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# RAINY DAY PEOPLE



COMEDY BY TODD MCCULLOUGH

# RAINY DAY PEOPLE



The Kennedy Center

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Winner of The Mark Twain Comedy Playwriting Award



*Comedy. By Todd McCullough. Cast: 5m., 7w. (3m., 5w. with doubling)* *Rainy Day People* takes a comic look at love, sex and other antidepressants. Zack Wallis has turned misery into a paycheck, writing a wildly popular newspaper column full of his cynical views on modern existence. However, on meeting Zoe Lofton, an equally depressed bookstore clerk working on a musical adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Notes From Underground*, he finds himself in love—and happy—for the first time. And while finding true love

might be a dream come true for most people, for Zack it means losing his inspiration to write. Torn between his relationship with Zoe, the advice of his new-age therapist and the threats of dismissal from his editor, Zack ultimately has to decide if true happiness is profitable, preferable or even possible. As the rain falls in the play, the main characters are interrupted and confronted by an eclectic chorus of sad and soaked New Yorkers who rant and rave on the downside of everything from relationships and single parenthood to art and amputation.

*Rainy Day People* is a smart, hilarious play that focuses on the age-old question: What is happiness, and is it available in easy-to-swallow capsules? *Area staging w/ optional rain machine. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 20 minutes. Code: R70*

Cover photo: University of Wyoming Studio Theatre, Laramie, Wyo., featuring Missy Moore and Todd McCullough. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel

ISBN-10 1-58342-173-4  
ISBN-13 978-1-58342-173-4



9 781583 421734

02003



*Dramatic Publishing*

311 Washington St.  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
ph: 800-448-7469



Printed on recycled paper

[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)

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By  
TODD MCCULLOUGH



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(RAINY DAY PEOPLE)

ISBN: 1-58342-173-4

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RAINY DAY PEOPLE was presented February 2, 2002, at the University of Wyoming Studio Theatre in Laramie, Wyoming. The production was directed by William Missouri Downs and included the following:

## CAST

Zack Wallis . . . . . TODD MCCULLOUGH  
Zoe Lofton . . . . . MISSY MOORE  
Harriet Brillstein . . . . . STEPHANIE HANSON  
Diana Demeter . . . . . COCO KLEPPINGER  
Simone Paxton . . . . . BRIDGET KARSON  
A Man (Sam) . . . . . BRADY MEIER  
A Biochemist. . . . . CHRIS LANG  
A Single Mother . . . . . HEATHER KALOUST  
Bohemian Girl . . . . . ERIN BUTLER  
Three-Card Monte . . . . . TOM CAMPBELL  
'Cats' Woman. . . . . DANIELLE BAILEY  
Mortimer Mendelbaum. . . . . AL RICH

## PRODUCTION STAFF

Assistant Director . . . . . DEVIN STANDARD SHALLOW  
Stage Manager . . . . . JASON DIAZ  
Set Design . . . . . JOEL HEINSCHEL  
Lighting & Sound Design . . . . . ELAINE WALRATH  
Props . . . . . DAWN HUMPHREY

# RAINY DAY PEOPLE

A Full-length Play

For 5m., 7w. (with doubling, can be done by 3m., 5w.)\*

## CHARACTERS

ZACK WALLIS, a writer . . . . . late 20s  
ZOE LOFTON, a bookstore clerk . . . . . late 20s  
SIMONE PAXTON, a clown/actress . . . . . late 20s  
HARRIET BRILLSTEIN, an editor . . . . . early 30s  
DIANA DEMETER, a therapist. . . . . early 30s  
A MAN . . . . . mid 20s

## THE CHORUS:

BOHEMIAN GIRL, a wannabe artist  
MORTIMER MENDELBAUM, a black ex-jew  
A BIOCHEMIST  
A SINGLE MOTHER  
'CATS' WOMAN, an ex-star of the musical  
THREE-CARD MONTE, a one-handed hustler

\*At least one black male. Character of Brillstein can be done by man.

TIME: Autumn

PLACE: New York City



SETTING: The stage is comprised of several locations.

