

Character Breakdown
borrowed from runnymede drama group

1. Nell Gwynn –LEAD The central character, Nell is plain-speaking, funny, cheeky and holds a strong feminist perspective. A common girl from a whorehouse in Cheapside she was a prostitute before the action starts, and becomes an orange seller at the theatre. She has an affair with the lead actor, and joins their ranks as one of the very first women on the stage. She has an affair with the King and falls in love with him. The actor should be a decent singer and dancer, and be confident and comfortable with bawdy humor.
2. Rose Gwynn –Nell's sister, slightly older. A smaller but key role, Rose is Nell's main confidante, especially early on, but distrusts the King and the court; with good reason, as Arlington eventually hurts Rose to get to Nell. She too has a Cheapside upbringing and may well still work as a prostitute.
3. Ma Gwynn - Their mother is a small role, a brothel-keeper who only appears in a single scene in Act 2
4. Thomas Killigrew 40-60 Killigrew is the manager of the King's Company – an important medium sized role throughout the play. He has to take the decision to recruit Nell, deals with the impact of that on the wider company, and battles the consequences of her fame/infamy for his business. Generally kindly and 'normal'
5. Charles Hart - LEAD A very famous actor of his day and the (romantic) lead actor of the Company. It is Hart who spots Nell, takes her under his wing and immediately begins an affair with her. He sponsors her joining the Company and is very jealous of the King, unnecessarily at first. A central role with some comic moments, especially as 'straight man' to Nell in Act 1. Appears as the romantic lead male in most of the plays within the play that we see in rehearsal and performance. 4 or 5 solo singing lines.
6. John Dryden – Any age over 25 Dryden was a fairly prodigious and successful playwright in his day, though his work has not lasted. In this play he is a slightly depressed character always up against an impossible writing deadline (end of the week for a new play!) and is delighted when Nell joins as his new muse – a 'real woman' he can write for. His comedy comes from his reworking of some classic Shakespeare plays...
7. Nancy - older than Nell -The Company seamstress – a commoner, a friend and a bit of a mother figure to Nell, this is a broad comedy role particularly when she has to step in for Nell when she leaves the company for a while. She is a terrible actor and the rehearsal scene in act 2 should be very funny as Nancy wrestles with the acting process.
8. Edward Kynaston 20-45 The actor in the Company who has always played the romantic female leads. Replete with his splendid pair of 'linen tits' he is mortified by the fact a

real woman will join the team. Broad comedy role with scope for controlled hamming, but also a figure with whom the audience must eventually empathize.

9. Ned Spigget – 16-25 The youngest and newest actor in the troupe, Ned is impressionable and nervous, but a champion for Nell who he probably fancies. He opens the play with a terribly delivered prologue that gets him booed offstage by the hecklers, but he grows up somewhat through the play and is an established member by the end. Some comedy lines.
10. King Charles The real deal – a King! A central character in fine clothes, famous for his devotion to hedonism and restoring a pleasurable and colorful culture to England after the puritans had been sent packing, Charles has an important speech in Act 2 when he explains that his playboy lifestyle and ‘do nothing’ political strategy makes sense in the context of his father losing his head, parliament having too much power, his having no direct heir, and balancing the Protestant and Catholic factions in the country after years of civil and religious war. He has a wife and three mistresses (in this play alone), and seems permanently up for it... Must wear the regulation wig! Regal but human, with lots of funny lines.
11. Queen Catherine – probably older than Charles Queen Catherine gave Charles no legitimate heirs and theirs seems a political marriage. She has just one Act 1 scene in which she speaks about 20 hilarious lines almost entirely in Portuguese, railing and swearing at Charles about his mistresses. Must be credible with learning to speak the Portuguese fluently and with great gusto
12. Lord Arlington OLD - Charles’ principal advisor, Arlington is a sizable and important role in the play, constantly keeping an eye on politics, parliament and the nation while his playboy boss seems uninterested in affairs of state. His motivations are clear, he is necessarily a bore and a drag on Charles, but this produces some comedy, and he goes to extreme lengths to try and rid the Court of Nell
13. Lady Castlemaine - The beautiful, saucy French mistress who Charles takes on, partly for political reasons, while he is still with Nell. Nell is terribly jealous and mocks Louise’s flamboyant clothes in one of her comic songs – a production number. Louise is not a large part - she appears in two Act 2 scenes and speaks mainly in French.
14. Louise de Keroualle - The beautiful, saucy French mistress who Charles takes on, partly for political reasons, while he is still with Nell. Nell is terribly jealous and mocks Louise’s flamboyant clothes in one of her comic songs – a production number. Louise is not a large part - she appears in two Act 2 scenes and speaks mainly in French.
15. 4- Attendants, Servants, Prostitutes, Hecklers