The English Theatre of Hamburg
Established 1976

presents

ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST?

A Comedy by Derek Benfield

Premiere on 20 November, 2014
Preview Performances at reduced prices on 17, 18 and 19 November
Regular Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours
Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesdays and Fridays beginning 25 November

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Dear English Teachers and Friends,

The English Theatre will premiere ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST? by Derek Benfield on 20 November, 2014 with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 17, 18 and 19 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.

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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 CAUGHT ON THE HOP, BEYOND A JOKE, BESIDE MANNERS, LOOK WHO’S TALKING, FISH OUT OF WATER, FUNNY BUSINESS and SECOND TIME AROUND. His very funny farce, ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST? is being performed at The English Theatre of Hamburg for the first time. Unfortunately, such delightful small cast plays are becoming more and more difficult to find. Derek Benfield and his contemporary playwrights with the same superb use of technique and one-liners seem to be a disappearing breed. 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.

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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 ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST? the characters differ enough to make them interesting, but the plot takes precedence over character so there is little time to go into them in depth. The play moves along at a fast pace and is similar to a rollercoaster ride. It should be enjoyed for what it is: two hours of fun in the theatre.

As is customary in domestic farces, there is a great deal of marital infidelity and deception going on in ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST? It is, therefore, important to keep track of the relationships in order to have a good understanding of the play. Gilbert (who is having an affair with Helga) is married to Shirley (who is having an affair with Roger). Roger is married to Jane who wants to have an affair with Mark, but does not succeed. Even Mark, at first innocent of all deceitful behaviour, gets trapped in the confusion and ends up being dishonest himself. Helga, whose conduct may be considered immoral, is nevertheless the only one who remains honest to the end. One cannot help but think of Sir Walter Scott’s famous words: “Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive.”
Summary of Derek Benfield’s  
**ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST?**

**Setting:** The living-room of Shirley and Gilbert’s English country house  
**Time:** A Friday evening in the winter of 1991  

**Act I**

Shirley, an attractive middle-aged woman, is married to Gilbert, who is supposedly on a business trip in Düsseldorf. Shirley has lent her house to her friend Jane this evening so Jane can have a secret rendezvous there with Mark, a good-looking young man. Before Shirley leaves for her Friday evening aerobics class, she and Jane talk about Mark, the sexy chap Jane hopes to seduce. Jane is nervous even though she knows that her husband Roger is home watching football on TV and thinks she has gone to school reunion. Shirley finds a leotard for her aerobics class and tells Jane she will phone later and ring four times. If Mark is still there, Jane is not to answer the phone. That way Shirley will know that it is not yet safe to return home.

After Shirley leaves, a helmeted figure in black leather motorbike gear comes in the back door. It is Mark who has come to the house on his motorbike. Jane sees the helmeted figure and screams. Mark quickly takes off his helmet and says, “It’s only me.” When Mark takes off the rest of his motorbike gear Jane sees that he is wearing a suit with black tie. She asks why he is dressed so formally and he tells her he assumed he had been invited to a party. Then Jane realises that Mark has no idea what she really wants from him. Her heart sinks, but she decides to make the best of it.

Mark notices a framed photo of Gilbert (Shirley’s husband) on the desk and concludes from the inscription, (“To my Darling Wife—from Gilbert”), that Jane is a married woman. Appalled that she would invite a young man home to dinner, he says he didn’t know that she was happily married. When Jane tells him she is not happily married to the man in the photograph, Mark’s condemnation turns straight away to sympathy. Jane lets him believe that she is terrified of her husband and begins to play the suffering, injured party. Mark hags her closely in an attempt to comfort her. Jane enjoys the close contact, but he soon releases her. She throws Gilbert’s photo in the wastepaper basket to show Mark that he has no rival. But instead of getting romantic, Mark suggests that they have dinner.

After they have gone to the dining-room the front door slams, but Mark is not paying much attention to her, she goes on to say that the fog makes him feel locked out of the house, Mark and Jane come into the kitchen. He suggests that they have a drink first and he opens the champagne that Shirley left for Jane and Mark. Helga drinks her glass of champagne fast and goes upstairs with the bottle, telling Gilbert she is going to wait for him in the master bedroom. Gilbert notices his framed photograph in the wastepaper basket and, deeply insulted, he puts it back on the desk. Then he goes into the kitchen.

