

Jubilation Mississippi

A One-Act
By
Stephen Bittrich

This version has been edited for high schools.

Jubilation Mississippi was first produced by The Drilling Company, Hamilton Clancy Artistic Director, in June of 2011 with the following cast:

McDean Dennis Gagomiros
Jim Darren Lipari
Charlie Stephen Bittrich
Stella Kendall Rileigh
Stranger Darren Lipari

The evening of one-acts was called *Happiness*, and the director of this piece was Katie McHugh.

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To contact the author, write to SBittrich@aol.com.

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Dennis Gagliardi (*McDean*) and Kendall Rileigh (*Stella*) in the original production of *Jubilation Mississippi* at The Drilling Company in New York City. Photos by Lee Wexler.

"JUBILATION, MISSISSIPPI"

BY STEPHEN BITTRICH

SETTING:

Jubilation, Mississippi. Although the play is set in the present, the feel of this sleepy little town is decidedly mid-1950's. Various settings -- a gas station, a roadside diner, a clearing in the woods, a taxi-cab. All these areas will be represented by minimal set and shifting pools of light. It should feel less like a black out between the

little scenes and more like a shift.
The colors should ideally be shades of
gray like an old black and white
television show.

AT RISE:

CHUCK MCDEAN enters the pool of light
down-left, followed by Jim, the local
mechanic and owner of "JIM'S GAS AND
AUTO REPAIR." JIM (and all of the
inhabitants we meet of Jubilation,
Mississippi) have a preternatural
tendency to smile or laugh...well, a
tendency towards jubilation.

MCDEAN

So can you fix it?

JIM

(Smiling)

Yes sir, I think I can, but I guess I won't really know the
full extent of to 'til I get up under the hood. Run her
through her paces.

MCDEAN

What's with the goofy grin, pal?

JIM

What?

MCDEAN

What's so funny about my car being dead?

JIM

Oh, she ain't dead. She's just ill.

MCDEAN

Listen, the sign says "Jim's Gas and Auto Repair." You got
a name tag that says Jim.

JIM

Yeah, that's me, Jim.

MCDEAN

And this is your place?

JIM

Yes sir.

MCDEAN

So I'm counting on you to fix my car. You know what you're doing right?

(Jim stifles a laugh)

MCDEAN (cont'd)

What's so funny?

JIM

Nothing. I'm just exultified ta be working on your car.

MCDEAN

Exultified. Fantastic. Jim, I suppose you're the only mechanic in this town, aren't you?

JIM

Oh yeah. No need for two mechanics here. Town's too small.

MCDEAN

Where can I get a bite to eat around here?

JIM

Charlie has a diner up the road a piece.

MCDEAN

And about how far is "a piece"?

JIM

You see up there where that sign says "arlie's iner"?

MCDEAN

Yeah...oh I get it. He's got some letters missing.

JIM

A "chuh" and a "duh."

MCDEAN

Okay then, Jim. I'll be at the diner. Call me when the car is ready.

JIM

Call you on the diner phone?

MCDEAN

No on the cell phone! On the number I gave you.

JIM

Oh, I thought that was yer home number!

MCDEAN

No, that's my cell...smiling again.

JIM

Smiling makes ya feel good.

MCDEAN

Okay, I'll take your word for it. Just call me on that number when you got an idea of what's going on with my car.

JIM

I'll take good care of her, sir.

(He chuckles and walks out of the light. McDean moves over to the pool of light for the diner center-right. He's looking at a folding map in his hand. As he sits he's greeted by CHARLIE himself, a large, jolly man sporting a big ole grin)

CHARLIE

Welcome to Charlie's Diner, sir.

MCDEAN

Huh? Oh thanks.

CHARLIE

I'm Charlie.

(McDean checks out his name tag)

MCDEAN

Hey, you found your "C."

(Charlie laughs heartily)

CHARLIE

I did, I did! I lost it offa that sign outside and foundt-it on ma name tag! Ha ha!

MCDEAN

All right then. All right.

CHARLIE

Mr. McDean, you are a laugh and a half!

MCDEAN

News travels fast around here. You already know my name.

CHARLIE

Oh, Jim jes called me and said you was on yer way over. Stella, your waitress, will be right over to take your order. Can I pour you some water?

MCDEAN

Yeah, hit me.

(Charlie pours water)

CHARLIE

Passing through?

MCDEAN

Yes, sir.

CHARLIE

Where from?

MCDEAN

Chicago.

CHARLIE

Oh boy, that's a big city indeed.

MCDEAN

Indeed.

CHARLIE

Well, enjoy your meal, Mr. McDean. Enjoy your water. Let me know if I can get anything for you.

MCDEAN

I will let you know, "Arlie."

(Charlie laughs and shakes his finger at McDean like he's a naughty boy. McDean pours over a map. He is reaching for his water, when STELLA arrives and knocks it over, spilling it partially on his shirt and lap)

MCDEAN (cont'd)
What the hell--?

STELLA
Oh! I'm sorry, sir. I'm sure sorry.

