

Plays for Young Audiences

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

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Merry Christmas, Strega Nona

Story by
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Music Composed by
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Merry Christmas, Strega Nona was first presented by The Children's Theatre Company for the 1987-1988 season.

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Characters:

Strega Nona

Big Anthony

Bambolona

Little Paolo

Signore Bambo, the Baker

Paolo's Father/Puppeteer

Mayor

Priest

Signora Rosa

Paolo's Mother

Ensemble includes: Zampognari; Villagers, Children

Act I. Scene i

Presets; The final moments of twilight. The snow covered hilltop, Strega Nona's tiny house and nearby, the even tinier goat shed wherein five Strega Nona's pet animals and her helper Big Anthony. In the distance, a valley with village square, church and surrounding cottages.

House lights fade. Preset gives way to a night of blue shadows and white, shimmering stars.

NARRATOR *(Voice-over.)* Once upon a Christmas time, near a little town in Calabria, Italy, there lived an old lady called Strega Nona - Grandma Witch... *(Within the house, a light from the cupped hands of Strega Nona illumines her face.)* She made magic to help people, in her little house high on the hill, along with Bambolona -- the baker's daughter -- who had come to stay and learn Strega Nona's wonderful secrets. *(Light from Strega's hands broadens to include Bambolona, standing at her side, gazing in wonder.)* And there was also Big Anthony -- who never paid attention. *(Light now includes Big Anthony, gazing too.)* Big Anthony was Strega Nona's helper, but he wished that someday he, too, could learn of magic. . .

STREGA NONA No more magic!

BIG ANTHONY
& BAMBOLONA Strega Nona?!

BAMBOLONA No more magic?!

BIG ANTHONY Never?!

STREGA NORA No, Big Anthony. Only until Natale.

BIG ANTHONY Natale?

STREGA NONA
& BAMBOLONA Christmas.

BIG ANTHONY No magic until Christmas? But when will that be? Soon?

BAMBOLONA No, Big Anthony. Natale is a whole month away.

STREGA NONA *(Indicating wreath.)* See here, Anthony -- the candles on the wreath?
They will help to count the weeks.

BIG ANTHONY Four candles.

BAMBOLOIA One for each week.

STREGA NONA Yes, children, tonight begins the season of "Advent."

BIG ANTHONY "Advent". . .

STREGA NONA And this is an "Advent Wreath." But quick -- before the magic fades
away -- time to light the first candle.

Bambolona ignites a taper from the light in Strega's hands, which then fades. Strega Nona sings.

STREGA NONA *(Sung)* With the touch of a flame golden bright
Bright as shimmering stars in the night
Mark the weeks as we pass through the season of light
Let us quick light a wick light a candle.
When the advent wreath candle you light
Watch your cares and your worries take flight
Saints above! Could there be a more beautiful sight?
As we quick light a wick light a candle.
Though with advent comes frost in the air
Doesn't matter -- we've no time to care!
Si! So much to be done, but so what? -- it's great fun!
Gifts to make, sweets to bake
House to clean, decked in green
Just a month till the morn of the day Christ was born:
Then the church bells will ring
Hear the choir, how they sing!
What a day! Wondrous day! Magic day!

(Spoken) Well? I get a little excited about Christmas. . .

(Sung) Be our guide in the dark, show the way
advent candle, please lead us, we pray
to that sweet, happy miracle of Christmas day
then that night we will light the last candle.

so come Christmas, which makes the old year
end in happiness, youth and good cheer
but each night till the feasting and friends we hold dear
every night we shall light a candle.

(Spoken) Oh, Bambolona. . . Big Anthony. . . how I do so love my
little Advent wreath!

From the distance below: many candlelit windows.

BAMBOLONA *(Gazing out the window)* Look! I can see my Papa's house. He lit a
candle too! Happy Advent, Papa! *(They rush outside and gasp at the
panoramas.)*

STREGA NONA So many stars tonight! Ah, bella, bella! How beautiful it is,
Calabria!

BIG ANTHONY Look!

STREGA NONA What, Anthony?

BIG ANTHONY That star! It's growing. . . moving. . . bigger. . . closer! Like magic!

STREGA MONA
& BAMBOLONA *(Variously.)* Magic? Could it be... ? *(In unison.)* The Christmas Star?!

STREGA NONA Un miracolo!

The distant sound of a boy's voice calling 'Strega Nona!'

BIG ANTHONY Why, Strega Nona -- the star is calling your name! *(Call again ;
"Strega Nona!" is more clear.)* There it is again! *(Strega and Bambolona
suddenly laugh.)* What's so funny?!

BAMBOLONA Big Anthony, open your eyes and you'll see!

Little Paola enters, carrying a lantern.

STREGA NONA Well, hello, little Paolo!

BIG ANTHONY *(Looking at Paolo.)* You mean. . .

BAMBOLONA That's right, Big Anthony. Little Paolo and his lantern.

BIG ANTHONY *(To Paolo.)* You're not a star!

LITTLE PAOLO I'd like to be.

STREGA NONA And I think I know something else you'd like: a nice warm cup of
chocolata!

