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*Dramatic Publishing*

# NIGHTINGALE

Adapted by  
Rita Grauer, John Urquhart  
and  
the Yellow Brick Road Shows



# NIGHTINGALE

AATE Distinguished Play Award Winner

*Fairy tale. Adapted by Rita Grauer, John Urquhart and the Yellow Brick Road Shows. From the story by Hans Christian Andersen. Cast: 4 either gender, 1 musician with option to add more.* This adaptation from the famous tale of Hans Christian Anderson is a participatory play of the highest quality for grades K-3. Something is amiss in the court of the great Emperor of China. Obsessed by his worldly possessions, the emperor has grown blind to the needs of his people and the real treasures of life. In this humorous adaptation of the classic fairy tale, ancient Oriental gods, the nightingale and the audience join forces to cure the emperor of his possessive and grasping ways. An important achievement in the often underestimated but difficult genre of participation plays. A genuinely compelling story. *Director's notes are available in the script containing drawings of set floor plans, details on costumes, music and movement, and discussion of characterization. Simple sets. Suitable for touring. Simple costumes. Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: N66.*

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Nightingale



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# Nightingale

A participatory play for children  
adapted from Hans Christain Andersen's story by

RITA GRAUER & JOHN URQUHART  
& YELLOW BRICK ROAD SHOWS



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**NIGHTINGALE** was adapted from Hans Christian Anderson's story "The Nightingale," by the Yellow Brick Road Shows Company as part of their 1979-'80 educational theatre tour. It received over 150 performances in elementary schools throughout the southwestern United States. The script was created by the following company:

**The Emperor**..... Steve Peterson  
**The Servant**..... Randall Nott  
**The Nightingale, 2nd God**..... Carmen Roman  
**Death, 1st God**..... Jason Coleman  
**Musician/Road Manager**..... Benay Radin

**NIGHTINGALE** was directed and edited by Rita Grauer and John Urquhart.



## DIRECTOR'S NOTES

### Sets and Properties

"Nightingale" was originally developed for an extensive elementary school tour, with a company of four actors utilizing minimal set pieces and properties. When produced in arena style it can be effectively performed in any school cafeteria, library, or multi-purpose room. A flat floor area of approximately 35'x35' will accommodate both the actors and an audience of 250 children.

The original production was staged in an elliptical playing area defined by ribbons laid on the floor. (*see appendices*) At each end of the ellipse were bamboo structures — one held the ornamental hand props used by the Gods, the other was draped with fabric to suggest the Emperor's throne room. Two bamboo "thrones" which nestled together when inverted, and a riser for the Gods, were the only other set pieces. A small "orchestra" for the musician was established adjacent to the thrones. Hand props and costume pieces were carried in the riser/box and the inverted "thrones."

This production concept is not integral to the play. Ultimately, the environments and effects in the script are to be provided by the imaginations of the actors and their audience.

Should economy not be a concern for your production, the play contains many opportunities for creative design and technical embellishment. However, keep in mind that the participatory nature of the play demands a high level of intimacy between the performers and their audience.

### Costumes

There is no "doubling" in the show, and there were no changes of costume in the original production. Therefore, five basic costumes (*including the musician*) are all that is required. However, movement requirements should be considered in the costume design, and it should be remembered that in the absence of elaborate set pieces the costumes will carry the show visually. Care should therefore be used in the selection of color and fabric.

## **Music**

Before developing the music for "Nightingale," our company researched the sculpture, poetry, painting, and music of ancient China. Using the images we discovered, we then set out to create music with an oriental "flavor" that suited the needs of the show, both rhythmically and emotionally. Our orchestra consisted of simple, basically percussive instruments: a wooden xylophone, a dance drum, wood blocks, a triangle, wind chimes, and a bamboo flute. No sheet music is provided. However, notes regarding appropriate use of sound and music are incorporated in the script.

## **Movement**

The movement sequences in "Nightingale" are used to portray important action that cannot be realistically created on stage — for example, in the prologue movement with narration is used to reveal the history of the Emperor's conflict with the Gods. Later, sound and movement are used to suggest the Nightingale itself, the rituals of the Gods, the search for, and capture of, the Nightingale, and the Emperor's encounter with Death.

