

Good Grief, It's Christmas

A Holiday-Themed Musical Comedy Murder Mystery Dinner Theatre Production

by Butch Maxwell

Running Time: Approximately 2 hours including audience interaction

Cast: 5 principal performers

Audience participation required

Music: Parody lyrics performed to familiar Christmas songs.

CAST

CHARLIE BRAUN: The organizer. Earnest, methodical, and convinced that clipboards can solve emotional problems.

LOOCY: A certified life coach with complete confidence and extensive notes on everyone's blocking.

MINUS: Professor of theology and ethics. Unable to answer a simple question simply.

SCHRADER: Middle-school music teacher. Accompanies life with quiet resignation.

SLOOPY: A beagle. Possibly the only competent investigator in the room.

AUDIENCE PARTICIPANTS

The Little Red-Haired Girl: Kind. Elusive. More important than she first appears.

Pepperjack Patty: Recruited to perform

Marcia: Patty's faithful assistant, also recruited.

Franken: Recruited as a Wise Man

Teacher: Still speaks in "Wa wa" language

SETTING

The rehearsal room of a church Christmas pageant.

The room has served generations of performers and volunteers.

It contains folding chairs, seasonal decorations, rehearsal materials, a keyboard, and decades of accumulated memory.

Time: The present.

The rehearsal takes place on the final evening before the building is sold.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Good Grief, It's Christmas is written as an interactive dinner theatre production.

Audience volunteers portray several small roles throughout the performance. No advance preparation is required, and volunteers should always be guided generously toward success.

The parody songs are written to familiar Christmas standards and are intended to be playful rather than polished.

Sloopy is written to be portrayed by a human in a costume to suggest a beagle. The actor's face must remain visible.

The mystery is fair-play. Every clue required to solve the crime is visible before the solution is revealed.

Program notes and "Fun Facts" clues are offered at the end of the script.

MUSICAL NUMBERS

ACT ONE:

 "Run, Run Rudolph"

 "Linus and Lucy"

 "Mele Kalikimaka"

ACT TWO:

 "Away in a Manger"

ACT THREE:

 "Linus and Lucy (reprise)"

 "Hang On Sloopy"

(All songs are musical parodies and should be licensed, substituted, or otherwise presented in accordance with applicable copyright law and local performance practices.)

Act One

CHARLIE BRAUN, MINUS, LOOCY, SCHRADER, and SLOOPY enter.

Charlie Braun steps forward. He looks at the audience.

CHARLIE BRAUN

They're selling the building. Where we did our first Christmas pageant. We haven't done this since we were kids. Nineteen sixty-five. More than fifty years ago.

(A beat.)

Seemed like time for one more pageant.

MINUS

Sixty-one years since the first one.

CHARLIE BRAUN

That's not helping, Minus.

SFX: Music – “Run, Run Rudolph”

LOOCY

(Singing)

♪ Out of all the blockheads
You know you are the mastermind
Run, run Sloopy,
Charlie Braun is just behind

CHARLIE BRAUN, MINUS, SCHRADER, and LOOCY

(Singing)

♪ Run, run Sloopy, somebody's gotta make it to town
Charlie, make it happen,
Tell 'em that we'll take the freeway down
Run, run Sloopy,
'Cause I'm reelin' like a merry-go-round

LOOCY

(Singing)

♪ Said Charlie to the cast now –

CHARLIE BRAUN

(Singing)

♪ “What have you been longin' for?
All I want for Christmas is what we had before

MINUS

(Singing)

♪ And then away went Sloopy

SCHRADER

(Singing)

♪ Couldn't take it anymore

CHARLIE BRAUN, LOOCY, MINUS and SCHRADER

(Singing)

♪ Run, run Sloopy, somebody's gotta make it to town
Charlie, make it happen,
Tell 'em that we'll take the freeway down
Run, run Sloopy, reelin' like a merry-go-round ♪

SFX: Song ends

CHARLIE BRAUN

(Speaking)

Okay. So. If we could just—

LOOCY

I've been thinking about the staging.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I was going to say—

LOOCY

The wise men are coming in from the wrong side.

CHARLIE BRAUN

We haven't started yet.

LOOCY

Exactly. So, we can still fix it.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I took notes, Loocy. I have a whole—

LOOCY

Charlie Braun. We are all pushing 70. The wise men are coming in from the wrong side.

CHARLIE BRAUN

The wise men are fine. If everyone could just take their—

LOOCY

They're coming from the east. They should enter from stage left.

