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Dramatic Publishing
Civil War Voices

Musical by
James R. Harris

Original Arrangements by Mark Hayes

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Civil War Voices – Musical. By James R. Harris. Featuring songs of the period with original arrangements by Mark Hayes. Cast: 6 to 19m., 4 to 19w. This musical tells the compelling and passionate true stories of real people who lived through the Civil War, often using the actual words they left behind in diaries, letters and other writings. Joe Harris was a cotton planter from Alabama with a conflicted conscience about the war. The discovery of the existence of his diary inspired the play. Elizabeth Keckley endured the indignity of slavery, bought her freedom and became Mary Todd Lincoln’s closest friend and personal assistant in the White House. Theo Perry and his pregnant wife, Harriet, were a young, married couple from Texas who were separated by the war. Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain was a college professor from Maine who enlisted to fight for the Union, became a national war hero as a result of his actions at Gettysburg and accepted the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. The show contains exciting arrangements of some of the greatest songs of the period, such as “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” “Amazing Grace” and “Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child.” Appealing to all audiences, the songs and stories bring to life the incredible drama of this stirring era. Flexible set. Music excerpts available online. Approximate running time: 1 hour, 50 minutes. Code: CN8.
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(CIVIL WAR VOICES)

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Featuring songs of the period
Original arrangements by Mark Hayes

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AUTHOR’S NOTES

Although this musical is set against the backdrop of a great and panoramic national conflict, the staging requirements for the show are quite flexible and relatively simple. The show can be performed using a single unit set. As the action of the play unfolds, the audience is called upon in its collective imagination to the various locations of the war. Some productions have featured slide presentations depicting period scenes and characters as a backdrop for the performance, while others have not.

Because of the flexibility of the staging requirements, this musical has been produced in a remarkable variety of venues. It was first performed in a small church fellowship hall and an intimate college theatre, but then was next produced in a giant performing arts venue. It has been performed in a “gymatorium” in Gettysburg, an intimate New York theatre, and a wide variety of concert halls and theatres on a national tour. It was even produced “in concert” to commemorate the anniversary of the Battle of Bull Run, complete with a 100-voice choir backing up the actors.

Cast size is also flexible. There are around 30 speaking roles, many with solo singing parts. More actors can be added in the ensemble scenes and for the large choral numbers. The show has also been performed with a small ensemble cast, using cast doubling. Casting suggestions for a 10-person cast have been included at end of script.
A few words about the characters in the show seem to be in order. The Narrator “controls” the show by calling forth the other characters to tell their stories. The script is written so the same actor portrays the Narrator and Joseph Harris. The transformation of the Narrator to Harris can take place in a variety of ways: a change in accent, perhaps, or a slight change in costume, such as putting on a coat or hat for example. The Narrator and Joseph Harris can also be portrayed by separate actors, in which case stage directions should be adjusted accordingly. Abraham Lincoln is also a character in this show by virtue of his friendship with Elizabeth Keckley. However, I do not believe it is necessary to try to cast a Lincoln look-alike in the role. (After all, how many people actually look like Abraham Lincoln?) A simple, familiar devise such as a stovepipe hat should suffice to convey the character to the audience.

Although there is a lot of sadness in the show, there are also moments of humor. I think it is important to highlight the lighter moments in the show whenever possible so as to lighten the burden of the war.

Lastly I would like to express my undying gratitude to my brilliant musical collaborator, Mark Hayes. Mark’s original musical arrangements make these classic American songs live anew. Anyone who is not genuinely touched by Mark’s stirring musical work in this show is a hard hearted soul indeed.
Civil War Voices was presented in New York at the Midtown International Theatre Festival by Bob Ost/Wildly Productive Productions in association with Sheila Simon Geltzer and Alma Villegas, with stage direction by Dennis Courtney and musical direction by Laura Bergquist. It was subsequently produced and developed by Barter Theatre, Abingdon, Va., by Richard Rose, producing artistic director. The Barter production was directed by Susanne Boulee with musical direction by W. Brent Sawyer.

* * * *

Special thanks to Robin McKercher and Doane College.

