

GRANDPA'S ATTIC

A Harmony College Show

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PRODUCTION NOTES

General

GRANDPA'S ATTIC represents a cast/chorus style show which can be a challenging and potentially rewarding (for audience and performers), production.

It is a one-act generic show with the opportunity for guest quartets and chorus to perform on the second half, independent of the storyline. The show was designed so any chapter would be capable of adapting and performing it based on individual chapter abilities and music selection. Every chorus member can be involved and feel he is an integral part of the show and thus his enjoyment of his hobby will be heightened.

As with any production, your chapter should use all the theatrical elements you have at your disposal to make GRANDPA'S ATTIC the most exciting and interesting production possible for your audience. These elements include scenery, props, costuming, lighting, chorus-stage presence, vignettes, pantomimes, or just about any other entertainment device you can imagine.

Following these general remarks, we have given you some more specific thoughts on the show and some production ideas. There are many more ideas that you can and should come up with on your own.

One good idea-producing process that can be used is brainstorming. Divide the chapter into groups. Assign each group an entire scene or different part of the

script. Let the group write down as many ideas as they can on how to stage their scene. Tell them to use all the theatrical elements they can think of and not to throw out any idea because it is impractical. The group which comes up with the longest list can be awarded a prize or some type of special recognition. Once the lists are complete, the show committee and show director can take them, extract the good ideas and use those which work with the total show in mind.

Suggestions have been indicated in the script on who should perform each song: chorus, quartet, or octets. These are only suggestions; flip these around to suit your own situation. Remember, however, that mixing chorus and quartet performances offers variety for your audience, gives a brief respite to the performers and provides opportunities to encourage quartet participation within the chapter. Also, do not overlook the possibility of using solo voices with chorus "loos" in the background. Double quartets are another form of variety.

Remember, the audience at your show could stay home and listen to barbershop recordings. They have come to witness a theatrical experience which includes both sound and sight; don't cheat them. Feature our unique product-barbershop harmony-and complement it with a solid visual performance. All the recommended songs for GRANDPA'S ATTIC may be ordered in a packet. The stock number is 6059. The script is stock number 4418.

Concept

The concepts that lead to the creation of GRANDPA'S ATTIC was the need for a generic show theme, that is to say, a show that contains songs which have no thematic connection. It is well understood that chapters often have a repertoire of several unrelated songs. A generic show theme provides the circumstances which allow these unrelated songs to be performed in a logical theatrical setting. The variety of the subjects of the songs demand a method of tying them together into a believable sequence within a setting in which they would be justified. Since an attic is normally filled with miscellaneous junk, which can easily serve as props to introduce songs, this was the theatrical setting chosen.

The music is the cornerstone of the production. The songs serve as pivotal points and the dialogue merely functions as transitions. This show was premiered at Harmony College, 1988. The script, which follows these notes, is a revision from that performance.

Premise

To help set the storyline for the show, the following premise was established. An older man, 70 to 75 years of age, is anxious to clear out his attic before moving away to retire. He has asked the local barbershop chapter to help with the packing and organization of the move. They are to separate items that will be donated to the chapter and those that the old man will take with him. Despite the fact that he wishes for retirement and a warmer climate, he is reluctant to leave the memories inherent in his house of fifty-plus years.

The chorus, while simulating work, really use the props or pieces they find to prompt the songs in their current repertoire. They search for appropriate props for three specific reasons:

1. As "reminders" to semi-justify their singing.
2. As "memorabilia" to prompt Grandpa into his stories about the history behind each piece, thus reminding Grandpa of all the memories contained in the house and area.
3. To delay the work of separating the pieces. They don't move pieces when they are singing, if they can get Grandpa to start on one of his stories, which prompts a song, they don't have to work.

Staging and Sets

The following describes the set design concepts used at the 1988 Harmony College. The set design consisted of a basic single set that was representative of an attic. The skeletal outline of a house frame was constructed of 2 x 4 pine but 1 x 2 or 1 x 3 pine could easily be used. In order to suggest a three-dimensional effect, the concept of the frame work was continued several feet downstage by suspending the "beams" from batons and securing the vertical posts of those beams to the stage floor.

