

AMERICAN LA RONDE

BY STEVEN DIETZ

FROM *REIGEN* BY
ARTHUR SCHNITZLER



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

AMERICAN LA RONDE
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*This play is dedicated to my students—
past, present, and future.*

AMERICAN LA RONDE received developmental support from the McCarter Theatre Center (Princeton, NJ) and ACT Theatre (Seattle, WA).

An earlier version of this play, under the title 360 (ROUND DANCE), was produced in 2011 by the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Texas (Austin, TX). This production was directed by Courtney Sale; the scenic designer was Chris H. Yoo; the costume designer was Bich Vu; the lighting designer was Rachel Atkinson; the sound designer was Tom Horan; and the stage manager was Taylor McCaslin. The cast featured Mark Barnes, Quetta Carpenter, Elissa Castles, Jeremy Lee Cudd, Gabriel Jason Dean, Dan Lenzian, Kelli Schultz, and Alexis Scott.

CHARACTERS

Actor One (20s) plays:

THE MAID
THE STUDENT
THE YOUNG DANCER

Actor Two (20s) plays:

THE YOUNG MAN
THE SONGWRITER

Actor Three (40s) plays:

THE DANCER
THE WIFE
THE FAMOUS SINGER

Actor Four (40s/50s) plays:

THE SOLDIER
THE HUSBAND
THE WEALTHY MAN

These four actors will also play the following non-speaking roles: A MANAGER, A BLONDE, A MAÎTRE D', and the VOICE OF THE FATHER.

The gender of these “women” and “men” is fully at the discretion of the production. The playwright authorizes changes to any personal pronouns in the text to reflect the make-up of the desired cast. For information on doubling with a larger cast, please see NOTE at back of script. Thank you.

PLACE

An American city.

TIME

Modern. This need not be “the present.”

SETTINGS

An open playing space—dark, sparse, elegant, dangerous. Individual locales are conjured, not depicted. The play does not stop between scenes. There are no blackouts. Action is continuous.

Props are minimal. Costumes are modern, timeless. Sound is potent, aggressive.

NOTE ON TONE/STYLE

As in the original Schnitzler play, the passions, actions and emotions here are intended to be both honest and large—unapologetically bold. These are real people caught in the most extreme moments of their lives. The burn is in their bodies; the recklessness and hunger is in their hearts.

“I am the lips I’ve kissed.”

—Albert Camus

AMERICAN LA RONDE

1. The Dancer and the Soldier

A padded bench in a dark corner of a strip club. It is night. Loud music plays.

The Dancer gives a lap dance to the Soldier. The Soldier wears his combat (not “dress”) uniform.

DANCER. How’s that?

SOLDIER. Mm-hmm.

DANCER. Is that good?

SOLDIER. Mmmmmmmmm.

DANCER. You want more?

SOLDIER. Huh?

DANCER. The big ones ask for little more. Most the soldiers in here are little boys. Look at them. Puddles in their pants before you even put your ass in their lap. But not you. You’re a grown man. You know what you want.

SOLDIER. Yeah, I guess—

DANCER. You tell those boys what to do, I bet. Give the little soldiers their orders.

SOLDIER. Maybe some of ’em—but I—

DANCER. So give me my orders. What shall I do?

He is touching her.

You’re soft.

He stops touching her.

SOLDIER. What did you say?

DANCER. Your hands, I mean. They're soft. It's nice. Shall we do a little more?

SOLDIER. Okay...

DANCER. It'll be good.

SOLDIER. ...what would that be?

DANCER. You mean what do I do?

SOLDIER. What does it cost?

DANCER. God, you really haven't, have you?!

SOLDIER. Just tell me how much.

DANCER. Don't worry, baby—you got it. I can feel it down there.

SOLDIER. But, I've only got—

DANCER. You've got plenty down there for me. *(A sudden cool whisper.) Hands down...manager coming...*

A manager [played by Actor Two], in a dark suit, walks through the room.

...that's it...no hands on the girls...house rules...okay...there he goes...

The manager is gone.

As you were, soldier. What's your name?

SOLDIER. Your hair is pretty.

DANCER. *(Laughs.)* My hair? God, you're sweet. C'mon, there's a room in back—

SOLDIER. Where?

DANCER. Right back there.

SOLDIER. Do the cops come?—do the cops ever come back there?

DANCER. *(Laughs.)* Sure—all the time. They love it back there. *(Before he can respond.)* It's okay—it's taken care of—

SOLDIER. I want to kiss you—just a kiss—

DANCER. —come on now—

SOLDIER. —how much is that?

DANCER. —back there you can be as nasty as you want to be.

SOLDIER. *(Looks at her.)* I thought you were younger. Onstage you looked younger.

DANCER. Let's talk about my *pretty hair* some more, okay?

SOLDIER. I'd seen this place from the outside and I—

DANCER. Jesus Christ, please don't explain—

SOLDIER. (*Overlapping.*) —I thought the girls in here would be young girls, college girls—

DANCER. —okay, already, I get it: *I'm not young*—

SOLDIER. —no, listen—

DANCER. —and you know what, baby?: *neither are you*. Nobody's young anymore. We're all just *old* for a lot longer than any of us planned.

