

THE PHILANDERER

OR

BOX, COX, DOX, FOX, KNOX AND SMITH

A Brand New and Original Farcical Operetta
based on the works of W. S. Gilbert, Bolton Rowe and Arthur Sullivan

by
Fraser Charlton

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

Bertie Smith (*a Philanderer*) HIGH BARITONE
Belinda Box (*a Respectable young lady*) MEZZO-SOPRANO
Catherine Cox (*a Passionate young lady*)..... SOPRANO
David Dox (*a Poet*) TENOR
Frederic Fox (*a Physician*)..... BARITONE
Nora Knox (*a Housemaid*)..... CONTRALTO

ORDER OF MUSIC

1. SONG - "When maiden loves" (*The Yeomen of the Guard*) BELINDA
2. SONG - "Oh, a doctor's a job" (*The Yeomen of the Guard*) BERTIE
3. DUET - "Catherine, tell me how are you, dear?" (*The Gondoliers*)
CATHERINE & BELINDA
4. SONG - "Oh, Catherine, my beloved one" (*Utopia Limited*)..... BERTIE
5. TRIO - "You say your doctor's love is true" (*The Pirates of Penzance*)
CATHERINE, BELINDA & NORA
6. TRIO - "There was last spring" (*Iolanthe*) FRED, DAVID & BERTIE
7. TRIO - "With wily brain" (*Utopia Limited*) FRED, DAVID & BERTIE
8. SONG - "I'm a simple little child" (*The Zoo*) NORA
9. QUINTET - "When a wooer goes a -wooing" (*The Yeomen of the Guard*)
..... CATHERINE, DAVID, BELINDA, BERTIE & FRED
10. FINALE - "So Bertie Smith has quite forsaken all his wicked courses" (*Utopia*)
..... CATHERINE, DAVID, BELINDA, NORA, BERTIE & FRED

Scene One - Belinda's apartments

Scene Two - Bertie's apartments

Scene Three - Belinda's apartments, the following afternoon

Time - Early 20th century

SCENE ONE - BELINDA's apartments.

SONG - BELINDA

Music - "When maiden loves", Yeomen of the Guard

When maiden loves, she sits and sighs,
She wanders to and fro;
She ponders not the 'Hows' and 'Whys',
The world is perfect in her eyes -
Her heart's aglow.
Each hour seems a day, Ah me!
When her love's far away, Ah me!
In every kiss
Is found the bliss
That makes her life complete, Ah me!

For years I thought it was my fate
To die alone, afraid
I'd never find my perfect mate -
A spinster was my natural state,
A sad old maid.
But that's no longer so, Ah me!
Farewell to grief and woe, Ah me!
For Cupid's dart
Pierced my heart -
I've found true love at last, Ah me!

BELINDA Oh Nora, I simply can't settle down to do anything! The intelligence that the arrival of my true love is imminent eradicates all thoughts of diligent industry. I haven't been able to concentrate on *anything* since the day I met him!

NORA I don't know, madam, but ever since you and Mistress Cox inherited that fortune from your step-father, men have been flocking around you like moths around a candle! I daresay that this young man is no different from any other fortune seeker. I've already warned you - those social climbers are just out for what they can get!

BELINDA Nora, how dare you make such an accusation! He is no mere empty-headed socialite - he is a doctor! A brilliant, rising young Scottish physician. Even his name breathes a certain heart-melting magic - Finlay Kildare! Such a man as he is surely worthy of a woman with my background and upbringing (*aside*) and truly deserves my well-defended chastity!

NORA Forgive me for doubting his credentials, Mistress Box, but some of the rogues you've had here for tea were no better than they ought to be! But a doctor - that's quite different. Dr. Kildare sounds perfect.

BELINDA Oh, he *is* perfect, Nora! Well, that is, apart from one, tiny, very minor flaw. Such is his devotion to his patients and regard for their total well-being that he is frequently absent-minded and, well, somewhat distracted. For instance, it is quite staggering how often the silly dear forgets to bring money with him to pay for the theatre tickets - and how often he has to rush off to keep an urgent appointment with a patient just before they present the bill for a meal!

NORA (*Aside*) I knew it - just like all the others!

BELINDA Is everything in readiness for his visit? The tea, the cucumber sandwiches - and the hot muffins?

NORA Madam, everything has been ready for the past two hours.

BELINDA Good. But don't bring it all in at once - I don't want it to appear that I'm trying to impress him.

Doorbell.

Oh, he's here! Nora, is my hair perfect? Are all the creases out of my dress? Has my makeup smudged?

NORA Don't fret, madam - you look as pretty as a picture.

Exit NORA. BELINDA sits and reads a book. Enter NORA and BERTIE.

NORA Dr Kildare, madam.

BELINDA (*Offhand*) Oh, Dr Kildare, here already? The time had quite slipped my mind. I trust I find you in good health?

BERTIE (*Scottish accent*) You find me in excellently well, Miss Box. I also hope that you blossom in the absence of disease?

BELINDA Indeed I do, sir. Nora, perhaps you would be so good as to bring us some refreshments?

NORA At once, madam.

NORA gives BERTIE a suspicious look and exits. BERTIE and BELINDA rush into each others arms.

BERTIE My dearest Belinda!

BELINDA My beloved Finlay!

BERTIE Oh, it is so good to see you again, Belinda! The road of life is indeed bleak without your smile to illuminate the way!

BELINDA Finlay - pray curb such passion! Remember that the merest hint of impropriety would be wholly against my strict upbringing.

BERTIE I'm sorry, my love. I quite forgot myself.

