

# Magna Carta 1215

A MUSICAL ROMANCE  
SET AGAINST  
THE SEALING OF MAGNA CARTA

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RUNNYMEDE is a full-length musical play telling the story of the years leading up to the sealing of Magna Carta at Runnymede, near Windsor, in 1215. We wrote it because we felt it was time to highlight an event whose legacy of freedom within the law remains with us today, far beyond its own century.

We have introduced several real-life characters into our plot. Some others are half-invented, and the rest are wholly invented.

The historical events depicted and referred to are factually correct (Eleanor of Aquitaine was at a Crusade), but we've used our imagination and in some cases (Eleanor again) we've had a bit of fun with them.

Few of us nowadays are aware of the carnage and suffering undergone by the people on the long road to Magna Carta. We've done our best to reveal this aspect without letting it take over the mood of hope which is an essential driving force throughout the show.

We make no apologies for using present-day speech patterns in the dialogue and plenty of modern beat underlining the music. We could have asked a learned professor to translate the script into thirteenth century English and backed it with plainsong, but we wanted to reach out to our audiences, not drive them away.

Whether you experience the show as a stage performance, a concert production or in any other way, we hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed writing it.

Welcome to RUNNYMEDE.

SPEAKING PARTS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

ROGER WENDOVER  
 BROTHER BENEDICT  
 BARON FITZWALTER  
 BARON BURGOYNE  
 SIR GEOFFREY  
 BARON MOUNTJOY  
 BARON DE GAVRON  
 BARON GREENWAY  
 BARON POMEROY  
 SIR WILLIAM  
 SIR HUGH  
 PEASANT MAN  
 PEASANT WIFE  
 KING JOHN  
 FIRST ABBOT  
 SECOND ABBOT  
 STEPHEN LANGTON  
 LADY FITZWALTER  
 MARGARET  
 MATILDA  
 BROTHER FRANCIS  
 BROTHER AUGUSTINE

OTHER BARONS, KNIGHTS, PEASANTS AND PRIESTS  
 PLAYED BY MEMBERS OF THE CHORUS

By avoiding heavy individual character  
 make-up and wearing simple and effective  
 costumes, minor roles can be doubled merely  
 by the addition or removal of a cloak,  
 headpiece or any other distinguishing item.

## SETTING AND STAGING:

The action, settings etc., are described as though for a full stage performance. Right and Left are Stage Right and Stage Left.

To save cumbersome cast movements, either during a stage performance or (particularly) during a concert performance, in place of Entrances and Exits it will probably be convenient to substitute the fading in and out of lighting on the areas where individuals and groups remain standing or sitting throughout, except for certain principals who come to centre stage for their scenes and songs. In a concert performance especially, every effort should be made to achieve well-controlled spotlighting (which will also enhance a normal stage production); it is not too much to say that the lighting in many ways replaces unwelcome and time-consuming scene changes. If separate larger groups are on stage at the same time it will be an advantage to spotlight or fade out their different areas when one group is prominent for any length of time while the other remains inactive (such as the barons' and knights' first scene).

Ideally the setting would consist of a rostrum arrangement, rising to the back and forming different levels for various groups. This particularly applies to a concert performance, or a stage performance in which groups do not enter and exit but remain in place unlit between their scenes (a refinement of this being to have groups quietly in place ready to be discovered behind opening tabs - assuming sets of tabs can be suitably arranged - and then concealing the groups again as the tabs close off their scenes. These tabs could be the usual all-purpose black often available in theatres, or might be cloths painted with some sort of unobtrusive symbolic design generic to the show). For stage performances there could be some minimal representative cut-out and backdrop scenery, perhaps suitable to be changed occasionally during the performance, but this is a matter for each production to decide. The centre front is at stage level and will form the main performance area for individuals and small groups. Any essential props will be brought on and taken off visibly either by the characters concerned or by costumed setting staff. Downstage far right is a desk and stool which remain throughout and onto which a spot is brought up and down as required. Downstage far left is an equivalent area, somewhat smaller, with a similar spot arrangement but no props. Unless otherwise indicated, all centre stage entrances and exits can be left or right as convenient to each production.

## A C T O N E

MUSIC: OVERTURE

LINK TO ACT ONE SCENE ONE:DURING THE OVERTURE A HIGH DESK AND STOOL HAVE BEEN SET DOWNSTAGE FAR RIGHT, FACING FRONT (OR THEY CAN BE PRE-SET). AS THE OVERTURE ENDS THE DESK SPOT COMES UP REVEALING A MONK WRITING AT THE DESK WITH A QUILL PEN. HE IS ROGER WENDOVER, A CHRONICLER. AGED NOT LESS THAN FORTY (BUT HE CAN BE CONSIDERABLY OLDER), HE IS A MAN CAPABLE OF INTROSPECTION, IMPATIENCE AND EXCITEMENT, ACCORDING TO HIS MOOD. (IT SHOULD BE NOTED HERE THAT AT NO POINT IN THE PLAY DOES ANY CHARACTER DIRECTLY ADDRESS THE AUDIENCE, ALL MONOLOGUES AND SONG PIECES BEING SPOKEN OR SUNG INTO THE AUDITORIUM VOID.) AT PRESENT WENDOVER IS CONCENTRATING ON HIS WORK. AFTER A FEW MOMENTS HE DABBLES THE PEN IN AN INKWELL, LOOKS AT THE TIP, GRUNTS CROSSLY AND RINGS A LITTLE HANDBELL. BROTHER BENEDICT, A VERY YOUNG MONK, ENTERS NERVOUSLY FROM THE RIGHT.

