

LAST STOP BEFORE BETHLEHEM

A Short Nativity Musical

by

LIZ STOCKLEY

Music by

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SchoolPlay Productions Ltd

15 Inglis Road, Colchester, Essex CO3 3HU

LAST STOP BEFORE BETHLEHEM

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*Scene 1 is on the road to Bethlehem;
Scenes 2, 3, and 4 are in the courtyard of the inn.*

There are eight songs:-

All This Way!

Such a Long Way.

Just Another Busy Day.

Poor Old Goat.

The New Recruits' Song.

Don't Wake the Baby.

A Difficult Donkey.

The Start of Something Special.

CAST

(number of speeches in brackets).

Innkeeper (37)

Housekeeper (10 + 4 offstage)

Hannah, (11) *the innkeeper's daughter*

Elizabeth, (18) *the innkeeper's daughter*

Timothy, (27) *the goat boy*

Samuel (11)

Simon (8)

David (7)

Rachel (8)

Rebecca (9)

Joseph (17)

Shepherd 1 (8)

Shepherd 2 (6)

Shepherd 3 (5)

Roman Commander (26)

Roman soldier 2 (9)

Roman soldier 3 (3)

Roman soldier 4 (3)

Roman soldier 5 (3)

Traveller 1 (7)

Traveller 2 (5)

Traveller 3 (3)

Traveller 4 (1)

Traveller 5 (1)

Traveller 6 (1)

Traveller 7 (1)

Guest 1 (1)

Guest 2 (1)

Recruit 1 (3)

Recruit 2 (2)

Recruit 3 (4)

Other Roman soldiers, Travellers and Guests.

Chorus of New Recruits.

Last Stop Before Bethlehem

31 speaking parts.

Non-speaking parts as required.

Chorus of newly recruited Roman soldiers.

Scene 1 is on the road to Bethlehem, Scenes 2, 3, and 4 are in the courtyard of the inn.

The children who live at the last inn on the road to Bethlehem are having to work really hard, helping with all the travellers. When a load of Roman soldiers arrive, fed up with chivvying people along the road, the housekeeper decides that the old goat, Phoebe, will have to be slaughtered to provide stew for everyone. Timothy, the goat boy, is distraught and the children try to find a way to save Phoebe.

Later that night a man arrives with a pregnant wife and a rather obstreperous donkey. The children, sorry for the woman, manage to persuade the innkeeper to let the couple stay in the stable with Phoebe, and they put the donkey in Phoebe's pen. When the housekeeper goes out to slaughter Phoebe at dawn, she has quite a surprise. Phoebe is reprieved, some shepherds turn up with some strange news about the baby who has been born in the stable. The new recruits who have been wandering about all night eventually turn up at the inn and everyone settles down for a celebration breakfast.

There are eight songs:-

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Such a Long Way.

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LAST STOP BEFORE BETHLEHEM

by Liz Stockley

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SCENE 1 A hillside along the road to Bethlehem.

(The sound of voices approaching. Introductory music gradually gives way to the wail of the wind as the first group of 5 TRAVELLERS enters - possibly through from back of auditorium. The Leader climbs up on to the top of the hill and gazes out across the valley. Then he turns and beckons to the others).

Trav. 1: Come on everyone! This way. That looks like the town over there.

Trav. 2: Oh yes. Look, you can see it from here. Not much further now.

Trav. 3: Oh, I'm so tired. Can't we sit here for a minute and rest?

Trav. 1: I should think so. There's still a few hours of daylight left. Don't forget we've still got to find lodgings for tonight though.

Trav. 4: Won't we reach Bethlehem by night fall?

Trav. 2: Not quite, no. We'll stay on the outskirts tonight. There'll be so many people in the town that we'd never find anywhere.

Trav. 5: Here's some people coming. Look.

(A second group of TRAVELLERS enters).

Trav. 5: Hallo, friends! Come and join us.

Trav. 6: Thank you. We will. It's a long road across these hills.

Trav. 1: Not much further though. Look, you can see Bethlehem across the next valley.

Trav. 7: Thank goodness for that. All this way - and for what? To pay our taxes!

MUSIC 1 - ALL THIS WAY

Travellers: *All this way!
 Travelling night and day!
 The wind is cold when day is done,
 And at midday the cruel sun*

Ro. 2: A warm house and a bath!

