

NEW WORLD NEWS

FOR MORAL RE-ARMAMENT



The Duke of Gloucester talks with (l to r) cast members Jon C P Mattocks, Kathy Dunkerley and Peter Honri, and (behind) Richard Owens.

'Are your heads of government of one heart and soul?'

— Wesley play starts Westminster run

PHOTOS BY CHANNER

The Duke and Duchess of Gloucester go backstage to meet the cast of 'Ride! Ride!' after the gala London premiere. Here they listen to Gordon Gostelow, who plays the part of John Wesley.





Hogarth projections are a feature of the staging of 'Ride! Ride!' (l to r) Gordon Gostelow, Caroline Villiers and Brendan Barry.

On the same wavelength

An interview with Gordon Gostelow, who plays the part of John Wesley, heard by an estimated three million people on the 'Pete Murray Show' (BBC Radio 2).

FOR the last 11 weeks of your life, you have been, to coin the title of the musical that you are in at the moment called 'Ride! Ride!', riding around the country.

We have had 11 weeks of it and we have been to all the places that Wesley was most concerned with in the 18th century—Newcastle, Bristol and then as all the industrial revolution towns grew up, Leeds, Bradford, Manchester and the Midlands. It was an astonishing tour, seeing the countryside he knew.

I must say that the central focus point of John Wesley in a musical—well I can't really imagine it.

It's the most extraordinary thing that has ever happened to me. I could not believe the offer of the part. And when I read about him I couldn't really believe anything about him.

Did you know anything about him?

Nothing about him at all. I was brought up a Methodist in Australia, as a child. A lot of the emotional things one is going through now—having to interpret this man— one remembers from being a child: the purity of what he was on about has been kept over 200 hundred years. From my own experience I know that. I remember things my parents used to say and do—it's exactly gelled with what I have to do on stage.

'Ride! Ride!' There is a very specific reason for the title isn't there?

Yes, because you see he was a Church of England priest. He lived and died a Church of England priest, but wasn't allowed to preach, because of various attacks by some sections of the 18th century Anglicans

against him and his brother. So his idea then was to go to where he could be heard and that was open air preaching. To do this he used to go all over England. He used to take a horse; and he also used to read when he was on the horse.

It is estimated that he rode over a quarter of a million miles during 50 or 60 years of a completely vagabond sort of life.

He had a place in Bristol which still exists. And his HQ in London in City Road, and in Newcastle. That was the triangle that he worked on. He just never stopped. Went everywhere. Also went to Ireland. Very strong in Cornwall.

He is estimated to have changed the lives of more people, simply by counting heads, than anyone between Luther and Lenin. This was something one never understood. This was an enormously gifted and powerful religious genius which one never heard about.

I was passionately interested in the century before—the civil war period. Wesley comes right at the end of that. He succeeded where the civil war failed. In the civil war, the Puritans won, defeated all the power of the Establishment, the Church, the King but then could not hold it. And somehow the whole thing reverted back, and the Church got very revengeful and the King got very revengeful. So one had to wait for another 50 or so years. And he healed that breach. Quite extraordinary.

Well, there are some more questions I would like to ask you, about the musical 'Ride! Ride!', and about John Wesley. This is a musical which you have taken to many parts

of Britain over the last 11 weeks. And I believe you have done fairly extensive business.

Extraordinary business.

Did it surprise you?

Absolutely, because the theatre is in a fairly rocky state at the moment. But we have had over 2,000 some nights, really very big houses.

Do you think this particular musical will in some way convert people to religion, or bring people back? You were brought up a Methodist—I don't know whether you are Methodist or not?

No, I have not had the kind of religious experience that this play goes on about at all.

Has it affected you?

Yes, very much. Because it is very powerful and it's very personal. I can understand him very easily. But I don't pretend to know what his experience was. I'm interpreting something that I can understand but not share. And I find this extremely moving.