Mark and Jane come into the living-room because Mark is certain he has heard voices belonging, perhaps, to burglars. Frustrated that Mark is not paying much attention to her, Jane suggests that Mark has met Gilbert, Jane objects. Nevertheless, Mark rushes outside to get his bike started after urging Jane to join him. After Gilbert succeeds in pushing Mark out the front door he runs upstairs to join Helga.

Jane comes out of the dining-room looking for Mark. After being locked out of the house, Mark has run around the back of the house and come in through the kitchen door. He tells Jane they can’t stay there any longer because he doesn’t want her husband to find her there. Not knowing that Mark has met Gilbert, Jane objects. Nevertheless, Mark rushes outside to get his bike started after urging Jane to join him.

Gilbert, who thinks he has heard someone in the house, races downstairs and comes face to face with Jane. They stare at each other, frozen like statues. Then Gilbert asks her if she has just arrived and Jane, not wanting Gilbert to know the truth, says yes. Gilbert tells her that some young “devil” came to the house to seduce his wife. He wonders why Jane is there because Shirley always goes to her aerobics class on Friday. Jane lies again telling Gilbert that she forgot about the class. She goes on to say that the fog out-
side has become so thick that she is afraid to drive and should perhaps spend the night in one of Gilbert’s bedrooms.

Mark throws open the kitchen door and asks Jane if she is coming. She pretends to Gilbert that she doesn’t know Mark which makes Mark think she has gone mad. Nevertheless, Mark insists that he is not leaving without her. Gilbert is pleased that Mark wants to take Jane with him and he encourages them both to go. Mark leaves through the kitchen expecting Jane to follow him.

After Mark has gone, Helga comes down the stairs to find Gilbert. Jane smiles knowingly at Gilbert, sensing that he is involved with the sextet. But Gilbert sticks to his story that Helga is the upstairs cleaning lady. After Jane leaves to join Mark outside, Gilbert scolds Helga for letting Jane see her. Intent on seducing Gilbert, Helga ignores this. She kisses Gilbert passionately and tries to take off his clothes. The front doorbell rings. Thinking that it could be his wife, he rushes Helga out to the kitchen. Then he races through the hall to open the front door, but no one is there. Roger (Jane’s husband), who rang the doorbell, has gone to the side of the house and enters the living-room through the French windows. He comes in with a small bunch of flowers for Shirley expecting her to be there.

When Gilbert sees that no one is at the front door, he returns to the living-room and is taken aback when he sees Roger whom he has never met. Each of the two men soon figures out who the other one is. Roger, however, successfully avoids questions as to why he is there and why he has brought flowers. Helga walks in from the kitchen and the two men turn to stone. When Gilbert recovers, he again introduces Helga as the cleaning lady. He says Helga is leaving to visit her mother in Düsseldorf as soon as she finishes her work. Roger points out that the fog is getting too thick for Helga to fly, and he uses the fog as his excuse for coming to Gilbert’s house. He says he remembered that Jane had once told him where Gilbert and Shirley live, so he stopped by to avoid driving in the fog.

At this point both men are sceptical about each other’s stories. Roger asks if he can stay until the fog blows over. Eager to get Roger out of the way, Gilbert offers Roger one of his four bedrooms. Roger asks Gilbert not to say anything to his wife Jane about his spending the night because she might get the wrong idea. He promises, in exchange, to say nothing to Shirley, Gilbert’s wife, about the “cleaning lady”. Roger and Helga go upstairs to their bedrooms and Gilbert goes out into the hall to lock the front door.

When Gilbert returns to the living-room, Jane and Mark walk in through the back door. Jane explains that they had to come back because of the thick fog and that they will have to spend the night in one of Gilbert’s bedrooms. Mark insists, to Jane’s dismay that they must have separate bedrooms. Since Helga is in the master bedroom, and Roger is sleeping in another one, Gilbert directs Mark and Jane to the two remaining bedrooms, saying that he will sleep on the sofa in the living-room.

