

Circular February 2021

Welcome to the first 2021 issue of the Circular, the newsletter exclusively for our most valued supporters, you: our Circle members. We're hoping to bring you a steady stream of uplifting news over the next few months – it's what we all need after last year!

So it's great to be able to kick off with something really positive...

Good news...

You'll be aware, we're sure, that the government announced its 'roadmap' of routes out of lockdown at the start of this week. It looks very likely that we'll be able to bring you live theatre from 17 May, kicking off on 18 May with *The Greatest Play in the History of the World...* more on that below.

We're not counting any chickens just yet, though – as our Executive Director, Caroline Routh, says: "The announcement of the roadmap has made us optimistic for our summer season, although we do of course know that things may be postponed again and so are proceeding with caution. We still have some planning to do before we can announce anything – but watch this space!"

And more!

We found out on 1 February that we'd been successful in a bid to the Garfield Weston Foundation's Weston Culture Fund – they awarded us £237,752 to support our work over the coming year.

The money will be used to support a summer and autumn season of work, including a new play by our Director Emeritus, Alan Ayckbourn, a show in our 'popular excellence' slot (you'll know that better as the period previously filled by shows like *The 39 Steps* and *Stepping Out*) and an autumn production of an adaptation we've commissioned of best-selling novel *The Offing*, by Benjamin Myers, set just up the road in Robin Hood's Bay.

It will also contribute towards equipment and training to allow us to film more of our live shows, and a programme of community-focused 'pop-up' screenings of those films aimed at engaging those who might not usually access live theatre.

You can find out more about the Garfield Weston Foundation here:

www.garfieldweston.org

And even more good news...

We're delighted to welcome a new member of the SJT family – our Fundraising and Development Officer, Stephanie Dattani, gave birth to a beautiful baby boy on 30 January. He's called Remi, and he's been a real hit with big sister Gwen!

While you're at home

Here at the SJT, we've trying to keep a steady stream of activities going that we hope you will enjoy while you're at home. They're changing all the time, of course, as some finish and others are introduced, but currently include:

- Two online courses led by former Rounders – stand-up comedy with Paddy Young (from 8 March) and performance poetry with Nadia Emam (from 9 March)
- Various Rounders classes for young people aged from 8 to 15+ years
- And don't forget that Roger Crowther and a number of our Circle members are still running the online book club.

For more information on the above visit our website, or to join the book club, contact Roger at rogercrowther@talktalk.net

A big SJT welcome to two new board members



Amelia Donkor ©Theresa Grace Fryer



John Wilkinson © Ant Robling

We've recently welcomed two new members to our board – Amelia Donkor and John Wilkinson.

Many of you will remember Amelia from her multi-tasking summer with us in Paul Robinson's production of *The 39 Steps*, in which she played Annabella Schmidt, Pamela, and Margaret, and proved adept at keeping a straight face under the most challenging of circumstances!

Amelia is an actor, writer and facilitator blending creative arts and community building. Other recent theatre credits include Hull Truck Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. Her work spans performance and script writing within the theatre and TV industry to learning and development workshops across

the public and private sectors. Her practice is often centred around storytelling with a focus on accessibility, diversity and inclusion. She is currently studying for an MA in Gender, Media and Culture from Goldsmiths.

John is a text-based theatre director living between York and Leeds, working freelance and as Artistic Associate at York Theatre Royal. He is the tenth recipient of the Genesis Future Directors Award at the Young Vic.

He trained at Bretton Hall College and on the National Theatre Directors Course. Most of his directing credits are focused on intense, modern classics, though he has also worked on large-scale musicals and festivals of new work for young people. He is also a trustee of Stage Directors UK, Pilot Theatre, and the Middle Child.

Amelia says: "I'm thrilled to be joining a theatre with such a heart. It's a space that draws people together, and I very much look forward to learning and listening to other board members, the SJT team and the wider community. I'm particularly interested in the fantastic engagement work the SJT does, and supporting the theatre in their continued creativity whilst the theatre landscape is changing. The SJT has demonstrated how a theatre can stay open and accessible, whilst the doors are temporarily closed."

John says: "The fact so many arts organisations are now diversifying the age range and professional expertise on their boards is a fantastic thing. It is vital for new trustees to engage with companies whose work they connect with and admire. The popular excellence and community-focused work at SJT has always resonated with me. Having a family connection with Scarborough, I hope to be able to help support in the continuation of such robust, vibrant, and inspiring practice. Plus, Paul Robinson has promised me some fish and chips!"

