

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
Theatre Office: 020 8567 0011
Box Office: 020 8567 5184
Email: enquiries@questors.org.uk



The Questors
THEATRE



THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

by Oscar Wilde

The Judi Dench Playhouse

16 – 23 July 2022

Fields at The Questors

Fields at The Questors serves Italian coffee, fine teas, snacks and handmade cakes, and is the perfect spot for a pre-theatre café stop or interval ice-cream.



Place your interval order before the show to beat the crowds.

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 six 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 2022 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 (subject to change):

7:00 pm – 11:00 pm (Monday – Saturday)

Sunday lunchtime: 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm

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

Fields and the Grapevine accept payments by card.



image: Robert Vass

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

by Oscar Wilde

The Judi Dench Playhouse

16 – 23 July 2022

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

Within only three months, the darling of society who stood before an adoring audience on 14th February 1895 at the St James's Theatre became a convicted criminal. In five years he was dead.

Wilde's reputation has since been handed back to him by history and the ignominy of his last years has been transformed into a tragedy visited upon him by late Victorian prudery rather than the so-called deserved consequence of scandalous immorality.

The actuality is, of course, not so black-and-white. If not the definite architect of his own downfall, Wilde was at least supremely arrogant in his careless attitude to danger. *The Importance of Being Earnest* contains many hidden references to a private life that was teetering on the brink. Some of them are, perhaps, subconscious, some are coded and some simply expedient (such as the name Worthing, which is where Wilde and his lover, Lord Alfred Douglas, were staying when he wrote it).

Earnest is subtitled *A Trivial Comedy For Serious People* and, though this could simply be one more of the many inverted aphorisms that pepper the script, it is perhaps worth dwelling on whether it could be taken more literally. Wilde's greatest love affair had to remain hidden. The man who became an outcast and a pariah had, for most of his life, been venerated for what amounted to the clever party trick of being able to 'come up with a good line': the serious is trivial and the trivial is serious. Thus, Gwendolen and Cecily fall in love with a name and are quite prepared to abandon the actual person if that person transpires to be called something else.

Unsurprisingly – and certainly not uniquely – Wilde's own prejudices, likes and dislikes come through in his writing. You can see his horror of age, his adoration of youth and beauty and his delight at a neat phrase or clever joke. In his portrayal of the upper classes he gives us characters that are scheming, manipulative, vain, avaricious and mendacious; could this have been how he actually saw the people around him? It should always be remembered that Wilde, being an Irishman, was very much on the outside of English society, looking in.

It's likely Wilde was sacrificed in place of prime minister, Lord Rosebery who'd had an affair with Lord Alfred's older brother who had later committed suicide (this certainly accounts for the rabid attitude of the young men's father, the Marquis of Queensberry). However, in 1895, another way homosexuality threatened the social structure was by transcending the class barrier. In the play, Jack's inscribed cigarette case is similar to many Wilde gave to lower class male prostitutes. (Doing so, he flirted with blackmail and provided some of the evidence that was used against him at his trials.)

Whether he is thumbing his nose at danger, sharing a private joke with friends or nodding and winking to those in the know, Wilde seems to have taken an almost childish delight in smuggling gay references onto the West End stage. 'Earnest' itself and 'Cecily' were slang words for homosexuality; 'morbidity' (for which Bunbury is 'well-

punished' by his death) was a more widely used euphemism, as was 'social legislation', which referred to the move to change the laws regarding sex between men. The invented word, 'Bunburying' – Algernon's fictional invalid who is his excuse for escaping to the country – could easily be read as a euphemism for illegal sex of any kind or homosexuality specifically. It's tempting to read things into the line 'A man who marries without knowing Bunbury has a very tedious time of it.' Wilde's own 'Bunbury' was his work; his sexual adventures were protected by the excuse of needing peace and quiet to write, away from his wife and children. In the original, four-act version of the play, there is a character called Gribbsby, who arrives to arrest 'Ernest' for debt. The amount – £762 14s 2d – is what Wilde owed to the Savoy at the time of writing and it is indeed astounding to remember how blatantly he conducted his highly dangerous 'Bunburying' in such public and 'respectable' places.

