

Acting Edition

Ken Ludwig's A Comedy of Tenors

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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ISBN 978-0-573-70487-1

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A COMEDY OF TENORS premiered in a co-production at the Cleveland Playhouse (Laura Kepley, Artistic Director; Kevin Moore, Managing Director) in Cleveland, Ohio in September 2015 and the McCarter Theatre (Emily Mann, Artistic Director; Timothy J. Shields, Managing Director) in Princeton, New Jersey in October 2015. The productions were directed by Stephen Wadsworth, with sets by Charlie Corcoran, costumes by William Ivey Long, lights by David Lander, sound by Joshua Horvath, and fight direction by Shad Ramsey. The Production Stage Manager for the Cleveland Playhouse production was Jennifer Collins. The McCarter production's Stage Manager was Alison Cote. The Assistant Stage Manager was Tom Humes for both productions. The cast was as follows:

SAUNDERS	 Ron Orbach
MAX	 Rob McClure
MARIA	 Antoinette LaVecchia
TITO	 Bradley Dean
MIMI	 Kristen Martin
CARLO	 Bobby Conte Thornton
RACÓN	 Lisa Brescia

CHARACTERS

SAUNDERS

MAX

MARIA

TITO

MIMI

CARLO

RACÓN

SETTING

The living room of an elegant hotel suite in Paris.

TIME

1936.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(We're in the living room of a hotel suite in 1936 in Paris. The hotel – the Faubourg Ritz – is part of Olympic Stadium, built for the Paris Olympics of 1924.)

(The room is light, bright and glamorous, as beautiful as any hotel suite in all of Paris.)

(There is a front door, center, opening onto a corridor. That is the only entrance or exit to the outside world. Two other doors, down right and down left, lead to offstage bedrooms. When the time comes, the bedroom downstage left will be for Maria and the bedroom downstage right will be for Racón. The room also has a balcony, stage left, that looks out onto the Eiffel Tower, as well as onto a soccer field one story below. There is also an outdoor patio, stage right.)

(The room also contains a sofa with an afghan over it, as well as some beautiful chairs and side tables. In front of the sofa and around the room are gift boxes beautifully wrapped, large and small, as well as several floral arrangements. These are the gifts that a visiting star is afforded by his hosts and fans when he comes to a foreign city to do a concert.)

(In the room, there is also a table with a variety of French catering on it.)

(Also in the room is a tin wash bucket with cleaning tools sticking out of it and a stack of folded towels. Clearly the maids didn't do a very good job of finishing their work.)

(The time is late afternoon on a beautiful fall day.)

(As the curtain rises, the room is empty and we hear an excerpt from Act Two of Puccini's La Bohème – the section towards the end of Musetta's waltz where all the voices intertwine with passion – coming from a radio in the corner.)

(After a beat, Henry Saunders hurries in through the front door. Saunders is in his early fifties and wears a business suit. He looks around the room, exasperated, then he turns off the radio and dials the telephone.)

(When the phone is answered, he speaks French with the misplaced bravado of a man who continues to believe the encouragement of his high school French teacher.)

SAUNDERS. *Bonjour. Je suis Henry Saunders. Oui, c'est moi. C'est vrai, c'est moi. C'est vrai. S'il vous plait, je veux parler avec Monsieur Max, le ténor. Merci. I'll wait.*

(He sees the wash bucket and picks it up with distaste; into phone.)

Max! Get up here! I don't care if you're rehearsing, I need some help. The concert starts in three hours and Tito isn't here yet. And look at this place. Nothing's ready for him! There's all this food to put out, we need to check the bathrooms to make sure they're clean, you know the French, and oh my God, the maids have left some underwear on the floor.

(He picks up panties and hose from the floor and stuffs them into his pocket.)

What kind of hotel is this?! Yes I know I chose it, but I shouldn't have to stuff underwear into... Because I'm

the producer! I was the Mayor of Cleveland! Now get the hell up here!

(He slams the phone down and starts to clean up the room, talking to himself as he goes.)

The biggest concert in the history of opera, and I'm taking the cellophane off the cold cuts. What's this?

(He picks up something from the buffet table and it turns out to be a whole tongue; he juggles it with disgust.)

Ahhhh! It's a tongue! Uchh! Oh my God. What's the matter with these French? They'd eat the wax off the linoleum if it had vinaigrette on it.

(As he puts the tongue back on the table, there is a knock on the front door. Knock, knock, knock!)

Come in!

(He pulls the door open and MAX enters, out of breath. MAX is in his mid-30s.)

Max!

MAX. Mr. Saunders.

SAUNDERS. What took you so long?

MAX. No Tito yet?

SAUNDERS. Tito Merelli? Has he ever been on time in his life?

MAX. Sir, he is the most famous opera singer in the world.

SAUNDERS. And does that mean he gets to keep me waiting?

MAX. Well, sort of. Maybe his plane is late.

SAUNDERS. Well that would be a novel excuse. The last time he didn't show up was because of his drinking and womanizing.

MAX. Sir, I'm in rehearsal. You're paying an orchestra and it's downstairs waiting for me.

