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Dramatic Publishing

NATHAN THE WISE

By
PAUL D'ANDREA

after

G. E. LESSING



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(NATHAN THE WISE)

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For my brother,
Mark M. D'Andrea Jr.

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the Play *must* give credit to the Author(s) of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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All producers of NATHAN THE WISE must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“Premiered by Theater of the First Amendment,
Fairfax, Virginia, on October 24, 2001.
Subsequently produced by Centro Dionysia, Rome, Italy,
on December 1, 2003.”

NATHAN THE WISE was originally produced by Theater of the First Amendment (Rick Davis, Artistic Director, Kevin Murray, Managing Director and Kristin Johnsen-Neshati, Artistic Associate) in Fairfax, Virginia, in October 2001. It was directed by Tom Prewitt; translation by Gisela D’Andrea and Paul D’Andrea; set design by Anne Gibson; lighting design by Lisa L. Ogonowski; sound design by David McKeever; costume design by Jelena Vukmirovic; the technical director was Ethan Osborne; the dramaturg was Mary Resing; the company manager was Kira Hoffmann; the assistant scenic designer and property manager was Eileen Daly; and the production stage manager was Cary Louise Duschl. The cast was as follows:

Nathan MITCHELL HEBERT
 Muslim Robber CARLOS J. GONZALEZ
 Christian Robber KYLE PRUE
 Saladin CRAIG WALLACE
 Sittah KIMBERLY SCHRAF
 Heraklios RALPH COSHAM
 Curd von Stauffen KYLE PRUE
 Recha MAIA DESANTI
 Daya LYNNIE RAYBUCK
 Bonfilio MORGAN DUNCAN
 Al-Hafi CARLOS J. GONZALEZ
 Ensemble BILLY CHACE, JEFF HINDMAN, JASON ROBERTS,
 PAUL SHERIDAN, NATHAN WOOLWINE

NATHAN THE WISE was produced by Il Centro Dionysia (Maria Nicoletta Gaida, Artistic Director) in Rome, Italy, in December 2003. It was directed by Domenico Polidoro, assisted by Andrea Baracco; the translation into Italian was by Georgia Gaida; with set design by Marco Brunetti; lighting design by Jurai Saleri; choreography by Francesco Manetti; original music by Massimo Torre Franca; costume design by Silvia Palmerani; the technical director was Enzo Ivan Sorbera; and the production stage manager was Anna Baldini. The cast was as follows:

Nathan ROBERTO MANTOVANI

Saladin ANTONIO TINTIS
 Sittah GABRIELA TOMASSETTI
 Heraklios RAFAELE MORELLATO LAMPIS
 Curd von Stauffen SANDRO CAMPAGNA
 Recha BEATRICE PRESEN
 Daya LUISA RICCI
 Bonfilio FRANCESCO MANETTI
 Al-Hafi RAFAELE MORELLATO LAMPIS
 Young Man/Angel ANDREA CAPALDI

NATHAN THE WISE was produced as a concert reading by Theater of the First Amendment (Rick Davis, Artistic Director, Kevin Murray, Managing Director and Kristin Johnsen-Neshati, Artistic Associate) in Fairfax, Virginia, on September 11, 2004. It was directed by Tom Prewitt; with set design by Anne Gibson; lighting design by Lisa L. Ogonowski; sound design by David McKeever; the technical director was Ethan Osborne; the company manager was Kira Hoffmann; and the stage manager was Lauren T. Hyland. The cast was as follows:

Nathan F. MURRAY ABRAHAM
 Muslim Robber CARLOS J. GONZALEZ
 Christian Robber PAUL TAKACS
 Saladin CRAIG WALLACE
 Sittah KIMBERLY SCHRAF
 Heraklios RALPH COSHAM
 Curd von Stauffen PAUL TAKACS
 Recha COLLEEN DELANEY
 Daya ROSEMARY KNOWER
 Bonfilio MORGAN DUNCAN
 Al-Hafi CARLOS J. GONZALEZ

NATHAN was produced for PBS broadcast by WETA/TV in Washington, D.C., in January 2002 with the original cast. The producer was Jackson Frost; the director was Joseph Camp; the executive producer was Jim Corbley; the executive in charge was Dalton Delan.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

At the beginning of the play Nathan speaks the first four verses of the Twenty-Third Psalm in Hebrew and then breaks off as he begins the fifth. "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want...Thou preparest a table before me..."

