



EDITION 13: DECEMBER 2021

# BLOC



BLOC Productions

# Bailiwick

## Editorial by Phil Hallworth

Welcome to our year-end edition of **Bailiwick**, packed with articles written by and about current and former members of the BLOC family.

Our Chairman, Andrew Carpenter writes about how the committee has been busy preparing for the happy day when we can return to the business we all love, then Ian Taylor takes us on another journey through his recent theatrical calendar! Yours truly is this edition's *Desert Island Shows* castaway and then we introduce what is to be a regular feature, *Musical Firsts*, in which we ask three members to answer the same questions – Jo Phillips, Pete Jones and Jadine Griffiee



kick us off on this – let me know if you want to be included in another edition. Sean Green is the latest former BLOC member to feature in our *Where Are They Now?* series before we celebrate 20 years since the Rose Bowl winning production of *Evita* by revisiting the experience with some of those involved. In response to Chris Parslow's piece on the history of Junior BLOC and BMYP, Emma Griffiths has provided us with an entertaining insight into her teenage Friday nights! Given the time of year we have provided you with a *Christmas Quiz* – no prizes, just for fun – thanks to Kathie Cooke for this. Last but not least, news of current and former members comes in two articles; first a moving tribute to Sally Noble and Peter Milne written by Simon Gregory, and then our regular *From The Wings* round-up.

As always, my thanks to Alex Milner for his time and design skills, Stewart McPherson and other photographers for the photos, and to the other members of the editorial committee: Jo, Kathie, Andrew, Alex and Chris.

Finally, with my Club Secretary's hat on, may I ask if anyone has experience of digitising photos and documents (or knows anyone with these skills) who could help us bring the BLOC archives into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and make them accessible to all via our website? Please contact me at [phallworth@me.com](mailto:phallworth@me.com) if you can help. Thank you.

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## Chairman's Overture by Andrew Carpenter

I write this introduction as I come to the end of my third year as your chair and by coincidence our third 'dark' year when it comes to performing at the Hippodrome. I can assure you that nobody is keener than I to be able to be back at our spiritual home and I look forward to being both BLOC chair and show producer for whatever we decide to perform next year! I have been delighted to return to the theatre on a number of occasions, both professional and non-professional, since we were all 'set free' on 19<sup>th</sup> July to see diverse and varied list of productions. It was particularly good to see our local fellow am dram members back on stage in September and October and I was personally disappointed to have had to miss both productions due to a pre-arranged holiday.

I think it appropriate at this time however to inform members of the immense amount of demanding work that has been going on behind the scenes during our down time to put our 'back of house' in order when it comes to processes and procedures. The idea is that when we re-commence rehearsals in the spring of 2022, we will have a structure that better supports our fabulous productions.

The main change has come about by changing our charitable status to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation [Practice guide 14A: charitable incorporated organisations - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/practice-guide-14a-charitable-incorporated-organisations) ([www.gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk)). The committee felt this better met our needs and required us to take a hard look at our constitution for which we are indebted to Graham Lewis and Phil Hallworth in particular. We also compiled a thorough Risk Register to look at potential pitfalls in our future sustainability. Graham and Phil were joined by new committee member, Chris Sterry, in its creation and the results of this will feature in the way we approach future productions. A new members' handbook is also nearing completion, with Alex Turasiewicz and Phil leading on this, which will set out BLOC's rules and expectations, including subjects like diversity & inclusion. It is important that as society moves forward, we move with it.

The Single Page Plans we put in place when I became chair in March 2019 are ongoing and we await a 'show year' to be able to put many of the proposed actions in place. These include a new brand/logo for BLOC Productions, a social agenda,

a skills matrix of our members (to identify any gaps and ensure we maximise members' skills), the appointment of a producer (I have been waiting patiently for two years) and improving links with other Bristol based musical theatre groups.



On the communications front I would like to pay tribute to Alex T for setting up a series of Member Forums earlier in the year. These were most useful in hearing your thoughts and views on our forward direction and these have influenced committee decision making when making important decisions. I thank all those who took part. I would also like to pay tribute to my predecessor, Sue Mitchell, for re-introducing the NODA long service awards to our calendar. We are hoping to be able to present more awards at our AGM next spring so if you think you are entitled to one please respond to the email you will have received from Phil recently.

Our raison d'être is to perform of course, and we have explored many and varied opportunities to do so this year including of course a production of *Kiss Me, Kate* at the Bristol Hippodrome last month. Unfortunately, as a committee we did not feel able to take the risk in any case meaning once again 2021 has been a blank year. However, I am delighted to report that we are nearing a decision on a show for 2022 and never in the history of BLOC Productions has this decision been more important. After an absence of what will be four years, we must choose a show that features as many of our company that wishes to perform, and so large ensemble numbers will be a deciding factor. In addition, obviously it needs to be available for licensing, be good box office and compatible with the Bristol Hippodrome programme. With over one hundred people on our membership waiting list, we are still a major force but now we await the opportunity to prove it once again in the manner we love and know best!

Finally may I wish you all a very Happy Christmas!

**View from The Royal Box**  
(a.k.a. Ian Taylor's sofa)

Hello again!

With the end of the strict Covid lockdown, it probably won't surprise you to learn that my theatre-going has returned with a vengeance. Since Bailiwick's last issue, I've seen several productions, ranging in quality from the good to the bad and even the downright ugly.

**The Good:** *Back to the Future*, *Anything Goes*, *South Pacific*, *John & Jen*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Carousel*.

**The Bad:** *Piaf*, *Private Lives* and *The Good Life* (the latter was, in fact, so awful that I left at the interval).

**The Ugly:** *Under Milk Wood* and Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Cinderella*.

A flying DeLorean car, a flux capacitor, a crazy time-travelling doctor and a skateboarding teenager. No, it's not Doctor Who on stage but the brand-new mega-budget musical ***Back to the Future***. Thanks to TV re-runs, the 80's film is embedded in the popular consciousness and audiences will no doubt be delighted to find plenty of familiar cinematic elements on the 2021 stage. Of course, this isn't a Stephen Sondheim musical or anything remotely highbrow – but the songs are all functional and service the plot well. The cast are uniformly excellent and their singing throughout this energetic and wonderfully entertaining piece of theatre is of a very high quality. Among plenty of other spectacular special effects throughout the show, the climactic flying DeLorean car – a genuine *coup de théâtre* - sent the audience into raptures. I've seen flying cars before but nothing like this one – and my jaw dropped. The whole superbly-designed production is hugely entertaining and highly recommended.

The road to the opening of Andrew Lloyd Webber's new musical ***Cinderella*** has certainly been rocky. But with all the lockdown delays and postponements a thing of the past, the show finally





opened in August. While, in many ways, it's hugely OTT and occasionally silly, it's also warm, funny and sporadically entertaining. It's not vintage ALW - and certainly not my favourite of his musicals - and it feels, to be honest, somewhat half-baked and a work in progress. There are, however, some splendid performances and it's definitely a crowd pleaser. Carrie Hope Fletcher does an admirable job as a Goth-like Cinderella and gets to sing some fabulous numbers. While I find Ivano Turco is a bit drippy in the role of Prince Charming's brother Sebastian, the villains are uniformly entertaining, with Victoria Hamilton Barritt stealing the show every time she appears as a Cruella DeVil-type wicked stepmother. Such a gloriously camp and wonderfully vicious role will one day be surely earmarked for Faye Banks! A "wow!" staging moment during the Act Two ball sees the revolve used to spectacular effect, while spectacular effects of a very different kind are generated by a troupe of super-buff shirtless hunks. There's even a gay marriage. While it's certainly too long, *Cinderella* is an effective piece of entertainment. If, however, your funds are stretched, there are undeniably better shows on which you could currently spend your money in the West End.

