

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

presents

DON'T LOSE THE PLACE!

A Comedy

by

Derek Benfield

Premiere on 17 November, 2016

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 14, 15 and 16 November

Regular Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesdays and

Fridays beginning 22 November

The English Theatre of Hamburg

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Dear English Teachers and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere **DON'T LOSE THE PLACE!** by Derek Benfield on 17 November, 2016 with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 14, 15 and 16 November. Bookings for this comedy have already started. Please use the cover of this study guide to help us advertise the play. The text of the play may be obtained at www.samuelfrench-london.co.uk or www.amazon.com. Teachers interested in being invited to a dress rehearsal of the play should contact Jasmin Pose at marketing@englishtheatre.de.

About the Author

Derek Benfield was born on 11 March, 1926 in Bradford, Yorkshire. He trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and made his first appearances with Brian Rix's company after which he acted for many years in various repertory companies. He appeared in a wide variety of parts in the theatre and on TV and was a prolific writer of comedy for the stage. Although he died in 2009 his many entertaining stage plays continue to be widely produced throughout the world. They include **ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST?** (performed by The English Theatre of Hamburg in 2014), **CAUGHT ON THE HOP**, **BEYOND A JOKE**, **BEDSIDE MANNERS**, **LOOK WHO'S TALKING**, **FISH OUT OF WATER**, **FUNNY BUSINESS** and **SECOND TIME AROUND**. His very funny farce, **DON'T LOSE THE PLACE!**, is being performed at The English Theatre of Hamburg for the first time. It, like his other plays, demonstrates the playwright's superb technique and use of comic one-liners. Apart from his creative work in the theatre the author's pleasures included watching cricket and tending his garden at his home in Barnes, south-west London. He is survived by his wife and by their son and daughter.

About the Play

Derek Benfield was a master at writing farces. Webster's New Universal Dictionary defines the word "farce" as "a light humorous play in which the plot depends upon a skillfully exploited situation rather than upon the development of character." In **DON'T LOSE THE PLACE!** the characters differ enough to make them interesting, but the plot takes precedence over character. The play moves along at a fast pace and should be enjoyed for what it is: two hours of fun in the theatre.

As is customary in farces, there is a great deal of deception going on in **DON'T LOSE THE PLACE!** Sylvia's boyfriend has walked out on her. Being jilted was painful and she is determined never to go through that again. So she decides to see other men in hopes of finding the perfect one to marry. When the play opens she is seeing three possible candidates on a trial basis, and has organised a strict time-table for their individual visits to her apartment so they will not run into each other. She likes them all, but she can't decide which of them she prefers. All three are good looking and have sex appeal. They even say they love her and talk about marriage. Clive is a well-built physical education teacher; Walter, an older successful businessman; and Eddie, a skilful carpenter. All three are equally determined to marry Sylvia. Despite her careful planning, all three suitors turn up unexpectedly on the same evening, demanding a clear commitment from her. Luckily, Sylvia's good friend Jemma is there to help her cope with the panic and confusion. Their task: Keep the men apart at all costs -- one in the kitchen, and the other two in the bedroom or living room! But for how long can they put off the inevitable confrontation of the three trial husbands? Who will she choose in the end?

"where anything can go wrong, something does, with the volume of audience laughter steadily increasing."
Newcastle Herald

Summary of Derek Benfield's
DON'T LOSE THE PLACE!

Setting: Sylvia's flat overlooking a river in a suburb of London
Time: 1985

Act I, a Friday evening in summer

Sylvia, a pretty young woman, is heartbroken because Robin, the man she wants to marry, has left her. Jemma, her friend and co-worker in their dress shop, tells her there are "plenty more fish in the sea". So Sylvia starts secretly dating three different men: Clive, Walter and Eddie. She arranges for them to come to her flat on different days of the week to make sure they will not run into each other.

She is waiting for Clive now. The young man always rows up the river in his boat and climbs up the stairs to her first floor balcony. When he walks in, wearing shorts and a shirt ("rowing gear"), he sees Sylvia wearing a seductive negligee. They grab each other impulsively and kiss. Clive tells her he wants to marry her, but Sylvia replies that while she loves him, she needs to make sure that she can trust her own feelings. She wants to marry the right man. Little does Clive know that he is only one of three possible candidates. The doorbell rings and they quickly pull apart. Sylvia tells Clive to hide in the kitchen because she does not know who is at the door.

