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Dramatic Publishing



THE SOUL COLLECTOR

By

DAVID EMERSON TONEY



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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For Faye, Inells, Brenda, Annie, Dale, Jennifer and
Emily...the fountain from which my current runs...

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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The Soul Collector premiered at the Everyman Theatre, Baltimore, Maryland, May 20-June 21, 2009. It was directed by Jennifer L. Nelson* with the following:

Mr. Coleman. Doug Brown*
Mrs. Coleman. Aakhu TuahNera Freeman*
Darnell. DeMargio House^
Claire. Erika Rose*
Cedric. Jefferson A. Russell*
Wisher. Craig Wallace*

Set Design. Daniel Ettinger+
Lighting Design. Jay A. Herzog+
Costume Design. Kathleen Geldard+
Sound Design. Chas Marsh
Props Design. Liza Davies
Wig Design. Anne Nesmith
Fight Choreography. Lewis Shaw*
Stage Manager. Amanda M. Hall*
Dramaturg. Naomi Greenberg-Slovin
Dialect Coach. Gary Logan*

* *Member Actor's Equity Association*

^ *Equity Membership Candidate*

+ *Member United Scenic Artists*

THE SOUL COLLECTOR

CHARACTERS

CEDRIC – 40s, African-American, a garbage man who dreams of owning the world's greatest chicken-wing restaurant.

DARNELL – 20s, African-American, Cedric's nephew, he also works as a garbage man. His dream is to meet Barry Gordy and become a Motown recording superstar.

MRS. COLEMAN – 50s, African-American, more of a mother than a landlady to Darnell and Cedric, warm-hearted with a great knowledge of the spiritual world.

MR. COLEMAN – 50s, African-American, a retired postman, he feels he has been slighted by the government he gave his life to serve.

CLAIRE/WOMAN – 30s, African-American. Though Claire is her base personality, she is possessed by two spirits (below). She plays all three characters.

1. SAUL KAUFMAN – 70s, Jewish, a New York agent whose claim to fame is that he was once close friends with Frank Sinatra. Saul died in Vegas in 1954.

2. NOZOMI (MIMI) KOBAYASHI – 10 years old, Japanese, a polite and kind girl who dotes on her father, General Kobayashi, who is away at war. Nozomi died in the atomic bombing of Nagasaki in 1945.

THADDEUS K. WISHER – African-American, a demon shape-shifter who swallows the spirits of the dead.

SET: A box set of a living room in a pre-war apartment building. A swinging door UR leads to an offstage kitchen. There is a bedroom offstage R and another offstage L. UL of center is the front door. The apartment is full of the junk and refuse of other peoples' lives. Stacks of newspapers line the walls. The pictures on the walls are a collection of velvet paintings and cheap hotel landscapes. There is a small rack of old clothes. The furniture in the room looks like it was just pulled from the junk pile seconds ago. One of the central articles is a large grandfather clock.

ACT I

SCENE ONE

SCENE: *It is 1972. Cleveland, Ohio.*

AT RISE: *We hear offstage voices from outside the front door.*

CEDRIC (*O.S.*). Lift up on the back end. Keep it level. I'm breakin' my back.

DARNELL (*O.S.*). This high as I can get it. Open the door, Mrs. C.

MRS. COLEMAN (*O.S.*). I told you to let me go first before you brought it up the stairs.

CEDRIC (*O.S.*). Squeeze by on this side, Mrs. C.

MRS. COLEMAN (*O.S.*). Ain't no part of me that little.

DARNELL (*O.S.*). I'm gonna drop it. It's cuttin' the blood off in my fingers.

CEDRIC (*O.S.*). Let's go back to the landing and let Mrs. C come first.

MRS. COLEMAN (*O.S.*). Y'all hush and do what I tell you. Rest the thing up on the bannister sideways so I can get by. Not that sideways. The other sideways.

(The door to the apartment opens and MRS. COLEMAN enters. She looks around the room in amazement at all the junk.)

MRS. COLEMAN (*cont'd*). Look at this place. I can't have this. I can't have this not for a second.