BENEDICT: Yes, Master Wendover?

WENDOVER: Ink.

BENEDICT: Pardon?

WENDOVER: The ink's run out.

BENEDICT: I'm sorry - I thought -

WENDOVER: You're not here to think. The Abbot sent you to be my assistant, learn from me, study my work. (PAUSE) If you must think, think...ink.

BENEDICT: Yes, Master Wendover. (BRINGS A FRESH INKWELL FROM THE FOLDS OF HIS GOWN) There's some fresh ink here, I was just going to bring it when you...

WENDOVER: When I what?

BENEDICT: (LAMELY)...Rang your bell...

BENEDICT GOES TO THE DESK, PUTS DOWN THE FULL INKWELL AND REMOVES THE OTHER. WENDOVER GRUNTS AND CONTEMPLATES HIS SCRIPTWORK.

WENDOVER: (READING) "In the year twelve hundred and four King John had lost all of Normandy and was called Lackland by his people. He taxed the English barons heavily, making much hardship for them and their peasants."

WENDOVER BECOMES AWARE THAT BENEDICT IS LOOKING OVER HIS SHOULDER, INTRIGUED.

WENDOVER: What are you staring at?

BENEDICT: Your parchment. Does it really say all that?

WENDOVER: Of course it does. It's a chronicle. Anyone in the future will be able to read it and know what happened. How the barons fought the brutal and bloody tyrant King John and forced him to seal our great charter of freedom at Runnymede.

BENEDICT: I beg pardon, but won't the king be angry with you for writing this?

WENDOVER: I doubt it. He's dead.

BENEDICT: I mean the new king.

WENDOVER: Well, he's only ten years old. Let's hope he'll read the story and learn from it.

BENEDICT: It's beautiful. I wish I could read it.

WENDOVER: (SLIGHTLY FLATTERED) Don't they teach novices how to read these days?

BENEDICT: (SHAKES HIS HEAD) Only Latin. I can see one or two Latin words here - (POINTS OUT WORDS ON THE PARCHMENT) - there's one - there's another -

WENDOVER: (ANGRILY) Take your grubby fingers off my parchment! Dirty little boy. (MUTTERING AS HE BEGINS TO WRITE AGAIN) I use English and French, hardly any Latin. If you want to make yourself useful, go and sharpen some fresh quills.

BENEDICT: (NERVOUSLY, AS HE EXITS LEFT) Yes Master Wendover. I'm - I'm very sorry - I didn't mean to upset you - I really will try to keep out of your way...(HE GOES)

WENDOVER: (IGNORING HIM AS HE WRITES) "The king levied scutage against the barons for each of their knights they did not send into his army. He abolished many civil liberties and there was great unrest throughout the land."

FADE UP INCIDENTAL MUSIC

ACT ONE SCENE ONE: THE BARONS' ASSEMBLY THE DESK SPOT FADES AND LIGHTING COMES UP ON THE ASSEMBLED BARONS, KNIGHTS AND PEASANTS AS THEY ENTER AND TAKE THEIR PLACES ACROSS THE STAGE. (NOTE AGAIN: STAGE DIRECTIONS REFER TO POSSIBLE MOVEMENTS OF CAST IN A FULL STAGE PERFORMANCE. THE ALTERNATIVE USE OF SPOTLIT AREAS IN WHICH THE CAST STAYS IN POSITION UNLIT OR BEHIND TABS INSTEAD OF EXITING IS A PRODUCTION CHOICE, WHETHER FOR A STAGE OR CONCERT PERFORMANCE. PLEASE BEAR THIS IN MIND WHENEVER THE SCRIPT REFERS TO EXITS AND ENTRANCES.)

INCIDENTAL MUSIC LINKS INTO:

(1A) MUSIC: BARONS, KNIGHTS AND PEASANTS  
"A KNIGHT MAY FIGHT HIS NEIGHBOURS"

(2) THE PEASANTS EXIT. THE KNIGHTS STAND IN GROUP ON RIGHT, THE BARONS IN ANOTHER ON LEFT. BARON FITZWALTER STANDS SEPARATELY CENTRE IN CONVERSATION WITH A KNIGHT, SIR GEOFFREY. THE BARONS IN CONVERSATION COME DOWNSTAGE FROM THEIR GROUP. (SOME BARONS AND KNIGHTS CAN HAVE REGIONAL ACCENTS IF PREFERRED)

BARON MOUNTJOY: It can't go on. He must give way.

