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Dramatic Publishing

A FULL-LENGTH PLAY

Here and Now

by

DAVID ROGERS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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DAVID ROGERS

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(HERE AND NOW)

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HERE AND NOW

A Full-Length Play

For Six Men, Seven Women and Three Parts
That May Be Either

CHARACTERS

See Author's Note on Characters, page 5 and 6.

PLACE: *The stage of the high school.*

TIME: *The present.*

The material of the play within the play "Here and Now" has been suggested by the work of Robert Selverstone, Ph. D., Director of Human Relations for the Westport, Connecticut Public Schools. While the events in the play are entirely fictitious and the techniques not necessarily those employed by Dr. Selverstone and any resemblance of the characters to any persons living or dead is purely coincidental, the author would like to express his deep appreciation to Dr. Selverstone for his help, guidance and criticism in creating the events and characters portrayed.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

"Here and Now" is an unusual play and requires some unusual devices to achieve its maximum effect. It is, actually, a play within a play, and to heighten the theatricality of the play within the play the outside material must be done very realistically. Therefore, I have suggested that the actors in the play appear as themselves, using their own real names. For purposes of printing simplification, I have titled the speeches in their own person, Actor Who Plays Paul or Actress Who Plays Jane, etc. Further, to make for easier reading, I have called the stage managers Elaine and Marvin, but I would prefer the actors playing these roles to use their own names, too. If more convenient, both roles could be played by men or women. Also, Mr. Harris, the director, could be Miss Harris. Another interesting possibility might be to have the actual director of the play assume this part under his or her own name.

Other minor changes to make this specifically your group, your school, are encouraged. I have referred to the Drama Group as "Dram Soc" but if yours is called "The Thespians" or "The Players," please change the name to conform. The same holds true of the ticket price or any other specific.

I suggest that the names of the actors be printed in the program without any character designation, and that the scenes be listed in this manner:

SCENE ONE:	The first rehearsal.
SCENE TWO:	The second week of rehearsal.
SCENE THREE:	The third week of rehearsal.
SCENE FOUR:	Dress rehearsal.
SCENES FIVE, SIX, SEVEN and EIGHT:	Tonight. The performance.

I further suggest that, although the play will be performed with an intermission, as a trick to fool the audience into further believing the reality of the situation, you print in the program the line: "The play will be performed without an intermission."

I think the above will prepare the audience for an unusual evening even before the play begins.

David Rogers

Scene 1

(When the audience enters the auditorium, the stage curtain is up but the stage unlit. The stage looks exactly as it would on any day when the auditorium is not in use. There are a few nondescript-looking chairs, a stool and a piano bench scattered about.

About five minutes before the play is scheduled to begin, ELAINE and MARVIN, the stage manager and her assistant, come on stage carrying a small table which they set DR. ELAINE goes off and gets a chair which she brings on and places downstage of the table. She then joins MARVIN in moving the chairs, stool and piano bench into a rough semi-circle downstage, leaving a playing area in front of them. Neither of them, nor the other actors who will soon enter, pay any attention to the audience, which may or may not react to them. As far as they are all concerned, the auditorium is empty.

After about two minutes, the ACTOR WHO PLAYS STU comes on from the wings, greets them quietly and helps them move chairs. A minute later the ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY and the ACTRESS WHO PLAYS KIM enter together.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY (to others). Hi . . .
ACTRESS WHO PLAYS KIM. The first rehearsal!
Isn't this exciting?

MARVIN (not impressed). Eh . . .

(ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB enters from the wings.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB (to ELAINE). Can't we have the lights on?

ELAINE (embarrassed). I couldn't find the switch.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB. Some stage manager! It's like rehearsing in the Haunted House at Disneyland.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY. I'll show you where it is.

(He goes off R with ELAINE as the ACTRESSES WHO PLAY VICKIE and JANE enter down the aisle.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE (calling from aisle). Hello . . .

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS VICKIE (from the aisle). Are we late?

ACTOR WHO PLAYS STU (calling back). No. Mr. Harris isn't here yet.

