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Family Plays

High Noon
in the
Styrofoam
with
Timely Nick
and
Betty Brown

Three Melodramas by Jeff Irvin

High Noon in the Styrofoam with Timely Nick and Betty Brown

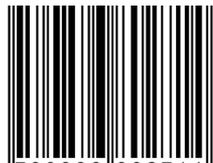
Melodrama. By Jeff Irvin. Cast: 8 to 19m., 4 to 7w., extras. These “quickie” melodramas are superb money-makers because they can be inexpensively produced with just four to six rehearsals, and audiences love them. **High Noon in Gloomtown** (8m., 4w., extras). A Wild-West shoot-'em-up with a mean villain, brave hero, delectable heroine, and lots of handsome guys and pretty gals. **The Sword in the Styrofoam** (4m., 1w., extras). A King Arthur slice-'em-up. The villainous king kidnaps the beautiful princess and locks her in a tower. Then along comes the knight in shining armor to save her and set everything right in the world. **How Timely Nick and Betty Brown Formed a Conglomerate** (7m., 2w., extras). A 1920s gangster stick-'em-up. Betty Brown, the heroine, is a bag lady, and the hero, Timely Nick, shows up in the nick of time. Specialty numbers and entr'actes may be added. The playbook gives some great suggestions for opening with a sing-along, including a lot of audience-participation foolishness. You can also add music to underscore the melodrama, and each play has a fairly transparent place to put in some dancing. Final words of advice for beginners: let actors pantomime the action as the narrator describes it and pick up cues rapidly. Remember that fast pickup of cues doesn't mean fast speech. Once the cue is picked up, the bumpkin can drawl, the beautiful girl can be seductive, the villain can sneer and the hero can be heroic. You'll be a hero, too, when you choose these plays for your audiences to enjoy. *Approximate running time: 75 to 90 minutes. Code: HD8.*

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High Noon in the Styrofoam with
Timely Nick and Betty Brown

HIGH NOON *in*
the **STYROFOAM**
with **TIMELY NICK**
and **BETTY BROWN**

**THREE QUICKIE MELODRAMAS
FOR COMMUNITY THEATRE**

By

JEFF IRVIN

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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JEFF IRVIN

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(HIGH NOON IN THE STYROFOAM
WITH TIMELY NICK AND BETTY BROWN)

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PRODUCTION NOTES*Props***High Noon in Gloomtown**

Sheriff's badge—Bart
 Bottles of liquor—Barkeep
 Work contract—Bart (gives to Nell)
 Six gun—Green
 Orange juice—behind bar
 U. S. Marshal's star—Green
 Stack of unpaid bills—Bart
 Deed—George
 Skimpy barmaid costume—Bart
 Playing cards—Bart
 Cigar (cheroot)—Bart
 Bag (of gold)—Green

The Sword in the Styrofoam

Flower—Rose (smelling it)
 Elevator shoes (optional)—King
 Double-headed axe—Gat, King
 Sword—Prince
 Longer sword—Guard gives to King
 Hood for Falcon
 Rope to tie Horse
 Bucket of water (or shredded paper)—Stage Hand
 Fake falcon wings & beak—Knight
 Crown—King
 Small tin cup (chalice)—Knight
 Small table—brought on stage
 Dishes of food—King

How Timely Nick and Betty Brown Formed a Conglomerate

Gun—Ned
 Sub-machine gun—Sam
 Shopping cart with repaired clothes —Betty (described on p. 27)
 Bathrobe over "wild" running gear—Nick (described on p. 34)
 Food—Betty
 Books—Nick
 Liquor—Sam (described on pp. 35-36)
 Bag of money—Sam
 Stretcher—Medics
 Boxing-ring bell
 Siren (offstage sound)

SINGALONG FAVORITES

All these songs are in the public domain, so you are free to copy them and sing them without fear of copyright infringement. Others, of course, may be added.

“Bicycle Built for Two”

Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer true,
I'm half crazy all for the love of you,
It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage,
But you'll look sweet
Upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two.

“Swanee River”

'Way down upon the Swanee River,
Far, far away,
There's where my heart is turning ever,
There's where the old folks stay.

All up and down the whole creation
Sadly I roam,
Still longing for the old plantation
And for the old folks at home.

All the world is sad and dreary
Everywhere I roam;
Oh, brothers, how my heart grows
weary
Far from the old folks at home.

“I Dream of Jeanie”

I dream of Jeanie with the light brown
hair
Borne, like a vapor, on the summer air;
I see her tripping where the bright
streams play,
Happy as the daisies that dance on her
way.
Many were the wild notes her merry
voice would pour;
Many were the blithe birds that warbled
them o'er.
I dream of Jeanie with the light brown
hair,
Floating like a vapor on the soft sum-
mer air.

“Clementine”

In a cavern in a canyon,
Excavating for a mine,
Dwelt a miner, Forty-Niner,
And his daughter Clementine.

Oh my darling, oh my darling,
Oh my darling Clementine,
You are lost and gone forever,
Dreadful sorry, Clementine.

Light she was, and like a fairy,
And her shoes were number nine;
Herring boxes without topses
Sandals were for Clementine.
Oh my darling, etc.

Drove she ducklings to the water
Every morning just at nine,
Hit her foot against a splinter,
Fell into the foaming brine.
Oh my darling, etc.

