

The Unsinkable Titanic

Book by Richard Brenneman
Music by John Dusenberry
Lyrics by Richard Brenneman

One Act, Book Musical, with Dance

The Unsinkable Titanic presents a group of players auditioning and rehearsing on that fateful night aboard the H.M.S. Titanic for a show to be put on for the passengers before the ship reaches New York. The players—singers, dancers, chorus, and a would-be juggler—are volunteer passengers and crew members. They are led by Dal, the Director of Entertainment aboard the ship, and his co-director/pianist Rudolf.

Memorable tunes, a love story, a jealous rival, dance numbers, interesting supporting characters, one elegant set (the main Dining Salon on the Titanic), period costumes, and of course characters dealing with an unfolding tragedy will make **The Unsinkable Titanic** an entertaining and moving experience for audiences. A production in 2012 would be appropriate since it's the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic.

Casting

Cast size: Medium (12, plus a small-medium size chorus)

Cast Type: Ensemble Cast - Featured roles, Star Vehicle - Female, Star Vehicle – Male

Dance requirement: The two leads and one middle-age female character need to be good dancers; the chorus and most other characters require some dancing ability.

Casting notes: 9 Men, 3 Women, and mixed chorus

Character Breakdown

DAL	Lead male. Early 30's. English, Oxford educated, inherited wealth, and now is the Entertainment Director on the Titanic. Good singer and dancer.
AYESHA	Lead female. Young, pretty, singer/dancer from Pennsylvania, working her way back to America as a waitress on the Titanic. Her dream is to perform on stage in New York City.
RUDOLF	DAL's rehearsal pianist and co-director. Piano (real or acted). Singing (with group). Loves his schnapps.
INKY	60 plus passenger. In a May-December relationship with MARYBELLE. Non-singing.
MARYBELLE	20 plus passenger. In a relationship with INKY. Singing.
MAX	AYESHA's jealous supervisor. Non-singing.
SOWANEE	Full-figure, middle-age, former madam who is in charge of cabin services. Writes songs, and is friends with CARL. Singing and dancing.
CARL	A middle-age kitchen worker, a juggler, a lyricist, and friends with SOWANEE. Singing.
A SHIP'S GUARD	Handles disturbances caused by MAX. Non-singing.
SECURITY GUARD	In charge of a suspected jewel thief, SERGIO. Non-singing.
SERGIO	40, slim, handsome, docile-looking, and being brought to New York--suspected of being a jewel thief. Non-singing.
CAPTAIN SMITH	Captain of the Titanic. Non-singing.
(SENIOR LADY)	First-class passenger. One line. Could be played by a chorus member. Non-singing.

Orchestra Size

Small to medium. Piano on stage.

Synopsis

Scene One

After dinner in the Dining Salon of the H.M.S. Titanic at sea.

The scene opens with Dal before the group of players, introducing himself and his co-director/pianist Rudolf to the people who weren't at the auditions the previous night, and acknowledging that some of those who were there were unable to audition due to time constraints. He then asks for some of the people to help Rudolf clear away tables and chairs so they have room to "swing the cat". That done, he points to the song sheets, encourages the newcomers to join in and do the best they can, and then kicks off the up-tempo opening number "**Let's Flatten Those Wrinkles**"--so that they can "put this one in storage".

At the conclusion of this number Dal asks only new people or those who were here late the night before and didn't get a chance to audition to remain. As some players file out, Inky (60 plus) waves to get Dal's attention and then introduces Marybelle, his 20ish partner, who wants to audition a song about the advantages of a May-December relationship for the May girl. After some discussion of such relationships between Dal, Rudolf, and Inky, Dal asks Inky how he got his name, and Marybelle says she gave it to him because he signs all the checks. Inky walks off in a resigned fashion, and then Marybelle sings "**It's Nice To Have Somebody**".

