

"I can play several instruments and I can also sing but I find it difficult to sing if I'm blowing into an instrument at the same time."

Alan Plater, *Blonde Bombshells of 1943*

Welcome...

...to the July issue of the Circular, the newsletter just for members of the SJT Circle.

We always look forward to hearing what our audiences think of our shows (especially, of course, when you enjoyed it!) – but every so often we get a bit of feedback that particularly touches us.

One such letter was sent to Theatre by the Lake in Keswick about our co-production of *Blonde Bombshells of 1943*, which opens here next week. It came from Reg, and we reproduce it in full:

Dear Sir, Madam,

I am writing to you to express the pleasure and enjoyment which we felt at the show Blonde Bombshells last night.

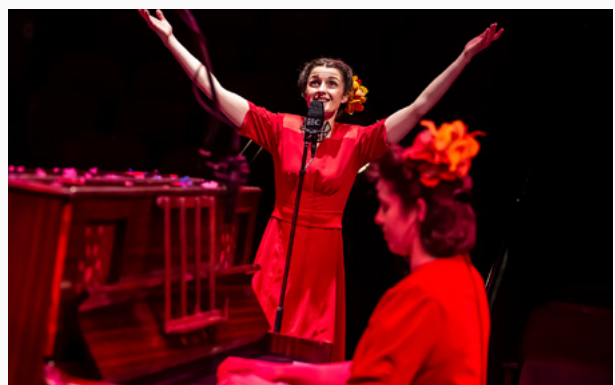
It was so delightful to see these young 'players' taking us all back to a time which was not so good, 80 years ago.

Everyone played their part beautifully and they were all so talented on the instruments they played, it was such a joy to see and hear their talents.

For my part, I was just an 11-year-old schoolboy, but used to hear most of this music on the Radio – no TV then, but so evocative to recall that era.

Thank you, all the players and the back room 'boys' who did all the scene shifting.

Yours sincerely
Reg



Blonde Bombshells of 1943 was written by the late, great Alan Plater, and our show programme features a lovely article about him by our (and his) good friend Paul Allen, who many of you will remember as the presenter of the BBC Radio 4's flagship arts programme in the 90s, *Kaleidoscope* – he also adapted *Brassed Off* for the stage.

Paul recalls Alan as a warm and engaging man who was hugely supportive to younger writers and was firmly rooted in, and enjoyed the funny side of, real life:

"The only time he wrote a car chase it took place in a caravan park with a speed limit of 10mph, which both parties observed – until one of them ran out of petrol."

A lot of the values Alan held dear – and it feels like kindness and humour are at the top of that list – are central to *Blonde Bombshells of 1943*. We think you're going to love it – take a look at the trailer [here](#).

More on Fleur and Ben

You may recall that in the last Circular, we brought you the news that while our Producer and Programmer, Amy Fisher, is on maternity leave, we've welcomed Ben Rothera to cover the programming side of things, and welcomed back Fleur Hebditch to look after producing. They're working two days a week each. We asked them to tell us more...

Fleur says: "Since leaving the theatre last year I have been working as Deputy Registrar for York City Council, which means I've registered many births, marriages and deaths over the last year.

"My most exciting ones have been in the last couple of weeks when I registered Amy's new-born son and married Jaye Lewis's son (not literally): we definitely know how to keep it in the SJT family.

"Alongside that, I've been working on some independent producing projects, which are still ongoing. During my time looking after the literary department here I met some talented writers and had the chance to work on some fabulous plays. One of those writers, Lily Bevan, got in touch with me to see if I would help her get her play HEN produced. We've had a couple of readings in London so far.

"I've also kept in touch with Rach Horner and we hope (funding permitting!!) that we can get *Worldly* staged within the next year.

"And I've been script reading for the Royal Exchange in Manchester as well as working on some projects as dramaturg. But when Paul called me to see if I would come back, I jumped at the chance: I love this place and everyone associated with it. I'm so happy to be back."

Ben, meanwhile, is an Independent creative producer, programmer and audience development specialist. He has a particular interest in helping under-represented groups to access the arts and finding audiences for contemporary work.

He has worked for many arts and cultural organisations helping to create high quality work, along with organisational strategy, fundraising and developing partnerships. Ben has worked with Mind the Gap, Square Chapel Arts Centre, 154 Collective, Leeds Playhouse and Creative Scene. As well as his work at the SJT, Ben is currently working with Bradford Producing Hub and Theatre Company Blah Blah Blah.

Ben says: "I'm so thrilled to be working at the SJT. Amy is such a hard act to follow, but hopefully I'll bring a few fresh ideas which I can't wait to share with Circle members soon!"

Backstage secrets



Company stage manager Fleur Beeley writes:

Spoiler alert! You'll probably receive this issue of *The Circular* when there are still a few performances of *The 39 Steps* left – if you're booked in to see one of those, postpone reading on until you've seen the show...

I'm going to reveal a little secret that has had more than one member of our team here scratching their heads – but actually, it's really simple, as the best things often are.

Early in the show, our hero Richard Hannay, played by Dave Hearn, pulls a window blind down and walks away – it springs straight back up again. He does it again – same thing happens. The third time, he gets halfway across the stage before it flies open.

The first two times are easy to explain – it's simply Dave letting go of the cord at the right moment. But that third time?

