

Set sail for voyage of comedy and song

AWARD-winning theatre company Spike Theatre will take audiences on a theatrical voyage using comedy, music and song in its new production *Sink or Swim*.

Premiering in the Liverpool Playhouse Studio next month before a national tour, the play will be scripted by Robert Farquhar while Spymonkey's Toby Park will co-direct and compose music for the piece.

It will be directed by Spike's artistic director Mark Smith.

Taking inspiration from tales of the 18th century "bedlam ships", *Sink or Swim* is a comic tale of three



Artistic director Mark Smith

men's maddening struggles at sea.

En-route to America the hapless victims find themselves running for the lifeboats when they come under attack and their ship is sunk. As the icy dawn breaks, and with only a single oar, they find themselves alone and going around in circles.

The company will tour to venues in the North West and South East of England on the show's maiden voyage with support from new venue partners Liverpool Everyman and Playhouse and The Lowry.

■ **SINK or Swim** is at the Liverpool Playhouse Studio from February 18-23.

Charity concert

THE League of Well-doers is holding a New Year Benefit Concert at the Philharmonic Hall on January 21.

The League, the city's oldest independent charity, is celebrating its 120th anniversary.

He was probably thinking 'uh oh new step-mum'

Paul McCartney's stepmother tells **Laura Davis** about her long and winding road from Norris Green to Los Angeles

THERE was a reporter on the doorstep – a regular occurrence at the McCartneys' Wirral home but this one was dripping wet from a rainstorm and clearly in need of a warming cup of tea.

So Paul's dad Jim and stepmother Angie invited him in and sat him down at the sofa. After a while the Beatle came downstairs and agreed to an interview.

But something was up – when Jim looked out of the window he realised it wasn't raining. The wily reporter had drenched himself with a hosepipe before knocking on the McCartneys' front door.

This was the sort of media scam to which Angie had to quickly get used when, in 1964, she became Mrs McCartney and she and her four-year-old daughter Ruth moved into Rembrandt, the Heswall house Paul had bought for his dad.

It is one of the many stories in her memoir, *My Long and Winding Road*, which she will launch at the Philharmonic Hall later this month despite now living in Los Angeles.

The Beatles had already begun the British invasion of America by the time she was introduced to "Uncle Jim" by her friend Bette Robbins, with whom she'd shared a Butlins Holiday Camp cabin when both women were in the finals of the Miss Holiday Princess competition aged 18. Bette later married comedian and red coat Mike Robbins.

Angie had remembered seeing Jim at one of Bette's family parties and recalled he had had two little boys. In the meantime his sons had grown into one half of one of the world's greatest songwriting partnerships and Scaffold member Mike McCartney, who at the time went by the name Mike McGear.

"I can remember as I got out of the taxi and Jim opened the front door I

thought, 'I'm going to marry him'," says the 83-year-old.

"It sounds absolutely ridiculous I know but it was like a light went on. It was his twinkling smile. He was courteous, he was kindly. He had a great sense of humour but he was very low-key, very self-effacing. Gentleman Jim everybody called him.

"It's making me all tearful remembering."

When Jim proposed, in 1964, Paul drove home from London in his Aston Martin the same day to meet his future step-mum for the first time.

"I was very nervous to meet him and he was probably thinking 'uh oh, new step-mum, new step-sister' and he and Mike were obviously very devoted to their mum who had died eight years earlier," says Angie, whose first husband, Eddie, passed away in 1962.

The couple were married in a North Wales chapel with the local gravedigger, Griff the Grave, and the rector's wife (and Mike Robbins's sister) Mary Bevan as witnesses. Mary was so nervous that she forgot how to play the wedding march on the church organ so played a Beatles song instead.

They honeymooned in the Bahamas, where *The Beatles* were filming *Help!* at the time, staying in the luxury Balmoral club.

"The Beatles had a house nearby but some nights the boys would come up and have dinner in the hotel courtyard," recalls Angie.

Back home in Heswall, it was time to get used to suddenly being of media interest and finding world-famous musicians sitting in your lounge.

One day, Angie walked into the room to find John Lennon gesturing at her with an empty tea cup.

"I just said 'John, we have a little word in this house, it's please' and he looked up and said 'ooh, sorry Ang'," she remembers.

"Evidently it struck a chord because



Paul McCartney with his step-sister Ruth, summer 1968; right, the McCartney family at High Park Farm, Mull of Kintyre, in 1971; Heather, Ruth, Paul with Mary aloft, Linda carrying Stella and Jim



Cynthia (Lennon) said later 'he's got the utmost respect for you because you told him to mind his manners'.

"John was incredibly talented, no doubt about that, but all this bravado and being rude and shouting at people was a front he put up to protect himself, I think. I thought he was lovely."

