



## CAAPA NEWSLETTER MAY 2021

Dear CaAPA members,

We hope this Newsletter continues to find all our members and your families, friends and loved ones healthy and safe as we continue to enjoy the easing of the lockdown. And especially for anyone who finds themselves alone: we hope that you are finding the courage and resilience to live with the changing guidelines, and able to keep spirits high despite the challenges. Summer is on the way and a new sense of hope!



The appeal for playlets on our theme **Action for the Church in Need** continues apace and has resulted in another very welcome submission. But we still welcome more, of course! Do be daring and post them!

*(The intended date for the event will (almost certainly!) be this autumn. See below.)*

***We also always welcome any news that members would like to share.***

***Are you involved in online projects – theatrical, musical, hobbies?***

***What are your future professional plans?!***

***How have you kept yourself busy during the lockdowns?***

***Have you learnt new skills?***

***Please do write!!***



***(for this Newsletter we are indebted to Michael Slater, Francesca De Luca, Jeremy Rowe, Jonathan Cooté and, as always for her formatting magic, Nadia Ostacchini)***

***This Newsletter contains only items submitted by members. Huge thanks!***

We begin by remembering the past members of CaAPA whose anniversaries occur at this time. This includes those who have made an invaluable contribution to the life of our predecessor, **The Catholic Stage Guild**.

***We start with our Memorial Book:***

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### **IN MEMORIAM (MAY)**

- 1992 JOYCE CARPENTER**
- 1992 MARIA BROWN**
- 1995 VISCOUNT FURNESS: VICE-PRESIDENT**
- 2001 RICHARD SHAW**
- 2007 CHARLES PEMBERTON: VICE-PRESIDENT**
- 2009 JOAN CAMPION**
- 2019 MARTIN KING**





ETERNAL REST GRANT UNTO THEM, O LORD, AND LET  
PERPETUAL LIGHT SHINE UPON THEM, MAY THEY REST IN  
PEACE. AMEN.

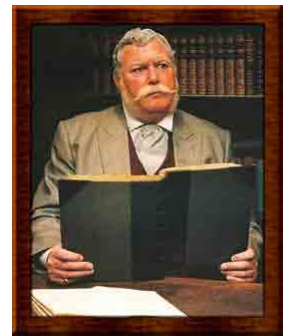
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*Michael Slater recorded these memories of several of our past members:*

**Viscount Furness**, *Vice-President*, came to the rescue of the Catholic Stage Guild in its early days, when it needed a base. He arranged the loan of one of his offices, until they were able to move to Corpus Christi.

**Charles Pemberton** was a very active Committee member for many years and the most supportive *Vice-President*. He was a very successful actor in the West End and on tour, and had a long and varied career on TV, appearing in *The Vicar of Dibley*, *Coronation Street*, *Doctor Who* and *All Creatures Great and Small*.

He performed his very successful one-man show *WS Gilbert - A Disagreeable Man?* at the CAA; a most wonderful evening!



Charles was a great pipe smoker and could be often found playing snooker in the old Green Room Club. He never lost his northern roots and had great charm and warmth.



Charles came up with a great idea when he suggested that we should get together with the **Actors' Church Union at St Paul's** Covent Garden. The senior chaplain was **Canon Bill Hall** and Charles suggested that we should share our Carol Service, which had been very successful for many years. The idea was that we hosted the service at **Corpus Christi** one year and the Actors' Church Union hosted at St Paul's the next. As MC, I had a wonderful relationship with Canon Bill Hall - he was so warm and

loved attending Corpus Christi and wearing a cope!

Our friendship was so solid that one year Canon Bill said at our after-service party, *"Every time Michael speaks he puts church unity back a hundred years!"*

Sadly, after the Canon left and **Theatre Chaplaincy UK** was formed, we had only one service at Corpus Christi and a new chaplain attended, **Lindsay Meader**. **Fr Alan** could not have given her a warmer welcome. However, the following year, 2017, the Rev Meader wrote that in future they were using their carol service to induct new assistant Chaplains; in 2018 they held a carol service with no mention of inducting any assistant chaplains!

