



The Village Players present a Café Theatre production of

COMFORT AND JOY

A comedy by Mike Harding



13th – 16th November, 2019

The Dunn Village Hall,
Rushlake Green, TN21 9QN

PROGRAMME

Contains
adult
themes and
language;
rated 15+



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Comfort and Joy – Director's notes

Comfort and Joy was first presented at the Oldham Coliseum in 1997. Its author, Mike Harding, is perhaps better known as both a folk singer and stand-up comedian, with his roots firmly in the north of England. He also has a strong affinity with Ireland, and much of the 'down to earth' humour and language in the play reflects this.

Let me take you back to the year 1997... the country had seen a lot of changes! In May that year, after eighteen years of Conservative government, the Labour party won a landslide victory in the General Election and Tony Blair became Prime Minister. There had been a lot of division about The European Union and several political scandals... so perhaps things weren't so very different from the present day! However, cities like Manchester had coped with some huge changes with the cotton mills and coal pits closing down. One of the references in the play is to The Dyers and Polishers Club, which had been a thriving meeting place in Manchester for workers from the wool mills, but by the mid-sixties there were hardly any millworkers left in the membership.

In 1997 England handed Hong Kong to China, scientists cloned Dolly the sheep, the film *Titanic* opened breaking all box office records and Harry Potter was first published. Sadly, the year also saw the death of Princess Diana, and that of Mother Theresa of Calcutta a week later. During that year we were listening to songs such as *Candle In The Wind* by Elton John, *Wannabe* by the Spice Girls and of course, *My Heart Will Go On!* Oasis and Blur were among the top bands, and even The Smurfs had a hit! Popular TV shows included Friends, South Park, The Simpsons and The X Files. After the extravagant fashions of the eighties, clothes were, by comparison, more minimalist: jeans, baseball caps worn back to front and track suits were very popular amongst the youth.

Artists like Damien Hurst and Tracey Emin were often in the news. The winner of The Turner Prize was Gillian Wearing who showed a video titled *60 minutes of Silence* (1996), where a group of actors were dressed in police uniforms and had to stand still for an hour (occasional surreptitious scratching could be observed).

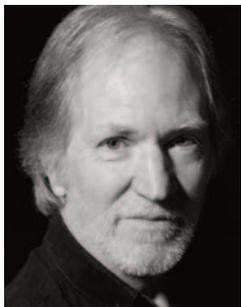
Which brings me to our play, *Comfort and Joy*. In staging this play we knew that we would face many challenges: it contains some adult themes and fairly strong language as well as some characters expressing views that were of the time and would probably have been considered politically incorrect by others even then, and certainly, would be today. There are a variety of accents for the actors to contend with and numerous challenges for the technical and backstage team.

So why did we choose this play? Simply because every time we read the text, we laughed. Out loud. And we have continued to laugh all the way through the months of rehearsals. Every single one of the backstage team has been brilliant: patient, hardworking and helpful. The cast members, comprising of some of the "old stagers" as well as some fresh new (and, dare I say it) young faces have been a joy to direct, bringing their multiple talents and willingness to work hard to rehearsals. I am extremely grateful to every single one of them for everything they have achieved - and always with a sense of fun.

So, I sincerely hope you enjoy our production of *Comfort and Joy* as much as we have enjoyed bringing it to you! I hope your Christmas turns out better than Margaret and Martin's, and I would also like to add that no stick insects were harmed in the making of this production. Merry Christmas!



The cast



Jim Edmonds



Lizzie Hutcheson



Elizabeth Benians



Clyde Young



Ann Walker



Mike Farrall



Jonathan Gray



Sue Draper



Vanessa Sergeant



Alex Goodsell



Jane Uren



Ian Charlesworth





Cast (in order of appearance)

Goff	Jim Edmonds
Margaret	Lizzie Hutcheson
Helen	Elizabeth Benians
Martin	Clyde Young
Fiona	Ann Walker
Jimmy	Mike Farrall
Chapman	Jonathan Gray
Monica	Sue Draper
Kathy	Vanessa Sergeant
Crispin	Alex Goodsell
Pat	Jane Uren
Hughie	Ian Charlesworth
Aliens	Alice Pepper + TBC
Choir	Heather Young, Elizabeth Williams, & members of the cast
Carol singers	Matilda Moir-Edmonds, Katie King, plus support choir

