

Circular February 2022

Welcome...

...to the first 2022 issue of the Circular, the newsletter exclusively for members of the Stephen Joseph Theatre's membership scheme.

This year, we're hoping to get back to some sort of normality – we'll be selling our shows at full capacity. But we do understand that that won't work for all of you, so our own productions will all feature at least one socially-distanced performance a week and, where we can, we're working with our visiting companies to plan in a socially-distanced show.

We hope you can join us, because...

2022, here we come!



Season Launch 2022 (from left to right): Chris Bush, Zoë Waterman, Lisa Cagnacci, John Rwothomack, Jessica Curtis, and Alan Ayckbourn © Tony Bartholomew

Many of you joined us on Friday 4 February to find out more about our shows for 2022 – for those who couldn't, we filmed the whole event. You can watch it here:

<https://youtu.be/IVm8AmUOW8I>



Paul Robinson speaking at the Season Launch 2022 © Tony Bartholomew

Our guests were the writer who has adapted *Jane Eyre* for our stage, Chris Bush; the show's director, Zoe Waterman; our former Associate Director, Lisa Cagnacci, who is working on events for our upcoming Brontë Festival; writer and actor John Rwothomack, who is bringing his show *Far Gone* to our stage on 30 March; designer Jessica Curtis, who has the exciting (and challenging!) job of visualising *Brief Encounter* for us this summer; and, of course, Alan Ayckbourn, who will be directing his 87th (yes, you read that right – 87!) play, *Family Album*, here in September.

We also heard from the chair of our board, Helen Boaden, and from our joint chief executives, Executive Director Caroline Routh and Artistic Director Paul Robinson – the latter discussing our other two in-house productions this year, *Constellations* (October and November) and our Christmas treat, *Cinderella*.

We really think this year's programme has something for everyone, from the hard-hitting to the utterly joyous, from serious drama to uplifting comedy – we do hope you can join us!

And if you'd like to see our film looking back at the events of 2021, which kicked the event off, take a look here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddz_twqt6gc

Brontë



Jane Eyre Cast (from left to right): Eleanor Sutton, Nia Gandhi, Sam Jenkins-Shaw, Sarah Groarke, Tomi Ogbaro, Zoe West

Our first SJT production of 2022 is *Jane Eyre* (8 to 30 April), and we're delighted to introduce you to our cast: Nia Gandhi, Sarah Groarke, Sam Jenkins-Shaw, Tomi Ogbaro, Eleanor Sutton and Zoe West.

This fresh and witty new adaptation is from the pen of Chris Bush, who wrote the brilliant *Standing at the Sky's Edge*, winner of the Best Musical Production at the UK Theatre Awards and the 2020 South Bank Sky Arts Award for Theatre, and which returns to Sheffield's Crucible in December before heading to the National Theatre early next year.

And around it we've built our very own Brontë Festival, including *I Am No Bird*, a new show from Stute Theatre, in association with the SJT and the Brontë Parsonage Museum which uses

live looped spoken word, soaring vocal harmonies and an unexpected twist to shine a new light on the artistry and resilience of the remarkable sisters.

It's co-written and directed by Lisa Cagnacci, who has also created an audio walk which will guide you around Scarborough as it was in the 1840s and show you Anne Brontë's favourite landmarks, including a dramatised scene from Anne's novel *Agnes Grey*.

There are talks from Sassy Holmes, from the Brontë Parsonage; novelist and creator of the Brontë Mysteries books Rowan Coleman; and local favourite Tim Tubbs.

Look out, too, for a mini-season of films of adaptations of the sisters' novels – we're still working on that!

For more on Jane Eyre and the Brontë Festival: <https://www.sjt.uk.com/whatson>

Absurd Person Singular



Alan Ayckbourn © Tony Bartholomew

Hard to believe, but 50 years ago this June, Alan Ayckbourn's *Absurd Person Singular* received its world premiere performance at our first home, the Library Theatre.

On the very day that marks that anniversary – Sunday 26 June – we're hosting an extremely special event in our Round. This is a fundraising event; all money raised will be going towards our New Work Fund, which nurtures and develops exciting new talent.

Alan will join us to lead a rehearsed reading of the show by some of his favourite actors – they've only just all been confirmed, so we can tell you first that they are: Elizabeth Boag, Bill Champion, Russell Dixon, Linford Johnson, Alexandra Mathie and Naomi Petersen.

You can pick and choose from the following events that day:

Noon to 1pm: A talk with Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist, Simon Murgatroyd – tickets £5.

