

THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

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THROUGH
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1995

FROM THE
SHORT STORIES
OF
O. HENRY

BOOK BY
MARK
ST.
GERMAIN

MUSIC BY
RANDY
COURTS

LYRICS BY
MARK

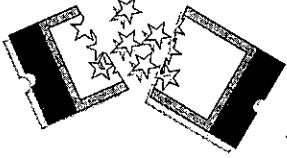
Playwright Mark St. Germain and composer Randy Courts have crafted a delightful theatrical entertainment out of two of O. Henry's short stories—"The Gift of the Magi" and "The Cop and the Anthem"—which they have woven together into a single story in their musical play. Both of these stories were published in O. Henry's collection *The Four Million* published in 1906, and both are quite brief: less than four pages apiece. Both stories are set in New York City, as are all the stories in the collection, and both take place near the turn of the twentieth century. St. Germain and Courts have added three characters not found directly in either story: Willie, a newspaper vendor, who narrates the tale, and City Him and City Her, who play all the other various characters needed in the play.

The story of "The Gift of the Magi" is a simple and endearing one: the day before Christmas, 1905, Mr. and Mrs. James Dillingham, a happy but poor young couple in New York City, are worried about what they will give each other for Christmas. The couple has only two valuable possessions: one is Jim's gold pocket watch, which had belonged to his father and grandfather; the other is Della's

long, beautiful hair. Jim has been trying to find a job without success and neither has been able to save enough money to buy a present for the other. When each learns what the other has done for the holiday, Della and Jim realize that all they need to be happy is each other, and that their love is the greatest gift of all.

"The Cop and the Anthem" concerns a happy-go-lucky bum, Soapy, who is trying to get arrested so he can spend a warm and well-fed Christmas in jail. Soapy has several tried-and-true methods for accomplishing this merciful arrest, and he attempts all of them. Eating luxuriously in an expensive restaurant and then confessing he can't pay the bill usually brings about a quick arrest without uproar, but this time the restauranteur merely throws him out of his establishment. Then Soapy heaves a rock through a merchant's window, but he can't convince the arresting officer that he did it. He tries to steal a purse, to feign drunken behavior, to steal an umbrella, but none of his antics seem to work.

The playwrights deftly weave these two tales together using some of O. Henry's own words to create flavor and ambience. ★



INDIANA REPERTORY THEATRE

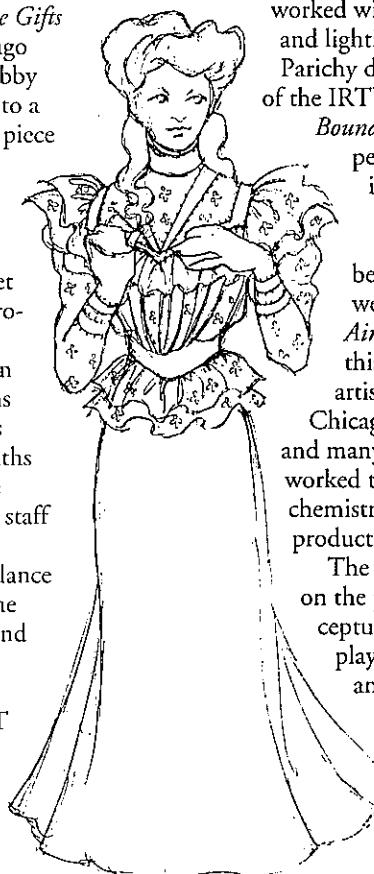
140 WEST WASHINGTON STREET • INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA 46204 • LIBBY APPEL, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Putting It Together:

A musical with only six actors? How can that be difficult to create? Well, all theatrical productions contain thousands of hours and immeasurable amounts of imagination to put together.

The IRT production of *The Gifts of the Magi* began over a year ago when IRT Artistic Director Libby Appel read the script, listened to a tape of the music, and felt the piece would work wonderfully for the IRT's Mainstage and youth audiences. Following this, the administrative and production staffs of the IRT set to the task of budgeting the production: this involves taking many details into consideration and anticipating the conditions under which the production is likely to be created many months later. These budgets create the guidelines by which the entire staff will work on this production.

