

Acting Edition

Nunsense

by Dan Goggin

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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NUNSENSE was first produced at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City on December 12, 1985. The performance was directed by Dan Goggin, with sets by Barry Axtell, lighting by Susan A. White, musical direction and arrangements by Michael Rice, and musical staging/choreography by Felton Smith. The Production Stage Manager was Trey Hunt. The cast was as follows:

SISTER MARY CARDELIA Marilyn Farina
SISTER MARY HUBERT Vicki Belmonte
SISTER ROBERT ANNE Christine Anderson
SISTER MARY AMNESIA Semina De Laurentis
SISTER MARY LEO Suzi Winson

CHARACTERS

SISTER MARY REGINA, MOTHER SUPERIOR (REVEREND MOTHER) – A feisty overweight Sophie Tucker-type who can't resist the spotlight.

SISTER MARY HUBERT, MISTRESS OF NOVICES – The second in command, she is always competing with the Mother Superior.

SISTER ROBERT ANNE – A streetwise tough character from Brooklyn. A constant source of aggravation for the Mother Superior.

SISTER MARY AMNESIA – This nun lost her memory after a crucifix fell on her head. She is very sweet.

SISTER MARY LEO – The novice, who has entered the convent with the firm desire to become the first nun ballerina.

NOTE: In the Original New York Production the Mother Superior was named Sister Mary Cardelia. In all subsequent productions the Mother Superior is named Sister Mary Regina, while Sister Mary Cardelia is the nun who modeled for the convent greeting cards.

SETTING

Mt. Saint Helen's school auditorium.

TIME

The present.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I spent a great deal of my life around nuns. And most of my experiences left wonderful memories. I wrote *Nunsense* because I wanted to share what I knew to be “the humor of the nun.” Though it may be hard to believe after you read this script, each of the Little Sisters of Hoboken is based on a *real-life* nun.

SISTER MARY REGINA was to the outside world a model Mother Superior even if she was overweight. But to those who knew her, she was an outrageous, quick-witted soul who knew how to get a laugh. She tried to convince you that she was strict, but everyone knew that her “bark was worse than her bite!”

SISTER MARY HUBERT was a kind person who would always try to be understanding and diplomatic. She taught the Novices the ground rules, and was supposed to be dignified. But with the slightest bit of encouragement she was ready to kick up her heels.

SISTER ROBERT ANNE was a tough streetwise nun who had a heart of gold. All the kids adored her because she spoke their language. And she could hit a baseball “out of the park.”

SISTER MARY AMNESIA was the picture of innocence. She couldn't remember her past and so looked at each new day with a childlike joy.

SISTER MARY LEO had been a professional dancer before she entered the convent and was always eager to display her talent. She was very impressionable because she was young and could easily be led astray.

In the context of *Nunsense*, Sister Mary Regina (Reverend Mother), Sister Mary Hubert, and Sister Robert Anne are the only nuns who actually worked in the Leper Colony. Sister Mary Amnesia and Sister Mary Leo only know of the Leper Colony through stories told by the others. Reverend Mother and Sister Hubert have a healthy rivalry (somewhat like Marne Dennis and Vera Charles in *Auntie Marne*). Each is always trying to outdo the other. But, Reverend Mother is always quick to remind everyone that she *is* the Mother Superior. Sister Robert Anne is Reverend Mother's nemesis. She would probably be thrown out of the convent if it weren't for the fact that Reverend Mother really knows that Sister Robert Anne is, underneath it all, a very dedicated nun. Everyone likes Sister Mary Amnesia because she is so innocent. Except for her first entrance when she appears a bit shy, she is unafraid. When she realizes that the audience is friendly nothing can dampen her childlike enthusiasm. Sister Mary Leo is frustrated by Reverend Mother in her attempt to shine as a nun-ballerina. For this reason she is easily led astray by her “buddy” Sister Robert Anne.

Before the performance and during intermission the sisters wander through the auditorium, on the stage, etc., as they please. For, after all, they are in their own school. They are very much “at home.” As the performance progresses they become equally “at home” in the spotlight! The script indicates that the sisters are performing on the set of the “eighth grade production of *Grease*,” and they are accompanied by a band. However, it should be noted, that the sisters could just as easily present their “benefit” in a church basement with an old upright piano and no set at all. *Nunsense* is a musical comedy for everyone-everywhere!