LITTLE PAOLO Uh, yes, Strega Nona -- please! *(Bambolona leads Paolo inside.)*

BIG ANTHONY Hot chocolate by the fire -- that does sound good! *(Strega Nona stops
him at the doorstep.)*

STREGA NONA Sorry, my young stargazer, but I'm afraid yours will have to wait
until after you've fed the animals. *(Animals appear. Anthony groans.)*
Now, now, Anthony -- you know very well that's your job. If you
don't dawdle, it'll be done quick as magic.

BIG ANTHONY "Magic." But that's just it, Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA What?

BIG ANTHONY Ever since I came to work for you, I've never understood why, with
all your magic, we have to do any work in the first place!

STREGA NONA *(Meaningfully.)* Anthony?!

BIG ANTHONY I know. You've told me before. It's a good thing to work.

STREGA NONA That's right. And. . . ?

BIG ANTHONY "Magic only when nothing else will do."

STREGA NONA That's right too. And . .

BIG ANTHONY "And?" You mean now there's more?

STREGA NONA Think, Anthony. Can you remember what I said earlier tonight?
"No magic . . . "

BIG ANTHONY ". . . at Christmas!" Now I remember.

STREGA NONA (*Turning to enter house.*) Bene. Good.

BIG ANTHONY Why?

STREGA NONA (*Halting at the steps.*) Why what?

BIG ANTHONY Why no magic at Christmas?

STREGA NONA Ah. That is something you must learn for yourself. I cannot teach you that.

BIG ANTHONY Because I wouldn't understand. . . because I'm stupid. . .

STREGA NONA "Stupid?!" Anthony, what makes you say such a thing!?

BIG ANTHONY I just feel that way sometimes. Lots of times. Remember when I turned you into a toad? And that time I used your magic ring? And all the trouble I caused with your magic pasta pot. . . ?

STREGA NONA Yes. Big Anthony, I remember. But making mistakes now and then doesn't mean that you're stupid.

BIG ANTHONY No?

STREGA NOWA No. In fact, maybe the trouble is that you are too clever!

BIG ANTHONY Clever?! Me?!

She gives him a tweak on the cheek and a pat on the hand, then enters the house while Anthony turns to his chores. Bambolona is pouring steaming water into cups for hot chocolate as Paolo stirs each cup with a spoon.

STBEGA NONA Ah, Bambolona! You've made the chocolata! Grazie! Now then, Little Paolo, tell your Grandma Witch the reason for this welcome visit.

BAMBOLONA It's my Papa, Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA Signore Bambo?

LITTLE PAOLO He sent me with a message.

BAMBOLONA Papa needs me . . .

LITTLE PAOLO (*Showing a coin.*) And see? He gave me a coin so I'd hurry.

STREGA NONA Tell me, Bambolona, is something the matter?

BAMBOLONA Yes! Christmas!

STREGA NONA Christmas? What's the matter with Christmas?

BAMBOLONA Just imagine getting up every morning before sunrise in order to bake Christmas cakes and Christmas pies and Christmas cookies and Christmas breads for every single household in Calabria. And then imagine doing that day after day after day for a month.

STREGA NONA Ah. Your Papa needs your help at the bakery.

BAMBOLONA (*A sigh.*) Oh, Strega Nona -- what should I do? (*Strega shrugs.*) I feel so sorry for him. (*Strega nods.*) But the reason I left in the first place was Because he made me do all of the work all of the time. "That's the way things are!" he'd say. Oooh, he made me so angry I changed the way things were.

STREGA NONA And you came here. But that was many months ago. Maybe he's changed too, eh?

BAMBOLONA Maybe.

LITTLE PAOLO Your Papa did give me this coin. That was nice of him to do.

BAMBOLONA That's true.

LITTLE PAOLO *(Pondering the coin.)* I wonder what I should buy ? I know -- Christmas presents!

BAMBOLONA That's it! I could help my Papa as a Christmas present to him!

STREGA NONA A wonderful idea!

BIG ANTHONY *(Entering the house.)* Oh, boy! Hot chocolate! Thanks, Bambolona. *(He grabs mug, slurps and scalds his tongue.)* Aaaaah! HOT!!!! *(He rushes outside to grab a handful of snow. He shoves it in his mouth; steam issues forth.)* Bambolona! Why didn' you tell me id wath tho hod?!

BAMBOLONA Because that's what hot chocolate is! Besides, you didn't give me a chance, you were so greedy.

STREGA NONA Children, please! It's Christmastime! Let's try not to quarrel. eh?!

BAMBOLONA
& BIG ANTHONY Si, Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA Bene. Now. Bambolona, why don't you tell Big Anthony your news?

BAMBOLONA I have to go away for Christmas.

BIG ANTHONY Oh.

BAMBOLONA My Papa needs my help at the bakery.

BIG ANTHONY Oh?

BAMBOLONA Well.. . ?

BIG ANTHONY "Well," what?

BAMBOLONA Well, aren't you going to miss me?

BIG ANTHONY I don't know. I'll have to wait and see.

BAMBOLONA Then I won't keep you waiting any longer! (*She stumps back into the house angrily.*) Where's my shawl?

BIG ANTHONY (*Following, to Strega.*) What did I say?

