

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404

612-872-5108
FAX 612-874-8119

Balloonacy

By
Barry Kornhauser

Balloonacy was originally commissioned by the Children's Theatre Company in 2011.

The license issued in connection with PYA perusal scripts is a limited license, and is issued for the sole purpose of reviewing the script for a potential future performance. All other rights regarding perusal scripts are expressly reserved by Plays for Young Audiences, including, but not limited to, the rights to distribute, perform, copy or alter scripts. This limited license does not convey any performance rights of any kind with this material. By accepting any perusal script(s), Licensee agrees to and is bound by these terms.

BALLOONACY is a small play designed for small audiences, and it is non-verbal. Its sole human character, who we will simply call the Old Man, has gotten out of the habit of speaking, probably because he hasn't anyone with whom to speak. And while he may not have exactly forgotten how to speak, he does seem to have forgotten how to play. His life is rather staid and sad, and he is resigned to his way of living. He has a heavy heart and the heavy step to go with it, in stark contrast to the balloon he will meet is boisterous, bouncy, lighthearted and quite playful, enough so to ultimately break through the Old Man's reserve. This little play is about the rediscovery of play and of the unruly joy it brings. [I've always imagined this Old Man to be that little French boy Pascal from the movie "The Red Balloon," now grown up and grown old, having forgotten all about his youthful adventure, and our balloon a descendent of the original come to once again rescue its boy. That movie had no spoken dialogue and our play, in its silence, is also a tribute of sorts.]

The setting is the Old Man's sparsely furnished gloomy apartment – in Paris, a view of the neighborhood dwellings serving as its backdrop. Up center is a large window now masked by closed curtains. An old standing lamp appears to be the room's main source of illumination. There is also a hamper, a free-standing broom closet, a microwave oven sitting on a cabinet unit with closed doors, and a trash can with a foot pedal that opens its lid. The door of the apartment is decorated with a calendar featuring an image of the face of the Mona Lisa and the days of the month thus far crossed out by a marker that hangs from an attached string. Today's date, not yet crossed out, is boldly circled. There is also a single uncomfortable wooden chair at a kitchen table covered by a dull cloth and set with a single napkin, fork, a canister of grated cheese, and a squeezable water bottle with a straw.

The scene opens with accompanying underscoring, a sad tune something of the feel of Scott Joplin's "Solace" arranged with a French flavor. [Inspiration for further underscoring can also be derived from the sound and spirit of the Chantons Francais of the mid 1920's – 40's.]

The main props here are, of course, balloons. 8 of these are required, all red and used in such a way as to create the illusion that they are all one and the same balloon.

(As some children may have latex allergies, the balloons used could be made of plastic. One brand of their manufacture is "The Very Best Balloons," and they are called Qualatex Bubbles. They have self-sealing valves, float with helium, and use a latex balloon regulator. They are also non-allergenic, non-oxidizing, and long lasting, and they will not explode into pieces nor make a noise if accidentally popped. [Why, they're hardly fun at all.]

The necessary balloons, all on strings, are described below. They are filled with helium, except for Balloon 7.

BALLOON 1: The “Floater.” Appears at the window.

BALLOON 2: Identical-looking “Floater.” Appears from trashcan.

BALLOON 3: Identical-looking “Floater.” Appears from out of the birthday gift box, wearing a birthday hat.

BALLOON 4: Identical-looking “Floater.” Appears from microwave.

BALLOON 5: Doomed Identical-looking “Floater.” Appears in broom closet. Will be deflated. (This balloon will have to be replaced each performance.)

BALLOON 6: Identical-looking “Floater.” Appears from hamper. Wearing white Band-Aid.

BALLOON 7: Identical-looking “Heavy.” Appears from outside of door. Has band-aid. This balloon is filled with air, not helium, so instead of floating when released, it drops directly to the ground. (For weight, may require some additional ballast.)

BALLOON 8: “Another Floater.” Appears at window. Identical but with the addition of a cut-out newspaper heart on one side.

The balloons need to be weighted in such a way that they don’t just float to the ceiling, but rather hover within reach.

BALLOONACY

The scene opens with accompanying underscoring, a sad tune something of the feel of Scott Joplin's "Solace" arranged with a French flavor. [Inspiration for further underscoring can also be derived from the sound and spirit of the Chantons Francais of the mid 1920's – 40's.]

