

**A Synopsis of  
Remembering Hue**

A Full-Length Play with Songs  
with  
With Book, Lyrics and Music

By Clyde Coreil

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### **Action**

The action takes place in 1967 and in 1968 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; in an aging resort hotel West Virginia; and in and near the Citadel, an enormous fortress located in Hue, Vietnam. Charlene is a broken-hearted artist of 24 who went to Vietnam as a volunteer teacher during the war because she wanted to find herself. She becomes intoxicated by Hue, which for her is Shangri La—the ancient city and the blossoming and deep love she now shares with Huong. She contributes her graphic talent which is sorely needed for his scholarly work on the Citadel and its place in the minds of all Vietnamese. In the desperate early hours of the Tet Offensive of 1968, Huong appears in the full parade dress of a North Vietnamese Army officer. Charlene is stunned. He pleads with her to accept and use the letter of safe-passage to Hanoi he worked so hard to get. Her signed illustrations are seized and will be used for military purposes. The world she had discovered and built is torn apart. Charlene breaks. As a result, she and Huong are shot and killed.

### Principle Characters

Charlene Ayer.....	24 years old, delicate, artistic, essentially lost at the beginning of the play, discovers herself in the Shangri-La city of Hue
Nguyen van Huong.....	28 years old, strong-willed but retiring man who scorns the regimes of both Hanoi and Saigon
Hal Garren.....	28 years old, a slightly aging Golden Boy who thrives on action and confrontation
Ben Hoggins.....	25 years old, an irony-loving ne'er-do-well who has shuffled sideways in life and wound up as a volunteer teacher of English
Renee Dupuis.....	27 years old, scarred by romance but who functions well as a more-or-less decisive leader
Balford "Baly" Deville.....	21 years old, sincere black university student majoring in music composition
Barbara Fields.....	22 years old, no-nonsense black university student, friend of Baly's
Stuart.....	29 years old, Charlene's very balanced, very decent ex-companion
Joe "Dummy" Skins.....	55 years old, a volunteer interested mainly in finding a way back to a lady in Dalat, Vietnam
Major Dai.....	40 years old, a suave man from Hanoi whose personality is half-French, half-Vietnamese
Steve Benoit.....	27 years old, university teacher, skydiving friend of Hal's
Vicki Alvarez.....	25 years old, companion of Steve's
Vui.....	23 years old, a Buddhist monk who is more inclined to eat than meditate
Phuoc.....	24 years old, a university student in Vietnam
Jeanette, Aldus, Tom.....	Barbara's students, can be from 5-9 years old
Ian Helson, David Schornhurst....	Reporters on the BBC Radio
Jeanne.....	Dummy's Vietnamese lady in Dalat

## **Conflict**

The tension derives from the inner conflicts of Charlene and Huong and from their romance. Early in the play, Charlene commits herself to finding meaning, although that entails a painful parting from Hal. Huong, a scholar dedicated to the high goals of an ancient Vietnamese nationalism, falls hopelessly in love with Charlene when she goes to his country to teach schoolchildren. The star-crossed lovers are destined for destruction.

# **ACT ONE**

## **Prologue**

The play opens with a brief Prologue in which an older Hal sings the theme song of the play alone in his apartment. On that day, June 1, 1977, Hal will be Best Man at the wedding of Baly, an old friend who is black. The groom shows up after the song, treats Hal like a dear but forgetful friend, and takes him off to the wedding. Here the Prologue ends.

## **Song #1**

### **Remembering**

Sung by Hal

### **\*\*\*Scene One\*\*\***

It is May of 1967. Hal is a slightly aging Golden boy, a handsome young creative writing teacher at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. He is returning with gear from a day of skydiving to the apartment of his fiancée, Charlene, a serious artist who has spent the day painting. She is troubled at the prospect of what lies in store for her in Kyoto, Japan, where Hal will be researching his second novel. He wants very much for her to go with him, but she is reluctant to sit around idly all day. As an alternative, she is seeking a year-long teaching organization that also staffs Vietnam. Darkly concerned, Hal is adamantly opposed to her accepting that job. She would be away from him, and that country is at war. They argue. Several of his skydiving buddies arrive. Charlene reluctantly agrees to accompany them to a parachute outing the following week.

