

PLAYBILL®

The Songbird
Question Mark Elementary Theater
Question Mark, Ohio



THE SONGBIRD

A Musical-Fantasia-Tragedy

By

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formerly of the Federal Bureau of Investigations

now resident playwright of Question Mark, Ohio

Performed by the Question Mark Elementary School Players

Directed by Holly Peterson

Characters in This Musical Play:

OLIVER WELPDALE-O'CONNOR, a boy

A LOVELY SWALLOW NAMED CECILIA, a small bird

EMILY, a girl and Oliver's friend

LESTER BRUNK, a terrible bully

DUDLEY, a smaller though no-less-terrible bully

MISS GIVENS, the music teacher

CHORUS OF BIRDS OF DIFFERENT SIZES

OLIVER'S MOTHER, a cold woman replete with melancholy

OLIVER'S FATHER, DETECTIVE O'CONNOR, a distant, tragic figure and local constable

OFFICER CHASTENS, a local police officer

A BODY, a human body, discovered mangled in the woods

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

[Music: "The Town"]

A bright overture as house lights fade. Suddenly, music shifts and at rise we see OLIVER, a boy of indeterminate age, as he walks through town. THE ENSEMBLE joins Oliver as he describes the town he is passing through.

OLIVER:

IN THIS TOWN
WHERE NOTHING EVER CHANGES
THERE'S THE MAIN STREET WITH A VERY LONG HEDGE

ENS:

A VERY LONG HEDGE.

OLIVER:

THERE'S A SCHOOL AND LIBRARY AND A GASOLINE STATION RUN BY A VERY STERN MAN

ENS:

A VERY STERN MAN.

OLIVER:

IT'S A BUSY LITTLE TOWN
WITH SO MANY BUSY LITTLE PEOPLE
BUT THERE'S NOWHERE I CAN BE MYSELF.

THERE'S MR. MAHONEY WHO BAKES THE CAKES
AND MS. MOLLOW WHO SELLS MINIATURE SPOONS
THERE'S MR. STANLEY WHO WRITES DOWN OTHER PEOPLE'S SECRETS

ENS:

OTHER PEOPLES' SECRETS.

OLIVER:

BUT THERE'S NOWHERE HERE WHERE I FEEL I EXIST

EVERYONE'S ALWAYS BUSY DOING WHAT THEY LOVE
BUT I STILL DON'T KNOW WHAT'S IN MY HEART
MY FATHER SUGGESTS A LIFE DEDICATED TO LAW
MY MOTHER SUGGEST A CAREER IN THE MEDICAL ARTS

BUT WHAT'S THAT MUSIC I SOMETIMES HEAR
THE ONE THAT KEEPS ME AWAKE EACH EVEN'IN

YES, WHAT IT DOES IT SAY ABOUT ME AND
WILL IT LEAD TO THE PLACE WHERE I CAN BE ME.

YES, THERE'S A SONG IN MY HEART I CANNOT SHARE
A SONG SO BIG I HEAR IT IN THE TREES
A SONG THAT NEEDS TO BE SUNG BUT I'M TOO AFRAID
WILL IT EVER LEAD TO THE PLACE WHERE I CAN BE ME?

(OLIVER comes to the woods and sits on the rock, then opens a book and begins reading. He hears a bird singing and whistles back. CECILIA, a beautiful swallow appears, and flies back and forth across the stage.)

OLIVER:

Why, who are you?

[Music: "Cecilia's Song"]

CECILIA:

(Whistle happy.)

OLIVER:

You're not afraid of me?

CECILIA:

(Whistle amused).

OLIVER:

You're very brave, aren't you?

CECILIA:

(Whistle amused).

OLIVER:

Why then I think I'll name you Cecilia. Here you go...

(OLIVER picks a flower and holds it out. CECILIA comes and picks it up.)

OLIVER:

You're such a smart bird, Cecilia.

CECILIA:

(Whistle seven note melody).

OLIVER:

How do you know that tune? I've been singing to that one to myself for days...How?

(CECILIA sings it again. The town bells ring. Oliver stands.)

OLIVER:

I'm sorry but those bells mean I have to go to school.

CECILIA:

(Whistle amused).

OLIVER:

Have a lovely day, Cecilia.

CECILIA:

(Whistle amused).

(OLIVER waves and exits in a hurry.)

