

# BLOC BAILIWICK

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## EDITORIAL BY JACK BLACKMORE

Welcome to the first issue of 2018 (which seems strange to write when it is now April)! We, the team, here at BLOC Bailiwick have been working hard to come up with some interesting new pieces for you all to read, but also keeping some of our favourite entries. This year we celebrate 85 years of BLOC Productions, formerly Bristol Light Opera Club, so we have plans to write a brief history of BLOC as a club through Bristol's history – if you have any stories to add, we want to hear them! Furthering to this, we are trying to get your voice heard more often: please fill in the surveys; something you don't agree with? Write in to us! We even have a new email: [bailiwick@blocproductions.co.uk](mailto:bailiwick@blocproductions.co.uk). Please don't hesitate to get in touch.

In other news, we have a few congratulations. For those of you who took part in 2016's production of *Fiddler On The Roof*, one of the Bagel family, Anya Cooke, has made her West End debut in *School Of Rock* as Katie (the Bass player). Congratulations Anya! Break many a leg. If you head down to see the show, keep an eye out for Anya on stage! Furthermore, huge congratulations to Stephanie Coates and her husband from all of us at BLOC on the birth of their daughter Jessica. We wish you all the best! Lastly, congratulations to all of our new members and I hope they will all feel welcomed into the BLOC family.

We would also like to pay our respects to the late Judith Bright, a prominent member of BLOC through the

sixties, seventies, and eighties. We know she will be missed.

As always, I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the making of this issue: Faye Banks, Jeremy Batt, Sue Donovan, Phil Hallworth, Phil Heycock, Peter Jones, Graham Lewis, Mike Ludlow, Carrie Northam, Gerry Parker, Ewan Poole-Gleed, Lucy Pope, Anna Sutton, Ian Taylor, Alex Turasiewicz, and Simon Vardakis.

For now, enjoy this issue of the BLOC Bailiwick.

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY BLOC

This year marks BLOC's 85<sup>th</sup> Birthday. So to mark the occasion we are hoping to revive an old tradition and have a dinner dance. As BLOC's first meeting was in October 1933 the plan is to arrange it to coincide with this. More details will follow in the coming months.



## BLOC CLUB NIGHT

A new production means we are re-instating BLOC Club Night! We will likely find ourselves for a drink after every rehearsal, however it would be nice to see everyone, members involved in the current production or not, at The Highbury Vaults after every rehearsal on the second Monday of every month: 9<sup>th</sup> April, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 9<sup>th</sup> July, 13<sup>th</sup> August, and 10<sup>th</sup> September. The more the merrier! I hope to see you there after our first rehearsal!

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- What do the editorial team do away from BLOC?
- Find out where BLOC first performed.
- A short history of Chitty.
- What has Ian been up to?
- What is it really like to win a Rose Bowl?
- Find out what Faye really thinks!

## BLOC COMMITTEE

After the most recent AGM, we spoke to members of the Committee about the jobs they do and some of the highlights they have had in their time.

**SUE DONOVAN -CHAIRPERSON**



There are many joys for me. Forty years of them but as Chair a few would be: seeing everyone's smiling faces on stage as the curtain goes down every night, the cheers from the audiences that they have enjoyed the show, being able to give our members a new show not only never performed by BLOC before but giving them a show no other amateur company in the South West have performed first (*Sister Act*, *White Christmas*, *Sunset Boulevard* and now *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*), watching the snow falling on the audiences during *White Christmas* and in the foyer and on the pavements outside. Also, the excitement with Graham when we get the box office figures in the interval knowing we have made a profit and our next year is secure for the Hippodrome, reading the fabulous critics like "jaw dropping choreography" for *My Fair Lady*, the orchestra's first note in *Sunset Boulevard* every evening making all the hairs on my arms stand up, watching and listening to Brendan Casey sing the Beast song at the end of Act one in *Beauty & The Beast*, the harmonies of the three witches in *Witches of Eastwick*. Being stood on stage watching Vicky as a young Evita on the balcony singing "Don't Cry for Me Argentina", watching a member having been given her/his first leading role – watching them from their audition, through rehearsals to opening night (thinking of Charlotte & Pete in *My Fair Lady*), having made some wonderful life-long friendships over the past forty years and making new friends every year, and there are so many more...

To be on the Committee of BLOC with a £200K turnover you firstly: have to attend monthly Committee meetings on time as that is where the business is discussed and issues voted, care passionately about BLOC and its future, realise you are working for what is best for BLOC, not what is best for yourself (EG: choosing a show that you would get the lead), willingness to offer assistance to other Committee members (especially marketing), acting representatives are the link between members and the Committee, and to be

a good team player. I MUST mention my *Fiddler On The Roof* family. I cherish the relationship I have with all my *Fiddler* family meeting on a regular basis from suppers, lunches, watching them in other shows, day trips... only sad thing is my husband, our beloved Rabbi is still many miles away searching for a home for us. AND I get to register all the new BLOC babies meaning my name is on all the birth certificates for life & I marry BLOC couples (eg. Bernard & Cheryl; Mike & Emma).

