

BABOONS

a play by

James Bentley Campbell

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BABOONS was originally presented by the Minnesota Ensemble Theatre in Minneapolis in 1973 with Keith Walters, Ben Kreikamp, John Nicolazzi, Susan Pochapski, Ingrid Kankans, David George, Todd Knaeble, Al Simenson, Katy Mader and Randall Hill and directed by James Bentley Campbell.

CAST

Blue Team

DIOCLETIAN	Emperor of Rome
GALERIUS	Emperor to be and son-in-law to be
VALERIA VALERIA	Daughter of DIOCLETIAN
PLUTIANO	Prefect of Police

Magenta or surprise pink Team

THIS and THAT	Slaves of PLUTIANO
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Red Team

GENESIUS	An actor
VIOLA	Wife of the actor
POLUS	The actor's partner

No team Team

NYMPH	A mysterious messenger
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INTRODUCTION

The time is 311 A.D. The place is the *auditorium* of DIOCLETIAN. It is the Emperor's birthday, the eve of his retirement and the appointment of GALERIUS as his heir designate and future son-in-law. GALERIUS, to kick off his new career, has decided to start a persecution and has commissioned GENESIUS & Co. to do the commercial. In defense of DIOCLETIAN I would like to say he raised zucchini in his spare time.

NOTE

Set properties should include a moveable prop box containing: cream pie makings, a fully charged seltzer bottle (siphon type), a red scarf, a collapsible sword, and other props as may be needed.

(*The Emperor's auditorium, empty, except for GENESIUS.*)

GENESIUS

Hello. My name is Genesius. Tonight we are going to do a *mime*. That is a play where the people who pay for the play play in the play that they pay for. The Emperor gets to play God. Everybody else plays everybody else. This is the story of a young man who leaves home. He leaves his father's house, a white stucco ocean front villa and goes forth in search of the truth. He thinks of the truth with a light in his eye. Meanwhile his father has a house full of lights: Acolytes, Carmelites, Socialites, Macedonians...He goes out into outer darkness and he hears weeping and gnashing. Here a weeper weeping. There a gnasher gnashing. Sometimes a weeper gnashing or a gnasher weeping. What doth he sayeth unto them? Doth he sayeth, "Look at the light in mine eye."? or doth he sayeth, "Look at the light in mine father's eye."? The point is, while there is a story involved, you'll pick it up as we go along.

(*Fanfare on a trumpet, off. Fanfare is followed by chimes ringing in slow march tempo. Enter a procession in single file preceded by THIS and THAT, who walk backward, ringing the chimes with butter knives. They are followed by VALERIA VALERIA. She wears a torn and disheveled 50s prom dress. She is dirty and appears idiotic. Behind her is the Emperor DIOCLETIAN, barefoot and in tights. He is decked out in a 12th century bishop's mitre and cope. Bringing up the tail of the procession is GALERIUS, heir designate and future son-in-law to DIOCLETIAN. He is dressed in a priest's vestments and carries a battered parasol over DIOCLETIAN's head. VALERIA and DIOCLETIAN stop before two small thrones. THIS and THAT chime their way backwards toward the prop box, where they put away the knives and chimes and turn and face DIOCLETIAN. Pause. The Emperor claps his hands. THIS and THAT take deep breaths and exhale violently, spinning around as they do. Except for one candle, all light is extinguished. Darkness and silence as at the creation.*)

DIOCLETIAN

Gods, demons, wood sprites, nymphs...

VALERIA

What's a nymph?

DIOCLETIAN

Shhhh... Gods, demons, wood sprites, nymphs... I, Pontifex Maximus
conjure you... Let there be light in this darkness... Open up the way... Is
anybody here?....

