

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

THE CHRISTMAS BUS

By
ROBERT INMAN



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** 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 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. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 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.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMVI by
ROBERT INMAN
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(THE CHRISTMAS BUS)

For inquiries concerning all other rights, contact:
International Creative Management, 40 W. 57th St., New York NY 10019
Phone: (212) 556-5636 - Fax: (212) 556-5665

ISBN: 1-58342-331-1

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the Play *must* give credit to the Author of the Play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production. The name of the Author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than 50% the size of the title type. Biographical information on the Author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

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

All producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“Originally produced at the Blowing Rock Stage Company,
Kenneth Kay, Producing Artistic Director.”

AUTHOR'S NOTES

There really was a Traveling Troubadour. On a frigid December night some years ago he was part of a vanload of passengers traveling from the Denver airport to the ski resort area of the Rockies. He told his fellow travelers how he had left a girlfriend in a small mountain town a year before and set out to see if he could make it as a folksinger. He and the girlfriend had lost touch; but now, with Christmas approaching, he was on his way back. Would she let him in? Had she found someone else?

The van stopped near the front door of a dwelling and the passengers held their collective breath as the folksinger trudged through the snow to the doorway, guitar case in hand. He knocked, a young woman answered, they talked earnestly for a minute or so, and then...she opened the door and he disappeared inside with a wave. To quote a once-popular song, the whole darn bus was cheering.

It's one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments that any writer treasures. If witnessing something like that doesn't get your creative juices flowing, nothing will. From there, imagination takes over and the vanload of tourists becomes a busload of orphans, led by a mother hen who intends to give them a special Christmas. It becomes a story of how people make families out of bits and pieces of their collective lives, how we might persevere when we truly believe in something, how vital it is to nurture a child, how love generates magic.

A note to theatres: the cast may be expanded by adding children, especially younger ones, with non-speaking parts. The more orphans, the merrier—up to a point. The limiting factor is the size of the bus. It must be large enough to accommodate Frump, Thomas and the kids.

I dedicate the play to all the orphans of the world.

The Christmas Bus premiered December 18, 2003, at Blowing Rock Stage Company, Blowing Rock, N.C. Produced and directed by Kenneth Kay, stage management by Jesseca Terharr, set design by Lyle Baskin, technical direction by Jess McNeil, sound design by David Koresh, lighting design by Dan Mathews, costumes by Jennifer Ackland, scenic design by Wendy McNeil. The original cast was:

THE EDITOR Robert Inman
MRS. FRUMP Freda Smith
THOMAS Hunter Thore
SHERIFF SNODGRASS Dana Clawson
THE TROUBADOUR Matthew Lindahl
DARLENE Maggie Cochran
THE ORPHANS Sarah Anne Brown, Forrest Brown,
Tommy Wright, Sky Franks, Lacey Elliott, Kelsey
Smith, Erin Johnson, Elizabeth Pitts

THE CHRISTMAS BUS

A Full-length Play

CHARACTERS

THE EDITOR 40s - 70s, writing a story for the
Christmas edition of his newspaper
FRUMP 50s - 60s, director of the Peaceful Valley
Orphanage
THOMAS . . 18, high-school senior and mechanical genius
SHERIFF SNODGRASS 40s - 50s, local lawman and
tireless investigator
THE BUSYBODIES three harpies who make life
difficult for Frump
THE KIDS . . ages 6 - 14, FRANKIE, CLARA, DONALD,
HILDA, EUGENE, LOUANN, CASEY, JENNY
THE TROUBADOUR 20s, a traveling folksinger
DARLENE 20s, the Troubadour's reluctant girlfriend

NOTE: Lead sheets for the six songs included in the play
follow the script (starting on page 66).

THE CHRISTMAS BUS

(The curtain rises.)

SCENE 1 - THE EDITOR

(From offstage, the sound of off-key singing:)

THE EDITOR *(singing, “Deck the Halls”)*.