(The girls go up on stage as ACTORS WHO PLAY PAUL and DON enter L.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS PAUL. Can't start without the director.

(The stage lights go on just as the ACTRESS WHO PLAYS BARBARA enters L. Taking advantage of the lights, kidding, she sweeps across downstage, fake gracious-dramatic.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS BARBARA. I want to thank you all for giving me this Academy Award

and I just want to say there is absolutely no one I have to thank. I did it all myself.
(The others laugh. The house lights go off.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB. I think you blew a fuse.

(ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE has come halfway down the aisle, in the dark.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE. Don't turn out the lights . . . a person could kill herself in the dark!

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE (calling to her). That's show business, _____ (She uses Actress Who Plays Dodie's real name.)

(ELAINE and ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY return R. He moves to ACTRESS WHO PLAYS VICKIE as ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE comes up on stage.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS KIM (to ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY). It is exciting! (Looking out front.) Just being in a theatre . . . even when it's empty . . . and standing on a stage . . . it doesn't matter if there's scenery or lights . . . there's a feeling that something's going to happen . . . you're going to learn or be moved or somehow become more than you are . . .

ACTOR WHO PLAYS DON. This stuff really turns you on? You want to be an actress or something?

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY (defending her). Why not?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE. It's better than working in the five and ten.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS BARBARA. It could be very glamorous.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS KIM. It's not the glamour! It's communicating with people . . . on a deeper level than you do when you just talk. That's what theatre means. And this play . . . "Here and Now" . . . I think it's going to be very exciting to work on.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE. Maybe too exciting.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY. Now, don't start that again, .

(He uses her real name but breaks off as MR. HARRIS, the director, enters L carrying a brief case.)

HARRIS (moving across stage to table DR). OK. OK. Time to go to work. (Others break from their positions at the start of what was about to be an argument. They ad lib greetings: "Hi" . . . "Hello, Mr. Harris" . . . "We're ready" . . . etc. HARRIS puts his brief case on table and opens it.) Is everybody here?

(ACTRESS WHO PLAYS CLAIRE has entered and started up the aisle.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS CLAIRE (somewhere in the aisle, guilty at almost being late). I'm here . . . I'm here . . . I'll be right there . . . I'm here . . . (She comes up on stage.) I did this dumb thing . . . I was thinking today was Tuesday and I got half way home before I . . . (Realizing she's talking too much.) I'm here.

HARRIS. Fine. (He takes playbooks out of his brief

case and begins to distribute them from stage R to L.) You all know which parts you're playing. . . . Please be careful with the books; I don't want to have to send for more. . . .

(As he reaches L, ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE enters L and he hands her a copy.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. Mr. Harris, my mother said I should tell you that she doesn't approve of this play.

HARRIS. Has she read it?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. No. But I told her about it. And she wanted you to know.

HARRIS. All right. I know. (He returns to his table, sits, opens a notebook.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE (to the others). Are you sure you don't want to change your mind? I mean, it's not too late to do another play.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS VICKIE. Oh, come on, _____ (She uses Actress Who Plays Adele's real name.) The Dram Soc voted democratically and this play won.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE. Only by two votes!

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY. I thought you liked this play!

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE. I do. I love it. I think it's fascinating.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE. I just don't know if it's right for a high school group.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE (agreeing with her). It is a little strong.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB. Whose side are you on?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE (anxious to please). Nobody's. I think you're both right.

(ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY is coming down the aisle.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY (forcefully, using Actress Who Plays Jane's real name) _____ is right. We can't do this play. We'll have to pick something else. (HARRIS looks up, listens. The next speeches are spoken simultaneously.)

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS VICKIE. Why shouldn't we do it?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS BARBARA. Who are you to say what we should or shouldn't do?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS KIM. This is the best play we've had in years.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS DON. Do we have to start this again?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE. I hate it when people change their minds.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE. You're absolutely right. We can't do it.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS PAUL. It's got a lot of good things in it.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. And a lot of things I don't want to say . . . (By now ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY is on stage.)

