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Dramatic Publishing



STARDUST

BY

WALTER KERR

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY



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(STARDUST)

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Stardust

A Comedy in Three Acts

FOR SEVEN MEN AND ELEVEN WOMEN

CHARACTERS

JANET ROSS	}	<i>..... students at the Academy of Dramatic and Allied Arts</i>
PHIL FORD		
MARION PHIPPS		
JOHN REDMAN		
CYNTHIA KEENE		
RAIMUND BROWN		
MAVIS MORIARITY		
MISS FREEMAN		
MISS ROBINSON		
MISS JONES		
TAD VOORHIS		
STELLA BRAHMS		
MR. BACH		<i>..... the head of the department</i>
DEAN OF WOMEN		<i>..... of the university</i>
PRUDENCE MASON		<i>..... a visiting actress</i>
CLAIRE CARTER		<i>..... her friend</i>
JERRY FLANAGAN		<i>..... from Hollywood</i>
ARTHUR SCOTT, JR.		<i>..... Prudence's fiancé</i>

PLACE: *The interior of the combined office and studio of the Academy of Dramatic and Allied Arts, attached to a small university somewhere in New Hampshire.*

TIME: *The present.*

NOTE: Suggestions for the production of the play will be found at the end of the text.

SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE: *Morning.*

ACT TWO, Scene One: *Later the same day.*

Scene Two: That night.

ACT THREE: *The night of the play.*

"Stardust" was presented, under the title "Art and Prudence," at The Catholic University Theatre, Washington, D.C., under the direction of the Rev. Gilbert V. Hartke, O.P., and Dr. Josephine McGarry Callan, with setting and lighting by Ralph Brown. Julie Haydon, guest star from Broadway, played Prudence, "guest star" of the play.

The cast included: JULIE HAYDON as Prudence Mason, CELCELIA BROWN as Claire Carter, DICK SYKES as Jerry Flanagan, WHIT VERNON as Mr. Bach, BIBI OSTERWALD as Marion Phipps, FRITZ PAUL as Phil Ford, EDNA EVANS STANLEY as Janet Ross, EDMUND BUTLER as Arthur Scott, Jr., and, as the other students, RAY McCORMACK, JACK SALAMANCA, KAY BECKER, MARGARET CUMMINGS, PATRICIA KECK, MARY JANE McDEVITT, SAM DAVIS, LIONEL BOOTH.

Production Notes

NOTES ON CHARACTERS

STUDENTS: They are an extremely young crew, very gullible, but with all the sophisticated airs of those who have come under "arty" tutelage. It is important that this be seen as a pose, however, and not as something that is inborn. They are always echoing Bach, adoringly; they try to be suave and "mature." Actually, they are nothing of the kind. They are perfectly harmless and attractive kids, and this incongruity must always be emphasized. In casting, it is important to use attractive and perfectly normal looking youngsters, rather than eccentric or "arty" types, so that the incongruity between personality and lines will always be maintained. Janet is younger than the other students, and the "sophistication" hasn't taken much, yet. Phil is without it altogether. Raimund is, perhaps, the next least affected.

PRUDENCE: She is nice, wholesome, and perfectly sensible, contrary to all expectation. She is in her late twenties.

BACH: He is a stocky, middle-aged man who keeps himself vital and young by the clothes he wears—tending to velvet jackets and colored jabots—by the scent in his abundant hair, by a tired effervescence of manner, and by the contagion of the theatre. He is completely without an American sense of humor; he is always in dead earnest. He speaks with a marked Russian accent. He is intense, excitable.

CLAIRE: She is Prudence's best friend. Claire is in her middle thirties, smartly dressed, and retaining much of the attractiveness that was hers when she was a mainstay in a good stock company, mostly doing comedy. She has common sense, a workable imagination, and a deadly sense of humor.

JERRY FLANAGAN: Jerry is thirty, sandy-haired, and nice-looking. He is show-wise, and always has been. He is completely

unexcitable, always casual, and never unpleasant, even when being sarcastic.

ARTHUR SCOTT, JR.: He is handsome in a slightly stuffy sort of way. He is flawlessly dressed always, and is smug.