Meanwhile, at the Southwark Playhouse, *John and Jen* is another matter altogether - a massive, impressive show in a tiny little space. It offers us a snapshot of small-town America, focusing on the lives of a brother and a sister, a mother and a son. It's simultaneously bittersweet, hilarious and heartrending. The two-handed production is flawless. Rachel Tucker and Lewis Cornay give phenomenal performances. Both have astonishing, versatile voices and their synchronicity appears totally instinctive and seamless. They laugh, they cry, they dance and they tell us their stories with

heart-breaking clarity. I cannot fault anything in their outstanding performances. Perhaps some may find *John & Jen* a little too sentimental at times, but for those of us with a taste for that sort of thing that's not an issue. This life-affirming and hugely moving show took me completely by surprise and provided a very worthwhile and enjoyable couple of hours in the theatre.

Finally, ***Anything Goes*** is just about as good and frothy a Golden Age musical as it gets. It's an extravaganza set on an ocean liner and features huge musical numbers, epic choreography, slapstick comedy, gorgeous costumes and witty dialogue. The production at London's Barbican was a real triumph: in the performance I saw there were no less than three mid-show standing ovations. That doesn't happen very often. The uniformly superb company was led by the luminous Sutton Foster, making her London debut in a role that's already won her a Tony award on Broadway. The plot can certainly be characterised as wafer thin, while the characters are two dimensional at best and the comedy hardly subtle. None of that matters, however, when weighed against the immaculate company tap numbers, the exuberant choreography and the pin-sharp character performances that make this an enormously successful production. It's scheduled for a cinema relay in the near future, so I'd recommend keeping an eye on the multiplex schedules so as not to miss out on a truly "delicious, delightful and de-lovely" evening.

That's all from me for now. I hope you all stay safe and well.

Ian x



## Desert Island Shows by Phil Hallworth

I'm guessing that my love and experience of musical theatre came later in life than for most of you. I was brought up on a diet of straight plays and only really discovered musicals when I came to Bristol in the early 1980s.

At school I joined the stage staff, building the sets and doing the scene changes for the annual school plays (usually Shakespeare), then progressed to the lighting box in the good old days when LX cues involved manually raising and lowering multiple dimmer switches on a vertical board (a Junior 8 I think) with whatever combination of hands, elbows and knees seemed to work best. The old way was fun!

My first onstage experience was as third, or maybe fourth soldier from the left in Gogol's *The Government Inspector* which earned me this classic comment from the drama teacher on my school report: "a commendable performance in a small but vital role"!! I went on to play a few more small but vital roles at school, such as a minor thane in *MacBeth*.

Having understandably not had the call to join Footlights at university, drama went on hold for a few years until I boldly volunteered to direct the school play (*A Man For All Seasons*) in my second year of teaching in Manchester; something I enjoyed doing twice more at Clifton College before they (wisely) decided to appoint a Director of Drama, Latin and English teacher Douglas Henderson, who had earlier been involved in the planning and building of the school's Redgrave Theatre. Douglas directed an annual staff and parents' production at the Redgrave each January, rehearsed and performed from start to finish in under two weeks (seriously). They were always great fun (with after show parties every night!) and my family were involved in them over a period of some 25 years. More often than not they were musicals, so that's where the musical voyage that now sees me stranded on this island began. Vicki Klein often choreographed the shows and Julian Edgell was a regular MD and composer, so there was a BLOC link even if I didn't know it at the time.

So, at last getting to the point, my first four Desert Island Shows come from this series of productions at the Redgrave, and my last are the four BLOC shows I've been fortunate to be in at the Hippodrome.

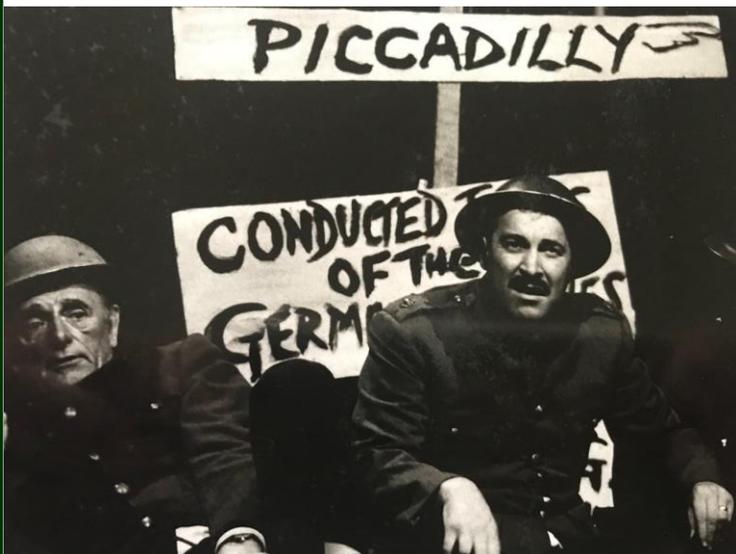


**The Ogre Bogle:** Occasionally Douglas had a year off and we did a panto, written and directed by Tony Cottrell. *The Ogre Bogle* was the first show I did, and I played a cat who couldn't talk (sensible casting), at least in the first half, before the good old 'magic of theatre' gave him a voice in the second half! The show won the Rose Bowl that year for best panto. Pantos were always hilarious, and with my propensity for ad libbing I generally got cast to lead the audience in the panto song. Another of Tony's pantos had me as Friar Tuck with our BLOC Treasurer Graham Lewis as Little John and fellow thespian Bruce Slatton as the Sherriff of Nottingham! Little did BLOC know what was coming their way in a few years' time!





**Guys and Dolls:** My first 'proper' musical, playing Harry the Horse with a dodgy Brooklyn accent. In those days I was a bit nimbler and enjoyed the crapshooters dance routine, and of course 'Sit Down You're Rockin' The Boat' was a highlight. My wife, Fiona, played General Cartwright.



**Oh! What a Lovely War:** The only show I've done twice. It would never be a BLOC show but it was a sell-out both times in the Redgrave – maybe in part because of the Douglas Haig connection with Clifton College? I portrayed Haig the second time but found it a painful role to play for the obvious historical reasons. Playing the multiple cameo roles in trenches in the other scenes was actually more enjoyable despite the impossibly fast costume changes (we went the authentic military uniform

way, rather than adopt Joan Littlewood's original white satin Pierrot look).

**Half A Sixpence:** This was to be Douglas's last show before the January series sadly came to an end, and I was thrilled to play Mr Shalford and to have my daughter Abi on stage with me as one of my shop girls. I think I overdid the method acting whilst blowing my top every night at young Kipps and ended up in hospital the following week with a mini-stroke, but that's another story!



