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Gorilla My Dreams

BY DAN COHEN

A talk delivered at the Divine Providence convention in October 2007. The title of this paper was borrowed from a 1948 Warner Bros. Bugs Bunny cartoon, directed by Robert McKimson.

WHEN I FIRST JOINED The Wodehouse Society, I took the nom de Plum of Cyril Waddesley-Davenport, a Hollywood gorilla imitator in the story “Monkey Business.” At the 2001 TWS Philadelphia convention, the members of Chapter One presented me with a gorilla suit and I wore it with pride at other conventions and events. At the Hollywood convention, I was asked to do a bit part as a gorilla in a skit. During the performance I fell off the stage. The audience, thinking it was just part of the skit, laughed heartily. But the pratfall wasn’t in the script. You can’t wear glasses with a gorilla suit, and I couldn’t see where I was going.

I was not seriously injured, but my ribs were bruised and for several months it hurt when I laughed. That’s a problem for a devotee of Wodehouse. At that point I decided that gorilla imitation is a young man’s game, and I gave up the gorilla suit. However, I did not abandon my interest in the subject of gorilla imitation, and whether you like it or not, I’m going to tell you all about it.

For example, did you know that January 31 is National Gorilla Suit Day? It is the day when you put on the gorilla suit you have hanging in your closet and annoy your neighbors. The holiday can also be celebrated on the 24th or the 17th, or most often not at all. The holiday was invented to honor the late *Mad Magazine* cartoonist Don Martin who did some cartoons about people in gorilla suits. One of the slogans is: “What else are you going to do on January 31st?” If you don’t believe me, check out National Gorilla Suit Day on the Internet. But I digress.

“Monkey Business” was written in 1932. The hero is Montrose Mulliner, a timid Hollywood studio employee who has been trapped atop a tall set by a gorilla that has just kidnapped a child. Montrose thinks he is about to be torn limb from limb, but the gorilla addresses him in perfect English. When Montrose expresses astonishment that a gorilla can



Dan in his well-traveled suit gets the girl (in this case, a sparkling Amy Plofker) at the 2005 L.A. convention.

speak so well, the gorilla replies:

“Oh, well, Balliol, you know. Dear old Balliol. One never quite forgets the lessons one learned at Alma Mater, don't you think? You are not an Oxford man, by any chance?”

“No.”

“I came down in '26. Since then I have been knocking around a good deal, and a friend of mine in the circus business suggested to me that the gorilla field was not overcrowded. Plenty of room at the top was his expression. And I must say,” said the gorilla, “I've done pretty well at it. The initial expenditure comes high, of course—you don't get a skin like this for nothing—but there's virtually no overhead. Of course, to become a co-star in a big feature film, as I have done, you need a good agent. Mine, I am glad to say, is a capital man of business. Stands no nonsense from these motion-picture magnates.”

After his “escape,” Cyril had grabbed a baby and climbed to the top of the set, where he is now trapped by an angry mob.

“And all my own silly fault, too. I see now I should never have snatched it from its perambulator. If you want to know what is the matter with me, I am too much the artist. I simply had to snatch that baby. It was how I saw the scene. I *felt* it . . . felt it *here*,” said the gorilla, thumping the left side of his chest. “And now what?”

This was all a wonderful Wodehouse flight of fancy. But what makes it really funny is that from the 1930s to the '60s, gorillas played by gorilla imitators were very popular in Hollywood films. And in these films the gorilla regularly snatched a baby, or more frequently a young maiden in a revealing nightgown, and headed for the high ground.

Where did this loony notion come from? Blame it all on Edgar Allen Poe. In his 1841 story “Murder in the Rue Morgue,” there is just such a scene, though Poe's ape was an Ourang Outang (that's how he spelled it). The story was the basis for many films, starting with the silents.

Gorillas were basically featured in two types of films: low-budget jungle epics and horror films. The jungle epics usually used stock nature footage. I started working in second-run movie theaters during the early Eisenhower administration. I saw countless jungle films

which used the same clip of the gorilla jumping up and thumping his chest. (The elephant stampede and the crocodiles slithering into the river were also very popular.) But in horror films where the gorilla has to work up close with the heroine, there are problems. Real gorillas are notoriously difficult to work with.

Even Tarzan of the apes had his problems. We know Tarzan was raised by the apes, and have always assumed they were gorillas, since they are about the right size. But in the films we never meet Tarzan's foster family. There is a real chimpanzee called Cheetah who was a companion or a pet or something and at the time of this writing was still alive and living in retirement. Why a chimpanzee who should be a gorilla is named after a big cat is a question that has nagged me since my movie days.

In films chimps were supposed to be fun and gorillas were monsters. Reality is different. We now know that chimps can be very dangerous. In the wild they will kill and eat monkeys. Gorillas are strict vegetarians. In 1966, at Brookfield Zoo in Chicago, a three-year-old child fell into the gorilla enclosure. A female gorilla picked the child up and carried it to a place near the door, where the keepers were immediately able to rescue it unharmed. So much for Cyril Waddesley-Davenport “feeling the part.” The following year a trained chimpanzee tore his trainer's arm off, literally tearing him limb from limb, and the trainer bled to death.

Still, gorillas are big—not the 800-pound gorilla in the room, but a silverback male can reach 500 pounds. Chimps are much smaller.

It's hard to say what the real first gorilla film was. We can start with *The Gorilla*, made in 1927 and adapted from a play by Ralph Spank. The film was remade in 1931 and then was again remade in 1939, this time as a comedy with the Ritz Brothers. Hollywood thought it was funny to have a gorilla pop up in a film, and the gimmick was used with some of its most famous comedians, including Laurel and Hardy and Abbott and Costello.

Gorillas or gorilla-like creatures also played sidekick to another stock Hollywood character, the Mad Scientist. The best example of this sort of film is *The Island of Lost Souls* (1932), with Charles Laughton as the evil nut.

The greatest of all gorilla films was *King Kong* in 1933. It was a huge hit, and it saved RKO. The man who conceived and directed the film was Merian C. Cooper, who wanted to use a real gorilla. But that proved to be impractical, so he turned not to a gorilla imitator but to special effects. The genius behind the effects was Willis O'Brien, a master of models and the technique of

stop-motion animation. *King Kong* has been copied and remade many times. It has also been voted the number-one horror film of all times by folks who compile lists like that.

A major remake was produced in 1976. Jessica Lange was the star, but the film was a failure. It did get an Oscar for special effects. Kong was supposed to be a mechanical gorilla; however, the robot didn't work very well, and most of the scenes were done with a fellow named Rick Baker in a gorilla suit. He did get screen credit, but only for designing the gorilla's face. This film ended with Kong not on the Empire State Building but on the World Trade Center.

Peter Jackson's 2005 remake of *King Kong* had excellent computer animation, and the film made some money, but it is generally considered a flop for the director of *Lord of the Rings*.

Throughout the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, most gorilla films used gorilla imitators because real gorillas were unreliable and Willis O'Brien-style stop-motion animation was very expensive and very slow. Few of this era of gorilla films came from quality studios like Perfecto-Zizzbaum. They were ground out on Hollywood's Poverty Row by studios like Monogram and Republic. Some of these films are still watchable, like the 1940 film *The Ape*, starring Boris Karloff. Karloff plays a mad scientist, not an ape—but there are guys in gorilla suits in this film.

The run-of-the-mill gorilla films from this era go from bad to really, really awful. Take *White Gorilla*. It is about an albino gorilla that is shunned by the more numerous black gorillas. It is supposed to say something about race relations in the 1950s. The Japanese jumped into this type of film with *Godzilla vs. King Kong* (1962). *King Kong* was a guy in a gorilla suit, but then *Godzilla* was a guy in a lizard suit.

Among the bad gorilla film fans there has been considerable debate as to which was the worst film. The consensus winner in this category is the 1952 film *Bela Lugosi Meets a Brooklyn Gorilla*. It certainly has the worst title. Lugosi had drug troubles and money troubles, and his career had been going downhill for years. He would work with anyone who would give him a job. He plays a mad scientist (what else!) on a remote island who turns people into gorillas. For reasons that are too idiotic to remember, a couple of New York guys show up. These guys are not just ordinary bad actors, they are imitating the most popular comedy team of the day, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. This film is very popular with the bad-film cultists, and the DVD is readily available, but I have never watched it and I don't intend to. I can handle bad gorilla imitators, but not bad Jerry Lewis imitators. Is



Ray "Crash" Corrigan as Bonga in *Darkest Africa* (1936)

there such a thing as a good Jerry Lewis imitator? Lewis threatened to sue the actor, but the film was so popular that instead he did an introduction for it.

Who were the folks who put on the gorilla suit in all of these films? The most famous gorilla imitator in Hollywood history is Marlene Dietrich. In the 1932 film *Blonde Venus*, she sang "Hot Voodoo" in a gorilla suit. The 1967 film *Planet of the Apes* is an exception because the actors playing the apes are recognizable. You can see Roddy McDowall and Maurice Evans under all that makeup. They are also talking apes, and that helps a lot. In the B films the gorilla imitator was usually anyone on the lot who could fit into the gorilla suit. They rarely, if ever, got screen credit, so we will never know who was under all that fur. But a few names are known. There was Ray "Crash" Corrigan. His real name was Ray Benits, and he was sort of a hanger-on at a variety of movie studios. He was a stuntman and an extra, and in the early 1930s he was a double for Tarzan himself, Johnny Weissmuller. He apparently first put on the gorilla suit in *Tarzan and His Mate* (1934). How many times he played a gorilla is unknown, but by the late 1930s he was able to shed the ape suit and star in a whole series of cheapie westerns and sci-fi serials. Later he bought a ranch that he rented out to film studios that were making more cheapie westerns.

A much more significant figure was Charles Gemora. He wasn't a stunt man or an extra, he was a makeup artist and special-effects guy. He created the Martian costume for *War of the Worlds* (1953) and he actually wore the costume in the film, but you wouldn't recognize him. Gemora also did gorilla work. He made the costume and played the part of the ape in the



Charles Gemora practices his comic timing with the masters of his time.

Laurel and Hardy films *The Chimp* and *Swiss Miss*. He actually got screen credit for the latter, though his name was spelled wrong. He was the ape in another remake of *Murders in the Rue Morgue*, *The Unholy Three*, and several Tarzan films. He is considered by many to be Hollywood's King of the Gorillas, a real artist who spent hours at the zoo studying the behavior and movement of gorillas, not just putting on the suit and beating his chest.

Gemora died in 1961. By that time the era of the gorilla imitator was drawing to a close. A few gorilla imitators got work on television. There was a *Planet of the Apes* series for a few seasons. A white gorilla with a unicorn-like horn was the monster in one of the early *Star Trek* episodes. There may have been some others, but the golden age of gorilla imitation was over.

What happened? Technology was part of it. Computer animation can give you a better-looking gorilla than a man in a monkey suit. But even more significant was the change in public attitudes toward the gorilla. You can't imagine a Captain Jack Fosdyke being a consultant for a film like *Gorillas in the Mist*—he was a self-confessed gorilla killer. Besides, they did use real gorillas in the film, and Fosdyke was afraid of them.

