

CANDIDE

OCTOBER 13-29, 2023

The Royal National Theatre Version
 Music by Leonard Bernstein Book Adapted from Voltaire by Hugh Wheeler
 In a New Version by John Caird
 Lyrics by Richard Wilbur Additional Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, John Latouche,
 Lillian Hellman, Dorothy Parker, and Leonard Bernstein
 Choreographed by Ryan Cappleman
 Music Direction by Jeffrey Saver
 Directed, Scenic Design, and Puppet Design by James Ortiz



1956 Original Broadway Production

On December 1, 1956, *Candide* first opened on Broadway as a musical at the Martin Beck Theatre. The premiere was directed by Tyrone Guthrie and conducted by Samuel Krachmalnick. It starred Robert Rounseville as Candide, Barbara Cook as Cunegonde, Max Adrian as Dr. Pangloss, and Irra Peta as the Old Woman. In 1974, directing legend Harold Prince commissioned a new, one-act book from Hugh Wheeler, and Bernstein continued to make edits until his final revised version premiered in 1989.



Members the cast of Skylight's 1992 version of *Candide* and the construction crew at the site of what was then the brand new Broadway Theatre Center.

Through all of its productions and permutations, it has gathered 10 legendary writers received five Tony awards including Best Book and Best Musical Revival, five Drama Desk Awards, and two Laurence Olivier Awards. We are presenting London's National Theatre version, which reimagines this masterwork by combining several previous versions.

Bridging the gap between musicals and opera, the operetta of *Candide* holds a special place in Skylight's history, having been produced twice before at the old space on Jefferson Street. This is its first time on the Cabot stage.

Candide was originally scheduled in 2020 as part of Skylight's 60th season. After three long years, we are thrilled to finally have this production as our 64th season opener.

Costume Designs Come to Life (Costume Design by Shima Orans)

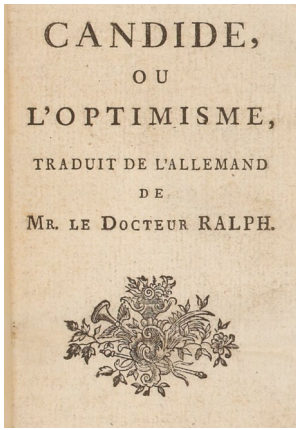


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The Enlightenment and Voltaire's *Candide*



Candide's source was a novella published in 1759 by the French writer Voltaire (1694-1778). The novella, one of the most memorable satires in all of literature, is rooted in historical events of its time, such as the European Seven Years' War (1756-1763), the execution of Admiral Byng in 1757, the Anglo-French War over Canadian territory, the 1755 Lisbon earthquake, and more. This period of political unrest was followed by the beginning of the Enlightenment, a movement that began when philosophers like Voltaire began questioning European beliefs and speaking out against intolerance and injustice. Essentially, the Enlightenment questioned traditional views of science, religion, and the state. Enlightenment thinkers believed that reason and scientific experiments should be used instead of doctrine and custom in order to ultimately transform and improve life and society. They also advocated for greater legal and social equality. The supporters of the Enlightenment revolted against superstition, prejudice, and fear. As a result, they consistently attacked the aristocracy and the church.

Candide satirizes and criticizes almost every powerful institution of Voltaire's time and reflects his ultimate disgust for Christian power systems and the arrogance of the nobility. Characters such as the Grand Inquisitor, the Bulgarian captain, and the proud young baron show the prejudices and irrationality of 18th-century institutions. That direct and disrespectful criticism of subjects, considered sacred centuries earlier, is central to both the Enlightenment and the work of Voltaire. So is the belief in the power of the human mind and the equality of men, best represented by the garden at the end of the novel.

Because of its scandalous nature, *Candide* was published secretly and anonymously. In fact, the exact time of its publication is unknown. But in mid-January 1759, Voltaire's publisher sent 1,000 copies of *Candide* to Paris and in late February the author's identity was revealed. The police were ordered to confiscate any copies of *Candide* that were found, but the controversy only increased the popularity of the book. By the end of the year, at least seventeen editions of the work had appeared. Religious officials declared the book "full of dangerous religious principles and prone to moral corruption." Nevertheless, *Candide* was adored by the reading public and since the late 1800s *Candide* has been recognized as a masterpiece.

Bernstein's *Candide*



Candide was later adapted into an operetta by the world-renowned composer, conductor, and educator, Leonard Bernstein. Bernstein is greatly known for combining classical music, popular styles, and theater in works of all genres. A dedicated music teacher, Bernstein participated in the Tanglewood Music Festival from its inception in 1940, winning awards for his influential televised youth concerts with the New York Philharmonic. He also conducted major orchestras around the world, serving as the music director of the New York Philharmonic from 1958 until 1969.

