



# Dramatic News

Spring 2008

[www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk](http://www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk)

In Our 65<sup>th</sup> Year

Page 1

3-5 April, Commemoration Hall

## COLD COMFORT FARM

The comic novel by Stella Gibbons, adapted by Paul Doust—directed by Mark Hebert



**Tickets £8, £6** (concessions)

**Available from**

- The Card Gallery, Market Hill, Huntingdon
- Phone: 01480
- Or on line @ [www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk](http://www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk)



### The Counting

**Elfine:** Sarah Ward, **Aunt Ada:** Ann Monk, **Urk:** Kevin Webb  
**Phoebe:** Sophie Gillett, **Adam:** Michael Black, **Flora:** Caroline Harbord  
**Judith:** Jeanette Brown, **Reuben:** Chris Topham, **Seth:** Mark Lamberth.

**E**ver since as a little girl Aunt Ada saw 'something nasty in the woodshed', Cold Comfort Farm has been cursed.

**T**he arrival of the charismatic Robert Poste's child, aka Flora, breaks the spell. This hilarious take on rural life in the 1930's is an evergreen classic for all ages.

*With thanks to Deirdre Lee for the sketch*



Brian Perrett



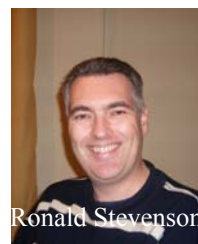
Ruth Rawlings



Kevin Tuohy



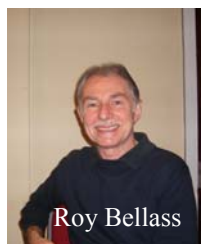
Kelly Mason



Ronald Stevenson



Phil Green



Roy Bellas

#### CONTACT DETAILS

**Email:** [theeditor@huntingdondramaclub.org.uk](mailto:theeditor@huntingdondramaclub.org.uk)  
 For details of past, present or future productions:  
[www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk](http://www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk)

**See Page 4 for vital, new information!**



## Thanks to Mark

If you notice anything different about the newsletter this issue, it may be because there has been a change of editor. Mark Lamberth has stepped down after several years and handed over the reins to John Morgan. Our huge thanks go to Mark for producing fantastic, regular newsletters and getting them out to everyone promptly. Communication is the lifeblood of any organisation and I'm sure you'll all agree that he has done a terrific job. And of course, with the newsletter no longer taking up so much of his time, Mark has been able to concentrate all his energies into creating the 'ferociously highly-sexed and quite deliciously absurd' character of Seth Starkadder in Cold Comfort Farm. Don't miss his performance – tickets are on sale now!

## I've Got The Part Mum Help How Do I Learn All These Lines!!!!

It's very difficult to advise on how to learn lines since everyone seems to have their own method that works best for them. For example, some are sight learners - they read the script over and over again and eventually they stick. Other fortunate souls have someone else to read them their cues. Some say each line aloud over and over again. Others only use the CD. It ultimately depends on how YOU learn best.

I have my own method which is a combination of several techniques and makes use of an intimate understanding of the play and my character, the way I hear cues onstage, and the way I, personally, learn best. I'll tell you what it is and you can judge for yourself if you think it will work for you.

My method has several steps that are taken one at a time. Most important, keep in mind that you are learning a role, not just learning or memorizing lines. Learning and understanding your character and his/her relationship to the other characters and to the play itself and its circumstance is the most important step to learning a role. It makes everything else come much more easily because you are not just memorizing disjointed lines by rote, you are truly understanding what the character is saying and why they are saying it.

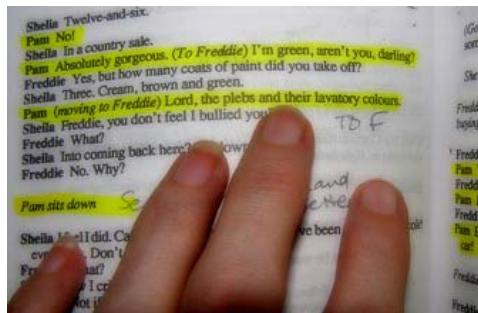
1. So first, read the script over and over... the first time to familiarize yourself with the play and your character; then looking more closely at your character to explore who he/she is, what their life is like, what their relationship is with the other characters in the play, and what they want - in their life, from the other characters, in the play, in each scene and in each moment of the play. Then read each scene and explore even more carefully exactly why they say what they say and do what they do.
2. Now, look at each speech or line individually and see if you can discover the "trigger" for that line. I'm not necessarily talking about the "cue" here (meaning the line immediately preceding your line). I'm talking about the specific thing that causes your character to say that line. Sometimes it is the line immediately

before it (answering a question, responding to a statement, etc.). But sometimes it may be a line that came several lines before the last line spoken (as when several people are speaking in the same conversation and your character is responding to something that was said several lines before they speak). Or it may be another character's actions that trigger your line (as a knock on the door might trigger a "who's there?", or the other character turning to leave might trigger a "don't go!"). Or sometimes it can be your own actions or even your own thoughts that cause you to say something (often when there seems to be no reason to say what you say it is triggered by what your character is thinking at that moment).

