

Join Us

If you enjoy theatre, why not join us and benefit from membership:

- ✓ Half price personal tickets for Questors productions*
- ✓ Discounted Guest tickets when you bring friends to Questors productions*
- ✓ Children's FREE tickets†
- ✓ Opportunities to be actively involved in our productions
- ✓ Opportunity to audition to join our company of actors
- ✓ Exclusive or discounted training courses
- ✓ Access to *iQ* – the members-only website: members.questors.org.uk
- ✓ Access to exclusive news on *iQ* and email newsletter
- ✓ Receive the regular programme leaflet
- ✓ Membership of The Grapevine Club
- ✓ Special invitations, events and offers not available to the public
- ✓ Ticket reservation facility (conditions apply)
- ✓ Voting rights in the company

**Reduced prices exclude certain events. †Under 18, excludes certain events, maximum four per event. Must be collected at the performance and accompanied by the member.*

Getting the most from your membership

We have a wide range of opportunities for you to become actively involved front-of-house or backstage. Volunteer help is always needed for selling programmes or stewarding, and training is provided if you'd like to work in Box Office with our computerised system. To meet members in a social setting, volunteer to help behind the Grapevine bar. Backstage staff including stage managers, prop makers, set builders, sound and lighting designers and operators, painters, wardrobe and costume and set designers are always welcomed; whatever your skills, we'll find a place for you. We also have courses for those wishing to direct.

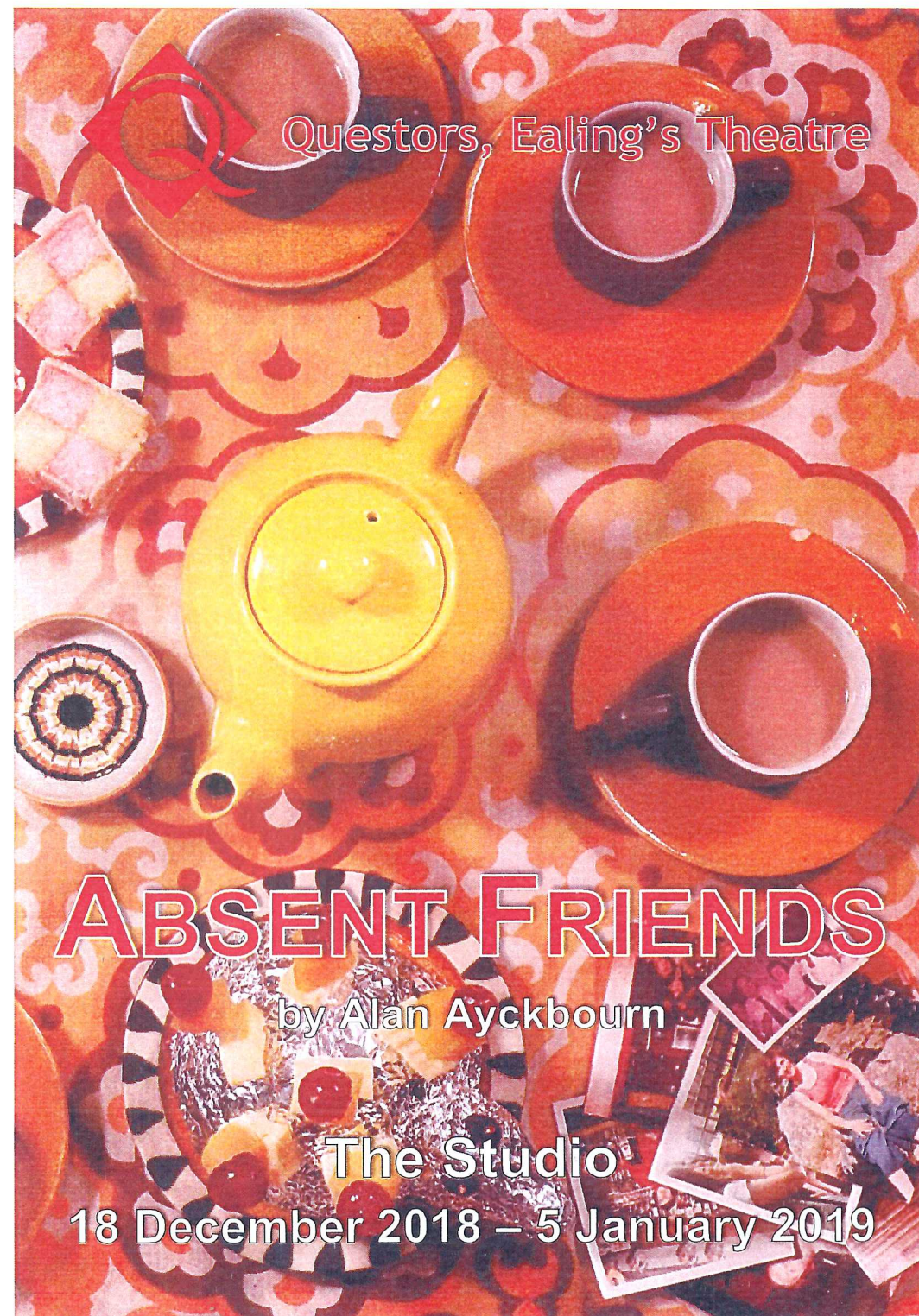
The Questors has a high standard of acting and, to maintain this, everyone wanting to act must first take an audition. These are held every month – call the Theatre Office for details of forthcoming auditions.