STREGA NONA I think, Anthony, it's what you didn't say.

BIG ANTHONY Oh. I'm sorry, Bambolona.

BAMBOLOMA (*Brightening.*) Are you?

BIG ANTHONY I'm sorry you're going to have to work so hard. Especially since all I have to do is wait for Christmas. (*Bambolona growls and turns away again.*)

STREGA NONA Don't feel too sorry for her, Anthony. Save a little sympathy for yourself.

BIG ANTHONY Huh?

STREGA NONA So you expect to just sit around the whole month, do you?

BIG ANTHONY Well, it is winter; we can't do any work in the garden. Of course, there's the animals to feed, and...

STREGA NONA . . . and everyone in the village.

BIG ANTHONY . . and everyone in the . . What?!

STREGA NONA Every Christmas Eve - I make a big feast for all the people of Calabria. It's my little gift to them.

LITTLE PAOLO It's wonderful, Big Anthony! Tables and tables full of food . . .

BAMBOLONA ...and singing and dancing and decorations.

STREGA NONA But I'm going to need your help, Anthony, to get everything ready. The whole house must be cleaned from top to bottom. . . and then there's the cooking and the baking. . .

BAMBOLONA Speaking of baking, I'd better be on my way. Don't work too hard, Big Anthony.

STREGA NONA Bambolona, it's late and supper is almost ready. You can go in the morning. *(To Paolo.)* You too, Paolo -- wouldn't you like to stay the night?

LITTLE PAOLO Oh, yes, Strega Nona! Yes, please!

STREGA NONA Only how can we let your parents know, so they won't worry?

ANTHONY,
BAMBOLONA
& PAOLO Magic?

STREGA NONA No, children. No magic. But something just as good: the help of a friend. Big Anthony, would you and Paolo please go fetch my little dove?

Anthony and Paolo go outdoors and get Dove as Strega quickly writes a message. Animals assemble to observe. Strega Nona and Bambolona step outside. Strega Nona speaks to the Dove which Anthony has handed to her as she puts the message in the Dove's beak.

STREGA NONA *(To Dove.)* Now, my friend -- please fly down to the village with this message for Little Paolo's Mama and Papa. Grazie!

LITTLE PAOLO Tell them "buona notte." *(Strega tosses Dove into the air. As an afterthought, Paolo calls.)* Oh -- and maybe a kiss goodnight?

STREGA NONA For Mama and Papa -- always a kiss!

All blow a kiss dad wave fare well. Dove soars up, across and off. Lights fade to Blackout.

Act I. Scene ii

Lights rise on the village square and the hustle and bustle of Townspeople (adults and children) and Vendors. The arches of the square are decorated with garlands and ornaments during the dancing and song.

TOWNSPEOPLE Viene, vedi , come and see
Such a morning! Can it be
Natale! Natale! Christmas drawing nigh?
Natale! Natale! Christmas spirits high!
Natale! Natale! Snow in Italy?!
Natale! Natale! Brings a welcome change of scenery!

Viene, vedi , come and see
Such a morning! Can it be
Natale! Natale! Christmas drawing nigh?
Natale! Natale! Christmas spirits high!
Natale! Natale! Bid all cares " adieu"
Natale! Natale! Now may all our Christmas dreams come true

Bella, bella, bells how merry
Ring andiamo come, don't tarry
Strumming, drumming. Humming everywhere
Singing of Christmas -- sing "merry Christmas!"
Bringing a Christmas day beyond compare!

Mayor enters with crate of decorations.

MAYOR Buon giorno, buon giorno! Good people of Calabria -- let us
decorate the square for Natale!

TOWNSPEOPLE hustling, bustling, wrappings are rustling
Christmastime is near
Dusting off garlands and trimming the boughs evergreen
Conniving, contriving and secrets reviving
This comes but once in a year
Oh, no! Ah-choo! May god bless you!
no matter, it adds to the sheen

TOWNSPEOPLE Christmas in Italy, in all the world, is the place to be. Si!
Nothing but the best! Come, sir, be my guest! You'll agree!
Yuletide meetings, yuletide greetings
Girls dressed in fine array inspire Clabrian boys to say
"oh, come let us make romance,
Make this a every man's holiday!"

Natale! Natale! Music in the air
Natale! Natale! Gathering round the square
Natale! Natale! Hand in hand with me
Natale! Natale! Christmas makes each day a jubilee!

Dance. The dance is interrupted by offstage chimes of church.

TOWNSPEOPLE Bells From The Steeple, Calling All People
People from far and near
Gently they bid us please recall
The source of Christmas cheer

Child of the manger birth,
It is to thee we say a prayer
Thanking thee for thy gift of love,
Releasing us from despair.

(Tempo accelerates and joviality resumes.)

Christmas in Italy we share together as joyously
Old friends are greeted and all are treated as family
Gathered by fireside we hope that our happiness will abide
In those who surround us
With love ever-boundless this christmastime

Natale! Natale! Christmas drawing nigh
Natale! Natale! Christmas spirits high
Natale! Natale! And amore too
Natale! Natale! Makes a month of Christmas dreams come true!