The girl (Martha) who sings the song—that is the moment after she has come into contact with him—there is something different in her life, and this has happened to thousands of people in relation to this man. He was a little man, and a shy man, a don, a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. He was not at all the sort of chap you would have thought would set the world alight.

Have you had the chance to speak to anyone who has seen 'Ride! Ride!', any member of the public?

Yes a lot. I have relied upon them. A lot of them are shocked. And they are honest to admit they are shocked, because they see on stage a religious experience which they thought was theirs, a private one, not something that necessarily would be shared by anyone else. And this has been marvelous because it gives me the idea that we are on the right track. I have even had a letter from a leper colony in Africa from someone who says that we are doing what they are doing in their lives. This is a very strange thing for a theatrical person like me to do. To be on the same wavelength as a religious experience like that.

Did John Wesley have a sense of humour?

He had a very dry, universal, sense of humour which you almost miss. He wrote the greatest travel journal ever. The jokes are there. He had a great joy in his life—a thing which one has to keep remembering about religious people. They are extremely joyful people. They have tremendous energy and they go on about something they love. One has to get the fizz of that over, as well as the sheer historical weight of what he did. It enormously influenced the whole of the 19th century.

He influenced the whole evangelical history of the Church of England. He had his finger in every pie in the 18th century. If anyone can be described as purifying and sweetening life in the jungle of Hogarth's world, which we are trying to recreate in the play, it would have been Wesley.

Wesley play starts London run

THEIR ROYAL HIGHNESSES the Duke and Duchess of Gloucester attended the gala London premiere of the musical *Ride! Ride!*

The Royal party went on stage after the final curtain to meet the cast, and then joined the crowds of distinguished guests, particularly church leaders, who attended a reception afterwards.

'Hey, when are they coming out? They've been in there a long time,' called out one eager local resident, leaning out of his window for a glimpse of the Duke and Duchess as they left.

The whole audience had been invited to stay on, and animated conversations went on for a long time. 'It is a daring enterprise—and it succeeds,' said one TV personality. 'They come through as a man possessed by God. I have a lot to think about.'

Ride! Ride! is presented by Aldersgate Productions, a company set up in response to a resolution by the Methodist Conference that the musical should be seen throughout the country.

Justice done

'I was deeply, deeply moved,' commented an Anglican bishop. 'We must back this with everything we've got,' he said, and added that he would start arranging parties. 'It did it historical justice,' commented another Anglican leader while a Salvation Army officer described it as 'truth for today coming across'. And a Methodist said, 'People get a sentimental idea of Jesus Christ. They have a sentimental idea of Wesley. This corrects it.'

'Disturbing' seemed to be one of the adjectives most used for an unusual show

that starts with Wesley alone in a spotlight challenging the integrity of the leaders of Westminster.

Many people commented on the sensitive performance of Gordon Gostelow as Wesley, a role made all the more striking, as the *Daily Telegraph* Peterborough column pointed out, because of his 'extraordinary physical resemblance to the founder of Methodism'.

Extraordinary response

Ride! Ride! starts its seven week London run after a successful three month provincial tour which has drawn wide press, radio and TV coverage. More than three million people last week heard a 12 minute interview with Gordon Gostelow on the popular BBC Radio 2 *Pete Murray Show* in which he described the response as absolutely extraordinary (See p 2).

BBC Radio 4 carried a four minute report on *Ride! Ride!* in its *Sunday* programme. It included extracts from the music by Penelope Thwaites and an interview with author Alan Thornhill.

Interviewer Michael Meach commented, 'If the audience at *Ride! Ride!* expects an evening of singing Wesley hymns and basking in a rose-tinted view of the beginnings of the Methodist church they'll be disappointed. *Ride! Ride!* sets Wesley's work against the crude vulgarities and social injustices of his day. The costumes, sepia lighting, with back projection of 18th Century etchings, all contributed to the impact of Alan Thornhill's play.'