The chair of our board, former BBC Director of Radio Helen Boaden, says: "I am delighted to welcome Amelia and John to our board. They bring fresh creative experience and different perspectives and each is passionate about how the SJT can offer the very best to our audiences and our town."

Amelia and John join a board comprising Helen Boaden, John Armistead, Kate Fenton, Christine Fitzpatrick, Clive Groom, Jon Lee, Richard Lumby, Alex Smith, David Warner, Mike Wilkinson and Sophie Wright

Testers for website

One of the things we're all beavering away at during this relatively quiet time is a new website, which we'll be launching later this year. We'd love to have a few volunteers to test it out before then. We'd like a real cross-section of our audience, so don't feel you need to have any real IT knowledge – it would actually be really useful for us to hear from people with very little tech know-how about how easy (or otherwise!) they find the new site to use. If you're interested in helping, please drop us an email on <mailto:marketing@sjt.uk.com>

The Greatest Play in the History of the World...

Just a reminder that this wonderful show starring BAFTA-nominated Julie Hesmondhalgh (*Coronation Street*, *Broadchurch*), which was due to be in our Round in the first week in March, has been moved to 18 to 22 May.

If you'd already booked tickets, you should have heard from us by now about moving them – if you haven't, do drop us a line at:

box.office@sjt.uk.com

And if you want to book, please visit:

https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1119/the_greatest_play_in_the_history_of_the_world

Meet Denzil Hebditch



In the latest of a series of profiles of our team here at the SJT, we'd like to introduce you to our Production Manager for the past nine years, Denzil Hebditch...

"I am a bit of a nomad. I was born in Cornwall before moving to Aberdeen when I was 10 months old. At five I moved to Winchester in Hampshire before

spending my teenage years in Norwich from age 12 to 20.

"I always enjoyed the theatre and drama was my favourite subject at school; however, after a few amateur shows at the Maddermarket Theatre in Norwich I soon realised that I was a terrible actor but that there were other paths available to me backstage.

"I started volunteering on the crew at the Maddermarket and every summer for three years I worked as the stage manager on the annual youth theatre productions at the Theatre Royal in Norwich.

"I trained in Stage Management at Guildford School of Acting from 1989 to 1991, where I met my future wife Fleur, now the Assistant Producer and Literary Manager at the SJT. She was on the acting course at the same time; however we didn't actually get together until 12 years later!

“After graduating I stayed in Guildford at the Civic Hall for a year before moving to Edinburgh for a while working for a company called 5th Estate. In 1993 I moved to London where I worked at the Thorndike Theatre in Leatherhead.

From 1995 to 1997 I travelled the world backpacking, during which time I was lucky enough to work as crew on a tour of *The Mikado* and *The Pirates of Penzance* across New Zealand and Australia, and on an arts festival in Wellington, New Zealand.

When I returned to the UK I worked as a stage manager in the West End and on tour on the musicals *Oliver!*, *Les Misérables* and *Cats*. When I was deputy stage manager on *My Fair Lady* at Drury Lane, Fleur and I got together and our eldest daughter, Ariel, was born in 2002.

When the show received its closure notice we decided to move away from London to Fleur's home town, Nottingham. I got a job as Production Manager at Nottingham Playhouse. Fleur and I married in 2004 and our second daughter, Velvet, arrived a year later.

After working on some fantastic productions including US and Hong Kong tours I left Nottingham Playhouse in 2010 and after a brief foray into retail (Fleur and I opened our own toy shop called Down the Rabbit Hole) I returned to theatre when I joined the SJT in March 2012.

I was excited to be able to work in the round for the first time since college but as soon as I arrived the stage was converted to a thrust for the spring season! Thankfully that was only temporary and I have been able to work on many memorable productions.

I love sailing and whenever I get the chance I love to get out on the water. In 2019 I had a wonderful trip around the Cape Verde islands on the *Oosterschelde*, a three-masted topsail schooner. Eventually I will live on my own boat and my nomadic life will be complete.

It has been great to raise a family in Scarborough – and how lucky am I to be able to work alongside my beautiful and talented wife?!

In the latest of our series of pieces looking at the lesser known history of the SJT, our Archivist Simon Murgatroyd invites you to meet:

The Forgotten Artistic Director

Here's a New Year's teaser for you. Can you name the Stephen Joseph Theatre's first female Artistic Director?

And no, it's not a trick question – although I suspect very few readers will know the answer as this is a particularly obscure piece of the company's history.

