

Excerpt Terms & Conditions

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

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

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 reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity of scripts.

Family Plays

ASYLUM

A one-act drama
by
JEROME McDONOUGH

One of McDonough's most exciting plays;
a consistent contest winner.

"First place in one-act plays at Southeast Missouri
State University ... We love the play!"

(Jo Nell Seifert, Poplar Bluff, Mo., Senior High School.)

ASYLUM

Here is another one-act play in Jerome McDonough's exciting avant-garde manner. Like his superbly successful *Fables*, this play shows his talent for paring away the egocentric stamp of approval which each of us gives to our actions.

"Lee High's Drama received an invitation to present *Asylum* at the International Thespian Festival ... We won first in our state ... Thanks to I. E. Clark and Jerome McDonough, my students are wiser, closer and very proud because of *Asylum*." (Ron Harris, Huntsville, Ala.)

Drama. By Jerome McDonough. Cast: 10+ actors. Most characters may be played by either men or women, even in the face of gender-stereotyped roles and names. A company of players takes the audience through a kaleidoscope in which one episode dissolves into another like an absurd dream. Each episode lets you see some aspect of yourself as a perceptive artist sees you, and the view is not always pleasant. What is the "asylum?" Is it the world of "normal" people, or the rest of us? The feeling of *Asylum* is one of space rather than a stage, a nameless place rather than a specific location. Technical theatricality must be minimized. An area, empty except for a tattered wheelchair. *Area staging. Costumes are unimportant except that Doctor and Person should dress appropriately to their stations. Work clothing—perhaps a jeans look—is suggested for the Ensemble. The choice of music is the Ensemble's prerogative. For university, community and high school. A Director's Script (prompt book) is available that contains drawings of costumes and set, details on all technical aspects of staging, discussion of characterization, plot and theme. It also suggests the complete blocking and full stage directions for all movement and business. Approximate running time: 35 to 40 minutes. Background music CD available. Code: AJJ.*

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

ISBN-13 978-0-88680-008-6

ISBN-10 0-88680-008-0



9 780886 800086 >

Asylum

Asylum

A one-act play
by

JEROME McDONOUGH

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308

Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170 • Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

©Family Plays

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by FAMILY PLAYS 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.FamilyPlays.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: FAMILY PLAYS, 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. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
FAMILY PLAYS of Woodstock, Illinois”

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

© 1975 by JEROME McDONOUGH

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved

(ASYLUM)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-008-6

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) 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(s) *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 the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

Produced by special arrangement with

Family Plays
of Woodstock, Illinois

To Jerome C. McDonough,
my father,
from whom I learned obstinacy
by example

ASYLUM

Dramatis Personae

ASYLUM is an ensemble play for a group numbering 10, 12, or, ideally, more. The members of the Ensemble play all the following roles (listed here in order of appearance):

Harper	Guard
*Chorus of Dancers	Judge
Stan	Prosulocutor
C. C.	*Chorus of Jurors
*Chorus of Thinkers	*Mob Chorus
Dinwiddie	Chuckles, the Wonder Beagle
Ms. Heart	Sympathetic Persons Nos. 1 & 2
B. B. (North Leader)	*Chorus of Flower Petals
A. A. (South Leader)	The Girl
D. D. (East Leader)	*Chorus of Hospital Patients
*Chorus of Soldiers	Doctor
Enemies Nos. 1, 2, & 3	Person

* Each chorus is made up of all performers not assigned to another role in that particular scene.

Multiple Casting

Multiple casting is the rule: names given below to members of the Ensemble are simply for the purpose of showing how the roles may be distributed among a small number of players.

