

# THE HEART OF THE WOOD

By  
Alex Jones

*Pentabus Theatre tour, October-December, 1998.*

Throughout the world there are stories about mysterious beings, as old as creation, which are the embodiment of nature itself, and will appear at times of deep trouble, to protect the earth and the natural order of things. In Europe, the Green Man is still revered by those people who are in touch with nature, and still celebrated as a guardian against natural disaster. England today; nature is under threat - fortunately there are plenty of people who want to change things and when the local woodland is threatened by developers, Pippa and Zoë, two truculent teenagers, take on councillors, developers and contractors in a comical battle for the possession of 'The Heart Of The Wood'. But the developers find they have bitten off more than they can chew when power of the Old Magic is invoked - and things take an inexplicable and terrifying turn. Past, present and future intermingle with music and masks to make this a tale that will enthrall the whole family. The Green Man legend is brought up to date in a magical story that also tackles current issues of global warming in a show that is poetic, funny and very entertaining.

## PROGRAMME NOTES

It seems to me that the biggest and most important issue that faces us at this present time is that of the state of the environment. As we approach the Millennium, it is natural that we should examine the state of the planet. Everywhere we look, Mankind has left its mark. It is fast becoming apparent that globally, destruction of the natural environment is taking place at an alarming rate: destruction of the rainforests, over fishing of the oceans, poisoning of rivers and streams, the growing list of extinct animals and fauna. When something is extinct it is gone forever; we have no second chance, but still the inexorable march of commerce and market forces takes what it can from the earth with no thought for the future and those who come after us. And now the weather is being affected by the massive deforestation taking place in Indonesia and Borneo: El Nino, the winds that blow across the equator have brought widespread flooding and severe drought in both America and Africa; a direct result of man's greed for a quick profit. I wanted to write the Heart of the Wood after a new by-pass was built locally. It was alarming to see meadows and woodland disappear so quickly - gone forever, and I felt that the legend of The Green Man was a wonderful way of bringing that message to the stage. The Green Man has meant many things to many people, appearing in many guises: Robin Hood, Puck, Erda, Pan, Cernunnos; and in many churches and cathedrals throughout Europe his face can be found, carved in roof-bosses and masonry, staring at us through his mask of leaves. Always he has been portrayed as a guardian of the natural world - he is a perfect ideal and image for the future. I do believe there is hope in a new generation of people who are concerned enough to protest and fight for the planet. The Millennium brings massive problems, but also massive challenges. The spirit of the Green Man is alive, walking through the land again, inspiring us to stand up for Mother Nature.

- Alex Jones - September 1999.

## CHARACTERS

PIPPA

ZOE

JACK MORRIS

MR GREEN / CERNUNNOS /  
PAN / GREEN MAN

POLICEMAN

THE HIPPIES:  
ELFIN / MARSHY / MOONCHILD

THE CONTRACTORS: DAVE & RICKY

KELLY LAWTON (REPORTER)

CAMERA OPERATOR

This play can be performed by four actors.

*For Lucy*

## ACT 1

## SCENE 1

POTTER'S WOOD. IT IS LATE MORNING AND THE SUN IS POURING THROUGH THE BRANCHES OF THE TREES ABOVE; BRIGHT SHAFTS OF LIGHT ILLUMINATE THE SCENE. BIRD SONG, ETC. ZOE ENTERS.

ZOE: (CALLS OFF) Are you coming, or what?

PIPPA: Yeah, hang on will you?

PIPPA STAGGERS ON, INAPPROPRIATELY DRESSED FOR WALKING: PLATFORM HEELS, ETC. SHE CARRIES A GHETTO-BLASTER.

Crikey, look at me shoes - caked in mud!

ZOE: I told you to wear something old.

PIPPA: I haven't got anything old.

ZOE: Lighten up, Pippa; it's great here.

PIPPA: Yeah? I prefer the real world thanks.

ZOE: This *is* the real world.

PIPPA: A wood? A wood's real?!

ZOE: Yeah.

PIPPA: Do we live in woods?

ZOE: What's that got to do with anything?

PIPPA: Well - do we?

ZOE: That's a stupid question.

PIPPA: Do we live in woods?

ZOE: I'm not even going to answer it.

PIPPA: Do we live in woods?

ZOE: Give it a rest, will you?

PIPPA: Do we live in woods?

ZOE: I'm not going to...

PIPPA: Do we live in woods?

ZOE: Shut up, will you?

PIPPA: Do we live in woods?

ZOE: (SHOUTS) No, no, no, no, no - we do *not* live in woods! Okay?

PIPPA: Thought you weren't going to answer me?

ZOE: You can be a right pain sometimes!

PIPPA: So we don't live in woods?

ZOE: Pippa, I'm warning you..!

PIPPA: I'm just trying to illustrate a point.

ZOE: Well hurry up and illustrate it!

PIPPA: We don't live in woods... do we?

ZOE: (THROUGH CLENCHED TEETH) No.

PIPPA: No - we live in towns where it's safe.

ZOE: Pip, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think you're more likely to be run over by a lorry in a town than in a wood.

PIPPA: But at least you'd have more chance of seeing it coming. There's too many trees here! It's not a proper environment.

ZOE: It's beautiful!

PIPPA: Beautiful? Zoë, there is dirt everywhere - the trees are dirty, the leaves are dirty; even the floor's dirty!

ZOE: It's called soil!

PIPPA: Oh really? Give me a break, eh Zoë? I'm not thick; I know what soil is and I don't like it; it's dirty!

ZOE: We grow food in it.

PIPPA: It doesn't mean we have to walk on it. I prefer good old-fashioned concrete.

ZOE: Oh Pip, I love it here! Just listen to the bird song and the wind in the branches.

PIPPA: Pull yourself together; you'll be writing poetry next! Come on, Zoë - let's go back, eh? Ring the girls up an' see what's going on? We've still got time to go up town, do a bit of shopping.

ZOE: I'm sick of shopping!

PIPPA: Sick of shopping?! There's something wrong with you, girl!

ZOE: I thought you'd like it here.

PIPPA: It's crap!

ZOE: I come here a lot.

PIPPA: What for?

ZOE: To get away from the noise and the bustle; feel close to nature an' stuff, y' know?

PIPPA: No, not really.

ZOE: Don't you want to breath fresh air, sometimes?

PIPPA: Air's air, Zoë. I don't care how fresh it is as long as I'm breathing...and shopping - come on!

ZOE: In a minute. Let's just sit here for a while.

ZOE SITS ON A TREE STUMP.

PIPPA: What for?

ZOE: 'Cause it's nice.

PIPPA SIGHS AND RELUCTANTLY SITS BY ZOE. A BEAT AND THEN SHE STANDS UP.

PIPPA: Well that's enough *nice* for me - let's go!

ZOE: Oh Pip, hang on please; just try and *feel* it.

PIPPA: Feel what?

ZOE: There's a sort of peace here. You can leave the town and all your troubles behind you, sit quiet an' well you sort of sigh and it's like a great big weight's been lifted from you.

PIPPA: Cider's better for that sort of stuff.

ZOE: Cider comes from apples.

PIPPA: God, you're clever!

ZOE: Apples come from trees.

PIPPA: You're gonna get all your A-Levels, you are!

ZOE: Trees grow in woods.

PIPPA: What are you trying to say, Zoe? Could you give me a hint please?

ZOE: Cider comes from apples...

PIPPA: Yeah?

ZOE: Apples come from trees.

PIPPA: Yeah?

ZOE: Trees grow in woods!

