

= A Very Merry Unauthorized Children 's Scientology Pageant =

A Very Merry Unauthorized Children 's Scientology Pageant is a satirical musical about Scientology and L. Ron Hubbard , written by Kyle Jarrow from a concept by Alex Timbers , the show 's original director . Jarrow based the story of the one @-@ act , one @-@ hour musical on Hubbard 's writings and Church of Scientology literature . The musical follows the life of Hubbard as he develops Dianetics and then Scientology . Though the musical pokes fun at Hubbard 's science fiction writing and personal beliefs , it has been called a " deadpan presentation " of his life story . Topics explored in the piece include Dianetics , the E @-@ meter , Thetans , and the story of Xenu . The show was originally presented in 2003 in New York City by Les Freres Corbusier , an experimental theater troupe , enjoying sold @-@ out Off @-@ Off @-@ Broadway and Off @-@ Broadway productions . Later productions have included Los Angeles , New York , Boston , Atlanta , Philadelphia and Washington , D.C.

Early in the production of the musical , the president of the Church of Scientology in New York sent a letter to the producer pointing out the Church 's history of litigation . This led Timbers and Jarrow to insert the word " Unauthorized " into the title , upon the advice of legal counsel . During the Los Angeles production , representatives of the Church of Scientology visited the production staff in the midst of rehearsals and handed out documentation of successful litigation against critics of Scientology . Parents of some of the Los Angeles cast members also received phone calls from Scientologists in the entertainment industry , asking them not to allow their children to perform in the musical .

A Very Merry Unauthorized Children 's Scientology Pageant has been well received . The 2003 New York production received an Obie Award , and director Alex Timbers received a Garland Award for the 2004 Los Angeles production . The musical also received positive reviews in the press . The New York Times characterized it as a " cult @-@ hit " , and The Village Voice , The Los Angeles Times and The Guardian all gave it favorable reviews . Variety and The Boston Globe had kind words for the updated 2006 edition . A 2004 cast recording released by Sh @-@ K @-@ Boom Records received four out of five stars from Allmusic and plaudits from The Los Angeles Daily News .

= = Background = =

Alex Timbers developed the concept and directed the play , while Kyle Jarrow wrote the accompanying book , music , and lyrics . Timbers and Jarrow were classmates together at Yale University . The script for the play is published by Samuel French , Inc . Jarrow was motivated to write the script by what he saw as a shift in religious teachings ? from an old model involving hell and retribution , to a new system of thought promising money or peace . Jarrow commented on Timbers ' idea of using children to tell a story about Scientology : " I did a lot of work on cults in college , and what I learned is that they sort of turn you into a child by appealing to that part of you that wants to be taken care of and given answers . And so it all began to make sense to me . " He said Scientology would be " an especially interesting topic for a theater piece " because of its criticism of psychiatry , relative newness compared to Buddhism , Islam , Judaism , and Christianity , and practice of requiring " that the follower take courses which cost significant amounts of money . "

Jarrow 's script was " almost entirely based on Hubbard 's own writings and the church 's literature " , though Jarrow was also influenced by critical journalistic accounts . He also drew on the " awkward woodenness of Christmas pageants ? the fact that children are often made to say large words that don 't sound natural coming out of their mouths . " Timbers said they chose to stick to Church of Scientology primary source material for background on the script because " We thought that the best way to satirize the Church of Scientology was to let the Church speak for itself . " During production , the creative team worked with cast members to educate them about the play 's background . " Kids shouldn 't just be saying things that they don 't understand . That 's what we 're criticizing ... people who just parrot behavior and language . We wanted to have an honest conversation with them , " Jarrow said . The published version of the script says that the musical

should not be performed by adults ; Jarrow said adults are " too jaded " , and would not be able to portray the " unwinking satire " of the piece .

