



presents

Joking Apart

by Alan Ayckbourn

by arrangement with Samuel French, London

Commemoration Hall, Huntingdon
Thursday—Saturday, 29th—31st March @ 7.30 pm
www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk

Programme

£1



Joking Apart

by **Alan Ayckbourn**

Directed by Ronald Stevenson, assisted by Jacquie Spencer

Produced by John Morgan

This play is performed under licence and with the express permission of Samuel French Ltd.

The entire play takes place in the garden of Anthea and Richard over a period of 12 years and ends in the present day.

Act I Scene I – Bonfire Night, early evening

Act I Scene II – four years later, a lazy summer Sunday morning

INTERVAL – there will be a 20-minute interval during which refreshments may be obtained in the foyer

Act II Scene I – Boxing Day four years later, a grey, wet afternoon

Act II Scene II – 7pm on a summer's evening, four years later

CARRIAGES – the performance will end about 10 pm

Welcome to Huntingdon Drama Club's production of

Joking Apart

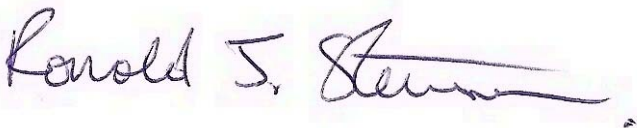
A brief word from the director

When deciding what play to put on next, one is often faced with the constrained reality of knowing what will work and the track record of what has gone before. One must also think very deeply about what play, an audience might enjoy, and which idea is just too fanciful or technically challenging for an amateur group to successfully stage.

Tonight, dear reader, I am hoping that you will take a step off with us from the safe ground of pure comedy into the world of dark comedy as so pithily observed and conveyed by Alan Ayckbourn. Dark comedy introduces the polar opposites of pathos and laughter, the combination of which, although often disturbing, allows us glimpses into the psyche behind human behaviour. Whilst stopping short of schadenfreude and thus out-and-out black comedy, the play does have dark undercurrents and this in itself is a significant departure for Huntingdon Drama Club from the tone of recent productions. If you come away from tonight's production thinking "why, I know someone just like that", then you too will have gained an understanding of why Mr Ayckbourn's plays are some of the most significant and enduring of recent times.

I have immensely enjoyed working with the cast over the past few months exploring the detail of *Joking Apart* and teasing out the latent humour which lurks within the text. I have also been fortunate to have the learned experience of Jacquie Spencer to hand, as well as being able to draw on the experience of many other Club members, and I thank everybody for their contribution. I would like to especially welcome those who have only joined the Club recently and for whom this is their first experience. Hope to see you again.

It is fair to say that no matter how much the cast has enjoyed themselves in rehearsal or performing on stage, it is to you, dear audience, that I now ultimately must turn. Please now, sit back, relax, and enjoy tonight's production, oh, and please do remember ... life is not a game of tennis!

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Ronald J. Spencer". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Director of *Joking Apart*

MARK LAMBERTH (*Richard*)

Mark returns to the stage in this his fourth performance for the Club. Having last played the part of amiable philanderer Henry Lodge in *Move Over Mrs Markham*, Mark now takes up the even easier-going (and sometimes complete pain-in-the-neck) role of Richard, Anthea's partner. In his more serious role outside of acting, Mark tries to balance work with being a family man.

DAISY SPENCER (*Anthea*)

Daisy is returning to the stage after many years of hard studying to become a lawyer. She has previously performed with Brampton Park Theatre Company and is thrilled to be up on stage once again. In accepting this, her debut role with the Club, she has had to come to terms with the prospect of taking on one of the most superficial of characters in *Joking Apart*, and has admitted that she loathes the character that Anthea is!

