



April — May 2021

Hi Kelvinians

I hope this edition of *The Jester* finds you and your loved ones well and safe and bearing up in these continuing difficult times.

In this issue, several obituaries by long time Kelvin members celebrate the life of the highly valued Kelvin member **Lis Miller**, who sadly died recently.

Some Kelvin activity continues from time to time on the Kelvin Facebook members' page; and I can strongly recommend checking it regularly to see what else is going on and for announcements (facebook login required):

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2364145819/?ref=share>

Do check out our website: www.kelvinplayers.co.uk and follow us on Twitter, Facebook etc

As in recent months, activity continues to be much less because of covid, and with the likelihood that this will continue now at least until late spring, *The Jester* for the time being will be much briefer when it does appear.

Online Rehearsed Readings (ORRs) are suspended indefinitely until and unless I receive a request (and some submissions as well) to start them again.

If you have anything at all to send me for inclusion in the next issue of *The Jester*, you can do so at any time by emailing it to me at: jester@kelvinplayers.co.uk

So depending on whether there is anything worthwhile to report, the next *Jester* will be at the beginning of June. If not, then I'm afraid that *The Jester* will not appear and I will suspend production of *The Jester* until such time as things change.

Geoff Collard (editor)

The deadline for the next *Jester* is always given in the current edition of *The Jester*, so you can always check the deadline in the most recent issue of *The Jester* if you're unsure

(so, depending on what happens as regards anything to report) please note in your diary! -

The deadline for the next *Jester* will be Saturday May 29th 2021

A Message of Hope from the Artistic Programme Committee

We're all having a rough time at the moment, right? And I know that suspending Kelvin's 2021 season was a proper gut-punch for many of us, yet ultimately the right thing to do. It was a difficult decision to make, and one that feels as though we've been left with nothing to look forward to, at least for a very, very, very long time...

Well I am glad to announce that we may have something for you to cautiously anticipate after all! The APC met up recently to discuss the notion of Kelvin hosting a series of live performances this summer – shows that would include the whole membership, everyone will have the opportunity to participate – and we would like to start the process of gathering ideas and thoughts from you all, before we settle down to the business of organising it.

We know the club has a wealth of absolute talent within its membership, so we're really looking for **anything** you fancy performing – poetry, singing, mime, dance, comedy, dramatic reading, storytelling, improvisation, as well as the more traditional monologues and straightforward acting-type stuff, and so on – you could give your own TED talk on the history of the ball bearing if you like – we are very much open to all suggestions at this stage!

There will be a few things for you to initially consider:

All performances will need to adhere to whatever government guidelines are in place at the time – but obviously, we can't predict what they might be, however we're assuming some kind of Tier 2 level restrictions are likely, so that's a no-no for your large cast dream play, sorry (solo work ideally, or small casts within a bubble should be acceptable)

There won't be any chance of furnishing you with a huge budget, I'm afraid – you'll need to source your own props, costumes, set etc. Think the minimal, stripped back, simplistic look of the Rehearsed Readings. Use your imagination. Think outside the box, get creative! There's always the red leather sofa from the Morris Room (unless Jacqs has thrown it away)

Also, don't forget performance rights. We are actively encouraging you to use your own work, but if you must use a licensed piece please find out firstly whether you are allowed to, and if so, how much it would be for one performance. I don't want to rule anything out right now, but we don't have loads of money to pay for everyone's licensing fees.

Those are the key things to bear in mind for now. We don't yet know when this will take place, how it will work, whether we'll have a paying audience or just the membership (maybe a mix of both), what lighting/sound is available, whether you'll have tech crew or not – we simply don't have the answers to those questions yet.

All we can do at this time is ask for your ideas about what you would like to perform, and go from there.

Have a think, please – you can chat to us about it, if you like – and in the meantime, keep wishing (or praying, if that is your jam) that we are able to perform in our wonderful theatre this summer, and get our audiences back ready for whenever the main shows return.

Email me artisticdirector@kelvinplayers.co.uk or contact any of the APC (Al Hedderman, Angela Markham, Alice Chadwick, Rick Procter-Lane, Simon Shorrocks, Chrissy Fryers) for a chat, we'd love to hear from you.

Hopefully, we'll have more news soon. Take care everyone,

Fran Lewis (APC)

*** A note from the editor of *The Jester***

Regarding the above, it occurs to me to wonder whether the APC is also considering the possibility of outdoor performances in the spring and summer which, once the weather is warmer, could perhaps be performed somewhere outside on Gloucester Road and /or somewhere in the city centre. As well as being good for us all, such events would be a good way of promoting the club and also for us being seen as engaging with the community.