They sit on the sofa. BERTIE takes BELINDA's hand.

BELINDA Dr Kildare! Control yourself! What if someone should enter?

BERTIE Let them! I don't care if the whole world knows of our love!

BELINDA Well, I do! I can hardly lecture others on their indiscretions if I'm indulging in them myself! However, I wouldn't object if you agreed to make our relationship... Well, more *permanent*. Well, darling Finlay, what do you say to that? Could you consider making me your... (*BERTIE has 'absent-mindedly' started taking her pulse like a physician*) Finlay!

BERTIE (*Snapping out of it*) I'm sorry, my love, but I am so preoccupied with my work that I get distracted. Carry on, my dear, you have my undivided attention. (*He holds her chin and looks into her eyes*)

BELINDA Well, what I was saying was that if you wanted to make our relationship more... *lasting*... then I wouldn't entirely (*BERTIE has meanwhile started examining her eyes, neck glands, mouth, etc.*) Finlay - stop that! Can't you even forget about your work when you're with me?

BERTIE My love, I try, but it requires all of my, not inconsiderable, mental powers merely to cope with the pressures of being a doctor. Oh Belinda, you must understand it's such a difficult job.

BELINDA Surely not, Finlay. Once you've learnt all the diseases and treatments it must be quite easy.

BERTIE If only! That's just the *start*. Medicine is far more than just fact regurgitation! Listen...

SONG - BERTIE

Music - "Oh! a private buffoon", Yeomen of the Guard

Oh! a doctor's a job that will make a quick bob,
If you listen to popular rumour;
There're some books you must learn, then you're ready to earn,
With a wallet that grows like a tumour!
Once you've got it by rote you can write them a note
And farewell to financial depression -
But there're one or two rules that the basest of fools
Must observe, if they love their profession.
There are one or two rules,
Half a dozen, maybe,
That the basest of fools,
When they've passed their degree,
Must observe, if they love their profession.

If you wish to succeed as a doctor, you'll need
To consider each person's auricular:
What is friendly to B might quite scandalise C
(For C is so very particular);
While D is demure, Mister E is quite sure
That his rash didn't come the way *you* thought!
And F's legal sense, if you cause her offence,
Will result in a writ for the High Court!
When they call you a lout,
You can't let yourself go;
Though it does put you out,
You must tell yourself 'No!' -
Or you'll get a new writ for the High Court!¹

You must always beware of the man with no hair
Who wants a big quiff like his brother,
And the woman of eighty who gets very baity
When you tell her she can't be a mother!
There's the lady with vapours, who makes all the papers
By fainting in settings dramatic,
And is always aghast when you tell her, at last,
That her problems are psychosomatic!
If you tell them the truth
There's a problem you'll find -
They will think you uncouth,
Though you try to be kind
When their problems are psychosomatic!

You see then, my dear, things aren't as they appear -
A doctor's not just a mechanic.
And though one may feel a great mission to heal,
With a fervour that borders on manic,
This mood you must dull and keep deep in your skull
When you're sent a malingering fretter.
Now, you must stop and pause - please, don't take up their cause -
They'll sue you if they don't get better!
Although it sounds base,
It's the Jack or the Jill
Who presents as a case
When they're not really ill
Who will sue you if they don't get better!

¹ This verse is sometimes omitted

BERTIE *collapses in a chair.*

- BELINDA** (*Rushing to him*) Oh, my dear, I had no idea it was so difficult! You poor thing!
- BERTIE** Please - no sympathy. Just show me a little consideration when I'm distracted.
- BELINDA** Granted! No matter how preoccupied you seem, you will find me understanding.
- BERTIE** (*Tentatively*) Even if the patient that I'm distracted with happens to be an attractive young woman?
- BELINDA** Even then.
- BERTIE** (*Springing up*) Oh, Belinda, we shall be very happy together!
- BELINDA** I feel sure of it! You know, I'm so looking forward to presenting you to my step-sister Catherine. In fact, I've invited her for tea this afternoon. She'll be here any minute.
- BERTIE** (*Worried*) Catherine?
- BELINDA** Yes.
- BERTIE** Catherine... Cox?
- BELINDA** Why, yes! You've met her?
- BERTIE** Yes! No! Er, I mean to say, I've heard a friend speak of her.
- BELINDA** Well, you'll speak to her yourself soon enough. I've asked her to arrive at three, and she's always very punctual.
- BERTIE** (*Aside*) Oh my God! (*Looks at watch*) Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry but I had completely forgotten that I've got an urgent appointment with Miss... No, Dame, er, Tissington-Smythe at three. I'll have to leave at once, my love, or I shall be late. Farewell, Belinda. (*He kisses her*) You are always on my mind! (*Exits hurriedly*)
- BELINDA** Oh, Finlay, couldn't you wait until Catherine arrives... Oh, what's the use. I'll simply have to get used to taking second place to his profession.

Enter NORA.

- NORA** Miss Box, Miss Cox has arrived.
- BELINDA** Send her in directly - I've got so much to tell her!
- NORA** Very good, madam.

Exit NORA. Enter CATHERINE, excited.

DUET - BELINDA *and* CATHERINE

Music - "After sailing to this island", The Gondoliers

- BELINDA** Catherine!
- CATHERINE** Belinda!
- BELINDA** My old friend!
- CATHERINE** My sister!
- BELINDA** Catherine, tell me, how are you, dear?
- CATHERINE** Full of life and full of passion!
- BELINDA** Have you gossip I should hear?
- CATHERINE** Tell me first, as is your fashion.
- BELINDA** Well, I have some news surprising,
But I think I'll keep you waiting.
- CATHERINE** What's this secret you're disguising -
Is it someone that you're dating?
- BELINDA** Expectation you can handle -
- CATHERINE** B. B., darling, you are teasing!