BARON DE GAVRON: The king? You're joking. He wouldn't give way if he met the devil.

MOUNTJOY: He is the devil. Hear what he did on one of my farms?

BARON GREENWAY: Is that where he forced them to put him up for the night?  
(NORTH COUNTRY?)

MOUNTJOY: Yes. Next morning he drove out the farmer and his wife  
and set fire to the farmhouse. With his own hands.  
There's a gracious monarch for you.

BARON POMEROY: Oh, for God's sake face facts, Mountjoy. We all  
(WEST COUNTRY?) get a bit carried away at times.

MOUNTJOY: (GRUDGINGLY) Well, alright, we sometimes fight between  
ourselves, but at least we stay within the law.

A BURST OF WILD LAUGHTER FROM ALL THE BARONS GREET'S THIS REMARK. THE  
KNIGHTS, FITZWALTER AND GEOFFREY LOOK ACROSS TO SEE WHAT CAUSED IT.

FITZWALTER: Have I missed something?

POMEROY: Mountjoy thinks we're all perfect gentlemen.

THE KNIGHTS ARE AMUSED, BUT NOT AS NOISILY AS THE BARONS WERE.

FITZWALTER: And what do you think, Pomeroy?

POMEROY: (AWKWARDLY) Me?

FITZWALTER NODS.

POMEROY: Well... I think we do our best.

FITZWALTER: And you, Greenway?

GREENWAY: I don't know. Barons have always fought each other  
- we have to look after ourselves.

FITZWALTER: And your peasants?

GREENWAY: Oh, to hell with the peasants. This is about taxation.



FITZWALTER: True enough - if we'd got no peasants we'd have no taxation. There'd be nothing to tax. No land husbandry and no harvest. So we'd all starve. Very clever.

GREENWAY: (GETTING ANGRY) You're twisting what I said.

FITZWALTER: How could I twist a stupid remark like "to hell with the peasants"?

GREENWAY: You calling me stupid?

FITZWALTER: Certainly not. I never repeat gossip.

GREENWAY HALF DRAWS HIS SWORD AND RUSHES UP TO FITZWALTER, WHO HALF DRAWS HIS OWN SWORD. (IF NO SWORDS THEY MERELY SEIZE EACH OTHER'S CLOTHING.) THEY STAND FACE TO FACE. THE BARONS AND KNIGHTS FREEZE, READY FOR TROUBLE.

MOUNTJOY: (TRYING TO SEPARATE THEM) For God's sake, have some dignity. Greenway - back off.

GREENWAY: Why should I?

MOUNTJOY: You started this, I saw you. Back off!

GREENWAY RELUCTANTLY RETURNS TO THE GROUP. SWORDS ARE SHEATHED. ALL RELAX.

MOUNTJOY: Is this the best we can do? No wonder the king thinks he can walk all over us.

FITZWALTER: Can I say something?

GREENWAY: (STILL PEEVED) You usually do.

FITZWALTER: I'm going to speak my mind. We all came here today to form a united front. We must forget our petty squabbles and work together. It's not easy but we've got to do it.

DE GAVRON: Well, I agree to that.

BURGOYNE: Me too. The king's gone too far. Somebody has to stop him and there's nobody but us

POMEROY: We're the ones he's ruining - we'll only be defending ourselves.

GREENWAY: (SNIDELY) And our peasants - is that right, Fitzwalter?

FITZWALTER: As a matter of fact it is. You won't like this, Greenway, but the peasants depend on us. When we suffer, they suffer more. If we win a bit of freedom they'll get their share. What's wrong with that?

GREENWAY: They'll use it against us, that's what's wrong with it.

THE BARONS AND KNIGHTS DEBATE THIS AMONG THEMSELVES UNTIL FITZWALTER SPEAKS.

FITZWALTER: (EXASPERATED) Oh, I give up. We came here to make plans to deal with the king. I thought we'd be together and strong for the first time in centuries, but just look at us - muttering away like a lot of old women.

MOUNTJOY: Hang on, Robert - we are together. It's just that some of us need reassuring.

DE GAVRON: There's a lot to gain if we win.

POMEROY: And a damn sight more to lose if we don't.

FITZWALTER: Alright, I've had enough of this. Colleague barons, I hardly need to remind you we're being taxed out of existence. The king has used our money and our best and bravest knights in a disastrous war. If we submit to him he'll do it again. Stand up to him and we can change things for all time. Do we agree or not? Come on, tell me.

BARONS SHOUT THEIR SUPPORT, EXCEPT GREENWAY.

FITZWALTER: Greenway?

GREENWAY: (MOODILY) Not much alternative, is there.