Today the gorilla is no longer regarded as a monster that will snatch your baby or your girlfriend. The gorilla is a seriously endangered species. Another civil war in the Congo has engulfed the Virunga National Park, home to one of the last populations of the very rare mountain gorilla, and several gorillas are known to have been killed. Think about that, Fosdyke!

And what of Cyril Waddesley-Davenport, now that his profession has disappeared? Of course, we don't really know what happened to him, but I like to think that Cyril was a pretty bright fellow. After all, he was a

Balliol man. And we know he made good money; \$750 a week during the depression was not chump change, or chimp change for that matter. His agent was a capital man of business and doubtless got him good deals even in bad films. He saved his money and bought California real estate. That's what Jack Haley did when there was no longer a demand for guys in tin suits. Haley became a millionaire, in a day when that still meant something.

No, I see a wealthy, aging Cyril Waddesley-Davenport sitting by his pool and sipping a banana daiquiri. *Bon appétit, Cyril!*

[Note: Neil Midkiff found a reference to a 1920 film, *Go and Get It*. *Imdb.com* says it involves "a series of murders committed by a gorilla carrying the transplanted brain of a human." Could this be the first?—Ed.]

"You are scared. To think," said Rosalie vehemently, "that I should have linked my lot with a man who's afraid of a teentsy-weentsy gorilla."
 Montrose could not let this pass.
 "It is not a teentsy-weentsy gorilla. I should describe the animal's muscular development as well above the average."
 "Monkey Business" (1932)

James Hogg: Doctor of Piggery

FROM JAMES HOGG: Though every author would like to feel he has something important to contribute, that was but a distant dream when I took on the role of old-time pig expert and wrote *Lord Emsworth's Annotated Whiffle*. The best I'd hoped for back in 1991 was a few laughs.

But I now find that the boys and girls at the United States Department of Agriculture don't see it that way at all. They're taking me seriously. I little thought, when cobbling together a history of pig persiflage all those years ago, that my slim volume would find a place in the world's greatest storehouse of farming science. But there it is in the catalogue of the National Agricultural Library in Beltsville, Maryland. And in good company too, nestling between *Lipid Composition and Thermotropic Phase Behavior of Boar, Bull, Stallion, and Rooster Sperm Membranes* and *Malignant Hyperthermia [Porcine Stress Syndrome]*. Where pig scholarship is concerned you could scarcely go higher.

How do I know this? Author's vanity, of course—I googled myself and hey presto. I confess I'm tickled pink at the thought of fooling—I mean, impressing—the agricultural eggheads down in Beltsville. Don't tell them, please, or they might sling me out.

Hollywood Adapts Wodehouse

BY BRIAN TAVES

Brian works at the Motion Picture/Broadcasting/Recorded Sound Division of the Library of Congress, and continues to edify TWS with his most excellent research. Here's the talk he delivered at the Divine Providence convention.

BACK WHEN I WAS a graduate student at the University of Southern California, I stumbled across an old memo in the studio files of Warner Brothers regarding the production of the 1938 Errol Flynn movie *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. The memo suggested that P. G. Wodehouse might be an ideal writer for the script. As absurd as this might seem, it gave me a notion a little less offbeat: to investigate in detail the relationship of Wodehouse to film, using such primary resources, since my field was the history of cinema and television.

Many years and other books and articles later, you may have noticed my long string of pieces for *Plum Lines* and *Wooster Sauce* on Wodehouse and the screen. At our conventions, I've also described for you Wodehouse's experiences in Hollywood, using his own words. Now I'm going to take on a more difficult task. Rather than look at Wodehouse himself in Hollywood, and what he wrote about it, I'm going to examine how the American film industry adapted his writing for the screen, largely without his involvement.

Cast your mind back to 1914. A 32-year-old writer, living and writing in both England and America, selling stories to the magazines, has just married a widow with a nine-year-old daughter. Within months, additional financial security seems to beckon when the Famous Players film company offers \$2,000 for the screen rights to his book of short stories, *The Man Upstairs*. However, our hero is about to find out that the road to mammon, movie-style, is ever a bumpy path—for the sale is botched by a hopelessly incompetent agent.

Our curtain is a short one, however, for that same year the first Wodehouse movie goes into production. *A Gentleman of Leisure* was made by the Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Company for Paramount release in January 1915. This movie was based on the 1911 play Wodehouse coauthored with John Stapleton, from his 1910 novel titled *The Intrusion of Jimmy* in the United States. Today, as preserved at the Library of Congress, you can see that the 1915 movie is surprisingly faithful to the source, particularly considering the limitations of the 75-minute running time and the reliance on intertitles for exposition and dialogue. Remember, the first "talkie" wasn't until 1927.



Brian Taves continues his sleuthing research.

Soon the first of several Wodehouse short films appeared, and within a few years Wodehouse novels had gained a sufficient literary profile that they became obvious candidates for filmic treatment in feature-length movies. In 1918 came the next Wodehouse feature, *Uneasy Money*, and a year later, *A Damsel in Distress* and *The Prince and Betty*. The year 1920 brought another arrival to the screen, *Their Mutual Child*, from the novel known as *The Coming of Bill* in England. *A Gentleman of Leisure* would be remade in 1923.

The screen prices for Wodehouse stories ascended rapidly over the decade. When Essanay bought the rights to *Uneasy Money* in 1918, \$1,500 was paid; Wodehouse had earned \$5,000 from the sale of serial rights to the *Saturday Evening Post*.¹ In 1927, when Universal bought all motion-picture rights to *The Small Bachelor*, the sale brought \$15,000.²

Throughout his writing, Wodehouse's plays frequently became novels and vice versa. From 1915 through 1928, Wodehouse was involved in writing the lyrics, and sometimes the book, for some 18 musical comedies produced on the London and New York stages. These were also brought to the silent screen: *Oh, Boy!* (1919) and *Oh, Lady, Lady* (1920), both from books and lyrics by Wodehouse and Guy Bolton; *Sally* (1925), from the Ziegfeld musical by Bolton and Kern with lyrics by Wodehouse; and *Oh, Kay!* (1928), from the play by Bolton and Wodehouse.

The star of two of these, Colleen Moore, explained how you make a musical comedy into a silent film: “It seems strange now . . . but we did it all the time, supplying the theaters with a cued score for the orchestra or organ, or, in some smaller theaters, piano, incorporating into the film the story and all the dance numbers, omitting only the singing. Since musical comedy stories in those days were invariably thin, we fattened them out with gag sequences.”³

In addition to musicals, Wodehouse also adapted comedies by continental playwrights for the English-speaking stage. None of these has had as many screen incarnations as his version of Jacques Deval’s *Dans sa candeur naive*. This play was first brought to the screen in 1928 and entitled *The Cardboard Lover*, switching the gender base. Instead of two men fighting over a woman susceptible to the charms of each, it is Marion Davies and Jetta Goudal dueling for a champion tennis player, as enacted by Nils Asther. Davies gives a riotous performance, justifying her reputation as a skilled comedienne.

Surprisingly, for an author so dependent on language, the silent era was the most prolific in the quantity of cinematic Wodehouse adaptations; not until the coming of television would he again prove so popular a source. With the “talkies,” although a film could now include not only his humorous situations but the dialogue that is so unique and essential to his style, sound films failed to take advantage of this new ability.

At the end of 1929, Ethel Wodehouse negotiated a screenwriting contract for her husband at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. At almost the same moment, the first Wodehouse sound film in the United States was released, a remake of *Sally*. Indeed, Wodehouse’s reputation in the theater, then considered the medium closest to “talkies,” was probably of more significance to MGM in their decision to hire him than his stories and novels. The studio had produced *The Cardboard Lover*, and Wodehouse was assigned to *Rosalie*, a stage musical to which he had contributed, but the studio decided to shelve the project. At the end of 1930, MGM bought the rights to *Candle-Light*, Wodehouse’s own 1929 adaptation of the Siegfried Geyer play, but his script was not produced.

Months after Wodehouse was released from screenwriting at MGM, production began on another version of *Her Cardboard Lover*. Released in 1932, it was retitled *The Passionate Plumber* (with a separate French version also produced). Buster Keaton took on the role of the “cardboard lover,” with Gilbert Roland as the cad and Jimmy Durante as further comic relief.

In 1933 Universal bought the rights to the unfiled *Candle-Light*, and the scripts, from MGM. This was the last year *Candle-Light* could have been transferred to the screen, since it is very frankly continental in its outlook—just before such morality was discouraged or banned outright by the new production code. Retitled *By Candlelight*, the movie reveals the interplay between prince and butler to ensure the success of a lady’s seduction.

In 1934 a small independent company, Liberty Pictures, bought the rights to Wodehouse’s 1910 short story “The Watch Dog,” which they transformed into the musical *Dizzy Dames*, released the next year. There is no resemblance to the Wodehouse source; perhaps the story was simply one whose rights were cheap enough to make the expense worth putting the Wodehouse name on it.

At the beginning of 1936, Paramount released *Anything Goes*, although the credits did not mention Wodehouse; Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse had revised the Bolton-Wodehouse book. The play opened on Broadway in 1934 and ran 420 performances, with Wodehouse receiving 2 percent of the gross.⁴ However, the movie added new songs to those by Cole Porter, Wodehouse’s lyrics having been only performed in England. In the film version of *Anything Goes*, a seagoing vessel is the setting for the antics of Bing Crosby, with Ethel Merman repeating her Broadway role.

The year before, 20th Century Fox bought the film rights to *Thank You, Jeeves* for \$15,000, along with a one-year option on the other stories and the right to make additional films centered around Jeeves. The contract could be extended for 20 years, but the movie series lasted barely two years.⁵ It was launched on what was perceived as a sure bet, casting as the literary valet Arthur Treacher, known for such roles. However, the first movie, *Thank You, Jeeves!*, dispensed entirely with the plot of the novel, and any other Jeeves story, the screenwriters involving our heroes with espionage.

David Niven made an acceptable Bertie, effectively capturing his comic perplexity.⁶ Niven was then under contract to Samuel Goldwyn, who typically loaned Niven out only for a single picture. Bertie is married at the conclusion, with his bride having other plans for a gentleman’s gentleman. *Thank You, Jeeves!* eliminates half of the Wodehouse team in adapting the stories to the screen, judging Bertie to be dispensable.

Thank You, Jeeves!, a 1936 release, was followed the next year by *Step Lively, Jeeves!*, which this time is not ostensibly based on any Wodehouse work but admits to being an original creation. Whereas in *Thank You, Jeeves!* Treacher had been a fussy, schoolmarm-type

figure, in *Step Lively, Jeeves!* he is naïve, with the brain of Bertie Wooster. Probably American audiences were regarded as unlikely to accept a valet as a source of more than slapstick. Both films were recently resurrected and placed on DVD.