All very sad. I can only pray that there might be changes in the leadership of Theatre Chaplaincy UK and we can resume our sharing in the future.



**Joan Champion** was a northern character actress, and always in demand on TV with her quirky sense of humour. Whenever she was free and happened to be in London, she would always give her time to appear in any production the Guild was presenting.



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**CaAPA HQ received this lovely letter from Francesca De Luca, a past member – a very much alive one! – from across the pond...**

I was a very active member of CaAPA in the past, especially in the days when it was called The Catholic Stage Guild. I was a member for about 20 years and was a former trustee. **Michael Slater, Richard O’Callaghan and Molly Steele** can vouch for me! The last seven years I’ve been living in LA pursuing my acting career.

**CHERISHED MEMORIES OF MY TIME AT CAAPA.**



When I was a longtime member of CaAPA and also in the days of it being known as The Catholic Stage Guild, those of you who knew me may have heard me read at numerous masses. It was always a pleasure to be chosen by Michael Slater to read at the Easter Vigil or at Christmas at The Actors Church.

I remember on one wonderful occasion The Mass of Thanksgiving for the restoration of Corpus Christi celebrated by the then Guild Chaplain Father John McDonald. It was a very special occasion, and I was honoured to be selected as a reader alongside the amazing **Patricia Hayes OBE, Joseph O Connor and Robin Marchal**. The Offertory of Gifts was given by **Frank Finlay CBE** and **Katy Slater**. Those present were **Moira Lister, Joan Turner, Margaret Savage, Frank Comerford, the Chairman of The Stage newspaper. Sir Alec Guinness** was there, often a regular at that time and we all went onto the beautifully historic **Garrick Club**, where we toasted Sir Alec on him being made a *Companion Of Honour* by the Queen. It was a humbling experience, looking back, at occasions such as these. I didn’t think it strange sitting next to Sir Alec, it felt pretty normal. Just another Catholic actor like most of us were, if you know what I mean!

Another fun time was travelling to Robin Hood’s town, to Nottingham Cathedral to do **Murder in the Cathedral** with the wonderful Richard O’Callaghan at the helm! Another time reading at a mass for the Cardinal. So many great memories, but you know, the ones that stand out the most were the camaraderie between the members, the genuine warmth, the laughter particularly from Michael Slater’s hilarious jokes! The proud look on my mother’s face when she heard me read the readings at mass. (She sadly passed away last year of Covid 19.) I really loved to bring the readings to life and put my heart and soul into them. Another random memory is of buttering the hot-cross buns so they would be ready for everyone after mass on Good Friday. When I was asked to be on the Trustee committee, I felt honoured and thankful to be part of such an enriching organisation that can help and uplift members’ lives.

Seven years ago, I decided to move to Los Angeles to pursue my acting career - it’s been a rollercoaster of an experience! Challenging times in getting the 01 Visa, now on the path to a Green Card. Rewarding times auditioning



and working with **Francis Ford Coppola** on his last **Live Cinema Project**, something I will always remember. Now television is beckoning. No-one goes on this path unless they love acting, a path that zigs and zags, twists and turns. This is my passion, so there's only the road forward. Remembering my faith in God has helped me during tough times. I'm grateful for those as I feel my sense of appreciation is even greater when life goes well; always learning, improving and connecting to others on this path is so valuable. That's why I look back with fondness of my time with CaAPA. I'll always cherish those memories. Connecting to each other, supporting, uplifting and loving each other is our greatest gift. Thank you to all of you who touched my soul at CAAPA.

Anyway, I would love it if you could add my headshot to the members' page! Thank you!

Wishing you much happiness with CaAPA and wishing you well!

