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Dramatic Publishing

The Ugly Duck

Book and lyrics by
James Still



Music by
Christopher McGovern



The Ugly Duck

Originally commissioned and produced
by TheatreworksUSA.

Musical. Book and lyrics by James Still. Music by Christopher McGovern. Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's The Ugly Duckling. Cast: 4m., 2w., extras optional. This telling of a beloved classical tale is a family musical that champions creativity and individuality through an Americanized, contemporary, thematic adaptation. Max is a 10-year-old boy who is thrown into a crisis when he is forced to spend his summer vacation with his Great Aunt Junie—a true original who lives in a faraway place called Kansas. Notorious in town as “Loony Junie the Crazy Duck Lady,” Aunt Junie makes purple popcorn balls, practices karate, lives in a house with playful furniture (played by actors) and sings to her ducks. Maximum, as Aunt Junie calls him, is a city kid trapped in a small town who slowly overcomes homesickness and his own intolerance. He ultimately transforms his fears into love and enthusiasm for creativity and individuality. As Aunt June tells Max, “People think everything has got to be one way and one way only. No matter how crowded it is—there’s always enough room to be yourself.” *Unit set, several locations. The original production toured with five actors. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 45 minutes. Code: U33.*

ISBN-13 978-0-87602-339-6



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Dramatic Publishing Company

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(THE UGLY DUCK)

ISBN: 978-0-87602-339-6

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“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”

- - Albert Einstein

Characters:

OPENING:

Max and four friends - - all 10 years old

NEW YORK:

MAX 10 years old, lives on the Upper West Side (Manhattan) with his father in their walk-up apartment. Max is a high-energy kid, likable, popular with his small circle of friends, a ringleader.

BILL Max's dad, in his mid-thirties, a struggling actor. Widower for several years, is raising Max as a single-parent.

KANSAS:

JUNIE Max's Great-Aunt who lives in Smaltown, Kansas. She was Max's mom's aunt. In her late 60s, a widow who lives alone and famous around town for her morning ritual of feeding the ducks. Kids call her "Loony Junie".

CHUCK Almost 10 years old, local bully.

DANA: 10 years old. Hangs out with Chuck. Has a hard time getting a word in edge-wise.

DAVID 7 years old, Chuck's little brother.

Originally commissioned and produced by Theatreworks/USA.

Musical Numbers:

ANOTHER WAY TO TELL A STORY - Company

UNDERWEAR JINGLE - Television Trio

HYPOTHETICALLY I, II - Bill & Max

STORY REPRISE TO AIRPORT - Company

STORY REPRISE TO KANSAS - Company

CHUCK'S CLUB - Chuck, David, Dana and Max

THE HOUSE SINGS - Junie and House

I WANNA GO HOME - Max & Junie

WHATCHA DOIN' JUNIE? - Max & Junie

OUR CLUB DITTY - Junie & Max

A MIND OF MY OWN - Chuck, Max, Dana & David

WHO TOOK THE DUCK? - Max, Dana, David, Chuck & Junie

WALTZ FINALE - Max & Junie and House

ANOTHER WAY TO TELL A STORY/BOWS - Company

THE UGLY DUCK was commissioned by Theatreworks/USA and premiered in workshop in New York City in the fall of 1992. Direction was by Melia Bensussen. Choreography was by Janet Bogardus. The production stage manager was Sandra M. Bloom. The cast was:

MaxJeff Porper
Dad/Chuck Andy Taylor
DavidAndrew Barr
DanaKimberly Schultheiss
JunieAnne O'Sullivan

In a revised script, **THE UGLY DUCK** performed with the following cast change:

Dad/Chuck Jeff Gurner

The scenic and property design was by Kevin Roach, costume design was by Connie Singer and Anne-Marie Wright.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I was drawn to Andersen's story "The Ugly Duckling" because of its themes of transformation, individuality and perseverance and not surprisingly I learned more about all of those things during the 2 1/2 years that we worked on our version of THE UGLY DUCK than I could have ever predicted. In producing THE UGLY DUCK, I would encourage a director and cast to approach the piece with the same spirit and imagination that the piece itself celebrates. In the original production, director Melia Bensussen determined that in keeping with the theme of transformation, the actors would provide some of the sound and set as well. Therefore, the actors created live sound effects on stage and most significantly the furniture in Junie's house was augmented by actors playing her pantry, side-table and mahogany coat rack. The fun of discovering these characters in rehearsal helped Junie's house literally come alive - - breathing, singing and responding to Junie's rich, imaginative world.

