

CARLISLE  
FLOYD

# PRINCE OF PLAYERS

AN OPERA IN  
TWO ACTS

PHARES

ROYAL

DOBSON

SHELTON

KELLEY

RIDEOUT

HARMS

EDDY



MILWAUKEE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

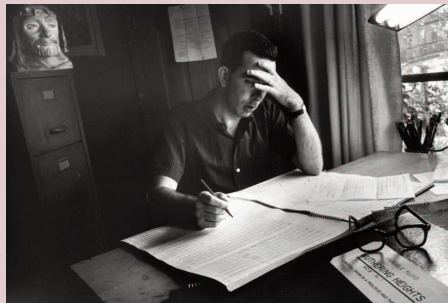
WILLIAM BOGGS, CONDUCTOR

The  
Florentine  
Opera

## FROM THE COMPOSER

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It is with great pleasure and pride that I congratulate the Florentine Opera and Soundmirror on this beautiful recording. It is the culmination of all the hard work and love that many people poured into making this opera a success.



From its very beginning, *Prince of Players* has been a joy for me. Back in 2011, I was flipping through TV channels and stopped on an interesting movie called STAGE BEAUTY, based on Jeffery Hatcher's play "The Compleat Female Stage Beauty" and directed by Sir Richard Eyre. The operatic

potential struck me immediately. Opera deals with crisis, and this was an enormous crisis in a young man's life. I felt there was something combustible in the story, and that's the basis of a good libretto.

I always seek great emotional content for my operas and I thought this story had that. It is emotion that I am setting to music. If it lacks emotion, I know it immediately when I try to set it to music: nothing comes. From the story comes emotion, from the emotion comes the music. Fortunately for me, the story flowed easily, and drawing from the time-honored dramatic cycle of comfort, disaster, rebirth, I completed the libretto in less than two weeks.

In 2013, the Houston Grand Opera commissioned *Prince of Players* as chamber opera, to be performed by its HGO Studio singers, and staged by the young British director, Michael Gieleta. For the next two years, I set the story to music while Michael and his production team (Shoko Kambara, set designer and Gregory Gale, costume designer) created the look and feel of the piece.

The 2016 premier was well received, which was gratifying, but the feedback from my friend and opera impresario, David Gockley, is what changed the direction of my opera forever: “This is not a chamber opera, this is a big, sophisticated opera that deserves a full orchestra and world class singers!” Fortunately for me, the Florentine Opera was part of our conversation and agreed to make that happen!

Sitting in the beautiful Marcus Center in October of 2018, hearing the world class singers and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra perform under the baton of Maestro Boggs, I was thrilled to witness Michael’s production of *PRINCE OF PLAYERS* turn into the sophisticated opera Gockley foresaw. It is a memory I shall never forget.

And now, having this outstanding performance recorded for the world to hear...my 93 year old heart is filled with joy and oh, so much gratitude!

—Carlisle Floyd  
*August 2019*

## CARLISLE FLOYD AND OPERA IN AMERICA

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As Americans, we've had a love affair with opera since it was first performed here in colonial times: English ballad opera, a play-with-songs that had captivated the London public, crossed the Atlantic in the 1730s. Before long, we began to fashion our own, using pre-existing folksongs and the like.

By far the liveliest center for opera was New Orleans. The first documented staging of a “real” opera in the United States took place there: André Grétry’s *Sylvain*, on 22 May 1796. European opera went on to gain a foothold and, by the time of the War Between the States, ballad opera had seen its last days. In the middle of the 19th century, “grand operas” by American composers began to appear. Quite a few decades would elapse, however, before composers started to mine their own home-grown musical styles—ragtime and jazz, in particular—to fashion operas as distinctly American as Scott Joplin’s *Treemonisha* (1915) and George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess* (1935).

By the mid-20th century, as Americans began to enjoy the economic prosperity that followed World War II, both opera and musical theatre had begun to flourish. There was a move toward the sort of lyric theatre that was neither musical comedy nor Eurocentric grand opera. During that fertile period, any number of stage works that we now call operas were also seen on Broadway.

Meanwhile, *verismo* (realistic) opera—a term often applied to Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci*, Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana*, and certain works of Puccini—was basically extinct in Europe. In America, though, it was continued by the likes of Gian Carlo Menotti, Kurt Weill, Mark Blitzstein, and Douglas Moore. Into this milieu, we bring Carlisle Floyd who, with his third opera, *Susannah* (1955), had a career-defining success. “The old girl,” as he later called his drama about a wronged young woman in rural Tennessee, was the first American opera since *Porgy and Bess* to earn a permanent spot in the repertory.

*Susannah* was no one-hit-wonder, either. The Old Girl's success initiated Floyd's astonishing 60-year, 13-opera career as a composer, and notable works soon followed in her wake. *Wuthering Heights* (1958), *Of Mice and Men* (1970), *Willie Stark* (1981), and *Cold Sassy Tree* (2000) paved the way for the "great book" trend in opera favored by a younger generation of composers—as Mark Adamo's *Little Women* (1998), John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby* (1999), and Jake Heggie's *Moby Dick* (2010) bear witness.

Floyd's decision, in 1976, to move from Tallahassee to Houston to found, with David Gockley, the Houston Opera Studio has proven to be an integral part of his artistic legacy. Under his leadership, Houston Grand Opera has boasted dozens of world premieres: In addition to five of Floyd's multi-hued operas, there's an impressively eclectic range of musical and dramatic styles—from Leonard Bernstein's *A Quiet Place* (1983) to John Adams's *Nixon in China* (1987) to Meredith Monk's *Atlas* (1991) to Rachel Portman's *The Little Prince* (2003).

In his newest work, *Prince of Players* (2016), composer-librettist Floyd again lays bare his passion for social justice and understanding. Though set in 17th-century England, the opera's highly charged drama deals with issues that confront us in 21st-century America—among them, the intricacies of sexual orientation and gender identity, and the resulting societal consequences.

Employing set pieces that evoke the Restoration era—a bawdy tavern song, courtly dances, a folksong used as a maladroitness audition piece—and calling on his tried-and-true mixture of affecting lyricism and sometimes-jarring dissonance, Floyd convincingly depicts the world of the actor Edward Kynaston. It's an inspiring—and true—story of an artist motivated by a soul-deep devotion to his chosen art form.

In a 1991 interview, Floyd stated, "I expect the audience to be engrossed in the stage action, and to have a total theatrical experience in which one element does not dominate—either the music of the drama or the production itself. The concept of total theater in which all the parts are fused is a very exciting one, and all too rarely realized." Fortunately for opera lovers—Americans in particular—it's a goal he has achieved time and again.

—J. Mark Baker

## STAGE DIRECTOR'S FORWARD

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The key to Jeffrey Hatcher's play, Richard Eyre's film and Carlisle Floyd's opera is that uncanny observer of England in the second half of the 1600s, Samuel Pepys, whose Diaries are perhaps the most vivid, candid and personal chronicle of the cultured, urban experience of the period. In the case of its theatrical antics, Pepys gave us a richly nuanced insight into the ways of that world, on and off-stage.

Both Jeffrey Hatcher and Carlisle Floyd use that source wisely: while Hatcher's play paints a scintillating picture of the Restoration exuberance, Carlisle Floyd's focus is on the fate of an artist during a period when artistry meant little more than artisanship. The artist at the center of the opera has his life rigorously governed by the art he serves, is subjected to an abrupt demise of his career, carries with him the baggage of an abusive childhood, social exclusion, professional rejection and the elusive idolatry that wanes the moment celebrity loses its battle with ageing and fashion. But most importantly, it is an artist driven by a highly principled vocational faith in his chosen art form.

If, to contemporary sensibility, it may sound too much like a portrait of male anxiety prompted by a loss of an entitlement, let us consider *Prince of Players*' parallel plot: that of empowering the female protagonists. The opera boldly portrays their trajectory from that of an imitator of male-monopolized discipline to that of a pioneer of its reinvention. It is Peg Hughes and Nell Gwynn who are the harbingers of tomorrow. Carlisle Floyd leaves us with no doubt as to whom the future will belong.

—Michael Gieleta

## SYNOPSIS

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Edward Kynaston (c. 1640–1712) was one of the last Restoration actors to perform women's roles on the English stage. *Prince of Players* deals with the crisis that this idolized star experienced when his career came to a halt with an edict from Charles II: “No He shall ere again upon an English stage play She”.

Homeless as a child during the Civil War, Kynaston was taken off the streets by an actor made redundant as a consequence of the closing of the theaters. Through him Kynaston learnt obsolete acting techniques. The opera follows Kynaston's fall from stardom, his descent into the theatrical lowlife, and his struggle to restore his stage identity set against the panorama of 17th Century London.