Center stage is a park bench with “Life Sucks” spray painted on it. UL is Zack’s apartment, furnished with a bed, a laptop, a small table with a CD player and, if desired, a television. UR is The Bound and the Fury, the bookstore where Zoe works, comprised of a counter with a telephone, a small table, and two chairs. DL serves as the therapist’s office, with a chair and a couch. DR is Brillstein’s office, with her desk. UC is a “rain machine.” This can be constructed rather easily using an overhead spout and water source. The actors use it throughout the show to drench (or lightly moisten, if you prefer) themselves in between scenes and before monologues.

# RAINY DAY PEOPLE

## SCENE 1

*(LIGHTS UP on the park bench. ZACK is sitting. ZOE, SIMONE and the CHORUS enter. The lighting is very theatrical, dreamlike. ZACK and ZOE should be dressed in all black. Everyone else's costuming should be fitting.)*

ZOE. Hello, my name's Zoe Lofton. I'd like to thank everyone for coming tonight. You know, it's been a long, hard process bringing this project to the stage. When I started, a lot of people told me I was crazy. "*Notes From Underground*"? they said. "There's no way in hell you can adapt Dostoevsky into a musical!" And you know what I told them? I said "Fuck you mom and dad! I'm moving to New York and I don't need your money anymore!" Well, I was wrong about the money, but I was right about Dostoevsky. This project has been a labor of love not only for me, but for everyone involved. One small note to your program before we begin, the lead role of the Underground Man will not be played by Richard Burton this evening, but by his understudy, Zack Wallis. Now, without any further ado, I present Dostoevsky's classic, *Notes From Underground!*

*(ZOE cues the CHORUS and exits. The CHORUS belts out a sustained "Ah." SIMONE cuts them off.)*

SIMONE. Russia. The mid-nineteenth century.

ZACK. “I am a sick man...I am a spiteful man. An unattractive man. I think that my liver hurts. But actually, I don’t know a damn thing about my illness. I am not even sure what it is that hurts. I am not in treatment and never have been, although I respect both medicine and doctors. I have been living like this for a long time—about twenty years...”

*(There is a loud thunderclap. Everyone looks up, startled. It starts to rain. SIMONE and the CHORUS pull out umbrellas, open them, and exit quickly. ZACK is left standing in the rain. The LIGHTS FADE OUT on the bench and FADE UP on Demeter’s office.)*

## SCENE 2

*(ZACK walks over to Demeter’s office, where DEMETER is seated and waiting.)*

ZACK. ...And it was the same dream from the past three nights. She’s there, and Simone’s there, all these people are there, and I’m on stage playing this part, saying these lines that I guess I still remember from living together, and then it starts to rain. And everyone opens umbrellas and leaves and I’m stuck there, in the rain, without an umbrella. And I think the weirdest part is that this is all taking place inside. It’s like I’m having a roofer’s worst nightmare. *(Beat.)* This is all just bad timing. We’ve been broken up, I mean I haven’t seen her or talked to her for I don’t know how long. And I never

had these dreams before. I don't see why this should be happening now. I just want to be happy. I'm trying to adapt, I'm trying to return to my life, the way it was before and now this.

DEMETER. Are you still on the medication?

ZACK. Yes, Doctor. (*DEMETER clears her throat.*) Yes, Soul Counselor. Well no. Well sort of. I've been off and on. Some days they're like popcorn, others I get into this whole metaphysical thing where I wanna go *au naturel*, I don't know.

DEMETER. I think it's pretty obvious that you're having trouble readjusting to your old life, and your sporadic use of the medicine isn't helping.

ZACK. But why? My life was perfect. (*Beat.*) Okay, it was miserable, but it was perfectly miserable. I wrote the column, I got paid well, and everything was okay.

DEMETER. Your parents' divorce still troubles you.

ZACK. No. That's something that I got over a long time ago.

DEMETER. Maybe consciously you don't think about it, but subconsciously it's still there.

ZACK. See, I don't like all that talk about subconsciousness. To say that there's something wrong with me subconsciously is a cop-out. I mean, how is that helpful to me? If it's subconscious, below consciousness, then what can I do about it? It's like coming out of a Neil Simon play. Deep down you know something is horribly, horribly wrong, but on the surface you just grin and say "Yeah, that was pretty funny."