The Questors Youth Theatre – QYT

Our Youth Theatre, QYT, runs weekly drama classes for all ages from 6 to 18. Younger groups meet on Saturday mornings and older ages at weekday teatime. There's often a waiting list for membership, so put your name down now! Details are online at questors.org.uk/qyt.

The Questors Theatre
12 Mattock Lane, Ealing, W5 5BQ
Registered Charity No. 207516

Programme: Nigel Bamford
Cover Image: Simon Snashall
Theatre Office: 020 8567 0011
Box Office: 020 8567 5184
Email: enquiries@questors.org.uk



Fields at The Questors

Fields at The Questors serves Italian coffee, fine teas, hearty meals and handmade cakes, and is the perfect spot for a pre-theatre meal or intermission ice-cream.



Order interval drinks before the show to beat the crowds.

Regular opening hours:
Monday to Saturday,
9:00 am to 7:30 pm

Also open before and during the interval of all Judi Dench Playhouse evening and matinee performances.

Find **Fields** on **Facebook**.

The Grapevine Bar

The Grapevine is our friendly club bar open to Members and Friends of The Questors Theatre and their guests, as well as 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 2019 edition of The Good Beer Guide and we are **CAMRA West Middlesex Club of the Year**. A choice of at least three real ales is usually available, including Fuller's London Pride. 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 pm – 11:00 pm (10:30 pm close on Sundays)

Sunday lunchtime: midday – 2:30 pm

See questors.org.uk/grapevine for more details.

Fields and the Grapevine accept payments by card.



image: Peter Collins

ABSENT FRIENDS

by Alan Ayckbourn

The Studio

18 December 2018 – 5 January 2019

ABSENT FRIENDS

English is a tricky language to learn. Alongside Mandarin, Japanese and Finnish (who would've known?) it is reportedly one of the most difficult of the world's tongues to master. It is not so much the structure, the vocabulary, or even the sound of the English language that apparently makes it so demanding to learn, but more the fact it is crammed full of contradictions and complex conundrums.

Only in English, for example, would it rain cats and dogs, or would we ask one of our (recently plummeted) canine friends to pull themselves together and stop barking up the wrong tree. Throw in our small islands' tribal love for countless regional dialects – not to mention the weird science of *i* before *e* except after *c* – and Mandarin, Finnish or even Esperanto might seem an attractive alternative for a keen foreign language student.

The perplexing density, richness of imagery and indeed downright oddness of our small islands' language is something Sir Alan Ayckbourn always tackles with insatiable relish. He adores the puzzling challenge that this verbal cornucopia presents, and mischievously weaves it through his plays with passion, virtuosity and glee.