In August 1934, MGM offered \$5,000 for the screen rights to the 1917 novel *Piccadilly Jim*. After two years of scripting by at least nine writers, only the novel's back story was used, but a superior cast—including Robert Montgomery, Frank Morgan, and Eric Blore in the characters Wodehouse imagined—resulted in an amusing comedy with the Wodehouse flavor.

By September 1936, to Wodehouse's own surprise, he returned to Hollywood as a screenwriter, first for MGM, then for RKO. At the latter studio, he was asked to adapt *A Damsel in Distress*. The 1919 movie of the book, filmed shortly after the original publication, had been faithful to the novel. In 1928 Wodehouse had collaborated on a stage version with Ian Hay. The new film would be based on both theatrical and novel versions, combined with fresh material. However, *A Damsel in Distress* proved to be the first Fred Astaire picture to lose money at the box office. This was probably inevitable; after seven vehicles with Ginger Rogers, audiences did not expect to see Astaire paired with newcomer Joan Fontaine. Nonetheless, Wodehouse felt disappointed as well, since for once he had scripted his own novel, as good a break as a writer gets in Hollywood, and he was not to return.

In 1942 MGM remade *Her Cardboard Lover*, this time with Robert Taylor as the title character, trying to keep socialite Norma Shearer from falling for roguish suitor George Sanders. Veering in new plot directions from the play, the delicate balance necessary to the comedy collapses in the last half hour. As a result, *Her Cardboard Lover* leaves a sense of disappointment in the viewer that has given the movie a much worse critical reputation than it deserves.

Television now emerged as the ideal medium for bringing Wodehouse to the screen, from single programs to series. The format of 30–60 minutes allowed an emphasis on dialogue and incident from the source. Two of his stage productions filmed in the 1930s were brought to the screen anew on multiple occasions in the 1950s. In 1949 the first British television show from Wodehouse was *By Candlelight*, and it was brought three more times to television in the United States, twice in

1953 and a third time in 1955.

During the same years there were nearly as many new versions of *Anything Goes*. On behalf of Wodehouse, Bolton had sold the rights to Paramount for the 1936 movie, while reserving television and broadcast rights—which turned out to be a prudent decision. Initially an hour-long presentation was made for television in 1950, as the premier episode of the series *Musical Comedy Time*, with Martha Raye. Another of a similar length, again on NBC, was broadcast in 1954 for *The Colgate Comedy Hour—The Ethel Merman Show*. An aging Merman played opposite a miscast Frank Sinatra in the gangster role, in a program surviving in kinescope form.

Finally, in 1956 a new movie version of *Anything Goes* was made, exactly 20 years after the original, and even had the same star, Bing Crosby. This 1956 adaptation was the least faithful of all to the play, although this time Wodehouse was credited.

The first American Wodehouse television broadcast had been in 1950, a one-hour *Philco Television Playhouse* version of *Uncle Dynamite*. It seems almost inevitable that the star was Arthur Treacher, in his fourth Wodehouse screen appearance.

Treacher's former partner, David Niven, also made further contributions to Wodehouse on the screen when he proved an ideal Uncle Fred in two television versions of "Uncle Fred Flits By." The first was in 1953, for *Hollywood Opening Night*, and the second in 1955, for *Four Star Playhouse*. The latter survives, was produced by Niven, and is one of the most successful transpositions of Wodehouse. The segment fully captured the zaniness while maintaining fidelity to the source, with the teleplay using much of the Wodehouse dialogue.

One of Wodehouse's plays, *Arthur*, adapted in 1952 from a Ferenc Molnár play but never hitherto staged, instead premiered on television, revised by Gore Vidal as a 1960 segment of the hour-long anthology series *Ford Startime*. Retitled *Dear Arthur*, it is a surprising story of a father who plans the ultimate marriage of convenience for his daughter, to an explorer perpetually away from home—a nonexistent man whose history he invents. The program is amusing and delightful, with many lines of Wodehouse, including his adage that a husband has no use for brains—they just unsettle him.

Ironically, while adaptations of Wodehouse in the theater formed the backbone of television

A Damsel in Distress proved to be the first Fred Astaire picture to lose money at the box office.

versions through the 1950s, subsequently this part of his output has seemingly been forgotten by audiences and producers looking solely to his stories and novels. Broadcasts of the British television productions of *The World of Wooster*, *Wodehouse Playhouse*, *Jeeves and Wooster*, and *Heavy Weather* have dominated Wodehouse on the American television screen, with one exception. *The Old Reliable* was filmed in 1988 for the American Public Broadcasting miniseries, *Tales from the Hollywood Hills*. *The Old Reliable* concentrated on the familiar Wodehouse device of the tell-all autobiography, of which there is only one copy, with prospective publishers and individuals named in the account jostling one another to steal it.

Outside of the United States, Wodehouse's work has been, and continues to be, adapted for the screen in a variety of countries, most notably his native England, but also such countries as Sweden and Germany. The decline of Hollywood movie interest in Wodehouse after 1942 stemmed from several factors. First, attempts to use Wodehouse himself as a screenwriter at MGM and then RKO had failed. Second, none of the other sound films associated with his name made any notable commercial mark. Third, in a Hollywood retooled in the 1950s for more youthful audiences, his style of storytelling had less appeal, while television became the vehicle to reach both the mass and more specialized audiences. Television's success in this regard may be judged by the way in which it has kept the Wodehouse name before new generations who discover his writing through the small screen.

Finally, a shameless plug. Learning more about Wodehouse's screenwriting, his Hollywood stories, and the film and television adaptations from many countries, not just those from America that I've just discussed, is not as difficult as purloining Galahad Threepwood's autobiography. For the tell-all book was published in 2006, with a harvest of information not available elsewhere. Entitled *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood*, it is available through the publisher, McFarland (<http://tinyurl.com/27sd6t>), or on Amazon.com.

Footnotes

1. Records of Transfers of Film Rights, U.S. Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Vol. 72, January 14, 1918, 322–324; Joseph Connolly, *P. G. Wodehouse* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1987), 37.
2. Records of Transfers of Film Rights, U.S. Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Vol. 152, February 15, 1927, 1–19.
3. Colleen Moore, *Silent Star* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1968), 172.

4. Robert McCrum, *Wodehouse: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2004), 228.
5. Records of Transfers of Film Rights, U.S. Copyright Office, Library of Congress, Vol. 339, October 16, 1935, 170–199. The play was registered for copyright on April 30, 1925, as number D71391, but was sadly not retained for the permanent Library collection.
6. Gerard Garrett, *The Films of David Niven* (London: LSP Books, 1975), 35.

Filmography

- A Gentleman of Leisure* (1915, Jesse L. Lasky Feature Play Co.) *
- Rule Sixty-Three* (1915, Essanay; short)
- Uneasy Money* (1918, Essanay Film Mfg Co. and Perfection Pictures)
- Making Good with Mother* and *Cutting Out Venus* (1919; shorts inspired by the Reggie Pepper stories)
- Oh, Boy!* (1919, Albert Capellani Productions, Inc.)
- A Damsel in Distress* (1919, Albert Capellani Productions, Inc.)
- The Prince and Betty* (1919, Jesse D. Hampton Productions)
- Piccadilly Jim* (1919, Selznick Pictures Corp.)
- Stick Around* (1920, A.J. Van Beuren; short)
- Their Mutual Child* (1920, American Film Co., Inc.)
- Oh, Lady, Lady* (1920, Realart Pictures Corp.)
- A Gentleman of Leisure* (1923, Famous Players–Lasky)
- Sally* (1925, First National Pictures)
- The Small Bachelor* (1927, Universal Pictures)
- The Cardboard Lover* (1928, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) *
- Oh, Kay* (1928, First National Pictures)
- Sally* (1929, First National Pictures) **
- The Passionate Plumber* (1932, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer) **
- Le Plombier Amoureux* (1932, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer; French-language film shot in Hollywood)
- By Candlelight* (1933, Universal Pictures Corp.) *
- Dizzy Dames* (1935, Liberty Pictures Corp.) **
- Anything Goes* (1936, Paramount Productions, Inc.) *
- Piccadilly Jim* (1936, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp.) **
- Thank You, Jeeves!* (1936, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp.) **
- Step Lively, Jeeves!* (1937, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp.) **
- A Damsel in Distress* (1937, RKO Radio Pictures, Inc.) **
- Rosalie* (1937, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp.) **
- Her Cardboard Lover* (1942, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Corp.) **
- The Philco Television Playhouse: Uncle Dynamite* (1950, NBC)
- Musical Comedy Time: Anything Goes* (1950, NBC)
- Broadway Television Theatre: By Candlelight* (1953, syndicated)

Hollywood Opening Night: Uncle Fred Flits By (1953, NBC)

Kraft Television Theatre: Candlelight (1953, ABC)

The Colgate Comedy Hour–The Ethel Merman Show: Anything Goes (1954, NBC) *

Pond's Theatre: Candle Light (1955, ABC)

Four Star Playhouse: Uncle Fred Flits By (1955, CBS) **

Anything Goes (1956, Paramount Pictures Corp.) *

Ford Startime: Dear Arthur (1960, NBC) *

Great Performances: Tales From the Hollywood Hills: The Old Reliable (1988, PBS) *

* = Extant in archives

** = Available on video and/or frequently broadcast on Turner Classic Movies cable channel (the MGM and RKO productions)

Filmography excerpted from Brian Taves, *P. G. Wodehouse and Hollywood: Screenwriting, Satires, and Adaptations* (McFarland, 2006); <http://tinyurl.com/27sd6t>. Note: I have made an Amazon list, "Wodehouse on Screen," including the relevant videos and books, which can be accessed from the Amazon listing of my book.

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Western Wodehouse Walk



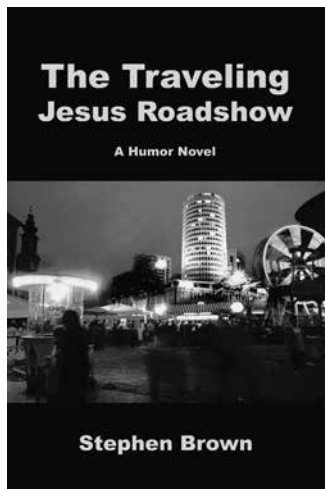
Carey Tynan and Karen Shottling enjoyed an informal Wodehouse walk in L.A. in March. Here's 1315 Angelo Drive (photo by Karen), where Wodehouse lived during his time in Hollywood.

Advice for Teacher

ON THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO'S website, Tony Ring spotted a plea for more Wodehouse in the college curriculum. In "What Ho! Humour in the Classroom?" Caz Zyvatkaukas notes that "Bertie Wooster has been mostly passed over when it comes to serious study. I think we should put aside the boxes of flowers that will accumulate at our doorsteps Feb. 14 and consider a better way to celebrate. We must ask ourselves: what would Bertie Wooster do?" For more details, go to <http://tinyurl.com/5p66we>.

