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# Clean-Up Cantata

**Synopsis:** Mr. Wilson, a high school band teacher, tries to determine the students responsible for toilet papering his house. Meanwhile, his ensemble struggles mightily with cooperating to play their music well. Finally, he catches the perpetrator and gives everyone a lesson in working together.

**Themes:** Cooperation, teamwork, unity.

**Characters:** 1 male adult (Mr. Wilson), 1 male teen (Nate), 2 female teens (Lisa, Erin), 2-6 teen extras/ either gender.

**Running Time:** 5 minutes.

**Staging Needs:** A half-circle of chairs arranged around a conductor's podium, with music stands by the chairs. No special lighting. Assuming that your actors aren't skilled musicians, a recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony will be useful. Mr. Wilson needs a baton and a music stand with papers. Nate needs a trumpet, Erin a snare drum, and Lisa a violin. The extras need instruments as well, but they can be unconventional--in the original production, one actor had a banjo. Also, the students should arrive with books or bookbags from their other classes.

**Acting Difficulty:** Easy to moderate.

**Tone:** Comedic dialogue.

**Can It Stand Alone?:** No.

**Author's Comments:** I confess: In high school, I was a Choir Snob, not a Band Geek. However, many of my friends were in the Band. So here's my homage to all my buds who weren't cool enough to sing.

**Performance Tips:** Mr. Wilson is the butt of some jokes, but he's smarter than his students think he is. Nate and Lisa are preppy; Erin is probably a skater. Nate is pretty oblivious. For his birthday, maybe Lisa will buy him a clue (if she doesn't dump him first). The fight among the musicians is the hardest, but also potentially the funniest, part of this sketch. Practice to make it *look* authentic without hurting anyone.

# Clean-Up Cantata

*By George Halitzka*

(A school band room. The members of the CLASS enter and sit down with their instruments. The bell rings and the director, MR. WILSON, steps up to a podium and taps with his baton for quiet. There is no response from the talkative CLASS. We specifically observe NATE and LISA in some sort of argument with ERIN.)

WILSON

Good morning, class.

(Still no response. Louder--)

Good morning, class.

(Nothing.)

Dee-ten-SHUN!

(The CLASS finally comes to attention.)

Good morning, class.

CLASS

(sing-song, with much eye-rolling)

Good morning, Mr. Wilson.

WILSON

I hope you had a wonderful weekend, boys and girls. We'll start with our excerpt from Beethoven's Fifth.

(The class begins rearranging their music stands.)

But first, why don't we become better acquainted? May I have a volunteer to tell us what he or she did this weekend?

(Silence and disbelieving stares from the CLASS. This is very unlike their "beloved" DIRECTOR.)

LISA

Mr. Wilson . . . are you feeling okay?

WILSON  
I'm well, Miss Caserta. Your weekend?

LISA  
I saw a movie with Nate.

WILSON  
How entertaining! What about Miss Knowles?

ERIN  
What were you smoking in the teacher's lounge?

( "The Look" from MR. WILSON. )

I went to a concert. Is that okay?

WILSON  
Chopin?

ERIN  
Smashmouth.

WILSON  
Dee-lightful. What about . . . Mr. Buck?

(He's not paying attention. LISA elbows him.)

NATE  
I didn't do it!

LISA  
(through clenched teeth)  
*This weekend.*

NATE  
I took Lisa to a movie.

WILSON  
And how about the rest of your time? Last night around 11:00,  
for example?

NATE  
Uh . . . I was watching the Discovery Channel.

WILSON

Indeed.

NATE

It was very educational. All about . . . frog sex.

(LISA puts her head in her hands. WILSON suddenly, with the air of a lawyer cornering a witness, holds up an empty toilet paper roll.)

WILSON

You weren't, by chance, covering my home with 96 rolls of toilet paper?

(The BAND finds this highly entertaining.)

NATE

No, sir. I go to bed at 9:00 on school nights.

WILSON

I'd like to see you after class, Mr. Buck.

NATE

What? Frogs were making out!

(NATE tries to look innocent--a skill at which he's obviously had little practice. MR. WILSON addresses the class.)

WILSON

Now, people, let's begin with Beethoven's Fifth, shall we? Kindly remember our struggles with *unity* on Friday. The *conductor* sets the tempo, not the musicians.

LISA

(through a cough)

Erin Knowles.

(ERIN forms her drumsticks into the shape of an X and holds them up to LISA.)

WILSON

Excuse me, Miss Caserta. Is there something you'd like to share with the rest of the class?

LISA

I was just saying . . . I'm sure you'll find out who TPed your house, sir.

WILSON

Rest assured that I shall. I may look like an old foggy to you, but in my day, I was a real Nacho Man!

(The CLASS snickers.)

Now let's try Beethoven. Remember to listen to the other parts, Mr. Buck.

NATE

Togetherness is my middle name.

WILSON

And . . .

(MR. WILSON counts off the beat, then the CLASS starts to play. They sound horrendous. Each STUDENT is playing something loudly and off-key with no regard for unity. WILSON tries to conduct this mess, but quickly despairs and gives them a cut-off. The noise dies out.)

What is wrong with you today, people? Have you forgotten how to count? Perhaps--how to read music? Mr. Buck, why are you playing so loudly?

NATE

Well, Mr. Wilson, we all know that the trumpet is the most important instrument--

LISA

Not a chance! Tell Bugle Boy who's the *best*.

ERIN

Yeah, drums rock.

LISA

Say *what*, Bongo-Brain?

ERIN

You heard me, Horsehair Head--

NATE

Without me, Beethoven is *nothing*--

ERIN

Nothing but *better*. Trumpeters blow!

NATE

Don't make me open my spit valve on you--

LISA

Forget it, Brass Lips! Violins are the *foundation* of the orchestra--

NATE

"Brass lips"? That's not what you said at the movie--

LISA

(mortified)

This is what I get for dating a wind player--

ERIN

Beethoven *needed* his snare!

LISA

Sure, after he went *deaf*--

ERIN

(wielding her sticks threateningly)

Let's see how you talk with a drumstick in your throat!

LISA

You want this bow up your butt?

(LISA and ERIN end up in a swordfight between bow and drumstick. MR. WILSON looks around in horror as NATE and the other MUSICIANS get into the act.)

WILSON

Ladies, have a seat! People--sit down! Girls--boys--class--  
(screaming)

QUIIIIII-EEEEETT!

(The STUDENTS look at him. He looks back. He feints as though to jump at them. They all run back to their seats.)

WILSON (*cont'd*)

People, this isn't something we should be fighting about! All of the instruments in the orchestra are equally important. It's only when they work *together* that a great sound is achieved.

NATE

Oh, yeah?

WILSON

Yes, Mr. Buck. It's impossible to do *anything* without cooperation. Could you have toilet papered my house last night without help?

NATE

Of course not!

(LISA's head is in her hands again.)

Ooohh . . .

WILSON

(quite pleased with himself)

And now, people, with Mr. Buck's shining example of cooperation in mind, let's try the Fifth Symphony again. Mr. Buck? I'll see you at my house this afternoon. Bring your trumpet; you can play me a . . . Clean-Up Cantata.

(WILSON laughs. He's the only one laughing.)

And . . .

(The group begins to play Beethoven's Fifth again. This time, they actually sound pretty good! The music fades as the lights dim to a blackout.)

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