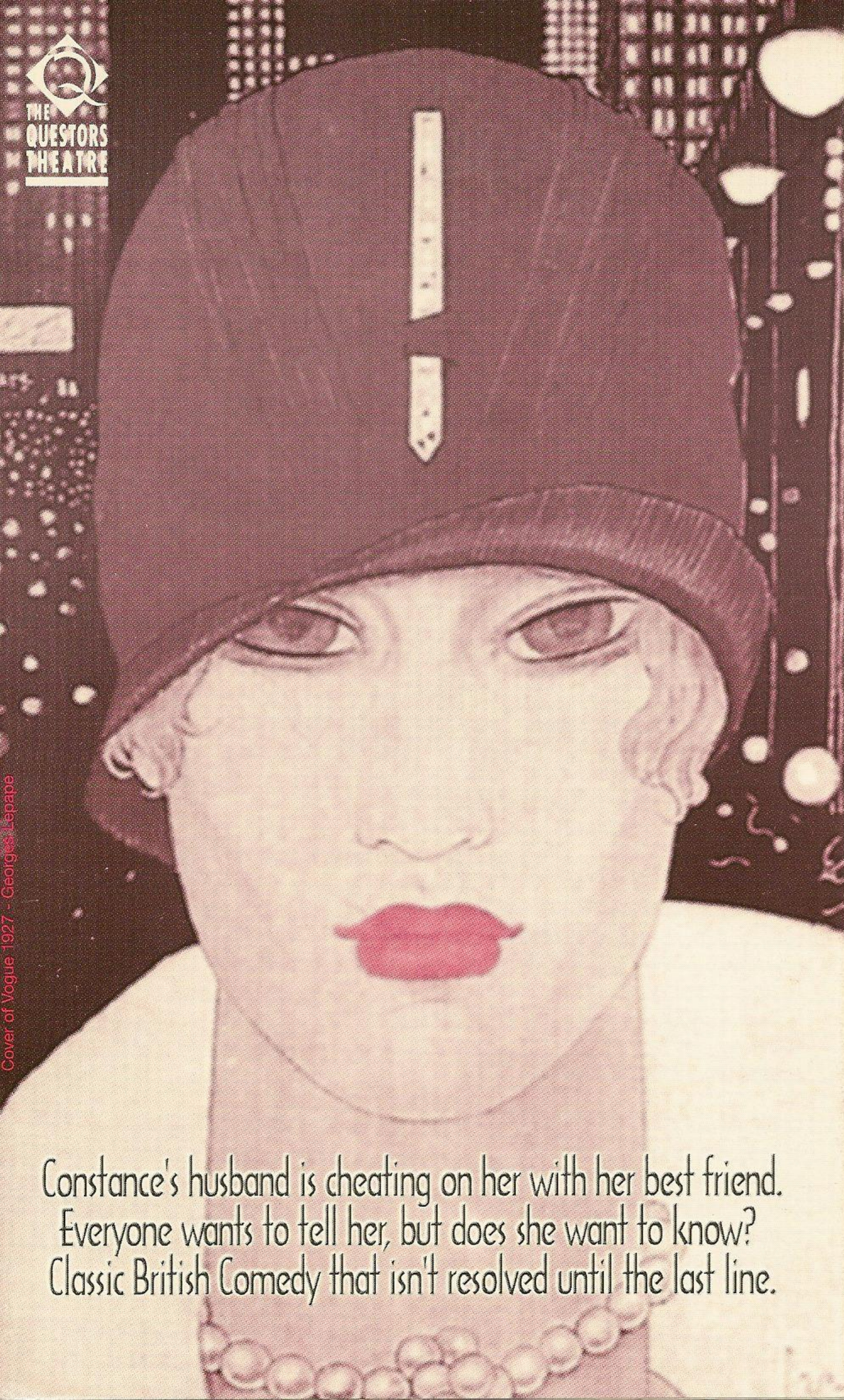


Cover of Vogue 1927 - Georges Lepape



Constance's husband is cheating on her with her best friend. Everyone wants to tell her, but does she want to know? Classic British Comedy that isn't resolved until the last line.

by W. Somerset Maugham

# THE CONSTITUTION WIFE

## PROGRAMME NOTES

W. Somerset Maugham lived from 1874 until 1965 but his play writing career only covered the period 1898 until he decided that he was no longer in touch with theatre audiences after the cool reception of his last play 'Sheppey' in 1933.

Maugham's comedies are in the tradition stretching from the Restoration wits through Goldsmith, Pinero, Wilde and Shaw and leading on to Coward and Rattigan. His strength, however, lies in his ability to draw real characters who live in recognisable societies and to find the comedy in their predicaments. As we enter the twenty first century the drawing room comedies of the 1920's may seem a remote world but Constance and her family, despite their wealth, face many of the problems of today and her comments on the role of the woman many will still find relevant and appropriate.

