

The Rattigan

The Newsletter of
The Terence Rattigan Society

ISSUE NO. 42 NOVEMBER 2022

Version

Farewell to our Chairman

Denis Moriarty succeeded the inestimable Barbara Longford as the Chairman of the Society only three years ago, but brought with him such generosity of spirit, encouragement and what can only be described as *joie de vivre* that it felt that we—especially those of us on the committee—had basked in his benign presence for far longer.

Denis was a man steeped in culture: for 32 years he was a BBC television producer in Music and Arts, his most notable achievements including the documentary series *Six English Towns*, with Alec Clifton-Taylor, *Face the Music* with Joseph Cooper, Joyce Grenfell and Robin Ray, *One Hundred Great Paintings*, *Edwin Lutyens Master Architect*, *The Triumph of the West* and films on Egypt in the *Chronicle* and *Timewatch* series.

From this it can be seen that his passions were largely musical and architectural, especially opera and especially churches. He sang for some years in the Philharmonia Chorus, and indeed can still be seen on YouTube singing his own version of *I'm a Gnu* by Flanders and Swann.

He won a scholarship to read history at St John's College, Oxford, but deferred it to do his National Service with the Royal Berkshire Regi-

ment in Germany, returning to take up his place in 1956. He was a very keen university performer, his fellow artistes including such notables as Dudley Moore. During our Society Conference at Trinity, Oxford in 2015, Denis led us on a tour of

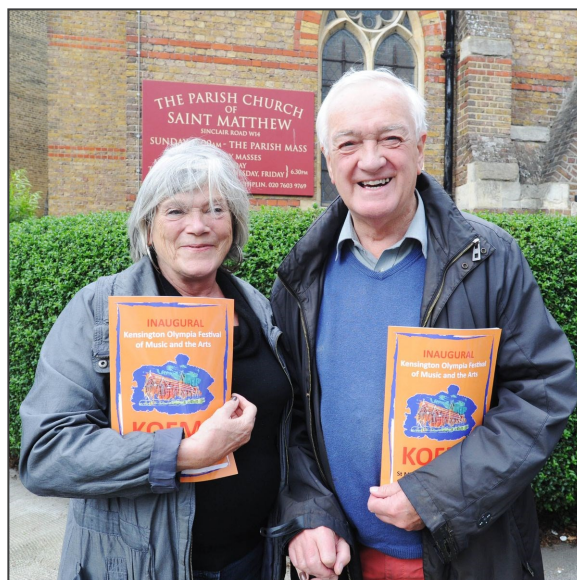
almost all the colleges, displaying his extraordinary breadth of knowledge (*see the next page*).

He was Mayor of Henley-on-Thames in 1975/6 and stood as a Labour parliamentary candidate twice in the general elections of 1974. If men of his calibre could be in government today, we would be in a far better place politically and culturally!

Denis also lectured worldwide on more subjects than would be thought

possible for one human being, yet remained incredibly modest and always ready to acknowledge other people's abilities and talents before his own. He was quite simply one of the most engaging and sociable men I have ever known. He was a member of two clubs, the Garrick and the Oxford & Cambridge, and was a liveryman of the Worshipful Company of Scriveners. With his wife Jinnie (*pictured*) he founded the Kensington Olympia Festival of Music and the Arts in 2015, to support the local community -

Continued on back page...





The Terence Rattigan Society

President: Sir David Suchet CBE

Vice-Presidents: Michael Darlow, Lord Fellowes, Dr. Holly Hill, Greta Scacchi, Geoffrey Wansell

Founder Barbara Longford

Treasurer Alison Du Cane

Membership Secretary Susan Cooper

Events Secretary Phill Ward

Chairman & Secretary

Newsletter Editor

Theatre Liaison

Drama School Liaison

Martin Amherst Lock

Giles Cole

Michael Wheatley-Ward

Prof. Michael Gaunt

US Representative Dr. Holly Hill

Email: terencerattigansociety@gmail.com

Website: www.theterencerattigansociety.co.uk

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.



Denis holding us in thrall as he relates the history of the Oxford colleges on a tour he led during the TRS Conference in 2015

A personal tribute to Denis from his friend and neighbour, playwright William Humble

Denis was a neighbour for many years but until relatively recently I knew him mainly as a dashing and often bow-tied figure who, I heard, went to the opera an awful lot, was a great musical expert and knew a large amount about architecture. So basically we had nothing at all in common.

