

Ladies, gentlemen; friends and colleagues of Ted. My pleasant task is to talk about Ted as a writer and the last play he completed. When I mention the name Badger I invite you to hiss and boo and stamp on the floor. (Rehearsal). Copies of the play will be available at the reception.

Ted's last play is a dark comedy set in the home of a self-confessed monster, Mabel, a Hampstead dame managing a household of helpless men who circle around her like so many moons. Her "boys", she calls them.

There was a real life Mabel and Ted and I were two of her boys; me very briefly, him for the rest of his life. The real Mabel was an Edwardian time traveller stranded in the 1960's, a once rising artist living alone towards the end of her life near the Heath, in an inherited mansion the upper floors of which she let out as rooms for men only. Mabel had Ted spellbound. He always loved strong voices; the more distinctive, the more idiosyncratic the better and, in real life as in the play, he surrendered unconditionally to her.

Ted had a good voice, himself. It was the thing I noticed about him on the day I first met him; his voice. 45 years or so later he finally confessed that it wasn't his real voice at all; teenage Ted was a north London boy who wanted to sound like Jack Hawkins so he adopted the Hawkins voice one day and it took possession of him.

He always kept pocket note books for when he was listening in to talk, scribbling scraps of dialogue verbatim right through his life. The gems of his collection would then be committed to memory and acted out repeatedly. That dreadful sinking feeling when once again he went into role for the current party piece, but however well I already knew the punch line, his marvellous capacity for taking pleasure from the way people spoke always counter balanced my irritation and let's be clear: on form, Ted was the best story teller you'd ever want to listen to.

In his Mabel play he drew on all he had learned in his life time of listening, collecting, savouring and performing. The play hasn't yet been put on but when it is I envy the actors who get those parts and the audiences will be holding their aching sides, me among them, I hope.

Ted himself takes part as he was when he was first setting out to become a famous playwright. He gave the best lines back to Mabel of course. The rest of the cast are composites. Lots of bits of you and maybe me could well have been mixed together with his own ideas to create them. See if you can spot yourself. There is a verbally incontinent poet. There is the smart, cynical guy who ought to be doing so much more with his life. There is an ill-natured, insecure gardener. There is a free spirited cleaning lady who is Mabel's only equal. There is Badger.

They are all Ted. Together his characters bring him dancing back; loud, daring, affecting, perceptive, usually over-estimating others and always under-rating himself. Enough from me; if you haven't read it yet, you really can and should, and see it one day, maybe. May it have many curtain calls.