The Traveling Jesus Roadshow

DAVID LANDMAN SENT US information about a book by TWS member **Stephen Brown**. Stephen has self-published a novel that mentions PGW a few times and has a number of other PGW connections. The title of his book is *The Traveling Jesus Roadshow*, and it is a spoof, David says, “of those who set up veritable carnivals at the site of a peanut butter sandwich that’s shaped like the Blessed Virgin Mary.” In the book, the trigger is a mold growing between two panes of thermal glass in an office building.



According, to David’s mini-review, “The novel is rather good. Good dialogue. Good metaphors à la Plum. Mostly rounded characters including a Scots gardener, Willie McAllister. Keen insights into American business practices.”

While there are some proofing issues (not uncommon in self-published novels), it makes for an entertaining read. It can be purchased through several websites, including <http://tinyurl.com/6moy8j>.

Tiger Pause

THOUGH THE SPECIFIC ARGUMENT became moot after this year’s Masters golf tournament, some worry about the sacrilege of Tiger Woods’s dominance of golf in this millennium. On the Telegraph.co.uk website, Mark Reason wrote an article about Tiger’s quest to reclaim his Augusta crown. You can access the article at <http://tinyurl.com/6ppb58>.

Mr. Reason says that “it’s also against the even more irrefutable laws of PG Wodehouse: ‘Golf,’ says the Oldest Member, ruminating on the terrace, ‘acts as a corrective against sinful pride. I attribute the insane arrogance of the later Roman emperors almost entirely to the fact that, never having played golf, they never knew that strange chastening humility which is engendered by a topped chip shot. If Cleopatra had been ousted in the first round of the ladies’ singles, we should have heard a lot less about her proud imperiousness.”

Newts on the 'Net

Many of you actively participate in PGWnet, our web forum. For those who don’t (or for those who do, and missed this), here’s an interesting recent item:

FROM SUSHMITA SEN GUPTA: A newspaper report mentioned that Ken Livingstone, London’s recent ex-mayor, “raises great crested newts in his spare time.” Sushmita goes on to say, “I was intrigued enough to google about it and so it is. Gussie lives! And impersonating the mayor of London! One of the online articles even asked Mr. Livingstone, ‘How’re your newts?’ to which he replied, ‘Having a great old time because it’s their breeding season. They’re just wagging their tails and spreading their pheromones through the pool. Plum would have loved to see this.”

Right Ho, Reggie!

WILLIAM “TOM” THOMAS notes that, in Will Shortz’s January 24, 2008, *New York Times* Crossword Puzzle, the clue for 38 Down is “_____ Jeeves of P. G. Wodehouse stories” (eight letters). While a true Plummophile would have a leg up on this one, your typical civilian may have been forced to solve the “across” items for the solution. The answer, of course, is Reginald.

Political Theatre

IN THE AUSTRALIAN, on April 26, 2008, Peter Wilson, Europe correspondent, reported that “Lynton Crosby has played many roles during his long career in the backroom of conservative politics, but in London next week he will face the critics in his first performance as Jeeves, P. G. Wodehouse’s butler.” For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/5jrjbv>.

Earnest Aunt

MANHATTAN’S THEATRE TEN TEN is currently producing *The Importance of Being Earnest*. In a review of that show, blogger Morgan Pehme (aka The Brooklyn Optimist) praised the actors. Of Plumworthiness is this comment: “Last, but not least, Christiane Young, who as the dread Lady Bracknell has many of the play’s funniest lines, well incarnates what P. G. Wodehouse’s Bertie Wooster often describes as the type of formidable aunt who chews broken glass and howls upon the occasion of a full moon.” For the full review, go to <http://tinyurl.com/5wecd4>.

Letter from England

BY ELIN WOODGER

My letters have become few and far between, but you can blame the U.K. Society for that. Last year I succeeded the estimable Tony Ring as editor of *Wooster Sauce*, which has kept me jolly well occupied. The Society also remains as busy as ever, with more going on than I can write about here.

Norman technically ceased doing Wodehouse Walks last year, but this hasn't stopped him from conducting two already this year. One in particular is worth mentioning. In March we enjoyed a visit from four Japanese women: Bun Katsuta, an artist who has created a new Bertie and Jeeves manga (a special kind of comic book); Maki Shiraoka and Ayaka Tokushige, editors for the publisher Hakusensha; and Tamaki Morimura, who has translated several PGW books into Japanese. They had come to London to conduct research for Bun's manga, and with Norman as their native guide, they probably went away with more information than they could use in a lifetime. In addition, they were given the rare treat of seeing the inside of Buck's Club, the primary inspiration for Wodehouse's Drones Club, and saw some speakers holding forth in pouring rain at Speaker's Corner (no sign of a bearded Bingo, though). I'll be writing more about the new manga in the fall issue of *Plum Lines*.

The big news on this side of the pond has to do with the new line of Wodehouse paperbacks just launched by Arrow, a division of Random House. (Alas, these gorgeous books are not published in the States, but you can purchase them in Canada and via outlets such as Amazon.co.uk.) In February the speaker at our Society meeting was Arrow publishing director Kate Elton,



Hal Cazalet (second from left) and an extra leg on their way to victory.

who told us all about the new books' genesis, including the commissioning of covers designed by Korean artist Swan Park. Kate also gave us a preview of marketing plans, which included a launch picnic in London in the spring. The Wodehouse Picnic duly took place in Russell Square on May 10—a truly Blandings-like day, filled to the brim with sunshine, warmth, and good cheer.

It is difficult to convey the full flavor of this lovely day. The folks at Arrow had outdone themselves in providing a splendid time for both Wodehouse fans and curious passers-by (many of whom are probably now Wodehouse fans). Picnickers were everywhere, enjoying the food, music, and various entertainments. Different parts of the square (a small park in central London) were reserved for various activities—here a band and singers, there areas for races and for croquet; here a place where children could paint pictures of newts, there a delightful toy pig-racing game, with children and adults both urging on their chosen pigs to the finish line. And, of course, there was a tent where one could buy books and visit the P G Wodehouse Society's table, which had old issues of *Wooster Sauce* and *By The Way*, leaflets about joining the Society, and much more besides.

The singers were Hal Cazalet, Eliza Lumley, and Sarah Whalen, and they performed a number of PGW favorites. It is impossible to describe how good they were—Plum would have so pleased to hear his great-grandson Hal doing such justice to his songs. Between sessions, Hal took part in the three-legged race—and won! There was also a sack race and no less than three egg-and-spoon races, with the youngest contestants showing quite a variety of forms.

The wonderful day was over far too soon—a successful launch for Arrow, and yet one more example of Wodehouse bringing enjoyment to many.



Colonel Murphy hosts the lovely Japanese Pluminaryes.

Chapters Corner

IT'S FUN BEING with other fans and reading about what others are doing. So please use this column to tell the Wodehouse world about your chapter's activities. Representatives of chapters, please send all info to the editor, Gary Hall (see back page). If you're not a member of a local chapter but would like to attend a meeting or become a member, you may get in touch with the contact person listed.

Anglers' Rest

(Seattle and vicinity)
Contact: Susan Collicott
Phone:
E-mail:



Birmingham Banjolele Band

(Birmingham, Alabama, and vicinity)
Contact: Caralyne Campbell
Phone:
E-mail:



The plucky Birmingham Banjolelers gather in Franklin, Tennessee. (Photo by Lucy Merrill)

THE BIRMINGHAM BANJOLELE BAND went on the road in March. We met at Lillie Belle's in Franklin, Tennessee, and finally got to meet some of our Tennessee members who can't usually make it to Birmingham. Kim Huguley of Nashville, who was encouraged to read Wodehouse by her grandfather, did a wonderful job organizing everything. We also found out that Barbara Bowen has a letter from Sir Pelham regarding some academic research she was conducting at the time, and the letter has since been donated to a university library. Also at this meeting, we hatched the

idea of a Wodehouse reading in October at the Elder's Bookshop (also TWS members) in Nashville, and also hopefully one at a library or independent bookstore in Birmingham. The plan for our May 17 meeting was for members to bring an excerpt from a Wodehouse work they might like to read at these events, so we could read and listen and make our choices.

Blandings Castle Chapter

(Greater San Francisco Bay area)
Contact: Ed and Missy Ratcliffe
Phone:
E-mail:



The Broadway Special

(New York City and vicinity)
Contact: Amy Plofker
Phone:
E-mail:



THE BROADWAY SPECIAL met on April 4 at The Players in Manhattan for a rollicking discussion of *Laughing Gas*. Special guests in attendance were Karen and David Ruef from Philadelphia's Chapter One.

The novel's science fiction elements were discussed. We thought it intriguing that Reggie Havershot and Joey Cooley immediately accept their peculiar situations. It was noted that children don't often come off very well in Wodehouse, yet the irony is that Reggie (like many other Drones) is so much a child himself that he adapts easily to his posish. Also of note is that Reggie and Ann are quite a successful couple, yet they spend little time together when both are in maturity. John Baesch produced a lovely pastel of Jackie Coogan as a child with his golden pageboy, though curls were notably absent.



Edwin Booth adorned. (Photo by Philip Shreffler)

Several of our members have actually experienced laughing gas without untoward excursions into the fourth dimension. Yale Schnader, DDS and TWS, is himself accustomed to administering the stuff!

Perhaps Yale surreptitiously piped a bit of the old NO₂ into our session, as we began by bedecking various busts of Players' founder Edwin Booth, and concluded with spirited snatchings of a policeman's helmet.



Philip Shreffler separates Matthew Dvorin from his helmet. (Photo courtesy of Philip Shreffler)

Capital! Capital!

(Washington, D.C., and vicinity)

Contact: Jeff Peterson

Phone:

E-mail:



Capital F.O.R.M.

(Friends Of Ralston McTodd—Ottawa and vicinity)

Contact: Megan Carton

Phone:

E-mail:



Chapter One

(Greater Philadelphia area)

Contact: Susan Cohen

Phone:

Fax:

E-mail:



WE HAD SO MANY people at our March 30 meeting that we had to move into a larger room in the restaurant. Everyone listened eagerly to new member Larry Dugan's excellent presentation of his well-researched paper, "Worcestershirewards: Wodehouse and the Baroque." Baroque, you say? Larry had quotes from Wodehouse which could be described as positively rococo.

Herb Moskowitz spoke of the loss of his friend, Chapter One member Hal Lynch. We learned some new things about Hal. He was a published science fiction short story writer, and puppeteers still produce a play he wrote in 1970, which won a Puppeteers of America prize. He was also a member of just about every literary society in Philadelphia.

We discussed our January trip to a restaurant and theatre to see *The Age of Arousal*. All agreed the day was a banner success and aroused in us the passionate desire to attend more shows together. Since Chapter One member Karen Ruef is on the theatre board, this ought to be an attainable goal.

We collected \$90 for our annual adoption of the newts at the Philadelphia Zoo. To a newt, that's a lot of money, and we expect our newts to live in the lap of luxury until next year, when we'll readopt them again. There was much good talk and much browsing

and sluicing at the meeting. As of this writing, our next meeting will be on June 1, featuring our annual read-aloud of a Wodehouse story. Once more the talented Herb Moskowitz will cast, direct, produce, and act in the read-aloud. No doubt there will be clever props, charming costuming, and amusing performances from all the readers.

