

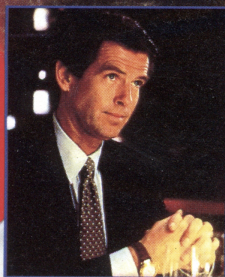
Drag

ISSUE TEN 12-25 APR £1.00

**WHAT'S ON
IN WEST YORKSHIRE!
AND BEYOND**

Streets Ahead!

**ANGELA GRIFFIN
CELEBRATES SIXTY
YEARS OF CHILDREN'S
THEATRE IN LEEDS**



SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED!

Pierce Brosnan and Robbie Coltraine
on the set of the new Bond film

TOO FUNKED TO FISH!

Funkfish and the typically tropical
sound of York

Plus

PHOENIX DANCE, GEORGE BEST & RODNEY MARSH,
KAYA KAVA, MOLLY THE MINKE, BAAADASSS TV
AND JOHN CRAVEN!

THE ONLY FULLY COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO WHAT'S ON IN MUSIC,
THEATRE, FOOD AND DRINK, CABARET, CLUBS, SPORT, CINEMA,
VIDEO, VISUAL ART AND DANCE, ALL OVER WEST YORKSHIRE!



ISSN 1355-5979



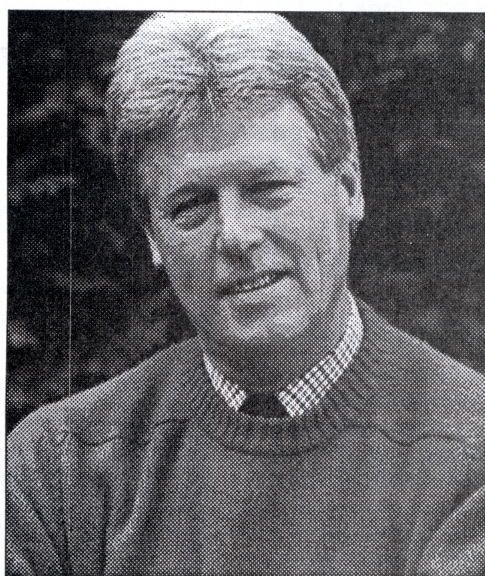
15

WEST YORKSHIRE'S WHAT'S ON GUIDE



Acting Up!

LEEDS CHILDREN'S THEATRE CELEBRATES ITS SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY
THIS YEAR, AND SEAN SMITH FINDS OUT WHY IT'S JUST AS
IMPORTANT NOW AS WHEN IT BEGAN IN 1935.



"My Mum's friend Linda used to go down to the Saturday morning workshops, and I was bored of a weekend, cos I had loads of energy. So she asked if I wanted to go down, because it was from nine am until half-eleven, and she thought it might calm me down a bit for the rest of the day."

Beeston's very own Coronation Street star, Angela Griffin, who plays hairdresser Fiona in the Granada soap talks about her reasons for joining Leeds Children's Theatre with exactly the same kind of breathless enthusiasm displayed by the kids who are involved in the group now. Although she left the group some years ago, there's a common thread of unflappable confidence and seemingly limitless enthusiasm and energy from both its past and present members.

Leeds Children's Theatre Group, which celebrates its sixtieth anniversary this year, began in the late 1920s as an informal group, organised by teachers to introduce drama and performance into schools. At the time those subjects were not covered by the national curriculum. After a period performing in various schools and then St George's Crypt, the group evolved into a formal society in 1935, and moved to the Civic Theatre in Leeds where it remains to this day.

Angela's experience of the group in the eighties seems to be fairly typical.

"I joined when I was six and left when I was fourteen, and in all that time I think I only missed three or four of the productions they put on, which usually happen twice a year. The first show I did was Pinocchio, and the last thing I did was Alice in Wonderland, where I was Alice. With Children's Theatre you've got to start at the bottom and work your way up. The first few times I was in the chorus, and then after that I'd get a

speaking part, after that I'd maybe get a few more main parts until I finally managed to get Alice."

Rather foolishly, I ask if she'd considered a career on the stage prior to her involvement with Children's Theatre. The soul of polite-

always quite loud when I was younger. I don't think I wanted to be an actress, but I think I knew I wanted to do something that could channel all that."

So how did Children's Theatre help her?

"Nobody goes onstage if they don't want to be there. Everyone gets stage fright or first night nerves, and you always get that giddy running around before the curtain goes up. Everyone's panicking that their costumes are alright and their make-up is okay, and hoping they can remember their lines... But you get that in professional theatre too."

ness, she valiantly tries to stop herself laughing, but doesn't quite succeed.

"Well no, not really. I was only five, you see. My mum says that I used to play dress-up and I was

"It taught me professionalism. When you put on these productions you had to have discipline. It gave me a lot of confidence in what I did... I'm not cocky at all!" She suddenly bursts

out into a broad Mancunian accent in response to some unheard pissing-taking in the Coronation Street office, where she's ringing from.

"I left Children's Theatre when I went into Intake High School in Bramley. My GCSEs were coming up and I wanted to get my schooling done right. They had a performing arts course, so I had my drama there, although I still popped back from time to time. After that I joined South Leeds Youth Theatre, so I didn't so much leave Children's Theatre as move onto other things."

How important was Leeds Children's Theatre to her chosen career?

"I think it was the best thing that ever happened to me. If it wasn't for Leeds Children's Theatre I wouldn't be here now, doing what I'm doing. No way."

I think she's referring to a prime role in the longest-running and most popular soap on British television, rather than being involved in an interview with Brag.

