

**PROSCENIUM**

# **Woman in Mind**

By Alan Ayckbourn

Woman in Mind

Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> October to Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2019  
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

# Woman in Mind

Alan Ayckbourn

## The Cast

Susan.....	Izzie Cartwright
Bill.....	Mark Sutherland
Andy.....	Paul Davis
Tony.....	Charles Anthony
Gerald.....	Neville Price
Muriel.....	Hannah Lester
Rick.....	Jamie Richards
Lucy.....	Jenny O'Connor
Directed by.....	Shirley Wootten
Stage Manager.....	Crystal Anthony
Assistant Stage Manager.....	Angie Sutherland Janet Harrison
Costumes.....	Angela Evans Anne Gerrard Crystal Anthony
Soundtrack.....	Charles Anthony
Lighting and Sound Operation.....	Richard Kessel

The action takes place in a garden

Act 1- A summer's day

**Interval (15 minutes)**

Act 2 - A moment later

Our thanks to Zena Wigram, Jenny Glover,  
Mike and Bonnie Joyce, Keith Cochrane

# Alan Ayckbourn

Sir Alan Ayckbourn was born in London in 1939, and has worked in theatre all his life. 2019 marks his 60th anniversary as a playwright. He has undertaken various roles including actor, writer and director, encouraged by his mentor Stephen Joseph, who founded the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough. Almost all of his plays to date have been first performed at this theatre, of which he was Artistic Director until his retirement in 2009, and many subsequently produced in the West End or at the National Theatre.

A prolific writer of comedy plays satirising middle-class manners, he is considered one of the world's pre-eminent dramatists. His first West End hit, *Relatively Speaking*, opened in 1967, and major plays since have included *Absurd Person Singular* (1974); *The Norman Conquests* (1975); *Bedroom Farce* (1977); *Just Between Ourselves* (1978); *A Chorus Of Disapproval* (1985); *Woman In Mind* (1986); *A Small Family Business* (1987); *Man Of The Moment* (1990); *Things We Do For Love* (1998); *Comic Potential* (1999); *Private Fears in Public Places* (2004) and *Roundelay* (2014). He has won numerous awards for his plays, which have been translated into 35 languages, and are performed worldwide on stage and television. Seven of his plays have been performed on Broadway.

Sir Alan Ayckbourn also writes plays for children and young people. These include *Mr. A's Amazing Maze Plays* (1989), *Invisible Friends* (1991) and *The Boy Who Fell Into A Book* (2000). *Gizmo* (1999) was written for the British Telecom National Connections project, organised by the Royal National Theatre involving young people nationwide. Also an accomplished director of his own and other plays, works he has directed include *A View From The Bridge*, starring Michael Gambon, and the USA premiere of his and Andrew Lloyd Weber's musical, *By Jeeves*.

Sir Alan Ayckbourn has received many honorary degrees, is Freeman of the Borough of Scarborough, was appointed CBE in 1987 and knighted for his services to theatre in 1997. His most recent play is *Birthdays Past, Birthdays Present* (2019).

# Michael Billington on Woman in Mind

[*Woman in Mind*] was partly inspired by Oliver Sacks's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*. It has parallels with Pinter's *A Kind of Alaska*, also prompted by Sacks, in its empathetic portrait of female isolation. But Ayckbourn goes even further in depicting, with astringent wit, society's failure to cope with mental distress. There is a hint of RD Laing in the idea that the nuclear family is itself a cause of madness. Religion, in the shape of quaintly curatorial Anglicanism or self-absorbed spiritualism, is hopelessly ineffectual. Even Susan's GP is a well-meaning twit who patronises her by entertaining her imagined family with rabbits made out of handkerchiefs.

The key thing about Ayckbourn, however, is that he shows rather than tells. In Susan, he creates one of the great female roles in modern drama [...] Disgruntled and hostile with her husband, visibly suggesting that his writing is a form of self-abuse, she acquires a frantic gaiety in the presence of her romanticised family. Above all, she conveys the profound solitude of a woman suffering her own form of agony in the garden. The play's laughter [...] as so often in Ayckbourn, is flecked with pain.

