



# The Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

# Version

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## Society launched at Rattigan's birthplace



**Our President at the launch party at 100 Cornwall Gardens**

It seemed entirely fitting that the first official event of The Terence Rattigan Society should be held at his birthplace; even more fitting in this centenary year that his birthplace should have been number 100, Cornwall Gardens, in South Kensington. Unfortunately, a hundred people couldn't be accommodated, but that would have been arithmetical neatness gone mad. Fifty, however, were present at the champagne reception on September 11th, amongst whom were James Cellan-Jones, a friend of Rattigan's and director of the film of *Bequest to the Nation*, Michael Imison, his one-time agent, Adrian Brown (*see the article on p3*), Lee Penhaligon, Chairman of the Sir Terence Rattigan Trust,

Elena Salvoni, noted restaurateur who served Rattigan many meals at Bianchi's, and his two biographers—and Vice-Presidents of the Society—Geoffrey Wansell and Michael Darlow. Michael gave a fascinating address and Jean Galitzine was presented with a framed certificate commemorating both the occasion and her appointment as the Society's President.



**Michael Darlow ready to sign copies of his biography of Rattigan**

Chairman Barbara Longford welcomed all those attending and proposed a toast to Sir Terence, whose plaque adorns the wall just outside the flat on the balcony. Our hostess was the current owner of the flat, Mrs Junko

Tarrant, who gave every impression of enjoying the company of fifty theatre practitioners and enthusiasts in her drawing room on a sunny Sunday afternoon. ☺

## Meanwhile at Harrow School

On 8 September Professor Dan Rebellato gave a brilliant lecture on *Rattigan & the Theatre of Emotion* at Harrow, to which members were kindly invited. 'Harrow,' he said, 'had everything Rattigan could want—theatre, politics and sex.' (*See next page...*)



**Prof Rebellato with the President and the Chairman at Harrow School**

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## The Terence Rattigan Society

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*Vice-Presidents:* Michael Darlow, Greta Scacchi, David Suchet CBE, Geoffrey Wansell



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## INTRODUCING ...our President

The bookcases in Jean's Galitzine's flat are full of imposing volumes with titles like *The Palaces of Leningrad* and *Russian Furniture of the Golden Age*. These represent one area of her life—her marriage to Prince George Galitzine and, since his death in 1992, her tireless work on behalf of the Prince George Galitzine Memorial Library in St Petersburg. The Prince was an expert on Russian art and history, and the library was founded in his honour by Jean and their daughter Katya.

Alongside these lavishly illustrated books are the *Collected Plays of Terence Rattigan*, inscribed with fond messages from the author, and these represent her earlier life as his close friend and confidante, and hostess at his parties.

On her substantial coffee table are arrayed the programmes from the various revivals of Rattigan's plays to which Jean has been invited throughout this centenary year. She also has some very evocative photographs of herself and Terry, in his garden at Sunningdale and on holiday in the South of France.

It is clear from the outset that Jean is very independent-minded, an early indication of which is the fact that she ran away from home when a young girl. Later, she went to art school in London, but it was as a fashion model that she became well-known in 1940s and 50s, in which capacity she travelled the world.

There was a moment in her career when she was almost tempted into becoming an actress too. The legendary Broadway producer Hal Prince told her she had perfect pitch and encouraged her to audition for a part in the musical version of *French Without Tears* in

1960. She got the part, having taken lessons with a singing teacher she met whilst appearing on the TV panel game *What's My Line?* However, she then got cold feet and pulled out, which was perhaps a wise move since the show, which went by its original title of *Joie de Vivre*, was an unqualified disaster. It ran for four performances, and was Rattigan's biggest flop.

Jean is revelling in the Rattigan revival, and delighted that his plays, most of which she saw first time around, are being properly rediscovered by a new generation of theatregoers. She was the automatic choice to be the President of the Society, and we are thrilled that she has agreed to take it on. It is a role she has already begun to undertake with relish. ☞

## Meanwhile at Harrow School *cont.*

Setting Rattigan's life in context, Prof Rebellato began by saying that he was born in the year that Frances Hodgson's Burnett's *The Secret Garden* was published and that he died in in the year that the Sex Pistols released their first album. Amongst many pertinent observations, we were reminded that Rattigan flirted with the Communist Party, that his pacifist views were changed by the war and that he has the distinction of having two West End runs of over 1000 performances each (*French Without Tears* and *While the Sun Shines*).

