

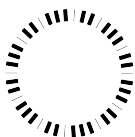
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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN

A Play in Four Scenes

by Alan Ayckbourn

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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A BRIEF HISTORY OF WOMEN was first performed at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, on 5 September 2017. The director was Alan Ayckbourn, with design by Kevin Jenkins, and lighting by Jason Taylor. The composer was Simon Slater and the choreographer was Sheila Carter. The cast was as follows:

ANTHONY SPATES Antony Eden
LORD EDWARD KIRKBRIDGE / DR WYN WILLIAMS /
DENNIS DUNBAR / GORDON Russell Dixon
CAPTAIN FERGUS FFLUKE / DESMOND KENNEDY /
RORY TUDOR / JIM SEABOURNE-WATSON Laurence Pears
LADY CAROLINE KIRKBRIDGE / MISS EVA MILLER /
PAT WRIGGLY / CAROLINE SEABOURNE Frances Marshall
LADY CYNTHIA / MISS URSULA BROCK /
JENNY TYLER / TILLY SEABOURNE-WATSON Laura Matthews
MRS REGINALD FFLUKE / MISS PHOEBE LONG /
GILLIAN DUNBAR / RUBY JENSEN Louise Shuttleworth

This production was presented with the same cast at 59E59 Theaters, New York, commencing 1 May 2018 as part of the Brits Off Broadway Festival.

CASTING NOTE

A Brief History of Women is written for a cast of six (3 women, 3 men). The suggested (and preferred!) distribution of the twenty-one roles is as follows:

ANTHONY SPATES – aged 17-77

LORD EDWARD KIRKBRIDGE – aged 65

DR WYNFORD WILLIAMS – aged 50

DENNIS DUNBAR – aged 50

GORDON – aged 50

CAPTAIN FERGUS FFLUKE – aged 27

DESMOND KENNEDY – aged 30

RORY TUDOR – aged 27

JIM SEABOURNE-WATSON – aged 30

LADY CAROLINE KIRKBRIDGE – aged 38

MISS EVA MILLER – aged 40

PAT WRIGGLY – aged 40

CAROLINE SEABOURNE – aged 97

LADY CYNTHIA – aged 20

MISS URSULA BROCK – aged 25

JENNY TYLER – aged 22

TILLY SEABOURNE-WATSON – aged 27

MRS REGINALD FFLUKE – aged 50

MISS PHOEBE LONG – aged 45

GILLIAN DUNBAR – aged 45

RUBY JENSEN – aged 40

NOTES ON MUSIC

Required Music

Licensees are provided with piano-vocal sheet music for “You Can Try” on pages 64 & 65 for an additional fee. This music is required for performance.

Suggested Music for Part Three

Whilst there is no requirement to use these pieces, it may be of use to refer to some of the music used in the original production:

“Dawn from the Daphnis et Chloé Suite” by Ravel for the Jack and the Beanstalk “ballet” rehearsals.

Dvorak’s “Humanesque” for where Spates and Gillian practice the cow dance.

PART ONE

Kirkbridge Manor 1925

CHARACTERS

ANTHONY SPATES – a footman, aged 17
LORD EDWARD KIRKBRIDGE – aged 65
LADY CAROLINE KIRKBRIDGE – his wife, aged 38
LADY CYNTHIA – their daughter, aged 20
CAPTAIN FERGUS FFLUKE – her fiancé, aged 27
MRS REGINALD FFLUKE – Fergus's mother, aged 50

TIME

An autumn evening.

SETTING

Four separate areas denoting sections of the ground floor of Kirkbridge Manor, including parts of the hall and main staircase, the study, the ballroom and the terrace.

1925. A section of Kirkbridge Manor, a Georgian country house. There are four visible areas, or parts of them:

The main hall extending offstage, the ballroom, also extending offstage, the study and a section of a grand terrace.

