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Dramatic Publishing

The Bremen Town Musicians: Nothing Is Worthless



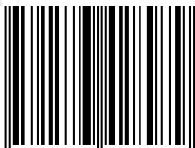
Comedy by Ric Averill

The Bremen Town Musicians: Nothing Is Worthless

Comedy. By Ric Averill. *Cast: 2m., 1w., 32 to 46+ either gender (doubling possible for smaller cast).* This play presents the classic fairy tale in delightful simplicity and then turns the same story into an urban fairy tale. In the classic fairy tale, four farm animals, a donkey, dog, cat and rooster, are kicked out of their homes as worthless. The animals find new strength and purpose as they band together, becoming an orchestra of musicians with their bray, bark, meow and cock-a-doodle-doo. They're far better in their minds than the cacophony presented to the audience—and later to a robber. The impromptu concert frightens the robber so much that he leaves his hideout and ill-gotten gold, and the animal musicians retire happily. The urban fairy tale takes the same story but makes the characters human and sets them on the streets of a big city, where the decrepit old junkyard of Jake is being condemned. Junkyard Jake meets and takes in Fiona, a homeless woman, then Sherri, a deaf girl selling flowers, and finally Pop-Head, a street kid. The street people band together playing junkyard instruments and fend off a series of city bureaucrats determined to turn them out as worthless. The four almost give up when belief in their own worth and music allows them to convince the mayor that their junkyard is really an art park. Just like in the classic fairy tale, the four look to live happily ever after. The urban fairy tale, however, does pose the question: "How do we each determine the worth of other human beings?" *Area staging. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: BK7.*

Cover: The Seem-To-Be Players at Lawrence Arts Center, Lawrence, Kan., featuring (l-r) Jason Ware, John Gary Brown, Jennifer Glenn, Christie Brandt and Beth Dearing. Photo: John Gary Brown. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

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The Bremen Town Musicians: Nothing Is Worthless

Comedy by
RIC AVERILL



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(THE BREMEN TOWN MUSICIANS: NOTHING IS WORTHLESS)

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The Bremen Town Musicians: Nothing Is Worthless was developed with local crop artist, Stan Herd, who created a fabulous junkyard complete with a backdrop that faded into a cityscape and let us play. The actors created a soundscape using found objects in the style groups such as of Bang on a Can or STOMP. The ensemble learned some American Sign Language, which was essential to Sherri's character in Act II: An Urban Fairy Tale. The play toured the United States from Philadelphia to Ft. Lauderdale, Fla.; St. Louis; Houston; Chicago; Mesa, Ariz.; Tampa, Fla.; Wichita, Kan.; and many stops between.

CAST

(Including original and touring cast members.)

DONKEY / JAKE Dick Peach, Ric Averill, Doug Weaver
DOG / FIORA Jennifer Glenn*
CAT / SHERRI Beth Dearing*
ROOSTER / POP HEAD Nadine Griffith, Jason Ware
ROBBER / URBAN ROBBER / ETC. Steve Emerson*

PRODUCTION

Stage Manager Bruce Smith*
Music Ric Averill

**Denotes members of Actor's Equity Association.*

The playwright gratefully dedicates this play to his many friends and colleagues from IPAY (International Performing Arts for Youth), TYA USA/ASSITEJ (Theatre for Young Audiences) and AATE (American Alliance for Theatre and Education).

Thanks for the many inspirational moments, the commitment to excellence, the shared visions, the challenges and the dancing always the dancing.

The Bremen Town Musicians: Nothing Is Worthless

CHARACTERS

ACT I: A CLASSIC FAIRY TALE:

ANIMALS / BREMEN TOWN MUSICIANS:

DONKEY

DOG

CAT

ROOSTER

FARMER

SOLDIER

BOY

OLD WOMAN COOK

ROBBERS 1–4 (or more)

PARROT

ACT II: AN URBAN FAIRY TALE:

URBAN MUSICIANS:

JAKE: a junkman.

FIORA: a homeless woman.

SHERRI: a hearing impaired flower girl.

POP HEAD: a street kid.

THE SUIT: a city official.

GROUCHY OLD SHOPKEEPER

MAD FRUIT STAND OWNER

HOOLIGAN

BUREAUCRAT

THE WOMAN IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING ELSE

THE MAYOR

CAMERAMEN

REPORTERS

CITIZENS

FULL CAST OF CHARACTERS

(With doubling options.)

