



MASKERS THEATRE COMPANY

present

THE HERBAL BED

By Peter Whelan



Directed by Sheana Carrington

Maskers Studio Theatre

21-25 October 2003



THE HERBAL BED BY PETER WHELAN

Peter Whelan was born in the Potteries in 1931. Most of his plays have been premiered by the RSC and 'The Herbal Bed' is no exception. A modern piece, it is set in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613 and has an authentic historical background, centring on Susanna, the eldest daughter of William Shakespeare who married John Hall the eminent physician in 1607.

The play unfolds around a public accusation of adultery that tests the relationships of all the main characters and also throws light on the harsh realities of life in post-Elizabethan Britain.

WHAT WE KNOW

Dr. John Hall - William Shakespeare's son-in-law, was a very successful Stratford physician and herbalist. His surviving medical case notes for the years 1611-1635 describe how he treated 155 patients from aristocrat to pauper. He recorded symptoms, medications, and the outcomes of his attentions. They provided a rare picture of provincial medical practice in Jacobean England. Their home, a fine timber framed house, reflects John Hall's prosperity and status, and in 1949 was bought by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. The house was restored and furnished as authentically as possible to resemble its appearance when John, Susanna and Elizabeth lived there.

"Mr. Hunt of Stock Green aged about 46, Labouring of a grievous Scab and Itch was thus helpt: prescription: Fumitory, Borage, Bugloss, Scabious, Wormwood, of each a like quantity as much as you please, draw out the juices, of which take boiling it in whey to the Consumption of the whey, always scumming of it. After it is boiled suffer it to settle. Drink every day a good draught of it cold, with sugar."
- quotation taken from John Hall's case book.

Susanna Hall - was said to be her father's favourite and on his death left his house, New Place, to her in his will. It was passed down to John and Susanna's only child Elizabeth. The name Susanna was highly unusual in a town like Stratford and was suggestive of Puritanism. As the Reformation swept England it was becoming a growing custom to give children names with biblical origins. She died at the age of 66 and her epitaph bears witness to her strength of character and her father's reputation:

"Witty above her sexe, but thats not all
Wise to salvation was good Mistris Hall.
Something of Shakespeare was in that, but this
Wholy of him with whom shes now in blisse.
Then Passenger, hast nere a teare
To weep with her that wept with all;
That wept, yet set herself to chere
Them up with comforts cordiall.
Her love shall live, her mercy spread
When thou hast nere a teare to shed."

Elizabeth Hall - was born in 1608, making Shakespeare a grandfather at 43 years of age. She married twice - once to Thomas Nash, a man almost twice her age, and on his death she married a John Barnard. He was given a baronetcy by Charles II. Still childless Elizabeth, now Lady Barnard, died in 1670 and no monument, headstone or marker from the time survives her.

Rafe Smith and Susanna Hall were slandered by Jack Lane by reporting that "she had the running of the reins and had been naughty with Rafe Smith". Susanna brought the case before the Consistory Court at Worcester Cathedral on the 15th July 1613. Rafe or Ralph Smith, the supposed lover, was a hatter and haberdasher of Stratford.

Jack Lane or John Lane - was the second son on an old respectable but eccentric family, who fittingly had a coat of arms "three fire balls flaming". He slandered Susanna with the charge of adultery. She took the case to court herself and cleared her name. He was accused of drunkenness and as leader of the anti-Puritan cause organised a riot against the intellectual incoming Puritan vicar, Thomas Wilson, who was strongly approved of by John Hall. Jack (John) Lane stayed away from the court case.

Out of these few facts Peter Whelan has created a play which is both entertaining and rewarding when reflected upon.

