



LORNA COBBOLD, World-Class Stage Manager

August 2024

Whilst enjoying a week with family members following my granddaughter's glamorous wedding I was invited to the Chichester Festival Theatre for **Cameron Mackintosh's** revival of the classic **Lionel Bart** musical **OLIVER**. To a capacity audience it was a fresh and vibrant production directed and choreographed by Matthew Bourne.

Listed for Cameron Mackintosh Ltd as Associate Producer – International Productions was **Lorna Cobbold (1971)** #668 on the web family tree. In a charmingly frank and open podcast interview Lorna, who has three decades of world-wide stage management experience (**Les Miserable, Lion King, Mary Poppins, Rock Follies** etc.), told that she first directed a show at school, largely because 'at 17 you'll do anything' and it won a prize. Wrestling with what to do next she obtained an English A-level to study Drama at Manchester University.

Her tutor there was **Alan Ayckbourn's** designer, **Michael Holt** who quashed her desire to also become a designer but suggested stage management in its place. Almost her first job was selling programmes at the **Royal Court Theatre** where she sought a work placement. To obtain the necessary Equity Card she joined an outdoor Shakespeare company in Plymouth doing all manner of menial tasks, mostly dictated by traditional west country weather. On returning to the Royal Court, she received a phone call from the **Nuffield Theatre** saying we need an Assistant Stage Manager today. Lorna went and there she claims, she learned her craft.

With colourful examples of things that went wrong, Lorna provides a brilliant layman's guide to the different responsibilities of the Assistant Stage Manager, the Deputy Stage Manager, the Stage Manager and the Company Manager, a hierarchy through which she ascended enthusiastically. She describes her move from plays into musical theatre with its vastly increased complexity brought about by sheer size and the increased number of disciplines.

Turning to the present, Lorna is currently involved in two plays in this country and will shortly be working on **Cabaret** in New York. Although America is familiar with British Musical Theatre they do things very differently on Broadway. I have learned that you cannot be taught stage management in class. Experience is what counts. You learn it by looking and listening. Lorna has done both these to perfection.

Anthony Cobbold