Ayckbourn's curiosity and respect for the unique strangeness of our mother tongue is such that, as a young child, he would sit under his dinner table at home and listen to his mother's conversations with her (curious and strange) family and friends. It was here, under the dining table and blissfully unaware of his passion for language, that he would first learn about our love for such things as idioms, homophones and ridiculously confusing phrasing; all of which he would later include in his 82 full-length plays. Not bad for a man who reaches his own octogenarian status in April next year.

It is the intimacy, authenticity and this skill of his listening that he playfully replicates in his dialogue, and which make his plays so utterly unique. In the same way an actor can read a Shakespearean monologue and know that it's clearly 'a bit of Shakespeare', read an Ayckbourn speech and you'll probably know it's 'a bit of Ayckbourn' too.

There is no better ear of our modern tongue (explain that to a foreign language student!), and there is no playwright who understands better the variants and vagaries of our ever-evolving English language.

Over half of his plays have been performed at The National Theatre, in Stratford, or in the West End. He is, no doubt, the UK's most prolific playwright.

Absent Friends, his 16th play, is the very first of his pure suburban tragicomedies – a style with which he has since become synonymous. It is a darkly hilarious and an uncomfortably enthralling piece. Richard Briers, who first played Colin in this play's premiere outing in 1974, referred to it as "appallingly

funny". I therefore hope, with reticence and trepidation, that you too are 'appalled' by tonight's entertainment!

But what can enthrall and appall in equal measure? What will make us cringe as well as making us cackle? Ayckbourn knew. Shattered dreams, adultery, the boredom of friendship, loveless marriages and unsatisfactory sex, just for a start!

In *Absent Friends*, Ayckbourn revels in his exploration of all of these depressing themes, and also takes aim at that oh-so-taboo subject – our very British inability to deal with, or even talk about, death. Or as the unforgiving character of Evelyn puts it, there's "Death, Death, Death!" and lots of it. This is a comedy, remember!

Most depressing of all however is the grim reality for the women of this play and the society they find themselves inhabiting in this slice of 1974 life. Sir Alan writes brilliantly for women. Unfortunately, society in 1974 did not treat them with the same due care and attention. The 1970s were a significant crossroads for British women. The 'new' woman (borne out of the social changes of the 1960s) was only just beginning to make her mark, and housewives, such as the characters of Diana and Marge, were still seen as the norm.

Some of Ayckbourn's plays are criticised for being dated but that is, in my view, a wholeheartedly wrong perception. His plays are period pieces and – as he always wanted them to be – should be set in the correct time for them to work as intended. This brings to the fore a consideration of when they were written, and how society (particularly in its treatment of women) has changed since.

When writing his trilogy of *The Norman Conquests*, Sir Alan realised there was a point in one of the plays where he needed "nothing significant to happen". He needed to pen a scene where no plot was developed, nothing meaningful occurred, and his characters just sat about talking. Ayckbourn was fearful of writing such a passage, and also worried about how it might be received by an action-needy audience. To a master craftsman of both comedy and drama like Sir Alan it felt like anathema, an unnatural challenge. However, once he had written and developed the scene, and once his talented actors had lovingly worked it, the reaction to it was phenomenal. Audiences loved both the underplayed reality and, dare I say, the Britishness of seeing people simply talking over our national drink – that elixir to treat all ills – a cup of tea. He realised how strong the concept was, and an idea for a play was born. And here we present it to you tonight.

Ayckbourn is a master listener and a master learner. Like his plays, he changes over time. He has learnt that you need to evolve in order to survive.

As you watch *Absent Friends*, please ask yourselves how much our society has changed, how much we have learned, and how much we ourselves have evolved from the mistakes of the past.

I hope you have fun watching. We've certainly had fun in bringing it to you.

'To Absent Friends...'

