



THE MUSICIAN'S GAZETTE



No. 14

WALKING BOXES PRODUCTIONS

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD'S *THE CAMEL'S BACK*

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote of this story: "I suppose that of all the stories I have ever written this one cost me the least travail and perhaps gave me the most amusement. As to the labor involved, it was written during one day in the city of New Orleans, with the express purpose of buying a platinum and diamond wrist watch which cost six hundred dollars. I began it at seven in the morning and finished it at two o'clock the same night. My amusement was derived from the fact that the camel part of the story is literally true; in fact, I have a standing engagement with the gentleman involved to attend the next fancy-dress party to which we are mutually invited, attired as the latter part of the camel--this as a sort of atonement for being his historian."

VISIT WALKING BOXES ONLINE

To keep up with all the happenings at *Walking Boxes Productions*, log on to www.walkingboxes.com You can check there for upcoming shows, browse through the show & CD archives, listen to music samples, or even sign up for music lessons.



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UPCOMING SHOWS

The Erstwhilists' artistic director, J Roth, is teaming up with Harmony Theatre to produce a show this December 23rd in Minnetonka.

Harmony Theatre is a group of first and second generation immigrants from the former Soviet Union who share in common the Russian language and a love for theatrical expression.

This show for *Yolka* (a major holiday in Russia) will feature the traditional Russian folk characters of Grandfather Frost, the Snow Maiden and the witch Baba Yaga. The show will primarily be in English.

Harmony Theatre is largely made up of children, and this show will be suitable for families. Go to www.walkingboxes.com or www.centerharmony.org to find out more.

THANKS

Walking Boxes wishes to thank Papa Steve, Kevin Maijala & the Sibley House staff, all our fine sponsors (please support them with your business), and all the performers involved with the show. Thanks also to all of you who have come out to support Walking Boxes and its collaborating artists over the past year.



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THE CAST

The Erstwhilists:

Jesse Griffith.....Perry
 Elizabeth Karre.....Betty
 Emily Tate
 Christine Nordin.....Aunt
 Mrs. Nolak
 Mrs. Tate
 Jeffry Nordin.....Macy
 Mr. Tate
 Ringmaster
 O'Sullivan
 J Roth.....Narrator
 Bailly
 Cab Driver

Story adaptation and original music by J Roth

FITZGERALD IN MINNESOTA

Fitzgerald was born in St. Paul in 1896. He lived with his parents there from 1896 to 1899 and again from 1908 to 1919 at various locations, including: 481 Laurel Avenue, 509 Holly Avenue, 593 Summit Avenue, 599 Summit Avenue, and 626 Goodrich Avenue. He completed his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, while living in St. Paul in 1919. He married a week after its publication to Zelda Sayre, youngest child of an Alabama State Supreme Court judge. He returned to St. Paul with Zelda, 1921-22, for the birth of their daughter (their only child), Scottie. Fitzgerald drew on St. Paul experiences for his fiction, especially the Basil Duke Lee stories, in which he describes the St. Paul Winter Carnival, the Minnesota State Fair, and the White Bear Yacht Club.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

An Illustrated Weekly
 Founded 1897
 APR. 24, 1920
 5c THE COPY



Beginning: **HIGH LIFE**—By Harrison Rhodes

Above is the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* that *The Camel's Back* appeared in. The cover for this issue, dated April 24th, 1920 was not done by Norman Rockwell. Rockwell only did one or occasionally two covers a month. His painting "The Ouija Board" decorated the following week's issue.






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F. SCOTT'S SHORT STORIES

The Camel's Back was first published in the April 24th, 1920 edition of *The Saturday Evening Post* and then in *Six Tales of the Jazz Age* (a companion volume of stories for his second novel: *The Beautiful and the Damned*.)

In Fitzgerald's twenty years as a professional writer, he wrote 178 short stories. Most of these were for sale to commercial magazines in the '20s and '30s.

In his life, the sale of stories to magazines earned him approximately \$250,000. This was more than half the amount he earned in his career from all sources including for his novels, royalties, and scriptwriting for Hollywood.

CHANGES TO THE STORY

The vast majority of our script for *The Camel's Back* contain the unaltered words of Fitzgerald. One change that occurred, was the creation of the character Father O'Sullivan. In the original story, it is an African-American waiter at the party (who also happens to be a "sho-nuff" minister) named Jumbo who unwittingly marries Perry and Betty. We deemed Fitzgerald's early 20th Century characterization of Jumbo as inappropriate for modern audiences, who have thankfully become more racially sensitive.

