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Privates On Parade

A Play With Songs

Peter Nichols

Music by Denis King

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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PRIVATES ON PARADE

Privates on Parade was presented in a revised and re-written version at the Donmar, London, on 10th December 2001, with the following cast:

Acting Captain Terri Dennis
Flight-Sergeant Kevin Cartwright
Sergeant-Major Reg Drummond
Cheng
Private Steven Flowers
Lance Corporal Charles Bishop
Corporal Len Bonny
Major Giles Flack
Leading Aircraftman Eric Young-Love
Sylvia Morgan
Lee

Roger Allam
Nigel Harman
David Hounslow
Wai-Keat Lau
James McAvoy
Hugh Sachs
Justin Salinger
Malcolm Sinclair
Daniel Tuite
Indira Varma
Carl Wu

The play directed by **Michael Grandage**
Designed by **Christopher Oram**
Musical Direction by **Chris Walker**
Choreography by **Scarlett Mackmin**
Lighting Design by **Howard Harrison**
Sound Design by **Fergus O'Hare**

PRIVATES ON PARADE

First presented by the Royal Shakespeare Company at the Aldwych Theatre, London, on 17th February 1977, and subsequently at the Piccadilly Theatre, London, on 2nd February 1978, with the following cast of characters:

Major Giles Flack	Nigel Hawthorne
Acting Captain Terri Dennis	Denis Quilley
Sergeant-Major Reg Drummond	Shaun Curry
Sylvia Morgan	Emma Williams
Flight-Sergeant Kevin Cartwright	Neil McCaul
Corporal Len Bonny	Joe Melia
Lance Corporal Charles Bishop	Tim Wylton
Leading Aircraftman Eric Young-Love	Simon Jones
Private Steven Flowers	Ian Gelder
Lee	Cecil Cheng
Cheng	Eiji Kusuhara

The play directed by **Michael Blakemore**

Music by **Denis King**

Setting by **Michael Annals**

The action takes place in Singapore and districts of Malaya

Time—1948

THE SET

The sets more or less alternate frontcloth and full stage in the manner of the variety theatre. Lee and Cheng sometimes move furniture and props, to the accompaniment of percussion, thus suggesting the popular Chinese opera.

Over the proscenium, downstage, is a sign-writing screen on which are flashed the names of the various scenes, given in the script.

Steps provide easy access from stalls to stage and musicians are unseen in a pit.

A frontcloth is down as the audience arrives.

Synopsis of Scenes

ACT I

Scene 1	The Quartermaster's Stores
Scene 2	On With the Show
Scene 3	Single Men in Barracks
Scene 4	Les Girls
Scene 5	Beginners, Please
Scene 6	Western Approaches
Scene 7	Get Up Them Stairs
Scene 8	Forces Sweetheart
Scene 9	Harmony Time
Scene 10	Our Sergeant-Major
Scene 11	Lest We Forget

ACT II

Scene 1	Nöel,Nöel
Scene 2	Kernel of the Knuts
Scene 3	A Tricycle Made for Three
Scene 4	Privates on Parade
Scene 5	The Midnight Choo-Choo
Scene 6	Latin-American Way
Scene 7	The North of Gongapooch
Scene 8	Pals
Scene 9	Even Their Relations Think They're Funny
Scene 10	Not Wanted On Voyage
Scene 11	Bless 'Em All

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT I

S.A.D.U.S.E.A.
The Movie to End Them All
Danke Schön
Western Approaches Ballet
The Little Things We Used To Do
Black Velvet
Better Far than Sitting This Life Out
The Prince of Peace

ACT II

Could You Please Inform Us
Privates on Parade
The Latin American Way
Sunnyside Lane
Sunnyside Lane (reprise)

Enquiries regarding the music should be addressed to
Samuel French Ltd

ACT I

SCENE 1

The Quartermaster's Stores

Chinese prompters, Lee and Cheng, enter to a giant fanfare of Chinese music. They wear black "pyjamas" throughout and hats, coats, rifles, etc. as required for their many silent roles, but always ready to serve as prompters

They raise tabs or wheel off screens, turn to the audience and bow, turn back, present the blacked-out stage and go

The frontcloth shows a jungle design with the play's title. The Lights go down and out and the cloth flies. The stage is bare. For some time there is no light

At last someone strikes a match us and comes down by its light. We see Steven Flowers, in khaki drill and beret, shouldering a kit-bag with a bush-hat strung to it. He is a twenty year old, untouched, sun-tanned conscript who speaks with a West Country accent. The match burns low and he blows it out. He drops the kit-bag on the floor, waits again, wipes his face with a handkerchief

Steve Anyone home?

