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Dramatic Publishing

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A Radio Play in Two Acts

By

PHILIP GRECIAN

Based on the film by

Frank Capra

Manuscript Version



Dramatic Publishing

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It's a Wonderful Life - The Radio Play, by Philip Grecian, based on the film by Frank Capra, was first produced at The Hussey Playhouse in the Topeka Performing Arts Center, Topeka, Kansas, on November 28, 2003, under the direction of Karen Hastings with the following cast (in order of appearance):

THE BOSS / FREDDY / CHAIRMAN John Hanna
 JOSEPH / SHERIFF / MAN Raymond Remp Jr.
 CLARENCE ODDBODY / MR. POTTER / ANNOUNCER . . . Philip Grecian
 YOUNG GEORGE / TOMMY Samuel Real
 YOUNG HARRY / YOUNG PETER BAILEY Zakary Hutchison
 YOUNG MARY / ZUZU Karly Hanna
 YOUNG VIOLET / JANIE Lauren Shoemaker
 MR. GOWER / MR. BAILEY / UNCLE BILLY George Paris
 TILLY / VIOLET BICK / SECRETARY Kirsten Hanna
 GEORGE BAILEY John Shoemaker
 MRS. BAILEY / MRS. HATCH Karen Hastings
 HARRY BAILEY / NICK / BERT THE COP Russ Hutchison
 ERNIE BISHOP / MR. MARTINI / MARTY HATCH/ CARTER
 Fred Salazar
 MARY HATCH-BAILEY / HORTENSE Melissa Boyer

It's a Wonderful Life had an encore stage production at The Hussey Playhouse a year later, beginning December 3, 2004, aired live on KMAJ-AM, December 4, 2004, under the direction of Karen Hastings with the following cast (in order of appearance):

GEORGE BAILEY John Shoemaker
 MR. GOWER / MICKEY / ERNIE BISHOP / TOM Raymond Remp Jr.
 MR. POTTER / JOSEPH / SAM / MARTINI / ANNOUNCER . . Philip Grecian
 YOUNG GEORGE / TOMMY Samuel Real
 YOUNG HARRY / YOUNG PETER BAILEY Zakary Hutchison
 YOUNG MARY / ZUZU Karly Hanna
 YOUNG VIOLET / JANIE Lauren Shoemaker
 CLARENCE / FREDDY / UNCLE BILLY Cliff Alfrey
 VIOLET / RUTH / MRS. BAILEY / MRS. DAVIS / WOMAN 1. . Kirsten Hanna
 BOSS / MR. BAILEY / MR. PARTRIDGE / CHAIRMAN / WELCH
 David Tangeman

TILLY / MRS. HATCH / HELEN / MRS. THOMPSON
 Karen Hastings
 HARRY BAILEY / BERT THE COP / REINEMAN / NICK / CHARLIE Russ
 Hutchison
 CARTER / JOE / SHERIFF / MARTY / POTTER'S SECRETARY
 Allan Hazlett
 MARY HATCH-BAILEY / HORTENSE Melissa Boyer

PRODUCTION STAFF AND CREW

HEAD FOLEY (SOUND) Ute Mueller
 FOLEY CREW Karen Gutzwiller, Shawn Curtis, Rachel Holmes
 MUSIC / KEYBOARDS Joseph Kampsen (2003),
 Elaine Wellborn (2004)
 MICROPHONE / LIGHT TECH. Beverly Johnson
 LIGHT / P.A. DESIGN Adam Jenks
 BOX OFFICE / MARKETING Kacy Douglas, Heath Wilson

NOTES FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

Staged radio drama is often more economical than full-stage productions, but there are several things to consider before going into rehearsal:

1. Everything depends on sound. Never cast an actor because of his or her physical presence. Cast the actor because of what s/he can do vocally. Many of the actors from the golden age of radio looked not at all the way they sounded.
2. Don't worry about costuming your actors to look like the characters they play. That's not the point. If you must have costuming, concentrate on the fashions of the 1940s, when radio was in its golden age.
3. Remind your actors that the voice must carry it all. A scowl or a posture is fine for the audience in attendance, and it may be necessary for your actors to establish character, but in the final evaluation, everything is in the voice.
4. Try to cast actors who can do multiple voices and accents. On-site audiences are fascinated to watch a single actor play multiple characters.
5. Music is terrifically important. It sets mood, moves your story from one location to another, one time to another, and it gives your audience clues regarding how they are supposed to relate to a scene. Do not try to produce radio drama without it. We use a single keyboard in our productions, sometimes with an organ sound, sometimes with a piano sound. In the case of *It's a Wonderful Life*, the piano seemed to work best.
6. The real visual drama for the on-site audience is in watching the sound effects crew. Make sure they, and their various apparatuses, are clearly seen.