Then he discovered that I had written a play about P G Wodehouse - and it turned out that he knew huge amounts about literature and drama as well as all the above. And then he listened to ANOTHER play that I'd written, in which Terence Rattigan was a significant character, and we suddenly had lots to talk about. (And I hope it wasn't

too much about me and my plays, but I'm embarrassed to say that it might have been).

Unlike myself, Denis was a polymath. For example he and my wife Caroline could talk about mediaeval churches and the relative values of different recordings of Handel's *Messiah* (or something like that) while I tried not to show that I was completely out of my depth.

He was also an enthusiast, and one who actually made things happen. In the early days of developing my Wodehouse play, we had a rehearsed reading and he arranged for fellow members of the Wodehouse Society to come to it. Afterwards he was - as he always was - extraordinarily complimentary, and put one of his wonderful Garrick Club postcards through my door thanking me for organising it. But in reality I owed him thanks for beefing up an invited audience with the result that we had a better idea of how the embryonic show had gone. (Very well I think, though I'll pass over the Wodehouse Society member who I noticed gently snoring. I like to put it down to the lunch they'd had beforehand).

The other thing I should mention about Denis was of course his charm, which was enormous, and existed alongside a genuine but entirely misplaced modesty. His career, as I had only begun to realize, was extraordinarily impressive. But I'll leave that to others to write about in detail.

I just wish that Denis and I had become friends a lot sooner. ☺

Editor's note: William Humble was Denis's guest at the 2021 Annual Birthday Dinner at the Oxford & Cambridge Club

Tyrant or misunderstood genius?

Phill Ward reports on the Society visit to Ibsen's 'John Gabriel Borkman' at the Bridge Theatre



Simon Russell Beale as Borkman and Lia Williams as his sister-in-law and former lover, Ella Rentheim, in Nicholas Hytner's production.

Photo: Manuel Harlan

TRS members with longer theatregoing experience than my own 38 years, and perhaps with sharper memories (since I may have seen and forgotten) will, I hope, enlighten me on their previous encounters with this particular Ibsen title. Why? Well, I'm mystified by the absence of this play from the major UK stage. I can recall only one major sighting pre-dating Nicholas Hytner's production this Autumn at his Bridge Theatre, such a fine addition to London's theatre landscape – and in such a beautiful setting. That was staged was at Hytner's previous place of employment—the National Theatre—featuring a cast of the finest actors of the day: Paul Scofield, Eileen Atkins and Vanessa Redgrave. For his own production, Hytner worked with a cast of the finest actors of today: Simon Russell Beale, Clare Higgins and Lia Williams.

Audiences understandably expect Ibsen productions to be set in a certain way – elegant Nordic interiors, acres of beautiful grey-silver silk for upholstery and costumes. The plot of *John Gabriel Borkman*, though, has a strong connection to contemporary life – and setting it in the here and now makes it entirely believable. The down-

fall and disgrace of this high-level financier is a very mirror to the misfortunes of public figures in our time. When you fall from a great height, what will your future be? Will your family and friends be there for you? Like her or loathe her, castigate or sympathise – think of the day-to-day life of Liz Truss now.

Borkman's domestic setting is a largely bare space – a tatty sofa and a few other basic creature comforts for his long-suffering and bitter wife Gunhild – provoking the thought that bailiffs have long since carted off any other possessions of value. In James Farncombe's austere lighting, there's no escape from Nordic doom. In this bleak prison Borkman paces endlessly, plotting his comeback and his revenge. Visitors are few and are neither welcome nor well treated.

Russell-Beale is an actor who relishes huge challenges – and in Borkman he must deal with a character with few, if no, redeeming features. Is he just a self-aggrandising tyrant? A misunderstood genius? He is certainly a bully to his friend Vilhelm Foldal (good to see the excellent character actor Michael Simkins back on stage) who appears as Borkman's sole remaining apologist, only to be crushed and dismissed. Then there are the two women in his life – the sisters who have loved him. In these roles we had two excellent portrayals by Clare Higgins as Gunhild and Lia Williams as Ella, the latter cleverly incorporating a leg injury into her character.