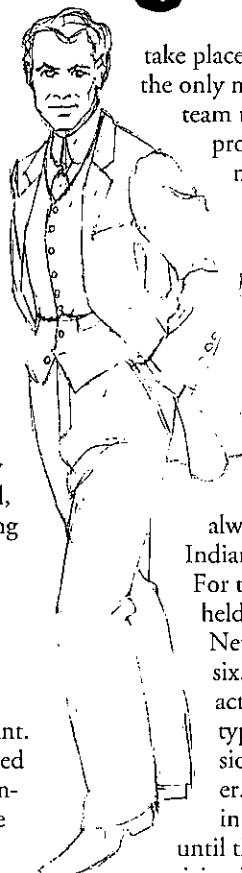
Next, Appel hired the free-lance artistic staff: in this instance she quickly offered the direction and choreography work to Peter Amster, who has created very successful musicals for the IRT in the past (*She Loves Me*, *Tales from the Arabian Nights*). In consultation with Amster, Appel then put



together the design team: set designer Scott Bradley is a newcomer to the IRT but his work has been seen and admired by members of the IRT artistic staff;

costume designer Nanzi Adzima has worked with Appel in the past; and lighting designer Dennis Parichy designed the first show of the IRT's season (*Broadway Bound*). Another important person in the musical staff is the musical director: Dan Stetzel was hired to fulfill this position because he had worked very well on last season's musical, *Ain't Misbehavin'*. Assembling this team is difficult: these artists live in several cities—Chicago, New York, Boston—and many of them had never worked together before. Their chemistry will make or break the production, so instinct is important.

The design team then embarked on the process of creating the conceptual and design world of the play: this process began with an introductory meeting in Indianapolis which took place in the summer, allowing the team to meet, see the theatre, and begin discussions in person which would subsequently



take place over phone and FAX. This is the only meeting that includes the entire team until about a week before the production opens. The designs must be developed on a strict time schedule and budget so the IRT's construction shops—costumes, scenery, props—have sufficient time and money to create the designs in time for the production to open.

Next assembly of the cast began. Usually the director suggests some actors for the project, but auditions are always held, frequently in Indianapolis and then in other cities. For this production, auditions were held in Indianapolis, Chicago, and New York to assemble the cast of six. Actors must be able to sing and act the roles, must be the physical type and age that the director envisions, and must work well together. Usually, all the actors are never in the same place (or even city) until the first day of rehearsal, so again, anticipating their combined stage chemistry is one of the tasks of the director. When actors are selected by the director, contracts are offered to them. Sometimes actors cannot be hired due to conflicts in schedule, but finally, a cast is assembled.

Meanwhile, the IRT's construction shops

A Parable in Our Time

Plays, like other forms of literature, come in different types. Some are realistic, presenting real-life characters; some are symbolic, seeking to represent ideas through situations on stage. *The Gifts of the Magi* is a little of both. It is a very special type of story called a **parable**.

You may be familiar with parables. Religious teachers have used parables as a way of illustrating spiritual truths through example. In fact, this is one of the main features of a parable: it uses illustrations to teach a moral lesson. Rather than telling us what to do or how to behave, it shows us examples of worthy actions or behavior and lets us draw our own conclusion.

Parables have a very specific way of doing this. It is through comparison of characters and situations to our own life that parables make their point. For this reason, parables usually deal with ordinary everyday people so that everyone can relate to them. Parables also make use of a special type of comparison called **analogy**. An analogy is a particular resemblance between two otherwise unlike things. For example, a professional basketball player and a kangaroo are not very similar, but they may both possess spectacular jumping abilities. By using illustration, comparison, and analogy in story form, a parable makes its point in an entertaining way.

In writing their parable, O. Henry and the playwrights have also used four elements of lit-

erature to give interest to the story: symbols, narration, irony, and the surprise ending.