But in 1971, Caroline Smith was appointed Director of Productions (essentially Artistic Director) for the summer season making her, as of writing, the company's first and only female Artistic Director.



Caroline Smith © TBC

Before we look at Caroline's brief tenure with the company, let's set the scene.

In September 1965, Stephen Joseph had decided to close the Library Theatre. By 1967, theatre manager Ken Boden had arranged for it to re-open as a professional venue, but by then Stephen was terminally ill with cancer.

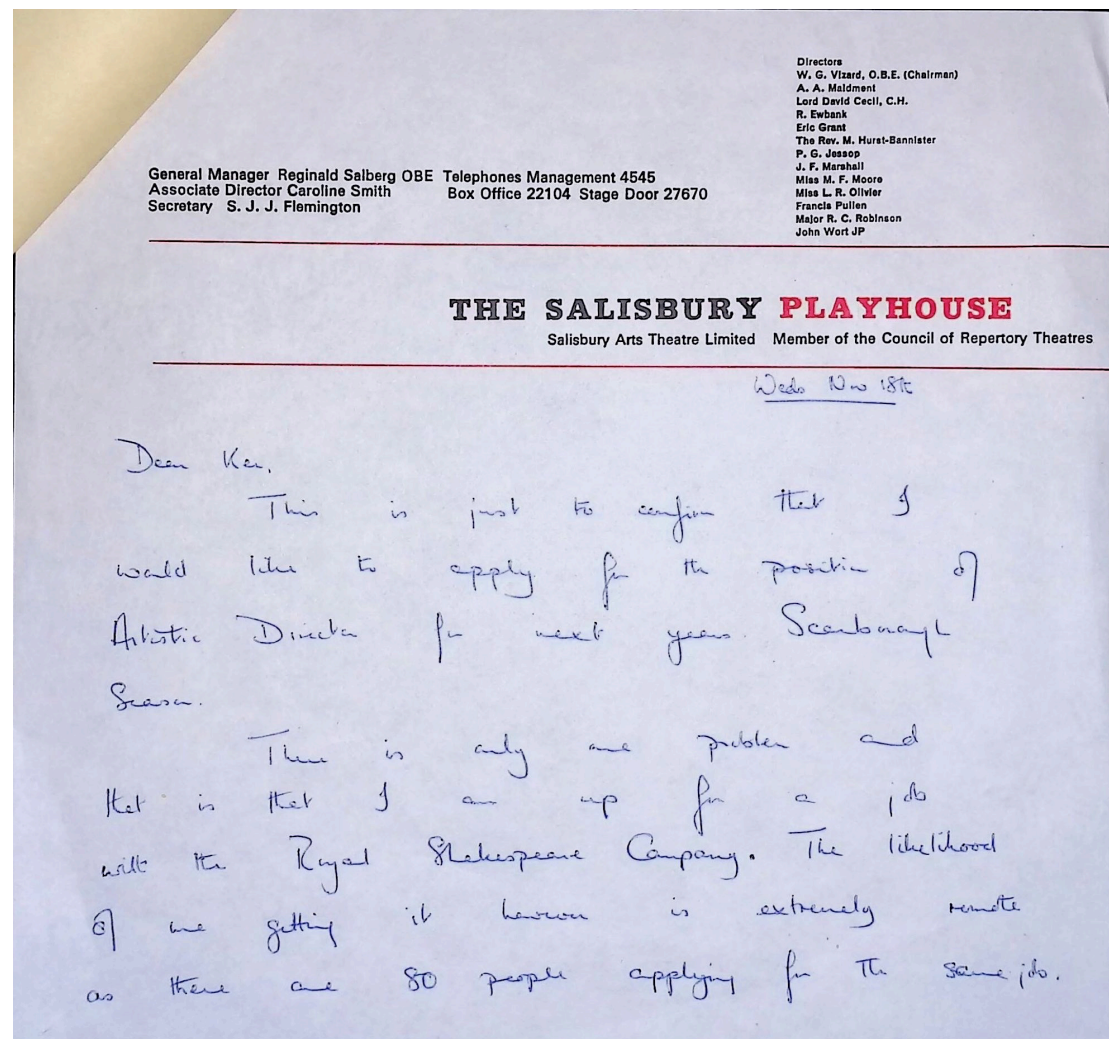
The role of Director of Productions/Artistic Director needed to be filled; it should be borne in mind that the company at the time was only operating summer seasons and had no guarantee of existence from one year to the next.

