

A Halton Hills Arts Council feature

Backstage with the 'British Connection'



With less than two weeks to go before the first performance of "Separate Tables", the Georgetown Little Theatre is very busy. Seen here in a scene from the play are (left to right) Vera MacDonald as Mrs. Ralston-Bell, Ashley Windsor as Mr. Malcolm and Pat Joynes as Lady Matheson. An extension has

already been built onto the existing stage, and the set itself is nearly completed, while actors are hard at work learning their lines. The seamstresses have their work cut out for them as everyone prepares for next Monday's first dress rehearsal and opening night February 23. (GLT photo)

Gerry's cues set stage for family's scenes

By **STEPHEN FROST**
Herald staff writer

Perhaps more so than in any other Georgetown Little Theatre (GLT) presentation, the stage set will play a key role in the forthcoming production of "Separate Tables", a fact of utmost importance to Gerry Eggleton, the one-time British Army entertainer who is serving as stage manager for the new play, which debuts February 24.

"Separate Tables" will be the GLT's entry to be adjudicated in the annual Drama Association Festival. Burton Lancaster, professional actor and director, will be one of the judges.

Mr. Eggleton received his initial theatrical training in Redding, England, where he was born. This coupled with his stint in Britain's National Service has made him a very popular man with theatre groups in Georgetown and Brampton.

When Mr. Eggleton moved to Georgetown ten years ago, he and his wife, Margaret became involved with the Brampton Musical Society (BMS). Mrs. Eggleton is a past president of the BMS and formerly served as vice-president of the GLT. Last year, she played the title role in the BMS production of "Hello Dolly" and remains busy with the society this year choreographing its upcoming musical, "Guys and Dolls".

Even the Eggleton's daughter, Nicola, has been known to lend a hand painting GLT sets.

as she did for the play "Rape of the Belt".

SIX YEARS
Mr. and Mrs. Eggleton became involved with the GLT six years ago, she in acting and he generally in the construction of sets. Since then, he has been stage manager for two other plays and last year tried his hand at producing, when GLT presented "Veronica's Room". Mr. Eggleton has also "admitted" to acting in the GLT play "Cinderella" as one of the ugly sisters.

It's behind the scenes, however, where Gerry Eggleton is most comfortable, as each new play brings along its own particular set of challenges. "Separate Tables" is not a difficult play insofar as the set doesn't have to be changed at the end of each act. However, because the actors spend a great deal of time at various tables, an extension to the stage had to be built to accommodate them.

This extension, measuring 16 by 20 feet, is somewhat lower than the main stage so that line of sight is not impeded in the front rows, and extends from stage right to stage centre. The remaining space will be partially filled with chairs. Mr. Eggleton says spectators sitting there may feel as though they are sitting in the play's living room. More tables will be placed on a raised portion of the stage which is to be raised eight inches at the rear of stage left.

One of Mr. Eggleton's problems is that the hall is needed

for church activities during the day and all the floor space required. Because the GLT practises every night, he and his crew have to design and construct the stage so it can be taken down every night after practise and rebuilt the next evening. Needless to say, it's a job Gerry has put a great deal of thought into.

Mr. Eggleton's concerns don't stop at stage construction and finished sets; those are only his initial duties as a stage manager. Once they're completed, the hard part begins.

LIGHTING, TOO
He is also responsible for lighting and sound, generally taking care of things during a single, technical walkthrough of the play. At this rehearsal, lighting and sound cues are decided upon, and from then on, Mr. Eggleton is responsible for their appearance, via the lighting and sound men, in the final presentation.

During the last week of rehearsals, he must be present all the time, since it is he and he alone who cues the actors and actresses for their stage entrance. To do this, he has to follow the script line by line at rehearsals and then the actual production itself.

Just before the play opens, another one of Mr. Eggleton's functions is to ensure all props are in place on stage. It can be most awkward when an actor is required to say, "my, isn't that a lovely urn" and there isn't an urn in sight. Ad libbing, he claims, may be one of

the occupational hazards of live theatre, but he likes to keep it to a minimum where he can.

One of the stage manager's last jobs is to see that make-up is finished and done properly.

Because there are no understudies, everyone has to be there when the curtain goes up, from make-up and lighting people to actors and actresses.

Once incident Mr. Eggleton likes to relate, happened in a BMS presentation when an actor was late. The only solution was for a stand-in to do the part with script in hand until the late actor appeared. Mr. Eggleton claims the audience was very receptive once the situation was explained.

Another incident he recalls is one involving a lead actress in a GLT production last year. As the national anthem was playing one minute before curtain call, she decided a visit to the facilities was necessary, leaving Mr. Eggleton at the top of the stairs glaring at his watch and muttering under his breath.