SAUNDERS. Max, I need some help up here! You were my assistant for *ten years*. Have you forgotten ten years of your life? Do you have amnesia or something?

MAX. No, sir. But now I'm an opera singer.

SAUNDERS. You're a what?

MAX. Oh no.

SAUNDERS. What are you again, Max? I must have missed it.

MAX. I'm a singer and you gave me a chance and-and now I have a career but we have a concert tonight in less than three hours and now I have to go back to rehearsal!

SAUNDERS. And I *want* you to go back to rehearsal, Max, as soon as you check all the *toilets* to make sure they aren't *filthy*, and make sure there's no more *underwear* lying on the floor, and *then find that jackass Tito Merelli!*

MAX. (*Picking up phone and clicking the clicker.*) I'm giving you three minutes, but that's *Ah, bonjour. Parlez-vous angl* – Oh, good. We're expecting Tito Merelli and his wife and they're arriving on –

SAUNDERS. Trans-America Flight 102 from Rome –

MAX. Trans-America Flight 102 from Rome, and we'd like to know if the plane is late. *Merci.*

(*He hands SAUNDERS the phone.*)

Hold this. I'll check the rooms.

(*He runs into one of the bedrooms.*)

SAUNDERS. (*calling to MAX*) Tito in Paris. Can you imagine? I'll bet he's out at the Follies Bergère, drinking champagne out of some filthy slipper.

MAX. (*offstage*) That's not fair!

SAUNDERS. Do you know what's riding on this concert, Max? My entire reputation's at stake!

MAX. (*offstage*) I know that, sir!

(*MAX buzzes out of the bedroom, across the room, and into the other bedroom.*)

That one's fine. The bed looks nice.

SAUNDERS. That's all he needs – a good bed so he can have sex with the maid and sleep through the concert.

MAX. (*offstage*) You shouldn't give him such a hard time. He's been a really good friend to me, and I think he's going through a sort of personal crisis.

SAUNDERS. Oh, no. The poor thing. Is he off his linguini? Can't drink his chianti fast enough?

MAX. (*entering*) I think he's starting to feel his age. I mean, he's almost as old as

(*stops himself*)

as some of the older opera singers who are still performing.

SAUNDERS. Really feeling your oats, aren't you, Max. Old man Saunders is heading over the hill, is that the idea?

MAX. No! No, no! I-I-I didn't mean –

SAUNDERS. I have fought to be in this position, Max. I've fought for thirty years, and now I'm producing the biggest concert in the history of Paris.

MAX. (*into the phone*) Hello? Yes I'm still here. Oh good! Thank you. *Merci.*

(*hangs up*)

His plane landed a half hour ago, so he should be here any minute, now I have to go, they're all waiting for me.

(*MAX runs out through the front door and is gone.*)

SAUNDERS. (*alone*) If I get through this week without a heart attack, it'll be a –...

(*He spots something sticking out of the sofa. He pulls on it and it's a brassiere.*)

Oh for God's sake. Why don't they just put a sign up: "Welcome to France, Fornication in Progress."

(*Knock, knock, knock! the front door*)

Max, would you stop horsing around! Just wait'll you see *this*.

(*He opens the door and the Merellis are there. TITO is the famous Italian opera singer and MARIA is his stunning wife. They're dressed with style,*

straight out of an Italian fashion magazine. They both have strong Italian accents, and they both look unhappy. They step into the room. SAUNDERS is still holding the brassiere.)

SAUNDERS. And with this symbol of the City of Paris, I bid you welcome.

(He tosses it away.)

MARIA. *Ciao.*

TITO. *Ciao.*

SAUNDERS. How lovely to see you again. And how was your flight? You had a good *voyàge*, I hope?

TITO. It was a-lousy, thank you.

SAUNDERS. Oh. I'm sorry. But I trust you checked in downstairs all right?

TITO. That was a-worse.

MARIA. Tito, enough.

TITO. It was an insult.

MARIA. They didn't know.

TITO. They should have known! It's a-their job!

SAUNDERS. What happened?

MARIA. It was nothing. The girl at the desk, she thinks he's another opera star named Carlo Nucci.

TITO. Carlo Nucci.

MARIA. She make a mistake. Is no big deal.

TITO. How could I be Nucci, eh? He's young, he's a-hot stuff, he's the greatest tenor in the whole world!

MARIA. Tito, please.

TITO. I get in the taxi at the airport, on the radio is a-Carlo Nucci. I get to the lobby, a beautiful girl with a big a-chest, she say "*Bonjour*, Mr. Nucci, we are so proud to have you in our hotel!"

MARIA. My husband is having a crisis.

TITO. Liar!

MARIA. Pig!

TITO. Witch!

MARIA. Child!

TITO. Diva!

MARIA. *Shut up!*

TITO. *Shut up a-youself!*

SAUNDERS. Well, you both seem to be in good spirits. Why don't I tell you about the logistics for the day, then we'll do the concert and ship you right back out. Ha! This hotel, as you can see, is part of Olympic Stadium where our concert will unfold in just three hours. *Tres horores*. Mr. Merelli, you know the running order, all quite standard, and soon *you*, your friend *Max*, and the famous tenor *Jussi Bjorling*, who arrived here yesterday from his home in Sweden – and who would have guessed

(with a Swedish accent)

dey have der opera in a-Sveden but ja dey do – ha, ha! – the three of you will take the stage in front of thousands of your greatest fans for the concert of the century: The Three Tenors!

