

# The Napoleonic Wars

## *The Musical!*

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# Prologue

The prologue sets the stage for the discussion of the Napoleonic Wars pitch..

[SETTING] Dinner table, Geoffrey, Margaery, and Tyrion having dinner.

Margaery starts the conversation by asking Geoffrey how his day went. Geoffrey then answers, “I had the pleasure to read the most amazing pitch today.” Sansa then curiously asks what the pitch was about. Geoffrey answers with great excitement, “The Napoleonic Wars, The Musical!”, and goes on to sing the pitched play that he memorized to his family...

## Act 1: Pre-Napoleon

In order to have both an informative and entertaining musical production based on actual historical events, it is crucial that the audience be provided with context in order to follow the events transpiring throughout the show. Due to the complexity of The Revolutionary French Wars, understanding the origins of the wars is important for setting the stage for the rest of the play; thus allowing individuals to have a more meaningful theatre experience.

The opening scene would depict the overall chaos beginning to spread amongst the French citizens due to the various political and economic issues arising at the time. Specifically the rally in the streets protesting against King Louis XVI would showcase the start of the French Revolution.

Next and possibly the most powerful scene in the production is a musical number that depicts the state of crisis and political unrest during the French Revolution that results in the execution of Louis XVI. This turning point in France's history must be shared with the audience as historically it foreshadowed France's future, revealing the country's vulnerable state and one which gave Napoleon prime opportunity to advance and assert his dominance. The French Revolution was extremely significant to the advent of the Napoleonic Wars because without the revolution it can be argued that Napoleon may have never risen to power and become the influential figure he came to be. Not only does the Revolution give some context to Napoleon's rise but it also portrays France's chaotic state and why Napoleon felt the need to spread the conflict to a more global scale in order to gain back France's power.

In this scene depicting the origins of the Napoleonic Wars, the five main countries will be introduced; France, Prussia, Austria, Russia and Great Britain. The narrator will give a brief statement about each country and explain its impact on pre-war Europe. This will allow the audience to understand the main contenders in the Napoleonic Wars and grasp the rising tensions in Europe at the time. The next scene will depict Britain's commercial success and Napoleon's desire to overthrow Britain in order to gain imperial superiority. The following scenes leading up to the war will illustrate the ongoing conflicts between France, Austria, Prussia and Germany, as well as Russia's rise, which threatened Britain. Much of the first act will be narrated to provide necessary historical context and ensure that the audience fully grasps the state of pre-war Europe and the rising tension which ultimately lead to the Napoleonic War. This narration will enable the audience to better understand the acts that will follow.

## Act 2: Rise of Napoleon

When it came to building his Grande Armee, Napoleon employed conscription across France to force people into joining the army. However it was only the poorest of the poor that were forced to join the army. Napoleon felt that those who had money would better serve him as officials and taxpayers to help fund his army. These Soldiers were torn away from their families and were to serve until peace had been achieved. The Soldiers experienced emotions of loneliness, boredom and anxiety of fearing death everyday. Crucial to life in the army was comrades, people who were going through the same things. In *Napoleon: The Musical* this will be shown by people being forced out of their homes and being sent to training, being sent away from their families, while Napoleon tries to tell them how they will be the defenders of the Fatherland.

Napoleon challenged popular military strategy of his time. It was part of the reason he was seen as “unstoppable” for so long and had a great influence over the Napoleonic Wars. To understand the Napoleonic Wars it is essential to understand what made Napoleon and the French army different. In our play *Napoleon: The Musical* our central example of Napoleonic military strategy will be demonstrated through a series of musical numbers of the battle of Austerlitz. This battle is significant to understanding the Napoleonic Wars because of two reasons; first, some suggest that this battle was Napoleon’s greatest victory<sup>1</sup> and second, it

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<sup>1</sup> McKenzie, Francine. “Victory and Defeat on Land and at Sea, 1803-1805.” Lecture, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

amplifies the success of the unique military strategies Napoleon's army used throughout the Napoleonic Wars. This battle emphasizes three key components of the successful military strategies; Napoleon's bottom-up approach to military leadership, distracting the enemy in one location to take control of another location and directly challenging the enemy. These tactics enabled the French army to be successful throughout the Napoleonic Wars and enabled Napoleon to stay in power for the time being. It is important to highlight why a bottom up leadership approach is important to the story. A decentralized decision making body allowed the generals to make decisions fast, without Napoleon needing to approve every decision made.<sup>2</sup> As well, traditionally, fights were fought on an open battlefield whereas at Austerlitz Napoleon positioned smaller groups of soldiers to decentralize the Russian and Austrian armies away from their strong core. This allowed Napoleon's forces to take control of Pratzen Heights while the enemy armies were drawn further from the base.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, Napoleon was an ambitious leader that led his army in many direct pursuits of enemies. Austerlitz helps the audience understand that Napoleon would seek war even if he was at a disadvantage.

