



The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

October 2017 Issue No. 22

Version

Now the New Play Award is done and dusted I think the Society can look back with some pride on what has been achieved. Not to mention lessons learnt along the way – anybody asking if we’re going to do it again next year should retire to a safe distance before the reply. But in the future? Well who knows? Talking to some of the seventeen finalists at the presentation I was struck by just how much they valued the ability, perhaps incentive would be a better word, to write at length for a competition. A number praised the very clear parameters we’d laid out but I think finalist Roy Chatfield identified a key strength when he commented: “By making the submission anonymous it sidelined, at a stroke, issues of gender and age and race and class and reputation and theatrical fashion (which can be useful but which can also be detrimental to creativity).” It’s fair to say that the finalists were grateful and astonished in around equal

measure when they heard the pains we took with assessing each entry. Speaking as one heavily involved in both reading scripts and in dealing with ensuring the consistency of marking I think once the entries came in, and the amount of work they represented was apparent, our main, indeed sole, aim was to give each and every one a ‘fair go’, as I think the Australians put it. If that meant four readings at stage one so be it. I’ve listed the seventeen final plays with short summaries and casting details later. If any members can think of any ways they could help these go further please get in touch.

In recognition of his contribution both to the Award and the Society in general Julian Fellowes was invited to become a Vice-President and we are delighted to announce that he has accepted. A full profile will appear in the next issue.

Roger Mills

A GLITTERING CEREMONY *by Martin Amherst Lock*

‘This is our moment, the moment we’ve been waiting for!’ bellows the chorus of sailors in Britten’s *Billy Budd* on desecrating the French fleet. Tuesday 26th September was very much *our* moment when, some twenty months after the competition was launched, the winner of The Terence Rattigan Society Award for a New Play for the Theatre was finally announced.

What an amazing journey it has been! An initial entry of nearly two hundred scripts, far exceeding what might have been expected, was whittled down by a team of thirty-four readers. Each play was marked out of 10 by two readers (and whenever there was any marked disagreement three or even four) to a preliminary short list of forty. A team of third-stage readers then narrowed the forty down to seventeen and finally, after further careful consideration, to three which our judges Julian Fellowes, Thea Sharrock, David Suchet and Professor Dan Rebellato were invited to rank in descending order from 1 – 3. For anyone without Barbara Longford’s organisational skill and stamina the task of coordinating so many scripts and readers would have been a logistical nightmare. But thanks to her administrative sangfroid and tireless energy and the assistance of Roger Mills, Clive Montellier and Diana Scotney all has gone smoothly and, most importantly of all, every script has been given the thorough scrutiny it deserves. All involved as readers

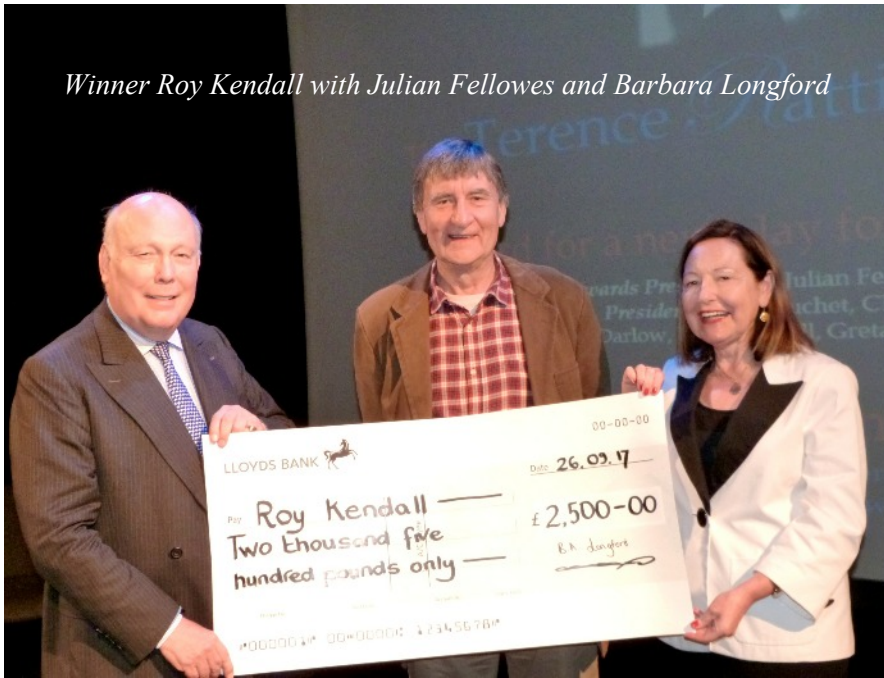
have been impressed both by the care and thought which all of the contestants have put into composing full-length plays and the remarkable range of subjects covered.

