

### **DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

*Absent Friends* is unique in a number of ways. For one, the time sequence of the play matches real time almost exactly, second for second. This seems to give the action an almost claustrophobic quality coupled with an oppressive inevitability. It seems impossible that so much - and yet so little - can change in such a short time span. I think the most disturbing thing to the cast and to me as we rehearsed this play was that the people we met in it were all people we knew - not by name - but by nature! All the characters created by Alan Ayckbourn are very normal people - but somehow they produce an extraordinary theatre magic together. Spooky!

Amongst tonight's players we have three of Moot House Players' hard-working stalwarts in Jennifer Southwell, Vanessa Smith and Doug Sheppard. We are more than pleased to welcome Colin Hayman back to the company after an absence of some eight years. Nikki Robinson returns to be with us again for the first time since her debut with the Players in last year's production of *The Skin of our Teeth*. Jim Wetherall joins us for the first time. He is normally found in the Water Lane company in Bishop's Stortford where he has played a number of substantial roles. This is his first with Moot House Players, and I sincerely hope it will not be his last. His calm talent has been a valuable building block for this production.

JFM

### **FUTURE PROGRAMME**

May 13-14-15 at 8.00 pm

#### **THE PRICE**

by Arthur Miller

Despite the Players' wariness of presenting American plays, we have staged plays by Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams and Thornton Wilder over the years. We return to Miller with our next production.

*The Price* explores the theme of responsibility and commitment in a changing world, and has been described as a beautifully intelligent play.