Geoff Collard

Elisabeth (Lis) Miller

28th February 1939 - 22nd February 2021



Lis in the Kelvin production of *Breath of Spring* 1970

Honorary Member Lis Miller was a formidable lady who demanded commitment and high standards from those brave enough to take on a role in anything she stage managed, however this was no more than she herself gave and they soon found that, if they didn't mess with her, her bark was worse than her bite and she had a very bright twinkle in her eye. She was a skilled director and producer but her real talent was in stage management and she contributed a great deal to Kelvin in the 70s and early 80s. Incidentally it was Lis who insisted that the roles of producer and director should be differentiated. Until then the roles had been combined under the title of 'producer'. She pointed out that this would be unheard of in the professional theatre and insisted on the term 'director'.

Lis did not suffer fools gladly but was generous in her mentorship of inexperienced people including the Bellinger family, mother Ann and daughters Jacquie and Vicki all of whom developed many backstage skills under Lis's tutelage.

My daughter's first reaction when I told her of Lis's death was, "I remember! She was the lady who knitted a jumper out of her dog's combings!" She had patiently saved up the hair from grooming her dog, had it spun into yarn and then knitted the aforesaid garment.

Lis left Bristol to move to Devon and became well known in the local non-professional theatre which included directing productions like *The Vigil* in Exeter Cathedral.

Lis was very proud of her Scottish roots. I'm not sure what these were as she spoke in a very posh English RP accent but she always had a half bottle of whisky stashed in the OP corner when she was stage managing, and would share a 'wee dram' with those of whom she approved.

She was always very proud of her sets and regarded the actors as an inessential nuisance. Heaven help anyone who messed with her set!

Lis and I kept in touch after her move and Dugald and I visited her in her unusual mews property near Axminster. Sadly she was increasingly troubled by arthritis in the last few years and the distinctive addressed note cards which she always used for correspondence became fewer although we did speak on the phone from time to time.

So another great Kelvin character, unknown to all but a few of the present membership, has passed on. However her strong character and insistence on the highest standards at all times have helped to mould Kelvin in the path of excellence for which we continue to strive.

A toast in her beloved amber liquid might read:

*Here's tae us, wha's like us?
Damn few, and they're a' deed!*

Happy memories Lis. *Slainte mahth!*

Mary McCallum

Lis Miller, Honorary Life Member of Kelvin, died on 22 February.

Lis joined Kelvin on 19th August 1968 and immediately became involved in Eric Turner's production of *Something to Hide* staged at the old YMCA Theatre in Trenchard Street. Her impact was immediate since early in 1969 Lis was offered and accepted the position of Assistant Stage Manager and was co-opted to serve on the Kelvin Committee in that capacity. The following year saw Lis make her debut (and only, - I believe) stage appearance in David Sharp's production of *Breath of Spring*. Lis went on to stage manage and direct many productions over the years always trying to encourage new and untried members to get involved. Indeed she was responsible for encouraging John Cousins and myself to become members.

Lis was an extremely well organised person bringing those talents to bear on all aspects of Kelvin life. She was one of those people, I suspect, that if she took to you, you were tolerated and pardoned from any minor indiscretion that involved her. If not, no!! Forget it!!

In later life, after she had moved away from Bristol to Axbridge in the early 1990s, I kept in touch sending Christmas cards each year until one year no card was received. On ringing her after Christmas to ask her if everything was all right she replied 'Yes I am are you?' I said 'yes' and 'only I was concerned because I hadn't had a Christmas card from you' How do you know you sent one ' came the reply 'because the address was computer generated and Denise signed it on your behalf!' I learned a lesson in social etiquette from this always writing a note from then on!

For Kelvin, Lis chaired the committee which organised the Diamond Jubilee celebratory dinner held at the historic Great Hall of Bristol Grammar School. Such was her organisational eye for detail, the man who was engaged to play discotheque music wrote (I suspect in exasperation) that he had performed before royalty, and on a good many other prestigious public occasions and he could not recall having received so many letters and instructions before in his working life relating to one event!

Lis served on a Premises Purchase Committee to identify properties that might be suitable for a Kelvin home when the decision was taken in 1985 to find a suitable alternative building to replace the rapidly deteriorating Somerset Street premises.

One last memory. Having slogged away writing two volumes of the detailed Kelvin history, it was Lis who rang me to say 'well done, oh, and the word to introduce the text is 'foreword' not 'forward'. Thanks Lis!!

So many more memories, all of them positive, and so many bringing a sad smile to the face. Lis leaves a sister and niece to whom are sent our warmest thoughts.

Richard Jones

“She taught me everything I know” *Funny Girl*

In 1973 I joined the Mercury Players, a summer group made up of a few various drama and musical groups within Bristol, the first of its kind at the time for a production of *Oh What a Lovely War*.

This is when I was first introduced to **Lis Miller** who was in charge of props. She was terrifying and someone you did not cross. The following year for Mercury's production of *Cabaret* she became Stage Manager and the year after during “Sweet Charity” Lis invited me to join the Kelvin Players ...I must have passed her test ... working backstage for June Wilson's production of *Out of the Question*, I was a novice to this side of a production being a performer, and so she took me under her wing, and I could not have had a better teacher. She would give me time and explain in detail as well as having patience. She had a vast knowledge which she was prepared to share. She would never ask anyone to do anything she was not prepared to do herself, which is something I still believe in to this day. After each production the workshop and flats would be cleaned, repaired and put in order for the next production. She liked things put in order and expected a professional standard. She could be stubborn and very self opinionated and liked a good argument, especially political, but she had a softer side and was always there to help and support when required. Unknown to people, on a Friday night after the show Lis would leave the theatre to help answer the telephones for The Samaritans.

