

A SOUTHPORT DRAMATIC CLUB PRODUCTION



**LITTLE THEATRE**  
Home of the  
Southport Dramatic Club

MIKE LEIGH'S

*Abigail's  
Party*

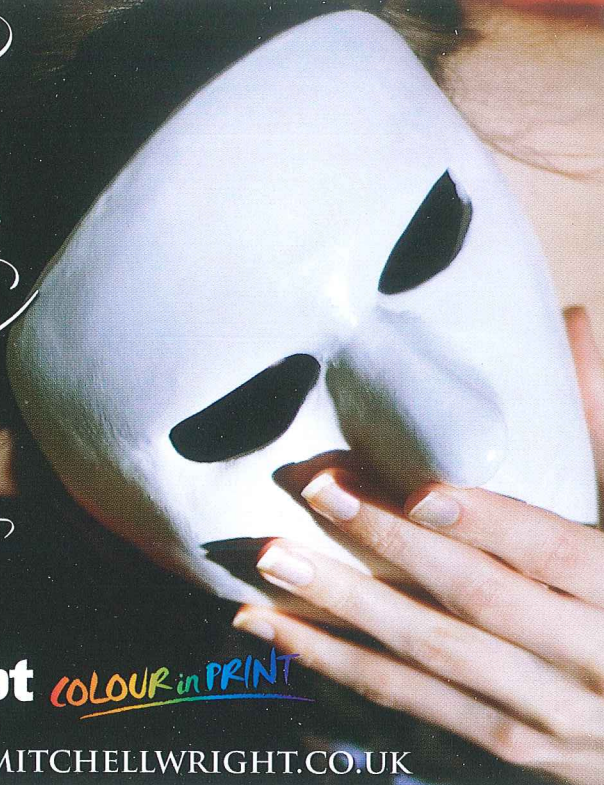
Directed by  
James Hughes-Alty

19th - 27th March 2010

7.45pm



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## Director's Notes

Early in 1977 Mike Leigh was planning a film for the Autumn when Michael Rudman and David Aukin, who ran the Hampstead Theatre, suddenly had to cancel a play at short notice and pressed him to come up with a play to take its place.

A seemingly inauspicious start for a play which ran for over a hundred performances and was so successful that no less than five managements wanted to transfer it into the West End!

The play was entirely devised in workshops where the cast improvised on ideas suggested by Leigh, but with none of them knowing what the others were going to do or where the scenes were going to go. *Abigail's Party* was the first description of the Seventies wannabes, their acquisitiveness, aspirations and so on. It's comedy, but a very black comedy that takes a merciless look at a Britain that was about to change forever with the rise to power of the Tories under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher.



## James Hughes-Alty

The play was later filmed for the BBC1's Play for Today series and though Mike Leigh was never satisfied with the result, it was watched by a staggering 16 million viewers, partly due to the fact that ITV was on strike, BBC2 aired something very highbrow, and Britain was

hit by one of the most violent storms in recent history! Whatever the reason for seeing it, *Abigail's Party* has become one of the best known and best loved plays of its time.

I was delighted to be asked to direct this play, and even more delighted with the extremely talented and experienced cast who agreed to help bring this production to life. I am indebted as always to the hardworking and generally unseen members who contribute to staging, lighting, sound, front of house and box office duties. The performance you are about to see is just the tip of the iceberg but I hope you enjoy it.





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# Mike Leigh

"I grew up from the earliest with a consciousness of class I think that is an important aspect of what it is I naturally keep saying and looking at."

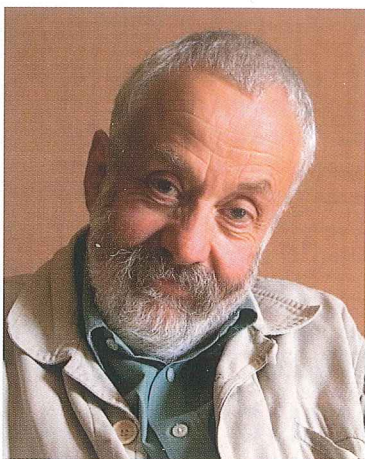
Born in Salford in 1943, Mike Leigh grew up as a middle class boy – the son of a doctor – in the middle of a working class area. Educated at the local primary school, Leigh showed a precious early talent for drawing, amusing friends with cartoons and caricatures. At the age of 17 and armed with three 'O' levels, he went to RADA on a scholarship with the rather vague ambition to, at some point, direct and make films.