Ro. 3: Proper food and some good red wine!

R. 4& 5: Lovely ladies!

Comm: (*Making notes in Roman numerals with chalk on a nearby boulder*). You can't stop there, Sir. Move along! That's about five hundred and thirty along here today.

Ro. 2: My children will all be grown up by the time I see them again.

Ro. 3: And I'll have got so thin with all this marching that my wife won't recognise me.

Ro. 4: All the beautiful girls will be married.

Ro. 5: And there won't be anyone left for us.

Ro. 2: Oh come on! Who'd want either of you two? Look at you. You need to smarten yourselves up a bit.

Comm: That goes for all of you. I've never seen such a miserable apology for an army. You - straighten your toga! And you - your sandal's undone! And what HAS happened to your helmet?

Ro. 2: I think it's the birds, Sir. There was something trying to nest in it last night and it's got a bit unravelled.

Comm: (*Shouting offstage again*). Yes, that way! Keep moving there! You're a shambles, you lot. A disgrace. Come on now. There's plenty more people on the road and we've got work to do. Fall in! (*They do so - badly*). Left, right, left, right

(*Music - possibly "ALL THIS WAY" - as they exit, marching very inadequately with Comm.'s shouts continuing and fading into the distance. Lights dim and more [or the same] TRAVELLERS enter wearily*).

Trav. 1: Just look over the next ridge and there are the town walls. Look!

Trav. 2: Thank goodness. I'm worn out.

Trav. 1: Looks like an inn down there in the valley. We'd better try there for somewhere to sleep tonight.

Trav. 3: Yes, Its going to be a cold night.

Comm: (*Offstage*). No loitering there. Move along! Keep the road clear.

Trav. 2: Come on!

(*TRAVELLERS exit and ROMAN SOLDIERS enter*).

Comm: Right. That's more or less the lot for this evening I think. We'll start back to camp now.

Ro. 2: There's a couple of stragglers down there, Sir. Look!

Comm: Oi! You! This way!

(There is a muffled shout from offstage).

Comm: What? *(Another shout)*. Come up here. You must keep to the road.
(JOSEPH enters, breathless from the climb).

Joseph: Can't get the donkey up the path. She's lame. I thought we'd just stop here for the night. It's quite sheltered among the trees lower down.

Comm: You can't do that.

Joseph: What?

Comm: Not allowed! We can't have the roads clogged up with travellers just sleeping wherever they happen to find themselves at bedtime.

Joseph: But the donkey's lame - or pretending to be - and I don't think she'll go any further; to tell the truth she's never been the easiest of donkeys. And my wife's not feeling too good either.

Comm: Travel sick, is she?

Joseph: No, she's going to have a baby.

Comm: She can't do that.

Joseph: What?

Comm: Not allowed. We can't have people just having babies wherever they happen to be at the time.

Joseph.: But what are we supposed to do?

Comm: You could try applying for a permit.

Joseph: A permit?

Comm: Yes.. You see, you're going to be in a muddle without one, aren't you? I mean what happens when you get to Bethlehem, pay tax for two people, and then just as you're about to go home, you're checked out at the town gates and - whoops! - there's three of you. I mean Caesar's not going to like that too much now, is he?

Joseph: But that's ridiculous!

Comm: Take my advice, Sir. Get a permit. Now, move along please. We can't have the roads clogged up with lame donkeys and expectant mothers.

Joseph: But where can we go for the night?

Ro. 2: Excuse me. There's an inn over the ridge. You could stay there. Be more comfortable for your wife anyway.

Joseph: But we've hardly any money left. It's been a long journey and I've got to keep some for the way home.

Comm: Well, there's nothing I can do about that. I have my orders and it's more than my job's worth to let you sleep in that wood. On your way! Fall in!

Left, right, left, right

(SOLDIERS exit and JOSEPH turns to go. Just then RO. 2 runs back in).

Ro. 2: Here, you! Take this money. I've got a wife at home. I remember what it was like when we had our first baby.

(He exits quickly).

Joseph: *(Shouting after him).* Why, thank you, Sir. Thankyou.

(The sound of the SOLDIERS marching continues throughout, getting slower and fainter and gradually becoming the background beat for the next song, the first verse of which might be sung in harmony on offstage mike by 3/4 voices while the lights dim to night time and groups of TRAVELLERS enter).

