



# The Circular

April 2020

## Stay safe, stay well

It seems incredible that a month has gone by since our last Circular. We hope you're all well, and staying safe and, as ever, we look forward to seeing you soon.

As we said last month, we thought this was a great time for you to get to know us a little bit better, via some pen portraits of our team.

They were really popular – we got so much good feedback from you last month! So we're starting this month's Circular with three more (and planning to carry on once the lockdown is over, although probably with just one a month then...)

So, say hello to our Executive Assistant Jaye Lewis; our Duty Manager Jason Mullen; and our Assistant Producer and Literary Co-ordinator Fleur Hebditch.

### Jaye

I've had a long and varied career – even though I say so myself!

An original Essex Girl, I trained as a PE and Drama specialist teacher in Kent gaining my B.Ed degree in 1981. I then went to the Welsh College of Music and Drama in Cardiff to do a postgraduate diploma in Dance and Drama, and taught for a while in Cardiff.

I quickly realised that I would rather 'do it' than 'teach it', so got my Equity Card by setting up *Boogie Take Two* with my fellow dancing partner Junior Walker. We would choreograph disco routines and then perform them around the Cardiff nightclubs... not sure that would be tolerated by the night clubbers now!

I was also one of the original members of *Red Alert*, a Cardiff dance group that had a residency on a pop programme on the Welsh TV



channel S4C. We were a bit like Pan's People (but with boys) for those who remember them! So one of my skills is dancing in Welsh... Not a great photo of those days in the 80s, but the only one I could find.



I spent five happy years in Wales performing on TV and theatre including Swansea Grand Theatre – where I changed career and found a husband.

Having been a dancer at the Grand Theatre I then got the opportunity of becoming a Deputy Stage Manager for *Jesus Christ Superstar*, as I could read music – and the Artistic Director was clearly desperate! The Company Stage Manager was a chap called Duncan – and it wasn't love at first sight. He thought I couldn't do the job (I absolutely could) and I thought he was boring! We have now been married for 32 years – so something must have gone right?

I toured all over the country as a Stage Manager working in York, Leicester, Manchester, Scarborough (with Alan Ayckbourn), London, and on a year-long national tour. Then I got fed up with living in digs...

Duncan and I got married in 1988; he was working as Managing Director of a media/TV/drama school in Bubwith at the time. A few years later, we had our son Oliver and I changed career again.

I spent seven years working in the charitable sector - first as Manager for Relate Yorkshire Coast for five years and then two years as Chief Officer for Age UK. But my passion for theatre was never far away. I decided to apply for an Admin Assistant's job at the SJT. I had worked as DSM there in the 80s, so thought I would be in with a chance.

So, career number five – theatre administration - and I'm still here 22 years on. I've had a succession of jobs at the SJT including Community Events Manager, Personal Assistant and now Executive Assistant working with Caroline Routh and Paul Robinson, as well as organising the Gallery and helping Paul Baines with the venue hires.



Oli is now a Police Officer – we are so proud of him, especially as we thought he was going to be an actor!

Duncan set up his own business, Eaglei, coaching businesses and students in presentation/communication/public speaking skills, while also working part-time on the Digital Advantage Programme based at Coventry University, Scarborough.

This is Duncan winning an Award at Scarborough Business Awards.





We have a cat called Pebbles who is very lovely – and she knows it!

And in my spare time I perform with Raven, singing, playing the flute, tenor recorder, accordion and lots of percussion. This means I can continue to show off and is great fun!



## Jason

I was born and grew up in West London. I developed a love of theatre at an early age partly through my mother, who had trained as an actor with the likes of Stephen Berkoff and Terence Stamp, and also by getting involved in school plays.

Aged eleven I left primary education to go full time to the Barbara Speake Stage School in Acton. Not really expecting to do any professional work I ended up spending the next three years working on shows as diverse as *Grange Hill*, *Crackerjack* and *Dave Allen*.

In 1981 I played a murderous boy scout in *The Final Conflict- Omen III* for 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox and featured in a music video, *Mind of a Toy*, for pop band Visage (you can watch it [here!](#)).

On stage I appeared in the West End, as lost boy Tootles in *Peter Pan* at the Shaftesbury Theatre with Jane Asher and Nigel Patrick and as a member of Fagin's gang and understudy to Oliver in the musical *Oliver!* at the Noel Coward Theatre.



Leaving stage school I returned briefly to secondary education until the age of 16. My first job after that was working in a property hire company that specialised in toys. I was basically responsible for helping the prop buyers/designers from TV shows to select set dressings suitable for their production.



One of the films I selected props for was Dudley Moore's *Santa Claus: The Movie*. I can still recognise the toys when I see it today.