Other lines, names and places reflect more prosaically the conditions under which the play was written. They are of interest to those seeking to link the trajectory of Wilde's disgrace to this, his most frivolous and apparently light-hearted work. For instance, the names of some of Lady Bracknell's social circle refer to actual people but, more interestingly, her name is arrived at from Lord Alfred's mother who came from Bracknell.

The missing act also refers to a book, *The Green Carnation*, about 'the culture of exotics'. The green carnation was a symbol of the aesthetic movement – young men who, as W.S. Gilbert put it, would 'walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in [their] mediaeval hand'. Wilde remains the most famous of these and is possibly the prototype of Bunthorne in *Patience*. Gilbert, in turn, provides possible inspiration for *Earnest*, both with his play *Engaged* and in the nonsensical plots of the Savoy operas (the lost baby is a very Gilbertian idea).

Incidentally, Sir George Alexander, the original producer, was responsible for the version of *Earnest* that is most often done and which we present tonight. It was Alexander who cut the extra act. Wilde objected.

'What does that matter?' Alexander said. 'You are clever enough to think of a hundred things just as good.'

'Of course I am,' Wilde replied. 'But that is not the point. This scene that you feel is superfluous cost me terrible, exhausting labour and heart-rending strain. You may not believe me, but I assure you that it must have taken fully five minutes to write.'

When he is told that 'Ernest' has expressed a desire to be buried in Paris, Chasuble fears 'that hardly points to any very serious state of mind at the last'.

Wilde died and is buried in Paris.

Earnest remains his most popular work because, unlike Miss Prism's three volume novel, it manages to avoid the earnest sentiment of his earlier plays. It is as hard, bright and sparkling as a diamond. It is seriously slight and slightly serious; we hope you enjoy it.

Richard Gallagher, Director

Some References

The Albany: Ernest Worthing's address on his calling cards was actually the home of George Ives, a friend of Wilde's and an activist for homosexual rights.

Anabaptists: a religious group that believes the only form of baptism should be complete immersion of the body in water.

Army Lists: published lists of commissioned officers in the British Army.

'As a man sows, so let him reap': a verse from the *Bible, Galatians 6:7*, meaning that actions determine fate.

Belgrave Square: another affluent London area in Belgravia.

The Brighton line: Victoria station served both the south coast, for the wealthy, and the south of London, mainly for poorer people. Jack is keen to point out that he was found at the more respectable platform.

Bunbury: the name of a school friend of Wilde's. Here, someone who deceives.

Canonical practice: church law.

Corrupt French Drama: possibly a reference to the plays of Alexander Dumas in the 1850s.

Court Guides: an annual reference manual listing the names and addresses of members of the upper class and aristocracy.

Divorce Court: before 1857, divorces could only be granted by Parliament at great expense, and they rarely happened. In 1857, Divorce Court was passed by Parliament, making divorce easier.

Egeria: chastity. Egeria, a nymph who gave wise laws to Numa Pompilius of Rome that were used for the vestal virgins.

The Empire: a theatre in Leicester Square, London.

Funds: government stocks that give a low yield of interest but are conservative and safe.

German scepticism: a German philosophy that examines style or appearance rather than substance.

Half Moon Street: a very fashionable street in London's West End; its location is handy to gentlemen's clubs, restaurants and theatres.

Liberal Unionist: a political group that voted against Home Rule for Ireland in 1886. Liberals were the conservative political group.

The Morning Post: a newspaper read by the upper class because of its reporting on engagements, marriages and social gossip.

Mudie: a lending library.

'... only eighteen': Cecily is the precise age to "come out" as a Society debutante. During the Season, eighteen-year-olds were introduced as marriage material for suitable men.

Oxonian: someone who graduated from Oxford University.

Pew-opener: a person who works for a church by opening the private pews of the wealthy.

The Primitive Church: the pre-Reformation Catholic Church, whose priest remained celibate.

The Railway Guide: an indispensable timetable of railway departures and arrivals, probably invented by Robert Diggles Kay in either 1838 or 1839.

Sent down: to act as a lady's escort for dinner.

Sententiously: full of, or fond of using, maxims, proverbs and so on, especially in a way that is ponderously trite and moralising.

