

Circular August 2021

Welcome...

...to the August issue of the Circular, the newsletter exclusively for members of the Stephen Joseph Theatre's membership scheme.

This month, we bring you news of our autumn season, plus a few of the things we've been up to behind the scenes over the last month.

The Offing



The Offing Design Meeting - Set by Helen Goddard, photographed by lighting designer Sally Ferguson

It's fair to say that we're getting pretty excited about *The Offing*.

This beautiful show came about quite by chance: our Artistic Director, Paul Robinson, turned the radio on back in 2019, and found himself in the midst of a conversation between presenter Jo Whiley and an author about his new book, set in a small coastal town with a history of smuggling – it all sounded very familiar!

Intrigued, Paul settled down to listen, and by the end of the interview, had ordered a copy of the novel and emailed writer Benjamin Myers's agent to see if he was open to the idea of a stage adaptation. Thankfully, he was – and now, we're thrilled to be bringing you this

wise and lyrical show, set just up the coast at Robin Hood's Bay. The set promises to be spectacular; the actors are perfectly cast; we have an exciting, fresh, creative team – we think you're going to love it!

And just to think, if Paul had turned his radio on just five minutes later, this might never have happened...

The Offing (14 to 30 October) only has a short run, and seats are being snapped up already. We really do recommend early booking on this one:

https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1133/the_offing

Season of mists...

If you're one of those people who loves the autumn – falling leaves, woodsmoke in the air, new pencil cases, and all – you'll probably be looking forward to a few nights out at the theatre, too. Luckily, we have plenty for you enjoy this year.

September brings the return of Alan Ayckbourn's *The Girl Next Door*, for just six performances between the 1st and the 4th – it's selling well already, so don't miss out!

That's followed by *The Ballad of Mulan* (11 September) – the story of the real woman behind the legendary Chinese warrior more familiar to Western audiences from the Disney films; and on 25 September, the extraordinary family show, *We All Wobble*. Rather than trying to describe this to you, we encourage you to watch their trailer here – you won't believe your eyes! <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSJZh6051W8&t=22s>

Also in September, we've a feast of films, including, for the first time, a weekend of fossil- and dinosaur-related treats in association with the Yorkshire Fossil Festival – we're particularly looking forward to paleo-artist James McKay's insights into the work of special effects maestro Ray Harryhausen before *The Valley of Gwangi* on Friday 10 September.

We'll bring you news of our programme from October to December next month, but if you can't wait until then, everything announced so far is on our website here:

<https://www.sjt.uk.com/whatson>

And look out for more films (we schedule those on a month-by-month basis), plus we're still working on a few more shows, so there might just be the odd one-off announcement to come – as ever, you'll be the first to know.

(By the way: if you can't make it to us for whatever reason, you can still catch two of our recent shows online as part of our SJT at Home streaming programme – *Home, I'm Darling* until 29 August, and *The Girl Next Door* from 1 to 19 September. Full details at the link above.)

Also in September...

If you, or someone you know (whatever their age!), is looking for a new and inspiring activity for that new-term feeling, check out our website – you'll find details there of lots of lovely things organised by our OutReach team. Who knows, you might make some new friends along the way...

They include:

The Eastfield choir (Thursdays from 23 September) – you don't have to be from Eastfield to join, it just takes place in the Community Centre there (and is free, thanks to the generosity of McCain Foods).

Global Voices (Thursdays from 23 September) - singing songs from around the world, from warm-ups, short rounds and chants to more complex, exciting songs.

Funky Choir (Tuesdays from 21 September) – an established choir singing a range of music including funk, classic disco and rock.

Various **Rounders** groups (from 22 September): Tiny Time, for 5-7s; Scarborough, for 8-11s, 12-14s, and 15+; Eastfield, for 8-12s.

Fuse Theatre (from 24 September): an inclusive youth theatre for young people with learning disabilities (ages 14-25) and those from mainstream education (age 14-18).

And, of course, your very own **Circle Cafés** – dates later in the newsletter!