The Ensemble

Harper	Kris	Ron
Stan	Jenny	Bob
Wanda	Mitch	As many more as desired

Distribution of Roles

The roles given in the *dramatis personae* at the top of this page may be distributed among the Ensemble as suggested here (or in any other way that best fits a particular production):

Harper } These two roles are constant throughout the play and are so
Stan } designated in the script (**Stan** plays C. C. and Prosulocutor;
Harper is Enemy No. 1)

Jenny – Enemy No. 2; Sympathetic Person No. 1; The Girl

Wanda – The lone female dancer; Dinwiddie; A. A.; Juror No. 2

Mitch – Enemy No. 3; Chuckles; Sympathetic Person No. 2

Ron – The lone male dancer; D. D.; Judge

Kris – Ms. Heart; B. B.; Juror No. 1

Bob – Guard

Doctor } It is desirable that the two performers playing these roles
Person } appear in the final scene only; however, if necessary, **Ron**
may play the Doctor and **Kris** may play the Person

Other Players (as many as desired) – members of the various choruses

ASYLUM

Setting

An area, empty except for a tattered wheelchair.

The feeling of ASYLUM is one of space rather than a stage, a nameless place rather than a specific location. Technical theatricality must be minimized. Stage directions are written for proscenium production; but other forms, especially an arena or environmental approach, may be desirable.

Production Notes

Lighting should not give a theatrical feeling. Light snaps are recommended rather than dimming. In non-proscenium productions, these light snaps also substitute for curtains.

Costuming in the formal sense is unimportant except that Doctor and Person should dress appropriately to their stations. Work clothing—perhaps a jeans look—is suggested for the Ensemble.

Most characters may be played by either males or females, even in the face of sexually stereotyped roles and names.

The choice of music is the Ensemble's prerogative. As an example, appropriate selections may be found on Deodato 2 (CTI 6029):

Opening and closing: "Skyscrapers"

Crucifixion: First section, "Knights in White Satin" (repeated several times)

Flower Sequence: "Pavane for a Dead Princess"

Contemporary rather than classical music is highly recommended.

Acknowledgements

With love to Debbie Kilman, Monty Goodson, Shaun Hare, Carol Pierce, Donna Lookingbill, Chuck Martin, Seanne Dean, Barney Mills, Jay Underwood, Kerby Munkres, Lisa Davis, Steve Russell, Wylie Montgomery and Janie Todd, who helped ASYLUM find its voice . . . To Sara Coble and her cast from Texas Christian University who brought ASYLUM to the university . . . To Charles Kellogg of the Poet's Repertory Theatre for choosing the flower sequence as part of his fine group's repertoire . . . and to a crusty editor who beat it out of me.



Crusty Editor's Comments

Here is another play in Jerome McDonough's exciting *avant garde* manner. Like his superbly successful FABLES, this one shows his talent for paring away the egocentric stamp of approval which each of us gives to our actions. If you want to see yourself as McDonough sees you, the picture is on the following pages.

ASYLUM

By Jerome McDonough

[At rise, the stage is bare except for a tattered wheel-chair far Up Center. The lights are dim; few instruments are burning. The loud opening music comes up. After a few counts, a lone male figure (HARPER) enters from Left and slowly crosses to Center. He is somewhat uncertain at first but his confidence grows throughout the following sequence.

A lone female figure enters slowly from the same direction. She is blank, her face an empty canvas. She is disoriented until she sees Harper. He smiles mildly, nods to her, and she starts a simple dance pattern, but she dances with little enthusiasm at first.

A lone male enters. He, also, is blank. The same greeting ritual takes place — he sees Harper, HARPER smiles and nods. The male starts to dance, haltingly at first. The balance of the characters enter one at a time and enact this same turn at an increasing pace.

A final figure, STAN, enters. HARPER greets him but STAN ignores the greeting, moves far Up Right and stands alone.

Each dancer is also alone at this point, an entity separate from the others. As the music builds, however, these individuals begin to move together, toward a group feeling. As the music and the dance grow in intensity and the selection nears its peak, the ensemble forms. There is a joy, a happiness of belonging. The music climaxes and the chorus drops to relaxed positions on the floor in three close

ASYLUM

groups surrounding the still-standing Harper. Only STAN remains separate. He moves somewhat toward them but sits apart, as he stood apart while they danced.]

HARPER. Stan, turn on some more lights before we get started, will you?

STAN. [*Unmoving*] Who needs lights? This thing looks better in the dark.

HARPER. [*Ignoring it*] Mitch, will you get the lights?

MITCH. [*Rising and exiting Left*] Sure.

