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Dramatic Publishing

The Pushcart War

**Adapted by
Gregory A. Falls**

**Based on the book by
Jean Merrill**



The Pushcart War

Created and toured with the Young ACT Company
in Seattle, Wash.

Drama. Adapted by Gregory A. Falls. Based on the book by Jean Merrill. Cast: 5m., 3w., with doubling, or up to 46 (13m., 11w., 22 either gender). A war begins with a Daffodil Massacre and ends with a Cantaloupe Day! Here is an action-packed allegory set in the 21st century. In 2011, a television documentary program recaps the 1991 Pushcart War in New York City. The war began when Mack, driving a mammoth moving truck, ran over the pushcart belonging to Morris the florist. Morris was pitched headfirst into a pickle barrel and daffodils were scattered everywhere. This calamity was part of a grand conspiracy by the three largest trucking firms in the city to remove all pushcarts, automobiles and taxis from the streets of New York. The pushcart peddlers fought back with a secret weapon, and the battle with the trucks raged on and on. Finally, the peddlers staged a peace march, but even this did not stop the trucks and the mayor charged the pushcarts with disturbing traffic. The people of New York, however, came to the peddlers' defense in a startling conclusion. Production notes are available in the script containing drawings of props, as well as details on scenery. One-wheeled truck and pushcart props. Fanciful sound effects and tumbling. Costumes: a combination of vaudeville and cartoon, with half-masks and exaggerated contemporary costumes. Approximate running time: 65 minutes. Code: PG3.

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The Pushcart War

By

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The play was created with The Young ACT Company, for the Washington State Cultural Enrichment Program, which toured schools across the State of Washington. They contributed to the development and the success of the production. The actors were Daniel Daily, Suzy Hunt, David Hunter Koch, Peter Lohnes, David Mong, James W. Monitor, Jacqueline Moscou, and Steven Rose. Anne Dennis Ford was stage manager and James W. Monitor was the assistant director.

The production was performed with half masks created by Shelly Henze Schermer, and the design of settings, pushcarts, and trucks was by William Forrester.

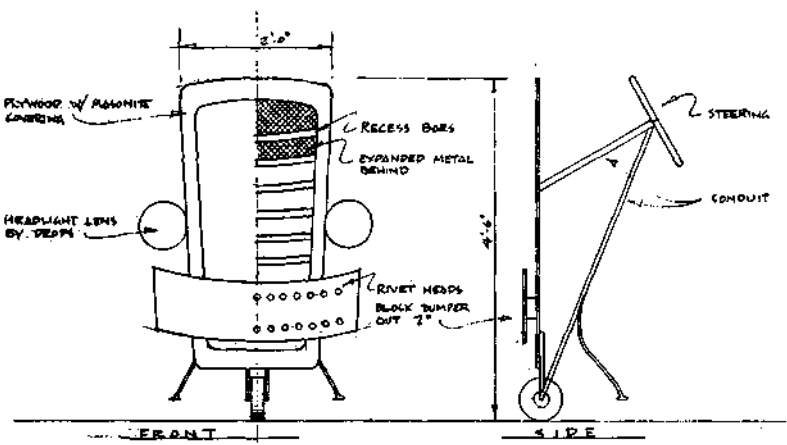
Notes

The play is written to be played continuously with all props brought in or rolled on, as part of the business of the scene. A brick wall up-stage is the background. The battles between the pushcarts and the trucks require a large acting space. A minimum of three trucks and five pushcarts are needed.

The style of the play is a combination of cartoon and vaudeville, using masks, tumbling and fanciful sound effects.