**PHIL HEYCOCK -ACTING REP**



I think having forty years' experience of working in Finance (the last thirty plus in quite senior positions) alongside twenty years of active involvement in amateur musical theatre both onstage and behind the scenes (additionally with a number of years on GP Committees) that I can be a good all-rounder including informally assisting our Treasurer with any financial input needed. Primarily my role to date has been to represent the members of BLOC to ensure they are treated fairly and their concerns and comments can be taken to GP meetings when appropriate. Being a relatively new BLOC member and coming from outside of Bristol I can hopefully provide a fresh perspective on how we do things. In my work life I regularly recruit staff who have significant financial and operational responsibilities and was able to use these in interviewing and recommending BLOC production team for 2017. On a more personal level, I would like to think that I have done my best to be a welcoming face for new BLOC members. I guess my ethos with regard to BLOC is that whilst we must uphold our standards to be at the top of the game as an amateur group performing in a venue otherwise used by professional theatre, what we do needs to be fun and a rewarding use of each individuals time and talent and that every single member needs to be treated with respect.

**PETER JONES -ACTING REP/  
PRODUCTION SECRETARY**



As an Acting Representative, my role is to represent the members views and bring to the Committee any concerns that members may have; attend monthly Committee meetings; and be present at rehearsals and ensure

members are aware of my role within the club. Furthering to that, I have to attend interviews and auditions for production team, new, and main cast members as "meet and greet". I arrange hall bookings for auditions, rehearsals, and the AGM; organise dates for Carol Service and book the church and services of the vicar; the after-show party (date, venue, food & collect payments); and gifts of chocolates to each dressing room during show week. I, also, help at the Patrons' Tea Party. I assist with arrangements for weekly tea rota, purchase tea/coffee/biscuits etc., serve teas & coffees in the absence of any other volunteers, and compile list of everyone's birthdays & purchase birthday cards and cakes whenever a birthday falls on a rehearsal night. Lastly, behind the scenes I collate weekly sales figures from the Hippodrome and produce spreadsheets showing comparison with previous years productions, attend other meetings as requested (eg. St Peter's Hospice), visit halls & venues re suitability, and assist with organising Children's after show party and with promoting the show (eg. Bristol Pride, Portishead Flower Show, Hippodrome Open Doors Day, Sister Act Bus).

**CARRIE NORTHAM -ACTING REP**



I have been a BLOC Committee member since 2013 when Sue encouraged me to stand as a Members' Representative - I didn't realise at that point that my appointment would go on this long! There are highs and lows being on the Committee - one of the lows for me personally is the length of the meetings, which we have once a month. There is also an inordinate amount of emails and WhatsApp messages that go on between us, which can be very difficult if you work full time! Being an Acting Rep I hope that the members, both acting and non-acting, can approach me with any points that they wish to be relayed to the full Committee. I am there to support other members of the Committee and feel I most certainly play my part by being willing and able to help when things need organising. We can't all do everything but we all certainly try to play our part. There are often important decisions to be made and some discussions do get tense, probably due to the fact that we have been elected to

represent the Membership, which, in itself, is a mammoth task! However, we always need help - whether as a Committee member or something behind the scenes without the pressure and the time commitment needed to be on the Committee! My highlights are when things go right and they often do but being on Committee is not straightforward - and I think the majority of the membership think it is a 2 hour meeting once a month - The highlights are also when my fellow Committee members make me laugh!

#### LUCY POPE -ACTING REP

I take my role as a Members' Representative seriously in respecting individuals' concerns and anxieties and believe that each individual deserves to be heard with respect and sincerity. Similarly, taking the time to respond to those concerns by letter, email, or in person is important to that individual. Sharing positive feedback is also important and can really boost an individual's confidence. On a number of occasions, I liaised and encouraged individuals to consider stated intentions to leave, I respond to members by email. All occasions made a difference to those individuals and all thanked me (and the Committee by default) by the respect they'd received in having their voice heard, issues discussed, and feedback provided.



#### MIKE LUDLOW -HEAD OF SALES AND MARKETING

The sales and marketing lead is responsible for developing and implementing sales and marketing campaigns, in line with BLOC Production's strategic objectives and budget allocations; to promote both the club and their annual hippodrome show. This is a diverse role dealing with multiple media streams including the internet and digital, printed, radio / TV, social media, and the press. Previous commercial experience or a marketing background would be beneficial. The essential skills for the role include creative thinking, time keeping, written and verbal, IT, organisational and project management. The desirable skills include website content management, database management, understanding of the marketing mix and an analytical approach. The Sales and Marketing lead



must work with multiple stakeholders and recruit an annual team to help deliver the workload. Working closely with BLOC's treasurer and the ATG theatre group, a positive outlook and strong interpersonal skills with a sense of humour definitely help.

