

The Legend of Quasimodo, Revisited

*Based on the novel "The Hunchback of Notre Dame"
By Victor Hugo*

*Adapted for the stage
by Stephanie A. Youngman*

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DEDICATION

*This play is dedicated to my father, Joseph J. Youngman,
from whom I inherited my funny bone.*

NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

Had Victor Hugo been alive to see his dark novel brilliantly parodied on the old TV series, "The Carol Burnett Show," he too might have been inspired to turn it into a colorful, kid-friendly farce. *The Legend of Quasimodo, Revisited* pays homage to her and other comedy pioneers and is infused with pop culture references for the amusement of anyone over three feet tall. But beneath the humor is a timeless moral core with lessons in cultural tolerance, triumph over adversity and the value of friendship.

As the title implies, my fast-paced, lighthearted adaptation takes a few liberties with the original text and focuses on one adventurous day in the life of fiction's most unfortunate fellow. Here, Quasimodo is meant to be adored, not feared, while his villainous master Frollo sports a bad toupee. The handsome war hero Phoebus is easily outwitted (and charmed) by the feisty gypsy Esmeralda and the city is patrolled by the 15th century's version of the Keystone Kops. Nothing and no one is taken too seriously.

This script contains the stage directions used in the professional production, including the blocking for the chase sequence at the end of Act I, Scene 2. These "silly bits" will provide insight into the visual comedy that is prevalent throughout the play which is often not derived from the text itself. Emphasis is placed on dialogue and action rather than scenery and costumes, which should be kept simple and somewhat campy, and breaking the fourth wall is encouraged, even where it is not expressly denoted.

Approximately 90 minutes.

(A more detailed synopsis and information about the original amateur and professional premiere productions can be found at the end of the script.)

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

(4 m, 1 w, 5 flexible, plus extras)

QUASIMODO: The bell ringer of Notre Dame Cathedral and ward of Dom Claude Frollo. An oafish man-child with a sunny disposition despite his life-long misfortune, unruly hair and the large hump on his back. Male, age 18-25.

DOM CLAUDE FROLLO: The chief authority figure in Paris and Guardian of Quasimodo out of the kindness of his black heart. Has a low tolerance for gypsies and a remarkably bad toupee. Male, age 30-50.

ESMERALDA: The feisty gypsy who befriends Quasimodo, enamors Phoebus and becomes Frollo's nemesis. A substandard belly dancer, pickpocket and human rights activist. Female, age 18-25.

CAPTAIN PHOEBUS DE CHATEAUPERS: (*Pronounced Feebus de Chat-o-pare.*) The handsome but dim-witted war hero hired by Frollo to rid Paris of "vermin." An affable man whose compassion ultimately eclipses his sense of duty. Male, 20-30.

STAGE MANAGER / MIME: The set mover and actor wrangler on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Also plays the Mime and cameos as Horatio the Fishmonger. Any age/gender.

AGNES / GAUCHERE / JEHANNE / HENRIETTE: Four semi-pious nuns from a church outside of Paris who discover the orphaned Quasimodo. Any age/gender. NOTE: Three of these actors double as Keystone Kop-like **GUARDS** and must be skilled in slapstick comedy; the fourth plays Esmeralda's protégé **SIMONE**.

PIERRE GRINGOIRE: The boisterous and frolicsome court jester with disc jockey tendencies. Emcee at the Festival of Fools. Male, any age.

GYPSIES: All ages, shapes and sizes to play various speaking and non-speaking roles. Can be played by the Guards, if necessary.

SETTING

Inside and around Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, France,
1467-1482.

SCENE BREAKDOWN

ACT I

Scene 1: Outside Notre Dame. Quasimodo Sunday, 1467.

Scene 2: The Festival of Fools. Catawampus Day, 1482.

Scene 3: Quasi's room. A few hours later.

ACT II

Scene 1: Quasi's room. Thirty seconds later.

Scene 2: Frollo's chambers. A short while later.

