



Newport, Maine

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MY TRAVELS WITH CECIL

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CAST

(8 Women, 7 Men and 6 of either sex: or with doubling 6 Women and 4 Men.)

Maudie Karpeles

Edith Dame Campbell

Cecil Sharp -- (Sess-ul Sharp)

Clown 1

Morry

Clown 2

Doctor

Horse

Wife

Clown 3

Man 1

Mr. Abernathy

Trainman

Lady 1

Mrs. Montgomery

Mrs. Davis

Mr Bridges

Mrs. Webb

Mr Jake Sowder

Mrs. Lucy Cannady

Student Dancers

Mrs. Sowder

English People

PRODUCTION NOTES

It was the late Ramon Sloan, a WPA folklore collector in Virginia, and Richard Chase, the author of "The Jack Tales," that first got me interested in Cecil Sharp's visit to the Appalachian Mountains. In 1977, I first went to the Vaughn Williams Library to look at their collection of materials on Mr. Sharp. Since that time I have been collecting material on Sharp and have had this play in my head, but the opportunity never presented itself for its completion until this spring. It was with the aid of the

Virginia Commission of the Arts, that I was finally able to write and produce "My Travels with Cecil."

I wrote this to be a touring show, and in the spring of 2002 it was performed in elementary schools, in whatever facilities they had for assemblies. Thus, the staging was very simple; a large painted drop, a piano stage left, a small table by the piano to set props on, etc., and several chairs to be used as needed. If a full theatre production was desired, rocking chairs, a front porch on castors, a representative train station, etc., could all enhance the production.

Costuming should be kept rather simple. The mountain folk should wear plain long skirts, aprons, and some women can wear bonnets. Men should wear long pants, blousey shirts and suspenders. Since we had our actors play several roles, a shawl or a bonnet, straw hat or wig helped differentiate the various characters. Above all, the costuming should be neat and tidy. Anything resembling "Hee-haw," hillbilly outfits must be strictly avoided. There are excellent pictures on the internet of Sharp and Karpeles that should help with their costumes.

There are two dances called for in the script. Cecil Sharp's Volume V, "The Morris Book" gives many

variation of the dance. The country-dance can be any that was used in the mountains, and these can be found in publications by Sharp and Chase. The Virginia Reel actually works very nicely.

Finally, this story really happened, the characters that populate this show all really lived. They should all be played with grace, style, and any form of hillbilly accents or mannerisms should be avoided.

SONGS:

Dance improvised to drum and tambourine

A Morris Dance

I Would Not Marry A Doctor*

Sweet William

Blackbird

Soldier Boy*

Chickens They Are A Crowin'

My Little Roving Sailor

Sunny South

I Would Not Marry A Blacksmith*

* same song -- different words

MY TRAVELS WITH CECIL by R. Rex Stephenson (8W 7M 6either--or with doubling 6W 4M.) Folk songs are the backbone of American music. And since our people came from all over the world, so did our folk songs. "My Travels With Cecil" dramatizes the true story of Cecil Sharp's journey to discover English ballads still surviving in America. In 1916, Sharp and his secretary Maud Karpeles traveled throughout the Appalachian Mountains in search of folk songs that had originally been sung in Britain, but had since disappeared from their oral tradition. This play recounts Sharp's desperate search for a song that has haunted him since his youth, "Soldier Boy." The play is ideal for touring. It features numerous songs Sharp collected along with several dances. It might be good to mention that without Mr. Sharp's work these songs would now be lost to the world. Great for groups who tour to schools. About 45 mins. Study Guide Available: (PDF \$9.95 or PRINT \$12.95) **ORDER # 3327**

R. Rex Stephenson earned his B.A. in middle and secondary education at Ball State University. Upon graduation, Stephenson taught at Bayshore Middle School in Florida and Redkey High School in Indiana. He received his M.A. from Indiana State University in theatre and in 1973 became a drama professor at Ferrum College in Virginia, where he was named professor emeritus in 2013. In 1984, he received his Ph.D. in educational theatre at New York University. He was producer/director of the Blue Ridge Dinner Theatre from 1979 to 2012. Stephenson has had 24 plays for children and adults published, including *The Jack Tales*, *The Liberated Cinderella*, *Treasure Island*, *Galileo: Man of Science*, *The Jungle Book*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Connecticut Yankee*, and *Glorious Son of York*. He has been a winner in two major playwriting contests: The American Alliance for Theatre and Education 1995 award for *Too Free For Me* (published by Encore), and the IUPUI National Youth Theatre Playwriting Competition, "Excellence in Playwriting" award 1996 for *Jack's Adventures with the King's Girl*. In 1996 he was awarded an Appalachian College Association Faculty Research Fellowship, to research and write *The World Is My Parish*, a drama about the life of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. He also received the Sara Spencer Child Drama Award from the Southeastern Theatre Conference in 2007. Stephenson lives in Ferrum, Virginia and he has three daughters, Janice, Jessica, and Juliet.