Another change, was the dispensing with of Fitzgerald's thin charade of setting the story in Toledo. We moved it back to St. Paul.

The song "Shine On, Harvest Moon" does not appear in the original. There the drunken trio sing a verse of complete nonsense. "Shine On, Harvest Moon" became a hit in 1908 and would likely have still been freshly in the collective conscious of 1919 St. Paul.

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HILL HOUSE (LETTER)

Louis Hill was the son of railroad tycoon and empire builder James J. Hill. Louis lived with his family in "Maryhill", the mansion-home James built for Louis, adjacent to James' own mansion-palace on Summit Avenue. Louis wrote the following regarding "The Camel's Back" to his daughter Maudie (who was away at boarding school):

"...under a separate cover I am sending to you a story by Scott Fitzgerald, the St. Paul boy who wrote the book [This Side of Paradise] which has taken so well. This is the story of Eddie Saunders and the camel at our Christmas party at the house. Perry Parkhurst is Eddie Saunders and evidently the Mrs. Nolak is Mrs. Gleason and the 'Tate' house is our house. The 'Club' is the University Club."

Though Fitzgerald was not present at this particular party in 1919, he would have been familiar with the Hill's Christmas parties, having escorted Marie Hersey to one in 1915.

BETTY MEDILL & THE FLAPPERS

The term "flapper" refers to a "new breed" of young women who emerged in the 1920s. They wore short skirts, bobbed their hair, and flaunted their disdain for what was then considered "decent" behavior. The flappers were seen as brash in their time for wearing excessive makeup, drinking hard liquor, treating sex in a more casual manner, smoking cigarettes, driving automobiles, and otherwise flouting conventional social and sexual norms. Some accused Fitzgerald and his stories of inspiring many young women into becoming flappers.

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When F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote *The Camel's Back* in 1920, he was newly triumphant, having succeeded in love, literature, and financial matters. A few years before, he had been dumped by a beautiful rich girl because he didn't have many prospects. Fitzgerald used this experience as the basis for his first novel, originally entitled *The Romantic Egoist*, which he edited during his enlistment in WWI. It was praised but rejected by Scribner's. Meanwhile he met Zelda Sayre, but she broke off their engagement, again because Fitzgerald didn't seem to have any prospects. Fitzgerald returned to St. Paul and moved in with his parents. He struggled with the revision of his novel, eating meals in his bedroom and pinning notes to his curtains. In September of 1919 he sent it again to Scribner's, this time titled *This Side of Paradise*. It was accepted. Fitzgerald was so excited that he ran outside and shouted the news to everyone passing on the street. He later wrote, "That week, I paid off my terrible small debts, bought a suit, and woke up every morning into a world of ineffable toploftiness and promise." The novel was published in 1920, became one of the most popular books of the year, and Scott and Zelda's engagement was resumed. A month after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, the Saturday Evening Post published *The Camel's Back* and paid Fitzgerald \$500 for it, \$100 more than they had paid him for any previous stories. Of this story Fitzgerald said, "it was written during one day ...with the express purpose of buying a platinum and diamond wrist watch which cost six hundred dollars." This watch was reputedly given to Zelda and was further proof to her, perhaps, that he finally did have prospects.

Alcohol is very prevalent in *The Camel's Back*. Certainly, writing it in 1920, Fitzgerald must have been considering Prohibition, which was just descending upon the country.

The 18th Amendment, banning the manufacture, sale and transportation of intoxicating liquors in the U.S., was passed by Congress in December 1918; its ratification by the mandatory thirty-six states was finally achieved on January 16, 1919 (Minnesota was the 37th state to ratify.) The ratified amendment was stipulated to begin in one year on January 16, 1920.

It's possible the revelers appearing in the story (based on actual St. Paul personages from December 1919) were imbibing with a bit more vigor than usual due to the fact that Prohibition was rapidly descending upon them. Then again, St. Paul is reputed to have been a safe haven for gangsters during the Prohibition era. Perhaps all along the St. Paul-ites knew that nothing would get between them and their alcohol. Perhaps it would have been best for Fitzgerald himself if something had gotten between he and his drinking, as alcoholism is reputed to have lead to his young death.

MORE RADIO SHOWS NEXT SUMMER

There was a time, when spooky stories on the radio were best heard under blankets, late at night. Next July, the *Bloomington Art Center Gallery Theater Company* recreates those radio days with spooky stories guaranteed to give you "Cool Chills on a Hot Summer Night." For more info go to www.bloomingtonartcenter.com and click on "theater." Radio personality J.B. Eckert (who has collaborated with the Erstwhilists) will be directing these shows.

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