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**The Newsletter of the *Naturist Action Committee* and the *Naturist Education Foundation***

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**Are You Ready?**



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Send us Event Reports!**

**They'll appear in the next newsletter.**

**Send to:  
Doug.Hickok@NaturistEducation.org**

## **2023 Events**

### **WNGD at Oaklake Trails**

Depew, OK

### **Glyn Stout Broom Pulling Day at Lupin Lodge**

Los Gatos, CA

### **WNGD at Lake Edun**

Topeka, KS

### **Alice in Wonderland Garden Party at Willamettans**

Springfield, OR

### **WGND at Travelites Nudist Retreat**

Hopkins, SC

### **WNGD at Toadally Natural Garden**

Harford, WI

### **WNGD at Bare Oaks Family Naturist Park**

Gwillimbury, ON

### **WNGD at Sky Farm**

Basking Ridge, NJ

**Check out the new website at:  
<http://wngd.info>**

# Film Review: Romance with a Double Bass

(1974, Robert Young, director.)

By Reb Belstner

You have to be of a certain (young) age or lived under a rock not to recognize the name John Cleese, but I'll be my usual eradicator of ignorance and discuss him, anyway.

John Cleese is an English comedian perhaps best known for being a founding member of the seminal comedy troupe Monty Python's Flying Circus and the writer/star of the hit 1988 film "A Fish Called Wanda". For those who have seen "Wanda" (and if you have not, I recommend you do), you may remember a rather memorable and ultimately comedic scene in which Cleese, in his character role of Archie Leach, does a strip tease while speaking Russian for an increasingly aroused Jamie Lee Curtis.

Cleese is also well known for a British television comedy series called "Fawlty Towers", created, starring, and written by him and his then wife, actress Connie Booth. "Fawlty Towers" has its own cult following, though not as great as that of Monty Python, and is worth a watch if you ever catch it on broadcast TV – typically PBS affiliates – or a streaming service.

Well, this month's review is of a rather short film (at only 40 minutes long) adapted from a short story by Anton Chekov and starring both Cleese and Booth, who co-wrote the script: "Romance with a Double Bass". A wonderful comedic romp well worth your time and, in my hearty opinion, family friendly.

We open upon the musician Smychkov (Cleese) walking through the countryside with the titular double bass in its case and hoisted onto his back. He is headed, in top hat and tuxedo, to perform with an orchestra for royalty. Unfortunately for Smychkov he arrived at the palace rather early and is redirected to the servant's entrance, in back. Once there, a functionary – presumably the house steward – tells him to go away and come back later.

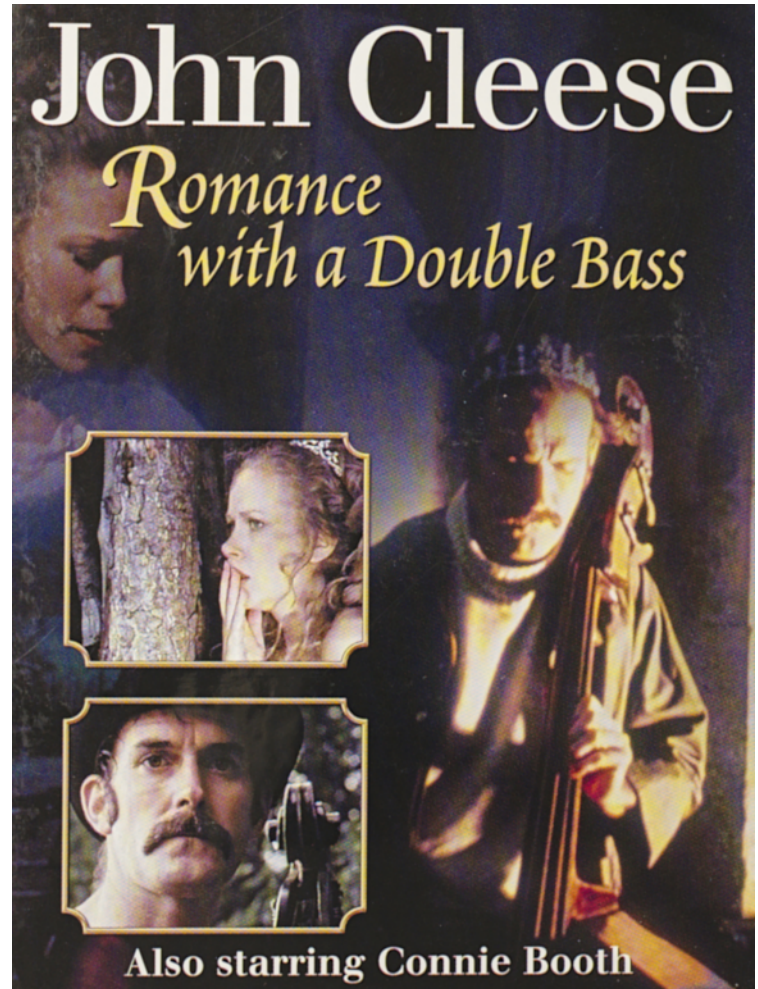
Switch, now, to the interior of the palace, where haste is being made for the final touches on the betrothal ball for the princess Constanza, who is less than enthusiastic about her upcoming arranged marriage to the Count Alexi (whom she refers to by the female Russian name "Alexis"). She shows a curt, rebellious streak to her mother as she plays with an ornate silver fishing float... a sign of things to come.

