

The English Theatre of Hamburg

Established 1976

Presents

FUNNY BUSINESS

by Derek Benfield

STUDY GUIDE

Premiere on 14 November, 2019

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 11, 12 and 13 November

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours

**Matinee Performances Tuesdays and Fridays at 11.30 Hours
beginning 19 November**

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Established in 1976

The English Theatre will premiere **FUNNY BUSINESS** on 14 November, 2019, with the usual preview performances at reduced prices on 11, 12 and 13 November. You can use the cover of this publication to advertise the play in your school or workplace. Bookings have already started. The text of the play may be obtained at theatre@samuelfrench-london.co.uk or amazon.com. Teachers interested in being invited to a dress rehearsal of the play on 10 November at 19:30 should contact marketing@englishtheatre.de

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Derek Benfield (11 March 1926 – 10 March 2009) was a British playwright and actor. He was born in Bradford and educated at Bingley Grammar School. As a playwright, Benfield wrote more than 30 stage plays. They were popular in regional venues and were often performed abroad. Three of his plays have already been produced at The English Theatre of Hamburg: **TOUCH AND GO** (2012), **ANYONE FOR BREAKFAST** (2014) and **DON'T LOSE THE PLACE** (2016). Benfield is well known for his character portrayal as transport company foreman Bill Riley in the UK television series **THE BROTHERS** in the early 1970s. Prior to **THE BROTHERS**, he starred as Frank Skinner in the 1970 cult sci-fi series **TIMESLIP**, broadcast in the UK. Benfield's other television roles included Walter Greenhalgh from **CORONATON STREET** (1961–69), Albert the Clerk from **RUMPOLE OF THE BAILEY** (1978–80), **BREAKAWAY** (1980) and **FIRST OF THE SUMMER WINE** (1988). Benfield once said, "My family is delighted with my success as a playwright, as it helps to prop up my tottering career as an actor."

ABOUT THE PLAY

"A must see for lovers of riotous comedy!" (The Stage) There are many kinds of comedy: satire, romantic comedy, comedy of manners, comedy drama, comedy thriller and more. **FUNNY BUSINESS** is farcical comedy which depends more on situation and plot than on character development. Its main purpose is to entertain. In **FUNNY BUSINESS** the characters are delineated enough to make them interesting, but the plot takes precedence so there is little time to go into personalities in any great depth. The play moves along at a fast pace and its purpose is to provide the audience with two hours of fun.

In **FUNNY BUSINESS** the character Mr Ferris has agreed to look after his sister's second class hotel while she is on holiday. Little does he know that a journalist/critic is coming to evaluate the service in the hotel. Nor has Ferris foreseen that the critic's arrival will coincide with an assortment of other guests who all have guilty secrets they do not wish to reveal. Ferris is caught up in a dizzy round of lies and misunderstandings that lead to several cases of mistaken identity and assumptions which turn out to be false. Despite all of the confusion he continues trying to protect the reputation of the hotel in the eyes of the critic, a task made more difficult by the fact that he does not know which of his guests the critic is! And he doesn't know if it is a man or a woman.

Summary of FUNNY BUSINESS

Time: a Friday evening in the summer

Place: a small hotel deep in the English countryside

Mr Ferris has agreed to manage his sister's hotel while she is on holiday, but he is unqualified for the job. He is asleep on a sofa in the reception area when the phone rings. It is his sister calling to alert him that a hotel critic from the Sunday newspaper will be coming to write and publish a critique about the hotel. Before Ferris can get the critic's name, however, his sister rings off and he cannot call her back because he does not have her number. This news frightens Ferris. He must find out who the critic is and treat him with special care to save the reputation of the hotel.

Henry, who has secretly planned an adulterous affair at the hotel, is waiting for his lady friend to arrive. Suspecting him of being the hotel critic, Ferris apologizes for not having champagne and caviar ready for his arrival. However, when Ferris finds out that Henry has not come to write about the hotel, he questions him as to why he is really there and finds out the truth. Henry, who has already booked the pink honeymoon suite, goes there to wait for his lady friend.

Angela, a confident, attractive businesswoman, arrives and goes to the reception desk. Thinking she is the lady Henry has been waiting for, Ferris sends her up to the honeymoon suite. When she and Henry meet, they each claim the other one is in the wrong room, and they both refuse to move out.

Next, Judy, a shy lady who has come to secretly meet Henry, tells Ferris that a room has been booked for her. When she mentions that her friend booked the honeymoon suite for them, Ferris is shocked, realizing that he has put Angela in the wrong room. He runs upstairs and tells Angela she must move. He brings her downstairs to the reception area and tells her to sit on the couch until he can find her another room. Then he tells Judy to go up to the honeymoon suite.