Sylvia is surprised to see that it is her friend Jemma. She didn't expect her until the following day. Jemma, a happily married woman, sometimes sleeps in Sylvia's guest bedroom for convenience sake. Her home is much farther away and she has just come from the nearby airport after a trip to France where she looked at the latest fashions. It is early evening, but Sylvia tries to convince Jemma that she should go to bed because she doesn't want her to see Clive and start asking questions about her secret complicated love life. She tells Jemma she will go to the kitchen to make her a cup of coffee.

Once in the kitchen, she tells Clive she doesn't want Jemma to know he is there and asks him to stay where he is until she can get Jemma to go to bed. She promises him they can continue with their love making later. Clive says he will come out of the kitchen if she doesn't get rid of Jemma in two minutes.

Sylvia returns to the sitting room and tries to persuade Jemma to go to bed, but after two minutes Clive bursts out of the kitchen. Jemma gasps. Sylvia tells her he is the plumber who has just fixed the toilet. Reluctantly, Clive goes along with the hoax and says good-bye. He leaves the same way he came, descending the stairs to his boat on the river.

Jemma is suspicious. There is, of course, no toilet in the kitchen and she thinks it odd that the "plumber" left via the balcony. Feeling a bit stunned by Clive's sudden appearance, she decides to have a bath to calm down, but she tells Sylvia she wants to know exactly what is going on when she returns.

As soon as Jemma is gone, Walter walks in unexpectedly.

He is the charming, older businessman that Sylvia is also dating. Walter knows where Sylvia hides her spare key and has used it to enter the flat. But because Walter is not scheduled for this evening, Sylvia is flummoxed. Before she can think of a way to get rid of him, Walter thrusts a bouquet of flowers into her arms, gets a beer from the kitchen and sits down to watch a rerun on TV of a football game he couldn't see earlier in the day. He has told everyone at work not to spoil the suspense by telling him who has won. Desperate to get rid of Walter, Sylvia tells him that his team lost three-nil. Walter is flabbergasted. How could she ruin a perfect evening for him like that? She tells him he is not due to come until next Wednesday and he must go because she wasn't expecting him. Walter, thinking he is the only man in Sylvia's life, ignores her protests and goes off to the kitchen to find something to eat.

When Walter is in the kitchen, Clive returns and says he will have to stay in Sylvia's flat because his boat has floated away. Not expecting Clive's return, Sylvia quickly hides the flowers Walter gave her in the bar. She insists that Clive go and have another look for his boat. To make sure he gets out of sight she follows him down the stairs to the river.

Walter walks in from the kitchen with some bread and cheese and wonders where Sylvia is. He sits down to watch the disappointing rerun of the football game and Jemma walks in from the bedroom wearing silk pyjamas. Before she realises a strange man is there she says, "Well, I've had my bath and now I'm all ready for you!" She stops suddenly and they stare at each other, neither one knowing who the other is. "I suppose you must be the television repair man," she says.

After a brief confusing conversation, clarifying nothing, Walter goes off to the kitchen to get himself another beer. Sylvia returns from the river and looks around anxiously. She tells Jemma she will explain everything later, but for now Jemma needs to keep Walter in the kitchen so she can get Clive, who has lost his boat, out through the front door without Walter seeing him. Jemma gulps down the wine that Sylvia keeps pouring into her glass and assures her friend that she will do whatever is necessary to help. Sylvia goes back down to the river to get Clive, and Walter walks out of the kitchen. Out of loyalty to Sylvia, without a clue as to what is going on, Jemma grabs Walter's arm, drags him back into the kitchen and stays with him to make sure he doesn't leave.

From the balcony Sylvia calls down to Clive to hurry up. As he comes up from the river she hears a cry of agony when he slips on the stairs and sprains his ankle. She goes down to help him up to the flat, and he hops over to the couch to sit down. Sylvia insists that he must take a taxi home right away, but Clive remains on the sofa nursing his injured ankle. Exasperated now, she pulls him up from the sofa and drags him off to the guest bedroom to get him out of the way.