PIPPA: (TO HERSELF) *Cider comes from apples... apples come from trees..trees grow in woods...* No sorry, haven't a clue what you're rabbiting on about.

ZOE: It's all connected, don't you see? Things we eat and drink; they all began somewhere like this: apple trees were cultivated from crab-apple woodland trees and grown in orchards, where they're picked, pressed and made into cider for you to drink.

PIPPA: Brill! So there's a cider tree in here somewhere?

ZOE: Oh what's the point? Can't you just soak up the atmosphere?

PIPPA: There is no atmosphere. We need some sounds; maybe that'll help!  
PIPPA SWITCHES ON HER GHETTO-BLASTER. TECHNO POURS OUT.

ZOE: Not here, Pip, please?

PIPPA: Trust me, Zoë - we need some music.  
ZOE SWITCHES IT OFF.

ZOE: Not here - it spoils the feeling.

PIPPA: I don't know why I let you bring me here; I knew I wouldn't like it!

ZOE: I brought you here because you're me mate; I wanted to share it with you.

PIPPA: Yeah... yeah well you're my mate too, Zoë, but I dunno, you're just a bit weird sometimes - all this nature stuff; it's not cool, Zoë.

ZOE: It's better than being at school, innit?

PIPPA: Marginally.  
PIPPA IS BORED AND RESTLESS. SHE BEGINS TO LOOK AROUND AND FINDS AN OLD BOTTLE WITH LIQUID IN IT.  
What's this?

ZOE: (IRONIC) It's a bottle, isn't it?

PIPPA: Ha, ha, ha, I sort of worked that out. There's something in it - might be alcohol.

ZOE: Yeah, well I wouldn't drink it if I were you.

PIPPA: Why not?

ZOE: Are you crazy?! Who knows what it is; it could be...

PIPPA: What?

ZOE: You know - somebody might have done something in it.

PIPPA: In a bottle?! (SNIFFS THE CONTENTS) It's... it's petrol!

ZOE: Oh no!

PIPPA: I don't believe it - it's petrol!

ZOE: Put it down, Pippa!

PIPPA: Somebody must have been hanging out here; camping or summat.

ZOE: Yeah, well maybe they'll come back.

PIPPA: I like a bit of a fire...

ZOE: Please Pip, not in a wood; it can spread real quick.

PIPPA: Lighten up Zoe. (LAUGHS) *Lighten up* - get it?

ZOE: Yeah, very funny. Put it down, eh?

PIPPA: Just having a bit of fun.

ZOE: You're mad, Pippa - fire's dangerous.

ZOE TRIES TO SNATCH THE BOTTLE FROM PIPPA.

PIPPA: (HOLDING THE BOTTLE TIGHTLY) I know - I love it!

ZOE: Oh please! Remember what happened last time? The fire-brigade was called.

PIPPA: Yeah, it was a buzz, eh?

ZOE: You could have burnt the whole place down.

PIPPA: There was no harm done. They put it out, didn't they?

ZOE: What if there was somebody inside?

PIPPA: It was a derelict warehouse; it was falling down.

ZOE: You didn't have to finish the job!

PIPPA: I love a good fire!

ZOE: Pip, you've got to be careful; you've been caught once, you could go to prison - it's arson.

PIPPA: I'll be careful.

ZOE: Why do you do it?

PIPPA: It's my *thing*, that's all. You like walking in woods; I like to burn them down.

ZOE: It's attention-seeking.

PIPPA: Funny, that's what my counsellor says.

ZOE: Look, my parents are divorced too, Pip.

PIPPA: But at least they still speak to you.

ZOE: It's not *that* bad.

PIPPA: They hate each other; we all hate each other. At least your parents are normal.

ZOE: No parents are normal. And my Dad's a real pain in the neck!

PIPPA: But he loves you.

ZOE: Says he does, but he doesn't show it much. He's always wrapped up in his precious work! I'm supposed to be spending the holiday with him - I'm dreading it.

PIPPA: Why? He buys you loads of stuff; gives you money an' all.

ZOE: I want his time not his money. He says he's dying to see me, but whenever I stay he's always busy with his local-government cronies; bunch of boring old farts! I'd rather stay at home with Mum.

PIPPA: I sometimes think they'd be better off without us; can't understand why they ever bothered having kids.

ZOE: Me Mum's alright.

PIPPA: I drive my Mum barmy; don't mean to.

ZOE: She loves you, you know she does. You're just a mad prat!

PIPPA: (LAUGHS) Yeah!

A STRANGE SOUND: A MIXTURE OF LAUGHTER AND WIND BLOWING THROUGH LEAVES ECHOES BACK FROM FURTHER IN THE WOOD. *PAUSE*

What was that?

ZOE: Dunno - there's somebody in the wood.

PIPPA: Nah, it's the wind, that's all.

ZOE: It sounded like somebody laughing at us.

PIPPA: Crikey, you're jumpy.

ZOE: I wonder why? Could it be because you've got a bottle of petrol in your hand? Thank God you've got no matches.

PIPPA TAKES A BOX OF MATCHES FROM HER POCKET AND SHAKES IT AT ZOE'S FACE.

Oh great!

PIPPA: (LAUGHS).

AGAIN THE STRANGE LAUGHTER ECHOES IN REPLY FROM INSIDE THE WOOD. *PAUSE*

ZOE: There's definitely somebody there.

PIPPA: So what? It's a free country, innit?

ZOE: It's a bit creepy. Who is it?

PIPPA: (HOLDING UP THE BOTTLE) Let's see if we can throw some light on the situation? (LAUGHS).

THE LAUGHTER ECHOES AGAIN. *PAUSE*

It's a weird laugh.

ZOE: I don't like this - I'm scared.

PIPPA: Relax Zoe; it's probably just some deranged mad axe-murderer. (LAUGHS).

THE LAUGH ECHOES AGAIN.

ZOE: That isn't funny, Pippa.

PIPPA: Well, I can't see anybody.

ZOE: There's definitely somebody there.

PIPPA: Yeah... maybe.

ZOE: What if it *is* a...

PIPPA: A what?

ZOE: You know -

PIPPA: No not really. Care to elaborate?

ZOE: What you said.

PIPPA: When?

ZOE: Just.

PIPPA: What did I say?

ZOE: You know -

PIPPA: I haven't a clue what you're on about.

ZOE: Yes you have!

PIPPA: No I haven't! Just speak English - please?!

ZOE: (SHOUTS) A mad axe-murderer - alright?!

THE LAUGH ECHOES, BUT WITH A MANIC QUALITY.

PIPPA: What did you have to shout for?!

ZOE: You were winding me up!

PIPPA: No I wasn't!

ZOE: Yes you bloody well were!

PIPPA: (SHOUTS) No I bloody well wasn't!

ZOE: Now who's shouting?!

THE LAUGH ECHOES MANIACALLY AGAIN.

Oh... *sugar!*

PIPPA: I can't work out which direction it's coming from.

ZOE: We'd better go, Pippa.

PIPPA: Yeah - maybe.

ZOE: Come on then -

PIPPA: In a minute.

ZOE: What?

PIPPA: In a minute.

ZOE: I thought you didn't like it here.

PIPPA: It's growin' on me.

ZOE: Are you doing this on purpose?

PIPPA: What?

ZOE: Trying to scare me?

PIPPA: No.

ZOE: Then let's go.

PIPPA: Not yet.

ZOE: There's a bloody mad axe-murderer in the wood - let's go!

PIPPA: How do you know he's an axe-murderer?

ZOE: How do you know he isn't?

PIPPA: (SARCASTIC) He hasn't got an axe.  
PIPPA BEGINS TO SPRINKLE PETROL AROUND.  
We'll go in a minute; I just wanna...

