

# GREENWICH STUDIO THEATRE

## The Nun

By Denis Diderot

13<sup>th</sup> November 1996 – 8<sup>th</sup> December 1996

Translated & adapted by Julian Forsyth

Directed by Margarete Forsyth

# PROGRAMME



*The Greenwich Studio Theatre Company*

presents

# the nun

from the novel by Denis Diderot

adapted by Julian Forsyth

directed by Margarete Forsyth

November 13<sup>th</sup> - December 8<sup>th</sup> 1996  
at BAC

sponsored by GLC  
"Still working for London"



*GLC Ltd is an award winner under the 'Pairing Scheme',  
(the National Heritage Arts Sponsorship Scheme) for its support of the Greenwich  
Studio Theatre Company.*

*The scheme is managed by The Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA)*

# The Greenwich Studio Theatre



Greenwich Studio Theatre was founded in 1990 at the Prince of Orange pub next to Greenwich BR station. The three actors who set it up, Neil Linden-Johnson, Nick Carpenter and Ian Embleton, ran the GST for two and a half years, mainly as a receiving venue for visiting fringe companies, while staging successful productions of their own, notably *Distant Point* by the 20th century Russian playwright Alexander Afinogenev, which was nominated for a London Fringe Award.

In 1993 the theatre's name and business was sold to husband and wife team Margarete and Julian Forsyth, who refurbished the premises and went on to stage eight productions of little known European plays by authors from Austria, Denmark, France, Germany and Switzerland, acquiring for the GST a reputation to rival that of the Gate Theatre at Notting Hill, and winning a Time Out Award and the London Fringe Best Director's Award in 1994 and a nomination for the 1995 Peter Brook Empty Space Award. In June 1995 the GST secured private sponsorship for a new season of plays from investment advisers GLC Ltd, matched under the pairing scheme by government funding from the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts.

However, as a result of an increasingly difficult relationship with the publican and lease-holder of the Prince of Orange, the Forsyths decided with regret to uproot Greenwich Studio Theatre from its original base and look for alternative premises where the long term prospects might be healthier.

The GST's "divorce" from the Prince of Orange culminated in the GST team being locked out of the premises and denied access to their equipment and seating, and in a High Court hearing on September 21st 1995, at which the Forsyths obtained an injunction which protects their right to the name and reputation of Greenwich Studio Theatre (pending a full trial), and a court order for the recovery of all GST property. The Forsyths then accepted an invitation from BAC's Artistic Director Tom Morris to take up temporary residence at BAC and revived their production of Wolfgang Borchert's *Out in the Cold* and Ludvig Hoberg's *Erasmus Montanus* as part of the Time Out Critic's Choice season "I Wish I'd Seen That" season in Studio 1. They also staged their adaptation of Hans Fallada's *What Now, Little Man?* as a co-production with Greenwich Theatre.

Greenwich Studio Theatre in Exile  
at BAC, Lavender Hill, Battersea SW11 5TF  
Tel & Fax: 0171 978 5688

Please ring our BAC office on 0171 978 5688 or write to us c/o BAC if you would like to go on ur free mailing list or become a Friend of the GST.

## THE COMPANY

### ROBERT ALDOUS

Father Seraphin

Trained at RADA, 1953-55. He has had a long career as a pantomime villain and this Christmas will be at the Lyceum Theatre, Sheffield, playing Abanazar in *Aladdin* with Les Dennis and Danny La Rue.

*The Nun* is his second collaboration with Julian and Margarete Forsyth. They worked together at The Young Vic on Goethe's *Faust, Part I*.

Robert's most recent stage appearances were on tour in George and Weedon Grossmith's *Mr. & Mrs. Nobody* and at Hampstead Theatre in D.H. Lawrence's *A Collier's Friday Night*.

He has just filmed an adaptation by John Tordoff of Robert Browning's *My Last Duchess*.

### SOPHIE ARNOLD

Suzanne Simonin

Sophie graduated from LAMDA in 1994 where her roles included Barbara in *Major Barbara* and Isabella in *Measure for Measure*. She has since played Ros in a British premiere of *Slaughtering the Pig* and Claire Clairemont in *Bloody Poetry*, both for London City Theatre.

Sophie also appeared in the short film *Unnamed Soldier* which was entered at the Cannes Film Festival. Sophie's most recent work was playing Nanine in *The Lady of the Camellias* for BBC Radio.

