

THE QUESTORS THEATRE

is based in West London where it has its own premises including a modern, flexible Playhouse, a Studio theatre, three rehearsal rooms, a workshop, an extensive wardrobe department and, of course, the Grapevine Bar, which is the hub of the theatre.

It has nearly 3,000 members, all of whom get involved in one way or another, either in the 20 plus productions that are staged each year, in the day to day running of the theatre, or as members of the audience.

As well as presenting a wide variety of plays, the Questors runs a two-year course for actors, plays host to visiting companies from home and abroad, mounts regular art exhibitions, runs workshops and clubs for young people and tours productions in this country and abroad.

In short, there is something for everyone at The Questors.

The Questors Theatre

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Admin: 020 8567 0011

Fax: 020 8567 8736

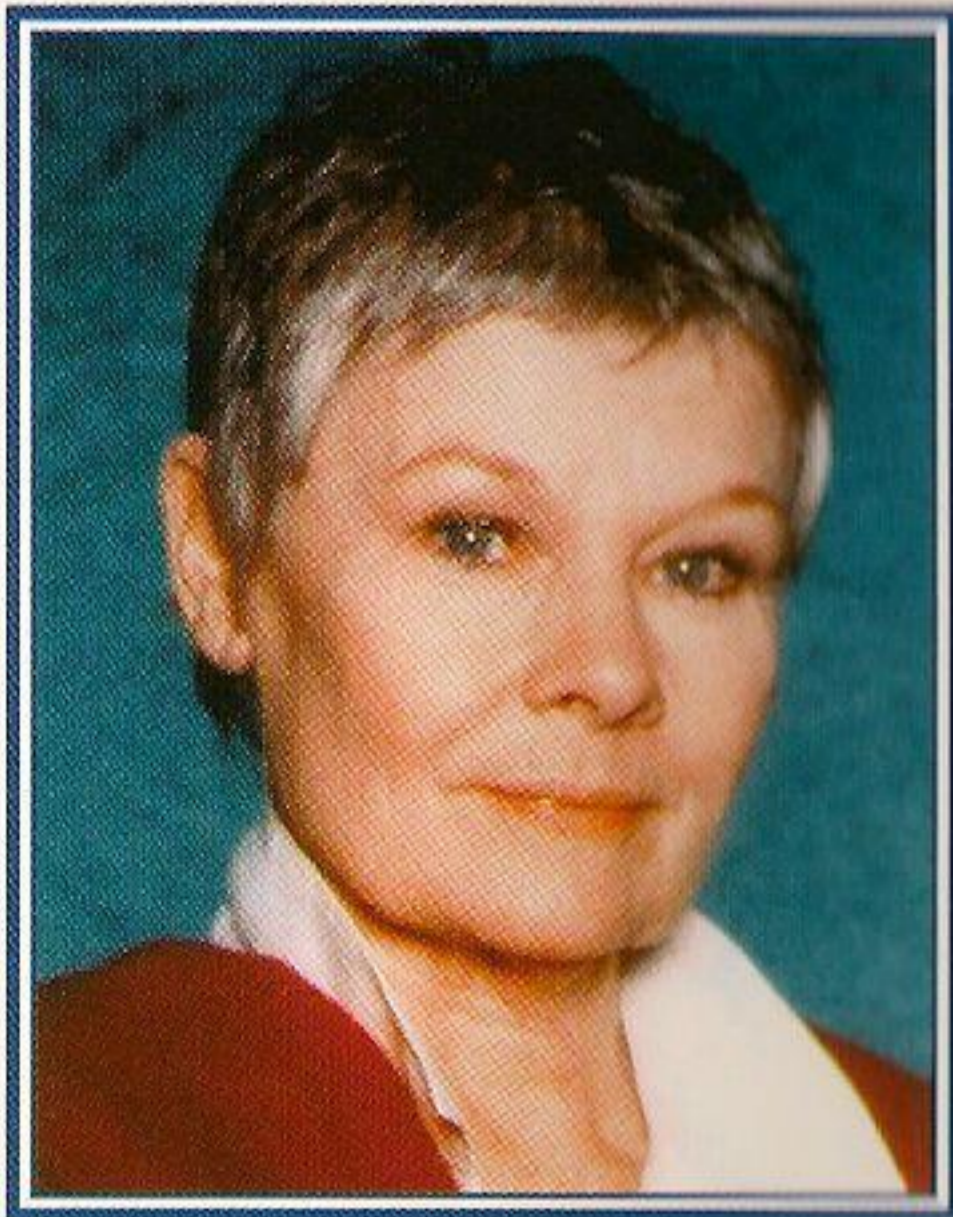
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ABSOLUTE HELL

