

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

presents

BIRTHDAY SUITE



A Comedy by Robin Hawdon

Premiere on 26 November, 2009

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 23, 24 and 25 November

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

**Matinee Performances at 11.00 Hours on Tuesday and
Fridays beginning 1 December**

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Dear Friends of The English Theatre of Hamburg,

BIRTHDAY SUITE, the hilarious British comedy by Robin Hawdon, is the second production of our 2009-2010 Season. The play will premiere on 26 November, 2009, preceded by previews at reduced prices on 23, 24 and 25 November. The critics wrote:

“...all the fundamental requirements of lively theatre...with an eye for the ridiculous and a strong sense of the farcical potential of traditional English reticence.” The Guardian

“...an inexhaustibly comic repertoire of expressive gesture that would do honour to Feydeau.” The Times

TICKET RESERVATIONS FOR THIS PLAY HAVE ALREADY BEGUN. See the cover of this publication for performance times. Please make your reservations well in advance to avoid disappointment. The script of the play can be purchased at <http://www.stageplays.com/index.htm>

About the Author:

Robin Hawdon was born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and trained as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. His acting career spanned over twenty years, and included many leading appearances in London’s West End, on television and in films. In 1982 he gave up his acting career to concentrate on writing and directing. Over the years he has had his plays performed at the Hampstead Theatre, the Salzburg, King’s Lynn, and Edinburgh Festivals, and on various national and foreign tours. His comedy, **THE MATING GAME**, ran for eighteen months at the Apollo Theatre, London and has been produced all over the world. Other plays such as **THE HERO**, **THERE’S A SMALL HOTEL**, **THE ROARING FORTIES**, **DON’T ROCK THE BOAT**, **REVENGE** and **BIRTHDAY SUITE** have been produced on tour in Britain and abroad. In 1989 his adaptation of Kingsley Amis’s Booker Prize-winning novel, **THE OLD DEVILS**, was produced on tour in the UK and in the USA. In March 1991 his comedy, **DON’T DRESS FOR DINNER** (produced at The English Theatre of Hamburg in 2002), opened at the Apollo Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue, and ran for six years in London, as well as playing in many other countries. His comedy, **PERFECT WEDDING** (produced here in 2005), has also played around the world. Mr. Hawdon’s first novel, **A RUSTLE IN THE GRASS**, was published in 1985 and sold over sixty thousand copies. From 1983—1986 he was Theatre Director at the Theatre Royal Bath. Recently his play, **GOD AND STEPHEN HAWKING**, about the advance of modern science and its effect on traditional philosophical thinking, caused a stir in the national press when Stephen Hawking himself objected to being portrayed on stage, despite the fact that the play was regarded by most people as a tribute to Hawking’s life and career. Robin’s wife of forty years, Sheila, is a psychotherapist and writer. They have two daughters, four grandchildren, and homes in Bath, the South of France and Australia.

About the Play:

BIRTHDAY SUITE was first produced at the Redgrave Theatre, Farnham in 1983. Subsequently there were two national tours and many provincial productions. It has also been produced in France, Germany, Scandinavia, Italy, Holland, Poland, South Africa and the United States. The fast moving comedy takes place in two adjoining hotel bedrooms. Geoff Tippett tells his friend Bob, who is unhappily married, that he has arranged a special birthday treat for him. The treat is a hotel room for the night, complete with champagne, a double bed and a very attractive girl named Mimi. There is, however, no Mimi. Geoff really wants Bob to reconcile with his wife, Liz, and has, therefore, told her to come to the hotel room for a quiet dinner with him (Geoff). The goal is to bring husband and wife together so they can talk in a romantic setting and hopefully work out their problems. Of course everything imaginable goes wrong. Bob expects Mimi, a prostitute, but, because of a room mix-up, instead meets a shy young woman named Kate whom he believes is Mimi. Kate thinks Bob is Dick, a computer-agency date she has never seen. The real Dick is a psychiatrist who has been shown into the wrong room so when Bob’s wife, Liz, appears he thinks she is Kate. Add a connecting door between the two

rooms which has mistakenly been left unlocked and confusion reigns as the foursome try to sort themselves out, aided by the temperamental Italian waiter, Tony, until Bob provides a surprising solution.

