Acting Edition

Inspecting Carol

A Comedy

by Daniel Sullivan
and The Seattle Repertory Theatre

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SAMUEL FRENCH

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Produced at the Seattle Repertory Theatre on December 11, 1991, with the following cast:

M.J. (Mary Jane) McMann..... Barbara Dirickson
Wayne Wellacre..... R. Hamilton Wright
Zorah Bloch..... Marianne Owen
Luther Beatty.....Danny Speigelman
Dorothy Tree-Hapgood.....Jeannie Carson
Sidney Carlton.....William Biff McGuire
Phil Hewlit..... Ethan Phillips
Walter E. Parsons.....Mark Smaltz
Kevin Emery..... Larry Paulsen
Bart Frances.....Alban Dennls
Larry Vauxhall.....John Aylward
Betty Andrews.....Mary Anne Selbert

Director: Daniel Sullivan
Scenic Designer: Andrew Wood Boughton
Costume Designer: Robert Wojewodski
Lighting Designer: Rick Paulsen
Composer: Norman Durkee
Sound Designer: Michael Holten

MUSIC NOTE

The song "Merry Wassail" which is published in this script at the end of the play, is available for use by amateurs at a music royalty of $5.00 **for each** performance, and is payable to Samuel French, Inc. one week in advance of production.

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CHARACTERS

Zorah Bloch—Founding director of The Soapbox Playhouse. In her 40's. Extremely self-concerned.

Sidney Carlton—In his 60's. A founding member of the Company. Kind but somewhat addled.

Dorothy Tree Hapgood—His wife. In her 60's. English and unable to lose her accent. A founding member.

Larry Vauxhall—In his 40's. Tough, intellectually vain Child of the '60's, still looking for a turn-on. A founding member.

Phil Hewlitt—In his 40'8. Small, obsessive usually plays the ineffectual character in any Soapbox production. A founding member.

Walter E. Parsons—African-American in his 30's. Recently taken up acting again after a stint in the armed forces. Good natured, excitable.

Luther Beatty—A large eleven-year-old. He's been playing Tiny Tim two years too long. Extremely friendly.

Kevin Emery—A nervous man in the impossible position of managing director. In his 40's. Afraid of Zorah.

M.J. (Mary Jane) McMann—In her 40's. A realist. She long ago realized that the Company hit bottom. She looks on now as a bemused observer. Founding member.

Betty Andrews—In her 40's. An inspector for the National Endowment for the Arts. A forbiding appearance. Bright red hair.

Bart Frances—A pleasant youth. Dresses in a motorcycle jacket and torn jeans.

Wayne Wellacre—In his 30's, in search of a new career in acting, no training, less talent, affable, eager to please.

SETTING: A mid-sized city in the Midwest.

ACT I

The stage and a portion of the auditorium of a mid-western regional theatre. The stage is thrust-style and is presently occupied by a unit set suggesting Dickens' London. M.J., the Stage manager, is preparing her table for the day's rehearsal. SHE sings to herself.

(WAYNE enters, nervously. HE carries a laptop word processor.)

WAYNE. Good morning. Hi. Am I too late?

M.J. Can I help you?

WAYNE. Is this the Soapbox Playhouse?

M.J. Yes.

WAYNE. I had an audition but I think I must be late.

M.J. With Zorah?

WAYNE. I don't know. (*Takes out brochure.*) Oh, yeah. Yeah With Zorah Bloch.

M.J. We're rehearsing now.

WAYNE. Yeah. I knew I was late.

M.J. I didn't know she had an appointment.

WAYNE. Well, it wasn't confirmed. I sent a postcard that I was going to be here. But ...

M.J. I don't think it's on her schedule.

WAYNE. I'm only here for the day so I was hoping she could work me in.

M.J. We're rehearsing now. We're just on a short break.

WAYNE. Oh, thanks. That's great. Are you an actress?

M.J. Only during periods of extreme necessity.

WAYNE. (*HE's on stage now.*) 'Cause I could see you've got on your costume.

M.J. Well actually these are my clothes. But you're right. I have been pressed into the service of this epic. I play the female population of London.

WAYNE. (*Impressed.*) Oh.

