SP news

Incorporating Millgate Arts Centre Bulletin

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Special points of interest:

- Focus on our next production "April in Paris
- Review of the Farndale Murder Mystery
- A tribute to Nancy Woods

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APRIL IN PARIS

By John Godber

7TH -14TH APRIL

Bet and Al lead a quiet, humdrum life in their small Yorkshire home . Frustrated with their life and worried about their future, the marriage has stagnated.

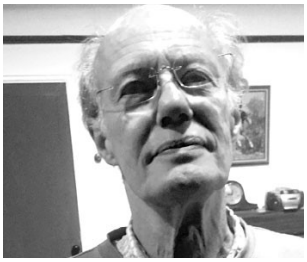
Then Bet wins a 'Romantic Breaks' competition in a magazine. The prize, a holiday in Paris, represents their first experience abroad and has a profound effect on the way they look at the world around them once they return home. Together they have to cope with the ferry crossing, French cuisine, wrestle with their phrasebook and fend off would-be muggers on the Metro in this hilarious depiction of the English abroad.

Cast and Crew

Bet	Elizabeth Travis
Al	Paul Dawson
Directors	John Matthews
	Verity Mann
Set Design & Construction	Keith Begley
Costumes	Verity Mann
Properties	Lorraine Reynolds
Stage Manager	Andrew Wilson
Prompt	Margaret Thompson
Technical	David Plowright
Sound	Luke Settle
Sound & Lighting	Michael Powis
	Tim Newbold
Make up	Mariella Ciniglio
Publicity	David Ebden

Stagey Bits

By Keith Begley



A theatre company is an interesting entity. It is essentially a company of Actors, though that too needs qualifying because (as I am sure you already know) in its earliest manifestations the Actor/ Manager evolved and when Strolling Players had a fixed Theatre to perform in, a whole panoply of specialised functions became fixed as well. Despite this some specialists continued to be nomadic generally because the most talented are always much sought after. Directors, designers and technicians are often moving from play to play, theatre to theatre, no more so than in Amateur Dramatics. And so, it came to pass that a Christmas holiday was thrust upon me and the last Set (The Farndale Murder Mystery) was designed and constructed by a different team . Anybody who saw the play would have been rightly impressed by the splendid set that was effectively one of the characters. For the usual crew the respite from construction meant we could get on with other tasks, some of which were becoming ever more pressing. Namely the removal of many of the larger props (doors, chairs, tables, standard lamps etc.) which went to join the sofas, armchairs, sideboards, tables and even wardrobes that we store at Tanners Business Centre in Greenfield. Fortunately the set for April in Paris is a relatively simple construction and we were able to complete all but the painting within a few days. The painting was going to be a simple job of no consequence, but Verity had one of her inspirations and it resulted in a major change to the visual concept that transformed the play's presentation with a result that I am sure the playwright, John Godber himself would applaud.

The Whole World's a Stage

A tribute to Nancy Woods (11/4/26 – 8/1/18) by Stella Woods

Fire and brimstone – chalk and cheese - love and hate – that just about describes my relationship with Nancy, my fiery, extraverted and passionate mother. I was never the daughter she expected, but we loved each other fiercely. She wasn't just a big fish in a small pond… she was more of a whale in the Tame Valley!

Born with an impeccable Delph pedigree with dozens of relatives and generations of family members from the area, she was different from other mothers – smoking cigarettes, drinking champagne, glamorous in fur coat and diamonds and completely and utterly politically uncorrect and outspoken. During his youth in the 1880s, her grandfather Herbert Watson joined a minstrel troupe, travelling and singing his way round the USA. When he returned to Saddleworth (before fathering eight children including Nancy's mother), his close friend Ammon Wrigley wrote a poem about him which began: "Two gods were present at young Watson's birth, the god of ale and the god of mirth." It could have been written about Nancy. On her father's side of the family, she had three aunts who performed *The Three Disgraces* at Delph's Krazy Kat Kabaret - Cab Calloway eat your heart out!

Nancy of course was a founder member of The Saddleworth Players. Returning from teacher training college in Bingley in the late 1940s, she and half a dozen friends revived theatre in Delph, setting up in the building that is now Delph Band Club, but known in those days as 'The Dive'. They did everything – converted the building (Tony Doherty was an architect); built the sets; made costumes, gathered props, acted in the plays and eventually moved to The Mechanics Institute on the site of the current car park opposite the Millgate Arts Centre.

