An Inspector Calls
by J.B. Priestley
Directed by Jim Mezon

“After all, y’know, we’re respectable citizens and not criminals.”
“Sometimes there isn’t as much difference as you think.”

Who killed Eva Smith? That’s the question Inspector Goole wants answered when he calls on the Birling family one spring evening in 1912.

The Birlings are in the midst of a celebration dinner. Their daughter Sheila has just become engaged to Gerald Croft, son of the president of Crofts Limited, and rival to Birling and Company. The Birlings are a prosperous family, one that Priestley describes as “pleased with themselves”, and this impending marriage makes this one of the happiest nights of Arthur Birling’s life. Arthur is feeling particularly expansive on this night – it’s 1912 and to him, the progress he sees happening in the world is cause for celebration. A new ship called the Titanic is about to set sail, automobiles and airplanes are making travel easier, and this looming war that people keep talking about will never come to pass. “We can’t let these Bernard Shaws and H.G. Wellses do all the talking”, he tells his family, “We hard-headed practical businessmen must say something sometime.”

Then, we hear a ring at the door – an Inspector is calling and he says it’s important. He enters the room and reveals some shocking news:

“Two hours ago a young woman died in the Infirmary. She’d been taken there this afternoon because she’d swallowed a lot of strong disinfectant … they did everything they could for her at the Infirmary, but she died. Suicide, of course.”

What does this girl’s suicide have to do with this family? How could any of them be responsible for her death? As Arthur Birling told the boys earlier in the evening, he doesn’t accept the idea that we are all responsible for one another. He believes that we need only take care of ourselves and of our own,

“The way some of these cranks talk and write now, you’d think everybody has to look after everybody else, as if we were all mixed up together like bees in a hive – a community and all that nonsense.”

As the Inspector begins to question the family, each member describes their connection to the dead woman. In doing so, they reveal how our actions towards one another can have long-lasting effects that we are often blissfully unaware of. And as more twists are revealed, the family learns more and more dark truths about themselves and each other and the line between innocence and guilt becomes more and more blurred.

This production will follow a series of Priestley plays produced at the Shaw Festival, including Time and the Conways (2000), Eden End (1994), When We Are Married (1990) and Dangerous Corner (1988). An Inspector Calls was recently selected by London’s National Theatre as one of the “100 Plays of the Century”.