Directed by Tony Edwards

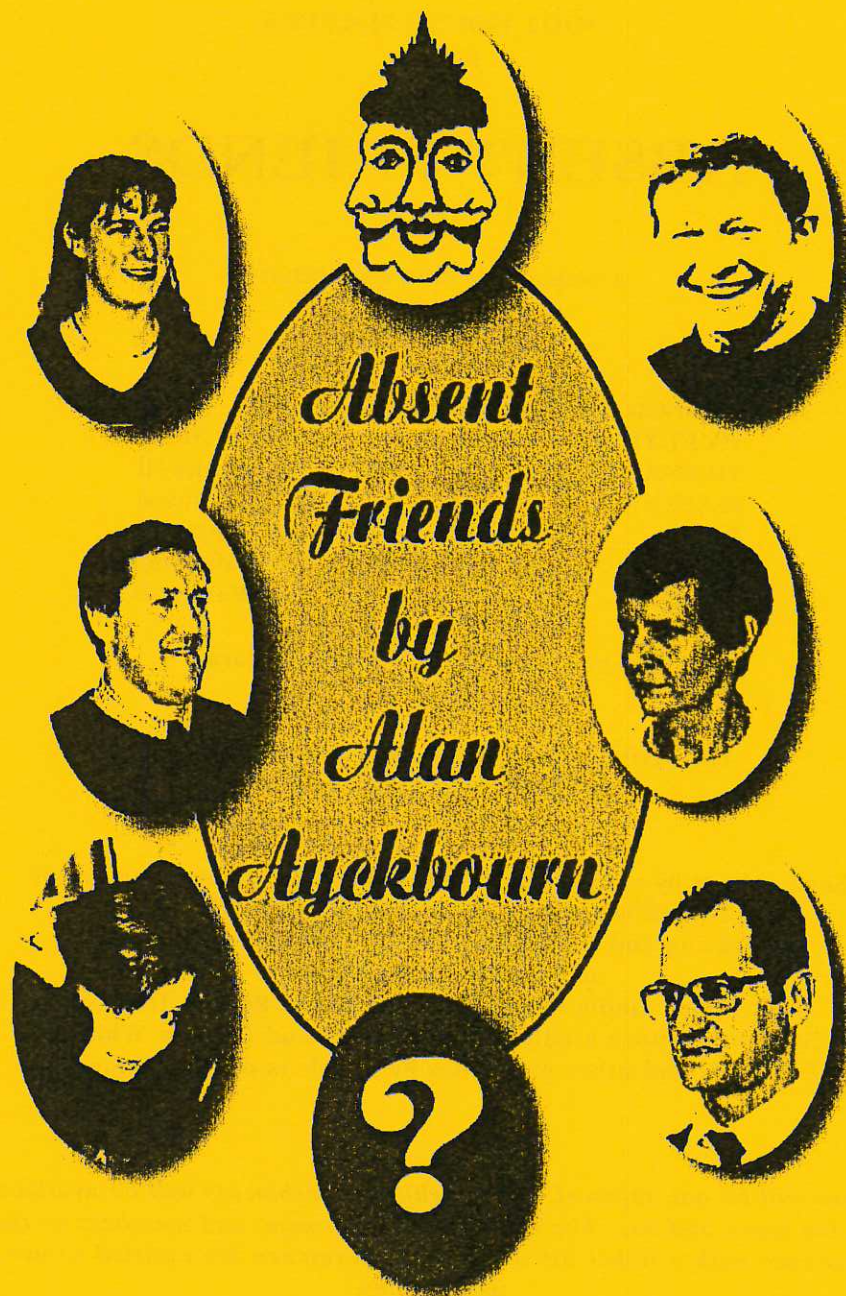
July 8-9-10 at 8.00 pm

#### **IVANOV**

by Anton Chekov

Directed by Jack Mitchley

**MOOT HOUSE PLAYERS ACKNOWLEDGE WITH GRATITUDE  
THE SUPPORT WHICH THEY RECEIVE FROM THEIR  
PARENT-BODY, THE MARK HALL AND NETTESWELL C A.**



1990

MOOT HOUSE PLAYERS  
present

# ABSENT FRIENDS

a comedy by Alan Ayckbourn

Characters in order of appearance:

EVELYN	...	Vanessa Smith
DIANA	...	Jennifer Southwell
MARGE	...	Nikki Robinson
PAUL	...	Doug Sheppard
JOHN	...	Colin Hayman
COLIN	...	Jim Wetherall

The play directed by Jon McNamara

*The action of the play takes place in the garden  
of Diana and Paul's house*

Setting built by members of the company under the direction of  
Tony Edwards, and decorated by Bett Hewlett  
Lighting and sound designed by Christopher Driver;  
operated by Jack Mitchley

Tea service kindly loaned by Gordon and Bettina Hewlett  
Garden furniture kindly loaned by Jane and Gordon Whittle  
Costumes and other properties by members of the company

*There will be one interval, during which refreshments will be available  
in the foyer and bar. The bar has a club licence, and members of the  
audience with a ticket for tonight's performance are entitled to use  
its facilities.*

## THE AUTHOR AND HIS PLAYS

Alan Ayckbourn was born in London in 1939. His mother was a writer and had several novels published by Michael Joseph before becoming, in the words of Ayckbourn, the "queen of the short story world", writing stories to order for popular women's magazines, often fitting them to existing illustrations. His father was leader of the London Symphony Orchestra. His preferred listening, however, was Al Bowly rather than Beethoven, whom he described as a "bloody old bore". The marriage broke up when Alan was five, and his mother then married a bank manager. Her income from writing was in the supertax class and it was she who paid the school fees for Ayckbourn's boarding at Haileybury after he had won a bank scholarship to the school. Here he had the good fortune to come under the influence of the French master, Edgar Matthews, who had at one time organised Donald Wolfit's tours and now took a party of boys to the continent with a Shakespeare play every summer holiday. To celebrate his final tour before retirement, Matthews took *Macbeth* to the United States with the seventeen-year-old Ayckbourn playing Macduff. They travelled over on the *Queen Elizabeth* and returned on the *Queen Mary*.

Matthews was responsible for getting Ayckbourn his first job. He left school on a Friday and joined Sir Donald Wolfit's company the following Monday as an ASM for a short run at the Edinburgh Festival. Thus began his life-time interest in the technical side of productions. He then became fascinated by theatre in the round when he saw Stephen Joseph's production of *Huis Clos*, and in 1957 joined his company at Scarborough. Two years later his first two plays were presented there. The company did a twelve-week summer season of plays at Scarborough, followed by "the Leicester-Birmingham-Hemel Hempstead-Harlow run". In Harlow they always performed at the then Stone Cross Hall in the Town Centre and the company slept at the homes of local people interested in the theatre. Alan Ayckbourn slept on the floor of Paul and Margaret Hopkins' house when Paul was working on the Harlow Citizen and appearing with Moot House Players.

Once he started writing, Ayckbourn followed a consistent pattern of work, spending a fortnight every year writing a play for the Scarborough season. And every year the forthcoming play's title appears in the publicity material before he has put pencil to paper. He has now written over 50 plays, most of which have opened at Scarborough, with more than half going on to the West End - ever since the success of *Relatively Speaking* in 1967. The editor of *The Stage* once suggested that Ayckbourn was being too prolific for his own good, which provoked Sir Peter Hall to comment: "If you didn't write so much, they'd realise you were quite good." The plays have been translated into more than 30 languages. Ayckbourn has received numerous awards and honorary degrees. In 1987 he was awarded a CBE, in 1996 he opened the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough and recently he was knighted for his services to the theatre.