

PLAYS FOR
New Audiences

A Division of Children's Theatre Company

Great Expectations

by Barbara Field

Based on the book by Charles Dickens

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The Cast originally consisted of six men, four women, two boys and one girl, and doubled as follows:

Young Pip*
Young Herbert/ Stable Boy
Young Estella/ Barmaid
Adult Pip**/ Soldier
Herbert Pocket/ Lieutenant/ Tailor
Wemmick/ Pumblechook/ Bentley Drummle
Jaggers/ Compeyson***/ Clergyman
Joe Gargery/ Aged Parent/ Porter/ Prison Doctor
Magwitch/ A Pocket
Miss Havisham/ Miss Skiffins
Estella
Bidley/ Clara Barley/ A Pocket
Mrs. Joe Gargery/ Molly/ A Pocket

* Young Pip's last scene takes place when he is told that he must apprentice himself to Joe.

**Adult Pip's first scene is at the Three Jolly Bargemen.

*** The actor playing Jaggers can double as Compeyson, except for a few non-speaking cross-overs in Act II. Since the character is heavily muffled, other actors may take turns at Compeyson during these scenes.

ABOUT THE NARRATION: The premise of this adaptation is that all of the actors tell the story; it is a shared effort in storytelling. Narration is assigned at the director's discretion. Narrating actors may be solitary and removed, may be part of the scene, or may be narrating while assisting in a scene change.

One interesting choice is to let narration about a particular character be spoken by the actor playing that role. For example, another member of the company can speak the line "The next morning early, after fortifying themselves with..." Pip might take the line, "Pip was puzzled."

THERE ARE OVER FIFTY SCENES IN THIS ADAPTAION. THE SET IS A NEUTRAL PLATFORM, WITH UPSTAGE SCAFFOLDING. THIS SCAFFOLDING PERFORMS SEVERAL FUNCTIONS:

1. A (MOVABLE) PART OF IT MUST BECOME MISS HAVISHAM'S IRON GARDEN GATE, ALLOWING ENTRANCES FROM BEHIND THE SCAFFOLDING ONTO THE STAGE.
2. IT MUST CONTAIN A COUPLE OF FUNCTIONING PROP SHELVES FOR THE ACTORS TO USE.
3. IF POSSIBLE, THE SCAFFOLDING SHOULD CONTAIN AN UPPER LEVEL, WITH VISIBLE STAIRS.

THERE SHOULD ALSO BE ONE OR TWO SMALLISH WAGONS, WHICH CAN BE PRESET OFFSTAGE WITH THE FEW BIG SET-PIECES (MISS HAVISHAM'S TABLE WITH THE BRIDE CAKE, FOR INSTANCE), THEN WHEELED ONSTAGE EITHER BY ACTORS OR MECHANICALLY. CHAIRS CAN BE HUNG ON PEGS AT THE SIDES OF THE STAGE OR ON THE SCAFFOLDING. IN ANY CASE, THE FURNITURE USED SHOULD BE AS SPARE AS POSSIBLE, AND SHOULD BE MANIPULATED RAPIDLY.

THE THAMES RIVER SCENES HAVE BEEN WRITTEN WITH A LARGE MAP OF THE THAMES ESTUARY IN MIND--TO BE USED ON THE FLOOR IF THE STAGE IS RAKED. MODEL BOATS MANIPULATED BY ACTORS CAN TRAVEL ON THE MAP. THE ACTORS PROVIDE, IN EFFECT, A KIND OF VOICE-OVER FOR THE ACTION.

WITH ONE OR TWO OBVIOUS EXCEPTIONS, COSTUME CHANGES SHOULD BE MINIMAL.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR MOST SOUND EFFECTS SHOULD ALSO BELONG TO THE ACTING COMPANY, WHO CAN RING ALL THE BELLS, MAKE THE RURAL SOUNDS, ETC., IN VIEW OF THE AUDIENCE.

