



Minna von Barnhelm

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The Greenwich **GT** *Studio Theatre*

presents

Minna von Barnhelm

by
Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

translated by Kenneth J Northcott
directed by Margarete Forsyth

30th September - 31st October 1993

This production is generously supported by
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Greenwich Studio Theatre was founded in 1990 by Neil Linden-Johnson, Nick Carpenter and Ian Embleton, who ran it successfully for three years, primarily as a receiving venue for visiting fringe companies. The theatre is now under new management, and after a period of refurbishment is reopening with a season of **Comedies of the Enlightenment** from the 18th century, performed by the Greenwich Studio Theatre Company. For most of the year, the new artistic directors intend to offer a wide range of challenging and innovative in-house work with a distinctive house style.

The Theatre will continue to be available to visiting companies for a limited number of months in the year. Contact us on 081 858 2862 if you are interested in hiring the space.

COMEDIES OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The new GST company's inaugural season features two comedies by major European writers from the 18th century Age of Enlightenment. The plays, from Germany and Denmark, are acknowledged masterpieces in their country of origin but are practically unknown in Britain.

Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*

arguably the only great German comedy written before the 20th century, is followed in November by Holberg's **Erasmus Montanus**, a hilarious study of what happens to a superstitious farming community when one of its sons returns home after three years at university and infuriates the farmers with his 'enlightened' views.

For The Greenwich Studio Theatre

Artistic Director	Margarete Forsyth
Associate Director	Julian Forsyth
Administrator	Alison Clarke
Production Manager	Keith Radley
Company Manager	Mark Feakins
Box Office Manager	Giorgio Frare
Wardrobe Mistress	Beeke Ropers
Publicity	Louisa Gummer

The Greenwich Studio Theatre is allowed to operate by kind permission of Bill Bridges, the Landlord and Leaseholder of **The Prince of Orange Public House**. The room in which the theatre is situated is dedicated to the memory of Dean Bridges.

The Greenwich Studio Theatre would like to thank the following people and companies for their support in realising this production.

Joan Forsyth for her generous financial support.

Bob Aylett, Ted Batley, Bill Bridges, Sarah Bridges, Bert Broe at Theatre Zoo, Peter Christian, Dudley Dods, Neil Fraser, Karl Holden, Jane, Susan Jenkinson, Andrew Killian, Lucy Rix, Deac Rossell, Leighton Vickers.

Goethe Institute, German Academic Exchange Service, Oval Printshop, LAMDA, RADA, Goldsmith's College, Greenwich Council, Fox Upholstery (Carol & Joan), Mountview Theatre School, RNT (Tony), Greenwich Theatre, The Company, Sainsbury's Homebase, Nick Bloom Stage Productions, PCR, SBS, ACID, Blackheath Gazette.

And all those people who gave their time and talents for free, to make the costumes and set and to refurbish the theatre.

Chair Sponsors

Mrs C Johnstone, Karl Pfeiffer, Teo Maler, Gisela Ropers, Marianne Eggers, Nigel Forsyth, Joan & Mark Forsyth, Nicola Fawssett, Cornelia Graffam-Lewis, Dietrich L Graffam, Christopher and Elke Graffam, Professor Dr Wolfgang Lottes, Schlaepfer, Theaterkreis Bortfeld, Transtalex Plc, Dudley Dods, John Humphries and Nicole Canuet.

If you would like to sponsor a chair at the GST, please ring 081 858 2862.

Der erste Brief.

an den Herrn.

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als einen der besten Menschen kenne, die ich
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Der zweite Brief.

an den Herrn.

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Der dritte

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Competition for arts funding is fierce and there is very little money to go around. There are two ways in which you can help the GST achieve its aims, by sponsoring a chair, or by becoming a friend



Sponsoring a chair

For £45, we will place a plaque on a chair in the auditorium, commemorating your kind support. You will also become a GST 'Friend for Life'.



Becoming a friend

For a minimum donation of £15, you will receive a regular update on new productions and projects, special ticket offers for the previews of each of our productions, and the opportunity to meet cast members at special Friends' Evenings.



If you would like to help the GST or would like any further information on either of these opportunities, please contact us on 081 858 2862, or fill in the form available in the foyer.