The producers wanted the musical to appear like a " corny and low @-@ rent production " . The ensemble includes 10 actors from ages eight to twelve . Though professionals , the child actors perform with a " realistic lack of polish " , as they are playing non @-@ professional children of Scientologists , performing in a holiday pageant . The chorus portrays Thetans , and the reactive and analytical portions of the mind are depicted by two children who share a conjoined right brain costume . During the Xenu story , the narrator is outfitted in a cardboard robot suit , and the actor portraying Xenu wears a " tacky headdress " . Staging , costumes and set design are all made to appear to be the " earnest work of schoolteachers and supportive parents trying to provide a colorful and cheery atmosphere on a small budget . " The stage design includes a " colorful , crayon @-@ colored backdrop of space age @-@ like , semi @-@ circular set pieces . " Costumes include white robes , rainbow @-@ striped socks and tinsel halos . Props used to denote locations include " a waving cardboard palm frond for Hawaii , a street sign and cell phones for New York . " The musical ends with a tableau vivant , where the audience sees the cast standing at the back of the theater holding candles and singing cheerfully as a door closes and they are blocked from view .

Early in the production of the play , John Carmichael , president of the Church of Scientology in New York , found out that a theatrical production involving Scientology was in the works . After showing up unannounced to a rehearsal , Carmichael sent a letter to the play 's New York producer , Aaron Lemon @-@ Strauss , citing his concerns at the possibility of being ridiculed . In the letter , Carmichael also pointed out the church 's many past lawsuits . Alex Timbers was quoted as saying : " We 've been told that the letter is a precursor to a lawsuit . " Carmichael visited the artistic staff a total of three times to voice his concerns before the play 's debut . After this occurrence , Jarrow and Timbers ' attorneys advised them to insert the word " Unauthorized " into the title of the play . This was done to avoid potential litigation from the Church of Scientology . In an interview with The New York Times , Carmichael later stated : " These folks have a right to write whatever play they want ... but they 've sunk to clichés . "

= = Plot summary = =

The characters gather on a cold winter night to rejoice in telling the story of L. Ron Hubbard . " Hey ! It 's a Happy Day ! " A narrator notes : " Today we relate the life of L. Ron Hubbard : Teacher , author , explorer , atomic physicist , nautical engineer , choreographer , horticulturist , and father of Scientology ! " Hubbard is born in a nativity scene , surrounded by parents and barnyard animals , as an angel proclaims , " Billions of years of evolution had climaxed with his birth . " He begins to question the nature of his existence . He is adrift on a boat in the Pacific Ocean during his service in World War II , when he begins to think about starting a religion . Hubbard tells his followers about what he has learned through his travels in " Science of the Mind " , singing about " the key to being free , the way to be happy " . He tells his followers that during the War " I saw how emotion can make you blind " , and he begins to teach his followers about the reactive mind .

Hubbard thanks the analytical mind (portrayed by two characters) for helping him to find the answers he was searching for , and proclaims : " Thinking rationally is the way to be happy and the key to learning more . " He announces to his followers , " You 'll operate with your analytical mind only There won 't be any emotions to stand in the way of your success . " As Hubbard tells his followers about his new ideas , they each proclaim to him : " You 're right ! " Hubbard answers : " Of course I 'm right ! " Hubbard 's followers thank him for teaching them his new ideas : " Now the sun will shine / And the world is fine / We have got the science of the mind . " A Church of Scientology Auditor explains some technical Scientology jargon to new recruits , and the E @-@ meter is described in a puppet show .

As Hubbard 's followers progress in their Scientology teachings , they learn of the story of evil alien prince Xenu . Celebrity actor characters describe their relationships with Scientology : John Travolta explains how Scientology " fueled his cool " ; Kirstie Alley says that it helped her conquer drug addiction " enabling me to star in the fine television series Fat Actress and to promote the quality

products of weight loss expert Jenny Craig " ; and Tom Cruise interacts with sock @-@ puppet incarnations of his new wife and daughter . The Internal Revenue Service brings a case against Hubbard , but he is able to defeat the tax charges by brainwashing his accuser . Celebrities Cruise , Alley and Travolta testify on Hubbard 's behalf during the trial . Skeptics question Hubbard about the Church of Scientology 's finances and methods of recruiting and retaining members . One young boy , left alone on the stage , sings about profound alienation . The entire company finally comes together to sing the " chilling finale " , which includes the refrain : " Just don 't ask questions / And everything is clear . "

= = Musical analysis = =

Jarrow incorporated musical themes from The Road to Freedom , a 1986 pop album with lyrics by Hubbard and performances by John Travolta , Leif Garrett , Frank Stallone , Chick Corea , and Karen Black . Jarrow also incorporated musical themes from 1980s pop , saying " the liturgical music of Scientology is 1980s pop , which seems strangely appropriate because of the science fiction books . So that 's what we did [in the show] . It 's a pastiche of synth @-@ pop and pageant choir music . " Jarrow said he tried " to capture the feel of kiddie rock " such as Free to Be ? You and Me and Kids Incorporated .