Ruby lips above the water,
Blowing bubbles soft and fine,
Alas for me! I was no swimmer,
So I lost my Clementine.
Oh my darling, etc.

In a churchyard near the canyon,
Where the myrtle doth entwine,
There grow roses and other posies,
Fertilized by Clementine.
Oh my darling, etc.

Then the miner, Forty-Niner,
Soon began to peak and pine;
Thought he oughter jine his daughter,
Now he's with his Clementine.
Oh my darling, etc.

In my dreams she still doth haunt me,
Robed in garments soaked with brine;
Though in life I used to hug her,
Now she's dead I draw the line.
Oh my darling, etc.

Now ye Boy Scouts, heed the warning
To this tragic tale of mine:
Artificial respiration
Would have saved my Clementine.
Oh my darling, etc.

How I missed her, how I missed her,
How I missed my Clementine,
Till I kissed her little sister,
And forgot my Clementine.
Oh my darling, etc.

“Row, Row, Row Your Boat” (Round)

Row, row, row your boat
Gently down the stream;
Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily,
Life is but a dream.

“Let Me Call You Sweetheart”

Let me call you sweetheart,
I’m in love with you.
Let me hear you whisper
That you love me, too.
Keep the lovelight glowing
In your eyes so true.
Let me call you sweetheart,
I’m in love with you.

“Buffalo Gals”

As I was walking down the street,
Down the street, down the street,
A pretty girl I chanced to meet
Under the silv’ry moon.
Buffalo gals, won’t you come out to-
night,
Come out tonight, come out tonight.
Buffalo gals, won’t you come out to-
night
And dance by the light of the moon.

“Home on the Range”

Oh, give me a home where the buffalo
roam,
Where the deer and the antelope play;
Where seldom is heard a discouraging
word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.
Home, home on the range,
Where the deer and the antelope play,
Where seldom is heard a discouraging
word,
And the skies are not cloudy all day.

“Oh, Susanna”

I came from Alabama with my banjo
on my knee;
I’m going to Louisiana, my true love for
to see.
It rained all night the day I left, the
weather it was dry;
The sun so hot I froze to death, Susanna,
don’t you cry.
Oh, Susanna, oh, don’t you cry for me,

I’ve come from Alabama with my banjo
on my knee.

“Red River Valley”

From this valley they say you are going,
We will miss your bright eyes and sweet
smile,
For they say you are taking the sun-
shine
That brightens our pathway the while.

“She’ll Be Coming ‘Round the Mountain”

She’ll be coming ‘round the mountain
when she comes,
She’ll be coming ‘round the mountain
when she comes.
She’ll be steaming and a-puffing,
And she’ll never stop for nothing,
She’ll be coming ‘round the mountain
when she comes.

Oh, we’ll all go out to meet her when
she comes,

Oh, we’ll all go out to meet her when
she comes.

We will kill the old red rooster—
He don’t crow the way he useter,
And we’ll all have chicken and dump-
lings when she comes.

“Sidewalks of New York”

East side, West side, all around the town
The tots sang “Ring-a-Rosie,
London Bridge is falling down!”
Boys and girls together,
Me and Mamie O’Rourke,
Tripped the lights fantastic
On the sidewalks of New York.

“You’re a Grand Old Flag”

You’re a grand old flag,
You’re a high-flying flag,
And forever in peace may you wave.
You’re the emblem of the land I love,
The home of the free and the brave.
Every heart beats true ‘neath the Red,
White, and Blue,
Where there’s never a boast or brag,
But, should auld acquaintance be for-
got,
Keep your eye on the Grand Old Flag.

Dedication

To Fred and Lil Perrenot

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THREE QUICKIE MELODRAMAS

THE FORMULA

The melodramas in this book are suitable for presentation at large parties or social gatherings as well as in a theatre. The actors should be amateurs who like to overact and laugh at themselves. Staged in front of non-paying audiences who know the actors personally, these short plays are absolutely sure-fire, guaranteed successes. On the other hand, if you decide to charge the audience, I suggest you stage these plays where no overripe produce is readily at hand. The jokes are *dumb*.

The Formula

Fred arrives home after a bad day at the office. His wife fusses over him to get dressed to go to the annual melodrama at the community theatre, or a party at the local lodge. She is bubbly, chatting on about how much fun this is going to be. But then she is one of the *organizers* of this affair. "oh boy," thinks Fred, in lower case.

Ralph from the bank gets up on stage; Susan, the church organist, sits at a piano in front of the left side of the stage. Ralph explains that melodramas traditionally cannot work without audience participation and that he was coerced to come up here and warm everybody up. He asks for requests from the songsheet. Someone shouts. Ralph directs everybody to the third song on the second page, and waits patiently for the rustle of paper to cease. He nods at Susan, starts bellowing in a painfully atonal but exuberant voice, "Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do . . ." and exhorts his friends with rather desperate-looking arm waves to save him from having to perform a solo. The audience joins in raggedly . . . first the sudden, near militant, chorus of fellow organizers; then the more relaxed people who had a *good* day at the office (or with the children). These are followed, in succession, by those who have had bad days, those who have had bad weeks (months, etc.), Ebenezer Scrooge, the Grinch, and, finally, Fred. Two Stephen Fosters and a Clementine later, Fred is protesting loudly against Ralph's judgment that the left side of the audience won the peak decibel prize for the round of "Row, Row, Row Your Boat."