A free standing, functional door was positioned upstage right. There were two chairs that were used extensively. The first was an old padded chair that was positioned downstage left. Grandpa would use this chair throughout the production. The other chair was an old wooden rocker set right center of the

stage. Grandpa used this chair during the ballad, "Rock Me to Sleep in an Old Rocking Chair."

Platforms were positioned upstage across the back to form three levels. The door was on the highest level so the platforms created steps onto the stage level.

The remainder of the set consisted of a large amount of "junk" which would fill an attic. Examples of these things are: old magazines, boxes, books, an old phonograph, old cupboards, etc. Ladders, chairs, footstools, ottomans, trunks, etc., were used to help provide additional levels for the chorus members.

A natural, undyed sharks-tooth scrim was used to help provide the opportunity for a visual break from the attic and allow a quartet to sing separated from the attic scene. A unit of stairs was set just upstage of the main curtain and downstage of the scrim to give the effect that a quartet would be coming downstairs from the attic for their scene. If a scrim is unavailable, a curtain will suffice.

The use of risers in the attic is prohibitive so the use of the platforms, ladders, trunks, etc., will provide the levels necessary for good sightlines.

Again, you may wish to stage the show completely differently utilizing the individual strengths of your stage. Even if the staging is simplified, good singing and strong characterizations and chorus involvement will carry the show successfully.

Props

Below is a list of the prop suggestions for specific song introductions called for in the script.

1. Vaudeville poster
2. 8" X 10" navy picture or photo album
3. Two (2) old wedding invitations
4. Old tax returns
5. Trunk
6. Old circus poster
7. Trumpet or similar, loud band instrument.
8. One exaggerated medal, obviously not official issue.
9. Display case with navy medals.
10. Letter sweater with a Y on it.
11. Fraternity paddle.

Characterizations and Acting

The show's cast is comprised of seven actors, two quartets and an octet that have dialogue, and the chorus as an ensemble. The part of Grandpa is the most challenging in terms of number of lines and responsibility. The other roles have a limited number of lines. We are confident that you can find these actors within your chorus ranks. However, if this is a problem due to the size or ability of your chapter, look to outsiders. If there is a community or little theater group in town, contact them. These amateur performers, like Barbershoppers, are very accommodating and love to be on stage. Also a Barbershopper from a neighboring chapter might be a perfect choice. Following are character sketches:

GRANDPA: Grandpa is an old man who has experienced a lot in his 70 odd

years of existence. He has been married for at least 50 years but it is left unresolved as to whether his wife is deceased or just out of town during this time. He is not really anxious to give up the memories inherent in this house of 50 years. He puts up a facade by encouraging the chorus members to pack up quickly, but each piece they find brings to surface some memories. He also feigns disliking the chorus singing frequently but this too is a ruse. While he can be played as a cantankerous old man, he has a sense of humor and deep down he is a nice guy.

GRANDSON: This young man feels out of place in the current time period. He would rather have been alive seventy years or so earlier. He idolizes the good old days when times were simpler. He can identify very well with his Grandpa and all the people who were famous in days past. Yet he eventually realizes that he will have a lot of memories in the future so he matures a little as he watches his grandfather become more accepting of his retirement, moving, etc.

MAN 1-4 and QUARTET MEN 1-4;
OCTET MEN 1-8: Basically these men are typical chorus members whose dialogue serves as "memory joggers" of Grandpa. Along with the rest of the chorus these men must appear to be looking for paraphernalia which will prompt songs.

CHORUS: There are a couple of scenes that verbal interaction is required from within the chorus. More importantly, the chorus must portray characters without the luxury of 4 dialogue. They do not accomplish anything in the attic, workwise, except singing. The props or set pieces could end up in the exact

same place at the end of the show as they were in the beginning. They should be involved in a relaxed, unstructured atmosphere with plenty of interaction. The chorus members are anxious to use any applicable prop they can to segue into a song.

Guest Quartets

Since this is a one-act playlet, the use of guest quartets within the confines of this show are limited. If the guest quartet has a song that may be adaptable to the attic scene and you have the time to prepare the transition, the quartet could be used during the 1st half. But more than likely if guest quartets are used, they probably could serve as the second half of the show.