THE COMPANY

Sally Cassin

Minna von Barnhelm

After gaining a classics degree at Liverpool University and training at the Webber Douglas Academy in London, Sally has had leading roles in numerous bars and department stores around the country.

Happily she has managed to alternate these with appearances at the Festival Theatre, Pitlochry; the Old Fire Station, Oxford; the Lyric, Shaftesbury Avenue and several dubious fringe venues in London and the States.

She comes to Greenwich after four foot-tapping months of work on *Crazy for You*, and appears by kind permission of the Licensed Victuallers Association.

Stephane Cornicard

Riccaut de la Marliniere

Stephane was born in Brittany, bred in Normandy and trained in France and the USA. Favourite parts include Gregor in *Metamorphosis*, Philip in *The Lion in Winter*, The Inspector in *Intermezzo* and Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Currently working as presenter on *TNT Cartoon Network*, Stephane is devising a one-man-show called *Icarus' Flight*, teaches 18th century French Comedy at the Institut Francais, is an active member of Paines Plough's Actors Laboratory and as often as possible rides Barnaby, 'The-most-beautiful-horse-you've-ever-seen'.

Reg Eppey

Count of Bruchsal

Reg left teaching five years ago to take a Post Graduate Course in acting at the London Theatre School.

Since then he has played Barberini in *The Life of Galileo* at the Young Vic Studio. He has appeared in two successive seasons at the Holland Park Festival as Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* and Sharpless in *Madame Butterfly*. He played in *A Christmas Carol* at the Oldham Coliseum and was in *Me & My Girl* at the Adelphi Theatre. Reg has appeared in pantomimes, plays and musicals in both the London and Edinburgh Fringe.

Mark Feakins

Fritz/Orderly/Company
Manager

Mark trained at Mountview Theatre School, after gaining a degree in librarianship!

His theatre work includes Puck at the Bridge Lane Theatre, and seasons at Chichester, Sadler's Wells, and recently at the Mermaid Theatre, as young Scrooge and Marley's Ghost in *A Christmas Carol*. At the Piccadilly Theatre Mark was in the Anglo/Japanese production of *Tango at the End of Winter*. He also toured nationally in Benjamin Britten's *Turn of the Screw*, stopping off on the way to perform for the 'lifers' in Wormwood Scrubs.

Future work includes a new television series, *Moving Story*, and the title role in the GST's second Comedy of the Enlightenment - *Erasmus Montanus*.

Julian Forsyth Major von Tellheim

Julian taught at Erlangen University in Germany before training as an actor at Webber Douglas Academy.

His recent theatre work has been with the RSC in Trevor Nunn's productions of *The Blue Angel* and *Measure for Measure*, at the Almeida in Wedekind's *Lulu* and Howard Barker's *Scenes From an Execution*, with the Wrestling School in Barker's *The Europeans* (seen last April at Greenwich Theatre), as Fagin in *Oliver* at Sadler's Wells (a role he has recorded on CD), and in several West End musicals.

His TV work includes *Poirot*, *Heroes* and *This is David Lander*.

Margarete Forsyth Director

Margarete is the new Artistic Director of the Greenwich Studio Theatre. She took an MA Degree in English and German at the University of Erlangen in Germany before teaching for four years at the University of London Goldsmith's College.

She then embarked on a career as a theatre and opera director, directing regularly for Carlos Opera and founding The Rude Mechanicals, for whom she directed Goethe's *Faust*, Buchner's *Danton's Death* and Brecht's *Life of Galileo*, all at the Young Vic Studio.

She has also directed a wide range of European classics at some of London's leading drama schools, and translated five plays by the Austrian playwright Arthur

Schnitzler, which were presented at the GST as part of last year's Greenwich Festival.

Louisa Gummer Publicity

Louisa trained at Mountview Theatre School after gaining a Maths degree from Oxford. In-between-times she worked for two of London's largest advertising agencies promoting such varied products as yoghurt, dog-food and computers!

She has recently been seen cavorting around on the stage of the Fortune Theatre, singing whilst covered in plastic fruit, and has also spent time, beehived, screaming senselessly at four Beatles lookalikes under a railway arch in Camden (which was pretending to be the Cavern Club) for the new feature film *Backbeat*.

Bernard Kay Paul Werner

Early: Trained Old Vic, London

Cheeky: Age 24 - learned, rehearsed and played Macbeth in 20 hours.

