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# STUMPED

(OR *YES ... NO ... WAIT*)

by Shomit Dutta

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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*STUMPED* was recorded as a digital ‘On Demand’ production by Original Theatre at Lords Cricket Ground, London, for release on 27th September 2022 with the following cast:

**BECKETT** ..... Stephen Tompkinson  
**PINTER** ..... Andrew Lancel

*STUMPED* premiered as a live production, produced by Original Theatre, at the Theatre Royal Bath, 23rd May to 27th May 2023, the Cambridge Arts Theatre, 5th June to 10th June 2023, and Hampstead Theatre, 16th June to 22nd July 2023, with the following cast:

**BECKETT** ..... Stephen Tompkinson  
**PINTER** ..... Andrew Lancel

Director | Guy Unsworth  
David Woodhead | Set and Costume Designer  
Howard Hudson | Lighting Designer  
Dom Bilkley | Sound Designer  
Mark Aspinall | Composer

The Irish premiere of *Stumped* will be at Bewley’s Café Theatre, Dublin, 24th July to 19th August with the following cast:

**BECKETT** ..... Barry McGovern  
**PINTER** ..... Michael James Ford

Director | Bairbre Ní Chaoimh



Operating and touring since 2004 the Original Theatre Company has toured extensively all over the UK and since 2020 have launched Original Theatre Online, producing a number of acclaimed online productions. In 2022, Original Theatre were awarded a Critics' Circle Theatre Award for our exceptional theatre-making during the Covid lockdowns.

Recent stage productions include: *The Time Machine*, *The Mirror Crack'd*, *The End of the Night* (a co-production with Park Theatre), *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Being Mr Wickham* (UK and New York), *A Splinter of Ice*, *The Croft*, Sarah Waters' *The Night Watch*, Stephen Jeffreys' *Valued Friends* (coproduction with Rose Theatre Kingston); Torben Betts' *Caroline's Kitchen* (originally *Monogamy*); Alan Bennett's *The Habit of Art* (UK & New York), Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Frederick Knott's *Wait Until Dark*, Torben Betts' *Invincible*, Emlyn Williams' *Night Must Fall*, Terence Rattigan's *Flare Path* and the award winning tours of Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* adapted by Rachel Wagstaff.

## FOR ORIGINAL THEATRE

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## ENTERTAINING WITH ORIGINALITY SINCE 1959

Hampstead Theatre was born in a humble hut sixty years ago, with a mission to produce original theatre without creative restriction. We quickly attracted a generation of talent that helped redefine British Theatre. From Harold Pinter testing out his early plays to the likes of Mike Leigh, Michael Frayn and Terry Johnson – and more recently Ruby Thomas, Nell Leyshon and Roy Williams, all premiering their work here.

Our home is one of London's best state-of-the-art theatres. Purpose built for the 21st century to allow our writers, actors, directors and producers maximum creative flexibility. Our ambitions are big as we aim to move theatre forwards with new ideas, talent and energy to excite our audiences with the lateral, the fresh and the unexpected. It's part of our belief that innovation, reinvention and surprise are the lifeblood of true entertainment.

Hampstead's beautiful Main Stage, with its epic dimensions and flexibility was built with directors and designers in mind. It has transported audiences into the 1924 Olympic Games amphitheatre (*Chariots of Fire*), to the intense traverse configuration of a courtroom (*55 Days*), deep into a Nottinghamshire coalmine (*Wonderland*) and on to the busy wards of an NHS hospital (*Tiger Country*).

Hampstead's Downstairs, is an intimate, 88-seat studio, established in 2012, since when it has been home to over 60 new plays. It is a much-loved space, wholly dedicated to new work, with a loyal following amongst audiences and artists alike. Through the Downstairs programme Hampstead continues to innovate and build on its exceptional foundations, as a theatre where new talent blossoms.

In 2023 Hampstead Theatre was delighted to welcome the brilliantly witty production of Shomit Dutta's *Stumped* to entertain our Downstairs audiences.