- BELINDA** Now, please tell me all your scandal -
CATHERINE Well, I have some you'll find pleasing.
BELINDA What new stories are you seeding -
Are there any really naughty?
CATHERINE I knew, despite your breeding,
You're not quite so prim and haughty!
- BOTH** I'll keep quizzing and requesting
Till you tell me, never doubt it;
Everything is interesting,
Tell me, tell me all about it!
- CATHERINE** You remember Brian Steading?
BELINDA Who looks like Sir Isaac Newton?
CATHERINE Well, he's had a shotgun wedding!
BELINDA Not that awful girl from Luton?
CATHERINE Then there's Penny, from the province,
Who, they say, is seeing Charlie...
BELINDA It's the greatest fuss I've seen since -
What's her name? - Virginia Marley!
- CATHERINE** Do you suit this season's dresses?
BELINDA No - my figure's not a twig!
CATHERINE I see Annie's bleached her tresses -
BELINDA And Lord Caspar's got a wig -
CATHERINE Mary Baines is getting thinner,
But her makeup's still too tarty -
BELINDA I must tell you 'bout the dinner
At John Hunter's dreadful party!
- BOTH** I'll keep quizzing and requesting
Till you tell me, never doubt it;
Everything is interesting,
Tell me, tell me all about it!
- CATHERINE** And now, Belinda darling, you simply must tell me your secret! Have you just made a killing on the stockmarket?
- BELINDA** Oh no, something far superior to that - I have a new admirer!
- CATHERINE** (*Aside*) I thought that for something to be 'new' one had to have something 'old'. No matter. (*To BELINDA*) My dear, that's wonderful! You must tell me all about him!
- BELINDA** Well, he's a brilliant doctor from Glasgow, he's *so* handsome and he's practically asked me to marry...
- CATHERINE** (*Condescendingly*) How fascinating! Now, I just know you're *dying* to hear all about *my* new lover!
- BELINDA** (*Sarcastically*) Oh, just *dying*.
- CATHERINE** I met him at 'The Amaranthine Lily' last week. We were discussing the rejection of primary colours as a means to speed the collapse of the bourgeois state when *he* walked in.
- BELINDA** And who is 'he'?
- CATHERINE** 'He' is Dylan Swinburne, a wild and passionate Welsh poet from Clanethley. I loved him even before I heard his poetry - but even more afterwards! His verse was savage, deep and frighteningly intense. It told a tale of love, hate, life, death, joy, despair, leeks, St. David, coal miners and a rugby team. By the time he had finished I was a shell - a drained, empty shell.
- BELINDA** He sounds very... Different.

CATHERINE Oh, he is! He is so utterly and passionately devoted to his poetry that he has difficulty understanding the simple thoughts of us mortals. Still, I *do* wish he'd understand the simple thought of *money*. It's quite extraordinary how often he leaves the house without his wallet...

BELINDA And when can I meet this picturesque gentleman?

CATHERINE Imminently - I've arranged for him to meet me here. He seemed oddly reluctant at first, but I managed to persuade him on the assurance that we would be utterly alone. He says that the eruption of the volcano of his passion cannot be controlled, and that the out-pourings of his heart could shock delicate company. Still, perhaps if you waited in the dressing room I could persuade him to meet you - after, of course, he's had a chance to make his amatory declamations.

Doorbell.

That'll be him now! Quick, go and hide - I'll come and get you when we're ready. Hurry!

Exit BELINDA into dressing room. Enter NORA.

NORA Your visitor, Miss CATHERINE.

Exit NORA. Enter BERTIE. He has long hair, red eyes and a sallow complexion and wears a baggy white shirt and tight trousers. His manner is pained and distracted, his accent outrageously Welsh.

BERTIE Catherine! My heart gushes now that I see you! *(They embrace)*

CATHERINE Oh, Dylan, you know that my passion is equally intense! Are you well, my love? You look terribly tired.

BERTIE I am afraid, my dear, that I am quite drained. I was overcome with the power of the muse last night. Never have I been so driven since I saved my father in that terrible mining disaster! The poem wasn't finished until the crimson claws of sunrise scoured the sky!

CATHERINE Another poem! Can I hear it?

BERTIE Oh, but you must, for it is about you! You must be warned, though - it is a wild, gushing and passionate composition. Are you strong enough to undergo its emotional torture?

CATHERINE Oh yes, Dylan, yes, yes, yes!

BERTIE Very well. It is called, simply, 'Catherine'.
"Oh Catherine, the love of my life,
When I see you, I no longer feel any strife.
Every glance cuts into my heart a valley -
The number of times a day I think of you, no man could keep a tally!
The passion I feel drives me to distraction -
With such hot, pulsing blood in my veins, I am weak to the demands of action.
If I lost you, my darling, I would die of remorse;
I would be like Richard the Third, looking for his horse.
Oh Catherine, please say that you'll always love me,
Or I shall have to take my own life and go at once to a cold, empty and desolate grave,
rather than spend the rest of my wretched and worthless life in misery."
There is no more to say. *(He collapses)*

CATHERINE I am drained. Never have I heard anything so beautiful. Oh Dylan, darling, make my happiness complete and sing to me while I recover.

BERTIE Sing?

CATHERINE Yes. You've often boasted of your fine tenor voice, but I've never been fortunate enough to hear it. Serenade me.

BERTIE Tenor voice? Did you say *tenor*?