MUSIC 2 - SUCH A LONG WAY TO BETHLEHEM

***Night drawing in and the air feeling colder,
Whisper of wind in the olives tonight,
Grey of the road, of the dust and the boulders,
Travellers too weary to put up a fight.***

***Such a long way over mountain and desert,
Such a long way to find rest for the night,
Such a long way to find so little comfort,
Such a long way till the town is in sight,
Such a long way,
Such a long way,
Such a long way to Bethlehem.***

***Step after step through the noon and the midnight,
Hearts full of heaviness, dreaming of home,
Following gleam of the road in the moonlight,
Following somebody's orders from Rome.***

SCENE 2 Nighttime in the inn courtyard.

(The area is lit by lanterns and there are people sitting at tables, drinking, laughing and talking while others move about carrying trays etc. The atmosphere is busy. Music over could perhaps be "JUST ANOTHER BUSY DAY".

Guest 1: Boy! Fetch us some more to drink, will you!

Timothy: Certainly, Sir. Just coming.

Guest 2: And where's our dinner? We've been waiting an hour or more!

Timothy: Sorry, Sir. I'll fetch it immediately.

(HOUSEKEEPER enters. She is large and fierce).

Hskpr: Get a move on, you lazy little good for nothing! I don't pay you to stand about chatting!

Timothy: But, I wasn't.

Hskpr: Don't you dare answer me back! Get on with your work!

(TIMOTHY scuttles off, the HOUSEKEEPER moves around the tables. The other CHILDREN are also busy serving, sweeping the floor etc. The INNKEEPER enters. TIMOTHY re-enters with a tray and takes it to one of the tables).

Hskpr: Why did it take you so long, boy? You're going to have to work harder than this if you don't want to be turned out!

Innk: Don't be too hard on the boy. He's doing his best.

Hskpr: His best's not good enough then. Not when we're this busy.

(Group of TRAVELLERS enters).

Trav. 1: Good evening, landlord!

Innk: Good evening, Sir. Can I help you?

Trav 1: We need rooms for the night. We're travelling into Bethlehem for the census tomorrow.

Innk: You and a thousand others, Sir. You'll find no rooms tonight.

Trav. 2: But surely there's somewhere? We're not fussy.

Trav. 3: Just exhausted!

Innk: Sorry sir. It's just not possible. Look at this lot!

Hskpr: Come on now. You've been told there's no room. We can't waste time talking to people when we've no room for them.

Innk: I'm sorry. You'll have to go. We're just too busy.

MUSIC 3 - JUST ANOTHER BUSY DAY

(First verse sung by HOUSEKEEPER on her own perhaps and then repeated by everyone. This pattern could be used on the other verses too if required).

*Clean the stable, sweep the floor,
Feed the hens and close the door,
Carry water, fetch the hay.
Just another busy day.*

*Serve the dinner, pour the wine,
Clean the dishes till they shine,
Scrub the tables, don't delay,
Just another busy day.*

*Shake the bedding, feed the dogs,
Light the fire and fetch the logs,
Check the cooking on the way,
Just another busy day.*

(Travellers get up, yawning, stretching etc. Music slows for the last verse).

*Light the candle, make the bed,
I'm so tired I'm nearly dead,
And tomorrow we can say
Will be another busy day.*

(TRAVELLERS etc. go off to bed, CHILDREN showing them the way. Lights dim. TIMOTHY enters, comes to front and sits on rock sniffing. REBECCA and RACHEL enter).

Rebecca: Why, Timothy, whatever's the matter?

Timothy: Oh, Rebecca, hallo. What a day! I'm so tired.

Rebecca: I know. It hardly seems worth going to bed. It'll be dawn by the time we've got to sleep.

Rachel: But what's the matter? You look really upset.

Timothy: Nothing. Oh well Yes. I don't know. It's just Phoebe the old one. The mistress says she's got to be slaughtered in the morning, she says she doesn't give enough milk.

Rachel: What? The old brown one? But she's lovely!

Timothy: I know. She was the first goat I looked after when the master took me in here. And I'm sure she'll give more milk in the spring. She just doesn't get enough to eat.

Rebecca: She's not the only one! None of us gets enough to eat!

(ELIZABETH, HANNAH, SAMUEL, SIMON and DAVID enter).

Rachel: Oh, that woman! She's a slave driver.

Samuel: You're telling me! She's just made us do the dishes all over again.