WANDA. [*Jumping up*] I want to dance some more.
Music!

RON. Give us a break, huh?

WANDA. [*Sitting back down*] Just my luck, a bunch of shut-ins.

[*Lights snap up.*]

KRIS. [*Covering eyes*] Hey! I liked it better the other way.

RON. [*Feigning shock*] Discretion, please!

KRIS. [*Exaggerated shame*] I'm so horribly embarrassed.

RON. We do have standards, you know.

STAN. Yeah, low.

RON. [*Turning on him*] Why do you even come down here?

[*This is about to erupt when HARPER intercedes.*]

HARPER. [*Mock-fatherly*] Now, now, is this the way a happy family acts? [*The battle cools temporarily.*]

JENNY. [*A memory*] At my house you were never sure if anybody liked you or not.

MITCH. [*Re-entering*] Lights all right? [*HARPER nods thanks.*]

STAN. [*Bored*] This whole thing is so very important.

RON. You can get out, you know.

STAN. I would but . . . [*smiling broadly*] I've found a home.

[*RON turns disgustedly away.*]

ASYLUM

WANDA. *[To Stan]* You're getting to be such a . . .

HARPER. *[Quelling it]* Easy. Once we start on each other, it's all over. At least he *[indicating Stan]* still wants to be here.

[The ensemble slowly drops its harshness toward STAN, who answers with a sarcastic grin.]

HARPER. Let's get moving. Places, please.

[All but Stan start to move off. HARPER, MITCH, and JENNY move Left; all others, except STAN, Right.]

STAN. *[From floor]* Places, places!

WANDA. *[To Stan]* Come on, will you?

STAN. This is my holy day.

HARPER. *[Gently requesting]* Stan . . .

STAN. *[Reluctantly rising]* All right. *[Exits Right]*

HARPER. *[From off]* Opening!

[Part of the Right group enters quickly, scatters about the Right area, and sits. Only C. C. (STAN) remains standing.]

C. C. *[Wandering through them]* They're taking over, I tell you. Positively taking over! *[Perplexed pause]* I've got to think about this. *[He paces while the other members of the group start chanting softly.]*

CHORUS. Think – think – think – think – (etc.)

[The chanting rises in volume as the rate of his pacing increases. He walks faster and faster. The chant peaks in a shout and he throws his arms up as if the idea has hit him. The CHORUS leans forward expectantly but the smile drops from his face, he goes slack, and the low chanting resumes.]

CHORUS. Think, think, think (etc.).

[The chanting does not rise as he recites his next thoughtful section.]

ASYLUM

C. C. There's a definite problem here. Who's got the man-power? We do. Who knows what's best for the country? We do. Who's right? We're as right as you can get! How come *they're* taking over, then?

[The "Think" chant gets louder for a few beats, then subsides to its former level.]

C. C. But they forgot one thing. *[While the chant continues, one member of the group speaks.]*

CHORUS MEMBER. What?

C. C. They forgot our nationalism, that's what. We can clout the pants off them there. I mean, who's more nationalistic than us? *[The CHORUS continues.]* I said, who's more nationalistic than us? *[The CHORUS stops, briefly.]*

CHORUS. I give.

C. C. Nobody is!

CHORUS. Oh, yeah. *[Low chant again]*

C. C. Nationalism. Check. The right. Check. What's missing?

CHORUS MEMBER. *[Over chanting]* Guns?

C. C. Got guns.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER. Bullets?

C. C. What do you think we're gonna hit 'em with, the butts? Got bullets. Nope, it's something else. *[Chanting continues.]*

[A very straight-looking figure carrying a mimed briefcase enters from Right and "knocks" on C. C.'s "door." C. C. "opens" the door. Chanting continues softly.]

C. C. Yeah?

DINWIDDIE. Good afternoon, sir, Miss (Mr.) Dinwiddie of Dinwiddie, Dickens, and Dullet, consulting firm, here.