The song , " Hey ! It 's a Happy Day ! " quotes Hubbard 's Scientology : A New Slant On Life . Songs are set to " cheesy synth @-@ keyboard backing " and feature " sublimely clunky dance breaks " . An electronic score emphasizes the musical 's " loony conviction " , while sleigh bells give the play a feeling of a " jazzed @-@ up saint 's play " . The songs incorporate video game music , and " beats from a child 's keyboard synthesizer . " The music in the show has been compared with the symphonic band Polyphonic Spree , and with the educational short films of Schoolhouse Rock .

= = Productions = =

= = = 2003 ? 2004 = = =

A Very Merry Unauthorized Children 's Scientology Pageant debuted in November 2003 , and had sold @-@ out Off @-@ Off @-@ Broadway and Off @-@ Broadway runs that winter , both directed by Alex Timbers . The musical was initially shown at The Tank theatre on 42nd Street where it ran for three weeks , and later moved to The John Houseman Theatre , where it was performed for an additional three weeks . The show opened in Los Angeles at the Powerhouse Theatre , in October 2004 , again directed by Timbers . The run was initially scheduled for October 15 through November 21 , 2004 , but was extended through December 21 , 2004 . Timbers said that he was excited to take the production to Los Angeles , commenting : " Since the whole goal of the show is to imagine how the Scientologists might stage a nativity pageant , there 's no better place to try than in their Jerusalem . "

When the production company first arrived in Los Angeles , the cast and crew were " intimidated " by Scientologists . Scientology officials had previously visited the New York City production in the midst of rehearsals and handed out " documentation of court cases where the Church of Scientology had successfully prosecuted those seeking to disparage the Church 's methods . " Director / creator Alex Timbers characterized these events as " terrifically wonderful and intimidating " . Editors from the Los Angeles Times received phone calls from Scientologists urging them not to write about the play . In addition , the parents of one of the children from the cast received phone calls from members of the entertainment industry who were Scientologists . The parents of these cast members were told that if their children performed in the play , " it might be bad for their future career . " The parents politely informed these callers " We read the script , and we don 't think it is mean @-@ spirited ... We understand your concerns , but we don 't share your concerns . " When asked by Variety magazine for the Church 's official take on the play , a Los Angeles Church of Scientology spokeswoman was quoted as saying : " This is not litigation material . This is nothing . "

In a 2007 interview , Jarrow commented on the Church of Scientology 's history of responses to productions of the play : " It 's clear the Church doesn 't like the show ? but in my opinion that kind of controversy is evidence that the show 's hitting a nerve and dealing with pertinent issues . So I take a certain pride in that . "

= = = 2006 ? present = = =

In late 2006 , the musical was performed at New York Theatre Workshop 's 4th Street Theatre in New York City , with Alex Timbers reprising his role as director and Gabriel Kahane as musical director . That same year , the show was also presented at the Boston Center for the Arts in Boston by Boston Theatre Works , and at Dad 's Garage Theatre in Atlanta . The Boston production was directed by Jason Southerland . When contacted by The Boston Globe for a statement on the Boston production , Boston Church of Scientology president Gerard Renna stated that the musical : " is not something we 're addressing " and that they were instead focused on antidrug education .

Dad 's Garage Theatre presented the musical again in 2007 , from November 30 to December 23 , 2007 . The entire cast from the 2006 production returned , and director Mary Claire Dunn emphasized that she educated the cast about Scientology on the first day of rehearsal . Theatre company Brat Productions in Philadelphia , Pennsylvania also put on a 2007 production , with performances from December 13 through December 30 , 2007 at St. Stephen 's Theater . The production was directed by Lee Ann Etzold . Landless Theatre Company in Washington , D.C. also presented the musical from December 20 , 2007 through January 13 , 2008 at the District of Columbia Arts Center in Adams Morgan . Andrew Lloyd Baughman was the director and music director .