This battle was an example of the gruesome slaughters that took place during the war. Austerlitz alone had 24,000 deaths. Many of the battles had more casualties than this and shows why the Soldiers had fear for the lives everyday they were in the army. Their fear caused them to spend their money as soon as they got it at the bar, as they felt they had no need to save the money for a rainy day.

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<sup>2</sup> Gates, David. 'Napoleon as General', *History Today* 48/6 (June 1998): 47-54

<sup>3</sup> McKenzie, Francine. "Victory and Defeat on Land and at Sea, 1803-1805." Lecture, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 2016

[Setting] - Austerlitz; Scene freezes and Narrator walks out

The narrator's role is essential to creating the binary between Napoleon and the larger picture of the Napoleonic wars. In this case, it is the narrator's role to paint Napoleon as a bottom up leader, giving generals the autonomy to make decisions.

[Setting]: Austerlitz; The Russian Army, The Austrian Army and The French Army have all arrived.

The scene will start by the allies climbing down from a mountain - Pratzen Heights - to attack Napoleon. The french troops will retreat, leaving the mountain. The French will then seize Pratzen Heights and Russia will not have the support to take it back. The scene should end with Russia and Austria retreating, while Napoleon leads his army away singing Queen's "We are the Champions".



## Act 3: The Coalitions

The wars of the First and Second Coalitions can be seen as the opening phase of the Napoleonic wars. Although Napoleon was not yet the leader of France, he was already exerting heavy influence in both of these wars and ascending up the ranks towards power. Act Two will focus on the expansion of France throughout the wars against these coalitions as well as provide insight into the different circumstances, events and triumphs that led to Napoleon's rise to leadership in France. The first scene will open with a noble and valiant depiction of the French victory in the Battle of Valmy. This will set the tone for the upcoming theme of French advancement and conquest as it marks the first official French victory in the revolutionary wars. Act Two will also highlight the rise of Napoleon and the military prowess he displayed when first starting out as an artillery commander. The play will then progress to showing how Napoleon was promoted to lead the fight against the Austrians in Northern Italy, and how he was successful in doing so, with specific emphasis on the Saorgio offensive in 1794. Perhaps one of the most captivating scenes of Act Two will be Napoleon's expedition to Egypt. This scene will display how the supposed scientific journey turned into a colonization as Napoleon and his troops defeated the Mamelukes in the Battle of the pyramids. The scene will then take a negative turn as British general Horatio Nelson would go on to destroy the entire French fleet of ships during the Battle of the Nile. Here, the play will show a more negative side of Napoleon as he decides to leave his stranded army behind in Egypt and return to France. From there, this act will go on to show how the delay in Egypt had allowed for the second coalition to unite against France. One of the highlights of Act Two will be when Napoleon returns to France and organizes the Coup to

overthrow the directory and appoint himself as one of the three consuls of France. The next scene will depict how Napoleon once again, rises to the occasion and defeats the second coalition and then takes full control of France. All of these battles and conquests will be narrated by advisors and generals that fought side by side with Napoleon or were there to witness his triumphs. This will provide further clarity and perspective towards the events that transpired, and will help to immerse viewers and make them feel more connected to the story. The First and Second Coalition Wars are a crucial part of the history of the Napoleonic Wars because they are a considerable part of the foundation upon which everything began. These wars are the time in which Napoleon was able to prove himself as a military genius and rise to power. Had he not gotten this opportunity through the wars of the First and Second Coalition, Napoleon would have never risen to the heights that he ended up reaching. In addition, these wars provided a glimpse into the future as they demonstrated the development and strengthening of the French empire, which eventually began to dominate all of Europe.

