

## Future Productions

Nuffield Theatre, Southampton, January 19th to 23rd, 1999

**The Cherry Orchard**, *Anton Chekhov*

One of the great plays of the century and not to be missed. Chekhov's last play is a funny but poignant comedy about saying goodbye to the past and hello to the future. It follows the changing fortunes of the charming but feckless Ranevsky family and their friends as they try to avoid the prospect of losing their estate through bankruptcy and take refuge in memories of the past and hopes for the future. Will their beloved cherry orchard be sold or saved from the axe? The answer will make you laugh but it will also make you cry.

Mottisfont Abbey, July 14th to 24th, 1999

**Thieves' Carnival**, *Jean Anouilh*

Romance, masquerade, music, misunderstanding and comedy set in a palatial home where two attractive heiresses are courted by three loveable rogues. Set in the "roaring twenties" in France and now transported into the classic lawns of Mottisfont makes an ideal choice for a summer's evening relaxation.

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**Would you like to join us?**

If you would like to join The Maskers Theatre Company as an active member, Betty Riggs, our Membership Secretary, will be only too pleased to hear from you!

Alternatively you may join the Friends of the Maskers. As a Friend you will receive a regular newsletter with advance notice of all our productions, plus free admission to most of our Workshop performances. If you are interested in joining us as a full Member or as a Friend then please call Betty Riggs on 01703-472619, and she will explain how to join.

*The Maskers Theatre Company*  
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**MOTTISFONT ABBEY**  
*courtesy of the National Trust*

# Wild Oats

*or*  
**The Strolling  
Gentleman**

*By John O'Keeffe*  
*Director Mollie Manns*

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**Wednesday**  
**15 July**

*to*

**Saturday**  
**25 July**  
**1998**

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Director Mollie Manns



Muz and Harry Thunder



Mistress Trap and Master Lamp

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## John O'Keeffe

"An English Moliere" according to William Hazlitt was in fact born in Abbey Street, Dublin in 1747. As a child he studied drawing, learnt Greek, Latin and French and read Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Congreve and Farquhar. He began his stage career playing comedy roles with a Dublin company and then took to writing plays full-time because of failing eyesight (which gradually led to his becoming totally blind in 1798). In 1762 he went to London for the first time, living with an uncle and aunt. He roamed round London, drew a great deal, went to the theatre including seeing Garrick play Lear and wrote his first play, a comedy *The Generous Lovers*. The play was never performed and the MS is lost. In all he wrote more than seventy dramas, farces, pantomimes and comic operas of which the best known is *Wild Oats*, for which he received 450 guineas. His main successes were during the late 1770's including *Tony Lumpkin In Town* and *The Son-in-Law*.

He married Mary Heaphy in 1774 and they had three children, Gerald, who died in infancy, John Tottenham and Adelaide. In 1783 he moved to Acton where he sat in the corner of a large garden and dictated the plays and operas to John, his son. He was a writer respected by both Congreve and Sheridan and much later in his *Recollections* O'Keeffe writes "Perhaps I may not be accused of much vanity when I state that Sheridan often gave his full opinion, that I was the first that turned the public taste from the dullness of sentiment, into which it was rapidly falling, towards the sprightly channel of comic humour; and that I was the only one that could do this." After spending most of his life around the London and Dublin theatres he moved to Chichester and then intending to retire in Sidmouth he and daughter Adelaide stopped in Southampton on the way. He was by now old and frail and they decided they liked the area so much, they took up residence in Bedford Place, an area described as "near Southampton". He wrote some poems there and his daughter read him novels of Sir Walter Scott. In *St. Ronan's Well* Scott had written "From Shakespeare to O'Keeffe". O'Keeffe remarked "Ah! The top and bottom of the ladder; he might have shoved me a few sticks higher."



He died at Bedford Cottage (now Bassils the Chemists) and was buried at All Saints Church in Back of the Walls, there being no Roman Catholic church in Southampton (the nearest being at Winchester) in 1833. His tombstone was probably destroyed by vandals at the end of the 19th century. There was an interesting article about O'Keeffe and the period when he lived in Southampton in the Hampshire Magazine June 1992 edition, written by John Edgar Mann, entitled "The Forgotten Poet of Bedford Place".