Costumes

At Harmony College, the cast and chorus were instructed to wear clothing which would typify working in an attic. This would include old jeans, sweaters, overalls, etc. Suits or anything remotely formal would be out of place. Grandpa was in blue-gray pants and a red and blue flannel shirt. The more colorful these garments, the more visual variety in the stage picture. Avoid loud colors or patterns which would be an audience distraction, however.

Lighting

Lighting will differ with every stage and with the equipment that is available. To give you just one idea, here is a description of the lighting that was used when GRANDPA'S ATTIC was first presented.

The lighting requirements were very simple. The effect was to create a well-lit room. Lekos (ellipsoidal reflector spotlights) were used to light the downstage area from the apron to just upstage of the curtain line. Twelve fresnels were hung on the first electric (that is the baton just upstage of the main curtain) and lit the middle area of the stage. Two rows of strip lights were hung on the center and upstage batons to provide filler illumination for the remainder of the stage.

The strips could be circuited to provide for three separate banks of lights, i.e., red, white, and blue.

The gels recommended for the lekos are as follows: No Color Pink (Roscolene No. 825, or Roscolux No. 33) or a No Color Straw, (Roscolene No. 804, or Roscolux No.6).

The general mood of the show is one of excitement and this can be reflected in the intensity of the lights. There was only one scene when the intensity was less than 100%. This was a very slow fade to a warm, dim blue background leaving a pinspot (a small circular pattern provided by a 3" leko) on Grandpa during the song "Rock Me To Sleep In An Old Rocking Chair." The chorus sings this song as a lullaby and the effect is that the sun is setting with the remnants of the sun throwing its last beam of light on Grandpa. This mood and lighting effect is broken when a quartet enters and turns "on" the lights in the attic. The lights return to full intensity as if they were attached to a light switch.

One or two follow spots could be used for quartets appearing from within the chorus as well as the guest quartets.

Sound

As with the lighting, the sound reinforcement will differ with stages and available equipment. Generally, several omni directional microphones properly hung over the main stage areas and several more at the front edge of the stage should do a pretty fair job.

These front microphones would ideally be PCC or PZM microphones but if they are not available, use a microphone in a foam "mouse" or put the microphones in stands which are set on the floor and angled just over the edge of the stage. This will eliminate obvious microphone stands on stage where they can destroy the scenic illusion. Even the quartets should be able to work around a floor mic.

Have someone knowledgeable set the microphones, adjust them during the technical rehearsal and "ride gain" on the microphones during the show. You will find two excellent articles on sound reinforcement at the back of the Show Production Handbook.

Grandpa was provided with a wireless lavalier mic. He must be very mobile and should not be restricted to only the downstage area within a limited mic range.

Conclusion

Please take all the preceding suggestions as just that. Your personnel, theater and audiences will dictate how you present the show. If you

make changes, make them with intelligence.

We have purposely left out cues for lighting, sound, spot lights and pin rail movement (hanging backdrops, etc.) since these will vary with each production. We have provided the space for these, however, on the right edge of the script. This is an excellent way to smoothly "call" a show. The Show Production Handbook explains how to use the cues.

Announcements before or after the show or during the intermission should be eliminated. Let your show program be your message board.

THERE IS ONE LAST, BUT VERY IMPORTANT POINT ABOUT STAGING A SHOW OF THIS TYPE. TIMING AND PACING ARE CRITICAL. THERE CAN BE NO DEAD SPOTS OR THE PRODUCTION WILL SLOW DOWN AND BECOME DULL. EACH SONG MUST BEGIN IMMEDIATELY AFTER

THE DIALOGUE WHICH SETS IT UP. PITCHES MUST BE BLOWN UNOBTRUSIVELY AND TUNE-UPS SHOULD BE HUMMED QUIETLY UNDER TALK. YOU MAY EVEN FIND THAT TUNE-UPS ARE NOT NECESSARY IF ALL THE SINGERS CONCENTRATE ON THE PITCH BEING BLOWN. IN ANY CASE, THE DIRECTOR SHOULD GIVE THE DOWN BEAT AS SOON AS THE SET-UP IS DELIVERED. THE MOVEMENT OF SCENERY CANNOT HOLD UP A SHOW EITHER.

