

History of the company

1980 THE FOUNDING OF THE COMPANY

The roots of the company go back to Christmas 1980, when the Leamington Spa Opera Group performed "The King and I" at the Royal Spa Centre in Leamington Spa. The show was produced by Phyl Harris. A number of young people were recruited to fill the roles of the Siamese children.



Following the show, the youngsters wrote to Phyl asking her to consider keeping them together as a young persons' theatre group. The term "Spa Sprouts" was used to acknowledge the fact that the group sprang from a larger organisation. Phyl remained with the company on a continuous basis until her death in 2013.

1982 - 1990 DEVELOPMENT OF THE GROUP

From this start in 1982, the young people's group combined two elements:

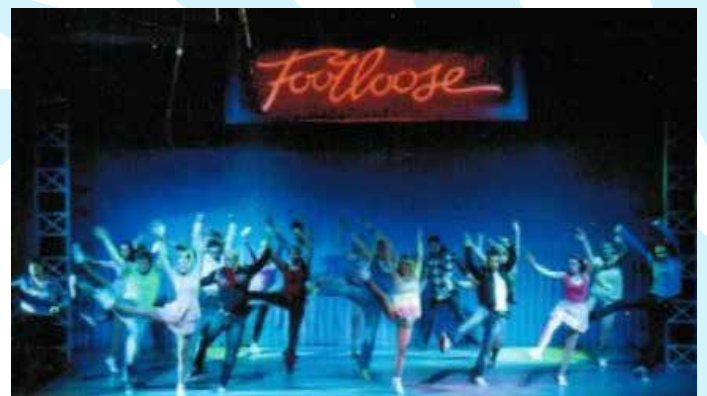
- Weekly sessions, teaching the basics of acting, music and dance. This training role has continued to the present day;
- Putting on public performances of a show at smaller local theatres or at the Royal Spa Centre.

The group's activities placed Phyl under pressure to obtain assistance with administrative and financial tasks. She received support from her family, and from parents of some of the children in the Company. One particular supporter was John Spencer, known to Phyl through the Spa Opera group.

The group remained as a young people's organisation performing more ambitious and successful shows, but as a consequence requiring more financial support. A fund-raising committee was formed in March 1990. The final show under this managerial arrangement was "Finian's Rainbow" in 1990.

1991 FORMATION OF THE SENIOR COMPANY

By 1991, John and Phyl were of the view that the company should be more ambitious, by lifting the self-imposed upper age limit. The intention was to allow youngsters, who had benefited from Phyl's tuition, to continue their theatrical interests within the Company. As a result, a Senior Company was formed, and the first Senior show, in November 1991, was "West Side Story". From this point, the company had Junior and Senior sections, managed as a single company with Phyl acting as Director to both portions. The age boundary between the Junior and Senior sections was lifted to 17/18.



1991 - 1998

From 1991 to 1998, Phyl continued to produce most shows, but with her mobility deteriorating, she gradually gave up the directing role, and there was a series of new directors, musical directors and choreographers. The Juniors continued with the emphasis on training, while the Senior shows were created with a cast on a "show-only" basis, and were not part of the Juniors' training programme. John Spencer decided to leave the Company on

December 31st 1998. He had personally funded the company's activities, and covered any losses. During this period, there were no formal accounts, in order to avoid him having to reveal the extent of his personal financial contribution.

1999 - 2013

In early 1999, the remaining members and families met to consider the way ahead in view of the loss of funding. A new bank account was opened, and a new constitution was agreed. A change of title to "Spa Theatre Company" was used as confirmation of the intention to operate as a unified organisation.

In 2000, the committee decided to apply for charitable status, in view of the emphasis on training and tuition. An application was made to the Charity Commission, and the constitution was slightly amended on their recommendations.

Charitable status was gained on 2nd February 2001.

Annual General Meetings became an established feature, with voting rights for the parents of the children in the Junior section, or the adults themselves in the Senior section.

This charitable status brought about a focus on governance, because of the need to prepare an Annual Report to the Charity Commission, and because the accounts had to be independently audited. The organisation became more professional in business terms, albeit still run by volunteers.

Both the Junior and Senior parts of the company put on annual shows. Typically, the junior shows took place at smaller venues like the Loft Theatre or the Bridge House Theatre. The Senior shows took place, generally, at the Royal Spa Centre.



Sweet music from Charity

HAVING A BLAST: Alison Bostock as Charity

Picture: LISA CAREY

SWEET CHARITY - The Royal Spa Centre, Leamington, until Saturday. Running time: 2 hr, 30 min.