## DRIFA ARNTHORS

Sister Monica/Sister Marie

Drifa graduated from the Arts Educational Drama School London in July last year where her roles included Hilde in *The Masterbuilder*, Bianca in *Women Beware Women* and Geerche in Fassbinder's *Bremen Coffee*.

Since leaving drama school Drifa has played the maid in Dürrenmatt's *The Marriage of Mr. Mississippi* at The New End Theatre and most recently Fannhrit in *My Sister Nanna* at The Akuseyri City Theatre and the title role in *Margaret the Great* at Tjamarbio Reykjavik, both in her home country, Iceland.

### emily BUTTON

Sister Sophia/Sister Sorelle

Emily graduated from the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in April of last year. Since then she has worked with Deborah Warner (St. Pancras Project for LIFT '95) and the RSC, in Adrian Noble's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the latter involving a short run at the Barbican, making the film of the show and then a five-month tour of the USA, including 10 weeks on Broadway. During the tour she played Titania/Hippolyta opposite Alex Jennings, replacing Lindsay Duncan.

Emily also completed an English degree at Oxford University.

### hILARY DRAKE

Madame Simonin/Mother Christine

Theatre credits include Paulina in *Death and the Maiden* at Lancaster (a very successful production which the actors then brought to London); the title role in

*Cleopatra*, Emilia in *Othello*, Titania in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and in *Romeo and Co*, all for Shakespeare Link in Tunis and Mauritius. Previously for the British Council she played the title role in *Lady Macbeth* touring Africa, The Far East, Sweden and Iceland. Further credits include the title role in *Happgood* (National tour, Century) Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* (Chester), Connie in *Rumours* (Chichester and UK tour), Mrs. Kay in *Our Day Out* (Worcester), Charlotte in *The Real Thing* (Cardiff) and Jane in *Steaming* (Comedy Theatre).

Hilary is a founder member of three companies: The Durham Theatre Company, Theatre PKf (whose last production was George Byatt's *House of Lies dedicated to Verity Bargate* in which she played Verity), and Women Under Glass for whom she directed Rona Munroe's award winning *Watching Waiters*.

Television credits include *Ashenden*, Viv Slater in *Brookside*, Malcolm Bradbury's *Anything More Would Be Greedy*. Films include *White Nights* and *Success is the Best Revenge*.

## VICKY EMPTAGE

Designer

Vicky studied at Middlesex University and is an established designer who has been part of the GST team since the beginning. She co-designed *Erasmus Montanus*, *The Will and Out In The Cold*. Her other work for the GST includes set painting and poster design for all their previous productions. Away from the theatre she has illustrated many books and produces a range of designer stationery and gift wrap.

## MARGARETE FORSYTH

Director

Margarete is the Artistic Director of the GST. She took an MA Degree in English and German at the University of Erlangen in Germany before teaching for four years at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Since then embarked on a career as a theatre and opera director, directing regularly for Carlos Opera and founding The Rude Mechanicals for whom she directed Goethe's *Faust*, Büchner's *Danton's Death* and Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, all at the Young Vic Studio. She has also directed a wide range of European classics at some of London's leading drama schools.

For the GST she has directed *Minna Von Barnhelm*, *And Women Must Weep* (Nominated for Best Director - London Fringe Awards 1993/4) which she also translated, *The Nun*, *The Green Parakeet*, *A Spanner in the Works*, *The Will and Out in the Cold*. For Greenwich Theatre she directed *What Now, Little Man?* (in a co-production with GST). As a designer Margarete created the sets for the GST's *Erasmus Montanus*, *Minna Von Barnhelm* and *The Will*.

For Margarete's first season at the GST the theatre was awarded a Time Out Award for Outstanding Achievement.





## JULIAN FORSYTH

### Adaptor

Julian taught at Erlangen University in Germany before training as an actor at Webber Douglas Academy. As Associate Director of the GST he has adapted and co-directed *Erasmus Montanus* (Best Director at the 1994 London Fringe Awards) and *Out in the Cold*, adapted *The Nun*, translated *A Spanner in the Works* and *The Green Parakeet*, and adapted *What Now, Little Man?* For Greenwich Theatre, as well as appearing in *Minna von Barnhelm*, *The Will*, *The Green Parakeet* and *And Women Must Weep*.