#### PHIL HALLWORTH – COMPANY SECRETARY

As per the BLOC Constitution the Company Secretary is one of the four Officers of the Company, who collectively form the Executive Committee. As might be expected from the job title, the bulk of the work of the Company Secretary is administrative and involves writing letters and emails on behalf of the Chairman and the Committee. Thankfully I am spared the task of writing Minutes of Committee meetings, which is just as well as I am currently doing the job from several thousand miles and several time zones away in Pakistan! The main secretarial tasks throughout the year include: notification and paperwork relating to the AGM, arrangement of any Extraordinary General Meeting from time to time, drafting letters of appointment and contracts for Production Team, drafting paperwork relating to child licences as applicable, copyediting promotional material for the shows, management of the Membership database, and writing to the Company as required on general matters unrelated to the day to day communication relating to the current production. Equally important is providing support and advice to the other three Officers. I think what acting members sometime don't appreciate is that the work of the Committee continues throughout the year. From the moment the curtain goes down on one production we start the process of planning for the next. Selecting the right show and the right Production Team are probably the most important and stressful decisions the Committee has to make as the future success of BLOC depends on making the right artistic and commercial decisions. Not surprisingly therefore the highlight of Committee work for me is seeing the Company pull off another artistic triumph and the Treasurer beaming at the size of the bank balance! Committee meetings are generally long and lively! It is the nature of the non-professional drama world that opinions are diverse



and strongly held and if I said discussions were always harmonious I'd be lying! However, what unites us is the best interests of the company and hopefully, as elected members and Officers, we do a decent job on the membership's behalf.

#### GRAHAM LEWIS – TREASURY SECRETARY/VICE CHAIRPERSON

As Treasury Secretary, I assist in the initial show selection, contract negotiation with Hippodrome and licensing co., and sort the annual renewal of all BLOC insurance premiums. I set and manage the budget, take responsibility for financial security of BLOC, prepare and present accounts to the AGM, and prepare and submit annual accounts to the charity commission. I handle the ongoing liaising with Hippodrome over many aspects before, during, and after the show; liaise with HMRC, re Gift aid tax reclaims; and handle the ongoing management of BLOC bank accounts. Finally, I review weekly ticket sales results and manage budget appropriately; sort the negotiation and liaison with Production team (general interface with the production team/Committee and membership); manage all income and expenditure - all payments out (orchestra contracts and payments); and act as a Peacemaker whilst dealing with general enquiries.

My highlights for being Treasury Secretary include not losing any children during *Fiddler On The Roof*, the strong friendships I've built, and being able to announce a profit after a show!

We also welcome Craig Rees who has joined the Committee as an Acting Rep.



#### Did You Know?

Caractacus Potts was named for the last independent ruler of England before the Roman conquest of southern England.

## GETTING TO KNOW YOU

A shared love of Musical Theatre is what brings us all together but how much do we really know about each other. We thought we would take the time and "Get to know you" starting with the editorial team.

**Jack Blackmore**

I joined BLOC after I was told that they needed more men for the production of *Fiddler On The Roof* and was lucky to discover that the part of Mendel had yet to be cast! *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* will mark my third production with BLOC Productions and I'm very excited to get back into the rehearsal space of Cotham Parish Church Hall.

Outside of BLOC, I am in my final year of university studying English & Journalism, work at the Bristol Hippodrome as a cashier (and on the odd occasion on the bar at Frankie & Benny's), and play squash regularly with some other BLOC members.

My favourite moment with BLOC will be the Saturday evening performance of *Fiddler On The Roof* having completed the bottle dance scene for the seventh performance in a row and not letting a single bottle fall in front of an audience – the euphoria felt from all in the venue was just incredible. It'll take a lot to top that!

**Alex Turasiewicz**

In September of 1976, I left London to come to Bristol to take up my first teaching post. I was completely new to the area so started looking around for a company to join. One of the first companies I saw that year was the Bristol Light Opera Club; they were performing *Oklahoma* at the Bristol Hippodrome. It was great to see a large company perform on a professional stage with a large professional orchestra. In the programme were the details of who to contact if you wanted to join and I did my audition singing "Wonder of Wonder" from *Fiddler On The Roof* and a speech from *Henry V*. I was accepted - it definitely was a bit easier then, if you were male - and my first show in 1977 was *La Belle Helene* in which I had a small principal part. Things were very different then: on the Sunday of the get in we had an hour on the stage and then Monday night was a Dress Rehearsal. We opened on Tuesday and played for two weeks

but only had matinees on Saturday - a total of thirteen performances. The second week was a breeze as the show had completely settled down and it did feel as though we could do a very long run. The main leads were always double cast and played alternative performances. Also, we didn't have radio mics and genuinely had to project to the back of the upper circle. Doing the show for two weeks meant that very good friendships were formed and I'm still in touch with many of those people involved in that first production.

I'm not a dancer but one of my fondest memories of BLOC is working with a lovely dancer called Lucille Ash, who seeing my worried face during one routine said "Don't worry - just stand there and I'll do the rest!" Although over the years I have had the pleasure of working with other clubs, BLOC has always been my number one club and I have prioritised being involved in their show every year.

Although I may not be around to see it, I hope that it gets to a one hundred years in 2033 and many of the current members will be able to celebrate a long and happy continuous association with BLOC having made it their number one club too.

