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Dramatic Publishing

PRAIRIE LIGHTS

A Musical

Book by SUSAN LIEBERMAN

Lyrics by DAVID RUSH

Music by ROSALIE GERUT

Piano orchestration and additional
arranging by David L. Sparr

“PRAIRIE LIGHTS was originally produced at Stage Left Theatre, directed by Drew Martin. It was developed in part at Chicago Dramatists. It is based on a story idea by Esther Crystal.”



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(PRAIRIE LIGHTS)

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Robert A Freedman Dramatic Agency, Inc.,
1501 Broadway, Suite 2310, New York NY 10036

ISBN: 1-58342-246-3

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PRAIRIE LIGHTS was originally produced by Stage Left Theatre at Theatre Building Chicago in Chicago, Illinois. It opened on November 12, 2002, with the following cast:

Abe	LARRY DAHLKE
Sophie	SHANA HARVEY
Rose	NICOLE BURGUND
Benjamin	JACOB ZACHAR
Gertie	KATE HARRIS
Doc	JOHN SANDERS
Sylvia	KARIN MCKIE
Ryder	RON WELLS
Irene	MELISSA SIENICKI
Andrew	JOHN FRANCISCO
Meg	STACY MAGERKURTH
Frank	MICHAEL DICE
Gunnar	BRADFORD R. LUND
Herbert	NOLAN CHRISTOPHER BAYES
Hilda	EMILY ALBRIGHT
Christina/Agnes	LOUISE ABNEE
Robert/Horace	MIKE ALJADEFF
Hazel/Elin	MARGARET BOEHM

PRODUCTION STAFF:

Director	DREW MARTIN
Music Director	CARL HAAN
Set Design	ALAN DONAHUE
Costume Design	PARASKEVE PAVLOS
Costume Assistants	SANDRA VERTHEIN, RANDALL LEURQUIN
Lighting Design	KEVIN HECKMAN
Properties Design	LEIGH BARRETT, ALICE ZAWADSKI
Choreographer	MEL GILPIN
Stage Manager	KELLY JONES
Assistant Stage Manager	JESSE HINTZ

PRAIRIE LIGHTS

A Musical in Two Acts

For 4 adult m. & 5 teen m.; 4 adult w. & 5 teen f.,
plus flexible chorus

CHARACTERS:

ABRAHAM BIRNBAUM. . . . 30s; Jewish owner of Wellspring
dry goods store
SOPHIE BIRNBAUM . . . 30s; Abe's wife, earthy and maternal
BENJAMIN GINSBURG 12; Jewish orphan, studious and
spiritual
ROSE GINSBURG . . . 15; his sister, protective and independent
ANDREW FLETCHER 17; an orphan, tough and restless
MEG DONAHUE 18; an orphan, mature and industrious
HERBERT MANFRED 14; an orphan, shy and scared
GERTIE SIMMONS the Wellspring seamstress, a sweet
chatterbox
FRANK PRINGLE a cantankerous Wellspring farmer
SYLVIA KNUTSEN. . Wellspring's tavern owner, outgoing and
hearty
GUNNAR KNUTSEN 15; Sylvia's son, very adolescent
DOCTOR BRADLEY . . Wellspring's doctor, young and idealistic
MAXWELL RYDER Wellspring's bank owner
MISS ANDERS. Wellspring's schoolteacher
IRENE RYDER 14; Ryder's daughter
ORPHAN CHRISTINA/AGNES . . . an orphan/a Wellspring kid
ORPHAN ROBERT/HORACE . . . an orphan/a Wellspring kid
ORPHAN HAZEL/ELIN an orphan/a Wellspring kid

LOCALES:

Mostly in Wellspring, Nebraska, a small prairie town, December 1905.

Interior, train station, New York City

Interior, Birnbaum's house

Interior, Birnbaum's Emporium, a dry goods store attached to house

Interior, Sylvia Knutsen's tavern

Exterior, Wellspring train depot

Exterior, Wellspring town square and assorted street crossovers

Exterior, Frank Pringle's farm, just outside town

SETTING:

The set should be a flexible unit playing space, allowing for a cinematic flow between the various scenes. The interiors should only be suggested, with only the real props needed for the specific scene.

Central should be the town square, a place where everybody passes daily.

Dominating the whole should be a vast Nebraska sky—expansive and beautiful at times, dark and threatening at other times, somewhat intimidating to the folks who live beneath it.

