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SF PERUSALS

GLORIOUS!

A Comedy

by Peter Quilter

SAMUEL FRENCH

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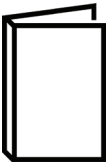
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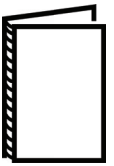
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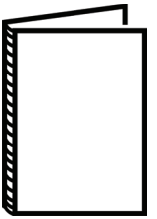
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Peter Quilter's plays have been produced in forty countries around the world and translated into thirty languages. He has had three successful shows in London's West End, a hit run on Broadway, and has twice been nominated for the Olivier Award – for Best New Play and Best New Comedy. His work has been produced at some of the world's most prestigious venues, including Sydney Opera House, the Ahmanson in Los Angeles, the Belasco Theatre in New York, and also at many of the National Theatres of Europe.

His most widely produced play is the Florence Foster Jenkins comedy, *Glorious!* which premiered at the Duchess Theatre in London's West End in 2005 starring Maureen Lipman. It has since been seen by over a million people in theatres across five continents. Stage productions have been broadcast "live" on television in Poland and Japan and the show has also had success in countries as diverse as Canada, Brazil, Germany, Russia, Romania, Israel and Spain.

Peter is also the author of the popular comedy *Duets* which has dozens of productions every year and has toured in many countries. His other comedies include the all-female *Curtain Up!* and the theatrical play *The Actress*.

In recent years, Peter has received critical acclaim for his Judy Garland play with music, *End of the Rainbow*. The show enjoyed hit runs in both London and New York and was nominated for three Tony Awards and four Olivier Awards including Best New Play. A movie adaptation of the play will be released in cinemas in 2019.

Peter's new work includes the drama *4000 days* and the comedy *Saving Jason* both of which had their world premiere productions at the Park Theatre in London.

Information, video clips, reviews and photographs from Peter's plays can be seen on his website – www.peterquilter.net

PRODUCTION NOTES

Settings

Projections of words and images are used occasionally during the play but these are optional and not essential. There is a "falling rose petal" effect at the end of the play which is also optional.

Singing

The songs in the show are intended to be sung live. Not necessarily a direct imitation of Madam Jenkins' voice, but with the actress singing badly in her own style. An alternative option would be for the actress to make a studio recording of the songs in her own voice. She would then skilfully mime to her own vocal track. This would work very well in the Melotone scene and perhaps also the finale. A production might work with a well-disguised mix of these two options. But singing everything live is always going to be the very best option for the show.

Music

There are three songs in the play: two of which, "The Laughing Song" by Strauss and "Queen of the Night" by Mozart are both readily available in terms of sheet music for piano accompaniments. The third song, "Clavelitos", is an old Spanish folk song and if this proves difficult to locate it may be hired from Samuel French Ltd.

Florence Foster Jenkins performed with a solo piano accompaniment. It was played live in the original production but could be pre-recorded and a dummy piano used.

First performed at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre (artistic director Jonathan Church) on 6th September, 2005, prior to a UK tour produced by Michael Codron and Lee Dean. The cast was as follows:

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS	Maureen Lipman
COSME MCMOON	William Oxborrow
ST CLAIR	Barrie Ingham
DOROTHY	Josie Kidd
MARIA	Janie Booth
MRS VERRINDER-GEDGE	Lolly Susi

Produced by Michael Codron
Directed by Alan Strachan
Designed by Simon Higlett
Lighting by Jason Taylor

The production transferred to the Duchess Theatre, London, on 3rd November, 2005.

I would like to dedicate this play to those listed below

CHRISTOPHER DUNHAM
for his support of my early work

BRYAN MURRAY
for his advice and encouragement

ALAN and FRANCES MACINNES
for the haggis and deep fried Mars bars

and

WOODY and HOLLY
for everything

The true story of
Florence Foster Jenkins
the worst singer in the world

CHARACTERS

FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS, an eccentric American lady, 60s/70s
COSME MCMOON, a pianist, early 30s
ST CLAIR, Florence's English boyfriend, 60s
DOROTHY, Florence's friend, 60s
MARIA, Florence and St Clair's Mexican cook and housemaid
MRS VERRINDER-GEDGE, an American lady, late middle age

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The action of the play takes place in New York

ACT I

Scene One	Florence's apartment at the Hotel Seymour
Scene Two	The Melotone recording studio, 54th Street

ACT II

Scene One	Ballroom of the Ritz Carlton Hotel, with added décor
Scene Two	Funerary gardens outside a church
Scene Three	The stage of Carnegie Hall
Scene Four	The stage of Carnegie Hall