CATHERINE Yes. That was what you told me.

BERTIE Well, it's tenor-*ish*..

CATHERINE Dylan, you said that you had a fine lyric tenor voice, and you're not leaving here until you sing a high 'C' from the chest!

BERTIE Ah, well, I don't know if that's possible, my love. I can't sing so well right now. My heart is so full of passion, it quite takes my breath away.

CATHERINE I think that you *do* want to sing, Dylan, if you want this week's rent paid.

BERTIE Well, I think I can just about summon up enough energy. But don't blame me if it goes wrong. (*Coughs*) It's the consumption, you see. I got it down the mine...

CATHERINE Get on with it!

RECIT. and SONG - BERTIE

Music - "Oh, Zara, my beloved one", Utopia Limited

Oh, Catherine, my beloved one, bear with me!
Ah, do not laugh at my attempted C!
Mock not, gentle maid, of thy heart's choice -
The fervour of my love affects my voice!

A tenor, all singers above
(This doesn't admit of a question),
Should keep himself quiet,
Attend to his diet
And carefully nurse his digestion;
But when he is madly in love
It's certain to tell on his singing -
You can't do chromatics
With proper emphatics
When anguish your bosom is wringing!
When distracted with worries in plenty,
And his pulse is a hundred and twenty,
And his fluttering bosom the slave of mistrust is,
A tenor can't do himself justice.
Now observe - (*sings a high note*),
You see, I can't do myself justice!

I could sing if my fervour were mock,
It's easy enough if you're acting -
But when one's emotion
Is born of devotion
You mustn't be over-exacting.
One ought to be firm as a rock
To venture a shake in *vibrato*.
When fervour's expected
Keep cool and collected
Or never attempt *agitato*.
But, of course, when his tongue is of leather,
And his lips appear pasted together,
And his sensitive palate as dry as a crust is,
A tenor can't do himself justice.
Now observe - (*sings a high note*),
It's no use - I can't do myself justice!

CATHERINE Considering your disabling passion for me, that was quite adequate.

BERTIE I do my best to please you, my angel.

CATHERINE Well, now that you've finished proclaiming your love, I think that it's time to introduce you to my step-sister Belinda - she's just dying to meet you. I'll go and get her - she's just in the dressing room. Wait here! (*Exit CATHERINE*)

BERTIE Oh my God! I'd better beat a hasty retreat! (*Exit BERTIE. He passes NORA on her way in. She gives him a significant look*)

Enter BELINDA and CATHERINE.

CATHERINE ...And you must hear this poem that he's just written about me... Oh - he's gone! He was just here, I swear it!

BELINDA Funny. He didn't *sound* particularly shy!

CATHERINE Oh, no doubt he was suddenly struck with inspiration for a new poem and had to leave to set it down ere he forgot it. It happens all the time, particularly when it's his turn to buy a round. But such is the curse of loving a true artist!

BELINDA It's quite extraordinary, you know, but my beloved Finlay also made a hasty exit when I announced your coming. Not that *I'm* suspicious, of course, but why this strange reluctance to meet their loved one's step-sister?

CATHERINE I'm sure I've no idea! But it does seem strange...

TRIO - BELINDA, CATHERINE and NORA

Music - "When you had left our pirate fold", The Pirates of Penzance

CATHERINE You say you doctor's love is true,
As pure as any amorous dove,
So why does he keep leaving you -
Has he another love?

BELINDA Although my trust dispels concern,
And doubt my laughter gaily mocks,
With curiosity I burn -
A puzzling paradox!

NORA A paradox!

CATHERINE A paradox!

BELINDA A most intriguing paradox!
A test to fox both Box and Cox -
A most perplexing paradox!

ALL A paradox, a most intriguing paradox!
Ha! ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! ho!

BELINDA I know that Finlay would not stray -
The number of my doubts is nought -
But what of Dylan Swinburne, pray?
He's not a stable sort!

CATHERINE Belinda, you must fret no more -
No man's untrue to Catherine Cox!
But still I'm not entirely sure...
It's such a paradox!

NORA A paradox!

BELINDA A paradox!

CATHERINE A most intriguing paradox!
A test to fox both Box and Cox -
A most perplexing paradox!

ALL A paradox, a most intriguing paradox!
Ha! ha! ha! ha! Ho! ho! ho! ho!

CHANT - NORA

Miss Box, Miss Cox, I'd like, if I may, to propose a possible situation that you could arrange
Whereby you could determine whether there is any hint of faithlessness inciting your suitors to act in a manner so strange.
Although you may wish to discount my advice and feel that I'm interfering with affairs above my station,
My extensive experience with wandering men, who are common in the lower classes, suggest a plan that will result in a full and proper explanation.
You must simply have tea together tomorrow afternoon, as you invariably do,
But you must also invite to it both of your admirers *at the same time*, with threats that if they don't come they will have to find somebody new.
This way, if they both appear as expected your fears will prove to be groundless,
But if they don't you'll know that they are indeed utterly base and deceitful and faithless as you already suspect (*Aside*) or even the same person!

BELINDA Of course -
That's right!
On any infidelities we'll shine a light!

CATHERINE How clever is our Nora Knox -
She quite out-thinks both Cox and Box.
She's hit upon the ideal plan
For us to catch a cheater out.
The absence thus of any man -
Will mean that he is but a lout!

ALL Will mean that he is but a lout! Ha! ha!
This paradox, this paradox,
I think we've solved this paradox!
Ha! ha! ha! this paradox!