As much as I enjoyed this I decided I wanted to work in theatre so changed jobs and became an usher, first on *Cats* and then at various theatres around the West End. I was a flyman and stage crew member on a number of shows before becoming the youngest stage door keeper in London at the Whitehall Theatre.

I got to meet and work with some famous names including Julie Walters and the lovely Prunella Scales (who I later learnt I am related to – she's my mother's third cousin) and in the process made some good contacts.

One of those was a producer called Martin Starkie who had written the hit West End musical *Canterbury Tales*. I left the stage door and started working closely with him as a production assistant and stage manager on his Chaucer Festival in Canterbury and Southwark.

This led me to adapt the musical into a small-scale touring version and, with an actor friend, set up a company to launch a professional tour around theatres in Wales and Kent. Further solo producing credits followed on the London fringe and with a small company run by well-known 1930s actor Joan White who became a close friend and, as she liked to put it, surrogate grandmother.

By the early 1990s I returned to the West End working in box office and as a staff supervisor. This led to three years as assistant manager at the Phoenix Theatre on *Blood Brothers* and another three years at what's now the Harold Pinter Theatre. In 2000 I applied and got the job as House Manager here at the Stephen Joseph Theatre and moved north. In 2004 I became Theatre Manager working with some brilliant people and remained until 2007 when I decided after 29 years to take a break from all things theatrical. During this time I worked as a steward at Scarborough Castle and ran the beautiful Kirkham Priory near York for a season.



I am now back part-time at the SJT as a duty manager and can also be spotted as a historic property steward and tour guide at Scarborough Castle. In my spare time I have been treasurer for a local community group, co-founded a small local theatre group – Scarborough Actors and Writers – and am also a performed playwright (one of my plays was on the SJT stage in *60 by 60* in 2015) as well as being a keen theatre historian.

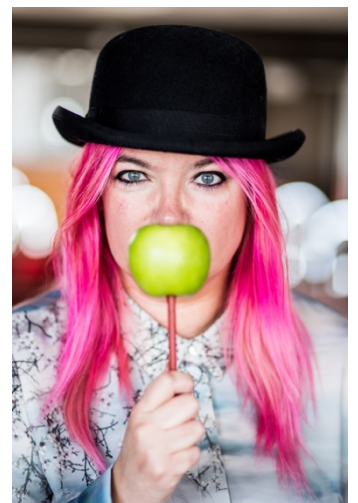
## ***Fleur***

It was one of the seminal series of the 90s, a drama which later drew comparisons with *The Wire* for its complex, multi-layered storyline.

*Holding On* had a stellar cast, including David Morrissey, Phil Daniels, Lesley Manville, Meera Syal, Ace Bhatti, Sam Kelly, Dominic Brunt and Diane Parish.

And there, in the small but showy role of 'beautiful young woman whose murder sets off a chain of events which have a huge impact on everyone else in the cast', was our very own Fleur Hebditch.

You can't miss Fleur if you visit the SJT – her ever-changing hair colours makes her a familiar figure to our regulars.





She started her theatrical life as an actress, doing some pretty high profile work – as well as meeting her end in a phone box in central London in *Holding On*, she was directed by theatre bad boy Mark Ravenhill in *I'll Show You Mine* at the Flnborough Theatre, and by Anthony Neilson in his play *Heredity* at the Royal Court.

This promising acting career came to a happy end when Fleur had two daughters – now both teenagers – with husband Denzil, whom she'd first met when they were both at the Guildford School of Acting. She went back to work directing shows by community companies, one of which, Sandi Toksvig and Elly Brewer's *The Pocket Dream*, was seen at the RSC's Swan Theatre.

And when Denzil took the post of Production Manager at the SJT, obviously the family came north too, and Fleur started working in the SJT's box office – familiar territory, as she'd worked in various West End box office in between acting jobs.

So: actress, director, admin; onstage, backstage, front of house. With such a wide range of theatrical experience, Fleur was an absolute shoo-in for her current role as the SJT's Assistant Producer and Literary Co-ordinator.

There are three main strands to her day-to-day work. She assists with the production of the SJT's own shows – everything from dealing with actors' contracts to setting up small-scale in-house productions such as our *Second Stage* play readings.

She works on the programming side, helping to choose visiting shows, negotiating deals with the companies that bring them, sorting accommodation. And – her favourite bit of the job – she heads up the team that looks at developing new work for our future programming. All scripts submitted to the theatre go to Fleur first – she reads them as part of a triage system. Those which get through that rigorous first step are then read by a panel of volunteer readers, and from there, the successful ones go to our senior readers.

