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AMAZING GRACE

Adapted for the Stage
by
SHAY YOUNGBLOOD

From the book
by
MARY HOFFMAN



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • London, England • Melbourne, Australia

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SHAY YOUNGBLOOD

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MARY HOFFMAN
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(AMAZING GRACE)

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AMAZING GRACE was commissioned by the Children's Theatre Company, Minneapolis, Minn., and premiered there in January 1995 with the following artists:

CAST

<i>Grace</i>	Danika A. Allen
<i>Nana</i>	Marvette Knight
<i>Ma</i>	Tonia M. Jackson
<i>Rosalie</i>	Lucricia Welters
<i>Mr. Maurice/The Usher</i>	Mark Queen
<i>Jin</i>	Aimee Thai Tang
<i>Fiona</i>	Sophie Gray
<i>Imani</i>	Jeanette Austin
<i>Natalie</i>	Britta Ollmann
<i>Felix</i>	Vicente Luna
<i>Sean</i>	Samuel Olstein
<i>Kofi</i>	Jeremy Woodson
<i>Neighborhood children</i>	Adara Bryan, Allison Buivid Cher Rina Chatham, Leah M. Curney, Christina Williams Gatzke, Maya Hastings, Seton Hawkins, and Courtney Steele

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director	Richard D. Thompson
Scenic Designer	Seitu Jones
Costume Designer	Ricia Birturk
Lighting Designer	Charles D. Craun
Composer and Sound Designer	Victor Zupanc
Choreographer	Marvette Knight
Stage Manager	Janice F. Campbell

AMAZING GRACE

A Play in One Act

For 3 women, 6 girls, 4 boys, extra children as desired

CHARACTERS

GRACE..... 8-11 years old, African-American*
NANA..... 50-60, grandmother of Grace, Trinidadian
MA 30-40, mother of Grace, Trinidadian
ROSALIE 19-25, ballet dancer, Trinidadian

*Grace's mother is from Trinidad, her father from The Gambia in Africa; she was born in the United States.

GIRLS 8-14 yrs.

JIN..... Asian
FIONA..... East European/Jewish
IMANI..... African
NATALIE..... Euro American
LILA Hispanic

BOYS 8-14 yrs.

FELIX..... Hispanic
SEAN Euro American
KOFI..... African American/Native American
RAJ Indian, from the subcontinent of India

TEACHER'S VOICE

CHILDREN FROM THE NEIGHBORHOOD, 5-15 yrs. old

Preface

When the Children's Theatre Company in Minneapolis first asked if they could mount a production based on *Amazing Grace*, I was flattered but puzzled. How could a thirty-two page picture book turn into a whole evening in the theatre? I needn't have worried.

I had a wonderful three-way transatlantic conversation with dramatist Shay Youngblood and director Rick Thompson in November 1994. They wanted to know all sorts of background detail: What had happened to Grace's grandfather? What work did Grace's mother do? Did Nana have a job?

It is just as well that my technique of inventing story means that the finished book represents only about a tenth of my thoughts about the characters. I certainly had to dig down into the hidden substructure. By then I had also written a sequel, *Boundless Grace* (Dial 1995), in which Grace visited her father in Africa, and this detail was incorporated too.

When the first draft of Shay's script arrived, I was fascinated to see what she had done with my simple book. Every story that Grace acts out or refers to could be shown at length on stage and the result was clearly going to be magical. One more expensive long-distance phone call sorted out all the final details.

In January 1995, I flew to Minneapolis to see the previews and help with publicity. I entered the theatre and met Shay and Rick for the first time. Also Victor Zupanc, who wrote the fabulous music, Seitu, who made a set based on Caroline Binch's illustrations, Danika, who played Grace, and all the other cast members.

The mayors of Minneapolis and St. Paul declared January 20, 1995 to be “Amazing Grace Day” and the theatre had a great party, where a steel band played the hymn “Amazing Grace,” which is becoming my signature tune.

Then we went in to see the premiere and I was applauded by the audience. It was a very proud moment, but I feel the praise must be shared with the highly talented team who put the production together and mostly with Shay Youngblood, whose fine version you will find here.

What you won't find, but will have to imagine, is the music and dancing, the many pieces of “business” invented by the child actors, and the special effect at the end when Grace rises up and “flies” surrounded by a cloud of purple dry ice. I had seen all this before at rehearsal but when it happened for real, I was as enchanted as any child in the audience.

