

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.

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PROSCENIUM

One For The Road

Willy Russell

One For The Road

**15th, 16th, 17th and 18th January 2003
Travellers Studio Theatre, Harrow Arts Centre**

One For The Road

By

Willy Russell

Dennis Cain Duncan Sykes
Pauline Cain Angie Sutherland
Roger Fuller Rob Hurcum
Jane Fuller Rosie Moutrie

The Time: The Recent Past

Directed by David Watkins
Stage Manager Margaret Rudolph
Assisted by June Watkins
Properties Jenny Glover
Sound Rod Moor-Bardell
Lighting Harrow Arts Culture

Our thanks for their support for 2002/3 season to
Medical Technical Ltd.

The Author

Willy Russell was born in Whiston, just outside Liverpool, in 1947. Over 50 years later Russell still lives in Liverpool but now in an elegantly restored Georgian house bought with the proceeds of his playwriting career of the last thirty years, in which time he has enjoyed a meteoric rise and is now the fourth most performed English dramatist after Shakespeare, Ayckbourn and Godber.



There was a strong tradition of storytelling in his family, and at primary school he enjoyed reading, gardening and football, but at his secondary modern school he was consigned to the factory fodder D stream. It was in this surprising environment that he conceived the idea of being a writer. Dismayed at the prospect of factory work he failed to obtain a printing apprenticeship, so at his mother's suggestion he trained to be a women's hairdresser. He worked at his trade for five years (in this way acquiring his ear for the way working class Liverpool women speak) eventually running his own salon. There on slack days he would write sketches, poems and songs.

Seeking a career which would give him a greater opportunity to write, he decided to become a student, having now passed O level English at night class. No Local Education Authority would give him a bursary, so he spent some time girder cleaning at Fords in order to fund his college O and A level studies. In 1970 he trained as a teacher at St. Catherines's College of Education and, at the prompting of his first girl friend Annie (later his wife) who originally interested him in the theatre, he studied Drama

there and began writing plays.

Three of these early one-act efforts under the collective title *Blind Scouse* were performed at the Edinburgh Festival fringe and were spotted there by the established playwright John McGrath. He put Russell in touch with the Everyman Theatre in Liverpool and after writing *Sam O'Shanker* for their touring company he was commissioned to rewrite a Manchester written documentary about the Beatles. He said that he was only interested if he could write his own piece on them, and thus was born his first big hit, *John, Paul, George, Ringoand Bert* (1974) which quickly transferred to the West End and was given two awards as Best New Musical and ran for a year. The show was notable for the ironic juxtaposition of songs against dialogue, and the sparkling Liverpool humour that has since become his trademark. He has been a full time writer ever since.

His subsequent works for the stage, most involved in some way with a character's quest for self-fulfilment, are: *Breezeblock Park* (1975), *One For The Road* (1978), *Stags and Hens* (1978), *Educating Rita* (1980 Society of the West End Theatre Award as Comedy of the Year), *Blood Brothers* (1983 named Best New Musical that year by London critics), *Our Day Out* (1983), and *Shirley Valentine* (1986).

Russell has strong views on making theatre accessible to a wide audience. He writes: *Whilst the working classes are accused of being philistines, there is a general attempt in this country to withhold culture from them... Literature is an invention by the middle-classes for their own benefit. The working-classes haven't accepted literacy yet, which is why it is so difficult teaching working class kids whose traditions are in the spoken word. That's why I write for the theatre, because it's concerned with the spoken rather than the written word.*

And, in an introduction to *Educating Rita: I love stories. I spend all my writing life trying to make stories. The story, the narrative, which is unfashionable in the study of English Literature, is to me all-important. A story, like a song, can transcend barriers of language, class and race.*

The Title

In the rare summer of 1976 I was on holiday in the Isle of Mull where I completed a new stage play. On the title page I typed the words *Tupperware Man*, the obvious and perfect title for my new play. Experiencing the twenty-four euphoria I always feel on completion of a play I set off the village of Dervaig, bought a bottle of claret in celebration of the completion and called in at the post office. The new script safely dispatched to Contact Theatre, Manchester I spent the rest of the day fishing, ruminating on how for once I had effortlessly come up with the perfect title for a play of mine, and sipping the warm red wine.

Three months later, back home in Liverpool, rehearsals for the play were just about to begin and I received a phone call, from an American lawyer representing the firm of Tupperware. He tells me that his client has learnt of the imminent production, has acquired a script and has forseen one or two 'prahblems'.

It seems that in my play I had suggested that it's not always the easiest thing in the world to fit a Tupperware lid back onto its container. And that didn't go down too well with the firm. When I suggested that in a Court of Law a dodderly old judge with shaky hands might also find some difficulty affixing a Tupperware lid to its container he became more amicable, even saying, *Mr Russell, I have to confess I have trouble with the goddam lids myself!*

As none of the parties wanted to go to court, least of all the theatre whose production would have to be postponed. We

achieved a compromise which, although simple and innocent enough at the time, has since caused me years of headaches. The agreement was that the firm would not press for any changes in the script as long as I was prepared to drop the title. I replaced the phone and went into the kitchen to make a cup of tea and come up with a new title. Eight hours later I was still there, a slightly demented figure amidst the cups and sheets of paper.

As the deadline approached, inspired by Bill Naughton's *Spring and Port Wine*, I took two incidents from the play and called it *Painted Veg and Parkinson*. The theatre's publicist was aghast. During the month's run in Manchester I never heard anyone refer to the play by its title. It was always, *the new play* or *Willy's play* or *the play that's on this week*.

Before we went on tour the play was variously known as: *Wagner's Walk*, *Aerosol Alley*, *Is Cain Able*, *Gnomes and Gardens*, *Phase Two*, *Anyone for Dennis*. Just before we opened in Norwich we settled on *Dennis the Menace*. The theatre foyer was packed with bodies pushing and shoving to buy tickets. The only problem was that they were young bodies, small bodies, kids – all of who thought they were buying tickets for a play about Dennis the Menace from the Beano.

After the tour I had a call from the Nottingham Playhouse who wanted to do the play but, yes, they wanted a new title. Just before the Nottingham production opened and before the play was published my wife, Annie, walked in one day and said, *Why don't you call it 'One for the Road'?* I gawped at her. It was, after *Tupperware Man*, THE title, perfect. *But, why didn't you say that months ago, years ago?*

Oh I did, she said, quite calmly, *I said it in Manchester, in Liverpool, in London, in Brighton and Norwich and Darlington, in*

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Our Next Production

Alphabetical Order, By Michael Frayn

An early Frayn comedy, set in the reference library of a somewhat rundown provincial paper, inhabited by a cosy, decaying community. A new assistant librarian is determined to bring order and logic to the confusion. The play is about the interdependence of order and disorder about how any excess of the one makes you long for the other.

Traveller's Studio : 26th - 29th March 2003 7.45 pm

Forthcoming Production Stepping Out, by Richard Harris

Traveller's Studio : 4th - 7th June 2003.