

A NEW MUSICAL to celebrate the 800th anniversary

"MAGNA CARTA 1215 "

Music & arrangements TERRY TROWER

Script & Lyrics STEPHEN SYLVESTER

Additional script & lyrics SUSAN GREGORY

Artwork WENDY CLOUSE

Duration approx 2 hrs

ALSO:-

6 Songs in Celebration of "MAGNA CARTA 1215"

for Male Voice Choir & Organ/ Keyboard

Music TERRY TROWER Lyrics STEPHEN SYLVESTER

Duration approx 25 mins

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MAGNA CARTA 1215

THE MAGNA CARTA 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.

ENQUIRIES:-

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TERRY TROWER and STEPHEN SYLVESTER

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 -

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

3 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?

2 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.

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

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

4 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?

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

2 DE GAVRON: Yes there is. You can just sit and wait for the king to strip you of everything you've got. Then you'll become a peasant - if they'll have you.

ALL LAUGH: GREENWAY NODS MOODILY, DEFEATED, AND MERGES WITH THE CROWD.

FITZWALTER: (TURNING TO KNIGHTS' GROUP ON HIS LEFT) Noble knights, what do you say? Will you stand ready to act when the moment comes?

KNIGHTS NOISILY AGREE

SIR WILLIAM (A KNIGHT) TO THE BARONS: May I ask something? We're all bound to our barons. What will you do if the king demands our service again?

5 No SIR HUGH: Yes, that's a good point. Will you pay scutage to keep us at home?

Not Pomeroy
BURGOYNE: Only if we can afford it - and not if the country's threatened. We can't go too fast.

6 No SIR WILLIAM: So there's no immediate action?

1 MOUNJOY: Robert?

FITZWALTER: No - how can there be? our purpose is clear but we're not ready yet. All we can do is go home - and watch - and wait.

FADE UP INCIDENTAL MUSIC

KNIGHTS AND BARONS EXIT. LIGHTS FADE. SPOTLIGHT COMES UP ON PEASANT MAN AND WIFE WHO HAVE ENTERED AND ARE STANDING DOWN LEFT FRONT.

FADE OUT INCIDENTAL MUSIC

MAN: You hear that, wife? They'll watch and wait.

WIFE: 'Twill make no change to our estate.
We slave away from dawn to dusk

✓

MAN: You're born a peasant. Life be such.
We're only given what's our due.
But change may come - my mother knew.

WIFE: Your mother? You were born, I'm told,
When she were only twelve year old,
An' she were dead by twenty-three.
Whence came her wisdom? You tell me!

MAN: She had the sight afore she died -
Believe me, wife, she prophesied
A future wondrous to behold.
I know she wasn't very old
But ere she went beyond the veil
She saw it all -

WIFE: A likely tale!
There go our barons 'gainst the king,
But naught they do will ever bring
The lifting of our ancient curse.

BOTH: Pray God they don't just make things worse.

MAN AND WIFE EXIT. FADE OUT DOWN LEFT SPOT. FADE UP DOWN RIGHT SPOT.

LINK TO ACT ONE SCENE TWO: WENDOVER IS WRITING AT HIS DESK, ALONE.

WENDOVER: (AS HE WRITES) "In the year twelve hundred and eight
English clergy received an order from Pope Innocent
the Third to elect Stephen Langton as Archbishop
of Canterbury. King John was asked to approve the
nomination and -" (LOOKING UP, REMEMBERING) Well,
really he went completely out of his mind, swearing
and frothing at the mouth - disgusting. (WRITING)
"His Majesty chose to reject it..."

ACT ONE SCENE TWO: JOHN'S COURT FADE OUT DOWN RIGHT SPOT. FADE UP CENTRE
-LIGHTING AS LANGTON (IN MONK'S CLOTHES), FITZWALTER, PRIESTS AND BARONS
ENTER AND GROUP AROUND JOHN, WHO ENTERS AND SITS ON A DRAPED CHAIR (AS
THRONE) CENTRE (OPTIONAL: A FEW OF HIS KNIGHTS CAN BE IN ATTENDANCE).

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THERE IS A SCREAM FROM THE GARDEN AND MATILDA RUNS IN, VERY DISHEVELLED SHE GOES TO LADY FITZWALTER WHO HUGS AND COMFORTS HER.

LADY FITZ: There, my darling, come here, it's alright.

FITZWALTER: (ENRAGED) The bastard - what's he done? Has he... Did he...?

MATILDA: (TEARFULLY SHAKING HER HEAD) He tried - he tried to kill me - I pushed him off. He was horrible - shameless with his body - an animal - I feel dirty...

FITZWALTER: I'm not letting him get away with this.

