



Su Gilroy with scenes from some of the many productions she has directed

Reviving summer rep. LYME REGIS

THE summer rep season, often in a seaside theatre, used to be a staple of this otherwise quiet part of the theatrical calendar. But over the years—war, political turbulence, changing taste in entertainment—the support declined and the genre almost died.

Two theatres, coincidentally both on the Jurassic Coast and about 25 miles apart, continue the tradition of two or three months of plays, changing every week, at Sidmouth's Manor Pavilion Theatre and the Marine Theatre at Lyme Regis.*

Director Su Gilroy, whose eponymous company stages the Marine's season, now in its third year, relishes the challenges for actors and back-stage of putting different plays on every week and stresses the importance of choosing plays that audiences will want to come and see.

Putting on a summer season of five plays is a lot of work, she says, and it wouldn't be possible without the help of so many people—'from the actors and stage management team on the season to everyone who works at the theatre, who helps us technically,

and with ensuring everyone knows the plays are on, the volunteers, who sell the tickets and greet our audiences every evening; and the good people of Lyme, who have been so incredibly welcoming and appreciative, and very helpful in lending us props, furniture, and costumes for our plays!'

Su is a dramaturg and freelance theatre director, working in theatre for more than 30 years, with more than 50 productions to her credit, from short rehearsed readings to full scale productions in number one venues. Her early career included time spent as a runner for a film production company, a blue-coat on a holiday camp, a drama counsellor on an American summer camp and a background artist on TV.

In a rep season, each play is rehearsed for a week, and at the Marine performances are on Thursdays, Fridays, Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays. 'We try and make sure that the season has something for everyone, so there is a variety of plays on offer,' she says. 'We also try to make it so that if someone is on holiday for a week, there are two plays that they can see in that week, and that those plays are very different, so hopefully they'll like at least one of

them. I love stories, and each of the plays has a very different story, so as you go from play to play, you're going from story to story, and the stories keep it fresh.'

Weekly rep, with its severely restricted rehearsal time, means there is 'a practical limit on what you can do in the rehearsal process. There is much less time for anything to evolve, but the actors always bring so much to it, ways to make the characters into real people.' Actors usually come to rehearsal more or less knowing their lines and Su as director will have worked out the moves (called "blocking"). 'Sometimes this can be taken from the script—the French's acting editions of the scripts have the moves from the original production written in. Following those directions used to be known as acting "en français"!'*

Choosing the plays is 'one of the really tricky parts of the season,' she says. 'I think of it as being a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle—there are so many things to take into consideration. First and foremost, they have to be plays that people will want to come and see—plays that have popular appeal. That generally means comedies, thrillers and some drama, and some that cross genre—this year the Alan Ayckbourn play we're staging, *Communicating Doors*, is a time-travelling comedy thriller.'

Designing the sets is complicated—closing one play on a Wednesday and opening the next on Thursday means the set has to be simple, so some have minimal scenery, while the thriller *Dead Guilty* will have a traditional box set. The final play, the very funny *Ladies Day* will be performed in-the-round, on the auditorium floor with the audience all around.

'The numbers of actors and stage management team are the biggest element in the budget for the season. The largest cast (seven) this year is for George Bernard Shaw's *Arms & the Man*, but as there will be no royalties to pay on that, I can afford a slightly larger cast.'

For a director, a rep season offers the chance to work on many different plays. 'Every time you do a new play you learn something new, which is always exciting.'

For the audience, there is not only the opportunity to enjoy several plays over a short time, but also to see the same actors in different roles—one actor, Victoria Porter, is in all five.

Su is a theatre person to the heart of her being—she loves directing, even under the pressure of summer rep, and she enjoys the ability as a producer to choose the actors and the plays: '*Arms & the Man* is a play I've always wanted to work on, so I'm really looking forward to that.'

'The Marine is such a lovely theatre, in such an idyllic spot, and who doesn't want to spend their summer by the seaside? Lyme itself is such a pretty

town, and I never get tired of that view as you come down the high street with Lyme Bay in the background.'

* There are a few other summer rep seasons, led by Frinton Summer Theatre, founded in 1934 and believed to be England's oldest surviving festival staging a new play weekly over eight weeks, Sheringham Little Theatre in Norfolk, which has been going for 65 years, and Oxford's Creation Theatre which goes on the road in the summer taking classic stories to beautiful open air venues. Sidmouth's summer-long rep began in 1958.

