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Family Plays
THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS

Musical, book, music and lyrics by Liz Peterson. From Kenneth Grahame’s classic book. Cast: 9 to 40+ either gender. The musical is an always lively, often hilarious adaptation with wisdom enough for all. Peterson’s music and lyrics add to the charm of the classic story, enhancing an old favorite. The wealthy, spoiled and wildly enthusiastic Mr. Toad of Toad Hall takes up a new hobby—motorcars—and terrorizes the once-peaceful English countryside along the Thames. His friends, Rat, Badger and Mole, try to talk sense to him without success. As a last resort, they lock him in his bedroom. He escapes and “borrows” a motorcar without asking—then the big trouble starts! Production notes are available in the script containing details on set and props. Unit set. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 40 minutes. Accompaniment CD available directly from playwright. Code: WD3.
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The Wind in the Willows

Dramatized by
LIZ PETERSON

From the classic children’s book by
KENNETH GRAHAME

Music by
LIZ PETERSON

Lyrics by
LIZ PETERSON and KENNETH GRAHAME

Musical consultant
GEORGE BANHALMI

Family Plays
311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098
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(The Wind in the Willows)

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“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”
THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS
A Musical for Children and Adults
by Liz Peterson

SETTING: English Countryside, 1908
SCENE I The Riverbank in Spring
SCENE II The Riverbank in Summer
SCENE III The Open Road
SCENE IV A Spot by the Side of the Road
SCENE V Toad’s Bedroom
SCENE VI Courtroom
SCENE VII The Dungeon
SCENE VIII Rat’s House, 5 Days Later
SCENE IX Rat’s House, Same Day, Suppertime
SCENE X Rat’s House, Next Morning, After Breakfast
SCENE XI The Secret Passageway
SCENE XII The Banquet Hall

CAST:
MOLE - enthusiastic, young, almost totally lacking in experience
WATER RAT - level-headed, optimistic, a good friend
TOAD - charming, maddening, aristocratic, does exactly as he pleases
BADGER - fatherly, in love with the sound of his own voice, sees his duty and does it

OTTER
OLD GREY
FOX
JUDGE
CLERK
POLICEMAN
JAILER
JAILER’S DAUGHTER
WASHERWOMAN
FERRET
RIVERBANKERS
WEASELS

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Production Notes:

The basic set is flattish hills of three different levels, the highest rising 4 feet above the stage floor, a padded platform painted in earth tones. Stage right, its base a few inches above ground, is a hole representing the entrance to Rat’s house. This set serves variously as the riverbank, hills at the side of the road, hills near Toad’s house, walls of Rat’s house, walls of the courtroom, and walls of the prison.

The animals look like people except for a few animal touches such as tail and whiskers, or in the case of Toad, a greenish tinge to his/her skin. The horse could have a horse head as well. All should have one or two animal actions, e.g., sniffing one another when they meet, scratching, making a typical sound, or, in Toad’s case, blinking when nervous, snapping at flies when bored, and leaping when excited. Mole could be obviously near-sighted.

The motorcar needs to be sturdily built. Since it is driven with leg power, it need not have wheels that work. Rat’s boat could be two dimensional, side view, fastened to a wagon, or carried by the actors as they “duck walk” behind it. The caravan needs a sturdy shaft for Toad to ride. The audience can imagine all the wonderful things inside.

SINGING RANGES:
Mole, Rat, Toad, and Badger sing in a middle range, easily reached by second sopranos, baritones, and most high-school students. If played by trained singers, transpose Toad to tenor range, Badger to bass.
SCENE 1
The Riverbank in Spring

(Music Cue - 1. Prelude)
(After a minute or so, the music becomes quieter and a spot comes up on Mrs. Moorehen, who is standing, stage right, in front of the curtain with an oversized THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS book in her hand.)

MRS. MOOREHEN: Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, welcome to THE WIND IN THE WILLOWS. I am Mrs. Moorehen, the animal who tells the story, and here are the other animals you will see in our play today: (One by one the main characters walk through audience, introducing themselves.) And now it’s time to use your imagination, to set the scene. Our story begins in the cozy but dark little underground house of Mr. Mole.

