

FIRE OF VESUVIUS

An Accompany Publishing Musical Play

CHARACTERS

The PHILOSOPHERS:

Cornelius, the town thinker
Lydia, his scientist wife
Julia, their 13 year-old
daughter
Marcus, their son

The NOBLES:

Flavius, Consul of Pompeii
Holconius, the Wine Merchant
Priest of Vulcan
Felix the Baker
Patrician #1, #2
Noble Woman #1, #2
Town Herald

The YOUNG GLADIATORS:

Drusus, a 12 year-old boy
Octavius, his friend
Drusus' Mother
Octavius' Mother

The CAPITO TWINS:

Helen
Ajax

The MESSENGERS:

Laertes
Marcellus

The ORACLE AT DELPHI:

Priestess #1, #2, #3

The ROMAN SOLDIERS:

Roman Soldier #1
Roman Soldier #2
Roman Soldier #3
Roman Soldier #4

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SCENES

Scene One: The Forum, Pompeii

Songs: *"If Mount Vesuvius Could"*
"Burning In Our Minds" [short version]
"Colosseum"

Scene Two: An Alleyway

Songs: *"We Could Use A Rock Or Two"*

Scene Three: The Home of Cornelius and Lydia

Scene Four: The Foothills of Mount Vesuvius

Scene Five: The Forum, later that morning

Songs: *"Burning In Our Minds"*
"Gone But Not Forgotten"

SCENE ONE

August 24, 79 A.D. Pompeii. Morning.

The Forum, the Center of Pompeii. In the background is the Temple of Jupiter, the most important building in the city of Pompeii. Behind the Temple, towering over the city, looms Mount Vesuvius. A thin trail of smoke emanates from its tip.

As the show opens, the entire CAST, the CITIZENS of POMPEII, walk onstage, starting about their daily business, snapping their fingers to the beat, and singing...

 **SONG: "IF MOUNT VESUVIUS COULD"**

[Finger snaps with the music]

So we're living here in Pompeii
So our Empire is grand
So we're peaceful in our province
But always out there looking for more land
We've got everything to gain, though
Living by this great volcano
And if Mount Vesuvius could
And if Mount Vesuvius could
And if Mount Vesuvius could
Take our hearts

Aqueducts are bringing water
Latin spoken every word
Roman living is a blessing
'Cause we've got the greatest shopping in the world
If the toga fits you better
And the sandals made of leather
And if Mount Vesuvius could
And if Mount Vesuvius could

And if Mount Vesuvius could
Take our hearts

CHORUS

A Roman belief is a dream that's born inside a smile
A rhythm that keeps when Vesuvius beats to our style

[The music breaks down, and the following dialog is spoken during the interlude. ROMAN NOBLES fearfully observe the smoking mountain in the background.]

NOBLE WOMAN #1

Look, Mount Vesuvius...

NOBLE WOMAN #2

It's still smoking!

ALL

[EVERYONE reacts] Do you see it? What does it mean? *[etc.]*

FELIX THE BAKER

[Steps forward, arms extended] Oh, Jupiter, and all the gods on Olympus, protect us!

PATRICIAN #1

Let it not be another earthquake.

PATRICIAN #2

Like the one we had seventeen years ago.

[The music builds back up. The CAST sings the final CHORUS.]

CHORUS


A Roman belief is a dream that's born inside a smile
A rhythm that keeps when Vesuvius beats to our style

[As the song ends, the CAST disperses and exits, so that the only characters remaining on stage are The NOBLES, CORNELIUS and LYDIA.]

[The TOWN HERALD steps forward and speaks loudly.]

TOWN HERALD

By order of Consul Flavius, all citizens of Pompeii must meet in the Forum. Citizens of Pompeii are called to the city center!

 *[FLAVIUS, the Pompeii Consul, calls the gathering of Citizens by clanging on a small bell. The Romans hear the bell and come together at center stage, talking to each other.]*

FLAVIUS

Quiet! By the power invested in me by the most revered Emperor Titus, I call you to order.