Rebellato's main theme, however, was Rattigan's mastery of subtext, his exquisite sense of rhythm, dramatic shape and narrative, and his compassion for life's outsiders and those whose desires don't fit the norms of society. ☞

*Dan Rebellato is himself a playwright and lectures in drama at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has also written the introductions to the Rattigan plays newly published by Nick Hern Books.*

# A Conversation with Adrian Brown

It is an unfortunate but inevitable fact that in a year when we are celebrating the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Terence Rattigan's birth, there is a diminishing number of people still with us who were close friends and contemporaries of his. One such is, of course, our new President, the delightful Princess George Galitzine, whose friendship with Rattigan is well documented, and another is Adrian Brown, theatre and TV director and poet.



Adrian at home with his Emmy

A puckish figure with a razor-sharp wit, Adrian studied English at Exeter College, Oxford, under such luminaries as Nevill Coghill, JRR Tolkien and CS Lewis. He first met Rattigan at an Oxford 'smoker' in December 1951 when he was to have played Buttons in a mock *Cinderella* pantomime written by Michael Codron (who went on to great theatrical success as a producer). Adrian was displaced at the last minute, however, by a young man who was considered to be more 'below stairs' in his general demeanour and delivery. By way of apology for being unceremoniously dropped from the cast, Adrian was seated in the best seats for the performance and thus found himself next to the very elegantly dressed and immediately recognisable figure of the great playwright of the day, himself a former Oxford undergraduate.

Cutting straight to the heart of the matter, Adrian turned to him and said, "You're Terence Rattigan, aren't you?" – to which there could only be one honest reply. "I'd like to shake you by the hand," continued Adrian, and was duly accorded that privilege. And so the relationship may have remained – a single handshake

and an evening's company at an Oxford revue – had chance not intervened some three years later when Adrian was in Paris with the Marquis de Cuevas Ballet Company. Adrian was not so much a dancer, he graciously explained at our recent meeting, but more of a stage manager who could move well. He was sometimes called upon to make an entrance or two, to play a pedlar or a passer-by, but was more often employed on the management side of the company. Anyhow, there he was in Paris, in the *Boeuf Sur Le Toit estaminet*, still smarting from being punched in the dressing room by Nijinski's sister, who had taken exception to his entrance being a bar too late in that evening's performance.

It is part of Adrian's style to name-drop quite unashamedly, as can be seen from the list of Oxford professors, so the mention of Nijinski's sister almost passes without comment.

In the same establishment, recovering from another day of having his screenplay for *The Deep Blue Sea* vandalised by the film's director, Anatole Litvak, was Rattigan. In Rattigan's words, he had been "brutally Litvak'd all day". Adrian reintroduced himself, Rattigan politely assured him that he remembered him, and so began a friendship that was to last many years, to the extent that Adrian was the partial inspiration for the young dancer Ron Vale in Rattigan's play *Variation on a Theme*.

Incidentally, this play was given a very good rehearsed reading at Chichester in August. It was the first public performance since 1958, the original production having garnered some of Rattigan's least favourable reviews. One could see why: despite the famous emergence of the 'angry young men' of the Royal Court just two years earlier, Rattigan's drama, based on *La Dame Aux Camélias*, was unapologetically old-fashioned and set amongst the moneyed classes in a villa in the South of France. It would clearly have jarred with the new wave of British drama, and the critics had a field day. "As far as I could see the star of the show was Norman Hartnell (the costume designer)," wrote Kenneth Tynan; "I didn't spot much real acting going on, but then there wasn't much reality there to begin with."

Adrian first directed a production of a Rattigan play – *The Sleeping Prince* – in Guildford in the 1950s, in which the leading lady was squeezed into the dress worn by Vivien Leigh in the original production. This dress was personally obtained by Rattigan from HM Tennant as a favour to Adrian.

It was particularly apt that the celebrations of the Rattigan centenary year began last January with a production of a little known Rattigan play – *Less Than Kind* – directed by Adrian at the Jermyn Street Theatre.