CAST

John Hall	Martin Cavenev
Susanna Hall	Maria Hutchings
Elizabeth Hall	Lydia Cavenev
	Phoebe Blandford
	Cicely Blandford
Hester Fletcher	Emma Carrington
Rafe Smith	Johnny Carrington
Jack Lane	Matt Avery
Bishop Parry	Graham Buchanan
Barnabus Goche - Vicar General	Philip de Grouchy

CREW

Production Manager	Graham Buchanan
Stage Manager	Helen White
Lighting Design	Nathan Weeks
Lighting Operator	Ivan White
Sound	Lawrie Gee
Sound Operator	Julia Campone & Kathryn Salmon
Fight Arranger	Ken Spencer
Photography	Clive Weeks
Programme	Sandy White
Set Design	Ken Spencer
Set Construction & painting	Students of City College [Supervised by Paul Lewis & Ken Spencer]
	Roger Lockett
Props	Ella Lockett & Gill Buchanan
Costumes	Serena Brown
Publicity	Jan Ward
	Heather Christiansen

The music is a selection taken from the works of William Byrd, John Dowland, William Lawes and Tomas Luis de Victoria.

Grateful thanks are extended to: Culpepers, Marlands Centre, Southampton; Alec Walters for the use of his extensive collection of period music; Vita Cress, St. Marybourne, Hants; Mrs. Jackie Rogers; Dee Cee Upholstery, Southampton; Mrs. A. Pollard; Mrs. S. Bell; Jan Ward (for babysitting!).

The action of the play takes place in Stratford-upon-Avon in the summer of 1613. There will be one interval of 15 minutes between Act I and Act II.

ACT I	Scene 1	June 1613
	Scene 2	Half an hour later
	Scene 3	Later that night
ACT II	Scene 1	Two days later
	Scene 2	Five weeks later
	Scene 3	Some weeks later

A DESCRIPTION OF WEIGHTS

Taken from a book entitled 'The Method of physick, containing the causes, signes and cures of inward diseases in mans body' by Philip Barrough, printed in 1624.

A graine is a barley corn taken out of the middle of the eare,
A scruple is twenty barley cornes.
Three Scruples contain a Drachme.
Eight Drachmes contain one ounce.
Quart, signifieth a quart of anything.
Libra is a pound.
Semis, is the halfe of every weight.
Minipulus, is a great handfull,
Pugillus, is a small handfull.
Ana, signifieth of every one a'like much.

From The Complete Herbal, by Nicholas Culpeper, 1649:

Sage (Common Garden) - Good for the liver and to breed blood.... To make the Pills, take two drams each of Spikenard and Ginger and eight drams of the Sage seed toasted at the fire. Make into a powder and add as much juice of Sage as needed to make into a mass of pills. Take a dram of them every morning and night, fasting, and drink a little pure water after. They are profitable for pains in the head and joints and they help the falling-sickness, lethargy, lowness of spirits and palsy.

Chamomile - A stone that hath been taken out of the body of a man being wrapped in Chamomile, will in time dissolve, and in a little time too.

A decoction of Chamomile takes away stitches and pains in the side. The flowers beaten and made into balls with oil drive away all sorts of agues. If the one grieved be anointed with that oil from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot and afterward laid to bed, he will sweat well.....

Dandelion - this herb helps one to see farther without a pair of spectacles. This is known by foreign physicians who are not so selfish as ours, but more communicative of the virtues of plants to people.... It openeth the passages of the urine both in young and old and will cleanse ulcers in the urinary tract. For this purpose the decoction of the roots or leaves in white wine, for the leaves used as pot herbs are very effectual.....



FORTHCOMING PRODUCTIONS

Christmas Baubles at Tudor Merchant's Hall
Tuesday 9th to Saturday 13th December at 7.30.
For tickets please tel. 023 8055 1489

"The Relapse" or "Virtue in Danger" by Sir John Vanbrugh
Tuesday 13th to Saturday 17th January 2004
Nuffield Theatre, Southampton
Nuffield Theatre Box Office: 023 80 671771

"Moonlight" by Harold Pinter
at the Maskers Theatre Workshop
Tuesday 23rd to Saturday 27th March 2004

"The Merry Wives of Windsor"
by William Shakespeare
in the Open Air at Mottisfont Abbey
Wednesday 14th to Saturday 24th July 2004



www.maskers.org.uk

This amateur production is presented by arrangement with Josef Weinberger Ltd