

CHARLEY'S  
AUNT  
2005

# A harsh lesson



Kicking off the new season at the Hampton Hill Playhouse, Teddington Theatre Club are putting on an old favourite, *Charley's Aunt*.

Set in 1892, Brandon Thomas' evergreen farce of college life centres around two Oxford students, Jack Chesney (Marc Batten) and Charley Wykeham (Tom Wright), who are plotting how to spend more time with

## THEATRE

### HIGHLIGHT:

*Nancy Groves gets the lowdown on Charley's Aunt which comes to Hampton Hill Playhouse.*

their sweethearts.

Charley invites the girls to meet his aunt (Mandy Stanhouse), but when she is delayed,

the boys persuade Lord Fancourt Babberly (John Kipps) to impersonate her and mayhem ensues.

Teddington Theatre Club last put on the show in the 70s.

***Charley's Aunt, Hampton Hill Playhouse, 90 High Street, Hampton Hill, Saturday September 17 - Saturday September 24, 7.45pm, no performance Monday, £6-8. Call 020 8979 9499.***



# A cornucopia of family fun in this comedy classic

THERE are such things as serious comedies. **Charley's Aunt** is not. It is a farce *par excellence*, sustained by its tight but improbable plot.

Teddington Theatre Club's revival of Brandon Thomas's perennial favourite underlined why this cornucopia of family fun continues in its popularity.

Even the initial run of 1466 performances remained unbroken for 60 years and during the 1890s was at one time running in 48 theatres. It now has the feel of bringing a well-loved board game out of its battered old box on to the parlour table. For all that, TTC's production was bright and fresh and much enjoyed by audience and cast alike.

In Oxbridge student rooms, Jack and Charley await their ladyloves whom they have invited for lunch. In 1892 the girls need a chaperone, but they are expecting Charley's wealthy widowed aunt from Brazil, "where the nuts come from". Jack was played by Marc Batten as a very earnest young blade, but not too familiar with the opposite sex. One could feel his anxiety as he admitted that girls are "even better than cricket". Charley is a likeable plodder, whose greatest fear is that he may look a "silly ass". Tom Wright put across Charley's hesitant charm with a warm sincerity.

Panic ensues when a telegram arrives to say that the aunt's arrival is delayed. However, the day is saved by

## Richmond Drama Awards

Mark Aspen

Lord Fancourt Babberley, a fellow student, who has dropped by to pinch a few bottles of champagne.

Fanny-Babbs, as he is affectionately known, just happens to have his drama society costume with him. A predictable spiral of events follows revolving around his clumsy, albeit successful, attempts to impersonate the missing aunt. As Fanny-Babbs so aptly says, "I am no ordinary woman". No ordinary actor should tackle this part (It has been played by actors ranging from Arthur Askey to Tom Courtney) but John Kipps is no ordinary actor and his energy and flair brought zip into what could be a drag (in more senses than one) in lesser hands. Together, the three students were acted well as an ensemble, which included some unexpected improvisations with errant costumes.

The students' put-upon factotum, the "artful" Brassett, was played with wry humour by Colin Greenhalgh, who engaged skilfully with the audience in his aside commentaries as he relished the mayhem on stage.

Kitty (Julie Davis) and Amy (Jen Hodge) were the epitome of the Victorian demure demoiselles, blissfully unaware

that "a pious fraud is the next best thing to a miracle". Then Amy's uncle and Kitty's guardian, Spettigue, burst irascibly on to the scene. This role was gift for John Roth, who inked in a well-drawn caricature, all twisted face and bent back, reminiscent of a period Tatler cartoon.

John Bellamy sympathetically portrayed the honest and amiable Sir Francis, Jack's father, whose pragmatic wooing of the wealthy "aunt", against his better judgement, is rapidly dropped (in favour of Spettigue) when Charley's real aunt arrives from Brazil. She is the poised and sophisticated Donna Lucia, Sir Francis's love of twenty years previously (altogether a better bet than Fanny-Babbs!). Mandy Stenhouse played this role with well, poise and sophistication.

Donna Lucia's ward Ela (Tracey Frankson) completes the series of coincidences, as she is Fanny-Babbs' lost love, and the circle is complete.

Appropriately, director Mair Graham chose to set the play in-the-round, not the easiest of configurations. However, it worked surprisingly well in a set that comprised little more than a floor cloth enhanced by the lighting. In particular, the circling of the rivals, Sir Francis and Spettigue, had an almost terpsichorean quality unusual in a farce.

This was a play simply to enjoy, no messages, no intent, just seriously farcical comedy.