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Dramatic Publishing

Robert Fulghum's

Uh-Oh, Here Comes Christmas

Based on the essays by the author of
All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten

Adapted by
ERNEST ZULIA and DAVID CALDWELL

Original Music and Lyrics by
DAVID CALDWELL

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Based upon the essays by
ROBERT FULGHUM

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(UH-OH, HERE COMES CHRISTMAS)

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UH-OH, HERE COMES CHRISTMAS

A Comedy/Drama

For 3 Men, 2 Women, 1 pianist

(cast may be expanded)

CHARACTERS

PHIL: (FRED in *Kindergarten*) 60-70, educated, paternal, witty, and a bit of a curmudgeon. He and Kathleen are paired as a couple through much of the show.

NICK: (ED in *Kindergarten*) Mid-40s-early 50s, wry, but with a warm/paternal side. An excellent comedian with dramatic substance. He and Dawn are paired as a couple in “Item #7.”

RUSTY: (BRANISLAV in *Kindergarten*) Mid-30s-early 40s, soulful and wise for his age, but with a twinkle in his eye and a good sense of humor. A strong singer.

DAWN: (JILL in *Kindergarten*) Mid-30s-early 40s, warm, versatile, self-confident, with a true spark of life. A very good comedian.

PEGGY: (KATHLEEN in *Kindergarten*) Late 50s-late 60s, maternal, witty and warm, with an air of wisdom from knowing how to live a full life. She has a real depth of character as well as a great sense of humor. Also a bit of a curmudgeon.

ACT ONE

“Scrooge” (Opening song)

(PIANO CUE: A fanfare-like version of “Deck the Halls” quickly dissolves into low, sinister underscoring. Fog spills onto the stage. Lights fade up as SCROOGE 1 enters dressed in period nightcap, nightshirt and robe, carrying candle. He has heard something while in bed and has come to investigate. SOUND CUE: Chains clanking, followed by a ghostly voice beckoning him. This pulls his focus out front.)

VOICE. “Scrooge ... Scrooge ...”

SCROOGE 1 *(seeing that it’s just Marley...for the one-hundred fiftieth time, he shouts to him at the back of the theatre).* Oh Marley, one year ... give it a rest!

(SCROOGE performs the following with a mixture of annoyance and droll humor. During the course of the song, the number of SCROOGES multiplies to five. The entire cast ends up onstage in Victorian nightgowns, robes, nightcaps, wire-rim glasses, gray wisps of hair and sideburns, carrying candles. If the production uses only one strong singer, that person should be SCROOGE 1. If you would like to feature all singers equally, there is an optional distribution of this number in the notes to the music director in the piano/conductor score.)

SCROOGE 1 (*singing*).

ONCE AGAIN, I HEAR THE LAUGHTER,
CHILDREN PLAYING IN THE SNOW,
THE MERRY STRAINS OF CAROLING,
EVERYWHERE I GO.
EVERY YEAR, THE SAME DAMN THING:
THE TWINKLING LIGHTS IN EVERY STREET,
THE HEART-FELT SEASONS GREETINGS FROM
THE STRANGERS THAT I MEET.

SINCE 1843, THOSE BLASTED
GHOSTS HAVE TURNED UP EVERY YEAR—
AND I ALWAYS END UP SINGING, DANCING,
GIDDY, FULL OF CHRISTMAS CHEER.

EVERY YEAR I GET DRAGGED INTO THE
QUICKSAND
WITH ALL THE OTHER FOOLS AND LUNATICS,
AND
BY THE TIME THE HOLIDAY'S DONE,
I'M RUNNING AROUND LIKE A SIMPLETON,
SHOUTING "GOD BLESS US EVERYONE!"

AND THEN, AFTER NEW YEAR'S, SCARCELY
DO I
GET AN HOUR OF RESPITE, WHEN—
LIKE THAT—IT'S NEXT DECEMBER, AND
THE WHOLE THING STARTS AGAIN.

PLEASE, WHAT CAN I DO TO STOP
THIS SEASONAL INSANITY?
NOTHING THAT I'VE TRIED HAS KEPT
THE GHOSTS FROM HAUNTING ME.

**I'VE BEEN IN THERAPY
FOR HALF A CENTURY,
TRIED YOGA AND TAI CHI
AND SCIEN TOLOGY;
I'VE CALLED THE PSYCHIC HOTLINE, AND
I'VE HAD MY AURA READ;
I'VE TAKEN PROZAC, AND I'VE BUILT A
PYRAMID ABOVE MY BED;
I'VE HUNG CRYSTALS 'ROUND MY NECK, AND
TRIED TO FREE MY INNER CHILD;
I'VE DANCED AROUND IN WAR PAINT WITH
MY MEN'S GROUP IN THE WILD.**

(There is a dance break set to a rumba beat. The other four SCROOGES enter, dancing wildly. The choreography becomes more unified and coherent, and then degenerates into very specific Three Stooges physical slapstick comedy routine between three of them, while the other two watch. The music cuts off sharply on the final gag, and the three SCROOGES freeze.)