Simon Snashall, Director

ABSENT FRIENDS

by Alan Ayckbourn

First performance of this production at The Questors Theatre: 18 December 2018

CAST

in order of appearance

Evelyn	Clare Purdy
Diana	Nina Flitman
Marge	Ceri Jones
Paul	David Hovatter
John	James Burgess
Colin	Mark Redrup

The action takes place in a living room, suburbia,
Saturday 3:00 pm, 1974.

The performance lasts approximately 2 hours including a 15-minute interval.

Please turn off all mobile phones and similar electronic devices. The use of cameras, video cameras and recording equipment is strictly prohibited.
Thank you.

PRODUCTION

Director	Simon Snashall
Set Designer	Michelle Weaver
Costume Designer	Claire Malyon
Lighting Designer	Terry Mummery
Sound Designer	Martin Choules
Stage Manager	Sylvia Wall
Deputy Stage Manager	Amanda Blake
Assistant Stage Managers	Aylara Hadjimova, Dotti Lawson
Properties	Ian Black, Sue Collins, Geoffrey Moore, Jo Perse, Peter Salvietto
Prompter	Bridgett Strevens
Lighting Assistant	Andrew Whadcoat
Light and Sound Operators	Azaldean Mohamed, Tracy Wickens
Lighting Rigger	Chris Newall
Set Realisation Leads	Doug King, Rob Willin
Set Realisation Assistants	Bron Blake, Henry Broom, Mark Fitzgerald, Bernd Gauweiler, Phil Lindley
Photographer	Peter Collins
Videographers	Peter Gould, Gavin Jones
Thanks to	Lucy Aley-Parker, Owen Calvert-Lyons, Anne Neville, Erin Pearce, Tufik at Fields, Jon Webster and Studio House Services, Kall Kwik (Chiswick)

Biographies

James Burgess – John

James trained as an actor at Drama Studio London. His productions at The Questors include *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Six Bad Poets*, *Season's Greetings*, *The Country Wife*, *Measure for Measure*, *Titus Andronicus* and the Overnight Plays. Other theatre includes *Dido*, *Queen of Carthage*, *The Alchemist* (Rose Playhouse) and *Love's Labour's Lost* (touring).

Nina Flitman – Diana

Nina has been a member of The Questors since summer 2011, when she appeared as Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. Since then, she has played Vivie in *Mrs Warren's Profession*, Sylvia in *The Pride*, Jacqueline in *Don't Dress for Dinner*, Elena in *The Bear* and Lady Macbeth in the RSC OpenStages production of *Macbeth*.

David Hovatter – Paul

David has been with The Questors since the early 80s, but most recently he was in *Rabbit Hole*. Last year he directed *Diana of Dobson's*. He has written for the Overnight Plays since it first started, and has also contributed to the Questival since it began. Other acting roles have been in *The Village Bike*, *Burnt by the Sun*, *The Pride*, *Macbeth*, *After the End* and, years ago, *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Ceri Jones – Marge

Having had a gap of 15 years, Ceri returned to The Questors last year playing Mrs Eynsford-Hill in *Pygmalion* and Rachel in *Season's Greetings*, and earlier this year appeared in *Daisy Pulls It Off* as the Headmistress. Ceri appeared in several shows prior to this, notably Rita in *Educating Rita*, *D-minus* (a one woman show that toured to Edinburgh), Sheila in *Benefactors* and *Hello Paris*.

Clare Purdy – Evelyn

Absent Friends is Clare's Questors debut. Prior to moving to Ealing last year, she was a regular performer in several touring and resident groups in Devon. Recent roles she has performed include Desdemona in *Othello*, Viola in *Twelfth Night* and Holly in *Dominion*, an original touring production.

Mark Redrup – Colin

Mark has been acting for The Questors since 1990. Recent parts include Dinty in *Sleepers in the Field* (2018) and Doolittle in *Pygmalion* (2017). Previous Ayckbourn include Stafford in *Sisterly Feelings* (1991), Graham in *Time And Time Again* (2007) and John in our 2002 production of *Absent Friends*.

