

Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and the BFF

*A comedy
by Kevin Stone*

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DEDICATION

For Owain

STORY OF THE PLAY

A one-act comedy based on Daniel, Chapter 3 in the Bible. The story involves three young Hebrews, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego living in Babylon. The Babylonian king, the notoriously proud Nebuchadnezzar, builds a golden image and decrees that all people in his kingdom must bow to it in worship. The three Hebrews stand for what they know is right and refuse to participate in the idolatry. The king condemns them and orders them thrown into the burning fiery furnace (the BFF). When the sentence is carried out, however, the three Hebrews are not burned up— and there is a mysterious fourth man in the furnace with them. In the end, the Hebrews are promoted to high office in the kingdom, and the king learns a lesson in humility. A subplot involves the preparations of the very non-musical Babylonian orchestra. Three scenes feature a "poetic interlude" as the three Hebrews perform an original sonnet, limericks, and a ballad. The king later tries his own hand at poetry and fails.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

This play was originally produced by Community Christian School of Overbrook, Kansas, in April 2024. The playwright directed the following cast and crew:

King Nebuchadnezzar - Elias Schonberg; Royal Herald - Frances Craig; Question Answerer - Kohl Craig; Shadrach - Reagan Craig; Meshach - Lyla Boland; Abednego - Ameliya Greer; Royal Fanner - Vivian Schonberg; Mirror Holder - Kyla McCray; Fourth Man - Greyson Webb; Babylonians - Colton Anderson, Jadyn Anderson, Casen Fawl, Belle Lading, Leah Lading, Abby Lang; Musicians - Gracyn Anderson, Casen Fawl, Belle Lading, Leah Lading, Abby Lang; Chaldeans - Colton Anderson, Gracyn Anderson, Jadyn Anderson; Guards - Thatcher Craig, Tess Schonberg; Set - Ella McCray, Elias Schonberg, Kaele Stone; Stagehands - Trey Bryant, Alisabeth Lading, Tess Schonberg, Kaele Stone, Greyson Webb; Lights and sound - Ella McCray

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Flexible cast of 15 to 32)

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR
ROYAL HERALD
QUESTION ANSWERER
SHADRACH
MESHACH
ABEDNEGO
ROYAL FANNER (non-speaking)
MIRROR HOLDER (non-speaking)
FOURTH MAN (non-speaking)
BABYLONIANS (9, or fewer with doubling)
MUSIC DIRECTOR
MUSICIANS (8, or fewer with doubling)
CHALDEANS (3)
GUARDS (2)

The roles of Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Nebuchadnezzar, and the Fourth Man are written as male, but can be played by females.

Suggested doubling: the Babylonians can double as the Musicians, the Music Director, and the Chaldeans. Also, the play can be performed with as few as five Babylonians by subtracting players and rearranging the lines.

PROPERTIES

large scroll (Herald)
small scroll (Herald)
eraser (Herald)
hand mirror (Mirror Holder)
crown (Nebuchadnezzar)
large, plumed fan on a long handle (Fanner)
a white dowel(s) (instrument) for each of the Musicians
baton for Music Director
sheet music
earplugs (Herald)
ropes (Guards)
oven mitts (Guards)
four sticks for roasting marshmallows
burnt marshmallows

MUSIC

6 snippets of very bad orchestral music, the worse the better

SCENES

- 1 – Plain of Dura: Herald gives an important announcement
- 2 – Plain of Dura: Herald corrects his announcement
- 3 – A practice room: the Musicians practice
- 4 – Poetic Interlude #1: Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego - sonnet
- 5 – Throne room: Nebuchadnezzar preens
- 6 – Plain of Dura: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego take a stand
- 7 – Poetic Interlude #2: Shadrach, Meshach, & Abednego - limerick
- 8 – Throne room (and Poetic Interlude #3) Nebuchadnezzar fumes
- 9 – The BFF: God saves His children

PRODUCTION NOTES

The set should be simple. A throne is needed for the throne room scenes. For the original production, two painted backdrops were quickly raised or lowered over the front of the BFF. One backdrop was the Plain of Dura, visible for scenes 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7. The other backdrop was the Throne Room, visible for scenes 5 and 8. For Scene 9, both backdrops were removed, revealing the BFF for the first time. The BFF needs to be large enough for four people to stand inside. The door opening should hinge on the DS side. A large dial on the front of the BFF is marked with four settings: *1 - Hot; 3 - Kansas Summer (or any other state you wish); 5 - Volcano; and 7 - Super Nova*. The BFF has a large window (or series of windows) in the front covered with a paper screen. This is backlit with red light to create silhouettes of the four people inside the furnace.

Here is one way for the Guards to catch on fire: a stagehand waits inside the furnace with “cloaks” or “capas” made of yellow and red crepe streamers. As the Guards push the victims through the open door to the furnace, the hidden stagehand throws the “cloaks” over them. The Guards run, trailing long streamers of “fire” behind them.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on the Plain of Dura. Enter HERALD and the QUESTION ANSWERER.)

