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Family Plays

FABLES

Commedia-style drama by
Jerome McDonough

FABLES

The premiere of *Fables* at West Texas State University won five of seven “Oscars” as the best of 40 student-directed plays.

Commedia-style drama. By Jerome McDonough. Cast: 10+ actors, flexible.

A commedia dell’arte-like troupe strolls into your theatre to the jingle-clatter accompaniment of their props (pots, pans, toy guns, etc.). They present five modern fables about our encounter with our environment and our neighbors. Jerome McDonough has the true artist’s ability to give fresh new insights into the way we mishandle our lives and our world. The playlets (fables) are: ***The Clowns***, who build a casket around the old folks; ***The Genii***, in which a young girl wishes for a genie and one appears (or is it just a boy from the next town?); ***The Glutton***, a touching, symbolically dynamic scene mainly in pantomime; ***The Bogey***, showing a harried businessman vainly seeking escape from conformity; ***The Drums***, in which two armies play at war while a young couple whisper words of love at their feet. What does it all mean? Each member of the audience will interpret the play according to their own background, their own personalities, and—especially—their mood as they watch the play. The playwright tried to give *Fables* a floating, timeless feeling that would enable each viewer to make their own interpretations, character analyses and symbol clarification. This play is excellent contest material for university, community and high school groups. *Bare stage. Costumes: blue jeans and sweatshirts. A director’s script is available containing drawings of costumes and set, details on all technical aspects of staging and 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. A set of 35mm slides set is available. Code: FC7.*

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Fables

F A B L E S

A Play in One Act

by

JEROME McDONOUGH

featuring

THE CLOWNS

THE GENII

THE GLUTTON

THE BOGEY

and

THE DRUMS

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

The Troupe

FABLES is performed by a mixed cast of ten or more actors. Ideally, the cast should feature an even number of male and female performers, but it is possible to perform the play with as few as two members of one sex and eight of the other.

Rehearsal clothes, leotards and tights, blue jeans and workshirts, or other nondescript, timeless costumes are appropriate. To this basic costume the actor may add other pieces for character identification – hard hats for the Craftsmen in “The Clowns,” a business-suit jacket for the Man in “The Bogey,” pots and pans as military helmets for the soldiers in “The Drums,” etc. Costumes are discussed in detail in the Director’s Production Script.

Each performer will probably be called upon to play a simple rhythmic figure on one of four percussion instruments, but it is not necessary that any member of the troupe be a musician per se. Sensitivity to mood is more important than musical experience.

The characters in each of the five miniatures which comprise FABLES are listed below. Double casting may be necessary (and is probably desirable) to cover all parts.

“The Clowns”

JIM, *an old man*
SOPHY, *an old woman*
CRAFTSMAN I, *an experienced artisan*
CRAFTSMAN II, *a journeyman artisan*
BOY, *a youth*
GIRL, *an ingenue*
STAGE MANAGER, *a theatre veteran*

“The Genii”

GIRL, *an ingenue*
OLD WOMAN, *guardian of the girl*
BOY, *a youth the age of the girl*
MAN, *middle-aged resident of the beach cottage*

“The Glutton”

THE EATER, *a person*
THE OTHER, *another person*

"The Bogey"

PUCKISH FIGURE, *a small person of indeterminate age*

MAN, *a worldly man*

GIRL, *in her teens, an innocent*

(TECHNICAL ASSISTANT, *controls a flashlight from the wings*)

"The Drums"

BOY-IN-LOVE, *a young man in love with a maid*

GIRL-IN-LOVE, *a maid in love with a young man*

ALPHA LEADER, *general of the Alpha Army (he carries a stick pistol)*

ALPHA SOLDIERS I, II, and III (ALPHA CHORUS), *enlisted men in the Alpha Army (they carry stick rifles)*

BRAVO LEADER, *general of the Bravo Army (he carries a stick pistol)*

BRAVO SOLDIERS I, II, and III (BRAVO CHORUS), *enlisted men in the Bravo Army (they carry stick rifles)*

Technical Staff

Members of the troupe perform the initial preparation of the stage area and may in fact control or simply appear to control the lighting. However, a minimum of one light man and one curtain man are recommended to supplement the troupe. The technical personnel must take special care to be out of the field of vision of the audience during the segments when the stage is bare.