Time—1944

ACT I

Scene One

A simple phrase is projected in wording across the stage: "This is a true story". Music begins – a beautifully sung recording of ***"ADELE'S LAUGHING SONG"*** *by Strauss. As this plays, we see a series of projected images and film footage that depict New York in the early Forties. During this, the specific year of the play – 1944 – is established. The final image is of the Hotel Seymour in Manhattan (circa 1944) accompanied by the wording – "The Hotel Seymour, New York". When this final image fades out, the music ends.*

A spotlight comes up on **COSME**, *an attractive, slightly effeminate young man in his early thirties. He stands outside a doorway at the far edge of the stage. He rings the doorbell.*

The door opens very slightly and the face of **FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS** *peers out. She is an eccentric, energetic American lady in the twilight of her years.*

COSME Hi. I'm Cosme.

FLORENCE Of course you are! I had no idea you were so remarkably young and attractive.

COSME What a coincidence – I had no idea either!

FLORENCE *(after a giggle)* Do come in.

COSME *enters.*

The door closes and the spotlight fades out. The lights come up on the apartment of **FLORENCE FOSTER JENKINS** *at the Hotel Seymour. It is crowded with heavy old furniture, appearing that it has all been transplanted from more spacious quarters. A piano sits amidst the clutter.* **FLORENCE** *welcomes* **COSME** *into the room.*

Do sit down.

COSME *edges towards the nearest chair.*

No – not there! Here. I think you'll find that more comfortable. That's a *man's* chair!

COSME *settles into the alternative grand armchair.*

Do feel free to smoke, if you wish.

COSME I don't smoke, but thank you.

FLORENCE Would you like a drink? I have some lovely fruit tea.

COSME Sounds perfect.

FLORENCE Good. Would you ring?

COSME Excuse me?

FLORENCE *gestures to a little bell on a side table nearby.*

This?

FLORENCE A little tinkle.

COSME *rings the bell.*

It really is so very, very nice to meet you. And you have such an unusual name… Cosme.

COSME Yes, my parents had a strange sense of humour.

FLORENCE Though it's poetic. "Cosme McMoon" – very musical.

COSME Yes. I should have been an operetta.

FLORENCE *chuckles at this.*

FLORENCE "With Cosme McMoon at the piano". Yes, I do like that.

COSME You haven't heard me play yet.

FLORENCE Oh, I've no doubt you'll be wonderful. And you've come so very highly recommended.

COSME By whom?

FLORENCE By George – my former pianist. He played for me for nearly ten years. But now he has problems. Lots of trapped wind! On a bad day he would make more noise than the actual piano. Which is no good at all.

COSME No.

FLORENCE But I'm sure we won't have that problem with you.

COSME I certainly hope not.

FLORENCE Please ring again.

COSME *rings the bell a second time, on this occasion with more force. After a short pause, the sound of a pan being slammed down is heard offstage.*

Ah, that sounds promising. Here she comes.

MARIA, *the Mexican cook and housemaid, enters.*

MARIA Si?

FLORENCE Tea and cake for our guest.

MARIA Oh, pastel y te? No me apetece preparar nada para su mariquita. Estoy intentando limpiar la cocina y después tengo que limpiar la moqueta porque sus invitados dejan el apartamento como un cochinero. Con lo poco que me pagan, sírvanse ustedes mismos.

FLORENCE *(after a pause)* Do you speak Spanish, Cosme?

COSME No.

FLORENCE Me neither. *(To* **MARIA***)* Just the tea, then.

Disgruntled, **MARIA** *exits back into the kitchen.*

MARIA *(as she goes offstage)* Jesus, Maria y Jose!

FLORENCE Such a passionate language. I'd love to understand a little more. I'm sure what she says is very colourful. We hope to replace her soon. Is the chair comfortable?

COSME Er – yes, thank you.

FLORENCE Quite big for this apartment, really. But I couldn't let it go. There would be nowhere for the men to sit, would there?

COSME I guess not.

FLORENCE How nice it is to meet a young man who is interested in sharing my love of music. I have always been tremendously interested in young musicians. We have helped many of them through my clubs and societies – and some have gone on to promising careers. I'm sure we will hear from them in the future. Music means so much to me! That is why I perform. I am so looking forward to singing at the annual ball next month. Last year's was quite an event! But first, we have my new recording to take care of. Have you heard any of my records?

COSME Is there more than one?

FLORENCE No, but I like the way it sounds.

COSME I haven't, no.

FLORENCE It's *The Bell Song* from Lakme.

