

**Buffalo Theatre Ensemble
Presents**



**By Alan Ayckbourn
Directed by Connie Canaday Howard**

Buffalo Theatre Ensemble sincerely thanks the College of DuPage Library for research support for classes studying the production, and the production.

Season's Greetings Study Guide
Buffalo Theatre Ensemble

Nov. 17-Dec. 18, 2022

November 18-December 18
Preview November 17
MAC, Playhouse Theatre

Time and Place:

The action takes place in the home of Neville and Belinda Bunker, in 1980, in a village outside of London

ACT 1 Scene One: Christmas Eve, 7:30PM
 Scene Two: Christmas Day, noon
 Scene Three: Christmas Day, midnight

ACT II Scene One: Boxing Day, 3:30PM
 Scene Two: December 27th, 5:15AM

Note: Adult themes and language; Simulated gun shots

Characters

Neville Bunker
Belinda Bunker, married to Neville
Phyllis, Neville's sister
Harvey, uncle of Neville and Phyllis
Bernard, married to Phyllis
Rachel, Belinda's sister
Eddie, Neville's friend
Pattie, married to Eddie
Clive

Intermission: there will be one fifteen minute intermission

Director's Note

The anticipation of holidays and extended family gatherings is very often filled with high hopes and excitement, and there are, hopefully, many moments of fun and joy experienced for each of us. But it's not uncommon in most families to have tensions, regressions, or, as Rachel says in *Season's Greetings*, "dramas." We used to joke in my family that these moments were as much a part of the holidays as eggnog, caroling, and cookies for Santa!

Season's Greetings is considered by most to be one of comic master Alan Ayckbourn's 'classics.' Since it first premiered in 1980, it has remained one of his most produced pieces, internationally.

We'll soon join the group at Belinda and Neville Bunker's home for four days over the Christmas holidays. Most are close family and friends, though one person, invited by Rachel, who is single, is joining the clan for the first time. Children are very 'present,' though in the scenes we see, they're asleep, off playing, on a walk - they're never onstage.

For most of us, there will be some resonances with the script, which is why the characters' particular situations and relationships, though probably very different from our own, still allow us to empathize and laugh. Many moments spiral into ridiculousness, as the characters trip over one another during this shared holiday. The warmth and humor in these dysfunctional characters, and their love of one another, makes it clear why they continue to strive with each other, certainly for the holidays, but in life, as well.

Season's Greetings is our holiday gift for you, however you celebrate the winter holidays. We hope you have a great time! Thank you for supporting live theatre, and BTE. CCH

Alan Ayckbourn Quotes, regarding *Season's Greetings*:

Source: Ayckbourn's official website <http://seasonsgreetings.alanayckbourn.net/styled-5/>

"The family reunion, the pile of brightly wrapped presents; the log roaring in the grate; a children's puppet show and a Boxing Day tea; turkey dinners; paper hats; crackers and streamers; around the base of the gaily decorated tree an extramarital relationship; a couple of stray gunshots in the hall. All the ingredients for a traditional English Christmas."

(Alan Ayckbourn's publicity note from the 1980 Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round winter brochure)

Advice on writing Christmas-set plays: "Well, I suppose, give them a landmine, but make sure you wrap it in a bit of tinsel".

(The Guardian, 20 December 2007)

An Interview with Alan Ayckbourn, on *Season's Greetings*

Source: Ayckbourn's official website <http://seasonsgreetings.alanayckbourn.net/page-5/>

Alan Ayckbourn has rarely talked about Season's Greetings in any meaningful way. In March 2019, his Archivist Simon Murgatroyd interviewed the playwright about the play prior to its revival at the Stephen Joseph Theatre during the 60th anniversary of his playwriting debut.

Simon Murgatroyd: Was there a particular inspiration behind *Season's Greetings*?

Alan Ayckbourn: One Christmas, my boys - Steven and Philip - had been preparing a puppet show for the grandparents. I said, 'if you want a hand, I'm around.' So they said, 'oh yeah, great.' I said, 'have you got a script?' and they said no. I said, 'well I'll write you one.'

I finished up taking the whole thing over and it got more and more complex with more and more scenes and more and more puppets. We pre-recorded the entire show onto a cassette and I wrote lyrics to exiting melodies from the Hit Parade at the time, which the boys recorded faithfully. By the end we had quite a complex tape, which we were supposed to match this puppet show to, which was pretty horrendous, quite difficult and very ambitious.

