

**NAXOS**
AudioBooks

Richard Brinsley Sheridan

The School for Scandal

Edith Evans, Cecil Parker, Harry Andrews and cast

CLASSIC
DRAMA



NA287512D

1	Act I Scene I	7:04
2	Maria, my dear, how do you do?	5:09
3	Oh dear, she changes colour very much!	5:26
4	Act I Scene II	4:56
5	Act II Scene I	5:39
6	Act II Scene II	9:06
7	Act II Scene III	4:21
8	Act III Scene I	6:03
9	I should be glad to be convinced my suspicions...	6:46
10	Act III Scene II	2:43
11	Act III Scene III	9:58
12	Act IV Scene I	6:33
13	Act IV Scene III	7:07
14	Ay, ever improving himself.	5:00
15	Well, sir?	5:06
16	Gentlemen, I beg pardon – I must wait on you downstairs...	5:28
17	Act V Scene I	6:09
18	Act V Scene II	6:31
19	I heard high words: what has ruffled you, sir?	4:05
20	Act V Scene III	4:56
21	As for that prodigal, his brother...	6:58

Total time: 2:05:18

Cast list

Sir Peter Teazle	Cecil Parker
Sir Oliver Surface	Baliol Holloway
Joseph Surface	Harry Andrews
Charles Surface	Alec Clunes
Lady Teazle	Claire Bloom
Lady Sneerwell	Dame Edith Evans
Mrs. Candour	Athene Seyler
Crabtree and Moses	George Howe
Sir Benjamin Backbite,	William Squire
Sir Harry Bumper and Careless	
Maria	Anne Leon
Rowley and William	Peter Williams
Trip	Peter Halliday
Snake	Michael Gough

Richard Brinsley Sheridan

The School for Scandal

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the author of *The School for Scandal*, was a frustrated politician, a poor businessman and a reluctant though brilliant playwright.

He was a good orator, once speaking for four and a half hours in the House of Commons, attacking the corruption of the governor of India, Warren Hastings. In the packed chamber ladies swooned, and Sheridan himself collapsed, continuing his argument for a further four exhausting hours three days later.

His indolence, however, was legendary; *The School for Scandal* was in rehearsal before Sheridan had finished writing it, apparently having to be forcibly locked in a room until it was completed. On the last page of the manuscript Sheridan scribbled: 'Finished at last, Thank God!' to which the theatre's prompter Hopkins added: 'Amen!'

Sheridan was a naturally witty man,

and when his great investment, Drury Lane Theatre, was destroyed in a disastrous fire, he was observed quietly seated outside a coffee house on the Piazza in Covent Garden, taking some refreshment. Upon being asked why he was sitting there whilst his fortune went up in flames, he replied: 'A man may surely be allowed to take a glass of wine by his own fireside?'

Given Sheridan's colourful personality, it is unsurprising that *The School for Scandal* sparkles with wit. Every character possesses it and lives by it. It epitomises their characters and reputations, both of which are favourite subjects for attack in the vicious, back-biting world of the late eighteenth century. Scandal and gossip abound, cheats and fraudsters are exposed, and no one is safe.

Perhaps the play contains something of the anarchic spirit of the American Revolution of 1776, which occurred one

year before it was produced – it definitely prefigures the French Revolution twelve years later, when Europe's values were turned upside down, and servants like Trip were as witty as their masters. But although one might expect a political slant in a play written by a politician, Sheridan makes his point instead with a glittering social comedy of manners. Though set in the age of sentiment, the play's spirit is that of Restoration comedy. Sheridan uses a range of stock characters that are well-known from the Restoration playwrights Wycherley and Congreve: the old husband with the young spirited wife; the young rake; and the benevolent relative. The 'virtuous' character of Joseph Surface, however, owes his incarnation to Molière's hypocrite Tartuffe. But it is Sheridan's sheer comic inventiveness that raises *The School for Scandal* above mere pastiche, the comic climax occurring when the screen in Joseph's apartment is thrown down, revealing to Sir Peter his young wife hiding behind it. It is a brilliant example of the play's theme: truth exposed beneath illusion.

Any flaws in the plot, which is slight, or in the characterisation, exist because for Sheridan, witty dialogue always took precedence. In the margin of the manuscript, Sheridan listed his witticisms, and fitted them into the play where he thought appropriate, sometimes irrespective of their suitability for the characters speaking them. The play would be unmitigatingly cruel and vicious were it not for its first-rate humour, which has kept it on the stage for more than 230 years. The actual gibes of the scandalmongers are weak enough (usually based on a woman's vanity), but the audience takes pleasure in their audacity. The ripostes of Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, however, are brilliantly conceived. They are a couple equally matched in wit, and once again we are reminded of Congreve, and the banter of Mirabelle and Millamant in *The Way of the World*.

The conflict in *The School for Scandal* is between maintaining a virtuous reputation, and the enjoyment of a more relaxed and natural lifestyle; an expression of a burgeoning idea that was to become

an ideal in the Romantic era. Joseph Surface hypocritically uses the former to disguise the latter, thus showing that reputation is not to be trusted. Sheridan knew this to his cost. His own reputation suffered from threats of bankruptcy, gossip about his frequent bouts of drunkenness, and political infidelity (he was always considered too sympathetic towards the problems of his native Ireland).