* * * *

For my parents, John and Eleanor Harris
CIVIL WAR VOICES

CHARACTERS

Narrator / Joseph Harris
Theo Perry
Harriet Perry
Elizabeth Keckley
Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain
First Master
Old Mistress
Cook
Keckley’s Mother
Second Master
St. Louis Woman
Governor Washburn
Mrs. Jefferson Davis
Mary Todd Lincoln
Abraham Lincoln
Cornelia Harris
Sgt. George Buck
General Lee
General Hunt
Union General
First Soldier’s Wife
Second Soldier’s Wife
Narrator’s Father
Confederate Medic
Confederate Officer
Confederate Woman
Celebrant #1
Celebrant #2

PLUS Fire Eaters, Confederate Soldiers, Union Soldiers, Citizens, Celebrants, Chorus

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CASTING SUGGESTIONS FOR 6 MEN AND 4 WOMEN

MAN 1
Narrator
Joseph Harris

MAN 2
Theo Perry
Governor

MAN 3
Chamberlain
Male Oppressor
(non-speaking)

MAN 4
Second Master
Abe Lincoln
General Lee

MAN 5
First Master
General Hunt
Confederate Soldier
Narrator’s Father
Confederate Medic

MAN 6
Cook
Sgt. George Buck
Union General
Celebrant

WOMAN 1
Harriet Perry
Celebrant

WOMAN 2
Elizabeth Keckley
Keckley as a Child

WOMAN 3
Keckley’s Mother
St. Louis Patron
Soldier’s Wife
Mary Lincoln

WOMAN 4
Old Mistress
Mrs. Davis
Cornelia Harris
Soldier’s Wife
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ACT ONE

PROLOGUE

(MUSIC 1: PROLOGUE)

TIME AND PLACE: The present, in the attic of a house.

AT RISE: NARRATOR wanders in, looks around the room with wonder, eventually sees an old picture and picks it up tenderly.

NARRATOR. When I was a little boy, I became fascinated with an old picture in a silver frame on my grandmother’s parlor table. It was a picture of a Civil War soldier, no older than my brothers. He was wearing a Union uniform with brass buttons down the front and an ill-fitting cap with a musket at his side. He looked at once determined to be brave and scared to death. His eyes stared straight forward with a look that said, “What’s to become of me?” My grandmother told me the young boy was her mother’s brother and that he was killed by a stray bullet during the Civil War. The haunting look on that young soldier’s face has stayed with me all my life.
Like many Americans, I have ancestors from both sides of the war. My mother was from Nebraska and my father was from Alabama. My dad grew up on an Alabama farm that had been in his family for generations. There were lots of old stories about the war, including one about a family member who hid up in a tree as the Union troops passed beneath, and another about a neighbor who was hung by his thumbs by Union troops sent to tear up the railroad. It seems he wouldn’t tell them where he had buried his silver.

Then I found a diary that my great-great-uncle kept in Alabama during the Civil War. As I read his diary, I could feel the warm breath of his life and times on every page. And I began to look for true stories of the war left behind by other Americans as well.

I found the letters of Theo and Harriet Perry.
THEO. I left my pregnant wife and child in Marshall, Texas, to fight for the South.

HARRIET. We wrote to each other devotedly throughout the war. This is our true story and these are our words. *(They run to each other and embrace.)*

NARRATOR. I discovered a book by a freed slave named Elizabeth Keckley in a New York museum shop.

*(NARRATOR takes a book from a trunk and KECKLEY enters. He gives her the book. She becomes animated.)*

KECKLEY. I was born a slave. Therefore I came upon the earth free in thought, but fettered in action. This is my true story and these are my words.

NARRATOR. A friend told me about the inspiring memoirs of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain.

*(NARRATOR takes a book from the trunk, and CHAMBERLAIN enters. He gives the book to CHAMBERLAIN.)*

CHAMBERLAIN. I was a college professor in Maine when the war broke out. I enlisted and fought for the Union. I soon found myself at the center of the most important battle ever fought in North America. This is my true story and these are my words.

NARRATOR. But it was my uncle’s diary that inspired my quest.

*(NARRATOR takes his uncle’s diary from a trunk and is transformed into JOSEPH HARRIS.)*
HARRIS. My name is Joseph Harris, a cotton planter from Oak Bowery, Alabama. It is November 9, 1860. This is my true story and these are my words.

CHAMBERLAIN. This is my true story and these are my words.

KECKLEY. This is my true story and these are my words.

THEO & HARRIET. This is our true story and these are our words.

ALL (holding their pages up to heaven). And these are our words.

