

Clap Hands and Sing

by
Scott Brick

Based on the short story by
Orson Scott Card

Taleswapper, LLC
1725 Butler Ave. #105
Los Angeles, CA 9002

© 2004 Taleswapper Inc., all rights reserved

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

CHARLIE - appr. 90 years old

JOCK - 30s, a robotic, idealized version of Charlie

YOUNG CHARLIE - early 20s

RACHEL CARPENTER - eight years younger than Charlie

MRS. CARPENTER - dowdy and delightful, Rachel's mother

LAWYER 1 - sycophant, yet daring

LAWYER 2 - sycophant, yet... well, nothing else, just a petrified sycophant

VIDEO SCREEN PERSONALITIES: SPORTSCASTER, HOST, RONCO
PITCHMAN, NEWS ANCHOR, FDA ANNOUNCER, CLINICIAN

Video images are seen throughout the play. As written, these images are to be performed live, suggesting a 3D holographic broadcast unit, yet when budgets allow, they can be presented on actual screens.

The date of October 28, 2004, as well as days of the week referenced in the script, should be updated to reflect current production dates. The past referred to in the play should always be our present.

Quotations from William Butler Yeats: Sailing To Byzantium (1927), Among School Children (1927).

SCENE ONE

At Curtain's Rise, the stage is dominated by Charlie's room. A typical setup for an aging, hospitalized invalid - typical, that is, of multi-billionaires. Furnishings are lavish, with various elaborate diagnostic/therapeutic machines sitting near the bed. Clearly this is no sterile hospital; it is the luxurious private residence of an extremely wealthy man.

Stage setup should suggest a large video screen sitting in front of Charlie's bed, although the audience sees its images behind him: Charlie faces outward, as though watching the screen; FLICKERING LIGHTS behind him suggest the pictures, a stage representation of the holographic images he beholds. The flickering lights bathe Charlie's bed in their soft glow.

LIGHTS UP SLOWLY to reveal CHARLIE in a wheelchair next to his bed. Dressed in baggy pajamas, he sleeps, completely unaware of the images before/behind him. A remote control is barely visible beneath his thigh.

TWO LAWYERS stand facing the screen, part of a video-conference in progress. They fidget, twiddle pens in their grasp, nervously shift papers, etc., not yet realizing the old man has fallen asleep.

LAWYER 1

...only so long we can hold them off, sir. The President insists he can't keep the Oversight Committee from investigating the THIEF program.

LAWYER 2

We've put pressure on him to keep his boys in line...

LAWYER 1

...but it's bi-partisan, I'm afraid. His hands are tied.

LAWYER 2

And the media have stepped up their campaign to get you to either step down as CEO or name a successor.

LAWYER 1

MurdochNewsNet has been suggesting that actor, what's his name? The really old one...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

LAWYER 2

But we can handle that, that's the least of our worries. The real problem... um...

They look at one another in fear. No-one wants to drop this bomb.

LAWYER 1

Sir, the Minority Leader just called for deregulation.

There's a pause.

LAWYER 2

We don't have the votes to stop it.

Both lawyers await a blow-up that never comes.

LAWYER 1

It would affect all of THIEF. The entire program, sir.

The lawyers exchange anxious glances, then face the screen again, expectantly.

LAWYER 2

Not just the time-travel platform...

LAWYER 1

(mutters, disgusted:)
He's asleep again.

LAWYER 2

(louder:)
...but the, uh, ancillary programs, as well.

Lawyer 1 waves his hands before the "camera," and when there's no response, shrugs and rolls his eyes.

LAWYER 1

He can't hear you.

LAWYER 2

(louder still:)
Sir, it's time travel in the hands of the masses. The great unwashed, sir.

Lawyer 1 chuckles, nudges Lawyer 2, then points to the screen as if to say, Watch this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

LAWYER 1

Sir, the Board just approved a 100% increase in the Charitable Contributions program -- the, uh, jaunts for the poor but otherwise worthy? Yeah, so there will actually be **two** free trips through time next year, sir.

