

The Wind in the Willows



music & lyrics: Stephen Kingsbury
book: Ben Sleep

Production Notes

Kingsbury
Creations

music production & publishing

Introduction

'The Wind in the Willows' is one of the best loved, classic children's novels of the twentieth century. In attempting to adapt this remarkable book, we were determined to adhere to the heart and soul of the tale - the importance of friendship. The Wind in the Willows is so much more than the shenanigans of Mr. Toad. Although he's an integral part of the plot, we did not want this to be a retelling of his adventures alone. Much of the difficulty in adapting the book lies in trying to weave together the many strands that give the book depth and vitality. Although not every sub-plot is addressed, we have worked hard to ensure that much of the original tale is left intact, and it was for this reason that we included minor characters such as the Sea Rat, as we believe their individual parts have a significant bearing upon the whole.

Although intended for children, we did not want this to be a patronising production. We feel the finished article is one that will stretch our younger performers, whilst simultaneously appealing to a much wider group, from dramatic societies to stage schools. The intention is for it to work on many levels - to appeal to the younger children in performance (and to encourage them to visit the novel itself), and to the potential adult audience; much like the book itself.

To describe this production as a musical might be a little misleading, it seems to have evolved far more into a play with music, something which feels all the more appropriate for The Wind in the Willows. The music encompasses a huge variety of styles with an occasional nod to the period, and the dialogue attempts to remain faithful (where possible) to that of the novel.

We have been helped along the way by many people; from the children who helped to record our initial song extracts, to the customers who were so keen to perform the piece that they started to rehearse it before it was finished, using wet-inked scripts and score! We are indebted to all for their support.

Gender Roles

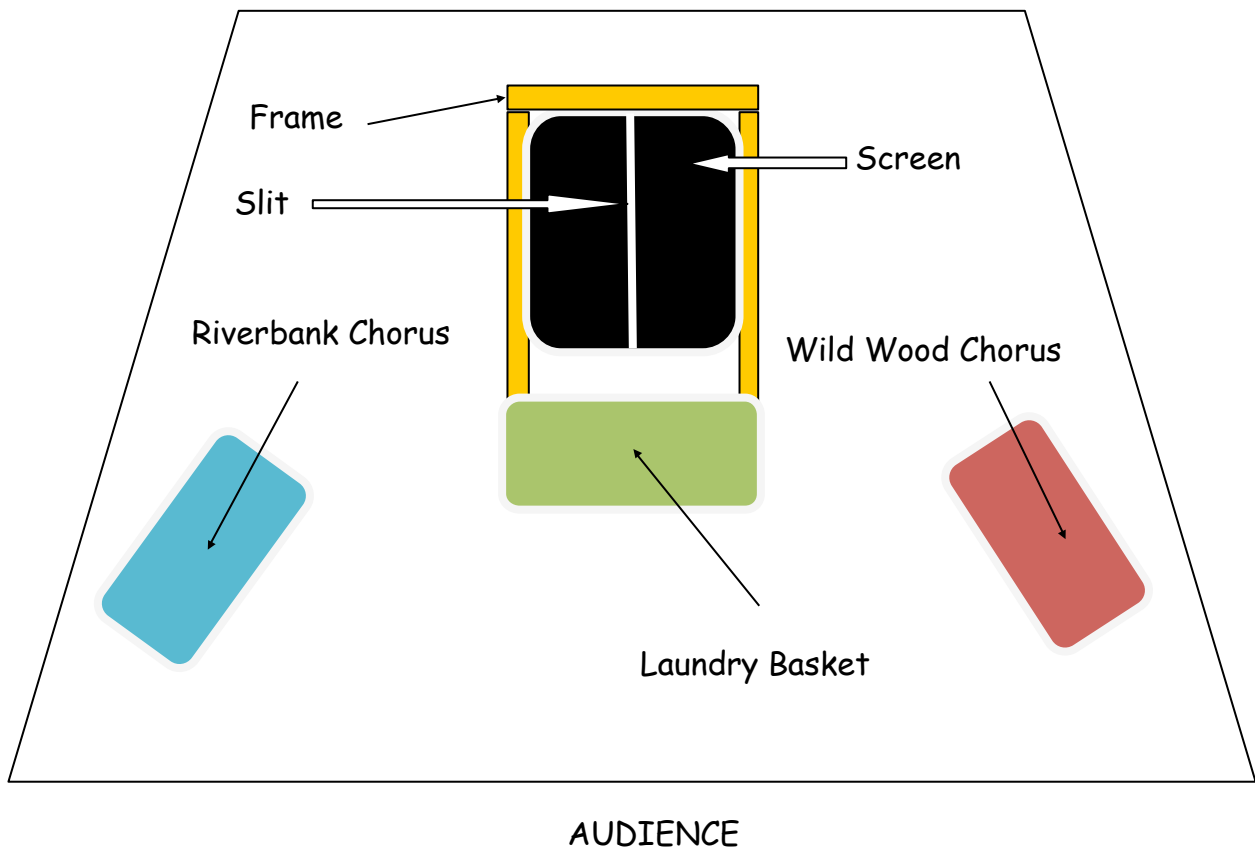
All parts are playable by either gender. We are sure that Mr. Grahame would have enthusiastically approved of an eccentric female Toad or belligerent Badger! Indeed, it may be fair to suggest that the message of friendship is even greater in a mixed cast. No doubt there could be some Twenty First Century male nurses too!