His two years at RADA did not inspire Leigh, so in 1963, after a time as an ASM and a bit part film actor, he enrolled at Camberwell Art School. From there he studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and the London Film School, and these experiences, along with an early admiration for the work of Joan Littlewood and the Theatre Workshop (*Oh What a Lovely War*), gradually led him to evolve his own working methods.

Between 1965 and 1969 he wrote nine plays which originated from improvisation, although it was not until 1969 that he realised that he was never going to be a "solitary writer". In 1970 *Bleak Moments* was produced at the Open Space Theatre in London and, a year later, a film based on this play which marked Mike Leigh's debut as a film-maker.

## MIKE LEIGH'S

*Abigail's Party*



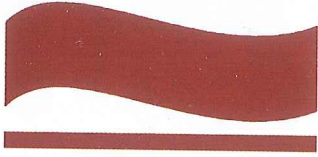
Incredibly, it would be another seventeen years before his next film was released. In the intervening period, Leigh concentrated on writing for the small screen and also producing more work for the stage. In 1972 he began a

productive relationship with the BBC, which included classics in the *Play for Today* series, such as *Nuts in May* (1975), which was later named Sixth Funniest Film Ever by the *Comedy Review* magazine. Theatre work included pieces for the Royal Court and the Royal Shakespeare Company. *Abigail's Party* was originally staged at London's Hampstead Theatre in 1977 and later produced as *Play for Today*. Alison Steadman, then Leigh's wife, won the *Evening Standard* and *Plays and Players* Best Actress Award for her portrayal of Beverly.

In the 1980s Leigh moved on to produce more work for television in association with Channel 4, and it was Film Four and British Screen who financed Leigh's second film in 1988, *High Hopes*. Despite the difficulty of getting backers for his work, *High Hopes* justified the faith of its producers; it achieved commercial success as well as considerable critical acclaim. Leigh founded "Thin Man Films" the following year, together with producer Simon Channing-Williams.

In the years since then, Leigh has produced seven more films, which have all centred on London, reinforcing his status as "the cinematic poet of London". In 1993 he won the Best Director's Award at the Cannes Film Festival for *Naked* and later that year, he was also awarded an OBE in recognition for his contributions to the dramatic arts. More awards have followed, including BAFTA's prestigious Alexander Korda Award and the Michael Balcon Award for outstanding contribution to cinema. *Secrets and Lies* took the Palme d'Or at Cannes in 1996. In 2004 Leigh's story of a back-street abortionist, *Vera Drake*, won the Golden Lion at Venice Film Festival, with Imelda Staunton winning best actress.





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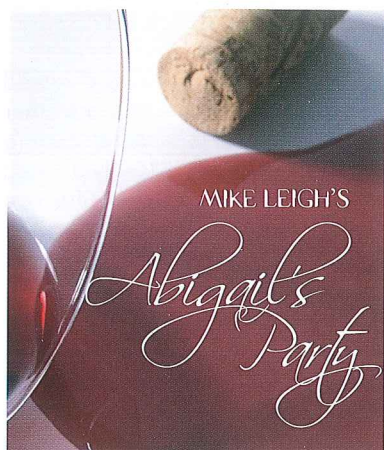
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## Directed by James Hughes-Alty

**A**bigail's Party is a play for stage and television written in 1977 by Mike Leigh. It is a suburban comedy of manners, and a satire on the aspirations and tastes (or lack of) of the new middle class that emerged in Britain in the 1970s. The play developed in lengthy improvisations during which Mike Leigh explored the characters with the actors, but did not always reveal the incidents that would occur during the play.

Beverly and her husband Laurence are holding a drinks party for their new neighbours Angela and Tony. They also invite Susan, another neighbour. Abigail herself is never seen – she is Susan's 15 year old daughter, who is holding her first teenage party next door.

## The Characters.

The characters seem not to like each other; the relationships between the couples appear to be based on mutual irritation and all seem self-occupied. Nor are they particularly likeable.



