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Questories

An Interview with James Saunders

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EXPOSED IN THE GRAPEVINE

An exclusive interview with James Saunders

For this issue of QUESTOPICS we asked Bill Wall to write about our next production **A Scent of Flowers**. His material was obtained by interviewing both **James Saunders** and **Peter Jefferies** (together) in The Grapevine. We are printing as much of the article that resulted as space will permit.

With the gracious tolerance common to all Englishmen dealing with an imbecile, **James Saunders** and **Peter Jefferies** answered all the uninspired questions I directed at them during our interview.



Audrey and James Saunders

The point of the interview was to fill in the background of the forthcoming production of Jimmy's play, **A Scent of Flowers**, first performed at the Duke of York's theatre in September, 1964. The play was directed then by **Shirley Butler**, a member of Questors, who directed Jimmy's previous success **Next Time I'll Sing to You**, both at its premiere at Questors and on its subsequent run in the West End. Incidentally, **Next Time I'll Sing to You** is to open in Paris during October, the first play of Jimmy's to be produced in France. This play was received very enthusiastically during its runs in Germany and Holland, and, of course, London.

When I asked Jimmy why he thought his work was, if anything, more popular on the Continent than here, he suggested that a combination of the heavily subsidised rep. theatre network in Germany, the shortage of good new playwrights, and the more catholic tastes of the audiences were responsible. This all may be so, but he characteristically omitted the salient reason that **A Scent of Flowers** is a very fine play.

Jimmy's earlier plays were delightful one-acters and older Questor members will remember **Barnstable** and **Double-Double**. These two found their way to somewhat larger audiences when they were televised.

Television is a medium for which Jimmy has recently written specifically. His adaptations of D.H. Lawrence's short stories done recently on ITV broke my vows of viewing continence. He told me that he enjoyed doing the adaptations as the stories had so much depth, and he was not compelled to get over a certain fixed idea.

Jimmy has not always worked as a professional writer. At one time he taught science. I suggested that there was no trace of a scientist's way of looking at things in his writing. He agreed by saying that nothing of this influence comes into his plays as he thinks the feeling for logic never works outside the laboratory.

Plays have not always been his writing medium, for in his earlier days he wrote short stories and a novel. It will be of more than some interest to literary analysts to know that he wrote his plays more with publication than performance in mind.

His typical working day starts at 9am, finishes for lunch at 1pm, starts again at 4.30pm and goes on until 7.30 in the evening. So much for the popular image of writers leaping from their midnight beds to smack the creative urge down on paper. Changes, if any, in the writing usually occur during the first reading by the cast. Quite a lot of the first act of **A Scent of Flowers** was rewritten during its rehearsal period. He has just finished a new full length play which he states, rather enigmatically, is still 'going through the mill'.

James Saunders' ambition is to write a play which he will think is a very good one two years later. He must be alone in thinking that he hasn't written one yet.

Bill Wall
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