Summer madness

BRIDPORT

IF you loved the sounds of ska, exemplified by the band Madness, don't miss Bridport Musical Theatre Company's summer show, *Our House*, on stage at the Electric Palace from 26th to 29th August, with a 2.30pm matinee on Saturday 29th.

Meet Joe Casey, on the night of his 16th birthday. Hoping to impress Sarah, the girl of his dreams, Joe breaks into a building site overlooking his home on Casey Street to show her the view across London. When the police arrive, Joe faces a life-changing decision: stay and face the consequences, or run.

In that moment, Joe's life splits in two. We follow Good Joe and Bad Joe as two parallel stories unfold, one shaped by responsibility, the other by rebellion, building towards an explosive and emotional climax.

Written by Tim Firth, whose credits include *Neville's Island*, *Kinky Boots* and *Calendar Girls*, *Our House* is the Olivier Award-winning jukebox musical featuring the songs of the ska and pop band Madness.

Down the rabbit hole with Artsreach

BUCKLAND NEWTON

TREEHOUSE Theatre, a company that specialises in interactive performances and workshops, comes to Dorset with Artsreach, the county's rural touring charity, with performances of *Alice in Wonderland* at Buckland Newton village hall on Wednesday 12th August at 10.30am, and an afternoon show at Cranborne's Cecil Memorial Hall at 3pm.

Specialists in history and great story-telling, Treehouse aim to introduce young people to the magic and drama of live theatre, in an inclusive and accessible way. Their production of Lewis Carroll's great story is a madcap adventure with peculiar creatures and chaotic fun.

Lost in Wonderland, Alice meets a very late White Rabbit, gets caught up in a crazy tea party, and plays a game of croquet with a tyrannical Queen—but will she ever find her way home? Expect a colourful and interactive show filled with excitement, laughter and live music, where you can even play a part on



Nasty Fishmonger is a fist-raising, fearsome fivesome of folk-punk coming to Bridport in August

stage if you want to! Up to 30 audience members can volunteer to join the cast on stage—arrive from 10am in Buckland Newton, and 2.30pm in Cranborne if you'd like to take part.

Punk rebooted. **BRIDPORT**

BRIDPORT is celebrating the raucous, chaotic, energetic, musical blast that was punk, with an exhibition and gigs on the theme of *Punk Bridport*, running to 22nd August. As part of this, there is a two-band gig at the arts centre on Friday 21st August, in collaboration with Clocktower Records.

Nasty Fishmonger is a fist-raising, fearsome fivesome of folk-punk from Bristol. With a new album in the works, and a slew of festival appearances under their belt, they continue to win new fans and friends everywhere they go with their rousing anti-austerity anthems. They have become firm festival favourites after blistering sets at Boomtown, Shambala, Bearded Theory, Beautiful Days and more.

Hailing from the south coast, Pussyliquor is a rambunctious five-piece promising “pleasant sounding music and a stream of consciousness that unfortunately they can’t turn off—all nonsense, completely missed the point punk music delivered with a smile and a satirical twist.”

The events run alongside an exhibition of photographs by Adrian Boot, who recalls: “UK punk erupted in 1976 like a cultural thunderbolt, driven by economic despair and a fierce rejection of the rock establishment. The Sex Pistols lit the fuse, while the Clash broadened punk’s horizons with reggae, politics and social conscience. Bands like the Damned, Buzzcocks, and Siouxsie and the Banshees added their own voices to a scene that was short-lived but seismic,

reshaping British music, fashion, and attitude for decades to come.”

This exhibition explores the raw, unfiltered spirit of punk rock through a series of powerful images that capture the scene’s energy, attitude and urgency. Hard to believe this all began 50 years ago! Where has the time gone?

Remembering Martin and more. **LYME REGIS**

LYME Regis Folk Weekend returns from Friday 28th to Sunday 30th August, with a lineup that includes a celebration of one of the all-time great folk singers and a tribute to a folk star who died too young.

Eliza Carthy comes to the Marine Theatre on Friday 28th with a group of musician friends to perform the Songs of Martin Carthy. Following the unexpected recent retirement of her father, his daughter Eliza has drawn together an ensemble of varied and talented musicians, all of whom have played a role in Martin’s long and outstanding career.

