

Noël Coward's

BLITHE SPIRIT

Directed by Scott Holland

An Improbable Farce in 3 Acts

9, 10, 16, 17, 23, 24

June 2017

Theater Rampe

Byfangweg 6

Basel



Performances at 19:30h, in English
Box office and Bar open at 18:45h
Tickets CHF30 (CHF25 for groups of 10 or more)



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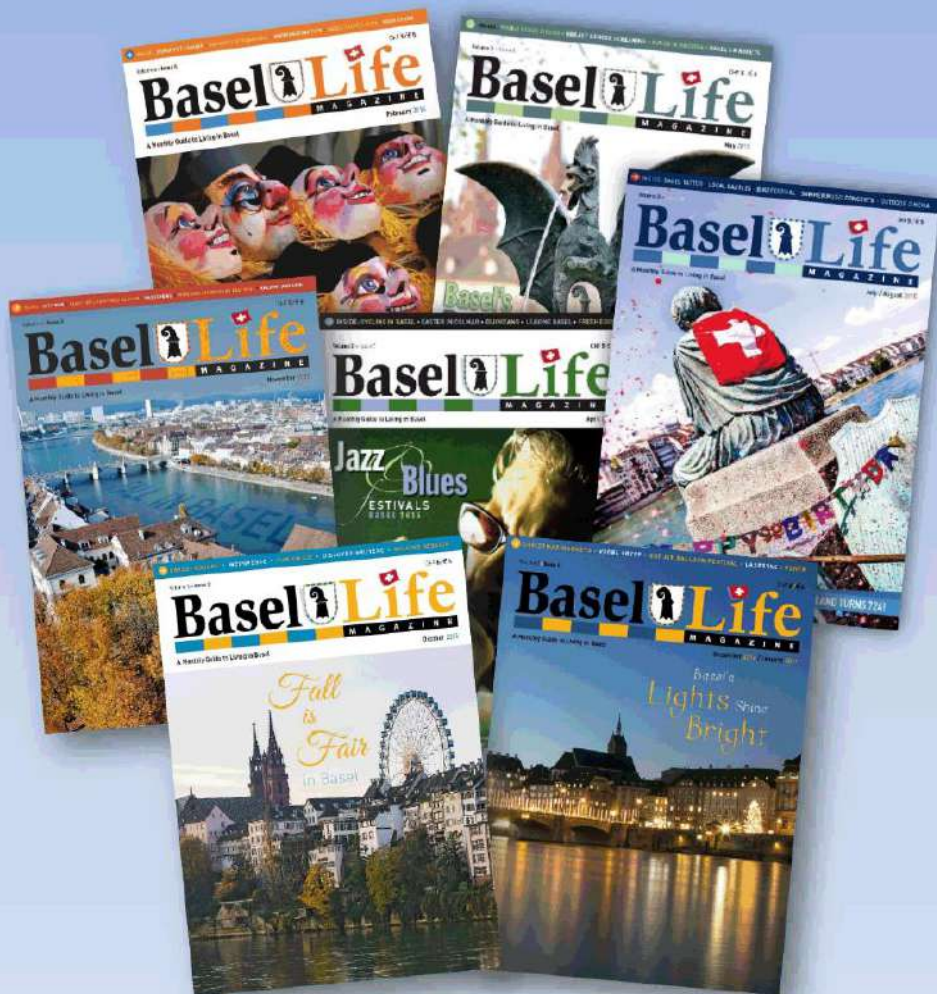
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Welcome from the President



A very warm welcome to Theater Rampe, Borromäum, where The Semi-Circle presents Noël Coward's *BLITHE SPIRIT*.

The Semi-Circle has been bringing English language theatre to Basel since 1975, and we have more than 95 productions to our credit. As a not-for-profit organisation, we rely entirely on the goodwill of volunteers. We do not own a theatre of our own, so we have to rent. We made our first appearance in the Borromäum in 1978, but then we strayed elsewhere for a while. However, we have been staging our June Productions here for several years now. We are always made to feel extremely welcome, so it is good to be here again, in Theater Rampe, for *BLITHE SPIRIT*.

Running a theatre group is like running a small business, and it is not always easy or straightforward. On the one hand, things do need to be thought through, planned, organised, budgeted, controlled and disciplined. On the other hand, this particular theatre group is also a Club, so in order to give people a chance to get involved, every time we put on a production we create a new team. Often the same people do come back for more, but even slight variations in the cast and crew creates a different chemistry combination, and it sometimes feels as if we are starting from the beginning all over again, and again, and again. One thing is sure, for these teams to work and for the whole thing to come together in the end, we need everyone: young and not-so-young, old hands and new hands, with and without experience, risk-takers and those who prefer to play it safe – yes, we need everyone, including you!

