

# Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

*Dramatic Publishing*



# **BABY GRAND**

**A Play**  
**by**  
**DAVID MARK COHEN**



**Dramatic Publishing**  
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

### \*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\*

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty fees are given in our current catalogue and are subject to change without notice. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. All inquiries concerning amateur and stock rights should be addressed to:

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING  
P. O. Box 129, Woodstock, Illinois 60098.

***COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES.*** This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including but not limited to the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication, and reading are reserved. *On all programs this notice should appear:*

"Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois"

©MCMLXXXIII (unpublished), and  
©MCMXCVI by  
DAVID MARK COHEN

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(BABY GRAND)

*Cover design by Susan Carle*

ISBN 0-87129-643-8

Childhood is not from birth to a certain age  
and at a certain age  
The child is grown, and puts away childish things.  
Childhood is the kingdom where nobody dies.

Nobody that matters, that is.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

*for my brothers, Richard and Stuart*

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*BABY GRAND* was first presented by Charleston Premiere Theatre (in association with Center Stage) at the Emmett Robinson Theatre as part of the 1990 Piccolo Spoleto Festival, Charleston, South Carolina. It was directed by Marya Bednerik; the set and lighting design was by John A. Olbrych Jr.; the costume design was by Mary Holloway; and the stage manager was Wendell Brooks. The cast was as follows:

SAM ZONDERMAN	.....	Craig Smith
NATHAN (PEP) ZONDERMAN	.....	Richard Blair
DELMADEAN MCDONALD KLEIN	.....	Susie Jo Pullon
CARL FISHMAN	.....	Irving Lipsky

Previous development of the script occurred at Theatre-in-the-Works (Amherst, MA), Wabash College (Crawfordsville, IN), University of Southern Maine (Gorham, ME), and The Writer's Theatre (NYC). Special acknowledgment is made to all the directors, dramaturgs, actors, designers and technologists who made the process so rewarding.

# **BABY GRAND**

**A Play in Two Acts  
For Three Men and One Woman**

## **CHARACTERS**

**SAM ZONDERMAN** . . . . . orphan son of a famous concert pianist. Boyish, dark-haired, 20

**NATHAN "PEP" ZONDERMAN** . . . . . his older brother, a Harvard Business School student. Handsome, muscular, curly dark hair, mid-20s

**DELMADEAN McDONALD KLEIN** . . . . .piano teacher and coach. Pretty, sturdy, red hair, mid-20s

**CARL FISHMAN** . . . .a piano tuner. Slight, bald, Jewish, 60s

**PLACE:** The Zonderman attic apartment-cum-studio.  
Beacon Hill, Boston.

**TIME:** Late 1970s.

## THE SETTING

An attic apartment-cum-studio in a townhouse in the Beacon Hill section of Boston.

The main entrance into the apartment is through a trapdoor and ladder. There are no windows except for a steel-framed skylight that covers the entire ceiling and has a number of openable frames.

One door leads to an unseen bedroom, another to the bathroom. The main room has four areas: 1) a small kitchen area with sink, stove, refrigerator, and cabinets; 2) a dining area with small table and two chairs; 3) a living area with armchair and, dominating the room, a Steinway Parlor Grand Piano; 4) a study area with a small desk, bookshelf and stereo.

Prints of classical musicians, recital posters, and a few abstract paintings have been removed from the walls, leaving oddly vacant spaces.

The studio was once used by a serious musician, but now two untidy brothers share the space that was never really meant for full-time living. A jarring feature is a weight bench with barbells and dumbbells in one corner.

# ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

AT RISE: *Late September. Mid-afternoon.*

*CARL FISHMAN is tuning the piano. He wears an old black suit with a formal tie and suspenders. He has a small black case of tuning tools [pitch fork, tuning wrench, tuning levers, etc.] open on the piano bench. He works in his shirtsleeves, his coat folded neatly on a nearby chair.*

*SAM ZONDERMAN is on the telephone. He is listening. He seems simultaneously anxious, annoyed, and bored.*

FISHMAN. Such a disgrace...

SAM (*on phone*). I know...

FISHMAN. Such a tragedy...

SAM. I agree...

FISHMAN. If I told your father once—

SAM. Absolutely...

FISHMAN. I told him a million times...

SAM. You don't have to tell me again—

FISHMAN. This is no studio for a decent piano.