A feast of drama



Drama FEAST sessions © Tony Bartholomew

Nearly 300 young people from across the Borough of Scarborough have enjoyed our Drama FEAST sessions this month.

Funded by Feast North Yorkshire, North Yorkshire Together, North Yorkshire County Council and the Department for Education, these free creative workshops were held in the theatre and at Eastfield Community Centre.

Children aged from five to 12 had fun learning about stage combat, samba drumming, clowning, circus skills, storytelling and acting.

Cheryl Govan, our Associate Director (Young People and Community), who designed the courses, says: "It was just brilliant to see so many young people having such a great time, and learning at the same time! A huge thank you to our sponsors for making this possible."

A bit of R & D...



The Ordinary People R&D © Tom Hanson

Have you ever wondered how touring companies, with no home theatre of their own, tackle the logistics of creating a new show?

It might mean hiring a space, whether that's a purpose-built rehearsal room, or a village hall – but where we can, we like to help out by offering any spare capacity in the building to companies we know, are associated with, or whose work we value. It's known as R&D (or research and development) time.

In July, we welcomed Leeds-based The Ordinary People (who make 'playful, contemporary theatre with aliens, karaoke and puppets'!) to work on a new project. They spent a happy week with us and we can't wait to see the results.

In August, we were joined for another week by one of our Associate Companies, Box of Tricks. They were working on two new shows, and we were lucky enough to be able to present readings of both of them – Lizzie Nunnery's *How to Survive the War*, and Billie Collins's *Too Much World at Once*.

And another of Associate Companies, VOXED, will be with us for a week next month working on their show, *Out Late*. This innovative dance company have been rehearsing in London, but *Out Late* is being developed specifically for in-the-round spaces across the country, so VOXED wanted to do their final tech in the round before embarking on a national tour (including, of course, us on 25 and 26 November).

They'll be able to work closely with our in-house technicians who know all the best tips and tricks for working in the round and, while they're here, they're also going to be recording the show so they can make a filmed version available in the future.

