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PRAKIM

**A Monthly Program
Manual for Synagogue
Activity**



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MINSTREL SHOW

One of the oldest and the best ways of celebrating Purim in its atmosphere of gaiety is through the Purim Shtetl. The joking little show "put over" on the audience has a charm of its own that is sympathetic to the spirit of this jolly holiday. Whether it is presented by itself or at the Purim Party or Dance, it never fails to be remembered as a uniquely pleasant Purim enjoyment.

To aid the synagogue groups in their Purim projects, we present here an outline of a Minstrel Show based upon one actually put on by Young Israel of Flatbush, Brooklyn, New York and composed by a group of individual members. It may be used as written here or serve as a basis for a more varied and elaborate production.

MINSTREL SHOW

The Minstrel Show is performed in the frolicsome spirit of Purim and should be taken by all in this vein. It goodnatureedly parodies and satirizes itself, the synagogue, the members and activities. In a light, bantering fashion it expresses the humor of human situations.

The success of a show is measured strictly by audience reaction and therefore creation of a proper mood and frame of mind must be a prime consideration and much effort should be given to it. There are several factors outside of actual text that influence it. Firstly, the personality of the individual minstrel. A little creativity and ingenuity, a few added words or motions during an act spells the difference between the drab and the exciting. Choose your minstrels with this in mind. Secondly, the manner of presentation plays a role in audience reaction. Each entertainment committee knows its audience and should modify the approach of the show to fit the audience appreciation. Thirdly, there are little technicalities which will be mentioned, that are tricks of the trade in "putting it over" on the audience.

Preparation

Rehearsals, scripts, dress and all matters relating to the show must be kept in strict confidence among those involved. The secrecy evokes an element of surprise and expectancy on opening night.

Personnel

A minimum of fifteen people are required. This number includes an interlocutor, who features as Master of Ceremonies; four end men, two for each end of the line, who put over the gags; and a ten man chorus. Prompters and substitutes must, of course, be on hand in any production.

Dress

Interlocutor - White satin tails, high hat or other distinctive apparel.

Chorus - tuxedos, black wigs, shoes, bowties; white socks, gloves and shirts.

End Men - Same as chorus except bowties that are large, bright and yellow.

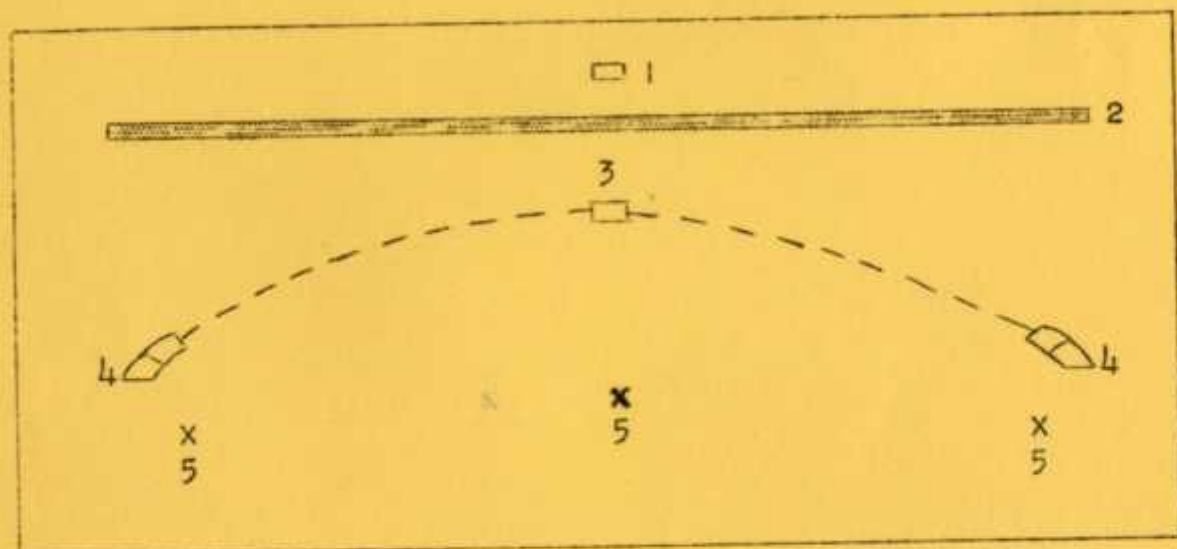
The faces of the chorus and endmen are blacked except around the mouth.

