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Dramatic Publishing

SING DOWN THE MOON: Appalachian Wonder Tales

Book by Mary Hall Surface

Lyrics by Mary Hall Surface and David Maddox

Music by David Maddox



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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Music and Lyrics by DAVID MADDIX

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Sing Down the Moon: Appalachian Wonder Tales was commissioned by and premiered at the Theater of the First Amendment (George Mason University's professional theater, Fairfax, Va.), on March 8, 2000. Rick Davis, artistic director. Kevin Murray, managing director.

Directed by Mary Hall Surface
Music Direction by David Maddox

Scenic Design by Tony Cisek
Costume Design by Holly Highfill
Lighting Design by Dan Covey
Puppets and Crafts by Anne Kennedy
Properties by Susan Senita Bradshaw
Choreography by Beth Davis
Dramaturgy by Kristin Johnsen-Neshati
Company Management by Kira Hoffmann
Stage Management by Cynthia Clark

The Ensemble:

Michael Bryant, Sherri L. Edelen, Jennifer Gerds, Kathryn Kelley, Dori Legg, Sarah A. Maxwell, Hugh Nees, Dwayne Nitz, Paul Takacs and Steve Tipton.

The Band:

Bill Dolde (violin)
Nicky Kraskowska (piano)
Matt Kanon (guitar and banjo)
Ralph Gordon (bass)

Authors' Notes:

Sing Down the Moon: Appalachian Wonder Tales was created after reading over 200 folk tales, legends, ghost stories and “wonder tales” from the Appalachian region. We finally chose to adapt for the stage five wonder tales—so called because they include a supernatural character—and one classic animal tale. None of the stories in our play are direct transcriptions of authentic tales, but rather, in the folk tradition, are our retelling of those tales. Just as the Appalachian settlers grafted together stories from their native England, Scotland, Ireland and Germany, we took elements from a number of different tellings of the tales to tap their deep archetypal resonances, as well as to have a rollicking good time.

The style of the piece demands imaginative, fluid direction and staging. The world of the play is complicated and any attempt to be too realistic would sink the production. We found that the most theatrical and simple solutions were the most effective. We chose to create a giant using two actors—one holding a giant papier-mâché head above and behind an actress who manipulated giant hands coming from poles at her waist. Our bean stalk was four actors standing along a rising platform, each offering his/her hand to Jack to propel him energetically “up the bean stalk.” Our giant’s quilt was three pieces of fabric covered with shiny coins that were manipulated by three actors to suggest the giant’s breathing. Catskins flew by standing on a four-foot platform, her veil billowing behind her, while the ghost of her adoptive mother manipulated a white bird on a pole “flying” along with her. The cow, dog and donkey in “Jack’s First Job” were all created by a single actor with the addition of one simple costume piece (a cowbell, a red tie for the puppy’s tongue, a donkey harness). In “The “Sow and Her Three Pigs” the houses for the pigs were 18" tall, carried by the actresses, and were

“fiddy-faddied” down by the fox pulling their roofs off, causing the walls to fall and reveal a miniature puppet-pig inside. The herd of wild horses in “Jack of Hearts and King Marock” were four actors manipulating six folkart-inspired horseheads woven with raffia. The sailboat was just a mast and sail; the canoe a prow with blue streamers. The wolves in “The Enchanted Tree” wore masks made of twisted brambles and twigs, as if the forest itself was alive.

An important note about the text: Characters speak not only as themselves but about themselves. It is crucial that the actors do not change to a “narrator’s” persona in these sections. Rather, they must remain as the character experiencing what he/she is describing.