ZOE: No Pippa, no! (GRABS HER).

PIPPA: Leave off, Zoe - just a little one.

ZOE: You could burn the whole wood down!

PIPPA: I'll keep it small.

ZOE: Don't be stupid!

PIPPA: (STRUGGLING) Let me go, you silly..!  
THEY FALL TO THE GROUND TOGETHER.

ZOE: You are not going to start another fire!

PIPPA: Yes I am!

ZOE: Please Pippa, don't..!

PIPPA: You're not going to stop me...

ZOE: Let's go - there's a nutter in the wood!  
GREEN ENTERS UNSEEN BEHIND THEM AS THEY ARGUE. HE IS DRESSED AS A WOODSMAN AND CARRIES AN AXE.

PIPPA: (IRONIC) Yeah - with an axe!  
PIPPA MANAGES TO STRIKE A MATCH. SHE HOLDS IT UP TRIUMPHANTLY. ZOE HAS CAUGHT SIGHT OF THE MAN BEHIND HER AND IS FROZEN WITH FEAR. PIPPA THROWS HER A SARKY SMILE AND TURNS TO THE TASK IN HAND. NOW SHE SEES THE MAN AND IS FROZEN WITH FEAR TOO. GREEN BENDS OVER HER AND BLOWS OUT THE MATCH.

GREEN: Little girls who play with matches might get burnt.  
THE GIRLS SCREAM, GREEN SCREAMS BACK, THE GIRLS SCREAM AGAIN; AGAIN GREEN SCREAMS BACK. PAUSE

ZOE: He *has* got an axe, Pippa.

PIPPA: Congratulations - smart arse!

ZOE: (TERRIFIED) What... are... you... going... to... do?

GREEN: I thought I might have a cup of tea - want one?

ZOE: What?

GREEN: One lump or two?  
GREEN TAKES A FLASK AND CUPS FROM HIS BAG.

ZOE: Aren't you..?

GREEN: What?

ZOE: Aren't you... an axe-murderer?

GREEN: No, why? did you want one?

ZOE: No - no, no, no we didn't!

PIPPA: Let's go, Zoe -

ZOE: (GETTING UP) Yeah, we'd better...

GREEN: (POURING TEA) Did you say you take sugar?

ZOE: Erm no...

GREEN: No sugar. And you?

PIPPA: I don't want any, thanks. We were just about to go.

GREEN: No you weren't.

PIPPA: Eh?

GREEN: You were just about to start a fire.

PIPPA: Yeah, well...

GREEN: In a wood.

PIPPA: So?

GREEN: So? So? Bit irresponsible, don't you think?

PIPPA: What's it got to do with you?

GREEN: Everything.

PIPPA: Eh?

GREEN: It has everything to do with me; and I suggest you listen a little more carefully - I hate to repeat myself.

PIPPA: You're a weirdo.

ZOE: Pippa...

GREEN: *I'm* a weirdo? That's a bit strong coming from you?

PIPPA: Eh?

GREEN: There you go again! Listen girl - pay attention.

PIPPA: Who do you think you're talking to?

GREEN: An arsonist?

PIPPA: I'm not an arsonist. Don't you call me an arsonist - I just like fire.

GREEN: This wood is ancient. It's all that's left of a great forest that once covered the whole of this country.

PIPPA: So?

GREEN: Your vocabulary is severely limited. I suggest you concentrate more at school.

PIPPA: I've had enough of this!

GREEN: If I catch you lighting fires here again...

PIPPA: What?

ZOE: Look, just calm down. I mean, there's no harm done is there?

GREEN: Oh but there is - every second of every minute of every day.

PIPPA: What's he talking about?

ZOE: Leave off, Pip.

GREEN: This planet is in grave danger, and people like you aren't helping.

PIPPA: Oh God, what are you - some kind of environmental freak?

GREEN: How did you know?

PIPPA: What?

GREEN: Perceptive child. You could go far, but you really must improve your vocabulary, bit monosyllabic. Try and read a little more.

PIPPA: Read?

GREEN: It really is a problem, isn't it? Yes, I am a freak of nature; but don't tell everyone, eh? (HANDS HER TEA) There you are - tea.

PIPPA: What?

GREEN: I wouldn't watch so much T.V. if I were you; it can sap the old grey matter considerably. (HANDS ZOE TEA) And there's yours.

ZOE: Oh... er thanks.

GREEN: (TOASTS) Bottoms up!

ZOE: This is... tea?

GREEN: My own concoction.

PIPPA: Don't drink it, Zoe.

GREEN: I think you should - you'll enjoy it.

ZOE: (SNIFFS) It smells funny. What's it made from?

GREEN: That would be telling.

ZOE: I'm not sure...

GREEN: It's good for you.

PIPPA: It smells like dog crap.

GREEN: Does it? Can't say I go around sniffing the stuff myself.

ZOE: You made it?

GREEN: From various infusions of bark, fungi and herb that grow in the wood.

ZOE: Really?

PIPPA: Don't drink it, Zoe.

ZOE: I like camomile tea.

GREEN: This is miles better than camomile - dog crap, too.

PIPPA: It's probably poisonous.

GREEN: Please yourself.

ZOE TAKES A SIP. PAUSE

PIPPA: What's it like?

ZOE: Mm, it's lovely! (DRINKS AGAIN) Try it - it's really nice ... it tastes of...

PIPPA: What?

ZOE: It tastes of...

PIPPA: What does it taste of?

ZOE: Well...

GREEN: Yes?

ZOE: It tastes of... well it sounds daft, but it tastes of the wood.

GREEN: (SMILES) It tastes of *the wood!*

ZOE: Yeah, yeah it does; I don't know how, but it does; sort of fresh an' clear, and...

PIPPA: Chill out, Zoe - it's only a cup of herbal tea!

ZOE: Try it Pip - it's lovely, honest. I can't explain it.

PIPPA: (DRINKS AND SPITS IT OUT) Eaghrrr! It's horrible! It *does* taste of dog crap!

GREEN: You *eat* it as well? Remarkable!

PIPPA: Just who are you?

GREEN: Who do you think I am?

PIPPA: A mad git!

GREEN: A mad git in a mad world - sounds about right.

ZOE: What's your name?

GREEN: What's yours?

ZOE: Pippa and Zoe.

GREEN: You have two names?

ZOE: No, I'm Zoe - she's Pippa.

GREEN: I see.

ZOE: What's your name?

GREEN: Mr Green.

ZOE: Mr Green?

GREEN: As opposed to Mr Blue, Brown or Turquoise.

ZOE: What's your first name?

GREEN: Mind your own business.

ZOE: I told you mine.

GREEN: You didn't have to.

PIPPA: He's bonkers.

GREEN: Now that really is the pot calling the kettle beige.

PIPPA: What?

GREEN: If I'm bonkers, what does that make you?

PIPPA: What are you getting at?

GREEN: Some kind of compulsive disorder, is it?

ZOE: She's doing okay.

GREEN: Pyromania?

PIPPA: I... I can't help it.

ZOE: Things have been difficult for her recently; it's attention-seeking.

PIPPA: No it's not!

GREEN: Sounds like a cry for help to me.

PIPPA: What do you know?

GREEN: Everything really.

PIPPA: You don't know nothing. I like a fire, that's all.

GREEN: Fire is a destroyer and a life-giver; you should use it more carefully.

PIPPA: You do talk crap!

GREEN: At least I don't eat it.

ZOE LAUGHS.

PIPPA: What are you laughing at, Zoe?

ZOE: I'm sorry...

