

STOKE REP
PLAYERS 

**TANTRUMS, HUFFS AND SEXUAL IMBROGLIOS
ABOUND IN THIS HILARIOUS AM-DRAM COMEDY**

★★★★★

"Deliciously stuffed with
Shakespeare...
a laugh-a-minute"
Mail on Sunday

★★★★★

"Terrific comedy packed
with killer comic dialogue...
plenty of twists and turns"
Whatsonstage



**A
BUNCH OF
AMATEURS**

by Ian Hislop & Nick Newman

This amateur production of "A Bunch of Amateurs" is presented by special arrangement with SAMUEL FRENCH LTD.

Tuesday 11th - Saturday 15th June 2019

This production contains occasional bad language.



WWW.STOKEREP.INFO

£1

From THE DIRECTOR

ANN WILLIAMS

I first came across A Bunch of Amateurs several years ago, when the film was shown on TV one dismal and wet Saturday afternoon. Having not heard of it before, I felt I had discovered an unknown treasure and thoroughly enjoyed this little gem about amateur theatre shenanigans. I was to discover later, that I was not alone in my enjoyment of the film, as Her Majesty the Queen, after seeing it at its premiere in 2008, requested it be shown to the Buckingham Palace staff at the Christmas Party.

In the period between the film and play, authors Ian Hislop and Nick Newman made several re-writes of the screenplay to form the script, which added immeasurably to the humour and the development of the characters the result of which you are seeing tonight. In Nick Newman's notes at the beginning of the script, he writes that A Bunch of Amateurs is a love letter to amateur dramatics. If that's the case, it's the wittiest love letter I've ever read.

Newman and Hislop, both contributors to Private Eye, have collaborated on scripts on many occasions, most notably for Spitting Image, Murder Most Horrid and the BAFTA award nominated The Wipers Times.

From our first rehearsal, I could see how well the cast was going to make each of these characters their own, and, it has been a joy to work with them from start to finish. Teamwork has been the key word

here and everyone including the backstage crew - has worked very hard to put on the lovely production which I never tire of watching even after the umpteenth time of seeing.

It did occur to me to contact Burt Reynolds to ask if he would consider reprising his role as Jefferson at Stoke Rep, but sadly, he was to pass away before the letter was written. Fortunately, our very own action hero, James Freeman, stepped very ably into the breach possibly unaware that he was not my first choice.

Following some casting issues, I feel I must say a thank you to Lottie Morris and Sophie Wood, who kindly took on their roles at the eleventh hour, hot on the heels of their successful production of Chicago. But, my biggest debt of gratitude is to Craig Wood, who started out as my assistant, but whom I would now describe as my co-director. I couldn't have managed without his unfaltering good humour and support which have sustained me through my trials and exasperations.

As Jefferson Steel, in misquoting Shakespeare, says "The play's the thing" and my bunch of amateurs have done it immeasurably proud.

Ann Williams

P.S. Bruce Willis, Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger and George Clooney were also unavailable to play Jefferson for us. I asked!!

Meet THE CAST



ANGELA DALE



JAMES FREEMAN



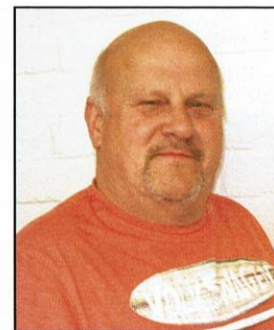
MIKE JOHNSON



LOTTIE MORRIS



DAWN HUXLEY



IAN BIRKIN



SOPHIE WOOD



CRAIG WOOD



THE CAST

in order of appearance

Dorothy NettleAngela Dale
Nigel DewburyIan Birkin
Mary Plunkett.....Dawn Huxley
Dennis Dobbins.....Mike Johnson
Jefferson Steele.....James Freeman
Lauren Bell.....Sophie Wood
Jessica SteeleLottie Morris

DIRECTOR: ANN WILLIAMS

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR: CRAIG WOOD

The action of the play takes place in the sleepy village of Stratford St John in Suffolk, in the rehearsal barn of the Stratford Players, an amateur drama society, and in a local B and B establishment

MAKE A NOTE IN YOUR DIARY OF THE DATES OF OUR EXCITING PLAYS FOR NEXT SEASON. FULL DETAILS OF THE FIRST FOUR PRODUCTIONS ARE ON THE INSIDE BACK COVER.

DETAILS OF THE FIFTH PRODUCTION, BLUE STOCKINGS BY JESSICA SWALE, WILL BE ANNOUNCED SHORTLY.

