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## The Ear, Nose & Throat Department

by Eric Shorter

There are many kinds of cough. There is the one we cannot help, like whooping. There is the cough courteous, a mild but audible clearing of the throat to announce our presence when unperceived by someone behind a desk. There is the cough direct, to attract attention as a warning to someone who is about to commit a social gaffe. And there is the smoker's before breakfast.

But the theatre seems to instigate, from time to time, a kind of coughing which is strangely infectious, making the rest of us suppose that half the audience has just risen from a sick bed to attend the play, or that they caught cold in a draughty coach on the way there.

Autumnal coughs? When it's autumn it is tempting to blame the season, the damp climate; and when coughs are written into

a play like *La Dame aux Camélias*, they seem to provoke a mysterious, sympathetic round of coughing from some of us as well.

But the kind of cough which fascinates me at the play is the cough subliminal - critical. That is to say, its victims do not know that they are being critical or that they are reflecting an artistic deficiency; but I would maintain that on some occasions they are and that the fault lies not in their throats, but in the throats of the players.

For it seems to me that more than not the coughing and clearing of throats, the sneezes and sniffles and rumblings of the gorge in theatre audiences signify not the presence of bacteria but the absence of attention. It is a failure to submit oneself utterly to the acting. In other words we aren't wholly there.

And whose fault is that? A delicate question; for the best of playgoers can be subject to lapses of attention, fits of day-dreaming, underlying anxiety, to prevent our complete absorption with the play before us. Who has not occasionally found himself, like a bored schoolboy, miles away when he ought to be listening?

When our mind should be on the play it's on our plans for tomorrow or the last train home or whether the baby-sitter is sitting properly. But even if we admit from time to time that our attention-span, as the doctors call it, is not as wide as it ought to

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## THE EAR, NOSE & THROAT DEPARTMENT

be and that while everybody else was plainly hooked by the show we were (to be frank) elsewhere, it is usually a sign that something is wrong on the stage. Especially if such palpable inattention is widespread, as it was at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford on Avon in the autumn for *King Henry the Eighth*.

Actors cannot be on their toes all the time. Nor can audiences. But on that particular night, with a packed house, and the usual mixture of students and middle-aged Americans, my theory about subliminally critical coughing seemed borne out with a vengeance.

Now, everybody knows that this play is not a masterpiece. It is not often acted and when it is the temptation to turn it into a pageant is hard to resist. How much of it Shakespeare wrote is disputed by scholars. Some say little, others say a lot; and the night I went it was tempting to credit John Fletcher with the whole yawnful thing, because it seemed so dull.

I do not suggest however that it seemed dull to all sections of the house but only to sections which were coughing. And those sections were the dress circle and the upper circle. Were the coughs and sneezes - one often inspires the other - an unconscious consequence of our not being able to hear the play as we would wish?

There was no proof, but from my perch in the front circle it wasn't hard to discern relative silence in the stalls. In other words the hearing was hard.

Whether a medical officer of health would have pronounced the upstairs people less fit than those below or tending to deafness or whether he would have sided with the idea that the noise was psychosomatic, it was obvious to an observer that the company wasn't holding us in pin-drop silence, though some of us may indeed have needed cough-drops or nose drops. The actors were just allowing their voices to drop to that level where it requires real effort to catch everything.

This isn't a question just of volume or projection. It is a question of vocal virtuosity; for if a player knows his job he can make us hang on every word, however softly he speaks. Since we were not thus hanging at Stratford on Avon, should we have concluded that the Royal Shakespeare Company didn't know its job? Or, more charitably, that the author hadn't put into their mouths words beguiling enough and situations compelling enough to hook us?

If you mention to managers or directors that a performance has been occasionally un audible, they will often complain of the auditorium's acoustics; and the acoustics at the Stratford aren't the best in the world.

But shouldn't the players master it?

A Brechtian band in the prompt corner (rather odd for the Tudor court) might have been accused of drowning the speeches except that it served to fill gaps in the action and to supply a sort of comment on what had just passed; but of course it isn't a play which traditionally gives excitement, save as a spectacle; and the RSC hadn't chosen to lean on spectacle as a let-out.

So there we were... hearing it rather than listening; and to my mind proclaiming its faintness by our coughs. I felt, amid the hubbub, like taking a deep breath and crying out: "Speak up, please!" as was the gallery's wont in my adolescence when a player couldn't be heard. But just as someone who coughs next to you can kill an actor's line and thereby lose him (and you) a laugh, any further interruption of the performance might only add to the sense (felt in the dress and upper circles but evidently not in the stalls) of our only overhearing Henry when we heard him instead of being button-holed. Or were we all in need of lozenges, perhaps even car-drops?

