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Blithe Spirit

Featuring Guest Artist Jamie Couch
A comedy by Noël Coward



February 20-24, 2007

7:30 p.m.

W. M. Turner Auditorium

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School of Theatre
STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY

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- Noel Coward



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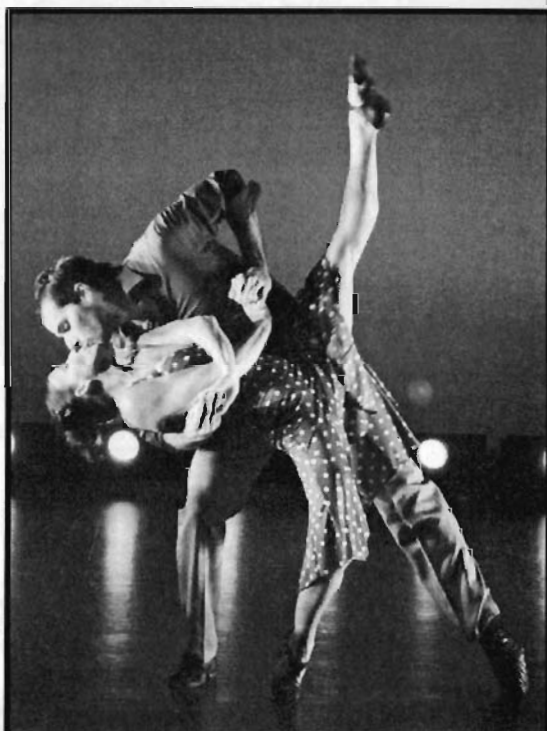
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Blithe Spirit
by Noël Coward

with Guest Artist Jamie Couch

Directed by Allen Oster

Scenic Design by Tomy Matthys
Costume Design by Angela Bacarisse
Lighting & Sound Design by CC Conn
Hair & Makeup Design by Courtney Parker
Stage Manager: Chris Flores
Assistant Director: Jeremy Barrow
Dramaturg: Catherine Restivo
Dialect Coach: Rebecca Carey

February 20-24, 2007

7:30 p.m.

W.M. Turner Auditorium

Dramaturg's Note

Lord Louis Mountbatten gave a defining description of Noël Coward at his 70th birthday celebration in 1969:

"There are probably greater painters than Noël, greater novelists than Noël, greater librettists, greater composers of music, greater singers, greater dancers, greater comedians, greater tragedians, greater stage producers, greater film directors, greater cabaret artists, greater TV stars. If there are, they are fourteen different people. Only one man combined all fourteen different labels - The Master."

Noël Coward, born in a suburban village near London, was the only healthy son of a struggling piano salesman. He didn't have much of an education but made up for it by reading a great deal. When he broke into the business as a child he was taken under the wing of a wealthy socialite, and he learned all about the upper crust. He used the upper class in many of his shows, like *Blithe Spirit*, and could make fun of them as both an observer and a participant.

In 1918, Coward, who had started to build his reputation in the theatre was drafted into the First World War. Not very happy with this, he used his connections to get a lighter duty. After nine months, and a minor head injury that caused him to have a nervous breakdown, he was given an honorable medical discharge. A few years later when he was established in the theatre and World War II broke out, he felt embarrassed about his non-involvement in the First World War and decided to help out with the second. After he briefly served as a secret agent in Paris, he entertained Allied troops in Europe, Africa and the Far East, usually at his own expense.

Coward also wrote *Blithe Spirit* in the midst of World War II, when death was on the mind of everyone. There was even a little controversy over Coward's making fun of death when the play first opened. *Blithe Spirit* was meant as an escape during a time of great sadness, over 65 years ago, but its humor still holds strong today.