Lucky: Haven't had to take a civilian job for over 40 years.

Reppy: Scores of parts in various reps - where have they all gone?

Telly: Who was the idiot who turned down *Z Cars*? Killed Ida Barlow in *The Street*. Known as the 'J.R.' of *Crossroads*.

Filmically: *Dr Zhivago*, *Darling Lili*. *The Hunting Party* (the English actor's dream - a Western), *Trog* - Joan Crawford's last film.

Latelly: *Galileo* at the Young Vic, Glendower at the RSC, French King in *Fruit 'n' Fibre*.

Futuristically: ???

Eddie Marsan

Just

Eddie has been a professional actor for the last two years, graduating from Mountview Theatre School, and is now a regular student at the School of the Science of Acting.

His theatre work includes Caligula in Albert Camus' *Caligula*, Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* in the open air (Oxford), The Ghost, First Player and Fortinbras in *Hamlet* (Guildford) and St Pior in *Noonday Demons* by Peter Barnes (GST).

TV Credits include *The Bill*, *Piglet Files*, *Crime Monthly* and *Dame Edna's Neighbourhood Watch*.

Keith Radley

Hans/Production Manager

After studying for several years Keith finally left Mountview Theatre School in 1992 to move straight into consecutive Shakespeare productions - Tybalt and Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet* (Springfield Theatre) and Lysander in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Bridge Lane Theatre).

Following this Keith has broadened his horizons by working in film production and direction, and helping with the refurbishment of the Greenwich Studio Theatre.

Beeke Ropers

Costume Design

Beeke first started making and designing costumes during her three years at

Goldsmiths College (University of London).

Since her graduation in 1991 she has worked on several fringe productions including *Galileo* directed by Margarete Forsyth at the Young Vic Studio and *Vitus Bering* at the ICA. She has also worked with the National Youth Music Theatre on *Aesop*, *Guys and Dolls*, *Billy* and *Poppy*.

Anette Schroeder

Literary Adviser

Anette graduated with an MA in German Literature and Politics from the University of Hanover, with an emphasis on Modern Drama, Brecht's early plays and Heiner Müller's work. Since then she has held workshops on 'learning plays' (Lehrstücke) in Germany and Great Britain. In 1990 she was Assistant Director in Margarete Forsyth's production of *The Life of Galileo* at the Young Vic Studio.

Following her critically acclaimed production of *Mauser* by Heiner Müller at the Greenwich Studio Theatre in 1991, she has worked on Konrad Bayer's prose collage *The Head of Vitus Bering*, adapting and directing it for the ICA Theatre in 1992, accompanied by a conference on the Vienna Group, where Gerhard Rühm gave one of his rare performances.

Tim Swinton

Landlord

Tim trained at the Central School of Speech and Drama.

Theatre work includes: Marcel and Theo in

Piaf, Mr Lucie in *No Orchids for Miss Blandish* and Splash in *Submariners* (Plymouth). At Chichester he appeared in *Soldiers Talking Cleanly*, and as Waitwell in *The Way of the World* which transferred to the Haymarket.

He was Apollinaire in *Picasso* (Edinburgh Festival), Nick in *The Scam* (Old Red Lion) and a rent boy in *Wide-Eyes Kingdom* (BAC). A happy association with Sheffield included appearances as De Haras in *William Tell* and Marquis St Evremonde in *A Tale of Two Cities* at the Crucible. Most recently Tim has appeared with the Manchester Royal Exchange as Pluck in *The Recruiting Officer*.

Joan Walker

Captain Marloff's Widow

Joan did a degree in Psychology and Maths before doing a post-graduate acting course at the Welsh College of Music and Drama.

Recent theatre includes *Two* and *How the Other Half Loves* at Theatr Colwyn; *An Evening with Gary Lineker* at the Duchess Theatre, London and a Middle East Tour; *The Master and Margarita* at the Lyric, Hammersmith and Almeida Theatre; *Carmen* at Derby Playhouse.

Television work includes *Coronation Street*, *Grange Hill*, and most recently all the female characters in *History File* for BBC2. Films include *Monsters* (director nominated for Best Director, Edinburgh '93), *Release Me* (BBC2), *Diamonds in Brown Paper* (C4).