When Julian Edgell found himself MD for BLOC's *White Christmas* and desperately short of men in the chorus (what's new?) he approached the aforementioned Tuck, Little John and Sherriff to audition to join BLOC. I remember we did our audition as a trio singing 'Fugue for Tinhorns' from *Guys and Dolls*, but the only other thing I remember about the nerve-wracking evening is Adele's smiling and encouraging face throughout (thank you!). Somehow, I was in BLOC...





**White Christmas:** “Come and have a giggle in the back row of the chorus” Julian had said, not mentioning the need to learn to tap dance and even to buy tap shoes! I knew from the first read through that BLOC was right up my street – the room was full of energy, talent and joy. Sue was her usual warm and welcoming self and I felt brave enough to stick my hand up to read a part, eventually being asked to understudy Chris Parslow as General Waverly, which was a great experience and I thank him again for staying fit and well throughout show week!

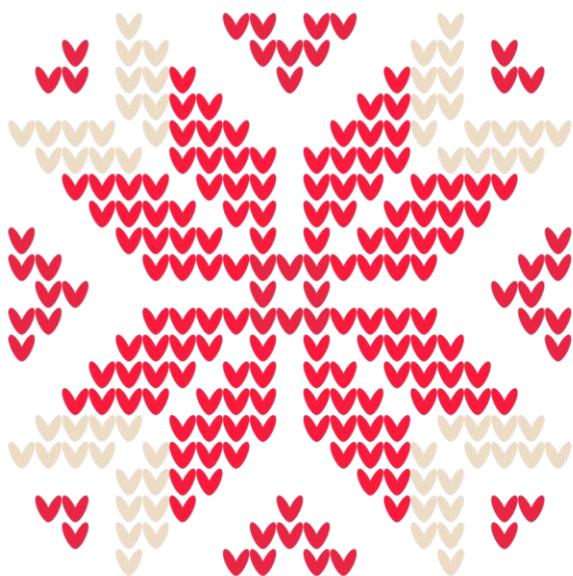
**Sister Act:** By now John Cousins had clearly received the memo from my old drama teacher about “a small but vital role” so cast me as the (hand-jiving) Pope – thus not requiring me to sing or dance, and keeping me well away from the stage up in one of the auditorium boxes! What a show week that was! I was on the committee so was aware that ticket sales were not great before we started the run, but rave reviews helped spread the word (and the love!) and ticket sales went through

the roof as the week went on. As a production to be in it was utterly joyous.



**Sunset Boulevard:** With a professional director/choreographer at the helm and with a rehearsal schedule very different to what we were used to, this was always going to be a roller coaster ride, but what a fabulous ride it was. Andrew Wright pushed us hard to get the very best out of us and it was a privilege to work with him, even if he failed to read the memo and gave me a role (Morino) that required me to sing a couple of solo lines in the fiendishly tricky 'Let's Have Lunch'. Terrifying, until I actually did it!

**Fiddler on the Roof:** Alex T had read the memo and cast me as The Rabbi, which involved minimal choreography and singing! I loved this role and being part of one of the Anatevka families Alex encouraged us to create. I still reckon the reason I got the two-year contract to work in Pakistan, which I took up immediately the curtain went down on *Fiddler*, was because I had started growing the Rabbi's beard when I went for interview!



**One soundtrack I'd take onto the island:** It would have to be *West Side Story* – not one of my eight shows admittedly, but it could easily have been. Douglas Henderson once did it as a school production but cast two teachers as Doc and Lt. Shrank (me). What a stunning score Leonard Bernstein wrote.

**One show I wish BLOC could do:** Can I make it two? *Phantom* or *Les Mis* – not everyone's cup of tea I know, but I think we'd have an absolute ball doing either of them... and they'd sell!

**Luxury theatrical item:** Either my Pope's costume from *Sister Act* or my Rabbi's Torah from *Fiddler*, in the hope that it will be God's will to rescue at least one of them!

## Musical Firsts by Jo Phillips, Pete Jones and Jadine Griffiee



**Jo Phillips**



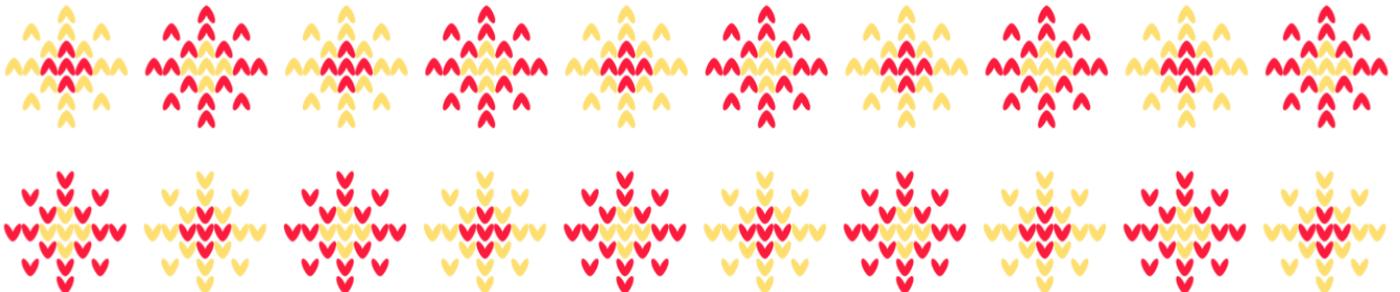
**Pete Jones**



**Jadine Griffiee**

<p><b>First musical you remember seeing?</b></p>	<p>The first musical I saw was <i>Starlight Express</i> in London, with the original racetrack set going through the stalls. It was an amazing thing to see.</p>	<p>BLOC's production of <i>My Fair Lady</i> at the Hippodrome, around 1985. This was just before I was married and BLOC's leading lady, Christine Parker, was going to be singing a solo at our wedding.</p>	<p>My first musical experience was <i>Blood Brothers</i> at the Bristol Hippodrome. I had no idea what the plot was and ended up sobbing in the crowd!</p>
<p><b>First musical that made you want to take to the stage or work backstage?</b></p>	<p>Not convinced there was one. I was lucky to see a range of things on stage and get hooked on theatre as a child, so it was a natural progression to get involved backstage at university with the drama/music societies.</p>	<p>At one of Fairfield GS's annual concerts at the Colston Hall, I sang '76 Trombones' from <i>The Music Man</i>. My background is in ballroom and Latin-American dancing where a lot of the music stems from musicals - hence my love of the genre.</p>	<p>The film versions of <i>The Sound of Music</i> and <i>Oliver!</i> I didn't see many musicals apart from pantomimes as a child. But I've made up for it since!</p>
<p><b>First musical audition or technical experience?</b></p>	<p>Producing Manchester Uni's panto in my third year. We did <i>Hansel &amp; Gretel</i> but obviously a rewrite full of (highly tasteful) student humour.</p>	<p>Although I have danced for England, performed for royalty, taken part in a number of films and danced the role of Fred Astaire, I think my BLOC audition was probably the most nervous I have ever felt in my life!</p>	<p>My first audition was for the part of Bet in <i>Oliver!</i></p>
<p><b>First role you had in a musical either onstage or backstage?</b></p>	<p>First proper musical tech experience was sound fx operating on a production of <i>Crazy For You</i> at The Crescent Theatre in Birmingham. I also doubled up as a cowboy in one scene!</p>	<p>Apart from the Astaire number (Puttin' On the Ritz'), helping FOH with Matt Jeanes and Vicky Hayes' <i>Rent</i> at the Olympus Theatre. I met so many lovely thespians who are now great friends.</p>	<p>As above, I got the part! It was great to be Nancy's side kick when I wasn't confident enough to take the lead role in my teens!</p>

