

Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Silent Night
The (Mostly) True Story of the
World's Most Beloved Carol

By
PETER MANOS

Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

© Dramatic Publishing

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play that are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMXVIII by
PETER MANOS

Printed in the United States of America

All Rights Reserved

(SILENT NIGHT: THE [MOSTLY] TRUE STORY OF THE WORLD'S
MOST BELOVED CAROL)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-210-0

© Dramatic Publishing

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois.”

This play is for Nicholas Manos,
who has taught me the true meaning of love.

Silent Night

The (Mostly) True Story of the World's Most Beloved Carol

CHARACTERS

FATHER JOSEPH MOHR: 20-50 years of age.

FRANZ GRUBER: 20-50 years of age.

TRINA GRUBER: 20-50 years of age.

NICHOLAS GRUBER: 8-12 years of age.

FRIEDA GRUBER: 12-14 years of age.

LIESL GRUBER: 7-11 years of age.

FRAU SCHMIDT: 35-80 years of age.

A choir can augment the cast or pre-recorded music can be used. MOHR plays guitar or he can mime to the pre-recorded music.

SETTING

The village of Oberndorf (Oberndorf bei Salzburg), Austria, Christmastime, 1818.

The play can be performed on a bare stage with just a table serving as an organ and later as GRUBER's workbench.

SONGS

1. All Hail to the Days (Drive the Cold of Winter)
2. Silent Night
3. A Child Is Born in Bethlehem (Ein Kind Geborn zu Bethlehem)
4. Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming
5. Ave Maria
6. The Coventry Carol
7. Bring a Torch, Jeanette, Isabella
8. Silent Night (Reprise)

The music for these songs can be found in the back of the book.

Silent Night

The (Mostly) True Story of the World's Most Beloved Carol

(Lights up. FATHER JOSEPH MOHR enters, strumming his guitar.)

(#1: “All Hail to the Days [Drive the Cold Winter Away]”)

MOHR.

ALL HAIL TO THE DAYS THAT MERIT MORE
PRAISE
THAN ALL THE REST OF THE YEAR
AND WELCOME THE NIGHTS THAT DOUBLE
DELIGHTS
AS WELL FOR POOR AS THE PEER
GOOD FORTUNE ATTEND EACH MERRY MAN'S
FRIEND
THAT DOTHS FOR THE BEST THAT HE MAY
FORGETTING OLD WRONGS, WITH CAROLS AND
SONGS,
TO DRIVE THE COLD WINTER AWAY.

We are about to tell a story of something that happened a long time ago. And it happened with magic and it happened with miracles and it happened with wonder. But all the magic and all the miracles and all the wonder were wrapped inside the most magical wonderful miracle of all. We call it “love.”

MOHR (*cont'd*).

'TIS ILL FOR THE MIND TO ANGER INCLINE
 OR THINK OF SMALL INJURIES NOW
 IF WRATH BE TO SEEK
 DON'T LEND HER THY CHEEK
 OR LET HER INHABIT THY BROW!
 CAST OUT OF THY BOOKS
 MALEVOLENT LOOKS
 BOTH BEAUTY AND MIRTH'S DECAY
 AND WHOLLY CONSORT
 WITH MIRTH AND WITH SPORT
 TO DRIVE THE COLD WINTER AWAY!

While the snow falls and the wind bites and the days darken, settle back now and warm yourself in the glow of all of us together spinning tales and singing songs, sharing the holiday and whispering our hopes for the year to come.

WHEN CHRISTMASTIDE COMES IN LIKE A BRIDE
 ALL HOLLY AND IVY CLAD
 TWELVE DAYS IN THE YEAR WITH MIRTH AND
 GOOD CHEER
 IN EVERY HOUSEHOLD IS HAD
 THE COUNTRY'S GUISE IS THEN TO DEVISE ALL
 GAMBOLS OF CHRISTMAS PLAY
 TO SPEND THE LONG NIGHTS IN HONEST
 DELIGHTS
 TO DRIVE THE COLD WINTER AWAY.

