

# Excerpt terms and 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.

*Dramatic Publishing*



Theatre for  
Very Young Audiences

# A Child's Garden of Verses

by  
Barry Kornhauser

From the poems of  
Robert Louis Stevenson

“This new and inviting form of theatre—highly successful in Europe and now making its way to the United States—is enchanting for all ages.”

*Times-Herald.com*

***A Child's Garden of Verses. Comedy with music. By Barry Kornhauser. Adapted from A Child's Garden of Verses by Robert Louis Stevenson. Optional music by Scott DePoy. Cast: 1m., 1w., 2 to 3 either gender.*** This is a multi-sensory, highly interactive Theatre for Very Young Audiences piece. Its words and actions are inspired by the classic book of poems by Robert Louis Stevenson. A few actors and a musician, puppetry and play, help audiences grow a garden and their imaginations as they frolic in the leaves, feed a bird, sing in the rain, dance with the wind, build a boat, and discover treasures, including the greatest of them all—friendship. They also plant seeds and words that, with careful tending, grow into flowers and poems to bring home. This play is specifically devised for preschool children as young as 15 months old, but can be enjoyed by children as old as those in first or second grades. *A Child's Garden of Verses* calls for the musicalization of some of the Robert Louis Stevenson poems or excerpts thereof. Producers can choose to create their own music for the piece or arrange to use the wonderful songs created by Scott DePoy for the premier production at the Alliance Theatre, which conceived and commissioned the work. *Unit set. Accompaniment and underscoring CD or lead sheets are available. Approximate running time: 50 minutes. Code: CN4.*

Cover illustration by Garnett Cheney used by special arrangement with United Educators, Inc., Lake Bluff, Ill. Cover design: Susan Carle.

ISBN 10: 1-58342-810-0  
ISBN 13: 978-1-58342-810-8



9 781583 428108 >

[www.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com)



*Dramatic Publishing*

311 Washington St.  
Woodstock, IL 60098  
phone: 800-448-7469  
815-338-7170



Printed on recycled paper

# A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES

By  
BARRY KORNHAUSER

Based on the collection of poems of the same title  
by  
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Optional music  
by  
SCOTT DEPOY



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

**\*\*\* NOTICE \*\*\***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY 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.dramaticpublishing.com](http://www.dramaticpublishing.com), or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, 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.

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.

©MMXII by  
BARRY KORNHAUSER

Printed in the United States of America  
*All Rights Reserved*  
(A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES)

ISBN: 978-1-58342-81-8

## IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play must give credit to the author 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 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 (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs.

*In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with  
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois”

In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

*“A Child’s Garden of Verses was conceived and commissioned  
by Alliance Theatre, Atlanta, Ga.”*

*A Child's Garden of Verses* premiered March 22, 2011, at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta Georgia.

### **Original Cast**

Actor 1 . . . . . Bernard Jones  
Actor 2 . . . . . Holly Stevenson  
Actor 3 . . . . . Denise Arribas  
Actor 4/Musician . . . . . Scott DePoy

### **Original Production Staff**

Director . . . . . Rosemary Newcott  
Composer . . . . . Scott DePoy  
Scenic Designer . . . . . Kat Conley  
Costume Designer . . . . . Jeanne Fore  
Props Manager . . . . . Robert Elliott  
Stage Manager . . . . . Olivia Aston  
Assistant Stage Manager . . . . . Becca Potter

## INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

*A Child's Garden of Verses*, inspired by the Robert Louis Stevenson collection of poems of the same name, is an interactive play to be performed for very young children (and their parents or caregivers) with a maximum audience size of no more than 20 to 30 participants. It is designed to be a cultural garden of sorts in which we help grow our audiences' imaginations. In the process, the children themselves will be given opportunities to become gardeners—nurturers—not only of flowers, but of our actors and even a puppet character or two. Finally, the work is intended to celebrate both childhood and play, just as Robert Louis Stevenson did in so many of his poems.

Those poems selected for this play may be treated as spoken-word pieces or songs, and a combination of both is best. Sometimes in the pages that follow, the decision about a poem's treatment is suggested; other times it is left entirely to the discretion of the director and company whether a piece is spoken or sung. Producers can choose to create their own music for the piece, but composer Scott DePoy created wonderful tunes for the premier production at the Alliance Theatre. This music is available from the composer by email: [scott.depoy@gmail.com](mailto:scott.depoy@gmail.com); phone: (404) 237-1246; or by writing him at 1239 Newbridge Trace, Atlanta, GA 30319. The underscoring of segments of the play not directly musicalized is also a welcomed addition anywhere it is found appropriate.

