



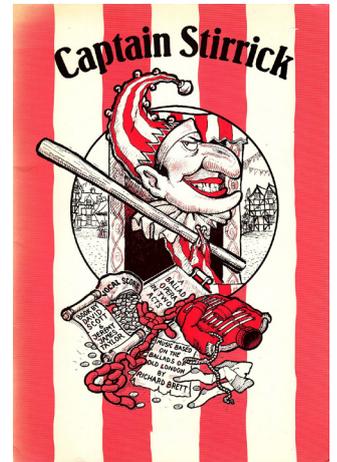
The Guide to Musical Theatre

CAPTAIN STIRRICK

Musical in 2 Acts: Music based on the ballads of Old London by Richard Brett, lyrics by Jeremy James Taylor, book by David Scott and Jeremy James Taylor

SYNOPSIS

Set in London at the beginning of the 19th Century, Captain Stirrick tells the dramatic story of the child-thief Ned Stirrick and his infant gang of pick-pockets as they plunder the rich to survive in the harsh conditions of George III's England. The colourful fantasy of the Fantoccinis and their puppets vividly highlight the taut drama and its inevitable tragic ending. A gripping play with a ballad score which strongly evokes the atmosphere of the London underworld.



STORY

Act One

The scene opens at the House of Correction, Cold Bath Fields, London in 1807. There are thirty children in various cells slowly moving into position. A door opens, the Chaplain suddenly appears, and the children say their evening prayers with. During the prayer, the Warder counts the boys, and after they are finished, he and the Chaplain leave him.

As soon as they are gone, the boys resume their activities. Led by Donkin, a small group approaches Joe Coverley, a diminutive boy sitting alone. They ask him to tell a story. When they don't like his story, they eventually end up attacking him like wild animals!

Suddenly, the Warder opens the door and hurls a boy into the room. It is Ned Stirrick. The boys take no notice of him and continue with their story game - this time having Charlie Clarke as the victim. Charlie tells them a story about a one-legged mermaid. Before Charlie can finish his story, the boys beat him up. Stirrick interrupts and tells the story of a boy named Ned Stirrick who went to sea with his father. His father was killed there and Ned ran back to England where he started a gang of thieves. This gang "cleaned up" all the fairs from Liverpool to Dover.

The scene transports us to one of those fairs. One August, Ned's gang was meeting at Bartholomew Fair, Smithfield, London. There are many different things to see at this fair: freak shows, the fat lady, puppet shows, etc. The "vilest" or most interesting display at the fair is the Court of Pie Powder - a travelling court of prompt justice which moved from fair to fair. Here speedy justice can be given to any wrongs that have been done.

The crowd disperses and everyone leaves except for Stirrick and a few kids waiting for the rest of his gang. Donkin appears with a new boy, Jones, who appears to be too innocent to steal. However, he produces two watches he just stole from Donkin (who lifted them earlier). Bill Long, the fake cripple, hobbles around the corner. The boys converse that he hasn't been pulling his share lately. If they don't pick pocket enough - they can't eat. Daffy and Jack arrive waving a bundle of dripping clothes they took off a dead body they found in the river!

Maria arrives with a small boy, Tommy, being led by the hand. This boy isn't a pick-pocket because he's blind.

However, he can sing - which he does very well. Stirrick forces Maria to get rid of the boy since they don't need a blind singer - they need pick-pockets! Once Stirrick has the group assembled, he tells them that they must continue working together and be careful not to get caught. Together, they celebrate their devious and various ways of stealing.

Everyone rushes off to do various jobs. Stirrick is alone and takes off his red trademark coat. This is the coat his father wore when he was shot on duty. Using the coat, he enacts a puppet show telling the story of his father and how he was killed. While Stirrick is doing this, Leach, the Punch and Judy puppet man from the fair, enters catching Stirrick off-guard. It appears the Stirrick is standing on the space which Leach has rented for his puppet show, and he needs to set up.

