

'Les Marottes' French Dramatic Society

Until the late 1990s, the annual French play was a university institution. The University of Liverpool's French Dramatic Society performed from the early 1950s onwards, with the name 'Les Marottes' being adopted by the company in the mid 1970s. A 'marotte' is a jester's bauble, a design of which was produced in the mid 1980s and

used on Les Marottes stationery. The name of the society was a pun to flatter the then Professor of French, Claus Mayer, who was a specialist of the 16th-century French poet Clément Marot, as well as a director and actor. Over the years, plays were performed in the Arts Theatre of the Victoria Building, the Neptune Theatre, the Catholic Chaplaincy and later the Eleanor Rathbone Theatre. Performances were particularly popular with A-level French students, with productions of A-level texts giving sold-out performances to school parties coming from as far afield as Yorkshire and Birmingham.



Figure 1: D1047/16/11- Les Marottes headed paper

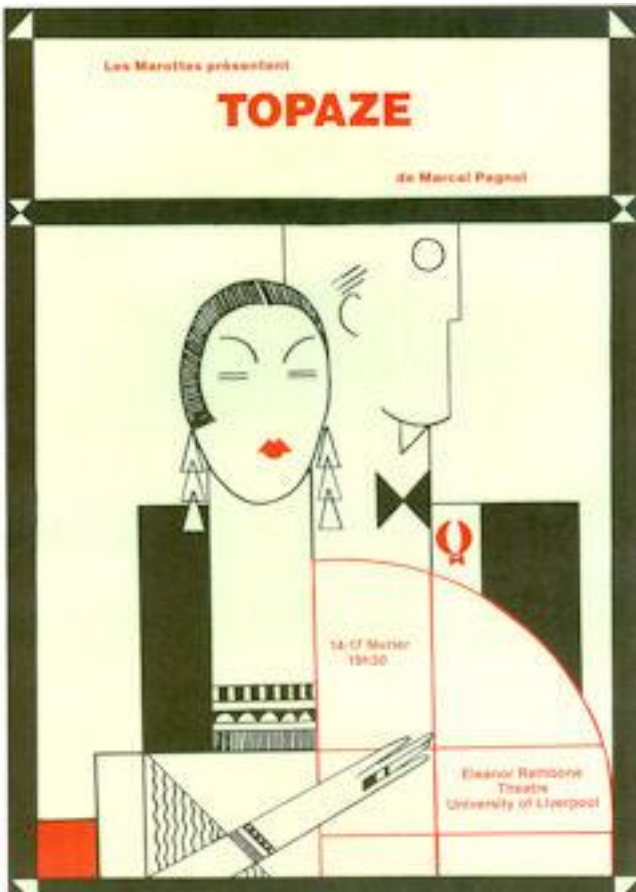


Figure 2: D1047/26/3 - Poster for 'Topaze'

The University Archives' Les Marottes collection consists of material relating to productions from the 1980s-2001, with some items from the 1950s and 60s, and includes posters, programmes, video recordings, production notes, annotated scripts, photographs, and even some props. The company performed works from the 17th to the 20th century, from Molière to Jean Anouilh.

Items from the collections give insights into Les Marottes productions, from their formative stages to the public performance. One such play is the 1990 production of Marcel Pagnol's *Topaze*. Notes and script annotations allow us to see how the company interpreted this dramatic work, while set drawings and draft programmes provide us with the original designs for the production and its ephemera. The final results can be seen in a video recording and photographs of performances.

The plays of Molière were a particularly popular choice with the company over the years, with one of their earliest productions being a selection of scenes from Molière's plays in 1955.

Some of the most visually striking items in the collection are the costume designs for the 1982 production of *Le Malade Imaginaire*. These beautifully drawn images by David Harvey Jones include costume fabric samples made at the Mabel Fletcher Technical College by students under his supervision. Other Molière plays performed by the company over the years include *Tartuffe* in 1989 and *Le Misanthrope* in 1993; there are videos of performances of both these plays in the collections.

Molière's plays have continued to be popular in Liverpool's theatres, most recently with Roger McGough's critically-acclaimed adaptations of *Tartuffe* and *Le Malade Imaginaire* for the Liverpool Playhouse in 2008 and 2009.



Figure 3: D1047/28/4 - Costume design for 'Angelique'

Figure 4: D1047/28/1 - Costume design for 'Argan'



The collection is also a record of the students and staff who were involved with Les Marottes. Many of the production notes and script annotations are by Guy Snaith, who was the company's producer and director from 1982-1997; there are photographs from productions and performances from the 1980s onwards; and finally there are programmes, audition notes and sign-up sheets.

References:

University of Liverpool , Special Collections & Archives website: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/index.html>

University Archives , Special Collections & Archives website: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/collections/colldescs/univarchives/index.html>

Les Marottes collection finding aid: <http://sca.lib.liv.ac.uk/ead/html/gb141uniguuld-p16.shtml#d1047>

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