(Spot comes up on Mole, stage left, in front of the curtain. He has a chair, a pail, brush, broom, and feather duster to work with.)

The Mole has been working very hard all the morning, spring-cleaning his little home. First with brooms, then with dusters; then on ladders and steps and chairs, with a brush and a pail of whitewash; till he has dust in his throat and eyes, and splashes of whitewash all over his black fur, and an aching back and weary arms. Spring is moving in the air above and in the earth below and around him, penetrating even his dark and lowly little house with its spirit of divine discontent and longing. It is small wonder, then, that he suddenly flings down his brush, says —

MOLE: Hang spring-cleaning!

— and he bolts out of the house without even waiting to put on his coat. Something up above is calling him, and he makes for the steep little tunnel that leads to the world outside. He scrapes and scratches and scrabbles and scrooges, working busily with his little paws and muttering to himself:

MOLE: Up we go! Up we go!
(During the next sentence, curtain opens and lights come up on the riverbank world in springtime. A two-dimensional grassy bank with bullrushes and daffodils is in front of the river. Water Rat’s front door is a hole in the bank on the far side of the river, stage left, with a sign reading “A. Water Rat, Esq.” Backdrop of the Wildwood.)

MRS. MOOREHEN: — till at last, pop! his snout comes out into the sunlight, and he finds himself rolling in the warm green grass of a great green meadow. With the sun on his back and the breeze on his brow and birdsong in his ears, he rambles through the meadow and sings a little song.

(Music Cue - 2. Mole’s Song)

MOLE: Flowers are budding, leaves are thrusting, No more whitewash, no more dusting, Everyone’s working but me but me, Everyone’s working but me.

Squirrels scurry, badgers bustle, Everywhere it’s hurry, hustle, Everyone’s rushing but me but me, Everyone’s rushing but me.

Bees are buzzing, larks are laying and Only I am holidaying, Everyone’s busy but me but me, Oh, everyone is busy but me. Oh—

Sun is shining, grass is greening, Spring is great without spring cleaning, Come and be happy like me like me Why not be happy like me!

MRS. MOOREHEN: The Mole thinks his happiness is complete, but then he sees — a river! Never in his life has he seen a river before. It gleams and sparkles, chases and chuckles, it grips things with a gurgle and leaves them with a laugh. Mole trots along the riverbank and listens to the stories the river tells. There is a dark hole in the opposite bank, just above the water’s edge. As Mole watches, he sees something twinkle. It is an eye, then two eyes, then a face with whiskers. It’s the Water Rat!
RATTY: (cautiously) Hullo, Mole.

MOLE: (cautiously) Hullo, Rat.

RATTY: Would you like to come over?

MOLE: I don't know how to swim!

RATTY: Never mind. I'll come fetch you in my boat.

(Ratty rows across the river and helps Mole get into his little blue and white rowboat.)

MOLE: (excited and a little afraid) I've never been in a boat before in all my life!

RATTY: Never been in a boat before — you've never — well I — what have you been doing, then?

MOLE: (shyly) Is it really so nice as all that?

RATTY: Nice? It's the only thing. Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing — absolutely nothing — half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats! (Starts singing. During the first verse Riverbankers drift onstage, with Mrs. Moorehen joining them. After the first verse, Mole and Riverbankers join Rat on the chorus.)

(Music Cue — 3. Messing About in Boats)

(Chorus)
Messing about - in boats; messing about - in boats,
Nothing's quite so pleasant as messing about in boats—
It really doesn't matter if you're in the boat or out of it,
Bailing it or sailing it or drifting all about in it,
You can go where you are going or somewhere else instead,
Sing in it or whistle or stand upon your head—

(Chorus)
It really doesn't matter, and that is half the charm of it,
Sponge it out or paint it, there isn't any harm in it,
Up the stream or downstream, you can wear a captain's cap,
Row with all your muscles or lie back and take a nap—

(Chorus)
RAT: And now it’s time to go for a little row.

