

# **A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT**

*adapted from Mark Twain's novel  
by R. Rex Stephenson*

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***Dedication:*** for Christie

### **STORY OF THE PLAY**

**A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court** is a modernized version of Mark Twain's classic satire. Sir Boss, a computer wiz, is transported back in time to the age of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. After proving his "magic" is more powerful than Merlin's, Sir Boss begins to modernize Camelot. The new TV station has Morgan La Faye as chief newscaster and Merlin as the "predictor" of the weather; the Knights of the Round Table form a basketball team, the Camelot Pacers, and everyone is getting e-mail. All goes well until King Arthur and Sir Boss, disguised as peasants, travel through Camelot so the King can see how the common people really live. Morgan and Merlin take this opportunity to create mischief by having the two sold into slavery. The rescue and return of Sir Boss climaxes the play, capturing Twain's humor, inventiveness and dark undercurrents as well.

### **PRODUCTION HISTORY**

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court was first performed at the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre on the campus of Ferrum College in July of 1998. The show was produced under an Equity Guest Artist's Contract featuring Hal Blankenship as Merlin. Joe Ray directed the production. In the fall of 1999, the play was produced by William Monroe High School under the direction of Joyce Sweet and Mary Beth McNulty.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(flexible cast of 15, extras, doubling)*

**SIR BOSS:** A computer expert from the 20th century cast into the 6th century.

**SANDY:** A damsel in distress.

**SIR LANCELOT:** A Knight of the Round Table.

**KING ARTHUR:** The ruler of Camelot.

**MERLIN:** A Magician.

**MERLIN'S PAGE:** A young boy.

**CLARENCE (CLARICE):** An educated young man (or woman).

**GUARD \***

**PRIEST \***

**SIR KAY \*:** A knight.

**MORGAN LA FAYE:** Arthur's sister and an evil sorceress.

**JOHN \*:** An evil noble.

**SIR DINADAN \*:** A knight.

**SLAVE DEALER\***

**SLAVEDEALER'S PAGE**

**ADDITIONAL ROLES:** TAILOR, PAGES, COURTIERS, NOBLES, CHILDREN, BASKETBALL PLAYERS, SLAVES, EXTRAS. \*

*\*These roles can all be doubled or tripled. Many of these roles can also be played by females; for example the priest, the slave dealer, the page etc.*

### **SETTING**

The play is performed against a black background; the only decorations are a large, colorful map of a part of England, showing the locations of Camelot and other places mentioned in the play, and two long red banners. The map hangs at center against the black curtains, and the banners hang to the left and right of it. Against the back "wall" is a platform four feet high at stage left, connected by steps to a longer platform two feet high running from center to stage right. Steps to the stage floor at center connect this lower platform. Two benches sit upstage against the higher platform. They stay here throughout the play, and move forward into different positions as needed. King Arthur's throne is brought in from offstage each time it is needed. In addition to an entrance left, across the platforms and steps to the stage floor at center, there are entrances stage right and stage left. During Sir Boss's narration the action should go on around him in semi-darkness with only a light or two to illuminate him.

### **DIRECTOR'S NOTES**

The songs in the play are all Medieval or Elizabethan traditional tunes. "Go to King Arthur's" is the British round entitled, "Go to Joan (John) Glover." "Sing We Now Merrily" is another traditional British round. "Morgana" is to the tune of "To Portsmouth," a round for four voices." The musical underscoring for the Camelot news should sound like any national news theme music. The music for the Morris Dance can be found in C. Sharpe's "The Morris Book." The text also provides easy-to-follow directions to stage the dance. The original production used # 11; however, the Sword Dance could be substituted for the Morris. "Ma'am, Hang Me A Man" is set to the tune of the traditional round in three parts, "Dame, Lend Me A Loaf." If the director should desire not to use live music there are recordings of British rounds and country dance tunes which can be used to provide links between scenes. There has also been a production which used songs by Elvis Presley to link some of the scenes.

## Act I

*(After the HOUSE LIGHTS go out, there is darkness for a few seconds. Then there are FLASHES OF LIGHT and crashing SOUNDS of an explosion. The STAGE LIGHTS come on to reveal SIR BOSS on the highest platform in a crouching position, dazed and unsure of what has happened. SIR LANCELOT enters SL with his sword drawn; SANDY follows him. They stop SL, as he challenges Sir Boss.)*

LANCELOT: Yield, sorcerer! Nay, I'll kill ye with my sword.  
*(HE raises his sword.)*

BOSS: *(As HE works his way down the steps to the stage floor.)* What nonsense is this, and whose masquerade party are you on your way to?

