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A CHORUS OF DISAPPROVAL

A Play in Two Acts

by Alan Ayckbourn

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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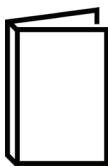
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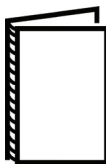


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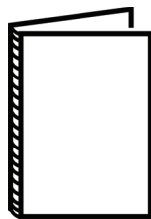
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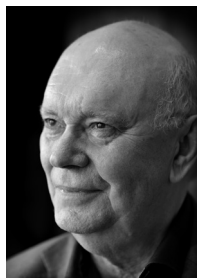
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alan Ayckbourn has worked in theatre as a playwright and director for over fifty years, rarely if ever tempted by television or film, which perhaps explains why he continues to be so prolific. To date he has written more than seventy-nine plays, many one act plays and a large amount of work for the younger audience. His work has been translated into over thirty-five languages, is performed on stage and television throughout the world and has won countless awards.

Major successes include: *Relatively Speaking*, *How the Other Half Loves*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *Bedroom Farce*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, and *The Norman Conquests*. In recent years, there have been revivals of *Season's Greetings* and *A Small Family Business* at the National theatre, in the West End *Absent Friends*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*, *Relatively Speaking* and *How the Other Half Loves*. In 2015, Chichester mounted a very successful revival of *Way Upstream*.

Artistic Director of the Stephen Joseph theatre from 1972–2009 where almost all his plays have been first staged, he continues to direct his latest new work there. In recent years, he has been inducted into American Theatre's Hall of Fame, received the 2010 Critics' Circle Award for Services to the Arts and became the first British playwright to receive both Olivier and Tony Special Lifetime Achievement Awards. He was knighted in 1997 for services to the theatre.

Image credit: Andrew Higgins.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

After a lifetime of playwriting (I first started as an unpublished writer at the age of ten!) my career has moved steadily forward from the status of untried tyro through to establishment figure to ageing experimentalist!

The work has reflected this. From the early tried and tested plays, (*Relatively Speaking*, *How the Other Half Loves*, *The Norman Conquests*, etc.) which thankfully people still seem happy to produce and come to see, through the middle period, larger scale so called “social” pieces (*Man of the Moment*, *A Chorus of Disapproval*) to the more recent smaller scale departures such as *Private Fears in Public Places*, *Snake in the Grass* and *Haunting Julia*, I have continued to experiment with shape and form, whilst I hope continuing to deepen my characters.

Throughout this, though, I have always needed to remind myself of the overriding prime directive drummed into me at an early age by my mentor, Stephen Joseph, that above all else a playwright is a storyteller.

To keep an audience in their seats you need to involve them in a constantly unfolding series of unexpected twists and turns. These can, of course, be the narrative of the story itself as in *Relatively Speaking* or, as with *Woman in Mind* say, through the psychological development of the characters.

One of the nicest things people can ever say to me, coming out of a new play for the first time of seeing it, is “Well, I never saw THAT coming!”

Alan Ayckbourn

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A CHORUS OF DISAPPROVAL

First produced at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, on 22nd May, 1984, with the following cast:

GUY JONES	Lennox Greaves
DAFYDD AP LLEWELLYN	Russell Dixon
HANNAH LLEWELLYN	Alwyne Taylor
BRIDGET BAINES	Jane Hollowood
MR AMES	Paul Todd
ENID WASHBROOK	Dorcas Jones
REBECCA HUNTLEY-PIKE	Heather Stoney
FAY HUBBARD	Lesley Meade
IAN HUBBARD	Mark Jax
JARVIS HUNTLEY-PIKE	Alan Thompson
TED WASHBROOK	Robert Cotton
CRISPIN USHER	Daniel Flynn
LINDA WASHBROOK	Caroline Webster
RAYMOND	
STAGE MANAGERS (non-speaking)	

The play directed by Alan Ayckbourn

Setting by Edward Lipscomb

Musical Direction by Paul Todd

The action occurs between the first rehearsal and first performance of an amateur production of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (Feb-May). It takes place in and around a small provincial theatre.

