

DIRECTORS NOTE

When Noël Coward wrote *Present Laughter* in the late 1940's, the theatre world glittered with a group of leading players who were the matinée idols; men of enormous talent who spent a large part of their professional life playing light comedy. They also had a reputation for extravagance and a wild, occasionally immoral, life style. Not only is Garry Essendine a representative of these stars he is also a caricature of Coward himself. But Garry is a carefully wrought caricature. Whether Coward was really like this is unlikely. The popular fantasy of the dressing gown and cigarette holder is more to do with a very hard working professional in spite of his public image of affection and eccentricity.

Present Laughter is light comedy; witty, trivial, amusing. Yet Coward's genius shines through. All the characters are beautifully drawn, complete and fully three dimensional. They make up a group who are absolutely integrated in their circle. The lovers, the wife, the servants, the theatrical associates all make up a society that is warmly observed and lovingly formed.

Essentially this is a play about theatre. Coward gives us a play that is the landscape of the London theatre world of the middle 20th century. Yet, equally, he is happy to reveal his thoughts about another theatre; the theatre of ideas. Allusions to Shakespeare, Chekhov and Ibsen are made, albeit satirically; but there is a kind of sneaking admiration, even an envy of the works of those greats. Most potently the attitude towards theatre is revealed through Garry's own behaviour and words. He acts on stage and off. It's as if the real Garry Essendine is perpetually hidden from the public view, even within his own close circle of friends. But when he needs to, he is far more than able to show a genuine affection and warmth; times when the actor's mask falls and the real Garry is revealed. It is on these occasions that a human being of absolute honesty shines through. A blatant and bludgeoning morality condemns hypocrisy in relationships, particularly in sexual matters. Dare it be said that Coward is almost a direct descendant of Ibsen?

Brian Ingram

THE AUTHOR

Noël Pierce Coward, actor, playwright, composer, lyricist, producer, author, occasional poet and Sunday painter was born in Waldegrave Road, Teddington in 1899. Only recently, thanks to the efforts of the Teddington Society, has the house, which still stands, been awarded the blue plaque commemorating the event.

Music was a strong influence on the boy and the man. His grandfather was an organist choirmaster and his parents met as members of the local Church choir. He attended the Chapel Royal Choir School, but failed to be accepted into the choir. Instead his mother, an ardent and knowledgeable theatregoer, was influential in starting his career as an actor. In 1911 he joined 'The Star Cast of Wonder Children' in a play called *The Goldfish*. The aptly named children included Michael Macliammoir and Dame Ninette de Valois who this year celebrated her 100th birthday. His success led to a number of engagements, one with Sir Charles Hawtrey from whom he learned much about the playing of comedy and gained an insight into the anatomy of playwrighting. In 1913 he appeared as an Angel in a play by Hauptmann together with the fifteen year old Gertrude Lawrence. Christmas of the same year saw him playing *slightly* in *Peter Pan*.

In 1915 he was introduced to high society on a visit to one of its doyens, a certain Mrs Astley of Hambleton Hall. This was an area of life in which he became increasingly at home and out of which developed an important element in his writing and acting. In that year he wrote the lyrics and music of his first song and by 1917 he had completed three plays.

The Young Idea which was staged in 1922 owed a lot to Bernard Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*. Shaw was not offended but wrote a constructive letter to the young playwright telling him never to read or see any of his plays ever again and go for originality. Coward took him at his word and in 1924 wrote and played the lead in *The Vortex*. It rapidly became the talk of the town and did for Coward what *Look Back in Anger* did for John Osborne some thirty years later.

From now on there was no looking back. Plays, revues, songs, film scripts all flowed from his pen in profusion. With plays like *Private Lives*, *Hay Fever*, *Blithe Spirit*, and *Present Laughter*, all comedies of manners, his place in the English theatre is assured.

Knighted, (somewhat belatedly) in 1970, he died in 1973. A black memorial stone was unveiled to his memory in Westminster Abbey in 1984. It bears the words 'A talent to amuse'.

PRESENT LAUGHTER

by Noël Coward

First performance of this production, Saturday 10th October 1998

Cast

DAPHNE STILLINGTON LORRAINE COOK
MISS ERIKSON GRACE CRADDOCK
FRED MARK REDRUP
MONICA REED CHARMAIN NORMAN-TAYLOR
GARRY ESSENDINE IAN RECORDON
LIZ ESSENDINE SARAH ANDREWS
ROLAND MAULE NICK FALK
HENRY LYPPHATT JOHN HINES
MORRIS DIXON ANTONY QUINLAN
JOANNA LYPPHATT HILARY BURNS
LADY SALTBURN CATHIE WALLACE

The action of the play takes place in
Garry Essendine's London Flat in the 1930's

ACT 1

SCENE 1 Morning

SCENE 2 Evening 3 days later

ACT 2

SCENE 1 The next morning

SCENE 2 Evening a week later

There will be one interval of fifteen minutes between Acts 1 and 2

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.

