

## Director's Notes

What is it that makes us human? What is the difference between our species and the millions of other creatures who inhabit this wonderful and perplexing planet?

To Sir Alan Ayckbourn, it is two things: the ability to fall in love and a sense of humor. These, he believes, are what "separate us from the animals," and he reasons that therefore the two must somehow be linked. To explore the connection, he wrote *Comic Potential*, creating a world "in the foreseeable future, when everything has changed except human nature." Here, television studios are controlled by power-mad executives and sinister accountants who care only about the numbers, producing programs so bad that human actors are not needed, and the characters are played by androids. (No, it's not *The Real Housewives of New Jersey*.)

Ayckbourn is the most produced playwright in the world besides Shakespeare. He has written over 70 full-length plays, which have been translated into more than 35 languages and earned him virtually every honor that can be bestowed upon a playwright. Most of his works were originally directed by him and premiered at the Stephen Joseph Theatre in Scarborough, England, where he was artistic director from 1972 until his retirement earlier this year.

*Comic Potential* is Ayckbourn's 53<sup>rd</sup> play and one of his very best, a work, according to critic Michael Billington, "over-stuffed with ideas." Though not a science fiction writer, Ayckbourn has written science fiction here, and, like the best writers of that genre, he has created a world of the future in order to comment on the world of the present. And comment he does, on the dumbing down of television, where only ratings and profits matter; on the subsequent inevitable loss of the great comic tradition that began in vaudeville and silent films; on the creative process; and, more subtly, on the plight of today's women.

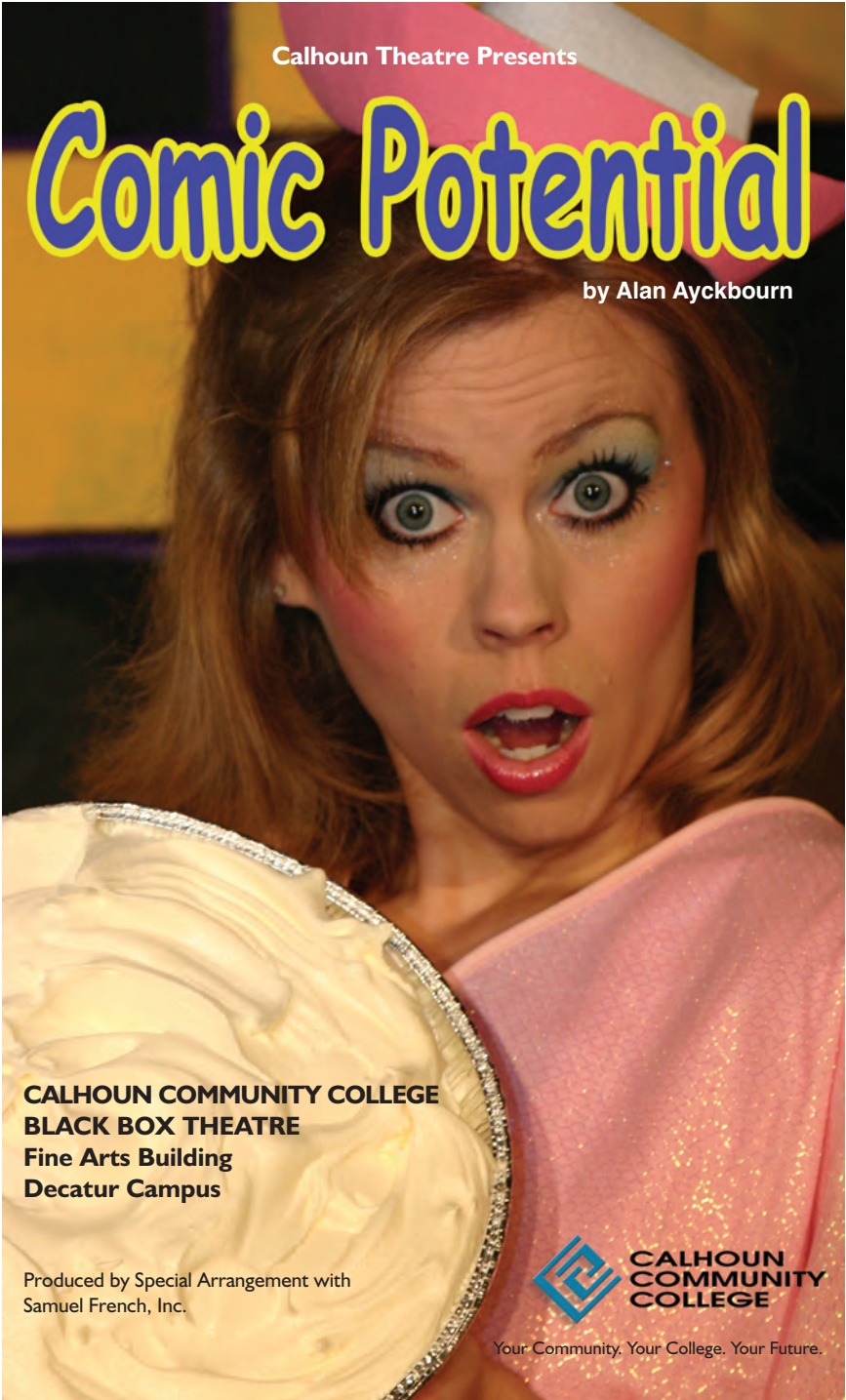
But it is the nature and relationship of love and laughter that take center stage in *Comic Potential*. Ayckbourn said he got the idea for writing the play when he happened to be reading the personal ads in a newspaper. He noticed that the most important quality people were looking for in a partner was not "pet-lover" or "attractive" or "non-smoker", but someone "with a good sense of humor." Do humans need humor? Is it essential to a successful romantic relationship? Does laughter lead to romance?

