

OAST NOTES

May 2026



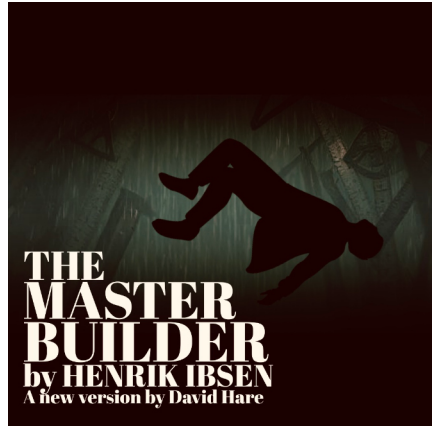
THE MASTER BUILDER

by **HENRIK IBSEN**
A new version by David Hare

16th - 23rd May 2026 8pm Sunday performance 3pm

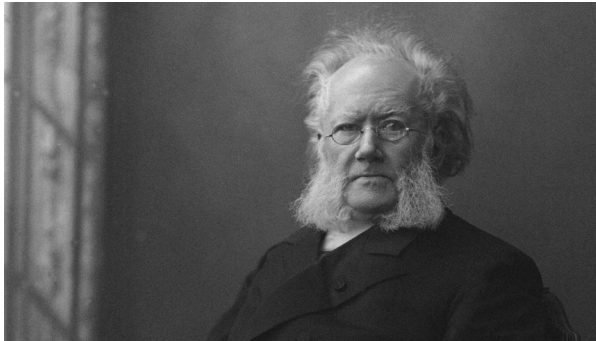
Performances 16th - 23rd May

Halvard Solness is a self-made man and successful master builder, but he feels threatened. He is fearful for his own sanity, and that youth will usurp his position in society. A young woman, Hilde Wangel, appears and claims they met ten years earlier. She says he made her a promise to give her a kingdom. He is drawn into her strange world. She wants him to climb the steeple of the house he has built for him and his wife, Aline, who is only too aware that he is afraid of heights. This play is a journey into Halvard's mind. Is he going mad? Who is the young girl, and why is she so keen to see him climb the steeple?



Tickets prices: Members £10 & non-members £14

Henrik Ibsen 1828 - 1906



Ibsen wrote twenty plays, and in that time, he changed the course of theatre drama forever. His early plays were historical and mythological, focused on Norway. Overall, they were unsuccessful, but a huge change in his fortunes occurred when he wrote *A Doll's House* in 1879. It

was a realistic and shocking play for its time, both in style and subject matter. It was radical and subversive, and is seen as an important moment in the history of feminism. This was followed by other realistic plays such as *Pillars of Society* and *Ghosts*. In his later plays, he moved closer to symbolism with a sense of mythology, while continuing to retain a social reality. These plays include *The Master Builder*, as well as *The Wild Duck* and *When We Dead Awaken*. He is one of the most performed playwrights of all time.

THE OAST THEATRE,
TONBRIDGE

Meet the *directors*

An introduction to the plays which
will be forming the **2026 - 2027 season**

8PM

8TH MAY 2026

LONDON ROAD,
TONBRIDGE,
KENT
TN10 3AN



29th, 30th & 31st May

Tickets £8

A Double Bill.

Abi's Apartment: Abi and Ben work at Madam's apartment. Abi wants a life of luxury, and an expired student visa is hanging over Ben's head. This play explores themes of jealousy, desperation, and manipulation. It is a dark twist on classic French farce.

Hymn to Canada: For as long as anyone has known Mike he has been fascinated by Canada, but reluctant to go there because of a fear of flying. Or is it something else? There is a long held secret which has torn a family apart.

Artist of the Month

Annette Tranter is an artist based in Tunbridge Wells. She studied art at Maidstone Art College and then Ravensbourne College of Art, gaining a degree in Fashion & Textiles.

She paints mainly in acrylics, but has also produced works in watercolours and water-soluble oils.

