

The Bremen Town Musicians



Adapted from the folktale by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm

Lavinia Roberts

Adapted from the folktale by Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm
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*This work is dedicated
to my godson Larkin Williams-Capone,
whose creativity, charm, and energy
would always earn him a banquet
if he ever had to sing for his supper.*

*My heart felt thanks
to Jennifer Van Bruggen
and the Topeka Civic Theatre and Academy
for their much appreciated support.*

The Bremen Town Musicians

CLASSIC/COMEDY. Three traveling minstrels arrive at a town where everyone hates minstrels. With nothing but their own shoes to eat, the minstrels have to come up with a story entertaining enough to earn their supper. The minstrels decide to tell the villagers the story of an aging donkey, dog, cat, and rooster who run away from their masters and head to the Town of Bremen to become famous singers and musicians. Along the way, the animals encounter a tiny house hidden in the woods where a band of dimwitted thieves are hiding out with piles of stolen treasure and an abundance of food. With their “beautiful” singing voices, the animals manage to scare off the thieves, enjoy a grand meal, and live out their lives happily ever after. Audiences of all ages will adore this humorous version of the classic tale by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.

Performance Time: Approximately 30 minutes.

About the Story



Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm, 1847

“The Town Musicians of Bremen” is a German folktale that was recorded by Wilhelm Grimm (1786-1859) and his brother, Jacob Grimm (1785-1863). A statue of the Bremen musicians, which depicts the donkey, dog, cat, and rooster (pictured below), was erected in Bremen, Germany, in 1953 to commemorate this much-loved tale. The Grimm brothers began collecting folktales in 1807 and published their first collection of tales in 1812 entitled *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (“Children’s and Household Tales”). Some of their most famous tales include “Cinderella,” “Little Red Riding Hood,” “Snow White,” “Rumpelstiltskin,” “The Tortoise and the Hare,” “Hansel and Gretel,” and “Beauty and the Beast.”



Statue in Bremen, Germany

Characters

(13 flexible, opt. extras)

MINSTREL 1: Enthusiastic, optimistic leader of a troupe of minstrels; plays the tambourine; flexible.

MINSTREL 2: Regrets leaving school to become a wandering minstrel; plays the flute; flexible.

MINSTREL 3: Hungry minstrel who would like to eat his own shoes; plays the triangle; flexible.

DONKEY: Aging donkey who has always dreamed of becoming a famous singer; flexible.

DOG: Arthritic dog who can no longer keep up with his hunting pack; flexible.

CAT: Aging cat who can no longer catch rodents; flexible.

ROOSTER: Aging rooster whose owner plans to eat him for dinner; flexible.

BAKER: Impatient baker who keeps interrupting the minstrels' story; flexible.

SERF: Indentured servant who would like a name; flexible.

CANDLESTICK MAKER: Naïve candlestick maker who bought a spoon thinking it was a religious relic; flexible.

THIEF 1: Yearns to be second-in-command; flexible.

THIEF 2: Leader of the thieves; flexible.

THIEF 3: Cries when he is scared; flexible.

EXTRAS (Opt.): As Townsfolk and Thieves.

NOTE: For flexible roles, change the script accordingly.

Setting

A small village.

Set

Thieves' hangout. A tiny house in the forest, which is surrounded by trees. Inside, there is a table and a window on one side. The table is covered with piles of coins, gems, and other treasures.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: A forest. There is a backdrop of trees.

Scene 2: A small town, played in front of the curtain. A tiny house hidden in the forest.

Props

Tambourine

Flute

Triangle

Basket of hot cross buns

Gardening tool or laundry basket

2 Spoons painted white

Cloth to wrap around spoon

Piles of coins

Gems and jewels

Treasure

Assorted foods

Badge that reads "Second in

Command" but is misspelled

badly with letters backward etc.

Special Effects

Faint glimmer from window

*“Show business
is never easy.”*

—Minstrel 1

Scene 1

(AT RISE: A forest. Minstrels 1-3 enter. Minstrel 1 has a tambourine. Minstrel 2 has a flute. Minstrel 3 has a triangle.)

MINSTREL 3: I'm starving! When was the last time we got anything to eat? Days?

MINSTREL 2: I knew I should have stayed in school. But nooo. (To Minstrel 1.) You talked me into dropping out and becoming a wandering minstrel. Wandering minstrel, more like *wanting* minstrel! Chance to get out on the open road, you said! Be your own boss, you said! Chance to really create great works of music! Ha! Great works of music! None of our tunes have gotten us a single thing to eat in days much less on the music charts!