Which brings me nicely to the point of thanking every single member of the cast and crew of this production – more than 50 people in total – for their hard work, dedication, creativity and commitment, without which we would not have been able to bring Noël Coward's *BLITHE SPIRIT* to you. Now sit back, relax and prepare yourselves for an entertaining evening of elegance, wit, love, drama, tragedy, comedy and a certain amount of ectoplasm.

Thank you for being with us this evening.

Sue Newstead



Öffnungszeiten

Brasserie: von Montag bis Samstag 11.30 - 23.45 Uhr

Küche: 12.00 - 14.00 und 18.30 - 22.00 Uhr

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The Director's Note

Noël Coward is a legend of the English-speaking theatre world and a British icon, having written classic plays such as *Private Lives*, *Hay Fever* and *Present Laughter*.

BLITHE SPIRIT is one of his most famous and popular hits. It was written in 1941 during the London Blitz when the horror of warfare was in all the papers. It was at this time that Mr Coward traveled with a female friend to Wales for a holiday and, within seven days, this comedy was written, polished and completed. Shortly after this he noted in his diary: 'Wrote a very gay, superficial comedy about a ghost. Feel it may be good.'

A comedy without any mention of the ongoing war, the play opened at London's Piccadilly Theatre on 2 July 1941 and was an immediate hit, running for 1,997 performances. It broke the record for the longest-running West End production at the time.

Even more incredible, only two lines from the original manuscript were dropped and none were altered during rehearsals of what Mr Coward dubbed *An Improbable Farce in Three Acts*.

As our play begins, successful novelist Charles and his second wife Ruth are preparing to host a dinner party and séance to be conducted by an eccentric medium known as Madame Arcati. For Charles, it's a fun and humorous way to do research for a new novel, appropriately titled *The Unseen*. However, the evening does not go as he plans and results in the spectral reappearance of his first wife, Elvira, who has been dead for seven years. Charmed at first by the spiritual presence of Elvira, Charles quickly gets caught between the two wives to humorous effect.

There are many things in this play that are not what they appear on the surface, which spoke to me as an individual and first-time director. I have always enjoyed the sarcastic and witty repartee of Mr Coward's characters and thought it would be a directorial challenge to work on this. He also has a great deal of fun with themes that still resonate with audiences today such as marriage, fidelity, 'true love' and life after death.

Mr Coward took a gamble that writing a comedy about death would speak to his audience during the dark period of World War 2 and the success of *BLITHE SPIRIT* proved him correct. Without spoiling our well-plotted finale, suffice it to say that the forces of death are tamed here in a way that warmed the hearts of wartime theatre-goers.

While we live in Switzerland during a period of relative peace, my hope is that tonight's performance of this all-time classic will nevertheless entertain and warm the hearts of all of us currently living in a world of political uncertainty and change.

Scott Holland



Cast in Order of Appearance

Edith, the Maid
Ruth Condomine
Charles Condomine
Dr George Bradman
Mrs Violet Bradman
Madame Arcati
Elvira Condomine

Fiona Müller
Cathy Barker
David Cox
Michael Bray
Catherine Matter
Diana Zuger
Melissa Magarici

Synopsis

The action of the play takes place in the living-room of the Condomine's house in Kent.

Seeking information for his next book, successful novelist Charles has invited eccentric medium, Madame Arcati, to conduct a séance in his home, together with his second wife Ruth, and friends Dr and Mrs Bradman. Madame Arcati inadvertently brings the spirit of Charles' first wife Elvira into the house, creating a love triangle that has hilarious and – some may say – disastrous consequences.

ACT I

Scene 1	Before dinner on a summer evening
Scene 2	After dinner

INTERVAL – refreshments at the Bar

ACT II

Scene 1	The next morning
Scene 2	Late the following afternoon
Scene 3	Early evening, a few days later

ACT III

Scene 1	After dinner, a few days later
Scene 2	Early hours the next morning

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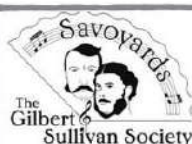
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David Cox as Charles Condomine

David has been a member of The Semi-Circle and involved in numerous productions for many years, as actor, director, and stage and lighting designer. Most recent credits with The Semi-Circle include Henry Smith in *The Extraordinary Revelations of Orca the Goldfish* (2014) for which he received the UK National Drama Festival Association award for best performance, and as director for *Entertaining Angels* (2015). The part of Charles in *BLITHE SPIRIT* has always been on his bucket-list of roles ... well, maybe not 'Always'!