**Anna Sutton**

How did I get involved in BLOC? Well in the words of *Pitch Perfect* you could say I'm something of a 'legacy'. My grandma Gwen, joined BLOC in its second show back in 1935, Dad then got involved in his teens and Mum having met dad during a BAOS show joined to spend more time with him. Having been onstage before I was born hidden under a habit, my first steps on stage were age six in *Carousel*. Living out of Bristol meant that I didn't really get involved again until the age of fourteen when I was the only one in my family not participating in *42<sup>nd</sup> Street*, so rather than be left at home every night I joined the backstage ranks as a dresser, a few years backstage and then age seventeen I returned to the stage.

Off stage I am lucky enough to have a job I love, working in a local primary school as a Business Manager, which for those of you who don't know means I manage the school budget, health & safety, and anything else that is not teaching & learning.

My favourite show has to be *Sister Act*, it was a joy to perform, made you smile, amazing audiences plus I got to watch Mum excel as *Sister Lazarus*.

With a lifetime of memories it is hard to pick a favourite moment, so I'll pick my first and probably most long lasting memory, rushing to get a seat on the full size, moving, carousel horses for the opening of *Carousel*.

Taking after both parents I have been lucky enough to enjoy 24 years with BLOC both on and off stage and am looking forward to marking 25 years with Chitty.

**Ewan Poole-Gleed**

I discovered BLOC when auditions started for *Fiddler On The Roof*. Unfortunately, I was busy with three other productions at the time and so couldn't audition, but I really enjoyed the show and I vowed to audition for the next year!

Outside of BLOC, I recently graduated from UWE Bristol with a degree in Drama with Creative Writing. I work at the Hippodrome as a Front of House Supervisor, so I'm very comfortable with the building already! I've also recently joined BAOS and will perform with them in *Jekyll & Hyde* in a few weeks. I will also be performing in *Sense & Sensibility* at the Minack theatre in Cornwall in June.

I think my favourite moment from my time with BLOC so far was the rehearsal we had for the dance break in "With a Little bit of Luck" last year. It was one of the hottest days of the year at the Newman Hall, and everyone was sweating buckets, but there was so much focus and we perfected the difficult routine. That was a well-deserved pint we had afterwards!

**Did You Know?**

*Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* has the distinction of being the only non-James Bond film produced by Albert R. Broccoli and Harry Saltzman after the Bond series began.

## THE HISTORY OF CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG



In 1964, Ian Fleming, author of the James Bond books, wrote *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang: The Magical Car*.

Fleming was inspired by real vehicles: a series of racing cars built by Count Louis Zborowski in the early 1920s. Fleming wrote the book for his son, and in fact it was the last book he wrote. He died from heart disease shortly before the book was published. The story of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* is perhaps most famously known for the film, released in 1968 starring Dick Van Dyke and Sally Ann Howes. Written by Roald Dahl, the film is quite a loose adaptation taking the concept of a transforming car but changing a lot of the plot.



In the book, Caractacus Potts is still married to his wife, Mimsie, and restores the

vehicle with money he earned from selling his whistling sweet invention to a local factory. The car surprises the Potts family by prompting them about its secret features, like its ability to transform in to an aeroplane and a boat. They sail in Chitty to Calais where they blow up a stash of ammunition stored in a cave, but the gang, who had stored the weapons, chase them and kidnap the children, Jemima and Jeremy. The gang plans to use the children as a decoy in a robbery but the children manage to warn the shop owner just as Chitty arrives with Caractacus and Mimsie. The family fly off and the book implies the car has more secrets.

The story in the film is much more fantastical than the books, featuring a sweet factory overrun by dogs, a Baron who wants to steal the car, and a country that has outlawed children. Caractacus Potts is widowed in this version, and there is a romantic sub plot between him and Truly Scrumptious, the daughter of the sweet

factory owner.

In 2002, the stage production premiered at the London Palladium. Featuring all the songs from the film, including six more written by the Sherman Brothers (who wrote the songs for the film), the story follows very closely to that of the film. The original production ran for over three years, and in that time became the longest running show the Palladium had ever seen, making over £70 million. The car used in this production holds a Guinness World Record for the most expensive stage prop ever costing £750,000! The show has since had three successful UK tours, the last having its final performance at the Bristol Hippodrome in February 2017.



## MY FAVOURITE THINGS

“Have you ever wondered what BLOC’s favourite movie musical is? Favourite song? Stage musical? Worst musical? Well, now’s your chance.” Each issue we will be compiling a different top 5 of our “Favourite Things”. In the next issue we will be revealing out Top Five Movie Musicals. Now we just need your votes. Please head over to the link and make your choices.

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DR7NSQ9>

## THE WINNER TAKES IT ALL – SIMON VARDAKIS

It's a Thursday afternoon in the busy shopping centre of Cribbs Causeway. The Mall is filled with the buzz of Christmas shoppers, the sound of the Salvation Army playing Christmas carols hangs in the air, with the percussion of cutlery and porcelain being prepared in the coffee shop I sit in as I wait to greet Simon Vardakis and ask him on his recent Rose Bowl Award evening, where he has won his third award. I set up the microphone and see Simon beaming as he takes a seat opposite me.