When we use the word **symbol**, we mean a character or situation that represents something other than itself. In *The Gifts of the Magi*, playwrights Randy Courts and Mark St. Germain have created characters called City Him and City Her who are meant to be symbols of the population of New York City. They are not only themselves, but they signify the thoughts and actions of all the residents of the city. For this reason, they can "stand in" for various types of people and play a variety of different characters in the play.

Narration means simply that someone tells the story directly to the audience in his or her own words. In *The Gifts of the Magi*, Willie, a

The Creation of a Musical Production

are in full swing, creating the scenery and costumes that the designers have drawn. They select materials, match colors, work out logistics of effects, and build or locate everything needed for the physical production. In addition to the shops creating tangible items, sound and lighting technicians are laboring to create sound and lighting designs. The work of these artisans is as important as the work of the actors.

Rehearsals begin three and a half weeks before the production opens. Actors, director, and musical director work eight hours a day learning the music, movement, and emotional signposts that will create the characters, actions, and situations called for in the script. Comparative interpretations clash and are worked out. Scenes and songs are fine-tuned. The musicians who will play the show do not participate until the last week to reduce costs, so their participation must be carefully orchestrated and introduced.

Finally, the production is taken into on-stage technical rehearsals, just three days before its



newspaper man, acts as the narrator, both relating the story and taking part in it. Willie is a creation of playwrights Courts and St. Germain; he does not appear in O. Henry's stories. But O. Henry did use narration in many of his stories, so Willie sounds very much like a character he might have created.

The word **irony** is used whenever there is a circumstance, character, or event that produces the reverse effect of what is expected. For example, Soapy is an ironic character in the play. You might think that spending a few months in jail might be unpleasant; but Soapy longs for this as a haven. His situation is also ironic because it seems that no matter how hard he tries, he cannot get arrested. There is irony in both the person and the events that

first audience is scheduled to appear. Here, for the first time, all the elements of the production come together in two 12-hour days of rehearsal where everything must be meshed and blended to create the finished production. Important acting moments must be perfectly lit. Costumes must not constrict. Colors must complement. Actor chemistry must be convincing. Scenery must move effortlessly and swiftly. Although many minor adjustments are made at this stage, there is little room for error. All the calculations and planning must pay off here.

The most important element—the audience—is the final ingredient. Their interaction with a production can influence it profoundly. The audience's energies, emotions, attention, and appreciation are of great importance to making this live art form fully come alive. ★

*Sketches by costume designer
Nanzi Adzima:
(far left) Della,
(center) Jim,
(near left) Soapy.*

surround him.

The **surprise ending** is closely related to the idea of irony. In it, things do not always end up the way the audience or reader might have assumed. The unexpected happens and creates a change in the situation that brings the story to a quick conclusion. This makes a dramatic impact and makes the story more memorable and interesting. O. Henry was a master of the surprise ending.

These four elements—symbols, narration, irony and surprise ending—combine in parable form in *The Gifts of the Magi*. Though our society is quite different from that of Jim and Della, they still have something to teach us. This is the true meaning

O. Henry's Short Stories

A Treasurehouse of Vocabulary

While O. Henry's stories display his mastery of making art of the commonplace, they also represent a love of the English language, evinced by his use of words in an inventive and original way. As you read the stories, how many of these words are you able to understand through their context?

In "The Gift of the Magi" the following challenging words are ingeniously used:

imputation
parsimony
instigates
predominating
mendicancy
appertaining
agile
longitudinal
ransacking
meretricious
patent
coveted

In "The Cop and the Anthem" these words may be found:

denizens
cognizant
hibernatorial
soporific
hegira
eleemosynary
insolvency
protoplasm
demi-tasse
decadent
epicurean
conspicuous
minions
fatuously
sprightly
execrated
insular
unattainable
sauntered
receptive

O. Henry Master of the Short Story

William Sydney Porter—better known to readers as O. Henry, the pen name he adopted while in jail—is almost as famous for the story of his own life as for the 600 short stories written in his brief career. When he wrote his best-known story, "The Gift of the Magi," in 1905, he had only five more years to live; he succumbed to cirrhosis of the liver in 1910 at the age of 47.