The Chicago Accident Syndicate

(Chicago and thereabouts)

Contact: Daniel & Tina Garrison

Phone:

E-mail:



OUR CHAPTER HOLDS bimonthly meetings with a wide range of activities. Sometimes members meet in each other's homes to enjoy a potluck supper and read Wodehouse. Sometimes we meet in an Irish pub. We enjoy theatre outings followed by dinner at a restaurant. We go to the Chicago Botanical Gardens to stroll through the English garden there, while reading excerpts from Wodehouse. We play miniature golf together and have one grand croquet game every year.

The Clients of Adrian Mulliner

(For enthusiasts of both PGW and Sherlock Holmes)

Contact: Marilyn MacGregor

Phone:



The Drone Rangers

(Houston and vicinity)

Contact: Toni Rudersdorf

Phone:

E-mail:



THE DRONE RANGERS continue their policy of living for pleasure only. To that end, we lately read *Jill the Reckless*, which filled us to the Plimsoll mark with high-minded purpose. Therefore, we challenged each other to a poetry contest over "Something Wodehouse." The winning poem was written by John Moore, TWS member and popular fantasy writer with several novels to his credit. An engineer by day, John has written Wodehousean pieces before ("What the Well-Dressed Man is Wearing"). This piece is called "Gunga Jeeves":

You can talk of cooks and maids, or your butler's escapades,
You can chat of "boots" from the mornings to the eves.
But when it comes to valets, I will hit you with a mallet

If you claim you know a better man than
 Jeeves.
 In my choice of shoes and spats, or of bowties
 and cravats,
 It is true that we may sometimes disagree.
 In the end, though, I'll concede on all matters
 silk and tweed,
 And we're peachy by the morning's eggs and b.

When I'm buttonholed by aunts who all want
 me affianced
 To some girl who is too drippy and a goop,
 But I cannot tell her nay (I'm a *preux
 chevalier*),
 And thus shortly I'll be landed in the soup.
 Now I really hate to trick her, but they're ringing
 for the vicar,
 So I call on Jeeves to use his massive brain.
 For the girl I can't sidestep so he'll convince her
 I'm klepto,
 Whilst I escape by climbing down a drain.

In the cosmic game of cricket, when I've played
 my final wicket,
 And I'm called up to be judged by the Great
 Batter,
 Jeeves will stand there right behind me, always
 ready to remind me
 That there never is a time when ties don't
 matter.

We were all so dazzled by John's poetic skill that we
 babbled and blithered, fawning over him.

In April we dined at the Raven Grill where,
 although we did not actually toss bread at each other,
 we were suspected by the waiter of planning to do so.
 He hovered. We give you this "managing the waiter tip,"
 free of charge, as a method to get excellent service. A
 waiter who thinks he will have to sweep the floor and
 clean those little cracks in the chairs after his customers
 vamoose is a very attentive waiter.

The Merry Month of May was to be even merrier
 because of Mr. Mulliner. The DRs proposed to indulge
 our reading fancy with *Mr Mulliner Speaking*. If you
 happen to be in Houston at any time, give Toni or Carey
 a call. If there's a meeting, you can join us!

The Flying Pigs
 (Cincinnati area and elsewhere)
 Contact: Susan Brokaw
 Phone:
 E-mail:



The Mottled Oyster Club / Jellied Eels
 (San Antonio and South Texas)
 Contact: Lynette Poss
 Phone:
 E-mail:



WE'VE READ A FEW more books and laughed a
 few more laughs since our last report. Thanks
 to Liz Davenport, who contacted Toni Rudersdorf, the
 Mottled Oysters and the Drone Rangers may yet have a
 joint meeting this year. We are looking forward to that
 festive assembly of the Lone (or perhaps I should say
 "Drone") Star State chapters.

Stories discussed have been *Bring On the Girls*, *Jeeves
 and the Feudal Spirit*, and *The Heart of a Goof*. We've
 met at Barnes and Noble, and at two restaurants, one of
 which was the Lion & Rose, which we sometimes refer
 to as the Emsworth Arms, and where we always raise
 a glass or two to the many and varied Wodehousian
 characters who've raised *their* glasses to a number of
 worthy fictional friends and jovial times.

A future discussion will center around Ukridge—
 Jan Ford discovered a restaurant called My Sam's, so
 we promptly scheduled a meeting there. *Mr Mulliner
 Speaking* is our pick for June, followed by *The Man with
 Two Left Feet* in July. If Clark Adams comes in again
 with two shoes from different pairs, we'll be ready for
 him this time around!

Currently we are on the lookout for expressions that
 Wodehouse uses in his stories which one would think
 to be more modern in origin. There may be a prize
 riding on the discovery of the most and best of these,
 so if anyone wishes to contribute to my (I mean our)
 list, my e-mail address may be found at the heading of
 this article.

**The New England Wodehouse Thingummy Society
 (NEWTS)**
 (Boston and elsewhere in New England)
 Contact: David Landman
 Phone:
 E-mail:



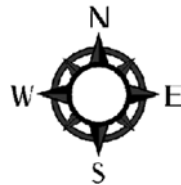
CONVENTION ATTENDEES will remember Mary and
 David Trumbull, he of the impeccable Norfolk
 jacket and plus fours, she of the sweeping gown and
 Dolly Varden hat. Mary and David, acting in their
 capacity as chairs of the Culinary Club that meets at
 the venerable Boston Athenæum, invited five NEWTS
 to speak in early March. Addressing the assembled in
 a reading room adorned with statuary that once stood
 in Thomas Jefferson's dining room, David Landman in

the guise of Chef Anatole introduced the speakers and provided continuity. Jean Tillson spoke about the way Plum used food to dramatic effect in “Lord Emsworth and the Girl Friend.” Lynn Vesley-Gross spoke on “Wodehouse on the Cuisine of the Americas.” And Rosemary Roman-Nolan (assisted by husband David Nolan) spoke on the historical and social context of the food one finds in Wodehouse novels, exemplifying her remarks with authentic savories prepared in her country kitchen.

A plenary meeting was held in late March at the renovated late-colonial tavern now home to Philip Drew of Carlisle, where the NEWTS welcomed two new members, Rashmi Poduri and Roberta Towner. Phil conducted a guided tour of the impressive homestead he restored practically single-handedly.

The Northwodes

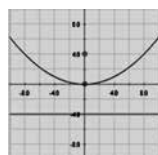
(St. Paul, Minneapolis, and vicinity)
 Contact: Kristine Fowler
 Phone:
 E-mail:



SIXTEEN LUCKY NORTHWODERS traveled to Hudson, Wisconsin, to see *The Play's the Thing*. The story was unfamiliar, since it is based not on the canon but on Molnár's Hungarian original. The play proved an appropriate vehicle for Wodehouse's witty and amusing style. Mark noted that all the laughter was coming from the Northwodes' side of the small house. Of course, we were all in a happy state to start with, having browsed and sluiced at Barker's Bar and Grill beforehand. A mere month later, we invaded the venerable Lexington Bar for the Kentucky Derby (thanks to Mary for making sure we kept this tradition). Ted, Dave, and Anne-Sophie provided ample hats from which to draw for the regular buck-a-horse stake. Linda scooped the pot by drawing Big Brown, who overcame the outside post to justify his ranking as favorite. Bonnie and other animal-lovers in the group mourned the sad end of second-place Eight Belles, an unfortunate and unWodehousean event. We consoled ourselves with the nosh Faith generously provided and then turned our attention to planning a research trip to our local racetrack, Canterbury Downs, so we'll have the arrangements letter-perfect when we offer that excursion as part of next year's convention!

The Pale Parabolites

(Toronto and vicinity)
 Contact: Peter M. Nixon



E-mail:

THE PALE PARABOLITES . . . those who are seeking the Pale Parabola of Joy . . . whatever that may be. The Pale Parabolites' motto is *nil admirari*. Like the Empress of Blandings, the Pale Parabolites take things as they come and marvel at nothing.



The Pelikan Club

(Kansas City and vicinity)
 Contact: Sallie Hobbs
 E-mail:

The Perfecto-Zizzbaum Motion Picture Corporation

(Los Angeles and vicinity)
 Contact: Melissa D. Aaron
 Phone:
 E-mail:



The Pickering Motor Company

(Detroit and vicinity)
 Contact: Elliott Milstein
 Phone:
 E-mail:



THE PICKERINGS MET on the evening of March 18 at the home of member Larry Nahigian, where all and sundry were treated to a feast of reason (and incomparable victuals) and a flow of soul (and superb Scotch), not to mention a return of the fair Christine. The dinner was of such a culinary level that several members were convinced that Larry had somehow conjured up Anatole himself from the Platonic universe wherein he resides. Members were also taken on a tour of the newly refurbished antique train room where all came away dazed as men who were kissed by goddesses in their dreams.

The book read and discussed at this meeting was *Sam the Sudden*. Many enjoyed the character development particularly in this novel, while others thought the craftsmanship of the imagery to be its highest achievement. A few thought the plot a little weak, but that was a mere quibble. Several of the women remarked that they enjoyed these non-saga books more than the sagas, especially the Jeeves novels, but others missed the Blandings series and wanted to get back to that. A compromise was reached for the next meeting's book with the choice of *Money for Nothing*.

The next meeting was to be May 13 at the Smiths' house. Can Sherry top Larry's dinner? Has Michael's antique camera collection grown? Will David bring special single malt scotch or his bowling pin bourbon? Will LuAnn's agendas continue to be spectacular? Will

Dicron finish the book? Will Elyse or Sue start it? These questions will be answered in our next installment. Or, if you live in the Detroit area and can't wait to find out, why not call us and join the next gathering?

The Portland Greater Wodehouse Society (PGWs) (Portland, Oregon and vicinity)

Contact: Carol James
Phone:
E-mail:



The Size 14 Hat Club
(Halifax, Nova Scotia)
Contact: Jill Robinson
E-mail:

The Soup & Fish Club
(Northern Virginia area)
Contact: Deborah Dillard
Phone:
E-mail:



THE NOBLE AIM of the Soup and Fish Club is to bring the joy of Wodehouse to the younger generation. The chapter's head and sole member, Deborah Dillard, aka Mary Kent, visits school librarians and gives presentations on the Master's great works to their students, and she occasionally tackles other projects to spread the word about Wodehouse.

Amazon Comes Through

ROBERT MOLUMBY RECENTLY purchased two PGW books from Amazon.com and says that Amazon was thoughtful enough to suggest two additional books which might be of interest:

The White Feather: The time of this story is a year and a term later than that of *The Gold Bat*. The history of Wrykyn between these two books is dealt with in a number of short stories, some of them brainy in the extreme, which have appeared in various magazines. In the volume's dedication, PGW says, "I wanted Messrs. Black to publish them, but they were light on their feet and kept away . . ."

