

Notes on “Twice a Kiss”

Peter Tranchell, 1981

List of characters and vocal ranges	p2
Description of characters	p3
Costumes (omitted in this edition)	p6
Scenery & lights	p6
Furniture	p6
Properties required	p7
Dance & movement	p7
Musical points	p8

Twice a Kiss

Libretto by Maurice Holt

Music by Peter Tranchell

Characters (in order of appearance)

Knipp, house-boy or page to Sir Robert Asymptote.

High baritone, E₃ – F₄

Susan, lady's maid to Lady Asymptote, and general house-maid.

Soprano, C₄ – G_{#5}

Sarah, Sir Robert's ward, an heiress; whom Sir Robert would like to give in marriage to Sir Peter Parallel.

Contralto, F_{#3} – F_{#5}

Sir Robert Asymptote, A pompous knight, a would-be playwright and a jealous husband, though secretly given to amours.

Baritone, G₂ – F_{#4}

Lady Asymptote, Sir Robert's wife, suspicious of her husband's predilections, whether amorous or dramatic.

Soprano, C₄ – D₆ (ossia B₅)

Sir Peter Parallel, a gallant, in debt to Sir Robert.

High Baritone, C₃ – G_{#4}

Mr Honeywood, an actor and the proprietor of a playhouse.

Bass, F₂ – D₄

Notes on the characters, etc

Knipp, the house-boy, a good-looking well-formed stripling of about seventeen. He is not a yokel (even if he utters in some urban or rural accent – which is not necessary) but an intelligent and spritely lad. It doesn't matter if he's more an actor than a singer. He moves about stage upon his duties easily and without gaucheness. Though sexually aware, he is diffident, hence his being a servant in the first place: He asks for permission to go out with deference: To make a date with Susan, he doesn't declare himself, but writes an anonymous note which sets off the whole train of events of the operetta. He wears no coat, but only waistcoat over his shirt. His kneebreeches are tights enough to discover a pretty pair of buttocks suitably articulated and in the right place on his body. This¹ facilitates his being effectively spanked by Sir Robert when the time comes. He plays the recorder, but his rendering of a 'fanfare' should be something of a caricature, - hence he needs to be something of an adroit player. His baritone voice should lie so that none of his upper notes is a strain.

Sir Robert, a well-off man-about-court, is a good-looking type in the earliest phase of middle-age. His figure is good. He is attractive enough for us to understand his magnetism for women. He has a playful side to him when it comes to flirtation. But also there is a hard business-like side to his nature. His utterances are incisive and authoritative, not to say pompous and bullisome. He can be obstinate and bigoted. He has no patience with fools, especially with romantic fools. He does not see that his wife may expect of him the same fidelity as he demands of her. His weak spot is that he is besotted with theatricals in a very amateur way. He has no conception of the ineptness of his own efforts as a playwright, and can only believe that everyone else shares his blind enthusiasm. His voice is a trenchant even slightly harsh one, without any vibrato. He could sing the patter-song from Rossini's 'Barber of Seville' or the Lord Chancellor's nightmare-song from Sullivan's 'Iolanthe' with speed, humour, and aplomb. His character is not a mean one, however, as he has made a generous loan to a young ne'er-do-well, Sir Peter Parallel, and does not stint the refreshments when visitors come to his house. He dresses well, and comports himself as an epitome of masculinity. Had he been younger, he would have made a good House-Tutor in an English Public School.

Susan, the maid, a jolly frolicsome wench, of highly attractive face and 'features'. Probably not more than seventeen years old, full of bounce, pert or coy as occasion demands. Her soprano voice shows no strain on high notes, and has no trace of vibrato. She is not intelligent enough to be a Despina-type maidservant as in "Cost fan' tutte", but she makes up for her thickness with her élan and effervescence. She probably dances well at Sir Roger de Coverley, enjoys bell-ringing, and might play mixed hockey for Girton, enjoying the fun of the showerbaths afterwards.

Sarah, the orphan ward of Sir Robert, whom Sir Robert would like to see married to Sir Peter Parallel, so that her inheritance may aid Sir Peter to pay off his sizeable debt to Sir Robert. She is slightly bored at the recurrent application of suitors for her hand. She believes in love, but is otherwise a down-to-earth type, slightly clipped and dour in her dialogue. She sing her more romantic lines with adequate lyricism but without vibrato, and indicates that she has a beautiful side to her nature, though she gives the outward appearance of a seventeen-year-old female cynic of premature hard-bitten-ness. Her enunciation is exceptional, and her voice has proper strength in its lowest register without the boom of "Hinge & Bracket". She dresses

¹ Whilst providing interest for the pygophile element in the audience.

smartly but very austerely. A lady-Jane-Grey figure, till she emerges radiant at the end. Meanwhile her pugnacity of manner is uppermost, and she sails into a room like a minor battleship ready to fire a broadside. She might be a female president of the Cambridge Union, and be a tiresome aunt when older.