CREDITS

Stage DirectorTerry Wright
Stage Manager.....Ray Vernon
Set Construction.....Rep Players Construction Team
Set Design.....Dawn Birks (from a concept by Ann Williams)
Lighting DesignMalcolm Rushton
Lighting Operation.....Janet Clarke
Sound Design and Operation.....Mike Adams
Props.....Kath Vernon
Set Dressing.....Margo Bloor and Tina Campbell
Set Décor.....Ken Mills and Team
CostumesRep Players
Front of House ManagerNick Bailey
Programme CompilerBrian Rawlins
Publicity ArtworkJohn Stone
Company Photographer.....Peter Croft

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are indebted to the St John Ambulance Brigade, whose members attend all our performances. Thanks also to The North Staffs Operatic Society for assistance with props and costumes.



PLEASE ENSURE THAT MOBILE TELEPHONES ARE SWITCHED OFF DURING THE PERFORMANCE

IAN HISLOP & NICK NEWMAN

Ian Hislop and Nick Newman, the authors of *A Bunch of Amateurs*, met at Ardingly College, in West Sussex, where Hislop became head boy and Newman was expelled in his last year after wiring up the chapel to play rock music during a service.



Hislop began his theatrical career directing and appearing in satirical reviews at the school alongside Newman.

The friends went to Oxford University, Hislop to Magdalen College and Newman to Oriel College. At Oxford, they began collaborating in scriptwriting for television and radio. Hislop also took over the job of relaunching and editing the satirical magazine *Passing Wind*.

Television credits for the couple include *Murder most horrible* for Dawn French, *The Harry Enfield Show*, and *Spitting Image*. Their contributions to BBC Radio 4 have included *Greed* all about it, *News at Bedtime* and the series *Gush*.

Hislop became editor of *Private Eye* in 1986 and has appeared on many radio and television shows. He has been a team captain on the satirical television programme *Have I got new for you* since the programme's inception in 1990.

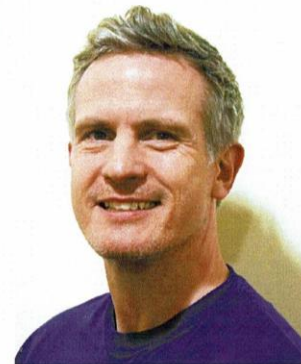
He is reputed to be the most sued man in England and among the people he has upset were Robert Maxwell, later shown to be an extensive fraudster and Sonia Sutcliffe, wife of the Yorkshire Ripper.

Hislop's and Newman's journalistic collaboration has continued to this day and Newman is resident illustrator and cartoonist on *Private Eye*. He has been resident cartoonist at the *Sunday Times* since 1989 and also contributes to *The Guardian*, *The Spectator* and *Punch*.

A Bunch of Amateurs is their third play. They also collaborated on *The Wipers Times*, a play about the newspaper produced in the trenches of Flanders in the first world war, and *Trial by Laughter*, which tells the story of William Hone, a bookseller, publisher and satirist, who stood trial in 1817 charged with sedition although his only crime was to criticise the government of the day and the libidinous monarchy.

Spotlight on... **JAMES FREEMAN**

James Freeman, who is playing the leading role of Jefferson Steele in tonight's production, joined the Rep in 1997, three years before the society moved from the old Rep Theatre in Beresford Street in Shelton. He appeared in *The Deep Blue Sea* and *Relatively Speaking* and was in *Journey's End*, the last production to be presented in the old theatre.



James came to Stoke from his home town of Stowmarket, in Suffolk, to study at Stoke Polytechnic, now Staffordshire University, where he obtained a degree in chemistry. After graduating, he stayed in the Potteries and worked firstly as a laboratory technician and later joined Johnson Matthey, the ceramic colour suppliers, as a Quality Control Supervisor. His most recent work has been as a skills tutor supporting unemployed people, but he is just about to start a new career as a maths tutor in a prison.

James has played leading roles in most of the 20 seasons since the new theatre opened and among his favourite roles have been John Merrick in *The Elephant Man*, Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night* and Oswald in *Ibsen's Ghosts*. He has also directed for the Players and his productions

have included *The Herbal Bed*, *My Boy Jack* and *Mrs Warren's Profession*.

He has also played a leading role in the administration of the theatre and is currently Membership Secretary and a member of both the Marketing Committee and the Players Executive Committee. He served twice on the Production Committee, the committee

that chooses plays and casts, and has taken his turn in the bar.

James has also branched out from the Rep to direct musicals for Newcastle Operatic Society and recent successes have included *Titanic*, *Barnum* and *Chicago*. He is just about to begin rehearsals for his next production, *Oklahoma*, to be staged at the Rep in October.

He briefly joined the Derby Shakespeare Society some years ago and that is where he met his fiancée Elena Fox, who has since played many leading roles for the Rep and for Newcastle Operatic Society. She has been cast as Ado Annie in the forthcoming production of *Oklahoma*.

James is excited to be in *A Bunch of Amateurs*, which he considers a very funny play, and hopes that you will enjoy the production.