There are some instances when the words of RLS' poetry are not heard at all, but rather serve only to inform actions. It should be noted that dramatic license has been taken with a few poems and a word or two changed to better suit the needs of the play. These minor changes are all annotated. Furthermore, there is occasional dialogue that is entirely original, not RLS' poetry at all, included



for the purposes of clarity and to help build the few simple rudiments of story.

Puppet characters have been mentioned. There is a bird puppet—a mother robin, manipulated by Actor 3. The robin in the Alliance production was a hand puppet with some mobility of head and wings, and this worked well. It may be helpful if this puppet is able to “roost” in a tree without support. Another puppet creation required is a nest of newly hatched baby robins. Again, the Alliance devised this as a hand puppet also, the nest sitting around the operator’s wrist (again Actor 3), fingers inside the hatchlings’ bodies, making their heads bob up and down, beaks wide open and facing upward, as if reaching to be fed. (Another possibility would be for this nest to be an automaton, operated by a visible crank that, when turned, causes the hatchlings’ heads to do the “haphazard” bobbing.) These babies will make one final appearance as the audience is leaving the playing space, now as fledglings flying overhead. This could be simply accomplished by a separate “flock” of these young birds dangling from the spokes of an umbrella without a canopy, held by an actor over the heads of our guests. Finally, there is the character of the “Old Gardener.” One very good option is to have this role played as a “main prenante” or “human-arm” marotte-style puppet manipulated quite openly by Actor 2. (It could also be a full-body puppet perhaps 3/4 life-size and fully articulated, again with no attempt to conceal its manipulation. Actor 2 would be fully visible operating it, with one hand holding the puppet and the other controlling its actions. For example, if the puppet is pouring a watering can, Actor 2 holds that can in the puppet’s hand and manipulates its motions.) It is, of course, also possible that the Old Gardener not be a puppet at all, just a role played by Actor 2 with some costume accouterment to distinguish the character.

Regarding the playing space, we should be aiming, perhaps in bits and pieces, for a whimsical English garden (circa 1885). It will feature “a number of things” one would expect to find there—a harvesting basket (to be filled with raked leaves), a section of white picket fence surrounding the musician’s station up-stage to one side, various garden implements as needed, a pail, a picnic basket, and three fruit crates of various sizes. These crates will be used to build a “ship” during the play and can also later become a birdbath and a sundial unless the design team would prefer the actual items to help establish the setting.

There should also be a small, flat wooden wagon (perhaps wheelbarrow-like in its operation), a rolling platform for an old-fashioned proscenium-style toy stage, with a working curtain that can be drawn open and closed by a simple pulley system.

UC there is an apple tree, its leaves already beginning to turn their autumnal colors. And tied to that tree is a fabric hammock in which the Old Gardener puppet now lies asleep. Through the course of the play, this hammock will transform into a sail, a picnic tablecloth and a “shadow.” Behind the tree is a window. (It can be free-standing, but it might be useful for this window to be built into a small flat painted as the wall of a garden shed. This would provide a place for hidden prop storage and for actors to conceal themselves upon exiting.)

And there may be flowers, of course. But they are not entirely realistic ones; they can instead be a bit hyperrealistic, colorful and fun. Some might even look surprisingly like alphabet letters. (This is, after all, a garden of verses.) There will also be a row of tilled “soil,” ready for planting.

As children will be occasionally tempted to wander about the garden, and welcomed to do so, there may be cause to bring certain items into the space only as needed and taken away when

not. Those that would remain need to be somehow “child-proofed,” and there should be no production elements that could inadvertently hurt a youngster (roses, yes; thorns, no). Although this is not quite “promenade”-style theatre, experience has shown that it may indeed prove a “toddle”-style approximation in which the actors should expect the unexpected and be prepared to improvisationally modify their blocking as needed.

Both research and experience have demonstrated that during a play for the very young, it is wise to do one thing at a time. This is because early learners tend to be “hyperaware,” with absolutely everything being of interest to them. If we want the children to pay particular attention to something we are doing at a given moment, it is best that we do all we can to concentrate their attention on that something. Lighting can help, so can the focus of the actors, as will being careful to isolate and place full emphasis on whatever stage business is being featured at a given time. (We want a one-ring, not a three-ring, circus.) It is also a good idea to take our time with shifts of focus, and that the show’s tempo, particularly in moments of transition from one sequence to another, be slow and deliberate.

