

## Going back in time

by Tony Beckwith

tony@tonybeckwith.com

### The Players

*"Oh, to be someone else for once!"* - Leonce and Lena, by Georg Büchner (1813-1837)



Anne (Thompson) Darch as Rosetta,  
Anthony Beckwith as Prince Leonce.

When the house lights dimmed to darkness and the audience finally settled down, an expectant hush filled the theatre and hung in the air. Everyone backstage stood like statues, the frenzied whispering faded away, and all eyes turned to the director. He, with haggard features showing the strain of three months of rehearsals, took one last look around then jerked his thumb upward. On that signal the curtain was raised, the lights came up, and a muted murmur rose from the audience as they saw the stage for the first time.

In the magical moment of silence before the curtain went up I was in position, stage left, reclining on a bench. My face was hot under my makeup and my lacquered hair felt stiff and sticky. I was playing a prince in a play set in early nineteenth century Germany, and had been practicing my haughty demeanor for weeks. I was fifteen years old but was already a veteran of several productions, so the haughty demeanor wasn't actually that much of a challenge to my acting skills.

My whole family was involved in the theatre. My mother, Muriel (who insisted that wild horses couldn't drag her onstage) was the prompter; my father, Rex turned in many stellar acting performances; and my brother, Christopher who somehow managed to look good in his filthy blue overalls, was one of the backstage boys.

The Montevideo Players was, for me, far more than a local amateur theatre group. It was an extended family, an introduction to the fascinating world of adults, and an education in many fields, not least of which was the delicate art of the love scene. When I first read the script of "Leonce and Lena," I saw that the prince would spend some time dally-

ing with a courtesan. I had to look that word up in the dictionary, and was very excited to discover what it meant. But my excitement knew no bounds when I heard that the role in question, Rosetta, was being played by one of the loveliest women in the group. She was a few years older than I, and was beautiful in all the ways that matter to a teenage boy. She was also, however, the director's wife, and I wasn't sure I'd be able to rehearse my tender scene with her while he looked on. I soon learned—not for the last time—that lust can trump an awkward shyness, and I spent many blissful moments gazing at her and saying things like, "I dream over your eyes as over magic springs, deep and hidden."

Working as an actor so early in life introduced me to the existential idea of “otherness” that was very much in vogue at the time. Playing different roles on stage gave me a sense of diversity within myself, a feeling that there was more than just one of me. This fueled my curiosity about my own identity, prompting me to delve more deeply into the question of who I was and where I fit in the scheme of things. I wasn’t the only one who felt this way. Most of the Players, who had ordinary day jobs of one kind or another, loved being involved in something so utterly different from their daily routine. My father explained that acting allowed him to step outside of himself and said that, in his opinion, exploring other realities gave us a broader understanding of the world around us—a perspective I agree with to this day. One of Prince Leonce’s lines seemed to speak for us all: “Oh, to be someone else for once!” (Rosetta’s husband, for example, in my case.)

Every club must have a clubhouse of some kind, and the Players had their Center. Housed in a small warehouse in an unfashionable part of town, it was drafty and cold and damp, but we loved it. There was plenty of room in the back to rehearse and build sets and store costumes. And in the front room was the all-important bar where I acquired a taste for Double Uruguay beer and certainly explored my share of other realities.

There was always a cast party after the final performance of every show. They were lively affairs, attended by everyone who was even remotely involved: set builders, stage hands, sound and lighting techies, props, wardrobe, makeup, front-of-house, plus family members and assorted groupies. The actors and actresses usually arrived still wearing stage makeup, and nobody went home until the wee small hours of the morning. I suppose we were all a little reluctant to leave. None of us wanted to let go of the magic and return to our ordinary lives.

## Chef in Residence

by Joanna Mullee

joannamullee@hotmail.com

# Chocolate Biscuit Cake

Butter an 18cm spring form cake tin. Put biscuits into a plastic bag, seal and crush into pieces (not crumbs!)

Melt the butter and syrup in a pan (or micro for about 1 1/2 minutes) until melted. Stir in the cocoa powder and raisins, then biscuit bits, mix thoroughly. Spoon into prepared tin and press to make a smooth even surface.

Put the cream into a pan and bring to almost a boil. Remove from heat and add the chopped chocolate, stir until chocolate has completely melted, then pour onto the biscuit base. Spread evenly; then chill for about half an hour.

Will keep for about a week wrapped in foil.

PS. Chopped nuts, dried fruit and malteasers can be added to the mix at the same time as the raisins. The combination is entirely up to you! (We just added the raisins and lightly toasted hazlenuts).

Chopped apricots, cherries and Brazil nut (or almond) is one suggestion.

Or - omit the cream , double the chocolate quantity and melt it and pour over the base. It will be a harder crunchier texture than the cream mixture.



### Ingredients:

- 200g Maria biscuits
- 100g butter
- 3 Tblsp golden syrup
- 2 Tblsp cocoa powder
- 50g raisins
- 50g dark chocolate (chopped)
- 50g double cream