



OR,

BY LIZ DUFFY ADAMS



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Originally produced in New York City by
Women's Project
(Julie Crosby, Producing Artistic Director).

OR, received its world premiere at the Julia Miles Theater in New York City, on November 3, 2009. It was directed by Wendy McClellan; the set design was by Zane Pihlstrom; the costume design was by Andrea Lauer; the lighting design was by Deb Sullivan; the sound design was by Elizabeth Rhodes; and the stage manager was Jack Gianino. The cast was as follows:

APHRA BEHN Maggie Siff
NELL GWYNNE (and others) Kelly Hutchinson
KING CHARLES II (and others) Andy Paris

Or, was further developed and subsequently produced by Magic Theatre in San Francisco California in November 2010. It was directed by Loretta Greco; the set design was by Michael Locher; the costume design was by Alex Jaeger; the lighting design was by York Kennedy; the sound design was by Sara Huddleston; the dramaturg was Jane Ann Crum; and the production stage manager was Megan Q Sada. The cast was as follows:

Aphra Behn Natacha Roi
Charles II, William Scott Ben Huber
Nell Gwynne, Maria, Jailer,
Lady Davenant Maggie Mason

CHARACTERS

APHRA BEHN — woman, late 20s to late 30s

JAILER — man

CHARLES II — man, Aphra's age or up to 10 years older

WILLIAM SCOT — man, same age as Charles

NELL GWYNNE — woman, early to mid-20s

MARIA — female servant, older

LADY DAVENANT — female aristocrat, older

NOTE: The play is designed for the male actor and second female to play all the parts except for Aphra. The man plays Charles and William. The woman plays Nell, Maria, and Lady Davenant. Either one may play the jailer. In the premiere production, the male actor played Lady Davenant as well, and that breakdown is an option, depending on casting considerations. Additional dialogue to cover a costume change in the cross-gender version is provided in Appendix One.

Maria is pronounced Ma-RYE-a, rather than Ma-REE-a.

PLACE

London.

TIME

1666 – 1670. The first scene is set in a private room of a debtors' prison. The rest of the play takes place in a rented parlor upstairs in a lodging house, with a door leading to an unseen inner bedroom, from evening to dawn of one night.

The play is set in the Restoration period, but plays off the echoes between the late 1660s, the late 1960s, and the present.

I will not purchase slavery
At such a dangerous rate
But glory in my liberty
And laugh at love and fate.

—*Aphra Behn*

Whore is scarce a more reproachful name
Than Poetess.

—*John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*

We are stardust, we are golden
And we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.

—*Joni Mitchell*

OR,

Prologue

Spoken by the actor who plays Aphra, in street clothes, intimately to the audience.

Or. Now that's a very little word
On which to hang an evening's worth of show
But I will now that little word enlarge
And show a vast unsettled world within
That open *O* and nosing thrust of *R*.
Our play will shortly ricochet between
A dense array of seeming opposites:
Spy or poetess, actress or whore
Male or female, straight or gay—or both
Wrong or righteous, treacherous or true
Lust or love, cheap hackney trash or art
Now or then, a distant fervent age
Or this our time of mingled hope and fear
And yet despite all seeming differences
Those *ors* divide less than they subtly link
And what seem opposite and all at odds
Are in their deepest nature most the same.
We all embody opposites within
Or else we're frankly far too dull to live
And this our wilding world cannot be hemmed
Within a made-up symmetry of sense.
That being said, we'll open up the gate
Unhinge the *R* and step on through the *O*
To find our characters, from hist'ry fetched
Although they no doubt would not know themselves

If they were sudden brought into this room
To witness; O blame not our hapless scribe
For that; she pleads a playwright's hallowed right
To have her way with people and events
Too far long gone for most of you to know
Just as our heroine in her own time
Made free with truth where it might serve her will.
If Aphra could but be with us tonight
We hope she would forgive our trespasses,
While you we hope to solace and seduce
With all our most alluring stratagems.
[O! Fire exits! There and there, all right?
Are all your cell phones off? Yes? Very good.]¹
Compose yourselves for pleasure, if you will.
Cue the lights, let never time stand still.

Scene 1

Aphra in a prison cell writing a letter, well-dressed in her own clothes.

APHRA.

And so I must, however I regret it
Now once more beg you, Sire, not to forget it
That here in debtor's prison I do lie
For lack of funds promised me as your spy.
To nag and scold my own adoréd king
Believe me, pains me more than anything.
But justice to myself demands no less
Than princely favor and full recompense.
And so — shit. Jailer! Jailer! Damn his eyes. (*Jailer enters.*)
Sweet kindly jailer mine, the ink's run dry.

JAILER.

So? Ain't you writ enough?

¹ Optional lines within brackets

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1M, 2W (doubling)

OR, takes place (mostly) during one night in the life of Aphra Behn, poet, spy, and soon to be the first professional female playwright. Sprung from debtors' prison after a disastrous overseas mission, Aphra is desperate to get out of the spy trade. She has a shot at a production at one of only two London companies, if she can only finish her play by morning despite interruptions from sudden new love, actress Nell Gwynne; complicated royal love, King Charles II; and very dodgy ex-love, double-agent William Scot — who may be in on a plot to murder the king in the morning. Can Aphra resist Nell's charms, save Charles' life, win William a pardon, and launch her career, all in one night? Against a background of a long drawn-out war and a counter-culture of free love, cross-dressing, and pastoral lyricism, the 1660s look a lot like the 1960s in this neo-Restoration comedy from the playwright *The San Francisco Bay Guardian* called "an artist of playful and highly literate imagination, radical instincts, and sardonic but generous humor."

"Luminaries of seventeenth-century England are resurrected and made to do the frug in OR, a playful, funny and inventive comedy ... [Ms. Adams'] language has a natural period flavor and a formidable wit; her characters possess the spark of fully animated spirits; and she weaves into her story both biographical detail and cultural context with grace ... Ms. Adams' smartly conceived unraveling of figures corseted in history honors the remarkable facts of Behn's groundbreaking career."

—The New York Times

"Liz Duffy Adams' historical romp of a backstage sex farce about Restoration playwright Aphra Behn displays style, humor, and jaw-dropping wit."

—BackStage

"Adams' historical play celebrates not only Behn's pioneering career, which Virginia Woolf famously memorialized ... ('All women together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of Aphra Behn'), but also the side of the writer's tumultuous life that Woolf dismissed as 'shady and amorous' ... [Adams] has written an Aphra-disiac valentine, not a stodgy bio-play."

—Time Out New York

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