His other recent theatre work includes Jacques in *The Miser* with Ian Richardson at Chichester Festival Theatre, Claudius in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* at the National Theatre, Leporello in *Don Giovanni* for Music Theatre London, Dr Manette in *Tale of Two Cities* at Greenwich Theatre, Poulteney in *St Joan* at the Strand, Trevor Nunn's productions of *The Blue Angel* and *Measure for Measure* for the RSC, Wedekind's *Lulu*, O'Casey's *The Silver Tassie* and Howard Barker's *Scenes From An Execution* at the Almeida, Barker's *The Europeans* for Greenwich Theatre and the Wrestling School, and Fagin in *Oliver* at Sadler's Wells and the Crucible, Sheffield.

## TIM FRANCES

### Monsieur Manouri

Tim last appeared with the GST in the original production of *The Nun* playing the lawyer and the late lamented author, Diderot. He went on to work with Sasha Fisher in *One-Eyed Monster* at Greenwich, followed by a stint at the Duke's Lancaster playing Antipholus of Ephesus in *A Comedy of Errors*, Buldeo the Hunter in

*Jungle Book Stories*, and Schultz in *Cabaret*. He reached the fulfilment of a lifelong dream playing a panto villain, Abanazar in *Aladdin* at the Liverpool Everyman. Other theatre work includes an hirsute pairing of Marley's Ghost and Fezziwig in *A Christmas Carol*, Aufidius in a North American tour of *Coriolanus*, *June Moon* with the Theatre of Comedy in the West End, and Jack Good in Bill Kenwright's *Good Rockin' Tonight*.

Radio work includes a series of short stories, and readings of Tennyson and Browning for the BBC, whilst on film and television, Tim has appeared as Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew* and in *Fortunes of War*.

Tim also works as a jazz pianist. He currently makes a fine living appearing in the Before pictures in hair restorer ads.

## AMANDA HILL

### Assistant Director

Amanda Hill completed her training at Rose Bruford College, on the BA Director's Course, in July 1996. Her final productions include *the Open Couple* by Dario Fo at the Finborough Theatre and a new piece of writing called *Fish* at The Canal Cafe Theatre.

During her time at Rose Bruford she set up Amen Theatre Company with writer Benedick Cooper. Their first external production, *The North Pole*, won the International Guardian Award at the Edinburgh Festival 1995 and the Best Ensemble award at the NSDF. Other Amen productions include an epic musical, *Winners*, *Thief in the Night*, and *Christine*, which was selected by the NSTC for Edinburgh 1996.

Since leaving college she has directed *Indian Summer* Upstairs at The Landor and co-directed *The Lost Tribe* at the Casson Room, Leatherhead. She also works freelance as a casting director for Alex Myers (commercials).

## KAREN JONES

Sister Angelica/Sister Martha

This is Karen's first professional appearance since leaving Rose Bruford College in July, where she played Rose Baum in Arthur Miller's *American Clock*, Sergeant Pickering in *The Passing Out Parade*, Helen in *A Taste of Honey*, and Paulina in *A Winter's Tale*. Whilst at college Karen also appeared as Daphne at the Edinburgh Festival 1995 in *The North Pole* by Ben Cooper, which won the Guardian International Student's Drama Award.

Previously Karen appeared with Action Transport Theatre in a community project and played Audrey in Dennis Potter's *Blue Remembered Hills*, and with Jigsaw Theatre in *Oliver!* as Mrs. Bumble, whilst completing a BTEC in Performing Arts.

Karen has a strong mezzo soprano voice as most of her previous stage experience was in musicals where she played the title role in *Calamity Jane*, Ado Annie and Gertie in *Oklahoma!*, plus many more, whilst working for eight years as a psychiatric nurse! And previously as a Redcoat at Butlins, and previously, and previously ...

## BERNARD KAY

The Vicar General

Early Trained Old Vic, London.

Cheeky: Age 24 - learned, rehearsed and played Macbeth in 20 hours.

Lucky: Haven't had to take a civilian job for over 40 years.

Reppy: Scores of parts in various reps - where have they all gone?

Telly: Who was the idiot who turned down *Z Cars*? Killed Ida Barlow in *The Street*. Known as the 'J.R.' of *Crossroads*.

