneous dance to the music supplied by Marconi (a

In spite of the claustrophobia of the piece *Dancing at Lughnasa* is a very dynamic play, something director Charles Slovenski capitalised on in style, using the whole theatrical space creatively and pulling truly vital performances out of every one of his actors. *Dancing at Lughnasa* is often compared to *The Cherry Orchard* – and you can see why, they both do what theatre does best, focusing on one story, the fortunes of one family, to illustrate a wider reality, to reflect a greater truth.

ALEC GUINNESS SHUNS LIMELIGHT

by David Lewis

In or out of character, Sir Alec Guinness shuns the limelight and never acts the star.

Though one of Britain's great stage and screen artists, he has been dubbed the world's most famous anonymous actor by one critic because of his private and professional modesty.

"I've been so amazed by the comparative success of my silly book," the double Oscar-winner said in an interview after his newly-published memoirs, *Blessings in Disguise*, had topped the country's bestseller list for several weeks.

Preferring cheese, scrambled eggs and beer to haute cuisine offered by the select Covent Garden restaurant he had chosen, 71-year-old Sir Alec was equally modest about his long career as "only an actor" in more than 40 films and 60 plays.

His range has been wide, from *Hamlet* in London's Old Vic in 1937 to Fagin in David Lean's *Oliver Twist* in 1948, from his Oscar-winning Colonel Nicholson in Lean's *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957) to a Jedi knight wielding a laser sword in George Lucas' record-breaking sci-fi epic *Star Wars* (1977).

For a while he was known as "the man of a thousand faces." Yet Sir Alec dismisses much of his work and says some of his acting has been far too tame.

The prologue of his book, in which he writes of his own ego in the third person and compares himself unfavourably with Lord (Laurence) Olivier, the late Sir Ralph Richardson and Sir John Gielgud, is similarly self-effacing. "The bold statement



In this edition, we have a special treat for our readers from member David Lewis' days as a journalist: an interview with Sir Alec Guinness from November 1985. Thank you for sharing it with us, David!

is never likely to be his: he is well aware he is not in the same class as Olivier, Richardson, Gielgud or the other greats," he says.

Others disagree. Novelist Anthony Burgess has written: "His admirers, who include myself, are rather less aware." And critic Ken Tynan said he

was "the best living English character actor."

Sir Alec was born in London on Apr. 2, 1904. He has never been certain who his father

ALEC GUINNESS SHUNS LIMELIGHT

was, although he suspects a certain Andrew Geddes, a director of the Anglo-South American Bank.

"The search for a father has been my constant, though fairly minor, speculation for 50 years," he writes.

A childhood spent drifting with his mother from one

"An actor is... at his best a kind of unfrocked priest who, for an hour or two, can call on heaven and hell to mesmerise a group of innocents"

lodging to another, and in boarding schools paid for by his stepfather, led to a small job in advertising when he was 18.

Lessons

He fell in love with the theatre as a small child, but his headmaster told him at 12 that he would never make an actor.

But he did direct and act at school, and his professional ambitions were fired when he heard at 15 "that one could earn as much as £16" on the stage.

"It hadn't quite occurred to me that you could earn a living as an actor," said the man later to make a fortune by having negotiated a percentage of the profits of *Star Wars*.

Through the advice of Sir John Gielgud, whom he rang up out of the blue, he took lessons with borrowed money, won a two-year scholarship to a

school of dramatic art and left advertising.

His money ran out after seven months, but he managed to find a non-speaking part on the London stage as a junior lawyer in *Libel* in 1934. Sir John gave him the part of Osric in *Hamlet* later that year, and his career was on its way.

Sir Alec seems loth to talk about acting – "I don't know what it means," he said – and he claims not to find fulfilment in applause or the act of performance itself. "The only excitement is the rehearsal period. All your antennae are up, accepting, rejecting, feeling your way inside and out... everything's functioning."

He likes the periphery of stage acting, the feeling of belonging to a company. "I love the life of the theatre. I love not having to act in fits and starts. I love getting down there of an evening and making myself up."

Converted to Roman Catholicism in 1956, he writes: "An actor is... at his best a kind of unfrocked priest who, for an hour or two, can call on heaven and hell to mesmerise a group of innocents."

But though he prefers theatre to cinema – "Filming doesn't interest me at all" - his appearance as Shylock in *Chichester* last summer [1985 – Ed.] was his first stage appearance since *Yahoo* (1977).

The reason, he says, is simply the material he is offered. "It's either lame or a masochistic, sadistic kind of horror in a brothel. ... I know I'm sent certain sleazy stuff because people think that if they've got me it will sound all

right and also make it doubly shocking."

Material

He has just turned down the chance to act under Sir Peter Hall at Britain's National Theatre: "I jumped on it avidly, thinking 'Ah', but I was bored by it ... a sense of déjà vu."

Film and television work has kept him busy, however. He scored a major success in 1979 as spymaster George Smiley in a British television series of John Le Carré's *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, and in its follow-up, *Smiley's People*.

He continued his long association with Lean as Professor Godbole in the film of *A Passage to India* (1984).

In 1980, the American Film Academy awarded him an Oscar for a lifetime's service to film.

His memoirs are being translated into French, German and Swedish and will be published in the United States next year.

His next film, *Little Dorrit*, is an adaptation from Charles Dickens. He begins filming in February and is looking forward to playing the colourful William Dorrit. "I love to play a rather over-the-top character. It extends me in some way. For the most part I get offered rather mild characters."