Although often nerve-racking, the position of stage manager is obviously not without its humorous side.

Halton Cable TV goes multi-lingual

Halton Cable Systems Ltd has received a six-month licence renewal from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission.

In addition to the renewal, Halton Cable Systems, which serves Georgetown, Acton, Milton and surrounding area has been given approval to proceed with the multi-lingual CFMT station (Channel 47) to its programming schedule.

Nine Toronto stations were ordered by the CRTC to add the multi-lingual station to their services. Those stations outside of Toronto where fewer than 10 per cent of the citizens speak English or French were allowed to add CFMT to their augmented or converter service.

By **ENID WILLIAMS**
GEORGETOWN LITTLE THEATRE is richly blessed with members who not only perform with expertise, but also willingly turn their hand to backstage work in a dual role as they prepare for "Separate Tables".

A quartet of talented women, originating from England, are the featured topic of this article.

Marie Cleaton arrived in Canada in 1956 where she took up residence in Port Credit and later moved to her present home in Brampton. Mrs. Cleaton first developed an interest in theatre through a friend who encouraged her to read for a Bramalea Little Theatre play. Innocently, she attended the reading and was subsequently cast in "All In Good Time", which was the beginning of theatre as a hobby.

Mrs. Cleaton has covered almost every area of backstage craft except producing, which she has no inclination to try. She has directed three one-act plays, all entries in competition, and won five awards with one and credits for the other as well.

A constant achiever, Mrs. Cleaton hopes to direct a full-length play in the future. She has been dressmaking since she was 13 years old and, over the years, has developed competence in dress design.

Being a natural artist in her craft, she is much in demand by theatre groups both as a dressmaker and for consultation on design. She has enjoyed creating costumes for Peter Pan and Aladdin, with heavy demands for distinctive characterizations. A costume designer "has to have a keen imagination and an eye for line and color," she explained.

Mrs. Cleaton has an inclination to teach the young and has been approached by Norrie Studio to become resident costume designer.

She believes community theatre should have a "leasehold system among the groups" which assists all groups financially and "creates a common bond between theatrical companies."

As "Miss Meacham" in Separate Tables, Marie will be bringing forth a character on stage not necessarily intended by the playwright, but one which is proving to be interesting. She also turns a willing hand to stitching and planning for the play, now in rehearsal.

Another imported asset is found in the person of Val Stoddart, who arrived in Canada in 1966. Initially, the Stoddarts began Canadian life in Toronto followed by a time in St. Louis, after which the family settled in Georgetown's Moore Park.

Originally, Val Stoddart began her interest in theatre in school where she participated in Gilbert and Sullivan and Shakespearean productions. While in training as a nurse, little time was left for theatre, but she did join a group in Reading, England before coming to Canada. Mrs. Stoddart has been working with GLT since 1975.

FIRST EXPOSURE
As Mrs. Stoddart talks about Christmas plays and performing for children, she speaks with great excitement, telling The Herald, "these productions are sometimes a child's first exposure to theatre". She also feels "performing for retarded adults is very rewarding when you see their faces light up with happiness".

Memorable roles include "Ruby" in When We are Married, as well as the mother in Billy Liar. Mrs. Stoddart has played a variety of roles, all "highly stimulating". This actress has also turned to assisting with wardrobe and properties, and particularly enjoys working on wardrobe for pantomimes, as "there's no specific period in history to be considered; a creative imagination is required to develop costumes which are garish in color and larger than life in concept".

Little Theatre always needs new members who are interested in backstage work, people who "feel a commitment and enjoy a challenge." Mrs. Stoddart said Very often, the best way to acquaint yourself with a theatre group is "through working backstage on a production where you become one of a theatrical family". Performing members should be encouraged to "broaden their knowledge of the stage by working backstage some of the time," she explained.

As we touched on the area of properties, Val stated that

EDITOR'S NOTE: For the second consecutive week, Halton Hills Arts Council columnist Enid Williams provides us with an in-depth look at the personalities behind the events. This week, the GLT's Marie Cleaton, Val Stoddart, Edna Ferguson and Joyce Holland.

"This is one of the most time consuming jobs, from the first production meeting to the final night of the run". However, this contribution provides a challenge in the realm of fantasy or period plays, because the efficiency of executing these duties can make or break a show. Properties require great ingenuity and the cast members rely heavily on "props" to enhance the quality of their performance.

VITAL AREA
Mrs. Stoddart went on to comment that wardrobe "is a vital area to arrive at a good end result under the lights". This job requires understanding of the mood of the play and characterizations to be dressed. There must be good communication between wardrobe committee and the artistic director.