While setting up his booth, Leach shows Stirrick a box of puppets he no longer uses. Stirrick asks Leach if he'll fire his assistant and let him help with the puppets. Stirrick's group can even help drum up some business for the show. After considering it a bit, Leach decides to give Stirrick a try. His first job will be watching the booth while Leach goes back to the bar for a re-fill. While Stirrick is alone, he pulls some of Leach's old puppets out of their cases and talks with them.

Stirrick talks with Mr. Punch, the puppet, and the puppet talks back with him. Thomas Gray, Leach's old assistant, enters and sees this curious scene. Gray interrupts Stirrick, and the two get acquainted. Stirrick tells Gray that Leach has offered him his old job, and Gray says that he is welcome to it. Stirrick also learns that Gray likes to steal from people, and Stirrick gets the chance to have a new recruit in his band. The two are just about to strike a deal when Charlie and Peg rush in. Leach has just employed Charlie!

Suddenly, there is a whistle call from behind the puppet booth - signalling the presence of Stirrick's business partner, William Perfect. Stirrick gets the kids to leave before Perfect arrives - for Perfect wants nothing to do with children. Perfect gives Stirrick some sausages to eat and checks if there are any "pickings" from the gang. Unfortunately, the kids haven't gotten anything yet, but they will. Stirrick then tells him about his job with Leach. With the gang around the puppet shows, there definitely will be more pockets picked.

Suddenly, they hear the cries of "Stop, thief!" A boy has been caught stealing food from a local merchant. Not one of the gang, the boy is chased by police and eventually ends up in the puppet booth. While the rest of the kids divert the police, the boy hides inside the booth. After the police leave, the gang pulls the laughing boy out of the booth. His laughter turns to bewilderment when the gang takes the stolen food from him and turns him over to the police who will beat him. There's only one place this boy is going to go - a house of correction.

The scene changes to Lord Kensington's dressing room in his London house. Kensington is in his dressing gown and has a wild hangover. There is a knock at the door and Percival Simms, his manservant and secretary, breezes into the room with the mail. Simms informs Kensington that he is expected to be at the fair either today or tomorrow. He has some business to attend to there - mainly collecting all the stall rents for the merchants who have set up booths. His mistress, Lady Caroline, wishes to go with him and see the entertainment - mainly the Punch and Judy show which she so much enjoys. Kensington orders Simms to take a bottle of brandy to Leach at the Punch and Judy booth. That way he'll be sure to be refreshed and ready to perform.

Simms goes to the fair and gives Brandy to Leach - informing him that Lord Kensington and Lady Caroline will be coming to see his show tomorrow at one. Leach tells Stirrick of this and then goes off to sample the brandy. Perfect, overhearing the news, is happy to hear that such wealthy people will be at the fair. This way the gang can move in for the pick-pocketing kill!

In the distance, a band can be heard playing to the excited chatter and cheering of a crowd of people. The Fantocinni Family - the famous marionette puppet group - enter and go into their booth directly across from the Leach's. Carlo Fantocinni sees Leach sipping from his brandy bottle and approaches him - mocking the Punch and Judy puppets in progress. Leach tells him about Kensington's impending visit and Carlo is very upset. The Fantocinni's marionettes perform for royalty, not Leach's Punch and Judy. When Mr. Fantocinni finds out about this, he explodes - demanding that Kensington come to his booth for a marionette show!

Everyone leaves except for Stirrick and young Elisa Fantocinni. Stirrick, attracted to her but not quite knowing how to act, talks with her while others grill sausages over the fire. The rest of the Fantocinni children

(Petra, Rico, and Maria) are fascinated as they sit with the gang and hear about all they do. Rico is taken with Stirrick's stories. Rico is rather suspicious of Stirrick's dealings and wants to hear more. Leach goes off to have a bit more to drink. The gang begins to share stories about themselves. Joe talks about his dead father. Peg starts to sing quietly ("The Weary Cutters"). Night has fallen and some of the children have fallen asleep. Stirrick tells his story - still watched very intently by Rico and Elisa. He tells how two years ago he was the "powder monkey" (employed to carry powder to the cannons) on his father's ship. The battle started and raged for quite a while. While carrying the powder, he saw his father killed - shot by a musket. Though his father's ship won, there was nothing Stirrick could do to revive his father. The image of his father's death has haunted Stirrick since.