I don't know where or how you will be producing your version of the play, but even if it is on a small scale with limited props and scenery, I'm sure that some of that enchantment will be there for you too.

AMAZING GRACE

SCENE ONE

AT RISE: *NANA is telling a story to her granddaughter, GRACE.*

NANA. Brer Rabbit quick untangled himself from the tar baby and run off singing, "I'm where I come from now. I live in the briar patch. Ha, ha, ha, ha." *(Beat.)* And that was the end of that. *(NANA claps twice as if wiping her hands of a situation.)*

(MA enters.)

MA. Grace, let your nana be now.

GRACE. Can't Nana tell me another story, Ma?

MA. Your nana must be tired. The two of you have been playing all evening.

NANA. I'm not tired one bit. Me and Grace are doing just fine. Ava, did I ever tell you the story about the three frog cousins and Mr. Fox?

GRACE. That's a really good story, Nana.

MA. No, Ma. You didn't have time to tell me many stories.

NANA. Things were different then.

(GRACE goes into the backyard with her two dolls and becomes wrapped up in her playworld. She is telling her

version of a story she has heard from NANA, in a very animated fashion, to her dolls.)

GRACE (*claps three times*). Once upon a time... (*Claps twice.*) a loooong, loooooong time ago, (*Claps once.*) Nana said it was so, that the ugliest, most disgusting-looking bumpy tree frog named Gorgeous was out hunting in the forest with two of his very, very, ugly, ugly cousins Kinda-Pretty and So-So-Fine. (*GRACE makes the sound of frogs talking.*) After a while they saw a beautiful fox with curly red hair sitting by the side of the river. "Aiii! Aiii! Aiii!" the beautiful red fox cried. "I met a wizard this morning who told me that it's going to rain so hard today that my house might wash away. Please, please, please help me put a new roof on my house so that my beautiful red hair won't get messed up." And so they helped him put a roof on his house. Soon, they could all hear the sound of the big storm coming. (*GRACE makes the sound of the wind. The sound of thunder is heard.*) Thunder roll. Lightning flash. (*Flash of lightning.*) And the rain start to come down hard, hard, hard. The beautiful red fox quick as lightning locked himself inside his house. He didn't even thank the three frogs for helping him, he just laughed, "Hi, hi, hi," and said they were too ugly to come into his house. Gorgeous, Kinda-Pretty and So-So-Fine were enchanted frogs so they put a spell on the beautiful red fox and turned him into an ugly, disgusting-looking, bumpy tree frog just like them. Poof! Like Nana say: When you hear someone calling your name...

NANA (*calling out*). Graaaaace.

GRACE. You must remember to look inside their heart...

NANA (*calling out*). Graaaaaace.

GRACE. To see how beautiful they are.

NANA. Grace, come!

GRACE. And that was the end of that. (*Claps twice.*)

(GRACE enters the kitchen. NANA and MA are preparing a meal.)

MA. Grace, how many times do I have to tell you to come when first I call you? What you so busy doing in there?

GRACE. I was in the enchanted forest, Ma.

NANA. And what happened in this enchanted forest?

GRACE. Three ugly tree frogs got revenge on the red-headed fox. (*NANA slips GRACE a treat.*) Thank you, Nana. Today in school my teacher said that some of the students in our class are going to perform the school play this year.

NANA. Which part are you going to play?

GRACE. I don't know yet. Our teacher is going to decide on the play next week.

MA. Well unless you remember to do your chores and set the table properly you will be watching that play from the audience.

NANA. Let the child be a child, Ava. She don't have to grow up so fast.

MA. I don't want her to think life is so easy as play-acting. When I was young I wanted to be an acrobat and work in the circus but you said I had to be more practical.

NANA. Things are different now. Girls have more chances to do pretty much everything.

MA. How different? You still can't make a living being an acrobat.

NANA. Is that the most important thing, making a living?
If play-acting makes her happy ...

MA. When I was coming up I had chores to do before and after school. I didn't have time for foolishness. I want Grace to be ... independent.

NANA. She's quite independent already.

MA. If she does well in school she can be a doctor or a lawyer or a dentist or ...

NANA (*sucks her teeth*). And if she wants to, she can just be Grace.

GRACE. I like being in stories, Ma. Nana tells me the best stories.

MA. Ma, what stories you been telling Grace?

NANA. The same ones I told you.

GRACE. Ma, why don't you tell me a story, please.