In this production, Ibsen's play comes across as joyless and unlovable. I'm not suggesting that Hytner's direction missed something, quite the reverse: by stripping away any theatrical devices, elegant sets, charming mood-setting music, he showed both a study of misguided megalomania and how contemporary Ibsen's writing remains. ✂

Before the performance, members and their guests enjoyed an early supper at the very conveniently placed Ivy restaurant, right next to the theatre. We are very grateful to Phill Ward for his efforts in organising these theatre visits and the accompanying eating arrangements which nourish both body and soul! *Ed.*

'Speak up, Mr Portman, please'

Norman Home looks back on sixty-six years of theatregoing with particular reference to the plays of Terence Rattigan

Gods of the theatre smiled on me when I came to London as a teenager to work in the Home Office. I lived at first in a congenial hostel for new recruits to the Civil Service, at 20 Sloane Gardens, a stone's throw from the Royal Court Theatre. This was in 1956, and John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* had opened on the 8th of May. I was soon in the audience to see it, as well as the other landmark productions at the Royal Court, when George Devine and his English Stage Company were beginning a new wave of 'intellectual' theatre, just as Joan Littlewood was soon to do for popular theatre at Stratford East, and *West Side Story* would do so for musical theatre at Her Majesty's.

My theatregoing had started much earlier than that, influenced by family friends in the Kent village where I lived. I helped them in their botanical publishing business, which they had relocated to their house from London's Covent Garden. They encouraged interest in the theatre. Touring West End productions came to Folkestone, some 15 miles away, and there were occasional trips to London, enabling me to see such significant productions as Peter Brook's *Titus Andronicus* with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh.

Looking back on those momentous years at the Royal Court, I must say that the sea change did not only affect Terence Rattigan. As members of the TRS we are perhaps apt to think that Rattigan was singled out for criticism and rejection. Along with Noël Coward, there were many playwrights whose careers were badly affected, some of them permanently: NC Hunter, Hugh and Margaret Williams, William Douglas Home, Jean Anouilh, to name just a few.

TR was a ready target for the popular press, totally unlike Osborne, a working class jobbing actor, who seems to have shunned publicity – he refused to cooperate with Irving Wardle in 1978, when Wardle was writing *The Theatres of George Devine*, saying he regarded the relationship as a

private one. When Osborne was due to arrive to give a talk to the Gallery First Nighters Club (GFN) at the Arts Theatre in 1970, the Club President rushed to greet my late partner and shake him warmly by the hand thinking he was Osborne! (The playwright proved to be an interested and friendly guest.)

I was a member of the GFN for many years and served on the committee for some time, until it rang down the curtain in 1996, after a century of existence. The Club fostered a genuine love of live theatre and was highly regarded by the profession, a reputation dented only temporarily in the late 1960s when a couple of individuals who were not bona fide members of the Club infiltrated attendance at first nights and were very vocal in their dislike of some of the plays. This seriously upset Peter Saunders in particular, who felt that the fate of some productions was being decided by a minority of troublemakers.

Actors and others in the profession gave up their Sunday afternoons to come and give us a talk and Q & A. The Club also organised annual dinners that celebrated theatre giants of the day as guests of honour, with an after-dinner cabaret to the tastes and interests of the principal guest. But after a hundred years the GFN had run its course: previews led to press nights instead of first nights, all seats are now bookable, and the name 'gallery' has gone.

The Annual GFN Dinner honouring Sir Terence Rattigan was held on the 30th of April 1972 at the Criterion Restaurant, Piccadilly, when TR attended along with his friends Margaret Leighton, her husband Michael Wilding, Jean Kent and Hermione Gingold.

In the centenary publication about the Club, the late Stephen Marshall recalled some of its great characters, and the undisputed Queen of the Gallery was Sophie Rosen, a large Jewish lady and a very powerful 'voice' in the theatre. Sophie was never heard to boo a play, and in any case it was

not Club policy to do so. On the occasion of Eric Portman's return to the stage in Rattigan's *Playbill*, the double bill of *Harlequinade* and *The Browning Version*, at the Phoenix Theatre on the 8th of September 1948, some twenty minutes into the first play came this loud, clear plea from Miss Rosen: "Speak up, Mr Portman, please, we'd love to hear you up here!" Loud applause followed, with the desired effect from Mr P. In the gathering at the stage door after the play, Eric Portman came out and said to Sophie: "There you are, you wicked old thing." He gave her a big kiss and said: "Why didn't you call out sooner?"



