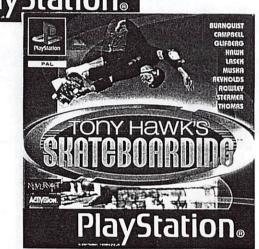


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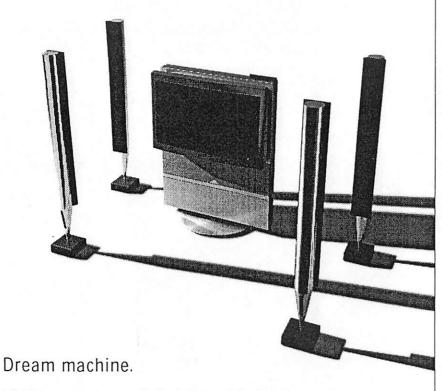
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An enthusiastic letter-writer, Nöel Coward was nevertheless very particular about the mode of address. Responding to an overblown missive from one of America's corporate magnates which began , 'From the desk of . . . ', Coward replied, 'Dear Desk of . . . '.

While studiously avoiding fame in the RAF, Lawrence of Arabia received a letter from Coward which began 'Dear 338171, or may I call you 338 ...?'

He loved sending telegrams too. He once wired a friend, 'AM BACK FROM ISTAMBUL WHERE I WAS KNOWN AS ENGLISH DELIGHT'.

Another enthusiasm was travel. After an uncomfortable night in a hotel in the tropics, during which he received the attention of gnawing insects, Coward was settling his bill when the manager approached to ask, 'Excuse me, sir. Would you mind very much if I put up a sign reading "Nöel Coward Slept Here"?'

'Not at all,' replied Coward, 'if you'll add one word -fitfully.'

He could be equally abrasive closer to home. In a West-End restaurant once, Coward laboured with the woodcock he had been served. 'I do hope, sir', the waiter enquired unctuously, 'that you found no shot in it'? 'No . . . no', replied Coward, 'it died a natural death.'

'Trouble is,' he added, poking the bird with his knife, 'There's too much wood and not enough cock.' It could be trying to have Nöel Coward as your friend. When Laurence Olivier wrote to tell Coward that he was to be a Doctor of Letters, Coward's remark was, 'Doctor of four letters; no doubt.'

When news reached him that an impresario whose slow wits had never endeared him to Coward had blown his brains out, the Master's only comment was, 'He must have been a marvellously good shot.'

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DIRECTORS NOTES

Good Evening and welcome to tonight's performance at the Tivoli.

When we were deciding which play we would perform next, and realised that 1999 saw Noel Coward's centenary, there was only one choice for me. Blithe Spirit sees Coward at his best; sparkling dialogue and social comment written into a genuinely funny play.

Since our last performance of "The Roses of Eyam" back in May the club has been busy assembling a strong line-up of plays for our 1999-2000 season and "Blithe Spirit" starts us off in fine fashion. There are just too many people involved to thank individually but praise must go to the cast themselves for getting together as a team so quickly, and also to the backstage crew and the Tivoli staff for providing everything I wanted quickly and efficiently, presenting an impressively authentic-looking set.

Finally I am pleased to instigate a Wimborne Drama first at the Tivoli - the use of the curtain! (Bear with us on this one.) I hope you enjoy the show, and thanks for supporting us.

Paul Dodman



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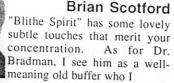
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THE NOEL COWARD

Noel Coward was born December 16 1899 in the London suburb of Teddington. His parents were Arthur Coward, a piano salesman, and Violet Veitch, descended from gentry and naval officers. Noel was raised in genteel poverty. As a child he appeared in school and community performances and made his professional debut at the age of eleven in a children's play called The Goldfish. Parts followed in The Great Name and Where the Rainbow Ends (a Christmas-time standard in London for the next forty years), in the company of which was Esme Wynne, who became Noel's intimate friend. supporter and collaborator. When the play's run ended, Violet Coward took her son on the rounds of theatrical agencies, despite the disapproval of relatives who regarded the stage as no place for a boy. Attending a music hall mind-reading act, Violet asked the clairvoyant if her son should continue in the theatre. From the stage the mind-reader intoned: "You ask me about your son, Noel Coward. Keep him where he is, keep him where he is, he has a great talent and will have a wonderful career!" Violet was convinced.