*Despite the fact that all the dividing walls are invisible and all the doors are mimed, the sound-proofing between the areas is extremely effective, and when our hero and central character, **ANTHONY SPATES**, moves between them, we hear only what he hears.*

*In the ballroom, seated just inside the hall door, are **LADY CAROLINE KIRKBRIDGE**, thirty-eight, and **MRS REGINALD FFLUKE**, fifty. Although they are talking animatedly, we cannot hear what they are saying. Similarly, in the study are seated **LORD EDWARD KIRKBRIDGE**, sixty-five, in silent conversation with **CAPTAIN FERGUS FFLUKE**, twenty-seven.*

***ANTHONY SPATES**, a young footman of seventeen, enters along the hall. He carries a silver tray, upon which is a newly mixed cocktail.*

*The sound of bar activity behind him and the muffled sound from the ballroom of a small twenties dance band.**

As he opens the ballroom door, the music increases in volume, mingled with the sound of general activity and

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chatter. Most distinctly we hear LADY KIRKBRIDGE and MRS REGINALD's voices for the first time.

LADY K *(in full flow)* ...No, it's my daughter I feel sorry for, that's all. I think it's unforgivable of both of them, behaving like this, unforgivable...

MRS R I don't think you can blame Fergus, my dear, it's hardly my son's fault, is it? It's men, darling, men. They've simply no sense of priorities, have they? I gave up trying to civilise them years ago...

SPATES *(hovering with his tray)* Your drink, milady.

LADY K Thank you, Spates.

SPATES places the fresh drink beside her and, during the next, gathers up their empties.

SPATES *(to MRS R)* Would you care for anything else, madam?

MRS R *(straining to hear him over the music)* What? What was that?

SPATES *(speaking louder)* Would you care for another drink, madam?

MRS R I can't hear a word you're saying – do they have to play this music quite so loudly, Caroline? These days they seem to insist on playing everything at this deafening volume. I do blame the Americans, you know. All that terrible jazz music. They'll all be deaf as posts before they're thirty. They never played as loudly as this in our day, surely?

LADY K It is rather loud, I must say.

MRS R Come round to the other side of me, young man. To my good ear.

SPATES moves round dutifully.

These people playing, are they Americans?

LADY K No, I booked them locally. I understand they're from Maidenhead.

MRS R Really? I can't believe people actually enjoy this sort of thing in Maidenhead.

LADY K Let's ask Spates, shall we? Spates, you're a young person, do you find this loud, do you?

SPATES The music, milady?

MRS R If you can call it that.

SPATES I find it very – pleasant, milady. Very catchy.

LADY K (*playfully*) Oh, do you? Does it make you want to get up and dance, Spates?

SPATES (*embarrassed*) I wouldn't quite put it like that, milady.

MRS R (*amused*) Oh, I do believe the boy's blushing!

LADY CYNTHIA, *twenty, comes on, straight from the dance floor.*

CYNTHIA (*as she appears*) Mummy!

LADY K Oh, darling! Are you enjoying yourself?

CYNTHIA Mummy, is he coming? Is Fergus coming to join us? Why isn't he here? Fergus should be here, as well. It's only me there.

LADY K He's coming, darling. He's talking to Edward in the study. He'll be here soon, I promise.

CYNTHIA I'm running out of people to dance with. Everyone's starting to stare at me...

LADY K No, they're not, darling, they're really not! That's only your imagination.

CYNTHIA ...“Oh, look, she's all on her own, poor girl, at her own engagement party! Where's her fiancé, do you think? He must have broken it off?”

MRS R Nonsense! Now don't be so silly –

LADY K That's not what they're saying at all, darling –

CYNTHIA They are!

LADY K – everyone's far too busy enjoying themselves.

CYNTHIA (*as she goes*) I'll soon be left dancing with the servants, at this rate...

She goes off again.

LADY K (*calling after her*) You can always dance with Spates, here, darling!

MRS R Caroline, honestly –!

LADY K I'm sure you're secretly a wonderful dancer, aren't you, Spates?

MRS R My dear! So familiar!

LADY K How do you mean?

MRS R With the servants. You mustn't be quite so familiar. You'll be giving the boy ideas, far above his station.