Dedication

For Emily Rose Tucker and Gary Evans, who assisted me with the music,
and especially to Michael Perry, who helped make this play what it is.

My Travels With Cecil

by R. Rex Stephenson

DANCE

(Six Morris DANCERS enter dancing, accompanied by Drum and tambourine and perform. At the end the DANCERS assume pose positions around stage; SHARP comes center.)

SHARP: Join us now for a play:

a drama of life, of death,
of sickness, of health,
of poverty, but not of wealth.
Come my merry players,
Come one, come all
As we tell the story of...

ALL CLOWNS: Master Morry!

CLOWN 1: Master Morry how do you feel?

(Crossing center)

Your health I mean, do tell.

MORRY: I am well, I have my health,

But sadly have no wealth.

CLOWN 1: So you are well?

(CLOWN 2 enters and goes to sleep directly behind MORRY.)

You look most fit.

MORRY: Best I be, and hope to keep.

For I have a wife that gets no sleep,

For we have eight, no, ten children to keep.

CLOWN 1: That's a fact and you should know it.

CLOWN 2: Talk, talk. How's a poor man to get his sleep.

Hush now, let out not a peep.

MORRY: What noise is this?

(As he turns around, he falls over CLOWN 2; MORRY appears to die.)

CLOWN 2: *(jumping up)* I said to hush; not to die.

CLOWN 1: He's dead and sir, you have killed him.

Broke his limbs and cracked his skull,

So I must run and get the law.

(While she is saying this, CLOWNS are going around picking up his limbs and dropping them.)

CLOWN 2: He is quite fine

And I will prove it.

Stand him up:

Now get to it.

(CLOWNS pull MORRY up.)

CLOWN 1: He is dead I say.

See how stiff he be

There is no life that I can see.

(CLOWNS are passing him back and forth; MORRY is very stiff.)

CLOWN 2: Nonsense, sir.

Let go the dad.

Let us walk ,

Or he'll be mad.

(MORRY rocks back and forth; at the last minute, several CLOWNS catch him; all clowns make falling sounds. When MORRY falls, his feet are straight up in the air. When one CLOWN tries to push them down, his head rises. They do this several times; finally one holds his head down while the other pushes his feet down. When he is finally flat again, they shake hands; they are very pleased with themselves.)

CLOWN 1: See, he is dead.

Let me get the sheriff.

CLOWN 2: Not the law.

Try a doctor first;

If that doesn't work

Then we'll get a hearse.

(During this part, CLOWN 2 is checking his pulse, stepping on MORRY, and other forms of physical torture.)

CLOWN 1: Do you know one that can raise the dead?

CLOWN 2: Poor chap, where is your head?

He's only ill and needs a bed.

Call a doctor.

ALL CLOWNS: DOCTOR! DOCTOR! DOCTOR!

(This is all done with great exaggeration. DOCTOR enters on a HORSE.)

DOCTOR?

DOC: I'm here, here at last.

We hear you are dying fast.

What's the matter with this man?

SHARP: The man is dead.

He cracked his head.

DOC: How long has he been dead?

SHARP: Seven minutes,

No, it's five I should have said.

DOC: If he'd been dead five years, I could cure him.

But five minutes, you'd better bury him.

(HORSE nays loudly in agreement.)

My horse agrees.

CLOWN 2: Are there two doctors?

One I do not see.

SHARP: Please sir, take his pulse.

(DRUMMER creates pulse with drum.)

DOC: He has a raging pulse.

CLOWN 1: How can a dead man have a pulse?

DOC: He must take this pill.

(Brings out huge pill)

CLOWN 2: That my friend will surely kill.

DOC: Impossible, he is already dead.

SHARP: We must bury him and read the will.

DOC: There is one way to raise the dead

(Everyone leans forward to hear.)

That, my friends, is to cut off his head.

Do you agree, my trusty steed?

(HORSE nays and goes to get sword; WIFE enters, CLOWN 4 dressed as woman with falsetto voice.)