### ACT I

Edward Kynaston is performing the role of Desdemona in *Othello*, opposite Thomas Betterton, the famed actor-manager of the Duke's Company in London. The spontaneous applause he receives upon Desdemona's death interrupts the flow of the production and upsets several members of the acting company.

After the performance, the artists are presented to Charles II and his mistress, the erstwhile orange seller, Nell Gwynn, now an aspiring artiste herself. Two society ladies seek Kynaston out backstage. They are so taken by his impersonation of Desdemona that they doubt whether he actually is a man. Kynaston's dresser, Peg (Margaret) Hughes, watches how they flirt with disgust and sings of her secret passions for Kynaston and for acting.

As Kynaston, still in his stage costume, and the ladies stroll in St. James's Park, they are accosted by Sir Charles Sedley, who takes all three for meandering prostitutes. Kynaston plays a dirty trick on Sedley but the joke does not go down well. Sedley vows revenge.

Several days later, Kynaston practices hand gestures on a dim stage while waiting on his lover, George Villiers, the Duke of Buckingham. Peg watches Kynaston rehearse

and confesses her desire to act herself. As she practices hand gestures with Kynaston, Villiers enters, recognizing Peg from her stage performance at a pub theater a night ago. He informs Kynaston that she will be performing that night again. Peg rushes off, embarrassed that Kynaston now knows her secret. Kynaston is disgusted by the idea of



a woman acting; Villiers calms him and suggests that Kynaston join him at the Oak Apple Day celebrations at the Palace of Whitehall.

At the royal banquet, Kynaston is once again presented to Charles II and Nell Gwynn who hardly recognize him in a man's attire. In attendance is also Sedley who reveals himself to be promoting Peg's burgeoning stage career. Kynaston makes sure that Sedley realizes it was Kynaston whom he propositioned in St James's Park. Sedley is seething.

Nell raves about Peg being the first woman on the English stage and Charles II consents: "Out with the old, in with the new." Anxious of the demise of his career, Kynaston begs Charles II to reconsider, but the king ultimately pronounces his edict.

## ACT II

Betterton is on stage rehearsing a scene from *King Lear*. He is awaiting Nell and Peg who are coming along with their protectors to audition for roles. Kynaston bemoans the consequences of the royal edict. Betterton urges him to take male roles; Kynaston attempts to do so in front of Nell and Peg, but has great difficulty and finally leaves the theater, humiliated.

Villiers awaits Kynaston at his London residence. Kynaston arrives haggard and disheveled. Villiers pronounces his decision to terminate their affair, offering money



to the obviously struggling Kynaston. Kynaston declines and leaves Villiers with a kiss on the forehead, quoting a familiar passage from *Othello*.

Kynaston gets an engagement at a bawdy tavern where he performs in drag as *Lusty Louise*. Peg appears in the audience during the performance and publicly offers to pay for Kynaston's release. Outside, she and Kynaston are accosted by thugs who viciously assault Kynaston. Peg notices Sedley in the shadows and realizes this has been his doing. She takes Kynaston to his rooms to recover.



Peg's relationship with Kynaston grows deeper over time as she tends to his wounds. He talks to her of his traumatic childhood and she confesses her love for him. She also admits to her limitations as an actress, only capable of imitating what she learned from observing

Kynaston. Kynaston challenges her to perform the scene her own way. Aroused by the intimate moment, Kynaston makes love to her.

At Duke's Theatre, Betterton is desperate to save the Royal Command Performance in which Peg refuses to participate unless *Othello* is restaged—by Kynaston. Betterton begs Kynaston to rescue the show and Kynaston consents.

Once restaged, the audience sees a different version of *Othello*: Kynaston himself is playing the title role and Othello's relationship with Desdemona, stripped of the old-fashioned histrionics, takes on stage realism that has not been seen before.

—Jane Matheny

# CAST

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Edward Kynaston.....Keith Phares

Margaret Hughes.....Kate Royal

Thomas Betterton.....Alexander Dobson

King Charles II.....Chad Shelton

Sir Charles Sedley.....Frank Kelley

Villiers, Duke of Buckingham.....Vale Rideout

Miss Frayne.....Nicole Heinen\*

Nell Gwynn.....Rena Harms

Lady Meresvale.....Briana Moynihan\*

Mistress Revels.....Sandra Piques Eddy

Hyde.....Nathaniel Hill\*

Female Emilia.....Jessica Schwefel

Male Emilia.....Nicholas Huff\*

Stage Hand.....John A. Stumpff

\* Members of the Florentine Opera's Baumgartner Studio Artist Program

**Florentine Opera Chorus** – Scott S. Stewart, Chorusmaster

**Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra** – William Boggs, Conductor

# LIBRETTO

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## ACT I

### Prologue

Scene: *Onstage at the Duke's Theater, London, 1661.*

*A raked stage. A large bed with flowing curtains. No other furniture. A figure lies on the bed in flowing, light blue robes. A rumble of thunder as an actor, THOMAS BETTERTON, an imposing man in his thirties, dressed and in dark makeup as Othello moves to the bed and parts the curtains. Thunder again, very loud. NED KYNASTON, made up as Desdemona, starts and sits up.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Othello?"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Ay, Desdemona."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Will you come to bed, my lord?"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Have you pray'd tonight, Desdemona?"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Ay, my lord."

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"If you bethink yourself of any crime unreconciled to heaven, solicit for it straight."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"What may you mean by that?"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"I would not kill that unprepared spirit."

*(Thunder, KYNASTON rises and backs away from BETTERTON)*

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Talk you of killing?"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Ay, I do."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Then heaven have mercy on me."

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Peace and be still!"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"I will, Sir. What's the matter?"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"That handkerchief which I gave thee thou gavest to Cassio."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"No, by my life and soul!  
Send for the man and ask him."

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"His mouth is stopped."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Alas!

*(Rumble of thunder as lights ebb to reveal side stage boxes filled with fashionable theatergoers.)*

He is betrayed and I undone!"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Weapest thou for him to my face?"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Down, strumpet!"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight!"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Nay, if you strive,"

EDWARD KYNASTON

"But half an hour!"

THOMAS BETTERTON

"Being done, there is no pause."

EDWARD KYNASTON

"But while I say one prayer!"

THOMAS BETTERTON

"It is too late!"

*(Wild thunder during what follows next. BETTERTON thrusts KYNASTON on the bed and "smothers" him with the red pillow. Knock offstage.)*

*(still smothering)*

"What noise is this? Not dead? Not quite yet dead?

I that am cruel am yet merciful;

I would not have thee linger in thy pain."

EDWARD KYNASTON

A guiltless death I die.

*(Desdemona dies)*

*(A male actor dressed as Emilia enters.)*

MALE EMILIA

My lord, my lord!

*(An audience male calls out.)*

CHORUS TENOR

Bring back the lady, bring back Desdemona. Bring back Kynaston!

THOMAS BETTERTON

What! How should she be murdered?

CHORUS

Bring back the lady, bring back Desdemona! Give us Kynaston!

*(BETTERTON struggles, but it is of no use. He turns and, looking at the bed, marches to it, pulls the curtain open and impatiently yanks KYNASTON to a standing position. The audience cheers as BETTERTON moves to one side and gives KYNASTON center stage.)*

Bring back the lady, bring back Desdemona!

*(KYNASTON curtsies, then bows, and removes his wig. The audience laughs as KYNASTON puts his wig back on and lies down on the bed. As BETTERTON lifts the pillow to once again smother KYNASTON, the lights go down.)*

Bring back the lady, bring back Desdemona! Give us Kynaston!

Kynaston! Kynaston! Kynaston! Kynaston!

## SCENE 1

*Time: After the performance*

*Scene: Backstage at the Duke's Theatre*

*(KYNASTON and BETTERTON enter, followed by MALE EMILIA.*

*The various actors are removing their makeup in the background, and dressers are taking costumes to be stored. MARGARET HUGHES, who calls herself PEG, is a pretty young woman in her early twenties and one of the dressers. She follows KYNASTON and he hands her the crimson pillow he has just used in the Death Scene.)*

MALE EMILIA

*(as he enters)*

Not again, never again! I shall not be humiliated again!

THOMAS BETTERTON

And I as well but what can I do?

Without an audience we have no play. As a player I deplore it, but as the manager I must permit it.

*(Emilia, shaking his head, starts to exit as one of BETTERTON's STAGE HANDS rushes up to BETTERTON.)*

STAGE HAND

The King and Miss Gwynn are on their way!

We must prepare to greet them!

*(There is great excitement as the news goes around the rooms and BETTERTON and KYNASTON along with the lesser players arrange themselves to greet the King and his pretty mistress. KING CHARLES II, splendidly arrayed, shortly enters with NELL GWYNN, a pretty young girl in her late teens and beautifully dressed, on his arm, followed by a few of the courtiers with him. All the people in the room bow deeply.)*

CHARLES II

Well done!