The choice of Harrow School as the venue for the Awards Ceremony could not have been more apt: it was at Harrow that Rattigan cut his teeth as a dramatist, relishing the challenge of composing a one-page playlet for his Lower Remove French master and fully availing himself of the school library’s extensive collections of the works of Sophocles and Aeschylus, of Galsworthy, Barrie and Shaw, which he would read late into the night. Indeed, it was whilst still at Harrow that he formulated what was to become the credo of his professional career: ‘Without an audience there cannot be a play.’

On welcoming the Society to the extremely comfortable and well-equipped Ryan Theatre, Adam Cross, Harrow’s Director of Drama, reminded us that of course Rattigan trod the boards as a schoolboy long before purpose-built school theatres had been dreamt of and would have performed Shakespeare in the cavernous and acoustically unforgiving Speech Room. He felt it to be highly fitting that the prize which Rattigan bequeathed to the school for dramatic composition in 1945 should now be complemented by the Society’s own Award.

Barbara Longford took great pleasure in welcoming the seventeen final short-listed writers to the Ceremony,

Winner Roy Kendall with Julian Fellowes and Barbara Longford



Fellowes concurred that what distinguishes Rattigan's work is that it is extraordinarily truthful. He remembers vividly the decline of Rattigan's popularity in the 60s when the literati and glitterati decided he was beneath their notice because he was writing about the English upper middle classes, failing to grasp (as Rattigan reminds any would-be dramatist) that to get at the truth of a subject you must write about what you know. Rattigan was always totally consistent in his character depiction; all one can ask of drama is whether it is truthful – and because he managed this time and time again his plays will never be out of fashion for long. He regretted having to break the hearts of fourteen contenders but not all could be winners and being on the final list of seventeen was very

all of whose scripts had been deemed by the readers' reports to have possessed particular merit, expressed her extreme gratitude to the judges for making the final choices, and conveyed David Suchet and Thea Sharrock's regrets at being unable to join us. She warmly thanked all those who had read the scripts and extended a particular welcome to two of our Vice-Presidents, Michael Darlow and Dr Holly Hill, who was visiting us from Dallas, Texas.

Our Master of Ceremonies, Giles Cole, said how grateful the Society was to Adam Cross and the school for hosting the Ceremony and explained why it had been decided that a prize should be awarded for a new play rather than a theatrical performance: Rattigan was a consummate dramatist, not an actor, and the most appropriate way to celebrate him and the craft which distinguishes his work was to promote the art of playwriting. It is very hard, he averred, to write a good play and even harder to get it performed professionally. Michael Wheatley-Ward's very generous offer to stage professional performances of the winning play in his theatre had given the Society a wonderful opportunity to introduce to the public a script which fulfilled the twin criteria of tautness of dramatic structure and commerciality. In other words a play which would have enough 'character' to survive in the world of the professional theatre.

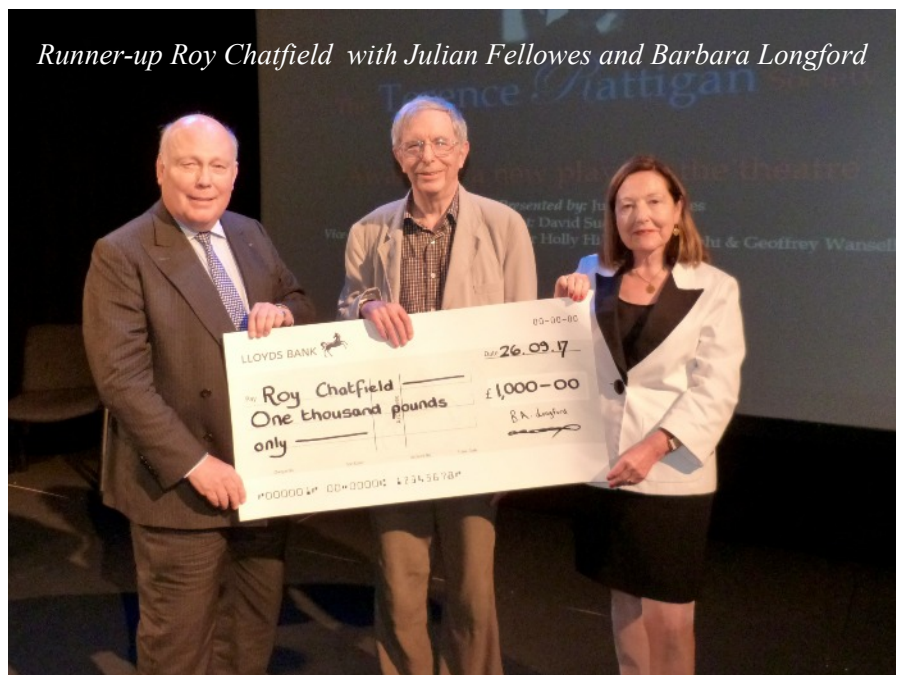
Michael Darlow, Rattigan's biographer and today's guest speaker, was up next and gave a thought provoking speech on the problems facing contemporary writers in getting plays considered let alone performed that we reprint in full in this issue.