JB: First things first, congratulations on your win!

SV: Thank you very much!

JB: How was it seeing the nomination for your role as Tevye in 2016's *Fiddler On The Roof*? You put a lot in to that role!

SV: Yeah! It was the award I wanted. Whilst I've won previous Rose Bowls, the one I really wanted was "Best Actor in a Musical". It was my fourth nomination for productions with BLOC, because I'd previously been nominated for Che in *Evita* (2001), The Music Man in *The Music Man* (2003), and Bill Snibson in *Me And My Girl* (2008). So, I was really pleased to get nominated for Tevye, I have to say, and you're right, it was very much an all-consuming role! I was really pleased when I received the nomination, but I absolutely wasn't holding my breath. Because I'd won the year before, I just thought, 'they're not going to give it two years in a row, they're just not!' Different category, but even so!

JB: Did you prepare a speech in advance?

SV: No, not even slightly. Bearing in mind, I didn't win anything the first five times I was nominated for the Rose Bowls. When it came to nomination number six, I just thought, again, 'I'm not holding my breath'. I just literally thought of something five minutes before the winner was announced! And then when I was nominated last year, again I thought 'well I only won a couple of years ago, they're probably not going to give me one,' so I didn't bother preparing a speech. And then as I won last year, I absolutely prepared nothing [this year], because I really didn't believe for a second I would win for it! So, no, no prep whatsoever! In fact, in previous years, I'd been really careful about how much I drank before I went up... No, I just cracked open the Gin and tonics, and the wine! I just didn't care; 'I'm not going to win, so it really doesn't matter how drunk I am.'

JB: It must have been quite another shock in that sense!

SV: It was, in fact I wasn't looking! I was looking down at the list, because I've tended to, over the last few years, bet on who's going to win. You put 50p in the pot; you back a horse! And then, whoever wins, you win the pot. So, I was busy checking through how much [I'd won] and suddenly my name is called out! 'Oh! I'd better get up then!'

JB: How did you prepare for Tevye? How was that in

your mind? When did you start preparing?

SV: I probably started before the auditions... Because I was in the production when we did it last (in 1999). I hadn't auditioned for any of the suitors, because none of them appealed. It was only ever the part of Tevye that had appealed to me in that production, so I just remember thinking 'well obviously I'm too young for this, I won't be auditioning for that, but maybe at some point in the future.' But I distinctly remember thinking that I'd want to do it differently from the way it was done. So, I watched a bit of the film before the auditions, and I just thought 'this isn't really how I remember it. I still want to play it, but I don't really want to copy this.' So, then I read the script a couple of times before the auditions, and that was really when it started because I just saw him as a really funny character, just a much lighter character than perhaps he's usually portrayed. I just found him really funny! When it came to the auditions and learning the monologues, I thought 'I'm going to inject as much lightness as I can to this.' Plus, it adds more to the pathos, and adds more to the sadness of the second act as things start going horribly wrong for him if the audience are really laughing at the outset. So that's where it started, finding lightness throughout it, and then for the second act finding more pathos and

sadness. And then, also, from my background, because my father being Greek Cypriot and my Grandmother being born in Cyprus with the villages she came from were like this! This is what it was like! I appreciate this was a Russian Jewish community we're talking about, but the Greek Orthodox in Cyprus of eighty years ago: that's what it was like! Very much these little hamlets, very much people being the dairymen, or being the farmer, and there's quite a lot of similarities between the heritage. Even the way in which they sing, there's a lot of chanting in the singing, and an awful lot of that is the 'yada-yada' (like in "If I Were A Rich Man"), so I'd heard a lot of that from when I was a kid, so that felt natural to me. It's not the Jewish heritage, but it's of the time heritage, and that still fits really. And, obviously, I started growing a beard!

JB: Do you feel the beard helped you?

SV: It did. I'd argued from the outside "I am the right age, I don't care that it's always played by someone older". In fact, I was five years older than [Chaim] Topol was when he made the film; and kids got married at fifteen/sixteen and started having children immediately! So, therefore, if I'd been married for twenty-five years, he's forty. I know he's played by a fifty-five/sixty-year-old a lot of the time, but for me he's not. The beard did help to add age to

the character, and also a feel of a countryman, the idea that he's not clean shaven does provide a more rustic feel. The older boots, that side of it give a feel for the poverty that he's got. And it adds to the tradition, of course. The fact that he says about having the heads covered and all these sorts of things, it adds to that heritage, to the belonging to this community. It helps with your sense of how your character fits in to a piece.

JB: You said that one of your goals was to achieve Best Actor in a Musical at the Rose Bowl Awards. What's your next goal?