**Summary of
BIRTHDAY SUITE**

Preface: There are many twists and turns in this comedy. For a better understanding of the following summary it may help to keep in mind the reality that the playwright starts with: Bob and Liz are having marital problems. Their friend, Geoff Tippett (who never actually appears in the play), wants to bring the two back together again so he tricks them into meeting in a hotel room where he hopes they will spend a romantic evening together and reconcile. Since it is Bob's birthday, Geoff tells Bob that he has arranged a rendezvous for him in the hotel room with a sexy girl named Mimi. He tells Liz, on the other hand, that he would like her to meet him (Geoff) in the same hotel room for dinner. Bob comes to the hotel room expecting to meet Mimi; and Liz comes to the same hotel room expecting to meet Geoff, an old friend. What Bob and Liz do not know as the play begins is that another couple are planning to meet on the same evening in the adjoining room. This couple, Kate and Dick, have never seen each other before, but a computer dating agency called "Soulmates Unlimited" has selected them as two people who are well matched for each other.

ACT I

Time: Around 8.00 p.m.

Place: Two adjoining bedrooms in a modern, medium-class, city hotel.

Geoff Tippett, a friend of Bob's, paid for the room for Bob's birthday and told him that he hired Mimi, a call girl, to join Bob so he could relax and forget his marital problems with his wife, Liz. Tony, an Italian waiter, shows Bob into one of the hotel rooms and points out the dresser, mini-bar, bathroom and a bed that can be lifted up and concealed in the wall. Tony tells Bob that the door to the adjoining room is locked.

While Bob is washing up in the bathroom, Tony shows Kate into the adjoining room and tells her he will bring the man she is expecting to the room as soon as he arrives. Kate has arranged through a computer dating agency to meet a psychiatrist named Dick. She is nervous about this blind date and wants to go to the bathroom to freshen up. Tony tells her where the bathroom is, but she misunderstands him and thinks he is referring to the door that connects her room with the room Bob is in. After Tony leaves, Kate opens this door and discovers, instead of a bathroom, an entire hotel room complete with a bed and a bottle of champagne. She concludes that Dick, the psychiatrist, is really only interested in drinking and sex. Bob walks out of the bathroom and assumes that Kate is Mimi, the call girl Geoff supposedly paid for! Kate believes that Bob is Dick, the psychiatrist who was chosen as a perfect match for her.

Kate and Bob converse without suspecting that they are talking to the wrong person. Bob confesses to Kate that she

is not what he expected. She tells him the bed seems a little obvious at this early stage of their relationship. After all, she says, what does Bob think this relationship is all about, a quick drink and then into bed? When Bob says, "Yes," Kate throws her drink in his face and storms into the other room through the connecting door that Tony had said was locked.

Shocked by Kate's behaviour, Bob goes to the door, looks into the other room and sees a table set for dinner. Kate assumes that Bob arranged for dinner to be served, but Bob is beginning to realize that there is something terribly wrong. He asks Kate which room Tony showed her into and she tells him the one they are presently in. Bob tells Kate he thinks there has been a case of mistaken identity.

Kate does not understand and begins to cry because she thinks her computer date is a man who wants her only for sex. She yells at Bob to go away and he retreats into the other room where he tries to figure out what has happened. Suddenly he realizes, after all the comments Kate has made, that she was expecting a man from a computer dating agency and mistook him for that man. That would also explain why she was so upset when he mistook her for a prostitute. Bob's problem now is that he likes Kate and wants to spend the evening with her, not with a prostitute he thinks is due to arrive any minute. He decides to ask Tony, the waiter, to help him with a plan he has worked out so he can spend his time with Kate. Bob wants to go back into Kate's room, make up with her and let her continue to believe that he is her computer date. When Dick, the real computer date, comes, Tony is to let him into Bob's room so he will think that Mimi is his computer date. Tony goes into the corridor to wait for Dick.

Before rejoining Kate, Bob remembers that he left his bag in the bathroom. The moment after he goes into the bathroom for the bag, Tony enters the room with Dick. Bob is now trapped in the bathroom with his overnight bag. Dick is puzzled about finding champagne, which he has not ordered, in the room. Tony explains that it is on the house. When Dick asks why the lady is not there yet, Tony tells him that someone is coming, but not the lady he is expecting. He tells Dick the first lady changed her mind and is sending a friend named Mimi instead. Dick protests, saying he chose his lady from hundreds of others, but Tony assures Dick that all ladies are the same underneath.