DEAN OF WOMEN: She is a large, hennaed woman with big features and a terrifying voice that has an upward, booming inflection. She is assured in manner and basso in tone. She is *not* prim.

MEANING OF TERMS "TAKE" AND "DOUBLE-TAKE"

The terms "take" and "double-take," used in the play, constitute a very useful bit of comedy technique.

A "take" is a delayed reaction on the part of the actor. His eye passes over something which would normally be surprising to him, but fails to register this immediately. He starts to go about his business, then his eye registers what he has seen before, so that he stops dead, facing front, for a split second, and then turns very swiftly toward the object itself.

A "double-take" is the same thing to the second power, and faster. This means that the first delayed registering on the part of the eye is weaker, so that the actor half-heartedly starts to turn toward the object but, midway, considers that whatever it is couldn't possibly be true, starts to turn away again, and *then* it registers with a bang, sending him spinning in the direction of the object.

This is something that happens all the time in life, but on the stage is blown up to sometimes startling proportions; i.e., exaggerated delayed reaction. In rehearsing actors unfamiliar with the technique, it is best to begin slowly until the actor has grasped all the psychological steps, one by one, and then, when he has, speed them all up together tremendously.

NOTE ON STAGING

The furniture is subject to much rearrangement. Also, shifting it around from act to act helps give variety in the playing. In the last act, the make-up table (or tables) can replace, say,

the piano or chaise longue, or can simply be added to it where a stage is large enough to take them all.

PROPERTIES

GENERAL: Chaise longue; piano and stool; drawing board and stool; statue; desk and chair in enclosure; telephone, miscellaneous papers, etc., on desk; shade on window; miscellaneous chairs, among them a "prop" chair with a removable leg; pile of rope and canvas; various theatrical "props," including fencing rapiers, Roman spears, an assortment of costume pieces, such as old top hats, Roman helmets, etc.; designs of various "arty" productions, tacked on walls; black crepe decorations and stepladder for Act Two, Scene Two; make-up tables (one fitted with make-up lights), make-up, towels, etc., for Act Three.

CYNTHIA: Armful of tall flowers, top hat for flowers, script.

MAVIS: Load of books.

JOHN: Fencing foil, long spear, pipe.

RAIMUND: Fencing foil, long spear.

MARION: Large box with three pair of ballet slippers (wrapped for mailing), miscellaneous mail on enclosure desk, ticket rack.

PHIL: Drawing board and pencil, framed portrait of Prudence (may be faked, as audience need not see it).

BACH: Telegram; whiskey decanter, glass, and siphon, on tray; watch; handkerchief; Prudence's suitcases; ladder.

JERRY: Slip of paper, Janet's scrapbook, rapier, package of confetti, pitcher of ice water, contract form, fountain pen.

ARTHUR: Business card, watch, overnight bag, topcoat.

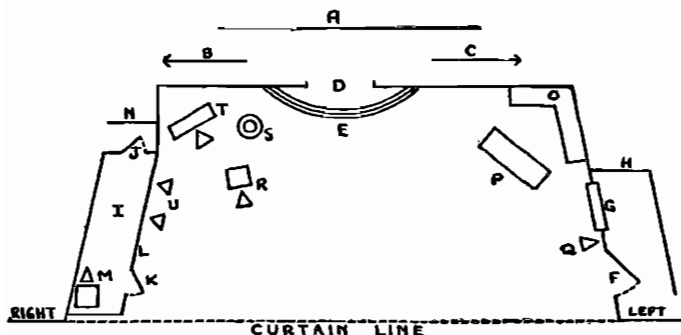
TAD: Hammer and nails.

CLAIRE: Overnight bag, handkerchief, rapier, one of Prudence's costumes for play, towel, ammonia bottle, stick of grease paint, package of cigarettes, long spear.

DEAN: Gloves, handkerchief, and prayerbook.

MISSES FREEMAN, ROBINSON, AND JONES: Programs.