Filmically: *Dr Zhivago*, *Darling Lili*. *The Hunting Party* (the English actor's dream - a Western), *Trog* - Joan Crawford's last film.

Latelly: *Galileo* at the Young Vic, Glendower at the RSC, French King in *Fruit 'n' Fibre*. *Minna von Barnhelm* and *The Green Parakeet* at GST.

Futuristically: ????

## RUTH PLATT

Sister Ursula/Sister Veronica

Ruth read English at Oxford University and graduated in 1993. She also studied at RADA for one year.

Theatre includes: Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Indianapolis Open Air Festival, Beatrice in *The Changeling* at the Old Fire Station, Lynette in *Can't Stand Up for Falling Down* directed by Marianne Elliott at The Etcetera Theatre, and she appeared in the Mercury Workshop at the Theatre Museum production of *The Amazing Mr Blunden*.

TV includes Melissa in *The Ruth Rendell Mysteries*, and film work includes *Home Truths* and the Cornwall Arts Trusts film, *The Pit*.

## DAVID PLATER

Lighting Designer

David holds an Hons Diploma in Stage Electrics and Lighting Design (RADA) where he has since lit *The Shelter*, *The Bright and Bold Design*, *Camille*, and *Gaslight*. For the GST Minna von Barnhelm, *And Women Must Weep*, *The Storytellers*, *Cock-a-Doodle-Do*, *Single Spies*, *The Nun* (also BAC), *The Green Parakeet*, *A Spanner in the Works*, *The Will*, *Out in the Cold* (also BAC), *Erasmus Montanus* (also BAC), and *Macbeth*.

Other lighting work: *Entertaining Strangers*, *Dark of the Moon* (Lyric Studio, Hammersmith), *The Rivals*, *It Took More than One Man* (Southwark Playhouse), *The Cherry Orchard* (Capitol Theatre, Horsham), *Liar, Liar* (The Red Room), *The Relationship* (Riverside Studios, Hammersmith), *Girls Were made To Love and Kiss* (The Old Fire Station, Oxford), *Oliver!* (National Youth Music Theatre (Kircaldy and Edinburgh), Rossini's opera *Count Ory* for new Sussex Opera Company (Brighton, Eastbourne, Broomhill), *Love on the Dole* (Theatre Royal Hanley, Oldham Coliseum and tour), *What Now, Little Man?* (Greenwich Theatre), *The Island Sea and Falling Through* (Riverside Studios), *The Niss* (Edinburgh), *Metamorphosis* (BAC), *Five Plays* for The Red Room, *Dark Tales* (Art's Theatre, Leicester Square).

David is Resident Lighting Designer for the Royal Academy of Dance and Deputy Chief Electrician at The Donmar Warehouse Theatre (Covent Garden).

## CHARLOTTE RANDLE

Sister Barbara/Sister Veronica

Charlotte has previously worked with the GST, playing Lisette in *The Will*. She went on to play Claudine in *The Miser* at The Chichester Festival Theatre. Other theatre includes the Wife in *The Shoemaker's Wonderful Wife* in Edinburgh and work for London's Theatre Laboratory.

On television she played Lady Elgin in *Lord Elgin* for the Lost and Found series.

Films include: *The Millers Tale*, *The Token King*, *The Evil Eye*, and *The Honest Courtesan*, due for release next year.

## DIC RAUB

Sister Catherine/Sister Clare

Trained at the Welsh College of Music and Drama '92 - '93.

Theatre: *A Clergyman's Daughter*, (Chipping Norton, Southwark Playhouse and tour with Mappa Mundi in Cardiff), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Castle Mews), *Love's Labour's Lost* (Sherman Theatre); *An Ideal Husband* (Lyric, Belfast), *Loud and Clear*, platform performance at the Royal National Theatre.