Jane and Mark go upstairs to their separate bedrooms while Gilbert puts a blanket on the sofa. When he thinks everyone has gone to bed, Gilbert takes off his shoes and tiptoes up the stairs to join Helga. As he reaches the top of the stairs Jane appears, and Gilbert, in shock, almost faints. Jane says she thinks she should telephone Roger so he does not expect her to come home. Gilbert quickly lies to Jane, telling her that Roger phoned earlier and said he got caught in the fog and was spending the night somewhere. Jane goes contentedly back to her bedroom and Gilbert goes downstairs. When Jane is out of sight, Gilbert again tiptoes towards the stairs. The phone rings. Gilbert stops and glares at it. It stops ringing after the fourth ring. For the third time he slowly tiptoes up the stairs smiling hopefully. Jane appears again and this time Gilbert practically falls to the bottom of the stairs. Jane asks if that was the telephone. Gilbert says yes, but he was not able to answer it, Jane, assuming that the call was from Shirley, says “good” and returns to her bedroom. Now, completely fed up, Gilbert returns, wearily, to the sofa and turns out the lights.

Act II

The next morning Shirley enters the house and sees Helga running downstairs into the kitchen. She has no idea who Helga is. Then Gilbert runs down the stairs and Shirley, who thought he was in Düsseldorf, says, “What the hell are you doing here?” He explains about the flight being grounded, and Shirley wonders if he found out about Jane and Mark. Shirley really spent the night alone at Roger’s house, but she tells Gilbert she had to stay at a girlfriend’s house because of the fog. Gilbert says a young chap came round who was very enamoured of her.

Helga comes out of the kitchen with coffee and toast, announcing that she is going to have her breakfast upstairs in Gilbert’s bed. Thinking that Shirley is the cleaning lady, Helga tells her she can start her work in the kitchen. Then Helga disappears upstairs. Shirley demands to know who Helga is and “what the hell” she is doing in their bedroom. Gilbert tells Shirley that Helga got caught in the fog and rang their doorbell last night in desperation. He goes on to say that she was looking for a cleaning job, so he hired her. Now he admits that it was a mistake and goes upstairs to “fire” Helga.

When Gilbert is gone, Jane comes in through the front door and explains to Shirley that she is returning from fetching her car which she left down the road. She tells Shirley how everything went wrong last night because Gilbert turned up unexpectedly with Helga. Shirley says she thought everything was okay after giving Jane the telephone signal of four rings and no one answered. She also tells Jane the same lie she told Gilbert about staying with a girlfriend overnight. She doesn’t want Jane to find out that she really went to Jane’s house to find Roger (Jane’s husband) with whom she has been having an affair. Shirley is surprised and relieved when Jane tells her that Gilbert slept on the couch, not with Helga. Jane is happy that Gilbert does not know about her and Mark. “No,” Shirley exclaims. “He thinks Mark came here to meet me!”
Mark comes downstairs barelegged, wearing only a short dressing gown. Still in the belief that Jane is Gilbert’s wife, Mark assumes that Shirley is a neighbour who just popped in for a visit. Gilbert comes downstairs and Jane takes Mark into the kitchen for breakfast leaving Shirley and Gilbert alone.

Gilbert tells Shirley he is hurt that she would invite another man for dinner while he was supposed to be slaving away in Düsseldorf. Then he tells her that Mark said she was terrified of him. She says she should be terrified of her for bringing Helga to their home. Finally, Gilbert agrees to go upstairs and try to get rid of Helga.

Just as Mark enters from the kitchen to collect dirty dishes from the dining-room, Roger comes down the stairs in his overcoat so as not to reveal that he is wearing only a T-shirt and underpants. The two men come face to face and are at first silent as each one wonders who the other one is. Roger tells Mark he is there because of the fog. Mark, naively, tells Roger quite honestly that he is there to see Gilbert’s wife. Mark leaves the perplexed Roger to clear up the dishes in the dining-room. Shirley comes out of the kitchen with a mug of coffee. She sees Roger for the first time and panics. Roger explains in hushed tones that he came to pay her a surprise visit last night and that he thinks Gilbert was much too concerned about the “cleaning lady” to work out that he came to the house to see Shirley. She explains that she didn’t return home from her aerobics class because of the fog. Instead, she went to his house to surprise him and ended up spending the night there. When Roger starts questioning Shirley as to why Mark came to the house, she quickly changes the subject to protect Jane and tells him to go upstairs, get dressed and leave.