Though this is certainly not a new technique (young people have always played this way, Creative Dramatics often stresses this approach to dramatizing a scene, Walt Disney movies have a long history of singing tea pots) - - it is still pure and refreshing when performed with verve and good heart. In fact, it is a production concept that consistently re-invents itself so joyfully and with such charm because it is limited only by the imaginations of the actors and their audience. Most importantly for me, it proves (again) that in the theatre you really can go anywhere and do anything in the blink of an eye.

SCENE ONE

(Outdoors in a park, New York City. Late summer. Max enters carrying an umbrella with a handle in the shape of a duck's head. He opens the umbrella which has several ducks painted on it. Four other 10 year-old kids run on. One of them notices Max twirling the umbrella.)

KID #3: What's with the umbrella, Max?

KID #1: Yeah, there's not a cloud in the sky.

MAX: *(Mysterious)* Oh - - it's a gift from a friend - - a new friend.

(The other kids look at Max and then at each other.)

KIDS: Right. *(They move away from Max and energetically talk to each other.)*

KID #4: Okay, okay! What are we gonna do on our last day of summer vacation?

KID #3: Our last day of freedom. . .

KID #2: What are you gonna wear on the first day of school?

MAX: How was everybody's summer?

KID #4: Long.

KID #3: Short.

KID #2: Hot.

KID #1: Boring.

KID #4: How was yours?

MAX: *(Smiling, as if he has a secret)* Interesting.

ALL KIDS: Interesting?

MAX: Do you guys remember that story "The Ugly Duckling"?

KID #3: Yeah - - I read it when I was a baby.

KID #1: *(Making fun of Max)* Quack! Quack!

KID #4: "Once upon a time there was this mother duck, right?"

KID #1: . . . and she sat on this weird, fat egg. . ."

KID #3: "And then this really, really, REALLY ugly duck popped out of the shell and so like, everybody made fun of him because he was such a dork."

MAX: I KNOW ANOTHER WAY TO TELL A STORY!
(The kids look at him then back to each other.)

KIDS: IS THIS STORY REALLY GORY?

KID #3: This duck was SO ugly. . .

MAX: I KNOW ANOTHER WAY TO TELL A STORY! Wait 'till you hear what happened to me this summer.

KID #3: WAIT A MINUTE, YOU!

KID #2: I DON'T WANNA HEAR ABOUT A DUCK WHO'S UGLY.

KIDS #1 & #3: THAT'S 'CAUSE YOU ARE UGLY TOO!

KIDS: WE DON'T WANNA LISTEN TO A STORY FROM THE PAST.

MAX: WHY NOT LET ME TELL YOU SOMETHING DIFFERENT PRETTY FAST? WHAT IF THE DUCK WAS JUST A PERSON?

KIDS: WOULD THAT PERSON HAVE A BEAK?

MAX: NO, BUT YOU COULD SAY THE PERSON'S DIFFERENT.

KID #2: YEAH?

KID #4: RIGHT!

KID #1: O! YOU MEAN A GEEK!

(Max takes out a baseball cap and jacket from his gymbag. He puts on the cap.)

KIDS: YEAH!

MAX: ONCE UPON A TIME THERE'S A KID IN NEW YORK. HE HAS LOTS OF THINGS TO DO.

KIDS: YEAH?

(Max tosses Kid #3 the jacket, "casting" him as the Dad)

MAX: THE KID HAS A DAD AND THE DAD NEEDS A JOB. HOW DOES THAT SOUND TO YOU?

KIDS: GOOD!

MAX: WE STILL NEED A DUCK.

KIDS: WE DON'T HAVE A DUCK! THE DUCK HAS NOT APPEARED.

MAX: WELL, WHAT IF THE KID MEETS A DUCK?

KIDS: A DUCK?

(All Kids strike a weird pose.)

MAX: OR A PERSON WHO IS WEIRD.

KIDS: YEAH!
GREAT. NOW: THERE'S ANOTHER WAY TO TELL A
STORY
WE'VE GOT LOTS OF WORK TO DO
HERE GOES ANOTHER WAY TO TELL A STORY
WHY CAN'T DUCKS BE PEOPLE TOO?

