

Alan Ayckbourn: A Career Overview

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Alan Ayckbourn: A Career Overview

- 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 Theatre in the Round at 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 Theatre in the Round 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 Theatre in the Round at the Library Theatre.
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 Theatre in the Round at Westwood (later renamed 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* marks the first time an Ayckbourn world premiere, directed by the playwright and in-the-round, to be recorded as a film.

The Girl Next Door

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

All Lies; Family Album

2023 The Ayckbourn Collection is donated to Scarborough Museums & Galleries and is featured in a year-long exhibition; *Truth Will Out*, a play announced but cancelled in 2020 due to the pandemic, receives a rehearsed reading.

Welcome to the Family; Constant Companions

2024 His 90th full-length play, *Show & Tell*, premieres marking his 65th anniversary as a playwright; *Father of Invention*, an unproduced play written in 2019 but cancelled in 2020 receives as rehearsed reading at the Stephen Joseph Theatre.

Show & Tell

2025 *Men, Meals & Me*, an unproduced play written in 2018 receives a rehearsed reading at the Stephen Joseph Theatre.

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

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