HOLCONIUS

Let's make this snappy. I've got slaves to lord over.

PATRICIAN #1

I second that.

PATRICIAN #2

I third that.

FLAVIUS

Nobles, have patience please.

HOLCONIUS

My slaves are picking the grapes in my vineyard. I don't have time for this meeting.

[CORNELIUS, a former slave now freed, addresses HOLCONIUS. This is improper and astonishes the crowd.]

CORNELIUS

I think you better make time, Holconius.

HOLCONIUS

How dare you speak to me that way. You, a slave.

CORNELIUS

You better listen up. Or you might lose your precious vineyard, all your slaves, and quite possibly your life!

HOLCONIUS

My life? How dare you! I'll have you skinned alive for that. Consul Flavius, flay him!

FLAVIUS

Uh, sir—

HOLCONIUS

I insist! Throw him to the lions!

FLAVIUS

Um, Lord Holconius—

HOLCONIUS

Make him fight the gladiators in the arena!

[NOBLES in the Crowd cheer. They love to watch the gladiator games.]

PATRICIAN #1

That sounds good!

PATRICIAN #2

Toss him into the arena!

FLAVIUS

Noble Holconius, Cornelius is no longer a slave. He bought his freedom.

HOLCONIUS

He did?

FLAVIUS

Cornelius is now our official philosopher, our thinker. He also teaches many of our children.

PATRICIAN #1

Well, what's he got to say about Vesuvius?

PATRICIAN #2

Vesuvius has been smoking for days!

HOLCONIUS

The streams at my vineyard have dried up.

TOWN HERALD

I was on the mountain yesterday. It was so hot. Like the earth was boiling!

FELIX THE BAKER

The gods are angry at us.

TOWN HERALD

Or maybe they're pleased with us.

HOLCONIUS

Maybe they just want to let off some steam?

[Everyone groans at this terrible joke.]

NOBLE WOMAN #1

The god Vulcan, he must be angry.

FLAVIUS

Who knows? The gods are mysterious.

FELIX THE BAKER

Consul Flavius, please, why don't you sacrifice some cattle to Vulcan and find out?

FLAVIUS

We already tried that. Priest, care to comment?

PRIEST OF VULCAN

As the Priest of Vulcan, I sacrificed a cow to the fire god. Then I cut open its belly.

[The CROWD is revolted by this. They make expressions of distaste.]

CROWD

Ugh! Ooh! *[etc.]*

PRIEST OF VULCAN

As you know, it is my duty to figure out the will of the gods by looking at the intestines of animals.

HOLCONIUS

That's nasty!

PRIEST OF VULCAN

It makes a disgusting mess. I wish I knew a better way to listen to the gods.

FLAVIUS

Better than studying intestines? Stop dreaming.

NOBLE WOMAN #2

So what happened?

PRIEST OF VULCAN

The guts looked good. Vulcan is not angry.

FELIX THE BAKER

So why the smoke?

CORNELIUS

I'll tell you why. It has nothing, and I mean nothing, to do with the gods.

[Everyone gasps. This is blasphemy! They start throwing wads of paper at CORNELIUS, the Roman sign of disapproval.]

PATRICIAN #1

You insult the gods!

PATRICIAN #2

You'll make them angry with us!

CORNELIUS

I'm sorry, I'm sorry! The gods are Great! The gods are Great!

PRIEST OF VULCAN

Jupiter rules the kingdom of the skies!

FELIX THE BAKER

And the great god Neptune rules the mighty seas.

NOBLE WOMAN #2

Goddess Minerva grants us wisdom when we most need it!

CORNELIUS

Look, I agree. The gods are in charge of everything...almost. This time, though, it's different.

[Everyone murmurs in shock. Is this guy insane?]

HOLCONIUS

Careful what you say, philosopher guy.

PRIEST OF VULCAN

Don't offend our gods.

CORNELIUS

I promise not to make anyone mad. Just listen.