Subsequently presented in the Olivier auditorium of the National Theatre on 1st August, 1985, with the following cast:

GUY JONES

DAFYDD AP LLEWELLYN

HANNAH LLEWELLYN

BRIDGET BAINES

MR AMES

ENID WASHBROOK

REBECCA HUNTLEY-PIKE

FAY HUBBARD

IAN HUBBARD

JARVIS HUNTLEY-PIKE

TED WASHBROOK

CRISPIN USHER

LINDA WASHBROOK

Bob Peck

Michael Gambon

Imelda Staunton

Jenny Galloway

Paul Todd

Jane Wenham

Moira Redmond

Gemma Craven

Paul Bentall

David Ryall

James Hayes

Daniel Flynn

Kelly Hunter

Directed by Alan Ayckbourn

Settings by Alan Tagg

Music Director Paul Todd

MUSIC FOR "THE BEGGAR'S OPERA"

The score used for the musical numbers from *The Beggar's Opera* in the original productions of *A Chorus of Disapproval* was the Frederick Austin version published by Boosey and Hawkes (1920, revised 1926) and companies performing the play are advised to obtain this.

ACT I

*The lights come up abruptly on a stage filled with people and we are suddenly and unexpectedly into the final moments of a first performance of an amateur production of Gay's "The Beggar's Opera". The performance by P.A.L.O.S. (The Pendon Amateur Light Operatic Society) is filled with gusto and enthusiasm. What it lacks in polish (in some quarters) it makes up for in flourish. Among the performers is, centre on a small raised platform, **GUY JONES** (Macheath). He is surrounded by his "doxies". Amongst these are **HANNAH LLEWELLYN** (Polly Peachum), **LINDA WASHBROOK** (Lucy Lockit), **REBECCA HUNTLEY-PIKE** (Mrs Vixen), **FAY HUBBARD** (Dolly Trull), **BRIDGET BAINES** (Jenny Diver) and others. Also present are **TED** and **ENID WASHBROOK** (Mr and Mrs Peachum), **IAN HUBBARD** (Matt of the Mint), **CRISPIN USHER** (Filch), **JARVIS HUNTLEY-PIKE** (Lockit) and others. At the piano, **MR AMES** (The Beggar).*

GUY (*as Macheath; singing*)

THUS I STAND LIKE THE TURK, WITH HIS DOXIES AROUND;
FROM ALL SIDES THEIR GLANCES HIS PASSION CONFOUND;
FOR BLACK, BROWN AND FAIR, HIS INCONSTANCY BURNS,
AND THE DIFFERENT BEAUTIES SUBDUE HIM BY TURNS:
EACH CALLS FORTH HER CHARMS TO PROVOKE HIS DESIRES:
THOUGH WILLING TO ALL; WITH BUT ONE HE RETIRES.
BUT THINK OF THIS MAXIM, AND PUT OFF YOUR SORROW,
THE WRETCH OF TO-DAY, MAY BE HAPPY TO-MORROW.

ALL (*singing*)

EACH CALLS FORTH HER CHARMS AND PROVOKES HIS
DESIRES,
THOUGH WILLING TO ALL; WITH BUT ONE HE RETIRES.

BUT THINK OF THIS MAXIM, AND PUT OFF YOUR SORROW,
THE WRETCH OF TO-DAY, MAY BE HAPPY TOMORROW.

The dance that accompanies the final chorus finally finishes with a triumphant tableau. The lights darken slightly to indicate the curtain has fallen. The company shuffle quickly into fresh positions. Muffled applause is heard. The lights brighten as the curtain goes up and the applause becomes louder and clearer. The company are all smiles at once. Several of these pre-rehearsed variants follow with finally GUY as Macheath taking a solo call and being applauded by his fellow artistes. Graciously, he presents his two leading ladies, HANNAH (Polly) and LINDA (Lucy). Both, in turn, are presented with bouquets. Next, the company turn in the direction of MR AMES (The Beggar) at the piano who rises and makes a sheepish acknowledgement. The general bow follows.