LADY K What rubbish! Come along, Rowena, do have another drink. Max mixes the best cocktails. You must have one of these. What's this called again, Spates?

SPATES A Bee's Knees, milady.

LADY K A Bee's Knees.

MRS R Heavens! What's a Bee's Knees?

LADY K It's from America. They drink it in speakeasies, apparently.

MRS R What on earth's in it?

LADY K Mostly gin, a fearful lot of gin. They're really rather addictive, I must say. Delicious. It was an excellent recommendation, Spates.

SPATES Thank you, milady.

MRS R Well, maybe I ought to try one, then.

LADY K I warn you, you'll end up wanting more of them. Are you still keeping tally, Spates? Still keeping count, are you?

I asked him to keep a tally of how many I'd had. How many so far, Spates?

SPATES Six, milady.

MRS R *squawks with laughter.*

LADY K Six! This can't be my sixth, surely?

SPATES No, that's your seventh, milady.

MRS R Caroline, really, Caroline, darling! You're incorrigible!

LADY K It's never my seventh! I have not had six of these already, that's ridiculous!

MRS R Caroline, you've been tossing them down like water, dear, all evening!

LADY K Then this is definitely my last! This is positively the last drink of the night for me. No more after this! Spates, if I ask for another, you are to say firmly, "No, milady, you have had quite enough!" Do you understand?

SPATES Yes, milady. One Bee's Knees for you, madam.

LADY K And, Spates, before you do anything else, please go into the study, and tell them Lady Kirkbridge says if Captain ffluke neglects my daughter any longer, he will find she has run off with some attractive ruffian from the village.

MRS R I wouldn't at all blame her if she did.

SPATES *(starting to leave with his tray)* Very good, milady. Madam.

MRS R *(staring at SPATES as he goes, to LADY K)* I must say, he's rather dishy. Where did you find that one?

LADY K Spates? He's local. Helps out occasionally. Farming family.

MRS R We plough the fields and scatter, what?

She laughs loudly.

SPATES *leaves the ballroom, closing the door behind him. The sounds there reduce sharply and are replaced by the hall sounds as before.*

He crosses the hall with his tray with the empty glasses and goes out to the bar.

He returns, almost at once, his tray empty, and moves to the study door, where he pauses and knocks discreetly.

LORD K (*from within, faintly*) Come!

SPATES *enters the study and hovers, waiting for a suitable gap in the conversation.*

(*in full flow*) ...No, as I say, as soon as I've popped my clogs, this whole caboosh, this entire estate, according to my father's will, technically passes to my younger brother, William...

FERGUS Oh, I see, not to Lady Kirkbridge?

LORD K Not as things stand at present. Not unless I choose to will it to her. (*smiling*) Which I haven't, as yet. Currently, I'm happy to let things stand, maintain the status quo. Once you get to my age, Fergus, you'll find your nearest and dearest grow progressively more interested in the state of your health. Caroline's my third wife, younger than me by thirty years and, don't misunderstand me, I'm very fond of her, as a wife, she's certainly a great deal more than adequate. But I've absolutely no illusions as to why she married me. None at all. Her overriding intention was to get her claws securely fastened into the Kirkbridge cash flow. I don't delude myself she married me for my virile manly physique, old boy. My late father's words, with regards to women, still ring in my ears: Love 'em, if you have to, bed 'em, if you want to, but trust 'em at your peril. (*irritably, to SPATES*) Yes, what is it, boy? Hovering there...?

SPATES Excuse me, milord, Lady Kirkbridge was wondering whether you'd care to join her and Mrs ffluke in the ballroom?

LORD K No, we bloody well wouldn't! Tell Lady Kirkbridge, Captain ffluke and I haven't yet finished our conversation. We will join them when we are ready to join them and not before. Is that, clear, boy? Don't bother us again! Now, there's a shining

example of what I was saying, Fergus. Give women an inch of rope and before you know it they've formed a lynch mob. Fatal! The moment they got the vote, they expect us to start treating them as bloody equals. Well, they're not equals, not at all, not in my book. Medically speaking they're an entirely separate, inferior species. Smaller brains, far less muscle. First, they're given the vote, what the hell's next? I'll tell you what comes next. Socialism. That's what comes next. Followed closely by Armageddon, mark my words. All I can say is, thank God I won't be around to see it. I'll be long gone by then. *(to SPATES)* Well, don't just stand there like a wet Tuesday, boy, make yourself useful and fetch us a couple more brandies.