## **SUPPORTERS**

Hampstead Theatre is grateful to its generous Patrons and Supporters, whose philanthropic underpinning ensures an outstanding calibre of creative work; highly subsidised ticket prices for young people, NHS and Emergency Services workers, seniors and people with access patrons and emerging playwright programmes.

## **RECENT ACCOLADES**

*Blackout Songs* (Hampstead Downstairs) by Joe White, nominated for a 2023 Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre.

Rebecca Humphries wins a 2023 OffWestEnd Award for Best Lead Performance for *Blackout Songs*.

Ruby Thomas nominated for the 2023 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *Linck & Mülhahn*.

*Folk* (Hampstead Downstairs) by Nell Leyshon, nominated for a 2022 Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre.

Monique Touko wins Best Director for *Malindadzimu* (Hampstead Downstairs) at The Stage Debut Awards 2022.

*The Phlebotomist* (Hampstead Downstairs) by Ella Road, nominated for a 2019 Olivier Award for Outstanding Achievement in an Affiliate Theatre.

Ella Road nominated for the 2019 Susan Smith Blackburn Prize for *The Phlebotomist*.

Moe Bar-El nominated a 2019 Olivier Award for Best Actor for *Every Day I Make Greatness Happen* (Hampstead Downstairs).

Tony Kushner and Jeanine Tesori's *Caroline, or Change* nominated a 2019 Olivier Award for Best Musical Revival.

Sharon D. Clarke nominated for a 2019 Olivier Award for Best Actress in a Musical for *Caroline, or Change*.

Fly Davis nominated for a 2019 Olivier Award for Best Costume Design for *Caroline, or Change*.

## CHARACTERS

**BECKETT** – a playwright, late 50s

**PINTER** – a playwright, mid 30s

## SETTING

Oxfordshire.

## TIME

Summer 1964.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

The idea for a play about Beckett and Pinter came about in the early 2000s. I was playing cricket for Gaieties CC (the club Pinter belonged to forty-odd years) and spending much of my time, as a D Phil student, unpicking the plays of Aristophanes. Some of these feature his favourite playwrights as characters, and my idea was to write an updated version of the *Frogs*, replacing Aeschylus and Euripides, who compete in the underworld for 'the Throne of Tragedy', with Beckett and Pinter. But for one reason or another it did not get written.

Some years later, in 2015, I helped organise a cricket match between a Pinter XI (Gaieties CC) and a Beckett XI (the Dublin-based Theatrical Cavaliers CC) for the 'Happy Days' Beckett festival in Enniskillen. It was suggested, rather last-minute, that as a complement to the game I write a comic skit involving Beckett and Pinter at a cricket match. I didn't want to do a rushed job so the play – now relocated from the underworld to the cricket field – remained unwritten.

In the spring of 2020, I found myself, along with everyone else, stuck in one place: finally, the ideal opportunity for writing the play. Moreover, The fact that Beckett and Pinter had also subjected their characters to enforced waiting in *Godot* and *The Dumb Waiter* created a conducive sense of *mise-en-abyme*.

I have always been interested in the relationship between a given author or text and other authors and texts (what academics dryly call intertextuality). Writing *Stumped* has allowed me to participate in this complex relationship creatively rather than simply observe it critically. I have also enjoyed subjecting two favourite authors to the exacting conditions that they impose on their hapless characters; in other words, giving them a dose of their own medicine.

*Stumped* exists in its original form and in a slightly longer one. The digital production and the forthcoming Irish premiere comprise the two main acts. The live production, in Bath and Cambridge ahead of a London run, includes a short third act or epilogue, written after the first lockdown. I'm not sure which I prefer. The play involves various 'twos'. There are two characters and two main acts, and there are two innings in the cricket match. At the same time, there are some 'threes': my original working title, *Yes... No... Wait*, refers to the three calls available to someone batting; and there are, including the epilogue, three acts. Perhaps it is fitting for a play where certainty proves elusive that the question of where it ought to end remains unresolved.