(Ring!)

Excuse me. Hello? Yes, Jacques.

(covering the phone)

It's Jacques Pessoir, my French assistant on the project. Cool as a cucumber.

(into the phone.)

What? Jacques, calm down and say it slo – STOP STUTTERING!

(covering the phone)

We don't think of the French as stutterers and yet –

(phone)

What?! He *quit?! Jussi Bjorling just quit?! Don't move, I'll be right down! I will fix it, JACQUES, CALM DOWN BEFORE I STRANGLE YOU!*

(hangs up)

TITO. Is there a problem?

SAUNDERS. No. No, no. That was an exercise that Jacques and I do in case there ever *was* a problem, and he handled it brilliantly. But I think I should be going now to make sure that everything is running smoothly, the machine is in gear and *vroom* we're off!

(He runs out.)

(**TITO** sits with his head in his hands and moans.)

MARIA. Tito, what is a-with you?

TITO. I'm a-getting old, Maria. The stars a-fade. The lights a-go out.

MARIA. That's from *La Bohème*.

TITO. So what?! That's not the point! It used to be, the girls at the stage a-door, they were four a-deep. I sign autographs, they want to hug me. "Take a picture, Tito." "We love a-you, Tito." Now everybody want a-Carlo Nucci.

MARIA. Noo.

TITO. When I was young, maybe ten year old, I hear my own voice singing in a-church and it was so beautiful I say that's from a-God. I say thank you God, you are good man. After that, I sing everywhere, eh? Every opera house. Every concert. I'm a big a-star. But then, six month ago – I never tell you this before – I'm a-singing Donizetti and my voice a-crack on the high C. Just a-once, but everybody in the place, they look at me and go "Uh oh. He's a-getting old. It's a-good-bye Tito."

(sob)

I cannot live this way without respect and honor.

MARIA. That's from *Madame Butterfly*.

TITO. Maria!

MARIA. Tito, you've got to stop this. You're in a-you prime.

TITO. My prime. Puh. I am being tortured in dungeon.

MARIA. That's from *Tosca*.

TITO. *Would you stop it!*

MARIA. But it's a-in a-you head! Your voice is just as good as ever! On the stage you got a-heart, you got a-soul! You still eat like a pig, but that's a-not new.

TITO. Pah.

MARIA. Hey. Nothing has changed! Except maybe you forget some things now and then.

TITO. I forget things? Me? Like what?

MARIA. It's a-not import. It makes no difference.

TITO. No! You tell me! I forget things. You tell me!

(She sighs.)

MARIA. It's my birthday.

TITO. Today?

MARIA. Yeah.

TITO. Today is you birthday?

MARIA. Yeah.

TITO. Uh-oh.

MARIA. Yeah.

TITO. Hmm. I guess that explain why I'm carrying this a-bag around.

MARIA. Tito?

TITO. You're right, I forget a-so much.

MARIA. Oh, Tito! Look at this! You remember! Hoo hoo! I open now, yes?

TITO. No, you're gonna wait till next Thursday. Friday.

MARIA. You're very funny. You're like a-Bingo Crosby.

(She opens the box and finds a brightly-colored scarf.)

Oh! It's a scarf! It's lovely, it's a-beautiful. Was it expensive?

TITO. Very.

MARIA. Excellent.

TITO. Hey. You want to celebrate? We got the bedroom, eh?

MARIA. Now? We just got here. We don't have our luggage yet.

TITO. You need luggage to make a-love?

MARIA. Well it might help. We got things in there.

TITO. Okay, fine, forget it.

MARIA. Hey, no. Don't be like this.

TITO. Like what? I'm a-fine. I gotta lay down anyway, take a nap. Us old people, we need to rest.

MARIA. Tito –

TITO. Hey, you want a younger man, you just gotta say so.

MARIA. Would you stop already! You are the best man I know, okay? And when our daughter get a husband, I hope he's just like you.

TITO. What has Mimi got to do with this?

MARIA. Nothing, I'm a-just sayin'.

TITO. Mimi get a husband in five year. Ten year. She's a baby.

MARIA. She's twenty-five years old.

TITO. Okay, *fifteen* year.

MARIA. She's a young woman. She's got a-urges.

TITO. Oh, sure. When she get to *puberty* you call me.

MARIA. Tito, she's past a-puberty. She's up to urges.

TITO. That's impossible! We sent her to boarding school in United States so she could be nice a-young girl and not get urges.

MARIA. Well she's got 'em, believe me.

TITO. How do you know this? Are you so smart?

MARIA. Because she talk to me. I'm her mother.

TITO. I'm not her father?

MARIA. 'Ats a-different.

TITO. What's a-different? My sister talk about urges with my Papa all the time.

MARIA. Your sister's only urge is to drive me crazy.

TITO. But she talk about it.

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