

PROSCENIUM

***2013 – 2014
SEASON***

*Our grateful thanks to
John Gobey and Keith Bayross
for their generous sponsorship
of this season's programmes.*

You Never Can Tell

PROSCENIUM

You Never Can Tell

By Bernard Shaw

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October 30th – November 2nd 2013
Compass Theatre, Ickenham

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By Bernard Shaw

Dorothea (Dolly) Clandon	Isobel Gathercole
Mr Valentine	Ben Morris
Parlour Maid	Anne Gerrard
Phillip Clandon	Oli Savage
Mrs Lanfrey Clandon	Shirley Wootten
Gloria Clandon	Zena Wigram
Mr Crampton	Jevan Morris
William	Bernard Vick
Finch McComas	Keith Bayross
Waitress	Koral Neil
Walter Bohun QC	Robert Ewen
Directed by	Alan Bobroff
Stage Manager	Arnold Glickman
Set Designed and Constructed by	Mark Brookes
Assisted by	Archie Brookes
Properties	Amie Daly
Production Assistant	Koral Neil
Costumes	Anne Gerrard
Lighting and Sound Operation	Paul Robinson

The play takes place in an English south coast seaside resort in August 1896

Act 1 A dentist's operating room

Act 2 Shortly after - The terrace of the Marine Hotel

Interval (fifteen minutes)

Act 3 The same – later that afternoon

Act 4 The same – 9 o'clock that evening

Proscenium would like to thank the following for their help with this production:

- **Grimsdyke Brass** for providing and recording the music
- **The Harrow Hotel** for providing dining room equipment
- **Hillingdon Theatre Society Workshop**
- **Dr Mark Kent** for the loan of dental instruments

Events of 1896

- Utah is admitted as the 45th U.S. state.
- An Austrian newspaper reports that Wilhelm Röntgen has discovered a type of radiation later known as X-rays.
- Walter Arnold of Kent is fined 1 shilling for speeding at 8 mph (exceeding the contemporary speed limit of 2 mph), the first speeding fine.
- Puccini's opera *La Bohème* premieres in Turin.
- Oscar Wilde's play *Salomé* premieres in Paris.
- Gilbert and Sullivan write *The Grand Duke*. The opera is a failure and they never work together again.
- The opening ceremonies of the 1896 Summer Olympics, the first modern Olympic Games, are held in Athens.
- In cricket, Yorkshire set a still-standing County Championship record when they accumulate an innings total of 887 against Warwickshire.
- The Ford Quadricycle, the first Ford vehicle ever developed, is completed, eventually leading Henry Ford to build the empire that "put America on wheels".
- International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress opens in London.
- Jim Mason, George Carmack and Dawson Charlie discover gold in the Klondike.
- Bridget Driscoll is run over by a Benz car in the grounds of The Crystal Palace, London, the world's first motoring fatality.
- The shortest war in recorded history, the Anglo-Zanzibar War, starts at 9 in the morning and lasts for 45 minutes of shelling.
- Queen Victoria surpasses her grandfather King George III as the longest reigning monarch in British history.
- The Glasgow Subway, the third-oldest underground metro system in the world, opens.
- Also in 1896, the New York Telephone Company is formed, and the Blackpool Pleasure Beach is founded by Alderman William George Bean.

Shaw's Heavenly Twins

Ronald Bryden, in his essay *Shaw's Heavenly Twins*, quotes Bernard Shaw's own reasons as to why he wrote *You Never Can Tell* in 1898: "to comply with many requests for a play in which the much paragraphed "brilliancy" of *Arms and The Man* should be tempered by some consideration for the requirements of managers in search of fashionable comedies for West End theatres. I had no difficulty in complying, as I have always cast my plays in the ordinary practical comedy form in use in all the theatres; and far from taking an unsympathetic view of the popular preference for fun, fashionable dresses, a little music, and even an exhibition of eating and drinking by people with an expensive air, attended by an if-possible comic waiter, I was more than willing to shew (sic) that the drama can humanize these things as easily as they, in the wrong hands, can dehumanize the drama. But as so often happens, it was easier to do this than to persuade those who had asked for it that they had indeed got it."

That was true; the play that eventually brought Shaw unrivalled success and popularity, began life in a rather haphazard manner. As Bryden tells us, the actor-manager George Alexander wrote to Shaw, somewhat unflatteringly: "When I got to the end, I had no more idea what you meant than a tom-cat." Actors were leaving the play, discontented and disillusioned. And one leading man of the day, Allan Aynesworth, apparently well trained in the style of the period, could barely handle some of the more passionate scenes in the play. "It was not that he did it badly, or tamely, or wrongly," said Shaw. "He simply could not do it at all."

