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Dear friends

Well, well, well. A date that's actually a shade earlier than final posting. Some mistake, surely?

It's been a year of reunions and of new meetings; of slightly less as performers and more of audience; of visits, from and to; of photography and music, of insane activity and enforced rest, of old routines and new responsibilities. *Plus ça change.*

Let's start with the activity that occupies more of our 'leisure' hours than any other: the theatre. We began the year working towards our directorial debut at the Sewell Barn. **The Shakespeare Revue** (which we'd previously directed together back in London) was created with a superb cast of eight, including Selwyn at the piano. Glorious audience reactions, highly enjoyable rehearsals, and we were hugely proud of what our team achieved.



Having completed this project, we thought it was time to rest from theatre for a while, but no; Cassie ended up playing Mistress Page – one of Shakespeare's two **Merry Wives** - while Selwyn assumed the stance of 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em' and took on the role of prompt – just so he'd get to see her occasionally. What a fabulous gang that was, too – twenty-four performers, led by the matchless octogenarian Terry Dabbs as Falstaff.

Thereafter, we managed to step off the stage for a while, until our final project of the year – just completed last week: a **Music Hall** as a joint fund-raiser for Weston Longville church and village hall. We recruited friends from the Sewell Barn, plus Rachel & Martyn (who have taken part in concerts here in Norfolk with us before), and a highly entertaining evening



was met with great approval. Better still, well over £400 profit was split between the two causes.

Slightly less performing meant that we had a little more time for seeing what our friends were up to. For the first time, we've seen (or taken part in) all eight shows at the Sewell Barn, and some very fine performances there were. We especially liked *Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde* (an extremely impressive and atmospheric show), *My Mother Said I Never Should* (four magnificent actresses), *The Long and the Short and the Tall* (an affecting and powerful piece with a very talented cast) and finally *Entertaining Angels* – superbly performed with some of the most quotable one-liners about the Church of England we've ever heard. [Rector's widow to her husband's ghost: "Are you in purgatory?" Reply: "No, I did that when I was in the parish."]



We've also been to see our friends at the Maddermarket on many occasions, and there too we have seen some high-quality theatre. Favourites included the powerful two-hander *Oleanna* (sadly under-attended, but magnificently performed); a superb *Double Falsehood* (Shakespeare or not Shakespeare?); another first-rate solo performance from the talented Jo Sessions in *Keeping Mum*; and an outrageously funny *How the Other Half Loves*, performed with huge aplomb and skill by all concerned. The Maddermarket also played host to our friends from the Upper Octave in their excellent **Bizet to Broadway** show; as you see, there was no absence of either sparkle or chutzpah...

We've also seen more of the Great Hall Players this year, and were particularly impressed by their recent production of the very difficult but beautifully-written *The Last Confession* (was the Pope murdered?).

Interestingly, this means that we've seen next to no 'professional' theatre this year – the only difference being in whether the performers get paid for their labours! Kit & the Widow were joined by Dillie Keane for an imperfect but enjoyable new version of *Cowardy Custard* at Bury St Edmunds, and we took Cassie's parents to see the touring production of *The Sound of Music*, which was much appreciated. Not least because our lovely friends from Imperial Opera days, Tom and Alex, house-sat for us during the preceding fortnight while they worked at the Theatre Royal and we were on holiday!

We were delighted to obtain tickets, just a few days ago, to take mum & dad to see the much-acclaimed **Christmas Spectacular at Thursford**: a huge cast of talented youngsters are swept up from London and deposited in a giant barn in the middle of the Norfolk countryside, miles from civilisation, and are watched by thousands of people in the course of the seven-week season. Fantastic.



There hasn't been much time for the 'flicks' this year – too much live theatre to see! However, we loved the concluding part of the *Harry Potter* saga; had a most amusing time watching *Gnomeo & Juliet* (yes, really); and had to admit that all the praise that's been heaped upon *The King's Speech* really was absolutely justified and deserved – a superb film.

