

The true-life rags to riches (and back again!) story of Littlewoods Pools Winner Viv Nicholson, told in this multi-award winning musical.

Best Musical:

London Evening Standard Theatre Awards
Critics Circle Theatre Awards
& Barclays Theatre Awards

Gallery Players
present

Spend Spend Spend



An amateur presentation by kind permission of Samuel French Ltd

Based on the
autobiographical book
'Spend, Spend, Spend'
by Viv Nicholson
& Stephen Smith

June 2008

Tel: 01394 386603 for details

THE NEW WOLSEY
THEATRE IPSWICH

Book and Lyrics by
Steve Brown &
Justin Greene
Music by
Steve Brown

This programme is printed on 100% recycled paper



Gallery Players Present

The Sunshine Boys

by
Neil Simon



Sir John Mills Theatre
7th-10th November
Box Office 01473 211498

An amateur presentation, performed by kind arrangement with
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Director's Notes

I have always been fascinated by what happens to us as we grow older. I find myself looking back rather than forwards and becoming less tolerant. It was this thought that was the catalyst for choosing this play.

Recently I started to wonder what had become of my old school friends in London and after doing some research on the internet, I discovered that there was an annual reunion dinner. I was one of the victims of the eleven plus examination and failed it miserably. I gained a place at a prestigious grammar school in Battersea after having been awarded what was called a Governor's place. Despite the nature of my old school I have never been one for tradition and so I went with some trepidation. I recognised no one and was about to leave when hunger got the better of me and I decided to take my place at table in the Grand Hall. It was only then that I realised that several of the ageing men I had walked past were in fact my former classmates. As we joked and reminisced I relaxed and enjoyed myself but a strange thing began to happen; the more we chatted I began to be irked by precisely those habits and opinions that had annoyed me all those years ago but now to my surprise I found myself more tolerant of those characteristics. Had I mellowed with age?

The play was first produced in 1972 with Jack Albertson and Sam Levine in the lead roles. Neil Simon adapted the play for the screen and the consequent 1975 film with Walter Matthau and George Burns in the lead roles, won several Oscar nominations. Ironically Simon's inspiration was the real-life vaudeville team of Joe Smith and Charles Dale who, unlike their theatrical counterparts, were inseparable life-long friends.

We have had great fun rehearsing this play. There is more in it than meets the eye. There is a real feel good factor about it yet it also allows affection for theatre to become an effective tool with which to question the nature of long-standing professional relationships. It raises questions of loss, change and friendship. I would like to think that apart from the inherent humour we have captured some of the more tender and revealing moments.

Steve Wooldridge



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Forthcoming Productions

June 2008 The New Wolsey Theatre

'Spend, Spend, Spend'

Inspired by the life of Viv Nicholson, who won £152,319 on the football pools in 1961 - equivalent to £5m today. When asked by the papers what she was going to do with the money, she replied, "I'm going to spend, spend, spend!". Viv's rags-to-riches-and-back story took her through five husbands, fast cars, bankruptcy and booze. 'Spend, Spend, Spend' charts the tragedy, comedy and love story that became the legend of Viv Nicholson. (See back page.)



Gallery Players Present

The Sunshine Boys

by Neil Simon

Cast (in order of appearance)

Willie Peter Phillips
Ben Silverman Mike Cook
Al Lewis Conrad Lord
Eddie Shaun Corcoran
Patient Mick Farrow
TV Announcer Helen Johns
TV Director Steve Watts
Nurse Amy Restall
Registered Nurse Brenda Caddick

Production Team

Director Steve Wooldridge
Set Design Dave Borthwick
Stage Manager Georgie Beard
Lighting Phil Rawe (assisted by Steve Rowe)
Sound Design Bryan Hoyer
Sound Operative Phil Rawe
Publicity Steve Taplin
Props Sue Simmons
Set Construction Dave Borthwick, Georgie Beard, Steve Wooldridge, Graham Dowe, Duncan Broatch, Shaun Corcoran, Mike Cook, Peter Phillips.
Front of House & Coffee Bar Sheila, Sue, Ruth, Judy & Mike, Linda, Steve, Mick & Jean.

Setting

The action moves between Willie Clark's hotel suite and a CBS television studio in the 1980's

There will be an interval of twenty minutes between Act 1 & Act 2 when drinks and refreshments will be available in the Bill Carver lounge.

www.galleryplayers.co.uk

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Neil Simon

Marvin Neil Simon was born in the Bronx on July 4, 1927, and grew up in Washington Heights at the northern tip of Manhattan. He attended New York University briefly (1944-45) and the University of Denver (1945-46) before joining the United States Army where he began his writing career working for the Army camp newspaper.

After being discharged from the army, Simon returned to New York and took a job as a mailroom clerk for Warner Brother's East Coast office. He and his brother Danny began writing comedy revues and eventually found their way into radio, then television where they toiled alongside the likes of Woody Allen, Mel Brooks and Larry Gelbart writing for *The Phil Silvers Show* and Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows*.

Simon received several Emmy Award nominations for his television writing, then moved on to the stage where he quickly established himself as America's most successful commercial playwright by creating an unparalleled string of Broadway hits beginning with *Come Blow Your Horn*. During the 1966-67 season, *Barefoot in the Park*, *The Odd Couple*, *Sweet Charity* and *The Star Spangled Girl* were all running simultaneously. From 1970-71, Broadway theatregoers had their choice of *Plaza Suite*, *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, and *Promises, Promises*.