MAX: I KNOW ANOTHER WAY!
KID # 2: SHOW US ANOTHER WAY
KID #1: SHOW US ANOTHER WAY
KIDS #3 & #4: SHOW US ANOTHER WAY
ALL: TO MAKE THIS STORY NEW!

MAX: Are you ready guys? Places!

ALL: Scene two!

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on Max & Bill's Upper West Side apartment. Modestly furnished. Bill is picking up Max's junk - - clothes, dishes, sports equipment, books - - that litters the apartment. Max is happily spellbound by the television.)

BILL: Whatcha doin', Max?

MAX: Nothin'.

BILL: Whatcha watchin', Max?

MAX: Nothin'.

BILL: My son - - the great communicator. *(Bill resumes picking up after Max and drapes coats, socks, towels etc. until Max resembles a mummy covered with all of his stuff.)* What do you want for dinner?

MAX: Potato chips.

BILL: What about vegetables?

MAX: *(This is their routine.)* Potatoes ARE vegetables.

BILL: Right. *(They high-five, Bill reaches to turn the TV off.)* Max, we need to talk - -

MAX: *(Annoyed)* Dad!

BILL: *(Suddenly sees what's on the TV)* There's my commercial! Look-look! Don't move! *(Pointing to TV)* There I am!

MAX: *(Playing like he's embarrassed)* Why me?

(We see what Bill and Max are seeing on the TV. Three actors suddenly appear framed by a giant TV screen and perform the jingle from the commercial live. Bill sings and dances along to his own image. Max watches both in mock horror.)

TV VOICES: OUR UH-UNDERWEAR
IT FITS YOU OVER THERE
OUR UH-UNDERWEAR
IT FITS YOU EVEN THERE AND EVERYWHERE
WITH ROOM TO ROAM
THEY'RE LIKE HOME SWEET HOME
THAT'S THE PUH-POWER UH-OF OUR
UH-UH-UNDERWEAR (OUR UNDERWEAR)

BILL: *(Sucking in his stomach)* Not bad for an old man, right?

MAX: Not bad unless you're the fourth grader whose dad plays the dancing underwear in a commercial seen by everyone in the world!

BILL: Max - -

MAX: Last week in front of the whole class my teacher said she saw my dad on TV - - in his underwear.

BILL: Max - -

MAX: If it wasn't summer vacation I'd have to drop out of school!

BILL: Max - -

MAX: I just wish - - *(He stops.)*

BILL: What?

MAX: Nothing.

(Bill looks at Max, Max looks away.)

BILL: I had a really important audition this week.

MAX: Who knew there was such a demand for dancing underwear.

BILL: This isn't dancing underwear. It's a new play. I'd get to be a real person in this one. In fact, that's what I wanted to talk to you about - -

(Max has clamped on a set of headphones, listening to music from his Walkman. He also turns up the television.)

(Bill watches him.) Don't forget to blink, Max. (Max doesn't respond.) They'll call if I got the job.

(The phone rings, Bill and Max bolt into action, another ritual.)

MAX & BILL: I'll get it!

(Max and Bill scramble to answer the phone and everything Bill has previously picked up scatters around the room again. Bill finally finds the phone.)

BILL: I got it! *(Excited)* Hello? *(Disappointed, handing the phone to Max)* It's for you.

(Max talks on the phone with his Walkman still on his ears.)

MAX: Hello? *(Listens.)* Hey, Jose! *(Listening.)* Sure, rollerblades are definitely cool. But only if the shoestrings are blue. *(Listens to phone.)*

BILL: *(Getting Max's attention)* Max - - we need to keep the phone free.

MAX: *(To Bill)* What?

BILL: *(Trying not to lose his patience)* The job - - remember?

MAX: *(To phone)* Jose? I gotta go. Listen: this is gonna be THE best summer in the history of the world! Me too, I got a list NINETY MILES LONG. What? O, right, I'll tell him. See you tomorrow. *(Hangs up)* Jose told me to tell you his sister saw your commercial and she thinks you're really cute.

(Bill puffs up and strikes a muscle pose.)

Dad - - his sister is five.

BILL: Well, the next time that phone rings -- it's no more dancing underwear for me.