At this point (if it is reached), the success of the evening is assured. If the audience sings, you've got them. They are primed, the mood is jovial and light. From here on, the point of the festivities is simply to maintain momentum.

The play that follows the singing just requires a cast with a villain to boo and a hero and heroine to cheer, a narrator who can be understood, and a pace fast enough to keep the audience heated up. This book provides one formula for designing and staging the fast-paced melodrama:

1) The first and indispensable part of an evening with a melodrama is the singalong. Suggested songs and their lyrics are provided at the end of this book.

2) The second event is rehearsing the audience to respond to stage signs (BOO!, CHEER!, etc.).

3) Present the play, with the plot couched within a (sometime) rhyming prose read by a narrator. The audience is kept involved by the periodic raising of the prompting signs.

4) The play is kept short (30 to 45 minutes) and is simply staged.

Rehearsing the Signs

The audience has to be made comfortable with the prompting signs before the play begins. Each sign to be used has to be introduced with a bit of playful banter, then the audience is given a few practice runs (and critiques, e.g. "that's a cheer?"). More on this later.

Play Structure

The narrative of all three plays is carried by a loosely rhyming prose, which should be read by a narrator with a clear voice. The narrator (dressed in accordance with the theme, in a tux, or whatever) stands off to one side of the stage and reads the narrative. The dialog spoken by the actors fits in with the rhyme scheme, so there is some humor generated by the irregular cutting back and forth from narrator to actors. This also helps out in the likely event that a cast member forgets a line or picks up the telephone before it rings. The NARRATOR can prompt and pretend that it was supposed to be that way. The narrator also has to be sensitive to the manipulation of the audience-prompting signs, otherwise the reading is drowned out by the audience cheering, booing, etc.

Length of Play

Using the above structure, these plays are exceedingly easy and quite fun to stage. The trick is to be short and pithy. The audience can only maintain its energy for a short time, so any play of this form has to be brief, with some interesting variety in the prompting signs. Remember the singing and the rehearsal of signs alone can last 20 minutes.

Extras

There are a number of add-ons to the basic formula that can add to the fun:

- Use music to underscore the melodrama. You need only think of daytime soaps to get the idea. The music can be orchestrated by someone manipulating a tape recorder, or can be simply an accompanying pianist. The cast members can even break into song to illustrate an action (“Let Me Call You Sweetheart”).
- Each play has a fairly transparent place to put in some dancing.
- Let the audience throw popcorn at the villain. Not generally recommended, particularly if the party serves alcohol. Be sure the popcorn is sold in bags, not tin cans.

—Jeff Irvin

A Note from the Editor

When we asked Jeff Irvin to give us a title for his collection of three melodramas, he suggested “From Bawd to Verse.”

And that pretty well sums up the fun of these three short farcical melodramas . . . although the “Bawd” is not bawdy—elementary schools, senior citizens, Girl and Boy Scout troops, Sunday school classes, and other wholesome groups can stage them with joy.

And the “Verse” is not worse. John Milton and Robert Frost don’t need to fret about the competition, but the rhymes and rhythm cleverly add to the tongue-in-cheek flavor of the presentation.

So if you want to call your evening “From Bawd to Verse,” that’s okay with us.

All three plays together will make a full evening of entertainment. One or two plays will go well in a dinner theatre format, or an eclectic evening of fun, fantasy, and refreshment.

The plays were originally presented at a U. S. Army base in West Germany. The author, a graduate of West Point, explains: “Every battalion in the Darmstadt military community was responsible for putting on a party at the officer’s club once a year, which had the dual useful purposes of bringing everybody together periodically and helping to keep the club solvent. My battalion [94th Engineer Battalion (Construction)] chose the original path of putting on an annual melodrama, which I wrote, and which starred the officers, NCO’s, and wives.” Each melodrama was presented at a theme party, with partygoers invited to dress appropriately—cowboy duds for “High Noon in Gloomtown,” medieval stuff for “The Swórd in the Styrofoam,” and 1920’s outfits for “How Timely Nick and Betty Brown Formed a Conglomerate.”

As a consequence of the original amateur staging, the author presents his material as though only rank neophytes will produce it (modest fellow). But we expect highly skilled non-professionals, and perhaps some professional theatre companies, too, to produce them, as they have our other “Quickie” melodramas, such as *THE SAGA OF SAGEBRUSH SAL*. These are superb money-makers because they can be inexpensively produced with just four to six rehearsals, and audiences love them.

Speaking of money, let us add our word of advice to beginners (the experts already know this): *Plan several performances*. The best advertising in the world is word-of-mouth. When the first-night audience sees your show, they’ll tell others, and the clamor for tickets will reach fever pitch.

Word-of-Advice No. 2: These plays are more fun in a small, intimate setting than in a big auditorium. It's better to plan four performances for 100 or so people at a time than one performance for 400 or 500 (can you imagine 500 people shouting BOO! in unison).

Final words-of-advice for beginners:

- Let actors pantomime the action as the Narrator describes it (*don't* let them just stand there and listen, as if they paid to see the show).

- Pick up cues rapidly. Normally, there should not be time for the director to snap his fingers between speeches. There are, of course, a few times when a pause is desirable—and a variety of tempos is necessary. Remember, too, that fast pickup of cues doesn't mean fast speech. Once the cue is picked up, the bumpkin can drawl, the beautiful girl can be seductive, the villain can sneer, and the hero can be heroic.

