



The Circular

September 2020

Welcome

Hello and welcome to the September 2020 issue of the Circular, the newsletter just for our Circle members.

In this month's issue, you can find out more about our upcoming autumn and winter season and learn more about the 'lost, occasionally found, often just misplaced' plays of our Director Emeritus, Alan Ayckbourn.

Season of mists...

It's almost October, a month that will go down in the history of the SJT as the one in which we re-opened after the great shutdown of 2020.

We're so thrilled to be able to welcome you back into our building. It won't feel quite the same, of course, but we're doing everything we can to make you feel both warmly welcome **and** safe within the theatre environment. We're constantly reviewing and updating our COVID-secure practices as the guidelines change – you can [find out more here](#).

We really welcome your feedback. It's great to know what we're doing right, of course, but, even more importantly, we need to know if we're doing anything wrong – this is a new world for all of us, and we're not going to get everything spot-on immediately.

And while we're on the subject of social distancing: **please, please** don't leave it till the last minute to book. Our reduced capacity to allow social distancing means we'll only have a limited number of seats available for all of our shows, and they're selling fast.

Even though there'll be empty seats in the auditorium, we really won't be able to just 'squeeze in' a couple of extra people. And we don't want you to miss out... [visit our website to find out what's on](#).

Circle Café

You should by now have had an invitation to our first Circle Café for a while – a chance for a chat and catch-up to let you know what's been happening over the past few months, and our plans for the future.

The 'Welcome Back' Circle Café will take place between 10.30am and noon on Monday 5 October, and will be hosted by our Executive Director Caroline Routh, our Artistic Director Paul Robinson, our Theatre Manager Paul Baines and our Fundraising and Development Officer Stephanie Dattani.

Because our friends at Eat Me Café are currently using our bar/lounge space, this event will take place in the Round. Tea and coffee will be provided (no cake/biscuits on this occasion, but don't worry: it's not the end of cake! Just us taking a little time to adjust).

A further email will be sent after booking with a personal arrival time to help maintain social distancing. Please bear with us as we adjust to this new way of working.

Spaces are limited, so please confirm your place as soon as possible by clicking [here](#) and letting us know how many tickets you require. With socially distanced seating we have limited capacity, so tickets will be on a first-come, first-served basis.

And for those who can't make it, we're planning to film the event and make it available online, just for Circle members – we'll keep you posted on that one.

Temperature checks

Next time you visit the building, expect to have your temperature checked. It's the latest in our package of security measures and is, we promise, completely unintrusive and very quick. One of our front of house team will simply hold a device up to your forehead – neither the person nor the device will make physical contact with you at any point – the whole process takes seconds.

If your temperature registers above 38°C, in accordance with government and NHS guidelines, we'll ask you not to come in. If that happens and you were visiting the theatre to see a film or show, we will credit your ticket fee to your account.

The Snow Queen

We're absolutely thrilled that our Snow Queen this Christmas is going to be the fabulous Polly Lister.

If you saw Polly as the monstrous Mari in Jim Cartwright's *The Rise and Fall of Little Voice*, or the adorable and down-to-earth Di in Amelia Bullmore's *Di and Viv and Rose* (both 2017), you'll know just how versatile she is.

And oh, is *The Snow Queen* going to put that versatility to the test! In addition to the title role, Polly will play – wait for it – a sorceress, our heroes Gerda and Kai, a granny, Humpty Dumpty, a reindeer and the not-so-wise Wisewomen of Whitby and Filey. And that's just



for now – writer Nick Lane is still tweaking the script, so don't be surprised if there aren't more roles added to that list by the time rehearsals start in November.

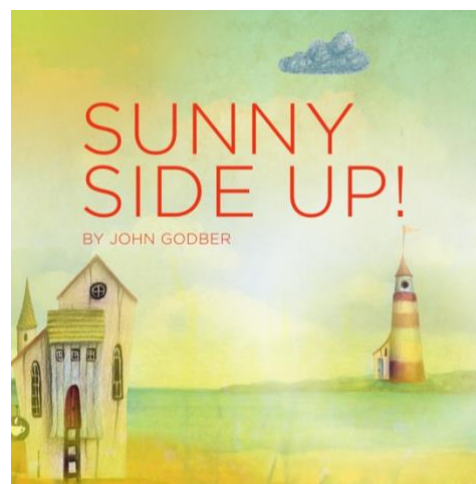
And just to return to the subject of bookings – our usual booking pattern is that the majority of seats for shows are sold in pairs, but that goes out of the window at Christmas when the entire family comes – so don't delay if you want to see *The Snow Queen*. You can book [here](#) or our box office is now open for both phone (01723 370541) and in-person bookings, Tuesdays to Saturdays from 11am to 4pm.

Sunny Side Up!

