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CONCORD
THEATRICALS

THE TWO WORLDS OF CHARLIE F.

Small Cast Adaptation

by Owen Sheers

SAMUEL FRENCH

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THE TWO WORLDS OF CHARLIE F. (small cast) is an adaptation of the original production first performed at the Theatre Royal Haymarket on 22nd January 2012. Directed by Stephen Rayne, produced by Alice Driver of Masterclass theatre for the Theatre Royal Haymarket, music by Jason Carr, design by Anthony Lamble, lighting and projection design by Will Reynolds, sound by Colin Pink and choreography by Lilly Phillips. The cast was as follows:

CHARLIE FOWLER ..... Cassidy Little

NURSE/ YOUNG SIMI/ MICHELLE TAYLOR/
DANCER 2/ COMMON ROOM NURSE ..... Teri Ann Bobb Baxter

BRITISH OFFICER ..... Stewart Hill

CHARLIE'S MOTHER/ SARAH THOMAS/ TRACY BOOTH/
MARIE WARD/ COMMON ROOM NURSE ..... Miriam Cooper

LAUREN PRESTON/ DANCER 1/
COMMON ROOM NURSE ..... Lily Phillips

DAVID PHILLIPS/ PSYCHOLOGIST/ SINGING TEACHER/
DELIVERY MAN/ BUSINESSMAN 1 ..... Owen Oldroyd

JEAN BARKER/ WAITRESS ..... Venetia Maitland

JOHN BOOTH ..... Tom Colley

DANIEL THOMAS ..... Stewart Hill

ROGER SMITH ..... Steve Shaw

LEROY JENKINS ..... Dan Shaw

CHRIS WARD ..... Swifty

ALI BRIGGS ..... Ash Young

SIMI YEATS ..... Mauellia Simpson

DARREN SOBEY ..... Gareth Crabbe

FRANK TAYLOR/ BUSINESSMAN 2 ..... Tomos Eames

CHARACTERS

CHARLIE FOWLER
NURSE
BRITISH OFFICER
CHARLIE'S MOTHER
LAUREN PRESTON
DAVID PHILLIPS
JEAN BARKER
JOHN BOOTH
DANIEL THOMAS
ROGER SMITH
LEROY JENKINS
CHRIS WARD
ALI BRIGGS
SIMI YEATS
YOUNG SIMI
DARREN SOBEY
FRANK TAYLOR
MICHELLE TAYLOR
SARAH THOMAS
TRACY BOOTH
MARIE WARD
PSYCHOLOGIST
SINGING TEACHER
DELIVERY MAN
BUSINESSMAN 1
BUSINESSMAN 2
DANCER 1
DANCER 2
WAITRESS
COMMON ROOM NURSES

NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER

For the original 2012 production of The Two Worlds of Charlie F by the Bravo 22 company, the songs were mostly (but not exclusively) performed to backing tracks, orchestrated to reflect the different styles (military band for the Training Song, and something more contemporary for the Pharmacopeia). I played piano live for a few moments, and one of the cast played a treble recorder solo in the Letters song. I would encourage you to use any musical talents in your acting company, and to feel free arrange the music in a manner appropriate to your production.

Jason Carr, 2021

ACT ONE

Scene One – Waking

Footage of **SOLDIERS***' boots on patrol is projected onto gauze.*

Lights fade.

Blackout.

Silence.

The sound of an IED explosion. In its wake military radio chatter, the thudding of a helicopter, loud at first, then fading down.

CHARLIE *(voice over)* Your hearing's the last to go.

The radio crackle melds into the sound of a hospital, the digital heartbeat of medical machines, getting louder.

(voice over) And the first to come back.

The lights come up on a cloud of dust, still clearing from the stage. A hospital bed surrounded by screens, backlit. The silhouette of a man lying in the bed.

A **NON-CAUCASIAN NURSE** *enters and walks behind the screens. She carries a tray with a water bottle and a glass. She, too, is silhouetted as she works. As she dresses her patient's stump, he begins to stir.*

NURSE What's your name?

He stares at her, his breathing becoming rapid.

CHARLIE Fuck. You.

NURSE You're in Birmingham, in hospital—

CHARLIE /Fuck you, you Taliban bitch!/

NURSE Can you remember your name?

CHARLIE *(shouting)* Help! Help! I'm in here! Here!

He tries to get out of bed but fails.

NURSE You're in Selly Oak Hospital. Please, can you remember your name?

CHARLIE *(shouting)* A.N.A.! A.N.A.! A.N.A.!