*(Suddenly, from around the stage and in the
house, loud animal calls, simian type. The
auditorium is invaded by Red Team mimicking
apes, baboons, gorillas, etc. They gather around
the candle. Their noises become sighs in
unison. The sighs become a conjuring chant.)*

RED TEAM

Pontifex Maximus, Ochre-magenta octopus,
Quam quam Aquila, Antepenultima,
Per Ardua ad Astra, Deus ex Machina....

*(They break. The chant is a failure. They
supplicate the darkness.)*

Hurrah, for the Lord,
Hail, God is divine.

Divine is the Army, divine is the State

Divine is Religion, divine is my mate ...Everything's divine!

(They resume the chant with more fervor.

*GENESIUS, in an ominous black cape, slowly
enters from the house. VIOLA screams.)*

POLUS

The Lord has returned.

VIOLA

He holds the whole world in the palm of his hand.

THIS

He is tired.

VIOLA

The whole wide world in his hand.

THAT

He'd like to sit down.

VIOLA

He's got everybody here in his hand.

POLUS

Wish him a happy birthday. (*Lights bump to full.*)

VIOLA

Report.

POLUS

The latest campaign into Afrodisiacland. (*The Red and Pink Teams animate a recent Imperial campaign, using the apron as a barge and the pit as a river. GENESIUS mimes DIOCLETIAN. POLUS is his boatman. VIOLA is his slave. THIS and THAT represent local fauna.*)

VIOLA

Except for the growl of the leopard and the snarl of the tiger, struggling and dying in the battle for survival, it was a quiet day...

POLUS

...Divine Diocletian, in his yacht, "Divine Diocletian Number Two", sped swiftly over the underwater growths of the Yb Krbt River. Divine Diocletian sat in the sternsheets, calmly puffing a rare mixture of eucalyptus bark and cork and shooting merrily at passing crocodiles with his divine imperial archery set...

VIOLA

"Blast you!" He cried at the thrashing beasts as he missed his shot...

POLUS

...And hit the cook!... (*THAT falls into the pit, a wounded cook.*)... Who was pearl diving beside the boat...

VIOLA

Divine Diocletian watched carefully as the body of the cook sank beneath the murky depths, the crocodiles fighting precariously among themselves for choice cuts...

(All except GENESIUS fall into the pit and become fighting crocodiles. PLUTIANO suddenly emerges from the pit and brandishing a machete, rampages among the actors. He is dressed in a black cutaway and a top hat. He wears a dickie with a bow tie but no collar and no shirt. Tights complete the ensemble. He focuses on GENESIUS.)

PLUTIANO

Obedience to orders, instant and unhesitating, is not only the life-blood of armies, but the security of states. And the doctrine that, under any circumstances whatever, deliberate disobedience can be justified, is treason to the commonwealth...

DIOCLETIAN

Prefect, not yet.

VALERIA

Today is a birthday and an engagement, you know...

DIOCLETIAN

I'll do it.

VALERIA

Sorry.

DIOCLETIAN

Welcome to my *auditorium*. Galerius?

GALERIUS

Ever ready, Almighty. We're sorry you missed some of the festivities, friends, but the early part of the evening was mainly a family affair. We have saved some funny things to show you. First, I am proud to announce that Yours Truly has just been named "Caesar in the West". I am also delighted to proclaim that I, the Lord Galerius, shall have the honor to take to wife the beautiful daughter of Divinity Himself, the Delectable, Lady Valeria-Valeria!

VALERIA

Thank you. I'm very happy!

GALERIUS

Secondly, we are contemplating a return to the Old Morality at home and in public. Our nation and the empire are divided, corrupted by various seditious factions. Pederasts have penetrated every orifice of our society. We must get them out and return to the ancient gods and virtues that made our city the mistress of the world. All rise for moment of prayer...

(All repeat the prayer with him.)

...Rome, Rome, sacred home,
Mistress of the Earth and Sky,
Second to none, the Only One,
Apple of the Ancient Eye...
To Mars!

ALL

To Mars!