Recent notable achievements were appearing in Portrait Artist of the Year in 2023, and being shortlisted in the final 50 in the British Art Awards 2024; her entry was exhibited at The Oxo Tower Gallery.

Annette joined the Oast Theatre about 14 years ago and regularly paints scenery. She finds this is an enjoyable change, working in collaboration with others and having to paint quickly on a large scale. The Oast Theatre provides a wonderful opportunity to meet like-minded people and to be involved in the creation of a production.



The Artist for Next Month

Ann Smith

The Oast Playgroup

The Oast Playgroup meet every Monday and Wednesday morning to build scenery for the Oast productions. They then have to erect it on the stage and secure any walls, doors and windows to the stage. Then it is painted and decorated as required by the Director of the forthcoming play. At the end of the run, they have to take it all down. That may seem fairly straightforward, but there is always the unexpected.



Over the years, the Playgroup have constructed the shoreline of an island, complete with sand and water; a World War One underground shelter, the inside of a London tube train, and three separate bedrooms, the model of the ship, Titternick, which broke in half and sank brilliantly on cue and many more besides, all on the same stage.

If this seems like something you might like to get involved with, just come along on a Monday or Wednesday morning. You will be assured of a warm welcome and join a group of friendly men and women, all sharing the aim of meeting the requirements of every Director, as well as plenty of light-hearted banter.

Ken Smith

Join the marketing team!

The Oast Marketing Team needs volunteers to help to distribute printed posters and flyers for each of our monthly shows.

It needs to be done once a month, and within a day or so following the closing of the previous show. The old posters and flyers need to be replaced with those for the new show. We distribute and display to regular retail and hospitality outlets in Tonbridge and Hildenborough. We are looking to expand the distribution to Tunbridge Wells and Sevenoaks.

You will only distribute to a handful of locations in your area. It should take no more than an hour a month of your time. If you can spare the time, once a month, to be part of the team carrying out this important role, please contact Andy Leggatt:

email: andy.leggatt@oasttheatre.com mobile: 07976216434

Making a drama of it

Scene: A house somewhere in West Malling. Two people, two mugs of tea and a dog. The two people are the editor and the drama director, Sandra Barfield

Ed. What goes into putting a programme of plays together for the season?

Sandra: A lot of work. Everyone thinks it's very straightforward, but it's not. First of all, we ask the directors to choose three plays, and then we, on the Drama Committee, read them and make sure they will fit into the season. They can be old plays or modern plays; it doesn't matter, that's not important. We have to make sure we cover a whole spectrum of theatre so we can cater for as many people as possible. Once we've sorted out the dates and everything else, and ask the directors if they're happy with the choices that we have made, I have to get the performing rights. If we don't get the performing rights, we have to go back to the director. We might have to shuffle everything around because if the cast is very large, and you have two large casts next to each other, we won't be able to get the actors, so we have to rearrange things. We also have the problem of directors saying they can't do a particular month, in which their choice would be very suitable for the season, even though they had said they could. But at the end of the day, we manage to muddle through, and usually it turns out to be a very nice programme. Another reason for not putting it on is that we may not be able to make the set. There are plays which present astronomically difficult sets. For example, in one play we read, someone had to fall down the stairs, and we were wondering how on earth we could sort that out.

Ed. We are putting a lot more plays on now. Do you see it progressing further?

Sandra: I have been passionate about getting the Janet Young Studio working because what we want to do is to put on very modern plays, and they are often shorter. Only one hour, half an hour, ten-minute plays, and for our main stage, that's probably not right. So the Janet Young studio presents a good space in which to put on those more modern plays. It presents a different challenge to the actors and audience. The close environment can be challenging.

Ed. It's also a good place to put on new plays, isn't it?

Sandra: We have got several new people who can write good plays, and they should be in that space. I don't see any reason why we shouldn't do our own plays and see how they go. When we're doing something new and different, it's always interesting to an audience. I think it's important that we help new writers if we can.

Continued on next page

Ed. Are you thinking of extending the runs?