Act Two

The stage explodes into life as the Fantocinni family prepare for Lord Kensington's arrival ("Roll Up"). Lord Kensington and Lady Caroline arrive followed by Simms. Lady Caroline wanders over to the Punch and Judy booth and wants to see the show. Fantocinni tells her that it's not showing at the small booth - they have moved it to the main tent today. They all go inside and watch the show. As they watch, Stirrick and the gang pick their pockets and leave with their bag of loot before the puppet show finishes. Lady Caroline showers praise on Leach and his new assistant, Charlie--much to Fantocinni's chagrin. Lady Caroline, Kensington, and Simms leave.

The gang comes out celebrating their new treasures. Perfect returns when the kids leave and is happy to hear that the gang has a lot to show for an afternoon's work. Leach invites Perfect out for a drink.

The rest of the gang arrive and talk with Stirrick. Peg tells them that Perfect is not a good man and that he must not be trusted. Rico steps forward and tries to expose Stirrick as the true thief involved with the evil Perfect. The gang listens because they don't know about Perfect and Stirrick's involvement. Right before Stirrick is exposed, Fantocinni appears to take his grand children for a ride on the flying swings.

Charlie returns rather distraught. It appears that Perfect kicked him out of the bar where he took Leach - no kids. Stirrick has Charlie give him the Punch and Judy puppets so that they can have a celebration puppet show - and they do. They have fun until the Constable arrives and chases them away. They all scatter. Charlie stays and is trying to rescue the puppets. Not believing that Charlie works for Leach, the Constable kicks him out.

Once the Constable is gone, the gang comes back singing about poor Mr. Punch. By the end of this, Stirrick has hung Mr. Punch on a little rope. When the rest of the gang rushes off, Stirrick is left alone with Mr. Punch. Mr. Punch talks to him--calling him an "evil man." Elisa suddenly interrupts Stirrick and startles him. She asks him to tell her more about his father, but he refuses. She tries to get Stirrick to open up to her, but he has a very difficult time.

Just as he is about to share with Elisa, Rico enters and tells his sister to leave, leaving her doll behind. Rico knows Stirrick is a thief and wants him to have nothing to do with his sister. He threatens Stirrick and leaves. Stirrick is confronted by Mr. Punch again. Arguing with Stirrick about his evil ways, he shatters the doll Elisa left.

Elisa returns looking for the doll and is horrified to see it destroyed. After much questioning from Elisa, Stirrick admits to smashing the doll. She calls for Rico--who comes to her aid. The rest of the gang come and witness what happens next.

Rico calls Stirrick a liar and questions the story he tells everyone about his father's death. This is too much for Stirrick, who pulls out a knife. Rico laughs when Stirrick does this, but no sooner does Stirrick stab him! The gang is horrified. Elisa screams. Gray asks Stirrick why he did this. There is no response.

The scene shifts to the Court of Pie Powder where Lord Kensington, Lady Caroline, and Simms are waiting to see the travelling judge about their robbery. The constable brings in a confused Fantocinni and Carlo who don't know why they have been summoned. A public document is read which informs them that their audience was robbed of valuable possessions at their puppet show. The Fantocinnis are accused even more, but have no idea what Kensington and the others are talking about!

There is a sound of scuffling at the front door, and Gray is ushered into the chamber followed by Perfect. Gray was caught stealing a sausage from Perfect's tray and is being brought up on charges. Things get very dramatic when Gray tells the Fantocinni's that Rico has been stabbed. They run off to check out the situation. After more and more questioning from the lawyer, Perfect is on the verge of being discovered as the man who organizes the pick-pocket gangs. Rather than have Gray risk revealing anything, Perfect drops the charges against him. The suspicious judge wants to question Gray just a bit more, and the complaining Perfect is removed from the courtroom. Kensington orders Simms to take Lady Caroline home.

Kensington then slaps Gray around until he confesses that he works for Stirrick - who really works for Perfect. Gray then promises to tell them everything, show them all the other kids/thieves, and take them to where Stirrick stores all his loot - as long as they don't beat him anymore.