Science fiction from *2001: A Space Odyssey* to *Blade Runner* to *A. I.* has speculated on what would happen if machines were somehow to develop human feelings. In *Comic Potential*, the first stirring of that humanity is laughter, which then grows into love, which in turn proves so confusing and illogical that it sets off a chain reaction of emotions that would short-circuit any brain, mechanical or human. "Love," Ayckbourn says, "plays absolute havoc with human wiring just as much as android wiring."

In that sense, perhaps machines won't be that much different. And Ayckbourn worries that there might be another, more ominous, similarity. Just as his actoids speak and behave not by thinking but by what others have downloaded into them, he wonders if humans, wired to their monitors and televisions, aren't programmed in much the same way.

*Comic Potential* also inadvertently demonstrates how suddenly the future becomes the present. Ayckbourn wrote the play in 1998, perhaps little realizing how quickly incredible changes could occur. Just eleven years later, not only would there actually be machines performing human tasks, but much of the technology used when his play premiered would be disappearing so fast that our production had to make many changes to update it. Had we left the play as it was, it would have appeared to be set in the past!

According to Ayckbourn, his goal in writing all of his plays is the same: to make his audience laugh and to disturb them at the same time. If that is the case, then what is his vision of the future in *Comic Potential*? Will human nature indeed remain the same, or does a different - and darker - future await us?

A woman with a surprised expression, wearing a pink top, holding a large white cake. The background is dark with a pink and yellow light source.


Calhoun Theatre Presents

# Comic Potential

by Alan Ayckbourn

**CALHOUN COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
BLACK BOX THEATRE  
Fine Arts Building  
Decatur Campus**

Produced by Special Arrangement with  
Samuel French, Inc.

 **CALHOUN  
COMMUNITY  
COLLEGE**

Your Community. Your College. Your Future.

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## CALHOUN THEATRE POLICIES

Thank you for supporting Calhoun Theatre. The cast and crew welcome you to the Black Box Theatre and [Comic Potential](#).

If you wish to greet the actors or crew members, you are welcome to remain in the theatre after the show.

**IN CONSIDERATION OF AUDIENCE MEMBERS AND PERFORMERS, PLEASE . . .**

**SWITCH ALL PAGERS, CELL PHONES, AND OTHER ELECTRONIC DEVICES OFF OR TO THE MUTE MODE. CELL PHONES SHOULD BE PUT AWAY. TEXT-MESSAGING IS PROHIBITED DURING THE PERFORMANCE.**

### NO PHOTOGRAPHING OR VIDEOTAPING

Pictures and videos of the play are available from the Theatre Department.

### BABIES AND NOISY CHILDREN ARE PROHIBITED.

Please consider others, and do not ask to bring children five and under into the theatre.

### HANDICAPPED SEATING IS AVAILABLE FOR ALL SHOWS.

Please inquire at the ticket desk if you require assistance.