Dan Goggin

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE

Overture	Orchestra
Veni Creator Spiritus	Sr. Anne & All
Nonsense Is Habit-Forming	All
A Difficult Transition	All
Benedicite	Sr. Leo & Hubert
The Biggest Ain't The Best	Sr. Hubert, Sr. Leo
Another Suprise	Sr. Anne
Playing Second Fiddle	Sr. Anne
Second Fiddle Conclusion	Sr. Anne
So You Want To Be A Nun	Sr. Amnesia
Mock Fifties	Srs. Leo & Anne
Turn Up The Spotlight	Rev. Mother
Lilacs Bring Back Memories	Srs. Hubert, Leo, Amnesia & Rev. Mother
Turn Off That Spotlight/Tackle That Temptation	All

ACT TWO

Growing Up Catholic	Srs. Anne, Leo, Hubert, Amnesia
Clean Out The Freezer	Srs. Hubert, Amnesia, Anne, & Leo
Just A Coupl'a Sisters	Sr. Hubert & Rev. Mother
Second Fiddle (Reprise)	Sr. Anne
I Just Want To Be A Star	Sr. Anne
The Drive In	Srs. Anne, Amnesia & Leo
I Could Have Gone To Nashville	Sr. Amnesia
Gloria In Excelsis Deo	All
Holier Than Thou	Sr. Hubert & All
Nonsense (Reprise)	All

*(Music Cue 00: **OVERTURE**)*

*(The musicians enter. They are part of the religious community and are dressed in their religious garb. They begin playing the overture. **SRS. HUBERT, ROBERT ANNE,** and **LEO** come into the auditorium and begin visiting with members of the audience. In general, they warm up the crowd. After about three or four minutes **SR. ROBERT ANNE** goes up on the steps leading to the stage.)*

SR. ROBERT ANNE. Ladies and gentlemen, may I have your attention please. Reverend Mother is on her way over here and I thought maybe you would all do me a big favor and help put her in a good mood. Cause believe me, there is nothing worse than a crabby Reverend Mother. What I'd like you to do is, when she arrives give her the Mount Saint Helen's cheer. If you don't remember it, here's how it goes. *(raising her fist in the air)* Wo! Wo! Wo! Let's try it on the count of three. Wo! Wo! Wo! That's great. Now do we have any whistlers in the audience?

*(**STAGE MANAGER** or **ASM** comes on stage through the stage right door followed by **REV. MOTHER.**)*

STAGE MANAGER. Here she is folks. Our own Reverend Mother, Sister Mary Regina!

*(**REV. MOTHER** comes to the front of the stage acknowledging applause. She then surveys the stage and notices a poster of Marilyn Monroe in a bathing suit. She is visibly upset and orders **SR. LEO** to get a drape off the easel announcing the performance. She goes up the stage left stairs and pins the drape to Marilyn while **SR. LEO** takes the easel offstage. **REV. MOTHER** rings a bell summoning the others to the stage. They come up*

immediately as REV. MOTHER conducts the band. On stage SR. HUBERT sits at the lunch counter. SR. ROBERT ANNE sits on the stool next to the juke box. SR. LEO sits on the bed. REV. MOTHER conducts the band faster and faster to the end of "Stars and Stripes.")

SR. HUBERT. Let's hear it for the Mount Saint Helen's Band!

REV. MOTHER. *(taking center stage)* Are we ready to begin?

SR. HUBERT. Reverend Mother, where's Sister Amnesia?

REV. MOTHER. *(looking around)* Sister...Sister Amnesia? **(SR. AMNESIA peeks out the stage left door.)** Oh, there she is. Come out, Sister. It's okay. They're all friends.

(REV. MOTHER goes to the door and leads SR. AMNESIA to the bed and puts her next to SR. LEO and pats her on the head.)

REV. MOTHER. *(to audience)* She's a little nervous. *(While walking back to center stage, she adds:)* She's a big mess is what she is! *(to SR. HUBERT)* Now, are we ready?

(SR. HUBERT nods yes.)

(REV. MOTHER clicks her clicker to summon the spotlight operator.)

REV. MOTHER. *(if audience laughs)* Brings back memories, huh?

(if small or no laughs) Not many Catholics here tonight *(today)!*

Alright, may I have some light please?

(The spotlight comes on in the wrong place then moves erratically around the stage as REV. MOTHER hollers directions trying to get the light on her face. Finally the light is right.)

REV. MOTHER. That's Sister Mary Myopia – our archery instructor.

Good evening, friends. *(She pauses as all on stage conduct the audience in responding, "Good evening, Sister.")* Oh, we sure can train 'em, can't we Hubert? On behalf of the

Little Sisters of Hoboken, I'd like to say: "Welcome to the theatre of Mount Saint Helen's School!" And may I extend our gratitude to each and everyone of you for coming here to participate in our fund-raising activities. Now, before we begin, I'd like to clear up what seems to be some confusion about the set here. You see, our eighth graders are putting on the musical, "Vaseline" and I gave –

SR. HUBERT. (*rushing over to REV. MOTHER*) It's *Grease*.