**Song #2****Skydiving Song**

Sung by All Present

Baly, one of Hal's students, shows up and sings the music he wrote for a poem by a friend of Hal's. He also agrees to Charlene's request to draw him near the campus lake on the following day.

**Song #3****Old Friends Like Us**

Sung by Baly

Hal's friends leave. Baly also leaves after reporting on a grading difficulty Hal is having with another student. Having experienced this sort of thing with headstrong Hal before, she is annoyed. She says that he cannot stay over as usual because she has some heavy thinking to do.

**\*\*\*Scene Two\*\*\***

Huong, wearing dark blue pants and an old white shirt, is hard at work removing a beam from a bell tower in the crumbling Citadel of Hue, a huge fortress whose walls are approximately two miles long. For several years, Huong has been working on a dissertation that deals with the symbolic meaning of that Citadel to all of Vietnam. He was pressured into accepting a commission in the North Vietnamese Army, which he did with the agreement that he could continue his research. The status as a student at the University of Hue.

Dai, a major in the North Vietnamese Army, is dressed as a civilian in this scene. He appears, addresses Huong as "Lieutenant" and gives him orders concerning his fixing up a guardhouse in the Citadel. Dai also informs Huong that he is not to leave Hue after November 1967, which is several months away. Huong reminds Dai that he is working as a Counterpart Leader for an American volunteer teaching organization. As such, he is expected to make trips to other parts of South Vietnam every month. They exchange words, Huong expressing contempt for the and leaves in a huff. Vui, a young Buddhist monk who has been eavesdropping, returns, munching as usual. He says to Huong, "You are destined to be very powerful or very dead. Personally, I'd vote for the latter."

**\*\*\*Scene Three\*\*\***

Charlene calls Stuart, an ex-lover who is now Charlene's confidante, advisor and friend. He shows up and tries to convince her to think less about leaving and more about him.

**Song #4****A Million Days of Blue**

Sung by Stuart

**\*\*\*Scene Four\*\*\***

Next day, as Charlene is finishing her drawing of Baly, they are joined by his girlfriend Barbara and two or three of her elementary school students. The kids know Baly and demand two songs.

**Song #5****We've Got Plenty of Sunshine**

Sung by Baly, Children

**Song #6****Say My Name**

Sung by Baly, Children

Hal shows up. Baly, Barbara and the children leave. Hal reports on a just-ended meeting where he has learned that his leave of absence is in jeopardy because of the grading difficulty. Again, Charlene is upset because Hal deals with things as though only he is involved in their future. She tells him to stay away for a couple of days, that she will see him at the parachute outing on Saturday, when—coincidentally—the grater matter will be resolved at a special meeting. She leaves. He thinks of their splitting up and sings.

**Song #7****What Could Have Been**

Sung by Hal

**\*\*\*Scene Five\*\*\***

At the airport, Charlene learns that Hal has chosen to go to Japan in spite of the fact that approval of his leave of absence has been withdrawn. He has resigned his job. Again, Charlene was not consulted. Bitterly angry, she breaks off the engagement, calls

the volunteer organization, and accepts the assignment in Vietnam. She is frightened and alone.

### **Song #8**

#### **Who AM I**

Sung by Charlene

### **\*\*\*Scene Six\*\*\***

Charlene joins others volunteers who are assembling for orientation in an old-fashioned country resort in West Virginia. Bennett, a crusty young volunteer from Tennessee, takes the vulnerable Charlene under his wing. He sings a protest song, accompanying himself on the guitar.

### **Song #9**

#### **A Time to Love**

Sung by Bennett

Bennett, Charlene and one other volunteer are held over without explanation while the 20 others depart for Vietnam. Huong arrives and explains that those three have been selected for the very sensitive post of Hue, the cultural center of the country. He points out that both sides have tactically agreed not to fight in Hue in order to preserve the spiritual identity of the nation. As a result, hue is intact, whole, and with only a relatively small US post with GI's who are restricted to base. This is unlike any other city in the South. There is one other volunteer in Hue, Renee, who directs volunteer activities in the northern part of South Vietnam. Huong is her national counterpart in title, but has only nominal leadership responsibilities. In her description of Hue to Charlene, she reveals her love of the city. She has sensed that Charlene is just out of a relationship and says, "If it weren't for broken hearts and lost souls, we'd have to close up shop. It's what you do with that that counts." They part, and Charlene finds herself almost serene for the first time in years.