As the children enter, the table is set with an empty vase, a water bottle with a straw, and a canister of grated cheese. The Old Man is sitting in his chair, his face buried behind a newspaper. His shopping bag is draped on the knob of the door.

Once the children are all seated, the Old Man turns the page and in doing so catches a glimpse of the audience. He quickly retreats behind the paper, then slowly, cautiously lowers the newspaper, thus getting a real good look at the crowd. This is a surprise, but not a particularly happy one. He hides back behind the paper, but then needs to take another look, just to make sure he's not seeing things. He peeks out again, this time from one side of the newspaper, and sure enough, they're there all right. He hides his face behind the paper once again, then takes yet another look, peering out from the other side of the paper. Maybe they've gone away. Nope! He pulls back behind again. He finishes this peek-a-boo business with one last look, this time raising the paper over his head. Oh, well, they clearly aren't going away. He turns around in his chair to continue reading facing away from the audience.

While turning, he notices his plate of spaghetti sitting on the counter beside the microwave oven. He folds his paper, puts the plate in the microwave, and sets the timer. Turning back to the table, he notices the shopping bag and retrieves it. Again heading back to the table, he catches a glimpse at the circled date on the calendar, and wistfully runs his finger around the circle as we hear a bit of the Happy Birthday tune. He sighs and then brings the bag to the table, where he sits and unpacks the following items he has purchased for himself: a birthday hat, a party blower, a birthday card (- the sort that plays music when opened), and a flower which he places in the vase on the table. He sits staring at these for a moment or two, when the microwave dings.

The Old Man crosses to the microwave oven, which he opens to reveal an unappetizing plate of spaghetti and meatballs. He removes the plate, shuts the microwave door, and heads to the table realizing that the plate is very hot. Dropping the plate on the table, he puts his fingers in his mouth to cool them, but this only burns his tongue. He takes a big sip of water to cool off his mouth, and, problem resolved, sits down in his seat. He looks at the plate of spaghetti, but realizing that it is too hot to eat, he decides to "celebrate" his birthday.

First, to a bar or two of “Happy Birthday,” he begins to don his birthday hat, and while doing so, the strap snaps his chin, stopping the music. [*This will be a recurring joke.*] He next blows on his noisemaker, but it’s broken and doesn’t make a sound. He then opens his birthday card and listens as it begins to play the birthday song, only to hear it slow down and die out altogether. Finally, he smells the flower. But that just makes him sneeze, knocking his hat off right into the plate of spaghetti. Dismayed and disgusted he discards the bag, card, and the “sauce-stained” hat.

Now he had better eat the spaghetti before it gets cold. He puts his napkin around his neck and then tries to shake some grated cheese out of its container, but none comes out, even with a few taps. Giving up on that, he lifts a forkful, but before he takes a taste...

The top of a balloon (#1) peeks into the room at the bottom of the window. The children will noisily notice this, and their noise alerts the Old Man who turns to the window to see what they’re fussing about. But just as he does, the balloon retreats out of sight. The Old Man assumes that the children are just being rambunctious, and turns back to his spaghetti. Just as he lifts another forkful into his mouth, the *whole* of the balloon appears in the window frame. The children respond, and the Old Man quickly turns again toward the window, but of course the balloon has disappeared as quickly as it appeared. Once again, the Old Man can’t understand what the children are being so silly about. He spits out the spaghetti and having found it as bland as it looks, tries once again to shake some grated cheese on it. Even with taps, no luck. He removes the lid. Just then the balloon flies into the room. The kids cry out; the Old Man turns, and is so startled to see the balloon that he tosses the cheese in the air and it spills all over.

“Well, that’s odd,” he thinks, “The wind must have blown that balloon in. But it doesn’t belong in here.” The Old Man nonchalantly puts the balloon back out the window. He retrieves a broom and dustpan from the closet and as he does the balloon returns, surprising the Old Man as he turns back, the kids’ responding. Having dropped the broom in his surprise, he now puts the balloon back out the window, and then picks up the broom and begins sweeping up the grated cheese. As he passes the window, the balloon re-enters through it, behind him. The kids react, the Old Man turns and is utterly surprised, instinctively raising the broom to protect himself. Then putting it down, he grabs the balloon, thrusts it out the window. He turns back to the broom as the balloon flies right back in. Turning to notice it, the Old Man once again tosses it out the window, only to have it immediately return! The Old Man grabs it one last time, tosses it out, and slams shut the window – on his thumb! In pain, nursing the wound, he returns to the broom closet, finds a box of Band-Aids on the high shelf, shakes out the one last Band-Aid inside, and bandages his thumb. He then forlornly

returns the box to the broom closet. The problem of the balloon finally taken care of, the Old Man picks up the broom and dustpan and finally sweeps up his mess of grated cheese.

