

THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER

by

Lori Phillips - Young

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This play is dedicated to Mary Grace Ketner because she believed and promoted the magic of intergenerational work and play.

THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER was first presented by the In Cahoots Children's Theatre at the First Unitarian Church, San Antonio, Texas, December 9, 1983; directed by Lori Phillips-Young with the following inter-generational cast:

Jacob Grimm: Anthony Young, Hans, the Shoemaker: Jim Stewart, Greta: Dona Fidler, Heidi: Julie Beck, Fritz: Eric Rogers, Trina, the Dog: Travis Ketner, Ferngerntz: Jennifer Mundy, Pippin: Heather Rogers, Poppin: Becky Smith, Trinket: Patricia Stewart, Dora: Lauren Walsh, Sam: Sean Madden, Frazzle: Emily Sadegh, Frau Von Schmidt: Marilyn Bunce, Kristina: Bethany Heinesh, Heinrich: Joel Stewart

Playwright's Notes

The Elves and the Shoemaker is a fractured fairy tale. It's a romp, a gambol, a frisk! It was originally written as an intergenerational adventure for a very specific (and very special) group of individuals who comprised the first In Cahoots Children's Theatre. Our goal was to produce a show where ordinary adults and children could come together and play.

Our experiment worked and, to my great delight, it keeps on working with every new production. Every cast, from the first to the most recent, always manages to take the show and add an individual zaniness that breathes new hilarity into the play. Directing this show is always fun because of the seemingly endless ways different actors take these characters and bring them to life. It was a privilege to be the co-founder, director, and resident playwright of that theatre. It is a greater privilege to be able to share this adventure with you.

Playing Time: About 1 1/2 hours.

SFX: Whimsical music, chain saw, rooster, fanfare, snoring, clock chimes, thunder and wind.

About the Characters

It is critical that each character not be a stereotypical fairy tale character. There is a quirk to each character that must be discovered and defined in each actor's own unique way. I've left plenty of clues by leaving the original stage directions in the script, but there is always more to be developed, always.

Jacob Grimm: Is a bit stuffy, but he loves a good story and eventually loosens up. During the course of the play he remains seated on stage observing the action with the rest of the audience, learning as they learn, reacting with delightful surprise along with the audience. For the first time in his career as recorder of stories, Jacob has the lovely responsibility of being part of the story.

Hans: Is the harried shoemaker that must co-ordinate the entire re-enactment of the story of the elves. He moves in and out of the action like the ringmaster of a three-ring circus. Knowing the elves has put a spin on his life that removes him from the ordinary good-old-boy he once was.

Greta: Is a solid, mother-earth, practical sort of woman to begin with, but as the play progresses she falls easily into the absurdity of the action with a charming giddiness.

Heidi and Fritz: (Can be double cast as Heinrich and Kristina.) They appear rather simple because they are. It is up to the actors and director to infuse their interactions with each other, as well as Hans and Greta and Trina, with lively sibling non-verbals.

Trina: Is possibly the audience's favorite character. The part has historically been played by a male actor. The children in the audience are very aware of the obvious contradiction (a boy playing a girl dog) and that tends to heighten the humor of the situation. It requires an inordinate amount of physical work and the ability to endure a hot, heavy, and cumbersome costume. There should not be anything obscuring Trina's face (such as a full head costume) for facial reactions are very important and should be heightened by character makeup. Trina is a commentator on much of the action. Her reactions and dog-talk add much of the hilarity to the script. Dog-talk is a series

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of barking sounds, howls, whimpers, and a deep rough voice that is used when Trina has a line of dialogue. Trina always seems to have a smart aleck quip ready.

The Elves: Are simply seven zanies who got lost while they were out playing in the forest. They are not cookie-cutter Santa Claus elves with the same green tunic and tights. Each character should look like they rose up off the forest floor dressed in the moss of the day. They are of the forest—not a Hallmark greeting card. Actors with rubber faces are best for these parts. The key to all the elves' characters is in the invention of their stage business. Every elf has his own shtick and it develops and grows every time that elf is on stage.

Ferngerntz: Is the leader, the boss and the bossiest. This part needs to be played by someone very agile with strong pantomime skills. Ferngerntz can and does get overwrought on a grandiose scale.