**FAST AWAY THE OLD YEAR PASSES,
FA-LA-LA-LA-LA, LA-LA-LA-LA
HAIL THE NEW, YE LADS AND LASSES,
FA-LA-LA-LA-LA, LA-LA-LA-LA**

(THE EDITOR bustles in through an exterior door on a flurry of wind—bundled in overcoat, hat and scarf, struggling to close the door against the wintry gale.)

**SING WE JOYOUS ALL TOGETHER,
FA-LA-LA, LA-LA-LA, LA-LA-LA.
HEEDLESS OF THE WIND AND WEATHER,
FA-LA-LA-LA-LA, LA-LA-LA-LA.**

(He finally manages to close the door and leans against it, catching his breath. Then he turns to the audience, hanging hat, scarf and overcoat on a coat rack as he speaks.)

THE EDITOR. Whoooooeeeee. She's blowing like a politician out there. And looking a lot like snow. But then, it *always* looks like snow right before Christmas. It's a tradition around here. Dark clouds, temperature dropping, wind picking up, kids getting that sparkle in their eyes and that rosy glow in their cheeks. Everybody gets excited—buying up all the milk and bread, waxing the runners on the sled, putting out extra seed for the birds. Young and old, standing around, looking at the sky: “Do it, Lord! Do it!” And then, nothing happens. Not a single dad-burned flake. That's the way it's always been. The delicious *promise* of a white Christmas. But...just a promise. (*Pauses, smiles.*) Except for once. And that's what I'm gonna tell you about. (*He pulls a reporter's notebook from a pocket and flips pages.*) Matter of fact, I'm writing it up for the newspaper. It's something my grandfather started years ago when he founded the paper—a special Christmas edition with recipes, poetry, a whole page of letters to Santa Claus, and an inspirational story. He wrote about a little girl who got lost in the woods. Folks searched all one bitter cold night. Gave up hope. No way to survive in weather like that. But early the next morning, they found that little girl sitting on a stump, doing just fine. Said she slept all night with a deer. Imagine that. Now, no editor has ever been able to top that story. But I've been saving this one, and... (*a sly smile*) well, we'll see what you think.

SCENE 2 - THE ORPHANAGE

(Lights up on the main room—cluttered and well lived in, sparsely furnished with worn, but sturdy beds, chairs and desks. Throughout the play, the EDITOR moves freely and unseen among the other members of the cast.)

THE EDITOR. Let me take you back a few years to Peaceful Valley—a green and pleasant place, with orchards and pastures and farmland, vegetable gardens and sturdy barns. But Peaceful Valley was not a peaceful place, and the reason was the Peaceful Valley Orphanage.

(A sudden burst of noise and motion as the orphans—CLARA, EUGENE, HILDA, DONALD, JENNY, CASEY and LOUANN—dash into the room from L, laughing and yelling rambunctiously as they mill about. The EDITOR snaps his fingers and the action freezes.)

THE EDITOR. These were the residents...well, most of 'em. *(Pointing them out.)* That's Clara...Eugene...Jenny...Hilda...Louann...Casey...Donald. Now Donald, as you see, had a constant companion—this geranium plant. There was a fire at Donald's home a while back, and the only survivors were Donald and the geranium. Sad story. But Donald was doing okay, and nobody paid much attention to the fact that he toted a geranium around all the time. The unwritten rule here was that you just accepted folks as they were, geraniums and all. *(The EDITOR snaps his fingers and the action resumes as the KIDS noisily exit R.)* Folks who lived nearby referred to the residents of Peaceful Valley as "The Hooligans."

And, they pretty much lived up to the name. Most days, it wavered between chaos and confusion, with a little hullabaloo thrown in for good measure.

(The KIDS dash back across the room, R to L, followed this time by MRS. FRUMP—a harried, and disheveled woman. She carries a broom and wears an apron with bulging pockets.)

FRUMP. A madhouse, that's what it is! A madhouse! Children, we need to have a little order here! *(The KIDS exit noisily L. FRUMP puts the broom aside and begins to tidy the room.)*

THE EDITOR. That's Mrs. Frump. The kids called her, simply, "Frump." She'd been running the orphanage for more than twenty years. Or maybe I should say the orphanage had been running her. Some days were better than others. *(The sound of a knock at the exterior door.)*

FRUMP. Coming.

