The Death and Life of Everyman: A Comedy

By Patrick Rainville Dorn

Freely adapted from the medieval morality play

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STORY OF THE PLAY

"The Death and Life of Everyman: A Comedy" is a contemporary interpretation of the allegorical story of a man who learns he must prepare to meet his Maker at the end of the evening's one-hour performance, and then does! As the play progresses and his doom approaches, Everyman discovers that family, friends and fortune cannot accompany him, and that even strength, beauty, intellect and emotion are no match for the Grim Reaper, yet faith, hope and charity prevail.

"Everyman" is especially intended for churches, schools and community theatres that are ready to move beyond religious skits, sketches and "homily" dramas to do something more challenging, less preachy, and more theatrical.

With a flexible cast and minimal set requirements, this show is ideal for companies with a limited budget or companies who wish to tour.

A NOTE ON INCONGRUITY

"Everyman" is a timeless play about a universally human situation. The theatrical conventions of juxtaposing contemporary and medieval references and also having actors shift abruptly from onstage focus to directly addressing the audience are intentional. They create a heightened sense of reality in which the audience can continually relate what's happening onstage to their own experience, taking on a serious subject in a playful environment.

CAST OF CHARACTERS *(17 roles, minimum 4 m, 3w.)*

EVERYMAN: *(m)* Represents each of us.
HERALD: Macabre announcer.
ADONAI: *(m)* Lord God, King of the universe.
MORTY or MORTICIA: Grim reaper.
FRATBRO: *(m)* former party animal.
MOM: *(w)* Making the most of life.
BETTY or BILL CASH: Financial manager.
MITZI MERIT: *(w)* Good deed guardian.
SANDY or RANDY: Childhood friend.
*EVERYBOY: Young Everyman.
SIS: Everyman's big sister.
*EVERYTWEEN: Pubescent Everyman.
DAD: Full of regrets.
*EVERYGUY: Everyman just a couple of years ago.
FR. ST. BERNARD: *(m)* Hospice chaplain.
BRUTUS: *(m)* Muscle-bound.
BONITA: *(w)* Style, accessories and not much else.
MENSTAT: Nerdy intellectual.
PASSIONATA: Hot-blooded.

**played by the same actor*

FLEXIBLE CASTING

There are 19 speaking roles which may be cast individually, or a smaller ensemble can double up on roles, so long as you consider the time required to change costume accessories. The minimum cast size is seven: Everyman, plus three males and three females.

Many of the smaller roles can be played either by a male or female. If an actor is playing cross-gender, make no effort to disguise the fact, and exploit any comic potential. In the spirit of comic incongruity, a petite female could play God with a long, white beard, and a brawny male could play Bonita with a tiara and feather boa. If the play is going to enjoy a long run, various roles could be rotated amongst the cast, or double-cast the show and mix and match between the casts for each performance to keep everyone on their toes.

SETTING

An empty playing area, except for either a rolling platform or "bier" at center, or a table up left. A large, removable crucifix hangs on the front of the bier/table. *(See production notes.)* There is an aisle through the audience. Other entrances are optional. The action is continuous, with no intermission or breaks between scenes.

Time: Whenever someone's number is up.
Place: Wherever that someone happens to be at the time.

PERFORMANCE SPACE

"Everyman" is intended to be able to be performed "anywhere": a traditional theatre space, church sanctuary or hall, classroom, cafeteria, recreation center or gym. It can even be presented in unusual locations, whether outdoors or indoors: a cemetery or park, shopping mall, mortuary chapel or hotel banquet room.

The playing area should be set apart from the audience. At the very least, this can be accomplished by taping off the playing area with masking tape, and establishing an aisle through the seating area. The audience can be seated in any configuration so long as they have an unrestricted view of the action: proscenium, thrust, three-quarter or in-the-round. A backstage would be helpful, but is not essential. This offstage area can be created by setting up folding screens. Or, if the players remain onstage for the entire play, provide benches for them at the fringe of the playing area.

Please see end of script for additional notes on costumes, props, music and sound effects.

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(AT RISE: Prior to the beginning of the play, PLAYERS greet the audience and help them to their seats. Optional pre-show MUSIC [funeral or appropriate contemporary music, i.e., "Another One Bites the Dust," "My Way," "Dust in the Wind," etc.] may play. EVERYMAN quietly and unobtrusively joins the audience. Pre-show MUSIC ends. Players move to aisle. Four or six players pick up a coffin or stretcher, serving as pallbearers. Remaining players form a line behind coffin. The player at the rear of the procession carries a drum and a party horn. The others have kazoos. A HERALD, with a staff, takes position in front of coffin. Player beats drum slowly as players, led by Herald, solemnly proceed down aisle to playing area, humming a funeral march on their kazoos, punctuated by the party horn. Players place coffin on the bier/table, form a semi-circle with the Herald DC. Drum ceases. Player blows horn. Herald glares at him. Herald bangs staff three times.)

HERALD: *(To audience.)* Hark ye mortals, foe and friend, and to this little play attend. For on the stage of life we stand, though it be wood, or stone, or sand. And listen as these players give, a little show to help you live. For in these present days of haste, each one of us much time doth waste. We work, and play, and children tend, with little thought that all must end. We fight in war and swoon in love, but fail to honor God above. Then all too soon we hear His call, and wonder why we lived at all. For when our time is done on earth, the Lord alone will judge our worth. We seek not power, wealth or fame; to help prepare you is our aim. *(With impressive gravity and sense of doom.)* On these things pray, if pray you can, for death must come to Everyman.

(HERALD bows with a flourish, turns to exit. PLAYERS stop Herald, gesture to audience. Herald refuses, but is pushed back to CS.)

HERALD: *(Continued.)* The players promise you no violence, if now you set your phones to "silence."

(PLAYERS glare at audience. One makes gesture of talking on cell phone, then draws finger across throat in threatening manner. If someone in audience turns cell phone off, players bow or blow a kiss in thanks.)

HERALD: *(Continued. Repeats line with solemnity and gravity, as if the monologue had not been interrupted.)* On these things pray, if pray you can, for death must come to Everyman.

(HERALD stares at audiences, laughs a macabre laugh, stares at audience. PLAYER lets loose a blast on party horn. ALL leap into action, opening coffin or pulling the sheet off the stretcher. Props and costumes are laid out to resemble the shape of a body. Players laugh and playfully pull out items and quickly set up for the first scene. Actors playing ADONAI and DEATH put on their costume accessories, either offstage or in full view of the audience. Players move the coffin UL or out of the playing area, leaving it open and in full view of the audience. Various props and costume accessories may continue to be drawn from the coffin, though for ease some may be pre-set backstage. During all this frenetic activity, Herald remains absolutely motionless, except for his eyes, which scan the audience. At last, when the players are either offstage or settled on benches along the stage perimeter, Herald bangs the staff three times.)

HERALD: *(Continued.)* The Summoning of Everyman! *(Turns and starts to exit, then stops, looks at audience, laughs a bloodcurdling laugh.)* Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha. *(Takes a step, trips or stumbles, recovers and exits, or moves to bench and sits.)*

End of Prologue

End of Freeview

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