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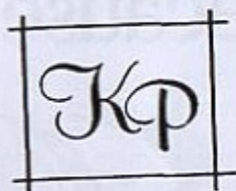


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# INTIMATE THEATRE

Green Lanes, Palmers Green, London N13 4DH  
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## Bob Dixon writes...

This week we welcome Enfield Light Operatic and Dramatic Society who present Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Gondoliers*. We wish them a successful week and hope they enjoy their stay with us.

Next week we have the Boden Studio Agency who present an enchanting musical *The Magic Carpet*, and the main star to capture everyone's heart is 'Rags' the lovable mongrel dog who makes his debut appearance. A perfect production for all the family.

*Cinderella* is our Christmas pantomime this year and we have a star-studded cast lined up with the multi-talented and zany lady Aimi Macdonald who plays Dandini, and the super actress and comedienne Sheila Bernette, together with Johnny Mans, Georgina Moon and Leo Dolan. Aimi Macdonald plays Dandini, Sheila Bernette the Ugly Sister Tutti and Johnny Mans plays Buttons. Both Sheila and Johnny return by public demand after their respective success in *Dick Whittington 1981* and *Jack and The Beanstalk 1982*. The beautiful Georgina Moon, playing *Cinderella*, is well remembered for her appearance in several *Carry On* films together with many television parts, notably as Miss Finch in *You're Only Young Twice*. Leo Dolan, playing the *Brokers Man*, has made many appearances on television and in pantomime to numerous to mention, but will be known more recently for his appearance in *Keep it in the Family* and *The Sword Divided*. This year we introduce the lovely Karen Clarke, a model from the "Sun" newspaper, as one of our spectacular dancers. Other artists include Brian De Salvo, direct from *Fiddler on the Roof* and Jeremy Bulloch from *Star Wars* and *Agony*.

With such a superstar line-up we feel sure this year's pantomime will be a great success. We have received lots of entries to our monthly raffle and the Grand Draw will be made during this week. So watch the post for your letter of congratulations yours maybe the lucky name drawn.

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## The Cast

The Duke of Plaza-Toro ( <i>a Grandee of Spain</i> )	<b>GORDON CORNELL</b>
Luiz ( <i>his Attendant</i> )	<b>COLIN ARROWSMITH</b>
Don Alhambra Del Bolero ( <i>the Grand Inquisitor</i> )	<b>ANTHONY GOLDING</b>
Marco Palmieri	<b>PETER JACKSON</b>
Giuseppe Palmieri	<b>HOWARD WRIGHT</b>
Antonio ( <i>Venetian Gondoliers</i> )	<b>RICHARD BODEK</b>
Annibale	<b>PAUL CODY</b>
Francesco	<b>JONATHAN MANN</b>
The Duchess of Plaza-Toro	<b>MARGARET WRIGHT</b>
Casilda	<b>JEAN STREETON</b>
Gianetta	<b>HELEN KIMBER</b>
Tessa	<b>CAROLINE FOURMY</b>
Fiametta ( <i>Contadine</i> )	<b>LIZ ARROWSMITH</b>
Vittoria	<b>SALLY PEARSON</b>
Giulia	<b>KATIE GOLDING</b>
Inez ( <i>the King's Foster-Mother</i> )	<b>DOREEN MAGEE</b>

### Ladies of the Chorus

**Liz Arrowsmith, Angie Box, Katie Golding, Chris Hadland, Marjorie Hanson, Julia Harris, Greta Jenkins, Marina Jones, Doreen Magee, Celia Mannock, Fran Markham, Sally Pearson, Valerie Wilson.**

### Gentlemen of the Chorus

**Richard Bodek, Paul Cody, Les Cooper, Mike Gilbert, Stan Goldie, Barry Hooper, Jonathan Mann, Alf Mousley.**

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## Musical Numbers

### ACT I

#### THE PIAZZETTA, VENICE, IN THE YEAR 1750

List and Learn .....	Contadine, Gondoliers, Antonio, Marco and Giuseppe
From the sunny Spanish shore .....	Duke, Duchess, Casilda and Luiz
In enterprise of martial kind .....	Duke of Plaza-Toro
O rapture, when alone together .....	Casilda and Luiz
There was a time .....	Casilda and Luiz
I stole the Prince .....	Don Alhambra with Duke, Duchess, Casilda and Luiz
But, bless my heart .....	Casilda and Don Alhambra
Try we life-long .....	Duke, Duchess, Casilda, Luiz and Don Alhambra
Bridegroom and Bride .....	Chorus of Contadine and Gondoliers
When a merry maiden marries .....	Tessa
Kind sir, you cannot have the heart .....	Gianetta
Then one of us .....	Marco, Giuseppe, Gianetta and Tessa
For ev'ry one who feels inclined .....	Marco, Giuseppe and Chorus
Then away .....	Ensemble

