



present



**Jeffrey
Bernard
Is Unwell**

By Keith Waterhouse

Based on the writings of Jeffrey Bernard

Directed and Produced by Andy Hill and Matt Ogden

This play includes language which might be deemed offensive by some, although commonplace now on post-watershed television. It is a play for adults and the content generally is not really suitable for younger children. There are also scenes which include cigarette smoking, which we have sought to minimise within the context of the play. Current legislation permits this for relevant dramatic performances.

Jeffrey..... and me! (Andy Hill)

Over recent months I have read much of what was written both by, and about, Jeffrey Bernard. There is little contradiction and most commentators seem to concur with Jeff's own opinions about his complex and rather shabby life.

But my own first thoughts were drawn to some startling similarities between Jeff and myself. Those who know me well may recognise some of them. First of all we share an obvious enthusiasm for public houses and the variety of people who inhabit them. We share a love of the English language – his ability to make a point (and make you laugh) in 120 words a week was unrivalled - and also a special enthusiasm for horseracing! There are too some rather odd coincidences. On the first performance of *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell* Jeff was within one month of the age I am now and was the same height and weight.

However that is about where the similarities end. Jeff was totally irresponsible, placed no value on material wealth or financial security and frequently borrowed from his friends without any intention of repaying. He had four wives (three divorced him, one committed suicide) and allegedly some 500 lovers. His attraction to women was undeniable, presumably based mainly on the hope that he would 'change and settle down'. His treatment of friends was little better and generally he would contrive to fall out with them. A longstanding drinking and racing friend was Conan Nicholas, immortalised as Caspar in the play. One Christmas when Jeff was 'flush'; he made a gift to his friend of £50, emphasising that this was offered as a gift and not a loan. Imagine Nicholas' consternation to read the Spectator the following May to find Bernard railing against his friend's unwillingness to repay such a small amount, originally offered in kindness. The two men were reconciled shortly before Jeff's death in 1997, but only just.

It is easy to think that Jeff's life was one of extraordinary ability wasted by alcoholism - this seems far from the truth. There were a number of periods of abstinence in his life but these were characterised by loneliness and a complete lack of creative output. It seems that Jeff only functioned on high octane fuel – all his marriages and liaisons were conceived during his drinking periods, as were virtually all of his written works.

Certainly I do not see Jeff as a suitable subject for hero worship and it is difficult to find anyone who looks back on his life with any admiration. The current generation of Private Eye journalists see him as a one dimensional bore and Norman Balon, the Coach and Horses landlord whose five minutes of fame (which prompted an autobiography 'You're Barred, you Bastards') were entirely attributable to his relationship with Jeff, is less than enthusiastic. For my part I would have loved to have shared a lunchtime session with Jeff, and a drink or two, and that is probably about all.

Jeffrey Bernard: The Illusion of Charisma (Matt Ogden)

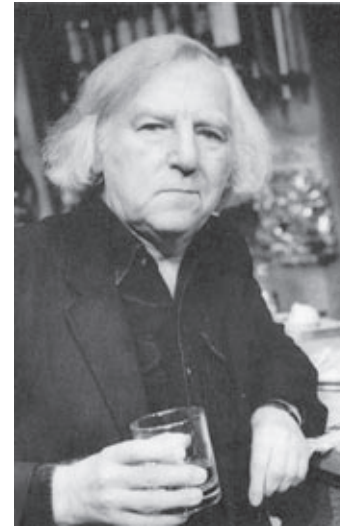
I have had many months now to ask what it is that makes Jeffrey such an attractive subject for a play. I suspect the answer lies in contradictions: his eloquence and monosyllabic drunkenness, his humanity and hedonist cruelty, his intimate self-knowledge and abject incapacity for learning.

For those of us used to the bar (and not the legal kind), Bernard's antics are reminiscent of our youthful escapades before the inevitable 'settling down.' His eloquence is a delight to the literary. His famous friends, conquests and places inform the historian. Take these away, however, and something other remains, which (I sincerely hope) will be fascinating to you the audience.

