

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

The Scarlet Pimpernel is a musical with music by Frank Wildhorn and lyrics and book by Nan Knighton, based on the novel of the same name by Baroness Orczy. The show is set in England and France during the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution. The story is a precursor to the spy fiction and the superhero genres, where a hero hides under a mild-mannered alias.

The Scarlet Pimpernel started as a workshop with Carolee Carmello as Marguerite and directed by Nick Corley, following a concept album.

The musical debuted on Broadway at the Minskoff Theatre on October 7, 1997 in previews, officially on November 9, 1997. Directed by Peter H. Hunt, it starred Douglas Sills (Sir Percy Blakeney), Christine Andreas (Marguerite St. Just), and Terrance Mann (Citizen Chauvelin).



In June shortly before the Tony Awards were announced, the show was slated to close. The show's fans known as "The League" decided it should have another try. With falling ticket sales, the show ushered in new producers and reopened with Sills and two new leads, Rex Smith and Rachel York and a vastly rearranged production in October 1998 (a year after the previous opening). The show closed at the Minskoff Theatre on May 30, 1999. It had a mini-tour of a scaled-down version in the summer of 1999 with three new leads. The revised version...opened on Broadway at the Neil Simon Theatre on September 7, 1999, closing on January 2, 2000 for a grand total of 772 performances and 39 previews. The cast starred Ron Bohmer, Marc Kudisch and Carolee Carmello. Like Wildhorn's two other big budget Broadway efforts (*Jekyll & Hyde* and *The Civil War*), the musical closed having lost money.

A US National tour ran from February 2000 through April 2001. The musical has had numerous international and regional US productions, including three runs at HCT in 2002, 2004, and 2009.

Adapted from Wikipedia

Main Characters

Sir Percy Blakeney: He is a wealthy English baronet who rescues individuals sentenced to death by the guillotine. He soon reveals himself to be a master of disguise, an imaginative planner, a formidable swordsman and a quick-thinking escape artist. With each rescue he taunts his enemies by leaving behind a card showing a small flower—a scarlet pimpernel. The identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel thus becomes a topic of widespread popular interest and the hero himself becomes the subject of an international manhunt by the French revolutionary authorities. To hide his true identity, Sir Percy presents himself in everyday life as a dim-witted, foppish playboy. His secret is kept by a band of friends known as The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. The league operates as an undercover team in enacting Sir Percy's rescue plans.



Marguerite Blakeney, née St Just: She is the wife of Sir Percy. She leads London society with her beauty, style and intelligence. She was an actress in Paris, where she held salons to discuss the issues of the day. She was not an aristocrat in French society.

Armand St Just: Older brother of Marguerite, who raised her after their parents died. He is a gentleman and a republican in France, but his views of the slaughter of the aristocracy do not match the times.

Citizen Chauvelin: Newly appointed envoy to England from Revolutionary France. He seeks the Scarlet Pimpernel, who is allowing aristocrats to escape their fate under the new regime. His character is based to some extent on the real-life Bernard-François, marquis de Chauvelin, who survived the Revolutionary period to serve as an official under Napoleon. He was a noted liberal Deputy under the Bourbon Restoration.

Adapted from Wikipedia

Synopsis

ACT I

Paris. May of 1794. At the bloody peak of the French Revolution, the beautiful actress Marguerite St. Just falls in love with an Englishman, Sir Percival “Percy” Blakeney. After a whirlwind courtship, she announces their engagement at her farewell performance at the *Comedie Francaise* (“Storybook”). Chauvelin, a high-ranking revolutionary official and Marguerite’s former lover, is furious. On the night Marguerite leaves for England with Percy and her brother, Armand, Chauvelin blackmails her into giving him secret information about the Marquis de St. Cyr, a friend of Percy’s whom Chauvelin promises will not be harmed. But Chauvelin uses this information to trap and execute St. Cyr and his family, along with scores of other innocent Frenchmen (“Madame Guillotine”).



In England, Percy and Marguerite are married (“You Are My Home”), but Percy is appalled to discover his new bride was responsible for the death of

his friend, St. Cyr. Fearing he has married a French spy, Percy sends a confused Marguerite off to bed alone on their wedding night (“Prayer”).

Determined to somehow right the wrong his wife has done, Percy persuades his friends to join him in a private war against the inhumanities of the bloody French regime. As *The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel*, they’ll work through disguise and diversion to save as many innocent lives as they can. Boarding a schooner to sail to France, Percy and his men fight back their fears (“Into the Fire”). By early July, Percy (a.k.a. The Scarlet Pimpernel) has pulled off one clever rescue after another, and Chauvelin responds with a fiery determination to catch this mysterious rebel (“Falcon in the Dive”).