While Tony is showing Dick the mini-bar, Bob crawls out of the bathroom with his bag but loses it on his way to the connecting door. Tony pushes Dick into the bathroom and, seeing the bag on the floor, throws it in the bathroom and slams the door. In a panic, Bob whispers to Tony that the bag belongs to him, not Dick, but Tony tells Bob it is too late and waves him into the other room.

In the other room now, Bob pleads with Kate to give him another chance. She assures Bob that she is not the nym-

phomaniac he seemed to take her for, and tells him that his behaviour was not what she would expect from a psychiatrist. Knowing now that the person he is pretending to be is a psychiatrist, Bob realizes that tricking Kate is not going to be easy. Kate says she will go into the bathroom to tidy up and then return to start all over again with him. Believing the bathroom to be in the adjoining room where she went before, Kate starts for the connecting door. Bob yells out, "No!" just in time to keep her from meeting the real Dick next door. He leads her into the bathroom in their room and then sits down to pour himself a drink.

Meanwhile, next door, Tony enters to set the table for dinner. He jumps when Liz, Bob's wife, comes in the room unexpectedly. Tony thinks she is Mimi and tells her to take off her coat and get on with her job. Liz is shocked. She tells him to do his job and leave her to look after herself. Confused, Tony leaves to get dinner menus. Liz looks around the room. She sees Kate's handbag by the phone and wonders why it is there.

Dick comes out of the bathroom and introduces himself to Liz. They quickly discover that there has been a mix up but do not understand how it happened. Liz says she was supposed to meet Geoff, but when she arrived at the hotel she was given a note saying, "Sorry, can't make it, but Tony will look after you. Have a lovely evening. Geoff." Dick tells her that Tony is the waiter. He, Dick, came expecting to meet a girl named Kate, but according to Tony, Kate sent a Mimi to meet him instead. Liz assures Dick she is not Mimi but that she is in the right room because it is booked in Geoff's name. Dick begins to wonder if he is in the wrong room and if Tony made a mistake by bringing him there. He tells Liz he thinks Geoff must have been there because there is a man's overnight bag in the bathroom. Liz shows him the woman's handbag she found as well. They are unable to solve the mystery so they decide to sit down and enjoy a glass of champagne. When Dick asks who Geoff is, Liz tells him he is a friend of her husband, Bob. She explains that her marriage with Bob is on the rocks.

Dick confesses he went to a computer dating agency to find a partner because, although he is a very good psychiatrist, he is hopeless when it comes to his own personal relationships. Liz says she is sorry his date did not show up, but Dick does not mind because he is enjoying himself thoroughly with her. They both decide to make the most of the evening and, lifting their champagne glasses, they propose a toast to Kate and Mimi, wherever they are.

When Tony returns with menus, Liz asks him why Geoff is not there. Tony, who still thinks Liz is Mimi, tells her to stop asking questions and get on with her job. Liz is outraged by Tony's reaction and warns him that he had better give her some answers fast. Tony is becoming as confused as the rest of them, but, keeping his agreement with Bob, he assures Liz and Dick that they are both in the right room. When asked who the handbag and overnight bag belong to, Tony tells them not to worry. They should stop asking ques-

tions and enjoy themselves. Liz and Dick accept Tony's suggestion for the time being and order dinner.

Next door Kate discovers that she left her bag in the other room and, before Bob can stop her, she goes through the connecting door and is surprised to see Liz and Dick. Kate apologizes for interrupting and explains that she left her bag in that room. Tony hands her the bag and, in an effort to protect Bob, says that her "gentleman" said they would not be needing that room so he let these other people use it. Dick offers Kate a glass of champagne and asks if her friend would like one too. Kate turns toward the other room and calls out, "Dick!" Bob is silent, but the real Dick answers, "Yes." Kate thinks it is an odd coincidence that the man she thinks is her computer date has the same name as the man with Liz. Bob has been hiding, but when he hears his wife's voice, he peers around the door frame to see if it is really her. He is shocked. Kate excuses herself, but before she can go, Liz asks her if she is Mimi. When she says she is not, Tony tells Liz she is Mimi. Liz protests that she is not Mimi, and Tony replies, "Two Dicks and no Mimis—I'm going crazy!"