After Judy gets to the honeymoon suite and meets Henry, she discovers Angela's suitcase on the bed and opens it thinking it belongs to Henry. But when she takes out a frilly night-dress she becomes jealous, certain that Henry has planned to sleep with another woman just because she was late getting to the hotel. Henry protests, but Judy goes downstairs to ask Ferris to put her in another room.

Ferris, however, is not in the reception area. He is in the blue room (not as large or as comfortable as the honeymoon suite) trying to get Mr Johnson, a very old man, to move out so that Angela can occupy the room. Ferris leaves the room after telling Mr Johnson he will give him five minutes to pack and vacate the room. Mr Johnson ignores this demand and goes into the bathroom.

In the reception area Ferris now has two women, Angela and Judy, who are insisting that he find each of them a room. Angela orders him to prepare two large gin and

tonics for her and Judy as they go into the lounge to wait.

Henry comes downstairs and blames Ferris for sending the wrong woman to his room. Ferris tells Henry to go into the lounge and make up with Judy because there is no other place in the hotel to put her. He also explains that he is expecting a man to arrive who will critique the hotel. Henry asks Ferris how he knows the critic is a man, and Ferris suddenly recalls that his sister hung up the phone without mentioning if it was a man or a woman. Ferris again pleads with Henry to go to the lounge and reconcile with Judy while he tries to get Mr Johnson out of the blue room.

While Ferris is gone, Angela comes in from the lounge and asks Henry to tell Ferris when he returns that she will be waiting in the honeymoon suite. She adds that she is not very impressed by the way the hotel is run and will have to make a note of it. It dawns on Henry that Angela must be the critic if she is making notes. He decides to tell Ferris as soon as he sees him, but first he needs to go into the lounge and reconcile with Judy.

In the honeymoon suite Angela notices that someone has opened her case and taken out her night-dress. She puts it back in the case and sits down to wait for Ferris. While she is waiting, Ferris drags Mr Johnson out of the blue room with the intention of coming back for his suitcase later.

Henry and Judy, having reconciled, come out of the lounge with their arms around each other. Ferris brings Mr Johnson downstairs and asks Henry to please help him get the stubborn old man into the lounge. Henry agrees to help, leaving Judy to return to the honeymoon suite to wait for him.

In the honeymoon suite Judy asks Angela why she is there. Angela tells her she is fetching her suitcase and waiting for Ferris to find her another room. Judy, who has a terribly suspicious nature, is sure that Angela is lying, that she is in fact waiting for Henry. Judy angrily leaves the room. When she sees Henry in the reception area she snubs him and goes into the dining room. Ferris comes into the reception area and hears from Henry that Angela is the real journalist. He knows this, he says, because she said she was making notes about the hotel. Ferris panics. He tells Henry that he has just moved Angela to the blue room, and now he has to move her back to the more luxurious honeymoon suite so she will give the hotel a good critique. He convinces Henry to move into the blue room, so Henry goes to remove his things from the honeymoon suite. Ferris then runs upstairs to move Angela back to the more impressive honeymoon suite.

Edgar, a new guest, enters the reception area. Judy comes in from the dining room and she and Edgar, who is her husband, are both astonished when they see each other. They each make up excuses for being there. When Edgar notices that Judy has been crying, he vows to kill whoever made her cry. She claims she was crying only because she felt lonely and suggests that they find Ferris so he can give them a room for the night. They go into the lounge to

look for him.

Ferris finds Angela waiting for him in the blue room. He is unusually polite which makes Angela wonder what he is up to. After much persuading, Ferris convinces Angela that she will be much happier in the honeymoon suite, the best room in the hotel. Angela relents wearily and they leave the blue room to go back to the honeymoon suite.

Having removed his overnight bag from the honeymoon suite, Henry comes downstairs and meets Judy coming in from the lounge. She tells him that her husband has unexpectedly come to the hotel so they will have to keep secret their plan to sleep together or Edgar will kill Henry. When Ferris appears in the reception area, Judy tells Ferris that her husband is in the hotel. Ferris panics. Edgar enters from the lounge and complains that Ferris was absent when he wanted to check in, so Ferris sends him and Judy to the blue room.

The telephone rings and Ferris answers. It is Angela in the honeymoon suite demanding that Ferris bring her a large gin and tonic at once. After Ferris takes the drink to Angela, she orders him to fetch the menu for her. Ferris goes downstairs to get it.

Judy and Edgar are now in the blue room which Edgar concludes is too small for both of them. He sees Mr Johnson's suitcase on the bed and assumes that his wife has been seeing another man. He takes the suitcase and heads for the reception area, saying he will kill whoever owns it.