Best Wishes

**Francesca De Luca**

*PS I changed my name to De Luca; previously I was Francesca Agati.*



*I have a wonderful newspaper clipping from years ago, when I was a reader alongside Patricia Hayes etc, for a big mass attended by Sir Alec Guinness and Frank Finlay. You may find it interesting!*

**Huge thanks Francesca for sharing your precious memories with us - and may your Mother RIP.**

**Perhaps in a future Newsletter you could regale us with your experiences of working with the revered director of The Godfather trilogy (hint, hint!!)**

## Actors attend Mass of thanks

Report by Michael Slater

EVERY month, a first Friday Mass for the Catholic Stage Guild is held, at 9.30 pm in the "Catholic Actors' Church", Corpus Christi, Maiden Lane, near Covent Garden, celebrated by a visiting priest with a special interest in and love of the theatre.

As Master of Ceremonies for the Guild, I have long given up preparing readers and prayers for the liturgy - last minute auditions, TV work etc mean that you have to create on the spot at 9.15 pm! However, this was not the case on July 1, a very special occasion with a Mass of Thanksgiving for the restoration of Corpus Christi, celebrated by parish priest and National Guild Chaplain Fr John McDonald, together with priests from Westminster, Brentwood and Southwark.

Before the service, soprano Evelyn Nicholson of English National Opera, and bass baritone Rudbeck Earl, taking time off from the Royal Opera House, joined together for Adams and Eve's duet from Haydn's *The Creation*. At the offertory, Evelyn sang *Hear ye Israel* from Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and Rudbeck sang César Franck's *Toutum Ergo Incarnatum* and Paur's *O Salutaris Hostia* during Communion. The organist was David Heyball, and the musical director was Jeremy de Barge.

Among those present at the

Mass were Sir Alec Guinness CBE, Frank Finlay CBE, Maura Lister, Margaretta Scott, Joan Turner, Margaret Savage, and Guild chairman Patricia Hayes OBE, together with Frank Cornford, chairman of the newspaper *The Stage and Television Today*, and his daughter Catherine Cornford, managing director of the paper.

Joseph O'Connor, Francesca Agati, Patricia Hayes and Robin Marchal contributed to the liturgy, while Margaretta Scott read the Actor's Prayer.

The offertory of the gifts was given by Frank Finlay and Katy Slater, a first year student from the Ross Bedford College of Drama.

After the Mass, there was a reception at the Garrick Club, an appropriate venue with all its theatrical history, where on ascending the grand staircase, you pass the

chair seats used by Sir David Garrick. During the reception a toast was proposed by Fr John McDonald to congratulate Sir Alec Guinness on being made a Companion of Honour recently in the Queen's Birthday Honours.

One of my most vivid memories of the evening is of when, having completed my duties on the summary, I found that Sir Alec Guinness was unable to get away because of the autograph hunters

surrounding him.

As I still had my smock on, I was quickly able to make a path for him, and, watching him depart along Maiden Lane, I realised what a master of disguise he is.

Putting on his hat at a jaunty angle, he strode off into the night, with his image instantly changed from Actor Knight, Companion of Honour, Commander of the Order of the British Empire - to just another "actor kiddie".



Guild vice-presidents Frank Finlay (left) and Frank Cornford, chairman of the newspaper *The Stage and Television Today* Photo: J. O'Connor.



Many thanks for the Easter Newsletter, which was delightful, and thanks also for including my bit about reading in Church. I'm attaching a kind of poster, which is self-explanatory, I hope. You might like to include it in the May issue.

All best wishes,  
Jeremy

## CaAPA PLAYWRIGHTS

The 'playlet evenings' (of which we hope to see another before long) have made a strong impression. There are Catholic writing talents which could go beyond the membership circumference, if people so desired. The evenings have also opened up the possibility of a new dramatic form.

We are seeking scripts of between 5 and 20 minutes in length, in order to create a single drama for professional and amateur presentation.

The subject chosen for the first experiment is the life and career of Constantine the Great. Differing views of his actions and personality will be welcome.

Royalties will be divided between the playwrights.