M.J. But mostly I'm the stage manager. You're going to have to clear off now.

WAYNE. I'll get right down. I just wanted to see how it feels.

M.J. Uh-huh. How's it feel?

WAYNE. Great. Big. But great.

M.J. This is big?

WAYNE. Bigger than my apartment.

M.J. Listen, this is a bad time ...

WAYNE. (*HE turns his back to the auditorium, then quickly wheels around, hump-backed, imitating the limp and withered hand of Richard the Third.*)
"Now is the winter of our discontent
Made glorious summer by this sun of York."

(HE stops, savouring it.)

M.J. You know this is a professional company.

WAYNE. I'm a professional. Or I was. I'd gotten about as far as I could go in data processing. I was good. I just wasn't feeling very fulfilled. So I'm following my bliss now.

M.J. (*HE's in the way.*) You'll have to clear off now.

WAYNE. (*Following her.*) You know Joseph Campbell? He's the guy who thought up *Star Wars*? You know, the movie?

M.J. Yeah.

WAYNE. Well, he didn't actually think it up, but he was a big influence on the people who did. Anyway, I was taking this potentiality seminar and we read this Joseph Campbell book about creation myths?

M.J. Yeah.

WAYNE. How there's all these ancient stories locked away inside us that can tell us how to lead our lives.

M.J. Oh?

WAYNE. So you just have to sort of "follow your bliss." It's kind of like "use the force" only not so violent. Anyway, that's what I'm doing. I'm following my bliss. (*Holding up his P.C.*) And I'm keeping a record of my experiences on the path.

M.J. Ok. But you have to be a union member to work here.

WAYNE. A union ... Oh. I get you. I get you. You have to be a union ... Oh God, why don't they *ever* give you a warning? Why don't they give you some kind of a ... you know, warning. There should be some kind of a warning. In the brochure here.

M.J. I think maybe you're just supposed to know that.

WAYNE. So what do I do now? I'm only in town for the day.

M.J. Hardly enough time to become professional.

WAYNE. Yeah. Well ... thanks. I appreciate your help.

WAYNE. (*Jumping up on stage.*) "Hey, lady. I like the way you move. I just had to tell you that. My engine's been kickin' over hard ever since I laid eyes on you."

M.J. Beg pardon?

WAYNE. That's from *Tijuana Truck Stop* by Terry Allen Anthony. That's my contemporary audition. You need two.

M.J. I know.

WAYNE. For contrast.

M.J. Yeah. Bye now.

WAYNE. (*As HE goes.*) Is there another theatre in town?

M.J. There's the lesbian theatre over at the Methodist Center.

WAYNE. Oh ... Do they ever use men?

M.J. You mean ...

WAYNE. On stage?

M.J. You'd have to ask.

(ZORAH enters with LUTHER, a heavy set 10-year-old.)

WAYNE. Ok. Thanks.

ZORAH. (*To Wayne.*) For Christ sakes, it's about time! The computer is *upstairs*. And as far as I'm concerned you can take the stupid thing back.

M.J. (*Hustling WAYNE out.*) No, this is not the computer guy. Mistaken identity.

WAYNE. Miss Bloch?

M.J. We're starting now.

(M.J. shows WAYNE the door. HE exits.)

ZORAH. Who was that?

M.J. I think I just saved you from a very painful experience.

ZORAH. Slightly creepy guy.

M.J. You don't know the half of it. Luther, you should be getting ready.

LUTHER. I don't come on for four more scenes.

ZORAH. Where were we?

M.J. The knocker.

ZORAH. The knocker. That's as far as we've gotten?

M.J. Yeah. (*Offering Zorah a jar of chocolate kisses from her desk.*) Have a kiss.

ZORAH. Get those out of here.

M.J. Can't. The actors expect it. Sort of my own little theatre tradition.

ZORAH. How can you eat those and stay so thin?

M.J. This is *all* I eat.

LUTHER. Wow. You must be a complete grease bag by now. (*Puts his hand in kisses' jar.*)

M.J. You want a ride home tonight? Keep it up.

LUTHER. Just one?

M.J. No.