(Mole sits in the stern, Rat in the rower’s seat. Rat starts “rowing” as crew members offstage pull the boat across the river. Chorus waves goodbye and sings part of “Messing about in Boats” as they drift offstage left, after the boat. Boat reappears stage right. Lights down on Wildwood.)

MOLE: (looking up with a start and waving a paw toward the Wildwood) Ratty, what’s that?

RAT: That’s the Wildwood. We don’t go there, we Riverbankers.

MOLE: (nervously) Aren’t they - aren’t the people friendly?

RAT: Well, the squirrels are all right, and the rabbits, some of them. And then there’s Badger. He lives in the heart of the Wildwood. Dear old Badger! Nobody messes with him. They’d better not!

MOLE: Who would want to?

RAT: Weasels and stoats and ferrets. They’re not as (gropes for the right word) as peaceable as they might be.

MOLE: Peace! That’s what we have these warm spring days. Dreamy and leisurely peace. (Sits back and dangles a paw in the water in a happy trance.)

(Music cue - Prelude reprise.)

(A few bars of the Prelude are cut off abruptly as Toad “wearing” a new racing boat, a 1908 swim suit, and a stop watch around his neck, comes rocking and rolling madly down the aisle. Mole and Rat, lost in peace, don’t see him, as their boat exits stage left. Toad comes on stage and rows madly upstream. Lots of grunting and groaning and checking his stopwatch. Exits stage right and back down an aisle. Mole and Rat reappear, stage right, still rowing leisurely to the Prelude. Otter appears on the riverbank, stage left.)
MOLE: (still in a daze) Dreamy and leisurely peace.

RAT: Hullo. There's Otter. Otter, here's my friend, Mr. Mole.
(Stops rowing. Rat and Mole climb out onto the bank.)

OTTER: (shakes Mole's paw, ready to be friends) Proud, I'm sure. Such a rumpus everywhere! All the world is out on the river today. I can't seem to grab a moment's quiet.

(A rustle behind them and Badger comes out on the bank.)

RAT: (delighted) Come on, old Badger!

BADGER: (trots forward a few paces, grunts) Hmmm! Company!
(Turns his back and disappears.)

RAT: (disappointed) That's just the sort of fellow he is. Simply hates Society. We shan't see any more of him today. Well, tell us, Otter, who's out on the river?

OTTER: Toad, for one, in his brand-new racing boat - new oars, new bathing suit, new everything.

MOLE: Who's Toad?

RAT and OTTER: Who's Toad?

(Enter the chorus of Riverbankers.)

RIVERBANKERS: You don't know who Toad is????

RAT, OTTER, and RIVERBANKERS: Toad's Mr. Toad from Toad Hall. He's green, well-dressed, pop-eyed, rather rich, a generous sort of fellow in a selfish sort of way. Always happy to see you come - and sorry to see you go. But most of all he's crazy.

MOLE: (shocked) You mean he's bonkers?
RAT, OTTER, and RIVERBANKERS: No, not bonkers. Crazy. He's always taking up a new craze - one right after another. One week it's canoeing, the next week it's tennis, after that it's the 50-yard dash.

MOLE:  
(admiringly) He must be very athletic.

RAT, OTTER, and RIVERBANKERS: Athletic?!!!  
(Laugh uproariously.)

RAT:  
(spotting Toad, who is racing up a side aisle) Toad? There you are. Hullo!

TOAD:  
No time for chit-chat, Ratty,  
(puff, puff) I'm setting a record.  
(Rows madly past the front of the stage.) Why don't you trade in that tub of yours for a faster model?  
(Rows out the door.)

MOLE:  
He looks as if he might fall out any minute.

OTTER:  
(looking in Toad's direction) Oops! He just did!

(Toad's empty boat comes drifting downstream. Toad, soaking wet and carrying one oar, comes galloping hysterically along the riverbank in pursuit.)

TOAD:  
My boat! Why didn't you catch it, Ratty? What's wrong with you, Otter?  
(To Mole) Don't just stand there, whoever you are. I've lost my boat!  
(Exits stage right.)

