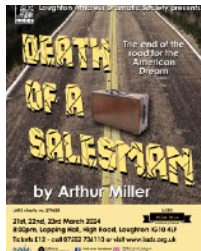


Promptings

In this issue...



**NODA Crit - A
Murder is Announced**



**Our Next
Production**



**Centenary
Celebration**



**Theatre Trip
6th April**

Message from Cathy



We are now half way through our Centenary season and what a season it's turning out to be. 'A Murder is Announced' was another massive LADS success for very many reasons. We were thrilled to have so many new members in the cast and crew, all of whom threw themselves into their roles with passion and enthusiasm and they are all wonderful additions to our society. Ticket sales surpassed our expectations and we received extremely positive feedback from our audience members. At LADS we always strive to produce the best quality productions we can in every area including sets, costume, props and performance. I'm always incredibly proud of the standard we achieve and this production was no exception. Having said that, it's also vital that we strike the balance between the

hard work necessary to deliver the standard we have come to expect and ensuring we all enjoy the process and have fun doing what we all love. This production was the perfect balance between the two so congratulations to Christian for creating and encouraging the enjoyable environment but also making sure we all worked hard to deliver the goods !!

Rehearsals for 'Death of a Salesman' are now underway and despite some early cast changes, are going well. We have a few props requirements so please keep reading and let us know if you are able to help.

As always, please make a note of the dates for your diary and I look forward to seeing you all soon.

Cathy



Dates for your diary

Sun 17th March	Set Up for <i>Death of a Salesman</i> - from 9:30 am
Thur 21st - Sat 23rd March	<i>Death of a Salesman</i>
Sat 23rd March	After show shindig in Buckleys Bar - all welcome
Sun 24th March	Set Down - 10:00am start
Mon 25th March	Crit. at 7:30pm in Small Hall followed by curry - all welcome
Sat 20th April	Centenary Celebration

Members news

We are delighted to welcome Cathal Connolly to LADS. Cathal has taken on the role of Stanley in 'Death of a Salesman' so we wish him all the best and hope he will be a member for many years to come.

Theatre Trip - 'The Lighthouse' - Sat 6th April

Some of us are going to see "The Light House" by Alys Williams on Saturday 6th April at 2.15 (matinee) at The Park Theatre (Clifton Terrace, Finsbury Park, London, N4 3JP). If you would like to join us, you can book your tickets at: [The Light House \(parktheatre.co.uk\)](http://TheLightHouse.parktheatre.co.uk). We would love you to join us.

Alys Williams - Alys is a northern theatre artist, based in Leeds and Glasgow. She trained at the École de Théâtre Jacques Lecoq and University of Cambridge. *The Light House* is her debut play as a writer. Alys also works as a guest lecturer in movement for theatre and a trainer for Tender UK, working to end domestic abuse and gender-based violence. Also, for those that know him, Alys is Iain Howland's niece.

Love is a complicated business. It gets even more complicated when the person you love doesn't want to be alive. Tender, funny and defiantly hopeful, *The Light House* is a real-life story of falling in love and staying in love, even when the lights go out and you're lost in the dark. It's a love letter to life.

Join the emergency response as we dance in the kitchen, sing in the streets and try to turn the lights back on. It gets lonely, muddling through these days and nights. So why don't we do it together?

★★★★★ 'The Light House manages to do something unbelievable. Bringing light to a dark place and helping us to feel the most powerful of emotions: Hope.' Theatre & Tonic

★★★★★ 'The Light House is beautiful. It was beautifully written, beautifully performed and beautifully structured.' Fairy Powered Productions