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adapted by Julian Forsyth

## THE CAST

### ACT 1 Paris 1760

Suzanne Simonin - *a novice*  
Madame Simonin - *her mother*  
Father Seraphin - *her confessor*

Sophie Arnold  
Hilary Drake  
Robert Aldous

### The convent at Longchamp

Mother de Moni - *the first Superior at Longchamp*  
Sister Ursula  
Sister Sophia  
Sister Angelica  
Sister Catherine  
Sister Monica  
Sister Barbara  
Mother Christine - *the 2nd Superior at Longchamp*  
The Vicar General  
Monsieur Manouri, a lawyer

Mary Ellen Ray  
Ruth Platt  
Emily Button  
Karen Jones  
Nic Rauh  
Drifa Arnthors  
Charlotte Randle  
Hilary Drake  
Bernard Kay  
Tim Francis

There will be an interval of fifteen minutes

### ACT 2 the convent at arpajon

The Mother Superior at Arpajon  
Sister Theresa  
Sister Sorrelle  
Sister Martha  
Sister Marie  
Sister Clare  
Sister Veronica

Alwyne Taylor  
Charlotte Randle  
Emily Button  
Karen Jones  
Drifa Arnthors  
Nic Rauh  
Ruth Platt



## THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Director  
Assistant Director  
Set Design

Lighting Design  
Assistant Lighting Design  
Sound Design  
Costumes designed and made by  
Administrator  
Stage Manager  
Lighting Operator  
Sound Operators  
Set Construction

Casting Consultant  
Publicity Design  
Photography



Margarete Forsyth  
Amanda Hill  
Vicky Emptage & Margarete Forsyth  
based on original design by Katherine Richards

David Plater  
Martin Stevens  
Rhys Davies  
Beeke Ropers  
Alison Clarke  
Tracey McIlroy  
Alex Wardle  
Tim Owen/Jake Strickland  
Richard Ordus  
Keith Radley  
Lennie Davis  
Richard Clayton  
Jake Stickland  
Cathy Bell, Julia Crampsie  
Vicky Emptage  
Camilla Watson

### For The Greenwich Studio Theatre

Artistic Director  
Associate Director  
Administrator  
Resident Lighting Designer  
Resident Costume Designer

Margarete Forsyth  
Julian Forsyth  
Alison Clarke  
David Plater  
Beeke Ropers

## The Greenwich Studio Theatre would like to thank the following for their support:

Laurence and Rosie Staden, Gilbert Hall,  
Nigel Forsyth, Amhurst Brown Colombotti and Laurence Winston  
Steve and all at the Devas Club, for providing the rehearsal space  
The Convent of the Sacred Heart, Father Cuthbert at Churchdown Road and  
The Central School of Drama for props  
Steve Elder for finding the music  
Jess, Jo, Kate, Liz and Sam for technical help  
Evelyn Costello, Joan Forsyth,  
Bradley Hemmings and David Brownlee at Greenwich Festival,  
Alan, Gerry and Kevin at West Greenwich House,  
Neil Linden-Johnson, Jonathan Banatvala, Don Thake,  
Richard Clayton, Illona Linthwaite,  
Cathy Bell, Margaret and Martin Aston, Goldsmiths' College  
Tom Morris and all at BAC

The auditorium seats used in this production are from the GST's original base at the Prince of Orange pub in Greenwich. They have been individually sponsored by members of the public and supporters of the GST. The company's work has also been supported by donations from Friends of the GST.

### Chair Sponsors

Mrs C Johnstone, Karl Pfeiffer, Teo Maler, Gisela Ropers, Marianne Eggers,  
Nigel Forsyth, Joan & Mark Forsyth, Nicola Fawcett, Cornelia Graffam-  
Lewis, Dietrich L Graffam, Christopher and Elke Graffam, Professor Dr.  
Wolfgang Lottes, Schlaepfer, Theaterkreis Bortfeld, Transtelex Plc, Dudley  
Dodds, John Humphries and Nicole Canuet, Jane Wynn Owen, Dera Cooper,  
Peter and Suz Buckhurst, Professor Dr. Hölting, Sigrid and Herbert Bohn,  
Frank Hübner, Jörg Stegert, Ray Jones (Centre Stage), Rudolf and Martina  
Beck, Peter-Paul Schnierer, Ted and Margaret Batley, Wyn Moyes, Axel Treu,  
Trudy Lawrence, Christin & Philip Brady, Dagmar Brunow & Bernd Hirschs,  
Nigel Andrew, Anna and Lorenz Lorenz-Meyer.

### Friends

T. Moriarty, James Morgan, T.P.Cowhig, Delphine Lettau, Olwen Anne  
Pearson, Rosemarie Morgan, Madeleine Craiggs, Jeanette Culver, Won-Yoe  
TYang, Mr & Mrs N Riley, Alison Ripley, Harald Marchant, Claire  
Marchant.

