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UNSINKABLE WOMEN

Stories and Songs From the Titanic

Book by

DEBORAH JEAN TEMPLIN

Music arranged and performed by

C. COLBY SACHS

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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DEBORAH JEAN TEMPLIN

Music arranged and performed by C. COLBY SACHS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My paternal great-grandmother, Maria Mueller, was a German immigrant who traveled to America by ship as a single mother with her son, Karl. My maternal grandmother, Emma (Behlers) Graupmann, was a master seamstress and quiltmaker. I favor historical accounts of real people because their lives have made a real difference in our world.

The following people have made a real difference in the creation and development of *UNSINKABLE WOMEN: Stories and Songs From the Titanic*: John N. Adams, Katharine Buffaloe Harris, Ken Cerniglia, Leighton H. Colman III, Lauren Duffie, Bernard Havard, Sara Jablon-Roberts, James Morgan, Britta Joy Peterson, Nancy Robillard, C. Colby Sachs, Kurt Schulz and Ron Schwinn.

UNSINKABLE WOMEN: Stories and Songs From the Titanic was first heard by audiences at The York Theatre Company’s Developmental Reading Series in New York City (James Morgan, Artistic Director) on Dec. 17, 2000. The play was then fully produced by the JENA company for a national tour in 2003.

CAST:

WOMEN Deborah Jean Templin

PRODUCTION:

Tour Manager..... John N. Adams
Musical Supervisor/Solo Pianist C. Colby Sachs
Creative Consultant..... Nancy Robillard
Costume Designer..... Sara Jablon-Roberts
Lighting Designer/Technical Director Lauren Duffie

The play was presented at Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Theatre (Bernard Havard, Producing Artistic Director) January 6-25, 2004.

CAST:

Women Deborah Jean Templin

PRODUCTION

Sound Design/Musical Supervisor/Research C. Colby Sachs
Creative Consultant..... Nancy Robillard
Movement Consultant..... April Feld
Costume Designer..... Sara Jablon-Roberts
Lighting Design Shelley Hicklin

UNSINKABLE WOMEN

Stories and Songs From the Titanic

CHARACTERS

THE GIRL ON THE BICYCLE

ELEANOR WIDENER

MARGARETTA “DAISY” CORNING SPEDDEN

VIOLET JESSOP

NORA

MARGARET “MOLLY” TOBIN BROWN

MARIE RACINE CARDEZA

MADELEINE FORCE ASTOR

IDA STRAUS

CHARLOTTE DRAKE CARDEZA

TIME AND PLACE: The play takes place in 1912 and afterward in various locales.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Character descriptions, a list of settings by scene, and extensive notes on dialect, music, set design and costume design can be found in the back of the book.

INTRODUCTION

In researching the *Titanic*'s passengers for this play, I sought help from the late writer Walter Lord. His book *A Night to Remember* is still regarded as the quintessential *Titanic* history, the first of its kind. When I visited Walter at his apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, I had the privilege of viewing his vast collection of *Titanic* memorabilia, including many personal tokens given to him by the survivors he interviewed. One such token, a pig-shaped music box, complete with a curly tail, still played the same tune that comforted children in one of the lifeboats.

My research, conducted at sites across the United States, included interviews with survivors' descendants and poring over diaries, letters and other writers' work. I found an astonishing absence in documentation of the third-class passengers and crew, specifically musicians. Music is a pervasive and elemental part of culture—it underscores our perception of an era. So it was imperative to me that musicians have a voice in this story. But how could I do it with such a gap in the record? As a veteran of historical fiction, Walter reminded me: “Use your imagination!” Live theatre provides the ideal imaginative space where the women of the *Titanic* can come together through their songs, as well as their stories.

For me, the fascinating part of the *Titanic* story is what these women did with their lives. In the years since the *Titanic* sank, women have made great strides. The right to vote is one of them. My purpose in creating this piece was to give female actors roles with historic meaning and a voice of their own. In my 50 years as a professional actor and writer, I am proud to think *UNSINKABLE WOMEN* will be performed in the future. Words have power—and can effect change.

As you prepare for your performance, bring your spirit to the realities of these distinct women and their worlds from over a century ago. They shared the tragedy of the *Titanic*, but who they became afterward was uniquely their own. Use your imagination to create your own meaningful voyage.

UNSINKABLE WOMEN

Stories and Songs From the Titanic

PRESHOW

(When the house opens, play TRACK #1 and TRACK #2.)

ACT I

Scene 1

(Southampton Docks, England.

TRACK #3: Underscoring “Come Josephine in My Flying Machine.”)