Sandra: I'd love to, but we are up against the demands of front of house, bar, and the coffee ladies, but I think we should have at least four performances.

Ed. So you would encourage members who may be toying with the idea of directing to step forward, and you'd let them put something on upstairs.

Sandra: Yes. They've still got to give me the play. I've got to read it and know what they are doing. We can't put on anything which, how can I say, something which is risqué, something pornographic. Some people write things, and you think, well, you'd never get that on any stage.

Ed. Why is theatre important to you?

Sandra: I went to theatrical school when I was six and a half. I am dyslexic, and I had a difficult time at my first school. But when I went there, we had to read Shakespeare, and they showed me the words, and all of a sudden, I could read. All of a sudden, the words were there for me. That taught me how powerful the written word is, and it taught me that the plays written are in your face. They come alive with people on the stage, showing you how this person reacts to that. It may not be how you would react, but it's how they react. I find it fascinating. I love theatre, I love going to see plays. I also see musicals, ballet, opera, but my passion is watching plays. I see as many as I can. It's live theatre. You enjoy what they're doing, and they're enjoying it too. It's also fantastic because of the different interpretations of plays. Whether you like them or not is immaterial, but it's their interpretation.

Ed. Where do you see the Oast going from here?

Sandra: The Oast has got to be more modern. I don't mean only modern plays. There are old and modern plays in the West End, and we should also do older plays as well as modern plays, but we have to look for a younger demographic. My remit is, for the next few years, to try to get plays on which are interesting for younger people, perhaps. I'm also trying very hard with the Christmas play to make the timings different so that children can come to see it. No parent would want their child to stay till midnight. This coming season, we're doing plays which are quite different, but some are quite old, and I hope to get a better season for the following year, with an eye to more modern plays, because I think it's important.

The End. Curtain

DECADES OF PLAYS



The Philanthropist 1977

Roy Bennett, Val Armstrong, Paul Barnes & Chris Hart



Hedda Gabler 1982

Alfred Baker, David Cope & Sally Woollard



The Secret Rapture 1994

Mary Alderson & John Taylor



A Doll's House 2006

Alexandra Warner & David Brady



My Zinc Bed 2010

Ashley Munson, Olivia Murray & Mike Metcalf



Ghosts 2018

Tom Rusbridge, Charlotte Whiting & Karen Dix

Humble Boy Review

Humble Boy by Charlotte Jones is an evocative and richly layered play that explores themes of family, loss, and the complexities of human relationships. The story centres on Felix Humble, played by Christopher Smith, who is a troubled astrophysicist grappling with his father's death and his own sense of displacement within his family. The author skilfully blends science and emotion, using metaphors from physics and beekeeping to delve into the nature of grief and the search for meaning. What I appreciated most was Christopher's ability to deliver Jones's dialogue, weaving scientific concepts into personal drama without feeling forced or overly academic, despite echoes of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.



*Bob Brown, Christopher Smith, Rebecca Thomas,
Kate Robbins & Rachel Dresner*

The cast kept the dialogue sharp, providing moments of levity amidst the more sombre undertones. Flora Humble, played by Rachel Dresner, was excellent. She, I believe, is new to the Oast, and I hope she will appear in future productions. Even Rosie Pye, played by Rebecca Thomas, as Felix's old girlfriend, was a joy and relatively new to me, first appearing at the Oast in 2025 in *Death of a Salesman*. The rest of the equally strong cast: Kate Robbins, Chris Miall and Bob Brown portrayed their characters as deeply flawed yet relatable. They captured the play's mood, which swung between comedic and poignant, reflecting the unpredictability of life itself. My only reservation is that some of the comedic dialogue was rushed, preventing the audience from appreciating it. The visual jokes worked beautifully, and the audience roared with laughter in the lunch scene over the ashes mistaken for pepper! Ultimately, *Humble Boy* is a moving exploration of identity and how we attempt to make sense of our lives, making it a memorable and thought-provoking experience.