Sensitivity is also required to enable the dressmaker insight into what is comfortable for the performer to wear, and sometimes a compromise must be arrived at with director's permission. The type of culture and style of shoes must be in keeping with the character wardrobe is dressing and it is "essential to complete an artistic characterization."

Val Stoddart will be playing "Miss Cooper" in GLT's festival entry, Separate Tables.

In 1957, Canada fell heir to one Edna Ferguson, who arrived from Bolton, Lancashire. After starting life here in Port Credit, the Ferguson family moved to their present home in Georgetown.

Through the Sunday School system in Britain, Edna Ferguson was introduced to theatre. Several years of participation ensued, marriage and then a family kept her off "the boards".

During the Second World War, she was in a drama society and musical theatre involvement followed. Mrs. Ferguson played the role "Lucille", a secondary part in No, No Nanner and as a chorus member enjoyed Fimian's Rainbow and "My Fair Lady" produced by Global Productions. Georgetown who took their shows to Brampton "because of a lack of proper performing facilities".

VERONICA'S ROOM

Through Chris Fisher, Mrs. Ferguson was introduced to GLT and played in Bonaventure. The area of props intrigued Edna and she contributed in this way to Veronica's Room, followed by being cast in When We are Married. This year, Edna has worked on props for every production including the one in

rehearsal at present, and is also on stage for Separate Tables.

The need to create and provide many props for a pantomime "is a challenge to me," Mrs. Ferguson said, and the individual must have ingenuity and creativity in order to come up with larger than life props. Edna Ferguson goes on to say "working with a compatible group of people gives you a warm feeling of belonging to the group". As a backstage worker, all jobs are "interlocked, which builds into terrific team spirit".

A vivacious, fun-loving person, Edna Ferguson hopes to be cast in some future GLT comedies as well as work in makeup, the latter, after taking a workshop. In regard to the need for a new theatre in this community, Mrs. Ferguson feels the "paying public deserves a comfortable environment to enjoy theatrical culture, an atmosphere conducive to an evening out." This thespian will be playing "Mabel" in GLT's forthcoming play.

'Separate Tables'
Feb. 23, 29
March 1
Sacre Coeur Hall

Joyce Holland, a Bristolian by birth, took up residence in Canada in 1966. Starting in Toronto, the Hollands sought a small-town environment and ultimately chose a home in Moore Park, Georgetown.

DRAMA LESSONS

Theatre captured Mrs. Holland's interest at the age of 12 while attending boarding school. She later took drama lessons from Hedley Goodall, well-known British dramatist. After marriage, Joyce joined a women's drama group in Bristol before moving to Southampton. Once settled in Canada some time later, she took up this interest by joining GLT.

An experienced actress, Mrs. Holland has played many roles, but she enjoys backstage

work with equal fervor. She feels "an actor should be willing to help backstage in order to fully understand what goes on to make her or she look good under the lights".

While doing properties for plays, Mrs. Holland goes on to say "this job requires great organization and a lot of cheek to find out where to borrow items needed". The job of props requires total dedication to this area of stagecraft and she stated, "you are responsible to all other cast members".

As wardrobe chairwoman for GLT, Mrs. Holland is well acquainted with the stock of costumes. She enjoys sewing and says, "wardrobing a show is a challenge when you are required to dress many different characters". Browsing around stores looking for inexpensive material is another interest, and she indicated to the writer "you must study the characters in a play and read the play three or four times before formulating a concept in your mind about how to dress them". The director has the last say but "he looks to the wardrobe mistress for a way to achieve what he wants".

MURDER MISTAKEN
Having been "prompt" or script assistant several times, Joyce says, "in this function, one can really see the director at work". Two memorable roles were that of Emma in Murder Mistaken, as well as Daphne in The Mumberley Inheritance.

Being a member of GLT "brings people together", Mrs. Holland comments, and "a pleasant social life together with an outlet for creativity, is only slightly surpassed by the joy of the team spirit generated during a play".

The role of Sibel in Separate Tables "is a challenge", Mrs. Holland remarks, as it is "totally unlike my own character".

"Hope to build this character to greater depth before the play opens February 22 at Sacre Coeur Church Hall".

