

AN EASTER CAROL

A new version of the original 1996 play
commissioned by Radius for Easter 2011

by

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Cirrus, Phoebe and Gibran, former students of Balthazar, Casper and Melchior, the wise men of the Nativity story, retrace the footsteps of their tutors and set out to unravel the mystery of a cryptic map, some ancient poetry and three symbolic gifts. Phoebe travels to Bethlehem, Cirrus to Galilee and Gibran to Jerusalem where their individual searches bring them all together on a hilltop outside the city. Reluctantly accepting that this is where their quest was meant to lead, they resolve to honour the legacy of their tutors and to stay to the very end. They make plans to rest before returning home, and witness the completion of the mystery, whatever that might be.

Character list and doubling roles

PHOEBE, CIRRUS, GIBRAN

Three former students of the wise men of the Nativity story.

JUDITH

Landlady of 'The Star' inn, daughter of the inn keeper of the Nativity.

SETH, JOSH

Grown-up sons of the Nativity shepherds.

ABNER, SOPHIE

Dealers in second hand fishing tackle on the shores of Galilee.

ASH, DEB, SMY

Money changers newly evicted from the Temple in Jerusalem.

FABIUS, RUFUS

Soldiers tasked with erecting a cross on a hillside outside Jerusalem.

Ideally, the actors playing Phoebe, Cirrus and Gibran should not double another part.

| Scene: | 1 <i>The mothballed house</i> | 2 <i>The Star Inn Bethlehem</i> | 3 <i>The shores of Galilee</i> | 4 <i>A back street, Jerusalem</i> | 5 <i>A hilltop, Jerusalem</i> |
|-----------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Actor 1 M | Cirrus | | Cirrus | | Cirrus |
| Actor 2 M | Gibran | | | Gibran | Gibran |
| Actor 3 F | Phoebe | Phoebe | | | Phoebe |
| Actor 4 F | | Judith | | Deb | |
| Actor 5 F | | | Sophie | | Fabius |
| Actor 6 M | | Seth | | Smy | |
| Actor 7 M | | Josh | | Ash | |
| Actor 8 M | | | Abner | | Rufus |

SCENE 1: The empty house of Casper, Balthazar and Melchior, now all deceased. Former place of Gibran, Cirrus and Phoebe's education.

(The cardboard boxes, inn furniture, office paraphernalia and fishing gear of the other scenes are hidden beneath the dustsheets of the mothballed house. Phoebe enters with Gibran. Cirrus follows. He has tried to dissuade them from entering the house and carries a legal document; a notice of repossession for the old house.)

CIRRUS: I told you. There's nothing to see anymore – it's all gone.

PHOEBE: *(shocked by the emptiness)* There should be books – there should at least be their books... there were hundreds of books.

CIRRUS: In the end it was all they had left to sell. *(hands Phoebe the notice)* It's a repossession order. If Melchior hadn't died, he would have been evicted.

PHOEBE: Such gentle men...

GIBRAN: Except with each other. So how they'll cope with an eternity together...

PHOEBE: Casper, Balthazar and Melchior.

CIRRUS: The greatest, wisest –

GIBRAN: Most argumentative men –

PHOEBE: That's not fair –

GIBRAN: *(rummaging among the dust sheets)* He was the oldest, wasn't he, old Melchior?

CIRRUS: And still managed to outlive them all.

PHOEBE: In this big old house.

GIBRAN: *(still rummaging)* You think they'd have left us something.

CIRRUS: They were our tutors; they left us everything we know.

PHOEBE: It would be nice, though. Something personal: to remember them?

GIBRAN: Then what about... this! *(from beneath the dustcovers he produces, with*

an overly dramatic flourish, a small dust covered box) Ta-raa!

PHOEBE: Gibran!

GIBRAN: Who wants to open it?

CIRRUS: We can't open it; it belongs to the estate.

GIBRAN: Come on, Cirrus, what estate?

CIRRUS: It belongs to the bank. *(showing the repossession notice)*

GIBRAN: Everything of value they sold, didn't they? They didn't sell this, therefore, it has no value. Why would the bank have any interest in something with no value?

CIRRUS: We don't *know* it has no value. *(moves to take the box)*

GIBRAN: No, we don't. But we will... when Phoebe opens the box! *(throws the box over Cirrus' head to Phoebe)*

(Phoebe catches the box and evades Cirrus' attempt to retrieve it.)

CIRRUS: Phoebe, don't encourage him.

(Phoebe teases Cirrus – offering the box and snatching it playfully away.)

CIRRUS: Phoebe!

(Gibran pulls a chair from under the dustsheets, and lifts Phoebe up onto it. Out of Cirrus' reach, Phoebe opens the box.)

GIBRAN: Well?

PHOEBE: *(pulling sheets of old paper from the box)* There's a lot of paper...

GIBRAN: Under the paper – look under the paper.

PHOEBE: I am looking under the paper.

GIBRAN: And?

PHOEBE: Nothing. Just paper. Just sheets of handwritten paper.

(Phoebe steps down from the chair. Disappointed, Gibran takes a sheet of paper from the box. Cirrus takes another and opens it out. There are three manuscripts, tattered and yellowed with age. Each is crammed with scribbled words, calculations and diagrams.)

GIBRAN: Not much to show for a life's work.

PHOEBE: Three lives' work.

CIRRUS: ...Casper wrote this.

PHOEBE: I'd know Melchior's fine hand anywhere. My notes were full of his comments and corrections.

GIBRAN: Old Balthazar: wrote his verse as gently as he taught... this is different.

CIRRUS: I can see how they ran out of money. Look at these accounts. *(offers the manuscript of accounts to Phoebe)*

PHOEBE: Charts and maps: Melchior's great passion. This is new: he never showed us this. *(offers the manuscript of the map to Gibran)*

GIBRAN: This doesn't make any sense at all. It's ancient, but with real presence. *(offers the manuscript of verse to Cirrus)*

CIRRUS: *(studying verses)* It's poetry, obviously – written by a mystic of some kind.

PHOEBE: *(studying the accounts)* What did they want with gold, myrrh and frankincense?

GIBRAN: *(studying the map)* That's quite a trip: here to... Palestine - straight as the crow flies. Like they were *drawn in* by something.

(No wiser but intrigued, they swap manuscripts again.)

CIRRUS: *(with the map)* Going out, maybe. But coming back... Galilee? Why make a detour so far North?