STAGE CHART



- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| A. Interior backing. | L. Railing. |
| B. To rooms and lockers. | M. Desk and chair. |
| C. To Academy stage. | N. Interior backing. |
| D. Up center archway. | O. Shelves for "props," ra-
piers, etc. |
| E. Steps. | P. Chaise longue. |
| F. Exterior door, left. | Q. Chair. |
| G. Window. | R. Drawing board and stool. |
| H. Exterior backing. | S. Statue. |
| I. Enclosure. | T. Piano and stool. |
| J. Door to Bach's office. | U. Chairs |
| K. Gate. | |

Prominent Newspapers Report on . . .

Stardust

"We've seen many farces about the stage . . . but the most consistently hilarious, excellently contrived bit of backstage folderol we've ever come across is Walter Kerr's 'Stardust.'" —*Washington Times-Herald*

"All in all, a gay and thoroughly enjoyable entertainment, a bright spot when a bright spot is welcome."—*Washington Star*

"Hilarious comedy . . . An amusing idea has been treated with originality and ingenuity in 'Stardust.'"—*Philadelphia Record*

"Walter Kerr has written knowingly and wittily of the tangles that beset, of all things, dramatic schools. It is in the hurly-burly of the école George Abbott that this promising and dizzy piece exists."—*Washington Post*

"Honestly funny . . . This is the sort of thing little theater should do more often. And it's a play the entire family can attend."—*Gary Post-Tribune*

ACT ONE

SCENE: *The interior of the combination office and studio of the Academy of Dramatic and Allied Arts, attached to a small university somewhere in New Hampshire. It is a spacious room, littered with theatrical properties. There are designs of various "arty" productions all over the walls, and among the things distributed about the room are to be found a hard-wood Roman chaise longue, a battered old piano, fencing rapiers, Roman spears, some rickety "period" chairs, a statue, and an assortment of costume pieces, such as old top hats, Roman helmets, etc. The effect is rather wild and colorful. The entrances are as follows: downstage, left, is the door to the outside, and the campus grounds; up center is an archway, with a backing suggesting a corridor; there are exits both right and left under this arch; going right leads to the students' lockers and classrooms; going left leads to the Academy stage. There is a window in the left wall above the door. Down right is a small railed enclosure with a gate, which houses the "office" part of the room. Inside the enclosure is a desk for Marion, student-secretary to Bach, with a telephone on it. Also inside the enclosure is a door, either in the down right wall or set in a jog in the wall within this area, which leads to Bach's inner sanctum—a very tiny private office; we need not see inside it.]*

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: *The stage is darkened and empty, except for JANET, whom we do not see. She is hidden in a coil of rope and canvas upstage, asleep. Immediately, there is a sound of sharp, efficient footsteps, off left, and we hear this person humming, "With hey, ho, the wind and the rain," from "Twelfth Night." The door, left, opens and MARION PHIPPS enters.]*

MARION [*singing now, briskly*]. "For the rain it raineth every day—the rain it raineth every day. . . ."

[MARION *has gone to the window in the left wall and pulled up the shade; the room is immediately flooded with morning sunlight picking out its gay colors and odd assortment of objects. MARION starts across to the enclosure, down right. On her way she passes the statue. She pauses, glances at the door to make sure no one is coming, and then quickly adopts the pose of the statue, dramatically. She checks with it and gets the line of her hips right with a slight lurch. Then she assumes a very dramatic expression, holding it a second, and letting a profoundly serious sigh escape as she relaxes again, starting toward the enclosure.*]

[MARION *goes through the gate and efficiently begins arranging things on the desk. JOHN REDMAN and CYNTHIA KEENE are coming in now, left. CYNTHIA carries an armful of tall flowers, rather like someone taking a curtain call. JOHN is in a smoking jacket, with a scarf around his throat.*]

JOHN [*superciliously*]. When she arrives today, I suppose she'll expect to find us a lot of unsophisticated children.

MARION. I have a Greek soul!

CYNTHIA. Older people never learn, do they? I should think it would be obvious that young artists never have a real childhood. [*She drapes the flowers over her elbow.*]

JOHN. Bonsoir, Marion!

MARION [*looking up briskly from her desk*]. Bonsoir, John! Comment ça-va?

CYNTHIA [*going to MARION, the flowers extended*]. Marion, darling, have you seen my babies? Aren't they sweet?

MARION. Cynthia—you know there's a strict prohibition about picking the Dean of Women's flowers.

