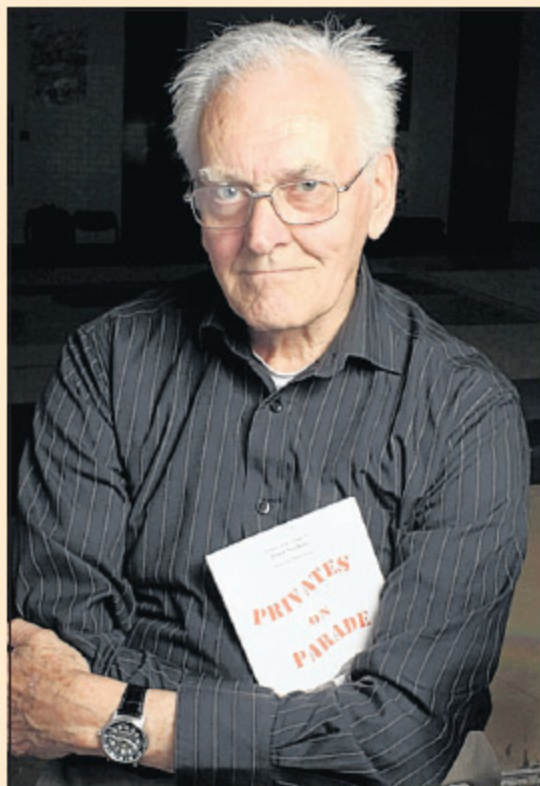


## FIVE QUESTIONS FOR...

### PETER NICHOLS

Peter Nichols' 1975 comedy, *Privates On Parade*, depicts the exploits of a military entertainment troupe posted to South-East Asia in 1948. Currently showing at West Yorkshire Playhouse, the musical play features drag performances, bawdy humour and pastiches of 1940s songs.



*Service with a smile: Playwright Peter Nichols*

remained. I still know Stanley. When he saw the play, he said he'd been dreading what I would reveal and, in fact, he was disappointed that it wasn't anything like us.

**When *Privates On Parade* was first performed, were people shocked by its depiction of gay servicemen?** I think people were quite alarmed by it. I sent it first to Bristol Old Vic and the director said: 'I'm sorry, I'd love to do this, but I don't think Bristol's ready for it.'

**Do you think national service should be reintroduced?** I don't think so. I think it's a pretty miserable affair. But looking back, in a way I'm quite glad I did it because without it, I wouldn't have met the people that I did.

*Abi Bliss*

*Tonight until Oct 11, Quarry Theatre, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Quarry Hill, Leeds, tonight 7.30pm, then Tue to Sat 7.30pm, mats Sat 2pm, Oct 2 and Oct 9 1.30pm, £15 to £25, concs available. Tel: 0113 213 7700. www.wyp.org.uk*

#### **How does *Privates On Parade* reflect your own experiences?**

I was in an outfit during my national service in Singapore called Combined Service Entertainment. The troupe was a mix of civilians and conscript airmen who volunteered, largely to skive off guard duties. It was known as a cushy billet.

#### **What kind of shows did you perform?**

We were all recruited in the first place to do a play, a farce called *Not So Much The Heat*. Then that play was suddenly cancelled. We didn't want to go back to guard duty, so we got together a variety show called *At Your Service*.

#### **What memories do you have of Stanley Baxter and Kenneth Williams, who were also in CSE?**

They were both evidently talented. Kenneth Williams used to do imitations of Bette Davis. He was very funny and very strange, as he always