Beverly

A department store make-up representative, she has failed her driving test a few times (no fault of her own of course), she flirts with Tony and is always trying to impress her guests. She considers her taste in music (Demis Roussos, Tom Jones) and art (kitsch erotica) to be every bit as good as that of her husband. Immensely proud of her home, she nonetheless admits that she cannot use the gadgets in her kitchen except the fridge where she keeps the red wine.

Beverly throughout the night offers her guests drinks and cigarettes (despite the fact that Tony and Angela have recently given up), which they usually refuse but end up accepting due to the fact that Beverly simply does not take no for an answer. Beverly effectively forces her guests to agree with her on most issues, for instance on the music they should listen to, or whether olives should be served, in each instance using their apparent consensus to score points with her husband.



Laurence

Estate agent Laurence is Beverly's husband, and the pair frequently argue. He aspires to the finer things in life: leather-bound Shakespeare (which he has probably never read), prints of Van Gogh and Lowry paintings, and Beethoven which he forces on his guests at unfortunate moments. He seems powerless to compete with Beverly's more flamboyant persona, and compensates by working too much, as his wife points out on several occasions. He considers a brisk handshake to be correct practise after a dance. While Laurence starts off behaving normally during the party, as he becomes increasingly hen-pecked by his wife, he begins to act in more neurotic manner, to the point where he too becomes an annoyance to his guests.





## Angela

Tony's wife. A nurse, Angela appears very meek and somewhat childlike, unintelligent and tactless. She can't drive, as Tony doesn't want her to. She is interested in the mundane and commonplace, much

to her husband's annoyance.



## Tony

He works in computing – merely as a computer operator, his wife twice points out, and used to play professional football for Crystal Palace but it "didn't work out". His feelings towards Angela

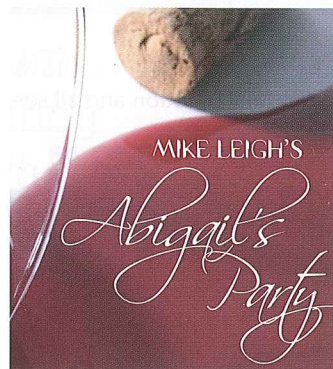
are mixed: on the one hand he is grateful that she cared for him when he was injured; on the other hand she is a constant reminder of the injury that wrecked his football career.



## Susan

Sue was getting divorced at the same time the other characters were getting married, as kindly pointed out by Angela. She is a quiet character who doesn't really have the courage to say no. She is

the only female visibly not dressed-up for the gathering. She clearly would rather be elsewhere. Throughout the play, Laurence attempts to find common ground with her.



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MIKE L

# Abigai

## Cast

*Beverly*

Kathy Felton-Aksoy

*Laurence*

Brendan Gillow

*Angela*

Catherine Leight

*Tony*

Ronnie Orr

*Susan*

Sallyanne Smerdon

Directed by

James Hughes-Alty

The action of the play takes place  
in the house of Laurence and  
Beverly Webb.

Time: Spring 1977

Act 1

Early evening in Spring

Act 2

Later that evening

There will be an interval of 20  
minutes between the two acts.  
Why not pre-order your drinks in  
the bar.





# EIGH'S

# It's Party



## Staging

### Stage Manager

Nick Evans

### A.S.M. (Book)

Sheila Furlong

### Set Design

Syd Coley

### Lighting Design

Tony Berry

### Sound Design

Chris Ratcliffe

### Sound Operator

Chris Ratcliffe

Lewis Scutt

### Properties

Julie Whelan

Gay Stowell

### Wardrobe

James Hughes-Alty  
& Cast

### Set Construction

SDC production team

### Scenic Artist

Bob Jessamine

---

### Photographs

Creative Mixed Media

### Programme

### Illustration and Design

David Charters

### Editor

Jorgen Petersen

## The Little Theatre - Home of the Southport Dramatic Club.

The SDC wishes to ensure that all our patrons enjoy a comfortable, enjoyable and safe visit to our theatre. We should be grateful for your cooperation in helping us to achieve this. Please note the following:

- 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.
- First Aid assistance is regularly provided by volunteers from the St. John Ambulance Brigade. Should you require help, please advise our stewards on duty in the Foyer.
- Patrons with hearing impairments should note that the auditorium has an Induction Loop System for your assistance. Hearing wands are also available from our stewards.
- **CAMERAS AND RECORDING EQUIPMENT MAY NOT BE OPERATED DURING PERFORMANCES**
- **KINDLY ENSURE THAT YOUR MOBILE PHONE IS SWITCHED OFF.**

Thank you.

