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SF PERUSALS

# THE ENTERTAINER

A Play

by John Osborne

SAMUEL FRENCH

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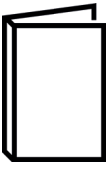
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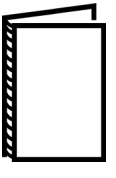
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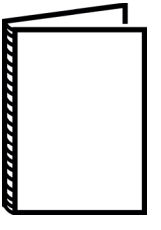
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John James Osborne was born in London on 12 December 1929 and died in Shropshire on 24 December 1994. He was married five times. His first wife was actress Pamela Lane. Pamela was the basis for the character of Alison in *Look Back in Anger*, outlived John and all his subsequent wives and died in October 2010. Osborne started writing plays whilst working as an actor in repertory in the 1950s. He first gained international fame in 1956 when *Look Back in Anger* was presented at the Royal Court Theatre, London, where many of his plays were produced, including *The Entertainer* (1957); *Epitaph for George Dillon* (1958); *Luther* (1961); *Plays for England: the Bamburgs and Under Plain Cover* (1962); *Inadmissible Evidence* (1964); *A Patroit for Me* (1965); *Time Present* (1968); *The Hotel in Amsterdam* (1968); *West of Suez* (1971) and *A Sense of Detachment* (1972). His other plays include *The Devil Inside Him/Cry For Love* (Huddersfield 1950 & Cardiff 2010); *Personal Enemy* (Harrogate 1955 & London & New York 2010); the musical *The World of Paul Slickey* (Palace Theatre, 1959); *The End of Me Old Cigar* (Greenwich, 1975); *Watch it Come Down* (National, 1975) and *DéjàVu* (Comedy Theatre, 1992) and he adapted Lope de Vega's *A Bond Honoured* (National, 1966); *Hedda Gabler* (Royal Court, 1972); *A Place Calling Itself Rom*e (a reworking of *Coriolanus*); Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Greenwich, 1975) and Strindberg's *The Father* (National, 1988). His work for television includes *A Subject of Scandal and Concern; The Right Prospectus; Jack and Jill; The Gift of Friendship; Almost a Vision; Try a Little Tenderness; You're not Watching Me Mummy; Very Like a Whale; God Rot Tunbridge Wells* and his autobiographical play *A Better Class of Person*. He also received the Tony Award in New York for Best Play for *Luther*. The Writer's Guild of Great Britain presented him with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 1992.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

The music hall is dying, and, with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone, for this was truly a folk art. In writing this play, I have not used some of the techniques of the music hall in order to exploit an effective trick, but because I believe that these can solve some of the eternal problems of time and space that face the dramatist and, also, it has been relevant to the story and setting. Not only has this technique its own traditions, its own convention and symbol, its own mystique, it cuts right across the restrictions of the so-called naturalistic stage. Its contact is immediate, vital and direct.

## THE ENTERTAINER

This play was first presented by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on 10 April 1957, with the following cast:—

| | |
|---|---|
| **BILLIE RICE** | *George Relph* |
| **JEAN RICE** | *Dorothy Tutin* |
| **PHOEBE RICE** | *Brenda de Banzie* |
| **ARCHIE RICE** | *Laurence Olivier* |
| **FRANK RICE** | *Richard Pasco* |
| **GORGEOUS GLADYS** | *Vivienne Drummond* |
| **WILLIAM (BROTHER BILL) RICE** | *Aubrey Dexter* |
| **GRAHAM** | *Stanley Meadows* |

and subsequently by the English Stage Company, in association with Laurence Olivier Productions, at the Palace Theatre, London, on 10 September 1957, with the following cast:—

| | |
|---|---|
| **BILLIE RICE** | *George Relph* |
| **JEAN RICE** | *Joan Plowright* |
| **PHOEBE RICE** | *Brenda de Banzie* |
| **ARCHIE RICE** | *Laurence Olivier* |
| **FRANK RICE** | *Richard Pascoe* |
| **BRITANNIA** | *Jennifer Wallace* |
| **WILLIAM (BROTHER BILL) RICE** | *Albert Chevalier* |
| **GRAHAM** | *Robert Stephens* |

*Settings by* Alan Tagg *with costumes by* Clare Jeffrey
*Music by* John Addison
*Directed by* Tony Richardson

No character, in this play, is intended to portray any specific person, alive or dead. Running time of this play, excluding intervals, is approximately two hours.