THE QUESTORS THEATRE



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Welcome to The Questors Theatre, one of London's best kept secrets - except to its 3,000 members. How do I know about the Questors? I am proud to have been their President for over 16 years. Founded in 1929, it has since grown into the largest community theatre in Europe with a reputation for the highest standards, not only in acting but in direction and design as well. Luckily, with so many members, we have a wealth of talent to call on for all aspects of production and members are encouraged to be as actively involved as they would like. Alternatively, they simply enjoy the social side of the club, including the friendly Grapevine Bar (one of the many perks of membership) and the many and varied shows in our newly refurbished 350 seater Playhouse Theatre and more intimate Studio Theatre.

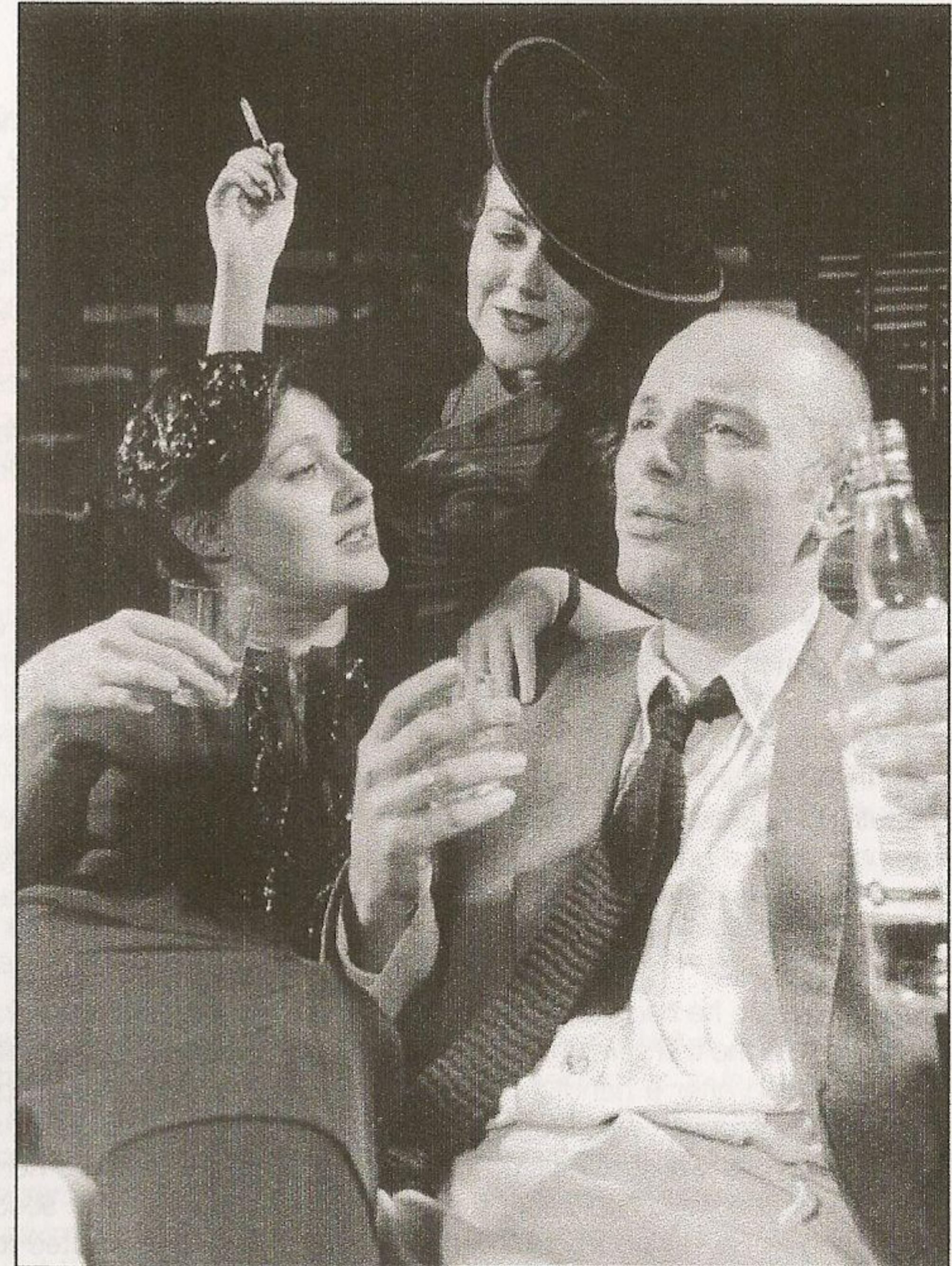
The Questors runs a professionally recognised two-year acting course in conjunction with Kingston College. There are also acting courses for beginners, free backstage training courses, visiting companies from home and abroad, regular art exhibitions, and workshops and clubs for young people. In short, there is something for everyone and with annual membership costing as little as £23.50 (including up to 10 free shows) it's great value for money as well.