MA. I'm sorry, baby. I don't have time right now, I'm late for a meeting, but I'll read you one later. (*MA kisses GRACE and exits in a rush with her briefcase.*)

GRACE. Nana, will you read me a story? (*GRACE gives NANA a book.*)

NANA. I remember this story from when I was in school. Come on out here to the story place and let me tell it to you like I remember.

(GRACE is joined by her friends as NANA tells the story of Joan of Arc. They "arm" themselves with trash can lid shields, bucket helmets, wooden swords, etc., and play out the story until NANA claps at the end.)

NANA (*claps three times*). Once upon a time, (*Clap twice.*) a loooooong, loooooong time ago, (*Clap once.*) it was so that a young French maiden named Joan of Arc became

known as the bravest woman in the world. Joan's country was being ravaged by the Hundred Years' War between the French and the English. The fighting was getting close to her peaceful village in the French countryside. One day Joan heard the voices of angels. The voices told her that her destiny was to save the true king of France by leading an army in defense of her country. At first, the governors and generals of the French army laughed at Joan because she was just a simple country girl and told her that a girl's place was at home cooking dinner. Joan remembered what the angels had told her and she told the governor and the general things no one else could know. Finally, after asking her over and over about the voices and the mission she had been given, they believed her. She was given a suit of white armor to disguise herself in battle. She cut her hair and put on a boy's cap. She wore boots, a cape and a sword. Not even her mother would have recognized her riding on her horse toward the battle.

All through her journey Joan was aided by the voices which protected her. Some people were afraid of Joan. They thought she was a witch. Soon Joan had more than five thousand Frenchmen under her command. Sometimes, under awful conditions, they had to cross rivers and march through valleys. They were often tired and didn't know if they could go on, but Joan and her soldiers fought bravely winning almost every battle. She figured out ways to surprise the enemy and trick them into surrendering. In one battle Joan was wounded. Many of the men thought she was going to die but she wasn't hurt badly and continued to fight telling the men

to "Have a good heart." In the end the English army surrendered and Joan saved her king and her country. But that is not the end. The very people she had helped were jealous of her and plotted to have her killed. In the end they wanted her to deny the voices she heard were from God. But she would never do that. She didn't give up even when she was wounded in battle. She didn't give up when people didn't believe she saw angels and heard voices. She didn't give up even when they promised to burn her alive. She kept her faith till the very end. Today Joan is considered a saint. This is the story they tell about her to this day. And that was the end of that. (*Claps twice.*)

GRACE. If I were Joan of Arc I wouldn't let them burn me alive, because I'd know who my friends were. I'd look into their hearts.

NANA. You'd make a fine Joan of Arc. (*Beat.*) Goodness! Look at the time. I'd better get supper ready. Your mother will be home soon.

GRACE. I'll help, Nana.

NANA. Thank you, sweetie. (*Beat.*) Oh-oh. My head must be in my pocket, I forgot to buy bread this morning. Here, take this money and bring me back a loaf of bread from Mr. Maurice's store. Go on now.

GRACE. Mr. Maurice's store? I don't like going there, he's so mean. He doesn't like us kids in his store. I think he must eat alligators and snakes for breakfast.

NANA. Don't say such things, Grace. The man is old and lonely. You must test a kind word or a smile on him and see how fast he cheer up. Go on now before night falls.

GRACE (*begins to exit, muttering to herself*). He's mean and I don't like him. He's grumpy all the time. (*She be-*

gins arming herself for battle with items in the kitchen.)
He's probably a spy. *(She stands as if listening to unseen voices.)* I'll need a shield.

(GRACE grabs a garbage can top and enters the yard where JIN, SEAN, FELIX, KOFI and FIONA are shooting marbles. OTHER CHILDREN enter for the battle scene.)

FELIX. What are you dressed like that for?

SEAN. It's not halloween.

FIONA. You going to a party?

GRACE. I'm on a mission.

JIN. Is it a secret mission, Grace?

GRACE. Top secret.

SEAN. Well what kind of mission is it?

GRACE. I can only tell you if you swear to keep it secret.

Then you can be part of my army.

SEAN. Girls can't be in the army.

GRACE. My nana told be about a girl who led an army all by herself.

KOFI. I want to be in your army, Grace.

SEAN. You don't know anything about being a soldier.

(He pretends to shoot a machine gun into the distance.)

GRACE. I know that you don't need to shoot a gun to win a war.

FELIX. Than how are you gonna win?