SETTING: *A bare stage supplemented by small set pieces provided by the performers*

TIME: *A continuum*



The author wishes to express his appreciation to Ron Williams, William Angus Moore, James Kemmerling, and the original West Texas State University cast:

Bily Black	Pam Hurst
Julie Brantley	Mathew Ohmes
Randy Clements	Doug Stewart
Ron De Voe	Terry Wilkes
Shelly Hamrick	Steve Wood

NOTES ON THE PLAY

A *commedia dell' arte*-like troupe of players strolls into your theatre to the jingle-clatter accompaniment of their props and paraphernalia (hard hats, pots and pans, toy guns, a ladder). They mount the stage, or platform, or street corner, or wherever you have chosen to present the play, and act out five playlets depicting man's encounter with his environment and his fellowmen. The ting and boom of wind chimes and drums and other percussion instruments follows the rhythm of their movements throughout the play.

FABLES was first presented at West Texas State University under the direction of Ron Williams with a cast of university drama students.

The playlets are: **The Clowns**, depicting the cycle of life. Two *commedia*-like clowns build a coffin in pantomime around an old, dying couple. A young couple, pushed to maturity by an impatient stage manager, takes the place of the dead ones. **The Genii**, in which a girl wishes that a geni would appear; and one does. (Or is it just a boy from the next town?) **The Glutton**, a touching, symbolically dynamic scene mainly in pantomime. A tough character tries to take food away from a young man who eats – and lives – with gusto. **The Bogey**, showing a harried businessman vainly seeking escape from some nameless something (conformity, perhaps?). **The Drums**, in which two armies play absurdly at war while a young couple whisper words of love at the warriors' feet.

What does it all mean? It will mean different things to different viewers. Each member of the audience will interpret the play according to his own background, his own personality, and – especially – his mood as he watches the play. Some members of the audience will go away saying, "I didn't understand what that was all about." The playwright intentionally avoided making positive, sermon-clear, didactic statements; instead, he tried through "poetic indirection" to give the play a floating, timeless feeling that would enable each viewer to make his own interpretations, character analyses, and symbol clarifications. Even succinct summaries like those given in the preceding paragraph are more explanation than the author feels the audience should have.

Because even those who leave the theatre saying "I don't know what it was all about" will continue to think about the play; and eventually something – an experience, a new acquaintance, a newspaper headline – will suddenly recall a scene and give it meaning.

The playwright, Jerome McDonough, is a promising young writer whose dreams are coming true faster than those of most promising young writers. In less than two years since he wrote his first play, five of his scripts have been published – two by Samuel French and three by I. E. Clark. Several of his unpublished manuscripts have been produced by community, university, and high school theatres.

Music

The musical accompaniment called for in *FABLES* is not formal music. What is desired is the feeling, the mood, the texture of the performance as expressed through sounds. These sounds set the moods of the transitions and punctuate the action onstage. The music is improvisatory, evolved in rehearsal by the director and the cast.

All movement during the prologue and interludes is consistent in mood and tempo with the mood and tempo of the musical figures.

The finger cymbals, wind chimes, triangle, and drum recommended are by no means a rigid pattern. Any instruments which come to hand – or any flotsam of the performance area – may be used. The above-mentioned instruments were indicated due to either their ringing capability and pleasing sound or the roughness and urgency associated with the instrument.

THE DIRECTOR'S PRODUCTION SCRIPT

We offer two aids to help the busy director stage this play. One is the Director's Production Script (prompt book); the other is a set of colored slides. The Production Script for *FABLES* contains a sketch for each actor showing a stylistic *commedia*-like make-up appropriate to the tone and style of the play; a detailed discussion, with sketches, of the various types of costumes which might be worn; a detailed discussion of lighting; an interview with the author concerning the meaning of the scenes; and detailed stage directions. The Production Script is by Ron Williams, who directed the premiere performance at West Texas State University. Notes for use of the play in high school and college contests and festivals are also included.