Joan was with the BBC Radio Drama Company for eighteen months and enjoys regular broadcasting work.

Deborah Wills

Stage Manager

Deborah trained at Mountview Theatre School. Since graduating in 1992 she has toured with Recreation Theatre in *Pride and Prejudice* playing Mrs Bennet and Charlotte Lucas, and appeared as Principal Girl in pantomime.

Her directing credits include *Spring Awakening* which won the HTV Youth Award in 1988.

Donna Wilson

Franziska

Donna trained at the Drama Studio, London after completing a BA Hons Degree at Loughborough University.

Theatre work includes:- the title role in *The Country Wife* and Dr Sally Smith in *Good Morning, Bill* (Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh). Jackie in *Hay Fever* and Annelle in *Steel Magnolias* (Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich); Young Cathy in *Wuthering Heights* (Byre Theatre); Sandy in the premiere of Andy de la Tour's *Safe in Our Hands* (West Yorkshire Playhouse); *Wind in the Willows* (Theatr Clwyd); *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Regent's Park) and *Romeo and Juliet* (Pentameters, Hampstead).

TV work includes *The Bill*, *Hannay*, *Charlie the Kid*, *Gentlemen and Players* and *Have His Carcase*, a Dorothy L Sayers mystery for the BBC.



Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

22nd January 1729 - 15th February 1781

"What do you have against laughter? Can one not laugh and be serious at the same time? Laughter keeps us more reasonable than melancholy."

Minna von Barnhelm Act IV

Minna von Barnhelm

by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

translated by Kenneth J Northcott

THE CAST

(in order of appearance)

Just, *Tellheim's servant*

Landlord

Hans, *a servant*

Fritz, *a servant*

Major von Tellheim

Captain Marloff's Widow

Paul Werner, *former sergeant major in Tellheim's battalion*

Minna von Barnhelm

Franziska, *her maid*

Riccaut de la Marliniere

Orderly

Count of Bruchsal, *Minna's uncle*

Eddie Marsan

Tim Swinton

Keith Radley

Mark Feakins

Julian Forsyth

Joan Walker

Bernard Kay

Sally Cassin

Donna Wilson

Stephane Cornicard

Mark Feakins

Reg Epey

The action takes place in an inn in Berlin in 1763,
shortly after the end of the Seven Year's War.

There will be a fifteen minute interval.



THE PRODUCTION TEAM

Director
Dramaturg
Company Manager
Production Manager
Stage Manager
Set Design
Costume Design
Lighting Design
Lighting Operator
Lighting Assistant
Sound Operator
Set Construction

Costumes made by

Structural Engineer
Publicity
Photography
Publicity Design

Margarete Forsyth
Anette Schroeder
Mark Feakins
Keith Radley
Deborah Wills
Margarete Forsyth
Beeke Ropers
David Plater
Giorgio Frare
Katie Andrews
Renato Nadal
Keith Radley
John Rogers
Dettmer Forsyth
Giorgio Frare
Renato Nadal
Beeke Ropers
Tim Heywood
Saleena Khara
Anja Siemens
Liz Adcock
Helga Bertazzo
Jeremy Draper
Louisa Gummer
Camilla Watson
Vicky Emptage



Minna von Barnhelm, oder das Soldatenglück.

Ein Lustspiel in fünf Aufzügen.

Von
Gottbold Ephraim Lessing.



Verlin,
bey Christian Friedrich Weg.
1767.

A NOBLEWOMAN FROM SAXONY..

In the early hours of August 22nd 1763, as Fräulein von Barnhelm and her maid Franziska pass the guard at one of the many city gates of Berlin and head for the King of Spain, the inn where poor Tellheim is just having to clear his rooms for the newcomers, the streets of Berlin offer them a view typical of the period: the protracted and destructive Seven Years War is just over, the peace treaty, signed in Hubertusburg, is just a few months old with Prussia the victor in the last of the three Silesian Wars, and the city is teeming with the uniforms of serving and discharged soldiers.

Frederick II, called 'the Great', was determined to consolidate and expand the power of Prussia, founded by the soldier-king Frederick William in the Holy Roman Empire, and at this time completely fragmented and divided into countless minor and minuscule kingdoms and principalities. Taking advantage of the disunity among his greatest enemies – Austria-Hungary, France, Sweden and Russia – and with an army of unparalleled strictness and discipline, the Prussian state's primary concern had to be to increase its territory, to gain land, goods and tribute.