It is essential that your performers be adept physically, and that time, imagination, and careful consideration be given to the creation of these movement sequences. The movement need not be authentically oriental, but it must carry the imaginations of your audience to the court of the great Emperor of China.

## **The Nightingale**

In the original production the "Nightingale" was portrayed by the use of a mime technique called the "oriental hand." The hands are crossed at the wrists and extended away from the body to suggest a bird-like form. The fingers and the hands undulate to give the illusion of a bird's wings in flight. To complete this illusion, the hands, not the actor playing the Nightingale, must receive total focus from the other actors.

If the "oriental hand" technique cannot be executed by your actor, an oriental style puppet operated by hand may be used to symbolically suggest the Nightingale.

## **Participation and Involvement**

Within the action of the play there are many opportunities for audience participation and involvement. These moments can provide your company with some of the most rewarding experiences possible on stage. Throughout

the playscript you will find specific descriptions of Yellow Brick Road Shows' approach to each of these "moments." Additionally, the following notes are provided to assist you in integrating these participations and involvements effectively into your production.

First, the difference between participation and involvement must be clearly understood. Very simply, it has to do with whether or not the audience is asked to help.

Participation occurs at those points in the play when a character actively, and verbally, seeks help by asking the children for a particular type of response which is essential to the continuance of the story. He then leads and directs their response. These participations include the creation of the "Imperial Orchestra," and those moments when the children are asked to put their hands over their hearts to call the Nightingale.

Involvement is encouraged in many scenes where the actor never directly asks the children to help. Instead, he provides opportunities for them to participate if they choose. Audience contributions at these moments are not particularly essential to the continuance of the story. Involvement occurs at those points where the audience offers advice or suggestions to the actors. Your actors should handle these moments selectively and honestly within the context of the play.

Successful handling of involvements encourages successful participations, and successful audience participation is achieved when the majority of the children contribute in an attentive, concentrated, and imaginative manner.

There are many factors involved in generating positive audience participation that will enhance your production—the pre-show warm-up, your characterizations, the flexibility of your actors, and your company's ability to control the response of the audience.

**Warm-Up** - Before every Yellow Brick Road Shows' performance the actors seat the audience. This provides an opportunity to establish a rapport from the moment the children set foot in the performance area. The children are led into the space by groups (*classroom-size*) and shown to their seats on the floor. Interaction with the audience during and immediately following the seating should be casual and friendly, yet controlled. Topics of discussion should prepare the children for the play and initiate a rapport which will insure the success of the involvement and participation to follow. Should it not be possible for your company to seat the children, it is suggested that your actors walk through the audience to accomplish this "warm-up."

**Characterization** - Participation and involvement are initiated by positive, likeable characters in the story—usually the protagonist or one of his associates. From the opening of the play the positive aspects of these characters' personalities must shine through. This does not mean that the protagonist, or any other character, should become accomodatingly one-dimensional. It simply means that the Servant, the Nightingale, and the Emperor must all possess genuine qualities of warmth and sincerity, and the Emperor's redeeming qualities must not be overlooked, even at the height of his folly.

**Control** - When 250 children are provoked to create an "Imperial Orchestra" the question of control becomes essential. The use of phrases like: "Wait for the conductor . . .," or "Be sure to watch the conductor.", in conjunction with a start/stop/volume signal used by the conductor/servant are tried and true techniques of controlling participation without minimizing response. Guidelines for control have been incorporated into the script. However, you may wish to experiment with these, or others, until your actors feel comfortable "leading" the participations.

A second aspect of control concerns pacing. Participations and involvements both exist to enhance a theatrical experience—the play. Overwhelming and uncontrolled contributions from the audience, or an actor who takes too much time soliciting the response he desires, will be detrimental to the pacing of your production. Both participation and involvement must move briskly, and they must be motivated by the needs of the story.

# NIGHTINGALE

*(Once the audience has been seated the actors continue to chat with the children, discussing topics that are pertinent to the play they are about to see. Our actors enjoyed discussing music, as a warm-up to the "Imperial Orchestra" participation. This topic was very accessible, as the musician's instruments were in full view of the audience. Your actors may find other topics, equally suitable, for their pre-show discussions.)*

*Once the audience is comfortable, relaxed, and receptive to the actors, the cymbal crashes and the actors quickly take their positions for the start of the prologue—the Gods are on one end of the stage, the Emperor and his Servant at the other. They bow simultaneously as the cymbal crashes again. The prologue begins.)*

## The Prologue

*(The prologue is underscored with simple, basically percussive music, which is played by the musician or whichever actors may be offstage.)*

Servant: *(as narrator)* In China, as you probably know, the Emperor is Chinese, and so are all of his people. *(he indicates the audience)*. Now the story we are about to tell takes place in China, a very long time ago. And that is precisely why we tell it—so it will not be forgotten!