SV: I guess I've got one award missing to complete the set. I've got Best Actor and Best Supporting Actor in a Musical, and I've got Best Actor in a Drama, I don't have Best Supporting Actor in a Drama. I'm not going to get that with BLOC, obviously! So, there's an argument to say that it would be nice to complete the set, of course it would! There's also an argument to say it would be nice to win three in a row, I don't think anyone's ever done that! But as far as the Rose Bowl Awards are concerned, I haven't [got a goal]. I wanted that one. When I won the first one in 2013, I literally did not take it out of its box until I won the second one in 2016. Didn't put it up, it was in a box in a cupboard. Because I just thought 'I've been nominated five times for Best Actor in a Musical, I get nominated once for Best

Supporting Actor in a Musical... Just not interested. I feel like you've given me this "because he deserves one. He's been nominated so many times, he deserves one." Just didn't do anything for me. So, it stayed in the cupboard. Then, when I won the second one, I got them both out. And now I've got this one! Brilliant! I would like to win one more, because I want to catch up with Christine West. She's a friend of mine and she's got four! But to be honest, I don't really have a goal. I suppose I'd like to win one for Directing? I'd like to direct a Best Musical, that would probably be the next thing, but that's quite a few years away. The next thing for BLOC would be to direct for them, and then to win Best Musical with them as Director.

JB: Well that's everything. Thank you very much Simon.

SV: You're very welcome. Thank you.



## FROM BLOC TO THE WEST END PART TWO BY JEREMY BATT

Going to college really was a huge step in my life, it gave me the platform to express myself and introduce me to the possibility of life as a performer. It gave me a platform to try and succeed. The big test was when you leave and must go it alone; I was lucky that I was able to get *Top Hat* before I left college as I was auditioning for a few things during my final year. When you do enter the business after college, it is so thrilling but can be scary as I was now on my own, an adult having to make decisions for myself, with some great advice from my parents and agent. I will say this I've found that keeping in contact with my agent and having an open dialogue to share opinions and have their advice has helped me immensely in my career.

I also can't believe that I have been able to fulfil some dreams of mine: to be in *Les Miserables*, my favourite show in the whole world, and to also appear as a professional on the Bristol Hippodrome stage with *Top Hat*. It was astonishing stepping back in to that place where I used to run around as a kid and here I am back as a grown up and a professional actor it was quite an extraordinary feeling. I'm currently performing in *Follies* at the National Theatre, and, again, I never thought I would have the opportunity to perform on a stage like that and I just always remember the feeling of stepping on that iconic Hippodrome stage as a boy and now getting to perform in another historic venue is truly magical. I just want to finish this part

by saying it's been a privileged be able to do the things I've done. If I could give any advice it would be never take for granted an opportunity and always try and express yourself as the person and performer you want to be. I would just like to end with saying it is truly an honour to have been asked to write this for the BLOC newsletter, it means a lot that I was thought of for this plus everyone is always so kind and polite when I come and visit, and it makes it that extra special. Thank you, I will never forget it. Also, to those who remember me when I was a kid, I apologise for my hyperactivity, I've calmed down slightly since then! Can't wait to come and see the next show!

## ON MY OWN BY FAYE BANKS

We all love musicals, if we didn't why else would we be part of this wonderful club. But have you ever watched a show that everyone is raving about and just not got it and thought you were the only one. We at BLOC Bailiwick want to give you the opportunity to share those thoughts and ask the question am I "On My Own".



I am delighted to be asked to vent on, well to be honest, anything but on something close to my heart. So, let's start with a positive...I love musicals! I love the daft bursting into song for no apparent reason, those obvious 'cue for a song' moments, a stage full of tappers moving as one, a set so immersive you feel like Alice in Wonderland falling down the rabbit hole, the highs and lows, and belly laughs.

Clearly, I'm a fan. But not all musicals are equal, so let's start with those that other people seem to love, but I would definitely shove

into Room 101;

Kicking off with *The Lion King*... five minutes of incredible explosive theatre followed by nearly three hours of unintelligible wailing and drumming...bum numbing, eye lid drooping, ear ache.

Next up, the racist and sexist *Annie Get Your Gun*. Oh yes, I'll pretend to be a crap shot so as not to crush the fragile ego of the leading man and, afterwards, I'll sing joyfully dressed up as a 'Red Indian' singing 'I'm an Indian Too'...cultural appropriation anyone?

Oh, *Hairspray*...where to start? Fat girl moans, hot self-obsessed guy doesn't notice her; fat girl gets famous by screeching, hot self-obsessed guy suddenly interested; fat girl does more painful screeching...the end. Moral of the story? If you want a narcissist, you don't need talent, just become a pointless celebrity.

Finally, the one that will probably get me defriended by my cool am-dram friends (actually is anyone in am-dram cool, really?);

anything (yes anything!) by Jason Robert Brown. Ok, a one-off moment of genius in *Parade* aside, the rest is self-indulgent naval gazing guff. I'm not explaining myself... It. Just. Is.

So, this has been thoroughly enjoyable and, despite not using my most favourite colourful language (assuming this is a family publication), I look forward to reading others.

Lots of love, Banksy xxx

Do you agree? Do you disagree? Write in to us at [bailiwick@blocproductions.co.uk](mailto:bailiwick@blocproductions.co.uk).

### Did You Know?

The first non-Disney film to feature songs by the Sherman brothers.

