

# Alan Ayckbourn: A Career Overview

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1939 Born on 12 April in Hampstead, London.

1956 Leaves school (Haileybury) and works with Donald Wolfitt at the Edinburgh Festival. Joins the Connaught Theatre, Worthing.

1957 Joins the Library Theatre, Scarborough, as an acting stage manager and meets his mentor, Stephen Joseph.

1959 Stephen Joseph challenges Alan to write his first play, the success of which leads to an immediate second commission. Appears as Stanley in the second production of *The Birthday Party*, directed by Harold Pinter. Marries the actress Christine Roland and has his first child.

*The Square Cat; Love After All*

1960 *Dad's Tale*

1961 Directs his first play, *Gaslight*. His second son is born.

*Standing Room Only*

1962 Joins the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, as writer, director and actor.

*Christmas V Mastermind*

1963 *Mr Whatnot*

1964 *Mr Whatnot* opens in the West End, only to close soon afterwards. Leaves the Victoria Theatre. Joins BBC Leeds as a radio drama producer.

1965 *Meet My Father* opens at the Library Theatre, it is immediately optioned for the West End and - eventually - retitled to *Relatively Speaking*.

*Relatively Speaking*

1967 *Relatively Speaking* opens in the West End to phenomenal reviews. Stephen Joseph dies.

*The Sparrow*

- 1969 *Relatively Speaking* is the first Ayckbourn play to be published.  
*How the Other Half Loves*
- 1970 Resigns from the BBC to concentrate on playwriting.  
*Family Circles*
- 1971 *How the Other Half Loves* is his first play to open on Broadway.  
*Time and Time Again*
- 1972 Appointed the artistic director of the Library Theatre, Scarborough.  
*Absurd Person Singular*
- 1973 *The Norman Conquests* (*Table Manners; Living Together; Round and Round the Garden*) breaks box-office records in Scarborough. *Absurd Person Singular* wins the *Evening Standard Award* for Best Comedy - his first award.  
*The Norman Conquests*
- 1974 Named Variety Club of Great Britain Playwright of the Year.  
*Absent Friends; Confusions*
- 1975 Has a record-breaking five plays running simultaneously in the West End, although *Jeeves*, a musical with Andrew Lloyd Webber, flops. His first entry in *Who's Who* and in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.  
*Jeeves; Bedroom Farce*
- 1976 Moves the Scarborough company to the Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round.  
*Just Between Ourselves*
- 1977 Directs for the first time in London in a co-production with Sir Peter Hall of *Bedroom Farce* at the National Theatre.  
*Ten Times Table*
- 1978 *Joking Apart*
- 1979 Writes his first 'chance' play, *Sisterly Feelings*, and his first farce, *Taking Steps*, dedicated to Ben Travers.  
*Sisterly Feelings; Taking Steps*
- 1980 *Suburban Strains; Season's Greetings*
- 1981 *Way Upstream; Making Tracks*

- 1982 *Way Upstream* floods the National Theatre.  
*Intimate Exchanges*
- 1983 The Arts Council Cultural Trends reports Alan Ayckbourn is more popular than Shakespeare (if only in regional theatres between 1981 and 1983!).  
*It Could Be Any One of Us*
- 1984 *A Chorus of Disapproval*
- 1985 Receives his first Olivier Award for *A Chorus of Disapproval*.  
*Woman in Mind*
- 1986 Takes a two-year sabbatical from Scarborough to become a visiting director at the National Theatre.
- 1987 Appointed a Companion of the Order of the British Empire (CBE). Arthur Miller praises his production of *A View From the Bridge* at the National Theatre.  
*A Small Family Business; Henceforward...*
- 1988 Returns to Scarborough and writes his first family play since 1962.  
*Man of the Moment; Mr A's Amazing Maze Plays*
- 1989 Celebrates his 50th birthday with the five-hour epic *The Revengers' Comedies*.  
*The Revengers' Comedies; Invisible Friends*
- 1990 Directs a Shakespeare play for the first time with Michael Gambon in the title role of *Othello*.  
*Body Language; This Is Where We Came In; Callisto 5*
- 1991 *Wildest Dreams; My Very Own Story*
- 1992 Appointed Cameron Macintosh visiting professor of contemporary theatre, Oxford University.  
*Time of My Life; Dreams From a Summer House*
- 1994 *Communicating Doors; Haunting Julia; The Musical Jigsaw Play*
- 1995 *A Word From Our Sponsor*