	<b>Jo Phillips</b>	<b>Pete Jones</b>	<b>Jadine Griffie</b>
<b>First musical personality you admired?</b>	Having been made to watch the <i>Les Mis</i> 10 <sup>th</sup> anniversary concert (on VHS, mind) quite a few times before going to see it on stage, I became quite obsessed with the likes of Lea Salonga and Colm Wilkinson from the original cast.	Bob Latham stands out. He was my first music teacher at Fairfield GS and little did I know that decades later he would be auditioning me to join BLOC! He was an incredible teacher at school, full of enthusiasm and introduced all types of music to us.	I was completely obsessed with Idina Menzel after seeing <i>Wicked</i> .
<b>First impressions of BLOC?</b>	I came to watch a rehearsal in 2016 but got instantly whisked away to the pub by Peter Sutton, so my first impression of BLOC was quite fuzzy to be honest.	Watching BLOC's <i>My Fair Lady</i> around 1985, I was blown away by the Ascot scene. Who knew that a few years later I would actually be in the show with BLOC? It was wonderful to dance with Eliza (Charlotte Hunter).	I didn't manage to see BLOC perform before I joined, but my mum spoke very highly of them so I had every confidence that BLOC would be brilliant! Now that I am a member, it's great and <i>Chitty</i> was such a memorable experience.
<b>First Choice - if you could choose any role in any show?</b>	Always DSM/show-calling. Having the upper-body strength of a gnat makes me a rather useless techie so shouting out cues and pressing buttons better fits my skillset!	Well, it has to be a Fred Astaire number from <i>Top Hat</i> , or maybe Gene Kelly in <i>Singing in the Rain</i> or <i>An American in Paris</i> . We can all dream!!!	I would love to play Gaaaaaalinda in <i>Wicked</i> and it would be great to come and go by bubble!



## Where Are They Now?

by Sean Green

It has been a while since I last performed in Bristol so I will begin with a bit of a catch up with how I got started.

I was asked to audition for Junior BLOC by Chris Northam, when they did *The Wiz*. I was only 10 - the entry age then was 12. I was a Munchkin and a mouse, but I really wanted to be the Lion – even though I was only 10 and everyone else was 16 or 17! I had the best time and stayed until I was 18 by which time the club was BMYP.

I then went to university to study music at Birmingham where I stayed away from classical music and ended up working with the university guild musical group where I appeared in, choreographed and was MD for a number of shows. After graduating I came back to Bristol and started MDing theatre groups starting at Failand. Then Julian Edgell was stepping back from being MD for BMYP and I stepped in; about the same time I joined BLOC. I joined for *The Witches of Eastwick* which I loved and is perhaps one of my favourite shows that I have done – so much fun. I was also in *Oliver!* but by that time I was also heavily involved as MD with other clubs such as BMYP and Theatreworx and committed to them. I was also teaching dance three days a week and piano two days a week. A lecturer from one of the schools I was teaching at came to see Theatreworx's *The Secret Garden* and said that I should be “doing this professionally” and, to cut a long story short, I ended up at Mountview doing a postgrad study in musical direction. From that point I have stayed in London and have been freelancing ever since.

Since then, shows that stand out for me include being assistant MD for *The Rocky Horror Show* around Europe which was fun and really eye-opening! Then there was *Twelfth Night* at the Young Vic which was a wonderful show and was Kwame Kwei-Armah's first production there. We had a community choir of 70 people plus 10 actors. The music was beautiful, and it was just a great experience.

Coming to the present, I am working on a show in London called *Get Up, Stand Up* which is basically the life story of Bob Marley using his music.



He wrote about his life which was very interesting and packed full of conflict. It was tough growing up in Jamaica in that era and whilst he didn't want to get drawn into the politics he couldn't avoid doing so – when he became a superstar, he became a focal point for Jamaica. It's uplifting, it's sad and it makes you think; it really has everything.

As MD, the challenges of doing the show are numerous. There is a massive weight to interpret his music accurately on stage. There is the need to do the music justice and make sure that it sounds like reggae and not too 'musical theatre'. Then, when you are dealing with a superstar like Marley, finding someone who can do him justice eight shows a week is a challenge and you really have to look after them to protect their voice.



And looking to the future, I am going back to where I started with a production of *The Wiz* at the Hope Mill theatre in Manchester. Once I get past press night for *Get Up, Stand Up* I will start rehearsing for *The Wiz* during the day and will be back in the Penthouse in the evening. I have re-orchestrated the show and done the vocal arrangements and will get a little time off to go up to Manchester in November to set the show up with the MD before leaving them to it.

So, that's what I've been doing with my time post being an active member of BLOC back in the mid 2000's. Thank you for reading and hopefully I'll catch you either in London or on tour.



With regard to actually MDing it, the band are on a raised platform in the left wing which we call the Penthouse. At different points in the show the musicians go on stage individually but for the last four numbers they are all on and I am left in the Penthouse on my own! Trying to control a band who are far away and that I can't see is interesting. They can see me on monitors, I can talk to them through earpieces and I have to do a lot of talking through the show!

Come and see it! It is a unique experience in the West End (at the Lyric Theatre). From what I have seen of audience reactions so far there is no other show like it in the West End.

**Editor's Note:** Congratulations to Sean for being nominated for the Black British Theatre Awards as Musical Director of *Get Up, Stand Up*.



## *Evita revisited... twenty years on*

One of the shows that frequently gets mentioned in members' Desert Island Shows is BLOC's production of *Evita* in 2001. So, in this article we have asked several members of that memorable Rose Bowl winning production to share their memories of a show that meant so much to so many who were part of it, or who saw it.

*"An impressive production from the moment it opened... The production showed great dramatic ability and vibrancy that swept right through the company... Choreography was of the highest standard... Music was performed by a first-class orchestra that always beautifully supported the singers."* (NODA review)

*"A highly coordinated and professional production with meticulous attention to detail... A superb piece of theatre and all who were involved are to be congratulated... BLOC is truly accomplished."* (Rose Bowl review)

**Vicky Hayes** (who played Evita)

*"...Excellent voice with impressive acting ability... Very impressive performance ..."* (NODA review)

*"The energy and focus throughout conveyed the burning ambition of Eva Peron... A first-class performance in all aspects."* (Rose Bowl review)

*Evita* was one of the most exciting, thrilling, scary and unforgettable theatre productions I've had the privilege to be a part of. From the offset, we all knew that it was going to be a very special production; it was the Amateur Premier, we had a fantastic production team, and were able to hire the original touring scenic set and costumes. We all felt the weight of responsibility on our shoulders to make it the best production possible.

The initial auditions were held at Cotham Parish Hall. Those who were lucky enough to be shortlisted were invited to re-audition on the Hippodrome stage, as the production team wanted to make sure that the cast could 'carry' the performances across to the audience. When the final casting was announced, no-one was more surprised than me to find that I'd secured the lead



role! It was then that the hard work really began. The entire company threw themselves into the rehearsal process - it was the epitome of a whole-team effort.