There now. Our boisterous introductions are out of the way. Tonight we tell the story that evokes a more quiet celebration. And that's the way the main character, Nicholas, likes it. Let us begin. Music in the air now—

(MOHR waves his hand. After a pause, "Silent Night" is heard.)

(#2: “Silent Night”)

CHOIR.

SILENT NIGHT, HOLY NIGHT
ALL IS CALM, ALL IS BRIGHT

MOHR. Tonight we are going to tell the story of the world’s most beloved Christmas carol.

CHOIR.

ROUND YON VIRGIN, MOTHER AND CHILD
HOLY INFANT SO TENDER AND MILD

MOHR. And it all came about because of four things. First, it came about because of—a pulled tooth—

(FRIEDA GRUBER steps forward, holding her cheek in pain.)

MOHR *(cont’d)*. This is Frieda Gruber who bit into a lollipop with a bad tooth.

FRIEDA *(in terrible pain, holding her jaw)*. Ow! Ooh! It hurts!

MOHR. Her family couldn’t afford a dentist so her father had to tie one end of a string to the tooth and the other end to the front door knob. Slam went the door, out came the tooth.

(SLAM! FRIEDA cries out.)

MOHR *(cont’d)*. Second, it all came about because of—a boat paddle—which was caused by miscommunication because of the bad tooth.

(TRINA GRUBER steps next to FRIEDA and regretfully produces a wooden oar from behind her back.)

MOHR *(cont'd)*. You will see what I mean. Third, it all came about because of a child. A beautiful, difficult child, who was different ... little Nicholas...

(NICHOLAS GRUBER walks up and takes TRINA's hand. TRINA produces a small rope, loops one end of it around NICHOLAS' wrist and the other end around her own.)

MOHR *(cont'd)*. But, fourth, and first of all these things, it all came about because of a hungry mouse.

(Pause. FRIEDA, TRINA and NICHOLAS exit.)

MOHR *(cont'd)*. I said—fourth, and the first of all these things, it all came about because of a hungry mouse. *(Pause.)* Liesl, that's your cue.

LIESL *(from off)*. Do I have to?

MOHR. If you don't, people will think it was all Nicholas's fault. You don't want people to think that about your brother, do you? Liesl?

LIESL *(from off)*. Well it was, a little.

MOHR *(more sternly)*. Liesl.

LIESL *(from off)*. I'm coming. Keep your hair on.

(Enter LIESL GRUBER, reluctantly, dressed as a mouse, a piece of leather in her hand.)

LIESL *(as mouse, an evidently rehearsed speech)*. Squeak squeak squeak. I am the mouse who ate the organ of the Church of St. Nicholas and made such a hole that nobody could play it. Without me and my hunger and my little mousy

teeth the greatest Christmas carol in the world would have never been written and all the people everywhere would be sad. Boo hoo.

MOHR. You added that last part.

LIESL. This costume itches.

MOHR. Don't forget eating the leather of the organ bellows.

LIESL (*pretending to bite leather strip*). Munch munch munch. I eat the organ bellows and make a big hole there so no air can get into the pipes so the organ can play—this is stupid.

MOHR. All right, Liesl, tell it in your own words and then you can get out of that costume and become Liesl Gruber for the rest of the play. Just tell us about what happened in a little village church, in Austria, in 1818.

LIESL. So, this stupid mouse ate this stupid piece of leather for that thing that pumps air in the organ so the organ was already wrecked at Christmastime and so they couldn't play it and it made a nice lunch to a stupid hungry mouse. Squeak squeak squeak. Can I go?

MOHR. Yes. Thank you.

LIESL (*to herself, disgusted, going off*). “Munch.” “Squeak.” I never. (*She exits.*)

MOHR. So, started by a hungry mouse. We now will tell the story of a simple little song that brightened the world. I will play Father Joseph Mohr, one of the authors of this song. Father Mohr wrote the words to the carol. Let me show you the man who wrote the music—Franz Gruber—

**(#3: “A Child is Born in Bethlehem
[Ein Kind geboren zu Bethlehem]”)**

(FRANZ GRUBER is seen playing the organ and conducting the CHOIR.)

