



www.leedsartscentre.org.uk
Registered Charity No. HS503872R

THE LADY IN THE VAN

by Alan Bennett

Directed by David Lancaster

Thursday 31st January to Saturday 2nd February 2008





LEEDS ARTS CENTRE

Leeds Arts Centre is a prestigious amateur theatre group, which was founded in 1945. We are a friendly society, working together to maintain the high standards for which our productions are known. We produce four plays each year at the Carriageworks, as well as organising workshops to help members to develop their acting, directing and production skills.

We offer opportunities to all who are interested in becoming involved with any aspect of drama, including acting, directing, stage management, props, designing, costumes, lighting, sound, publicity and front of house.

New members are always welcome

If you are interested in acting, directing, designing or making scenery or costumes, helping backstage with stage management or props, or lending a hand with publicity, then why not speak to one of our members front of house this evening, or in the theatre bar after the show?

You can also write, with contact telephone number, for further information to:

The Secretary
Leeds Arts Centre
c/o The Carriageworks
Millennium Square
Leeds LS2 3AD
or e-mail us at:

publicity@leedsartscentre.org.uk



A Message from the Lady Herself...

To Those Who Are Attending This Performance and Are Lovers of Truth –

Although I have been Deceased for a considerable number of years, it behoves me, nevertheless, to point out that the career of this play has caused me, in my celestial lodging, no little Surprise.

I say surprise because I, who in life was jealous of my privacy, am now in death what is Vulgarly Termed a Star. I did indeed live in my Van in Mr. Bennett's London Garden for fifteen years, and no doubt I did arouse the emotions of Disgust, Curiosity and Bewilderment that will be evoked during the Course of This Performance. But I never dreamed that Mr. Bennett would decide to write all this down. He did it first in an essay in the London Review of Books not long after my demise in 1989. Some ten years later, he was at it again in dramatic form. I was portrayed on the London stage by one Dame Maggie Smith, a woman, I believe, of some Distinction in her Profession. The considerable success of this August Lady has resulted in more Versions of Me than can be right or, indeed, hygienic. In the form of Anne Rye, I appeared at the West Yorkshire Playhouse in 2001; as Susan Hampshire, I roamed the country some Three Years Later. Now a certain Dawn Wilkinson is adopting my temporal form. It appears that I can reproduce myself at will. The very thought induces a headache, possibly.

You may want to know what this play is "about". Well, it is about me, of course – my adventurous and infuriating spirit. This spirit is in sharp contrast to the rather cautious Mr. Bennett, who gives me aid and succour none the less. As I insinuate myself into his life, he has to work out whether he is helping me out of kindness or out of that darkest of motives, a writer's curiosity. That is why you will see two Alan Bennetts on stage; he is in two minds about himself. I understand that this kind of thing is quite common in theatrical presentations. It is called Art.

In this Programme, you will find what I believe is called a Curriculum Vitae of your author (and my former landlord). Enjoy the Entertainment. Think Kindly of me.

MISS MARY SHEPHERD.

(As told to David Lancaster)



Cast

Alan Bennett	Martin Cusworth
Alan Bennett 2	Tom Bailey
Miss Shepherd	Dawn Wilkinson
Social Worker	Victoria Logue
Pauline	Pip Tibbetts
Rufus	Keith Huckfield
Underwood	Mark Williamson
Mam	Mary Nelson
Interviewer/Mams Dr	Catherine Land
Leo Fairchild	Edwin Barracclough
Yob/Ambulance Man/ Priest/Council Worker	Gabriel G Keogh

**The Running time of this production is approximately
2 hours; there will be one interval of fifteen minutes
during which the bar will be open.**

