

THE SIXTH FORM PRODUCTION 2012



NOISES OFF

BY MICHAEL FRAYN



6 7 8 NOVEMBER 7.30pm

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Cast

DOTTY OTLEY	<i>Cecily King</i>
LLOYD DALLAS	<i>Max Turner</i>
GARRY LEJEUNE	<i>Ed Mason</i>
FLAVIA BRENT	<i>Talia Pick</i>
FREDDIE FELLOWS	<i>Oscar Cooper</i>
BROOKE ASHTON	<i>Georgia Green</i>
SELSDON MOWBRAY	<i>Angus Grant</i>
POPPY NORTON-TAYLOR	<i>Sophie Grierson</i>
TIM ALLGOOD	<i>Daniel Rasbash</i>

Production

Lighting & Sound Operator	<i>Adam Osborne</i>
Deputy Stage Manager	<i>Ellie Wilson-Smith</i>
Assistant Stage Manager	<i>Juliette Perry</i>
Assistant Stage Manager (Properties)	<i>Miriam Evison</i>
Technical Stage Manager	<i>George Veys</i>
Set Construction	<i>Petersfield Carpenters</i>
Scenic art	<i>Bedales Stage Crew</i>
Wardrobe	<i>Lesley Dakin</i>
Production Design	<i>Joanne Greenwood</i>
Acting Coach	<i>Georgie Sampson</i>

nothing on

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Cast

MRS CLACKETT	Dotty Otley
ROGER TRAMPLEMAIN	Garry Lejeune
BELINDA BLAIR	Flavia Brent
PHILIP BLAIR	Freddie Fellows
VICKI	Brooke Ashton
BURGLAR	Selsdon Mowbray

Production

Assistant stage manager Poppy Norton-Taylor

Stage & company manager Tim Allgood

Directed by Lloyd Dallas

*The action takes place in the living-room of the Brents' country home,
on a Wednesday afternoon*

Act I The Grand Theatre, Weston-super-Mare, Monday 14 January

Act II Theatre Royal, Ashton-under-Lyne, Wednesday matinee, 13 February

Act III Municipal Theatre, Stockton-upon-Tees, Saturday 6 April

There is a short interval between each Act.

BAGS, BOXES AND SARDINES

Xavier Wilson was the first school friend who took me to the theatre - **See How They Run** I seem to recall and it was truly truly awful, and while I have no wish to steal the thundering trumpet of J G Stillwater's programme note that follows (indeed suffice to say I fully support its reassessment of the form and its claim for Arts Council monies), farce was a bad thing in my books for many many years.

And so also, probably rightly, farce has become a dirty word in British theatre. Very much the poor relation of theatrical genres, it harks back to a time of smutty movies with Robin Askwith, cheese fondue and lazy stereotypes. Essentially, farce was the product of a different, simpler, world. 4 quick drafts by Michael Frayn led to a performance of a one acter called Exits in 1977 at a late night charity gig, which subsequently gave birth to the full version of Noises Off, opening at The Lyric Hammersmith in 1982. Just a short glance over its shoulder then was all it took to see the murky heyday of the farce that it lovingly skewered, receding gently in the rear view mirror; but **Noises Off** itself though is not so much a farce as much as a love letter to the theatre - its stock characters and knowing phrases are universal. Despite the fact that it is tempting to think of it as an unequivocally British play its popularity behind the Iron Curtain (where until 1988 they only had the first two acts) and across Europe (where different racial tropes replace the British class system, playing on Catalan/ Spanish boundaries, the Italians putting in a special Sardine Song between acts, the Finnish version pastiching Helsinki

accents and Tempere dialects and so on and on) tell a different story. (Nearly everyone loves it because it makes them laugh. And so, maybe it's that simple, although J Y T Greig's **The Psychology of Laughter & Comedy** (1923, Allen & Unwin, London p50ff) might argue that "**the genetic aspects of the problems and the connexion between first smiles and oral eroticism is key**" but the pudding is already being over-egged.

