

Childe Rowland

**A pantomime written by
Ron Nicol
With words & music by
Barbara Tulloch**

Spotlight Publications

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Childe Rowland

Written by Ron Nicol

Music and Lyrics by Barbara Tulloch

CAST (in order of appearance)

Stage Manager

Stage Crew

Merlin the Magnificent

Childe Rowland

Burd Ellen, his sister

Queen Guinevere, his mother

Sir Chancelot, a cheeky knight

Sir Dancelot, an arty knight

Sir Prancelot, a superior knight

Turvey, an Apprentice Jester

Topsy, an ambitious member of the Chorus

Gorm, number One Elf, a would-be comic

Glum, number Two Elf

The Elfin King

Herdsmen

Cowherd

Shepherdess

Sheepdog

Swineherd

Henwife

Cockerel

Burd Ellen's Shadow (*non-speaking mime*)

Chorus of Knights, Courtiers, Horses, Cows, Sheep, Pigs and Hens

Elves

Many characters make only one appearance, so doubling, trebling and even quadrupling of roles is possible, the five 'Herdpeople' could be played by only one or two performers, for example. Most of the supporting characters can be male or female, with the text changed appropriately as required.

Time & Place: Britain of myth, legend - and pantomime

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act 1

Prologue

Scene 1 - By the churchyard

Scene 2 - Camelot

Scene 3 – The borders of Elfland

Scene 4 – Camelot

Scene 5 – Elfland, near the Dark Tower

Scene 6 – The Stables, somewhere in Elfland

Act 2

Scene 1 – The Dark Tower

Scene 2 – The Cow Meadow, somewhere in Elfland

Scene 3 – The Pasture, somewhere in Elfland

Scene 4 – The Dark Tower

Scene 5 – The Piggery, on the road to the Dark Tower

Scene 6 – Somewhere in Elfland

Scene 7 – The Hennery, near the Dark Tower

Scene 8 – The low green hill, outside the Dark Tower

Scene 9 – Inside the Dark Tower

Scene 10 - Camelot

'*Childe Rowland*' was first produced by Glenrothes Theatre Company in Newcastle Community School, Glenrothes in January 2008 with the following cast:

Stage Manager	Rachael Hynd
Stage Crew	Caitlin Massie, Eilidh Smith
Merlin the Magnificent	Andrew Miller
Childe Rowland	Nikki Conn
Burd Ellen	Stephanie Childs
Queen Guinevere	Audrey Stevenson
Sir Chancelot	Lee Mitchell
Sir Dancelot	Ron Campbell
Sir Prancelot	Ann King
Turvey	Billy Hardie
Topsy	Rachel Law
Gorm	Norma Nicol
Glum	Aileen Henderson
Elfin King	Ron Nicol
Herdsman	Ron Campbell
Cowherd	Aileen Henderson
Shepherd	Lee Mitchell
Sheepdog	Sarah Laing
Swineherd	Ann King
Henwife	Lee Mitchell
Cockerel	Ron Campbell
Burd Ellen's Shadow	Eilidh Smith
Chorus	Stephen Bain, Madeleine Buchan, Roisin Farmer, Kerr Finlay, Sarah Laing, Jodie McGee, Bethan Massie, Aidan Miller, Aine Pocock, Mahri Smith.
Elves	Matthew Bain, Iona Fraser-Collins, Niamh Fraser-Collins, Shannon McCabe, Alan McGee, Paul McGee, Erryn Miller, Terri Robertson, Deborah Robertson, Kerri Robertson, Rachel Suttie.

Director	Ron Nicol
Musical Director	Barbara Tulloch

MUSICAL SCORE

Overture

“It’s Showtime” - Chorus

“Will I Remember This?” - Rowland

“I Could Be Famous” - Topsy

“I Will Find You/Home” - Rowland & Burd Ellen

Entr’acte

“It’s Not Fair” - Elfin King & Elves

“Ode To Lancelot” - Guinevere

“Somebody Help Me” - Burd Ellen & Her Shadow

“Hurrah!” - Whole cast

The music and lyrics by Barbara Tulloch are contained in “The Childe Rowland Song Book”. Details of hire are available on request.

