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BIG DOG PUBLISHING
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*To my parents,
who instilled in me a sense of humor,
and who tried to teach me to play music,
but that didn't work.*

A Highly Ridiculous Tale of Jack

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A Highly Ridiculous Tale of Jack was first produced as part of the Honolulu Theatre for Youth summer Stage One program.

A Highly Ridiculous Tale of Jack

FARCE. Jack doesn't like to practice his bagpipes—he just likes playing them. Jack's bagpipe playing is so horrible, his parents can't take it anymore. His mother can't bring herself to tell Jack that she doesn't like his playing, so Jack's father encourages him to venture forth to share his "talent" with others. Jack leaves home, but his bagpipe tootling is so horrid it causes deaths all over the countryside. Jack's bagpipe "music" even scares away a menacing revenant. Desperate to keep Jack away from the castle, the King consults his counselors—Wise One and Wise, Too—to find a way to rid the kingdom of Jack's deadly bagpipe tootling. An overzealous knight, who wields a whopping weapon, is tasked to rid the countryside of Jack's unbearable bagpipe playing once and for all. Screamingly hilarious!

Performance Time: Approximately 60 minutes.

Characters

(6 M, 3 F, 5 flexible, opt. extras)

- BALLADEER/MESSENGER:** Narrator who later plays the Messenger; flexible.
- JACK:** Doesn't like to practice playing his bagpipes—he just likes to play them; plays the bagpipes so badly that his screeching creates deaths all over the countryside; male.
- FATHER:** Jack's father who fears Jack's bagpipe "music" and encourages him to venture forth into the world to share his "talent" with others; male.
- MOTHER:** Jack's mother who can't bring herself to tell Jack she doesn't like his bagpipe playing and is afraid it will kill her; female.
- KING:** Cowardly, self-centered king who has no interest in helping the peasants but is determined to rid the countryside of Jack's bagpipe "music"; wears a royal cape and crown; male.
- DWARF:** Serves as the King's "great steed"; actor can be any height; wears a horse harness with bells or a string of bells around his neck; male.
- PRINCESS ESMERALDA:** King's lovely daughter who marries Jack but is tricked and lured away by the Revenant; female.
- WISE ONE:** Counselor to the King who is called upon to find a way to get rid of Jack; flexible.
- WISE, TOO:** Counselor to the King who is called upon to find a way to get rid of Jack; flexible.
- SIR GILES:** Overzealous knight (aka "The Somewhat Impolite") who is tasked with ridding the countryside of Jack's horrible bagpipe "music"; wears armor and a helmet and carries an oversized weapon; male.
- OLD WOMAN/FAERIE QUEEN:** An old woman who is hard of hearing and is seeking help from the King to rid her home

of the Revenant; later reveals herself to be the Faerie Queen; female.

REVENANT/STRANGER: Animated, moaning skeleton that is haunting the Old Woman's home and has stolen her magical ring; later disguised as a handsome gentleman; male.

DEMONS 1-3: The Revenant's hungry minions; flexible.

EXTRAS (opt.): As additional Townspeople and Demons.

Sets

The sets may be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows but should be easy to move on and off as the play fluidly flows through a variety of places.

Jack's house. A backdrop of the interior of a house or a few simple set pieces may be used.

Old woman's house. A cutout of a small hut or house with a fireplace and chimney may be used. Note: Skeleton legs fall down the chimney.

King's castle. A backdrop or cutout of the interior of a castle or a few simple set pieces may be used.

Revenant's cave. A backdrop of a cave may be used.

Along a roadway. A bare stage or a backdrop may be used.

Props

Mandolin or guitar, for Balladeer
Bagpipes
Earplugs or cotton
2 Large sacks
Hammer
Ear horn (paper cone)
Horse harness with bells, for Dwarf
Plastic skeleton (See special effects)
Skeleton legs
Skull
Assorted skeleton bones that dance with the skeleton legs
Ring, for Old Woman
Go Fish card game
Large sword or another weapon, for Sir Giles
Helmet, for Sir Giles
Royal cape and crown, for King
Paper scrolls (royal decrees)
Cap, for Stranger
Skeletal foot, for Stranger
Mask, for Stranger
Assorted cooking utensils, for Demons
Ropes to bind Jack and Esmeralda
Golden bagpipes (painted gold with gold glitter)
Baby doll wrapped in a baby blanket

Special Effects

Terrible screeching noises

Deathly squeak

Moaning

Sound of bones clicking

Combination of screeching from bagpipe, moaning sounds,
and bones clicking

Puff of smoke

"Flames" in the Old Woman's fireplace (lighting effect)

Flash (lighting effect to allow Old Woman to transform into
the Faerie Queen)

Bagpipe music (prerecorded)

Dancing skeleton. The Revenant character first appears as
bones and then comes together to form a full skeleton.
Ideally, the Demons can collectively animate the various
skeletal bones as puppets to create one large dancing
skeleton.

