

Coming Productions

IN THE PLAYHOUSE

9 - 16 May

THE DRESSER

by **Ronald Harwood**

Wonderfully affectionate and theatrical in the liveliest sense. It's 1942, Sir and his depleted company tour Shakespeare to crowded audiences, who sit out the Blitz. Tonight they are playing King Lear. 'Sir', is actor, manager and aging star. Norman is his eponymous dresser, without whom there is no Lear. The equivocal relationship between these two provides us with a poignant story, which is also extremely funny, tough and inspiring.

IN THE STUDIO

16 May - 6 June

QUARTERMAINE'S TERMS

by **Simon Gray**

Simon Gray is at the height of his craft as he looks in on the 1960's staff room of an English school for Foreigners. This sensitive and often humorous play concerns the lives and loves of seven teachers, each of them harbouring a private tragedy: a philandering husband, a parasitic mother, a neurotic child. At the centre is St. John Quartermaine, pleasant, agreeable but a hopeless teacher who is desperately lonely. In the end, it is he who suffers the greatest tragedy. This mix of comedy and petty cruelty is irresistible.

IN THE THEATRE FOYER

31 May

SHAKESPEARE SLEPT IN ACTON

a talk by **Peter Whelan** on the trials, tears and rewards of writing plays. The title relates to a serious theory of Peter's and it promises to be a highly entertaining evening.

Admission £3.00

IN THE PLAYHOUSE

13 - 20 June

HEARTBREAK HOUSE

by **Bernard Shaw**

When Hesione Hushabye invites young Ellie Dunn to her country house for the weekend, determined to persuade her not to marry the extremely rich Boss Mangan, the wind blows, and, aided by the inventive Captain Shotover, more than the cradle is rocked! Shaw's great play is full of humour and bursting with ideas that reverberate even in our modern world. Beneath the surface, the sexual tensions, the sense of despair and the dreams of happiness combine to give this play a unique richness.

The Bright and Bold Design

by

Peter Whelan

This programme has been produced with the support of Beryl and Jim Manley



This production is supported by John and Sue Vernon to celebrate a two hander first cast at The Questors in '52 and still running in the provinces today.

THE AUTHOR

Peter Whelan was born in the Potteries in 1931. He began writing for the stage through two collaborations, *Lakota* with Don Kincaid and *Double Edge* with Leslie Darbon. This was presented at the Vaudeville theatre. Peter's succeeding plays include *Captain Swing*, *The Accrington Pals*, *Clay*, *The Bright and Bold Design*, *School of Night*, *Divine Rights*, *Shakespeare Country* and *The Herbal Bed*.

Divine Rights, a play concerning our Monarchy, was premiered at the Birmingham Repertory theatre. His other plays have all been premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company and presented first at Stratford and subsequently in London. His latest play, *The Herbal Bed*, was transferred to the Duchess Theatre and is currently touring Britain. It has also just opened at the Eugene O'Neill theatre on Broadway. This play won the prestigious Lloyds Bank Award for Best Play of the Year in 1997, when it was also nominated for a BAFTA award.

Peter also writes for television and films.

At The Questors we have presented three of his major plays: *The Accrington Pals* (1987), *Clay* (1989) and *Shakespeare Country* (1993). This play was commissioned by BT for the BT Biennial.

Peter and his wife, Ffrangcon, have been acting members of the Questors since 1956. Peter has both acted and directed but sadly his professional commitments prevent him from doing so at the moment. Ffrangcon, happily, still acts with us and last appeared in *Juno and the Paycock*.

They live with their two sons and daughter in Acton.

We are delighted that Peter is talking to The Questors membership on his return from overseeing the opening of *The Herbal Bed* in New York. (For further details of this please see the back page of this programme)



AUTHOR'S NOTE

As a child in Stoke on Trent, it always seemed to me magical that you could earn a living by freehand painting pottery. Money for brush strokes...

The paintresses were a legend then and still draw the crowds at Wedgwood's Barlaston factory, where you can watch them at work in the entrance lobby. So when I read the brief details of the life of Clarice Cliff, the working class paintress who became a star designer in the 1930's, I was all attention. What is fascinating is the way her talents were brought to light and encouraged in a Svengali-like way by the man she worked for, Colley Shorter... who she eventually married. At first I thought about writing a play about them.

But it was another path that began to draw my thoughts: this process of shaping others to the shaper's image... what if there were resistance? What if the object of the shaper's obsession wished to control her own destiny?