Simon: And they were spotless the first time!

David: *(To ELIZABETH and HANNAH)* Why does your father keep her on? Everyone hates her.

Eliz: I think he's frightened of her. Like everyone else.

(Lights have been gradually going up during this conversation).

Hannah: Look how light it is. Surely it can't be dawn yet? We haven't even been to bed.

Timothy: No. It must just be a full moon.

Samuel: That's not for another two weeks. Anyway it's brighter than that. Look! It's that star!

(They all get up and stand, clustered, looking up).

Simon: But stars aren't usually that bright. What can it be?

(There is a shout from inside - "Put those lanterns out!")

Eliz: Look out! She's still awake. Let's go!

(They start to leave, but HOUSEKEEPER enters).

Hskpr: And just what do you lot think you're doing, may I ask? Idling your time away as usual! *(The CHILDREN say nothing)*. It's nearly dawn. Look how light it is. You boy! *(To TIMOTHY)* Make sure that old goat's ready first thing. She'll be a bit tough but if we get the meat boiling early enough she'll make a good enough stew for the evening meal.

(HOUSEKEEPER exits. CHILDREN all look at each other. TIMOTHY turns away and covers his face with his hands).

Samuel: We've got to do something! We can't let her slaughter Phoebe!

Simon: But what can we do?

MUSIC 4 - POOR OLD GOAT

Children: *Tattered and old with a fleabitten coat,
She's a poor old goat,
The days of her youth are extremely remote,
She's a poor old goat,
She's no longer pretty or sprightly or new,
But she's served us too well to be made into stew,
So we're going to save her whatever we do,
She's a poor old goat.*

*With a stringy old tail and a scraggy old throat,
She's a poor old goat,
She never expects any barley or oat,
She's a poor old goat,
But she's always been here, through our childhood a friend,
And now is too early to see her days end,
So we're going to save her and always defend
Our poor old goat.*

(There is a noise off - a muffled shout).

David: What was that?

Hannah: There's someone coming up the path. Look!

(JOSEPH enters).

Joseph: Don't be frightened. It's all right. I know it's late but I'm looking for a room for the night.

Eliz: I'm sorry. There's no space anywhere here. The inn's fuller than I've ever known it.

Joseph: Then I don't know what is to become of us. My wife can't go any further.

Hannah: Isn't she well?

Joseph: She's pregnant.

Rebecca: But we can't leave her out there on the road!

Rachel: Of course not.

Samuel: Surely there's somewhere here!

(INNKEEPER enters).

Innk: What's all this noise? Guests are trying to sleep, and it's high time you children were asleep too. I suppose it's this strange brightness that's keeping you all up, is it?

Hannah: Not exactly. *(She takes his arm).* Daddy

Eliz: *(Taking the other arm).* Dear father

Innk: Oh dear. I know that tone of voice. What do you want this time?

Hannah: Well, we know how full the inn is, but this is a real emergency.

Eliz: There's this poor lady who's not very well.

Hannah: Out there on the road!

Eliz: And we know you couldn't leave her out there!

(All the others join in, trying to persuade him. Eventually he lifts his arms).

Innk: All right! All right! There's no space at all inside but if you can find a corner in one of the stables, she can stay there. Only for goodness' sake don't say anything!

Children: Oh thank you! We knew you'd help. Etc.

Innk: Daughters! Your life's not your own if you've got daughters!

(INNKEEPER exits).

Eliz: Can you find a spare stable, Timothy?

Timothy: I've been thinking. We can put some of the younger goats in together and then move Phoebe into the spare pen along with these people. She's so gentle she won't trouble them. And that'll leave Phoebe's pen free for their donkey.

Samuel: Shall I lead your donkey up for you, Sir?

Joseph: No. I don't think you'd better. She's never been the easiest of donkeys; a bit unpredictable with strangers. I'll fetch her and my wife. I can't thank you enough!

Timothy: I'll go and get the pens ready then.

David: And we'll show you the way!

(Exit. GIRLS could sing last verse of "SUCH A LONG WAY" again here as everyone exits and the lights go down.)

(Sound of feet tramping in a very ragged march, shouts of "This way, Over here," etc. The NEW RECRUITS enter - a bedraggled, motley collection of Romans, newly arrived and lost).

MUSIC 5 - NEW RECRUITS' SONG

(Background chant of "Left, right, left right").

