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Family Plays

THE UNDERCOVER LOVER

(The Substitute Servant)

Kabuki-style comedy by
David Grote



THE UNDERCOVER LOVER

(The Substitute Servant)

Kabuki-style comedy. By David Grote. 2m., 5w., extras. Either title may be used when you present this comic madness, a modification of a Kabuki farce from 15th-century Japan. It's a delightful taste of Oriental theatre for Western audiences. Ukyo, a badly henpecked husband, wants a night away from home. He wraps himself in a heavy blanket and tells his harridan of a wife that he is going to spend the night praying in their garden. When she goes to bed, he forces his servant to take his place under the blanket, and Ukyo slips out. Discovering the ruse, the wife takes the servant's place and awaits her husband's return. Everybody enjoys what happens next except poor Ukyo—and even he gets a “kick” out of it. A frequent contest winner for adult and young adult theatres, the Kabuki is the traditional theatre of the Japanese middle class; but, although many Americans have heard of the Kabuki, few have ever seen even a sampling. *The Undercover Lover* is an attempt to help fill this void. *A director's script is available that gives suggestions for simulating an Oriental staging of the play as well as details for producing an Americanized version. Since the intricacies and costumes of an authentic Japanese performance are beyond the experience of most American theatre groups and theatregoers, the Americanized version is likely to produce a more enjoyable product for both cast and audience, with many of the conventions retained in modified form. The orchestra: uses “found” instruments, such as a ratchet wrench, a tennis racket, a bird call, a file and spoon, a string of bells. Prop men: a group of three or four stage assistants dressed in black and, by convention, considered to be invisible. Costumes: exaggerated, ranging from the kimono to a sort of clown costume. Makeup: traditional white face of the mime or clown. Approximate running time: 25 to 35 minutes. Code: U38.*

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The Undercover Lover

THE UNDERCOVER LOVER

A One-Act Farce

Adapted from the Japanese by

DAVID GROTE

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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THE UNDERCOVER LOVER

Cast

UKYO (OO-kee-yo) – the middle-aged husband

TAMANOI (TAM-uh-noi) – his wife

TARO (TAY-roe) – his servant

CHIEDA (chee-AY-dah) – the wife's maid

SAEDA (sah-AY-da) – the wife's other maid

HANAKO (ha-NAH-koe) – the Other Woman

| | | |
|---------------|---|--|
| CHORUS LEADER | } | These roles may be played by as few as 4 males or females – or by as many as desired |
| CHORUS | | |
| PROP MEN | | |
| ORCHESTRA | | |

SETTING: A bare stage which will be Ukyo's house,
the Garden, and Hana ko's house, as required

TIME: Now . . . or then

PRODUCING THE PLAY

“The Undercover Lover” is a modification of a Japanese Kabuki comedy probably dating back to the fifteenth century. The Kabuki is the traditional theatre of the Japanese middle class; but, although many Americans have heard of the Kabuki, few have ever seen even a sampling. “The Undercover Lover” is an attempt to help fill this void.

The Director’s Production Script, which may be obtained from the publisher, gives suggestions for simulating an Oriental staging of the play as well as details for producing an Americanized version. Since the intricacies and costumes of an authentic Japanese performance are beyond the experience of most American theatre groups and theatregoers, the Americanized version is likely to produce a more enjoyable product for both cast and audience, with many of the conventions retained in modified form:

The Chorus and Orchestra may or may not be made up of the same group of performers. The Chorus sings, speaks in unison, and provides one solo speaker, the Chorus Leader. The Chorus sits on the floor in the Down Left area of the stage. The Orchestra accompanies the songs of the Chorus as well as mimed actions by the principal cast members. The “accompaniment,” however, is not the kind that Western audiences think of in terms of musical plays. The Orchestra uses “found” instruments — e.g., a ratchet wrench, a tennis racquet alternately rubbed across the strings or hit on the wood by a crescent wrench, a bird call, a file and spoon, a string of bells. The Director’s Production Script includes a musical score for the songs, with indications of rhythm for these unusual instruments. However, each producer is welcome to improvise original music if desired. All the songs given in this script may be sung by the Chorus while the actors pantomime the words; or the cast member may sing the song himself.

The Prop Men, in the Kabuki tradition, are a group of three or four stage assistants dressed in black. They are, by convention, considered to be invisible and may walk into the middle of a scene to place furniture or give an actor a needed property. Groups with limited personnel may let Chorus members double as Prop Men.

Makeup in the Kabuki is highly stylized. This feature should be retained in performing “The Undercover Lover.” However, rather than attempting the complex authentic Oriental makeup, the author recommends the traditional white face of the mime or the clown. Illustrations for suggested makeup are given in the Director’s Production Script.

Costumes should also be exaggerated. There are many options, ranging from the costly and symbolic kimono of the authentic kabuki to a sort of clown costume. The director may want to design his own costumes or use those illustrated in the Director’s Production Script.

No matter which of the many options are used for music, makeup, and costume, a production of “The Undercover Lover” is certain to be an enjoyable as well as educational experience for casts and audiences.

