

THE ENGLISH THEATRE OF HAMBURG

Established 1976

presents

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME

*A Comedy by
Patrick Cargill*

Premiere on 21 April, 2022

Preview Performances at reduced prices on 18, 19 and 20 April

Performances Tuesday to Saturday at 19.30 Hours and Sunday at 14.30 Hours

Matinee Performances weekly either on Wednesday or Friday at 11.30 Hours

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Dear Friends of The English Theatre of Hamburg,

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME, a comedy by Patrick Cargill, will premiere on 21 April, 2022, with pre-view performances at reduced prices on 18, 19, and 20 April. The dialogue is modern and witty and provides just the right combination of oral and visual entertainment. Bookings for this delightful British comedy have already started. See the cover of this study guide for dates and times of performances.

About the Playwright:

Patrick Cargill (1918—1996) charmed audiences for over fifty years as both actor and writer. Admired immensely as a master of the light touch, he began his career in repertory, then went on to star in many West End London productions, including **BOEING, BOEING, BLITHE SPIRIT, SAY WHO YOU ARE** and **TWO AND TWO MAKE SEX**. He also appeared in many films, among them Charles Chaplin's **A COUNTESS FROM HONG KONG** with Marlon Brando and Sophia Loren. He is perhaps best known, however, for his appearance as the father in the long-running TV series **FATHER, DEAR FATHER** as well as for numerous other roles on television. In addition to **DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME**, he is the author of many other plays, the most successful of which was **RING FOR CHATTY**, which was filmed after its West End run.

About the Play:

DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME opened in May of 1984 at the Thorndike Theatre, Leatherhead. From the very beginning the play has been extremely popular with audiences and critics. After a tour of Sweden in 1985 and the U.K. in 1986, the play has gone on to successful runs in theatres across the U.K. and abroad. This light and frothy comedy concerns a middle-aged family man, Charles, who has had a brief affair in New York with an American girl. Back in England now, he believes he covered his tracks by not giving her his British address or phone number. But she manages to track him down anyway and appears one evening on his doorstep! Keeping her true identity from his wife, Margery, throws Charles and his brother, who aids in the deception, into a series of hilarious complications which are compounded by the arrival of the brother's wife. And to confuse matters even further, it soon becomes clear that Margery herself is keeping a romantic secret.

*"Patrick Cargill's new comedy **DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME** . . . achieves its aim of making people laugh at the indiscretions of others."* **Surrey Advertiser**

*". . . with good comedy so hard to find, **DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME** provides a good reason to spend a couple of hours chuckling in the stalls."* **The Stage**

Summary of DON'T MISUNDERSTAND ME by Patrick Cargill

Setting: The living-room of Charles and Margery Fleming's house near Richmond, Surrey.

Time: Friday evening in late June, 1984.

Act I

Charles and Margery Fleming (both middle-aged) are expecting Charles's brother, Robert, and his new wife for the weekend. As they prepare for the evening, they wonder how the new wife, Jane, whom they have never seen before, will compare to the previous one. Margery is about to go out for some wine, which Charles forgot to buy, when the phone rings. She dashes to answer it before he can. It is their son and daughter, who are on a student holiday in France, and are phoning to say hello. Charles is shocked to learn that the teenagers, instead of learning French, are nude bathing and getting intimate with the opposite sex. Margery is less worried. She appreciates the children's honesty about their activities and only wishes that her husband, whom she suspects had an affair on his last business trip to New York, would be just as truthful. Charles insists that nothing of that sort happened while he was away. He has his own suspicions about Margery's enthusiasm for a certain tennis player named Brad, whom he knows she has seen both on and off the tennis court. Margery claims that she is simply fond of tennis, and leaves to buy the wine for dinner.

A few seconds later Robert, Charles's younger brother, arrives. His wife, Jane, could not accompany him because at the last minute her mother had an accident in the kitchen and had to be looked after. Over drinks Charles confesses to Robert that he did, in fact, have a brief affair with an American girl on his last trip to New York, but that, because of his love for Margery and the children, he left suddenly for home without saying goodbye to the girl. He assures Robert that he covered his tracks by not giving the girl his British address or phone number.