DESIGNATED PREMISES SUPERVISOR, ALAN NEWPORT

## Music used in the production

### In order:

*I feel love*

Donna Summer

*Goodbye my love, goodbye*

*For ever and ever*

Demis Roussos

*Its not unusual*

*Green, green grass of home*

*She's a lady*

Tom Jones

*Smoke gets in your eyes*

*Nearness of you*

*When I fall in love*

*I'll be seeing you*

Chris Botti

*Symphony No.5 in C Minor, Op.67:*

*I Allegro con brio*

Beethoven



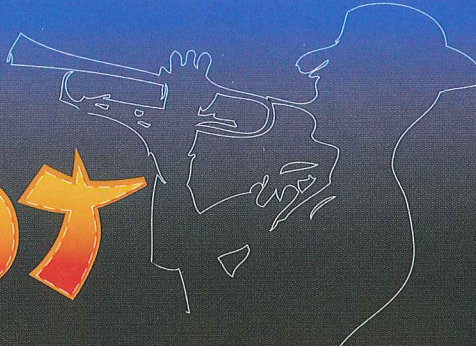
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Tit Willow

A Wandering Minstrel



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# Britain in the 1970s

Abigail's Party takes place in 1977, but what was Britain like in 70's?  
Do you remember? If not, join us for a walk down memory lane.



## CHAOS, RUBBISH & REVOLUTION

The big issue facing **Edward Heath** when he took office in 1970 was the economy.

British productivity was pitifully low compared to America or Europe, never mind Japan.

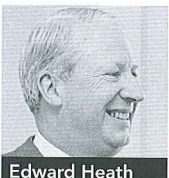
Inflation was particularly worrying. Prices were rising by 7% and wage earnings by double that.

Britain not only had heavy levels of unionisation through all the key industries but also, by modern standards, an incredible number of different unions – more than 600 altogether.

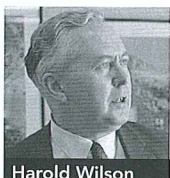
Unofficial and **wildcat strikes** meant that even leaders of large unions had only a wobbly hold on what actually happened on the factory floor.

Heath immediately faced a dock strike, followed by a big pay settlement for local authority dustmen, then a power worker's go-slow which led to power cuts. Then the postal workers struck.

The mood of the government was less focussed and less steely



Edward Heath



Harold Wilson

than it would be nine years later, when **Margaret Thatcher** came to power.

Many industrial workers, living in still-bleak towns away from the glossy pop world of the big cities, did seem underpaid and left behind. The faster growing economies of France and Germany were a living rebuke to Whitehall.

What finished off the Heath government was the short war between Israel and Egypt in October 1973, the **Yom Kippur War**. It sparked an international oil crisis and demands from the miners for increased pay.

The national speed limit was cut by 20 miles per hour to 50mph to save fuel. Then in January 1974 came the announcement of a **three-day working week**.

Ministers solemnly urged citizens to share baths and brush their teeth in the dark. Television, by now, the nation's sucking-sweet, was ended at 10.30 each evening.

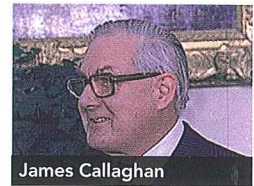
Heath had promised "tomorrow would be better than today" but now he couldn't even keep the lights on. In February 1974 he asked the Queen to dissolve parliament and went to the country on the election platform

he had prepared two years earlier. "Who governs?"

The country's answer, perhaps taking Heath's question more literally than he had hoped, was "not you Ted!"

The election brought Labour back to power with **Harold Wilson** as Prime Minister for a second term. However, on March 16th 1976 Wilson surprised the nation by announcing his resignation as Prime Minister taking effect on 5th April 1976.

Six candidates stood in the first ballot to replace him. They were: **Michael Foot, James Callaghan, Roy Jenkins, Tony Benn, Denis Healey** and **Anthony Crosland**. In the third ballot on April 5th Callaghan defeated Foot in a parliamentary vote of 176 to 137, thus becoming Wilson's successor as Prime Minister and leader of the Labour Party.