Yet that doesn't address the question of why **Noises Off**? Easy of course to be platitudinous about the benefits of laughter : it relieves stress (possibly lowers stress hormones say some no doubt heavily funded quacks), relieves pain (questionable - try dropping a chair on your foot and laughing), important social medicine (helps with teamwork; really?), good for your heart muscles (hmmm...more likely to cure heartbreak perhaps) and various other spurious notions. Learned academics take various positions - here is the general humanist approach of Chamfort that, "the most wasted of all days is that in which we have not laughed" but closer examination suggests this is utter nonsense. Laughter machine extraordinaire Freddie Nietzsche has a predictably dry crisis about it all, chuckling that - "perhaps I know best why it is man alone who laughs; he alone suffers so deeply that he had to invent laughter." Even so my money though is on Jean Houston : "at the height of laughter, the universe is flung into a kaleidoscope of new possibilities." Houston's position feels closest to the chaos, the relief and the explosive joy that Noises Off can create; certainly working on it with this particular bunch of young actors has been an absolute pleasure and I wish them all well in their future careers, which I suspect will not be too far from the Brents' living room for several.

So in the words of the man who knows, "sit back right easy and laugh;" this production is for you - enjoy yourself.

J J Green
Hambledon 2012

Behind The Dressing Room Door

DOTTY OTLEY (Mrs Clackett) makes a welcome return to the stage to create the role of Mrs Clackett after playing Mrs Hackett, Britain's most famous lollipop lady ('Ooh, I can't ardlly 'old me lolly up!') in over 320 episodes of TV's **ON THE ZEBRAS**. Her many stage appearances include her critically acclaimed portrayal of Fru Säckett, the comic char in Strindberg's **SCENES FROM THE CHARNELHOUSE**. Her first appearance ever? In a school production of **HENRY IV PART I** – as the old bag-lady, Mrs Duckett.

BELINDA BLAIR (Flavia Brent) has been on the stage since the age of four, when she made her debut in **SINBAD THE SAILOR** at the old Croydon Hippodrome as one of Miss Toni Tanner's Ten Tapping Tots. She subsequently danced her way round this country, Southern Africa, and the Far East in shows like **ZIPPEDY-DOODA!** and **HERE COME LES GIRLS!** More recently she has been seen in such comedy hits as **DON'T MR DUDDLE, WHO'S BEEN SLEEPING IN MY BED?**, and **TWICE TWO IS SEX**. She is married to scriptwriter Terry Wough, who has contributed lead-in material to most of TV's chat shows. They have two sons and three retrievers.

FREDERICK FELLOWES (Philip Brent) has appeared in many popular television series, including **CALLING CASUALTY**, **CARDIAC ARREST!**, **OUT-PATIENTS**, and **IN-PATIENTS**. On stage he was most recently seen in the controversial all-male version of **THE TROJAN WOMEN**. He is happily married, and lives near Crawley, where his wife breeds pedigree dogs. 'If she ever leaves me,' he says, 'it will probably be for an Irish wolfhound!'

ROBIN HOUSEMONGER (Author) was born in Worcester Park, Surrey, into a family 'unremarkable in every way except for an aunt with red hair who used to sing all the high twiddly bits from **THE MERRY WIDOW** over the tea-table'. He claims to have been the world's most unsuccessful gents hosiery wholesaler, and began writing 'to fill the long hours between one hosiery order and the next'. He turned this experience into his very first play, **SOCKS BEFORE MARRIAGE**, which ran in the West End for nine years. Two of his subsequent plays, **BRIEFS ENCOUNTER** and **HANKY PANKY**, broke box office records in Perth, Western Australia. **NOTHING ON** is his seventeenth play.

LLOYD DALLAS (Director) 'read English at Cambridge, and stagecraft at the local benefits office'. He has directed plays in most parts of Britain, winning the South of Scotland Critics' Circle Special Award and going on to a highly successful season for the National Theatre of Sri Lanka. In recent years he has probably become best known for his brilliant series of 'Shakespeare in Summer' productions in the parks of the inner London boroughs.

GARRY LEJEUNE (Roger Tramplemain) while still at drama school won the coveted Laetitia Daintyman Medal for Violence. His television work includes **POLICE!**, **CRIME SQUAD**, **SWAT**, **FORENSIC**, and **THE NICK**, but he is probably best-known as 'Cornetto', the ice-cream salesman who stirs the hearts of all the lollipop ladies in **ON THE ZEBRAS**.

SELSDON MOWBRAY (Burglar) first 'trod the boards' at the age of 12 – playing Lucius in a touring production of **JULIUS CAESAR**, with his father, the great Chelmsford Mowbray, in the lead. Since then he has served in various local reps, and claims to have appeared with every company to have toured Shakespeare in the past half-century, working his way up through the Mustardseeds and the various Boys and Sons of, to the Balthazars, Benvolios, and **Le Beaus**; then the Slenders, Lennoxes, Trinculos, Snouts, and Froths; and graduating to the Scoops, Poloniuses, and **Aguecheeks**. His most recent film appearance was as **Outraged Pensioner** in **GREEN WILLIES**.