# A Child's Garden of Verses

## CHARACTERS

Roles are suggested below.

ACTOR 1 (m), also plays TOM

ACTOR 2 (w), also serves as puppeteer of male OLD GARDENER puppet or plays OLD GARDENER

ACTOR 3 (w), also serves as puppeteer of female BIRD puppet.

ACTOR 4 (m) referred to henceforth as ACTOR/MUSICIAN

These actors, along with their director, should look for opportunities within the script to discover and invent for themselves. They should, above all, play.

## Some POST-SHOW Possibilities

Once the families exit the garden, there can be a variety of post-show activities available to them in the anteroom. These might include:

- (1) having one of the actors read aloud some other of the Robert Louis Stevenson poems from a richly illustrated edition of *A Child's Garden of Verses*.
- (2) constructing a simple puppet—perhaps of a bird, maybe even a shadow-puppet version.
- (3) having fun with shadows—even made through hand shapes or with shadow puppets.
- (4) engaging in simple gardening tasks like raking leaves or shoveling “earth” in a sand table, with child-sized tools.

# A Child's Garden of Verses

## The "Invitation"

*(As audience members enter an "anteroom," they find ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN playing on a guitar, mandolin, or other such instrument. All of the other actors are sitting, crouching, or kneeling, busy at work on some garden task. Eye-level to the children, these actors individually greet different arriving family units, introducing themselves and thanking the guests for coming to visit our garden which they indicate is at the end of a visible path. Each child is given a seed and the parent is given a small slip of paper on which is typed one of the following words—"world," "so," "full," "things," "we," "all," "be," "happy" or "kings." These words, they will later discover, are from the RLS poem:*

### HAPPY THOUGHT

The world is so full of a number of things,  
I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings.

*One adult per family is also given a cloth satchel to wear over a shoulder. It contains several items that the family will be asked to use during the performance—a packet of seeds and as many natural "treasures" as there are children in that family. [These treasures include such items as seashells, pine cones, dried bean*

*Pods, etc.] The actors, wearing similar satchels, then hand each family a small flowerpot with instructions to plant both the seed and the word in it. [The pot should be partially filled with a dark rubber mulch.] Once the seed and piece of paper are planted, the actors put each flowerpot on the toy proscenium stage wagon. When all have been met and the wagon is full, an actor speaks.)*

ACTOR 1 (*quietly, to ACTOR 2*). Shhhhh. (*He looks carefully at the flowerpots. Then at the audience.*) They're growing. (*Again to ACTOR 2.*) We mustn't disturb them. (*He draws closed the curtains of the little stage.*)

ACTOR 2 (*to ACTOR 1*). But to grow, don't seeds need sunlight?

*(ACTOR 1 considers this, then solves the problem by turning on a tiny stage light on a miniature boom, focused onto the curtained stage. Alternatively, he could remove a flashlight from his satchel and shine it down behind the curtain.)*

ACTOR 1 (*after studying the stage*). What will the seeds grow into?

ACTOR 2. Flowers.

ACTOR 1. What will the words grow into?

ACTOR 2 (*even after a moment of thought, but still unsure*). Poems?

ACTOR 1. Do poems also need sunlight to grow?

ACTOR 2 (*after another moment*). I don't think so.

ACTOR 1. Then what do they need?

ACTOR 2 (*yet another moment*). Imagination?

ACTOR 1. Where can we find that?

ACTOR 2 (*one last moment of thought*). In the garden?

*(ACTOR 1 nods in agreement. ACTOR 3 starts handing out pillows with floral patterns to the audience members, telling them that they can sit on these once inside.)*

ACTOR 1. What are you doing?

ACTOR 3. Giving them their pillows.

ACTOR 2. Pillows? In a garden?!

ACTOR 3. Why, of course. Haven't you ever heard of a flowerbed?