PROLOGUE

The stage is bare. All drapes are still flown. The back-stage wall, pinrail, wings, lights, and all technical paraphernalia are fully visible. A work light is burning.

The TROUPE can be heard approaching from the back of the auditorium accompanied by the uptempo playing of finger cymbals, small triangles, wind chimes, and a drum and the knocking, clanking, and clanging of bits of dangling prop and set pieces they carry with them. As they enter the lighted auditorium, the PLAYERS smile, wave, and shake hands with audience members, but they speak only in mime, if at all.

The ACTORS mount the stage and begin the preparations for the performance. A single MUSICIAN sustains the happy approach music. The rest of the CAST variously store props and set pieces in the appropriate wings; bring in the cyclorama, teasers, and tormentors; cross busily back and forth adding costume bits, checking make-up, or adjusting beards and wigs. The auditorium lights fade. The work light fades (if possible) as it is replaced by a strong back light.

When all technical facets are in readiness, two more performers join the musician. All three move toward the pit while improvising on the happy figure. Two other cast members move briskly from the wings to Down Center. The follow spot hits them as they display a canvas banner reading, THE CLOWNS. When the audience has seen the banner, it is laid face up on the apron as the spot fades.

As the BANNER BEARERS exit, the music switches to a hammer-tapping figure, which fades when the Craftsmen enter.

THE CLOWNS

[JIM and SOPHY carry in a plain bench and place it Center. They sit at opposite ends of the bench and stare blankly out over the audience. General illumination up. They fold their hands deliberately in their laps. The two CRAFTSMEN enter Right, speaking, carrying plans.]

CRAFTSMAN I. Is this the spot?

CRAFTSMAN II. *[Looking at plans]* According to the plans. It extends from here twenty feet over stage left.

CRAFTSMAN I. *[Looking at plans over his shoulder]* That's twelve feet, isn't it?

CRAFTSMAN II. You're right. Sorry.

CRAFTSMAN I. It's O. K. I'm glad we caught it this early.

CRAFTSMAN II. *[Putting down the plans]* We may as well get started.

CRAFTSMAN I. No, it's late. Let's start first thing tomorrow morning.

CRAFTSMAN II. Suits me.

[They exit Right as the BOY and GIRL enter.]

BOY. Is this it?

GIRL. I don't know. The script said, "Cross."

BOY. Cross?

GIRL. You know . . . *[demonstrating]* cross.

BOY. No, I don't.

GIRL. That must have been in another play.

BOY. *[Turning to go]* Let's try again later.

[She nods as they exit Left, and the CRAFTSMEN re-enter.]

CRAFTSMAN I. Where did you leave them?

CRAFTSMAN II. Around here someplace.

CRAFTSMAN I. *[Seeing the plans on the stage]* Here you go.

CRAFTSMAN II. No, I'm sure I was farther off left.

CRAFTSMAN I. Look over there, then.

[CRAFTSMAN II reaches off Left and receives a comic book from the STAGE MANAGER.]

CRAFTSMAN II. [*Waving offstage*] Thanks.

CRAFTSMAN I. [*Taking the comic book*] Are you sure these are the right plans?

CRAFTSMAN II. [*Taking the book back*] Of course. Look. [*Pointing*] Twenty cents. [*CRAFTSMAN I nods in agreement.*]

CRAFTSMAN I. Say, I feel energetic. Why not start this afternoon?

CRAFTSMAN II. It's all right by me.

[The CRAFTSMEN move to opposite sides of the old couple and mime building an enclosure, frequently checking the comic book. This action continues. When the work is well begun, the YOUNG COUPLE re-enter, pushed on by an exasperated STAGE MANAGER.]

BOY. This isn't our entrance.

