



# The Rattigan

The Newsletter of  
The Terence Rattigan Society

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## Version

## Our President honoured



Photo: Tony Cole

We congratulate our President on becoming a knight of the realm in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to drama and to charity over a career spanning 50 years. An honour greatly deserved. Sir David has many interests, especially photography, and is seen here in 2019 signing copies of his book *Behind the Lens: My Life*. He is also President of the Leica Society and of the Inland Waterways Association as well as being a Trustee of the Garrick Club. We send warmest greetings to him and to Sheila, Lady Suchet, along with many thanks for his charming personal Christmas video message to us. We can only hope that circumstances will allow us to toast them both at a future Society function. ☞

### Editorial:

## The future for live theatre

It always sounded like the year of perfect vision, 2020, but instead we got something even more unexpected. We got a global pandemic - and that has made us rethink many aspects of the ways in which we live and the ways in which we communicate. It has forced upon us the necessity to re-examine many of the things which were taken for granted, such as family gatherings, shopping, train travel, and of course leisure and entertainment. This has resulted in the worst crisis to hit the theatre, in particular, since the second world war - and even that didn't darken theatres in the way that the pandemic has.

But the theatre world has adapted or, more accurately, is in the process of adapting. All is not doom and gloom. Yes, theatre practitioners of all kinds - producers, actors, directors, musicians, designers, writers, technicians, stage management and other backstage staff - have lost earnings on a massive scale; redundancies have abounded despite the furlough schemes and the financial assistance finally extended to some of the self-employed, and in almost every conceivable way the situation could not have been worse. Social distancing and other Covid-19 requirements placed huge constraints on producers and theatre managements, so as to render any kind of performance non-viable in normal financial terms.

Against those odds how could any theatregoer expect to see anything like a return to live performance? Live (and recorded) streaming of performances to home screens is all very well, and certainly an initial answer, but in an effort to get something up and running managements missed a trick by making many of these free to view - or at least that was an opinion expressed during a webinar in November by Nica Burns, [Cont. on back page...](#)

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## The Terence Rattigan Society

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Editor's note: Any views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual author and do not necessarily represent the views of The Terence Rattigan Society or its Committee.

### Introducing our new Events Secretary

## Phill Ward

Signing up to the TRS, on the day it was announced, Phill was surprised to learn that he was joining a brand-new special interest society. A quick web-search confirmed just how many similar supporter clubs exist to celebrate playwrights, artists, composers et al. He wondered why it was that a major writer for the British stage had to wait until his centenary for an organised band of admirers to celebrate his work. TR's temporary decline is well documented—and it was this brief period, perhaps, that affected latent desires to champion his life and writings.

Phill's own initiation in "the aesthetic of TR" began with a schoolboy viewing of the Asquith/Donat film of *The Winslow Boy* on TV. Later an adult encounter with the Almeida's celebrated 1991 production of *The Deep Blue Sea* immediately established his awareness of the emotional depth and quality of TR's writing, which germinated the seed that developed into a lifelong attachment to that particular play. Previously he had never experienced a desire to return to any production multiple times.

He grew up in Essex, educated in largely academically undistinguished and uncultured circumstances. His rescue was music – specifically singing of the church and choir variety. His hometown sported a notable boys' choir at the time and singing with it gave him juvenile experience of the professional music world. He took part in countless London concerts alongside occasional jaunts to perform in European concert halls. At that impressionable age, he fell under the spell of the conductor. Most kids' heroes are footballers or pop singers, he says, but his were those chaps on the podium with the stick. Living close to the capital he would regularly pack himself off to concerts and the opera. Via the latter he would occasionally see West End plays once he discovered midweek and Saturday matinees: a play in the afternoon, an opera at night.



Then he started working – a few vaguely arts-related posts – including dogsbodying at Wigmore Hall and the Barbican Centre before and whilst it opened: he was on duty when HM The Queen cut the ribbon! And he was at the first night *Les Misérables*. This led to what he considers

as his first real job in the Arts – at the Royal Festival Hall – just at the time it was taking off as an arts centre welcoming visitors all day, following 30 years as a place one didn't consider entering before the concert hour.