As a result, Scarborough Theatre Trust took the decision to appoint a Director of Productions on an annual basis. In 1967 and 1968, the position was filled by Rodney Wood – who had worked as a stage manager and director with the company since 1959. He was followed in 1969 and 1970 by Alan Ayckbourn; despite the fact he was employed full-time by the BBC as a Radio Drama Producer and not supposed to take on any other work!

Come 1971, Alan informed the Trust he was heading to America for his first major Stateside transfer with *How The Other Half Loves* and a new Director of Productions would be required.

It's not clear what the process for application was – very little from this period survives in Archive. However, two people are known to have applied for the role: Philip Hedley – most famous as Artistic Director of the Theatre Royal Stratford East from 1979 to 2004 – and Caroline Smith.

Caroline was an Associate Director at the Salisbury Playhouse at the time and her application letter survives in the Ayckbourn Archive at the University of York. Within it, she noted her only proviso in applying was she had also applied for a job at the Royal Shakespeare Company which would take precedence – understandably enough!



18/11/1970 Library Theatre - Caroline Smith © Scarborough Theatre Trust

Caroline had no previous connection with the Library Theatre, although she knew Alan Ayckbourn having worked with him during 1962 and 1963 at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent. There she had been stage manager, actor and director and had experience of theatre-in-the-round and had also worked with Stephen Joseph.

This obviously worked in her favour as – so far as it is possible to tell – there was no actual interview for the job! The applicants appear to have been given to the Trust with the theatre manager Ken Boden recommending that Caroline be given the job sight unseen.

A month later, on 13 December 1970, Ken replied to Caroline's application with the news she had been appointed to the job unanimously and entirely on his recommendation and that it might be a good idea if they met!

His letter also makes it clear the theatre had lost £1,330 the previous year with the blame being solely placed on Alan's shoulders for several reasons such as not doing what the Arts Council wished, increasing wages for actors and employing two more actors than had been agreed.

In accepting the role, Caroline was agreeing to produce five plays – three of which had to be new in order for the theatre to qualify for grant subsidy – with a company of eight actors (four male and four female), one stage manager and one assistant stage manager. Ken also noted the board would like one of the new plays to be by Alan 'if at all possible'.

Caroline was introduced to the Scarborough Theatre Trust board on 21 March 1971 and presented her plans for the season. It would begin with what Ken euphemistically labelled as the 'bankers' – two established plays by well-known writers: *Under Milk Wood* by Dylan Thomas and *The Daughter-in-Law* by DH Lawrence.

1971 Summer Season of Theatre in the round

Tickets 45p
Full-time Students under 21, Old Age Pensioners and Children 25p
Matinees 25p all seats.

Please Note
Advance Booking and Theatre Tickets obtainable now from the Box Office Tel. 4279 (open from 10 a.m. daily) or from Rowntree's Department Store (1st Floor entrance).

Party Bookings and Transport Subsidy
For full information apply by post (enclosing stamped addressed envelope.)

Programme :

June 14th to 19th	UNDER MILK WOOD
June 21st to 23rd	DAUGHTER - IN - LAW
June 24th to 30th*	UNDER MILK WOOD
July 1st to 7th	DAUGHTER - IN - LAW
July 8th to 14th*	TIME AND TIME AGAIN
July 15th to 21st*	UNDER MILK WOOD
July 22nd to 28th*	DAUGHTER - IN - LAW
July 29th - Aug 4th*	TIME AND TIME AGAIN
Aug. 5th to 11th	REVENGE
Aug. 12th to 18th	TIME AND TIME AGAIN
Aug. 19th to 25th*	ONE FOR THE ROAD
Aug 26th-1st Sept*	REVENGE
Sept. 2nd to 8th	ONE FOR THE ROAD
Sept. 9th to 11th	TIME AND TIME AGAIN

* MATINEES 2-30 p.m.
This programme is subject to alteration.

UNDER MILK WOOD
by DYLAN THOMAS
Dylan Thomas' masterpiece. A beautifully witty, human canvas of life in a Welsh village.

THE DAUGHTER-IN-LAW
by D. H. LAWRENCE
At times comic, at times serious; the play deals with the universal struggle between mother and daughter-in-law, for possession of son/husband.

TIME AND TIME AGAIN
by ALAN AYCKBOURN
The latest new comedy, from the author of "Relatively Speaking" and last year's highly successful "The Story so far . . ."

