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Dramatic Publishing

SALT & PEPPER

A Full-length Play

by

JOSE CRUZ GONZALEZ



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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For Rubén Sierra

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Salt & Pepper was first presented as a staged reading in June 2000, at the Kennedy Center, as part of New Visions/ New Voices 2000.

Salt & Pepper was read at Childsplay's New Play Project on May 23, 2000 in Tempe, Arizona. The New Play Project was made possible in part by a generous grant from the Whiteman Family.

Salt & Pepper premiered at Childsplay on October 27 through November 19, 2000 at the Tempe Performing Arts Center, Tempe, Arizona. The production was directed by Graham Whitehead and including the following cast:

Hannah LISA RANDOLPH KINDALL
Andy JERE LUISI
Salt GORDON WAGGONER
Old Man JON GENTRY and D. SCOTT WITHERS
Pepper ANDREA MORALES

Production Staff and Crew

Set and Costume Design GRO JOHRE
Lighting Design PAUL BLACK
Sound Design JULIE RANDOLPH
Fight Choreography LARRY GRUBBS
Properties Master PAMELA HOUSER
Stage Manager SARAH TERNAN
Production Manager ANTHONY RUNFOLA
Technical Director ANDREW CAMPBELL
Scenic Artist JOLANE MORGAN
Master Carpenter DAVE EKHOLM
Costume Construction/Wardrobe Supervisor
D. DANIEL HOLLINGSHEAD
Master Electrician TIM MONSON
Electrician CASSANDRA FLYNN

The world premiere production of *Salt & Pepper* was presented as part of the Whiteman Foundation New Plays Program. Significant additional funding came from the Flinn Foundation, COMPAS, the Children's Theatre Foundation and Boeing Employees Community Fund, and the Children's Theatre Foundation of America.

Special thanks to Dan O'Neill and Jenny Lucier, David Lucier/The Barnes House, David and Sonja Saar, Graham and Margaret Whitehead, Rosemary and Patrick Walsh, Debra K. Stevens, and Childsplay Resident Company and Staff, Palabras, Gordon Waggoner, and to my family, Cory, Casey and Kelsey.

SALT & PEPPER

A Full-length Play
For 3 Men and 2 Women

CHARACTERS

SALT . . a 10-year-old boy. Loves his grandpa and brother.

PEPPER . a 10-year-old Latina girl. She dresses like a boy.
She likes to read books.

OLD MAN . Salt and Andy's grandfather. Hannah's father.
In his 50s. He is a hard man to live with.

ANDY a 17-year-old boy. Salt's older brother.
Very protective of Salt.

HANNAH appears as a memory. She has a beautiful
singing voice. She is Salt and Andy's mother.

SETTING: A small agricultural town, somewhere near a
desert, 1952.

Approximate running time: 55 minutes

To the best of our knowledge, the children's songs: Hush 'n' Bye; Johnny Get Your Hair Cut (Hey Betty Martin); Built My Lady a Fine Brick House; Go to Sleepy Baby, Bye; and The Juniper Tree, which are used in this play, are considered public domain. Melody lines appear at the back of the playbook.

SALT & PEPPER

SCENE 1

SETTING: *Onstage are letters of the alphabet scattered about. They come in all different shapes and sizes. The letter characters are not in any recognizable order. They may be used to create settings as well as words.*

AT RISE: *HANNAH appears. There's a glow about her. HANNAH is a memory. She throws the small paper characters up into the air. She is a young woman. She wears a plain cotton dress. She wears no shoes.*

HANNAH (*singing*).

**Hush 'n' Bye
Don't you cry
Oh, you pretty little babies**

**When you wake
You'll get sweet cake
And all the pretty little ponies**

**A brown and a grey
And a black and a bay
All the pretty little ponies**

OLD MAN (*offstage*). Hannah?

(HANNAH runs and hides. The OLD MAN, Hannah's father, enters. He is half dressed in overalls and carries a lantern. He wears no shoes.)

OLD MAN. Hannah, where are you?

HANNAH. Hidin', Daddy! You gotta find me!

OLD MAN. Hannah, it's the middle of the night.

HANNAH. Where am I?