[CORNELIUS motions to his wife, LYDIA, who holds up a large diagram of Mount Vesuvius. The diagram shows a column of lava running up the middle of the volcano. To the side is a large tectonic plate, pushing into the side of the volcano.]

HOLCONIUS

What in Jove's name is that?

CORNELIUS

It's a cross-section of Mount Vesuvius. The column on the inside is fire, molten rock, about to burst through.

FELIX THE BAKER

What are you talking about?

CORNELIUS

I have a theory. Actually, it's my wife's theory.

PATRICIAN #2

Your wife?

CORNELIUS

Lydia, maybe you should explain.

FELIX THE BAKER

You're going to let a woman talk for you?

CORNELIUS

She's more of a scientist than I am. Come here, Lydia.

LYDIA

[Addressing the crowd] Noble citizens of Pompeii! We are standing on a moving crust of the earth.

[The Crowd of NOBLES hoots and hollers in laughter. This is truly the most stupid thing they've ever heard.]

CROWD

Ha ha! Are you kidding me? *[etc.]*

LYDIA

The plate we're standing on is colliding with another underground moving plate.

HOLCONIUS

[Mocking] "Colliding with another underground moving plate!"

[The Crowd of NOBLES laughs hysterically. This is great entertainment.]

CROWD

Ha ha ha!

LYDIA

The intense heat from the collision causes both plates to melt, turning rock into boiling lava.

PRIEST OF VULCAN

[Still laughing] OK, please. Stop! My stomach is hurting!

FLAVIUS

Enough! Too funny!

CORNELIUS

The boiling lava has nowhere to go. That's why Mount Vesuvius is smoking, that's why the streams have dried up, and that's why the sides of the mountain are hot!

LYDIA

It's about to burst, and we're about to be covered in boiling hot rock!

CROWD

[Roaring again in laughter] Ha ha ha!

FLAVIUS

Thank you, Cornelius, and thank you, lovely Lydia, that was good fun!

FELIX THE BAKER

[Wiping away tears of laughter] Yes, very funny.

TOWN HERALD

You crazy philosophers, you'll do anything for a laugh.

CORNELIUS

Hey, we're serious.

HOLCONIUS

Honestly, citizens, I thought the best way to settle this was by sending messengers to the Oracle.

FLAVIUS

Holconius, you speak with perfect timing. I received word that our messengers are about to return...and here they are! Welcome, Laertes. Welcome, Marcellus.

[LAERTES and MARCELLUS come running in, exhausted.]

LAERTES

Noble citizens of Pompeii, we come from Delphi with news from the Oracle.

TOWN HERALD

What did they say?

LAERTES

After days of traveling, Marcellus and I arrived at the Temple of Delphi.

MARCELLUS

There we made sacrifices to Apollo, god of Music, Art and Prophecy.

LAERTES

Then we spoke to the three Priestesses, the Pythia.

[FLASHBACK SCENE! The Three PRIESTESSES enter, dressed in shimmering white, looking mysterious and otherworldly. They are carrying a bowl and leaves.]

[LAERTES and MARCELLUS move downstage left to join them. The PRIESTESSES speak to LAERTES and MARCELLUS in a soothing, angelic voice.]

[While this is happening, the other characters on stage freeze and remain silent. The stage lights can dim on the rest of the stage and highlight the dialog between The MESSENGERS and The PRIESTESSES.]

MARCELLUS

Oh, Holy Priestesses of Apollo.

LAERTES

We come bearing sacrifice from the city of Pompeii.

MARCELLUS

Jewel of the Roman Empire.

LAERTES

We've been sent by our Consul.

MARCELLUS

To ask you about the smoke from Mount Vesuvius.

LAERTES

What does the smoke mean?

MARCELLUS

Does it mean danger?

[In speaking the following lines, The MESSENGERS turn to address the audience in 'present time'. The PRIESTESSES act out what is stated.]

MARCELLUS

And then the Priestesses each took a deep breath from a bowl of steaming bay leaves.

