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Dramatic Publishing

Interrupting Vanessa



**Drama by
Colleen Neuman**

“In a world where imaginary friends seem real,
and real friends are scarce, Vanessa discovers both.”

—Childsplay, Tempe, Ariz.

“How refreshing to have a family play as delightful and thought provoking for adults as well as children ... *Interrupting Vanessa* is a vastly entertaining show that can serve as a useful tool for stimulating conversation between parent and child ... The play generates so many important issues, further discussion is likely to continue on the way home.” —Sheila Schultz, KDHX Community Media, St. Louis.

Drama. By Colleen Neuman. Cast: 2m., 2w. Vanessa lives with her mother, who seems too busy to listen to her and calls Vanessa's beloved collection of stuff a “pile of junk.” Vanessa uses her stuff—keys, string, wire, cardboard, broken flashlights, old radios—to create inventions and to make up stories. There is one more treasure she keeps in her room: her father. Vanessa's father died last year, but Vanessa, unable to let him go, has imagined him back to life. Dad is there reading his newspaper and telling jokes, just like he used to. Vanessa gets carried away by her imagination, telling her father elaborate stories about things like receiving a gold medal from the president and having a ranch with bucking broncos. Then Mom does the unthinkable—she invites Timmy Fibbins over to play. Vanessa is mortified! No one at school talks to Timmy. Her dad reminds her that no one talks to her, either. He also decides that it's time for him to leave. Once Timmy arrives and starts talking, things aren't so bad. He likes her junk, laughs at her jokes and doesn't laugh at her inventions. In the end, Vanessa makes a new friend and a statement of truth: her dad died last year. Realizing she is never really alone, she lets her dad go to “live on the ranch and ride the broncos.” *One int. set. Approximate running time: 50 minutes. Code: ID4.*

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Yolanda London, Eric Zaklukiewicz and Steven Scally.
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INTERRUPTING VANESSA

By
COLLEEN NEUMAN



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Childsplay premiered *Interrupting Vanessa* April 30, 2005, at Tempe Performing Arts Center, Tempe, Ariz. The director was Anthony Runfola; scenic design, Katharina Hantke; costume design, Elizabeth E. Ihlenfeld; lighting design, Michael J. Eddy; sound design, Anthony Runfola. The stage manager was Gretchen Schaefer. The cast was:

Vanessa Yolanda London
Mom Jodie L. Weiss
Dad. Steven J. Scally
Timmy Fibbins. Eric Zaklukiewicz

INTERRUPTING VANESSA

CHARACTERS

VANESSA a girl, 10 or 11 years old

MOM Vanessa's mother

DAD Vanessa's dead father

TIMMY FIBBINS a boy, 10 or 11 years old

PRODUCTION NOTES

COSTUMES

- VANESSA - Pants and a shirt. Somewhat rumpled.
- MOM - Business clothes.
- DAD - Business clothes—shirt open at collar, tie loosened.
- TIMMY FIBBINS - Shirt, trousers and jacket. Neat as a pin.

PROPS

- VANESSA - A bookbag that contains a boom (an object which is about the size of a fist, is covered with ridges and has a hole through it), a spelling test and a cupcake. There is a compass in her pocket.
- MOM - Purse. Stack of mail. Tray with carrots, dip and glasses.
- DAD - Newspaper. Compass in pocket.
- TIMMY FIBBINS - Comb in jacket pocket.

SET

- A chair.
- A bed.
- A hook for hanging up clothes.
- A pile of junk that includes an old radio, a hat with feathers, a kite, a hook, some cardboard, boxes, keys, yellow stuff, string, flashlights, wire and a lot of other stuff.

INTERRUPTING VANESSA

SETTING: *A chair is DL. Vanessa's bedroom is center. It includes a bed and a pile of junk.*

AT RISE: *DAD sits on the bed reading a newspaper. VANESSA enters L carrying bookbag. MOM enters R carrying purse and mail. MOM is a little tired. VANESSA isn't tired at all. Both walk to center.*

VANESSA. Mom, I'm home! (*Stops, drops bookbag, getting something out of it.*) I found the coolest thing.