At the end of the song, Anthony, Bambolona, and Little Paolo enter the square.

LITTLE PAOLO *(Running to his parents.)* Papa! Mama! I got to spend the night at
Strega Nona's!

MOTHER Did you have a good time. Paolo?

LITTLE PAOLO Oh, yes! A wonderful time! *(He runs to tell the other Children about his evening.)*

FATHER Grazie , Big Anthony; thank you for seeing our boy safely home.

BIG ANTHONY Oh, that's alright. I had to come to town anyway.

PRIEST Ah, buon giorao, Bambolona!

BAMBOLONA Good morning, Father.

PRIEST And what brings you to the village? It seems we only get to see you and Strega Nona at church.

BAMBOLONA I've come to stay the month with my father, Father.

PRIEST You've come to work at the bakery? With your father? Oh, my dear child, you're a saint!

BAMBOLONA Oh. I hope it won't be that bad.

PRIEST But what about your magic lessons with Strega Nona?

BAMBOLONA Oh, Father -- Strega Nona won't do any magic at Christmas. She says, "Christmas has a magic all its own."

PRIEST And so it has! *(He pats Bambolona on the hand and exits.)*

BIG ANTHONY Oh, my! Will you just look at all the pretty decorations!

Paolo and Children enter, laughing and shouting, as they throw snowballs at Anthony. Anthony joins in their game. The Children all throw at Anthony, who ducks, allowing snowballs to fly offstage into the wing. Children freeze, in unison say 'Oh, oh!' and then quickly rush off. Anthony remains alone onstage, snowball in hand.

MAYOR *(Threatening, from offstage.)* BIG ANTHONY!

BIG ANTHONY Oh oh.

Mayor storms onstage – his clothes disheveled. He has clumps of snow all over himself.

MAYOR I should've known it was you!

BIG ANTHONY Hello, Signore Mayor. You're looking very. . . festive.

MAYOR I am, am I? Well, that isn't how I feel. . .

BIG ANTHONY Oh, no? I'm sorry to hear that. Another one of your headaches?

MAYOR Among other things.

BIG ANTHONY What a shame! And no magic cures from Strega Nona for a whole month! She's busy getting ready for Christmas, you see.

MAYOR No doubt that's why she sent you down the hill.

BIG ANTHONY That's right. She asked me to get all sorts of things.

MAYOR Did she ask you to get in trouble?

BIG ANTHONY Trouble? No.. .

BAMBOLONA *(Rescuing him.)* Big Anthony? Anthony, come along!

BIG ANTHONY Huh?

BAMBOLONA Didn't you want to escort me to the bakery?! *(She nods her head rapidly as a cue to him; he doesn't get it.)*

BIG ANTHONY The bakery? No. . .

BAMBOLONA *(Grabbing his arm.)* Oh, what a thoughtful gentleman you are! Grazie . . . delighted! *(They are at a safe distance from the Mayor.)* Well? Aren't you going to thank me?

BIG ANTHONY What for?

BAMBOLONA Oh, never mind! I swear, Big Anthony, sometimes you are so... so... Big! *(She starts upstage as the bakery begins shift in place. Anthony follows. Townspeople enter to facilitate the shift.)*

TOWNSPEOPLE Christmas in Italy! All month we dash about frantically
Daily trips to the shops and perpetual stops at the bakery
Pies, breads and cake displays
And trays of cookies with chocolate glaze
Chewy caramel treats, honey marzipan sweets
For the holidays. Sweet holidays!

A sight we delight in: custard cups with spice
All bulging, indulging cinnamon at a price
Confection perfection -- be it sweet or tart
What rapture, this! Oh joy! Oh bliss!
Bambo makes each cake a work of art!

Act I. Scene iii

The bakery. Baker is at work, alone. Suddenly, a well-to-do Matron and her two ill-behaved Children lurch in. The Children rush to the carts of food.

MATRON *(To Children.)* Statti fermo! Vieni qua! Non mangiate niente!

BAKER Buoa giorno, Signora.

MATRON Buoa giorno, Signore Bambo.

BAKER Siete ven uta per ritirare la torta?

MATROH Spero que sia pronta.

BAKER Vedrete. . . *(She pays him. As he turns to fetch the cake, a frenzied throng of Customers descends upon him.)*

CUSTOMERS Tocca a me! Vado in fretta! Aspetta il tuo turno!

Baker quiets the Customers down as he gets an elaborately decorated cake for the Matron.
Customers gaze in wonder and admiration.

BAKER *(Waving them aside.)* Fate spazio, prego. Arriva la torta.

CUSTOMERS Che bella! Perfetta! Fantastica! Straordinaria! Un capolavoro!
Complimenti, Signore Bambo!

BAKER *(Modestly.)* Oh, niente. *(He turns to the other Customers.)* Chi e la
prossima? *(Customers resume their rude clamoring as Bambolona,
followed by Anthony, enters the bakery and calls through the crowd.)*

BAMBOLONA Papa? Papa!

BAKER *(Not noticing her.)* Si si-- have a little patience; you'll get your turn!
(Calling over his shoulder to a Woman.) Now what was it you
wanted, Signora ? A dozen almond cookies and a raisin cake?