At this point, with a sort of reluctant alacrity, the producer, DAFYDD LLEWELLYN, springs on to the stage from the auditorium.

The cast, in turn, applaud him. Looking somewhat incongruous in his modern clothes, he bows modestly and finally raises his hands for silence. The applause ceases.

DAFYDD Ladies and gentleman, thank you all for that wonderful, wonderful reception. There are a million people I ought to thank. There are a million people I'd like to thank and there are a million people I'm afraid I'm not going to thank, at least by name or you'll be sitting here till tomorrow morning. *(He laughs)*

The cast smile with relief.

I will, if I may, restrict myself to saying this. Thank you, wonderful cast. Thank you, wonderful, wonderful stage management. Thank you, marvellous audience. But thank you most of all to one individual without whom none of this

could have happened. He joined PALOS but a few weeks ago. The emergency occurred and the man rose to the occasion. What more can I say?—he's been... Well, your reception said it all. Ladies and gentlemen, our very special Macheath, Mr Guy Jones.

DAFYDD turns and presents GUY who acknowledges fresh applause. Again, the cast join in. The curtain falls finally. The lights again dim to indicate this and the applause becomes muffled, finally dying out.

The cast start to disperse, chattering and laughing and moving towards the dressing rooms.

GUY, quite suddenly, is all alone. No one, once the curtain has fallen, speaks or even acknowledges him. He stands for a moment before starting to remove his costume, beginning with his wig and hat, then jacket and cravat.

Stage managers begin to move round him re-setting and striking props, including the raised platform.

In time, the remaining stage lights go out and are replaced by harsh working lights. Similarly the stage reverts from a performance to a rehearsal state.

HANNAH, still in her basic Polly costume, comes on carrying GUY's ordinary clothes. She watches him for a second.

HANNAH *(softly)* Well done.

GUY Mmm?

HANNAH Well done.

GUY *(dully)* Thank you.

HANNAH *(indicating his clothes)* Here are your...

GUY *makes no move.*

I'll leave them here... (*She puts the clothes gently on a table and makes to leave*)

GUY Thanks.

HANNAH (*turning as she goes*) I— (*Changing her mind*) Right. I must... Goodbye.

GUY Yes. Goodbye.

HANNAH *goes.*

GUY *finishes changing, finally putting on his mac. He seems about to leave but turns in the doorway and surveys the darkened stage. We hear the distant sound of the piano playing "YOUTH'S THE SEASON MADE FOR JOYS". It's a fragment, a wistful echo of his memory.*

It is now three to four months earlier. February and very cold. Voices and laughter are heard from a distance in the dressing rooms offstage. GUY, having entered from the street, stands uncertainly wondering whether to proceed further.

BRIDGET, *in coat, hat and boots, enters with a small rehearsal table which she bangs down rather noisily.*

At first appearance she is a rather graceless, galumphing girl who has long ago dispensed with social niceties and conventional sexual role-playing. She gives no sign of having seen GUY but continues on her way. GUY makes a little gurgling sound in his throat.

BRIDGET (*turning back at the last minute*) Did you want somebody?

GUY Mr Jones.

BRIDGET Mr Jones?

GUY Yes.

BRIDGET No.

GUY No?

BRIDGET No. No Mr Jones here.

GUY No, no...

BRIDGET This is the Operatic Society.

GUY Yes, yes.

BRIDGET We haven't any Mr Jones.

GUY No. You won't have.

BRIDGET No?

GUY Well, you might have but... No, I'm Mr Jones.

BRIDGET You're Mr Jones?

GUY Yes. *(Slight pause)* Sorry.

BRIDGET We'll start again, shall we?

GUY Yes.

BRIDGET I've just come in. Right?

GUY Right.

BRIDGET OK. So. Who do you want?

GUY Mr Lewellyn. Mr— *(He takes an envelope from his pocket and looks at it)* —Mr D ap Llewellyn.

