

UNCONVENTIONAL
By Dale Ahlquist

Cast of Characters

11 Females; 9 Males

<u>CHAIRMAN:</u>	The chairman of the convention.
<u>KIMBERLY:</u>	Chairman's assistant.
<u>EBBIE:</u>	Staff Representative for the Convention Center.
<u>LARRY:</u>	The sound guy.
<u>CARRIE:</u>	The light girl.
<u>SALLY:</u>	Sally Ann Schmuudee, a Young Scholar.
<u>HOLLY:</u>	Holly Hapjoy, a Young Poetess.
<u>HUBERT:</u>	Dr. Hubert Corrigan, an expert on the panel.
<u>LILITH:</u>	Dr. Lilith Avenrude, an expert on the panel.
<u>CARL:</u>	Dr. Carl Sharpe, an expert on the panel.
<u>ANDREA:</u>	A convention attendee.
<u>WENDY:</u>	A convention attendee.
<u>AL:</u>	An old convention attendee.
<u>AGNES:</u>	An old convention attendee.
<u>EDITH:</u>	A very old convention attendee.
<u>ROBERT:</u>	A convention attendee dressed in a Hawaiian shirt.
<u>LEONARD:</u>	A convention attendee dressed in a space suit.
<u>VIN:</u>	One of the masked gunmen.
<u>DIN:</u>	One of the masked gunmen.
<u>LIN:</u>	A masked gunwoman.

ACT I - Convention center.

ACT II - Convention center.

Approximate Length

90 minutes

Time

Modern Day

Place

Convention Center

ACT I

Setting: Stage of a convention hall. There is a microphone and a projector onstage.

At Rise: KIMBERLY and the CHAIRMAN are onstage. Convention attendees are sitting in the actual audience. LARRY and CARRIE are in the Sound of Booth, out of sight from the audience.

CHAIRMAN

Welcome, everyone! I don't know why I should have to say this because it's obvious, but please turn off your cell phones.

(Pauses)

Is this mic working?

(Enter EBBIE)

EBBIE

Is everything okay?

CHAIRMAN

Well, it seems—

KIMBERLY

Don't start yet! It's not even 7 o'clock!

CHAIRMAN

I...I knew that.

EBBIE

Do you need anything?

KIMBERLY

He needs a watch.

CHAIRMAN

(To EBBIE)

Who are you?

EBBIE

I'm Ebbie. I'm from the Santa Fe Convention Center. And if you need anything, just let me know.

(EBBIE immediately exits)

CHAIRMAN

I feel so stupid. Did I look stupid?

I'm sure no one heard you. KIMBERLY

But everyone saw me. CHAIRMAN

People are still coming in. KIMBERLY

How's the attendance? CHAIRMAN

KIMBERLY
(Squinting out through the lights)
I can't tell. Oh no, I can see Robert out there.

Oh. Well, I suppose nothing's perfect. CHAIRMAN

That's Robert's whole argument. KIMBERLY

Never mind Robert. Are the speakers all ready? CHAIRMAN

Do you mean the loudspeakers or the people speaking? KIMBERLY

(Pauses)
I don't know. What do I mean? CHAIRMAN

I'll check on both. KIMBERLY

Do I have to make any announcements besides the obvious ones? CHAIRMAN

No, just the obvious ones. KIMBERLY

I forgot my name tag. CHAIRMAN

KIMBERLY

But did you forget your name?

CHAIRMAN

(Pauses)

It doesn't matter. I'm just the chairman. Nobody cares about the chairman. But I really can't announce that everyone has to wear their name tag if I'm not wearing mine.

KIMBERLY

So skip that announcement.

CHAIRMAN

I can do that. In fact, I'll skip all the announcements, since they're all obvious.

KIMBERLY

Right.

CHAIRMAN

In fact, why don't I skip the introductions, too? All the speakers are listed in the program.

KIMBERLY

The programs.

CHAIRMAN

The printed programs?

KIMBERLY

Oh, the programs didn't show up.

CHAIRMAN

But...who was in charge of...?

KIMBERLY

It's time to start!