Lady Asymptote, Sir Robert's wife, is a middle-aged young woman of considerable dignity and consequence. She is not particularly attractive or handsome, but under the authoritative exterior, there's a soft heart. However peremptory and severe her utterances, you are sure there's a twinkle in the eye. She has a sense of humour despite a mostly dead-pan stately exterior. And she is an easy victim to flattery, since so seldom its recipient, and hence her readiness to indulge in a bit of coquetry and teasing with Sir Peter, - but her superior intelligence enables her to disparage him within his earshot (when he is hiding behind the screen). She is perhaps more innately endowed with melodramatic sense than her husband, for it is she who persuades Sir Peter that he and she will be compromised if discovered together by Sir Robert. There is no reason at this moment why Sir Robert should not take Sir Peter's arrival as natural. After all he has invited Sir Peter and expects him. But Lady Asymptote turns the episode into a dangerous charade, for once Sir Peter has hidden, it will be harder to explain this if he should then be discovered. And as the 'play' gets under way and screen's moved hither and thither, Lady Asymptote's attempts at diversion of attention are genuine and serious, even if she secretly enjoys the situation. Her intelligence is again seen when it is her contribution to the efforts to persuade Sir Robert to relent that finally does the trick. How did she do it? She tells us; and this moment must be really touching. However, not lugubriously but in a bittersweet almost nostalgic manner, smilingly through tears (unshed). Throughout the operetta, Lady Asymptote is the one with the sense of humour and fun. Her song about errant husbands is sung with a smile, as well as with something of the potentially shrewish wife. Her duet with Sir Peter has the verve and vitality of a coy dizzy debutante as well as worldly cynicism. And her asides and explanations in the ensuing scenes with Sir Robert are uttered with relish. Throughout, her enunciation is exact and clear, and her voice without vibrato, but all her singing must be a sheer pleasure to hear. Her many top notes should be unstrained, - not high notes after the menacing or hostile manner of Queen of the Night, but joyful and natural-sounding 'exceedings' as the high notes of Blonda and Constanza in 'Il Seraglio'. There should be warmth and sympathy in her tone-quality as well as (when necessary) the dry cutting edge. Lady Asymptote's part needs a vocal acting-ability more than any of the other voice parts, together with a sweet, true and powerful voice. You think she might giggle at any moment and have readily wobbly dewlaps, but she doesn't and hasn't.

Sir Peter is a young man in his mid-twenties. He has evidently inherited a business and considerable wealth, but also has inherited little business-acumen together with a taste for extravagance and elegant self-indulgence. He could never take an aspirin without a glass of champagne to wash it down. It's no wonder he's apparently in debt. You'd never guess it to look at him. Inwardly he's probably a rather selfish narcissist. Outwardly he's always in good humour, ready to chat anyone up, likes to be pleasant and to be admired. He is not a dissipated rake but, rather, a randy 'gallant'. He has in him an element of Malvolio in courtly swagger without the bizarreness, of Andrew Aguecheek in the mincing tentativeness without the gauche innocence-of-the-world's-ways, and of 'Bunthorne' in *Patience* as regards the willowy artistic pretence, or of the spirit of Beardsley, Rossetti, and the pre-Raphaelite and art-nouveau periods. He's a lady's man and a lapdog. He's the embodiment of a simper. He looks a fop, but an attractive one. He utters in a voice with the pansy-quality of Archbishop Runcely [sic]. He dresses like a