PIPPA: I'm going. You coming with me, or what?

ZOE: (SIPS TEA) After I've finished this tea.

PIPPA: I don't believe this!

ZOE: It's wonderful; it really does taste...

GREEN: Of the wood?

ZOE: It does.

GREEN: You have an empathy with this place. Most people only taste the bitter sting of the unfamiliar.

PIPPA: It tastes like...

GREEN: Yes, well I'll have to take your word for that. So what brings you here, Zoe - a simple stroll?

ZOE: Well yeah, but I do care about what's happening to the planet. I mean it really worries me; everything green and natural seems to be disappearing so quickly.

PIPPA: Oh God, she's off again!

ZOE: But it does, Pip. The rain-forests are being torn down and burned...

PIPPA: Well that's nothing to do with me; I do derelict buildings, not Brazil!

ZOE: Whole species of animals are disappearing daily - gone forever!

PIPPA: Life's too short to worry about a rhino or two.

ZOE: We don't know what it feels like anymore to walk somewhere and not hear the sound of traffic nearby.

PIPPA: Who wants to walk? What's wrong with four good wheels?

ZOE: What's right? You can drive anywhere you like now, but there's nothing worth seeing when you get there; nothing natural anyway.

PIPPA: That's all you know! There's palm-trees in that new shopping-centre.

ZOE: There used to be a whole wood there! We're losing our links with nature. I'd love to be able to wake up and hear bird song and the breeze blowing through the branches of trees...

PIPPA: This is what I like to wake up hearing!

PIPPA PLAYS A TAPE ON HER MACHINE. GREEN PRESSES THE STOP BUTTON.

What do you think you're doing?!

GREEN: Please don't spoil the natural peace of this place. I personally don't share your taste in music - your co-operation is appreciated.

PIPPA: Suck a lemon!

SHE SWITCHES IT BACK ON. GREEN SWITCHES IT OFF.

Look, if I want to play my music, I will - all right?!

GREEN: Temper, temper!

PIPPA GOES TO SWITCH IT ON AGAIN.

ZOE: Wait till later, eh Pip?

PIPPA: Whose side are you on, Zoe?

ZOE: It's not about sides.

GREEN: Zoe's right, Pippa; wait till you get home, and then you can destroy the fabric of your inner ear, and shred your aural nerve-endings in the comfort of your own room.

PIPPA: (SARKY) Ha, ha, ha! (GOES TO SWITCH ON MACHINE).

GREEN: *Ha, ha, ha!* I wouldn't do that if I were you.

PIPPA: Watch me!

SHE SWITCHES IT ON AGAIN. AFTER A BAR OR TWO THE MUSIC BEGINS TO SPEED UP. PIPPA AND ZOE LOOK SURPRISED. GREEN LAUGHS; HIS LAUGHTER POURS OUT OF THE TAPE-MACHINE IN REPLY. HE LAUGHS AGAIN, AGAIN THE MACHINE REPLIES. THE MUSIC GROWS FASTER, THE LAUGHTER MORE MANIC. EVENTUALLY SMOKE BEGINS TO POUR FROM THE BACK OF THE MACHINE AND THE MUSIC GRINDS TO A SLURRY HALT. PIPPA SWITCHES IT OFF, HORRIFIED.

GREEN: Oh dear, it's not broken, is it?

PIPPA: How did you do that?

GREEN: Never mind how I did *that*. How do I do *this*?

HE PLUNGES HIS HAND INTO THE FOREST FLOOR AND PULLS UP AN OAK SAPLING. IT STANDS IN THE EARTH AS IF IT HAD GROWN THERE. ZOE AND PIPPA ARE GOB-SMACKED.

ZOE: I... think... I think we'd better go.

PIPPA: Yeah, this is too weird for me.

GREEN: We ought to talk again sometime, Zoe.

ZOE: Eh..? Yeah, yeah - whatever!

GREEN: The wood likes you.

ZOE: Does it?

PIPPA: Come on, Zoe - he's not all there.

GREEN: Where am I then?

PIPPA: Eh?

GREEN: Am I in the root of the oak?

PIPPA: What are you talking about?

GREEN: The salmon's gut?

PIPPA: You're barmy.

GREEN: The loam of the soil?

PIPPA: You need treatment, mate.

GREEN: The fuse that greens the holly, the blood that swells the berry and the forest fruit, the wind in the elders, the cone on the pine, the honey in the hive, the feather that turns the falcon's fall, the antler on the stag, the night-owl's screech - am I there?

PIPPA: Let's go, Zoe.

GREEN: Am I in all of them?  
ZOE STANDS TRANSFIXED.

PIPPA: Zoe - let's go!

GREEN: Am I in the claw that tears, the beak that stabs?

PIPPA: Zoe!

ZOE: Who *are* you?

GREEN: You tell me.

PIPPA: He's a bloody nutter! Come on, Zoe; don't talk to him.

ZOE: I've seen you somewhere... there's something familiar about you.

GREEN: Not many people see me anymore.

PIPPA: Perhaps you ought to ask yourself why?

GREEN: But *you've* seen me before.

PIPPA: I wouldn't forget a weirdo like you... Okay, so where have I seen you?

GREEN: (SMILES) In the devouring flame of the bonfire's fury.

PIPPA: You really are a sad old git! I ought to get the police on you for busting my tape-machine.

GREEN: But I never touched it - did I?  
PAUSE

ZOE: We'd better go... erm, thanks for the tea.

GREEN: My pleasure. Please call again; tiffin is at three.  
ZOE AND PIPPA BEGIN TO EXIT.  
Zoe!  
ZOE STOPS AND TURNS.  
If you do want to speak to me again, just come here and blow this.  
HE THROWS HER A WHISTLE.

ZOE: What is it?

GREEN: A whistle made from elder-bark.

PIPPA: A whistle? Get a life, eh?  
GREEN SMILES, THE GIRLS EXIT.

GREEN: A life? Perceptive child - that is exactly what I want.  
MUSIC. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.

## SCENE 2

*LE JOLIE ESCARGOT RESTAURANT. JACK, ZOE AND PIPPA ARE SITTING AT A TABLE. JACK IS POURING WINE, TRYING TO CREATE AN OCCASION - IT ISN'T WORKING. THE GIRLS ARE SULKING.*

- JACK: Does your mother allow you a little wine with your food, Pippa?
- PIPPA: No, I have to nick it from the fridge when she's out.
- JACK: (LAUGHS) Well I'm sure just a little drop wouldn't hurt.  
HE POURS THEM ALL WINE.
- PIPPA: I'd prefer cider.
- JACK: Yes, I bet you would.
- ZOE: I'd prefer a pizza.
- JACK: Zoë, this is *Le Jolie Escargot*, the best French restaurant for miles around: Carte Blanche, Michelin stars - the lot! This is a real treat.
- ZOE: Is it?
- JACK: (READING THE MENU) Yes of course it is. The French invented Nouveau Cuisine.
- ZOE: Nobody asked them to.
- JACK: It's a gastronomic education in here.
- ZOE: Oh great - education in a restaurant! I'm supposed to be on holiday.
- PIPPA: Are we gonna be set an exam by a broccoli-spear?
- JACK: (WEARY LAUGH) Oh, the dry sarcastic, grating humour of the young! It's so reassuring... Zoë, please try to enjoy yourself - this is a very expensive restaurant... (BACK TO THE MENU) Now, let's see what we'd like to eat, eh? Ooh look - veal escallop in a white wine sauce; that sounds nice!
- ZOE: I'm a vegetarian, Dad.
- JACK: Are you?
- ZOE: You know I am. I've been a vegetarian for years.
- JACK: Oh yes, yes you have, haven't you? I thought you might have given that up by now.
- ZOE: Why would I give it up?
- JACK: Well you know - adolescent phase and all that; thought you might have grown out of it.
- ZOE: it's not a phase, it's a way of life; it's called having principles.
- PIPPA: They've got a new shop in the High Street.
- ZOE: What?
- PIPPA: *Principles*. Wouldn't be seen dead in there myself.
- PAUSE
- JACK: Well it's the veal for me, I think. What about you?
- ZOE: You're not having veal.
- JACK: Aren't I?