CHAIRMAN

(To podium)

Welcome, everyone—

KIMBERLY

The bell! The bell!

CHAIRMAN

(Picks up bell next to podium and rings it)

Welcome, everyone!

ROBERT

(From audience)
Can't hear you!

CHAIRMAN

Is the mic not working? Hello?

LARRY

(From sound booth)
You have to turn on the mic!

CHAIRMAN

What?

LARRY

Turn on the mic! There's a switch!

ROBERT

Switch on the mic!

CHAIRMAN

Test, test. It's not working! I don't care what you say, it's not working.

(Enter LARRY)

LARRY

(Coming out of the sound booth)
You have to turn on the microphone!

CHAIRMAN

(Looking for switch on mic)
Is there a button or something?

LARRY

(Arriving at podium and switching on mic)
There.

CHAIRMAN

Test. Ah! That's better. Let's hear it for the sound guy!
(Applause)

Okay! Welcome, everyone, to the 19th Annual North American Brass Bell Convention!
(Applause)

We have, I think, a record crowd this year! People attending from all across the continent! Including that distinguished brass bell collector who might have the largest collection of brass bells in the world, but who also might have set the distance-traveled record this year. He's come all the way from Nova Scotia: Mr. Bruce Edgeworth! Let's hear it for Bruce!

(Applauses)
Stand up, Bruce!

(Big smile. No one stands up.)

KIMBERLY

He's not here. Had to cancel.

CHAIRMAN

(Still smiling, but masking his pain)

Thank you. Well! I don't need to tell you that we have just a great program planned for the first night of our convention.

(As he is speaking, the lights slowly start to dim)

We're going to get right to it, skip all those boring announcements, and start off with a real treat! Our first speaker this evening...

(Looks around at the increasingly diminishing light)

Our first speaker this evening, making her very first presentation at a Brass Bell convention...

(Darker)

...comes to us from...excuse me? What uh... what's happening?

(Totally dark)

ROBERT

Can't see anything!

CARRIE

(From booth)

Working on it!

CHAIRMAN

What's going on?

CARRIE

Lights aren't working.

CHAIRMAN

Yes, I can see.

CARRIE

You say you can see?

ROBERT

(Singing)

Oh, say can you see...

KIMBERLY

Robert, can you please be quiet!

CHAIRMAN

No, no, *I* can't see—

CARRIE

Then why'd you say you could?

CHAIRMAN

That's not what— Ladies and gentlemen, I am *so* sorry, we are having some complicated—

CARRIE

Must have popped a circuit breaker or something. Unless this light board is shot.

CHAIRMAN

—complicated technical difficulties, as you can see. Can't! Can't see.

CARRIE

Did someone say they could see?

CHAIRMAN

No! No one here can see because the lights are still not on!

CARRIE

Oh, wait!

(Lights come back on)

Accidentally hit the master switch! Can you believe that?

LARRY

Sound is working!

ROBERT

Let's hear it for the sound guy!

(Enter EBBIE)

EBBIE

Everything okay?

CHAIRMAN

Well, as a matter of fact—

EBBIE

Let me know if you need anything.

(Exit EBBIE)

CHAIRMAN

(Almost in shock)

Now then. Kicking off, our first speaker comes to us from Aberdeen, South Dakota. This is a presentation that is based on her high school senior thesis. Youth, ladies and gentlemen! Hope for the future. Let's make her feel very welcome: Miss Sally Ann Schmuudee!

(Applause. Enter a quite nervous SALLY, who goes and checks out her overhead projector, attempting to turn it on. It's not turning on. She keeps fiddling with it. Meanwhile AL and AGNES walk in front of the stage, looking for a vacant seat.)

AL

Do you see any seats?

AGNES

Not yet.

AL

I can't believe we're late. We've never been late.

AGNES

Well, yes we have. It's just that they've never started on time before.

AL

You're right. Why would they do that?

AGNES

There are a couple seats, right over there!

AL

Oh, those are pretty good ones!

AGNES

Look! There's Holly Hapgood! Hi Holly! I hope she's going to do a poem. She's so talented.

(They make their way to their seats and start talking to audience members)

AL

Excuse us.