C. C. *[Starting to close door]* I'm busy.

DINWIDDIE. *[Stepping in]* Sir, what you need *[the chanting rises slightly]*, that is to say, the commodity that is missing *[chanting louder]* is *[Chanting very loud. DINWIDDIE mumbles something which C. C., now interested,*

ASYLUM

can't hear for the chorus. He signals for her to say it again. She does. He still can't hear.]

C. C. *[Shouting above the chorus to Dinwiddie]* Wait a second! *[To chorus]* Hey! Back off on that, will you? *[The CHORUS comes down to its first level.]* Now, what were you saying?

DINWIDDIE. I said, what you need is . . . organization!
[The CHORUS abruptly stops speaking and stares blankly at Dinwiddie.]

C. C. *[Intrigued]* Come into my office, Dinwiddie.

[The CHORUS disperses toward Down Center and forms a chair for C. C., one for Dinwiddie, and C. C.'s desk.]

C. C. Have a chair.

DINWIDDIE. Thank you. *[She sits. He sits.]*

C. C. What's your plan?

DINWIDDIE. The way I see it, big-picturewise, is that you're overly diversified. There are societies here, vigilantes there. Your eggs are in too many baskets, if you read me.

C. C. That may be an affirmative.

DINWIDDIE. It is. Obviously, you should all get together. Form a conglomerate!

C. C. By George, that may be it. *[Musing]* Form a conglomerate. *[Back to her]* Leave your card with my secretary.

DINWIDDIE. *[Haughtily]* You have no secretary. *[Part of the desk rises and becomes the secretary, MS. HEART.]*

HEART. I beg your pardon.

C. C. Take Dinwiddie's card, Ms. Heart.

HEART. Must you treat me like a servant?

C. C. Sorry. Would you mind taking the card, Ms. Heart?

HEART. *[Extending her hand to Dinwiddie]* Your card, please.

DINWIDDIE. *[Handing her a mimed card]* Thank you.
[C. C. is pacing again.]

ASYLUM

HEART. This way. [*Escorting DINWIDDIE toward the Right wing*] There's one thing I don't understand.

DINWIDDIE. What's that?

HEART. He never calls me "Snookums" any more.

DINWIDDIE. [*Profoundly*] We all have our crosses to bear. [*Exits. HEART thinks about this statement.*]

[*Pause*]

C. C. Ms. Heart, . . .

HEART. [*Re-crossing*] Call me "Snookums," won't you? We're alone.

C. C. Really, Ms. Heart, this is a business office.

HEART. How about [*posing*] "Snooks"?

C. C. [*Pause, looking her over*] Snooks, . . . [*Back on the track*] call a meeting of all the societies at once. There are urgent matters we must discuss.

HEART. [*Resignedly*] Right away. [*She claps her hands once.*]

[*The CHORUS rises and starts milling about in confusion. DINWIDDIE joins them.*]

C. C. Gentlemen, if you'll be seated. [*The CHORUS, including HEART, quiets and sits about on the floor.*]

C. C. I have discovered what our organizations lack.

CHORUS. What, C. C.?

C. C. Organization.

[*The CHORUS erupts in a hysteria of ad lib confusion. C. C. clears his throat loudly. They come to order.*]

C. C. We must concert our efforts. Our responsibility today is to choose regional leaders.

B. B. [*Jumping up*] First chooser!

C. C. You haven't quite got the spirit of the thing, B. B.

B. B. If I don't choose, I never get picked.

CHORUS. You do, too, get picked.

B. B. Sure, for right field.

CHORUS. There, there.

ASYLUM

C. C. Your enthusiasm impresses me, B. B. I like that. I'll bet you're not afraid to take the bull by the horns, obligationwise.