FARMER (ROBBER)
DONKEY (JAKE)
SOLDIER (ROBBER)
DOG (FIORA)
BOY (ROBBER)
CAT (SHERRI)
OLD WOMAN COOK (ROBBER)
ROOSTER (POP HEAD)
ROBBER 1
PARROT (ROBBER'S VOICE)
ROBBERS 2–4 (may be eliminated)
JAKE (DONKEY)
FIORA (DOG)
SHERRI (CAT)
POP HEAD (ROOSTER)
THE SUIT (ROBBER)
GROUCHY OLD SHOPKEEPER (ROBBER)
MAD FRUIT STAND OWNER (ROBBER)
HOOLIGAN (ROBBER)
BUREAUCRAT (ROBBER)
THE WOMAN IN CHARGE OF EVERYTHING ELSE (ROBBER)
THE MAYOR (ROBBER)

TIME

THEN and NOW.

PLACE

THERE and HERE.

PRODUCTION NOTES

SET

The show requires two sets, one of which could be hidden behind the other. The fairy tale set can be very simple: flats painted to designate a road traveling past trees and pastures. There should be some representation of the hut for the second scene in Act I: A Classic Fairy Tale where the robbers are found. The fairy tale set is removed to reveal a junkyard. This can be an area filled with found objects turned into art or junk lying around, some of which can be played like an instrument. There could be a backdrop showing the junkyard stretching out with an aggressive and predatory cityscape stretched out behind. The show can be done very simply and creatively with as much found art as possible.

The original set was designed, built and painted by Stan Herd, a world-famous crop artist, painter and collaborator.

The original set was a fully reversible backdrop of five flats. Three of them were 4 feet by 8 inches, and the other two were 3 feet by 8 feet covered on both sides. In Act I: A Classic Fairy Tale, the back three large flats represented the forest. The two smaller flats were brought on for the second scene and depicted the interior of the robber's hut. They were set about 2 feet right and left of C, and the gap between was covered by a piece that formed a roof between them with a high baseboard, thus creating a window to the forest through which the animals could first look into and then enter. Hidden behind this set was the junkyard for Act II: An Urban Fairy Tale.

The reversed flats revealed the urban junkyard and formed a scenic backdrop with junk stretching as far as the eye can see and a large city skyline in the background. Some of the junk actually on the set was picked up in the painting. Every prop mentioned in Act II: An Urban Fairy Tale was revealed when the set was swung about and reversed to become Jake's Junkyard.

COSTUMES

Original costume design and construction was by Jennifer Glenn, costumer and actress for the Seem-To-Be Players.

The costumes were colorful and almost clown like. In the first piece, the animals were clothed, but the clothing suggested the animal. The donkey wore coveralls; the dog, patched pants; the cat, a calico skirt; and the rooster, a bright red vest. They had headpieces that didn't cover their faces but did add ears and a comb. They also wore hand or paw and foot covers. The robbers wore gypsy-like costumes, with a stuffed parrot on The robber's shoulder. The robber voiced the parrot.

In Act II: An Urban Fairy Tale, the animal parts were discarded and the costumes were changed. The urban characters became almost hobo clowns, colorful against the gray cityscape background. The costumes added to the surreal or fairy tale aspect of the piece. Jake's coveralls were topped by a bright patched coat. Fiora wore layers and layers of baggy dresses and skirts, sashes and shawls. Sherri wore a simple skirt decorated with large flowers. She also had flowers in her buttons and in her hair. Pop Head wore patched jeans, a T-shirt, a wild vest, a tie and a very tall velvet paisley top hat. The urban visitors wore basic drab street clothes that matched their positions; coats, dresses, uniforms and other insignias of urban status all marked them as established.

MUSIC

The junkyard band consisted of found and made instruments including washtub bass, a washboard, partially filled pop bottles for a blown flute sound and various cans and buckets struck for percussive impact. The improvised junkyard band had a bit of falvor to it similar to the groups STOMP or Bang on a Can. Playwright Ric Averill created the original soundscape.

The Bremen Town Musicians: Nothing Is Worthless

ACT I: A CLASSIC FAIRY TALE

SCENE 1: THE FOREST

AT RISE: *The setting is a wooded area. The ROBBER's "hut," which may be brought on for the second scene, is offstage. As house lights dim, a faint, strange march music heralds a procession of the ANIMALS, each holding signs and crossing the stage. The signs are lit by lanterns, candles and torches held by the ANIMALS. DONKEY's first sign says, "THE." DOG's first sign says, "BREMEN." CAT's first sign says, "TOWN." ROOSTER's first sign says, "MUSICIANS." By the time ROOSTER exits, DONKEY is back on with a second sign that says, "A." DOG's second sign says, "CLASSIC." CAT's second sign says, "FAIRY." ROOSTER runs by, stops and wiggles his tail feathers, replacing an actual sign with a visual pun on "tale" before exiting. The music changes as action begins.*

FARMER enters wearing a straw hat with a hoe in his hand, yelling and chasing DONKEY.