Shomit Dutta



## ACT ONE

*(A cricket ground in the Cotswolds, an overcast day in late June. Sounds of the game are heard throughout. The action takes place to one side of the pavilion. BECKETT is seated on one of two folding chairs. He is padded up but has his coat on over his kit. He is watching the game and filling in a scorebook on his lap. Beside him a scoreboard reads twenty five for two off nine overs (and shows the first innings total of one hundred and seventy). PINTER is fetching his batting gear from the changing room. BECKETT has taken over the scoring to facilitate this.)*

*(Throughout Act One PINTER and BECKETT, though focused on the game, seem locked in a tacit duel where one inclines to direct confrontation while the other favours parry and surprise. Enter PINTER with his gear.)*

**BECKETT.** You could pad up.

**PINTER.** I am.

**BECKETT.** Is that a fact?

**PINTER.** I haven't finished yet.

**BECKETT.** You're in after me.

**PINTER.** I know.

*(Pause. BECKETT fills in the next ball (no run). PINTER sits but makes no effort to pad*

*up. He is preoccupied with his boot and a bruise on his left ankle.)*

**BECKETT.** Have you actually started?

**PINTER.** Yes.

**BECKETT.** In what respect?

**PINTER.** I'm wearing my box.

**BECKETT.** (*Aside.*) Mustn't neglect the little things...

*(BECKETT fills in the scorebook.)*

What's happening with our lift?

**PINTER.** We haven't even batted yet.

**BECKETT.** I like to have a secured exit.

**PINTER.** I've made some enquiries.

**BECKETT.** An old habit. (*Offhand.*) From my days in the French resistance.

**PINTER.** We're currently in the Cotswolds.

**BECKETT.** I'm aware of that.

*(Pause. BECKETT raises an arm to acknowledge a bye.)*

Our first run in two overs...

*(BECKETT fills in the scorebook.)*

**PINTER.** Are you planning to bat in that coat?

**BECKETT.** (*Thinking.*) I haven't ruled it out.

*(PINTER surveys BECKETT's appearance.)*

**PINTER.** You seem... Somewhat out of sorts.

**BECKETT.** They're deep, my sorts. And I'm rarely out of them. But I am prone to superstition.

**PINTER.** I had no idea.

**BECKETT.** At least when it comes to batting.

**PINTER.** In that case, I'll redouble my efforts.

**BECKETT.** I'd prefer it if you added to your efforts, rather than multiplying.

**PINTER.** I'm not sure how to take that.

**BECKETT.** Perhaps in the spirit in which it was intended.

**PINTER.** Which was?

**BECKETT.** Strictly mathematical.

*(PINTER starts putting on his left pad. The lower strap proves painful. A cry of "Wait... Yes" from a batsman.)*

At last. A scoring shot.

*(Writing.)* Runs... one... Batsman...three.

*(PINTER starts to undo the pad.)*

**PINTER.** It's no good.

**BECKETT.** What?

**PINTER.** I have a swollen ankle.

**BECKETT.** A latter-day Oedipus.

**PINTER.** I acted in *Oedipus* as a young man.

**BECKETT.** Did your mama come?

**PINTER.** This was rural Ireland.

**BECKETT.** Beyond her clutch...

**PINTER.** I was playing Creon.

**BECKETT.** I see.

**PINTER.** Oedipus was fifty-six.

*(Beat.)*

**BECKETT.** Who played Jocasta? His fertile wife and mother.

**PINTER.** She was no spring chicken.

*(PINTER removes the pad and re-examines his ankle. BECKETT fills in the scorebook.)*

**BECKETT.** Does it hurt?

**PINTER.** *(Muttering.)* He wants to know if it hurts.

**BECKETT.** If you'd used your hand.

**PINTER.** My foot saved four runs.

**BECKETT.** The crack of leather on bone...

**PINTER.** Off your bowling.

**BECKETT.** The *sine qua non* of an English summer.

**PINTER.** *(Aside.)* He leaves no bone unpicked, no swelling lonely.

**BECKETT.** 'Heard by all the birds of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.'

**PINTER.** Am I pissing in the wind?

**BECKETT.** 'Adlestrop.'

*(BECKETT fills in the scorebook.)*

Twenty-seven for two off ten overs.

