

PROSCENIUM

The Winslow Boy

By Terence Rattigan

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Wednesday 2nd April to Saturday 5th April 2008
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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CAST:

Ronnie Winslow	Eddie Sykes
Violet	Anne Gerrard
Grace Winslow	Evelyn Moutrie
Arthur Winslow	David Pearson
Catherine Winslow	Lynette Shanbury
Dickie Winslow	Richard Jago
John Watherstone	Mark Sutherland
Desmond Curry	Charles Anthony
Miss Barnes	Sheila Harvey
Fred	Colin Hickman
Sir Robert Morton	Michael Williams
Directed by	Crystal Anthony
Stage Manager	Izzie Cartwright
Assisted by	Kathleen Jones Colin Hickman
Lighting & Sound	Compass Theatre
Costumes	Evelyn Moutrie Anne Gerrard

The action of the play takes place in Arthur Winslow's house in Kensington, London, and extends over a period of two years preceding the war of 1914-1918.

Act 1, Scene 1. A Sunday morning in July.

Act 1, Scene 2. An afternoon in April, nine months later.

Act 2, Scene 1. An evening in January, nine months later.

Act 2, Scene 2. An afternoon in June, five months later.

With thanks to East Lane Theatre Company, Rickmansworth Players, Questors and Good Companions for help with this production.

THE PLAYWRIGHT

Terence Rattigan had a secure, comfortable, Edwardian middle class family background. Both his grandfathers were barristers and his father, Frank, was a diplomat. However, in spite of the undoubted social status, the Rattigans were not particularly wealthy and believed firmly in the sons being self-reliant. Terence was never as well off as most of his peers at prep school, Harrow and Oxford.

From an early age Terence was fascinated by the theatre, announcing at the age of seven that he was going to be a playwright: he spent his pocket money on going to the theatre and reading plays and would entertain everyone by reciting names, dates and places connected with the most obscure productions. When his father was forced into early retirement, he tried to impose all his frustrated ambitions onto Terence, wanting him to follow in his footsteps and become a diplomat and sportsman.

However Terence had begun to write and mix with the theatre set at Oxford and managed to persuade his father to give him time to develop his talent and to grant him £200 a year for two years. If he had not made a success of writing by then he agreed to enter a more secure profession.

French Without Tears ensured his artistic and financial success and by 1942, when *Flare Path* was produced, a critic declared: 'his was the acceptable voice of protest that would not embarrass or annoy those who dictated what was politically or artistically acceptable.'

At one point in the late 1940s/early 1950s Rattigan's popularity with audiences was such that his plays occupied three adjoining theatres in Shaftesbury Avenue for almost three years. He believed in craftsmanship and structure in play writing and championed the 'theatre of character' over the 'theatre of ideas'. But in 1956 the success of *Look Back in Anger* changed the face of the theatre and Rattigan seemed increasingly middle-class, conventional and out-dated.

Indeed when Osborne was challenged on the vulgarity of his play he responded, 'Look, Ma, I'm not Terence Rattigan.'

It was unfortunate that the decline in his popularity led to the failure of his 1957 play *Variations on a Theme*, which was the first time that he openly and honestly addressed the issue of his homosexuality.

Out of touch with the Britain of the sixties he left and set up home in Bermuda, but there was a revival of interest in his plays in the seventies. Harold Pinter, who met him in the late 1950s, is an admirer: 'He wasn't at all pretentious. He had real charm and was suffering from the way he had been treated. It was fashion and spite that saw him booted about ... driven by envy. He had a great respect for the craft of writing. He was very skilful, very entertaining and very shrewd about human nature. He wasn't a safe playwright at all but very adventurous.'

CAREER

- 1911 Born in 100, Cornwall Gardens, Wimbledon.
- 1925 Entered Harrow on a scholarship.
- 1929 Played cricket for Harrow against Eton at Lords – 'the happiest year of my life'.
- 1930 Trinity College, Oxford.
- 1933 His first play *First Episode* opened at the Q Theatre.
- 1935 Worked with John Gielgud on adaptation of *Tale of Two Cities*.
- 1936 *French Without Tears* opened at the Criterion: 'gay, witty, thoroughly contemporary without being unpleasantly modern.'
- 1940 Served in the RAF.
- 1942 *Flare Path* opened at the Apollo.
- 1944 Collaborated with Asquith on film *The Way to the Stars*.
- 1946 *The Winslow Boy* won the Ellen Terry Best Play award.
- 1947 Wrote screenplay for *Brighton Rock*.
- 1947 *The Browning Version* won Ellen Terry Best Play award.
- 1948 Anthony Asquith's film of *The Winslow Boy*.
- 1952 *The Deep Blue Sea*.
- 1954 *Separate Tables*.
- 1957 *Variations on a Theme*.
- 1960 *Joie de Vivre* opened and closed after four days.
- 1964 Rented a house in Bermuda.
- 1971 Knighted in the Queen's Birthday Honours.
- 1975 Wrote a play for radio *Cause Celebre* – a great success.
- 1976 *Cause Celebre* opens at Her Majesty's Theatre. Rattigan seriously ill.
- 1977 Died at his home in Bermuda.