Pause, no answer

Hullo? (He waits again, then shrugs, takes a piece of paper from his tunic pocket and looks at it. He picks up his kit-bag again and makes to go)

As he disappears an overhead Light is switched on, showing a narrow circle of stage floor

Len Bonny enters from one side, pushing a skip. He is dressed as Steve but with three stripes. On the skip is a clipboard with papers. Len is by turns aggressive and morose, with a Midlands accent

Steve comes back into the light. Len jumps

Len Where d'you fucking come from?

Steve Bukit Timah, Sarge. Up the Bukit Timah Road.

Len I don't mean where d'you fucking come from in Singapore. I mean what you doing creeping in here like a fucking mouse?

Steve I came to get my arrival chitty cleared.

Len takes Steve's chit, looks at it with some suspicion, forms words with his lips

Len Private Flowers. (*He looks at Steve as if to verify this*) Clerk special duties. In—tell...

Steve Intelligence.

Len looks at him again

Len I can fucking read! Intelligence, eh? You'll be all right here. It's all fucking long words here. A shower of fucking Einsteins here. Where d'you come from?

Steve Bukit Timah. In a gharry up the Bukit Timah Road.

Len Not in Singapore. In Blighty.

Steve Swindon.

Len Railway Junction.

Steve That's it.

Len Railway town. D'you work on the railways?

Steve I came here straight from school. I'm going to be a teacher.

Len You'll be all right here. All la-di-da round here. And fucking elocution. Right, let's get you kitted out. (*He pulls down a small shelf at the side of the stage, stands behind it, puts the chit on the shelf and issues kit*) Stripes, sergeant's, khaki drill, pairs two. Everyone here gets three stripes up.

Steve You mean we're all sergeants? Just like that?

Len Temporary, acting, unpaid. Just so we can use the messes when we go on tour. And all the civvies got some pips up. So don't call me fucking sergeant. Only two of my stripes is substantive.

Steve Right you are, corporal.

Len No, it's all fucking first names here. So you better call me Len and I'll call you fucking Einstein, all right?

Steve takes the stripes and tries them against his sleeve

Or I could call you Swindon. See how things turn out.

Len ticks the list on the board and goes off

Steve pins the stripes on, looks at them and smiles with pleasure

Steve (*quietly*) Dear Everyone at Fifty-Six, as you can see by the top of this letter form, from now on your errant son and heir is to be addressed as Sergeant Flowers. Which I take to be a long overdue recognition of my innate genius.

Len enters with more kit

Len Badges, cap, pairs, one. Incorporating faces, pairs one, face to the left smiling, face to the right browned off.

Steve looks at the badges

Steve They're the tragic and comic masks.

Len The what?

Steve The masks of tragedy and comedy.

Len Get out! Typical, that is. No cunt never tells me nothing. Stores-basher me, always have been. I know inventories backwards. Boots, mosquito, jungle-green, soldiers.

Steve I see you do, Len.

Len Then I'm posted here and put to handling these cunts: shoes, patent, type Astaire, Fred. Pairs, one. (*He gives the shoes to Steve, then ticks the list*)

Steve stows the items in his kit-bag. Len produces a cardboard box

(*Showing Steve some of the items*) Sticks, greasepaint, assorted, six. Putty, nose, portions one. Shadow, eye, jars one. Puff, powder, other ranks, one. Then later you might get a pair of tights, fishnet, black, sergeant's. Male oblique female. Brassière, sequinned, inflatable, sergeant's. Wigs, auburn, wavy, officer's.