Briefly Phill was general manager of the King's Head— a character-building experience and an opportunity to experience producing theatre at the edge – the edge of financial viability!

Speaking of finance, several years followed when he often had to engage with balance sheets at the national funding body Arts Council, England in the Music Department, with specific responsibility for Opera. It was a good time to be there – with a substantial increase in Government arts support from Blair's cabinet supported by—just imagine—an Arts Minister with considerable knowledge of the subject. Salutations, Lord Smith! It was a great opportunity for Phill to see and assess the work of our opera and music theatre companies across the nation. Whenever possible on out-of-town visits he would fit in a play or two at one of our myriad excellent regional theatres.

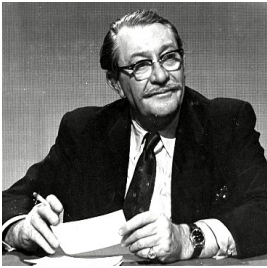
Though he is not American, these days he finds himself seeing Rattigan through US eyes and ears. This is entirely connected to how he now spends his time professionally. For over a decade he has run London Arts Discovery – a niche incoming tour operator specialising in theatre tours for the North American groups recruited from the big cultural centres and regional theatres across America and Canada.

**Continued on p7...**

# The age of the 'telephoney'?

*With reference to the Society's online reading of Rattigan's 'Heart to Heart' on 20.1.2021  
Roger Mills describes the original 1962 television production*

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Gilbert Harding. There's a name to conjure with. He died before I was aware of him as a figure but he's always fascinated me. I think I own every book he wrote and every one written about this complex and tormented

man. Harding was a big bankable star yet if - and it's a big if - he's remembered at all today it's merely for his irascibility and outright rudeness on panel games like *What's My Line?* and that wretched John Freeman *Face to Face* interview. (Yes, Freeman pushed Gilbert hard on his private life but the experience didn't kill him as seems to be commonly believed - he saw and approved the thing before it was shown. He could have died at any time he was so ill.)

Gilbert intrigues me as an early and high profile figure who came from (almost) nowhere to be made by television. He was, as the saying goes, famous for being famous, a phrase coined, I think, to describe Isobel Barnett, another example of the breed. John Freeman's interview exposed Harding as the miserable man he was, but in-depth study reveals also desperate guilt at being paid huge sums by the BBC for what he sees as trivia. His own description was a 'telephoney'.

Which brings me to Rattigan's David Mann (Kenneth More), the interviewer in the Freeman mould in the 1962 television play *Heart to Heart* - maybe the most significant of the playwright's later works. Ashamed at deserting academia (the best political scientist of his generation) to grill folk on the box, he sees himself as a bit of a telephoney - though like Harding he likes banking the cheques.

Mann has information which exposes a well-known politician (Ralph Richardson) as at best foolish, at worst a fraudster, which he threatens to use during a live television interview unless the minister resigns first. (That's all you're getting of the plot - the film is on the DVD box set.) Michael Darlow reckons that the subject matter was influenced both by the Gilbert Harding *Face to Face* and Richard Nixon's 'Checkers' broadcast and that's clearly true. But scenes of interviewing on live TV go alongside a dissection of private life, character and motivation and, as so often with Rattigan, the different kinds of love. That said, as if to emphasize that this is a television

play, the mechanics of television are shown in all their detail - there's an almost documentary feel to these sections - and in 1962 these insights, and those into the everyday editorial choices and pressures, would have been new to many viewers. Surprising and shocking too maybe. Location film inserts and exteriors of the new BBC TV Centre are used extensively. The production by Alvin Rakoff is stylish and goes at a pace which makes the hundred-odd minutes pass without any feeling of longueurs.