If you are interested in collaborating in this project, please email:  
collaborative.direct@btinternet.com

I will then send more details, together with a first draft of an initial play as an example

You do not need to be a historian. In the first instance, writers can find plenty of material and references on the internet.

## Collaborative Dramas ed. Jeremy Rowe.

*A very interesting proposal...*

*And now another two excerpts from Jeremy's diary: first -*

### CLOWNING

If I could be employed as a clown, which circus would I try to join? My preference would be the **House of Commons**. But I doubt whether they would have me. If a Prime Minister felt he had to leave 10 Downing Street before revealing his intention to become a Catholic, how fare I then at my age, and indiscreet as I am/? Perhaps a golf club? My spine would render me a non-playing member. Perhaps a circus.



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*... and this one recalls a memorable evening in 2017 at the CAA in Covent Garden -*

### THE DRAMA OF CHRISTIANITY

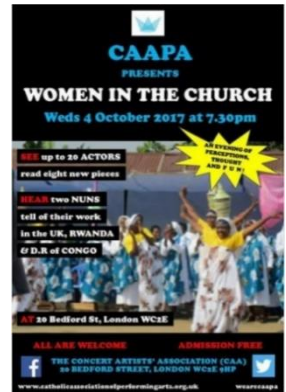
**October. 4<sup>th</sup>.** A rewarding and instructive evening with the Catholic Association of Performing Arts (CaAPA). First, there were eight short plays on the theme of **Women in the Church**. Not surprisingly, a recurring idea was the desire for women's ordination. Because the matter was





presented dramatically, it made better sense to me than when it is explored theologically. Could this be called 'dramatic theology'? Affections are to the forefront? For many, this would mean that it is not theology at all.

There was a mysterious play about the ambiguities for safeguarding, in which it was impossible to differentiate the restraints of the State from the guidance of the Church. The boundaries of Authority were in question. The drama was wrought out of an interview between a young woman whose conscience may, or may not, have been truly involved, when she witnessed a man falling to his death over a bridge into a river. The ambiguity stemmed from the quietly menacing interviewer, who said he did not have to name the organisation he represented. Echoes of *An Inspector Calls*.



My own play was about a deacon's wife, who wishes to join her husband in a vocation of a 'diaconal couple' – a phrase sometimes used in America. This play was drawn from **Bridie Stringer's** book '*Baptising Babies and Cleaning Gutters*', although the suggestion of realising the implications of 'diaconal couple' was my idea. Ten-minute plays are a fine concept. You can string them together like beads of different shapes and colours, and the refraction of their light is kaleidoscopic.

**T.S. Eliot** felt that he had to hide his Christian themes under the fabric of upper-class English society, but we (largely with his assistance) have gone beyond those requirements. We are in more delirious times, and have to face our challenges more transparently, with simpler methods, but with all the metaphor, simile, verse rhythms and spectacle that he employed. We need literary Baptism of situation and character. We need to give pleasure in ways that please God, and that will ask for a creativity to which we are not accustomed. And there will be fierce contests of intellect and emotion. In fact, there will be the refreshing reality of a renewed drama.



After the plays, the *Canonesses of the Holy Sepulchre* spoke very fluently, and with quiet passion, about their work with the underprivileged. They draw their ancient inspiration from the Cenacle, from the women who went to the empty tomb, and from **St. Mary Magdalene**, who was the first person to encounter the Risen Christ. They embody the theme of Women in the Church with their attitude of independence which lay at the heart of the beginnings of the Church, together with their vocation to look after the poor, thus defining a form of feminine authority. Women can aspire to this authority in so many ways without instituting their power in Priesthood. What could be a greater vocation than serving between the empty tomb and the figure of the Risen Christ?

He was nailed to a tree as a convicted blasphemer and criminal. He rose as the King of the Universe.



