

Circular May 2021

Hello to you, our much-valued Circle member – and welcome to what we hope is a brave new world for all of us! As we write this, we're all breathing a huge sigh of relief – we successfully re-opened last night, and our first week of shows is sold out...

Radio times



Julie Hesmondhalgh and Ian Kershaw talking to Jonathan Cowap for BBC Radio York

We re-opened the theatre with a bang – we were the first venue on a national tour of the hugely acclaimed *The Greatest Play in the History of the World...*, which kicked off in our Round on Tuesday 18 May. The same day, we hosted BBC Radio York's outside broadcast of the Jonathan Cowap show from our foyer. It culminated in an interview with the star and writer of the show.

Showing consummate professionalism, actor Julie Hesmondhalgh and her husband, writer Ian Kershaw, ran into the theatre, flask of coffee in hand, with seconds to spare after a three-hour drive

from Manchester, plonked themselves down on one of our comfy foyer sofas opposite Jonathan, and launched straight into a wonderful interview.

It was the final interview in a programme which is well worth a listen. There are also fascinating contributions from actors Alexandra Mathie and Linford Johnson, talking about our next show, Alan Ayckbourn's *The Girl Next Door*.

Our joint chief executives, Paul Robinson and Caroline Routh, are in there, too, talking about how we've survived the past year and our plans for the future. Our production manager, Denzil Hebditch and chief electrician Paul Stear give fascinating insights into the technical side of our productions. There's the usual sauce from Eat Me Café's Martyn Hyde and Stephen Dinardo; and you can meet two of our regular audience members, Tony and Paula Bates.



Alexandra Mathie & Linford Johnson interviewing for BBC Radio York

You can find the programme at the link below, but do hurry – It'll only be available on BBC Sounds until 16 June: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p09gt297>

And our huge thanks to Radio York who, at the last minute, agreed to stay on for an extra half hour or so to facilitate an eleventh hour interview which Julie gave to Radio 4's flagship arts show, *Front Row* – you can catch that here, right at the start of the programme: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m000w4t2>

The Girl Next Door



Rehearsal pictures from The Girl Next Door © Tony Bartholomew

Rehearsals are well under way for our first in-house show of 2021, *The Girl Next Door*, written and directed by Alan Ayckbourn – his 85th play, no less!

And in a move designed to keep the show running if any of the company exhibit symptoms of Covid-19, the production will feature two separate casts.

The bulk of the shows will be performed by **Bill Champion, Linford Johnson, Alexandra Mathie** and **Naomi Petersen** who will make up a bubble with their stage management team.

But should any of that bubble show symptoms, the entire group will have to self-isolate – and a second bubble comprising **Georgia Burnell, Michael Hobbs, Tayla Kovacevic-Ebong, Eliza McClelland** and a second stage management team will be ready to step in. They will also perform the show on a number of dates throughout the run.

Our Artistic Director, Paul Robinson, says: “The safety of our audiences, staff and visiting freelancers, including the actors, is paramount.

“For this first show of 2021, which opens before the final step of the government’s roadmap on 21 June, we thought it was important to have a second team on hand in case of any problems.”

In *The Girl Next Door*, Bill Champion plays veteran actors Rob Hathaway, stuck at home during the summer of 2020 with only his sensible older sister for company. Rob has little to do but relive his glory days when, as the star of the nation’s favourite TV period drama *National Fire Service*, he ruled the roost as George ‘Tiger’ Jennings: wartime hero, and living legend among firefighters.

Then one day Rob spots a stranger hanging out the washing in the adjoining garden. But the

neighbours haven't been around for months. So who is the mysterious girl next door? And why is she wearing 1940s clothing?

The Girl Next Door can be seen in the Round from Friday 4 June to Saturday 3 July. For more information, please visit: https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1131/the_girl_next_door

Home, I'm Darling

Not long now till we start rehearsals for our second show of 2021 – Laura Wade's brilliantly acerbic comedy, *Home, I'm Darling*.

We've assembled a terrific cast for this show: Vicky Binns, Sandy Foster, Sam Jenkins-Shaw, Tom Kanji, Sophie Merzell and Susan Twist.

Coronation Street fans will recognise **Vicky Binns** as Molly Dobbs, a role she played for six years until her character's death in the famous live tram crash episode which marked the soap's 50th anniversary in 2010.

Sandy Foster is also a familiar TV face, with appearances in hit shows *Killing Eve* and *Call the Midwife* under her belt.

Our audiences will remember **Sam Jenkins-Shaw** as Richard Hannay in our hugely popular 2018 production of *The 39 Steps*.