During my time at the Home Office there was a thriving Dramatic Society. In the late 1960s I was cast as the young master, Peter Gilbert, in *The Browning Version* and Johnny, prompt and odd-job boy in *Harlequinade*. In the first play the well-intentioned director kept me more or

less anchored to the spot, standing behind the sofa, in the critical scene with Crocker-Harris when I think I have hurt his feelings. The role of Johnny is small but was fun to play, although I think the play itself is more amusing 'on the page' than on the stage. Kenneth Branagh's production at the Garrick in 2015 was not that successful and Chichester had previously had the better idea in 2012 of pairing *The Browning Version* with a new play, *South Downs*, written for the purpose by David Hare.

In the twenty years or so when Rattigan was out of favour I saw most of the London productions of his plays: they were certainly a mixed bag, but they started well with *Ross* at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket in 1960, starring Alec Guinness (revived in a 1986 production at the Old Vic with Simon Ward in the title role, and again at Chichester in 2016 with Joseph Fiennes). Also in 1960 there was a disappointing *Joie de Vivre*, a musical version of *French Without Tears*, at the Queen's Theatre (now the Sondheim). I was one of the few who saw it, as it closed after four performances. We had to wait for 55 years for the pleasure of seeing the original play at the Orange Tree in Richmond, a

theatre that also gave us a memorable *While The Sun Shines* in 2019.

After the disappointment of *In Praise of Love* (Duchess Theatre, 1973), TR returned to form with *Cause Célèbre* at Her Majesty's in July 1977. I have a vivid memory of seeing TR arrive at what proved to be his last first night, cheerfully acknowledging us first-nighters waiting outside the theatre. The production did full justice to a gripping play, running for 282 performances, exceeded only during those years by *Ross* in 1960, which clocked up 762. The revivals of *Cause Célèbre* at the Lyric, Hammersmith in 1998, and at the Old Vic in 2011, were also memorable.

By this time, of course, Rattigan's reputation had resumed its rightful place in British theatre, gloriously maintained by revivals of *The Deep Blue Sea*, *The Winslow Boy*, *Flare Path*, *After the Dance* and *Love in Idleness*. There have been unexpected events as well: premieres of *Less Than Kind* at Jermyn Street Theatre in 2011 and the staging of *A Tale of Two Cities*, adapted by Rattigan and John Gielgud at the King's Head in 2013; plus new plays which have explored key events in Rattigan's personal life and the emotional depth of his work: *The Art of Concealment* by Giles Cole (committee member and editor of this newsletter) at Jermyn Street and Riverside Studios in 2012 and *Kenny Morgan* by Mike Poulton at the Arcola in 2016.

For me this has been a rewarding look back at my many years of theatregoing, and a small way of paying tribute to what Sir Terence Rattigan's life and work have meant to me. ∞



Alec Guinness in the original London production of *Ross* in 1960 and Joseph Fiennes at Chichester in 2016. Above: Eric Portman, who starred in *Playbill* in 1948.

Audio Rattigan

*Prof. Dan Rebellato unearths
some vintage Rattigan*

Without much fanfare, two audio releases appeared this summer from Audible, of great interest to the Society. Both contain archive BBC recordings; the first is *Terence Rattigan in His Own Words*, a collection of five substantial interviews with the playwright, and *Terence Rattigan: A BBC Radio Drama Collection*, a handsome collection of 13 full productions of the plays from *French Without Tears* to *Cause Célèbre*.

The interviews are, to me, more interesting because less familiar. The earliest is from 1969 and the latest from July 1977, only four months before his death, and indeed, bracingly, one can hear him sounding increasingly tired and frail as the interviews head through the 1970s.

They fall into that wilderness period when Rattigan's critical standing was at its lowest, though in the last interview he does note signs of being appreciated again. In these recordings, he dwells rather bitterly on his defenestration from the front ranks of British playwrights; that's understandable enough, but it means that a rather petulant tone sometimes breaks through the diffident urbanity with which he typically conducts himself.

That urbanity, on the other hand, is rather delightful. He is a good, casual storyteller; the account of having to rewrite *Flare Path* on the veranda of the Mess in Freetown with various commanding officers looking over his shoulder is very amusing – as is the report of his hapless attempt to explain the symbolism of *The Caretaker* to its author, Harold Pinter. In one interview, he takes pains to emphasise the difference between himself and Coward, with whom he was so often bracketed. If nothing else, he says, "he's very quotable. I'm eminently unquotable, I notice, because I'm not in the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*" – in the process, producing a paradoxically quotable self-description.

