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Family Plays

O, LITTLE TOWN

Christmas drama by
JEROME McDONOUGH



O, LITTLE TOWN

Jerome McDonough has the gift of telling a significant, dramatic story in terms so simple that every group can present his plays effectively, from the rankest amateurs to the most artistic professionals. Typical of his unique style, this play is very simple to stage yet strikingly effective, with very poignant moments relieved by equally funny scenes. *O' Little Town* is an ideal Christmas play for all groups.

Drama. By Jerome McDonough. *Cast: 10+ actors, flexible. The play is designed for versatility in staging and simplicity of presentation. All the roles are played by four principal performers plus a chorus or ensemble which may number from as few as six actors and actresses to as many as 30—or even more.* God watches earthly preparations for Christmas, and He is appalled. Everyone is self-centered and/or money-centered—a sorry picture of how God's creatures celebrate His Son's birthday. Then God spots a young couple hitchhiking into a city. The wife is very pregnant, and the husband tries desperately to find a place for her to have her child ... but there is no room for them. God remembers a similar scene from long ago. *O, Little Town* is a modern parable ... the Bethlehem story as it might happen if Jesus were born today (there is, however, no suggestion that the baby born in this play is a messiah). The chorus members form a "living cyclorama" or backdrop behind the action, keeping their backs turned to the audience when not performing. They don in symbolic bits of costume (such as a hat) to portray each role. They also handle all props and all scene changes. The props and costume pieces lie on the stage floor behind the chorus when not in use. The only scenery required is a few folding chairs and a bench. Thus the play is suitable for staging anywhere—in the chancel or fellowship hall of a church, on a lawn or a tennis court, in a large classroom, as well as on a conventional stage. Production notes in the script give full details. *Bare stage (or room floor). Costumes: modern. Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: O89.*

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O, Little Town

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A Play for the Christmas Season

by

JEROME McDONOUGH

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311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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JEROME MCDONOUGH

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(O, LITTLE TOWN)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
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ABOUT THE PLAY

O, LITTLE TOWN is a modern parable . . . the Bethlehem story as it might happen if Jesus were born today (there is, however, no suggestion that the baby born in this play is a messiah).

The play is designed for versatility in staging and simplicity of presentation. All the roles are played by four principal performers plus a chorus or ensemble which may number from as few as six actors and actresses to as many as thirty—or even more. The chorus members form a living cyclorama or backdrop behind the action, keeping their backs turned to the audience when not performing. They don symbolic bits of costume (like a hat) to portray each role. They also handle all props and all scene changes (the props and costume pieces lie on the stage floor behind the chorus when not being used). The only “scenery” required is a few folding chairs and a bench.

Thus the play is suitable for staging anywhere — in the chancel or fellowship hall of a church, on a lawn or a tennis court, in a large classroom, as well as on a conventional stage. See pages 25-27 for fully detailed production notes.

Jerome McDonough has the gift of telling a significant, dramatic story in terms so simple that every group can present his plays effectively, from the rankest amateurs to the most artistic professionals.



DEDICATION

For W. Richard Mixon

“Salem’s a lousy place to visit, but I wouldn’t want to live there.”

—Jerome McDonough. December 13, 1977

And for
the original voices:

Larry Mayes, Crystal Sutton, Tim Thomas, Charis White, Ellen Keller, Pete Hagan, Kelly Dixon, Charla Driver, Allison Foust, Diana Holeman, Charles Mixon, George Yancey, Mike Altendorf, and Greg Sasueda

O, LITTLE TOWN

Cast of Characters

Angela
God
Husband
Wife

Chorus Roles

[All roles to be acted by an ensemble of six or more performers]

Record Offer Announcer
Rent-A-Santa Announcer
Ellie the Elf
Santa 1
Santa 2
Santa 3
Santa 4
Child
Mother
Cop
Director
Jan
Carla
Cynthia
Harve
Arnie
Lackey Angel
Grocery Store Manager
Hospital Receptionist
Orderly
Cabbie
Driver
Another Driver
Passenger
Driver's Wife
Distant Driver
Drunken Offstage Voice

TIME: Today or any period in which the spirit of Christmas has been misplaced.