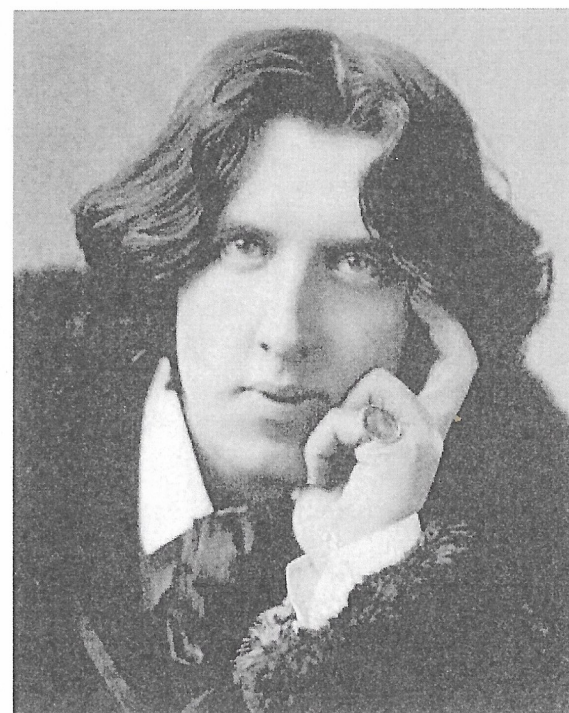
'Slight refreshment at five o'clock': known as light tea, served to people who visit at this time of day.

Temperance beverage: a drink that expressly does not contain alcohol.

Three-volume novels: lending libraries circulated novels in three parts so that three different readers could be reading at the same time. This practice ended in the late 1800s.

University Extension Scheme: the University of London began these extension courses that were early developments in adult education.

Womanthrope: a humorous word made up by Miss Prism for a person who hates women.



QUESTORS STUDENT GROUP 74 PRESENTS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST

by Oscar Wilde

First performance of this production at The Questors Theatre: 16 July 2022

CAST

in order of appearance

Lane	Django Bevan
Algernon Moncrieff	Brendan Conlan
John Worthing	Joshua Perry
Lady Bracknell	Lily Baker
Gwendolen Fairfax	Marie Maillot
Miss Prism	Nicola Littlewood
Cecily Cardew	Aleksandra Cedro
Merriman	Django Bevan
Rev. Canon Chasuble	Wesley Lloyd

Act One: Algernon's flat in Half Moon Street, London

Act Two: The garden at the Manor House, Woolton, Hertfordshire

Act Three: The morning room at the Manor House

The production lasts for approximately two and a half hours, including two intervals, one of fifteen minutes and one of ten minutes.

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

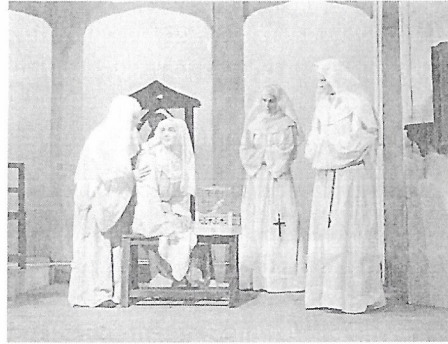
Director	Richard Gallagher
Associate Director	Maria Gebhardt
Set Designer	Charles Dixon
Costume Designers	Ladies: Jane Arnold-Forster, Jayne Bilson, Jane Higginson, Karen Latimer; Gentlemen: Sarah Andrews
Lighting Designer	Roisin Tierney
Lighting Associate	Tim Hayward
Sound Designer	Martin Choules
Stage Manager	Hasti Rezvan
Deputy Stage Manager	Robert Eagle
Stage Management Support	Michelle Weaver
Assistant Stage Managers	Chris Benson, Bron Blake, India Fisher, Emmanuel Hardy, Emily Hawley, Jenny Richardson
Properties	Joanna Mludzinska
Administrator and Pooh-Bah	Dotti Lawson
Lighting and Sound Operator	Evelina Plonytė
Lighting Riggers	John Green, Terry Mummery
Set Constructors / Painters	Laurie Barth, Lucas Calvert, Maxwell Calvert, Chris Carty, Johnny Cooper, Martin Dixon, Vian Dixon, India Fisher, Cecily Johnson, Ruhan Malik, Rick Myrtle
Set Décor	Ian Black
Photo / Videographer	Robert Vass