(McDean forgives her in an
instant. She is an
enchanted woman)

MCDEAN
That's all right.

STELLA
I'm Stella.

MCDEAN
Yes, you are.

STELLA
Passing through?

MCDEAN
Yep, from Chicago.

STELLA
Boy...

MCDEAN
It's a big city.

STELLA
I'll say. And far away from this place.

MCDEAN
Not so far.

STELLA
What's your name?

MCDEAN
Chuck...McDean. My friends call me McDean.

STELLA
Okay, that's what I'll call you.

MCDEAN
Stella, maybe you can help me out.

STELLA

I hope I can.

MCDEAN

Why isn't this town on the map?

STELLA

Oh, it's too small for any map.

MCDEAN

That right? And the town is actually called Jubilation like the sign?

STELLA

Yep, that's us. Just like on the sign. Home of Jubilation Springs.

MCDEAN

That's perfect.

STELLA

Perfect?

MCDEAN

Oh, it's just amazingly fortuitous, Stella, because I'm a reporter. Doing a story on the happiest places to live in America. I'm driving around the country and reporting it all on a blog for the newspaper I work for.

STELLA

Blog?

MCDEAN

Yeah, that's right. And I have been woefully remiss in my reporting thus far.

STELLA

I like how you talk.

MCDEAN

I like how you listen. I think I just found my first story. Is this a happy place, Stella?

(Beat, She doesn't answer.
Looks suddenly uncomfortable)

MCDEAN (cont'd)

(Listing--)

Jim at the auto repair, your boss, slap happy "Arlie," Mr. Kincade at the general store who sold me this map since my GPS is all wacky -- all happy as clams. Where's your Cheshire Cat grin?

(Charlie shoots over -- a bit frenetic -- but still VERY cheerful)

CHARLIE

Everything all right here, Mr. McDean? Did you need a menu? Oh Stella, darling, what happened to Mr. McDean's water?

MCDEAN

I spilled it. I'm clumsy that way.

(Stella and Charlie laugh)

CHARLIE

Oh, that's not a problem. We can just sop that right up.

(He pulls a dish cloth from his apron and begins dabbing the water, Stella dabs on her side as well)

CHARLIE (cont'd)

Did Stella tell ya 'bout our specials?

STELLA

I was about to.

MCDEAN

Is there something in the water around here?

(Charlie loses his smile for one moment but quickly regains his composure)

CHARLIE

What did you say?

MCDEAN

Everybody seems awful chipper around here, and I was just wondering what the secret is.

CHARLIE

Well, I don't know what the secret is, but I can tell you this, Mr. McDean. I can make your diner experience the best you ever had in your whole entire life. I can bring you a piece of pure heaven for a mere 55 cents.

MCDEAN

Is that so?

CHARLIE

Yes sir. A piece of Jubilation's famous apple pie. A glass of pure spring water. Make ya smile from ear ta ear. Even a big city boy like you. Idn't that right, Stella?

STELLA

Yes, that's true. Best around.

MCDEAN

All right then. Bring me a piece of that pie and a cup of... coffee.

(They laugh)

CHARLIE

Yes sir! And Stella, get Mr. McDean another glass of water.

STELLA

Yes sir.

(Stella exits)

CHARLIE

Planning to stay over night in Jubilation, sir?

MCDEAN

I guess that would depend on my car.

CHARLIE

Yes, sir. Yes it would.

MCDEAN

Does Jim know what he's doing?

CHARLIE

Oh he surely does. Best mechanic in town.

MCDEAN

He's the only mechnic in town!

(Charlie laughs, slaps his
knee)

CHARLIE

Yes sir, that he is!

MCDEAN

He just seemed maybe a little slow to me.

CHARLIE

Slow?

MCDEAN

Never mind. I'm sure it's fine.

CHARLIE

Well, if you do need to stay in town a spell, if you go
just a bit further down the road, you'll come to the hotel
run by Mr. Frank Wiley.

MCDEAN

Just down the road.

CHARLIE

Yes sir. Maybe a quarter mile. Same side of the road.
Can't miss it.

MCDEAN

Does it say "Otel"?

(Charlie laughs)

CHARLIE

No, no, he ain't got no lit sign. It's jes a painted sign
says "Frank's Hotel."

MCDEAN

Of course it does.

CHARLIE

(Calling over his shoulder)

Stella, honey, how about that water for Mr. McDean?

(Stella re-enters with the pie
and coffee)

STELLA (O.S.)

Coming right up.

CHARLIE

Well, you enjoy your little slice of heaven, Mr. McDean.

(Charlie exits. Stella looks to see if he's gone, then slips the bill on McDean's table)

STELLA

My shift is almost over. Do you mind if I leave this bill with you?

MCDEAN

Sure. Let me pay you now.

(McDean picks up the bill, reads it, and looks strangely at her. She places the pie and coffee on the table, though oddly not in front of him and exits. Charlie reenters as McDean produces his wallet)

CHARLIE

So what's the verdict, Mr. McDean? Oh, you haven't even touched it yet.

