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If you enjoy theatre, why not join us and become a member of The Questors?

If you enjoy a regular night out at the theatre with friends, why not become a member of The Questors? As a Playgoer Member, you'll receive a 20 per cent discount on your ticket; to most Questors productions, free tickets for your children to most Questors productions, regular information about our productions, and membership of the Grapevine Bar, so you can come and enjoy a quiet evening in the Grapevine throughout the year.

Or you could join as a Company Member and receive a 50 per cent discount on your ticket and opportunities to get involved in our productions, in addition to all the benefits for Playgoer Members.

You can get all of this for just £27.00 for Playgoer membership and £55.00 (£38.00 concessions) for Company membership, with discounts for payment by Direct Debit. You can find Membership Application forms in the Box Office Foyer, or just phone the Theatre Office.

Stay in touch

Sign up for our weekly or monthly emails, full of the latest news, at www.questors.org.uk or send us your name and address and we'll post you our bi monthly season card.

Find out all about our forthcoming productions – along with a lot of other information about The Questors – on our web site.

- ▶ What's on
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www.questors.org.uk



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Questors Ealing's Theatre

KNIVES IN HENS

by David Harrower

The Studio
8 – 23 February 2008

www.questors.org.uk



Questors Grapevine Bar

The Grapevine is our friendly club bar open to the members of The Questors Theatre and their guests, as well as serving audience members on show nights. The club is open seven nights a week and Sunday lunchtimes and is managed and staffed entirely by volunteers. We are the proud holders of a Cask Marque award for the quality of our real ales, we appear in the 2008 edition of The Good Beer Guide, and we have been named as West Middlesex CAMRA Club of the Year 2007. Real ales recently on tap include Fuller's London Pride, Twickenham Sundancer and Fuller's Old Winter Ale. We also provide a range of draught lagers and ciders, as well as wines and spirits – all at very reasonable prices.

Opening hours:

7.00-11.00pm (10.30pm close on Sundays)

also Sunday lunchtime 12.00-2.30pm



KNIVES IN HENS

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Knives in Hens

While researching Scottish history during the rehearsal process of *Knives in Hens*, I came across a passage in TC Smout's *A History of the Scottish People 1560-1830*, which seemed to encapsulate the truth behind the play, and which I enthusiastically read aloud to the cast:

'After the harvest, most lowland peasants were obliged to take their grain to the water mill to which they were 'thirled' [bound] by their tenure and then obliged to pay a heavy 'culture' [fee] to have it ground into meal. Throughout Scotland this servitude was resented and evaded if possible. It made the miller both an important and an unpopular figure in the community, as indeed, he seems to have been throughout Europe: "I care for nobody, no not I, if nobody care for me." [The refrain from the folk song, *The Miller of Dee*]

The mill had further to be supported by peasant labour conscripted to repair the leets and weirs, and to carry a new mill stone from the nearest quarry when the old one broke. This last was one of the occasions that united the community in effort and enjoyment. The stone had to be trundled over the bad roads on its circular edge with a young tree thrust through the centre like an axle, an operation needing a great deal of labour and ale to carry to a successful conclusion.'

It was some weeks later, when reading an interview with David Harrower in the programme of his 2006 West End hit, *Blackbird*, that I realised that this was

no coincidence. The young Scottish playwright had chanced upon the same passage, which had inspired him to write *Knives in Hens*.

Premiered at the Traverse Theatre in 1995, *Knives in Hens* was the first of Harrower's plays to be performed. It has gone on to become a major international success, translated into over 20 languages and given more than 70 professional productions. Harrower, now 40, has frequently been included in lists of the brightest stars of a new generation of British theatre writing along with the likes of Joe Penhall, David Eldridge and fellow Scot, Gregory Burke. He has gone on to write *Kill the Old*, *Torture Your Young* (Traverse 1998), *Presence* (Royal Court 2001) and *Dark Earth* (Traverse 2003) as well as *Blackbird* (Albery Theatre) and several stage adaptations.