GIRL. We're not on for two more pages.

STAGE MANAGER. You don't believe me, huh? Well . . . [*Looking for something, then spying the plans dropped earlier in the show*] Uh huh, here it is. [*Picks up the plans*] See?

BOY. [*Looking curiously at the plans*] He's right. Let's start.

STAGE MANAGER. It's too late.

GIRL. It can't be!

BOY. [*Comforting her*] Come on. We can do it.

STAGE MANAGER. [*Exiting*] Equity doesn't screen them like they used to.

BOY. Ready?

GIRL. Let me get character.

BOY. There's plenty of time for that later. We've got a show to do.

[The BOY and GIRL cross behind the bench. The BOY stands behind Jim, the GIRL behind Sophy. Together, the BOY and GIRL cover, in order, the mouths, ears, and eyes of Jim and Sophy. The BOY and GIRL exit.]

CRAFTSMAN I. How's it coming down there?

CRAFTSMAN II. Everything was smooth until I hit this Charles Atlas.

CRAFTSMAN I. [*Putting aside his work and crossing to Craftsman II*] Maybe I can help. What's the problem?

INTERLUDE I

The BOY and GIRL exit in the dark as the MUSICIANS begin a slow sound texture.

The back light rises again. There is a dreamlike feeling to this transition. The performers move slowly to their new positions. The music continues even as the musicians rise from the pit and exchange their instruments with replacement musicians en passant.

A second banner is brought out. This time it reads, THE GENII. The follow spot illuminates it and fades. As before, the banner is placed face up on the apron.

As the BANNER BEARERS exit, the music softens. It fades as the GIRL takes her position.



THE GENII

[The GIRL sits Down Center. She begins running sand through her fingers. General illumination up. The OLD WOMAN enters and confronts her.]

OLD WOMAN. Here you are. Wasting time on the beach.

GIRL. I told you, but you never listen.

OLD WOMAN. That's unfair.

GIRL. I don't think so.

OLD WOMAN. You'd best come home now.

GIRL. I'll stay.

OLD WOMAN. *[Giving up]* As you wish.

GIRL. What?

OLD WOMAN. As you wish.

GIRL. Do you really think I could?

OLD WOMAN. Nonsense.

GIRL. I'm going to try.

OLD WOMAN. Finish this foolishness. And come home.

[The OLD WOMAN exits. The GIRL closes her eyes. The BOY enters. He crosses to her, tentatively. The GIRL looks up.]

GIRL. It's you!

BOY. Excuse me?

GIRL. To think that it's possible to sit on the beach and wish and then open your eyes and here you are.

BOY. I don't understand.

GIRL. You are confused, I'll bet. You've come such a long way. From Baghdad, isn't it?

BOY. No, Santa Maria. Ten miles down the road. Just this side of the mountains.

GIRL. They made you say that.

BOY. You could say so, I guess. My name's Charles Merriwether.

GIRL. That's not right.

BOY. Isn't it?

GIRL. It's Mandrup.

BOY. [*Correcting gently*] Charles . . . Charles Merriwether.

GIRL. [*Contemplatively*] Charles Merriwether . . . Charles Merriwether. No, I'm sorry.

BOY. I've been Charles for twenty years. It's not my fault.

GIRL. [*Mildly piqued*] They send who they want to. I had hoped – I mean you're very nice and, well, perfect in every other way – but when you have your mind set . . . well, you know.

BOY. [*Wanting to help*] I'll pretend that I'm Mandrup.

GIRL. It won't do. Who ever heard of a Charles Merriwether named Mandrup? There must be another explanation. [*Slips into musing. An idea*] That must be it!

BOY. What?

GIRL. They couldn't send Mandrup, so they sent you. [*CHARLES shrugs as if to say, "Uh, right."*] Tell me, is it really beautiful like they say?

BOY. Where I come from?

GIRL. Yes. Is it beautiful?

BOY. In a way. There's been some urban renewal.

