

# Maskers Theatre Company at Mottisfont Abbey "Thieves Carnival" by Jean Anouilh 14-24 July 1999

By Jan Ward

Maskers Theatre Company has been performing in the open air at Mottisfont Abbey every July since 1982.

One couple for whom Mottisfont holds special memories are Brian and Angela Stansbridge. Brian became a "Masker" as a teenager and was joined by Angela when they married 27 years ago. Indeed the "Maskers" company has been a major part of their family life with their three children having grown up with Mum and Dad playing a variety of characters, in numerous productions. The children too have been involved as members of the crowd scenes—their son specialising in any activity which involves being neck-high in the river. Brian and Angela have taken part in more than a dozen productions at Mottisfont including: Tom Jones, She Stoops to Conquer, Canterbury Tales, Cyrano de Bergerac, The Recruiting Officer, The Rover, Midsummer Night's Dream, Three Musketeers, and Much Ado about Nothing.

In 1985 they played the romantic leads in Philippa Taylor's production of Jean Anouilh's Ring Round the Moon. At the time Angela was newly pregnant with their youngest child Hannah. Brian anxiously watched his wife's every move as she climbed ladders, was frequently 'hit' to the ground, and threw herself in the river, all in the interests of drama! Thirteen years later, young Hannah is playing alongside her father Brian in another Anouilh play at Mottisfont. This time Philippa is directing Thieves Carnival for ten performances from Wednesday 14 to Saturday 24 July.

Brian is well known for comic roles such as Micky Miller in Canterbury Tales and as Bottom in Midsummer Night's Dream. Once again he gets to play the fool in this delightful comedy set in 1920's France. As a master of disguise he and his two friends set out to dupe two innocent young heiresses. Who is deceived and who are the deceivers remains to be seen.

This is a lighthearted show with music and dancing, plenty of fun and frolics. Mottisfont Abbey is a beautiful setting, and this production will take place with the shrubbery and summer-house as its background.

The audience is invited to picnic before the performance, and then to settle into their garden chairs in this magical arena. There's nothing quite like the Mottisfont Abbey grounds in the evening. As the sun goes down across the nearby fields you can see barn owls fly out from the trees, and around the abbey house itself there are bats to be seen. The swans and moorhens solicit crumbs from the picnickers and all in all it's a privilege to be in such a beautiful place. Of course it can get chilly when the sun goes down, but most people come prepared with rugs.

Brian and Angela are drawn back to Mottisfont year after year, as are audiences who start booking as early as March. Fridays and Saturdays are usually busy, but tickets are almost always still available for Sunday and weekdays right up to the week of the show. Call the Box Office at the Turner Sims Concert Hall (01703 595151) for information on seating availability.



Two important "Maskers" — Brian and Angela Stansbridge in one of their early "Masker's" plays. (Below) From "Dulce Vita"



At Netley Abbey, without his Dulce Vita stage make-up is Derek Doddington with his daughter, Charlotte