



Enquiries: 020 8567 0011  
Box Office: 020 8567 5184  
Fax: 020 8567 8736  
e-mail: enquiries@questors.org.uk  
Web site: www.questors.org.uk

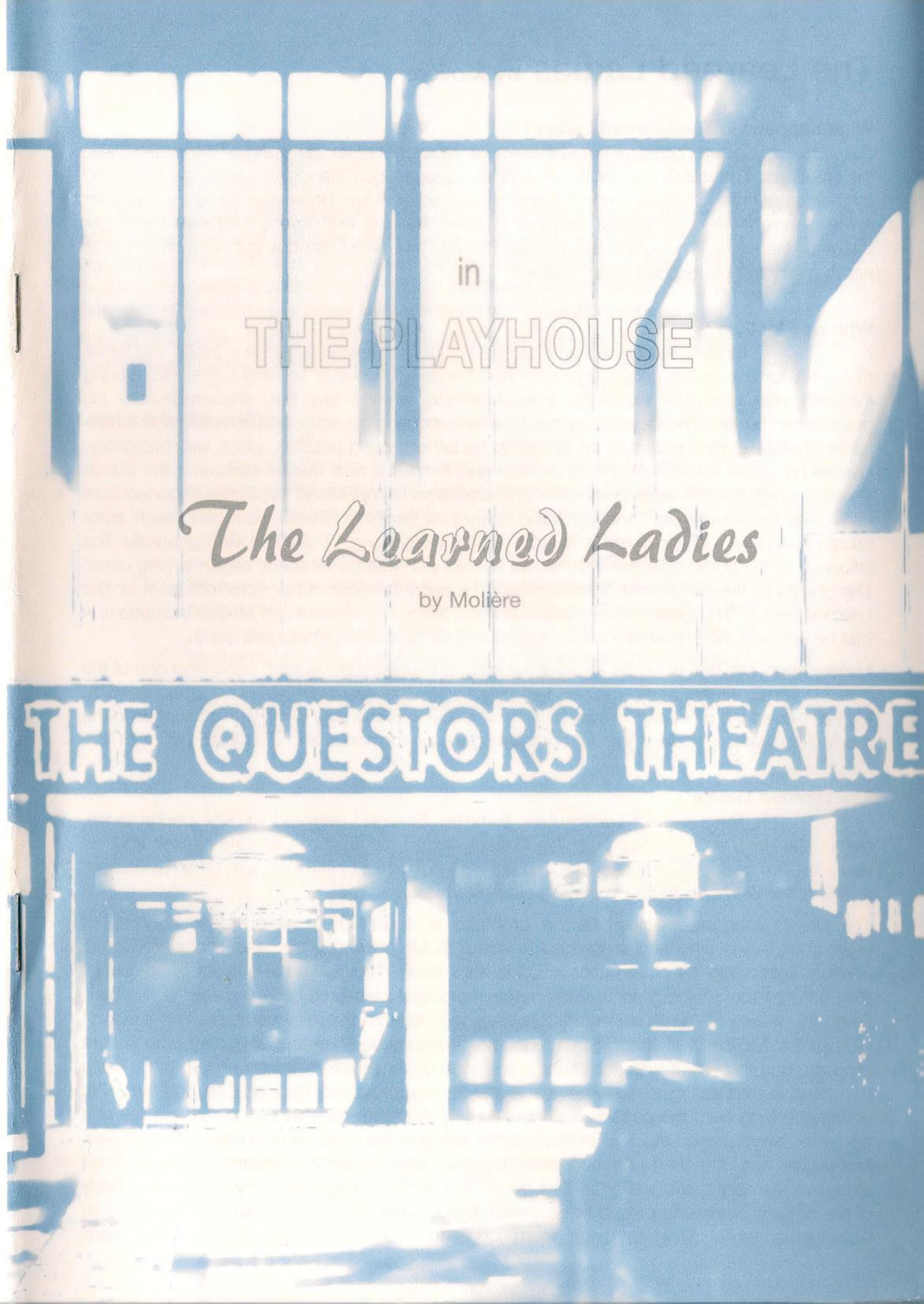
Welcome to The Questors Theatre, one of London's best kept secrets - except to its 3,000 members. How do I know about the Questors? I am proud to have been their President for over 17 years. Founded in 1929, it has since grown into the largest community theatre in Europe with a reputation for the highest 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!

Dame Judi Dench  
President of The Questors Theatre



in  
**THE PLAYHOUSE**  
*The Learned Ladies*  
by Molière

**THE QUESTORS THEATRE**



# The Learned Ladies by Molière

## What happens in The Learned Ladies?

In the household of Chrysale war rages between the world of the intellect and the emotions. Chrysale's brother, Ariste and his young friend Clitandre are ordinary men, ruled by their emotions. Chrysale's wife Philaminte, her sister in law Belise and her elder daughter Armande are intellectual snobs, devoted to book learning and poetry. Chrysale's younger daughter, Henriette, is caught in the middle. She is in love with Clitandre, but her mother wants her to marry the pretentious poet; Trissotin.

