

Garden Suburb Theatre's Abducting Diana

It is good to see the Garden Suburb Theatre tackling something as way out as this farce by the Italian writer Dario Fo, even if in doing so they diminish their audience.

Abducting Diana is not a play I know and the programme was unhelpful, not even stating who the translator was (Stephen Stenning, apparently). Between the first scene and the main act an Intermezzo is performed while the scenery is changed. This was written by Toby Moore and John Musker, dealing with local subjects and amusingly played by Declan Leary.

But it had no relevance to the action of the play. The woman, Diana, is abducted with her boyfriend, by four men in masks depicting Blair, Bush, Prince Charles and Saddam Hussein. She eventually gets the upper hand and indulges in torture of one of them using electric wires. There is a great deal of shouting since the full-head masks make speech difficult. What the audience made of all this, heaven knows. Mary Musker, as Diana, was

excellent as this ruthless young woman and was ably supported by Paula Morris as her seemingly gentle old Mother. These two performances made the evening interesting. The four villains were played by Noel Radnedge, Nick Vause, Mark Overall and Andy Farrer as well as these masks with their fixed expressions allowed.

The second half of the play was more interesting but I personally do not find torture amusing. The appearance of the Mother brought new twists to the already complicated plot. The production, by Liz Travis, fizzed with life and action. Altogether a brave adventure.

I cannot finish this article without my personal tribute to Val Gregory, who died so tragically. She was a nice actress and sensitive and excellent director.

I always looked forward to her productions which were well researched and interesting. I shall long remember the lovely ensemble playing she achieved in *Dancing In Lughnasa*.

LEONIE STEPHEN

Alan Lawson - two tributes



Alan Lawson, who died in November, photographed on the occasion of his and Anne's, overdue and typically reluctant, acceptance of their Life Membership of the Residents Association in 1997.

One of the most influential books on sociology to be published in recent years is *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam, a professor at Harvard. Although based on research in America it is equally applicable to social trends in the UK. The main theme of the book is the decline of social capital in modern society. By this Robert Putnam means a sense of belonging to a particular

community, membership of clubs and societies and participation in local amenity groups. He believes that this decline leads to alienation and isolation and the breakdown of communities.

Reading this book I kept on thinking of Alan Lawson, and it could well have been written with him in mind. Alan had a passionate belief in the Suburb as a living society. For him, the Suburb was much more than

Alan Lawson, who died on 6 November 2002, had celebrated his 90th birthday a few weeks previously. He was well known on the Suburb, having been born and brought up here. His work as a Film Cameraman had taken him to the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s and later to other theatres of war in 1939-1945. He met and married Anne, a Nursing Sister, when he was in hospital in 1943 and they made their home in the Suburb, latterly in Oakwood Road. He worked for some years for the BBC.

Alan was a great Suburb enthusiast and worked to preserve its unique character. He was elected to the Residents Association Council in 1972 and served as Honorary Secretary for five years, becoming Vice Chairman, then Chairman in 1980 until 1983. He continued to support the Residents Association on various committees and he and Anne were made Honorary Life Members in 1997.

Amongst other activities he was responsible for producing and editing the first Residents Association Newsletter – the forerunner of the Suburb News.

He did a number of recordings of recollections of lifelong Suburb residents and these are now in Suburb Archives. He was a keen gardener and until a few years ago he had not one, but two, allotments, whose produce he distributed generously.

Music was another important interest and he had a large collection of classical music and was one of the 'Disc Jockeys' at Fellowship House Club, which he supported in his usual enthusiastic manner. For the last ten years he was a member of the Fellowship Committee and took on the task of Premises Manager for Fellowship House.

Alan will be sadly missed throughout the Suburb, but he will not be forgotten.

JANETTE HARRIS

architecture and town planning, it is a place where residents can live full and satisfying lives within a community. The numerous organisations and societies on the Suburb provide a framework for community life, and everyone can find something which is relevant to their interests and needs. This was not a theoretical belief but a real commitment and throughout his life he was actively involved in one Suburb organisation or another. It was impossible to attend a Suburb event without Alan mucking in selling tickets, organising the catering or clearing up. He set such a wonderful example of commitment and dedication.

I first met Alan as a parent at King Alfred School where I was in the same class as his son Anthony. On those days KAS was quite different from any other school and many parents had progressive, radical and left

wing ideas. Even as a child I remember Alan being talked about as someone who had gone to Spain and fought in the Civil War against Franco.

After my school days I lost touch with Alan until I came to live on the Suburb in 1972. I still have the letter he wrote inviting me to fill a casual vacancy on the Residents Association Council in 1976. From then on our lives kept on criss-crossing through our involvement in numerous Suburb organisations. What was so refreshing about Alan was that throughout his life he remained a freethinking radical with a healthy scepticism of all authority. He had not changed from how I remembered him as a KAS parent back in the 1950s.

I shall always think of his enthusiasm and energy and, for me, he will remain the embodiment of the Suburb as a living community.

CHRISTOPHER KELLERMAN

Val Gregory

Val Gregory, who died on 5 December 2002, was a woman of many gifts, an excellent teacher, pianist, actress and producer. Trained at the Guildhall School of Music she subsequently taught at the Mountview Theatre School, of which her father was the first President. The founder, Peter Coxhead, remembers her as a brilliant young actress and particularly recalls her wonderful performance as the young girl in Ibsen's 'Ghosts'.

Val became an active member of the Garden Suburb Theatre in the late seventies, holding poetry readings and other events in her house, accompanied by incomparable refreshments. She made her directorial debut in Lorca's 'The House of Bernardo Alba'. She also acted, most notably in Berkoff's 'West', for which she won the best actress award in the Barnet Festival. John Colmans, chairman of the Garden Suburb Theatre, spoke at her very moving funeral of her many qualities: her kindness in encouraging and advising people, her persistence and determination, and her optimism. She had great faith that you had it in you to do it. Unforgettable was her organisation of 'As You Like It' in the Czech Republic, where she coped with technicians who spoke no English and inaccurate interpreters in bitter weather. Perhaps her most important quality was her great sense of enthusiasm and fun. This quality and her perfectionism

were amply displayed in her last work as director for the group, 'Dancing at Lughnasa', to prepare for which she went, with her son Colin, to Donegal to ensure that the accents of the cast were consistent and accurate. This is a sad play in many ways but she gave us a production that was filled with life. Even more so was this quality displayed when she came on at the end of Coward's 'Still Life' as the heroines garrulous friend. She stole the show and demonstrated exactly what the sheer joy of being on stage is all about.

Val put on a number of one-woman shows at Fellowship House on Tuesday afternoons, and elsewhere, demonstrating her tremendous skill and versatility.

Her activities were multiple. A governor of St Michael's School, Camden Town, she also helped there voluntarily several days a week, teaching music, helping children with reading difficulties and willingly taking on any task, however difficult. In her own home she gave piano lessons and coached children for examinations over a period of more than forty years, so innumerable pupils and parents remember her with affection and gratitude. An active member of the Hampstead branch of the National Trust she was a regular steward at Fenton House.

Everything Val did she did well. She was much loved and will be greatly missed by everyone who knew her.

JEAN NEAL

Allotment winner

A well attended RA Allotments Harvest Supper in October heard committee chairman David Rapson make a plea for more water to be laid on to allotment sites. Gill Read's

plot had been judged the best kept by a panel headed by RA chairman Georgina Malcolm. Gill said she was delighted to be awarded the Phyllis Young Memorial Trophy.

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