SCROOGE 1 *(stepping forward, speaking to audience)*.
What?! You've never heard of the Three Scrooges?!

SCROOGES 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 *(singing)*.

**CAN YOU IMAGINE AN ETERNITY MORE GRIM
THAN ONE SPENT WITH JACOB MARLEY AND
TINY TIM?**

SCROOGE 1 *(speaking)*. Excuse me; nowadays we call him
“Vertically Challenged Tim.”

SCROOGES 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 (*singing*).

**EVERY YEAR, THERE'S TEN MORE VERSIONS
OF MY
LIFE ONSTAGE AND ON TV,
GENERATING PILES OF CASH FOR
EVERYONE BUT ME.**

SCROOGE 5 (NICK).

**I THINK THAT IT'S HIGH TIME I TOLD
THE WORLD WHERE I AM COMING FROM—
AND SO I'VE LAUNCHED A WEB-SITE. CHECK
IT OUT:**

SCROOGES 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5 (*lights snap to a tight special
resembling a follow spot. They strike a barbershop-quar-
tet pose and sing in harmony*):

HUMBUG-DOT-COM.

SCROOGES 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5.

**IF YOU CAME TONIGHT EXPECTING DANCING
SUGAR PLUMS, YOU'LL FIND SLIM PICKIN'S.
IF A GOOD OLD-FASHIONED HOLIDAY SHOW
IS WHAT YOU WANT**

SCROOGE 2 (PHIL, *holding a pair of theatre tickets*).

YOU CAN GO TO THE DICKENS.

SCROOGES 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5.

**EVERY YEAR WE GET ROPED INTO THIS
FOLLY,
AND EVERY YEAR WE'RE EXPECTED TO BE
JOLLY...**

SCROOGE 1.

**AND YOU CAN BET IN AN HOUR OR TWO
THOSE GHOSTS WILL COME AS IF ON CUE
AND PESTER ME THE WHOLE NIGHT THROUGH!**

(PEGGY pulls away from the others and begins to remove her SCROOGE robe, nightshirt and cap, revealing her modern clothes: she is a contemporary person with a bad case of Scroogitis. She does not sing the following.)

SCROOGES 1, 2, 3 & 5.

**UH-OH, HERE COMES CHRISTMAS YET
AGAIN—THE WHOLE EXHAUSTING MESS!
HOW DOES EVERYBODY COPE
WITH ALL THE BILLS AND STRESS?
THESE DAYS IT'S GETTING TOUGH FOR ANY-
ONE ABOVE THE AGE OF NINE.**

SCROOGE 1.

**A LOT OF FOLKS HAVE CASES OF
SCROOGITIS WORSE THAN MINE!**

(They drift away, taking PEGGY's Scrooge costume, leaving her alone onstage. The PIANO continues, as PEGGY begins to speak.)

Trick or Treat

PEGGY *(feeling crabby and cynical)*. It was a Sunday afternoon, a few days before Christmas. Rainy, windy and cold. Wintersgloom. My things-to-do list was growing like mold. My temper was short. My bio-index: negative.

The day's horoscope reading suggested caution. And the Sunday paper suggested dollars, death and destruction as the day's litany. O tidings of comfort and joy.

This holy hour of "Lordsdaybliss" was jarred by a pounding at the door. (*SOUND CUE: Door knocks.*) Now what? (*She sighs deeply, then crosses downstage to a pool of light.*) Resigned to accept whatever bad news lies in wait... (*She pantomimes opening a door, then stops dead in her tracks, looking at the child; she is dumbfounded by the incongruity of what she sees. Her crabbiness is temporarily diverted.*) I am nonplused.

Standing on the front stoop is a rather small person in a cheap Santa Claus mask, holding out a large brown paper bag. "TRICK OR TREAT!" Santa Mask shouts. (*Pause.*) What? "TRICK OR TREAT!" Santa Mask hoots again. Tongue-tied, I stare at this apparition. He shakes the bag at me, and dumbly I fish out my wallet, and find a dollar to drop into the bag.