## Act 4: Napoleon's Blockade

In this act of the musical, Napoleon's Continental Blockade will be discussed. Geoffrey explains to his son that (after learning about who he was and what the French wars were from Act I) the main rivalry for the French was the British.<sup>4</sup> He goes on to recap how the British had been the main obstacle for Napoleon and even compares them to the like of a massive splinter in the hand of the French Emperor. After Geoffrey explains how Napoleon felt that he *needed* to defeat the British in order to prevail as the "King of Europe", Tyrion feels resentful of the French and even considers them like a bully; doing whatever they want without any compassion for anyone.

Here, Geoffrey corrects his son by explaining how these decisions were made by Napoleon; one person, as opposed to the whole of France.<sup>5</sup> That this key figure alone is responsible for the construction of the Continental System and hence, the 'bullying' that is being done is through the process of expanding French hegemony.

Moving on, Geoffrey goes into the specifics of the blockade. He explains how the British weren't going down without a fight; and that in fact, they never did. They were constantly fighting – and beating - the French on the waters and these victories \*refers to act 3\* are what led Napoleon to use the last card in his deck: to seek an economic warfare.<sup>6</sup> What is an 'economic warfare'? Well, explains Geoffrey, this particular economic warfare consisted of

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<sup>4</sup> Jose Luis Cardoso, 'Lifting the Continental Blockade: Britain, Portugal and Brazilian Trade in the Global Context of the Napoleonic Wars' in Lucia Coppolaro and Francine McKenzie, ed., *A Global History of Trade and Conflict since 1500* (2013).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

trapping the British in their own little bubble and not allowing them to communicate with anybody outside of their little island. This includes any method of them receiving their food and other goods or selling them. Tyrion cries out more resent towards Napoleon and complains how the British will end up starving and poor. Geoffrey smiles knowing that his son now understands the bigger picture.

To comfort his son, he quickly explains how Napoleon lost in this method of warfare too and that, also, the British ended up doing all those things anyway and even becoming more stronger than they were in the end. Puzzled, Tyrion asks how. In reply, Geoffrey explains how Portugal provided the British with a clear passage to trade goods and, many other countries that the French forced not to communicate with the British also did as well.<sup>7</sup> He also tells his son how Napoleon's bullying (strict influence) towards various countries like Spain and Austria led to a series of revolts as people began to finally stand up to him together.

Geoffrey then goes on to explain how the Continental System is extremely important to us because it shows us how one bully can influence many other people to follow him and conform to his harshness. However, it also teaches us how it takes one person to stand up to him for everybody else to follow up and speak up.

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald Findlay and Kevin H. O'Rourke, *Power and Plenty: Trade, War, and the World Economy in the Second Millennium* (2007).

## Act 5: Napoleon's Downfall

When Napoleon made the decision to invade Russia in 1812, he was simply acting on the impulses that had worked in his favour in the past. His demand for more—more land, more power, more anything, accompanied by the will, intellect, and nerve to get it had granted him his ascent to power and the victories that would follow. These early victories fooled him into believing he would always win. In 1812 however, Napoleon miscalculated, and his own ego and belief that he would always win clouded his judgement.

Despite being insatiable, the European powers around him still made an effort to appease him, with Austria, Prussia, Britain and Russia all making their own attempts to negotiate with Napoleon on his terms in the decade leading up to the war<sup>8</sup>. Like a child however, Napoleon could not be persuaded by reason and demanded for more. He could not see why a European peace would be beneficial to all countries in the area, including his own.

In the case of the musical, Napoleon's greed and inability of knowing when to stop is a theme that will be carried throughout the production. The decision to wage war on Russia in 1812 would best be highlighted by a musical number inspired by Napoleon's own words to his ambassador in St. Petersburg, that Russia must be "placed back in the situation of inferiority in which she was" at the time of Tilsit<sup>9</sup>. In this number, Napoleon would explain that "it must be bigger, and brighter, and better, and bigger" in response to the refrain he would be met with from the ensemble cast, "but why?" This cast of characters, including officials, advisors and common

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<sup>8</sup> Paul W. Schroeder, 'Napoleon's Foreign Policy: A Criminal Enterprise', *Journal of Military History* 54/2 (1990): 152

<sup>9</sup> Harold T. Parker, 'Why Did Napoleon Invade Russia? A Study in Motivation and the Interrelations of Personality and Social Structure,' *Journal of Military History* 54/2 (1990): 136

citizens alike, would explain in separate parts why France should seek peace, why common life is getting better for the French in the absence of war, and why the decision to invade Russia would only hurt French interests.<sup>10</sup> This number would highlight that Napoleon's decision in this case, and arguably every situation before, was influenced not by a careful analysis of what was best for his country, but what would allow him to get, simply put, more.