We've had shows in the parishes, too. Concluding with the Music Hall mentioned above, we've also had the Nessuno Trio in the elegant surroundings of Morton Hall; the Upper Octave came to Weston Longville to give us their Porter to Puccini compilation; and Gresham's School choir made a welcome return to Great Witchingham church. Oh, and don't forget the fundraising Quiz, hosted in Weston but in aid of Great Witchingham, with fiendish questions set as always by our friends Dot & Milton from Bolton; a fine time was had by all.

This brings us to Selwyn's work in the Wensum benefice. We were delighted to welcome our new suffragan Bishop, Jonathan (and I must pause here to quote a great bit of verse from our friend Robin, who, observing a photograph [of a young muntjack deer] of mine on Facebook, came up with this: "I just don't know where to begin / Can Cassie have been at the gin? / Today it's a fawn, But after the dawn / It's the Suffragan Bishop of Lynn.") Wonderful.

The struggle to sell the small Victorian mission church in Lenwade, St Faith's, continues – but, at the time of writing, looks as though the sale is nearly concluded (despite the best efforts of the Land Registry to throw spanners in works at the last moment). Service patterns have changed, hopefully encouraging parishioners from all six villages to meet rather more often; fundraising, legal matters, liturgy and pastoral work continue to occupy roughly equal space and time.

As for Cassie's business – in the worlds of organising, IT and websites – it continues to peak and trough in a manner familiar to every freelancer. Clients in Norfolk, Suffolk, London and even northern Spain; attic clearances, filing system establishment, best use of space and furniture; visits to IKEA and online research – it's all been great fun!



Oh, and not forgetting some lovely photographic assignments; our musical friend Rachel also happens to specialise in portraying Queens for a living (Elizabeth I and **Victoria**) – so some very entertaining times were spent capturing Their Majesties in various stages of dress and undress.

On the organising side, Cassie's work with apdo-uk (the Association of Professional Declutterers & Organisers) has now stepped up a gear. For seven years, it's been largely a 'portal' of information – both for those of us working in the organising profession, and for potential clients – but now we need to become more of an authority and a voice in the industry, to provide training and development for our members, and much more.

We held our first conference in March 2011, which was a great success, with 33 out of (at the time) around 90 members in attendance, in central London. As a result, there's a lot of *gratis* investment of time that needs to be made to lay the groundwork for these matters, but Cassie's a great believer in what-goes-around-comes-around – and the contribution of the organising profession is something she's very passionate about.



Cassie has also spent some very enjoyable times working with the Jelly team. No, nothing to do with food: this is an initiative, started in the USA and now popular in the UK, giving sole traders a chance to **meet up monthly** in a working environment. It's neither networking nor sales, but rather a recreation of the network of support one might receive in a normal office. She's been involved in the administration of this for the Norwich area, and also attended a wonderful conference for small businesses in Shropshire back in March – lots of inspiration and great ideas.

Our friends, our friends... We've welcomed folks to our beautiful county several times. It was lovely to see **Sarah-Lou and her gorgeous hound Bea**; Ruth & Adrian from Wales; Dot & Milton from Bolton (at least twice!); and lots of our family came up from London when sister Jenny came over from Spain to Norfolk with the children in May.



By way of return, Cassie hopped across to Europe yet again: this time to see her sister and family on their own territory in Competa (near Malaga). Glorious weather, tapas lunches, meeting the local community, and a large number of daft dogs (including Nube – Spanish for 'cloud' – **the new family puppy**: "a cross between a spaniel and something fluffy") - wonderful stuff. The **mountain scenery** is spectacular – although it takes a certain amount of nerve to drive the frequent hairpin bends! And then, of course, the visit had been timed to coincide with nephew Jack's 13th birthday. A somewhat riotous and fabulous evening was spent at a favourite local restaurant; Jack celebrated his birthday in style; and Auntie Cassie nursed a hangover back to England the following day...