## Who was Molière?

Molière was born Jean-Baptiste Poquelin to a wealthy family in 1622. His father made his fortune as an upholsterer and then became a courtier to King Louis XIV. Young Poquelin was given an expensive education and studied law but, encouraged by his grandfather, he became devoted to the theatre becoming an actor and adopting the stage-name of Molière. He went as far as foregoing his father's court position, which was hereditary; instead he asked for his inheritance in cash and formed a new theatre company, the Illustre Theatre, which specialised in *commedia dell' arte*, a semi-improvised farce style imported from Italy. The *commedia dell' arte* operated through a series of stock characters; each actor usually specialising in one persona. Molière adopted the character of the clown Sganarelle. The influence of the *commedia dell' arte* would remain with Molière when he began writing plays. The ghosts of the *commedia* characters can be seen throughout his work, not least in *The Learned Ladies*. The essential difference between the old characters and Molière's creations is that he endows the characters in his plays with a far greater psychological depth.

Molière spent the rest of his life as an actor and, of course, a playwright; becoming one of the greatest comic writers of all time. His last play *La Malade Imaginaire* was performed in 1673. Molière played the main part himself. It is ironic that it was this play deals with corruption in the medical profession. Molière was taken ill during the performance and died later that night.

## The Learned Ladies

*The Learned Ladies (Les Femmes Savants)* received its first performance, before the king, on 11th March 1672. Molière played the part of Chrysale himself and his daughter, Armande, played Henriette. The part of the mother, Philaminte, was taken by Hubert, a male actor who specialised in playing elderly females.

The play is a satire attacking certain practises at court. There were indeed a group of aristocratic ladies who had embraced learning. In Molière's day this was considered most unusual, particularly by other ladies in Louis XIV's court. They were the subject of ridicule as they thought that learning, to the detriment of physical pleasures, was the way to the soul. Given the values of the 21st century it is easy to condemn this play as sexist. But it wasn't women that Molière was attacking so much as the excesses of the upper classes who sought diversion and fashion. It was not learning that was under attack so much as pedantry. There had been a tradition of pedant clowns in plays throughout the Renaissance and the 17th century deriving from the pedants written about by Aristotle. They usually took the guise of a doctor or lawyer; again stock characters to be found in the casts of the *commedia dell' arte*. Montaigne had attacked the scholastic method that produced pedantry. This involved extensive memory training in order that pupils and students might learn by heart a vast body of pre-digested, systematically ordered material, taught the young to be vain and proud of their attainments, while failing to teach them judgement, self knowledge and practical moral

philosophy. Such minds were utterly bereft of growth, unable to converse freely, and certainly incapable of the talents required to run a state.

The play is peopled with characters, many of whom do not automatically attract our sympathy. Both Philaminte and Trissotin have been described as 'comic monsters'. But the psychological truths Molière gives the characters maintain the foundations of reality. He is able to place recognisable characters in farcical situations as well as providing the audience with examples of humanity that range from the romantic to the grotesque.

After its final performance in 1672 *The Learned Ladies* did not receive another production until it was revived by The Comedie Francaise in the 1920s.

## Learning and morality

'.... Most intolerable is the woman who as soon as she has sat down to dinner commends Virgil, pardons the dying Dido, and pits the poets against each other, putting Virgil in the one scale and Homer in the other ... she lays down definitions and discourses on morals. Like a philosopher .... Let her not know all history; let there be some things in her reading which she does not understand. I hate a woman who is forever consulting and poring over the 'grammar' of Palaemon, who observes all the rules and laws of language, who like an antiquary quotes verses that I never heard of, and corrects her unlettered female friends for slips of speech that no man need trouble about: let husbands at least be permitted to make slips in grammar!'

Juvenal: *Satire VI, II*

'It is true, as they say, that the body should not pursue its appetites in such a way as to harm the mind; but why should it not also be true that the mind should not pursue its appetites to the point where they harm the body?'

Montaigne: *Essais, III*

'Molière did not expect his spectators to bring to his plays the furrowed brows of moral philosophers intent on gauging the midpoint of virtue between the various excesses of vice. His aim was to entertain. To do so, while at the same time giving a true and telling portrait of the human condition, he used laughter as the measure of reason and unreason. Through laughter, whole audiences could join together in recognising and mocking departures from the mean.'