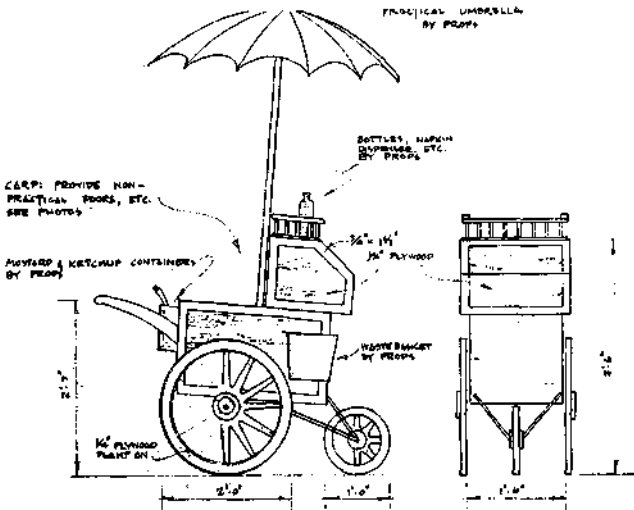
The pushcarts should be smaller in scale than they actually would be because it will emphasize their size relative to the trucks. We experimented with several prototype trucks, and found that a one-wheel truck worked best for us. (See sketch.) They look large, are easy to handle, and do not take up much backstage space.

THE PUSH CART WAR



NEW TRUCK

SCALE 1" = 1'0"



HOT DOG WAGON

NOTE: WHEELS CUT OUT OF 3/4" PLYWOOD WITH 3/4" PAINT ON. HUBS TO BE



CHRIS DENNISON PHOTO



CHRIS DENNISON PHOTO

CAST OF CHARACTERS*

TV Floor Manager	Harry The Hot Dog
TV Cameraman	Mr. Jerusalem
Barbara Walker	Charlotta
Walter Alistair	General Colt
Newscaster	Little Miltie
Mobile Announcer	Truckers (Several)
Driver	Policeman
Taxi Driver	Police Commissioner
Big Mack	Talk Show Announcer
Morris The Florist	John-John Johnny
Lady With Flowers	TV Actors (2)
Wenda Gambling (Young)	Mayor
Wenda Gambling (Old)	Mr. Posey
TV Announcer	Pea-Tack Squad (2)
Rescue Team (2)	Young Girl
Big Moe Mammoth	Old Woman
Tiger Sweet	Man With Leash
Louie Livergreen	Artist (R. Solbert)
Maxie Hammerman	Woman With Initiative
Frank The Flower	Young Woman
Old Anna	

* Eight actors can play all the roles in the play.

Women can play many of the roles that in the book are men.

DOUBLING FOR 8 ACTORS

- Actor 1 Walter Alistair, Mayor, Policeman, Pea-Tack Squad, Trucker.
- Actor 2 TV Floor Manager, Old Anna, Taxi Driver, Lady With Flowers, TV Actor, Old Wenda, Old Woman, Trucker.
- Actor 3 Barbara Walker, Young Wenda, Charlotta, General Colt, Young Girl, Woman With Initiative, Young Woman, Trucker.
- Actor 4 TV Cameraman, Driver, TV Announcer, Maxie, Little Miltie, Man With Leash, Trucker.
- Actor 5 Big Mack, Police Commissioner, Mr. Jerusalem, TV Actor, Talk Show Announcer, Artist, Trucker.
- Actor 6 Harry The Hot Dog, Mobile Announcer, Louie Livergreen, Policeman, Pea-Tack Squad, Rescue Team, Trucker.
- Actor 7 Newscaster, Frank The Flower, Big Moe, Trucker.
- Actor 8 Tiger Sweet, Morris The Florist, Mr. Posey, John- John Johnny, Rescue Team, Policeman, Trucker.

THE PUSHCART WAR

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THE PUSHCART WAR

(The opening scene is a NCA-TV studio in New York. Enter an unmasked floor manager and a cameraman, followed by Barbara Walker, carrying her mask. Brief ad lib, some help with clothes, etc. Walter Alistair enters, joins them then addresses the studio audience directly. He also carries his mask.)

ALISTAIR: Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to our studios, for the thirty-fourth edition of "The Twentieth Century: A Look at the Past." It's a great pleasure to have an audience from (City) . We will need responses from you during the show, so when the floor manager holds up the applause sign, we want you to applaud and when she puts it down, we would like you to stop immediately. Let's try that, shall we? OK, up it goes. Very good, and now down it comes, and you stop. Well, that was a little ragged, let's try it again. Very good! We've got some wonderful guests with us tonight. . . .

FLOOR MANAGER: Sixty seconds, Alistair.

ALISTAIR: We'll be on the air in just a minute, so if you'll excuse me. Sit back and enjoy the show!

