

August Monthly Talk – Brian Freeland: Playing the Clown

During Brian’s presentation, he was both narrator and player. Seeing a production of Shaw’s play *Man and Superman* at the Bristol Old Vic during the early years of his National Service encouraged Brian to consider the theatre as a potential career: three weeks after demobilization he started work at the London Palladium. Large chunks of the next twenty years were spent touring abroad, often with plays by or about G B Shaw.

As himself, Brian started to give his talk about his hero, but soon Shaw made his presence known, interrupting the narrator, chatting directly to the audience and offering impressions of his contemporaries.

In this light-hearted manner Brian chronicled the life, the plays, the reviews, the correspondence and the complicated personal relationships of Shaw.

Shaw called the clown “the best part of the circus”, and wrote “all my life I have merely been playing the clown”. Mrs Patrick Campbell always started his letters to him ‘Dear Joey’ – a reference to that other famous clown, Joseph Grimaldi . This inspired Brian’s title for his talk.

Shaw died in 1950 following complications when he fell from a tree whilst pruning it and was said to have a whimsical smile on his face. Maybe he was remembering the incident below.

Brian ended his presentation with the tale of an occasion when Shaw arrived in Fitzroy Square rather the worse for drink and began dancing around the square,

A policeman came along and asked him to stop but ended up taking his helmet off and joining in. Drawing the attention of a police inspector, these two were then joined by the inspector!

It was an entertaining presentation especially welcome on an extremely wet and cold August afternoon.