### ACT II

#### PAVILION IN THE PALACE OF BARATARIA (Three months later)

Of happiness the very pith .....	Chorus of Men with Marco and Giuseppe
Rising early in the morning .....	Giuseppe with Chorus of Men
Take a pair of sparkling eyes .....	Marco
Here we are at the risk .....	Fiametta, Vittoria, Tessa, Gianetta and Chorus of Girls
Dance a Cachucha .....	Chorus and Dance
There lived a king .....	Don Alhambra with Marco and Giuseppe
In a contemplative fashion .....	Marco, Giuseppe, Gianetta and Tessa
With ducal pomp .....	Chorus with Duke and Duchess
On the day when I was wedded .....	Duchess
To help unhappy commoners .....	Duke and Duchess
I am a coutier grave and serious .....	Duke, Duchess, Casilda, Marco and Giuseppe
Here is a case unprecedented ...	Marco, Giuseppe, Casilda, Gianetta and Tessa
Once more gondolieri .....	Ensemble

### For THE INTIMATE THEATRE

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# When Whatever Sir Said Went

by Patrick Ludlow

'Ten minutes allowed for the alteration of clocks'. An odd phrase. It was bracketed in a contractual clause. This allowed managers to dismiss actors late for rehearsal. And such was the discipline in the theatre in the early part of the century, that it was not unusual for the clause to be implemented.

Indeed, it's how I obtained my first engagement. The boy who was rehearsing John in *Peter Pan* was late. The director, Dion Boucicault, unusually punctual. I was around, allowed to read the part, and got the job.

When the tardy fellow eventually arrived at the stage door he was refused admittance and told he was fired. If he'd brought an action for wrongful dismissal he'd have been laughed out of court. Punctuality was important then.

Turning up tight, absent from a train call, or coming through the front of the house (instead of using our back door) - all warranted the sack. You could even get the chuck for wearing your own clothes (the ones you'd provided for the show) privately. This sounds hard but imagine the leading lady visiting a night club and spilling green Chartreuse over her white dress for Act II.

Boucicault, son of the Victorian playwright, was particularly strict. Newspapers were forbidden at rehearsals as was knitting (death to inspiration). You spoke only when addressed and save perhaps for his lovely wife, Irene Vanbrugh, everyone called him Sir.

In spite of this tyranny, with the making of a part, there was more latitude than there is today. Even that martinet Boucicault encouraged you, to some extent, to develop your role along your own lines. And with other directors, when mature, you were given almost a free hand. Certainly whoever is in charge must hold the reins securely but then it was possible not only to create a part but to create a type of part.

I remember, years ago, a young actor telling me he had been engaged for a Pat Ludlow part. Being unemployed at the time I didn't appreciate the compliment as much as I should have done.

Of course understudies must give a similar interpretation to their principals otherwise it will upset the company when they appear. When Jessie Matthews deputised for Gertie Lawrence she gave a carbon copy performance but once she started to get parts on her own, advised by brilliant Masie Gay, she developed her own gamine charm.

On tour stars like Seymour Hicks, Leslie Henson, and Evelyn Laye had their prototypes who were always available for the road. But it was the individualists who were most in demand and one was often asked at an interview: 'What parts have you created?'



## WHEN WHATEVER SIR SAID WENT

The theatre was cosier in bygone days. You couldn't sleep there (blitzes excepted) but it was a home from home. Dressing room lights were never turned off and artistes entertained their friends for hours after curtain fall. This was more prevalent in the provinces but even in London we vagabonds used to call for letters in the morning and stay to chat up chums.

Music Hall discipline was severe. With two houses a night the speed and efficiency of the stage management were paramount. The early turns, jugglers, trick cyclists, and trapeze artistes (a hazardous life) were only allowed a bare ten minutes, and only on perfunctory call. They came through the tabs while the next scene was being set and, as likely as not, the band were already playing the curtain music for the next act. If they dared extend their time, even for a minute, the curtain came down and they were given no chance to make their bows.

On the other hand no one told these performers what to do. During their allotted span they did what they liked. But if the public didn't like them their time was further reduced. And they were demoted to first turn.

Acts that were drawing the town might be allowed to choose the coveted place just prior to the interval; but Marie Lloyd (a law unto herself) working two, maybe three, twice-nightly halls fitted in her appearances as and when she could. It was an honour to drive the great Marie around and only cabbies with galloping steeds could apply.

My claim to fame is that I appeared, in a sketch, on the same bill with her. It was a farewell performance at the Ambassadors Theatre. Alas, she was past her prime and the applause was sympathetic rather than enthusiastic. Better to dream of the volcanic roars which raised roofs at the turn of the century.

Discipline was even tougher in the States. When Wilkie Bard, topping the bill at the Palace in New York, didn't find favour with brash Americans not only was his time reduced but on the Tuesday the bills were reprinted with another top.