peacock but in good taste. He wears a full-bottomed curly-haired wig, but a blonde one. His hat has an enormous brim loaded with flowers (large ones like magnolias and tea-roses); and ribbons in gay pastel shades drip from his hat, his shoulders, his cuffs, his knees, almost like a morris-dancer, but without any rusticity. He might be at a fête champêtre with Watteau. His full coat open in front, to reveal much lace and linen cravatry and an aldermanic (but not fat) waistcoat, is flared at the waist and widens down to well below knee-level. Its embroidery outdoes the Chelsea flowershow. He is an expert at the courtesies of court, and has an elegant if exaggerated bowing technique (one pointed foot forward, and never showing the inside of his hat when twirling it about him in the process of the flourish). Take all his clothes off, and put him on the beach at Brighton, and he'd probably have the figures of an Adonis. But he's not a heldentenor, just a useful voice without vibrato. Though he appears a smiling dolt in finery, his eyes bespeak intelligence of a sort, and a sense of humour. When hidden behind the screen, he loses no time in mounting a chair and looking over the top, and re-acts aptly to the conversation of the others about him. He even manages to lean over and filch Lady Asymptote's gauzy wrap from round her shoulders. Naturally, he lowers his head back into concealment when he thinks he may be observed. If he overplays, he's in danger of upstaging the rest of the cast in this scene. And at the end nobody should notice that he is the only character who doesn't get paired off. He's a laugh, but a likeable one. He doesn't want to marry Sarah, and who can blame him. His eyes are too bright for that.

Mr Honeywood, the actor manager, once he has divested himself of his theatrical accoutrements, is clearly a *matinée*-idol but not an insipid one. No smelling of roses in the moonlight for him. A down-to-earth type, but talented. His voice is full, strong, velvety, and a joy to hear, from the bottom of his range to the top. He sings without vibrato. He doesn't overact his song, nor throw it away, but shows style and stylisation in putting it over, which immediately explains to us how he has gained the top of the dramatic tree while still in his twenties. He enjoys everything he does, and from his first appearance emanates warmth and magnetism. He's a tall, well-built, handsome chap, without any idiosyncrasy or unnecessary gesture. As natural as possible. Almost a singing James Bond, probably not unlike Richard Marlow when the latter was younger, but without the acne. A "good sort".

The 'Play'

Sir Robert's play is entitled "The Tragedy of Sir Thomas Overbury". A passage of it is tried over during the operetta. The subject-matter may well have dramatic potential, but Sir Robert's treatment of it will surely receive much rewriting when Mr Honeywood prepares it for the stage. The lines are either flat or overcharged, and, being set to be spoken by the singers against a musical background as if they are reading from scripts (which they hold in their hands), should be uttered either with amateurish dullness, or questioning disbelief, or fustian rodomontade. Even Mr Honeywood is tempted to play his opening lines with a tinge of hysteria. Sir Robert's answer in the rôle of the King is a melodramatic one starting in purple-passage vein, followed by conspiratorial confidentiality. Sarah's reading is flat and without nuance, reflecting her total lack of interest in the matter. Sir Peter is nonplussed at finding himself condemned to death in his first sentence. Lady A (with her usual humour) manages to get just the wrong (slightly mocking) in her "Farewell"s.

The musical accompaniment of the speeches is for organ, simulating a pair of post-horns, in a musical phrase reminiscent (though reversed) of Beethoven's piano sonata "Les adieux". It

should not swamp the speakers. This is one musical moment in the operetta where the use of a piano in lieu of an organ is less than satisfactory.

Internal date, Costumes, Wigs

The operetta is set in a house in London during the reign of Charles I, i.e. between 1660 and 1685, to judge from Sir Robert's song. The absence of reference to the Plague or to the Great Fire (1666) or The Popish Plot (1678), and Sir Robert's suggestion that the King might have to 'flee again to France' seems to put the date fairly close after the Restoration, in the early 1660's.

This gives us a clue to costume. The operetta is intended to be performed as a period-piece. It is not a work which will stand up to presentation in rubber mackintoshes or lurex space-armor.

[Costume section omitted in this typeset edition as it contains many illustrations – for access to these pages please contact the Peter Tranchell Foundation, or see Cambridge University Library MS.Tranchell.4.18].

Scenery & Lights

An operetta to be performed in a College Hall against a background of panels and perhaps portraits. If such an ambience cannot be used, scenery (in the way of backdrop-scenes, etc) should be avoided, and the scene suggested in the simplest way by occasional period furniture and a suspended picture or portrait or two.

It is inadvisable to use stage-built doors or even the actual doors of a College Hall. The doorway or entrance to the stage should be kept open. Only one entrance is needed.

The scene is meant to represent a chamber (possibly an upper chamber) in a Restoration-period house in London.

Drapes and curtains which make the acoustics dull should be avoided.

There is no need for a frontal curtain. The music gives time for Knipp's initial entry and final exit. Then blackout.

Lights need no very complex lighting plot. Side-lighting (with amber and pink) is advantageous as an addition to lighting from the front.

Furniture

1 not too large refectory-type oblong dining table.

1 folding free-standing screen about 5'6" tall, of leather or japanned panels, - ought to be a handsome piece.

