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Dramatic Publishing

A LAURA INGALLS WILDER CHRISTMAS

By
LAURIE BROOKS



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

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(A LAURA INGALLS WILDER CHRISTMAS)

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For Terry and Judine,
who understand the truest, best thing.

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A Laura Ingalls Wilder Christmas was co-commissioned by The Coterie Theatre, Kansas City, Missouri, and Nashville Children’s Theatre. It premiered at The Coterie Theatre, November 2002. Jeff Church was the producing artistic director and Joette Pelster was the executive director. The production included the following:

CAST

Laura Aneliese Krull
Pa. Ric Averill
Mary. Catherine Queen
Carrie. Adria Rook
Ma. Jeanne Averill
Johnny Steadman Carson Lee Teague, Sam Nichols
Mrs. Starr Deb Bluford

ARTISTIC AND PRODUCTION COMPANY

Director Scot Copeland
Set & Properties Design/Technical Coordinator . Jason Harris
Costume Design Greg Benkovich, Lisa Harper
Lighting Design Art Kent
Sound Design David Kiehl
Production Stage Manager Amy M. Abels Owen
Production Assistant/House Manager Sarah Wienke

A LAURA INGALLS WILDER CHRISTMAS

A Full-length Play
For 2m and 5w

CHARACTERS

PA INGALLS

MA INGALLS

LAURA INGALLS ten years old

MARY INGALLS twelve years old

CARRIE INGALLS seven years old

JOHNNY STEADMAN . . ten years old, walks with a limp

MRS. STARR forties, the wealthiest woman in town

TIME and PLACE

Iowa, 1876.

NOTES

The play operates in various worlds: actual time, Laura's imagination, and a distorted, larger-than-life child's perspective.

The play is done on a bare stage except for a large wooden box at center around which the action revolves. This box transforms from a grave to a wagon, bed, table, seating and becomes a wagon again. The box is also used to store necessary props, which are kept to a minimum. Lighting and sound play an important role in creating mood and atmosphere.

SUGGESTED PROP LIST:

Transforming wooden box, blanket, Ma's shawl, sled, china shepherdess, schoolgirl figurine, Pa's fiddle, Mary's sunbonnet, bucket, stockings with candy, Carrie's doll, Mary's apron and Laura's valise. All other props are suggested with pantomime.

SONGS:

The songs in the play are traditional, including "Where There's a Will There's a Way" and "Sweet By and By" which can be found in *The Laura Ingalls Wilder Songbook: Favorite Songs from the "Little House" books*, by Eugenia Garson.

A LAURA INGALLS WILDER CHRISTMAS

AT RISE: *Lights. The family is gathered at a grave. They sing an arrangement of “In the Sweet By and By” (traditional hymn). During the song, MA ceremoniously takes the family’s china shepherdess and puts it away in the box at center. PA takes his fiddle and adds it to the box. PA tries to lead MA away from the grave. She resists. PA takes her by the shoulders and firmly leads her away. One by one the family leaves the grave, each finding separate spaces, except for LAURA.*

INGALLS FAMILY (*singing together*).

In the sweet by and by we will meet on that
beautiful shore.

In the sweet by and by we will meet on that
beautiful shore.

(LAURA is left alone at the grave.)

LAURA. Good-bye, Baby Freddie.

(LAURA closes the lid on the box. In the following scene the action is pantomimed by the actors in their separate spaces. Sounds of rain.)

PA (*slapping the reins*). Hee-ah! Get up, Pip. Get up, Paddy.

(In their own spaces, the family members are jostled as they ride, huddled against the rain.)

MARY. If I could feel the sun on my face right this minute
I swear I'd never wear my sunbonnet again.

CARRIE. I hate rain!

MARY. Carrie!

CARRIE. Well, I do.

MARY. You must say I dislike rain more than I can say.

CARRIE. Me, too.

(The family is jolted to a stop.)

PA (*slapping the reins*). Get up, Pip. Paddy, git! (*Cracking the whip.*) Caroline! (*MA is lost in a reverie.*) Caroline! Take the reins. (*MA takes the reins. PA gets down to help the ponies.*) Come on, Pip. Walk on, Paddy. (*The wagon moves forward out of the mud. PA realizes MA is crying.*) Don't cry, Caroline. We'll be there soon. If only it'd stop raining.

MA. I keep hearing him cry, Charles. He's all alone and...
it's raining.

PA. Try to think about our new life, Caroline. We'll be far away from this blasted country. The hotel might be the answer to our prayers.

MA. But it's a tavern. What kind of place is that for our girls?

PA. A better place, I hope. (*Cracking the whip.*) Hee-ah!
Git up!

LAURA. I'm worried about Ma. She's gone so quiet.

MARY. She's thinking, is all.

LAURA. I think she never really left Uncle Peter and Aunt Eliza's farm.

CARRIE. But she's right here.