The mask lifts, and it is an Asian kid with a ten-dollar grin taking up most of his face. "Wanta hear some caroling?" he asks, in singsong English. (*The puzzlement is over.*)

(*As an aside.*) Now I know who he is. He belongs to a family of refugees settled into the neighborhood by the Quakers. Boat people. Vietnamese, I think. He stopped by at Halloween with his sisters and brothers, and I filled their bags. Hong Duc is his name. At Halloween he looked like a Wise Man, with a bathrobe on and a dishtowel around his head. (*End of aside.*)

"Wanta hear some caroling?"

(Still somewhat skeptical.) I nod, envisioning an octet of urchin refugees hiding in the bushes ready to join their leader in uplifted song. “Sure, where’s the choir?”

“I’m it,” says he.

And he launched forth with *(PIANO CUE: A phrase of “Jingle Bells.”)* an up-tempo chorus of “Jingle Bells” at full lung-power. This was followed by an equally enthusiastic rendering of what I swear sounded like *(PIANO CUE: A phrase of “Hark, the Herald.”)* “Hark, the Hairy Angels Sing.” *(Illustrating with gentle sensitivity.)* And finally, *(PIANO CUE: “Silent Night.”)* a soft-voiced, reverential singing of “Silent Night.” Head back, eyes closed, from the bottom of his heart, he poured out the last strains of “Sleep in heavenly peace” into the gathering night.

(She is transfixed and deeply moved.) Wet-eyed and dumbstruck by his performance, I just stood there. *(She mimes receiving the candy cane.)* He then produced half a candy cane from his pocket and passed it solemnly to me.

Flashing the ten-dollar grin, he turned and ran from the porch, shouted “GOD BLESS YOU,” and “TRICK OR TREAT” and was gone.

(Looking after him, making a wry reference to the announcement from the old “Lone Ranger” TV show.) Who was that Masked Kid?

Hong Duc, the one-man choir, delivering Christmas door to door.

(As an aside, sitting on her front steps.) I confess that I’m usually a little confused about Christmas. It never has made a lot of sense to me. It’s kind of unreal. Ever since I got the news about the guy in the red suit, I’ve been a closet cynic at heart. Singing about riding in a

one-horse open sleigh is ludicrous to me. I've never seen one, much less ridden in one. Never roasted chestnuts on an open fire... Never harked a herald angel... And babies and reindeer stink. I've been around both, and I know.

Singing about things I've never seen or done or wanted... Dreaming of a white Christmas I've never known... Christmas isn't very real. And yet...

(Genuinely wrestling with the conflict, she rises.) And yet. I'm too old to believe in it, and too young to give up on it. Too cynical to get into it, and too needy to stay out of it. *(Ending the aside, she returns to the imagined front door, stepping back into the moment.)*

Trick or Treat!

After I shut the door I just lost it— *(Overwhelmed and elated.)* laughter and tears exploded out of me at the same time. Right down the chimney and into my mid-winter's gloom... comes "Saint Hong Duc." He is confused about the details, like me, but he is very clear about the spirit of the season. It's an excuse to let go and celebrate—to throw yourself into holiday with all you have, wherever you are. *(PIANO CUE: Soft underscoring, "Silent Night." She reaches deep within, pondering and finally resolving her own confusion about the holidays.)* "I'm it," says he. Where's Christmas? I ask myself. I'm it, comes the echo inside me. I'm it. Head back, eyes closed, voice raised in whatever song I can muster the courage to sing.

(She exits, singing softly, with delight, "Hark the hairy angels sing..." Lights fade to transition. The PIANO continues "Hark the Herald," leading to "The Christmas Pageant.")

The Christmas Pageant

PHIL (*entering with chair. He speaks with droll, whimsical humor*). Every year in December, a mysterious and bizarre tribal ritual is enacted in thousands of places around the country: “The Annual Church Christmas Pageant.” And since this “extravaganza” is usually run by *amateurs* under *pressure*, *everything never goes right*. Which is why I’ve always been content to look on from the pews, rather than participate in the “carnage.”

One fateful Christmas, several years ago, our church had a pageant that coincided with an outbreak of German measles, chicken pox and the Hong Kong flu. The night of the pageant there was a sleetstorm, causing a partial power failure. This threw some people’s clocks off, so half the shepherds were late. And one of the sheep hired for the occasion got diarrhea.

That was about par for the course, since Joseph barfed during the performance and some little angels managed to both cry and wet their pants simultaneously.

To top it off, the choir of teenagers walking about with lighted candles created a feeling that had more to do with the fear of fire and the wrath of God than peace on earth.

(*Chuckling.*) I don’t think it was really all *that* bad... and maybe all those things didn’t happen the same year... (*PEGGY enters with chair.*) but a sufficient number of senior ladies in the church had had it up to here with the whole hoo-ha and declared:

PEGGY (*to audience*). No more pageants! Ever!