WIFE: Stop, stop! For I am his wife.

If you cut off his head,

Then surely he will be dead

DOC: My horse...

(HORSE nays.)

...does not agree!

WIFE: I have ten children here.

(WIFE points to where they should be.)

I have ten children here.

(THREE CLOWNS on their knees appear.)

They cry and want their father near.

(All CHILDREN break out in great gushes of tears.)

CLOWN 2: Let me give them a cloth. Their eyes upon to dry.

(Pulls out eight foot hanky from shirt and gives it to the CHILDREN.)

DOC: Oh, their sorrow makes us cry.

(DOCTOR and HORSE cry together.)

WIFE: Please Doctor, you must act.

CHILDREN: *(in unison)* Yes Doctor, you must act.

DOC: I will; I will; that's a fact.

This sword I give to my trusty steed,

And he my friend will do the deed.

He will raise the dead

By cutting off Mort's head.

(They roll MORRY onto his stomach, pick up his rear, one picks up his head, and HORSE crosses

and raises a sword. CLOWN 3 enters.)

CLOWN 3: Stop I say, for I am the law.

I am here to arrest one and all.

DOC: I cannot stop my horse from doing surgery.

WIFE: (*pointing to HORSE*) He is guilty of unmitigated perjury!

My man's not dead.

(Just as HORSE brings down the sword, MORRY jumps up.)

MORRY: Don't cut me.

Please let me be.

Asleep I've been.

So give the Doctor all his pay,

And we shall dance and dance and dance

ALL: Until we get to France.

MUSIC: MORRIS DANCE

(They all do a short Morris Dance. Pantomime SHARP helping them with steps as EDITH DAME CAMPBELL enters. SHARP exits and all DANCERS freeze.)

CAMPBELL: Might I find Mr. Cecil Sharp in this location?

MAUDIE: (*narrative*) Hello, my name is Miss Karpeles, but everyone calls me Maudie. I am going to tell you about how we, Cecil Sharp and I, I'll tell you about him later, came to be in the Rocky Mount Hotel in Franklin County, Virginia on August 9, 1918. But before I tell you about him, I need to explain how we got here. It was really because of this lady, Edith Dame Campbell.

(Pointing to CAMPBELL)

CAMPBELL: Excuse me, could you direct me to Mr. Cecil Sharp?

MAUDIE: I think that is quite possible.

(Narrative)

Oh, I got ahead of myself again. We are in New York at the Algonquin Hotel on East 33rd Street. Cecil and his troupe just performed one of the Mummers' plays which he had preserved. Do you feel on the mark now? We'll get back to Rocky Mount later.

(To CAMPBELL)

Now to answer your question, Mrs. Campbell, he is.

CAMPBELL: Excellent. You know I have never seen a real Mummers' play performed on stage, and with a Morris Dance. What great fun. I must speak to Mr. Sharp at once. I have some very important information to share with him. I have collected more than fifty traditional English Ballads in Tennessee.

MAUDIE: (*calling to him*) Cecil, Cecil. Cecil, there's someone here that wants to speak with you about British ballads found here in America.

SHARP: (He enters, now out of his Morris outfit.) Step over here, ma'am, where we can talk. Morris dancers, you can have an hour break.

(They all mumble, "Thanks, Sharp." "Thanks, Mr. Sharp." "We've almost got it.")

MAUDIE: (*narrative*) What she told Mr. Sharp was — I get ahead of myself again.

CAMPBELL: Here, sir, is a manuscript of fifty British ballads that I found preserved in the Appalachian Mountains.

(She hands him a manuscript.)

SHARP: Ballads?

CAMPBELL: Songs that I would guess date back to Shakespeare's time. Some might even be older than that.

SHARP: Well, let me see your manuscript.

(As he thumbs through the manuscript.)

Maudie, come quick. Look at this manuscript! Here are some of the exact songs that we have been trying to collect in England, except these are much more accurate.

MAUDIE: *(narrative)* I'll bet I forgot to tell you who Cecil Sharp is. I got ahead of myself again, didn't I? To explain who he is, I must go way back in 1890...

(CAMPBELL exits and a MAN wearing an academic robe enters with a chair and sits down)

...when Cecil was the Headmaster, I think you would call it the Principal, of a very prestigious music school.

MAN 1: Well, Mr. Sharp, another very successful school year. You'll have a month's vacation, and then you can be right back at it.

SHARP: That's what I wanted to talk to you about. I am afraid I must resign.