Meanwhile, in the kitchen, Jemma has locked the door and put the key down her cleavage so that Walter cannot leave.

When Walter threatens to reach down her cleavage for the key, however, Jemma gives up and gets the key herself. She unlocks the door and they both go into the sitting-room where they find themselves alone. Walter goes down to the river to look for Sylvia who is not there.

When Walter is out of sight, Sylvia enters from the guest bedroom where she has left Clive. She explains to Jemma that Clive has sprained his ankle. Then Jemma demands that Sylvia tell her what is going on. Sylvia confesses that since she can't marry Robin (who left her), she is "trying on" different men to see which one will make the best husband. Walter and Clive are "contenders". She begs Jemma to help her keep the men from seeing each other.

After Walter returns from the river, Clive comes hopping out of the guest bedroom. Walter wants to know who Clive is, but before he can get an answer, Jemma grabs Clive and goes into the kitchen with him. Then Sylvia tells Walter that Clive is Jemma's lover. Having already decided that Jemma is unbalanced, Walter goes to the bar for a whisky to help him absorb the news. When he opens the drinks cupboard he finds the flowers he bought for Sylvia and asks why they are there. She tells him that she hid the flowers because she didn't want Jemma to be jealous since Clive didn't bring her any.

Meanwhile, Jemma goes through the same routine with Clive that she went through with Walter. She locks the kitchen door and puts the key down her cleavage. In answer to his questions about Walter, Jemma tells Clive that Walter is there because he is her lover. She is keeping Clive in the kitchen, she says, because she wants to make Walter jealous. Hoping that her lie will do the trick, Jemma unlocks the kitchen door so they can join Walter and Sylvia.

To avoid a fight, Clive tells Walter that nothing happened in the kitchen and he has no reason to be jealous. Walter and Sylvia do not know why he would say such a thing. Jemma explains to Clive that Walter brought the flowers to Sylvia as a thank you for letting them "do it" in Sylvia's flat. Then Jemma cuddles up to Walter and smiles, sexily, so Clive will believe her story. Walter wonders what this mad woman is up to, and Sylvia goes quickly to Jemma to hint to her that her actions are contradicting the story she made up for Walter, that Clive is Jemma's lover. Jemma doesn't take the hint, so Sylvia asks Walter if it isn't time for him to go home. He says no, that he is enjoying himself. When Jemma continues to hang onto him, however, he is not sure he wants to stay. Sylvia gets Clive to go into the guest bedroom to rest his ankle and Walter tries to join him to get away from Jemma, but before he can make a move, Jemma pushes him into Sylvia's bedroom. Now the two women, left alone in the sitting-room, try to get their conflicting stories straight.

But, before they can explain their made-up stories, the door-bell rings. Surprised by this, Sylvia goes to the door and discovers, to her great dismay, that it is Eddie, her third lover, the one that Jemma doesn't know about yet. Eddie, a carpenter, carries an armful of wood and a bag of tools. He comes into the flat with the intention of going into Sylvia's bedroom to build a cupboard for her as he earlier promised to do. Sylvia can't stop him. He greets Jemma and tells her he is going to

marry Sylvia. Jemma thrusts the flowers into Sylvia's arms and congratulates her.

"The two bedroom doors open in unison, and Walter and Clive look in. They see Eddie and disappear hastily back inside, slamming the doors behind them. Eddie is astonished, and looks at Sylvia. Sylvia looks at Jemma, frantically. Jemma sinks onto the sofa in despair."

Black-out

Act II, Five minutes later

Sylvia is in the guest bedroom with Eddie who is building a cupboard for her, and Jemma is in the kitchen. Walter and Clive are in the sitting-room having a congenial conversation. They are friendly to each other because Sylvia told them that Eddie was a carpenter building a cupboard for her, and they both think Jemma (not Sylvia) is the other one's lover. The women haven't had a chance to speak in private to compare their made-up stories because of Eddie's unexpected arrival.