MOM. Hello, Vanessa. (*Kisses VANESSA. Continues on to chair.*)

VANESSA. It was just lying on the sidewalk.

MOM. How was school?

VANESSA (*holding up the boom, which is an object the size of a fist, is covered with ridges and has a hole through it.*) Look! (*Turning it over in her hands.*) I wonder what it is...

MOM (*sits, kicks off shoes, reading mail*). Did you eat your whole peanut butter sandwich at lunch?

VANESSA (*which reminds her*). Oh, Mom, at lunch today Timmy Fibbins...

MOM. Because you hardly touched your oatmeal at breakfast.

VANESSA. I told you I wasn't hungry for it.

MOM. Oatmeal is good for you, Vanessa...

VANESSA (*holding up boom*). Mom, what do you think this thing is?

MOM. What? (*A glance over.*) Oh no. Not more junk. Where did you get that?

VANESSA. I told you. I found it on the way home from school. (*Which reminds her.*) At school today, Mom, Mrs. Wing...

MOM (*looking at a bill*). How can the phone bill be this much?

VANESSA. Mrs. Wing wore her hat with the...

MOM. I never call anybody.

VANESSA (*gives up. Picks up her bookbag*). I guess I'll put this in my room. (*No response.*) With the rest of my stuff. (*No response. Walking to her bedroom.*)

MOM. Pick up your bookbag, Vanessa.

VANESSA. I did.

MOM. And get started on your homework. And please do something about that pile of junk in your room.

VANESSA. It's not a pile of junk.

MOM. Vanessa? (*VANESSA stops.*) Do as you're told please.

(VANESSA goes to her bedroom. MOM continues with her mail.)

VANESSA (*sits on bed. Her feelings are clearly hurt. DAD lowers paper, looks at her, waits*). She says my stuff is a pile of junk.

DAD. Who says that?

VANESSA (*who else?*). Mom.

DAD (*not surprised*). Oh. (*As an afterthought.*) Is Mom real or is she made up?

VANESSA (*they've gone over this before*). Mom is real. You're made up.

DAD. That's what I thought. How was school?

VANESSA. It was okay.

DAD. Did you listen to your teacher? (*VANESSA recognizes this as the beginning of an old comfortable joke between them.*) Because it's important to listen to your teacher. That's how you get ahead.

VANESSA (*the old comfortable punch line*). I have a head.

(They laugh an old comfortable laugh.)

DAD (*noticing boom*). What's that?

VANESSA. I found it on the way home from school.

DAD. What is it?

VANESSA. I don't know. It has all these ridges on it. See? And look—there's a hole all the way through it.

DAD. Does it do anything?

VANESSA. Yes.

DAD. What?

VANESSA. I don't know. (*Using boom as a knob on an old radio.*) This radio could use another knob. Too big. (*Tries to screw it onto a flashlight.*) Or maybe on this flashlight. It could be a handle. This could be a really big flashlight with a handle. Guess not. (*Continues to play with boom and junk while DAD pages through his paper.*) At school today, Timmy Fibbins ate a peanut butter sandwich and threw up. Twice.

DAD. Lost his lunch again.

VANESSA. Once in the lunchroom and once in the hall.

Timmy Fibbins probably has the world's record for throwing up—seventeen times since school started. Mrs.

Wing wore her hat with the feathers today.

DAD. That Mrs. Wing is one in a million.

VANESSA. I traded my sandwich for a cupcake.

DAD. I hope it was chocolate. With cream filling.

VANESSA. It was.

DAD. Good girl.

VANESSA (*pulling spelling test from bookbag*). And I got

Massachusetts spelled right except I left out the H. One little letter and I still got it wrong. Boy, that's so unfair.

How do you spell Massachusetts?

DAD. Very carefully. (*They laugh.*) If you go to Massachusetts, don't get lost.

VANESSA. I won't.

DAD. Take a compass.

VANESSA. I will. I always do. (*Takes compass out of her pocket, shows it to DAD.*)

DAD. Good girl. (*As he settles back in with his paper.*)

Knock, knock.

VANESSA. Who's there?

DAD. Atch.