Exeunt

SCENE TWO - BERTIE's apartments. DAVID and FRED are discovered. DAVID is an aesthetic poet (but not Welsh) and FRED is a slovenly doctor (and not Scottish).

DAVID (*Writing a poem*) My love... My love... Ah! My love is pure and true, my dear,
It gushes forth like...

FRED Diarrhoea?

Enter BERTIE, divesting himself of Dylan's costume.

FRED Ah, Bertram returns from his philandering! A successful jaunt, old chap?

BERTIE I'll say! Mind you, I almost got into a terrible scrape. I didn't know that Catherine and Belinda are step-sisters! Took some quick thinking to get out of that, I can tell you.

DAVID Well, dear boy, I'd like to see think your way out of this situation. These letters (*producing them*) came by special delivery just before you arrived. They are signed, respectively, Miss Box and Miss Cox.

BERTIE Oh yes. More love letters, I suppose.

DAVID Fred and I took the liberty of opening them for you, dear boy.

BERTIE Oh, I say...

FRED You see? I knew that the old coot wouldn't mind! Well, old chap, the letters are inviting a Dr Finlay Kildare and a Mr Dylan Swinburne to tea tomorrow at Miss Box's apartments - both at the same time!

- DAVID** And any excuses will result in an instant and complete severing of all financial, and other, relations!
- BERTIE** But this is quite appalling! (*Sits*) That's it - I'm a ruined man!
- DAVID** So, dear boy, somehow you've got to be both of your philandering personas simultaneously or it's goodbye Belinda and goodbye Catherine. You know, it really is most devilishly funny when you think about it!
- FRED** I'll say!
- BERTIE** Well I don't say! Belinda and Catherine mean a good deal to me. They're both beautiful, intelligent, affectionate... and rich! I was even considering marrying one of them.
- DAVID** Oh yes? Which one?
- BERTIE** I hadn't quite decided that yet... But I would've done, given time... and a copy of their bank statements. Blast it all - now I'll never have the chance!
- FRED** I don't understand, old chap - where has this sudden sentimentality come from? You've always positively avoided making any commitments before. And, God knows, you've had enough opportunities!
- BERTIE** I say, that's not true! I've been passionately devoted to each and every one of my female conquests... Companions. I would only abandon them in the most hopeless of situations and with the greatest of distress to myself.
- DAVID** Pull the other one, Bertie! Everybody knows that you're the most vapid and frivolous wastrel in the city. But as you seem to have forgotten, perhaps we should remind you...

TRIO - FRED, DAVID *and* BERTIE

Music - "If you go in", Iolanthe

- FRED** There was last spring,
When you took wing
With that charming country lady.
Father with gun
Soon stopped your fun,
Rolling in the hay with Sadie!
- ALL** Rolling, rolling, rolling,
Rolling in the hay with Sadie!
- Each affair must have its end
When rifts appear that cannot mend -
You'll be wise the girl to shun
Who has a father with a gun!
- DAVID** And what about
When you went out
With your bosses ugly daughter?
She was alone,
Dropped like a stone,
When her papa was made a porter!
- ALL** Porter, porter, porter,
When her papa was made a porter!
- While the sun shines make your hay -
So when a lady comes your way,
Ere you commit yourself, ensure
That her father isn't poor!

BERTIE Don't it appear
That I'm sincere
When I say I truly love them?
Though if they grow
Poorer, you know,
Then, perhaps, I might just shove them.

ALL Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps,
In fact we're sure that he would shove them!

Nothing ventured, nothing won -
You need cash when love has gone -
In for a penny, in for a pound -
Money makes the world go round!

DAVID and FRED collapse laughing. BERTIE is annoyed.

BERTIE Look, you stupid chumps, this is no laughing matter! I'm in severe danger of losing two undying sources of undying income... joy!

DAVID Oh, come off it, Bertie, I don't know how you can keep a straight face and say such things! Go to the club and get stinking - you'll have soon forgotten these 'undying sources of joy' by your fifth G and T!

BERTIE Well, it's clear that if that's all you care about my personal happiness, you may consider our friendship at an end!

FRED I say, David, steady on, old chap. I think Bertie's actually serious!

DAVID Good God, I think you're right! I'm really frightfully sorry, old fruit, I had no idea. But don't worry - David Dox will never abandon a friend in a fix. Come on Fred, get that grey matter sloshing about. We need a solution to Bertie's dilemma.

FRED I'm afraid that us Fox's aren't too strong in the head department at the best of times, let alone after last night's binge. Still, I'll do my best, old chap.

BERTIE Look, thanks awfully for the offer, but I just can't see any possible way out of this particular predicament. I'm afraid that this is the end of a glorious career.

DAVID Don't despair yet, dear boy! We've just got to put our heads together and think up a cunning plan...

FRED A subtle ploy...

BERTIE A private plot!

TRIO - BERTIE, FRED and DAVID

Music - "With wily brain upon the spot", Utopia Limited

With wily brain upon the spot
A private plot we'll plan,
The most ingenious private plot
Since private plots began.
That's understood. So far we've got
And, striking while the iron's hot,
We'll now determine like a hot
The details of this private plot.

BERTIE I think we ought - (*whispers*).

FRED & DAVID Such bosh I never heard!

FRED Ah! I've a thought! - (*whispers*).

BERTIE & DAVID How utterly dashed absurd!

DAVID I'll tell you how - (*whispers*).

BERTIE & FRED Why, what put that in your head?

BELINDA I've got it now - (*whispers*).

FRED & DAVID Oh, take him away to bed!

FRED Oh, put him to bed!