(The floor manager watches the "TV Control Booth" off-stage, while Barbara and Alistair go up-stage, turn their backs to the audience, and put on their masks. The floor manager and the cameraman pick up a large rectangle, like a TV screen, which is covered with black cloth. They dolly it toward Barbara and Alistair, as the sound of a news program comes up. When the TV screen is in front of them, Barbara and Alistair turn down-stage

as the cameraman removes the black cloth and they appear on the screen.)

ALISTAIR: Good evening, America. This is NCA-TV. The National, Columbia, American Television Network.

WALKER: And I'm Barbara Walker.

(Applause Sign)

ALISTAIR: You are watching the award-winning documentary program: 'The Twentieth Century—A Look at the Past.'

(The screen closes in on Barbara. Walter exits.)

WALKER: Tonight we go back twenty years to 1992 and the most amazing war ever fought in America. The Pushcart War began —, 1991, in New York City. Here is the film clip of the news of that day.

(Enter a newscaster from another part of the stage, who addresses the audience directly. Exit Barbara, floor manager and cameraman, taking the TV screen and cloth with them. All television scenes are now played without the screen, but with the performers directly addressing the audience.)

NEWSCASTER: This morning, traffic in New York almost came to a complete standstill in the heart of the city. Our mobile unit is now on its way over to the center of the jam. Come in, Fred?

(From all sides several of the cast drive on with brightly colored steering wheels in their hands. They make motor

and horn sounds as they become a traffic jam. First they shout and honk, then groan and, finally, wait with quiet boredom. Fred, the mobile announcer, enters on roller skates with a microphone in his hand. He skates to one of the drivers.)

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Yes, James, we've maneuvered our Channel 18 cameras to the center of the jam at 42nd Street and Broadway. I'm making my way to a car almost exactly at the center of the jam. Excuse me, sir. . . .

DRIVER: Hey, buddy, get say, aren't you that guy from TV?

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Yes. Our audience would like to know exactly how long you have been here.

DRIVER: Since 8:30 this morning. I was on my way to work.

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: That was six hours ago. You haven't moved in six hours?

DRIVER ANNOUNCER: Between 10:30 and 11:00 I moved from back there to here.

MOBILE: About ten feet?

DRIVER: Yeah!

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Can you tell me, what do you think causes these jams?

DRIVER: Taxis. Too many taxis. Like this lady up here *Come on, Lady, will you move.*

OTHER DRIVERS: Aw, shut up!, etc.

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: James, I'm making my way to a taxi now. . . . Excuse me, Miss. What do you think is causing all this congestion?

TAXI DRIVER: It's the buses. They take up too much room on the streets. They ought to ban buses during the day.

(During this speech some of the bored drivers realize they are on television and begin waving and silently mouthing words toward the camera: 'Hi, Ma' etc.)

ALL: It's the taxis, it's the buses, it's the trucks, etc.

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Back to you, James.

NEWSCASTER: That's the way it is in Times Square.

(The traffic jam dissolves and the cars drive off. The mobile announcer skates up-stage. Two cars going very fast zoom past him.)

NEWSCASTER: Downtown traffic is moving. Our mobile unit is now in the Bowery. Can you hear me, Fred? Fred?

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Yes, James. Traffic is moving here in the Bowery. Even the big trucks are getting through.

(Mack drives up in his truck and stops alongside of, and very close to, the nervous mobile announcer.)

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Here's one now. . . . Your name, sir?

MACK: Albert P. Mack. Just call me Mack: Big Mack.

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Any trouble with the traffic in such a big truck?

MACK: Yeah, but I know how to wheel this Mighty Mammouth.

(Mack revs his truck motor and expertly drives around the mobile announcer and stops on the other side of him, increasing the mobile announcer's discomfort.)

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Very impressive!

MACK: Got a load of piano stools to deliver.

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: Some experts believe big trucks such as these are to blame for the traffic.

MACK: Some experts! If we don't deliver, them experts would be sorry.

(Morris the Florist pushes his cart on stage. A woman enters and begins looking at Morris' flowers.)

MORRIS: Daffodils! Fresh flowers from Long Island!
(Mack tries to drive his truck but finds that Morris' cart is in his way. He honks and shouts at Morris.)