Recruits: *Far across the sea we have come from Italy,
Full of hopes of fame and courageous gallantry,
We have left our home all prepared to fight for Rome,
Being soldiers in the Roman army.*

*We would like to learn and our money we would earn,
But the road is hard and the officers are stern
We were keen at first but it's getting rather worse
Being soldiers in the Roman army.*

*Here the wind's like ice and the natives are not nice
So if asked again we would certainly think twice,
And they tell us this is annus mirabilis,
Being soldiers in the Roman army.*

SCENE 3 Later that night.

(There is the sound of a baby crying and perhaps the voice of MARY singing a lullabye. TIMOTHY enters, yawning, rubbing eyes and looking up at the sky. JOSEPH enters).

Jos.: Excuse me. I don't really like to ask - you've been so kind already - but do you think you could find something for my wife to eat? I have a LITTLE money.

Tim: At this time of night? All the doors will be locked. I don't think I can.

Jos.: A little bread? Or milk? My wife is so weak and tired.

Tim: Milk! Perhaps one of the goats will give some.

(Both exit. RACHEL and REBECCA enter).

Reb: I thought I heard a baby crying.

Rachel: Me too. You don't think that lady's had her baby already, do you?

Reb: Let's go and see.

(Exit. SAMUEL, SIMON and DAVID enter).

Sam.: It's even brighter now. How strange it is.

Simon: Look! There are people over there in the stables.

David: Rachel and Rebecca are there. Let's go and see what's happening.

(Exit. HANNAH and ELIZABETH enter).

Eliz: What's happening? I heard noises and it's so light out here.

Hannah: I don't know. But look, the others are over there, in the stable. Let's go and see.

(Exit. We can hear them off, laughing and talking, admiring the baby. INNKEEPER enters).

Innk: Whatever is going on? How is anyone expected to sleep? Oi! You lot! What's all the noise about?

(ELIZABETH and HANNAH run in).

Eliz: Oh Father, you'll never guess!

Hannah: He's so sweet!

Innk: Who's so sweet? What are you talking about?

Eliz: It's the lady, father. She's had her baby!

Innk: She's what?

Hannah: In the stable.

Innk: In MY stable?

Eliz: Well, yes. But it's all right.

Innk: Had a baby? In my stable? In the middle of the night?

(The other CHILDREN enter, talking excitedly. Suddenly there is a shout, from the HOUSEKEEPER offstage).

Hskpr: Whatever's all that noise? People here are trying to sleep!

Innk: I knew there'd be trouble If SHE finds out that some strange lady's gone and had a baby in our stable I'll never hear the last of it!

(TIMOTHY enters, excitedly, with bowl of milk).

Tim: Look! Just look at all this.

Innk: Quietly, lad.

Sam: What? It's only milk.

Tim: But it's Phoebes milk! She's given more milk than she's ever given before! The lady in the stable's drunk as much as she wants and Phoebe's still got more!

Reb: How strange! Did you give Phoebe extra food last night?

Tim: No! It's just amazing. I can't understand it.

Rachel: Well, perhaps the mistress won't want her slaughtered now. Not if she's giving lots of milk.

Tim: Oh the mistress won't believe me. She'll just think it's some sort of trick.

Sam: And anyway, once she's made up her mind, she won't change it.

Simon: Look! Who's this coming?

Innk: Oh dear! Not more trouble. I think I may as well give up hope of getting any sleep tonight.

(SHEPHERDS enter).

Shep. 1: Is this the place then?

Shep. 2: It must be. Look, the star's right overhead now.

Shep. 3: And there's all these people!

Innk: Excuse me. Are you looking for someone?

Shep. 1: We certainly are! And I think we've nearly found him, haven't we?

Innk: What? Who do you mean?

Shep. 2: The king. The baby king. We were told he'd be here.

Innk: King! I'm sorry but this is just a simple inn - and we are just ordinary people. We've no king here.

Shep. 3: But the star?

Innk: Yes, it's odd, isn't it? But no king. Sorry.

(SHEPHERDS start to leave).

Eliz: But there is a baby!

(They stop).

Hannah: Yes, there is a baby. He's just been born in the stable. But I don't think he's a king.

Shep. 1: Will you show us?

Eliz: Yes, it's just over here. But don't wake him.