NURSE You'll wake the other patients.

CHARLIE Help! Radio my position! Radio my position! A.N.A.! A.N.A.! A.N.A.!

NURSE Would you like some water?

CHARLIE A.N.A.! A.N. – ...Water?

She pours a glass of water.

Oh no you don't. You're going to poison me. You think I'm fucking stupid? You're going to kill me. That's fucking cleaning fluid!

NURSE It's from a bottle.

CHARLIE Show me.

She opens a fresh bottle in front of him and pours it into a plastic cup. As she approaches him, **CHARLIE** *knocks it from her hand.*

Fuck off! I'm a British soldier! Help! Over here! It was the terp, wasn't it? I bet it was the fucking terp.

He begins singing.

I'M 'ENERY THE EIGHTH, I AM,

The **NURSE** *exits. When she re-enters she is with a* **BRITISH OFFICER** *in British military uniform. Both enter the screens.* **CHARLIE** *stops singing.*

CHARLIE You fucking turncoat! You motherfucking traitor! I swear, when I get out of here I am going to rip out your throat, shit down your neck and wipe your fucking gene pool from the face of the earth.

The **OFFICER** *nods, then leaves.*

NURSE You're in Birmingham. In hospital. They'll move you off the ward if you carry on like this.

CHARLIE *(between bursts of song)* Yeah, Birmingham, of course I am. Birming – fucking – ham? I don't think so. Boss! Boss! Don't leave me in here! Don't leave me!

The **OFFICER** *enters. He is with a young woman,* **LAUREN.** *They both walk behind the screens.*

At first **CHARLIE** *doesn't see her. He continues his shouting and swearing.*

LAUREN Charlie? Charlie, it's me.

He turns to look at her and immediately starts crying.

CHARLIE Oh Jesus. Lauren, how did they get you? I swear, when I get out of here I am going to kill every motherfucking one of you. Baby, have they hurt you? Did they torture you? If you've touched one hair on her head—

LAUREN, *shocked, begins to leave. The* **OFFICER** *exits with her. He returns with an older woman,* **CHARLIE'S MOTHER.**

CHARLIE'S MOTHER Charles? It's your mother. Calm down now, calm down.

CHARLIE Mum? No, no, not you too. No, this has to stop! Stop stop stop stop!

The cubicle goes dark. **CHARLIE** *suddenly bursts through the downstage screen, falling to the ground. He is in uniform. He stands, one leg missing, and leans on his crutch. He looks at the audience.*

You know when you fell off your bike? As a kid? Do you remember that pain? The one you don't feel at first, but then you look down at your hand, your knee and it's all gritty from where you bounced along the pavement. And that's when it comes on, pulsing, and you're like, "Ow, ow, ow, what the fuck?"

That's what I remember. That kinda feeling. Grit in my hands, my knees.

In my mouth. The taste of it.

And the smell of Afghan. Gritty and shitty. Sand, skin flakes and shit.

That's what I remember.

Beat.

I don't remember waking up.

I don't remember eating breakfast.

I don't remember being given orders, or loading up, or leaving the compound.

I don't remember going where we went.

I don't remember walking through an archway, a low archway.

I don't remember the IED going off.

None of that.

Beat.

What I *do* remember is taking down our ponchos the night before because there was a heelo coming in the next day. Then lying down in my trench on some shitty deflated air

mattress and looking up at the Afghan stars which, let me tell you, are like no other fucking stars anywhere else.

Next thing I know, I'm being tortured by the fucking Taliban. For three weeks.

If anyone tries to tell you an induced coma is any kind of fun, they're fucking lying. So, yeah, I realise I must have looked like a class A asshole back there just now, but you have to understand I wasn't *in* that hospital bed. Sure, I *was* in that bed, and as far as my fiancée and my mother were concerned I was there. Their Charlie was back. But at the same time he wasn't.

That round light above me? That was an observation hole. The screens? A temporary Taliban holding station. The nurse? Some devious fucking interrogator. The pain and the tubes? That was the torture.

"I'm 'Enry The Eighth, I Am?" No fucking idea. Didn't even know that song had more than two lines.

Beat.

When British soldiers were wounded in the Napoleonic Wars it took them months to get home, if they did. In World War One a fortnight at least. World War Two, about the same from France, much longer from India, Egypt, Burma.

Now? Medevaced from Nad Ali North to Bastion in twenty minutes, back in the UK in twelve, thirteen hours tops. But in here –

He taps his head.