Not surprisingly – it's a world premiere by one of the world's most performed living playwrights, after all – John Godber's *Sunny Side Up!* has set our box office alight.

So much so, that we've already planned in an extra matinee at 1.30pm on Friday 30 October.

You're the first to know about this, so grab the chance while you can – you can book [here](#) or via the box office as above.



Hansard

We've got an exciting one-off event coming up that we wanted you to be the first to know about...

Our Artistic Associate, Simon Slater, has teamed up with a member of one of the country's greatest theatre dynasties, Jemma Redgrave, to present a rehearsed reading of Simon Woods' two-hander *Hansard*, directed by Paul Robinson, on Tuesday 20 October at 7.30pm.



It's a summer's morning in 1988 and Tory politician Robin Hesketh has returned home to the idyllic Cotswold house he shares with his wife of 30 years, Diana. But all is not as blissful as it seems. Diana has a stinking hangover, a fox is destroying the garden, and secrets are being dug up all over the place. As the day draws on, what starts as gentle ribbing and the familiar rhythms of marital sparring quickly turns to blood-sport.

A witty and devastating new play, *Hansard* premiered at the National Theatre in August 2019.

As a Circle member, you can buy tickets [at this link](#) from 10am on Wednesday 30 September; they'll go on general sale at 10am on Friday 2 October.

Following on from *Hansard*, you can see the versatile Mr Slater in his one-man show, *Bloodshot* (he describes it as 'vaudeville, murder, magic and jazz' - how can you resist?), from 21 to 24 October - you can find out more about that below.

Bloodshot

Our Artistic Associate and very own Renaissance Man, Simon Slater, brings his one-man show *Bloodshot* to our stage next month (21 to 24 October). We don't use the term lightly – just as a couple of examples of his extraordinary versatility, Simon:

- Played Sam Carmichael in *Mamma Mia!* in the West End for five years
- Narrates audio books, including Hilary Mantel's *Wolf Hall*
- Was MD on the National Theatre's award-winning *Amadeus*
- Has composed over 300 original scores for theatre, film, TV, radio and theatre, including our last four Christmas shows (and this year's *The Snow Queen*).

In Douglas Post's play, he turns his talents to a noir-ish thriller, playing down-on-his-luck photographer Derek Everleigh, who gets entangled in some very murky business in 1950s London.

The Chicago Tribune praised *Bloodshot* as 'a genuinely enveloping thriller [and a] strikingly gripping yarn', while *The Vienna Review* said: "*Bloodshot* one-ups the typical thriller in an unexpected way: It also breaks your heart."

Sounds unmissable? You can book [here](#) or via the box office as above.



From the press...

As one of the first theatres in the country to announce an autumn/winter season of live theatre, we've garnered some nice press coverage in the last few weeks.

The Guardian's Chris Wiegand dubbed the SJT 'the canary in the coalmine', praising us for showing 'how creativity can be born from constrictions' – [read it here](#).

On the *Northern Soul* website, theatre editor (and himself a theatremaker) Chris Wallis was impressed by both our Artistic Director Paul Robinson's creative and fiscal sense, saying: "*His success at reopening the SJT speaks for itself, although he's mindful that he might 'go down in a blaze of glory'. I think not.*" - [read it here](#).

In the *Yorkshire Post*, respected theatre critic and playwright Nick Ahad was impressed by our 'bold new season' – [read it here](#).

And, of course, we continue to be grateful to Sue Wilkinson at the *Scarborough News*, who gives us great coverage week in, week out throughout the year, [including this](#).

The lost, occasionally found, often just misplaced Ayckbourn plays

by Simon Murgatroyd

Following my article in a recent Circular about the lost SJT summer season of 1966, I've had an interesting enquiry relating to my favourite subject of all – Alan Ayckbourn!

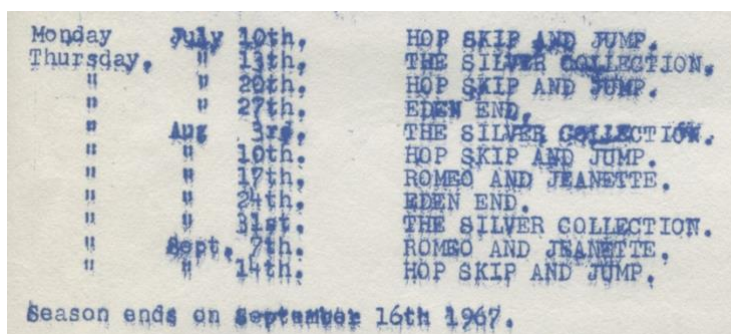
When this year's summer season was announced, there was a new Ayckbourn play called *Truth Will Out* in the schedule, which was obviously cancelled along with the rest of the season. The question was: has Alan Ayckbourn had any other plays announced but never produced at the SJT over the decades?

