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*Dramatic Publishing*

A Full-length Play

by

JOHN OSBORNE

# The Entertainer



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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## NOTE:

The music hall is dying, and, with it, a significant part of England. Some of the heart of England has gone; something that once belonged to everyone, for this was truly a folk art. In writing this play, I have not used some of the techniques of the music hall in order to exploit an effective trick, but because I believe that these can solve some of the eternal problems of time and space that face the dramatist, and, also, it has been relevant to the story and setting. Not only has this technique its own traditions, its own convention and symbol, its own mystique—it cuts right across the restrictions of the so-called naturalistic stage. Its contact is immediate, vital and direct.

CAST

*In Order of Appearance*

BILLY RICE

JEAN RICE

ARCHIE RICE

PHOEBE RICE

FRANK RICE

WILLIAM (BROTHER BILL) RICE

GRAHAM DODD

TIME: *The present.*

## OVERTURE

1. Billy and Jean
2. Archie Rice—"Don't take him seriously!"
3. Billy, Jean and Phoebe
4. Archie Rice—"In Trouble Again"
5. Billy, Jean, Phoebe and Archie

## INTERMISSION

6. Billy, Phoebe, Jean, Archie and Frank
7. Archie Rice—"Interrupts the Programme"
8. Billy, Phoebe, Jean, Archie and Frank

## INTERMISSION

9. Frank Rice—"Singing for You"
10. Billy, Phoebe, Jean, Archie and Frank
11. The Good Old Days Again
12. Jean and Graham—Archie and Bill
13. Archie Rice—The One and Only

The first performance in Great Britain of THE ENTERTAINER was given at the Royal Court Theatre, Sloane Square, London, on 10th April 1957 by the English Stage Company. It was directed by Tony Richardson and the decor was by Alan Tagg. The cast was as follows:

BILLY RICE.....*George Relpb*  
JEAN RICE.....*Dorothy Tutin*  
PHOEBE RICE.....*Brenda de Banzie*  
ARCHIE RICE.....*Laurence Olivier*  
FRANK RICE.....*Richard Pasco*  
GORGEOUS GLADYS.....*Vivienne Drummond*  
WILLIAM (BROTHER BILL) RICE.....*Aubrey Dexter*  
GRAHAM .....*Stanley Meadows*

## SETTING:

The action takes place in a large coastal resort. The house where the Rice family live is one of those tall ugly monuments built by a prosperous businessman at the beginning of the century. Only twenty-five minutes in the brougham to the front. Now, trolley buses hum past the front drive, full of workers from the small factories that have grown up round about. This is a part of the town the holiday makers never see—or, if they do, they decide to turn back to the pleasure gardens. This is what they have spent two or three hours in a train to escape. They don't even have to pass it on their way in from the central station, for this is a town on its own, and it has its own station—quite a large one, with acres of goods sheds and shunting yards. However, the main line trains don't stop there. It is not residential, it is hardly industrial. It is full of dirty blank spaces, high black walls, a gas holder, a tall chimney, a main road that shakes with dust and lorries. The shops are scattered at the corners of narrow streets. A news agent's, a general grocer's, a fish-and-chip shop.



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# The Entertainer

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## OVERTURE

During the Intermissions, an advertising sheet  
may be lowered.

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## NUMBER ONE

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**SCENE:** *At the back a gauze. Behind it, a part of the town. In front of it, a high rostrum with steps leading to it. Knee-high flats and a door frame will serve for a wall. The sight-lines are preserved by swagging. Different swags can be lowered for various scenes to break up the acting areas. Also, ordinary, tatty backcloth and draw-tabs. There are two doors L and R of the apron. The lighting is the kind you expect to see in the local Empire—everything bang-on, bright and hard, or a simple follow-spot. The scenes and interludes must, in fact, be lit as if they were simply turns on the bill. Furniture and props are as basic as they would be for a short sketch. On both sides of the proscenium is a square in which numbers—the turn numbers—appear. The problems involved are basically the same as those that confront any resident stage-manager on the twice nightly circuit every Monday morning of his working life.*

