

Philosophus

OR

A TRUE AND TERRIBLE RECOUNTING OF THE HORRIBLE EVENTS TO BEFALL ONE FRANÇOIS-MARIE AROUET, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS "VOLTAIRE," AT THE VILE HANDS OF DESPOTISM AND TYRANNY, AS REPRESENTED BY BARON FRANZ VON FREYTAG AND HIS INSIDIOUS PERSECUTION OF SAID PHILOSOPHER, WHICH, OVER THE COURSE OF A FEW WEEKS, DICTATED THE FATE OF LIBERTY AND FREEDOM IN THE HISTORICAL TRAJECTORY OF WESTERN CIVILIZATION

A Historical Farce
By Colin Speer Crowley

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Dedication

*To Neal Radice and Alleyway Theatre of Buffalo, New York,
for guiding "Philosophus" into the first light of day.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

In this award-winning farce, famed philosopher (and very self-important!) Voltaire has fled from the court of Frederick II, King of Prussia, with a stolen and highly sensitive manuscript of the King's poems. Determined to embarrass the monarch before the world, Voltaire finds his journey to France halted in the city of Frankfurt by Baron von Freytag, representative of the Prussian King. Before too long, the Baron's over-eagerness to obey his master's wishes and the enormity of Voltaire's ego combine to create utter chaos, which becomes more ludicrous by the addition of a money-hungry German shrew, two slightly dim-witted servants, and Voltaire's sex-obsessed niece. This hysterically historical play is mayhem from start to finish, with a little bit of Kaufman and Hart, Oscar Wilde, Monty Python, and Benny Hill all rolled into one.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

"Philosophus" was first produced by Alleyway Theatre in Buffalo, New York, on September 13th, 2018. The production was directed by Neal Radice and assistant directed by Samantha Vakiener, with sets, lighting, and sound design by Neal Radice, costumes by Joyce Stilson and Todd Warfield, and wig styling by James Cichocki.

The cast was as follows:

*Voltaire.....Chris J. Handley
Collini/DornAndrew Zuccari
Freytag.....James Cichocki
Frau SchmidtChristopher Standart
Mademoiselle DenisEmily Yancey*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 2 w)

FRANÇOIS-MARIE AROUET (VOLTAIRE): 50s-60s.
French philosopher and runaway from the Prussian court. A self-important intellectual with a Messiah complex.

***COLLINI:** 20s-40s. Secretary to Voltaire. A Sancho Panza wannabe who looks just a little too Italian.

BARON FRANZ VON FREYTAG: 30s-50s. Representative of the Prussian King in Frankfurt. A proud military man with a fierce, obsessive dedication to authority.

***DORN:** 20s-40s. Secretary to Freytag. A parrot-like underling shouting rehearsed words of affirmation and assent.

FRAU SCHMIDT: 40s-50s. Wife of the Prussian consul. A bulldozer of a woman with an unquenchable love of money.

MADEMOISELLE DENIS: 20s-30s. Niece of Voltaire. A voluptuous and lust-ridden libertine masquerading as an ingénue.

**Note: Collini and Dorn are played by the same actor. There are five almost instantaneous changes. This can be done with a removable mustache and soldier's uniform jacket. Feel free to have Voltaire use some physical comedy to help fill the time gap for a quick switch. An example would be when Voltaire hides from Freytag. Voltaire can scamper around the stage trying to find someplace in which to squeeze, which gives the actor playing Dorn/Collini time to make a change.*

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TIME

One evening each in June and July of 1753.

PLACE

A city square in Frankfurt, Germany and the adjacent house of Frau Schmidt.

COSTUMES

VOLTAIRE: Dressed in the 18th century attire of an elegant intellectual with shiny waistcoat, pure white britches, nice big wig.

COLLINI: Sancho Panza-like man with a very Italian mustache.

DORN: A soldier's uniform with a snare drum strapped around his waist.