Learning your trigger is much better than simply memorizing your "cue". Sometimes another actor may drop, paraphrase or repeat a line due to stage nerves. Many novice actors simply wait to hear their cue rather than really listening to what is going

on in the scene and that's a sure fire way of getting stuck on lines when on stage. Knowing what is going on in the scene and what really makes you say what you say guarantees that you'll never dry up on your lines.

3. Now go scene by scene and work on each line. With book in hand read your cues silently, then read your own lines aloud. Now do it again, slowly, covering your lines with a piece of paper. Read the cue and try to remember your line. Don't worry if you don't at first, just try again. When you've got one pretty well, go to the next one, but this time start with the first one and then go to the next. The next time start again from the first, then go to the second then the third. Each time start from the beginning of your scene so each line keeps getting reinforced and practiced over and over as you learn the next one, and the sequence of lines become clear to you. Do this for each scene.
4. By this time you should be very familiar with your lines. They're not memorized yet, word for word, but you will really know what is happening in each scene and what your character







(Continued from page 2)

is saying.

5. Play the CD whenever you can and run your lines over and over. The more you do it, the more organic and real the lines will feel to you and the more naturally they will come. The human mind seems to remember better when the body is engaged in some other action, so run the CD when you're in the car (as long as it doesn't distract you), when you are doing dishes, cleaning, ironing, dancing, walking, running, exercising, whatever. Don't try to say them in a particular way or copy the way you do it in rehearsal or the way you think they "should" be said. This will make sure that you don't get into a sing-song, "rehearsed" sounding way of saying the lines, and will, ultimately, allow you to react naturally to the situation on stage rather than just recite the lines like a broken record ... Ooops CD!

Best of luck from somebody in the club who isn't that great at learning lines!

Ronald Stevenson

Read a report on Michael Burrell's prompting thoughts in [Put another shilling in the meter](#), [Dr Watson](#) on page 4



**Mark Hebert is directing our current production *Cold Comfort Farm*. But who is he? And where did he come from?**

**Caroline Harbord put these and other, equally penetrating questions to him.**

Mark is a fairly well-known face on the drama scene in the Huntingdon area, and he keeps incredibly busy. He has recently been playing Widow Twankey in the Wellworth Players' production of *Aladdin*, and as soon as *Cold Comfort Farm* is over he will be going straight into rehearsals for *The Winter's Tale* at Shakespeare at the George. But this is the first time he has been involved with Huntingdon Drama Club. So I ask him, how did he come to be directing our latest production?

'I received the email that Michael Black sent out asking for submissions. My usual club, the Wellworth Players, doesn't do much in the spring and I fancied the idea of working with new people and I already had the idea in my head that *Cold Comfort Farm* would be an interesting play to tackle. It just so happened that the cast size was just what Michael had specified in the email, so I submitted it and here I am!'

So, are you enjoying directing *Cold Comfort Farm*? 'Immensely – I look forward to rehearsals and everyone is being very supportive. The teamwork is terrific and it's a funny script, not flawless, but flexible enough for our purposes. There are some very strong parts and the casting was a dream. The essence of drama, I think, is conflict. This has it in spades.'

Tell me about how you got involved in drama and some of the productions you have been involved with. 'I did a tiny bit at school. My Dad had a place at drama school, but opted for the relative safety of Pharmacy. He directed amateur shows when I

was a kid and I grew up thinking that mucking about on stage was 'normal', although I rarely took part. My brother is a professional film, television and theatre designer (with 2 BAFTAs). My talents (such as they are) lay dormant until about 12 years ago when I was asked by Lydia Eldridge to stand in for a Murder Mystery in Needingworth. I've not stopped since.'

'As for productions, well, I've been in nearly all of the Shakespeare at the George shows since *Macbeth* in 2000 and all of the plays and pantomimes at Wellworth since 1996. My favourite performances have been *When we are Married* by JB Priestley for Wellworth Players, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for both Hemingford and the George, and *Twelfth Night* at the George. I've also hugely enjoyed directing pantomime at Wellworth. It's a huge buzz because of the pleasure the kids get out of being in it and also because it has given me the chance to write.'

What advice would you give to anyone in the club who fancied trying their hand at directing? 'Start with a one act play with a small cast. Prepare well in advance, by which I mean some weeks before you cast it.' And is it scary making the transition from actor to director? 'It's a bit like playing rugby (which I did in my youth) – it looks more frightening as a spectator than it actually is to do.'

And finally, tell us a bit more about you and who you are. I'm sure you have a real life outside of acting!

'Well, in real life I am a Medical Rep. More specifically I sell pharmaceuticals to hospital-based doctors, nurses and pharmacists across East Anglia. I work for a large US-based company mostly involved in Cardiology and Diabetes disease areas. Wearing my work hat CCF stands for Congestive Cardiac Failure and HDC stands for High Density Cholesterol!'