Well done, ev'ryone! Splendid, brilliant, excellent! What a ripping good play, superbly performed! One was simply overcome.

NELL GWYNN

Yes, we were overcome. Just overcome! Oh, what a world is the stage,  
with its candle light and its shadows, its smell of grease paint  
and powder.

Oh, what a world this is! As soon as me feet touched the floorboards  
and I smelled that greasepaint and powder,  
I felt a tingling in me veins and a stab of joy in me 'eart!  
I long to be on the stage one day and to act and sing me 'eart out!  
That will be a dream come true, and I'll feel me life is fulfilled! What a  
world is the stage, and some day, I'll belong here!

THOMAS BETTERTON

As player and manager I welcome you to our theatre. We're most  
humbled that you've honored us.

CHARLES II:

*(turning to KYNASTON)*

And you, sir, are remarkable,

*(turning to BETTERTON)*

And you, sir, of course as well.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(bowing with hand over his heart)*

Your Majesty overpraises me.

CHARLES II *(to BETTERTON)*

The play has great pow'r and sweep, but I've one thing to suggest,  
if I might.

THOMAS BETTERTON

Of course, Your Majesty.

CHARLES II

If somehow it could be made... a bit...shorter.

*(The players and people in the room look blankly at each other as the KING  
turns to leave.)*

Splendid, just splendid! Give us more such plays!

*(With NELL on his arm, CHARLES II sweeps out as all in the room bow  
deeply until he is gone. As soon as they are gone, other well-attired well-wish-  
ers enter and greet cast members)*

*(A STAGE HAND (male voice) crosses with two elegantly attired  
and attractive young women who stand diffidently to one side.*

*KYNASTON looks at them and then gestures for them to come over to see  
him. They excitedly cross to KYNASTON and extend their hands as the stage  
hand introduces them.)*

STAGE HAND

This is LADY MERESVALE and MISS FRAYNE.

LADY MERESVALE

Oh, Mister Kynaston, I can find no words to adequately praise...

MISS FRAYNE

...praise your performance tonight... your death scene... So...

LADY MERESVALE

... moving... heartbreaking.

*(Their faces abruptly break into smiles as they look at each other and giggle  
embarrassedly.)*

Are you by chance...

MISS FRAYNE

... free this evening?

LADY MERESVALE

... for a

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE

stroll at St. James's Park?

*(KYNASTON pauses for a moment, looking at their eager faces, and  
finally says.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

Yes, that would be a pleasure but I must be back within the hour.

LADY MERESVALE

Oh, that would be so...

*(clasping their hands together)*

MISS FRAYNE

so delightful!

LADY MERESVALE

...delightful!

EDWARD KYNASTON

But I must remove my grease paint and change clothes.

MISS FRAYNE

Oh, no!

LADY MERESVALE

Oh, no!

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE

We want you just as you are!

EDWARD KYNASTON

Then on to your carriage!

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE

Oh, what a dream come true! Come true!

*(The two ladies each take an arm and sweep KYNASTON out of the room, leaving PEG in the dark, seething at the sight.)*

MARGARET(Peg) HUGHES

Leave, chattering ninnies with your magpie minds!

Leave and good riddance to you! I come from your world too:

I may not be wealthy, and earn my keep as a dresser,

but I have the soul of an artist and would not trade that for all your pearls. And

I want more than anything to perform one day on this stage.

And you've no more appreciation of the man who travels with you than

a native in the wild! A man of such talent, a man of such

feeling, a man of such beauty that it astounds the eye.

*(turning once again to the exit)*

And now this rare man, this man of such gifts is all alone with those foolish women, while I, who cherish him have just his pillow for company. Does he know that ev'ry night I watch him from the wings?

That I know ev'ry word he speaks and ev'ry gesture he makes?

Would he be angry or would he care? I wonder. Edward,

EDWARD KYNASTON! I love you to distraction but for now I must

be silent, my heart corseted with fear. But one day I'll confess it,

though I'll tremble when I tell him! Yes, one day I'll confess it, one day

and then he'll know, he'll know, he'll know! But for now I'll be silent with

just his pillow for company. But one day, perhaps one day my love will find its voice!

*(PEG clutches the pillow to her heart as the lights go down in the dressing room.)*

## SCENE 2

*Time: Later that evening Scene: St. James's Park*

*(KYNASTON, with ladies on each arm, strolls through the dark.)*

LADY MERESVALE

Do you know how many roles we've seen you in?

EDWARD KYNASTON

Tell me again.

LADY MERESVALE

Six, counting today.

EDWARD KYNASTON

Can you name them all?

LADY MERESVALE

Yes, I can.

Juliet and Ophelia too.

MISS FRAYNE

And the one with the hands.

EDWARD KYNASTON

Don't say it!

Just call them "The Scots."

MISS FRAYNE

Whatever for?

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(said with sarcasm)*

Because they're Scottish!

*(The ladies burst into giggles and then MISS FRAYNE elbows LADY MERESVALE.)*

What are you ladies conspiring?

LADY MERESVALE

Well...

MISS FRAYNE  
Oh, just go and ask him.

LADY MERESVALE  
I was wondering...

MISS FRAYNE  
We were wondering...if you were truly,

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE  
truly a gentleman.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Ladies, ladies!  
You need have no fear for your honor.

MISS FRAYNE  
No, no!  
That's not what we

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE  
...meant, not at all what we meant!

EDWARD KYNASTON  
So what do you mean?

MISS FRAYNE  
Well...

LADY MERESVALE  
you see... I have a wager with my father.

MISS FRAYNE  
and I have the same with my uncle.

LADY MERESVALE  
I say that it's an insult to your art

MISS FRAYNE  
an insult to your art

LADY MERESVALE  
to think art for one moment...

MISS FRAYNE  
...for even a moment

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE  
that you're not really a male...

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Ladies, ladies!  
Say what you mean!

MISS FRAYNE  
...that you were not created...

LADY MERESVALE  
...that you were not created...

MISS FRAYNE  
...by

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE  
God as a male.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
*(bolding up his hands to protest)*  
Ladies, ladies, I assure you that I am made the same as other men.

LADY MERESVALE  
*(looking pained)*  
I regret to say your word would not be sufficient.  
*(KYNASTON looking at her blankly)*

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Then what is required?

LADY MERESVALE  
An inspection would suffice,

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE  
one that we can swear to on our honor as gentlewomen.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
*(KYNASTON looks dumbstruck for a moment and then, seeing the earnestness of the ladies, he smiles wickedly)*  
Inspection is granted but not in the open here.

*(The ladies look at each other briefly and then nod in agreement, but before they can go more than a few steps, SIR CHARLES SEDLEY, dressed garishly as a dandy, seemingly drunk, and walking with a cane, enters and, upon seeing the three figures, calls out:)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

Oh, Heaven forfend!

Do my eyes deceive me?

Three fair maids instead of just one!

Come skewer yourself on my waiting pole!

*(The two ladies scream and clutch each other.)*

LADY MERESVALE

*(seething, to KYNASTON)*

For honor's sake, assert yourself, protect us!

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

How much for each of you?

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE

*(hysterically to KYNASTON)*

DO something!

EDWARD KYNASTON

Very well.

*(pointing at each one)*

That one's a shilling, that one's six pence, And I am five pounds!

LADY MERESVALE

*(to KYNASTON)*

Players are all the same! I should have known.

Players are all the same:

MISS FRAYNE and LADY MERESVALE

wanton and vile!

*(As SEDLEY starts toward them, MISS FRAYNE takes LADY MERESVALE by the arm, and they exit in high dudgeon. SEDLEY then crosses to KYNASTON who turns to leave when SEDLEY's voice stops him.)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

Here now, not so fast. Stop now! Wait!

I can pay you what you ask.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(stopping and turning to face SEDLEY)*

I doubt you'd find in me what you're looking for.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

I'll be the judge of that. Come now, give us a feel.

*(SEDLEY reaches out and puts his hand over what he assumes to be a breast and, as he does so, KYNASTON takes his hand by the wrist and guides it to his crotch. As SEDLEY smiles with ardour and anticipation, KYNASTON presses SEDLEY's hand against his genitals and... SEDLEY, shocked, immediately takes his hand away and, furious, shouts at KYNASTON:)*

You're the vilest of whores, you bum boy!

I shall never wear this glove again!

You know not whom you offend, whom you've offended most

grievously! I am a nobleman and I'll teach you how to treat your betters.

So watch out for me, bum boy. Watch out for me!

Watch out! Bum boy!

*(SEDLEY turns and storms off stage. KYNASTON laughs as he, too, exits.)*

## SCENE 3

Time: Later that night.

Scene: Stage of Duke's Theatre.