Staging

On stage the fifteen seats are arranged in a slightly semi-circular fashion. The background is a curtain directly behind the seats. It conceals the prompter, who must be able to move behind each minstrel, and obviates the necessity of added background.

Sound

At least three stage microphones are necessary, one in the center of the stage for the interlocutor and soloists and two for the end men. If more are available, they should be utilized in relation to the number of minstrels and size of the stage. One act of the show calls for a pantomime to Fred Warings version of the spiritual "Dry Bones". The phonograph, placed behind the prompter's curtain should be attached to the sound system. The piano also should have a microphone.



1- Prompter
2- Curtain

AUDIENCE
3- Interlocutor
4- End Men
5- Microphones

Music

A piano accompaniment is best suited for the songs; a drum can best serve to augment the rhythm. A banjoist, preferably one of the minstrels, completes the minimum requirements for music.

Each minstrel has a tambourine.

Lighting

Footlights are on during the entire show. Fluorescent fixtures laid end to end on the stage can very well serve as footlights. One spotlight is a minimum requirement to be used for the interlocutor during the introductions and for the soloists.

Opening

The house lights are dimmed and the interlocutor, in white satin tails, steps forward as the spotlight follows him. (This first appearance of a member of the cast in costume is the first step in putting the audience in an expectant and receptive frame of mind.

The interlocutor, with a genuine look of regret, waits for the attention of the audience and announces that it pains him to inform the audience that the show was scheduled to begin, but the minstrels have failed to arrive. He then asks the audience to bear with him while the reason for the delay is ascertained. In the meantime, a short musical interlude is announced. During this time, when the audience's attention is entirely focused on the interlocutor, the minstrels assemble silently just outside the auditorium. Just as the interlocutor finishes his announcement, the piano starts playing the first song, "Hello There".

The spotlight suddenly shines to the back of the auditorium where the minstrels, their hands raised and swaying to the music, march in a double line down the center aisle singing "Hello, Hello There".

(Tune: "Hello, My Baby")

Hello, hello there,
How do you do there
We bring you fun and laughter so.....

(Sit back in leisure
CHORUS (Make way for pleasure
(Here comes your Minstrel Show.

You're in for a grand time
A jolly old grand time
Swaying with rhythm to and fro

CHORUS

They repeat the song until they reach their proper seats on stage, the lines ascending to the stage from opposite sides. The spotlight continues to follow them throughout. For added effect, the lines are arranged so that they cross each other on stage to get to their proper seats. At their seats, they stop and wait for quiet. (Be sure to pause for audience reaction after each act or gag.) Meantime, each minstrel takes his tambourine from his chair and holds it in his right hand.

The Interlocutor then says, "Gentlemen, be seated!" At this point the minstrels, who all have their tambourines in their right hands, give three beats with the tambourine - overhead, against the knee and on the floor - as they sit down.

One minstrel seat, however, is empty! All the minstrels look towards the empty seat and ask "Where's (name)?" among themselves. The missing minstrel should preferably be a heavy-set person who is noted for his sense of humor. Suddenly the spotlight beams to the back of the room and comes down the aisle singing a solo of "Hello, Hello There" and stands at his seat. The Interlocutor greets him saying, "Where were you? You have embarrassed us! How can you explain your lateness?" "Well, you see, Mr. Interlocutor", is the answer, "I was promised a solo and you didn't give me one, so I took it myself!" The Interlocutor bids him, " , be seated!" and the Minstrel repeats the same three beats with his tambourine and sits down.

Since this trick opening is based on the surprise of the audience, it is wise to restrict entrance of late comers to the auditorium during the opening number.

(Tambourines are used by the minstrels only for applause after soloists perform and remain on the floor beside chairs at all other times. Minstrels should give a hearty "ho-ho" after each gag.)

After the audience has quieted down, the regular program begins.

"Doo Da" is sung by the entire company without an introduction from the Interlocutor. This song is sung seated. The minstrels beat time to the music by tapping their hands on their knees.

(Tune: "Camptown Races")

(name of cong.) Minstrels welcome you, Doo da, doo da
We've lots of fund prepared for you, doo da, doo da day.