Candide was originally presented in 1956 by Lillian Hellman as a play with accompanying music in the style of her earlier work, *The Lark*. However, Bernstein was so excited by the idea that he convinced Hellman to turn it into a "comic operetta" for which she wrote the original libretto. Since 1974, it has been mainly performed with a book by Hugh Wheeler, which is more authentic to Voltaire's novel. The main lyricist was the poet Richard Wilbur, while other writers of the text include John Latouche, Dorothy Parker, Lillian Hellman, Stephen Sondheim, John Mauceri, John Wells, and Bernstein himself. Maurice Peress and Hershy Kay orchestrated all

but the overture, which Bernstein did himself. Although *Candide* was not successful at its premiere, its later versions have achieved great renown, respect and popularity.

The Mastermind Behind the Puppets, James Ortiz

Candide marks Ortiz's return to Skylight after wowing audiences with his astounding vision for Skylight's production of Grétry's opera, *Beauty and the Beast* (*Zémire et Azor*) in 2017, for which he directed and designed scenery and puppets. His memorable, larger-than-life *Azor* puppet was operated by four dancers. Ortiz recently created the puppet design for the 2022 Broadway revival of *Into the Woods* and earned the 2022 Drama Desk Award for his puppet design for Lincoln Center's *The Skin of Our Teeth*. His acclaimed production of Off-Broadway's *The Woodsman* won him a 2016 Obie Award. Ortiz had begun work on the 2020 production of Skylight's *Candide* when the pandemic shut down the process.



Photo by Mark Frohna



Photo by Mark Frohna

Q&A with Director, Designer, James Ortiz

Michael Unger: Can you tell us a bit about what makes your *Candide*, your *Candide*?

James Ortiz: Certainly. It has a long history of being this absurdist romp and quite a mad, mad, mad, mad, mad, world, rat race, travelogue energy. The more I kept working on it, the more I kept dreaming about it, the more I kept thinking about it, the more I realized it's not a show about people traveling. It's a show about people growing and changing and trying to be better people. As soon as that was clear to me, I no longer felt beholden to set it in the French Enlightenment. I could make it about what it means to be a good person and how absolutely absurd that sometimes is.

MU: So, where did you set it?

JO: Since so much of the story is about a group of characters that are rule-following perfectionists, and complete optimists to the point where they have no relationship with bad feelings or bad things whatsoever – a pretty extreme idea to begin with – how do you communicate that in a powdered wig? How can that make sense to a contemporary audience. I love a period drama but sometimes that period can distract from what we're trying to say.

So, because of this perfect, clean, optimistic universe I ended up setting it in a surreal version of the suburban 1950s – the era when the operetta was written; closer to the realm of "Leave It to Beaver," a manicured, tidy, organized kind of universe. I think of it like *Candide* is going on a Rumspringa. An optimistic little light bulb goes on a quest and learns about himself, the world, and how to live in it; and hopefully has enough equipment to be able to get through it.

The surreal quality became very interesting to me. I started pulling from surreal painters like Dali, Magritte, and Escher; and asked how we can expand the universe of *Candide's* mind. In a lot of ways, I think the show is inside of his head. We go to a lot of dark places in the show so I thought it would be interesting if we exaggerated some of these darker, more villainous characters in the form of enormous puppets.

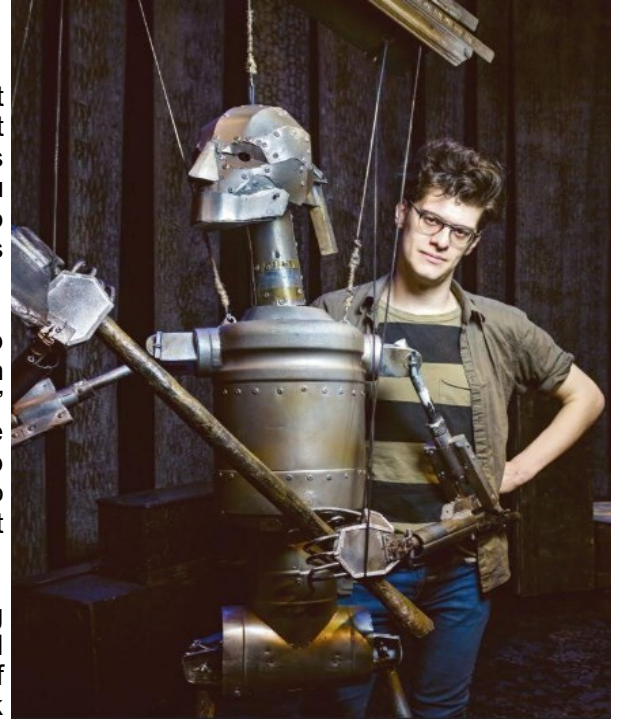


Photo of James Ortiz with the Woodsman puppet by Jacobia Dahm



James Ortiz's puppet design for *Peter Pan and Wendy* at The Shakespeare Theatre.
Photo courtesy of Scott Suchman

MU: How has this production been customized for the "Skylight Treatment"?