MINUS

Actually, the magi's point of origin is somewhat ambiguous. Matthew doesn't specify—

LOOCY

Nobody asked you, Minus.

MINUS

I'm simply saying that "the east" is a relative designation depending on—

LOOCY

Stage left, Minus.

MINUS

—one's frame of reference.

LOOCY

I took vacation days for this.

She moves on, as if this explains everything.

SCHRADER

Remarkable.

A beat.

Schrader produces a tiny piano. He regards it for a moment. He begins to play.

SFX: Music: “Linus and Lucy”

Minus begins to move. Just slightly. He can't help it.

Charlie Braun begins to move. He is trying to do it correctly. He is not doing it correctly.

Loocy begins to move. She is absolutely certain she is doing it correctly. She is doing something entirely her own.

Schrader plays. He does not move. He plays the tiny piano with complete commitment.

Sloopy is already dancing. Has been for some time.

Charlie Braun, Loocy, Minus and Slooppy encourage willing audience members to join in.

For approximately one minute the building sale doesn't matter. The wise men don't matter. Sixty-one years of everything doesn't matter. They are just who they were.

SFX: The music ends.

A beat. Everyone settles.

Slooppy crosses to the area behind the keyboard. He noses around the base of it with great purpose.

He finds something — a folded document, two pages, wedged between two objects in the room. He will keep the pages in order all evening. It is the most organized anyone in this room has ever been. He picks it up. He looks at it. He looks at the audience. He looks at it again. He is certain this is important.

He looks at it again with the focused intensity of someone who has recognized a word. He has not recognized a word. He is a dog. But something on this page has stopped him in a way that hay and garland and extension cords did not.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Now. The nativity. We have three wise men—

MINUS

Potentially more.

CHARLIE BRAUN

We have three wise men—

MINUS

The text is genuinely silent on the specific number.

LOOCY

There are three wise men, Minus. There have always been three. There will always be three.

MINUS

Historically—

LOOCY

Three.

MINUS

—that's simply not—

LOOCY

Three!

A beat. Minus opens his mouth.

Don't.

Minus closes his mouth. He adjusts his backpack.

CHARLIE BRAUN

So, who to cast?

(Scanning the audience.)

You three. You look wise.

PEPPERJACK PATTY

(An audience member)

That has never been said to me before.

MARCIA

(An audience member)

I think you're very wise, sir.

A beat.

PEPPERJACK PATTY

I'm Pepperjack Patty. This is my assistant, Marcia.

MINUS

Statistically improbable.

CHARLIE BRAUN

And your name, sir?

FRANKEN

(An audience member)

Franken.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Excellent. Patty, Marcia, and Franken. Three Wise Men.

FRANKEN

I was just hoping to eat dinner.

CHARLIE BRAUN

And yet, here we are.

LOOCY

Fine. Wise Men enter from stage left.

PEPPERJACK PATTY

Why do I have to be a Wise Man?

MARCIA

Because you're wise, sir.

PEPPERJACK PATTY

That's not why.

MARCIA

I know, sir.

PEPPERJACK PATTY

Then why did you say it?

MARCIA

Habit, sir.

A beat.

MINUS

Some relationships achieve a level of stability normally associated with geological formations.

A beat.

FRANKEN

I already regret volunteering.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Excellent. You're going to fit right in.

LOOCY

All right. Wise men are settled.

SCHRADER

(Without looking up)

There was also probably no drummer boy.

A pause.

CHARLIE BRAUN

We cut the drummer boy.

SCHRADER

I know.

CHARLIE BRAUN

After The Incident.

SCHRADER

I know.

CHARLIE BRAUN

We don't talk about The Incident.

SCHRADER

I know.

(A beat)

He started with "Wipe Out."

MINUS

Which was alarming enough.

SCHRADER

And then he just... kept going.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Nobody knew he knew "In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida."

Pause.

MINUS

(Quietly, despite himself.) I did.

A beat.

CHARLIE BRAUN

You knew?

MINUS

He mentioned it. Before the service. I thought he was joking.

(A beat.)

I didn't say anything.

A beat.

SCHRADER

(Without looking up.)

Why not?

MINUS

(Already retreating.)

The ethical implications of unsolicited performance notes in a sacred context are considerably more—

LOOCY

Not now, Minus.

A beat. Minus adjusts his backpack.