Death at the Excelsior: This collection of short stories includes: "Death at the Excelsior," "Misunderstood," "The Best Sauce," "Concealed Art," "The Test Case," and others. Robert says "some of these stories I have seen in other PGW collection books; others I have never seen before." [For additional information about *The White Feather* and *The Gold Bat*, see John Graham's "Collecting Wodehouse" columns in the *Spring 2008* and *Autumn 2004* issues of Plum Lines, respectively.—Ed.]

Newting Right Along

JEAN TILLSON PROVIDED this item of interest (taken from <http://tinyurl.com/6bgnow>): "In the summer of 2011, Pixar will release *Newt*. The story tells what happens when the last remaining male and female blue-footed newts on the planet are forced together by science to save the species, and they can't stand each other. Newt and Brooke embark on a perilous, unpredictable adventure and discover that finding a mate never goes as planned, even when you only have one choice."

"Newts, Jeeves. . . . You must have heard of newts. Those little sort of lizard things that charge about in ponds."

"Oh, yes, sir. The aquatic members of the family Salamandridae which constitute the genus *Molge*."

Right Ho, Jeeves (1934)

Gussie for Mayor?

JAMES STURDEVANT FOUND an interesting profile of the new mayor of London, Boris Johnson, on the website of BBC News. The full article is at <http://tinyurl.com/4eeyjs>. James was most pleased to find that the writer of the article (Brian Wheeler) pointed out that Mr. Johnson's personality has some rather Wodehousean elements. For example, Mr. Wheeler, describing the new mayor, says he is "often described as a buffoon, even by his admirers, [and] his bumbling, self-deprecating persona has long made him one of the best-known politicians through his appearances on TV chat shows." Even more explicitly, in 2002 in the *Observer*, Sir Max Hastings (then the *Daily Telegraph* editor), wrote that "over the next few years, [Boris Johnson] developed the persona which has become famous today, a facade resembling that of PG Wodehouse's Gussie Finknottle, allied to wit, charm, brilliance and startling flashes of instability." [There's been a substantial amount of discussion about the accuracy of the comparisons on PGWnet. Stop by online to see the varied opinions.—Ed.]

"Jeeves," I said, "I had scarcely expected this of you. You are aware that I was up to an advanced hour last night. You know that I have barely had my tea. You cannot be ignorant of the effect of that hearty voice of Aunt Dahlia's on a man with a headache. And yet you come bringing me Fink-Nottles. Is this a time for Fink or any other kind of Nottle?"

Right Ho, Jeeves (1934)

John Lithgow & Plum

BY DAVID McDONOUGH

IT WAS IN MARCH 2007 when a few of us in the Society journeyed to Symphony Space in New York City to enjoy a Wodehousean evening entitled *A Celebration of P. G. Wodehouse*. The event was hosted by *New Yorker* writer Adam Gopnik, and the highlight of the evening was a reading of “Uncle Fred Flits By” by the eminent actor John Lithgow. Those who wish further details of that sublime night out may refer to the Summer 2007 issue of *Plum Lines*, in which I elaborated on the fun, or the June 2007 issue of *Wooster Sauce*, in which Amy Plofker did the same.

Emboldened by his success, Mr. Lithgow returned to New York this spring in a limited run of the show *Stories by Heart* at the Mitzi E. Newhouse Theatre at Lincoln Center. Although it was billed as a one-man show, Mr. Lithgow was not alone. Uncle Fred was once again the cornerstone of the night. A few Wodehouseans—Amy Plofker and I among them—were privileged to be among those present at the April 27 performance.

Seated in a comfortable chair on a stage setting that looks much like one’s study (if one had one), Mr. Lithgow begins by reminiscing about his grandmother, Ida Lithgow, a stern and rock-bound New Englander (a Nantucketer, as it turns out) who entertained her grandchildren with the poetry of her youth. As proof, Mr. Lithgow offers up the hoary Oliver Wendell Holmes saga of “The Deacon’s Ride, or the Wonderful One-Horse Shay.”

“I’ll bet none of you have heard this since you were children,” Mr. Lithgow told the audience, and he was right—in fact, such poetry is so out of fashion that I would venture to say that many of the crowd had never heard it at all. But in Mr. Lithgow’s hands, it took on new life, and I vowed that I would willingly spend the whole evening listening to Mr. Lithgow recite poetry. But there was a bigger treat in store.

The Lithgows led a somewhat nomadic existence when young John was growing up. His father, Arthur Lithgow, was an actor, director, and theater producer, most famously of regional Shakespeare companies. Sometimes there was money in the bank, and many times there was not. But there were always stories, a wealth of stories.

With the children seated around him, Arthur Lithgow would pull out *Tellers of Tales*, an anthology edited by W. Somerset Maugham, and as John remembers it, he, his brother, and his sister would clamor for “the funny one.” That, of course, was “Uncle

Fred Flits By.” They were not alone in their estimation; in most polls of Wodehouse fans, this is the story that is voted top of the heap.

(For all of you who, like me, were introduced to Wodehouse at your father’s knee, remind me to tell you someday about the time we broke my parents’ bed when the old man was reading us that same story.)

Many years later, Arthur Lithgow was seriously ill and despondent. Desperate to help him, John was seized with a thought, and, tucking his father into bed, he began to read “Uncle Fred Flits By.” Halfway through, he heard a sound that hadn’t reached his ears in some time, and that he thought he might never hear again. His father was laughing. Arthur Lithgow began to rally, and lived another two years.

And so, having left no one in the house with a dry eye, Mr. Lithgow began to read the story. And when I say read, I lie. He has committed the story to memory. Whether on his feet, ringing the front doorbell of The Cedars, or seated on the chair with a disdainful expression as he impersonated the woman Connie, or back on his feet again in the role of Pongo impersonating a vet, tapping his teeth with a pencil and trying to smell of iodoform, or diving behind an imaginary settee in full Pink Chap mode, or giving the best New York performance as a parrot looking offensive since Sir Ian McKellen’s celebrated turn in the Royal Shakespeare Company’s production of *Treasure Island* three seasons ago, Mr. Lithgow delivered an energetic, hilarious, and true-to-its-source telling of the tale. If anything, he was even better at the Newhouse than at his 2007 Symphony Space performance.

Those who have seen Mr. Lithgow on screen (*Terms of Endearment*, *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai*) or on television (*Third Rock from the Sun*) know what a fine actor he is. But most of us have not seen him onstage, and seeing him onstage is a treat highly recommended. Nothing could be better than watching a great actor perform a great story by a great writer.

At press time, there were no plans to take this show to other venues, or to record it. We can hope, however, and earnestly entreat Mr. Lithgow never to stop reading stories, never to stop performing live, and always to read the funny one.



A Cherce of Words

BY TODD MORNING

I WAS RECENTLY reading *Full Moon*, a Blandings Castle novel published in the United States in 1947. Early in the book, I came across a paragraph describing the physical attributes of Prudence Garland:

It has never been authoritatively established what are the precise attributes which qualify a girl to rank as a dream rabbit, but few impartial judges would have cavilled at the application of the term to Prudence, only daughter of Dora, relict of the late Sir Everard Garland, K.C.B. For while she had none of that breath-taking beauty which caused photographers to fight over Veronica Wedge, she was quite alluring enough in her trim, slim, blue-eyed way to justify male acquaintances in so addressing her over the telephone. There was not much of her, but what there was was good.

Of course, the last sentence is the paragraph's punch line, eliciting a smile, if not an all-out laugh. I was struck, however, by the similarity of this sentence to a more famous line from the movie *Pat and Mike*, written by the husband-and-wife team of Garson Kanin and Ruth Gordon. In perhaps the most well-known scene of the film, the talented athlete Pat Pemberton (Katharine Hepburn) walks away from her future manager Mike Conovan (Spencer Tracy), while Mike says to a colleague: "Not much meat on her, but what's there is choice." (Memorably, Tracy pronounces the last word in the sentence "cherce.")

This led to a question: Did the Master conveniently lift this line from the movie and place it in his novel? Although I knew that Wodehouse had spent time as a screenwriter in Hollywood, I wasn't sure if he was much of a moviegoer. But then, *Pat and Mike* jokes are among Bertie Wooster's favorites. Perhaps Wodehouse went to the movie *Pat and Mike* assuming that it featured the comic dialogue of two Irishmen.

It didn't take long to discover that *Full Moon* predated the movie *Pat and Mike* by a number of years, with the release of the movie coming in 1952. In fact, *Full Moon* was written in the first half of the 1940s when Wodehouse remarkably completed several novels despite his many difficulties.

The next question, then, was whether Ruth Gordon and Garson Kanin lifted the line from Wodehouse. This is not an easy question to answer: an outright

literary theft is difficult to pin down. At one end of the scale is my seventh-grade classmate, Jake Selpin, who, when assigned an oral report on James Madison, stood in front of the class and read from the *World Book Encyclopedia* until our teacher stopped him. Returning to his seat, Jake threatened to beat up the kid in front of him (me). (For some reason, Jake always tried to connect his poor academic performance to his innocent classmates, whom he bullied regularly. Ironically, in a scene reminiscent of Wodehouse, I saw Jake years later in Elgin, Illinois, pursued by a policeman. Apparently he was still making bad cherces.)

But I digress. The next step was to find if there were any connections between Kanin or Gordon and Wodehouse. Did they know him? Were they fans? Could one or both of them have read *Full Moon* before sitting down to write *Pat and Mike* and swiped the line?

I concentrated first on Ruth Gordon but found only one link to Wodehouse. In *Yours, Plum: The Letters of P. G. Wodehouse*, edited by Frances Donaldson (Hutchinson, 1990), I came across these sentences in a letter, dated July 17, 1946, from Wodehouse to Guy Bolton: "To refresh the old memory, I wrote *Leave It to Psmith* in 1924 and you let me incorporate a good bit of your stuff from the dramatization of *Piccadilly Jim*. (Greg Kelly and Ruth Gordon tried it out in Des Moines but it never reached N.Y.)." Aha! Ruth Gordon appeared in a dramatization of a Wodehouse work. However, this didn't necessarily mean that I had caught her with her hand in the Wodehouse cookie jar, and despite continued searches, I found no more links between Ruth Gordon and Wodehouse.

Turning next to Garson Kanin, it didn't take long to find a reference to Wodehouse. In *It Takes a Long Time to Become Young* (1978), Kanin's plea for respect for the wisdom and skills of older people, he writes on page 21: "P. G. Wodehouse published one of his most sparkling comic novels a few weeks before his death at ninety-three." So Kanin was a reader of Wodehouse, and he obviously had read more than one of the novels. How else would he know that Wodehouse's last Jeeves and Wooster novel, *Aunts Aren't Gentlemen*, was one of his most sparkling? In order to make that comparison, Kanin must have read a number of Wodehouse novels. It didn't take a leap of the imagination to picture Kanin lounging beside his late-1940s Hollywood swimming pool, reading *Full Moon* with a pen close at hand, ready to jot down the best lines. I thought I was ready to make an arrest.

