



THE CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

PRESENTS

PALLADIUM PLAYERS

Blithe Spirit, Act I Scene 2

About the play: *Blithe Spirit* is a play by prolific British playwright Noel Coward, first performed in 1941 in the West End, where it ran for a record 1,997 performances before moving on to Broadway later that year. Exploring themes of deception, love, loyalty, and the complex legacy of past relationships, *Blithe Spirit* is one of Coward's most acclaimed plays and has been staged multiple times on Broadway, been made into a movie and also adapted into the musical *High Spirits*. Also a composer, director, and actor, Coward wrote over 50 plays in a half-century writing career and is considered one of the most influential English cultural figures of the 20th century.

About the scene: Skeptical novelist Charles Condomine invites self-proclaimed medium Madame Arcati to his home for a séance, hoping to observe her and gather material for his new book. He also has invited friends Dr. and Mrs. Bradman to join him and his wife Ruth for drinks and dinner. They are interrupted when Madame Arcati arrives, and the séance begins. Much to the surprise of the two couples, there are supernatural manifestations – the table trembles, Madame Arcati falls into a trance, and Charles hears the voice of Elvira, his first wife. Frightened, he wakes Madame Arcati, and the party breaks up. The couple discovers that the hapless psychic accidentally summoned the spirit of Condomine's late wife, whom he loved dearly but who died several years ago. Suddenly, his home and life are quickly turned into a shambles as his wife's ghost torments both himself and his new bride. Only Charles can see and hear her, and he and his wife immediately quarrel about her presence. The cross-conversations among the trio are exasperating to Ruth, who, believing Charles drunk, goes off to bed in a huff, leaving him alone with Elvira!

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Character Descriptions:

Ruth Condomine: Smart-looking woman in her middle 30s. She is Charles Condomine's second wife. She is witty and sophisticated, but also matter-of-fact and practical. Throughout the play she is trying to restore her household to normalcy.

Charles Condomine: Nice-looking man in his late 30s. He is a bright, sophisticated and successful author who lives in a country house with servants and his new wife, Ruth. He is articulate, stylish and very sure of himself.

Dr. Bradman (George): The local doctor. He is well educated, and probably quite a bit older than the Condomines. Decidedly skeptical regarding anything spiritual or occult.

Mrs. Bradman (Violet): The doctor's wife, who is middle-aged and a bit faded. She is trying to be sophisticated, but not always succeeding.

Madame Arcati: An eccentric authoress and professional psychic. Elderly but spry, she wears outlandish clothing but is no fraud. She takes herself quite seriously, but comes across completely over the top.

Elvira Condomine: a ghost. She is Charles' first wife, who died seven years earlier. She is very attractive, vivacious and conniving. She is gray from head to toe and spends the entire play in the negligee she died in. Her attempts to monopolize Charles' attention form the central tension in the play.

Edith: The Condomines' awkward maid. She has been on the job just a few days and is very unsure of herself and therefore comical. *(She has only two lines in this scene.)*