KELLY MASON (*Louise Emerson*)

This is Kelly's fourth appearance with the Club and her biggest role to date. She relishes playing the unbalanced Louise and is especially pleased that, unlike her part in *Move Over Mrs Markham*, she is able to deliver her lines fully clothed! Kelly will be stepping into the director's shoes for the Club's summer production of the Agatha Christie classic *A Murder is Announced* – she also intends to remain fully clothed in her directorial debut.

CHRIS TOPHAM (*The Reverend Hugh Emerson*)

Chris has acted for many years with Brampton Park Theatre Company, with this being only his second outing with Huntingdon Drama Club. Many of you may remember his tap-dancing butler routine in *Move Over Mrs Markham*, which is definitely in stark contrast to his nervous vicar routine in *Joking Apart*. His feet will be firmly on the ground throughout tonight's production.

MATT LLOYD (*Brian*)

This is Matt's first performance with Huntingdon Drama Club and may well be his last, which is nothing to do with the undoubted quality of his acting, but rather because he is only in Cambridgeshire for a short period. Absent from stage for some years, Matt's main experience, both as actor and director, was with Ferndown Drama Group in Dorset, in his early twenties. Originally from Liverpool, he now lives in London.

KAT SEXTON (*Melody and Mo*)

Kat has been involved in theatre since the age of nine, and studied drama at university. This is her fourth appearance with the Club, and she is enjoying the challenge of having two contrasting roles to juggle with in tonight's production. Kat has made tremendous efforts in promoting the Club, including being interviewed on local radio stations.

MICHAEL BLACK (*Sven Holmenson*)

Michael is Chair of Huntingdon Drama Club and in his 27 years with the Club he has turned his hand to both acting and directing. He and Caroline Harbord are once more playing a married couple as in last spring's production of *Silhouette*, when she instigated his murder (and is probably considering it in *Joking Apart*). In the autumn Michael directed a farce for the first time – *Move Over Mrs Markham* – and will be directing the Club's production of *Jane Eyre* this November.

CAROLINE HARBORD (*Olive Holmenson*)

Caroline has been with Huntingdon Drama Club for just over a year. You may have seen her as Joanna Markham in *Move Over Mrs Markham* and as Celia Wallis in *Silhouette* last year. She has enjoyed playing Olive, who she describes as 'a vacuous, bitchy, two-faced trophy wife' and nothing like any of her previous roles. In real life Caroline is a freelance marketing consultant and writer, and has little in common with her character, preferring walking, climbing and cycling to manicures, facials and designer clothes.

LOUISE NICHOLLS (*Mandy*)

This is Louise's debut with Huntingdon Drama Club and the first time that she has ever acted. She's a self confessed drama queen and has finally put it to good use. In real life she is a scientist, and not an artist like the character she plays in *Joking Apart*. She assures us that it is all very interesting.

AMANDA ROGERS (*Debbie, Anthea's daughter*)

Amanda is the youngest member of the cast at only fifteen years of age, and is studying GCSE drama at Hinchingsbrooke School. This is her first performance with the Club but she has taken part in several shows with a local performing arts school, which she has attended regularly for over two years.

RONALD STEVENSON (Director)

Ronald has acted with the Club for a number of years as well as with other local groups. He recently adapted for stage and directed the Club's Christmas show *The Greatest Gift* as part of PaTCH's *Dreaming of a White Christmas*. He really prefers acting to directing and will be appearing soon in his next role as a stunt cowboy in *Crazy for you*, the musical by George Gershwin. His first love, however, is mountaineering and he hopes to have knocked off a few more 3000m peaks in the Italian Alps before the autumn production. In fact he will be making a swift, and much needed, departure after this production to climb in the hills of his birth in the north west of Scotland.

JACQUELINE SPENCER (Assistant Director)

Jacque has directed many successful plays for Brampton Park Theatre Company and *Silhouette* for Huntingdon Drama Club and has (very) occasionally been tempted onto the stage when a suitable role arises. She has enjoyed pitching in with ideas for *Joking Apart* and using her creative talents to further the artistic merit of the production.