Porter was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, in 1862 (during the Civil War). His father was a doctor; his mother died when William was three. Following this event, the family moved in with a widowed grandmother and a maiden aunt who encouraged the youthful Porter in his interest in reading and storytelling. At 17, Porter began working in his uncle's drug store as a pharmacist's apprentice; he received his pharmacist's license two years later. In 1882 he began to show symptoms of tuberculosis, so friends invited him to live in Texas in hopes of improving his health. He first worked on a sheep ranch near the Mexican border and later settled in Austin where he held a variety of jobs.

In 1887, Porter married Athol Estes Roach and began working as a draftsman in the Texas Land Office. His wife encouraged him to pursue his interest in humor writing, and he founded a moderately successful weekly magazine called *The Rolling Stone*, devoted to satiric portraits of local residents. The Porter's family life put strains on the writer emotionally and financially. Their first child died at birth, and Athol's health began to decline after the birth of their daughter Margaret in 1889. When the land office closed, Porter found work as a bank teller.

In 1894 a shortage was discovered at the bank, and Porter was accused of embezzling \$5,500. It is presumed that he would have been pardoned, because the shortage in his accounts was likely due to bad bookkeeping and lax management at the bank rather than to criminal intent. But when summoned from his new home in Houston to stand trial in Austin, Porter fled, leaving his wife and children behind, landing for a time in New Orleans and Honduras in Central America. In 1896, his wife's health deteriorated, and

Porter returned to Texas to be with her as she died. That year he had his first story accepted for publication, but he was forced to stand trial and was convicted.

Porter served four years in an Ohio penitentiary where he devoted himself to writing stories about his experiences in Honduras and coined the pseudonym *O. Henry*, a name borrowed from a prison guard, Orrin Henry. In

output was partially the product of his tremendous talent for writing quickly. However, Porter also needed the money in order to satisfy his indulgent lifestyle, to finance his second unhappy marriage, and to provide for the private schooling of his daughter.

Porter developed a drinking problem that often caused him to miss publication deadlines. But his ability to create a story on short

notice is legend. Porter was assigned the writing of a Christmas story in 1905. His illustrator, Dan Smith, was running out of time to do the drawing and Porter had still not turned in a story. Smith asked the writer just to tell him what to draw and Porter had to admit that he hadn't even thought of an idea for a story. But he told the illustrator to draw a picture of a sparsely furnished room with a man holding a watch and a woman with long hair, sitting side by side on a bed. The illustrator went to work and so did O. Henry. Realizing that he had to make the story fit the drawing, he wrote, in one afternoon, "The Gift of the Magi."

By 1909 Porter's health began to decline due to many years of alcohol abuse. Although he was almost an invalid by 1910, the writer continued to pour out stories. He died, penniless and in debt, in June of 1910, but his numerous short stories continued to be published until 1923. Some of his most popular stories include: "Mammon and the Archer," "The Ransom of Red Chief," "An Unfinished Story," and "Two Thanksgiving Day Gentlemen."

What accounts for O. Henry's tremendous popularity? Partly, it is what he wrote about—the lives and feelings of everyday people. "I've got some of my best yarns from park benches, lampposts, and newspaper stands," he once said. He also drew from his own experiences. He wrote about things he knew, or had heard or seen, in a way that the ordinary reader could understand. This special talent led him to overcome the hardships of life and to achieve the lasting success we remember today. O. Henry is the master of make-believe, putting a romantic glow on everyday living. ★



1901 he published his first story from prison, "Georgia's Ruling." When he was released, Porter moved to New York to pursue his writing career, finding publishers for his work in the weekly *New York Sunday World* and the monthly magazines *Everybody's*, *McClure's* and *Munsey's*. His first collection of stories, *Cabbages and Kings* (1904), drew its title from a poem by Lewis Carroll (another pseudonymous writer) and contained adventure stories about Central and South America. In 1906, his second book, *The Four Million* (the population of New York), appeared. This series of tales about New York was so popular that he followed it with three more books. His prolific

SPECIAL THANKS TO
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