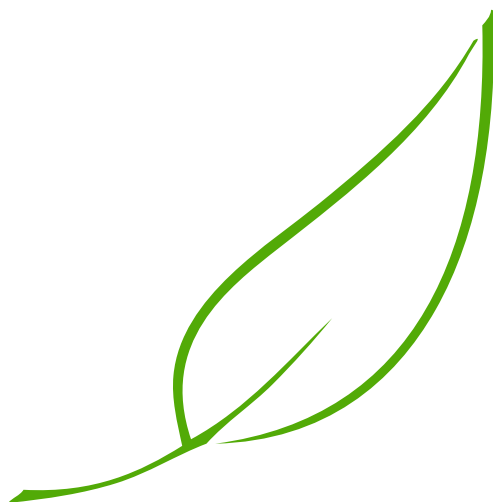


THE MONK WHO FOUND MIDDLE C

By Larry Nestor



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SYNOPSIS: Our story is based in the year 1025 A.D at a Monastery in Northern Italy and loosely tells the tale of how Guido of Arezzo became the creator of the grand staff that is used in written music today. With fun characters like Monk Damien, Monk Guiseppe, and even Monk Thelonious, the laughs abound with this light-hearted comedic two song musical.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 female, 1 male, 5 either, extras)

BROTHER GUIDO (m/f)..... monk. *(51 lines)*
 BROTHER DAMIEN (m) monk. *(80 lines)*
 STUDENT (m/f) young musician. *(5 lines)*
 BROTHER THELONIOUS (m/f)..... monk. *(18 lines)*
 BROTHER GUISEPPE (m/f) monk. *(25 lines)*
 PEASANT (m/f) delivery person. *(3 lines)*
 SALESPERSON (f) deals in miracles. *(18 lines)*

SONGS

“Music Can Be Terrific”

“Only a Miracle”

PRODUCTION NOTES

This short mini-musical is designed for use by school or church groups. Though its setting is a monastery, its story has no religious function. They are mythical historical characters created to represent those persons who, indeed, were historically the first to notate music on parchment and paper. For this reason, this historical comedy-musical can be performed in any school or church without concern for any specific religious bias.

Light comedy with a simple flavoring of music is the essence of this short, entertaining playlet. It offers an opportunity for both the musically and drama-oriented person to participate side by side. For this reason, it is a unique play for a school on its own or as a lead-in or climax to any type of musical program. Many schools may choose to use it as a change-of-pace piece to be combined with one or more one-act plays as a total evening's entertainment.

Though several members of the cast are designated as monks, those players can just as easily be nuns in a monastery. The other parts can also be adjusted for variety or to suit the players available.

TIME: *The year 1025 A.D*

SETTING: *A Monastery in Northern Italy. The stage represents the dining room and the music room. An oblong wooden table is Stage Left. There are four wooden stools, two on the Upstage side (long side_ and one each on the Stage Left and Stage Right sides (short sides.) Table is set with a bowl, cup, and spoon at these four places. A small organ is Stage Right. (If organ is unavailable, a small portable keyboard instrument may be used. Otherwise, a prop may be used in conjunction with taped music. Any electric cords employed show be covered.) Behind the organ is an easel on which is placed a chart of the grand staff (see chart at end of script.) The walls are bare except for a few small windows with rounded tops near the ceiling line. Outside doorway is Stage Left. Doorway to other rooms is Stage Right.*

AT RISE: *GUIDO is seated at the organ, playing a solemn piece of music (Note: music should begin before curtain goes up.) Moments later, DAMIEN enters Stage Right. He carries a long scroll of music (if possible, use onion-skin paper.)*

DAMIEN: *(As he crosses toward organ.)* Good afternoon, Brother Guido.

GUIDO: *(Stops playing and looks up.)* Good Afternoon, Brother Damien. Where have you been?

DAMIEN: I've been busy copying the new chant. I finally finished it. Your idea about using those parallel lines sure makes it easier to sing. *(Points to chart on easel.)* What a grand idea.

GUIDO: What title did you give it?

DAMIEN: I'm calling it the Gregorian Chant—in honor of Pope Gregory.

GUIDO: That has a nice ring to it.

DAMIEN: But the music sounds more like a dirge.

GUIDO: Maybe the title will sell it. Do you think we can get it published?

DAMIEN: I don't know. Take a look. *(He gives scroll to GUIDO.)*

GUIDO: *(Unrolls scroll and scans it.)* Mmmmm. Interesting. *(Plays a few notes on the organ.)* Not bad. Words look OK. How's the hook?

DAMIEN: Pretty strong. It repeats ev'ry one hundred measures.

GUIDO: Isn't that rather long for a verse?

DAMIEN: Well, the story line is rather involved.

GUIDO: Do you think it's commercial enough?