Even quicker than that. Pretty much insta-fucking-taneous. Blink of an eye kinda stuff. With a few weeks high-definition hallucinations thrown in for free.

The only problem is that when you come back that quick not all of you comes back at once.

He lifts up his stump.

And I don't mean the fucking obvious either.

Beat.

There was this one time, on Herrick five. I was out on patrol. Sangin. Some kids came up. They were talking to one of the A.N.A. soldiers. I asked him what they wanted. He said, "They want to know where you are from?" I said, "Tell them the other side of the world." So he did. But then the terp started laughing. I asked him what was so funny. He said, "He told them you were from another world."

At the time I told the terp to correct him. But now, well, I kinda think he might have had it right the first time round.

Beat.

Before we get any further I can see more than one of you out there are thinking, "What kind of an accent is that for a *Royal* Marine anyway?" Well I'll tell you, my friends. Canadian, that's what, and don't you fucking forget it. Or the Fijians, the Trinidadians, the Gambians, the Gurkhas. Oh yeah, thanks to your over-industrious forebears we're all in this Afghan shit together, all us citizens of the Commonwealth.

And now, for the brief time *we* have together, so are you. So, shall we get started?

He throws a wide smile.

Let's go on a tour.

Scene Two – Histories

CHARLIE *stands to attention.*

CHARLIE PO56085M.

Corporal Charles Fowler.

Aged twenty eight.

B company twenty two commando, Royal Marines.

Injured in Nad Ali North, September 23rd 2011.

I was on a section assault on a compound when a western flank stepped on an IED. Op was successful. Casevaced from the area to Bastion and then to Selly Oak Hospital, UK. After three weeks in a medically induced coma, I spent four weeks at QE, then straight to Headley Court.

Halfway through his speech **CHARLIE** *is joined on stage by* **LEROY**, *who also begins reciting his history as* **CHARLIE** *continues his at a lower volume. This pattern is repeated with each soldier entering earlier and earlier in the previous soldier's speech until the stage is filled with wounded* **SOLDIERS** *reciting their histories.*

LEROY 25044898.

Rifleman Leroy Jenkins.

Aged twenty two.

Fourth batt The Rifles.

Injured on 26th July 2009, Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

Left leg blown off in an IED strike, medevaced back to the UK.

Recovery in Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham, for eight weeks. Right leg amputated. Rehab at Headley Court for a year. Awaiting medical discharge at Tedworth House.

DANIEL 542711.

Major Daniel Thomas.

Aged thirty nine.

Second Battalion Royal Welsh.

Suffered a traumatic brain injury in an IED strike on 4th July 2009 whilst commanding a company in Babaji, Afghanistan.

Medevaced to Bastion, Kandahar, Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham.

Discharged after six weeks.

Spent seven months in Headley Court for brain rehabilitation.

Awaiting medical discharge.

JOHN 25223563.

Sapper John Booth.

Aged twenty.

Nine Parachute Squadron RE.

Injured on 19th July 2008, PB Armargh, Sangin, Helmand Province. Taliban ambush on a vector rescue op. IED blast to rear of Wimik – blown sixty feet into Taliban firing point. QRF on quadbike taken back to FOB Jackson, Sangin. Medevaced to Camp Bastion, then Queen Elizabeth and Selly Oak.

Broken back four places, broken leg, arm, shattered heel, shrapnel legs, thigh, groin, lung contusion, head injury, ten-week strict bed rest. Told would never walk again, wheelchair-bound, intensive rehab. After treatment returned to frontline September 2010, but forced to return after nine months due to previous injuries. Awaiting spinal surgery and rehabilitation.

FRANK PO63793G.

Corporal Frank Taylor.

Aged twenty five.

Special Forces Support Group.

Injured on 1st Feb 2007 in Helmand Province.

Hit by RPG blast as storming Taliban compound. Casevaced via Black Hawk to Kandahar for initial treatment. Once stabilised flew back to Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham. After six weeks began recovering physically but mentally struggling. Currently seeing psychologists in an establishment in Berkshire.

ROGER 25886967.

Corporal Roger Smith.

Age thirty seven.

B Company.

Two PWRR.

Injured on 26th August 2008 in Nad Ali, Afghanistan. I was commanding a Snatch three hundred metres short of jab when the vehicle hit an IED. I was blown clear of the vehicle, landing on my right shoulder and neck. Medivaced to Bastion. I had prolapsed discs at C5–C7 in my upper spine and a dislocated shoulder. Casevaced back to UK. Sent to Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham, where discs at C6 and C7 were replaced. Presently undergoing rehab at Headley Court.