## CHARACTERS

**BILLIE RICE**
**JEAN RICE**
**PHOEBE RICE**
**ARCHIE RICE**
**FRANK RICE**
**WILLIAM (BROTHER BILL) RICE**
**GRAHAM DOOD**
and
**BRITANNIA**

Overture

1. Billy and Jean.
2. Archie Rice— “Don’t Take Him Seriously!”
3. Billy, Jean and Phoebe.
4. Archie Rice— “In Trouble Again”.
5. Billy, Jean, Phoebe and Archie.

Intermission

6. Billy, Phoebe, Jean, Archie and Frank.
7. Archie Rice— “Interrupts the Programme”.
8. Billy, Phoebe, Jean, Archie and Frank.

Intermission

9. Frank Rice— “Singing for You”.
10. Billy, Phoebe, Jean, Archie and Frank.
11. The Good Old Days Again.
12. Jean and Graham—Archie and Brother Bill.
13. Archie Rice— “The One and Only”.

## PRODUCTION NOTE

Here is a view of England seen through the eyes of a music-hall comedian and his family, and constructed with the disciplined freedom of the twice-nightly variety programme.

As the challenge to the director and cast is considerable, it is assumed you will not be attempting this play unless you have responded to and been stimulated by it. Therefore these few production notes are intended to guide the group over the pitfalls and not to explain or justify the play's philosophy; as such they will be as severely practical as possible.

John Osborne has said that he wants to make people *feel* in the theatre, and let them think afterwards. His method is to throw before the audience statements, ideas and situations, and then let them respond at their will. During performances at the Royal Court Theatre the casts of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer* used to play a game of guessing where some members of the audience would walk out. Indeed, Mr Osborne, in his foreword to the acting edition of *Look Back in Anger* (q.v.), postulates that for members of an audience to leave the theatre is a response: better they should leave noisily, because they have been offended, than sit snug and unhearing.

Like all plays written by actors, from Shakespeare onwards, *The Entertainer* has dialogue which only works to its greatest effect when spoken to a listening audience. The construction and punctuation of the dialogue is dramatic and not literary. Observe, for instance, the difference in rhythm between Billy's opening speech in Number Five and Archie's closing lines: the one broad and flowing; the other nervous and jerky. You may examine the whole play in this way.

*Staging*

The place is England – the time is 1956.

Alan Tagg's original settings for the Royal Court Theatre had a two-fold intention: (1) that the settings could be changed without any pause in the presentation (of course, John Osborne's construction of the play enormously helps this) and (2) that the whole play should have the atmosphere of the music hall. Accordingly, false stage boxes were designed for the Royal Court Theatre with heavily decorated bow fronts topped with red plush, the usual theatre front curtain was replaced by an example of a typical music-hall advertisement cloth, and electrically operated

numerical indicators were installed which lit up and showed the number of each "turn" as it was being played.

Directly behind the advertisement cloth was the music-hall area: tormentors either side, through which Archie Rice entered or left, and a gaudily painted gauze backdrop. This gauze was backed with black "tabs" so that scenery and property changes could be carried out behind the gauze backdrop while a music-hall number was being played in front. A rising microphone was installed to come up at the footlights for the music-hall scenes.

When the gauze and its attendant black tabs were flown out, the Rices' living room was revealed. Even here the music-hall atmosphere was retained. No naturalistic room with the fourth wall removed, but gauze wings, gauze backdrop (the top of which could be seen by the audience) and heavily swagged borders. In this backdrop was set the living-room door, which opened onstage showing the passage beyond, and which was reached by stairs coming up through the stage. There was no backing to the stairs or passage except the back wall of the theatre. (See frontispiece, also ground plan facing p. 98.)