MOLE:  
Ratty, I want to meet him.

(Music Cue - 4. Meet Mr. Toad)

RAT, OTTER, RIVERBANKERS: Oh, meet Mr. Toad from Toad Hall. He's bulgy and not very tall. He's silly and foolish, stubborn and mulish, He thinks he is lord of it all, He thinks he is lord of it all.

Toad likes to sing his own praises In flowery elaborate phrases He thinks he is bright, but how could he be right? The scrapes he gets into amaze us.
MOLE: (eagerly) Ratty, when can I meet Mr. Toad?

RAT: As soon as I’m in a tolerant frame of mind.

(Rat and Mole leave. Otter and the Riverbankers sing one more verse to audience.)

Toad loves to take up something new, Something exciting to do. Bicycling one week, sailing the next, And his friends have to go along too, His friends have to go along too—

(Spoken) And pretend they like it! (Sung) That’s Toad!

(Otter and the Riverbankers leave. The Weasels come in to change the scenery. As they work, they say nasty things about Toad. They hate him because he’s too rich, has too many possessions, is too lucky, has too many friends, etc. They act as a Greek chorus, commenting on the action, and they wish him ill. May his racing boat spring a leak, may his tennis whites turn gray, may his mattress sag - all sorts of minor domestic disasters.)

SCENE II
The Riverbank in Summer

(Before lights come up, we can hear Mole and Rat conversing.)

MOLE: Spring is gone and summer's here and at last we're going to call on Mr. Toad.

RAT: Toad, ah, Toad. It's never the wrong time to call on Toad. Early or late he's always the same fellow. So good-tempered, so affectionate. Perhaps he's not very clever. And perhaps he's rather boastful and conceited, but he has got some great qualities, has Toady. You'll see.

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(Lights have come up on the riverbank in summer. Daffodils have been exchanged for a summer flower, perhaps wild roses. Backdrop, stage left, is a distant Toad Hall, a rambling, impressive, stately mansion. Mole and Rat are in Rat's boat, with Mole competently rowing toward Toad Hall. Toad is seated stage left in a wicker lawn chair studying a large map. At the water's edge is a sign: "Private. No Landing Allowed!")

**RAT:** Look, Moley, there it is. That's Toad Hall.

**MOLE:** *(overwhelmed)* Why, it's, it's, it's —

**RAT:** Banquet hall, dairy, greenhouse. It's quite extensive. The boat house is over there, and beyond it's the stables.

**MOLE:** Why, it's, it's, it's - extensive! But where's Toad's racing boat?

**RAT:** Up on the crossbeams, I suspect. He'll be finished with boating by now. Why there he is. *(Calls to him.)* Toad! *(They tie the boat to the sign and disembark.)*

**TOAD:** *(jumps up)* Hooray! Splendid! *(Shakes their paws warmly.)* How kind of you to come! I was just going to send a boat down to fetch you, Ratty. I want you badly - both of you. Come inside and eat something. How lucky it is, you turning up just now.

**RAT:** *(sitting down)* Let's sit a bit, Toady, and be quiet. You haven't met Mr. Mole.

**MOLE:** *(sitting too)* I'm delighted to meet you, Mr. Toad, and delighted to see your delightful residence, which I've heard so much about.

**TOAD:** *(boisterously)* Finest house on the river. Or anywhere else, for that matter! *(Rat gives Mole an I-told-you-so nudge. Toad notices and starts to get embarrassed, then bursts out laughing.)*
TOAD: All right, Ratty. It’s only my way, you know. And it’s not such a very bad house, is it! Now, look here. Let’s be sensible. You two are the very animals I wanted. You’ve got to help me.

RAT: (innocently) It’s about your rowing, I suppose. You’re getting on fairly well by now, I suspect, though you splash a good bit still. But with patience and a great deal of coaching, maybe one day —

TOAD: (disgusted) Boating - pooh! Who cares about boating? I gave that up long ago. Silly boyish amusement. It makes me downright sorry to see you fellows, who ought to know better, spending all your energies in that aimless manner. No, I’ve discovered the real thing, the only thing. And I plan to devote the rest of my life to it. Come with me, dear Ratty, and your friend too, if he will be so very good, just as far as the stable yard, and you shall see what you shall see!