Tom Kanji has an impressive theatrical resume: he's worked extensively at Shakespeare's Globe; with our friends Northern Broadsides, and at our sister theatre, the New Vic in Stoke.

We'll have an extra special welcome for **Sophie Merzell** – she was due to appear with us last May in Northern Broadsides' production of *Quality Street*, which was, of course, cancelled, so we'll be glad to see her at last!

And **Susan Twist** is another *Coronation Street* veteran, playing two separate roles in that show – Donna Stout and Lydia Hartman – although she's probably best known as Rosie Banks in *Brookside*.

Home, I'm Darling is a co-production with the Octagon Theatre Bolton and Theatre by the Lake in Keswick – find out more here: https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1132/home_im_darling



Rounders return



SJT Youth Theatre enjoying the sunshine in our outdoor Rounders sessions at Woodend Creative Gardens
© Stephen Joseph Theatre

We wanted to share this joyous image with you – taken by Cheryl Govan, it's one of our Rounders groups meeting in person for the first time in over a year.

Our various age groups have been getting back together for a couple of weeks now, meeting outside on the back lawn at Woodend – we're very grateful to our friends there for helping us organise this and providing the necessary facilities.

Artists' bursaries

We're delighted to be able to offer five bursaries of £1,000 each for freelance artists based in or near Scarborough.

The SJT Artist Bursaries are being offered through the Scarborough Creatives group to support the freelance creative sector locally post-Covid. They're aimed at allowing artists to spend time creating, learning, planning or developing, will be awarded to artists or creatives who live in the Borough of Scarborough.

The scheme is a partnership initiated by the SJT, in association with Scarborough Creatives, supported and administered by SJT Associate Company, ARCADE.

Applications are open until 15 June. The process is simple: applicants should send a CV (if available) to info@hello-arcade.com and a statement either in writing (no more than a side of A4), or filmed or recorded (no more than five minutes long), talking about themselves and their creative practice, how they propose to spend the bursary if awarded, and how it will benefit them, their practice or organisation.

All applicants are encouraged to join the Scarborough Creatives Facebook group, although this is by no means mandatory. Membership of the group is free, and there are other benefits including regular networking opportunities.

Light tomorrow with today...



We thought you might enjoy this quirky little piece of SJT history.

During some recent work in our bar, a couple of our tech staff had to poke around above the ceiling – and they found this 1935 cigarette card nailed to the wall up there. Given that our beautiful building was originally an Odeon cinema and opened in 1936, we think there's every reason to believe it's been there throughout its history.

We'll probably never know, of course, who put it there and why, but there's a lovely connection – the reverse of the card explains that the elegant lady is Norma Shearer portraying poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning in the film *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* – it also starred Scarborough-born actor Charles Laughton as her father.

Charles was present at the opening night of the cinema in 1936: you can find a programme with his picture in it in the alcove at the bottom of the stairs from the foyer up to the first floor. And another nice connection: he's pictured alongside a member of the Storey family whose Samuel Storey Family Charitable Trust still generously support us today.

Dates for your diary

We're currently working on some dates for Circle events for the rest of the year, but for now, we just have the one date for your diary:

Thursday 17 June: Behind the scenes of *The Girl Next Door*. A chat with some of our backstage/production team from 11am in the Round. Advance booking is essential – please call the box office on 01723 370541 by Tuesday 15 June, please. And on the day, to help enable a safe flow of people around the building, we'd be grateful if you could arrive no earlier than 10.30am and no later than 10.50am. Thanks! https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/990/circle_cafe

Membership packs

Our Fundraising and Development Officer *Stephanie Dattani* writes:

I've recently returned from maternity leave: I do hope I get to see you all in the SJT soon now that we are finally open again! This is just to say hello and once again, please bear with us whilst we work through your membership packs (we do have a backlog and are trying to get them out to you as soon as possible).

If you haven't had your packs/cards by mid-July then please contact me on 01723 356645 or stephanie.dattani@sjt.uk.com and I can get it sorted for you.

For those members who usually have rehearsal access with their benefits: due to Covid restrictions, we're currently unable to facilitate your 'insider access', but we are currently coming up with ways for you to still get the exclusive behind-the-scenes action... watch this space! We can't wait to be able to share the process of making a show with you again in real life – we'll let you know once we are able to do so.

Looking forward to seeing you all on the 17 June!

Stephen Joseph: in his own words

By Simon Murgatroyd



Stephen Joseph © Scarborough Theatre Trust

Much has been written about Stephen Joseph for The Circle over the years. Yet, as far as I am aware, we've never taken the opportunity to actually let Stephen's own voice be heard.