You'll be a hero, too, when you choose these plays for your audiences to enjoy.

HIGH NOON IN GLOOMTOWN

This first play is a western, and is the simplest of the three to stage. The costuming is not much more elaborate than that required for a backyard barbecue, except for the horse and dog costumes (which can be as simple as jumpsuits, hoods adorned with animal ears, and appropriate facial make-up or masks). The setting requires a couple of card tables, some folding chairs, and a facade that can pass for a bar. The following audience prompting signs are required: BOO!, HISS!, CHEER!, WHOOP!, AW!, SIGH!, and BONG!

Rehearsing the Signs

BOO! This sign is easy to teach. Just bring up income taxes (or term themes if your audience is teenagers).

HISS! Also easy. Ask everybody to pretend their mouth is wired shut. Then bring up income taxes.

CHEER! Point out that this sign does *not* mean to say “Cheer.” This is not an endorsement of a laundry detergent. This sign means provide loud support, as in “Yay!” or, when this sign is shown at the end, “Encore!” Practice cutting off the cheering by lowering the sign. Otherwise the play may last an hour . . .

WHOOP! Now this sign means cheering with a western flavor—a little out of control, some whistles, a rebel yell or two.

AW! This one is performed entirely while exhaling. Think of puppies on Christmas Day . . .

BONG! and **SIGH!** Male versus female competition:

BONG! As this is a low-budget production, the company typically cannot rent the grandfather clock required by the script. The plot turns on a clock striking twelve (hence, the title). As grandfather clocks have decidedly bass tones (demonstrate high and low-pitched BONG!), the males in the audience have to chime in on cue.

SIGH! Another exhaling command. For the women in the audience. Think of a fifteen-year-old looking at the latest teen heart throb, or remember fainting for the Beatles, whichever is easiest. A decidedly soprano command. Demonstrate high-pitched and low-pitched SIGH! Make the latter sound like Sylvester Stallone with an upset stomach. Women only.

During the play have the sign prompter shout out just before BONG! is used, "Okay, men!" The women also require warning.

Conduct of the Play

The narrator reads. Actors overact. The sign-bearer follows his cues. The hero gets the heroine and the villain is vanquished.

The Cast

Bart—The Villain

Nell—The Heroine

Green—The Hero

George—The Heroine's Father

Barkeep

Red—The Hero's Best Friend

Amber—The Hero's Horse*

Cowboys (at least three)

Cowgirls (at least two: Ten Dollar Bess and Booby Lee)

**(if a horse costume is used, choose carefully who plays the rear end)*

Scene 1

[The play begins with the CURTAIN closed. The NARRATOR steps to his stand, bows, and begins]

NARRATOR. The little town of Gloomtown was controlled by just one man.

He had the strings to everything caught in his iron hands. *[BART enters in front of curtain. BOO!]*

This man was evil from his shoes to the peak of his peaked hats, and as he slithered 'round through town he'd scare the dogs and cats.

They say his father was a madman, and his mother was a shrew who called her son Evil Bart and fed him witch's brew.

BART. I liked the chunky parts . . . *[Sneer]*

NARRATOR. This man he was sheriff, he was mayor, owned the bank. He ran the town saloon and bar,

made the moonshine people drank.

He was the town's only judge,
and attorney for defense . . .

BART. So obtaining an acquittal
involves no small expense . . . [*Sneer. HISS!*]

NARRATOR. It was said he had a soft spot
for old folks, kids, and priests,
but if he found out they were Yankees,
he'd hang them facing East. [**BOO!** or **CHEER!** (*depending on where
play is put on*)]

BART. Forget? Never!

NARRATOR. His favorite spot was the saloon, [*CURTAIN rises*]
he loved that den of vice.
His hand-picked women drank and danced
amid the cards and dice.

MEN IN BAR. Bring on the girls! [**WHOO!** *DANCING GIRLS come in
amid whoops. GEORGE staggers up to the bar*]

NARRATOR. Poor old George, he was the town drunk,
though sober from time to time.
The senior folks could recollect
once back in '69
he up and swore off whiskey—
and ever since drank wine.

GEORGE. Uh, gimme a bottle of Chateau Margaux '59!!

BARKEEP. All we got is rotgut, George. [*Hands George a bottle;
GEORGE drinks*]

NARRATOR. He used to be a wealthy man
and known with some renown
as a temperate, godly soul
'til Bart burst into town.
Bart tempted him with moonshine,
tainted women caught his eye,
he gambled 'til most all was gone
though his family cried and cried.
Through the years his business quit,
his sainted wife, she died—
but not before she told him:

FRAIL WOMAN IN BONNET AT SIDE OF STAGE (or VOICE OFF-
STAGE). Please save our daughter that plot of land
out on the northeast side. [**AW!**]

NARRATOR. George's daughter was about twenty. . . [*Enter NELL*]

He named her little Nell. [**CHEER!**]

As pure a woman never lived,
a true blue Southern belle.

Bart wanted her in his saloon
(she had something he could sell)
and tried to hire her as a hostess.

NELL. Gee, Bart, that sounds swell!