This is a fascinating question for me – so fascinating I've actually written a book called *Unseen Ayckbourn*, essentially about the same subject! But in a nutshell, the answer is yes. Although, it's also a little more complicated than that. It has to be, really, or this would be a very short article.

Alan Ayckbourn has indeed had a couple of plays announced by the SJT which were never produced. He's also had several plays announced under completely different titles and, in one memorable case, a play announced which was not the play delivered despite having the same title!

So here's a whistle-stop guide to the Ayckbourn plays that never took place – or sort of took place – at the SJT over the years.

The earliest incidence is 1967 when a press release for the summer season announced Alan's new play *The Silver Collection*. This is the only time that title was used as when the summer season posters were printed, *The Silver Collection* had been changed to *The Sparrow*; a play which has only ever run for three weeks at the Library Theatre and was never seen again.



Monday	July	10th.	HOP SKIP AND JUMP.
Thursday	"	13th.	THE SILVER COLLECTION.
"	"	20th.	HOP SKIP AND JUMP.
"	"	27th.	EDEN END.
"	Aug.	3rd.	THE SILVER COLLECTION.
"	"	10th.	HOP SKIP AND JUMP.
"	"	17th.	ROMEO AND JEANETTE.
"	"	24th.	EDEN END.
"	"	31st.	THE SILVER COLLECTION.
"	Sept.	7th.	ROMEO AND JEANETTE.
"	"	14th.	HOP SKIP AND JUMP.
Season ends on September 16th 1967.			

Alan would later write he changed the title but, to be honest: "*I'm not really happy with that title [The Sparrow] either.*" Given no one ever saw it again, perhaps he was worrying needlessly there.

Just to be comprehensive, it should be also noted that *The Sparrow* was preceded by a play which was first performed under a completely different title to that by which it is more familiarly known today. In 1965, *Meet My Father* premiered at the Library Theatre before it became *Relatively Speaking* for its West End premiere during 1967.

Similarly in 1970, the Library Theatre premiered a play called *The Story So Far*... his went on a UK tour in 1971 revised and retitled to *Me Times Me Time Me* which was then revised and retitled to *Me Times Me* during the actual tour. The play eventually became known as *Family Circles*, although Alan is unconvinced any of the title changes or revisions made any difference to the play and that 'he should have left it alone'. Both title and play presumably.

Moving onto more famous fare, in 1973 Alan announced he would write three plays for the Library Theatre's summer season – please note, at no point did he ever refer to them as a trilogy that summer. This was entirely due to the fact Alan was averse to discouraging tourists who might not have fancied having to spend three nights of their week's holiday in the theatre!

The plays were performed as *Fancy Meeting You*, *Make Yourself At Home* and *Round And Round The Garden*. When they transferred to the West End in 1974, the titles were altered to *Table Manners*, *Living Together* and *Round And Round The Garden* and they also became an

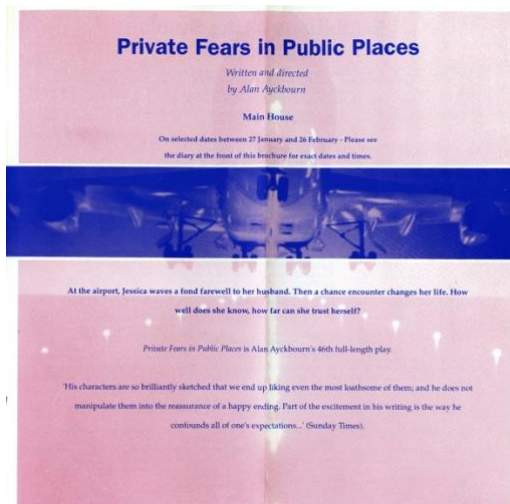
acknowledged trilogy under the name of *The Norman Conquests*. It would be 20 years before the SJT actually staged *The Norman Conquests* under the title it is best known for!

In 1974, Alan announced in *The Sunday Times* that his play for 1975 would be called *Bedroom Farce – A Comedy*. Given there was an awful lot of critics who later argued that *Bedroom Farce* was incorrectly titled as it was not a farce, Alan could have saved himself a lot of bother by keeping the original title!

During 1980, a – sadly unrecorded – newspaper article reported Alan's next play would be called either *Like A Sister*, *As A Sister* or *Sisterly Touches*. It was actually called *Sisterly Feelings*.

The next play is the big one – and previously covered a couple of years ago in the Circular. In 1980, the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round announced Alan's new play would be called *Sight Unseen* and would be his first thriller. A couple of days before rehearsals were due to begin, Alan still hadn't written the play having decided it wasn't terribly interesting. Instead, he wrote an entirely new play, utilising the same set and cast, called *Season's Greetings*. Given the lateness of the piece, it's extraordinary to think the show opened only one day late and became a genuine Ayckbourn classic.