SPATES Yes, milord.

During the next, SPATES locates and gathers up their empty glasses.

LORD K I'll have you know, that Captain fluke here is a national hero.

FERGUS *(modestly, shrugging)* Well, hardly that...

LORD K Ever met a national hero before, have you, boy? In the flesh?

SPATES No, milord.

LORD K Well, you're looking at one now, boy. Much decorated man, this one. Risked his life for the rest of us, so that we could sleep peacefully in our beds. Military Medal. Royal Army Medical Corps. Acts of gallantry and devotion to duty under fire. What do you make of that, boy?

SPATES Congratulations, sir.

LORD K Now, fetch him a bloody drink. He's earned one.

FERGUS *(hesitantly)* Well, perhaps just one more. Then I must, really...

LORD K Now, getting back to my brother William – generally known to the family as Mad Willie – Mad, Bad Willie – the

chances are, he won't even bother to lay claim to the estate, even if he's offered it. He's gone and joined up with this new Labour Party.

FERGUS Oh, has he? Has he? That's interesting.

LORD K *Interesting?* Complete bloody lunacy! Fancy calling themselves the "*Labour*" Party, for God's sake! More or less implying that the rest of us never do a stroke of work, eh?

He and FERGUS laugh.

SPATES *goes out, closing the door behind him and cutting off their voices. Bar noises return. He returns there with the empty glasses. He re-enters with his tray, which now has the cocktail intended for MRS R.*

*He returns to the ballroom. The music again increases in volume as he opens the door.**

LADY K *(still in full flow)* ...No, I'm sorry, Rowena, I don't agree with you. Not at all. I think these class differentiations belong in the last century, I really do. Since the war, we're all surely much more equal than we ever were before. I mean they actually fought side by side, didn't they? As equals under fire...

MRS R My dear, if you don't mind my saying so, you're beginning to sound most appallingly liberal...

LADY K Well, what if I am? I don't care...

MRS R All I'm saying is that, in a perfect world, everyone should know their place and stay there. That's all I was saying –

LADY K I fear for our future, Rowena, I really do. If we stick with the old values as they were, well, just witness what happened in Russia, my dear –

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MRS R Dear God, don't even mention the Russians!

LADY K I mean, I worry for Cynthia. She has her whole life ahead of her. I worry dreadfully for her, Rowena. For any young person, growing up these days, come to that. Life, just at present, is simply a huge question mark. Everything's so in the melting pot, don't you feel?

SPATES (*placing the glass beside MRS R*) Your Bee's Knees, madam.

He remains within earshot through the next, watching the offstage dancers.

MRS R I think you're worrying unnecessarily, Caroline. I know she's only a stepdaughter but your husband must have made some sort of provision for her, hasn't he? She surely has no need to worry?

LADY K I don't think he has made provision. Not yet, at any rate.

MRS R What are you saying? He hasn't allowed for her? But doesn't that...?

LADY K No, not for either of us. He keeps – putting it off. As things stand at present, everything, this house, the whole estate goes to his brother, William.

MRS R Oh, dear God! So you'll get nothing? Either of you?

LADY K Not at present, no. Not unless he alters things. But I'm sure it's just a matter of time before he does...

MRS R This is extraordinary. Why on earth did you agree to marry him, dear girl, in the first place?

LADY K (*rather lamely*) I thought I – I convinced myself, at the time, I was in love with him –

MRS R Well, that's no reason at all to get married, is it?

LADY K – and I had the impression that he loved me, as well.

MRS R That's even less reason.

LADY K Now I'm not quite so sure...

MRS R Whether you love him?

LADY K No.

MRS R Or whether he loves you?

LADY K No.