**MUSIC.** *The latest, the loudest, the worst. A gauzed front-cloth. On it are painted enormous naked young ladies, waving brightly colored fans, and kicking out gaily. Written across it in large letters are the words: "ROCK'N ROLL NEW'D LOOK."*

*Behind the upstage gauze, light picks out an old man. He walks across the stage from L to R. As he reaches C he pauses and looks up. There are shouts and screams. The noise of a woman trying to separate two men—her son and her lover perhaps. Cries of "Oh, leave him alone! Don't! Please don't! Leave him alone." He walks off R and reappears beside the swagging, walking in C. There is a crash and the sound of blows. He pauses again, then goes on. The woman screams, loudly this time. He pauses again, turns back, and shouts down over the banister rail, "Do you mind being quiet down there, please." He pauses, but there is no response. "Will you kindly stop making all*

*that noise!" He manages to sound dignified, but he has a powerful voice and the noise stops for a moment. He nods and starts moving. A voice shouts: "Why don't you shut your great big old gob, you poor, bloody old fool!" A woman's sob stabs the end of the sentence and the old man hesitates, turns back and calls over the stairs: "Are you all right, Mrs. —?" A man's voice is heard, urgent and heated. A door bangs, and the noise is muffled. The sobbing is still audible but the situation seems to be more controlled. The old man returns C and enters through the door-frame.*

BILLY RICE is a spruce man in his seventies. He has great physical pride, the result of a lifetime of being admired as a "fine figure of a man." He is slim, upright, athletic. He glows with scrubbed well-being. His hair is just gray, thick and silky from its vigorous daily brush. His clothes are probably twenty-five years old—including his pointed patent leather shoes—but well pressed and smart. His watch chain gleams, his collar is fixed with a tie-pin beneath the tightly knotted black tie, his brown Homburg is worn at a very slight angle. When he speaks, it is with a dignified Edwardian diction—a kind of repudiation of both Oxford and cockney that still rhymes "cross" with "force," and yet manages to avoid being exactly upper-class or effete. Indeed, it is not an accent of class but of period. One does not hear it often now.

*Take up front gauze.*

*He walks down C, laying down a folded newspaper, two quart bottles of beer, and a telegram, which he glances at quickly. He crosses to the forestage door R, and goes through it singing sonorously but cheerfully:*

BILLY.

"Rock of ages cleft for me  
Let me hide myself in thee!"

*[He reappears in his shirt sleeves, pulling on a heavy woolen cardigan over his waistcoat. Still singing, he sits*

down, pours himself out a glass of beer, and starts to unlace his shoes. He puts these in a box with tissue paper upstage c. The noise starts up again from downstairs. He drinks from his glass of beer, takes out a nail file and stands cleaning his nails expertly. This is like flicking off the old, imaginary speck of dust. There is a yell from downstairs. BILLY speaks, gravely, with forethought.] Bloody Poles and Irish! [He sits down and puts on his carpet slippers. Front door slams, he takes spectacles from his case and puts them on.] I hate the bastards. [He unfolds his newspaper; the doorbell starts to ring. He looks irritated, but he has his feet up and is too comfortable to move. He sings cheerfully, as if to drown the noise of the doorbell.]

"Nearer, my God, to Thee  
Nearer to Thee!

[He listens and then goes on.]

Even though it be a cross  
That raiseth me . . .

[He picks up the newspaper and peers at it gravely.]

Still all my song would be  
Nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer to Thee!"

[He puts down his paper. Standing.] Why don't they answer the bloody door! [He leans his arms on the chair, wondering whether he will have to go after all.] Ought to be locked up, some of these people. [It looks as though he won't have to go after all, and he settles back cheerfully.] Dirty, filthy lot. [Picks up paper.] No wonder we're going down. [Pushes paper down suddenly.] My God, there's a draft! [Gets up and goes to door and looks out.] I'll bet they've left the front door open. Born in fields, they are. [Takes a rug and arranges it against the door.] Probably were born in fields. Animals. [Back to chair and sits down.] Like animals. Wild animals.

