

Circular August 2022

Welcome...

Autumn is just around the corner! As the days grow shorter, join us for a farewell and a greeting; news of an exciting new show from Red Ladder Theatre Company, plus our Christmas offering; and meet our latest Corporate Partner.

Hello and goodbye...



Brief Encounter © Tony Bartholomew



Family Album in rehearsals © Tony Bartholomew

As August turns into September, it's goodbye to one wonderful show and hello to another. *Brief Encounter*, which so many of you saw and loved, is heading on tour to the New Vic in Newcastle under Lyme from 7 to 10 September, then to our co-producers: Theatre by the Lake in Keswick from 14 September to 8 October, and the Octagon, Bolton, from 20 October to 5 November.

Given that *The Stage* called it 'exquisite', the online reviews site *Reviews Hub* said it was 'a total success' and the *Express* praised its 'mercurial essence of joy and heartbreak' in a five-star review, we think it'll continue to be a huge success!

As our talented *Brief Encounter* team have been bringing that show to the stage each day, our equally talented *Family Album* team have been hard to work in rehearsals: Alan Ayckbourn's 87th play, no less, it opens with us on 2 September and plays till 1 October – find out more in an interview with the author, director and sound designer further down this issue of the Circular.

Our outreach work...

You may have seen that the role of Associate Director (Young People & Community) has been made redundant – although we're delighted that Cheryl Govan will be returning to us this Christmas to write and direct our show for under-6s (more on that below). The redundancy is part of a departmental restructure that we are putting in place to help us grow and develop our programme of work in our communities and with our young people. All our groups are carrying on exactly as normal and bookings are already open. Please keep an eye out for lots more news in future issues of the Circular!

A show not to be ignored...



1My Voice Was Heard But It Was Ignored © Ant Robling

A fiercely honest play about racial identity by breakthrough Ghanaian-English writer Nana-Kofi Kufuor comes to us next month after a successful run at the Edinburgh Festival.

My Voice Was Heard But It Was Ignored (15 and 16 September) was inspired by Kufuor's experiences growing up in Stockport, and working in education with young people from a range of backgrounds.

Fifteen-year-old Reece is roughly accosted by the police outside M&S. His teacher Gillian watches as his face is pressed into the wet gravel with a policeman's knee in his back, frozen out of fear for her own safety. The next day, Reece locks them both in her classroom, refusing to relinquish the key.

He wants her to pay – and to fully understand the pain of the irreversible breakdown of trust her inaction has caused.

This fascinating and important new show comes to us for just two nights:

https://www.sjt.uk.com/event/1420/my_voice_was_heard_but_it_was_ignored

Christmas is a-coming – yes, really!



Time to start thinking about Christmas – if you haven't already booked, we've two fabulous shows for you to choose from this year.

Families with children over six will enjoy Nick Lane's new version of *Cinderella* in our Round – the usual Nick mix of mayhem and classic fairy tale. If ever a young girl needed a break, it's Cinderella. She never gets a day off; she sleeps in the cellar. And what of her dreams of freedom and adventure? Well, they're just dreams.

Until one night... A trainee fairy with a wonky wand turns up at the wrong house, utterly lost and eager to please. Next thing you know, she's turning rodents into horses, lizards into servants and shoes into glass. Hang on, glass shoes? Whose side is she on?!

But Cinders has the chance to be the belle of the ball... as long as she's back before midnight. Will she get the adventure she's always dreamed of? Or will her sisters spoil the perfect Christmas party?

Meanwhile, upstairs in our Mac, younger theatre-goers can enjoy the story of *Sammy the Shoemaker's Impossible Day*. Written and directed by Cheryl Govan, and performed by students from the BA (Hons) Acting course at Coventry University Scarborough, the show will be the perfect introduction to theatre for under-6s.

Sammy is a brilliant shoemaker. People come from all over the land to have their shoes made by Sammy. But one day, everything becomes just a little bit tricky – everyone seems to want really whacky shoes made from the strangest things, including hay and cheese!

To find out more about both shows, visit our what's on page:
<https://www.sjt.uk.com/whatson>

Hello to our new Corporate Partner!

We're delighted to welcome another new Corporate Partner – Handelsbanken join Castle Employment Group, Clock's Home & Garden Centre and Bibelot Bee Gift Emporium, Eaglei, Lloyd Dowson Chartered Accountants and Pinkney Grunwell Lawyers LLP in giving us support to make our theatre as inclusive and accessible as possible for the local community.

Handelsbanken plc recently celebrated its 150th anniversary as a bank. With a local office situated on the Scarborough Business Park in Eastfield, Handelsbanken continues to support established trading and property businesses as well as private clients and personal mortgage customers. They remain committed to our decentralised approach that delivers true local relationship banking with account managers and support staff being readily accessible to customers at the local branch.

Owen Mahoney from Handelsbanken says: "We are proud to continue our support for the Stephen Joseph Theatre. The theatre has long been a focal point of Scarborough's rich cultural heritage, and continues to deliver high quality productions whilst also undertaking some fantastic community outreach work locally."