THE PREMISE ON WHICH THIS ADAPTATION STANDS IS THAT SIMPLE, HONEST STORYTELLING AND OPEN USE OF THE STAGE AS A STAGE WILL BE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN ANY LITERAL-MINDED OR REALISTIC SET.

The entire company is assemble onstage, except for the actor playing MAGWITCH, who is already hiding behind the tombstone.

NARRATION His family name being Pirrip and his own name being Philip, in the beginning the boy could make of both names nothing longer than ... Pip.

So he called himself Pip,

And came to be called Pip.

The family name, Pirrip, he had on the authority of a certain tombstone, his father's.

And on the authority of his older sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery,

Who was married to the town blacksmith.

They lived in the marsh country of Kent, where the Thames ran down to the sea.

In that dark, flat wilderness was a village churchyard where, one day, Pip found his parents.

Churchyard. A few tombstones. Pip kneels in front of one of them, reads haltingly.

PIP "Philip Pirrip, late of this parish." (PAUSE) "Also Georgiana, wife of the above..."

NARRATION The boy, a small bundle of shivers, began to cry, when—

MAGWITCH pops up from behind a tombstone.

MAGWITCH Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat!

PIP Oh don't, sir!

MAGWITCH Tell us your name quick, then!

PIP Pip, sir.

MAGWITCH lifts him abruptly, sets him atop the stone, searches him. He finds a crust of bread, which he gnaws.

MAGWITCH Lookee here, then--where's your mother?

PIP There, sir. (*Magwitch starts.*) There--"Also Georgiana" . That's my mother.

MAGWITCH Hah. And that's your father, alonger your mother?

PIP Yes, sir. "Late of this parish."

MAGWITCH Hah. And who d'ye live with now, supposin' I kindly let you live, which I haven't made up my mind about?

PIP My sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery. She's wife to the blacksmith.

MAGWITCH Blacksmith, eh? (*he looks down at his leg irons.*) Lookee here: the question being whether or not you're to be let live--you know what a file is?

PIP Yes, sir.

MAGWITCH And you know what wittles is?

PIP Wittles is food, sir.

MAGWITCH You bring me a file and you bring me some wittles, or I'll have your heart and liver out. Bring 'em tomorrow at dawn--and don't say a word about having seen me--and I'll let you live. (PIP NODS) But mind, I'm not alone, if you're thinking that. No indeed, there's a young man hid with me, in comparison with which young man I am an angel. So you must do as I tell you.

PIP Yes, sir.

MAGWITCH (*pulls out a little bible.*) Swear--say "Lord strike me dead if I don't."

PIP "Lord strike me dead if I don't."

MAGWITCH gives him a dismissing nod. The boy backs away, then bolts. MAGWITCH huddles by the tombstone.

THE FORGE KITCHEN

NARRATION Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, was more than twenty years older than the boy.

She had established a great reputation as a foster parent, because she had brought the boy up by hand. (*as pip races in, she slaps him.*)

She was neither a good-looking woman, nor a cheerful one. (*Joe steps in to protect pip.*)

Pip had the impression that she must have made Joe Gargery marry her by hand, too. (*she slap's Joe, as well.*)

MRS. JOE Where've you been, young monkey? I'm worn away with fret and fright over you.

PIP I've only been to the churchyard.

MRS. JOE Churchyard! If it weren't for me you'd have been in the churchyard long ago. Bad enough being a blacksmith's wife, and him a Gargery, without being your mother as well. You'll drive me to the churchyard one of these days, between the two of you.

As she talks, she butters a slice of bread, hands it to Pip with another slap. He takes a bite, then when she isn't looking, he hides the rest in his pocket. Joe notices, however. Mrs. Joe turns to Pip.

MRS. JOE Where's your bread? Did you swallow it whole? This boy has the manners of a swine!

JOE Oh no, my dear, I don't think he—

MRS. JOE Don't my dear me! I'm not your dear. (*she hands pip a slate, some chalk.*)

NARRATION Pip felt little tenderness of conscience toward his sister.

But Joe he loved. (*Joe watches pip writing laboriously on the slate.*)

JOE I say, Pip, old chap, what a scholar you are!