But don't just take my word for it, the next time you're in West London call into The Grapevine Bar on any Wednesday evening at 8pm for a free tour of the theatre and a drink on us!

Worth looking into?

Definitely!

Dame Judi Dench
 President of The Questors Theatre



ABSOLUTE HELL

by Rodney Ackland

Rodney Ackland (1908-1991) and *Absolute Hell*

Rodney Ackland was inspired to work in the theatre by seeing a season of Chekhov plays in the 1920s. He trained as an actor at Central School, and acted professionally for the rest of the 1920s, but became a playwright in the 1930s. No fewer than 14 new plays of his were performed during that decade, the most famous ones being *Strange Orchestra*, *The Old Ladies* (adapted from Hugh Walpole) and *After October*. He continued writing in the 1940s, when The Questors presented world premieres of two of his works: *The Dark River* in 1943, and *The Diary of a Scoundrel* (adapted from Ostrovsky, later retitled *Too Clever by Half*) in 1946.

In the 1940s Ackland moved into films: he wrote screenplays (*49th Parallel*, *Hatter's Castle*, *Uncensored*, *Thursday's Child*, *The School Teacher*, *The Queen of Spades*) and also directed two of them (*Thursday's Child*, *The School Teacher*).

None of his original plays was a great commercial success: they were not right for their time. The critics were wary of them, and they had very limited public appeal. They were considered highbrow (something generally undesirable in those days). Until the 1950s, only the drawing room comedy or the light musical had much chance of attracting any substantial West End audience. People did not want plays that held a mirror up to the world or human nature, and most certainly not their world or their nature. Yet Ackland wrote well made plays: immaculately constructed, beautifully characterised and observed. So when *Look Back in Anger* came along, and the whole theatre underwent a revolution, Ackland, whose plays really belonged with those of the new wave, was categorised as a playwright of the past and almost entirely forgotten.

This was partly also because he had stopped writing for several years after *The Pink Room* in 1952. *The Pink Room* was the first version of *Absolute Hell*. It opened to such cruelly damning press notices that it closed after a handful of performances and Ackland's confidence as a writer was shattered. His problem was as usual that he was too bold. He dared to suggest that during the second world war there were men and women who were not heroes, doing their bit for victory, but rather who had spent the war drowning out reality in seedy drinking clubs. It was described as "a libel on the British people". The nation still wanted to be proud of itself and its victory. It did not want to be reminded of any truth about itself. And the play was Chekhovian: it had a very large number of characters and no recognisable plot. And perhaps the most serious crime of all – it ridiculed the character of an elderly literary critic. This is what Harold Hobson had to say in the Sunday Times:

"On Wednesday evening the audience at Hammersmith had the impression of being present, if not at the death of a talent, at least at its very serious illness... It is a sad thing to have to say of a man of Mr Ackland's past that his latest work has no wit; that it has no fire; that one of its scenes – in which an elderly female critic has her wig pulled off – must be one of the least creditable to author, players, producer, and management in stage memory; that its writer seems to have read nothing before or after *The Cherry Orchard*".