PLACE: A large city.

PRODUCTION NOTES

O, LITTLE TOWN is performed by an ensemble of at least 10 performers. Except for God, Angela, Husband, and Wife, all parts are filled by members of the six-(or more) person Chorus. The Chorus forms a living cyclorama, or backdrop, upstage and moves in and out of the action as needed. Chorus members also set and strike all items of stage furniture and props. When not involved in the action, Chorus members stand with their backs to the audience.

SETTING

There is no set *per se*. Locations are suggested by various arrangements of eight folding chairs, a bench, and an easy chair.

COSTUMING

God—a full white-gray wig and beard of good quality; a full-length white robe covering white slacks and shirt or suit; a pair of sandals

Angela—a flowing white robe (caftan or other loose-fitting gown)

Husband—a heavy outer coat, jeans, a flannel shirt, sturdy shoes

Wife—jeans, a maternity top, sturdy shoes, an ample coat (probably not her own)

Chorus—All members of the Chorus wear a basic outfit comprised of blue jeans and a red or green, or red and green long-sleeved top.

Character is suggested by the addition of bits of costume, for example:

Record Offer Announcer—a large, floppy “Rock” hat

Rent-A-Santa Announcer—a loud sport coat

Ellie the Elf—a red party hat

Santa’s 1, 2, 3, 4—poorly constructed white cotton beards stretched over some pipe cleaners; cheap elf hats

Child—a winter coat, muffler, stocking cap

Mother—a conservative winter coat; purse

Cop—a policeman’s hat and badge

Director—an ascot and, perhaps, a trendy sport coat

Jan, Carla, Cynthia, Harve—the basic outfit, perhaps with an outer coat or jacket added

Arnie—an outer coat

Grocery Store Manager—a grocer’s apron

Lacey Angel—a halo made by twisting one end of a white coat hanger.

The other end, the head band, is a large circle. This is not one of your top angels

Hospital Receptionist—a white tunic top and a scarf tied at the neck

Orderly—a white lab coat

Cabbie—a windbreaker jacket and a small-brimmed cap

Driver, Another Driver, Passenger, Driver’s Wife, Distant Driver—heavy winter coats

These costume bits may lie on the floor behind the Chorus, to be donned unobtrusively while the Chorus member has his back turned to the audience.

PROPS

All props are controlled by cast members, so they are listed by role (the props may also lie on the floor upstage of the chorus “backdrop”):

Angela—an automobile ignition coil

Husband—a back pack containing a blanket; a baby doll wrapped in newspaper

Wife—perhaps a shoulder purse of a simple type

Record Offer and Rent-A-Santa Announcers—microphones

Ellie the Elf—a plastic holly boa

Santa 1—an elf doll

Santa 2—a sprig of plastic mistletoe

Santa 3—a computer print-out

Santa 4—a liquor bottle

Mother—a purse

Cop—a night stick

Director—a clip board, notes, a pen

Grocery Store Manager—perhaps a feather duster, a milk carton

Grocery Shelf—a milk carton

Hospital Clerk—some forms, a pen, a telephone

Cabbie—a pencil

Distant Driver—a newspaper

LIGHTING

Ideally, a follow spot isolates all God/Angela scenes, and the Down Left and Down Right areas may be illuminated separately.

The action is such, however, that any kind of general illumination is adequate. It is helpful if a significant portion of the lights may be turned out for the partial blackout sections but even this may be set aside, if necessary. So long as the action may be seen by the audience, there is no lighting problem. Light cues are given in this script for those who can use them.

MUSIC

Some kind of rock or contemporary dance music version of a Christmas song is necessary in two sections of the play.