7. Try never to use pre-recorded sound. It robs the audience of the experience of seeing how a sound is produced.
8. A pause that may be effective in a play with costumes, lights, sound and makeup will be an eternity in a radio drama. Shorten pauses or eliminate them entirely. Always keep energy high. Always.
9. Some actors are more comfortable when they can make eye contact with those with whom they are acting. In our ongoing annual production of *It's a Wonderful Life*, George Bailey has some scenes with Mary Hatch-Bailey and Mr. Potter that involve eye contact. It helps the actors.
10. In the commercial breaks written into the script, consider actually selling commercial time to local merchants and dramatizing commercials written specifically for your production. It helps with the production budget, and audiences love it.

While I have written any number of original dramas, I have written my share of adaptations, and have come to realize that the most important aspect of adaptation is to remain true to the spirit, if not the letter, of the original. You know, as a writer of adaptations, that you have done your job when people say, "It was just exactly the film (or book)," when you know that, in fact, it isn't.

It's a Wonderful Life is the one I have written that is closest to the original inspiration, but it is not, by any means identical. It can't and mustn't be. Moving from one medium to another dictates changes.

Some cues in the film are visual, and in radio, the visuals must be conveyed through sound, music and dialogue.

Some plot problems in the original film aren't noticed until the story is stripped down to sound only. It was necessary, for instance, for Joseph to explain to Clarence why he must wait before entering into George's world:

JOSEPH. It's not that easy. All that we've seen here has taken place in the past, remember?

CLARENCE. Oh. That's right.

JOSEPH. Once we catch up to the present, that will be your moment to act.

There is also a character in the film, Cousin Eustace, who is irrelevant to the story. Dialogue would have to be created simply to explain his presence. It is easier to eliminate the character, and I'm willing to bet that, had I not mentioned it here, you wouldn't have noticed Eustace's absence.

There are several aspects of the film that fell by the wayside because of this difference in media, including Clarence's copy of *Tom Sawyer*, the "George Lassoing the Moon" cartoon illustration and the "Hee-Haw" business among the boys who grew up in Bedford Falls.

And there are sections of the film that slow down the action. They are excised. You are likely not to miss them unless you compare the film to this script.

Some of the dialogue is from the original screenplay, but much of it is rewritten for audio theatre.

There is a phenomenon we noticed in our first staged radio adaptation (*Dracula!*) that has carried through to the others: Many audience members will sit with their eyes closed, creating the radio experience for themselves. When we first noticed it, we thought they were falling asleep! Then we would see them suddenly look up toward the sound effects crew to see how a particular sound was created. Once they were satisfied, their heads would drop and their eyes would close again. They were experiencing theatre of the mind, literally.

It was difficult in our original production, for John Shoemaker, as George, and me as Potter, to get past Jimmy Stewart and Lionel Barrymore, so at the very first read-through that's how we played them. Once we got them out of our systems, we found different ways to approach the characters. It is important not to do imitations of the actors in the film, but rather, to approach these characters in original ways.

The original company loves doing this show. At this writing we have done it three years running and are planning a fourth year, at which point we may retire it for a season or two, then bring it back. Each year we have aired one evening's performance on a local radio station, in order to give a wider audience a taste of old-time radio. It is a natural part of our development process. Next season we will simulcast with a radio station and the local public television station.

If you have never staged radio drama before, you are about to make a startling and rewarding discovery, and so is your audience. The Golden Age of radio drama may have ended forty years or so ago, but, with your participation, the Silver Age is just beginning.

— Philip Grecian

IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

A Radio Play in Two Acts

For as few as 7 men, 3 women, two boys, two girls
Playing 63 speaking roles,
plus crowds, mobs, clientele, passersby