The script provides a phonetic rendering of the Hebrew words. The letters "ch" are pronounced as in "Johann Sebastian Bach."

The displays of skill with sword and scimitar in I.5 can be replaced with a choreographed duel, perhaps with dervish circlings for Saladin.

PRONUNCIATION

Al-Hafi	ahl hah FEE
Assad	ah SAHD
Ayyubites	AYE you bites
Bonfilio	bawn FEEL lee o
Darun	dah ROON
Daya	DIE uh
Heraklios	hair AHK lee us
Recha	RAY kuh
Saladin	sahl uh DEEN
Shariah	SHA ree ah
Siloa	sill OH uh
Sittah	SEE tah
von Stauffen	vawn SHTAU fin
Wolf von Filnek	WOLF vawn FILL neck

This play is an adaptation of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*. Lessing wrote *Nathan* in 1779 in honor of his friend Moses Mendelssohn, the advocate of Jewish emancipation, civil rights and enlightenment.

Nathan also presents a compelling portrait of Saladin, the Islamic warrior sultan, the George Washington of Muslim history. The story is based on the 1192 battle among Christian, Jew and Muslim for control of Jerusalem. The resolution comes from a challenge based on the concept of "the People of the Book," the surprising commonality of the three monotheistic faiths.

The challenge is itself based on ideas from Boccaccio's 1352 "Parable of the Rings" (*Decameron*, I.3).

NATHAN THE WISE

A Play in Two Acts
For 6 Men and 3 Women

CHARACTERS (in order of appearance)

NATHAN a wise and wealthy Jew, 60s
MUSLIM ROBBER (doubled by Al-Hafi)
CHRISTIAN ROBBER (doubled by Curd)
SALADIN . . . the sultan of the Middle East from Egypt to
Syria, ruling in Jerusalem, 55
SITTAH Saladin's sister, late 40s
HERAKLIOS Christian Patriarch of Jerusalem
RECHA Nathan's daughter, 16
DAYA Recha's governess, 40s
EXECUTED TEMPLARS (doubled by Sittah and Nathan)
EXECUTIONER (doubled by Al-Hafi)
CURD VON STAUFFEN . . a Christian Knight Templar, 24
BONFILIO a friar, 50s
AL-HAFI . . a Muslim whirling dervish, a mendicant monk,
40s

TIME AND SETTING:

The year is 1192. The place: Jerusalem at the time of the Third Crusade (1189-1192), during a truce offered by Saladin, victorious leader of the Saracens against the Crusaders.

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Although we can't see him yet, we hear NATHAN praying, wailing like a cantor, as he walks alongside his caravan in the desert. He is singing the 23rd Psalm.)

NATHAN *(off)*. Ha-SHEM RO-EE. LOH ech-SAR.
Bin-OHT DE-SHEH yar-bi-TSAY-nee.

(NATHAN enters. He has been traveling for more than six months, and is now about twenty miles from Jerusalem. Although he is strong, the journey has taken its toll on his almost seventy-year-old body. He climbs a rise, and looks out. In the distance he can see Jerusalem gleaming.)