*(PINTER fiddles with the strap of his left pad. BECKETT gets up to update the scoreboard himself.)*

**PINTER.** This buckle could be more forgiving.

**BECKETT.** There's batsmen all over. Blaming on their pads the faults of their limbs.

(**PINTER** removes his left boot and rests his injured foot on his right knee. He prods the injury. Meanwhile **BECKETT** raises an arm to acknowledge a leg bye.)

**PINTER.** It needs ice.

(**BECKETT** motions to rise.)

**BECKETT.** I'll go.

**PINTER.** You can't.

**BECKETT.** Why not?

**PINTER.** You're doing the scorebook.

(**BECKETT** sighs and resettles.)

Besides, there's a notice: 'No spikes in the pavilion'.

(As **PINTER** removes his other boot, a good ball whistles past the bat. We hear the fielders' "oohs".)

**BECKETT.** (*Filling in the book.*) A dangerous bowler.

**PINTER.** What's this, his fifth over?

**BECKETT.** His sixth.

Hopefully, he won't have too many more.

(*They watch the next ball.*)

**PINTER.** I think I'll bat in tennis shoes.

**BECKETT.** A wise move.

**PINTER.** Kinder on the ankle.

**BECKETT.** It'll mean you can frequent the pavilion. (*Half-aside.*) Once you've padded up.

(**PINTER** hobbles to the pavilion. **BECKETT** updates the book and briefly takes stock.)

**PINTER** *returns with a bag of frozen vegetables and tennis shoes.)*

**PINTER.** Frozen peas. They need the ice for drinks.

**BECKETT.** Regular or petits pois?

*(PINTER puts down the tennis shoes and checks.)*

**PINTER.** Petits pois.

**BECKETT.** Smaller spheres. Better for the bruise.

**PINTER.** Is that so?

**BECKETT.** Though they will warm up faster.

*(PINTER starts applying his peas. Eleven overs are now complete and a new bowler is about to come on.)*

**PINTER.** A change of bowling.

**BECKETT.** Sadly at the wrong end. What's he called?

**PINTER.** *(Shouting out.)* Bowler's name?

*(A slightly unclear set of replies from the field.)*

**BECKETT.** What was that?

**PINTER.** ... Sergeant?

*(PINTER relays the nearest fielder's clarification.)*

Like the rank, but 'Sarge' with an 'a'.

*(BECKETT writes it in the book.)*

**BECKETT.** Let's hope he bowls some 'military medium'.

**PINTER.** Do you subscribe to nominative determinism?

**BECKETT.** Up to a point.

Named as I am, I avoid cathedrals.

*(PINTER smiles. They watch the new bowler's first ball, which the batsman edges for a couple of streaky runs.)*

**PINTER.** Shot!

*(BECKETT looks at PINTER askance. Cries from the field ("Yes" from the batsman followed by "Lucky bastard", "Save three", etc. from the fielders).)*

**BECKETT.** *(Writing.)* Runs... two... Batsman... four.

*(Pause. They watch the next ball.)*

How's your filmscript going?

*(PINTER has to think.)*

The three-way project with Ionesco.

**PINTER.** To be honest, it's somewhat dormant.

**BECKETT.** *(Eying the pads.)* Like your efforts here...

**PINTER.** I have a working title. *'The Compartment'*.

*(No response.)*

It bears a resemblance to your latest play.

**BECKETT.** In what respect?

**PINTER.** It's a *ménage à trois*. What was it called, again?

**BECKETT.** *(Filling in the scorebook.)* *'Play'*.

**PINTER.** Although where you have a man and two women,  
I have a woman and two men.

**BECKETT.** Are any of them housed in jars?

**PINTER.** No. The similarity ends there.

(**BECKETT** raises his arm to acknowledge a leg bye.)

