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Play Reviews

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Play Reviews

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Mrs. Sally Suddywuddle, a sweet little old lady, in a gesture of friendship, offers to bake cookies for Mr. Jasper Jollyjell, a sour little old man who is her next door neighbor. With the help of the audience, she bakes one big gingerbread cookie. True to the story, the cookie comes to life much to the delight of Sally, who names him Jiminy Jeepers, and much to the disappointment of Jasper, who wants to eat him. Jiminy runs for his life. Along the way he meets a cow (Betty Bovina), a horse (Eustus Aguinas), and a fox (Valerie Vulpine). Each of them try to eat Jiminy but he escapes in the end, thanks to Jasper.

This play, excellent for touring, is full of audience participation which will delight preschoolers through third grade. A well balanced diet is hinted at as the children learn what cows and horses eat and what goes into gingerbread cookies. Also, an ongoing feud is ended with a gesture of friendship and kindness. The characters, though mostly two-dimensional, work well with the style of the play though very versatile and skilled performers will be needed to handle the audience’s reactions as well as to create believable characters.

The script is unclear on several things. For example, the songs included left me unsure as to whether they are sung or “rapped.” If there is music with the script, it was not included. The script is also unclear as to where some of the action is played, or where some of the props come from. A Christmas theme is hinted at but can easily be eliminated. A skilled director should be able to work around these problems. — Dianne Breinholt

Years ago, the wicked witch, Hecate, stole happiness away from the village of Nitt and locked it away in a metal box. The mayor has “volunteered” Abercrombe, a carpenter, to go through Fantasy Forest to the other side and retrieve the metal box. Abercrombe also must avoid the awful, ferocious dragon of Nitt that lives in the forest. He is followed into the forest by his daughter, Robin and her dog, Quid. Abercrombe is captured by Hecate and her gnomes. Robin and Quid look for her father with the help of Sylvanus, a wandering tree. At the edge of the forest they meet up with Sir Cyril, an English tea-drinking dragon, with “a tail with a happy ending.” This nice dragon of Nitt helps them rescue Robin’s father and steal the metal box of happiness from Hecate who chases them back to the village of Nitt where, with the help of some sugar, she is changed into a nice person. Upon returning to the Village, the box is opened and it is revealed that the box is empty. The village people realize that happiness is something which you are born with.

The play has a fun storyline and Sir Cyril’s proverbs are quite “punny.” I feel, however, that the dancing bushes, Fred and Ginger, are superfluous. Another way of stopping Hecate and her gnomes could be devised. Also, in order for the chase scene through the audience to work, more actor-audience interaction is needed throughout the rest of the play.

Costume and production notes are provided at the end of the script. Traveling with this show could be done with some adaptations. Junior High and high school students can perform this play for all ages. The script contains something for everyone. — Dianne Breinholt


This book contains another collection of royalty-free one-act plays from past issues of *Play Magazine*. Scripts for junior/senior high grades, middle/lower grades, a puppet show, and adaptations from classics are included. Kindergarten through adults will find these scripts easy to perform for classroom, school, church, or community groups, and teachers will find them to be a nice resource for Christmas programs and activities. The scripts can be adapted for touring and production notes are included.

Although some scripts are a bit trite, each play contains a special Christmas message -- some serious and some humorous. Some of the more memorable ones for the junior/senior level are: *Christmas Eve Letter*, a modern version of the "Yes, Virginia. There is a Santa Claus, "story; *A Christmas Promise* where a son/brother is surprised to find himself with four dates to the Christmas dance; and *A Star in the Window*, a warm story of an immigrant couple and a Christmas miracle legend. For the middle grades, I found The
North Pole Computer Computer Caper hilarious. Who would expect that Santa Claus has a western cowboy son complete with electric guitar and a computer named Kumquat? Others in this age group include: Randy the Red-Horned Rainmoose wherein Randy saves the day when Rudolph develops a cold, and We Interrupt This Program where the children of the world repay Santa with a rocket load of gifts. All are excellent for the lower grades. Santa's Magic Hat is a puppet show containing a lesson about greed. The best scripts are the adaptations from literary classics including A Christmas Carol, Sherlock Holmes' Christmas Goose, Little Cosette and Father Christmas from les Miserables, and A Merry Christmas, a round table reading from Little Women. -- Dianne Breinholt