VANESSA. Atch who?

DAD. Bless you.

(*They laugh.*)

VANESSA. Knock, knock.

DAD. Who's there?

VANESSA. Little old lady.

DAD. Little old lady who?

VANESSA. I didn't know you could yodel.

(They laugh.)

DAD. Knock, knock.

VANESSA. Who's there?

DAD. Interrupting cow.

VANESSA. Interrupting co—

DAD. Moo!

(They laugh.)

MOM. Vanessa?

VANESSA. I didn't hear anything.

DAD. Sure you did.

MOM. Vanessa!

VANESSA. I still didn't hear anything.

DAD *(not a guess)*. You will.

MOM *(louder)*. Vanessa!

VANESSA *(gives up)*. What?

MOM. Come in here please!

VANESSA. Okay! *(To DAD.)* I'll be right back. And you'll be right here waiting for me.

DAD. I know.

VANESSA *(going to MOM)*. What?

MOM. Vanessa, I was calling you.

VANESSA. I didn't hear you.

MOM *(getting up, gathering together purse, shoes, mail)*. Anyway, I forgot to tell you—I saw that nice Mrs. Fibbins at the bank today. She's such a nice woman. She says "thank you" all the time. I invited her Timmy over to play after school.

VANESSA (*incredulous*). You invited who?

MOM. Timmy Fibbins.

VANESSA (*mounting panic*). Where?

MOM. Here.

VANESSA. When?!

MOM. Now. So comb your hair, brush your teeth... (*Noticing the look on VANESSA's face.*) Vanessa, what is wrong with you?

VANESSA. I don't even know him.

MOM. Of course you know him. You go to school with him.

VANESSA. But...!

MOM. And he'll be here in a few minutes. Which means you have time to clean up that pile of junk in your room. (*MOM exits.*)

VANESSA (*as she returns to her room*). It's not a pile of junk... (*Slumps on bed.*) I don't want Timmy Fibbins here.

DAD (*a glance around*). You're in luck. I don't see him.

VANESSA. He's coming here! To my house! To my room! (*Jumping up.*) Nobody at school better find out! Nobody at school talks to Timmy Fibbins!

DAD. Nobody talks to you either.

VANESSA. That's because I don't talk first! (*A terrible realization.*) He's going to touch all my stuff! (*Starts to throw things under bed, under blankets.*)

DAD. He's going to throw up.

VANESSA (*stops hiding stuff*). Oh man. He's going to throw up. (*Sits on bed.*) I won't talk to him first. (*A little voice.*) That always works.

DAD. Does it?

VANESSA (*so miserable*). I'm eating my cupcake. (*Getting cupcake out of bookbag.*)

DAD. Good girl.

VANESSA. I wonder what Mom would say if she saw me eating this cupcake? (*Takes a bite.*)

DAD. She'd say: Why, Vanessa, I see you're eating a cupcake. Can I have a bite?

VANESSA. That's what you'd say. She'd say... (*Pretending to be MOM.*) Now, Vanessa, did you eat your whole cupcake? Because you hardly touched your nasty oatmeal that didn't even have raisins in it. And I'm too busy to talk to you. I'm reading my mail. (*Picking up spelling test.*) Why, here's a letter from the White House! (*Reading.*) Dear Mrs. Vanessa's Mother: The president of the United States cordially invites Vanessa to the White House so he can give her a really cool medal.

DAD. I was just reading about that in my paper. (*Reading.*) The president looks forward to meeting Vanessa Vandaspik and will seek her advice on important matters. You know, Vanessa's Mother, we've never been to the White House. Maybe we should go along.

VANESSA. We can go along if we pick up our bookbag, do our homework, brush our teeth and comb our hair.

DAD. I bet Timmy Fibbins' parents have never been to the White House.

VANESSA. Well, his mother only knows two words—"thank" and "you."

DAD. I wonder what the medal is for. Does your letter say?

VANESSA. No. Does your paper say?

DAD. No.

VANESSA. Mrs. Wing knows. (*Puts on a hat with feathers.*) Hello, Mr. Vanessa's Father. It is I. Mrs. Wing.