Thanks to: **River Apparicio, Katherine Armstrong, Toby Burbidge, CJ, John Dobson, Carla Evans, Phil Gossan, Nigel Glasgow, Shaan Latif-Shaikh, Nicola Maddox, Alex Marker, Harriet Parsonage, Arshiya Safarinejad, Maggie Turner, Argosy Players (Ruislip) and anyone else we've missed**

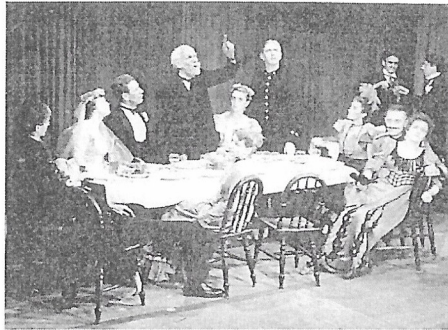
75 Years of the Student Group



1947 – Cranford



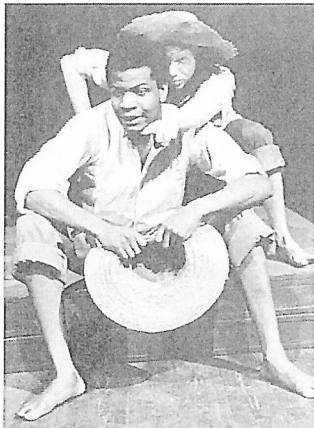
1947 – Cradle Song



1957 – The Wedding



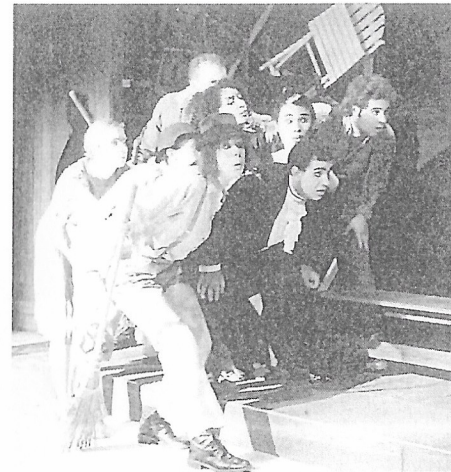
1967 – The Crucible



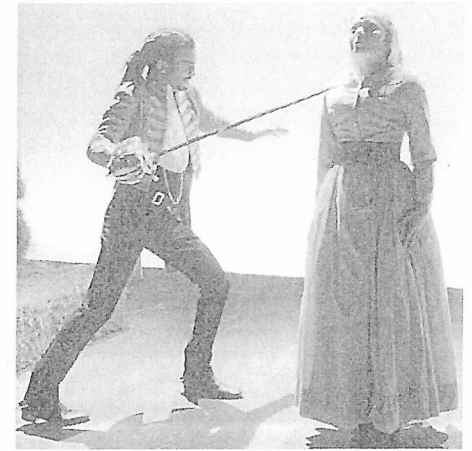
1977 – The Mark Twain Show



2001 – The Government Inspector



2007 – The Visit



2009 – Far from the Madding Crowd



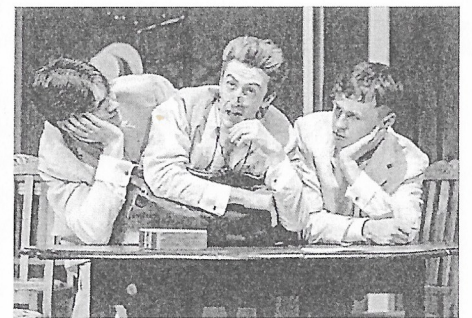
2014 – The Balcony



2017 – Love's Labour's Lost



2017 – Trelawny of the 'Wells'



2019 – Charley's Aunt

Biographies



Lily Baker – *Lady Bracknell*

Lily is twenty-five but is never quite accurate about her age: she considers it so calculating. She grew up in Birmingham where she did youth theatre for six years. She appeared in the premiere of Claire Dowie's *Arsehammers*. She studied English literature at Queen Mary University, London. Her skills include playing the trumpet, ice skating and close-up magic. In *Loveplay*, Group 74's first production, she appeared as Woman, Roxanne, Flynn and Rita. Lily now lives on a narrowboat and is currently seeking representation.