**"And Jack wears the crown now.
He's king from this day.
It's more than he hoped for,
Though he still cannot play."**

—Balladeer

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Balladeer enters, strumming a mandolin and goes CS. Townspeople are wandering about strolling, playing, etc. Townspeople stop to listen as Balladeer sings the following.)

BALLADEER: (To the tune of "On Top of Old Smokey," sings.)

"I'll tell you a story,
the story of Jack." (Jack enters with his bagpipes. The Balladeer stuffs earplugs or cotton into his ears. Jack plays and terrible screeching noises rend the air. Townspeople freeze, horrified. One after another, they fall over, dead. Unaware, Jack exits. Removes the earplugs from his ears. Sings.)

"His mother, his father,
who'd hide in a sack."

(Father and Mother enter, taking off sacks. They are chagrined about the damage. Terrible screeching noise. They quickly cover each other's ears. Reluctantly, fearfully, they head off after Jack, awkwardly holding each other's ears. Sings.)

"If he picked up his bagpipes,
or threatened to play."

(Screeching noise. Mother runs on, covering her ears. With a deathly squeak from the pipes, screeching stops abruptly. Sings.)

"Poor Jack had no talent
least that's what they'd say."

(Father enters, carrying Jack's bagpipes.)

FATHER: (To Mother, indicating bagpipes.) Hide this
screeching beast! Hide it! Now!

MOTHER: (Holding ears.) What?

FATHER: (Shouts.) Hide this horrible horror!

MOTHER: (Holding ears, shouts.) What?!

FATHER: He'll play it again. Jack'll play this deadly
instrument again.

MOTHER: No! Anything but that!

FATHER: I gotta get a hammer.

MOTHER: A hammer?

FATHER: Yeah, a hammer. (*Pantomimes pounding the bagpipes with a hammer.*) Bang, bang!

MOTHER: (*Understands.*) Ah...

FATHER: (*Pantomimes pounding the bagpipes with a hammer.*) Don't...worry...bang, bang!

(*Father exits to get a hammer. With her hands over her ears, Mother runs about looking for a hammer.*)

MOTHER: Bang-bang! Bang-bang! (*Accidentally steps on the bagpipes, which make a noise. Screams.*) Ahhhh!

(*Mother faints and falls to the ground. Father enters, carrying a hammer.*)

FATHER: We shall overcome! (*Sees Mother and thinks she is dead. Shouts.*) Ahhhh! (*Drops the hammer and rushes over to Mother. Crying.*) Oh, my little acorn! Destroyed by the beastie! Oh!

JACK: (*Offstage, calls.*) Father?! Mother?! Have you seen my pipes?!

FATHER: Curse ye, boy! (*Upset at the "death" of Mother, he picks up the bagpipes and tosses them offstage.*)

JACK: (*Offstage, overjoyed.*) Hey, here they are!

(*Jack enters, carrying the bagpipes. He takes a big breath, and just as he readies to play, Mother awakens.*)

MOTHER: (*Sees Jack with bagpipers, screams.*) Ahhhh!

FATHER: (*Startled.*) Ahhhh!

MOTHER: (*Pointing at Jack, screams.*) Ahhh! Ahhh!

FATHER: (*Screams.*) Ahhh! (*Seeing that Jack is about to play, he "drops" Mother. Mother cries absurdly. Startled, Jack stops and*

stares. *To Jack.*) Don't play, don't play... *(Shouts.)* ...don't play! You'll kill your mother!
(Pause.)

JACK: Kill my mother? *(Pause. Hurt, crying.)* Momma doesn't like my playing?

(Mother and Father look at him and then at each other. Pause.)

FATHER: *(Lying.)* Well, yes—

MOTHER: No!