Steve The lady officers?

Len The fucking men.

Steve Aren't there any women here?

Len Not enough. So the men get up in frocks.

Steve I don't fancy wearing frocks.

Len *Nil desperandum*. It may never happen. You can come here as a concert fucking pianist and end up shovelling shit. Look at me—sparks, chippy, Jack-of-all-fucking-trades. And I came in as an accordionist. You'll be attached to Captain Dennis. I'll take you along there now.

Steve (*shouldering his kit-bag*) What's he like?

Len Terri? Easy-going. San Fairy Fucking Ann. You know, typical civvy.

Terri enters the auditorium

Terri (*from the back of the theatre*) There you are, Leonora! At long last!

SCENE 2

On With The Show

Len Hullo, Terri. We been waiting for *you*.

Terri Who's your friend?

Len Sergeant Flowers. He's going to be attached to your section.

Terri arrives on stage from the stalls

Terri It sounds heaven.

Terri is sun-tanned, has dyed blond hair, plucked and pencilled eyebrows, matt tan base, wearing pastel-coloured slacks and shirt, smoking a cigarette in a holder. His voice is Shaftesbury Avenue pasted over Lancashire

Sweetie, I can hardly wait to attach you to my section but we're supposed to be rehearsing and let's face it we've wasted enough time...

Len We been waiting for *you*.

Terri You dare speak to an officer like that and I'll scream the place down. Go to your post this instant! And you, duckie, I should drop that expensive-looking handbag and find yourself somewhere to sit.

Steve drops his kit-bag on the stage

Not here, duckie, this is the stage. Those are the wings, that is the front-of-house, up there are the flies and the whole bag of tricks is known as The Theatre.

Len leads a bewildered Steve to the wings

And now perhaps young Tom Edison will give us our opening lights. And is everyone ready backstage?

Chorus (off) Yes, all ready.

The house Lights come up

Terri It's fabulous!

Terri goes off and immediately comes back acting. He's a stilted performer, always playing out front, even when speaking to someone on stage

Great heavens, look at this! Rehearsals due and no-one here. I've never seen such amateurs. Dear oh Lord! Are you there, Sparks?

Len *(off)* Yes, I'm here, Terri.

Terri Then give me your working lights.

The overhead Lights come on

And take out your house lights.

Black-out

During the Black-out, Kevin comes on

Len *(off)* Fucking thing!

The working Lights come on again

We see Kevin: twenty-odd, good-looking, wearing sun-glasses and a white shirt, khaki shorts, etc. London accent, awkward actor

Kevin Hullo, Terri...

Terri Ah! Someone's condescended to join me. *(To the audience)* Flight Sergeant Kevin Cartwright, R.A.F.

Kevin Sorry I wasn't here on time. I couldn't find my glasses. And one of them had a drink left in it.

Terri One of them had a drink—I find that totally outrageous.

Charles comes on; twenty but putting on weight and losing hair, camp but matronly, Yorkshire accent

Charles Sorry I wasn't here on time.

Terri Well, Sergeant Charles Bishop, Royal Army Medical Corps, what's your excuse?

Charles You know I'm fond of music.

Terri Well?

Charles I've been listening to a three-piece orchestra.

Terri Yes?

Charles And the third piece was rather long.

Terri This is too much, honestly! Take your places without another word.

Len comes on. He cannot act at all

Len Sorry I was not here on time.

Terri Never mind, Sergeant Len Bonny, Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, tell me, where've you been?

Len I've been buying my wife a dress.

Terri A dress? That's nice. What kind of a dress?

Len A Biblical dress.

Terri A Biblical dress? What's that when it's at home?

Len You know—Lo and Behold!

Terri (*with gestures to explain*) Low—and behold?

Len I find it hard to look her in the face.

Terri You find it hard to look—I refuse to listen to another solitary word.

Eric comes on; twenty, plain, ungainly, hair shaved well above ears, wearing issue glasses and sweating profusely into K.D. He has a plummy voice and a hearty demotic manner

Who's this? Sergeant Eric Young-Love, R.A.F. You're late for rehearsal.