Back in England, Percy and his men have now become virtual caricatures of their dandified, foppish selves in order to deflect suspicion from their heroic activities in France. They facetiously speculate about the identity of their new British hero, “The Scarlet Pimpernel.” Marguerite, baffled by this new distant and inane Percy, laments their marital estrangement (“When I Look at You”).

Chauvelin arrives in England and asks Marguerite to help him discover the identity of The Scarlet Pimpernel, but she angrily refuses. Realizing that Marguerite is unhappy in her marriage, Chauvelin reminds her of the passions they shared early in the revolution (“Where’s The Girl?”). Marguerite rejects his advances. Meanwhile, despite a lack of trust in her, Percy continues to secretly love his wife.

Percy and his men are summoned to the Royal Palace by the Prince of Wales, who suspects they may have something to do with The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. They persuade the Prince, however, that their frequent trips to France are merely to buy frills and frou-frou (“The Creation of Man”). Meanwhile, Chauvelin meets secretly with Marguerite, informing her that her beloved brother, Armand, has been arrested in Paris as a member of the Pimpernel’s League. He insists she spy for him at the Royal Ball that night. If she fails to come up with information about the Pimpernel, Armand will be guillotined. Marguerite, Chauvelin and Percy eye one another warily, as all three wonder who exactly can be trusted in this slippery world (“The Riddle”).



ACT II

That night, at the Royal Ball, Percy continues his public disguise as England’s greatest fool, joking about the elusive Pimpernel and mocking the stony-faced Chauvelin (“They Seek Him Here”). Undeterred, Chauvelin commands Marguerite to uncover the identity of the Pimpernel, and she arranges to meet the Pimpernel outside on the footbridge. When Percy arrives, disguising his voice and keeping in the shadows, Marguerite confesses that she spied and attempted to expose him, but it all stemmed from Chauvelin’s coercion and blackmail. She warns the Pimpernel to run from Chauvelin, and begs him to help her save her brother. Percy sends his wife away, and releases his great joy at discovering that she has only been an innocent victim (“She Was There”).

Percy and his men set off for France to save Armand, but Marguerite also secretly travels to Paris. Disguising herself as a French tart, she tries to cajole information about her imprisoned brother from two soldiers. Chauvelin, however, instantly sees through her disguise, and orders both Armand and Marguerite to be sentenced to the guillotine. Embittered at his realization that Marguerite will never return his love, Chauvelin finally drives her out of his heart (“Where’s The Girl – Reprise”).

In prison, Marguerite tries hard not to think of Percy (“I’ll Forget You”). Resolved to catch the Pimpernel, Chauvelin allows Marguerite and Armand to escape and sets a trap for all of them. As everyone converges on stage, Marguerite finally learns that the Scarlet Pimpernel is actually her own husband, Percy. Percy and Chauvelin confront each other in the ultimate swordfight and showdown, and although Percy seems certainly doomed to death, he manages to outwit Chauvelin one last time. Finally, Percy and Marguerite are reunited and able to trust one another (“When I Look At You – Reprise”). The full company joins in to celebrate this triumph of the human spirit (“Into The Fire – Reprise”).

Adapted from Tams-Whitmark Music Library, Inc.

Commercial recordings

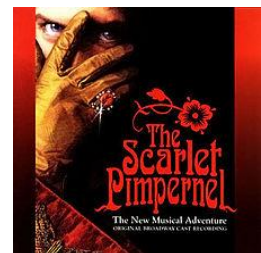


Concept Album (1992)

Features Chuck Wagner as Percy, Linda Eder as Marguerite and David Clemmons as Chauvelin. Orchestrations on this album are more contemporary versions than are found in other recordings of the show. Songs that are exclusive to this release are: "Home Again," "Marguerite" (Substituted later for "Where's The Girl?"), "Now When the Rain Falls," "Our Separate Ways" and "There Never Was A Time."

Original Broadway Cast Album (1998)

Features Douglas Sills as Percy, Christine Andreas as Marguerite and Terrence Mann as Chauvelin. This recording has songs from the first version of the Broadway production which had some major alterations later on.



Encore! Album (1999)

Features the same cast as the OBC Album. Only four songs were re-recorded for this album. Rex Smith recorded "Where's The Girl" and "Falcon in the Dive" while Rachel York sings "Storybook" and "I'll Forget You." Also included are "You Are My Home," originally from the concept album, and "Only Love," originally from the OBC Album.