JO: The assignment was look for ways to simplify – cast size, production, etc. *Candide* is normally performed with a very large cast. We have a cast of 11 which means that means that everybody is playing a million parts, which actually adds to the buoyancy of the show. It also means that I don't want to see the actor that played his parental figure in one scene become a monster to him in the next. So, this is when puppetry becomes our friend.

MU: In *Candide* we are in many places and never the same place twice. How have you handled that in terms of your scenic design.

JO: We play into the surrealist idea by creating a playful world in which anything can happen. We also have projections to help us define location quickly and economically. Also, we are not slavishly sticking to the 1950s as the show evolves. At the top of the show there's a presentational, courtliness quality. In Voltaire's novel, these are German aristocrats of the 1640s. There's a quality in the way that they behave. While we're not going to change that quality of speech and pattern, I asked myself, what is the closest equivalent for a contemporary audience? The 1950s, where things are just a little performative.

I was excited to incorporate a giant light bulb that keeps coming in and out of the show. When characters have huge transformations, we use the light bulb to humorous and great effect. It brings me a lot of joy to literally illuminate it over their heads.

Q&A with Director, Designer, James Ortiz (Continued)

MU: Having seen some rehearsals, I would say your production is incredibly inventive and like no *Candide* anyone as seen before. If you know *Candide*, you will love how refreshing this production is. And if you don't know *Candide*, you'll find this a very contemporary musical offering. It's definitely a win/win! Talk to me a little bit about how we got from what Voltaire wrote, to what Bernstein (and his gaggle of many writers) wrote, to what Ortiz is putting on the stage.

JO: I approached it like I was directing Shakespeare in that there's a boatload of references that Elizabethan people would have gotten that we just don't. And how can we simplify and contextualize? I can do all the dramaturgy I want, but if the sense doesn't get on stage, then what's the point? So, it became about deciding what is the equivalent of this moment?

I started with spending a lot of time with the material, of course: with Voltaire, with Bernstein and Lillian Hellman and Sondheim and everybody else on that list – because it has a long history of rewrites. I thought to myself, “There has to be a way to make this clearer or crisper or richer or fuller. We're also in a post-everything-that-happened-in-2020 world. And it was important for me that our female characters had more going on than, perhaps, the original, which is reflected in our staging. We are making space with great respect for what Voltaire wrote for some of the female characters. He sort of wrote them in a little corner so they could be simpler ideas on *Candide's* journey. But it was important for me that there was a lot more going on for them.



Hydra battle from *Hercules* at New York's Public Theater - Photo courtesy of Joan Marcus.

MU: What would Voltaire think if he came to this production at Skylight?

JO: He would ask, “How did we discover electricity and why are these lights so bright?” Voltaire spoke for a generation, which is the most impossible thing that anybody could possibly do. He was this voice of what irony can be. He was always offering very biting commentary and aggressively writing about all the awful things that he was seeing in the world. The characters in that world are either saying, “Well, that's just the way it is,” or they're aggressing against it, as he did. Voltaire pulled his punches in a really funny way that I think is interesting. He sometimes goes really, really hard with some of these moments of extreme darkness. And then he'll put in a really humorous pratfall. I think he was somebody who knew his audience and how to keep the ball in the air.

So, I think he would enjoy the show for that reason. I think the spirit of this production is ultimately one of buoyancy that can stop for a moment of poignancy. We kept saying in the rehearsal room, “It must be full, but it also just needs to be true, which is not the same thing as real.” I think Voltaire would also say, “Sorry, I really did create a bizarre tone poem for you to chase.”

MU: For all the talk of how unabashed optimism doesn't necessarily work and all the irony surrounding that word, is this an optimistic show?

JO: I think it has an adult view of optimism. But it's optimism on your own terms. These are very young people who then grow up to be adults. So, when you start thinking about child development and unabashed optimism, there are conversations around, “Don't cry, be happy,” things that no good parent would say. All of these ideas are connected to the journey of oneself; self-confidence, self-acceptance, self-love, believing in yourself, trusting other people. These are all the things that *Candide* learns as he collects people along his way. He has a Scarecrow, a Tin Man, a Dorothy. He has all of these friends that come along with him. If you put them all together, they would make the perfectly realized person, which I think is why he needs to learn from each of them. They are his chosen family. So, by the end of the show, yes, I think it says that it is important to be optimistic. But that may not be the word anymore, and that the point of life is to live it.

There's never going to be a satisfying answer to what is the meaning of life. So, the answer is you're doing it. You have been doing the meaning of life all along. It is about bliss and surrender and vulnerability. I think that's ultimately what we're building towards at the end, which is better than optimism. The two extremes of optimism and nihilism are represented by *Candide* and *Martin*, respectively. Everything else is in between those two – everything else is simply being a person.

Skylight
music theatre

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