NARRATOR. But then she read the fine print of her contract,

NELL. I'll wear WHAT???. [**HISS!**]

NARRATOR. And as she came to understand Bart's cavalier and manipulative attitude

towards her sex, she exclaimed in an outraged voice,

NELL. Bart, you can go to HELL! [**CHEER!**]

NARRATOR. [*Aside*] (We are tailoring this part so Jane Fonda will accept the role in the movie version.)

Nell went and earned her meager living
on her own ancestral land. [*NELL exits*]

Incensed, Bart put on his sheriff's star
and told George:

BART. I demand

you clear your daughter off that plot,
do you understand?

No one would pay you fifty cents
for that small plot of land.

And in back bills for shots of booze
you owe me fifty grand.

GIRLS. [*Crowding around George and wagging their fingers at him*]

And in back bills for shots of booze,
you owe him fifty grand! [**BOO!**]

NARRATOR. But George, he wasn't sober enough
though Bart would plead and plead.

George's brain was somewhere else.
He couldn't find the deed.

GEORGE. Gimme some Chateau Margaux '59!

BARKEEP. Same old rotgut as always, George . . . [*BARKEEP hands George a bottle*]

NARRATOR. Now once a week on Sunday,
at precisely 12 o'clock,

good old George would sober up—
at least enough to talk.

It was a strange phenomenon,
but no one asked him why.

The town presumed that, like wet clothes,
he needed airing out to dry.

Evil Bart knew it was Friday
so he cursed his wicked fate.

He handed George a bottle,
and settled down to wait. [*CURTAIN closes (or stage blacks out) as
NARRATOR continues*]

Now into town on Saturday
rode a man that no one knew. [*One COWBOY stands in front of cur-
tain. GREEN rides onto apron from side of stage*]

He looked like any cowboy
wantin' just to pass on through.

Someone asked him who he was.

COWBOY. What's yer handle, pardner?

GREEN. Call me Green . . .

NARRATOR. he simply said.

GREEN. This here's my horse Amber
and that there's my dog Red!

Hi Ho Amber, Away! [*CHEER! CURTAIN opens*]

NARRATOR. He dismounted at the town saloon,
hitched up his proud cayuse,
walked with Red up to the bar,
and ordered orange juice.

GREEN. I'd like it straight up.

BARKEEP. Orange juice!

NARRATOR. the barkeep cried.

BARKEEP. I thought you were a man . . .

GREEN. That I am,

NARRATOR. Green softly said.

GREEN. I'll take it in a can.

BARKEEP. Try Bart's Mesquite Moonshine,

NARRATOR. the barkeep slyly purred.

BARKEEP. The first two quarts are almost free . . . [*HISS!*]

NARRATOR. Green stiffened and demurred.

GREEN. I want to save my soul from that vile liquid:

THE SWORD IN THE STYROFOAM

(A title that has nothing to do with the plot)

The second play has a mock medieval setting, and is a bit more complex to stage.

Costuming

Costuming for this play can either be very elaborate or very simple. For the lavish production, medieval costumes can be rented from a costume company. For lower-budget renditions, costumes can be simple stylizations. For example: the King wears a crown, the Princess wears a tiara, the Prince wears football gear transparently converted to jousting armor.

If the acting group desires the King to be very short (as in the "Wizard of Id" comic strip), one solution is to seat the person playing the King on a backless stool on rollers, and drape his costume over him.

Setting

The castle setting may be fairly simple. A cardboard crate with cardboard-tube bars is needed for Crank's and the Prince's on-stage jail. A cardboard medieval tower facade (it can be short—4 to 6 feet high) is needed in one scene, where the Princess stands behind the facade on a stool or stepladder while the Prince rhapsodizes in front.

One sequence of action switches rapidly back and forth between the Princess's Land of Good and Plenty, and the King's castle. This switching can be done by having the Land of Good and Plenty at one side of the stage and the King's castle on the other. An actor wearing a floridly painted cardboard tree facade can run to the part of the stage simulating the Land of Good and Plenty and hold up a sign reading "LAND OF GOOD AND PLENTY," then to the other side with a "KING'S CASTLE" sign. One advantage of this type of play is that there is no need to be subtle in keeping plot and settings clear.

The Singalong

If the medieval play is to be staged as part of a general medieval theme evening, singing "Clementine" (or most of the other songs at the end of this book) may feel a bit out of place. One way around this problem is simply to rewrite the lyrics for well-known songs. Examples:

(Tune: "Bicycle Built for Two")

"Dragon, dragon, give me your answer do,

I blow smoke rings all for my love for you." Etc.

or

“Row, row, row, your boat
gently 'cross the moat.
Verily, verily, verily, verily
we hope your boat'll float.”

Rehearsing the Signs

The signs that are required are **BOO!**, **CHEER!**, **HISS!**, **AW!**, **SIGH!**, **GASP!**, **PREPARE TO**, and **SPLASH!**

BOO!, **CHEER!**, **HISS!**, **AW!**, **SIGH!** These are explained in the lead-in to “High Noon in Gloomtown.”

GASP! This is the exact opposite of **SIGH!** Instead of using a soft, slow exhale, **GASP!** is performed by suddenly inhaling. Warn the audience not to straighten up too violently while performing the **GASP!** (demonstrate a particularly violent **GASP!** with flailing elbows) as people in neighboring seats have been known to have their glasses knocked off.