Like the folk tales themselves, the traditional music of the Appalachians is evolved from the music of the settlers’ original homes in Europe, particularly the British Isles. Appalachian dance music, called “Old-Time,” sounds vaguely like Irish or Scottish music that has been boiled and combed. It is a very rhythmic music that bubbles and cascades forward with fiddles, banjos and guitars (although, oddly for its Celtic roots, no flutes). It is not Bluegrass, a more recent American form that among other differences employs a dramatically different banjo technique. Old recordings of Old-Time are exemplified by “Uncle Dave Macon and His Fruit Jar Drinkers,” or “Gid Tanner and the Skillet Lickers.” Modern recordings include “Highwoods String Band” and the “Horseflies.” Traditional Appalachian singing, often associated with church service, is rich with harmony. Further examples of Appalachian music’s roots in the British Isles are found in ballads such as “Barbara Allen” and “Little Musgrove” which are common in America and often little changed from versions found in Great Britain and Ireland.

These are the elements that form the spine of the music in *Sing Down the Moon*. The play contains substantial singing—every actor sings, several in featured songs—and there is music almost continuously, with tight and complicated interaction with the text. The music should not be treated as incidental, since it is really another character on stage, interacting in rapid dialogue with the actors. The music is not exclusively Old-Time, but draws from Old-Time and “theater music” styles to create something that serves the world of the play. There are moments of traditional dance music, song and melodic underscoring. The band* includes fiddle, upright bass, piano and a guitar/banjo double, supplemented by actors playing percussion instruments. The fiddle part is especially demanding in that it calls for the player to be strong as both an Old-Time (with its unique rhythmic bowing) and lyric player—that is, the fiddler needs the right hand of an Old-Time player and the left hand of a classical player. (*N.B. Although a live band is preferable, a recorded version of the score is available for rental.)

We are both from the Appalachian region—Mary Hall from Kentucky and David from North Carolina— and were drawn to this subject naturally. It is a rich and complicated culture, full of a dark beauty born of hardship, history and, most importantly, people. It is full of colors and shafts of light, of music and singing and nature always ready to reclaim any new clearing. It is a mountainous region full of the paradox of limitless vistas and claustrophobic hollers. It is a place overflowing with craft and imagination.

— Mary Hall Surface and David Maddox

Story order:

All six stories together (plus the opening song) result in a production of about 90 minutes, with the ideal order being that represented in this script. If a producer requires a one-hour version, the authors approve the following combination and story order: “Sing Down the Moon,” “Catskins,” “The Sow and Her Three Pigs,” “Jack’s First Job,” “The Enchanted Tree.” Other story combinations must be approved by the authors.

Please note: In this script, the cue numbers (i.e., **QA4**) correspond to the cue numbers on the recorded version of the score that is available to rent should a producer not be able to use a live band.

These same cue numbers are also listed in the Full Score, which contains all music, text and stage directions.

The placement of the cue number indicates the beginning of the cue. The # sign indicates where the music ends. See the example below:

WIFE (Entering.)

“What’s that noise? Who’s in my house?”

QA11 (*music begins*)

JACK

Jack hid himself behind the first thing he could find.
He’d never seen anybody the likes of this lady.

WIFE

“Show yourself!”

(*music ends*)

JACK

“I’m Jack, ma’am.”

The original cast recording of *Sing Down the Moon* contains additional text written for the cast recording only. The play is to be performed with only the text in this script.

Woman Three

Wonder Bean: Ma
Catskins: Mother
Job: Store Owner
Pigs: Mary
Marock: Featherflight
Tree: Old Woman

Woman Four

Wonder Bean: Cow/Fiddle/Bean Tree/
Quilt
Catskins: Daughter
Job: Wife
Pigs: Martha
Marock: Daughter/Chicken
Tree: Girl

Woman Five

Wonder Bean: Bean Tree/Quilt
Catskins: Wife
Job: Tom/Cow/Puppy/Donkey
Pigs: Ensemble
Marock: Daughter/Eagle Puppet
Tree: Wolf/Tree

Special thanks to
Rick Davis
and
Kevin Murray

ACT I

OPENING SONG

QA1

(JACK sits isolated on stage. CATSKINS stands separately, isolated. A group of three to five singers [ENSEMBLE] are grouped together, separate from JACK and CATSKINS.)