JEAN W25031076.

Sergeant Jean Barker.

Aged twenty six.

Twenty six Engineer Regiment eight Squadron.

Injured on 15th June 2011. I was in a convoy in the lower Sangin valley when my Pinzgauer hit an IED. I was thrown from the vehicle, sustaining two broken ankles and a damaged lower back. Medevaced from blast area to Camp Bastion. Flown to UK to Selly Oak Hospital. Sent back to regiment with ongoing physio.

Awaiting below-knee amputation of right leg and reconstruction of left ankle. Also receiving treatment for PTSD. Discharge date, 11th April 2012.

DARREN 25051100.

Bombardier Daz Sobey.

Aged thirty four.

Twenty sixth Regiment Royal Artillery.

Injured on April 2007 on Salisbury Plain whilst commanding one hundred and five milimetre artillery light gun.

Gun crew accidently crushed me bringing gun into action. Spinal damage and losing use of left arm. Had spinal surgery but remain in chronic pain and reliant on strong medication.

Awaiting medical discharge.

CHRIS 24652173.

Colour Sergeant Chris Ward.

Aged forty three.

First Battalion Royal Green Jackets.

Injured in July 2006 by an IED while on patrol in Sangin valley. Lost both legs, two fingers and both bollocks. Eight weeks at Selly Oak hospital, then fourteen months at Headley Court before voluntary medical discharge. Mentor for the Not Forgotten Association.

ALI 25108692.

Sergeant Ali Briggs.

Aged thirty six.

First Battalion Royal Anglian Regiment.

Injured on 17th June 2007 on Herrick six when a mortar round landed in my forward operating base. Shrapnel in my legs, mainly right knee. Casevaced to Bastion where initially treated, then flown back to Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham. Transferred to Headley Court for intensive rehab. Awaiting elective below-knee amputation.

SIMI W1042163.

Lance Corporal Simi Yeats.

Aged thirty eight.

Injured 16 June 2010 in Hameln, Germany. Damage to left knee. Realignment of left leg at Frimley Park Hospital. Undergoing physio and rehabilitation at Headley Court, pending army career outcome.

DAVID 25014876.

Captain David Phillips.

Aged thrity seven.

Nine Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers.

Injured on Herrick eight, 2008 Sangin, Afganistan.

Mortar attack. Suffered shrapnel wounds to the stomach and leg. Medevaced to Camp Bastion and transferred to Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham.

There for six weeks, three of them in an induced coma. Transferred to Headley Court. Remained for seven months. Suffer from PTSD.

Scene Three – Joining

The **SOLDIERS** *remain in their positions. They begin humming.* **CHARLIE** *takes a step forward.*

[MUSIC: "MEN OF HARLECH"]

CHARLIE I joined up for a bet. I saw an advert for the Royal Marines – "99.9% Need Not Apply". So I applied.

As each **SOLDIER** *speaks they also take a step / wheel forward.*

DANIEL I was working in Tesco when I read an article about Sandhurst being short of officers.

ROGER Well the Gulf War had kicked off, hadn't it? Everyone wanted a gun. *I* wanted a gun. My father-in-law had been giving me grief – telling me I couldn't handle it. So I joined. That fucking showed him.

DARREN Family tradition. My father was artillery, my uncle's artillery, my great-great-grandfather was artillery. Even my nan was an ack-ack gunner.

FRANK When I saw the Twin Towers go down, well, I thought I wanted to be part of it, you know, help sort it out. I was a bricklayer at the time but we'd had a hard couple of winters and we had our son on the way. So yeah, I joined for my family too.

LEROY I can't remember the Twin Towers. I was ten years old when that happened. In my family though, every male has to serve in the army. I joined as soon as I could, when I was sixteen. My mother wanted me to wait. She'd already lost two of my brothers. One in the Falklands, another in the Gulf.

CHRIS I wanted to be a copper, but my dad said coppers don't have no mates, so we went down the careers office and I joined the army instead. Royal Green Jackets. My old man was dead proud.

ALI His dad was right. Coppers don't have no mates. My grandfather said I'd never amount to anything. When he died I joined up. When I passed out and saw the look on my mum's face I thought great, two birds, one stone. I made my grandad proud and my mum don't think I'm a knobhead anymore.