Gilbert comes downstairs with Helga who is now wearing Gilbert’s raincoat over her Lufthansa uniform. Roger and Shirley leap apart when they see them. Anxious to keep the focus off Roger and her, Shirley asks why Helga is wearing such a very long coat. In turn, Gilbert keeps the focus off Helga by insisting that Roger should have breakfast before leaving. Roger says he would like two lightly boiled eggs, so Shirley drags him to the dining-room to wait for his breakfast. She returns to the living-room to confront Gilbert about Helga. To Helga’s surprise, Shirley tells her that she is Gilbert’s wife. The shocked Helga tells Shirley that she is not the cleaning lady. Helga takes off her coat, revealing her Lufthansa uniform and says she wants to go home. She runs through the French windows out into the garden to her car.

With Helga out of the house, Shirley and Gilbert begin accusing each other again of being unfaithful, he with a flight attendant and she with a young man. In order to explain why Mark came to the house and to clear herself of any blame, Shirley tells Gilbert the truth about Mark coming to see Jane and about lending the house to Jane for the night. Gilbert laughs out loud because he can’t wait to see Jane’s expression when she sees Roger there. His laughter irritates Shirley and she regrets telling Gilbert about Jane. She says that whatever happens he had better not tell Jane who told him the truth.

Roger comes into the living-room to ask about the eggs, and Shirley ushers him quickly back into the dining-room, assuring him that she will bring him the eggs. Gilbert chuckles again at Shirley’s attempt to keep Roger from finding out that Jane is in the house, but he stops laughing when Shirley reminds him that he still has not explained how Helga happened to be there. Jane comes in from the kitchen and Shirley tells her that she really needs to leave. Gilbert explodes with laughter at Shirley’s attempts to get Jane to leave before Roger finds her there. Jane goes upstairs to get her handbag before leaving and Shirley races into the kitchen to boil Roger’s eggs, but first she orders Gilbert to keep Jane out of the dining-room where Roger is. Gilbert laughs again. His laughter stops abruptly, however, when Helga comes in from the garden and tells him she can’t get her car started. He agrees to have a look at her car, but before they can go, Mark comes in from the kitchen and sees Helga in her uniform for the first time. He says he didn’t recognize her at first with her clothes on. Gilbert tells Mark to put his trousers on and go home. Mark goes upstairs and Gilbert takes Helga outside to have a look at her car.

After taking the boiled eggs to Roger in the dining-room, Shirley goes upstairs thinking Roger and Jane are safely separated. But when Jane comes downstairs the dining-room door opens and Roger looks out. Jane and Roger both freeze in astonishment. Jane finds out that Roger came to the house last night and she asks for an explanation. Roger says he went for a drive after the football game, got caught in the fog and found refuge in Gilbert and Shirley’s house. Roger assumes Jane has just popped in for a visit. He excuses himself to return to finish his breakfast in the dining-room.

Shirley comes downstairs carrying an empty champagne bottle. Jane tells Shirley that Roger is in the dining-room eating breakfast and that she intends to ask him what his real reason was for coming to the house. Shirley asks Jane not to make a scene. They agree that Roger must not talk to Mark.

Gilbert and Helga come in from the garden, having failed to repair the car. Shirley waves the empty champagne bottle in Gilbert’s face and asks him how it got in the bedroom. He says he has no idea, but Helga tells her bluntly that it was her and Gilbert’s aperitif. Gilbert asks Jane to take Helga into the kitchen for a coffee so he can have a word with Shirley in private. Alone with his wife, Gilbert tells her truthfully that he spent the night alone on the sofa. Then he lies, telling her that the real reason Roger came to the house was to meet Helga in secret and that he lent the house to Roger for the night. Shirley knows, of course, that this is a lie, but she decides it is best to let Gilbert think that she believes him.