REV. MOTHER. (*looking at her white collar*) Where?

SR. HUBERT. (*turning REV. MOTHER around to see the set logo*) *Grease!*

REV. MOTHER. Oh! – It's *Grease*. Who knew?

(**SR. HUBERT** goes back to her seat and as she is walking waves her hand over her head indicating that **REV. MOTHER** is clueless.)

Well, anyway, I promised the children that we wouldn't disturb their handiwork during our benefit and so that's why things may seem a bit incongruous at times. Now, we have a wonderful introductory song, but before we begin the festivities, let us ask the Lord to bless us in our endeavors. Sister, (*indicating SR. ROBERT ANNE*) if you will.

(*Music Cue 02: VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS*)

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

VENI CREATOR SPIRITUS.

ALL.

MENTES TUORUM VISITA.

IMPLE SUPERNA GRATIA.

QUAE TU CREAMISTI PECTORA.

(*Music Cue 03: NUNSENSE IS HABIT-FORMING*)

ALL.

SOME FOLKS THINK OF CONVENTS

AS THE PLACES WHERE WE PRAY.

BUT LET US TELL YOU CONVENTS

ARE MUCH MORE THAN THAT TODAY.

ALL. (*cont.*)

WE'RE DEDICATED PEOPLE
BUT WE LIKE TO HAVE OUR FUN.

REV. MOTHER.

WE'RE HERE TONIGHT (*TODAY*) TO SHARE WITH YOU
THE HUMOR OF THE NUN!

ALL.

NUNSENSE IS HABIT-FORMING
LET US TELL YOU WHY.

REV. MOTHER.

WHEN A SISTER GETS APPLAUSE,
IT'S A SPECIAL "HIGH."

ALL.

THERE IS NOTHING WE CAN DO
ONCE WE GET A LAUGH OR TWO.
IT'S SOMETHING WE CANNOT CONTROL
ONCE WE'RE ON A ROLL!

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

HAVE YOU HEARD THE ONE ABOUT THE TRAVELING
SALESNUN
WHO REALLY DREW A CROWD?
IT SEEMS THIS FARMER HAD A HORSE
RATHER WELL-ENDOWED –

REV. MOTHER.

SISTER! NUNSENSE MAY BE HABIT-FORMING
BUT LET'S DRAW THE LINE!

SR. HUBERT.

CUT THE CHEAP SHOTS!
WHY BE COMMON?

REV. MOTHER.

WE CAN BE DIVINE!

ALL.

EVERYBODY'S HERE SO LET'S TELL 'EM WHO WE ARE:

REV. MOTHER.

THIS IS SISTER ROBERT ANNE.
SHE SINGS AND DRIVES THE CAR.

SISTER MARY AMNESIA
DOESN'T KNOW HER REAL NAME.

ALL BUT SR. AMNESIA.

A CRUCIFIX FELL ON HER HEAD.
HER MEMORY'S GONE. WHAT A SHAME!

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

SISTER HUBERT IS OUR NOVICE MISTRESS
AND OUR GUIDING LIGHT.

SR. LEO.

SHE'S SECOND IN COMMAND
AND STANDS AT REVEREND MOTHER'S RIGHT.

SR. HUBERT.

SISTER LEO IS THE YOUNGEST
AS A NOVICE SHE'S BRAND NEW.

REV. MOTHER.

AND I'M YOUR REVEREND MOTHER,
SISTER MARY REGINA, THAT'S WHO!

ALL.

NUNSENSE IS HABIT-FORMING,
THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE SAY.
WE'RE HERE TO PROVE THAT NUNS ARE FUN,
PERHAPS A BIT RISQUE.

WE STILL WEAR OUR HABITS
TO RETAIN OUR MAGIC SPELL.
THOUGH WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO HEAVEN,
WE'RE HERE TO RAISE SOME HELL!

REV. MOTHER. Sell it, girls!!

ALL.

NUNSENSE IS HABIT-FORMING,
THAT'S THE REASON WE ARE
UP HERE ON THE STAGE TONIGHT (*TODAY*)
HOPING YOU'LL AGREE.

REV. MOTHER, SRS. ROBERT ANNE & HUBERT.

NUNSENSE IS HABIT-FORMING,

SRS. AMNESIA & LEO.

WE'RE HOOKED,

ALL.

AND ALL WE KNOW IS:
WE JUST CAN'T KICK IT,
THOUGH SOME FOLKS MAY PICKET,
WE JUST CAN'T KICK THIS NUNSENSE.
SO ON WITH THE SHOW!