The garden setting, admirably constructed by the very skilled Playgroup (applauded on both occasions I saw it), coupled with the scenic art by our resident artists, served as a perfect microcosm for the characters' emotional turmoil and growth. I enjoyed the production very much and came back later in the week to marvel at the talent on display. The director, Stuart McCreadie, must be very proud of this production. The cast and the creative team were a testament to the high standards achieved at the Oast.

Mel Paszkowski

Just Let Me Go Review



Gavin Dyer & Edward Bailey

What a brave and thought-provoking new piece! Louis Robinson's *Just Let Me Go* takes an unflinching look at how we live with loss, and the ways friendship and memory can bend under the weight of grief. Using movement, shifting time frames, and moments of direct storytelling, the play draws us into a space where past and present blur – sometimes heartbreakingly so.

Seb's task is to write a eulogy for Freddie, his old friend – but as the story unfolds, we're left wondering whether Freddie ever truly existed, or if Seb and Tom are really mourning each other. Gavin Dyer gives a subtle, engaging, and quietly magnetic performance as Tom, full of natural presence reminiscent of

Thomas Coombs in *Death of England*. Edward Bailey's Seb is more tightly wound, determined to "get it right", until his deeper lack of self-love begins to surface. Together, they hold the emotional tension beautifully.

This is a demanding piece for performers and the audience. Robinson's script and direction constantly move the goalposts, stretching our attention and empathy – perhaps occasionally too far. Some exchanges between Seb and Tom repeat themselves, and a little editing might heighten the impact without losing the rhythm of grief's repetition. Yet that very looseness also invites interpretation, just as the physical movement does, reminding us that grief never unfolds in straight lines.

Afterwards, the bar was buzzing with conversation about what it all meant – a sure sign that the play had struck a chord. It's wonderful to see such adventurous, experimental work in the Oast's Janet Young Studio: bold, poetic, and heartfelt theatre that lingers long after the lights go down.

Phil Holden

Humble Boy

Total tickets sold	754
Members	275
Non members	479
% of seats sold	83.82

Just Let Me Go & Overruled

Tickets sold	135
% of seats sold	100

Overruled Review



Laurence Plumb & Ashley Munson

After enjoying an amazing array of homemade cakes during the interval between the two plays, the audience settled down for the second play of the afternoon, *Overruled* by George Bernard Shaw.

Two couples, obviously, not married to each other but married to another, are staying in the same luxury seaside hotel. The wordsmith, Shaw, brought out so much humour from the situation, which reflected on the standards, expectations and morals of the early twentieth century. All four actors perfectly played the mannerisms of the period, making the seemingly unlikely situation entirely believable. All four, Laurence Plumb, Ashley Munson, Kate Dellow and Bizz Portlock, beautifully costumed, naturally, from the Oast wardrobe, maintained the pace throughout, complete with the appropriate affectations, and inflections throughout.

The audience only ever sees the end result of the weeks of planning and rehearsal required to present a play to them. The input from the Director, Marc Evans, and everyone else involved in bringing even a short play to an audience is intrinsic to the result, and yet it is the actors who are seen by the audience. So well done to all involved in this really enjoyable play.

Ken Smith

Hania Simons Obituary



Hania Simons died at home on March 17 2026. She was born Ann Lizak the second daughter of Stanislaw and Jadwiga Lizak, two Polish emigres who settled in Liverpool in the late 1930s. Her father was a GP and her elder sister followed in his footsteps. Her unofficial family pet name was Hania, and her first language was Polish. She was reasonably fluent all her life,

Hania was educated in Liverpool, where she adored the safety and camaraderie of a Catholic girl's school in Aigburth. She graduated as a dentist in December 1975, together with Paul Simons. Paul walked her safely home through some of the frontier areas of Liverpool to her home after a party late one night. She

sent him packing as his presence in the house in the early hours of the morning might upset her father.