One of my favorite memories is of standing on the balcony delivering 'Don't Cry for Me Argentina' in the iconic white dress, not just to the audience, but also to the entire cast, who had been directed to turn upstage and face me. It was a true 'pinch me' moment at every performance.

The Rose Bowl Award that we received that year for Best Production was the icing on the cake for an unforgettable experience that I will always treasure.



favourite, and the male dancers looked great in them. Not only did we have the costumes but everything that went with them; hats, boots, shoes, jewellery, you name it and it was there, marvellous. I have to confess that not quite everything made the list to go forward for sale, a rather nice pair of gents two tone oxfords were worn on stage but never made the list, one or two of Evita's belongings disappeared, I actually must confess to still using the sleeve ironing board on a regular basis! There was even a sewing machine, and long rehearsal petticoats, heaven knows where they went as they were nothing to do with *Evita* but they came in a wicker skip.

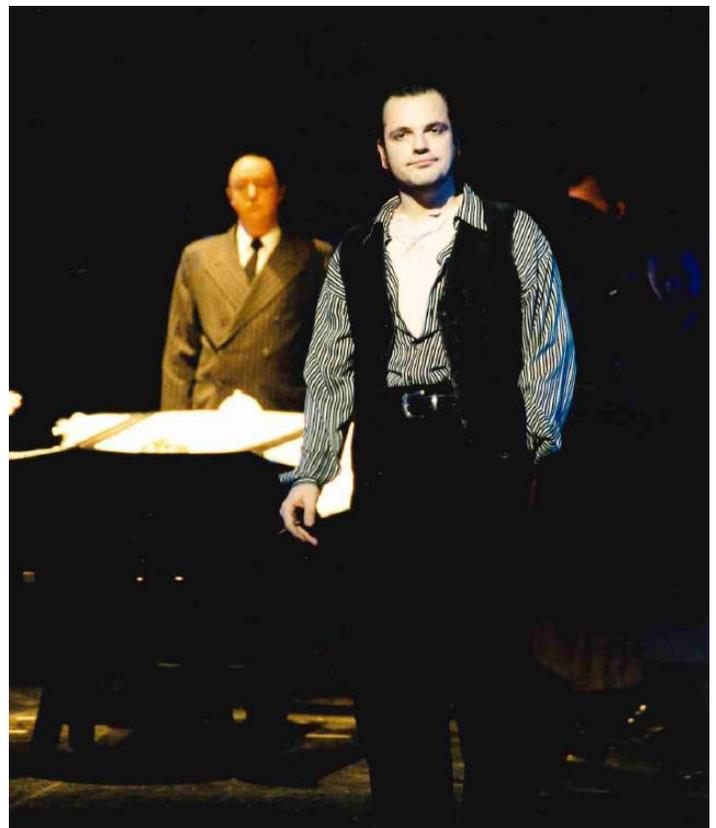
**Lucille Villamayor** (Wardrobe Mistress)

*"Costumes were stunning and very authentic..."*  
(NODA Review)

I remember when *Evita* was offered to BLOC, I believe it was the first amateur company to stage this musical. I think it was The Really Useful Theatre Company and they made available the costumes and set with the offer. However, if memory serves, they had no idea how many costumes we needed in the production and part of the deal was that we would list all the costumes together with sizes etc., so that they could offer them for sale to a costumier. John Cousins, Pete Sutton, myself and a couple of others travelled to a warehouse somewhere or other to inspect the set and costumes; the set was available for inspection, but the costumes and wigs were locked in wardrobes with no way of accessing to view what was on offer. Anyway, BLOC decided that they would accept the show and all that went with it.

The costumes arrived at a facility near BAOS by the Feeder... ooh what excitement! To list all the costumes I managed to collect very willing helpers to take measurements whilst I listed everything, wardrobe by wardrobe, I don't remember how many there were but it took us the best part of a day to get it all down on paper. It was lovely to see all the military costumes, the soldiers were my

The costumes were soon offered and sold to a costumier in Hazelmere if I remember rightly. I would imagine that by now the collection must be slightly diminished and looking rather shabby, but they were very splendid when we took charge.



**Sid Vardakis** – (who played Che)

*“A strong persona... this portrayal impressed greatly...”* (NODA Review)

*“Super energy and focus.....a brilliant performance in every aspect...”* (Rose Bowl review)

The announcement of *Evita* seemed a watershed moment. BLOC had regularly put on classic shows but *Evita* was different – a much more modern show written by, at the time, the biggest name in Musical Theatre.

I had recently seen *Evita* in the cinema and was delighted to be cast as Che; particularly when John Cousins made it clear that he wanted the character to interact with the whole show utilising a similar device as the film.

This show sparked my love for the narrator style roles of which I have played a number since. I also enjoyed the fact that I had one costume throughout! However, my most striking memory of the process must be watching nine guys spending hours at rehearsal attempting to get their marching, choreography and singing in perfect unison. Their efforts were (whilst hilarious at times) genuinely inspiring and the end result was worth every ounce of sweat and tears.

**Chris Parslow** – (who played Juan Peron)

*“Peron... had a great presence and stature accompanied by a good voice...”* (NODA review)

*“This wavering matinee idol was well portrayed... his timing was excellent... he had fine command of all aspects of the performance.”* (Rose Bowl review)

The great thing about BLOC's production of *Evita* was that we were the first amateur performance and, whilst that shouldn't really make any difference, there was a real excitement about it. The costumes and set were all from the original London production. I played Juan Peron and, as you can see from the photographs, I was blessed with two wonderful Evas – Vicky Hayes and Melanie Evans.



My abiding memory is of the audition on the Hippodrome stage. I auditioned with Vicky and we had to do the ‘Dice are rolling...’ confrontation in Act 2 – quite possibly one of the most difficult pieces I have ever had to learn. I think it is fair to say that, whilst we had the words in the right order, we basically threw random notes at each other and hoped we finished together.

Rumour has it that the Peron wig is still doing the rounds somewhere!





eventually granted the Premiere license in March by which time the production team was in place and we could finally go public.

Secondly, we were also able to negotiate with RSO for the hire of their touring set, props, costumes and wigs. These were delivered to a storage space in Bristol two weeks prior to production week which meant that the stage crew were able to iron out any difficulties set wise prior to getting into the theatre. Similarly, the wardrobe team could do the same with the costumes.

The show was basically an Opera and by the time the company hit the Hippodrome the whole team was buzzing with excitement at performing a UK Premiere. Rave reviews were received, including one from RUG and, eleven months later, the icing on the cake, the show received the Rose Bowl for Best Musical.