SCENE 1: An Alabama townhall meeting

(MUSIC 2: DIXIE UNDERSCORE)

HARRIS. I heard today that Abraham Lincoln was elected president. This is ominous news as he is opposed bitterly to our Southern institutions.

(FIRE-EATERS drift in one at a time.)

I went to a mass meeting for the purpose of taking into consideration the best means of Alabama seceding from the Union in consequence of Lincoln’s election. Oh, this is a dangerous business. I have never heard as much confusion as I heard there. Passions are running so high everyone wanted to speak at once!

(ENSEMBLE MEMBERS gather together to form a meeting of “fire-eaters.”)
SOUTHERN FIRE-EATERS.
    The North won’t fight. they need our cotton.
    We must defend our sacred honor.
    Alabama must secede at once.
    A war with the North wouldn’t last a month.

(Ad lib.)
HARRIS. I perceive that we are on the eve of one of the
greatest revolutions imaginable.

(SONG 3: THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG)

FIRE-EATER #1.
    WE ARE A BAND OF BROTHERS,
    AND NATIVE TO THE SOIL
    FIGHTING FOR THE PROPERTY
    WE GAINED BY HONEST TOIL.

FIRE-EATER #2.
    AND WHEN OUR RIGHTS WERE THREATENED,
    THE CRY ROSE NEAR AND FAR;
    HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG
    THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

ALL FIRE-EATERS.
    HURRAH! HURRAH!
    FOR SOUTHERN RIGHTS, HURRAH!
    HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG
    THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

FEMALE FIRE-EATERS.
    AS LONG AS THE UNION
    WAS FAITHFUL TO HER TRUST
LIKE FRIENDS AND BRETHREN,
KIND WERE WE, AND JUST;

FIRE-EATER #3.
BUT NOW, WHEN NORTHERN TREACHERY
ATTEMPTS OUR RIGHTS TO MAR,
WE HOIST ON HIGH THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG
THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

ALL FIRE-EATERS.
HURRAH! HURRAH!
FOR SOUTHERN RIGHTS, HURRAH!
HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG
THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!
HURRAH FOR THE BONNIE BLUE FLAG
THAT BEARS A SINGLE STAR!

FIRE-EATER #1. Ladies and gentlemen, our Southern
cause is righteous. We must defend our sacred honor
from Yankee insult. The South will be victorious!
ALL FIRE-EATERS (cheering). SECESSION!

(HARRIS moves downstage.)

HARRIS. I fear we may be moving too quickly. These
people are my friends, and they are good people. They
seem so sure that war is the answer. Why can’t I be so
sure? What if my friends are wrong? They could be
killed. I could be killed. Our way of life could be de-
stroyed. There must be some way to avoid war. I love
the South and I fear for her future.
(SONG 4: DIXIE)

HARRIS (heartfelt, slowly).
I WISH I WAS IN THE LAND OF COTTON
OLD TIMES THERE ARE NOT FORGOTTEN
LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY!
DIXIELAND

IN DIXIELAND WHERE I WAS BORN IN
EARLY ON ONE FROSTY MORNIN’
LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY! LOOK AWAY!
DIXIELAND

(FIRE-EATERS take up song, slowly and stately at first,
thent building to a frenzy.)

ALL FIRE-EATERS.
I WISH I WAS IN DIXIE
HOORAY! HOORAY!
IN DIXIELAND, I’LL TAKE MY STAND
TO LIVE AND DIE IN DIXIE
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!

TWO FIRE-EATERS.
OH, HEAR THE NORTHERN THUNDERS MUTTER
NORTHERN FLAGS IN SOUTH WINDS FLUTTER
TO ARMS! TO ARMS! TO ARMS, DIXIELAND!

ALL MALE FIRE-EATERS.
SEND THEM BACK YOUR FIERCE DEFIANCES
STAMP UPON YOUR CURSED ALLIANCE
TO ARMS! TO ARMS! TO ARMS, DIXIELAND!
ALL FIRE-EATERS.
I WISH I WAS IN DIXIE
HOORAY! HOORAY!
FOR DIXIELAND I’LL TAKE MY STAND
TO LIVE AND DIE FOR DIXIE
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY, DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!
AWAY, AWAY, AWAY, DOWN SOUTH IN DIXIE!

(HARRIS returns to being NARRATOR.)