OLD MAN. You gonna catch yourself a cold.

HANNAH. It's been rainin' letters again.

OLD MAN. Letters?

HANNAH. In all shapes and sizes mixed together.

(HANNAH throws some letters into the air. She runs and hides again. The OLD MAN searches for her.)

OLD MAN. Where are you?

HANNAH. I've collected a bunch of 'em, see? Ain't it beautiful, Daddy?

(HANNAH throws some more letters into the air. She runs off again. The OLD MAN searches for her.)

OLD MAN. Honey, come inside where it's safe.

HANNAH. I can't, Daddy.

OLD MAN. Why not?

HANNAH. 'Cause I'm writin' you a postcard.

OLD MAN. A postcard?

HANNAH. Give up?

OLD MAN. No.

HANNAH. I found me the most pretty one you ever seen.
Look! (*Her hand appears. She holds up a small postcard.*)

OLD MAN. There you are!

HANNAH. It's a picture of the Grand Ole Opry. Ain't it the most beautiful buildin' you ever seen? It's where I'm gonna make my professional debut.

OLD MAN. Debut? What's that?

HANNAH. It means I'm gonna sing in front of the whole world, Daddy. And you gonna be proud of me. People will want my autograph and want me to star in their Hollywood pictures!

OLD MAN. Let me see your forehead.

HANNAH. I ain't got a fever! (*She crosses away from him.*)

OLD MAN. You ain't makin' any sense, Hannah.

HANNAH. That's 'cause it's a dream, Daddy.

OLD MAN. A dream?

HANNAH. And it yours.

OLD MAN. Mine?

HANNAH. Yes, sir. Rememberin' how things were. Good and bad. But there isn't much time.

OLD MAN. Time for what?

HANNAH. Before I go away.

OLD MAN. Why you wanna do that?

HANNAH. It's in the postcard, Daddy. All you gotta do is read it.

OLD MAN. Hannah, you can't leave.

HANNAH. Daddy, I gotta go and find my future.

OLD MAN. But it's here with your boys and me.

HANNAH. It's in the wind callin' to me.

OLD MAN. What wind?

HANNAH. The same one that brings the rain and the duststorms. It's callin' my name...wantin' to sweep me up and take me far away.

OLD MAN. To where?

HANNAH. Anywhere my little songs will be heard, Daddy.

OLD MAN. There's nothin' but heartache out there. I seen it. Felt it.

HANNAH. That's all I've ever known, but not no more. I'm gonna let that wind carry me and my babies into the future and take us wherever it wants.

OLD MAN. But them boys are too little to go anywhere.

HANNAH. That's why I need your help, Daddy. You gotta come with me.

OLD MAN. I ain't goin' nowhere and neither are you.

HANNAH. If I don't go now I'll just wither away and die. Can't you understand?

OLD MAN. No, I can't. You got a place here. Ain't that enough?

HANNAH. I made up my mind.

OLD MAN. I forbid you to go!

HANNAH. I'm takin' my babies with me.

OLD MAN. No, you ain't. You wanna go chase after some stupid dream then go, but them boys are stayin' here with me.

HANNAH. No.

OLD MAN. You made your choice. So get!

HANNAH. Please, Daddy...

OLD MAN. Get off my place! Get! (*HANNAH rushes away dropping the postcard.*) Hannah?! Hannah?!

HANNAH (*singing*).

**Hush 'n' Bye
Don't you cry...**

OLD MAN. Don't you leave!

HANNAH (*singing*).

Oh, you pretty little babies...

OLD MAN. Hannah!

(The OLD MAN stands there for a moment, alone. He sees the postcard lying on the ground. He picks it up, crumpling it and throwing it to the ground. A moment later he picks it up and places it in his pocket.)

SCENE 2

A country song is heard. ANDY, a 17-year-old boy, enters flipping a large blue pancake from a frying pan high into the air. He grabs a plate of multicolored pancakes stacked atop one another. SALT, Andy's younger brother, rushes in wearing a metal pot on his head and carrying a broom as weapon. He falls to the floor, shooting everything in sight.