*(The stage is dimly lit with only Desdemona's bed on the bare stage.*

*KYNASTON has removed his makeup, his gown, his wig, and stands only in his underpants, and we see the male KYNASTON for the first time. He is on the stage alone going through an elaborate ritual of the hands which silently expresses a full range of emotions from the most exalted joy to the most wracking grief, all mirrored in his face at the same time. He occasionally stops and eagerly looks in the direction of the entrance to the stage and then returns to his hand gestures.)*

*(Peg, with Desdemona's pillow, rushes onstage and is as startled when she sees KYNASTON as he is seeing her.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

Oh!

You startled me!

I didn't know you were still here!

MARGARET HUGHES

I'm leaving late tonight.

EDWARD KYNASTON

But you have my pillow.

MARGARET HUGHES

*(confused and guilty)*

I'm taking it home to mend it.



EDWARD KYNASTON  
Well, be careful, it's precious to me.

MARGARET HUGHES  
I will.  
You were rehearsing your gestures.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Yes, you can never rehearse them enough.

MARGARET HUGHES  
I have a confession to make.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Then by all means, let me hear it.

MARGARET HUGHES  
More than anything in all the world, I want to be a player.  
To perform the roles that you perform, and on this very stage.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
But why break your heart? You're a woman.

MARGARET HUGHES  
But times may change and if they do I'll be ready to take my place.  
I already know three roles.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
How can you say, you "know?"

MARGARET HUGHES  
I stand in the wings ev'ry night and I know your ev'ry gesture for  
Desdemona, Rosalind, and Ophelia. Are you angry with me?

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Why, yes! Why would you do such a thing?

MARGARET HUGHES  
Who better to learn from? Who?  
You've become "The Prince of Players."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
I don't discuss my past. I much prefer my present.

MARGARET HUGHES  
But surely someone taught you...

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Why don't you show me the gestures for melancholy?

*(As he demonstrates she follows him very accurately and the two of them, unknowingly, move more closely together. They end up shoulder to shoulder as VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM, enters and stops when he sees them, puzzled at what they are doing.)*  
*(VILLIERS applauds and enters. KYNASTON and MARGARET separate at once as Villiers goes to KYNASTON and embraces him. PEG draws away.)*

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
Bravo!

EDWARD KYNASTON  
George! George, this is Peg, my dresser.  
And this, Peg, is the Duke of Buckingham.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
Oh yes, you look familiar. Where might I have seen you?

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Miss Hughes came to me from SIR CHARLES SEDLEY.  
She would like to be a player.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
That's where I've seen her... in Sir Charles' little playhouse.  
Who would've thought a girl could act?

MARGARET HUGHES  
*(increasingly uncomfortable)*  
Yes they can, your Grace.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
So it seems. And tonight you're performing at Killegrew's.

MARGARET HUGHES  
Oh yes, sir, but it's only a tiny theatre. And it's in a tavern.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
*(shocked)*  
No! A female performing in public? It's forbidden!

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
But it's nothing, Ned, really nothing.  
A tiny stage in a tiny tavern where you smell beef and cabbage while you watch.

EDWARD KYNASTON

It's forbidden, and where's the art in that?

MARGARET HUGHES

I really must go... I'm late.

It was a pleasure to meet you, your Grace.

*(Peg rushes offstage, carrying the pillow, as KYNASTON, puzzled and troubled, looks after her.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

But a woman on the stage? It's unlawful, I tell you!

It can't be!

*(VILLIERS takes an envelope out of his pocket and holds it out to KYNASTON.)*

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

This will take your mind off of Killebrew's beef and cabbage.

EDWARD KYNASTON

What is it?

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

An invitation from King Charles to be a guest at dinner at the Palace.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(glancing at the invitation quickly and then looking up, very excitedly, the question of PEG completely forgotten for the moment)*

And you will take me with you?

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

That would be difficult... you're a player...

EDWARD KYNASTON

Not just any player! Not just any player!

I'm called "The Prince of Players!"

Surely it would not degrade you to be seen with me at the Palace.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

*(touched by KYNASTON's eagerness)*

Only if the utmost discretion be observed.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(suddenly angry)*

Have I ever been other than discreet? Have I ever? Have I?

*(VILLIERS crosses to KYNASTON and kisses him hard on the mouth, putting an end to the argument. Without saying anything he crosses slowly to the bed, undressing as he goes. KYNASTON precedes him to the bed and sits waiting as VILLIERS, only in his undergarments, finally stands in front of KYNASTON, hands him the invitation, puts his hands on KYNASTON's shoulders. He bends down to kiss KYNASTON once again as the lights go down.)*

## SCENE 4

Time: a week later

Scene: Banquet Hall, Whitehall Palace

*(Courtiers are gathered for a formal reception as KING CHARLES II and NELL GWYNN greet the guests. Both the KING and NELL are elaborately attired.)*

*(HYDE, the KING's chief minister, spots VILLIERS arriving late with other guests and leads him to the KING.)*

HYDE

The Duke of Buckingham, your Majesty.

CHARLES II

*(smiling at VILLIERS, taking both of his hands in his)*

George!

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

Majesty!

CHARLES II

*(patting the DUKE's shoulders)*

We thought you'd forsaken us.

*(KYNASTON enters the ball, uncomfortable with the surroundings' splendor)*

HYDE

*(spoken)*

Mr. Kynaston.

CHARLES II

Ah, Mister Kynaston... you look familiar...

NELL GWYNN

*(excitedly)*

The player! You saw him in Othello.

EDWARD KYNASTON

I was Desdemona.

CHARLES II

Oh yes, and splendid you were:

But you've unsexed yourself since we met!

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

*(bowing)*

Your Majesty, may I present Miss MARGARET HUGHES.

*(MARGARET curtsies as NELL steps forward.)*

NELL GWYNN

And the talk of London! At last a woman on the stage!

MARGARET HUGHES

Well it was surely novel, but whether it will be repeated

I cannot say.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

*(smiling pleasantly, although obviously displeased)*

And whether there be further demand.

HYDE

And what the Crown will allow.

CHARLES II

*(exuberantly)*

I say out with the old and in with the new!

What happened shall not happen again.

After twenty years of Puritan rule our England needs a new chapter of life. Here's to the Crown fore'er restored and here's to the forfeit the traitors must pay. May Cromwell's soul e'er rot in hell and may his dead body rot in chains. After twenty long years of Puritan blight our Kingdom will thrive from now on! After twenty long years of Puritan rule, our England will now be reborn!

*(There is loud applause and KING CHARLES smiles at the reception, while KYNASTON says sarcastically to PEG:)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

Well, "Margaret," I should congratulate you.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

I was there last night.

I thought you quite pleasing.

MARGARET HUGHES

Perhaps if I have more chances...

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(cough)*

Ah, but something is only novel once.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

Now you promised you wouldn't make a fuss, Ned.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(to PEG)*

And when did you plan to tell me!?

MARGARET HUGHES

I thought it not worth mentioning since it was just for one performance, I thought...

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

And how came you to know Mister Killigrew and his tavern theatre?

MARGARET HUGHES

I am the...

*(SEDLEY stops MARGARET in mid-sentence)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

Just a moment, George! Let me explain that!

I lent Killigrew a modest sum to present Marg'et on his stage.

It was a gamble that paid off for us both, and now more performances are planned. Thought I'd lost my mind when she became your dresser.

Now she's become a player too! And mostly from watching you.

Have you seen her in your role?

EDWARD KYNASTON

I've not had the pleasure, but there's more to acting than imitation:

There are years of training too.

MARGARET HUGHES

But I started with an advantage: I was born a girl!

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

You must come see her. It would be such fun!

EDWARD KYNASTON

We don't go to plays just for "fun", sir, but to discover what is true in our lives. We players hold up mirrors to you in the audience for you to see your reflection.

We show you at your weakest and your most exalted and in language you could never summon yourselves. The stage is not just a painted portrait but a portrait that steps out of its frame. We reveal what men conceal, and that is not always jolly!

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

(to SEDLEY)

Please, my friend meant no offense sir! His art is his life.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

None taken, but do see her!

EDWARD KYNASTON

It was good to see you again, sir.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

Have we met before?

EDWARD KYNASTON

There was the matter of the glove...

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

How dare you! You'll pay for this!

CHARLES II

(The KING holds up his hand and says)

And why not have women on the stage?

They've had them in France for some time now.

HYDE

(in an aside but clearly audible)

Anytime we do something horrible here it's said

"The French have done it for years!"

EDWARD KYNASTON

(stepping forward and bowing)

With all due respect, sir, your Majesty's not serious...

CHARLES II

Of course I am! It's just a musty custom.

EDWARD KYNASTON

Would you destroy our livelihoods, put us back on the streets?

