

Playstage

Junior

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DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW



The story behind the famous Christmas song 'Jingle Bells'.

Written by
Andrew Beattie

DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW: THE STORY OF 'JINGLE BELLS'

Background to the Play and the Carol

These notes could appear in the programme or could be given (in an abbreviated form) by an announcer before the play starts.

Jingle Bells was written by church minister James Lord Pierpont (1822–1893) and published under the title *One Horse Open Sleigh* in the autumn of 1857. It is an unsettled question where and when Pierpont originally composed *Jingle Bells*: both Medford, a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts, and Savannah, Georgia, claim that the song was composed there. There is also a dispute about the purpose of its composition, with some suggesting that it was originally written to be sung by a Sunday school choir at Thanksgiving. However, *Dashing Through the Snow* assumes that the song was written by Pierpont at the Simpson Tavern in Medford and was inspired by the town's popular annual Christmas sleigh races – a legend supported to this day by the town's historical association, who have erected a plaque outside the Simpson Tavern recounting the story. It must be noted that the play's central narrative – involving the proposed cancelling of the races – has been invented for dramatic purposes, and there is no suggestion that this ever happened.

Setting

Time: Christmas 1856

Place: Medford, Massachusetts, USA

DASHING THROUGH THE SNOW: THE STORY OF 'JINGLE BELLS'

CAST

Boys:

JACK

CALEB

SCOTT

THOMAS

Girls:

MARCIE

STEPHANIE

LAUREN

BARBARA

JAMES PIERPONT, a church minister

Running time approximately 20 minutes

9 speaking parts.

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SCENE ONE

The Streets of Medford

We open on an outdoor scene: the children of Medford are excited by the year's first snowfall. A group of four BOYS and four GIRLS gather outside the town's Simpson Tavern.

JACK

Is it happening?

MARCIE

Yes...it really is...

CALEB

Snow! At last!

STEPHANIE

Oh, tell us we're not dreaming, Jack!

JACK

No. This is no dream, Stephanie!

CALEB

This is the real deal!

LAUREN

And it's settling!

SCOTT

On the trees...on the gardens...

JACK

On the houses!

THOMAS

Jack's right! Our town has disappeared under a blanket of white!

BARBARA

(Rubbing hands together) I feel cold to my bones!

THOMAS

(Flapping his arms around himself) Me too!

STEPHANIE

But maybe that'll mean the snow won't melt!

LAUREN

Oh, I just can't believe that winter's finally here!

CALEB

And in the nick of time too! We can't have Christmas without snow! Not in Massachusetts!

(SCOTT is kneeling, as if examining the snow that has fallen on the road.)

JACK

What are you doing, Scott?

MARCIE

Scott's trying to find the road!

BARBARA

It's hidden under all that snow, Scott!

SCOTT

Quiet! I'm measuring!

(They gather round him; SCOTT lifts some "snow" in his hands)

SCOTT

Half an inch already! *(He looks up at the sky)* And the sky's not done yet.

CALEB

(Also looking at the sky) Not by a long chalk. Look how dark it is over there... *(Pointing)*

STEPHANIE

So that means...

THOMAS

(Jumping up and down and cheering) The races!

LAUREN

Pastor Pierpont always says you need at least two inches of snow on the road for the races to take place.

SCOTT

Well, I think there will be enough snow to hold them on Christmas Day this year!

BARBARA

Imagine. Church in the morning...then a huge turkey dinner...then the whole town out here, enjoying the races.

THOMAS

(As if on a horse-drawn sleigh, with a whip) Gee up! Gee up! *(Looking round)* My team's out in front! Everyone else is behind us!

JACK

Keep dreaming, Thomas! And you won't be out in front!

MARCIE

No. Everyone else will be in front of *you*! Same as they always are, every year!

CALEB

(Eyeing him craftily) Hey...Scott...why don't you check out the sky again? How much more snow do you think will fall?

(SCOTT gazes "expertly" up into the sky. As he does so, CALEB gathers some "snow" into a "ball", aims it at him...and throws.)

SCOTT

Hey!

CALEB

Direct hit!

BARBARA

That was a mean trick to play, Caleb!

(SCOTT is now gathering some “snow” into a “ball” – all of which has to be imagined, of course, through miming – and throws it at CALEB. Within moments a raucous snowball fight has broken out between all the children – who don’t notice the local priest, PASTOR PIERPONT, walking past. Inevitably, one of the snowballs hits him – and the children freeze.)

JACK

Pastor Pierpont!

CALEB

Sir, we –

(The PASTOR is brushing down his coat. Meanwhile, in the background, LAUREN is helping THOMAS – who has been hit hard by a snowball. She brushes down his coat and dries him off etc – this continues through the next exchange.)

MARCIE

It was the boys, Pastor Pierpont. They started it!

(Jeers and protests from the GIRLS.)