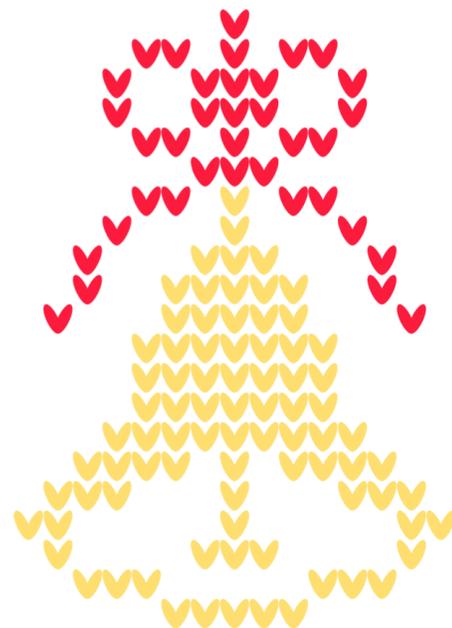
**Editor's Note:** Are there any other shows that members would like to have a reunion with members of the production and share their memories, either in person or via this newsletter? Please let me know – [phallworth@me.com](mailto:phallworth@me.com)

**Peter Sutton** – (Chairman of BLOC and Stage Director)

*“A brilliant evening... the large backstage crew were extremely well organized with swift scene changes and the entire production flowed effortlessly from scene to scene.”* (Rose Bowl review)

Why was *Evita* such a memorable production? It was probably the first of the ‘modern’ musicals to be released for amateurs. I have to speak with two hats on - Chairman and Stage Director.

Firstly, a lot of semi-secret discussions had taken place in late 2000 between Eric Arnold and myself, initially with the Robert Stigwood Organization (RSO) who held the performing rights at that time, and then The Really Useful Group (RUG) as the rights had reverted to them in early 2001. We were



**'The Triple':**  
by Emma Griffiths



Following the piece in the last edition outlining the history of Junior BLOC / BMYP, Emma Griffiths sent us her reminiscences:

I read your entry in the Bailiwick and it made me smile! I'm one of the few remaining members of BLOC (I think) who did 'The Triple' - Minis, to Junior BLOC to the adult company. If Natasha Green is still a member then she also qualifies, but everyone else from my cohort of minis (Harriet deWinton, Charlie Cartwright, Becky Collier-Burgess, Katie Austin, Sean Green) have either moved away or are part of other clubs.

It was by a lucky coincidence I ended up as part of the BLOC family. We moved to Bristol from Dawlish in 1991 and my next-door neighbour happened to be Chris Baker who many will remember from Juniors. I was an irritatingly energetic child and my parents wanted to channel my enthusiasm into theatre. Chris recommended Junior BLOC, and we went to see their production of *Peter Pan*. I was hooked (*nice pun, Ed.*), joined the Minis immediately and loved it. As you'll see from the list above, I am still friends with the kids I met back then, indeed Harriet was my Maid of Honour (and I hers).

Fast forward to age 11 and we were all performing in a production of *Bugsy Malone* together and nervously prepping for our auditions for The Juniors (who were about to do *Bye Bye Birdie*, directed by Matt Jeanes). I was \*ahem\* vertically challenged at that age compared to my fellow cast members, and when Mavis Holdsworth gathered them all up to give them a pep talk about the

upcoming audition, I was told I could try for it the next year. Indignantly I replied I was "older than Harriet by a full month!".

That audition was one of the scariest I've ever attended! The legendary Chris Northam was at the helm, and we were told he would just stop us when he'd heard enough. True to his word, I made it through one verse and chorus of a hackneyed 'Oom Pah Pah' before I was told that was it. Terrifying. Luckily it got me in, and I was now a member of Junior BLOC!

Stepping into that rehearsal room I recall how we'd previously mocked the Juniors for their luvvie behaviour - we were sure we'd NEVER kiss everyone, especially boys! Of course, it took about half an hour into the rehearsal before we were all "dahlings".

*Bye Bye Birdie* was a heck of a show to start off with! Not only were utter legends like Sarah Boulton, Vicky Chilcott and Spencer James in the leads (two of whom later found success in London) but Vicky Hayes, Melanie Evans, OJ Lynch, Simon Gregory, Sid Vardakis and Lucy Pope had joined the cast as on-stage backing vocalists! It also began a lifelong crush for all of us underage girls on one Gary Lightwood who played Elvis look-alike Conrad Birdie. We were all



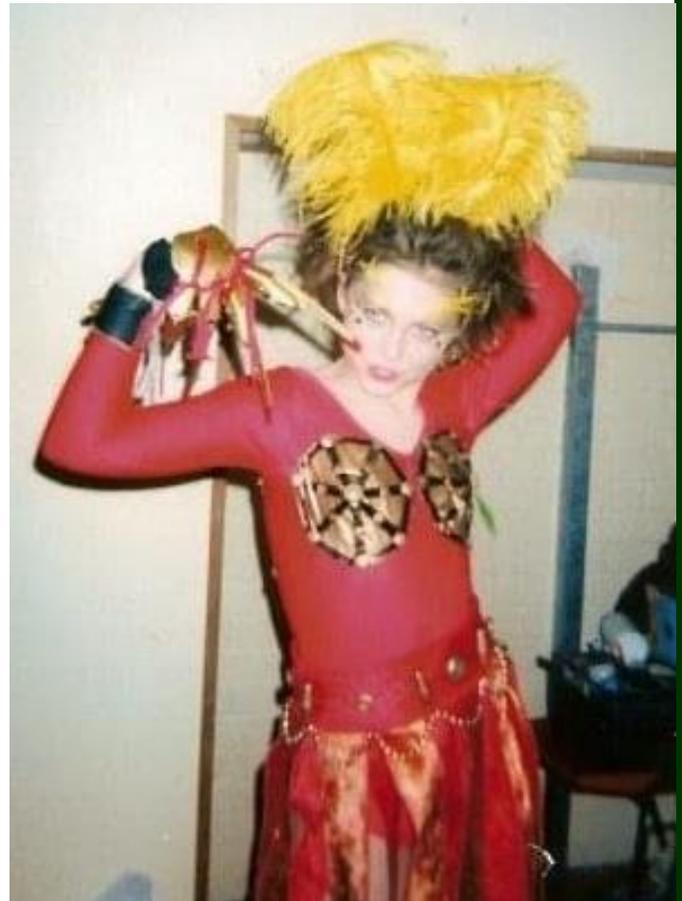
directed to swoon whenever he was around, something none of us found a challenge! I also got cast in my first part, albeit a small one, when Matti asked “*who wants to play a Mum?*” and I shot my hand up so fast I’m sure there must have been a sonic boom! I was a clear foot shorter than my child (one youthful Jane Williams) but I gave it all I had.

We all talk about the good old days, but I maintain that the training I received through Minis and Juniors was absolutely second to none. I had the immense good fortune to be taught by such an incredible variety of talented directors, choreographers and MDs; people such as Vicki Klein, Julian Edgell, Ben Wiles, Chris Northam, Pat Brown, Sally Noble... the list goes on and on. And the discipline instilled by people such as Mavis Holdsworth and all the countless parents who poured their hearts into making our productions as brilliant as possible. I know my mum as well found a real sense of family as part of that group of parents, and I think she enjoyed show week as much as I did!

I have so many more stories I could share (touring the US with *Hair*, performing at EuroDisney and having a huge row with my then new boyfriend and now husband Michael, eating Revels that Julian left on the piano during rehearsals...) but I’ll leave those for a drunken reminiscence some time in person.

I really am so very grateful that I was able to be a part of such a wonderful club for all these years (next year it’ll be 30 I think!). I think everyone who was a part of it will fondly remember Friday night rehearsals being the absolute best time of the week, turning into Mondays when we grew up. Long may that continue.

**Editor’s Note:** Congratulations to Emma on recently winning the Rose Bowl for Best Supporting Actress for her portrayal of Lina Lamont in BAOS’s 2019 production of *Singing’ in the Rain*.