SAM. You think I don't know?

FISHMAN. So hot...

SAM. Is it my fault?

FISHMAN. So dry...

SAM. It wasn't my decision—

FISHMAN. It kills a piano.



SAM. Sounds wonderful.

FISHMAN. What? (*Realizes SAM hasn't been listening.*) Are you listening to me, *Nachum*? *Nachum*?

SAM. What? (*Covers the receiver.*) What, Mr. Fishman?

FISHMAN. You're killing this piano. Can I show you something?

SAM. Mr. Fishman, I'm on the phone. See, telephone? Just hurry up and finish, ok?

FISHMAN. You've been on that phone since I started here.

SAM. You don't have to remind me. (*On phone.*) Esther, the tuner's here. I can't talk. (*Listens.*) Tuner. Not *tuna*...(*Listens.*) The piano tuner. Fishman. (*Listens.*) That's right. (*To himself.*) Jesus...(*On phone.*) I'll ask him—(*To FISHMAN.*) My aunt Esther wants to know when can you come do her Bosendorfer?

FISHMAN. Who's Esther? Saltzman?

SAM. That's right.

FISHMAN. With the Bosendorfer? In Weston?

SAM. You got it.

FISHMAN. And the *fishumulte* shepherd?

SAM. Sheepdog.

FISHMAN. Tell her I don't *shlep* to Weston anymore.

SAM (*on phone*). He says he doesn't *shlep* to Weston anymore. (*Listens. To FISHMAN.*) Since when?

FISHMAN. Since the *fishumulte* sheepdog *cakked* on my new shoes.

SAM (*on phone*). I'll have him call you...(*Hangs up.*) Are you nearly finished, Mr. Fishman?

FISHMAN. *Nachum*, come here.

SAM (*not moving*). What?

FISHMAN. Come here. Let me show you something. (*He motions silently to SAM to come. SAM finally moves.*) You see this, *Nachum*? What is it?

SAM. What? What is what?

FISHMAN. This. You're a bright boy, *Nachum*. Tell me what it is.

SAM. This? You mean this?

FISHMAN. What is this, *Nachum*?

SAM. This is a piano, Mr. Fishman. And my name's not *Nachum*.

FISHMAN. This is not a piano!

SAM. No?

FISHMAN. No! This is a Steinway Parlor Grand Model "O" 1937. "The Instrument of the Immortals"! And since when isn't your name *Nachum*?

SAM. I'm Sam, Mr. Fishman.

FISHMAN. Sam?

SAM. *Shmoo-ale*? *Nachum*'s my brother. Remember?

FISHMAN. You're *Shmooale*? Little *Shmooale*? The baby?  
(*An alarm sounds. SAM moves to shut it off.*)

SAM. What's your point, Mr. Fishman? We haven't much time. You promised you'd be finished by three-fifteen. It's already three.

FISHMAN. With a Steinway Parlor Grand Model "O" 1937, you don't hurry, *Shmooale*.

SAM. You promised—

FISHMAN. Now listen to me! (*Stops, looks a second, questioningly.*) You're sure you're *Shmooale*?

SAM. Mr. Fishman!

FISHMAN. All right. "The Instrument of the Immortals"—right? Right. (*Pointing.*) What's this?

SAM. It looks like a radiator.

FISHMAN. Oy, what a bright *boychicle*! Your father, of blessed memory, always had bright boys...

SAM. Not bright enough to understand what you're driving at, Mr. Fishman.

FISHMAN. Who puts a piano so close to a radiator? You want to dry it out? Warp the pin block? Crack the sounding board? Your father never kept this piano so close to a radiator. At least not in winter.

SAM. It isn't winter.

FISHMAN. Yet. But it's already *yontif*. Not long until heat comes on for the season.

SAM. Besides, it isn't played very often anymore.

FISHMAN. That's a secret you're telling me? You don't think I could tell from the *fishumulte* condition I found this piano in today? Let me tell you something. In the thirty and more years I've been tuning this piano, I've never heard it so far out of tune. Your mother, of blessed memory, would have died from shame to call me to tune such an out-of-tune piano. Let me tell you a secret, little *Shmooale*—

SAM. What?

FISHMAN. Do you know how to get to Carnegie Hall?

SAM. That's a very old joke, Mr. Fishman.