BROOKE ASHTON (Vicki) is probably best known as the girl wearing nothing but 'good, honest, natural froth' in the **Hauptbahnhofbrau** lager commercial. Her television appearances range from **Girl at Infants' School** in **ON THE ZEBRAS** to **Girl in Massage Parlour** in **ON PROBATION**. Cinemagoers saw her in **THE GIRL IN ROOM 14**, where she played the **Girl in Room 312**.

nothing on

A Glimpse of the Noumenal

A Glimpse of the Noumenal
condensed from J G Stillwater, *Eros Untrousered - Studies in
the Semantics of Bedroom Farce*

The cultural importance of the so-called 'bedroom farce', or 'English sex farce', has long been recognised, but attention has tended to centre on the metaphysical significance of mistaken identity and upon the social criticism implicit in the form's ground-breaking exploration of cross-dressing and trans-gender role-playing. The focus of scholarly interest, however, is now beginning to shift to the recurrence of certain mythic themes in the genre, and to their religious and spiritual implications.

In a typical bedroom farce, a man and a woman come to some secret or mysterious place (cf. *Beauty and the Beast*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, etc.) to perform certain acts which are supposed to remain concealed from the eyes of the world. This is plainly a variant of the traditional 'search' or 'quest' the goal of which, though presented as being 'sexual' in nature, is to be understood as a metaphor of enlightenment and transcendence. Some partial disrobing may occur, to suggest perhaps a preliminary stripping away of worldly

illusions, but total nudity (perfect truth) and complete 'carnal knowledge' (i.e. spiritual understanding) are perpetually forestalled by the intervention of coincidental encounters (often with other seekers engaged in parallel 'quests'), which bear a striking resemblance to the trials undergone by postulants in various esoteric cults (cf. *The Magic Flute*, *Star Wars*, etc.).

A recurring and highly significant feature of the genre is a multiplicity of doors. If we regard the world on this side of the doors as the physical one in which mortal men are condemned to live, then the world or worlds concealed behind them may be thought of as representing both the higher and more spiritual plane into which the postulants hope to escape, and the underworld from which at any moment demons may leap out to tempt or punish. When the doors do open, it is often with great suddenness and unexpectedness, highly suggestive of those epiphanic moments of insight and enlightenment which give access to the 'other', and offer us a fleeting glimpse of the noumenal.

Another recurring feature is the fall or loss of

trousers. This can be readily recognised as an allusion to the Fall of Man and the loss of primal innocence. The removal of the trousers traditionally reveals a pair of striped underpants, in which we recognise both the stripes of the tiger, the feral beast that lurks in all of us beneath the civilised exterior suggested by the lost trousers, and perhaps also a premonitory representation of the stripes caused by the whipping which was formerly the traditional punishment for fornication.

Farce, interestingly, is popularly categorised as 'funny'. It is true that the form often involves 'funny' elements in the sense of the strange or uncanny, such as supposedly supernatural phenomena, and behaviour suggestive of demonic possession. But the meaning of 'funny' here is probably also intended to include its secondary sense, 'provocative of laughter.'

This is an interesting perception. It scarcely needs to be said that laughter, involving as it does the loss of self-control and the spasmodic release of breath, a vital bodily fluid, is a metaphorical representation of the sexual act. But it can also occasion the shedding of tears, which suggests that it may in addition be a sublimated form of mourning. Indeed we recognise here a symbolic foretaste of death. If sneezing has been widely feared because it is thought that during a sneeze the soul flies out of the body, and may not be recaptured (whence 'Bless you!' or '*Gesundheit!*'), then how much more dangerous is laughter. Not once but over and over again the repeated muscular contractions and expulsions of breath drive the 'soul' forth from the body. The danger of laughter is recognised in such expressions as 'killingly funny,' and 'I almost died'. There is a lurking fear that even more spectacular violence may ensue, and that a farce may end with a bloodletting as gruesome as in *Oedipus* or *Medea*, if people are induced to 'split their sides' or 'laugh their heads off'.

Fear of the darker undertones of bedroom farce has sometimes in the past led to its dismissal as 'mere entertainment'. As the foregoing hopefully makes clear, though, financial support by the Arts Council or a private sponsor for the tour of a bedroom farce would be by no means out of place.