B. B. I'm not afraid, C. C.

C. C. You shall be in charge of our Northern operations.

B. B. I'll . . . give it all I've got.

C. C. *[Fatherly]* I know you will. *[Pause as B. B. beams]* Now, we need East and South leaders. *[Hands fly up from the chorus in schoolroom fashion. They wave their arms while trying to hold others down, saying "Me, me" and "I wanta," etc.]*

C. C. *[Shushing them]* You're the South, A. A. *[A. A. rises to join B. B.]*

B. B. *[Shaking hands, welcoming aboard]* A. A.

A. A. *[Shaking hands, welcoming aboard]* B. B.

C. C. You're East, D. D. *[D. D. joins the others.]*

B. B. *[Shaking hands, welcoming aboard]* D. D.

D. D. *[Shaking hands, welcoming aboard]* B. B.

A. A. *[Shaking hands, welcoming aboard]* D. D.

D. D. *[Shaking hands, welcoming aboard]* A. A.

B. B. *[Giving his title to A. A., cordially]* North.

A. A. *[Giving his title to B. B., cordially]* South.

D. D. *[Giving his title to B. B., cordially]* East.

B. B. *[Giving his title to D. D., cordially]* North.

A. A. *[Giving his title to D. D., cordially]* South.

D. D. *[Giving his title to A. A., cordially]* East. *[Introducing A. A. to B. B.]* South, North. *[Handshake]*

A. A. *[Introducing B. B. to D. D.]* North, E . . .

[C. C., wearying of this, clears his throat again.]

A. A. }
B. B. } *[Meekly]* Sorry, C. C.
D. D. }

C. C. North, South and East sections, take your posi . . .

CHORUS. *[Interrupting, questioning]* What about the West?

ASYLUM

C. C. *[Shocked, as are the other leaders]* The West is to the Left.

CHORUS. *[Embarrassed]* Oh.

C. C. Any other questions?

CHORUS. None, sir!

C. C. Excellent. North, South, and East sections, take your positions!

[The CHORUS, now military, marches to positions forming three sides of a square angled from Up Left to Down Center with the open end at Down Center.]

C. C. Right face!

[All face the center of the square.]

C. C. Prepare to defend! . . . Defend!

[All soldiers draw hand guns and hold them at the ready.]

C. C. *[Moving to Center]* Now we're ready for anything. *[Looking around]* Wait a minute. Something's still missing.

NORTH LEADER (B. B.). Anybody bring lunch?

EAST LEADER (D. D.). I got it.

NORTH LEADER. *[To C. C.]* Everything's here.

C. C. Hmmm.

SOUTH LEADER (A. A.). *[Rising tentatively]* We don't have the . . .

C. C. Huh?

SOUTH LEADER. I almost hate to mention it.

NORTH LEADER. Speak up, son, we're all friends.

SOUTH LEADER. *[Starting back down]* Really, it's nothing.

C. C. *[Coaxing]* No, no. What is it?

SOUTH LEADER. I was thinking . . . there's no . . . enemy.

C. C. There isn't?

EAST LEADER. *[Looking around]* Dingbang if there ain't. That's a good one on you, C. C.

C. C. *[Crossing and calling angrily to Harper]* Harper,

ASYLUM

we've got to have enemies. You'd better have some out there.

HARPER. *[From off]* Let me check. *[Calling]* Enemies? Enemies?

[A hubbub of unenthusiastic voices comes from off Left saying, "I guess so," "I can do it, if you want," etc.]

HARPER. We'll be right with you.

C. C. *[Returning to his position]* I doubt it. *[Reassuming his power]* The enemy approaches!

[HARPER, JENNY and MITCH burst in from the West (Left), dancing exuberantly.]

C. C. Hold it! What kind of enemies are those?

ENEMY #1 (HARPER). *[Still dancing]* It's our style.

C. C. Put a little menace in it, won't you?

ENEMY #2 (JENNY). We just don't feel it that way.

C. C. *[Appealing]* Harper . . .

HARPER. *[Dropping character for the line]* We're your enemies. *[He resumes character as Enemy #1.]*

C. C. All right, all right. *[To his Army]* The enemy approaches!

[ENEMIES dance to the center of the armies.]

C. C. Open fire!

[After a few shots, the firing takes on a rhythm (one possibility is, "Bang, bang, bang, BANG!"—a Conga). The ENEMIES stop, listen, then dance to the rhythm. The only fatalities are a few North and South soldiers shot by their own counterparts.]

C. C. *[Exasperated]* Cease firing!

[The firing stops. The dancing continues, slightly subdued.]

C. C. *[To enemies]* You mean they didn't get even one of you?

ENEMY #3. Nope.