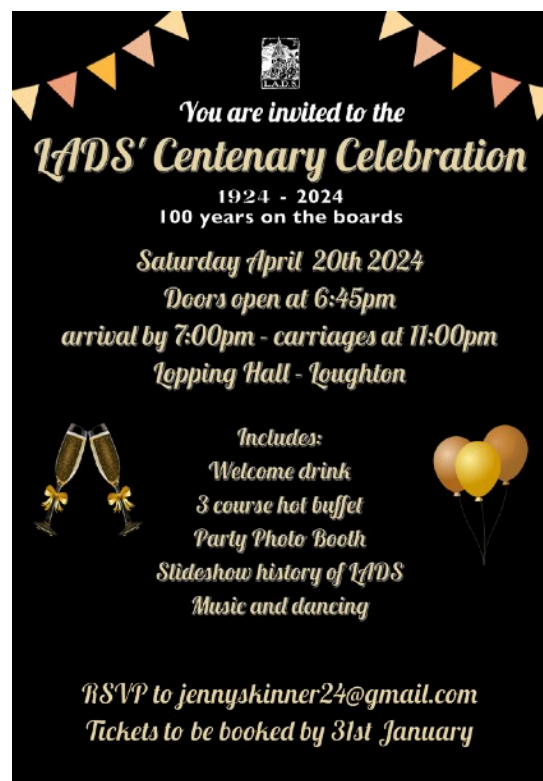
★★★★★.5 'Powerful, poignant, life-affirming' The Reviews Hub

'A triumph of creativity and audience participation: full of humour and sadness but with an overriding sense of hope.' Yorkshire Times

'An impressive solo venture' Always Time For Theatre

'Weaves a story of love, and of how to care for a loved one who feels cast adrift from life' British Theatre Guide

Centenary Celebration - 20th April 2024



Plans for our Centenary celebration are well underway and the Centenary Planning Committee have planned an evening that we won't forget so if you haven't already booked your ticket please do.

This is a wonderful milestone for LADS and it will be lovely to celebrate with as many members as possible.

Booking period has been extended beyond 31st January but please book asap as we need to confirm numbers for catering etc.

Please RSVP to Jenny Skinner on jennyskinner24@gmail.com

To book tickets please send a back bank transfer to LADS (using same details as for membership fees or cheque to Martin Howarth.

I really hope that you will be able to join us for this once in a century celebration of all that is LADS.

Cathy

NODA Crit. - A Murder is Announced

As an enthusiastic Agatha Christie fan, I was delighted to see LADS second play in their centenary season was to be A Murder is Announced. Agatha Christie plays have been a staple of amateur theatre for much of the time LADS have been performing and their popularity was evidenced by the sold out run of this production, Agatha certainly pulls in the punters.

There is a cosy expectation with Agatha. Her stories are often set in comfy rural middle England where traditional values and politeness shine but where revenge attacks, greed, poisoning and stabbing are also common place. Perhaps it's that intriguing contrast that keeps Agatha being read and watched.

Set and Props

The set for A Murder is Announced looked glorious as it oozed late 1940s Chipping Cleghorn and displayed the familiar LADS attention to detail. Full marks to Lee Kenneth for a terrific design. The teal and cream colouring looked rich and wealthy, the impressive fireplace made for a fine drawing room and the details, such as the light switch and door handles, showed care in getting it as authentic as possible. The furniture was in period with a lovely telephone table and

chair. The line of the walls was interesting and underlined the original two rooms with the front bay window. The hall side walls were blacked out which, with the black stage front and black pelmet made for a framed screen of the stage, much like an old television screen.

I was surprised that the chair line was so far back on the stage which meant most of the dialogue was delivered 2/3rds upstage. Was this to keep the chairs behind the fireplace? I'm not sure this worked for reasons I'll explore later. Could the fireplace and the telephone table have been swapped enabling the chairs to be a few feet further downstage?

The props supplied and gathered by Val Jones and Alice Smith were so very important in this play. The purple Devon violets - dead and alive, the impressive pearls that hid a significant clue.



coffee cups with real coffee and milk. The shepherdess lamps (where did you get those?), real chocolate cake with an enormous birthday candle. We had post-war presents such as apples, honey and handkerchiefs as well as a period photo album and aged envelopes. Great attention to detail.