Cathy Barker as Ruth Condomine

Cathy grew up in north-west England and has lived and worked in London, Yorkshire, Peru and Kenya before moving to Basel six years ago. Having not acted since she was quite a young thing, she is thrilled with the opportunities The Semi-Circle has given her to tread the boards once more – in productions such as *Calendar Girls* (2014) and *Alas, Poor Fred* (2016). Cathy works as a teacher and editor, and sings with the small, but perfectly formed, Basel Chamber Voices. Her idea of sporting activity is a nice cup of tea and The Guardian cryptic.



Melissa Magarici as Elvira Condomine

Melissa has worked in theatre, film and radio for most of her life. She is also a kitesurfing instructor, sailor, diver and wakeboarder. She joined The Semi-Circle in 2016, to take an acting role in *Dracula* – or, as she puts it, to be abused by an immortal Count from Transylvania. At the moment she enjoys teaching English, translating works of fiction and materialising into the world of the living to cause a bit of chaos ...

Cast

Diana Zuger as Madame Arcati

Diana has been in Switzerland since the swinging sixties and, as a Founder Member of The Semi-Circle, she has been involved, on stage and off, in productions too many to mention. Over the 40 or so years since The Semi-Circle began, Diana's acting roles have been many and varied including most recently *A Murder is Announced* (2013) and *Syrinx* (2015). From time to time she insists that she will hang up her acting shoes ... but who could refuse the iconic character of Madame Arcati!



Michael Bray as Dr Bradman

Michael is an Australian, born in Adelaide but brought up in the UK. His career as a medical research scientist brought him to Basel in 1981 and he retired from Pharmaceutical R&D only a couple of years ago. Retirement has allowed Michael to broaden his horizons. He became a member of The Semi-Circle some 18 months ago, initially coming along to the monthly play readings and then as front of house manager for the 2016 June and autumn productions.



Catherine Matter as Mrs Bradman

Catherine has lived and worked in Basel longer than she cares to admit, and has been a member of The Semi-Circle since 2014 when she joined the Club to take the male role of Scuzzy in *1-900-Desperate*. We were very pleased to find a good female role for her the following year as Sarah in *Entertaining Angels* (2015). Catherine has been performing with some other theatre groups recently, but she is thrilled to be acting again with The Semi-Circle, and in a full-length period piece at that!



Fiona Müller as Edith, the Maid

Since Fiona was at school she has been very interested in acting and, in recent years, she has played several roles in a Swiss amateur group. After attending drama courses in Vancouver and Glasgow, her wish to act in English grew even stronger. Fiona joined The Semi-Circle in 2016 as one of The Count's exotic and sensual Brides in *Dracula*. Now she is very excited to have a role in another Semi-Circle production – this time playing a completely different character as Edith, the Maid!



The Director

Scott Holland

Scott joined The Semi-Circle in 2007 to act in *As Good as New* with Director, Peter Hilton, and a cast of potentially off-beat in-laws, played by Susan Aeschbach, Sue Stafford and Richard Brown. Ten years later, the two Sue's and Richard join Scott again to bring *BLITHE SPIRIT* to the stage – this time as Assistant Director, Props Manager and Producer respectively.

Scott's most recent on-stage performances were in *The Zoo Story* (2016), and *My Apology* (2015). However, he has assisted in directing several productions and scene work in the US and here in Basel. For the last 5 years, he has been hard at work on the Semi-Circle Committee, as Secretary and now co-Vice President of the Club.



Production Crew

Director	Scott Holland
Assistant Director	Susan Aeschbach
Producer	Richard Brown
Stage Manager	Alison Bolton
Assistant Stage Manager	Kirsten Gräser
Stage Hands	Heather Genini, Dragan Gelev, Hansueli Müller, Gabi Solomon, Tanja Spichty
Stage & Set Design	Scott Holland, Richard Brown, Ash Chumber
Set Build	Ash Chumber, Richard Brown, Bernard D'Alwis
Set Dressing Consultant	Jolanda Gilbert
Light & Sound	Jerome Salyers, Billy Gilbert, Michael Clarke
Props Manager	Sue Stafford
Costumes	Caroline D'Alwis, Marlis Miller
Make-up	Barbara Bekalska, Helen Baldomero, Valentina Dalessa, Irem Gurbuz, Elena Degl'Innocenti, Amy D'Alwis
Front of House and Box office	Sue Newstead, Edward Atkinson, Corinna Balfour, Adrian Chess, Miriam Cohn, Jan Hawley, Louise Houghton, Maggie Jagger, Sharon Marshall, Sarah Nevill, David Nevill, Ralf Pfaff, Joy Scherer, Val Walder
Bar	Chris Jones, Peter Hilton, Wendy Monard, Tim Seabrook
Publicity	Sue Newstead, Billy Gilbert, David Laurie
Artwork Design	Ruth Lowe
Photography & Programme	Ralf Pfaff

Special thanks to all family members of the committee, the director, the cast and crew – without their support and patience this production would not have come to the stage.