JOHN MORGAN (Producer)

John has been an active member of Huntingdon Drama Club for more years than he cares to remember – in fact he has given up counting. Following a short period of internal exile in Woodbridge, Suffolk, he is now back in town and once again able to provide the Club with his extensive technical knowledge of sound and lighting. He also acts - he last played George in *Blackadder* and can frequently be caught larking around with the *St Barts Readers and Singers*.



*Peter Barton, Gerry Davison and Jack Hyde
in Dr Who and the Empress of Othernow, 1994*

BACKGROUND TO ALAN AYCKBOURN AND *JOKING APART*

Joking Apart was Alan Ayckbourn's twenty-second play, though his tally has now reached seventy! Indeed many of tonight's cast recently went to see his latest play, when *If I Were You* was performed in Cambridge.

Joking Apart first opened at the Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round, Scarborough, in 1978, and in the following year it transferred to the Globe Theatre in London. *Joking Apart* was the joint winner of the *Plays and Players Best Comedy Award* in 1979.

Already well known for his observations of middle-class manners, Alan Ayckbourn attracted some comment from critics about concentrating too much on dysfunctional families. One even suggested that he write a play where the central couple were happy and normal. *Joking Apart* is his direct riposte to that criticism, hence the carefully chosen play title. It could be argued, however, that Alan had the last laugh by ensuring that pretty much every other character in the play has a personality flaw of some sort!

Other Ayckbourn plays performed by Huntingdon Drama Club

1983: *Relatively speaking*

1986: *Absent friends*

1993: *A chorus of disapproval*

1997: *Absurd person singular*

BETTER STAGE LIGHTING AT THE COMMEMORATION HALL

The trustees of the Commemoration Hall recently launched an appeal to upgrade the stage lighting, which is likely to cost between £16,000 and £20,000.

The Club has decided to kickstart the appeal by contributing £1,000. This is the amount left to us by Jack Hyde, who many of you will remember. Jack was a member of the Club from our first production, in 1944, until his death in 2003.

Jack acted in well over 100 plays, ranging from *No sex please, we're British* to *Dr Who and the Empress of Othernow*, by Club member Peter Vials. He also directed several, and was at various times chair and treasurer for a number of years.

We're delighted to put Jack's money to such good and lasting use. A plaque will be fixed in the hall, to commemorate Jack and naming Huntingdon Drama Club as the donor.

ABOUT HUNTINGDON DRAMA CLUB

Since 1944 Huntingdon Drama Club has produced at least two shows a year. We operate on the principle that we're all in it to have fun and we're mercifully free of tantrums, egos and politics. We work very closely with other theatre groups, as you'll see from the cast biographies, and we're always delighted to welcome new members.

There are many roles within the club, all of equal importance. We need people working on lighting, costumes, set-building, front-of-house, properties, special effects and publicity, just as much as we need actors. If you're interested, please come along and meet us. We're a friendly bunch and we'd love to have you on board. You can get more information on our website at www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk, by calling our Chair, Michael Black, on 01480-454486 or via any other Club member.

The Club's next production will be Agatha Christie's vintage Miss Marple whodunnit

A Murder is Announced

adapted for the stage by Leslie Darbon and directed by Kelly Mason (Louise in *Joking Apart*).

Performances: 22, 23, 29 and 30 June, in various venues
30 June: Medway Centre, Medway Road, Huntingdon

If you'd like to be involved in the production, come to the read-through on Wednesday, 4 April.

For details, please see our website, www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk, or phone the producer, John Morgan, on 01480-454486 or 0777-598-5626.

Our autumn production will be Charlotte Brontë's classic tale of love, passion and insanity

Jane Eyre

Adapted by Willis Hall, directed by Michael Black (Sven in *Joking Apart*)

Performance dates: 15-17 November in the Commemoration Hall.

Details on our website, www.huntingdondramaclub.org.uk, or phone Michael on 01480-454486.