The diffidence of his pronouncements, however, is something of a pose and disguises the real seriousness with which Rattigan thinks about playwriting. It is striking that when he's talking about Pinter's allegorical symbolism (not something TR goes in for very much) he misses the goal, but later, when he's discussing what is original in Pinter's dramaturgy,

he's much more illuminating: "he's deliberately taken the past out of his writing and the drama is the drama of now and that's why it's so exciting." His sincere admiration for Pinter runs right through these interviews; in one, he is clearly tickled by his interviewer's counterfactual question, imagining if Harold Pinter had written *The Winslow Boy* (who wouldn't be?). Elsewhere, there's an interesting conversation about the challenges of writing historical dialogue that covers Shaw, Osborne, and Bolt and shows clearly the thought process of a working playwright.

It's when Rattigan allows himself a little spontaneity that I think we see what he really feels. In an interview with Derek Malcolm from 1973, coinciding with a revival of *While the Sun Shines* at Hampstead Theatre, he responds to the question of whether he would ever write as giddily farcical a play like that again and he responds quickly that he doesn't feel he could write another comedy – if anything like a world war arose, he says, he'd not want to respond with laughter but with "rage, anger at what had got us into that situation". Telling the familiar story of the attempt to persuade him into the diplomatic service, he recalls his father telling him "You can do it in your spare time, old boy", sharply adding "that's complete nonsense – you can't write in your spare time. It's a full-time job" and again, the tone shifts, and one senses the complete commitment of Rattigan to his writing.

In the longest interview, he faces, I feel, a slightly unsympathetic interviewer, but manages articulately to stand his ground about his aversion to 'Plays of Ideas' ("I don't think that a play should be about *anything*. I really must take issue with you on that. A play is a play is a play. What is *Hamlet* 'about'? What is *Oedipus* about, for heaven's sake?") and the idea that he only ever wants to 'please' an audience while, later, conceding that his sharp opposition between 'people' and 'ideas' was flawed, as Shaw had pointed out.

But maybe we shouldn't look too hard here for insights. When one interviewer asks if writers ought to talk about their plays he retorts "Oh, emphatically not. I rather wish I weren't myself.... Writers should be judged by what they write. They talk through their plays." That said, there is a warm sense of TR as a person and, beneath it all, a steely commitment to his craft. He also shows himself to be a shrewd judge of his own writing; at the conclusion to his chat with Hubert Gregg, he's asked to nominate his two best plays and he offers *The Deep Blue Sea* and *After the Dance*, a fairly common view now, but it certainly

wasn't then.

Permit me a grouch: this release comes with minimal information about the sources of these interviews. Of the five recordings, we learn the programme titles of just three and none of the interviewers is named. The date given for at least one of them is inaccurate. I would have liked a bit more care to go into the presentation of this material, allowing the reader to place these things in context. Oh, and they call him 'Terrence Rattigan' on the artwork.

For what it's worth, this is all the information I have been able to assemble about these interviews:

Out of This Week Radio 4, 9.05am 12 December

1969. Interviewer: Derek Hart (4')

Scan Radio 4, 8.45pm 4 January 1973. Interviewer: Derek Malcolm (12')

Hubert Gregg at the London Theatre, Episode 6: Piccadilly/Criterion, Radio 2, 9.02pm 12 February 1974. Interviewer: Hubert Gregg (10')

Unknown archive recording, supposedly 5 September 1975. Unknown interviewer. (45') *If anyone can shed light on this, do let us know!*

Kaleidoscope, Radio 4, 9.30pm 12 August 1977. Interviewer: Sheridan Morley (18')

To aid your listening pleasure, here are what I believe are the dates and details of the original productions:

French Without Tears
Has introduction by TR
Radio 4, 25 Dec 1973
Dir. Norman Wright

Adventure Story
Radio 4, 15 June 1981
Dir. David Spencer


The Final Test
Light Prog, 5 June 1963
Dir. Norman Wright

Separate Tables
Radio 4, 24, 31 July 2022
Dir. Anne Isger

Ross
Home Service, 19 Apr 1965
Dir. John Gibson

Bequest to the Nation
Radio 4, 23 May 1981
Dir. David Johnston

Cause Célèbre
Radio 4, 25 June 2011
Dir. Thea Sharrock/Polly Thomas

Terence Rattigan in his Own Words is available at <https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Terence-Rattigan-in-His-Own-Words-Audiobook/B09YS3Z63Q> and **Terence Rattigan: A BBC Radio Drama Collection** at <https://www.audible.co.uk/pd/Terence-Rattigan-A-BBC-Radio-Drama-Collection-Audiobook/B09VCN42X6> 