LAURA. I know she is. But she's hardly talked since we left.

CARRIE. Maybe the cat's got her tongue.

LAURA. I think she's too sad to talk.

CARRIE. She misses Baby Freddie.

MARY. Hush up about that, Carrie.

CARRIE. Why do I have to hush up? We all miss him.

LAURA. Especially Ma.

CARRIE. Why did he have to die?

MARY (*to LAURA*). Now see what you've done?

CARRIE. He never even got to have his first birthday.

MARY. Don't be sad, Carrie. Baby Freddie's in heaven now and there's no more beautiful place than heaven.

CARRIE. Then why don't we all go to heaven? (*Silence.*)

LAURA. Because we can't go together. And I wouldn't want to go without you.

CARRIE. Will I go to heaven when I die and see Baby Freddie?

MARY. Yes, Carrie.

LAURA. Maybe Ma wants to die so she can see Baby Freddie.

MARY. Hush, Laura. What a thing to say.

PA. Hee-ah! Good boy, Pip. Walk on, Paddy.

LAURA. I wish Baby Freddie hadn't died.

MA. I wish we had a place to call home.

PA. Wish we'd see the end of this blasted rain.

MARY. I wish I knew what lies ahead.

LAURA. I wish I could make Ma smile.

CARRIE. I wish we were at Bird Oak.

PA. That's Burr Oak, Buttercup.

LAURA. I wish we weren't going to Burr Oak. I don't like living in town.

PA. Well now, since you've never lived in town before, maybe you better wait and see before making up your mind.

LAURA. It's backtracking, Pa. I want to go west.

PA. I know, Half-pint. And we will. In due time. We just need to get back on our feet. Times are hard, and not just for us.

LAURA. Those blasted grasshoppers.

PA. You can say that again.

CARRIE. Those blasted grasshoppers.

PA. Better to backtrack than be beholden to folks. Long as I have a beating heart and two working hands, we'll make it on our own, thank you kindly. Charity's not for this family.

LAURA (*pause*). Are we poor, Pa?

PA. We don't have much and might be headed for even less, but we got each other. (*Pause.*) Git up, boys.

(LIGHTS CROSS FADE. The family throws off their shawls, coats and hats, and takes up the hustle and bustle of the hotel. Hurrying this way and that they pantomime the work of keeping the hotel running—folding laundry, drying dishes, dusting, stacking wood. This scene is intended to be expressionistic, from a child's larger-than-life point of view. Soundscape of the hotel—honky-tonk piano, banging doors, dishes, front desk bell ringing, shuffling cards, laughing.)

LAURA. Ma, can I go out to the barn now?

MA. Not until you finish your chores.

LAURA. It's so noisy in this hotel.

MARY. Guess we'll just have to get used to it.

LAURA. It's hurting my ears.

MA. Stop complaining and start working!

LAURA. Pa, can I have a shot of whiskey?

MA & PA. No!

(Hustle and bustle increases in pace and soundscape increases in volume. LAURA, at center, can't take it another minute.)

LAURA. Wait!

(All freeze. Barn soundscape. Sounds of horses: a nicker, stomping feet, snorts. During the following, LAURA pantomimes taking care of the horses, feeding them hay, hugging and currying them. She can hear but cannot see the family members who speak to her.)

LAURA *(cont'd)*. Want your supper, Paddy? I've got some bran mash for you. *(Playful nickering.)* Yes, I've got some for you, too, Pip. I'm glad you still remember how to play. Mary forgot how.

MARY. I didn't forget. I don't have time to play.

LAURA. Her pretty hands are all cracked and chapped.

MARY. Can't be helped. Got laundry to do.

LAURA. Ma hasn't put out her china shepherdess. She always puts out her china shepherdess.

MA. This hotel just doesn't seem like home to me.

LAURA. But it isn't home until Ma puts out the china shepherdess.

MA. Can't be bothered about that now.

LAURA. Pa's put away his fiddle. He hasn't played one song since we came to this blasted hotel.

PA. Don't have the heart for playing the fiddle just now, I reckon.

LAURA. "Don't have the heart for playing the fiddle just now, I reckon." That's what you always say, ever since we came to this hotel. Will you play the fiddle again? Just one song.

PA. Got chores to do, Half-pint.

LAURA. But when will you have the time? When will you bother? When will you have the heart?

(Barn soundscape fades. The family fades. JOHNNY STEADMAN enters the space, walking with a decided limp.)

JOHNNY. Laura Ingalls!

LAURA. What do *you* want, Johnny Steadman?

JOHNNY. I got a horned toad.

LAURA. You do not.

JOHNNY. I surely do. Wanna see it?

LAURA. Your ma'll whup you if she catches you with that thing in here. No animals allowed in the hotel.

JOHNNY. See if I care. I bring all kinds of sundry creatures to home and never get caught. *(Pause.)* I got it hidden right here in my pocket.