MACK: Hey! Move that pushcart! It's them pushcarts and the pedestrians that are the problem.

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: So it is today on the streets of New York: Traffic is moving, but slower, and tempers are short.

WOMAN: Aren't they sweet. I'll take a dozen.

MACK: Hey! Move that pushcart outa there!

MORRIS: Why should I move? I do business here every day.

MACK: Get it outa here!

MORRIS: There you are, Madame.

WOMAN: You put thirteen in this bunch.

MORRIS: I always put thirteen. Morris the Florist never gives a small dozen.

WOMAN: Thank you, Morris the Florist.

MORRIS: You're welcome, I'm sure.

(Mack honks.)

MACK: Hey, buddy! I gotta unload ninety dozen piano stools before five o'clock.

MORRIS: I got to sell two dozen bunches of daffodils. Tomorrow they won't be so fresh.

MACK: In two minutes they won't be so fresh. OK, Buster, you asked for it.

(Mack is frustrated. He revs up, honks his horn, but both Morris and the woman continue to ignore him. With a shout Mack drives his truck into the cart which is upended. Morris is sent head first into his cart. Off-stage: drums, cymbals and kazoo. They freeze in a tableau. The woman has dropped her flowers which are on a string so that in the tableau they look as though the camera has caught them in mid-air. One of the cast enters and holds up a sub-title over the tableau which says, "The Daffodil Massacre.")

ALISTAIR: What seemed only another small accident, later became known as "The Daffodile Massacre." It was the first blow of The Pushcart War.

(Tableau dissolves and exits.)

ALISTAIR: It is a matter of record that in the 20th Century there were many huge trucks. Like the Mighty Mammouth. There were Leaping Lemas and Ten Ton Tigers.

(As it is named, each kind of truck enters and parades across the stage. The Mighty Mammouth has a horn that "roars" like an elephant. The Leaping Lema has a bouncy leaping movement which is made, of course, by the driver. The Ten Ton Tiger has a motor that sounds like a growl.)

ALISTAIR: Many of the trucks were so big you could not see around them. Later that week, this occurred. The movie star, Wenda Gambling, was driving to location for her film when she was trapped behind such a truck.

(A truck drives on. It is followed by Wenda Gambling in her open sport car. Her car is only a colorful sport car steering wheel. She tries repeatedly to pass the truck but she can never see around it. The truck turns and is "driving" up-stage with her following. The two drivers doing lateral movements make it appear that she is trying to get around the truck, but can't. Finally, the truck drives off stage followed by Wenda, honking her horn.)

ALISTAIR: And now, a special treat: To tell us just what happened that dreadful evening, we have Miss Wenda Gambling here in our studio. Please join me and welcome to our program the glamorous, attractive movie star: Miss Wenda Gambling!

(Old Wenda enters to applause, which she loves! She and Alistair do a show biz kiss on both cheeks and simper. She throws kisses to the audience as a studio attendant hands her a bouquet of roses.)

OLD WENDA: Walter. Fans you're very kind.

ALISTAIR: Wenda, tell us what happened that dreadful evening.

OLD WENDA: By the time I escaped, it was so dark that I had to sleep in a log cabin on top of the mountain.

ALISTAIR: The movie studio sent out a search party and the next morning they found you there. We have a surprise for you, Wenda: Here is that evening's news report.

(Sounds of wind blowing. An announcer with ear muffs and wool scarf enters with microphone. He is followed by two rescue men wearing scarves and hard hats with blinking lights on top. They are carrying Young Wenda, who sits on their clasped hands with her arms around their necks. Old Wenda exits.)

TV ANNOUNCER: Movie star, Wenda Gambling, was rescued this morning from the top of Bear Mountain, fifty miles outside of New York.

YOUNG WENDA: I've been here all night, with only a granola bar to eat.

TV ANNOUNCER: That's terrible. What happened?

YOUNG WENDA: It was because of that big truck. *There are too many of them and they are too big.*

TV ANNOUNCER: Many people are saying that today.

RESCUERS: *There are too many trucks and they are too big.*

TV ANNOUNCER: And that's the news from the top of Bear Mountain.