Cecil Northcott wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* Magazine, 'One of the most surprising facts about the state of the Christian religion in present-day England is that while formal Church-going appears to be on the downgrade anything connected with Christianity that is musical, poetic, dramatic or singable is on the up-grade.'

'We have had the continuing success of the two gospel musicals *Jesus Christ Superstar* and *Godspell*, now to be joined by *Ride! Ride!*



Charles and John Wesley.

RIGHT PUBLICITY

MEMBERS OF THE CAST were invited to share in the evening service at the Methodist Central Hall. The minister, the Rev Dr Maurice Barnett, told the congregation, 'I hope you'll tell all your friends what is happening at the Westminster Theatre. Take your neighbours.'

'Friends from America, see it and invite the cast to America. Quite seriously.' There were many, he said, who felt that this sort of witness could invade a deeper level that the country needed at this time. 'Take it to America. You need all we need, perhaps in a double way.'

Thanking the cast he said, 'Our prayers will follow you. I'd like from this service a stream of the right kind of publicity.'

UNCONVENTIONAL

INTERCHANGE, an American Methodist monthly, quotes Ron Mann, a member of the board of Aldersgate Productions, in an article about *Ride! Ride!*: 'Ronald Mann has expressed optimism about the success of *Ride! Ride!* He pointed out that "when John Wesley began his work, the world was also at a time of great change and great unrest. His response was to bring thousands and tens of thousands a transforming experience of Christ".'

'In order to do this, Mr Mann commented, Wesley "had to break with conventional ways and to go out into the fields and the public squares to preach. Today we believe that we must look constantly for new ways, not for the sake of being unconventional, but in order to be effective."

LONDON BROADCAST

QUEST, the BBC Radio London programme, carried a ten minute programme on *Ride! Ride!* including interviews and songs from the show.

WORTH A VISIT

SOUTHERN EVENING ECHO, Southampton says that *Ride! Ride!* 'is worth a visit whatever your allegiances'.

AN LP AND A CASSETTE with 19 songs from the show is available from Grosvenor Books. Price £2.95 (incl VAT). For all orders sent with cash, postage free within the UK.



Director Peter Coe with (left) Jeremy Anthony and (right) Brendan Barry.



A theologian looks at Caux

The third in a series of reflections on the MRA international conference centre in Switzerland by the Rev Dr Richard Bevan, Vicar of Grasmere.

WHEN I VISITED Caux last summer, I did not dream what a memorable and indelible experience it was going to be for me. Now the recollection of it flashes across my mind frequently, and I feel a glow inside. This is not a glow of nostalgia, but the glow of a flame, because at Caux some part of oneself catches fire, and it is surely the fire of the Spirit.

On the morning before I left, I stepped out of the lift of the Grand Hotel above Mountain House. Plainly into my mind came the sharp thought, 'God intends to restore vision.' Other thoughts also came during the day: 'I must be sure that my eyes are clear to see what He wants me to see.' 'Another person may be wearing a disguise, but I must not be deceived by outward appearances. Search the heart.' Here was a strong and powerful voice speaking a message audible to my mind, which I was obviously meant to receive. I am still in the process of interpreting what was said to me. Perhaps the message was given to share with others and to be passed on. If this is so, the reader will take part in the interpretation and application of the words, and will understand something of what was implied.

Unclouded by fear

The way I see the meaning of these things at the moment is related to the basic honesty and love engendered by life at Caux, together with the direct turning to God in expectancy that He will guide and lead individuals into the way of peace. In a world of unprecedented confusion Caux stands like a sentinel, heralding a unity of nations by means of a straightforward quartet of absolute standards, honesty, purity, unselfishness and love. Beginning with the individual, these extend to all who will accept the challenge, so that they become the essential link in a pure and radical transformation of life and outlook, leading to a new quality of fellowship and understanding, coupled with goodwill. With the acceptance of these standards comes vision unclouded by fear, pretence or prevarication. The individual is enabled to drop the mask of evasion and deception, because the heart is alive to God and neighbour in a direct and sincere conviction of reality.