Dal congratulates Marybelle on her song, and then asks if there are any other paying passengers trying out. Ayesha (pretending to be a passenger) raises her hand. Dal remembers her from the previous night, and he is just as drawn to her as he was then. He asks Ayesha about the meaning of her unusual name. She says it simply means that when he calls it, he probably wants her. Enough said, Ayesha sings and dances to the song she brought: "**Let Me Dance**". Dal is quite impressed, and he asks Ayesha about her ambitions. While recognizing her talent, he is still surprised to learn she has no interest in college (not "warmin' to the heart" as her dad would say)—only in performing. Ayesha is limping so Dal gets her to a chair; and then asks Rudolf to bring them an ice pack. Rudolf, who has just returned from the deck outside, obliges and says that they're unlikely to run out of coolant judging by the ice floating by the ship.

Dal places the ice pack on Ayesha's ankle momentarily, and then just as Ayesha's supervisor Max enters Dal lifts the ice pack and kisses Ayesha's ankle. Ayesha says he shouldn't have done that, that he is taking liberties, but she is obviously quite pleased. Max becomes very jealous and gets into a verbal confrontation with Dal. Max forbids Ayesha to be in any dancing act, demands that she return to her post early the next day, and then exits in a huff. Dal leaves to see what he can do about this situation, and while he is gone Ayesha, feeling that Max will be able to prevent her from performing, sings "**This Could Have Been My Dream**".

Dal returns with good news. He explains that he has spoken with the biggest single owner of the ship, Mr. Ismay, who got him his job (Mr. Ismay is on the Board of Governors at Oxford and that is where Dal, an Oxford grad, met him), and Mr. Ismay agrees that Ayesha should be a full-time performer. No more waiting on tables. To celebrate, Dal and Ayesha sing and waltz to the joyous **“This Is The Time”**.

At the conclusion of the number Dal suggests they go see Max to tell him about the new arrangement. Ayesha is apprehensive, telling Dal how terribly strong and hot-tempered Max is. Dal tells Ayesha he was on the fencing team at Oxford and that if something were to happen he doubts Max could even land a punch. Max enters suddenly with his fists clenched, and a scuffle ensues wherein Dal pulls off a table cloth and drapes it about Max’s head and shoulders.

The scene ends in a blackout.

Scene Two

The Dining Salon, a few minutes after the scuffle.

Dal and Ayesha are alone. Ayesha compliments Dal on his being clever about handling Max (“despite that eye”); but Dal says he wishes he could actually win a fight one day. Nevertheless, he agrees with Ayesha that fighting is hardly a way to go through life. Taking advantage of this thought Dal tells Ayesha that he may have a way of keeping Max at bay: he presents Ayesha with a beautiful ring to “legitimize” their relationship. Ayesha adores the ring, but trying to draw Dal out of his English reserve, asks if the ring is just to keep Max from bothering her. Dal says it will help to save him from a lot of bruises--and it’s also to “tell you someone close at hand is very fond of you”. Victory for Ayesha! Dal says she’ll have to explain the ring to everyone, and Ayesha says she won’t tell them it’s to keep Max away—rather, “it’s to keep you around”. She then sings **“In Case You Haven’t Noticed We’re In Love”** to Dal, describing not what it has been like, but what she fantasizes it will be for them.

Dal’s response, unfortunately, is to remind Ayesha that the ring doesn’t mean they are actually engaged. Ayesha is crestfallen, and asks if perhaps there is someone else. Perhaps a wife? Dal asks her if she thinks he would be working on this ship if he had a wife and children at home. Ayesha reminds him that many men do exactly that—it falls under the necessity of making a living. Dal tells her that he inherited a bunch of money and is spared that necessity. Ayesha suggests that perhaps the other lady is a fortune hunter, as perhaps she is too. Dal says he knows that she, Ayesha, isn’t, and that the “other lady”, Grace, can’t be—she’s no longer alive. Ayesha feels terrible and sees that Dal is not over this loss. She asks Dal if Grace ever wore the ring he just gave to her. Dal says no, she had an even nicer one, and she was buried with it. As his feelings of loss take over, Dal sings **“Green”**.

