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buffoon, *n.*

Pronunciation: Brit. /bə'fu:n/, U.S. /bə'fun/

Forms: 15–16 **buffon(e, -onne, -oun, oone, bouffon, boufoou, 16– buffoon.**

Frequency (in current use):

Etymology: < French *buffon, bouffon*, < Italian *buffone* buffoon, < *buffa* a jest, connected with *buffare* to puff; Tommaseo and Bellini consider the sense of 'jest' to be developed from that of 'puff of wind', applied *fig.* to anything light and frivolous; others, e.g. Littré, refer it to the notion of puffing out the cheeks as a comic gesture. (In 17th cent. accented on first syllable.)

†1. A pantomime dance. *Sc. Obs. rare*⁻¹. [French '*danser les buffons* to daunce a morris' Cotgrave]

c1550 *Complaynt Scotl.* (1979) vi. 52 Braulis, and branglis, buffons, vitht mony vthir lycht dancis.

2.

a. 'A man whose profession is to make sport by low jests and antick postures' (Johnson); a comic actor, clown; a jester, fool. *arch.*

1584 KING JAMES VI & I *Ess. Prentise Poesie* sig. Eijj We remaine With Iuglers, buffons, and that foolish seames.

1589 G. PUTTENHAM *Arte Eng. Poesie* I. xxxi. 50 Buffons, altogether applying their wits to Scurrillities & other ridiculous matters.

1657 S. COLVIL *Mock Poem* (1681) 68 But how the Buffons all be outted.

1683 W. KENNETT tr. Erasmus *Witt against Wisdom* 2 Mountebanks, Buffoons, and Merry-Andrews.

a1734 R. NORTH *Lives of Norths* (1826) I. 411 The bey..like other voluptuous Turks, had his buffoons to divert him.

1835 E. BULWER-LYTTON *Rienzi* I. i. i. 7 The stale jests of a hired buffoon.

1868 F. W. FARRAR *Seekers after God* I. iii. 42 Greedy buffoons, who lived by making bad jokes at other people's tables.

b. Used for 'buffoonery'.

1780 W. COWPER *Progress of Error* 153 Thy sabbaths will be soon Our sabbaths, closed with mummery and buffoon.

3. *transf.* A low jester; 'a man that practises indecent raillery'

(Johnson); a wag, a joker (implying contempt or disapprobation).

- a1610 J. HEALEY tr. Epictetus *Manuall* (1636) 73 Avoid the playing of the Buffone, and procuring of others laughter.
- 1616 B. JONSON *Every Man in his Humor* (rev. ed.) II. v, in *Wks.* I. 26 Age was authoritie Against a buffon: and a man had, then, A certaine reuerence pai'd vnto his yeeres.
- 1680 H. MORE *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* Pref. p. xiv Buffoones rather, and abusers of the Apocalypse, than serious Interpreters of it.
- 1750 JOHNSON *Rambler* No. 72. ¶8 Falstaff the cheerful companion, the loud buffoon.
- 1840 MACAULAY *Ranke's Hist.* in *Ess.* (1851) II. 147 Buffoons, dressed in copes and surplices.

4. attrib. and adj. Belonging to or characteristic of a buffoon; vulgarly jocular. (Somewhat *arch.*)

- 1631 B. JONSON *Staple of Newes* v. vi. 10 in *Wks.* II With buffon licence, ieast At whatsoe'r is serious.
- 1687 DRYDEN *Hind & Panther* I. 3 The Buffoon Ape, as Atheists use, Mimick'd all Sects.
- 1739 tr. C. Rollin *Anc. Hist.* (ed. 2) V. 68 A jumble of buffoon tales.
- 1765 H. WALPOLE *Vertue's Anecd. Painting* (ed. 2) III. iv. 125 Egbert Hemskirk Of Harlem, a buffoon painter.
- 1855 MACAULAY *Hist. Eng.* III. 469 No mean images, buffoon stories, scurrilous invectives.

COMPOUNDS

General *attrib.*

C1.

buffoon-bird *n.*

- 1774 O. GOLDSMITH *Hist. Earth* V. 390 It [*sc.* the Numidian Crane..] is vulgarly called by our sailors the Buffoon Bird.

C2.

buffoon-like *adj.*

- 1611 R. COTGRAVE *Dict. French & Eng. Tongues* *Bouffonnesque*, buffoone-like.

DERIVATIVES

buffoo'nesque *adj.* = BUFFOONISH *adj.*

1756 *Gentleman's Mag.* **26** 254 That they should commit intellectual mendicity in buffoonesk terms.

bu'ffoonical *adj.*

1834 W. BECKFORD *Italy* II. 39 The strangest, most buffoonical grimaces.

1834 W. BECKFORD *Italy* II. 169 A lay-brother, fat, round, buffoonical.

bu'ffoonism *n.* = BUFFOONERY *n.*

1611 R. COTGRAVE *Dict. French & Eng. Tongues* *Bouffonnerie*, bouffoonisme, ieasting.

1617 J. MINSHEU *Ἠγεμὼν εἰς τὰς γλώσσας: Ductor in Linguas* 56 Buffoonisme..vi: jesting.

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