Martin Choules – Sound Designer

Martin has recently designed the sound for *Rabbit Hole*, *Animal Farm*, *Improbable Fiction*, *The Exonerated*, *Rhinoceros*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* and *NSFW*.

Claire Malyon – Costume Designer

This is Claire's final production for The Questors before leaving to study with the Northern College of Costume in 2019. It will be a hard thing to leave all the lovely and supportive actors/stage crew/box office ladies behind but I promise to visit! Hope you enjoy the horribly 70s costumes.

Terry Mummery – Lighting Designer

In the last few years, Terry has been exploring how projections can enhance the audience's experience of a production. Previous shows that he has been involved with as either projection designer or lighting designer (either solo or in collaboration) are *Krapp's Last Tape & Rockaby*, *Rabbit Hole*, *The Heiress*, *Multitudes* and *Not About Heroes*.

Simon Snashall – Director

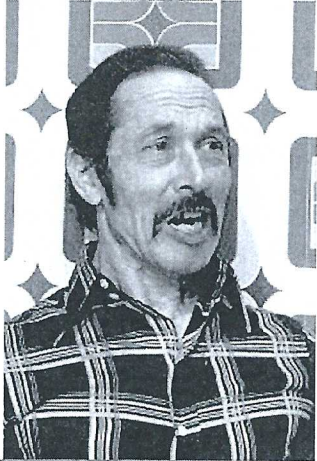
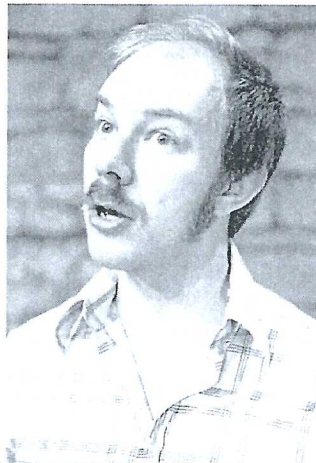
Simon trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School and started acting with the National Youth Theatre and then at The Questors; some may remember his Mozart in *Amadeus*. He is a professional actor and director, and has had nearly 20 years working in theatre here and abroad. TV credits include *Spooks*, *The Inspector Lynley Mysteries*, *The IT Crowd*, *Silent Witness* and most recently *Humans*. He assisted on 'The Dream' at the start of 2018. This is his first directing back at The Questors.

Michelle Weaver – Set Designer

A member of The Questors since 2003, Michelle has become one of our most active stage managers. She is also a member of the Board of Trustees. The set design for *Absent Friends* is her first foray into theatre design.

Meet the Company – Thursday 20 December

Come and meet the Director, Cast and Crew for an informal discussion in the Studio as soon as possible after the first Thursday performance.



The Questors – The Future

Help to make The Questors an even better place! Donations and bequests are continuing to contribute to the life of this unique theatre. For instance, a generous donation made possible a recent training programme for young ESOL students (English for Speakers of Other Languages), and ambitious work on the fabric of the site is ongoing. This is your theatre and the theatre of future generations of playgoers and participants. Donate now or in your will, anonymously if you prefer. Andrea Bath, our Executive Director (020 8567 0011), will answer any enquiries in confidence. Or go to questors.org.uk/giving to see ways in which you can support The Questors.

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Next at The Questors

THAT FACE

by Polly Stenham

25 January – 2 February 2019

The Studio

Martha's falling apart. Alcohol seems to help, and so do prescription drugs. Except when her 15-year-old daughter borrows them. Her son is her only hope of sanity, but he's only just 18 and has dropped everything to try and help her. And her rich ex-husband is flying in to sort everyone out... This is a story of one family's struggle with a crisis that is slowly spiralling out of control.

RUTHERFORD & SON

by Githa Sowerby

8 – 16 February 2019

The Judi Dench Playhouse

Rutherford's eldest son has a plan that might save the family's glass-making factory. Fading power, dashed hopes and family secrets take centre stage in this gripping portrayal of two generations of a northern family struggling with class, feminism and freedom. *Rutherford & Son* received huge acclaim when first staged in 1912 and has rightly claimed its place as a modern classic.