Before announcing the results Lord

much to be applauded. All of the finalists had richly earned their prizes and the winning plays were 'marvellous'. He and Dan Rebellato awarded the Third Prize, a set of plays of Terence Rattigan, published by Nick Hern Books and generously donated by Society member Nick Hern, to Peter Briffa for his play *Wrong Move*. The Second Prize, a cheque for £1,000 and a rehearsed reading of the play for the Society went to Roy Chatfield for his play *Going Back*. The First Prize, a cheque for £2,500 and a professional production of his play at the Sarah Thorne Theatre, to Roy Kendall for his play *The Onion at the End*.

We were then treated to readings, introduced and rehearsed by Michael Gaunt, the Society's Drama School Liaison, of the two winning plays' opening scenes. *Going Back*, which tells the story of a hostage's return to his family after six years in captivity, quickly immersed us in the awkwardness of a reunion which should be joyful

Runner-up Roy Chatfield with Julian Fellowes and Barbara Longford



but which in reality is fraught with suspicion and unease. What do you say to your wife and daughter when you have been so long apart? Do you even really recognise each other? And how do you face the fact that life has moved on inexorably in your absence and cope with deeply disturbing intimations of infidelity?

In total contrast *The Onion at the End*, set in the 1930s, transported us to the world of theatrical digs ruled over by an indomitable landlady whose strictures against any hanky-panky and haughty disdain have wonderful shades of Joyce Carey's Myrtle Bagot. Her new hapless guests, a comic double act called First and Last, are swiftly warned over an inviting supper of congealed rice pudding that the photographs of her guests who fail to cut the theatrical mustard are relegated to the lavatory and that there is 'a kitchen you can use – but of course you won't need to'. Mention of British Empire stamps, Wills cigarette cards and crystal-set wirelesses swiftly creates a sense of period charm, and humour, with highly suggestive allusions to acrobats getting up to extraordinary antics on the landing, abounds; but the fact that Teddy's bedroom is strictly out of bounds hints that there is something nasty in the woodshed and that all is not quite as it seems. As the title suggests, there will

undoubtedly be tears before bedtime...

Michael Wheatley-Ward concluded the Ceremony by saying how excited he is to be putting on the winning play in his theatre in February. Publicity will start straight away, the play's title will immediately be added to his playlist and he will be sending the script to his preferred director Michael Friend, a seasoned interpreter of Bernard Shaw, opera, pantomime and *Beyond the Fringe*, who will suggest possible cuts and changes before the play goes into rehearsal. Reading the winning plays has assured him that, despite the fears of many, the art of careful play construction is very much alive and kicking; it will be fascinating to observe how the audiences react and of course whether any producers amongst them will wish to take the play further.

The Award for a New Play for the Theatre has undoubtedly been an enormous success and must stand as a milestone in the Society's history, not least in its bringing together so many members of the Society in what has been a demanding but ultimately deeply rewarding venture. The hard work of reading and judging is over; now there is another moment for which we are all waiting: an outing to Broadstairs and what will be a fascinating first night!

NEW PLAYWRIGHTS MUST BE DISSIDENTS

At The Terence Rattigan Society New Play Award Presentation Ceremony Vice-President Michael Darlow was asked to speak on Rattigan's relevance to playwrights today. This is what he had to say.

I want to say something about Terence Rattigan's relevance for today's audiences and, more particularly, about his relevance for today's aspiring dramatists - many of whom are here today and entered the competition. Writers who both aspire to make successful careers in today's theatre and to write plays of lasting value.

Today Terence Rattigan is often described by critics as the 'British Chekhov' on account of both his style and his dramatic construction - the accumulation of small incidents, the sense of people enduring, the inconclusive endings in which life goes on, and for his emotional truth and portraits of bourgeois, middle class people who are not the rulers, but who are, perhaps, 'the also' - those who have been left behind.