COSME Very nice.

FLORENCE I recorded it for Melotone Studios. Such *kind* people! At first they seemed surprised that when recording I simply sang through the song just once. But I feel that if you don't get it right the first time, you won't do it any better the second – so why tire yourself? That's why I don't find recording anywhere *near* the trial most of my fellow artistes do.

MARIA *enters. She pushes a large tea trolley covered in a draping sheet. On it stands a slice of cake and a pot of fruit tea, plus plates, napkins, cutlery, cups, etc.*

Thank you, Maria. *(She points to an area close to* **COSME***)* There! Aqui! Aqui!

MARIA *ignores* **FLORENCE** *and parks the trolley far away downstage of the main door.*

Thank you, Maria!

MARIA Si, si, luego me vuelvan a dar las gracias cuando les diga que mañana ya no vuelvo. *(To* **COSME***)* Ha!

FLORENCE *just smiles and shrugs, having not understood a word.*

MARIA *exits.*

COSME She only brought one piece of cake. Are you not...?

FLORENCE No. I'm cutting down. Shall I pour? I don't like it very strong.

COSME That's fine.

FLORENCE *pours the tea.*

FLORENCE Do you enjoy playing the piano?

COSME Yes, I do. Though it's always a struggle to earn enough dollars each month.

FLORENCE Well, worry not. I shall pay you an extortionate amount.

COSME Good! That really is music to my ears. It will make my bank manager very happy.

FLORENCE Oh, I shouldn't worry about him. I don't like banks. They always seem to be writing to me and warning me about things. I do wish they would leave me alone. I'm a very busy woman. My father was a banker in Pennsylvania. And he

was not a very contented man. It's not a line of work that is good for the soul.

COSME *takes a bite of the cake.*

Moist?

COSME No, I'm fine.

FLORENCE A mean – the cake?

COSME Oh – er, sure – just right. And even little silver balls on top. You're spoiling me.

FLORENCE I know – aren't I wicked! *(She giggles again)* I do long for a piece myself. But I must resist or I shan't fit into any of my costumes. They are very spectacular. I make them all myself. It is such a bore if you have to keep letting them out at the waist. So I follow a strict regime.

Her eyes linger on the cake as **COSME** *takes another bite. She licks her lips.*

COSME So – erm – is there anything you want to ask me?

FLORENCE Oh, no. We'll just get to know each other as we go along. Though, you are aware I need someone to begin playing for me immediately?

COSME Oh, yes. Your friend Dorothy has already given me all the sheet music.

FLORENCE Has she?

COSME Yes. She came to the restaurant where I play background music. I offer them Chopin as they chew on their meatloaf. It's my contribution to the war effort.

FLORENCE Do you enjoy playing Chopin?

COSME Well, I prefer it to storming the beaches of Normandy…

FLORENCE Oh, yes. Far more relaxing… And I'm sure the diners very much appreciate what you do.

COSME Oh, I don't think anybody actually notices I'm there. I'm hidden behind the salads. Obscured by broccoli. It's quite challenging.

FLORENCE Now are you sure Dorothy gave you everything? Including for the recording, the ball and the recital at the Sherry Netherland?

COSME Yes, I think so. I know most of the pieces quite well anyway.

FLORENCE Thank goodness you do! You'll be very nervous – we always have a huge crowd. Eight hundred each year at the Ritz Carlton. There's never an empty seat. And I know each member of the audience personally.

COSME You must have a lot of friends.

FLORENCE Well, not so much because of that. But because everyone who wishes to attend a recital must first come here for an interview.

COSME You have to interview to get a ticket?

FLORENCE I think that's quite unusual.

COSME Quite – yes.

FLORENCE I have to insist on it. No exceptions. It's the only way to root out "the enemy".

COSME The enemy?

FLORENCE There's a certain element—those who come just to mock and cause trouble. There's always a gaggle of them at the back of the room. I'm trying to do something about it. Would you like another piece of cake? There's plenty more.

COSME No, thanks. I don't want to spoil my dinner.

FLORENCE No, you don't! What are you having?

COSME I – haven't decided.

FLORENCE Well. You certainly wouldn't want to spoil that! I don't know what I'm having either. It's always a bit of a surprise – and not often a pleasant one.

Her eyes fall on the cake again, making **COSME** *very self-conscious.*

COSME Are you sure you won't have a small piece?

FLORENCE I mustn't. But it is distracting, isn't it?

We hear the sound of **ST CLAIR** *singing to himself outside the door.*

Oh – you can meet St Clair!