The doorbell rings. It is Jaynie (a girl in her twenties) with whom Charles had the affair in New York. He is, naturally, stunned to see her and wonders how she located him. She was invited by her father to accompany him on his yearly trip to England, and it was no trouble, she explains, finding Charles's phone number and address in the telephone book. Charles apologises for having to leave New York so suddenly, but he is delighted, he says, to see her now. His mind, however, is racing, desperately trying to figure out what to do with Jaynie before Margery returns with the wine. Since he had told Jaynie in New York that he was divorced, he now tells her that Margery is Robert's wife and that he lives with them. Robert is not entirely pleased with the solution, but finally agrees to help his brother in the deception. Together they convince Jaynie that Margery will not like her unan-

nounced appearance. It is agreed that Robert will drive Jaynie back to the hotel where she is staying and that Charles will phone her there first thing in the morning. Before leaving, however, Jaynie says she needs to freshen up in the bathroom. Robert goes outside to bring his car closer to the house, and Charles, remembering that he has potatoes cooking for dinner, exits to the kitchen.

Margery enters with the wine she has bought and is startled when she sees Jaynie, who has just come out of the bathroom. Margery assumes that the young woman is Jane, Robert's wife, whom she has not yet met.

Margery: Oh, I beg your pardon.

Jaynie: That's quite all right. You must be Mrs Fleming.

Margery: Margery, that's right. And you, of course, must be Jane.

Jaynie: Jayne? Oh, it's funny me being called that again. Everyone knows me as Jaynie.

Margery: Do they? Then Jaynie it shall be. How do you do, Jaynie?

Jaynie is surprised to be received so warmly by Margery after what the men said about her. But, before Jaynie can express her confusion, Margery makes her feel completely welcome in the house. Jaynie mentions that she wanted to freshen up earlier but could not find a towel in the downstairs bathroom. Margery apologizes for this and sends Jaynie to the upstairs bathroom where she will find everything she needs.

Charles returns from the kitchen and is alarmed to see that Margery has already arrived home with the wine. After she exits to the kitchen, Robert, who in the meantime has driven his car closer to the house, enters through the front door looking for Jaynie. Both men panic when they realize they do not know where she is.

Margery comes in from the kitchen and greets Robert warmly. She tells him she has met his new wife and thinks she is very attractive, then returns to the kitchen. As Charles and Robert frantically try to figure out what to do, Jaynie, having freshened up, comes downstairs. She informs Robert that he will not have to drive her back to the hotel because his wife, Margery, seems to know all about her and assumes she will be staying the night. She then exits into the kitchen to help Margery with dinner.

The brothers stare at each other in disbelief.

Charles: You know what this means? According to Margery, Jaynie's sleeping here—with you.

Robert: And according to Jaynie, she's sleeping here—with you.

Charles: But that means you're sleeping with Margery!

They are interrupted by the ring of the telephone. Margery rushes in from the kitchen to answer it. She tells the men to go into the dining-room and start dishing-up. They leave the dining-room door open and we hear the murmur of their voices.

Margery: (On the phone) Hello? . . . Speaking . . . Who? Oh, hello. Just a moment. (She runs quietly to the dining-room door, closes it gently and returns to the phone.) Sorry—just turning off the radio . . . Not at all, I'm delighted to hear from you. Where are you? . . . At the Connaught. I'll just jot the number down. (She does so on a jotting pad) Got it. (She puts the paper in her pocket) Well, I'm up to my eyes just now . . . Yes, of course I'd love to, but this weekend is impossible . . . To begin with, Charles is here . . . Yes, and his brother and his wife are staying the weekend too, so I won't be able to spare a moment.

Charles opens the dining-room door.

Charles: Come along, Margery. It's getting cold.

Charles goes back into the dining-room.

Margery: Coming! (Into phone) Look, I must fly. Why don't you give me a ring on Monday or Tuesday, and I am sure we'll be able to arrange something . . . That would be fine . . . You do that . . . Lovely . . . Of course, I do . . . Of course . . . Goodbye—Brad.

Margery puts the phone down, pauses for a moment and then turns to the dining-room door as the curtain falls.

