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*Dramatic Publishing*

# The Christmas Bus



Book, music and lyrics by  
Robert Inman



# The Christmas Bus

**Musical. Book, music and lyrics by Robert Inman.** *Cast: 4m., 5w., 8 children. (Children's cast can be expanded with nonspeaking parts.)* It's Christmas Eve, and Mrs. Frump, the director of the Peaceful Valley Orphanage, is planning what she believes will be the most special Christmas ever for her kids. She's borrowed an old bus and arranged for each child to spend Christmas with a family in the area. The only problem is, she hasn't told the Busybodies on the orphanage board of trustees, who believe Frump has gotten too old and soft to handle the rowdy kids at Peaceful Valley. With the help of teenage Thomas, the oldest of the orphans and her trusty right-hand man, Frump sets off to deliver the kids—pursued by the suspicious Sheriff Snodgrass and the Busybodies. Along the way, they pick up a passenger: a traveling troubadour who's been on the road trying his luck as a folksinger and is now returning home to his girlfriend (who may or may not be glad to see him). It's an adventuresome ride, culminating in a Christmas even more special than Frump could have ever imagined. Enjoy this wonderful Christmas ride with 15 original songs. *One int./one ext. set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: CE3.*

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# THE CHRISTMAS BUS

A Musical

Book, lyrics and music

by

ROBERT INMAN



**Dramatic Publishing**

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“Originally produced at Children’s Theatre of Charlotte,  
Charlotte, N.C., Alan Poindexter, Artistic Director.”

*The Christmas Bus* was presented at Children's Theatre of Charlotte, Charlotte, N.C., December 1-17, 2006. Directed by Jen Band and Alan Poindexter, scenic design by Sandra Gray, choreography by Delia Neil, costume design by Bob Croghan, properties design by Peter Smeal, sound design by Gary Sivak, music director was Drina Keen, lighting design was by Eric Winkenwerder, technical director was Pete Wennerstrom, production stage manager was Ryan Margheim and costume shop manager was Amy Akerblom. The cast was:

MRS. FRUMP . . . . . Susan Roberts Knowlson  
THE EDITOR . . . . . Steven Ivey  
TRAVELING TROUBADOUR . . . . . Mark Sutton  
SHERIFF SNODGRASS . . . . . James K. Flynn  
DARLENE . . . . . Barbi Van Schaick\*  
HORTENSE . . . . . Jill Bloede  
ETHEL . . . . . Amy Van Looy  
MYRTLE . . . . . Gina Stewart  
THOMAS . . . . . Ben Mackel\*  
CLARA . . . . . Jamila Reddy  
HILDA . . . . . Adara Blake  
JENNY . . . . . Heidi Woodward  
EUGENE . . . . . Myles Moses  
FRANKIE . . . . . Corey Cray  
DONALD . . . . . Jura Davis  
EMMA . . . . . Emily Hudson  
LOUIE . . . . . Cody Pyles

\* Denotes member of Actors' Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States.

# THE CHRISTMAS BUS

## CHARACTERS

THE EDITOR . writing a story for the Christmas edition of  
his newspaper

FRUMP . . . . . director of the Peaceful Valley Orphanage

THOMAS . . . . . high school senior and mechanical genius

SHERIFF SNODGRASS . . . . . local lawman and tireless  
investigator

THE BUSYBODIES . . . . . three harpies who make life  
difficult for Frump

THE KIDS . . . . . FRANKIE, CLARA, DONALD, HILDA,  
EUGENE, LOUANN, CASEY, JENNY

THE TROUBADOUR . . . . . a traveling folksinger

DARLENE . . . . . the Troubadour's reluctant girlfriend



## MUSICAL NUMBERS

### ACT ONE

1. Christmas Bus Theme
2. Interlude 1
3. It's a Madhouse! . . . . . Frump, Thomas, Kids, Busybodies
4. Interlude 2
5. We Love Ya Frump . . . . . Thomas, Kids
6. Interlude 3
7. Persistence. . . . . Frump, Thomas
8. Interlude 4
9. Interlude 5
10. Semi-Star . . . . . Troubadour, Kids
11. Interlude 6
12. Christmas at the Orphanage . . . . . Frump, Thomas, Kids
13. A Christmas Like This . . . . . Frump
14. Interlude 7
15. It's Never Easy . . . . . Kids
16. Interlude 8
17. Thinking of Home. . . . . Troubadour, Thomas, Kids, Frump