[*He settles down. Across from up L comes a YOUNG GIRL. BILLY pours himself out some more beer. The GIRL knocks on the door. He listens.*]

BILLY. Who is it? [*The GIRL knocks again.*] Who is it? Can't get any peace in this damned house.

GIRL. Is that you, Grandad?

BILLY. What?

GIRL. It's Jean.

BILLY [*rising*]. Who is it?

JEAN. It's me—Jean.

BILLY [*goes to door and stands behind it*]. Can't even read the paper in peace. Who?

JEAN. It's your granddaughter.

BILLY. Oh! What she doing? [*JEAN tries to push the door open but the rug prevents it.*] Just a minute! Just a minute! Hold your horses! [*He bends down.*]

JEAN. Sorry.

BILLY. Hold your horses!

[*He releases the rug and opens the door, revealing JEAN RICE. She is about twenty-two, dark, with slightly protruding teeth, and bad eyesight. She is what most people would call plain, but already humor and tenderness have begun to stake their small claims around her nose and eyes. Her mouth is large, generous.*]

JEAN. Hello, Grandad.

BILLY. I wondered who the hell it was.

JEAN. I'm sorry.

BILLY. I thought it was some of that mad lot carrying on.

Well, come on in if you're coming, it's drafty standing about in the doorway. I've only just sat down.

JEAN [*coming in, kisses him*]. Did I disturb you? I'm sorry.

BILLY. I'd just sat down to read the evening paper. Well, this is a surprise. Who let you in?

JEAN. The son, I think. He didn't say a word.

BILLY. Shouldn't think he did. He's too bloody ignorant, that's why.

JEAN. I could hear her. I was ringing the bell for ages.

BILLY. It's a bloody farmyard, this place.

JEAN. Well, how are you?

BILLY. Bloody farmyard. They want locking up. And you know what now, don't you? You know who she's got upstairs, in Mick's old room, don't you? Some black fellow. It's true. I tell you, you've come to a madhouse this time.

JEAN. You're looking very well. How do you feel?

BILLY. I'm all right. You expect a few aches and pains when you get to my age. Phoebe's at the pictures, I think. She didn't tell me you were coming.

JEAN. I didn't tell her.

BILLY. No, well she didn't say anything. So I wasn't expecting a knock on the door.

JEAN. I only decided to come up this morning.

BILLY. I'd only just sat down to read the evening paper.

JEAN. I'm sorry. I disturbed you. [*She has picked up her cue neatly. The fact that his evening has been disturbed is established. His air of distracted irritation relaxes and he smiles a little. He is pleased to see her anyway.*]

BILLY. Well, give your Grandad a kiss, come on. [*She does so.*]

JEAN. It's good to see you.

BILLY. Well, it's nice to see you, my darling. Bit of a surprise. Go on, take your things off. Phoebe won't be long. What she went out for, I don't know. [*JEAN undoes her coat, and throws a packet of cigarettes on the table.*]

JEAN. Got you those. Gone to the pictures, has she?

BILLY. She's mad. Oh, that's very kind of you. Very kind, thank you. Yes, she said she was going early. I don't know why she can't stay in.

JEAN. Well, you know—she's always been like that. She enjoys it.

BILLY. Well, she'll have to learn. She's not a youngster anymore. When she gets to my age, she won't want to do it. [*He unwraps the cigarettes and takes out an ivory holder*

*from his waistcoat.*] Oh, this is nice of you. Thank you. Still, if she stays in, she only gets irritable. And I can't stand rows. Not any more. [*He stares in front of him.*] No use arguing with Phoebe anyway. Would you like some beer? [*She shakes her head.*] She just won't listen to you. Are you sure you won't? There's a damn great crate out in the kitchen. Archie brought it in this morning.