But in likening Rattigan to Chekhov one must not overlook the fact that just below the surface in the plays of Chekhov, written in the late 1890s and the first years of 20th Century, one can detect the mostly unseen, but inexorable, march towards revolution, the march which would explode first in 1905 and ultimately in 1917. Something similar is to be found in Rattigan, something as fundamental to his best plays as it is to the plays of Chekhov.

Of course, one must also not overlook the essential fact that by portraying unchanging emotional truth, as both Rattigan and Chekhov do, a dramatist remains

eternally relevant.

But for today's aspiring playwrights there is another element in Rattigan's work which is often overlooked but which, I think, is especially relevant.

This was first highlighted by The Observer's critic Ronald Bryden in November 1970, during the period of Rattigan's near universal critical rejection. Reviewing a revival of Rattigan's 1947 play *The Winslow Boy*, Bryden compared the Rattigan of Winslow, and his other plays of the 1940s and early 1950s, the period of Rattigan's greatest success, to the dramatists working behind the Iron Curtain. Dramatists who were forced to hide the plays they wanted to write behind the ones their audiences and the censors would accept. For playwrights working behind the Iron Curtain that meant the political censors, and for Rattigan working in the London theatre of the 1940s and early 1950s it meant the commercial censors. In his article Bryden drew his readers attention to how in *The Winslow Boy* the upholders of British traditional decency are quite willing to ruin the daughter Catherine's happiness in order to 'stop the Winslow's anti-Establishment circus'.

Rattigan had, of course, started out as an open dissident, an angry young man. As a boy here at Harrow he had clandestinely circulated among his friends the works of Bertrand Russell, the Huxleys and Freud. He had been one of the leaders of a revolt against compulsory army cadet force parades and at Oxford he had voted in the notorious 1933 Oxford Union Debate on the motion: 'That this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country'.

In 1933 his first produced play *First Episode*, featuring a group of university undergraduates, caused a minor scandal, attracting newspaper headlines like 'Stage Shock For Oxford'. With its scenes of casual student sex, drinking and gambling, it was seen as shocking, dirty, naughty, and attracted the attention of the Public Morality Council, a kind of Mary Whitehouse group, which sought to get the play banned by the Lord Chamberlain.

In 1936 *French Without Tears*, although the lightest of comedies, again featured students and mocked the British establishment and militarism, to such an extent that von Ribbentrop, the Nazi ambassador in London, took visiting Nazi dignitaries to see it as proof that the British had become decadent and gone soft. Rattigan's 1938 satire *Follow My Leader*, written with Anthony Goldschmidt, lampooned Hitler, Mussolini, the Nazis and the British policy of appeasement, and was actually banned by the Lord Chamberlain.

In *After The Dance* in 1939 and the plays written during the war Rattigan not only created characters and plots of complete emotional truth which accurately reflected the public mood of the time, there was also that Chekhovian sense of coming fundamental change. This applies particularly to the original version of *Love In Idleness* called *Less Than Kind*.

But by 1947, when Rattigan wrote *The Winslow Boy*, the world and the social landscape had undergone a fundamental change. Writing in that same year, Norman Marshall, in his book *The Other Theatre*, cited the fact that the London theatre was dominated by just two or three all-powerful commercial managements and warned that: 'There is a real danger that the race of English dramatists may soon become extinct'.

It is at this point that Rattigan becomes the kind of undercover dissident dramatist discerned by Ronald Bryden in his 1970 review, with plays such as *The Winslow Boy*, *The Browning Version*, *The Deep Blue Sea* and *Separate Tables*. It is also in this period that Rattigan's political stance appears to shift, even though his fundamental underlying beliefs remained essentially the same. Some people have regarded this shift as a betrayal.

But before accepting that judgement one should, I think, bear in mind Graham Greene's dictum that: "A writer should always be ready to change sides at the drop of a hat. He stands for the victims and the victims change. Loyalty confines you to accepted opinions ... but disloyalty encourages you to roam through any human mind ... it gives you an extra dimension of understanding."

Rattigan was never likely to become a Royal Court dramatist or fit into the theatre of Joan Littlewood. He was in every way unsuited to that theatre, temperamentally and intellectually. Later when he tried, as he claimed, to 'blow up the Establishment' he abjectly failed. But in the period from the end of the war until the mid-1950s and the rise of The Royal Court and Joan Littlewood, and to some extent afterwards, he did succeed in being what Ronald Bryden described as a kind of dissident dramatist in the commercial West-End, the

theatre controlled by the likes of Binkie Beaumont and H.M.Tennent.