Kate returns to Bob, and Tony soon comes in from the corridor to take their orders for dinner. Bob demands to know from Tony how "that woman" got into the other room. Tony does not know but assumes that Geoff Tippett sent her. At first Bob says Geoff could not have done that, but then it occurs to him that Geoff may very well have sent Liz along without telling him in an effort to bring husband and wife together for a reconciliation. Kate becomes suspicious and asks Bob what his connection with the woman next door is. Bob lies and, still pretending to be Dick, the psychiatrist, tells her she is one of his patients who has been following him. After Tony takes their orders for dinner and leaves, Bob suddenly realizes that his whole plan could be blown apart if Liz finds his overnight bag which he left in the bathroom next door. He must get the bag so he tells Kate he has to leave but will be right back.

Dick has left Liz but soon returns after making an inquiry in the lobby. He tells her he has just checked with the register and discovered he is in the wrong room after all. He is supposed to be next door. Before they can work out the puzzle, Tony enters pushing a dinner trolley covered with a large tablecloth. Unknown to Tony and the others, Bob is concealed on the lower part of the trolley by the tablecloth. While Liz and Dick are taking their places at the table, the trolley moves seemingly by itself towards the bathroom. Bob appears from beneath the trolley and slips into the bathroom to get his bag. The bewildered Tony retrieves the trolley and, when he (Bob) starts to crawl out of the bathroom with his bag, he sees the trolley disappearing out of reach. Tony finishes his work and wheels the trolley out to the corridor, closing the door behind him. Bob remains trapped in the bathroom.

Dick is still so preoccupied with how he got put in the wrong room that, without realizing what he is doing, he puts two large spoonfuls of ginger in his champagne and

shakes a lot of salt on his melon. He takes a bite, chokes on it and reaches for his champagne to wash down the melon. The ginger in the drink is so hot he turns red, spits out the champagne and clutches his throat. Staggering to his feet, he runs into the bathroom for some water but quickly returns, white faced, and says there is a man in the bathroom who is trying to climb out of the window. Just as Liz is about to go to the bathroom, a strange figure appears. It is Bob with a bristly beard round his jaw, a turban made from a towel round his head and sunglasses on his nose. He has his overnight bag under one arm. In a heavy Indian accent he says he is sorry to disturb them but he is an inspector who is checking to see that everything is sanitary. He quickly goes into the corridor and, a moment later, appears next door where Kate, frightened by his disguise, screams and runs into the bathroom. Tony enters and, seeing a strange figure pounding on the bathroom door while Kate is screaming inside, he picks up a champagne bottle and smashes it over Bob's head! Bob collapses on the floor.

ACT II

In one room Liz and Dick are recovering from the shock of an intruder. In the other, Bob is holding his fake beard while Kate fans him with his fake turban and Tony asks if everything is all right. Bob starts to worry again about why his wife is next door, but Kate persuades him to relax and enjoy his meal.

Tony goes next door and Liz asks him to tell the man and woman in the other room that she and Dick do not want to be disturbed. After Tony leaves, Liz strokes Dick's brow causing him to react nervously. When Liz pulls the bed down from the wall Dick starts shaking all over. She suggests that he lie down.

Next door Bob hears the noise as the bed hits the floor and asks Tony, who has returned to serve dinner, about the sound. Tony says it is the bed and that the people next door do not want to be disturbed. The thought that another man might be going to bed with his wife drives Bob crazy. He asks Kate to forgive him and strides to the connecting door, throws it open and enters the other room where Liz and Dick are by now reclining on the bed. Tony watches from the doorway.

Bob is furious. He demands that Liz and Dick stop whatever it is they are doing and tells his wife, Liz, he is sorry for causing the whole mess. But Liz pretends not to recognize her husband, which causes Bob to go into a frenzy. Dick gets angry when Bob calls Liz "darling," and threatens to have him removed if he does not leave. Bob refuses to leave and goes berserk when Liz continually insists she does not know who he is. He jumps on the bed and hurls pillows and bed clothes around. Kate looks in the room to see what is going on. Dick and Tony try to get Bob under control. After a struggle Bob stops fighting and agrees to go back to his room quietly, but, just before he leaves, he warns Liz that he has not finished with her yet.

