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The 146 Point Flame

By

MATT THOMPSON

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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MATT THOMPSON

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The 146 Point Flame premiered at the Spreckels Theatre as part of the San Diego International Fringe Festival on July 3, 2014.

Cast:

TESSA..... Amanda Schaar
YETTA..... Adi Mullen
LENA..... Laura Bohlin
VINCENZA Lauren Preski
MALE ENSEMBLE Patrick Duffy

Production Staff:

Director Nick Kennedy
Costume Designer Valerie Henderson
Sound Designer Matt Warburton
Stage Manager Kristin Cline

The 146 Point Flame

CHARACTERS

TESSA

YETTA

LENA

VINCENZA

MALE ENSEMBLE: Plays the roles of FOREMAN, GARCELANCO, FATHER, FIREMAN, BROTHER, MYSTERIOUS MAN and ELEVATOR OPERATOR.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Even though there are five actors onstage, each actor has a story to tell. They are conscious of one another, but they have minimal interaction. They do listen to one another's stories throughout, sometimes reacting to the words by smiling, clapping, etc. The staging should suggest quickness in between character dialogue. This piece is not linear in form and should be taken as such by the artists involved. The element of time is critical to this piece.

The play is set in 1911. The actresses should wear simple dresses of the period, nothing fancy or colorful. The MALE ENSEMBLE may wear a suit. His change into different characters can be done using the skills of the actor. Very little costume change is needed.

CASTING

This piece is powerful with the minimum of five actors. That being said, several productions have added a chorus of women, aside from the four main female roles. The addition of up to eight actresses can contribute to the staging elements, as well as the overall production value, if needed. These additional actresses speak the lines of “ALL WOMEN” and where it states that all of the actors speak. The MALE ENSEMBLE role may also be delineated among up to seven actors, if necessary.

The 146 Point Flame

(Five black boxes litter the stage. The atmosphere is a mix of colored lighting and odd shapes. In the dark, we hear the crackling and snapping sounds of fire mixed with a light breeze. After a moment, with the lights still down, the sound changes to chaos, screaming and yelling and the clanging of fire wagon bells. Each cast member is frozen in a different position on their respective blocks. LENA and YETTA's blocks should be very close together. The lights slowly rise to a darkened and very moody feeling. The cast begins to breathe in and out in synchronization, slowly at first and then faster. There is a pin spot on each box that flashes in quick succession as the lights bounce back and forth between the cast as they breathe in different broken rhythms now. Music plays as the cast breathes faster and faster with the lights bumping up and down on them quicker and quicker. The chaotic sounds begin to play once again. Each breath is now panic. The sound of breathing now begins to echo. Their breathing gets more and more frantic as smoke fills the stage. Then the music, sounds and breathing abruptly stop, except for the wind, which will play throughout the piece.)

Beat.

The ensemble gives one long, deep exhale. The lights rise a little on the factory. There should be very little in terms of scenic elements. Slowly, the actors become conscious of the sounds, then eventually of each other. The women begin to mime their work at various sewing machines. Their miming should resemble a choreographed dance.)

ALL WOMEN. Sew. Sew. Sew. Sew.

FOREMAN. Sew, snap! Sew, snap!

ALL WOMEN. Sew, snap! Sew, snap!

FOREMAN. Cut, sew! Cut sew!

ALL WOMEN. Cut sew! Cut sew!

(The smoke begins to clear as the lights rise to full.)

ALL WOMEN *(rising in volume and passion with each word)*.

Sew! Sew! Sew! Sew! Sew! Sew! Sew!

TESSA. Twenty-three.

VINCENZA. Washington Place.

YETTA. Greenwich Village.

TESSA. New York City.

ALL. 1911.

TESSA. America is melting—

LENA. Melting.

YETTA. Melting.

LENA. The sound of bells.

VINCENZA. Yes. The bells are ringing for us. I can hear them.

TESSA. For us all.

YETTA. In my mind's eye, I can see myself as a dove with elegant snowy wings, gliding, softly flapping through the ocean of clouds. The ringing of the bells draws my tiny body closer, closer to the edge of the sky. I am drawn to the rays of the sun glinting off of my crystal chariot.

TESSA. In my home of Warnemünde, we would cook sausages.

LENA. Air fills my lungs. Clean, fresh air.

TESSA. My father would fatten the casings, and he would throw the dead pieces of meat onto the metal rods, lifeless ... impaled.

VINCENZA. And the buildings stretch out into space. My fingers graze the tips of the hard cinders.

YETTA. Higher and higher we go as our bodies lift gracefully towards the open land. In the flash of a flame's second, I sense—

VINCENZA. The opportunities.

TESSA. The fire would ignite with a thunderous roar. My mother would laugh at the site of the stinking, smoldering flesh.

YETTA. The freedom.

LENA. Freedom.

TESSA. It meant that we had enough money to eat.