CHARACTERS

P.A. VOICE in the radio studio. Unseen (played by the stage manager)
CALL-LETTER SINGERS in the radio studio
ANNOUNCER radio announcer
MR. GOWER the Bedford Falls druggist
MRS. BAILEY George Bailey's mother
BERT THE COP a close friend of George's
ERNIE BISHOP cabdriver and George's friend
MARY HATCH-BAILEY George's wife
ZUZU BAILEY George's youngest daughter
THE BOSS a big man in heaven
JOSEPH an angel
CLARENCE ODDBODY George's guardian angel
YOUNG GEORGE BAILEY George as a boy. He works at Gower Drug
YOUNG HARRY BAILEY Harry as a boy. George saves his life
YOUNG MARY HATCH . . . the little girl who will grow up to marry George
YOUNG VIOLET BICK . . a precocious little girl who likes every boy she sees
TILLY the secretary at Bailey Building & Loan
HENRY F. POTTER the richest man in the county
MR. BAILEY George's father
GEORGE BAILEY a man with a wonderful life
JOE owner of a luggage store
HARRY BAILEY George's brother
VIOLET BICK . . . likes every man she sees, but has always secretly loved George
SAM WAINWRIGHT George's wealthy friend who left Bedford Falls
MR. PARTRIDGE the school principal
MARTY HATCH Mary's older brother
FREDDIE Mary's hopeless date at the dance
MICKEY a troublemaker
MAN ON PORCH witness to love
UNCLE BILLY George's befuddled uncle
CHAIRMAN chairman of the board, Bailey Building & Loan

MAN AT BOARD MEETING member of the board
 ANOTHER MAN AT BOARD MEETING. member of the board
 RUTH DAKIN BAILEY Harry's new wife
 MRS. HATCH Mary's nosy mother
 ED has an account at Bailey Building & Loan
 CHARLIE has an account at Bailey Building & Loan
 TOM has an account at Bailey Building & Loan
 MAN IN BUILDING & LOAN MOB . . . has an account at Bailey Building &
 Loan
 MRS. THOMPSON has an account at Bailey Building & Loan
 WOMAN IN BUILDING & LOAN MOB . has an account at Bailey Building &
 Loan
 MAN 2 IN BUILDING & LOAN MOB . . has an account at Bailey Building &
 Loan
 MRS. DAVIS has an account at Bailey Building & Loan
 POTTER'S SECRETARY office gatekeeper for Henry Potter
 MR. REINEMAN. collects rents for Henry Potter
 MR. CARTER a frosty bank examiner
 HORTENSE. a bank teller
 JANIE BAILEY. George's oldest daughter
 PETER BAILEY II George's oldest son
 TOMMY BAILEY George's youngest son
 MAN AT MARTINI'S RESTAURANT. a diner
 MARTINI. an ebullient Italian restaurateur
 NICK. a bartender at Martini's
 WELCH. a customer at Martini's
 MAN ON THE STREET . . tells George that the Bailey Building & Loan is no
 more
 OSGOOD a public library employee
 HELEN. a public library employee
 MAN 1 NEAR LIBRARY a witness
 WOMAN 1 NEAR LIBRARY a witness
 MAN 2 NEAR LIBRARY a witness
 WOMAN 2 NEAR LIBRARY a witness
 SHERIFF has a warrant for George's arrest
 REPORTER with the Bedford Falls Courier

PLACE: Bedford Falls, and, for a few horrible hours, Pottersville. Somewhere
 in New York state.

TIME: Before, during, and just after World War II.

ACT ONE

SETTING: A radio studio. Doors R and L. A control booth window at an angle from UC to ULC, with an “On Air” light above. A platform DL where the keyboard player sits. DR is an array of sound-effects machines and tables with sound equipment. There is a couch and a coffee table UC, a counter area UR with water pitchers and cups. Chairs and incidental tables scattered. Downstage are three microphones evenly spaced. The light plot is simple: A general wash for the beginning and end of Act One and the beginning of Act Two, the ability to independently dim the lights upstage and downstage, and the ability to spot each of the microphones.

AT RISE: Sound-effects crew enters and crosses to equipment. Keyboard player enters. Actors enter one at a time and in groups. Some carry scripts.

P.A. VOICE. Thirty seconds to air!

ALL (ad-lib). Thank you! (The ACTORS, ad-libbing, prepare. Some leaf through their scripts. Some pick up scripts from chairs and tables. Others sit or move to microphones.)

P.A. VOICE. In ten...

(The pace quickens as those ACTORS on microphones find places in their scripts and listen for the P.A. or watch the “On Air” light on the set.)

P.A. VOICE. 5...4...3...2...1...

(“On Air” light comes on.)

SINGERS *(sing call letters in four-part harmony)*. “W- - -!”

MUSIC: Theme, “After the Ball,” establish and under.

ANNOUNCER. Broadcasting from the *(call letters)* Studios and through the sponsorship of *(names of sponsors)*, the *(name of producing group)* Radio Players present Frank Capra’s classic *It’s a Wonderful Life* adapted for radio by Philip Grecian. Our story in a moment, but first, a word from our sponsor.

MUSIC: “After the Ball,” up and end.

(Commercial here.)

MUSIC: Theme, “After the Ball,” up, establish and under.