Adapted from Wikipedia



Frank Wildhorn

Composer (1959- present)

Multi-Grammy and Tony Award nominated composer/producer Frank Wildhorn's works span the worlds of popular, theatrical, and classical music. In 1999, Wildhorn became the first American composer in 22 years to have three shows running simultaneously on Broadway: *Jekyll & Hyde*, which received four Tony nominations; *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, which received three Tony nominations; and *The Civil War*, which received two Tony nominations. He also wrote additional songs for Broadway's *Victor/Victoria* and was represented on Broadway by *Dracula: The Musical* and *Wonderland*. Wildhorn was also a producer and co-creator for *Harlem Song*, the first open-ended theatrical run at the famed Apollo Theater in New York City.

International projects include: *Carmen*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *Never Say Goodbye*, *Rudolf: The Last Kiss*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *Dracula*, and *Tears of Heaven*. U.S. projects include: *Bonnie & Clyde*, *Zelda*, and *Camille Claudel*, which yielded the song "Gold," heard at the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, Utah. Upcoming projects include: *Havana*, *Casanova*, *Excalibur*, *Mata Hari*, *Ali*, and *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*.

Wildhorn is an associate artist in musical theatre with an endowed chair at the Alley Theatre in Houston, TX, where he launched *Jekyll & Hyde* (1990), *Svengali* (1991), and *The Civil War* (1998). He also wrote music for Arthur Kopit's play *The Road to Nirvana* and scored the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

Adapted from FrankWildhorn.com



Nan Knighton

Book/Lyrics (1947-present)

Nan Knighton received a Tony nomination for Best Book of a Musical for *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, for which she also wrote the lyrics to Frank Wildhorn's music. *Pimpernel* ran on Broadway for three seasons, went on to two U.S. National Tours, and has been produced all around the world....Her most recent work with Wildhorn (apart from several songs she contributed to the new musical *Rudolf* which premiered in Budapest, Hungary and is also playing in Vienna, Austria) is *Camille Claudel*, for which she wrote book and lyrics.... Ms. Knighton wrote the stage adaptation for Robert Stigwood's *Saturday Night Fever*, which received an Olivier nomination for Best Musical in London's West End. *SNF* went on to play on Broadway for two seasons followed by several tours in the U.S., Europe, Australia, and Asia. Ms. Knighton's play *Man With Two Hearts Found on Moon* received its first reading at The Roundabout Theatre, starring Swoosie Kurtz and Neil Patrick Harris. It is currently in development along with her mystery play *Bad Dreams*.

As a lyricist, Ms. Knighton has also worked with composers Jonathan Larson (*Rent*), Robert Lindsey Nassif (*Eliot Ness in Cleveland*), and Howard Marren (*Paramour*). Her original musical *Snapshots* (with music by Mr. Marren) received its first reading at the Manhattan Theatre Club.... Ms. Knighton's song "You Are My Home" (with music by Mr. Wildhorn, recorded by Linda Eder and Peabo Bryson) reached the Top 40 A/C List. Her song "Gold" (also with music by Wildhorn) received its international debut at the Opening Ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Ms. Knighton has also written for public television and film (*My Little Girl*, starring James Earl Jones and Geraldine Page). She has been published in the Michigan Quarterly Review, and has served as a judge for both The Kleban Foundation Award and The Young Playwrights Festival. Ms. Knighton is an alumna of Harvard University and Sarah Lawrence College, from which she received her B.A. degree. She received her M.A. from Boston University, where she is proud to have studied with both novelist John Barth and poet Anne Sexton.

Adapted from NanKnighton.com



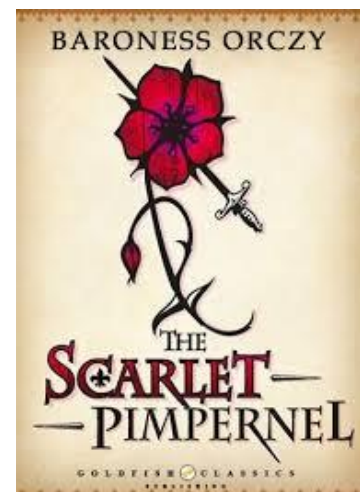
Baroness Emma Orczy

Author (1865-1947)

Baroness Emma Orczy was a Hungarian-born British novelist and playwright. She is best known for her series of novels featuring the Scarlet Pimpernel.

In 1903, she and her husband wrote a play based on one of her short stories about an English aristocrat, Sir Percy Blakeney, who rescued French aristocrats from the French Revolution: *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. She submitted her novelization of the story under the same title to 12 publishers. While waiting for the decisions of these publishers, Fred Terry and Julia Neilson accepted the play for production in London's West End. Initially, it drew small audiences, but the play ran four years in London, broke many stage records, eventually playing more than 2,000 performances and becoming one of the most popular shows staged in Britain. It was translated and produced in other countries, and underwent several revivals. This theatrical success generated huge sales for the novel.