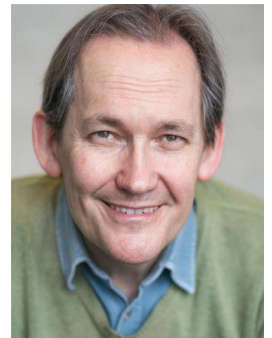


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*We've had another very welcome letter from a current member.*

*This is from Jonathan Coote:*

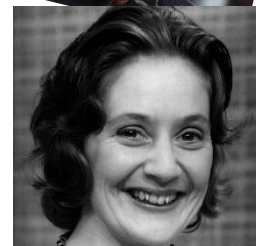
I thought you might be interested in a piece about my encounter with the late **Baroness Shirley Williams** (not that I encountered her when she was 'late', she was still very much alive at the time). I don't know if I've ever told you the story, but it might be suitable for inclusion as it has both a Catholic and a theatre angle. I'd originally sent it to The Times (without the reference to Corpus Christi and a few other 'actory' bits), but they seem to have spurned it. But, hey, their loss, CaAPA's gain?



A few years ago, I'd been invited to audition to understudy the roles of **John Major, David Cameron** and **Harold Wilson** in the West End production of **Peter Morgan's** play '*The Audience*', starring **Dame Helen Mirren**. On my way to the casting, I decided to pop into **Corpus Christi**, Maiden Lane and put up a candle. While I was in there, I noticed that Baroness Shirley Williams was in there doing the same. She left before me, but, when I emerged, I saw that she was still in Maiden Lane, looking in the window of a restaurant.

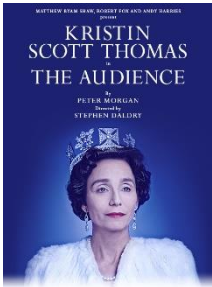
Regarding this encounter as not only an omen, possibly even heaven-sent considering the circumstances, but also an opportunity to glean some possible insider advice on how best to portray her former *Prime Minister Harold Wilson*, I politely waylaid her.

Once I'd managed to explain myself, she was utterly charming and very helpful, possibly a sign of her own youthful enthusiasm for theatre, and told me that she had been in the Cabinet when Harold Wilson had announced his shock decision to resign. She also said, with typical candour, that I was physically completely wrong casting for Wilson, but might get away with Cameron and, maybe, Major, at a push! This was not particularly what I wanted to hear at the time, but, as it turned out, she was completely right and I was eventually cast as understudy for **Gordon Brown, Anthony Eden** and **James Callaghan** - none of whom, I had originally been seen for. I was also cast in some smaller, supporting roles, including a very enjoyable cameo as **Cecil Beaton**.



Some time later, we had an open understudy performance for an invited audience and, on a whim, I sent her an invitation via the **House of Lords**, reminding her of our chance encounter and thanking her for having been 'my good luck charm'. As I'd more or less expected, I heard nothing, but when I returned home from the performance, I found a delightfully enthusiastic email from her, saying that she had indeed attended with a friend and enjoyed the play immensely, with some very complimentary, thoughtful and insightful comments about all our performances and the production as a whole.





It was a most memorable experience of a generous, warm-hearted individual who just happened to be a politician. The run of the play was an historic success, providing **Peter Morgan** with the inspiration for writing the series **'The Crown'**, and I subsequently appeared in the West End revival with **Kristin Scott Thomas** a year or so later, in which I added another character to my roster as the **Archbishop of Canterbury** in a new flashback scene of the Queen's Coronation.

*(I do have the original email she sent me which you could include but as it came via the House of Lords, there is a bit at the bottom about it being forbidden to publish or reproduce it elsewhere.)*

**Thank you for that fabulous anecdote Jonathan! And we'd better not publish your original email – we wouldn't wish you to end up in the Tower!**

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**And we have just heard that our administrator Jimena has given birth to a daughter! Huge congratulations from us all at CaAPA!**

Hi Kenneth,  
Thank you so much!!

She arrived at 42 weeks, had a lovely homebirth.  
She arrived on the 18th April weighing 7 lbs. Her name is Noa Brown.  
X Jimena



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**FUTURE DATES FOR THE DIARY** (assuming - & hoping - the government's roadmap to recovery doesn't change!)