I spent many hours in her company, especially the pub, she liked a drink and could drink most men under the table. I have many stories and memories but most of all as the song from *Funny Girl* goes ... “She taught me everything I know”... backstage, for which I will be always grateful.

John Cousins

My first play with **Lis Miller** was *Duet for Two Hands* and I remember her directing me to walk onstage as head of the household with authority, which I thought I did. Lis stopped me and told me to do it again and not to do my tart's walk. I did not take offence and learnt to appreciate this side of her character over the years.

We shared a big doggy interest and kept in touch with all her latest happenings, Christmas cards etc.

I know Lis was always in touch with Kelvin members from her era, and I will always remember her strong views and personality to match.

Christine West

Street Art, Lis Miller and me!

I was saddened to hear of the passing of **Lis Miller**, who, back in the day was a key member of Kelvin. I met Lis way back in the mists of time; well 1971 to be precise.

I was invited to design the set for a Kelvin production of *Two Stars for Comfort*, directed by Sally Noble, to be staged at the YMCA theatre in Trenchard Street, off Colston Avenue. It was a bit scary to be honest. I was just 20 years old and it got even scarier when I met Lis, Kelvin's Stage Manager, set builder et al!

She was tall, somewhat austere looking with hair firmly fixed in a tight bun and a manner that suggested she would stand no nonsense. In the company she was referred to as "She who must be obeyed"; but by heck she knew her theatre craft.

Kelvin was based in Kingsdown in those days. We were in a Mews building comprising a former carriage space at street level and a tack room upstairs. Downstairs was for all things technical, scenery, lighting, props store etc; it was chock full. Upstairs was the rehearsal space. The whole thing was significantly smaller than the Studio Hall and this is where "Street Art, Lis Miller and me" comes in.

The set for '*Two Stars*' was the lounge bar of a riverside pub, and everything was built and painted out on the street at weekends by Lis and me; all at the mercy of English spring weather.

I very soon learnt that whilst Lis' no-nonsense reputation was well-deserved she was a joy to work with. She also had an immense charm which she could turn to good advantage when needed. Courage's Brewery was based in Bristol by the Docks and somehow Lis managed to borrow pretty much everything we needed from them; furniture, bar, shelving, optics, pumps the lot. She even managed to get the beer free, all for a complementary full page advert in the programme!

Since 1929 Kelvin has had members who have come and gone. Some have left a legacy which is built into the very fabric of Kelvin. Lis Miller was one of them.

Robin Turner

From **Vickie Lennard**

The first time I met **Lis Miller** she had a glass of whisky and a cigarette in one hand, a paint brush in the other, a slightly lopsided smile and a twinkle in her eye. I joined Kelvin Players at the age of 17 and although I joined as an acting member Lis soon recruited me to help backstage as much as possible - we had lots of fun together and I introduced my mother and father, Ann and Ron, and sister Jacqui to Lis and we became a well-polished and practiced team under Liz's exceptionally competent stage management.

Lis was an incredible character - a bit like indelible ink - once met, never forgotten!! Lis started the trend of painting a brick in the garage at Somerset Street of all the colours we used for a show, one brick, one colour - the show's initials were stencilled on top, and this was continued until the club moved premises, Lis always wondered what the buyers of the garage made of the stencilled coloured bricks and if they had any idea of what they indicated!

Lis was not only an extremely organised and competent stage manager but also a very talented director and it was always a joy to work with her. When she directed *The Gazebo* we were all heavily involved and at the get in on the Sunday morning Lis took her place in the middle of the auditorium at the College Theatre and was busy directing us all on getting the stage set - part of this involved a large wooden trellis which was to represent huge floor to ceiling picture windows and patio doors. Lis sat next to Ron and studied the wood structure being screwed together - "Ron, it's not going to fit!" she whispered "yes it will" replied Ron, "Are you sure?" questioned Lis and Ron nodded confidently. Once the structure was completed the majority of stage hands insisted that it would not fit in the gap. "Oh yes it will" asserted Lis and, of course, it did! The show was a huge success and we all enjoyed it immensely.

I moved away from Bristol many years ago and have always missed the theatre and Kelvin Players - but I stayed in touch with Lis and we would correspond a few times a year and would telephone and talk once or twice a year. When we did it was always just like old times and we would reminisce about our backstage days and the people we knew, shows we had seen etc. Although I only saw Lis usually once a year I will miss her terribly but always fondly and with a smile - she really was a great friend, lots of fun, full of mischief and delightfully naughty company.

Sleep tight dear friend.