GRANDPA'S ATTIC is an exciting entertaining show. The potential for the cast and audience to have a lot of fun with the show is very high. It also provides a vehicle for a great amount of varied repertoire to be performed by your chorus. With the flexibility built into the script and the characterizations, the show can be adapted by almost any chorus to provide an audience an evening of entertainment.

(Preset: a cluttered attic filled with articles of days gone by. Trunks, ladders, stools, old chairs, magazines, boxes, games, old toys, decorate the set. The set is merely a frame of a house with a window outline and junk hanging from hooks using 1' x 2' or 1' x 3' pine and a black traveler behind. There is a free standing door unit downstage right with a set of stairs that is downstage of the concert curtain so that this curtain may be dropped to cover the attic scene from view.)

(As the curtain opens, the chorus members are scattered about the set and begin to sing)

LET A SMILE BE YOUR UMBRELLA (Stock #7254)

(Singing the chorus only, no verse)

(On applause, two or three chorus members gather around Grandpa, who is seated in a chair downstage right.)

Man 1: Well, sir, what do you think of the chorus?

Man 2: Did you like that song??

Grandpa: Well, I hope you can work as well as you can sing. After all, that is what you volunteered to do. I got to get all this stuff separated and packed so I can move.

Man 3: Say, are you ALABAMY BOUND? *(Pitch)*, ON THE OLD DOMINION LINE? *(Pitch)*, or just SAILING AWAY ON THE HENRY CLAY? *(Pitch)*. *These song titles are to be delivered very deliberately as if the chorus will immediately go into the respective song).*

Grandpa: Cut it out!

Grandson: Hey Grandpa, look what I found. This is great. Did you attend this show? *(He holds up an old vaudeville poster of a star long forgotten).*

Grandpa: Of course, I saw all the big names on the Orpheum, Loews and Red Path Circuits.

Man 2: Who's this guy? I never heard of him.

Grandson: Are you kidding? Henry Lauder was a great entertainer; he toured with Jolson and Cantor and played all the big houses in the country.

Man 1: Big houses!? You mean prisons? *(Searching for a laugh)*

Man 2: (disgustedly) Prisons?!...

Man 3: Sorry about the interruption Gramps. We just can't keep your Grandson in this century, he is always day dreaming about the past... If it's not one thing, It's another.

Grandson: *(While the quartet 'oo"s the beginning of the song, the Grandson, does a voice over, speaking the first 13 measures. The quartet then continues with the words at measure 14 as the Grandson listens.)*

I WAS BORN SEVENTY YEARS TOO LATE (Stock #7550)

(Quartet)

Grandpa: *(wistfully reminiscing)* I remember how things were, *(transitional recalling the current situation)* I remember ... I remember you're supposed to be working!

Man 3: Ok guys, let's separate the stuff that goes with Gramps, and the stuff that is donated to the chapter.

(Chorus members generally agree. A chorus member finds a photo album with an 8 x 10 navy picture.)

Man 4: A veteran? I didn't know you were in the service.

Grandpa: Oh that. It's a picture of our first shore leave after three months at sea.

Man 1: Girls in every port, huh?

Grandpa: Yeah, except that one.

WHAT! NO WOMEN? (Stock #7248)

(Quartet)

Grandpa: I've heard three songs now and not one thing has been moved. At this rate, I'll have to spend another cold winter here. You're not packing, you're just singing, what do you think this is, a rehearsal for a show?

Man 4: He's right. Besides, there isn't a lot of room for the risers. *(They simulate work, Grandpa finds an old wedding invitation)*

Man 2: *(Looking over Gramps' shoulder)* Does that wedding invitation bring back memories?

Grandpa: Yes it does. *(Semi-remorsefully)*

Man 3: You were a very handsome couple.

Grandpa: Oh they were. I was at the wedding, but as a guest. I lost the bride to another fellow. *(Grandpa sits down in his chair downstage right. The harmony parts 'Oooh' while the leads sing the words to the verse. Starting at the chorus, measure 17, all parts sing the words.)*

THE CHURCH BELLS ARE RINGING FOR MARY (Stock #7246)
(Chorus)

(The applause breaks Grandpa's concentration and a chorus member tries to ease the tension)

Oct man 1: So you're, HEADING SOUTH, huh? DOWN WHERE THE COTTON BLOSSOMS GROW, or down on SOUTH RAMPART STREET?

