



## Enter Year 12

Some Facts and Figures  
about  
The Wessex Actors Company

1993-2004

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*"Professional Drama for the South West"*

# THE WESSEX ACTORS COMPANY

## An introduction

\* The WESSEX ACTORS COMPANY is a professional touring theatre company. Our policy is to:

- stage fully professional, top quality, entertaining work.
- provide a public service to all sectors of the community, in particular those prevented from getting to live professional drama in urban centres;
- offer a concentrated regional focus by:
  - serving Somerset, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire
  - developing indigenous talent
  - contributing to the region's distinctive cultural profile
- inform and educate; add to the quality of life.

\* To achieve this policy, we pursue a touring programme that caters for theatre-goers on the one hand, and for a wide range of specific community groupings on the other.

\* In many cases this involves visiting a whole range of venues not designed for drama presentation but serving as meeting places for our different audiences. Often these will be in rural situations.

\* In summary: a professional, public service offering regional relevance and top quality entertainment value.

Patrons: The Most Hon The Marquess of Bath  
The Lord King of Bridgwater, CH  
Ned Sherrin  
Robin Bush, Chairman, Somerset  
County Council

Artistic Director: Michael Barry  
Directors: Michael Speirs, John Woods, Helen  
Putt

Creative Associates: Jane McKell, Nicholas Chagrin,  
Pip Utton

Company Limited by Guarantee Reg No 2888257  
Registered Charity No 1035422

## HISTORY

The Company was formed in 1993 and toured its first production in the autumn of that year, with financial help from The Foundation for Sport and The Arts. Thomas Hardy's own second dramatization of "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" proved a winner with regional audiences.

The Company has filled from the start a unique niche with its focus on regional talent. All writers performed have been from or live in the south west. All creative talent (with one or two minor and rare exceptions) lives in or comes from the south west and is not imported from London.

Above all the Company aims, within its slender resources, to provide a public service for the south west - with "something for everyone as often as possible".

A chequered start to the Company's fortunes was due to a wide variety of factors: to the significant lack of viable funds with which to operate; to the unique challenges of the rural south west with a small population thinly spread, where no word of mouth can operate, where little or no infra-structure exists, where creative talent is thinly spread, unpracticed and requiring more finance to live on than we could offer; and overall to a regional culture of poverty, aggravated by national recessions and by the subjection of the nation's culture to the market forces of commercialism. Persistence and steady progress against such a stack of negative influences has eased the situation slowly but surely to the point where a consistency of production quality has been achieved.

An outstanding range of regional drama has been presented over eleven years in a wide variety of venues to an increasing response of plaudits.

Capital funding from the Lottery Board, with help from The Chase Charity and The Pilgrim Trust, and supportive sponsorship from Stage Electrics, Whites of Taunton and B.C.C., made an enormous difference to the Company's fortunes - providing it with a base level of capital items available for its daily use.



A production base sponsored over several years by firstly The Blakehay, an Arts Centre in Weston-super-Mare, then the David Hall Arts Centre in South Petherton, and most recently, Quantock Lodge, Over Stowey, has also given a significant boost to the Company's future.

Special initiatives gather pace in providing a range of benefits to the Company:

- Arts for Everyone Express funding for a provocative triple bill of new plays "lifting the lid on bureaucracy" collectively called "The Organisation".
- Arts for Everyone Express support for a short film "featuring members of the Wessex Actors Company" made by Artistic Director Michael Barry's independent production company Perceptive Creation - "Old Mrs Chundle", a pilot for a long series of TV films of the short stories of Thomas Hardy, a project that will bring further benefits to The Wessex Actors Company.
- A co-production with Bridgwater College of "A Life in the Day" by Leslie Veales (2000)



- Comprehensive professional development for actors - a course developed with finance from the Somerset Skills Support Project.

The Company has established itself securely enough in terms of both artistic achievement and financial stability for its future to be looked at and planned for positively. It has been a pleasure to have played a role in this achievement - and my grateful thanks go above all to our supporters in audiences everywhere, to our Board and Patrons, to those who have financed the Company's operations and not least to all those creative talents who have put financial considerations aside in order to work with us.

