

## **GEDS' first stage production of the 2010-2011 season -**

### ***Quartet***

**by Ronald Harwood,  
directed by Tim Hancox**

#### **Description and audition notes**

**Performances:** 2 - 6 November, Théâtre de Terre-Sainte, Coppet.

**Audition:** If **Tuesday 31 August, English Church Hall Crypt, 7:00 p.m.** If you cannot make this date, contact Tim on [hancox@iso.org](mailto:hancox@iso.org) or 022 733 37 87 (home). After casting, rehearsals will start in early September: Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays. Because the cast is small, they will probably be called to virtually all rehearsals: Tim is still working on that.

*Quartet* was a most successful playreading last season in October, and this is some of the reason it was chosen for a full production. The casting of the reading happened to be very successful too but Tim is at pains to point out that auditions are open.

Members with long memories may recall our previous production of a Ronald Harwood play, *The Dresser*, loosely based on his own experiences in that role to one of the old-style actor-managers of the 1930's. It was an intelligent, quite poignant evocation of "the show must go on", even in wartime and against all the odds. Also distinguishing that particular production (apart from Tim in a minor role) was that Mr Harwood accepted an invitation (against all his friends' advice, he told us) to come and see his play. He told us he liked and admired our production (well, he would, wouldn't he?) - but sufficiently strongly that we had reason to believe him!

*Quartet* is quite different: it is also intelligent, also poignant in places, but intended more as entertainment, being a very amusing comedy with beautifully crafted and individual characters (see over). The language is lucid but comprehensible and written to flow. The comedy and sharply perceptive lines and characterisation are always there and audiences appreciate it highly. The language and actions are periodically strong, but we will review them in the light of Geneva audience susceptibilities.

"Ronald Harwood is one of our most interesting playwrights. Sinewy prose and hand-carved dialogue makes his work a pleasure for the ear as well as the mind." *The Times*

**Synopsis:** Cecily, Reggie and Wilfred are in a home for retired opera singers: if such exist, like this, perhaps an ex-Statelike Home but down on its fortunes, with many genteelly shabby inmates one step from poverty. They have to live together and put up with each other, bickerings, incipient boredom, almost counting out the days. But at least one highlight is that each year, on 10 October, there is a concert to celebrate Verdi's birthday. Jean, who used to be

married to Reggie, arrives at the home and disrupts their equilibrium. She still acts like a diva and refuses to sing the chosen quartet, Verdi of course (for reasons valid and revealed in due course). Again, the show must go on ... None of the cast are required to be able to sing. Since all characters must play 60s plus (quite a lot plus, if we wish: one is definitely going somewhat gaga), there are also parallels with David Storey's *Home*, another one-time GEDS production. *Home* is much softer, gentler sadder: *Quartet* has some raucously funny episodes and will greatly entertain audiences.

**Cast:** *(all ages are 60s plus but otherwise need not be related to each other. Notes below are deliberately brief as characters will develop, you + notes, during rehearsals.)*

**Cecily (Cissy) Robson**, a large woman (not sure why, except perhaps the profession tends to embonpoint), usually with a beatific smile and not always there. A tendency to be endearing and likeable - if maddening. Is she really regressing to the past, or does she just look back to happier times in India (colonial, probably)? Has she really lost her marbles or is it a defence mechanism: does she just enjoy quirky references to past events?

**Reginald (Reggie) Paget**, the slim, fit, immaculate collar-and-tie man, perhaps a dandy as well as a gentleman, intellectually still active and capable, also the one who, throughout his career, had some awareness of eventual retirement and a desire that it should be comfortable, cashwise. Difficult relationship with his ex-wife when she unexpectedly arrives, understandably resenting the encroachment on his peace. Also given to temper tantrums about not being served marmalade (a deep plot, he believes, by the probably harmless waitress).

**Wilfred Bond**, the counterpoint: large, rough, untidy in an artistic way or simply neglectful. Does he really lech after Cissy, or does he simply fancy himself as a bit of a dog? Probably both. Much given to dubious propositioning when Cissy has her headphones on and cannot hear him: very cleverly constructed comedy part. Uses a walking stick and is much given to schoolboy humour, which the audience will love.

**Jean Horton**, the grande dame or diva, certainly reliving past glories in her mind, willing to make a better go of it than Reggie, aware she is rather the unwelcome newcomer into an entrenched group of people, if not bosom friends, at least required to get on together and cope with each other's eccentricities. Might be helpful if she is tall but I don't think Maria Callas was ... Like the others, interesting hints of some tragedy in her past life.

**Back-stage:** of course, as always, we need the back-stage people who make things happen. Some are already on board but there is always room for more help: do come to auditions or contact Tim as overleaf.