As we celebrate the centennial of Stephen's birth on 13 June, it seemed appropriate to turn back to the man himself and look at what he said of his most famous creation, the Library Theatre in Scarborough.

These two articles, rarely reproduced since publication in 1959, offer a glimpse of Stephen's own thoughts and his obvious passion for what he created.

The first article, *Return of Theatre In The Round*, was published in the *Gazette & Herald* in 1959. Somewhat bizarrely, it's attributed to Heath Block despite the accompanying author photo clearly being Stephen himself. Heath Block was actually a pseudonym Stephen used for letters pages in which he would stage arguments between himself and Heath Block to, essentially, promote the Library Theatre!

This article gives an insight into how Stephen viewed the town and the theatre.

Return Of Theatre In The Round

If you take an early turn off Westborough for the sea, you will go down the steep hill of Vernon Road.

On your left you will pass Scarborough Public Library. Here, during the summer, there is a theatre, set up in the concert room.

It is no ordinary theatre, though the plays are much what you might expect from a good repertory company and the actors you may have seen already or may yet see in other theatres or on television.

The unusual thing about this theatre is that members of the audience sit all round a central acting area. The seats are raised in comfortable rows round a small arena in the middle of the floor. This is Theatre in the Round.

There are many theatres like this in America, and a famous one in Paris, another in Milan.

Although the Theatre in the Round in Scarborough is not a permanent set-up, it is the first professional theatre of its kind in modern England.

I say 'modern' because there used to be round theatres in the middle ages for the mystery plays, though even these were probably adaptations of primitive earthworks rather than special buildings.

However, since the Studio Theatre started in Scarborough during the summer of 1955, the company has taken Theatre in the Round to many other halls in Leicester, Birmingham, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Hemel Hempstead, Harlow and London. The unusual form of staging has a number of special qualities. The audience is very close to the actors – no one being more than half a dozen paces away from the stage.

Every seat commands a full view of the acting area. This gives the actors opportunities for subtlety in speech, gesture and movement and ensures that nothing is lost on the audience.

The closeness of actors and audience – means that the audience feels the acting more strongly and the actors are more aware of the response of the audience. You will find that this makes the performances very exciting.

The Theatre in the Round is very small, seating 250 people. Obviously no one is going to make a fortune out of it!

In fact, the company is helped by Scarborough Corporation, which charges only a modest rent, and by the Arts Council of Great Britain.

But being small, the theatre is ideal for staging plays that would never get a showing in one of Scarborough's bigger theatres. Plays that should appeal to keen theatre-goers, new plays by young writers, little-known foreign plays in translation – these can all be chosen for production.



Stephen Joseph 'directing' *Wuthering Heights* in 1956 with Shirley Jacobs & John Rees © Scarborough Theatre Trust

Scarborough has seen new plays such as *Prentice Pillar* by Ruth Dixon, *Wuthering Heights* by Joan Winch, and *The Lunatic View* by David Campton; foreign plays such as *Phédre* by Racine, *Love And Chance* by Marivaux, and *Office Of Information* by Tardieu; good repertory plays such as *An Inspector Calls* by Priestley, *Dial M For Murder* by Frederick Knott, and *Look Back In Anger* by John Osborne.

Of course, the Theatre in the Round uses no background scenery and it is at a disadvantage when it comes to spectacular shows, but these are already well looked after.

Many people like to go to shows in which there are star names. But one of the excitements of Theatre in the Round is that most of the actors are young and the audience takes part in creating the stars of tomorrow.

Perhaps more important than talent spotting, though, is the interest of seeing a small group of actors in different parts. The company changes the play each Thursday and the actors can be seen in two roles during the week.



Stephen Joseph (left) on the set of Alan Ayckbourn's *Standing Room Only* in 1961 (© Scarborough Theatre Trust)

This summer, for the fifth time, the company presents Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre. There is a talented young company performing in a group of entertaining plays—most of which are quite new.

If you have been before you will know what to expect. If you're making your first visit, be prepared to enjoy yourself!

This article was intended for a general readership who were possibly unfamiliar with theatre-in-the-round and it's a fine example of how lively and enthusiastic Stephen's articles could be.

The second article is written for a more theatrical-savvy audience, having been published in March 1959 in *Theatre World* magazine. It expands upon much of what its written in the first article as well as encapsulating what Stephen felt theatre-in-the-round was capable of becoming.