And it is this, I think, which makes Rattigan particularly relevant for today's aspiring playwrights, playwrights who will need to work in a theatre where the West End is dominated by musicals and revivals and television drama is almost all soaps, thrillers or American imports, plus a few adaptations of favourite classic novels, but few, if any, original single plays or short series – apart from 'who dunnits' – or even TV productions of theatre classics. Playwrights who will have to survive in a Britain where Arts Council funding has been cut by 36% since 2010 and local authority funding for the arts has been cut by 40%. There is the fringe, but that won't sustain you financially.

So in the British theatre of today I think it will be vital for aspiring young dramatists whose ambition is to be something more than hack script-writers, who wish to survive financially, but who aspire to write work of lasting social and creative value, to learn from Rattigan's example.

Like Rattigan you will need to become an undercover theatrical dissident, following the example of dramatists who worked behind the Iron Curtain and were forced to hide the plays they wanted to write behind the ones their audiences and the censors would accept. By following their example and the example of Terence Rattigan you are more likely not only to improve your chances of surviving financially in today's theatre and of writing plays which are put on and seen by the public, but you are also more likely to stand a chance of writing plays which are emotionally true and have the potential to be of lasting value – like the plays of Terence Rattigan.

COMING EVENTS

Saturday 18th November, 2017

Play Reading, Pre-Christmas Buffet Lunch & AGM, at Doggett's Coat & Badge. *A rehearsed reading of the play which came second in The Terence Rattigan Society Award for a new play - 'Going Back' by Roy Chatfield. Full details of this event and a booking form are enclosed with this newsletter.*

Saturday 17th February, 2018, matinee. PLEASE NOTE THE DATE.

Special TRS group visit to a professional performance of the award-winning play 'The Onion at the End' by Roy Kendall, by The Sarah Thorne Theatre Company, in Broadstairs, Kent. Full details and a booking form will be sent to all members as soon as possible.

February - March 2018 The Winslow Boy

Directed by Rachel Kavanaugh opens at the Chichester Festival Theatre 8 - 17 February moving to Birmingham Repertory Theatre 21 February - 3 March 18.

This issue edited by Roger Mills email trsnews@virginmedia.com.
The next issue will be edited by Giles Cole email gc@gilescole.com.
Contributions are welcome, ideally before the end of December for the January edition.

AFTER THE....

Finalist Tom Killigrew reflects on the award.

All playwrights hate rejections: whatever they say or write. Having a play turned down hurts. It really hurts. Think of a knife wounding deeply somewhere between the heart and the soul and you've got the feeling. And it's worse when it happens in public, with nowhere to hide.

I was one of the fourteen writers out of seventeen short-listed contenders for The Terence Rattigan Society New Play Award 2017 who did not win and who slunk home to our garrets with only the cruel taunts of failure ringing in our ears. It doesn't matter how many times family, friends and colleagues tell us 'being short-listed is success in itself'; we know it wasn't; we know the drama behind the platitudes.

I can only speak for myself, I haven't consulted any of my writer colleagues, successful or not, but the awards ceremony made me ask myself 'why *did* I enter my play *BUST* for The Terence Rattigan competition?'

The answer for me, almost uncannily and to the letter, was echoed in the opening words of Julian Fellowes at the ceremony held on 26 September in The Ryan Theatre, Harrow School, Rattigan's alma mater. I write plays for the theatre. And by 'the theatre', I don't write plays for 60 people or less in a room above a public house. When I write a play, I imagine it on a big stage, either one of the publicly-funded venues, or more likely a production in the West End, staged by one or more private companies or individual producers: strong, deep and interesting enough to hold its own in a *commercial* theatre.

That is why I entered. The very name Rattigan was synonymous with the rather glamorous world in which he made his name at such an early stage in his career, with the overnight success *French Without Tears*. And I picked up the feeling that the judges would be looking for well-structured plays, with articulate well-rounded characters, a plot that made dramatic sense and that was capable, if you like, of 'leapfrogging' over those cockpits of filth and incomprehension we dignify with the label of 'fringe' theatre.

While I was taking my MA in Playwriting & Screenwriting, at an institution which shall remain nameless except to say that it is part of London University, a lecturer told me I should never include the word 'commercial' in a CV because it implied I was only writing for the money. Well I'm not. Although for most of my working life as a journalist I've written for money, I don't write plays to make money. I write plays because I'm driven to write them. However, for most of my colleagues, including many of the seventeen short-listed Rattigan writers, it is impossible even to make a modest living out of writing plays alone. So the prize of a professional production was another reason for submitting a script.