REVENGE
by HOWARD BRENTON
By one of our leading modern dramatists. A tale of two twin avengers, which is by turns comic and melodramatic. Not suitable for children.

ONE FOR THE ROAD
by THE COMPANY and RAY HERMAN
Adapted from Boccaccio's "Decameron" - this will be an "Entertainment" with music.

1971 Summer © Scarborough Theatre Trust

For the rest of the season, she proposed three new plays: *Revenge* by Howard Brenton, Alan's untitled and unwritten latest work, and a 'medieval ballad' described as a 'dramatic play with music'.

It was an eclectic choice of work but the minutes of the meeting note that Caroline made it clear that 'the plays she produced had to be her forte in order for the season to be popular and successful apart from a financial success'.

The board unanimously agreed to the season and agreed that Caroline was to be paid £35 a week for the duration of the summer season; adjusted for inflation that is approximately £500 a week. I'm not sure there are many Artistic Directors who would work for that amount today!

★
SCARBOROUGH Theatre Trust
has appointed Caroline Smith
artistic director for the Summer
season it will be presenting "in
the round" this year at the
resort's Library Theatre.
Miss Smith is currently at
Salisbury Playhouse

Stage announcement © The Stage

Four days later, Caroline's appointment was officially announced and the story carried by *The Stage* newspaper with the summer season confirmed as running from 14 June to 11 September.

It's worth noting that Caroline was responsible for casting Christopher Godwin – with whom she had worked previously – at the Library Theatre for the first time; Christopher, of course, became a key member of the company during the 1970s and was most recently seen in 2018 in Alan's *Better Off Dead*.

Sadly, very little survives in the Archive about the actual season itself, with next to no press cuttings, reviews or images. But we do have several interesting observations.

Caroline directed all but Alan's play including the 'medieval ballad', which became Ray Herman's *One For The Road*, a loose adaptation of several of the stories from Boccaccio's *Decameron*. The programme for this is a personal favourite of mine as it has a rather wonderful cast list: Lorenzo Medici, Niccolo Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia, Leonardo Da Vinci and... a Pig.

Her production of Howard Brenton's *Revenge* ruffled a few feathers, too, as advertising for it warned of strong language and violence. This led to the Vicar of St Martin's Church – despite apparently never seeing the play – complaining to the clerks of both the town and county council as well as the chairman of the Scarborough Corporation Entertainment Committee on behalf of the Scarborough Council of Churches!



Time & Time Again © Scarborough Theatre Trust

As for Alan, he did produce a play – *Time And Time Again* – which he was writing until the day before rehearsals began and which, according to *The Stage*, he was rehearsing until half-an-hour before the first performance! It was a huge success, though, and is considered the first of his tragic-comic works.

At the end of the season, the board declared it an artistic, if not a financial, success. True, it had lost less money than the previous year but the board was disappointed that a £400 loss had been made despite a slight rise in ticket sales and an increase in ticket prices.

And that marked the end of Caroline's tenure with the company – of which there is disappointingly little to show; there isn't even a contemporary photo from her time at the Library Theatre.

The next year saw Alan return as Director of Productions before being appointed to the permanent role of Artistic Director at the close of the summer season.

Caroline, meanwhile, would go on to great success and from 1975 to 1978, she was Artistic Director of Manchester's Contact Theatre and gained a reputation for fostering and championing new plays and new writers. She has worked with numerous companies throughout the UK both in the regions and the West End as well as working on radio and television.

She also became closely associated with the Orange Tree Theatre – at which she is still an Associate Director – and was chair of the board for a number of years.

Perhaps one of her most significant achievements, though, is founding InterAct Stroke Support, a charitable organisation which uses professional actors to deliver reading material specially selected to suit the needs of stroke patients to stimulate memory, language, and lift spirits.

It was inspired by her nursing of her terminally-ill brother who enjoyed being read to. A doctor, he discussed with her how the arts and health could support each other. Caroline began reading voluntarily at local hospitals before forming the company.

Today, InterAct Stroke Support has professional actors working with 19 hospitals and more than 50 stroke clubs across the UK reading to victims of strokes. During the pandemic, they have been even bringing the reading service directly to home through video or even phone calls.

Caroline has enjoyed an exceptional career in theatre over the decades and whilst her connection to the SJT may not be widely known, she has a very special place in our history: not only as our first female Artistic Director, but also as one of the people who helped guide the theatre through one of its most perilous times when its future was by no means certain.

You can find out more about InterAct Stroke Support here:
<https://www.interactstrokesupport.org>