

AUDITION NOTES

PRIVATE LIVES by Noël Coward

Performance dates 23 to 27 November 2021

Théâtre de Terre Sainte, Coppet

Audition Date : Tuesday 14th September from 19:00-22:00 in Holy Trinity English Church (the church not the basement hall) 14bis rue de Mont Blanc

Masks must be worn but can be removed when auditioning.

Auditions are open to all and will be run as 'cold readings' from the script – there is no need to prepare any material beforehand. If anyone is genuinely unable to attend the auditions but would like to be considered, they may contact Jenny Buffle directly for a private hearing (022 776 4837).

Verbal and physical fireworks are the hallmark of this, one of Noel Coward's most famous comedies. Written in 1930 it is a cynical comment on love and marriage – a stylish 'period' piece in which the two main characters demonstrate that they cannot live together and yet cannot live apart. Amanda and Elyot, having divorced each other five years earlier, are both now honeymooning with their new spouses in Deauville and, unknowingly, have booked adjoining rooms in the same hotel. Realizing they have made a pair of mistaken marriages, the divorcees attempt to escape their mismatched partners, Victor and Sibyl, and flee to the privacy of Amanda's secluded Paris flat. Here their love-hate relationship swings nimbly between passion and pitched battle and when they are discovered several days later by their jilted spouses, all four lovers must finally acknowledge just who is really suited to whom.

Wit and dialogue are almost more important than the actual plot in this battle of the sexes though at its early performances the second act love scene was nearly censored in Britain as too risqué. Prominent among the famous actors who have appeared in Private Lives were Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton whose own fiery rows and passionate reconciliations appear to have mirrored those of the two lead characters.

Central to the success of the play is the quality of the rejected partners, Victor and Sibyl, whose own attitudes to marriage are inevitably affected by the behaviour of Amanda and Elyot.

(Coward wrote one of his most popular songs, "Some Day I'll Find You", for this play.)

Our rehearsal period will run from the beginning of October with three rehearsals per week (usually Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, but this will be confirmed).

Cast members need to be available over the weekend of the theatre get-in Saturday 20 and Sunday 21 November.

Please note:

In the current uncertain health situation, and, given the inevitable close proximity of the two leads (there is a lot of kissing and fighting in Act 2!) preference in casting will be given to those who are double vaccinated against Covid 19.

Ages noted are indicative

CAST

Sybil Chase

In her twenties, Sybil is coquettish, bubbly and somewhat shallow not given to particularly deep thought. Very much the blushing bride, she is several years younger than her husband, deferring him and denying any intention to “manage” or run his life. But finding herself the abandoned wife, she gives way to dramatic tears and self-pity, and shows an ability to “manage” both Victor and Elyot in order to get her way. From the end of the first act she and Victor become a kind of “couple,” thrown together by their shared fate, travelling together as they seek justice from their wandering spouses. They balance the central pairing of Elyot and Amanda and, as the “wronged parties,” they contrast in every sense with the passionate, witty couple at the heart of the action.

Elyot Chase

Early to mid-thirties, Elyot is witty, somewhat cynical and prefers to live in the moment. He is wealthy and fashionable, accustomed to luxury, and self-indulgent. In conversation, he is flippant and mocks traditional social conventions. Refusing ever to be serious, his philosophy, if any, is his belief that in the long run everything is “nonsense”, nothing lasts and the intelligent response is to live for the moment. However, Elyot has his insecurities, and is not unaffected by social expectations. He has willingly entered into a second, probably unfulfilling, marriage and is resigned to acting out the conventional role of husband. Confronted by Victor in Act 3, he admits that he is completely in the wrong, and that his flippancy is meant “to cover a very real embarrassment.”

Amanda Prynne

Early thirties, Amanda is glamorous, sharp-witted and exquisitely mannered, strong-willed and passionate. By abandoning Victor and by being sexually active while unmarried, she defies the conventional role of women as seen by the society of the 1930s. Her relationship with Elyot, though hopelessly plagued by their bickering, also offers a more equal—and honest—alliance than that with the stodgy Victor: when not fighting, she and Elyot are intellectual equals and comfortable companions. Though flouting social conventions, Amanda is well aware of their power to smooth over conflicts. If Elyot’s philosophy is to “be flippant,” hers is to “behave exquisitely” so as to avoid facing the consequences of their actions and to distance herself from the uncomfortable realities of their volatile relationship.

Victor Prynne

In his thirties, Victor is rather formal and dignified, possibly a bit dull. Steadfastly conventional and self-consciously masculine, he is the conservative counterpart to Elyot’s rebellious flippancy. Habitually “serious,” proper, and moderate in all things, he is paternally protective of Amanda but seems to possess a bland and passionless nature. In defence of his and Sibyl’s “honour,” Victor presents a caricature of manly chivalry, which evaporates completely when confronted by Elyot: his violence is easily neutralized by Elyot’s clever argumentation, but when his temper is roused, he is not above striking the woman he claims to defend.

Louise

Can be any age. Appearing briefly in Act 3, the French maid at Amanda’s Paris flat (and French-speaking) is long-suffering.