ZOE: No.

JACK: Excuse me, but who is the parent around here?

ZOE: What's that got to do with anything?

JACK: You're telling me what I can or cannot eat?

ZOE: Well *you tell* me.

JACK: You can eat what you like, Zoë.

ZOE: (RISING) Come on then -

JACK: Where are you going?

ZOE: For a pizza.

JACK: Sit down, Zoë.

SHE REMAINS STANDING.

Sit down - *please*.

SHE SITS. PAUSE

ZOE: You're not having the veal.

JACK: Actually - I am.

ZOE: If you order veal - I'm leaving.

JACK: You will not leave. (SHOUTS) You will stay here and enjoy yourself!

PAUSE

(CALMER) Now what would you like? There does seem to be a small vegetarian selection listed.

ZOE: You're not having the veal.

JACK: What is so wrong with me eating veal?

ZOE: The calves are fed entirely on an unnatural liquid diet; kept in tiny crates, in which they don't even have enough room to turn around, never see the light of day, and then they're *murdered* when they're only a few days old.

JACK: Yes I know - that's why they taste so nice.

ZOE: (RISING) Right, let's go Pippa!

JACK: All right, all right; I won't order the bloody veal!

ZOE SITS AGAIN. JACK HAS ANOTHER LOOK AT THE MENU.

What about starters?

PIPPA: Onion bharji.

JACK: This isn't a balti take-away, Pippa. What about some Pate?  
(READING MENU) Mm - they've got foi gras here!

ZOE: You're not eating foi gras.

JACK: Oh for god sake!

ZOE: They force-feed the geese - ram corn down their throats with a plunger until their liver explodes!

JACK: I see - no foi gras, then?

ZOE: Not if you expect me to eat here.

JACK: Fine!

PIPPA: (READING MENU) They haven't got samosas, either.  
A FRENCH WAITER APPROACHES THE TABLE.

WAITER: Bonjour! May I take your order please?

ZOE: Pizza for me.

WAITER: Pizza? Pizza?! Zis ees a *French* restaurant!

ZOE: Okay - I'll have a *French* pizza.  
PIPPA IS GIGGLING.

WAITER: Zere is no such thing.

PIPPA: Have you got frog legs?  
PAUSE

WAITER: Please do not ask me to hop over ze counter, eet ees very boring.  
THE GIRLS ARE LAUGHING.

JACK: (READING MENU) There *are* frogs legs on the menu, actually.

ZOE: (SUDDENLY SERIOUS) What?!

JACK: Would you like to try some?

ZOE: You serve frog legs?!

WAITER: We serve anybody (LAUGHS).

ZOE: This is not a laughing matter. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!  
Those legs are yanked off live frogs and their poor writhing bodies are casually tossed into a gory bucket, where they are gradually suffocated by the weight of the other agonised victims.  
PAUSE

WAITER: You don't want frog legs, then?

ZOE: (FURIOUS) This isn't a restaurant - *it's a slaughterhouse!*  
PIPPA NODS SOLEMNLY.

WAITER: No frog legs.

PIPPA: Do you do curries?

WAITER: No - we don't do curries or pizza, or fish and chips, or backed beans on toast!

PIPPA: What's a *backed* bean?

JACK: All right, all right, calm down everyone. Look, just bring us three salad starters please. And make sure the lettuce has been humanely killed and apologised to! (NOTICING PIPPA DOWNING THE VINO)  
Don't swig it, Pippa - it's not lemonade!

PIPPA: No - it's wine.  
THE WAITER EXITS.

JACK: Well! Well this is very nice, isn't it?

ZOE: (SARKY) Yeah!

JACK: Oh come on, Zoe; just a difference of opinion over food.

ZOE: Yeah, yeah... okay.

PIPPA: Imagine not having curry!

JACK: They do lovely desserts here, though. I could seriously ravage one of heir French Tarts... I mean... when I say *ravage*, I mean...

ZOE: I was more concerned about the French Tart.

JACK: (LAUGHS) Yes... yes... well... (LIFTS GLASS) A toast, eh? It's terrific to have you staying with me again, Zoe - here's to a wonderful holiday!

ZOE: (HALFHEARTEDLY) A wonderful holiday.

PIPPA: A wonderful holiday.

JACK: So, have you got anything planned? excursions and such-like?

ZOE: I was hoping you might be taking us somewhere?

JACK: Oh sorry, Zoe, but I'm so busy at the moment.

ZOE: Great! Council business, I suppose?

JACK: New scheme coming up; got to hammer it through. I'm on the board of the company involved, so I stand to make quite a packet; can't afford to mess it up.

PIPPA: That's illegal, that is!

JACK: Shh, shh! Not here, Pippa please! Walls have ears and all that.

ZOE: What are you up to now, Dad?

JACK: It's all perfectly kosher and above board (on paper) - nobody's to know any different. Anyway, it's all down to competitive-tendering - best price gets the job. I can't help it if I happen to be on the board of one of the companies as well as being a councillor; it just turned out that way.

ZOE: What is it, more building-schemes?

JACK: Something like that.

ZOE: Still tearing the countryside to pieces, are you?

JACK: Developing an infrastructure within a viable environmental framework.

ZOE: Environment? You don't know the meaning of the word!

JACK: Let's not argue in here, Zoë - please! (TAKES BOTTLE FROM PIPPA) That's enough for now I think, Pippa. It's not...

PIPPA: *Lemonade* - I know.

PAUSE

JACK: So what do you want to do? If you need any money..?

PIPPA: Yeah, that'd be useful!

JACK: I'm talking to my daughter.

PIPPA: She wants to go shopping.

ZOE: I don't want your money, Dad.

PIPPA: What?!

ZOE: Keep it!

PIPPA: Think about this, Zoe. Don't be rash, eh?

JACK: I'd just like you to have a nice holiday; I thought a bit of cash might help.

PIPPA: It would.

ZOE: I thought we might spend some time together for a change.

JACK: Unfortunate timing; can't be helped. I'm sorry; we'll spend *some* time together, I'll make sure of it.

ZOE: Yeah!

JACK: So, what are you going to do until I'm free?

ZOE: Oh, I don't know; do some walking, I suppose.

PIPPA: Oh God no! Not in that bloody wood again!

JACK: Which wood's that, then?

ZOE: Which wood? How many woods are there around here?

JACK: Potter's Wood?

PIPPA: Yeah, it's a right depressing place.

ZOE: It's not depressing; it's beautiful in there.

JACK: Well... er, make the most of it.

ZOE: What do you mean?

JACK: That new scheme we've been discussing - it's a by-pass.

ZOE: You're joking?!

JACK: It has to go somewhere.

ZOE: (RISING) Right - see you later!

JACK: Oh don't storm off, Zoe please?

PIPPA: (FOLLOWING HER) Crikey Zoe, can't you have a sulk later? I'm starving.

ZOE: Stay - I just wanna be on my own.

PIPPA: (SITTING) Fair enough.