These artists, who may include Nick Hart, Tim Van Eyken and Eliza’s son Finn Curran Carthy, will share the stage with her, honouring and celebrating Martin’s immense legacy and musical back catalogue.

On Saturday, the Sandy Denny Project is brought to the stage by six musicians—Sally Barker, Marion Fleetwood, PJ Wright, Gemma Shirley, Mat Davies and Mark Stevens. With every passing year, Sandy Denny’s reputation as a songwriter and interpreter of traditional material continues to grow.

Sandy Denny, briefly a member of the Strawbs, but best-known as the charismatic singer and songwriter with Fairport Convention, died at the tragically early age of 31 after a fall down a flight of stairs.

The two concerts on Sunday 30th begin at 1pm



Eliza Carthy comes to the Marine Theatre to perform the Songs of Martin Carthy in August

with Ophelia, the latest musical story created by Bob Whitley (guitars and mandola) and Lee Mackenzie (cello). Known for their previous musical explorations, *Magellan: Circumnavigation* and *Anne Boleyn: Wolf at the Door*, the pair have now turned their attention to tell a story of “love, treachery and tragedy”, inspired by Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*.

The evening features Dorset-based favourites Ninebarrow, who are patrons of the festival, with friends Honey & The Bear and Becki Driscoll.

Not the angry Osborne

BUCKLAND NEWTON AND DRIMPTON

IF the name John Osborne says “angry young man” to you, think again. The John Osborne who is coming to Dorset with Artsreach on 12th and 13th August wants to spread a little happiness!

Already familiar to Artsreach audiences with his *John Peel’s Shed* solo show, the poet and storyteller returns with a new show, *To Make People Happy*, on Wednesday 12th at The Gaggle of Geese at Buckland Newton, at 8pm, and Thursday 13th at The Royal Oak, Drimpton, at 7.30.



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Top Six at the Flix

Sun is out and sitting under the shade of an old oak tree whilst reading the latest edition of *Marshwood Vale* is much to be preferred to a darkened cinema, so here are my favourite films that I have watched in the last 12 months.

***Sentimental Value* (2025)** Mubi.

Following a failed father and filmmaker attempting to connect with his daughters by turning the former family home into a set, Joachim Trier's *Sentimental Value* is a subtle yet sweeping tapestry of art, family and connection that takes the breath away. TheWrap. Chase Hutchinson

***Train Dreams* (2025)** Netflix.

A Western epic of breathtaking visual splendor and formidable lyrical cinematic poetry, it's a work containing all the wondrous, devastating layers of an entire life, which it explores with a gentle grace without hiding from the agony that comes with it. TheWrap. Chase Hutchinson

***One Battle After Another* (2025)** Sky

In years to come, when this appears on TV late at night, it'll be impossible to switch off. It's just one of those films. A stone-cold, instant classic. Empire. Alex Godfrey

***Sinners* (2025)** Apple TV

It's a sweaty, intoxicating, all-nighter of a movie, and its allure cannot be denied. TheWrap. William Bibbiani

***Secret Agent* (2025)** Mubi

It's a major achievement, and for my money, sure to be one of the best films of the year. The Hollywood Reporter. David Rooney

***The Voice of Hind Rajab* (2025)** BFI player

It is deliberately punishing material, channelled through unapologetic, galvanising film-making. Politicians should see it. Decision-makers should see it. The Times. Kevin Maher

Let's face it, there has never been a better time for an uplifting show, something to cheer us all up. Poet and Bard of Barnsley Ian McMillan calls Osborne's work "beautifully written, funny and poignant".

To Make People Happy explores the humour section of second-hand book shops, jokes overheard on market stalls and finding the positives in life, even if that means finding friendship with your end-of-life carers and sharing a love of Chas and Dave with a taxi driver after the world's least appealing wedding. With audio clips of moments guaranteed to make an audience happy, this is a poetry show with a difference.

Unpredictable from the Pyrenees

HONITON

NOTHING Concrete, a six-piece band based in the French Pyrenees, led by Scottish songwriter Fergus McKay, comes to the Beehive centre in Honiton on Saturday 22nd August.