My childhood days were punctuated by Nancy and her life at the theatre or 'thee-arter" as she pronounced it. Other mothers joined The Women's Institute and worked for The Lifeboat Society or attended garden parties and coffee mornings. Not Nancy. Born just two days after Hugh Hefner and married to a man born the same week as Marilyn Monroe, right from the start she was determined to be different.

She loved performing and dressing up, but her acting antics were not limited to appearances at the Saddleworth Players; for her, the whole world was a stage. From the tone of her voice, the peal of her laughter, the exaggerated tales she told, the way she dressed, the way she spoke - life was truly a drama unfolding day by day. Her job as a primary school teacher offered ample opportunity for flamboyant self – expression - the children loved her and she loved them. She organised school productions, nativity plays and musical concerts and often appeared at school in costume to teach the children about different cultures or historical periods.

One of Nancy's great hobbies was sewing and she was an accomplished dressmaker. I, being a tomboy, did not appreciate having clothes made for me, which I imagine was a great disappointment to her, but fortunately she had ample opportunity to indulge her passion for clothing and fashion at the theatre, creating costumes for the many plays she acted in over a 40 year period. I remember trailing behind her at Oldham market searching for fabrics, ribbons, props and on one occasion, a feather boa for her role in *Lady Precious Stream*. The feather boa in question was bright turquoise with shoes and a satin dress to match – just gorgeous! Gold lamé suits; silver sling backs; leopard skin handbags; silks, satins and furs – was this Hollywood or the dark satanic mills?

My father absolutely adored her and she adored him too. "What's it like being married to an actress?" someone once asked him. She and Dad met in Delph fish and chip shop while she was buying supper for the theatre cast after one play back in 1948. They'd attended Delph primary school together in the 1930s and recognised each other while standing in the queue. Nancy, who described my father as 'a good catch and very handsome', invited Mike back to meet the rest of the cast and the rest, as they say, is history. My father must have been in love because he was actually persuaded to appear in a few plays. Mum used to say 'He knew his part and looked smart.' That just about sums up Dad's acting prowess.

While Nancy attended rehearsals, my brother Simon and I were left in the care of our doting father who was much more easy-going than Nancy and loved to spoil us. Rehearsals for us meant games with dad, cocoa and biscuits and lounge room cricket. Years later when I was in my forties, Nancy discovered that whenever she wasn't around, Simon, Dad and I were regular patrons of Vera Shallcross's corner shop, with full access to Ben Shaw's range of fizzy drinks and all manner of tooth rotting sweets and chocolate. We kept it secret all those years!

One of my favourite stories about mum and her passion for the theatre involves my first birthday. Apparently she had a lead part in the play but told the producer she couldn't come to rehearsal on the 22nd December as it was my birthday. The producer (the fearsome Eve Rollins) told mum I was only a baby and wouldn't know, but

Nancy stuck to her guns and refused to attend. My fiercely independent mother was already back treading the boards while I was still an infant, but cared enough about being there for my first birthday to miss rehearsal. I like that!

Sometimes she'd take me with her to rehearsal and I'd explore the bowels of the theatre – scary, dusty, dark and inviting - full of props, scenery, hidden passageways and the all-important 'stage door'. As a small child I loved the bright lights of the mixed dressing rooms overflowing with exotic clothing, tubes of greasepaint and make-up, tacky, chipped mirrors and grown-ups with flabby, wrinkled flesh parading in their underwear. We paid regular visits to Eric Clarke, a talented dressmaker who worked in a three storey weaver's cottage opposite the Mechanics Institute in Millgate. I remember crawling round underneath his sewing table picking up pins with a magnet, while my mother focused on birthing her latest creation with the help of Eric.

In one play, perhaps *Lady Precious Stream*, Nancy played the role of a society hostess. My job was to teach her a song that she would perform live on stage on a grand piano. She had an atrocious voice – singing voice that is. Apparently I told her she changed key every bar. But she played and sang with a panache and confidence that made up for her limited skill level. I admired her courage and can still remember every note of that song.

I tame the lion; I put him in his place
Some prince of violinists or Eastern potentate
I always remember, whatever else I do,
That though man may be a lion, he's human too!

Then there was the time she played the part of the Jamaican slave Tituba in *The Crucible*. To save time getting ready, she would blacken her face at home then walk up The Sound to the theatre. One night she scared the wits out of a passer-by as she greeted her by lamplight - people of colour were thin on the ground in Delph in those days.