THE GIRL ON THE BICYCLE. No introductions, no names. Just call me “The Girl on the Bicycle.” Oh yes, I was there. But I don’t want to go back to that era. You think it was all so romantic, the great houses, the horse-drawn carriages, the grandees in their top hats; a golden age. *Au contraire. (Sound completes.)*

There was no penicillin, no antibiotics. People died terribly young of cholera, tuberculosis, in childbirth. Women still “belonged” to their husbands, as property; so much for the romance of 1912.

There was a lot of money, though. \$400 for first-class tickets! I could live for half a year on that kind of money. There were vast sums of money being thrown around by a very few ... men of course. Men. Money. Ego. That’s what created *Titanic*.

Titanic—it's all anyone talked about. Now, I'd read the advertisements for *Titanic*; how it was the fastest, fanciest, grandest, about to embark on her maiden voyage.

So, I got on my bicycle and rode down to the Southampton docks to have a look.

The first thing I noticed was the sea ... of people. People preparing for the voyage, people saying goodbye, people trying to remember where they had left what they forgot to bring. There were separate gangways for first-, second-, and third-class passengers.

Mothers, fathers, servants, children ...

There were vehicles jamming the street onto the wharf.

One group of lorries was unloading luggage onto dollies. Luggage with gleaming embossed leather with gold clasps, piece after piece, twenty in all, same set. (*Realization.*) It all belonged to one person!

Then I looked up at a fortress of steel, four football fields long, eleven stories high. You couldn't see the top deck or the smokestacks. The largest ship ever built, *Titanic* was so carefully, so brilliantly designed it couldn't be taken down.

It was unsinkable ...

If it hit an iceberg head-on.

But that's not what happened. The iceberg gashed a hole in the starboard side, the sea poured in, and the ship was down in an hour and a half.

Everyone wants to know about the grandeur, the menu, the décor of the ship. I don't know. I can't tell you how many palms there were in the Palm Court. What I remember are the people.

I'm not talking the "captains of industry." I think you know where I stand on them.

No. I'm talking about the other people. The women like me, whose lives would be changed forever.

They're what I remember.

(TRACK #4: Ship's horn.

Costume change into MARGARETTA "DAISY" CORNING SPEDDEN.)

Scene 2

(DAISY SPEDDEN's bedroom, Tuxedo Park, New York.)

DAISY SPEDDEN. My name is Daisy Spedden. My husband, Frederick, and I traveled a great deal with our little boy. When we embarked on our very first voyage together, we gave our son, Douglas, a little white plush bear made by the Steiff Company in Germany. He carried it with him on all our travels.

"How proudly he holds his head!" my husband said.

"What will you name him?"

"Polar," Douglas replied promptly.

We traveled to the Portuguese island of Madeira where we spent several months. Douglas had a bout of measles and insisted on keeping the bear with him at all times. After the quarantine was lifted our governess made sure Polar was thoroughly scrubbed. I'm afraid he lost a little fur. Douglas and Polar were inseparable.

When the weather turned hot and sticky, we went to our family's summerhouse near Bar Harbor, Maine, and together Douglas and Polar would splash in the water. When winter came, we returned to Tuxedo Park, and they would tumble in the snow. I recorded it all in my journal and took pictures of all our travels.

On one of our trips, when Douglas was six, on our way back to New York, we decided to book passage on what was being called the most phenomenal ship ever built. We boarded the *Titanic*.

(*DAISY SPEDDEN's cabin E-40 aboard the Titanic.*)

DAISY SPEDDEN (*cont'd*). It was our fifth night at sea. We were fast asleep when the lights were turned on and we were told to get into the lifeboats. No one was getting into them at first because no one wanted to leave the ship. On the starboard side, Officer Murdock allowed men to get into the boats, so our family got into Lifeboat 3.

(*Lifeboat 3.*)

DAISY SPEDDEN (*cont'd*). We could see the port lights go under one by one, until there was an awful explosion. Then the ship seemed to break right down the middle and, after a bit, go down.

When we got on the *Carpathia*, it became obvious that we were missing something—Polar! Douglas sobbed uncontrollably, but he was nowhere to be found. Then a sailor from the *Carpathia* looked into Lifeboat 3 and saw Polar on his back at the bottom. He retrieved the bear and gave him back to Douglas. So many others were not as lucky. During our voyage on the *Carpathia* there were burials at sea. We did what we could. We raised funds and supported survivors.

After the *Carpathia* docked at Pier 54, our family went back home.

(*The Spedden home in Tuxedo Park, New York.*)

TRACK #5: Accompaniment “Toyland.”)

