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Dramatic Publishing

A Full-Length Melodrama

**No Opera at the Op'ry
House Tonight**
or
Too Good To Be True

by

TIM KELLY



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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NO OPERA AT THE OP'RY HOUSE TONIGHT

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TIM KELLY

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(NO OPERA AT THE OP'RY HOUSE TONIGHT)

NO OPERA AT THE OP'RY HOUSE TONIGHT

or

Too Good To Be True

A Full-Length Melodrama

For Five Men* and Six Women

CHARACTERS

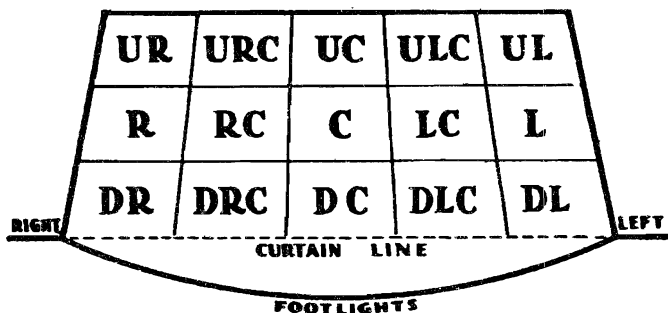
BETTY.....*a faithful sister*
BILLY BRIGHT..... *an impoverished nobleman*
BIG GULCH..... *a servant of the law*
CLAUDE HOPPER..... *a good sort*
ALMA PUMPERNICKLE..... *a prima donna*
WOLFGANG von WOLFPACK..... *a scoundrel*
LILY LIVERSPOT.....*a notorious creature*
MADAM VIOLETTA.....*a grand artiste*
CINDY LOU..... *a searching seamstress*
CAP'N ALKALI.....*a seafaring man*
INDIAN*.....*a hired "hand"*
WOMAN IN SHAWL..... *a seeker of revenge*

PLACE: *The town of Desert Rat, in the Arizona Territory.*

TIME: *1890's.*

*Actor portraying Cap'n Alkali may also play the Indian.

CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for *up right*, RC for *right center*, DLC for *down left center*, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

ACT ONE

Scene One

SCENE: The shabby hotel suite of Billy Bright, in reality Count Onitt, a blueblood. Early morning. There is a small, rickety table C with a music box on it, a few wretched chairs scattered about, and DL, another table or desk. Music scores are strewn over the top. There is a dressing screen UL. Logical stage dressing can complete the setting, if desired. Everything is worn and tattered. Exit into bedroom is L, entrance from hotel hallway is R.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: Stage remains empty for a few moments. From the bedroom comes the voice of BILLY BRIGHT singing or humming some operatic selection. BETTY, his faithful sister, ENTERS R carrying a basket. She listens for a moment, smiles out to the audience.)

BETTY: My brother, the aristocratic Count Onitt posing as a commoner for reasons that will shortly be revealed, is in excellent voice this morning. Would that he had his heart set on being a singer instead of a famous operatic composer. For, in truth, being of gentle and noble birth, I do not know how much longer I can endure the rigors of life

here on the American Frontier.

(BILLY ENTERS L, putting on his shabby coat.
He is a good-looking young man. He
crosses to BETTY, still singing, kisses
her on the forehead.)

BILLY. Good morning, sister dear.

BETTY. Good morning, brother dear.

BILLY (moving to desk). What's for breakfast?

BETTY. Same as we had for supper.

BILLY. And what was that?

BETTY. Same as we had for lunch.

BILLY. And what was that?

BETTY. Nothing.

BILLY. Alas, I had forgotten. (Then:) Music is
the only nourishment I crave.

BETTY (moving to him). Oh, brother dear, will
you not give up this insane idea of becoming
a composer?

BILLY (correcting her). A famous composer.

BETTY. It's no disgrace to be penniless and
starving.

BILLY. It's no virtue, either.

BETTY. Why tell everyone your name is Billy
Bright? When one has a title--letting
others pay is quite fashionable.

BILLY. Not me. (Puffs out his chest.) That is
why I have come to America, to the West.
I will prove myself as a successful composer
in this land of opportunity, and not as one
more unemployed baron or duke.

BETTY. You're a count.

BILLY (with pride). Count Onitt.

BETTY. I have kept your secret faithfully.