It's that small team's responsibility to choose the shows that we think you, our audience, will enjoy, whether as a full production in the Round or McCarthy, or as a reading in, for instance, our *Second Stage* evenings.

In 2018 Fleur was selected to take part in Channel 4's *DRAG SOS*. A group of drag queens from Manchester and London descended on Scarborough to change three people's lives in a drag makeover show.

*"I'd always wanted to be a drag queen but being a woman I never thought I could, but little did I realise that Drag now encompasses all genders – I just wish I'd known sooner in life,"* says Fleur.

The show, [which can still be viewed on All4](#) really did change Fleur's life. She has embraced all things drag and carried on performing in the guise of Dada Bizarre.



She's teamed up with Eat Me Café's Martyn Hyde to create *Scraping the Barrel*, bringing variety cabaret shows to Scarborough.

*"I am so thankful to have found drag," says Fleur. "I get to create mini theatrical pieces, sew my own costumes, style my own wigs and make people laugh. It's fabulous being a 50-year-old female drag queen!"*

**Stop press:** Just as we were putting this edition of *The Circular* to bed, *The Guardian* ran a feature on '10 TV classics that are overdue a reairing' – including *Holding On*. Who knows, we may yet get to see Fleur as that murder victim!

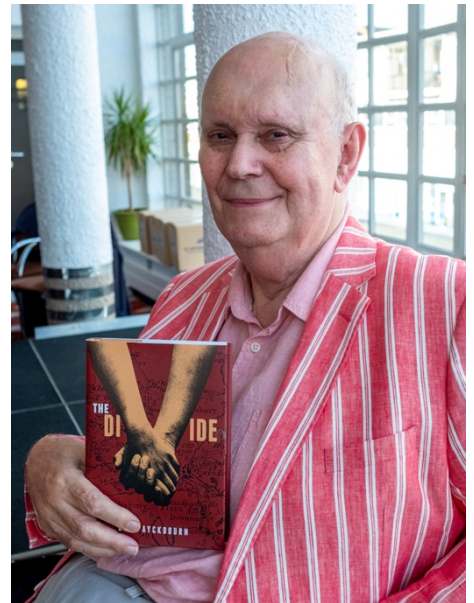
## Exploring *The Divide* with Alan Ayckbourn

By Simon Murgatroyd

Had the country not gone into lockdown, this month would have seen Sir Alan Ayckbourn talking to the Stephen Joseph Theatre Book Club about his debut novel *The Divide*.

As the meeting did not take place, the Book Club members were invited to submit questions to the playwright about *The Divide*, which he has responded to and the Book Club has kindly allowed the *Circular* to reprint.

*The Divide* was published by PS Publishing during September 2019 – and launched at the SJT – and is a tragic love story set in a future England which has been devastated by a plague. Contact between the opposite sexes is fatal and, as a result, men and women have been forcibly separated by the 'Divide'.



### ***Over 80 plays and now, a novel. How and why?***

**Alan Ayckbourn:** I found, now I'm not quite so involved with running a theatre (!) that when I was not occupied with rehearsals for my two yearly productions, I had considerably more rest-of-the-year writing time. Having that year completed next year's play early, I set myself a project which was originally never intended as a play or even a novel but an abstract project with an impossibly large, financially impractical scale. I think inevitably as I got further into the writing it took on the form of a graphic play or a dramatic novel. A sort of cross between the two genres, really.

### ***What is it about this story that made you want to write it in a different format? Were you attracted to it as a challenge?***

Yes, a challenge, in a way. The writer in me saying to the director, "Go on, put that on stage if you can, if you dare!" If I'd originally approached it as a play, I would have probably restricted the piece to a maximum of two or three locations or perhaps chosen to make the setting unspecified and location-less. I'd also have concentrated the story so it was told by a dozen or fewer characters. Playwriting for me is essentially about minimalism. Not just for financial or practical reasons but artistic ones as well. I've always admired artists in other media who achieve this. Painters who can convey so much with so few lines; musicians who can do likewise with so few notes.

### ***Why was it best to use diary/documents rather than narration/soliloquies?***

My stock in trade is dialogue. It's when I feel I'm at my strongest. My stage directions are brief and practical and where I feel least comfortable. No Bernard Shaw or Arthur Miller, !! The diary

form came naturally, the boy and girl speaking directly and unselfconsciously from their hearts. Soliloquies, in a sense. The rest is reported dialogue, be they village council meetings or the numerous inter-departmental memos and e-mails that fly to and fro between officials.