WOMAN No, Signore Bambo: two dozen raisin cookies and an almond cake.

BAMBOLONA Papa!

BAKER Not now, Bambolona, I'm busy... *(Sudden realization.)* Bambolona!!!
(Bambolona holds out her arms for a hug.)

BAMBOLONA Papa Bambo! *(Instead of a hug, Baker shoves an apron on his daughter,
to her surprise and disappointment.)*

BAKER Help me find an almond cake in this mess!

BAMBOLONA Papa! Is that all you have to say to me?

BAKER Yes. No-- and a dozen raisin cookies.

WOMAN Two dozen!

BAMBOLONA What about a "glad to see you?" Or at least a "Buoa giorno !" ?

BAKER *(Embrace and kisses.)* Oh, forgive me, daughter. "Buoa giorno !"
Hey, everybody -- look here, Bambolona's back at her Papa's

bakery! (*Customers respond with "Aaahs, How sweet" etc.*) From now on -- you want something, ask her!

Customers immediately revert to rude clamoring. Bambolona heaves a sigh and steps forward to deal with them as Baker retreats to his work-station to catch his breath. A pool of light highlights Anthony as din of the bakery and movement fade and slow to enhance focus.

BIG ANTHONY Will you just look at all those wonderful cookies and pastries and cakes! Mmmmm! (*Matron is nearby with her spectacular cake.*) Now that's what I call a cake! Look at all that frosting! It's even got a candied cherry on top! I wonder how much it costs?

CUSTOMER (*Snapping out of 'isolation.'* Proudly, to Audience.) Fifty florens.

BIG ANTHONY Fifty florens?! That expensive?! I don't have that kind of money! All I've got is what Strega Nona gave me this morning; just enough to buy all the supplies she needs. I wonder how I could. . .

LITTLE PAOLO (*Gazing at coin, to Mother.*) It's my coin, so can I decide what to buy?

MOTHER Of course, Paolo -- you earned it.

BIG ANTHONY . . . earn a cake! Signore Bambo! (*Action resumes as Anthony ambles over to Baker.*) Signore Bambo?

BAKER (*Lugging a huge sack of sugar.*) Too busy... take your turn... Bambolona will help you. . .

BIG ANTHONY It's me, Signore -- Big Anthony!

BAKER Big Antho. . . (*He freezes, drops the sugar sack on his foot.*) Ahhh! Anthony! Oh, no! What do you want?! Oh, please, please go away! Can't you see I'm busy?

BIG ANTHONY But that's what I was hoping to talk with you about.

BAKER "Talk?" Fine. Later. . . sometime after Christmas. . . no, make that "after Easter". . .

BIG ANTHONY I only thought I could help.

BAKER "Help?!" That's what I was afraid of!

BIG ANTHONY You need help, don't you?

BAKER Of course I do! But. . .

BIG ANTHONY I know, I know . . . you're thinking of the last time I helped you.

BAKER You read my mind.

BIG ANTHONY But Signore Bambo, last time was all an accident. Here I was, all alone in the bakery while you went to the town square to sit with your friends . . . and I was hungry and all the cakes and cookies looked so tempting. . . and you didn't explain to me about how too much yeast could make too much dough, and then. . .

BAKER Enough! The memory is too painful.

BIG ANTHONY I'm only saying that if you let me help you now -- things would all be different.

BAKER Different? How?

BIG ANTHONY Well. . . you'd stay here to watch over me, wouldn't you?

BAKER You bet I would.

BIG ANTHONY Then how could I get into any trouble?

BAKER Knowing you, there must be a hundred ways.

BIG ANTHONY Oh please, Signore --won't you please give me one more chance? After all, it is Natale.

BAKER So?

BIG ANTHONY Natale -- Christmas -- the season of brotherly love.

BAKER So?

BIG ANTHONY A time to be kind and forgiving to one another. . . ?

BAKER Oh, I understand.

BIG ANTHONY You do?

BAKER You want to help me as a way to say you're sorry for all the trouble you caused the last time.

BIG ANTHONY I do?

BAKER Don't you?

BIG ANTHONY Well, to be perfectly honest. . .

BAKER By all means, Big Anthony -- be perfectly honest. . .

BIG ANTHONY All I really want is one of these big cream cakes.

BAKER What?! Then why don't you just buy one?

BIG ANTHONY I don't have enough money. You see, all I have is what Strega Nona gave me to. . .

BAKER Never mind; I haven't time for the details. . . .

BAMBOLONA Papa! We're running out of cookies!

BAKER Another batch will be ready in a minute.

BAMBOLONA (*Surprised to see Anthony.*) Big Anthony! What are you still doing here?

BIG ANTHONY I'm going to help you, Bambolona.

BAMBOLONA You are? (*Anthony nods proudly. To Baker.*) He is? (*Baker shrugs. She returns to Customers.*) Then heaven help us too!

BAKER Here's an apron, Big Anthony. Help me make frosting for the cookies.

BIG ANTHONY (*Donning apron.*) Oh, boy! Cookies! Just tell me what to do!

BAKER That sack of sugar. . . there. . .