We lost the Hendersons after the first four minutes.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I apologized to them personally.

LOOCY

You apologized to everyone personally.

CHARLIE BRAUN

It seemed like the right thing to do.

MINUS

It was the right thing to do. Ethically speaking, when a performance causes—

LOOCY

We are never speaking of this again.

A beat.

SCHRADER

We say that every time.

CHARLIE BRAUN

(To an audience member.)

Hey, aren't you my teacher from the second grade?

TEACHER

(An audience member.)

Waa waa waa.

Everyone turns.

MINUS

You know, we're all adults now. You can just talk to us.

A beat.

TEACHER

Waa.

SCHRADER

(Without looking up)

Worth a try.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I didn't realize it was an impediment.

(A beat.)

Good grief. I hope I don't get cancelled!

LOOCY

Some things don't change.

(A beat)

I find it comforting.

Sloopy crosses back the other way. Still purposeful. Still ignored.

The camel costume smells like mildew.

CHARLIE BRAUN

It always smells like mildew.

LOOCY

It smelled like mildew in 1965. Apparently, nothing has changed.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I know.

LOOCY

Something should be done about that.

CHARLIE BRAUN

It's a camel costume, Loocy. It's supposed to smell like—

LOOCY

Not like *that*, it isn't. That costume is creating weather.

SFX: A mobile phone ringtone.

It's Charlie Braun's phone. He looks at it. He looks at it for a long time.

What?

CHARLIE BRAUN

It's from the lawyer.

LOOCY

What lawyer?

CHARLIE BRAUN

The building lawyer. The— the sale lawyer.

MINUS

The attorney handling the property transfer.

CHARLIE BRAUN

They found a buyer.

Pause.

LOOCY

That's not possible.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Redwood Community Holdings. Whoever that is.

Pause.

LOOCY

When?

CHARLIE BRAUN

Right after Christmas. The sale closes after Christmas. Then they gut it. Maybe tear it down. Depends how much parking they need.

A beat.

Schrader plays a single chord. Quietly. Then stops.

LOOCY

(A beat, then briskly.)

Well. After Christmas is after Christmas. We have a pageant to finish.

Sloopy crosses to Charlie Braun and presents the document with considerable urgency.

CHARLIE BRAUN

(Not looking up from clipboard)

Not now, Sloopy.

Sloopy presents it higher. He fans the two pages slightly, in case the problem is quantity.

(Already moving toward the star)

That's very good. Hold onto that.

Sloopy looks at the document. Looks at Charlie Braun's back. He carefully folds the document and tucks it somewhere on his person. He will not forget this. He pats the place where it is tucked. Once. Deliberately.

A beat. Then Loocy snaps back.

LOOCY

That star is still too far left.

The cast reassembles. Charlie Braun consults a clipboard he has been carrying and clearly not referring to.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Okay. Places. Let's just— let's run through it from the top. We have the star, we have the manger, we have the— where's the camel costume?

LOOCY

It's in the corner where it has always been.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Great. Good. So—

LOOCY

It still smells.

CHARLIE BRAUN

We know it smells, Loocy.

LOOCY

I'm just noting it for the record.

CHARLIE BRAUN

There is no record.

LOOCY

There should be a record.

Sloopy wanders by.

A beat.

Sloopy licks her hand.

A beat.

Loocy freezes. She looks at the hand. She looks at Sloopy.

Dog germs!

A beat.

Sixty-one years of dog germs!

She wipes her hand frantically on Charlie Braun's sleeve.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Why am I involved?

LOOCY

Because you're closer!

MINUS

Scientifically speaking, the risk of transmission is—

LOOCY

Not now, Minus!

SCHRADER

(Without looking up)

Some things don't change.

Schrader sits at his keyboard. He plays a brief run. Stops. Adjusts something.

CHARLIE BRAUN

The shepherd gets a microphone.

A beat.

LOOCY

...Fine.

A longer beat.

SCHRADER

(Without looking up.)

Hm.

Sloopy crosses the back of the room again, still carrying the piece of paper, still ignored.

Charlie Braun steps into the center of the room. He does not consult his clipboard. He holds it at his side. This is deliberate.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Everyone. Stop.

Everyone stops. Including Sloopy. A genuine beat of silence.

Here is what we're going to do. The wise men enter from stage left. The shepherd stands at the manger. The camel stays where I put him. The star is fine. We run the nativity from the top, no interruptions, no adjustments, no opinions about the east.

(A beat.)