Kenneth More takes a part originally slated, I read, for Richard Burton and I think the latter would have given us a very different Mann. Yet More is entirely believable as the diffident former academic thrust into the limelight; 'besotted' with his wife but finding his intellectual soulmate in the production assistant on the series (Wendy Craig before she was 'typed'). Failing to hide a borderline drink problem, he's a little mystified as to how he's got where he is and whether he likes it or not.

In 2020 Ralph Richardson's stunningly impressive Sir Stanley Johnson seems oddly up to the minute, even leaving aside the happy happenstance of the surname. One supposes he started out in political life with some sort of principles, and maybe he still holds them deep down, but the real priority is number one. Now as a cabinet minister he's an almost completely artificial creation. From the homely 'man of the people', cat-loving common man to the good degree from the University of Liverpool carefully concealed behind a façade of the 'University of Life' he is another phoney. Rattigan gives us a politician for the television age, who knows more than his interlocutor just how to make the camera love you. Michael Darlow reckons he's shocked by Mann into making a revelation of his misconduct. I don't agree—he knew what he was going to do. It was damage limitation and it works - the public are seemingly behind him.

In the final scene a dismayed Mann is assured that Johnson might have survived but will never now be PM. These days I wouldn't be so sure. Back then a lot of people wrote off Nixon too. Once again Rattigan is seeing down the years. ☞

*For the most interesting insights into Gilbert Harding at the time of his high profile I recommend the Stephen Grenfell edited **Gilbert Harding by his Friends** published just after his death. It's available at very reasonable prices from the usual online second-hand booksellers. RM.*

# The art of survival in the theatre

by Michael Wheatley-Ward

*Our Theatre Liaison committee member Michael Wheatley-Ward (pictured below in his box office) runs the Sarah Thorne Theatre in Broadstairs, Kent, where the winning play in the Society's new play competition, 'The Onion at the End', was premiered in 2018. It is a community theatre with a varied programme and, like every other theatre, it was hit hard during the pandemic. 2020 gave Michael the opportunity to re-examine the role of theatre and his own part in it, as well as rediscover his domestic life! This is an article he wrote in September in response to the pandemic—**Staying Positive During Covid**—and on the opposite page is a follow-up interview conducted in December. As you will notice, things changed somewhat between those two months...*

I was recently asked why I am so positive about live theatre. Well, I am a fatalist and often Mother Nature or fate bungs a spanner in the works. If you read history, which in my opinion, alongside Domestic Science, should be increased in our schools, you will know that Shakespeare had plagues which closed theatres, there was the big typhoid epidemic in the early 1800s and of course the flu epidemic after the First World War. I will not go into conspiracy theories but whatever brought about the current pandemic, fate decreed it.

In March 2020, when theatres were closing and there was a lack of backbone amongst the public, when they panic-bought everything in the shops, I thought 'Well, let's be positive and put the panto posters up'. One school group said to me 'We now have something to look forward to'.

We plan our pantomimes eighteen months in advance, but this time we might not get final clearance from government till November, so we will 'box and cox' accordingly with cast and finances. We had put our pantomime on sale with Ticket-source with a minimum number of seats, but if we were allowed to increase them to the full

house we would do so. Unfortunately, our landlords Kent County Council closed down the theatre alongside the Adult Education Centre we share till next year. Therefore we are performing a small version around local schools and will attempt something at another site during Christmas.

I notice quite a few producers coming to the rescue with small-scale pantomimes to fill gaps. I do not blame larger producers for cancelling. Pantomimes cost as much as a small West

End musical to stage and it makes commercial sense to pull up stumps and lie fallow for a year. After all, commercial producers can put losses against profits which is what our small unsubsidised theatre will do.

I appreciate some strands of theatre that are dependent on grants might fail, but if they are putting on what the public wants to see they should survive in some form. It is the zombie companies that will fail, unless they are lucky enough to obtain the Government Cultural Arts hand outs!

So stay positive, look on the bright side—we will survive in live theatre. You cannot put us down this easily, Mr. Covid.