SOLDIER. Your skin is so soft.

DANCER. Now you're talkin', old man...I know you know how this goes...

SOLDIER. I don't have any money left.

DANCER. Oh, baby—did no one tell you? Soldiers get it for free. You just got home and you gotta go back to your wife but you want a little fun first, right? Why not live it up? Lotta boys didn't come home at all. You're lucky.

SOLDIER. *All my boys came home.*

DANCER. See there—through that door—it's real dark and nice...

SOLDIER. *Did you hear what I said?*

DANCER. Still want to kiss me?

The Soldier has stopped touching her.

Back there you can kiss me anywhere...

He does not respond.

...anywhere but on the lips...c'mon...

The Soldier stands, steps away.

What's wrong, baby? It's okay...really it is...

The Dancer lifts her hand to the Soldier's face—and he notices her bracelet: silver, simple.

SOLDIER. Where'd you get that?—your bracelet?

DANCER. It was a gift. Some guy.

SOLDIER. And what did he get? The guy who gave you that?

DANCER. It was just a—

SOLDIER. God—something like that—it must have bought him *whatever he wanted*.

DANCER. Look, let's just—

SOLDIER. I had *nothing for her*. I had *nothing for my wife*. I should have had something like *this*...

As he speaks, the Soldier gently slides the bracelet off her wrist. The Dancer does not stop him.

...I stepped off the plane and...I had nothing...the whole time I was looking for her—my son and my wife—I'm running through the airport—

—looking for them in the crowd—
and the whole time I wished I had a gift in my pocket—wished I'd brought her something—*something shiny*—
something like *this*.

DANCER.

Hey...it's okay...

...it's gonna be okay...

And now the Soldier turns to leave, taking the bracelet with him—

DANCER. (*Calls after him.*) Wait—GIVE ME THAT!—THAT'S MINE!—STOP HIM—HE OWES ME—HE OWES ME FOR FIVE DANCES!—

Her voice is overcome by the rising music, and—

2. The Soldier and the Maid

—the action is continuous, as the Soldier is immediately intercepted by the Maid.

We are in a downtown alley, under a streetlight. It is late night. We hear music from a club nearby. The Maid wears a long coat. They are both a little drunk.

MAID. (*Laughing.*) YOU OWE ME! YOU OWE ME ONE DANCE AT LEAST!

SOLDIER. No—

MAID. OH, C'MON—

SOLDIER. —I can't dance to that stuff—that teenager music—it's just noise—

MAID. —you sound like an old grampa!

SOLDIER. —nothing but pounding and pounding.

MAID. And it's better out here in the alley?

SOLDIER. (*Holding her.*) Oh, yeah—

MAID. (*Flirting.*) You're drunk.

SOLDIER. —right here—me and my lovely little Lucille.

MAID. *Louise.* My name is Louise.

SOLDIER. Okay sure sorry whatever, I'm—

MAID. And you are Sergeant Robert Montgomery Kincaid.

SOLDIER. How do you know that?

MAID. (*Laughs.*) You told me all sorts of things while you were looking over my shoulder at that blonde. Who was that blonde you kept looking at? She had that fakey white hair that makes men all stupid. The woman I work for has hair like that. I'm all the time cleaning it out of her drain—why does that white hair make men all stupid?

SOLDIER. (*Defensive.*)

What blonde? I don't know what you're—I didn't see a blonde anywhere—

MAID. (*Playful.*)

You know exactly what I'm talking about! Who?—Blonde?—Me?—Where?—

She pulls him closer.

MAID. Do you like my mouth? You said you liked my mouth. Why don't you kiss it? Isn't that why we came outside?

SOLDIER. You're all pretty—

MAID. That *is* why we came outside right?

SOLDIER. —all of you—every little part—

MAID. (*Whispers, close to him.*) I'll be Lucille. Call me that tonight, I don't care. Tonight is just right. Let's make it be just right—

AMERICAN LA RONDE

by Steven Dietz

“Our intentions convict us.”

4–10 n/s (doubling, flexible casting)

A simple silver bracelet travels through the lives of ten bold and desperate lovers, giving us a glimpse of the intrigue and heartache left in its wake. AMERICAN LA RONDE is a provocative and fully contemporary re-imagining of Schnitzler’s notorious play *Reigen*, known as its French translation, *La Ronde*. Sexy, literate, emotional, and highly theatrical.

“What’s mature about this adaptation of Arthur Schnitzler’s Reigen—a play that caused a riot in its own day—is the sensitivity with which the encounters between these people are depicted. Desire and resentment battle it out in every scene but never in the same way. The characters run a relay around the play, handing off the action from one to the next, and what finally emerges is a complex story about the harsh dynamics of human interaction.” —Austin Chronicle (Austin, TX)

Also by Steven Dietz
FORCE OF NATURE
INVENTING VAN GOGH
PARAGON SPRINGS
and others

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