DAMIEN: I'm not sure. I thought we could try it out this Sunday. If enough people join in singing, I'll have Brother Guiseppe and Brother Thelonious help me make up a hundred copies.

GUIDO: How long did it take you to draw this up?

DAMIEN: Two weeks.

GUIDO: At that rate, it will take the three of you over a year to complete the copies. By then, ev'ryone will be tired of the song.

DAMIEN: Maybe you can help us.

GUIDO: You know I'm not much of a draftsman. I'm more of an idea man.

DAMIEN: Why, you have a beautiful hand.

GUIDO: (*Looks admiringly at his own hand.*) It is rather pleasing to the eye. Probably from lots of musical exercises. If only I weren't allergic to the quill. I guess the sight of a feather reminds me of one of my boyhood chores —cleaning up after the ducks and chickens. The dust and feathers always made me sneeze. So now the mere thought of a quill makes me—ah, ah, ah—(*He appears as if he is about to sneeze.*)

DAMIEN quickly puts his index finger firmly under GUIDO'S nose. GUIDO relaxes and seems to have lost his urge to sneeze, but as soon as DAMIEN removes his finger, GUIDO erupts with a violent sneeze.

GUIDO: Aaahhhhchewwww!! (*Note: some talcum powder placed on the organ top will add dramatically to the effect.*)

DAMIEN: God bless you, Brother Guido.

GUIDO: Thank you, Brother Damien. And may God always bless you. (*Pause.*) Do you think He's interested in such simple things as a sneeze?

DAMIEN: Probably not, bit I'm sure He heard you, nonetheless. I will now leave you to your music. I must go to prepare supper.

GUIDO: What are we having tonight?

DAMIEN: The usual.

GUIDO: Gruel?

DAMIEN: It fulfills all the minimum daily requirements.

GUIDO: It may fulfill your requirements, but not mine.

DAMIEN: I've heard you say that you could live on beautiful music alone.

GUIDO: Yes, but with a tender steak thrown in now and then. At least I know the wine is good.

DAMIEN: (*Gathers up his scroll of music from the organ.*) Unfortunately, the cask developed a leak. When I arrived in the cellar, I found several mice staggering around the floor. There's nothing more disgusting than a drunken mouse.

GUIDO: (*Somewhat disgusted himself.*) That's for sure.

DAMIEN: Fortunately, we're due for another shipment. (*As he exits Stage Right.*) See you at dinner, Brother Guido.

GUIDO: Yes, Brother Damien. (*After DAMIEN exits.*) I think that in the vast scheme of things, it's only right that gruel should rhyme with cruel. But, alas, I still have my music, and my music definitely has me.

(Music starts. He sings.)

MUSIC CAN BE TERRIFIC
IF THE MELODY IS STRONG
AND THE WORDS ALL FLOW ALONG.
RIGHT FROM THE START,
IT CAN TAKE YOUR HEART
AND LIFT IT HIGHER
THAN A HEAVENLY CHOIR.
EV'RY WORD YOU SING
CAN BE A STAR TWINKLE-ING IN THE NIGHT
IF YOU DO IT RIGHT.

Offstage voices may answer, "If you do it right." GUIDO will look around in an attempt to see where the voices are coming from.

MUSIC CAN BE TERRIFIC.
MUSIC, MUSIC,
AHHHH—

Loud knock at door Stage Left.

GUIDO: Come in, please. *(Pause. There is no answer. This time louder.)* Please come in. *(Still no response.)* Then go away.

The door opens. STUDENT enters with a piece of music and crosses to the organ.

STUDENT: Good afternoon, Brother Guido.

GUIDO gets up from organ.

GUIDO: Good afternoon. *(STUDENT gives GUIDO a penny for the lesson.)* Thank you. Have a seat.

STUDENT sits down at organ, places music on stand, sits up nice and straight and looks back at GUIDO, who is now standing behind him/her.

GUIDO: Begin.

STUDENT takes a deep breath, lets it out slowly, then begins to play, producing one terrible chord after another, and each chord registering unfavorably on GUIDO'S face.

GUIDO: Stop.

STUDENT does so. The music was upside-down. GUIDO turns the music right side up.

GUIDO: Now play.

STUDENT does so. This time, the music is worse than before. GUIDO signals STUDENT to stop. Music stops.

GUIDO: I can see you haven't been practicing.

STUDENT: I have. Half an hour a day, just like you said. Except Sunday. You said I could have one day off for good behavior.

GUIDO: True. *(Pause.)* You say you played like that for six straight days?

STUDENT: Yes. Monday through Saturday.

GUIDO: And what did your parents say?

STUDENT: They always leave the house when I'm practicing.

GUIDO: Mmmmmm, I wonder why.

STUDENT: They say they don't want to disturb me.

GUIDO: So you end up disturbing yourself.