The Winslow Boy
Radio 4, 21 March 1981
Dir. Ian Cotterell

The Browning Version
Home Service, 30 Sept 1957
Dir. Norman Wright
Part of a Rattigan Festival

The Deep Blue Sea
Radio 4, 29 July 1972
Dir. Christopher Venning

Variation on a Theme
Radio 4, 17 Nov 1969
Dir. Archie Campbell

Man and Boy
Radio 3, 23 May 1981
Dir. John Dove

In Praise of Love
Radio 4, 19 April 1980
Dir. Peter King

Rattigan Memorial

The refurbishment is under way!

Photos courtesy of Lucy Briers



Survey results

Grateful thanks to those members who responded to the survey in the last issue regarding the question of digital or print copies of the newsletter. OK, there were only 12 of you, but even that is something of a record in terms of reader response!

Of the 12, three of you opted for receiving it via email only, eight preferred to receive it by post, as now, and one said he would like both. Not exactly conclusive, but there is a clear majority in favour of the status quo.

I see no reason, however, why the three should not be accommodated as e-readers only, and that the one should not have it both ways. Everyone's a winner!

For the winner of the photo competition, please see the back page....

Farewell to Denis

Continued from front page

- and young musicians, and he remained a frequent opera- and theatre-goer till the end. His chairmanship of the Terence Rattigan Society was perhaps the last role that he undertook in the creative world, and he embraced it fully, with his customary flair and boundless energy.

His funeral at his local church on 9 September was attended by over 300 people, including representatives of this Society. We send our whole-hearted condolences to Jinnie and his family. He was a man of erudition, faith, and constant good humour, A great loss. *Editor* ∞



PICTURE QUIZ

ANSWERS and result



1). The first photograph was taken in 1971 on the occasion of Terry's receiving his knighthood at Buckingham Palace. Who is accompanying him (both names required)?

Answer: Harold and Peggy (Pegs) French. Harold directed the original production of French Without Tears and they were both with TR in Bermuda when he died in 1977.

2). The second photograph shows a scene from which Rattigan play?

Answer: Heart to Heart, a play for television, given an online reading by the Society during lockdown.

There were a massive two entries for this little quiz, and the first to be received with both answers correct came from...

Malcolm Herring. He therefore wins an Amazon voucher. Congratulations to him and commiserations to the other entrant, Anita Barley. ∞

Dates for your diary

Sunday 20 November 2022

The AGM and lunch at Koha, a restaurant close to the Duke of York's Theatre, followed by a matinee performance of **The Doctor** by Arthur Schnitzler, adapted by Robert Icke and starring Juliet Stevenson. Details and booking form have been sent out to all members by email.

Please note: The following options are all available: to attend the AGM, lunch and theatre (£60); the AGM and lunch only (£25); the AGM and theatre only (£35); to attend the AGM only (no charge). Fixed menu is as follows:

*Wild boar sausages with creamy mash and curly kale
OR Spinach gnocchi made with wild mushrooms,
truffle oil and shaved parmesan
Vanilla cheesecake*

Saturday 10 December 2022

A visit to the Orange Tree, Richmond, for a matinee of Shaw's rarely performed **Arms and the Man** followed by an early supper. Again, you should have received further details and a booking form by email.

In the midst of a bloody central European war, a chance moonlit encounter throws together an idealistic young woman and a Swiss mercenary with an unexpectedly realistic attitude to soldiering. This is the last production from Artistic Director Paul Miller.

Thursday 19 January 2023

A visit to the Donmar Warehouse for a matinee performance of Lillian Hellman's **Watch on the Rhine**. This will be followed by an optional supper nearby. Further details and a booking form will follow.

Summer 1941. On a peaceful morning in her Washington DC living room, widow Fanny Farrelly anxiously awaits the return of her daughter and her German son-in-law, fleeing Europe with their children. As night falls, dark secrets emerge, and this American sanctuary becomes even more dangerous than what they left behind.

February 2023 TBC

A private screening at the Cinema Museum of a documentary on the renowned British artist **Eric Ravilious** is planned, followed by a talk from the director of the film. Date to be decided.