(FRUMP crosses to the door and opens it and is pushed aside by HORTENSE, MYRTLE and ETHEL, who rush in and bustle officiously about the room, conducting an inspection. FRUMP looks frantic.)

FRUMP. Ladies! So nice to see you. May I offer you some apple cobbler? It's fresh out of the oven...

(The women ignore her—poking into corners and under furniture, making displeased note of the clutter. ETHEL carries a clipboard and scribbles furiously on it.)

FRUMP follows them, making a vain effort to straighten and tidy.)

THE EDITOR. These very prim and proper ladies were members of the orphanage board of trustees. Frump and the orphans referred to them—though not to their faces, of course—as the Busybodies. It seemed that their greatest joy in life involved descending on Frump at the worst possible moment.

HORTENSE. Aaaaah! Dust! Have you ever seen such? Ethel, are you writing this down?

ETHEL. Writing it all down, Hortense, every little bit of it.

FRUMP. Now, ladies, if you'll just...

MYRTLE. Aaaagh! Cobwebs! Why I don't believe the place has had a proper cleaning in years.

ETHEL. Maybe longer.

HORTENSE. Decades, if you ask me.

ETHEL. Somewhere between years and decades.

FRUMP. Well, you know, cleaning day is Saturday, and since it's Friday...

ETHEL (*picking up a handkerchief from the floor*).
Aaaagh! Cooties!

HORTENSE. Add it to the list, Ethel. Why, I've never seen such disorganization!

MYRTLE. Slothfulness!

ETHEL. How do you spell that?

HORTENSE. Untidiness!

MYRTLE. Chaos and confusion!

(The KIDS gallop in—laughing, yelling, milling about the BUSYBODIES, who recoil in horror. The women huddle together and edge toward the door.)

FRUMP. Now, children...Eugene, stop that...children, let's mind our manners...Jenny, for heaven's sake, lower the volume...

HORTENSE, MYRTLE, ETHEL. It's a madhouse!

(They exit in a huff. The KIDS race about for a moment longer, then dash offstage as FRUMP sits wearily in a chair.)

FRUMP *(calling offstage)*. No apple cobbler for supper unless...unless...well, I don't know unless, but I'll think of something. Merciful heavens! Can anything else go wrong today?

(Another knock at the door. FRUMP struggles to her feet and opens it to reveal SHERIFF SNODGRASS, holding FRANKIE by the collar. FRUMP pretends not to notice FRANKIE.)

FRUMP. Why, Sheriff Snodgrass, how lovely of you to drop by! Come on in the kitchen. I've got some apple cobbler, fresh out of the oven.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS *(entering, FRANKIE still in his grip)*. Miz Frump, I'm afraid I don't have time for apple cobbler. I'm here on business. Serious business. *(The SHERIFF gives FRANKIE a shake. FRANKIE lets his head bob crazily from side to side.)*

FRUMP. Oh, dear.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Old Man Gulley has been complaining about his cows' milk turning sour. I have investigated, Miz Frump, and I have found the culprit.

FRUMP. They've been eating bitterweed?

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. No, Miz Frump. *This* culprit. I caught young Frankie here, riding those cows.

FRUMP. Frankie, is that so? (*FRANKIE shrugs.*)

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. At a gallop, Miz Frump. Cows ain't meant to be ridden. Especially at a gallop. (*With a jerk, FRANKIE breaks free from the SHERIFF's grasp. The SHERIFF and FRUMP chase him about the room.*) Frankie, come back here! Frankie, stop that right now! Frankie!... (*FRANKIE eludes their grasp and darts away, exiting R with a gleeful laugh. The SHERIFF collapses into a chair.*) Miz Frump, that boy...that boy...

FRUMP. He's an energetic and ingenious young man, Sheriff. Why, Frankie was telling me the other day that he aspires to be a law enforcement officer, just like yourself. A champion of truth and justice.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Miz Frump, you can't be a law enforcement officer if you have a criminal record. And I'd say that's where that energetic and ingenious young man is headed.

