

IRT

MARQUEE

February 1995

Love and laughter, music and magic will fill the stage as the Indiana Repertory Theatre presents

Dreams from a Summer House February 8 through March 5 on the IRT Mainstage. With book and lyrics by Alan Ayckbourn, Britain's most prolific playwright, and music by John Pattison, *Dreams from a Summer House* places the legend of "Beauty and the Beast" in our contemporary world. It is a fairy tale for grown-ups, a witty and delicious tale of modern marriage and timeless romance.

As *Dreams from a Summer House* unfolds, the peaceful quiet of an English country garden goes topsy-turvy when the figures in a painting of Beauty and the Beast come magically to life. As if that weren't enough, the storybook characters cannot speak; they only sing—and everyone else is forced to sing in order to communicate with them. The comic complications multiply when Beauty falls for the dissipated artist who brought her to the Beast in retaliation kidnaps the artist's acrimonious (and tone-deaf) ex-wife.



ON THE
MAINSTAGE

DREAMS

FROM A SUMMER HOUSE

BOOK AND LYRICS BY
ALAN AYCKBOURN

MUSIC BY JOHN PATTISON

Of all the fairy tales, "Beauty and the Beast" seems most to inspire the contemporary imagination. It has spawned two great films—Cocteau's 1946 classic and Disney's recent animated version (which has been reborn as a stage musical and is currently enjoying what is expected to be a very long run on Broadway)—as well as a television series. But this popularity is nothing new; countless variations on the theme have been created in the 238 years since Madame Leprince de Beaumont first conceived the tale of "La Belle et la Bête" in 1757. Ayckbourn and Pattison's variation, *Dreams from a Summer House*, had its premiere at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round in Scarborough, England, in the summer of 1992. The American premiere was a co-production of the Arizona Theatre Company and Seattle's A Contemporary Theatre in the fall of 1993.

For its own *Dreams*, the IRT is joining with the Alliance Theatre Company of Atlanta (originator of *Flyin' West*) for

(left) Christopher Innvar is Robert, the artist, and Anne Rogers is Chrissie, his ex-mother-in-law, in *Dreams From a Summer House*. Photo by David Zeiger, courtesy of the Alliance Theatre Company.

its first co-production effort with another regional theatre. Directed by Alliance associate artistic director David Bell, the production features a cast of eight, including celebrated British actress Anne Rogers, star of such Broadway hits as *42nd Street* and the London productions of *The Boy Friend* and *My Fair Lady*.

This first-time co-production brings many new challenges to the IRT staff. The production was built and rehearsed in Atlanta, where it has been performed at the Alliance since January 4. Following the final Alliance performance on February 4, Saturday night, the Alliance staff strikes the set and costumes and packs them into two semi trucks. After an all-night drive, they arrive at the IRT by 6 p.m. Sunday, when the IRT crews begin round-the-clock load-in. By 6 p.m. Monday, the set will be up, and the electric crew will begin to focus lights. Tuesday evening the actors and musicians, fresh from Atlanta, have a tech-dress rehearsal; and Wednesday evening we'll see the first IRT preview of *Dreams from a Summer House*. ★



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DREAMS

FROM A SUMMER HOUSE

ALAN AYCKBOURN

Dream Maker

There are plenty of good reasons Alan Ayckbourn is one of the world's most popular playwrights. For starters, there's his keen eye for the hilarity lurking under the surface of everyday life. But Ayckbourn's world is more than the sum of its funny lines: his comedy belies a keen understanding of the complexity of personality and the foibles of human behavior. Dismissed by critics and the intelligentsia early in his career as merely a comedian, Ayckbourn's reputation has grown steadily over the years; he is now considered the supreme theatrical chronicler of contemporary English mores.

Never one to rest on his artistic laurels, Ayckbourn has toyed with conventions of form and genre throughout his prolific, 46-play career. *Dreams from a Summer House* is typical in its aesthetic daring: it interweaves elements of a well-wrought contemporary romantic comedy with the fanciful world of fairy tales. An additional element in the mix is music: *Dreams* is a further experiment with the incorporation of music and song into the standard play format that Ayckbourn began with two earlier plays, *Suburban Trains* and *Making Tracks*.