--Catherine Restivo

Plays by Noël Coward

- 1920: *I'll Leave It to You* *
- 1921: *The Young Idea*
- 1923: *London Calling* * (some songs)
- 1924: *Charlot's Revue* (some songs)
The Vortex *
- 1925: *Hay Fever*
Fallen Angels
Easy Virtue
- 1926: *The Queen Was in the Parlor*
This Was a Man
- 1927: *Home Chat*
Sirocco
- 1928: *This Year of Grace* * (musical)
- 1929: *Bitter Sweet* (musical)
- 1930: *Private Lives* *
- 1931: *Cavalcade* * (musical)
Cochrane's 1931 Revue (musical revue)
- 1932: *Words and Music*
Design for Living *
- 1934: *Point Valaine* *
Conversation Piece
- 1935: *Tonight at 8:30* *
- 1938: *Operette* (musical)
Set to Music (musical)
- 1941: *Blithe Spirit* *
- 1942: *This Happy Breed*
- 1943: *Present Laughter* *
- 1945: *Sigh No More* *
- 1946: *Pacific 1860* (musical)
- 1947: *Peace in Our Time*
- 1950: *Ace of Clubs* (musical)
- 1951: *Island Fling*
Relative Values
- 1952: *Quadrille*
- 1954: *In Which We Serve*
After the Ball
- 1956: *South Sea Bubble*
Nude with Violin *
- 1959: *Look after Lulu* (adaptation)
- 1960: *Waiting in the Wings*
- 1961: *Sail Away* (musical)
- 1963: *The Girl Who Came to Supper* (musical: music and lyrics)

* Coward also acted in these plays

From the Director

Noël Coward, a master of theatrical sophistication and wit, wrote *Blithe Spirit* during a stay at Portmeirion, after his London office and apartment had been destroyed in the Blitz of 1941. Coward felt the public needed something amusing and escapist during the dark days of the war. *Blithe Spirit* took him less than a week to write and became the longest running comedy in British theatre for three decades. Among the over 40 plays he wrote, *Blithe Spirit* was Coward's favorite and remains a 20th century classic "chestnut" throughout the world.

A program note in the original British playbill of *Blithe Spirit* stated: "If an air raid warning be received during the performance the audience will be informed from the stage. . . . those desiring to leave the theatre may do so but the performance will continue." Not unlike the difficult period of World War II, or for that matter, during any world conflict, people need a diversion from the constant "news media blitz" of death, destruction and deception. Hopefully, this production of *Blithe Spirit* will, temporarily, transport you away from today's troubled times and make your evening flow like a bone-dry martini.

-AHO

About the Artistic Staff

Angela Bacarisse (Costume Designer) has designed over 200 productions in academic and professional theatres across the country. Her most recent SFA costume designs include *Grease*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Cheever Evening*, *China Dolls*, and *The Night of the Iguana*.

Barbara Blackwell (Costume Shop Supervisor) holds a BFA in Art from SFA. This is her seventh year as Costume Shop Supervisor. She has designed or co-designed *China Dolls*, *The Member of the Wedding*, and *Trudi and the Minstrel*.

Jeremy Barrow (Assistant Director) has assistant directed *The Tempest*, *Trudi and the Minstrel*, and *Harvey* on the Mainstage. He has also directed *How I Learned to Drive*, *The Open Meeting*, and *Diatribes*.

Rebecca Carey (Dialect Coach) is an ATA student. She has appeared at SFA in *Chamber Music* and *Doublespeaks?*, and was Movement Assistant for *The Servant of Two Masters*. She will be directing *No One Will Be Immune* later this spring.

About the Artistic Staff (continued)

CC Conn (Lighting & Sound Designer) holds an MFA from Indiana University. Her most recent SFA design credits include *Grease*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Cheever Evening*, and *The Night of the Iguana*.

Chris Flores (Stage Manager) has stage managed *Grease*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Anton in Show Business*, and *The Shadow Box*. He also assistant stage managed *The Member of the Wedding* and *Hair*. Next fall he will be interning at the Guthrie Theatre in Minneapolis.

Lauren Glass (Assistant Stage Manager), a sophomore from League City, assistant stage managed *Grease* and *The Night of the Iguana*. This past summer she worked as an intern for Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Houston.

Ella Rose Haag (Assistant Lighting Designer) has designed lights for *How I Learned to Drive*, *Bonjour, Ià, Bonjour*, and *Picnic on the Battlefield*. She also designed costumes for *Chamber Music* and has worked on numerous crews.

Tomy Matthys (Scenic Designer) has taught for over 40 years at SFA, where he has designed over 200 productions. His most recent scenic designs include *Grease*, *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *The Tempest*, *Anton in Show Business*, *The Shadow Box*, *Trudi and the Minstrel*, and *Sylvia*.

Allen Oster (Director) is a native of North Dakota. His most recent SFA directing credits include *Bonjour, Ià, Bonjour*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *The Shadow Box*, and *Hair*. He administers the Student-Directed Productions Program and directs SFA's High School Summer Workshop. He won the Teaching Excellence Award for the university in 1996 and was named a Piper Professor of Texas in 2006.