### **Song #10**

#### **After the Night Gets Blue**

Sung by Charlene

**\*\*\*Scene Seven\*\*\***

That evening a celebration dinner is attended by the remaining volunteers. Huong delivers a short but touching speech on Hue which he expands later when he and Charlene find themselves alone in the banquet hall. He explains what Hue means to him as a Vietnamese and a historian studying at the University of Hue. Charlene and Huong talk about his dissertation project-recording the physical Citadel and its more complex cultural meaning. She is captivated by his passionate description and finds him to be elegant, sincere and handsome. She volunteers her services as a trained graphic artist in Huong's Citadel project. Reluctantly, Huong agrees to consider her offer. They shake hands longer than would be considered proper before both are embarrassed. Huong blushes and quickly leaves. Charlene's head is full of dreams of Hue and of memories of Hal. The end of Act One finds her with possibilities that were undreamed of earlier. The first few notes of Who I Am, which she sang at the airport, form the brief musical introduction to That Old Magic Land.

**Song # 11****That Old Magic Land**

Sung by Charlene

**\*\*\*\*\*END OF ACT ONE\*\*\*\*\***

## Act II

### Thematic Lines Established in Scenes 8 and 9

(Scenes are numbered consecutively throughout the play.)

Charlene quickly falls in love with Hue and with her work of teaching English to schoolchildren. For her, it is Shangri-La—graceful, antique, quiet, refined, charming, and surprisingly peaceful (actually, it is the tranquil eye at the center of the hurricane.) the stage scenery is lush with pieces of beautiful but crumbling architecture here and there. She feels that this is the one place on earth that she was meant to be. Part of Charlene’s fascination with Hue was doubtless due to her interest in Huong and his reconstructing and recording of the national and cultural functions that took place in the Citadel. She brings to the project the sophistication of graphic design, which includes making a large number of cut-away architectural drawings with which Huong can trace the movement of the individuals and groups through the maze of interconnected buildings. These drawings will later be of enormous importance to the troop movements of the North Vietnamese Army in the Tet Offensive. At first, Huong is unaware of this aspect of the drawings. Charlene is attracted to Huong, but she has been burned before and is reluctant to acknowledge the depth of her feelings...and she still thinks of Hal.

### \*\*\*Scene Eight\*\*\*

Weeks become months. Charlene is radiant and fully engaged in her activities in the classroom, in painting and in working with Huong in the Citadel. She has found for the first time a life she feels is hers. She is concerned but not really upset when Renee gives her a suspicious letter from Hal, which bears no postmark. Charlene opens it and reads it aloud to Renee. Japan is not at all what he expected. To help deal with a complete writer’s block, he has secured press credentials to work for a while as a reporter in Vietnam. Hal, who has secretly delivered the letter to Hue, meets Renee, who reads him the riot act and says that he should leave. Hal is just passing through Hue in pursuit of a news story and is scheduled to leave next day. He encounters Huong, who is under strict orders to be extra-accommodating to journalists. Despite his concern about Hal as a rival, Huong provides useful contacts and approves Phuoc’s arranging for Hal to spend several weeks writing about Hue, which has been neglected in the media. Huong’s motivation is mainly to keep fighting away from Hue. Hal sees quickly that Charlene no longer needs him. He knows that he should leave as Renee suggests, but he can’t—because he still loves her and because of an increasing fascination with the political and military scene.