ACT 1

Prologue

As the lights come up, the Stage Crew have just finished building the set – a church and its surroundings. One notices the audience and nudges the others. Each reacts in his/her own way, scampering off or sauntering away looking nonchalant. Music plays and the chorus of Knights, Courtiers, Ladies-in-waiting, Servants, Squires and Pages enter for the big opening number “It’s Showtime”. After the number the chorus bow enthusiastically while the music continues

Merlin *(off)* What’s going on out there?

Dead silence as the music stops and everybody freezes

All Chorus Nothing!

Merlin *(off)* I said, what’s going on?

The Stage Manager enters

Stage Manager Oooh, you’re for it now.

All Chorus Why?

Stage Manager You’ve woken Merlin, that’s why.

All Chorus Merlin!

Stage Manager You’d better get about your business. Now!

All Chorus Now?

Stage Manager Now! Get off!

All Chorus Get off?

Stage Manager Quickly! He’s coming!

All Chorus Merlin’s coming?

Stage Manager Yes! Merlin’s coming!

All Chorus *(panic)* Get off! Get off! Off! Off! Off!

They exit as quickly possible as Merlin storms on stage

Merlin What’s going on? People are trying to sleep! *(He sees the audience)* Oh. We’ve started.

Stage Manager You’re dead right we’ve started.

Merlin Sorry. I was just – merely a nap, you understand – late night last night...

Stage Manager Don’t mess about! Get on with it!

Merlin One moment, sirrah! I’m no common strolling player - I’ve performed in Shakespeare, I’ll have you know! Treat me with respect, fellow. I’m the star!

Stage Manager Well, I’m not sure about that – but star or not, are you ready?

Merlin Of course I’m ready! Merlin the Magnificent is always ready!

Stage Manager Right, then. Let’s get this show on the road. Go music! Go lights!

Music plays and the lighting fades to an atmospheric setting as the Stage Manager exits and Merlin prepares himself

Scene 1

By the churchyard

Rowland and Ellen enter, and throw a ball from one to the other. A single spot is brought up C, throwing a beam representing the sun across the stage. Rowland and Ellen freeze as Merlin steps into it, using his resounding 'Shakespearean' delivery

Merlin Greetings, mere mortals. I am Merlin the Magnificent. That same Merlin who served King Arthur well. I can tell and foretell, see and foresee all things under the sun and beyond. You may have heard of me, and of the main character in our story - Childe Rowland. Rowland was one of the great King Arthur's sons - allegedly - and Burd Ellen was his dear sister. He loved her well, and cared for her as brothers should always care for their sisters.

He makes a pass with his staff. During the following dialogue, Rowland and Ellen carry out the actions described

One day Rowland and Burd Ellen were playing close to the church. Rowland threw the ball, and made it fly over the church-yard wall. Burd Ellen ran round to seek it.

Magical 'spiriting' music as Ellen circles the church anticlockwise and exits. Rowland circles the church clockwise and exits. Merlin waves his staff and the light changes again, casting long shadows

Scene 2

Camelot

Music plays as Guinevere enters with Sir Chancelot, Sir Dancelot, Sir Prancelot, other Knights, Courtiers, Ladies-in-waiting including Topsy, Servants, Squires and Pages. As they arrive at their positions normal lighting is restored. Chancelot, Dancelot and Prancelot, eager amateur operatic singers who seize any opportunity to burst into song, leap forward and begin to sing 'We Are The Knights' to the tune of 'The Toreador Song' from Bizet's 'Carmen'

Knights We are the Knights who fight for Guinevere,

We are the best – yah boo to all the rest...

Guinevere Shush! Shuuush!

The Knights reluctantly abandon their song as Rowland enters

Rowland Mother! Mother!

Guinevere Rowland, where have you been?

Rowland Ellen and I were playing by the church yonder. By an unfortunate chance I threw the ball over the wall and Ellen went to fetch it. Long I waited, mother, and longer still, but she came not back again. I sought her east, I sought her west, I sought her up and down, but she's nowhere to be found.

Guinevere You mean she's disappeared?

Rowland Like dew on a May morning.

Guinevere Then we must consult Great Merlin the Magician. He can tell and foretell, see and foresee all things under the sun and beyond. Send for him.

Merlin (*steps forward behind Guinevere*) I'm here, Your Grace.

Guinevere Don't *do* that, Merlin, how often must one tell you? It makes one's poor heart go pitter-patter, pitter-patter. It's most distracting. Why can't you knock and wait like ordinary people?

