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Dramatic Publishing

A Full Length Musical

45 MINUTES FROM BROADWAY

George M. Cohan's musical
adapted by
June Walker Rogers



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(45 MINUTES FROM BROADWAY)

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George M. Cohan's

45 MINUTES FROM BROADWAY

Revised by June Walker Rogers

A Musical in Two Acts

For Seven Men, Six Women, Extras, Chorus

C H A R A C T E R S

BEN/GEORGE M. COHAN

MISS TEMPLETON

GEMMA/MISS HIGGINS

DANI/FLORA DORA DEAN

STEVE/TOM BENNETT

CORINNE/MRS. DAVID DEAN

CHRIS/JOE CRONIN

JASON/KID BURNS

WILHELMINA/MARY JANE JENKINS

ROSELYNN/MRS. PURDY

CARTER/MR. WARREN

POLICE CAPTAIN

POLICEMAN

FOUR REPORTERS

TOWNSPEOPLE AND CHORUS (As desired)

Time: The Present

Place: Middletown School Gymnasium

ACT ONE:

SCENE ONE: The School auditorium stage

**SCENE TWO: Exterior of the Castleton Manor,
morning**

ACT TWO:

SCENE ONE: Backstage

SCENE TWO: Interior of Castleton Manor, evening

SCENE THREE: School auditorium

ACT ONE

THE CURTAIN RISES on a meeting of the Middletown School Drama Club, being held on the stage of the school auditorium. Some of the students are sitting on chairs scattered around, some are on the floor. ROSELYNN is seated on top of a theatrical trunk placed stage R. The big, old trunk has stickers all over it, reading "The Keith-Albee Circuit", "The Palace", "New Amsterdam Theatre", "Union Square Theatre", etc. There is a general feeling of bedlam with different conversations going on in little groups. DANI, the ballerina, is doing ballet exercises stage L. STEVE, the athlete, is doing push-ups. MISS TEMPLETON, the teacher, is looking over a script with GEMMA, the president of the Drama Club. The players ad lib conversation, humming, vocalizing, setting up a great racket. BEN, the custodian, wanders in, either from the audience or from stage L, and tries to get MISS TEMPLETON's attention.

BEN (calling). Miss Templeton! (Of course she cannot hear. He shouts louder.) Miss Templeton! (Nothing happens. He puts his fingers to his mouth and utters a piercing whistle. Everyone stops what they are doing and looks up in quiet.)

STEVE. What is it? Football practice?

ROSELYNN. That's very good, Ben. Do you do bird calls too?

BEN. Hog-calling might be more to the point around here.

What is this? The debating society?

GEMMA. It's the Drama Club.

BEN. Same difference. Sorry to interrupt you, Miss Templeton.

MISS TEMPLETON. Yes, Ben?

BEN. It's getting late. I'm going to have to lock up soon.

MISS TEMPLETON. We'll be finished in about ten minutes.

BEN. I don't want to rush you but I have my orders. Besides that, in ten minutes, I go on overtime, and the school board won't pay it.

MISS TEMPLETON. We'll be out in ten minutes. I promise.

BEN (nods, looks them over). The Drama Club, huh? What were you staging? World War Two? (He exits.)

GEMMA (who has been studying a play catalog, closes it with a bang). Ten minutes or ten hours, it doesn't make any difference. We're still no closer to picking out this year's musical than we were last week.

DANI. I don't care what it is. As long as it's meaningful.

STEVE. New and original are the key words.

CORINNE (the theatrical one). And everyone has to have the opportunity to do something, down front in the spot light. Nobody should be out of sight.

CHRIS (moving to her, a put-down). You are out of sight, Corinne. (She makes a face at him.)

MISS TEMPLETON. At this rate we'll be doing the Spring Musical at Christmas. We have got to make a decision.

CARTER. Does it have to be a musical? I don't know if I can sing out of the shower.

ROSELYNN. No problem. We can do the whole show in the boys' locker room and put you in the shower. I can hear it now. (She sings a scale.)

DANI. Make the water warmer! (She pantomimes soaping herself and sings a scale. The others begin singing scales, jazz riffs, whatever, all pantomiming taking showers.)

STEVE. Where's the soap?

CORINNE. Who's got my towel . . .? (All are singing now as JASON, the student director enters. He is egotistical and brash with the knack of saying the wrong thing at the wrong time. He applauds them.)

JASON. Wonderful! Wonderful! Just what we need . . . a nice, clean musical. (The others laugh, stop singing.)