Well, that time, he hooks the loop at the end of the cord around a small peg at the bottom of the window. Attached to the peg is a length of fishing line – a fine, transparent filament that's almost invisible to the naked eye, especially under theatre lighting – and attached to the fishing line, offstage, is a member of the stage management team.

At just the right moment, they yank the line, the peg comes out and the blind rattles open. It's as easy as that...

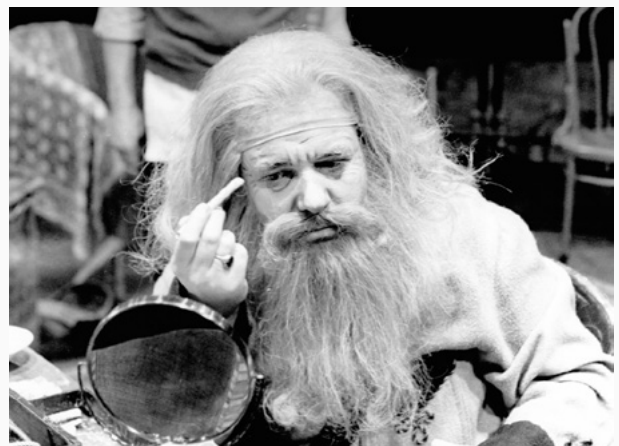
Russell Dixon

We're deeply saddened to bring you the news that one of our favourite actors, and, we know, one of yours too, has passed away.

Russell Dixon had a relationship with the SJT, and in particular with Alan Ayckbourn, that went back many decades.

From his first appearance in the studio at *Westwood in Clouds* (1980) to his final appearance here in 2019's *Birthdays Past*, *Birthdays Present*, Russell never failed to delight audiences with his remarkable comic timing, and he made many friends in the town. He will be much missed by all of us at the SJT.

Here's the hugely impressive list of SJT productions which Russell performed in (asterisks denote an Ayckbourn world premiere): *Clouds* (1980); *The Conservatory* (1981); *Tapster* (1981); *You Should See Us Now* (1981); *Suburban Strains* (1981); *Season's Greetings* (1981); *Saturday, Sunday, Monday* (1982); *A Trip To Scarborough* (1982)*; *Incidental Music* (1983); *She Stoops To Conquer* (1983); *Thark* (1983); *A Chorus Of Disapproval* (1984)*; *The 7 Deadly Virtues* (1984); *The Dresser* (1984); *Bricks 'n Mortar* (1984); *Family Circles* (1985); *Tons Of Money* (1985); *Woman In Mind* (1985)*; *The Brontës Of Haworth* (1985); *Time And Time Again* (1986); *Blithe Spirit* (1986); *Touch Wood And Whistle* (1986); *Time Of My Life* (1992)*; *Neville's Island* (1992); *Roundelay* (2014); *Confusions* (2015); *Hero's Welcome* (2015)*; *Henceforward...* (2016); *No Knowing* (2016)*; *Taking Steps* (2017); *A Brief History Of Women* (2017)*; *Better Off Dead* (2018)*; *Birthdays Past*, *Birthdays Present* (2019)*.



Dates for your diary

Our July Circle Café introduced attendees to four spectacularly talented actors – Dave Hearn, Lucy Keirl, Olivia Onyehara and Niall Ransome, also known as the cast of *The 39 Steps*.

In a wide-ranging 45-minute chat, we heard which actor was most prone to getting the giggles onstage (a real hazard with this show!); how Niall, flung onto stage in his wheeled office chair, never knows where he's going to end up and ad libs his way through; and, more seriously, the quartet's opinions on drama schools and other ways of getting into theatre.

As ever it was both entertaining and informative – and there's another coming up soon. You'll be able to meet some of the talented actor-musicians from the *Blonde Bombshells of 1943* company on Thursday 10 August.

Our Circle Cafés are usually held on Thursdays, which is also matinee day for both live shows and in our cinema, so why not make a day of it? Your Circle membership entitles you to a generous 10% discount in Eat Me @ The SJT, and you could catch a show or a film afterwards.

This year, we're also introducing a few Circle Socials – evening events, similar in format to Circle Cafés, but aimed at those of you who can't make mornings (although if you are a Café regular, you're still very welcome to a Social, of course!).

Circle Socials will be in the Boden Room, with a 5.45pm arrival for a 6pm start, and will last approximately half an hour, giving you time to grab a drink or a bite to eat if you're seeing that evening's show.

Circle Cafés (starting at 10.15am, so please aim to arrive between 10am and 10.15am) include:

Thursday 10 August: meet the *Blonde Bombshells of 1943* company

Thursday 14 September: meet the *Constant Companions* company

Thursday 26 October: meet the *These Majestic Creatures* company (please note that in the last two issues of the Circular, we accidentally said this Circle Café was on 16 October – sorry about that!)

Thursday 23 November: meet our new(ish!) Production Manager, Simon Bedwell

Thursday 14 December: meet the *Beauty and the Beast* company (please note that, as the cast will actually be on stage performing at the usual 10.15am start time, this December Circle Café will be in the Boden Room, with a later start at 1pm – please try to arrive between 12.45pm and 1pm).

Circle Socials (starting at 6pm, so please aim to arrive between 5.45pm and 6pm) include:

Tuesday 26 September: meet Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist, Simon Murgatroyd, who will talk about Alan's 89th play, *Constant Companions*