James Callaghan

## WINTER OF DISCONTENT

The "Winter of Discontent", a Shakespearean phrase used by Callaghan himself to describe the industrial and social chaos of 1978-9. There were strikes galore: Oil tanker drivers, road haulage drivers, workers at British Leyland, water and sewerage workers. The worst



blow for the government, however, came from the public sector. NUPE, the public sector union, called out more than a million school caretakers, cooks, ambulance men, refuse collectors on random stoppages for a £60 week guaranteed minimum wage.

Children's hospitals, old people's homes and schools were all plunged into trouble, depending on volunteers.

The single most notorious action was by cemetery workers in Liverpool who refused to bury dead bodies leaving more than 300 to pile up in a cold storage depot. Liverpool Council discussed emergency plans for disposing of some at sea. Funeral corteges were met at the cemeteries by pickets and forced to turn back.

In the centre of London and other major cities, huge piles of rotting rubbish piled up, overrun with rats and a serious health hazard. Inside government ordinary work almost ground to a halt.

Nobody was proved to have died in hospital as a result of union actions, there was no shortage of food in the shops and there was no violence. This

was chaos and a challenge to the government. It was not a revolution, but that is the effect it had. Labour was overthrown and out of the chaos came Margaret Thatcher.

Source: BBC Andrew Marr

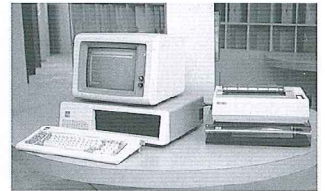


## Silver Jubilee

Despite all the problems, Britain put its heart and soul into celebrating the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977. Most of its heart and soul, anyway. Some, like the Sex Pistols, argued noisily that there was nothing to celebrate, the nation didn't have a great deal of spare cash with which to do it. However, healthy debate on the monarchy was not then encouraged in the way it is now, so the dissenters maintained a low profile as HMQ and Prince Philip set out on an expensive celebratory tour of both the nation and the Commonwealth. On jubilee day, 7th June, thousands of street parties were held across the land, and in the centre of London massive crowds thronged the thoroughfares around Buckingham Palace to salute the Royal Family

## Products Launched in the 1970s

- Digital watch
- Pocket Calculator
- Personal computer  
(all in 1971)
- The word processor
- e-mail (1972)
- Digital Camera (1975)
- Post-it-notes
- Mobile phone
- Walkman (1979)





# Sporting Highlights from 1977

Sporting highlights in 1977 included Virginia Wade's victory over Betty Stove in the Wimbledon ladies final, John Conteh's retention of the World Light-Heavyweight boxing title in a bout with the American Len Hutchings, Geoff Boycott's hundredth century, scored against the Australians in the fourth test at Headingley, and James Hunt's victory in the British Grand Prix at Silverstone.



In the exclusively domestic events, Lester Piggott clocked up his 8th Derby win on The Minstrel, Red Rum galloped into the record books with a 3rd Grand National victory and Manchester United beat Liverpool 2-1 in the FA Cup final.



# Entertainment in 1977

## Film:

*Saturday Night Fever* with John Travolta got many youngsters down to the disco to strut their funky stuff. Alternatives included George Lucas's *Star Wars* and Steven Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, Barbara Streisand and Kris Kristofferson in the third version of *A Star is Born*, and Roger Moore in *The Spy Who Loved Me*, his third outing as 007 (see brain teaser).

## Pop Music:

The European Song Contest was held on May 7th in London with Angela Rippon as presenter. The contest was won by Marie Myriam, who represented France, with her song, *L'oiseau et l'enfant*. United Kingdom came 2nd with *Rock Bottom*.

*Bohemian Rhapsody* is named "The Best Single Of The Last 25 Years". The soundtrack to the film *Saturday Night Fever* was an enormous hit that established the Bee Gees (who had composed most of the tracks) as the most popular artists in the world. *Saturday Night Fever* also moved disco music into the mainstream, and it dominated the charts for the next few years. Beverly's favourite Demis Rousos' *Forever and Ever* topped the charts the year before.

## Television:

If you wanted comedy there were *The Good Life*, *Porridge*, *Morecambe and Wise*, *The Goodies* and *The Muppet Show*. If you were more interested in cops 'n' robbers there were *Starsky and Hutch*, *Charlie's Angels*, *Kojak* and *The Sweeney*.