(Let the rhythm sway
(Hear the music play
CHORUS (Clap your hands, stamp your feet
(Throw your cares away.

(At this point, each minstrel claps his hands twice and stamps his feet twice.)

You're bound to laugh we guarantee, doo da, doo da
The gags you'll hear, the things you'll see, doo da doo da day.

CHORUS

The interlocutor, rising, introduces the end men. As each end man is introduced, he gives a very small, serious bow.

Interlocutor's introduction - "Introducing the end men of our Minstrel Company. To my right, that Irrascible Rascal of the Minstrel, Rufus; (applause) and to his right that pleasing Pappy of Paducah, Tambo." The names of the other end men are Rastus and Bones. Introduction for them should be similar to above.

GAG 1 (Gags can be found on Page 23)

Interlocutor then introduces "Sweet Mystery of Song" - a parody on people who fancy themselves as great Chazonim.

(Tune: "Sweet Mystery of Life")

Ah, what is this mystery that we call singing
Ah, why is it everybody likes it so?
Oh, that clearing, gargling, tuning to get ready
It's just the thing for me to sing, as you all know.

For a singer is a special kind of person
Trilling, thrilling notes that range from low to high,
There's no answer, no real reason for these actions
It's just for fun, and then it's done and so good-bye.

GAG 2

GAG 3

Interlocutor introduces that "classic song of Minstrel shows", to be sung by the entire company - "Dry Bones". A victrola has been placed in the back of the stage and the Fred Waring recording of "Dry Bones" is played. The entire company "sings" the record in pantomime, with hand motions pointing out the various bones.

GAG 4

GAG 5

GAG 6

Interlocutor introduces "Bretel Blues". He gives a short explanation of a bretel or "breitel" and of the desire many men have to officiate at services.

(Tune: Original - can be adapted to any blues tune)

I've got the Bretel Blues - I've got to get a bretel quick
I've got the Bretel Blues - I know it's making me quite sick
You've all heard Koussivitzky, Richard Tucker, Cantor Wieder
But of all the greatest singers, you know that I'm the leader

CHORUS (I've got the Bretel Blues, I hate those blues
(But let me get a Bretel quick)

I don't want to join with - Chazonic unsung heroes
I'd even be contented with just the Anim Zmiros.
(Singer dances a few short, snappy steps - Mexican style -
across the stage and back.)

CHORUS

They promised that I'd daven, Shacharis, Musaf sure
But it never fails I end up - with Pisookay Dezimrur...

CHORUS (end slow and high)

I'd love to do a solo - and show my baritone,
But you'll never see the day that - they'll let you sing alone!

CHORUS

You've all heard of (name), (name), (name)
But how can you compare them - with a voice as good as mine. (flat note)

(Minstrels applaud with tambourines for encore. Soloist returns.)

I've had those Bretel Blues
And now that I've done what I could
I've had those Bretel Blues
And now I'm feeling kind of good.

This should be a lesson - and teach you all to know
To let the prima donnas - run the whole darn show.
I've had those Bretel Blues - I've lost those blues
So you can have your bretel back.

GAG 7

GAG 8

(At this point the interlocutor introduced a member who is a talented magician. He was dressed in an oversized academic cap and large flower in his lapel. He is not part of the minstrel company but appeared from off-stage. Any individual solo talent - music, etc. can be used at this point.)

Interlocutor introduces the name song, "Who's Who" which will have to be adapted to fit the individual congregation.

(Tune: "Mandalay")

On a street called Coney Island; where it crosses Avenue I
Stands a fine imposing building, with its steeples to the sky.
Its members are the finest that ever you have seen
But their names are so confusing - and I'll show you what I mean.

(very slow)
For there's Fromberg, Bloomberg, Goldberg,
Rosenberg and Perlberg, too
Applebaum and Kestenbaum
and Herman Rosenbaum. (slow)
Then there's Goldman, Feldman, Richman,
Lieberman, Weissman, too
And there's Eckstein, Feinstein, Goldstein, Weinstein
and Yudy Finkelstein - (slow)

You don't know who is who.

Now there's Brickman, Newman, Werman
Horowitz and Herskowitz
Eisenman, Schwartzman, Berman
Paltrowitz and Lefkowitz
Greenfeld, Herfeld, Neufeld,
Krassner, Krantz and Katz,
Binder, Badner, Bodner,
Scheck and Schneck and Sachs.