DAISY SPEDDEN (*cont'd*). We all had many sleepless nights after *Titanic*. I kept a journal to try to make sense of what happened. I wrote a book for Douglas titled *Polar the Titanic Bear* and gave it to him as a Christmas present. The bear helped Douglas. I was always grateful to that sailor. (*Sings.*)

WHEN YOU'VE GROWN UP, MY DEARS
AND ARE AS OLD AS I
YOU'LL OFTEN PONDER ON THE YEARS
THAT ROLL SO SWIFTLY BY
MY DEARS THAT ROLL SO SWIFTLY BY

Three years after the *Titanic* sinking, my son, Douglas, was killed in a hit-and-run accident. You go on. (*Sings.*)

TOYLAND! TOYLAND!
LITTLE GIRL AND BOY LAND
WHILE YOU DWELL WITHIN IT
YOU ARE EVER HAPPY THEN
CHILDHOOD'S JOY LAND
MYSTIC MERRY TOYLAND!
ONCE YOU PASS ITS BORDERS
YOU CAN NE'ER RETURN AGAIN.

(*TRACK #6: Underscoring "Oceana Roll Pt. 1."*)

Costume change into ELEANOR WIDENER.)

Scene 3

(*ELEANOR WIDENER's house.*)

ELEANOR WIDENER. I am Eleanor Elkins Widener. In Philadelphia, we were known as a family of collectors. Me, silver and porcelains. My son, Harry, books. My husband, George, was not a serious collector, but he enjoyed our passions. We lived with the things we collected. They were our totems. Hallowed objects, if you will.

Harry made a game out of collecting. He kept careful record of his purchases in a large ledger in which he wrote the date of purchase, bookseller and the price he paid. He made up his own secret price code. Collectors use a code to record the price he paid, without any other collector being able to tell. I purchased the diamond and ruby bejeweled edition of the *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* for Harry. The dealer told me, “Oh Mrs. Widener, to find anything that would match its sumptuousness you would have to go back to the Middle Ages.”

While Harry was at Harvard, he compiled his wish list. Dickens, Blake, Longfellow, Emerson, Hawthorne and Poe. He not only collected books, he read them. On that last trip to Europe together, he bought one of the last existing copies of Francis Bacon’s *Essays* published in 1598. He remarked to the bookseller, “I think I’ll take that little Bacon with me in my pocket, and if I am shipwrecked, it goes with me.”

(Sound completes. WIDENER’s cabin C-80/82 aboard the Titanic.)

ELEANOR WIDENER (*cont’d*). The night the crash occurred, Mr. Widener and I remained in our cabin, and then Harry came in and told us we must go up on deck. My husband twisted a ring from his finger and placed it in my hand. I was taken to the lifeboat with my maid. George and Harry stayed on deck to aid the officers. That was the last I saw of my husband and son.

As the lifeboat pulled from the *Titanic*, I saw one of the officers shoot himself in the head, and a few minutes later saw Captain Smith jump from the bridge into the sea. I respected George, honored him. He was a good man. But Harry—so handsome and clever and bright-eyed.

He shared the game of collecting with me. We were conspirators, he and I. Mother and son—so like mothers and sons—I read Francis Bacon.

“The good things that belong to prosperity are to be wished for, but the good things that belong to adversity are to be admired.”

“Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed and some few to be chewed and digested.”

I certainly digested the events of April 15, 1912. They changed the direction of my life.

I decided to use my personal fortune to build an addition to our church for George. And with the help of Harry’s collector friends, I cracked the code in his ledger. I acquired the books that had been on Harry’s wish list. Thirty-five hundred rare books combined with his handwritten log of acquisitions became the Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Library at Harvard University. I insisted that Harvard agree to the following terms:

(TRACK #7: Underscoring “Oceana Roll Pt. 2”)

ELEANOR WIDENER (*cont’d*). Harry’s collection is to always be kept separate. There is to be at all times a special curator for the Memorial Library; a trust will be set up to fund the salary and to maintain the books and the rooms. No brick is ever to be changed.

(Harry Elkins Widener Memorial Library.)

ELEANOR WIDENER (*cont’d*). It took over two years to complete the library and install all the books my dear boy had wished for. I could not stay long away from the library—I feel nearer to him when I am there. His portrait hangs over the fireplace. When the library was dedicated,

newspapers reported the opening of “the world’s largest college library,” a fitting tribute to Harry—the youngest man in first class to die.

At the dedication of the library, I met Dr. Alexander Hamilton Rice of New York City, a noted geographer and explorer, who read a great deal. We were married, and with him I embarked on several South American expeditions in search of a tribe of strong women called the Amazons.