As Ferris re-enters the reception area he meets Mr Johnson who has come in from the lounge. The old man says he is not feeling very well. Edgar comes angrily down the stairs with Mr Johnson's suitcase and tells Ferris he is going to kill its owner. After Mr Johnson says the suitcase is his, Ferris stops Edgar from advancing on the old man by asking him if he really wants to kill someone who is half dead already.

Angela comes down the stairs into the reception area and sees Edgar. For some reason they are horror-struck at seeing each other there. In a panic Edgar rushes for the nearest exit but on the way collides with Ferris who, in turn, collides with Mr Johnson. As Edgar flees, the other two men fall on the couch.

ACT II

A few minutes later, Mr Johnson and Ferris are alone in the reception area. Henry comes in and wants to know where he can spend the night. Ferris tells him he'll have to sleep on the couch because Edgar and Judy have taken over the blue room.

The phone rings and Ferris jumps. It is Angela requesting more gin. Ferris asks Henry to take Mr Johnson into the garden. After arriving in Angela's room with the gin, Ferris tries to find out what her connection with Edgar is, but Angela won't say. She starts making sexual advances toward Ferris who gets out of the room as fast as he can and returns to the reception area. Mr Johnson and Henry

have returned from the garden. Henry suggests that Ferris give Mr Johnson some brandy to settle his stomach, but Ferris refuses to waste good brandy on the old man. So Henry advises Ferris to give Mr Johnson an indigestion tablet. Not expecting to find one, Ferris nevertheless looks for one in his desk. To his surprise he finds a packet of tablets, but Mr Johnson refuses to take one. Ferris whispers to Henry to tell the old man a joke so that when he laughs Ferris can pop the pill in his mouth and Henry can wash it down with water. It works, but Mr Johnson still wants brandy. Ferris agrees to give him brandy if he promises to sit in the lounge.

Ferris then gives a menu to Henry and tells him to take it to Angela while he deals with Mr Johnson. He forces Henry to go upstairs and deal with the sex crazed woman by threatening to tell Edgar about his affair with Judy. Henry takes the menu and goes upstairs to the honeymoon suite. Angela answers the door and is surprised to see Henry there with the menu instead of Ferris. When he explains that he is helping Ferris with room service, she asks him to pour her another gin. She enquires about his relationship with Judy, and Henry tells her it is over for now because her husband has turned up. Angela tells Henry that she finds it an odd coincidence that her husband has turned up too. This frightens Henry because he doesn't want to be caught with the wife of either husband.

Edgar has decided to remain in the hotel but he wants a room of his own because the blue room is too small for two people. Ferris starts to think where he can put him. While he is thinking, Edgar says he wants to talk to Angela, an old friend, but he doesn't want his wife Judy to know there is someone in the hotel he knows. Ferris says his lips are sealed and he sends Edgar up to Angela in the honeymoon suite.

Still in the honeymoon suite Henry tells Angela he has to leave because he is afraid that her husband will come and find him there. Just then, there is a knock on the door. Assuming that it is Angela's husband, Henry darts into the bathroom to hide. Edgar enters and tells Angela he wants to talk with her. It turns out that she is the wife he left a long time ago but never divorced. He asks her to keep this a secret from everyone in the hotel. He is a bigamist, married to both Angela and Judy. Edgar hears a noise in the bathroom. Claiming he is still jealous of any of Angela's admirers, he opens the door but finds the bathroom empty. Angela can't believe that Henry is not there.

In the reception area Henry staggers in from the garden looking a mess. He tells Ferris he escaped through the bathroom window of the honeymoon suite and climbed down the drainpipe to get away from Angela's husband. Ferris tells him that the man was Edgar, just an old friend of Angela's, but Henry insists that it was Angela's husband, not Edgar. Now both Henry and Ferris believe that there are two unhappy husbands in the hotel. It does not occur to them that Edgar could be married to both Angela and Judy.

Mr Johnson comes into the reception area. The old man now has a spring in his step and a lustful gleam in his eye. Ferris has ordered a taxi for him, but Mr Johnson doesn't want to leave. He wants to know where the ladies are. Several times Ferris and Henry physically restrain Mr Johnson from going upstairs to find the ladies. They begin to wonder if it was really an indigestion pill that they forced him to take. Ferris checks the packet and sees that it was actually a pill that increases one's libido. It is no wonder that Mr Johnson's interest in the ladies has picked up. To divert his attention, Ferris tells Mr Johnson that the women are in the lounge, and the old man hurries away to find them. Ferris then tells Henry to go and join Judy in the blue room. Edgar will be put in another room, Ferris says, so Henry won't have to worry about him. Henry goes upstairs to join Judy in the blue room.