DAVID Oh, put him to bed!
BERTIE What! put *me* to bed?
FRED & DAVID Yes, certainly put him to bed!
BERTIE But, dash it, don't you see -
FRED Do listen to me, I pray -
DAVID It certainly seems to me -
BERTIE Bah - this is the only way!
FRED It's rubbish absurd you growl!
DAVID You talk ridiculous stuff!
BERTIE You're a drivelling barndoor owl!
FRED You're a vapid and vain old muff!

ALL So far we haven't quite solved the plot -
They're not a very ingenious lot -
But don't be unhappy,
It's still on the *tapis*,
We'll presently hit on a capital plot!

BERTIE Suppose you two - (*whispers*).
FRED Now *there* I think you're right.
Then, perhaps you - (*whispers*).
DAVID That's true - he certainly might.
I'll tell you what - (*whispers*).
BERTIE I will if I possibly can.
Then on the spot - (*whispers*).
FRED & DAVID Bravo! a capital plan!
BERTIE That's exceedingly neat and new!
FRED Exceedingly new and neat.
DAVID I fancy that that will do.
BERTIE It's certainly very complete.
FRED Well done, you sly old sap!
DAVID Bravo, you cunning old mole!
BERTIE You very ingenious chap!
FRED You intellectual soul!

ALL At last a capital plan we've got;
We won't say how and we won't say what:
It's safe in my noddle -
Now off we will toddle,
And put into action this capital plot!

Exeunt conspiratorially.

SCENE THREE - BELINDA's apartments. NORA is discovered making final preparations for afternoon tea.

NORA I'm just dying to see how Bertie Smith gets out of this situation. Oh yes, I'm on to his game. I think it's shocking, playing around with two young ladies in such a reckless way. Really, the middle classes should be protected from such indelicacies! Still, I can see the attraction. It wasn't that long ago that I too fell prey to his advances. 'Course, he wasn't plain Bertie Smith when I knew him - he was Sir Nathan Monism, K.C.B! That lasted a whole weekend, that did, before he found a gaudier butterfly to pursue. Still, it was a wonderful weekend... I've never found another who's treated me half as well, and Lord knows I've done enough searching! Now look - don't get any ideas about my morality. I'm not some dizzy-headed flirtatious young thing - I'm a good girl, I am! I admit that I have been out with a great many young men, but they didn't mean anything. There's always only been one man that I truly loved. The trouble is, I keep forgetting exactly *which* one!

SONG - NORA

Music - "I'm a simple little child", The Zoo

I'm a simple little child, and my ways are nice and mild,
And I never harmed a soul in all my life,
And I don't know what is wrong, as my principles are strong
For this hemisphere of wickedness and strife.
I have bracelets, it is true, and I've diamonds, just a few,
That are locked up in a chest of drawers at home,

And a dressing case with tops of gold and diamond drops,
But I haven't an idea from whence they come!
And the bouquets come in showers of the most expensive flowers
That Covent Garden market can provide,
While it happened once last year that a park hock did appear,
The very best of thoroughbreds to ride!
I have dresses by the dozens but they're given me by cousins
Who have known me ever since I was *that* high,
And tickets for the play are sent me every day,
But I'm sure I never can imagine why!

To Greenwich in the season I have been and for the reason
That I did not like my cousin to offend;
But I saved my reputation, to his very great vexation,
By driving back to London with his friend.
On more than one occasion, after very great persuasion,
I have driven down to Richmond with his brother,
And once I do remember, in the middle of September,
To Hampton Court I travelled with another!
It is true I went to Dover when the Season was just over,
But then it was with George - I should say Harry,
And Harry - I mean, Charlie, or was it Thomas Parlie?
Was the only man I ever meant to marry.
It might have been the other - or it might have been his brother -
But neither could I ever bear to part;
But, whichever of the two, it really was, it's *true*,
That I loved him from the bottom of my heart!

Enter BELINDA and CATHERINE.

BELINDA Is everything ready, Nora?

NORA Yes, madam.

BELINDA Excellent. Kindly go and show our guest in. I think we've kept them waiting for long enough.

CATHERINE Yes. I think that fifteen minutes is the fashionable length of time.

Exit NORA.

BELINDA It's strange, but I'm sure that I could only see one figure in the hall. It must've been Finlay.

CATHERINE You think so? Well, his knock sounded like Dylan's.

Enter NORA.

NORA Madam, there's a Mr Locks to see you. Apparently he is the valet of Mr Swinburne and Dr Kildare.

BELINDA Oh, I knew it all along - they've sent a messenger to excuse themselves!

CATHERINE Typical men! We should never have trusted them!

Enter BERTIE. He is dressed as a 'gentleman's gentleman' and sports a false moustache.

BERTIE Miss Box, Miss Cox, I regret to inform you of some distressing news in connection with Dr Kildare and Mr Swinburne...

CATHERINE Oh no! Have they been in an accident?

BERTIE In a sense, yes. They are both afflicted with a severe bout of chicken pox that Dr Kildare contracted from one of his younger charges.

BELINDA And so they're not coming?

BERTIE Oh no, madam. Motivated by the stern orders in your invitations they have managed to rise from their sick beds as a token of their extreme affection. However, before I bid them enter, I must warn you that they have affected to cover their faces, not only because of the disfiguring effect of the spots, but also in an earnest attempt to prevent the spread of infection. *(Exits)*

BELINDA The poor dears!

CATHERINE To think that they would cause themselves such inconvenience for our sake! Oh, Dylan, Dylan, will you ever forgive me for doubting you?

Enter BERTIE with FRED and DAVID. FRED is dressed as Finlay and DAVID as Dylan, but both cover their faces with a cloth bag.