SYNOPSIS

This comedy of manners has as its general theme the absurd behaviour of scandalmongers. Lady Sneerwell opens the play by complaining of how she has been wounded by slander, while she is in fact plotting with Joseph Surface to discredit his brother Charles in order to stop him marrying Maria, an heiress and ward of Sir Peter Teazle. Joseph is an arch hypocrite and is paying court to Lady Teazle, who, originally a simple country girl, is now a leading scandalmonger. His true intention is to use her to get to Sir Peter's ward Maria himself. Maria, however, loves Charles – a wastrel, but honest.

The boys' rich uncle Sir Oliver Surface makes a secret trial of his nephews, and, deciding on Charles's basic honesty, he helps him financially. Joseph is exposed by a penitent Lady Teazle, who is finally reconciled with her husband.

THE RECORDING

Thomas Moore, Sheridan's friend and biographer, wrote of *The School for Scandal*: '[It is] from beginning to end a continued sparkling of polish and point.' This classic recording proves the truth of Moore's words, starring one of the twentieth century's greatest exponents of the art of eighteenth-century comedy, Dame Edith Evans.

There is high sense of style here: an archness of delivery and a richness of characterisation that we just do not hear or see in today's theatre. Every actor is consistent. The production from the 1950s has terrific pace, with crisp diction, in a tradition of playing period comedy that challenged the slow, over-elaborate, grandiose style of nineteenth-century theatre. It was William Poel (1852–1934)

who first rebelled against the lush and sentimental versions of Shakespeare that were being staged in the nineteenth century, and who demanded a return to bare boards and poetry. Poel's ideas are now common currency amongst Shakespeare directors.

His radical ideas began to be adopted for classics other than Shakespeare. He favoured a unified acting ensemble, and encouraged the actors to keep the story flowing with a swift pace of performance. This called for imaginative actors of the calibre of Edith Evans, who Poel first saw in an amateur performance, and who he signed up for his production of *Troilus and Cressida* in 1912. Poel was Dame Edith's mentor, and we can hear her putting his theories to good use in this recording.

EDITH EVANS: (1888–1976)

Her distinguished career, which spanned sixty years, and during which she played over 150 different roles, included numerous works by Shakespeare, Congreve, Ibsen, Wycherley, Wilde, and

contemporary playwrights including George Bernard Shaw, Enid Bagnold, Christopher Fry and Noel Coward. She was a renowned Millamant in *The Way of the World* (1924), Rosalind in *As You Like It* (1926 and 1936), and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* (1932, 1934, 1935 and 1961) – but the role she will always be remembered for in the public's imagination is Lady Bracknell in *The Importance of being Earnest*, which was captured on film in 1952.

She was created a Dame Commander of the British Empire (DBE) in 1946.

ATHENE SEYLER (1889–1990)

An accomplished stage actress who made her debut in 1909. She wrote a book in 1944 called *The Craft of Comedy*, still invaluable to students today, and in this recording we hear her putting that craft into delightful action. She is best remembered today for her cameos in films such as *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Inn of the Sixth Happiness*. She died in 1990 aged 101.

CECIL PARKER (1897–1971)

Mainly remembered as a film actor, whose husky voice and pompous characters dominated so many British films from the 30s to the 60s. In all he made 91 films. Most memorable were *The Lady Vanishes* (1938); *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945); and the Ealing comedy *The Ladykillers* (1955). The part of Sir Peter seems tailor-made for him, though he never played it on stage.

CLAIRE BLOOM (b.1931)

Claire Bloom made her London stage debut in 1947 in Christopher Fry's *The Lady's not for Burning*. She received great acclaim for her portrayal of Ophelia in *Hamlet* at Stratford-upon-Avon in 1948. A renowned film actress, she starred opposite Charlie Chaplin in *Limelight* (1952) and opposite Laurence Olivier in *Richard III*. She was also in the film version of *Look Back in Anger* with Richard Burton. She continues to appear on stage, and in film and TV.

HARRY ANDREWS (1911–1989)

Though, like Cecil Parker, more recognised as a film actor, he was on stage from

1933, and after army service appeared at the Old Vic, playing in the classics, whilst also developing his film career. He played a wide range of film roles, but was especially well known for his portrayal of military types in films such as *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958) and *The Hill* (1965). He gave a sinister comic performance in *Entertaining Mr Sloane* (1969), and as Joseph in this classic recording creates a convincingly smooth hypocrite. He was awarded a CBE in 1966.

Notes by David Timson

Music on this CD:

BOYCE SYMPHONY NO. 2

Philharmonia Orchestra / Walter Jellinek

BOYCE SYMPHONY NO. 5

Philharmonia Orchestra / Walter Jellinek

LINLEY HERE'S TO THE MAIDEN OF BASHFUL FIFTEEN

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Richard Brinsley Sheridan
**The School for
Scandal**

Performed by **Cecil Parker, Baliol Holloway, Harry Andrews,
Alec Clunes, Claire Bloom, Dame Edith Evans, Athene Seyler,
George Howe, William Squire, Anne Leon, George Howe,
Peter Williams, Peter Halliday** and **Michael Gough**

Sheridan's most famous play, *The School for Scandal*, has been called 'the best existing English comedy of intrigue'. A favourite with audiences and critics alike since its premiere in 1777, this play is a classic English comedy of manners. Full of satirical wit, it subverts the Georgian social mores of its day with subtlety and charm. This historic recording from the 1950s features Edith Evans, Cecil Parker and Harry Andrews: some of the finest actors of their generation.

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