## MARY ELLEN RAY

Mother de Moni

Mary Ellen was a member of leading theatre companies in America, and in England helped found Paines Plough, touring extensively with that company, Foco Novo, and The Kosh. She has appeared at The Royal National Theatre, The Royal Court, The Royal Exchange, The Traverse Edinburgh, The Liverpool Playhouse, The Playhouse Newcastle, The Leicester Haymarket, Birmingham Stage Company, and The Duke's in Lancaster.

Roles include: Big Mama in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, Chorus in *Medea*, Mother-in-law in *Blood Wedding*, Kate in *All My Sons*, Miriam in *Habeas Corpus*, and Gratiana in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. British Premieres include *Hunting Scenes from Lower Bavaria*, *House of Yes*, *The Stickwife*, *Sleeping Policemen*, *Quantrill in Lawrence*, *Music to Murder By*, *Ladybird*, *Ladybird*, *Dorothy and The Bitch*, *The Hot Hello*, *Mr. Hyde*, *The Edge*, and the one-woman play, *Later*, written especially for her by David Pownall. Recent television includes *The Bill*, *Selling Hitler* and *Unnatural Pursuits*. Mary Ellen also played Nille in the GST's *Erasmus Montanus*.

## BEEKE ROPERS

Costume Design/Wardrobe

Beeke first started making and designing costumes during her three years at Goldsmiths College (University of London).

Since her graduation in 1991 she has worked on several fringe productions and with the National Youth Music Theatre on *Aesop*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Billyd* *Poppy* and *Threepenny Opera*.

Most recently she designed the costumes for the GST's productions of *Minna von Barnhelm*, *Erasmus Montanus*, *And Women Must Weep*, *The Storytellers*, *The Green Parakeet*, *A Spanner in the Works*, *The Will* and *What Now*, *Little Man* at the Greenwich Theatre.

## ALWYNE TAYLOR

Mother Superior at Arpajon

Alwyne graduated in English and Drama from Exeter University.

Theatre includes: *A Chorus of Disapproval*, *The Revenger's Comedies*, *June Moon*, *The Last of the Red Hot Lovers*, *The Dining Room* and *The Linden Tree*, all at the Stephen Joseph Theatre at Scarborough; *The Three Sisters* at Bristol Theatre Royal; *Once in a Lifetime*, *Company*, *Sweet Charity*, *Happy End*, *Flying Blind* and *The Accrington Pals* at Manchester Library Theatre, where she won the Manchester Evening News Award. Also *A Day in the Death of Joe Egg* at Cardiff; *Blood Brothers* at Coventry, *The Norman Conquests* at Sheffield; *The Constant Wife* at Windsor; *Two Happy Families* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* at Derby and *The Rover* at Salisbury Playhouse.

TV and Film credits include *Genghis Cohen* (BBC Screen Two), *Casualty*, *The Bill*, *South of the Border*, *Strong Poison*, *Minder*, *London's Burning*, *Devices and Desires*, *Is That A Fact?*, *The Painted Tales* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

Radio work includes reading A.N. Wilson's *The Healing Art* for Woman's Hour (BBC Radio 4).

# Denis Diderot

Denis Diderot (1713 - 1784) was one of the leading thinkers of the French Enlightenment. He pursued knowledge in all its forms with an amazing vigour, and it was under his direction that the great French *Encyclopaedia* was published between 1747 and 1766, a major work, which aimed to 'change the way of thinking' in France. This mammoth task completed, the pace of Diderot's output scarcely slackened, and when he set off for Russia in 1773 to visit Catherine the great, he was working on five different pieces of work as he travelled.

His thought contains irreconcilable paradoxes, and one of his favourite literary forms was the dialogue, which allowed him to argue both sides of a question. In some of his works materialistic atheism (which earned him a spell of imprisonment in 1749) seems to lead towards a deterministic stance, but Diderot's simultaneous belief in progress and the possibility of the good society prompted him to use the stage as a secular pulpit, and he launched a new theatrical genre, the *drame bourgeois*, to demonstrate that happiness may be achieved through virtue. When dealing with the theory of drama and the actor's art, Diderot's writing is fascinating and vibrant with ideas, sometimes seeming to foreshadow the scope of cinema, but the plays themselves are the worst examples of this generally unsuccessful new genre, swamped by pathos and sentiment to a degree that a twentieth-century audience finds unbearable.