AGNES

Sorry! Did we miss anything?

AL

I hope not! We never miss anything. Hi there! First convention?

AGNES

We've never missed a convention in 19 years!

AL

Been to every one of 'em. I think this is the farthest we've ever come.

AGNES

Sacramento was farther.

AL

Oh, you're right. We got the award that year. You know, the distance-traveled award.

AGNES

We get it every year that it's west of the Mississippi.

AL

(To audience member)

Where are *you* from? We're from Freeport, Maine. I bet you didn't come as far as that!

AGNES

Al, I should tell you that I heard that Bruce Edgeworth is coming from Nova Scotia this year. That beats us.

AL

Bruce Edgeworth? Where is he?

AGNES

I think that's him over there.

AL

The guy in the space suit?

(Points to LEONARD who is offstage, but visible)

AGNES

That's not who I was pointing to.

AL

Well yeah, that guy looks like he came from even farther than Nova Scotia. At least he'll beat Bruce Edgeworth. Never liked that guy.

AGNES

You've never even met him!

SALLY

(To CHAIRMAN)

The projector is not working. I can't do my powerpoint.

CHAIRMAN

Um, lights? Sound? The powerpoint thing isn't working.

LARRY

Not my department!

CARRIE

Not me either!

CHAIRMAN

Kimberly?

KIMBERLY

I don't know anything about tech stuff.

CHAIRMAN

See if you can find that Ebbie lady.

KIMBERLY

Right.

(Exit KIMBERLY)

CHAIRMAN

(To SALLY)

Why don't you just start without it, and we'll see if we can get it working as soon as we can.

SALLY

(Hesitant)

Okay.

(Clears throat, begins reading from her paper)

The Scottish Brass Bell. Its Origins and Development.

(Clicks her remote as if it were working, but it isn't)

There are three distinctive shapes of the Scottish Brass Bell that can positively be traced to the 18th century.

(Clicks)

The Wrengrave.

(Clicks)

The MacGregor.

(Clicks)

And the Donny Bonny. Most of them were first used in these two regions of Scotland

(Clicks)

highlighted on the map.

(Clicks)

When we compare them side-by-side, you can see that the curves of the Wrengrave are more sweeping. Notice the details.

(Clicks)

While the Wrengrave was more physically attractive, the wider mouth of the MacGregor made it more practical for its louder but less dulcet ring.

(Clicks)

However, the most coveted Scottish Brass Bell was the Donny Bonny, and remains so to this day. Dr. Fencer Minecroft,

(Clicks)

shown in this picture holding a Donny Bonny, has offered the thesis that the lasting appeal of this bell is probably due to its association with the legendary Lost Tribe of Israel that migrated to the Scottish Highlands.

(Clicks)

And while the theory has been largely debunked by Professor Angus MacMillian

(Clicks)

shown here, the legend somehow persists.

(Clicks)

Here is another photo of Professor Angus MacMillian about a month before he was murdered.

(Clicks)

This shows the police discovering his body stuffed inside his doghouse.

(Clicks)

Ironically, he was murdered by being struck on the head with a brass bell.

(Click)

This is a photo of the murder weapon. It is not only *not* a Donny Bonny, it's not even from Scotland, which is obvious both from the handle and the—

CHAIRMAN

Um, I'm sorry to interrupt, Sally, it's very engrossing, but I can see that it would probably be more compelling with the visuals.

SALLY

That's sort of what I was thinking, too.

CHAIRMAN

Why don't we plan to fix the projector and you can finish your talk with the powerpoint at our session tomorrow. Let's hear it for Sally, everyone!

(Applause)

Rather than having a full break right now, let's get the panel of experts up here, and we'll reschedule Sally's presentation for later in the convention.

AL

Aw, it was just getting interesting. I didn't know any of that about the Donny Bonny.

ANDREA

(In audience)

I actually own a Donny Bonny. I should have brought it.

ROBERT

Yeah, then we'd have something to look at.

(SALLY exits the stage, and the three PANELISTS begin to take their places at the table onstage. HUBERT looks professorial and important. LILITH is wild-haired and a little crazy-looking. CARL looks bored and out of place. Enter EBBIE.)