Because the gauze wings could not act as masking in themselves, plum-coloured velvet legs were also hung at the necessary intervals up each side.

The use of gauze, which is difficult material to paint, hang and light, is *not* essential to the play. Because Alan Tagg used it, it meant that at the Royal Court Theatre it was possible, with appropriate lighting, to see the back wall, although the music-hall backdrop and the living-room backdrop were both "in"; as far as the living-room backdrop was concerned it meant that artists could be seen coming up the stairs and walking along the passage to the living-room door: and for the music-hall backdrop it meant that the nude posing as Britannia in Number Nine could be set behind the backdrop (and its black tabs) during the music-hall scene and to reveal the nude only necessitated the black tabs being drawn aside and the lighting being changed. The back wall of the theatre was used twice, once at the beginning of the play when it was hung with neon and bright electric signs to represent a street, and once at the very end of the play when the entire stage was cleared completely and it represented itself – the back wall of a theatre.

This description has been dealt with at some length in the hope that it might help by knowing how the original production

was planned scenically. It can, of course, be simplified. There are three areas necessary: the orchestra pit, the music hall, and the sitting room. The music hall needs three to four feet in depth, after which the remainder of the stage area (not forgetting to allow for the music-hall backdrop) can be given to the living room. There is *no need* to see beyond the living room backdrop, and the door can lead off right or left to save having to allow for the depth of a passage outside the door. The stage left tormentor opening was used at the Royal Court as the entrance to Phoebe's kitchen, so it is conceivable that the stage right tormentor opening could be the door to the living room. An entrance far down stage is not easy to use from the producer's point of view, but this alternative might be considered a better entrance for the artists than entering through the wings, if this form of staging is used.

It must be remembered that the Rice family can play over the music-hall area, so that the living-room scenes can be opened out, but of course the artists must be moved upstage of the music-hall backdrop before the end of the scene. This linking of the two areas is particularly useful between Numbers Eight to Nine and Nine to Ten, when Archie Rice goes directly from the room into his music-hall turn, and at the end of the turn is immediately part of the living-room scene once more.

*Some short notes on the characters*

Very few words are needed on the characters. John Osborne has written his own notes about them and, with those in mind while a careful study is made of the text, each character is found to have a past as well as a present. Even Brother Bill and Graham, although their *rôles* are very small – and although their scenes are concurrent, switching from one side of the stage where Jean and Graham play their scene on the same settee that has been used all through the play, to the other side where a desk and two chairs have replaced Billie's armchair – they are both characters who have been mentioned many times during the course of the play. Not only do their scenes add greatly to our knowledge of the destinies of Archie and Jean, but they also complement all that has been said about themselves.

In thinking of Billie Rice, one can but quote John Osborne writing in the programme for the Boston, USA opening: "The

only way he could deal with life was continually to draw on the strength of his remembered past".

Between Jean and Frank – a half brother and sister – there is a deep affection, understanding and tolerance. It is this same tolerance, as well as her intelligence, that allows Jean to accept Phoebe's attitude in Number Eight and it is to Phoebe that she gives unspoken comfort in Number Ten. Frank plays at being Archie's "feed", until the news of Mick's death strikes right through the gay *façade* we have seen up till then.

Finally, Phoebe and Archie Rice: both wonderful acting parts with tremendous scope and variety; each knowingly acting a part, but each being caught off guard, for example, with Phoebe in Number Seven and with Archie in Number Ten.

*Music*

Music for *The Entertainer* has been specially composed by John Addison and is available on hire direct *from the publishers only*. They will be glad to furnish particulars on request.

The work is scored for viola, B♭ trumpet, trombone, percussion and piano. When all these instruments are not available it is desirable that at least a percussion player be used with a piano.