CYNTHIA. They begged to be cut. They called out, as I passed: "Cut me! Cut me, please!" I cut them.

JOHN. It's vulgar to restrict nature. But, of course, the Dean of Women *is* vulgar.

[*As CYNTHIA arranges the flowers in an old top hat, surrealistically, MAVIS MORIARITY comes in, left, with RAIMUND BROWN tagging after her.*]

RAIMUND. What do you think she'll be like, when she comes, Mavis?

MAVIS. Tired. Tormented. But terrific.

[*As RAIMUND goes to MARION at the enclosure, MAVIS matter-of-factly deposits her load of books, sits at the piano, and begins to play vast symphonies without actually touching the keys. She does it rather magnificently.*]

RAIMUND. Any word yet?

JOHN. Has Mr. Bach heard from her?

MARION. Mr. Bach hasn't come in yet this morning. I don't know.

[*The sound of running and giggling is heard off left.*]

JOHN. Oh, dear! The little ones are with us!

MARION. I *don't* know why Mr. Bach lets them come to school here.

JOHN. Well, the theatre will always need bit-players, you know.

[*The MISSES FREEMAN, ROBINSON, and JONES come in, left, agog; all speak at once.*]

MISS FREEMAN. Morning, everybody!

MISS ROBINSON. Is she here yet?

MISS JONES. When are we going to meet her? Huh?

CYNTHIA. Children, dear. Modulate your voices. It's *so* early.

MARION. Prudence Mason has not arrived yet.

JOHN [*stripping off his smoking jacket to reveal a fencing shirt—silk—with a red heart on it*]. Why should anyone be excited about meeting Prudence Mason? She's simply one of us. Another artist.

MISSSES FREEMAN, ROBINSON, and JONES [*practically together*].

But *she's* famous!

MAVIS [*suspending her hands in mid-air*]. We'll all be famous.

Tomorrow. The next day. What does it matter? [*She resumes her silent symphony.*]

CYNTHIA [*reclining, with a script to study*]. Mavis—must you do that? I can see nothing in this room but your hands.

MAVIS. Someday I'm going to play a demented pianist. I must be ready.

[*JOHN and RAIMUND have selected fencing foils, and now jump to a stance.*]

JOHN. En garde!

[*JOHN and RAIMUND clash rapiers and hurl themselves about the room furiously, fencing; nobody else pays any attention.*]

MARION. Some mail for Miss Freeman, Miss Robinson, Miss Jones. [*She hands them a large box.*]

MISS ROBINSON. Our ballet slippers!

MISS JONES. They've come!

[*With shrill squeals of delight, the MISSSES FREEMAN, ROBINSON, and JONES tear the box apart and retire upstage to put them on. At the same time, TAD strides in, left.*]

TAD. Good morning, everybody! Are we ready to rehearse my play?

MARION. Your play! When we're waiting for Prudence Mason to rehearse "Anthony and Cleopatra"?

MAVIS. By Shakespeare.

TAD. Shakespeare's dead. I'm alive!

MAVIS [*going to MARION for her mail*]. He did some rather interesting things, though, Tad. Give him his due.

TAD [*stripping off his coat*]. My play is scheduled for this morning, and we're going to rehearse it! Places—for the first chorus!

CYNTHIA. Stella's not here.

MISS JONES. Neither is Janet!

TAD [*in black despair*]. There you are! How am I supposed to become a promising playwright with a fresh sense of form, when people don't come to rehearsal?

[*STELLA appears in the doorway, left, her face a graven blank, her hair unkempt. She leans heavily against the door frame.*]

MISS ROBINSON. Here's Stella.

TAD. Stella! You've already held us up for—

[*Suddenly TAD stops, as he notices her face. ALL become intensely sympathetic.*]

TAD. Oh, I'm sorry. Is it at you again?

STELLA [*turning her face away, down her shoulder, and laughing bitterly*]. At me again? I haven't slept for days.

CYNTHIA. Nervous depression, dear?

STELLA. I don't know. Call it what you will. It's just with me, that's all.

JOHN. Everyone goes through it, Stella. All of us who are sensitive.

STELLA. If I could only sleep! If the moon would let me!

TAD. Stella—are you able to rehearse?

