

PROSCENIUM

Lettice and Lovage

By Peter Shaffer

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Wednesday 16th June to Saturday 19th June 2010
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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Cast:

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| Lettice Douffet | Susi Thornton |
| Lotte Schoen..... | Evelyn Moutrie |
| Miss Framer..... | Crystal Anthony |
| Mr Bardolph | Keith Bayross |
| Tourists..... | Anne Gerrard |
| | Sam Thornton |
| | Angie Sutherland |
| | Clare Sutherland |
| | Nicky Sutherland |
| | Crystal Anthony |
| | Jenny Akato |
| Directed by..... | Mark Sutherland |
| Stage Manager..... | Paul Davis |
| Properties | Margaret Rudolph |
| Lighting..... | Izzie Cartwright |
| Sound..... | Charles Anthony |

Thanks to Mary Ennis (Good Companions, Edgware),
Mike Williams, Barry Rudolph, Duncan Sykes,
Alexandri Rigazzi Tarling (voice coach), Dean Clegg

Act 1 Scene 1 - A series of scenes in the Grand Hall of
Fustian House.

Act 1 Scene 2 - Miss Schoen's office at the
Preservation Trust, London.

Act 2 - Lettice Douffet's basement flat in Earl's Court.
Several weeks later.

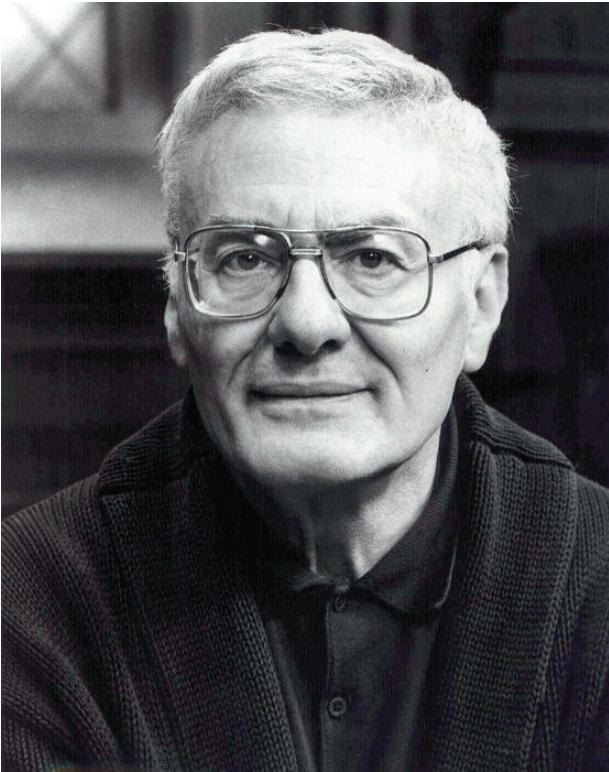
Act 3 - Lettice's flat six months later.

There will be one short interval of 5 minutes between Act 1
and 2, and a 15 minute interval between Act 2 and 3.

The Author

Peter Shaffer and his twin brother were born in 1926 in Liverpool. The family moved to London in 1936 and he attended St Paul's School, from where he won a scholarship to read history at Trinity College, Cambridge. However, before going up to university he spent three years working in the Chislet coal mine, having been conscripted as one of the 'Bevin Boys', an experience which he said gave him great sympathy for the way many people are forced to spend their lives.

After graduating in 1950 his first literary venture was a detective novel – the first of three co-authored with his brother Anthony and published under the pseudonym Peter Anthony: Anthony went on to write the enormously successful mystery *Sleuth*.



From 1951 Peter Shaffer lived in New York and worked at a variety of jobs: Doubleday's bookshop, Grand Central Station, an airline terminal, Lord and Taylor's department store, and the New York Public Library. He states that for years he laboured under the impression that the passion he had developed for the theatre

could only be used as a pastime and that his daily profession had to be something 'respectable'. When he moved back to London he worked for nearly two years in the symphony music department of Boosey and Hawkes. Meanwhile he was successful in having plays accepted for television and radio and in 1955 he left Boosey and Hawkes to 'live now on my literary wits'.