When Sylvia walks in from the guest bedroom she sees the two men talking, and worries that they may find out the truth. When Jemma comes in from the kitchen, Sylvia whispers to her to get Walter back into the kitchen so he and Clive do not continue talking to each other and discover what is really going on. Then Sylvia smiles sweetly and goes into her own bedroom to change out of her negligee. Jemma drags Walter into the kitchen for the second time and tells him to stay there. Walter does in fact stay there because he assumes that she and her supposed lover, Clive, want to be alone in the sitting-room.

Satisfied that Walter will stay in the kitchen, Jemma heads for the guest bedroom to change out of her silk pyjamas and into her street clothes, but just before she gets there, Eddie comes out. He has been thinking and now suspects that, with two other men in the flat, something improper could be going on. He tries to go into Sylvia's bedroom, but Jemma blocks him. Then he heads for the kitchen and Jemma tries to block him again. He pushes her aside and enters the kitchen, saying he is just going to look for a dustpan. Afraid that Eddie and Walter will talk to each other and find out what is going on, Jemma quickly gets the dustpan for Eddie and tells him he can't stay there because Walter has high blood pressure and is not well. She says she knows what Walter needs because she is the District Nurse. Walter tries to contradict her, but she holds his face so tightly against her bosom that he cannot speak. Then she releases Walter and hurriedly marches Eddie out of the kitchen. She pushes him into the guest bedroom to work on the cupboard, grabs her street clothes from the same room, and returns to the sitting-room where she smiles innocently at Clive and then goes into Sylvia's bedroom to change her clothes.

Walter gets curious and looks into the sitting-room from the kitchen to see what is going on. Clive is the only one there. He asks Clive if he is really serious about "her" (Jemma). Thinking Walter means Sylvia, Clive says that he wants to marry her. Walter needs another drink after hearing that Clive is apparently serious about marrying crazy Jemma. He fixes a drink for Clive too. Clive asks Walter about his lover, and Walter, thinking he means Sylvia, says he wants to marry her.

Clive thinks that is fine because he believes Walter is having an affair with Jemma, not Sylvia. Each man thinks the other one has strange taste in women because Jemma has behaved peculiarly the whole evening. Clive even laughs and suggests that they have a double wedding.

When Sylvia and Jemma come into the sitting-room again and hear that the men are actually talking amiably to each other and are not hostile, they realise it is time for them to get their stories straight in private. So that they can be alone, Sylvia convinces Walter that he needs to go into the kitchen again, this time to make sandwiches for them; and Jemma persuades Clive to go out onto the balcony. The women then quickly talk and discover that they have told the men different stories, causing both of them believe the other one is dating Jemma, not Sylvia.

Before they can talk any further, Eddie comes out of the guest bedroom and asks Sylvia why she didn't tell him that both Clive and Walter had come for "treatment" from Jemma, the "District Nurse". He tries to kiss and cuddle with Sylvia, but she escapes from his arms, fearing the other men could come in any minute, which they do.

Continuing with the pretence (for Eddie's sake) that Jemma is the District Nurse and both of the men are ill, Jemma pushes Walter down on the couch. When he strongly objects, Eddie tells him forcefully to be quiet and cooperate with the nurse. Clive, watching on, thinks Eddie and Jemma have lost their minds.

Sylvia saves the day by telling Walter he needs to get back in the kitchen (for the fourth time) and make more sandwiches because she promised to have some for the Boy Scouts for their fête. But Walter, who is angry now, tells Eddie that Jemma lied to him about being a District Nurse, that she is really Sylvia's partner in their dress shop. This information convinces Eddie that the other two men are up to no good. He is ready for a fight, but Sylvia asks him to go into the bedroom with her. His mind quickly switching to sex, Eddie eagerly agrees, forgetting about everything else.

Left alone with Clive and Walter, Jemma tries to convince each of them she is the lover of the other one. She staggers frantically from one to the other, while Walter and Clive watch her in total amazement. In order to escape from this mad woman they both go into the kitchen and start to make sandwiches for the Boy Scouts. After catching her breath, Jemma runs into the kitchen to keep the men from talking to each other and discovering the truth.