Act II

The setting is the same, just after dinner. Margery and Jaynie are doing the washing-up in the kitchen while the men talk in the living-room. Charles tells Robert that the meal exhausted him. He had to keep talking and laughing the whole time to prevent Margery from asking Jaynie any embarrassing questions. Robert wants to know what his brother intends to do about the situation. Charles comes up with the idea of showing Jaynie the local pub ("Americans always like to see inside an English pub," he says.). That way they can keep the women apart because Margery, who hates such places, will refuse to accompany them. At the pub they will have time to persuade Jaynie to return to the hotel for the night. As soon as the three of them have left for the pub, Margery moves to the phone and takes out the piece of paper she had written the telephone number on earlier. On the phone she asks to speak to Mr Brad Denyer and is told that he is out. Just as she is replacing the receiver, the front doorbell rings. It is an attractive girl in her twenties.

Girl: I'm Jane.
Margery: Jane?
Girl: Your sister-in-law. Bobby's number two.
Margery: (Very bewildered) Bobby's number two—I see. How silly of me, I should have realized at once. How do you do, number two. I'm Charles's number one.

(In the text of the play and in this teaching material Jane is referred to as the "Girl" to help readers distinguish clearly who is speaking, Jane or Jaynie.)

The Girl explains that her mother's accident turned out to be nothing serious so she decided to come along after all. Margery quickly realizes that, to avoid an embarrassing situation, she must do something with Jane before Jaynie comes back with the men. She persuades the Girl to go upstairs and wait for Robert.

Charles, Robert and Jaynie return from the pub. They did not stay there long because it was very crowded. Straight away Margery asks Jaynie to step into the garden for a few minutes so that she can speak privately with the men. She then informs Robert that another girl, who claims to be his wife Jane, has arrived and that he needs to sort out the problem with her upstairs.

Margery: I am very happy to entertain your wife under my roof, Robert, but not your wife and your mistress—at least not at the same time!

And with that she exits, leaving the brothers speechless. Robert is furious with Charles for not telling Margery the truth from the beginning. They are interrupted by Jaynie, who comes back in from the garden. "It's getting cold out there," she explains. Before they can persuade her to go back into the garden, the Girl enters, carrying her suitcase. While upstairs she overheard Margery tell Robert that she would not entertain his wife and mistress at the same time. Now, seeing Jaynie there in the flesh, the Girl refuses to stay another moment in the house. She exits through the front door, followed by Robert running after her.

Jaynie asks Charles why the strange girl is so angry. He comes up with the explanation that the girl is Robert's mistress and that Robert invited her here thinking Margery would be away for the weekend. Hearing Robert and the Girl returning, Charles takes Jaynie back into the garden.

Robert has determined that he must tell the Girl, his wife, the truth about the situation, i.e. that Jaynie is not his mistress, but Charles's, and that he and Charles have been deceiving Margery about this the whole evening. The Girl is so relieved by the news that she bursts into tears and cannot stop crying. Charles enters from the garden,

and he and Robert decide to go out to buy some brandy, which the Girl says is the only thing that will calm her down.

After the men have left, Jaynie enters from the garden. She and the Girl look at each other coldly, each sure that the other is the mistress who is deceiving Margery. After a few sarcastic remarks to each other, Jaynie gradually comes to understand what is really going on, i.e. that it is not Robert who is married to Margery, but Charles, and that he has been keeping this from her the entire evening. Together the girls decide to protect Margery by not telling her about Charles's affair with Jaynie. Instead, they plan to drop some sleeping pills (which Jaynie has in her suitcase) into Margery's coffee so she will go to bed early and give Jaynie the opportunity to tell Charles what a bum he is. But, before she tells him off, she intends to take Charles back to the hotel with her, tell her father that Charles seduced her, and then watch her father blacken both of Charles's eyes. The girls giggle and run upstairs to perfect their plan.

Margery, unseen by the girls, has been listening to their conversation. She now moves quietly to the foot of the stairs where Jaynie's suitcase (with the sleeping pills inside) has been left. She is about to open it when she hears the men returning with the brandy. She quickly goes into the kitchen with the case. After the men have entered and settled down in the living-room, she slips back in from the kitchen, quietly puts Jaynie's case back where it was and returns to the kitchen.

The girls enter, looking for Jaynie's case. Jaynie picks it up, gives the Girl a big wink and exits to the hall to open the case and collect the sleeping pills.

Margery enters the living-room with coffee things. The Girl is about to pick up a cup, but Margery stops her, insisting that that cup is Charles's. Margery gives Charles his cup of coffee and then sees to it that the others are served, including Jaynie who has returned from the hall looking rather confused because she was unable to find the sleeping pills in her case.