He was for a while literary critic for the weekly review *Truth* and music critic for *Time and Tide*, but in 1958 his first stage play *Five Finger Exercise* opened at the Globe, directed by John Gielgud, and launched his hugely successful stage career: it had long runs both in London and New York, winning Evening Standard and New York drama critic awards.

In 1962 a double bill of high comedies, *The Private Ear* and *Public Eye* was staged at the Globe and in 1964 *The Royal Hunt of the Sun*, produced by the National Theatre and directed by John Dexter, opened at Chichester and subsequently The Old Vic. These two plays represent the two very distinctive strands of Peter Shaffer's work. *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* was strikingly theatrical, full of spectacle, epic grandeur and dramatic and tragic tension, but also engaged in a serious moral debate. In the same mould came *Equus* (1973) and *Amadeus* (1974): all three plays gained many awards in London and New York while the film version of *Amadeus* won eight Oscars, including one for the author. *Yonadab* (1985) and *The Gift of the Gorgon* (1992) followed a similar pattern.

However, in parallel with these powerful dramas came a number of sophisticated and witty comedies, including *Black Comedy* (1965) and *White Lies* (1967). Maggie Smith had appeared in *The Private Ear* and *Public Eye* and *Black Comedy* and in 1987 Shaffer wrote *Lettice and Lovage* with Maggie Smith specifically in mind. It opened at the Globe, directed by Michael Blakemore, and won the Evening Standard award for best comedy and when it transferred to New York both Maggie Smith and Margaret Tyzack won Tony Awards.

Some Textual References

Lovage (levisticum officinale)

Known in German as Lieberstocke (love sticklet) and in English as love parsley. The odour of the plant is very strong,

the taste warm and aromatic and it abounds with a yellowish, gummy, resinous juice. It originates from the Mediterranean and has been cultivated since the time of Pliny. Very popular from the Middle Ages in English and, in particular, monastery gardens where it was made into herbal remedies for many ailments – and a love potion. For spot removal: ‘the leaves, bruised and fried with a little hog’s lard and laid hot to any blotch or boil will quickly break it.’

The Shell Centre

The British central office of the major oil company Shell. It consisted of a skyscraper of 27 storeys – the first in London to exceed the height of the Victoria Tower and Palace of Westminster – and three nine storey wings. A prominent feature on the South Bank of the Thames near County Hall and therefore in the 1980s an ideal site for anti-capitalist action.

Guides for Historic Houses

The National Trust, in its appeal for volunteers, claims ‘the experience will help you to develop knowledge and awareness as well as improving your communication and leadership skills and boosting your confidence.’ It offers a training course designed to help prospective guides: create a thematic tour for a historic site; integrate historic biography into theme-based interpretation; adapt and respond to various audience types. Training which Lettice Douffet would consider entirely superfluous.

She would also have no sympathy with the couple who were for a period in charge of Shakespeare’s Birthplace – in an anecdote told by Henry James: ‘they grew sick and desperate from finding their office the sort of thing I suppose it is: full of humbug, full of lies and superstition imposed upon them by the great body of visitors, who want the positive, impressive story about every object, every feature of the house, every dubious thing – the simplified, unscrupulous, gulpable tale.’ Lettice would have supplied that with relish.

The Execution of Mary Queen of Scots

At Fotheringhay Castle on 7 February 1587, Mary was told that she was to be executed next day. She spent the last hours of her life in prayer and writing letters and her will. The scaffold that was erected in the great hall was three feet tall and draped in black. It was reached by five steps and the only things on it were a disrobing stool, the block, a cushion for her to kneel on and a bloody butcher’s axe. At her execution the executioners knelt before her and asked forgiveness. According to a contemporary account by Robert Wynkfield, she replied, “I forgive you with all my heart.” The executioners and her two servants helped remove a black outer gown, two petticoats, and her corset to reveal a deep red chemise – the liturgical colour of martyrdom in the Catholic Church. As she disrobed she smiled faintly to the executioners and said, “Never have I had such assistants to disrobe me, and never have I put off my clothes before such a company.” She was then blindfolded and knelt down on the cushion in front of the block. She positioned her head on the block and stretched her arms out behind her.

About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week, at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

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Chair : Crystal Anthony

Artistic Director : Mark Sutherland

Secretary : Izzie Cartwright

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.uk

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