CATSKINS

RISE AND FLY
WAY UP HIGH

JACK

WHAT'S ROUND AS A SILVER COIN
AND SHINES AS BRIGHT AS GOLD
WHAT WAS BORN BEFORE ADAM
BUT ONLY A SINGLE MONTH OLD

ENSEMBLE

IF I HAD THE SONG OF AN ANGEL
AND WINGS SO I COULD FLY
I'D FLY TO WHERE THE STARS SHINE ABOVE
AND SING DOWN THE MOON FROM THE SKY

JACK

WELL THE MOON SHE'S ROUND AS A SILVER
COIN
AND SHINES AS BRIGHT AS GOLD.

SHE WAS BORN BEFORE ADAM
BUT SHE'S ONLY A SINGLE MONTH OLD.

JACK & CATSKINS
SHINE DOWN ON ME STARS IN THE HEAVENS
I'M GOIN' FAR FROM MY HOME.
SING DOWN TO ME MOON ON THIS MOUNTAIN
WATCH OVER ME WHERE I MAY ROAM.

(Other actors enter, assembling a stage picture of the people of Appalachia. [JACK's MA enters with the COW.])

ENSEMBLE
OH MOTHER, DON'T YOU BE WEARY
OH MOTHER, DON'T YOU WEEP.
THOUGH THE FIELDS ARE ROCKY
AND THE CREEKS THEY RUN DRY
OH MOTHER, DON'T YOU WEEP.

SOLO
DO YOU HEAR THE WIND A-BLOWING
DO YOU HEAR THAT MOURNFUL SOUND
BLOWING DOWN DRY CREEKS
PAST A HUNGRY CHILD—
WON'T NOTHING GROW IN THIS GROUND.

JACK (OR CATSKINS)
I AM NO LITTLE SPARROW.
I'VE GOT NO WINGS
AND I CAN'T FLY.
I'LL SIT RIGHT HERE IN MY GRIEF AND SORRY
AND PASS MY TROUBLES BY AND BY.

(Actors shift as the music transitions into the first story.)

Jack and the Wonder Bean

QA2

(JACK's MA leads an emaciated cow toward JACK. She holds the cow's lead-rope out to JACK. He shakes his head. MA insists, then JACK sadly crosses and takes the cow's rope. MA, with a big gesture, sends JACK off into the world with the cow. MA sits, with her head in her hands.)

JACK

Once there was a poor boy named Jack, who lived on a mountain with his mother.

MA

Times were harder than they'd ever been. They didn't have a scrap of food left and not a cent of money.

JACK

Even their old brown cow had stopped giving milk. Jack knew that he and his mother would starve if he didn't make a good trade for their cow.

(JACK crosses the stage until he encounters a RICH MAN, counting his money. JACK offers the cow to the RICH MAN, who laughs at JACK and exits. JACK crosses the stage until he encounters a WOMAN with

chicken. He gestures that he would like to trade. The WOMAN refuses and exits. JACK crosses the stage until he encounters a mysterious MAN. JACK gestures that he would like to trade. MAN turns his back on JACK. JACK begins to exit.)

#

MAN

“Jack. I’ll trade one bean for your cow. A wonder bean. It’s magic. Take it.”

(JACK takes the bean.)

QA3

(JACK gives his cow to the MAN, who exits. JACK crosses back to his MA.)

#

MA

“Jack, did you make a good trade for our old cow?”

JACK

“I did, Momma. I traded for a bean. A wonder bean.”

MA

“Here we sit starving and you trade the last thing we have for a bean! Give me that.”

(MA tosses the bean away. But the MAN appears, catching it.)

QA4

#

MA (cont'd)

“You useless, no-count child.”

(MA turns away and JACK scrambles after the bean. The MAN opens his hand, revealing the bean.)

JACK

But Jack found the bean and he planted it

QA5

JACK (cont'd)

deep in the ground.

(JACK hoes the ground and MA sharpens her ax. The work is hard.)

JACK (cont'd)

Jack kept his eye on where he'd planted the wonder bean. By noontime—

(The MAN, now wearing one green glove, has begun to “grow” with his arm.)