To say that Jeffrey is an enigma is trite and unfair. He is plainly a man of exceptional wit, and a charisma that (if he can be believed) enticed five hundred women into attempts to change him. He understands himself to be complex. He forgives himself, often using his childhood experiences to explain his rejection of 'polite' society. Yet he does not forgive others. He derides them for their wanting to make him safe; he lampoons the very things in others that he justifies in himself.

In short, Jeffrey is a true product of Soho's bright façades and desperate refusal to conform. He has become the celebrated son of the only place that would tolerate his arrogance.

Keith Waterhouse (Author)



Keith Waterhouse was born in 1929 and is still a prolific writer, producing regular columns for the *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday*. As a playwright, *Jeffrey Bernard* has become one of his best known works but he also wrote numerous plays with Willis Hall including *Billy Liar*.

One of his earliest works was the screenplay for the excellent *Whistle Down the Wind* (Hayley Mills and Hywel Davies) and he wrote numerous TV screenplays including the long running *Worzel Gummidge*.

He was a regular contributor to *Punch* where our own Caroline Cook got to know him and earlier this year he was kind enough to send us the following message when Caroline told him we were planning a production of *Jeffrey Bernard Is Unwell*:

Now are The Halse Players quite sure they want to go ahead with this? They wouldn't rather be putting on a wholesome detective play where the vicar pipes up towards the end of Act 2: "But Inspector, there's just one thing I don't understand....."?

Very well, I just give them notice that Jeffrey Bernard was not a very nice man. My original title for this play was "The Worst of Jeffrey Bernard" – but that was purloined by the subject himself, for an anthology of his writings which needless to say he never bothered to collect.

Eventually I settled for the title "Jeffrey Bernard Is Unwell" – the apology posted in The Spectator whenever he failed to deliver his weekly Low Life column – which was often.

I had been meaning for some years to write a play about Soho before they pulled it all down in favour of high rise flats and concrete office blocks – then a constant threat to the area. Happily, execution was deferred.

The play, while strongly anecdotal, had to have a central character, and when I finally got down to it, Jeffrey Bernard was the obvious candidate.

In a square mile infested by rogues, he was by way of being something of a gentleman rogue. He was surprisingly well educated and remarkably well read. He was a brilliant writer when he had to be. But it was at roguery that he excelled.

He was unreliable, all but unemployable, a wastrel, a philanderer, a freeloader, a compulsive gambler, a heavy drinker and smoker and for much of the time a complete pain.

Yet he never lacked friends – particularly women, which is probably why he never lacked enemies either.

The reason for his popularity only came over me when I was writing the play. He was a surrogate Huckleberry Finn – the perpetual truant we should all like to be if we didn't have mortgages to pay and jobs to go to.

Enjoy the play. Then don't forget to lock up and put the cat out.

KW

The Cast

Jeffrey Bernard

Poets, Editors, Wives,
Girlfriends, Actors, Publicans,
Police, Waiters, Jockeys,
Trainers, Artists, Doctors,
Nurses, Customs Officials,
Drunks, Tarts.....

Andy Hill

Sylvia Mary Haselock, Leff
Cook, Derek Hillenbrand,
Matt Ogden, Katy Davies,
Richard Elston, David Porter,
Caroline Cook, Maggie
Cooksley, Rod Lipscombe,
Alan Byrne, Claire Daly,
Simon Burch, Doreen
Williams,

Set Design & Construction	Tony Burch and Chris Baldwin
Furniture, Properties and Costume	The Cast, Stage Managers and friends
Makeup	Jodie Reading and Rebecca Reavey, with Amy Hill and Alice Baldwin
Posters and Programme	Matt Ogden, Andy Hill and John Bull
Ticketing and Publicity	Derek & Jill Hillenbrand & Tony Burch
Stage Management	Jenny Hill with Jan Baker and Helen Baldwin
Pyrotechnics	Julian Notley
Front of House Team	Stephen and Ann Hoole, Clayton Vellacott
Lighting	Simon Burch
Sound	Simon Burch
Directed and Produced	Andy Hill and Matt Ogden

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

Please note no cats were harmed during the preparation for this production.