MINSTREL 3: (To Minstrel 1, indicating his shoe.) You think if I boiled up this shoe it would taste okay? Maybe if I added a little rosemary?

MINSTREL 1: Now stop your moping, you two! This is show business! Show business is never easy.

MINSTREL 3: (Points.) Hey, is that sage over there?

MINSTREL 1: We are not eating any shoes. Look, gang, there is a town ahead crawling with potential dinner donors. They need us as much as we need them! How else are they going to know what is happening in the world without traveling troubadours, such as ourselves, coming into the village to spread the news to them through song?

MINSTREL 3: Newspapers, magazines, the Internet, radio, PBS news hour?

MINSTREL 1: This is before all that.

MINSTREL 3: No TV? So that's why this is called the Dark Ages!

MINSTREL 2: (Indicating shoe.) I get the sole, guys. You can have the laces.

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MINSTREL 1: We are not eating any shoes, troupe! Okay, I suggest that we rally our spirits and really sell our song. Come on, minstrels! Let's practice our ballad again from the top.

MINSTREL 3: Just one question...so, we are supposed to spread what is actually happening in the world to others?

MINSTREL 1: Well, yeah.

MINSTREL 3: Oh.

MINSTREL 1: What do you mean "oh"?

MINSTREL 3: But we don't actually know what is happening in the world. We just make stuff up.

MINSTREL 1: How are they going to double-check? Like they ever leave their villages. Besides, the stuff we sing about—you know, plagues, war, famine, the Norman invasion—that stuff happens all the time.

MINSTREL 3: I guess you are right.

MINSTREL 2: *(To Minstrel 1.)* So much for artistic integrity.

MINSTREL 1: Okay, company. And a one, a two, a one, two, three, and...

MINSTREL 3: I am too hungry to sing.

MINSTREL 2: *(To Minstrel 1.)* I need my limited remaining energy for begging when we get to the village.

MINSTREL 1: Well, fine. Have it your way. Come along, troupe. Let's see those smiles. Nothing sells like a smile. *(To Minstrel 3.)* Good posture with that triangle. And let's go.

(Minstrel 1-3 exit. Curtain.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: A small town. In front of curtain. Townsfolk are scattered about the stage busy with daily tasks. Baker is standing with Candlestick Maker and holding a basket of hot cross buns. Serf is carrying a gardening tool or laundry basket.)

BAKER: (*Shouts.*) Hot cross buns! One a penny! One a penny! Get your hot cross buns! Hard to be cross with one of [Bernie's] best hot cross buns! One a penny! Two a penny! Buy one, get one free! Limited offer! [*If female, "Beatrice."*]

CANDLESTICK MAKER: I'll take two of those.

BAKER: Two pennies.

CANDLESTICK MAKER: I thought it was buy one, get one free. So one penny.

BAKER: Like I said, that was a limited offer.

(*Minstrels 1-3 enter.*)

SERF: (*To Minstrels.*) Why, hello! How are you fine fellows?

MINSTREL 2: Starving...

(*Minstrel 1 elbows Minstrel 2 to shut him up. Minstrel 1 bows dramatically to Serf 1.*)

MINSTREL 1: Hello, fine madam! We are three traveling troubadours.

SERF 1: That's good. I was worried you were minstrels!

MINSTREL 1: Oh?

SERF 1: Because we hate minstrels here! Don't we, townsfolk?

(*Townsfolk agree.*)

MINSTREL 3: But we are—

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(Minstrel 1 covers Minstrel 3's mouth.)

MINSTREL 1: Definitely not minstrels! Take my word for it!

CANDLESTICK MAKER: The last minstrels who came into town, we chased out without a single six pence or scrap to eat! *(To Townsfolk.)* Isn't that right, everyone?

(Townsfolk agree.)

MINSTREL 2: *(To himself.)* I knew I should have stayed in school. My teacher told me I needed to study, bring my grades up, but I just didn't listen!

MINSTREL 3: *(To Townsfolk.)* May a humble traveler, such as myself, inquire as to why you don't like minstrels?

BAKER: Why? They are nothing but scroungers! Begging for food! They should get a real job like becoming a baker!

CANDLESTICK MAKER: Or candlestick maker!

BAKER: Were there candlesticks back in the Middle Ages?