I entered a play which I hoped fitted the bill. In my play *BUST*, well educated people, who speak English in sentences and only use 'bad language' where necessary

to help define a character or move forward the action, talk about some of the finer things in life such as art and wine, while under the surface, emotions bubble and cruel fate in the form of illness, intervenes to spoil the dance. That's the set-up, at least.

From talking to a number of the 'Rattigan 17' who were led up to what was described to us as 'the chamber of horrors' before the awards ceremony itself, even the date 26 September was a day, once far away on the horizon, that had gradually steamed towards us out of the deep blue sea. Despite the warm welcome and kind hospitality from the TRS, the occasion was one of hope against hope, overshadowed by a very palpable fear. It wasn't made any easier by the Oscar-style presentation...third? No. Possibly.. second? No. Surely it couldn't be, I couldn't have? The tension by that stage is almost unbearable. You strain forward in your seat to hear the name. Of the winning play. The winning writer.

But it isn't me, nor the other twelve disappointed ones. What can we do but clap and smile? And for me, the rest was just a blur. I didn't hear any more words. I could hardly speak during the post-ceremony drinks. All I wanted to do, in the politest and most unobtrusive manner, was to slip away. To reflect on what might have been. To lick wounds as raw as they were real. But of course I'm sure we all wish the top three well and I hope the winner, *The Onion at The End* by Roy Kendall, has a wonderful production which leads to even greater things.

Said Giles Cole: 'It is *hard*, to write a play.' But committed writers who stay the course know that it is only by writing a play, a full-length play, that one learns to write a better play and be able to aspire to, and not just dream of, the kind of success that is inspired by Terence Rattigan. Many are called. Few are chosen. Yet if the TRS decides to continue the award I for one will be entering a hopefully better and more successful play.



The Terence Rattigan Society

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THE FINAL PLAYS

The Onion at the End Roy Kendall 2F 3M 1B

A 1930s hopeful comedy double act just about to open at the Winter Gardens in Southport in a summer show called "Follies of Parade" have to finish developing the spots required at the same time as becoming involved with the family of their landlady and her disabled son.

Going Back Roy Chatfield 2F 2M

A long term captive of freedom fighters in an unnamed country returns home to Basingstoke after seven years and tries to pick up the pieces while feeling he wants to go back to the scenes of his captivity.

Wrong Move Peter Briffa 2M

A chess-master, Temple, annoyed at what he sees as an unfair portrait in a new novel entices the author Ogden to a basement where he confines him with release only possible if he wins a game of chess. Through interminable games we explore the relationship between the two.

A Case of You Ian Collinson 1F 2M

A husband and wife are accompanied on a trip to the Lake District by a lifelong friend of the husband who is introduced as a confirmed bachelor but who later is found to be rather more than that with feelings for his friend that are not merely affection.

After the Ball Ian Grant 3F 3M

Moving forward and back in time, between 1914 and 1985 the play follows the life of William Randall an idealist International Socialist, his family, relationships and his political beliefs. William's idealism might bear fruit, but never in the present.

Bandit William Patterson 2M

Theatre of the Absurd meets the Goons and Galton & Simpson in a droll two hander about a couple of characters responding to events flashed up on a video screen while at the same time trying to decide what to do with an amputated arm.

Better Left Unsaid Tom Glover 2F 4M

Keith, fed up with his dysfunctional family, decides that it's time to end it all so he leaves letters around the house to his nearest and dearest. Prevented from carrying out his plan he returns home as the letters are discovered.

Bluey Carole Boyer 2F 2M 1M/F

Can a set of humanoid robots take the place of a human peace keeping force? Prototype 'Bluey' must be programmed and tested before mass production and implementation takes place and we join him and his minders in the lab.

Broken Wings Roisin Moriarty 2F 2M

The arrival of a 25 year old son brought up by his evangelical American father throw the life of his birth mother and her close family into turmoil as she confronts issues from her past.

Bust Tom Killigrew 3F 3M

When his wife Dilly is diagnosed with a terminal illness, top British sculptor Max is forced to reassess not only his attitude to women, but also his artistic practice. He creates a traditional portrait bust of his wife, carving it from the finest marble but his relationships with friends, colleagues and particularly women, are changed for ever.

Finders Jason Hall 2F 1M

Joan and Zeb a young couple trying to live an ethical life and bringing up their five-year-old son with the same values discover an old forgotten bank account containing millions of pounds and are forced to deal with the issues it raises and its impact on their ethical life.