After the song Sowanee and Carl enter (along with Rudolf and rest of the players, who mingle about in the background). Sowanee is a full-figured woman in charge of cabin services, and Carl

is a kitchen worker. Carl addresses Dal and suggests that he sing something more peppy—something, for instance, that Carl has with him. Dal says “I won’t be performing, thank you. I’m the director”. Carl then says they came by because they heard he was sweet on Ayesha; and then asks Ayesha about her ankle, lifting up her leg to check it. Ayesha, annoyed but not angry, tells Carl to stop, prompting Dal to ask what exactly they’re here for. For the show, they say. Sowanee says she sings and dances. Dal says they’re somewhat late--rehearsals have begun, and they say they don’t need rehearsals. Carl then explains that he’s a juggler, that he can juggle anything: potatoes, oranges, eggs. He starts to juggle some eggs and smashes one on the floor. Dal says that won’t go over well. In response, Carl reminds everyone that juggling is the oldest form of entertainment, but people don’t respect jugglers. Besides, he has more—he can tell stories while he juggles, such as stories about Dal and Ayesha. This annoys Dal no end. Sowanee then says “wait a minute, do I get a chance to audition?” Dal says she’s entitled to an audition, and asks her what she has. She says it’s a song she wrote herself that goes over pretty well, especially when everyone gets liquored up! She sings and dances to “**I’m Fat But I’m Fantastic**”. Dal likes the song and agrees to have Sowanee in the production, but not Carl. All is not lost for Carl, however, when Dal offers him the stage manager position.

Max enters again, looking for Ayesha. He comes up to her and adamantly tries to coerce her into coming back to work, telling her she will do as she is told. She resists, and when Dal tells Max that Mr. Ismay, who practically owns this ship, says Ayesha works for him now Max threatens to close Dal’s “big mouth” and then takes a round-house swing at Dal, who deftly steps aside and trips Max who falls on his face stunned. The LADIES scream while Ayesha goes to the door and hollers for a guard, as Sowanee sits atop Max to hold him down—several OTHERS join Sowanee on Max.

A guard enters, lifts Max to his feet and then asks him “What do we have here... some flamenco dancing that got out of hand? This is the second time that we’ve been called to control you, mister.” Max says this would be all over with if this sissy would stand and fight. As the guard takes Max off he reminds him that they have a brig aboard this ship and he’s close to becoming its first customer.

Dal then brings everyone back to the task at hand, reminding them that they have a performance the next night, so tonight is their last chance to get the show ready. He hands out song sheets, saying here is a song we will sing as a chorus, and asks Rudolf to play through once quickly—“then we’ll vocalize.” All sing “**With My Arms About You**”, a song about sailing on the great Titanic across the cold Atlantic, wild and blue.

After the song Sowanee speaks up for Carl, telling Dal that besides juggling Carl is a fine lyricist and should be given a chance to be in the show. Dal asks Carl if he is unhappy with his stage manager assignment. Carl replies: “unhappiness is my handmaiden.” Softening, Dal asks Carl if he’s the lyricist then who adds the music ? Carl replies that it’s Sowanee, but his favorite lyric was written for a man to sing. Dal then offers Sowanee a derby hat and says to go at it; but Sowanee says no—this is for you to do, Carl... it’s your statement. Carl then sings “**Should I Be Shamed?** (‘I like the feel of satin... adore the sounds of Latin... loving man, not manhood...’)

Dal tells Carl that his song was rather like a confession. He likes the song and the message, but it would cost him his job if he staged it aboard this ship. He reminds Carl that Captain Smith conducts the religious services here—he held one this morning right where they are standing. Carl says his song has nothing to do with religion, but Dal says it flies in the face of religious teaching. “We could never do it on the Titanic... it would sink the ship!” Sowanee says “Not hardly; this is an unsinkable ship—remember?” And then she says we can’t scuttle Carl’s creativity altogether, and asks to sing another of Carl’s songs, even though it gives her the chills because there’s too much damn emotion in the song. Dal is hesitant but acknowledges that we’re going to hear this song whether we want to or not. Sowanee says “you should hear it; because you and Ayesha are the models for it.” Sowanee sings “**I Just Saw Two People In Love**”.