Courtney Parker (Hair & Makeup Designer), a junior from Red Oak, appeared in *Variations on the Death of Trotsky* and worked on crews for *La Périchole*, *Anton in Show Business*, and *The Laramie Project*.

Mark Porter (Technical Director) comes to SFA from the Austin Theatre Alliance. He was Technical Director at St. Edwards University and at the Coconut Roof Playhouse. He has worked in television and film, on Broadway, and extensively Off-Broadway.

Catherine Restivo (Dramaturg) has performed in *A Cheever Evening*, *Women and Wallace*, and *Write Me a Love Scene*; she will be in *The Moon Please* later this semester. Cathy was also the dramaturg for *Grease* and *The Night of the Iguana*.

The Cast *(in order of appearance)*

Edith	Amanda Ruth McLaren
Ruth	Savannah Seilheimer *
Charles	Jamie Couch
Dr. Bradman	Sean McDaniel *
Mrs. Bradman	Sionelle Mallon
Madame Arcati	Cassidy Claire Risien
Elvira	Rebecca Killick
Understudy for Madame Arcati	Corey Horn

Synopsis of Scenes

The play takes place in the summer of 1940 in the living room of the Condomines' home in Kent, England.

Act One

Scene 1: Before dinner on a summer evening.

Scene 2: After dinner.

Ten-minute intermission.

Act Two

Scene 1: The next morning.

Scene 2: Late the following evening.

Scene 3: Early evening. A few days later.

Ten-minute intermission.

Act Three

Scene 1: After dinner. Several days later.

Scene 2: Several hours later.

* Designates a member of the Beta Phi cast of Alpha Psi Omega, the national honorary dramatics fraternity.

About the Cast

Jamie Couch (Charles) teaches in SFA's English Department. His bachelor's and master's degrees are both from SFA. He has acted at SFA (shows include *Hamlet*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Medea*, *Macbeth*, and *Major Barbara*), with the Texas Shakespeare Festival, and at Kilgore College.

Corey Horn (Madame Arcati Understudy) is a transfer from Our Lady of the Lake University, where her credits included *Three Poets*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Man Who Couldn't Dance*.

Rebecca Killick (Elvira), an American Theatre Arts student, appeared in *Grease* and is a member of the Original Cast. At Rose Bruford College she appeared in *Fool for Love* and *Machinal*.

Sionelle Mallon (Mrs. Bradman) is an ATA student who performed in *Women and Wallace* last semester. At Rose Bruford her credits include *Angels in America* and *The Children's Hour*.

Amanda Ruth McLaren (Edith), an ATA student, appeared in *Chamber Music* and is currently involved in the OC. She performed in *The Children's Hour* and *A View from the Bridge* at Rose Bruford.

Sean McDaniel (Dr. Bradman) has appeared at SFA in *Bonjour, là, Bonjour*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Trudi and the Minstrel*, *Hair*, and *The Man Who Came to Dinner*. His directing credits include *Medal of Honor Rag*, *Goodbye, Oscar*, and *Welcome to the Moon*.

Cassidy Claire Risien (Madame Arcati) has performed in SFA's *Bonjour, là, Bonjour*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Anton in Show Business*, *How I Learned to Drive*, *Women and Wallace*, and *The Waste Disposal Unit*.

Savannah Seilheimer (Ruth) is no stranger to the SFA stage. She has acted on Mainstage in *The Servant of Two Masters*, *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *A Cheever Evening*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *Anton in Show Business*, and *Harvey*.

The Technical Staff

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Costume Shop Supervisor	Barbara Blackwell
Assistant Stage Manager	Lauren Glass
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Master Electrician	Sarah Blake
Lightboard Operator	Zane Whitney *
Followspot Operators	Elizabeth Davis *, Kayla McCurry
Soundboard Operator	Austin Chason
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Floor Run Crew	Lorenzo Belpassi, Brenda Truett, Kristi Young
Light Hang Crew	Holly Adair, Russell Arnett, Natalia Borja, Michelle Broadnax, Brandon Polanco, Meaghan Rosenberger *
Paint Crew	Chris Matragos, Charley Naughton-Rumbo, Chelsea O'Dell, Allison Ostrander, Emily Rickford
Wardrobe Head	Christina DeWitt
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Dr. Robert Carroll, Genevieve Couch, Juanita Finkenberg, Lamplite Theatre, Hardy Meredith, Dr. Alan Nielsen, Kary Raine, Shirley Watterston.

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