## SETTING

The action takes place in a large coastal resort. The house where the Rice family live is one of those tall ugly monuments built by a prosperous businessman at the beginning of the century. Only twenty-five minutes in the brougham to the front. Now, trolleybuses hum past the front drive, full of workers from the small factories that have grown up round about. This is a part of the town the holiday-makers never see – or, if they do, they decide to turn back to the pleasure gardens. This is what they have spent two or three hours in a train to escape. They don't even have to pass it on their way in from the Central Station, for this is a town on its own, and it has its own station – quite a large one, with acres of goods sheds and shunting yards. However, the mainline trains don't stop there. It is not residential, it is hardly industrial. It is full of dirty blank spaces, high black walls, a gas holder, a tall chimney, a main road that shakes with dust and lorries. The shops are scattered at the corners of narrow streets: a newsagent's, a general grocer's, a fish-and-chip shop.

## OVERTURE

During the intermissions, an advertising sheet is lowered.

## Number One

*At the back a gauze. Behind it, a part of the town. In front of it, a high rostrum with steps leading to it. Knee-high flats and a door frame will serve for a wall. The sight lines are preserved by swagging. Different swags can be lowered for various scenes to break up the acting areas. Also, ordinary, tatty backcloth and draw-tabs. There are two doors left and right of the apron. The lighting is the kind you expect to see in the local Empire: everything bang-on, bright and hard, or a simple follow-spot. The scenes and interludes must, in fact, be lit as if they were simply turns on the bill. Furniture and props are as basic as they would be for a short sketch. On both sides of the proscenium is a square in which illuminated numbers, the turn numbers, appear as the programme proceeds. The problems involved are basically the same as those that confront any resident stage-manager on the twice nightly circuit every Monday morning of his working life.*

*Music. The latest, the loudest, the worst. A gauzed front-cloth. On it are painted enormous naked young ladies, waving brightly coloured fans, and kicking out gaily. Written across it in large letters are the words: "ROCK'N' ROLL NEW'D LOOK".*

*Behind the upstage gauze, light picks out an old man. He walks across the stage from left to right. As he reaches centre he pauses and looks up. There are shouts and screams. The noise of a woman trying to separate two men—her son and her lover perhaps. Cries of "Oh, leave him alone! Don't! Please don't! Leave him alone". He walks off right and reappears beside the swagging,*

*walking in centre. There is a crash and the sound of blows. He pauses again, then goes on. The woman screams, loudly this time. He pauses again, turns back, and shouts down over the banister rail: "Do you mind being quiet down there, please?" He pauses, but there is no response. "Will you kindly stop making all that noise!" He manages to sound dignified, but he has a powerful voice and the noise stops for a moment. He nods and starts moving. A voice shouts: "Why don't you shut your great big old gob, you poor, bloody old fool!" A woman's sob stabs the end of the sentence and the old man hesitates, turns back and calls over the stairs: "Are you all right, Mrs—?" A man's voice is heard, urgent and heated. A door bangs, and the noise is muffled. The sobbing is still audible but the situation seems to be more controlled. The old man returns centre and enters through the door-frame.*

**BILLY** *and* **JEAN.**

**BILLY RICE** *is a spruce man in his seventies. He has great physical pride, the result of a life-time of being admired as a "fine figure of a man". He is slim, upright, athletic. He glows with scrubbed well-being. His hair is just grey, thick and silky from its vigorous daily brush. His clothes are probably twenty-five years old, including his pointed patent leather shoes, but well pressed and smart. His watch chain gleams, his collar is fixed with a tie-pin beneath the tightly knotted black tie, his brown Homburg is worn at a very slight angle. When he speaks it is with a dignified Edwardian diction, a kind of repudiation of both Oxford and cockney that still rhymes "cross" with "force", and yet manages to avoid being exactly upper-class or effete. Indeed, it is not an accent of class but of period. One does not hear it often now.*

*Take up front gauze.*

*He walks downstage centre laying down a folded newspaper, two quart bottles of beer, and a telegram, which he glances at quickly. He crosses to the forestage door right, and disappears through it singing sonorously but cheerfully:*

"ROCK OF AGES, CLEFT FOR ME,
LET ME HIDE MYSELF IN THEE!"