The scene changes to Puddle Dock, the wharf beside the Thames where the stolen goods are stashed. The bewildered children enter tired and nervous. Stirrick is there - drained and quiet. They are awaiting Perfect's arrival--for he comes every night. While they wait, they notice that Gray is not amongst them. Perfect enters in a panic telling them that the authorities have Gray and that he's probably telling them everything. Gray enters followed by a Constable, who drags Stirrick out.

Stirrick is next seen alone in his prison cell when Mr. Punch appears to him one more time. The puppet questions Stirrick until he finally punches him. Stirrick then hears Rico's voice. It tries to manipulate him into believing that the story of his father's death and everything else is just a lie. To avoid this, he tries to sing to Mr. Punch like he used to as a baby. The puppet continues to mock Stirrick until he grabs it and strangles it to silence.

Gray enters and questions Stirrick. Stirrick has a total breakdown--hearing voices screaming all around him. He is haunted by many images until suddenly he wakes up back in Cold Bath Fields - where the show opened. The other children are shouting at him. It appears that Stirrick has been screaming in his sleep for quite some time. The Chaplain and Warder burst in and drag him out to clean him up for his trial. The other kids ransack the bag Stirrick left behind. There they find puppets, a red coat, and a knife--all things Stirrick talked about in his "story." The kids realize that Stirrick told them his story - not one that was made up!

The kids continue with their game having another kid tell a tale. The cycle starts again - this time with Jimmy. Poor Stirrick is going to meet his end tomorrow for having killed another man.

MUSICAL NUMBERS:

1. Roll Up - Jem, Bill, Peg, Voices, Company
2. Before The Ending Of The Day - Solo, Company
3. The Court Of Pie Powder - Company
4. Turkey Rhubarb - Tommy
5. Now I Comes Up From Twickenham - Bill, Solo, Trio, Company
6. Slope Your Arms - Stirrick
7. The Hue and Cry
8. Botany Bay - Solo, Company
9. Take A Toff
10. Signor Fantocinni - Fantocinnis, Company
11. The Weary Cutters - Peg, Two Others
12. A Chapter Of Cheats - The Gang, Fantocinnis
13. Hush A Bye Baby - The Gang
14. My Friend Mr. Punch - The Gang
15. The Ballad Of Ned Stirrick - Peg
16. He Who Lies - Four Gang Members
17. Ballad - Reprise
18. Ballad - Conclusion

CAST size: Large (over 20)

Cast type: Children in Cast, Ensemble Cast - Many featured roles, Mainly Men, Strong/Large Chorus

Dance requirement: Standard (Musical Staging/Some Dance/Optional)

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN - Principals: 7 female, 22 male

Barmaid	Jones	Rico - Carlo and Mrs. Flockton's son
Bill long	Judge Prinseps	Street Girl
Carlo Fantocinni - Grandfather	Lady Caroline Watson - Lord	Street Trader
Fantocinni's son	Kensington's mistress	The Fantocinnis:
Caroline Cottenham	Lestock Peacock - Lord	The Gang:
Chaplain - Chaplain at Cold Bath	Kensington's attorney	The Poor:
Fields House of Correction	Lord Kensington	The Rich:
Charlie Clarke	Maria Taylor	Thief
Constable Pratt	Mario - Carlo and Mrs. Flockton's son	Thomas Gray
Daffy	Mr. Leach - The Punch and Judy man	Tommy - A blind boy
Donkin	Mrs. Flockton - Carlo's common law wife	Town crier
Elisa - Carlo and Mrs. Flockton's daughter	Ned Stirrick - Known as the Captain	Warder
Grandfather Fantocinni	Petra - Carlo and Mrs. Flockton's daughter	William Perfect - Sausage man, in league with Stirrick
Jack Wilkes		Passers-by, Indigents, Street-Vendors, Constables, Urchins
Jem Barnes		Peg Clarke - The Ballad Singer
Jimmy Pender		Percival Simms - Lord
Joe Conerley		Kensington's secretary

INSTRUMENTATION:

clarinet, trumpet, trombone, percussion, guitar, concertina, violin