### ACT TWO

18. Entr'acte
19. Christmas Eve . . . . . Thomas, Kids
20. Interlude 9
21. Interlude 10
22. Riding on the Christmas Bus . . . . . Thomas, Kids
23. Interlude 11
24. Driving Like a Maniac! . . . . . Kids
25. Interlude 12
26. Interlude 13
27. The Geranium Song . . . . . Troubadour, Kids, Frump
28. Santa Wears Cowboy Boots . . . . . Troubadour, Frump, Kids
29. Super Star . . . Frump, Thomas, Sheriff, Kids, Troubadour, Darlene
30. Interlude 14
31. Riding on the Christmas Bus (Reprise) . . . . . All

## Preface

There really was a Traveling Troubadour. On a frigid December night some years ago he was part of a vanload of passengers traveling from the Denver airport to the ski resort area of the Rockies. He told his fellow travelers how he had left a girlfriend in a small mountain town a year before and set out to see if he could make it as a folksinger. He and the girlfriend had lost touch; but now, with Christmas approaching, he was on his way back. Would she let him in? Had she found someone else?

The van stopped near the front door of a dwelling and the passengers held their collective breath as the folksinger trudged through the snow to the doorway, guitar case in hand. He knocked, a young woman answered, they talked earnestly for a minute or so, and then...she opened the door and he disappeared inside with a wave. To quote a once-popular song, the whole darn bus was cheering.

It's one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments that any writer treasures. If witnessing something like that doesn't get your creative juices flowing, nothing will. From there, imagination takes over and the vanload of tourists becomes a busload of orphans, led by a mother hen who intends to give them a special Christmas. It becomes a story of how people make families out of bits and pieces of their collective lives, how we might persevere when we truly believe in something, how vital it is to nurture a child, how love generates magic.

Notes to theatres:

The cast may be expanded by adding children, especially younger ones, with non-speaking parts. The more orphans, the merrier—up to a point. The limiting factor is the size of the bus. It must be large enough to accommodate Frump, Thomas and the kids.

Most of the roles are gender-specific. However, the role of the youngest orphan may be played by either a boy or girl. If a boy is cast, Louann becomes Louie.

I dedicate the play to all the orphans of the world.

— Robert Inman

# ACT ONE

## SCENE 1 – THE EDITOR

*(Music up: CHRISTMAS BUS THEME.*

*Music segues to the sound of a blustery wind.*

*The EDITOR bustles in, bundled in overcoat and scarf, shivering with cold. He pauses for a moment, catching his breath, then turns to the audience. As he speaks, he sheds his coat, scarf and hat and hangs them on a coat rack.)*

THE EDITOR. Whooooeee. She's blowing like a politician out there, and looking a lot like snow. But then, it always looks like snow right before Christmas. It's a tradition around here. Dark clouds, temperature dropping, wind picking up, kids getting that sparkle in their eyes and that rosy glow in their cheeks. Everybody gets excited—buying up all the milk and bread, waxing the runners on the sled, putting out extra seed for the birds. But then...nothing! Not a single dad-burned flake. That's the way it's always been. Except for once. And that's what I'm gonna tell you about. *(He pulls a reporter's notebook from a pocket and flips pages.)* Matter of fact, I'm writing it up for the newspaper. It's something my grandfather started years ago when he founded the pa-

per—a special Christmas edition with recipes, poetry, a whole page of letters to Santa, and an inspirational story. I've been saving this one and I think it's pretty special. But...I'll let you judge.

*(Music up: INTERLUDE 1.)*

## SCENE 2 – THE ORPHANAGE

*(Lights up on the main room—cluttered, messy and well-lived-in, sparsely populated with worn but sturdy furniture. Through a window we see green fields and blue skies. Throughout the play, the EDITOR moves freely and unseen among the other members of the cast.)*

THE EDITOR. Let me take you back a few years to Peaceful Valley...a green and pleasant place, with orchards and pastures and farmland, vegetable gardens and sturdy barns. But Peaceful Valley was not a peaceful place—*(Abrupt musical crash.)* And the reason was the Peaceful Valley Orphanage.