THE UNDERCOVER LOVER

[As the audience is taking their seats, the members of the ORCHESTRA enter individually and take their places to the Left of the performing area. They make a great show of "tuning" their various "instruments" (metal tools, tennis racket, etc.). If the CHORUS is a separate group of actors, they enter together and take their places near the Orchestra. Finally, the CHORUS LEADER enters and sits downstage of the Orchestra and Chorus. Lights dim. The LEADER signals, and the ORCHESTRA plays a great cacophonous chord, all instruments at once, and the play begins]

LEADER. *[Speaking to audience, with soft orchestral accompaniment]* All wars are over, the people are happy,

Peace rules the land, in city and home.

CHORUS. *[Singing]* Peace without, and peace within,

And peace within.

No storms can threaten the harmony

Of nation or home.

The happy family,

Husband and wife,

Are gentle as the spring winds,

And love is full-blown.

[UKYO enters and crosses to the downstage edge of the stage]

UKYO. *[To audience]* I am the Lord Ukyo. I live here in my lovely little home on the outskirts of the city. *[PROP MAN holds up sign saying HOME, or perhaps a drawing of a house]* I am happy, of course, but still, sometimes I think of the fine time I had out in the country not too long ago. Stayed at a little village near the lake, and met a girl named Hanako. She served me, poured my wine . . . took care of me, you know *[giggles slyly]*. Not very sophisticated, of course, but what a face, what a figure! And very warm-hearted, too. Why, when I came back home, she followed me right back to town, got a little apartment, and writes to me all the time. *[Takes out letter]* "Darling, how I miss you! How I wish to see you again! How I wish to take you . . ."—well, you get the idea. And how I wish to see her again, too. But how? That is a real problem. My wife, the sweet old dear, can't stand for me to be away from her for a minute. Ah, life is hard! I must think. *[UKYO starts to sit, and PROP MAN 2 places a stool under him at last second. This, and all succeeding business with stools*

and hand props, should be done so that the actor never notices the Prop Men. UKYO should sit as if certain the stool will be there, so he never has to even look, and the PROP MAN will always just barely get the prop in place in time. UKYO adopts "Thinker" pose, then leaps to his feet] Aha! I have it! Where is the old shrew? [He begins to look all around the stage. As soon as he stands, the PROP MAN picks up stool. UKYO calls] Darling! Dearest! Where are you my sweet? Love of my life, where are you? [Continues walking and looking until Tamanoi enters]

CHORUS. *[Speaking]* His words are like honey . . .

UKYO. Yoo-hooooo!

CHORUS. His voice is so sweet . . .

UKYO. Yoo-hooooo!

CHORUS. She cannot bear to ignore him.

But underneath his words, his heart is lying,

Lying such lies as men always will tell.

Unknowing, she comes, sweetly and gently,

Like a cooing dove seeking her mate.

[LADY TAMANOI enters. She is anything but a cooing dove, but for the moment at least, she will be sweet and gentle]

TAMANOI. You called me, my dearest? What can I do for you?

UKYO. Sit down, my dearest. I have something to tell you.

[PROPS 2 & 3 each place a stool for UKYO and TAMANOI, who sit. The two MAIDS enter and stand to the side listening]

TAMANOI. What is it, my darling?

UKYO. It's nothing, really. I, ah . . . I didn't want to worry you, but . . . well, I, ah . . . I've been having nightmares lately, yes, that's it, nightmares, terrible nightmares. So, I thought . . . well, you know . . . perhaps a little trip might be just the thing . . . you know, a pilgrimage to purify my soul. A religious pilgrimage.

TAMANOI. A pilgrimage? What do you mean? How long would this pilgrimage take?

UKYO. Well, I, ah, I ought to visit a lot of different temples and holy shrines—no point in doing it unless I do it right, is there? I might have to go all around the country. It might take a year—who knows, maybe two.

TAMANOI. Two years?! *[The sweetness is gone]* You can't mean it! Let you out of my sight for two whole years? No way! *[Abruptly changes back to the gentle, demure wife]* It would break my heart. *[Rises, and crosses to the MAIDS, who comfort her]* Chieda, Saeda, stop him. I am too overcome to speak. *[Bursts into tears]*

UKYO. *[Rising]* It's good to know you object, my dear; it shows how much you love me. You know I don't really want to go. It's just that these terrible nightmares are so—so *terrrrrible*. My soul must be awfully troubled. I just can't see any other way out.

SAEDA. Then, at the very least, if only to make her happy . . .

CHIEDA. . . . You could do a penance here at home.

BOTH. Yes, my lord, please do.

TAMANOI. Can that be done?

SAEDA. Of course, my lady. It's called . . . *[She can't remember]*

CHIEDA. . . . Mortifying the flesh.

UKYO. Are you crazy? That would hurt! Dearest, a pilgrimage would be so much simpler and easier.

TAMANOI. That's what you think! You may suffer as much as you wish, but not on a pilgrimage. Any suffering you decide to do will be done right here at home. *[She crosses her arms and plants herself squarely in front of him. The MAIDS imitate her position]*

UKYO. Damnation! *[Begins to pace, using the Groucho walk]*

LEADER. His wondering heart, his loving heart,

Is filled with dreams of Hanako.