In the honeymoon suite Angela tells Edgar she can't talk with him any longer because she is going to have a bath. Edgar agrees to leave, but before he does he makes her promise not to tell anyone in the hotel that they are married.

After Henry knocks on the door to the blue room, Judy opens the door and lets him in. He says he can now stay with her because Edgar will be sleeping elsewhere. Judy still suspects Henry is having an affair with Angela, but he convinces her that he is not.

Angela, having postponed her bath, comes down to the reception area. She wants to know from Ferris how Henry disappeared from the bathroom. Ferris explains that he climbed through the bathroom window and shimmed down the drainpipe. She is relieved, but asks Ferris to continue with her room service after she has had her bath. She also tells him not to mention to anyone that her husband is in the hotel. Ferris assures her that his lips are sealed.

When Angela is gone Edgar comes in from the lounge. Ferris tells him there has been a cancellation and he can now have a room overlooking the car park. Edgar is pleased but wants to first fetch his bag from the blue room before going to his new room. Ferris goes into the lounge to fill Mr Johnson up with coffee to counter the effects of the pill he swallowed.

In the blue room Henry tells Judy to lock the door while he takes his trousers off. As he does so someone tries to open the door. Suspecting that it is Edgar, Henry panics. He runs into the bathroom, without his trousers, and locks the door. Judy unlocks the main door and Edgar comes in to fetch his bag. When he discovers that the bathroom door is locked, Edgar becomes suspicious that Judy is hiding a man in there. He goes to find Ferris to get the key to the bathroom. Judy then tells Henry it is safe to come out of the bathroom, but there is no reply. For the second time, Henry has crawled out of a bathroom window and found a way to get down to the ground. Judy picks up Henry's trousers and leaves the room with them.

Mr Johnson, still looking for the ladies, comes back into the reception area followed by Ferris holding a coffee pot

and mug. Ferris promises to tell Mr Johnson where the ladies are only if he drinks the coffee. On that condition Mr Johnson agrees to do so. Ferris continually refills Mr Johnson's mug but does not see that each time he does so Mr Johnson pours the coffee on a plant near the couch where he is sitting. Henry appears from the garden, breathless and without his trousers. He explains what happened and convinces Ferris that to save the day, Ferris must climb up to the blue room, crawl through the bathroom window, unlock the door and explain to Edgar that he was just doing some plumbing work. That way Edgar won't hurt anyone. Ferris refuses to do it, but when Henry offers him enough money he changes his mind. Since Henry's trousers are supposedly still in the room, Ferris has to take off his trousers to make the situation believable. He does this reluctantly and then goes outside to the fire escape that leads up to the bathroom window in the blue room. Henry puts on Ferris's trousers which do not fit well.

Edgar comes downstairs and tells Henry he needs to get into his wife's locked bathroom. Since Ferris is not there to offer help, Edgar heads back to the blue room and Henry rushes outside to check on Ferris's progress getting up into Judy's bathroom. When Edgar arrives in the blue room his wife is not there, but the bathroom door opens and Ferris steps out, without any trousers. He tries to convince Edgar that he was fixing the plumbing and locked the door so he could concentrate better. He adds that he took off his trousers so they would not get wet. Unable to find them now, he explains that the chambermaid must have taken them to be cleaned. Edgar seems to buy the improbable story and goes to his room overlooking the car park to wait for Ferris to bring him the menu.

In the meantime, Mr Johnson, left alone, has gone up to the pink room and let himself in. Angela, having taken her bath, comes out of the bathroom to find a strange man standing there. Mr Johnson advances on her. Screaming, she runs out of the room, slamming the door behind her. Down in the reception area she grabs Henry and pulls him upstairs to get rid of the old man in her room.

Judy comes downstairs from the blue room looking for Henry and carrying his trousers. Edgar, annoyed that Ferris has not brought him a menu, stomps into the reception area. He sees Judy holding what he assumes are Ferris's trousers. He tells her she should not be doing the chambermaid's work, which Judy finds puzzling. Ferris comes down the stairs with a bath towel wrapped around his bare legs like a sarong. Edgar tells him to put on the trousers Judy is holding. Ferris knows they are Henry's but puts them on anyway and goes into the lounge searching for Mr Johnson. Edgar hastens back to his room with a menu.