**GC:** Michael, you kindly offered us the article on staying positive during the pandemic because you are obviously very much in the direct firing line of theatre closures, and your perspective is one of a local regional theatre, the Sarah Thorne Theatre in Broadstairs, rather than a major West End or big city theatre, about which we have heard rather a lot. First of all, could you tell us how many scheduled performances have had to be cancelled?

**MWW:** We were just coming to the end of our Spring season so only eight events were cancelled. However plans for the next nine months including our Summer Rep Season were put on hold, then cancelled. This only left the pantomime as an aiming point. We were planning for *Puss in Boots* to open on December the 8<sup>th</sup> but, sadly, that had to go as well, as did the plans for a school direct pantomime.

**GC:** Have you had to lay off any staff or are most of them volunteers?

**MWW:** Our business model is simple. There are only two working directors and other paid staff are taken on for shows only, and our volunteers work alongside them.

**GC:** Have you been able to make use of the furlough scheme, or the support scheme for freelancers?

**MWW:** Well, my business partner and I managed to be furloughed but as we do not pay rates we only managed a small discretionary grant. The other loans and cultural grants are a sore point. It was £50k or more to apply for via the Arts Council, a larger sum than we need, plus we had to declare we would be bankrupt which would be a lie for us. I am meeting my MP to discuss what I think is a very serious gap in funding smaller theatres and producers, plus self employed artists and technical staff.

**GC:** I obviously wish you well with that. Meanwhile, have you been able to make any other use of the theatre?

**MWW:** Again, our business model is based on the other users of the site paying the building costs, we just provide the theatre productions. As Kent County Council - our landlords - closed down this entire multi-purpose site the building is a 'Sleeping Beauty'. When we knew that we could not stage the pantomime we just buckled down and accepted our fate and now plan to re-open next Spring.

**GC:** Will the lockdown affect your council grant?

**MWW:** We pride ourselves on having been self-sufficient for nearly fourteen years. We have project grants but not revenue. We have re-invested profits back into the stage and other equipment including seating - nearly £80k! In fact, a retired head of the Arts Council said we were the ideal business model for smaller theatres.

**GC:** That's something of an accolade.

**MWW:** Well, yes. Accolades are nice, of course, but he is a retired Arts Council head!

**GC:** How have you filled your time while the theatre has been dark? Any long-neglected projects to be attended to?

**MWW:** Initially we took advantage of the lockdown to clear out my office at home, along with other redundant items, and started to re-decorate inside and out. Apart from Sarah Thorne and the TRS I am also Chairman of

**MICHAEL FLAGG PRESENTS**

# **SURVIVING IN THE THEATRE**

A Biography of  
**Michael Wheatley-Ward**

Compiled by Michael J Flagg  
and edited by James Bellamy and Peter Such

Michael's biography was mentioned in the January 2020 issue (No. 31) and is available for purchase on Amazon and at major bookshops such as Waterstones and Foyles

two local property-owning charity concerns and the annual Dickens Festival in June. Then the local Residents Association that run the beautiful Georgian Square in Ramsgate where I live asked me to help out as Acting Chairman, so I have been busy on that as well. The weeks have gone quite quickly.

**GC:** How do you think the lockdown will affect audiences in the future - will they be more reluctant to venture out to the theatre? Or will they be desperate for live entertainment?

**MWW:** My gut feeling is that there is a great deal of unspent money out there for people to use up. As I am often asked 'When will the theatre re-open?' I am sure audiences will return, but obviously we must put on what people want to see. We are a known drama house and we have quite a number of smaller quality productions around to choose from, plus we produce in-house, as you know from the winner of the TRS Play Competition. Another draw is our local community work and that is queuing up. I think so long as we are not greedy with seat prices all will be well. I'm a fatalist and will accept the future as it happens. We are lucky we do not have shareholders - we are our own bosses. I think the zombie arts groups that always depend on grant aid will be the problem area unless they adapt.