SALT. Pa-pow! Pa-pow! Pa-pow! Pa-pa-pa-pa-pow! (*Enemy fire is returned at SALT.*) Ughhh!!! Pow! Ughhh! (*SALT's death is dramatic. He falls onto one of the letters. Beat. Opening his eyes:*) You wanna play war, Andy?

ANDY. No.

SALT. Come on! I'll be the enemy.

ANDY. Go away, Salt. Can't you see I'm busy?

SALT. Whatcha doin'?

ANDY. Makin' breakfast.

SALT. Pancakes?

ANDY. Yup.

SALT. Colored ones?

ANDY. Yup.

SALT. Which colors you makin'?

ANDY. I got green, yellow and blue. *(He flips the blue pancake high into the air and catches it with the plate of colored pancakes.)*

SALT. Wo! Can I help?

ANDY. Take that stupid pot off your head.

SALT. Andy, I can't do that.

ANDY. Why not?

SALT. 'Cause it's my helmet! It's my only protection.

ANDY. Against what?

SALT. The enemy. They're all around. Hidin'. Waitin' to strike me dead.

ANDY. Well, you look real stupid, Salt.

SALT. I ain't stupid!

ANDY. Fine, then you can't help!

SALT. Okay, there, see! *(He drops his helmet to the floor.)*

ANDY. Too late.

SALT. Andy!

ANDY. I guess there's nothin' to save you now!

SALT. Huh?

ANDY. From the hounds of war! *(He howls loudly and then sticks his arms out and flies by SALT making air-plane noises.)*

SALT. Air raid!

(SALT grabs the pot and puts it back on his head. ANDY returns, strafing SALT. SALT uses his broom as an anti-aircraft gun.)

ANDY. I'm hit!

SALT. Yeah!

ANDY. But now I'm a kamikaze!

SALT. Oh, no, duck for cover!

ANDY. Too late!

(ANDY crashes into SALT. SALT and ANDY lie there dead. Beat.)

SALT *(jumping up)*. I won!

ANDY. No you didn't! You're dead!

SALT. No, I'm not, see?! It was my general!

ANDY. What?!

SALT. You killed my general, but I still lived!

ANDY. Salt, nobody survives a kamikaze attack.

SALT. But I did! You lost! I won! Victory dance! *(He pounds out a beat on his helmet using wooden spoons. He dances a victory dance.)*

ANDY. Will you be quiet!

SALT. Sore loser.

ANDY. Salt, eat your pancakes!

SALT. They're gonna need more salt.

ANDY. I already added some. Eat.

(SALT grabs a blue pancake. He rolls it up and eats it.)

SALT. Um...blue one's real good!

ANDY. It don't taste any different from the others.

SALT. It do too. Blues taste different from yellows. Yellows taste different from greens. Greens taste real different from blues.

ANDY. Whatever you say, Salt...

SALT. Andy, who taught you how to make colored pancakes? Was it Ma?

ANDY. No.

SALT. Then who?

ANDY. I can't tell you that.

SALT. Why not?

ANDY. 'Cause it's a big fat secret.

SALT. But you can tell me. We're brothers. Right?

ANDY. Nope. We ain't brothers. Somebody left you on the porch step. The old man took you in 'cause all you did was cry.

SALT. That ain't true!

ANDY. Sure is!

SALT. Well, I don't care 'bout your big fat secret! I don't wanna know!

ANDY. Fine. Suit yourself. But you better hurry before the old man gets here. It's your turn to wash them plates.

SALT. I can't, my arms got broke.

ANDY. Salt!

SALT. They are. See? They won't move. (*He wiggles his body and his arms flap side to side.*)

ANDY. You ain't weaselin' outta this again. It's your turn.

SALT. No, I'm not gonna do 'em.

ANDY. Yes, you are! (*He grabs SALT in a headlock.*)

SALT. Ow! Let me go!

ANDY. Not until you say "I give."

SALT. Why do I always gotta wash 'em?

ANDY. When you learn how to cook then you won't have to do 'em! Now say it!

SALT. No!

ANDY. Say it!

SALT. I give!

(ANDY releases SALT. SALT places his helmet back on.)

ANDY. When the old man catches you wearin' that pot on your head, you're gonna be sorry.

SALT. No I won't.

ANDY. Why's that?