Out of this Jessie Frost came into being. Like Clarice, a working class paintress. Like Clarice, promoted by the man she worked for and for that man I had a model in my remarkable father-in-law, Jack Price, himself a talented pottery designer in the 1930's. (His work is even now being re-discovered.)

Significantly for me he was also a force in local Labour politics... a thoughtful, mainstream social activist, but one who, as in the play, was more than ready for the revolution to start in the middle of the night. I've always felt a sense of loss that he died before I could meet him. I also have the usual playwright's sense of guilt that I have made free with his character to make my play.

For the confrontation of Jessie and Jim goes far beyond the personal. They draw their energies from two different visions of the human struggle... Jim's is the struggle to improve and perfect society... Jessie's is the survival struggle of life itself.

The wilful reshaping of other people's destinies has played all too clear a role in the whirlwind violence of our century. The claims on the individual to commit to common causes and shared ideals have been all too powerful. And even from those with the best intentions the pressure has had a threatening edge.

It is these forces that are released in Jessie and Jim... with me as I wrote the play, watching the tide of old certainties recede in the world... and writing in a mood of respect, not for the label or the theory or the gesture, but for the goodness and humanity of personal aspirations.

Morally, it's where we came in.

Peter Whelan, November 1991

The Bright and Bold Design

by Peter Whelan

First performance of this production, Saturday 18th April, 1998

Cast (in order of appearance)

Ulik Devlin	KELVIN WEST
Violet Chappel	JAIME BRODIE
Jessie Frost	LIZZIE FRENCH
Ada Lovatt	HELEN SANDERS
Joyce Murray	CLARE MITCHELL
Hector Brabant	NICK HAWKER
Jim Rhys	VINCENT WOOD
Mabel (Mab) Cooper	MELANIE SHORT
Grace Rhys	LISA DAY
Raymond Parker	ADRIAN FRASER

The action is set in 1935

ACT I

Scene 1 The freehand paint shop at Hector Brabant and Co,
near Burslem, Staffordshire; early March

Scene 2 The same, later the same morning

Scene 3 The garden of the Pines, Jim and Grace's house; the same afternoon

Scene 4 The paint shop; about a month later

Scene 5 Jessie and Mab's flat; an evening in April

Scene 6 The Pines; a few days later

INTERVAL OF FIFTEEN MINUTES

ACT II

Scene 1 The paint shop; summer the same year

Scene 2 A cemetery; a few weeks later

Scene 3 The paint shop; a few days later

Scene 4 The Pines; about a month later; September

Production Team

Director	DAVID EMMET
Set Designers	JOHN HORWOOD, NICK HAWKER
Costume Designer	EMMA HARMAN
Lighting Designer	DAMIEN LAZELL
Sound Designer	RICHARD BRIDGEN
Sound Operator	ELEANORA MURPHY

Stage Managers ROGER GREENING, BRIN PARSONAGE

Assistant Stage Managers GERALDINE HAWKINS,
CHRISTOPHER TOMLINS

Properties HARRIET SIMON, CAROLINE GARDNER

Set Construction NICK HAWKER, CHRISTOPHER TOMLINS,
MAX COYNE, WANDA DUSZYNSKA

Prompter GRACE CRADDOCK

Wardrobe CHRIS GREENING

Lighting Operators MARK LUCEK, MEL PEREIRA

Make-up and wigs PAUL CASEY, AMENEH MAHLOUJJI

THANKS TO:

Jim Craddock

Connie Kavanagh



THE PLAYHOUSE IS EQUIPPED WITH AN INFRARED SOUND TRANSMISSION SYSTEM FOR USE BY PEOPLE WITH HEARING DIFFICULTIES. IT IS NOW POSSIBLE TO USE THIS SYSTEM WITH PERSONAL HEARING AIDS SWITCHED TO THE T POSITION. To obtain the appropriate receiver please contact the Duty House Manager.



THE PLAYHOUSE IS EQUIPPED WITH A LIFT WITH ACCESS TO THE BAR AND UPPER FOYER LEVELS FOR THOSE WITH MOBILITY PROBLEMS.

1. The taking of food and drink into the auditorium is NOT permitted.
2. The use of cameras; video cameras or tape equipment during the performance is also prohibited.
3. Patrons are requested to turn off portable telephones and beepers in the auditorium, since the activation of these during a performance is offensive to audience and actors alike.