(Aside, to audience.) Even though it has
deprived me of romance, for not long ago

in the quaint hamlet of Bewery Gulch I met a young man of the West who would have made an ideal husband. Our hearts reached out to one another. Alas, my duty to my idealistic brother comes first. Together we have some strength, separated we are like stray chickens in a coop of foxes.

BILLY (looking over some score). Remember, Betty, above all else I have my pride.

BETTY. We don't eat pride, brother, and if we could it would be hard to digest. (Holds up basket.) I have grown frail on the onions and radishes of the field.

BILLY. I shall patronize the free lunch at the Palace Hotel and stuff my pockets with delicacies.

BETTY. In your pockets even the holes have holes. Besides, if you don't buy something there's no lunch.

BILLY. Then they shouldn't call it free.

BETTY (eyes upward). I thank heaven dear Mama and dear Papa did not live to see the wretched state their children have descended to.

BILLY (crosses and embraces her). There, there, dear little sister of mine. You must have patience.

BETTY. I'd rather have a sandwich.

BILLY. I have an appointment today to see the manager of the Salami Opera Company. He'll buy my new opera. I feel it.

BETTY. I pray it. (BILLY spies the music box.)

BILLY. Sister, the music box! I told you we would have to pawn it.

BETTY. No need. Last night while I was pressing your threadbare trousers I discovered a forgotten coin. It will keep things going

for a few days.

BILLY (indicating the music box). This is all we have left of our memories of another life. We've sold or pawned everything else. (He lifts the top and a lilting melody begins to play.)

BETTY (affected). Replace the top, brother dear, or I shall dampen the worn carpet with my tears. (He does so. She continues.) If only dear Papa hadn't chanced our fortune away.

BILLY. That is in the past. Trust me. You have nothing to fear. (There is a banging from offstage R.)

GULCH (voice offstage). Hey, in there! Anybody home?

BETTY. 'Tis the sheriff.

BILLY. Big Gulch?

BETTY. None other. (More banging.)

GULCH (offstage). Are you deaf? (BETTY moves to Billy's arms.)

BILLY. Dignity and bearing, Betty. Remember, you stay under my protection.

BETTY. I'd rather stay under this hotel roof, brother dear, and I think that's what Sheriff Big Gulch has come to talk about.

GULCH (off stage). Am I comin' in or stayin' out?

BILLY. Enter, sir, you are welcome.

(BIG GULCH, the gruff sheriff, ENTERS R. He is a huge galoot wearing a ten-gallon hat, sagging gun belt, and his trousers tucked into his boot tops. He is awfully bow-legged.)

GULCH. Howdy.

BILLY and BETTY. Howdy.

GULCH. That's what I jus' said. Howdy.

BILLY. Howdy.

BETTY. Howdy.

GULCH. Howdy. (Annoyed.) Now cut that out. One howdy 'tween the two of yer is more than enuff.

BETTY. Do sit down, dear sheriff. And let me take your hat.

GULCH (sitting). I'll set, but leave my hat where it belongs. I feel plumb naked without this sombrero. Now, to business. (BETTY is anxious to forestall the bad news.)

BETTY. May I get you some coffee?

BILLY. Do have some.

GULCH. Reckon I could. Much obliged.

BETTY. That's too bad.

GULCH. Why?

BETTY. There isn't any.

GULCH. Then whyd'ya offer me a cup?

BETTY. To be polite.

GULCH. Tarnation! (Slaps his knee, stands.) If you and your brother ain't the strangest critters I ever did meet.

BETTY. My brother is not strange. He's a composer.

GULCH (looking around the room). How can you compose without no piano?

BILLY. I hum.

GULCH (taking out a paper). Hum yourself out of this. (Hands it to BILLY.)

BETTY. What is it?

BILLY (reading). We're being evicted.

BETTY. From this tattered hovel?

GULCH. I don't like to do it, but the law's the law. You folks ain't paid no rent in over five months. Seven dollars is seven dollars.

BILLY. Ah, but I have an appointment with the manager of the Salami Opera Company.

GULCH. That don't pay no hotel bill and the

manager hyar wants you out.

BETTY. A moment, sir. (She turns aside and takes the coin she found the night before from her dress.) Will this do?

GULCH (taking it). Do? (Looks at it.) Fer what?

BETTY. Our rent.

GULCH. Missy, you're plumb loco. This hyar's a Confederate dime.

BETTY. You could keep the change.