CANDLESTICK MAKER: Sure there were. To hold the candles. I mean, yeah, it's the Dark Ages, but it's not that dark!

MINSTREL 1: *(To Townsfolk.)* But, surely, you want to hear the news that minstrels spread, being secluded in this isolated little village?

SERF: Not really. I'm a serf. I'm in lifelong indentured service to my feudal master, Lord Tidwell. I could care less about what those tattered wanderers have to say. King So-And-So went to this or that crusade or Duke Whatever is building a new summer castle in Shropshire. Big deal. That isn't going to sow my field, now is it?

BAKER: *(To Minstrel 1.)* Besides, I don't think they spread the real news anyways! From what I've seen, they tend to just make stuff up! The last guy had some really nonsensical song about Normans invading Northumbria.

MINSTREL 3: We have a song about that, too!

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(Minstrel 1 elbows Minstrel 3 to be quiet.)

CANDLESTICK MAKER: *(To Minstrel 1.)* What did he say?

MINSTREL 1: We heard a song about that, too.

CANDLESTICK MAKER: Oh.

SERF: One minstrel came with this drivel about a deadly black plague and all kinds of other nonsense. Like some disease could knock off one-third of the population of Europe! And carried on the fleas on rats!

TOWNSPEOPLE: *(Laugh.)* Yeah, right!

BAKER: *(To Minstrels.)* You sure you're not minstrels?

(Minstrels 1-3 adlib "Oh, no," "Of course not," etc.)

SERF: *(To Minstrels.)* Are those instruments?

MINSTREL 2: No, no, just gardening tools...the latest from Paris.

CANDLESTICK MAKER: *(To Minstrels.)* So who are you, anyway?

MINSTREL 1: Do you like storytellers?

BAKER: Well, we guess so. We've never had any before.

MINSTREL 2: In that case, we are storytellers. *(To Minstrel 1, 3.)* Right, troupe?

(Minstrel 1, 3 nod in agreement.)

SERF: *(To Minstrels.)* So what do you do for a living? *(Sarcastic.)* Oh, wait. Let me guess. You charge folks to hear your stories?

MINSTREL 3: Only a small, nominal fee, of course...to cover the cost of our travel, education, health care plan, 401-K, royalties, etc.

SERF: Great. Now people are charging us for stories. As if serfs weren't oppressed enough already!

BAKER: I'm not surprised. Yesterday, a pardoner came through and tried to charge me to have my sins forgiven.

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SERF: Nothing is free anymore! I'm sick of being the serf! Serfs! I am so insignificant the playwright didn't even give me a name! I'm just "Serf." When are the masses going to rise up against the bourgeois class?

MINSTREL 2: I'll give you a name. I'll call you ["Leslie."]
["Lyle" if male.]

SERF: Thank you!

CANDLESTICK MAKER: I remember that pardoner. He sold me the finger of Saint Cuthbert for only four chickens. Really great deal. (*Unwraps the "finger" with great care, holds it up, and looks at it with reverence.*)

BAKER: That's not a bone. That's a just a spoon painted white.

CANDLESTICK MAKER: (*Realizes.*) You are right! That is so unfair!

MINSTREL 2: I need a spoon...

CANDLESTICK MAKER: I'll trade it to you for four chickens.

MINSTREL 2: No way.

SERF: Look, storytellers, I have a field to plough. We are not interested in your story.

MINSTREL 1: Wait! Don't go! The story is free!

TOWNSFOLK: It is?

MINSTREL 2/3: (*To Minstrel 1, confused.*) It is?

MINSTREL 1: If you don't like it, that is.

SERF: We don't like it. Now, bye.

MINSTREL 1: (*To Townsfolk.*) Please, listen to our story. If you do enjoy the story and want to support future works, then you can pay us a small donation.

MINSTREL 3: (*To Townsfolk.*) We'll put you on our donor list. Only three shillings makes you a lord or lady, and four a duke or duchess.

MINSTREL 2: (*To Townsfolk.*) We might let you be a duke for only one of those hot cross buns.

SERF: What if we don't like your tale?

MINSTREL 2: Then you don't owe us anything.

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BAKER: *(To Townsfolk.)* What have we to lose? *(To Minstrels.)*
All right. We'll listen.

MINSTREL 2: *(To Minstrel 1, 3.)* We better do a really good story, troupe.