(Wind sounds as they exit.)

ALISTAIR: "There are too many trucks and they are too big!" That was the first battle cry of The Pushcart War. No one understood this better than The Big Three of the trucking industry: Big Moe Mammouth of Mammouth Moving, Tiger Sweet of Tiger Trucking, and Louie Livergreen of LEMA: The Lower Eastside Moving Association.

(Each of The Big Three enters as he is named. Each has a distinctive walk and they are all worried. They pace around the stage in a pattern, then stop as their conference

begins. Drums and snares accompany their walk. Big Moe has a cigar, Tiger slams his fist into his hand, Louie has a long cigarette holder.)

BIG MOE: Why does she pick on our poor trucks?

TIGER: She's a trouble-maker.

BIG MOE: Maybe the traffic is not so good, but then I say, "Who's to blame?"

TIGER: Big Moe, my boys tell me it's the pushcarts. They block the streets, and I gotta believe the guys that are out there every day on the firing line.

LOUIE: Absolutely correct, Tiger. My drivers confirm it. These peddlers are behind the times, still trying to haul things in old-fashioned carts. They are dangerous.

BIG MOE: We gotta do something quick, Louie.

LOUIE: I agree, Big Moe. So, here is my master plan for taking over the streets of New York City.

ALL THREE: "We're taking over the streets of New York City"—Yeah!

(They do a walk-stop-and-speak exit routine, with drum sounds.)

WALKER: That day The Big Three secretly declared war on the pushcarts and thus began The Secret Campaign.

(The title, "The Secret Campaign," is carried across the stage. In this campaign, the trucks begin the fight by using their horns to frighten the pushcart peddlers or by swerving around the pushcarts so that they are upended and the peddlers are sent sprawling across the floor. The campaign ends with all the carts up-ended and the peddlers shouting and chasing the last truck offstage.)

Drums and kazoos accompany the battle. Tiger enters, talking to a TV announcer who is holding a microphone as they both travel across the stage.)

TIGER: Three vegetable carts ran into one of my ten-ton Tigers on C Street this morning. Tomatoes all over the street! Twenty other peddlers yelling at my poor driver. Throwing tomatoes at his truck! What kind of working conditions are these?

MOBILE ANNOUNCER: You feel it was the fault of the pushcarts?

TIGER: They are a menace in the street. It's a fact. They are not designed for modern traffic conditions.

(Tiger and Announcer exit, as Maxie Hammerman rolls his work bench on, followed by Frank the Flower. They survey the up-ended carts. During the scene, Maxie resets all the carts on their wheels.)

MAXIE: Not designed?! He's saying that a pushcart is NOT designed? Look! Look how compact? So it shouldn't take up too much space on a crowded street.

FRANK: I am not complaining, Maxie.

MAXIE: Designed! I would like to redesign Mr. Tiger Sweet himself!

FRANK: Just because a pushcart is in an accident does not mean he caused it.

MAXIE: This is correct. And when did a pushcart even hit a truck, Frank the Flower?

FRANK: Never.

MAXIE: It would give me a pleasure! What happened to you, Old Anna?

(Enter Old Anna with a broken piece of a cart.)

OLD ANNA: As you can see, my pushcart was hit by a Ten-Ton Tiger in front of the hospital. You know what he said to me?

(The driver enters and stands beside Old Anna. As he shouts, she mouths the same words and makes the same gestures. This double mirror image is used several times in this scene.)

DRIVER: Hey, lady, move that cart off the street. It's unsanitary.

OLD ANNA: *(Shouting at him.)* Unsanitary? My cart is as clean as a tea cup.

(Enter Harry the Hot Dog, also carrying a broken piece of cart.)

HARRY: Hey, Maxie, you know what hap- - -. Hey, what's going on here?

MAXIE: What happened to you, Harry Hot Dog?

HARRY: I had this accident, y'see, on Christopher Street, and this. . . .

FRANK: Car hit you?

(Wood Block.)

HARRY: NOOOOOO . . .

MAXIE: Taxi hit you?

(Wood Block.)

HARRY: NOOOOOO . . .

OLD ANNA: A motor bike, maybe?

(Wood Block.)