The technical rehearsals were akin to professional technical rehearsals in that there was a lot of me shouting and the boys crying. I remember Steven saying, 'this is only meant to be fun!' and running crying out of the room as I shouted, 'it may be fun to you, but this is a show and we've got to do it professionally.' By the time it went on, all the Christmas joy had gone out of it. Afterwards I thought, 'what the hell am I doing?'

Is it true your literary agent, Peggy Ramsay, tried to discourage you from writing the play?

I wrote it much to the dismay of Peggy who implored me 'Oh God, darling, plays set at Christmas are so boring.' And I thought, 'well not this one because it'll be the worst Christmas in the world.' I just filled the stage with contradicting personalities starting with the two uncles and spreading outwards to the two sisters who tussle over a newcomer; you always need a newcomer to represent the audience!

It also has an unusual setting, why did you choose a hallway?

This was also the second strand of inspiration - you always need multiple strands. People kept asking me, where are you going to set your next play? In the bathroom? I kept saying, 'I don't want to set a play in the bathroom!' I'd written plays in bedrooms, kitchens, living rooms and gardens and I thought, what else is left? What about a hall? If you've got a house full of guests at Christmas and it's an open plan hall leading onto the front door and the dining room and the living room and into the kitchen and leading up the stairs, then it's a multi-intersection location and it really worked dramatically. I had a houseful of visitors all traversing this hall and I decided to situate the Christmas tree as the focal centre of Christmas in the hall. It all followed

on from there. It was a great, fun play to do.

How was it originally received at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round?

It was very successful in Scarborough and it had two productions in two years. We used to run a show for more than one season if it was proven to be successful and this one certainly was. I think everyone has had at least one disastrous Christmas and so the audience related to it. I used to say, you may think you've had a bad Christmas but wait until you see this one - none of your guests actually got shot!

...

Do you have any memorably awful Christmas experiences?

This house has had one or two memorable christmases - particularly when my mother was alive. She used to be a person who could get under someone's skin very quickly when in close proximity and two days of Christmas was quite enough. I remember once, a person was so angry they slammed the door shut and the door handle flew off and they got trapped in the room! I also remember a stand-up fight about a chair. This was disputed territory between two people, both claiming they wanted it and you just looked round at a room full of empty chairs and wondered why were they fighting over it. 'That's my handbag! It's my chair!' That was another door-slammer.

The Playwright:

Source: "Alan Ayckbourn." *Gale Literature: Contemporary Authors*, Gale, 2010. *Gale Literature Resource Center*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/H1000003932/GLS?u=cod_lrc&sid=bookmark-GLS&xid=118be41e.

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Surname is pronounced Ache-born; born April 12, 1939, in Hampstead, London, England; son of Horace (a concert musician) and Irene (Worley) Ayckbourn; married Christine Roland, May 9, 1959 (divorced, 1997); married Heather Elizabeth Stoney, 1997; children: Steven Paul, Philip Nicholas. **Education:** Attended Haileybury and Imperial Service College, Hertfordshire, England, 1952-57.

CAREER:

Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round Company, Scarborough, England, stage manager and actor, 1957-59, writer and director, 1959-61; Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, England, actor, writer, and director, 1961-64; British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Leeds, Yorkshire, England, drama producer, 1965-70; Stephen Joseph Theatre, writer and artistic director, 1970--; professor of contemporary theatre, St. Catherine's College, Oxford University, 1992. Visiting playwright and director, Royal National Theatre, London, 1977, 1980, 1986-88. Also acted with several British repertory companies.

AWARDS:

London Evening Standard best comedy award, 1973, for *Absurd Person Singular*, best play awards, 1974, for *The Norman Conquests*, 1977, for *Just Between Ourselves*, 1987, for *A Small Family Business*; *Plays and Players*, 1989, for *Henceforward . . . Vaudeville*, and 1990, for *Man of the Moment*, best new play awards, 1974, for *The Norman Conquests*, and 1985, for *A Chorus of Disapproval*; named "playwright of the year" by Variety Club of Great Britain, 1974; Nominee for the Antoinette Perry Award for best play, 1979, for *Bedroom Farce*; D.Litt, University of Hull, 1981, University of Keele, 1987, and University of Leeds, 1987; *London Evening Standard* Award, Olivier Award, and *Drama* Award, all 1985, all for *A Chorus of Disapproval*; appointed Commander of the British Empire, 1987; Director of the Year Award, *Plays and Players*, 1987, for production of Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge*; Drama-Logue Critics Award, 1991, for *Henceforward . . . Vaudeville*; TMA/ Martini Regional Theatre Award for Best Show for Children Young People, 1993, for *Mr. A's Amazing Maze Plays*; lifetime achievement award, Writers' Guild of Great Britain, Birmingham Press Club Personality of the Year Award, and the John Ederyn Hughes Rural Wales Award for Literature, all 1993; named Yorkshire Man of the Year award, and the Mont Blanc de la Culture Award for Europe, both 1994; Best West End Play award, Writers' Guild of Great Britain, 1996, for *Communicating Doors*; knighted, 1997; Special Tony Award for Lifetime Achievement in the theatre, 2010.