After the wars for Silesia and Bohemia which had led to the acknowledgement of Prussia as a major power, Frederick now had his eye on Saxony, Minna's homeland, and in contrast to the more or less poor rural state of Prussia, a state until then relatively well-off, and characterised by landed gentry and rising bourgeoisie. The foray which had begun as a 'preventative war' was, however, to have drastic consequences for all parties.

For a start, Frederick made enemies of practically all the political forces of the age, an age typified by a terrible muddle of alliances and declarations of war. In fact only the Kingdom of England under George III, whose American colonial policy required anti-French allies, came to the aid of Prussia, sealing in the Westminster Convention a non-aggression pact which subsequently led to an active alliance with Prussia and an exchange of troops. Both parties celebrated the victory of the Prussians over the French, Frederick was honoured as a hero, and in England pubs were named or renamed 'The King of Prussia'. But the celebrations had been bought dear: the Anglo-Hanoverian troops had already been beaten, Hanover occupied by the French, East Prussia occupied by the Russians, Lower Silesia conceded to Austria, the Swedes were fighting in Pommerania and even Berlin was sometimes besieged, without either side being able to deliver the final blow.

The effects were terrible: the land was laid waste, trade and commerce smashed, the civilian population starving. But above all the failing strength of the Prussian army, which even at the start had only been half that of its opponents, was a sign of the end: losing its notorious discipline and becoming a force of wounded, weakened and demoralised soldiers. Only the restraint of Russia under its new Czar, the ardently pro-Prussian Peter III, thwarted the crushing blow of the Allies and led to the stalemate, which persuaded the warring parties to end the war; a war which clearly had led to no major territorial changes, leaving half of Europe in ruins, claiming countless lives, making cripples of entire companies, putting thousands of soldiers on to the street - and: causing an undersecretary and theatrical author to write the first worthwhile German comedy, a military comedy, bringing together the Prussian Major von Tellheim and Minna.



*Berlin,
Brüderstrasse*

..IN BERLIN..

Lessing, torn between Prussia and Saxony, finds in Berlin a circle of friends, who, even if not untouched by the war, can nonetheless be counted among the more favoured classes, a rising bourgeoisie familiar with the literary and philosophical ideas of the French Enlightenment and eager for active exchange with the great intellectual movements of the time. It is precisely these circles who force through the enfranchisement of the bourgeoisie, who teach responsibility and independent thought as emancipation from the serfdom of dependence, and who initially – and unexpectedly – found hope in the new king.

Frederick the Great, musically gifted, educated by scholars, enthusiastic admirer of the Sun King and all French culture, can certainly be regarded as a potential reformer of the narrow and oppressive conditions in Germany. He begins to weaken the previously complete dependence of the peasants on their squires, and recognizes their lack of rights, attempts to create an independent judicial system, abolishes torture in the case of certain criminal charges and softens the punishments for serious crimes. His famous dictum, "In my state each man shall be free to find salvation in his own way," promises greater tolerance in religious

matters, indicating a trace of democracy apparent in his life-long ideal of the ruler as the "first servant of the state". His philosophical round table at Sanssouci of which Voltaire was the most notable member gives the impression of an enlightened society on the verge of democracy.

Against this tendency towards liberalization stands his belief in an absolute rule, complete control of a rigidly and hierarchically structured army (and thus the major part of society), an intervention in the lives of citizens and soldiers (including permission to marry) and an ever present system of reports and spies, which kept the king constantly and fully informed about every subject, their attitudes and plans, and which allowed him to reach out with the long arm of the state police if necessary. In fact, the apparent contradiction of these two tendencies is characteristic of the period. A Europe released from the fetters of religion, not yet in the grip of nationalist movements, existed in a curious vacuum, a strange balance, which in spite of all events holds back major advances like industrialisation, the rise of the bourgeoisie to prominence, the politicisation of all classes and the move towards nationalism at all levels of cultural, political and social life.



*Frederick
the Great
and Voltaire*

..FRANCE, ENGLAND..

