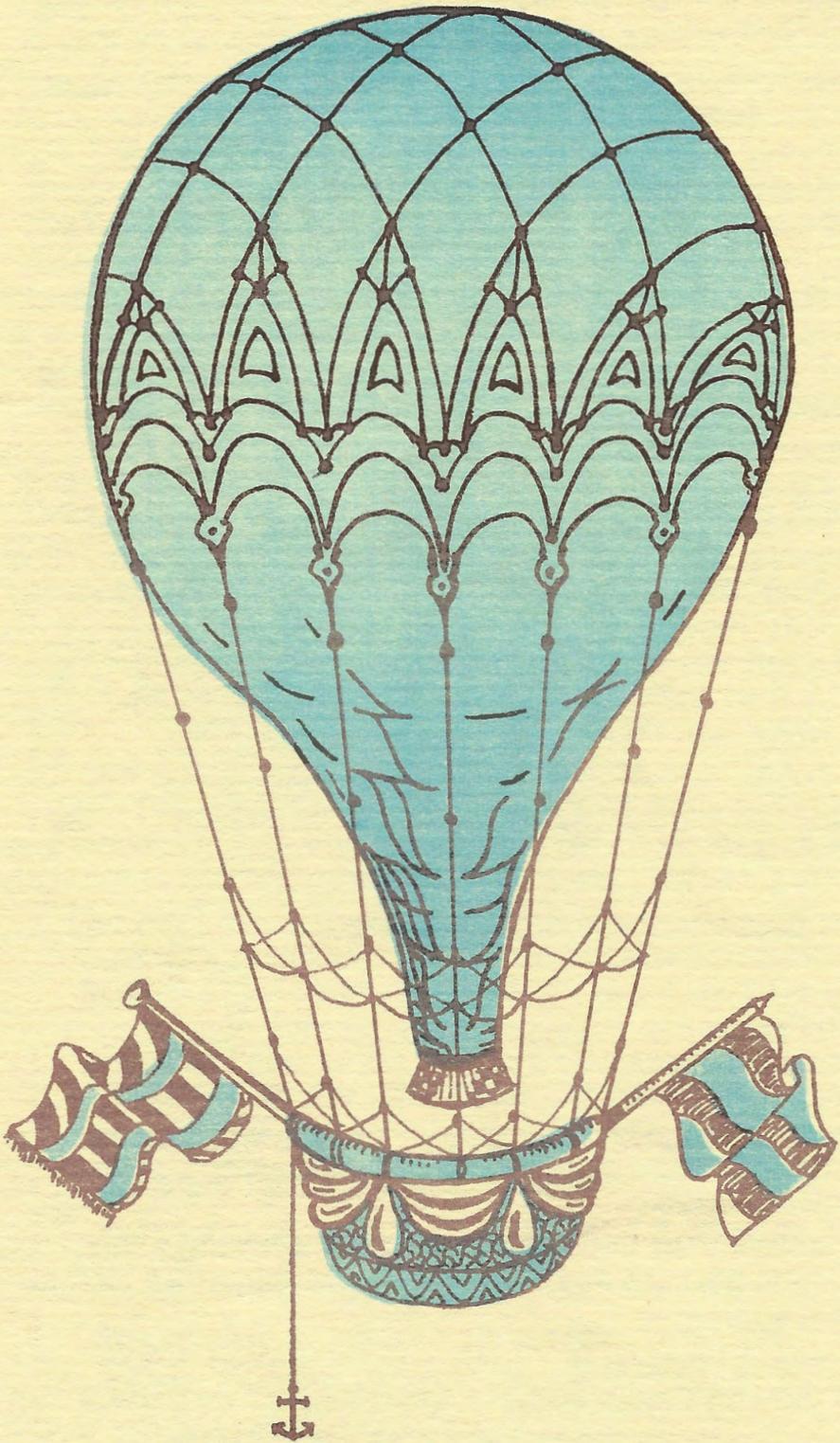


Oct 1978

 THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY



*A Penny  
for a Song.  
by John Whiting.*



# THE QUESTORS THEATRE COMPANY

FIRST PERFORMANCE AT THE MINACK THEATRE,  
PORTHCURNO, CORNWALL: 7TH AUGUST 1978

FIRST PERFORMANCE AT QUESTORS: 7TH OCTOBER 1978

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*A Penny for a Song* was written in 1949/50 at what Whiting calls 'a time of great personal happiness.' He goes on to say: '... it seemed natural that such a feeling should be expressed in a play. I was entirely uncritical of life as I was living it then, and the whole world seemed to be in love. War appeared the greatest absurdity.'

The play was his second to be written, but his first to be performed. It was first produced in 1951, the year in which Whiting won the Festival of Britain Play

Competition with *Saint's Day*. This play evoked the kind of adverse critical response that was to be the initial greeting for most of Whiting's work, although many distinguished actors and directors acclaimed it, speaking of it as 'moving, beautiful and fascinating.' (John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft) and recording their '... deep faith in his talent, integrity and promise' (Tyrone Guthrie and Peter Brook).

*A Penny for a Song* had a similarly mixed reception. In a production by Peter Brook at the Haymarket it ran for only thirty-six performances. This lack of success was due in no small part to the unenthusiastic reaction of the critics.

For the play's revival at the Aldwych in 1962 Whiting re-wrote several sections. Whether this was a result of being worn down by adverse criticism to a state of indifferent non-resistance, or as a result of a changed and disillusioned view of life, it is impossible to say. Certainly, the second version has less charm, the delicate and gentle atmosphere of the garden being shattered by an aggressive and militantly left-wing Edward Sterne.