BELINDA *(Rushing forward)* My dear Finlay!

CATHERINE *(Rushing forward)* Darling Dylan!

BERTIE *(Stopping them)* Stop! I'm afraid that physical contact is expressly forbidden, by order of their physician!

BELINDA Of course, how foolish of us. I trust I find you in excellent health, Dr Kildare.

FRED *(Normal accent)* Of course I'm not - I've got bally chicken pox, haven't I?

BELINDA Well, there's no need to be rude, my dear. It must be the itching making you so irritable.

CATHERINE Belinda darling, I thought you said that Finlay was *Scottish*...

BERTIE *(Barely concealed panic)* I think, madam, that you'll find the change in accent is consequent to the muffling effects of the facial covering.

BELINDA Of course, that must be the explanation!

CATHERINE Oh Dylan, have you managed to compose any poems during your terrible ordeal? Ones about *me*, for instance?

BERTIE *(Hurriedly)* Yes sir, or about your home in *Wales*.

DAVID *Wales?*

BERTIE Yes sir, I believe you told me that Clanethly was your birthplace.

DAVID Er, right. *(In a precise, upper class English accent)* Ah, dai bach, I've started one, plad kumree. It's about valleys, the Labour Party and a male voice choir. Dai Bach. A gogogoth.

CATHERINE How wonderful, darling - and you seem to have recovered your tenor voice, too! You're certainly speaking a good deal higher than yesterday.

BERTIE A rather fortuitous side effect of the chicken pox for Mr Swinburne is the inevitable laryngitis that accompanies the prodromal phase. But I fear that the young gentlemen are getting tired. I am afraid that we must be going.

BELINDA Of course, Mr Locks. Nora! Would you come and show our guests out?

Enter NORA. She has rumbled their game!

- BERTIE** Good day to you, madams. Come along, sirs.
BERTIE, DAVID and FRED start to exit. As FRED passes NORA she trips him and he stumbles into DAVID.
- DAVID** Fred! Watch where you're going, you clumsy oaf!
- FRED** Sorry, David old chap, it's this bally mask! Can't see a damn thing.
Pregnant pause.
- BELINDA** Fred?
- CATHERINE** David?
- BERTIE** I really think that it is imperative that we should leave immed....
- BELINDA** Unmask these impostors!
- CATHERINE** Tear down their disguises!
In a struggle, FRED and DAVID are unmasked. NORA holds BERTIE and prevents him from leaving.
- BELINDA** Who are these young men?
- NORA** Mistress Box, Mistress Cox, I think that you'll find that their valet holds the answer... *(She tears off BERTIE's moustache and exits triumphantly)*
- BERTIE** Ow!
- BELINDA** Finlay!
- CATHERINE** Dylan!
- BERTIE** It's a fair cop!
- BELINDA** You... You're both Finlay *and* Dylan?
- CATHERINE** You mean to say that Belinda and I were both in love with the same person? You fraudulent cad!
- BELINDA** And you hoped to deceive our trusting natures with your friends here? You monster!
- BERTIE** I can explain...
- BELINDA** Don't bother!
- CATHERINE** Can't you see the damage you've already done?

QUINTET - CATHERINE, DAVID, BELINDA, BERTIE *and* FRED

Music - "When a wooer goes a-wooing", The Yeomen of the Guard

- CATHERINE** When a wooer
Goes a-wooing,
Naught is falser
Than his joy.
- DAVID** Maid's deceiving
With his suing -
Love he's thieving
From his toy.
- BERTIE** Oh, the happy days of doing!
- ALL** Oh, the happy days of doing!
Oh, the sighing and the suing!
When a wooer goes a-wooing,
Hollow is his gift of joy!

BELINDA When a lover
Woo's another,
Undercover,
Who's her friend,
Then it's prime
That he discover
That their time
Is at an end.

BERTIE Oh, the doing and undoing.

ALL Oh, the doing and undoing,
Oh, the sighing and the suing,
When a wooer goes a-wooing,
With his lover's oldest friend.

BERTIE When my scheming
Is outwitted,
Ends my dreaming,
Heart is lead!
All things grieve me,
Hope has quitted,
Please just leave me
Here for dead.

ALL Oh, the doing and undoing,
Oh, the sighing and the suing,
When a wooer goes a-wooing,
And he wishes he was dead.

Exit BELINDA with FRED and CATHERINE with DAVID. BERTIE is left alone and distraught. NORA enters unnoticed.

BERTIE Oh, what's to be done? If only I'd just come clean with them at the start. Too late now, though. As soon as news of this little incident gets about my reputation will be in ruins! You'd better face it, Bertie old man, henceforth it's a bachelor's life for you - whether you like it or not!

NORA (*Coming forward*) Oh, I wouldn't be so hasty...

BERTIE It's too late (*sees her*) attractive stranger - my mind is already made up!

NORA There you go, pretending you don't know me, Bertie Smith... Or should I say Sir Nathan Monism?

BERTIE Of course! Now that I look more closely... It's... Penelope, isn't it?

NORA Nora.

BERTIE That's right! Nora, Penelope, they're practically the same! Oh, it's such a relief, I mean, *pleasure* to see you again. I say, I'll never forget that wonderful week we...

NORA End.

BERTIE ...weekend we spent in sunny Bournemouth...

NORA Clacton!

BERTIE ...Clacton. It's one of most treasured memories! I say, Penny...

NORA Nora.

BERTIE ...Nora, you're not *married* yet, are you?

NORA Not, as yet, no. Why Bertie?

