

# In the Spotlight

## Lettice and Lovage

by Peter Shaffer

Prepare yourself to be entertained. Beginning this weekend, the venerable Provincetown Theatre Company will present a comedy by Peter Shaffer who, over the years has mastered both drama and comedy. You do remember the powerful *Equus*, don't you? and then there was that little play turned into the big movie, *Amadeus*. Mozart has never had it so good. Back in 1965, Shaffer also wrote a black comedy called BLACK COMEDY. Then along comes *Lettice and Lovage*.

Picture yourself in the position of tour guide, not on a bus or a natural rock formation, but in a stuffy museum. Imagine if you would that in order to spruce up your life and that of the museum that you began weaving your own tales into the tour. Now you begin to get the picture of the two women in *Lettice and Lovage*.

The London Evening Standard wrote "Enlarge! Enliven! Enlighten! is the battle cry of Miss Lettice Douffet, indefatigable enthusiast of history and the theatre, and the implacable enemy of the 'mere'. Her encounter with Miss Lotte Schoen, formidable devotee of unvarnished Fact could hardly be expected to be fruitful. Yet a deeply productive friendship develops between the two when they discover that they share a mutual enthusiasm for the grandeur of 'non-mere' days gone by."

Director Anthony Jackman has long wanted to bring this play to Provincetown and was not fulfilled two winters ago when the play had a successful staged reading. This time he has the entire 32' stage of the Mayflower Room to use as his palate. Tony has repeatedly proven his ability to transform a simple space into everything from a gay bar to a hotel lobby to the setting for a Miss Gay Massachusetts Pageant. Best of all, he loves his work.

Those of you who have been around town for some time may recall the wonderful rendition he brought to the stage of *Lion In Winter* and the powerful *Beirut*. Over a number of winters, Tony was also the force behind *Close To Home* fundraiser events. Since 1984, he has focused his talents in stage design and served as Technical Director last season.

Jean Bates of Harwich will assume the role of Lettice. She first came to Cape Cod in 1958 and has always enjoyed acting. Her more recent roles included the title role in

*Goodnight, Mrs Puffin*, Julia in *Lend Me A Tenor* and Madame Arcati in *Blythe Spirit*, all with the Chatham Drama Guild; Doris in *The Century Club* at Harwich Junior Theatre, and the Queen in *Once Upon a Mattress* at Cape Repertory Theatre.

Phoebe Otis of Provincetown will perform the role of Lotte. Phoebe has been a member of the PTC since the early seventies and has acted, directed and even written for the Company. Her favorite production? *Elegies for Angels*, *Punks* and *Raging Queens*, which she directed in 1993. She also sang in the production.

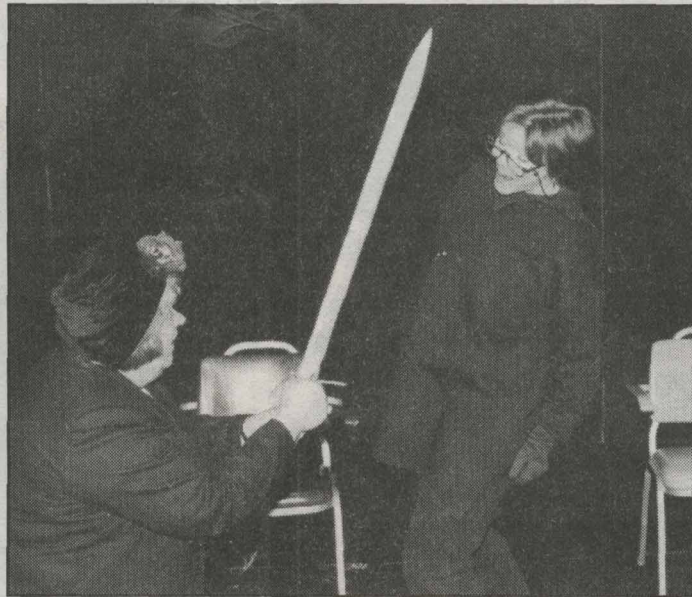
Patrick Falco of North Truro will take on the role of Bardolph. Patrick most recently appeared last summer and last fall in the Provincetown and Boston productions of *Picasso at the Lapin Agile*. Among his credits are *Goodnight, Mrs Puffin* and *Breaking Legs* at the Chatham Drama Guild and Judge Henry Neville in Boston Majestic Theater's production of *The Song of Jacob Zulu*.

Betty Newman of Provincetown will appear as Mrs Framer, marking her seventh appearance in a PTC production. Earlier roles included Mrs Belotti in *Hot-I Baltimore* last spring and Mrs Morris in *The Day They Shot John Lennon*.

Mark Kevin Riordan will appear as The Surly Man, marking his second role with the PTC. Mark appeared last summer in A

*Message To Michael*. Behind the scenes, he was also the stage manager for *Message* and for *Hot-I Baltimore*.

