

Saying it with flowers

Last autumn Suburb poet, Peter Phillips, was involved in a collaboration with the composer David Loxley-Blount who, inspired by a series of about thirty poems entitled ‘Saying it with Flowers’” by Peter, wrote four pieces for organ and solo instruments.

‘Saying it with Flowers’ imagines the strange life of flowers, their human dimension and the poet’s connection with them. The four poems featured in the concerts imagine the flowers in a setting of fear and danger.

Each piece was written for and named after one of four poems, and performed over a period of three weeks in October 2016 at

St Lawrence Jewry in Guildhall Yard in the City. David Loxley-Blount is no stranger to the Suburb and has contributed to the Proms at St Jude’s lunchtime concerts, which are sponsored by the Residents Association, while excerpts of choral works performed at St Jude’s can be heard on his website at www.djlloxley-blount.co.uk.

Peter, who has had six collections published, is trying to organise workshops for those interested in learning the art of making poetry. Readers who are interested can contact him using the details given in his advertisement below.

KNOTWEED

Don’t even dream of winning – you’ve read the reports
seen us on YouTube
cringed at the images

You think you can get us
at ground level
breaking through foundations.
Once we’re properly out, on the march, that’s it, unless
you purge deep.

Our roots are deeper than you can dig.

We know biological control is under trial.
You decide if chemicals are ethical.

You want a solution but there is none.

You won’t find us but we’re everywhere waiting.

We decide when to strike. We’re in your garden.

Music written for organ and saxophone

UKRAINE
SUNFLOWER

Dogs were howling. I don’t know what breed but something like wolves; so maybe Alsations. They wouldn’t stop, their noise was contagious. Soon we were all weeping. When they came,

we quietened, but not the dogs. Soldiers picked through our debris-scorched field. Most wore balaclavas. Only yesterday, children had skipped through us, laughing at how tall we were.

We don’t feel tall now. Soon trucks arrived more soldiers. The dead were found, their pockets emptied. Dogs kept howling. Pieces of the plane were scattered, some crushed us.

I said, *Can we still be called Sunflowers?*
And the dogs? They were shot.

Music written for organ and trombone

LOCAL POETRY WORKSHOPS
HAMPSTEAD GARDEN SUBURB NW11

LED BY PETER PHILLIPS
experienced published poet (6 collections)

Enquiries invited from those interested in learning the art of making poetry. Starters and the more experienced welcome. Each session will also introduce the work of an established contemporary poet.

Class Size: 4-8 students. Fees: £12 (2 hour class plus a break)

For further details contact Peter Phillips
0208 455 6772 pcphillipslondon@hotmail.co.uk
For information on Peter’s writing: www.poetrypf.co.uk



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SUBURB ARCHIVES
FROM THE ARCHIVES



The Golders Green Hippodrome

At 6.30pm on Boxing Day Friday 1913, Mrs Walter Gibbons, the managing director of the ‘Golders Green Amusement and Development Company’ sang the National Anthem to herald the grand opening of the latest addition to her husband’s London-wide portfolio of ‘Theatres of Varieties’ - The Hippodrome, Golders Green. The Stage newspaper was there to witness and record the special occasion, and noted that Mrs Gibbons received “a fine reception” from an audience “who appeared highly delighted with the splendid building, as well as with the excellent fare provided”.

The very first chapter in the topsy-turvy life and times of the Hippodrome had begun, and with a classic variety line-up of the era: magician David Devant “who mystified the company at will”, the “mirth-provoking patter” of comic dancers The New Macs, the singing impersonator Tom Stuart “bringing down the house”, animal trainer Dandy George and his Jungle Kid, and a host of other singers, comedians and musicians.

The Hippodrome would go on to establish itself as part of the romance of theatre history, and the building would subsequently be reinvented into a BBC television and radio studio, a BBC concert hall, and in recent years as one of the homes of an international Christian movement. But now it appears that the future of this Grade II-listed building appears uncertain. So an appropriate time to chart a remarkable story...

With the construction of the extension of the Hampstead Tube Line to Golders Green in 1907, shopping parades and homes began to pepper the former countryside. For land-owning entrepreneurs, it was the perfect opportunity to speculate on money-making enterprises to complement an expanding suburb - designed not only to entertain those pioneering new arrivals, but to attract visitors from the surrounding neighbourhoods.