The Set

Ah, the big question - "how on earth do you stage 'The Wind in the Willows'?" This was a conundrum we pondered over for a long time before we finally felt we'd stumbled upon a solution. We desperately wanted to avoid badly painted sets, cumbersome entrances and exits and poor excuses for the many cars that Toad crashes. We felt simplicity was the answer. Therefore, the only thing that is needed for this production (excluding the numerous personal props for characters) is a laundry basket (preferably the biggest that can be found!) and a screen of black material that is placed behind the basket. It

should be slit up the middle to allow exits and entrances through it. If possible, and if it can be adequately supported, the back of the laundry basket can be removed to aid exits and entrances.

The suggestion is for the stage to be set out as below:



The entire cast would remain on stage for the vast majority of the performance. Characters, when not in the scene, remain sitting with their appropriate chorus. The Riverbankers (or 'Riverbank chorus') consist mainly of voles, otters, mice, rabbits and other cute furry animals. The Wild Wooders (or 'Wild Wood chorus') consist of Weasels, Stoats and Ferrets. As and when they are needed, they can either leap up and into the action, or use their place as a starting point to get somewhere else. Much of the action will take place downstage, in the space in front of the basket and between the two choruses. The idea is for the audiences' imagination to provide the settings and 'suspend their disbelief'. Everything that needs to be used can be sourced from the basket - picnics, weapons, costumes etc. Similarly, the basket itself is used for many different things: It becomes a cart, a car (numerous times!), a secret tunnel, a train, a boat and much more. The idea is to allude to something rather than provide it. Therefore, Toad + a steering wheel + a basket = a car. Alternatively, Toad meandering his way about the stage with just his steering wheel usually signifies Toad and his car out of control! We have also provided opportunities for the basket to contain material etc, which could be

used to evoke the Riverbank or the like. The idea is that the production comes from the basket, much as the tale comes from the book. The various ways in which the basket can be used will be described in more detail in the appropriate scene breakdowns.

Properties by Character and Scene

Unless otherwise stated, all props are taken from, and return to, the laundry basket.

Act 1

Scene One

Choruses	Green and blue material (The Riverbank)
Rat	Items for picnic - red and white checked tablecloth, items of food, candelabra, bottle of wine, napkins (all could be in a smaller basket). An oar/small pole to punt with when the basket becomes his boat.
Mole	A couple of items he mentions in basket - ginger beer, lemonade
Badger	A stick (<u>not taken from basket</u>). This is Badger's personal prop and remains with him throughout the show.

Scene Two

Toad	A harness for 'the Old Grey Mare'.
------	------------------------------------

Scene 3

Two Weasels	A steering wheel (<u>brought on separately from basket</u>) and kept with them whilst sitting in the Wild Wood chorus.
-------------	--

Scene 5

Toad	Various steering wheels (these can be taken from the basket or handed to him by members of the chorus). <u>Goggles (These can be part of Toad's costume)</u>
Policeman	Notebook and pen (<u>personal prop - not from basket</u>)
Weasels 1 & 2	Steering wheel and old fashioned car horn.
The Clerk	Notebook and pen (<u>personal prop - not from basket</u>)

Act 2

Scene 1

Sea Rat	Pole with handkerchief a la Dick Whittington (<u>personal prop</u>)
Swallows	A map
Rat	A small suitcase

Scene 2

Gaoler's Daughter	A piece of rope, a piece of material (a handkerchief or such like)
-------------------	--

Scene 3

Pursuers	Pistols (<u>Personal props</u>)
Riverbank Chorus	A large piece of black material for the tunnel (either taken from the basket or brought on at the top of the act).

Scene 4

Stoat 1 A rifle
Rat, Mole, Toad, Various weapons: pistols, swords, belts etc
Badger

Scene 5

Weasels Various bottles, party ribbons, hats etc. These can either be hidden personal props, or taken from the basket during the **chase scene** in Act 2.