**A Christmas Quiz**  
compiled by Kathie Cooke

Answers can be found at the end of this Newsletter.

**Round 1:** Emojis - Name the Christmas musical or song:

1. ✖️ ❤️ 🙈
2. 👁️ 🛏️ 💭 ❄️ 🎄
3. 🦌 🍏 👃 🦌
4. 🎵 🔔 🎸
5. ❄️ 🧑‍🎄

**Round 2:** Christmas Musicals trivia:

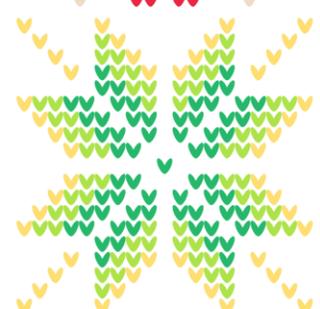
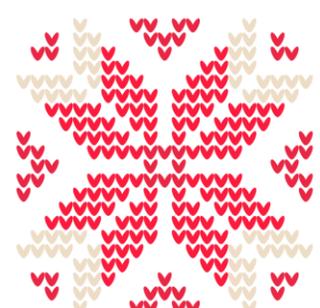
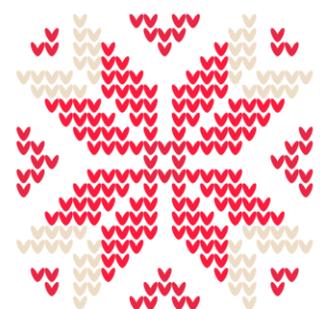
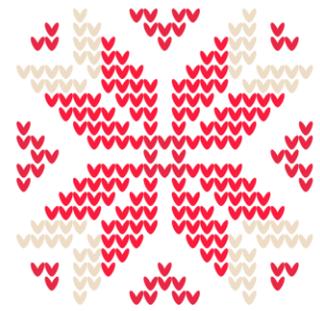
1. In *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, what is Jack Skellington known as? The \_\_\_\_\_ King.
2. In *The Muppets Christmas Carol* which song does Kermit sing?
3. Near the end of which Christmas musical do the women who work in the brothel sing 'Hard Candy Christmas'?
4. Who wrote the 1992 musical *Scrooge*?
5. In which British city did it premiere?

**Round 3:** Picture Round - identify the show from these stage and screen images:



**Round 4:** Complete the lyric

1. 'Off with my overcoat, off with my gloves, who needs an overcoat...'
2. 'A room is still a room, oh, even when...'
3. 'For we need a little Christmas, right this very minute. Candles in the window...'
4. 'Through the years we all will be together...'
5. 'All around the Christmas tree there'll be dreams coming true, but when we're together...'



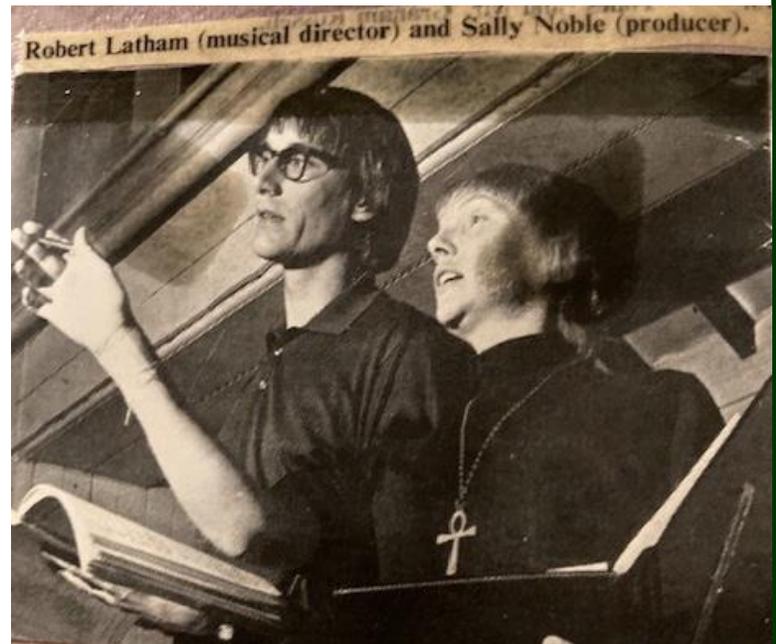
## Remembering Sally Noble and Peter Milne

by Simon Gregory

In the last couple of months, we have very sadly lost two pillars of the Bristol theatre community who did so much for the local theatre scene, and particularly for youth theatre. **Peter Milne** and **Sally Noble** between them affected the lives of so many in such a profoundly positive way.

**Peter**, Pete... or as I first knew him, Mr Chairman, became Chairman of Junior BLOC after his daughter Sarah had joined the club following a recommendation from then Junior BLOC member, and current BLOC member Carrie Northam (nee Bishop). Sally had set up Junior Bristol Light Opera Club in the early 70's and very quickly it became THE place for young people to learn to tread the boards. She was the Director extraordinaire and every Friday night we'd rehearse for the next show and, with the backing of a dedicated team of parents the show would always be a success – those parents were headed up by Pete as Chairman of the committee with Sal at the helm of each show - it was a perfect combination... and not forgetting the brilliant musical team of Chris (Northam) as MD with Julian (Edgell) assisting – it really was a dream team. As rehearsals took place in the main hall, further action was taking place in the kitchen where committee members and various other parents would spend the evening, grouped around a table in the middle with Pete's briefcase on the table as the focal point... for gossip!! The amazing thing about Pete the Chairman was that he commanded the respect of not just the adults but all the youth members – they knew that he wouldn't stand messing about or bad behaviour, a look was all that was ever required, but he also connected with them and fun was always at the heart of everything. When not at rehearsal Pete was the life and soul of the party, famously even dressing up as Marilyn Monroe for one infamous after-show party! He even made it on stage himself when the committee and parents decided they were going to do a show themselves called 'Chip Off the Old BLOC' – he teamed up with our regular Stage Manager, Bev (Holdsworth), dressed as Gendarmes to perform, 'The Gendarmes Duet'... to great acclaim! Pete remained Chairman long after Sarah had left the

club and until he moved up to Scotland with his second wife, Mary (Pete lost his first wife, June, to cancer) for a well-deserved theatrical retirement.



**Sally** – where to start with dear Sal? She was the person that everyone looked up to. She had an amazing way that allowed you to express yourself, to find your own way on stage, all the while guiding you so skilfully that you didn't even notice. She was our leader but also our peer and we looked to her for guidance not just on stage but also off... which she was always only too happy to give. She helped shape our lives in every aspect – she challenged us, energised us, made us laugh (she was incredibly mischievous!), taught us how to simply 'be' on stage, empowered us... the list goes on and on. She never tired, she always came to every rehearsal with a masterplan and you just went with her, complete trust. She shaped, she nurtured, she steered, an utter dedication to helping each and every one of us to perform to the absolute best of our ability, always finding ways to encourage and finding a way to give you an inner confidence you didn't know you had. I know every time I step on stage I use something that Sal taught me. Stagecraft just oozed out of her and we soaked it up like sponges, it was just a joyous place to be, a Sally Noble rehearsal! I have seen so, so many posts since her passing where the line is used... *"I wouldn't be who I am, doing what I'm doing without Sal"*... and this is just as true for those that progressed into the industry as those of us who continue to tread the boards on the

amateur stage, and probably many who do neither but know that Sal absolutely set them up for life. She never seemed to age and became an immortal figure to us and in many ways, she still is and always will be.