Merlin Because I'm not an ordinary person, Your Grace. I'm a Great Magician. Merlin the Magnificent, to be exact. It's not my way to knock and wait. It's my way to suddenly appear and cause great

consternation and the pitter-pattering of people's hearts.

Guinevere But not so suddenly, Merlin, and *not* directly behind one. Give a discreet cough to let one know you're there.

Merlin My apologies, madam.

He breaks into a fit of over the top coughing

Guinevere That isn't quite what one had in mind, Merlin.

Merlin Again I apologise, great Lady. It won't happen again. (*Bowing deeply.*) I am here, Your Grace. What can I do for you?

Guinevere It's my dear son, Merlin. My dear Childie Rowland.

Rowland Childe, mother. Childe.

Guinevere Sorry, Rowland. Ask Merlin what we need to know.

Rowland Merlin, can you tell me where my sister's gone?

Merlin First you must tell me what happened. Carefully now. Leave out no detail.

Rowland I was playing with my sister by the church, and I threw the ball over the wall. Ellen ran to get it - and then - well, she just disappeared! I looked for her everywhere, but I couldn't find her.

Merlin Which way did she run? To the right or to the left of the church?

Rowland To the right. It was the nearest way.

Merlin Which way was the sun shining?

Rowland It was shining full on her face.

Merlin So she ran contrary to the sun's course. And her shadow, where was that?

Rowland Behind her.

Merlin Ah, Rowland, then this is the way of it. This will happen when people forget and run widdershins.

Guinevere Widdershins, Merlin?

Merlin Anticlockwise. When folk run against the light, their shadows are out of sight and can't be taken care of properly. That's when they're in the greatest danger.

Guinevere From what, Merlin? Tell one quickly, what happened to one's dear daughter?

Merlin When she was running round the church widdershins, fair Lady Ellen must have been carried off by Elves. Elves have power when folk go against the light.

Guinevere But where will she be now?

Merlin I fear she may be a prisoner in the Dark Tower of the King of Elfland.

Everybody (*horrified exclamation*) Ooooooh!

Guinevere The Dark Tower of the King of Elfland?

Everybody Ooooooh!

Merlin Yes, my lady. The Dark Tower of the King of Elfland.

Everybody Ooooooh!

Rowland Then I must rescue her!

Knights Hurrah!

Guinevere One moment, Rowland dear. Merlin, surely this isn't a task for one's own dear son. One means, the Dark Tower - the King of Elfland!

Everybody Ooooooh!

Guinevere Somebody else must rescue her.

Merlin We'll ask for volunteers...

The Courtiers, Ladies-in-waiting, Servants, Squires and Pages think of something better to do and quickly exit. Only Rowland, Merlin, Guinevere, Chancelot, Dancelot, Prancelot and perhaps a few other Knights remain, but even they are trying to shuffle towards the wings until Guinevere glares at them and they freeze

Guinevere Oh dear, where's everybody gone? Wait! Shouldn't one send one of one's boldest knights to carry out this dreadful undertaking?

The Knights are horrified. They've no intention of volunteering for anything hazardous, and react appropriately throughout the following - but not too obviously in case Guinevere notices

Merlin You're quite right, my lady. None but the boldest knight in Christendom will be able to bring her back.

Guinevere The boldest knight in Christendom. Of course. Step forward, Sir Lancelot.

Chancelot He's not here, Your Grace.

Dancelot He's absent, Your Majesty.

Prancelot In absentia, my lady.

Guinevere What? No Lancelot?

Dancelot Not a lot.

Chancelot Not a jot.

Guinevere Where is he?

Prancelot I wot not.

Guinevere Wot not? What's a wot not?

Chancelot It's a whatjamacallit...

Dancelot A thingummyjig...

Chancelot A whatsit...

Prancelot (*smugly*) It means 'I know not'. Wot is archaic.

Dancelot You're telling me!

Chancelot And you're a spotty swotty wot not!

Guinevere Chancelot! Really!

Chancelot Sorry, your Grace.

Prancelot Actually, I *do* wot. He's seeking the Holy Grail.

Guinevere Very well. Somebody else must take his place.

Merlin Volunteers, step forward.

Each of the Knights indicates that one of the others would be a far better volunteer, but Guinevere's having none of that nonsense

Guinevere You, you and you. Step forward.