Lawyer 2 laughs unexpectedly, then stifles the sound when he hears it.

LAWYER 2

You can't say that...

LAWYER 1

Sir, Wall Street wags saw smoke rising from corporate headquarters and have been making comparisons to the Vatican...

LAWYER 2

(to Lawyer 1:)

You're going to wake him up...!

LAWYER 1

...they say you're at death's door and we're desperately trying to elevate some poor Cardinal.

LAWYER 2

Actually that one's true, sir...

LAWYER 1

(to Lawyer 2:)

Y'know, we should just reprogram that android of his and stick him in the old guy's place, a kinda "Man in the Iron Mask" kinda thing.

LAWYER 2

(petrified:)

Shhhh! Don't wake **that one** up...!

Charlie rolls over slightly in his chair, activating the remote control. WHITE NOISE signifies the changing of a channel. LIGHTS DOWN on lawyers. LIGHTS UP on new image. (Each subsequent video image will be in separate stage areas, sequentially lighted as the channels change.)

SPORTSCASTER

...in Mega Bowl IX! Your final once again: Pittsburgh Steelers 62, Manchester United 6.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

SPORTSCASTER (CONT'D)

No field goals or missed extra points, by the way -- the Brits managed three safeties when Pittsburgh couldn't handle the newly-sanctioned ball in the end zone--

More WHITE NOISE, and again the channel shifts. The "I Love Lucy" theme is heard.

HOST

...as we celebrate the show's 120th anniversary by counting down your favorite 120 episodes, here on The Lucy Channel...!

Another channel shift.

RONCO PITCHMAN

...Ronco's new ACTIVE MOM, the convenient electric breast pump that stores up natural mother's milk so your baby will feel your love all the time. ACTIVE MOM, because no matter how busy you are, your baby comes first...

Another channel shift:

NEWS ANCHOR

...today called for drastic censorship of Lifeloops, urging Hollywood to stop what the Moral Minority have termed an "ugly" and "profane" practice, and remove all cameras from toilet bowls, urinals and bidets...

Another channel shift: a man and woman lewdly embrace, while an ANNOUNCER delivers an FDA warning.

ANNOUNCER

JACKHAMMER should not be used by anyone taking aspirin, sleep aids or cold suppressants. Do not take JACKHAMMER in conjunction with anabolic steroids. If you're in a monogamous relationship, avoid taking JACKHAMMER while trying to get pregnant. JACKHAMMER should not be used by epileptics, diabetics, narcoleptics, heart patients, people with allergies, hay fever or stomach disorders. May cause shingles, gas and intensive vomiting...

Charlie opens his eyes and the commercials cease abruptly, replaced by an image of RACHEL.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

Charlie's eyes open blearily, yet before they can focus on Rachel, her image disappears, replaced by another rabid pitchman -- this time, however, the image is silent, MUTED. Instead, the TV emits an innocuous announcer's voice:

TV VOICE

It's late.

CHARLIE

(growls)

TV VOICE

It's late.

CHARLIE

Shut up.

TV VOICE

It's late.

CHARLIE

Shut up!

TV VOICE

It's late.

Charlie grips the remote to hurl it at the TV.

JOCK

You fell asleep in front of the television again, Charlie.

JOCK moves. He has been sitting silently, motionless, since the curtain's rise, yet his posture has been that of an android in powersave mode, his head down, hopefully unnoticed by the audience. Jock is the most elaborate and effective of Charlie's diagnostic/therapeutic machines. His demeanor and attitude should suggest a younger, more idealized version of Charlie. Jock powers up now and stands. His appearance is entirely human, yet the occasional stiff movement should convey he's an android.

CHARLIE

Leave me alone, swine.

JOCK

And you rolled over onto the remote. Again.