MINSTREL 1: Don't worry. I have one in mind... *(Curtain rises. A forest. A Donkey is seated. To Townsfolk.)* Once upon a time, a long time ago, a dependable donkey worked for many grueling years for his master. As time passed, the hardworking beast grew old and weak.

MINSTREL 2: *(To Minstrel 1.)* Hey, I know this story. *(To Townsfolk.)* One day, the unfortunate animal heard his master say that he was going to get rid of him. When the donkey heard this, he said...

DONKEY: Humans! How ungrateful! I didn't hear them talk about getting rid of Granny when she asked for a cane! She became the revered village wise woman! Me? A few gray hairs, and I haul one load of firewood in a little over my usual time and, bam, I'm useless! Well, fine. Now it's time for me to retire and pursue my dream. I've always wanted to be a musician! Forget work! Forget the practical life! I will run away to the Town of Bremen. I am gifted with a powerful voice. I will become a famous singer. Hee-haw! Hee-haw! Heeeee-hawwww!

MINSTREL 3: So the donkey said goodbye to his old home forever.

DONKEY: Good riddance, hominids! This ungulate is on his way to Bremen! Heee-haww! Hee-hawww! There's no Heee-haww! Business like...heee-hawww...show business! Hee-haw!

MINSTREL 3: And trotted down the road to Bremen.

MINSTREL 1: Soon the donkey came upon an old dog.

(Dog enters, howling gloomily.)

DONKEY: Good morning, my canine comrade! How are you this pleasant afternoon?

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DOG: (*Sad howl.*) Pleasant afternoon!? Sadly, not for myself. I am arthritic, and my rheumatism is so bad I can hardly run. I can still do tai chi, but I can no longer keep up with the rest of my hunting pack. My master wants to shoot me! Me! So much for man's best friend. Whatever shall I do?

DONKEY: Have no fear, fine fellow. Why not come with me to the Town of Bremen? Together, we can be magnificent musicians.

DOG: Grand idea! I like the notion of devoting my life to the arts. I never liked being in the hunting pack business anyways. They literally make you work like a dog...long hours and no dental benefits.

MINSTREL 3: So the new friends, the dog and the donkey, headed down the road toward Bremen.

MINSTREL 2: Soon they came upon a cat.

(*Cat enters, glumly.*)

CAT: (*To Dog.*) Just my luck! You going to start chasing me, or what?

DOG: My chasing days are over. Have no fear, Cat. How are you this pleasant afternoon?

CAT: Pleasant afternoon? Ha! Just like a dopey dog to be obnoxiously optimistic.

DOG: You use a lot of alliteration.

CAT: I am a fantastic feline. We are famous for always applying alliteration or assonance to our daily dialogues, duh.

DONKEY: You seem sad.

CAT: Me? Well, I am no longer as supple and spry as I once was. See, I am growing geriatric. (*Demonstrates.*) So much so that I can no longer catch cunning rodents as I once could. In my old age, I am simplifying and prioritizing my life...more naps and such. But my mean, merciless master wants to get rid of me! You have to help me! Whatever shall I do?

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DONKEY: Do come with us to the Town of Bremen. There, we shall be distinguished musicians.

DOG: *(To Donkey, whining.)* Does the feline have to?

DONKEY: Yes. *(To Cat, warning.)* But don't be catty to Dog anymore, Cat.

DOG: *(To Cat.)* Or you'll regret it, doggone it!

CAT: *(To Dog and Donkey.)* You're both the cat's meow! Of course I will! Meow, meow, meow!

MINSTREL 1: So the cat, the dog, and the donkey headed merrily down the road toward Bremen.

MINSTREL 2: Soon, they came upon a rooster, crowing with all his might.

(Rooster enters.)

ROOSTER: Cock-a-doodle-doo! Cock-a-doodle-doo!

CAT: *(Annoyed.)* Do you mind? You are hurting my ears. Why are you crowing so loudly? *(To others.)* That boisterous bird is bonkers.

ROOSTER: I am old and weak. My master wishes to eat me tonight for dinner, so I am crowing while I still can! Cock-a-doodle-doo! Cock-a-doodle-doo!

DONKEY: You have a beautiful, strong voice! Why not join us? We are going to the Town of Bremen to be great musicians.

ROOSTER: Really?

CAT: Of course!

SERF: *(To Minstrels.)* This is boring.

MINSTREL 1: We can give the Rooster an English accent!

[END OF FREEVIEW]