From 3pm: the reading – tickets are £15 or £35.

Or, treat yourself to a VIP ticket, which includes souvenir programme, talk, premium tickets for the reading, Q&A and hot buffet at Eat Me Café, at **£80** (if booking a VIP ticket, you don't need to book a ticket for the talk. This will automatically be booked in for you).

Buy one, get one free in March!



RICE, Mugabe, My Dad and Me, As You Like It, DONUTS

Along with a lot of other theatres across the UK, we've teamed up with the National Lottery to bring you a two-for-one offer on tickets for most of our March shows. We hope you can find something you like!

First up is **RICE** (4 and 5 March). Hotshot Nisha works for Australia's largest rice producer. She's determined to become the country's first female Indian CEO, and is close to sealing a multi-billion-dollar contract with the Indian. Yvette, an older Chinese migrant, is the cleaner. She has her own ambitions, but her daughter faces court after a protest against the unethical practices of a national supermarket chain. This UK premiere of a powerful new play from Asian-Australian writer Michele Lee has won many awards including the Australian Writers' Guild Award for Best Original Stage Play.

On 8 and 9 March, we travel back to April 1980 for **Mugabe, My Dad & Me**. Rhodesia becomes the independent nation of Zimbabwe. A born free, Tonderai Munyevu is part of the hopeful next generation from a country with a new leader, Robert Mugabe. *Mugabe, My Dad & Me* charts the rise and fall of one of the most controversial politicians of the 20th century through the personal story of Tonderai's family and his relationship with his father. Interspersing storytelling, live music from a female mbira player and some of Mugabe's most unapologetic speeches, this high-voltage one-man show is a blistering exploration of familial love, identity and what it means to return 'home'.

We're looking forward to welcoming our old friends Northern Broadsides from 15 to 19 March. They're bringing a new production of **As You Like it** – it's their 30th anniversary production, bringing their bold, refreshing style to Shakespeare's most musical and much-loved comedy for the very first time.

On 21 March, join three friends as they get ready for a night out in the joyous **DONUTS**. The music is intoxicating; they start to dance. Inspired by classic sitcoms of the 1990s and 2000s, *DONUTS* is a celebration of how music brings people together, no matter what life throws at them. Bursting with precision and soul, it is a hypnotic and playful 'groove along' to jazz and funk.

From the UK's leading disabled-led theatre company, Graeae, **Kerbs** (23 to 26 March) is the debut play by Wolverhampton-based playwright and poet Michael Southan. Exploring taboos around sex, romance and disability, the play charts the relationship between Lucy and David

who are dating and desperate to find some time alone. The perfect spot? A caravan holiday park, of course. But can this romantic weekend go to plan? With everything stacked against them, including broken toilets, patronising staff and Lucy's constantly interfering mum, not to mention broken pink wafers, it could be make-or-break. *Kerbs* is a co-production between Graeae and Belgrade Theatre Coventry for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021.

To get two-for-one tickets for any of the above, just buy a National Lottery ticket (you may be asked to provide proof of purchase on arrival at theatre), then book using the code LYLT22, either at the box office or online.

Also in March (but not in the Love Your Local Theatre offer) is:

The Last Quiz Night on Earth (28 and 29 March). Eat Me Café have kindly given us their space for two nights to welcome this show from our Associate Company, Box of Tricks. It's the end of the world. The last night on earth. An asteroid is heading straight for us. Fancy going out with a bang? Landlady Kathy invites you to the last quiz night on earth with Quizmaster Rav. He's the host with the most. But with time ticking, some unexpected guests turn up out of the blue. Bobby wants to settle old scores and Fran wants one last shot at love. Expect the unexpected to the bitter end.

Written and performed by our launch day guest John Rwothomack, **Far Gone** (30 March) is a gut-kicking physical performance with humour, poetry, and the horrors of being a child soldier. It follows the life of Okumu, an innocent boy living with a good family in Northern Uganda. When his village is attacked by Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), he and his brother are captured and their lives are forever changed. Seen through the eyes of those that love him and those that betray him, Okumu's experiences strike straight at the heart.

For more information, or to book for any of this year's shows, please visit:
<https://www.sjt.uk.com/whatson>

Dates for your diary

We do hope you can join us this year for our popular Circle Café events – we'll be announcing more as the year goes on, but below are the most imminent ones...