Plays were a common sight on all channels in 1977 and in November that year *Abigail's Party* was seen by 16 million people.

You have probably noticed that James Hughes-ALty has told the extraordinary story behind this in the "Directors notes on page 3

## Brain Teaser

Beverly is very proud of her well-assorted bar so let drinks be the subject of our brain teaser.

What was James Bond's signature drink?

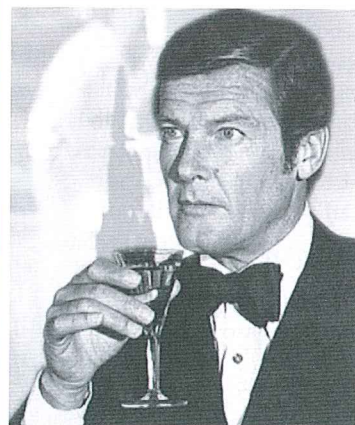
Was it Dry Martini?

Was it Gin and Tonic?

Was it Vodka Martini?

and should it be "shaken, not stirred" or was it the other way round?

Answers on page 17.



Roger Moore as James Bond drinking a ???? - in the Mujaba Club for the film *The Spy Who Loved Me* (1977)



**Margaret Mann**



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# Are you old enough to remember 1977?

## SDC Productions

*Ghost on Tiptoe*  
By Morley & Sisson

*Saturday, Sunday, Monday*  
By Eduardo De Filippo

*Two and Two Makes Sex*  
By Richard Harris  
& Leslie Dureen

*Vivat, Vivat, Regina*  
By Robert Bolt

*Effects of Gamma Ray*  
By Paul Zindel

*Public Eye*  
By Peter Shaffer

*The Gentle Hook*  
By Francis Durbridge

*A Third Person Singular*  
By Sir Alan Ayckbourn

*Skin Game*  
By John Galsworth

*Sleuth*  
By Antony Shaffer

*Mother Goose*  
By John Evans



Gordan Winsland & Peggy Ince  
in *Saturday, Sunday, Monday*



Shiela Pook as Elizabeth I in  
*Vivat, Vivat, Regina*

## Oscar Winners

Best Picture  
*Annie Hall*

Best Actor  
Richard Dreyfus

Best Actress  
Diane Keaton

Supporting Actor  
Jason Robards

Supporting Actress  
Vanessa Redgrave

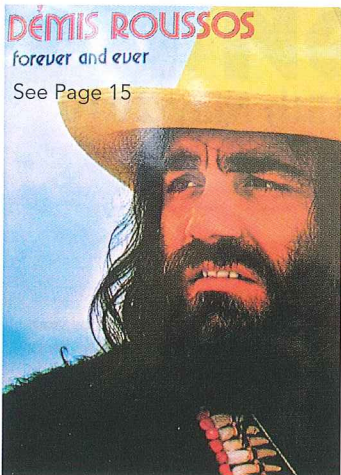
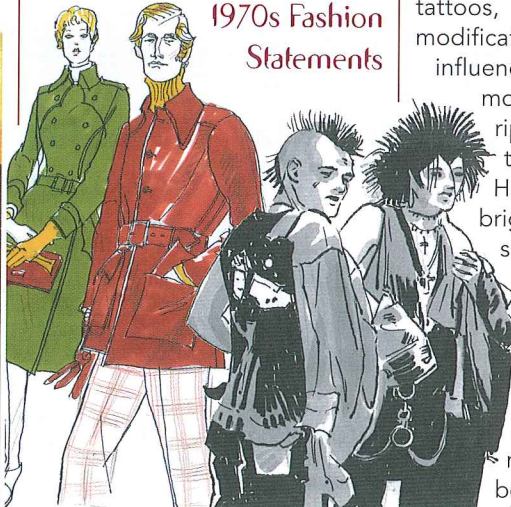
Best Director  
Woody Allen

## The Punk Culture.

Although Abigail never appears on the scene we understand from the conversation on stage that she is a punk or at least influenced by the punk culture which emerged in the UK in the mid 70s.

Punks sought to outrage others with the highly theatrical use of clothing, hairstyles, cosmetics, tattoos, jewellery and body modification. There was a large influence by DIY-created and modified clothing, such as ripped or stitched-together pants or shirts. Hair was typically dyed in bright unnatural colours such as red, blue, green, pink or orange and arranged into a Mohawk or liberty spikes. Hair could also be cut very short or shaved. Belts with metal studs and bullet belts were popular.