FARMER. Get out of here! Get! Cain't work no more, no good for nothing. All you do is eat me out of house and home and take up good space fer sleeping! Get!! And never let me see you here again!!! You worthless old Donkey!!!!

DONKEY (*stumbling away from FARMER*). Hee-haw! Hee-haw!! Worthless old donkey! Worthless old donkey!!! I'll show you worthless old donkey! (*Gets ready to attack.*) I'll

kick you, I will! *(Steps back.)* ... Except my shoes have worn to a worthless nub. *(Yells again.)* I'll wake you with my pitiful braying!! *(Brays wistfully. Tries one more appeal.)* I'll work harder and to make myself worthwhile! *(Thinks about it.)* What am I saying? I'm too tired to plow, too pooped to plant and too headstrong to harvest! Hee-haw!!! *(Turns to walk down the road the opposite direction.)* Who needs your dumb old farm anyway! I'll just go where folks appreciate me ... not quite sure where that'll be ...

(DOG enters, barking. He is pursued by SOLDIER in uniform.)

DOG. Arf! Howl!!! Grr!!

(DOG runs around DONKEY, almost oblivious of him. SOLDIER throws his shoe at DOG.)

SOLDIER. And stay away, you flea-bitten mongrel!! Your pups are better watchdogs than you!! You worthless cur!! *(Exits, muttering under his breath and stomping unevenly with one shoe off.)* Worthless, mangy, foul-smelling beastie ...

DOG. Worthless? Grr!! Worthless!! Grr!! I'll show you worthless!! I'll make your shoes worthless!

DONKEY. Heavens!

(DOG grabs the SOLDIER's shoe with his teeth and flings it around.)

DOG. I'll tear your nightshirt up!!! I'll ... I'll soil your rugs and eat your Sunday dinner and ... and ... grrr ...

(DOG notices DONKEY and growls.)

DOG *(cont'd)*. What are you staring at?

(The SOLDIER's other shoe comes flying in from offstage.)

SOLDIER *(offstage)*. Worthless!

DONKEY *(defensively)*. Listen, you miserable old dog! You keep your distance or I may have to kick you with my big, heavy hooves!

DOG. And I may have to bite you with my sharp white teeth!

(They circle, looking at each other.)

DONKEY. Oh, yeah? Well, your teeth don't look so sharp to me. In fact, it doesn't look like you have too many of them left.

DOG *(suddenly putting tail between legs)*. I'm sorry you noticed. It's true. My teeth aren't what they used to be.

DONKEY. Well, ... I, uh ...

DOG. At least you still have your feet! Your great, long donkey feet with sharp, stiff shoes!

DONKEY. Actually, my shoes have long since worn down to a nub, and it hurts if I raise my hoof any higher than this ...
(Lifts leg, nearly falls over.)

DOG. Really? *(Laughs.)* That's too bad. Too bad! But what are you doing here on the road?

DONKEY. It's a sad day, indeed. No more plowing the fields, no more rides for the children on picnic days, no more parades to stubbornly bring to a halt. I've been thrown out of my master's house—as worthless!!

DOG. That's terrible! Terrible! *(Leans on DONKEY.)* Uh, if you don't mind my asking ... What's a worthless donkey do?

DONKEY. What's a worthless dog do?

DOG. I beg your pardon?

DONKEY. I heard your master. Sent you packing, too! You're in as sorry shape as I am.

DOG. Where are you going?

DONKEY. I don't know!! I've only just now been kicked out.

DOG. Me, too—and I have no idea where to go, either.

(They ponder a moment in silence.)

DONKEY. I've heard that Bremen Town is a friendly place.

DOG. I was there once—with my master—during the fair!

They had clowns and musicians and acrobats!!!

DONKEY. And pies! Pies and pretzels and pastries, I've heard!

DOG. Oh, yes, yes, yes! And they'll throw scraps to the animals and ... *(Suddenly sad.)* But I was there with my master.

DONKEY. I was going to go with my master—what good would it do for us to go to Bremen Town with no one to ...