JEAN. No thanks, Grandad.

BILLY. No, when she gets in that mood, I just go out.

JEAN. Where do you go?

BILLY. I go for a walk. Or I go to the Club. You haven't been to the club. Oh, I must take you then. It's very quiet, mind you. Except at weekends. You get some of the wives then. But they're mostly old-timers like me.

JEAN. Sounds fun.

BILLY. Well, it's somewhere to go when you're fed up with the place. Don't suppose it would appeal much to youngsters like yourself. I expect you go in more for these jazz places.

JEAN. I'd like to go. You must take me.

BILLY. Would you really? Would you? All right. But, I warn you, there's none of your boogie-woogie. How long are you here for?

JEAN. Just the weekend.

BILLY. We'll go tomorrow night. It's a good night Sunday. I sing them some of the old songs, sometimes, when I feel like it. Haven't done it lately, not for a long time. Don't seem to feel like it.

JEAN. Where's Dad?

BILLY. He's at the theatre. He's playing here—at the Grand this week, you know.

JEAN. Oh, yes, of course.

BILLY. I don't seem to feel like it these days. You get a bit depressed sometimes sitting here. Oh, then there's the Cambridge down the road. I go there, of course. But there's not the old crowd there, you know. What about the news, eh? That's depressing. What d'you make of all this business out in the Middle East? People seem to be able to do what they

like to us. Just what they like. I don't understand it. I really don't. Archie goes to that damned place down by the clock tower.

JEAN. The Rockliffe.

BILLY. Yes, the Rockliffe. Every tart and pansy boy in the district are in that place at a weekend. Archie tried to get me in there the other day. No, thank you. It's just a meat-market.

JEAN. How is Dad?

BILLY. He's a fool.

JEAN. Oh?

BILLY. Putting money into a roadshow.

JEAN. I didn't know.

BILLY. Oh, it's another of his cockeyed ideas. He won't listen to me. He spends half his time in that Rockliffe.

JEAN. I see. What show is it this time?

BILLY. Oh, I don't remember what it's called.

JEAN. Have you seen it?

BILLY. No, I haven't seen it. I wouldn't. These nudes. They're killing the business. Anyway, I keep telling him—it's dead already. Has been for years. It was all over, finished, dead when I got out of it. I saw it coming. I saw it coming, and I got out. They don't want real people any more.

JEAN. No, I suppose they don't.

BILLY. They don't want human beings. Not any more. Wish he wouldn't get stuck in that Rockliffe. Gets half his posing girls in there if you ask me. [*Warming up.*] Well, why should a family man take his wife and kids to see a lot of third-class sluts standing about in the nude. They'll go once. They won't go again. You can't blame them, can you? Can't even see anything exciting in it myself. It's not even as if they got the figures nowadays. They're all skin and bone.

JEAN [*smiles*]. Like me.

BILLY. Well, you don't stand around with nothing on for everyone to gaup at, and God bless you for it. But you never see a woman with a really good figure now. I could tell you something about beautiful women now, I could. And it



wasn't all make-up, either. They were ladies. Ladies, and you took off your hat before you dared speak to them. Now! Why, half the time you can't tell the women from the men. Not from the back. And even at the front you have to take a good look, sometimes.

JEAN. Like the Government and the Opposition.

BILLY. What's that? Don't talk to me about the Government. Or that other lot. Grubby lot of rogues. Want locking up. No, old Archie's a fool. He won't even listen to you. He's never listened to me, anyway. He listens to all these smart boys. And there's plenty of them in our profession, believe you me. That's why I put up with old Phoebe. She's had to cope, I can tell you. But I don't have to tell you. He's going to come a cropper, I'm afraid. And pretty soon, too. He's bitten off more than he can chew.

JEAN. With this new show, you mean. Has he really put money into it?