RAT: I’m wonderfully comfortable, Toady, right where I am.

TOAD: Why then, we’ll bring it to you, but first we’ll have to catch Old Grey. (Rat stretches out comfortably, map over face, as if to take a nap. Toad and Mole leave. Offstage sounds of Toad trying to catch Old Grey, who makes noises like a spirited stallion. With all the racket. Rat, of course, finds it impossible to take a nap.)

(Offstage) Here, Grey, nice Grey, good Grey. Oats. Grey, we won’t go far, I promise you, not yet. Please, Grey? Just to the riverbank? (more fiercely) Aha! Thought you’d outsmart me, did you? Mole, stand by the gate and if she jumps over, grab her by the halter.

MOLE: Got her!

TOAD: Good. Now, the harness - there we go - and we’ll just hitch her up to this.

MOLE: (gasps) Oh! How lovely! What is it?
(They enter stage left, walking beside a depressed-looking old grey mare, a drudge, harnessed to a cart.)

TOAD: It's a gypsy caravan. (expansively) There's real life for you. The primitive life, embodied in this little cart!

MOLE: (pointing to nets of onions and potatoes hanging from the bottom) What's all that?

TOAD: Onions, potatoes, turnips. Look inside. I'll show you all the arrangements. (Mole follows eagerly) Come on, Ratty.

RAT: I'm quite comfortable right here, thank you very much. (Stretches out again and puts map over his face.)

MOLE: (delighted) Why, there are bunks to sleep in and a little writing desk, even a cooking stove.

TOAD: (proudly) That's not all. Look. Pots and pans and kettles and tubs and biscuits and sardines - everything you could possibly want. Soda water, tobacco, letter paper, bacon, jam, cards, dominoes, books —

MOLE: Look, Ratty. There's even a bird and a bird cage. (Bird warbles happily. Rat does not respond.)

TOAD: We're all packed up, you see. We'll make our start this afternoon.

MOLE: We will? Oh, oh, oh, OH ! ! !

RAT: (removing the map from his face) I beg your pardon, Toad, but did I hear you say something about “we” and “start” and “this afternoon”?  

TOAD: Now, you dear good Rat, don't start talking in that snifty way of yours. You know you've got to come. You surely don't mean to stick to that fusty old river all your life, do you, and just live in a hole in a bank and a boat? I'm going to show you the world, my boy. (Slaps Rat on the back.) I'll make a man of you. (Thrusts hands in his
pockets and strides manfully about. Sings at his romantic best. Mole joins him on the repeated lines, harmonizing.)

(Music Cue - 5. The Open Road)

The open road, the hills, the hedges, the downs, Hamlets, villages, cities, castles, and towns.
To sleep on a pine-needle rug
And to drink my tea from a mug,
And to ramble and roam every day,
Every night a new home.

The open road, a changing horizon before me,
Sunshine, moonlight, birdsong never could bore me.
To sleep with the stars and the wind,
To have lizards and beetles for friends,
And to ramble and roam every day,
Every night a new home.

MOLE: (jumping up and down) I want to go! I want to go! I want to go! GO!!!

TOAD: Splendid! Ratty, what about you?

RAT: I'll stick to my hole and my fusty old river and my boat, thank you very much, and Mole's going to stick with me. Aren't you, Mole?

MOLE: (taken aback) Uh, why, oh - of course I am. (Loyally) I'll always stick with you, Rat. Always! (Wistfully) All the same, it sounds as if it might have been rather fun.

RAT: Oh Mole, if it means that much to you, I suppose we might —

MOLE: (overjoyed) Oh, Ratty, oh Ratty, oh!

TOAD: You needn't decide in a hurry, my friends. Let's go inside and have a leisurely lunch. I don't really care one way or the other. I only want to give you fellows pleasure. "Live for others" - that's my motto.