Now you see just what I mean. (slow)

The Interlocutor introduces the Committee Song. He explains that the synagogue has many committees - all working for the betterment of the congregation. This song is a tribute to those committees and to the people who are now and soon will be working with them.

The song is sung by the entire company seated, with each minstrel calling the individual committee, rising from his seat to do so. The last committee of each stanza (underlined) is sung by the same person each time who stands and sings in a deep voice.

(Tune: Original)

CHORUS (Put us on a Committee, too
(Put us on a Committee, too
(Put us on a Committee, too
('Cause we all want to have a little something to do. (repeat)

(Minstrel A) There's a HOUSE Committee
(Minstrel B, etc.) There's a SHUL Committee.
And one for the CEMETERY, too.

There's a MEMBERSHIP Committee - There's a SEAT Committee
And one for the CHEVRA KADISHA, too.

CHORUS

An APPEALS Committee - A CATERING Committee
And one for the CONSTITUTION, too.

A YOUTH Committee - A BULLETIN Committee
And one for GEMILATH CHASADIM, too.

CHORUS

There's a GRIEVANCE Committee - A JOURNAL Committee
And there's one for the MIKVAH, too.

There's a SOCIAL Committee - A Welfare Committee
And one for MAOS CHITIM, too.

CHORUS

There's a BALL GAME Committee - A FORUM Committee
And there's one for the TALMUD TORAH, too.

There's a RITUAL Committee - A BANQUET Committee.
And ONE that is doing this for you.

CHORUS

GAG 9

The interlocutor introduces "our version of Old Man River".
This song is about a hard working member who, while others rush to get
work done, goes about his business in a very slow way. There's one in
every organization.

(Tune: "Ol' Man River")

You can look from here to Mississippi
You'll meet up with no one quite the same,
Not in this or any other city
To compare with his widespread fame.

For men there are, and men there'll be,
Who rush and worry endlessly,
But here is one who has the knack
Let's trouble roll right off his back.

There's a different style about his talkin'
But the young 'uns understand his aim.
There's a different gait about his walkin'
Yet he seems to get there just the same.

He's got no worry, there aint no hurry
Today's took care of, so why despair of
Tomorrow's troubles, they'll burst like bubbles
In air.

He trains them juniors, ye keeps in tune - yers
Adjust yer prayin', to the cantor's sayin'
So all dat goodness and all dem blessin's
be yours.

But now and then, when all seems pat,
He's blamed for this and blamed for that,
While gathered round, way up front there
Sit boys who understand and care.

T'aint no use frettin', and no regrettin'
Yer doin's recorded, 'til ye gets rewarded
That's (name) , who just keeps rollin' along.

The interlocutor introduces the poem routine.

Bones: Mr. Interlocutor, I's got a poem to recite.

Inter: Now Bones, that's very fine indeed. How does your poem go?

Bones: Don't ye be what ye aint
Jes ye be what ye is
Ef a man is what he isn't
Den he isn't what he is.

Rufus: I's got one, too.

Inter: You don't say Rufus. And how does your poem go?

Rufus: 'Twas in a lunch room that they met
Romeo and Juliet
He had no cash to pay to debt
So Rome-oid what Juli-et.

Inter: That's fine Rufus. Now Tambo, you're not going to let us
down, are you?

Tambo: An optimist ten stories fell
And at each window as he passed
Made sure he called in to yell,
"All right, so far", and hurried past.

Inter: We're all feeling very poetic this evening, aren't we? It's
up to you now, Rastus.

Rustus: Sure nuf. Here goes.

A doctor once fell in a well
And broke his collarbone
The doctor should attend the sick
And leave the well alone.

The interlocutor introduces recitation of "Boots" done by
minstrel who stands and dramatizes as he recites. (The Purim "Kiddish"
or other appropriate poem may be substituted here.)

GAG 10

The interlocutor introduces the President's Lament. We all know that the president of the congregation is always worried by financial difficulties which can only be cured by a substantial bank balance.