VINCENZA. Why?

TESSA. And I would watch the small pieces of animal flesh scorch underneath the flames.

VINCENZA. Why?

LENA. So young.

YETTA. I always ate so many pastilas that they called me little dough girl in Russian.

TESSA. As the drippings of the animal's lard plummeted toward the open flames through the meager metal rods, there was this sizzling sound and then a—

YETTA. (*stage whisper*) Pop.

VINCENZA. Pop. Pop.

LENA. Pop. Pop! POP! POP! POP! POP!

ALL WOMEN. POP! POP! POP! POP! POP! POP! POP! POP!

(*Beat.*)

TESSA. Pop.

LENA. The dress I am wearing is from Poland. Our wages are so low at the factory, we can't even afford to buy one of their

cheap garments. This tattered dress that I am wearing was my mother's. She gave it to me before we left. Before the trip. Before we left the old country.

YETTA. That was many years ago.

LENA. My sister was barely old enough to comprehend.

FOREMAN. Get to work!

ALL WOMEN. Work!

FOREMAN. Work, work, work, work!

ALL WOMEN. Work, work, work, work!

VINCENZA. From the outside this tall magnificent structure looked—

FOREMAN. Strong.

VINCENZA. When in reality it was—

LENA. Fragile.

TESSA. Like the shell of an egg.

YETTA. Mother was—

LENA. Weak. Was always trembling. Her mind was tough but her body was—

YETTA & LENA. Brittle.

YETTA. I can barely remember my mother. She did not smile often.

LENA. We came to America. And that made her very—

YETTA. Sad. There was joy inside, but at the same time ... Utter sadness.

LENA. My mother's eyes were sapphire ... deep oceans. I can see them piercing through water into the atmosphere, she sees me. Between the rusty clay of the setting sun, my mother's eyes glow outward across the skyscape.

YETTA. My father loved her very much. But my mother's eyes ...

LENA. My mother's eyes. Inside her saddened eyes there was a place of maternal comfort that I carry with me, with my sister. Within the rim of her iris is where I live now.

VINCENZA. Last evening, I met a man ... Garcalanco.

(The FOREMAN transforms into GARCELANCO. They act out the scene VINCENZA describes.)

VINCENZA. He hailed from Sorrento. Six feet tall, chestnut colored hair, the most impressive amethyst eyes. How striking he is! Arm in arm we strolled, as we turned the corner around Thirteenth Street. My heart, for the first time in my life, felt the strange elation I had only known from literature. I began to pull ahead down the sidewalk, but Garcalanco held me back in a ... sensitive sort of manner. *(Smiles. Beat.)* We walked along the storefront until we stopped at one. We looked up. "Mazzarino's Italian Food." Beneath the red and green painted sign he confidently approached the large glass window and waved his hand. In an instant ... a flicker of light. I looked up at this gorgeous stranger whose arm I had clutched, as if to hold on forever. He smiled down at me. My face flushed but I managed to smile back. Then, Mr. Mazzarino opened the door and welcomed his only customers for the evening as we sat down at a table for two. He closed the front door. We were the only people in the restaurant that evening. During dinner, we laughed and smiled, and I stared into this man's beautiful face. Out of the corner of my eye, I caught a glimpse of Mr. Mazzarino smiling. He turned off the kitchen lights and walked right out the back. And just like that. We were alone—

GARCELANCO. Alone.

VINCENZA. Alone.

ALL WOMEN. Alone.

VINCENZA. Alone, in the restaurant, Garcalanco told me how Mr. Mazzarino was his neighbor in Naples and he had known him since he was a young boy. He told me stories of his past. How he would help his uncle pull in kingfish at the docks in a giant net, and how he had learned to club these enormous fish on the head until they struggled no more. He watched the life go out in the animal. As a boy he was told this was merciful, but cried every night afterward by himself in bed. His heart was tender, trapped within the strength of his chest. (*Smiles.*) We shared stories of our past, our lives and dreams for the future. In fact, when I told Garcalanco that I wanted to be a designer in fashion ... he didn't laugh like so many others had. He looked into me and said in a calm voice ...

GARCELANCA. I know you will be wonderful.

VINCENZA. My entire existence culminated into one single night. (*Beat.*) That night. (*Stage whisper.*) Ohhh! How many lives would one give for the opportunity to explore this world on a night like that! (*Change in attitude.*) The lights in New York are so bright in the evening, one can barely make out the stars in the sky.

GARCELANCO. We have all the time now!

TESSA. Time.

ALL WOMEN. Time.

GARCELANCO. All the time that the planet can offer us. We are no longer looked down upon as immigrants. Filthy, gritty immigrants they call us. Why? Why are we so disgusting?

VINCENZA. Why are we so different?

GARCELANCO. But we are no different here. Here we are exactly the same. Breathing and living and dreaming among the heavens, just like the rest of the city.