WILHELMINA. Well, you were late, Jason, and it was easy to pick one without you telling us all what we ought to do.

JASON. Willie, you misjudge me. Why don't we go out afterwards and then maybe you'll get to know the real me.

WILHELMINA. No thanks, Jason, I have enough trouble dealing with the fake you.

CORINNE. Don't talk to him like that, Willie. Rejection makes him feel rejected.

MISS TEMPLETON. That's no way to talk to the director.

DANI. Right. And the director is allowed to be overbearing and egotistical. That's show business.

JASON. I'm not egotistical. I just happen to know my capabilities . . . and they're endless. Who else can act, sing, dance, direct, design the scenery and do the lighting?

CORINNE. If you could only sew a straight seam, Jason, you'd go right to the top.

WILHELMINA. Oh, somebody shut him up. There's never been anyone who can do all those things well.

JASON. Oh no? How about George M. Cohan? He had almost as much talent as I do.

WILHELMINA (having to be held back). Let me at him.

MISS TEMPLETON (stepping between them, looking at them both. Calmly). I don't want to pull rank, but we will all be ladies and gentlemen, or we will all flunk senior English. (JASON and WILHELMINA walk away from

each other.) Now we've got to pick the play or we'll have to give up certain things, like rehearsals.

JASON (turning back). You're absolutely right, Miss Templeton, but you've got to admit I'm right about George M. Cohan.

MISS TEMPLETON (nodding). He was phenomenal. My grandmother had her greatest successes in his shows. That trunk . . . (She points at it.) . . . everything in it . . . even the labels show what a big star she was and no one was more important to her career than Jason's idol, Cohan.

JASON. The original Yankee Doodle Boy. He knew show business better than anybody. He knew whether you did a new show or an old show, as long as it was entertainment, it didn't matter. What he said then is still absolutely true today. (He sings:)

“THERE'S NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN”

SAME OLD SONGS ABOUT THE SAME OLD MOON
FEW NEW WORDS BUT THE SAME OLD TUNE
DASHING ON BEFORE US
WE SEE THE MERRY CHORUS
AND EVERYTHING THEY DO YOU KNOW'S BEEN DONE
YOU HEAR THE SAME OLD JOKES
THAT MAKE THE SAME OLD HIT
THE SCENERY'S JUST THE SAME
BUT IT'S BEEN PAINTED UP A BIT
YOU CAN ASK MOST ANY SHOWMAN
INQUIRE OF CHARLEY FROHMAN
AND HE'LL SAY THERE'S NOTHING NEW BENEATH THE
SUN!

DID YOU EVER STOP TO FIGURE THAT THIS VERY LIFE
WE LEAD
WAS LED BY OUR ANCESTORS, DON'T YOU KNOW
WE IMAGINE THAT WE'RE LIVING IN AN AGE OF MIGHTY
SPEED
BUT TO TELL THE TRUTH WE'RE ABSOLUTELY SLOW
FOR FASHIONS, FADS AND FANCIES ALWAYS ARE AND
ALWAYS WERE
THOUGH THEY RAVE ABOUT PROGRESSION, THERE'S
BEEN NOTHING NEW OCCUR
EV'RY THING IS JUST THE SAME AS WHEN THEY WROTE
THE CALENDAR
AND THAT'S OVER NINETEEN HUNDRED YEARS AGO
THE SAME OLD

HARD LUCK STORIES FROM THE HARD LUCK BOYS
GOOD LUCK BOYS HAVE THE GOOD LUCK NOISE
THERE IS NOTHING SURER
THE POOR ARE GROWING POORER
THE RICH ARE MAKING MONEY BY THE TON
FOR IT'S THE SAME OLD WORLD
IT'S FULL OF SMILES AND TEARS
AND EVERYTHING THAT'S GOING ON'S
BEEN GOING ON FOR YEARS
IF THE TRACK IS CLEAR OR MUDDY
SIZE UP EVERYBODY
AND YOU'LL FIND THERE'S NOTHING NEW BENEATH
THE SUN.

(SONG ends.)

JASON. Say, that gives me an idea. Right from the old master! If there's nothing new, then why not do a really, old, old-fashioned show? It'll be so old, it'll seem new. Either way, we can't lose! Oh, Jason, you're terrific!

WILHELMINA. Terrifically overbearing.