**Song #12****I Know It's Gone**

Sung by Hal

**\*\*\*Scene Nine\*\*\***

Charlene visits Huong's newly-restored guardhouse residence with a birthday gift. It is December—chilly and rainy. Huong is not at home yet, but Dai answers the door, introduces himself as Huong's old friend from the highlands and says that he is awaiting Huong. Despite Dai's sophistication and charm, Charlene doesn't like him. Huong arrives and Dai excuses himself, saying he will be back later. Charlene gives Huong the gift, a large portfolio to protect the many drawings she has made of the Citadel. Huong gives her the one thing of value that he has in the world—a wedding ring that had belonged to the mother of the French priest who raised him and taught him the values of the historian. Charlene asks Huong if he fully understands what the giving of a ring means. He says he does. Charlene becomes emotional. They agree to wed in the Saigon cathedral in early June of the following year. Huong is quite apprehensive but hides it as they leave for a casual stroll to the nearby gate of the Citadel. There, old Mr. Nguyen is building a home-made carousel to be used in the celebration of Tet, the Vietnamese New Year at the beginning of the February. The stage lights become multicolored and a calliope begins playing Merry-go-round, a song that Charlene will sing later in the play. They kiss as the lights go down.

**\*\*\*Scene Ten\*\*\***

It is later that evening in the guardhouse. Dai has found Charlene's drawings of the Citadel and is examining them with great interest when Huong returns. Dai praises them and asks specific questions. Huong answers, explaining briefly and somewhat sarcastically. Through Dai's oblique remarks, Huong gradually sees that an enormous offensive is being planned. The drawings are valuable because they will be a guide to the mazes of the Citadel, which will itself be a major battlefield. He is enraged. Dai says, "You are indulging yourself in the fiction of a jade garden. Your Vietnam did a long time ago." He adds that Charlene is to be made to finish the drawings as soon as possible, and that she is to leave all of them with Huong. Under great pressure, Huong agrees but demands for her letter of safe passage signed by general Giap, head of the North Vietnamese Army. They two men argue, but Dai solemnly swears to do his best if the drawings are finished in time.

**\*\*\*Scene Eleven\*\*\***

The guardhouse. Dai storms out. Huong is distraught. He puts on his overcoat and walks outside near the Perfume River and sings.

**Song #13**

**There's Nothing Left of Time**

Sung by Huong

Not seen or heard by Huong, Charlene is down right looking at the river. There is a great calm and radiance emanating from her as she sings of her great joy at having given her heart away.

**Song #14**

**Twelve's a Lonely Hour**

Sung by Charlene

Huong happens upon Charlene and warns her that it's not safe to be out this late. She cannot be concerned but notices that he is troubled. The conversation turns towards the drawings, and she assures him that, with a lot of effort, most of the project can be completed before Tet. Still enchanted by visions of their future together, she asks, "How many generations of lovers have stood where we are standing now and been hypnotized by the magnificence of moments like this? Together they sing.

**Song #15**

**When Someone Holds Your Hand**

Sung by Charlene and Huong

**\*\*\*Scene Twelve\*\*\***

The female volunteers' house in Hue. It is December 23, 1967, shortly before 5:30p.m. when a Christmas Party will begin. Ben and Renee have fallen in love, and Ben sings his gift, a song.

**Song #16**

**Song for Renee**

Huong, who is a close team member, shows up with Charlene and the volunteer who came to Hue with Charlene and Ben. Hal, in reporter's dress, joins the group with concern on his face. He calls Charlene to one side and hurriedly asks her to be in Saigon for Tet. He has traveled around the country a lot and seen evidence of a massive buildup.

“Get Huong to go with you,” he says. “Hue is very vulnerable, who is usually joking and provoking, sees that Huong is also distracted and asks him to sing a song written by Hal’s friend in Saigon who is absorbed by the idea of solidarity, friendship and unions. Those themes are reflected in the lyrics. Reluctantly, Huong sings.

### Song #17

#### Christmas Friends

Sung by Huong, the Group

On the one hand, the people gathered in the room are a tiny part of the reason why the country is being torn apart. On the other, they have shown Huong great care and consideration and provided the home he had never known. He knows that shortly, he might well have to take up arms against them. He cannot handle that thought, begins to break down as he finishes the song, and leaves the room. Hal and Charlene follow. A concerned Charlene re-enters and says that Huong is exhausted and that Hal has taken him home in a taxi. She rejoins the group and joins in the singing of Christmas Friends by the entire group, which ends the scene.

### \*\*\*Scene Thirteen\*\*\*

It is 9 a.m. in Huong’s guardhouse four days before the glorious celebration of Tet. Charlene enters from a bedroom, wrapped in one of the thick blue robes her parents sent as a Christmas gift. Children are shouting in high spirits outside and shooting firecrackers. Huong enters in an identical robe. They take a look at each will know that she spent the night with Huong. He quietens her. She sees the portfolio on which they worked until very late.