GULCH. I like you two younguns--even if you are a mite peculiar. (Regretfully.) Ain't nothin' I can do. You gotta pay up your rent by tonight or out you go in the mornin'. (EXITING.) Adios.

BETTY and BILLY. Adios.

GULCH. Adios . . .

BETTY. Adios . . .

BILLY. Adios . . .

GULCH (from offstage). Adios. (Then:) Now cut that out! (Impulsively, BETTY seizes the eviction notice, moves DR.)

BETTY. That it's come to this! (Back of her hand to her forehead.) Oh, Father, why did you have to be a gambling man?

BILLY. Fret not, Betty. I will save the day! My new opera will come to our rescue. (He dashes to the desk and sweeps up a musical score.)

BETTY. Would that it could. (She rubs her belly.) Hunger gnaws at my heart. (Realizes she's rubbing her belly, quickly corrects the error. BILLY crosses R, picks up the music box.)

BILLY. If I don't see the opera manager today, do you know what I'm going to do?

BETTY. What?

BILLY (a shrug). I'll try to see him tomorrow.
(He EXITS.)

BETTY (calling after him). Brother, I faint from
hunger! (She holds out her arms in
supplication, faints.)

FAST CURTAIN

- OLIO -

ACT ONE

Scene Two

SCENE: On stage at the shabby Op'ry House and
Cattle Auction. Scattered about are bits
and pieces of stage paraphernalia; e. g. ,
scenery flats, lights, folding chairs,
costume rack, etc.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: A member of the Salami
Opera, CLAUDE HOPPER, is sweeping the
stage. Offstage R, the company manager,
MADAM VIOLETTA, is vocalizing. She's
not in good voice. CLAUDE stops his
sweeping, leans on the broom, listens.)

CLAUDE. I declare, when Madam Violetta, the
backbone of this hyar Op'ry Company,
carries on with her vocalizing, it sounds
like someone's boiling alley cats in hot
sauce. (The vocalizing stops.)

(ALMA PUMPERNICKLE, Violetta's niece and
the prima donna, ENTERS R. She's

a lovely thing.)

ALMA. Oh, Claude----

CLAUDE (grinning). That's my name.

ALMA. I can't find Cindy Lou anywhere.

CLAUDE. She's gone out looking for her father,
Miz Alma.

ALMA (to audience). Poor little seamstress.
Years ago, when she was but a babe,
an avalanche of snow and ice separated
her from her beloved Dada. Alas, she has
never given up hope that one fine day they
will be reunited; consequently whenever
we enter a new town or mining camp she
seeks out news of him.

CLAUDE. I reckon this hyar Desert Rat Op'ry
House is about as low as we've sunk.

ALMA (looking around). True, it has not the
glitter and gilt of the finer opera houses,
but it will more than suffice.

CLAUDE. Tish-tosh, Miz Alma, that's more
of your Pollyanna talk. Why, most of the
time they use this hyar barn for cattle
auctions.

ALMA (valiantly). Where cows have moo-ed,
we will do better.

CLAUDE (impressed). Where you walk, Miz
Alma, the sun follows.

ALMA (lowering her eyes modestly). I know.

(BILLY ENTERS L, music score under his arm.
He also carries the music box.)

BILLY. Good day to you, miss. And to you, sir.

ALMA. Good day.

CLAUDE. Howdy.

BILLY. Could you direct me to the manager of

the opera company?

ALMA (aside). How handsome he is.

BILLY (aside). What a delightful creature.

CLAUDE. We ain't got no manager. We got what you might call a manageress.

BILLY. Manageress?

ALMA. My aunt. Madam Violetta Salami.

BILLY. I'm expected. Allow me to present myself. (He takes out a calling card, hands it to ALMA.)

ALMA (reading). Mister Billy Bright, F. C. (Thinks.) F. C. ?

BILLY. Famous composer.

ALMA. I've never met a composer. I mean a living one.

CLAUDE. I've never met a dead one, either.

ALMA. Oh, this is our baritone----

CLAUDE. Bass----

ALMA. And basso-profundo.

CLAUDE (shaking Billy's hand). I also sweep up. The name's Claude Hopper.

BILLY. Charmed, I'm sure.

CLAUDE. I can be charming, too. When I want to be.

BILLY. I do believe you, sir.

ALMA (aside). Such manners. He makes my girlish heart flutter. (From offstage R comes the sound of MADAM VIOLETTA, back at her vocalizing.)