*He reappears in his shirt sleeves pulling on a heavy, woollen cardigan over his waistcoat. Still singing, he sits down, pours himself out a glass of beer, and starts to unlace his shoes. He puts those in a box with tissue paper upstage centre. The noise starts up again from downstairs. He drinks from his glass of beer, takes out a nail file and stands cleaning his nails expertly. This is like flicking off the old, imaginary speck of dust. There is a yell from downstairs.* **BILLY** *speaks, gravely, with forethought.*

**BILLY** Bloody Poles and Irish!

*He sits down and puts on his carpet slippers. Front door slams, he takes spectacles from his case and puts them on.*

I hate the bastards.

*He unfolds his newspaper, the doorbell is still ringing. He looks irritated, but he has his feet up and is too comfortable to move. He sings cheerfully, as if to drown the noise of the doorbell.*

NEARER MY GOD TO THEE
NEARER TO THEE!

*He listens and then goes on.*

EVEN THOUGH IT BE A CROSS
THAT RAISETH ME.

*He picks up the newspaper and peers at it gravely.*

STILL ALL MY SONG WOULD BE
NEARER MY GOD TO THEE,
NEARER TO THEE!

*He puts down his paper.*

*(standing)* Why don't they answer the bloody door!

*He leans his arm on the chair, wondering whether he will have to go after all.*

Ought to be locked up, some of these people.

*It looks as though he won't have to go after all, and he settles back cheerfully.*

Dirty, filthy lot. *(picks up paper)* No wonder we're going down. *(pushes paper down suddenly)* My God, there's a draught!

*Gets up and goes to door and looks out.*

I'll bet they've left the front door open. Born in fields, they are.

*Takes a rug and arranges it against the door.*

Probably were born in fields. Animals. *(back to chair and sits down)* Like animals. Wild animals.

*He settles down. Across from left comes a young girl,* **JEAN**. **BILLY** *pours himself out some more beer. The girl knocks on the door. He listens.*

Who is it?

*The girl knocks again.*

Who is it? Can't get any peace in this damned house.

**JEAN** Is that you, Grandad?

**BILLY** What?

**JEAN** It's Jean.

**BILLY** *(rising)* Who is it?

**JEAN** It's me – Jean.

**BILLY** *(goes to door and stands behind it)* Can't even read the paper in peace. Who?

**JEAN** It's your granddaughter.

**BILLY** Oh! What she doing?

**JEAN** *tries to push door open but the rug prevents it.*

Just a minute! Just a minute! Hold your horses! *(He bends down)*

**JEAN** Sorry.

**BILLY** Hold your horses!

*He releases the rug and opens door, revealing* **JEAN RICE.** *She is about twenty-two, dark, with slightly protruding teeth and bad eye-sight. She is what most people would call plain, but already humour and tenderness have begun to stake their small claims around her nose and eyes. Her mouth is large, generous.*

**JEAN** Hello, Grandad.

**BILLY** I wondered who the hell it was.

**JEAN** I'm sorry.

**BILLY** I thought it was some of that mad lot carrying on. Well, come on in if you're coming, it's draughty standing about in the doorway. I've only just sat down.

**JEAN** *(coming in, kisses him)* Did I disturb you? I am sorry.

**BILLY** I'd just sat down to read the evening paper. Well, this is a surprise. Who let you in?

**JEAN** The son, I think. He didn't say a word.

**BILLY** Shouldn't think he did. He's too bloody ignorant that's why.

**JEAN** I could hear her. I was ringing the bell for ages.

**BILLY** It's a bloody farm-yard this place.

**JEAN** Well, how are you?

**BILLY** Bloody farm-yard. They want locking up. And you know what, now, don't you? You know who she's got upstairs, in Mick's old room, don't you? Some black fellow. It's true. I tell you, you've come to a mad-house this time.

