

A SOUTHPORT DRAMATIC CLUB PRODUCTION

Sparkling 'High Spirited' comedy from the master.

NOËL COWARD'S

BLITHE SPIRIT



25th Sept - 3rd Oct 2009

Directed by David Charters



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BLITHE SPIRIT

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You are probably reading this sitting waiting for the first of our productions to begin. After a pretty dreary 'wet and dry' summer, here comes autumn with a season of plays to draw you from behind your door and excite your senses.

It seems no time at all since last September. Eleven productions (including our Youth Theatre productions) have traversed our stage to rewarding reviews, affording work, fun and pleasure to the company and audience alike.

Here may we remember the sad loss of Gwen Storey, whose positive critiques appeared in the local press. Her all round talents and charming personality will be greatly missed.

Our everlasting thanks goes to you our patrons and sponsors for your continuing loyal support without which we could not exist.

I am sure you will enjoy our opening play Noël Coward's most enduring work *Blithe Spirit*, which played 1997 consecutive performances, breaking box office records in the West End. This comedy involves a novelist who researches the occult and hires a medium. A séance brings back the ghost of his first wife. Sit back and witness the reaction of his second wife!

September Tide, by Daphne du Maurier is our second production. Set by the sea in Cornwall, this play explores emotion and relationship; involved are, a mother, her daughter and son in law. Attractions in this case are curiously unconventional. Does Daphne du Maurier's personal life inspire her? The tide of romance ebbs and flows throughout. How will it end?



Good Evening and Welcome

Tom, Dick and Harry, a farce by Ray Cooney and his son Michael is the third play in our season. Tom, one of three brothers and his wife are about to adopt a baby. Dick and Harry are anxious to make a good impression on the woman who is to check the suitability of the home and life style of the prospective parents. Can you imagine what the Cooney pen contrived from that situation? Come and see.

Come December we have, as we have every year, our Pantomime. This year it is called the *Beauty and the Beast*, but I do not think that will give you any clue to what it is all about. However, rest assured it will be full of fun, innuendos and last but not least your opportunity to join in.

The Play Selection Committee have the arduous task of finding enough new and familiar material to please you all. They hope their efforts will accomplish that.



Oh by the way, do you know that an exciting deal is offered to our sponsors? Reward your staff and friends. Champagne reception – group/party tickets – wine and supper – meet the production director and the cast and all this while supporting the arts. What's more it's tax deductible; how about it? Just call our Sponsorship Secretary Jorgen Petersen on 505473.

Now join the Condomines and Bradmans in a glass of wine – the bar is open – and await Madam Arcati. Enjoy your evening.

Celia Pope - Chairman



BLITHE SPIRIT



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Director's Notes



David
Charters

Being invited by the Play Selection Team to direct Noël Coward's famous *Blithe Spirit* has been a special honour. It has also presented us with certain benchmarks notched up by the SDC's previous performances. (see page 17). The professional theatre has recently revived the play internationally. The Broadway production starring Rupert Everett and Angela Lansbury* won TONY awards. Penelope Keith set new standards in her recent West End performance. Nearer home the Manchester Royal Exchange will be staging their

production for their winter programme.

We are not intimidated. The text has been edited to fit in with modern playing times and arranged into two acts instead of three. The cast chosen have been a delight to work with and

are ready blithely to achieve the spirit of this entertaining play.

**It has been reported that Angela Lansbury hopes to re-create her role as Madame Arcati in London as her last stage performance.*

*When we are young we
read and believe the most
fantastic things.*

*When we grow older and
wiser we learn, with
perhaps a little regret,
That those things can
never be.*

*We are quite quite wrong!
Noël Coward*




BLITHE SPIRIT

Gender notwithstanding we should be grateful the sentiments of "Don't put your daughter on the stage Mrs. Worthington" were not a reality in the Coward household.

For it was Noël Coward's mother who encouraged her son onto the stage as a child actor and go on to become the author, playwright, actor, director, composer, raconteur and cabaret performer with whose work we are so familiar.

Indeed he developed his clipped, staccato style of speaking so that his almost deaf mother could hear him, with the added benefit of eradicating his slight lisp.