After *The Pink Room*, Ackland wrote little more for the theatre. The Questors did another world premiere of one of his plays, *The Other Palace* in 1964, but it was not taken up by any West End management.

But in recent years Ackland has started to be rediscovered. *Too Clever by Half* was performed at the National in 1988; he rewrote *The Pink Room* as *Absolute Hell* and it was performed at the Orange Tree in 1987, on BBC TV in 1991 and at the National in 1995, gaining Judi Dench a best actress Olivier award for her role as Christine. Richard Eyre and Nicholas Wright, in last year's *Changing Stages* television series, picked out Rodney Ackland as one of the best forgotten playwrights of the 20th century.

By the time Ackland rewrote *The Pink Room* as *Absolute Hell*, not only had tastes changed, but the Lord Chamberlain's censorship had gone as well. In the original version Ackland had had to disguise the numerous homosexual relationships, do without the bad language that even in the 1940s was a normal part of bohemian speech, and make the sexual content of the play much milder. So the original was an emasculated, even bastardised version of the play he really wanted to write. The central character, Hugh Marriner, in the original had a self-righteous wife. In *Absolute Hell* he has a long-standing male lover. Whether that was one of its problems is uncertain, but most likely in 1951 *Absolute Hell* would have caused even greater outrage than *The Pink Room*.

Tyrone Guthrie wrote a preface for the play in 1951 – but publication was withdrawn after it flopped. He said:

"In my opinion the play has virtue not only as drama, but a piece of evidence about a significant historical period. The conventional reaction to it is that it is about a lot of degenerate people; and that there is something disloyal about admitting the existence of such life in the London that could "take it" in the very testing years 1941-45. Well, I don't admit these characters are more degenerate than the average specimen. They are only more candidly analysed. I don't hold that the good name of London is glorified by being sentimental. I believe that this play with its brilliant evocation of an environment and an atmosphere that, if not conventional, are certainly typical of the time – all large communities had their Pink Rooms – will be of considerable historical interest. And if people turn to it for historical evidence, they will, I think and hope, be rewarded by the discovery of a piece of exquisite and intricate theatrical craftsmanship – a symphony in the Chekhov manner – many voices, many themes, woven together in a loose but distinguished pattern."

David Emmet

ABSOLUTE HELL

by Rodney Ackland

First performance of this production: 3rd November 2001

CAST

CHRISTINE FOSKETT	SARAH MORRISON
DORIS WESTON	HILARY SHEARING
BUTCH	JASON ETHERINGTON
MEMBERS	SUSAN GERLACH
	KAREN MUNRO
	PHILIPPA RANDALL
	BARRY RAWKINS
	EVAN RULE
	JANET EGAN
JULIA SHILLITOE	RICHARD GALLAGHER
HUGH MARRINER	JOHN HINES
SIEGFRIED SHRAGER	CLAIRE GARRIGAN
ELIZABETH COLLIER	BARBARA MARKER
MRS MARRINER	MARK REDRUP
MICHAEL CROWLEY	PAUL FRANCIS
MAURICE HUSSEY	TOM BUTLER
SAM MITCHUM	MONYENE KANE
LETTICE WILLIS (THE TREACLE QUEEN)	STEPHEN GRAY
CYRIL CLATWORTHY	CHRISSIE GORMAN
BILL	ANNE CHAUVEAU
R B MONODY	VIVIEN KERR
MADGE	TONY MARSHALL
DOUGLAS EDEN	TOM BUTLER
Gls	JASON ETHERINGTON
	ANTHONY GREEN
	ANTHONY GREEN
	DOROTHY BARBER
NIGEL CHILDS	JULIET VAUGHAN TURNER
MRS PRATT	KAREN MUNRO
FIFI	EVAN RULE
COOK	JASON ETHERINGTON
P C MOLSON	
D I ROACH	