The victory of the Prussians over the French may have been celebrated on the streets, but in more genteel circles refined French culture remained dominant. In parallel with the general social development, the theatre had also changed – especially in comedy. Under the strong influence of Molière, Lessing's era sees significant attempts to define the comic anew. Here, too, the enlightened bourgeoisie is in the vanguard, wanting to see its new position in society reflected on the stage, rejecting the traditional division between tragedy and comedy. Until then tragedy was suited only to the noble upper classes, since only they possessed the necessary depth and gentility, whereas comedy was fitting only for the lower classes, having degenerated from the old plays of the fairground with the buffoon as its most notorious exponent. This provoked an argument over the idea of the comic, which is distant to us, but in fact goes back to the theories of Aristophanes.

The avowed aim of the German theatre, even to this day, to contribute to enlightenment and instruction and thus to the edification of the audience, has its origins here. This educative aspect, which from the viewpoint of English theatre often seems so limited, originates in this period. For the first time, theatre could be more than pure entertainment – only the lower classes could be fobbed off with comedy. As a result, the theatre moved in two directions: the bourgeois tragedy on the one hand, and the 'rührende Komödie' or 'comédie larmoyante' on the other.



Illustrations of Minna by Chodowiecki

It is not until Molière's *Misanthrope* that the idea of comedy as appropriate for the bourgeoisie is possible. Lessing finds in Molière a radically destructive use of the comic which evolves into satire and reveals man generally as foolish and thus negative. Gottsched, the dramatist and theatre critic, formulates the theoretical background of an entirely positive, sentimental idea of comedy, in which the representation of human foibles has only an elevating effect and the bourgeois 'heroes' are shown in such sentimental scenes that there can be no question of their being representative examples of a 'rounded' character. Nonetheless one old idea remains: weakness, ignorance and misbehaviour are laughed at on the stage.

It is Lessing who, in his writings on the *Hamburger Dramaturgie*, observes that, "plays which combine laughter & feeling have never been criticised..., only these are true comedies which represent virtues as well as vices, decency as well as absurdity... since a society made up entirely of fools is almost as improbable as a society made up entirely of sages. It is obvious that one can deviate from this one true path in two ways. One deviation has long been known as the burlesque, whose characteristic consists in representing nothing but vices which cause laughter, whether it be a useful or a senseless laughter. Noble attitudes, serious passions ... are entirely absent for the same reason:... if one shows nothing but virtues and decent manners.... which arouse admiration and sympathy, regardless of whether these have an improving effect on the audience or not, that is the tragicomedy! To sum up: the burlesque only aims to provoke laughter, the tragicomedy only to move, true comedy aims to do both."

Lessing attempts to develop comedy and tragedy under the conditions of modern realism. Starting out with French dramatic theory, he then turns to the English theatre. Lessing becomes an enthusiastic follower of Shakespeare, and as well as translating and discussing English works he takes over some though patterns and constructions into his own writings. The subtitle of *Minna*, "The Soldier's Fortune" is taken from Thomas Otway's play of the same name (first performed in the Theatre Royal, 1695) and the idea of the she-wit is reflected in the characters of Minna and Franziska: "I am afraid your Ladyship then is one of those dangerous creatures they call She-wits, who are always so mightily taken with admiring themselves, that nothing else is worth their

notice" is how Otway puts it, but it soon becomes clear that Lessing treats this approach more positively and thus in a more emancipatory manner

The general development of English comedy towards a picture of life that is fuller and more human can already be seen in Lessing's early comedies. But mastery of this concept is not fully achieved until *Minna von Barnhelm*, with its unique and even today still affecting balance between the comedy of forgivable human error and the tragedy of the seriousness of life, which inimitably covers all the characters in the play: Tellheim is not simply a tragic hero, Minna not only a self-sacrificing lover, Franziska so much more than a cunning maidservant, and Just – how complex even this character is with his comic, moving features. Lessing lends his proteges a truthfulness and humanity, which makes the play speak to us even across two centuries.

..AND FINALLY IN HAMBURG..

Lessing writes *Minna* in 1763. The Seven Years War is over. The Prussian Major von Tellheim, engaged to the Saxon noblewoman Minna von Barnhelm, has received his dishonourable dismissal from the army, since he has been accused of accepting bribes from the Saxons over war contributions. Quarrelling with his fate, he sits in a modest inn in Berlin. His fiancée follows him and wins him back. The simplicity of the plot makes this comedy a contemporary piece which describes events and conditions which could have been experienced in reality by the audience of the day. Goethe calls *Minna* "the truest product of the Seven Years War".

