

The Adventures of Christopher

A Ballet For Children

by

Paul F. Page

(Fall 1967—Spring 1968)

The Cast: The characters are all children between six and ten years of age.

- Christopher: eight years old; average eight-year-old height or just slightly smaller
- Anne: eight years old; a bit shorter than Christopher (of course)
- The Prince: ten years old; slightly taller and more commanding than the rest
- William: the family watchdog
- The Children: boys and girls between six and ten (about 20 in number) who often dance in pairs

Costumes:

- All are dressed in clothes suitable for dancing, but also in the country style of plaids and bright colors. The main emphasis should be on the colors.
- William — improvise (he's a dog!)
- The Prince: in white

Setting: Christopher lives in the middle of a huge forest (could there be any other kind? in a non-descript place/country. His house has two stories and a slanted roof—for the snow season. He lives with his parents and William, a large watchdog. The entire house is made of light-colored rock and the roof is black shingles. It is six in the morning, early Spring, and Christopher is standing at the window, determined to execute the plan he had devised the previous evening: spend the entire day with his friends in the forest celebrating youth and freedom.

Story:

- PROLOGUE—The ballet opens with a group of children singing the prologue. This could be a separate chorus or might be the dancers themselves. At any rate, they should be ABLE TO SING. This section is optional and may be deleted if necessary (i.e. the “singers can't sing!”) or may be played instrumentally. The number is to be performed in a very moderate tempo, fading in speed and volume at the end until it is just barely a whisper as THE ESCAPE begins. As we hear the chorus fading into a haze, Christopher appears at his window and THE ESCAPE is underway.
- THE ESCAPE—Christopher climbs quietly out his window on the second floor and proceeds to slip noiselessly down a lattice framework which is holding up a tree next to the house. He reaches the ground and looks around to make sure no

one has seen him, first to one side of the house and then to the other, finally satisfied that he is quite alone. He then heads for the front gate, moving very very slowly and quietly past William so as not to wake him. He holds his breath as he tiptoes by and then...relaxes as he has successfully gotten past the dog. He approaches the front gate and quietly pushes open the huge iron door and then he is free! The music concludes rapidly as Christopher prances into the forest beyond, rejoicing at his new-found and undiscovered freedom.

- **MARCH OF CHRISTOPHER**—Christopher is free at last and begins his journey with an exultant march through the forest, the sun shining silent beams through the tall trees and their warmth spreading a charming glow over the entire scene. After an exuberant start, Christopher suddenly slows down to a walk and the forest comes alive to play for him as he watches. After a brief thought about the sneaky way he left home, his walking becomes a wildly enthusiastic run, resolving finally into the original MARCH and then fading to a quiet finale.
- **QUIET INTERLUDE**—Christopher slows down to a lazy stroll through the forest in order to catch his breath.
- **PARADE OF THE CANDY CHILDREN**—Then, suddenly, Christopher stumbles across a clearing in the middle of the forest. As he approaches, he catches a glimpse of a group of children who are dancing there. He comes up very slowly and watches them from behind a tree. THEY are marching like little soldiers. As the parade continues, Christopher runs up and finally we see him slip into the group unnoticed and he continues to dance with them until the piece concludes.
- **CHRISTOPHER AND FRIENDS**—When the PARADE is over, all the children are very happy to see Christopher and they begin to exchange plans, wondering what they will do next. They finally embark on a wild game of tag which resolves into a game of building a huge man, pyramid fashion, with the children climbing on each other's shoulders. (Some of the children dance around them.) The little finale is left to the choreographer's comic imagination.
- **WALTZ**—The principal characters are Christopher and Anne. The others sit around in a circle and watch, reacting to their dancing. The beginning is extremely slow as the two are shy with each other, learning the step of this waltz, as it were, for the very first, halting time. Their shyness and embarrassment is quite obvious, but it does not stop them, either. Finally, they are able to find the $\frac{3}{4}$ meter of a waltz step, though they are very shaky in movement and certainly not too terribly graceful, either. At last they discover the flowing technique of a real waltz and begin to do a very beautiful waltz to the lyric tune of the music. The others look on with amusement and interest. And then Christopher and Anne break from their original step and begin a flowing $\frac{2}{4}$ meter dance which carries them all across the stage, gaining in excitement and speed until all the children are on their feet, joining in with great enthusiasm. The music and dance of

Christopher and Anne builds to a strong *fff* at which time the tempo returns to $\frac{3}{4}$ waltz meter. All the children join in and the stage is filled with beautiful, happy faces dancing in patterns around each other. At last, the music begins to fade and keeps doing so (*ad lib*) until all has quieted down; the children have drifted back to their original positions surrounding Christopher and Anne; and these two are once again found dancing alone, much slower than the preceding. Their beautiful harmony gradually disintegrates into the form it had been at the beginning of the WALTZ. Christopher and Anne separate and bow/curtsy to each other as the music fades.

- SLUMBER MELODY (romance)—After the GAME and the WALTZ, all are tired. It is midday and all find a place to lie down and rest for a bit. Christopher, asleep, imagines a Prince leading him through his dreams to a sparkling castle and through the beautiful gardens and hidden coves of that fantastic mansion. The Prince takes his hand and leads Christopher into a dreamland of mystical unreality. After a brief adventure, the dream vanishes and Christopher falls into a deep sleep. (Some of the Children may take part in this episode, too, if it is possible to accomplish this.)
- CHRISTOPHER GOES HOME—Christopher awakens suddenly, noticing that it is getting late and the sun has begun to sink. He waves goodbye to his friends and begins his trip home. It is beginning to get cold and he hurries as much as he can, startled here and there by the shadows. He is interrupted by a few pleasant thoughts about the fun he had this day, but that is shattered once again by the fact that it is late and he had better hurry. Just as he gets home, he stops for a moment at the gate and begins to be taken up with the beauty of his whole day, dancing happily in his delight. He marches like a soldier up to the front gate and swings it wide open, closing it behind him and dancing once again. William, watching the whole scene, is bewildered, but welcomes Christopher and “dances” with him. Christopher scrambles in through his second floor window and crumples, exhausted, on his bed.
- LULLABY PAVANE—(The dance here is very much characterized by the quiet, hymn-like music.) Christopher rises and pantomimes a very soft and quiet ballet, very formal, very slow, very graceful. This brings him to the finale at which time he motions the lights out and he fades into a haze as the music and lights grow softer and softer, pooling around him. We finally see Christopher climbing into bed and then...asleep.

Though the ballet is scored for performance with two pianos, it may effectively be performed with only the score from the First Piano part. The ballet is to be performed without intermission, curtains, or elaborate scenery.

If performed strictly as a concert piece, a resume of the story will be essential if the music is to be understood by the audience.

The Adventures Of Christopher was performed three times at Angelico Hall on the Dominican University campus in San Rafael, CA in December 1969 and January 1970 for the public and about 1500 school children who paid 50 cents each for admission. All of the proceeds were donated to a music scholarship fund at Dominican. Joan Edgerton Gabert's School of Classic Ballet in San Rafael provided the cast of children and Ms. Gabert directed and choreographed the production. The title role was performed by Melanie Radke. Bob Freitas played the Piano II score and I the Piano I score. In those days, sadly, we did not have adequate recording equipment and video tape had not yet been invented. Nor did we have the foresight to take still photos of the various performers and/or scenes. These performances were favorably reviewed in the Marin *Independent Journal*.

This engraving has not been altered in any way from the original score.

It is my hope that, after all these years, *The Adventures Of Christopher* might again take on life for anyone who discovers this music online. It has not been heard since 1970, forty-one years ago.

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