*(Sound completes. TRACK #8: Underscore “The Ship I Love.”
Costume change into VIOLET JESSOP.)*

Scene 4

(VIOLET JESSOP’s cottage, Suffolk, England.)

VIOLET JESSOP. Violet Jessop’s the name, *Titanic* stewardess. I survived both *Titanic* and her sister ship, *Britannic*, sinkings, serving passengers for over forty-one years until my retirement. I worked up the career ladder from working with third-class to first-class passengers. I had heard nothing but good about this company, the White Star Line, sailing between England and America. But, I also knew the work to be very arduous and the hours very long. Seventeen-hour days and I was paid three shillings. *(Sound completes.)*

What I learned was worth more than what I earned. Understanding people and their needs was my specialty, and I took pride in my work. The type of passenger who patronized it expected all the service the company could give and got it.

I was asked for an interview at my thatched cottage in England shortly before they released the film *A Night to Remember*. I told them me memory wasn’t as good as it used to be.

There are plenty of survivors who never spoke of *Titanic*.

But, I said I'd do my best.

(Remembering the night of the crash.)

Suddenly there was no sound. There had always been the sound of the engines. But there was stillness, which I thought strange.

I decided to go to my room. I saw Stanley at the door, the ship's steward. "My God, woman. We're sinking. You've got to go up on deck!"

All I could think was I hadn't brought a winter coat. But Anne my fellow stewardess—she went straight for her Macintosh. Stanley made a grab toward the wardrobe. "Stan! My spring coat? Completely inappropriate for a shipwreck."

I made do with my spring coat.

"A hat?"

I locked the door.

Anne had already gone up to the boat deck—no ... I went in front of Anne. And Anne was behind me. And I turned around.

And there was Stanley. Standing. In the corner, at attention. He always paid such attention to us. Cared for us. Stan.

(TRACK #9: Underscoring "Londonderry Air—Danny Boy.")

VIOLET JESSOP (*cont'd*). You see, he never went to the lifeboats. He was precluded from entering them because of his sex. Stewardesses were responsible for assisting people into the boats and making sure they had their life preservers. Many of us survived. Of the crew, few of the victualing staff—cooks, pantry men, plate washers, reached the lifeboats.

None of the bellboys survived, none of them was even fourteen years of age. They never played shuffleboard, but they helped others to. They polished the crystal glasses and poured drinks, cut off the tips of gentlemen's cigars. The boys didn't go in the lifeboats because when they heard women and children first ... they considered themselves men.

(Costume change into NORA.

Sound completes.)

Scene 5

(Music hall dressing room.)

NORA. I was dancing in the music hall but getting a bit long in the tooth. So I decided to learn to work from my neck up and of course always willing to show 'em a little leg, I developed an act for luxury liners.

(TRACK #10: Accompaniment "Alexander's Ragtime Band."

Per artistic discretion, "Alexander's Ragtime Band" can be performed acapella with the use of a pitch pipe. This variation allows for the actor to prompt audience participation if so desired.)

NORA *(cont'd, sings).*

OH MY HONEY

OH MY HONEY

BETTER HURRY AND LET'S MEANDER

AIN'T YOU GOIN

AIN'T YOU GOIN

TO THE LEADER MAN RAGGED-METER MAN

OH MY HONEY

OH MY HONEY

LET ME TAKE YOU TO ALEXANDER'S
GRANDSTAND BRASS BAND
AIN'T YOU COMING ALONG?

COME ON AND HEAR
COME ON AND HEAR
ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND
COME ON AND HEAR
COME ON AND HEAR
IT'S THE BEST BAND IN THE LAND
THEY CAN PLAY A BUGLE CALL LIKE YOU NEVER
HEARD BEFORE
SO NATURAL THAT YOU WANT TO GO TO WAR
THAT'S JUST THE BESTEST BAND WHAT AM,
HONEY LAMB!
COME ON A LONG
COME ON ALONG
LET ME TAKE YOU BY THE HAND
UP TO THE MAN UP TO THE MAN
WHO'S THE LEADER OF THE BAND
AND IF YOU WANT TO HEAR THE SWANEE RIVER
PLAYED IN RAGTIME

(Potential ad-lib "you know the words," "sing along," etc.)

COME ON AND HEAR
COME ON AND HEAR
ALEXANDER'S RAGTIME BAND.

NORA (*cont'd*). I was prepared and ready for action when I ran into Wallace Hartley. Wally played solo violin at age fifteen, going on to lead an orchestra in Bridlington. Pretty soon after that he took up a position entertaining passengers on cruises across the Atlantic. By the time he became bandmaster of the White Star Orchestra on the *Titanic* in 1912, he'd made about eighty crossings.