The programme for this production was produced with the kind assistance of

Lewis Francis Blackburn
solicitors

14-16 Paradise Square Sheffield S1 2DE
0114 272 9721



Production Team

Director	David Lancaster
Production Manager	Rich Francis
Prompt	Debs Sandles
	Robin Thornton
Stage Manager	Steven Fryatt
Asst. Stage Managers	Emily Holloway
	Martyn Drake
Set Consultant	Peter Sandles
Lighting	Peter Waddicor
Sound	Jonathan McLeod
Props	Amy Dutton
	Rachel Vernelle
Costumes	Keeley Scothern
	Pauline Ratcliffe
	Maryline Pineau
Poster design	Amy Dutton
Front of House Mgrs.	Shirley Broadbent
	Jackie Thompson

Miss Shepherd's costumes courtesy of British Heart Foundation, Help the Aged, St Michael's Hospice, St Gemma's Hospice, Oxfam & PDSA Charity Shops

The Bennett File

As a writer, performer, and a (rather reluctant) media figure, Alan Bennett is that most unfortunate of human beings, a “national treasure”, ripe for parody on the old *Dead Ringers* radio series, and too easily assumed to be a cosy and nostalgic figure, like Sir John Betjeman, but not so posh.

In fact, the cosiness is deceptive. Although his work ranges from life in lower middle-class Yorkshire to intrigue in Cold War Moscow, it is consistently ruminative, sad and suffused with a sense of loss and longing.

That said, he is never hectoring or depressing. As you will see in this play, his writing is a wonderful tightrope walk between the two extremes of wild laughter and wistful tears.

In other words, he is humane; he embraces life in all its complexity; he sees the extraordinary in the ordinary (and vice versa). This means that unlike this programme note, he is never pompous or pretentious.

Bennett Beginnings – I

Born in Armley, on 9 May 1934, the son of a Co-op butcher
Educated at Leeds Modern School and Exeter College Oxford, where he won a First in History. He says that as an adolescent, he assumed that he would become a Church of England clergyman, for no better reason than he looked like one.

Bennett Beginnings – II

At Oxford, he performed and wrote comedy with the Oxford Revue. This led in 1960 to the satirical revue *Beyond the Fringe* with Peter Cook, Dudley Moore and Jonathan Miller. First performed at the Edinburgh Fringe, the show was a huge success in London and later New York. Although Bennett remained at Oxford and taught medieval history until 1962, he soon realised that he was not cut out to be an academic.



Bennett on the Boards

His first stage play as a writer was *Forty Years On* (1968) starring Sir John Gielgud. Since then, he has had a string of successes, including *The Madness of George III* (1991, later made into a very successful film starring Nigel Hawthorne), *The Lady in the Van* (1999) *The History Boys* (2004).

Bennett on the Box

His most famous work in this medium must be *Talking Heads* two series of comically poignant monologues in 1987 and 1998. He has written many television plays, however, and has appeared as characters in his own work, as himself, and as the narrator of the Winnie the Pooh stories. His film screenplays include *A Private Function* (1984) and *Prick Up Your Ears* (1987).

Bennett and Books

Starting in 2000 with a novella, *The Laying on of Hands*, he has started a new branch of activity writing books. The most recent is *The Uncommon Reader* (2007), which looks at what would happen if the Queen were to develop a passion for reading.

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Advertising & Sponsorship

Leeds Arts Centre is a member of the Leeds Civic Arts Guild, and is a registered charity and non-profit making organisation. We are currently looking for companies and organisations that would benefit from advertising in our programmes or sponsoring our productions.

To find out more, contact our Publicity Officer at:

Publicity Officer, Leeds Arts Centre

c/o The Carriageworks, Millennium Square, Leeds LS2 3AD
or e-mail us at: publicity@leedsartscentre.org.uk

To find out more about the activities and forthcoming productions of the Leeds Arts Centre visit our website at:

www.leedsartscentre.org.uk



**LEEDS ARTS
CENTRE**

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Shelagh Stephenson's
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and performed in the main auditorium

w/c 16th June 2008

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written and directed by new playwright

David Wheatley

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IDOMENEO

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