

CODS to stage world premiere of 'Powder and Paint'

CODS, Crediton's amateur dramatic society, must be one of the luckiest dramatic society's in the country!

It has been chosen to present, this autumn, the world premiere of a musical - a first not only for CODS but also for Crediton.

Powder and Paint is a musical with a history.

It is all about Helena Rubinstein. Out of nowhere she became a household name. Beauty was her business and as the first woman ever to build a global industry, she really did have a tale to tell.

The idea of dramatising her life story came to James Bulmer when in 1987 he inherited a box full of correspondence between this amazing woman and the manageress of her Mayfair salon, Rosa Bird.

The letters and telegrams - more than 2,000 of them - span the years from just before the First World War through to the time of the Great Depression.

They provide a remarkable insight into the complex person who was Helena Rubinstein.

But then those turbulent times and the frantic, colourful, emotional life she lived persuaded James that these letters would be the perfect basis for a feature film.

It was whilst setting up the production in Los Angeles that the idea to do a musical took hold.

Having already prepared the storyline he approached a family friend, Ant Stevens, in 2005 to write the book and lyrics to his original film treatment and Mike Heath, an army colleague of Ant's, to write the music to the lyrics.

The bringing together of these talents was to produce a musical called *Powder and Paint*. The musical is definitely not a biography - perhaps it can best be described as a character study wrapped up in romance and mystery.

Some liberties have been taken to emphasise the drama and to highlight the challenges which, even today, confront a go-getting woman in a male dominated world.

Without doubt "Madame" Rubinstein met her fair share of fear, loneliness and heartbreak on her rocky road to success.

In the play the protagonist is, of course, Helena herself. Born in Poland in 1872 we are introduced to her as a headstrong teenager.

Refusing to wed the man chosen by her father, she is packed off to a sheep station in the Australian

Outback to stay with her Uncle Louis.

After an alleged incident occurs whilst staying with her Uncle, Helena flees to Melbourne; and that's where her story really begins.

Rosa Bird - the one who collected all the letters - assumes the role of narrator in the first act, but then becomes very much part of the action in the second.

Edward William Titus, a Polish American journalist, provides the romantic interest and much of the comedy.

Good looking, intelligent, utterly charming but wickedly flirtatious, he and Helena meet, fight and fall in love. The trouble is that a match made in heaven is not what you get when two egos collide.

On her roller-coaster ride from Melbourne to London, Paris and New York, the play brings on her arch rival Elizabeth Arden, her son Roy and, later on, the Lehman Brothers.

And then there is the girl Claire. Who is she? Where did she come from? What is it about her that affects Helena in such contradictory ways?

Helena Rubinstein built an empire making women beautiful.

She developed a beauty cosmetics business which dominated Australia, America, the United Kingdom and much of Europe, in fact it was a world-wide business.

She established the business in 1899 after she borrowed £250 from a friend to set up her beauty salon.

From 1900 to 1907 her business grew, through mail order and Australian women in their thousands ordered her Crème Valaze face cream.

By then she was a millionairess and in 1908 she moved to London with her new husband Edward Titus, setting up in Grafton Street. By 1914 Edwardian women had made Helena a millionairess for the second time.

Leaving Rosa Bird as her manageress in London she moved to New York with her family, only to find that Elizabeth Arden had set up business a year earlier. For the next five decades they were to battle it out for market share.

It was in 1928 that she became a multi-millionairess when she sold the American side of her business for \$7.5 million to the bankers, the Lehman Brothers.

In an amazing coup two years later she bought back

Exclusive by Alan Quick

the business for just \$1 million.

Hugely successful though

she was, her personal life fell apart when her marriage to Titus ended in divorce.

She was later to marry again, to the Russian Prince Gourielli-Tchkonia. During the 1930s her business flourished on both sides of the Atlantic; however by the end of the 40s the Nazis had destroyed most of her interests in Europe. She set about rebuilding and was publicly congratulated for her "war effort" by President Roosevelt.

From 1950 onwards her cosmetics: face creams, lotions, powders, lipsticks became world-wide products and by 1956 were available even in communist countries. Bestowed with numerous honours she carried on working into her 90s.

Then on April 1, 1965 after a routine board meeting she complained of not feeling well. She retired to her bed and died in her sleep aged 93.

Helena Rubinstein was the first corporate woman chief executive of an international conglomerate. The company was sold to Colgate for \$125 million in 1973 and subsequently bought by L'Oreal in 1988, where it has remained as a highly successful international brand.

James Bulmer, from Chawleigh is now the producer and Ant Stevens is the director for *Powder and Paint - The Musical*.

Mr Bulmer explained: "Characters have been cast and rehearsals have begun.

"There is a real buzz at rehearsals and everyone is very excited about it.

"It is full of passion, drama, humour and is a play with music."

"*Powder and Paint - The Musical* is sure to be a big success and without doubt is destined for the West End"

"Staging this in Crediton will certainly put the town on the cultural map for musicals in Devon."

Gillian Mackenzie, the producer for CODS, said that the play will be performed in Crediton from October 31 to November 3.

"There are about 20 songs and much of the story-line is told through the songs.

"We have a cast of 24 ranging in age from 13 to 60-plus and an amazingly clever set.

"We are thrilled to have been given this opportunity to present a world

premiere and unusually for us we are working with people who have created the show, which is also a first for us.

"We will be holding a champagne reception to launch the world premiere and hope everyone will come along to one of the performances."

Don't miss performances which will be staged at Queen Elizabeth's Academy Lower School.

Tickets are not released at present but further details can be seen on two websites: www.codsonline.com and www.powderandpaint-themusical.com.

Keep your eyes peeled for updates in the *Crediton Courier* and make sure not to miss this love story with a twist...a bitter twist!



An image of Rosa Bird, the hard working manageress of Helena Rubinstein's salon in London, one of the main characters in "Powder and Paint".