CREW

DIRECTED BY	DAVID EMMET
DESIGNED BY	JOHN WIBBERLEY
COSTUMES DESIGNED BY	NICHOLA THOMAS SUE MILLHOUSE JENNY YATES
LIGHTING DESIGNED BY	TIM HAYWARD
SOUND DESIGNED BY	RICHARD LEWIS
STAGE MANAGERS	ALEC ATCHISON, MARK AYRES
DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER	DINAH SQUIRE
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS	JASON ARMSTRONG, JUDE GOODE LUKE GREEN, ANNABEL MAURICE
ACCENT ADVISORS	SUSAN GERLACH, LEONE MARTIN
PROPERTIES	JENNY RICHARDSON
CONSTRUCTION	JOHN WIBBERLEY RICHARD WILLIAMS
PROMPTER	SUE OLIVER
LIGHTING OPERATOR	JAMES CARR-SAUNDERS
LIGHTING ASSISTANT	WOODY HUGHES
SOUND OPERATOR	SUE CROWSON
RAIN EFFECT	CHRIS TOMLINS
PROJECTIONS	ELLIS PRICHARD
WIGS AND MAKE-UP	ROSHAN GHANGADHARAN ABIE HARDY NADINE McBRIDE, JULIE THORN
THANKS TO	TESSA CURTIS, BILL GRAY COLIN HORNE, DAMIEN LAZELL GEOFF MOORE, JO PERSE

The play is set in "La Vie en Rose" club, London W1

Act 1 – Thursday 21st June 1945, opening time

Act 2 – The same evening, closing time

INTERVAL OF 15 MINUTES

Act 3 – Thursday 5th July 1945, closing time

Act 4 – Thursday 26th July 1945, opening time

Running time: about 3 hours 15 minutes, including interval

FORTHCOMING PRODUCTIONS

NEW WRITING DOUBLE BILL

In **The Studio**, 17th November - 1st December

CARRYING ON by Roy Hyams

This is a gentle and touching piece about the relationship between brothers Ted and Tim, Ted's wife Doris, and Herbert, the man with whom she is 'carrying on'. Told in a poetic style reminiscent of Dylan Thomas, this is a comic fable for our time.

and

A TOUCH OF ROSE MADDER by Jim O'Connor

This warm and funny play won Questors member O'Connor the Little Theatre Guild award for best one-act play. It is a quietly moving character-study telling of the interaction between Rose Carlyle, an elderly and feisty widow, and her new home help, who is, to her surprise, a man!

THE QUESTORS FAMILY CHRISTMAS PRODUCTION OF

THE SNOW QUEEN by Stuart Paterson, from the story by Hans Christian Andersen

In **The Playhouse**, 8th December - 5th January

The Snow Queen will rule the world when a splinter of her evil mirror penetrates the heart of a child and turns it to ice. 'Give me a child with a heart of ice and you give me power over all the good magic in the world.' Join Gerda on a thrilling journey to rescue her best friend Kay from the clutches of the wicked Snow Queen and save the world from being frozen. Follow her in her perilous quest and meet a host of amazing characters along the way. Hans Christian Andersen's classic tale has enchanted children and adults alike for generations and will continue to do so in this stunning Christmas production. Tickets are selling fast so book now to avoid disappointment!

SOMEONE WHO'LL WATCH OVER ME by Frank McGuinness

In **The Studio**, 5th - 19th January

This engrossing play follows the thoughts, feelings and and conversations of three hostages being held in the Lebanon.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

I/we wish to apply for membership of The Questors Theatre
BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

Full Name/s

Address

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Telephone No. E-mail

Date/s of Birth

Membership Type: (please tick one)

Individual £39.50

Joint £71.50

Concessionary £23.50 Senior Citizens, UB40s, Leisure Pass Holders

Joint Concessionary £39

Single Family £47 one adult and all children under 17

Joint Family £81.50 two adults and all children under 17

Please include names and dates of birth of all children for both types of family membership

Student £13 All tickets at half price - on production of NUS card - no free shows

Associate £15 For those residing outside a 25-mile radius of The Questors - no free shows

Life membership is available - please ask for details

Where did you hear about The Questors?