**Continued on p7...**

# Rattigan – a Soviet perspective

by James Heyworth-Dunne

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Terence Rattigan would have joined the deservedly illustrious playwrights whose works were banned in Stalinist Russia. His plays would have been perceived to convey no improving social message, to portray a social class fit only for annihilation and to have been besotted by erotic love that had no purpose other than self-gratification.

Erotic love offended. It was considered decadent and irrelevant compared to the overwhelmingly important economic and political challenges being faced. Sexual activity was seen as a resource that needed to be harnessed to the needs of the State or it would be wasted. The uncontrolled sexual urge was feared as leading to depravity and crime. A commission was set up by Lenin to seek ways to harness sexual activity. This remained a State preoccupation.

Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov's masterpiece, *I Want A Baby*, is considered one of the foremost dramatic works of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was ready for production in 1927 but banned. It was not performed until 1990.

Tretyakov is undoubtedly one of 'the greats'. He collaborated closely with other contemporary 'greats' for the whole of his career. He worked with the poet Mayakovsky, whose poem *Lenin*, written a few months after Lenin's death, remained unsurpassed as a eulogy of the leader. He also worked with the internationally renowned theatre producer and innovator, Meyerhold, and the cinema giant Eisenstein, who produced *Battleship Potemkin*, *Ivan the Great* and many more. Meyerhold and Eisenstein produced all Tretyakov's plays.

Tretyakov was a master of theatrical innovation. His dramatic and staging techniques created an electric pace and appeal. He pioneered what he called 'industrial art', that is, plain, direct representation, with no character description or development, that sharply impacted his audiences.

In *I Want A Baby*, Milda, a party official, wishes to produce the perfect proletarian baby but without

a love match that she considers to be superfluous and undesirable. At many levels and through many different actors the play unfolds the complexity of the aims and the perversities of Soviet society. Towards the end of the play, in a baby contest, Milda's child shares first place with a child whom Milda considers to be unworthy. The next place is won by the child of a drug addict. All are hailed as 'heroes of the revolution', an inconclusive ending except as signifying that the challenge to create the perfect Soviet society remained incomplete.

*I Want A Baby* was banned for undermining Soviet family values. Meyerhold argued that it had been produced as a contribution to the debate on the need to control sexual activity.

If it is correct to interpret Catherine Winslow's denial of romantic opportunity with Sir Robert Morton as the result of dedication to her social cause, there may be an extremely tenuous and entirely unintended comparison between Catherine and Milda. However, and for example, Tretyakov's Milda and Rattigan's Diana and Jacqueline in *French Without Tears*, Alma Rattenbury, Hester Collyer, and the sexually and romantically disappointed Millie Crocker-Harris were polar extremes. Milda could not have inhabited the world or the psyches of Rattigan's heroines any more than these could have inhabited Milda's.

No doubt without expressly intending to do so, Mayakovsky wrote what we might see as a sequel to the unfinished business in *I Want A Baby*. *The Bedbug* was published in 1929. The hero, on his wedding day, was accidentally frozen in a basement. He is revived fifty years later, by which time the perfect Soviet society has been created. There is no more poverty or destitution, illness or natural disasters, crime, drunkenness or depravity. The hero and this new world are entirely disconnected. The hero is exhibited in a zoo as an example of the decadence of the bygone era. The title of the play comes from a bedbug that was frozen and then revived at the same time as the hero, becoming the



Sergei Mikhailovich Tretyakov

hero's only companion in the zoo.

Rattigan did not offer to us his vision of the future. His depictions of the intensities and complications of the present were his preoccupation and more than sufficient to cause us rapture. Tretyakov was arrested without explanation in 1937, another innocent victim of Stalin's Great Terror. Tretyakov killed himself in prison by hurling himself to the ground from a fourth floor landing.