FISHMAN. This piano is no joke! You've got to play it. Every day. Or you might just as well burn it for firewood.

SAM. I've been thinking about taking lessons again.

FISHMAN. Well don't wait too long. It may be the "Instrument of the Immortals" but, *boychicle*, I assure you, it's as mortal as you or I. (*The telephone rings.*)

SAM. Damn...Look, just finish, Mr. Fishman. Please? (*Goes to phone, answers it.*) Yes, Esther? (*FISHMAN shrugs, closes his tool case, moves towards the weight bench.*) Who else calls me ten times a day? (*Listens.*) I told you, you're asking the wrong nephew—(*Notices FISHMAN scrutinizing the room.*) Look, Fishman's leaving. Gotta go. (*Hangs up.*) Nu, Mr. F? You're finished?

FISHMAN. What is this? You're starting a gymnasium here?

SAM. It's just Pep's weight bench.

FISHMAN. Who's Pep?

SAM. My brother. *Nachum*?

FISHMAN. What kind of *yiddishe* name is Pep?

SAM. A nickname. *Nu*, Mr. Fishman, you all set?

FISHMAN. You'll pardon my asking, but you've made some changes here?

SAM. A few...

FISHMAN. More than a few. It's three years, but I remember photographs. Concert posters. Your father's bust of Beethoven hung right there—

SAM. You've a wonderful memory—

FISHMAN. They gave it to him at his first United States concert. I was there—

SAM. Mr. Fishman—

FISHMAN. I still have the program—

SAM. If you're finished—

FISHMAN. So, *nu*, where'd they all go?

SAM (*wearily*). My brother gave them away.

FISHMAN. All of it?

SAM. When we sold the house in Brookline and moved in here.

FISHMAN. Everything?

SAM. He would have given away the piano if he could have found a way to get it out of here. (*Checks watch.*) Jesus...

Mr. Fishman, you've got to leave—!

FISHMAN. Before I go. Do me the favor?

SAM. What now?

FISHMAN. Move the piano. For me?

SAM. Do we have to?

FISHMAN. Come. (*SAM moves to the opposite side of the piano.*) A *bissle* to the right.

SAM (*does so*). How's that?

*(NATHAN "PEP" ZONDERMAN climbs up the ladder. PEP is clean-shaven and wears a collegiate outfit of button-down shirt, tie, cord jeans, and a sports jacket. He carries a battered briefcase and a paper bag.)*

SAM *(covers the receiver with his hand)*. It's Esther. She wants to know about dinner.

PEP. I already told her no.

SAM. But, Pep—

PEP. Tell her!

SAM *(uncovering the receiver)*. False alarm, it wasn't him after all.

PEP. Sammy—! *(Advances toward phone.)* Let me have that.

SAM. I'll call you later—*(He hangs up quickly. There is a momentary standoff.)* Guess how many times she's called?

PEP *(tearing off his jacket and loosening his tie)*. I couldn't care less.

SAM. Aw, c'mon, Pep. Guess.

PEP *(tossing SAM the paper bag)*. Here, I bought some fix sticks—

SAM *(catching the package)*. I wish you wouldn't call them that. *(He carries them off to the bathroom.)*

PEP. What?

SAM *(offstage until indicated he's back)*. "Fix Sticks."

PEP. What should I call them?

SAM. What they are—syringes.

PEP. Baby, don't start—*(He begins to sit, but remembers something in his pocket.)* Oh. Here's the new Medic Alert necklace. Let's try not to lose this one, ok?

SAM. I didn't lose the other one—

PEP. C'mere—

*(SAM reenters and comes over to PEP. PEP places the necklace around SAM's neck.)*

PEP. Keep it there. *(Collapses wearily into the armchair.)*

SAM. Hard day in academe? You should have been here, playing operator with Aunt Esther. Guess how many times she's called—

PEP. Baby, I'm bushed. Do my neck, will you?

SAM. Only if you'll guess.

PEP. C'mon...*(SAM doesn't move.)* All right...

SAM. Good. *(He goes behind PEP, massages his neck and shoulders.)*

PEP. Three?

SAM. Three? Don't be silly.

PEP. Five?

SAM. Don't make me laugh.

PEP. Oh, that's good...Eight?

SAM. Not even close.

PEP. Seriously? More than eight?

SAM. Eleven.