ANNOUNCER. And now...*It’s a Wonderful Life!*

MUSIC: “After the Ball” segue to heavenly celeste- style music establish and under.

SFX: Glass wind chimes.

(Audio note: Voices in this first sequence are echoed, including dialogue among angels. Prayers are being sent up to heaven in a sustained vocal montage. Cues must be tight.)

GOWER. I owe everything to George Bailey, help him, Lord.

MRS. BAILEY. Please, God, help my son, George.

BERT. He never thinks about himself, sir, that’s why he’s in trouble now.

ERNIE. George is a good guy. Give him a break, God.

MARY. I love him, Lord. Watch over him for me.

ZUZU. Dear God, please bring Daddy back. Thank you. Your friend,
Zuzu.

MUSIC: Heavenly music swells, then under.

SFX: Wind chimes tinkle.

THE BOSS. Hello, Joseph. Trouble?

JOSEPH. The name “George Bailey” keeps turning up.

THE BOSS. Yes. I know.

JOSEPH. We should probably send someone down.

THE BOSS. Whose turn is it?

JOSEPH. Clarence...the clockmaker.

THE BOSS. Oh, Clarence. He still doesn't have his wings, does he?

JOSEPH. He doesn't have much going for him at all, sir.

THE BOSS. But he has faith, Joseph...a strong and simple faith. Seems to me that's exactly what George Bailey needs right now. Send for Clarence.

MUSIC: Glissando.

CLARENCE. You wanted to see me, sir?

THE BOSS. Yes, Clarence. Someone needs our help. His name is George Bailey, and he's about to throw away God's greatest gift.

CLARENCE. His life?

THE BOSS. His life.

CLARENCE. Oh dear!

THE BOSS. It will be your mission, Clarence, to change his mind.

CLARENCE (*in rapture*). I have a mission! Um...sir...if I should accomplish my mission...might I perhaps have my wings? It's been nearly two hundred years now... and...well...people are beginning to talk.

THE BOSS. Clarence, you do a good job and you'll get your wings.

CLARENCE. Oh, thank you, sir!

THE BOSS. Now, no time to lose...Joseph?

JOSEPH. Sir?

THE BOSS. I'm turning this over to you. Brief Clarence on his mission.

JOSEPH. Yes sir.

THE BOSS. I have my eye on some sparrows I must attend to. (*Fading.*)
Good luck, Clarence!

CLARENCE. Thank you, sir!

MUSIC: Harp effect to note exit.

JOSEPH. Now then, Clarence, let's go back in time a bit for some background on George Bailey.

MUSIC: Harp gliss.

(Voices of children fade in over gliss and stay under following dialogue. Note: JOSEPH and CLARENCE remain slightly echoed. The children's voices are not echoed.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Come on, Harry!

JOSEPH. That's him...George Bailey. Twelve years old.

CLARENCE. They're sliding in the snow...down the hill.

JOSEPH. ...and across the icy pond.

CLARENCE. Riding on...snow shovels!

JOSEPH. It's a contest...to see who can slide the farthest.

YOUNG GEORGE *(mock-announcing)*. Aaaand stepping up to the starting gate, my kid brother, Harry Bailey!

YOUNG HARRY. I'm not scared, George. *(But he is.)*

OTHER CHILDREN *(in background. Ad-lib)*. "Come on, Harry!"
"Attaboy, Harry!", etc.

YOUNG GEORGE. Go, Harry! Go!

YOUNG HARRY *(uncertain)*. Here I...goooooooooooo!

YOUNG GEORGE. There goes the scare baby! My kid brother,
Haarrrrryy Baiillleey!

CLARENCE. Oh! He's going much farther than the others! And faster!

JOSEPH. Out where the ice is thin.

SFX: Ice cracking.

MUSIC: Dangerous sting.

CLARENCE. The ice is breaking!

YOUNG HARRY. George!

MUSIC: Excitement.

SFX: Splash.

CHILDREN (*ad-lib. Excitement. "Harry!" "Somebody save him!" "What'll we do?", etc.*)

CLARENCE. He's fallen in! He's gone under!

YOUNG GEORGE. I'm comin', Harry!

SFX: Splash.

CLARENCE. George...George is jumping in! Where is he?

SFX: Splashing, up and under.

CLARENCE. There he is! He's got Harry!

YOUNG GEORGE. Make a chain! Lie flat on the ice, make a chain!

CLARENCE. They're pulling him out!

MUSIC: Bridge.

SFX: Wind chimes.