MRS R I think, if I may say so, Caroline, that you've been unbelievably naïve. Almost to the point of downright stupidity. Take my advice, dear, and get him to write you into that will *tout de suite*.

LADY K (*unhappily*) I sometimes think he doesn't give a jot what happens to either of us. He says, you never have to worry about women, they always cope, somehow. They can always manage to scrape by, find some luckless man to sponge off.

MRS R What an appalling thing to say! That's so Victorian!

LADY K Well, he is, darling, if he had his way, he'd have us all back in corsets and crinolines. I keep saying, Edward, this is the twentieth century, my dear...

CYNTHIA *returns briefly.*

CYNTHIA (*despairingly*) Mummy, please...

And she goes off again.

LADY K (*after her*) Yes, darling! (*suddenly, agitated*) Spates, did you find Captain ffluke?

SPATES Yes, milady.

LADY K Did you tell him we need him here? Urgently?

SPATES Yes, milady.

LADY K And are they coming?

SPATES (*hesitantly*) I'm – not entirely sure, milady.

LADY K If they're not here within two minutes, I'm going to become very angry. You tell them that from me!

SPATES (*moving nervously away*) Yes, milady.

LADY K Very angry indeed!

MRS R Caroline, steady, dear...

SPATES (*hurriedly leaving the ballroom*) Yes, milady.

LADY K No, hell with them both, Rowena. I'm sorry, I know he's your son, but to hell with them. Wretched men! I've had it up to here with them! I spent months arranging all this, you know –

SPATES closes the door behind him, cutting her off. The scene continues silently as he hurries across the hall to the study door. He is about to knock when he remembers the drinks that had been ordered. He hurries back to the bar and returns almost at once with two fresh brandies on his tray. He knocks on the study door.

LORD K (*from within as before, faintly*) Come!

SPATES enters the study, closing the door behind him.

(in full flow as before) ...And I have to tell you, Fergus, old chap, that bloke Ramsay MacDonald terrifies the life out of me. Give a chap like that one sniff of power, let him get his hands on the ship of state's tiller, we're all heading for the rocks, old boy, I can tell you. Women and children first, all hands on deck, every man for himself.

FERGUS (*getting rather depressed from what he's hearing*) Yes... Yes...

LORD K Well, I'm out of it soon enough. Best of luck to you.

FERGUS Thank you.

LORD K You're going to need it. (*seeing SPATES*) Ah, at last! Gunga Din. Where the blazes did you get to? We're both dying of thirst here, man.

SPATES I'm sorry, milord. I got – delayed.

LORD K Delayed?

SPATES Yes, milord.

LORD K You sound like a blasted railway engine.

SPATES Lady Kirkbridge is becoming somewhat – anxious – that you join her, milord, that's all –

FERGUS (*rising nervously*) Yes, well perhaps we'd better, perhaps –

LORD K You tell Lady Kirkbridge, Spates, that I'm not in the habit of being treated like some piddling little lap dog! Expected to run around at her beck and call.

SPATES Yes, milord.

LORD K Fergus, sit down!

FERGUS *sits.*

(*to SPATES*) And you, get out!

SPATES Yes, milord.

LORD K We're both going to enjoy our brandy and finish our conversation, like civilised men. In a couple of months' time, you'll be my son-in-law, Fergus, and I'm entrusting you with my stepdaughter. I'm handing you her reins. You needn't worry, she'll come with a dowry, I'll see to that, but I'll leave them to sweat it out for a bit longer. If the girl's anything like her mother – and she came as part of the package when I married Caroline – if she's anything like her mother, you may find, to start out with, she's a little bit frisky. Headstrong. She may need a bit of breaking in. A firmer hand. A touch of the crop. But nothing, I'm sure, that a war hero like yourself can't handle, once you've got the bridle on her –

SPATES *creeps out, closing the door behind him and cutting off further conversation, which continues silently under the next.*

He stands in the hall for a moment, taking a series of deep breaths to calm himself.

He prepares to enter the ballroom again.

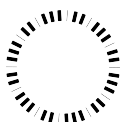
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