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Dramatic Publishing

Playing the Palace



A Full Length
Musical
by
June Walker Rogers



↖ The Dramatic Publishing Company

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(PLAYING THE PALACE)

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DAISY BELL ALLEN John's mother
MR. VAN CLEEF distinguished-looking head of
 Landmarks Commission
ANNA HELD beautiful Ziegfeld singing star

VOICES FROM THE PAST
CHORUS
STAGE MANAGER

TIME: Present
PLACE: Stage of the Palace Theatre

*By omitting a chorus and doubling some of the principles, the show may be reduced to five men and five women.

ACT ONE

SCENE: *When the audience enters the theatre the curtain is up on a bare stage. At C stands a "ghost light." This is nothing more than a bare bulb on a pole fixture that is habitually used to light an empty theatre. When it is time for the show to begin, the house lights dim very slowly. As they dim, the **PLANIST** enters from the stage or a side door and, going to the piano, plays with one finger the first two bars of "THERE'LL BE A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN TONIGHT." From the back of the auditorium we hear the second two bars answered by a horn, guitar or, if there is to be only a piano, a voice humming. Other instruments or voices join from other parts of the theatre for the next two bars - during which time other **MUSICIANS** enter the pit, if there are more musicians. For the last two bars, one **SINGER** appears on stage and joins the others singing:*

(SONG: "HOT TIME IN THE OLD TIME TONIGHT")

**IN THE CHORUS WE'LL JOIN IN
THERE'LL BE A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN
TONIGHT.**

*During the second and third choruses of the song, **CAST**, **CHORUS**, and any **MUSICIANS** that can, parade in*

from all sides of the auditorium singing the song. It is somewhere between a circus parade and a demonstration at a political rally. Bright, up, noisy. CAST members may interrupt their own singing to greet audience members, shaking hands, saying, 'Hello.' They may carry signs that read "PLAYING THE PALACE" and other signs listing credits for director, writer or performers. As they march down the aisles, stage lights come up. Somewhere in the middle of the third chorus, the entire company is on a brightly-lit stage moving and singing in an exciting way.

CAST.

**WHEN WE HEAR THEM 'A
BELLS GO DING LING LING
WE'LL JOIN 'ROUND
AND SWEETLY WE WILL SING
AND WHEN THE VERSE IS THROUGH
IN THE CHORUS WE'LL JOIN IN
THERE'LL BE A HOT TIME IN THE OLD TOWN
TONIGHT!**

At the end of the song, there is a blackout and everyone clears. Then the ghost light goes on. JOHN ALLEN enters the empty stage. He is a young executive, wearing a business suit and carrying a clipboard. With him is RANDY KELLY, more roughly dressed.

JOHN. We'll want to take the chandeliers down before the wrecking crew comes in.

RANDY. Right, Mr. Allen.

JOHN. We can probably sell those... and there's a summer theatre made a bid for the seats. Now, was there anything in the lobby worth saving?

RANDY. Well, there are two chandeliers out there and some sofas and things and a lot of oil paintings of people.

JOHN. Who?

RANDY. I don't know... old people... funny clothes...

(BILL BAILEY BURNS enters. He is an old man.)

MR. B. Those aren't old people... those are old stars. The greatest stars in vaudeville. They all played here at the Palace from the day my father built it.

JOHN. Oh, Mr. Burns... We're just doing a preliminary before the wrecking crew comes in tomorrow. This is my foreman, Randy Kelly.

RANDY. Sorry about your theatre, Mr. Burns. I saw the first live show I ever saw here. I'll never forget it.

MR. B. So did I. And my father never let me forget it. This old theatre has been my life ever since.

RANDY. You must've known a lot of stars... like Sylvester Stallone...

MR. B. Not him. I knew the old stars. Eddie Cantor, Milton Berle, Sophie Tucker... I even met George M. Cohan when I was a boy.

JOHN. Are those the people in the paintings?

MR. B. No. Those are stars from my Dad's time. Joe Howard, he sang and wrote songs and Anna Held, she played here. One of Ziegfeld's greatest stars.

RANDY *(never heard of him)*. Ziegfeld?

MR. B. *(sighs)*. Before your time, I guess. Like me. Like the Palace itself. But growing up in this theatre... what childhood! Other boys had tops or yo-yos or skates... Not me. I had real entertainers I could watch every day... matinee and evening.

RANDY. I getcha. When I was a kid, I watched TV all the time.

MR. B. Nothing like it, young man. These were real live people you could touch. They made the theatre into a regular toyland for me... like in that old song...

JOHN. What old song?

MR. B. Before you tear down a piece of history, my boy, you should learn something about it. (*He sings.*)

(SONG: "TOYLAND")

VERSE:

WHEN YOU'VE GROWN UP, MY BOYS
AND AS OLD AS I,
YOU'LL OFTEN PONDER ON THE YEARS
THAT ROLL SO SWIFTLY BY, MY BOYS,
THAT ROLL SO SWIFTLY BY.
AND OF THE MANY LANDS YOU WILL
HAVE JOURNEYED THROUGH,
YOU'LL OFT RECALL THE BEST OF ALL
THE LAND YOUR CHILDHOOD KNEW,
YOUR CHILDHOOD KNEW.