"I owe so much to the people there. They just push you along. They just never, ever let you get complacent. The discipline they teach you there, I don't think it can be taught anywhere else, not at that age. I think Leeds Children's Theatre is brilliant. Other children's theatre groups are based around exams, and there's a lot of pressure there, but exams aren't everything. If people want to go down that path, that's fine, but there you had fun while you learned. And you meet such a brilliant group of people there, everyone's there to do exactly what you want to do."

But although the fun factor is still an important element in what goes on, the aims of Leeds Children's Theatre were very clearly defined right from the very start, as Karen Waddicor, an adult member who has been involved for more than twenty-

five years explains:

"It was always in the constitution of the group that adults and children would perform shows which were suitable for children. It's not just kids putting on shows to entertain adults. It's not cute kids standing up there doing their thing, it's more serious than that."

Because of this determination to avoid producing work which kids can't understand, the group tends to keep away from such fare as 'Annie', 'Oliver' and 'The Sound of Music'. Recently it's proved difficult to find new shows which are written specifically for children, although one of the main successes of the past few years was 'The Magic Scarf' which was written specifically for the group. Karen tells me about an idea for a writing competition to find new original material for the group to perform next year, and we'll pass on more information about this as we get it.

"We have to be aware of market forces to the extent that we can't afford to be too self-indulgent. We have to consider bums on seats. The important thing is to remain accessible."

What they really need is a brand new Alan Bennett play, isn't it?

"Yeah, but Alan Bennett doesn't write for children unfortunately."

Karen explains that, contrary to what you might presume, Leeds Children's Theatre doesn't have charitable status, and receives no help

whatsoever from any outside body. Any profit made from one show, goes towards paying for the next one. Since the government stopped paying teachers allowances for extra-curricular activities, the number of school trips to the theatre have, if you'll excuse the pun, decreased dramatically. All this means that for the Leeds Children's Theatre, the emphasis has shifted to attracting families rather than school parties.

During its sixty glorious years, the Children's Theatre has helped hundreds, perhaps thousands of young people (nobody could even guess at an exact figure) to find their feet onstage, among them such household names as Peter O'Toole and John Craven. John, who now presents the BBC's Countryfile on Sundays, was a genuine seventies icon because of programmes like Screen Test, and remembers his time at the Children's Theatre with real affection.

"I only played one major role with them, in a play called 'Nicolo and Nicolette' and I was Nicolo, a toy soldier who came to life. It was a good part and, as I remember, an excellent production with some very talented people. I fell for Anne Murgatroyd, who played Nicolette, but unfortunately she was going out with another member of the cast."

However it wasn't all heartbreak for young master Craven. It seems the Newsround news-hound to be broke a few hearts himself.

"Leeds Children's Theatre gave me my first taste of fame. Some schoolgirls who came to see the play formed a fanclub for me and sent me letters! A few years ago, when we were on a family holiday in Italy, a woman in the next apartment said: 'You won't remember me, but I was in your fan club at Leeds Children's Theatre.' It was a very pleasant reminder of happy times."

The happy times continue. Karen and I leave the bustling bar and adjourn to the Civic Theatre's hectic backstage area to speak to members of the cast of the group's latest production, 'Toad of Toad Hall'. Organised chaos reigns supreme as everyone goes through their paces in the final dress rehearsal before the following evening's opening performance, and our conversation is surreally punctuated by a loudspeaker in the corner of the room asking for "Badger and Fieldmouse onstage, please."

Hayley and Neil are both fourteen, Gemma is fifteen and Natalie, at eighteen, is the old lady of the frighteningly confident and articulate foursome. Although they put forward a variety of reasons for being involved in the group ("It keeps us off the streets and out of trouble... You make new friends... It's a hobby for me, I don't want to be an actress"), Hayley probably sums it up best.

"Well, I'm slightly dyslexic, and being involved with Children's

Theatre has helped me to read better and built up my confidence a lot. I find it a lot easier to talk to people..."

"Yeah, she's just a big bully now!"

Confidence is the key word here. The discipline involved in working on a major show is invaluable in showing children both what they are capable of on their own, and perhaps more importantly, what they are capable of when working with other people, and all for the miserly sum of just £2.50 a year. Leeds Children's Theatre is clearly an important part of all its members' lives, and equally clearly, it wouldn't be half the organisation it is without those same members.

"It's the best way to get high and you don't even have to take drugs! And it's fun as well... It teaches you stuff... How to be assertive, dahling... And you make loads and loads of friends..."

"But you haven't got any friends!"

"If you audition and you don't get a part, you can either help out in the front of house, or you can help around the back. There's something for everybody. Even if you're really shy, you can still help out backstage."

So are there many shy people here? I haven't met many whilst I've been here, I tell them.

"Well, they might be shy when they first come, but not for long."

The last word must go to Kath Ward, Leeds Children's Theatre's Life President and backstage Head Cook & Bottlewasher. Known to most people simply as Auntie Kath ("I think I must have got nieces and nephews than anybody else in Leeds!"), she first became involved with the group just after the war when her young man at the time (later her husband, Eric) took her down to group committee meetings, for, as she describes it, "A bit of a different night out." Although she's never once been onstage in front of an audience, she's been involved with the group ever since.

"As far as the future for us goes, I think it's just going to go up and up, because everyone here is so keen and interested. Leeds Children's Theatre is a friendly group. It's a community. I love it."

Leeds Children's Theatre is celebrating its sixtieth anniversary with a grand reunion to be held at the Civic Theatre in Leeds in early December. Anyone who has taken any part in the Children's Theatre's activities over the years is invited to go along and meet up with old and new friends. For more information, call Ann Smith on 0113 271 2614.



Angela Griffen in younger days, far right, getting a hug.