After Bob and Kate have returned to their room, Bob decides to tell Kate the truth, that the Dick she arranged to meet through "Soulmates Unlimited" is the man in the other room. He apologizes to Kate for deceiving her and suggests that she should go and meet him because he does not know she is here. Then the real Dick can choose between her and Bob's wife, Liz.

Kate bravely enters Liz and Dick's room and tells Dick the truth. He does not know what to do since he has been enjoying the company of Liz. Liz offers to go to the hotel restaurant while they work things out. Left alone, Kate and Dick find that they have little of interest to say to each other and Kate quickly concludes that she would prefer to return to Bob. She asks if Dick would like her to tell Liz to return to him, but Dick says he is not sure that is best because he is beginning to suspect that Liz really is Bob's wife. Dick concludes ironically that he and Kate need to get Bob and Liz together in order to break them apart. Dick will send Liz a message to return and Kate will trick Bob into confronting his wife by telling him that Mimi has just arrived and that he has to deal with her. Dick phones Tony and asks him to send Liz back to the room. Then he leaves the room to wait and see what happens. Kate returns to Bob and tells him Mimi is on her way up to the room next door and he must go over there and receive her. After Bob has gone through the connecting door, Dick comes into Kate's room from the corridor.

In the other room there is a knock on the door and a nervous Bob goes to answer it. Mimi stands there with an exotic hair-do, large sunglasses and a tight dress. He lets Mimi in and she apologizes in her French accent for being late. She flirts and tries to lure him to the bed, but Bob resists her because he is afraid his wife will come in any minute. When Mimi lies on the bed someone knocks on the door and Bob fears it is his wife Liz. He quickly lifts the bed up into the wall with Mimi on it. It is, however, only Tony at the door with two cognacs that Bob ordered earlier. There is a muffled cry from the wall and Tony asks Bob who that is. Bob lets down the bed and tells Tony that it is Mimi. Mimi says "Hi." When Tony tells Bob that the other lady, Liz, is on her way up, Bob pleads with him to find a way to stop his wife from coming to the room until he can get rid of Mimi. Tony agrees and leaves.

Mimi tries again to seduce Bob but Bob has decided by now that he is too old for the Mimis of the world and too old to start a grand passion with Kate next door. He tells Mimi he wishes he had stayed home with his wife and never become involved in the mess he is in. Mimi understands how Bob feels and tells him she will leave after using the bathroom. Bob is so grateful to her that he kisses her and says, "I'll never forget this." Then he dashes out to the corridor after which Mimi says, "You're dead right you won't." She takes off her sunglasses and her wig, and is revealed as Liz! Liz takes her things and vanishes into the bathroom. Bob rushes back in from the corridor and calls urgently to "Mimi" in the bathroom to hurry up. Then he goes to the connecting

door, knocks, and asks if he can have a word with Kate. Dick opens the door and, seeing that Bob is alone and calm, stands aside and lets Kate go through.

Bob tells Kate that she is the nicest thing that has happened to him for years and, if possible, he would like to continue the relationship, but he has to go down to the restaurant (where he thinks his wife is) and finally have everything out with Liz. Kate gives Bob a kiss and, as she lies on the bed, she tells him she will wait for him there. With Mimi in the bathroom he tries to persuade Kate not to wait but she refuses. There is a knock on the door. Thinking it must be his wife this time, Bob raises the bed into the wall with a screaming Kate on it. When he opens the door and discovers that it is again just Tony he shouts at him. Dick charges in, having heard the shouting, and wants to know where Kate is. Bob tells Dick that Kate is in the bathroom, and begs Dick to go away and let him sort everything out. Dick leaves but tells Bob this is his last chance. Next door Dick picks up his umbrella and goes out into the corridor.

