

THE CHARACTERS

Professor Henry Higgins: The man of the future in the play, Higgins has his mythological roots in the Greek story of Pygmalion, a sculptor who can't find a woman who is up to his standards and so creates one from stone. As a reward for services rendered, the gods then bring his work to life. Pygmalion and his living statue Galatea marry and live happily ever after. In a more modern context, Shaw found his roots for Higgins in the explosion of scientific development, and primarily in the science of language. Before World War One Oxford and Cambridge universities were full of the new science of linguistics and its high priests of phonetic analysis. These movements, in line with the discoveries of Darwin and Freud, were shattering the Victorian grip on human expression and class restrictions. We also find in Higgins a reflection of Sherlock Holmes - the one a criminologist, the other a Professor of Phonetics. Another influence was Mary Shelley's "Dr Frankenstein" who played God in creating and improving upon life through science. And perhaps there is a hint of a similarity in Higgins' relationship with his student to the relationship that Shaw's mother had with her live-in singing teacher, George Vandeleo.

Colonel Pickering:

A "Watson" to Higgins' "Sherlock" and a gentle remnant from the colonial past, Pickering has returned from India where he has been studying speech patterns of the natives. He is a gentleman who holds doors for ladies, who treats all with respect, and yet who really doesn't believe that Higgins



and Science can create a duchess from a flower girl. As Eliza reminds Higgins, the phonetics teaches her how to sound like a lady, but she only becomes one when she's treated as such.

Above: Costume sketch for Colonel Pickering by Sue LePage

Eliza Doolittle: A young Cockney flower girl whose goal in life is to leave her life on the streets and run her own shop. Smart enough to realize she needs to upgrade her image, and determined enough to succeed in fooling royalty, Eliza broke new ground in 1914 in the wake of the suffragette movement - a strong young woman moving towards financial and emotional independence. And as the play progresses, Eliza develops into an



Costume sketch for Eliza by Sue LePage

articulate and worthy representative of her generation, and a feisty opponent to the bullying Higgins. Strongly influenced by Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, this play has echoes of Nora's door slamming shut on Torvald, when Shaw has Eliza stride through a similar door.

Alfred Doolittle: Eliza's father, he is a dustman by trade but the irony of his name is not lost on those around him. Shaw makes him an articulate spokesperson for a number of causes including middle-class morality, absent fatherhood, and the simple Cockney virtues of an enjoyment of life's pleasures.

Mrs Pearce: The perfect foil for Eliza's father, she is a virtuous and hard-working housekeeper to Higgins. She continually reminds him of the rules of common courtesy and polite society that he is ironically attempting to teach Eliza, and the only woman, by the end of the play, who still picks up after him.

Mrs Higgins: Professor Higgins' mother, a strong, stately yet kind matriarch, keenly aware of the childish eccentricities of her one and only son.

The Eynsford Hills: Freddy, Clara, and their mother are faded gentry, no longer rich and the children are pretentious and needy. Freddy, naïve and somewhat foolish, is helplessly in love with the charismatic Eliza. Does she marry him? The play leaves the question unanswered.