JOHN I just always wanted to. Ever since my older brother gave me this tank you built yourself. I was always running round the woods, that kind of thing. I signed up when I was sixteen. My mum's always supported me. Always.

JEAN It was a way out to be honest. I had an attitude problem. Was either the army way or the other way, if you know what I mean. The police and my parents pushed me in.

DAVID Every man in my family's served. Crimean War, Boer War, World War One, World War Two. Do you know Psalm 144? It was written in the front of our family bible – "Blessed be the Lord, my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." But it's about security too. For my family. Stability.

The **SOLDIERS** *remain in their final positions.*

Scene Four – Recruitment

[MUSIC: "HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW"]

Three women enter, Frank's girlfriend: **MICHELLE**, *John's mother:* **TRACY** *and Charlie's fiancée:* **LAUREN**.

MICHELLE He said he was doing it for all of us, our future. And I still believe him. He was. We had our Liam on the way and, well, we needed the money. So yeah, of course I supported him.

TRACY My husband, his stepdad, he was in the army. So, yeah, I know what it's like. What they're like. And I know he's always wanted to join, from when he was little.

LAUREN We met two weeks before he went for his basic training. I was working in a pub. He had to have three shots of tequila before he had the courage to ask me out. He was full of it, even then.

MICHELLE He really wanted to do something. He wanted to make a difference. And he did, I'm sure of it. There was just so much we didn't know, wasn't there? About what it was going to be like. When he went away. Afterwards.

TRACY But, at the end of the day he's my son, isn't he? He's my baby. I'd never stop him, but, well, it's hard, yeah, it is. Seeing your boy go off like that.

LAUREN I could see straight away there was no way he wouldn't go. And I was never going to ask him to choose, was I? I mean, who wants to hear they come second?

A single spotlight upstage discovers **SIMI**. *She begins walking downstage, singing..*

SIMI

I SING BECAUSE I'M HAPPY
I SING BECAUSE I'M FREE
FOR HIS EYE IS ON THE SPARROW
AND I KNOW HE WATCHES ME

The other women exit.

When I was seven I had a dream. I was going to live where the Queen lived. And I was going to be a soldier.

I'd seen her when she came to visit on Independence Day. All of us were lining the streets of San Fernando, waving. And she waved back. She had a pink hat, and a matching suit. And as she waved I was shouting, "I'm going to live where you live! I'm going to live where you live!"

And then I had my dream. I told my mother about it while she was combing my hair.

YOUNG SIMI *enters and kneels in front of* **SIMI**, *who begins combing her hair.*

YOUNG SIMI There were four of us, four girls. My mother kept forgetting our names, so in the mornings when she was getting us ready for school, she numbered us instead, one to four. I was number three.

Beat.

Mummy?

SIMI *(as her mother)* Keep your head still, child!

YOUNG SIMI I had a dream last night.

SIMI *(as her mother)* You always dreaming some stupidness!

YOUNG SIMI No, Mum! This is a good one.

SIMI *(as her mother)* You always say it's a good one. Go on then. What is it?

YOUNG SIMI I dreamt I was a soldier and I lived where the Queen lives.

SIMI *(as her mother)* Where the Queen lives? Where the Queen lives? I told you it was a stupid dream! You know where the Queen lives?

YOUNG SIMI No.

Beat.

But I can find out.

SIMI *(as her mother)* Look, child, get to school before you're late! And stop talking your stupidness!

She ushers **YOUNG SIMI** *away.*

YOUNG SIMI *(to audience)* Joining the army wasn't even a thought in my family. I had no father, so Mum was both mum and dad. Every time I mentioned my dream she went ballistic.

SIMI Of course I did! You know what it is to have a girl-child in the Caribbean and be mother, father, everything? You have to keep them close. Where you can see them, reach them.

YOUNG SIMI If I was playing in the backyard and went out the gate, she'd come out to pull me back in.

SIMI You was too far for me to reach out that gate. Too far.

YOUNG SIMI But I wanted to do something different. I wanted to go to England. I wanted to be a soldier. So one day I woke up and I told her. I was going.

The two women look at each other

SIMI Too far. Too far.

YOUNG SIMI *walks upstage towards a recruiting office.*

YOUNG SIMI Two weeks after I got to England I saw an advert. "Be the Best", it said. "Join the British Army." I got on a bus to Edgware, came out of the station and there, in front of me, was a careers centre. So I walked in.

She enters the recruiting office where **CHRIS** *sits behind a desk.*

CHRIS Afternoon, how can I help you?

YOUNG SIMI I'd like to join the army.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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