Incidental music for various portions of the play may be desired but there should be no need for musical transitions since the play’s action is continuous and full blackouts or scene change curtains are unnecessary.

LAMAZE

For groups who like to put all the realism possible into plays, the character WIFE may utilize Lamaze “Natural” childbirth breathing exercises. An oversimplified description of the progressive exercises follows:

Slow deep chest breathing: Deep, slow inhalations through the nose and exhalations through the mouth.

Panting: Short expulsions of air through slightly parted lips. Each exhalation voiced with a quiet “hee” or “ha” sound.

Pant/Blow: Pant as above; alternate every fourth or fifth exhalation with a burst of air, puffing out the cheeks, blowing. Increase the frequency of blowing as pain increases, switching to straight blowing toward the final stages.

In each breathing exercise, the woman concentrates on some individual object or "focal point."

UPDATING

Permission is hereby granted to update any portions of O, LITTLE TOWN which may have lost their pertinence for future audiences. This need for updating will be especially evident in the television commercial sequence and in some idiomatic language usage.

But, please, be gentle.

CHORUS PRODUCTION NOTES

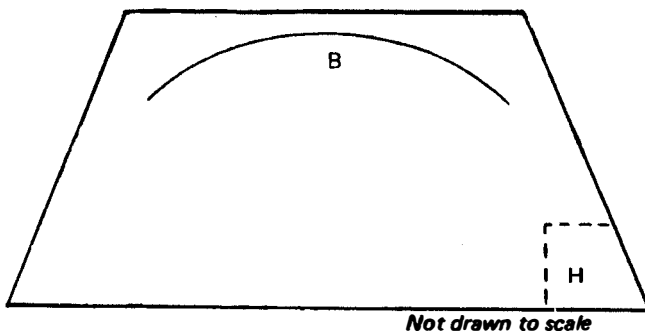
Chorus members need to be constantly alert to the location of each entrance and to adjust their cyclorama positions accordingly during prior scene changes.

There will also be a tendency for the Chorus to overbalance to Left or Right. When blocking and entrances allow, the "living cyclorama" should stretch across the entire upstage area, like a backdrop curtain.

May the love of God shine in your heart throughout the Christmas season and may that spirit live within you the whole year long.
Merry Christmas!

Jerome McDonough

FLOOR PLAN



H indicates the location of "Heaven" (other possible locations include the apron, or a high platform)

B indicates the location of the Chorus or "Living Cyclorama" when not involved in the action

O, LITTLE TOWN

[At rise, an old man with a long gray beard is sitting in a chair, Down Left, dozing. A girl, dressed in white, crosses from Right on tiptoe. She moves to the man and calls softly to him. Lights up Down Left]

ANGELA. Boss? *[He stirs slightly in his sleep but doesn't awake. Louder]* Boss?

GOD. *[Jerking awake, not knowing where he is]* And I'm telling you, Moses, if these people don't straighten up, I'm gonna give 'em such a shot . . .

ANGELA. It's me, boss.

GOD. Oh, Angela. *[Amiably]* What do you need?

ANGELA. . . . I don't know how to . . . It's about Earth . . .

GOD. *[Trying to place it]* Earth . . . Earth . . .

ANGELA. Three planets from the sun? My ambassador post?

GOD. Oh, yes. I did some of my best work there. Adam and Eve somebody, wasn't it? *[ANGELA nods]* I wouldn't have thought about that place for a million dollars. Not that I need the money. It's been weeks since I looked in down there.

ANGELA. Uh . . . more like two hundred years.

GOD. Two hundred years! Hmmm. But they were doing pretty well. Some spunky little nation was just coming around. *[Musing]* Strange, I haven't heard from that direction lately.

ANGELA. It's strange, all right. Things have gotten completely . . . *[she can't express the situation]*

GOD. What's the problem?

ANGELA. Maybe you'd better take a look.