PLAYS

- *Xmas v. Mastermind*, first produced in Stoke-on-Trent, England, at Victoria Theatre, December 26, 1962.
- *Mr. Whatnot*, first produced in Stoke-on-Trent at Victoria Theatre, November 12, 1963, revised version produced in London at Arts Theatre, August 6, 1964.
- *Relatively Speaking* (first produced as *Meet My Father* in Scarborough at Library Theatre, July 8, 1965, produced on the West End at Duke of York's Theatre, March 29, 1967), Samuel French (London, England), 1968.
- *The Sparrow*, first produced in Scarborough at the Library Theatre, July 13, 1967.
- *We Who Are About To...* (one-act; includes *Countdown*; first produced in London at Hampstead Theatre Club, February 6, 1969; also see below), published in *Mixed Doubles: An Entertainment on Marriage*, Methuen (London, England), 1970.
- *How the Other Half Loves* (first produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre, July 31, 1969, produced on the West End at Lyric Theatre, August 5, 1970), Samuel French (London, England), 1971.
- *Mixed Doubles: An Entertainment on Marriage* (includes *Countdown*, and *We Who Are About To...* ; first produced on the West End at Comedy Theatre, April 9, 1969), Methuen (London, England), 1970.
- *The Story So Far*, produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre, August 20, 1970, revised version as *Me Times Me Times Me*, produced on tour March 13, 1972, second revised version as *Family Circles* (produced in Richmond, England at Orange Tree Theatre, November 17, 1978), Samuel French (London, England), 1997.
- *Ernie's Incredible Illucinations* (first produced in London, 1971), Samuel French (London, England), 1969.
- *Time and Time Again* (first produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre, July 8, 1971, produced on the West End at Comedy Theatre, August 16, 1972), Samuel French (London, England), 1973.
- *Absurd Person Singular* (first produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre, June 26, 1972, produced on the West End at Criterion Theatre, July 4, 1973), Samuel French (London, England), 1974.
- *Mother Figure* (one-act; first produced in Horsham, Sussex, England at Capitol Theatre, 1973, produced on the West End at Apollo Theatre, May 19, 1976; also see below), published in *Confusions*, Samuel French (London, England), 1977.