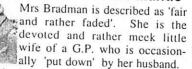
So was Noel. He was fifteen when he told his friend Esme "I am going to have the whole theatrical world at my feet". He was a precocious boy, apparently charming, with a good ear for music and an excellent sense of humour. He had the talent of meeting people and making connections, and making the people he met his friends. Noel Coward went on the road for the first time in 1939 with a production of

'Dr. Bradman' Brian Scotford



wouldn't care to consult about anything worse than a slight strain. I console ,myself with the thought that he must have some hidden depths that cause his wife to stay with him despite his attitude towards her.

"Mrs Bradman' Val Mantle



She obviously doesn't have much of a social life and when the rare opportunity occurs for a visit, she tends to talk too much and giggle nervously.

'Madame Arcati' Jan Stevenson

She comes over as a daft old biddy, but she really believes in what she does. She is full of vim and vigour, as you might say. Nothing fazes her, but she can

not tolerate people who mock her profession. I think that Noel Coward put her in the play in a 'spirit of mockery', but she manages to come out on top with her 'tricks of the trade'.

'Elvira' Ann Pond



I am told, for in truth I know little, that 'the smart sophistication, technical accomplishment & convention-defying morality of Noel Coward's plays captured the public of the day.

The little I do know is Blithe Spirit; celluloid version. If I am the public, it captured me. The nuances of speech, politeness turning almost vitriolic; established middle-class routine disintegrating into chaos; smug and cosy becoming dissatisfied ice. Elvira was always my favourite - butter wouldn't melt turning to rancid conglomerate. I wanted to play her but, in a way, hope I can't do her justice. I mean, who wants to be a petulant, self-centred, scheming, immoral, predatory bitch?

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'Charles' Jeremy Austin



Whilst he could never be described as a social realist, Noel Coward has the knack of persuading us that even if the world described in "Blithe

Spirit" may never actually have existed, certainly it ought to have. Utterly rousted by the arrival of Mme Arcati, poor Charles' orderly existence lurches from disaster to disaster. My favourite line from the part? There are many but one of the best must be "If you don't behave vourself I won't take you into Folkestone, ever!" Hardest line to remember? I keep forgetting!

'Ruth' **Judy Garrett**



When offered the role I was very surprised but pleased - I had been very impressed with the Wimborne Drama productions I had seen but I had never expected

the opportunity to perform on the Tivoli stage. Rehearsals have been a true comedy throughout. Ruth's character appears to be in a state of permanent hysteria. My favourite line is 'I've not the slightest desire to look at your tongue, kindly put it in again'. I have to control the desire to giggle as my stage husband Charles' face is such a scream! I will be nervous but hope I can do justice to the character in Noel Cowards centenary year.

'Edith' Heather Shew



Although not a demanding role ('Yes'm' has to be my favourite line!), Edith has been a most enjoyable part to perform. Coward's description of her as merely 'a maid' doesn't do the

part justice, since it is she who is pivotal to the plot and is responsible for the fates of Ruth, Charles and Elvira. Her willingness to please, failed attempts at efficiency and sheer lack of experience certainly add humour to the play! Edith is a scatty, forgetful and clumsy young girl - I just hope I wasn't type-cast!

CENTENARY

Gerhart Hauptmann's Hannele in Liverpool. Among the other young actors on the train to Liverpool he was instantly charmed by Gertrude Lawrence, a "vivacious child with ringlets", whose later partnership with Coward in Private Lives and Tonight at 8:30 became legendary. Role followed role through Coward's teenage years, including a cameo appearance with Lillian Gish in D. W. Griffiths' film Hearts of the World. He was drafted into the army in 1918, the last year of World War I, but spent a large percentage of his service in army hospitals with various nervous ailments.