'The Constant Wife' opened in Cleveland, Ohio in November 1926 and despite a nervous Ethel Barrymore having cue sheets all over the stage and the director hidden in the fire place prompting, it transferred to New York where it ran for a year followed by another year on tour. It opened in London in April 1927 and the first night was a disaster because a considerable number of seats had been sold twice, once expensively and once to the pit queue. The latter arriving first refused to budge so that quarrels broke out, delaying the performance and upsetting the actors.

However, the play ran and was seen all over the U.K. It has been revived with great success all over the world including a prestigious West End showing in 1975 with Ingrid Bergman in the lead.

Maugham had been influenced by Ibsen in his early plays and it is perhaps not stretching the comparison too far to consider 'The Constant Wife' as 'A Doll's House' turned into a comedy. The comparison between Torvald's treatment of Nora and John's of Constance and the consequent growth to independence in both women is striking. However, one must bear in mind that Maugham saw himself primarily as an entertainer. In his preface to The Collected Plays he wrote:

*"...this is the business of comedy. To my mind it is not a work of edification, though it should be a work of art, and if it castigates the follies of the moment that is by the way and only in so far as this ...occasions laughter. The object is the entertainment of the audience not their improvement."*

Over the years there has been much discussion about how to interpret the conclusion of the play. Perhaps this is a compliment to Maugham's skill in creating realistic situations. Without revealing too much of the denouement it might be worth quoting part of Maugham's reply when asked what happened next: after giving his opinion he added

*"But I may be wrong. The author does not always know."*

ALAN CHAMBERS

# THE CONSTANT WIFE

by W. Somerset Maugham

First Performance of this production on Saturday 1st April 2000

- Act 1 - John's house in Harley Street  
Act 2 - Two weeks later.  
Act 3 - 1 year later.

There will be a short musical interlude between Act 1 & Act 2  
and an interval between Act 2 & Act 3

## CAST

in order of appearance

Bentley	Nigel Worsley
Martha	Heather Naylor
Mrs Culver	Sibeal McGuinne
Barbara	Mari King
Constance	Cathy Wallace
Marie-Louise	Caroline Nagle
John	Nigel Lawrence
Bernard	Mark Redrup
Mortimer	Derek Chandler

Jazz interludes played by John Rolfe

## CREW

Director	Alan Chambers
Designer	Nick Hawker
Specialist Painting	Elaine Hagan
Lighting Designer	Frank Wood
Stage Management	Alec Atchison, Tom Butler, Emma Davis, Tina Harris, Eric Lister, Marguerite Minster, Jo Perse, Anna Jablkowksa
Costumes	Bridgett Strevens
Assisted by	Sylvia Wall, Jenny Yates
Make-up & Wigs	Claire Awin, Birna S. Bjorgvinsdottir

## THANKS TO:

Sarah Andrews, Julia Bradley, Emma Goodwin, Colin Horne,  
Jenny Richardson, Geoff Webb, Alison Meik,  
Chris Sydenham, the Lighting Operator and Spot-Co Lighting.

by W. Somerset Maugham

THE CONSTANT WIFE

**The Questors Theatre**  
extends a very warm welcome to all the  
delegates attending the Southern Regional Conference of  
The Little Theatre Guild

## FORTHCOMING PRODUCTIONS

Sunday 2nd April

### **THE SHAKESPEARE REVUE**

*Devised & Directed by Christopher Luscombe & Malcolm McKee*

*Starring Gemma Craven & Clive Francis*

#### **IN THE PLAYHOUSE**

Following a sell-out season at The Barbican and a critically acclaimed West End run, this "irrepressible musical production" (Daily Express), originally staged by The RSC, is coming to The Questors. This joyous words-and-music celebration of the delights of the bard gathers together some of the finest comic material inspired by Shakespeare. With contributions from the cream of writing and performing talent this collective masterpiece is certain to enthrall, entrance and ENTERTAIN!

A hugely enjoyable show.... Absolute Bliss.... A delightful comic cocktail.

15th - 22nd April

### **SOAPSUD ISLAND** by Phillip Sheahan

#### **IN THE STUDIO**

The revival of one of The Questors' most successful and original new plays. An immediate hit when it premiered in 1990 as the first production by PlayBack, this celebration in drama and song of the memories of those who worked in the famous Acton Laundries between the wars, has performed nationwide to popular and critical acclaim and is now coming back to The Questors (with some new twists) to rekindle the enthusiasm of old fans and to delight a new audience.

29th April - 6th May

### **PYGMALION** by Bernard Shaw

#### **IN THE PLAYHOUSE**

Shaw's dramatization of a Cockney flower girl's metamorphosis into a lady not only is a delightful comedy but also has much to say about social class, money, spiritual freedom and women's independence. Its combination of ideas and social comment, together with its rich comic characterization, make it one of the most enduring and entertaining of English comedies. A classic for all time. Would anyone miss it? "Not bloody likely!"

**The Questors Theatre, Mattock Lane, London W5 5BQ**  
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