The IRT production of *Dreams* is directed by noted musical theatre director and Alliance Theatre Company associate artistic director David H. Bell. "There is a wonderful sense of civilization and romanticism in this piece," Bell says. "The singing becomes a metaphor for what we have lost since we were children. Ayckbourn speaks with such incredible gentleness about modern angst. It gives the play a wonderful sense of fantasy."

Recently, the Alliance Theatre Company's *Stagebill* caught up with Ayckbourn at his artistic home, the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, England, and persuaded him to share some of the secrets in his bag of tricks.

STAGEBILL: What inspired you to create a "musical play"?

AYCKBOURN: John Pattison has been resident musical director-composer here at the theatre for some time, so it

BY TIM SHERIDAN

seemed logical for us to do a full-length show together. I wanted to expand my writing base—to explore new fields—and music is a very powerful way of altering and enhancing one's own natural writing style.

STAGEBILL: In recent years you've started to write plays for children as well as adults. Is that what led you to use the familiar children's theatre theme of fairy tales in *Dreams from a Summer House*?



AYCKBOURN: Since starting to write for children, I have discovered that they respond to the same things as adults, and the gap between the two audiences is narrower than one thinks. I began to write what I think of as children's plays for adults; *Dreams* was my first. I used a fairy tale because I think adults are just as much in need of fairy tales as children—perhaps more so.

STAGEBILL: One of the most

engaging aspects of your plays is how you work within the conventions of theatre and live performance, exploiting time and space.

AYCKBOURN: Well, I suppose, almost exclusively among British playwrights, I write only for the stage. Theatre has been my fascination. Over the years I've explored the potential of the stage tools available to me, and time and space are both extremely important. Time, obviously, as a result of the timespan of the play: where you start and finish. If you start an hour or two early, you bore the audience with yards of exposition. You start too late and nobody knows what the hell is going on. Somewhere in between you get it all about right. Those were the first lessons I learned about playwriting. From there I became interested in the use of time as a tool within the timespan of the play. For instance, I rediscovered what others have found before me: when stage time equals real time, the effect is to bring in a close-up lens, because people are working very, very slowly. The details of the stage are exposed minute for minute. Whereas the reverse happens when a play is set over 30 years in two hours.

Space has been influenced by working in the round [at his theatre in Scarborough]. There one looks down on the stage floor instead of the back wall. You get people moving within their own spaces. So I thought that those spaces could be used as double spaces—two spaces at once.

STAGEBILL: You say you were rediscovering these tools. In what way?

AYCKBOURN: As soon as anybody stands up and says, "I've thought of something new," somebody else stands up and says, "No, Webster did that 400 years ago." I was rather proudly crediting myself at one stage of my career on writing this peculiar blend of the dramatic and comic running together. It was only when I directed a Jacobean play for the National [Theatre of Great Britain] that I realized that this was what they had been doing back then. We'd lost it. What fuels my approach at the moment is an attempt not to write a genre play, but to embrace



there all.

STAGEBILL: You acted in the original production of Harold Pinter's *The Birthday Party*; Pinter's work made a big impression on you. Are there other writers you admire?

AYCKBOURN: To a certain extent, the way I became influenced by writers is by directing them. Because half my life is not spent writing, but directing. Directing someone like Arthur Miller is very helpful to me as a dramatist because you must dissect the play, find out the author's intentions. You can't help noticing how the watch has been assembled.

STAGEBILL: That's a good description for the process: finding out how the watch works.

AYCKBOURN: So many people, for a long time, thought technique was a very dirty word. But if you find out the basics of how to tell a good story or how to hold an audience by just developing character, then these things only help when your dazzling message to mankind is presented. Otherwise, they can leave in the interval. So you have to keep them there. There are a hundred reasons these days for people not to stay in their seats for two hours. It's toughest with the theatre. I was talking with my actors the other day and I said, if you sit in any seat in this auditorium, it creaks, because it's an old theatre. If you multiply those creaks by 300, you can get quite a noise. But when you get silence, you realize that all those people have decided to freeze. They've made a conscious decision. If you can do that to all those strangers, then obviously the material is working. ★

Tim Sheridan is a playwright and an editor for the Alliance Theatre's Stagebill.



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L. BEN LYTLE
*Chairman of the Board,
Chief Executive Officer and President
The Associated Group*



(left) Alan Ayckbourn.