The friction between Napoleon and the other great leaders at the time must be capitalized on as well. In the musical, it will be apparent that Russia in particular, in addition to the several other powers at the time, made a strong effort to appease Napoleon<sup>11</sup>. Napoleon however, was not like other politicians, who had one or two clear goals in mind while negotiating. Napoleon, on stage, would remark in another musical number, that "I'm not like other statesmen". He would explain how you, with "you" being the negotiating parties at the table, while he stretches situations as far as they will go. This score would be titled "What do you want?," referring to the genuine question asked by both the world powers at the time and historians to this day. While his imperial dreams are not unknown, Schroeder explains that, "He had no final goal, because he often pursued any and all goals and none in particular..."<sup>12</sup>

The two ideas that we would like to emphasize in regards to the Russian invasion in 1812, include how Napoleon's impulse and rationale in this situation was no different than that which he had acted upon before, and that, given his insatiable greed and ambition for more, he was impossible to effectively negotiate with. We depict him as a man who simply asked for too

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<sup>10</sup> Asprey, *The Rise of Napoleon Bonaparte*, ch. 39: 441

<sup>11</sup> Paul W. Schroeder, 'Napoleon's Foreign Policy: A Criminal Enterprise', *Journal of Military History* 54/2 (1990): 152

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 155

much, and while his demands may have earned him his power in the first place, it was his nerve to always ask for more that led to his downfall.

## Conclusion: Beyond the Wars and Napoleon's Legacy

It is important for a musical about historical events to tie in the effects of these events to the modern world. This allows the audience to draw connections between those events and modern world concepts or at least somewhat equivalent concepts. Napoleon was a great, and the Napoleonic Wars have influenced modern society a great deal. The wars help Napoleon invent and spread the ingenious ideas of his, globally. This part of the musical will discuss some of Napoleon's most influential creations that still exist in the modern world.

[Setting] - Family is gathered around the dinner table as they watched Geoffrey bring the pitch to life with some of his dancing and singing skills.

Tyrion asks his father, once the performance is over, "What happened to the Soldiers after the Wars?"

Geoffrey responds by saying that many of the soldiers were actually proud of the time they spent in the army under Napoleon. In fact many of the Soldiers had fond memories of their time spent in the army. But after the wars were over, many of them went back to their families and lived their lives.

Tyrion asks his father, "But with the horrors of war, why were there some fond memories?"

Geoffrey answers, "Well Napoleon was a little different than most leaders. He rewarded bravery for anyone in the army that showed it, not just the generals or high ranking officers. In fact many



of the veterans got together after the war to relive some of their fond memories. Now let's go wash the dishes."

[Setting] - Geoffrey and his family are washing the dishes.

Tyrion asks his father why the Napoleonic Wars are important. Geoffrey responds, "Let's go for a walk, and I will show you why the Napoleonic Wars are important."

[Setting] - Geoffrey and Tyrion are walking down the street.

The last scene of the musical will be portrayed in a musical number. The musical number will be split into two different parts. Firstly, Geoffrey will ask Tyrion about who invented the street numbering system<sup>13</sup>. Tyrion will not know the answer and will ask his Dad to tell him. Geoffrey then screams out, "Napoleon!". This format will be repeated multiple times with different question each time, the questions would ask about the law enforcement system<sup>14</sup>, the religious freedom<sup>15</sup>, and the civil codes<sup>16</sup> that Napoleon has introduced to the world. For the second part, Geoffrey will ask Tyrion the same question listed above, but this time, both Geoffrey and Tyrion will scream out, "Napoleon!". Once the second part of the musical is over, the act concludes with Geoffrey and Tyrion arriving home.

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<sup>13</sup> "Napoleon the Great? A debate with Andrew Roberts, Adam Zamoyski and Jeremy Paxman," YouTube video, 3:00, posted by "iqsquared," November 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bxQ4TcTcPbl>.

<sup>14</sup> McKenzie, Francine. "Revolution, War and Rise of Napoleon." Lecture, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, September 26th, 2016

<sup>15</sup> Rapport, Mike. *The Napoleonic Wars: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 122

<sup>16</sup> Rapport, Mike. *The Napoleonic Wars: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. 122