Not so fast, you say; there's not enough evidence here for any judge or jury to convict; everything presented thus far is purely circumstantial. Reluctantly, I came to

the same conclusion and decided that it didn't much matter. After all, the variant of the Wodehouse line in the movie is remembered today not so much because of the line itself but because of Tracy's superb delivery and choice of the word *cherce*—another example of what a great actor can do with a line. Therefore, I can report that I've given up my searches and placed everything I've collected into my slim unsolved literary thefts file. Now if I could only find out what happened to Jake Selpin.



Douglas Vining

DAVID LANDMAN has informed us that Douglas Vining, a member of the NEWTS, passed away in February. David sent this notice from Douglas's good friend, NEWT Charles Swanson: "Our old friend and recent NEWT member, Douglas Vining, of Hubbardston, Massachusetts, died yesterday [Feb. 22]. He had been ill for two or three years. He was a great Wodehouse fan. His wife Dolores survives him."

Page Hearn

PAGE HEARN, a longtime actor at City Lit Theater Company in Chicago, passed away suddenly on May 17. *Chicago Tribune* critic Chris Jones says that Hearn was "the consummate Jeeves." In the seasons of P. G. Wodehouse shows, audiences loved to see Mr. Hearn become the famous valet. More information is available at <http://tinyurl.com/54h84z>.

Gary's Call for Articles!

DON'T BE SHY, now, fellow Wodehouseans. (Not likely, methinks!) I know there are some of you out there with a scholarly bent who would love to toss some sparkling research our way, and others of a less formal nature who have a delightful idea for a humorous article. Humor R Us. P'raps even a concept for a regular column? I'd love to hear your ideas, whether fully developed, half-baked, or just a few sprinkles of spices so far. And of course, the short bits and news updates are always welcome. I look forward to hearing from you; contact information is on the back cover!

The 2011 Convention!

YES, THE 2011 CONVENTION can be yours! The details about how the host chapter is chosen are available in TWS's Convention Steering Committee (CSC) Charter. If you are unable to get it from TWS's website (<http://www.wodehouse.org/twsCSCcharter.html>) for some reason, please write to Elin Woodger for a copy.

All bids for the 2011 convention must be submitted to Jean Tillson by September 12, 2008. .

The host chapter selection will be made well in advance of the 2009 St. Paul convention. The CSC Charter mandates: (1) Any chapter wishing to host a convention must submit their bid to the Committee by nine months before the next convention (in this case, by September 12, 2008). (2) The Committee will notify bidding chapters whether their bids have been successful at least six months before the next convention. Thus, chapters wanting to host the 2011 convention will be notified by December 12, 2008, whether their bid has been successful or not. (3) If the Committee receives no bids by the nine-month deadline, they will use those nine months to make their own convention plans—which may mean selecting a likely chapter and inviting them to play Persian Monarchs, with the honor of hosting the 2011 convention as the stakes.

For full host chapter selection criteria, download the CSC Charter from our website.



Big Apple Bats

Laura Loehr found an article of interest in the *Buffalo News* on April 6, 2008, in which writer Deepti Hagela tells how New York City schools launched a cricket club this spring, "becoming what is believed to be the first school system in the country to offer the sport." Despite the wild popularity of cricket in India, Pakistan, Australia, and other countries, Hajela ponders why it has never caught on in the USA. He goes on to say that the NYC high schools "are playing a limited-over form that should have games lasting no more than two or three hours." Perhaps that will be sufficiently short to fit comfortably in the American attention span!

Remembering Frits Menschaar

BY JOHN GRAHAM

(ASSISTED BY GUS CAYWOOD)

LONGTIME TWS MEMBER, Wodehouse collector, and book dealer Frederik (Frits) Menschaar died in mid-February at his home in upper Manhattan. Frits had celebrated his 80th birthday in October 2007 and appeared to be in excellent health. Like Plum, Frits began each day doing his daily dozen (with a bit of yoga added in). The cause of death is uncertain, but was probably a sudden heart attack or stroke. He is survived by seven nieces and nephews in the Netherlands.

Frits was born in 1927 in Holland. During the Nazi occupation he and his family lived in The Hague, where they were part of the Dutch resistance movement and assisted several Jewish friends. After the war Frits spent a brief time in England, where he was introduced to cricket and Wodehouse. He trained as an engineer and spent most of his professional career working in Southeast Asia, primarily Indonesia; he moved to New York in the late 1970s. After retirement he devoted much of his time to his beloved cat Snooples (who predeceased him) and to collecting Wodehouse. In less than 10 years he had accumulated first-English and first-American editions (many in dust wrapper) of every book Wodehouse wrote. Late in life his collecting interests drifted toward intricately detailed miniature model ships. Frits also loved classical music and sang in numerous choruses all over the city. He was thrilled to have performed at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall.

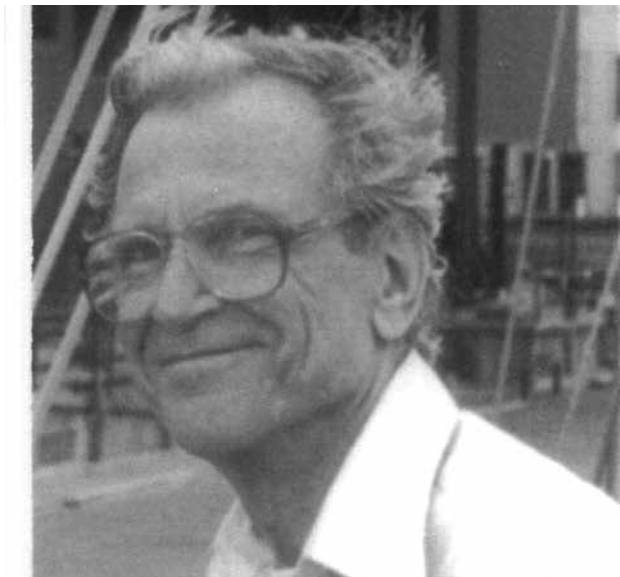
In 1991 Frits published his first Wodehouse book sale catalogue and attended his first and only

Wodehouse convention in New York. As a book dealer, Frits supplied many of us over the years with choice items for our collections; he never seemed to care greatly about making a profit. He felt so badly about overcharging me for the first book I bought from him (a second edition of *The Head of Kay's*) that he gave me generous discounts from then on. His last printed catalogue was 1997, around the time that book sales shifted to the Internet. From then on, he avidly bought and sold books on eBay and prided himself on his ability to place a bid with just seconds remaining in an auction.

Besides reading and collecting Wodehouse, Frits always kept an eye out for opportunities (for himself and friends) to see Wodehouse on stage, and he took great pleasure in having attended numerous notable performances of Plum's plays and musicals in and around New York. He saw the world premiere concert performance of *Betting on Bertie* (1996) and the opening night of at least two other U.S. premieres: *Good Morning, Bill* (2003) and *The Beauty Prize* (2005).

Frits made several lasting contributions to the world of Wodehouse, including discovering previously unknown published material and bibliographic details not found in McIlvaine. But of all his good deeds, two stand out in my mind. In 1993 he convinced Jimmy Heineman to publish a facsimile first edition of *The Swoop*, Plum's exceedingly rare paperback from 1909. It was published in an edition of just 400 copies, and Frits became their sole American distributor. I remember visiting him the day a box of 250 copies was delivered. Frits marveled that here was perhaps the greatest collection of *Swoops* ever assembled in one place (that place being his kitchen table). So if there is a paperback copy of *The Swoop* in your book collection today, it is probably the facsimile edition, and you have Frits to thank for its being there.

Frits's other lasting Wodehouse contribution is that he was the moving force behind the creation and installation of the bronze plaque at the Little Church Around the Corner, commemorating Plum and Ethel's marriage in 1914. TWS president Florence Cunningham first came up with the idea for a wall plaque, but it was Frits, living in New York, who did the legwork (and arm-twisting) to make it all happen. The inscription on the plaque includes these lines from *Uneasy Money*: "It's on Twenty-ninth Street, just around the corner from Fifth Avenue. It's got a fountain playing in front of it, and it's a little bit of Heaven dumped right down in the middle of New York." The bottom line of the plaque reads: "In loving memory, The Wodehouse Society." To my mind, that's a fitting and lasting tribute not only to The Master, but to Frits Menschaar as well.



Frits Menschaar

Oh, Lady! Lady!! at 42nd Street Moon

BY NEIL MIDKIFF

SAN FRANCISCO'S SPECIALIST in rare and unusual musical theater, 42nd Street Moon, celebrates its 15th anniversary this season, and in December the company revived one of the shows presented in its first season: Bolton and Wodehouse and Kern's *Oh, Lady! Lady!!*—which some TWS members saw during our 1993 San Francisco convention.

The company performs in a tiny theater (299 seats, exactly the size of the Princess), with piano accompaniment, simple costumes, almost no sets, and the singers holding scripts in notebooks, except when they put them down for dancing. Over the years they've perfected the style to where the notebooks are nearly invisible; indeed, in future productions they'll be dispensed with entirely. What won't change is the emphasis on letting the scores and books of long-forgotten shows live again in these lively, intimate productions with top talent.

Greg MacKellan and Stephanie Rhoads, the company's founding artistic directors, both appeared in this production, to the audience's delight, and brought many longtime company members back for this anniversary cast. Indeed, MacKellan (as Spike Hudgins) and Sean Sharp (as detective Cyril Twombly) repeated their roles from 1993.

Most Wodehouse fans know that Plum had a special love for this show and reused the plot in his 1927 novel *The Small Bachelor*. But as he explains in his preface to the 1970 reprint of the novel, "you can't just take the dialogue and put in an occasional 'he said' and 'she said.'" Most of the play's action comes in the later portion of the novel, and several characters and plot elements—Sigsbee H. Waddington, Officer Garroway, Lord Hunstanton, Ferris, the motion-picture stock, the fake pearls, Prohibition, and the Purple Chicken—are all new in the book.

Since the novel is now much better known than the musical, I'll describe the show's characters with reference to them. Instead of George Finch, wealthy amateur artist and small bachelor from East Gilead, Idaho, we have Willoughby "Bill" Finch, a well-to-do young man of no apparent profession, from East Gilead, Ohio. He isn't small or plain like George. In fact, as portrayed by Michael Cassidy, he could step right into an Arrow Collar ad with no questions asked. Not quite so tongue-tied as George, Bill is still a bit shy around women, and he is the perfect "straight arrow" character, even to the extent of jumping into the ocean to rescue

a young woman swimmer in distress. That's how he meets Molly Farrington (the charming Meghann May), who differs only in surname and in family situation from Molly Waddington in the book. Mrs. Farrington is Molly's real mother, not a stepmother, and is twice a widow, with rather a dim view of matrimony: "If men were dominoes, her last husband would have been the double blank," Molly tells Bill.

As the show begins, one of the ladies of the ensemble, "Miss Clarette Cupp," gives a spoken welcome with "announcements" that set us in the 1918 period. She hopes we haven't been bothered by the suffragettes picketing outside, reminds us to wear our flu masks, and welcomes us to the Farrington estate on Long Island on Bill and Molly's wedding day. Though the bridesmaids are eager to see Molly in all her finery, Molly's mother isn't as optimistic: "Marriage is not a process for prolonging the life of love, but for mummifying its corpse." She wants Molly to "be extra-careful with your wedding gown; you may need it again someday."