Django Bevan – *Lane / Merriman*

The Importance of Being Earnest will be Django's first production at The Questors or anywhere. He has been a member of Student Group 75 for the past year and will be leaving in September to attend drama school at Mountview.



Aleksandra Cedro – *Cecily Cardew*

Before moving to London in 2017, Aleksandra was studying and living in Poland. At the age of thirteen, she took her first professional theatre steps in local city theatre. While living in the Polish capital of Warsaw, she took roles in various TV drama series over several episodes. As an acting student at The Questors, she took part in *George Orwell's 1984* in 2019 as ASM and a Party Member. In *Loveplay*, she appeared as Hilda, Marianne, Joy and Anita.



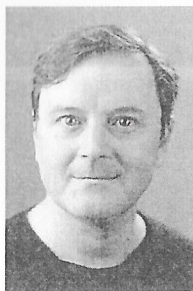
Brendan Conlan – *Algernon Moncrieff*

Brendan has acted in school plays, including *Dad's Army*, as well as writing sketch comedy. He read philosophy at Leeds University and is a keen guitar player. He played Marcus, Deric, Trevelyn, Man, De Vere and Quinn in *Loveplay* earlier this year.



Nicola Littlewood – *Miss Prism*

Nicola was an AFA and Encore student from 2015 to 2016. She performed two public showcases and was acting ASM for *Twelfth Night* in 2016. That was also the year she became an acting member. Her first role was a year later, as Ramia in *Galatea*. More recently, she played Lady Caroline in *Dear Brutus* (2021/22). She performed in the Slack Captains' improvised show *No Script, No Problem 2*, the Power Play *Four Stars* and the 2022 Overnight Plays.



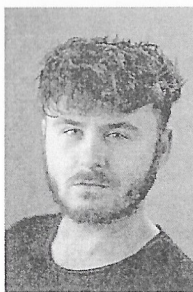
Wesley Lloyd – *Rev. Canon Chasuble*

Wesley graduated from Student Group 62 in 2009. He has since been in numerous shows at The Questors, the last being as Syme in *George Orwell's 1984* in 2019. He last guested for Student Group 67 as Edwards in *Blue Stockings*. Wesley will be seen at The Questors as Octavius Caesar in the Etheric Players production of *Antony and Cleopatra* in the Studio next May. He also works in films and TV.



Marie Maillot – *Gwendolen Fairfax*

Marie was born and raised in Brittany, France. Since the age of fourteen, she has taken part in a multitude of shows with styles ranging from puppeteering and improvisation to panto. Marie moved to London in 2017 in order to become an actress. She joined The Questors Academy in 2019 and is looking forward to her second performance with Group 74 since playing Gilda, Helen, Miss Tilly and Brigitta in *Loveplay*.



Joshua Perry – *John Worthing*

Josh has been a member of The Questors since 2017 and went on to graduate with Student Group 72, with which he starred in *Future Conditional* and *Charley's Aunt*. Other Questors credits include *Days of Significance*, *Bull*, *Dear Brutus* and *Loveplay*, as well as a Questival and Overnight Plays. He is thrilled to be in *The Importance of Being Earnest* and is hoping to take part in many future productions at The Questors.

Richard Gallagher – Director

Richard trained at Manchester Polytechnic School of Theatre. At The Questors, his last 'full time' acting appearances, some years ago now, were as Lady Bracknell in Francis Lloyd's production of *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 2009 and as Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. More recently, he appeared as Clarence in *All Joy of the Worm* in honour of Shakespeare's 400th anniversary, and in the Errors of Comedy production of Martin Choules' *Being for the Benefit of Mr Kite*. He has been tutor/director for the second year student group since Group 64. Also for The Questors, he wrote the 2013 pantomime *Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp*.

Maria Gebhardt – Associate Director

After graduating Student Group 71, Maria continued to appear on the Questors stage. Over the years, Maria has turned to directing and producing. She's worked in both theatre and film, amateur and professional, including *You Have Absolutely No Sense of Time* at the Camden Fringe and *It Was Funny the First Time* (nominated for the Pinewood Lift-Off Sessions). Maria is very excited to be able to direct her favourite Oscar Wilde play for a second time.