CHORUS:

TOYLAND! TOYLAND!
LITTLE GIRL AND BOY LAND
WHILE YOU DWELL WITHIN IT
YOU ARE EVER HAPPY THEN.
CHILDHOOD'S JOYLAND
MYSTIC MERRY TOYLAND,
ONCE YOU PASS ITS BORDERS
YOU CAN NEVER RETURN AGAIN.

JOHN. Well, thanks, Mr. Burns. Nice to hear what music was like in the old days... but shouldn't you be getting your stuff out of your apartment upstairs before the wrecking crew comes?

MR. B. I suppose. There's a girl up there... young actress... going through old playbills and posters... some research project... some young people care about the history of the theatre.

JOHN. I just got my job to do, Mr. Burns. I'm sure this was a terrific theatre in its day... but that was yesterday. Tomorrow this land'll be a terrific condominium.

MR. B. You think that's progress? *(He starts off.)*

JOHN. Oh, Mr. Burns... could you turn out that light? I mean it's very bright, annoying...

MR. B. That? All theatres keep them on whenever they're empty. One light on a bare stage. It's called a ghost light.

RANDY. You got ghosts around here?

MR. B. I don't know. There's an old show business saying, every performer that ever played a theatre leaves a little piece of himself behind. Maybe so...

JOHN. Well, all the same, would you mind turning it off?

MR. B. No. Not at all. *(He exits.)*

JOHN. Now, what about the old dressing rooms? Anything salvageable there?

RANDY. I don't know, Mr. Allen. They're all boarded up.

JOHN. Well, see if you can break into them. Take a look.

RANDY. Okay, Mr. Allen. *(The ghost light goes out. The stage is dark.)*

JOHN *(calls)*. Thanks, Mr. Burns...

MR. B *(off)*. All right...

JOHN. Go on, Randy.

RANDY. Yeah... *(He goes off.)*

JOHN *(calling)*. Now, I can't see anything, Mr. Burns...

MR. B *(off)*. I'll turn on some of the front lights...

(ROSIE O'GRADY enters carrying playbills, old books, etc. She bumps into JOHN.)

ROSIE. Oh!

JOHN. Who's that?

ROSIE. Excuse me... I didn't know there was anyone here.

JOHN. I'm here.

ROSIE. Oh.

JOHN. This place gets a little spooky without any lights, doesn't it?

ROSIE. Yes. *(There is a terrible crash off. Frightened, ROSIE screams, drops what she's carrying and clutches JOHN.)* What's that? *(Suddenly, the front lights come up. ROSIE, realizing she is holding a stranger, jumps away in embarrassment.)* Excuse me.

JOHN. Not at all. I enjoyed it.

ROSIE. I was looking for Mr. Burns.

JOHN. He's around. I'm John Allen.

ROSIE. Rosie O'Grady... *(They shake hands.)*

JOHN. I'm from out of town.

ROSIE. I know. I mean, I know most of the men in town.

JOHN. They're lucky...

ROSIE. I mean, I grew up here... *(Another crash off. ROSIE screams.)* What is that?

JOHN. It's just my foreman. He's breaking open the old dressing rooms.

ROSIE. Foreman? *(Disappointed.)* Are you one of the people who want to tear down the Palace?

JOHN. I'm in charge. I work for Palace Associates. We expect to have the demolition crew here tomorrow.

ROSIE. Don't you feel funny earning your living tearing things down?

JOHN. I don't see it that way. I feel my job is building things. There's going to be a beautiful condominium on this property. I designed it.

ROSIE. We have lots of new condominiums, but not too many old theatres. You should look at some of this research I've been doing on it... the Palace, I mean. The governor came to the opening. Nora Bayes was on the bill and Fannie Brice played here and W. C. Fields...

JOHN. Yes. But they're all dead. And this theatre goes tomorrow. They won't be playing here again.

ROSIE. Maybe the theatre won't go tomorrow... *(Suddenly, the ghost light begins to flicker.)* What's that?

JOHN. Mr. Burns called it the ghost light. *(Calls.)* Mr. Burns... is something wrong? The ghost light is flickering...

MR. B *(off)*. Wait a minute...

(MR. B. runs on, stares at the flickering light.)

MR. B. Golly! I heard about that my whole life but I never saw it happen. *(There is another crash off.)*

ROSIE. What does it mean?

MR. B. My dad used to say when the ghost light flickers, the spirits of the entertainers from a theatre's past were moving around the stage again, singing, dancing... telling their jokes... looking for applause.

JOHN. That's a superstition. This is probably a loose wire.

ROSIE. I wonder... *(She begins to applaud.)*

JOHN. Excuse me, Miss O'Grady, are you trying to bring back a ghost? That's ridiculous.

MR. B. You never know, young fellow. *(He starts to applaud, too. Off, a man's voice on an echo mike sings.)*

VOICE. I'M A YANKEE DOODLE DANDY...

JOHN. What is this? Are you playing some kind of trick, Mr. Burns?