BIG ANTHONY You mean the one that fell on your foot?

BAKER No. The other one. Bring it here to the mixing bowl. But be careful, it's very. . .

BIG ANTHONY HEAVY !! (*He stumbles and smashes sack against the bowl. A cloud of sugar dust bursts up out of the sack.*)

BAKER Big Ant... A... A... (*joined by Bambolona and Customers.*) A.. Ah-choo!

BAMBOLONA Big Anthony! What are you doing?!

BIG ANTHONY Helping. (*He sneezes also.*) I hope?

BAKER (*Sampling the frosting.*) Well, Big Anthony, that was pretty clumsy of you, but I must admit, that was just the perfect amount of sugar.

BIG ANTHONY It was? Really? (*To Bambolona, a grin.*) Did you hear that, Bambolona? I was perfect! (*Bambolona rolls her eyes and walks away.*) All right, partner -- now what?

BAKER Well, Big Anthony, I suppose you could take the cookies out of the oven while I finish with this frosting. (*Anthony charges over toward the oven.*) Only be sure to use the oven mitt; the door, it's very. . .

BIG ANTHONY HOT!!! (*Anthony, hopping and waving his hand in pain, collides with Baker, who has just filled a frosting tube. Frosting spurts up into the Baker's face.*) Oh, Signore Bambo - I am sorry!

BAKER (*About to erupt.*) I'll say you are!

BIG ANTHONY Lucky for me it's Christmastime.

BAKER (Still a growl.) Lucky? How so?!

BIG ANTHONY Christmas -- a time to be kind and forgiving and. . .

BAKER I'll try to remember that. (He turns away and then pauses; a frown.)
Your hands, Big Anthony -- how are they?

BIG ANTHONY Oh, fine.

BAKER You're sure they aren't burnt?

BIG ANTHONY Quite sure.

BAKER (Sniffing.) But... but something is.. .

BIG ANTHONY Smells like. . .

BAMBOLONA Papa? Aren't those cookies ready yet?

BAKER My cookies! Quick! Quick!

Smoke issues forth from oven. Anthony reaches to pick the burning cookies off the tray.

BAMBOLONA Careful, Big Anthony; those cookies are very. . .

BIG ANTHONY HOT!!!

Having grabbed the cookies with his bare hands, Anthony tosses them into the air like juggling balls, then chases them around the shop, trying not to let them fall to the floor. Customers dodge him, shrieking. The pandemonious pursuit of the cascading cookies moves out of the bakery and into the town square, where Bambolona - basket in hand - is able to finally capture the cookies. Customers cheer. Bambolona and Anthony look surprised at one another, then share a smile, before bowing to the cheers and applause, with Anthony's final bow landing his face directly into the Matron 's cake. Blackout.

Act I. Scene iv

Strega Nona's house. Almost dusk. The old woman is seated on her doorstep, waiting. Anthony appears over the ridge, carrying only a small basket. When Anthony notices that Strega Nona is not inside the house, he turns around to try to sneak a way, puts basket in goat house, but Goat "baahs " in greeting.

STREGA NONA Big Anthony?!

BIG ANTHONY *(To Goat.)* Tattle-tale! *(Approaching Strega Nona.)* Ah -- good afternoon. Strega Nona.

STREGA NONA Good evening, Big Anthony.

BIG ANTHONY "Evening?" Already? My, my -- how short the days become in wintertime! Have you ever noticed that, Strega Nona?

STREGA NONA I notice a lot of things, Big Anthony. I notice you've spent the entire day down in the village. And I'm also noticing your hands are empty.

BIG ANTHONY You're angry with me.

STREGA NONA No, I'm not. I only want to know where's the new broom, new mop, new feather duster I asked you to buy? I know, I know. You forgot; you usually do.

BIG ANTHONY But I didn't forget!

STREGA NONA No?! Oh, what a good boy! Big Anthony, I am very proud of you!

BIG ANTHONY *(Beaming.)* You are?

STREGA NONA Shame on me. . . jumping to conclusions like that. Can you forgive me?

BIG ANTHONY Of course.

STREGA NONA Well?

BIG ANTHONY "Well," what?

STREGA MONA The broom, the mop, the other things. . . where are they?

BIG ANTHONY I couldn't buy them.

STREGA NONA Oh no? Why not?

BIG ANTHONY I didn't have the money you gave me.

STREGA NONA You lost my money?!

BIG ANTHONY No. I spent it.

STREGA NONA You spent it?! All right, tell me -- what did my money buy?

BIG ANTHONY Well. . . I went with Bambolona to the bakery and . . .

STREGA NONA And.. .

BIG ANTHONY And I had a little accident with one of Signore Bambo's cakes.

STREGA NONA Mamma mi's ! A cake cost that much?

BIG ANTHONY It was a very special cake.

STREGA NONA I should hope so! The Baker should be ashamed of himself, charging that much money for a cake!

BIG ANTHONY Oh, but there were cookies too!

STREGA NONA Cookies, you say? And how special were they?

BIG ANTHONY Here -- you can see for yourself... *(He retrieves basket from the goat house, looks inside it, discovers it empty.)* Wha... why. where are they? *(Goat looks up at him innocently, then burps.)* Pig! *(To Strega Nona.)* I was hoping the cookies would keep you from getting angry.