SPLASH! There are points in the play where a large, heavy object gets tossed from great height into the moat. The problem is how to get one single **SPLASH!** instead of a series of unrealistic **SPLASH! SPLASH! SPLASH!**'s. For this reason a special, two-part audience prompt sign is designed: **PREPARE TO** and **SPLASH!** Hold both signs next to one another so they read **PREPARE TO SPLASH!** When held up together, these signs warn the audience that a **SPLASH!** is about to occur. When the **PREPARE TO** sign is dropped, the audience, theoretically, booms **SPLASH!** in unison. Run through this sequence a couple of times, telling those who cannot get in sync that they are all wet.

Conduct of the Play

The narrator reads. Actors overact. The sign-bearer follows his cues. The hero gets the heroine and the villain is vanquished.

The Cast

King—The Villain

Princess Rose—The Heroine

Prince—The Hero

Crank—The Unfortunate

Falcon/Knight—Prince's Trusty Friend

Horse—Eponymous and Expendable (for some reason, some people *like* teaming up in horse costume. If no one volunteers, this cast member(s) is easily ridden out of the plot)

001, 002, 003—Names of the King’s spies who kidnap Rose. (It is suggested that these names be rewritten to conform to some in-joke for the audience seeing the play. For instance, make a pun on a prominent person’s name. This play was once given in front of a General Fye. We named the spies Fee, Fo, and Fum. The King exclaimed, “Where’s Fie?” and all three spies pointed at the general.)

Herald—Announces arrival of King

Gat (The Saturday Night Special)—Preferably big, muscular, and bald. If he is not bald, one verse of the narrative (“The guards went off to make peasants give presents, and the axeman went off to grow hair . . .”) should be re-written.

Peasants, Guards, Lords—6 people minimum

Scene 1

[NARRATOR takes position. CURTAIN rises with a LORD and several PEASANTS on stage]

NARRATOR. Once upon a time there was a kingdom
where everybody was destitute.

Their King taxed them for all their worth
and hoarded all the loot.

He taxed the clothing on their backs;
he taxed each knife and fork.

Even the kingdom’s lords complained . . .

LORD. This is getting like New York.

NARRATOR. This evil king was deeply feared.

PEASANT 1. *[Fearfully]* Where’s the King?

PEASANT 2. *[Fearfully]* Where’s the King?

NARRATOR. He hated all things nice . . .

Happiness or mirth or joy—
all gave him the hives.

So the subjects in his kingdom
all had creases in their cheeks . . .

PEASANT. Because we have to wear these frowns
for weeks and weeks and weeks . . .

NARRATOR. Once a year the King would leave
to vacation in the caves,

where he’d spend his time pulling wings off bats
and rummaging through old graves. *[HERALD enters]*

HERALD. Hear ye, hear ye, be it known on this date
the King has . . . GONE! [CHEER!]

PEASANT 1. Start up the music! [*General merriment*]

PEASANT 2. [*Pointing, trembling*] The King! [*The KING enters*]

KING. Did I hear happy music?

Who's the one to blame?

Someone even dared to laugh . . .

I *know*, my warts are all inflamed.

What? No one admits the crime?

Guards! Throw them all into the moat! [BOO!]

Attach a rock to the plump one there,

he looks like he might float! [*GUARDS grab a peasant and push him offstage. PREPARE TO SPLASH!*]

PEASANT. Ahhhhhhh! [*Man falling. When PEASANT stops making falling sound . . . SPLASH! GUARD is drenched from offstage (optional, as the front rows of the audience may get wet—if the audience is all wet anyway, use double water)*]

NARRATOR. When the King was in bad temper,
he'd go to the dungeon dank

and yell down to the dungeon guard,

KING. Bring on up the Crank! [*CRANK is led on stage by GUARDS and put in a cage at the rear of the stage*]

NARRATOR. The Crank was a harmless creature
the King had left locked up for years.

The Crank was kept half-starved

and at the point of tears.

KING. Crank, tell me your problems.

CRANK. Oh, Sire, I am completely and totally miserable.

I am fed just once each second day.

The water is a stagnant green
and the food tastes like stale hay.

I could not be in worse shape.

My spirits are at an all-time low.

I'm sad, I'm hurt, I'm sure I'm sick

and have ingrown toenails on eight toes! [AW!]

KING. Oh, Crank! You *do* do me good! Guard, see what the
matter is with the other two toes! [*HISS! GUARD stomps other toes*]

[*CURTAIN closes as NARRATOR speaks. In front of the curtain a pair of PEASANTS go by arm in arm*]

NARRATOR. Still the King wasn't happy
for on his borders was a land
where birdies sang and people laughed . . .

KING. [*From behind the curtain*] I hate that word "birdies" . . .

NARRATOR. and walked by hand in hand.

The trees grew tall there, and the flowers bloomed,
and the fruit all tasted sweet.

No one yelled and no one cursed
and the kids all brushed their teeth.

PEASANT. Furthermore we have full employment,
and a stable consumer price index.

[*CURTAIN opens, with PRINCESS ROSE smelling a flower*]

NARRATOR. And this land was ruled by a princess fair.

They called her Princess Rose.

She had a smile so sweet and a heart so warm
it could melt December snows.

Suitors came from far-off lands
to try and win her hand.

But they were all turned away . . .

She sought The Perfect Man.

ROSE. That's *The Perfect Man*, capital T, P, and M.

My Prince must be gallant
and ride a fiery steed.

His manner must be truth and love . . .
and he must have eyes for only me.