But all the dreams are empty dreams,

For his eyes see only his wife. *[UKYO shudders]*

With spirit crushed and head bent low,

He ponders: "What shall I do?

What shall I do?"

UKYO. Aha! I've got it! *[Crosses to Tamanoi and seats her on stool]* My dearest, my sweet, since you insist, I won't go away at all. What I shall do is stay right here and perform a seven-day prayer vigil right here in our own garden.

TAMANOI. That's a good idea. Then I can stay right by your side, bring you food . . .

UKYO. No, no, no! Women are evil. *[SHE glares]* In religion, I mean . . . what I mean is, one look at you and all my holy thoughts would disappear. You must not be there with me.

TAMANOI. Well, dearest pet, if I'm not there, you won't be either.

UKYO. How can you say such a thing. Why, my very soul is in danger. How can you deny me? *[Begs on his knees]*

CHIEDA. Oh, see how he begs you, my lady.

SAEDA. How can you say, "You can't do this?"

CHIEDA. It's only a little prayer.

BOTH. Please say yes, my lady.

TAMANOI. Hmmph! . . . Well, if you insist. You have my permission. Tonight you may hold a prayer vigil.

UKYO. Tonight? You mean only one night?

TAMANOI. Did you hear anyone say two?

UKYO. Well, I see. If that's the way it has to be, that's the way it has to be. Tonight.

TAMANOI. *[Starting to exit, with the MAIDS. On each succeeding line she moves closer to exit, then stops and turns back]* Until tomorrow morning. Early tomorrow morning.

UKYO. *[Rising]* Remember, you are not to come to see me, for any reason. You are not to disturb my vigil.

TAMANOI. I promise. But remember, one night only.

UKYO. Oh, absolutely, my dear . . . no visits, my sweet.

TAMANOI. Positively . . . one night, my love. *[TAMANOI and MAIDS glare at UKYO. He smiles innocently, and, satisfied for the moment, they exit]*

UKYO. *[Kicking his heels]* Ho, ho! I fooled her, I fooled her! *[PROP MEN take away stools]* She's pretty sharp, for a woman, but she's no match for me. *[Laughs]* Now, where is that Taro? Taro! Taaarooooo!

TARO. *[Enters and stands directly behind UKYO]* Yes, my lord.

UKYO. *[Doesn't see Taro, looks other direction]* It's you?

TARO. *[Moving, and again behind UKYO]* Yes, my lord.

UKYO. *[Still looking]* Where are you?

TARO. Right here, my lord.

UKYO. Well, what do you know? You certainly got here fast.

TARO. And you, my lord, are looking particularly happy today.

UKYO. With good reason, Taro, with good reason. What do you think just happened? I got the night off. The whole night. And I'm going to see Hanako.

TARO. That's wonderful, sir. *[Pause]* How did you manage that?

UKYO. It wasn't easy, let me tell you. I tried everything. Then I gave her this cock-and-bull story about nightmares, and how I was worried about the state of my soul, and had to pray all night long.

TARO. Oh, that was smart, sir.

UKYO. Yes, I thought so, too. Now, there's just one little thing I want you to do for me.

TARO. Yes, my lord.

UKYO. I forbade her, absolutely, to come meddling around and disturbing my prayers. But you know what kind of old busybody she is. Sure enough, in the middle of the night, she's going to come sneaking through the bushes to spy on me. And if she doesn't see someone out here praying, there'll be all hell to pay. Now, I know it may be a bit uncomfortable, Taro, but it's only until morning. How about taking my place and being religious for tonight?

TARO. My lord, you know I would do anything for you, but not this.

UKYO. What's that?

TARO. It's your wife, sir. She has a terrible temper.

[As CHORUS begins song, TARO pantomimes the subject matter, playing TAMANOI until the beating starts, at which point he switches and plays himself getting the beatings]

CHORUS. *[Singing]* Your wife is all smiles when you're around;

When she looks in the mirror, her chubby cheeks glow,

Glow, glow;

Her chubby cheeks glow.

She's kind to all, and she sits like a little fat angel,

Spreading joy wherever she goes,

Goes, goes;

Spreading joy wherever she goes.

But . . .

When she's angry . . .

She's a witch,

She's a fiend,

She's a devil,

She's vicious and evil,

Evil, evil;

She's vicious and evil.

And, if she finds out,

If she suspects what's ahead,

Then she'll beat poor Taro,

Taro, Taro,

Till Taro is dead.

[TARO ends on his back, dead, then turns over and begs Ukyo]

UKYO. So you're afraid of her, but not of me. Is that what you mean? I'll show you . . . *[PROP MAN hands him a sword, which he brandishes over Taro]*

TARO. Wait! I was wrong, my lord. I didn't mean that. You are the frightening one, my lord. I'll do whatever you say.

UKYO. *[Pulls a hair and cuts it on sword]* You're sure of that?

TARO. Yes, my lord.

UKYO. Absotively?

TARO. Yes, my lord.

UKYO. Posilutely?

TARO. Yes, my lord.

UKYO. Then I won't kill you today. *[Gives sword back to PROPS]*
Come, come, it was only a joke.