The final line is one of my favourite sentences I've read by Stephen – and would later be echoed by urn who wished London audiences would come to Scarborough to see his work done properly. It reminds us of how progressive Scarborough was theatrically at the time and what hopes Stephen had for his experiment by the sea.

Theatre Go Round!

The theatre in the provinces is taking a beating. There are many of our largest cities without a resident professional repertory company, Leeds, Leicester and the Potteries for example. One or two established reps are doing well, but in the main the reps are having a difficult time. The audience for theatre seems to be diminishing.

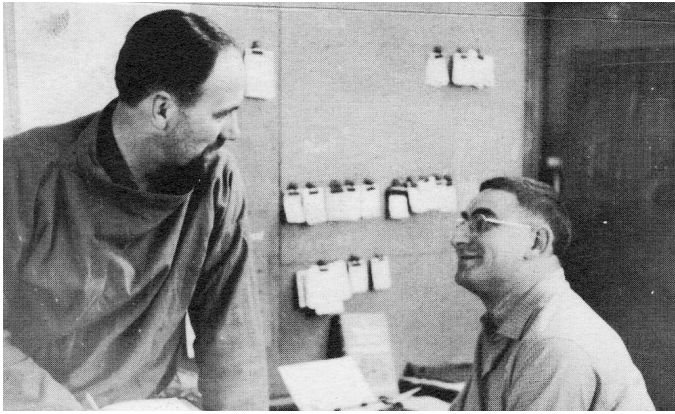
There are a few experiments trying to get out of the rut. One of these is theatre in the round – a form of presentation where the audience sits all round a central acting area. It is theatre on a small scale, seating no more than 300. It is theatre on the cheap, the total expenses being no more than £250 per week. It is theatre for actors and audiences, there being a close bond of excitement between them.

Theatre in the round has an ancient history. In this country, at present, the Studio Theatre company is the only professional group trying out this form of presentation.

After live summer seasons at Scarborough, the company has proved that it can attract all sorts of people into the theatre, and hold their attention with all sorts of plays.

Touring round theatreless towns, the company has proved that theatre on a shoe-string need not be of low standard. But the people who have witnessed this near-miracle have been few, there being terrific resistance to going to the theatre anyhow. The idea will catch on.

Each visit the second time round brings a bigger audience. Soon it will be full houses. If the money lasts till then!



Stage manager Rodney Wood and Stephen Joseph backstage at the Library Theatre © Scarborough Theatre Trust

Have you ever asked yourself what the theatre can do that the cinema and the TV cannot? Work it out. In the end you'll remember that the theatre has live actors who are responsive to a live audience and vice versa. You can eat fish and chips through a TV show. You can switch off. They go on acting just the same. You can cuddle your girl friend at the flicks. They go on acting. In the theatre, actors feel the response of the audience. Every performance is a unique work of creation, a work of art made by that audience and those actors at this moment of time. So to hell with the scenery that the films can do so much better! To hell with the frame that protects the

cathode ray tube! Let's have the actors in the same room as the audience, let's have four front rows, let's get really excited about this acting business!

You can call it highbrow, but it isn't. You can call it a new-fangled gimmick. But it isn't. You can be worried stiff by the ways it differs from the proper theatre – but this won't worry an audience which has never been in a proper theatre (ninety per cent of the population, at a guess).

Any sort of play can be done, and the company is currently doing *Squaring The Circle* by Kataev, *The Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter, *Ring Of Roses* a new play by David Campton, *Martine* by Jean-Jacques Bernard and *Easter* by Strindberg. Recently Margaret Rawlings caused a stir with a powerful performance in *Phédre* by Racine.

Nearly half the plays by the company have been by new and unknown writers (the critics were far too busy complaining about the lack of new writers to travel to Scarborough and have a look!)

The company believes that comedy is most important. Comedy of Menace, perhaps. Besides *The Birthday Party* they have presented *The Lunatic View* by David Campton – a comedy of menace to beat them all. But it is difficult to get serious comedy. The company is now talking about the idea of an improvised comedy. But the author won't be thrown out with the scenery – he'll be an actor in the company with a say in the plot, character and theme matters. It will be interesting to see if the Lord Chamberlain* lets this idea through.

Very few of the plays have been West End successes. *Dial M For Murder* and *Look Back In Anger* though have featured and done very well at the box office. But why imitate the West End? The West End will soon be imitating Scarborough. There will be a theatre in the round in London before long, so go and see the original company now.

*From 1737 to 1968, the Lord Chamberlain had the power to decide which plays would be granted a licence for performance – effectively, he was able to censor any plays he personally didn't consider suitable!

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