• I enclose a cheque/postal order payable to The Questors Ltd for £

• I would like to pay by Credit Card - Mastercard/Visa

Card No. Expiry Date

Cardholder's Name

Address (if different from above)

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Signed Date

NEW MEMBERS' TICK SHEET

Many members join just to see the shows.

However, if you want to get more involved, please tick the areas you are interested in below. Remember, experience isn't always necessary (except for acting, for which you must audition).

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Acting | <input type="checkbox"/> Stewarding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Directing | <input type="checkbox"/> Box Office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Publicity | <input type="checkbox"/> Set Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Photography | <input type="checkbox"/> Costume Design |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stage Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Printing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Envelope Stuffing (daytime) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lighting | <input type="checkbox"/> Grapevine Bar |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sound | <input type="checkbox"/> Maintenance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Props | <input type="checkbox"/> Stage and Seating Construction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prompting | <input type="checkbox"/> Wardrobe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PlayBack (Reminiscence Theatre) | |

Details of previous theatre experience:

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Questors Membership Gives You...

- Access to over 20 productions a year - classic, contemporary, international and new plays. From just £6.00 a ticket.
- Free ticket to up to 10 shows each year.
- Membership of the exclusive Grapevine bar.
- Questopics, our lively monthly magazine.
- The chance to act, direct or get involved backstage.
- Discounts at: Holmes Place, Café Uno, Café Cyberia, Ealing Dance Centre, Elegance Dry Cleaners, House of Colour, Art Bar and Grill at Jarvis International Hotel, Snappy Snaps.

For membership call 020 8567 0011, Mon - Fri, 9.30am - 5.30pm or join us in the Grapevine bar at The Questors Theatre on any Wednesday at 8.00pm for a free guided tour of the theatre and a drink on us.

Orchard Travel

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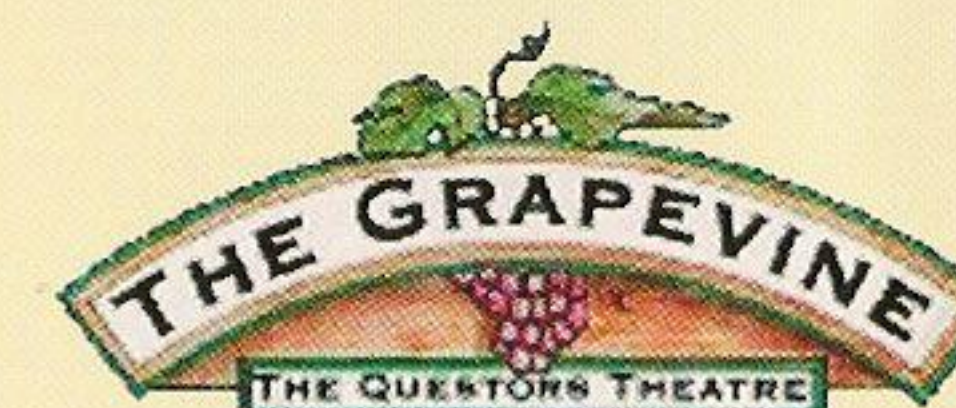
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Worldwide Flights

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Late Deals

•
Hotels

•
UK Breaks

£25 off every booking
over £500 for
Questors Members



WORTH CROSSING EALING FOR!

For your interval or after show drinks visit the friendly and comfortable Grapevine Bar. It's open seven nights a week and Sunday lunchtimes. We pride ourselves on the quality of our cask ales, which usually include Fuller's London Pride, Fuller's Chiswick Bitter and a guest ale. We also provide a range of draft lagers and ciders as well as wines and spirits - all at very reasonable prices.
www.myfavouritepub.com/questors