**JEAN** You're looking very well. How do you feel?

**BILLY** I'm all right. You expect a few aches and pains when you get to my age. Phoebe's at the pictures, I think. She didn't tell me you were coming.

**JEAN** I didn't tell her.

**BILLY** No, well she didn't say anything. So I wasn't expecting a knock on the door.

**JEAN** I only decided to come up this morning.

**BILLY** I'd only just sat down to read the evening paper.

**JEAN** I'm sorry. I disturbed you.

*She has picked up her cue neatly. The fact that his evening has been disturbed is established. His air of distracted irritation relaxes and he smiles a little. He is pleased to see her anyway.*

**BILLY** Well, give your Grandad a kiss, come on.

*She does so.*

**JEAN** It's good to see you.

**BILLY** Well, it's nice to see you, my darling. Bit of a surprise. Go on, take your things off. Phoebe won't be long. What she went out for, I don't know.

**JEAN** *undoes her coat, and throws a packet of cigarettes on the table.*

**JEAN** Got you those. Gone to the pictures, has she?

**BILLY** She's mad. Oh, that's very kind of you. Very kind, thank you. Yes, she said she was going early. I don't know why she can't stay in.

**JEAN** Well, you know, she's always been like that. She enjoys it.

**BILLY** Well, she'll have to learn. She's not a youngster any more. When she gets to my age, she won't want to do it.

*He unwraps the cigarettes and takes out an ivory holder from his waistcoat.*

Oh, this is nice of you. Thank you. Still, if she stays in she only gets irritable. And I can't stand rows. Not any more. *(He stares in front of him.)* No use arguing with Phoebe anyway. Would you like some beer?

*She shakes her head.*

She just won't listen to you. Are you sure you won't? There's a damn great crate out in the kitchen. Archie brought it in this morning.

**JEAN** No thanks, Grandad.

**BILLY** No, when she gets in that mood, I just go out.

**JEAN** Where do you go?

**BILLY** I go for a walk. Or I go to the club. You haven't been to the club. Oh, I must take you then. It's very quiet, mind you. Except at weekends. You get some of the wives, then. But they're mostly old-timers, like me.

**JEAN** Sounds fun.

**BILLY** Well, it's somewhere to go when you're fed up with the place. Don't suppose it would appeal much to youngsters like yourself. I expect you go in more for these jazz places.

**JEAN** I'd like to go. You must take me.

**BILLY** Would you really? Would you? All right. But, I warn you, there's none of your boogie-woogie. How long are you here for?

**JEAN** Just the weekend.

**BILLY** We'll go tomorrow night. It's a good night—Sunday. I sing them some of the old songs, sometimes, when I feel like

it. Haven't done it lately, not for a long time. Don't seem to feel like it.

**JEAN** Where's Dad?

**BILLY** He's at the theatre. He's playing here—at the Grand this week, you know.

**JEAN** Oh, yes of course.

**BILLY** I don't seem to feel like it these days. You get a bit depressed sometimes sitting here. Oh, then there's the Cambridge down the road. I go there, of course. But there's not the old crowd there, you know. What about the news, eh? That's depressing. What d'you make of all this business out in the Middle East? People seem to be able to do what they like to us. Just what they like. I don't understand it. I really don't. Archie goes to that damned place down by the clock tower.

**JEAN** The Rockliffe.

**BILLY** Yes, the Rockliffe. Every tart and pansy boy in the district are in that place at a weekend. Archie tried to get me in there the other day. No thank you. It's just a meat-market.

**JEAN** How is Dad?

**BILLY** He's a fool.

**JEAN** Oh?

**BILLY** Putting money into a road-show.

**JEAN** I didn't know.

**BILLY** Oh, it's another of his cock-eyed ideas. He won't listen to me. He spends half his time in that Rockliffe.

**JEAN** I see. What show is it this time?

**BILLY** Oh, I don't remember what it's called.

**JEAN** Have you seen it?

**BILLY** No, I haven't seen it. I wouldn't. These nudes. They're killing the business. Anyway, I keep telling him, it's dead

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