- 1996 Moves the Scarborough company to the Stephen Joseph Theatre, a converted former Odeon cinema, which opens with *By Jeeves* - a successful reworked revival of his and Andrew Lloyd Webber's flop musical.  
*The Champion of Paribanou*
- 1997 Knighted for 'services to theatre' and marries Heather Stoney. Receives the Lloyds Private Banking Playwright of the Year Award.  
*Things We Do for Love*
- 1998 *Comic Potential; The Boy Who Fell Into a Book*
- 1999 The National Theatre names him as one of the most influential playwrights of the 20th century. Writes *House & Garden* for his 60th birthday, two plays performed simultaneously in two auditoria by the same cast.  
*House & Garden*
- 2000 *Virtual Reality; Whenever*
- 2001 Directs on Broadway for the first time with *By Jeeves*. Official biography, *Grinning at the Edge*, by Paul Allen published.  
*GamePlan; FlatSpin; RolePlay*
- 2002 His first book, *The Crafty Art of Playmaking*, is published.  
*Snake in the Grass; The Jollies*
- 2003 *Sugar Daddies; Orvin: Champion of Champions; My Sister Sadie*
- 2004 Receives the Variety Club of Great Britain Lifetime Achievement Award.  
*Drowning on Dry Land; Private Fears in Public Places; Miss Yesterday*
- 2005 Takes his Scarborough company to New York for the first time to the Brits off Broadway Festival with the critically acclaimed *Private Fears in Public Places*.  
*Improbable Fiction*
- 2006 Suffers a stroke in February, but is directing again by October.  
*If I Were You*
- 2008 The Old Vic revives *The Norman Conquests*, directed by Matthew Warchus, to great acclaim.  
*Life and Beth; Awaking Beauty*

- 2009 Steps down as artistic director of the Stephen Joseph Theatre. Receives the Society of London Theatre Special Award at the Laurence Olivier Awards.  
*My Wonderful Day*
- 2010 Receives the Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in Theatre and the Critics' Circle Award for Service to the Arts. The National Theatre revives *Season's Greetings*.  
*Life of Riley*
- 2011 University of York acquires Alan Ayckbourn's archive for the nation. The BBC dedicates an episode of the Arts documentary series *Imagine* to Alan Ayckbourn.  
*Neighbourhood Watch*
- 2012 *Neighbourhood Watch* becomes the first Ayckbourn play to transfer to both New York and London with the original company. A West End revival of *Absent Friends*, directed by Jeremy Herrin, is acclaimed by critics.  
*Surprises*
- 2013 *Surprises* nominated for UK Theatre Awards' Best Play. Directs the North American premiere of *Sugar Daddies* at ACT in Seattle.  
*Arrivals & Departures*
- 2014 Alain Resnais's final film, adapted from *Life Of Riley*, is released; the National Theatre revives *A Small Family Business* - the first Ayckbourn play to be live-streamed around the world.  
*Roundelay*
- 2015 *Hero's Welcome*
- 2016 Receives Oxford Literary Festival Honorary Fellowship.  
*Consuming Passions*
- 2017 Celebrates his 60th anniversary with the Stephen Joseph Theatre.  
*A Brief History of Women*
- 2018 Appointed Director Emeritus of the Stephen Joseph Theatre.  
*Better Off Dead*
- 2019 His first novel, *The Divide*, is published. Celebrates his 80th birthday and the 60th anniversary of his professional playwriting debut.  
*Birthdays Past, Birthdays Present*

2020 The Covid-19 pandemic and UK theatre lockdown leads to the cancellation of his new play; records another new play *Anno Domino* performing opposite his wife, Heather Stoney, which is released as an audio stream.

*Anno Domino*

2021 *The Girl Next Door* becomes the first Ayckbourn production, directed by the playwright in-the-round, to be recorded as a film.

*The Girl Next Door*

2022 His latest play, *All Lies*, will premiere at The Old Laundry Theatre, Bowness-on-Windermere, the first play not to premiere at the STpehn Joseph Theatre since 1987.

*All Lies*

*Research and written by Alan Ayckbourn's Archivist, Simon Murgatroyd.*

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