(opposite page) Candice Song Donahoo is Belle (Beauty) and Christopher Innvar is Robert, the artist who accidentally brings her magically to life, in *Dreams From a Summer House*. Photo by David Zeiger, courtesy of the Alliance Theatre Company.

P—S—I—

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ABOUT THE PLAY

I know too little of your world -
 But just enough to tell
 There are no clear beginnings.
 Nor are there tidy, happy endings.
 Your stories are confused.
 A tragedy for some becomes
 A comedy for others;
 You laugh at sadness,
 Weep when you should smile.
 -Belle, in *Dreams from a Summer House*



In the English town of Scarborough, one of the most accomplished and successful living playwrights runs a theater, where he writes and directs plays for an intimate, theater-in-the-round space. And it seems that his style of performance (with minimal scenery and much dependence on the audience's imagination) contains a clue to his special art: taking advantage of this unpretentious, flexible stage, Alan Ayckbourn's comedies all revolve around a kind of doubling of the world, in which two sets of characters are juxtaposed against each other in a fluid virtual space. In Ayckbourn plays, we view the characters in shifting perspectives: within the same stage area, actors may play out actions belonging to two different rooms in the same house, or the same room at different times, or a real world interacting with a world of fantasy. Always one world comments on the other. Thus, a specific theatrical space has afforded Ayckbourn his characteristic structures and themes (which remain central to any performance of these plays, in any kind of theatrical space). Delicately and with consummate skill, Ayckbourn shows a familiar,

frustratingly limited world haunted by alternative, but nearly unattainable, possibilities.

It is through myths that men are lifted
 above their captivity in the ordinary, attain
 powerful visions of the future, and realize
 such visions.

-Peter Berger, *Pyramids of Sacrifice*

Nowhere does Ayckbourn take this
 subtle, inventive challenging of the
 limits of commonplace experience fur-
 ther than in his 1992 "musical play"

Dreams from a Summer House. Here, his usual bittersweet comic themes - the quiet frustrations and unacknowledged longings in placid lives - are played out through the absurd clash of reality against a classic myth, that of Beauty and the Beast. Here, ordinary people retreat into liquor, into extended childhood, into triviality and endless busy-ness, and into broken relationships; but painting and music mysteriously bridge the gap to a world of fantasy and legend - Ayckbourn the writer contemplates art as an interruption of ordinary perceptions, a way to a fuller experience of being.

Interestingly, Ayckbourn chooses to intervene in these mildly thwarted lives with a myth of imprisonment and misrecognition: Beauty and her Beast are not refugees from some fairyland Utopia. They, too, must discover their own unacknowledged love in order to free themselves from the curses that bind them. Perhaps misrecognition and imprisonment of various kinds strike at the heart of Ayckbourn's compassionate comedies: we too, are implicated - in the very act of theatergoing - by Ayckbourn's hopeful evocation of the possibility that art and myth might free us from petty illusion and unnecessary limitation.

Myths are essential to the process of keeping our souls alive and bringing us new meaning in a difficult and often meaningless world.

Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth* (1991)



Oh, may I join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence; live
In pulses stirred to generosity,
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn
For miserable aims that end with self,
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night like stars,
And with their mild persistence urge men's search
To vaster issues,
so to live is heaven:
To make undying music in the world...
- George Eliot, "The Choir Invisible"

- Michael Evenden,
Consultant Dramaturg

ABOUT THE PLAY: a conversation with Alan Ayckbourn

Steve Alter: I remember last year when I was talking to you about *The Revengers' Comedies*, you hadn't written *Dreams* yet, and you said "I think it's going to be Faust meets Cinderella" – which I thought was a wonderful description – but now that I've read the play...

Alan Ayckbourn: Ah, yes, well it's moved a little away from that now hasn't it? I don't know what I would call it now – obviously it's Beauty and the Beast meets... something or other – it's rather hard to sum up.

SA: These past few years, it seems like you've been writing plays for families and children in between adult plays. Was *Dreams* a conscious attempt on your part to blend your family-oriented, more fanciful children's plays with your adult work, or did the play just evolve that way?