Scene 3: The streets of Paris. Later that night.

Scene 4: Inside Notre Dame. The next morning.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Set: This play is performed on a bare stage using minimal set pieces with the exception of an elevated platform used as Quasimodo's perch in the cathedral tower. If the bell rope cannot be rigged to swing and/or sustain weight from above, there should be enough rope for the actors to run with it across the stage from the wings.

Lighting: A basic lighting plot except for the strobe light effect needed to achieve the "silent film" look for the chase at the end of Act I, Scene 2.

Sound: Cathedral bells, silent film music for the chase. Other music can be minstrel, classical, Baroque or even instrumental versions of French standards.

Special props: The "infant" Quasimodo can be a large wiggled pillow swaddled in a dingy blanket. Djali (*pronounced "Jah-lee"*) is a medium-sized stuffed goat adorned with gold jewelry, including his horns and hooves. The "dummy" Esmeralda should be life-size and similarly dressed, but lightweight and padded to avoid injury to the actors. Likewise, the Guards should carry only harmless toy swords and shields.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: The stage is dimly lit and bare except for a wicker basket containing the "infant" Quasimodo wrapped in a blanket. SFX: Church organ music is followed by the clanging of cathedral bells. QUASIMODO suddenly swings onstage from a thick rope. He is a bulky man-child in a loose fitting tunic with bushy red hair, a droopy chin and an unmistakable hump on his back.)

QUASIMODO: Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Sanctuareeeeeeee!

(The STAGE MANAGER, whose station is far downstage and visible throughout the show, runs onstage and tries to stop him.)

STAGE MANAGER: Quasi, stop!

QUASIMODO: I don't wanna stop. This fun! Sanctuary!

STAGE MANAGER: *(To audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen, I'm really sorry about this. Please bear with me while I get things under control and then we'll start the show again.

(STAGE MANAGER finally stops QUASIMODO'S swinging.)

STAGE MANAGER: *(Cont'd.)* Quasi, you're early. Again.

QUASIMODO: The bells chimed.

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, but that was part of the pre-show music. You don't come on for another seven pages.

QUASIMODO: Why?

STAGE MANAGER: I don't know why. That's how it's written.

QUASIMODO: How what's written?

STAGE MANAGER: The play.

QUASIMODO: What play?

STAGE MANAGER: This play. "The Legend of Quasimodo, Revisited."

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QUASIMODO: I'm a legend? Like Joan of Arc? Or Excalibur? Or Dracula?!

STAGE MANAGER: Sort of.

QUASIMODO: Wow! How cool is that!

STAGE MANAGER: Very cool. Can we get on with it now?

QUASIMODO: So this play is about me, huh?

STAGE MANAGER: Yes, you. Quasimodo, the Hunchback of Notre Dame.

QUASIMODO: Uh, I prefer the Posture-Impaired Bell Ringer of Notre Dame.

STAGE MANAGER: Fine. Let's go.

QUASIMODO: But wait. If this play is called "The Legend of Quasimodo..."

STAGE MANAGER: *(Air quotes with her fingers.)* "...Revisited."

QUASIMODO: *(Mimics her air quotes.)* "Whatever." And I am Quasimodo, why do I have to wait seven more pages to come on stage?

STAGE MANAGER: It could be worse. If this was Victor Hugo's novel, you'd have to wait fifty-two pages to make your entrance.

QUASIMODO: Good point. So, is that seven pages from now or seven pages from where we were supposed to have started the play?

STAGE MANAGER: Why do you do this to me?

(QUASIMODO turns, finally noticing the lack of scenery.)

QUASIMODO: Hey! Who stole the cathedral?

STAGE MANAGER: Nobody. It was never there. We only pretend it's there.

QUASIMODO: But shouldn't there at least be a belfry? Maybe some gargoyles on either side, you know to spruce it up a little. Perhaps a pretty stained glass window in the middle there...

(STAGE MANAGER tries to grab HIM but now he sees the audience. He gasps.)

End of Freeview

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