Eric I've been eating at my girlfriend's.

Terri Is your girlfriend a good cook?

Eric Oh Lord no! Even the mouse ite eat. Mice eat out!

Terri Oh, Jesus!

Eric I can do it, honestly, Terri...

Terri Even Leonora got her lines right.

Len And I didn't come here as an actor. I came as a fucking accordionist.

Terri All right! Carry on. (*He claps his hands for attention*) Well, everyone's here but Sylvia. Where is Sylvia, where is she?

They all pretend to search the stage

Sylvia appears: twenty-eight, Eurasian, beautiful, speaks with an Indian intonation, wears a dress and high-heeled shoes

Sylvia (*joining them looking*) Who are we looking for?

Terri You! Temporary Lieutenant Sylvia Morgan of no fixed abode. Where have you been?

Sylvia I'd rather you didn't say that, Terri.

Terri What—where've you been?

Sylvia Of no fixed abode. It doesn't sound very nice.

Terri It only means you're not in any of the services, duckie.

Sylvia I'm sorry but it makes me sound not entirely respectable.

Terri Well, how about "Of no service in particular and yet at the service of you all".

Sylvia That's even worse. When we go up country, those soldiers will be in heaven-knows-what stages of sexual starvation.

Terri Why do you think I volunteered? Get on with the lines.

Sylvia I've been answering an advert for a girl to help in the officers' mess.

Terri Did you get the job?

Sylvia No, they said they wanted a girl who'd been in a mess before.

Terri I will not countenance another word! Are you all ready?

Chorus Yes.

Terri Are you all steady?

Chorus Yes.

Terri Then lights, action, music!

Stage lighting. They line up and the band strikes up. They sing their opener

Chorus What shall we do for an opening number?
Waltzes are schmaltz and we're sick of the rhumba,
Front Row Crests of the Wave are too hackneyed by far.
Chorus Hey, what about letting them know who we are?
We're SADUSEA
And on the other hand we're glad to see
You've come along tonight to join our laughter,
To see our dance,
To feel a touch of magic and a breath of romance.
We've taken pains
To see our show's the sort that entertains
And now there's nothing very much remaining
Except for naming
The Company:
We're S.A.D.U.S.E.A.,
Song and Dance Unit South East Asia.

They move about in planned confusion and take individual lines in the next verse

Len What...?

Terri Not yet.

Len Fuck it.

Chorus What can we do for the rest of the chorus
They know who we are so they know what to call us,
We're ready and steady and rarin' to go.

Terri Hey, what about saying the name of the show?

They form a line and sing in unison

Chorus It's Jamboree,
We're bringing you a Jungle Jamboree.

Len We've got together in this equatorial latitude,

Chorus To chase your blues away and change your attitude.
 So now you'll see
 We've got the kind of personality
 To make you come with us upon a spree
 Or pot-pourri
 Or a jubilee

Terri So one-two-three for
Chorus S.A.D.U.S.E.A.
 And their Jingle-Jangle-Jungle Jamboree!

They all dance off as the Lights change

SCENE 3

Single Men in Barracks

The cloth is flown to reveal a bar-counter with shelves of bottles behind, stools in front

Lee and Cheng appear as waiters, tunics over their black pyjamas

They set tables and chairs, then bow and "present" the scene

Reg and Steve enter. Steve is still shouldering his kit-bag

Reg This is the mess.

Steve Very nice.

Reg And I'm the mess steward. Any complaints, any problems, let me know.
 Any cheek from Lee. This is Lee. He number one boy. Sarnt Flowers, he
 belongee mess now.

Lee, polishing glasses, nods

And this is Cheng, Cheng take Sergeant's kit to bearer, tell him fix velly
 good bed chop-chop, or Tuan ask plenty questions. Savvy?

Cheng nods, takes the kit-bag from Steve and goes

Sit down and have a drink.

Steve Well, thanks, Sergeant-Major, I'll have a ginger beer shandy.

Reg Two large gins. Lee. Plenty big like-so.

They sit at a table, while Lee prepares drinks

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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Samuel French London



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