GIRL. They didn't tear down anything that was important or, you know, historical? [*Moving slightly toward him*] Or romantic?

BOY. I don't remember anything that was very [*moving toward her slightly*] romantic.

INTERLUDE II

The GIRL and the SWIMMER exit in the dark as the MUSICIANS begin a light, uptempo sound texture.

The back light rises again. The performers pass to their new locations. New MUSICIANS replace the old and exchange their instruments en passant as before.

A banner reading THE GLUTTON is brought out quickly, displayed, and placed on the apron. The BANNER BEARERS exit.

The music softens as THE EATER enters.



THE GLUTTON

[THE EATER enters with a large platter of food (all food is mimed). General illumination up. THE EATER glances about the area, picks a spot on the floor, sits, and begins to eat. THE OTHER enters at a brisk pace but slows when he notices Eater. Eater is oblivious of Other's presence. OTHER studies Eater a bit, circling him, bending for a better perspective, and, finally, scowling in disapproval.]

OTHER. What do you think you're doing? [*EATER does not respond.*] I'm speaking to you. What is it you think you're doing? [*Eater remains oblivious. OTHER'S anger builds.*] I'm speaking to you! What are you doing? [*OTHER can contain himself no longer. He grabs the platter from Eater, dumps the food on the floor, grinds it with his heel, and hurls the platter into the wings.*] How do you like that?

[EATER still pays no attention to Other but patiently rises and moves off the way he entered. OTHER watches his exit with satisfaction but his expression changes to chagrin when EATER re-enters with another platter, reassumes his former position, and begins to eat once more.]

OTHER. You're certainly a slow learner, aren't you? [*EATER ignores him.*] Here's lesson number two! [*He grabs the platter away as before, dumps its contents on the*

*floor, stomps on them, and hurls the plate into the wings.]
What do you say now?*

[EATER rises and moves off. OTHER is satisfied again until EATER re-enters carrying two platters. OTHER seethes. EATER balances the two platters as he seats himself as before. He carefully places one platter on the floor. Priest-like, he cradles the second platter in his hands, raises it, and offers it to the other. OTHER reacts as the lights . . .]

Fade to BLACK



INTERLUDE III

EATER and OTHER exit in the dark as the MUSICIANS begin a steady medium tempo figure interspersed with arhythmic drum beats. The feeling is one of tension.

The back light rises again. Passing is done as before.

The new banner reads THE BOGEY. The BANNER BEARERS exit.

The music fades as the Puckish Figure enters.



THE BOGEY

[The PUCKISH FIGURE enters from Right carrying a large A-frame ladder. He tiptoes to center stage, stops, and puts the ladder up. When he accomplishes this, he darts Down and Up and Right and Left as if seeking something. Finally, he moves back to the ladder and begins to climb. When he reaches the top, he perches there, waiting. General illumination up. If possible, the upper portion of the ladder is visible only in silhouette.

The MAN enters quickly from Left, crosses to the ladder and glances about, as if someone is following him. He pulls some papers from his inside pocket and starts to unfold them. A harsh light hits him from off Right. He jumps around the ladder and huddles low to the ground. He stuffs the paper back in his pocket. After a

count or two, the light goes out, but the MAN still watches the area intently. He does not notice the GIRL entering from Left. She walks up behind him.]

GIRL. Hi!

MAN. [*Grabs her arm and pulls her down next to him*]
Be quiet! They're probably still around.

GIRL. [*Unflustered*] All right.

[*They crouch silently for a few seconds.*]

MAN. [*Thinking all is clear*] Where did you come from?

GIRL. Is it important?

MAN. Probably not. They're gone now.

GIRL. They could be circling the block.

MAN. How did you know that?

GIRL. I've paid my dues.

MAN. You have, have you?

GIRL. May I get up?

MAN. Don't wander off.

GIRL. Heavens no. This is nice.

MAN. I wish I could share your enthusiasm.

GIRL. Try.

MAN. When they're everywhere? You look under lamp posts and they're there. Look in movies and they're there. Everywhere! But it's all right. [*Patting the pocket holding his papers*] I've got my game plan.