JACK: Come on, Zoe; don't do this to me in the middle of a crowded restaurant.

ZOE: Oh go and rape the environment, why don't you?!

JACK: Don't say things like that in here.

ZOE: (SCREAMS) Crook!!

SHE STOMPS OUT. JACK BURIES HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS.

PIPPA: (READING THE MENU) Do you get chips with the veal?

MUSIC. LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.

## SCENE 3

POTTER'S WOOD, LATE AT NIGHT. A LIGHT WIND RUSTLES THE LEAVES AND BRANCHES AND FARAWAY AN OWL IS HUNTING; IT'S LONELY SCREECH ECHOES THROUGH THE TREES. THE MOONLIGHT CASTS DARK SHADOWS ON THE FOREST FLOOR. ZOE ENTERS, MUMBLING TO HERSELF.

ZOE: Crook! My own father's a stinking crook! How could he? He knows how I feel about the environment and stuff! The lousy swine! He'd have eaten that veal if I hadn't stopped him; and the pate and the frog legs! Probably have eaten them live, knowing him! Slaughtered it at the table with a steak knife - how could he?!

SHE SITS ON THE TREE STUMP.

All right, calm down - count to ten! (SLOWLY) One, two, three, four... (FASTER, LOSING HER TEMPER) five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten! (SHOUTS) Crook!!... (SIGHS) Oh well, I'd better head on back before the silly git sends the police out after me...

SHE STANDS AND GOES TO EXIT, BUT IS UNSURE OF WHERE.

Oh God no! Which way did I come? Oh... I'm lost! I don't believe it - I'm lost! What the hell did I come here for? It's the middle of the night! All right, all right, calm down, calm down; now let's see - the moon's over there, so I must have come in... hang on, was the moon behind me? Oh God!

SOMETHING RUSTLES THROUGH THE UNDERGROWTH.

What's that? There's something there... or *somebody*. No, no, it's probably just a fox or a dear.

SOMETHING RUSTLES AGAIN.

(LOUDLY) Good job I've got a knife with me, just in case..! Good job I'm a black-belt in karate; if there was somebody around, they'd be sorry if they attacked me... *very* sorry, yeah..! What's this in my pocket? A gun? A gun - oh yeah, yeah, I'd forgot I'd got this with me; just been doing a bit of target-practice... Oh it's loaded too! Have to be careful; could *kill* someone with that...

SOMETHING RUSTLES.

Yeah - it's a magnum; same as Clint Eastwood's; blow your head off this would... (THREAT) So don't even think of doing anything, pal! (ALMOST CRYING) I want me Mum!

RUSTLE AGAIN. SHE PULLS THE WHISTLE OUT OF HER POCKET AND POINTS IT AROUND HER, LIKE A GUN.

I'm warning you - I'll blow you to pieces..! I'll... What *is* this? It's that stupid whistle... but that was in my other jacket - *weird!*

SOMETHING RUSTLES.

It must be a fox!

SOMETHING RUSTLES - LOUDER.

Aaghrrr! (BLOWS THE WHISTLE).

PAUSE

Nothing - well what did I expect?

AN OWL HOOTS NEARBY. ZOE TURNS AROUND AND A BARN OWL IS SITTING IN THE UNDERGROWTH WATCHING HER.

An owl - wow!

OWL: Wow!

ZOE: What?

OWL: What?

ZOE: An owl - talking!

OWL: An owl - talking!

TOGETHER: I don't believe it! This isn't possible! What's happening? An owl can't talk. It's talking... And how does it know how to repeat what I say...(FAST) before I say it?

THE OWL'S HEAD FALLS OFF.

ZOE: Aaghhr - it's head's come off!

GREEN ENTERS - THE OWL IS A PUPPET.

GREEN: Doesn't yours?

ZOE: What..? No, of course not.

GREEN: Pity - it can be very liberating.

ZOE: What are you doing here?

GREEN: You called me - you blew the whistle.

ZOE: But I mean - in the middle of the night?

GREEN: You're here in the middle of the night. What are you doing here?

ZOE: I... I'm not sure. I just had to come here; had an argument with my Dad.

GREEN: You're not the kind of child that answers back, are you?

ZOE: Er... yeah.

GREEN: Tut, tut, tut - what is the world coming to?

ZOE: How did you do that with the puppet?

GREEN: That's not a puppet; that's a very rare breed, only a few left.

ZOE: Well there would be if its head keeps falling off. But how did you know what I was going to say...

TOGETHER: Before I said it..? How do you do that? This is weird! This is truly strange... stop it... please...

ZOE: I'm scared.

GREEN: So you should be; in the heart of the wood in the dead of night.

ZOE: I got lost; I took the wrong path.

GREEN: Maybe you took the right one.

ZOE: What do you mean?

GREEN: The wood likes you - I told you.

ZOE: How can a wood like me?

GREEN: Don't be so negative, kid - you're not that bad.

ZOE: (LAUGHS) You're crazy!

GREEN: It's a crazy world.

ZOE: What is it about this place? Why do I always want to be here? I... feel at home here.

GREEN: Perhaps it is your home. Perhaps you're *meant* to be here - like me.

ZOE: I shouldn't be talking to you - I know nothing about you.

GREEN: You're perfectly safe with me, Zoe - I won't hurt you.

ZOE: Who are you?

GREEN: Mr Green - I told you.

ZOE: But you're someone... I don't know, someone different. I've never met anyone like you.

GREEN: Who do you think I am?

ZOE: Some kind of magician.

GREEN: You're getting warm.

ZOE: You live here, don't you - in the wood?

GREEN: Sometimes. I live in many woods.

ZOE: Are you a traveller?

GREEN: I travel, but never move.

ZOE: (LAUGHS UNEASILY) What are you talking about?

GREEN: This was a beautiful place once: verdant and pure, teeming with life and promise. Clear water bled through the land to a bountiful sea. Creatures of all sizes and species grazed and killed, lived and died in the dance of the spirit's cycle... I wish you could have seen it then. Look at it now. I'm angry, Zoe; angry, but tired.

ZOE: How could you have seen the earth when it was young?

GREEN: Tell me who I am, and you'll know.

ZOE: You're Mr Green, the nutter, aren't you?

GREEN: (SMILES) Half right.

ZOE; You said this wood was once the fragment of a great forest?

GREEN: This is the very heart of that forest. At one time it was possible to walk from here all the way to Scotland, and always have the company of an oak or an elder, a squirrel or a boar charging through the undergrowth alongside. And the deer were everywhere too. The great stag would peer through the leaves at the stumbling, clumsy man learning his way to the mother's heart. (LAUGHS) I do sound like a nutter, don't I?

ZOE: But a nice nutter. You seem to care a lot about the state of the planet.

GREEN: But it's up to your generation to stop the destruction; a heavy responsibility, but there's no one else.

ZOE: The wood's going to be bull-dozed.

GREEN: The wood? Which wood?

ZOE: Potter's wood - this wood.

GREEN: Are you sure?

ZOE: Yeah.

GREEN: I hadn't heard anything. How do you know?

ZOE: My Dad's going to do it. He's behind the plan for the by-pass.

GREEN: You're sure of this?

ZOE: Certain.

GREEN: (SCREAMS) Aaghrrr!! How can you come here all sweetness and light, beaming like a fairy in the dead of night - to bring me this news?!

ZOE: Wha..? What are you talking about?

GREEN: Perfidious irony! Your father - your own sire!

ZOE: Steady on... please, I don't know what you're talking about...

GREEN: Are you here to torment me, child?

ZOE: No...

GREEN: Is this some kind of sick joke?

ZOE: No, honestly...