Oh friends ... it doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman; if you love somebody, these are the words that you have to learn to say. Now listen carefully. Here it comes ...

I'll be loving you, always – with a love that's true, always – when the things you planned, need a helping hand, I will understand, always, always – Days may not be fair, always – that's when I'll be there, always – not for just an hour – not for just a day – not for just a year, but always.

'Always' by Irving Berlin 1925 (Act I, Scene 2)

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Noël Coward

by Scott Holland

Noël Peirce Coward (1899-1973) was an artist who epitomised British elegance and sophistication in the theatre and in life. His public persona was frivolous and seemingly pretentious, but his pen was a sword that cleverly sliced up hypocrisy and questioned contemporary morals around unspoken topics such as adultery and upper-class privilege.

He was born 16 December 1899 in Teddington, England, into what he called "genteel poverty". Noël was intelligent, temperamental, and a natural performer from an early age, making his first stage appearances in amateur concerts at seven years old. He loved to dance and sing and threw terrible tantrums if he was not summoned to perform for guests at home. He made his public stage début aged 12 and quickly made friends with the adult artists in the theatre, finding his way into middle- and even upper-middle-class circles in and around London. From these social circles he observed and created the material for his plays.

Coward was considered a boy genius of the West End stage in the 1920's and 30's, during which he wrote and often acted in his own plays such as *The Vortex* (the play that secured his fame aged 25), *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives* and *Design For Living*.

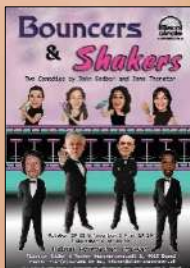
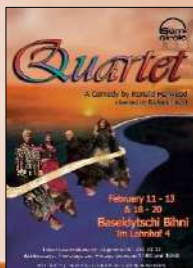
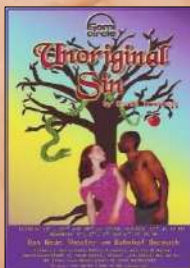
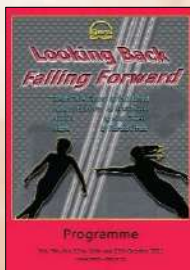
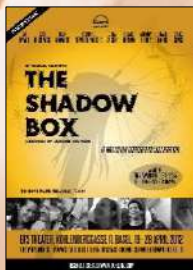
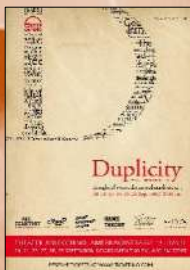
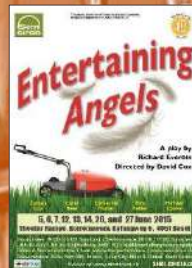
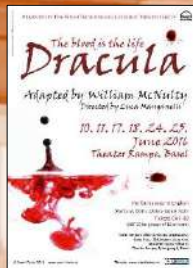
He was renowned for writing witty and conversational dialogue for his characters which was unique in a time of exclamatory theatrical scripts. Thus, many of his earlier plays were successfully adapted for the screen in the early 1930's.

Through the 1930's, Coward produced several plays for the West End and Broadway, splitting his time between London, New York and Paris. By 1940 he had written 32 plays – *BLITHE SPIRIT* followed in 1941 – and approximately 140 tunes, including the hits 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen Go Out in the Midday Sun' and 'Don't Let's Be Beastly to the Germans'. Among his films were *Cavalcade*, *In Which We Serve* and *Brief Encounter*. He also became a celebrity in his own right, making personal appearances on television and as a cabaret artist.

In the 1940's Coward settled in Jamaica. A reporter once asked him why he chose to live in Jamaica rather than in Britain, to which he replied 'I can answer that in just two words - income tax.' He built a home there and entertained lavishly.

Sir Noël Coward received a Knighthood in 1970 in recognition of his talents and service to his country. He died on 29 March 1973 at his home in Jamaica. In 1984, a commemorative stone was placed in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Along with his music, film and oft-produced plays, a constant stream of articles, biographies and documentaries keep his image alive as the personification of wit, gentility and elegance.



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- ☛ Andreas Rasp and team from Theater Rampe, Borromäum
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