**FOR SAFETY REASONS, IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT AUDIENCE MEMBERS DO NOT LEAVE THEIR SEATS WHILE THE PLAY IS IN PROGRESS.**

**THOSE WHO DO LEAVE THE THEATRE MAY NOT BE RESEATED UNTIL INTERMISSION. LATE COMERS WILL BE SEATED AT THE DISCRETION OF THE HOUSE MANAGER.**

**ENJOY THE SHOW!**

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**Peggy Payne** (Prim Spring) is a home-schooled tenth grader who has appeared in a number of roles for Fantasy Playhouse Children's Theatre, including Emily in *Monster in the Closet*. She was nominated for a Wings Award for her performance in the title role in the 2008 Huntsville Community Chorus production of *Annie*. A dancer since she was four, Peggy's performance parts have included Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (Alabama Youth Ballet) and Clara in Community Ballet Association's *Nutcracker*, for which she won a 2005 Wings Award. A dual-enrollment student at Calhoun, she lives with her family in Mooresville.

**Kim Parker** (Carla Pepperbloom) is an artist who teaches graphic design at Calhoun. She is also a local actor and director who has performed frequently with Theatre Huntsville and Renaissance Theatre. Her Huntsville credits include Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Poopay in *Communicating Doors*, and, most recently, Sister James in *Doubt*. After graduating from West Morgan High School, she came to Calhoun, where she is best known for playing Ellie in *The Desperate Hours*, Sylvia in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Poppy in *A Small Family Business*, and alternating as both Kate and Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*. She lives in Decatur.

**Phil Parker** (Chandler Tate) is an actor well-known throughout the Huntsville area. He began his career at Calhoun, where he is best known for many classic Shakespeare roles: Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, and Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*. In Huntsville he has appeared in *Of Mice and Men*, *I Hate Hamlet*, *Holy Ghosts*, *A Higher Place in Heaven*, *The Book of Liz*, *Laughter on the 23rd Floor*, and many more. Phil is a graduate of Buckhorn High School and lives in Decatur.

**Damien Peters** (Son/Marmion/Man) is a general education major from Harvest. He attended Sparkman High School, where he performed in a number of shows, including *Guys and Dolls* and *Little Shop of Horrors*. He has appeared at Calhoun in *12 Angry Jurors*.

**Angela Williams** (Mother/Farmer's Wife/Shop Clerk/Waiter 2/Prostitute/ Technician) is a Calhoun theatre major who graduated from Falkville High School and now lives in Decatur. She appeared in Calhoun's *12 Angry Jurors* last March.



*Calhoun Theatre sends its deepest condolences to Dr. Cathy Hansberry, former head of the Calhoun Foundation, whose husband, George, passed away last month. In addition to being a great friend to Calhoun College and Calhoun Theatre, Dr. George Hansberry was revered in Decatur and throughout our area as a physician and humanitarian, as a kind and giving man whose first thought was always how he could help people. His passing was a loss for us all.*

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## Cast Biographies

**Sheela Agrawal** (Mother/Farmer's Wife/Woman/Waiter 2/Technician) is a Calhoun theatre major from Huntsville who is also currently working with Acting Up! Academy for Dramatic Arts. She attended Grissom High and Lee High School for the Creative Writing Magnet.

**Quentin Barrentine** (Lester Trainsmith/Hotel Clerk/Waiter 1) graduated from Priceville High School and now lives in Hartselle. A theatre major, he has performed with Calhoun Theatre for two years, appearing in *Death of a Salesman*, *Dating for Dummies*, and *Twelve Angry Jurors*.

**Casey Camp** (Doctor/Farmer/Turkey) is a local actor who has starred in many shows in the Black Box Theatre, including *Picnic* and *The Dining Room*. He is best-known for playing Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*, Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He lives in Decatur.

**Heather Crawford** (Jacie Triplethree) graduated from Athens State University and is currently working as a teacher in Limestone County. Before that, she attended West Limestone High School, where she played Sandy in *Grease*. She then earned an associate's degree in theatre arts at Calhoun, where she is best remembered for her roles as Olivia in *Twelfth Night* and Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*, in addition to appearing in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *All in the Timing*, and *The Rimers of Eldritch*. She lives in Athens.

**Ashley Hubbert** (Adam Trainsmith) has been a scholarship theatre student at Calhoun and UAB. At Calhoun, he has appeared as Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet*, Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Sir Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*, Hap Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, and many others. His UAB credits include *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Seagull*, and *The Food Chain*. Ashley is from Town Creek and attended Hazelwood High School.

**Krista McCarty** (Waiter 2/Woman) of Madison is a psychology major who attended Sparkman High School. She has appeared in a number of productions at Calhoun, including *The Comedy of Errors*, *You Know I Can't Hear You When the Water's Running*, *Othello*, *The Female Odd Couple*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *Death of a Salesman*.