Costumes

Again, the attention to detail in the costumes was exceptional as Liz Adams excelled in the wardrobe department, ensuring everything was of the period. I particularly noticed Miss Marple's black hat and matching gloves, all of Julia's clothes but especially the black patterned A-line dress and the vivid green skirt, Edmund's jacket and complementing waistcoat and Clara's mustard coloured coat. Hats were worn for outdoor wear and changes were made for the

different days in different scenes. A tremendous piece of work, well done.



Direction

The play seemed to be acted in a distinctive style which I assume was by design rather than accident. We were transported to the late 1940s with everyone appropriately well-spoken with a pointedness and exaggeration that was classy and reminded me of a Noel Coward production.

There was good discipline from the ensemble when the attention focused on a couple of the characters. Everyone else was still and listening with no distractions. Examples were in Act 1 Sc3 when Lettie was explaining the background and later when Phillipa had her turn. This was admirable and echoed the audience who were also listening and learning as the plot unfolded.



The blackout murder scene was superb with the chaos of screams, shouts and confusion. The torch light and the new voice of Rudi Scherz heard over the panic and fright made for a memorable highlight. The contrast of pace against the previous calm atmosphere worked well. When the lights came back up, we were

treated to a great picture of the actors gathered over the body and the end of Sc 2.

As previously mentioned, I was surprised to see the chair line so far upstage. This resulted in much of the dialogue being delivered from those positions and the actors needing to project a bit more, which wasn't always evident. It also took the intimate duologues away from the audience. When two or three actors entered together through the door it was a bit of a squash behind the large chair. There was more room when the scenes were played downstage and the actors were able to move around but as so much of the play was seated it meant the actors were a fair way away from the audience.

There were moments of comedy such as Craddock's question 'Is she always like this?' and the response from all was an underplayed nodding yes. Also, the reaction to the toy gun that fired pieces of potato.



The attempted stabbing of Miss Marple could have been more convincing. With better timing Craddock could have reached Letitia as her arm was poised about to plunge with full force into her victim. Instead, Jean was a little hesitant, waiting for Dean and the horror of a live death on stage was less believable. Generally, fights and violent scenes are much more realistic on the professional stage, perhaps something for amateurs to consider.

Cast

Letitia Blacklock

Jean Cooper gave an excellent performance as Lettie (or Lottie). She was in control of the play for much of the opening scenes with her smiling

hostess act that welcomed everyone into her home. This contrasted well with the anger and fury we saw displayed first in Sc 2 but then again in full force later in the play. Lettie had a number of the longer explanations that provided the audience with context and background clues, such as the Randal story or the hotel with Rudi. These aren't easy to convey, but Jean did a good job at delivering the all-important messages.



The iodine scar on Lettie's neck could have been made more obvious when the necklace was removed. The neck scar was covered by Jean's hand and rather than stand face onto the audience, Lettie moved around and was mainly side on to the audience. It was a visual moment that got slightly lost.

The slightly confused and possibly guilty look on Letitia's face in Act 2 Sc 3 when Edmund runs out was one of disbelief and a lovely touch. Her anger and ranting were in good contrast to Miss Marple's calm and unruffled demeanour.

Julia Simmons

Fiona Delves picked up the style of the play well with pointed stock middle-class delivery. It made for a confident performance and leant itself to the deception that Julia was playing. Her reaction to 'The Announcement' was exaggerated and brought her 'jolly hockey sticks' character to the fore. The little silent smiley chats between Julia and Patrick early on suggested there was more between them than met the eye and we saw the hand clenches later referred to by Miss M.

Dora Bunner

Cathy Naylor was almost unrecognisable as Bunny in that thick grey wig. Her costumes were smart but dowdy and Cathy adopted a

noticeable awkward way of sitting with knees slightly apart, as opposed to the other ladies who demurely kept their feet together when seated. Bunny's exaggerated and often funny delivery made her a little different and someone that needed Letitia's care. Trying to remember the titles of the books and the polite disappointment at receiving handkerchiefs for a birthday present were funny. Her penchant to always tell the truth was endearing and comic. It was a good observation of a middle-aged spinster who was dependent on the kindness of others.