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

Thursday 17 March – members of the Northern BroadSides company, who are performing their latest show *As You Like It* in our Round from 15 to 19 March

Thursday 21 April – members of the *Jane Eyre* company

May 19 – Simon Murgatroyd, archivist to both Alan Ayckbourn and the SJT

June 23 – tbc

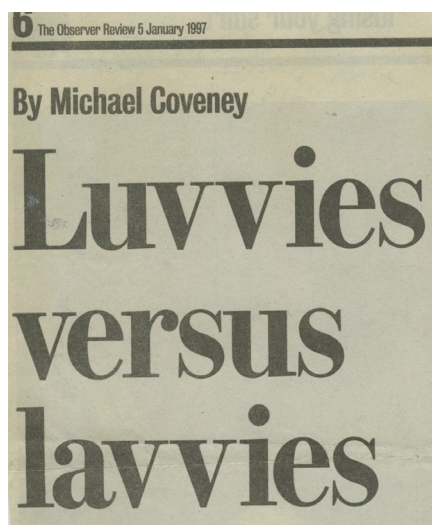
July 14 – tbc

August 11 – members of the *Brief Encounter* company

September 15 – members of the *Family Album* company

A Moment In Time: Luvvies Vs Lavvies

by Simon Murgatroyd



Headline in *The Observer*, 5 January 1997

theatre from becoming a public toilet?

For those of you with a good memory, cast your minds back 25 years. Do you remember 'luvbies vs lavvies'?

For in early 1997, the SJT was making national headlines for all the wrong reasons. Today, we would no doubt dub this part of the 'culture wars' but back then, this was a genuine surprise and an unforeseen shock to the theatre.

To set the scene, the Stephen Joseph Theatre had opened in a barrage of publicity in spring 1996. Over the previous five years, £5.2m had been spent converting the town's former Odeon cinema into the state-of-the-art theatre complex with which we are all familiar and support today.

However, there were funding difficulties from the get-go. This was largely due to a now acknowledged ill-conceived arts policy. With the introduction of the National Lottery, large sums of

money were suddenly available for arts and heritage projects and there was an emphasis on capital projects – ie, buildings such as the SJT.

Ayckbourn in council cash row

BY BILL ANDERSON AND
LISA VANOLI

Playwright Alan Ayckbourn has caused an outcry by asking cash-strapped Scarborough council for money to keep his new £5.2 million theatre out of debt.

The council, which faces cuts in services and staff and is proposing to close 22 public toilets to save money, already gives the Stephen Joseph theatre £141,000 a year towards running costs and Scarborough tax payers are urging the council not to hand out another penny.

One local councillor fanned the flames by saying publicly that the theatre was like a "train

without brakes" and others are claiming the money is "wasted on luvvies."

However, Ayckbourn has forecast a £200,000 shortfall for 1997/98 despite attracting operating funding from the Lottery. Friends say the director is upset over the barrage of anger directed at him and the theatre.

Mac McCarthy, chairman of the Stephen Joseph theatre trust said: "It is most unfair, directed at a man who has done so much for the town. Every new business goes through an initial learning curve."

The National Lottery is providing funds over three years to cover part of any

deficit, but it requires matching funding from Scarborough council, £50,000, and North Yorkshire County Council, £25,000, over the same period.

Scarborough council meets in the New Year to consider the request for the extra £50,000, which an officer's report calls "relatively modest" compared to the needs of other theatres in Yorkshire.

Ayckbourn added: "There has been a period when there have been fewer and fewer reasons for people to come here. But over the last year the theatre has attracted 90,000 people. They came and spent a lot of money in the town."

■ Leader, page 6

Article from *The Stage*, 3 January 1997

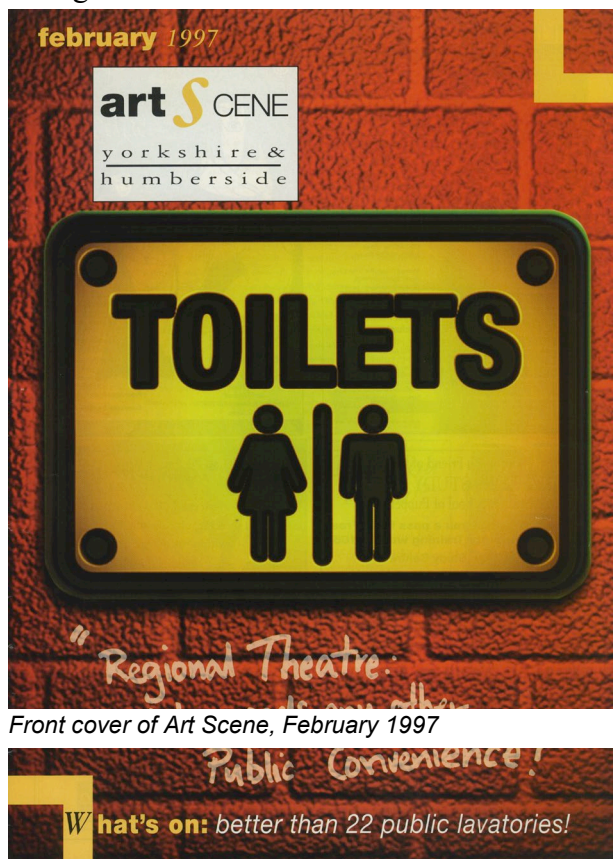
Unfortunately, this was not accompanied by increases to funding to help run these venues. In the case of the SJT, the company moved into a building more than twice the size of its previous home, practically doubled its workforce overnight and yet was receiving essentially the same public subsidy as it had in the old venue.