Andrew Calder:

*Molière-The Theory and Practice of Comedy*



# The Learned Ladies

by Molière

First performance of this production at The Minack Theatre 18 August 2003  
First performance of this production at The Questors Theatre 27 September 2003

## CAST

### CHRYSALE

*A well-to-do citizen*

Derek Chandler

### PHILAMINTE

*Chrysale's wife*

Sarah Andrews

### ARMANDE

*Chrysale & Philaminte's daughter*

Emma John

### HENRIETTE

*Chrysale & Philaminte's Daughter*

Lydia King

### ARISTE

*Chrysale's brother*

Ken Ratcliffe

### BELISE

*Chrysale's sister*

Sue Wheatley

### CLITANDRE

*Henriette's lover*

Iain Stirling

### TRISSOTIN

*A fine wit*

Steve Fitzpatrick

### VADIUS

*A scholar*

Mark Redrup

### MARTINE

*A kitchenmaid*

Claire Bennett

### L'EPINE/JULIEN

Nigel Worsley

### THE NOTARY

David Wheatley

## PRODUCTION

Direction

Brian Ingram, Eldi Dundee

Set Design

John Rolfe

Stage Management

Katy Gallantry, Miles Davis  
Harriet Parsonage

Costume & Wardrobe

Tim Heywood, Jessica Cave  
Anne Gilmour, Grace Craddock,  
Pam Smith, Sylvia Wall,  
Jenny Richardson, Maria Brusa

Lighting

Martin Stoner, Rob Barnett

Sound

Lizzie Averill

Make-up & Wigs

Caroline Silk, Allie Hillman

Bust of Plato made by

Eldi Dundee

Fight Arranger

Peter Kennedy

Choreography

Julia Cooke

Martine's song composed by

Don Kincaid

Crew

Jim Craddock, Ruth Williamson,  
Natalie Howick, Dennis Dracup,  
Jonathan Rose



# COMING SOON

## A Wedding Story

by Bryony Lavery  
In **The Studio**, 4 - 18 October

Memory is one of the key themes of modern drama and Bryony Lavery's lyrical and tender play tackles it on many levels. Literally, in that it deals with a mother afflicted by Alzheimer's, and metaphorically, in that it suggests that our whole life is a fusion of past and present and is shaped by the virtual reality of cinema. Set in a fog-enveloped wedding marquee, this 90-minute play presents parallel but intertwined actions. In part, it is the story of free-spirited lesbian Sally who meets the amazing Grace at a wedding and who, after an ecstatic fling, finds herself torn between independent solitude and lifelong commitment. But it is equally about the devastating impact of Alzheimer's on Sally's mother, Evelyn, and on her father, vainly trying to cope with a wife who scarcely recognises him. To add to a rich brew, Sally's brother is a California-based movie buff and the action is suffused with memories of Evelyn's favourite film, Casablanca.

## A Russian in the Woods

by Peter Whelan  
In **The Playhouse**, 16 - 25 October

Amongst the ruins of post-war Berlin, a young soldier is sent for a weekend to guard a deserted British army office. In the corrosive atmosphere of Cold War power struggles, he innocently finds himself caught up in a situation where his conscience is on trial. He comes to realise that everyone else understands the situation in a way he can't comprehend, and the plot takes a twist that makes it evident how dangerously out of his depth he is.

First performed by the RSC, this is the amateur première of this play by Questors member Peter Whelan.

## Blithe Spirit

By Noël Coward  
In **The Playhouse**, 8 - 15 November

Blithe Spirit is an inspired and inventive comedy, and Coward's longest-running play. It is set in the country home of the sophisticated author Charles Condomine who is researching for his latest book, the unseen, and calls in the wonderfully eccentric Madame Arcati to hold a séance. Unfortunately, the proceeding has an unforeseen result and the ensuing situation makes for much hilarity. This is classic Coward, and one of his best loved plays.

## ART EXHIBITIONS

The Art Exhibitions continue to flourish. We are delighted that 2003/2004 will see the welcome return of old friends as well as welcoming those who are new to the Questors. There will be a wide cross section of artwork exhibited on both the Grapevine Bar and the Upper Foyer for members and friends to enjoy.

As always, we are very happy to hear from anyone interested in holding an exhibition at the Questors. For further details please contact Jane Mason on **020 8567 0011** on Tuesdays or Thursdays.

come to  
*Quickies*  
in the Upper Foyer

Serving tea, coffee, cakes and ice-cream.

Look out for an extended service, coming soon. Also, during the Christmas show Quickies will be serving mulled wine and mince pies.

Book now for our wonderful Christmas production of



## The Witches

by Roald Dahl, adapted by David Wood

13th December - 3rd January

**BOX OFFICE 020 8567 5184**

Adults £9.00

Children £7.00

Family ticket (2 adults and 2 children) £29.00