Becca is a musical play by Wendy Kesselman that focuses on the relationship of Jonathan, a disturbed ten-year-old boy, and his beautiful doll, Becca. The entire action of this fantasy takes place within Jonathan’s bedroom - a room filled with the over-sized cages of animals Jonathan has caught in the fields that surround his home. As the story begins, Jonathan is heard practicing his violin, an obviously arduous task that neither he nor his cringing animals can endure. From the action, it is apparent that Jonathan is frustrated and angered by the never ending demands of his frequently absent parents. Powerless, Jonathan seeks to compensate for these feelings by bullying and starving his animals and by forcing Becca to respond to his every whim. Eventually, Becca rebels at Jonathan’s demand that she tell him she “loves him the best.” To punish her, he not only hits, squeezes, and verbally abuses her, but forces her into “the worst place in the world,” the dread creature-filled closet. No ordinary closet, it is filled with rats, a snake, and a witch, each of whom threatens to torment and/or destroy Becca in some heinous manner. As Becca struggles to resist Jonathan’s will, she is transformed into a “real live child” — a child who claims she is not a doll, but Jonathan’s sister, Rebecca, “and you know it!” Within the closet, Becca conquers her fears, fights off the creatures’ attacks, and emerges to inspire the animals to conquer their own fears and free themselves from their cages. Realizing that he has lost control, Jonathan once again promises to mend his ways, but Becca, like the animals, escape his grasp. Alone, dejected, and friendless, Jonathan realizes that you can’t force someone to love you and sings a remorseful song. As he sings, Becca returns to the room, listens, and quietly decides to give him another chance, joining him in a reprise of the song, “Sometimes I’m Lonely.”

This is a disturbing play. It raises questions for which no satisfactory answers are given. For example, where are Jonathan’s parents? And why is the sole responsibility for maintaining the life of his caged animals, his and his alone? Who is Becca? Is she a doll, is she an imaginary playmate or is she Jonathan’s sister, as she and the animals insist? If
she is his sister, how, when and why did this transformation take place and what do his parents think about it? Where are Jonathan’s other friends? Surely he has schoolmates. He’s not an isolated pre-schooler, or is he? At what age do children have imaginary playmates? Whose primary relationships are with dolls, their playthings and their parents? And who has fears of closets? Certainly, if one were to examine those books which children seek out and enjoy across age and interest levels to establish a source of insight and example into those relationships and interests that are most associated with the middle-aged child (as opposed to those of the pre-schooler) Jonathan’s relationship with his parents and with Becca appear to be much more closely aligned with pre-schoolers than with ten-year old boys. The middle-aged child’s primary relationships are generally with peers of the same sex. These relationships tend to be competitive and are rarely, if ever, romantic. Parents figure very little in to the life of a ten-year old, and fears of imaginary creatures in one’s closet are almost unheard of. The idea of a ten-year old boy having an imaginary playmate has no parallels within literature that target children within this age and interest level. On the other hand, pre-schoolers are often depicted playing with their imaginary playmates. Primary relationships with parents and humanized inanimate objects are the norm. The love that these pre-schoolers often shower on their dolls and friends tends to be unabashedly enthusiastic and possessive in character. Like Jonathan’s, their worlds tend to be small with action often being confined to a single room within a home. Concerns about nightmares and creatures in the closet figure prominently in the literature.

Returning to another issue, if Becca saves Jonathan’s day by returning to be his friend, either an imaginary or real sister friend, is this a healthy resolution to Jonathan’s need to be accepted and loved? Is this an honest answer for the audience? Is this play about the need to overcome one’s fears and the futility of forcing others to love you through manipulation and force, or is it about child abuse and/or incest? Why the long white dress? Why the story of the prince and the princess? How many times has Jonathan locked Becca in the closet to discipline her, and is this an original idea or one he (or the author) faced at some time in his (or her) life? Why the manipulative dialogue that beguiles Becca into returning and why is she so vulnerable to it?