The door opens and closes. **ST CLAIR BYFIELD** *enters. He is an elderly gentleman, frazzled and overweight, but bursting at the seams with loud theatricality. He is originally from England and utilizes his native accent to full effect.*

ST CLAIR We have a guest?

FLORENCE Mr McMoon. A piano player.

ST CLAIR Aha! Our potential new pianist! Welcome! Hope you can hold yourself in better than the other chap. Some afternoons, it was like the 1812 Overture in here.

ST CLAIR *shakes* **COSME***'s hand, as he stands.*

COSME Cosme McMoon. Nice to meet you.

ST CLAIR St Clair Byfield.

COSME Are you English?

ST CLAIR I am.

COSME What are you doing in New York – did you get lost?

ST CLAIR *(laughing)* Yes, I think I must have. Been here for years. Though you never lose your roots, deep down. I love the English. Though I couldn't eat a whole one! *(He laughs loudly then fetches himself a glass of bourbon)* You from here?

COSME No, I grew up in Chicago.

ST CLAIR Chicago! During Prohibition?

COSME Yes.

ST CLAIR You must be thirsty! Can I get you a large one?

COSME No, thank you.

ST CLAIR Oh, come on, it's not a meeting of the Verdi Club – have a damn drink.

FLORENCE Have a bourbon, Cosme. Don't mind your tea. Maria doesn't make it terribly well. But the Bourbon hasn't been anywhere near Guadalajara, so you'll be fine.

COSME *(pressured)* Just a small one.

ST CLAIR *(looking at the decanter)* I'm glad you said that – there's only a drop left. Must have been a struggle.

COSME What?

ST CLAIR Having no alcohol around. I'd have signed up with Capone like a shot.

COSME It didn't bother me. Though I think my parents would have liked the opportunity to drown their sorrows.

ST CLAIR They still there?

COSME No. They're now in Florida with the other crocodiles.

ST CLAIR *passes* **COSME** *a small bourbon as* **FLORENCE** *just stares at him, smiling broadly.*

So, what do you do for a living, St Clair?

ST CLAIR I tread the boards!

COSME You're a carpenter?

ST CLAIR No! Actor! Didn't you see me in the Park?

COSME *shakes his head that he did not.*

We played the summer there with a particularly un-talented director. Did his best to completely ruin Shakespeare's tragedies. Next year, he hopes to destroy Chekhov.

COSME Well, I'll definitely come next time.

ST CLAIR You must!

COSME Are you in a show right now?

ST CLAIR No, nothing at the moment.

COSME So, you're "resting"?

ST CLAIR No, dear – "drinking"! Cheers! *(He takes a large gulp of his bourbon)* Actually one of the chaps from the Park does have a job – on the Great White Way.

COSME Really?

ST CLAIR Yes. Young fella by the name of Marlon Brando.

COSME Is he any good?

ST CLAIR Rubbish! It's always the way. The true talent gets completely ignored. Still— *(He raises his glass)* We make the best of things. *(He finishes the rest of his bourbon in one go)*

COSME *also takes a sip.*

FLORENCE Do you like it? The bourbon?

COSME Yes, it's very nice.

FLORENCE I don't drink myself. Sometimes a little sherry for my voice, but that's all.

COSME Do you find your throat gets very sore – from all the singing?

FLORENCE Actually, no. I very rarely suffer ailments of any kind. This is quite unusual, but I just seem to be able to sing endlessly without suffering any stress or tiredness at all. I have a resilient throat.

COSME Well – that's lucky.

FLORENCE Yes. It's a blessing.

ST CLAIR So – do we think you will be playing for Madam from now on?

COSME Well, it depends on—

FLORENCE Of course he will! He's going to be perfect. And all the ladies will be very jealous of me. Do you have a young lady of your own, Cosme?

COSME No, I don't.

FLORENCE Waiting for the right one?

COSME Something like that...

MARIA *enters.*

MARIA Cuándo quieres comer?

FLORENCE What was that?

MARIA Cuándo – Quieres – Comer?

FLORENCE Oh! Yes, wait – I know this one. She's asking what time to make dinner. Any preferences, St Clair?

ST CLAIR As soon as you like. I'm starving. Have we got any steak?

MARIA Que?

ST CLAIR Steak? *(He mimes a pair of bull's horns)*

MARIA *(with eyes raised to the sky)* Si.

ST CLAIR Fine. That'll do me. But don't over-cook it. I want mine rare. Understand? Molto rare-o. Just rip its horns off and stick it on a plate.

MARIA Cuándo?