As well as Junior BLOC, Sal also set up Bristol Youth Theatre, tackling plays with subject matters that would scare others off, but she made everything relevant and her approach meant we always understood what we were saying and what we were doing... she didn't just get behind the text, together she helped us turn it inside out! She also Directed many times for BLOC including *Robert & Elizabeth*, *Song of Norway*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *The King and I*, *The Sound of Music*, *Oliver!* and *Annie*, also appearing on stage in both of BLOC's 75 & 100 Years of the Hippodrome celebrations.



Junior BLOC... BYT... Peter... Sally... they left a huge legacy and that still lives on today, with Bristol Musical Youth Productions being the current incarnation of what they began all those years ago.

They say school days are the best days of your life... not for us! Friday nights at Cotham Church Hall... Pete and the gang in the kitchen, Sal at the

helm in the main hall with Chris and Jules playing anything and everything they could think of at the piano! It was the highlight of every week, all that mattered to us... and show weeks were something else again! If you were there, you already know it really was the very, VERY, best of times.

On behalf of so many... Thank you Sal and thank you Pete. Thank you so, so much, for everything. And as Sal would say....

*"God Bless. X"*

Pictured are (*page 21*) Sally with BLOC's own dear Bob Latham, and (*page 22*) Peter (Chairman) on the left with Sheila Edgell (Treasurer, and who is also sadly departed) in the middle, and my Dad, Mike Gregory (Vice-Chair) on the right! They'd turned up to Sheila's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday party as Chippendales!

**Editor's Note:** we also invited BLOC members to send in their own reminiscences of Sally to add to Simon's article. Here they are:

### **Roland Kitchen**

I worked with Sally for many years in the 1980s and was taught many stage tricks by her. I appeared on stage with her in her last stage appearance during a sketch of *Arsenic and Old Lace* for BLOC's 100th year celebration of the Hippodrome. It was an interesting time because as she readily admitted, Alzheimer's was taking hold and so I had to 'feed' her most of her lines with prompts. She was lovely and followed me round the stage like a faithful puppy because she trusted me. It didn't stop her from delivering her lines superbly though.

### **Laura Stanley**

I was in the ensemble for Junior BLOC's *Peter Pan*, which she directed in 1994. I remember being rather in awe of Sally as a pretty shy and retiring 13-year-old, but was thrilled at the end of the run, when she asked if I would like to join BYT. I had many happy years then being directed by Sally in *Find Me*, *Our Day Out* and *Noah*. She really ignited a love of acting in me and is remembered with enormous fondness for seeing potential in a very quiet child!



**Vicky Hayes**

I've just been looking at the BLOC website at past shows to prod my memory. Sally appeared onstage with BLOC in both the 1987 and 2012 productions of *Thanks For the Memories* (as did I). I had the huge responsibility of trying to reprise her 1987 performance as Sarah Bernhardt in the 2012 version! Some people may not know that she was also a published author in later years - her book 'Hannah and Horatio Pea' (still available from Amazon) is based on some of her childhood experiences and memories of her own dearly loved nanny, Hannah. (I'm the very proud owner of a signed copy). She really was one of a kind.

**Emma Griffiths**

Another one here who just wouldn't be who I am today without her. For many reasons. Around age 9/10 I was in a little show *A Victorian Christmas* that she was directing. I had a little song ('Father, Dear Father' - I still remember it). She took my mum to one side and said "*that child needs singing lessons to get the best out of her voice*". My mum didn't have the first idea how to go about that, and Sally kindly gave her a few questions she should ask and what she should expect to hear. And pointed out Valerie Hancock who was also in the cast. My mum dutifully asked Val about lessons and she agreed, even though she wasn't actually a teacher at the time! Such a seemingly small intervention, but one that set me up vocally for life and also created a whole new business for Val!

**John Cousins**

I met Sally back in 1974 during my first show with BLOC, in the production of *The King & I*, in which I played a dancing dog... I wish I could have said something more dramatic! But I was lucky enough to direct her in her last production with BLOC in a scene from *Arsenic and Old Lace* during "100 Years at the Bristol Hippodrome." The pupil was teaching the teacher.

It was mainly during her time with The Kelvin Players that I got to know her as a director/performer and would watch her act in total awe... doing little but saying a lot. But it was when she adjudicated for the Bristol Three Act Festival that I really started to get to know her. This was a time when the adjudicator gave an onstage adjudication after the performance, usually on the Thursday night. You sat there in total fear of her and what she was going to say – sometimes these adjudications could be quite brutal. Fortunately, I was very lucky and somehow managed to get away with it, but they were masterclasses and amazing performances.



Sally lived just around the corner from me and I would often see her going over to Waitrose in her usual colours of blue or pink top with a crisp white blouse with the collar turned up – very theatrical and very dramatic. Once you met Sally, she was someone you would never forget. Her voice was very gentle, but her look was commanding. Her stories were fascinating and you held her in total respect. It was a privilege to have known her over the years and to have learnt so much from her. Thank you xx.

## From the Wings

This is a regular column providing news within the BLOC family, with apologies for any omissions.

Congratulations to our Chairman, Andrew Carpenter on the birth of a grandson, **Archie John Carpenter** on 31<sup>st</sup> August.



Congratulations to Kathie Cooke on the birth of a daughter **Connie Grace Cooke** on 24<sup>th</sup> September.



We were very sad to learn of the deaths of **Peter Milne** and **Sally Noble** recently. Simon Gregory has written passionately about them earlier in this edition.

Congratulations to former BLOC member **Jeremy Batt** who has been playing Olaf in *Frozen* on the West End. Also to **Nic Gibney** (who played Tom Thumb in BLOC's *Barnum*) who is an Ugly Sister in *Cinderella* in Bath this year, **Tom Creswick** who is playing Buttons in Wells Little Theatre's *Cinderella*, and **Courtney Jackson** who is Queen Thelma in *Sleeping Beauty* at the Tivoli Theatre, Wimborne. It is always great when we hear of former members going on to make a name for themselves in professional theatre. Apologies to anyone we've missed!



## Answers to the Christmas Quiz

### Round 1 Answers:

1. Never fall in love with an elf (*Elf the Musical*)
2. I'm dreaming of a white Christmas (*White Christmas*)
3. Rudolf the red nosed reindeer
4. Jingle Bell Rock
5. Frosty the Snowman

### Round 2 Answers:

1. Pumpkin
2. 'One more sleep 'til Christmas'
3. *Once upon a Christmas*
4. Leslie Bricusse
5. Birmingham

### Round 3 Answers:

1. *Frozen The Musical*
2. *Here's Love*
3. *Annie*
4. *The Grinch*
5. *Nativity*

### Round 4 Answers:

1. '...I'm burning with love' (I've got my love to keep me warm - *White Christmas*)
2. '...there's nothing there but gloom' (A house is not a home - *Promises, Promises*)
3. '...carols at the spinet' (We need a little Christmas - *Mame*)
4. '...if the fates allow' (Have yourself a merry little Christmas - *Meet me in St Louis*)
5. '...then my favourite gift is you' (When we're together - *Olaf's Frozen Adventure*)