MATILDA: (BREAKING AWAY FROM LADY FITZWALTER) No, father, please! He'll kill me. (GOING TO GEOFFREY) Oh Geoffrey, you know what he was like - you know how he made me go with...

GEOFFREY: I couldn't oppose him - he'd have called his guards. My lord, I beg you to hold fire and let his visit go by. We're in terrible danger.

LADY FITZ: Geoffrey's right, Robert. Come with me - we'll find him and pretend nothing's happened.

FITZWALTER: (SEETHING) Nothing's happened? Dear God, he ruins my country and then he tries to do the same to my daughter. And you expect me to treat him like an honoured guest?

LADY FITZ: (LEADING HIM OFF) Yes, my dear. Save your anger and share it with your brother barons. I've got a feeling these things are coming to a head.

THEY EXIT.

GEOFFREY: Matilda - forgive me - I wasn't brave enough. Oh, you're so upset - I long to comfort you, but I haven't even the courage for that. Perhaps you've had enough of men.

4 POMEROY: Bouvines! The stink of it!

1 MOUNTJOY: John's given us nothing but humiliation.

NO BURGUYNE: Bouvines! He led us there, he let the French destroy our best people -

2 DE GAVRON: Our friends, our knights, slaughtered -

4 POMEROY: He ran from the field - ran from Bouvines -

3 GREENWAY: Bouvines - the foulest day in our history - the stink of it's in my nostrils -

2 DE GAVRON: Bouvines - I want to howl it in the king's face - over and over - Bouvines, Bouvines -

DE GAVRON'S REPEATED SHOUTS OF "BOUVINES!" MERGE WITH THOSE OF THE OTHER BARONS AS THEY JOIN IN, GESTURING ANGRILY. THE CRIES SUBSIDE INTO AN A [REDACTED] SILENCE (NO CHEERING) AS FITZWALTER AND LANGTON ENTER.

1 MOUNTJOY: (FLATLY, AFTER A PAUSE) You don't look very happy, Robert.

FITZWALTER: Happy? That viper of a man has made a deal with the Pope... Oh, you tell them, Langton, I'm too sickened. (HE GOES TO STAND NEXT TO MOUNTJOY)

LANGTON: I'm afraid it's true. He used his new favour with the Holy Father to win his support against you. If you take up arms against him you could be excommunicated.

THERE IS A STUNNED SILENCE

3 GREENWAY: So the taxes he's taken from us can be used to pay foreign mercenaries, with the Pope's blessing?

LANGTON: Yes.

3 GREENWAY: Well, I'm not having that. Rome can chuck me out but I'm going to fight to keep my land.

4 MOUNTJOY: I can't believe I'm saying this, Greenway, but I totally agree with you.

A QUIET, RELIEVED RIPPLE OF AMUSEMENT ALL ROUND

FITZWALTER: And what about our people's freedom? That's the cause that really links us.

4 MOUNTJOY: Of course. If we don't win more freedom for the people we'll simply go from civil war to a peasant rebellion.

LANGTON: I want to tell you how unhappy I am to bring news that leads to bloodshed. It's not in my nature to condone bloodshed. But the truth must be faced. Whether or not you fight this man there will be bloodshed. At least you can give it a finite purpose and stop his endless roving carnage.

FITZWALTER: Archbishop, I've meant to say this for some time. You're now the king's priest, but your sympathies are with us. I think we all respect your commitment, but if the risk to your position is too great -

LANGTON: No. I've borne this king long enough. He is unique, nothing is beneath him. If there's a...

FITZWALTER: Then we're proud to have you as our religious mentor.

LANGTON: Thank you, Robert, I'm honoured. Well, gentlemen, I can dedicate your army to God's service, but I can't command you in battle. It seems to me you lack a chosen leader.

1 MOUNTJOY: I don't think so. (ALL LOOK AT HIM) Robert, it's obvious. How can anyone else be at our head?

FITZWALTER: Me? You want me to lead you? What will you think of me if I take you to defeat?

4 POMEROY: We've tasted defeat. We'll never forget Bouvines.

HE IS INTERRUPTED BY ANGRY SHOUTS OF "BOUVINES!" "AVENGE BOUVINES!" ETC.

If we're defeated, you'll have done your best. We all will.

FITZWALTER: Very well, if everyone's of the same opinion. But ~~dear~~ friends, I warn you, the days that come will be like darkest night in our minds. Some of us will suffer wounds, some will perish. Whatever the outcome there will be grieving women and fatherless children. We challenge a base and unscrupulous enemy, merciless (REMEMBERING MATILDA) and lecherous... (SHOUTS) But we will prevail! Yes, of course I'll lead you!