STELLA. Rehearse? All right. What does it matter?

TAD. It's good of you to try. Everyone! We'll do it without Janet!

[*TAD spreads his hands to indicate positions, as CYNTHIA, STELLA, MAVIS, and the MISSES FREEMAN, ROBINSON, and JONES quickly move into semi-dance positions for the chorus.*]

TAD. Now, breathe. Breathe first. Until the beat comes to you. Don't force it.

[*They stand a split second, swaying, silent, TAD governing this silent swaying with his hands, and building a growing rhythmic motion approaching a crescendo. Just as he hits the crescendo with his hands, he shouts:*]

TAD. All right!

[ALL open their mouths for the first word, but before it is out, PHIL has entered, left, and spoken.]

PHIL. Anybody here seen Janet?

[The CHORUS virtually collapses from the frustration. TAD turns away, anguished.]

TAD. Phil! You ruined that!

MAVIS. It would have been the finest reading of the first line I've ever given.

PHIL. But I can't find Janet! She stood me up last night. I've got to know where she is! [He moves upstage, and looks off beyond the arch.]

MARION. She'd be a lot better off rehearsing Tad's play than sitting with you on the library steps!

PHIL. Listen, you kids. What's between me and Janet is between me and Janet. You keep out of it.

TAD. Mr. Bach says art comes first.

PHIL [crossing down to the door, left, and looking out again].
Not with me it doesn't.

MAVIS. You'll never be an artist, Phil. Too bourgeois.

TAD. If you can pull yourself together, Phil, would you mind making that sketch you promised? Of this chorus?

PHIL [giving up, disgruntled]. Oh, all right! [He gets a drawing board, sits at the side, and sketches what follows.]

TAD. Ready, girls! This time we'll stop for *nothing!*

[TAD repeats the rhythmic build with his hands, more rapidly, and at the crescendo they go into the chorus. RAIMUND and JOHN have resumed their fencing.]

CHORUS [with appropriate symbolic postures and movement, all of it horrible].

I am

The spirit of the tram-car

Of a foggy afternoon

On the London rails. . . .

With the dead cigarettes, some red at the tips and some
merely moist,

And the swift, expunged saliva, the abandoned phlegm,
Fouling the floor of my being.

The windows rattle in an echo of my mind

And their images blur

As time beats them by and bludgeons space

In the mad race to nothingness,

Backwards.

[*At the finish, their voices trail off into a suspended, pregnant hush, as though the tone continued to throb in the silent air. Into this comes a sneeze from the rolled-up canvas on the floor—a shocking finish to their mood. EVERYONE is startled. PHIL jumps up.*]

PHIL. What's that?

TAD [*walking away, spiritually whipped*]. It doesn't matter. The whole thing's destroyed.

MISS JONES. I think it came from there!

[*MISS JONES points to the canvas; at the same time the canvas starts to move, rising.*]

MISS JONES. Yes!

[*ALL step back and hold their breaths, as the canvas reaches full height. It sneezes again and falls off, revealing JANET, holding her finger to her nose.*]

PHIL. Janet!

JANET [*sleepily, rubbing her eyes now*]. Hello, Phil. Hello, everybody. What time is it?

MARION. Janet. Did you sleep there all night?

JANET [*nodding, trying to wake up*]. I got in through the window. It was too late to go to the dorm. I'd have been campused, and they wouldn't let me be in "Anthony and Cleopatra." [*She sneezes violently.*]

PHIL. Janet! Where did you catch that cold?

JANET. Getting in character. For my part, I spent half the night at it. [*She sneezes.*] I think I got it.

PHIL [*grimly*]. Janet. Where *were* you last night?

JANET. Walking in the hills. Barefoot. I got the most wonderful sense of ancient Rome!

PHIL [*aghast*]. You were up there alone? *At night?*

JANET. I had to have a creative solitude.

STELLA. I should have done that. Instead of tossing. Turning. Perhaps you have to *accept* the moon.

PHIL [*taking JANET by the wrist and drawing her away from the others*]. Janet, are you crazy? You don't know *who* might have been loose up there!

JANET. But, Phil—what do you want me to do? Just sit in my room and try to *imagine* the character? Where would I get that way? [*She sneezes with particular violence.*]

PHIL. Have you taken anything for that cold?