Meanwhile, Smychkov kills time by wandering the palace grounds, eventually finding a gate to the exquisite gardens, which makes him gaze in wonder. His awe is short lived, as the house steward suddenly reappears and barks "I told you to go away!" to the beleaguered musician and slams the gate in his face.

"Come the revolution..." Smychkov mutters under his breath as he saunters off.

The frustrated and overheated Smychkov takes refuge at a

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nearby lake, where he takes off his shoes and dips his feet to cool off as he rehearses his music in his head. The feeling of the water between his wriggling toes is such a relief... and no one seems to be around... he decides it's the perfect situation to shed the rest of his clothes and go for a skinny dip to further relieve himself from the summertime heat.

Idiosyncratically, he keeps his top hat on as he swims. I have to admit, as the owner of a top hat, myself, it made me cringe to watch Smychkov/Cleese get the headgear indiscriminately wet while splashing about in the water.

Not too far away, at another part of the lake, Constanza is napping; a fishing pole with her ornate float set up by the water. Smychkov, in his watery wanderings, comes across her and is clearly struck by her beauty. He decides to pick a bouquet of wild flowers and ties it to the float. He then tugs on the line to ring the bells on her fishing pole and swims away so he cannot be seen. Constanza, woken by the bells, tries to pull in the surprise bouquet when the line snaps, the float bobs and then finally sinks.

The princess calls out for help, seemingly to no avail.

But someone, seemingly a peasant in the woods, does indeed hear her.

In the absence of assistance, she takes action by shedding her clothing (with the exception of her tiara), and hops into the water to rescue her precious float.

Well, the peasant from the forest turns out to be a thief who steals her clothes! Constanza sees the crook in the act and screams at him to stop, emphatically jumping up and down in the water. At nine minutes and fifty seconds into the film we have seen our first glimpse of full frontal nudity... and, of course, it's of a woman.

Meanwhile, Smychkov returns to his own spot on the lake and discovers he, too, has been a victim of the clothes thief (who surprisingly left behind the double bass, for which one would think he could get more money). And, of course, the musician and the princess meet up, and their nudity is the engine for a great deal of comic banter and situations based in the shame and ill-ease textile society members find in seeing one another sans clothing. And for most of the rest of the film both Booth and Cleese are naked, but in line with the double standard still in existence today, we see everything of Costanza but not Smychkov (although we do see a lot of his butt, to John Cleese's credit).

Once the pair get past the initial shock of seeing each other in the all together, Smychkov finds himself with two quandaries: how to get himself back to the palace in time for the ball and somehow smuggle the princess back there, sight unseen?

What follows is a quite funny journey beset with hurdles and misunderstandings, during which time one gets to see how silly typical social norms concerning nudity really are.

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How does Smychkov get her back to the palace in time for her betrothal?

How does he resolve being nude before getting together with the rest of the orchestra?

How does Constanza get dressed, herself?

Well, I'd rather not ruin it for you. You'll just have to check this gem out and watch it for yourself for the answers, the comedy, and the surprising and quite sweet and tender ending.

[For patrons of the NEF Research Library, request "video289" to watch this film. Becoming a library patron and requesting loans is all a free service of the library.]



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