The play did not see an opening night until 1900, and even then the critic Max Beerbohm commented on its erratic nature. "Realism and sheer fantasy are inextricably entangled in the scheme of the play," he wrote. "Serious characters behave ridiculously, ridiculous characters suddenly become serious. Mr Shaw sends all the persons of his play dashing round sharp corners, colliding with one another, picking themselves up, exchanging hats, and dashing off again." And that is the reason why the play is so enduring and captivating of course. But it was not until Granville Barker's inclusion of it as a mainstay in his repertory company at the Royal Court Theatre, that *You Never Can Tell* became a favourite with the public.

Shaw was less amused by his play's miscarriage than he pretended. It was the main reason for his decision, a turning point in his career, to offer his plays to the public in print, since no one would offer them in performance. But although it took him time to recognize it, the writing of *You Never Can Tell* embodied a decision even more important. Without intending to, he had written a play impossible for the new generation of actors, reared on naturalism and notions of polite understatement. His creation called for the old breed of theatrical mountebanks he had loved in his youth, trained on Shakespeare, melodrama, and that last refuge of the commedia dell'arte, the English pantomime. At some level below consciousness, he had made the decision not to be the apostle of Ibsen and naturalism on the British stage.

How had this reversal come about? It looks like the complicated result of Shaw's admiration for the novel which gave him the germ of his play, Sarah Grand's *The Heavenly Twins*. After reading it in 1895 he pronounced the work touched with genius. (Indeed, his title for the first draft of *You Never Can Tell* was *The Terrestrial Twins*.) Madame Grand was in actuality an

Irishwoman named Frances Bellenden-Clark who, having coined the phrase "the New Woman" in 1894, lived up to it by adopting the style of George Sand. She had ridden the wave of Ibsenite scandal provoked by the London premiere of *Ghosts* by publishing a novel, written some years earlier, in which a wife dies of syphilis caught from a dissolute husband - one of three Victorian heroines (the novel owes much to George Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*) whose lives support the judgment of Gloria in *You Never Can Tell* that the conditions of marriage at present are not such as any self-respecting woman can accept.

Grand's novel is so nearly excellent that the itch to try and improve it is irresistible. Shaw's attempt consisted of taking over its materials and giving them more cheerful outcomes. All of Grand's heroines come to sad or saddish ends: one dead through sexual ignorance, one permanently wounded by learning on her wedding day of her groom's promiscuity, the third - the female twin of the title - cast off by the love of her life when he learns that she is the beautiful boy who has won his friendship on midnight visits in her brother's clothes. Though the novel makes quite moving the man's sense of double loss - both of the boy he has loved and the girl he idealized at a distance - Shaw clearly found something perverse in the notion of rewriting *As You Like It* so as to give it an unhappy ending. No, he rejoined in *You Never Can Tell*, the world is not entirely hopeless, but benign in its insistence on being peopled. Men may be stupid, but not all of them conspire to make women stupider. And where stupidity flies in the face of Nature, Nature can be counted on to enforce common sense.

To make his comic vision prevail over the bleak feminist accusations of Grand's novel, Shaw conjured up the mighty ghost of Shakespeare. The face of his bust in Stratford parish church presides over *You Never Can Tell* on the shoulders of the old waiter whom Dolly has christened "William" because of this resemblance. Like Ephesus in *The Comedy of Errors* or the unnamed capital of Illyria in *Twelfth Night*, Shaw's seaside town is thrown into confusion by the appearance of supernaturally handsome twins from the sea, marvelling at the brave new world unknown to them in their island nursery. Mrs Clandon is a female Prospero who cannot regain her kingdom until she acknowledges that thing of darkness, her furious, wounded husband, as her own. The philosopher Suzanne Langer wrote that tragedy deals with life from the point of view of the individual - all individual lives, one may say, end badly - while comedy perceives it with the eyes of the community or species, recognizing that for every death there is a birth, for every divorce a wedding, for every parting a lover's meeting. Shaw opposes to the severe judgment of minds preoccupied by individual rights the friendlier view - he calls it socialist - of the world of Shakespearean comedy, where spring follows winters, Jack shall have Jill, and all shall be well so long as each generation of society forgets its tragedies in the happiness of its children.

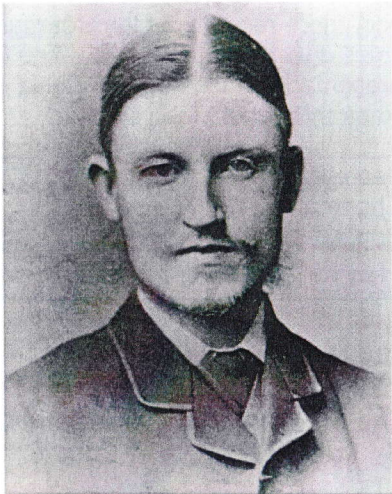
In case the power of Shakespeare is insufficient, the gods of the old Italian comedy take over the stage in the last act. Harlequin, Columbine and Il Dottore drag the older generation out of the melodrama they have made of their lives and into the eternal dance of the seasons and human love. When *You Never Can Tell* finally found its audience in May 1905, during the Vedrenne/Barker seasons at the Court Theatre, the critic Desmond MacCarthy called it a religious farce. He might also have called it "the play in which Shaw decided not to be the English Ibsen, but to be Shaw."