(Tune: "Sonny Boy")

Listen as I tell you tenderly
Hearken to the burden of my plea
What I've been let in for
To take it on the chin for
A President's life aint such a jamboree.
Sure 'twould be a pleasure
Enjoy beyond a measure
If we could do without, money boy.
Oh those weekly payrolls
Bills as every day rolls
Just got to have money, boy.
Heap of obligations they jar my peace and joy
Oy, such aggravations, just aint, funny boy.
What a grand solution, if every institution
Could run without money, boy.
We could plan such great things, many up-to-date things
Without a thought- without, money boy.
We'd have escalation, cooling installation
All done without money, boy.
All the things we prayed for, at our beck and call.
Nothing to be paid for, we'll get no bills at all.
It's time I took a shake up, guess I'd better wake up,
'Twas such a lovely dream, sonny boy.

GAG !!

The interlocutor introduces the *Maffir* Song. Speaks on *maffir* - one of the most coveted honors of the Service.

(Tune: Original)

You may keep all your riches,
You may keep your good name,
You may carve mighty niches
Right in the Hall of Fame.
I keep asking for one thing
I don't mind any taunt,
I keep asking for one thing
And this is what I want....

(It's *Maffir* I'm after, I'm after a *Maffir*
CHORUS (Please try to understand my point of view

You can keep the shilshi, the hagba-glilah, too
Don't even give me shishi, chamishi keep for you!

(It's *Maffir* I'm after, I'm after a *Maffir*
CHORUS (Won't someone make my fondest dreams come true.

I'll tell the Shul Committee what to do
It's my Bar Mitzvah shabbos, on that they have to figure
Today is also the Yahrzeit of my next dorrige's shvigger.

CHORUS

Now here is something I'll confess to you,
To many shuls I've travelled, from Brighton up to Yonkers,
I plead and beg for a Maftir, but
Ess helft vee a toiten bonkess!

CHORUS (sung by entire company as soloist dances a la Red Buttons)

Although my inspirations are quite a few
A happy thought just struck me. I'll get to say the Haftorah
I'll go across the street, to the _____ Talmud Torah!
And now my fondest dreams have all come true!

The Interlocutor gives a short introduction to the Grand Finale.
The Minstrels rise and sing Grand Finale song as they leave the stage.

(Tune: "Bring Back Those Old Minstrel Days")

Bring back, bring back those Minstrel Days
Days of the long ago,
Bring back, bring back faces we knew,
Faces we all loved so,
We did our best to jest and bring you a smile
Our jokes and our patter, our laughs and our chatter,
Now we go - we hope the memory stays
Bring back those old Minstrel Days!

THE END

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The following gags were among those used in the original production of this show. It is suggested that each congregation use gags best suited to their community. Here, too, it would be appropriate to use Purim jokes which are not included below.

Bones: Hey, Tambo, did you see dat snazzy light blue Caddillac out der on de street?

Tambo: Yeh, boy, Ahs seen it.

Bones: I wonder who dat fancy car belongs to.

Tambo: Why - dat's my car out der.

Bones: Go on, don't you kid me.

Tambo: I aint foolin; dat's my car, sure enough.

Bones: How comes you owns a car like dat?

Tambo: Well, you knows where ahs got my business establishment, my shoe shine emporium; well, de only public telephone in de neighborhood is located next door in dis Cadillac automobile store; and whenever ahs has to make a call, ahs just walks in der. Well, now afterall, how many times can I goes into a man's store widout buying nothin?

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Bones: You know, Tambo, I think ahs gonna get me a new car, too. You know that old rattle trap of mine, it's just about done in.

Tambo: Say der Bones, what kind of car do you have?

Bones: Oh, ahs got one of dem der old makes, you know, de Kangaroo.

Tambo: Kangaroo; dat's not a car, dat's an animal dat jumps up and down.

Bones: Dat's my car.

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Rastus: You know, Mr. Interlocutor, there's a little girl living on my block - names Carmen Cohen, and I feels mighty sorry for the poor kid.

Inter: Sorry? What for?

Rastus: Well, you see, it's this way. Her mother calls her Carmen and her father calls her by her last name, Cohen. And the poor kid, she doesn't know whether she's Carmen or Cohen.

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Bones: Mr. Interlocutor, do you know Leon Cohen? (Substitute first names of synagogue members named Cohen.)

Inter: Yes, Bones, I know Leon Cohen.

Bones: Do you know Irwin Cohen?

Inter: Certainly, I know Irwin Cohen.

Bones: And do you know Joe Cohen?

Inter: Yes, of course, I know Joe Cohen.