Chancelot, Dancelot and Prancelot step forward reluctantly, taking their opportunity to burst into song – albeit rather dispiritedly

Knights We are the Knights who fight for Guinevere,

We are the best – yah boo...

Guinevere Not now, not now! Please!

Merlin Chancelot, Dancelot and Prancelot. A sorry looking lot.

Guinevere Chancelot, Dancelot and Prancelot. Not Lancelot. Now what?

Chancelot (*with a sneer at Prancelot*) We wot not.

Rowland I'll do it, mother, or perish in the attempt!

Knights Hurrah!

Guinevere Perish? Oh, one's goodness! Must you, Rowland?

Rowland Mother! It's your dear daughter who's missing. Fair Burd Ellen. I love her dearly, and cannot leave it to some bold old knight to rescue her. I'm her brother, and must save her by myself.

Knights Hurrah!

Merlin Are you sure, Rowland? Woe be to the man or mother's son who attempts the task if he be not well taught beforehand what he must do.

Rowland Merlin, you can tell and foretell, see and foresee all things under the sun and beyond, tell me how man or mother's son may find fair Burd Ellen in the Dark Tower of the King of Elfland.

Merlin Rowland, if you undertake this task, there are two things you must remember. Simple they are to say, but hard they are to perform. One thing is to do, and one thing is not to do.

Guinevere This sounds awfully complicated, Merlin.

Merlin (*ignoring her*) The first thing you must do is this. Once you have entered the Land of Faery, whoever speaks to you, you must out with your sword and cut off his head. In this you must not fail.

Guinevere One moment, Merlin. One's Rowland can't go round cutting people's heads off. One won't allow it. He's been brought up to be kind to - to...? Come on Rowland, be kind to...?

Rowland (*flustered*) Be kind to – to...

Guinevere (*looking towards her knights*) Anyone?

Dancelot Stray cats and dogs?

Chancelot Small birds and furry animals?

Prancelot (*smugly*) Fair ladies and little children.

Guinevere Right, Sir Prancelot. Fair ladies and little children.

Rowland Fair ladies and little children. One must never strike in anger, and - and never take advantage of one's opponent, and never strike him in - er - in the...

Guinevere (*looking towards her Knights*) In the...?

Chancelot The side?

Dancelot The front?

Chancelot The bottom?

Somebody whispers 'the bum' and the Knights - except Prancelot, of course - snigger and repeat 'bum' like naughty schoolboys

Prancelot (*smugly*) The back.

Guinevere Yes, Prancelot. The back. Now, Rowland...

Rowland I must strike my opponent in the back as befits a true knight.

Guinevere No, Rowland - you must *not* strike your opponent in the back as it befits *not* a true knight. You must remember, Merlin, Rowland's been trained in chivalry. He went to Knight School, you know, and took evening classes. As did all one's knights, even though most of them seem to have forgotten everything.

Prancelot looks smug and puts out his tongue at Dancelot, who reacts angrily and has to be held back by Chancelot. Guinevere glares, and the Knights stop scuffling and try to look innocent

Guinevere That's better. Yes Rowland, you must only strike at knights in tournaments - and absolutely never never ever to kill.

Merlin But suppose your opponent should wish you harm? Worse still, what if he should make an attempt upon your life? What if he would kill you, Rowland? What then?

Rowland Oh, that's different - I'd cut his head right off before he got a chance to do it to me!

Knights Hurrah!

Rowland The only thing is - if I didn't manage to cut his head off he might cut *my* head off before I could stop him! I don't think I'd like that!

The Knights vigorously - but silently - agree

Childe Rowland

Plot Summary

When Burd Ellen mysteriously disappears, Rowland consults the wizard Merlin, who suspects that she might have been spirited away by Elves. Rowland sets out on a perilous - and hilarious - journey to the Dark Tower to rescue his sister. After a succession of odd encounters in the Land of Faery, Rowland finally enters the Dark Tower and comes face to face with the awesome and all-powerful King of Elfland. Rowland saves the day - he's the hero, after all.

"Childe Rowland" is the full-length version of Ron Nicol's award-winning one act play "The Spiriting of Burd Ellen", published by Spotlight Publications. The music and lyrics written by Barbara Tulloch are contained in "The Childe Rowland Song Book", which is also published by Spotlight Publications.