Rarely Done Productions in Syracuse , New York put on a production of the play , which ran from October 3 to October 18 , 2008 . Circle Theatre in Fort Worth , Texas has announced a 2008 production , which ran November 20 to December 20 , 2008 . Know Theatre of Cincinnati , Ohio planned a 2008 production December 6 through January , 2008 . Ron May , artistic director of Stray Cat Theatre in Phoenix , Arizona , also planned a production of the play for the 2008 season , and A Red Orchid Theatre in Chicago , Illinois planned a production to run from November 17 to December 28 , 2008 . Representatives for the Church of Scientology did not respond to repeated requests for comment from the Chicago Tribune about the 2008 Chicago production .

The 2008 Chicago production was well received , and A Red Orchid Theatre again put on a production of the play in its 2009 ? 2010 season . The Chicago production was directed by Steve Wilson , and ran from November 12 , 2009 through January 3 , 2010 . The play 's artistic director , Kirsten Fitzgerald spoke positively of rehearsals for the Chicago production : " The energy that explodes into the theatre with the start of each rehearsal is palpable and impossible to deny , even from the office next door . I am ecstatic and so very grateful to bring last year 's smash @-@ hit to audiences old and new . The heart of last year 's joyous and hilarious Chicago Premiere returns with plenty of surprises and new fun up our sleeves . " Crain 's Chicago Business ranked the production as one of the top ten things to do for the weekend in the city . Another Illinois production ran from December 7 , 2009 to January 3 , 2010 , by Next Theatre in Evanston . On December 2 , 2009 , performers sang songs from the play in a production called The Songs of Kyle Jarrow at the 92YTribeca in Manhattan , New York . Performers included Jeb Brown , Tony Award @-@ nominee Alison Fraser , Susan Goodwillie , Caesar Samayoa , Libby Winters , and Lauren Worsham .

A 2010 production was planned in Clearwater , Florida , for showings December 2 through December 22 . The play in Clearwater is produced by American Stage for the After Hours series . A representative for the theater , Andy Orrell , told the St. Petersburg Times , " The After Hours series does shows that are more avant garde , more risque , shows that we couldn 't really do on the main stage . In a lot of ways , this show fits perfectly into that criteria . " Clearwater is a spiritual headquarters for the Scientology organization ; when contacted for a statement by St. Petersburg Times , Kyle Jarrow responded , " Wow ! ? I had no idea they were doing the show down there . Clearwater is almost ground zero for Scientology . That 's sure to be extra controversial . " The American Stage Theatre Company performs out of the Raymond James Theatre in St. Petersburg ,

Florida . The Actors Guild of Lexington in Lexington , Kentucky planned a production to run from April 7 ? 17 , 2011 , directed by the group 's artistic director Eric Seale .

= = Reception = =

= = = Awards = = =

A Very Merry Unauthorized Children 's Scientology Pageant received a 2004 Obie Award for its 2003 production in New York City . Kyle Jarrow and Alex Timbers were given " Special Citations " from The Village Voice for developing the piece . Timbers and Jarrow were honored with the award at the May 17 , 2004 Obie Award presentation , at New York 's Webster Hall . Alex Timbers also received a Back Stage West Garland Award for best director , for the 2004 Los Angeles production of the play .

= = = Reviews = = =

A Very Merry Unauthorized Children 's Scientology Pageant received positive reviews from the press . A review in The New York Times described the musical as having a " crude , faux @-@ naïf sensibility " , and stated that it " provides a cult @-@ hit blueprint for a young generation that prefers its irony delivered with not a wink but a blank stare . " A 2003 review in New York City 's The Village Voice compared the show to The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui , stating : " Just as Ui doesn 't explain the complex phenomenon of the Third Reich , Scientology Pageant doesn 't probe the psychology of cults ; instead , both demystify subjects whose appeal stems in no small part from the mystique their acolytes have attributed to them . " Though most of the media reception of the musical was positive , New York Church of Scientology President John Carmichael did not have kind words for the production . Carmichael asserted that L. Ron Hubbard was portrayed in the play as " an authoritarian demagogue whose methods create emotionless followers . " Other critics complained that the young members of the cast were portraying characters and depicting content that they could not understand .