FLORENCE What? Oh – soono. Prego. Whatever it is. Immediatamente. A momento!

MARIA Now?

FLORENCE That's the one!

MARIA *exits, muttering to herself.*

Do you think she got all that? Will we actually get steak? She might have thought you meant fish!

ST CLAIR Fish with horns?

FLORENCE In Guadalajara they eat anything. Sometimes without killing it first. I better go and check. Would you excuse me, Cosme? I must go to war with Mexico and then return victorious from the kitchen!

ST CLAIR So theatrical!

FLORENCE Yes – every entrance and exit here is done with a flourish. I always leave the room like the Queen of the Night exiting into the wings after my beautiful aria.

ST CLAIR *(with **"QUEEN OF THE NIGHT"** bell notes)* Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

FLORENCE *(in the wrong key)* Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!

*Together, they burst into a brief rendition of the bell notes in the **"QUEEN OF THE NIGHT"** aria. Horribly off-key, but full of amusement and comradery.*

FLORENCE *exits with a light skip.*

COSME *is stunned by this.*

ST CLAIR Isn't she out of this world?

COSME Yes – a different planet entirely.

ST CLAIR Been together for years. Nearly a decade now.

COSME But you're not married?

ST CLAIR No, no. She has been, though. *(In a whisper)* Long time ago. When she was seventeen. It was all a bit of a mess – she ran off to Philadelphia with some doctor. Did it just to get away from her father, I think.

COSME Well, we all like to get away from our fathers.

ST CLAIR Yes. I suppose we do. But the old boy relented at the end and, to everyone's surprise, left her a rather substantial estate. *(He gestures around the room)* And lots of furniture.

COSME Yes. I see.

ST CLAIR So cluttered in here. The other place was much bigger – but it got too expensive. But as long as she can live here in Manhattan and give her balls and recitals, she's more than happy. Do you sing at all?

COSME I have my moments in the bath.

ST CLAIR *(laughing)* Don't we all! I think you'd have a wonderful time if you played for Madam – all her passion. By God, she puts her life and soul into it. And the audience loves to see that. You'd be amazed who turns up. Cole Porter is a regular, you know.

COSME You're joking.

ST CLAIR Not at all! He's a big fan. Those flowers are from him. *(He points to a vase of pansies on the piano)* Always comes along with a group of young men. Rather flamboyant chaps.

COSME Really?

ST CLAIR Yes… I don't think any of them are Mr Porter's relatives.

COSME No – they're probably just…

ST CLAIR
COSME } *(together)* Friends/associates/colleagues/assistants…

ST CLAIR Yes – something like that. But it's always thrilling when he comes. I love the life we have here. Love it!

COSME How did you end up here in the first place?

ST CLAIR I came over from England to be a star. Thought I'd stay a year, earn enough money to have a good life and then sail back to Bognor Regis in style.

COSME And what's Bognor Regis like? Street lamps, fish and chips and lots of fog?

ST CLAIR Something like that.

COSME I'd love to go there one day.

ST CLAIR To Bognor? Don't be ridiculous.

COSME To England.

ST CLAIR Oh – well, yes, that's nowhere near as bad an idea.

COSME I love the accent.

ST CLAIR I struggle to retain it sometimes. But I don't want to talk like everyone else here, do I? My accent is my selling point. It's my best shot at getting acting parts.

COSME And does it work well for you?

ST CLAIR No – not in the slightest.

FLORENCE *enters.*

Everything all right? Sort out dinner, did you?

FLORENCE I've absolutely no idea. I think she's planning to offer us one of her traditional Mexican meals.

ST CLAIR Really? Well, in that case – I'll start getting drunk now.

FLORENCE Then it'll have to be on sherry – it's all we have.

ST CLAIR I'll go and buy in some supplies. *(To* **COSME***)* Nice to meet you, old chap. Hope to see you at the first big event!

COSME *and* **ST CLAIR** *shake hands, then* **ST CLAIR** *turns to* **FLORENCE.**

Goodbye, gorgeous! *(He gives her a big smacker of a kiss)* Nectar of the gods!

ST CLAIR *exits from the apartment.*

FLORENCE And what have you been talking about?

COSME All kinds of things. Including some of your famous friends. *(He gestures to the vase of pansies)*

FLORENCE Oh yes, Cole Porter. He always comes with a *huge* bunch of pansies. People are so kind. At my recitals I'm always surrounded by flowers. Which serves an artistic purpose – because the delicate fragrance of the blooms can mingle with the delicate cadences of my voice, making it all so much more beautiful for the audiences – indulging all of their senses at once.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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