This play is technically exciting. Kesselman uses fantasy to capture the interest and imagination of the audience and the use of music enhances the action immeasurably. It has a small cast and limitations on setting that make it appropriate for either touring or producing within either an intimate or expanded stage setting. The dialogue is believable, well-time and succinct. The staging possibilities are a director’s dream. But the content of the play, the relationships, the verbal, physical, and psychological abuse, the violence in the closet and potential violence in the minds of a young audience, and the fact that the
central characters are victims make the decision to produce this play entirely questionable. If one were to choose to direct this play, some hard questions would need to be asked — disturbing questions that fall beyond the realm of aesthetics and into those of values and personal responsibility — Kathrine Farmer


This story of teenage suicide is circular. As we travel with Jennifer back in time from the scene of her suicide to a happy picnic in the park with her mother, it becomes evident that her suicidal depression is based on, what seem to her, some drastic changes that have occurred in her life within the last year. Her mother, who, as a single parent, has been her closest friend and confidant, remarries, moves to a new neighborhood and goes back to college. Jennifer is left to start making new friends in a new high school and neighborhood mostly on her own. The root of the problem for Jennifer seems to lie in the change she sees in her relationship with her mother. This is emphasized in the closing scene which portrays the way her mother used to take time to be with her.

The play deals mainly with the surface of the suicide. Even the glimpses we are allowed inside Jennifer’s mind do little to create a conflict one can get a good grip on. One is left with questions which most people involved with a suicide victim have. We are also left wondering about the kind of relationship Jennifer and her mother had. In Jennifer’s mind no one else could really give her the attention she wanted. Does the playwright want us to blame the mother for what happened? The message sent to a teenage audience is “if you feel depressed and want some attention, go kill yourself.” The audience needs to see that although the grieving family will always remember Jennifer, she is the one most hurt by her act and that the world will go on. Suicide is not a solution to problems.

The play is well-written, but leaves us wondering why it was written.

This play could be produced by high school students as well as professionals. The set can be anything from abstract to realistic depending on stage size or touring needs.

— Rosemarie Howard


While playing a game of chess with her cat, Alice notices the resemblance between “Kitty” and the sulky expression of the Red Queen chess piece. Alice then discovers the real Red Queen watching them from the looking glass. Her curiosity aroused, Alice climbs through the looking glass and discovers herself in Looking Glass Land where everything and everybody lives backwards. Alice soon finds that she is a pawn on the second square of a chess game and that she must get to the eighth square so she can become a queen.
Along the way she meets many characters including Tweedledum and Tweedledee; Humpty Dumpty; and the Red and White Kings, Queens, and Knights. To get to Queen Alice’s Banqueting Hall (the eighth square), Alice must move through the Garden of Live Flowers, a Railway Journey, The Wood Where Things Have No Names, Wool and Water, Humpty Dumpty’s Square, and the Forest. Soon after she becomes queen, Alice finds herself back in her chair at home with “Kitty” wondering whether she really went to Looking Glass or just dreamed it.

Nursey-Bray’s script, with music added, is true to the original in most of Carroll’s wonderful dialogue. Children will identify with Alice as she is hurriedly pushed from square to square by grownups “too preoccupied to listen and sort out a child’s misconceptions.” She learns to handle things by herself and “by Looking Glass logic, an adult watching Alice’s struggles learns even more about how not to handle children.”

The production is designed to be played on a big chess board but that is not necessary. Skilled high school actors through adults will enjoy the challenge of this script. Along with a puppet show version of The Walrus and the Carpenter and a “black theater” version of The Jabberwocky, which are optional, there are other puppets and special effects. Extensive technical notes are found in the back along with music. The cast can be large or doubled. — Dianne Breinholt


The Hiding Place is based on the true story by Corrie Ten Boom. It is set before and during World War II in Holland, and in a Nazi concentration camp. The Ten Boom’s are very religious Christians whose home is used to hide Jews escaping the Nazi’s. They are found committing this “crime” and are sent to Concentration camps. That is the skeleton of the story, the meat is in the way the Ten Boom’s look for the best in everyone and every circumstance.