With the end of the war England needed to be entertained, to delight in something that could replace the scenes of horror and destruction. Coward was well-positioned for the moment. He was being reviewed regularly as an actor in the London press. And since 1914 he had been writing songs, stories, and sketches in collaboration with Esme Wynne, a couple of which had been produced. He experimented with novels, sold a few short stories, and wrote script after script. In 1919 the option on one script, The Rat Trap, was picked up by a New York producer and led to a commission for another play. I'll Leave It To You, shallow but filled with clever and witty dialogue, opened in 1920 with Coward and Esme Wynne in the cast. Rebecca West reviewed it, saying "If one wants to be, so to speak, in at the birth of a considerable dramatic talent, it is worth going to "I'll Leave It To You". Another critic wrote that the reason

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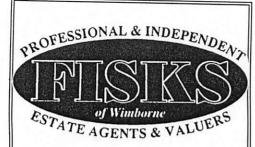
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Coward continued the theme with The Young Idea (loosely based on G. B. Shaw's You Never Can Tell), which he wrote in 1921 just before his first visit to New York, and in which he appeared in London in 1923. This was followed in 1924 by The Vortex, a turn against the excesses of post-war society, which barely got past the censors of the Lord Chamberlain's Office - the play depicts an older woman with a young lover, cocaine use, and hints of homosexual relationships. The next year he finished Fallen Angels, Hay Fever, and Easy Virtue. At one point Coward had five of his works playing simultaneously in London.

By 1926, when Coward was touring America in *The Vortex*, he was an established theatre celebrity on both sides of the Atlantic, with some of his most enduring works yet to come.

Private Lives, written for himself and Gertrude Lawrence, premiered in 1930, his patriotic panorama, Cavalcade, in 1931, and Design for Living in 1933. Other plays that followed include 1936's Tonight at 8:30, (also for Gertrude Lawrence), Present Laughter and This Happy Breed in 1939, Blithe Spirit (1942), Quadrille (1952), and Nude With Violin (1957).

Coward's talent extended in many other directions as well, He wrote, directed, and starred in *In Which We Serve* (1942), his World War II tribute to the Royal Navy. He wrote dozens of brilliant songs, including "Mad About the Boy", "Mad Dogs and

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Englishmen", and "Don't Let's Be Beastly To The Germans". In the 1950s he established a second career for himself as a cabaret entertainer and became one of the first artists to make Las Vegas a regular tour stop.

Noel Coward loved to travel, and although he maintained a home in England most of his life, he spent much of his time voyaging to every continent. Several of his plays, including Design for Living, were written aboard ship. In 1956 he took up residence in Bermuda to avoid the tax situation in England. Later he lived briefly in Switzerland before settling in Jamaica, his home for the rest of his life. In 1970 he was honoured with a knighthood in his native land. In 1971 he was given a Tony Award for Distinguished Achievement in the Theatre.

Noel Coward died March 26, 1973 at his home "Firefly" in Jamaica.



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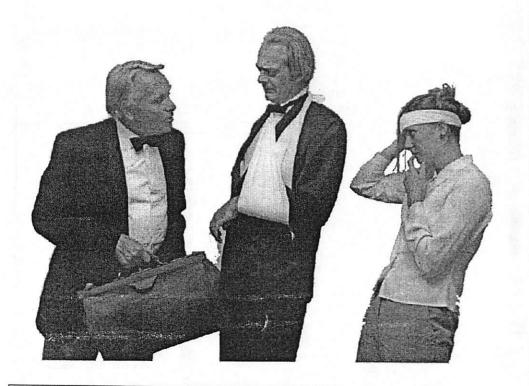
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BLITHE

SPIRIT

BY NOEL COWARD

CAST

(in order of appearance)

EDITH the maid	HEATHER SHEW
RUTH	JUDY GARRETT
CHARLES	JEREMY AUSTIN
DR. BRADMAN	BRIAN SCOTFORD
MRS BRADMAN	VAL MANTLE
MADAME ARCATI	JAN STEVENSON
ELVIRA	ANN POND

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