Greasepaint, costumes, props, prompters, scenery, opening night, cast parties, buffets, it might as well have been Broadway or The West End. Theatre in the Woods household was a very serious business indeed. For some families it was politics or sport, for us it was entertainment. Nancy would sit in bed with an old tape recorder rehearsing her part and attempting to reproduce the correct accent for whichever play she was in. As opening night approached she would become increasingly nervous and tense, feeling sick and unable to eat. She was once in a play called *The Italian Straw Hat* which had a crowd scene where people had to rush across the stage chattering – in Italian. I was enlisted to teach the cast some real Italian phrases to stop them from shouting: 'spaghetti, ravioli, cappuccino' etc.

I would proudly attend each opening night with my father and brother. We'd search for her name on the program - *'Eliza Doolittle – Nancy Woods'* and our hearts would swell with pride. A few days later a 'crit' of the play would appear in The Oldham Chronicle. How overjoyed she was when her name was mentioned.

She deeply admired her fellow actors at The Saddleworth Players, particularly the men – John Gillespie, Des Flanagan, Tony Doherty, John Tanner, Ken Wright and John Kenworthy, not forgetting the stalwarts on the female side – Millicent Mallalieu, Trish Kenworthy, Elizabeth Hardie, Margaret Howarth, Joan Nuttall, June Holmes, Anne Wright, Edwina Lomax (now Rigby) and many, many others. I could never understand the attraction of being on stage, but while neither I nor my brother has followed our mother into the theatre, both of us make a living from talking, writing, radio and public speaking, so we've carried on her legacy. I can still hear Nancy telling me to project my voice so the deaf old lady at the back can hear me.

Nancy was very proud to be awarded a golden pin in 1994 as a life member of The Saddleworth Players – Elizabeth Hardie told me recently she was their oldest serving member and Anne Wright revealed that she always phoned after each opening night to offer her unsolicited verdict on the performance. So typical of my mother! The last play she attended was *Great Expectations* in November last year. The perfect title for a woman who never played small. Diana Ross once said: "You can't just sit there and wait for people to give you that golden dream. You've got to get out there and make it happen for yourself." That's what Nancy did.

So farewell to my beautiful, generous, warm, kind-hearted mother; my fun-loving friend and confidant and my greatest and most outspoken critic. You may be gone, but after you shuffled off your mortal coil at the grand old age of 91, I had a dream about you. You were in your thirties, dressed in a silver bell-bottomed trouser suit with red boots, red lipstick, glistening dark hair and a gilded cigarette holder, smiling, puffing away, laughing and throwing your head back. That's how I like to remember you. What a fun person you were and how many wonderful and happy memories you have left behind. How I will miss you...

Stella Woods - daughter -January 2018

Mike and Nancy Woods

Murder at Checkmate Manor is a play within a play put on by the 'Farndale Avenue Housing Estate Townswomens'Guild Dramatic Society'. As with all of the Farndale plays, this one doesn't always go right. The problem is that the rights have to be wrong and the wrongs have to be very right, which requires talent and timing.

The very hard working cast of five produced quite possibly the worst murder mystery ever performed and you don't get that good at being bad without having a great team.

Leading it all and trying to keep everyone in check is Phoebe, primly and properly played by Alayne Whitworth who also takes on five other characters, most of whom end up dead ... or do they? Then there is Audrey, played by Verity Mann, who shows some excellent timing and comedy in her many different roles.

June Holmes plays Thelma, who gets the most out of her two roles including being one half of a very funny mimed song and dance duet. Felicity only plays two roles but Lorraine Reynolds and her extremely expressive face had the audience in stitches. Gordon, played by John Tanner, who is a last minute replacement for Sylvia! He gave a lovely portrayal of Inspector O'Reilly, completely getting the lack of facial and vocal expression. His mimed song and dance with Thelma was a triumph but the highlight had to be his outfit in the fashion show.

A fantastic set, great costumes and beautifully timed sound and lighting cues gave the audience some very funny moments. What a great team effort all round! There was even time for some audience participation with the raffle and quiz with prizes to be won. I was just disappointed that I didn't win the homemade marmalade!

Mark Rosenthal, Jan 28 2018

Unleash your inner techie!

We are very fortunate in having a large pool of actors and directors to approach when putting together a Season. Many of them also take on essential backstage and front of house roles. Not being the shy, retiring sort, they can also be found behind the bar and serving coffee. There is, however, one area that Members do seem shy of— and that is the Technical Team.

So, would you like to share the enjoyment and excitement of being part of a production? Why not come and see the play free! Only the techies get to watch the show from the auditorium. As a sound or lighting operator, you can follow the script and initiate pre-programmed cues. Or, in the weeks before the play, you can help with rigging and focussing lights - no experience needed. Gain experience with the software used to programme the light or sound cues. Help with the design process: find our create music or sound effects; learn how to contribute to the audience's experience through the creative use of lighting.