MAN 1: I won't hear of it. You are the best headmaster this school has ever had. Students and teachers both adore you.

SHARP: As you may know, I have been spending some of my spare time collecting the old ballads, the old dances, and the old Mummings' plays.

MAN 1: You've published a few things. We are very proud of you. Now if it's a question of money...

SHARP: It's not the money, sir; it's the time.

MAN 1: The time, Mr. Sharp?

SHARP: Yes sir, these ballads and dances are only remembered by a few old people.

(He crosses away)

If someone doesn't start collecting them, and I mean today, there's a chance they'll be lost forever. We will lose part of our British heritage.

MAN 1: That's a noble cause, Mr. Sharp,

(following him)

...but I doubt if there is any money in it.

SHARP: I fear there is none, but if I don't do it, who will?

MAN 1: I wish you the best of luck, Mr. Sharp.

(He shakes his head warmly and exits)

MAUDIE: *(narrative)* It was then that Cecil and I began our travels all over the British Isles. I was armed with my trusty typewriter.

(Huge old typewriter is brought out to her, she takes it.)

We would find someone that knew an old song; Cecil would write down the music, and I took shorthand and would get the words. In the evening we'd find a piano and we'd sing through the songs until we got them perfectly.

(She puts down typewriter and sits behind piano.)

SONG: I WOULD NOT MARRY A DOCTOR

SHARP & MAUDIE:

I WOULD NOT MARRY A DOCTOR
HE'S ALWAYS KILLIN' THE SICK;
I'D RATHER MARRY A SOLDIER BOY
THAT MARCHES DOUBLE QUICK.

SHARP: Maudie, I think you got all the words correctly. You know, I love this old song.

MAUDIE: Isn't this the one you heard as a child?

SHARP: Yes. And in some ways it's the song that got me interested in the old ballads. I think there's another verse, and I believe there's a chorus; it has something to do with a blacksmith, but nobody seems to remember it.

MAUDIE: Oh, you're very lucky to collect this one. If we'd come to the poor bloke a year later, he would have been dead, and the song would have been lost forever.

(SHARP goes back and sings the first verse, "I would not marry a blacksmith..." and then he sings it again; he pounds the keys; MAUDIE goes back into narrative)

As you can see, Cecil is a very dedicated collector.

(CAMPBELL re-enters and she joins them.)

CAMPBELL: That's why I want him to come to the Appalachian Mountains.

MAUDIE: Will we go Cecil? I mean will you go?

SHARP: Yes, I will. I'll have to find the money. But I'll find it, and Maudie, I'd like you to come with me.

CAMPBELL: You both will love it. I think it's the most beautiful country in all of America.

SHARP: And the people, will they be willing to sing the old songs for us?

CAMPBELL: Believe me when I tell you, Mr. Sharp, the mountain folk are different from anyone else living in England or in America.

MAUDIE: *(narrative)* I'm almost ready to take you back to Rocky Mount in August of 1918. But first I have to show you this meeting we had with one Mr. Abernathy. You can believe me when I tell you that after our conversation with this man, we had some reservations about going to Virginia.

(CAMPBELL exits and ABERNATHY enters.)

ABERNATHY: I assume you're still resolute about taking this journey to the mountains?

(SHARP holds up tickets.)

SHARP: We have our train tickets right here. Leave tomorrow.

ABERNATHY: I see you have two of them.

MAUDIE: Yes, I get to go, too. And I'm taking my trusty typewriter so I can get all the lyrics exactly correct.

ABERNATHY: It's bad enough that you're going, Mr. Sharp, but taking a woman with you? Believe me when I tell you, those people that live in the mountains are heathens.

SHARP: Mrs. Campbell has assured us...

ABERNATHY: *(interrupting)* Mrs. Campbell is a do-gooder. Those people live in shacks; they don't work, they have no contact with the outside world, and they bear almost no resemblance to a civilized people.

SHARP: We appreciate your concern, but I can't believe that people who still sing the old British ballads could possess any of the characteristics that you're describing.

MAUDIE: Yes, Mrs. Campbell said that they are isolated, but they care deeply for their children, attend church regularly, but because of their simplicity, they live a bit differently from the rest of American society.

ABERNATHY: They're dangerous. That's why I want to give you this, Cecil.

(Hands him a gun)

This will protect you and Maudie.

(SHARP holds it by the barrel; ABERNATHY takes it back and offers it to MAUDIE.)

Here, Maudie, try it out for size.

MAUDIE: I'd really rather not.