ZORAH. Luther dear, your mother would be very angry with us if she thought you were eating candy at rehearsals.

LUTHER. But it's traditional.

M.J. Backstage. Now.

LUTHER. (*Going.*) We're nowhere near my scene.

ZORAH. (*To M.J.*) Why are we moving so slowly?

M.J. Well ...

ZORAH. (*With exaggerated concern.*) It's not like we have to stop to figure anything out. What's the difference this year?

M.J. Hmm. Let me see. Could it be Larry?

ZORAH. All right, no need for your withering irony.

M.J. Was I being ironic? I'm so ashamed.

ZORAH. Did I have another choice?

M.J. I'm not being critical.

ZORAH. I waited until the last possible minute before I asked him.

M.J. You want to know what's taking up time. I'm telling you.

ZORAH. No one else would do it. I couldn't *give* the role away. I'd have to put *you* on.

M.J. Why, you don't think our loyal subscribers would buy me as Scrooge?

ZORAH. After all these years they probably wouldn't even notice.

M.J. You ready to start?

ZORAH. At least you'd be easier to work with.

M.J. (*Ironically.*) Hey. Come on. Larry's a lamb compared to what he did last time.

ZORAH. Oh, now, let's not get into that ...

M.J. You have no idea how bad that was. You were sitting safe at home. We were the ones who had to make it through the performance.

ZORAH. I fired him, didn't I?

M.J. Yes, and you have just rehired him.

ZORAH. He's apologized for that.

M.J. Apologized? He spoke Spanish, Zorah. He performed the entire role of Scrooge in Spanish.

ZORAH. Shh-hh-hh!

M.J. Why did he do that? It was insane and it took four hours because nobody knew when to come in with their lines. What was that all about?

.ZORAH. He said he was protesting American involvement in Central America.

M.J. Oh for Christ's sake. Are we still involved?

ZORAH. I think so.

M.J. Oh, shit.

ZORAH. Larry's fine now. The divorce sort of took the edge off him, thank God.

M.J. That's not all Marci took off him.

(The door to the lobby opens. DOROTHY enters with SIDNEY. DOROTHY is limping badly. SHE has a home-made splint on her foot, covered by a man's sweat sock. SIDNEY carries a donut-shaped pillow.)

SIDNEY. (*To Dorothy.*) Careful, there're steps here.

DOROTHY. Of course there're steps here.

ZORAH. Dorothy?

DOROTHY. He tells me there are steps here.

M.J. What happened?

DOROTHY. Sorry. It's nothing. It's ridiculous.

SIDNEY. She won't see a doctor.

DOROTHY. Have we started?

ZORAH. Are you all right?

DOROTHY. It's nothing. Don't worry. The skirts will cover it.

ZORAH. What happened?

SIDNEY. Freezer accident.

M.J. What?

SIDNEY. Freezer accident. She—

DOROTHY. I open the freezer door and a sausage roll comes crashing down on my foot.

SIDNEY. My fault. I had my suppositories in there. (*HE produces a box of suppositories.*)

DOROTHY. He crams the thing with suppositories.

SIDNEY. There was a sale.

DOROTHY. Drives me up the pole.

M.J. You don't come on for a while. We're at the knocker.

SIDNEY. That's me. (*As HE exits, HE places his suppositories on M.J.'s table.*)

DOROTHY. (*To Sidney.*) Could you bring me a cup of coffee? (*To Zorah.*) I need to give a listen to this anyway. I think the accents have gone off. (*As DOROTHY sits, M.J. helps place her foot on the adjoining seat.*)

(PHIL, a middle-aged actor, carries Luther on his shoulders. PHIL is having difficulty getting through a doorway.)

PHIL. Zorah ... Zorah ...

M.J. We're not ready for you yet, Phil.

PHIL. I can't even get through the door with him.

ZORAH. He ducks. He always ducks.

PHIL. I'll have to come through on my knees. Is this the same door as last year?

ZORAH. Of course. Get down, Luther. Somebody help Luther down.

PHIL. Help *Luther*?

LUTHER. Here. I can do it. (*HE pulls himself up on the door frame and lowers himself to the floor.*)

ZORAH. I don't know how solid that is, Luther.