BRIDGET Is he expecting you?

GUY Yes, I think so. He said round about this time.

BRIDGET Wait there, then. Mr Jones, yes?

GUY Yes.

BRIDGET *goes.*

GUY hops around a little. Half because of nerves, half because of the cold. He spies a piano in the corner and moves to it. From the envelope he is holding he produces a small piece of music, obviously torn from a book.

With an inexperienced finger, he taps out the odd note and attempts to match them with his voice. Whatever he plays appears to be outside his range. He clears his throat but it's quite obvious that his voice has packed up completely. With sudden determination, GUY screws up the piece of music, stuffs it into his pocket and marches towards the door.

Before he can leave, there is a burst of chatter from off and DAFYDD enters. He is a busy, slightly overweight, energetic man in his late thirties. A live wire. The mainspring of the Society. Never using one word where three will do, never walking when he can hurry. Whatever the temperature, DAFYDD always appears to find it a little on the warm side.

DAFYDD (*seeing GUY*) My dear chap, I'm so sorry. I'm deeply sorry. I knew you were coming. I wrote down you were coming. It slipped my mind. How do you do? Dafydd Ap Llewellyn. Good of you to come along. We're on our first stages of rehearsal. Just getting started. Broken for tea for ten minutes.

GUY Ah. Yes.

DAFYDD (*calling*) Mr Ames? I'll just fetch Mr Ames in and he can play for you. Brought something along to sing, have you?

GUY Well, I had sort of—

DAFYDD (*calling*) Mr Ames? Otherwise we've got plenty of bits and pieces lying around, you know. And, of course, Mr Ames, he's encyclopaedic. He's played practically every musical comedy you could name. Choose a key, choose a tune, choose a tempo, he's away—where, the bloody hell is he? Excuse me. (*He moves to the door, calling*) Mr Ames?—ah, there you are. This is Mr Ames.

MR AMES *enters. He is a small, intensely shy man whose silent, unobtrusive personality is in direct contrast to that of DAFYDD's.*

Mr Ames, this is Mr—God, I'm afraid I don't even know your name—Mr...?

GUY Jones.

DAFYDD Mr Jones. Not Welsh, are you?

GUY No. No. 'Fraid not. From Leeds.

DAFYDD (*dubiously*) Leeds?

GUY Originally.

DAFYDD Originally from Leeds. Right. This is our Mr Ames. Mr Ames, Mr Jones is going to sing for us. Give us an idea of his range. And intonation. Which is a polite way of saying can he sing in tune. (*He laughs*) If not, welcome to the club. What are you, tenor, are you?

GUY I think I'm a sort of light baritone. I think.

DAFYDD Oh yes? Light baritone, eh? Yes, we've got plenty of those lurking in the back row, haven't we, Mr Ames? They're what we call our down the octave brigade.

GUY (*laughing*) Yes, yes...

DAFYDD Come on then. Let's have a listen. Did you say you had some music? Or shall we ask Mr Ames to rifle through his golden treasure chest of memories?

GUY (*fumbling for his music*) No, I've brought... (*He is unable to find it and rummages through his pockets*) Just a second...

DAFYDD Bit of *Merry Widow*? Fancy that?

GUY (*somewhat panic-stricken at the thought*) No, no, please...

DAFYDD West Side Story? Oklahoma? The King and I?

MR AMES *plays a bar of this last.*

GUY (*finding his music at last*) No. Here we are. Found it. Here. (*He holds up the crumpled piece of music*)

DAFYDD Is that it?

GUY Sorry.

DAFYDD You shouldn't have splashed out like that, you know.
Not just for an audition. *(He laughs again)*

DAFYDD *takes the scrap of music from GUY and gives it to MR AMES.*

Here we are, Mr Ames. Second Act of *Tannhauser* by the look of it. *(He laughs)* No, I'm sorry, Mr Jones. We're only having a little joke. Don't mind us, you'll get used to it. Possibly. *(Briskly)* Right. Seriously for a moment. Be serious, Llewellyn, boy. What have we got here? *(He puts on his reading glasses)* My word, my word. You still claim you're not Welsh? What does that say there, Mr Ames? What does it say to you? *All Through the Night*. Ar hyd y nos.