PHIL. It was as if cholera had once again been among us. (*Pause.*) But time marches on, and nostalgia is strong.

PEGGY (*softening*). Oh, I suppose it couldn't have been all that bad.

PHIL. So when last December approached, it was the "sweet narcotic of nostalgia" that addled the brains of those same senior ladies, as they considered the pleas of the younger mothers, who had not been through this ritual ordeal and would not be dissuaded. (*DAWN enters with chair.*)

DAWN. It was time their children had their chance. (*RUSTY and NICK enter with chairs.*)

PHIL. And in short order, people who kept saying ...

ALL (*DAWN looks at them plaintively; they all heave a sigh and surrender to the moment, declaring in unison*):
"We ought to know better."

PHIL. ...were right in there making angel costumes out of old bedsheets, cardboard and chicken feathers. (*All move chairs into church formation, with center aisle and two chairs on either side, facing front. They remain standing.*)

NICK (*stepping downstage while others move to church formation*). Just the right kind of bathrobes could not be found for the Wise Men, so some of the daddies went out and bought new ones, and backed a pickup truck over them to age them a little. (*Joins others in church formation.*)

RUSTY (*standing off to the side, pantomiming conducting*).
An angel choir was lashed into singing shape.

DAWN (*pointing toward the altar*). A real manger with real straw was obtained.

PEGGY. And while there was a consensus on leaving out live sheep this time, some enterprising soul did manage to recruit some housebroken white French poodles for the occasion.

PHIL. But the real coup was renting a live donkey for the Mother Mary to ride in on. Now, none of us had ever seen a live donkey ridden through a church sanctuary, and it seemed like such a fine thing to do...at the time.
(He sits.)

PEGGY *(sitting beside PHIL)*. We made one concession to sanity: deciding to have the thing on a Sunday morning in the full light of day, so we could see what we were doing.

PHIL. ...And no full rehearsal. These things are supposed to be a little hokey anyhow, and nobody was about to go through the whole thing twice. *(PIANO CUE: Underscoring, "We Three Kings.")*

DAWN *(announcing the occasion with great enthusiasm)*. The great day came and everybody arrived at church.
(She sits.)

NICK. Husbands who were not known for regular attendance came—probably for the same reason they would be attracted to a nearby bus wreck. *(He sits beside DAWN.)*

PHIL. It wasn't all that bad, really. At least, not early on.

PEGGY. We hooted out the carols with full voice. *(PIANO CUE: Underscoring, "O Little Town of Bethlehem.")*

RUSTY *(conducting)*. And the angel choir got through its first big number... *(Piano notes turn sour.)* almost on key. *(He sits.)*

DAWN. The Star of Bethlehem was lit over the manger.

PHIL *(rising)*. And then it came time for the entrance of Joseph and Mary...with Mary riding on the "U-Haul donkey." *(Crossing UC as the others all turn to face him, focusing on the invisible donkey, which has entered at the rear of the church, ready to process down the center aisle.)* The donkey made two hesitant steps through

the door of the sanctuary, took a look at the whole scene, and *seized up*. (*PIANO strikes a loud dissonant chord as the cast lurches slightly from their seats toward the donkey. Illustrating the donkey's rigidity with his voice and body, PHIL continues.*) Locked his legs, put his whole body in a cement condition well beyond rigor mortis, and the procession ground to a halt. (*PIANO CUE: A thudding crash. All freeze.*)

(*Aside.*) Now...there are things you might consider doing to a donkey in private to get it to move, but there is a limit to what you can do to a donkey—in church—on a Sunday morning—in front of women and children. Jerking on his halter and some *wicked* kicking on the part of the Virgin Mary had no effect. (*He sits beside PEGGY.*)

(*Quite pleased with himself.*) Seated with my wife in the front row and dressed in my Sunday best, I rose to the rescue. (*He moves C and works his way UC to donkey. PEGGY counters L.*) The floor of the sanctuary was polished cement. And so, with another man pulling at the halter, (*NICK steps C and crouches, as if pulling the donkey downstage, while PHIL pushes from behind.*) I crouched at the stern end of the donkey and pushed—(*Grunting as he speaks.*) slowly—sliding—the rigid beast—across—the floor—inch—by—stately—inch.

RUSTY (*rising with an urgent sense of mission*). With progress being made, the choir director turned on the tape recorder, (*SOUND CUE: Loud choir singing "Oh Come, All Ye Faithful."*) RUSTY begins shouting:) WHICH BLARED FORTH A MIGHTY CHORUS OF "O COME ALL YE FAITHFUL" FROM THE MORMON TABERNACLE CHOIR!