In 1992, Alan told the theatre his new musical with John Pattison would be called *Songs From A Tree House*. He changed the title to *Dreams From A Summer House* before the play was advertised to the public, but not before all the tickets had been printed. One wonders if members of the audience were confused when they saw their tickets inexplicably had a completely different play on them!



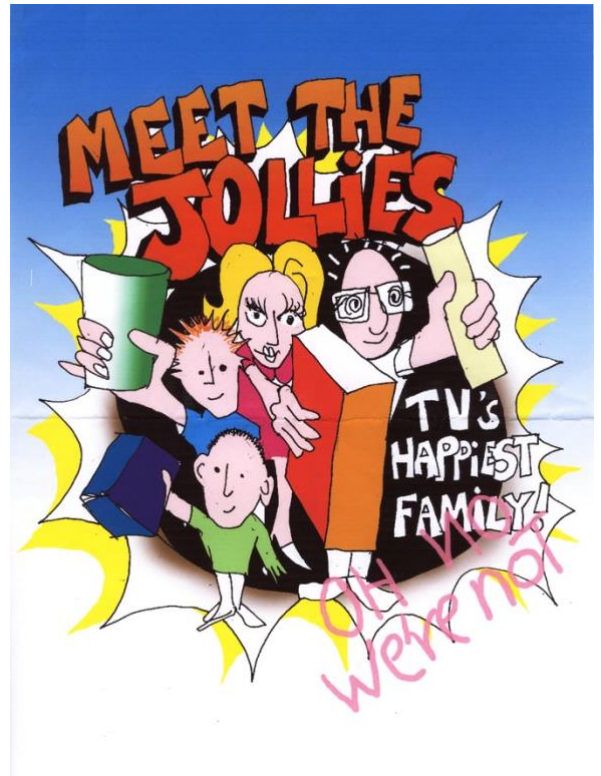
He followed this with *Private Fears In Public Places* – again famously announced and advertised in the 1993/4 winter brochure as a play set in an airport terminal. No sooner – and that apparently is quite literally no sooner – than the brochure had gone to print, Alan phoned the press officer Jeannie Swales to tell her there was no play called *Private Fears In Public Places*. In fact there was currently no play at all. Jeannie was apparently just moments too late to stop the press there...

Alan did write another play in its place, again at the last minute, called *Communicating Doors*, which – like *Season's Greetings* before it – did rather well for itself.

Private Fears In Public Places did, of course, eventually get written as a rather successful play in 2004, taking New York by storm in 2005. Although it is a completely different play to the one for which the title was originally conceived!

As it's being revived as an audio play for this Christmas, directed and performed by Alan Ayckbourn, it's worth noting that *Haunting Julia* was such a late addition to the 1994 spring schedule it wasn't announced or promoted in an SJT brochure. Alan originally intended it to be the opening play for the McCarthy auditorium at the new SJT but when the Arts Council announced standstill funding in 1994 for many of the country's theatres, Alan found himself having to write the 'cheap' play (single set, three actors) early as a means to boost box office.

And finally, we have my absolute favourite as I was working on box office at the time. In 2002, Alan announced his new play for Christmas would be called *The Jollies*. The press office sent out a letter to the region's schools describing the play as being about 'television's happiest family' who were constantly recorded and broadcast, inspired by the then recent phenomenon – sadly, still with us today – of reality TV.



The Jollies was announced in late spring, but during the summer Alan casually announced that the play he intended to write had fallen apart and he was going to write something completely different. Fortunately, he kept the title of *The Jollies* but with a completely different plot that bore no relation at all to the advertised piece.

Of course, given this substantial change, it would have been wrong on so many levels not to have notified the schools the play they had originally booked was now a totally different beast. So we'll just pretend that the box office did notify the schools rather than the reality of the rather anxious few weeks when the Schools Booking Manager waited for the inevitable complaints of mis-selling from the schools.

Except, not one school either noticed or complained about the change. Make of that whatever you will!

And that's the whistle-stop tour of the Ayckbourn plays you've missed or thought you missed but hadn't or you have seen but haven't really. Confused? Don't even get me started on alternative plots, rewritten plays, abandoned titles and plots... It's enough to keep someone in a full-time job. Oh wait...

And if you've got any thorny questions regarding Alan or the SJT that you're desperate to get answered, why don't you drop the Circular a line and we'll see if we can answer them in future issues?

Simon Murgatroyd is Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist and has been described as the ultimate Ayckbourn geek. He's sees nothing wrong with this and is quite happy for it to be his official title.

Welcome back

We know a lot of you have been missing regular contact with our lovely Fundraising and Development Officer, Stephanie Dattani. You'll be delighted to hear that, along with many other members of our staff, Stephanie will be returning from furlough to full-time duties at the start of November. We're sure she'll be in touch as soon as she can, but it will take her a day or two to find her feet again, so don't worry if you don't hear from her immediately...