CHARLES II

Oh come now! You can find something else!

EDWARD KYNASTON

I've worked half my life to do what I do.

Would you ask me now to toss that aside?

CHARLES II

Surely, you exaggerate, sir!

EDWARD KYNASTON

I was an orphan and a chimney sweep, put out on the streets before I was eight, then taken in by a kind old man to live in a cellar with fourteen boys. He gave us shelter and he gave us food and then also he taught us how to act, to learn the language of the stage: its movements, its gestures, its language, its speech, evoking a world of such feelings I'd never known. Joy, all consuming, anger that inflamed me, and love that fired my soul! The kind old man would whisper to me: "The other boys are good, Neddie, but when the theatres reopen—you will be the star!"

(He pauses...)

Well, I worked and I worked for four long years until at last

I was on the stage where I still perform today.

This is my life and the lives of others like me.

I beg you, entreat you, not to take our lives away.

My life is my art, my art is the stage: don't take our stages away!

(Everyone has become quiet during KYNASTON's outburst and then the silence is broken by KING CHARLES:)

CHARLES II

You're not a performer for nothing, sir:

You almost persuaded me!

EDWARD KYNASTON

(immediately angry)

That was not a performance, sir:

That was my life!

(There is a pause as the group of people look furtively at each other, and then KING CHARLES turns serious and addresses KYNASTON, barely controlling his anger.)

CHARLES II

With a kingdom to rule, and all the reforms, this is not important!

EDWARD KYNASTON  
IT IS TO ME!

*(KYNASTON bows in deference and steps back with VILLIERS. KING CHARLES, his face set, turns to HYDE and says sternly:)*

CHARLES II  
I would have you prepare an edict to return women to the English stage!

HYDE  
No, Majesty, that is too rash! It reverses years of custom! Give yourself time to think!

CHARLES II  
*(dictating)*  
"Ministers of the Privy Council: I present to Parliament an Edict which I wish to have passed, put down in law, and posted. We do permit that all women's parts be acted by women.  
No He shall ere again upon the English stage play She."  
*(There are cheers and applause from the gathering, followed by:)*

CHORUS  
Long live our King, let his subjects rejoice. Never England's might waiver away! Vainly Dutchmen or Gauls try attack our shores. Our God our King shall be our defense. Here's to restoring the British crown, and here's to an end to exile! After twenty long years of Puritan rule, our England must now be reborn!

*(KYNASTON has looked at the cheering group with dismay and then he leaves VILLIERS and crosses quickly to PEG who has stood, silently looking on. He takes her by the arm and shouts over the guests:)*

EDWARD KYNASTON  
What have you done?! How could you betray me?

*(Before PEG can reply, NELL GWYNN quickly crosses to KYNASTON and roughly takes his hand off of MARGARET's arm. KYNASTON, unthinking, impulsively takes hers in return.)*

NELL GWYNN  
*(shouting)*  
How dare you speak to her that way!  
She'll bring women to the stage!

EDWARD KYNASTON  
But at what price, ma'am, what price?

CHARLES II  
*(shouting at KYNASTON)*  
Release Miss Gwynn, Mister Kynaston!  
You have exceeded propriety!

*(VILLIERS quickly crosses and, taking KYNASTON firmly by the arm, leads him out of the room as PEG, troubled, looks on. The courtiers burst once again into a celebration of the KING.)*

NELL GWYNN and CHORUS  
God save our King and protect our land  
and blessed is the man who calls England home as the traitors' heads roll and hangmen recall that our lives all belong to the King!

## ACT II

### SCENE 1

*Time: one month later*  
*Scene: the stage of the Duke's Theatre*  
*(which is bare except for four empty chairs. BETTERTON is privately rehearsing a scene from KING LEAR with a limp doll form in a white dress as Cordelia.)*

Spoken during the repetition: Howl, howl, howl, howl! Oh, you are men of stones! Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so That heaven's vault should crack. She's gone forever. I know when one is dead and when one lives. She's dead as earth. Lend me a looking glass If that her breath will mist or stain the glass Why, then, she lives.

*(KYNASTON enters in a great state of anger)*

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Tom! Tom! The King's edict is now law!  
I've no longer a profession and no way to earn a living!

THOMAS BETTERTON  
*(setting down the doll and crossing to him, puts his arm around KYNASTON's shoulders comfortingly)*

Perhaps the edict will be revoked. You'll find something... I feel sure of it. But I can't talk now:  
I'm waiting for Miss Gwynn and Miss Hughes.  
Sir Charles and the King are bringing them here to audition...

EDWARD KYNASTON  
For what?

THOMAS BETTERTON  
*(pointing to one of the chairs)*  
To be members of this Company...

EDWARD KYNASTON  
I can't believe you're serious!

THOMAS BETTERTON  
*(holding up his hand)*  
But no more conversation: I hear them outside.

*(BETTERTON puts on a smile as the ladies enter followed by SIR CHARLES SEDLEY who glares at KYNASTON as KYNASTON nods to PEG who smiles politely in return. The two women sit in the chairs as does SIR CHARLES SEDLEY who refuses to acknowledge KYNASTON.)*  
So which of you will begin for us?

NELL GWYNN  
I will be first: my selection will be in a lighter vein.

THOMAS BETTERTON  
And what will that selection be?

NELL GWYNN  
"My Johnny Has Asked Me to Marry Him."

*(BETTERTON nods and she begins singing a spirited folk ballad filled with roudies.)*

My Johnny has asked me to marry him.  
I hope and I pray it is not a whim.  
He's the thrill of my heart, he's the love of my life,  
And now Johnny has asked me to be his wife.  
Hold me, enfold me with arms open wide. Johnny, I want so to be your  
bride. Take me, ner for-sake me, my life now begins.  
Johnny has asked me to marry him!  
*(There is applause as she finishes.)*

THOMAS BETTERTON  
A lovely rendition, Miss Gwynn.  
Don't you agree, Mister Kynaston?

EDWARD KYNASTON  
A lovely rendition indeed, but perhaps the city's music halls are more  
suited to Miss Gwynn's gifts.

THOMAS BETTERTON  
*(quickly to cut off SEDLEY who has risen to protest)*  
And now Miss Hughes what do you have for us?

MARGARET HUGHES  
The Death Scene from Othello.  
For my performance I'm indebted to Mister Kynaston:  
It is really his but the feeling is mine.

*(Thunder, Margaret backs away from BETTERTON)*  
"Talk you of killing?"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
*(in a low voice from the side)*  
"Ay, I do."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"Then heaven have mercy on me."

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Peace and be still!"

MARGARET HUGHES  
"I will, Sir. What's the matter?"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"That handkerchief which I gave thee thou gavest to Cassio."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"No, by my life and soul!  
Send for the man and ask him."

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"His mouth is stopped."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"A-las! He is betrayed and I undone!"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Weepst thou for him to my face?"

MARGARET HUGHES  
"O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!"

THOMAS BETTERTON  
"Down, strumpet!"

MARGARET HUGHES

"Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight!"

THOMAS BETTERTON

"Nay, if you strive,"

MARGARET HUGHES

"But half an hour!"

THOMAS BETTERTON

"Being done, there is no pause."

MARGARET HUGHES

"But while I say one prayer!"

THOMAS BETTERTON

*(in full voice)*

"It is too late!"

*(Wild thunder during which follows next. BETTERTON thrusts PEG on the bed and "smothers" her with the red pillow.)*

*(SIR CHARLES SEDLEY has leapt to his feet applauding as KING CHARLES enters, also applauding.)*

CHARLES II

Great feeling!

I watched from backstage. Her future seems assured!

Seems assured! What do you say, Kynaston? After all, this is your role.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(genuinely)*

There are things I can be as a woman that I could never be as a man.

NELL GWYNN

Kynaston, why have you such low regard for playing one's own gender?

EDWARD KYNASTON

There's not the same art in that. It's much simpler to play one's own sex.

THOMAS BETTERTON

*(genially)*

Then show us, Ned.

Surely now you'll be playing a man.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(uneasily)*

It's something I've never done...

THOMAS BETTERTON

*(sympathetically and jovially)*

It's not that difficult, Ned:

I do it ev'ry night!

NELL GWYNN

*(brightly, with a touch of sarcasm)*

Mister Kynaston would be a star in any guise.

THOMAS BETTERTON

Go ahead, Ned, and take the stage.

*(KYNASTON positions himself away from the other people in the room. He inhales and then speaks in a low voice, exaggerating the declamatory nature of the text.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(uncertainly)*

"It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul. It is the cause..."

*(He freezes and then asks.)*

May I start again?

NEL GWYNN

Yes, yes of course!

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(with greater bravado)*

"It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul, it is the cause.

Yet I'll not shed her blood nor scar that white skin of hers.

Yet she must die...

Yet she must... "Might I...once more?