DEMETER. I happen to love Neil Simon.

ZACK. Maybe I should be analyzing you.

DEMETER. Regardless of whether or not the problem is subconscious, you need to work through it. And, despite your remarks about America's most beloved comic playwright, I'm going to help you.

ZACK. Thank you, Doctor. *(DEMETER clears her throat.)* Thank you Spirit Guide. Hmm. I don't really know where to start. Okay, I've got it, how about the day I wanted to blow my head off?

*(ZACK pulls out a gun. He puts it to his head and walks to his apartment. LIGHTS OUT on Demeter's office.)*

### SCENE 3

*(LIGHTS UP on Zack's apartment. He sits on his bed, the gun to his head. He hesitates, stops, puts it under his chin instead. He cringes, pulls it away, and takes a deep breath. Then he puts the barrel in his mouth. LIGHTS UP on Brillstein's office. BRILLSTEIN is seated at her desk. She picks up the phone, presses a button. The phone rings in Zack's apartment.)*

ZACK. Hello?

BRILLSTEIN. Fuckhead.

ZACK. Hello, Miss Brillstein.

BRILLSTEIN. Where's my column?

ZACK. I'm finishing it up right now. I'll have it in to you by this afternoon, ma'am.

BRILLSTEIN. Are you screwing with me, Wallis?

ZACK. No ma'am.

BRILLSTEIN. Because I own you, don't forget that.

ZACK. I haven't forgotten, ma'am.

BRILLSTEIN. This afternoon, or you will be the unwilling victim of sodomy.

ZACK. Yes (*BRILLSTEIN hangs up*) ma'am.

*(LIGHTS OUT on Brillstein's office. ZACK hangs up the phone. He takes his laptop and starts typing. The LIGHTS COME UP on Demeter's office. She talks to Zack from across stage.)*

DEMETER. How's the column coming?

ZACK. Dandy.

DEMETER. Was that your boss?

ZACK. Yeah, she wanted to make sure I'd have it in by print time. She's a really great editor. She's got the personality of a bitch combined with the charm of a bigger bitch.

DEMETER. She's a bit hot-tempered?

ZACK. Donald Duck was hot-tempered. My boss is a seething black orb of bitch fury. (*Beat.*) There. Done.

DEMETER. Can I read it?

ZACK. Allow me.

*(As he speaks, the LIGHTS FADE OUT on Demeter's office and Zack's apartment. During the speech, individual CHORUS MEMBERS come out one by one with umbrellas and newspapers, and pick up, as if reading, where the last person left off. When they enter, they douse themselves sufficiently with water, then put their umbrellas up. NOTE: Any or all of the characters should get rained on in between scenes, before monologues, etc. Exactly when and how wet is up to you, though I say the*

*wetter the better. During the speech, the LIGHTS COME UP on Brillstein's office, where she's seated, reading the column to herself.)*

ZACK. Happiness. Happiness is overrated. So many people make it the linchpin, the crux of their lives. I feel sorry for these people. They're staking their time, energy, and money toward something that's ultimately unattainable. Sure, there are instances of happiness, most of them firsts. Your first bike. Your first kiss. Your first orgasm.

*(The BOHEMIAN GIRL enters.)*

BOHEMIAN GIRL. "Okay, well, orgasms, but you see my point? Once these firsts are over, the joy fades. The thrill is gone. You can never permanently achieve happiness. You can, however, permanently achieve misery."

*(MORTIMER enters.)*

MORTIMER. "All you have to do is wake up, and while you're washing your slowly dying body in the shower, think about all of the miserable, wretched lives that people lead. Poverty in India. Human rights violations in China. Africa, hell, there's always evil, terrible shit going down in Africa."

*(The BIOCHEMIST enters.)*

BIOCHEMIST. "We don't need to send Africans food, we need to send them U-Hauls so they can get the hell out of there. But you don't even have to get international.

Take a walk down your street. Instead of taking the time to smell the roses, how about taking the time to smell the rank, barely coherent, homeless shell of a man whose days have become nothing but an alcoholic blur of sorrow.”