GREEN: I feed you the seeds of the earth's spirit; the husk of my own silent agony and you reward me with this news?!

ZOE: I don't know what you're talking about..!

GREEN: I thought you were the one!

ZOE: Which one?

GREEN: To take my place!

ZOE: I don't understand...

GREEN: The signs were all conspiring to tell me that. The *wood itself* was welcoming you - I can feel it! How can you do this? You ungrateful, unworthy child! You have a great gift and you crush it underfoot to powder with your insolent words!

GREEN SEEMS TO SUCK IN THE SPIRIT AROUND HIM, SINKING SLOWLY TO THE GROUND, WHERE HE IS SWALLOWED BY THE EARTH ITSELF. ZOE STANDS FROZEN IN HORROR. A GIANT, TERRIFYING FIGURE IS SUDDENLY REVEALED AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE CLEARING, BACKLIT BY A POWERFUL LIGHT. HE IS CROWNED WITH STAG'S ANTLERS. HE SPEAKS WITH GREEN'S VOICE.

ZOE: Who are you?

CERN: "Cernunnos" - the spirit of the stag is within me. And you are trespassing in my wood.

ZOE: This isn't happening... it's not possible!

CERN: Leave now and halt the destruction of this wood, or I will haunt your every waking hour.

ZOE: (PANICKING) But what can I do..? It's not my fault!

CERN: Leave now, or stay forever!

ZOE: I'm... I'm trying to explain, that's all..!

A GREEN HAND SHOOTS THROUGH THE EARTH AND GRABS HER LEG. ZOE SCREAMS AND TRIES TO RUN, BUT THE HAND IS GRIPPING HER HARD AND SHE FALLS TO THE GROUND. CERNUNNOS HAS GONE.

Aaghrrr! Oh my God! What is it? Please - let me go! Please!!

SHE PRISES THE FINGERS OFF HER LEG, GETS UP AND BACKS OUT OF THE WOOD, CAREFULLY LOOKING ALL AROUND HER. THE GREEN HAND REMAINS, AS IF IT IS GROWING OUT OF THE EARTH. MUSIC AS THE HAND SLOWLY SINKS BACK INTO THE GROUND.

What... is this... all... about? I don't understand... what's happening? (SHOUTS) What is happening to me?!!

SHE RUNS OUT OF THE WOOD. THE MUSIC REACHES ITS DARK CONCLUSION AND THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.

**Pentabus Theatre touring, October-November 1998.**

**The Spectator** - I think I know what is about Pentabus. They call themselves "Shropshire's Touring Theatre Company" but at the end of *Heart Of The Wood*, their latest play, I suddenly knew what it is that makes them different from other touring theatre companies. They are in fact, Shropshire's Magic Touring Theatre Company. "I wanted to write the Heart Of The Wood after a new by-pass was built locally" says Alex Jones, "It was alarming to see meadows and woodland disappear so quickly - gone forever, and I felt that the legend of The Green Man was a wonderful way of bringing that message to the stage. I do believe there is hope in a new generation of people who are concerned enough to protest and fight for the planet. The Millennium brings massive problems, but also massive challenges. The spirit of The Green Man is alive, walking though the land again, inspiring us to stand up for Mother Nature. The play begins with teenagers, Zoë and Pippa (Rachel Colles and Dawn Hudson) skiving off school. Zoë wants to show her friend the woods she has recently discovered, to share her new-found fascination with this place of peace and beauty. However, Pippa, a budding arsonist in orange fun fur, purple flares and gold-wedgie loafers is not impressed. She would rather be shopping or clubbing. Zoë - sporty fleece and Doc Marten's - insists on staying a while, but regrets her stubbornness when Pippa unearths a bottle of petrol and produces a box of matches with a peculiar gleam in her eye. But Pippa's incendiary ambitions are doused by the appearance of a bloke with an axe in his hand and a ten times more gleam in his eye. All this 'gleam in the eye' stuff is not metaphorical, by the way - Pentabus's stage is a narrow tongue that reaches out into the Village and School halls where they perform, bringing the actors as close to the audience as it is possible to get. The gleams in the eye are really, unnervingly really unnervingly there. How can you act a gleam? Beats me. As Zoë and Pippa's adventures unravel, we glimpse familiar problems - broken homes, workaholic divorced parents with little time for their kids - and less familiar ones: like what does a guy do when he is gradually turning into a tree? Aha, you might go, a humorous touch. Actually, this play, like most of Pentabus's productions is very funny indeed. The actors are clever enough to let their characters indulge in slapstick and farce without losing their credibility. The humour is very necessary, as a large part of Pentabus's sense of magic and illusion depends on a fantastic set of tricks designed by the genius, Purvin, lighting, live music, masks and Sue Hall's out-of-this-world costumes. All this at close quarters would be a bit much for younger audience members. I've known children as young as four sit entranced all the way through a two-hour Pentabus play, but they do need a few reassuring cuddles here and there, and the frequent gales of laughter never fail to blow the spooks away. The set is not the only source of tricks and illusions. I don't know whether extra skills are in the job spec for Pentabus actors, but they invariably show a range of skills that go away beyond performing a script convincingly. This bunch, Rachel, Dawn, Greg Hobbs and Jo King knocked us all dead with the hilarious song and dance act that introduced the second half, but it is one of those magic moments that made you wish you had a replay button in your head as you know what whenever you weren't looking at one performer, the others were doing equally amazing things. As I left, I was thinking - as I often do after seeing Pentabus, who are it must be said my favourite theatre company of all time bar none (and mark my words I've seen quite a few) - what an immense privilege it is to have high entertainment of this calibre on our doorsteps, at prices we can afford and in a form which our children enjoy as much as we do. If you haven't seen them - go. Take some kids, or go alone. Get some good strong magic into your life!

**Ludlow Journal** - An educational romp illuminating the concerns, diversity and comic peculiarities of modern society, Pentabus Theatre Company's latest production, *The Heart Of The Wood*, explores and satirises a strangely recognisable world of environmental destruction, spiritual imagery and contemporary stereotypes. The play tells the entertaining tale of Zoë, a wide-eyed student, keen to save the world, and her friend Pippa, a pyromaniac-shopaholic, who with the help of the Green Man and a tree house of crusty hippies, do battle with Zoë's divorced Dad, a callous contractor keen to profit from progress, and his slapstick employees. Written by local playwright Alex Jones, the script weaves twelve colourfully exaggerated and identifiable characters into a story that deals with many of the issues that have great relevance to today's youth. Alex Jones said "I do believe that there is hope in a new generation of people who are concerned enough to protest and fight for the planet - The spirit of the Green Man is alive, walking through the land again, inspiring us to stand of for Mother Earth." Although there are times when perhaps the highly informative play delves too deeply into green politics for younger members of the audience, such moments are more than made up for by the excitement and hilarity of this energetic production. After the interval the play combines the comedy of *Harry Enfield* with the feel-good factor of the *Full Monty*. Punctuated by the superb songs of the workmen and the hippies, it races towards the climax as the character changes and becomes frantically quick and with the ever-present music capturing and guiding the excited mood of the audience. So accomplished were the four members of the cast as actors, musicians and most importantly as true entertainers that they slipped between their different roles with apparent ease. Especially entertaining

was Greg Hobbs, who played six of the twelve characters with a wonderful variety of accents. With a handful of multi-talented performers and with dedication to bringing theatre to even the remotest rural communities, the small and highly mobile company evoked a sense of romantic past; an idyllic time when travelling players journeyed through a green England bringing entertainment to delighted audiences. *Andy Sibcy.*