In London from Hampshire, where he lives with Merula, his wife of 47 years (their actor son Matthew has two children), Sir Alec left the restaurant for a wig-fitting as Dorrit.

Always an actor to take his work seriously, he shaved his hair for a role back in 1934, and it never properly grew back.

PLAYREADING CORNER

Doors open 7.00pm: playreadings commence at 7.30pm.

Playreadings take place downstairs at the English Church Hall, Rue de Mont Blanc, Geneva



APRIL 14
ENGLISH CHURCH HALL

Working Girl

by Béibhinn Regli

An Irish college student struggling to pay her way during the economic crisis decides to take an unusual part-time job, causing mild scandal. Can a small community in "Holy Catholic Ireland" find its way out of the dark ages and join the 21st century?

Arranged by Béibhinn Regli.

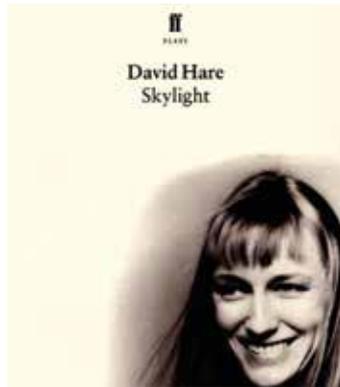


APRIL 28
ENGLISH CHURCH HALL

GEDS writes

We present another evening of original drama by GEDS members.

Arranged by Siân Ackroyd.



MAY 12
ENGLISH CHURCH HALL

Skylight

by David Hare

East London school teacher Kyra Hollis is visited on the same night by son Edward and father Tom Sargeant. Kyra had been living with the Sargeant family years earlier, but left after her affair with Tom was discovered by Tom's wife, who has since died. Edward now accuses Kyra of having left him as well, as he saw her as a big sister, and he demands to know why she left his life.

Shortly thereafter, Tom, a wealthy restaurateur, with real life references to Terence Conran, appears unheralded and for no apparent reason. Kyra's less than glamorous lifestyle leads him to poke fun at her to the point of insult, accusing her of self-punishment. After Kyra cooks a spaghetti dinner (which the actress actually cooks on stage), the talk turns to their relationship, and it becomes clear that their chances of rekindling their romance rest on whether one of them can change their preconceived notions of the other. Arranged by Valerie Antoniotti.

2016 productions

Do you have a play in mind that you would like to direct in 2016? Email your proposal to Tim Hancox (thancox@bluewin.ch) by April 5th 2015.

Elsewhere:

Date: Friday 15th May 2015
Venue: Théâtre de L'Espérance, Geneva
Doors open: 19h30
Show starts: 20h00

In *The Middle Of Nowhere* is a farcical family comedy about Kate, a 30-something, newly-cosmopolitan university lecturer who travels home to see her parents, Penny and Bill, in their new house on the weekend of her father's 60th birthday. It isn't long before she's butting heads with her fiercely right-wing father while her mother tries to keep the peace. Things take a turn for the surreal, however, when a strange man called Fish, who claims to have been exiled from a cult in the woods, barges in on their breakfast and refuses to leave.

The show will start with 45 minutes of improv comedy by The Renegade Saints. The Village Players will take to the stage in the second half with our FEATS preview.

To register your interest in coming and to receive further updates about how to book tickets, please send an email to villageplayers@gmail.com.

Renegade Saints Improv
Mr Pickwick's Geneva
9 April 2015, 8pm

If you can't wait till May, you can also catch the Renegade Saints' monthly show at their usual venue, Mr Pickwick's Pub, on April 9th. Doors open at 7.30 and your 10 franc ticket includes a voucher for a free drink!

The Catalyst Theater presents – *Blue Butterfly*, by Richard Crane and the Catalyst, in English with surtitles in French

Théâtre Pitoëff
29 April–2 May, 2015
Weds–Fri 8pm / Sat 5pm
Thé Tre la Grange de Dorigny,
Université de Lausanne
8–10 May, 2015
Fri–Sat 8pm / Sun 7pm

Q&A with the actor–scientists: May 2nd and May 10th, after the show. Tickets: CHF 10.30 box office: <http://bluebutterflyplay.ch/>

The Catalyst Theater Company presents *Blue Butterfly*, a new play about science supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Written by renowned British playwright Richard Crane in collaboration with the scientists and theatre artists of The Catalyst, and directed by Ailin Conant of the Theatre Temoin in London, *Blue Butterfly* will run from April 29–May 2 at the Pitoëff Theatre in Geneva, and from May 8–10 at the Theatre Grange de Dorigny in Lausanne.

WHAT'S ON ... APRIL TO JUNE 2015

Who	What	When	Where
GEDS	<i>Working Girl</i> playreading	14 Apr	English Church Hall
GEDS	Annual General Meeting	21 Apr	English Church Hall
GEDS	<i>GEDS writes</i> playreading	28 Apr	English Church Hall
The Catalyst	<i>Blue Butterfly</i>	29 Apr–2 May	Théâtre Pitoëff
GEDS	<i>Skylight</i> playreading	12 May	English Church Hall
Village Players/ Renegade Saints	<i>In the Middle of Nowhere</i>	15 May	Théâtre de L'Espérance
GEDS	<i>The Fall of the House of Usher</i> playreading	26 May	English Church Hall
GEDS	<i>Camp Confidence & The Most Massive Woman Wins</i> playreading	9 Jun	English Church Hall
GEDS	<i>Popcorn</i>	16–20 Jun	Théâtre Pitoëff
GEDS	<i>A Laughing Matter</i>	27 Jun	Chez Leather, Chevry, France

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