(*CEDRIC leads the way as he and DARNELL carry in an old black and white console TV and stereo combination.*)

CEDRIC. Front of the couch. (*They sit it down.*) That wasn't too bad.

DARNELL. That's 'cause you didn't have the back end. Anybody want a beer?

CEDRIC. I'm good.

MRS. COLEMAN. I don't drink nothin' but Pilsner.

DARNELL. Got a P.O.C.

MRS. COLEMAN. That'll do.

DARNELL. Plug it in and see if it works, Uncle Cedric.

(*DARNELL exits to the kitchen as CEDRIC plugs in the TV. It immediately comes on and fills the room with the sound of static.*)

MRS. COLEMAN. You need some rabbit ears or something'. (*CEDRIC grabs a rabbit-ears antenna from behind a pile of magazines.*) Like the doctor ordered.

CEDRIC. Darnell, bring me a screwdriver.

MRS. COLEMAN. You know y'all all right with me, Cedric. But I can't let you turn my building into a junkyard.

CEDRIC. This ain't junk. These is articles all in various stages of antiquity.

MRS. COLEMAN. I don't want no rats or roaches in my building.

CEDRIC. We ain't bringin' nothin' like that in here. Soon as we bring things in I clean it up.

(The grandfather clock strikes four.)

MRS. COLEMAN. Where you get that TV?

CEDRIC. It was just sittin' out front.

MRS. COLEMAN. It ain't nowhere near four.

CEDRIC. Needs work. Picked that up last month on our route. Out there in Pepper Pike.

MRS. COLEMAN. But what good a broke clock gone do?

CEDRIC. That clock is worth a fortune.

MRS. COLEMAN. Really?

CEDRIC. Your eyes would fall out your head if I told you how much.

MRS. COLEMAN. How you know?

CEDRIC. 'Cause of Darnell.

MRS. COLEMAN. What?

CEDRIC. He got the tingle.

MRS. COLEMAN. The what?

CEDRIC. Whenever we get something we think is worth somethin', Darnell puts his touch on it and see if he get a tingle.

(DARNELL enters with two beers and hands one to MRS. COLEMAN. He gives the screwdriver to CEDRIC as MRS. COLEMAN takes a deep swig.)

MRS. COLEMAN. That's the spot.

CEDRIC *(as he attaches the antenna)*. Here we go.

MRS. COLEMAN. Cedric says you get a tingle.

DARNELL. Right between my eyes.

MRS. COLEMAN. Ain't heard nothin' like it.

DARNELL. Never fails.

MRS. COLEMAN. And the tingle means money in the bank?

CEDRIC. That clock was the first thing he felt it on. Had that bad boy in our truck at a stoplight. Chinese fella pulled up next to us and offered us... How much, Darnell?

DARNELL. Six hundred dollars.

MRS. COLEMAN. Good God from Zion.

CEDRIC. And that ain't the only time that happened. After while we had to put a tarp over things just so we could make it home. But we figured out the bigger the tingle the bigger the pay off.

MRS. COLEMAN. Lord have mercy. You two are a couple of lucky ducks.

CEDRIC (*finishes with the antenna*). There.

MRS. COLEMAN. Merv Griffin might be on. (*CEDRIC flips from station to station and stops. We hear nothing but static.*) Check the tingle.

DARNELL (*puts his hand on the TV*). Yep. (*CEDRIC flips stations again for more static.*) Let me try.

CEDRIC. I know how to turn a TV knob.

(*DARNELL turns the TV one click and we hear Arthur Treacher introduce Merv Griffin. "Here's the dear boy himself...Merrrrrvyn!!!"*)

DARNELL. There you go.

MRS. COLEMAN. Told you Griffin was on.

CEDRIC. What did you do?

DARNELL. I just turned it.

(CEDRIC flips the TV knob around and it goes back to static.)

MRS. COLEMAN. I was watching that.

CEDRIC. I just want to... *(DARNELL turns the channel one click and the sound of a cowboy shoot-'em-up is heard.)* Forget this thing. *(CEDRIC tries to turn it off but the sound continues.)*

MRS. COLEMAN. Can't turn it off?