Shaw Festival Study Guide 2005
(With excerpts taken from Ronald Bryden's 1995 essay *Shaw's Heavenly Twins*)

Bernard Shaw Quotes

- Nothing is ever accomplished by a reasonable man
- The longer I live the more I see that I am never wrong about anything, and that all the pains that I have so humbly taken to verify my notions have only wasted my time
- I never resist temptation because I have found things that are bad for me do not tempt me (The Apple Cart-1930)
- There are some experiences in life which should not be demanded twice from any man, and one of them is listening to the Brahms Requiem
- Is the devil to have all the passions as well as all the good tunes? (Man & Superman-1903)
- Chess is a foolish expedient for making idle people believe they are doing something very clever when they are only wasting their time
- Do not waste your time on Social Questions. What is the matter with the poor is poverty; what is the matter with the rich is Uselessness
- Do not try to live for ever. You will not succeed
- The thought of two thousand people munching celery at the same time horrified me (explaining why he turned down an invitation to a vegetarian dinner)
- If you cannot get rid of the family skeleton, you may as well make it dance
- Patriotism is a pernicious, psychotic form of idiocy
- Patriotism is your conviction that this country is superior to all others because you were born in it
- Peace is not only better than war, but infinitely more arduous
- Reviewing has one advantage over suicide; in suicide you take it out on yourself; in reviewing you take it out on other people
- What we call education and culture is for the most part nothing but the substitution of reading for experience, of literature for life, of the obsolete for the contemporary real
- The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man

Bernard Shaw

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|---------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1856 | Born in Dublin (July 26) |  |
| 1876 | Comes to London, begins literary career by ghosting music criticism | |
| 1879/
1883 | Writes five unsuccessful novels | |
| 1884 | Elected member of newly-formed Fabian Society | |
| 1888/
1894 | Successful career as music critic | |
| 1892 | First play, <i>Widowers' Houses</i> produced | |
| 1893 | <i>Mrs Warren's Profession</i> | |
| 1894 | <i>Arms and the Man, Candida</i> | |
| 1895/
1898 | Successful career as drama critic | |
| 1896 | <i>The Devil's Disciple</i> | |
| 1897 | <i>You Never Can Tell</i> | |
| 1898 | <i>Caesar and Cleopatra</i> . Marries wealthy heiress Charlotte Payne Townsend | |
| 1899 | <i>Captain Brassbound's Conversion</i> | |
| 1903 | <i>Man and Superman</i> | |
| 1904/
1907 | Vedrenne and Granville-Barker productions at the Royal Court Theatre establish Shaw as successful playwright | |
| 1904 | <i>John Bull's Other Island</i> | |
| 1905 | <i>Major Barbara</i> | |
| 1906 | <i>The Doctor's Dilemma</i> | |
| 1908 | <i>Getting Married</i> | |
| 1910 | <i>Misalliance</i> | |
| 1912 | <i>Androcles and the Lion, Pygmalion</i> | |
| 1914 | Publishes <i>Commonsense About the War</i> , arousing immense hostility | |
| 1919 | <i>Heartbreak House</i> | |
| 1920 | <i>Back to Methuselah</i> | |
| 1923 | <i>Saint Joan</i> | |
| 1925 | Awarded Nobel Prize for Literature | |
| 1928 | Publishes <i>The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism and Capitalism</i> | |
| 1929 | <i>The Apple Cart</i> | |
| 1936 | <i>The Millionairess</i> | |
| 1943 | Charlotte dies | |
| 1950 | 2 November: dies at home in Ayot St Lawrence | |

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, at the Harrow Arts Centre for rehearsals, so that four plays are presented in each season. Social, fund raising activities and play readings take place throughout the year.

Secretary: Clare Wooster

Chairman: Dave Pearson

Contact us at www.proscenium.org.

Our Next Production:

The Creation of the World and Other Business

By Arthur Miller

Miller's witty story of Adam and Eve, written in the 70's, is both a comedy and an inevitable tragedy; ranging from word play to saucy innuendo. There is also a philosophically amusing conversation about good and evil. The plot covers the first birth and the first murder in the world. The serious issue, however, is the discussion over which power should rule the world. It is both a thought provoking and entertaining treatment as only Miller can write.

Directed by Anne Gerrard

Wednesday January 22nd to Saturday January 25th 2014

7:45 pm, Compass Theatre, Ickenham

Jeanne Hawkes: In Memoriam

Jeanne, who passed away on October 8th, was a member of Proscenium for more than fifty years. She acted for the group on many occasions, and directed many memorable productions. She was also a hard-working committee member, filling various roles including Publicity and Membership over the years. She will be sorely missed by her family and her many friends, and Proscenium dedicates this production to her memory.



Requiescat in Pace.