EBBIE

Need anything?

CHAIRMAN

The powerpoint didn't work.

EBBIE

I'll check your contract.

CHAIRMAN

What does the contract have to do with it?

EBBIE

Be right back.

(Exit EBBIE)

(Enter KIMBERLY)

KIMBERLY

Couldn't find her.

CHAIRMAN

She was just here.

KIMBERLY

So everything's okay?

CHAIRMAN

No, everything is not okay. We're going to start the panel.

(SALLY crosses in front of stage)

HOLLY

(In audience)

Sally! Come sit by me!

SALLY

Oh, Holly, I'm so glad to see you!

HOLLY

Your talk is really good so far. And I love what you've done with your hair.

SALLY

Thanks. Do you think it was too esoteric? Where'd you get that cute dress?

HOLLY

You know they all love esoteric. It's very affirming even for those who don't understand it. I borrowed the dress from my sister, can you believe it?

SALLY

The second half of the talk I get further into the esthetic distinctions and some of the even bloodier debates. That is so great how you and your sister are the same size.

HOLLY

The historical controversies provide a nice juxtaposition to the mere technical aspects. That must be a real challenge to combine the two. What are you going to wear tomorrow?

SALLY

I just let the research do the talking. I could never do what you do. Write a poem and get up there in front of everyone and recite it. I'm going with schoolgirl plaid tomorrow.

HOLLY

A combination of innocence and intellectuality. Very good.

SALLY

What about you?

HOLLY

I was going to wear a cream chiffon blouse, not my sister's, but now you got me thinking: I wonder how a poem would go with plaid.

SALLY

Might be considered too safe. For a poem.

HOLLY

I'm so nervous. I don't know why I put myself through this.

SALLY

I know. Me, too. I think I should have worn different shoes.

HOLLY

Only the people in the front row look at your shoes. But they can be very unforgiving. The dress is way more important because more people see it. But the most important thing is your hair, and yours looks fab.

SALLY

I'm so glad we could sit together.

HOLLY

Great convention.

CHAIRMAN

(To mic)

The next thing on our program—

(Loud music suddenly starts playing)

What the...? Could you turn that off? Turn that off!

LARRY

What?

CHAIRMAN

Turn the music off!

(Music goes off)

LARRY

I thought you wanted music for the break!

CHAIRMAN

There's no break here! The program is continuing!

CARRIE

Lights are working!

ROBERT

Let's hear it for the sound guy!

CHAIRMAN

(Interrupting the applause)

If...if...IF!...I could have your attention! We come now to the highlight of the evening: our panel of experts. By way of introduction, our first panelist probably needs no introduction. Dr. Hubert Corrigan of the Vancouver Institute of Historical Technology. He is joined by the lovely Dr. Lilith Avenrude, newly appointed Director of the Museum of Brass in Philadelphia.

LILITH

Pittsburgh.

CHAIRMAN

Pittsburgh. And our third panelist, Dr. Carl Sharpe from right here in Santa Fe, an expert on precious metals. The audience will be invited to ask the experts questions at the conclusion of their remarks. Dr. Corrigan, we begin with you.

HUBERT

Thank you. I'm delighted to be here. I must tell you: I have been pondering the theme of this convention, and as I have done so, one thing became absolutely clear to me. Clear as a bell.

(Chuckles artificially)

It is this. I think that all of history can be understood through brass bells. If you take brass bells out of history, you don't have anything. You don't have a narrative. You don't even have a story anymore. The past is silent. Think about it. In the 30 Years War. In the 100 Years War. In the War of 1812. In the Revolution of 1848. In the Supreme Court Decision of 1854. In the Transcontinental Railroad. In the Treaty of Versailles. In the Eastern Passage. In the development of the Cathode Ray Tube. And I would even venture to say in the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle. The role played by the brass bell is without comparison. It's clear that all of the most important figures in history, history as we know it, had brass bells. Napoleon had brass bells. Ulysses S. Grant had brass bells. General MacArthur had brass bells. Susan B. Anthony had brass bells. I wouldn't be at all surprised if the "B" in Susan B. Anthony stood for Brass Bells,. Let's face it. The books are finally being opened on this! And only now are historians and scientists and sociologists opening their eyes to the facts. The facts! The facts that *we* have known all along! Brass Bells. The ring of truth.