NELL GWYNN

Please.

EDWARD KYNASTON

I'll...skip ahead a bit.

*(He starts to lighten his voice and it takes on an airy tremulous sound.)*

"Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men..."

If I could try once more...

CHARLES II

We mustn't impose on you any longer.

*(turning to KYNASTON and kindly)*

Kynaston, they tell me that the light of a star burns long after the star has died, even though it's not known to the star.

*(KYNASTON tearfully rushes out, humiliated)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY  
*(as the KING, NELL, and Peg leave)*  
And what of Miss Hughes?

THOMAS BETTERTON  
We'll take her of course.  
Come around tomorrow and we'll discuss it.  
*(As soon as the KING's party has exited BETTERTON crosses to KYNASTON and looks at him with concern)*

EDWARD KYNASTON  
How can this be happening? My life as a player over?

THOMAS BETTERTON  
Oh Ned, you can't give up! Nothing is over till you say it is.  
You're still a young man; it is not too late to learn new things.  
I beg you hear me out 'til I'm done! I love you like a brother and we've known each other all these years, ever since you came here as a lad and dazzled us with your gifts. You're my prince of players and will be as long as you're here. So don't talk of leaving. That's a blade to my heart, as a player and a friend. Take on male roles, I beg you. Hamlet, Macbeth and Lear. Surely you can't refuse that. Consider this carefully, I beg you! Consider this carefully, I beg you. It's just a role, like any role.  
You have your whole life ahead of you!

*(KYNASTON, sobbing, rushes across stage and exits. BETTERTON, shaking his head sadly, looks after him and then picks up his doll and starts rehearsing again.)*  
Never! I'd sooner go back to the streets!

## SCENE 2

*Time: a month later*

Scene: Villiers' reception room at York Palace on the Strand.  
*(The scene opens on VILLIERS at his home. He looks somber and obviously agitated, as if in anticipation of something.)*  
*(Shortly KYNASTON arrives and is shown to VILLIERS. VILLIERS rises and extends his hand, then stares at KYNASTON who is unshaven and somewhat unkempt. VILLIERS shakes his hand somewhat too cordially, and looking at KYNASTON, closely asks him:)*

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
Ned, it's been a while. You look a fright.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
*(smiling wryly)*  
I'm well enough, thank you, for an indigent player.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
Have you found work?

EDWARD KYNASTON  
Yes... of a different kind... but it pays.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
If you're ever in need of money, you've only to let me know.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
*(interrupting)*  
Why have you asked me here?

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
*(VILLIERS's face becomes grave and then he says after a long pause:)*  
For the saddest of all reasons... I can no longer see you.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
*(distressed)*  
NO!

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
It's true... There has been some gossip about you and me.  
Some talk of our being seen together in private as well as public.  
And I can't risk more: I have to think of my family name.

EDWARD KYNASTON  
But we've been discreet.

VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM  
I'm also getting married...

*(KYNASTON who has been standing sits, stunned.)*  
...into an old distinguished family, and a whiff of scandal and I'd be disowned by her family as well as my own. And I can't risk that, not only disgrace, but not having a farthing of my own.  
*(He pauses and begins again in a subdued voice.)*  
I'll miss having you in my life: all the pleasure you've brought me.  
It's not for want of caring, that I promise you. You'll always be in my heart.  
*(There's a long strained silence, broken finally when KYNASTON rises and, going over to VILLIERS, kisses him on the forehead.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Though he do shake me off, Comfort for-swear me!  
His unkindness may defeat my life, but never taint my love."  
*(KYNASTON, his face revealing his pain, walks across the room and exits as VILLIERS sadly looks after him.)*



## SCENE 3

Time: one week later

Scene: onstage at the Cock Pit Tavern

*(The scene opens onto a bawdy, shabby music hall full of drunk, working class men, noisily drinking their ale and stout while they watch what is performed on a small, shallow stage. The manager of the tavern is a coarse middle-aged woman, dressed in worn street clothes, who has just finished a joke to which there is loud applause, laughter, and whistles. She holds up her hand for silence and then introduces the next performer as Lusty Louise.)*

### MISTRESS REVELS

Gents, it's my esteemed pleasure to introduce to you, from the world's great stages, that Cock-Sure Madam, that Ballys Bawd, that Paragon of Beauty and all things refined, who will entertain you now with a tender ballad which will bring a tear to your eye!

I now give you Lusty Louise!

*(There is great applause, yells and whistles, as KYNASTON enters, dressed in a garish gown, a huge blonde wig, white makeup, smeared rouge and lipstick. KYNASTON, slightly drunk, walks uncertainly, and then from the center of the little stage begins to sing in a throaty voice.)*

### EDWARD KYNASTON

"Oh, come all you laddies and listen to me, and I'll tell you a tale that will fill you with glee: Of a pretty maiden, fair and tall, who married a man who had no balls at all!"

No balls at all, no balls at all.

The night of the wedding, she crept into bed;

Her cheeks were rosy, her bum was red.

She reached for his pecker, his pecker was small;

She reached for his balls, but he'd no balls at all! (audience joins in)

No balls at all, no balls at all;

She'd married a man who had no balls at all!

*(by himself)* Oh Mother, Oh Mother!

What shall I do? I've married a man who's unable to screw.

My troubles are many, my pleasures are small:

For I've married a man with no balls at all! No balls at all,

no balls at all! I've married a man with no balls at all!

*(MISTRESS REVELS re-mounts the stage and puts up her hands to speak.)*

### MISTRESS REVELS

I hear some of you boys are noising it about that our lady is not a lady at all. Well, we'll take care of that right now.

*(A snare drum roll starts as KYNASTON takes his hands and slowly inches his dress up until he is interrupted by a woman's voice shouting:)*

### MARGARET HUGHES

Stop!

Stop!

STOP IT!

*(MISTRESS REVELS turns to look out front as KYNASTON squints into the lights to see the source of the voice. The crowd grows silent as out of the shadows emerges a woman in a cloak and corset. She mounts the stage and pushes back her corset to reveal her identity as PEG.)*

### MISTRESS REVELS

*(sneering)*

What do you want here, lady?

### MARGARET HUGHES

I want the lady.

### MISTRESS REVELS

Only when she's finished

### MARGARET HUGHES

I'll pay you for her. *(holds up a pouch)* Five pounds.

*(MISTRESS REVELS holds out her hand and PEG gives her the pouch.*

*MISTRESS REVELS opens the pouch and looks inside as PEG goes to KYNASTON and takes him by the arm.)*

### MISTRESS REVELS

All right, lady, you can have him and good riddance, I say!

*(MARGARET takes KYNASTON's hand and leads him off the stage.*

*As they exit there are cries of "boos" and whistles. To quell the protest*

*MISTRESS REVELS turns to the audience and says:)*

His heart was never in it. Now one more time!

### MISTRESS REVELS and CHORUS

"Oh, no balls at all, no balls at all.

She married a man with no balls at all!"

*(The lights go down on the tavern and a scrim comes in as PEG and KYNASTON move downstage in a spot and start to walk quickly offstage.*

*Suddenly out of the shadows a group of three young ruffians run onstage and start pummeling KYNASTON as PEG screams,*

*"STOP! STOP!" KYNASTON fights back but is quickly overcome and falls to his knees, covering his face with his hands. PEG screams for them to stop and then she sees SIR CHARLES SEDLEY, standing and smiling in the moonlight, and quickly grasps the situation.)*

MARGARET HUGHES

Stop!

Is this your doing!?

How dare you do this!

Make your brutes stop! This minute!

*(Shortly, SEDLEY orders the ruffians to stop.)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

That's enough.

Let him go.

*(KYNASTON lies hovering on the ground, bruised and bleeding. PEG goes to SEDLEY and slaps him across the face as she shouts:)*

MARGARET HUGHES

How did you know I was here?

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

It was simple:

I had you followed.

What woman of quality goes out at night alone?

MARGARET HUGHES

And why would you do this to him?

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

*(laughs at her)*

Perhaps you should ask him.

MARGARET HUGHES

I want nothing further to do with you.

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

That would be difficult: I still pay your way.

*(crosses to KYNASTON)*

I hope you've learned a lesson from this as to how to treat your betters!

The matter between us is now settled.

*(SEDLEY seethes at being reminded and then strides off, saying to PEG through clenched teeth:)*

You're due at the theatre in the hour.

*(PEG sits and cradles KYNASTON's head in her lap.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

How did you find me?

MARGARET HUGHES

Betterton told me. Can you walk?

*(KYNASTON nods that he can.)*

Then I will take you to your rooms. I have a carriage waiting.

*(As she lifts him to his feet he looks at her with naked gratitude and says weakly:)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

Thank you...

Left here I might have died.