STREGA NONA But I'm not angry, Big Anthony.

BIG ANTHONY No?

STREGA NONA There's still enough time to get the whole place cleaned up and make everything nice for Natale,

BIG ANTHONY That's right! We've got plenty of time!

STREGA NONA Enough time -- if we don't dawdle.

BIG ANTHONY Right! And as for the new broom and the mop and feather duster and all. . . *(He goes to goat shed and pulls out a money purse.)* I saved up the three coins wages you paid me -- I can use that, I'll go back down to town right away . . . *(He starts off.)*

STREGA NONA Oh, no you won't.

BIG AMTHOLYY Huh? You mean we don't need those things after all? You'll use your magic?

STREGA NONA Absolutely not! "No magic at Christmastime!"

BIG ATHONY I forgot.

STREGA NONA You can't go now, because by the time you got down the hill, the shops would be closed. And besides, Big Anthony, you're not the only one who forgets. *(She goes into the house and gets a scroll from the table.)*

BIG ANTHONY I'm not?

STREGA NONA No. So I made up a new list; just a few more things. . . *(she stands at the top step and lets scroll unroll - it's almost the width of the stage.)*
You'll go in the morning.

Anthony looks at the list and groans as the light quickly fade.

Act I. Scene v

Town square, the following day. Various Townspeople engaged in pleasant conversation; including Children, Parents and Vendors. Suddenly the sound of Bambolona's frustrated growl and she marches angrily into the square.

BAYBOLONA How?! How could I think that Christmas would make things any different?!

BAKER *(Offstage.)* Bambolona!!!

BAMBOLONA *(She hollers back.)* I don't care how busy the bakery is, Papa Bambo! I'm taking a rest!

BAKER Bambolona!!!

BAMBOLONA *(Still hollering.)* You heard me! I'll be back in a little while!
(Bambolona marches right into Anthony.) 'scusi. . . oh, Big Anthony! Better not let my Papa see you.

BIG ANTHONY Why? Is he still mad about yesterday?

BAMBOLONA It took most of the night to clean up the mess.

BIG ANTHONY Then you're mad too?

BAMBOLONA Me? No, Big Anthony -- I'm used to you.

BIG ANTHONY Oh. Then you're just mad at your Papa, huh?

BAMBOLONA I'm not mad at him.

BIG ANTHONY But it sounds like. . .

BAMBOLONA I'm only pretending.

BIG ANTHONY Pretending? Why?

BAMBOLONA Promise to keep it a secret? *(Townspeople all lean in to eavesdrop.)* It has to do with Christmas. *(They lean in further.)* You see, my coming back to the bakery was supposed to be a Christmas present to my

Papa. . . (*All nod and says "Uh-huh."*) But do you know what? (*All: "Un-unh."*) This morning I realized how much I've missed him. (*Oh ?*) I guess I love him. (*Ah!*) Why, he wouldn't be my Papa Bamba and I wouldn't be his little Bambolona, if we didn't holler and fight. He expects it of me. (*Townspeople nod and 'ahh' in approval.*)

BIG ANTHONY Like everyone always expects me to forget and cause trouble?

BAMBOLONA That's right, Big Anthony. Anyway, I decided to try and find Papa a little something extra for a Christmas gift. But if he still thinks I'm mad at him, he won't expect anything from me and then when I do give him a present, it'll be a wonderful surprise! (*Townspeople applaud 'Brava! Brava!' Bambolona waves a finger at them.*) Now remember! I said it was a secret! (*Townspeople resume their activities as if they hadn't heard a word.*) We'd better go talk somewhere else.

BIG ANTHONY But I can't talk, Bambolona. I've got a lot of shopping to do.

BAMBOLONA Me too!

BIG ANTHONY For Strega Nona.

BAMBOLONA Oh, that's right! I've got to think of a gift for Strega Nona too!

BIG ANTHONY (*He pulls out the scroll.*) She made a long list.

BAMBOLONA A Christmas list -- from Strega Nona? (*Townspeople all turn their attention.*)

TOWNSPEOPLE (*Variously, in sequence.*) Strega Nona . . . ? . . . asking...? ...for a gift?! Let's see! (*Anthony is mobbed.*)

BIG ANTHONY No! No! Not a list of things she wants!

TOVNSPEOPLE (*Disappointed.*) Ohhh.

BIG ANTHONY It's a list of things she needs -- for the feast!

TOVNSPEOPLE Ahh -- the feast!

MATRON Why, it wouldn't seem Natale without the feast at Strega Nona's.

BIG ANTHONY She's very busy getting the house ready.

PRIEST But don't you know that Strega Nona loves Natale ?

MAYOR'S WIFE That's why she's so busy!

MAYOR Why, she doesn't even have time to cure headaches. . .

FOOD VENDOR . . . and make love potions. . .

WART MAN . . . and get rid of warts.

PRIEST All the things Strega Nona does for us. . .

SIGNORA ROSA . . . and gives to us. . .

PRIEST . . . all through the year.