HARRIS. Wait a minute, everybody. I thought we settled all this.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY. Yes, we did . . . but I've been thinking and thinking . . . and look, this play . . . well, it cuts too deep. It's into things people get upset about.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS BARBARA. That's exactly why we should do it! It's a play about a human relations group where high school students and teachers and parents meet and talk about their feelings . . . try to resolve

- their problems. It deals with real problems.
- ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY. Why can't we for once do a play that has some depth?
- ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE. 'Cause it's safer to do one that has some shallow.
- ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. Imagine talking about . . . personal problems. With parents! It's pure science fiction.
- ACTOR WHO PLAYS PAUL. It's real. There are groups like this. They've been tried a lot of places . . . and very successfully.
- ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY. Maybe you can discuss intimate things like this in a . . . a kind of encounter group atmosphere . . . but you can't talk about them on a stage.
- ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. My mother says there are some things ladies don't talk about anywhere.
- ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB. We talk about them. In the cafeteria . . . the halls. . . . Why not on stage?
- ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE. 'Cause there'll be people listening!
- ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB. I'm not talking to myself in the cafeteria. Not yet, anyway.
- ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. She means an audience . . . a large group of heaven knows who.
- ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY. As business manager of the club, I certainly hope it'll be large.
- ACTRESS WHO PLAYS CLAIRE. Please don't make another speech about selling tickets.
- HARRIS. We're wasting a lot of time. We discussed this play and the other choices weeks ago . . . everybody had a chance to speak then. There was a vote and "Here and Now" won.
-

ACTOR WHO PLAYS PAUL. And that should settle it.

HARRIS. Frankly, I was surprised by your choice . . . but very pleased. I think it's time we did a play that has meaning for all of us.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY (tense). But suppose this play really gets to somebody? Suppose you hit a nerve too hard and some kid flakes out watching this?

HARRIS. Maybe that could happen. There are lots of people that are up tight about these situations . . . but maybe they won't flake out . . . maybe they'll learn something. Maybe it'll help them.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY. And maybe it'll do something real bad to them.

HARRIS. I'd be sorry if you felt you couldn't be in the play, _____ --(He uses Actor Who Plays Tony's real name.)--but if you want out, I understand. (ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY stands, torn, trying to decide.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY. You seem pretty tense about all this. Are you afraid you'll flake out?

ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY (defensive). No!

ACTOR WHO PLAYS JERRY. Then?

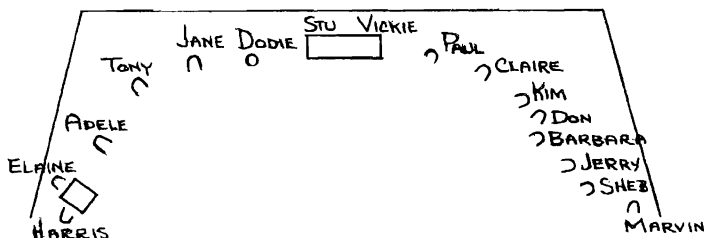
ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY. I'm not quitting.

HARRIS. Anybody else who'd rather not be in it?
(He looks at ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. She turns away. He looks at ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE, uses her real name.)
. . . ?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE (angrily). I like being in plays. Even plays I don't like!

HARRIS. All right, then. Let's rehearse. Will everyone sit down, please? (The actors

all take chairs. Stage managers each go to one side of the stage.)



(The setting is the empty stage of a high school auditorium.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS SHEB. Are you sure we can do it on our scenery budget?

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS JANE (a further grievance). And there are no costumes!

HARRIS. Just the sort of things you'd wear to any meeting. Maybe those of you who are playing adults . . . that's Adele, Claire, Paul, Stu and Barbara . . . I think you can be a little better dressed than the kids.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS KIM. That is over-30 chauvinism. I dress as well as any of the old folks I know.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS ADELE. See? It's beginning to upset us already.

HARRIS. No. I shouldn't have said that. It's already helping me to understand better. Now, when the play begins, you're sitting right where you are now.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS DON. Like this?