*(The audience members, pillows in hand, are told by ACTORS 1 and 2 to follow them on the path into the garden, while leaving the stage wagon behind. This "path" leads them between two tall hedges or trellises. As they cross through, they smell fragrant floral scents and listen to the call of a bird. The head of the BIRD puppet, manipulated by ACTOR 3, pops through the hedge now and again with a whistle, but each time, upon seeing the visitors, gives a cry and retreats [- or "retweets"]. The music has continued throughout.)*

*[If an anteroom does not exist, all of the above action can take place in the garden itself. ACTOR 2's line above "In the garden?" would be changed to "Here, in the garden?"]*



## THE PLAY

*(Once inside the garden and settled onto their pillows in a proscenium-style area henceforth referred to as the "flowerbed," the peek-a-boo game with the BIRD continues. As ACTOR 2 takes her place by the OLD GARDENER puppet, ACTOR 1 helps the children spot the BIRD who flies off shyly each time she is spotted. It would be fun to have her appear in all sorts of odd places, i.e., from out of a flowerpot, for example. Eventually, she might even appear right behind ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN now at his station, and, if the children gesture and call out her whereabouts, the BIRD would of course hide each time this actor turned to look for her, thus avoiding his detection. Finally, in her beak, she might grab a [fake] violin bow from ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN's station and fly to safety high up in the apple tree. There she spots the OLD GARDENER sleeping in a hammock. The BIRD looks curiously at the man, up toward the audience, and back toward the man. Then, having come to a decision, she puts down the bow, and hops onto a windowsill upstage of the hammock and very near the man's snoring head. She gives a nod to ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN who begins singing.)*

ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN.

*(Poem: "A TIME TO RISE")*

A birdie with a yellow bill  
Hopped upon the window sill,  
Cocked her\* shining eye and said:

## ACTOR 3

*(turning her and the BIRD's attention to the sleeper).*

"Ain't you 'shamed, you sleepyhead!"

*[\*The actual line in the poem reads:*

*"Cocked his shining eye..."]*

*(ACTOR 3, manipulating the BIRD puppet, blows loudly into a whistle that she wears around her neck—the BIRD's voice. [She may wear a few different whistles to create a variety of robin "calls."]) The OLD GARDENER wakes with a start, upturning the hammock, and toppling out onto the ground, perhaps with a sound effect provided by ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN.*

*He gets up with some difficulty, brushes himself off, notices the BIRD and tries to shoo her away with a small planting stick he removes from his satchel. The sight of the stick excites the BIRD. She repeatedly swoops toward it, deftly avoiding the OLD GARDENER's swings, and finally grabs the stick in her beak, an action that sets the man into a dizzying spin, as she flies away happily.*

*Recovering, the OLD GARDENER shakes his fist in the exiting BIRD's direction, and then dismisses this. He removes a second planting stick and a packet of seeds from his satchel, and sets to work. He "digs" a small hole by poking his stick at the ground, places a seed in it, covers it over, and then moves on to the next.*

*ACTOR 1 begins to watch him. He comes over, taps the OLD GARDENER on the shoulder, then crosses around him. The OLD GARDENER turns to find no one, then turns back to continue his planting, only to be surprised to find ACTOR 1, now TOM [as indicated by some costume accouterment, one that has the letter "T" or the word "TOM" on it], standing in front of him. He lets out a little shriek and then grumpily returns to task.)*

ACTOR 1/TOM. Hello, sir. *(The OLD GARDENER ignores him.)* Good morning, I say! *(A grunt of a reply.)* And how are you this fine day? *(No response. ACTOR 1 addresses the audience.)*

*(Excerpt from poem: "THE GARDENER")*

The gardener does not love to talk,  
He makes me keep the gravel walk;

*(The OLD GARDENER shoos TOM to the "gravel walk.")*

And when he puts his tools away,

*(The OLD GARDENER looks at him with a mixture of annoyance and suspicion, and exits with his tool—the stick.)*

He locks the door and takes the key.

ACTOR 3 *(wheeling in the wagon with the toy stage on it, addressing ACTOR 1).* Never you mind. We have plantings of our own.

*(ACTOR 2 runs back in without the OLD GARDENER puppet, but with a pinwheel flower hidden behind her back. At the wagon she meets ACTOR 1 [who has his flashlight at the ready, if one is used.] Each stands at one side of the stage. They look at it, then, with great anticipation, at each other, and then back at the stage.)*

ACTOR 1 *(addressing the flowerpots that are hidden behind the stage curtain)*. Flowers, did you grow yet?

ACTOR 2 *(similarly)*. Poems, did you grow yet?

*(They draw open the curtains, and lean in for a closer look [perhaps even utilizing the flashlight] only to find the flowerpots unchanged. They look at each other and shake their heads.)*

BOTH ACTORS. No.

*(ACTOR 3 closes the curtain and pulls the wagon back out.)*

ACTOR 2.

Do you think in half an hour  
a seed can grow into a flower?  
A fragile flower just like this

*(She reveals her pinwheel flower.)*

that the breezes like to kiss?