JOSEPH. George saved his brother's life that day...but he caught a bad cold, and the infection cost him the hearing in his left ear. It was weeks before he could return to his after-school job at Gower's Drugstore.

SFX: Door opens. A small old-fashioned bell on a looped wire tinkles. Door closes.

(Note: YOUNG HARRY may leave stage. He will be PETER in Act Two.)

YOUNG GEORGE. It's me, Mr. Gower...George Bailey!

CLARENCE. What's he doing? Playing with something bolted to the tobacco counter...

JOSEPH. Cigar lighter...a complementary light for customers.

CLARENCE. He doesn't smoke at his age!

JOSEPH *(with a chuckle)*. No...he dreams dreams and makes wishes...

CLARENCE. On a falling star?

JOSEPH. No...on that old cigar lighter. It's a tradition among the boys in Bedford Falls.

YOUNG GEORGE. Wish I had a million dollars.

SFX: Lighter clicks on. (Note: This is considerably larger than a standard lighter.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Hot dog!

CLARENCE. He'll get his wish!

JOSEPH. Hmmm.

YOUNG GEORGE. Mr. Gower...? You back there?

GOWER *(slightly off mike)*. You're late!

YOUNG GEORGE. Yes sir. Sorry.

YOUNG MARY. Hello, George.

YOUNG GEORGE. Oh...hi, Mary.

YOUNG MARY. I have a whole dime. I'm trying to decide between a soda and chocolate ice cream.

SFX: Door opens. Bell tinkles. Door closes.

YOUNG VIOLET. Hello, George!

YOUNG GEORGE. Hi, Violet.

YOUNG VIOLET (*sizing up a rival*). 'Lo, Mary.

YOUNG MARY (*primly*). Hello, Violet.

YOUNG VIOLET. Do you mind if I sit here at the soda fountain with you?

YOUNG MARY. Certainly not.

YOUNG GEORGE. The usual?

YOUNG VIOLET. Mary was here first.

YOUNG MARY. I'm still deciding.

YOUNG VIOLET. All right, then, two cents worth of licorice shoelaces.

YOUNG GEORGE (*confirmed*). The usual. I'll get 'em. Be right back.

YOUNG VIOLET. I like him!

YOUNG MARY. You like every boy you see!

YOUNG VIOLET. What's wrong with that? Oh! Here he comes!

YOUNG GEORGE. There you go, Violet.

YOUNG VIOLET (*honey dripping*). Thank you, George. Help me down off the stool? It's awfully high.

YOUNG GEORGE (*not buying it*). Uh huh.

YOUNG VIOLET (*sweetly*). Never mind!

SFX: Little girl's shoes land on floor.

YOUNG VIOLET. There! Did it myself! (*Gaily:*) Goodbye, Georgie!
(*Flatly:*) Goodbye, Mary.

YOUNG MARY. Goodbye, Violet.

SFX: Door opens. Bell tinkles. Door closes.

(Note: YOUNG VIOLET may leave stage until she becomes JANIE in Act Two.)

YOUNG GEORGE. Made up your mind yet?

YOUNG MARY. Chocolate ice cream.

YOUNG GEORGE. What? Sorry...talk into my good ear here.

YOUNG MARY. Chocolate ice cream.

YOUNG GEORGE. With coconut?

YOUNG MARY. I don't like coconut.

YOUNG GEORGE. You don't like coconut! Say, don't you know where coconuts come from?

YOUNG MARY. A coconut tree?

YOUNG GEORGE. No! (*He realizes she's right, though it's not the answer he wanted.*) Well yeah! But where is that tree?

YOUNG MARY. I don't know.

YOUNG GEORGE. Tahiti! Or the Fiji Islands...the Coral Sea! Look here!

SFX: Riffing of paper.

YOUNG GEORGE. *National Geographic* magazine! Only us explorers can get it! I been nominated for membership!

YOUNG MARY. Ooo.

YOUNG GEORGE. You just watch...I'm going out exploring some day.

YOUNG MARY (*all the faith in the world*). I know you will.

YOUNG GEORGE. Darn right. Hey, what's this under the counter? You drop this?

YOUNG MARY. No, George, I...

YOUNG GEORGE (*he fades away from mike as he says this line*). Hold on, I'll get it.

YOUNG MARY. George? (*Softly.*) Oh...this is your bad ear. (*A pause. Soft.*) I know you can't hear me with this ear...but I love you, George Bailey... I'll love you till the day I die. (*She realizes what she has said.*) Oh!

YOUNG GEORGE (*fading in*). Here it is. Looks like some kinda... telegram or somethin'. You drop this? Hey, what's the matter with you?