(Quick blackout, lights up. All of the SISTERS are congratulating each other as SRS. ROBERT ANNE, AMNESIA, LEO, exit stage right door. REV. MOTHER is center. SR. HUBERT stands at her right.)

REV. MOTHER. Oh, thank-you. Thank-you so very much. Now, just in case there is anyone here who hasn't heard what our little fund-raiser is all about – we've had a small disaster back at our convent. You see, a short time ago, our cook, Sister Julia–

(both cross themselves)

– Child of God, served some vichyssoise soup and nearly every sister died instantly of botulism!

SR. HUBERT. It was kind of like the last supper! *(She laughs at her little joke.)* That's a little convent humor!

(REV. MOTHER is not amused at SR. HUBERT's stealing the spotlight.)

REV. MOTHER. Why, we wouldn't be here now if it hadn't been for the fact that we were off playing bingo with some Maryknolls. *(to SR. HUBERT)* What a bunch of cut-throats they turned out to be, huh?

SR. HUBERT. *(rather excitedly)* I still say their Mother Superior cheated when she didn't call B-15! I know she had it.

REV. MOTHER. Now, calm down, Sister. Lord knows, she's not pretty, but she doesn't cheat.

SR. HUBERT. She does, too. B-15 – I saw her slip it right up her sleeve. It was all I needed to win. *(very indignantly)* But that's alright, cause God don't like ugly! MMM–MMM.

REV. MOTHER. *(to audience)* The point is when we got back to the convent we found fifty-two of our sisters lying face down in that soup!

SR. HUBERT. Now, we had no idea what to do so we all began praying for guidance.

REV. MOTHER. Then I had a vision. It was either Saint Catherine of Siena or Saint Thomas Aquinas in drag. *(pause)* I never could tell 'em apart – *(pause)* Never have seen 'em together! Anyway, I was instructed to start a greeting card company to raise funds. Well, of course I did – and it was a huge success!

SR. HUBERT. So we took the money and buried forty-eight of the fifty-two dead sisters and then Reverend Mother bought a 3D-HD flat-screen TV for the convent. *(pause)* Personally, I thought we should have buried *all* of the sisters *before* we bought the 3D-HD flat-screen TV, but as Mistress of Novices I'm only "number two" around here so one tries hard not to question Reverend Mother.

REV. MOTHER. *(getting very irritated)* And one will try –

BOTH. – harder in the future!

REV. MOTHER. That's right, dear!

(REV. MOTHER points the index fingers of both hands at SR. HUBERT's face and makes a "ZZZZZZIT" sound as if to zap her.)

The worst part is, we had to put the last four sisters in the freezer!

SR. HUBERT. And the Ben & Jerry's ain't tasted the same since!

REV. MOTHER. That's why we're putting on this little show. We've got to raise enough money to bury those last four dead sisters!

SR. HUBERT. We hope you'll forgive the limitations put on us by the loss of so many of our sisters, but if they hadn't *died*, we wouldn't have to *bury* them, and then there wouldn't *be* this little show in the first place.

REV. MOTHER. (to **SR. HUBERT**) But they *did*, we *have* to, and there *is*, so there you are!

(Using the index fingers of both hands and pointing them at each others faces they “zap” each other in unison: ZZZZZTTT. Then REV. MOTHER continues to the audience:)

REV. MOTHER. (cont.) Now, about a week ago I held tryouts for our show and I picked the sisters whom I felt were the very best – of what’s left of us – and I asked each one of them to prepare something that best displayed her talent.

SR. HUBERT. But first, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the history of the Little Sisters of Hoboken and that’s what our next song is all about.

REV. MOTHER. (sarcastically) Thank-you, Hubert.

SR. HUBERT. Don’t mention it.

(SR. HUBERT exits stage right door and immediately returns with the rest of the cast while REV. MOTHER continues with the audience.)

REV. MOTHER. You see, we started out running a leper colony. Oh, I know some of you probably think that’s a bit distasteful, but all the other causes were taken! You see, it all began when we –

(The cast is in place but SR. AMNESIA is in SR. LEO’s spot and SR. LEO interrupts REV. MOTHER by whispering something in her ear. Without another word, REV. MOTHER takes SR. AMNESIA by the shoulders and moves her to the proper position. SR. LEO goes to her spot.)

(to SR. AMNESIA) Wasn’t that a fun trip?!!!

(SR. AMNESIA nods.)

Alright, are we ready? Let’s do it!

MUSICAL DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR. Five, six, seven, eight!

(Music Cue 04: A DIFFICULT TRANSITION)

ALL.

