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### Season's Greetings

by Christopher Soden  
EDGE Dallas Contributor  
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Dry, wry, pointed and amusing, Theatre Three's staging of Sir Alan Ayckbourn's **Season's Greetings** is a delightful foray into the comic possibilities of the Christmas Holiday Season. Set in the present-day British home of Neville and Belinda Bunker, beginning on Christmas Eve and ending on Boxing Day, this comedy is predicated on the understanding that Christmas all too often clarifies everything wrong in our lives as well as everything right. Perhaps because it's the time of year when it's our "job" to be happy. So much stress and energy is spent making certain each traditional ritual comes off without a hitch that pleasure seems to be the least of it. In this regard Ayckbourn's characters seem to have much in common with their Yankee counterparts.

Belinda and Rachael are sisters spending the yuletide season together in Belinda's home along with her husband, Neville, his best friend Eddie, Eddie's wife Pattie, and other assorted guests. Bernard is an unhappy doctor married to Phyllis, a bon vivant who drinks too much. He seeks fulfillment in staging elaborate puppet shows for the children that drive everyone straight up the wall. Rachael invites a burgeoning writer named Clive to stay with them. She is more attracted to Clive than she will even admit to herself, and Clive is just a little too self-important to realize that sometimes the truth doesn't always play out successfully in the actual world. The sight of this attractive, but very skinny man dressed as Father Christmas makes for a very meager Santa indeed, and an apt metaphor for the proceedings as a whole.

Each character in Seasons Greetings has her or his own foibles and sympathetic moments. Ayckbourn makes them all just flawed enough to appreciate and laugh with rather than at them. The humor ranges from the ironic to the physical to the absurd. When Clive attempts to explain to the tipsy Phyllis that the percentage of gay men in the field of writing is probably no higher than, say, the profession of train conductors, she comes away with an altogether loopy grasp of the situation. Stealing a few illicit romantic moments under the tree, Belinda and Clive lose more time trying to undress one another than they do getting some serious smooching done. Convinced that Clive is an imposter, visiting only to pilfer the Christmas Presents, Harvey hides in the darkened living room, locked and loaded.

I wouldn't dream of suggesting there's anything wrong with the state of comedy in general these days. It's patently unfair to compare any one work to another out of context. And, also, there's a bit of mystery involved when one director can combine certain elements in ways that are satisfying and entertaining while another just can't seem to get the same result. And I have no problem with the earthy, the raunchy or colloquial. After a certain number of disappointments, one is grateful when something, anything, is truly funny, whether that involves repartee, sarcasm, bon mots, goofiness, slapstick, depravity or the exposure of skin. Still I've got to say it is quite encouraging and exhilarating to spend an evening at the theatre where we're not serenaded by a chorus of blaring body functions. Well. Maybe just one short one.

I continue to be impressed by the ingenuity of Metroplex set designers in using extremely limited spaces to great, evocative effect. In the instance of Season's Greetings the two gentlemen to thank are Jac Alder and David Walsh. The standouts amongst a quite nimble and divine ensemble cast are: Julie Painter, Leslie Turner, David Fluitt and Emily Gray.

*Theatre Three Presents: Sir Alan Ayckbourn's Season's Greetings,  
November 23rd-December 16th at Theatre Too. 214-871-3300.  
theatre3dallas.com*

*Christopher Soden received his MFA in Poetry from Vermont College in 2005. He is a teacher, lecturer, actor, performer and playwright. In addition he writes film, theatre and literary critique. In his spare time he likes to read, cook, dine, do crossword puzzles, chill and nap.*

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