In 1930, shortly after his poem *Lenin* had been read to an audience that included Stalin at the Bolshoi Theatre and received a five minute standing ovation, Mayakovsky shot himself in the heart. Mayakovsky had been covertly accused of 'Trotskyism', a deadly offence. Meyerhold was arrested, tortured and murdered in 1940, during Stalin's Great Purge. Eisenstein died in 1948 of natural causes, an exception in a period when "every thinking man knew he could be shot at any time". For all his anguishes, Terence Rattigan led a charmed life by comparison. ✎

## Introducing Phill Ward

*Continued from page 2*

Many of his clients are serious theatre aficionados, keen to see the best of the British stage.

He vividly remembers the wonder with which the NT's *After the Dance* was received by the numerous groups he took to see it – demonstrated by the debate afterwards at the post-show discussions organised with the director and some of the cast. Phill's work with LAD is largely how he got to know our esteemed founder Barbara Longford; they have occasionally discussed and planned events of mutual benefit to both the TRS and his American groups. He regularly takes groups on visit to places of historical and cultural significance – for instance to Rudyard Kipling's home in East Sussex and to private country houses for a Downton-esque evening with the Aristocracy. The Garrick is a favourite haunt with frequent requests for return visits.

2020 has been as bleak a year in the travel world as it has in theatre; however he firmly intends that LAD, which celebrates 40 years in operation in 2021, will continue to delight our American friends. He also hopes that when planned ideas for outings and events for TRS members can be delivered he will be able to meet many more of you next year and beyond. ✎

## The art of survival in the theatre

*Continued from page 5*

**GC:** Under social distancing how many can you seat in the theatre? Can that be in any way viable?

**MWW:** On most shows we can operate on a lower capacity as we move the seats around anyway, but for pantomime where we make our profits we really do need near capacity. If not, then we just cut our cloth accordingly. I can tell you one thing - we will survive and help re-build live theatre.

**GC:** Absolutely! But how much do you think the theatre's future will depend on the lifting of social distancing?

**MWW:** I think your previous question answers that. One area that has affected us is the growing on-line systems. We are not going to be opening daytime Box Office as the passing trade was dwindling fast before the lockdowns. We are looking at extending our agency systems in local shops, though, and extending prior to show Box Office times. The world is changing and we have to go with it.

**GC:** The theatre aside, how has the lockdown affected you on a personal level?

**MWW:** Well, my wife Terrie and I have been married for 32 years and this is the longest time we have spent together. Apart from the odd moment or two life has been marvellous. I think having sorted out the house we would like more holidays away from this area. I do miss our trips to London, taking in a museum, shows, and a good lunch, but hopefully that will return. Summing it all up, I have re-found a personal life alongside theatre - which really has been my mistress!

**GC:** Well, that's a bonus for sure! I hope Terrie agrees with you! Finally, what is the general feeling about the pandemic in your area? Are people abiding by the guidelines? Are masks being worn and so on?

**MWW:** The problem around here, I feel, is the lack of hospitals. We did have a fever isolation hospital and several small ones. They have all been lumped together into one big Hospital in Margate. The stroke unit is now in Ashford, thirty miles away. We all know that urgent medical cases are being rationed to support the crisis but I do wonder if the management decisions of the NHS want looking into. The staff are excellent but then most front line staff are in shops, railways, pubs etc. Masks are being worn but the general feeling is we hope this is the last lockdown or the economy is in dire problems for future generations.

**GC:** Yes, I fear for those who will still be repaying the cost of this crisis in years to come. But, to end on a more cheerful note, it's reassuring to see such determination to survive and to keep live theatre going, as you clearly exhibit, Michael. And I think that calls for another plug for your book *Surviving in the Theatre* by Michael Flagg, which contains much of your wide-ranging experience as a theatre practitioner over the years. Very best of luck for the Sarah Thorne Theatre and many thanks for your time. ✎

## The future for live theatre

*Continued from front page*

the prima donna of theatre managers, whose company Nimax owns no fewer than six West End theatres. Once you get something for nothing, you are reluctant to pay anything subsequently, however appealing the production. And the modest fees that could have been charged would have not only brought a trickle of cash into an income-starved industry, but would have established a useful precedent. But Nica Burns is 'a force of nature' (to quote one eminent producer amongst our ranks) and her general message about the future of live theatre was uplifting and positive.