CEDRIC *(unplugs the TV)*. Fix it later.

MRS. COLEMAN. What you all gonna do with the money?

CEDRIC. What money?

MRS. COLEMAN. From when you sell this stuff.

DARNELL. Oh, I'm gonna...

CEDRIC. We ain't decided yet. Ain't that right, Darnell?
You don't know what you gonna do with your share.

(MR. COLEMAN enters through the front door. It's obvious his feet hurt.)

MR. COLEMAN. Look out. Here I come. Everybody back up. Bad feet here.

MRS. COLEMAN. What you doin' on your feet, Nathaniel?

MR. COLEMAN. Lookin' for you. Thought you up and died over here. Merv Griffin is on and I'm starvin'. *(He sees the mess in the room.)* Great Googalee-Moogalee. Look like a cyclone been through here. Don't you know garbage men don't bring they work home? It's garbage. That's why people put it outside. 'Cause it ain't supposed to be in the house.

MRS. COLEMAN. Don't you worry 'bout it, baby...don't worry about it for a second. These is articles in various stages of antiquity.

MR. COLEMAN. Like a Viet Cong minefield in here. If I hurt myself steppin' on somethin' I'll sue you and your mama.

DARNELL. How your feet, Mr. C?

MRS. COLEMAN. They know you've suffered, baby.

MR. COLEMAN. Been a postman my whole life. Gave my life and feet for this country and they turnin' a blind eye to my pain and anguish.

MRS. COLEMAN. A dirty nasty shame.

MR. COLEMAN. Got commercials for it on TV, like it ain't nothin'. Like you can walk up to Gray's drugstore and get the cure. But I'm here to tell you. Severe athlete's foot ain't nobody's joke. It's a disability. But Uncle Sam...he say I ain't nothin' but a jive turkey tryin' to get over. Walk a mile in my feet and he'd cry like a baby.

CEDRIC (*mocking MR. COLEMAN during previous line*).
Cry like a baby.

MR. COLEMAN (*to DARNELL*). That a Pilsner?

DARNELL. Yeah.

MR. COLEMAN (*points across the room*). What's that over there? (*DARNELL "takes the bait" and MR. COLEMAN takes the beer out of DARNELL's hand.*)
Thank ya.

MRS. COLEMAN. Sorry I forgot about dinner, baby. They needed somebody to open up their door while they carried this TV in.

MR. COLEMAN. What you got there? What you got there? That's an old Zenith. The Buick of TVs.

MRS. COLEMAN. Just sittin' in front of the building.

MR. COLEMAN. It work?

DARNELL. Yeah.

CEDRIC. No.

MR. COLEMAN. Come on, Pat, 'fore I miss all of Griffin. Arthur Treacher might say somethin' funny with his drunk self. (*He exits.*)

MRS. COLEMAN. Right behind you, baby. See...I could lose my job over this stuff up here if the owner was to come by. So...?

CEDRIC. So?

MRS. COLEMAN. So once you sell some of it...if you throw a little my way...it might make it worth the risk.

CEDRIC. How much were you thinking?

MRS. COLEMAN. Fifteen percent.

CEDRIC. Deal.

MRS. COLEMAN. Good.

CEDRIC. Now you can't go back on it later and ask for more.

MRS. COLEMAN. Hand to Jesus. Now let me get some food in this old man 'fore he have a fit. See you later... sweet potato.

DARNELL. Plant you now and dig you later.

(*MRS. COLEMAN exits.*)

CEDRIC (*to himself*). Would've gone to twenty-five.

DARNELL. How come you don't want Mrs. C to know what we doin' with the money? Told her everything else.

CEDRIC. 'Cause there's a line, nephew. And the line say don't let people know too much 'bout your business.

'Cause first thing you know they'll come bustin' into your dreams with they muddy shoes on. Only folks you can trust with your dreams is family.

DARNELL. Mrs. C is close to family.