Explanation of Stage Directions

We hope that the majority of stage directions are self explanatory, but beneath are some suggestions for those that may not seem so clear. We would encourage all directors to ignore stage directions at any point they please!

Act 1

Scene 1

Stage Direction: 'RIVERBANKERS appear L+R and pull 'River and Bank' from the basket downstage L+R'

Explanation: Blue and green material can be concealed in the laundry basket, and unravelled by one (or both) choruses, to give the impression of the RIVERBANK.

Scene 2

Stage Direction: 'MOLE and RAT attach the HORSE to the basket'

Explanation: The 'Horse' can be attached to some form of harness, a pair of reins or the like, which are then held by Mole/Rat/Toad as they sit on the laundry basket (which has in turn become the cart).

Scene 3

Stage Direction: Music grinds to a halt then builds to crash as they are thrown from the caravan by the speeding motor car that crashes through the screen from behind them. As the dust settles we see TOAD sitting transfixed...he begins slowly...

Explanation: The 'speeding motor car' should be one of the Wild Wood chorus, who career about the stage holding a steering wheel. They should cause the 'crash' by jumping on to the laundry basket from behind and scattering the friends.

Scene 5

Stage Direction: 'TOAD 'drives' around the stage recklessly'

Explanation From the top of the song, Toad should be holding a steering wheel - each subsequent reference to a 'new' or different coloured car refers to steering wheels that Toad brings on. His 'driving' is him careering

around the stage. Toad should feel free to use the laundry basket as his car too.

Stage Direction: 'TOAD 'crashes' again'

Explanation The 'crashes' should involve Toad careering into various people - preferably using as many of the chorus as possible!

Stage Direction: 'TOAD crashes again. During the next verse a bossy, matronly NURSE takes TOAD hobbling to the basket, this time doubling as a hospital bed.

Explanation Again, the 'bed' can be the laundry basket.

Act 2

Scene 2

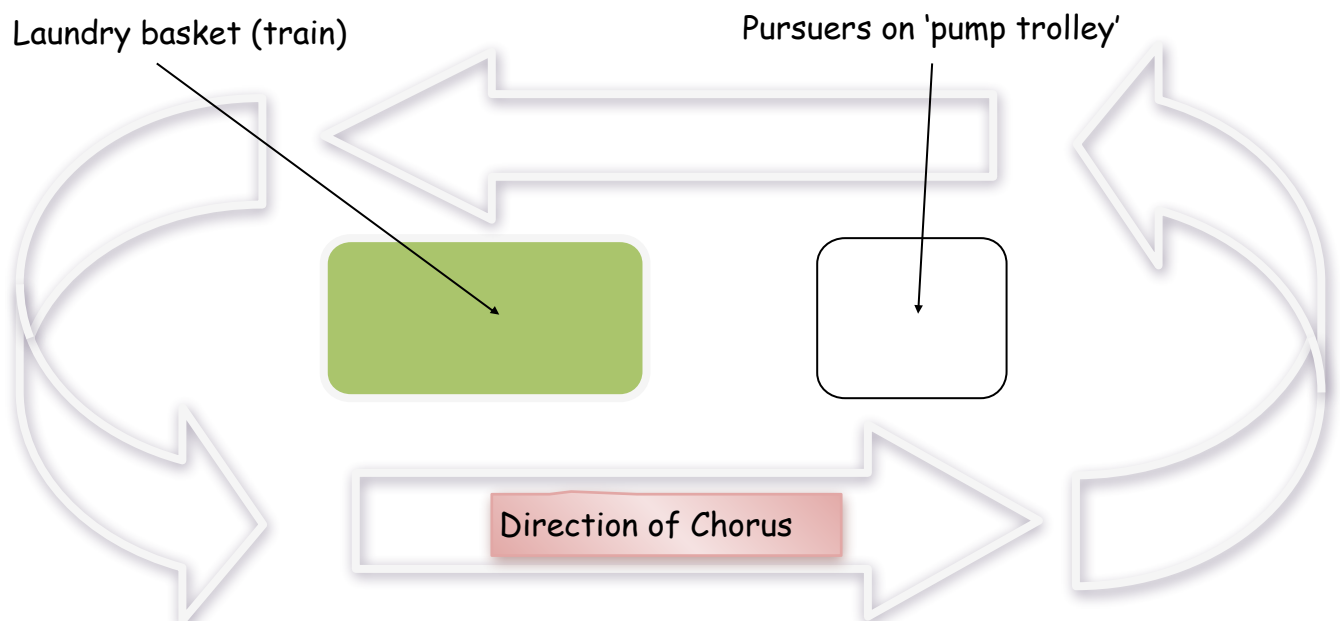
Stage Direction: 'TOAD cries in exaggerated sobs. We hear his sobs echoed in a higher pitch somewhere from behind the basket. TOAD stops - so do the higher pitched sobs. He looks around, and satisfied it was his imagination, begins weeping again. The higher pitched weeping begins again. He stops, the other stops.'