*(The Emperor enters, and, in a stylized movement sequence, he suggests the environments and events described by the narrator.)*

The Emperor of China had the most beautiful palace in all the world. Around his palace were the most beautiful gardens in all the world. People would come from the furthest corners of his empire to visit the Emperor and admire his flowers. But no matter how many flowers the Emperor had, he still wanted . . .

Emperor: More!

Servant: The People of China were made to work day and night to please their emperor.

*(He steps into the scene as the Servant, bringing flowers to his Emperor.)*

Emperor: More! (*the Servant mimes bringing more flowers*) More! (*again he brings more*) More! (*and again*) More! (*there are no more flowers*) More! More! More!

(*The force of the Emperor's demands drives the Servant from the stage.*)

Servant: (*as narrator*) Until the people no longer looked with pleasure upon the Emperor's beautiful gardens.

(*The Emperor returns to his throne.*)

The Gods, in their celestial heavens, saw this, and sent a great wind to destroy the Emperor's gardens.

(*Music. The Gods enter, and, in a ritualistic dance, they depict the destruction of the Emperor's gardens by wind.*)

Emperor: No!

Servant: When the wind was over, the Gods had left the Emperor only the most beautiful flower of all.

(*The Gods return to their platform.*)

Gods: All is well.

Servant: But not for long!

(*The Emperor takes the stage.*)

The Emperor had the most beautiful robes in all the world, made by the finest tailors in all of China. People would come from the furthest corners of his empire to visit the Emperor and admire his robes. But no matter how many robes the Emperor had, he still wanted . . .

Emperor: More!

Servant: The People of China were made to work day and night to please their Emperor.

(*He steps into the scene as the Servant, bearing imaginary robes for his Emperor.*)

Emperor: More! (*the Servant brings more*) More! (*again he brings more*)  
More! (*and again*) More! (*there are no more robes*) More! More! More!  
(*again the Servant is driven offstage*)

Servant: (*as narrator*) Until the people no longer looked with pleasure upon the Emperor's beautiful robes.

(*The Emperor returns to his throne.*)

The Gods, in their celestial heavens, saw this, and sent a great fire to destroy the Emperor's robes.

(*Music. The Gods enter, and, in a ritualistic dance, they depict the destruction of the Emperor's robes by fire.*)

Emperor: No!

Servant: When the fire was over the Gods had left the Emperor only his finest robe.

(*The Gods return to their positions on the platform.*)

Gods: All is well.

Servant: But not for long!

(*The Emperor sits dejectedly on his throne.*)

Without his beautiful gardens and fine robes the Emperor soon grew melancholy, and the People of China were very sad because their Emperor was so unhappy.

(*End of prologue. The action is now depicted realistically. The Servant enters the scene and sits on the smaller throne beside his Emperor. The Emperor is obviously thinking. He "hmmms" as he thinks, and the servant mirrors his "hmmms" as only a servant would do. Finally the Emperor reaches a conclusion.*)

Emperor: There's nothing to be done! (*simply*) I can't invite anyone to the palace, I have nothing to show them! (*with great irony*) The Emperor is the keeper of the treasures of the empire . . . and I have no treasures with which to delight my people!

Servant: *(Humbly)* But my Emperor, they delight in seeing you, not just your fine possessions.

Emperor: No . . . no. I must have something special to make my people happy. *(he thinks a moment)* Of course! My Imperial Marble Collection! *(the Servant runs to fetch the marbles from behind the throne)* I am still the only Emperor to have a blue cat's eye marble.

*(The Servant stops.)*

Give me my Imperial Blue Cat's Eye Marble!

Servant: Emperor . . .