## IAN'S COLUMN



Don't worry! While "Ian's Column" might sound just a little bit X-rated, I promise you it isn't going to be. Alex T and Vicky Hartland – both over-fond of double entendres if you ask me – may have come up with that particular title, but you can rest assured that what you'll be getting is a family-friendly musing on the theatre productions I've seen, the ones I plan to see, and the ones that I recommend that you try to see too.

So far this year, personal reasons have somewhat curtailed my regular theatre trips, but that doesn't mean I haven't already seen some wonderful things on the London stage. Three musical productions head my list:

**Hamilton** - What more is there to say about the juggernaut hit that's just arrived from Broadway? Believe the hype and buy a ticket now (they've just released a new batch). It's a 'game changer' of a musical and it really is as good as the critics say. An expertly crafted story is sensationally performed by a stunningly talented company; combining brilliant choreography with an incredible fusion of hip hop and musical theatre. It's truly a creation that generates wonder and amazement. I loved it and have already

booked to see it again twice more this year.

**Follies** – Stephen Sondheim's brilliant musical, stupendously performed in an unforgettable production, may have finished its run but the good news is that it's been such a smash commercial and critical hit that it will be back at the National Theatre next year. You'll never see a better production of this glorious bitter-sweet homage to the *Follies* of yesteryear. It's truly unmissable and you'll need to get your booking in early on this one.

**The Grinning Man** – many of us saw this home-grown musical on its first run at the Bristol Old Vic. It's now getting a well-deserved bow in the West End. A strange tale based on Victor Hugo's novel *The Man Who Laughed*, it is simultaneously dark, poignant and uplifting. I was swept up in the story and loved every strange and eerie minute. Highly recommended for those who missed it in Bristol.

If your preference runs to plays, you'll be spoiled for choice right now. I'll confine my recommendations to just two:

**The Ferryman** by Jez Butterworth is the hot ticket of the year. Fresh from its recent 'Best Play' win in the London Evening Standard Awards, it's likely to go on to scoop an Olivier Award in April. Marshalling a large cast to focus on the events

surrounding the deaths of the IRA hunger strikers in 1981, this epic play has garnered five-star reviews from all the major UK papers. It offers three hours of compelling theatre.

**Network** is a play by Lee Hall that's been adapted from the 1976 film of the same name. Directed by the brilliant *avant garde* director Ivo van Hove and starring Bryan Cranston and Michelle Dockery, *Network* is an immersive production at the National Theatre's Lyttelton auditorium that brims with quality and technical chutzpah. Cranston – famously "mad as hell and not going to take it anymore" – gives a tour-de-force performance that should win him an Olivier Award in April. What's not to like?

There are still plenty of other productions that I've yet to see. Mouth-watering prospects include *Everyone's talking about Jamie*, *Young Frankenstein*, and *The King and I* – and I've already got my seats booked for the National Theatre productions of *Absolute hell* and *Macbeth* (starring Rory Kinnear and Anne-Marie Duff), *The Inheritance*, and *Fun home* at the Young Vic, *Romeo and Juliet* at the RSC, and the musicals *Barnum*, *The Rink*, *Miss Littlewood*, and *Company*. Reviews to follow in due course...

## DECADES OF BLOC BY GERRY PARKER

In October 1933, this paragraph appeared in the local Bristol newspapers: 'A new amateur society to be known as the Bristol Light Opera Club is being formed. The promoters feel that there is scope for a new organisation of this kind and it is their intention to conduct the society's affairs on democratic lines paying particular attention to the development and encouragement of new talent'. The new club, conceived at the Rotary Club House in Colston Street, quickly found a regular home in the Cabot Cafe on College Green. The Cafe is long gone, but the decorative facade is still visible if you look up when walking from the Centre through to the bottom of Park Street.

The newly formed BLOC immediately found strong support: The Duchess of Beaufort became the first president; and amongst the Vice-Presidents was the legendary singer Dame Clara Butt. 1933 could hardly be described as a time when life was easy in this country, with over 2.5 million unemployed, 25% of the working population.

Undeterred, BLOC set about forming a company to produce Gilbert and Sullivan's *Cox and Box* and *The Pirates of Penzance* at the Victoria Rooms, opening on April 17th, 1934. To add a few new problems for the fledgling company, it was arranged that two days before the dress rehearsal the whole production would be transported to St Monica's Home for the Elderly on the Downs and be presented there. Problems caused by an inadequate generator did not stop the performance going ahead, and in spite of the many difficulties it threw up, BLOC's first production was so well received at the home that the practice was repeated for several years. The cost of staging that first production was £300 and, even taking into account inflation, that is a very small amount compared to

today's budget for a production at the Bristol Hippodrome!