No allowance was made by funding bodies – either for the SJT or many other similar projects – for the vast increase in expenditure needed to successfully run new larger buildings. Something had to give.

At the end of its first year (1996) at the new venue, Artistic Director Alan Ayckbourn predicted the company would run a loss of £200,000 during the coming year (1997) and, subsequently, asked Scarborough Council to contribute an extra £50,000 subsidy in addition the £141,000 it already gave – and which had not been increased following the move from the smaller venue, the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round (at Westwood). The £50,000 request was also part of a tripartite agreement with the National Lottery and North Yorkshire County Council which would cover the shortfall providing each of the three bodies contributed. If one dropped out, devastatingly, the entire funding was lost.

At the same time, Scarborough Council was discussing means of trying to save £566,000 in its annual budget and was considering cutting 22 public toilets which, coincidentally, amounted to approximately £50,000. The theatre's request for funding and the decision regarding the toilets were entirely separate issues funded by separate budgets as several of the more level-headed Scarborough councillors pointed out.

Sadly, louder voices failed to make that distinction including several councillors and, fanned by the often less than supportive local media at the time, the suggestion Scarborough Council had the choice between funding the SJT or having public toilets in the town was the story which instead emerged.



Front cover of Art Scene, February 1997

The dissenters found a public figurehead in Councillor Jane Kenyon, who became the public face of opposition to the theatre, featuring in newspapers and on television arguing against further subsidy for the theatre and issuing quotes such as the theatre was like a 'train without brakes' and 'it's time the theatre learned to stand on its own two feet'.

Another councillor noted the subsidies were being 'wasted on luvvies', which set the ground for the headline which would make national headlines and which is still remembered and quoted today.

Luvvies vs lavvies. It's catchy, you have to admit. Completely inaccurate admittedly, but when has that ever stopped a good headline?

The credit for the headline has often been claimed by *The Scarborough News*, but it was almost certainly first used on the BBC current affairs programme *Newsnight*. It's certainly where it gained the most traction. The programme filmed a section in Scarborough, narrated by the SJT actor

John Strickland, using the headline and from that came national and, subsequently, international coverage of the issue.

As had previously occurred with public disputes between the council and the theatre, it was an own-goal for the councillors briefing against the theatre as it generated some exceptionally negative publicity for the town as well a fair amount of ridicule – particularly once Alan Ayckbourn was interviewed by the national media.

Cannily, he stuck to the facts noting just how much the Stephen Joseph Theatre generated financially for the town – and quoting directing from Scarborough Council's own figures on the matter!

Although the issue had been simmering since the end of 1996, it had caught the public's attention with various newspaper headlines and TV reports by 3 January 1997. On 6 January, the whole matter came to a head when Scarborough Council voted by 35 to 9 (Councillor Kenyon being one of the nine voting against) that the theatre should be granted the extra £50,000.

The Mayor of Scarborough, Mavis Don, noted: "The luvvies vs lavvies debate has been demeaning," as well as pointedly noting that there was never any possibility of it being the theatre versus toilets as they were funded by entirely separate budgets. If anything, the headlines had worked in the theatre's favour as the media coverage had been so negative to the town.

Of course, the debate would simmer on for some time and 'luvvies vs lavvies' would be used frequently in the months to come to describe the incident. Nor was it the last funding crisis, just two months later, Yorkshire County Council reneged on the tripartite deal and Alan Ayckbourn announced the SJT would close indefinitely from September.

But that's another crisis for another story.

Back to 'lavvies vs luvvies': ultimately both the theatre and the toilets were funded. Although as Alan Ayckbourn noted, the SJT did have some lovely toilets anyway which the public were more than welcome to use!

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