BARONS CROWD ROUND ROBERT, NOT CHEERING BUT ENTHUSIASTICALLY CLAPPING HIM ON THE BACK, SHAKING HIS HAND AND MURMURING, "THANK YOU, ROBERT", "WELL DONE", "WE'RE PROUD OF YOU", ETC.

1 MOUNTJOY: What shall we call you?

FITZWALTER: (PUZZLED) Well - Fitzwalter, as usual. What else?

LANGTON: Not just Fitzwalter. "Fitzwalter, Marshal of the Holy Army of God".

CHEERS AND MORE SHOUTS OF "AVENGE BOUVINES!" WHICH FADE AS THE LIGHTS
FADE ON CENTRE STAGE.

FADE UP INCIDENTAL MUSIC

BARONS AND KNIGHTS SHOULD REMAIN ON STAGE AND QUIETLY RE-ARRANGE THEMSELVES
READY FOR THE "PRELUDE TO BATTLE" SCENE DURING THE FOLLOWING LINK, RATHER
THAN EXITING AND COMING BACK AGAIN.

LINK TO ACT ONE SCENE SEVEN FADE UP SPOT DOWN LEFT AS THE PEASANT MAN AND
HIS WIFE ENTER.

FADE OUT INCIDENTAL MUSIC

MAN: Northampton Castle over there
Be stuffed with mercen'ries, I hear -
With drunken Germans, Danes and Dutch
And Spanish men and other such.
They can't come out - they're shut up tight,
Besieged by Englishmen.

WIFE: That's right,
And here be sleeping close to hand
Our country folk, a goodly band
I grant you. But how fare the cattle
In a field that's set for battle?
How fare we?

MAN: Wife, hold your tongue
And watch these men who wait among
The trees and hedgerows for a glint
Of dawn and daylight. Eyes like flint,
They seek the sunrise.

ACT ONE SCENE SEVEN: PRELUDE TO BATTLE START FADING UP CENTRE STAGE LIGHTS,
BUILDING TO FULL BY END OF SCENE. THE ARMY IS REVEALED, STIRRING GRADUALLY
TO LIFE, CULMINATING IN A FROZEN TABLEAU BY END OF SCENE

WIFE: Here it be!
Look, husband - far as you can see,
The soldiers for the fight are geared.

BOTH:



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FITZWALTER: Well, he keeps his crown. And he'll still have the power of the monarchy but he won't be able to abuse it. Master Langton, what's your plan?

LANGTON: I will go to the king and arrange a schedule for the adoption of the Charter. As your emissary I hope you will allow me to act freely on your behalf.

FITZWALTER: That goes without saying. I admire your courage -

2 MOUNTJOY: We all do.

ALL MURMUR AGREEMENT

FITZWALTER: - but we can't take anything for granted with that man.

LANGTON: I'm well aware of it. He has given me a pledge of safe conduct and as long as you stand firm I think he will honour it.

3 GREENWAY: We'll make sure he does.

LANGTON: Thank you. It's time now for me to go to him. I promise you, gentlemen, I'll do my best, whatever happens to me.

3 GREENWAY: Don't worry, Master Langton - if he slices you up we'll deal with him.

LANGTON: (DRYLY) I'm much obliged.

LANGTON AND ALL THE BARONS EXCEPT FITZWALTER EXIT RIGHT, TALKING AMONG THEMSELVES. AS THEY GO, MATILDA COMES IN THROUGH THEM (SHE ASKS ONE OF THEM SILENTLY WHERE HER FATHER IS AND HE POINTS TO FITZWALTER AS HE GOES)

MATILDA: Father!

FITZWALTER: My dear child, come in, come in, our meeting's finished. Are you enjoying being here in London?

THEY EXIT LEFT.

FADE DOWN LEFT SPOT.

FADE UP CENTRE LIGHTING

ACT TWO SCENE THREE: A LONDON PUB GEOFFREY ENTERS RIGHT WITH AS MANY KNIGHTS AS POSSIBLE, PREFERABLY BEARING BENCHES AND STOOLS ON WHICH THEY SIT AND WHICH THEY TAKE OFF AT THE END OF THE SCENE. GEOFFREY IS WITH A FRIENDLY GROUP OF THREE KNIGHTS.

1ST. KNIGHT: London's the place to be, lad.

GEOFFREY: I've never been here before.

2ND, KNIGHT: You don't know what you've missed. There's nowhere like it, (TO OTHERS) and we've been all over the place, haven't we?

3RD. KNIGHT: I wouldn't have minded missing Northampton.

1ST. KNIGHT: Or Bouvines.

GEOFFREY: You were at Bouvines?

3RD. KNIGHT: We had to be. Sent by our barons to fight for the king.

2ND. KNIGHT: Got massacred for our trouble. I tell you what, I'm glad we've taken him on - he's the worst thing that ever happened to this country.