He crosses to the trash can to dispose of it, steps on the pedal, and as the lid lifts the balloon (#2) flies out, startling the Old Man again, causing him to drop the broom and toss the grated cheese now on the dustpan into the air yet again.

Clearly, there is no use trying to get rid of the balloon. So instead the now very apprehensive Old Man decides to keep the thing nearby, better to keep an eye on it that way, only "asking" to be left alone so he might eat his meal in peace. He tries doing so, but, the balloon keeps intruding, floating in front of his face. So he then holds the balloon out at arm's length, but without realizing it, lifts its string on his fork instead of a pasta strand, getting a good mouthful before noticing. Spitting it out, he grabs his water bottle for a mouth-cleansing drink, but instead squirts himself in the face. The Old Man stands up, knocking over his chair or pushing it away from the table [*as he will soon need some clear space immediately upstage of the table*]. He wipes his face with his napkin.

After doing so, he grabs the balloon to take it to the opposite side of the room far away from the kitchen table. As he crosses he puts the napkin in his back pocket, not realizing that he has caught the end of the balloon string along with it. Once across, he gestures to the balloon to stay. He then begins to cross back to the table, not realizing that the balloon is following him. The reaction of the children will compel the Old Man to stop. He will gesture to the audience that the balloon is where he put it, and then turn and point to show them, only to find that the balloon is gone! More reactions will inform the man to look behind him to find it, but every time he turns, the balloon follows and so remains behind him and out of sight. Finally, upstage of the table, he turns opposite, and is startled by the balloon. He instinctively slaps it away, only to have it slap him back, knocking him to the ground behind the table, and following him behind.

The Old Man's head pops up from behind the table; he is still visibly shaken. [*He releases a mechanism that pushes the balloon from out of the downstage side of the table.*] The balloon reappears from under the table with a "giggle." [*This sound was created instrumentally.*] The Old Man grabs it, throws it out the front door, and slams the door shut behind it. Satisfied that he has disposed of it at last, he returns to the table and raises a forkful of spaghetti to his mouth.

Just then the doorbell rings. The surprised Old Man hesitantly approaches the door, first opening it just a crack. He sees nothing. Opening the door the whole way, he finds a gift-wrapped box sitting on the floor at its threshold. He lifts it up and carries it over to the table. He tentatively knocks on it, that classic “knock knock knock-knock knock,” only to hear the box give the conclusive “knock knock” reply. Taken aback, he nervously unties the bow, lifts off the lid, and, of course in doing so, the balloon (#3) floats out, frightening the Old Man once again. But now it is wearing a colorful new birthday hat [*taped to its top*].

The balloon indicates that the Old Man should look in the box. The Old Man cautiously does so, and there he finds another birthday hat, and he gestures shyly “For me?” The balloon tips towards him as a nod, and the Old Man starts to put on the hat, the strap snapping at his chin once again. The balloon “laughs” and the Old Man momentarily gets mad, removes the hat and holding it to his mouth like a trumpet blows at the balloon. Much to his surprise, a noise is omitted much like the honk of a working party noisemaker. This, of course, surprises the Old Man. He tries to blow in it again with the same result. He blows again. Another honk. This has become fun. He gives one more blow in the direction of the floor, and this time, instead of a honk, the sound is a “splat” hitting the floor. The balloon “giggles” and the Old Man puts the hat back on, of course snapping his chin yet again.

The balloon signals the Old Man to look into the box again. He does so and takes out a folded-up piece of paper. The balloon then leads the Old Man towards the broom closet where, tripping over the broom that is still on the floor, he stumbles into its door, fortuitously mounting the paper there, where it unfolds to reveal a game board for Pin-The-Tail-On-The-Donkey, along with its paper donkey tail.