As is inevitable, we said farewell to some dear friends this year, and this letter is



an opportunity to acknowledge them. Jimmie Chinn, playwright and adorable man, from Cassie's days involved with south London theatre groups; Ashley Hodgson, a gentle and lovely colleague from the same network; Sally Dixon, whose superb performance of Hedda Gabler at the Sewell Barn was mentioned in last year's letter, died tragically young of cancer. And, last but not least, we were able to travel back to Beddington to celebrate the long life of the adorable **Reg Willis**, who was such an important part of our parish life there. His reading of John of Gaunt's speech (underscored with Holst's *Jupiter - I Vow to Thee, My Country*) in our final poetry evening at St Mary's is one of many joyful memories of a loving, kind and talented man. May they all rest in peace.

We're so glad that Mum & Dad took the plunge and moved to Norfolk three years ago. They still love the quieter surroundings and being able to see green stuff instead of walls. Dad's memory, sadly, is getting worse, and he is no longer happy driving; but at least we're nearby to help out when we can.

With all this running around, the holidays were especially vital this year. A different routine from normal – and kept at an economic level! – but we're well aware of how lucky we were to enjoy the excursions we've had. Our regular visit to Dot & Milton in Bolton for a post-Christmas crash-out, including New



Year; a few days in beautiful Rutland to excavate one show from the brain (*The Shakespeare Revue*) before starting on the next one (*Merry Wives*). Our usual post-Easter break was spent this year with friends Dave & Jill Sealey (in return for designing their B&B website!), with the beauties of Warwickshire and Worcestershire to explore (including, of course, **Shakespeare country**); and their son Dan's wedding to plan, which Selwyn took in May.

Our summer break was this year split in two. Rather than taking three weeks in France, as is our usual habit, we spent just over a week in the beautiful Calvados area of Normandy in July/August. We were fortunate enough to find (rather late in the day) a seldom-rented-out, very reasonable little gite, and luxuriated in the peaceful surroundings, the beautiful garden and lots of local places of interest (and, natch, cider & Calvados). Lots of beautiful places to visit, including a rather fine zoo near Lisieux (the **white Siberian tiger** was a particular favourite), the welcoming wine bar in

our nearest town (the fact that it (a) sold excellent wine and (b) was run by a dishy young man had, of course, nothing to do with it – the free wifi was the main attraction); a fabulous visit to business colleague (via the aforementioned Jelly conference), Judy Mansfield, in her gorgeous mill house; and much, much more.



Then, in early October, we were thrilled to spend a wonderful fortnight staying in the newly-built villa of friends Hilary & Gilbert in Portugal. A country we'd never



been to, a language we don't know; far from the main tourist attractions, Ourique is the nearest town, about an hour north of the Algarve coast. We were there for two weeks, in temperatures that were unusually high, even for Portugal; our favourite places were various little resorts along the west coast (Odeceixe is heavenly), and chilling out on the villa's patio, up on a hill, watching the **amazing views** punctuated by visits from egrets and goats. We now can't wait to return some time to see how work is progressing!

So what's coming up in the new year? Well, it remains to be seen how long Cassie can keep away from treading the boards – but nothing is planned at the moment. However, after the success of the Music Hall, we've been threatened with a booking in April before the old village hall is pulled down and replaced with a new one, celebrating the 1940s (the era in which the present one was built)...

Our post-Christmas holiday will be spent as usual with dear friends Dot & Milton in Bolton; we've a yen to return to Paris (for the first time in many years) after Easter; and the rest of the year will be dictated by the fact that Selwyn is due a sabbatical – the first since 1999, and delayed from this year when it didn't work out. Cassie's work with apdo-uk is likely to figure large this year, and her own business. We'll try to stay in better touch with our loved ones, near and far, family and friends, and always welcome visitors to Norfolk!

We hope that, despite economic difficulties and fears, that your own year has been happy, and that 2012 will bring all you would wish for yourselves. We think of you often, and send to each of you our love as always –



Cassie
Selwyn