1ST. KNIGHT: When you think of his brother - no comparison.

2ND. KNIGHT: And his father. They say he was a great king, someone you could respect.

3RD. KNIGHT: Not to mention his mother.

ALL LAUGH

GEOFFREY: What's funny about her?



JOHN SITS AND BROODS. LANGTON STANDS AND WAITS PATIENTLY

JOHN: (SUDDENLY) Oh - sorry - d'you want to...er..(HE GESTURES VAGUELY INTO THIN AIR AT SITTING LEVEL)

LANGTON: No thank you, I'll stand. (A LONG PAUSE) We do need a reply, your majesty.

JOHN: We? Oh, of course - your new friends.

LANGTON: I am the barons' emissary. (HE OFFERS JOHN A SCROLL) Here is the Charter. We ask you to consider it.

JOHN: (TAKING SCROLL) Oh, not this wretched thing again.

LANGTON: We have altered it and made it into a declaration on which we ask you to set your seal in common with us. It will bring peace to the country.

JOHN: And if I refuse?

LANGTON: The fighting will continue. Sire, you are not in a favourable position. I strongly advise you -

JOHN: Don't you dare try to advise me. (PAUSE) Alright. You have me by the tail.

LANGTON: It was never our desire to coerce you. We wish you to meet us willingly and accept our demands. They are very reasonable, as you will see when you read them - er - have them read to you.

JOHN: (HEAVY PAUSE) Very well. I've no option. Where and when do they want me to meet them? I'm not having them here in Windsor Castle. (CYNICAL) That at least I still possess.

LANGTON: No, not here, but not far away. Runnymede. :

WIFE: Now comes the time.

MAN: Now comes the time
When all will change.

WIFE: What is our crime
That leaves us suffer all year round
While others prosper?

MAN: Have we found
A cause, a day to change our lot?

WIFE: They say be glad for what you've got,
But we've got nothing.

MAN: Here we stand
And watch the greatest in the land
At Runnymede in pomp and state
Assemble to decide our fate.

BOTH: The river flows beside the field
Unmindful while the Charter's sealed.

FADE DOWN LEFT SPOT. THE PEASANTS STAY IN POSITION.

FADE UP DOWN RIGHT SPOT:

LINK TO ACT TWO SCENE FIVE:

WENDOVER IS WRITING AT HIS DESK

WENDOVER: "On the fifteenth day of June in the year of our Lord
twelve hundred and fifteen King John kept his promise."
(LOOKING UP) That in itself made history. (WRITING)
"He came to Runnymede where the barons were assembled.
The Great Charter, the Magna Carta, was prepared and lay
waiting for his seal. If he refused it, he knew the
days of his reign were numbered."

WENDOVER RISES AND GOES TO THE ONSTAGE EDGE OF THE DOWN LEFT AREA. HE STANDS
GAZING OUT ACROSS THE CENTRE STAGE, WHERE RUNNYMEDE IS TO BE PREPARED. ALL
AVAILABLE SETTING IS GRADUALLY ASSEMBLED IN FULL VIEW AS HE SPEAKS.

FITZWALTER LOOKS OFF LEFT AND WAVES AN UNSEEN PERSON TOWARDS HIM.

FITZWALTER: And thank God, here's the one to tell you.

GEOFFREY NOW LOOKS OFF LEFT TO SEE WHO IT IS. FITZWALTER SEIZES HIS CHANCE TO SLIP AWAY AND EXIT RIGHT. MATILDA ENTERS LEFT AND STANDS STARING ACROSS AT GEOFFREY.

MATILDA: (STUNNED) Geoffrey?

GEOFFREY: Matilda. My dearest, sweet Matilda.

THEY MOVE TO EACH OTHER AND HOLD HANDS.

I never knew you were here. I didn't dare hope...

MATILDA: And you - (TEARFULLY) I thought you were dead. There was no word - just a terrible silence. And stories of gruesome battles. I was sure you'd perished.

GEOFFREY: (HUGGING HER) None of my messages reached your home. And I could never find your father - at least then he could have sent word about me to your mother.

MATILDA: And I'd have known you were alive - but nothing about your feelings for me.

GEOFFREY: They're the same. They'll never change. (HOLDING HER FACE BETWEEN HIS HANDS) I kept a picture of you in my mind but it was always fading, slipping away and back again, and I started thinking nobody could be so beautiful and I must be making it up.

MATILDA: Now you can see the real Matilda. Am I a disappointment?

GEOFFREY: You? You are more lovely than I could ever remember. I'm trying to believe you're here with me, the real you, and not my mind playing tricks again.

MATILDA: (KISSING HIM) You believe it now?