So in the year 1913, not one, but two astonishing buildings emerged out of the north-west London soil. The first was in May - the impressive Ionic Cinema, complete with its four enormous Grecian style pillars, which was opened by Anna Pavlova, star ballerina and local resident. Then in the same month, work began on London’s latest ‘Theatre of Varieties’ - on the very same spot that had only recently served as a construction site for Golders Green station. Building the Hippodrome took just over six months - and a Ham & High reporter Ham & High writing just before opening night was suitably impressed:

“It occupies such a delightfully convenient position beside the tube terminus that it is likely to be not only a recreative boon to the people of Golders Green, and the Garden Suburb, but to all the other suburbs which are in touch with it by means of trams and motor buses. Architecturally the building will be of an imposing and pleasing character, and will give a touch of distinction and completeness to the fine square which it dominates. The internal decorations will be artistic, the comfort of every class will be studied down to the smallest detail - and every seat may be booked”.

The renowned theatre architect Bertie Crewe had concocted a Modern English Romanesque masterpiece at a cost of £24,000 - dubbed “the crowning glory of the whole scheme of colonization” by the Hendon & Finchley Times. The Hippodrome was a whopping 2,340 seater, a giant stage complete with a trap door for a massive water tank specially designed for aquatic spectacles. The Stage’s reviewer was equally impressed on the first night: “eighty feet above the street level hangs a brilliant electric light, the main entrance leads to an inner hall with panelled walls and ceiling, marble staircases lead to the stalls and the grand circle, and both balconies are constructed upon the suspensory system, which prevents the use of any pillars. The colour scheme is Rose du Barri and French Grey.”

Intriguingly, it appears that Crewe had made no plans for licensed bars in his original designs for the Hippodrome. Perhaps, I wonder, in sympathy with the ‘temperance’ of the nearby Hampstead Garden Suburb? At any rate one of the conditions of the Hippodrome’s first liquor licence in 1915 was that alcohol would only be served at performances of plays - and not music hall or films...

The prices of admission were aimed at luring in locals and visitors alike and in the early years, just 1 shilling got you a seat in the dress circle compared with 7s 6d for the equivalent seat in West End. Even on the priciest night of the week - second house on Saturday night - it cost 8d in the Stalls, 2s for the ‘Imperial Fauteuils’ – and 3d on the Balcony. After all, there was plenty of space to fill!

Music Hall-style variety dominated the programme in the early years, and all the great performers of the day - Marie Lloyd, Gus Elen and Lillie Langtry - came to Golders Green. The second phase in the life of the Hippodrome was staging major pre- and post-West End theatrical productions, and the beginning of a long-term relationship with the D’Oyly Carte Opera company. This coincided with the next phase of its life in the early 1920s under new proprietorship - the second of only three owners in its entire history as a theatre.

The Hippodrome also served the locality as a fund raising venue - hosting a variety show helping to secure finances to build the Golders Green War memorial clock tower, and concerts in aid of Hendon Wing Air Training Corps Welfare during WW2. And today, ask any local or former resident (over a certain age), I’m certain that the Christmas pantomimes or Ralph Reader’s Gang Shows for the Scout Association were a formative part of their Hippodrome-going ritual.

However, in its final theatre era, the Hippodrome (now owned by Mecca) had struggled with dwindling crowds, and threats of redevelopment. In 1959 there had been a bid to build a 12 storey office block on the site – but it was blocked by a vigorous local campaign with its 30,000 signature petition. Hiring the space to the BBC provided a lifeline for the owners, but by 1968 it was all over. On Sunday 18th February, just under 55 years on from its first breath, there was a showbiz send-off they fondly dubbed “Hippodrome Adieu” - with a massive cast list - Bud Flanagan, Vera Lynn, David Kossoff, Danny La Rue, David Jacobs and Status Quo - representing the Music Hall era to the emerging pop stars of the day...

The BBC then moved in, and finally purchased the leasehold of the former Hippodrome Theatre in 1970. The building was converted into a radio and television studio, reducing audience capacity to 700 seats, and famously providing a home for the BBC Concert Orchestra whose live broadcasts of shows like Radio 2’s ‘Friday Night is Music Night’ would become Golders Green legend.

But disaster struck in 2003 when the auditorium ceiling collapsed leaving tons of plaster and cement in front of the stage - and the decision was made to permanently close down all operations from the former Hippodrome Theatre. With the Ionic, The Lido, The Orpheum and The Regal already gone, this would sadly mark the end of a 90-year history of cinema and theatre venues in the locality. The building was eventually sold to the El Shaddai church in 2007 for £5 million.

Perhaps there may yet be another twist in the tale of the Hippodrome?

ALAN DEIN



The Hampstead
Garden Suburb Archives Trust

exists to preserve the history and culture of the Suburb

Website: www.suburbarchives.com · Contact: 020 8455 8813 or 8455 2877 · Email: suburbarchives@gmail.com