JASON (paying no attention). The more I think of it, the better I like it. A show with familiar music, the songs you love to sing. Dancing . . . give me the old soft shoe, the waltz clog, the time step. (Demonstrates some of the steps. As he does.) You know, Cohan used to do this kind of strut thing and he'd walk right up the side of the proscenium . . . (He starts to do it . . . everyone cries, "Jason, don't! You don't know how! You'll kill yourself!") Nothing to it! (He takes a flying leap, falling back and hitting his head against the trunk, and sinking to the floor.)

CORINNE. Okay, Jason, you've made your point, that's enough drama.

ROSELYNN (looking down from the trunk). You're jealous Corinne, 'cause Jason's fallen for me. Isn't that cute?

CHRIS. Okay, Jason, get up. We got the picture.

(JASON doesn't move and MISS TEMPLETON, worried, bends and touches his shoulder.)

MISS TEMPLETON. Jason All right, Jason He's not moving He's hurt!

DANI. He's demonstrating acting again.

MISS TEMPLETON. No he isn't, Dani. I wish he was. He's out cold.

ROSELYNN (jumping down from trunk). I'll get some help.

STEVE. There may not be anyone left in school.

WILHELMINA. The nurse! We need the nurse. Or get a doctor.

MISS TEMPLETON. Well, don't just stand there. Move! (Everyone runs off to get help. Looking at his head.) Oh, what a bump. Poor Jason . . . Ice! Maybe some ice! If there's someone still in the cafeteria, I'll get some ice . . . (She runs off. JASON, twitches a bit, then moans, then begins to sit up.)

JASON. Oh, what hit me? (Touches his head.) Ouch! I've been clobbered. By a critic, no doubt.

VOICE. That's not funny.

JASON. It wasn't meant to be. (Looks around.) Who said that?

VOICE. I did.

JASON (still looking for the source of the VOICE). I don't see anyone . . . (Rubbing head.) . . . Maybe my eyes were affected.

VOICE. You're leaning against me.

JASON (automatically). Sorry . . . (Then looking, realizes it is the trunk, not a person he is leaning against.) Maybe it's not my eyes, it's my brain that's out of whack. No. It's a gag. Trunks don't talk.

VOICE. Oh no?

JASON (to the trunk). I'm sure of it.

VOICE. Yeah? Ask me a question, any question.

JASON (shrugs, rather than argues). Okay, how . . . old are you?

VOICE (insulted). I won't answer that. Nobody in show business ever tells their age.

JASON. I could figure it out. You traveled with Miss Templeton's grandmother at the turn of the century. So, that makes you . . .

VOICE (hastily). Mature! I've traveled. Seen the world. Worked

with the great and the near great. The tales I could tell.

JASON. You knew George M. Cohan, right?

VOICE. I supported him on a lot of tours. He'd sit on me at the railroad station while we waited for the train.

JASON. Really?

VOICE. I've kept some of his props as souvenirs. Open the bottom drawer.

JASON (reluctant). I don't like to go through somebody else's drawers.

VOICE. Oh, go ahead!

JASON (pulling at bottom drawer). It's stuck.

VOICE. Not so *rough!*

JASON (easing the drawer out). There! (Takes out a straw hat.) Say! This is still in pretty good condition.

VOICE (proud). That's me! No moths, no mildew. There's a cane that goes with it. Try them out. (JASON takes out the cane, puts on the hat, struts around in it, swinging the cane.)

JASON. Hey, this is cool!

(BEN, the custodian, comes down the aisle, calling:)

BEN. Hey, kid! What are you doing up there? I left strict orders.

VOICE. Oh, oh. We're in trouble.

JASON. I'm sorry . . . I was just talking to . . . (Starts to indicate the trunk, decides that sound ridiculous. BEN is now on stage.) Excuse me, but you look familiar. Do I know you?

BEN. Everybody knows me!

JASON. Give me a hint . . .

VOICE. Boy, are you kids dumb. (Hums "Yankee Doodle Dandy.")

JASON. I got it! James Cagney!

BEN. He was the carbon copy. I'm the original.

JASON. The original who . . . (Realizing.) Georgie? (Deciding it must be true.) Georgie, baby!

BEN. Mr. Cohan, to you! Mr. George M. Cohan. (He bows to the audience.) My mother thanks you, my father thanks you, my sister thanks you, and I thank you!

JASON. Gosh!

BEN (to him). Star of stage, screen and radio. They wanted me for television, too, but they didn't invent it in time.

JASON. Wow! I admire your confidence.

BEN. Either you got it or you ain't.

JASON (nods). Right! How do you get it?