Dal’s reaction isn’t positive. The song is a lot of “overly sentimental pap!” But before anyone can respond, a security guard enters, handcuffed to his prisoner, Sergio. Sergio is about forty, slim, handsome and docile-looking. The guard is surprised to find everyone there close to midnight. He’s looking for a place to give his prisoner some exercise (“it’s colder than a reindeer’s nose” out on the decks). Dal says they’ll be finished soon, and when the security guard asks if they can stay and watch Dal says yes—as long as they don’t try to foist a song on him. The guard says they won’t, but Sergio here may end up in Sing-Sing, but adds quickly (after the groans following his joke) that Sergio is harmless—may not even be guilty of jewel theft—just a suspect at this time. Nevertheless, some of the players are apprehensive.

Dal says enough of this, let’s have a run-through. The guard asks if he’d like to see some of Sergio’s magic tricks. Sergio says he’ll need to go to his cabin to get his props. Dal is hesitant. “Wait a minute; I didn’t agree to any magic on the program. Least of all by someone who is under arrest”. Sowanee urges Dal to say yes. Ayesha adds that Sergio has shown her some of his tricks, so he should wait until he’s seen them. Dal agrees reluctantly. The guard and Sergio exit.

Suddenly Rudolf who has just returned from outside on the deck is startled, and asks if anyone felt that scraping. He says he saw huge iceberg float by just now, and he thinks we must have hit it. Many of the players become alarmed; but Dal, thinking it’s likely that Rudolf is just trying to create a rumpus, suggests another rational explanation. Then a distress signal sounds. Dal asks Rudolf to go back out and see what he can find. Rudolf exits, but suggests everyone put on their life jackets. More discussion and growing alarm among the players. Then Ayesha asks why the engines have stopped. More discussion. More alarm. Rudolf returns, excited with fear, saying that everyone is running to their rooms to put on life jackets! Carl notices that the ship is listing. Dal advises all to go get their life jackets and then meet back here. Ayesha tells Dal it takes two people to put on a life jacket. Dal asks Ayesha to run to her room to get her jacket and then meet him in his cabin C-12. “Remember?” Ayesha says, “Did you think I’d forgotten already, Dal? I’ve got cabin C-12 singled out for a big event in my life. That’s why I’m sure this ship won’t go down.”

Scene Three

A few minutes later. Dining Salon on the sinking Titanic. Dal, Ayesha, and the others have returned.

Dal urges Ayesha and Sowanee to get into a life boat as soon as possible. Ayesha is going to stay with Dal no matter what. Dal wants her to go—this is a matter of her life—but Ayesha is persistent. Sowanee says she's not in love, and besides "while the vessel may not go down, I don't want to tweak the devil's nose", so she leaves.

Captain Smith then pokes his head in the salon door, and says, "Have you heard the alarm? We are lowering women and children in the lifeboats on B deck... after which the crew will be excused from duty, so it becomes every man for himself." After some questioning, Captain Smith says he fully expects a vehicle to come to their rescue, but they should be prepared for the worst. He exits.

The security guard (holding 4 whiskey bottles) and Sergio enter. After the guard takes a swig from one of the bottles and recommends the others do likewise ("Makes for a nice little belly warmer before you hit that cold water"), Carl decides to leave ("when they start handin' out free booze—you know the ship is goin' down"). The guard takes off Sergio's handcuffs. Rudolf re-enters (after going out on deck when he heard the ship's band playing "Danny Boy") and says that he just saw someone fall 70 feet into the water and come up with his eyes bulging. The guard says stories like that aren't helping. Dal, Ayesha, and Rudolf then lead in one by one to the song "**Life, Life, Life**" about needing courage in the face of impending danger.