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## About the play

The play was first performed at the Covent Garden Theatre, London in 1791. It was written some time after the great period of Restoration Comedy, and while similar in style it has a subtler and less bawdy touch. The play was written before O'Keeffe came to live in Hampshire but it contains many local references such as Sir George Thunder who says he lives "half a league this side of Gosport", the play's actor hero Charles Rover tells Harry Thunder "the bills are already up with our names tonight to play at Winchester" and the villain, appropriately named Farmer Gammon is referred to as "a Hampshire Hog". From other references in the text it seems certain that the play is set in and near Stockbridge, and the coach inn scene is probably at the Grosvenor Hotel. Like his contemporary, Sheridan, O'Keeffe liked to use play on words and Rover has a constant flow of quotations from plays which he has performed, mainly Shakespeare and other early 18th century writers. The play is particularly well constructed with a steady flow of characters, including sailors, ruffians, theatre types, Quakers and all the strands and subplots fall into place with a neat denouement. The play is based on eight locations during the fifteen scenes and early performances were reputed to last up to four hours, most of which was probably spent changing the sets! We will use the minimum of scenery to indicate the various locations leaving your imagination to fill in the details and the performances should run for around two hours plus the interval.

The play tells the story of how Rover, the star of a travelling troupe of actors, takes the role of his friend Harry Thunder, presents himself as a suitor to Harry's cousin, the Quaker Lady Amaranth and, by so doing sets in motion a whole series of mistaken identities and ingenious intrigues. Regular visitors to our productions at Mottisfont may remember a similar set of mistaken identities from our production of *The Beaux Stratagem* by George Farquhar, some ten years ago.



The Grosvenor Hotel - Stockbridge

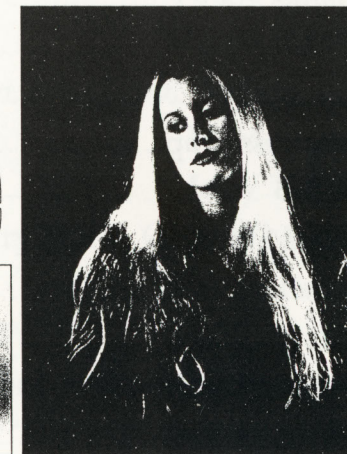
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## Cast in order of speaking

John Dory ..... John Carrington  
Sir George Thunder ..... Albie Minns  
Ephraim Smooth ..... Graham Buchanan  
Lady Amaranth ..... Belinda Drew  
Sarah ..... Emma Carrington  
Muz ..... Carl Donnington  
Harry Thunder ..... Alec Walters  
Rover ..... Paul Mills  
Farmer Gammon ..... David Pike  
Sim ..... Paul Taylor  
Jane ..... Sophie Scott  
Banks ..... Harry Tuffill  
Twitch ..... Alan Watson  
Landlady ..... Christine Baker, Mollie Manns  
Mistress Trap ..... Hazel Burrows  
Lamp ..... Ken Hann  
Maid at Inn ..... Helen White  
Amelia ..... Sarah Lynn  
First Ruffian ..... Paul Baker  
Second Ruffian ..... Bruce Atkinson  
Third Ruffian ..... Matthew Tuffill  
Sheriff's Officer ..... Derek Leslie  
Villagers etc. .... Brenda Atkinson, Amber Holloway,  
Sarah O'Leary, Nick Osmond,  
Cameron Shiell, Kate Ward

## Production crew

Director ..... Mollie Manns  
Assistant to Director ..... Christine Baker  
Costumes ..... Serena Brown, Sandy Harlow, Kate Ward  
Sound ..... Lawrie Gee, Carmen Ortigosa, Antoinette Slaven  
Lighting ..... Clive Weeks, Tony Lawther,  
and Nathan Weeks assisted by others  
Properties ..... Ella Lockett, Irene Shiell, Gill Buchanan  
Wigs ..... Showbiz  
Set Design & Construction ..... Douglas Shiell, Brian Langford,  
Cameron Shiell, Amy Langford,  
Geoff Cook  
Stage Manager ..... Angie Barks  
Deputy Stage Manager ..... Martin Ingoe  
Front of House Managers ..... Ron Tillyer, Julia Jupp, Val Barwell  
Stewards ..... The Maskers  
Programme Design ..... Harry Tuffill  
Marketing and Publicity ..... Harry Tuffill, Geoff Wharam

Our thanks for:

Furniture ..... Amber Antiques, Portswood

The Director wishes you a pleasant evening in the delightful setting of Mottisfont Abbey and thanks the many Maskers and other friends who have helped with this production.