BERTIE Well, how would you consider taking on an out-and-out cad such as myself? A newly reformed and devilishly handsome out-and-out cad, mind you. What do you say?

NORA Well, if *you'd* consider taking on a not particularly well-educated and rather poorly paid girl such as myself. A strikingly attractive rather poorly paid girl, I might add, though.

BERTIE Oh yes, Penny...

NORA Nora!

BERTIE ...Nora, oh yes, yes, yes! (*They embrace. Aside*) Phew! Saved from bachelorhood!

Enter BELINDA and FRED arm-in-arm, followed by CATHERINE and DAVID likewise engaged.

BELINDA Mr *Smith*, we have an announcement to make.

CATHERINE Yes, we have decided to forgive you.

BERTIE Forgive me?

BELINDA Yes. Once outside, we reasoned thus; when you wooed me as Finlay you were impersonating Frederic...

FRED Except for the Scottish bit.

CATHERINE And when you pledged love to me you were impersonating David...

DAVID Except that *I* come from Colchester.

BELINDA Therefore, we reasoned that all along I was *effectively* in love with Frederic...

CATHERINE And I was *as good as* in love with David...

BELINDA And as they both find us not unattractive...

CATHERINE And as we find *them* not unattractive...

BELINDA Well, in short, we've decided to marry!

BERTIE I say! Why, that's marvellous!

BELINDA & CATHERINE Marvellous?

BELINDA (*Disappointed*) We thought you'd be heartbroken!

BERTIE I am, that is, I *would be* if I had not also the great fortune to be getting married.

CATHERINE Getting married?

BELINDA But who an earth would marry you?

NORA Your loyal, obedient and extremely virtuous housemaid!

FRED Well done, old chap! How spiffing!

DAVID I say! Top-hole!

BELINDA Well, Bertie, Nora's certainly a charming girl, although I'm not sure whether *extremely* virtuous is quite the qualifier I would use...

CATHERINE Never mind. I'm very pleased for you, Bertie. She's certainly a far more suitable class of girl!

BERTIE My friends, I thank you for your kind words. From now on, with the help of my darling Penny...

NORA Nora!

BERTIE ...Nora I shall renounce my former ways. My philandering days are over!

FRED Damn glad to hear it, Bertie! Come on, everybody, I think that this calls for a celebration!

FINALE

Music - "Society has quite forsaken all her wicked courses", Utopia Limited

DAVID So Bertie Smith has quite forsaken all his wicked courses,
That led to many broken hearts and writs for quick divorces!

ALL Although divorce is dying out in England!

CATHERINE Despite his evil frauds that we accepted very gladly,
We'll never be vindictive to a man who treats us badly!

ALL A maxim that is prevalent in England!

FRED Although we've been compliant in his sordid little scheming,
We've met the girls that all our sleeping lives we have been dreaming!
And so I can forgive him, for it's turned out very sweetly.

ALL In short this little incident has finished up quite neatly!
It really is surprising
When philanderer's disguising
Causes complicated couplings that we never planned!
By behaving indiscreetly
It has worked out quite completely,
And there'll be a triple wedding in this happy land!

BELINDA My morals and my conscience are dictating to me clearly;
'Please take this doctor for a spouse and love him very dearly.'

ALL You'll never find a bride with doubts in England!

NORA My education's bad, I'm poor, my hands are often dirty,
And yet, it's ended up that I'm the maid to capture Bertie!

ALL And he's tried just about all maids in England!

BERTIE My friends, you have my heartfelt thanks for your moral ablution;
For any problem, honesty is always the solution.
I've seen the light and with your help I will reform completely!

ALL In short this little incident has finished up quite neatly!
It really is surprising
When philanderer's disguising
Causes complicated couplings that we never planned!
By behaving indiscreetly
It has worked out quite completely,
And there'll be a triple wedding in this happy land!

CURTAIN

AUTHOR'S NOTE

For several years, Newcastle University Gilbert and Sullivan Society used to perform a paring of 'Cox and Box' and either 'Trial by Jury' or 'The Zoo' as a Summer show. The problem was that this didn't give many opportunities for women, as 'Cox and Box' is for three man, and doesn't really allow changing the sex of any of the *dramatis personæ*. And, hence, the names of the characters...

So, after the success of 'Wicked Waxworks', I thought that I'd have a go at writing a one act, principals-only show with an equal number of men and women. I wanted to capture the atmosphere of 'Three Men in a Boat' and P. G. Wodehouse, mixed with a dash of Oscar Wilde. I also wrote the part of Berties for myself, so thought I'd go the whole hog give myself lots to do, and as well as show off my ability to do accents! Shameless, I know – forgive the hubris of youth? The inspiration for Dr Kildare is obvious, while Dylan is somewhat based on the Welsh intellectual played by Dudley Moore in the film 'Bedazzled' (1967).

In comparison to 'Wicked Waxworks', I re-wrote a lot more lyrics in this show, feeling it was easier to do this with a smaller number of characters, and wouldn't require so much work when creating the score (Tippex and pen in those days!) It was paired with 'Trial by Jury' in 1989 (using a song from 'The Zoo' would have made *that* a more difficult combination) and went down rather well. This was a relief, as the actress playing Belinda was injured at one of the final rehearsals, and another actress had to step in with 48 hours notice – and was terrific!

We performed a short version of the show as an entertainment for a local NODA meeting in 1994, and the last time I played Bertie was with Gosforth Musical Society in 2009, when it was paired with Noel Katz's lovely, original one act musical 'Murder at the Savoy'. It has proved itself to be a pretty robust little show, and, I believe, fulfils its original purpose admirably!

29th May 2022