*(Music up: IT'S A MADHOUSE!)*

*A sudden burst of noise and motion as the orphans—THOMAS, CLARA, EUGENE, HILDA, DONALD, JENNY and LOUANN—dash into the room, followed by FRUMP, staying just out of her reach. EUGENE has a rubber snake in his hand. The others are either chasing him or trying to stay out of his way. They romp about, laughing and yelling.)*

FRUMP. Children! Children! Here you go again...running  
in the house...and being too loud... (*louder and louder*)  
...and...and...driving poor old Frump to distraction!  
(*Singing.*)

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

THOMAS & KIDS.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

ALL.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

FRUMP.

**ALL DAY LONG I COOK AND CLEAN, MEND AND  
SEW AND DUST;  
WASH THEIR CLOTHESES, WIPE THEIR NOSES,  
REFEREE THE FUSS;  
ALTHOUGH I LOVE 'EM DEARLY, THEY'RE  
ABOUT TO DRIVE ME NUTS;  
IT'S CHAOS AND CONFUSION, IT'S A  
MADHOUSE!**

FRUMP, THOMAS & KIDS.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

THOMAS & KIDS.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

FRUMP & KIDS.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

*(Music under. FRUMP grabs one kid, then another, trying to restore some semblance of order, without effect. They slip out of her grasp and continue to dash about.)*

THOMAS & KIDS.

**EVEN THOUGH WE'RE ORPHANS, THEY MAKE  
US GO TO SCHOOL,  
OBEY THE STAFF AND FACULTY AND FOLLOW  
ALL THE RULES;  
BUT WHEN THE SCHOOL DAY'S OVER, WE LIKE  
TO ACT LIKE FOOLS;  
IT'S A LOT MORE FUN WHEN IT'S A  
MADHOUSE! IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

FRUMP.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

FRUMP, THOMAS & KIDS.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

*(Music under. The sound of a car horn.)*

FRUMP. Now, who on earth could that be?

THOMAS & KIDS. Oh no! It's the Busybodies!

*(The door flies open and HORTENSE, MYRTLE and ETHEL—The BUSYBODIES—bustle in. They all wear white gloves. ETHEL carries a notebook and pencil. THOMAS and the KIDS freeze.)*

FRUMP *(a look of horror)*. Ladies! What a nice surprise!

*(The BUSYBODIES ignore FRUMP.)*

THE BUSYBODIES (*singing*).

**BUSY, BUSY, BUSY, BUSY, BUSY.**

**WE'RE THE BUSYBODIES AND WE'VE COME TO  
TAKE A LOOK**

**AT EVERY LITTLE CRANNY AND EVERY LITTLE  
NOOK;**

**WE'LL MAKE A NOTE OF EVERYTHING,**

ETHEL.

**I'LL WRITE IT IN MY BOOK.**

HORTENSE.

**AND THE FIRST THING WE NOTICE...IT'S A  
MADHOUSE!**

MYRTLE.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

ETHEL.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

THE BUSYBODIES.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

*(Music under as the BUSYBODIES stride briskly about the room, poking and prying. ETHEL scribbles furiously in her notepad. FRUMP follows them in a dither, trying ineffectually to bring order to the clutter.)*

HORTENSE. Aaaggh! Dust! Have you ever seen such?

Ethel, are you writing this down?

ETHEL. Every little detail, Hortense.



MYRTLE. Aaaggh! Cobwebs! I don't believe the place has had a proper cleaning in years!

HORTENSE. Decades, Myrtle, if you ask me.

ETHEL. Somewhere between years and decades.

FRUMP. Well, you know cleaning day is Saturday, and since it's Friday...

ETHEL. Aaaggh! Cooties!

HORTENSE. Add it to the list, Ethel.

ETHEL. You betcha!

HORTENSE. I've never seen such disorganization!

MYRTLE. Slothfulness!

ETHEL. How do you spell that?

MYRTLE. S-l-o-t-h...

HORTENSE. Untidiness!

THE BUSYBODIES. Chaos and confusion!

*(The KIDS gallop in—laughing, yelling, milling about the BUSYBODIES—who huddle in a tight circle, holding up their skirts, looking on in horror as they edge toward the door.)*

THE BUSYBODIES *(cont'd)*.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

THOMAS & KIDS.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

FRUMP.

**IT'S A MADHOUSE!**

ALL.