Being related to a Beatle was even more of a change for Angie's daughter Ruth, who Jim later adopted.

"I tried to protect her from all that and I used to say 'don't ever tell anybody your phone number and don't ever tell anybody when Paul or Mike

are home'," says Angie. "On the day she started school, the headmaster had told the kids not to treat her differently from anybody else but the older kids would cut bits off her hair or cut the nametags out of her clothes or w-lies."

After Jim's death in 1976, following a long period of deteriorating health, Angie made when she refers to in her book as "a bad business decision" and lost the small flat she had moved into with Ruth.

They moved to Norfolk and later to Australia to live with friends before



Angie McCartney with Jim, Jane Asher and Paul McCartney in the garden at Rembrandt after Mike McCartney's wedding to Angela Fishwick in June 1968

Picture: EDITH STOPFORTH

Angie McCartney with her mum and sister Joan on the sea wall at Hoylake; inset, Angie today

Picture: BOB STOPFORTH



heading to America in the 1980s, where Angie found work as a production assistant. After a spell in Russia they returned to Los Angeles in 1993.

Having gone from a relatively impoverished childhood in wartime Norris Green to become a Beatle's stepmother, Angie wasn't finished with the world of showbusiness.

With the help of Ruth's third husband, Martin Nethercutt, they set up McCartney Multimedia, which represents a range of clients including musicians, writers, actors and photographers.

Angie also founded the company Mrs McCartney's Teas, which offers "four fab" organic flavours and donates a percentage of profits to the Linda McCartney Centre in Liverpool.

She has kept in close contact with Cynthia Lennon (they talk on the phone almost every week) and admits to looking up Rembrandt on Google Earth ("it's still there but the nameplate's gone off the gate").

And she speaks to Jim's two sons "sporadically". "We called Mike (last week) because it was his birthday but we got the

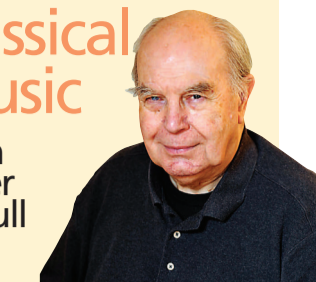
answering machine so we left him rude messages," says Angie.

"Paul is always all around the world. I don't know how he does it."

■ **MY LONG and Winding Road** by Angie McCartney is published by Rok Books on January 30. She and special guests will celebrate its launch with two evenings of Beatles music, Philharmonic Hall, January 30 and 31.

classical music

with Peter Spaul



Preview

German Romantics/ Philharmonic Hall

ONE of the secrets of the musical masterpiece is that it is capable of being interpreted in many ways. When Lief Ove Andsnes visits the Liverpool Phil next week he will be the soloist in the fourth Piano Concerto of Beethoven.

The distinguished pianist has recently begun recording the cycle with the Mahler Chamber Orchestra (Sony Records) and Nos 1 and 3 which appear on the first CD are distinguished by his crystal clear playing, almost redolent of the mountain streams of his native Norway.

With Vasily Petrenko at the helm this concert to be heard next Thursday, looks to be a crowd puller, beginning with *The Flying Dutchman Overture* of Wagner and finally the *Symphony No 4* of Brahms, Soloist and conductor answer questions in the foyer bar afterwards.

The concert is repeated on Sunday afternoon (January 27) and the Brahms *Symphony* is featured at the Friday lunchtime coffee concert, when, as well as coffee and biscuits, concert goers will hear the conductor talking about the work as well as performing it, and can meet the orchestra in the bar afterwards.

Reviews

Britten: Cello Symphony, Cello Sonata & Cello Suites (Hyperion) IT'S half a century since Britten wrote music for the great Russian cellist Rostropovich, who then went on to record it. But music cannot be set in aspic and in the composer's centenary year it is right that present day artists should approach the music again.

Thus we have Alban Gerhardt recording the complete corpus on two CDs for Hyperion, and admirable this release turns out to be. The three cello suites are worthy of revival. In the cello symphony Alban Gerhardt is joined by Andrew Manze and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra, but this piece has always proved, for me, a difficult cup of tea.

Gerhardt proves equal to all the interpretative and technical challenges and having the symphony on disc at least gives me a chance to try and get to grips with it.

Delius: Piano Concerto/ Paris Nocturne (Chandos)

THE Piano Concerto of Delius is a rare bird, but now makes its appearance on this Chandos CD with Howard Shelley and the BBC Scottish Orchestra under Andrew Davis. This is the little heard original and very early three movement version, romantic but short of the well known Delian idiom.

However Brigg Fair, based on the Lincolnshire folk song *Paris*, *The Song of a Great City* and the *Idylle de Printemps* are also here, giving a tempting programme for Delians, some of it recorded many years ago by the RLPO. It's all beautifully played and recorded.