FRUMP. Now, Sheriff, it can't be as grim as all that.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. And he's not the only one. I'm out here constantly—neighbors calling about your young'uns chasing each other up and down the road with garden implements, putting bed sheets on their heads and scaring poor old widow ladies. Miz Frump, you have a problem with discipline. I have to tell you, some of the members of the orphanage board of trustees are beginning to wonder if you have not lost control, Miz Frump. Lost control.

FRUMP. Sheriff Snodgrass, these are fine young people. We've just got to find ways to channel their boundless

energy into constructive avenues. We've got to emphasize socialization, fraternalization and matriculation!

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Huh?

FRUMP. And you can bet we will. Starting right away. You and the ladies on the board of trustees will see improvement, Sheriff Snodgrass. Improvement!

(The KIDS—joined now by FRANKIE—dash back in from L, milling about the SHERIFF and FRUMP, tussling and dashing about. The SHERIFF stares at the ruckus and backs away toward the door.)

FRUMP. Are you sure I can't offer you some of that apple cobbler? With a scoop of vanilla ice cream?

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. I've gotta be going, Miz Frump.
(He exits quickly.)

FRUMP. He's a nice man, but I do think he takes things a bit too seriously. *(She turns to the raucous children. EUGENE is rooting around on the floor on all fours, snorting like a pig.)* Eugene, stop that. *(She grabs him around the waist and sets him upright.)* Donald, wipe your nose. Clara, wipe Donald's nose for him. Frankie, I want you to sit down at that desk and write ten times, "I will not ride cows." *(The KIDS are all utterly ignoring her. She flaps her arms in frustration and calls out...)* Thomas, I believe I could use your help in here!

(THOMAS enters. He's the oldest of the orphans, a boy in his late teens. He watches the melee for a moment.)

FRUMP. Thomas, it's a madhouse! They're as wild as a bunch of...well, hooligans.

THOMAS. Hey! Time out! *(The KIDS stop abruptly.)*

We're gonna take a vote.

DONALD. What're we gonna vote on, Thomas?

THOMAS. We're gonna vote on whether we think Frump is a good egg.

LOUANN. What's a good egg?

FRANKIE. Somebody that keeps her pockets full of jelly-beans.

(The KIDS surround FRUMP, digging in her apron pockets for jellybeans. She grins and playfully tries to slap their hands away.)

CASEY. Somebody that doesn't raise a big fuss when we spill our milk.

CLARA. Somebody that gives big hugs.

HILDA. Somebody that tucks us into bed every night.

JENNY. Somebody that makes chicken 'n dumplings.

EUGENE. Somebody that darns our socks when they get holes in 'em.

THOMAS. So, is Frump a good egg?

THE KIDS. Yeahhhhh!

THOMAS. And why is Frump a good egg?

THE KIDS. Because we love ya, Frump. *(The KIDS all hug FRUMP. She beams. Then the KIDS, except for THOMAS, dash off R.)*

FRUMP. My, my, my. They are a bunch of little dears, aren't they.

THOMAS *(skeptically)*. If you say so, Frump.

(FRUMP works about the room—sweeping, dusting, straightening, humming to herself. THOMAS sits at a

desk and starts drawing on a tablet. The EDITOR crosses to the desk.)

THE EDITOR. Now, Thomas here, he'd been at the orphanage almost as long as Frump. She found him one morning on the doorstep—a little baby, wrapped in a blanket, in an apple crate. Over the years, most of the kids who came here stayed for a while and went on to good, permanent homes. But for some reason, nobody took Thomas. So he stayed on, growing up, helping Frump. *(Looks over THOMAS's shoulder.)* A few months from now, he'd be graduating from high school. Wanted to go on to college and study mechanical engineering.

(FRUMP crosses to the desk and looks over THOMAS's shoulder.)

FRUMP. What's that you're working on?

(THOMAS shows her the drawing—a conglomeration of gears, pulleys, wires and electric circuits.)

THOMAS. A kid-o-mometer.

FRUMP. A what?

THOMAS. See, you put a dirty, hungry kid in this end about five o'clock in the afternoon, press a button, and he comes out the other end at six—clean, fed, and with his teeth brushed.

THE EDITOR. Now, that's something the world could really use.