In the newly founded Hamburger Nationaltheater, where Lessing is the dramaturge, the first performance is delayed again and again by censorship until finally on September 30th 1767, in the words of a contemporary critic, "The new comedy of Mr Lessing is performed in the presence of a very great throng of theatre-goers to deserved applause." The play is received with enthusiasm, immediately revived and brings an avalanche of similar comedies in its wake. Much as he must have enjoyed this success, Lessing must have been conscious of how close to the boundaries of political acceptability he had gone, and of the politically explosive nature of the text, since it utters a series of uncomfortable truths about the Prussian state, which, however subtly expressed, are nonetheless clear to all present.



*The
Hamburger
Schauspiel-
haus*

DEBTS AND HONOUR

The role of the innkeeper reveals a mechanism of Prussian state control which not only the army but also the civilian population had to suffer: owners of hotels and inns were used for extensive spying and drew a major part of their income from monies which the government was prepared to pay for detailed information (over and above the usual compulsory registration) about all the affairs and activities of their lodgers. Consequently these places were regarded as rather safe, but their allegiances cannot have increased the popularity of the landlords and required a constant balancing act on their part. The loyalty and submissiveness of the servant Just are surely individual characteristics, but they also reveal both the dependent status of his class and, indirectly, the other side of the coin: one of the greatest problems of the army was that the lower classes, beaten into service and devoid of rights, took every opportunity to escape, and desertion significantly weakened the strength of the army in time of war while greatly increasing the number of beggars and petty criminals in time of peace. The effects of the war on all classes and the inadequate provision for dependants is brought out in the character of the Widow Marloff, towards whom Tellheim can show such selfless magnanimity and whose situation illustrates the weak and inflationary financial policy of the state. Therefore, money, in the form of Thaler, Groschen, Louis d'Or and all sorts of other currencies dominates great stretches of the dialogue whether as talk about gaming debts, salaries, sureties, nest eggs or forced contributions.

It is a fact that the high military debts of Prussia, which made up around two thirds of the state budget in the war years, led to the spectacular collapse of many banks and factories, which were all involved in army business. These closures and cutbacks unleashed great uncertainty amongst the populace and led to a further worsening of the economic situation. The soldiers, drafted away from the fields or the workbench, had either to look for alternatives (and that was often simply begging, particular for invalids) or to try to take advantage of the recruitment system practised in the various armies at the time. It was perfectly normal and, in an age not yet characterised by the strict boundaries of nationalism, relatively justifiable in moral terms, for professional soldiers to join a foreign army or for whole companies to be hired out from one power to another, as was common between England and Prussia. But for the elite of a country this remained treason, and it is not only his passion for gambling and otherwise dubious activities, but also this conception of treason which causes Tellheim to despise the Riccaut de la Marliniere. Thus Sergeant-Major Werner's enthusiasm for a new war in Persia is a logical progression from the European theatre of war to more exotic locations, motivated by a touch of crusading mentality. Throughout the course of the play, there is no sign of a positive treatment of concrete social relations, except perhaps in the figure of Franziska, whose friendly relationship with her mistress breaks social barriers, and also in the expressly magnanimous treatment of Just by Tellheim. But to an audience of the time their relationships must have seemed exceptional, underlining the general feeling that conditions are terrible and times are bad, war or no war.

ENLIGHTENMENT AND ENTERTAINMENT

Conditions are terrible and times are bad for Tellheim, too. The war has cost him his health, and worse, his honour. It is important to remember that since Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas the concept of honour had undergone a decisive change. If Aquinas saw honour as an individual and social value, this conception had developed more and more into one of social approval by one's milieu, changing from essence into appearance. The approbation of one's peers, of people of standing, constituted honour, which in Lessing's day is synonymous with social position. Loss of honour is worse than death – one vegetates on the edge of the rigid social system, like a leper. Tellheim's degradation, which in his opinion is unmerited, becomes for him a loss of faith in his social milieu