The ideas, and indeed the dialogue, contained in Diderot's narrative works pack a far greater punch than plays such as *The Illegitimate Son* (1757) or *The Father of the Family* (1758), and here now at BAC is another paradox in the making: a theatrical success for Diderot at last? - but created from his novel the satirical and anti-monastic *La Religieuse* (finished around 1760, but not published until 1797); more cogent and far richer in emotional colour than his plays, it ranges from humour to anger, from sentimentality to cynicism.

ENID STOCKWELL





## Diderot the Dramatist

Denis Diderot had such interesting things to say about theatre and the art of the actor that it seems odd we should know nothing of his dramatic output. In his essay *On Dramatic Poetry* he advises playwrights to "make it a cast iron rule not to put a single detail down on paper until your overall plan is complete." On the face of it this looks like sound advice, but the general critical consensus (including Enid Stockwell of London University writing in this programme) seems to be that Diderot himself would have done well not to heed it. "Wooden", "sentimental", "pompous", "self-righteous", "turgid" are some of the kinder adjectives that have been used to describe his plays. In writing them, he clearly felt a compulsion, or a duty, to moralise and educate.

Diderot's systematic approach to playwriting and the poor quality of his plays contrast strangely with the apparently haphazard and at times almost unconscious process of creation that characterises those works of fiction which have ensured his place in literary history: *Rameau's Nephew*, *D'Alembert's Dream*, *Jacques the Fatalist* and *The Nun*. All of them are, in different ways, bizarre, unpredictable, startlingly original. All were too radical and outspoken to be published during his lifetime and remained unknown until after the French Revolution.

In one of his letters Diderot seems to acknowledge that a measured, controlled, conscious method of creation, such as he advocates in his theoretical writings on the theatre, does not really suit him: "I only talk well to myself, or to others when I forget that they are there. The faster I write, the better I do it." And with specific reference to *The Nun*, he records in a letter to a friend: "I set to work, and was still at it at three o'clock in the morning. I am going like the wind. I let my thoughts run free; I don't know how to restrain them."

Diderot never intended *The Nun* to be a play, yet the novel contains passages of uninterrupted dialogue, that are rich in dramatic irony and innuendo. Much of the rest of the book presents enormous problems for an adaptor and director, but we succumbed to the temptation to try to dramatise this work in which its author achieved a level of theatricality and dramatic intensity that are singularly lacking in his plays.



## Genesis of The Nun: A Practical Joke

Diderot was a lover of mystifications. One of his stories is entitled *This Is Not A Story*, and another is called simply *Mystification*. A German friend of his, Melchior Grimm, was fond of practical jokes, and it was these two men who concocted the elaborate hoax that was to develop into *The Nun*.

Diderot's circle of intimate friends in Paris during the 1740s and 50s included the elderly and quixotic Marquis de Croismare, who in grief at the death of his wife had left his estates in Normandy to seek distraction in Paris. Though a devout Catholic, the Marquis quickly found comfort and enduring friendship among the coterie of freethinkers, materialists and atheists around Diderot. He was an eccentric, prone to losing himself in one or other of his ruling passions: book-collecting, or music, or the art of cooking omelettes, but he was above all else a philanthropist, generous to a fault, who could disappear for weeks on end among the down-and-outs of Paris, studying their way of life, making friends and helping where he could. He seems to have been enormously popular, and Diderot was especially attached to him and set enormous store by his company. But in 1758 the Marquis returned on business to his country estate near Caen in Normandy and, coming under the influence of his old friend the local priest, was reconverted to religion. Worse than that, he showed every sign of staying in Normandy.

Diderot, no doubt suffering under the enormous pressures of editing the Encyclopaedia, was greatly hurt by this desertion, and early in 1760 he and his friend Grimm hatched a bizarre plot to lure the Marquis back to Paris. They remembered that, two years previously, he had intervened, without success, on behalf of a nun who was demanding to be released from her vows. Diderot and Grimm decided to forge a letter, supposedly from this nun, to the Marquis, telling him that she had escaped from her convent, was alone and hungry in Paris, and desperately needed his help. They expected that, with his usual impetuosity and gallantry, he would rush back to Paris to take her under his protection. Further letters were planned and executed, describing in detail the young nun's unhappy life in the convent. According to Grimm, the writing sessions among Diderot's family and friends were conducted amid gales of laughter.