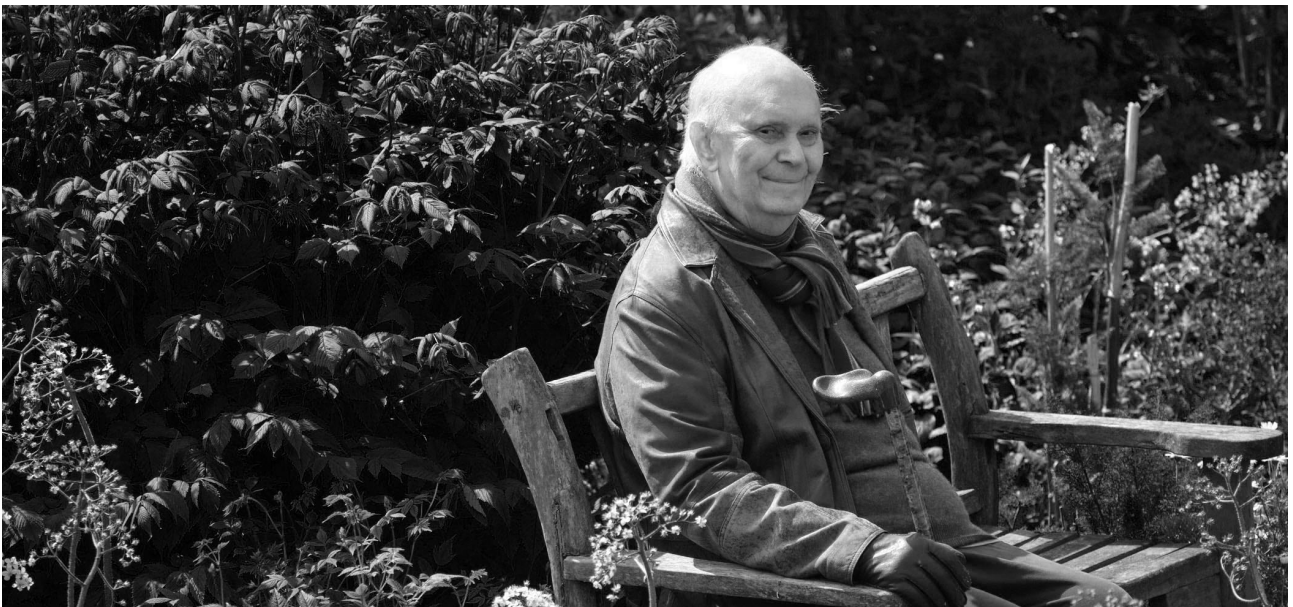
Dates for your diary

Meet our casts, crews and SJT staff for an insight into what happens behind the scenes. We'll be confirming our guests later, but for now, pop the following dates in your diary...

Thursday 9 September
Thursday 21 October
Thursday 18 November
Thursday 16 December

A Director of Significance

Next month we welcome back to our Round The Girl Next Door (1 to 4 September). It was, of course, written and directed by Alan Ayckbourn – Simon Murgatroyd considers his directing career...



Alan Ayckbourn © Tony Bartholomew

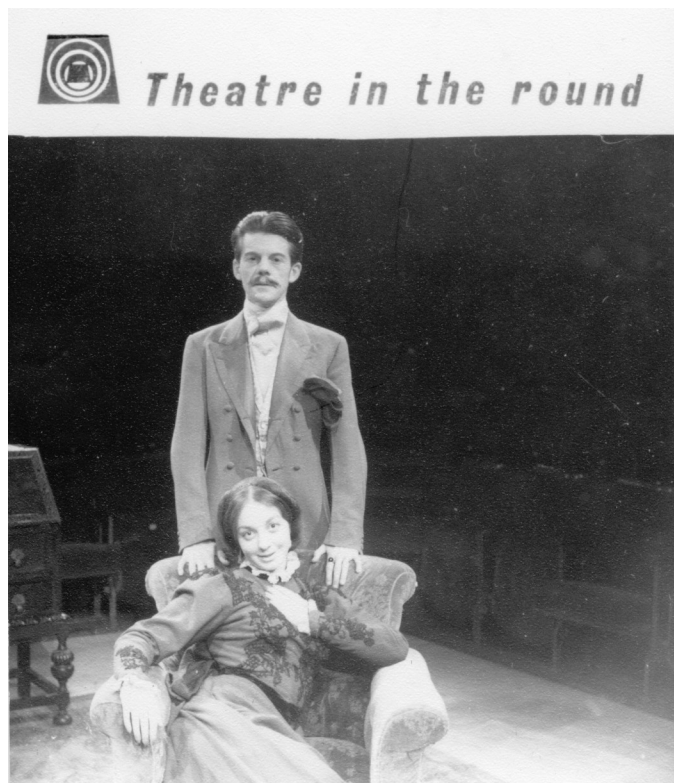
This summer marks the 60th anniversary of Alan Ayckbourn's professional directorial debut at the Library Theatre, Scarborough, in 1961.

It is now a given that there are two strands to Alan Ayckbourn's professional life – playwriting and directing – and he has frequently noted that during much of his career he considered himself a director first and a playwright second, as so much of his time was spent directing.

Yet most of us still consider Alan Ayckbourn first and foremost a playwright and don't really stop to consider how important his directing career is, nor the impact it has had on this company and theatre.

On the 60th anniversary, I thought I might delve into the facts and figures and dazzle you with statistics with just how significant Alan Ayckbourn has been, not just as a playwright and Artistic Director, but also as the pre-eminent director at the Stephen Joseph Theatre over the decades.

Alan joined the Library Theatre in 1957 as an actor and began playwriting in 1959; subsequently he has written 85 plays of which 81 have premiered at the SJT in its various incarnations. There's also been premieres of a substantial number of other works such as revues and children's shows.



