



present

Absurd Person Singular



by Alan Ayckbourn

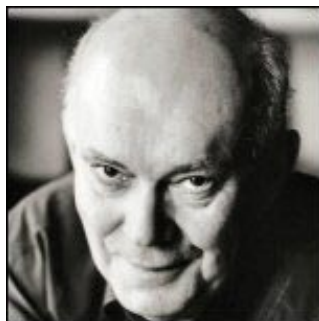
Halse Village Hall

28th & 29th February, 1st March 2008
at 7.30pm

Alan Ayckbourn

Alan Ayckbourn was born in London in 1939 and has spent the whole of his life in theatre, working as an actor, director and playwright. It was early in his acting career when he was attached to the theatre at Scarborough where Stephen Joseph (who was to become his mentor) was Artistic Director, that he complained about the quality of the parts he was getting. Joseph suggested that he should write a part for himself and this was the beginning of a career encompassing more than 70 plays (to date) with Ayckbourn regularly described as 'Britain's greatest living playwright'

His first major play was 'Relatively Speaking' first performed in 1967, followed in the 1970's by two of his best known works 'Absurd Person Singular' and 'Absent Friends'. Scarborough has remained Ayckbourn's theatrical home where the old theatre has been rebuilt and named the 'Stephen Joseph Theatre' and for many years all Ayckbourn plays have been premiered there. He remains the Artistic Director there but has announced his intention to retire from the post in 2009.



'Absurd Person Singular' has run twice in the West End (the revival currently) and once on Broadway. It was also adapted for television starring Nicky Henson (Sidney) and Prunella Scales (Jane). The play was an early experiment in 'offstage action' with the original plan placing the action in the sitting room. The author has described how the play came to life once he decided the switch the action to the kitchen leaving the Potters (originally major characters) to be heard and not seen. The play won the Evening Standard award for Best Comedy in its opening year.

Sir Alan Ayckbourn has himself won numerous awards for both writing and direction and received his knighthood in 1997.

Matt Ogden (Director)



After Matt's defining performance as Ernest Beevers in 'Time and the Conways' it was only natural that the Halse Players would bully him into becoming a Director. As a 'comedy' was on the agenda Matt was quick to choose an Alan Ayckbourn and 'Absurd Person Singular' was speedily selected from a shortlist. At that time Matt was blissfully unaware that the play was to be revived in the West End and described by The Times as 'Ayckbourn's greatest play' before the end of our rehearsal period. Where Halse leads....

'I really believe this play is far more than a comedy. If we can make the black bits blacker and all the characters properly three dimensional we will have succeeded.'

Editor's note: At the time of writing (three weeks before production) Matt will be happy if some of the actors know some of their words.

Acting: The Caucasian Chalk Circle (youth); Cinderella etc in the woods (panto), Time and the Conways

Halse Players

Previous Productions

Cinderella and the Forty Thieves in the Wood (January 2007).

Alan Byrne, David Porter, Richard Elston, Liz Topping, Jay Brooksbank, Alison Bellamy, Leff Cook, Rob Wonnacott, Matt Ogden, Derek Hillenbrand, Sam Kirkham, Norman Tricks, Barbara Bartlett, Chris & Katy Davies, Doreen Williams, Ann Hoole, Vicky Remnant, Katy MacKeith, Anna Kennedy, Naomi Porter.

Produced and Directed by Maggie Cooksley and Liz Richmond

Time and the Conways (J.B. Priestley) July 2007.

Ann Hoole, Richard Elston, Maggie Cooksley, Simon Burch, Jay Brooksbank, Jenny Hill, Claire Daly, Sylvia-Mary Haselock, Matt Ogden and Alan Byrne.

Produced and Directed by Andy Hill

Next Production

Under Milk Wood (Dylan Thomas) – a 'read' version – 5/6/7 June 2008.

To be Produced by Jenny Hill and Directed by Ann Hoole.
First reading 10th March at the Village Hall – all welcome.

The Cast

Jane Hopcroft	Jenny Hill
Sidney Hopcroft	Andy Hill
Ronald Brewster–Wright	David Porter
Marion Brewster–Wright	Caroline Cook
Eva Jackson	Claire Daly

Together with the voices of...

Alan Byrne and Debbie Baker as Dick and Lottie Potter
Monty Burch and Tatty Ogden as George

Set Construction	Stephen Hoole, Chris Baldwin, Rob Wonnacott, Tony Burch, Clayton Vellacott, Lesley Todd
Furniture, Props, Stage Dressing	Debbie and Michael Baker
Costumes, Hairstyles, Makeup	Ann Hoole, Rosemary Taylor, Jodie Reading, Sharon Ogden
Posters and Programme	Matt Ogden, Andy Hill and John Bull
Ticketing and Publicity	Jill Hillenbrand and Tony Burch
Stage Management	Shirley and Alan Byrne
Stage Crew	Stephen Hoole, Clayton Vellacott, Matt Reading and Brian Gorham
Front of House Team	Leff Cook and Jill Hillenbrand
Lighting	Adrian Shepherd
Sound	Simon Burch and Sylvia-Mary Haselock
Prompt	Doreen Williams
Assistant Director	Maggie Cooksley
Producer	Andy Hill
Director	Matt Ogden

The Halse players would like to thank The New Inn for the provision of rehearsal facilities

Absurd Person Singular

A play by

Alan Ayckbourn

Act One

The kitchen of the Hopcrofts' home.

Last Christmas

Act Two

The kitchen of the Jacksons' flat

This Christmas

Act Three

The kitchen at the Brewster-Wrights'

Next Christmas

The play is set during the 1970s.