MAYOR'S WIFE That's why we were hoping your list might tell us what we could do for her.

BIG ANTHONY Oh. (*Townspeople go back to their business. Anthony confides in Bambolona.*) I'd like to give a Christmas gift to Strega Nona too.

BAMBOLONA Well, who knows? -- maybe while you're getting Strega Nona's supplies, an idea for a gift will just come to you. Ideas usually do.

BIG ANTHONY But Bambolona, not too many of my ideas ever turn out too good.

BAMBOLONA That's true. Oh, but this is different. Nobody -- not even you, Big Anthony -- could get in trouble thinking up a Christmas present! (*Bambolona exits.*)

BIG ANTHONY (*After a slight pause.*) Bambolona -- wait! I've got an idea! A good one! (*He races after Bambolona.*)

MOTHER (*Noticing Paolo not eating.*) Paolo? What is it, Paolo?
 FATHER Thinking about Christmas?

LITTLE PAOLO Yes. And Strega Nona.

FATHER
& MOTHER Ah, Strega Nona.

TOWNSPEOPLE (*A collective murmur.*) Strega Nona.

LITTLE PAOLO I wish I could think of a present.

MOTHER A Christmas present. . .

TOWNSPEOPLE . . . for Strega Nona.

LITTLE PAOLO She's always so nice to me. Just like a Grandma.

FATHER Perhaps that's why she's called Strega Nona -- Grandma Witch.

SIGNORA ROSA Yes. Because she's like a Grandma to us all.

(*She sings*) Who could count all the days, all the times, all the ways
All the hearts touched by her love
Far beyond measure the treasure of Strega we share
Think of the moments cheered suddenly hearing
The fluttering wings of her dove
We pause in delight to rejoice in the sight
Of a lavender shawl up above.
. . . ever there through all our days
Strega's magic, tender gaze
Grandma Strega watching
Gives me strength and peace of mind
As she blows a kiss to bless me --
Kisses loving, warm and kind

TOWNSPEOPLE (*various*) Like a beacon in the night / near in sight a warming light
Little grandma hold me tight / she'll set things right

(*unison.*) So like a guardian angel hov'ring o'er me from above
Ever wise and gentle. Understanding grandma that I love.

TOWNSPEOPLE *(various.)* Magic in her heart does dwell
Welcome all with soothing spell
Tell your troubles, she will help
And keep you well

(Unison.) Oh, how can we repay you, Strega, anything you need?
Then we'll strive to share your kindnesses
In thought and word and deed.
May her magic live in me may it live eternally
Come the day we gaze on high to see no more her shawl
We shall blow a kiss recalling
How our Strega blessed us all.

When the Townspeople have finished their song, Anthony stumbles in. He is covered head to foot with parcels, brooms, mops, etc. The only way we know it is Anthony is by the hat on top of the moving heap.

TOWNSPERSON Oh, Big Anthony! Just look at you!

BIG ANTHONY I can't look! I can't see a thing!

TOWNSPEOPLE What an awful lot of stuff. All for Strega Nona? Broom. . . candles. .
.curtains. . . mop. . . washtub. . . feather duster. bedcovers. . .
tablecloth. . . carpet. . .

BIG ANTHONY And this isn't even the whole list. . . Signora Rosa?!

SIGNORA ROSA Over here, Big Anthony! What can I do for you?

BIG ANTHONY *(Proffering the list.)* I'm not sure how to say it... there, near the
bottom. . .

SIGNORA ROSA Ah, Strega Nona needs the Baccala !

TOWNSPEOPLE Ah, si! The baccala!

SIGNORA ROSA A nice, dried codfish for the feast.

TOWNSPEOPLE Si-- for the feast!

MAN Why, it wouldn't seem a feast without the baccala! (*Signora Rosa pulls forth an enormous, dried codfish.*)

TOWNSPEOPLE The Baccala!

SIGNORA ROSA Here you are, Big Anthony -- the biggest and best baccala in all of Calabria! (*Townspeople assist in placing it in his arms.*) But are you sure you can manage all this up the hill?

BIG ANTHONY No trouble at all. Why, I've made so many trips up that hill, I could do it blindfolded!

SIGNORA ROSA I'm only saying, with all the ice and snow, one "trip" and . . .

BIG ANTHONY (*Starting off*) Gracie! Arrividerci!

SIGNORA ROSA (*A shrug.*) Buona fortuna! Good luck!

Music underscore as Anthony exits the town square and lights begin to isolate group of Townspeople at the edges of the square, who observe and make ad-libbed remarks about Anthony's progress.

A Puppet Anthony slowly ascend the hill above the town square. Just as it reaches the top. Puppet Anthony loses footing and starts tumbling down, kicking up snow clouds as it snowballs head over heels.

Townspeople scream and rush to and fro in alarm of an avalanche. The parcels and implements which Anthony had been carrying begin to rain down on the Townspeople's heads. Anthony – encased in a huge snowball – finally rolls onstage and lies in the midst of them. Townspeople suddenly look up in fear.

TOWNSPEOPLE Ahhh! The baccala!

All but Anthony scatter. The huge codfish drops on Anthony's head. Immediate blackout.

Intermission.