Bones: And you also know Bill Cohen and Dave Cohen?

Inter: Yes, I've known both of them a good many years. Now what's this all about?

Bones: Mr. Interlocutor, are you acquainted with Sam Cohen?

Inter: Yes, Sam Cohen is one of my good friends. Now will you PLEASE let us know what's all this Cohen business bothering you so much tonight.

Bones: And Mr. Interlocutor, do you know Abe Cohen?

Inter: Sure I know Abe Cohen. Everybody knows Abe. But will you please come to the point - we just have to go on with the show.

Bones: Well, Mr. Interlocutor, do you do you knows where all dem COHENS come from?

Inter: Why, I never gave the matter any thought. Do you happen to know where all those Cohens come from?

Bones: Well, I was puzzled about that question for a good long while and never could figure it out. One day, I was just strolling along the avenue, and THERE was a BIG sign on the side of the building in letters three foot high. As I slowly read that sign I say's to myself - dat's it. Dat's de solution to de problem; dat's where all dem Cohens come from.

Inter: Now tell us, Bones, what did you read on the sign?

Bones: Doze great big letters on de sign reads COHEN MFG. CO.

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Rastus: Say you sure look mighty sad. Those blues are scrambled all over your face. What happened?

Rufus: Oh, nothing, nothing.

Rastus: Come on, pal; something must have happened. Tell, me, it's your buddy.

Rufus: It's my wife again. Had an argument.

Rastus: Boy, O Boy, your wife sure is a heap of trouble. That little woman is a magician. She can turn anything into an argument. Now, what is it?

Rufus: I had a terrible argument with my wife and she swore she wouldn't talk to me for thirty days.

Rastus: Ho, ho, that's rich. Then you should be happy.

Rufus: Why happy? This is the last day.

Bones: Ah's right.

Tambo: No, ah's right. Man, ah know ahs right.

Bones: Well man if you so sure you'se is right, is you willin to be on it.

Tambo: Man, ah's so sure ahs is right ahs is willin to bet all ahs got on it.

Bones: Well man, how much you'se got?

Tambo: Well, ah's got around \$100,000.

Bones: What do you mean you'se got around \$100,000? Either you'se got a \$100,000 or you aint got a hundred thousand. Now how much you got?

Tambo: Man, ah's got around a \$100,000.

Bones: Man, you'se crazy. Either you'se got a hundred thousand or you aint got a hundred thousand. Now tell me man -.

Inter: Say fellows, what's going on here?

Bones: Dis here man is crazy. I ask him a civil question and he can't give me no civil answer. I's ask him how much money he's got and he says to me he's got around a hundred thousand. Now you know dat can't be. Either he has a hundred thousand or he aint got a hundred thousand.

Inter: Now take it easy boys. I can settle this for you right away. Tell me Tambo, how many times a year do you get an "aliyah" in the synagogue?

Tambo: Well, Mr. Interlocutor, I'd say I's gets an aliyah about once a year.

Bones: MAN, I KNOWED HE AINT GOT NO \$100,000!

- - - - -

Inter: Now for a little diversion, let's have some mental gymnastics. Do any of you gentlemen know any good riddles?

Rastus: I know one, Mr. Interlocutor.

Inter: All right, Rastus, let's hear it.

Rastus: How do you make a coat last?

Inter: I don't know. How do you make a coat last?

Rastus: Make the pants and vest first. Get it?

Inter: We get it; but we don't want it.

Rufus: I got one, too. What is the trade of all the Presidents of the United States?

Inter: What is the trade of all the Presidents?

Rufus: Dat's what I want to know.

Inter: That's a silly question, Rufus. The Presidents had different trades and professions. Some were lawyers, some were soldeirs, etc.

Rufus: Yes, but wan't dey all Cabinet makers?

Inter: Got me that time. Now what is your riddle Bones?

Bones: It's got a simple one, Mr. Interlocutor.

Inter: That's the kind we all like.

Bones: To what man do all other men take off their hats?

Inter: I never knew they did. I thought they take them off to ladies.

Bones: But, dis is a man; and all men remove their hats for him.

Inter: Some celebrity?

Bones: No, a common ordinary man.

Inter: I give up, Bones.

Bones: To the barber, of course, or they couldn't get a haircut.

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TO PRAKIA.

(Musical notes for original tunes available upon request.)