



CURTAIN CALL



NO in the limelight

NAME: Philippa Taylor
AGE: 56
ADDRESS: Belmont Road, Portswood
SOCIETY: Maskers Theatre Company
SHOW: Thieves Carnival, Mottisfont Abbey, July 14-24

FAVOURITE ROLE: Directing Twelfth Night; Playing Hestor Bellboys in Penny for a Song
ACTING HERO/HEROINE: Dame Judi Dench
MOST EMBARRASSING STAGE MOMENT: Completely forgetting my lines at the beginning of When We Are Married at the Nuffield Theatre. At the time I was 40, but I was playing a 14-year-old and my mind went totally blank.

HIDDEN TALENT: I don't think I've got one
GOOD LUCK RITUAL/CHARM: I keep hold of my script for as long as possible before the curtain goes up.



Al fresco acting

If you've come across some strange happenings on Southampton Common recently, don't worry there is no need to call the police.

It is just the cast of Maskers Theatre Company's latest al-fresco show getting into character.

Wind, rain, and bemused onlookers it seems, are not enough to put them off - they have been used to it for years.

"We've had the odd jogger and mountain bike rider going through the rehearsals, along with groups of lads who decide a game of football nearby is probably not the best idea," says show director Philippa Taylor.

Having been involved with the company - now famous for its open-air productions at Romsey's Mottisfont Abbey - for 20 years, Philippa says

By **David Schaffer**



the weather will never put them off. "For the shows at Mottisfont, audiences can more-or-less guarantee that unless it is dangerous for the cast or them, they will always get a show to watch," Philippa says.

"In 20 years, I can only remember two performances of the countless productions we've done that had to be cancelled."

Taking on French playwright Jean Anouilh's Thieves Carnival this time around, it continues a Maskers tradition to generally avoid Shakespeare.

"When we started this company, there seemed to be plenty out there who were doing open-air Shakespeare, so we thought we would avoid it," Philippa adds.

"And often his work

can get a bit heavy - we know from our audiences that they want to have a good time, have a picnic and don't want something too serious."

To get an idea of the growing popularity of the Maskers however, you only have to witness the eagerness of people to secure their place in the Mottisfont grounds.

"We are only able to open the gates to the Abbey at 6.30pm, for a 7.30pm performance, but people queue from 5pm," Philippa says.

"And then when the gates open people run to get the best picnic and viewing spot, it's a really funny sight."

Thieves Carnival is staged as part of Romsey Arts Festival from July 14 to 24, except July 19.

Tickets, priced £6.50-£9.50, are available from the box office on 01703 595151.

at a glance

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IN THE OPEN AIR: Mollie Manns as Lady Hurff and Nicky Housham as Juliette in Thieves Carnival.