So together this experienced company of actors will take on Peter Shaffer in *Lettice and Lovage*. The delay due to illness is now behind them and the performances ahead. At the time we went to press, it was still unclear in the lost performances would be recaptured on Memorial Day Weekend. Call PTC for that information at 487-8673. Tickets are \$12 for adults and \$10. for members, seniors and students. Call PRS for reservations at 487-2400. Tickets will also be available at the door.





# At its heart, "Lettice" is love story

By Michael Van Belle

What happens when two completely opposite British women meet as employer/employee in 1970s London? In the case of Provincetown Theatre Company's 1999 season opener, "Lettice & Lovage," by Peter Shaffer, the result is a merry, if not bizarre, ride through British history, architecture and theater. But mostly, audiences will witness the unfolding of a warm, tender friendship.

The show opens tonight at 8 p.m. in the Mayflower Room at the Provincetown Inn, One Commercial Street, with performances May 13-16 and 20-23.

The story revolves around Lettice Douffet, a tour guide in a boring, stately British home. She lives by her theatrical mother's words, "Enlarge! Enliven! Enlighten," and as such, begins to embellish things about the house to her audience.

"It gets to the point where her boss, Lotte Schoen, tries to fire her, but what really happens is Lettice intrigues her by dressing for the meeting as Mary Queen of Scots just before she was executed," says director Anthony Jackman. "What results is a very warm friendship between these two women, a bond which Shaffer has really captured."

It's the classic case of opposites attract. On one end of the spectrum is theatrical, crazy Lettice, and on the other is starchy, stiff, bureaucratic Lotte. The two find common ground in their love of the "grandeur days" of England and the changes that

1970s England faced.

Jean Bates, who plays Lettice, describes it as "one of those wonderful relationships between two older women that have nothing to do with sex or anything else like that." Bates has performed in shows at the Chatham Drama Guild, the Harwich Junior Theatre and the Cape Cod Repertory Theatre in Brewster.

Phoebe Otis, who plays the role of Lotte, agrees that the unlikely friendship drives the play's humor as well as its touching moments.

"Lettice is a romantic; Lotte is very pragmatic, self-contained and stiff, and it's wonderful to see the effect that Lettice has on her," Otis says. "You know that they will always be good friends until one of them dies, and I love stories that deal with other types of love besides romantic love." Besides the core relationship between the two lead characters, Shaffer also explores the concept of progress, and people being left behind by it, Otis says. "It explores how these two women, who are really in love with the past, can adapt to the new, modern world — all the things they see that are different and not necessarily good," she says.

There are many historical references in the play, told usually through Lettice's theatrics. For example, Lettice tells the story of how she used to sell cheese in a shop and told her would-be customers that Richard III used to eat this certain cheese every day in order to reduce his hump. "She tells these stories that, basically, are true with grand

embellishments, and everyone gets caught up in her stories," Jackman says.

Even her stodgy, uptight lawyer, played by Patrick Falco, becomes tangled in her fantasies. "Mr. Bardolph is so by the books, yet he gets caught up in Lettice's games and breaks the cover of the stuffy lawyer," Falco says of his character.

Otis says you cannot know Lettice without being changed. "Bardolph comes in very lawyer-like and proper, but he gets to know Lettice and pretty soon he's just as crazy as she is," she says. "And she has no idea of the effect she has on others — absolutely none."

For Jackman, who also built and designed the set with the help of several Provincetown High School students, directing this show has been a labor of love.

"We did a workshop of this about a year ago as a staged reading at Napi's Restaurant, and I had been studying and reading the script about a year before that," he says.

Jackman has been involved with PTC since 1984 and is its full-time technical director today. He has also directed "Beirut," "The Lion in Winter" and, most recently, "A Christmas Carol" for the company. For him, one of the biggest challenges this time around has been directing a comedy. "It's all down to timing, and I've never really directed comedy," he says. "This play is so slap-wham-bam farce. One of the essential things to make it work is getting that special bond between the actors playing Lettice and Lotte,



Photo Vincent Guadagno

Jean Bates, Phoebe Otis and Betty Newman (left to right) in the Provincetown Theatre Co. production of "Lettice and Lovage."

and it's interesting because with Jean Bates, I am using a real English actress."

This has presented an interesting challenge for the other actors, particularly Otis. "Besides the fact that there are so many lines to learn, it is written, as I like to say, in British," she says. "I am having to deal with an accent, which is a challenge, especially when you're working with someone who's really British. Jean and Tony are both British, so my accent has to sound good."

For Falco (a cast member for PTC's 1998 production of "Picasso at the Lapin Agile," which had a six-week engagement in Boston), the real challenge has been dealing with

finding the character's transforming moment in the play in just the 40 minutes or so he is on stage. "It's always where to find that change — in this case, that moment where my character is seduced by these two women. I have to find that moment and not just play-act it in much less time than an actor whose character is in all three acts," he says.

Also in the cast are Betty Newman, who plays Lotte's secretary, Mrs. Frammer, and Mark Kevin Rioridan as The Surly Man (and also stage manager for the production).

Tickets are \$12, \$10 for members, seniors and students. For information and reservations, please call 487-8673.