PEP *(gives a low whistle)*. Shit...

SAM. I'm marking it down.

PEP. The woman is a basket case.

SAM. Eleven calls in one day. It's a new record.

PEP. If you went out, you wouldn't be bothered.

SAM. I don't go out.

PEP. Maybe you should.

SAM. You think I should? *(He looks at PEP a moment.)* You think I should go out?

PEP. You know what I think. *(SAM stops massaging. He moves to the phone.)* What are you doing?

SAM. Calling Esther. We're going out. To Weston.

PEP. I said you, not me.

SAM. It's Erev Rosh Hashanah.

PEP. So?

SAM. We always go.

PEP. We haven't gone in years.

SAM. We used to—before...

PEP. Well now it's after. Besides, what is she serving?

SAM. You think I'm as rude as you? I didn't ask.

PEP. You are and you did. What's the menu?

SAM. Incredible...

PEP. The menu?

SAM (*quickly*). Matzo ball soup with farfel, chopped liver, brisket, potato kugel, carrot tzimmes, challah, assorted jello molds and—oh, yeah—salad.

PEP. Thank god for something green. What about dessert?

SAM. I don't eat dessert. Remember?

PEP. Never? (*Pause.*) It doesn't matter. It's all crap.

SAM. You love Esther's liver.

PEP. It's still crap. There's nothing on the menu that you should be eating. You want to get sick?

SAM. Why not?

PEP. Fine, get sick. (*PEP gets up.*) Where's the *Globe*?

SAM. Where it always is.

PEP (*turns, bumps into the relocated piano*). Jesus...! What the—? (*Notices.*) Who moved this thing? Sammy?

SAM. Hmm?

PEP. The piano?

SAM. Beats me. Maybe it rolled.

PEP. Has someone been playing this? Baby?

SAM. Leonard Bernstein dropped by this afternoon. He wanted to try it. I couldn't refuse him.

PEP. We have a rule! Don't we?

SAM. I didn't play it.

PEP (*taking SAM gently, but deliberately, by the collar*). You wouldn't lie to me, would you, baby?

SAM. Not me...

PEP. No?

SAM. I did move it, but I didn't play it. Honest. (*PEP maintains his threatening grip.*) The heating season's coming. It was too close to the radiator. (*PEP releases him. They look at each other a moment.*)

PEP. If you're going out, you better hurry.

SAM. Can I take the car?

PEP. I need the car. I'm going out.

SAM. Out where?

PEP. Back to the "B" School library. Take the "T" to Riverside.

SAM. And from there?

PEP. Get Uncle Irv to pick you up.

SAM. Can't you take the subway? It's a five-minute ride for you on the Red Line. It's forever to Riverside—and there're too many people.

PEP. You want to go, make your own arrangements. What's for supper?

SAM. You are unbelievable.

PEP. I am hungry. Am I to assume that you are not cooking? (*He goes to the fridge.*)

SAM. How can you work on Rosh Hashanah?

PEP. Harvard University, contrary to popular opinion, is not owned, operated, or controlled by the World Zionist Conspiracy—neither is its Business School. Life goes on. (*Searching in the fridge.*) That good ham all finished?

SAM. What?

PEP. The ham...?

SAM. I packed it for your lunch, remember?



PEP. There's nothing in here. I thought you were going shopping today.

SAM. You didn't leave me any money.

PEP. Didn't I? (*SAM shakes his head. PEP takes out his wallet, extracts a few bills, leaves them on the counter.*) Here. You can go tomorrow.

SAM. I don't shop on *yontif*.

PEP. Since when?

SAM. Since you won't go with me to Weston.

PEP. Don't be a baby! Jesus, you are such a baby sometimes, you know that? I know how to take care of babies, remember?

SAM. Yeah, sure...

PEP. What?

SAM. I said, sure...

PEP. Have you forgotten? Hmm?

SAM. No.

PEP. Good. (*Starts looking through cabinets.*) What the hell is there to eat?

SAM. Why can't we go? Please? Please?

PEP. You are really too much, you know that? For nearly thirty months—and I know, 'cause I've counted every blessed one—you've refused to go out of this house, except for shopping or one of your very rare walks to the Public Gardens—which is right around the corner practically. And now, out of the blue, you want to drive fifteen miles each way for a meal with loud-mouthed relatives and food that will drive you straight to a syringe.