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

ACT I

“Orphan Train” Company
“Way Out Here” Abe & Sophie
“Way Out Here”—Reprise Abe
“Momma’s Hanukkah Song” Benjamin & Rose
“Home Quartet” Abe, Sophie, Benjamin & Rose
“Birnbaum’s Emporium” Abe & Benjamin
“Far Away With Me” Andrew & Rose
“Momma, Good Morning” Sophie
“Sweet Holiday Light” Company
“The Dreidel Song” Benjamin & Town Kids

ACT II

“Candles of My Own” Rose
“Between Two Worlds” Abe & Sophie
“Momma’s Hanukkah Song”—Reprise . . . Sophie & Gertie
“If I Were a Maccabee” Benjamin & Town Kids
“The Dreidel Song”—Reprise. Company
Finale Company
Curtain Call (“Sweet Holiday Light”—Reprise). . Company

ACT I

SCENE ONE: Wellspring, Nebraska/train station, New York, December 1905.

(LIGHTS up on DOC, who stands alone with his black medical bag.)

(SONG: “ORPHAN TRAIN”)

DOC *(sings)*.

**IT’S WINTER, WINTER AGAIN,
I CAN FEEL THE COLD CHILLING DOWN EV’RY
BONE;
WHEN THAT NORTHERN WIND GOES BY,
HOWLING THROUGH THE ENDLESS SKY,
MAKES A BODY FEEL LOST AND ALONE
IT’S WINTER, WINTER AGAIN.**

(LIGHTS down on DOC, up on RYDER, who takes out a gold pocket watch and holds it thoughtfully.)

RYDER *(sings)*.

IT’S WINTER AGAIN...

TOWNSPEOPLE *(sing)*.

IT’S WINTER AGAIN...

RYDER (*sings*).

**AND IT MAKES ME WORRIED, MAKES ME
AFRAID
WINTER, DON'T COME AGAIN.**

GERTIE. It's awful quiet without Reverend Simmons...

SYLVIA. I sure miss the days when my tavern was
crowded with chatter and singing.

RYDER. If I could turn back time... (*RYDER puts away
his pocket watch.*)

DOC. A year since scarlet fever tore through Wellspring...
a year since people slipped through my fingers...

ORPHAN (*solo*).

I'M COLD AND AFRAID...

ORPHANS (*sing*).

WE'RE COLD AND AFRAID

ORPHAN (*solo*).

**AND THEY'RE SENDING ME FAR
FAR, FAR AWAY, FAR, FAR AWAY.**

*(BENJAMIN sleeps leaning against ROSE. Two suitcases
and a stack of books bound with a leather strap are be-
side them. BENJAMIN stirs.)*

BENJAMIN. Momma? Momma, I'm cold!

ROSE. Benjamin...

BENJAMIN. Momma! (*Waking.*) Rose...?

ROSE. You were dreaming again.

BENJAMIN. Where are we?

ROSE. The train station. We're going to Nebraska.

BENJAMIN. Oh yeah...Nebraska...then what?

ROSE. That's all they told us. We're going to Nebraska on the Orphan Train to find a new family.

BENJAMIN. Live with strangers?

ROSE. Shh... It'll work out. I promise. *(Sings.)*

**MOMMA MADE ME PROMISE,
TO TAKE CARE OF YOU SOMEHOW.
AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER
I'LL BE YOUR MOMMA NOW.**

**MOMMA SAID REMEMBER,
THE PROMISE THAT WE MADE.
AS LONG AS WE'RE TOGETHER
NOTHING SHOULD MAKE US AFRAID.**

(ROSE digs into her pocket and takes out a dreidel.)

BENJAMIN. Poppa's dreidel! You saved it!

ROSE. Yes! Wherever we go, at least we'll have that for Hanukkah. Now put it in your pocket.

BENJAMIN. But you say I lose everything.

ROSE. Oh, I know you'll never lose Poppa's dreidel.

BENJAMIN *(puts the dreidel in his pocket. Sings.)*

**POPPA MADE ME PROMISE
ALWAYS TO REMEMBER
WHO WE ARE AND WHERE WE'RE FROM,
WHAT WE'RE SUPPOSED TO DO.
POPPA MADE ME PROMISE NEVER TO FORGET;
NEVER FORGET WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A JEW.**

DOC *(reads a telegram)*. "Special delivery: New York Children's Welfare Society sending orphans for

adoption. Stop. Arriving in Wellspring, Nebraska, December third. Stop.”

RYDER. Orphans coming on a train? New York isn't Nebraska. They might not fit in. They'll be strangers.

DOC. But they're young and healthy and strong.