Buoyed by the spirit of this song, Dal at the conclusion says "When danger looms, dancing booms... let's do it!" and then leads a **rhumba line** that the others join. Carl re-enters saying they wouldn't let him in the boats because he's a man—besides, he forgot his hat. Ayesha says "Your hat isn't going to do you much good. Try a dress!" Carl says he doesn't want to go down in drag, and then joins the rhumba line. A senior lady pokes her head in and says "You should be ashamed of yourselves. There is no dancing on White Star Lines on Sundays!" Dal points out that it's no longer Sunday. She leaves with her nose in the air. Carl says the calendar doesn't matter—it's Doomsday; and they're putting their heads in the sand. Dal agrees, and the rhumba line comes to an end.

Dal then decides to go out on deck to see for himself how things are going. While he's gone Rudolf says to Ayesha that Dal must surely have a hold on her for her to remain with them. Ayesha says "I don't know about any 'hold'... she then sings "**He's Got My Heart**"

Dal returns and says the last life boat is now loading and Ayesha must get on it. She won't. Dal says he feels responsible for a beautiful enchantress with everything to live for refusing a life-saving opportunity, and he doesn't like that one bit. Ayesha asks if he likes her. "Certainly I like you... it's much more than 'like' for heaven's sake!" She says it's her decision to stay, and that's final. Meanwhile the security guard keeps drinking, and Ayesha takes him up on his offer of a

few swigs, as does Rudolf. Sergio declines. His new-found freedom is enough, and he wants to keep his wits about him. Rudolf then asks if there are any schnapps, and the security guard hands him a bottle, asking if he ever sailed on a German ship. Rudolf says no, but his former music teacher was a German lady. The guard asks if he ever shared schnapps with her, and if perhaps he ever made love to her—even to music. Rudolf: “Why should I deny it?”

Hearing this, Ayesha takes Dal aside and says she has a confession to make. She’s a virgin; and she doesn’t want to die a virgin. “Can’t we... that is... can’t we quick go to your cabin?” Dal says her lack of experience makes her think this situation is no obstacle to love-making, but it is. Besides, his cabin is probably flooded right now. Ayesha suggests they find a place nearby. Dal says perhaps there is, but he’s too distracted and panicky right now—but if it must be perhaps there are other suitable candidates. Ayesha, “Yes, and you’re quite willing to make such an announcement; is that it?” She bursts into tears. Dal tries to comfort her, and says he was trying desperately to inject some humor into the situation—that she’s means the world to him... or what’s left of it. But now he needs to be about the business of trying to think of a way of saving everyone.

Ayesha, “We’re not through with my idea yet, Dal. Maybe I have no experience... but I’m drooling with instincts and I say you’ll feel tons better... and you’ll have so much more to live for. Remember, Dal; I’m a dancer and I can make you want me more than life.” **She begins to dance (a la strip-tease)**, lifting her skirts well above the knee. She asks Dal if she’s tempting him. Carl says he’s tempted; but when Ayesha begins to shed some outer garments Dal says this is embarrassing. Ayesha continues, chucking Dal under that chin. Then, a muffled, but shaking explosion occurs. Ayesha stops dancing. Carl says it must be the boilers. Max enters hurriedly.

Max tells Ayesha to get her clothes on. He’s paid a crewmember five hundred dollars for the two of them to get on the last boat. Ayesha refuses. Max grabs her. Dal does nothing. Rudolf asks why. Dal says it may be the best thing for her. Ayesha, “you’d turn me over to this gorilla?” Dal frees Ayesha from Max’s grip. Ayesha says that compared with life with Max death would be sweet. Max storms out, asking Ayesha how long her proud love will last underwater. **Ayesha resumes her dancing.**

After a few minutes pistol shots are heard. Rudolf runs out to see what happened and returns to say that they shot Max. He was trying to force his way onto the last lifeboat and they shot him—dumped his body overboard.

There is much discussion about what to do next. Will they be saved? What will happen when the ship sinks? ... Dal says that any plan is better than no plan, and he comes up with the idea of making make-shift life rafts out of deck chairs and the large canvas tops that have been discarded from the lifeboats. Everyone is assigned tasks to get this done, but the continuing morbid thoughts and suggestions are too much for Ayesha. She seeks relief in singing and dancing—to a reprise of “**Let Me Dance**” until Captain Smith pokes his head in one last time to say there are no more life boats.