MUSIC 6 - DON'T WAKE THE BABY

*Don't wake the baby asleep on the straw,
His mother beside him, the beasts at the door,
He's lying so sweetly asleep in the manger,
Let him rest, away from all danger.*

*Don't wake the baby, they say he's the one
Who'll shine in his splendour like moon and like sun,
Though born in the darkness with no celebrations,
He'll be king, one day, of all nations.*

*Don't wake the baby, though night's turned to day,
The star shining brightly has shown us the way,
His life may bring trouble and danger and worry,
But for now, let him sleep, there's no hurry.*

*Don't wake the baby, they say he's a king,
Whoever he is we'll be happy and sing,
And maybe one day we will say we were able
To greet the babe in the stable.*

(Exit ELIZABETH, HANNAH and SHEPHERDS. As the song ends, the chorus of RECRUITS enters, bedraggled and obviously lost. ELIZABETH and HANNAH re-enter during the following scene).

Rec.1: Oh thank goodness! People!

Rec.2: Civilisation!

Rec.3: Is there anywhere here we can get a cup of tea?

Innk: Cup of tea! It's the middle of the night, the inn's full up, some strange lady's just gone and had a baby in my stable, and now a mob of exhausted foreigners turns up asking for cups of tea! I don't believe it!

Rec.3: Well, is there?

Innk: Who are you all? You're not from round here, are you?

Rec.1: New recruits for the Roman army. We've just arrived and are on our way to the camp at Bethlehem.

Rec.2: But we seem to have got lost.

Innk: No. You're going the right way now. This is the last inn on the road in to the town.

Rec.3: Well, thank goodness! We seem to have been wandering round these hills

for hours.

Eliz: Well, I might as well make some tea. I think we could all do with it.

Hannah: Yes, I'll help you. It's been quite a night.

Innk: That poor lady! She thought she'd found somewhere quiet to have her baby, and look at it!

Rec. 1: A new baby, you say? Well, we ought to be celebrating then.

Rec. 3: That's right. Fetch the tea, girls!

MUSIC 6a - DON'T WAKE THE BABY [REPRISE]

SCENE 4 Dawn in the courtyard.

(Cock crows. Recruits are curled up asleep all over the place. Lights up gradually. HOUSEKEEPER enters, sharpening a large knife).

Hskpr: Boy! Where are you? It's dawn. Is that old goat in her stable?

(TIMOTHY enters, followed by the other children).

Tim: Oh please! Please don't kill Phoebe! She's given so much milk this morning. Please don't!

Hskpr: What are you snivelling about?

Sam: It's true! She's given loads of milk!

Hskpr: Rubbish! Don't think I'm going to listen to that sort of nonsense. I know you kids and your tricks.

Tim: Please! Please don't! She's the best goat of all of them!

Hskpr: Sentimental nonsense! Out of my way!

(She exits, brandishing knife. The CHILDREN stand in shocked silence. TIMOTHY covers his face with his hands. Suddenly there is a scream from the HOUSEKEEPER from offstage).

Hskpr: Ah! Get off! Leave me alone, you beast! Ah!

Eliz: Whatever's happening? Surely Phoebe hasn't attacked her?

Simon: Phoebe wouldn't attack even HER!

David: But in any case Phoebe's in with the lady and her baby, isn't she? Didn't you move her?

Tim: Yes, I did. And the mistress will have gone straight into Phoebe's old pen!

Rebecca: With the donkey!

Rachel: And remember what the man said about his donkey?

Hannah: Not the easiest of animals!

(More screams from the HOUSEKEEPER. Perhaps a donkey braying?).

Hskpr: Let me go. Get off, you brute!

Tim: In fact, it sounds to me like quite a difficult donkey!

MUSIC 7 - A DIFFICULT DONKEY

*She's a difficult donkey there isn't a doubt,
Wherever you leave her she always gets out,
She won't stay in pens or in fields where she's put,
And with no provocation she'll tread on your foot,
She's nasty and vicious,
She's beastly and mean,
She leaves a disaster
Wherever she's been,
They're trying to sell her,
But nobody's keen,
She's a difficult, difficult donkey!*

*She's a difficult donkey whatever they say,
She knocks people over and gallops away,
She bucks and she bites and she isn't too nice,
And before going near her you ought to think twice,
She's rotten and nasty,
She'll bite and she'll kick,
She's stubborn and awkward,
And stupid and thick,
She makes everybody
Who sees her quite sick,
She's a difficult, difficult donkey!*

*She's a difficult donkey we have to admit,
But we'd also confess that we like her a bit,
She's saved poor old Phoebe from ending up stew,
And she's sorted our nasty old mistress out too,*

*She's pretty and lovely,
She's clever and bright,
She's given the mistress
A terrible fright,
And she's quite a success,
And a hero tonight,
Although she's a difficult donkey!*

(ROMAN SOLDIERS enter).