CHARLENE

I was so sleepy that I barely remember what we were working on? (REFERRING TO PORTFOLIO WHICH SHE IS OPENING) We are finished...at least I think we are.

HUONG

We are...(SPREADING RECENT DRAWINGS ON TABLE) I can’t really believe it. It’s been four months: it seems more like four years. These are so very important to me...to us...to Vietnam. The first part of my dissertation is already done. In the second part, I will use all of the drawings to...describe in detail...movements on important occasions and suggest the underlying meanings. Vietnamese are very much inclined to see underlying meanings, but not to discuss them.

CHARLENE

Then you’ll be able to work at the University. After we return from the wedding in Saigon, I will never leave this city...I mean to live anywhere else. For me, it is the center.

HUONG

For me, you are the center...the house at the center. (HUONG TURNS AWAY. CHARLENE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND. SHE TURNS HIS FACE TO HER AND SEES GREAT EMOTIONS.)

CHARLENE

Huong...what is it?

HUONG

Nothing...They'll give me a degree and say that I'm a hero...No one will give you anything.

CHARLENE

I don't need anything...only you...are you alright? (HUONG NODS, THEN PULLS AWAY GENTLY.)

Charlene breaks this confusing seriousness by referring to the celebration that permeates Hue.

### Song #18

#### The Time of Tet

Sung by Charlene

Eager to see Mr. Nguyen's finishing touches on the home-made carousel, Charlene says she'll see Huong at the gate in 20 minutes. Dai watches her leave, enters and demands the drawings. Huong asks for the letter of safe passage. Dai produces it in a small leather case, adding that it was secured only with great difficulty. They exchange items. Dai says that he must have slides made of the drawings that afternoon. Huong demands a set of slides and asks what will happen to the originals. Dai says that General Giap will probably send them to the War Museum in Hanoi. "You and Ms Ayer (Charlene) will become famous. She doesn't even know what she's done for Vietnam...And who will remember Dai? No one, Ha!"

### \*\*\*Scene Fourteen\*\*\*

The exuberant joyousness of Tet seems to be a projection onto the world of Charlene's state of mind. Huong catches up with Charlene, sees her greeting people in Vietnamese, comments that she is becoming more Vietnamese than he is. Charlene replies as they reach the carousel, "I am more myself than me...Look at those horses reared back...little mirrors everywhere, eyes bulging manes flying, nostrils opened wide. Mr. Nguyen has carved out an expression of...extreme anticipation in those blocks of wood. Who would have ever guessed that he would understand the depth of those great emotions?" She mounts a horse and sings Merry-go-round, which provides the counter-statement of Who Am I. At this moment, Charlene is at the pinnacle of a vision of herself she had never imagined. Huong's action indicate more of a clouded mind, which he attempts to hide.

**Song #19****Merry-go-round**

Sung by Charlene

**\*\*\*Scene Fifteen\*\*\***

It is 3 a.m. on the morning of Tet in the female volunteer's house. The randomness of an occasional firecracker is replaced by the sound of distant machine guns and explosions, which become louder. Still dressed for outdoors, Charlene is sleeping in an armchair, waiting for Huong, who had promised to take her to the guardhouse about six hours before. The sound of fighting awakens her and she is worried about him. She awakens Renee, and they turn on the radio, which is reporting the coordinated attacks throughout the country by the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army. The announcer mentions that the Citadel in Hue is the scene of fierce fighting. Charlene is expressing her great concern for Huong as a university student known to the volunteers enters in Viet Cong dress and carrying a rifle and bandoliers. He hurriedly greets the two women and politely says that Renee must come with him to safety in the hills. Charlene must wait. He leaves with Renee.

Huong shows up in the parade dress uniform of a North Vietnamese lieutenant. She is relieved to see him and thinks that the uniform is a guise. Fighting can be heard nearby, and he says he does not have much time. He gives her the letter and says that a car is waiting outside to initiate her journey to Hanoi. Arrangements have been made for her to stay with a family on the outskirts of that city. He will visit her as soon as he can so that they can be married. Her first reaction is shock and stunned calm. The she sings sadly, joined by Huong.