*Michael Billington, The Guardian, February 9<sup>th</sup> 2009*  
(Review of Vaudeville Theatre production)

## Three Actors on Ayckbourn

### Penelope Wilton

People recognise themselves in Alan's plays. He understands the British and the middle classes' pomposity and vulnerability, the way they try to keep up appearances. His plays don't do great big emotions, but he writes about the small things that can change a life.

I first worked with him on *The Norman Conquests* in 1974. Like all his plays, it started in Scarborough. The producer figured three plays wouldn't work in the West End – they all have their own story, but they show a single weekend in different rooms of a country house. So we did it in Greenwich with a wonderful cast: Michael Gambon, Penelope Keith, Felicity Kendal. One day someone literally rolled in the aisles. A man fell out of his seat because he knew what was happening in the other rooms in the other plays. It's a wonderful thing to hear laughter that's uncontrollable. Alan's plays always seem much more serious on television. They're best watched with

other people. He's made British theatre a much livelier place. He's always doing interesting things with time on stage – I did *Sisterly Feelings* and that's two plays in one. He understands isolation particularly well. Look at *Woman in Mind*, where you're watching a woman having a nervous breakdown. He notices people that aren't being noticed.

I come from Scarborough, and I'd say the Stephen Joseph theatre there has been one of his greatest successes. He kept it going for years. Scarborough's busy in the summer, but most of the year it's not and he's brought such a lot of wonderful work – not just his own – to that part of the world. He never stops.

## **Ben Miles**

I came to star in *The Norman Conquests* at the Old Vic in 2008 not knowing much about Alan's work, other than he was considered one of the greats. I'd misconceived them as light comedies, but was blown away by the depth of the writing. It seemed to me like an English Chekhov: nothing happening in a rural country house. When you lift the lid, it's total chaos: spiritual, psychological, emotional. There's huge tragedy but it's achingly funny. He gets English anxiety so perfectly and portrays it with such humanity and humour, it's agony. That's the key to *The Norman Conquests*. If you ignore the agony, you dilute the comedy... We were all worried it wouldn't work on Broadway. "No one's going to know where the A218 is or what Guildford even is. Surely, no one's going to care about Sugar Puffs." But it went down incredibly well. There's a huge Ayckbourn fanbase in New York. I'm doing *The Lehman Trilogy* here now and people have come up to me saying *The Norman Conquests* was one of the best times they've had in a theatre. They loved seeing this chaotic little England. Ayckbourn ranks very highly in the anglophile's handbook out here – up there with Shakespeare, Monty Python and Fawlty Towers.

## **Nina Sosanya**

Alan Ayckbourn was the last thing I expected to do. I'd trained as a dancer and his plays didn't seem to have space for somebody like me. They were about middle England – the irony being I'm from middle England. To be honest, I had an opinion of him even though I'd never seen or read his plays, so I had no idea what they really entailed. How dark and profound and how funny they can be. Just auditioning for *House and Garden* changed that. The character – Pearl – made sense to me straight away. Alan sat there chuckling. It was very satisfying.

The two plays were staged simultaneously in 2000, directed by Alan, at the National Theatre – *House* in the Lyttelton, *Garden* in the Olivier next door. We had two rehearsal rooms and someone had taped out a track to match the distance between the

two theatres. You left one rehearsal room, weaved through the building, past the dressing rooms, before you arrived at the rehearsal room next door. That was hilarious in itself...Really, his England is no different from anywhere else. It's a microcosm for examining human interactions such as love and betrayal, trust and friendship. *House and Garden* is absolutely not about a country fete. It's a shame we don't see more Ayckbourn today. There's almost a feeling it's too of its time. Too establishment, too middle-class, too white. I wish they were marketed a bit differently. He's due a renaissance because, well, he's a master.

*The Guardian, April 12th 2019  
(marking Ayckbourn's 80th birthday)*

## Portrait of a Marriage

To the suburban house you return again  
with a new hat and the stammering discourse  
of mild rebellion. You dare not entertain  
questions like – can I start again? Seek divorce?  
Because now, middle-aged, you would gain  
nothing but insecurity and remorse,  
all the might-have-beens crying in the brain.