MR. B. No... No...

A WOMAN'S VOICE *(off, on mike, sings)*. I DON'T CARE. I DON'T CARE.

JOHN *(calls)*. Randy!

(RANDY appears.)

RANDY. Yeah, Mr. Allen?

JOHN. Anybody back there singing?

RANDY. No. I thought it was you.

ANOTHER WOMAN'S VOICE *(off, on mike, sings)*. SHINE ON... SHINE ON HARVEST MOON.

MR. B. Sounds just like old Nora Bayes herself...

JOHN. Mr. Burns, I know you're attached to this theatre, but no matter how many tricks you try, the demolition starts tomorrow.

GROUCHO'S VOICE *(off, on mike)*. Ahh, demolition! That's the secret word. Listen, when I played the Palace I tore the house down but this is ridiculous.

JOHN. I don't know what you're trying to do, but tomorrow night the Palace will be a pile of old bricks.

(MARY, SALLY and IDA enter, in time to hear this.)

MARY. No, it won't.

SALLY. Not tomorrow anyway.

ROSIE. What happened, girls?

IDA. We got it! (*She hands ROSIE an official-looking document.*)

ANOTHER MAN'S VOICE (*off, on mike, sings*): I
WONDER WHO'S KISSING HER NOW?

MARY. Oh! Isn't that cute? Somebody turned the muzak
on.

ROSIE (*to MR. B.*). Who is singing?

MR. B. Maybe when that young man opened those old
dressing rooms, they came out...

SALLY. Who?

MR. B. The spirits of the old stars... locked away... all
these years...

RANDY (*to JOHN*). Hey, are these people crazy?

JOHN. Well, you know what they say about show people.

ROSIE. Yes, they say there's no people like show people,
they smile when they are low. And I'm smiling, Mr.
Allen, 'cause this is an injunction. It stops you from
destroying the Palace for at least a month. That gives
us time to get the Landmarks Commission to declare it
the landmark it is, and keep it safe forever.

RANDY. Hey, Mr. Allen, maybe they're not so crazy.

MARY (*to ROSIE*). Who's that one?

SALLY. He's cute...

IDA. But he wants to tear down this theatre...

RANDY. Well, I don't exactly want to... It's my job.

JOHN. Right. It's your job.

RANDY. Yes, sir!

JOHN. Now, ladies, I know this was a wonderful old
theatre but we can't afford to get sentimental over
buildings that can no longer pay their own way.

ROSIE. We're going to show you, this one still can.

MR. B. What do you mean, Rosie?

ROSIE. In the month we have, we're going to put on a show...

MARY. We'll re-create a typical old vaudeville bill...

MR. B. By golly...

ROSIE. And if the commission declares it a landmark, we'll have the beginning of some money to fix it up again.

MR. B. Well, there's a lot of old props in the prop room. They might be things you could use.

ROSIE. Sally, go take a look, will you?

SALLY. Sure... *(She goes off.)*

JOHN. You better go watch her, Randy. See that nothing is taken out of this theatre.

ROSIE. We're not going to take anything out. We're going to use it all right here.

JOHN. Go along, Randy, and watch that girl. *(He goes off.)*

IDA. I think I'll go help Sally. *(She goes off after RANDY.)*

MARY *(to MR. B)*. Are there a lot of old props?

MR. B. Oh, hundreds...

MARY. They probably need me, too. *(She goes off after IDA.)*

JOHN. Maybe I better watch Randy. *(He goes off after MARY.)*

ROSIE. Well, Mr. Burns, I got a lot of material out of these old playbills. I mean, at least I know the names of some of the stars. Maybe you can tell me what kind of acts they did and then we can have our people work them up.

MR. B. Well, let's see... a typical opening act would've been like Fink's Mules.

ROSIE. Fink's Mules?

MR. B. They did tricks.

ROSIE. I don't have any mules, Mr. B. Let's stick to the stars.

MR. B. Well, old George M. himself...

ROSIE. George M. Cohan. He wrote all those songs... "Over There" and "You're a Grand Old Flag."

MR. B. But he started in vaudeville. With his family. Mother, father, sister. The Four Cohans. But old George was the star of the act. I think he may have been the first act I ever saw.

ROSIE. What did he do? *(The ghost light begins to flicker.)*

MR. B. Well, he sang, he danced, he told jokes. He was kind of a little guy... and he had this sorta strut... so when he sang... *(He imitates COHAN.)* I'M A YANKEE DOODLE DANDY...

(The ghost of GEORGE M. COHAN appears from behind the ghost light, dressed in a jockey costume.)

COHAN. Wait a minute... hold your horses. When you do that kick, you gotta put a little more snap in it...

MR. B. *(automatically)*. You mean like this? *(He starts again.)* I'M A YANKEE--

COHAN. And your singing... I mean, you need more of an attack. Let the audience know you're there.

MR. B. I been singing that song in the shower since I was a lad.

GROUCHO'S VOICE *(off, on mike)*. In the shower, huh? That's why you're all wet.

ROSIE. Mr. Burns, I think you're arguing with a ghost. It's probably rude.