- *The Norman Conquests* (trilogy; composed of *Table Manners*, *Living Together*, and *Round and Round the Garden*; first produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre June, 1973, produced on the West End at Globe Theatre, August 1, 1974), Samuel French (London, England), 1975.
- *Absent Friends* (first produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre, June 17, 1974, produced on the West End at Garrick Theatre, July 23, 1975), Samuel French (London, England), 1975.
- *Service Not Included* (television script), produced by British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 1974.
- *Confusions* (one-acts; includes *Mother Figure*, *Drinking Companion*, *Between Mouthfuls*, *Gosforth's Fete*, and *A Talk in the Park*; first produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre, September 30, 1974, produced on the West End at Apollo Theatre, May 19, 1976), Samuel French (London, England), 1977.
- (Author of book and lyrics) *Jeeves* (musical; adapted from stories by P. G. Wodehouse), music by Andrew Lloyd Webber, first produced on the West End at Her Majesty's Theatre, April 22, 1975.
- *Bedroom Farce* (first produced in Scarborough at the Library Theatre, June 16, 1975, produced on the West End at Prince of Wales's Theatre, November 7, 1978, produced on Broadway at Brooks Atkinson Theatre, 1979 ; also see below), Samuel French (London, England), 1977.
- *Just Between Ourselves* (first produced in Scarborough at Library Theatre, January 28, 1976, produced on the West End at Queen's Theatre, April 22, 1977; also see below), Samuel French (London, England), 1978.
- *Ten Times Table* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, January 18, 1977, produced on the West End at Globe Theatre, April 5, 1978; also see below), Samuel French (London, England), 1979.
- *Joking Apart* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, January 11, 1978, produced on the West End at Globe Theatre, March 7, 1979), Samuel French (London, England), 1979.
- (Author of book and lyrics) *Men on Women on Men* (musical), music by Paul Todd, first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, June 17, 1978.
- *Sisterly Feelings* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, January 10, 1979, produced on the West End at Olivier Theatre, June 3, 1980; also see below), Samuel French (London, England), 1981.
- *Taking Steps* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, September 27, 1979, produced on the West End at Lyric Theatre, September 2, 1980), Samuel French (London, England), 1981.
- (Author of book and lyrics) *Suburban Strains* (musical; first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, January 20, 1980, produced in London at Round House Theatre, February 2, 1981), music by Paul Todd, Samuel French (London, England), 1981.
- *Season's Greetings* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, September 24, 1980, revised version first produced in Greenwich, England at Greenwich Theatre, January 27, 1982, produced on the West End at Apollo Theatre, March 29, 1982), Samuel French (London, England), 1982.
- (Author of book and lyrics) *Me, Myself, and I* (musical), music by Paul Todd, first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, June, 1981.
- *Way Upstream* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, October, 1981, produced in London at National Theatre, October 4, 1982), Samuel French (London, England), 1983.
- (Author of book and lyrics) *Making Tracks* (musical), music by Paul Todd, first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, December 16, 1981.
- *Intimate Exchanges* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, June 3, 1982, produced on the West End at the Ambassadors Theatre, August 14, 1984), Samuel French (London, England), 1985.
- *It Could Be Any One of Us*, first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, October 9, 1983.
- *A Chorus of Disapproval* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, May 3, 1984, produced on the West End at the Lyric Theatre, June 11, 1986), Samuel French (London, England), 1985, screenplay adaptation by Ayckbourn and Michael Winner, Southgate Entertainment, 1989.
- *The Westwoods*, first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, May, 1984, produced in London at Etcetera Theatre, May 31, 1987.
- *Woman in Mind* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, June 3, 1985, produced on the West End at Vaudeville Theatre, September 3, 1986), Faber (London, England), 1986, Samuel French (London, England), 1987.

- *A Small Family Business* (first produced at the Royal National Theatre, June 5, 1987), Faber (London, England), 1987, Samuel French (London, England), 1988.
- *Henceforward...* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, July 30, 1987, produced on the West End at Vaudeville Theatre, November 21, 1988), Faber (London, England), 1989.
- *Man of the Moment*, first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, August 10, 1988.
- (Adaptor) Will Evans and Valentine, *Tons of Money: A Farce*, Samuel French (London, England), 1988.
- *Mr. A's Amazing Maze Plays* (first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, November 30, 1988), Faber (London, England), 1989.
- *Familiengeschaft: Texte und Materialien zur Schweizerischen Erstaufführung am Schauspielhaus Zurich*, Neue Schauspiel, 1989.
- *The Revengers' Comedies*, first produced in Scarborough at Stephen Joseph Theatre-in-the-Round, June 13, 1989.
- *Wildest Dreams*, first produced in Scarborough, May 6, 1991.
- *Ernie's Incredible Illucinations*, (published together with *A Day in the Life of Tich Oldfield*, by Alan England) Thornes, 1991.
- *A Cut in the Rates*, Samuel French (London, England), 1991.
- *Time of My Life*, first produced in Scarborough, April 21, 1992.
- *Dreams from a Summer House*, first produced in Scarborough, August 26, 1992.
- (Adaptor) Henry Becque, *Wolf at the Door: A Play*, translated by David Walker, Samuel French (London, England), 1993.
- *Communicating Doors*, first produced in Scarborough, February 2, 1994.
- *Haunting Julia*, first produced in Scarborough, April 20, 1994.
- *The Musical Jigsaw Play*, first produced in Scarborough, December 1, 1994.
- *A Word from Our Sponsor*, first produced in Scarborough, April 20, 1995.
- *This Is Where We Came In*, Samuel French (London, England), 1995.
- *My Very Own Story: A Play for Children*, Samuel French (London, England), 1995.
- *Callisto 5*, Samuel French (London, England), 1995.
- *By Jeeves*, first produced in Scarborough, May 1, 1996.
- *The Champion of Paribanou*, first produced in Scarborough, December 4, 1996.
- *Things We Do for Love*, first produced in Scarborough, April 24, 1997.
- *Family Circles: A Comedy*, Samuel French (London, England), 1997.
- *It Could Be Any One of Us: A Comedy*, Samuel French (London, England), 1998.
- *A Word from Our Sponsor: A Musical Play*, Samuel French (London, England), 1998.
- *Comic Potential*, Faber and Faber (London, England), 1999.
- *House*, first produced at the National Theater, August 9, 2000.
- *Garden*, first produced at the National Theater, August 9, 2000.
- *Private Fears in Public*, produced at in New York, NY at the 59E59 Theater, 2005.