***Did you feel/expect a novel would reach a new/different audience?***

I hoped it would. A novel is a very one-to-one process. With plays over several live performances I can watch audience reaction night by night. Mind you, these days I rarely change anything during those early performances, apart from perhaps the odd tiny timing detail, usually after discussion with the performers. But the information I glean from that experience certainly informs me when I sit down to write the next one. With a book it's a bit like closing your eyes and throwing it down a well and then waiting for the splash that never comes. I don't know how these professional novelists cope without feedback, I really don't.

***While the woman's side of the wall was far from ideal, it didn't seem dangerous. Do you believe men are naturally, and irredeemably, more violent?***

I think sadly, without the moderating influence of women, they probably are. Mind you, women unfortunately are very often the root cause of a great deal of male violence, inadvertent or otherwise, too! But on balance I believe if the sexes faced permanent separation, their respective behaviours in *The Divide* would probably be the result. There is violence on the women's side too, of course, but it's generally more oblique. Rather like the emotional bullying I understand goes on in girls' boarding schools. In *The Divide*, Axi's calculatingly cruel treatment of poor Soween year after year is a case in point. A commercial hire boat owner once told me he made it a rule never to rent to single sex groups. He'd had too many boats wrecked that way. In many respects the women behaved worse than the men. So maybe the moral is that whilst men and women living side by side occasionally create all sorts of potentially violent sexual tensions between them, living apart can prove just as frustratingly destructive.

You can learn more about *The Divide* at Alan Ayckbourn's official website [here](#) and if you're interested in reading it, it is available here from [PS Publishing](#).

With thanks to the SJT Book Club, further details of which can be found [here](#).

## Community Kitchen

We're in awe of the great work that our friends from Eat Me Café and Social and their community partners to help the most vulnerable people in our town during the current crisis.

Eat Me owners Martyn Hyde and Stephen Dinardo have enlisted the help of at least 16 other businesses to help make and distribute food to those in need while the country is in lockdown.

*"It's early days but we have to do something to turn a negative into a positive. We are in real need of funds: just £4 buys a meal for a vulnerable person. Please help if you can,"* he says.

You can donate to the Community Kitchen [here](#).

And we were delighted to be able to help in just a very small way by donating stock from our bar after our temporary closure.





## Isabel pitches in for the NHS

We're very proud of our wardrobe assistant Isabel Innes, who is putting her talents to good use during our temporary closure to make equipment for NHS nurses.

Isabel is usually to be found in our wardrobe department, where her day-to-day work can include anything from making pirate outfits to carefully recreated period costumes.

But during our current closure due to the coronavirus crisis, Isabel, who has moved back to be with her parents in Beeford, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, has been making scrub bags, face masks and headbands for NHS staff after reading an appeal from Facebook group For the Love of Scrubs – Our NHS Needs You.

*"The headbands have buttons on which the face masks can be attached to," she explains. "A lot of nurses have started wearing them because their ears were getting sore from having the ties from the face masks directly on them all the time."*

Isabel studied for a BA in Costume Design and Construction for Stage and Screen at Yorkshire Coast College (now Scarborough TEC), during which she did work experience at the SJT and was subsequently offered a job.

She has since worked on many productions including *A (Scarborough)*, *Christmas Carol*, *The 39 Steps*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Stepping Out* and, last Christmas, *Treasure Island*.



## Housekeeping!

Just to let you know a couple of practical things...

### Membership renewal

Thank you to all of our members who have continued to renew their memberships. Please be assured that your membership renewal has gone through on our system, but there will be a delay in getting your physical packs out to you. Once we are able to open up again we will be posting all packs out to members who have renewed during this period as soon as possible. Thank you for your patience at this time.

### A message from box office

Our team has now nearly finished contacting everyone affected by our recent closure. In some cases we've been unable to contact customers or have not heard back after leaving messages, and an automatic refund has been issued.

All **requested** refunds should be with customers by now. If you haven't heard from us, or are waiting for a refund, please follow the steps below to check the status of your booking.

1. Check your bank account if you requested a BACS or card refund to see if you have already been refunded.



2. Log into your online account and view your order history to see if your tickets are still in your account.
3. Contact the Box Office on alex.briggs@sjt.uk.com or by calling 01723 370541.

### **The new few weeks...**

We're doing our best to keep in regular contact with all of our customers, especially Circle members and those who may not have access to the internet.

If all goes according to plan, you should receive regular emails or mailouts from us over the next few weeks, keeping you up to date with all our news.

If you do have access to the internet, but don't receive our emails, do drop us a line so we can make sure we have your email address listed.

And if you know anyone who you think would like to hear from us, now's the ideal time for them to sign up to our mailing list here: [www.sjt.uk.com/maillinglist](http://www.sjt.uk.com/maillinglist)