Michael Barry, Artistic Director  
Updated Jan 2004

## SOUTH-WEST WRITERS

*("One looks forward to future productions with keen anticipation")*

Since 1993, we has fulfilled one of its key aims by producing only scripts by south west writers:

**"Tess of the D'Urbervilles"** - Thomas Hardy's own script

*("The audience was treated to one of those rare evenings of theatre magic by a versatile, highly accomplished team"- 1993)*  
*("Passionately depicted by a vivacious cast"... "This powerful production is not to be missed"- 2001)*



**"Youth's a Stuff will not Endure"** - John Pilkington  
*("I so enjoyed the performance - and so did the audience")*



**"At the End of the Day"** - Jean Nelson

*("High professional standards")*

**"The Hole in the Top of the World"** and **"The Delights of France"** - Fay Weldon

*("An ambitious and challenging evening. Full credit to Michael Barry's Company")*

**"Sowing the Seed"** - triple bill comprising:

- **"Looking for England"** - Graham Harvey
- **"Heartland"** - John Pilkington
- **"Cows"** - Karoline Leach

*("Dramatic portrayal... moving picture... poignant play. A powerful and professional performance")*

**"Tom Jones"** - Michael Barry/ Henry Fielding

*("This fine new adaptation was faithful, hilarious, full of character, rich dialogue and action")*

**"The Warden"** - Michael Barry/ Anthony Trollope

*("The magic began - under the sure direction of Michael Barry")*

**"Dickens at Christmas"** - John Hagan/ Charles Dickens

*("Beautifully delivered... intimate and evocative feeling. Charming night out!")*

**"An Evening with Dr Grace"** - Anthony Smith

*("A most excellent evening of entertainment")*

**"The Organization"** - triple bill comprising:

- **"Working the System"** - Allen Saddler
- **"Pencils"** - Peter Norbury
- **"How to make your Theatre Pay"** - David Henry Wilson

*("The three studies provide a good insight into government and the prevailing consensus of corruption")*



**"MacShrew"** - Lesley Trotter

**"The Snow Queen"** - Lesley Trotter

*("It was the best show I've ever seen in my life... It was terrific")*

**"A Christmas Carol"** - Phil Smith and Paul

Stebbing/ Charles Dickens

*("In the vanguard for originality in this imaginative new adaptation"- 1997)*

*("This excellent adaptation...is totally engaging and quite frankly better than any glittering TV personality filled pantomime.."- 2001)*



Double bill comprising:

- **"Love Letters"** - Michael Barry/ Thomas Hardy.

- **"Passion and the Revolutionary"** - Michael Barry/Thomas Hardy

(*"Entertaining, attractively presented and refreshingly welcome"*)

**"The Indiscretion of an Heiress"** - Michael Barry/ Thomas Hardy

**"I Love my Love"** - Fay Weldon

**"Hotel UFO"** - Phil Smith

**"A Life in the Day"** - Les Veales

**"Dead Woman's Ditch"** - Michael Barry

(*"A powerful story inhabited by rounded characters... a wonderful piece of story-telling"... "The play was excellent - story, content and production"*)

**"Not in my Back Yard"** - Frank Hatt

(*"A wonderfully entertaining evening... absolutely hilarious..." "fun, fast-moving and quick-witted"*)

*And presented productions:*

**"Courtship"** - Kim Hicks/ Jane Austen

(*"What a delight! A truly accomplished performance"*)

**"Couples?"** - Kim Hicks/ Dorothy Parker

(*"Vastly entertaining evening - a real treat!"*)

**"Man of the Minute"** - David Weller/ John Aubrey

(*"Splendid in every way" - "I was spellbound"*)



**"A Father for my Son"** – Jenny Coverack/ Kathleen Scott

(*"A riveting production" - "A great success"*)

**"East Lynne – the Victorian story"** – Vera Hughes + David Weller/ Mrs Henry Wood

(*"Drawn with uncanny realism"*)