GRUBER. All right now, all together!

CHOIR *(LIESL, FRIEDA and FRAU SCHMIDT may be augmented by others, seen or unseen, as GRUBER leads them from the organ).*

A CHILD IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM
HALLELUJAH
JERUSALEM REJOICED THEN
HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH

GRUBER. Hold it. Frieda, you're off. Is your mouth still hurting from when I pulled your bad tooth yesterday?

FRIEDA. *(holding her jaw).* Yeff.

GRUBER. Well, stand closer to Frau Schmidt and try to follow her.

FRAU SCHMIDT *(an older woman with a disagreeable disposition).* Herr Gruber, it is certainly not easy being the only person in this choir who knows how to sing.

GRUBER. Yes, well, from the beginning, here we go—

CHOIR *(as GRUBER plays organ).*

A CHILD IS BORN IN BETHLEHEM
HALLELUJAH
JERUSALEM REJOICED THEN
HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH

MOHR *(to audience, as GRUBER continues to play and conduct).* Here we are at Christmastime in Oberndorf, Austria. Not much of a town. Simple people here. Boatmen and bargees, most of them. They paddle up the Salzach River into the mountains, load salt on their rickety flat-topped rafts

and paddle back downriver to Salzburg and other towns. Except when the river freezes. Then we share what little food we have and wait for sun and spring to be good enough to thaw things out so we can break our backs at our paddles and head up the mountains for more salt for the cities.

CHOIR.

HE LIES WITHIN A CRIB SO SMALL
HALLELUJAH
YET WITH LOVING POWER HE RULES US ALL
HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH

MOHR. Of course, spring is often harsh here as well. Sometimes the Salzach, released from its icy prison, takes out its pent-up anger on us, charging down the mountain like a raging bull, tossing aside the houses hugging the riverbank as if they were made of feathers. But we survive. We rebuild. We look out for each other. We hope for better times.

CHOIR.

THE OX AND DONKEY BOWED TO HIM
HALLELUJAH
AND RECOGNIZED THEIR ONLY KING
HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH

MOHR. This late December, Franz Gruber is at the organ, getting our little choir ready for the Christmas Mass this year. He teaches school in the next town over—we can't afford to have a school here—and he plays the organ here. Part time. Any music that ever comes to this poor little place seems to be part-time music. I am part time too. Like I said, I am Father Joseph Mohr. But really sort of a part-time father. I'm just an assistant priest and curate, not the real full-time priest who is supposed to be here but rarely is.

CHOIR.

GREAT KINGS THEY COME FROM DISTANT LANDS
HALLELUJAH
WITH GOLD AND MYRRH AND FRANKINCENSE
HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH

MOHR. And so, in this year 1818—a year of particular hardship because of the wars of years past—soldiers marching through here, blowing up bridges, wrecking houses, filling our streets with smoke and blood. Marching into our houses and taking our food and whatever belongings we have that they think have any value. First the French. Then the Austrians. Then the Prussians. We've given up all to the lot of them. Am I cheering you up this Christmas? Back to the music.

GRUBER. Here we go, really feel it in your hearts, singers! Sing it!

CHOIR.

ALL JOY AT THIS MOST HOLY BIRTH
HALLELUJAH
THIS CHRISTMAS PRAISE THROUGHOUT THE
EARTH
HALLELUJAH, HALLELUJAH

MOHR. Our little church is St. Nicholas. It is the center of our lives in more ways than one. This winter of 1818 the snow has come down so hard, it has blocked the roads. People are freezing in their houses. They congregate at the church during really cold spells just to survive. The Feast of St. Nicholas will be more than just a celebration around here. It will be one of the few times this winter when we can all feel truly warm—physically, certainly ... spiritually—well, we can hope.

GRUBER. Again, please! Full force now! Shout it to the rafters!

CHOIR.

ALL JOY AT THIS MOST HOLY BIRTH
HALLELUJAH
THIS CHRISTMAS PRAISE
THROUGHOUT THE EARTH
HALLELUJAH, HALLELU—

(Suddenly, there is a crash and some smoke. The organ groans as if in a death rattle.)