NATHAN *(cont'd)*. Al-MAY me-noo-CHOT ye-nah
ha-LAY-nee. Naph-SHEE ye-sho-VEV yan-CHE-nee
ve-mah-geh-LAYEE TSE-dek le-MA-an she-MOH.
(Raising his hands to the heavens.) GAM kee ay-LECH
be-GAYEE tsal-MA-vet, loh-EE-RAH RAH kee-
ah-TAH ee-mah-DEE shiv-te-CHA—

(Unseen by NATHAN, two men—a MUSLIM ROBBER and a CHRISTIAN ROBBER—approach him stealthily.)

NATHAN (*cont'd*). —oo-mish-an-TE-cha HAY-mah
ye-nah-cha-MOO-nee. TAH-ah-ROCH—

(*CROSS-FADE TO:*)

SCENE 2

(*SALADIN, the sultan, strides to a public platform and stands between his sister SITTAH and the Christian Patriarch HERAKLIOS. CROWD noises.*)

SALADIN. I, Saladin, Improver of the World, have just returned from viewing the devastation of war. In disguise, I walked among the people. I saw old men and women crying, their leather faces so wrinkled the tears couldn't flow, caught in the creases like streams on a mountain. I saw a woman with dead eyes lullaby a dying child. I questioned: Why don't they revive the babe, husband the wife and bring harvest home? I therefore declare there shall be a truce in Jerusalem. (*SITTAH and HERAKLIOS are shocked.*) The treasure hitherto consumed by war shall be given to the poor. Christian and Jew may live in peace with Muslims. (*The CROWD breaks into shouts of joy and cries of "Truce in Jerusalem!" "O mighty Saladin!" and "Peace in our time!"*) Death to the man who breaks my law.

(*Angry, SITTAH turns and strides off. SALADIN follows her with his eyes and then turns to look at HERAKLIOS, who serenely brings his hands together in prayer. CROSS-FADE TO:*)

SCENE 3

(NATHAN is kneeling by his campfire. The TWO MEN approach NATHAN from behind. One has a broken piece of wood in his hand. The other has a knife. Without moving and without looking at them, NATHAN speaks.)

NATHAN. I'm baking bread. Can you smell it? It's pretty good. Considering there's no leaven. But, you know, any bread's good when you're hungry. *(The TWO MEN stop.)* In a few minutes it's ready. Eat with me. My caravan's rich. Richer, friends, than you can possibly rob. Eat. Put on new clothes. I'll give you more than you can steal—and we'll walk together the last day's journey to holy Jerusalem. See? There. *(NATHAN points to Jerusalem, out in the distance.)* Look, out there! The turrets of Jerusalem. The Dome of the Rock. The Tower of David. The Mount of Olives. The madness and the hope of all mankind meet, there—see!—there, in the dreaming city of Jerusalem. And, look! The setting sun has like a hunter cast a lariat around the turrets of Saladin, and edged them in gold. *(NATHAN turns to the TWO MEN.)* You are Christian and Muslim.

CHRISTIAN ROBBER. You are Nathan.

NATHAN. I am. Join a Jew in prayer.

MUSLIM ROBBER. To whom?

NATHAN. The one God.

CHRISTIAN ROBBER. You're a rabbi.

NATHAN. No, I'm not.

MUSLIM ROBBER. They call you Nathan the Wise.

NATHAN. I remember what I've seen and I have a pretty good idea of what I don't know. Is that wise, or is that common sense? Come.

CHRISTIAN ROBBER. Those Hebrew words. What do they mean?

NATHAN. "Thou preparest a table before me, in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over."

CHRISTIAN ROBBER. Ah. *(He kneels and crosses himself.)* "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life."

(The MUSLIM ROBBER kneels and prostrates himself.)

MUSLIM ROBBER. "And I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

(NATHAN offers his bread to the TWO MEN. They tear off pieces of the bread.)

CHRISTIAN ROBBER. Why do you help us?

NATHAN. I'm a man. I consider nothing that is human to be alien to me.

MUSLIM ROBBER. You give us bread. What do you want?

NATHAN. A husband for my daughter.

MUSLIM ROBBER. Hah!

NATHAN. Don't worry. I didn't have you in mind.