RYDER. Are you saying these orphans are ready to work?

DOC. Yes, I am. We need them as much as they need us. Trust me, Mr. Ryder.

RYDER. That's not so easy since last year.

MEG (*sings*).

**WHERE AM I GONNA GO,
MY HEART UPON MY SLEEVE,
WITH BARELY TIME TO CATCH MY BREATH
AND HARDLY TIME TO GRIEVE?
I STILL CAN FEEL MY MOTHER'S TOUCH
AND HEAR HER WHISPER LOW:
“AND NOW IT'S TIME TO SAY GOODBYE
AND NOW IT'S TIME TO GO.”**

**WHAT AM I GONNA DO?
I SHOULD BE ON MY OWN.
AFTER ALL WHEN YOU'RE EIGHTEEN,
IT'S RIGHT TO BE ALONE.
BUT I WOULD GIVE A HUNDRED YEARS,
A THOUSAND YEARS PLUS TEN,
IF I COULD SEE MY MOTHER'S FACE,
A-SMILING ONCE AGAIN.**

ORPHANS (*sing*).

**I WOULD GIVE A HUNDRED YEARS,
A THOUSAND YEARS PLUS TEN,
IF I COULD SEE MY MOMMA'S FACE,
SMILING ONCE AGAIN.**

MEG. Children, pay attention!

ANDREW. Who do you think you are—the boss lady?

MEG. My name's Meg Donahue. The Welfare Society hired me to take all of you out West.

ANDREW. Whadda you know about orphans?

MEG. I'm one myself.

ANDREW. Still don't give you the right to push us around.

ORPHAN CHRISTINA. What's gonna happen to us?

ORPHAN HAZEL. How long we gonna be on the train?

ORPHAN ROBERT. Will I get a pony?

GERTIE (*sings*).

**CAN IT HAVE REALLY BEEN A YEAR AGO
TODAY
MY DARLIN' REV'REND SIMMONS, BLESS HIS
HEART, HE PASSED AWAY?
I STILL RECALL HIM SPEAKIN' AS HE LEFT ME
ON MY OWN:
"PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD, MY LOVE, AREN'T
MEANT TO BE ALONE.
AS SOON AS YOU ARE ABLE, AFTER I HAVE
GONE ABOVE,
STEP OUT INTO THIS PRETTY WORLD AND
FIND SOMEONE TO LOVE."
I'M LOOKIN' NOW, MY DARLIN', FOR A CHILD
OR MAYBE TWO
TO COME AND LIVE INSIDE MY HEART IN
MEMORY OF YOU.**

ORPHANS (*sing*).

**I WOULD GIVE A HUNDRED YEARS,
A THOUSAND YEARS PLUS TEN,
IF I COULD SEE MY MOMMA'S FACE...**

HERBERT. Ain't you scared, Andrew?

ORPHANS. Yeah, ain't you?

ANDREW. Nuthin' to be scared a'—nuthin', nuthin',
nuthin'! (*Sings.*)

**COME ON, ANDREW, STAND UP TALL
YOU AIN'T SCARED AT ALL.
YOU'RE SMART AND FAST, YOU'RE TOUGH
AND STRONG,
YOU KNOW HOW TO GET ALONG.
WHO CARES IF YOUR POPPA RUN OFF ONE
DAY
IF YOUR MOMMA TOOK SICK THAT WAY?
THEY CAN TAKE YOU ANYWHERE,
LET 'EM DO AND LET 'EM DARE
LET 'EM SEE IF YOU CARE.**

DOC. Reverend Simmons would have welcomed these
children.

RYDER. Reverend Simmons is gone.

DOC. But he'd have told us to look ahead. (*Sings.*)

**KIDS WHO NEED A MA AND KIDS WHO NEED A
PA
ARE COMING ON THE ORPHAN TRAIN.
AND MAYBE ME AND YOU,
WE'RE NEEDING SOMEONE TOO.**

(*Speaks.*) You lost a son, Mr. Ryder. And I lost more
than I can bear to remember. But we can't keep holding
onto the past. (*Sings.*)

WE'VE GOT A SECOND CHANCE AT LAST...

RYDER. I don't know, Doc. (*Sings.*)

**MAYBE WHAT YOU SAY IS TRUE
ABOUT THIS ORPHAN TRAIN.**

DOC (*sings*).

TRUST ME, IT'S THE THING TO DO.

RYDER. Maybe, maybe not. (*Sings.*)

SUPPOSE IT'S ALL A FOOLISH LIE?

DOC (*sings*).