ACT ONE, SCENE TWO**[Music: "The Classroom"]**

OLIVER enters the classroom, where LESTER and DUDLEY are already seated. He takes a seat beside EMILY. LESTER throws a balled-up piece of paper at the back of Oliver's head.

EMILY:

Just ignore them, Oliver.

OLIVER:

I have. Ever since grade school started five years ago.

(MISS GIVENS, the new music teacher, enters.)

MISS GIVENS:

I am so sorry that I'm late. But the fire truck was playing such a marvelous tune that I just had to follow it. My name is Miss Givens and I will be your new music teacher.

(Some of the children groan.)

MISS GIVENS:

Today we're going to learn about notes in a scale. Let's start with the C major scale. Have anyone of you ever sung in front of an audience before?

(There are several more groans.)

MISS GIVENS:

Well, then it will be a first time for everyone. Who would like to begin? What's your name?

EMILY:

Emily.

MISS GIVENS:

What a lovely name? Would you like to be first? How about you?

EMILY:

All right.

(EMILY stands and sings the first three notes.)

MISS GIVENS:

Lovely. Who's next? How about you? *(She indicates LESTER.)* Let's try these first three notes in a scale.

LESTER:

Okay.

(LESTER sings the first three notes very deeply and beautifully.)

MISS GIVENS:

You have a very deep voice, Lester, basso profundo. Well done. Now how about you? Is your name Oliver?

OLIVER:

I'm sorry, miss, I can't.

MISS GIVENS:

Everyone can sing, Oliver. You just have to give yourself a chance. Now let's have some fun with it.

OLIVER:

I'm sorry, miss, I can't.

MISS GIVENS:

Let's just try the very first note then.

OLIVER:

I'm sorry...I have to go...

(OLIVER bolts through the classroom door. Lights shift as OLIVER makes his way to the woods)

ACT ONE, SCENE THREE

[Music: “The Woods”]

OLIVER hurries back to the woods and takes a seat on the rock again, sniffing. EMILY arrives and sits beside him.

EMILY:

I thought this might be where you ran off to. What’s wrong? Why are you crying?

OLIVER:

I can’t. I’m terrified of singing in class.

EMILY:

But you have a beautiful voice.

OLIVER:

Thank you. But my mother says singing isn’t serious. And my father barely speaks to me. I’m afraid if he finds out I’m singing he’ll think less of me.

EMILY:

Singing is something a person does for themselves. It doesn’t have to be serious. And it doesn’t have to be for other people.

OLIVER:

It’s just that I’ve never sung in front of anyone before.

EMILY:

That’s silly. All you have to do is to give it a try.

OLIVER:

Really?

[Music: “Think of a Note”]

EMILY:

THINK OF A WONDERFUL NOTE
ANY TINY, HAPPY NOTE

(CECILIA arrives and begins to whistle along.)

EMILY:

That bird is trying to help!

JUST THINK OF A WONDERFUL NOTE

ANY TINY, HAPPY NOTE

(Whistles to music.)

CECILIA:

EMILY:

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TRY

(Whistles to music.)

CECILIA:

EMILY:

(to Oliver.) Now you try.

THINK OF A TINY, HAPPY NOTE

(Whistles to music.)

OLIVER:

EMILY:

See you're doing it.

ANY HAPPY LITTLE NOTE.

(Whistles to music.)

OLIVER:

EMILY:

ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS TRY!

(Whistles to music.)

OLIVER:

(The song ends with everyone laughing.)

EMILY:

I told you that you could do it. Tomorrow when you go to class, you can whistle instead of sing!

(OLIVER grins.)

OLIVER:

That was fun. Thanks ever so much for your help. Both of you.

(LESTER and DUDLEY enter, carrying slingshots)

LESTER:

Why look at this? Here's the scaredy-cat and his little friend. And what's this?

(CECILIA kindly approaches the two bullies. LESTER tries to catch her.)

LESTER:

Grab it!

OLIVER:

Leave her alone!

(LESTER and DUDLEY try to grab the bird.)

EMILY:

Leave her alone. Unless you're some kind of coward.

LESTER:

The only coward around here is him. Everyone knows he's scared of his own shadow. Too afraid to even sing in class. Don't worry. We'll get that bird, next time.

(OLIVER and EMILY watch the bullies leave.)