AA: It sort of happened that way. I think that the adult work had been, if you like, leaking into my children's work. The last two children's shows I wrote, *My Very Own Story* and *This is Where We Came In*, have very big elements of adult stuff in them. And the reverse was happening and still does to a certain extent with *Wildest Dreams*, and *Dreams* in particular. *Dreams* has got – I can say it now, but I wasn't consciously doing it – but it's got a lot of the feeling of some of the early French films, like Renoir's films. They always had a sort of innocence about them, although they were not in any way fey – they were quite sharp. But they have a timelessness about them, in a funny way. I was more aware of this when we were doing it than when I was writing it.

SA: This play begins in familiar territory for you, and then there's kind of a wonderful explosion that happens when Beauty enters and we suddenly go off on a very different path.

AA: One thing that we did, because I knew that we were going on this fantastic journey, was to try and keep it as real as we could at the beginning. It pays tribute, like a lot of my work, to those kinds of American films, where handsome men fall in love with girls in the garden, like *Roman Holiday* and *Moonglow* and *Picnic*, so it has that sort of feel. I tried to start it very much as if we are headed in one direction and it's all going to be real, and then – as we do with farce – the magic just begins to creep in.

SA: It is quite surprising.

AA: It was nice when it happened. A lot of people were saying, "Thank you for taking me out of it all." They just loved it. Quite a lot of my trips don't take them

very far away from their own front doors and they are painfully aware that what they are seeing is happening, if not in the same room as them, then in the next room. I think with this play, it lifted them, and I think a lot of them were quite surprised.

SA: Did you know in advance that you wanted to write a musical?

AA: Yes, actually. My agent, who is also Christopher Hampton's (*Les Liason Dangereuses*) agent, told me, "Chris has just gone away to work with Andrew Lloyd Webber on *Sunset Boulevard*," they went off to his villa somewhere. So I said to my composer, John Pattison, "I don't have a villa, but why don't we go away – this is how they write musicals, you know." It sounds rather mundane, but we went to Majorca. John took all of his gear, his keyboards and equipment, and I took my word processor and printer. We thought it was going to be hard when we got there because the sun was just beating down, but we just went into the room at 9:30 after breakfast and we worked until 6. And we very rarely spoke to each other. He was rattling away for the first few days, conjuring up the muse, and I was beginning to write. I had brought a synopsis, but I was beginning to bang out the libretto and as I finished it I would just throw pages at him. The songs were more or less indicated, so he was able to start with a few ideas, but I was also writing lyrics at the same point.

SA: Were you writing the lyrics as John composed the music, or did you write a lyric and the music came later?

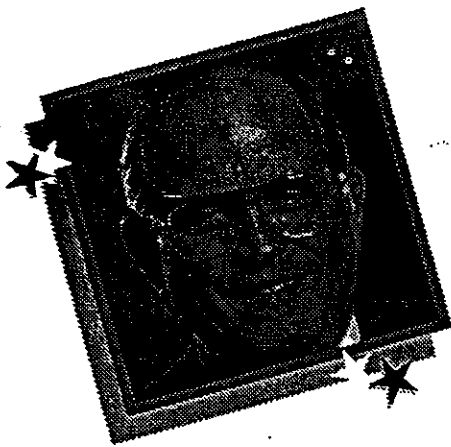
AA: I wrote the dialogue and John worked his way through it musically, and then later on, much later, we went through again and tidied up the lyric where it helped the music and vice versa. But in some cases, like with the love song, *I Am Dreaming*, John produced that tune and I wrote the words to it, but usually I wrote the lyric and the music came later.

SA: This play probably has the closest thing to a happy ending of anything you've written in quite some time. Was there a conscious effort on your part to give the audience that kind of release, or did you just find yourself there at the end of the play?

AA: I was very aware that with the story such as it was, that I built expectations for something that was not going to be too heavy. You could hear the audience going, "Oh great! We were worried that the playwright was going to let us down like he usually does."

SA: Now you're going to have to write more plays with happy endings. People are going to expect it.

AA: Yeah, well, I've got a happy ending in the new one, so I don't know, I must be getting soft.



Letter from the President of the Board Jerry Semler

Dear Fellow Subscribers,

The dawn of 1995 has been an exciting time here at the IRT. Our world premiere of *God's Pictures* by Daisy Foote attracted significant press attention, not only locally but nationally as well. This kind of recognition is very important to maintaining and enhancing the IRT's profile, not only within our own community but also in the national community of resident theatres.