Tony tells Bob that he cannot find Liz and asks where Mimi is. Bob tells him she is in the bathroom but Tony hears a muffled cry coming from the wall again. Bob lets down the bed to reveal Kate. In the meantime Liz has removed her disguise completely and comes out of the bathroom. Both men stare at her in astonishment. When Bob asks where Mimi is, Liz takes Mimi's wig from her bag and throws it to Bob saying, "Here." Bob is amazed that his own wife could trick him into believing she was someone else. Tony cannot believe that there is no Mimi and that there never has been one. Liz tells them she got her disguise from a little boutique downstairs and that she pretended to be Mimi so she could test Bob and see how far he would go. She adds that she could tell that it was Bob when he tried to disguise himself as an Indian inspector. When Bob asks her why she is here in the first place, Liz explains that Geoff asked her to come but that he was obviously trying to get her and Bob together. When Liz asks Bob if he really fell for Kate, Tony says that he did. Bob tells Tony to shut up.

Liz finds it naïve of Bob to get involved with a younger woman, but Bob says that if he had had a better time with Liz the past few years he might not have done so. Liz tells

him that if he gives her a better time he might get a better time. Bob should take her out for "naughty nights in hotels" sometimes and not wait for Geoff to set them up. Bob says he did not know that that was what she wanted. Liz admits that she did not know it either until she had a taste of it this evening, but it is very clear to her now that what their marriage needs is adrenaline! Liz suggests that they start now. They have a room to themselves, cognac and a bed. Thinking of a way to prevent Liz from seeing Kate, Bob promises to do what Liz says if she will just go next door and tell Dick that Kate will return to him soon. Liz goes next door to speak to Dick, but, as soon as she goes through the connecting door, Dick comes in from the corridor, waving his umbrella angrily, demanding to know where Kate is. To avoid being hit by the umbrella, Bob ducks into the bathroom and locks the door. Hearing the noise, Liz returns to the room to find out what is going on. Dick tells her that Bob will not come out of the bathroom and tell him where Kate is. Liz asks why he wants to know about Kate, and Dick replies that he thinks it is time they all went back to the beginning and did things as they were meant to do in the first place. Liz agrees and yells at Bob to come out of the bathroom. He yells back, "Not until that madman's left." Tony looks on and says that they are all crazy.

There is a muffled cry from Kate which comes from the wall and they finally realize that she is trapped behind the bed. Dick pulls the bed down and is thrilled to find Kate because he has made up his mind that she is the right girl for him after all. He grabs her by the arm and flings her through the door saying he is taking her home for breakfast at his place.

Liz tells Bob that Dick and Kate have left and that he can now come out of hiding. The bathroom door opens and Bob comes out wearing Mimi's wig, dress and sunglasses. He wiggles past Liz, saying, "Sorry sweetie—you're not my type." Liz explodes with laughter. Tony comes in, sees "Mimi" and pinches "her" on the bottom, saying, "Buona serra, baby!" Bob turns around and looks at Liz for help as he says, "No, wait, no . . .!"

Curtain

MULTIPLE CHOICE EXERCISE

1. Geoff plays a trick on his friends Bob and Liz in an effort to (a. bring them back together, b. confuse them, c. amuse them).
2. Bob comes to the hotel room expecting to meet (a. his boss, b. a prostitute, c. his wife).
3. Kate expects to meet (a. Bob, b. a blind date from a computer dating agency, c. an Italian).
4. At first Bob thinks that Kate is (a. Liz, b. the maid, c. Mimi).
5. Bob asks the room waiter to trick Kate into thinking that he is (a. Dick, b. Tony, c. Geoff).
6. Dick is a (a. computer programmer, b. civil servant, c. psychiatrist).
7. When Tony first meets Liz he thinks she is (a. Mimi, b. Kate, c. the hotel receptionist).
8. In order to escape from the bathroom Bob pretends to be (a. an Indian sanitation inspector, b. a plumber, c. a doctor).
9. To test her husband, Liz pretends to be (a. Kate, b. Mimi, c. a boutique assistant).
10. Dick finally leaves the hotel with (a. Kate, b. Liz, c. Tony).

Answer Key:

1. a, 2. b, 3. b, 4. c, 5. a, 6. c, 7. a, 8. a, 9. b, 10.a

INTERPRETATIVE EXERCISE

1. What is your opinion of computer dating agencies? Should people use such agencies to find a partner or leave finding a partner to chance?
2. How do you feel about the way Geoff got involved in the personal lives of his friends, Liz and Bob? Were their marital problems none of his business or was he justified in interfering the way he did.