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

- *Contemporary Dramatists*, 6th edition, Gale (Detroit, MI), p. 19.
- *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Gale (Detroit, MI), Volume 5, 1976; Volume 8, 1978; Volume 18, 1981; Volume 33, 1985.
- Elsom, John, *Post-War British Theatre*, Routledge Kegan Paul (Boston, MA), 1976.
- *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century*, Volume 1: A-D, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1999.
- Hayman, Ronald, *British Theatre since 1955: A Reassessment*, Oxford University Press (New York, NY), 1979.
- Joseph, Stephen, *Theatre in the Round*, Barrie Rockcliff, 1967.
- Kerensky, Oleg, *The New British Drama: Fourteen Playwrights since Osborne and Pinter*, Hamish Hamilton (London, England), 1977.
- *Modern British Literature*, Volume 1, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 2000.
- Taylor, John Russell, *The Second Wave: British Drama for the Seventies*, Methuen (London, England), 1971.
- Taylor, John Russell, *Contemporary English Drama*, Holmes Meier, 1981.

- Watson, Ian, *Alan Ayckbourn: Bibliography, Biography, Playography, Theatre Checklist, No. 21*, T.Q. Publications, 1980.
- Watson, Ian, *Conversations with Ayckbourn*, Macmillan (London, England), 1981.
- White, Sidney Howard, *Alan Ayckbourn*, Twayne (Boston, MA), 1985.

Season's Greeting 'Facts':

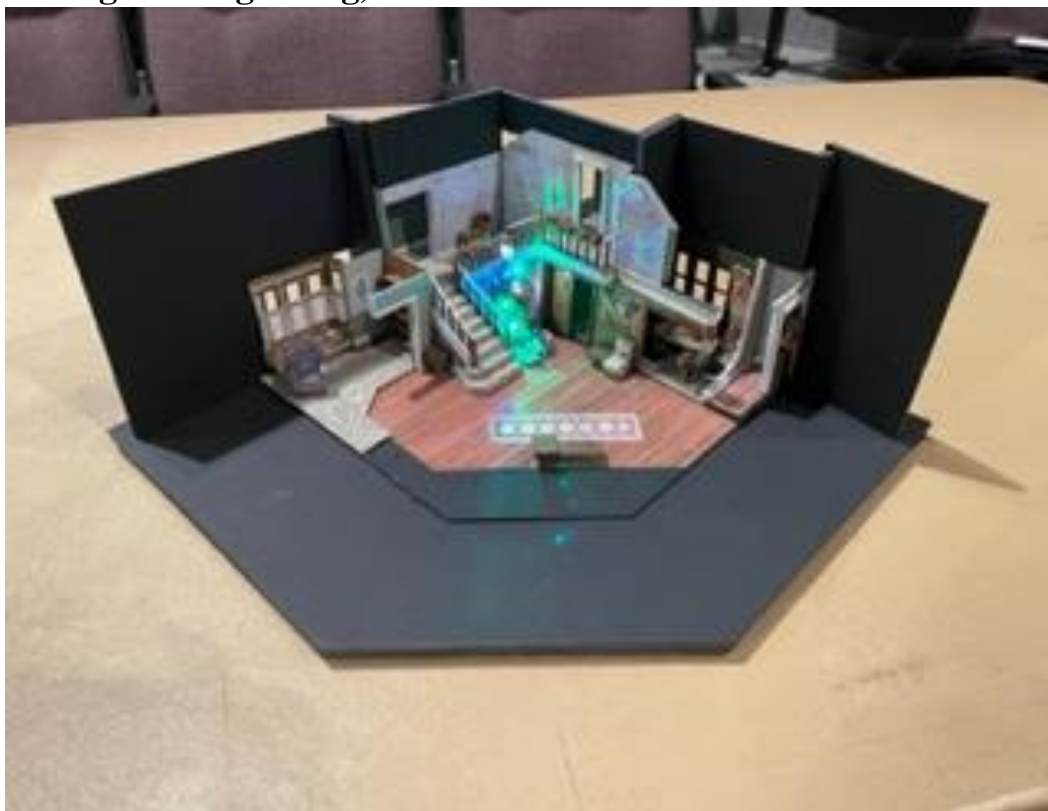
Source: Ayckbourn's official website <http://seasonsgreetings.alanayckbourn.net/styled-7/>