CHARLIE

Okay, turn it off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

Charlie waves absently at the screen and it begins to fade. In the flicker, Charlie once again sees the image of RACHEL before lights completely fade. Charlie questions the images in his mind rather than the screen.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)
Who...?

JOCK
What?

CHARLIE
That was...

JOCK
(rapidly:)
CNN, CNBC, Lucy, A&E, back to CNN, Spice,
Bravo, History, BET-

CHARLIE
(shakes his head)
Who did that remind me of?

JOCK
I'm not programmed to read your mind,
Charlie.

CHARLIE
Juliet? No. She *played* Juliet.

JOCK
It's time for your meds again.

CHARLIE
...Rachel.

JOCK
No, *you* have to take them this time.

CHARLIE
Rachel Carpenter.

Jock inserts his hand into a computer interface. He cocks his head as though rapidly downloading data.

JOCK
Your lawyers have forwarded seventeen documents for your signature, you have two injections waiting for your perforated arms, and a news upload awaiting your haggard face, so we can prove to one and all that you are, indeed, alive.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

CHARLIE
I'm tired, Jock.

JOCK
Yet will they capture the irony in a man
building a fortune on time machines...

CHARLIE
Let them wait, I said I'm tired.

JOCK
...only to survive long enough to find
out that every aged person is his own
time machine? I somehow doubt this.
Here.

*Jock moves to help Charlie out of his wheelchair. On
unstable legs, Charlie stands while Jock places a bathrobe
around his shoulders. With his back to the audience, Charlie
removes the bottom of his pajamas.*

JOCK (CONT'D)
"An aged man is a paltry thing, a
tattered coat upon a stick."

CHARLIE
Shut up.

JOCK
"Unless Soul clap its hands."

CHARLIE
I said shut up!

Charlie's boxer shorts hit the floor.

JOCK
"And sing, and louder sing, for every
tatter in its mortal dress."

CHARLIE
Are you finished?

JOCK
You know I am. You programmed me.

CHARLIE
Bad enough I made you *look* like me...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (7)

JOCK

I used to wonder what effect my facial features would have on any of your old friends who dropped by to visit. Until I discovered you don't have any friends.

Charlie doesn't respond. He climbs into bed, painfully, using a cane propped against the bed.

JOCK (CONT'D)

What's wrong?

CHARLIE

Nothing.

JOCK

You climbed into bed without complaint. What's wrong?

CHARLIE

Ah yes, dear computer, a change in the routine of the habitbound old man, and you suspect what, a heart attack? Incipient death? Extreme disorientation? Don't get your hopes up, I'm fine.

JOCK

What's wrong, Charlie?

CHARLIE

A name. Rachel Carpenter.

JOCK

Living or dead?

CHARLIE

I don't know.

Jock busies himself preparing a staggering array of medicines by Charlie's bedside.

JOCK

Living and dead, I have one thousand four hundred eighty in the company archives alone.

CHARLIE

She was... seven years younger than me. Eight? And she lived in Provo, Utah. Her father was a pianist. Quite famous, actually. Everyone always angled for an invitation to their home...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

LIGHTS UP on RACHEL, standing behind Charlie, speaking to him as if from across the years.

RACHEL

My father was always the main attraction. Our living room was like a cluttered salon, and there were always many admirers. But you came to see *me*.

LIGHTS DOWN on Rachel.

CHARLIE

She may have become an actress when she grew up. She wanted to.

JOCK

Rachel Carpenter. Born Provo, Utah. Mother, Eileen, teacher. Father, James, pianist. Attended--

CHARLIE

Don't show off, Jock. Was she ever married?

JOCK

Thrice.

CHARLIE

And don't imitate my mannerisms. Is she still alive?

JOCK

Died nine years ago.

CHARLIE

Of course. Of course, dead. How did she die?

Jock doesn't respond.

CHARLIE (CONT'D)

How?

JOCK

Not pleasant.

CHARLIE

Tell me anyway. I want to feel suicidal tonight.

JOCK

In a home for the mentally incapable.

(CONTINUED)