*(SINGLE MOTHER enters.)*

SINGLE MOTHER. “Listen to the piercing cries of a malnourished child coming from a tenement window. When I hear a child crying, a good part of me wants to go up, kneel down and say “Get used to it.”

*(‘CATS’ WOMAN enters.)*

‘CATS’ WOMAN. “Friendships are betrayed, hopes and dreams are dashed and trod upon, lovers grow distant. The only people foolish enough to think they’re truly happy are the ignorant.”

*(THREE-CARD MONTE enters.)*

THREE-CARD MONTE. “The problem is, I can’t be like these people. I can’t turn myself off to the world. These people have constructed their lives around a handful of crucial falsities. And I’ve always said...continued on B Three.” *(Everyone stops, looks frantically through the paper to find the continuation of the article. Resuming:)* “I’ll take the grim truth over the sparkling lies any day.”



ZACK, BRILLSTEIN & CHORUS. “Happiness, lasting happiness, is a myth, and one I stopped believing in a long time ago.”

*(ZACK joins BRILLSTEIN in her office. The CHORUS exits.)*

BRILLSTEIN. Goddamn if you aren't a morose little bastard.

ZACK. Thank you, ma'am, your comments mean a lot to me. For next week, I was thinking—

*(The phone rings.)*

BRILLSTEIN. Shut up for a second. *(Picks up the phone.)* *New York Observer-Herald*, this is Harriet Brillstein. What is it? So? So? Well, break the story before they do. I don't care if they haven't issued a verdict yet, guess! We need to be one step ahead if we're gonna compete with the *Post*. Integrity? Who hired you? Listen, they don't call us yellow journalists because we employ Asians, jackass! Now get me a headline! *(Hangs up.)* Ethics my ass. Goddamn liberal arts majors. *(To ZACK.)* Looks good, what can I expect for next week?

ZACK. Well, I was thinking of doing something bleak and pessimistic, but not without a dash of good old misanthropic humor.

BRILLSTEIN. “If it's not broke...

ZACK & BRILLSTEIN. ...we don't print it.”

BRILLSTEIN. Good boy. I gotta hand it to you, Wallis, ever since you started writing your sad little wah-wah column here, our readership has been constantly increas-

ing. You're getting famous, boy, and more importantly, I am.

ZACK. I'm glad I could be of service, ma'am.

BRILLSTEIN. I know you are. Now get the hell outta here.

ZACK. Yes ma'am.

BRILLSTEIN. Oh by the way, you still seeing that shrink?

ZACK. Yes ma'am.

BRILLSTEIN. How's that going?

ZACK. Well, not too bad—

BRILLSTEIN. What I mean is, you aren't getting happy or cured or anything are you? You're still pretty fucked up right?

ZACK. Well ma'am, you'll be glad to know that I'm not happy, I'm nowhere near being cured, and I'm still as fuckity-fucked up as the day I first went to visit her.

BRILLSTEIN. Good to hear, good to hear. Okay, *now* get the hell outta here.

*(LIGHTS OUT on Brillstein's office. LIGHTS UP on the bench. As ZACK exits, he bumps shoulders with THREE-CARD MONTE, who is entering. They exchange some muttered insults. NOTE: Any time ZACK or ZOE enters or exits before or after a CHORUS MEMBER monologue, they should bump shoulders and exchange some improvised insults. Nothing big, often a simple "Up yours" or "Watch it, asshole" will do. Feel free to be creative.)*

THREE-CARD MONTE *(to the audience)*. You know three-card monte? That game? You know, the guy's got three cards, they're kinda bent in the middle, and he moves 'em around real quick, like "Find the queen!

Where's the queen?" Yeah, well I invented that. My name's Monte. I tried all kinds of stuff before I got it right. 12-card monte. 52-card monte. On e-card monte, lost a lot of money on that one. But now, every nickel-and-dime hustler in the city does it. Cheap bastards. (Beat.) Plus, a few months ago, I lost my right hand. It's all been downhill from there. Can't move those cards around too damn quick with only one hand. My career, my livelihood, my whole life. Over. A word of wisdom, friends: You drop a fork down the garbage disposal during a blackout? Wait until the power comes back on before you try to get it. (Beat.) Being an amputee sucks.

*(He exits. LIGHTS OUT on the bench.)*