It was false even before the first caress  
but how you strove to make it true,  
fouling silence, talking louder to suppress  
the lie that somehow grew and grew,  
as you hid each new distress  
behind the photograph of the smile and you  
less than radiant in your wedding dress.

And, in the stabbed evenings, when the sun  
died, by appointment, in its Joseph's coat  
you asked help from anyone  
whose million edition pen could write  
romantic novels to overcome  
the truth of all the lonely all about,  
the taste of nothing on your tongue.

Now, one year's gone since your clumsy honeymoon  
and he talks to you behind an unlocked door;  
again your artificial smile alone  
floats between the ceiling and the floor  
like some quiet heartbreak, almost to condone  
what, after all, others too must slow endure,  
the clock, the unhappiness, the civilized bore.

*Dannie Abse  
Extract, Selected Poems, 1994*

# Ayckbourn's "Incomprehensible" Lines

## Bill

Ah! Score ache

Wo! Won't spider slit up pikelet...

Skater baby

Score grounds appeal cumquat doggy  
Martha had sick on the bed...

Squeezy, cow, squeezy...

Saul bite. Saul bite

Octer bin sir. Climb octer bin sir.

Mrs sure pardon choose 'un.

Pea squeak jinglish. Pie squeaking jinglish  
cow

## Susan

... I grow hugh, summer few bald teddy  
know these two wonderful children, Lucy  
and Rick. I cannot tell you how heaply  
cowed siam.

Tinny beers a show. High december how  
rotten high trade fat haywood throw twig  
and throng hike hair share rents. Pie lank  
hod hat day lid! Hens, hang few saw paw  
up-short. Hang few. Hang few,  
hens, sizzle pie tart insole.

Grey ice way chew...? Grey ice way...?

Hair growing, hens? Goosey?

Gandy? Chair old? Hair shone?

Tone show, fleas. Fleas, tone show.

December bee? Choose 'un?

*Ah! You're awake*

*No! Don't try to sit up quite yet*

*Later maybe*

*You're bound to feel somewhat groggy  
after that hit on the head...*

*Easy, now, easy...*

*It's all right. It's all right.*

*Doctor Windsor. I'm Doctor Windsor.*

*This is your garden, Susan*

*We speak English. I'm speaking English  
now*

*... I know you, some of you already  
know these two wonderful children, Lucy  
and Rick. I cannot tell you how deeply  
proud I am.*

*Many years ago. I remember how  
often I prayed that they would grow big  
and strong like their parents. I thank  
God that they did! Friends, thank you for  
your support. Thank you. Thank you,  
friends, with all my heart and soul.*

*May I say to you...? May I say...?*

*Where are you going, friends? Lucy?*

*Andy? Gerald? Where've you gone?*

*Don't go, please. Please, don't go.*

*Remember me? Susan?*

## Our Next Production

# Lilies on the Land

### By the Lions part

Just over 80 years ago, The Women's Land Army was formed to help feed the British public during WW2.

At its height over 80,000 served; from different backgrounds and walks of life, aged 19 to over 40. Torn from their families, unused to the hardships of farming life, they missed their home comforts.

Poignant and funny by turns, and based on interviews with Land Army Girls, 'Lilies' tells of their hardships, their joys and their loves.

Directed by Neville Price

January 30<sup>th</sup>, February 1<sup>st</sup> 2020, 7:45pm  
2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020, 2:45pm & 7:45pm

Compass Theatre, Ickenham  
Box Office : 01895 250 615

## Further Productions in 2020

**The Cherry Orchard**, by Anton Chekhov, 30<sup>th</sup> April to 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

**Old-World**, by Aleksei Arbuszov, 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> June 2020

## About Proscenium

Proscenium was founded in 1924. Since then, the aim of this experienced group has been to present classic and contemporary plays to as wide an audience as possible. Since 1990, performances have taken place at the Harrow Arts Centre and, more recently, at the Compass Theatre, Ickenham.

The company meets three times a week in Harrow for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary : Ben Morris

Chair : David Pearson

Contact us at [www.proscenium.org.uk](http://www.proscenium.org.uk)