- Wednesday 6 October 7pm at CAA Covent Garden: book launch (see below\*\*)
- Tuesday 26 October 7pm at CAA: CaAPA playlets evening: *Action for the Church in Need*
- Tuesday 16 November 7pm at CAA: CaAPA AGM
- Tuesday 14 December 7pm at CAA: CaAPA Christmas Dinner

**Michael Slater writes:**

**\*\* The book launch of *Beth* by Julia Scott on Wednesday 6 October. \*\***

Julia Scott asked if we could help to find someone to make a film of her book.  
I explained that we are not film makers!!

However, after reading her book, which has the support of **Cardinal Vincent Nichols**, I thought that we could help in providing the CAA for a book launch in which we could use the talents of our members by acting out excerpts from the book. Julia is so pleased that we can work together on this.







**Some background:**

"Beth is fifteen and pregnant, yet she is certain she has done no more than hold a boy's hand, let alone anything else.

She is innocent, inexperienced, in total denial, as her body takes on an existence alien to her and beyond her control. The domino effect that her experience has on those around her, together with their own life experiences, throws her into turmoil; but what will she do?"

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**Penny Culliford** has written an audio play on the famous *London Italian Joseph Grimaldi*, whose blue plaque can be seen on Exmouth market near St Peters Italian Church. It is produced by **Tricolore Theatre Company**, founded by **Nadia Ostacchini**.

Please go to the Home Page of: [www.tricolore.org.uk](http://www.tricolore.org.uk)

Penny and Nadia were also interviewed recently and will feature in a two-page article about Tricolore's work in **The Messenger of St Anthony** magazine sometime this autumn promoting, amongst other projects, our recent bilingual English/Italian Christian children's play supported by CaAPA: **'Un Bambino di Nome (A Boy Called) Porro'**, and which played at **The Pleasance Theatre** in December 2019.

*The Messenger of St Anthony* is read by over 600,000 people worldwide and published in Italian, English, German, French and Romanian. The article should feature in both the English and Italian language editions. Needless to say, they said they didn't fail to give CaAPA a little plug!



**THE TABLET SPRING FESTIVAL WEBINAR – Thursday 27<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2021:**



The price is £45 (incl. VAT) for a three-day ticket and you can book online via the following link: [www.thetablet.co.uk/events/96/the-tablet-spring-festival-webinar](http://www.thetablet.co.uk/events/96/the-tablet-spring-festival-webinar)

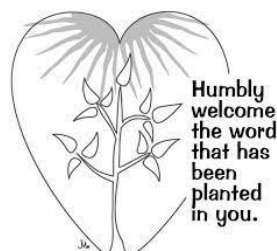
Some parts of the schedule still need to be confirmed, however there is quite a bit of detail on content and speakers.

At the bottom of the page on the above link, you will see that it says:

**For more information about the speakers click here (in red)** and this will lead you to speaker bios.

*NB: there will be recordings available at the end of the event which guests will be able to access.*

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# Catholic Association of Performing Arts

A reminder that *archive* copies of the Newsletter are available on the CaAPA website Members' area. You can access this only if you have a login and password. Do set up an account next time you visit if you haven't already registered.

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Lastly, please do send in any items you have written, or may be of interest to members, for inclusion in future Newsletters to [kennethmichaels@hotmail.com](mailto:kennethmichaels@hotmail.com)  
Feel free to send us any accompanying photos too!



Until next month, may you all remain safe.  
God Bless.

**Kenneth Michaels**  
**(Hon.Secretary).**

[@Wearecaapa](https://www.instagram.com/wearecaapa)

[www.catholicassociationofperformingarts.org.uk/](http://www.catholicassociationofperformingarts.org.uk/)



*Our diverse group of members, whom are comprised of actors, directors, writers, singers, musicians and other entertainers, share in a creative community where they can also grow in their spiritual values. We also aim to serve the wider community by presenting productions for charitable causes or by taking productions on tour to schools, local theatres, parishes and elderly*