CHAIRMAN

Provocative, no doubt, Dr. Corrigan. Dr. Avenrude? You're next?

LILITH

Hmmm... The role of the brass bell in history may be interesting, but I think we miss the point when we focus only on events. What is a fact anyway? A fact is nothing till we give it meaning. It's more important to talk about the significance of the brass bell rather than the object itself. What does it represent? What does it mean? I'll tell you what it means. It means oppression. But! It also means liberation. The bell calls for the servant, the slave, the blind follower, the herd, the masses, the mob, who cannot think as individuals, cannot think for themselves. But! With compliance comes defiance. The bell rings out with freedom, with celebration, with unleashed festivity, a holiday, a revolution, a victory, a voyage, something new, something crazy, an escape, an alarm, a circus act, transcendental mischief! And to the bell, add brass. Add it! What is brass? Who cares what the *is* is? What does it mean? I'll tell you what it means. It means varnish versus tarnish. The thing that stays versus the thing that fades. The hard and the soft. The change, the flow, the ring, not the sound but the circle, the band, the pose, the figure, the statue, the statuette, the combination of all things but the limitation of none of them. Add that to the bell. Add that! Sound and fury signifying *everything*! That's what the brass bell is all about!

CHAIRMAN

Well, there's provocative and then there's provocative! Dr. Sharpe, I do not envy you having to follow that!

CARL

Um...I'm an expert in precious metals? And um...brass is not even a precious metal, so...I...can't really...

(Pauses)

Um, I know the Liberty Bell is a bell. It's pretty famous as far as bells go. But...it's not... brass...and, well, it's broken. It's got a big crack in it. So it's useless as a bell. You've got a useless bell. I suppose if it had been made out of brass, who knows? I don't think I really have anything else to add to the argument. Whatever the argument is.

CHAIRMAN

Challenging words to be sure. Let's open it up to some questions from the audience because I'm sure there will be some.

ANDREA

(Stepping to the audience mic)

I'm interested in the idea that brass is not considered a precious metal. Is "precious" a technical term or an economic term or a cultural term?

CARL

Well, I can tell you that—

LILITH

I think the question misses the point.

HUBERT

On the contrary, I would say the question makes a greater point. One of value. Something that can be measured.

LILITH

It's not about value, it's about meaning. Yin-yang. Confluence. Authenticity.

CARL

But I can actually tell you what a precious metal is...

CHAIRMAN

Let's save that discussion for later. Next question.

EDITH

(At audience mic)

I couldn't hear anything. Could you repeat the first speech?

CHAIRMAN

I thought the mics were working!

LARRY

What?

CHAIRMAN

I thought the mics were working! She says she couldn't hear anything.

LARRY

You want me to turn 'em up?

(Loud feedback, lights dim)

CHAIRMAN

No! Stop!

LARRY

That better?

CHAIRMAN

Probably not. Ma'am, do you have a question?

EDITH

What?

CHAIRMAN

Do you have a question?!

EDITH

Yes, that's why I'm here. I have an 1803 Carston Rye. I'd like to know what it's worth.

HUBERT

An 1803 Carston Rye? Napoleonic! Epic! Now that's a brass bell! Prodigious.

EDITH

What did you say?

HUBERT

Prodigious!

EDITH

How much?

HUBERT

Why, it's invaluable!

CARL

I thought you said value was something that could be measured.

HUBERT

We're talking Napoleonic! You can't put a number on that.

CARL

Yes you can. If it's Napoleonic, it's five foot seven.

EDITH

5 to 7 what? Hundred? Thousand?

WENDY

(At audience mic)

Are we bidding now?

CHAIRMAN

No, we're not bidding. We're taking questions.

WENDY

I'd like to know when the bidding begins.

CHAIRMAN

What bidding?

WENDY

What do you mean, what bidding? Are we going to be able to buy it or what?