Funes, the Memorious Paul Williams 2M

In a town in England after the second world war two characters return home and try to reintegrate into civilian life. Picking up the threads of home-life, family relationships, friendship, navigating work, becoming a father, dealing with family tragedy, and getting old at the same time coping with traumatic memories of the war.

Lenin in Poland John Morrison 1F 2M 1F/M

A proposal put to the Russian Government to turn the Lenin Mausoleum into an attraction as an art gallery involves Yelena the art specialist mistress of a nouveau riche Russian tycoon (who is to fund the enterprise) and Viktor, the embalmer in a series of interactions where the very nature of art is explored.

Prophecy Caroline Summerfield 3F 3M

In 1951 Catherine Cresswell is the as yet unborn child of Rosemary Farley. In the present she is a Conservative Home Secretary plotting to become Prime Minister. Both Catherine and her mother Rosemary are politically ambitious, but with very different consequences. We see Catherine pursuing her ambitions now, whilst her mother, Rosemary pursues her ambitions in 1951.

The Rattigan Affair Lynda Strudwick 2F 4M

After knocking herself unconscious Lydia, a young journalist, writing an article on Rattigan comes round to find herself in the presence of the "ghost" of Terence Rattigan himself who offers to help her with her article by introducing her to some of his major characters.

The Predator Sayan Kent 3F 1M

An inappropriate relationship between pupil and teacher raises questions of just who is the predator and who the bait as well as exploring the impact of the discovery on the teacher's mother, herself a soon to retire head teacher, and an ex-teacher journalist friend.

The Wild Boy Hugo Plowden 2F 3M 1B

The story of attempts to 'civilise' Peter the Wild Boy a feral child found in the woods in Hanover by George 1 and brought to England under the care of his wife Catherine of Ansbach and tutored by a Doctor Arbuthnot.

Casting details are for guidance only and must not be relied on. Producers interested in seeing any of the plays with a view to production should contact Barbara Longford using the contact details on page five.

AFTER THE DANCE (Theatre by the Lake, Keswick) reviewed by Paddy Briggs

It is I think a coincidence but all five of Terence Rattigan's earliest plays have been revived in the last year or so. "French Without Tears", "Flare Path", "While the Sun Shines" and "Love in Idleness" in good London or touring productions and now "After the Dance" at the splendid "Theatre by the Lake" in Keswick, Cumbria. With the exception of the first of these the plays have rarely or ever been performed since the original productions and it has all been a bit of a treat for Rattigan fans!

Since the Keswick theatre opened in 1999 it has put on in repertory over May-November seasons nearly one hundred different plays in its main and studio theatres. The standard is consistently high and there has been a good range from Shakespeare to the modern classics. "The Deep Blue Sea" was their only previous Rattigan in 2006. Having seen many of these productions over the years I can say that the theatre is a real celebration of the English professional theatre and a reminder just how good our actors and directors (etc.) are – even away from the metropolis!

"After the Dance" forms a rather sad epilogue to the inter-war years - by the late thirties their hedonism and shallowness had run its course. Noel Coward treated it humorously – "*I've been to a marvellous party*" appeared in 1938 and many of his great works of those years held a satirical mirror up to the self-indulgence of the times. Rattigan's treatment of the subject – only his second play to be performed – is a deeply serious melodrama in stark contrast to Coward and to the froth of his own hit "French Without Tears".

In "After the Dance" Rattigan treats the end of the triviality of the inter-war years with less of a shrug and with more regret than Coward. The hard-partying crowd around writer David Scott-Fowler is having a "Last Hurrah" – it is the year of Munich and can there be any doubt that this party will end with a bang not a whimper? Twenty years of abandon have taken their toll. Some of the rich gang have gone, some taken to drugs and nearly all, including Scott-Fowler, to alcohol in prodigious quantities. He and his wife Joan have danced their way, unsteadily at times, through twelve years together. He describes his getting married thus "*It was one of those things that happened; we'd been having an affair. And then one day we were a bit drunk and we thought it might be fun to get married*" Into this frenetic but complacent



Izabella Urbanowicz (Joan Scott-Fowler) and Richard Keightley (David Scott-Fowler). Photo by Keith Pattison.

world comes an earnest secretary, Peter, who is helping Scott-Fowler with his latest book and Peter's fiancée Helen. Also in the ménage is the cynical but ultimately observant sponger John – long part of the party.