His taste of the high life was announced early in life with "I am determined to travel through life first class" which he most certainly did, drawing some criticism in the austere pre and war years.

Even his war efforts were astonishing.

Winston Churchill told him – "Go and sing to them when the guns are firing, that is your job" and he did so – in Europe, Africa, Asia and America – more than once during air raids without missing a stride.

Mad dogs and Englishmen indeed.

This was also a front for his work for British Intelligence. This was discovered by the Nazis, his name being in their Black Book for his arrest and execution should they invade, which greatly amused him when he later found out. He was wanted by the British for his talent and by the Nazis for execution. Interesting double.

He was widely loved in his profession, not least for frequently and quietly paying for the needs or debts of people he barely knew.

His prime time was before and during the war with such classics as "In which we serve", basing his character on Lord Louis Mountbatten.



Noël Coward
1899 - 1973

He did, however, enjoy later new popularity with "Around the World in 80 days", "Our Man in Havana", "Bunny Lake is Missing" and "Boom".

His last film appearance was in "The Italian Job", during which he suffered bouts of memory loss and the onset of arteriosclerosis.

Blithe Spirit is a Ghost comedy, the title of which is derived from Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem "Hail to thee blithe spirit, Bird you never wert".

Noël Coward considered "Blithe Spirit" his best work and it went on to break box office records for a West End comedy not beaten until 1970s and was made into a film directed by David Lean.

Coward's wit ever present, is typified by Blithe Spirit's Charles: "If you are trying to compile an inventory of my sex life, I feel it only fair to warn you that you have omitted several episodes. I shall consult my diary and give you a complete list after lunch".

Extremely risqué in its day and still amuses today.

He died in Blue Water, Jamaica in March 1973 and was buried on Firefly Hill. At his funeral John Gielgud and Lawrence Olivier read verse and Yehudi Menuhin played Bach.

Impressive even in death.

Best remembered for his wit we close with the following:

When a Times interviewer said: "I hope you have not been bored having to answer the same old questions about yourself"

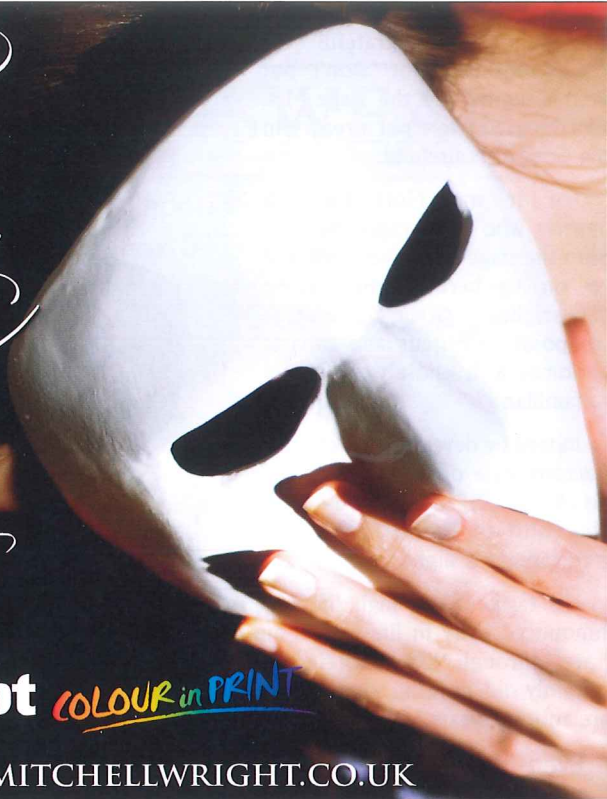
Coward rejoined:

Not at all – I am fascinated with the subject

Aren't we all?


BLITHE SPIRIT

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A **séance** is an attempt to communicate with spirits. The word “séance” comes from the French word for “seat”, “session” or “sitting” from the old French “seoir”, to sit. In French the word’s meaning is quite general. In English, however, the word came to be used specifically for a meeting of people who are gathered to receive messages from spirits or to listen to spirit medium discourse with or relay messages from spirits.