DANCE hall hostess Charity Agnes Valentine has had enough of her seedy existence, so she sings and dances her way through romances in search of the perfect fairytale ending. This Broadway comedy musical is charged with energy, and there are plenty of great song and dance routines to get your toes tapping. Highlights include *If My Friends Could See Me Now* and the all-time classic *Hey, Big Spender!* which were sung with real gusto by the lively cast from The Spa Theatre Company. Living in New York in the swinging 60s, Charity wants to break free from the monotony of her work - which involves more than just dancing with the customers. She is exploited by amen, with her funniest moment being spent in the closet of an Italian film star while he reconciles with his glamorous girlfriend. The star of the show has to be the talented Alison Bostock who plays Charity brilliantly.

Rachel Pinder

2013 ABANDONING THE SENIOR COMPANY

The increasing costs of hiring the Royal Spa Centre became critical for the company's financial survival. By the end of 2013, the company was on the point of dissolution. The deficit was overcome by a fund-raising appeal, but the committee realised that it was no longer possible to run both the Junior and Senior elements. It was decided that the Company should stay true to its roots, namely the encouragement of the younger members, so the Senior side had to be abandoned. The Senior show of 2013, The Full Monty, was the last to be performed. The Junior company continued.

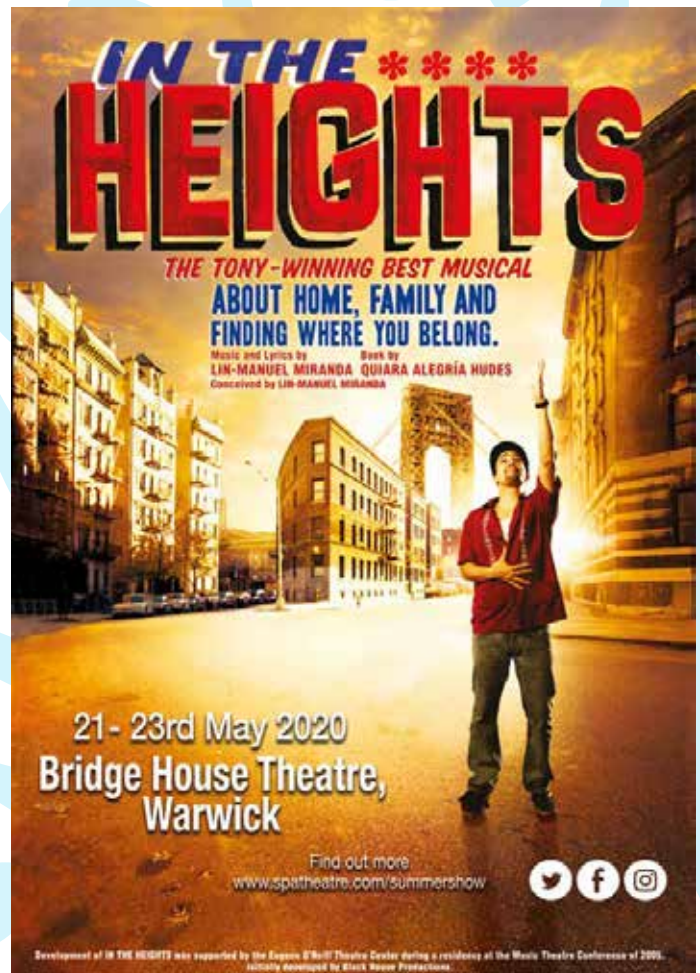
2013 - 2020

The Juniors continued training and putting on annual shows.

Prior to 2017, children performing in the annual show had to be individually licensed by Warwickshire County Council (WCC); this was an administrative burden. In order to simplify the safeguarding arrangements, the company developed a Child Protection Policy which was agreed with WCC. The Company was granted BOPA status (Body of Persons Application), meaning that the Company meets its statutory safeguarding requirements.

2020 - 2021 THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In March 2020, the world was faced with the Covid-19 pandemic. The Junior company was well under way in terms of putting its 2020 show, In The Heights, for May 2020. In March however, the Government announced severe restrictions on meeting, and it became impossible to stage the show. It was abandoned, and the company was put on hold.



2022 RESUMPTION

In late 2021, the risks from Covid-19 were becoming more controlled, and the committee took the decision to resume the company's activities with this year's show. So The Little Mermaid was chosen, and the Company recommenced operations in January 2022.

So this is where we are today, and we will continue our training and performing role as long as there is the enthusiasm that has characterised the last 40 years.