Music comes up. Student sings second verse of "Music Can Be Terrific."

STUDENT:

MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU SICK—
LOTS OF LINES AND LOTS OF DOTS—
SOMETIMES YOU FEEL YOU'RE SEEING SPOTS.
PRACTICE EACH DAY.
OH, YOU PLAY AND PLAY.
THE SONGS GET TOUGHER.
WHY MUST I SUFFER?
EV'RY SINGLE NOTE CAN BE A PAIN.
I DEVOTE ALL MY TIME—
MY LIFE'S NOT MINE.
MUSIC CAN MAKE YOU SICK.
MUSIC, MUSIC
AUGH—

(Spoken.) I have trouble reading this grand staff that you invented.
All these lines make me dizzy.

GUIDO: Apparently it makes your music dizzy as well.

STUDENT gets very upset. Begins to cry, tearing his/her music in half before leaving Stage Left in a huff. GUIDO'S eyes follow STUDENT out the door. After a momentary pause, his eyes fall on the torn manuscript. He observes it for a while as it lies on the organ. He then picks up the pieces, brings the two together, and then separates them in the air. He appears to have an idea—a bright new idea. DAMIEN enters Stage Right with a large bowl of gruel.

GUIDO: *(As he holds up pieces.)* Hmmmmmmmm.

DAMIEN: B flat, isn't it? Sounds as if you have a good idea.
Humming in B flat always means a good idea.

GUIDO: It may well be, Brother Damien.

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DAMIEN: We're always in the market for good ideas. We'll discuss it at dinner.

DAMIEN crosses to table and places the bowl in the Center, Bells chime six o'clock as he dispenses the gruel. GUIDO straightens up the music on the organ and then joins him at the table. GUISEPPE and THELONIOUS enter from door Stage Right and come to the table. GUIDO will sit on a stool Stage Right of the table. DAMIEN sits to his immediate Left. After all are seated, they bow their heads and silently pray for a moment or two. They make the sign of the cross and begin to eat.

THELONIOUS: What a wonderful surprise, Brother Damien. I had no idea we were having gruel. This will be the twelfth night in a row.

GUIDO: *(Singing.)* On the twelfth night of Christmas—

DAMIEN: Be thankful, my good brothers. This very night, there are many souls who would sell their spirit to the devil for a bowl of gruel.

GUISEPPE: *(Tasting.)* This is hot enough to be connected with the devil.

DAMIEN: Brother Guido, tell us of your new idea.

THELONIOUS: Oh, brother!

GUIDO, DAMIEN, and GUISEPPE: Yes!

THELONIOUS: Ev'rytime Brother Guido gets a new idea, we have to work all the harder. Two weeks ago, he invented the grand staff, and we end up having to draw all those lines.

GUIDO: I think my new idea has terrific potential.

DAMIEN: Is it a new song?

GUIDO: No.

GUISEPPE: A new prayer?

GUIDO: No.

THELONIOUS: A new way of sweeping floors?

GUIDO: No. My idea will make it easier for musicians to read the grand staff.

THELONIOUS: Don't tell me I'm gonna have to print bigger.

GUIDO: No. Actually, it will mean less work.

DAMIEN, GUISEPPE, and THELONIOUS: (*Not convinced.*) Less work?

GUIDO: Yes. It calls for the elimination of one of the lines.

DAMIEN: Which one?

THELONIOUS: Any one. Would it matter?

GUISEPPE: Maybe not.

GUIDO: The grand staff is revolutionary, but I feel that it needs a little revision. My music students are having trouble deciphering the eleven lines. Some complain that the lines make them dizzy. Others got confused and quit taking lessons. I offered to teach them the new method for free, but they all said, "No way!"

DAMIEN: So what is this new twist that will improve your original idea? Just what line are you planning to do away with?

GUIDO: The middle line.

DAMIEN: The middle line? C?

GUIDO: Yes.

General commotion between GUISEPPE and THELONIOUS.

DAMIEN: (*To GUISEPPE and THELONIOUS.*) Brothers, please.

They stop their conjecture.

DAMIEN: (*To GUIDO.*) And what happens to all the notes that fall on that line?

GUIDO: Fear not, I have worked out a solution. First, we split the grand staff into two staves. One for the right hand and one for the left hand. (*He gets up and goes to chart on the easel, arranging it so those seated at the table can see.*) The top five lines will be for the right hand. The bottom five for the left. Whenever a note falls on C, we'll just use a little ledger line. A tiny little line here and there, instead of a long line from here to there. It will be much easier to read. (*He starts back to the table.*)

DAMIEN: It will save on ink. And quills.

GUIDO: Aaacchewww!

DAMIEN, GUISEPPE, and THELONIOUS: God bless you, Brother Guido.



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by Larry Nestor.

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