CEDRIC. Horseshoes and hand grenades, nephew. Family ain't just "folks you know." Family is real. We family 'cause we got a bond. Bonded. Like the Earth is bonded to the sun.

DARNELL. Like gravity.

CEDRIC. Now without gravity...what the Earth gone do?

DARNELL. Go flyin' off somewhere.

CEDRIC. Right.

DARNELL. Out there flyin' through space. Nobody to look out for it.

CEDRIC. Yeah.

DARNELL. Nobody to talk to. Crashin' into things.

CEDRIC. So you get it?

DARNELL. It's family business. I got you. (*He starts to exit.*)

CEDRIC. Where you goin'?

DARNELL. Thought of some lyrics on the truck today. (*He exits to his bedroom. From O.S.:*) Had the tune for a month but couldn't get the words. But when we got back to the yard today the words was just fallin' out my head.

CEDRIC. I was thinkin' we could do inventory.

DARNELL (*O.S.*). Thought you was goin' out with that new dispatcher lady tonight.

CEDRIC. Canceled.

DARNELL (*O.S.*). Come on now.

CEDRIC. What?

DARNELL (*O.S.*). We talked about this.

CEDRIC. You need to stop dippin' in my private business.

(DARNELL enters carrying a toy piano and sets himself up on the couch.)

DARNELL. I just want to make sure you're set when my songs become Motown hits. It be good if you had somebody for when I'm on tour.

CEDRIC. You ain't got to fret about me. I raised you. You didn't raise me. 'Sides, I'll have the restaurant to keep me busy.

DARNELL. Okay. But later for that inventory.

CEDRIC. 'Long as we get to it.

DARNELL. With this one...got enough for my first album.

CEDRIC. How many is that?

DARNELL. Twelve.

CEDRIC. That many?

DARNELL. Twelve labor-of-love songs. Wait a minute, that's a good name for a song. Let me write that down. *(He takes a pen from his pocket and writes on the palm of his hand. To himself:)* Labor of love. *(He sets himself up in front of the toy piano and prepares to strike a chord.)* Now got to get this first chord right. *(He plays the opening chord to "Jingle Bells.")* Let me know what you think of the words. *(As he sings he plays along on the toy piano. The song is set to the Christmas carol "Jingle Bells.")*

GIRL, YOU ARE MY LIFE

I'LL NEVER LET YOU GO.

YES, OUR LOVE IS TRUE.

YOU'RE THE WOMAN OF MY DREAMS.

SO WHAT I'VE GOT TO SAY.

I JUST CAN'T HOLD IT BACK.

WITH FOUR WORDS THAT I CAN'T ESCAPE.
WON'T YOU LISTEN TO MY HEART.

OH, I LOVE YOU, GIRL.
I LOVE YOU, GIRL.
I HUNGER FOR YOUR TOUCH.
WITHOUT YOUR LOVE, I CAN'T GO ON
WON'T YOU STEP INTO MY WORLD,
GIRL.

What do you think?

CEDRIC. Well...

DARNELL. You think it's as good as "Oh Girl, Now
You've Left Me"?

CEDRIC. Can't say.

*(DARNELL sings the first phrase of the song. It's to the
tune of "O Come All Ye Faithful.")*

DARNELL.

OH GIRL, NOW YOU'VE LEFT ME
MY WORLD IS LOST WITHOUT YOU.
PLEASE COME BACK AND SAY YOU'LL BE
THE ONE I ADORE.

CEDRIC. Listen, Darnell...we need to talk.

DARNELL. I'm wondering if I should...when it's time to
take my demo to Barry Gordy...if I should take a plane
or drive to Detroit. It ain't that far from Cleveland to
drive. But I want to be relaxed when I get there. What
you think? Should I drive?

CEDRIC. He ain't there.

DARNELL. Who?

CEDRIC. Gordy. He in Los Angeles now.

DARNELL. How you know?

CEDRIC. *Jet* magazine in the barber shop. Had him pool-side at his palatial home.

DARNELL. Guess I'll have to take a plane. Can't be cool and relaxed after drivin' all the way to L.A. You got to do things right when you dealin' with a callin'.

