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Rainbow's Ending

A play

Noël Greig

Samuel French—London
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RAINBOW'S ENDING

The play was first performed by the Tricycle Youth Theatre in November 1984 with the following cast:

Siobhan Callaghan
Karen Clancy
Siavaun Clarke
Robert Ewen
Marc Holland
Jenny Jules
Neema Kambona
Kate Lawton
Patrick Montague
Fiona O'Donnell
Neran Persaud
Chris Pitsalis
Sonia Stewart
Steve Swainbank

Directed by Paddi Taylor
Produced by Maureen Simpson

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(See also page ii)

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AUTHOR'S NOTES

The Making of the Play

I was asked to write a play for a large, mix-race group of young people in London, working from the Tricycle Theatre in Kilburn. We met on a weekly basis over a month or so and, under the leadership of director Paddi Taylor, explored various themes and ideas. Towards the end of that process the themes of group loyalty, power and individual choice began to emerge. My task then was to find a storyline within which to develop those ideas. It was a wonderful, inventive and imaginative group, well aware of the problems facing anyone growing up in a tough urban environment, but certainly not daunted by life. Instinctively I decided I was not going to give them yet another "depressed youth growing up in inner-city blight" type of play. I wanted something that would reflect their own vigour and sheer joy of life, whilst also engaging with big, important issues. A modern "fable" seemed appropriate, as did a storytelling style, which would give free rein to imaginative performing, unencumbered with the conventional trappings of theatre. After the first few worries about the style ("Yes it's a good story but how do you turn it into a play?') there were no problems. Indeed, whereas many trained actors are taught that to "act" is to be someone else entirely, these young people I worked with had much less trouble beginning from the basis of: "Here I am on this stage, this is me and I'm going to tell you a story, and it goes like this ..."

A Note on Storytelling Theatre

In this style of theatre the performer acts as both character and narrator. This is not a conventional script, with stage directions, lists of props used, scenic instructions and character descriptions. Instead, all this information is contained within what the performer is given to speak. In its simplest form, a play like *Rainbow's Ending* could be performed by one (very skilful) actor with nothing but her or his body and voice to create all the characters and bring to life all of the narrative. Conversely, it may be presented by a large group of people and with even the addition of more traditional theatre effects (lighting changes, music, etc).

This may at first seem daunting: how to bring alive a play in which the traditional "signposts" and conventional effects that we associate with "theatre" are absent. In fact, storytelling theatre is the oldest form of theatre: think of the person on their mat in the African market surrounded by an audience, retelling an old and complicated myth with only the aid of perhaps a piece of cloth or a musical instrument. Indeed, we all "storytell', when we re-enact incidents that have happened to us — sketching in the scene, the action, with snatches of dialogue and commentary. I have often found that an excellent way into this style is to start with simple exercises based on the telling of incidents that have happened to us during the day. We find out the ways we all naturally have of bringing to life things that have taken place: think of someone excitedly repeating and showing what happened in a playground fight, or in the cinema queue, or at the football match, or in assembly yesterday.

The key to the style is essentially that everything is *animated* — by this I mean that the lines which are narrative are worked on to have as much life, vigour and physical action attached to them as the "dialogue" lines. There is no "neutral" in this style of theatre.

To give one small example. In SCENE 1 performer G has the line: "I'm bigger than you," one of them boasted.

Now, the narrative part of the line ('one of them boasted') gives the key as to how the dialogue part of the line ('"I'm bigger than you"') could be delivered — that is "boastfully'. But this does not mean that once the performer has delivered the dialogue, he or she then slips into a flat monotone for the narrative. Indeed, here is the fun of this style, for the task is then to discover how best to deliver "one of them boasted'. There could be a number of choices:

1. To carry on in the manner of the word, as it were, and deliver the line "boastfully" (ie to deliver it "in character').

2. To step outside the character and comment *on* the character to the audience in a sort of aside: "one of them boasted" could then be delivered with a whole other meaning — that is, "isn't this giant a bore, going around boasting all the time?"

3. To deliver the line totally "unboastfully" (fearfully, perhaps), so giving an indication of the character's *real* feelings (ie "I'm only boasting because I'm really timid').

This is only one tiny example, but I am sure that once a group begins to explore the text it will become clear that every single line is a goldmine of different ways of delivery, with countless possibilities of different emotional weights and colours.