One of the earliest books on the subject of communication amongst deceased persons was *Dialogues of the Dead* by George, First Baron Lyttelton, published in England in 1760. Among the notable spirits quoted in this volume are Peter the Great, Pericles, William Penn and Christina of Sweden.

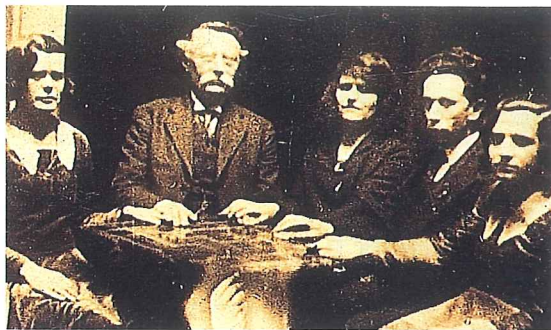
The popularity of séances grew dramatically with the founding of the religion of Spiritualism in the mid nineteenth century. Perhaps the best known series of séances conducted at the time were those of Mary Todd Lincoln who, grieving the loss of her son, organized Spiritualist séances in the White House. These séances were attended by her husband President Abraham Lincoln and other prominent members of society.

The 1887 Seybert Commission report marred the credibility of Spiritualism at the height of its popularity by publishing exposures of fraud and showmanship among secular séance leaders.

The séance depicted in *Blithe Spirit* is a so called Leader Assisted Séance where a small group of people is seated around a table in a dark or semi dark room. The leader is typically asserted to be a medium and he or she may go into a trance that theoretically allows the spirits to communicate through his or her body, conveying messages to other participants.

Scientists who have conducted a search for real séances and believed that contact with the dead is a reality include the chemist William Crookers, the evolutionary biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, the inventor of radio Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of telephony Alexander Graham Bell, and the inventor of television technology John Logie Baird, who claimed to have contacted the spirit of the inventor Thomas Alva Edison.

Scientific sceptics and atheists generally consider both religious and secular séances to be scams, or at least pious fraud, citing lack of



A séance in progress CA.1920

empirical evidence. The Jewish religion strictly prohibits taking part in anything to do with it. Likewise, Islam prohibits this act.

Some Christians believe that spirits can be contacted (as presented in the First Book of Samuel) but that the Bible specifically forbids contact with spirits, and they cite Biblical verses to support their belief.

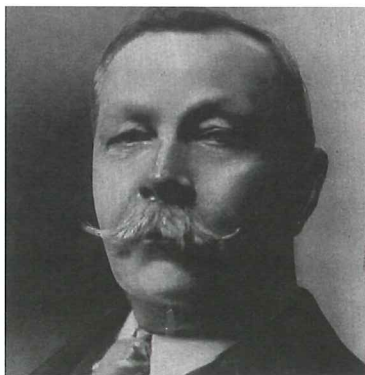
Debunkers

Among the best known exposers of fraudulent mediumship acts has been Harry Houdini, who clearly stated that he did not oppose the religion.

In the 1920s, after the death of his beloved mother, Cecilia, he turned his energies toward debunking self-proclaimed **psychics** and **mediums**, a pursuit that would inspire and be followed by later-day conjurers. Houdini’s training in magic allowed him to expose frauds who had successfully fooled many scientists and academics. He was a member of a *Scientific American* committee that offered a cash prize to any medium who could successfully demonstrate **supernatural** abilities. None were able to do so, and the prize was never collected. The first to be tested was medium George Valentine of Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania. As his fame as a “ghostbuster” grew, Houdini took to attending **séances** in disguise, accompanied by a reporter and police officer. Possibly the most famous medium whom he debunked was the **Boston** medium **Mina Crandon**, also known as “Margery”. Houdini chronicled his debunking exploits in his book, *A Magician Among the Spirits*.

These activities cost Houdini the friendship of the gentleman pictured (left).

A famous believer in Spiritualism
Can you guess his name?
Answers on page 18





Edith
Georgina Gillen



Ruth Condomine
Helen Pickavance



Charles Condomine
Jon Ellis-Fox



Doctor Bradman
Pete Slater



Mrs Bradman
Helen Bennett



Madame Arcati
Pat Ball



Elvira
Marilyn Fletcher-Hill

NOËL CO

BLITHE



Once upon a time there was a charming country house, in which lived a very happy married couple.