Rooted in original songwriting, the band brings together a wide range of influences, blending blues, world music, jazz, cabaret, folk and swing into a sound that is both distinctive and hard to categorise. The music is deeply danceable, often witty and always alive with a sense of mischief and purpose.

The songs often carry a political edge, but never lose their sense of humour or playfulness. That balance of substance and style has helped define a band identity that feels eclectic yet coherent, adventurous yet accessible.

In 2025, they released their fourth album, *The Imperfectionist*, to widespread praise, with reviews calling it "a masterpiece" and "joyful, nostalgic and just a little unpredictable."

Your music..your way.

BSO COMPETITION

NON-professional musicians and instrumentalists across the UK are invited to enter their home recordings for the second annual BSO Music-Making Competition, which returns for a second year, sponsored by Lark Music. Entry is free and the closing date for applications is 3rd September.

The panel of industry judges includes broadcaster and writer Tom Service, guitarist Dagan Wilkin, and presenter Helen Arney. Winners will be announced in the autumn. With a prize pot of £3,000, the process is simple—simply submit one short video from any genre via bsolive.com/create.

There is a £1,000 cash prize for each age category, spanning 18-24, 25-39, and 40 plus. Performances which display confidence and control will impress the judging panel, with notes and rhythms that feel clear and intentional—as will recordings displaying musicians at ease with their instruments.

Winners of the 2025 inaugural event included student Amy Jerman from Wareham, counsellor and manager Llewella White from London and former art teacher Rob Johnston from Southsea. The winners deepened their creativity, aspiring to record projects and experience more live music.

Dougie Scarfe, the BSO chief executive says: "The BSO Music-Making Competition exists to get people creating music—to pick up a new instrument, or revisit an old one, and simply start playing. If you're over 18 and music isn't the day job, then this is for you. Feel free to let your creativity roam, taking any genre or musical



*A riotous adaptation of *The Pickwick Papers*, comes to Dorchester in August*

instrument as your starting point.”

Lark Music, sponsor of the competition, is a specialist insurance provider dedicated to protecting musicians and their instruments. Through its partnership with the BSO, Lark Music is proud to support the Music-Making Competition and wider initiatives that give more people the opportunity to play, perform and be heard. Find out more about Lark Music’s support of the BSO and the Music-Making Competition at larkmusic.com/bsc

For full details and to enter, visit bsolive.com/create—entries close on Thursday 3rd September.

Whatever the weather... DORCHESTER

RAIN or Shine theatre live up to their name—they perform whatever the weather. So, despite the July heatwave, be prepared for possible August storms when they roll into town with their summer 2026 show, a riotous adaptation of Charles Dickens’ *The Pickwick Papers*, coming to Maumbury Rings at Dorchester on Sunday 16th August at 6pm.

Journey into a delightfully chaotic and quintessentially Victorian world. Misadventure and merriment collide in a whirlwind of Dickensian absurdity! Join the lovable Mr Pickwick and his eccentric band of companions as they bumble their way through confusing courtships, courtroom shenanigans, questionable duels and carriage rides gone terribly wrong.

Expect fast-paced wit, slapstick, more multi-rolling mayhem and a cast of larger-than-life characters in this new and hilarious adaptation by Jon Legg.

GPW

The Young Lit Fix

Traitors’ Nest

By Frances Hardinge

Published by First Ink

Hardback £16.99

Age 12+

Review by Nicky Mathewson



LEGEND has it that the Great Game began when the magpie maiden first shared her secrets with a man close to death after being defeated in battle, a man who yearned for power that was not yet his.

The magpie maiden showed him her castle, a real castle, not just a stockade built from earth and timber, and promised to show him how to build such a thing for himself. In return the magpie maiden and her kin should always be welcome in all of the castles and those who dwell in them should always “remember those to whom you owe your power”.

A pact was formed and the man gained the power he craved but along the line of time, one of his descendants broke the pact, so the Great Game began and the castles began to move. Faceless lords in an otherworldly competition for power became the masters of fate for those on earth.

For teenager Burr and his younger sisters who have lived in the shadow of only one castle, things are about to change. Their loyalty will be tested and in order to survive a tumultuous game, they will have to dig deep to find their courage.

Captivating historical fantasy fiction from a master storyteller.

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