When Eddie and Sylvia come out of the bedroom, Sylvia tells him that Jemma is married and comes there to meet with Clive, her lover, in secret. She adds that Clive made a mistake and came on the wrong night. To explain Walter's presence to Eddie she tells him that Walter is Jemma's husband. Eddie concludes that when Walter appeared, Clive must have made a dash for his boat and twisted his ankle. Sylvia tells him he is right.

Now that Eddie thinks Walter is Jemma's husband and Clive is Jemma's lover, he is concerned that the two men might start fighting, so he rushes into the kitchen to keep them apart. He pushes Walter into the sitting-room, but stays in the kitchen

with Jemma and Clive who soon think he is talking nonsense. When Eddie insists that Jemma's husband is in the flat, Jemma looks through the keyhole and sees only Walter talking to Sylvia.

In the sitting-room Walter tries to persuade Sylvia to get rid of the carpenter, leave Jemma and Clive to get on with it and come away with him. Sylvia replies that his offer is tempting and she loves him, but she doesn't know how much.

Back in the kitchen, Eddie tells Jemma that, according to Sylvia, the man in the sitting-room is her husband. Realising that she has to confirm Sylvia's latest lie, Jemma, says that it is true. Eddie tells Jemma she has to do something to prevent a fight between her "husband" and Clive. Clive doesn't know what they are talking about.

Jemma solves this latest predicament by taking Eddie into the sitting-room. She then tells Walter to go into the bedroom with Eddie to give him advice on the cupboard he is making. He refuses. Since she can't force Walter to leave, she tells Eddie to go into the bedroom alone so she and Walter (supposedly her husband) can kiss and make up. Eager to escape from Jemma, Walter eagerly goes into the bedroom with Eddie. Now Jemma is angry with Sylvia for making things more complicated by telling Eddie that Walter is her husband. She pushes Sylvia into the kitchen with Clive and joins them.

Jemma has become so confused by now that she is beginning to believe some of the stories she and Sylvia made up. Jemma tells Clive he can hop off home now because, her "husband" (Walter), is in the guest bedroom with Eddie. Clive, of course, doesn't care if Jemma's "husband" is there. He came to the flat for one reason only—to see Sylvia; and he mistakenly assumes that everyone knows that.

Suddenly Sylvia becomes alarmed that Walter and Eddie, who are in the guest bedroom, might talk and find out that they both came to see her. She whispers her concern to Jemma. To keep this from happening, Jemma races out of the kitchen and into the bedroom to keep Eddie and Walter from discovering the truth.

In the kitchen, Clive tries to persuade Sylvia to come away with him. As with Walter, Sylvia says she loves him and it is tempting, but she still hasn't made up her mind.

Meanwhile, Jemma pulls Walter out of the guest bedroom so he can't talk to Eddie. He starts to go to the kitchen, but Jemma intercepts him, her arms outstretched. She pushes Walter down on the sofa and orders him to stay there. Then she goes into the kitchen and makes matters more confusing by telling Sylvia and Clive that everything is all right, that Walter is in the sitting-room talking to her "husband". (Walter is, of course, alone in the sitting-room.)

Eddie comes out of the bedroom. Still believing that Walter is Jemma's husband, he advises him to forgive and forget about Jemma's affair with Clive. He wants Walter to buy Jemma some flowers. Walter doesn't know what Eddie is talking about.

In the kitchen, Clive hears raised voices and wonders why Jemma doesn't go into the sitting-room to separate Walter and her "husband". She says, "I don't think I can." Then she

peeks through the keyhole and sees that Eddie and Walter are talking. Eddie says he is not there just to build a cupboard. He is there because he wants to marry “her”. Walter, assuming he means Jemma, shakes Eddie’s hand and says, “Welcome to the club”.

Then Jemma and Sylvia race into the sitting-room to make sure the men don’t find out they are both dating Sylvia. Walter asks Jemma if she thinks that Clive suspects that Eddie isn’t here just to build a cupboard. Sylvia says he really is here only to build a cupboard, but Walter insists that Eddie wants to marry Jemma. Eddie is baffled by this news. And Sylvia, surprised by this latest falsehood, turns to Jemma and says, “Jemma—darling! What a lovely surprise! You never told me that.” Eddie is, of course, even more surprised, but before he can get to the truth, Clive hops in from the kitchen. In a failed attempt to avoid more confusion, Jemma grabs the bewildered Eddie and asks him to carry her away into the night.