*(With his arm around her neck supporting him, KYNASTON and PEG, with great effort, exit.)*

## SCENE 4

**Time:** immediately following

**Place:** Kynaston's rooms

*(The lights come up on a small bedroom furnished meagerly with a narrow bed, a bucket and a stool. The door opens and PEG enters, still supporting KYNASTON, whose arm is around her neck. He stands in the middle of the room as PEG helps him remove the dress he is wearing and he stands naked except for his undergarments. She goes to the bucket, takes a cloth and begins washing his bruises and wounds as well as his garish makeup.)*

MARGARET HUGHES

Shall I get a physician?

I have no skill.

EDWARD KYNASTON

No, no, I'll be alright.

MARGARET HUGHES

But you've bruises and cuts.

EDWARD KYNASTON

I'll be alright.

At least I am out of that hideous dress!

MARGARET HUGHES

Thank God!

Now you must stay here until you've recovered. I'll bring you your food, but you must stay in bed.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(gently)*

Why are you doing this?

I've not always been kind to you.

MARGARET HUGHES

I couldn't bear to think of you in that dreadful place.

EDWARD KYNASTON

The tavern?

MARGARET HUGHES

Not a man like you, not a player of your fame!

EDWARD KINSTON

Lusty Louise! Prince of Players!

MARGARET HUGHES

Rest here while I dress your wounds.

EDWARD KYNASTON

I was beaten when I was ten. I was an orphan.

The lads I lived with wanted to punish me because I was favored.

They tried to ruin my face.

It took months for the scars to heal.

MARGARET HUGHES

I'm so grateful you survived!

EDWARD KYNASTON

We slept on stinking pallets on hard, cold floors, and the food we ate was mostly gruel, but we survived, and I made friends who took my side in fights.

It was worst when my guardian was gone and I...was alone... The jealous boys would strip my clothes off and then they'd try to... But why are you taking care of me?

MARGARET HUGHES

Surely you know or at least suspect.

EDWARD KYNASTON

Know what?

What must I suspect?

MARGARET HUGHES

That I love you, Ned. I love you!

With all my heart, I love you.

There've been times when I feared my heart would burst with what I felt for you, but I dared not tell you.

I couldn't tell you: you were so far above me, it would have seemed an impertinence. But after seeing you lying on the ground, lying twisted there and moaning with pain, I knew I could tell you what I felt, and I

knew also that I would.

You were still the Prince of Players, but now you were also just a man in urgent need of someone to ease your pain, for someone to bind your wounds and give you care.

So loving you as I do, I want to provide you that, and to restore you to the Kynaston I adore, I adore and I will! I will!

I've wanted to tell you for so long now and even now, I'm trembling, but I'm happy that you know...

EDWARD KYNASTON

You know...

MARGARET HUGHES

I know you can't feel the same. Now hand me your underdrawers.

I'm taking your clothes so you can't leave.

You must rest in your rooms while your wounds heal.

I'll come ev'ry day with food.

Do you agree to that?

*(He nods and then quickly falls asleep. She then puts on her cowl and exits.)*

*(The lights go down on the scene and when they come up again, it's a week later. KYNASTON is sitting up in bed in a night shirt and smiling as PEG stands in the center of the room, and removes her cloak.)*

MARGARET HUGHES

Your wounds are healing and you're looking better ev'ry day.

EDWARD KYNASTON

I want to go out and resume my life, such as it is.

MARGARET HUGHES

*(sitting on the edge of the bed)*

We'll visit the playhouse tomorrow. Tom will be glad to see you!

*(They look at each other for a moment and it is evident that they have confided in each other during the intervening week and developed feelings for each other.)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(taking her hand and very gravely)*

There's something I'd like to know:

How do you die as Desdemona?

MARGARET HUGHES

Like you, of course, why do you ask?

EDWARD KYNASTON

I'm never satisfied with what I do: there's always something missing.

MARGARET HUGHES

*(vehemently)*

I despise doing it your way!

EDWARD KYNASTON

That can't be true. I can't believe that.

I've been praised for its beauty.

MARGARET HUGHES

It is beautiful—too beautiful to believe.

EDWARD KYNASTON

What would you do?

MARGARET HUGHES

I would fight and struggle 'til my last breath to hold on to life... any woman would!

EDWARD KYNASTON

But women are sensitive, feeling creatures,  
at the mercy of unfeeling men. That's why I love to play them.

MARGARET HUGHES

*(vehemently)*

That is your fantasy! You deny us anger and passion!  
You make us less than human! I dread ev'ry time I play the scene!

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(angrily)*

Then play it your way! Nobody's stopping you!

MARGARET HUGHES

*(matching his anger)*

You are, damn you! Yours is the only way I know!

EDWARD KYNASTON

Then fight him the next time! Give Othello a surprise!  
And what of making love with men?  
Are you always docile and always on your back?  
*(Suddenly she lies on top of him, putting her arms around him, and kisses him passionately. Without breaking the kiss...she pulls him on top of her and KYNASTON tentatively responds at first and then, aroused by the emotion of the moment, begins making love to her ardently as the lights go down on the scene.)*

## SCENE 5

Scene: The same

Time: Several days later

*(The scene opens immediately with loud knocking on the door of KYNASTON's rooms and BETTERTON is heard calling for KYNASTON who is asleep in bed.)*

THOMAS BETTERTON

Ned, Ned!

It's Tom!

*(KYNASTON awakes and in the semi darkness pulls on his drawers and unsteadily goes to the door, which he opens to a frantic BETTERTON.)*

Ned, I'm desperate, desperate for your help!

EDWARD KYNASTON

What's wrong? Please tell me!

THOMAS BETTERTON

It's Peg!

EDWARD KYNASTON

What do you mean? What has she done now?

THOMAS BETTERTON

There's a command performance for the King tonight  
and Peg refuses to go on, and the house is full!

EDWARD KYNASTON

What is the play?

THOMAS BETTERTON

Othello. And she won't perform it until the final scene is restaged.

EDWARD KYNASTON

"Restaged?"

THOMAS BETTERTON

And that you're the only one to restage it!

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(suddenly understanding and smiling)*

I think I know what she means.

THOMAS BETTERTON

Then will you do it? I'm desperate!

EDWARD KYNASTON

What will you pay me?

THOMAS BETTERTON

Ten percent of the house.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(smiling and patting him on the arm)*

It's done then. I'll be there shortly.

*(As KYNASTON completes his dressing BETTERTON, relieved, rushes offstage.)*

## SCENE 6

**Time:** Later that evening

**Scene:** Duke's Theatre

*(The lights come up on the crew scurrying about the stage, setting the bed and canopy mid-stage and bringing on props for the evening's performance.*

*BETTERTON, partially in costume, is onstage when KYNASTON rushes in.)*

THOMAS BETTERTON

*(calling out to one of the stage hands)*

Bring Mistress Hughes to the stage at once.

Mister Kynaston is waiting for her.

*(Hearing that KYNASTON has come, SEDLEY rushes out from the rear and up to KYNASTON, taking both of KYNASTON's hands in his.)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

Oh, Mister KYNASTON, thank you so for coming! Margaret is intractable, utterly intractable

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(withdrawing his hands)*

I'm happy to be of service. *(with a sardonic smile)*

You mustn't risk contamination.

*(SEDLEY doesn't understand at first and then, when he does, he bows and says:)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

I hope that unfortunate bus'ness can now be forgotten.

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(smiling coldly)*

Perhaps when my wounds have healed.

*(Peg rushes in, in a lavish costume and embraces KYNASTON.)*

MARGARET HUGHES

Ned!

Ned!

You've come!

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(KYNASTON holds her at arm's length and says:)*

Are you willing to commit yourself to me?

MARGARET HUGHES

Oh, yes! Anything you say.

EDWARD KYNASTON

Then start by getting out of that beautiful robe; You're to be only in your nightgown. And your hair must be mussed.

*(She musses her hair delicately and KYNASTON ruffles it. As she looks at him questioningly he says to her:)*

You've been sleeping.

*(He then takes her by the arm and starts offstage.)*

We must rid you of half your greasepaint while we run your lines.

MARGARET HUGHES

Who is to be my Othello?

EDWARD KYNASTON

I am.

*(MARGARET's eyes open widely, and she smiles with pleasure.)*

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

*(turning to BETTERTON)*

That's preposterous! Surely he's not serious!

THOMAS BETTERTON

He knows ev'ry word of Othello. I should know!

SIR CHARLES SEDLEY

*(weakly)*

Then I'll not object any further. God help my poor Margaret!