Orczy went on to write over a dozen sequels featuring Sir Percy Blakeney, his family, and the other members of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, of which the first, *I Will Repay* (1906), was the most popular. The last Pimpernel book, *Mam'zelle Guillotine*, was published in 1940. None of her three subsequent plays matched the success of *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. She also wrote popular mystery fiction and many adventure romances. Her *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard* was an early example of a female detective as the main character. Other popular detective stories featured *The Old Man in the Corner*, a sleuth who chiefly used logic to solve crimes.



Themes and Symbols

Heroism and Disguise

Introducing the notion of a “hero with a secret identity” into popular culture, the Scarlet Pimpernel exhibits characteristics that would become standard superhero conventions, including the penchant for disguise, use of a signature weapon (sword), ability to out-think and outwit his adversaries, and a calling card (he leaves behind a scarlet pimpernel at each of his interventions). By drawing attention to his alter ego Blakeney he hides behind his public face as a slow thinking foppish playboy (like Bruce Wayne), and he also establishes a network of supporters, The League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, that aid his endeavors.

Adapted from Wikipedia

The Scarlet Pimpernel

The flower known as the "the Scarlet Pimpernel" is, according to the narrator, "the name of a humble English wayside flower; but it is also the name chosen to hide the identity of the best and bravest man in all the world." The flower, then, which has become Percy's moniker symbolizes all his best qualities -- his English charm, his humble origins, and his innate humility as a hero that expects no reward for his deeds. Perhaps the most admirable thing about Percy is that he's willing to appear stupid, even buffoonish, in order to secretly continue his missions as the Pimpernel. Indeed, behind a deceptively humble front dwells a hero.



From GradeSaver.com

Loyalty

“I would say that the main theme of the Scarlet Pimpernel is Loyalty. Loyalty to one’s country, one’s family, one’s husband/wife, etc. Marguerite must choose between her loyalty to her country, France, and her loyalty to her husband. She is also torn between her loyalty to the Scarlet Pimpernel, whose actions she strongly believes in, and her loyalty to her brother Armand. In the end she chooses passion over what is proper (serving her country through Chauvelin). She loves the Pimpernel and Armand so much that she betrays Chauvelin and France for them.

Though it is subtle, one can read from Chauvelin’s character that he is also torn – between his thirst for glory for himself and his thirst for glory for France. That is why he does not tell Robespierre that he knows the identity of the Pimpernel – he wants the glory all for himself when he single-handedly captures the Pimpernel. He plans and carries out all these schemes for breaking Marguerite and killing the Pimpernel, and says it all for the good of France. But from his little sarcastic insults, manipulation, and twists, you can see that Chauvelin enjoys ruining people because he is egotistical and it makes him feel better.

So, the question she asks is, what is more important? Loyalty to yourself and your morals, or your country and its morals?”

By Catherine Pore from Weebly.com

Political and Social Order

People throughout the world have had differing interpretations of the French Revolution. Many people who have studied the events of the Revolution over the last two centuries have viewed the French aristocrats as selfish, wealthy, and oppressive villains who largely deserved their violent fate. Baroness Orczy's *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, however, reflects a different vision of the Revolution and the social classes involved.

Orczy's novel presents a highly sympathetic view of nobility. The main characters, including the Scarlet Pimpernel himself, are all aristocrats. The tremendous hardships faced by French nobles such as the de Tournay family are highlighted, along with their innocence of any specific crimes. Deep sympathy is expressed for the injustices done to them: "The daily execution of scores of royalists of good family, whose only sin was their aristocratic name, seemed to cry for vengeance to the whole of civilised Europe" (*Scarlet Pimpernel*, p. 20). This viewpoint, which holds that innocent French nobles are being forced to pay for their ancestors' oppression of the people, is repeated throughout the book.

Not all French aristocrats are portrayed as ideal people in the novel, however. The narrator describes the Comtesse de Tournay as a woman possessed of the typical haughty, rigid bearing of her class. After coldly voicing her desire to never meet Marguerite because of her past denunciation of a noble family in France, the countess is described as being "encased in the plate-armour of her aristocratic prejudices... rigid and unbending..." (*Scarlet Pimpernel*, p. 35).

While some members of the nobility are portrayed in an unfavorable light, much sympathy is still shown for them in the story. The lower classes, on the other hand, are frequently described in extremely unflattering terms. The first sentence of the novel, for example, refers to the common people of Paris as "a surging, seething, murmuring crowd, of beings that are human only in name, for to the eye and ear they seem naught but savage creatures, animated by vile passions and by the lust of vengeance and of hate" (*Scarlet Pimpernel*, p. 1). The violent excesses of the lower classes are characterized as horrible and disturbing throughout the story, further evidence that Orczy's novel is a presentation of the French Revolution from the perspective of the nobles of France.

From Encyclopedia.com