and its representatives, the authorities. His social rebellion, his dream to find an existence outside this structure, "under another sun", therefore only sounds wishful and half-hearted, and would be doomed to failure. Lessing's criticism of this concept of honour, morally empty and reduced to the function of a class structure, is conveyed by Minna's attitude. Her laconic reply, 'honour is honour', indicates her belief in breaking through this false appearance and reclaiming personal ethics. It is a genuine element of social utopianism, even if it develops only in the smallest of social units, the couple. Her unshakable conviction is that as long as he believes in himself, Tellheim remains the honourable man she fell in love with. Her belief does not depend on a wider social network, since she still occupies her social position and thus would raise Tellheim to her level. This may reveal the notion of a certain social independence of women on Minna's part, but cannot be reconciled with Tellheim's code of honour and that of his class, which means that Minna's progressive ideas must fail. That Minna, too, is not immune from social restrictions only becomes clear in her little intrigue, when she pretends to have been disinherited and thus is reduced to Tellheim's social level. How and whether this attempt to save Tellheim would work is left open, despite the Major's enthusiastic reaction, and Persia as a land of hope proves again both exotic and unrealistic. In fact it is the timely message from the King revoking Tellheim's discharge which, like a *deus ex machina*, ensures a happy ending to the play.

Thus *Minna von Barnhelm* does not follow the typical structure of comedy, which rests on such well-known foundations as mistaken identity: it derives its comedy instead from the inherent traits of its characters, and not from grotesque and ridiculous exaggeration but from human failings that are just as common today. For Tellheim is not only brave, honour-loving and helpful, he is also proud. And it is this excessive pride – justifiably attacked by Minna again and again – which prevents him from accepting the generosity of his friends and makes him the victim of his own virtue. Tellheim is not a one-dimensional character: his concerns are justified by his society, and it is only the exaggeration of his pride and his stubbornness that gives him a comic dimension, almost entirely developed through language.

Lessing's use of exaggeration for comic effect is reflected as well in the minor characters, but even Minna plays a part. Her human warmth, her unswerving steadfastness in her love for Tellheim and her good humour do not prevent her from indulging in the occasional gentle irony or, when that doesn't work, from turning to deception. While Lessing gives Minna a degree of emancipation and independence rather unusual for the period, she nonetheless remains a real person; with all her trust and hope, she never becomes an unrealistic ideal, such as we find later in Kleist's heroines. Minna stands with both feet on the ground. Thus she may represent the high principle of cheerfulness and love, but she is not able to cut the Gordian knot. It is this that makes her and the Major, above and beyond the question of social rank, true equals. They have not only their strengths and their flaws, their hopes and their weaknesses, but also the ability to learn. And the ability to learn is Lessing's central theme: something is learned by all at the end of the day, at the end of this very long day when the Count of Bruchsal arrives with full ceremony. They have learnt that trust comes before class allegiance, that games can go too far, that true morality is superior to tawdry appearances, and – so it seems to the modern audience – that the high human ideals of the Enlightenment are limited by the balance of political power. For, in spite of his positive resolution, Lessing avoids the kitschy, sentimental happy ending. Just as Paul Werner's last words "in ten years you'll either be a general's wife or a widow!" return us to the uncertainty of life, so Lessing closes *Minna* with a characteristic ambiguity, which so accurately describes the essence of the period, a poetic prophecy which raises the play above its contemporaneous concerns and even today entertains and instructs.

OUR NEXT PRODUCTION

ERASMUS MONTANUS

by Ludvig Holberg
adapted and directed by Julian Forsyth

4th November - 28th November 1993
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A young Danish student, Rasmus Berg, known to his fellow scholars as Erasmus Montanus, returns home to the farming community in which he grew up. Three years at university have changed him beyond recognition.

By hiding his insecurity beneath a display of appalling academic pedantry, Erasmus becomes the catalyst for a series of comic upheavals and family feuds in the village. The highlight is a hilarious mock Latin disputation with the local deacon which is treated by the villagers like a sporting event.

Finally, Erasmus is bullied into conceding some of the 'errors' of his education and acknowledging that, contrary to the teachings of the scholars, the earth is not round, but flat.

Ludvig Holberg, the 'Moliere of the North', was born in Norway but lived in Copenhagen and is the undisputed father of Scandinavian drama.



Major von Tellheim