He writes of *Knives in Hens*: 'I wanted to create a world that seems incredibly strange and archaic. A pre-industrial world, but I wanted to also think of it metaphorically – a world where language was only used very specifically. A world so immersed in the rhythms of work and existence that there was no time for outward things, where people lived within nature and were not able to step outside the world and look at their place within it.'

However he has also been quoted as saying: 'With *Knives in Hens* I can't remember writing it or what I was thinking of at the time.' It is perhaps this almost subconscious process of creation that gives his simple tale of a miller, a ploughman, and the ploughman's wife its elemental,

dreamlike quality – and which has been the source of its far-reaching popularity.

Scotland at the end of the 18th century was a country on the brink of a radical social and economic transformation. In the 1780s and 90s the introduction of new technology led to the rapid growth of the textile industry, swelling the populations of towns and cities. Meanwhile in the countryside the growth of the agricultural export trade to England prompted the enclosure of land, which had previously been held in common, into modern farms run by businessman-farmers.

However, for many of the Scottish peasantry in both lowlands and highlands these changes were no more than a distant rumour and life went on as it had done since time immemorial. In 1801 Scotland was still a predominantly rural nation, with only seven towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants. Traditional rents were paid to traditional lairds for lands which consisted of open, ridged, stony fields dotted with pools of boggy water and tall thickets of gorse.

Living in widely-separated settlements which were too small to be called villages in the modern sense, the economic, social and religious life of the peasants was dominated by centuries-old tradition. The laird owned the land, which was frequently tilled in common by joint tenants and their labourers known as 'crofters' or 'cottars.'

They produced virtually all of their food and most of the other necessities of life

themselves, with money almost irrelevant in a system where barter dominated and rents were paid in flour. Hard female labour was an essential part of agriculture with wives helping their husbands at harvest and at hay-time, carting and mucking, as well as carrying out domestic tasks.

A typical cottar dwelling consisted of a stone hut with walls five feet high and twelve feet long, a roof thatched with straw, and an earth floor. Even the larger houses of prosperous farmers frequently had only two rooms in which the family and their servants, labourers and animals would sleep. Furniture was usually limited to a few stools and chests, a bed, a cooking pot and a wash tub.

While Scottish peasants of the period had a reputation for comparatively high levels of literacy, in many areas opportunities for education were limited. Parishes of fifty square miles might have only one school and one schoolmaster, and attendance was not compulsory.

Limited though it was, education gradually began to broaden horizons and erode the crust of irrational custom. The reorganisation of agriculture away from inefficient communal methods and mass migration to the growing industrial towns followed. For the peasants the changes meant liberation from an isolated and poverty-stricken existence – but also the end of a co-operative way of life in a community where fellowship was both essential and very real.

Stuart Watson

KNIVES IN HENS

by David Harrower

First performance of this production: 8 February 2008

THE CAST

Young Woman
Pony William
Gilbert Horn

Sarah Hannah
Ryan Hurst
Julian Casey

The Country

9 – 22 February 2008

In the Studio

An outstanding modern play presented in repertoire over two weeks.

Arabian Nights

19 – 23 February 2008

In the Playhouse

The Questors Youth Theatre presents a fantastically theatrical production full of tall tales and adventure.

THE CREW

Director	Stuart Watson
Set Designer	Alex Agg
Composer/Performer Original Music	Ian Crawford
Lighting Designer	Francois Langton
Sound Designer	Paul Wilson
Stage Manager	Michelle Weaver
Deputy Stage Manager	Curtis Ashley
Assistant Stage Managers	Wesley Lloyd Eli Abboh
Properties	Harriet Parsonago
Dialect Coach	Catherine Sangster
Wardrobe	Jenny Yates Anne Gilmour
Set Construction	Richard Williams
Sound Operator	Geoffrey Morgan
Photography	Ian Cole
Hair & Make-up	Natalie Wickens Kate Taylor Greasepaint
Front of House	Sylvia Wall Jane Arnold-Forster
Programme Editor	Penelope MacLachlan
Programme Design and Print	Considerthisuk.com