We are now actively looking to recruit and train new Sound and Lighting Designers and Operators to work on the 2018/19 Season and beyond. If you would like to expand your skill set, and join the team please contact David Plowright at david@plowright.net

Or on 07764 861110

You will be given full training and great opportunities to develop your skill set. If you own a Smart Phone or work a computer, the chances are you are tech savvy enough to make a fantastic contribution and enjoy these valuable and essential roles.

And remember...

An Actor without techies is a naked person standing in the dark, trying to emote.

A techie without actors is a person with marketable skills.

Cheers!

Our dedicated bar staff have been working hard to provide an outstanding service for all the many shows, concerts and events on at the Millgate Arts Centre. Being behind the bar is fun and sociable and a great way to catch up with other Members. The majority of the work, however, is currently falling on a core 20 or so who would really like more members to swell their ranks.

If you can spare some time in the evening, from 6.45 until after the show, then please do consider joining the team. Your bar leader will train and assist you and Ken Wright will be thrilled to count you in!

Please contact Ken on wright.ken@talk21.com to offer your much needed services.

Spotlight on the Wardrobe Manager's Role

If you're creative with a flair for fabrics and accessories you may love being a Wardrobe Manager. Each play's requirements are different and casts come in all shapes and sizes so there's no chance of the role becoming dull! It's great if you sew but sewing is not a requirement as there are others on hand to help out. This Summer we're planning on remodelling and reorganising the Costume Store to maximise the storage space. We'd love you to join us on productions, as part of the team or by taking on the role of Wardrobe Manager for one or more of the plays. If you're interested, please get in touch with the Production Team (John Hankin, Anne Wright, Verity Mann or email Verityjmann@gmail.com

The Wardrobe Manager

Attend production meetings to determine the requirements of the play, in consultation with the Director, usually 1 month before rehearsals start.

Attend the first read through and take down the cast's vital statistics:

Chest / collar size / waist/ inside leg/ hat size / shoe size for men.

Chest / waist/ hip/ height/ dress size + shoe size for women.

Set a time and date with the Head of Wardrobe (Verity Mann on 07855 951671/ Veritymann@aol.com to have a good look through the costume store for appropriate costumes. Note – the store mainly has period costumes and accessories. For modern day clothes the cast may be happy to provide their own.

Put a rail together of suitable clothes.

Liaise with the Production Secretary for a suitable time and date for the cast to try on outfits. Note – try to do this before rehearsals so as not to eat into rehearsal time or set up an additional evening / weekend slot.

Buy / hire / make costumes as necessary. Check the budget with the Production Secretary. The Wardrobe Manager has a list of people who may help with sewing.

Make sure all costumes to be used are clean and in good repair. Note: check buttons and fastenings.

Try to get all costumes ready by tech week and by the dress rehearsal at the latest.

During the Production Run:

Be available to assist and repair costumes and accessories if required.

Iron costumes as necessary.

Wash and iron any costumes as required.

After the Production Run:

Repair, wash or dry clean used items and return them to the costume store.

Note: expenses will be reimbursed by the Treasurer. Either contact David Shipp on shippdavid@icloud.com with details, or put a note with receipts in an envelope in the bar til during the run and take the appropriate amount from the bar takings. Put a note on the envelope that you have been paid.

Notes from the Editor

Dear Saddleworth Players,

We hope that you are enjoying the Season so far, either as part of a production or as an audience member. This year has been busier than ever with the introduction of Saddleworth Live and we're enjoying seeing you more often at the Millgate Arts Centre. We've had a few challenges with the heating, the weather and a leaking roof, but, as always, the show must go on—albeit with emergency heaters and thermal vests!

A busier schedule means more requirements for Front of House and Bar Staff, so do please sign up to help. If it's been a while since you were involved, do please get in touch; we'd love to have you on board. Either leave a message on our answer phone, send us an email or drop us a line at The Millgate Arts Centre.

Do also consider joining our technical team. We are actively looking to recruit and train new members to design and run sound and lighting.

Finally, we were saddened to hear of the passing of Nancy Woods, one of our founders and our longest serving Member. Her daughter Stella has written such a fabulous tribute to her, catching exactly the Nancy we knew and loved.

Verity

Contributions to SP News all gratefully received and printed in full, space permitting.

Email Verityjmann@gmail.com

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