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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 7 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.

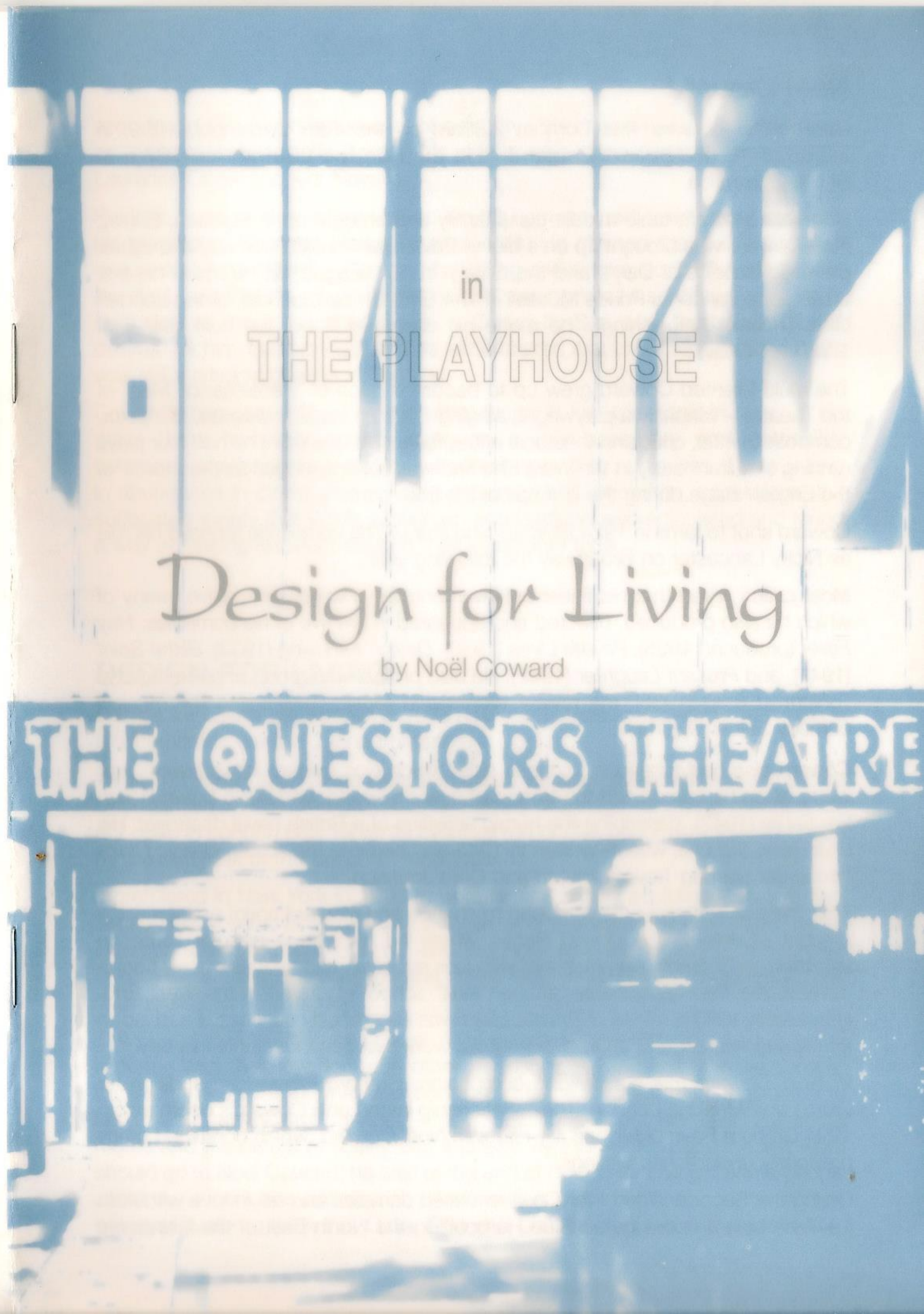
The Questors runs a professionally recognised two-year acting course in conjunction with Kingston College. There are also acting courses for beginners, free backstage training courses, visiting companies from home and abroad, regular art exhibitions, and workshops and clubs for young people. In short, there is something for everyone and with annual membership costing as little as £23.50 (including up to 8 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!

Judi Dench

Dame Judi Dench
 President of The Questors Theatre



in
THE PLAYHOUSE

Design for Living

by Noël Coward

THE QUESTORS THEATRE

Noël Coward

Noël Pierce Coward was born at 2.30am on the 16th December, 1899, in Teddington, Middlesex, England. He died on the 26th March 1973, in St Mary, Jamaica.