(Max looks at him in disbelief.)

Hypothetically, I mean.

MAX: Hypo -- what?

BILL: Hypothetically.

MAX: Translation, please.

BILL: Hypothetically. It means -- maybe -- or -- just supposing. It means "what if".

MAX: Sure, I get it. . .

BILL: HYPOTHETICALLY, YOU COULD PLAY FOR THE YANKEES

MAX: OR METS

BILL: RIGHT!
MAYBE ALL OF THEM: GIANTS, KNICKS AND METS

MAX: QUARTERBACK THE JETS
WHAT IF I COULD FLY ABOVE THE
THUNDERCRACKS
IT'S A BIRD, A PLANE, NO IT'S MAX!

HYPOTHETICALLY, I COULD LEARN HOW TO HULA -
- OR NOT.

MAYBE JOIN A BAND, LET MY HAIR GROW LONG,
DYE IT GREEN A LOT
WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF I RAN FOR PRESIDENT

BILL: VOTE FOR MAX --

MAX: HE'S EXCELLENT . . . *(Bill: INTELLIGENT)*
HE IS CONFIDENT. . . *(Bill: AND MAGNIFICENT)*
MAX AS PRESIDENT GETS A MONUMENT - -
MAX IS - -

(With Max going off in a good mood, Bill launches into his pitch.)

BILL: So, president Max, what would you think about getting out of New York for the summer?

MAX: *(Suspicious)* What do you mean?

BILL: You know, take the summer off, drop out of the rat race. Slow things down a little bit.

MAX: You mean take a trip?

BILL: *(Uncomfortable)* Sorta.

MAX: You mean like a vacation?

BILL: *(Stretching it)* Kinda.

MAX: *(Confused)* Sort of a trip that's kind of a vacation?

BILL: Exactly!

MAX: Dad, why am I not excited here?

BILL: You remember Aunt Junie, right?

MAX: *(Teasing)* I thought she was dead.

BILL: Max!

MAX: Aunt Junie . . . the one who always sends that duck stuff for Christmas?

BILL: I thought maybe you'd like to see her this summer.

MAX: When is she coming to visit?

BILL: Well, that's the really interesting part. Your Aunt Junie's getting pretty old and the trip wouldn't be that easy - - so - - I thought maybe - -

MAX: *(Helping him out)* Hypothetically - -

BILL: Right! Hypothetically, YOU could visit HER.

MAX: No way.

BILL: Just for the summer - -

MAX: WHAT?!?

BILL: Now wait a minute - -

MAX: I am not gonna spend my summer with an old lady in some foreign country!

BILL: *(Laughing)* It's not a foreign country, Max. She lives in Kansas.

(We hear an odd sound, voices screaming "Kansas!", a panicked voice inside Max's head)

MAX: Kansas! ? ! *(Max is desperate)* You might as well send me to Jersey! Or Antarctica! Or a deserted island! *(Phone rings, Bill runs to answer it)* Dad!

BILL: *(To phone)* Hello? *(Disbelief)* I did? You're sure?

MAX: Dad?

BILL: Just a minute, Max. *(To phone)* They did? You're sure? I do! I mean yes!

MAX: I'm not going to Kansas.

BILL: *(Looking back to Max and then the phone)* I'll be there. Thank you! *(He hangs up the phone and dances wildly around the room.)* Thank you! I got the job! I finally got the job!

(Max watches Bill acting like an excited child. In fun, Bill tries to get Max to dance but Max refuses, pulls away.)

MAX: I don't like dancing.

BILL: *(Stops dancing)* Max, I'm sorry. But do you think I want to play dancing underwear the rest of my life? Look - - if I don't take this job, I might as well give up my acting career and just become - -

MAX: My dad?

BILL: That was mean.

MAX: *(Lashes out)* Everything was a lot more fun before Mom died!

BILL: *(Fighting back)* For me too. *(Gently, trying to reach Max)* Max, what about our agreement: always do the best we can, help each other out. That's our deal. *(Max doesn't look at him)* Right? *(Max doesn't look at him)* Right?

MAX: *(Reluctant)* Right.

BILL: It's just a couple of months. You'll see, the summer in Kansas will go by so fast you won't even know you've been there.

MAX: That's because I'm not going.

BILL: *(Pushing him)* You'll make some new friends - -