AVE MARIA! IT'S SO HEAVENLY TO BE A
MEMBER OF A GROUP THAT'S PUTTIN' ON A SHOW!

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

IT'S GREAT!

ALL.

ALTHOUGH IT IS A DIFFICULT TRANSITION
FOR WE STARTED OFF AS MISSIONARIES
WHICH, OF COURSE, IS OBVIOUSLY
MUCH MORE APROPOS.

SR. AMNESIA.

BUT THEIR MISSION GOT IN TROUBLE.

SR. LEO.

AND THAT BURST THEIR HOLY BUBBLE.

REV. MOTHER.

WE WERE CAUGHT IN AM IMBROGLIO,

SR. HUBERT.

AND WE FINALLY HAD TO GO.

ALL.

SO WE HOPE YOU'LL UNDERSTAND
IF WE'RE NOT ABSOLUTELY GRAND.

SRS. AMNESIA & LEO.

FOR WE FEEL A LITTLE QUEASY,

ALL.

WE'RE UNEASY IN THIS SHOW.

REV. MOTHER. Let me start from the beginning. Now pay
attention! We're going to give you the history of our
order and you're going to be quizzed on it afterward.

(spoken:)

FILLED WITH GREAT ANXIETY
SISTER HUBERT SAILED WITH ME
AND SISTER ROBERT ANNE
TO A LAND OF UNKNOWN CIRCUMSTANCE.

WE REACHED OUR DESTINATION
WITH A BIT OF TREPIDATION
FOR WE'D COME TO ORDER LEPERS
BACK TO WORK IN SOUTHERN FRANCE.

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

NO!

SR. HUBERT.

NO!

SR. LEO.

NO!

SR. AMNESIA.

NO!

REV. MOTHER. Oh, no! That's not right! We'd come to
join an order working *with* lepers on an island *south* of
France. That's it!

ALL.

EACH OF US, AS BEST WE COULD,
CUT A TREE AND CHOPPED SOME WOOD
WHICH THEN WAS USED IN BUILDING
HUMBLE HUTS FOR QUARANTINE.

WHEN SISTER MARK YVONNE
HAD FINISHED UP THE PORTA-JOHN,
WE ALL SAT DOWN AND WAITED
FOR THE FIRST OF THOSE UNCLEAN.

REV. MOTHER. And they came from everywhere!

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

THERE WERE HOTTENTOTS WITH ROTTEN TOTS
IN BASKETS ON EACH MOTHER'S HEAD.

SRS. AMNESIA & LEO.

AND ZULUS, THEY CONCLUDED
NEVER UNDERSTOOD A THING THEY SAID.

SR. HUBERT.

UBANGIS WHO WERE GANGING UP
ON NATIVES WHO WERE BEING FED.

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

AND SWAZI WHO WERE GOOSING
ALL THE BUSHMEN IN THE LINE AHEAD.

ALL.

IT WAS DREADFUL!
THE PYGMIES HAD THEIR NOSES

STUCK IN EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS
WHILE WATUSIS HAD THEIR BUSINESS
STUCK IN EVERYBODY'S NOSE.

BUT THE TRUTH OF THE MATTER,
IF YOU REALLY WANT TO KNOW,
WAS THAT EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS
WAS ABOUT TO DECOMPOSE.

REV. MOTHER.

HUBERT, ROBERT ANNE, AND I
ARE LUCKY THAT WE'RE STILL ALIVE
FOR SISTERS WENT TO PIECES
AT A DEVASTATING RATE.

WHEN A NOVICE SPILLED HER FOOD,
AT FIRST, WE THOUGHT HER RATHER CRUDE
TILL WE REALIZED HER HAND
WAS ON THE FLOOR WITH HER FORK AND HER PLATE!

ALL. Wait!

REV. MOTHER. There's more!

SR. HUBERT.

THE PROTESTANTS, IT SEEMS,
HAD SET OUT TO WRECK OUR DREAMS.

ALL.

WE HAD HUMBLE HUTS
WHILE THEY BUILT LEPER CONDOS-BY-THE-SEA.

REV. MOTHER.

COMPETING FOR EACH LEPER
PUT OUR MISSION WORK IN JEOPARDY.
SO WE DEVISED A PLAN
TO AVOID CATASTROPHE.

SR. HUBERT

WE CHALLENGED THEM TO RACE
CAUSE WE THOUGHT WE'D TRUMP THEIR ACE
IN THE HUNDRED METER DASH
WHEN WE ENTERED SISTER ROSE.

SR. ROBERT ANNE.

BUT AS SHE WAS VICTORY-BOUND,
HER SCHNOZ FELL ON THE GROUND.

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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