Hasti Rezvan – Stage Manager

Hasti joined The Questors as a youth theatre member about seven years ago. Since then, she has worked as an ASM on various productions, including *The Dog and the Scarf*, *Ariadne and the Monsters* and *Bard in the Yard*. She was DSM on *Loveplay* and operated the lights for *India Gate*. Hasti learnt dance for three years, contemporary, ballroom and jazz, and also taught Questors Youth Theatre for a term.

Martin Choules – Sound Designer

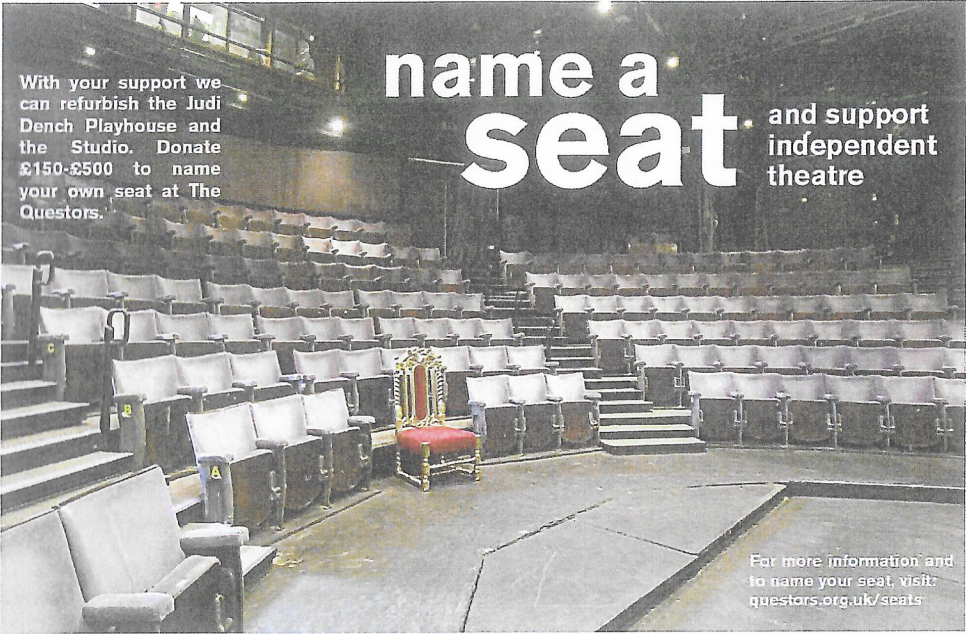
Martin has recently designed the sound for *Loveplay*, *Dear Brutus*, *Strange Orchestra*, *Fault Lines*, *Future Conditional*, *Absent Friends*, *Rabbit Hole*, *Animal Farm*, *Improbable Fiction*, *The Exonerated*, *Rhinoceros*, *Fear and Misery of the Third Reich* and *NSFW*.

Charles Dixon – Set Designer

Charles has had much experience in the Questors workshop over the last three years, but this set is the first he has fully planned, managed, built and perfected as a fully-fledged set designer. Whilst working on *The Importance of Being Earnest*, which has been fraught with challenges, Charles has been simultaneously taking exams for Maths A-Level, one year early. He learned so much from this process and is grateful for this amazing opportunity.

Roisin Tierney – Lighting Designer

Roisin joined The Questors in 2016 and has worked backstage in a variety of roles including lighting assistant, assistant stage manager and set painter. Roisin is particularly interested in lighting and animation and most recently designed some of the animations for the production of *George Orwell's 1984* to celebrate The Questors' 90th anniversary. This is her first time designing the lighting for a show.



Questors Student Group Tutors

- Director of Studies and First Year Tutor **David Emmet**
- Second Year Tutor **Richard Gallagher**
- Voice Teacher **Adam Ganne**
- Movement and Physical Theatre Teacher **Duncan Aldridge**

Show Feedback Form

Your thoughts and opinions are important to us. Please scan the QR code with your phone camera to fill out our anonymous show feedback form. This is so we can continually improve our audience experience and our productions. Thank you so much for coming to visit The Questors Theatre. We hope that you enjoyed the show.