EMILY:

I'm so sorry, Oliver. Just ignore them.

OLIVER:

You're right. Anyway, it's getting dark. We better go. Good night, Cecilia.

CECILIA:

(Whistles goodbye and then flies away.)

EMILY:

You weren't afraid of those two bullies when it really mattered. I think you're actually braver than know.

(EMILY takes OLIVER'S hand and they hurry home through the dark.)

ACT ONE, SCENE FOUR

[Music: “The Body”]

OLIVER and EMILY walk back toward town. Up ahead several adults are gathered, including Oliver’s father, DETECTIVE O’CONNOR, who kneels beside a dead body.

OLIVER:

What’s that? It looks like another dead body.

(The children approach a dead body which has been covered with leaves.)

DETECTIVE O’CONNOR:

Looks like both eardrums have been shattered. And there’s a musical composition of some kind. Can anyone read this?

OLIVER:

I can, father.

(Oliver’s father hands the bloody composition to OLIVER, who slowly reads it.)

OLIVER:

It looks like it’s composition for seven different instruments. Or maybe seven different voices.

DETECTIVE O’CONNOR:

Amazing.

OLIVER:

What do you think it means, father?

DETECTIVE O’CONNOR:

I don’t know. But I intend to find out.

OLIVER:

I’d like to help. If I may.

DETECTIVE O’CONNOR:

No, you’re too sickly. Your mother would never allow it. Go on, I’ll see you back at home.

(DETECTIVE O’CONNOR walks off. OLIVER turns to EMILY. OLIVER balls up his fists, looking determined.)

EMILY:

What is it? What are you going to do, Oliver?

OLIVER:

I'm going to solve this mystery. And end this grisly series of murders, once and for all. I think I have an idea...

(OLIVER takes EMILY'S hand as they hurry through the woods.)

[Music: "Beginning of Adventure"]

EMILY:

Where are we going?

OLIVER:

To ask for help.

(OLIVER and EMILY find CECILIA nesting in a tree. OLIVER whistles to her. CECILIA whistles back. OLIVER nods.)

OLIVER:

Cecilia said there's something very suspicious going on in these woods. It may have to do with the bodies that keep being found.

(OLIVER whistles to CECILIA again and CECILIA whistles back. OLIVER nods.)

OLIVER:

She said she thinks it has something with all trees being cut down to make way for that new lumber mill. She said she's willing to help us find the answers. Come on.

(OLIVER and EMILY follow CECILIA as she flies through the woods.)

EMILY:

Where are we going now?

OLIVER:

To the Tree of Birds.

(OLIVER and EMILY stop before a gigantic tree which seven branches. On each branch is a majestic, costumed bird—a PIGEON, a CARDINAL, a PEACOCK, a FINCH, a CUCKOO, a STARLING, and the grandest of them all, a HAWK, the majestic king of the birds. The HAWK flies down and stares at OLIVER and EMILY.)

THE HAWK:

Who dares to approach our sacred tree?

OLIVER:

Your majesty, with your permission, we would like to request an audience.

THE HAWK:

You may speak.

OLIVER:

Your majesty, something very strange is happening in these woods. A number of bodies have been found in recent weeks and Cecilia...(*OLIVER motions toward CECILIA.*) Cecilia mentioned that it might have something to do with the lumber mill being built.

THE HAWK:

For human beings you two seem very brave. Yes, something is very wrong with our woods. Our forest has been wounded. A great imbalance has occurred and is affecting all the animals and plants and trees.

EMILY:

A wound?

THE HAWK:

Yes, several wounds, in fact. Bright circular wounds made of an impenetrable light. But these are secrets of the forest we keep to ourselves. We are not used to discussing such matters with human beings.

OLIVER:

But we'd like to help. Before anyone else is hurt...

THE HAWK:

Then you must become one of us and join our conference of birds. You may become any bird that you wish, but you must imitate its song perfectly in order to proceed.

OLIVER:

I don't think I understand...

THE HAWK:

Sing! The two of you humans must sing if you wish to join the conference!

OLIVER:

But I don't think I can...

THE HAWK:

Then you cannot become a bird.

EMILY:

Oliver, you have to try...

OLIVER:

But I'm so afraid. Okay, I'll give it my best...(*OLIVER takes a deep breath and begins to whistle.*)