All her shows had to close in the first lockdown but in November, during the second lockdown, she was bubbling with enthusiasm about the 23 shows she was then booking, and tickets were 'flying out of the box office'. Admittedly, they were not necessarily full-blown shows with extended runs, but short-run entertainments which could be mounted under Covid guidelines and for which she was prepared to lose money or, at best, break even. Her view was that it was important to keep audiences used to the idea of still being able to go to the theatre, even if there were more empty seats than filled seats. No doubt this approach will pay off. She is very much an 'up-and-at-'em' kind of producer.

This is being written towards the end of November, before we know whether we will actually come out of lockdown after 2 December, so everything is still to be determined in that regard, but the sheer ebullience and determination shown by Nica Burns a few days ago is very persuasive and it seems likely that her attitude will rub off on other major producers who have every need to get theatres open again and theatre practitioners back in business. There will be sacrifices, beyond those already made, but if other producers are prepared, as she is, to lose more money in the short term for a more long-term benefit, then audiences will respond. Theatre is a symbiotic experience: performers and audience need each other and that relationship will continue whatever the deprivations.

This also means that much serious thinking will be done in terms of the whole theatre experience. As an example, Nica Burns pointed out she and her staff had to make a big decision regarding the planned refurbishment of the Lyric Theatre in Shaftesbury Avenue. £12 million was earmarked for the work, but when all theatres had to close it became a question of either go ahead and spend the money on the building, or scale back the plans drastically and spend money on protecting people and their jobs. The result of the vote taken by her hundred-plus staff was no surprise - £4.5 million was spent on the building, and the remainder on people. Other such major decisions will no doubt become

necessary as the theatre industry re-examines itself. The physical experience of being in a theatre will need adjustment. Bar service is already being replaced by drinks being brought to your seat; exits and entrances are being streamlined; physical tickets may well disappear altogether. The big question then will be: will ticket prices have to increase to claw back a little of the lost revenues and the loss of seating capacity?

Perhaps things will have moved on by the time you read this article, but in late November it is still very much an open question. It certainly seems that socially distanced audiences run counter to the whole point of a communal experience, so such measures can surely only be seen as an interim procedure. Let us hope that in the first quarter of 2021 the availability of vaccines, coupled with a downturn in fatalities, will create a new perspective not just on theatregoing but on the whole fabric of social living – and social living without shared live entertainment would be a poor existence indeed. ☞

**Editorial footnote:** *In the same webinar in which Nica Burns was giving her views on the future of live theatre, the Chairman of English National Opera and the London Coliseum, Dr Harry Brünjes, quoted from 'The Winslow Boy' by saying that he was determined "to do right by the company" and he made a point of referencing Terence Rattigan in that regard.*

*Has anyone ever considered adapting a Rattigan play into an opera, one wonders? Which one would make the best operatic subject? It would probably have to be one of his more sweeping epic dramas, perhaps 'Ross' (Lawrence of Arabia) or 'Adventure Story' (Alexander the Great). Or even 'Bequest to the Nation' (Nelson and Emma Hamilton). And there is always his adaptation, with John Gielgud, of 'A Tale of Two Cities'. Or perhaps your editor is not sufficiently au fait with the world of opera and such a project has already seen the light of day, in which case a reader will no doubt be in touch! But Rattigan set to music—any composers out there?*

*Or perhaps a musical rather than a full-blooded opera? TR attempted that himself with 'Joie de Vivre' based on 'French Without Tears' but you will remember what happened to that. Four performances and then final curtain. Could anyone else do better? We could have some catchy little tunes like 'Let's Knock the Crock' or 'Himmler or Something Sim'lar' from 'The Browning Version'; or perhaps 'Separate Tables' could be reconfigured as 'Sunset Beauregard'. Or perhaps too many works of pure artistry have been transformed into too many second-rate pale comparisons already. ☞*