In the First Act the dialogue is initially gay and frivolous but soon we are aware that Helen has a cause – to get Scott-Fowler to stop drinking and to steal him away from Joan. Joan assumes that this is a crush - a "*romantic school-girlish sort of thing*" but she underestimates her rival. David goes "on the wagon" and succumbs to Helen's charms. "*I've every intention of marrying you.*" Says Helen "*So, David, will you please marry me*" to which he replies with a sigh "*Yes, Helen. I'm afraid I will*". Then, as John Bertolini put it in "The Case for Terence Rattigan", the "*question becomes will [Helen] succeed in her rescue, or will the new generation be pulled into the vortex of self-destruction...of their predecessors...*". The rescue does succeed but the incipient love affair has immediate and

tragic consequences. We become aware that despite the superficial frivolity of their marriage Joan deeply loves David and once she has learned that she has lost her husband, and during an uproarious party, she goes to the balcony and unseen behind a curtain throws herself to her death. In the final act, and after a dressing-down from the rather puritanical John, we see David struggle with the twin pulls of desire on the one hand and honour and principle on the other. The latter wins, but it's all too late.

The almost operatic melodrama of the suicide and aftermath was handled well in the Keswick production, especially by Izabella Urbanowicz as Joan. This was a subtle and sensitive performance of great depth. Repertory involves some casting compromises but in the main the Director Philip Wilson has used his resources with skill. Charlotte Hamblin was an excellent Helen – as she had been a fine Miss Julie in Strindberg's, masterpiece the night before!

The renaissance of "After the Dance" began with a very good BBC television production in 1992 (available now on DVD) and then with a garlanded version at the National Theatre with Benedict Cumberbatch as David five years ago. The success in Keswick suggests that it deserves to join the mainstream Rattigan repertoire.

SUPPORTING A 20th CENTURY THEATRE ADVENTURE STORY

Back in 1949, probably while tussling with *Adventure Story*, writes Roger Mills Terence Rattigan still found time to donate to a project that with hindsight still seems audacious in the extreme. A complete mobile theatre which could be towed around the country to towns where playhouses had been destroyed or facilities for performance poor. Donors were asked to sponsor a seat for a minimum of 15 guineas. Sadly we don't know just how much Rattigan contributed but his name is proudly on the list.

The idea was John Ridley's, a theatre enthusiast and engineer at the Sketchley works in Hinckley. Funding was by private sponsorship organised by the actor Wilfred Harrison. The attraction, named the Century Theatre, was designed and built by John Ridley, Dick Bull and Rob Robinson in Hinckley between 1948 and 1952. The cost was £22,000 equivalent in 2016 to £692,000 adjusted for prices and over £1.9m for earnings.

While travelling showmen even with the most sophisticated equipment were still hauling round trailers full of individual components all to be assembled by hand on site from the ground up this newest ever 'booth' looked forward to modern fairground practice. On arrival on site the four 33 feet long by 10 feet wide ex-military trailers which formed the structure were set out in a parallel row. The sides of each folded out to form the floor and ceiling and the seats were then rolled out. Levelling was by hydraulic jacks; towing by ex WD Crossley, by the looks of it, Gun Tractors.

From 1952 the Century toured until changing legislation on road haulage and the increasing decrepitude of the Crossleys saw it permanently erected in 1975 at



the head of Derwentwater in the pretty town of Keswick where it was a treasured landmark for walkers on the way to Friars Crag. Mind you it hadn't ventured very far from 1972 onwards and then only in the north of England. No doubt the operators found like the theatrical booth and menagerie owners of previous times that mobile entertainment in the British climate was darned hard work.

In 1995 the Century Theatre became redundant following a Lottery grant to build a new theatre in Keswick. In the following year it was acquired by Leicestershire Museums to be based permanently at Snibston Discovery Museum, Coalville just a few miles north of its original construction site in Hinckley.

It re-opened in October 1997 and since has benefited from a new 2-storey front of house. The auditorium has recently been fully redecorated and all of the seating has undergone refurbishment.

The Century Theatre continues to be a unique and special venue that provides high quality performances, shows, live music and films for local residents. It also happens to be the largest item in the Leicestershire County Museums collection!

But had not Terence Rattigan contributed in 1948 the Century may not have been built would not have ended up in Keswick to be replaced by a marvellous new theatre which has just staged one of his biggest hits. With the royalties going to The Terence Rattigan Trust it just shows that such speculation sometime pays off!

As far as I can tell none of his work was performed while the Century was touring. The only previous production on the Theatre by the Lake was *The Deep Blue Sea* in 2006.