*(During the above we see the audience gathering in the boxes on either side of the stage. It is an elegant attitude attired in their finest including VILLIERS with his fiancée, SIR CHARLES SEDLEY, and the KING and NELL GWYNN. The lights come down until the stage is almost in darkness for a brief time, during which PEG and KYNASTON come onstage and take their places. The lights then come up on Act 5 of Othello as it was in the Prologue. KYNASTON, costumed and with darkened face and turban, is completely immersed in his role and PEG is responding to the level of passionate realism he creates.)*

MARGARET HUGHES  
"Othello?"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Ay, Desdemona."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"Will you come to bed, my lord?"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Have you pray'd tonight, Desdemona?"

MARGARET HUGHES  
"Ay, my lord."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"If you bethink yourself of any crime unreconciled to heaven,  
solicit for it straight."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"What may you mean by that?"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"I would not kill that unprepared spirit."

MARGARET HUGHES  
*(Thunder. MARGARET rises and backs away from KYNASTON.)*  
"Talk you of killing?"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Ay, I do."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"Then heaven have mercy on me."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Peace and be still!"

MARGARET HUGHES  
"I will, Sir. What's the matter?"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"That handkerchief which I gave thee thou gavest to Cassio."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"No, by my life and soul!" "Send for the man and ask him."

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"His mouth is stopped."

*(rumble of thunder)*

MARGARET HUGHES  
"Alas!  
He is betrayed and I undone!"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Weepst thou for him to my face?"

MARGARET HUGHES  
"O banish me, my lord, but kill me not!"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Down, strumpet!"

MARGARET HUGHES  
"Kill me tomorrow, let me live tonight!"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Nay, if you strive,"

MARGARET HUGHES  
"But half an hour!"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"Being done, there is no pause."

MARGARET HUGHES  
"But while I say one prayer!"

EDWARD KYNASTON  
"It is too late!"

*(There is an offstage thunderclap as KYNASTON grabs the pillow on the bed, throws PEG roughly onto the bed, and begins to smother her with the pillow. PEG flails about with her arms and legs but KYNASTON is relentless. She screams from underneath the pillow as FEMALE EMILIA knocks at the door but KYNASTON won't let up as she claws at his face and slaps at his arms. The audience is totally immersed and leans forward in their seats, their faces distressed and incredulous, fearing the action is real.)*

FEMALE EMILIA  
*(shouting from offstage)*  
"My lord, my lord, let me in! What is happening?"

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(looking up and speaking in a throttled voice)*

"What noise is this? Not dead?

Not quite yet dead?"

*(EMILIA bursts in as KYNASTON looks away and then looks on with glassy eyes as EMILIA leans down to listen to PEG's heart.*

*KYNASTON looks around him, seemingly lost. As Emilia starts to speak PEG says weakly:)*

MARGARET HUGHES

"O falsely, falsely murdered."

FEMALE EMILIA

*(astonished, looking at PEG )*

"Who has done this deed?"

MARGARET HUGHES

"Nobody. I myself. Farewell.

Commend me to my kind lord:

O farewell."

*(PEG then "dies" and FEMALE EMILIA looks wonderingly at KYNASTON.)*

*(KYNASTON then picks up the pillow and speaks to it, treating it as a dying lover)*

EDWARD KYNASTON

"Here is my journey's end. Desdemona's dead.

I kissed thee ere I killed thee...no way but this...to die upon a kiss."

*(He then kisses the pillow and lays it on the bed and, quietly weeping, slowly eases himself down onto it. As he does so there are resounding cheers and thunderous applause.)*

CHORUS

Bravo, Kynaston! Bravo, Kynaston! Bravo!

Bravo, Kynaston! Bravo, Kynaston! Bravo!

Bravo, Kynaston!

Bravo, Kynaston!

Kynaston and Hughes!

*(As PEG extends her hand, KYNASTON rises to his feet and joins her in a bow. As the applause continues silently in pantomime, PEG turns to KYNASTON and asks:)*

MARGARET HUGHES

*(intently)*

You're changed, Ned.

Who are you now?

EDWARD KYNASTON

*(somewhat dazed and breathing heavily)*

Nothing has changed...

I'm the same...only more so. Look, Peg, they're still applauding! Shall we take another bow?

*(The applause comes up again along with cheers of "Bravo, Hughes!" and "Bravo, Kynaston!" and then gradually fades as PEG and KYNASTON stand, holding each other's hands, as the curtain falls.)*

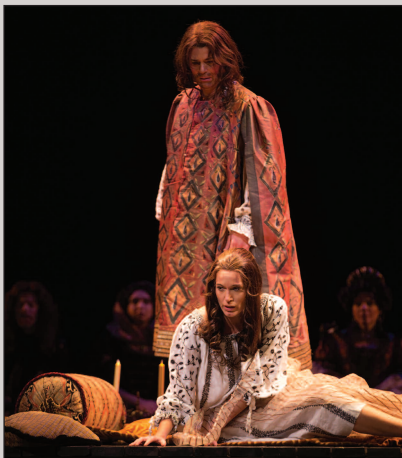
CHORUS

Bravo, Kynaston, bravo, bravo! Kynaston and Hughes!

Bravo, Kynaston, bravo, bravo! Kynaston and Hughes!

Bravo, bravo, bravo, bravo! Kynaston and Hughes!

Bravi, bravi, bravi, bravi all!



# CARLISLE FLOYD

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CARLISLE FLOYD (1926) IS ONE OF THE FOREMOST COMPOSERS  
AND LIBRETTISTS OF OPERA IN THE WORLD TODAY.

He began his teaching career in 1947 at Florida State University, remaining there until 1976, when he accepted the prestigious M. D. Anderson Professorship at the University of Houston. While there, he and David Gockley co-founded the Houston Opera Studio, which has become one of the most prestigious young artists programs in the world.

Considered the “Father of American Opera,” Floyd’s operas are regularly performed in the US and Europe. He first achieved national prominence with the premiere of *Susannah* by the New York City Opera in 1956. In 1957 it won the New York Music Critics’ Circle Award and subsequently was chosen to be America’s official operatic entry at the 1958 Brussels World’s Fair.

His second opera, *Wuthering Heights*, premiered at Santa Fe Opera in 1958, and continues to have life decades later: a critically-acclaimed recording, released by The Florentine Opera in June 2016 on Reference Recordings, was listed in *Opera News*’ 10 Best Opera Recordings of 2016.

During his long career, Floyd has composed 13 operas. His most recent, *Prince of Players*, premiered in March 2016 at the Houston Grand Opera. With this Milwaukee production, the Florentine Opera gives *Prince of Players* its world-premiere live recording.

Among the numerous awards and honors Floyd has received include a Guggenheim Fellowship (1956); the National Medal of Arts in a ceremony at the White House (2004). In 2008, Floyd was one of four honorees—and the only composer—to be included in the inaugural National Endowment for the Arts Opera Honors. In 2001, Floyd was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He holds six honorary doctorates.

During the 2015–16 season, Floyd partnered with OPERA America to produce “Masters at Work,” a live, interactive webcast exploring the making of an opera, based on *Prince of Players*.



# The Florentine Opera

## MAKING OPERA A DESTINATION FOR MILWAUKEE

The Florentine Opera Company is Wisconsin's oldest fully professional performing arts organization and the sixth oldest opera company in the United States. Founded in 1933 as the Italian Opera Chorus by John David Anello, the Florentine today attracts talent from around the world and employs nearly fifty local professional chorus singers and nearly a hundred Wisconsin-based designers, carpenters, technicians, seamstresses and crafts people each season. Florentine performances range from Baroque gems with period instruments to world premieres.

Over the years, the Florentine has had the honor of hosting some of the world's greatest opera singers, among them: Beverly Sills, Samuel Ramey, Mark Delavan, Luciano Pavarotti, Vivica Genaux, Sherill Milnes, Raquel Montalvo, Richard Tucker and José Carreras. The Florentine trains the next generation of American opera singers through the Donald and Donna Baumgartner Studio Artist Program.

Other Florentine Opera recordings include: *Elmer Gantry* by Robert Aldridge and Herschel Garfein, which won 2012 Grammy-Awards for Best Classical Contemporary Composition and Best Engineered Album, Classical; *Rio de Sangre* by Don Davis; *Wuthering Heights* by Carlisle Floyd; and *Sister Carrie* by Robert Aldridge and Herschel Garfein. The company has been proud to work with Soundmirror on each of these recordings.

The Florentine is a professional company member of OPERA America.

## THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players* was performed by arrangement  
with Boosey & Hawkes Inc., publisher and copyright owner.

Based on *Compleat Female Stage Beauty*, by Jeffrey Hatcher, through special arrangement with Lionsgate.

Premiered as a chamber opera by Houston Grand Opera on March 5, 2016  
and in fully orchestrated form by the Florentine Opera Company on October 12, 2018

Scenery and costumes for this Florentine Opera production  
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## CREDITS

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**Artistic Advisor:** Carlisle Floyd

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**Produced by:** Florentine Opera Company

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