The Los Angeles Times review in 2004 stated that : " The show found a New York audience willing to move from the tongue @-@ in @-@ cheek children 's pageant concept to something that became startlingly adult . " In a 2004 review in The Guardian , the article cited notable quotes from other reviews , including The New York Times , The Village Voice , and The New York Observer . The review stated that audiences " have a chance to witness a wide @-@ eyed , straight @-@ faced , scrappy and touching telling of the story of L Ron set to a cheesy electro @-@ pop score . See the great man , clad in a white Plyphonic [sic] Spree @-@ style gown , wander from inquisitive soul to wounded war veteran to writer of pulp science fiction to leader of world religion . Sort of . "

Of the updated 2006 version , Variety stated that " .. the breezy one @-@ hour show is equal parts adorable and creepy , hilarious and unsettling , making it way more compelling than your average holiday entertainment . " The Boston Globe also reviewed the 2006 edition of the play , and its review spent more time giving background on some of the cast and crew , particularly writer Kyle Jarrow , stating that " .. Jarrow has created a musical about L. Ron Hubbard that is , in its own sardonic way , much more funny and touching than any of Cruise 's diatribes against Ritalin . " The New York Sun described the production as an : " ingenious musical account of L. Ron Hubbard 's life and times " , and compared the discomfort produced by watching the piece to that produced by the 2006 documentary Jesus Camp .

The 2007 Philadelphia production also received favorable reviews , and critic Wendy Rosenfield of The Philadelphia Inquirer wrote " .. somehow the production emerges triumphant , retaining its innocent sense of inquiry and buoyant good humor while making some pretty serious philosophical points . " A review in The Washington Post of the 2007 Washington , D.C. production was more critical . Peter Marks wrote that " .. aside from a weird sci @-@ fi back story involving Prince Xenu , a figure from Scientology lore , the incidents the playwright relates that shape Hubbard 's belief

system unfold choppily and dryly . " The production received a positive review in by Bob Anthony in AllArtsReview4U , who wrote " This is so charming that it rates a " must see " status . The show should be extended at another venue . " Manya Brachear reviewed the 2008 Chicago production for the Chicago Tribune , and highlighted the play 's " trilling tunes " , including " Hey ! It 's a Happy Day ! " and " The Science of the Mind " . The two Chicago productions in 2009 also received favorable reviews in the Chicago Tribune ; the reviewer noted , " this show manages to simultaneously skewer Scientology and showcase the young performers in an upbeat , fun way . "

= = Cast recording = =

A cast recording of the musical was released by Kurt Deutsch 's Sh @-@ K @-@ Boom Records , on November 2 , 2004 . " Hey ! It 's a Happy Day ! " , " Science of the Mind " , " Rain " , and " Finale " are tracks from the original 2004 production . The other songs on the album were written by Jarrold .. to further explore the subjects and themes of the stage production . " The first track on the album is entitled " Disclaimer " , and is a general announcement to the audience . The Los Angeles Daily News surmised that this disclaimer served to " keep the creators of this acidic little send @-@ up from getting hauled into court " :

Ladies and gentlemen : Before we go any further , I would just like to inform you , that Scientology , Scientologist , Dianetics , and the name L. Ron Hubbard , are registered trademarks ? owned exclusively by the Church of Scientology . Thank you . Now let 's get on with the show !

The CD release received four out of five stars from Allmusic , where it was described as " Funny , weird and wonderful " , and " the offbeat theater offering of the year " . Specific tracks highlighted by Allmusic included " L. Ron Hubbard " , in which the chorus centers on the question : " What does the ' L. ' stand for ? " , and " The Way It Began " [sic] , which begins with the preface statement : " The following is completely secret and absolutely serious . It is the story of the universe as described in the most sacred literature of the Church of Scientology . " In the song " Mister Auditor " , the children actually sing some of the typical questions asked in Scientology auditing , and in the song " Something Special " , allegations that the Church of Scientology " preys on the weak and confused " are discussed , but the narrator states that none of these allegations are true .

2004 Cast recording

" Disclaimer " ? 0 : 18

" Hey ! It 's a Happy Day ! " ? 4 : 37

" L. Ron Hubbard " ? 3 : 44

" The Way That It Began " ? 3 : 10

" Searching " ? 2 : 33

" Science of the Mind " ? 2 : 44

" Mister Auditor " ? 3 : 18

" Rain " ? 4 : 11

" Something Special " ? 3 : 40

" Finale " ? 2 : 40

" Rain With the Fabulous Entourage " ? 3 : 52