HERALD: (Unrolls a large scroll and reads.) "Hear ye! Hear ye, all subjects of the Babylonian Empire—" Wait a minute. (To the audience.) No offense, but you're not Babylonians. Do we have any Babylonians here? True Babylonians of any pedigree?

(Enter the BABYLONIANS and SHADRACH, MESHACH, and ABEDNEGO.)

BABYLONIANS: (Ad libs.) Here we are... We're Babylonians... Born and bred in Babel... You bet... (Etc.)

HERALD: That's more like it. Now we have some Babylonians. (Reads from the scroll.) "Hear ye! Hear ye, all Babylonians!"

SHADRACH: Excuse us.

HERALD: Yes, what is it?

SHADRACH: We're not Babylonians.

MESHACH: The three of us.

ABEDNEGO: (Pointing.) One, two, three.

MESHACH: We're Hebrews.

SHADRACH: You enslaved us, remember?

MESHACH: Kidnaped us?

ABEDNEGO: Destroyed our homes?

HERALD: Yes, yes. We all remember.

SHADRACH: Well, if that decree is for Babylonians, and we're not Babylonians, do we have to listen to it?

HERALD: Once we capture you and destroy your homes, you become one of us. You've been assimilated. You're as Babylonian now as they come.

MESHACH: Funny, I don't *feel* Babylonian.

ABEDNEGO: I *thought* I felt Babylonian last night, but it was just gas.

HERALD: Please keep that to yourself. Do you mind if I read this now?

SHADRACH: No, go right ahead.

HERALD: Thank you. "The great king, the glorious king, the most stupendous King Nebuchadnezzar has issued the following degree—"

BABYLONIAN 1: Don't you mean "decree"?

HERALD: No, "degree." It says right here. "De-gree." *D-e-g-r-double-e.*

BABYLONIAN 2: It's a typo.

BABYLONIAN 3: Kings don't make typos, do they?

BABYLONIAN 4: Well, they certainly don't issue *degrees*.

BABYLONIAN 5: Except at graduation time.

BABYLONIAN 6: They issue decrees.

BABYLONIAN 7: And proclamations.

BABYLONIAN 8: And fireside chats.

BABYLONIAN 9: Stuff like that.

HERALD: Do you mind? This is kind of important.

SHADRACH: The man has a job to do. Let him talk.

HERALD: Thank you, Mr.—

SHADRACH: Hananiah.

HERALD: (*Peering at SHADRACH's name tag.*) Hananiah? Your name tag says "Shadrach."

SHADRACH: "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

HERALD: What? Roses?

SHADRACH: Never mind.

HERALD: I'll never understand Hebrews. (*Reads from the scroll.*) "The king has issued the following *degree*: You are commanded that when you hear the sound of the cornet, the flute, the harp, the sack— (*Turns the scroll around and reads from the back.*) —but, the psaltery, the dulcimer, and every kind of music, you are all to fall down and worship the image of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar (the great, the glorious, and the most stupendous king) has set up!" (*To the QUESTION ANSWERER.*) Hold this.

(*HERALD hands the scroll over and pulls out another, smaller scroll.*)

HERALD: *(Cont'd. Reads.)* "P.S.: Whosoever does not fall down and worship the image of gold that the king has set up shall immediately and without procrastination or delay be thrown into the BFF!" That is all. Any and all questions can be addressed to the Royal Question Answerer.

(The QUESTION ANSWERER steps forward. The HERALD rolls up the small scroll, takes the large scroll back, and exits.)

QUESTION ANSWERER: Any questions?

(A rapid-fire set of questions.)

BABYLONIAN 1: Is the king serious?

BABYLONIAN 2: He can't be serious!

BABYLONIAN 3: Where's the music going to come from?

BABYLONIAN 4: Where is this image of gold?

BABYLONIAN 5: Is it real gold?

BABYLONIAN 6: Can I worship standing up?

BABYLONIAN 7: Or do we have to fall down?

BABYLONIAN 8: How do we know when the music starts?

BABYLONIAN 9: What's a BFF?

QUESTION ANSWERER: Wait! Wait! One question at a time! Even a trained Question Answerer such as myself cannot keep track of so many questions at once! I'll start with you. *(Points to BABYLONIAN 1.)*

BABYLONIAN 1: Is the king serious?

QUESTION ANSWERER: The great, glorious and most stupendous King Nebuchadnezzar is always serious. Next.

BABYLONIAN 2: He can't be serious!

QUESTION ANSWERER: That's not a question. Next.

BABYLONIAN 3: Where's the music going to come from?

QUESTION ANSWERER: From musicians. Next.

BABYLONIAN 4: Where is this image of gold?

QUESTION ANSWERER: *(Pointing to the fourth wall, above the audience's heads.)* You see that tall, golden statue on the golden pedestal in the midst of the plain of Dura straight in front of you?

(All the BABYLONIANS turn downstage, look up. Pause.)

BABYLONIAN 4: Yes.