Clive asks Sylvia if Jemma’s “husband” knows that Jemma has two men (Walter and Eddie) on the go. When Sylvia tells him that Jemma’s husband left long ago, Eddie insists that Walter is her husband and he is still there. Realising that their lies have become so entangled that the men are on the verge of discovering the truth, Jemma and Sylvia try to tiptoe away and hide.

But the men stop them, and the women watch guiltily as Eddie, Walter and Clive ask each other questions until they have everything figured out.

Sylvia blames them for all the trouble because they were scheduled to come on different nights. Afraid that the men will kill each other now, as Jemma predicted, Sylvia holds her hands above her head, dramatically and shouts, “You mustn’t fight over me!” But the men are silent, not even considering violence.

Eddie asks Sylvia how she could carry on with three men at the same time. She confesses that she loves all three, but couldn’t make up her mind which of them she wanted to marry. Hearing that, Walter asks the other two men to step into the kitchen with him. In just a short time they return and Walter announces that they have come to a decision. They have decided to carry on as they have and share Sylvia. Sylvia is disgusted by this and says she’s never heard of anything so immoral in all her life. Walter reminds her that she has been sharing them, but Sylvia thinks that is different because she has been trying to make the decision as to which of them she should marry. Walter insists that they have made a final decision among themselves, but Sylvia still thinks their idea is dreadful.

The doorbell rings and Jemma runs to answer it. The men explain to Sylvia that they all love her and they would rather share her than give her up completely.

Jemma returns with an enormous bunch of flowers and tells Sylvia that they are from Robin (the former boyfriend who left her, but the one she truly loves). Robin, has brought the flowers for her and said, “he’s sorry, how about dinner, and he’ll be outside in his car with the engine running.” Sylvia immediately goes to the three men and kisses each one of them. She says she loves them all, but that Robin is the one man she always knew she wanted to marry. They wish her good luck and she happily takes the flowers and runs out the front door to Robin.

Eddie fetches his carpentry tools and Walter offers to give Clive a lift home. While they get ready to leave, Jemma sobs into her handkerchief. As the men drift unhappily towards the front door, Jemma calls out to them: “Wait a minute!” I’ve just had a marvellous idea! Why don’t you all share me?”

**Black-out
Curtain**

MULTIPLE CHOICE EXERCISE

1. Sylvia’s boyfriend (a. Walter, b. Robin, c. Clive) has left her.
2. When the play opens, Sylvia is looking for a replacement boyfriend and has been regularly seeing (a. one man, b. two men, c. three men).
3. Jemma is Sylvia’s (a. cousin, b. sister, c. friend and business partner).
4. Sylvia’s problem is that she cannot decide (a. who she wants to marry, b. when to set the wedding date, c. whom to invite to the wedding).
5. Sylvia’s problem gets worse when all of her suitors (a. lose interest in her, b. show up unexpectedly at her flat, c. decide to return to their wives).
6. Clive is a young man who (a. jogs, b. drives his car, c. rows his boat) to Sylvia’s flat.
7. Walter is an older businessman who not only wants to spend the evening with Sylvia, but also wants to (a. watch a football game on her TV, b. discuss financial matters with her, c. plan their wedding).
8. Eddie is a carpenter who brings along his tools to (a. repair Sylvia’s balcony, c. renovate her kitchen, c. build a cupboard in her bedroom).
9. Sylvia and Jemma (a. invite the men to tea, b. watch the football game with them on TV, c. try to keep them from talking with each other).
10. When the men find out that Sylvia has been seeing all three of them, they (a. fight each other, b. decide to share Sylvia among themselves, c. destroy Sylvia’s flat)
11. Finally, Sylvia confesses that she loves and has always wanted to marry (a. Clive, b. both Walter and Eddie, c. her former boyfriend Robin).

Answer Key: (1. b, 2. c, 3. c, 4. a, 5. b, 6. c, 7. a, 8. c, 9. c, 10. b, 11. c.