**IT'S A MAD...HOUSE!**

*(The BUSYBODIES exit. So do the KIDS, leaving FRUMP collapsed, exhausted, in a chair.*

*Music under: INTERLUDE 2.)*

THE EDITOR. So now you see why the residents of the orphanage were referred to as “The Hooligans”...and why those three ladies from the orphanage board of trustees were called “The Busybodies”...and why Peaceful Valley was anything but peaceful. At the time of our story, there were eight orphans.

*(As the EDITOR introduces the KIDS, they wander in one at a time, cross the room, and exit.*

*CLARA enters, carrying a basket of laundry.)*

THE EDITOR *(cont’d)*. Clara was the oldest of the girls, fifteen or so. She was the motherly type and helped take care of the younger kids.

*(HILDA enters, examining herself in a hand-held mirror, primping her hair.)*

THE EDITOR *(cont’d)*. Hilda was twelve, just beginning to be interested in boys and makeup, both of which frequently landed her in the doghouse.

*(JENNY enters, looking about.)*

THE EDITOR (*cont'd*). Jenny was ten, a budding artist with a sharp tongue and a voice that could make the windows rattle.

JENNY. Awright, who's got my yo-yo?!!

(*LOUANN enters, riding a tricycle.*)

THE EDITOR. Louann was the youngest and smallest of all the kids, and frequently referred to by the others as “the munchkin.”

(*THOMAS enters, reading a book.*)

THE EDITOR (*cont'd*). Thomas was the oldest of the boys—eighteen, and soon to graduate from high school. He aspired to go on to college and become a mechanical engineer.

(*EUGENE enters. He wears a cast on one arm and a bandage on his forehead.*)

THE EDITOR (*cont'd*). Eugene was perhaps the cleverest of the bunch, a fine student of cause and effect, like jumping from the roof of the orphanage to see what it would be like to land in the Nandina bush below.

(*DONALD enters, carrying a potted geranium plant.*)

THE EDITOR (*cont'd*). There was Donald, who was something of a sad story. There had been a fire at Donald's home, and he and that geranium plant were the only survivors. The geranium was his constant companion. The

other kids were kind and understanding. The unwritten rule at the orphanage—you just accepted everybody as they were, geraniums and all.

*(A loud knock at the door. Music out.)*

THE EDITOR *(cont'd)*. And then...there was Frankie.

*(FRUMP crosses to the door and opens it to reveal SHERIFF SNODGRASS, holding FRANKIE by the collar. FRUMP pretends not to notice FRANKIE.)*

FRUMP. Why, Sheriff Snodgrass, how lovely of you to drop by! Come on in the kitchen. I've got some fresh apple cobbler.

*(SHERIFF SNODGRASS enters and follows her, with FRANKIE in his grip.)*

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Miz Frump, I'm afraid I don't have time for apple cobbler. I'm here on business. Serious business.

FRUMP. Oh, dear.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Old Man Gulley has been complaining about his cows' milk turning sour. I have investigated, Miz Frump, and I have found the culprit.

FRUMP. They've been eating bitterweed?

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. No, Miz Frump, this culprit. *(Gives FRANKIE a shake.)* I caught young Frankie here riding those cows.

FRUMP. Oh, dear. Frankie, is that so? *(FRANKIE shrugs.)*

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. At a gallop, Miz Frump. Cows ain't meant to be ridden, especially at a gallop. (*With a jerk, FRANKIE breaks free from the SHERIFF's grasp. The SHERIFF and FRUMP chase him about the room.*)

Frankie, you come back here! You little rascal!

FRUMP. Frankie, stop that right now! Frankie...! (*FRANKIE eludes their grasp and exits in a dash, laughing gleefully.*)

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Miz Frump, that boy...that boy...

FRUMP. He's an energetic and ingenious young man, Sheriff. Why, Frankie was telling me the other day that he aspires to be a law enforcement officer, just like yourself. A champion of truth and justice.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Miz Frump, you can't be a law enforcement officer if you have a criminal record. And I'd say that's where that energetic and ingenious young man is headed.

FRUMP. Now, Sheriff, it can't be as grim as all that.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. And he's not the only one. I'm out here constantly—neighbors calling about your young'uns chasing each other up and down the road with garden implements, putting bedsheets on their heads and scaring poor old widow ladies... You have a problem with discipline, Miz Frump.

FRUMP. Sheriff, these are fine young people. We've just got to find ways to channel their boundless energy into constructive avenues. We've got to emphasize socialization, fraternalization and matriculation.

SHERIFF SNODGRASS. Huh?