#

JACK (cont'd)

A bean tree had grown up knee high.

“Momma, look!”

QA6

MA

“Don’t be bothering me, boy. I got work to do.”
The cold pain of hunger had bit right through
the mother’s heart. She didn’t have a shred of
kindness left.

JACK

Jack tried to keep working at his chores but by
dinnertime—

MA

“There ain’t any dinner.”

(The bean tree grows higher—the MAN stands.)

#

JACK

“But, Momma, look. The bean tree is as tall as
me!”

QA7

MA

“What’d I tell you about talking nonsense? You
go straight to bed so I don’t have to listen to
that fool mouth of yours.”

(MA exits.)

JACK

So Jack went off to sleep hungry.

(JACK settles into sleep. The BEAN TREE grows, created by four actors, standing in a curved line going up and around the stage. JACK wakes up.)

#

JACK (cont'd)

The next morning,

QA8

#

JACK (cont'd)

the sun was only half shining through Jack's window.

QA9

JACK (cont'd)

Like there was something blocking the light! It was the bean tree growing clear up to the clouds! "Wonder where that would take a boy if he climbed it?"

(The MAN, as the base of the bean tree, reaches out to JACK.)

#

JACK (cont'd)

"I'm gonna find out."

QA10

(JACK climbs the bean tree, propelled by the BEAN TREE actors who take his hand, passing him rapidly from one to another "up" the bean stalk. JACK lands in a new world and the BEAN TREE disappears.)

JACK (cont'd)

When Jack got to the top, he didn't know where he was.

#

WIFE (Entering.)

"What's that noise? Who's in my house?"

QA11

JACK

Jack hid himself behind the first thing he could find. He'd never seen anybody the likes of this lady.

WIFE

"Show yourself!"

#

JACK

"I'm Jack, ma'am."

WIFE

"A boy? A little boy?"

JACK

"Yes, ma'am. I'm awful hungry. Could I have me something to eat?"

WIFE

"Eat?"

JACK

"Like a biscuit or a little scrap a' ham?"

QA12

WIFE

“You’re gonna be what’s to eat! My husband
will swallow you in one bite.”

*(The GIANT’s footsteps [off-stage timpani] shake the
world.)*

GIANT’S VOICE

“Fum, fo, fee, foy,
I smell the blood of a little boy.”

JACK

Jack started to take outta there quick.

WIFE

“Don’t try running that way. He’ll grab you up
in one swipe.”

GIANT’S VOICE

(Growling.)

“Yummm!”

JACK

Jack didn’t want to be no giant’s breakfast!
“What do I do?”

WIFE

“Jump in this oven. He won’t find you here.”

(JACK jumps into the oven.)

#

QA13

GIANT'S VOICE

“Be he alive or be he dead,
I’ll start with his toes
and eat up to his head.”

#

WIFE

“There’s no little boy here. You must be smell-
ing the one you ate yesterday.”

(GIANT growls angrily.)

WIFE (cont’d)

“I’ll get you something to eat. Don’t you worry.”

QA14

*(GIANT growls angrily again and rocks the ground as
he stomps off.)*

#

WIFE (cont’d)

“But first,

QA15

WIFE (cont’d)

I’ll have me a breakfast of nicely roasted little
boy!”

*(WIFE crosses to the oven, but JACK pops out, surpris-
ing the WIFE.)*

#

WIFE (cont'd)

“Ahhh!!”

JACK

“Law, Giant lady, it’s hot in there! Good thing I know how to blow out a fire.”

QA16

WIFE

“You get on outta here, trickin’ boy, back to where you came from! Now get!”

(Big hungry growl from the GIANT.)

#

WIFE (cont'd)

“I said I’m gonna fix you something to eat. I’m aimin’ to make you some eggs from your prize hen.”

QA17

(GIANT walks off, pleased. Giant’s WIFE exits, grumbling.)

WIFE (cont'd)

“All I ever do for that man is cook, cook, cook...”

(JACK starts to leave, but the sight of the prize hen stops him.)