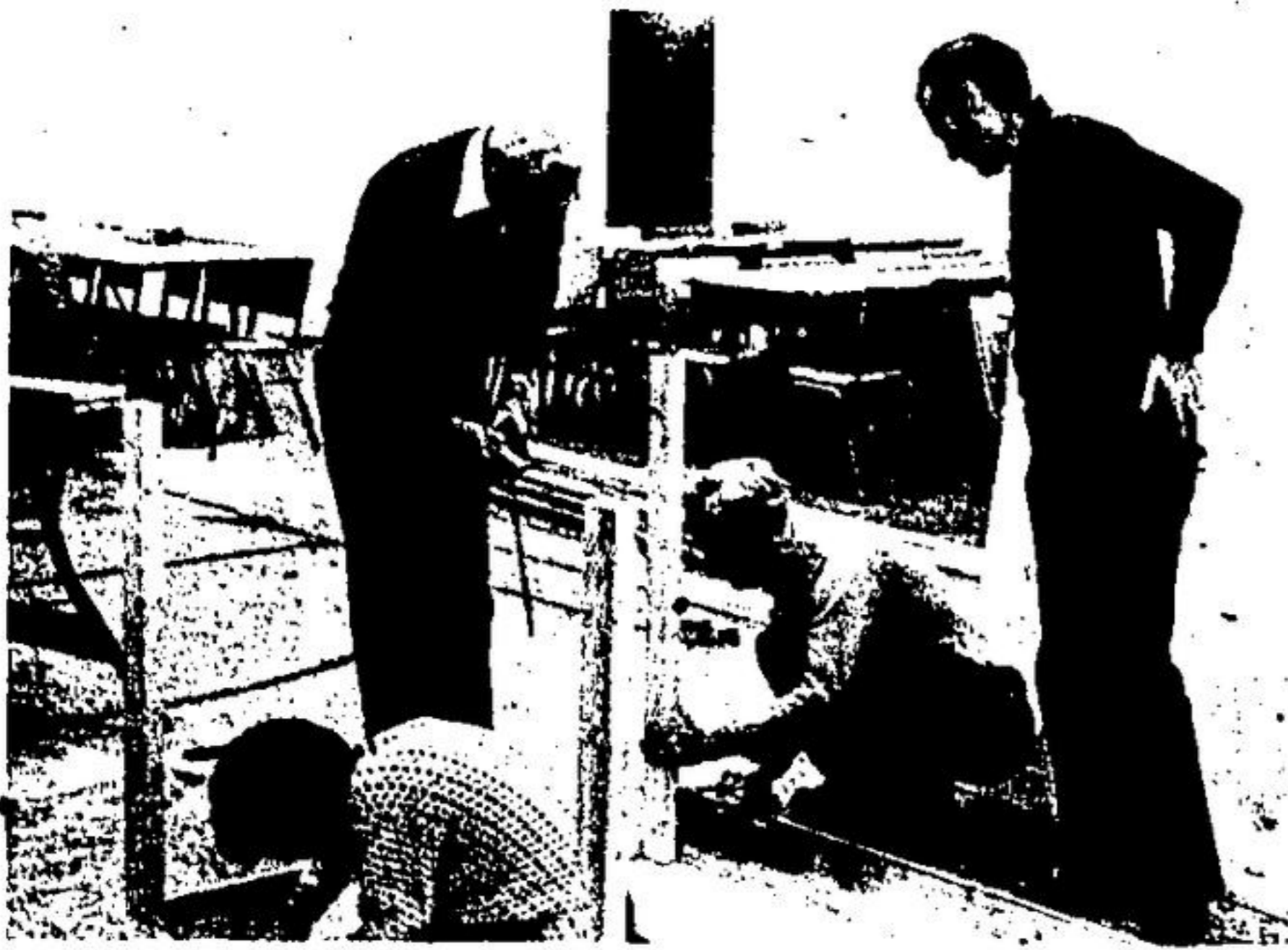
While Canada was maturing from the embryo stage to adolescence in the field of performing arts and related stagecraft techniques, this country embraced many knowledgeable arts-oriented people from other parts of the world. Over the last 20 years, Stratford, Shaw Festival and Theatre London in Ontario alone, have elevated the standard of professional theatre in this country.

As community theatre feeds to the professional theatre, we are indeed fortunate to have a quartet of Brits come-Canadians in the midst of GLT, who perform ably as well as generate expertise in backstage stagecraft with dedication.

The women mentioned in this article are an example of self-disciplined thespians, a credit to the Canadian theatrical scene.



Hungry for entertainment? The GLT's Marie Cleaton, Val Stoddart, Edna Ferguson and Joyce Holland request the pleasure of your company at 'Separate Tables', opening a week from Saturday



Gerry Eggleton (far right) supervises GLT stage crew constructing set sections for the upcoming production of "Separate Tables", which opens Feb. 24. With Mr. Eggleton from left are Robble Ferguson, Frank Holland, and Jack Ferguson. (Herald photo)