MUSLIM ROBBER. I meant—so rich and so foolish.

CHRISTIAN ROBBER. Nathan. We'll eat your bread.

MUSLIM ROBBER. But we won't take your money.

(The TWO MEN start to exit.)

CHRISTIAN ROBBER. May I say, Nathan. With this piece of bread and with peace in our time, we could earn our own money.

MUSLIM ROBBER. And so. Aspire higher, rabbi.

(NATHAN looks at them in surprise. The TWO MEN exit. CROSS-FADE TO:)

SCENE 4

(In NATHAN's house. RECHA and DAYA.)

RECHA. Oh, no, good nurse Daya. No one will ever take the place of my father Nathan! I have the best there ever was.

DAYA. That's what all the foolish young girls say. But now you are a woman! And now there is a truce. You can marry. I tell you, Recha, find a handsome young prince and run off with him. Perhaps to France. That way you can be a Christian! Like me! And then I can get back to France! To my home in Anjou. To Anjou, my poupou!

RECHA. I'm not your poupou. And I don't want to go to Anjou. I'm the daughter of a virtuous Jew. Why should I become a Christian?

DAYA. Aha!

RECHA. You're always aha-ing.

DAYA. If I could only talk!

RECHA. And there's another! What does that mean?

DAYA. I must not speak. I must be forever silent, tassel-turn, and even thumbstruck. But you, Recha, should long to be in love! Ah! Love! Love! Love!

RECHA. If love, love, love is so wonderful, why do you reject Al-Hafi? He's loved you ardent and faithful all these years!

DAYA. Al-Hafi is not a Christian. He is most irreligious. A Muslim. A disbeliever. An infantile! Perhaps even a Hereford! But if you fell in love with a Christian, then my most ardent wish would be fulfilled. To see you back in Europe, among people worthy of you.

RECHA. You love your people and I love you for it. But I want to stay with my father Nathan.

DAYA. Aha! Nathan!

RECHA. Yes, Nathan! What did he ever do to you, that you always try to seek my happiness elsewhere, away from him?

DAYA (*darkly*). If I could only talk.

RECHA. Daya, my darling, you talk all the time.

DAYA. Is your life perfect?

RECHA. Yes! It is, so leave it alone. It will be, if my father gets back safe to me. No, it isn't. Look at these wars! Daya, what if in this truce—Moses and Jesus and Muhammad appeared and told us to stop the wars! What if the three of them just showed up one fine day, arm in arm! Then the world would listen!

DAYA. Stop your fantasies! I know what's best for you. Fall in love. With some fine young man gleaming like an angel.

RECHA (*smiling in spite of herself*). An angel! Oh, Daya! A typical excellent, practical plan! And my dear nurse, how will I know that I've met a man like an angel?

DAYA. You'll know.

RECHA. How?

DAYA. Your knees will go weak.

SCENE 5

(SALADIN enters. He's angry. As he speaks, he's half dragging, half throwing about FIRST KNIGHT TEMPLAR.)

SALADIN *(enraged)*. Blood, you see, blood, flowed over my ankles on the battlefield! And in a ditch I saw a woman with dead eyes lullabying a child. *(SALADIN seizes a SECOND KNIGHT TEMPLAR, and throws him about.)* I—am—the—sultan. Improver of the world. But my title was a mockery in my throat. So I made a truce!

(SALADIN has set up the two KNIGHTS TEMPLAR for execution. The EXECUTIONER enters, leading another Templar, CURD VON STAUFFEN.)

SALADIN *(cont'd)*. You Knights Templar are mortal enemies of the Muslim faith. I let you live. And then you broke the truce! *(Beat.)* Execute them all. *(The FIRST and SECOND TEMPLARS bow their heads. The EXECUTIONER lifts his sword.)* You, leader of the Templars. Why did you break the truce?

CURD. My life had become a hollow nut.

SALADIN. What did you expect?

