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Published by East Finchley Newspapers, P.O. Box 3699, London N2 8JA. www.the-archer.co.uk



By Adam Justice-Mills

Mad March is here, with everything in the garden springing up, clocks springing forward and fuel prices climbing skywards. How to keep those bills down?

It always takes me a couple of days to adjust to the new time: the last clocks I do are the central heating and the car clock. Adjusting central heating timers to when we're actually in the house (and lowering the thermostat, of course) makes significant savings on heating bills. With care, we can dry laundry outside for the first time in ages, saving on tumble dryer costs (and electricity consumption and CO₂). By April, we might not need heating at all, most days.

We don't use our car every day but it's too old to be fuel-efficient and too young for the scrappage scheme, so I need to be careful when I use it. I've started putting in a fixed quantity of fuel which, as the cost goes up and up, makes me fill up more often, highlighting my fuel use.

I'm also learning to drive to save: easy on the throttle and anticipating to reduce braking. I'm cycling to work again, so that helps too. Some cars can convert to "green" fuel but bio-ethanol is going to be a long-term problem because of the water-to-grain-to-ethanol issue. A quarter of the annual 400 million tonnes of grain from the US already goes on bio-fuel, so it's not really sustainable. Electric cars might help and I'm looking into that.

Spring's a great time for gardens and this year we've got some plants from last year's seeds coming up. Seed swaps are fun and excess seeds get used locally, where they're likely to survive. I've been working with a group making a forest garden over the winter. For now, I'm watching my willow "fedge" sprouting and looking forward to foraging fun in summer.

Troy Boy

Review by Angela Anderson

If you like puns, head for The Gatehouse in Highgate Village to see *Troy Boy* directed by Kit Hesketh-Harvey, using his own translation of Offenbach's *La Belle Helene*.

The title of the musical sets the tone for jokes like "He's Homer-phobic" and "Don't worry, Achilles, that scratch will soon heal".

The lively action for *Troy Boy* begins in suburban England where the beautiful Helen is fed up with her very boring husband. A trip to the local Greek restaurant and an encounter with the handsome waiter from Troy leads to Helen and Menelaus being transported to live with the gods and goddesses in ancient Faliraki and the story of Helen and Paris told.

The Merry Opera Company is a new company which aims to make opera accessible and fun. I particularly enjoyed the performances by Anthony Flaum as Orestes, played as a streetwise, lascivious wide boy and Marcin Gesla as Agamemnon, who had a wonderful rich deep baritone voice and a commanding presence.

Musical director Stephen Hose, playing keyboard, leads five musicians playing cello, violin, clarinet, flute, viola and saxophone. Their spirited 19th century café-style perfectly complements the singing.

Kit Hesketh-Harvey is largely known for his work with Kit & The Widow and regular panel appearances on Radio 4's Just A Minute, but

he has been adapting, writing and translating since 1988. His quick wit and humour are evident throughout the production. *Troy Boy* runs till 5 March at Upstairs at The Gatehouse in Highgate Village. For information, telephone 020 8340 3488 or visit www.upstairsatthegatehouse.com

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The cast of *Wind in the Willows*, another hit for Create. Photo by Michael Cronshaw.

The Wind in the Willows

Review by Isobel and Grace Cronshaw, aged 11 and nine

The Create Theatre School put on its latest performance *The Wind in the Willows* on 6 February and the Finchley Youth Theatre was packed to witness a great show. With perfect casting of 40 children aged between three and 12, and the woodland characters we love, including Toad, Ratty, Mole, and Badger, it was filled with good songs and great singing.

We particularly liked the cleverly hidden microphones that added real punch to the tuneful vocals. A lot of thought had gone into the production. The scenery and costumes were very professional, and when Mole got lost in the Wild Wood a couple of snow machines provided a realistic wintry blast.

Our favourite scene was the trial of Toad. When he was found guilty the entire court burst into song with the verdict ("Twenty Years!") and pointed the way to prison. We also enjoyed the stoats ("too bad to be in a boy band") who were all dressed like old-fashioned gangsters and added a creepy edge. At one point all the woodland creatures started tap-dancing: not something you see very often in Cherry Tree Wood.

After the hit performance, we managed to grab an interview with Maddie (Mole), Niva (Badger), and Sona (Otter). They told us that they were doing four performances, had been practising for about five months (wow!), and that they got their parents to help them learn their lines.

We also thought that the raffle in the interval for the East Finchley Bobath Centre, which raised more than £310,

was a great idea (and not just because we won a prize!). For more information go to www.createtheatreschool.co.uk.

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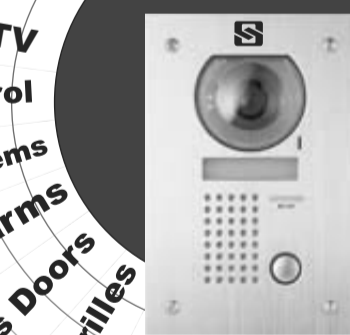
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