LANCELOT: Yield. Put away your magic *(HE is a bit afraid.)* or I'll run you through.

BOSS: So, you're Sir Galahad, and this is a damsel in distress.

LANCELOT: No, I am Sir Lancelot and this damsel is in disguise.

SANDY: Strange sir *(SHE crosses between SIR BOSS and SIR LANCELOT removing a veil.)* my name is Cassandra La Feinter of Cornwall.

BOSS: Quite a handle. I'll just call you Sandy. Now, Lance—

LANCELOT: Stay where thou art. My sword is stronger than your magic.

SANDY: Spare him, Sir Lancelot. Spare him. Me thinkest he's not a sorcerer. Let him join our party.

BOSS: Sandy, I would like to come to your party later. Right now I'm working on a computer and it blew up. *(HE is wandering away SR, looking for his computer.)*

LANCELOT: Com-pu-ter?

BOSS: Yes. It was a Dell Computer 2000 – with Windows '98.

SANDY: Let us take this stranger to the King. He is a curiosity.

LANCELOT: Aye. That he is. But beware. By the look of his dress he must be a magician of some sort.

BOSS: (*UR of THEM.*) Are you both from an insane asylum? (*No answer.*) How far are we from Hartford?

LANCELOT: Never heard of the village of which you spake.

BOSS: (*Pointing out over the audience.*) There's a town over there. Is that Bridgeport?

LANCELOT: No. Camelot.

BOSS: Is that the name of the asylum?

*(LIGHTS go to black. SIR LANCELOT exits right. SANDY and SIR BOSS cross DR as a light comes up. During the following narration, KING ARTHUR'S throne is placed at center and the two benches are placed to the right and left of it. MUSIC for the song to come is played as King Arthur, MERLIN and his PAGE, the KNIGHTS OF THE ROUND TABLE, LADIES, and CHILDREN enter and take positions around the stage and on the benches. Sir Lancelot is in the SR area, Merlin and his Page are to the right of King Arthur.)*

BOSS: After a journey of about an hour I was led into a great room with many costumed men and women present. There was music and a bit of dancing. It was all very ... medieval.

*(MUSIC. ALL all sing the following song – twice in unison, three times as a round, and twice in unison, while the CHILDREN perform a simple dance.)*

**SONG** (*Round.*)

GO TO KING ARTHUR'S  
AND FEAST ON BROWN ALE.  
AND YOU AND I WILL  
IN THE MORNING TO DALE.

*(At the end of the song, the CHILDREN resume their places as the ADULTS applaud them.)*

BOSS: Where are we?

SANDY: In King Arthur's court. There are the Knights of the Round Table.

BOSS: What is today's date – if you don't mind, miss?

SANDY: The 19th, I think, of June, 528.

BOSS: What year?

SANDY: 528.

BOSS: But less than an hour ago it was 2000.

SANDY: What was?

BOSS: Never mind. Sandy, tell me why I am here.

SANDY: You are Sir Lancelot's prisoner. He will exhibit you to King Arthur and the other Knights of the Round Table and tell of your capture.

ARTHUR: *(Turns to LANCELOT.)* Sir Lancelot, you have a prisoner and an adventure to tell us about. I love stories. Don't keep me waiting.

LANCELOT: Yes, great liege. *(Crosses to DRC.)* I, Lancelot, rescued this damsel in distress, Cassandra La Feinter *(Pointing to SANDY.)* and was on my way to set her seven sisters free from the three ogres who held them captive when I ran into seven giants.

ARTHUR: Seven, Sir Lancelot? *(Meaning: Is that all?)* Seven?

LANCELOT: Nay, I think it more. Maybe fourteen!

COURT: Fourteen?! *(The COURT is impressed and shows it.)*

LANCELOT: Yes. Fourteen. *(HE begins to count on his fingers. When he gets to ten he cannot go any further; MERLIN sends his PAGE to Lancelot and Lancelot counts to fourteen using the Page's fingers.)* Yes, fourteen giants! *(MERLIN'S PAGE returns to his former spot.)*

BOSS: *(To SANDY.)* Who is that bearded fellow? Don't tell me, is he Merlin?

SANDY: Yes, Merlin. A prophet and a magician.

BOSS: And who's the little fellow Merlin sent to help Lancelot count?

**End of Freeview**