Jeffrey Bernard Is Unwell

A play based on the writings of Jeffrey Bernard

by Keith Waterhouse

*The play is set in the 'Coach and Horses' public house in Greek Street, Soho.
The time is the recent past*

There will be a 20 minutes interval between the two acts.

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

Absurd Person Singular (Alan Ayckbourn) February 2008.

Jenny Hill, Andy Hill, David Porter, Caroline Cook, Claire Daly, Derek Hillenbrand.

Produced by Andy Hill, Directed by Matt Ogden

Under Milk Wood (Dylan Thomas) June 2008.

Chris Davies, Alan Byrne, Leff Cook, David Porter, Paul Batchelor, Matt Ogden, Charles Grimwade, Caroline Cook, Katy Davies, Claire Daly, Doreen Williams, Sylvia-Mary Haselock and Simon Burch.

Produced by Jenny Hill, Directed by Ann Hoole

Next Production

Deckchairs (Jean McConnell) 19,20,21 March 2009.

To be Produced and Directed by Maggie Cooksley and Jenny Hill. This is a series of 6 short one act plays with a twist, acted by women. There will be an open meeting to introduce the play on Friday 28th November 2008 at the Village Hall at 7.00 pm with reading/audition at a later date to be advised.

Everyone welcome.

BIOPICS

As our characters are real people we think it is more interesting to tell you about them instead of the actors!

Jeffrey Bernard (Andy Hill)



Jeffrey Bernard was born in 1932 and grew up to be a wastrel, spending all his time in pubs and drinking clubs, cadging from friends and acquaintances, occasionally working in dead end jobs to find enough money to live his chosen life. He was eventually introduced to journalism through a drinking companion, Elizabeth Smart, who arranged for him to write articles on horseracing for her then employer, Queen magazine. He graduated to writing a weekly



article for the Sporting Life which became popular until that paper sacked him for persistent drunkenness. For a while he wrote racing articles for Private Eye (under the pseudonym Colonel Mad) and finally wrote the 'Low Life' column for the Spectator which made him famous worldwide. Such was the popularity of the column that the magazine put up with his persistent unreliability to the extent of posting the message 'Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell' whenever a predictable indisposition prevented him from filing his copy on time.

Elizabeth Smart (Sylvia Mary Haselock)



A Canadian writer and poet, she devoted most of her life to a one sided love affair with the poet George Barker, who already had a wife and numerous other lovers. Nonetheless she bore him three children. Barker was an alcoholic and, over a period of time, dragged Elizabeth in the same direction. She came to London in the 1960s



during a period in which she was apart from Barker and met Bernard as part of the Bohemian crowd she socialised with at that time. In her latter years her health deteriorated (mainly due to her drinking) and she died of a heart attack in 1986 at the age of 73.

Denis Shaw (Matt Ogden)



A veteran of more than 70 screen and television appearances (often non speaking) Denis Shaw was little more than a professional extra who worked to fund his drinking. Notorious throughout the West End for not paying his bills he was banned from most pubs including the Coach and Horses where landlord Norman Balon hated him passionately. The tale in Act One of his dinner with Bernard at the Stork Club actually took place but with Keith Waterhouse, the playwright, rather than with Jeff. Shaw died of a heart attack in 1971 at the age of 49.