1961 *Gaslight* © Scarborough Theatre Trust

Alan considers his directing career began almost simultaneously with his playwriting – in reality, there's a couple of years' gap. But on 29 June 1961, Alan made his debut as a director with Patrick Hamilton's famed Victorian thriller *Gaslight*.

It was well received by audiences and critics and vindicated Stephen Joseph's decision to encourage Alan to direct and to move away from acting. Stephen, Alan has said, knew that a taste for directing would put paid to his acting career and, of course, it did.

That he embraced this new direction is clear from the fact that between June 1961 and August 1962 when he left Scarborough to help found the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Alan still managed to direct six productions – as well as act in 13 productions.

When he returned to Scarborough as Director of Productions between 1969 and 1970, his directing career kicked into top gear and by the time he became Artistic Director during 1972, he would be a phenomenal directorial force at the SJT over the years to come. Consider this: during the 21 years the company was based at the Library Theatre, there were 154 productions. Of these, Alan directed 39 despite the fact he was only actively directing during nine of those years.

In 1976, Alan oversaw the company's move to its second home at Westwood and at this point, it really becomes clear just how Alan's contribution as a director matters to the company.

Over the next 20 years, he would direct 110 productions at Westwood, that's a (rounded-up) average of six productions a year! In context, there were 240 productions at Westwood between 1976 and 1996, so Alan directed 46% of all productions.

That's in addition to running the company, writing new plays, directing his work in London as well as taking a two-year sabbatical from Scarborough to work at the National Theatre!

And we mustn't forget that a number of these productions were among the most ambitious that had ever been attempted by the company: flooding the auditorium for *Way Upstream*, building a swimming pool for *Man of the Moment*, directing *Intimate Exchanges*' many permutations over the course of a year, the two-part *The Revengers' Comedies*, and so on and so forth.



Library Theatre - Directing 1974 © Haydonning Ltd



Westwood Directing - 1979 © Scarborough Theatre Trust

It's a pretty remarkable couple of decades by anyone's standards.

It also, to put it bluntly, saved the company a huge amount of money during those years. Although it's not generally well known, Alan never drew his wage as Artistic Director between 1972 and 2009 and – as seen – he took on the brunt of directing duties for the company. By doing this, he was undoubtedly helping the company survive through its more difficult periods by both not being paid and not having to hire directors.

In 1996, the company moved to its present home, the SJT, where Alan was Artistic Director until 2009. We've been here for 25 years now and even though Alan substantially reduced his workload following his stroke in 2006, he has still directed 84 plays at the SJT which equates to a third of productions staged in this building to the present day!

Since 1961, Alan has directed 232 productions with this company. As of this month, the company since 1955 has staged 644 productions...

That means Alan has directed in excess of a third of all plays since the Library Theatre opened in 1955. It's an extraordinary figure, probably unmatched by any other director at a single venue in a regional theatre in the UK. To say that Alan has been dedicated to the SJT over the decades is something of an understatement.

And it's not just been his own work. Alan has directed more than 80 productions in Scarborough by authors as diverse as Chekhov and Ibsen, Arthur Miller and William Shakespeare, Ben Travers and Harold Pinter as well as prolifically tackling new writers such as Tim Firth and Stephen Mallatratt.

Indeed, much of the wide diversity of plays produced by the company over the decades by established writers was as a result of Alan's desire to direct specific plays and playwrights.

But how does he compare to other directors with the company? Well, that in itself is revealing. The most prolific director after Alan was Stephen Joseph himself who, between 1955 and 1965, directed 38 productions; pretty remarkable but still less than Alan himself directed at the Library Theatre.

Stephen is followed by Robin Herford (32 plays) and Malcolm Hebden (30 plays). Malcolm - alongside Connal Orton - is responsible for directing the bulk of non-Ayckbourn-directed productions during the Westwood years.

So not only are we marking 60 years of Alan Ayckbourn directing, but six decades of a constant and important directorial presence at the SJT whose influence – even with all these statistics – is beyond measure.

Simon Murgatroyd is Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist and the creator of his official website
www.alanayckbourn.net