The production team

Director	Pam Edmonds
Producer	Anita Gunn
Stage Manager	Clive Uren
Set co-ordinator & design	John Gunn
Set team	John Gunn, Graham Stoner, Johnny Bates, Ian Charlesworth
Props & set dressing	Rhona Verrell, Ki Flavell
Wardrobe	Sue Wilson
Prompts	Inyca Humphreys, Chris Cogdell
Lighting	Andrew Nairne
Sound	Robert Verrell
Sound & technical support	Jonathan Austin
Publicity, programmes	Peter Williams
Front of House	Anita Gunn & team
Bar	Peter Williams & team
Catering	Mary Dick-Cleland
Raffle	Anita Gunn, Nannette Burton



Running order

The action of the play takes place in the front room of the home of Martin and Margaret Duggan, in the north of England, in 1997.

Act I

Scene 1 December 23rd. Evening

Starter

Scene 2 Christmas Eve. Morning

Scene 3 Christmas Eve. Evening

Main Course

Act II

Scene 1 Christmas Day. Morning

Scene 2 Christmas Day. Later

Dessert

Scene 3 Christmas Day. Late afternoon/early evening.

About the Director, Pam Edmonds

Pam is a founder member of The Village Players, having played the part of an Indian Suitor in *The Sleeping Beauty*, the first pantomime in 1992. Since then she has acted in numerous productions and been involved, in a variety of roles, in almost all of them. Pam previously directed *Fiddler on the Roof*, *My Fair Lady*, *A Celebration Of Christmas*, *There Goes the Bride* and *A Victorian Christmas Evening*.

Pam is grateful to The Players for the opportunities that being a member of the group has provided to learn about many aspects of staging a production, be it in directing, set design, or performing.



Pam Edmonds



In rehearsals





The Angie Trew award

Members, acknowledge your favourite actor by voting for the annual Angie Trew Award.

Each year at the AGM in October, the Angie Trew Award for “The Most Deserving Actor” is presented to the person who has given an outstanding performance in the preceding 12 months. It doesn’t have to be a leading role, but something that has most impressed, amused or entertained you. So while watching this production please make a note of anyone you would like to nominate when the time comes to vote. We will remind you in the newsletter.

Last year’s winners were Kate Rolff as “The Most Deserving Actor” for her performances in both *A Woman of No Importance* and *Calamity Jane* and Johnny Bates as “The Most Valuable Input” for his extensive support to the group over many years in both acting roles and backstage. As an exception, we also decided to make a third award entitled “The Most Promising Newcomer” and this was presented to Zak Nicholls for his performance in *A Woman of No Importance*.

Forthcoming events

The next Café Theatre production by The Village Players will be *Comfort & Joy* a hugely funny play written by playwright and entertainer, Mike Harding. It is set in Lancashire over the Christmas period. Relatives you hardly ever see and who are very different from you, arrive at your house for the festivities. No-one receives a present that is at all appropriate. Culinary disasters abound. Long-buried resentments rear their ugly heads as the alcohol flows and tongues are loosened!

This will be performed here at the Dunn Village Hall from 13th to 16th November so make a note of the dates in your diary. However, please be aware that this play includes adult language so is probably best suited for those aged 18 or over.

Our thanks

The Village Players wish to thank everyone who has generously assisted with this production with special thanks to:

The County Group for their sponsorship and help in the preparation of the programme and other publicity materials.

Gareth Looker of Looker Marketing Communications for the design and artwork of our programmes, flyers and posters.

Mark Bostock for taking the cast photographs.

Mary Dick-Cleland for arranging and preparing the catering for each evening.

Pets Corner for the loan of two cat baskets.



About the author – Mike Harding

Early life and education

Harding is of Irish ancestry on his mother's side. He was educated at St Anne's, Crumpsall, and St Bede's College, Manchester. After a varied career in a variety of casual roles, he took a degree in English and Education at the University of Manchester.

Professional career

Harding began performing as a folk singer and as a member of several local Manchester bands in the 1960s, making his first recordings for the Topic label. He began telling jokes between songs, eventually extending them into longer humorous anecdotes that became the main focus of his act. He released his first album, *A Lancashire Lad*, in 1972, followed by *Mrs 'Ardin's Kid* in 1974. In 1975, the single release of *The Rochdale Cowboy* reached number 22 in the UK Singles Chart, and brought him national attention.



Mike Harding

As a stand-up comic he made several series for the BBC and appeared on numerous television and radio programmes, including two series of travel films in Ireland and the Appalachian Mountains of America. He also played rock and roll with his band, the Stylos, with the Lowe Brothers. He has had many albums and singles released, whilst the latter included *Man 'nited Song*.