GRUBER *(pushes on the keys, nothing)*. Oh no. I knew this would happen sooner or later. Frieda, go tell Mama we need her sewing kit.

FRIEDA *(holding her jaw)*. “Owing kit?”

GRUBER. Yes. Sewing kit. I’m going to try to sew up the holes the mice made in the bellows.

(FRIEDA exits.)

FRAU SCHMIDT. This is terrible. Without that organ we will all be singing in different keys. Pathetic.

LIESL. I tried to get Mr. Wyzansky to catch the mice.

FRAU SCHMIDT. Mr. Wyzansky?

LIESL. Our cat. All he did was sleep.

GRUBER. Let’s just take a look down here ...

(GRUBER crawls under the organ, his head out of sight as the others watch.)

MOHR. Yes, we met that mouse. Even the mice are hungry in Oberndorf. They have been eating at the leather of the organ bellows all winter. Anyhow, pretty soon you will meet Mrs. Gruber. Actually, you met her already, and her son Nicholas but you weren’t properly introduced. So, first you will meet

Mrs. Gruber, Katharina. Everybody calls her Trina. A good woman. A little absent-minded. But more importantly, you will meet their only son, Nicholas. Yes, Nicholas. Same as our church. Same as the Feast of St. Nicholas which we all know as “Christmas.” Quite a coincidence. Don’t you think? A trinity of Nicholas. You never know. Sometimes good things can come when you have a trinity.

(Enter TRINA and NICHOLAS with, as we saw before, a rope tied around his wrist. The other end is tied to TRINA’s wrist like a leash. She has some long object under her arm and a covered tray in her hand.)

TRINA. Franzie?

GRUBER *(still under the organ)*. Under here, my dear.

We’ve got new holes in the organ bellows. Got your needle and thread?

TRINA. Needle and thread. Oh. Was I supposed to bring that?

GRUBER *(patiently)*. Yes, my dear. I need your sewing kit.

TRINA *(produces a paddle from behind her back. To the unseen choir)*. Well I wondered why you’d need a rowing kit.

FRIEDA *(entering, angry)*. Owing kit! Owing kit!

TRINA. Now, Frieda, don’t get upset. It makes your jaw hurt.

(To CHOIR.) Listen, everybody, I made Christmas cookies! *(Sees FRAU SCHMIDT, her mood darkens.)* Oh, hello, Frau Schimdt, how are you?

FRAU SCHMIDT *(taking cookie tray away from TRINA, coldly)*. We will eat these in the sacristy. No more food up here. That’s probably how we got mice to begin with. Come along everybody. Except for that boy. *(Indicating NICHOLAS.)* He should not be here at all.

TRINA. I am sorry, Frau Schmidt.

FRAU SCHMIDT. Follow, everybody.

(FRAU SCHMIDT exits with the cookies.)

LIESL *(to FRIEDA)*. Can you eat cookies with your sore mouth? *(FRIEDA gives her a dirty look.)* Maybe you can kind of lick one. Like you're supposed to do with lollipops.

(LIESL rushes out, FRIEDA chasing her.)

TRINA. Nickie? How about we go down for cookies?

(NICHOLAS stares at the organ and GRUBER underneath it.)

GRUBER *(still underneath)*. Hello, Nickie!

MOHR. Little Nicholas Gruber never developed in a normal way. He didn't seem to know how to talk or even to understand people when they talked to him. He often did nothing but sit and stare into space. Sometimes he would tantrum and nobody knew why. Mrs. Gruber found it easier to tie him to her rather than have him get into trouble.

GRUBER *(from underneath)*. I just may be able to fix this anyway. I can—maybe fold some of the fabric over—tie it—maybe we'll have this working after all this Christmas.

MOHR. Of course, sometimes even tied to his mother, Nicholas got into trouble.

TRINA. I'm worried about Frau Schmidt, Franzie. She's still mad that Nicholas destroyed that hymnal last Sunday. I think he just liked the feel of the paper.

GRUBER *(from underneath)*. Did you tell her we paid for it?

TRINA. Well of course. Franzie. I just wish people would understand better.