Patrick Simmons

Patrick is one of those shallow characters that Christie churned out in abundance. Apart from being a bit drippy, Phil Preston didn't have much to get his teeth into in this part. His diction and volume were good and he and Julia made a handsome pair. Patrick was the sort of chap that could meet a girl and go along with her story rather easily. I liked the way he was seated for the interviews with Craddock and Miss Marple thus taking away the height differences that could have been awkward.



Mitzi

Dolly Howlett plays the eccentric larger than life characters with humour and a style all of her own. They are a great addition to the plays and with Mitzi we saw Dolly at her comic best. It was such a bizarre character with a unplaceable accent, who would never have held down a job in this house but a welcome contrast to the uptight others. I'm glad Christian allowed Dolly to take Mitzi into the farcical sphere, it was fun.

Miss Marple

Sylvia Zilesnick was the quintessential Miss Marple in looks, style and character. This was a lovely portrayal of the calm and considered Miss Marple that takes every turn and tribulation in her stride. Sylvia moved only when required, such as a deliberate walk to the vase or to address someone, it was most efficient. As was her line delivery that appeared considered, clear and well-paced. The final line at the end of Act 1 Sc1, "Who is going to be murdered?", was delivered straight out front then went into a freeze with dimmed lights and was just right in its stock Whodunnit? style.



I liked the way that Miss Marple often remained in the background listening and observing and then, when ready, she stepped down stage into the discussions with an "excuse me Inspector". Miss Marple and the Inspector then became the demon duo sleuths.



Phillipa Haymes

Phillipa was another of this cast of fine speakers with great diction. As well as being a good character actor, Meg Lamour had the most wonderful speaking voice, just right for this style. Phillipa moved around the stage with the grace of a dancer and you just knew there was more to her

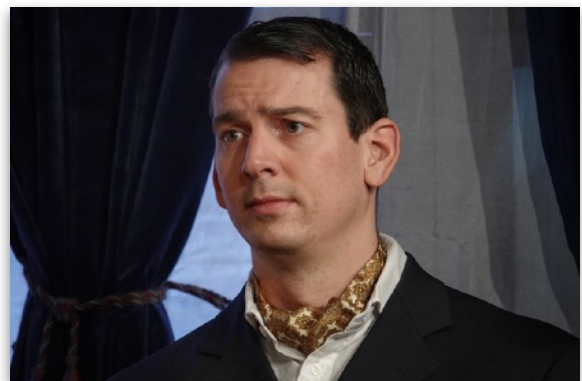
than we were seeing. Phillipa was the obvious Pip but only Miss M worked that out. A good performance from possibly a new LADS member.

Edmund Swettenham

The left-wing political radical didn't have too much opportunity to be developed and is rather brushed over in this version. Dan Thomas did well with little to work on. He was rather more animated than others when called upon to contribute but played the part convincingly.

Mrs Swettenham

Liz Adams captured the rather nosey Mrs Swettenham who didn't want to miss out on the invitation. She was more concerned about what her son Edmund would say or do and became an interesting someone from the village. Again, lovely diction and delivery of lines, Clara added another dimension to the story.



Inspector Craddock

The God fearing, intelligent Inspector Craddock was wonderfully played by Dean Bartholomew who is always a joy to watch on stage. Dressed in a smart sharp suit with neatly cut hair and heavy rimmed glasses, he looked the part. The choice of placing him with a Welsh Accent was terrific and added to the part superbly. I imagined a back story of a strong Presbyterian ex-Welsh guard, a military man now giving his civic duty to the constabulary. It also made me laugh, as I couldn't get Uncle Bryn from Gavin and Stacey out of my head. Craddock was in charge, gathering facts and information from the assembled characters. His sniffs and gestures, glasses cleaning and punctuated delivery of lines were all small details that made for an interesting and distinctive portrayal that gave depth which wasn't necessarily on the page. This

was really good work that made for an excellent performance. Well done.