Our co-production of *Dreams from a Summer House* with the highly respected Alliance Theatre Company of Atlanta, Georgia, is another important step in that process. The combined resources of our two companies has enabled us to create a particularly lush, beautiful production. And our association together, as in last season's East Coast tour of *Flyin' West*, spreads the word to an ever-increasing national audience of the high-quality work being presented at our own Indiana Repertory Theatre.

Enjoy the show! ★

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DREAMS

FROM A SUMMER HOUSE

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Alan Ayckbourn is England's most popular and prolific contemporary dramatist. Born in London in 1939, he has been working in the theatre since the age of 17, as a stage manager, sound and lighting technician, scene painter, prop maker, actor, writer, and director. As a playwright, Ayckbourn has written more than 45 plays, over 20 of which have been performed in London's West End or at the National Theatre. Since 1971, he has been artistic director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round in Scarborough, where his plays are first produced under his own direction. Among his most well-known works are *How the Other Half Loves*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *The Norman Conquests*, *Bedroom Farce*, *Season's Greetings*, and *A Chorus of Disapproval*.

John Pattison studied composition and piano at Dartington College of Arts and has worked extensively both as a composer and music director in England. On the artistic staff at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round since 1988, Mr. Pattison has composed music for approximately 30 productions, including several Ayckbourn scripts such as *The Norman Conquests* and *Wildest Dreams*. ★

Dreams Team

CREATIVE STAFF

DIRECTOR David H. Bell (Associate Artistic Director, Alliance Theatre)
SET DESIGNER Dex Edwards (IRT, *Flyin' West*)
COSTUME DESIGNER Beth Novak (IRT, *Mr. Adelman's Nothing*)
LIGHTING DESIGNER Diane Ferry Williams (Ford's Theatre, the Kennedy Center)
MUSIC DIRECTOR Joel Fram (Broadway, *Falsettos*, *The Secret Garden*)

CAST

MELINDA Donna Lynne Champlin (Carnegie Hall, *Very Warm for May*)
BELLE (BEAUTY) Candice Song Donchoo (Atlanta theatre, Miss Atlanta 1993)
BALDEMAR (BEAST) Eric Ferguson (The Acting Company, Arena Stage, Old Globe)
AMANDA Stacia Fernandez (New Tours, *Jerome Robbins' Broadway*, *Evita*)
GRAYSON Al Hamacher (Alliance, 59 productions, Moscow, Shanghai)
ROBERT Christopher Innvar (Off Broadway, *The Fantasticks*, *Blackamoor*)
SINCLAIR James Ream (Arena Stage, Alley Theatre, Ford's Theatre)
CHRISSIE Anne Rogers (Broadway, *42nd Street*, London, *My Fair Lady*)

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Artistic Director Kenny Leon
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present

DREAMS

FROM A SUMMER HOUSE

BOOK AND LYRICS BY ALAN AYCKBOURN
MUSIC BY JOHN PATTISON

FEBRUARY 8 - MARCH 5, 1995

Directed by DAVID H. BELL

Scenic Design by DEX EDWARDS
Costume Design by ELIZABETH NOVAK
Lighting Design by DIANE FERRY WILLIAMS

Sound Design by MILO MILLER
Music Director JOEL FRAM
Stage Manager DAVID DREYFOOS

Casting JODY FELDMAN • JAY BINDER

THE CAST

MEL Donna Lynne Champlin
a teenage girl
BELLE Candice Song Donehoo
a Beauty
BALDEMAR Eric Ferguson
a Beast
AMANDA Stacia Fernandez
Mel's sister
GRAYSON Al Hamacher
Mel & Amanda's father
ROBERT Christopher Innvar
Amanda's ex-husband
SINCLAIR James Ream
Amanda's second husband
CHRISIE Anne Rogers
Mel & Amanda's mother

THE SETTING

an English garden in August
and beyond
There will be one intermission.

Assistant Director MIKE HALL
Musicians JOEL FRAM
PATRICK HUTCHISON

Dreams from a Summer House received its premiere at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round, Scarborough, England.

This theatre operates under an agreement between the League of Resident Theatres and Actors' Equity Association, the Union of Professional Actors and Stage Managers in the United States.

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