NARRATOR. I share my uncle’s love of the South. But there are some things about the Old South I will never understand. How could anyone have been so blind to the injustice of owning people as property? Southerners of the time, including my uncle, were very religious. They engaged in a great deal of moral self-examination on a variety of topics, but not slavery. Listen carefully to the words of “Bonnie Blue Flag.”

(SONG 5: BONNIE BLUE FLAG REPRISE)

FIRE-EATER #2.
WE ARE A BAND OF BROTHERS,
AND NATIVE TO THE SOIL
FIGHTING FOR THE PROPERTY
WE GAINED BY HONEST TOIL
SCENE 2: Slave quarters of a Southern plantation in Dinwiddie, Virginia

(MUSIC 6: SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE A MOTHER-LESS CHILD starts as background with COOK humming melody softly.)

KECKLEY. I, Elizabeth Keckley, was born a slave in Virginia, my mother’s only child. My father was the slave of another man, and he could only visit us twice a year. Our reunions were always joyous. On one such occasion when I was about seven, my father was told by his master,

FIRST MASTER. I’ve decided to move to the West, and I’m taking you with me. Say your goodbyes. You will never return here again.

KECKLEY. The announcement fell upon that rude log cabin like a thunderbolt. I remember how my father cried out against the cruel separation—his last kiss; his wild straining to hold my mother; the tears and goodbyes. And then he was gone. My mother could not restrain her sorrow. My old mistress had no tolerance for her tears.

OLD MISTRESS. Stop your nonsense. There is no necessity for you putting on airs. There are plenty more men around here, and if you want a husband so badly, stop your crying and go find one.

KECKLEY. Mother turned away in stoical silence. My parents never met again in this world. (Sings.)

A LONG WAY FROM HOME
OH LORD, MY LORD
I FEEL SO FAR FROM HOME
(Spoken.) Later that year, I witnessed for the first time the sale of a human being. My master had just purchased his hogs for the winter, but he was unable to pay for them in full. To escape this embarrassment it was necessary to sell one of his slaves. Little Joe, the son of the cook, was selected as the victim.

FIRST MASTER. How old is that little boy of yours?

COOK. My Joe just turned five.

FIRST MASTER. I want you to go and dress him up in his Sunday clothes and bring him to me. I have a surprise for him.

KECKLEY. Joe arrived in his Sunday clothes with a bright face. The poor little boy had no understanding of what was about to happen to him. Behind closed doors, Joe was placed on the scales and was sold like the hogs, at so much a pound. His father was not told of the transaction, but his suspicions were aroused.

COOK. Where are you taking my little boy? What’s happening?

FIRST MASTER. I’m just taking Joe to town for a visit. I’ll bring him back in the morning.

KECKLEY. But he never returned. My mother began to worry that I would be sold.

KECKLEY’S MOTHER. Lizzy, you’re the only thing I have left on this earth. I can’t let anyone take you away
from me. Listen to me. I have a plan. Master can’t do without his fine clothing. Lizzy, I will teach you to sew. If you become a fine seamstress, Master will never sell you.

COOK. Lizzy, you knew my little boy. You and my Joe were friends. Please, Lizzy. Listen to your mother.

KECKLEY’S MOTHER. Promise me you will learn, Lizzy.

KECKLEY (as a child). I promise, Mother.

(MUSIC 6a: TIME PASSED. FIRST MASTER enters, clears his throat, and the group disperses.)

KECKLEY (cont’d., as herself). Time passed and I became a young woman. For four years, a white man—I spare the world his name—had base designs upon me.

(She is shadowed menacingly by MALE OPPRESSOR, who looks her up and down.)

I do not care to dwell upon this subject, for it is one fraught with pain. Suffice it to say that he persecuted me for four years, and I became a mother. The child of which he was the father, my son George, was the only child that I ever brought into the world.

The years passed, and my new master moved to St. Louis. (MUSIC 6b: ST. LOUIS/CALL OF DUTY - SOUTH) There I was hired out to others as a seamstress to bring in extra money. Soon I had a large and extensive clientele that included some of the finest la-
dies in the city. Still I could not stop thinking of one thing: Freedom!

*(KECKLEY goes downstage and NARRATOR steps forward.)*

NARRATOR. While Keckley dreamed of her freedom, men across the South were answering the call of duty. Theo Perry, a young lawyer from the little town of Marshall, Texas, volunteered for service, but he deeply longed for home.