## 1970s Fashion Statements





# FUTURE ATTRACTIONS AT THE LITTLE

An SDC Production

## Stepping Out

By Richard Harris  
Directed by Margaret Mann

**23rd Apr -  
1st May 2010**

Box Office opens: 16th Apr 2010



A Maghull Musical Theatre Company Production

## The Hot Mikado

By arrangement with Josef Weinberger Ltd

**9th - 12th June 2010**

Advanced bookings contact Betty & Graham on 01695 632 372.  
Box Office opens: 2nd June 2010

A Waterloo & Crosby Theatre Company Production

## The Hollow

By Agatha Christie By arrangement with Samuel French Ltd

**16th - 19th June 2010**

Advanced bookings 0151 924 0231 Box Office opens: 7th June 2010

A Birkdale Orpheus Society Production

## Hello Dolly!

Book by Michael Stewart, Music and Lyrics by Jerry Herman

**8th - 15th May 2010**

Advanced bookings 01704 564042 Box Office opens: 1st May 2010

An Old Hall Brass Production

## Old Hall Brass In Concert

**20th June 2010**

Advanced bookings 01942 715684

An SDC Bar Production

## My Mother Said I Never Should

By Charlotte Keatley Directed by Michelle Pappini

**18th - 22nd May 2010**

Box Office opens: 11th May 2010



A Loreto Bamber Production

## Loreto Bamber Summer Show

**25th - 26th June 2010**

Advanced bookings 01704 538351

A Too Friendly Theatre Company Production

## The Time of Your Life

by arrangement with Samuel French Ltd

**27th - 29th May 2010**

Advanced bookings 01704 541306 Box Office opens: 20th May 2010

A Southport Amateur Operatic Society Production

## Cole Porter's - Anything Goes

By arrangement with Music Scope & Stage Musicals of New York

**3rd - 10th July 2010**

Advanced bookings 01704 228936 Box Office opens: 28th June 2010

Box Office Tel: (01704) 530521/530460 www.littletheatresouthport.co.uk. Hoghton Street, Southport PR9 0PA



# Hello DOLLY



**Birkdale Orpheus Society**  
50 Years of musical theatre

**Saturday 8th May - Saturday 15th May 2010**

**at The Little Theatre,**

Hoghton Street, Southport

Matinee Saturday 15th May at 2pm

Box Office Opens: Saturday 1st May

11am - 2pm - Tel: 01704 530521

Advanced Ticket Sales - Tel: 01704 564042



Visit our website at:

[www.birkdaleorpheus.co.uk](http://www.birkdaleorpheus.co.uk)

NODA National Operatic and Dramatic Association

Registered Charity No: 701236

Book by Michael Stewart

Music and Lyrics by Jerry Herman

Based on the play "The Matchmaker" by Thornton Wilder

Original Production Directed and Choreographed by Gower Champion  
produced for the Broadway Stage by David Merrick and Champion-Five Inc.

By arrangement with MusicScope and Stage Musicals Limited of New York



**A SOUTHPORT DRAMATIC CLUB STUDIO PRODUCTION  
IN THE BAR**

limited seating, please book early

Directed by Michelle Pappini

**18th - 22nd May 2010**

**7.45pm**

A warm, poignant elegy about growing up, growing old and growing or not growing-wise.



**My Mother Said  
I Never Should**

By Charlotte Keatley



Box Office opens: 11th May 2010, 11am

Box Office Tel: (01704) 53021/530460 [www.littletheatresouthport.co.uk](http://www.littletheatresouthport.co.uk). Hoghton Street, Southport PR9 0PA.



**A SOUTHPORT DRAMATIC CLUB PRODUCTION**



DIRECTED BY  
**MARGARET  
MANN**

**23rd April  
to  
1st May,  
2010**

**7.45pm**

Your dreams  
could be just  
a step away

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# **STEPPING OUT**

## **BY RICHARD HARRIS**



Box Office opens: 16th April 2010, 11am

Box Office Tel: (01704) 53021/530460 [www.littletheatresouthport.co.uk](http://www.littletheatresouthport.co.uk). Hoghton Street, Southport PR9 0PA.