The play had only previously been performed in a much altered version – under the title *Love in Idleness* – by Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in the 1940s. Thus Rattigan’s own ‘angry young man play’ was turned into a star vehicle for two middle-aged romantic leads. Adrian restored the original text and the production was such a hit that a regional tour is being planned for next spring.

Adrian was featured in the recent series of radio talks on Rattigan given by friends and contemporaries – as indeed was Jean Galitzine – and in the BBC4 documentary broadcast in July. He is proud to have known Rattigan and to have been numbered amongst his closest circle of friends, but is also quick to point out that he has had other achievements in his life – his TV career for a start, best exemplified perhaps by the ‘Emmy’ he won for directing *The Belle of Amherst* and his BAFTA nomination for *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*.

He has also published two volumes of verse, and been dubbed the Grand Master of the Knights of Verse for the Eccentric Club of Great Britain. There is little that can be said to follow that. So Adrian himself follows it with one of his favourite anecdotes.

He tells of a dinner in a Russian restaurant, attended by himself, Rattigan, John Gielgud, Esme Percy and a Swiss publisher. Percy, a wonderful actor of the old school, had a glass eye and at one point in the evening it fell out into his soup. He calmly plucked the eye out of the soup bowl, wiped it on his napkin and replaced it, while everyone else pretended not to notice. Adrian remembers thinking at the time: “Is this what the high life is like?”

His top floor flat in Edith Grove certainly suggests a life lived to the full. It is crammed with beautiful and exotic artworks, furniture and intricately decorated ceilings, each of which is suggestive of a well-remembered moment or episode from his past. It is as if he has gathered his treasures around him to guard against the encroachment of a much less civilised age than the one he recalls with effortless vivacity. ☞



## Recent Productions and Coming Soon

Terence Davies’s film of *The Deep Blue Sea*, starring Rachel Weisz, Simon Russell Beale and Tom Hiddleston has a special screening on 27 October to close the BFI London Film Festival. It will open in UK cinemas on 25 November.

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In Chichester, *The Browning Version*—in tandem with David Hare’s new play *South Downs*—finished its run at the Minerva Theatre on 8 October. Directed by Angus Jackson and starring Nicholas Farrell and Anna Chancellor as the Crocker-Harrises, it was a complete sell-out and critical hit. Charles Spencer in *The Daily Telegraph* called the production “well nigh faultless”, Libby Purves in *The Times* referred to “a perfectly paced and powerful rendering of this remarkable play”, while for Michael Billington in *The Guardian* it was “as good a revival as you could wish for”.

☞

Another excellent production of *The Browning Version* was presented at Harrow School by the Old Harrovian Society in September, with John D Collins as The Crock.

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A Christmas Cocktail Party for founder members is planned for 6 December in K5, Rattigan’s set of rooms in Albany. Anthony Fletcher hosts, and Geoffrey Wansell will speak and sign copies of his biography, *Terence Rattigan*. See flyer for details.

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*The Art of Concealment*, a play about the life of Terence Rattigan, premiered at the Brighton Festival fringe in May, opens at the Jermyn Street Theatre in January 2012. See the enclosed flyer for details.

## The Rattigan Theatre?

The campaign to name a theatre after Terence Rattigan is gathering pace. Following mention of it in *The Daily Telegraph* on 26 September, when Charles Spencer called for the Duchess Theatre to be so renamed, there was a letter from the Society in *The Times* the following day to similar effect. It is a cause which also finds great favour with our Vice-President Geoffrey Wansell, who started the ball rolling earlier this centenary year.

In his *Telegraph* article, Charles Spencer says: “The Duchess, which staged the premiere of one of his greatest plays, *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952), which ran there for more than 500 performances, as well as a touching later work, *In Praise of Love* (1973), would be a good choice. I urge Nica Burns, the Duchess’s co-owner and chief executive, to consider renaming the theatre the Rattigan as a matter of urgency.” ☞

Members are encouraged to submit news, views, letters and anecdotes to this newsletter. Please contact the editor via email (gc@gilescote.com) or phone (07957 135570). The deadline for the next edition is Friday 16 December. ☞