Thanks to:

Mike Hagen and Alex Marker and their students, Mike Cuming, Ruth Parry, Chris Edwards, Chris Tomlins and the Studio House Services

Biographies

Julian Casey – Gilbert Horn

Julian began acting at Leeds University and made his debut in 1987 as Hector in *Troilus and Cressida*. He joined The Questors in March 2006 and has since played Roger in *Mouth to Mouth*, Ged Murray in *Comedians* and Borachio in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Sarah Hannah – Young Woman

Sarah graduated from Drama Studio London in 2002. This is Sarah's third production at The Questors. She has also appeared in *Bloody Poetry* and *Vincent in Brixton*. Her theatre and film credits include: *Antony and Cleopatra*, National Tour; *Fastest Clock in the Universe*; New Venture, Brighton; *Martellino and the Saint*, National Theatre, *Telstar*, Asperation Films (due for cinema release 2008), *I Want Candy*, Baggy Joe Productions and *Inside/Out*, Arcadian Productions.

Ryan Hurst – Pony William

Ryan's first show at The Questors was the controversial *Mercury Fur* and this is his second. Ryan trained at Rose Bruford College. Theatre credits include *Pal Joey*, Alan Ayckbourn's *Confusions*, *A Small Family Business* (Minerva & Chichester Festival Theatre) and *Absolute Hell* (ICA). Radio credits include *The Dark Tower* (BBC R4). TV credits include *Emmerdale*, Scott Saunders in *Brookside*, *City*

Central, *Casualty* and *The People Are The Forest*. Film credits include Chester Davenport in *Interval for MTV*, for which Ryan won the MTV Best Actor Award.

Stuart Watson – Director

This is Stuart Watson's directorial debut at The Questors. He has appeared as an actor in *Comedians* and *Bouncers*. Directing credits elsewhere include *The Collector* (Jermyn Street Theatre/Actors Centre), *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *Arms and the Man*, *Blue/Orange*, *Dogg's Hamlet Cahoot's Macbeth*, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Sauce for the Goose* and *The Country Wife* (all Putney Arts Theatre).

Alex Agg – Set Designer

Alex is happy to return to The Questors after designing *Bouncers* (Studio, 2003), *Road* (Playhouse, 2004), and *Ringback* (Studio, 2004). Alex has enjoyed working on the odd theatre production whilst spending the past four years working in event production design throughout London. Recent work includes *The Merchant of Venice*, (KDC at Barons Court Theatre) and *Take Two* (Gatehouse, Highgate).

Ian Crawford – Composer/ Performer Original Music

From 2003 – 2006, Ian was Artistic

Director of Putney Arts Theatre where he has directed and produced many productions. As a composer, productions include *Arabian Nights*, *Grimm Tales*, *Treasure Island*, *Wild Tales* and *The Libertine*. As Musical Director, work includes *Honk!* and numerous revues. Sound design work includes *Our Country's Good*, *The Libertine*, *Tartuffe*, *An Ideal Husband* and *The Tempest*.

A Servant to Two Masters

1 – 8 March 2008

In the Playhouse

Like the best of farces, the plot is pure whipped cream.

The Caucasian Chalk Circle

8 – 15 March 2008

In the Studio

Brecht uses storytelling to explore deep themes.



The Questors Theatre

Art Exhibitions

Our regular art exhibitions offer a wonderful opportunity for local artists to display their work.

Please take time to have a look when visiting the theatre.

For details on upcoming exhibitions or on exhibiting your work, please contact Jane Mason in the Questors Office on 020 8567 0011.

The Railway Children

21 – 29 March 2008

In the Playhouse

A well loved family classic with serious messages at its core.