FATHER: What?

JACK: *(Crying.)* My playing kills you, Momma?

MOTHER: *(Lying.)* No, it's not that. Not that.

FATHER: *(Surprised.)* It's not?

MOTHER: *(Lying.)* It's not, my poor little boy. See? I'm not dead.

FATHER: *(To Jack, awkwardly.)* Yes, see, she's not dead. I mean, you could...play...and she wouldn't really end up dead, my poor, confused little Jack. No, no, it wouldn't happen that way. *(Unsure.)* Is that what we mean, Mother?

MOTHER: Right, Father. *(To Jack.)* It wouldn't kill us for you to play.

JACK: So shall I play? *(Gets ready to play.)*

MOTHER: *(Shouts.)* Nooo!

FATHER: *(Shouts.)* Don't!

JACK: But you said I could.

FATHER: I said she wouldn't...you know, die.

MOTHER: *(To Jack, searching for an excuse.)* Yeah, I'm not going to die...from that. It's just...

FATHER: *(To Jack.)* It's just...

MOTHER: *(To Jack.)* You're...

FATHER: *(To Jack.)* You're...

MOTHER: *(Lying.)* Too good for us.

JACK: *(Surprised.)* Too good?

(Jack gets ready to play. Mother pulls the bagpipe away from his mouth.)

FATHER: Oh, yes! Of course, that's it! You're too good...far too good...you know, for us...to listen to you play.

JACK: No, I'm not. *(Smiles.)* Really?

MOTHER: You're so good, it just kills us.

FATHER: *(To Jack.)* Yes, it would kill us. Oh, boy, it would kill us...dead. We'd just fall over dead if you played. Your playing just kills everyone.

JACK: *Kills everyone?*

MOTHER: You know, uh... *(Thinks. Lying.)* ...with joy.

FATHER: Yes, yes! That's it! *(To Jack, lying.)* With joy.

MOTHER: *(To Jack.)* You're known simply...everywhere.

FATHER: *(To Jack.)* I hear the few survivors talking every day—

JACK: *(Astonished.)* Truly? Everywhere?

FATHER: Far and wide.

BALLADEER: *(To audience.)* Far and wide. In fact, no one could play quite as badly as Jack.

FATHER: *(To Jack.)* So why waste your..."talent"...on two old people?

JACK: Because I love you.

MOTHER: *(Unexpectedly touched.)* Oh. *(To Father.)* He loves us. Did you hear that, Father? He loves us.

FATHER: And we love you, my son.

JACK: And I want to share my talent to make both of you proud of me.

MOTHER: *(Sentimental.)* Then play, my son.

FATHER: *(Horried.)* What?!

MOTHER: He loves us, dear. *(To Jack.)* And we do love you.

FATHER: We do? *(Realizes. To Jack.)* I mean, of course we do!

JACK: You have always cared for me and fed me and loved me... *(Begins to tear up.)* ...and this is just a small bit I can do to show my love for you.

MOTHER: *(Tearing up.)* Play, my little boy.

FATHER: *(Gives her a hard look.)* But, Mother –

MOTHER: *(Tearing up.)* My boy loves his mommy, and Mommy loves her boy. *(Sobbing, but frightened. To Jack.)* Play...

(Mother hugs Father and they nearly strangle each other with fear.)

FATHER: *(Terrified.)* Play? *(To Jack.)* As your Mother says, my son. *(Braces for the worst.)* Play your love for us. *(Chokes up.)* I love you, Mother.

MOTHER: I love you, Father.

(Mother and Father resign themselves to their fate.)

FATHER: Goodbye, Mother.

MOTHER: Goodbye, Father.

(Jack cannot play because he starts to cry.)

JACK: *(Confused.)* Goodbye?

MOTHER: *(To Jack.)* Goodbye!

FATHER: *(To Jack.)* Yes, yes, goodbye! We love you so much, that we won't be so selfish as to keep your..."talent"...for ourselves. *(Jack is struck by this. He screams out his tears. Mother screams, thinking it is the pipes. Jack thinks she is crying because he is leaving. They get mixed up between love and death. There is a comic exchange of covering ears, dying, hugging, and screams. Finally, Mother and Father realize that Jack has not played and they are not dead. To Mother, surprised.)* We're not dead.

[END OF FREEVIEW]