MCDEAN

I'm sorry, Charlie. I just got a call from Mr. Jim. My car is ready. I gotta run on down there.

CHARLIE

I don't think he called here.

MCDEAN

He called me on my cell.

CHARLIE

Cell?

MCDEAN

Tell you what, let's just wrap that up to go. Ten dollars ought to cover it, right?

CHARLIE

Oh that's more than enough, Mr. McDean.

(Stella returns with a bag and plastic container)

STELLA
I think you wanted a doggy bag?

MCDEAN
Why yes. Yes, I did.

(Stella quickly wraps up pie)

MCDEAN (cont'd)
Thank you Stella. Thank you, Charlie.

(Charlie looks a little bewildered but takes the tip, smiles and exits)

MCDEAN (cont'd)
Y'all have a nice night.

(McDean exits. He walks into the next pool of light which is center stage. The woods. he looks at his watch. Stella soon arrives to meet him)

MCDEAN (cont'd)
Well, well, well. Nice little spot here. "Lovers Lookout." That's a sweet name.

STELLA
You came.

MCDEAN
Hell yes. How could I resist your mysterious note.

STELLA
I was afraid you'd just run away.

MCDEAN
Well, I don't have a working car. That'd be a trick.

STELLA
I have a car.

MCDEAN
Do you?

STELLA

Yes. It could go anywhere. Anywhere the road takes you.

MCDEAN

So what's this all about, Darlin'?

STELLA

It's hard to explain.

MCDEAN

People explain things to me that are hard to explain all the time. And somehow I make sense of it all. That's what I do.

STELLA

This town has nobody like you, that's for sure.

MCDEAN

I can believe that.

STELLA

All the men here are close to idiots, doting idiots...Jim, Charlie, Frank Wiley at the hotel, Sam Kincade....

MCDEAN

I have a feeling you'd bring out the doting idiot in men wherever you lived.

STELLA

What's Chicago like?

MCDEAN

Windy.

STELLA

That all?

MCDEAN

It's amazing. You should come sometime.

STELLA

Could I stay with you?

MCDEAN

Honey, you can come visit me any time.

STELLA

I wish it were that easy...to leave here.

(He slides in behind her and
takes her wrists and puts her
hands on an imaginary wheel)

MCDEAN

It is easy. Just hop in your car, start your engine, and
you drive. Just drive.

(beat)

So you want to explain your note? Why should I not eat or
drink anything?

STELLA

Cause if you did, maybe you wouldn't feel much like leaving
Jubilation.

MCDEAN

Pie's that good?

STELLA

It's that good... and maybe you'd turn into some kinda
idiot too.

MCDEAN

Not likely. Though I might dote over you.

STELLA

This place is not what it seems. People here ... they look
happy ... but...

(He runs a finger down her
arm)

MCDEAN

What are you going on about?

STELLA

Would you take me with you?

MCDEAN

What?

STELLA

Take care of me?

MCDEAN

I might think about that. But maybe we should get to know
each other better.

STELLA

I need someone. I can't stand it here... all the men...

MCDEAN

That why you asked me to meet you out here?

STELLA

Yes.

MCDEAN

Nobody here understands you. They're all a little too nice?

STELLA

Yes.

MCDEAN

Maybe you want someone who ain't so nice.

STELLA

Maybe.

MCDEAN

Well, I think you mighta found him.

(He leans in to kiss her, but
She wriggles away)

MCDEAN (cont'd)

What's the matter?

STELLA

Could you love me forever?

MCDEAN

Darlin' I don't even know you--yet.

STELLA

I need help. I need someone to love me for me.

MCDEAN

That's what we all need. I'd need to kiss you right now.
That's what I'd need.

STELLA

Don't you understand?

MCDEAN

Explain it to me.

STELLA

I need your...

MCDEAN

What?

STELLA

Can't you...?

MCDEAN

Look, Darlin', we gonna do this or not? Or I can go back over to the hotel, eat my pie and watch me some TV. Your call.

STELLA

You don't think you could be happy with me? Just me?

MCDEAN

Sure, baby, sure. Maybe if you're real nice to me, if you know what I mean...

STELLA

When you talked so nice before, I thought maybe you were different.

MCDEAN

It is what it is.

(Beat)

STELLA

I tried to help you.

MCDEAN

You did? Well, thanks for tryin'.

(Beat)

Okay, I gotta go. Been nice knowing you, Sweetheart.

(He starts to go)

STELLA

Wait!

MCDEAN

Yeah?

STELLA

Wanna know the secret to happiness?

MCDEAN

Sure.

STELLA

I lied before.

MCDEAN

That right?

STELLA

It's got nothin' ta do with the water, nothin' ta do with the pie.

MCDEAN

Good ta know.

STELLA

Kiss me before you go.

THE PLAY CONTINUES FOR ONE MORE PAGE.

FOR THE LAST PAGE OF THE PLAY, WHICH YOU CAN READ FOR FREE, EMAIL STEPHEN BITTRICH AT SBITTRICH@AOL.COM