As well as comedy, he has released albums of serious songs, most notably *Bombers' Moon*, the title track of which tells of his father's death. The album also includes *The Accrington Pals* and cover versions of Bruce Springsteen's *Factory* and Eric Bogle's *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*.

Harding composed the music scores for *DangerMouse*, *Count Duckula* (he also sang the main and end titles with Manchester native Doreen Edwards), *The Reluctant Dragon* and *The Fool of the World and The Flying Ship* for Cosgrove Hall Films.

As well as being an acclaimed musician and comedian, he wrote a number of books; *The Armchair Anarchist's Almanac*, *The Unluckiest Man in the World*, *The 14½ Pound Budgie*; *The Little Book of the Green Man*, *The Little Book of Stained Glass*, *The Little Book of Gargoyles*, and *The Little Book of Misericords*; and the loosely factual autobiography, *You Can See the Angel's Bum, Miss Worswick!*

He more recently made a series of fourteen short films on minority religions in England for the BBC's *Heaven and Earth* show. Harding has presented the annual BBC Radio 2 Folk Awards, and from 1997 to 2012 he presented the weekly BBC Radio 2 flagship folk and roots programme, *The Mike Harding Show*, his last show was on 26 December 2012.



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The Village Players

The group owes its existence to Angie Trew for it was thanks to her vision that the first pantomime was produced at The Dunn Village Hall in 1992. Having "recruited" Anita Gunn and Jimi Jervis Read to the team, the enthusiasm and creative skills of these three ladies ensured that the pantomime was a great success and this led to the formation of The Village Pantomime Players later that year.

Under the leadership of Angie, and then Anita, the group went on to produce a variety of plays, comedies (in a Café Theatre style) and musicals. In 2003 the name was changed to The Village Players to reflect the group's commitment to providing the village with a wide variety of entertainment. Sadly, Angie lost her courageous battle against cancer in September 2009 but her legacy lives on.

Join us:

Onstage or backstage, plays, pantomimes, musicals, theatre suppers.

Contact:

Anita Gunn 01435 873226 or
Clyde Young 01435 830059

Or visit our website at:

villageplayersrushlakegreen.co.uk

Meet new people, have great fun and help provide that 'certain something' for our local community.

Follow us



You can now follow The Village Players Rushlake Green on Facebook. Like our page and keep up-to-date with all our news, audition dates, ticket sales and sneaky looks behind the scenes at rehearsal and back-stage.

Past productions

February 1992	The Sleeping Beauty
May 1992	Ways and Means
December 1992	Fishy Business / Hidden Meanings
May 1993	The Boyfriend
February 1994	Cinderella
November 1994	The Patient & Rats
June 1995	Variety Show
January 1996	Boeing Boeing
February 1997	Beauty and the Beast
November 1997	Relatively Speaking
March 1999	Holiday Snap
February 2000	Mother Goose
November 2000	Seasons Greetings
October 2001	Fiddler on the Roof
May 2002	Out of Order
February 2003	Jack and the Beanstalk
November 2003	Home is Where Your Clothes Are
June 2004	Theatre in the Round
November 2004	South Pacific
May 2005	Blithe Spirit
February 2006	Dick Whittington and his Cat
November 2006	Don't Dress For Dinner
May 2007	When We Are Married
July 2007	A 15th Anniversary Review
November 2007	The Ghost Train
May 2008	My Fair Lady
November 2008	Not Now Darling
May 2009	Hay Fever
Nov 2009	It Runs in the Family
Dec 2009	A Celebration of Christmas (in aid of The Eve Appeal in memory of Angie Trew)
June 2010	A Midsummer Night's Dream (Shakespeare-on-the Green)
November 2010	Deadly Nightcap
May 2011	Oklahoma!
November 2011	See How They Run
February 2012	An Enchanted Journey (Poetry and Music Evening)
May 2012	Lord Arthur Savile's Crime
November 2012	20th Anniversary Review
June 2013	The Merry Wives of Windsor (Shakespeare-on-the-Green)
November 2013	Make Way for Lucia
May 2014	Carousel
November 2014	There Goes The Bride
May 2015	Fatal Encounter
November 2015	Victorian Christmas Evening
February 2016	Cinderella
August 2016	Radio Play
November 2016	Glorious!
June 2017	Sand Castles
November 2017	A Woman of No Importance
May 2018	Calamity Jane
November 2018	Relative Values
May 2019	The Happiest Days of Your Life