**BECKETT.** (*Totting them up.*) Our... ninth leg bye.

**PINTER.** What about *your* filmscript?

**BECKETT.** Finished some time ago.

**PINTER.** What's it called, again?

**BECKETT.** '*Film*'. They start on it next month.

(**PINTER** digests this. **BECKETT** fills in the scorebook.)

**PINTER.** Did you get Chaplin?

**BECKETT.** Buster Keaton.

**PINTER.** Not bad...

**BECKETT.** I doubt he's read it.

**PINTER.** That's film actors for you. Leave everything till the last minute.

**BECKETT.** I believe you've acted in some films yourself.

(*Beat.*)

**PINTER.** I'll return to '*The Compartment*' as soon as I can. Though I should warn you. I'm getting my teeth into a new play.

**BECKETT.** (*Filling in the scorebook.*) Thirty-one for two off twelve.

**PINTER.** Perhaps you're wondering what it's about?

**BECKETT.** (*Offhand.*) Not really.

(**PINTER** looks slightly grazed.)

When are our plays about anything?

**PINTER.** You speak of our work in tandem.

(**BECKETT** gets up to update the scoreboard.)

**BECKETT.** Our methods are very different.

**PINTER.** Shall I tell you who's in it?

**BECKETT.** They both involve wounds,

**PINTER.** There's a retired butcher,

**BECKETT.** Festering, leprous,

**PINTER.** Left by his wife.

**BECKETT.** Weeping, putrescent.

**PINTER.** She died years ago.

**BECKETT.** But with my characters,

**PINTER.** He lives with his brother,

**BECKETT.** The wounds are exposed,

**PINTER.** A jobbing chauffeur,

**BECKETT.** The outlook is hopeless,

**PINTER.** And two of his sons.

**BECKETT.** And yet they press on...

**PINTER.** Neither does much.

**BECKETT.** ...*ad nauseam.*

(**BECKETT** sits and starts updating the scorebook.)

**PINTER.** The third's an academic.

**BECKETT.** Your characters are different.

**PINTER.** He visits from America,

**BECKETT.** The wounds are concealed,

**PINTER.** With his shadowy wife.

**BECKETT.** Fiercely contained,

**PINTER.** The thing's set in London.

**BECKETT.** Till slowly but surely,

**PINTER.** I have a strange feeling

**BECKETT.** They come to a head.

**PINTER.** She'll stir things up.

*(A cry of "Wait... Yes" from the field.)*

No title as yet.

**BECKETT.** *(About to write.)* Runs... one... Batsman...

*(BECKETT looks up from the book to the two batsmen.)*

Which of these players is which?

**PINTER.** This end is *(Peering.)* ... Fred Paolozzi.

**BECKETT.** *(Checking.)* That's a relief.

**PINTER.** Fred's a flyman at the Palladium.

**BECKETT.** *(Filling it in.)* In terms of the scorebook.

**PINTER.** He also coaches at the Gover school of cricket.

It's through him that I got involved with the club. He has a wonderful eye. Can hit the ball miles.

**BECKETT.** But not today.

**PINTER.** The other end is 'Young Dick Wyse'.

**BECKETT.** *(Looking in the scorebook.)* Number four.

**PINTER.** At least, that's what they call him. Joined just before me. I think he's a medical student.

**BECKETT.** So neither is the man who might give us a lift?

*(A cry of 'no-ball' from the umpire. BECKETT raises a hand to acknowledge.)*

**PINTER.** Fred's probably going back with the skipper.

**BECKETT.** The skipper...

(**BECKETT** *looks for him in the scorebook.*)

**PINTER.** Laurie Lupino-Lane.

**BECKETT.** (*Still looking.*) Batting at...

**PINTER.** Son of *Lupino* Lane.

**BECKETT.** ...number nine.

**PINTER.** The music hall star, who set up the club.

I found out earlier that Laurie's just taken on a dwarf who used to perform with his father, as his butler.