The Girl decides it is time to drop the sleeping pills into Margery's coffee. She asks Margery if she would like sweeteners for her coffee. Margery says yes, so the Girl hands Margery's cup to Jaynie. Jaynie takes two tablets from her purse and drops them into the cup. Everyone drinks and makes small talk for a while, but, instead of the pills having an effect on Margery, it is Charles who grows sleepy. The confusion is cleared up when Jaynie explains to the Girl that she could not find the sleeping pills in her case and, therefore, had to drop real sweeteners into Margery's coffee. And Margery reveals that, after secretly overhearing the girls' plan, she "borrowed" the sleeping pills from the suitcase and put three in Charles's cup. She did not want him, she says, to go to the hotel and get two black eyes from Jaynie's father.

Jaynie now realizes that Margery knows the truth about her affair with Charles. She starts to apologize, but Margery breaks in.

Margery: My dear, I don't blame you--not in the least. There's absolutely nothing wrong in showing affection towards a divorced man who is living with his brother and sister-in-law and their two children in a quiet little suburb in Surrey.

The telephone rings. As Robert is nearest, he answers it. He says the caller is Bradley Denyer, but before he can announce to whom the caller wishes to speak, Jaynie interrupts and says it is her father. Margery, surprised by this information, quickly asks Jaynie to take the call on the other phone in the bedroom upstairs where she will have more privacy. Charles, very sleepy now from the effect of the pills, tries to explain that Brad really wants to speak to Margery, but he falls asleep before he can communicate the information clearly.

After completing the telephone call with her father, Jaynie returns to the living-room and says he just called to tell her they would be flying back to the States on Tuesday. She wonders how he knew the telephone number here. Margery quickly explains that, while they were at the pub, she called the hotel and gave them the telephone number in case any messages came for Jaynie.

While Jaynie is collecting her things to leave, Robert takes Margery aside and explains how overjoyed Charles will be that Jaynie is going back home. "He's been trying to get rid of her all night," he assures Margery.

Margery: And, Robert, if you thought Brad Denyer asked for me on the telephone, you must have misunderstood.

Robert: I understand. I misunderstood.

Robert and the Girl depart. Margery tells Jaynie that the taxi, which she ordered for her, is waiting outside.

Jaynie: I just don't know what to say.

Margery: Then let me say it for you. The joy of living is that you never grow too old for anything. That being the case, the surprises grow less surprising, and the shocks less shocking. So go back to your great big country, and live a great big life!

Jaynie exits. Charles, asleep on the sofa, mutters "Bloody Brad." Margery replies, "Yes, darling, bloody Brad." She tears up the piece of paper with Brad's number on it and drops it in the wastepaper basket. Then she kisses Charles on the brow, switches off the lights and turns to go upstairs as the curtain falls.

Multiple Choice Exercise

1. Charles has recently had an affair with a girl in (a. Spain, b. Australia, c. America).
2. Charles told Jaynie that he (a. was divorced, b. was married, c. lived in France).
3. At the beginning of the play, Charles and Margery are expecting (a. Robert and his new wife, b. Brad Denyer, c. Jaynie) for the weekend.
4. Robert's wife does not accompany him because (a. she is ill, b. she does not like Margery, c. her mother had an accident).
5. Charles is surprised that Jaynie located him in England because (a. she only speaks Spanish, b. he lives in a remote part of the country, c. he did not give her his address or phone number).
6. After Jaynie arrives on his doorstep, Charles tells her that (a. he, b. his brother Robert, c. his gardener) is married to Margery.
7. Margery always wants to answer the phone before Charles can because she is expecting a call from (a. her parents, b. Robert's wife, c. Brad Denyer).
8. When Robert's new wife arrives, Margery is confused because she (a. expected a much older woman, b. thought the woman would be Chinese, c. was under the impression that Jaynie was Robert's wife).
9. (a. Jaynie, b. Margery, c. Robert) puts sleeping pills in Charles's coffee.
10. Brad Denyer, who phones Margery twice during the play, turns out to be (a. Jaynie's father, b. Robert's friend, c. Charles's boss).

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

Interpretative Question

The author's purpose is apparently to make us laugh at, rather than get terribly upset by, people's indiscretions. This seems to be Margery's attitude in the play. See again her last speech to Jaynie. Is this the best attitude toward life or not?