LUTHER. No problem.

ZORAH. Strong, huh? You put on a little muscle last summer, didn't you, you little pipsqueak?

LUTHER. Yeah.

ZORAH. You're going to be too big for this role next year.

LUTHER. Really?

M.J. (*Protecting Luther.*) We don't want to talk about next year now, do we?

PHIL. Zorah?

ZORAH. Yes, Phil.

PHIL. I was just talking to Larry—

M.J. Oh, shit.

PHIL. ... and we were thinking maybe we could find some other way for me to get Tiny Tim around? I can do it. I can lift him. I just wonder if it doesn't look funny.

ZORAH. What? That you're ...

PHIL. Yes ...

ZORAH. ... carrying him around?

PHIL. Yes.

PHIL. I know it's a a strong image and everything, but why should Cratchit be coddling him? I mean, if the kid's got this big and he's still using a crutch, maybe it's because I've been carrying him.

ZORAH. So then you *make* him walk.

PHIL. Yes. Yes. To make him strong.

ZORAH. (*At a loss.*) Uh-huh.

LUTHER. Yeah, watch. (*Leaping about on his crutch.*) Look out, dudes. I could beat you home so fast!

M.J. (*Restraining Luther.*) That's enough now, Luther. You're going to hurt yourself. Luther. Stop it!

PHIL. Well, that may be going a little too far, but you get the idea.

LUTHER. Wheelies!

M.J. (*To Zorah.*) Could we just say no to this idea and move on?

ZORAH. Phil, no. Thank you, Luther!

LUTHER. Cool.

PHIL. I may not be able to carry him anyway. My back is very weak. I've got this traveling pain in my right leg. Along the sciatic nerve.

M.J. Doesn't the sciatic nerve go down your other leg?

PHIL. I'm telling you ... It travels.

M.J. (*To Luther.*) Come on, Dude.

PHIL. (*Muttering to Dorothy.*) He is supposed to be Tiny. That's his name.

M.J. Come on, Phil. We're starting.

PHIL. (*To Zorah, privately.*) So I'm just an actor to you again? Someone you say "no" to?

ZORAH. (*Under her breath.*) Please, Phil.

PHIL. I'm feeling a little used.

ZORAH. This isn't the place for this.

PHIL. So where then?

ZORAH. Look, Phil, you must understand—we made a mistake.

PHIL. I didn't make a ...

ZORAH. All right, *I* made a mistake.

(DOROTHY pores over a tattered manuscript.)

PHIL. Are you saying it's over?

ZORAH. Phil, please, it never began. We slept together once. Sorry, Dorothy.

DOROTHY. No bother.

ZORAH. It was a mistake.

PHIL. It may have meant nothing to you, but I don't give myself away so freely.

ZORAH. You gave yourself away?

PHIL. Why then? Why'd you do it. Why'd you sleep with me?

ZORAH. I was drunk. You were begging me. I don't mean to diminish you, Phil. I'm sure you had a powerful experience. You're fixated. Understandably.

PHIL. And you're hiding. I know you're hiding.

ZORAH. I can't do this, Phil.

PHIL. Because you were fantastic. That was no mistake.

M.J. (*Entering.*) Zorah, can I talk to you?

ZORAH. Please.

PHIL. Overwhelming, I think, is the word.

M.J. (*Crosses to Zorah.*) Excuse me, Phil, am I interrupting something?

PHIL. (*As HE goes.*) Something? I believe it's something. Yes, I do. (*To Zorah.*) And I believe it meant something to others, too.

M.J. (*To Zorah.*) We are rapidly eating up the four days of rehearsal time you allow yourself for this project.

ZORAH. They've been doing it every December for twelve years. You think they don't remember how it ends?

M.J. Walter's never done it.

ZORAH. Oh, yes, Walter.

M.J. You want him to go on cold?

ZORAH. It's your job to push me.

M.J. That's what I'm doing.

(WALTER enters in the hooded costume of the Ghost of Christmas Yet-To-Come. HE carries a bony, wooden hand.)

WALTER. Hey ...

LUTHER. Whoa! Sca-a-*ry*!

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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