With this style of theatre there are excellent possibilities for imaginative casting: there can certainly be cross-gender casting and there will be a different layer of meaning if, say, the giants are played by two males as opposed to two females or a male and a female. So, too, if Rainbow was black and the giants were white, this would add a particular slant. All such choices are open to the group and all have their validity. There is also the opportunity (in staging) for exciting and inventive use of group work — how do you depict crowds, heaps of bones, a cloud passing the moon or a huge gaping mouth using just bodies and voices?

It is a very physical form of theatre. But it can also be used as a reading exercise, free as it is from such things as stage directions, which often get in the way of a reading. Hopefully, in all the various forms that *Rainbow's Ending* may be used, it will provide a useful stimulus, through vocally and physically animated narrative, for discussion of its themes.

A Note on Casting

The speech paragraphs have been allocated to twenty participants in such a way as to give the group an even distribution of roles. I have allocated "character" parts throughout to particular letters (e.g. the two Giants are always speakers G and H, Rainbow is speaker T, etc). Please use the lettering only as a guideline: you may have a larger or smaller group than twenty, in which case you will need to re-allocate lines. There should be no problem with this if you keep in mind the basic rule (which can always be broken if you wish!) that the character always has those dialogue/narrative lines that relate to her or him. You may, though, find your own more interesting logic to line-distribution.

Scene Numbers

Scenes are numbered 1 to 25. This is not random: each new scene comes where, in my estimation, the story shifts on and perhaps a new mood needs to be created or a new dynamic created.

Noël Greig

Also by Noël Greig,
published by Samuel French Ltd:

Do We Ever See Grace?

RAINBOW'S ENDING

SCENE 1

A There were two giants.
B They were huge.
C Enormous.
D Gi-normous.
E Gigantic.
F Anyway, they were very big.
G "I'm bigger than you," one of them boasted (and no kidding, this chap was as big as the Post Office tower).
H "Push off, titch," said the other (who was as high as the Empire State building).
G "Bet I can eat more than you at a go," boasted the first.
H "Oh yeah?"
G "Yeah."
H So they decided to have an eating competition, to see who could guzzle the most in one sitting.
G Mealtimes for giants lasted a couple of hundred years,
H So they shook hands,
G And agreed to come back when they'd had a good old tuck-in,
G
H } (*together*) And off they went.
I A little later in the day, a woman was sitting by the riverbank, with a fishing rod. It was a sunny day and the trout were almost queuing up to get themselves hooked.
G A couple of miles downriver, one giant lay down and started to lap up the water.
I "That's funny," said the fisherwoman, "the water's going down."
G "Slurp slurp," went the giant, as he drained the river dry, "come on little fishes, into my gob."

I So the fisherwoman packed up her tackle and trudged off to find another river.
H But there wasn't one, because the other giant had drained them all dry.
J Over the hill, a farmer was feeding his herd of cows
G When from out of the sky a mighty hand swooped down
K
L } (*together*) And up into the clouds went the cows.
G And, "Very beefy, very tasty," said the giant, as he marched off in search of the next course
J Leaving the farmer to mutter, "Ruddy giants, that's the second herd they've guzzled this week."
M And so it went on
N Week after week, month after month.
O "Where have all the buffalo gone?" the North American natives asked.
H But all they heard was a great big belch from behind the mountains.
P "What's happened to the whales?" said the deep-sea divers.
G And a great fat giant, lolloping on the seashore, smacking his greasy lips could have told them.
Q Nothing was safe from them.
R "They've started on the birds now," said someone.
S And everyone looked up at the empty sky and the silent trees.
T "I haven't seen a swan for years," sighed another.
H Meanwhile one of the giants had discovered the delights of melons, grapes and peaches, and was forcing several tons of each down his gullet. "Just a little snack," he burped.
G While the other was ripping up the banana trees and forcing them down his throat.
H (They were both getting pretty full by now and were staggering a bit.)
A By this time, people were getting fed up.
B "That's the trouble," someone pointed out, "we're not getting fed anything; it's these blasted giants who are getting fed up."
J "Look at the land," said the farmers, "it used to be fit to bust with fat cattle and ripe fruit. Now we're lucky to get half a dozen turnips from it."

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