BARON FRANZ VON FREYTAG: Dressed in a suit so bright and full of medals – most of them likely bought at a second-rate pawn shop – that one wonders how he is able to stand. He has a Hitler-like mustache.

FRAU SCHMIDT: She is a grizzled, terrifying-looking creature, who, upon first glance, may or may not be a human being. She wears a bonnet on her head that is so massive and metallic it could use its own zip code.

MADemoiselle DENIS: A rather voluptuous, rotund woman with a huge wig and a low-cut dress. Looks like a cross between an angel and a lecher with lots and lots of makeup.

ACT I

(AT RISE: FRANÇOIS-MARIE AROUET, better known as the French philosopher VOLTAIRE, emerges CS from between the curtains. He appears rather old and yet bristling with a wiry, determined energy. He gazes upon the audience and gestures for silence. He smiles and begins to talk grandly with an air of tremendous self-importance.)

VOLTAIRE: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen, to this fine production of a moving and important theatrical masterpiece. Thank you all for coming and braving the icy gale of tyranny and oppression to sip from this heavenly glass of truth. The crucial play you are about to see is entitled “Philosophus,” which means “philosopher” in Latin, which, of course, is in reference to the star of the masterpiece... namely me. I am François-Marie Arouet, although you may know me as “Voltaire,” and the story you are about to see is subtitled “A True and Terrible Recounting” – et cetera, et cetera – for a reason... for it is, indeed, just that – both true and terrible. Indeed, I shall warn you now that there may be certain people among you, especially the fairer sex, who may have to depart from the premises during certain moments of high intrigue and drama or else succumb to the tremors of the moment and collapse, lifeless, before us all. This would only serve to dirty the floor. *(The LIGHTS begin to fall. This portion of the monologue can be modified to include the name of the theater and other relevant information.)* As another reminder, the theatrical organization that has consented to put on this great production has asked me to remind those among you that any mechanical devices, such as cotton gins and clocks, be silenced forthwith. What a blasphemy upon liberty it would be for their gears to make a sound just when I am escaping the greedy grasp of autocracy. Know, above all, that the play you are about to see marks the moment where your current liberty was born and from which it thereafter has not and can never be exorcised from your soul’s bosom.

(There is now just a SPOTLIGHT on VOLTAIRE.)

VOLTAIRE: *(Cont'd.)* Before we start, I would give you a few more reminders. First, the year of the play is 1753, the month, June. Second, the scene is Frankfurt, Germany, which, in June of 1753, was a self-governing city within the Holy Roman Empire. Third, Germany, as such, was not a country, but a group of countries, the greatest of which was Prussia, governed by Frederick the Second, whom some call "the Great," a sentiment regrettably adopted by your modern historians.

(SFX: A loud "a-HEM" sounds from the wings – i.e. "hurry up, please.")

VOLTAIRE: *(Cont'd.)* With that, ladies and gentlemen... the play begins!

(VOLTAIRE gestures grandly. SFX: Some mighty ORCHESTRA CHORDS sound with overdone grandeur. Perhaps the music is from Bach or Handel. We don't really know, and we don't really care – we just want it to stop. The overture eventually descends to more somber and thoughtful chords. The musical atmosphere suggests the kind of intimacy and peacefulness created in Hollywood movies to herald the twilight hours. The CURTAIN rises on a darkened stage on which we can only barely discern traces of buildings. One by one by one, candles LIGHT in the windows of the buildings. A whole world is lit up before our eyes. The last candles to alight are in a grand-looking building off to the side of the stage, The Golden Lion, a well-known inn. SFX: A ROWDY COMMOTION soon erupts from behind the front door of this establishment and rudely interrupts the pristine silence of the night. The noise grows louder and louder and louder, until... BAM! The front door of the inn flies open and a large suitcase is hurtled onto the stage like a gargantuan stone – THUD!! A loud cacophony of condemnation broadcasts from the unseen interior on the other side of the open door. A minute later... another bag – THUD!... and then

End of Freeview

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