GUY Yes. Coincidence.

DAFYDD *(mock serious)* Well. I don't know. Should we allow a man from Leeds to sing this, Mr Ames? Eh? What do you think?

GUY It was just the only song I happen to...

DAFYDD Well. Seeing your name is Jones. Maybe. Special dispensation, eh?

GUY *(gamely trying to keep up with the joke)* Thank you very much...

DAFYDD Just this once.

GUY It was the only song I knew in the piano stool. My mother used to sing it. Years ago.

DAFYDD Your mother's Welsh, then?

GUY No.

DAFYDD But she sings?

GUY No, she...

DAFYDD Bring her down. Bring her down next time with you.

GUY No, she's dead.

DAFYDD (*sadly*) Ah. Well. Too late, then. Too late. Sad. Can you play that do you think, Mr Ames?

MR AMES Yes, yes... (*He plays a chord or two, peering at the music*)

ENID WASHBROOK *appears in the doorway during this. Behind ENID, her daughter LINDA cranes round her to catch a glimpse of the newcomer.*

ENID Are we starting again, Dafydd?

DAFYDD In just one moment, Enid, just one moment. We'll give you a call. We're just going to hear this gentleman sing...

ENID Oh, right. Excuse us, won't you...

DAFYDD We'll give you a call.

ENID (*to GUY, as they go*) Good luck.

GUY Thank you.

ENID *and LINDA go out.*

DAFYDD Now, Mr Jones, the millon dollar question. Are you going to sing this in Welsh or in English?

GUY Well, I'm sorry, in English if that's all right...

DAFYDD (*hopping about in mock pain*) Oh, oh, oh, oh... Like *Pomp and Circumstance* in Japanese... If you must, if you must... Right. When you're ready, Mr Ames. Take it away...

MR AMES *plays the introduction. DAFYDD moves away slightly. GUY opens his mouth to sing. Before he can do so, DAFYDD is there before him sounding off in a full Welsh tenor.*

Singing.

HOLL AMRANTAU'R SER DDYWEDANT, AR HYD Y NOS,
DYMA'R FFORDD I FRO GOGON-IANT, AR HYD Y NOS;

GO-LAU A-RALL YW TYWYLL-WCH, I ARDDANGOS GWIR
 BRYD-FERTHWCH,
 TEULU'R NEFOEDD MEWN TA-WELWCH, AR HYD Y NOS.

DAFYDD stops singing. MR AMES stops playing. There is a respectful silence.

Sorry. I'm sorry. I sincerely beg your pardon, Mr Jones. Every time I hear... *(He breaks off too moved to continue. Then, clapping GUY on the shoulder)* It's all yours. Take it away, boy.

GUY *(horrified)* Right.

MR AMES re-starts the introduction. DAFYDD moves away to the far reaches of the auditorium. GUY, by now very nervous, misses the introduction first time round but manages on the second.

Nervously.

WHILE THE MOON HER WATCH IS KEEPING,
 ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT,
 WHILE THE WE—

DAFYDD *(calling from the darkness)* Mr Jones, sorry to interrupt you just as you were getting underway. That's lovely. Very pleasant. A little tip. Just try facing out this way a bit more, would you? You're not in need of the music, are you?

GUY *(straining to see DAFYDD)* No, no.

DAFYDD No, it didn't appear you were reading it. *(Waving GUY away from the safety of the piano)* Now. Just try placing your weight equally on both your feet. Legs slightly apart. That's it. A bit more. Now, can you feel yourself balanced, can you?

GUY Yes, yes.

DAFYDD Singing is a great deal to do with balance, Mr Jones. Balance, you see. You can't sing on one leg now, can you? You'd feel unbalanced.

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