- *Season's Greetings* is Alan Ayckbourn's 26th play.
- The world premiere was held at the [Stephen Joseph Theatre In The Round](#), Scarborough, on 25 September, 1980.
- The London premiere was held at The Round House on 13 October 1980. Although this is officially regarded as the London premiere of the play, the 1982 Greenwich Theatre production, which opened on 28 January 1982 and later transferred to the West End, is sometimes incorrectly identified as the London premiere.
- The production at The Round House marked the first time Alan had directed one of his plays in-the-round in London and the first time the original Scarborough company of an Ayckbourn play performed in London.
- *Season's Greetings* was not actually the play Alan Ayckbourn intended to write. His new play was announced as the thriller *Sight Unseen* in 1980, however when Alan could not write it, he took several of the character names, the hallway setting and the Christmas period and then wrote an entirely new play called *Season's Greetings* in its place.
- *Season's Greetings* was originally promoted as Alan Ayckbourn's 25th play and the world premiere production featured a programme with a silver cover to mark this. It is actually his 26th full length play though, as when first produced in 1980, Alan did not include [Jeeves](#) in his official play canon.
- It is the first Ayckbourn play in which a character is shot - and if the inept character Doctor Longstaff had his way, it would be the first Ayckbourn play in which someone was murdered!
- *Season's Greetings* has been adapted for the radio twice by the BBC and also for television; the television adaptation is regarded as one of the best screen adaptations of Alan Ayckbourn's plays and is recognised by the British Film Institute as a significant example of the 'television play.'
- It was the first Ayckbourn play to be published as an ebook when Faber published it in 2010 to tie in with the National Theatre's revival of the play.
- Alarminglly, Alan Ayckbourn has noted the play draws on his own experiences of Christmas including his attempt to once stage a puppet-show for his children!

Scenic Rendering for BTE's Production



Season's Greetings Model by Sarah Lewis (if you look closely, the Christmas tree lights are glowing)



Some Costume Preliminary Sketches



Neville 2





Clive



Clive

Things to watch for in performance:

- This is a single setting scenic design, though we see multiple rooms, and other entrances to hallways leading to the rest of the house. What is the effect of seeing people in different rooms, who don't necessarily 'hear' one another?
- How do the design elements facilitate the action of the play (scenic, costumes, properties, lighting, sound)?
- Notice how often characters tell stories about the past, either shared or individual. Why and when do they do this? Is there a pattern?
- How do characters change throughout the show?
- This play is set over four days. How is that time passage depicted? What is your reaction to the transitions between scenes?

Things to think about after the performance:

- Why do you think we never actually see the children, but only the adults? The band is at the rear of the center platform, through the façade of the window. What was that effect?
 - What does the play say about relationships: couples, siblings, extended family and friends, and the people who join traditional events?
- What do you believe the story says about life? What does it say about relationships? What does it say about growing into adulthood?

Other Analysis "Tools":

- What happens in the very last moments of the play? Certainly, the last few minutes, but, more importantly, the last thirty seconds? In that time, WHAT happens or is said, and what does that say about what the play is 'about?' In a nutshell, how do the playwrights drive their point(s) home?
- And what is the significance of the title? Why did the playwright decide that this was the most quintessential title for their work?

The running time for this production is approximately 2:05 hours with one 15 minute intermission.

This performance takes place in the Playhouse of the MAC. The show runs Thursday - Saturday evenings at 8P, and Sundays at 3P, November 17-December 18, 2022 (11/17 is a preview; there is NO PERFORMANCE ON 11/24). The MAC's Box Office is 630/942-4000, and the information on the show and performances is at this site: <https://www.atthemac.org/events/seasons-greetings/>