LAERTES

What we saw next was extraordinary.

MARCELLUS

They fell into a deep trance, and began spinning, as if possessed.

[The Three PRIESTESSES start to spin. They become lost in their whirling, as their visions come to them. The MESSENGERS turn back to speak to the PRIESTESSES. The PRIESTESSES speak in a slow, eerie voice.]

LAERTES

Tell us, Pythia, what is the future of fair Pompeii?

PRIESTESS #1

There is a vision. I see the future.

PRIESTESS #2

I see...fame.

PRIESTESS #3

The future is bright—

PRIESTESS #1

[Interrupting] Wait, not bright. Burning. I feel heat.

PRIESTESS #2

Yes, burning!

PRIESTESS #3

Glowing.

PRIESTESS #1

Pompeii will become a legend. Famous for all time.

[Cue Music: “Burning In Our Minds”, short version. This is a short version of the full-length song in Scene Five. The words are different in this version, as The PRIESTESSES sing of a vision that the ROMAN NOBLES misinterpret.]



SONG: “BURNING IN OUR MINDS” [SHORT]

In two thousand years Pompeii will shine
Famous for all time
And the legend of Pompeii will stay
Burning in our minds

[As the music fades, The PRIESTESSES exit.]

[The MESSENGERS move upstage to join the rest of the CAST, in “present time”, back in the Forum of Pompeii. The CAST becomes unfrozen.]

FELIX THE BAKER

"Famous for all time," they said. I'd call that good news.

FLAVIUS

"Pompeii will shine." Seems like we have nothing to worry about.

LYDIA

Didn't they say anything about underground moving plates?

CORNELIUS

Or molten rock?

PATRICIAN #1

Quiet, you two!

PATRICIAN #2

We've heard enough about your "moving plates."

LYDIA

Sometimes the Oracle can be misleading.

HOLCONIUS

By Jove, you're the stupidest philosophers I've ever met.

NOBLE WOMAN #1

You heard the Oracle.

NOBLE WOMAN #2

Pompeii will be famous for two thousand years.

FLAVIUS

Correction: "famous for all time."

PATRICIAN #1

The Oracle has spoken. There's no danger of disaster.

PATRICIAN #2

The smoke doesn't mean anything.


FLAVIUS

In honor of this good news, let's have some fun the old-fashioned Roman way. Gladiator games!

[The NOBLES cheer in excitement. The Gladiator games are what the Romans live for.]

TOWN HERALD

The only ground shifting today will be the stomping at the Colosseum.

 *[FLAVIUS clangs on the small bell.]*

FLAVIUS

By Consular decree, the citizens of Pompeii shall meet at the Colosseum at two o'clock.

 **SONG: "COLOSSEUM"**

To us there's nothing that isn't greater, nothing greater
Than cheering after our Gladiators, Gladiators
We're cheering, we're cheering, we're cheering...

The Colosseum
Where we're watching, where we're watching them
The Colosseum
Where we're watching, where we're watching them
The Colosseum

Where we're watching, where we're watching—
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!

The games and tournaments start this minute, start this minute
In line we're buying our season tickets, season tickets
We're buying, we're buying, we're buying...

The Colosseum
Where we're watching, where we're watching them
The Colosseum
Where we're watching, where we're watching them
The Colosseum
Where we're watching, where we're watching—
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!

C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!
C-O-L-O-S-S-E-U-M, yeah!

[After the song, EVERYONE heads off stage in excitement, except for CORNELIUS and LYDIA. They remain on stage alone.]

CORNELIUS

They'd rather listen to a Priestess in Greece than what we have to say.

LYDIA

I'm scared. That smoke is a bad sign.

CORNELIUS

It's not safe here. Let's get Julia and Marcus, and leave town immediately.

LYDIA

We can stay with my cousin in Rome.

CORNELIUS

Rome. We'll leave tonight.

[CORNELIUS and LYDIA exit. The lights fade. End of Scene.]