Emperor: *(He realizes something is amiss. He takes the marbles from the Servant)* Give me my . . . Where is it? *(searching through the marbles)* Where is my blue cat's eye? *(pause)*

Servant: *(he bows)* The Emperor of Japan has it. *(The Emperor doesn't remember.)* He won it . . . the last time you played . . .

*(The Emperor remembers now, and he's even sadder than before.)*

Emperor: Take them away!

Servant: *(trying to cheer him)* Here's the big green one you won from the Czar of Russia.

Emperor: Take them away!

*(The Servant bows and returns the marble collection to its place.)*

Have I no treasures left at all?

Servant: Have you forgotten your Imperial Goldfish?

Emperor: *(delighted)* My Imperial Goldfish! Yes! *(thinks)* No! They'll splash all around and ruin my robe. And I have only one robe left. *(despairs)* Oh . . . why did the Gods destroy all my beautiful robes?

Servant: *(ever helpful)* Emperor . . . you still have the finest robe of all . . .

Emperor: But one robe is not enough.



Servant: It's the most beautiful . . . *(he is at a loss)*

Emperor: *(sits, hopelessly depressed)* Oh . . . what am I to do?

*(As the Servant gazes helplessly at the Emperor an idea comes to him. He leans over and whispers to the Imperial Musician.)*

Servant: Play some music to cheer up the Emperor.

*(The Musician plays a simple little melody. It is cheerful and it catches the Emperor's attention. He begins to perk up. The song ends.)*

Emperor: *(curiously)* What was that?

Servant: "The Song of the Ascending Spirit." Did you like it?

Emperor: Yes. Very much. Play it again. *(the Musician plays)*

Servant: *(as the music plays)* You see . . . it is a simple song . . . and yet it makes you happy.

Emperor: Very happy! Play it again!

*(Once again the Musician begins to play. Almost immediately he is interrupted by the Emperor.)*

Wait! You have other instruments . . . play them as well!

Servant: *(sensing the Emperor's train of thought)* But Emperor . . . it's beauty is in it's simplicity.

Emperor: *(ignoring the Servant)* Yes, yes . . . of course. I want other instruments. Now play! *(the Musician crashes the cymbal and begins to play)* Yes! *(the Musician stops, looks at his instruments, and begins to play once again, adding some chimes)* Yes! Yes! More! *(again the Musician stops, then he adds the drum)* Yes! More! MORE! *(The Musician desperately begins to play every possible instrument until the melody is lost in a cacophony of sounds.)* MORE! MORE! *(the Emperor steps back to listen)* Wait! *(the Musician stops, and the Emperor surveys the orchestra)* Are there no more instruments?

Servant: This is all you have, Emperor . . . this is all you need . . . it's just a simple song.

Emperor: (*excitedly*) Of course! But if this simple song and these few instruments make me happy . . . think how it would delight my people if I had an Imperial Orchestra!

(*he gestures grandly*)

I decree . . . there shall be music throughout the palace. The People of China shall make music! (*cymbal crashes*)

Servant: (*urgently*) But Emperor . . .

Emperor: (*very pleased with himself*) I have spoken! (*cymbal crash, the Emperor exits*)

Servant: (*He is very worried. He speaks to the musician.*) I hope the people will understand. (*The Musician nods.*)

(*The Servant crosses the stage to the Gods' platform. He mounts it and bows formally to the audience as the cymbal crashes. He speaks directly to the audience, with sincerity.*)

People of China. The Emperor has decreed there shall be music throughout the palace. (*tenatively*) He wants us all to make an Imperial Orchestra. (*looking through the audience*) Can anyone think of some instruments for our orchestra? (*some children may raise their hands*) You don't need to raise your hands, just tell me.

(*The audience will begin to call out suggestions. The Servant should listen to several, responding to the more unusual ones with delight. Then, at the first opportune moment, he makes a very grand gesture, as the cymbal crashes, to regain attention.*)

Very good! We must work quickly! We'll have this section here play the flutes.

(*All the instruments assigned should be taken from the children's suggestions. The Servant steps down from the platform to make the assignments. He should assign the instruments in this manner—if there are very young children in one section they should be given the easiest instruments to play, such as drums, adults or older children may be given more sophisticated instruments, such as tubas or french horns.*)

This section will play violins . . . you will be the horns . . . and this section, the drums . . . (etc.)

