

Alan Ayckbourn: The Playwright

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Alan Ayckbourn has been writing plays professionally for more than 65 years. He is rarely if ever tempted by television or film, which perhaps explains why he continues to be so prolific.

His first play was *The Square Cat* which premiered on 30 July 1959 at Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre, Scarborough (now the Stephen Joseph Theatre). It was famously written after the prospective playwright complained about the quality of his acting roles to Stephen Joseph, his mentor and founder of the Library Theatre. Stephen challenged him to write a better role and a better play.

The Square Cat was the result, a farce which proved to be a big hit. It was the second most successful show of the 1959 summer season and the first play to run for three weeks during the company's repertory seasons. Alan earned £47 in royalties and was immediately commissioned to write a second play for the winter season. An extraordinary playwriting career had been launched.

As of 2025, Alan has written 91 plays which includes such notable pieces as *Relatively Speaking*, *How The Other Half Loves*, *Absurd Person Singular*, *The Norman Conquests*, *Bedroom Farce*, *Season's Greetings*, *A Chorus Of Disapproval*, *A Small Family Business*, *Man Of The Moment*, *Comic Potential*, *House & Garden* and *Private Fears In Public Places*.

Thirty-nine of his plays have been produced in the West End or at the National Theatre. His plays are regularly produced around the world and in recent years his work has drawn much popular and critical acclaim with his own productions at the 59E59 Theatre, New York, as part of the *Brits Off Broadway* festival.

At one point he held the record for the most plays running simultaneously both in the West End and on Broadway and he is believed to be the only playwright to have had plays running simultaneously at the National Theatre, in the West End and on the London Fringe.

His numerous awards include the Variety Club Playwright Of The Year and Lifetime Achievement Awards, the Writer's Guild Of Britain Lifetime Achievement award, the Montblanc de la Culture Award for Europe, the Sunday Times Award for Literary Excellence, the Critics' Circle Award for Services to the Arts and the Oxford Literary Festival Honorary Fellowship. He is also the only playwright to have won both the Laurence Olivier Awards Special Award and the Special Tony Award For Lifetime Achievement In Theatre.