BEN. Kid, I got a feeling you won't have to look far. You remind me of me. And that's the biggest compliment I can pay anyone.

JASON. Thanks. But if I've got your confidence, how come I haven't picked the spring musical yet?

BEN. Look no further. Open the second drawer in that trunk. (JASON opens the drawer.)

VOICE (giggling). That tickles . . .

JASON (takes script from drawer, reads title). "Forty-Five Minutes from Broadway."

BEN. I personally autographed that copy for Fay Templeton.

JASON. Fay Templeton? That's Miss Templeton's grandmother.

BEN. That slip of a girl has a granddaughter? Amazing! That script has all my production notes in it.

JASON (skimming the script). It practically directs itself.

BEN (nods). I was very thorough. Tell you what, kid, you do that show and I'll stick around and help you with the bits. You can't fail! Oh, and before I forget . . . (Takes a bowler hat from the trunk.) There it is . . . The hat I always wore when I was directing. (Puts hat on JASON.) You wear it!

JASON. And maybe the good luck'll rub off on me?

BEN. Not luck, talent!

JASON. I can feel it working already. I'll direct a terrific production of "Forty Five Minutes from Broadway" . . . and while I'm at it, I guess I may as well play the lead.

BEN (proudly). That's my boy . . .

JASON (calls). Okay, everybody . . . we're starting rehearsals now . . .

BEN. Rehearsals? In the old days we didn't bother with rehearsals. We just went out there and knocked the people dead.

JASON (stunned). No rehearsals? How did you start?

BEN. Well, somebody yelled "Five minutes to curtain!" . . .

JASON (yells). Five minutes to curtain . . .

BEN. The music started . . . (MUSIC begins.) And I sort of liked to open with a march number, kid . . . kinda got the show going with a kick. (He sings:)

"YOU'RE A GRAND OLD FLAG"

Verse: THERE'S A FEELING COMES A STEALING
AND IT SETS MY BRAIN A'REELING
WHEN I'M LISTENING TO THE MUSIC OF A
MILITARY BAND.

JASON sings:

ANY TUNE LIKE YANKEE DOODLE
SIMPLE SETS ME OFF MY NOODLE

BEN:

IT'S THAT PATRIOTIC SOMETHING THAT NO ONE CAN
UNDERSTAND.

BOTH:

WAY DOWN SOUTH IN THE LAND OF COTTON
MELODY UNTIRING
AIN'T THAT INSPIRING!
HURRAH! HURRAH! WE'LL JOIN THE JUBILEE
AND THAT'S GOING SOME, FOR THE YANKEES BY GUM
(BEN pulls a flag from the trunks, unfurls it.)
RED WHITE AND BLUE, I AM FOR YOU.

BEN:

HONEST YOU'RE A GRAND OLD FLAG.

(He hands the flag to JASON. As JASON starts to sing the chorus, the rest of the company comes marching on, dressed in "Forty-Five Minutes to Broadway" costumes, join in the singing as they come on. Either the actors push the scenery for the play on or the stage hands come on behind them, setting scenery as they do the number. It should be a march number in the manner of a military drill. The cast carries flags. As many choruses as are necessary may be used to accommodate the number. As soon as JASON begins singing, BEN blends offstage.)

JASON: (Later with chorus of cast)
YOU'RE A GRAND OLD FLAG
YOU'RE A HIGH FLYING FLAG
AND FOREVER IN PEACE MAY YOU WAVE
YOU'RE THE EMBLEM OF THE LAND I LOVE
THE HOME OF THE FREE AND THE BRAVE
EVERY HEART BEATS TRUE UNDER RED, WHITE AND
BLUE
WHERE THERE'S NEVER A BOAST OR BRAG
BUT SHOULD AULD ACQUAINTANCE BE FORGOT
KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE GRAND OLD FLAG!

(By the time the number is finished, the set for the play is in place. A large flat depicting a tree has been brought on and placed stage R in front of the trunk. L, and slightly down stage of the tree, a bench has been placed. There is the exterior of a house at L with the door C. [This can be as simple or elaborate as you wish] Perhaps we see a bit of the side of the house which extends into the wings and the front of the house angles upstage.)

When the number ends, a POLICE CAPTAIN and a POLICEMAN enter R, trying to move the crowd away from the front of the house. Someone takes whatever flags have been used, and carries them off.)

CAPTAIN. All right, move along, move along. We can't have you hanging around here . . .

(The principals in the play exit at once, leaving chorus and FOUR REPORTERS to argue with the policeman.)