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How To Make Your Theatre Pay

A comedy

David Henry Wilson

Samuel French—London
New York-Toronto-Hollywood



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HOW TO MAKE YOUR THEATRE PAY

First performed by The Wessex Actors Company in March 1998, with the following cast:

Rouse	Magnus Stewart
Mike	Gary McKinven
	(later replaced by Julian Chaloner)
Mavis	Angela Touhig

Directed by Pat Hudson

The first London production was at the Union Theatre in May 1999, with the following cast:

Rouse	Jamie Neil
Mike	Kieran Buckeridge
Mavis	Abigail Fisher

Directed by Nick Pilton

CHARACTERS

Rouse, small, seedy, obnoxious. He has a sort of semi-educated accent, with flattened vowels: he pronounces his name "Riouse", "name" becomes "naeem" etc. Final "l" sounds turn into "w"; "Council" is thus "Ciounciw". And "people" becomes "peopwe"

Mike, pleasant, well-spoken

Mavis, very sexy, and revealingly dressed

The action of the play takes place on the stage of a theatre. The onstage set can, therefore, be anything at all

Time — the present

HOW TO MAKE YOUR THEATRE PAY

The stage of a theatre

When the play begins, Mike Pemberton-Hawkesley is inspecting the set. Mavis is in the auditorium as a member of the audience

Rouse enters

Rouse Mr Pemberton-Hawkesley?

Mike Yes.

Rouse Rouse is the name. From the Council. We had an appointment for one o'clock.

Mike Oh yes!

Rouse And it's now eleven and a half minutes past one, which emolumates a loss of eleven and a half minutes.

Mike I'm sorry, I'd forgotten you were ...

Rouse A lot of people forget that I'm coming, but I come all the same.

Mike What can I do for you, Mr Rouse?

Rouse The question is what I can do for you, Mr Pemberton-Hawkesley. I've been asked by the Chairman of the Council, my very good friend Sir Charles, to try and turn your substantial losses into something more acceptable to the Council. Namely, a profit.

Mike Well, that would be nice.

Rouse Not merely nice, Mr Pemberton-Hawkesley. Indecrundible. Let's start with this name of yours, shall we?

Mike My name?

Rouse Extremely uneconomical.

Mike I'm sorry. I happen to have been born with it.

Rouse Then change it. If we all stuck to what we were born with, we should never leave our mother's nipples. However, I am not here to huggle over your name or your mother's nipples. I shall call you Pem, which at a stroke is a saving of eighty-seven and a half per cent. Rouse researches have revealed that the average head of department is addressed by name at least twenty-four times a day, which at a saving of one second per call will indentrify two minutes saving in a five-day week, or one hundred and four minutes per year, or just under seventeen and a half hours in ten years.

Mike Everybody calls me Mike.

Rouse Oh! Am I to take it that you are on first-name terms with your employees?

Mike Certainly. Aren't you?

Rouse Absolutely not. Inferiors must be kept in their place. First name today, give me a rise tomorrow. No, no, Pem, familiarity breeds confopulation. (*He takes out a notebook and pencil*) Now I'm going to ask you a few questions if you don't mind or if you do mind.

Mike Right.

Rouse How much do you earn?

Mike Oh!

Rouse I shall have your answer checked.

Mike Fifteen thousand.

Rouse Phew! That's a lot of money.

Mike It's not a lot by —

Rouse Then let's round that down to twelve thousand, shall we? A thousand pounds a month should be ample for anyone outside Council offices.

Mike Mr Rouse, I'm sure the Council don't intend you to cut —

Rouse Who knows what the Council intend, Pemmy? The Council works in strange and wondrous haberdobberies. The fact is that by adjusting your salary from fifteen to twelve thousand, we save twenty per cent.

Mike This is some kind of joke, isn't it?

Rouse Joke? You are talking to a representative of the Council.

Mike Look, I don't mind you investigating how we spend Council money, but there'll be no cuts in salary either for myself or for my staff.

Rouse Mummy, Mummy, I want all the cake, not just a slice! Oh dear, what a kerbaddie. You remind me, Pemmy, of the man with the bag of gold in the sinking boat. "Throw some out!" cried the voice of reason. "No!" cried the voice of greed. And do you know what happened?

Mike No.

Rouse He bubbulated.

Mike He what?

Rouse Now, I must ask you some questions about this establishment of yours. Firstly, what exactly does it do?

Mike It's a theatre.

Rouse That's what it is. I want to know what it does.

Mike Our main activity is to put on plays.

Rouse Plays.

Mike Yes.

Rouse And what do you mean by plays?

Mike Dramas. We range from Shakespeare to modern plays, musicals, pantomime, lunchtime theatre —

Rouse Are you doing this deliberately?

Mike What?

Rouse Shakespeare, mantopime, sumicals! You can't fuzzle me, Pem, I know the meaning of the word "play", and I doubt whether Sir Charles and the Council will be very pleased to hear that the money extangulated from the tax-payer is now being "played" with.

Mike Mr Rouse, do you actually know what a theatre is?

Rouse That, Pemmy, is what I'm here to find out.

Mike You mean you've never heard of Shakespeare?

Rouse It might be more relevant to ask whether Shakespeare has heard of me.

Mike He died in 1616.

Rouse In that case, he can write in for a rebate.

Mike Tell me, Mr Rouse, since you know absolutely nothing about the theatre, how can you possibly advise me on the best way to run it?

Rouse Oh dear. Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear. The Layman's Blunder. Reorganastification, Pem, is always done by outsiders. When the economy's in a mess, they make the Minister of Education Chancellor of the Exchequer. When education's in a mess, they give it to the Minister of Transport. And every so often, in any case, the Prime Minister does a hey-diddly-plunkyrole which he calls a reshuffle to make sure nobody knows that they're talking about. The outsider sees most, Pemmy. On my last assignment I saved the Council millions because I had no preconstipations.

Mike What was the assignment?

Rouse Hospitals. Do you know what I found in the hospitals, Pem?

Mike No.

Rouse Hundreds and hundreds of people lying in bed. In their pyjamas. Doing absolutely nothing. The Council was paying millions to have these malabiddles fed, warmed, finglepotted at every whimsey by salaried attendants ... It was a disgrace.

Mike What did you do?

Rouse I removed a large number of beds, reduced the staff of attendants, and brought in a few hundred supervisors from the Council to stop the malabiddling.

Mike My God!

Rouse You'd be amazed what people get up to. Take the unifarcities.

Mike The what?

Rouse They're connected with education. What did I find there? Huge buildings, rooms, paphernomiums everywhere, hugely expensive. And what were people doing there? Talking and reading. That's it. Talking and reading! I'd have closed them down on the spot.

Mike What happened?

Rouse Sir Charles said some people might complain if we closed them down, so we're just giving them less money and calling it reallocation. Eventually they'll fade away, and then we can put all those huge buildings to some useful purpose, which brings me most aptly to this building here.

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