EDITH

I didn't bring it with me.

WENDY

I'm not talking about your dumb bell.

ANDREA

A dumb-bell is not a bell. It's a weight.

EDITH

How much?

CHAIRMAN

Let's stay on topic. Does anyone have a question for our panelists?

EDITH

My question wasn't answered!

CHAIRMAN

I'm sure it was, you just didn't hear it. Does anyone else have a question?

AL

I do!

AGNES

(To another audience member)

Al always has a question.

(Enter EBBIE)

EBBIE

I found your contract. You didn't check the audio-visual support.

CHAIRMAN

What does that mean?

EBBIE

It means the overhead projector is not our responsibility.

CHAIRMAN

But you provided it!

EBBIE

That doesn't mean we guarantee it works. We can send a technician, but you'd have to pay the charge associated with it.

CHAIRMAN

And what's that?

EBBIE

\$650.

CHAIRMAN

What?! Never mind. We can buy a projector for that! And a turkey dinner to go with it. I am going to complain to your director.

EBBIE

There might be some other options. Let me see what I can do.

CHAIRMAN

No, let *me* see what you can do.

EBBIE

Everything else okay?

CHAIRMAN

We're just waiting for the next thing to break down. Why don't you stay and watch?

EBBIE

I'll check back.

(Exit EBBIE)

AL

(At audience mic)

Can I ask my question now?

CHAIRMAN

I'm sorry. Go right ahead.

AL

Dr. Sharpe, did you imply that if the Liberty Bell had been made of brass it would not have cracked?

CARL

I...didn't imply it, I just started to speculate that—

HUBERT

When you start talking about the history that might have been, you have to consider not just the wars we might have avoided but some of the peace that we swerved from. Not just the long suppression of the steam-engine, but the tardiness of the tea cup. What if England and India don't meet? What if Roosevelt—Theodore—doesn't negotiate a deal between Russia and Japan? What if World War II happens before World War I?

LILITH

That's like asking what if the Post-Impressionists came before the Impressionists?

HUBERT

Well, what if?

LILITH

A better question is, what if we had art theory before art? What if we actually knew what we were doing before we did it? What does that mean? I'll tell you what it means. It means we could spare ourselves the reactionary arts, the reactionary philosophies, and the reactionary political parties.

HUBERT

I'm talking about events, not ideas.

LILITH

I'm talking about content, not form.

CARL

I'm talking about why I'm not going to talk about the Liberty Bell.

AL

I have another question.

AGNES

Al always has another question.

AL

Yes, Dr. Avenrude, what kind of brass bells do you have in the Museum of Brass?

LILITH

No idea. I was just appointed director last week. I'd have to check the catalog. But come visit. I'll give you a personal tour.

AL

Thank you very much! We will, won't we, Agnes!

AGNES

We can go see the Liberty Bell at the same time!

LILITH

That's in Philly, Hon. I'm in Pittsburgh.

AGNES

Then we'll make a day of it.

CHAIRMAN

Next question.

(Unsure as he is watching LEONARD in his strange costume approach the audience mic)

...Yes?

LEONARD

I...

(Pauses)

I'm Leonard.

CHAIRMAN

Hello, Leonard. What's your question?

LEONARD

I...

(Looking around)

I...I.... I think I might be at the wrong convention.

(Enter EBBIE)

EBBIE

I'm going to look for another overhead. So I'll be back. Everything else okay?

CHAIRMAN

He says he's at the wrong convention.

EBBIE

Sir? Did you want the Comic-Con?

LEONARD

This isn't the Comic-Con?

EBBIE

Next hall over. No. Two halls over.

LEONARD

The sign said...

EBBIE

Sorry, some of the signs got mixed up.

LEONARD

But now I've paid the registration fee for this convention.

EBBIE

Well, that's between you and the Brass Bell people.

KIMBERLY

We're a non-profit, so the entrance fee is a donation. It's not refundable.

LEONARD

Oh. I guess I'll just stay here.

EBBIE

Okay, let me know if you need anything else!

(Exit EBBIE)

(LEONARD returns to his seat)

Agnes, what's a Comic-Con?

AL