BILLY. Is there a fire somewhere?

CLAUDE. Shucks, that ain't no siren. Only Madam Violetta doin' her scales.

BILLY. Sounds more like her nails.

ALMA. Claude, inform my aunt Mr. Bright is here. (The vocalizing stops.)

CLAUDE (going). I hope when we open up tonight no one throws a fish at her like last time. (EXITS R.)

BILLY. You have not told me your name.

ALMA. It's Alma. Alma Pumpernickle.

BILLY (enraptured). Pumpernickle . . . Alma Pumpernickle. That is a very musical name. Do you, by any stroke of good fortune, sing? (ALMA vocalizes the scale--loudly.)

ALMA (modestly). I am the prima donna of the Salami Opera.

BILLY. Eureka!

ALMA. What do you mean, sir?

BILLY (opening the score). My opera. The leading role is written for your youthfulness, charm and beauty!

ALMA (lowering her eyes). What do you call your opera, sir?

BILLY (a pause, then:) Ill Pistachio.

ALMA (warmly). Ill Pistachio.

BILLY. If I could only have a few moments alone with you before I meet your aunt. To go over the score.

ALMA (moving DR, to audience). Not only is he handsome and musical---he has enthusiasm.

BILLY. What do you say, dear lady?

ALMA. As a fellow-artist what can I say, sir?

BILLY. Pray, do not call me "sir". Call me "Billy".

ALMA. Sir Billy?

BILLY (moving DL, to audience). She's pretty, she sings and she has wit! (To himself.) Watch out, my foolish heart.

ALMA. We have no orchestra, Billy.

BILLY. No orchestra?

ALMA. Things have been hard with us. We had to economize.

BILLY. This is sad news.

ALMA. But there is a musical saw in Claude's

broom closet.

BILLY. I'll hum. You pluck.

(ALMA leads him off UR. As they make their EXIT, that villainous rogue, BARON WOLFGANG von WOLFPACK, SLINKS IN DL, oilier than a kerosene lamp. He wears traditional villain's garb.)

WOLFPACK (aside to audience). There she goes. My future wife, although little does she know it. I have sneaky plans and I will carry them out. I never fail because I have carved my career by "first-class" chiseling. (Laughs.) Not for nothing am I named-- Baron Wolfgang von Wolfpack!

LILY (from offstage L). Wolfpack!

WOLFPACK. Quiet, Lily, you'll spoil everything.

(LILY LIVERSPOT, a notorious confidence woman, ENTERS L. She wears menacing black.)

LILY. Why are you here in this miserable backwater of Desert Rat? There are no pickings here.

WOLFPACK. Do you think I would have sent for you if there weren't?

LILY. Who are we going to take this time? Desert Rat has a short supply of widows and orphans.

WOLFPACK (disgusted). Widows and orphans? Think big, Lily Liverspot, think big! I only steal from the rich.

LILY. Why is that, Wolfpack?

WOLFPACK. Because the poor don't have anything worth stealing.

LILY. Good point.

WOLFPACK. Come close. (LILY moves close.)
In this pitiable Salami Opera Company there
is a sweet young prima donna who is about
to inherit a fortune.

LILY. A fortune!

WOLFPACK. Quiet!

LILY. Sorry, Wolfpack. I get a little over-
excited when I think of fortunes.

WOLFPACK. Gold mines.

LILY. Aaaaaaaaaaaaaah.

WOLFPACK. Unfortunately, her father met an
"untimely" end in the Yukon.

LILY and WOLFPACK. Ha, ha, ha.

LILY. Her name?

WOLFPACK. Alma Pumpnickle.

LILY. That's a name?

WOLFPACK. I must marry her before news
reaches her ears or the ears of her aunt,
the hag who runs this musical flea circus.

LILY. Do you know them, Wolfpack?

WOLFPACK. Wherever the company plays I
appear bearing a bouquet of flowers. An
ardent admirer of music and beauty. Ha,
ha, ha. Now I am ready to spring my trap.

LILY. By force?

WOLFPACK. Force? Never! I am descended
from a long line of clever and crafty
nobility. And I cherish cleverness and
craftiness almost as much as I cherish my
noble title--Baron.

LILY. You make so much of your title.

WOLFPACK. Next to treachery, deceit and
foul play, I value nothing as high.

LILY. What do you want me to do?