Act 1

- Scene 1 Before dinner evening
- Scene 2 After Dinner
- Scene 3 The next morning

There will be an interval of 20 minutes

DWARD'S

SPIRIT



*Kemi Charters—Bastide
as the voice of Daphne*

Act 2

- Scene 1 Later the following afternoon
Scene 2 Early evening, a few days later
Scene 3 After dinner, a few days later
Scene 4 Several hours later

minutes between Acts 1 & 2

Staging

Stage Manager	Linsay Haywood
Assistant Stage Manager (book) & Assistant to Director	Jean Watkinson
Set Design	Syd Coley
Lighting Design and Special Effects	Tony Berry
Lighting Operator	Philip Hutchinson
Sound Design	Brian Hodge
Assisted by	Lewis Scutt
Properties and Stage Dressing	Sandy Town & Ann Richards
Wardrobe	Members of the cast & SDC Wardrobe Manchester Royal Exchange Costume Hire The Costume Shop, Southport Emerson Menswear
Scenic Artist	Bob Jessamine
Set Construction	SDC Production Team
Stage Crew	Michael Clarke Chris Hutchinson
Floral arrangements	Joan Hardwick

Programme

Photographs	Neil Hickson
Illustration & Design	David Charters
Editor	Jorgen Petersen

Acknowledgements

The Director would like to
thank personally:

Helen Bennett, Samantha Roberts and
Georgia Gillen for stepping in as rehearsal
assistants and Fran Percival for loan
of dining chairs

Music used in this production:
Irving Berlin's 'Always'
and
The Blythe Spirit Waltz and
Prelude by Richard Addinsell

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- Should you arrive after the performance has started, you will be guided to your seats when a suitable opportunity occurs.
- At the end of the performance, exits will be open at both the front and back of the auditorium.
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Thank you.

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Always

Elvira's favourite song

The composer and songwriter is Irving Berlin, son of a Jewish emigrant in the USA. No other composer and songwriter has had so much influence on the development and performance of American popular songs as Irving Berlin.

In his personal life, Berlin had met and married **Dorothy Goetz** in 1912 but suffered a tragedy of nightmarish proportions when he and the new Mrs. Berlin went on their honeymoon to Cuba.

Dorothy contracted typhoid fever on their honeymoon and died soon after their return. In 1925 he met a socialite, Ellin Mackay, the daughter of Clarence Mackay, the CEO of Postal Telegraph.

At that time, any songwriter even one of Berlin's stature, was considered beneath the



Irving Berlin
1886 - 1989

social status of such a high born woman and Clarence Mackay tried for months to prevent a marriage between the two. At one point he sent the hapless Ellin to Europe to place her out of reach. It was during this absence Berlin wrote some of his most beautiful love ballads, including *Always*.

However, they were married in 1926, against the wishes of both families, who objected to religious intermarriage, and her father, who was a prominent Roman Catholic layman, disinherited her. Without dispensation from the Church, the two were joined in a civil

ceremony on January 4th, 1926.

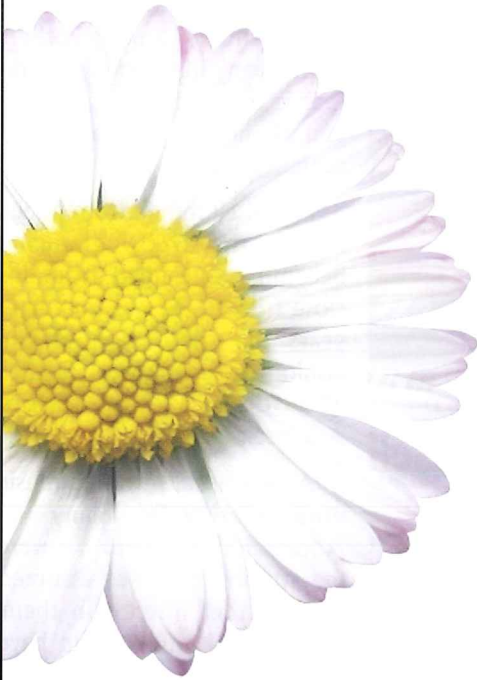
Finances, however, were not a problem: Berlin assigned her the rights to his song *Always*, which yielded her a huge and steady income. Berlin died in his sleep on September 22nd, 1989 at the age of 101 and was interred in the Woodlawn Cemetery in Bronx, New York.