At one of the afternoon sessions on the basic principles of MRA, someone was troubled about the inadequacy of the individual to be effective in bringing about the necessary change in human life and outlook. Surely MRA was much too simple to do all that must be done to bring about the vast change on which peace and the future of mankind depend! Can the elementary equipment of David vanquish Goliath in the modern setting of giant greed, hatred and faceless oppression? Are four standards sufficiently weighty and effective to combat the modern enemy? Yes, because the real enemy is within each person, and personal commitment to the absolute standards is accompanied by remarkable results. This is where the courage to decide comes in.

My only public utterance at Caux came at this point. I felt that the discussion of MRA principles was so important, that I was led to say, 'Don't feel that you cannot enter the battle, because you have no adequate weapons.

'In your own strength your weapons are inadequate, but with God's help you have been shown a new way, and offered divine guidance. Consequently your weapons have a hidden strength.

'Don't blame your weapons for your own cowardice, or as an excuse for cowardice, but trust and gain courage that there is a place in the battle-line for you.'

I placed the paper on which I wrote this in my spectacle case, so that each time I put on my reading glasses, I am reminded of the truth that everyone, starting with myself, can be a shirker or a fighter. I thank Caux that I reached this decision there. I believe that God was at work to bring home the truth to me.

Unifying truth

I also wrote down some other remarks made during this session which seem to throw light on the way the Spirit works at Caux. A distinguished man from Southern Africa said, 'If you walk with God, you'll eat with kings,' and he believed that this could be literally true at Caux. A young person, who had recently been changed, said, 'Today you have come to a cross-road. You have to decide to put right what is wrong.' A South

American pointed out that 'our neighbour is either our prey or our victim, our competitor or our friend and brother (sister)'. A final unifying truth was put into words by someone else, and in this truth is contained a world of meaning: 'There is something special about every viewpoint. Every viewpoint can be brought within the one spectrum of human life on earth, so that it can be shared.'

Surely these sentiments are a proof that people can triumph, where they answer the voice which speaks to them. They can be brought together, if they apply absolutely the absolute standards. At Caux they can discover how the absolute standards work in one cross-section of humanity, and these, if applied to everyone, can solve the world's problems.

The cross-section is always fluid, because people are coming and going, but their experience seems to tally, and this is a recommendation for applying Caux awareness cosmically. All the people are the multiplication and final addition of some people. We can deduce from this how vital it is that some people should commit themselves completely to influence the rest. For this purpose the more people who come to Caux, the better.

SPARKLES WITH ZEST

STAGE MAN'S DIARY, the column by Georgie Wood in *The Stage and Television Today* noted this week: 'Further contentment in the post was *The Song of a Merryman* by Cliff and Edna Magor—an enthralling paperback published by Grosvenor Books at £1. It is the story of Ivan Menzies, the D'Oyly Carte Star of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, and his co-star and wife, Elsie Griffin. It sparkles with a rare zest and good humour.'

ARCTIC WINDOW

THE NORWEGIAN FILM *Light and the Arctic Cathedral*, was shown in Tunbridge Wells last month. Commissioned by the Norwegian Government, the film shows painter, Victor Sparre, creating the huge stained-glass East window of the new church at Tromsø. The Soviet Academy of Arts chose the film for the Moscow Film Festival last year.

A cassette of Victor Sparre speaking in London at the MRA centre about the artist's role in society is available from Grosvenor Books, 54 Lyford Road, London SW18 3JJ (price £1.85 + 15p VAT p+p 20p).

DOUBLE BOOKING

DAILY MIRROR (circulation four million) carried a 300-word story this week about the forthcoming books *Dear Archbishop* and *Rebirth of a Nation?* (See NWN Vol 24 No 24).