SAM. They're our family.

PEP. Ah, yes. What took you so long, baby, to get around to that?

SAM. Well, they are. They are our family, Pep. Papa would have wanted us to go—

PEP. They are not your family! Uncle Irv and Aunt Esther and cousins Phil and Carol and Jim are not your family! I am your family—and don't you ever forget it! (*SAM is silent. He appears on the verge of tears.*) Look, what do you say we go over to the Square? To the Wursthaus? I've got enough time. You love their pastrami—

SAM. No...

PEP. Or to Steve's. For ice cream. We'll cheat a bit.

SAM. I'm not hungry.

PEP. You've got to eat. (*Silence. PEP proffers the car keys.*) Here. Take the car. I can stand only so much guilt. (*SAM shakes his head.*) C'mon...(*From behind, PEP wraps his arms around SAM in an unconsciously affectionate gesture. Then à la Durante:*) Whaddya say to pastrami?

SAM (*shakes PEP's arms away*). No!

PEP. Hey! You all right?

SAM. I miss him, Pep.

PEP (*sympathetically*). You think about it too much. That's your problem. You just need to forget it and find something to do to occupy your spare time. Think about that instead. Am I right?

SAM. I'm scared...

PEP. Oh, baby...

SAM. And I'm getting too many reactions.

PEP. Oh. That. (*Suddenly distant.*) Go see Hoffman.

SAM. He doesn't help. He says I'm not careful enough.

PEP. Maybe you aren't.

SAM. I am careful. I do everything I can. (*PEP looks at him.*) Most of the time...

PEP. See somebody else.

SAM. Like who?

PEP. Birnbaum.

SAM. Thanks a lot.

PEP. You asked me.

SAM. For a doctor.

PEP. What do you think he is? A veterinarian?

SAM. Maybe you should go.

PEP. Great idea. That would help you? My going to a shrink?

If that's what you think, baby, then maybe you really better go.

SAM. Let's drop it, ok?

PEP. Go drink some juice.

SAM. I'm fine.

PEP. You're irritable.

SAM. I'm fine.

PEP. Listen to yourself.

SAM. I'm fine.

PEP. You're shaking.

SAM. I'm not.

PEP. You're sweating.

SAM. I'm not.

PEP. You're repeating yourself.

SAM. I'm—(*Breaks off. Realizes he's having a reaction. He looks to PEP.*)

PEP (*gets up, goes to fridge. Takes out orange juice and pours a tall glass. He hands it to SAM who drinks*). Better—?

SAM (*nods sheepishly. He finishes the juice*). We should eat soon.

PEP. Whatever you say. You're cooking.

SAM. I don't always notice anymore. It just starts. How can I stop it if I don't even notice?

PEP. I think I'll wash up. (*Moves toward the bathroom.*)

SAM. Pep! (*PEP stops. Turns to look at SAM.*) This morning I filled an entire syringe. With regular insulin. The needle was in me before I realized the mistake. I could have killed myself. I swear I started with the right vial. What do you think of that?

PEP. I think you better stay the hell away from that piano.  
(*PEP exits. SAM looks after him. Music fades in. Lights fade to black. Music continues in darkness.*)

## SCENE TWO

AT RISE: *Late November. Mid-morning. The doorbell intercom buzzes. No response. The doorbell intercom buzzes again.*

*SAM hurries in from bedroom. He wears a nice pair of slacks, open-neck shirt, sweater, and loafers. He goes anxiously to the intercom.*

SAM. Yes? (*Garbled reply.*) Ms. McDonald? (*Garbled reply.*)  
Top of the stairs. All the way up. (*He buzzes the door open, then checks his appearance in the mirror. He realizes that he's wearing his Medic Alert necklace. He takes it off, putting it in his pants pocket. Then he goes to the trap, opens it, and peers down. The sound of footsteps approaching is heard.*) Keep coming. Two more flights...

DELMA (*from below*). Where are you, anyway?

SAM. Look up.

DELMA. Up where?

SAM. Up here. Let me give you a hand...

*(He reaches into the trap, brings up a large shoulder bag and sets it aside. Then he assists DELMADEAN McDONALD KLEIN up the ladder. She wears a long-sleeved western blouse, skirt, boots, and an old army jacket. She steps in and SAM closes the trap. DELMA is breathless from her climb.)*