Pippin and Poppin: Are mirror images of one another. They are constantly moving in tandem, mirroring a reaction facially or physically. It is not critical for them to be look-alikes, or the same sex. The mirroring is in the movement and reactions.

Trinket: Is a found-art sort of elf. She collects little bits of things and hangs them all over her clothes. She tinkles and glitters. Would wear a can-opener for a brooch if can-openers had been invented in her day.

Dora: Is profoundly simple—which leaves her open for interpretation. She is sweet.

Sam: Is a curmudgeon of extreme proportions. Dour, doubting, and incredibly skeptical. He may look nasty, but he is never vulgar or crude. He has been given the opportunity to change his mind set and that makes him lovable. (He'd hate admitting it, but it's true!)

Frazzle: Is like a burnt-out, hippie, love-child of the sixties. He is rarely in-step with the others and is blissfully unaware of almost everything; yet, there is this constant sense of child-like wonder and discovery that shines through Frazzle.

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Frau Von Schmidt: Was originally written for a woman who was in voice therapy! She was working on eliminating a monotone, so the Frau became a calliope-throated wonder which means every thing is practically sung instead of spoken and uses the silliest range of spoken tones. "Hello-oo" is sort of yodeled. This character has few lines, but makes for an enormous stage presence. Children always leave the theatre saying, "Hello-oo! How are you-hoo!" She's clearly quite goofy in the lovable extreme.

Kristina: Is a simple, but sweet child whose knees lock. Believe me, it has potential.

Heinrich: Is a bit of a toot. One cast played him like a demanding little Neo-Fascist and he brought the house down with his "sturdy boots" line. (A perfect example of the creative range of play for each character.) Act well your parts!

THE SETTING

The stage is divided into two playing areas. Downstage of the curtain line, or in front of the proscenium, is the area where Jacob Grimm and Hans the shoemaker interact. Upstage is the shoemaker's house and workshop, where the main action of the play occurs. When possible, a scrim divides the two areas to heighten the effect of going back in time.

It is a tidy, but woefully bare little room. The door to the shop is upstage left. On one side of the door there is a hall tree and on the other side there is large bay window with a window seat. Once, long ago, finished shoes for sale were placed in the window. There is a hint of dust and cobwebs in the window as if to suggest that the shoemaker has fallen on hard times. Outside the window, we can see a sign that says "Shoemaker's Shop." Inside in front of the window seat is a bench where the customers can try on shoes. Upstage center is a large work bench where Hans cuts out the shoes. Center stage is the shoemaker's bench. Upstage right there is a grandfather's clock. Downstage right there is small table, a chair, and two small footstools on a braided rug.

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Scene 1

(AT RISE: As the house lights fade, a short whimsical musical interlude is heard. When the house is completely dark the music fades, and the voices of the ELVES can be heard from offstage. THEY call out the name JACOB GRIMM one-by-one very softly until the chorus is complete and quite loud. Eventually one voice is heard above the rest.)

ELVES: *(Offstage left and right. Ad lib)* Jacob...Jacob...
Jacob Grimm...JACOB GRIMM! *(There is a sound like a clap of thunder and a fierce wind begins to howl. Out of the howl we hear JACOB GRIMM'S voice.)*

GRIMM: Oh, no-oooo!

(HIS voice grows louder. There is a bright flash and a spotlight hits CS as JACOB GRIMM appears to be dropped on stage. He lands on his behind and his howling stops abruptly. He is in his stocking feet wearing only a night gown and a nightcap.)

GRIMM: Oh! Well, I never! What is the meaning of this?
(HE looks down and sees that he is covered in a shimmery dust.) Oh, my. *(HE stands and dusts himself off.)* Oh, my. *(HE looks out into the audience and realizes he is standing in his nightclothes.)* OH, MY! *(HE quickly covers himself.)*

(HANS enters from the back of the house muttering to himself as he hurries to GRIMM. He is carrying GRIMM'S shoes, pants, vest, tie, jacket, and hat.)

HANS: Oh, boy! I told them not to forget the time zones.
"Don't forget the time zones," I said. Now look. *(HE stops and looks at GRIMM.)* Oh, my!

GRIMM: Hans? Hans, the Shoemaker? Is that you? Hans, it is you? *(HE crosses to him and shakes HANS' hand.)*
What a surprise!

End of Freeview

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