Tommy Trinder

A good idea was an edict which decreed that all acts should visit the sticks; but when a couple of internationally famous comedians played Denver - like Wigan, in England, the comedian's graveyard - for a Sunday matinée (death where is thy sting?) it was too much. In place of gales of laughter there was somnolent silence. After trying every known gag without any response one of them addressed the audience: 'And now, my partner and I, will come among you with a brickbat - and beat the B'Jesus out of you.'

Although the malefactors didn't carry out their threat they were both out of work for a very long time.

Good news: a very funny chap who hasn't always seen eye to eye with disciplinarians is, after a protracted period, to appear again in the West End at the Shaftesbury where they are having a Christmas pantomime. Once upon a time Tommy was a regular top of the bill at the Palladium (a marvellous house of clockwork efficiency) but lately he's been working the clubs and telling them, in his inimitable cockney, about his travels: 'Just come back from Australia (sniff) - Australia (sniff) - I like Australia (sniff) - makes me feel so refined.'

Another one goes: 'Just come back from Nice (sniff) - Nice (sniff) - It's snowing there (sniff) - snowing (sniff) - a thousand francs a flake.'

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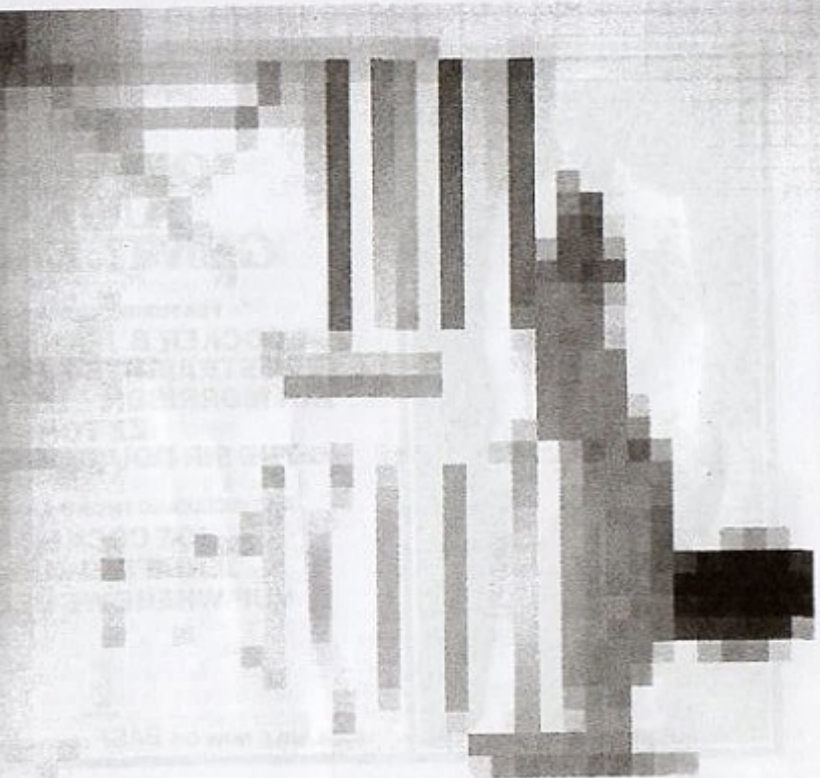
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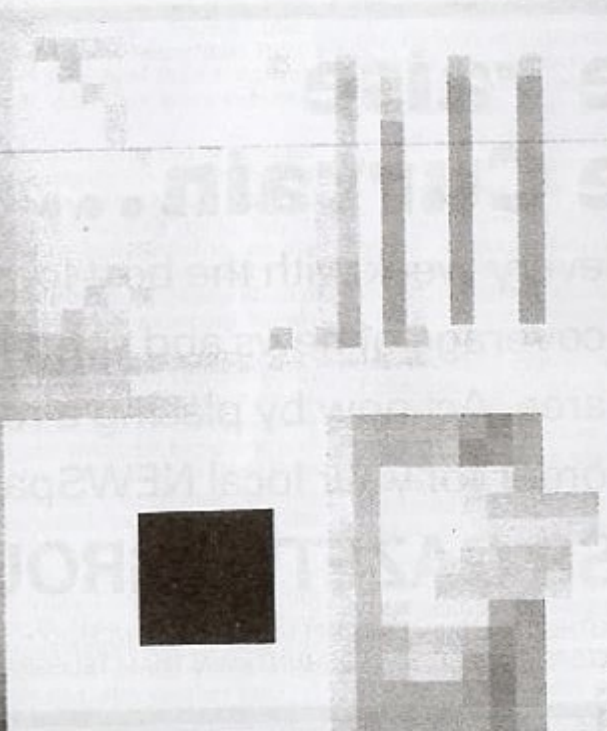
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