BILLY. Put money into it! Don't make me laugh! He hasn't got two halfpennies for a penny. It's all credit. Credit, if you please! How he gets it beats me, after that last business. Still, he could always talk, your dad. And that's about all. Do you know, I spent thousands of pounds on his education. Went to the same school as me. And his brother. Thousands of pounds. He wasn't one of these scholarship people, like you. It was all paid for, every penny. And where's it got 'em! [*He takes a drink.*] That Rockcliffe. They should close the place. Someone should write to the Council about it. I'm surprised nobody hasn't. There's a lot of gentry here, you know—besides the riff-raff around here. Retired people. They don't want that kind of thing going on. Are you all right? You look as though you've been keeping late nights or something. What have you been doing with yourself? Lots of these parties, eh?

JEAN. No, not really.

BILLY. Well, you've got to have a good time while you're young. You won't get it later on. I'll bet he won't be in till all hours tonight.

JEAN. Dad?

BILLY. I'm very pleased to see you, Jean. Are you all right?  
They're treating you right?

JEAN. Oh, yes.

BILLY. They're doing right by you, I hope. You're not in any trouble are you?

JEAN. No, Grandad. I'm not in any trouble.

BILLY. I just wondered why you came up to see us like this suddenly.

JEAN. Oh, it's just——

BILLY. I'm not asking you to tell me. You do as you like, my darling. I 'spect you're hungry, are you?

JEAN. I ate on the train.

BILLY. You shouldn't have done that. It's extravagant, and all they give you is a lot of rubbish. You're not extravagant, are you?

JEAN. I don't think so.

BILLY. No, I didn't think so. You're a good girl, Jean. You'll get somewhere. I know you'll get somewhere. You're not like the lot in this house. You'll do something for yourself. You take after your old grandfather—[*She smiles at him affectionately.*]—don't you? You take after your grandfather. You've got my ways. Oh, I know. Jean, if ever you're in any kind of trouble, you will come to me, now won't you?

JEAN. I will.

BILLY. I mean it. Now look—there's just the two of us here. Promise me you'll come and tell me.

JEAN. Of course, I will, but there's nothing——

BILLY. I'm not fooling about, I'm serious. Phoebe will be back any minute, and I don't want her to know. I want you to promise me.

JEAN. I promise you. If there is anything——

BILLY. If it's money, mind——

JEAN. Well, I tell you I've just——

BILLY. I've got a few pounds in the Post Office. Not much, mind you, but I've got a few pounds. Nobody knows, so not to say a word, mind.

JEAN. No.

BILLY. Not even the pension people. I don't tell them my business. But, as I say——

JEAN. Grandad, I promise. If I want anything——

BILLY. Probably don't give you much in that job do they? You tell 'em what you're worth—they're robbers.

JEAN. They pay pretty well.

BILLY. How much was your fare up here? [*He is getting slightly carried away.*]

JEAN. No, Grandad, please—I don't want it.

BILLY. Hold your bloody noise. If I want to give it to you, you shall have it. [*He feels in his pocket for a purse.*] Here, just a minute——

JEAN. Please——

BILLY. What's the matter? Isn't it good enough for you?

JEAN. It isn't that——

BILLY. Well, then. Do as you're told and take it. I wouldn't have dared argue with my grandfather. Even at your age. [*Counting out his money.*] Um. Well, I don't seem to have enough just now. How much is it?

JEAN. I don't remember.

BILLY. Of course you remember. Look, there's half a quid. You take that towards it for now, and on Monday I'll go to the Post Office and get it out for you.

JEAN. Darling, you'll need that for the weekend. There's cigarettes and papers, and you're taking me to the Club, remember?

BILLY. Oh. Yes. I'd forgotten that. Well, we'll call it a loan, mind.

JEAN. A loan?

BILLY. Yes, a loan. You know what a loan is.

JEAN. Oh, all right.

BILLY. You mustn't go short. We all need looking after. And you've got to look after your own kind. No use leaving it to the Government for them to hand out to a lot of bleeders who haven't got the gumption to do anything for themselves. I want to look after you, Jean. I do, I do, really.