THE ARCHER-SHEE CASE

In 1908 George Archer-Shee, a thirteen year old cadet at Osborne Naval College, was charged with stealing a five shilling postal order from one of his classmates. His father, Martin, a wealthy, upper-middle-class Bristol banker, refused to accept his son's guilt and through the services of his elder son, major Martin Archer-Shee, secured the services of one of England's greatest barristers, Sir Edward Carson.

At fifty-four, Carson was at the peak of a brilliant career. Although philosophically a conservative and staunch Unionist, he was a dedicated opponent of bullying, especially when the powerful sought to intimidate the weak. He agreed to take up the case after closely questioning young George Archer-Shee for three hours about the details of the case and finding him trustworthy – and he took only a nominal fee. It took two years to vindicate the young boy but Carson eventually forced a reluctant government to admit his client's innocence and pay an indemnity of £120, a large sum in 1910.

There was enormous public interest in the press reports of the trial. The idea of a young boy wrongly accused of stealing and dismissed from his school without due process shocked the public, and they particularly admired his father's determination to defend his son.

THE PLAY

“Let Right Be Done”

Rattigan said that he had been fascinated by the case for sometime as an example of injustice that had considerable dramatic possibilities. In July 1945 he took the case from the 'store room of his mind' and began to write *The Winslow Boy*. He made a number of changes in the details of the case in order to sharpen the dramatic and moral conflicts involved.

Firstly he moved the play from 1908-10 to 1912-14. This preserved

the Edwardian setting, a period which many of the middle class theatre going audience of the 1940s looked back on with a certain nostalgia, but also made the audience aware of the Great War which was to threaten and destroy its security and stability.

The Archer-Shees were an affluent Catholic family, whereas the Winslows are a conventional, Anglican family, seen at the beginning of the play returning from church and discussing the sermon. They are only of modest financial means, so the the strains of financing the case to a degree threaten the harmony of their family life.

George Archer-Shee's elder brother was, in fact, 35 years old and a Conservative MP and provided considerable support to his father. Rattigan made Dickie a rather feckless, 19 year old Oxford undergraduate. This serves to increase Ronnie's sense of isolation and to focus the audience's attention on the father. It is Arthur Winslow's stubborn conviction of his son's innocence and his determination to see right and justice done which is at the moral centre of the play.

He transforms Ronnie's sister, Catherine, from a conventional Tory young lady into a radical and a suffragette. This gives her the independence and the strength of character to be a firm support to her father and provides an added dramatic conflict and frisson with the conservative barrister.

Sir Robert Morton is clearly modelled on Carson and has all of his relentlessness, self-confidence and ability to make a powerful emotional appeal. Rattigan chooses not to show the courtroom, however, in order to focus the drama on what the case did to the family.

Our Next Production

The Killing Of Sister George

By Frank Marcus

Sister George is a beloved character in the popular BBC radio soap opera Applehurst , a hymn-singing district nurse who rides around on her moped bringing health, advice and good-cheer to the villagers. However, a struggle for ratings and reports of notoriety in the personal life of June Buckridge, the actress who plays George, result in the BBC's decision to kill her off. The play reveals the effect this has on both her personal and professional life involving her young flat-mate Childie McNaught and Mercy Croft, the BBC executive responsible for the programme, both of whom have their own interests at heart.

Directed by Sheila Harvey

Wednesday 18th June to Saturday 21st June 2008

About Proscenium

George Woollands and Margaret Rendle founded Proscenium in 1924.

The company's first production was the now little-known "The Tide" by Basil McDonald Hastings. Since then, the company has performed nearly 250 plays, using Harrow as a base since 1945.

In this time Proscenium has built up a strong reputation for performing challenging plays (both classic and contemporary) to a high standard.

For more information on Proscenium, and to join our mailing list, please visit our web site :

<http://www.proscenium.org.uk>

**This season is dedicated
to the memory of
Roderick Jones (1931-2007)**

Contact us at:

www.proscenium.org.uk

Chairman

DUNCAN SYKES

Artistic Director

MARK SUTHERLAND

Secretary

SHIRLEY WOOTTEN

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