[ANGELA snaps her fingers and lights come up on the full stage. Loud rock music comes up. Two CHORUS MEMBERS, Left and Right, are stretching an elastic or ribbon tape between them above their heads, forming a huge television screen. (TV screen may be deleted, if necessary.) The

RECORD OFFER ANNOUNCER is seen miming his message as the CHORUS dances behind him]

GOD. How do you get such a good picture?

ANGELA. I'm on the cable.

GOD. Turn the sound up. [*ANGELA snaps her fingers*]
Remote control, too? [*ANGELA nods as the Record Offer Announcer becomes audible*]

RECORD OFFER ANNOUNCER. [*Super upbeat disc-jockey style. Dance music under him*] . . . this fabulous TV offer, that dynamite new collection, *DISCO CHRISTMAS, including all of your Yuletide favorites! Get down to tunes like *"The Holly Hustle," and that skyrocket everybody's boogying to, *"Silent Night, Funky Night."

GOD. Boogying?

RECORD OFFER ANNOUNCER. If you act now, we'll toss in, absolutely free, a second album, CHRISTMAS'S GREATEST HITS, all recorded in mind-blowing stereo by a recently-deceased original artist. Let nostalgia well up as you whip your sleigh down memory lane. For fastest service, dial, toll-free, 1-800-37S-A-N-T-A. [*Freeze*]

GOD. Silent Night, Funky Night?

ANGELA. That's not all. [*She snaps her fingers and the CHORUS becomes a singing Christmas tree*]

CHOIR. [*Tune of "O, Tannenbaum"*]

O, Christmas tree, O, Christmas tree,
Run right down and buy from me.
My trees are always of the best,
Shiny bright and perma-prest.

Come buy a warm electric log,
Complete with polyester fog.
O, Christmas tree, O, Christmas tree,
Guaranteed and static-free.

[*Freeze*]

GOD. Turn that thing off. [*ANGELA does finger snap. CHORUS fades as lights dim out Center and rise Down Left.*]

*These record titles and other timely items within the script may be updated as years go by.

TV screen and an Announcer remain in place Let me get something straight. This “Christmas” they’re talking about. It’s my son’s birthday down there, right? *[ANGELA nods]* What does static-free and perma-prest have to do with it? Has Jesus seen this?

ANGELA. I thought he’d be too upset.

GOD. Surely it’s not that way all over. Those couldn’t be real people.

ANGELA. Well, with television it’s hard to say, but it seems to be the same story almost everywhere. Maybe not with singing.

GOD. And what’s wrong with singing? *[Slipping off the subject]* Take your psalms. That David really had a way with a tune. *[Wandering]* How’d my favorite one go? *[He snaps his fingers to a phantom tune]*

ANGELA. *[Getting him back on the track]* Here’s some more. *[Snaps her finger]*

[TV screen lights back up (full stage lighting). RENT-A-SANTA ANNOUNCER is seen smiling vacuously into the camera]

RENT-A-SANTA ANNOUNCER. Friends, have your Christmas parties been lagging the past few years? Is that holiday spirit just not there? Well, say no more. Pick up your phone right now and arrange a visit from RENT-A-SANTA. *[A CHORUS member wearing a tacky Santa beard and hat turns toward audience and waves stupidly]* One of our highly trained professionals will attend your festivities, bringing a ton of fat jolliness with him. Larger parties may need our economical six-pack. *[Several more tacky SANTAS turn and wave]* If your gathering is a bit more adult, a visit from Ellie the Elf might be right down your chimney. *[A GIRL turns and strikes a sexy pose. On cue, she throws her arms up as if emerging from a cake]* Imagine the joy on your guests’ faces when Ellie pops out of a giant plum pudding and starts pouring Christmas cheer for everyone. *[She twitches to Announcer and strokes his arm]* Before you forget, dial . . .

GOD. *[Overlapping]* Turn it off. *[ANGELA snaps finger. Center lights out; Down Left up]* I don’t believe this. Let’s drop in down there and check it out firsthand. *[Looking down at his robe]* Maybe we’d better change.