Production Team

DIRECTOR BRIAN INGRAM
SET DESIGN TEAM SPENCER BUTLER, JO BOOTH,
HELEN CARTER, JIM CRADDOCK,
ELIZABETH DOWSE,
SAM DEER, JOHN ROLFE
COSTUME DESIGNER EMMA HARMAN
SOUND DESIGNER MARK LUCEK
LIGHTING DESIGNER ANDY CARTER

STAGE MANAGER JO BOOTH
DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER BRIN PARSONAGE
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS HELEN CARTER,
KATIE LONGHURST

WARDROBE CORINNE NIELD, SUE MILLHOUSE,
CHRISTINE HOFF

PROPERTIES CONNIE KAVANAGH
LIGHTING OPERATORS MEL PERIERA, JOEL SCHRIRE
SOUND OPERATORS LIZ AVERILL, JAN MEJSNAROVA
HAIR AND MAKE-UP LISA HILTON, FIONA AFFUL
OF GREASEPAINT

with thanks to:

Christian Blood, Damien Lazell, Helen King, Terry Mummery, Jayne Yardley,
Roger Lewis, Diana Nesbitt, Floyd Winter, Chris Tomlins, Eric Lister



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.

ART EXHIBITIONS:

IN THE UPPER FOYER

8 October - 10 November

NICK HEDDERLY

Nick graduated from Birmingham School of Art in 1984 and currently lives and works in Nottingham. He has participated in group and selective shows both in Nottingham and elsewhere. These include the Cookham Arts Festival, The Galleries London, The Field Gallery in Farnsfield, the Nottingham Artists' Open and Art Auction and the Leicestershire Schools exhibition.

Solo shows include the Century Gallery in Henley on Thames, a one man show at the Nottingham Castle Museum and touring exhibition, the Oxford Arts Centre and The Questors Theatre.

IN THE GRAPEVINE

8 October - 10 November

MARK CLIFFORD

Most of the work in this exhibition is concerned with the synthesis of the photographic image with line and paint, of the 'real' and the imaginary – seeking to create balance and harmony between inner and outer realities. My themes revolve around the human relationship with nature, with geometry and confinement and, generally, the oddities of our existence. Primarily I see myself as an observer, a reporter and an interpreter.

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Why not sponsor a programme? Contact Tim Godfrey, Appeals Manager, on 0171 622 8104 for details.

Questors Information

THE GRAPEVINE CLUB

The Questors has a fully licensed bar which is now open to all members. The Bar is open every evening plus lunchtimes on Sundays. Questors members are requested to sign in their guests when entering the bar.

THE HOTPLATE

Delicious hot and cold food is available in the Upper Foyer between 6.30pm and 8.00pm during the run of Playhouse productions, and coffee, tea and cakes are served during the interval. No hot food will be provided at the Sunday matinées.

NOTE

The Hotplate is not open for Studio productions, but when Studio performances coincide with those in the Playhouse, it will endeavour to serve both audiences.

NEW MEMBERS EVENINGS

Why not attend one of our new or prospective members evenings and have a conducted tour of the Theatre complex? Tours start and finish at the Grapevine Bar, 8.00pm every Wednesday.

THE STUDENT GROUP

The Questors runs a two-year part-time student course in Acting; details can be obtained from the office.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S GROUPS

There are a number of groups for younger members. These cater for all age groups from 5-17. The classes are intended to create awareness of the theatre and provide a stimulating channel for imagination.

For The Questors Theatre

President	Dame Judi Dench
Artistic Directorate	Anne Gilmour, Brian Ingram
Director of Studies	David Emmet
Chair	John Davey
Vice-Chairman	Anne Gilmour
Company Secretary	Sue Blake
Club Secretary	Christine Garland
Finance Director	Ken Kettle
Stage Director	Martin Stoner
Marketing Director	to be filled
Theatre Manager	Elaine Orchard
Marketing Officer	Tanya Leigh, Oliver Jackson
Productions Secretary	Kris Collier
Membership Secretary	Alice Pennicott
Programme Editor	Vincent McQueen
Questopics Editor	John Dobson
Sponsorship	Tim Godfrey, Alan Drake
Box Office Management	Bridgett Strevens
Programme Sales Organiser	Val Blaxland
Front of House Manager	Eric Lister
Press Relations	Helen Parkinson
Wardrobe Care	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.