**BECKETT.** (*Filling in the scorebook.*) Is that so?

**PINTER.** Apparently he's less than three feet tall.

**BECKETT.** What about Dick Wyse?

**PINTER.** I doubt he has a butler.

**BECKETT.** Does he drive?

**PINTER.** When I spoke to Laurie about a lift back to London, he said this other chap was our best bet.

**BECKETT.** What 'other chap'?

**PINTER.** Our putative driver.

**BECKETT.** What's he called?

**PINTER.** I've no idea.

**BECKETT.** (*Scanning the book.*) Must be one of these.

**PINTER.** It stands to reason.

**BECKETT.** (*Still looking.*) Though there is the odd gap in the batting order.

**PINTER.** Laurie said he'd ask him on our behalf.

**BECKETT.** Has that happened yet?

**PINTER.** I'm not sure.

**BECKETT.** But you know him by sight?

**PINTER.** (*Gingerly.*) Not as such.

(**BECKETT** *sighs in frustration.*)

Still, we must have seen him. Assuming he's playing.

**BECKETT.** Can we at least give him a name?

For morale, if nothing else.

**PINTER.** Do you have one in mind?

**BECKETT.** What about... Doggo?

**PINTER.** Doggo?

**BECKETT.** A reflection of his attitude.

**PINTER.** As in '*lying* doggo'?

**BECKETT.** He's eluded us thus far.

(**PINTER** *carries on icing his bruise.* **BECKETT** *glances at him periodically with growing irritation.*)

(*Filling in the book.*) Two off the over... Thirty-three for two off thirteen.

(*The situation continues.*)

Can you not pad up before applying those bloody peas?

**PINTER.** They're not peas... they're petits / pois.

**BECKETT.** (*Erupting.*) Just put on the fucking pads!

(*Tension.* **BECKETT** *gets up and starts pacing about.*)

**PINTER.** Why are you getting so exercised?

*(BECKETT stops to update the scoreboard (thirty three for two off thirteen overs), tendering his explanation as he does so.)*

**BECKETT.** We were always taught at school that the next two batsmen should be padded up. If you, as the man in after me, decline to pad up, I fear that...

**PINTER.** What?

**BECKETT.** That fate may deem it an act of hubris and see *me* sent in quickly and swiftly dismissed, as prologue to *your* comeuppance.

**PINTER.** *(Digesting this.)* If I'd realised the gravity of your condition, I'd have acted sooner.

*(BECKETT sits back down and takes a deep breath.)*

**BECKETT.** Batsmen are especially prone to such things. I remember some in the Portora first eleven who, on the day of a game, avoided shaving, smoking, even masturbating.

**PINTER.** I don't envy you or your schooling.

Still, I suppose, it's in keeping with your nature.

**BECKETT.** Masturbating?

**PINTER.** Agonising first and acting later.

**BECKETT.** As opposed to acting at leisure and repenting in haste?

*(Pause. BECKETT takes up the scorebook and pen.)*

I missed the last two balls.

**PINTER.** Both dots.

**BECKETT.** No...

(**BECKETT** looks from field to scorebook to field again.)

Paolozzi must have got a single.

(**BECKETT** updates the book. **PINTER** observes him.)

**PINTER.** I could throw you a few in the nets.

**BECKETT.** No.

**PINTER.** Once I've padded up.

**BECKETT.** My first innings in thirty-five years. I'd rather not be reminded of my decrepitude.

**PINTER.** You're hardly decrepit.

**BECKETT.** Pad up promptly, and we may yet placate the umpire in the sky. Assuming he's open to appeasing.

**PINTER.** Or appealing...

(**PINTER** puts on his tennis shoes, and sighs deeply.)

**BECKETT.** (*Noticing.*) 'For this relief much thanks.'

**PINTER.** *Hamlet.*

**BECKETT.** Act one, scene one.

**PINTER.** Line eight. Francisco to Barnardo.

(**BECKETT** eyes him.)

I was in *Hamlet* as well.

**BECKETT.** You don't say.

(*Filling in the scorebook.*) Let me guess... Ophelia.

**PINTER.** Horatio. I understudied Hamlet.

**BECKETT.** Was this also in Ireland?