It is the earlier version that we are presenting. This, despite the carpings of the critics, has remained popular with audiences.

The play takes its title from a poem by W. B. Yeats, as does *Marching Song*, one of Whiting's later plays.

All things can tempt me from this craft of verse:  
One time it was a woman's face, or worse —  
The seeming needs of my fool-driven land;  
Now nothing but comes readier to the hand  
Than this accustomed toil. When I was young,  
I had not given a penny for a song  
Did not the poet sing it with such airs  
That one believed he had a sword upstairs;  
Yet would be now, could I but have my wish.  
Colder and dumber and deafer than a fish.

When the play was performed in Germany, it was given a title which translated means 'When We Were Happy' — a title of which Whiting approved.

# *A Penny for a Song.*

*by John Whiting.*

## Cast in order of speaking:

<b>Sir Timothy Bellboys</b>	—	TED SCRIVENER
<b>Humpage</b>	—	PHILLIP SHEAHAN
<b>Samuel Breeze</b>	—	GRAHAM WILLIAMS
<b>Lamprett Bellboys</b>	—	PHILIP REMINGTON
<b>Hester Bellboys</b>	—	ROSEMARY PURKIS
<b>Dorcas Bellboys</b>	—	ANNA MARIA ASHE
<b>Hallam Matthews</b>	—	ALAN DRAKE
<b>Edward Sterne</b>	—	TONY BARBER
<b>Jonathan Watkins</b>	—	ALEXANDER BARBER
<b>George Selincourt</b>	—	KEN RATCLIFFE
<b>Pippin</b>	—	ROSEMARY PARRY JONES
<b>James Giddy</b>	—	DEREK LONGHURST
<b>Rufus Piggott</b>	—	SIMON SURTEES
<b>Rev. Joseph Brotherhood</b>		MICHAEL DAVIS

Directed by JOHN DAVEY

Designed by ROGER HARRIS

The action takes place in the garden of Sir Timothy Bellboys' house on the coast of Dorset, on a summer's day in 1804.

ACT 1: Morning

ACT 2: Later in the day

*THERE WILL BE AN INTERVAL OF 15 MINUTES BETWEEN THE ACTS*

### **HISTORICAL NOTE**

In the summer of 1804 England was trembling in anticipation of a vast invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte, who was seen by many as the devil incarnate. Wild tales and rumours of his method of attack ran up and down the country, but the fact of impending invasion was widely accepted.

It is against this background that Whiting sets his play. He says: "The historical references in the play are actual. I have taken no liberties. It is rarely necessary to embroider the finer lunacies of the English at war."



*STAGE MANAGER* : MARTIN UDALL  
*Deputy Stage Manager* : CHRIS LEJEUNE  
*Lighting* : MARTIN STONER  
*assisted by* : ROGER KELLY  
ALAN B. SMITH  
*Sound* : BRIAN McLOUGHLIN  
*assisted by* : ANNIE WILLIAMS  
*Wardrobe* : ADRIENNE HOWELL  
BARBARA HUTCHINS  
*Construction* : ROY BRIERLEY  
JO BIRCH  
RICHARD LEWIS  
*Properties* : KATH HARRINGTON  
*Assistant Stage*  
*Managers* : ALEC ATCHISON  
BARBARA DOLAN  
GRAEME GOODALL  
HOWARD GORNALL  
ALAN GREENBERG  
TIM HAYWARD  
JOHN HAZELL  
LEON HENRY  
SALLY HILL  
DAVID HOWELL  
PETER KENDRICK  
BARBARA MORRIS  
GEOFF POWELL  
JENNY PULSFORD  
NINA ROBINSON  
ROGER STURM  
CHRIS SYDENHAM  
NEIL WILLIAMS  
FRANK WOOD

*About the author:* **JOHN WHITING**

- 1917 born in Salisbury, the son of an army captain  
1930 sent to school in Taunton  
1934-6 at R.A.D.A.  
1936-8 series of acting jobs at Aberystwyth, Regent's Park and Bideford, where he met Jackie Mawson, whom he later married  
1939 joined anti-aircraft section of Royal Artillery  
1940 married Jackie Mawson  
1944 discharged because of sinus trouble  
1944-6 wrote unpublished novel 'Not a Foot of Land' and various stories and plays for radio  
1947-51 in repertory at York and Scarborough  
1947 wrote radio play *Eye Witness* and started on *Saint's Day*  
1948-9 wrote *Conditions of Agreement*  
1949 finished *Saint's Day*; started *A Penny for a Song*  
1951 *A Penny for a Song* at the Haymarket  
*Saint's Day* won Festival of Britain Play Competition  
1951-2 wrote *Marching Song*  
1953 wrote *The Gates of Summer*  
1954 *Marching Song* first produced  
1957 wrote one-act play *No Why*  
1960 Peter Hall commissioned *The Devils*  
1961 *The Devils* opened at the Aldwych — and was a success  
1962 cancer was diagnosed  
1963 died on June 16th, a week after entering hospital

You are invited to come to a

**PUBLIC DISCUSSION**

on this production which will be held on

**TUESDAY, 17th OCTOBER at 7.45 p.m.  
in the BERNARD SHAW ROOM**

Would you be interested to hear what other people thought of the play and the performance? Would you like to learn more about the play and about John Whiting? Would you like to tell others about your reactions, favourable or unfavourable?

The Discussion will be led by three experienced members of The Questors, Jo Irvin, David Gower and John Vernon, with chairman Alfred Emmet to keep things going.

**YOU WILL BE WELCOME  
TUESDAY, 17th OCTOBER**