NARRATOR. But while she listened to her birdies . . .

KING. [*Offstage*] I hate that word!

NARRATOR. and smelled the perfume of her flowers,
the evil King plotted and schemed
to get her in his powers.

For all that goodness on his borders
was more than he could take.

It always made his neck scar itch
and made his bunions ache. [*KING enters on side of stage opposite
from Princess*]

So he called his secret agents

KING. Double-Oh One, Two, Three! [*Three SPIES enter*]

I want Rose kidnapped
and brought back here to me! [*BOO! The SPIES run off stage*]

NARRATOR. Back in the Land of Good and Plenty,
the poor doomed Princess walked, [*The three SPIES re-enter and
sneak along behind the Princess*]

happy as she always was . . .

but she was being stalked.

SPY. Now! [*The SPIES hoist up Rose on their shoulders; ROSE goes as
rigid as a board with arms stretched straight over her head*]

NARRATOR. The struggle was a brief one,
she screamed but no one came . . .

ROSE. Help! I am the poor, helpless victim
of a cruel political abduction! [BOO!]

NARRATOR. She fought with all the strength she had [*ROSE wiggles
her hands and feet (only) vigorously, then goes limp*]
then fainted dead away.

[*CURTAIN. See note at end of Scene 1 in "High Noon in Gloomtown"*]

Scene 2

[*CURTAIN opens with KING, two GUARDS, the caged CRANK,
and ROSE onstage*]

KING. Dear Rose,

NARRATOR. said the evil King

as the Princess was coming to . . .

KING. your face is white, you seem quite pale—

Can I get something for you?

CRANK. Yes! Steak and potatoes! [*AW! On all his asides, CRANK
spreads apart the bars of his cage and leans out*]

ROSE. Yes! A fast horse back while the sun still shines!

NARRATOR. quoth the fiery tongued Princess . . .

ROSE. A slice back of my country's pride!

Look! You soiled my dress!

How dare you stain my honor

with this sordid, vile foray?!

I must go back to my own sweet land

and there I want to stay! [CHEER!]

NARRATOR. The evil King would not yet quit,
for if he and she were wed
he could only think of all that land
and the misery that he'd spread.

HOW TIMELY NICK AND BETTY BROWN FORMED A CONGLOMERATE

(A Touching Tale of the 1920's)

The third play has an urban 1920's setting.

Costuming

Costuming for this play can be very elaborate or very simple. For the lavish production, 1920's costumes can be rented from a costume company. For a lower-budget rendition, old clothes can be altered to match general 1920's styling. For instance, the gangsters and Jake can wear old suit jackets several sizes too large, with padded shoulders. A Dick Tracy-type hat would help Jake's costume, and Big Sam the Axe and Snake-Eyes Ned should wear pork pie type hats which can be nested to humorous effect when they go into their joint disguise. Ned requires a large extremely loose-fitting overcoat for purposes of the disguise. Nick should wear a 1920's preppie-yokel type outfit, such as a V-neck sweater and knee socks and knickers. Betty can wear a peasant dress.

Setting

This play requires the most elaborate stage prop preparation of the three plays presented in this book. Among the props required:

- A shopping cart from which Betty sells her repaired clothing
- Some clothing repaired in an absurd manner to go into the cart, including a shirt with one long and one short sleeve, and a brightly dyed and patched sports coat.
- A cardboard limousine facade (which a "driver" carries across stage) for Sam's escape.
- A boxing ring for the final scene, sturdy enough for Maloney and Nick to move around on.

Rehearsing the Signs

The required signs are BOO!, CHEER!, HISS!, AW!, SIGH!, DUM!, DAH!, BANG!, POW!, and RAT-A-TAT-TAT!

BOO!, CHEER!, HISS!, AW!, SIGH! These are explained in the lead-in to "High Noon in Gloomtown."

DUM! DAH! One of the principals in the play is the detective, Jake the Heat. Whenever he comes on stage he is greeted by the theme from *Dragnet*. The audience is prompted with repetitive DUM! and DAH! signs, and the audience responds with DUM!, DAH! DUM! DUM!,

DUM!, DAH!, DUM!, DUM! (and a final higher-pitched) **DUM!** Getting an audience to get the timing right is a bit difficult, as half the audience is always ahead of the signs. It will help to simply hold up both the **DUM!** and **DAH!** signs simultaneously and have them reversed (facing away from the audience) at the start. When a sign is flipped to face the audience, the audience responds (**DUM!**). The audience holds the **MMM. . .** until the sign is reversed, then the audience cuts the **MMM. . .** off. This slows the theme down, but keeps the audience with you. Don't rehearse this more than twice, and don't expect perfection. Half the fun is getting it wrong.

BANG!, POW! The person leading the sign rehearsal should explain that fire regulations have prevented the use of noisemakers for the shooting scenes in the play, and as the play would be rather flat without some sound effects, the crowd needs to fill in the gap. **BANG!** and **POW!** (two of the necessary sound effects of any gangster melodrama) require some special coordination to insure only one shot is fired when the script calls for one shot. Hence there are two signs: the **PREPARE TO** and the **BANG!** signs. When held up to read **PREPARE TO BANG!** the audience is being cued that a **BANG!** will occur shortly in the script. When the **PREPARE TO** sign is lowered, the crowd yells **BANG! POW!** also requires coordination with a **PREPARE TO** sign. Rehearse this several times.