Lee Davis's invaluable *Bolton & Wodehouse & Kern* (Heineman, 1993) explains that Guy Bolton's first wife had left him for another man a few years earlier, and that Bolton had a notebook full of pithy and bitter comments on marriage, which he sprinkled into his musical comedies. Fortunately, he found ways of giving these lines to characters who could make them funny in context. Mrs. Farrington, as played by Darlene Popovic, is a dragon of suspicion and mistrust; Watty, the elevator operator in Finch's Greenwich Village building, is a philosophical Irishman:

Hale: Love is a wonderful dream.

Watty: Aye—and matrimony's a wonderful alarm clock.

Hale: It was a case of love at first sight.

Watty: So was mine—and if I'd had second sight, I'd still be a bachelor.

I see that I've brought in Finch's best friend without an introduction. Hale Underwood, a hack playwright, was replaced by J. Hamilton Beamish, author of self-help booklets, in the novel. Hale doesn't claim to be an expert on everything, but he does claim to know what works on stage, which makes his earnest setup of the "ruined girl" deception even funnier. As played by longtime 42nd Street Moon favorite Bill Fahrner, he combines a goofy enthusiasm with a winning romantic baritone

voice, and makes a perfect pairing with Stephanie Rhoads as May, Finch's old girlfriend from East Gilead. In this version May is May Barber, who has broken out of small-town prudery by becoming a lingerie buyer in Paris. On her way to deliver Molly's trousseau, Hale sees her in the train and falls in love at first sight. When Finch finds she's in town, however, he fears that she has come to make trouble, perhaps even sue for breach of promise, and the idea of staging an embarrassing scene to make her give up Finch runs pretty much the same way in the musical and in the novel.

Finch's valet, Spike Hudgins, is an ex-burglar, the exact equivalent of Frederick Mullins in the novel, winsomely realized by MacKellan as a gentle, almost dainty soul wrestling against temptation. Spike's sweetheart, "Fainting Fanny" Welch, made a direct transition from stage to page. Lesley Hamilton, star of several "42nd" shows over the years, gives her a high-voltage portrayal, from gum-snapping cynicism to full-on "Hearts and Flowers" sentimentality in her "don't turn me over to the police" spiel. Her target is the pearl necklace among the wedding presents—in this version, a gift from Finch, not an inheritance as in the novel. She thinks Spike is after the necklace too; he protests that he is reformed, "as honest as the day is long." "Sure, 'cause you work nights," she counters. But he tries to persuade her to go straight too, and they sing of his vision of domestic happiness on a duck farm in "Our Little Nest"—a nest that's feathered with the loot they've accumulated during their careers:

And at a house in Mineola
I got away with their victrola;
So we'll have music in the evening
When we are in our little nest.

Other musical highlights in the first act give Wodehouse's positive side of romance to counter Bolton's cynical quips: Bill and Molly's "Not Yet," yearning for the time when on their honeymoon "the whole wide world we will forget"; Hale and May's duet "I Found You and You Found Me"; the title song for Bill:

Oh, Lady, Lady, when you come our way,
You're like the sunshine on a winter day.

and Bill and Hale and Spike's trio "Do It Now":

Let three friendly natives tell you this:
Love's a thing you really shouldn't miss.
It makes life wonderful and sweet,
So go and fall in love with the first girl you meet!

Molly also has "dreamed that one fine day" she'd meet "one who'd be for grace and looks like the men in story books" in her song "Do Look at Him"—the song that replaced "Bill." Over the years, several explanations have been given for dropping what would later become Wodehouse and Kern's best-known song when it was used (slightly rewritten) in *Show Boat*. Some say it was too slow, or didn't suit the voice of Vivienne Segal, the original Molly. The most compelling explanation is that the original Bill was played by a handsome, suave dancer, and the lyric just didn't fit the character. So instead of "I love him because he's just my Bill," Molly at this point sings, "I never can see why Bill loves me."

Barry Day's *The Complete Lyrics of P. G. Wodehouse* (Scarecrow Press, 2004) mentions that several versions of the book for *Oh, Lady! Lady!!* exist, including varying lists of songs. Not among his alternates, though, is a song which this production added for Lesley Hamilton to sing as Fanny, "Saturday Night" from *Miss Springtime*. "She was a very good girl on Sunday; not quite so good on Monday . . ." indeed! Fainting Fanny casts doubt about Bill's past and steals the pearl necklace as the first act concludes with Bill driven to distraction.

Molly: Poor dear, he's wandering in his mind.
Mrs. F.: Well, don't worry—he can't get far.

The second act takes us to the rooftop garden in Greenwich Village where Finch and Underwood have neighboring penthouses. Hale is hosting a party for May, but she's so popular with his friends that he has to ask the moon, "Is there a chance that she'll love me?" in the beautiful "Moon Song." May lightheartedly cautions the men that "some little girl is sure to get you soon or late" in "Waiting Round the Corner." The show's sappiest song, "Little Ships Come Sailing Home," was apparently one of Kern's "trunk" songs with a meaningless lyric by Herbert Reynolds that Plum did his best to improve. This production salvaged it by having it sung by the ditzy Miss Clarette Cupp, who gave it a silly charm complete with hand gestures for the little ships.

Molly arrives hoping for an explanation and reconciliation with Bill. This affords the perfect opportunity to put the song "Bill" back in the show. I was a bit startled that the opening of the second verse was not sung; instead, lines were spoken over the music until Molly began again at "I can't explain why he should be just the one, one man in the world for me." In retrospect, this makes more sense, as it leaves out some of the text that doesn't describe this show's Bill: "He isn't half as handsome as dozens of men that I know" and so forth. In any case, Meghann May gave it a wonderful

rendition, and all the “original version” lyrics that aren’t familiar from the *Show Boat* version were sung.

Molly and Bill’s reconciliation is a bit touchy: “If I’m the first girl you ever kissed, how do you do it so expertly?” “If I’m the first man who ever kissed you, then how can you tell whether I’m expert or not?” They “confess” their early crushes on Lillian Russell and John Drew in “Before I Met You,” and all seems settled for a while. But doubts return when girls keep turning up in Bill’s sleeping porch. Fanny has married Spike, and they, expecting that Molly and Bill will be on their own honeymoon trip, have settled into Bill’s apartment. Later May, tired from the party at Hale’s, takes a nap there. Mrs. Farrington is prepared to believe the worst, and Molly is doubtful besides, but with the confused assistance of a veddy-veddy British detective, things eventually get straightened out. Molly’s mother even confesses to a disreputable background on the stage, and (in another unexpected interpolation) sings “Semiramis” by Kern and Anne Caldwell, very much in the style of “Cleopatterer,” with plenty of Near Eastern bumps and grinds. After Molly and Bill decide to join with Hale and May in a double wedding, reprises of “Oh, Lady, Lady,” “I Found You,” and “Do It Now” provided a rousing finale.

Musical director/accompanist Dave Dobrusky explained in a post-performance discussion that the musical material for this production arrived mostly as sheet music for the individual numbers, and that he had had to provide some vocal harmonies and to arrange some of the linking music. He’s a crackerjack pianist, and skilled at making the singers sound their best—two qualities that aren’t found together as often as one might wish. Stage director Kalon Thibodeaux has stolen the stage as a comic actor in several of their productions; here he proved that he’s just as good at leading other actors in a romantic farce that works as well today as it did in 1918.

I saw it twice, and though it wasn’t possible to get all the Blandings Castle members to settle on one date, all who made it on one day or another agreed that Jerry and Guy and Plum would have been proud to claim it as an enduring hit.



For more information about the 42nd Street Moon theatre, visit <http://www.42ndstmoon.com>.

What’s in an e-Name?

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED by Pete Georgiady, who says he is “the Society’s original impetuous bad boy.” Says Pete: “The Society’s directory of members is a necessity for contacting other members but it also yields some interesting information on their personalities. Creative e-mail addresses often reflect members with specifically Wodehousian personas. Doing a cursory scan of e-mail addresses in our membership directory produced a list of some easily recognizable, and some not so obvious, Wodehouse-related tags. Those folks with appropriate addresses deserve a tip o’ the hat.”



[For privacy purposes, we’ve chosen to print the Wodehousean portion of the e-mail addresses, and skip the domains & owners.—Ed.]

- NewtP0nd:** Not a coincidence that the owners of this one are ardent salamander lovers!
- BlndgsCast:** A well-known address to *PL* contributors.
- LadyBassett:** And a fan of canines, to boot.
- Plum1881:** If you must choose a number, the Master’s birthyear is a good choice.
- www.dronesclub.net:** A website, rather than an e-mail, but it still qualifies!
- Plumike:** A nifty Japanese variation.
- Jeeves17112:** Are there really 17,111 others?!
- UncleFred:** Could be a troublemaker, this one.
- ISayWhatHo:** The only complete Woosterian sentence among the bunch.
- PlumMontyB:** The creator and the createe.
- PigHooey:** How many times has the owner had to explain that one?
- BrtWooster:** Perhaps someone already had the Bertie version . . . ?
- Bertie:** Simple, but effective.
- PGW:** Effective and simple.
- OldMem:** Why, who could that be?

While not directly related to things Wodehousean, there are others just as entertaining: OatySporran, FreeCakesAndAle, Buns4Us and others. Creativity can come in small, even virtual, packages!



Volunteer Officers

President of The Wodehouse Society:
Kris Fowler

Membership Secretary (new-member inquiries,
contact information changes):
Ian Michaud

<http://www.wodehouse.org/inquiry/>

Treasurer (dues payments):
Jean Tillson

Editor Emeritus: Ed Ratcliffe

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Gary Hall

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Columns Editor: Dan Cohen

Final Proofreading & Technical Assistance, Printer/
Mailer Liaison, Rosters, Dues Sheets: Neil Midkiff

Website address: www.wodehouse.org
Website Development & Maintenance:
Shamim Mohamed, aka Pongo

We appreciate your articles, Quick Ones, and observations. Send them to Gary Hall at the addresses above!

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Old Home Week in Moscow

AS NOTED PREVIOUSLY in *Plum Lines*, The Russian Wodehouse Society has organized a very special event: The Old Home Week in Moscow. The dates are August 10–16, and the week includes visits to the Kremlin and the palatial Tsaritsyno; a Moscow sightseeing bus tour, as well as walks around Moscow; and visits to Tolstoy's Museum-Estate Khamovniki and Chaliapin's House-Museum. Participants will also have a unique opportunity to compare Blandings Castle with Moscow country estates—Chekhov's Literary and Memorial Museum (Melikhovo) and the country mansion of the famous Russian poet Lermontov (Serednikovo). The price is \$650, fully inclusive except for hotel and meals. There are places still available, so if you are interested and would like further information and a booking form, write to tour organizer Masha Lebedeva. The program of Old Home Week in Moscow is also available at: <http://Wodehouse.ru/moscow2008.htm>.