Born into a comfortable middle-class family and brought up in Surbiton, Surrey, Noël Coward was brought up on a diet of Edwardian musical comedy and lighter dramatic classics at Daly's and the Gaiety. In 1911, aged 12, he made his first stage appearance as Prince Mussell in *The Goldfish* by Lila Field, at the London Little Theatre. Astonishingly, he made his directorial debut the next year with *The Daisy Chain*.

The multi-talented Coward grew up to become a kind of "Renaissance Man" of the Theatre – variously a playwright, singing-actor of stage and revue, film actor, composer, writer, critic and theatrical entrepreneur. At one point he had four plays running simultaneously in the West End and was acknowledged as the master of the English stage during the first half of the 20th century,

Coward shot to fame in 1924 as writer and star of *The Vortex*. He reprised his role as Nicky Lancaster on Broadway the following year.

Most critics agree that his finest achievements as a writer for theatre, many of which he also produced, directed and appeared in are five of his comedies: *Hay Fever* (produced 1925), *Private Lives* (1930), *Design for Living* (1933), *Blithe Spirit* (1941), and *Present Laughter* (1942). He also produced a group of one-act plays *Tonight at 8:30* (1935); the review *Words and Music* (1932); and the musical comedy *Sail Away* (1961).

Coward also had a serious, patriotic side, which was evident in his tireless war work, when he entertained the troops all over the world, and in his film *In Which We Serve* (1942), describing the heroic activities of a British naval destroyer. His short play, *Still Life*, was re-written in 1945 and became the screen classic *Close Encounter* starring Trevor Howard and Celia Johnson.

After the war, theatrical tastes began to change and Coward spent an increasing amount of time in the United States where he became a popular figure on television. In England, his plays met with less success, and he was openly hostile towards the then fashionable "kitchen sink" school of drama in the West End. However in 1963 a revival of *Private Lives* was enormously successful and led to a renewed interest and appreciation of his work that continues until this day.

In 1931 Coward met his life-long companion, Graham Payn at an audition for *Words and Music* in London. Their relationship lasted until Coward's death and in 1994 Graham Payn published *My Life with Noël Coward*, which contained many previously unpublished writings.

During the Second World War Coward visited Jamaica and fell in love with it. In 1947 he built a home called Blue Harbour on the North East of the Island. He

soon found that he attracted a lot of celebrity visitors and built a second home, as a retreat, called Firefly. Among his visitors were John Gielgud, Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier and Ivor Novello.

Publicly, Coward never openly referred to his homosexuality, and would not allow his biographer Sheridan Morley to mention it. He claimed that the public was unsure about his sexuality (despite him writing and singing songs like *Mad about the Boy*), and that his refusal to "come out" sprang from a solicitous wish not to disillusion all those harmless ladies in Goring-by-Sea who "harboured secret desires" for him. But it should also be remembered that until 1967 homosexuality was still a criminal offence in England.

Coward's homosexuality is an important factor in his work, and in many of his plays there is a conjunction between a gay sensibility and ostensibly heterosexual relationships that has a potent appeal to audiences. There is love in abundance in Coward's work, but it is scotched, scorched, frozen love, the suffocated variety that Wilde, Maugham and Rattigan also articulated and found a way of making resonant beyond their immediate tribe.

DESIGN FOR LIVING

Design for Living was written in 1933 as a star vehicle for Coward and his close friends Alfred Lunt and Lynne Fontanne.

While *The Vortex* and *Private Lives* had barely escaped the attentions of the Lord Chamberlain's office, the provocative themes of *Design for Living* meant it did not open in London until 1939. Its eventual run of 203 performances was ended by the outbreak of the Second World War.

It premiered in New York in 1933 to popular and critical acclaim. The New York Times described it as a play of "skill, art and clairvoyance, performed by an incomparable trio of comedians," and the New York Sun called it "as happy a spectacle of surface skating as one might see," adding that the skaters were "sometimes on very thin ice."

The play chronicles the attempts of three people, Gilda, Otto and Leo to come to terms with their love for each other. The complex and revolving relationship between them ends in what was considered to be, and still may be considered to be, a most provocative manner. It asks questions about our sexuality, social mores and the nature of fidelity. But it is also very funny. Perhaps the last word should go to Noël Coward; he said of the end of *Design for Living*: "Some people see it as a lascivious anticipation of some sort of carnal frolic.....I as author, however, prefer to think that Gilda, Otto and Leo are laughing at themselves."