Angela and Henry burst into the honeymoon suite and see Mr Johnson in bed. Henry bundles him out of the room and Angela goes back into the bathroom. As Henry and Mr Johnson come down into the reception area, Ferris comes in from the lounge wearing Henry's trousers. Henry explains that he found Mr Johnson in the honeymoon suite. Ferris asks if Angela's husband was

there. When Henry says no, Ferris exclaims that he hasn't even seen her husband yet. Mr Johnson tries to go back to Angela in the honeymoon suite, but Henry and Ferris grab him and lock him in a large cupboard in the reception area where he can do no harm. Ferris throws in a girlie magazine for him to read.

Ferris goes back upstairs to give Angela room service while Henry goes out to the dining room in search of food. When Angela lets Ferris into her room he apologizes about the unfortunate episode with Mr Johnson and adds that he wouldn't want her to write about that in her Sunday newspaper article. Angela laughs and tells him that that is not what she is there for. When Ferris grasps that Angela is not the critic, he stops being polite and tells her to pack her things and leave the room. Then he goes down to the reception area where he meets Henry coming out of the dining room. He tells him that Angela is not the journalist. They conclude that the only one left who could possibly be the journalist is Edgar! Ferris and Henry exchange their trousers. Then Ferris runs back to the honeymoon suite, grabs Angela and drags her down to the reception area where he tells her to wait for a minute. He then runs upstairs to the blue room and drags Judy down to the reception area as well and tells her to stay put. Then he takes Angela up to the blue room.

In the blue room Ferris tells Angela she is now where she belongs. She warns him that she will stay there only if he fetches her more gin and tonic. Ferris agrees and hurries down to the reception area where he is surprised to encounter Edgar. Assuming now that Edgar is the journalist, and therefore in need of special treatment, he tells him that he won't have to sleep over the car park after all because he has a much better room for him. Edgar thinks Ferris has gone mad but he follows him up to the honeymoon suite and has a look at it. Edgar is not impressed with the room. He says it is to pink! Desperate now, Ferris asks him if he doesn't want to write about the best room in the hotel in his newspaper article. Edgar replies that he is in the construction business and is not there to write an article about the hotel. He adds that he only came to this "dump" of a hotel because all of the other hotels were full. Ferris is distraught that he has not

yet discovered who the journalist is. Edgar leaves and Ferris follows him down to the reception area where Judy and Henry have just entered from the dining room.

They are joined by Angela who comes down the stairs and complains to Ferris that he hasn't brought her the gin she requested. She sees Edgar and asks why he is still there. Judy asks if they have met. Edgar says no, but Angela says yes. Angela then asks Judy if she knows Edgar well since she is using his first name. Judy replies that of course she knows him well because Edgar is her husband. Then Angela, in exasperation, proclaims that Edgar can't be Judy's husband because he is her husband.

Trapped, Edgar admits that he is married to both Angela and Judy. Henry points out that since Edgar married Angela first, he can't really be married to Judy. Therefore Henry and Judy can move back into the honeymoon suite. Judy agrees enthusiastically, but Edgar threatens to kill Henry if he follows through with his plan. Henry replies that there is no point in threatening him anymore because he is "only frightened of husbands." He and Judy go, smiling happily, up to the honeymoon suite. Angela tells Edgar to come with her to the blue room because, after all, they are still married.

From outside a taxi driver honks his horn. Ferris lets Mr Johnson out of the cupboard and tells him his taxi is here so he can be on his way. Before he goes, Mr Johnson asks if he can have one more of those "indigestion tablets." When Ferris says no, Mr Johnson responds, "Not even if I promise not to mention them in my article?" Ferris freezes. Mr Johnson goes on to say, "And just think of it—people in and out of bedrooms, men exchanging trousers, guests being put in cupboards. It's going to make very interesting reading." As he goes out the main entrance, Ferris panics, realizing that Mr Johnson is the journalist who came to the hotel to write a critique. He grabs the packet of tablets from the desk and races after Mr Johnson yelling "Wait! You've forgotten your indigestion tablets! Mr Johnson!"

CURTAIN

Study Questions

1. For whom is Ferris managing the hotel?
2. What is the profession of the person coming to evaluate the hotel?
3. Why is Henry in the hotel?
4. Who is Henry afraid will kill him?
5. What drink does Angela prefer?
6. Who wants to seduce all the ladies in the hotel?
7. Who is married to both Judy and Angela?
8. What does Ferris desperately need to discover?
9. How many times is Ferris mistaken about the identity of the journalist?
10. Who turns out to be the journalist?

Answer Key:

1. His sister. 2. Journalist. 3. To meet Judy secretly. 4. Edgar. 5. Gin and tonic. 6. Mr Johnson. 7. Edgar. 8. Which hotel guest the journalist is. 9. Three times. 10. Mr Johnson.