GALERIUS

Now a word from the Blessed Almighty, Supreme Pontiff, Master of All, Protector of the Poor, Author of Justice, King of Kings, Light of the East and West, Our Best Beloved, Yours and Mine, simply divine, herrres---
Diocletian!

(DIOCLETIAN doffs his mitre and cope and addresses the house. As he speaks, he removes a banana from his tights and eats it.)

DIOCLETIAN

I am an army man. The army found me a slave and made me a soldier.

GALERIUS

The whole world should be military!

DIOCLETIAN

I'll do it.

GALERIUS

Sorry.

DIOCLETIAN

While working my way to the top, I had a mystical experience...

VALERIA

...Tell that one, Daddy...

DIOCLETIAN (*Red/Pink animation.*)

A witch revealed to me...while she was in a trance induced by torture...that I would certainly become emperor if I could find and strangle a wild boar with my bare hands. Of course I had to be noticed, i.e., by the right people. I had fears of finding myself alone in the bushes with a wild boar and no witnesses. Then I remembered we had within our legion one who went by name, "Boar". Arrius Aper he was called, and he was wild. (GENESIUS *mimes Aper.*)...He wore his cap pulled down over his eyes, rode his horse backward and corrupted boys on Sunday. I summoned Aper and all the right people to my tent (as I have summoned you here tonight) and I strangled him forthwith. As my fingers crushed his windpipe, I closed my eyes and prayed. "To Mars!"...

ALL

To Mars!

DIOCLETIAN

...I said. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that I strangled a boar on that day. Today I am sixty and I forsake the world. My empire is my garden. My citizens – beans, eggplants, yams, what-have-you. When you grow a vegetable, you know a vegetable. But who knows what can happen in the city? Only yesterday I was riding my newest mare. Three years old and she loved to jump. On the last hazard she fell and threw me. Her leg was broken. I drew my sword and cut her throat. "To Mars!"...

ALL

To Mars!...

DIOCLETIAN (*Sits on his throne.*)

...I said. There were fountains of red blood over the green grass. My eyes were spattered with her blood. Galerius?

GALERIUS

Thank you, Almighty, Supreme Pontiff, Pontifex Maximus, thank you, thank you. It is with a leaden heart we see you depart over the hill to your garden. As you have taught us, it is all for the best. And now for the funny things. Friends and honored guests, after considerable trouble and expense, the Divine Auditorium is proud to present, direct from the Villa Naples in Naples, those zany, boffo-socko goof-offs, Kid Genesius and his Boffo-Sockos! (*A hand bell rings. ALL freeze. A painted NYMPH enters, X's to center and speaks.*)

NYMPH

How Genesisus went out, found the Christians, and became one...

(NYMPH exits, ringing her bell. Red/Pink Team animates a dryad ceremony. The men are trees. VIOLA is Mother Earth. GENESIUS carries a collapsible stage sword.)

VIOLA

Mr. Genesisus, you funny man, look at me. I am pure as a transparent fish, older than the sea, twice as beautiful. I will let you see the charms that charmed God. You will feast your senses, boy. You will see my rings, wings and tattoos, the intricate scars on my breasts, all four of them. Who else do you know with four breasts? Wait 'til you see my hair, my mustache, my belly, mossy as the rumpled earth, my thighs... When I pass, trees groan with pleasure...

TREES

Ohhhhhhh!

VIOLA

Listen, I'm going to tell you a secret...Philosophy is bullshit!

(GENESIUS "kills" her with his sword.

PLUTIANO and GALERIUS enter the area.

GENESIUS hides behind a ceremonial mask.)

PLUTIANO

Brayvo, brayvo! Very sincere, very frank!...(GENESIUS tries to slip away.)
...Everybody stay right where you are. Genesisus?

GENESIUS

Never hear of him.

PLUTIANO

Yes. Who are you?

GENESIUS

I am janitor.

PLUTIANO

Janitor? What are you doing behind that mask?