*I'll be loving you always,
With love that is true always.
When the things you've planned
Need a helping hand
I'll understand always*

BLITHE SPIRIT



Madame Arcati: "Daphne is really more attached to Irving Berlin than anybody else".

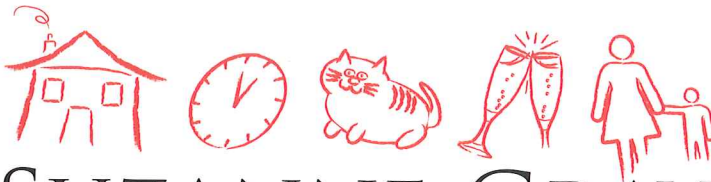


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One evening, when we had some friends around, we heard the *Warsaw Concerto* on the radio. We did not manage to get the name of the composer, and we soon realized that none of us actually knew who it was. Judging from the style of the music we finally came to the conclusion that the Concerto was written by **Rachmaninoff**. We were wrong, but not that wrong.

The *Warsaw Concerto* was written by **Richard Addinsell** for the 1941 film *Dangerous Moonlight*, and continues to be a popular concert and recording piece. The film-makers wanted something in style of **Sergie Rachmaninoff**, but were unable to persuade **Rachmaninoff** himself to write the piece. Roy Douglas orchestrated the concerto. It has been recorded over one hundred times and has sold in excess of three million copies.



Richard Addinsell
1904 - 1976

Addinsell wrote music for several British Films in the mid 20th century among others David Lean's film *Blithe Spirit* and that is the underscoring music you will hear in our production tonight.

Addinsell retired from public life in the 1960s, gradually becoming estranged from his close friends. He was for many years the companion of the fashion designer Victor Stiebel, who died a year before Addinsell in 1976.

As was usual with film music until the 1950s, many of Addinsell's scores were destroyed by the studios as it was assumed there would be no further interest in them. However, recordings of his film music have been issued since his death, reconstructed by musicologist and composer Philip Lane from soundtrack of the films.



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First stages at the Opera House Manchester on July 2nd 1941, as a "try out", before moving on to the Piccadilly Theatre London, with the following distinguished cast:

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CHARLES

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Martin Lewis

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Moya Nugent

MADAME ARCATI

Margaret Rutherford

ELVIRA

Kay Hammond

DIRECTED BY

Noël Coward

This is the third time the Southport Dramatic Club has presented the play.

Firstly directed by **Roland Lumby** in 1961 with the following cast:

EDITH

Susan Fox Hulme

RUTH

Diana Travis

CHARLES

Michael Hards

DR. BRADMAN

Frank Starkey

MRS. BRADMAN

Margaret Wilkinson

MADAME ARCATI

Thelma Falls-Hand

ELVIRA

Eileen Huxtable

The second production was in October 1986, directed by **Janine Grime**, the cast included:

EDITH

Jan James

RUTH

Margaret Hodge

CHARLES

Don Anderson

DR. BRADMAN

Charles Preston

MRS. BRADMAN

Margaret Hill

MADAME ARCATI

Thelma Falls-Hand

ELVIRA

Sandra Unsworth



Margaret Hodge and Don Anderson



Michael Stowell

THE COMPLICATIONS OF CONDOMINE AND THE CONDIMENTS

The 1986 production

On the last Friday and Saturday Don Anderson was too ill to perform and as a replacement Michael Stowell took over the part of Charles without any time for rehearsal. With such a convincing performance the audience hardly noticed that Michael was reading from the script.

However, when Thelma as Madame Arcati requested salt and pepper for her incantations scene, Michael rushed off stage searching, frantically for the items on the properties desk. He came back just with the salt. Thelma still in character immediately sent him off again to find the pepper.



A séance in progress this evening at 7.50pm



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