(BOY with a hat and a whiny voice enters, holding and berating CAT.)

BOY. Mama don't want you about here no more! You're nasty and dirty and smelly and Mama's tired of feeding you! I oughta tie your leg to a brick and throw you in the river! That's what I oughta do!

(CAT struggles, looks at DONKEY and DOG, who instinctively jump past her and challenge the enemy.)

DONKEY. Hee-haw!!!

DOG. Grr! Grr!!!!

CAT. Hisssss!

DONKEY. Hee-haw!!!

DOG. Grr! Grr!!!!

BOY *(shrieks and exits)*. I always knew you was a haunted cat! Help! Help!

(CAT relaxes, protected. CAT only “meows” or “hisses.”
NOTE: This will be reflected in Act II: An Urban Fairy Tale
by SHERRI, who only signs using American Sign Language
[ASL] rather than speaking.)

CAT. Meow!

DONKEY. Guess we showed him! My, what a rude person!

DOG. Worse than my master ...

DONKEY. Or mine. People should know better. Are you all right, Cat?

(CAT rubs against DONKEY, then DOG, purring.)

CAT. Meow.

DOG. I think she’s all right, Donkey ... and I think she wants to go with us.

(CAT nods and purrs.)

DONKEY. It would seem that way. Cat, we’re thinking of going to Bremen Town.

(CAT is enthusiastic.)

DONKEY *(cont’d)*. In hopes of pastries and pies.

(CAT cocks her head, laps her tongue.)

DONKEY *(cont’d)*. Pardon?

DOG. Cream. I think she hopes we’ll find cream as well. I understand, Cat.

DONKEY. No doubt! No doubt we’ll find cream.

(CAT moves to one side, looks back, looks off, then back at them, hisses and meows.)

DOG. I think she's telling us that she knows the way.

(CAT stretches out, then nods, very contended.)

DONKEY. Then to Bremen we will go!

DOG. But we have no one to ...

(Suddenly, ROOSTER crows, screeches loudly and runs on-stage, very excited, pursued by a nasty, dirty apron-wearing, rolling pin-wielding OLD WOMAN COOK.)

ROOSTER. Cock-a-doodle-doo!!!!

OLD WOMAN COOK. Get back here, dinner! I can't wait to eat you up! Goodness knows you're worthless for anything else!! You sleep past sunrise!! The chickens are too nervous around you to lay eggs!! And you crow at night and keep me awake!

(OLD WOMAN COOK chases ROOSTER around DONKEY, DOG and CAT.)

ROOSTER. Cock-a-doodle-doo!!!!

OLD WOMAN COOK. I've got the answer, dearie little rooster, and it's called a kettle, a frying pan, a shish kabob thingamabob, an oven, a griddle, a boiling pot and you're going in 'em—like it or not!!!

ROOSTER. Cock-a-doodle-doo!!!!

(OLD WOMAN COOK continues her tirade as ROOSTER runs through and around the other ANIMALS. They look at one another, come to an unspoken agreement and begin to bray, growl and hiss at her.)

DONKEY. Hee-haw!!

DOG. Grrr! Grrr!

CAT. Hisssssss!

OLD WOMAN COOK. What? What are you animals doing here? Where are your masters and mistresses? You get out of the way!! Give me my rooster!! Give me my rooster!!

(She holds up a frying pan and threatens them. They form a line, hiding ROOSTER behind them. As she threatens them, they stand back one at a time, indicating that they will reveal and give up ROOSTER. Each time they step aside, ROOSTER has moved on to hide behind the next one.)

OLD WOMAN COOK *(cont'd)*. All right, give him up!

DONKEY *(indicates that ROOSTER is behind him)*. Hee-haw!

OLD WOMAN COOK. Out of my way, you old thing! Wait, where'd he go?

(When DONKEY steps aside, ROOSTER isn't there.)

DOG *(indicates that ROOSTER is behind him)*. Woof, woof!

(OLD WOMAN COOK looks, but ROOSTER has moved down the line.)

OLD WOMAN COOK. Trying to be smart, huh ... Now where is he?

CAT *(as though to help)*. Me-ow ...

OLD WOMAN COOK. Out of the way! I want that bird now!

(She looks behind CAT, but still doesn't see ROOSTER.)

OLD WOMAN COOK *(cont'd)*. Where is he? Where is he???

(They reform a line, hiding ROOSTER. They all point off-stage with their "thumbs." ROOSTER starts to point, too, from behind, but they knock his hand down.)