THE HAND PAINTRESSES

It is impossible to write about the hand paintresses without frequent reference to Clarice Cliff, who is the most famous of them all (along perhaps with Susie Cooper) and whose works are now collector's pieces fetching enormous prices.

Like Clarice, few girls continued their schooling beyond the age of thirteen and some would be apprenticed to the enamelling trade in the potteries and would be trained in the art of painting freehand onto pottery. They would be paid one shilling for a five-and-a-half-day working week and would give most of their earnings to their mothers, using the little that was left to buy the "pencils" and palette knives essential to their trade.

When World War I ended there was an increasing demand for inexpensive, functional earthenware, much of it barely changed from what had been produced in the region for more than two centuries. Many talented artists and tradesman had lost their lives in the war, presenting an opening that was to create golden opportunities for girls like Clarice.

Examples of typical work at this time include black prints of Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle that were lithographed onto the ware. Orange lustre would then be sprayed on, cleaned off, and the enamel colours would be applied. Simpler designs consisted of a lithograph round the top of a vase, with bright yellow or lilac airbrushed around the rest of it. Lithographs were mass-produced by the roll and would be cut off to the appropriate lengths and fitted onto the ware.

Gradually the work got freer as progressive designers applied their talents. In 1923 Clarice Cliff helped to decorate a line at Wilkinsons called "Oriflamme" using an entirely different technique. The ware was covered in a swirling amorphous mass of gold and purple shades, probably done at least in part with an airbrush. The effect was completely random and no two pieces were identical.

Clarice's big chance came in 1927. She knew that with the purchase of another pottery, Wilkinsons had acquired thousands of pieces of ware in very dated shapes and many with manufacturers faults. She had the idea of covering the ware, faults and all, in freehand painted designs of bright colours. She was given permission to set up an experimental workshop and with a fifteen-year old apprentice, Gladys Scarlett, set to work. Her boss was so pleased with the experiment that, before a single piece had been put on the market, he increased her team to eight.

Clarice instructed her girls to apply the paint thickly with exaggerated brushstrokes. This was the opposite of what apprentice decorators were usually taught, but Clarice felt that the roughness of the brushstrokes would make it more obvious that the ware was handpainted.

By the end of 1928 her staff numbered 28 and included boys as well as girls. An efficient system was organised assigning decorators to benches according to their job. The front row of the shop was occupied by outliners, who, working with just one colour, painted the basic pattern of the ware. Behind them sat the enamellers whose job was to fill in the outline. Some shades such as red and purple had a consistency that made them difficult to apply evenly, so only certain girls worked with these. At the back of the shop were the banders and liners who executed the last stages of the decoration. They rotated the ware on a wheel with one hand while with the other hand they brushed on a band of paint.

A "missus" would be appointed to supervise the running of the shop. She had to make sure that all materials were on hand, that correct colours were available for each of the designs, and the apprentices properly mixed the powdered paint pigment with the turpentine and the oil. She also made sure one of the girls copied the designs into a pattern book so that when new orders arrived ware could be produced in the same style. This practice continued up to the Second World War.

Questors Information

For The Questors Theatre

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Artistic Directorate
Director of Studies
Chair
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Club Secretary
Finance Director
Accountant
Stage Director
Marketing Director
Theatre Manager
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John Davey
Steve Hames
Sue Blake
Christine Garland
Ken Kettle
Carol Ruddock
Martin Stoner
Sonja Garsvo
Elaine Orchard
Caroline Barcock
Kris Collier
Alice Pennicott
Vincent McQueen
John Dobson
Tim Godfrey, Alan Drake
Bridgett Strevens
Val Blaxland
Eric Lister
Sandra Hutchinson
Persil, Comfort and Stergene
Courtesy of Lever Bros.
Dry-cleaning by C.D.S.

Administration

The Questors office is open from 9.30am until 5.30pm every weekday.

If you wish to make contact for details of membership, or hiring the Theatre and rehearsal rooms, telephone the office on: 0181 567 0011.

Membership

If you wish to become a member please fill in the application form (copies in the Foyer); just send it to the Theatre with the appropriate subscription, or call 0181 567 8736.

Box Office

For personal callers the box office is open every Wednesday evening 6.45pm to 8.30pm; Monday to Friday 11.00am to 12 noon; during productions 6.45pm to 8.30pm; Sunday matinées 2.00pm to 2.30pm.

Members of The Little Theatre Guild of Great Britain and The International Amateur Theatre Association