Mark comes downstairs fully dressed. Shirley tells him that he and Jane must not leave together. Mark doesn’t understand why not. Roger walks in from the dining-room, saying to Gilbert that his wife is a very good cook. Shirley impulsively pulls Mark towards the hall telling him that it is time for him to go, but he escapes from her clutches. A very confused young man, he tries to work out why Roger refers to Shirley as Gilbert’s wife. Both Gilbert and Roger laugh at the confused lad who finally
figures out who is married to whom. Roger asks Mark if he
knows Jane. Now that Mark knows that Jane is Roger’s
wife, he lies to keep Roger from finding out what has been
going on. He says he saw Jane this morning for the first
time. Again Shirley urges Mark to go. This time he follows
her advice, but stops when Jane and Helga come in from
the kitchen.

Both Shirley and Jane try to get Mark to leave. Shirley even
gives him a hefty push and he goes flying out into the hall.
Then Jane tells Roger to go and get dressed so they can go
home together. Now Gilbert tries again to get rid of Helga,
telling her that Roger can give her a lift. Helga, however, is
more interested in going with sexy Mark who now comes in
from the hall dressed in his leather motorcycle gear. Gilbert is
jealous of Helga’s apparent attraction to the young man. Rog-
er, now fully dressed, comes downstairs. He has been doing
a lot of thinking and now suspects that Mark was having dinner
with his wife Jane last night. Gilbert comes to Mark’s rescue
by saying that Mark was having dinner with the neighbour
lady who is famous for having toyboys. Mark protests that he
is not a toyboy and runs out into the garden.

Helga kisses Gilbert good-bye, saying she will see him
again on Lufthansa, but Shirley insists that next time Gil-
bert will be travelling British Airways! When Helga hears
Mark’s motorbike starting up she runs out into the garden
so she can go with him. Now Jane again tries to persuade
Roger to leave with her. She pulls him towards the
French windows. He says that he doesn’t understand why
she came this morning. She explains quite sensibly that
she was lonely, having been on her own all night in their
great big empty house. She winks at Shirley and leaves
for home with Roger.

Shirley starts searching for her leotard that she wore
during her aerobics class last night. She is horrified
when she realises that she must have left it at Roger’s
house after spending the night there. Gilbert asks her if
she believes what he told her earlier about Roger and
Helga having an affair. She kisses him lightly and re-
plies that she can imagine no earthly reason why he
would just make up a story like that. She starts to go to
the kitchen. Gilbert, thinking she has believed his
lie, laughs to himself. Then his smile fades as he sud-
denly realises why Roger was there. “Shirley!” he calls
out as he races out to the kitchen.

Curtain

MULTIPLE CHOICE EXERCISE

1. Shirley lends her house to Jane so she can meet there with (a. Gilbert, b. Mark, c. Roger).
2. Mark comes to the house by (a. car, b. train, c. motorbike).
3. Mark thinks that Jane’s husband (a. loves her, b. mistreats her, c. wants a divorce).
4. Jane throws Gilbert’s photograph (a. out the window, b. against the wall, c. into a wastepaper basket).
5. Gilbert is having an affair with (a. Shirley, b. Jane, c. Helga).
6. Helga is (a. German, b. Italian, c. French).
8. Every Friday Shirley goes to (a. the cinema, b. her knitting class, c. her aerobics class).
9. Gilbert tells everyone that Helga is (a. the new cleaning lady, b. an interior decorator, c. his nurse).
10. Shirley spends the night at (a. a hotel, b. Roger’s house, c. her mother’s).
11. Shirley returns home in (a. the morning, b. the afternoon, c. the evening).
12. Helga thinks Shirley is (a. the cleaning lady, b. Roger’s wife, c. a neighbour).
15. Gilbert finally realises that Shirley may be having an affair with (a. George, b. Roger, c. Mark).

Answer Key: (1. b, 2. c, 3. b, 4. c, 5. c, 6. a, 7. c, 8. c, 9. a, 10. b, 11. a, 12. a, 13. b, 14. c, 15. b)