Deidre Redgrave - The Mistress (Claire Daly)



Keith Waterhouse may not have had one particular 'Mistress' in mind but Deidre Redgrave was certainly the most likely to become the 'fifth Mrs Bernard'. Deidre was the divorced wife of Corin Redgrave (their otherwise happy marriage was destroyed by Corin's political obsessions) and mother of Jemma Redgrave, the latest heir to the Redgrave family's exceptional talents. Deidre was also a political activist and following the break up of her marriage was one of the leaders of the 'Greenham Women' whose antinuclear protests were famous in their day. She was introduced to Bernard in the Coach and Horses by John Hurt who



was a mutual friend. The initial conversation did not go well as Bernard had written some unpleasant things about the Greenham Women but within nine hours he had charmed her into his bed. The following week he was quoting her (albeit anonymously) in the Spectator - 'I could drown in your eyes'. Even this gross breach of intimacy failed to turn Deidre against Bernard and they stayed together for two years before parting for the usual reason.

Norman Balon

Norman, landlord of the Coach and Horses is an integral part of the play but does not appear. The self styled 'rudest landlord in London' took advantage of his new found fame following the opening of Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell to publish his autobiography which claimed the following critical review:

'Norman Balon has done little in his life to justify a whole book being written about him' (Craig Brown, The Times)

The publishers were so pleased they included this on the jacket.

Unlike most of Jeff's friends, Balon - who is teetotal - is still alive at the age of 82.

And here are some more of Jeff's friends and acquaintances who appear or are mentioned in the play:

John Le Mesurier - fondly remembered by us all as Sgt Wilson in Dad's Army. Died in 1983, aged 71, from complications arising from cirrhosis of the liver.

Dylan Thomas - In the late 1940s Thomas had few friends who would join him for a drink at 11.00 in the morning. Jeff, then working on a local building site, was one. As we know, Dylan Thomas died in 1953 aged 39 after a competitive drinking session.

Francis Bacon - an aggressive homosexual and a great artist, next year is the centenary of his birth. Bacon was highly offended when the play was first performed, portraying him as camp and effeminate. We will not be doing anything to redress the situation.

John Minton - an artist and writer who also had homosexual leanings, Minton was a lecturer at the Royal College of Art (RCA) when he first met Bernard as a young man. He lavished attention on his protégé to the extent of taking him on extensive European trips for which Bernard repaid him shabbily. He committed suicide in 1957 aged 40.

Frank Norman – Raised as an orphan in East London, Norman had a poor start in life, culminating in three years imprisonment during his twenties. He progressed to be a writer and impresario gaining fame from 'Fings ain't what they used to be', a major West End hit of its day. Norman and Bernard remained great friends until the former's untimely death at the age of 50 from cancer.

Nina Hamnett – Known as the 'Queen of Bohemia' in her prime, she was a talented writer and painter. By the time Jeff knew her she had descended into alcoholism and was a regular at the 'Colony Room Club' where she was renowned for periodically being sick into her handbag, closing it, and carrying on drinking. In 1956 at the age of 66 she fell out of a window of her apartment and impaled herself on the railings 40 feet below. She died two days later.

Muriel Belcher – Described as a 'Jewish dyke' she ran the Colony Room Club which attracted all manner of artists and misfits. Renowned for language too colourful to repeat here – her favourite word was the only one we have deleted in deference to the sensibilities of Halse residents. Died in 1979 aged 71, the club continued until its closure (for residential development) earlier this year.

Fran Landesman – is the author of the wonderful poem 'Crown of Thorns – for Jeff' which appears at the end of Act One. She is the mother of Cosmo Landesman, film critic for The Times who has this year published a biography of his rather odd parents.

Eva Johansen – described as Jeff's best friend, she was a student at the RCA who didn't get around to going home or getting on with the rest of her life. Photographic evidence reveals her to have been a stunning looking woman in her day. She cannot have been much more than 45 years old when she set herself and her bed on fire as described in the play.

The Trainer – The racehorse trainer with the triplets is Richard Hannon who, as predicted by Jeff, has turned out to be one of the greatest talents in his field.

Jeremy Madden Simpson – younger brother of talented artist Jane Madden, he died suddenly in 1984 at the age of 42. Described at that time as a gifted film maker. He may, however, have been spending too much time at the Coach and Horses.....