Does everyone understand?

A beat. Everyone nods. Even Loocy.

A longer beat. Charlie Braun looks at his clipboard with the confidence of a man who has thought of everything.

LOOCY

We need the camel.

A beat. Charlie Braun looks up from his clipboard. He looks at the clipboard. He looks back up.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I was getting to that.

LOOCY

When?

CHARLIE BRAUN

Right now. I was getting to it right now.

LOOCY

You have a clipboard.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I have a clipboard.

LOOCY

The camel is not on the clipboard.

A beat.

CHARLIE BRAUN

The camel is implied.

LOOCY

Whatever. We need a camel and it's not going to be me.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Minus.

MINUS

I have significant concerns about the ethical implications of—

CHARLIE BRAUN

It's a costume, Minus.

MINUS

—reducing a culturally significant animal to a comedic prop, which raises questions about—

LOOCY

Minus should wear it.

MINUS

I absolutely should not wear it.

LOOCY

It would suit him.

MINUS

That is not a reason.

LOOCY

It's mildewed.

MINUS

That is a reason.

CHARLIE BRAUN

You could put it over the backpack.

Minus:

The backpack stays.

LOOCY

You've brought that backpack everywhere for sixty-one years.

MINUS

Preparedness is a virtue.

SCHRADER

(Without looking up.) That's one word for it.

LOOCY

So...?

A beat. Loocy and Minus look at Charlie Braun.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Don't look at me. I'm the director.

Sloopy is already wearing the camel costume. Has been for some time. Nobody knows when this happened.

A beat.

SCHRADER

(Without looking up.)

It suits him.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Okay. Good. We have the camel. We have Joseph—

SCHRADER

I'm not Joseph.

CHARLIE BRAUN

You're Joseph.

SCHRADER

I play keys.

LOOCY

You're also Joseph. It's not a big part.

SCHRADER

I'm aware of that.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Okay. Geography. Because last time the shepherds ended up in Bethlehem and the wise men were near the salad bar.

He starts indicating areas around the room.

The manger stays just outside the exit until we move it in.

LOOCY

Because someone didn't set up before rehearsal.

CHARLIE BRAUN

We're setting up now.

(A beat.)

We have the star—

LOOCY

I don't like where it is.

CHARLIE BRAUN

It's already hung.

LOOCY

It's too far left.

CHARLIE BRAUN

It's fine, Loocy.

LOOCY

It's going to fall on someone.

Charlie Braun moves toward the rigging area, consulting his clipboard. He reaches up and tests the support with one hand — not adjusting, just checking. He makes a note. He is very organized about this. The clipboard has never helped.

CHARLIE BRAUN

It's not going to fall on anyone.

SCHRADER

(Without looking up.)

You were just up there.

Sloopy studies the star area with grave concern. He repositions invisible points in space no one else can see.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Mary and Joseph go here.

LOOCY

I'm Mary.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Yes. You're Mary.

LOOCY

I've always been Mary.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Yes.

LOOCY

There was never another option.

CHARLIE BRAUN

No one suggested there was.

(A beat.)

Minus, you're the shepherds.

MINUS

Plural?

CHARLIE BRAUN

Budget cuts.

MINUS

Historically—

CHARLIE BRAUN

You're all the shepherds.

(A beat.)

Shepherds over here. Wise men come in from—

LOOCY

Stage left.

CHARLIE BRAUN

—from somewhere over there. The star hangs above the manger area.

LOOCY

Too far left.

CHARLIE BRAUN

The camel stays near the manger.

Sloopy immediately wanders somewhere else.

Or near it, conceptually.

(A beat.)

Okay, from the top.

Everyone is in their positions. Schrader stands at the manger with the particular stillness of a man who has made his peace with something.

The nativity begins.

Sloopy, as camel, quietly begins grazing on things: a strand of garland, a costume piece, someone's scarf, an extension cord. He does this with total concentration and increasing confidence until the scene can no longer continue around him.

Sloopy.

Sloopy does not stop.

Sloopy, that's not—

Sloopy notices something, possibly a squirrel. Stops eating. Regards it with great interest. Begins following it with complete confidence toward the edge of the playing space.

No. No, no, no—

LOOCY

The camel is leaving.

CHARLIE BRAUN

I can see that.

LOOCY

Do something.

CHARLIE BRAUN

Sloopy. Sloopy, come back. The manger is— the manger is this way.

Sloopy does not come back.

A beat.