

## an interview with Peter Vincent & 'The Girl Next Door'

Scriptwriting for the stage and TV is a precarious occupation. Getting noticed is one thing; staying noticed and in demand is another. One writer who has stood the test of time is Peter Vincent.

Peter has been writing since his school days with a CV including *The Frost Report*, *The Two Ronnies* and *Dave Allen*, so this week NODA London asked him about his long career and his views on his rediscovered musical, 'The Girl Next Door'.

In his lounge, surrounded by books and pictures painted by members of his family, Peter, an unassuming character, set the scene for the interview as he busied himself making the drinks and wondered why anyone would want to read about him and his career. Despite having worked with a stellar cast of comedy greats from Tommy Cooper to Russ Abbott- (Indeed he still writes jokes for Ronnie Corbett –usually in bed at 7 a.m. when he says his mind is sharper) –he still thinks of himself as a beginner, something of an amateur.

Peter is not what you'd call a 'showbiz' person like Barry Cryer, from whom he shamelessly begs jokes. But he still remembers when he was a student, the thrill of hearing a West End audience laughing at his jokes, courtesy of the Footlights Revue. Once started and hooked on the sound of laughter a comedy writer craves more and more. There is no known cure.

Like most other writers Peter began with parodies (in the style of Kai Lung or the King James Bible) in the school magazine. He was writing not very seriously whilst studying history at Cambridge in the 50s. There he met organ scholar, Alan Vening and fellow undergraduate, John Pardoe (later a well known Liberal M.P.). As they were all involved in *The Footlights* they were called in to write 'The Girl Next Door' at extremely short notice when *The Arts Theatre* rejected another musical (written by others) This was the first full scale musical created by any of them and they had the advantage of knowing nothing whatsoever about musicals and having no time for second thoughts. They were lucky to have the help of one of the dons, Dr

Harry Porter, who fortunately did know something about musicals.

Set in the 50s in the village of Abbots-in-the Langley, (or wherever this show is put on) the two act musical is a light hearted and nostalgic story, all about love and starry eyed adulation. Featuring a range of comedy characters from the romantic and absurdly egotistical tenor lead to a permanently discombobulated Irishman, the large cast allows the performers ample scope to display their acting and vocal talents Perhaps the highlight of the show is the spoof G & S operetta which features in Act Two and which showcases the genius of Alan Vening's composition skills. 'Impatience' or 'The Spaceman's Bride' is an invention which will ring happy bells with anyone acquainted with Gilbert and Sullivan. It was Andrew Taylor, the director, who dusted off the old fifties copies and spent hours tweaking the script to make it accessible to a 21<sup>st</sup> century audience. Andrew also customized the piece by removing Cambridge in-jokes and giving it local colour.

The show's been an artistic and financial success for Abbots Langley. Andrew Taylor thinks it would be ideal for amateur companies to add to their repertoire –once a few post-production finishing touches are added to the script. Where finances are increasingly constrained 'The Girl Next Door' can be set very simply and can be performed with a piano and there are plenty of parts for everyone!

Peter Vincent has few rules for comedy writing. One is "Writing with someone else is more fun. Find someone really good and write with them". The second rule is "Make your hero suffer." The third rule is (as always) that there are no rules. Asked how he felt about watching a show written by a group of friends fifty two years ago in much more gentle and innocent times, he said "It surprised me. It made me laugh. The jokes were fifty years old. For me –that's young."

To find out about 'The Girl Next Door' and other plays by Peter Vincent, contact Andrew Taylor ([ajt@andrewtaylor.plus.com](mailto:ajt@andrewtaylor.plus.com))

Pictured on the left is Andrew Taylor who directed the recent production of 'The Girl Next Door' staged by ALGSS and on the right is Peter Vincent, the scriptwriter