Comm: Oh, so there you are! You lot should have been in Bethlehem hours ago!

Rec. 1: Well we got lost.

Comm: Got lost! What kind of soldiers are you going to make? Got lost, indeed!

Rom. 1: I wonder if they do breakfasts here?

Eliz: I don't think we'd be able to find enough for all of you, Sir. We're full to overflowing already.

Innk: Yes, we're going to be hard pushed to find enough breakfast for the guests we've got. You, boy! Have you collected the eggs yet?

Tim: No, I'll go and look now. There's plenty of milk though!

Boys: We'll come and help.

(Exit 4 BOYS. SHEPHERDS enter from the stable).

Shep. 1: We must go now. We left our sheep last night and must get back to them.

Shep. 2: Thank you for your hospitality.

Shep. 3: And take care of that baby king!

Innk: Well, you may think he's a king but it all seems a bit unlikely to me.

(BOYS re-enter).

Tim: Just look at this! There are loads of eggs!

Sam: The hens must have been laying all night!

Simon: There'll be enough for everyone to have a boiled egg!

Shep. 1: You see! Now tell me that baby's not a king.

Innk: You think he's got something to do with the eggs?

Shep. 2: Certainly. Something very special has happened here tonight.

David: There was all that milk too!

Innk: It's certainly odd.

Shep. 3: And there was the strange bright star which led us here.

Shep. 1: We have no doubts. We were told quite definitely that a baby king would

be born here tonight.

Shep. 2: Quite definitely.

Shep. 3: Absolutely certainly.

Innk: Oh well, you'd better stay for breakfast.

Comm: Wait a minute. You're telling me that you've got a king here. King of what?

Shep. 1: King of the Jewish people, Sir.

Shep. 2: And much more.

Comm: Caesar's not going to like that a lot.

Shep. 3: He's only a baby, Sir. He won't harm Caesar. But he will bring great changes.

Shep. 1: He's no ordinary king, you see.

Comm: Oh well, I suppose that'll be all right then. So long as he's registered for tax. I suppose they have got a permit?

Innk: I really think that's the last thing on their minds at the moment. But I think we should be glad of his birth whoever he is.

Eliz: Yes, that poor couple have no family and friends around to celebrate with.

Hannah: So let's have a celebration breakfast!

Eliz: To welcome the baby king!

Tim: With milk and eggs all round!

(Shouts off - from the HOUSEKEEPER again).

Hskpr: Help! Leave me alone, you beast! Let me out!

Sam: Oh, we'd forgotten about her. Hadn't we better rescue her?

Innk: Rescue her?

Simon: Well yes. You see, the donkey's got her pinned up against the stable wall and won't let her out.

Innk: WHAT? I'd better go and see.

David: Watch out for that donkey!

Comm: Right then you lot! Smarten yourselves up a bit. It's not every day we get invited to a party.

Reb : It would be good to have some music.

Comm: Music, eh? You do realise that you'd need a permit for that, I take it?

Rachel: Whatever do you mean?

Comm:A music permit. I mean we can't have people just striking up tunes wherever and whenever they fancy it. The noise would be dreadful!

All: Oh do shut up!

(INNKEEPER and HOUSEKEEPER re-enter. MUSICIANS enter. Dance?).

MUSIC 8 - THE START OF SOMETHING SPECIAL

All: *There's the start of something special in the air,
And a strange new star in the sky,
One day we'll declare our delight that we were there,
And perhaps they will ask us why.
We will say we saw
A new baby on the straw,
And a strange new star in the sky,
And the baby's birth
Will forever change the earth,
And the angels told us why.*

*There's the start of something special in the air,
And a strange new star in the sky,
There's a baby born in the cold new light of dawn,
We have heard his tiny cry.
So today we sing
That the baby is a king
And a strange new star in the sky
Casts a shining light
All across the world tonight,
And this song is our reply.*

CURTAIN