DAD. Well, so it is. So nice to see you again. I hope you listened in school today, Mrs. Wing. Because that's how you get ahead.

VANESSA. I have a head. (*They laugh.*) Actually, at Ipsiling Elementary, we all listen to Vanessa. You have a brilliant daughter.

DAD. I know.

VANESSA. If there's something you don't know, you should ask me.

DAD. Well, I was wondering why the president of the United States is giving Vanessa a medal.

VANESSA. It's the National Best Speller Medal made out of solid gold.

DAD. How do you know?

VANESSA. I'm Mrs. Wing. I know everything.

DAD. Vanessa's Mother and I are so proud of her.

VANESSA. You should be. She's an amazing speller. Today she taught everyone at Ipsiling Elementary how to spell Massachusetts.

DAD. How do you spell Massachusetts?

VANESSA. Very carefully. And don't put in an H. Putting in an H is always wrong. There have always been too many H's in spelling but it took smart and courageous Vanessa Vandaspik to do something about it. So we have a new rule at Ipsiling Elementary—no more H's on spelling tests. We call it The Vanessa Rule. And to celebrate, we've declared tomorrow Vanessa Day!

DAD. Didn't we just have Vanessa Day yesterday?

VANESSA. That Vanessa Day was because Vanessa saved the entire kindergarten class from a rampaging herd of

- buffalo. This Vanessa Day is because she's a good speller. Vanessa's Father, I don't think you're listening.
- DAD. Is Timmy Fibbins going to be at Vanessa Day?
- VANESSA. No! Not only does Timmy Fibbins put the H in Massachusetts—sometimes he puts in two.
- DAD (*clutching at chest*). Oh! The shock of Timmy Fibbins putting two H's in Massachusetts is causing me to have a heart attack. If I die, it will be Timmy Fibbins' fault. If only there were a doctor somewhere close by... (*Falls over.*)
- VANESSA. Actually, Vanessa is a doctor. She went to medical school for her science project. (*Throws away hat.*) The cause of ninety-nine percent of all heart attacks is the absence of a boom in the baboom compartment of the heart.
- DAD. What's a baboom?
- VANESSA. A baboom is the sound the heart makes when it beats—baboom, baboom, baboom. The heart beats for a while without the boom but then one day when no one is listening, it stops. So I better save your life. I'll put in a new boom.
- DAD. But we don't even know what a boom looks like.
- VANESSA. A boom is about so big, has ridges and there's a hole through it. (*Holding up the boom.*) It's a boom! (*Presses boom against DAD's chest and gives it a crank.*) Crrrrrrrrrik!
- DAD (*getting up*). I'm saved! We'll all go to the White House after all!
- VANESSA. And to the thousands and thousands of Vanessa Days still to come!
- DAD. I'm so proud of you...
- MOM (*off*). Vanessa?

DAD. Your mother is so proud of you...

(MOM enters.)

MOM. Vanessa?

DAD. We're so proud of you...

MOM. Vanessa! *(Enters bedroom.)*

VANESSA. What?

MOM. I was calling you. Again.

VANESSA. I didn't hear you, Mom.

MOM *(straightening up VANESSA and room)*. He's here.

VANESSA. Who?

MOM. Timmy Fibbins. Did you comb your hair and brush your teeth? And you didn't even touch all this junk. *(Trying to arrange it better somehow. Gives up. Leaving.)* I'm bringing him up. And you should have cleaned up that pile of junk. *(Exits.)*

VANESSA. It's not a pile of... *(Words fail her. Frantic.)* What should I do? I should lock the door! *(Runs to door, locks it.)* What should I do now?

DAD. Don't talk to him first?

VANESSA. I won't talk to him first.

DAD. That might work.

VANESSA. That will work. That always works. *(A little voice.)* What if it doesn't work?

MOM *(tries to open VANESSA's door)*. Vanessa? *(Rattles door.)* Vanessa? Your door won't open!

DAD *(stands, buttoning jacket, folding newspaper)*. Time for me to go.

VANESSA *(stunned)*. You can't go. You never go.

DAD. You have company.

VANESSA. I don't want company!