OLD WOMAN COOK (*cont'd*). Ah, gone down the road, has he? Well, it won't be long before I'll find that little fricassee and fry him and bake him and broil him and shake him and ...

(*OLD WOMAN COOK exits, muttering. The ANIMALS all sigh.*)

ROOSTER. Cock-a-doodle-doo and ...

(*ROOSTER shakes the ANIMALS' "hands" one at a time.*)

ROOSTER (*cont'd*). Thank you, you and you!!! That was certainly a close one! I can't believe my good fortune—saved by barnyard friends. Yes, mi'lady Cat, much thanks, friend Dog, much thanks, and sir Donkey, my life is in your hands!! (*Flops down on the ground as if helpless.*)

DONKEY. My, he certainly is excitable!

DOG. Demonstrative!

CAT. Meow!

ROOSTER. Why, thanks! (*Hops up.*) But tell me, friends of the farm, where are you travelling? And—that determined—might I go with you, because I certainly have no place to call home anymore!!

DONKEY. Obviously!

DOG. Neither do we!

CAT (*indicates with a paw that they should head offstage one direction*). Mee-ow!

DONKEY. The cat seems to be pointing us toward Bremen Town.

DOG. But what about our masters?

ROOSTER. Masters? Who needs masters? You shall be your own masters. I shall join you! In fact, I shall lead!

(ROOSTER leads off the opposite direction from CAT. DONKEY and DOG immediately follow ROOSTER. CAT lags behind, meowing.)

DONKEY *(to DOG)*. Quite a company we've got ourselves amidst!

DOG *(pants a few doubts)*. Are you sure, sure, sure, sure ... ?

ROOSTER. Don't dally, Dog and Donkey, follow me! I was purchased at the fair, you know, years ago, as a young chick! I know the way and ...

CAT *(insistent on her sense of direction)*. Mee-ow! Mee-ow!

(Noticing CAT meowing and looking in the opposite direction, ROOSTER quickly pivots.)

ROOSTER. ... and the best way is to simply follow Cat. To take the edge off the journey, I think I'll sing!!

DOG. An excellent idea! I'll join!

DONKEY. And so will I!!!

CAT. Mee-ow! *(As if to say, "Me, too!")*

Bremen Town Musicians Sort of Song

(This is less a real song than a rhythmic intonation of each ANIMAL's own barnyard sounds. The song should grow into a movable marching rhythm.)

ROOSTER.

COCK-

(Breath.)

A-DOODLE-DOO!

(Breath.)

CAT.

ME-OW!

DOG.

WOOF!

DONKEY.

HEE-HAW!

ROOSTER.

COCK-

(Breath.)

A-DOODLE-DOO!

(Breath.)

CAT.

ME-OW!

DOG.

WOOF!

DONKEY.

HEE-HAW!

ROOSTER.

COCK-

(Breath.)

A-DOODLE-DOO!

(Breath.)

CAT.

ME-OW!

DOG.

WOOF!

ROOSTER.

DO!

DONKEY.

HAW!

ROOSTER.

COCK-

CAT.

ME ...

ROOSTER.

A-DOODLE

CAT.

OW!

DOG.

WOOF! WOOF!

DONKEY.

HEE-HAW!

ROOSTER.

DO!!!

(The ANIMALS howl out a grand finale note and are quite satisfied with themselves.)

DONKEY. Clearly we are meant to be a choir!

DOG. I have never heard such beauty in voice!

CAT *(shakes her head in laughter)*. Me-ow!

DONKEY. Rooster has led us to our fortune!!!

ROOSTER. I have? I mean, of course I have. How?

DONKEY. Why, we're obviously musicians!! Bremen Town Musicians!! When they hear us at the fair they will give us bread and cream ...

DOG. And meat scraps ...

ROOSTER. Don't forget pies and pastries and pretzels!!!

CAT (*laps happily thinking of the food and cream*). Meeee-ow! (*Realizes there's nothing there and holds paws up pathetically.*) Me-ooooow.

DOG. I know, I know, Cat. We may be dreaming—

ROOSTER. But I say, why not make our fortune singing?

DONKEY. How else can we make a living, thrown out and worthless as we are?

CAT. Me-ow! (*With the intonation of "I'm game!"*)

DOG. Then let's be off!

DONKEY. And sing our way to Bremen Town!

(The BREMEN TOWN MUSCIANS exit singing their cacophonous song and laughing. Lights go down and the hut interior is brought onstage. There is a chimney at the top of the hut.)