HARRIS. Right. Mark it, Elaine. (She makes note

in her script.) You're a casual group of strangers who have come together for a meeting. Just you, Tony . . . change seats with Sheb. Tony always sits alone on the side . . . afraid to be involved.

ACTOR WHO PLAYS TONY (as they change seats).
I don't blame him.

HARRIS. Let's just read through the script today and see how we feel about the parts we're playing. If you have any questions about your characterizations, I'll try to answer them.

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS DODIE. I start by clearing my throat?

HARRIS. Give it some time first. Curtain goes up on absolute silence. I want the audience to feel you've been there for minutes saying nothing. It's the first group meeting. You all feel uncomfortable. Strange. Take as much time as you like. Curtain.

(As the actors begin the scene from the play within the play, they seem actually to read the lines, but within a page or so, blend away from staring constantly into the books, which would be dull for the audience. Glance at them and look up to say the lines . . . make it a stage convention that you are reading rather than actually doing so. When speaking as the actors, hold the books down in a definite way so the audience knows when you are the part and when you are the actor.

They all sit, staring straight ahead. After a beat, DODIE clears her throat. They all look at her.)

DODIE (smiling, sheepishly). Nothing . . . (Another beat.)

ACTOR WHO PLAYS STU (to HARRIS). It says I take out a pack of cigarettes-- (HARRIS nods.)-- then I say . . . (As character.) May I smoke?

BARBARA. Cigarettes?

STU. What else?

BARBARA. I don't think it's allowed in the auditorium.

SHEB. But in the men's room . . . anything goes!

ACTOR WHO PLAYS STU. It says I glare at him and rise impatiently.

HARRIS. Yes. Get up and walk over right. . . .

ACTRESS WHO PLAYS CLAIRE. Shall I go on?

HARRIS. Please.

CLAIRE (to PAUL). Why are we in the auditorium? It seems like a strange place for this kind of meeting.

PAUL. Some of the teachers didn't want us in the teachers' lounge, there's some kind of team practice in the gym, which means the cafeteria would be too noisy, and Thursday nights the Spanish society meets in the library.

ADELE. There must be fifty or sixty classrooms.

PAUL. The custodian says that interferes with his cleaning.

SHEB. Very interesting . . . but stupid! The principal thinks he's running this high school, the school board thinks they're running it, but when you come right down to the nitty gritty, it's the janitor tells you what you can do. (A beat. JANE rises and moves to Stu's former chair beside VICKIE.)

JANE. May I sit next to you?

VICKIE. Why . . . sure.

JANE. I met you at the orchestra try-out? . . . I played the Brahms?

- VICKIE. Oh, yes. You were marvelous. (JANE sits beside her.)
- STU (irritable). Is this all we're going to do? Just look at each other for two hours?
- PAUL. You can do anything you want. Talk about anything that concerns you.
- STU. Well, aren't you going to start us off? You're the group leader. The therapist.
- PAUL. No. I'm not a therapist . . . and you're not patients.
- KIM. Then what are we here for?
- VICKIE. Talk.
- SHEB (singing). "Getting to know you . . ."
- PAUL. Exactly. We are a group of healthy people . . .
- KIM. Ha!
- PAUL. Presumably. (He rises, walks as he talks.) The idea is to break down the stereotype reactions we have to each other as parents . . . teachers . . . pupils. It's called a Here and Now group because we're supposed to discuss what's bothering us here and now. If we let it all hang out, maybe we'll be a little less uptight . . . understand each other . . . and ourselves . . . a little better. (He winds up DL.)
- ADELE. Well, how does it work? Do we all take turns with our neuroses?
- PAUL. No. Anyone can say anything. Any time. The only rules are: no smoking, no fist fights and nothing that happens here can be talked about outside the group.
- CLAIRE (doubtfully). Well, I suppose that's all right . . . as long as there are parents here.
- KIM (putting CLAIRE on, fake Southern accent). Lawsy, lawsy! Ah don't go nowhere without mah chaperone!