There will be a 15 minutes interval between each act.

THE PLAYERS

Jenny Hill (Jane Hopcroft)

This is a very different role for Jenny after her excellent adult debut in 'Time and the Conways' last year. 'It was easy to find some sympathy for Kay and I like to think I shared some of her attributes. Jane, however, is different and to begin with I could see no part of her personality or behaviour that linked to me in any shape or form. I really wanted to make sure she is not some sort of a caricature, however, so as you scratch beneath the surface you find that her most important characteristics (which by and large are good ones) are shared by many people we all know.'



This is Jenny's first venture into comedy and the largest part she has undertaken. It has been noticed that she is spending increasing time cleaning the house and hopefully this will continue after the end of the production.

Acting: Toad of Toad Hall and Our Town (youth); Time and the Conways.

Andy Hill (Sidney Hopcroft)

Andy has no idea why he returned to acting after the easy option of telling everyone else what to do. The role of Sidney, however, was a large part of the temptation. 'To begin with he seems a grubby, despicable little man, a classic bully. His redeeming features begin to emerge however, particularly when compared to the other male characters, and you end up with a man with a multitude of faults, but who dearly loves his wife. What's wrong with that, I say?'



This is the biggest part Andy has undertaken and is a rare comedy in his repertoire. His main ambition here is to be as little as possible like Richard Briers who played Sidney in the first West End production.

Acting: Getting On, Rope, Childrens' Day, As You Like It, Rebecca
Directing: Time and the Conways

Claire Daly (Eva Jackson)



Claire is becoming a vital cog in the Halse Players machine, particularly as the Chair (and sole member) of our Under 40s section. 'I really enjoyed 'Time and the Conways' despite being dead for the whole of Act Two. This time at least I am alive for the middle act but still with no lines to learn!'

Eva is a great role (currently being played with great distinction at the Garrick) and we are looking forward to Claire's very own interpretation. Claire has plans to leave Halse in the autumn to return to full time education for a while. We hope she comes back soon!

Acting: Grease, Oliver, Time and the Conways

David Porter (Ronald Brewster-Wright)



It would be impossible to choose a more suitable part for David's first full play. As will emerge, height is a definite advantage. 'I hope Ronald is nothing like me, but I have met him so many times over the years – at work, on the cricket pitch and at the Bridge Club! Apart from anything else, after my previous acting endeavours it is a relief not to have to wear a dress.'

David is retired and divides his time between homes in Halse and in Bristol. He is an experienced after dinner speaker and a renowned raconteur.

Acting: As You Like It (youth); Cinderella etc in the woods (Panto)

Caroline Cook (Marion Brewster-Wright)

Marion is one of Ayckbourn's greatest comedy parts and one can imagine there is long queue whenever the play is cast for the professional stage. Our Director will confirm that for our casting there was only one candidate after five minutes of reading!

Caroline is unique in our small company in having undertaken some high quality drama training (at Bromley Little Theatre) in her youth. How else could someone of such renowned sober habits play such a part?

Stage Management: The Lady's not for Burning



Derek Hillenbrand (Geoffrey Jackson)



Derek's first stage appearance in adulthood was in the last Halse pantomime when he played a gay courtier. 'I am anxious to restore my heterosexual credentials and the part of Geoffrey seems to be an ideal start.'

Derek is, of course, a little older than his stage wife but we are sure the £2 wig from the charity shop would not have helped. Not least because many of his fellow actors would have refused to appear on the same stage. We hope the long speech at the beginning of Act Two will not have dulled Derek's enthusiasm and that he will return again for the Halse Players when the memory has faded.

Acting: Cinderella etc in the woods (Panto)

Absurd Person Singular – a comedy (or is it?)

It is recommended you read this article after you have enjoyed the performance as it contains clues to the plot.

Alan Ayckbourn is not loose with his use of the English language. It comes as rather a surprise, therefore, to note that his description of 'Absurd Person Singular' as it appears on the front of the Acting Edition is not 'a comedy' or 'a farce' but simply 'a play'.

Comedy it is, of course, and often a farcical one at that. No one could say otherwise of the middle act where Eva continually attempts suicide while four others in the same room continue with life in blissful ignorance. It is a very funny comedy and there is no doubt that it was the comic element that led us to the play in the first place. Ayckbourn always has more up his sleeve however, and it would be a disservice to his play to ignore the themes underlying what would otherwise be an amusing piece of slapstick.

Not far below the surface is the triumph of the industrious and practical working classes over complacent and socially superior middle classes – a theme (coincidentally) explored in the last HP production, 'Time and the Conways'. Although we are hardly encouraged to like Sidney in the early stages of the play, as time progresses the other characters become less and less attractive so that on balance we are happy with the eventual victory of the 'little man'.

But perhaps more important, whatever the impression from Act One, Sidney and Jane are partners in every sense, and grow closer as the play progresses. Unlike the other couples they are practical people who can rely on one another and understand each other perfectly, faults and all. Jane is quick to forgive Sidney's apparent bullying for the misdirected frustration with an alien situation that it is. In turn Sidney (eventually) forgives her occasional nervous mistakes and perceived social gaffes.

His success is their success, and they grow stronger and more capable together. Never has Sidney ever looked at another woman – indeed we see him shocked that a man would make sexual comments about another man's wife. Geoffrey and Eva do (mysteriously) affect reconciliation from the wreckage of Act Two; there are clues that this may be borne of economic necessity more than anything else. Ronald is simply clueless about the opposite sex, and we are left thinking that perhaps his first wife made a better decision than poor Marion.