Mike Cook





The Sunshine Boys



Peter Phillips



Conrad Lord



Jack Albertson and Sam Levine

However critical acclaim came slowly for Simon. In spite of the fact that he had had more smash hits than any other American playwright, critics continued to take pleasure in dismissing him as a mere "writer of gags."

In 1973, following the death of his wife, Simon reached a low point in his career with two failures *The Good Doctor* (1973) and *God's Favorite* (1976). A move to California, however, reinvigorated him and he produced a much more successful play later that year in *California Suite*.

After marrying actress Marsha Mason, Simon went on to write *Chapter Two* (1977) which was considered by many critics to be his finest play to that date.

Then, in 1983, Simon began to win over many of his critics with the introduction of his autobiographical trilogy--*Brighton Beach Memoirs* (1983), *Biloxi Blues* (1985) and *Broadway Bound* (1986)--which chronicled his stormy childhood, his brief Army time, and the beginning of his career in television. Suddenly the critics began taking him seriously. He followed up in 1991 with *Lost in Yonkers* for which he won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

During the course of his career, Simon has won three Tony Awards for Best Play (*The Odd Couple*, *Biloxi Blues* and *Lost in Yonkers*.) He has had more plays adapted to film than any other American playwright and, in addition, has written nearly a dozen original screenplays himself. He received Academy Award nominations for his screenplays *The Odd Couple* (1968), *The Sunshine Boys* (1975) and *California Suite* (1978). He has also been the recipient of the Antoinette Perry Award, the Writers Guild Award, the Evening Standard Award, the New York Drama Critics Circle Award, the Shubert Award, the Outer Circle Award, and a 1978 Golden Globe Award for his screenplay, *The Goodbye Girl*.



Lee Meredith, Jack Albertson and Sam Levine

A History of Vaudeville

Vaudeville was a genre of variety entertainment prevalent in the United States and Canada from the early 1880s until the early 1930s. The origin of the term is obscure, but is often explained as a corruption of the expression "voix de ville", or "voice of the city". Another plausible etymology makes it a corruption of the French *Vau de Vire*, a valley in Normandy noted for style of songs with topical themes.

Developing from many sources, including concert saloons, minstrelsy, freak shows, dime museums, and literary burlesque, vaudeville became one of the most popular types of entertainment in North America. Each evening's bill of performance was made up of a series of separate, unrelated acts. Types of acts included (among others) musicians (both classical and popular), dancers, comedians, trained animals, magicians, female and male impersonators, acrobats, one-act plays or scenes from plays, athletes, lecturing celebrities, minstrels, and short films.

By the 1880's, the Industrial Revolution had changed the once rural face of America. Half of the population was now concentrated in towns and cities, working at regulated jobs that left most of them with two things they never had back on the farm a little spare cash and weekly leisure time. These people wanted affordable entertainment on a regular basis. Most variety shows were too coarse for women or children to attend, and minstrel shows were already declining in popularity. In a world where phonographs, film, radio and television did not yet exist, something new was needed to fill the gap.

Vaudeville also tried to bridge a social gap that had divided American audiences ever since the upper and lower classes clashed in a deadly 1849 riot.

After the Astor Place Riot of 1849 entertainment in New York City was divided along class lines: opera was chiefly for the upper middle and upper classes, minstrel shows and melodramas for

the middle class, variety shows in concert saloons for men of the working class and the slumming middle class. Vaudeville was developed by entrepreneurs seeking higher profits from a wider audience.

- Robert W. Snyder in *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), Kenneth T. Jackson, editor, p. 1226.



Small to Big Time

More than 25,000 people performed in vaudeville over its 50-plus years of existence, working their way through the three levels defined by the trade newspaper *Variety*

"Small time" small town theatres and cheaper theatres in larger towns. Performers made as little as \$15 a week in the early years, closer to \$75 over time. These often crude theatres were the training ground for new performers, or the place for old-timers on the skids to eke out a few final seasons.

"Medium time" good theatres in a wide range of cities, offering salaries of up to a few hundred dollars a week. Performers seen here were either on the way up or on the way down.

"Big Time" the finest theatres in the best cities, using a two performance-a-day format. Most big time acts earned hundreds per week, and headliners could command \$1,000 a week -- or far more.

Some performers insisted that there was only **"big"**, **"small"** and **"small-small"** time. However you labeled them, there were varying levels of vaudeville. Years later, a vaudeville dancer explained how miserable the "small time" experience could be.

'In small time we worked on the Death Trail that was the name for one-nighters in places you never heard of, like Missoula, Montana, places where nobody would go unless they really needed work and we did. They weren't theatres, they were kind of stores, with benches instead of seats. When the show began, the baker, the laundry truck driver and maybe the garbage man dropped what they were doing and jumped in to play the music. They were the band. They'd come in and they couldn't play . . . But we got a lot of experience. The Bert Levy time was really awful. Their houses were often in the same town we were working in, but theirs weren't even as good as ours . . .'

- Mack Lathrop, as quoted in *The Vaudevillians*, p. 138.

'Everything I know I learned in Vaudeville'
James Cagney



(Bing Crosby in Vaudeville)