Design for Living

by Noël Coward

First performance of this production 8th February 2003

CAST

Ernest Friedman	Chris Ifould
Gilda	Sarah Galton
Leo Mercuré	Robert Seatter
Otto Sylvus	David Palmer
Miss Hodge/Grace Torrence	Grace Craddock
Helen Carver	Kerri Logan
Henry Carver	Richard Brown
Matthew	Jonathan Rose

ACT I

Otto's studio in Paris

ACT II

Scene I.	<i>Leo's flat in London (eighteen months later)</i>
Scene II.	<i>The same (a few days later)</i>
Scene III.	<i>The same (the next morning)</i>

ACT III

Scene I.	<i>Ernest's apartment in New York (two years later)</i>
Scene II.	<i>The same (the next morning)</i>

Time: 1933

PRODUCTION CREW

Director	Roger Beaumont
Designer	John Rolfe
Lighting and Sound Design	Alan N Smith
Wardrobe Design & Production	Sarah Andrews, Jenny Yates, Nichola Thomas
Stage Manager	Eric Lister
Deputy Stage Managers	Brin Parsonage, Alec Atchison
Properties	Harriet Parsonage
Set Construction	Jim Craddock, John Feather, Peter Collins, Barry Jones
Portraits painted by	Elaine Hagan, Elena Gausson Marks
Sound Operator	Sue Crowson
Lighting Operator	Sally Milton
Prompter	Pam Smith
Assistant Stage Managers	Matthew Simpson, Sophie Fonteyn, Elena Marks, Nina Lubicz-Nanrocka, Jie Zhou, Martin Choules, Les Fraser
Hair and Make Up	Kathryn Smith, Claire Walmsley-Moss
With thanks to:	Jenny Richardson, Jo Perse, Kirsty Packham, Chris Sydenham, Tina Harris, Nigel Worsley, Sylvia Wall

COMING SOON

The Questors Youth Theatre presents

Ernie's Incredible Illucinations by Alan Ayckbourn

In **The Studio**, 19 - 28 February

Ernie is a girl with an incredible imagination – everything she imagines becomes real, much to the consternation of her parents. They take Ernie to the doctor's in search of a cure but things don't go exactly as planned. Secret agents, a boxing granny and mountaineering in the local library make this a hilarious story and fun for all ages.

and

The Chrysalids by David Harrower from the novel by John Wyndham

In **The Studio**, 19 - 28 February

Set in a post apocalyptic future, *The Chrysalids* deals with issues of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. It tells the story of David, who lives in a world where those who consider themselves normal, the 'Norms' rule, and try to destroy anyone they see as different, the 'Mutants'. David is different, he is telepathic, but how can he hide this difference and avoid a terrible fate?

A View From The Bridge by Arthur Miller

in **The Playhouse**, 15 - 22 March

This is a powerful drama about incestuous love, jealousy and betrayal from one of the twentieth century's most celebrated playwrights. It tells the story of Eddie, a longshoreman in 1950's New York, a decent, often loveable man, doomed to destroy himself because of a fatal flaw in his character - the nature of his love for his niece, Catherine.

Run for Your Wife by Ray Cooney

in **The Playhouse**, 5 - 12 April

This is a much acclaimed farce from the master of farces. John Smith is a London cabby with his own taxi, a wife in Streatham, a wife in Wimbledon, and a knife-edge schedule. By strict adherence to this schedule, he has been a successful, if tired bigamist, for three years. But one day, after gallantly intervening in a mugging, he is taken to hospital and in the ensuing complications John tries bravely to cope with a succession of prying policemen, the press and two increasingly irate wives until he manfully confesses the truth - but no-one believes him!

ART EXHIBITIONS

We are very pleased to welcome two local artists who will be exhibiting their work here from the 8th February:

Sue Shepherd -

a selection of watercolours in the Grapevine Bar

and

The Rev. Peter Watkins -

in the Upper Foyer

We are always delighted to hear from anyone interested in holding an exhibition at Questors. For further details please contact Jane Mason on 020 8567 0011 on Tuesdays or Thursdays.

LIVE THE ADVENTURE

The Questors Theatre presents

The Life and Adventures of NICHOLAS NICKLEBY Parts 1 & 2

by Charles Dickens, adapted by David Edgar

24th May - 7th June 2003

**A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to see this
spectacular production.**

Booking soon...look out for further details.