

Alton Fringe Theatre

Alton, a small market town between Basingstoke and Petersfield in Hampshire, is famous for brewing beer, as the site of an English Civil War battle and as the place where Sweet Fanny Adams was brutally murdered and dismembered. The town has literary links with Edmund Spenser, Gilbert White, Elizabeth Gaskell and, most notably, Jane Austen.

For twenty years, Alton Fringe Theatre players have been challenging themselves and their audiences with a wide variety of dramatic material, ranging from Shakespeare to Schiller, from Euripides to Pinter, Ostrovsky to Lorca. Specialising in small-scale, intimate studio productions, we have, in the last five years, presented our growing following with *The Fire Raisers*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Under Milk Wood*, *A Man for All Seasons*, and *Kindertransport*.

This production of *Salome* marks a number of firsts for the company. We have never before attempted a piece by Oscar Wilde, the venue is several times larger than those we are used to and it is the first time we have performed outside rural Hampshire. We are very much looking forward to the experience.

Acknowledgements

Amery Hill School	Rehearsal facilities
Jo Foulkes	Dance music & choreography
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Little Green Dragon Bookshop	Ticket sales in Alton
Hilary Amor	Head of lokanaan
St Patrick's Redemptorist Community	



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Salome



Oscar Wilde

The Maltings Centre, Alton
St Patrick's Church, Edinburgh
August, 2008

Cast *in order of speaking*

Narraboth , <i>Captain of the Guard</i>	Richard Hagen
The Page of Herodias	Becky Ryan
First Soldier	Paul Cottam
Second Soldier	Dom Gwyther
A Cappadocian	James Willis
Iokanaan , <i>The Prophet</i>	Steve Rowland
Salome , <i>Princess of Judaea, daughter of Herodias</i>	Jo Foulkes
Third Guest	Catherine Gerlach
Herod Antipas , <i>Tetrarch of Judaea</i>	Tim Guilding
Herodias , <i>Wife of the Tetrarch</i>	Chris Chappell
Tigellinus , <i>Roman Ambassador</i>	Michael McGreevy
First Guest	Penny Cushing
Second Guest	Morag Horn
Director	Michael McGreevy
Assistant Director	Lesley Willis
Props	Catherine Gerlach
Costumes	Sue Wilson
Lighting & Sound	Haydn Chappell
Publicity	Paul Cottam

Scene

A great terrace in the Palace of Herod, set above the banqueting-hall

Duration approximately 1 hour 15 minutes – no interval

Oscar Wilde (1854-1900), playwright, poet, story-writer, is celebrated for his brilliant dramas of humour and wit, among them *The Importance of Being Earnest*. At the peak of his fame, in 1895, he was imprisoned for homosexuality and condemned to two years hard labour. His health failed and on release from prison he went into exile. He died in Paris three years later.

Salome, one of the least known of his plays, has both humour and wit expressed in superbly elegant language, but it has much more. The play is based on the biblical story of John the Baptist and the rash promise Herod made to his stepdaughter. It is a story of integrity in conflict with lust and power – a study in obsession – and ultimately leads to a savage and appalling tragedy.

The play was written in French and first performed in 1896 in Paris. The English translation was by Lord Alfred Douglas, later revised by Wilde himself. It was banned in England, where it was not performed publicly until 1931. This ban, we are told, was because of the use of biblical names in the play, but there was also the bitter anti-Wilde prejudice to be overcome. Wilde was ill-served by many of his friends and commentators.

There have been some memorable productions of **Salome**, not least Steven Berkoff's remarkable presentation at the National Theatre in 1989. Berkoff wrote at the time: "Wilde scored the play with great song-bursts of arias, plumes of multi-coloured and ornamental dialogue modelled on 'The Song of Songs'." **Salome** has also been described as a work of modern art, full of depth and surprises.

Salome is being performed in the classical eighteenth century church of St Patrick. Built between 1771 and 1774 for the Scottish Episcopal Church it passed to the United Presbyterian Congregation in 1818 and became a Roman Catholic church in 1856. The busy parish church is now in the care of the Redemptorists. It makes a spectacular setting for **Salome**.

Oscar Wilde never saw a production of **Salome**. In Reading Prison he heard that it was being performed in Paris and wrote movingly to Robert Ross:

*"Please say how gratified I was at the performance of my play, and have my thanks conveyed to Luigne Poë.
It is something that at a time of disgrace and shame I should still be regarded as an artist."*