SALT. 'Cause he loves me more than you.

ANDY. Oh, really?

SALT. Yup. So you better watch out.

ANDY. He's been in a foul mood all week.

SALT. That's 'cause he wrecked his truck and hurt his arm.

ANDY. And he's takin' it out on me. It ain't no picnic.

OLD MAN *(offstage)*. Andy?

ANDY. See?

SALT. It's Grandpa!

(The OLD MAN enters. He wears overalls, boots, a soiled baseball cap and gloves. His arm is in a sling.)

OLD MAN. Salt, go get ready for school.

SALT. Yes, sir.

OLD MAN. And take that stupid pot off your head. *(To ANDY.)* Don't you hear me callin' you?

ANDY. No, sir.

OLD MAN. Well, we got a truck to fix. It ain't gonna fix itself.

ANDY. I was gonna eat first.

OLD MAN. The day already started.

ANDY. I'm hurryin'.

OLD MAN. You stayin' out nights don't help any.

ANDY. I got my reasons.

OLD MAN. Well, your reasons ain't helpin' me fix my truck. All that schoolin' you're so proud of, where's it got you? It can't fix my truck engine. And you know even less about produce. I got a business to run. Them bills ain't gonna pay themselves.

ANDY. All you ever do is complain.

OLD MAN. 'Cause you give reason.

ANDY. I'm gonna leave one day and then you'll be sorry.

OLD MAN. You'll never leave.

ANDY. I might. I got plans.

OLD MAN. Plans?

ANDY. I wanna see the world. Travel to faraway places. Learn to speak different languages even.

OLD MAN. How are you gonna do that?

ANDY. I'm gonna join the Marines.

OLD MAN. The Marines? They won't take you. You just like your ma. Head in the clouds. And look where it got her.

ANDY. I'm gonna show you.

OLD MAN. Well, you show me how to fix my truck first, 'cause while you're under my roof you'll do as I say! There ain't no room for fools or dreamers in this house.

ANDY. Fine, I'm goin'!

(ANDY storms out. The OLD MAN eats one of the colored pancakes.)

OLD MAN. Blue one's good. At least he learned how to cook.

(SALT enters combing his hair and dressed for school. He hums "Go to Sleepy Baby Bye.")

OLD MAN. What's that song you hummin', Salt?

SALT. I don't know.

OLD MAN. I heard it before.

SALT. Where?

OLD MAN. That was one of the songs your mama liked to sing.

SALT. Really?

OLD MAN. She had the prettiest voice you ever heard.

SALT. I don't remember her too good.

OLD MAN. She was always singin' and playin' her guitar for you boys. Wrote her own songs and even made records too. Just about everybody in Nashville knew her.

SALT. Andy says she had her own bus with her name written on it.

OLD MAN. Oh, that's right. She was a big radio star too. She was always singin' at the Grand Ole Opry and she even went to make a Hollywood picture once.

SALT. My ma was a movie star?

OLD MAN. I think she even won one of them actin' awards.

SALT. How come Ma didn't ever take us with her?

OLD MAN. Well, that's 'cause she was always on the road. Them entertainers have got a lot of travelin' to do and it ain't no place for little ones. That's why you two come to live with me.

SALT. Was Ma rich?

OLD MAN. She had so much money she had to put it in two banks.

SALT. No.

OLD MAN. Yup, but she gave it all away to needy people.

SALT. My ma was somethin' else, wasn't she?

OLD MAN. She loved you a whole lot.

SALT. Grandpa, did my ma go to school?

OLD MAN. For a little while 'til Andy was born.

SALT. She did real good for herself and she didn't need no school.

OLD MAN. That's right.

SALT. You know more about things than my teachers do.

OLD MAN. Well...

SALT. Why do I gotta go to school, Grandpa? Everythin' I need to know is right here with you. One day, I wanna drive a truck just like you.

OLD MAN. You do?

SALT. Ah huh.

OLD MAN. Well, maybe missin' one day won't hurt.

SALT. You mean I don't have to go?

OLD MAN. Nope.

SALT. I'll work real hard and I won't complain like Andy.

OLD MAN. Then go get changed. We got us a truck to fix and produce to deliver!