**Laura Moran** (Trudi Floote) is an English education major from Lacey's Spring. She attended Brewer High School, where she was in *Dearly Departed* and *Run for the Money*. At Calhoun she has appeared in *12 Angry Jurors*.

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## Cast of Characters

**LM05623**, a male actoid (Doctor, Farmer) .....Casey Camp  
**CW77502**, a female actoid (Mother, Farmer's Wife) .....Sheela Agrawal  
Angie Williams  
**LJM54823**, a juvenile male actoid (Son).....Damien Peters  
**JCF31333** (Jacie Triplethree) .....Heather Crawford  
**Chandler Tate**, an aging director.....Phil Parker  
**Prim Spring**, a programmer .....Peggy Payne  
**Trudi Floote**, a technician .....Laura Moran  
**Carla Pepperbloom**, the company regional director .....Kim Parker  
**Adam Trainsmith**, a young writer.....Ashley Hubbert  
**Lester Trainsmith**, a billionaire corporate magnate.....Quentin Barrentine  
**Marmion**, speaker for Mr. Trainsmith .....Damien Peters  
**Hotel Desk Clerk**.....Quentin Barrentine  
**Woman**.....Sheela Agrawal  
Krista McCarty  
**Man** .....Damien Peters  
**Dress Shop Assistant** .....Angie Williams  
**Waiter 1** .....Quentin Barrentine  
**Waiter 2** .....Krista McCarty  
Angie Williams  
Sheela Agrawal  
**Prostitute** .....Angie Williams  
**Turkey** .....Casey Camp  
**Technician**.....Sheela Agrawal  
Angie Williams

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## Synopsis of Scenes

**Comic Potential** takes place in the foreseeable future, when everything has changed except human nature.

### Act I

- Scene 1. A television studio. One morning.
- Scene 2. The same. Later that day.
- Scene 3. The same. A few days later.

### Act II

- Scene 1. The television studio. The same day.
- Scene 2. The foyer of The Grand Hotel. That evening.
- Scene 3. The studio. The same evening.
- Scene 4. The hotel boutique. The same evening.
- Scene 5. The studio. The same evening.
- Scene 6. The hotel restaurant. The same evening.
- Scene 7. The studio. The same evening.
- Scene 8. The hotel room. The same evening.
- Scene 9. A sleazy hotel room. Later that night.
- Scene 10. The studio. The next morning.

**Comic Potential** runs approximately two hours, plus a ten-minute intermission between acts.

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## Production Staff

Director .....	Bill Provin
Set Designer .....	Bubba Godsey
Set Builders.....	Colin Montgomery Bubba Godsey Casey Camp Damien Peters
Painters .....	Sheela Agrawal Angie Williams
Costumes .....	Zoe Lambert
Lights .....	Bubba Godsey
Light Operator .....	Colin Montgomery
Music/Sound .....	Bill Provin
Sound Recorder .....	Colin Montgomery
Props .....	Peggy Payne Sheela Agrawal
Choreography .....	Heather Crawford Ashley Hubbert
Assistant Directors .....	Sheela Agrawal Angie Williams
Absent Friends .....	Kurtis Charleson Tammy Hasting

### Theatre Student News

Gregory Peebles has been named the newest member of the Grammy Award-winning a cappella group Chanticleer. The only full-time classical voice ensemble in the United States, Chanticleer has been called “the world’s reigning male chorus.” A native of Hartselle, Gregory appeared in Calhoun’s ***A Midsummer Night’s Dream***, ***The Taming of the Shrew***, and ***The Diviners*** in the mid-1990s, productions in which he also either sang or served as musical director. After leaving Calhoun, he studied music at Ole Miss, graduating with honors. He then moved to Chicago and has been singing professionally ever since. In addition to his singing career, Gregory is a composer whose works have been performed in the United States and Europe.

Emily Parks, in her first year as a theatre major at UAB, has received two prestigious Irene Ryan Award nominations for her performances as Bunny in ***The House of Blue Leaves*** and Mrs. Malaprop in ***The Rivals***. A graduate of Buckhorn High School, Emily will be remembered by Calhoun audiences for many powerful performances, particularly Emilia in ***Othello***, Olive in ***The Female Odd Couple***, Mary in ***Vanities***, and Linda in ***Death of a Salesman***.

Congratulations to both of these outstanding former students.