Explanation The Mouse should be concealed behind the basket from the top of Scene 2.

Scene 3

A general note on the chase scene:

The idea is to create the impression of speed using chorus members. As the basket remains still, the chorus should provide the sense of movement by travelling past the basket; this could be done quite effectively as illustrated below:



It may be possible to add more comic effect if the chorus were to carry things such as branches or puffs of steam, anything that adds to the drama!

Stage Direction: 'TOAD spots the 'Railway Station' and STATION CLERK (see production notes)'

Explanation We suggest that the basket is used in some way as a ticket office/ desk. There could be a sign (taken from the basket) that could hang on the screen.

Stage Direction: 'TOAD (suddenly better!) hops up onto the footplate with the ENGINE DRIVER. The music accelerates.'

Explanation Once again, the basket is used for the train.

Stage Direction: 'The POLICEMAN, PRISON GUARD and the STATION CLERK (the pursuers) appear. They are on their own pump trolley gaining on our hero!'

Explanation This 'pump trolley' should be mimed. The idea is to mimic the old dolly carts. If the characters stand facing each other, and each alternately bend their knees in time to the music, the effect should be perfect!

Stage Direction: The tunnel appears and, unseen, TOAD disappears through the screen and hides behind the basket. The ENGINE DRIVER and the pursuers exit.

Explanation The 'tunnel' should be a large piece of black cloth, carried past the front of the basket, at which point Toad (whilst behind) jumps behind the basket.

Costumes

Wherever possible, a mere hint of a costume is all that's required. Rather than give specific character costume notes, it's suffice to say that all can be equipped with minimal effort. The idea is to notice the instincts that are reflected in our own nature, so full on animal suits are not necessary! We would suggest the use of: animal ears (maybe on headbands for quick removal), tails, whiskers and the like. Riverbankers could wear natural colours - greens, browns etc, whilst Wild Wooders could wear black. The four main characters could have references to their characters: A waistcoat for Toad perhaps, a cricket cap for Ratty etc. It really is down to the director. Just remember that there are some quick changes, and a lot of movement!

Music and Sound Cues

The 19 tracks on the CD supplied with the Vocal Score contain the song backings, the incidental music and the sound effects (see details in the script). When the 'Chorus' are called upon in a song, this is, in effect the combined forces of the Riverbank and Wild Wood choruses.

Although the levels of each track on this CD have been carefully balanced, it is assumed that the sound technician will adjust the volume of each track as necessary during the performance. The exact cue for each track has been clearly marked in the script. The tracks all start 'on the nose' so there should be no delay if they are play/paused. The music has been carefully timed to fit with any dialogue but it is recommended that actors practice the timing of any dialogue that occurs over music. Details of exactly how the dialogue fits with the music can be found in the Vocal/Piano Score.

Songs

TITLE	VOCALISTS	VOCAL/PIANO SCORE PAGE
On the Riverbank	<i>The Riverbank & Wild Wood Choruses, Rat & Mole</i>	1
On the Riverbank -reprise	<i>The Riverbank & Wild Wood Choruses</i>	15
Life on the Open Road	<i>Rat, Mole, Toad, Horse, Passers-by & Chorus</i>	19
In the Wild Wood	<i>Incidental</i>	34
Who's There?	<i>Mole & Wild Wooders</i>	35
Badger's Home	<i>Incidental</i>	52
Indestructible Toad	<i>Toad, Policeman, Nurse & Chorus</i>	54
You Exasperating Rogue!	<i>Badger</i>	69
On the Road Again!	<i>Toad & Chorus</i>	71
The End Now for Certain	<i>Chorus</i>	74
Where I Belong	<i>Sea Rat & Rat</i>	76
Sad and Miserable Toad	<i>Toad</i>	87
Toad's Adventure	<i>Toad, Prison Guard, Station Clerk, Policeman, Engine Driver & Chorus</i>	88
Stoat Patrol	<i>The Stoats</i>	114

Party Animals	<i>The Weasels, Toad & Chorus</i>	118
The Wide World	<i>Incidental</i>	132
Now We Can Share	<i>Company</i>	133

A Final Note From the Writers...

Thank you for choosing to produce *The Wind in the Willows*. The piece was written to be fun and challenging for performers and entertaining for audiences. We hope it succeeds in both departments! Please contact us via the publisher - **Kingsbury Creations** - if you have any queries regarding the show, we will be glad to help.

Best wishes!

Stephen Kingsbury and Ben Sleep