Dates for your diary

We do hope you can join us for our popular Circle Café events – we'll be announcing more as the year goes on, but let's start by getting the dates below into your diaries...

Circle Cafés (all 10.30am arrival for an 11am start unless otherwise stated):

15 September – members of the *Family Album* company

6 October – tbc

10 November – members of the *Constellations* company

15 December – Christmas Circle Café (12.30pm arrival for a 1pm start)

Family Album: An Interview with Alan Ayckbourn

Family Album is Alan Ayckbourn's 87th play and will premiere at the SJT in next month. Here the playwright discusses his new work with his archivist, Simon Murgatroyd, and gives a taste of what's to come.

What is the inspiration behind your latest play, *Family Album*?

It was born from watching a TV programme called *A House Through Time* which I thought was rather interesting: generations of people seen through the eyes of the house and the changing face of the house. It was a very interesting idea and not a million miles from something I'd written earlier – *A Brief History of Women* in 2017. I thought it is an idea I could revisit, but this time looking at the people – the family – more than the house.

In what way is the focus on the family?

It's set in a house built post-World War II to accommodate the new families emerging from war-torn England. I thought let's visit one of those families, who have lived with the parents-in-law throughout the war with their young children. So we start in 1952 with the



Alan in rehearsals with Acting Stage Managers Jude Deeno and David Lomond © Tony Bartholomew

dad, John, finally leaving the Royal Air Force and the family moving into their first home along with their furniture, largely inherited from the parents of his wife, Peggy. We start with an empty room as they and the furniture move in. We then follow that family through to the next generation too; the early '90s when John and Peggy's youngest child, their daughter – Sandra – has grown up and had her own children. We contrast the lifestyles and, especially, the journey of women through that period. And then we come through to 2022 and the third

generation – Sandra's daughter, Alison – still in residence but about to move out of the house with her partner, Jess.

This sounds like it could be a straight narrative going from 1952 to 2022, but you're never going to be that conventional!

It does sound like a conventional three act play – where you'd get act one in 1952; act 2 in 1992 and act 3 in 2022. But, I thought, what if the three time periods were allowed to run concurrently and thus we see them directly contrasting with each other? So we see the young grandparents planning for the future of the daughter, who is also frustratedly running a birthday party for her own daughter, simultaneously with her own daughter also planning to move out of the house with so many memories and unhappy vibes. We see the stark contrast between the lives and attitudes of the generations. It's the first time I've run three timelines simultaneously in one of my plays.

What's interesting as you talk is it's obviously a story about women, highlighted by the fact the company consists of five roles, four of which are female.

The story became – knowing me – quite a lot about the journey of women. I was particularly interested in the middle generation – Sandra in the play. We lost a whole generation of talented young women because nobody thought – in the aftermath of the war, to our disgrace – that women were worth educating. I think *Family Album* is a sort of social document really in that the grandmother – the young wife emerging from World War II – is not unaware that her own daughter requires and is worthy of a serious education, which the father is not prepared to pay for or to countenance affording. He prioritises the older sons over the daughter. We see the effect of that in 1992 with the second generation and a daughter unfulfilled with her own children, living in a broken marriage in a state of wasted life.



Georgia Burnell as Peggy © Tony Bartholomew

Which is not to say it's a gloomy play?

It is an optimistic play in that things have got better. The ray of hope is for the future. The third generation are a same sex and mixed race couple. It's also mixed social levels as the partner, Jess, comes from a northern working class background and for her, she is my token stranger. You always have to bring one character in for whom the entire place is a

mystery and then have it explained to them slightly. What is this place? Why is it so quaint, so peculiar and why is all the furniture arranged this way?



Antony Eden as John and Frances Marshall as Sandra
© Tony Bartholomew

Which becomes quite a significant part of the story itself with the furniture having its own story to tell. The furniture is important – we see it arrive and also depart. The grandfather's chair becomes quite significant: as the granddaughters say, that's the chair John sat in and generations of children wet themselves around it, waiting to be told off or punished! So by the present day, the room it's been in for 70 years has a sort of ominous feeling growing from it as opposed to the optimism of the first generation moving in.

This is the third play in succession where you've returned to the time of your youth: the 1940s in *The Girl Next Door* and the 1950s in *All Lies* and *Family Album*, is there a reason for that?

At my age, you get torn between a feeling that you are no longer part of the modern world really – I've long ago retired, I'm no longer a part. I use the internet, so I'm part of the modern world in one sense although I'm not on social media directly. So I'm not of that generation but – on the other hand – I am of the past and I can chronicle that and indeed my play *All Lies* has a premise that could not occur in the 21st century. I do think although the recent past has not yet unlocked – it has a certain feeling of being past and it still has a lot to tell us about ourselves.

Finally, this is your second world premiere of the year and your 87th play. I'm interested in what you consider most vital element in keeping audiences interested?

Take the viewer by surprise. Good storytelling is surprising, it has to be. Once a sense of the predictable sets in, there's a sort of feeling that you're probably not doing a very good job. I hope *Family Album* will surprise audiences.

Family Album can be seen at the Stephen Joseph Theatre from 2 September to 1 October 2022 with full details online at www.sjt.uk.com.

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