**Song #20****All My Love**

Sung by Charlene and Huong

Holding the portfolio, Dai rushes in and demands that Huong return immediately to his urgent responsibilities. The lives of 100 men depend on it. Charlene recognizes the portfolio and angrily asks what he is doing with it. Dai tries to ignore her, but as her belligerence increases, he shouts that he got it from Huong for military purposes. She grabs at the portfolio. Huong tries to pull her back, but she has the strength of a person gone berserk and breaks away, again and again attacking Dai and trying to get the drawings. The disastrous explosion of her idyllic vision is centered in the act of getting the portfolio. Because of her extreme violence despite repeated warnings and because of the urgency of the moment, Dai shoots her with his pistol. Huong is paralyzed by shock and slowly lifts his own pistol to shoot Dai. Dai realizes that Huong wants to be shot and

reluctantly shoots as his own life is threatened. Hal rushes in. Dai exits. Holding Charlene's body vertically against his shoulder, Hal sings Who Am I.

## END OF SCENE 15

### EPILOGUE

Lights grow increasingly blue and dim on the death scene, but stay up somewhat on Hal. They become more and more white as he slowly crosses to stage left where he exchanges his reporter's field jacket for the sportcoat he wore in the prologue. After a long pause in which Hal is lost in memory, he begins to sing Remembering without accompaniment. Understated instruments join in. As in the prologue, Baly enters after a cursory knock at the door. Other lines from the prologue are acted until Baly says, "Dig the spats, Man." At that point, lights dim. The "Wedding March" begins softly and then increases in volume. Vui, the young monk, has assumed the pose of a minister ready to conduct a marriage. Stuart, Steve, Vicki, Phuoc and others in the cast are the seated members of the congregation. Hal walks Barbara upstage to meet Baly. They are married with the appropriate words. Hal then escorts Renee as she and Ben are married with fewer words. Pause. Hal replaces Vui at the podium. Pause. Vui announces, "Nguyen van Dai, General in the Army of the People's Republic of Vietnam." Dai enters ceremoniously but slightly smiling up right and crosses down left. Hal speaks.

### HAL

(IN THE TONE OF A GOOD, STRAIGHTFORWARD PREACHER DRESSED IN A LOOSE-FITTING UPPER GARMENT) Friends, we are gathered together here today to pay tribute to those who have gone before us, blessed with the divine gift of humanly love. That and that alone is what makes life worth living and death worth dying. It has the strength to lift us out of ourselves and give us life everlasting, it enables us to heal ourselves and those we hold dear. It gives us the supreme power to forgive...and be forgiven.

The pool of light on Hal fades and comes up on Huong, who enters slowly and erect from upstage left and crosses to center left near Hal. Huong is in the full traditional dress of the Vietnamese Groom. The grand finale entrance is Charlene, in the full, snow-white wedding dress with veil of a Western lady. She enters from down left, magnificently lighted in an other-worldly shade of blue. She is lofty and in the spirit of great happiness. She takes Dai's arm and they cross to meet Huong. Distant strains of Merry-go-round are heard. The chorus onstage sings some of the words of the song softly.

HAL

What has been put together in heaven, no human being can pull asunder. And these two spirits are surely and inseparably joined for always and evermore.

Huong lifts Charlene's veil and kisses her. The orchestra plays the second verse of Remembering. Hal begins singing. He is joined by the chorus onstage.

**(Song #1)**

**Remembering**

**(2<sup>nd</sup> verse, repeated as necessary)**

**II**

**It's over now**

**But that time has run**

**Into my heart**

**With every sun.**

**'Til yesterday**

**tomorrow brings,**

**I'll be in Hue**

**Remembering.**

As Hal begins singing, Huong and Charlene begin a grand waltz. After they have gracefully gone around the stage twice, they are joined by other couples, one by one. The sparkling atmosphere is enhanced by colored lights reflected off the many mirrors of the carousel horse's head. This head (or the entire horse) has been elevated and revolves as the dancers dance. The stage becomes dark, except for the horse's head, which itself fades slowly, ending the play.

**END OF PLAY**