## The RSC revival

The play was rediscovered by The Royal Shakespeare Company and presented at the Aldwych Theatre, London in December 1976, directed by Clifford Williams. The initial cast included Alan Howard as Rover, with Jeremy Irons as Harry Thunder, Zoe Wanamaker as Jane and Ben Cross as Second Ruffian! Later productions included appearances from John Nettles, James Bolam, Sinead Cusack and a maid performed by Ruby Wax! The critics proclaimed the play "a masterpiece".

### The critics

"The Royal Shakespeare Company has struck gold... this play is better than *She Stoops to Conquer*... in fact I swear it is as good as all but the very best of Congreve and Sheridan... I declare there is not to be found a more entirely delectable entertainment pitched between Heaven and Charing Cross."

**Bernard Levin** *The Sunday Times*

"What strikes one most forcibly about *Wild Oats* is its rare combination of generosity of spirit and mastery of situation... One cannot be too grateful to the RSC for belatedly sowing its *Wild Oats*."

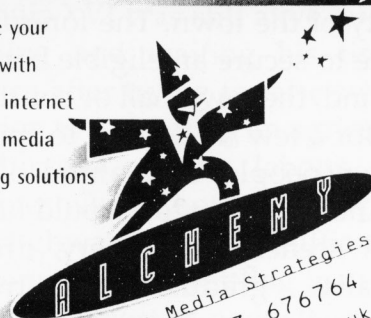
**Michael Billington** *The Guardian*

"I doubt whether any audience in London has been more surprised by joy than that for *Wild Oats*."

**Robert Cushman** *The Observer*

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## The Strolling Players

We can remember the days when the old strolling player was an institution of the country...and when the annual visit of the strolling company would awaken the curiosity of the town. The forerunners of the company were sent in advance to secure an eligible barn - or if fortune and the magistrates were kind, the town hall or courtroom - in which to fit up the theatre-rural for a few weeks and to spot out such lodgings as the suspicious townspeople, ever afraid of "the players", could be induced to let... Anon the waggon would lumber into the town with the wonderful scenery, machinery, dresses, decorations, and other paraphernalia... gradually the strollers arrived at head-quarters, having strolled perhaps a matter of seventeen miles.

**Peter Paterson**, *Confessions of a Strolling Comedian*, 1864

It was the custom of the London actors, especially the leading ones, to do little more at rehearsals than read or repeat the words of their parts, marking on them their entrances and exits as settled by the stage manager and their respective places on the stage. To make any display of passion or energy would be to expose oneself to the ridicule or sneers of the green room.

**William Charles Macready**, *Reminiscences*, 1875

## The Quakers

George Fox founded the Society of Friends in 1668 with the ideal of absolute religious spontaneity under the direct guidance of the Spirit of God. As late as this play the Friends were obliged to wear a special, sober form of dress; to use a method of dating that substituted "First Day" for "Sunday"; to use "thee" and "thou" in ordinary speech; the men had to keep their hats on when custom required them to take them off...Friends who were unwilling to be pacifist or who married non-Quakers were expelled from the Society.

**John Kent**, *Elizabeth Fry*, 1962

## 1791 and all that

*The Times* newspaper, popularly known as *The Thunderer* had started circulation. All Europe was in turmoil with Revolution in the air. Louis XVI was still alive but a certain Lieutenant Napoleon was watching and waiting his time. "Farmer" George III had lost America after trying to raise swingeing taxes and he had turned his attention to promoting an agricultural revolution which included the introduction of new labour saving devices like the threshing machines which shortly led to riots and the introduction of The Riot Act. Highwaymen and Ruffians patrolled many of the roads. The first convicts were settling in at Botany Bay. Canals were being built for the transport of goods and steam power was in use in the new textile mills. Britain was busy expanding the Empire and Wilberforce introduced his first, unsuccessful bill to stop slavery. The Marylebone Cricket Club set down the first rules of cricket but a man could still be hanged for sheep or horse stealing, the last man hanged for the latter is buried at St Johns Church in Itchen Abbas. Ballcock WCs and production line tooth brushes were invented. John Wesley died, aged 88. The following year the Methodists broke away from the Anglican Church. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart died, aged 35.



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