2 occasional wooden big chairs of solid structure, carved (not Chippendale or Sheraton). One at side, one somewhere central.

1 solid period-type chair behind screen, invisible till screen is overturned, but then visible. Not modern bentwood, etc. Sir Peter may stand on it, when in hiding.

Whatever else is thought needful to dress stage without cluttering acting area or inhibiting movement.

Properties

It is a help if Knipp at his first entry to speak the Prologue has something to carry as if about some household duty. If he carries his own letter to Susan and hides it in the rose-bowl in view of the audience, it takes away some of the mystery as to its author, but he could perhaps bring on the rose-bowl itself with its contents and set it down.

1 rose-bowl containing (artificial) roses or similar flowers. No water.

1 letter, suitable for hiding among flowers.

1 Tray

1 Tablecloth suitable for table (brought in by Susan with the tray).

Assorted cutlery and glassware or drinking equipment, (probably not tankards), flagons, cordials,- on tray.

Fans for Lady Asymptote & Sarah, if thought necessary, probably hanging from wrists by cord.

Wrap for Lady Asymptote.

5 Play scripts of Sir Robert's Play, already on stage somewhere.

Assorted theatrical-disguise material for Mr Honeywood.

1 Wooden Casket about 14" x 8" x 7" for Sarah's musical box.

1 Straight stick (be-ribboned) for Sir Peter, if thought necessary.

Dance and movement

Movement in solo songs should not appear mechanically contrived (such as "cross left at line 3").

Natural movements are called for in the duet between Sir Robert & Sarah (p.12² [bar 243]), and an element of pursuit of Susan by Sir R (p.20 [from bar 359]).

The duet between Lady Asymptote & Sir Peter (p.29, et seq [from bar 588]) calls for a slow dance routine, very stylised and simple.

The 6/8 tempo (2 beats in a bar) which starts at the foot of p.62 [bar 1149] may need movement enough to underlay its agitation, and again on p.68 [bar 1257].

The ensemble starting at the foot of p.74 [bar 1367] does not go too fast, is sung *leggiero quasi sotto voce* but with punctilious enunciation. Some minimal movement might help after bar 2 on p.75 [bar 1370].

When this music is reprised on p.79 (Allegro) [bar 1431] it almost calls for ensemble dance of the pavane- or pazzamezzo-type steps done in twos or threes abreast. Movement should cease at the turn of the page to p.81 for the final ensemble [bar 1446].

During any movement, it is important that the eyes and mouths of the performers be visible to the whole audience all the time. Hence movements or dances, or indeed any manoeuvres of the

² In this section bar numbers in the typeset score have been added in square brackets, as the page numbers refer to the original manuscript score which is not published.

production, should not involve the players in turning their back while uttering. Even profile acting in side-view is ineffective in musical performance, and can lead to sloppy entries of the vocal part, & loss of the tempo, apart from inaudibility of text.

The Music

Metronome marks are given for the approximate speeds of the songs and ensembles. The recitative sections are not intended as replicas of Mozartian recitative, but are meant to be sung as near as possible in the rhythms and pitches given in the notation, keeping a basic pulse going throughout. *Rubato*, *colla voce*, *ad lib*, etc, are indications that some leeway may be given. But the underlying pulse must be resumed as soon as possible.

It is best for the singers to learn their parts in absolutely strict tempo to begin with, and then to relax the rigidity where necessary for fully dramatic rendering.

If the audience laughs during a set-piece, the music continues nonetheless. If during recitative, then a pause may be made if feasible to allow the laughter to abate before proceeding. But on the whole it will be found that despite laughter, there are few places where the music needs to stop.

The accompaniment is for piano and electronic organ. The pianist is the chief accompanist and needs to know the music well, so as to follow where necessary. Brilliant sight-reading will not serve. The organist should choose timbres which are as orchestral as possible.

If no organ is available, the organ part can be played by an intelligent player on a piano, altering his part to sustain.

Grand pianos are preferable to uprights, since the players can be so sited as to see over or round their music.

Pianists should play lightly, and avoid swamping the voices. There are only a few passages where a good rousing loudness is required, and these are indicated.

It may be desirable for production-purposes to cut the 2nd and 3rd bar of the Tempo at the foot of page 3 [bars 53 & 54].

On page 26 [bars 508 & 509], the coda of Lady Asymptote's song ("... blame him! Blame him!") can have an alternative end (not shown in the score). If Lady Asymptote proves to lack a suitable top D, the composer should be consulted.