CEDRIC. Call what?

DARNELL. Song writin' and singin' is my callin'.

CEDRIC. When you decide that?

DARNELL. I didn't decide. You don't pick it. It pick you. Can't deny my gift. That would be wrong.

CEDRIC. Look...I know Motown gone flip over those songs of yours.

DARNELL. I know that's right.

CEDRIC. But see...remember when you moved in with me? You came in here wantin' to be a superhero.

DARNELL. Why you bringin' that up?

CEDRIC. Walked around here all the time with them pajama bottoms 'round your neck. Nearly broke your neck jumpin' off the back of that couch tryin' to fly.

DARNELL. I was ten.

CEDRIC. Didn't work out though. See...that's how life is. Much as you wanted to be Superman. You had to let that go.

DARNELL. I let it go 'cause it was make believe. My music is real.

CEDRIC. The point is you didn't let that stop you. Look...I didn't come out the box wantin' to be the proprietor of the world's finest gourmet chicken-wing restaurant. You ain't born spoutin' earth-shatterin' recipes like chicken-wing chili, chicken-wing souffle or chick-

en-wing pie. Genius like that comes to you over time. Time will tell the truth on you. See now...this gone shock you. Know what I wanted to be before? Before chicken grabbed ahold of me. Thought I'd die if I didn't make it. You'll never guess.

DARNELL. Can't you see I'm tryin' to write a song?

CEDRIC. This important, Darnell. Come on. Guess.

DARNELL. Doctor, lawyer, Indian chief? What?

CEDRIC. A rodeo clown.

DARNELL. What?

CEDRIC. I know. I was reachin' for the stars. Fell in love with them baggy pants and that puffy green wig. So when I was sixteen I packed up my bags and ran away from home and joined the rodeo. But in the end time showed me there was somethin' else better for me. Somethin' special. Chicken wings. But that never would've happened till I let that old dream go. Just let it go. You get what I'm sayin'?

DARNELL. Why you puttin' doubt in my mind?

CEDRIC. See, thing is you need a fall back plan.

DARNELL. This is a callin'. You don't let go or fall back from a powerful thing like that.

CEDRIC. But maybe it ain't the right callin'. Maybe it's the wrong number. I'm just sayin'...

DARNELL. Then it ain't a callin'. It's somethin' else. *(He plunks a few notes on the piano.)* Shoot. *(He picks up his piano and exits to the bedroom.)*

CEDRIC. Thought you was gonna write.

DARNELL *(O.S.)*. You done messed me up. Ain't in the mood no more.

CEDRIC. Just makin' conversation.

DARNELL *(O.S.)*. Let's just take inventory.

CEDRIC. Oh...did I tell you I was gonna have the people who work at my restaurant dress like angels? Cooks, waiters...everybody.

DARNELL (*O.S.*). Why?

CEDRIC. Just followin' logic. Chickens got wings. Angels got wings. It'll get people in the mood for a heavenly meal 'fore they sit down. Atmosphere. Can you dig it?

DARNELL (*O.S.*). I can dig it.

CEDRIC. But here the kicker. The angel wings they got on...ain't the regular kind. Guess what kind?

(DARNELL enters with a legal pad and pen.)

DARNELL. Chicken wings.

CEDRIC. It's genius.

DARNELL. Maybe.

CEDRIC. What's wrong with it?

DARNELL. Okay...I'm just sayin'...just sayin'...people walkin' around with giant chicken wings on could make your dinner portions seem small.

CEDRIC. You think?

DARNELL. Yeah.

CEDRIC. Solid. See this is what I'm talkin' about. Family lookin' out for each other. Regular angel wings it is.

DARNELL (*looks at his pad*). Startin' with the porcelain. One set of porcelain figurines of a little white girl with big eyes. One with her dog. One with a bucket and one with her little red wagon.

CEDRIC (*checks for the item*). Solid. Next.

DARNELL. One ancient Chinese vase made in Japan.

CEDRIC (*picks up a vase*). One ancient Chinese vase made in Japan. Cool. Next.