LAURA. Can I hold it?

JOHNNY. Naw. You'll drop it 'cause it's too squishy.

LAURA. Will not.

JOHNNY. You're afraid of squishy things. All females are.

LAURA. Not this female. I'm not afraid to hold a smelly old toad.

JOHNNY. It's not smelly.

LAURA. Smells like a cow pie.

JOHNNY. That's because I found him in a field.

LAURA. I'll be careful. I won't drop him.

JOHNNY. Cross your heart and hope to die?

LAURA. Stick a pin in my eye. *(LAURA holds out her hands to receive the toad. JOHNNY gives her the "toad." It is a cow pie.)*

JOHNNY. Got ya! Ha! Ha!

LAURA. Ooooo! You liar!

JOHNNY. Fooled you. Fooled you. *(LAURA throws the cow pie at JOHNNY.)* Laura's got a cow pie in the house!

LAURA. I hate you, Johnny Steadman. You're the worst boy I ever met! *(JOHNNY fades, laughing.)*

MA. What's all this shouting, Laura?

LAURA. It's that awful, mean Johnny Steadman.

MA. Now, Laura, is that a nice way to talk about a friend?

LAURA. He's not my friend.

MA. Why, of course he is. I'm sure he's happy to have someone his own age right here at the hotel. It must have been lonely for him before we came.

LAURA. He's mean and hateful. He pulls my hair and he makes fun of us and... *(LAURA looks at her hands, still smelling of cow pie.)*

MA. And what?

LAURA. And everything. He's awful, horrible, and dreadful.

MA. Laura, we must be mindful of his infirmity. None of us can know how difficult life is for him, dragging that useless foot.

LAURA. Being crippled is no excuse for being mean.

MA. Nonetheless, you must be extra nice to him, Laura, like a good girl. Do you hear me?

LAURA. Yes, Ma.

MA. Remember the Golden Rule.

LAURA. "Do unto others as you would have done unto you." I know, Ma. *(MA fades.)* But I still hate him.

(LIGHTS CROSS FADE. LAURA and MARY sing "The First Noel" in two-part harmony. CARRIE listens nearby. During the song, MA is in spotlight. MA's shawl becomes a baby that MA rocks in her arms. By the end of the song, MA realizes that her arms are empty and the shawl becomes just a piece of cloth.)

LAURA & MARY *(singing)*.

Noel, noel, noel, noel.

Born is the King of Israel.

(MA fades.)

MARY. That was much better.

LAURA. If we keep practicing every day, we won't even be nervous Christmas Eve.

MARY. I will be. Everyone at church listening and looking at us. I wish I had a good dress to wear instead of this old thing.

LAURA. Me, too. But we'll sing our part so perfectly no one will even notice what we're wearing.

MARY. We'll have to be awful good.

LAURA. We better practice that last part again.

(MARY leads and the two girls sing the refrain again, a capella.)

LAURA & MARY *(singing)*.

Noel, noel, noel, noel...

(CARRIE joins on the last line, but sings loudly and off key.)

LAURA, MARY & CARRIE *(singing)*.

Born is the King of...

LAURA. Carrie!

CARRIE. What?

LAURA. You're not supposed to sing.

CARRIE. But I like singing.

LAURA. You sing off key.

CARRIE. No, I don't.

LAURA. You can't even carry a tune.

CARRIE. I don't have to carry it, I'm singing it.

LAURA. Well, don't.

MARY. Laura, you're hurting Carrie's feelings.

LAURA. I don't mean to hurt Carrie's feelings, but Carrie will hurt the churchgoers' ears.

CARRIE. You don't like my singing.

LAURA. I do. I like your singing.

CARRIE. Then can I sing with you at church on Christmas Eve?

LAURA & MARY. No!

MARY. I mean maybe you can sing with us next year.

CARRIE. But why can't I sing this year?

LAURA. Because. Ma and Pa will be lonely if they have no one to sit with them.

MARY. Yes, Carrie, you have an important job already.

CARRIE. Okay, but I'd rather sing.

LAURA. Go ahead, Mary, let's practice the reading.

(During the following, JOHNNY sneaks up on the girls. He carries a sled. The girls elocute with high diction and overblown gestures.)

MARY. And Mary brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room at the inn.

LAURA. And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them...

MARY. Louder, Laura. Project.

LAURA. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid... *(JOHNNY pulls LAURA's hair.)*
Ouch!

JOHNNY *(imitating them)*. "And they were sore afraid."

LAURA. You skedaddle, Johnny Steadman.

JOHNNY. I live here, too, remember?

LAURA. How could I forget?

CARRIE. Is that your sled?

JOHNNY. Yes. I'm going sledding. Have you ever seen a more beautiful sled? Come all the way from Chicago.

CARRIE. It's the most beautiful sled in the whole wide world. I'd give anything to have a sled like that.

MARY. It is a lovely sled.