Oct man 2: Yeah, way down there, WHERE THE SOUTHERN ROSES GROW.

Grandpa: Which of those four songs are you going to sing?

Oct man 4: None, that's too obvious. But we thought you'd like this one.

I'M GOING TO BUY A ONE-WAY TICKET TO A LITTLE ONE-HORSE TOWN
(Stock #7249)
(Octet)

Grandson: Wow, look at these old tax returns ... 1913. Gee, I wish my taxes were this low.

Grandpa: Hey that was quite a shock. Those were your great granddad's first tax

records. You know, when the 16th amendment removed the restrictions on taxation he thought they'd tax anything that moved.

DON'T PUT A TAX ON THE BEAUTIFUL GIRLS (Stock #7256)
(Chorus)

(Chorus members are rummaging around, moving boxes from one side of the stage to the other. In an old trunk, a chorus member finds a circus poster ... he is about to pack it and Grandpa sees it and says:)

Grandpa: Hey wait a minute. That's from my circus days.

Man 1: I didn't know you were with the circus. Were you a trapeze artist, lion tamer?

Grandpa: Oh no, I used to just watch, but my dad worked. He got money for setting up the tents, but I got to see all the acts. He really didn't enjoy show biz, especially working with the elephants, but it put some food on the table ...

WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO TOWN (Stock #7252)
(Chorus)

Man 2: Break time!

Grandpa: What do you mean break time? You've done nothing but sing since you got here. A break from singing would be great.

Man 3: He's right. I'm sure he wouldn't object if we actually started to work here.

Grandpa: *(emphatically)* Certainly not!

Man 1: *(to Man 4)* Does he mean he would certainly not object to us working or certainly not that we are suppose work??

Man 4: I can't tell.

Man 1: *(to Man 2)* Does he mean he can't tell because he knows and it's a secret or he can't tell because he doesn't know?

Man 3: Never mind! *(The chorus packs some more)*

Man 4: Another wedding Invitation? Should this go with the other one? Oh wait, this is an invitation to your wedding.

Grandpa: Yes, just let me look at this for a moment. This is the Mary that shared her life with me.

MARY, YOU'RE A LITTLE BIT OLD FASHIONED (Stock #7250)
(Quartet)

Grandpa: *(to the Grandson)* I hope you find a girl like my Mary someday.

Grandson: Well, I hope so too.

Man 4: Are you kidding, this kid can't keep the ladies away.

Grandson: *(obviously setting up another song)* True, how true. *(The pipe blows the pitch and the Grandson breaths as if to start a song)*

Grandpa: You mean trite, how trite. Another song, right???

THEY GO WILD, SIMPLY WILD OVER ME (Stock #7253)
(Chorus)

(On applause, the scrim drops. The octet enters the stage via a stair unit stage right to sing in front of the scrim.)

Oct Man 1: We really have to go over that new song for the show.

Oct Man 3: What show?

Oct Man 2: What do you mean, what show? The show tonight.

Oct Man 4: Well, if we don't get this attic straightened out, we won't make the show.
Oct Man 3: What show?

Oct Man 5: If we're not gonna rehearse, we might as well go back to the attic and forget all about the show.

Oct Man 3: What show?

Oct Man 6: What key are we singing this song in?

Oct Man 7: What song?

Oct Man 8: The ballad.

Oct Man 1: G.

Oct Man 3: What show?

All but Man3: *(quietly, trying to set mood)* Let's just sing.

I'M ALONE BECAUSE I LOVE YOU (Stock #7245)

(Octet)

(On applause, the quartet exits stage right up the stairs, and the scrim opens revealing the chorus in a different position than earlier with one of the members blowing a trumpet, poorly)

Grandpa: Hey do you guys know MacNamara's Band?

(Chorus generally agrees)

Man 1: Say Gramps, I didn't know you were Irish.

Grandpa: Who's Irish, not me. I just like that song and I figured since you aren't working, I might as well hear a song I like.

MAC NAMARA'S BAND (Stock #7705)

(Chorus)

Man 2: Well, what do you think? We've got plenty more where that came from.