Sergeant Mellors

Martin Howarth gave an arresting performance as Sergeant Mellors, I thank you!



Sound and Lighting

Andrew Rogers found some delightful pieces of music as incidentals between scenes. Mainly light and country afternoonish but with the occasional menace and intrigue that all fitted the Miss Marple style.

I did think the sound effects of the clock and the telephone too loud. It may have been that they were played through the PA speakers and into the hall. Could the sound have come from a speaker offstage in the wings or even had the PA volume turned down.

The lighting design did its job with the blackout scene working very well. There was no spill from lights off stage and the timing of this most important lighting cue was spot on!

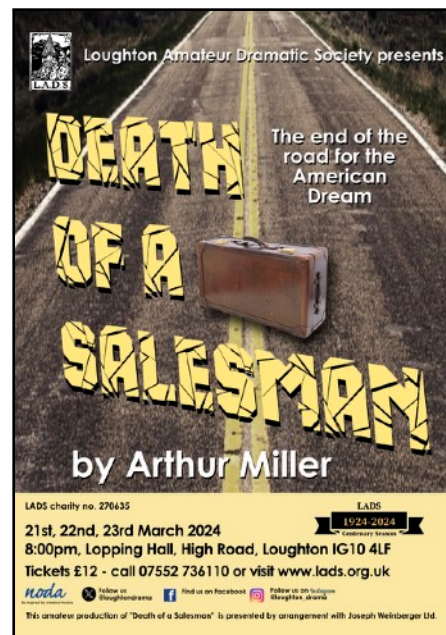
Summary

I really enjoyed this performance of a good play. It showed strong acting in a subtle but effective style that gave much that Agatha would have been delighted with. It was true to the story and period written in the late 1940s. A fantastic set, costumes and props list that showed LADS admirable attention to detail.

Paul Daynes

NODA Regional Representative London District 6
Paul.Daynes@noda.org.uk

Our next production



Rehearsals are going remarkably well for Death of a Salesman – I knew directing it would be a huge challenge, but I have been so encouraged by the wonderful cast and crew we have that each rehearsal is exciting and inspiring. Tickets are selling well, so make sure you get yours booked – many people were disappointed for A Murder is Announced when they couldn't get tickets.

We will need some help with props...

We need some 1940s American football gear – see photos:

- a helmet, which we would need to spray gold
- shoulder pads
- American footballs (delated and blown up)

The helmet and shoulder pads don't need to fit anyone in particular, as they are only carried.

Also

- a leather punch-bag
- a valise
- old fashioned man's umbrella
- washing basket (or log basket) as next page obviously not plastic.

We also need a 1950s 'wire recorder' – see photos. It is unlikely we will be able to get one

and will probably have to make something, so if anyone has anything that looks like it please let me know.

Jean

AMERICAN FOOTBALLS, HELMETS AND SHOULDER PADS



BASKETS:



WIRE RECORDER:



Do you remember?

5 years' ago

January 2019: "The Lion in Winter" by James Goldman.

Directed by Adam Rabinowitz. Cast included: Andrew Rogers, Melanie Clark, Ian Russell, Alex Roth, Peter Galloway, Karen Rogers, Freddy Parker



10 years' ago

January 2014: "Why Me" by Stanley Price.

Cast included: Howard Platt, Eileen Stock, Frances Chalkwright, Cathy Naylor, Jon Gilbert, Peter Galloway



25 years' ago

January 1999: "Rough Justice" by Terence Frisby.

Cast included: Deborah Denne, Amanda Smith, Andrew Rogers, Roger Barker, Val Parker, Babs Oakley, Foster Barnett, Irene Elkins

