

TIMELESS TALES:

A Hans Christian Andersen Quartet

by Doug Goheen

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Timeless Tales: A Hans Christian Andersen Quartet weaves together four of Hans Christian Andersen's best-known stories in an exciting and flexible format. Narrated by Andersen himself, the play introduces us to the master storyteller from Denmark, providing background information on his childhood and the circumstances leading to the publication of his plays. After the "Prologue," the actual dramatization of the tales begins. They include: "The Princess and the Pea," "The Little Mermaid," "The Emperor's New Clothes," and "The Ugly Duckling." This last tale also serves to shed light on Andersen himself and his transformation from a poor, lonely "ugly duckling" living in the small village of Odense to the celebrated writer of Copenhagen. The stories are presented in a delightful manner with flexible casting and simple costumes and staging.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(flexible cast of 14 or more)

Prologue
Clothes

H.C. Andersen
Young Hans
Hans' Father
Hans' Mother
Fortune-teller
Citizens (Ensemble)

3. The Emperor's New

Emperor
Empress
Prime Minister
Councilor
2 Weavers (f)
Ensemble

1. Princess and the Pea

Prince
King
Princess
Queen
3 Princesses
Ensemble

2. The Little Mermaid

Little Mermaid
Grandmother
5 Mermaids
Sea Witch (m)
Prince
Princess Bride
Ensemble

4. The Ugly Duckling

Ugly Duckling
Mother Duck
4 Ducklings
Visiting Duck
2 Hens
Old Woman
Woman's Hen
Woman's Cat
3 Swans
Father
Son

SETTING

The play can be presented either on a conventional stage or in any large, multi-purpose room, such as a gym or a cafeteria. In the original production, a horseshoe-type setting was used, with children seated on the floor around the perimeter of the semi-circular playing area. Three sets of book flats were used. Curtains connecting units one and two and units two and three provided additional entrances and exits.

COSTUMES

Keep costumes simple, with a basic outfit for each of the actors, supplemented by costume pieces, such as a crown and a robe for the royalty members. Hans, himself, should be dressed in a long coat, shirt, breeches and a hat.

PERFORMANCE TIME

Approximately one hour. The tales can be presented in virtually any order but should conclude with "The Ugly Duckling" since it provides a nice segue to the closing speech of Hans Christian Andersen.

PROLOGUE

(MUSIC plays as the audience enters. With the exception of the ACTOR who plays Hans, MEMBERS OF THE ENSEMBLE have been interacting with the children as they arrive. They help seat the children, visit with them, and talk about fairy tales, or ask if they have heard of Denmark. When the play is ready to begin, the Ensemble moves to the upstage playing area. Momentarily, HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN appears.)

HANS: Good morning. My name is Hans – Hans Christian Andersen, to be precise. Perhaps you’ve heard of me, because of the 168 tales I wrote during my lifetime. Maybe you have encountered some of them – “The Steadfast Tin Soldier,” “Thumbelina,” “The Nightingale.” Well, I thought so. But today, I’d like to share with you four of my very favorite tales. First, however, a little bit about me – your storyteller this morning. I was born nearly 200 years ago, in a little town called Odense, a village of rolling meadows and winding streams, of stone farmhouses and cobbled streets. Although there were only 5,000 people, it was a much bigger place in my imagination.

(Two MEMBERS of the ENSEMBLE step forward to become YOUNG HANS and his FATHER, who reads to him.)

HANS: My father, a shoemaker, would read to me every day. My favorite stories came from *A Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. These were the first tales I would act out just for myself. I even made paper cutouts and put on little shows in my puppet theater. I didn’t know at the time that we were so poor, because in my imagination I was so rich.

(The ACTOR playing HANS’ FATHER returns to his place.)

HANS: It was a very sad day when my father died when I was 11 years old. He had been my only real friend growing up.

HANS: *(Continued.)* But I continued to amuse myself with the world of make-believe for the next several years. However, when I turned 14, I began to dream of bigger things to come.

(The ACTRESS playing Hans' Mother steps forward.)

YOUNG HANS: Mother, I wish to go to Copenhagen.

MOTHER: Copenhagen! That is nearly one hundred miles away! And so many people! Whatever makes you want to go to Copenhagen?

YOUNG HANS: Please, Mother. There I shall sing and recite.

MOTHER: Sing and recite! Foolish boy. And what will you do for money? Since your father died, God rest his soul, we are poorer than ever before.

YOUNG HANS: I have money from my clay pig bank – five kroners.

MOTHER: Five kroners will not last so long in Copenhagen.

YOUNG HANS: Please, Mother. I shall become famous!

MOTHER: Famous! Silly lad. But I can see you are bound and determined, idle dreamer that you are. First, though, I will visit Olga, the fortune-teller.

HANS: And so she did.

(YOUNG HANS and his MOTHER set out to meet the FORTUNE-TELLER.)

HANS: Everyone in Odense had consulted Olga, the fortune-teller, at least once. But she had always frightened me.

YOUNG HANS: Mother, she frightens me!

(The FORTUNE-TELLER enters.)

HANS: But my mother persisted, and finally we arrived at the mysterious fortune-teller's.

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MOTHER: ... and he has the silly idea of going to Copenhagen.

FORTUNE-TELLER: *(Cackling.)* Another fortune-seeker.

MOTHER: And he has only five kroners from his clay pig bank to take with him.

FORTUNE-TELLER: *(Crossing to YOUNG HANS and inspecting his hands.)* Only five kroners, eh?

MOTHER: We're very poor, you know. Certainly I have no money to give him. *(The FORTUNE-TELLER continues to inspect YOUNG HANS.)* Better he should stay at home here in Odense and learn to be a shoemaker like his father, God rest his soul. But no, he wastes his time making paper cutouts for his silly stories.

HANS: And then ... a miracle!

FORTUNE-TELLER: Madam, your son is destined to become a great man.

MOTHER: What?!

FORTUNE-TELLER: He will be a wild bird who shall fly high, great and noble in the world.

YOUNG HANS: *(Delighted.)* You see, Mother?

MOTHER: But he ...

FORTUNE-TELLER: One day the whole village of Odense will be illuminated in his honor.

HANS: Well, that was all I needed to begin my journey to Copenhagen.

(HANS' MOTHER embraces her SON and bids him farewell. Along with the FORTUNE-TELLER, she then retreats to the background as Young Hans begins his journey.)

HANS: After walking for three long days, occasionally catching a ride here and there, I finally arrived – Copenhagen! So big ... so busy with all sorts of activity ... and so many people!

(The ENSEMBLE becomes CITIZENS OF COPENHAGEN, engaged in various sorts of business.)

End of Freeview

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