(ABERNATHY forces it into her hand.)

It's so big and so heavy and..

ABERNATHY: Let me show you. Put your finger on the trigger and just move it like so.

(The gun ends up pointing at SHARP's face. MAUDIE screams and throws the pistol in the air over her head and ABERNATHY catches it)

SHARP: I think we want nothing to do with firearms.

ABERNATHY: Well, everyone down there is armed. Armed and dangerous. So let me just put this in your hand. Now put your finger over the trigger. Don't worry, it's not loaded. Now just squeeze.

SHARP: Really sir, I'd rather not.

ABERNATHY: It's not loaded. Just squeeze. Here, I'll take off my hat. Just aim it at my hat. Just squeeze the trigger slowly.

SHARP: All right, if you insist.

(Shot rings out and blows hat out of ABERNATHY's hand. ABERNATHY screams, SHARP screams, and MAUDIE screams.)

Give this contraption to Mr. Abernathy.

(MAUDIE takes the gun by its handle and ends up pointing it at ABERNATHY.)

ABERNATHY: Let's be careful. Give it to me.

SHARP: I think we'll do nicely without your weapon.

(ABERNATHY exits. SHARP freezes.)

MAUDIE: *(narrative)* So we began our sojourn. In 1916, we went to Kentucky and Tennessee. Money was scarce, and we often had to spend our time choreographing plays or teaching dance classes. Now I'm ready to talk about our experiences that began on August 9, 1918. At 6:30 in the afternoon, Cecil and I got off the train in Rocky Mount, Virginia.

(CONDUCTOR carries on bags and MAUDIE gets typewriter.)

CONDUCTOR: Are you sure, Mr. Sharp, that you want to get off the train here?

SHARP: Are we not in Franklin County, Virginia?

CONDUCTOR: Yes, but if you would go on to Greensboro, it's a much nicer town with nicer hotels.

SHARP: I'm sure you're correct, sir, but we have been led to believe that the most beautiful ballads in all of

the world can be found right here in Virginia. We will spend the night in the local hotel and then—where are going Maudie?

MAUDIE: Would you mind?

(MAUDIE hands typewriter to CONDUCTOR and starts flipping through her notes.)

To Saint Peters, a mission school. Episcopalian, we think.

CONDUCTOR: Yes, I know it well. It's out by Calloway. You'll have to hire a wagon. If you're lucky, you might be able to hire a motorcar. But no matter what conveyance you use, it will probably take you an hour or two to get there from Rocky Mount.

SHARP: Then we will leave early in the morning.

(They start to go)

CONDUCTOR: Don't forget your typewriter. I'd go on to Greensboro if I were you.

(SHARP removes bags.)

MAUDIE: *(narrative)* It was a very pleasant hotel. Unfortunately, that night it was as if the heavens opened up and pelted us with rain, the likes of which we had seldom seen.

(Stagehand removes typewriter.)

So we spent our day in the hotel and met everyone staying there. That night the guests of the hotel begged Cecil and me to sing some of the songs that we had been collecting in the mountains.

(MAUDIE is at the piano with SHARP beside it; there are a couple of guests with them.)

LADY 1: Mr. Sharp, will you and Miss Karpeles sing us one of those ballads that you've rediscovered in the mountains?

SHARP: We will sing you one that dates all the way back to the time of Mr. William Shakespeare. We discovered this one in North Carolina. It's called "Sweet William."

MAUDIE: If you've heard it, join us.

SONG: SWEET WILLIAM

MAUDIE and SHARP:

A SOLDIERS TRADE IS A CRUEL LIFE;
IT ROBS THOSE LADIES OF THEIR HEARTS DELIGHT,
CAUSES THEM FOR TO WEEP AND MOURN
THE LOSS OF SOLDIER BOY NEVER TO RETURN.

ALL: *(join in)*

YELLOW WAS THE COLOUR OF MY TRUE LOVES HAIR,
CHEEKS WAS LIKE A LILY FAIR.
IF HE RETURNS IT'LL GIVE ME JOY;
NEVER LOVE ANY BUT A SWEET SOLDIER BOY.
IF HE RETURNS IT'LL GIVE ME JOY;
NEVER LOVE ANY BUT A SWEET SOLDIER BOY.

LADY1: I love that song. I never realized it was British.

(Guests exit. MAUDIE comes forward.)

9 MORE PAGES TO END

PRODUCTION SCRIPT WILL INCLUDE COPIES OF THE SONGS.