*(She blows gently on it, but the pinwheel flower doesn't spin. She tries harder and harder, without success. AC-*

*TOR 1 then produces a little "church" fan and waves it at the pinwheel flower, setting it in motion. ACTOR 2 is delighted, but then the generated wind blows her and the flower away! Surprised, ACTOR 1 turns the fan on himself and is also blown offstage by it. ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN begins to play and sing, as the wind builds.)*

ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN.

*(Excerpt from poem: "THE WIND")*

Wind!

O Wind!

I saw you toss the kites on high

*(ACTOR 1 reenters, pulled by a blowing kite on a [stiffened] string.)*

And blow the birds about the sky;

*(ACTOR 3 reenters, her BIRD puppet buffeted about by the wind.)*

And all around I heard you pass,  
Like ladies' skirts across the grass—

*(ACTOR 2 reenters, pulled by an umbrella the canopy of which has been inverted by the powerful wind. All three actors are now circling the stage, dancing the wind.)*

ALL.

O wind, a-blowing all day long,  
O wind, that sings so loud a song!

*(During the next verse, ACTOR 2 continues to be blown about, led by the umbrella. ACTOR 1's kite gets caught in the tree, and the wind blows him away from it and downstage toward one side of the audience. ACTOR 3 is blown downstage opposite, without BIRD. She reveals a church fan of her own to ACTOR 1. They both begin fanning the audience as the song continues, crossing opposite, ending where the other began.)*

ACTORS 1, 3 & ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN.

I saw the different things you did,  
But always you yourself you hid.  
I felt your push, I heard you call,  
I could not see yourself at all—

*(During the above, ACTOR 2 is blown off and back on again, her umbrella now stripped of its canopy, victim of the wind. She grabs the tree for support.)*

ALL.

O wind, a-blowing all day long,  
O wind, that sings so loud a song!

*(ACTOR 1 fans himself offstage, first grabbing the kite to take with him. ACTOR 2 is blown from the tree. Its leaves blow off with her! Just before she exits, she grabs the harvesting basket and takes it with her. ACTOR 3, waving her fan behind her, blows herself across the stage. She manages to hold steady and calls out to the others.)*

ACTOR 3. The wind's at our backs, mateys! Set sail!

*(The hammock fabric is turned into a sail and fastened to a mast [- perhaps the apple tree]. Pillows and crates are gathered by ACTORS 1, 2 and 3 who build a sailing ship around the mast during the first verse of the song below. The ACTORS will be its crew, ACTOR 3 its captain.)*

ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN.

*(Excerpt from poem: "A GOOD PLAY")*

We built a ship upon the stairs  
 All made of the back-bedroom chairs,  
 And filled it full of sofa pillows  
 To go a-sailing on the billows.

*(The ship complete, all of the ACTORS perform nautical gestures as they continue singing.)*

We sailed along for days and days,  
 And had the very best of plays;  
 But Tom fell out and hurt his knee...

*("Tom"—ACTOR 1—falls out, knocked "overboard" by ACTOR 3 who, in her enthusiasm, swings her arms wide open. [Her other arm just misses ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN who wisely abandons ship, retreating a few steps away to safety.] For a moment we don't know ACTOR 1's fate. He is fine, but when he sees the others' concern, he milks his non-injury for all it's worth. ACTOR 2 sympathetically helps him offstage. [She could even put him in a lifeboat—the wheelbarrow-like rolling platform, now without its toy theatre—to cart him offstage,*

*powered by the wind of his fan.] ACTOR 3 is left all by herself on the boat.)*

## ACTOR 3

*(sadly, as the music draws to a close).*

...So there was no one left...but me.

*(She is very forlorn, and sits down sadly on her abandoned ship. After a moment, ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN approaches her.)*

## ACTOR 4/MUSICIAN.

*(Excerpt from poem: "THE LITTLE LAND,"  
sung a cappella)*

When at home alone I sit

And am very tired of it,

I have just to **shut my eyes**

To go sailing through the skies—

To go sailing far away

To the pleasant Land of Play;

To the fairy land afar

*(and with a gesture and glance at the children)*

Where the Little People are.

*(Continuing, to ACTOR 3.) Shut your eyes. (He and the returning ACTORS 1 and 2 very quietly encourage adult and child audience members to board the ship, being sure to take their pillows. When a "full" crew has been assembled, he continues.) Now open your eyes!*

ACTOR 3 *(seeing her new shipmates, her spirits instantly raised).* New friends!