The Colston Hall provided the venue for the two productions staged in 1935, which saw the company at last living up to their name presenting the Light Operas *The Geisha* and *The Vagabond King*. The latter show proved to be a favourite with BLOC audiences, being chosen for the company's first production at The Empire Theatre in Old Market in 1947 and, repeated there, in 1951. The move from the Victoria Rooms to the Colston Hall was not a voluntary one: it was caused by a fire which consumed most of the Victoria Rooms in January 1935. A small group of BLOC supporters and management were in fact gathered across the road on the corner of Richmond Hill ready to embark on a journey to London to see costumes and scenery for *The Geisha*, which was due to open in six weeks' time, when they noticed smoke coming from the Victoria Rooms. The production team was faced with what appeared to be an impossible task, but with the aid of a great deal of scaffolding and drapery (I wonder what today's health and safety people would have made of such arrangements!), the show opened on time, and received a fulsome response from the audience. Not as great, however, as the one received by Dame Clara Butt, who attended the final performance. After she and BLOC President, The Duchess of Beaufort, had been presented with bouquets following the final curtain, the orchestra spontaneously played "Land of Hope and Glory", which Dame Clara had so often sung, with

the whole audience joining in. The evening ended as a wonderful tribute to a great singer.

The second 1935 show was almost wrecked by thieves who, the day before the dress rehearsal, stole the drapes which concealed a false proscenium arch. Wardrobe Mistress Mrs Edwards and her team stayed up all night making new drapes so that the dress rehearsal could go ahead on time. Alas, with all the added expense, the production was not a financial success, losing £140, a very substantial amount in those days. 1936 was spent in replenishing the club's funds rather than producing a show. They were back in business the following year in the refurbished Victoria Rooms, with the rarely seen Gilbert and Sullivan Comic Opera *Princess Ida*. They stayed with Gilbert and Sullivan and the Victoria Rooms the following year, this time presenting the far more popular *The Gondoliers* before returning to Light Opera for their 1939 presentation of *Lilac Time*. With three financial successes in a row, especially *Lilac Time*, BLOC looked set for a long period of stability, having now firmly established themselves as one of the top musical societies in Bristol.



Unfortunately, a gentleman named Adolf Hitler, who had come to power in February 1933, was about to take a hand in history, causing the start of the second World War in September 1939. BLOC, along with so many other local societies, were forced to close for the duration, only reappearing in 1946 with *The Rebel Maid*.

## WHAT'S ON

If you have an event you would like us to share please let us know.



**Jekyll & Hyde The Musical – BAOS. 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> April. Redgrave Theatre**

Tickets available from [http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem\\_2496.TcsWebTab\\_2497.TcsProgramme\\_516849](http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem_2496.TcsWebTab_2497.TcsProgramme_516849)

**The Importance Of Being Earnest—The Wayfarers Drama Group. 11<sup>th</sup>—14<sup>th</sup> April. Theatre in the Hut.** Tickets available from [www.wayfarersdrama.org.uk/book-tickets/4592689835](http://www.wayfarersdrama.org.uk/book-tickets/4592689835)



**Iolanthe – BGSOS. 18<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> April. Redgrave Theatre**

Tickets available from [http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem\\_2496.TcsWebTab\\_2497.TcsProgramme\\_496598](http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem_2496.TcsWebTab_2497.TcsProgramme_496598)

**Oliver! – Tickenham Drama Group. 24<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> April. Tickenham Village Hall**  
Tickets available from <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/tickenhamdramagroup>



**Secret Cabaret. 27<sup>th</sup> April. Piano Bar, Bristol Hippodrome**

Tickets available from <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-secret-cabaret>

**High Society – BMT. 2<sup>nd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> May. Redgrave Theatre**

Tickets available from [http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem\\_2496.TcsWebTab\\_2497.TcsProgramme\\_489767](http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem_2496.TcsWebTab_2497.TcsProgramme_489767)



**Priscilla, Queen of the Desert – BMCC. 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> May. Redgrave Theatre**

Tickets available from [http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem\\_2496.TcsWebTab\\_2497.TcsProgramme\\_487126](http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem_2496.TcsWebTab_2497.TcsProgramme_487126)

**Little Shop of Horrors – Wells Operatic Society. 15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> May. Wells Little Theatre**  
Tickets available from <https://www.wellslittletheatre.com/>



**Supper, Sketches and Skits Show – Failand Drama Circle. 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> May. Failand Village Hall**

Tickets available soon

**Secret Cabaret. 25<sup>th</sup> May. Piano Bar, Bristol Hippodrome**

Tickets available <https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/the-secret-cabaret>



**Little Shop of Horrors – BAOS Youth. 30<sup>th</sup> May-2<sup>nd</sup> June. Redgrave Theatre**

Tickets available from [http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem\\_2496.TcsWebTab\\_2497.TcsProgramme\\_518402](http://redgravetheatre.savoyssystems.co.uk/RedgraveTheatre.dll/TSelectItems.waSelectItemsPrompt.TcsWebMenuItem_2496.TcsWebTab_2497.TcsProgramme_518402)

**Priscilla, Queen of the Desert – WODS. 31<sup>st</sup> May-2<sup>nd</sup> June. The Playhouse, Weston-super-Mare**

Tickets available from <https://parkwoodtheatres.co.uk/Playhouse-Theatre/show/27a16f82-72d5-e711-8119-d1a137370c73/priscilla-queen-of-the-desert>