Thanks Mark, and we hope you'll stick with the club and maybe direct or even act for us again!

## OPERA IN HD



Cineworld Huntingdon is one of many cinemas in 15 countries showing operas from the New York Met live, in high definition (HD). It's a stunning experience – excellent camerawork, so you're very close to the characters all the time, large screen, high quality picture and sound, subtitles, and comfortable seats with plenty of legroom (they're on the Delux Screen). And at £25, ticket prices are way below what you would pay to sit miles from the stage at Covent Garden or the Coliseum.

The remaining operas this season are *Tristan and Isolde* (22 March), *La Bohème* (5 April, so come and see *Cold Comfort Farm* on the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> if you aren't involved in it) and Donizetti's comedy *La Fille du Régiment* (26 April – go and see that and come on to our poetry evening afterwards).

If you think you don't like opera, this might well change your mind.

Michael Black



### Put another shilling in the meter, Dr Watson

... and other lines the playwright didn't intend. Michael Burrell gave a very entertaining and useful talk on Monday, 17 March. Although we'd billed it as being about prompting, he argued that the point was really to do with how actors learn lines and how they deal with drying up.

It isn't just amateurs who forget lines. Michael mentioned an actor who was in the West End production of *The Mousetrap* for several stretches. At one performance, when he'd been playing the part for about five years, he made his entrance, started his first line, 'My name is...' And dried. None of the cast could help him without going out of character. He walked slowly round the stage. Struck a pose. His name came back to him, and he finished the line: 'Paravicini'. None of the audience would have realised anything had gone wrong.

In Michael's experience of the professional and amateur stage – stretching back to the 1950s – if there's no prompter, the cast will take far more responsibility for learning lines. His advice is to learn them thoroughly, and early on. Work out what the character is thinking. And if something goes wrong, react as the character would react. Above all, stay calm and do something purposeful, like walking round the stage. If you look as though you know what you're doing, the audience won't know any better. Often another character can help you out, though obviously not when you're supposed to be telling them your name!

So the message is, prompters are at best unnecessary, and at worst counter-productive – they give the game away that something is amiss. In one of Michael's examples, the prompt was given: 'Heresy'. But as the word occurred 14 times in the speech in question, that wasn't a great deal of use.

Michael hasn't been involved in a production with a prompter for over forty years, but his advice if one is used is that they should only prompt if asked. An actor who wants a prompt should say 'Yes' in a suitably thoughtful way, and the prompter should give enough of the next line for them to know exactly where they are.

As for the shilling for the meter: once when Michael was playing Sherlock Holmes, the lighting technician started bringing down the lights by mistake, instead of setting the next lighting change. Holmes and Watson kept moving nonchalantly into the remaining patches of light, but when they were left in pitch darkness, Michael hit on what to say. And of course the lights went back up.

*Michael Black*



### 2008/09 Committee

As you may have seen on our website, the committee elected on 4 February is as follows:

Chair:	<b>Michael Black</b>
Vice-Chair:	<b>Carol Wadey</b>
Treasurer:	<b>Kelly Mason</b>
Secretary:	<b>Caroline Harbord</b>
Committee:	<b>Ann Monk, Richard Meredith, Ronald Stevenson, John Morgan.</b>

Many thanks to Kat Sexton, Mark Lamberth and Peter Welsh, who were on last year's committee but didn't stand again. John Morgan is now newsletter editor, as well as webmaster.

### Subscriptions for 2008

Have been increased to **£12**.

This is the first increase for several years, and is needed to cover the fixed costs of the club (e.g. insurance, postage, web hosting).

Please contact Kelly to pay *your* subscription!

### FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Cold Comfort Farm:** 3-5 April. Please publicise the production to everyone you know. It's turning out to be much funnier than some of us expected. Tickets are going well, but with costs rising (particularly for hiring rehearsal space and the hall) we need to sell at least 80 tickets per performance to break even.

**Poetry evening:** this will be at Ronald's on Saturday, 26 April (sorry a recent email said March). Details to follow.

**Hay Fever:** we're performing in Brampton on 18 and 19 July, and have been invited to the Medway Centre – this will probably be the previous weekend. Auditions in April: details to follow.

**Autumn production:** we intend to choose this in time to publicise it in the *Cold Comfort Farm* programme.

### Cold Comfort Farm, Can you help?

**Set Building** at the Commemoration Hall on:

- Thursday 20 March, 7.00—10.00
- Thursday 27 March, 7.00—10.00
- Friday 28 March, 7.00—10.00
- Saturday 29 March, 10.00—5.00
- Sunday 30 March, 10.00—5.00 (provisional)
- Tuesday 1 April, 6.00—11.00 Tech Rehearsal
- Wednesday 2 April, 6.00—11.00 Dress Rehearsal

**Performances**, can you help Front of House?

Thurs—Sat, 3—5 April

More information from [john.morgan@c-c-z.co.uk](mailto:john.morgan@c-c-z.co.uk)  
or phone 01480 454486