Grandpa: NO!! Confound it, I give you a song and you take a concert.

Man 3: *(Finding some war medals in a display case with one medal that is obviously not an official one.)* Hey, what's this medal, I've never seen one like this one before, it sure doesn't look official. Hey guys, listen to this, "For extraordinary and meritorious service above and beyond the call of duty, for unselfish sacrifice for the betterment of the unit, undoubtedly saving countless lives and/or feet!?!?"

Man 4: *(taking medal)* Feet??

Grandpa: Oh that. *(Chuckles)* That was from the men of the 102nd Infantry.

Man 1: But I thought you were in the Navy?

Grandpa: I was ... after I was transferred from the Army 'cause I couldn't march.
Mom was the only one who thought I'd make a good soldier.

THEY WERE ALL OUT OF STEP BUT JIM (Stock #7247)
(Chorus)

(After the song, the lights begin a slow, slow dim as if it is getting dark. One chorus member asks about a rocking chair found upstage center.)

Man 1: You want to donate this old chair?

Grandpa: Oh no, I want to keep that, I haven't seen this old thing for years. Just let me sit here a while.

(Lights dim, chorus assumes a very casual position and quietly sings. Grandpa falls asleep by the end of the song.)

ROCK ME TO SLEEP IN AN OLD ROCKING CHAIR (Stock #7263)
(Chorus)

(After applause, quartet enters and turns on the lights waking up Grandpa)

QMan 1: Hey, let's get some lights on in here.

Grandpa: *(waking up with a start, somewhat embarrassed)* What? Huh? Oh well, come on you guys, let's get this stuff packed.

(Chorus is not happy with the quartet because they woke him up. General grunts and grumbles.)

Man 2: *(Holding sweater up)* A letter sweater with a Y on it. Hey, did you go to Yale.

Grandpa: No, Ypsilanti U, why??

Man 3: Ypsilanti U Y?

Grandpa: No! Not Ypsilanti U Y. Ypsilanti U, COMMA, WHY??

Man 3: I just didn't think you'd be the athletic type.

Grandpa: I wasn't, I was the manager of the team. I was already married, remember, four whole songs ago. But it seems all the girls were going for the football players.

YOU GOTTA BE A FOOTBALL HERO (Stock #7257)
(Chorus)

QMan 2: Sorry about waking you up before. We gal here late because we just got done doing a show.

QMan 3: What show?

QMan 4: Never Mind.

QMan 2: And besides, John here had to stop and see Freida.

Grandpa: OK, I'll bite. At the risk of yet another song, who's Freida?

RED-HEAD (Stock #8099)
(Quartet)

Grandpa: So, Freida's a redhead, huh?

QMan 2: No, she's a blonde. We just don't know any songs about blondes.

Man 1: *(finding a fraternity paddle)* A fraternity paddle?? I suppose you were on the receiving end of this once or twice to earn your pin?

Grandpa: Yeah, but the initiation to earn that thing was a lot easier than giving it away.

Man 4: No kidding, I don't think I would want a crummy old paddle.

Man 3: Not the paddle, the pin.

Man 4: What pin?

Man 2: His Fraternity Pin

MY FRATERNITY PIN (Stock #7251)
(Chorus)

Grandpa: Well, I didn't think it could be done, but you guys did it. You spent the whole day singing and not one thing is ready to go. It's time to call it a night.

Man 1: Well, not all the day was wasted, and besides, George owns a moving company. He can fix everything, right George?

George: I'll have my men over to pack everything tomorrow morning at 9:00. No charge, is that alright?

Grandpa: *(Confused)* That'll be great. But what the heck were you doing all day if you weren't planning on moving things?

Man 1: Well, your attic was the only place we could find to practice. Our meeting hall is being painted and we had to get ready for our big show.

Man 3: What show?

Grandpa: Well boys, now it's my turn to admit something, I really enjoyed your singing. You see, I'm gonna be out of town during your show and I knew that if I kept egging you on, I would have my own little command performance. Thanks guys, you know, a little bird told me this would be a good day, I believe he was right.

LET A SMILE BE YOUR UMBRELLA (Stock #7254)
(Chorus sings entire song including verse)

Close curtain.

The End.