She worked in the Community Service in Liverpool for much of her career. She enjoyed it and made lifelong friends of work colleagues. She would write sketches and parody the management to entertain people at meetings, which they loved. She married Kevin, another dentist, and they had three children – Ellie, Clare and Anthony. Kevin died tragically in 2007, and later that year, she was reacquainted with Paul at a meeting in London and, after 30 years, she still recognised him. She moved to Tonbridge with Paul, and they bought a home together in Aylesford. They married in Tunbridge Wells in 2010.

She and Paul visited the Oast Theatre on an open day in 2013 or 2014, and decided to join, volunteering in the Box Office. Hania realised that it was not for her and threw herself into helping in other areas. She started acting, and her first role was in *Absurd Person Singular*, directed by Phil Porter, in April 2016. He gave her additional one-to-one coaching, and she developed into a well-respected actor, winning the Best Actress award at the Southern Counties Drama Festival in 2022. She also acted with the Stag Theatre Company, Hadlow Amateur Dramatic Society and Medway Little Theatre in which she played her last role as Inspector Lestrade in *Sherlock Carol* in December 2025.

In 2018, her granddaughter Lucy was born. They did everything together, and she relished in one of the greatest roles of her life, that of a granny.

Hania is survived by Paul, her three children and Lucy.

Letter

My two friends and I sat in the front row at Wednesday's performance of *Humble Boy*. The painted backdrop of Cotswold countryside was lovely, and the flowers on each side of the stage looked very realistic. Not knowing anything about the play, the twist at the end as to the identity of Jim the Gardener, took me by surprise, despite Flora's deceased husband having been called "James". We enjoyed Rachel Dresner's debut role at the Oast, with assertive acting and very smart outfits. Christopher Smith, dressed in a variety of knitted tank tops, kept up his stammering, awkward, academic student personality throughout. I always enjoy Bob Brown's acting - ever since he starred in "Lovesong", disappearing and resurfacing with his beloved in that amazing bed. Bob's roles are often gentle, reflective and romantic, so it was intriguing to see him micturating at midnight, often using strong language and being domineeringly passionate! Well done to Chris Miall for learning that string of Latin names for all the flowers, which "Flora" congratulated him upon at the very end. But for the three of us, the highlight of the whole play was Mercy Lott's LONG lunch grace, before they eventually ate the "seasoned" soup. Kate Robbins played the character of Mercy delightfully and was the only one who was kind to "Felix". *Humble Boy* was a fascinating, amusing and interesting play, which gave us much to discuss on our way home. Thank you to the director Stuart McCreadie and everyone involved in the production.

Valerie Thornewell (regular member of the audience)

100 CLUB WINNERS

£25 Mrs J Pierce
£10 Mrs A Jennings
£10 Mr H Dawson
£10 Ms P Berger
£10 Mr C Powis

You can join the 100 Club for just £13 per year. Call Valerie Shields on
01732 355919 or email 100club@oasttheatre.com

Quiz

Name these Ibsen plays

1. B _ _ _ _ _
2. P _ _ _ G _ _ _ _
3. T _ _ L _ _ _ F _ _ _ T _ _ S _ _
4. R _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _
5. T _ _ W _ _ _ D _ _ _ _
6. W _ _ _ W _ D _ _ _ A _ _ _ _ _
7. L _ _ _ _ _ E _ _ _ _ _
8. E _ _ _ _ _ A _ _ G _ _ _ _ _
9. A _ E _ _ _ _ O _ T _ P _ _ _ _
10. T _ _ V _ _ _ _ _ A _ H _ _ _ _ _

Answers next month

Answers for last month's quiz

1. Harry Worth
2. As Times Go By
3. The Office
4. Ever Decreasing Circles
5. To The Manor Born
6. Fawlty Towers
7. A Fine Romance
8. Goodnight Sweetheart
9. The Mistress
10. Yes Minister

THE OAST THEATRE

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Deadline

Please send in any copy you wish included in the Oast notes by the 6th of the month. Copy to be sent to:

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