QUESTION ANSWERER: Congratulations, you found it.
Next.

BABYLONIAN 5: Is it real gold?

QUESTION ANSWERER: The great, glorious and most
stupendous King Nebuchadnezzar never uses fake gold.
Next.

BABYLONIAN 6: Can I worship standing up?

QUESTION ANSWERER: No. You must be on the ground,
flat on your face.

BABYLONIAN 7: So, we have to fall down?

QUESTION ANSWERER: *(After a beat.)* Flat. On. Your.
Face. Next.

BABYLONIAN 8: How do we know when the music starts?

QUESTION ANSWERER: I'll make it simple for you. When
you see everyone else bowing down to that image of gold,
you bow down, too. Just follow the crowd. Next.

BABYLONIAN 9: What's a BFF?

QUESTION ANSWERER: The burning fiery furnace. B-F-F.

BABYLONIAN 6: How big is this furnace?

QUESTION ANSWERER: Big enough to accommodate
anyone foolish enough to disobey the king's orders. Next.

BABYLONIAN 1: How hot is the furnace?

QUESTION ANSWERER: It is burning and fiery. I believe
you will find it hot enough. Next.

BABYLONIAN 9: What's a sackbut?

QUESTION ANSWERER: Enough questions. Wait for the
music. *(Exits.)*

BABYLONIAN 8: Well, how do you like that?

MESHACH: Good questions.

BABYLONIAN 9: Seriously, what's a sackbut?

BABYLONIAN 5: Another day, another law.

BABYLONIAN 4: Rules, rules, rules.

BABYLONIAN 3: Always something to do for his majesty.

BABYLONIAN 2: Remember when he decreed no one
could breathe air for a whole day?

BABYLONIAN 1: I broke that one.

SHADRACH: I think we all broke that one.

BABYLONIAN 7: (*Looking downstage, over the audience.*)
We're really supposed to fall down and worship that thing?

(*BABYLONIAN 2 falls down in a "worship" position.*)

BABYLONIAN 6: What are you doing?

BABYLONIAN 2: Practicing my grovel.

BABYLONIAN 6: Oh, get up! (*Pulls BABYLONIAN 2 up.*)

BABYLONIAN 5: (*To SHADRACH, MESHACH, and ABEDNEGO.*) What about you non-Babylonian Babylonians? Are you going to comply?

ABEDNEGO: You have to ask?

SHADRACH: What do you think?

BABYLONIAN 1: I think you'd better.

BABYLONIAN 4: Unless you like it *really* hot.

BABYLONIAN 1: We could get away with breathing if we stayed still and did it real quiet. But this is different.

BABYLONIAN 5: Yeah, you're either up or down. There's not a lot of middle ground.

SHADRACH: We don't need middle ground.

MESHACH: We don't worship abominations.

ABEDNEGO: We don't bow down to lies.

BABYLONIAN 2: That's kinda what I thought they'd say.

BABYLONIAN 5: Suit yourself. They'll take you straight to the BFF.

BABYLONIAN 9: Immediately and without procreation or delay.

BABYLONIAN 6: That's procrastination.

BABYLONIAN 9: What is?

BABYLONIAN 6: Forget it.

BABYLONIAN 1: Listen, non-Babel people, bottom line: you don't want to make the king mad.

BABYLONIAN 4: He got so mad once that he bit a spoon in half!

BABYLONIAN 3: He got so mad once that he punched a horse right in the face!

BABYLONIAN 8: He got so mad once he stomped a hole right through the floor!

BABYLONIAN 2: That was termites.

BABYLONIAN 8: He was still angry.

MESHACH: He can get angry if he wants, but it won't change our minds.

BABYLONIAN 7: Look, you can *pretend*, can't you?

SHADRACH: Pretend?

BABYLONIAN 7: When the music plays, stoop down and pretend to worship.

BABYLONIAN 5: Act like you're tying your sandal.

BABYLONIAN 2: Or act like you're trying to find your chariot keys.

BABYLONIAN 3: Do *something*.

BABYLONIAN 4: Just don't stand out.

BABYLONIAN 6: Try to fit in!

BABYLONIAN 1: Follow the crowd!

BABYLONIAN 7: You'll be bowing down on the *outside* but standing up on the *inside*.

BABYLONIAN 1: Nobody will know the difference!

ABEDNEGO: But that would be dishonest.

BABYLONIAN 8: There are more important things than honesty.

ABEDNEGO: Name one.

BABYLONIAN 9: Um, staying alive.

BABYLONIAN 3: What's a little white lie compared to a hot, flaming furnace?

MESHACH: Both lead to a fiery end.

SHADRACH: We'll take our chances standing up and standing out.

MESHACH: We cede the middle ground to you.

ABEDNEGO: See you guys later. You'd better practice that grovel some more.

(Exit SHADRACH, MESHACH, and ABEDNEGO.)

BABYLONIAN 1: Some people are just impossible! Let's go.

(THEY begin to exit.)

End of Freeview

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