**AT LEAST WE HAVE TO TRY,
WE DARE NOT LET OUR CHANCE GO BY.**

RYDER. You're sure these kids are healthy?

DOC. Young, healthy and strong!

RYDER. Do you think they'd have a boy for me?

DOC. A whole train full of them! You'd have your pick.

SYLVIA (*sings*).

**I HOPE THAT SOMEBODY STRONG IS COMING
TO HELP ME RUN MY PLACE
MY SON GUNNAR'S A LAZY SLOB
HE JUST TAKES UP SPACE.**

GUNNAR (*sings*).

**I HOPE THAT SOMEBODY STRONG IS COMING
TO HELP MA EVERY DAY.
HE COULD SWEEP AND WASH THE POTS
SO I CAN GO AND PLAY.**

(ROSE and BENJAMIN struggle to fit books into suitcase.)

MEG. Line up, everyone. Come on! (*To BENJAMIN and ROSE.*) You'll have to do something about those books.

ROSE. We will, we will! (*To BENJAMIN.*) Hide them under your coat. (*BENJAMIN starts to stuff books under his coat.*)

MEG. Oh, don't try that.

ANDREW. Lay off him, will ya!

MEG. I don't want to see the boy sent back.

ANDREW (*flings open his suitcase which is empty*). Gimme those books. I got nuttin' in my case. (*ANDREW tips his hat gallantly to ROSE and whisks the books into his suitcase.*)

ROSE. Thank you...?

ANDREW. Andrew.

ROSE. Thank you, Andrew.

ANDREW. So, your brother's a reader.

ROSE. Yes.

BENJAMIN. Those are Poppa's holy books.

ANDREW. Holy you say? I'll guard 'em with my life.

ROSE. You are wonderful!

ANDREW. You is too, Miss...?

ROSE. My name is Rose.

ANDREW. Rose who's pretty as a rose.

MEG (*sings*).

**IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A MA, IF YOU HAVEN'T
GOT A PA,
GET ABOARD THE ORPHAN TRAIN.**

ANDREW (*sings*).

**IF YOU HAVEN'T GOT A FRIEND OR A PENNY
YOU CAN SPEND,
GET ABOARD THE ORPHAN TRAIN.**

HAZEL (*sings*).

IT'S A TRAIN THAT'LL CARRY YOU FAR AWAY

CHRISTINA (*sings*).

TO A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN STAY

ROBERT (*sings*).

AND YOU CAN STAY THERE EV'RY DAY

ROSE (*sings*).

HOPE IS ON THE WAY!

TOWNSPEOPLE (*sing*).

**OUR TOWN'S BEEN DYING DAY BY DAY
BAD TIME'S HAD ITS SAY
BUT HOPE AT LAST IS ON THE WAY!**

ORPHANS (*sing*).

HOPE AT LAST IS ON THE WAY

ALL (*sing*).

HOPE AT LAST IS ON THE WAY.

(See music for remainder of song. Orphan parts are flexible.)

(LIGHTS shift to:)

SCENE TWO: Birnbaum home, Wellspring, Nebraska.

(SOPHIE puts a pot of soup on the table. The table is set for two with a loaf of challah and water jug in the

middle. ABE enters and wearily takes off his shopkeeper's apron. He opens the soup pot and takes a sniff.)

ABE. Mushroom barley soup, mmm...

SOPHIE. It's so cold now, you need it. *(ABE washes up at a basin as SOPHIE takes a letter from her pocket.)* A letter came from Sam Levy.

ABE. Sam? Not Esther? Did someone die?

SOPHIE. No, no. "Dear Abe and Sophie, Esther and I enjoyed seeing you last month. The boys devoured Sophie's apple cake which Esther swears is better than her own mother's recipe. I know how homesick Sophie gets when she and Esther talk about their families back East. This is why I write. I am in a position to expand my business and wonder if you would consider selling your dry goods store—"

ABE. What?

SOPHIE. "For you, the sale would give you enough money to return to Baltimore—"

ABE. What have you been saying to Esther?

SOPHIE. There's more. "...Esther wants you to come for the first night of Hanukkah next month so we could make a deal then. My sons are very anxious to run their own business and are looking at other opportunities as I write this."

ABE. Let them look!

SOPHIE. Can't we just go and hear what he has to offer?

ABE. You know why he wants our store? Because we do twice the business in a town half as big as Delville. Is this because I'm a genius? No! It's because we don't live by the Jewish calendar and stop every other day.

SOPHIE. And what's so much business done for us?