ANGELA. We'll go to a city. Nobody will even notice.

GOD. Whatever you think. [*He claps his hands (optional—thunder sounds at each hand clap)*]

[As they move slightly into the main stage area, the CHORUS disperses to become three SANTA CLAUSES, Down Right, Down Right Center, and Down Center, all hawking wares on the same street. Families gather around each. A LITTLE GIRL wants everything the Santas are selling. Her MOTHER does not]

GOD. [*Reacting to cold*] Brrr!

ANGELA. Christmas Eve's always cold.

GOD. I'm not sure winter was such a good idea.

[Lights up Center, Down Left]

SANTA 1. [*Down Right*] Ho, ho, ho! Merry Christmas! [*To little girl*] Little girl, would your Christmas be truly complete without a couple of these battery-powered elves? [*Aside to Mother*] Batteries not included. [*Open, to Mother*] Give the kid a break, Mom.

SANTA 2. [*Down Right Center*] Mistletoe! Fresh synthetic mistletoe! Ho, ho, ho! 'Tis the season to be jolly and what's jollier than a quick smooch? Have a merry kissmas!

SANTA 3. [*Down Center*] Get your computerized letter from Santa right here. Fill in the form and a child of your choice will receive a note of good wishes, or, if you prefer, apology, direct from North Pole, Long Island, New York. Ho, ho, ho, ho! Sign up now.

[GOD and ANGELA are looking on in disgust as yet another SANTA enters and crosses to Santa 1]

SANTA 4. Get lost, buddy. This is my corner.

SANTA 1. I don't see your name on it. Drop dead.

SANTA 4. I've been right here for two months. I'm not letting some cheesy peddler steal my turf. Take off. [*A crowd gathers*]

SANTA 1. Cheesy! [*Throwing a punch*] These elves are quality junk! [*A fight breaks out, both Santas rolling on the ground. Other Santas watch, taking sides, betting, etc.*]

SANTA 2. Three to one on the big guy.

SANTA 3. I'll take five bucks of that.

GOD. Saint Nicholas would faint dead away.

CHILD. Why are the Santas fighting, Mama?

MOTHER. They're just playing. Santas have to play, too.

CHILD. Why are there so many?

MOTHER. These are his helpers.

CHILD. *[As Mother drags her out to the cyc position]* Does he really need help like this? *[SANTA 4 overcomes 1 and drives him from the area with a boot. Santa 4 starts hawking his wares. SANTA 3 pays off 2]*

SANTA 4. *[Grabbing an onlooker. Open extortion]* Ho, ho, ho! Buy a fifth of Christmas cognac, guaranteed to warm that little elf of yours. Specially priced, today only.

[ONLOOKER hastily searches for money as GOD claps his hands. The CHORUS all fades to the cyc position. GOD and ANGELA start crossing toward Down Right]

GOD. I think I'm too late. Maybe I ought to try that stunt I pulled at those two cities—Sodom and, uh, Gonzales.

ANGELA. Gomorrah.

GOD. *[Stopping at Center]* Whatever. I levelled those places and I can do it again. Adam and Eve had their faults, but they never went in for this.

ANGELA. *[Compassion for her charges rising]* Now . . . maybe you shouldn't be hasty. Surely *somebody* down here still appreciates.

GOD. *[Disagreeing]* Humph.

[A COP enters from the Up Right section of the Chorus and approaches the two]

COP. Hey, you two!

ANGELA. Us?

COP. Yeah, you. What are you doing?

GOD. *[Aside to Angela]* I thought you said we wouldn't be recognized. *[ANGELA shrugs her confusion]*

COP. I know you religious nuts when I see you. There's an ordinance in this town against panhandling and you'd better not try it on my beat or you'll really need to start praying. Move it. *[GOD and ANGELA start to move away toward Down Right]*