**Ludlow and Tenbury Wells Advertiser 'Arts Page'** - Pentabus Theatre's autumn touring production 'The Heart Of The Wood' is a vigorously inventive dramatisation of the Green Man myth in the service of a passionate plea for greater reverence of the natural world. The impending Millennium gives the play an unnerving apocalyptic edge, but what saves it from portentous polemic is its humour and capacity for self-mockery. Author Alex Jones clearly has the younger generation in his sights and quite rightly so if the planet is to be saved. Pentabus' distinctive blend of Brothers Grimm Gothic and breathtaking theatrical energy makes it captivating for such an audience. The writing may be strident at times, but the weaving of Celtic mythology, contemporary ecological awareness and sharp satirical comedy works very successfully. If ever a cause deserved to be worn openly on a theatre company's sleeve, this is it. Greg Hobbs as Green Man gives an imposingly physical performance, which adds pathos to panache with engaging delicacy. Dawn Hudson's Pippa is played with just the right degree of sullen adolescent, bloody-mindedness to provide the vital antidote to Rachel Colles' passionate environmentalism. Rachel's Zoe is a performance of considerably greater subtlety than in 'The Wright Stuff'. As the evil demon of corporate vandalism and self-absorbed father, Jo King provides a key element to the play's dialect, without resorting to hectoring caricature. Director Steve Johnstone maintains impressive narrative momentum. This production will turn the Pentabus tour into a crusade. *Ian Barge.*

### **PROMOTER COMMENTS**

**Sir John Talbot School/Whitchurch Leisure Centre** - Thought the performance was excellent. I ran a colouring competition and the winners were all people who had not been before. I'm certain they will all be back - it was great. The best family show yet!

**Colmers Farm** - The best we have ever experienced. We were so impressed that we rang up and booked your next play the following day. The company were totally brilliant! "I thought the show was great" - a GCSE student said the next day, "When you get environmental stuff it can all seem the same, but the whole thing was so well staged that you didn't feel preached at". I felt the show worked on many different levels - it was some people's first time at the venue and at a theatre show and it was accessible to all.

**Devonshire Junior School** - The company were excellent. I enjoyed the show, as did the audience. It was a very good play. We booked the play because we are trying to get theatre into the school.

**Farlow + Oretton Village Hall** - It was an excellent show and the village really enjoyed it.

**Rockspring Community Centre** - Excellent. The audience were captivated all the way throughout. Very successful with the way the stage went right through the audience. This brought people into very close contact with the performance and drew them into the production. I strongly believe in offering the opportunity for young people (and their families) from the Sandpits area of Ludlow the experience of live theatre and music.

**Abberley Hall School** - We thought the publicity was gruesome and misleading, I think flyers might be better with all venues as I knew the Stockton lady was concerned about the competition I kept away from where she had put posters. The company were brilliant - what fantastic people. I was over committed so didn't get to see it, but I got good feedback from the children who thoroughly enjoyed it. However I had a very strong comment from a member of staff of the use of the word 'crap'.

**Abbots Moreton Village Hall** - Good and powerful!

**Greig Centre** - The company were excellent. I was really pleased with the show; it was very original and enjoyable. I particularly liked the way the space was used it was non-conventional, and everyone enjoyed it. We booked it because we liked the theme and thought it would appeal to a youthful audience.

**Aston on Clun Village Hall** - We were very impressed by the show and thought the actors were extremely versatile and talented - the way they were taking different parts was remarkable.

**Theatr Clera** - The company were lovely. I thoroughly enjoyed the show, the A-Level students were particularly impressed with the special fx. The environmental issues were extremely popular amongst the public.

**Hope Baggot Village Hall (Norbury Village Hall)** - The show was excellent.

**Clifton Campville** - The show was extremely well received, in fact two boys came on Friday and made

their parents bring them back on Saturday. I thought it was an excellent show; everybody was impressed. The environmental issue was relevant to us as there has been recent controversy about selling off some common land to a building company.

**Swanbourne village Hall** - Awful poster - a lot of people thought it looked quite nasty and were put off. We have a lot of fundamental Christians in the village who wouldn't bring their children. The show was fantastic, fabulous, wonderful - everybody was transfixed.

**Fulmer Village Hall** - Very good show, everyone felt pulled into the action.

**Llaniggon Village Hall** - The show was wonderful, everyone thoroughly enjoyed it. The time just flew between 7.30 and 10.00.

**Kidderminster Library** - Excellent!

**Peopleton** - Everybody in the audience was very complimentary about the show. One or two said it was the best yet. Excellent show - another winner.

**Lacon Childe School** - The audience thought the show was excellent, but one old lady left because she thought it was too loud.

**Martley Village Hall** - Brilliant show, total sell out, and have half booked your next show for February.

**Lucton School** - The performance was very good, everyone enjoyed it and the suitability for the audience was spot on.

**Ledbury School** - The company were great and were very professional actors. Excellent acting and musicianship. Ingenious set. The show has a good message for our audience. It was a first class show. Really enjoyed it - when are you coming again?

**All Saints** - The best show I have ever seen you do. It was magical looking at the kids faces astounded and the mums and dads astounded. The dance was like sha waddy waddy music - lovely! The play was even more wonderful than the last one. They just get better and better - the set was excellent too. Everyone enjoyed themselves - what more can I say?

**Bishops Castle Community College** - Very well done - and the audience enjoyed it.

**Witton Middle School** - The show was presented to 11-12 year olds and there were very favourable comments from children. They loved the special effects, the humour, the set and the way actors/actresses appeared and disappeared - a wonderful way of giving children access to live theatre.

**Condover Village Hall** - The standard of acting and subject matter were excellent and all our audience enjoyed it thoroughly.

**Email from Mr Peter Napier** - Thank you for a truly excellent performance at Pontesbury Village Hall tonight. This is not the first time I have come away from a Pentabus performance feeling uplifted. Your productions really reach the audience and in my opinion I find that Heart Of The Wood is more entertaining than anything on in the West End, or anywhere else for that matter, even if in more humble surrounding!

**Letter from Anna, age 10 from Ledbury Primary School** - I went to see you do Heart Of The Wood at Ledbury Primary School. I thought that it was brilliant! I have never seen such a brilliant play in my whole life and I bet I won't ever again. My mum and dad thought it was brilliant too. We wondered how you all changed so quickly, I know I couldn't! I liked it when Pippa turned on the music in the wood. But I liked every bit Well done!

**Letter in Pinvin's Parish Mag** - Please pass on a sincere thank you to the Pinvin Memorial Hall committee for organising a visit from Pentabus Theatre Company. The performance of The Heart Of The Wood was one of the best in a tradition of truly superb performances. The whole evening was a real treat. The play was very topical as it happens for the central plot involved a conflict between developers and the environmentalist 'The Green Man' of the woods. You will be glad to know that the trees won! To quote from Alex Jones - 'As we approach the Millennium it is natural that we should examine the state of the planet. Everywhere we look, Mankind has left its mark. It is fast becoming apparent that globally, destruction of the natural environment is taking place at an alarming rate... the inexorable march of commerce and market forces takes what it can from the earth with no thought for the future and those who come after us'. The legend of The Green Man was a wonderful way of bringing that message to the stage. The play has inspired me to reform the now extinct Pinvin Environmental Group, perhaps with a view to marking the Millennium. Are there any villagers who would be interested? If so, please contact me. *Jill Terry.*

**Report from West Midland Arts at All Saints Church Herefordshire** - Clearly many people in this audience are big fans of Pentabus and have seen their work before. However this production seemed to totally engross the young people present and created a memorable occasion