Ayesha says “we already know about that, but can you perform a marriage on a sinking ship?” Dal says this is hardly the time for that. The Captain says the problem seems “not so much the sinking ship as the sinking feelings”. Then he apologizes for trying to interject some humor at this time. He commends them for their bravery, but says he’s done all he can for them, and now it’s every man for himself. He exits. The security guard, waving a bottle overhead, says “isn’t that the bastard who ordered full steam ahead? Then he draws a gun, but Rudolf settles him down.

Then Inky enters wearing formal clothes. He tells everyone that Marybelle is safely ensconced aboard the last life boat. Rudolf asks why he’s wearing formal clothes, and Inky says “I’ll admit to you that I fully expect to meet my maker tonite; and I don’t want Him to think I’m a slob!”

The ship continues to sink. Carl says there’s a bunch of people out there praying. Ayesha, “Everything is so very hostile. The black, icy water; this cumbersome, sinking ship; the panicky passengers... everything but our love, Dal; and these tiny make-shift rafts... do you think we have a chance?” Dal says yes, but we have to prepare to put the plan into action very soon. He gives details of the last steps, in particular that they must wait until the water is within five feet of the deck before tossing the rafts into the ocean and the climbing into them.

Ayesha, “DAL, while we’re still both warm and dry, please tell me how you feel... what I mean to you... what do we mean to each other?” She sings “**Tender Love**”

***** the closing dialogue *****

AYESHA

Oh Dal, look quick; there’s a falling star. Remember the first time you kissed me—it was right here on this deck and we watched a falling star.

DAL

I’ve never seen the sky so brilliant as it is tonite.

AYESHA

In spite of the danger we’re in, I’ve never felt so brilliant about my life—about our lives... as I do right now.

DAL

Just over your shoulder, Ayesha... see that couple sitting on the deck chairs? That’s Mister and Misses Strauss. She refused to get into a life boat without him. They’re just awaiting their fate!

AYESHA

God bless them!

DAL

The ship's going down, Ayesha. We must get on with the business of saving our lives.

AYESHA

And Dal; thank you for putting me in your show!... maybe we'll get to do it in... in...

DAL

In another ship; on another ocean. You've been the star of my show, Ayesha, since I first met you. I do love you... and I'll wait for you... back to basics... let's hope no one goes unconscious from the shock of the cold water... believe me, I'll wait for you, Ayesha; I'll wait for you forever.

(DAL eases himself over the rail—a splash is heard)

AYESHA

Dal? Dal? Oh please, Dal! Why don't you come up? Dal, Dal; for God's sake, don't leave me, Dal!

(AYESHA's cries gradually succumb to the strains of **"Let Me Dance"**)

End of Scene Three

End of Play

About the Authors

John Dusenberry, composer

John Dusenberry, recognizing the quality of the work he and Richard Brenneman had done on “The Unsinkable Titanic”, as well as the fact that 2012 is the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the Titanic, is pursuing a production of this excellent show.

John started his music life as a jazz trombone player in the New York area. Since acquiring formal training in music composition at USC and UCLA, John has focused on writing. Two musicals of his own, “The Campaign” and “Best Laid Plans”, as well as “The Accidental President” in collaboration with writer Allan Provost of Miami, Florida have been produced very successfully in the Los Angeles area. His music for a production of “Best Laid Plans” at the Beverly Hills Playhouse received an excellent review in Daily Variety.

Richard Brenneman, book and lyrics

Richard Brenneman, a scientist by profession and poet at heart, has written many plays, poems, and lyrics during his lifetime. He also hosted two early public television science shows called 'Innovations' on Channel 28, and 'Science Safari' on cable television. After a chance meeting with composer John Dusenberry in the early 1990's, and listening to some of John's music, he sent the book and lyrics for “The Unsinkable Titanic” to John, who began setting the lyrics to music. John set 11 of the 14 songs before events led them to put the project aside. Richard Brenneman has since passed away (2006).