I have to admit I was a little concerned when I first got the script because the story of the Ten Boom’s is so touching, and I worried about a musical of The Hiding Place. I felt it might be too easy to lighten the immensity of this story with trite music and lyrics. I was pleasantly surprised. The music was well done, yet a little superfluous to the script. I only felt a few places where the music really benefited the play because the script stood quite well on its own. Act I handled the time period prior to the Ten Boom’s arrest and imprisonment with the sense of urgency, excitement, and fear that I am sure the Ten Boom’s experienced. A feeling for each of the characters was strong enough to set up the Christian values that the story should tell. Having been set up in Act I for the Ten Boom’s imprisonment, I was ready to accept the miracles that happened in the concentration camp with Corrie and her near flawless sister Betsie. I was disappointed here because the focus
was on Corrie’s solitary confinement rather than Betsie and the sustaining faith she brought to everyone in such horrible circumstances. The miracles that happened to the Ten Boom sisters (such as the Bible that they smuggle from camp to camp) are heard about, but we don’t experience them; they do not encompass our heart as they could. I wanted to experience the awe of the unwavering faith that Betsie has in the circumstances they are forced to encounter. I was also disappointed in the ending. I hope I don’t ruin this for anyone, but the play ends with Betsie’s death and Corrie’s release from the camp which sounds fine unless you know that Corrie was not supposed to be released. She was scheduled to die. And the miracles go on from there. This is not to say that the play is not well written for I did enjoy it, and had I not been familiar with the original, I probably wouldn’t know what I had missed. But, this is a familiar story, and I am sure others will feel the same loss.

The cast is large (46 characters in all), but it can be somewhat reduced by double casting. The music is good, but the play can stand on its own without it. It has some technical needs that might make touring difficult. It would be a good spring board for educating students about Nazi Germany. In-School performances or good community theater would serve the script well. — Erin Caldwell

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Prodigy (originally entitled Young Mozart) is the story of Leopold and Wolfgang Mozart. What starts as an honest attempt for Father to encourage and develop talent in his young son progresses to a master/puppet relationship. Leopold discovers, only too late, that he has destroyed the very thing he was trying to protect - the beauty of the child and his music.

Prodigy is written as if it were a piece of music. The scenes are intended to flow from one to another with a feeling of natural crescendo moving the action ever forward to the final scene. The musical score consists of a variety of Mozart’s music. The compositions are intended to glide into each other helping to create the musical flow of the play. The use of puppets emphasize the changes within the parent/child relationship, allowing the boy to act out what is happening to him.

Scenic needs are minimal. Costumes can also be kept quite simple in order to allow the relationships to have primary focus. More attention should be given to the lighting and sound portions of the play which need to enhance the musical flow of the piece. There are 8 cast members: six adults and two children. In order to create the audience identification and parent/child relationship desired, it is important to cast Wolfgang and Nannerl with children rather than adults. The production can be effectively played for mixed audiences from age nine to adult, as well as to individual school groups. — Christine Bartlett

This is a full length musical, 68 pages long, intended for family audiences and focused heavily on Protestant/Christian values. It is based on the popular story published in 1905 that has been a favorite for years. The basic characters are familiar, although in the play they are not well developed and the playwright has chosen to mix storylines of minor characters with those of the main characters and, to some extent, clutters the clean direction of the storyline.

The young girl, Pollyanna, has lost both parents and comes to live with her wealthy aunt Polly in Vermont. Her minister father has taught her a game of being glad that allows her to look at the bright side to almost every situation, even tragic ones. She teaches the game to all those around her and changes the direction of invalids, crotchety people, and ordinary citizens in the community. She then falls from a tree injuring her spine, and has difficulty adjusting to this new deprivation.

In the play, the resolution comes very fast and we are not totally prepared for it. The play also inserts a number of songs and dances, sometimes without full motivation. The chorus may simply wander on stage even during a scene in a lonely part at night. With some judicious cutting, the production could be successful. It would work well for audiences of all ages and, in its present form, would involve a very large production company. — Harold R. Oaks