RAT-A-TAT-TAT! This is the sub-machine gun sign. No **PREPARE TO** sign required, as sound should be a ragged staccato anyway.

Conduct of the Play

The narrator reads. Actors overact. The sign-bearer follows his cues. The hero gets the heroine, and the villain is vanquished.

The Cast

Big Sam the Axe—The Villain
Snake-Eyes Ned—The Villains' Oddsmaker (easily played by a woman)
Betty Brown—The Heroine
Timely Nick—The Hero
Jake the Heat—The Detective
Newsboy
Dot the Doll—The Flapper
Maloney—The Champion
Announcer—The Boxing Announcer

Cops—6 required for initial scene, 1 for final (some may be women)

Boxing Challengers—4 (can be reduced by re-writing final scene, if desired)*

Medics (with stretcher)—2 (may be women)

Boxing Spectators/Speakeasy Customers—4 (can be cops in the earlier scene)

*The final scene has 4 spectators, Jake, Sam, Ned, a policeman, Maloney, 4 challengers, 2 medics, Nick, Betty, and an announcer. For a community group with a lot of people who want bit parts, a cast size of 18 is desirable. If the size needs to be trimmed, simply cut from the final scene 2 spectators and 2 of the challengers (and the SECOND and THIRD CHALLENGERS' lines). The medics, after carrying the first challenger offstage on the stretcher, can return as spectators.

Scene 1

[NARRATOR takes position. CURTAIN opens to empty stage]

NARRATOR. Now it comes about

in the Fall of 1924

that the street was still

until . . . *[SAM and NED enter, sneer at audience. HISS!]*

Big Sam the Axe ran out of dough. *[SAM turns trouser pockets inside out]*

SAM. The green, spendable kind. The kind the dolls like.

NARRATOR. Now Big Sam the Axe was hot.

The hottest guy around.

He was wanted in about fifteen states

for shooting up some towns

and robbing banks

and running rum

and corrupting the morals

of the innocent young.

SAM. They have to start sometime! **[BOO!]**

NARRATOR. Now a man of Big Sam's stature

as Public Enemy Number One

thought it harmful to be broke

as long as he had a gun. *[NED hands Sam a gun]*

SAM. Well, Snake-Eyes Ned, what are the odds we bust this jug?

NED. Three to one, Big Sam, a piece of cake . . . [*NED and SAM walk offstage*]

NARRATOR. So they strode into the First National Amalgamated Commercial

City Maritime Bank of Friendly Credit
in one of its convenient downtown locations
and applied for a no-interest loan without any repayments.

VOICE OFFSTAGE. Help! Police! I'm being robbed!

NARRATOR. Big Sam the Axe and Snake-Eyes Ned
found the teller impolite. [*NED and SAM walk backwards onstage, Sam's pistol pointed offstage. PREPARE TO BANG!*]

SAM. I told you not to call the cops,
you know this serves you right! [**BANG!**]
Missed!

NED. The cops are coming! [**CHEER!**]

NARRATOR. Big Sam was known far and wide
as a master of disguise. [*NED is wearing a coat much too long for his body, and he jumps on the shoulders of SAM, who closes the coat in front of his face*]

The police could never find him
though they'd try and try. [*Keystone-type COPS run helter-skelter across and offstage*]

They assigned their best detective,
the world-famed Jake the Heat, [*Enter JAKE. DRAGNET THEME (DAH! DUM!)*]

who'd solved a thousand cases
while working on his beat.

JAKE. The time's too short,

NARRATOR. thought Jake the Heat,

JAKE. for Sam to have gone far.

I smell the gunsmoke in the air
and there has not been a car.

Good citizen, can you tell me,
has the thief come running by?

NED. Oh, Protector of the City's peace,
I cannot tell a lie.

He very definitely took it on the lam thataway. [*NED points offstage*]

NARRATOR. So Jake gave detailed orders

for his men to keep the chase . . . [*COPS stop running around and*

congregate briefly around Jake, then run off in unison in direction JAKE points]

JAKE. You heard him, thataway!

NARRATOR. But there was here something odd
that he simply could not place.

JAKE. Are you sure he went thataway?

SAM. Yeah, copper, he went thataway. *[SAM answers from under coat, and points by sticking out his arm between buttons]*

NARRATOR. Thus reassured, Jake the Heat
turned to follow all his men,
fully certain that at long last
he'd cornered Sam, but then . . . *[DRIVER with cardboard facade car pulls up. SAM and NED jump in. JAKE looks the other way and misses Sam and Ned giving up their disguise. SAM pulls out a sub-machine gun as car leaves stage. RAT-A-TAT-TAT! JAKE flattens out on stage]*

JAKE. I thought he went *thataway!*
Mark my words, Big Sam,
you won today,
but I'll teach you yet,
Crime Does Not Pay! **[CHEER!]**

CURTAIN

Scene 2

[CURTAIN rises. BETTY is peddling clothes out of a shopping cart]

NARRATOR. Along this same street lived a dame
by the name of Betty Brown,
as sweet a pancake as there was
in any part of town.
She made her living selling clothes
that others didn't keep . . .
she sewed them up in the dark at night . . .

BETTY. Shirts, trousers, cheap! *[She holds up a shirt, one sleeve long, the other short]*

NARRATOR. She used the meager earnings
for food and monthly rent
and saved a little surplus,