CURD. To die.

SALADIN. What do you expect?

CURD. Death.

(CURD turns. SALADIN stares at him and is surprised at what he sees.)

SALADIN. Serve me.

CURD. Impossible. I'm dead.

SALADIN. Then you're free of obligations. Serve me.

CURD. I will serve only a soldier better than myself.

SALADIN. Your rash statement convinces me. *(To the EXECUTIONER.)* Give this man your sword. *(The EXECUTIONER gives CURD the sword. To CURD:)* Show me your skill.

(CURD takes the sword, raises it over his head, and brings it crashing down on a wooden beam. He cuts the beam in two. SALADIN draws a piece of silk from his clothing. He throws it in the air. He draws his scimitar, and before the silk can fall, SALADIN cuts it into many pieces with his rapidly flashing scimitar. SALADIN points with his scimitar to the beam and the silk.)

SALADIN *(cont'd)*. Templar. Saladin. *(CURD kneels and presents the sword to SALADIN.)*

CURD. You are the greater warrior. My life is yours.

SALADIN *(to his SOLDIERS)*. Spare his life.

EXECUTIONER. Why, O Saladin?

(SALADIN fixes the EXECUTIONER with a look.)

SALADIN. Because once, a long time ago, my brother Assad was lost. He was a jewel of great price. A sun-

filled opal that I loved. Do it because once a babe was burnt and naked. Do it because it is the will of Saladin. *(To CURD.)* You have the freedom of the city. Do not leave Jerusalem. I have your word?

CURD. Yes.

SALADIN. Come to me tomorrow.

CURD. I shall.

EXECUTIONER. And the others?

SALADIN. Why, you'll have to kill them, won't you?

(Exit SALADIN. CURD recovers his poise, straightens, and swirls his cape. We can see that it is white with a red cross. He walks off. We see the sword being raised and then LIGHTS OUT.)

SCENE 6

(FRIAR BONFILIO is in attendance upon the Christian Patriarch HERAKLIOS. BONFILIO has an obsessive hand-wringing gesture that makes him look servile.)

HERAKLIOS. Saladin is a severe observer of the law. Yet. The truce has been broken. And a Templar was spared by Saladin, who executed all the other truce-breakers. Find out why. *(HERAKLIOS hands a letter to BONFILIO.)* Bear my message, just as I gave it to you, to the— *(enjoying the word)* Christian—Templar.

BONFILIO. O Heraklios, I cannot!

HERAKLIOS. *Just* as I gave it to you, on pain of excommunication.

BONFILIO. Yes, Eminence.

HERAKLIOS. Then find out everything you can about the Jew, Nathan.

BONFILIO. Yes, Patriarch.

HERAKLIOS. The wealth of the caravan. How he got his money.

BONFILIO. Through trade.

HERAKLIOS. Yes, trade, but sometimes there are little dubieties, little hedges. Saladin worships the law. Find out where Nathan has broken the law. Everyone breaks the law. Oh. And see if this Nathan has made any seditious remarks against Saladin. Maybe a jest, in wine. When you give confession, has anyone—?

BONFILIO. Master, I'll die on the rack before I'll reveal a syllable of any confession I have heard.

HERAKLIOS. Of course. So would I. You know this Nathan has publicly refused me money.

BONFILIO. He gives direct to the poor. Of all religions.

HERAKLIOS. Yes. He's very well liked, isn't he.

BONFILIO. Jews are free to live in Jerusalem. Free to be liked.

HERAKLIOS. Under the law. Don't forget the law. (*Beat.*)

GLOSSARY

Ayyubites	dynasty founded by Saladin
Hadith	maxims of the prophet Muhammad
Hajj	Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca
Ijtihad	independent reasoning
Shahadah	Muslim proclamation of faith
Shariah	Islamic holy law
Sunnah	customs imitating the actions of the prophet Muhammad
Zakat	alms given to assist the poor