GIRL. Why?

MAN. They're everywhere!

GIRL. [*Circling the ladder*] Not here.

MAN. [*He inspects the area suspiciously, then smiles*]
You're right! Who would have thought?

GIRL. It's special.

MAN. Yeah?

GIRL. They're never here. I come every day.

MAN. They've never been?

GIRL. Never.

MAN. I'll be right back. [*Starts to exit*]

GIRL. Where are you going?

MAN. To get my things.

GIRL. Leave them. You don't have to worry. You'll eat and sleep and dream and . . .

INTERLUDE IV

A very slow sound texture begins. The back light rises.

The MUSICIANS, still playing, move up. When they reach the stage level, all but the drum stop. The DRUM plays an ominous beat reminiscent of a military funeral all the way into the wings. The beat continues.

The BOY and GIRL enter. The BOY gathers the previously dropped banners and drapes them about the Girl's shoulders in the manner of a cold weather wrap.

The BANNER BEARERS enter. The DRUM continues its slow meter, but begins building to a crescendo. The banner reads THE DRUMS. The BEARERS do not place the banner down, but present it to the BOY, who in turn drapes it about the Girl's shoulders. The BEARERS exit. The BOY and GIRL freeze in position Downstage.

The DRUMMER, now playing very loudly, pounds a final stroke and lets it reverberate through the room.



THE DRUMS

[The ALPHA ARMY enters in formation from Right. The BRAVO ARMY enters in formation from the Left. The two groups confront each other and glare. They freeze in these positions of hostility. Lights up in the Downstage area.]

BOY-IN-LOVE. [*Becoming audible*] . . . and in the whole world, no, in the whole universe, there's no one else but you. No one in the whole . . . anywhere.

GIRL-IN-LOVE. When you say it that way, I know it's true. Tell me again.

BOY-IN-LOVE. I love you.

GIRL-IN-LOVE. I love you, too. [*She sighs.*] A few days ago we were just people.

BOY-IN-LOVE. And now we're . . . us. [*He gestures for her to sit.*]

GIRL-IN-LOVE. [*Sitting on the apron stage*] Magic, isn't it?

BOY-IN-LOVE. [*Sitting by her*] Yes.

[*They freeze. Upstage lights up. General murmuring among the ALPHA ARMY*]

ALPHA LEADER. Quiet, you fools, do you want them to hear? [*He points to the Bravo Army.*] The rest of my instructions will be in code.

ALPHA SOLDIER I. But we don't know the code.

ALPHA CHORUS. None of us know the code.

ALPHA LEADER. You don't?

ALPHA CHORUS. No.

ALPHA LEADER. You are under arrest.

[*ALPHA ARMY freezes.*]

BRAVO LEADER. Follow me.

BRAVO SOLDIER I. We can't.

BRAVO LEADER. Why not?

BRAVO SOLDIER I. We're under arrest. [*Pulls a parchment from his pocket*] And I quote, ". . . to wit, all parties of the second part, to be known as the Bravo chorus, are under arrest, such term to be construed to mean that they shall be detained against their will or otherwise at this spot until word is forwarded by this office to the Bravo leader."

BRAVO LEADER. I am Bravo leader.

BRAVO SOLDIER I. You are designated?

BRAVO SOLDIER II. Show us your papers! Some credentials!

BRAVO SOLDIER III. And hurry. Are we to be detained all day?

BRAVO LEADER. [*Seeking words*] Uh . . . [*firmly*] I have credentials. [*Slaps all of his pockets*] I know I had them.

BRAVO SOLDIER II. Take him away.

BRAVO LEADER. You can't! [*BRAVO SOLDIERS I & III seize him and place him at the rear of the column and then rejoin the column.*]

BRAVO SOLDIER II. [*Turns his back to men as he orders:*] Follow me!

[*BRAVO SOLDIERS freeze.*]

BOY-IN-LOVE. Nothing could spoil this for us.