GRACE. I am going to outsmart the enemy. Besides, I have a magic sword.

JIN. Is it really magic, Grace?

GRACE *(sucks her teeth like NANA)*. Of course it is.

FIONA. Can I be in your army, Grace?

FELIX. Me too!

GRACE. Anybody else?

ALL (*shout*). Me, me, me. I do. I do.

GRACE. Then you must swear to keep this mission a secret. I promise...

ALL CHILDREN (*repeat with one hand on their heart and the other one in the air*). To uphold the duties of a noble knight... and I promise... to never reveal my mission... and I promise... never to give up.

SEAN. Yuck...

JIN. What's our mission, Grace?

GRACE. A voice has told me that we must cross enemy lines and return with supplies for the troops to make them strong for the war ahead. Jin, you can be my captain. Here's a sword. We're going deep into enemy territory. We're going to Mr. Maurice's store.

SEAN. Mr. Maurice!

JIN (*returns GRACE's "magic sword"*). Not me.

FIONA. Me either.

KOFI. I'm not going to Mr. Maurice's, he makes faces at us through his window. Like this. (*KOFI demonstrates.*)

GRACE. Someday they'll give us medals.

JIN. Who, Grace?

GRACE. Everybody, we're going to save the world.

KOFI. The whole world?

GRACE. The whole entire world and the universe.

JIN. From what?

GRACE. Grumpy faces.

KOFI. How we gonna do that?

GRACE. Just follow me. Slow and quiet as a snail.

FELIX. Don't they eat snails in France?

KOFI. In garlic with butter.

FIONA. They're called escargots. My dad says they taste like chicken.

JIN. Your dad eats snails? Yuck!

FIONA. Only once. I think they made him eat them when he was a little boy because he was bad.

KOFI. Maybe Mr. Maurice ate some snails.

SEAN. Maybe that's why his face is stuck grumpy.

GRACE. I have a secret weapon.

SEAN. If Mr. Maurice is a spy, do we get to shoot him?

GRACE. No, Sean, we capture him. Are you going on this mission or not?

SEAN. Can I be a lieutenant? My dad's a lieutenant.

GRACE. Only if you can follow orders.

SEAN (*crisply saluting her*). Yes sir. (*GRACE gives him a sword.*)

KOFI. Can I have a shield?

GRACE. Sure. Over there.

JIN. Look! I found a cape. (*GRACE wraps a scarf around JIN's waist and puts a sword in it. FIONA puts a ceramic bowl on her head and finds a large stick and a shield.*)

FELIX. What if we're attacked?

SEAN. What if we're captured?

KOFI. What if we can't get through enemy lines?

GRACE. We never give up. Shhhh! Somebody's coming. (*ALL hide behind the bushes.*) OK. All clear. Troops, forward march. (*GRACE begins humming a marching song and ALL CHILDREN march. One, two, quick-step, quick-step, as they sing along with GRACE, call-and-response fashion.*) I am not afraid and I won't give up, I won't give up, I won't give up.

ALL. I am not afraid and I won't give up, I won't give up,
I won't give up.

GRACE. I'm twice as strong and twice as tough. I will
never give up, never give up.

ALL. I'm twice as strong and twice as tough. I will never
give up, never give up.

GRACE. I'd rather drink from a dirty tea cup. I will never
give up, never, never give up.

ALL. I'd rather drink from a dirty tea cup. I will never give
up, never, never give up.

GRACE. I am not afraid and I won't give in, I won't give
in, I won't give in.

ALL. I am not afraid and I won't give in, I won't give in, I
won't give in.

GRACE. This is a fight I'm gonna win, win, win.

ALL. This is a fight I'm gonna win, win, win. Yeah! (*ALL
march behind a scrim where they clash with another
army and fight with the shadows. They emerge from the
fight with EACH CHILD holding an apple and GRACE
holding a loaf of bread.*) Hooray for Grace.

KOFI. I can't believe Mr. Maurice didn't yell at you.

FIONA. Or feed you to the crocodiles.

FELIX. He even gave you apples for all of us.

FIONA. For free.

GRACE. He just pretends to be grumpy, he's really on our
side. Now he's got a happy face.

SEAN. What was your secret weapon, Grace?

GRACE. I said, how d'ya do, Mr. Maurice. Then I gave
him a smile with my please and thank you, monsieur.

FELIX. Grace, you're amazing.

SEAN. Amazing Grace.

ALL. Yeah, amazing Grace.