TAD [*impatiently*]. Phil, will you please release Janet so she can rehearse?

PHIL [*furiously*]. Rehearse? Look at her! She's practically sick!

JOHN. Remove the artist's suffering and you remove his stimulus.

PHIL [*gritting his teeth and leading JANET up to the archway*].

Come on. I've got some stuff in my locker.

TAD. But Janet can't go! She has my best lines!

PHIL. She could have double pneumonia, for all you'd care! You'd think it was good training for "*Camille*," or something. You and your arty ideas!

[PHIL drags JANET out, up center and right.]

TAD [*hopelessly*]. And *he* wants to be a painter! There isn't a shred of temperament in him.

MARION. We'd better keep an eye on Janet. She hasn't been here long enough to be secure in Mr. Bach's principles.

[BACH enters, left, bustling, flourishing a telegram.]

BACH. Good morning, each!

MAVIS. Good morning, Mr. Bach.

RAIMUND. Good morning, Mr. Bach. Has she come yet?

MISS FREEMAN. Will we meet her right away?

TAD. Could we do a performance of my play for her, Mr. Bach?

BACH. Pause, please. You will address me individually for questions. But not now. [*He waves the telegram.*] Miss Mason will arrive in one-half hour. Approximately thirty minutes.

[*There is excited reaction from ALL.*]

BACH. Halt! This excitement is unprofessional. We will go on as though nothing was about to take place. Rehearse Mr. Voorhis' play! I forbid you to think of "Anthony and Cleopatra" until Miss Mason arrives. Then we will all begin at once—hand-in-hand. Fellow artists together!

TAD. That was *my* feeling exactly, Mr. Bach.

BACH. Do not have feelings. Do what you are told. Now, I will brush my teeth.

[*BACH turns promptly and goes out, up center and right. Excited reaction begins again, but TAD is firm.*]

TAD. You heard what Mr. Bach said! Do what you're told. Places! And this time give it *core!*

[*ALL swing quickly into choral positions while RAIMUND and JOHN take up long Roman spears, cross them, and try to duck one another. The CHORUS is now repeated as before, except that it is no sooner begun than JERRY FLANAGAN enters, left. JERRY stops at the door as he sees them all in action, and frowns skeptically, puzzled. The choral movement suddenly seems to be coming in his direction, so he ducks a little and tries to cross the room. It is no go. He has no sooner ducked than the CHORUS swerves and almost engulfs him. He doubles back, plays the field and finally, with great dexterity, dodges through and across toward the enclosure. Here he unexpectedly nearly runs afoul of RAIMUND'S*

spear. He leaps over the gate and into the enclosure for safety. MARION, at her desk, looks up, businesslike. He tips his hat to her.]

JERRY. Uh—pardon me. I'm trying to get some information about a Miss Prudence Mason.

MARION. We're expecting her any minute. Are you from the press?

JERRY. Why, no. No, I'm not. This is the—Academy, though? Academy of Dramatic and—*[He looks it up on a paper in his hand.]*—Allied Arts?

MARION. Yes. Did you wish to enroll?

JERRY. Oh, look, now! I'm a little old for that.

MARION. Not at all. We do not discriminate against maturity. What *did* you want? I can't make appointments today for anyone but the press.

JERRY. Don't bother. I've got one with Miss Mason directly.

[JERRY is now staring at the CHORUS again, which has dropped to a gruesome whisper.]

MARION. Oh, you know her?

JERRY. Not exactly. We've got business. I was headed for New York—but she wired me she was coming here. So I grabbed a plane.

[BACH re-enters, up center from right.]

BACH. I have brushed my teeth. The day begins. You will now separate for fifteen minutes and be alone with your thoughts. Exercise B-14 in private communion. Then come back. I wish to talk with you.

[BACH whizzes past JERRY without bothering to notice him, and goes into his private office. The STUDENTS disperse, off up center and right, talking ad lib among themselves.]

JERRY. Who was that? Stanislavsky?

MARION *[worshipfully]*. That's Mr. Bach, our director. Craig Kendall Bach. He *studied* under Stanislavsky!