To complicate the plot, a certain Madame Moreau, living at Versailles, was chosen as an unwitting go-between and instructed to forward the Marquis' replies unopened to Diderot. Further letters, again composed by Diderot but supposedly from Mme Moreau were to supplement "Sister Suzanne's" own letters to the Marquis.

The Marquis, in letter after letter, expressed his deep concern for the young woman's plight, but refused to budge from Normandy, and instead notified "Madame Moreau" of his elaborate arrangements for the nun to travel to Caen and take up a position and place of refuge in his own household. Diderot and Grimm stalled for as long as they could, with moving reports, supposedly from Madame Moreau, of the nun's precarious state of health, until they finally decided, under continued pressure from the Marquis, that this practical joke had got seriously out of hand. With a touching final letter describing the onset of fever and the nun's Christian forbearance in the face of death, they killed her off.

That should have been the end of "Sister Suzanne". (Marguerite Delamarre, the real nun whose appeal against her vows had inspired the original hoax, continued to languish in a convent until after the French Revolution.) But Diderot found that the story of her unhappy experiences had seized his imagination and refused to let go. As a young man he had been briefly incarcerated in a monastery. More importantly, his sister Angelique had entered a convent against her parents' wishes, only to go mad and die young. The subject touched a raw nerve in him. All through the summer of 1760, in addition to his continuing labours on the Encyclopaedia, he was furiously writing *The Nun*.

It is not difficult to see why Diderot felt unable to publish the novel during his lifetime. He was continuously at odds with the censorship over the Encyclopaedia, in which the Jesuits perceived a threat to the authority of Church and State. Any attempt to publish *The Nun*, a work which could be interpreted as a full-scale attack on the convent system and through that on the Catholic Church, and which contained an audaciously sympathetic portrait of lesbian love, might have damaged his standing with the authorities so severely as to give a death blow to the Encyclopaedia, a project to which he had devoted the best part of his life.

In fact, the object of Diderot's scorn is not convent life per se, but an anomaly in the law that allowed binding religious vows to be taken at the age of sixteen, when the legal age of majority at that time was twenty-five. Diderot is concerned with abuses of personal freedom arising from that anomaly, typified by Suzanne's parents' convenient disposal of her into a convent.



## Dénouement

Shortly before her "death", in one of her letters to the Marquis de Croismare, "Suzanne" had promised to send him the manuscript of her memoir, so that he might have some knowledge of the person to whom he was offering help. The memoir, completed by Diderot several months later, was never sent to the Marquis, but 8 years later he finally revisited Paris and called upon the go-between, Madame Moreau-Madin. Her ignorance of all that had passed through her hands brought the whole elaborate hoax out into the open. According to Grimm, the Marquis laughed heartily at the whole affair. One wonders if this is true.

Diderot died in 1784. Though the text of *The Nun* was circulated among a handful of subscribers in 1780, the first proper edition did not appear until 1796, twelve years after his death. Once Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte had given way to the return of the monarchy, the book was banned in 1824 and again in 1826. According to Diderot's biographer P. N. Furbank, it is only in recent years that it has ceased to be regarded as pornography. As recently as 1968, Mme de Gaulle had Jacques Rivette's film version banned by the French Ministry of Information.

The conclusion of that film had Suzanne being lured into a brothel in Paris, escaping from a man's lewd embraces and leaping from a window to her death on the pavement below. The novel's ending is inconclusive, with the reader left to imagine what happens to Suzanne in some of the seedier quarters of Paris. When we staged this adaptation at Greenwich in 1994, I tried to end it with an epilogue in Diderot's study, involving Diderot himself and Madame Moreau, that dramatised the story's genesis in the attempted hoax on the Marquis de Croismare. That ending was described variously by the critics as "a mistake", "a risky manoeuvre", "clumsy" and "a dash of tricky postmodernism". The epilogue has now gone, the play's ending is as inconclusive as the novel's, and we hope it is better for it.

### *JULIAN FORSYTH*

Diderot. A Biography by P.N. Furbank (Minerva)

Leonard Tancock's introduction to his translation of *The Nun*. (Penguin Classics)