*(There may be some chatter at this point, but once everyone has been assigned an instrument, and their roles are understood, the Servant should regain focus by stepping onto the platform as he speaks. A cymbal crash may also be used here if necessary.)*

Now, we will need to practice! When we play for the Emperor, I shall be the conductor. *(surveying his orchestra as the conductor)* When I point to your section, like this *(he points)* it will mean begin. When I put my fingers together, like this *(he brings his arms up in a very large gesture and touches the tips of his index fingers together)* it will mean stop. *(A cymbal crash may also be used if an additional control device is necessary. Experimentation with these signals is encouraged, and ultimately, your Servant should use those with which he is the most comfortable.)* Shall we try it?

*(The Servant now works with each section individually, being sure to encourage and praise good work with phrases like—"Oh, the Emperor will like that!" or "Such lovely music!", etc.)*

Now let's try it altogether!

*(He begins with one section, then adds another, etc., until everyone is playing. He is delighted. He gives the signal to stop.)*

*(Joyously)* Oh . . . the Emperor will be so pleased. *(to the Musician)* Sound the gong for the Emperor! *(to the audience)* And don't forget to bow!

*(The Emperor enters. The audience will bow from their seats.)*

Hold your instruments where the Emperor may see them!

*(The Emperor surveys this grand "orchestra." He is genuinely moved by his people's efforts.)*

Emperor: Imperial subjects . . . you have made such beautiful instruments! I must hear them play!

Servant: *(containing his excitement)* Is the Imperial Orchestra ready? *(there will be a broad "yes")* Violins . . . play! *(One at a time he adds each of the sections. The Emperor marvels over this "orchestra" and he*

*especially encourages the more creative and unusual contributions.)*  
Flutes! Drums! Horns!

*(Once everyone is playing the Emperor looks concerned.)*

Emperor: More! *(the Servant signals the audience to play louder)* More!  
*(the Servant's conducting begins to grow frantic)* More! *(the Servant*  
*realizes that once again things are out of control)* More! More! MORE!

*(The Servant signals the "orchestra" to stop. The Emperor approaches*  
*him and speaks in a hushed voice.)*

Are there no more instruments?

Servant: *(simply)* Emperor . . . this is all the people of China.

Emperor: *(trying his best to be gracious)* Imperial subjects . . . thank you!  
You have brought many beautiful instruments to play for me, but I'm  
afraid it is not enough. *(simply)* I must have more.

*He quickly exits as the cymbal crashes. There may be chatter in the*  
*audience, or suggestions of other ways to please the Emperor. The*  
*Servant acknowledges these statements by nodding. His gaze turns*  
*apprehensively toward the heavens.)*

Servant: I hope the Gods are not too angry with him!

*(The drum sounds dramatically as the Servant exits and the Gods appear*  
*on their platform. Music punctuates their speech.)*

1st God: He makes his people suffer.

2nd God: He thinks only of himself.

Both: What shall we do?

*(They begin a dance-like ceremony, punctuating their speech with*  
*demonstrative oriental movement.)*

2nd God: Shall I send wind?

1st God: Shall I send fire?

*(They dance as wind and fire, building to a frenzy. They reach a climax and suddenly stop.)*

2nd God: There is another way!

*(They bow to each other, the music changes in tone, and they begin a ritual dance in which the 1st God transforms the 2nd into the Nightingale. At the conclusion, the Nightingale lands on the hand of the 1st God.)*

We shall send . . .

1st God: The Nightingale.

*(The 1st God sets the Nightingale in flight and fades from the stage. The music changes and the Nightingale dances alone, depicting its descent from heaven to earth. As she arrives at the palace, the Servant enters. He is dejected after having tried so hard to please his Emperor, only to fail once again. He sits. The Nightingale circles him, then perches on the Emperor's throne.)*

Night: *(singing sweetly)*

Listen to your heart song,  
Listen deep within.  
Share the love you have  
While you still can.

*(The Servant is surprised.)*

Look around you,  
Love your fellow man.  
Sing the song of joy  
Within your soul.

*(Looking around the room, the Servant spies the Nightingale. He gazes at her admiringly. Her song has touched his heart.)*

Servant: Why it's just a little bird!

*(Suddenly he realizes just where the "little bird" is sitting.)*

Oh . . . little bird . . . you mustn't sit on the Emperor's throne!