PIP I'd like to be. (*he writes.*) How do you spell Gargery?

JOE I don't spell it at all.

PIP But supposing you did?

JOE It cannot be supposed--though I am oncommon fond of reading.

PIP Are you, Joe? I didn't know that.

JOE Oncommon--give me a good book and I ask nothin' better.

PIP (*pause*) Did you ever go to school?

JOE My father, he were given to drink, Pip; and whenever he were overtook with drink, he'd beat my mother and me, most unmerciful. We ran away a time or two, and my mother would find a job. "Joe," she'd say, "now you shall have some schooling, please God." And so I'd start school. But my father was such a good-hearted man, he couldn't bear to live without us, so he'd hunt us down and drag us home. Then he'd beat us up again to show how he'd missed us. Which you see, Pip, were a serious drawback to my learning. (*Mrs. Joe takes pip's slate away.*)

MRS. JOE Time for bed, boy. (*she gives him a slap for good measure.*)

JOE Time for bed, Pip, old chap. (*whispers*) Your sister is much given to government, which I meantersay the government of you and myself. (*he hugs pip*)

There is a distant boom of a cannon.

MRS. JOE Hark, the guns.

JOE Ay. It must be another convict off, eh?

PIP Off?

MRS. JOE Escaped, escaped.

PIP Please, Joe, where's the shooting come from?

MRS. JOE Ask no questions, you'll be told no lies.

JOE It comes from the Hulks, Pip, old chap.

PIP Please, Joe, what's the Hulks?

MRS. JOE This boy! Answer one question and he'll ask a dozen more!

JOE Hulks is prison ships.

PIP And please, Joe—

MRS. JOE No more! Time for bed! Bed! Bed! Bed!

NARRATION Conscience is a dreadful thing when it accuses a boy.

Pip labored with the thought that he was to become a thief the next morning ...

Which was Christmas Day. (*the cannon booms.*)

Pip scarcely slept that night.

When pale dawn came he crept into the forge where he stole a file, and thence into the pantry where he stole a loaf of bread,

Some brandy,

And a beautiful, round firm pork pie.

As he ran toward the marshes, the mist, the wind, the very cattle in the field seemed to accuse him.

Stop thief! Stop that boy!

The churchyard. Pip runs toward the convict, whose back is to Pip. The man turns at Pip's whistle – but it is not the same man! Both gasp, then the man runs off. Pip empties his pockets, then Magwitch appears. He grabs the brandy.

MAGWITCH What's in the bottle, boy?

PIP Brandy.

Magwitch stuffs the food into his mouth. He shivers as he eats.

PIP I think you've caught a chill, sir.

MAGWITCH I 'm much of your opinion, boy. *(he pauses, listens)* You brought no one with you? *(pip shakes his head.)* I believe you. You'd be a mean young hound if you could help hunt down a wretched warmint like me, eh?

PIP *(pip watches him eat.)* I'm glad you enjoy your food, sir.

MAGWITCH Thankee, boy, I do.

PIP But I'm afraid you haven't left much for him.

MAGWITCH Who's him?

PIP That young man you spoke of, who's with you.

MAGWITCH Oh, him. *(he grins)* He don't want no wittles.

PIP He looked as if he did –

MAGWITCH --Looked? When? *(he rises.)*

PIP Just now.

MAGWITCH --Where?!

PIP Right here, a few minutes ago. I thought it was you-- he wore gray, like you, and he wore...he had the same reason for wanting a file. He ran away.

MAGWITCH Did he have a scar on his face?

PIP *(nods)* Here.

MAGWITCH Give us that file, boy. *(Magwitch starts to file his leg irons)* And then ye'd best go--they'll be missing you! *(pip nods, then runs off.)*

NARRATION As Pip ran home, he could still hear the file sawing away at the convict's fetters.

He fully expected to find a constable waiting to arrest him when he got home.

But there was only Mrs. Joe, readying the house for Christmas dinner.

END OF PREVIEW. PURCHASE PERUSAL FOR FULL SCRIPT

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