

A Tale of Bravery of a Zebra, a Lioness and a Very, Very Small Bird

A Full-Length Play for Young Audiences

By Nikki Harmon

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STORY OF THE PLAY

An optimistic and friendly Grévy's zebra sees a reward poster for rhino horn nailed to an acacia tree. She quickly hatches a plan and convinces a feared lioness and a hesitant, red-billed oxpecker to sneak out of the wildlife conservancy and save the endangered black rhinos. Soon these three endangered species and unlikely friends head into the perilous bush, filled with poachers hiding behind every tree. With the help of the lioness' old friend, a puff adder and her snakelets, they save not only a herd of rhinos but a tigris reed frog, a mama elephant, and her calf, too. Oh, and of course a sleepwalking baby rhino! All the while fighting off the poachers to bring everyone back safe and sound to the conservancy. The play runs 60-65 mins (depending on the length of the 2 poacher battles).

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The show was produced February 8-18, 2024, by the East Valley Children's Theatre and performed at the Mesa Arts Center in Mesa, Arizona.

ABUYA: Penny Ellis	AASIR: Lexi Leibrand
NATORI: Beni Bermudez	BISHARA: Alyson Avery
HANUNI: Jordan Cranson	KIONI: Jolee Casey
CHIKU: Cecilia Riter	ZAWATI: Bryghton Patrick Blanco
ZUMA: Logan Nelson	PILI: Jaya Myers
HODARI: Nora Bermudez	SEFU: Jaya Myers
THIMBA: Noella McOwen	SNAKELETS: Brynnleigh Patrick
RHINOS: Tiana Barnum,	Blanco, Ethan Bogert, Riley
Marley Baxter, Lydia Tran,	Bogert, Tegan Johnson, Audrey
Kaeden Zantout	Lindenberg, Peyton Stratton

PRODUCER & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: Bryanna Patrick Blanco
DIRECTOR & SOUND DESIGNER: Tanner Morris
STAGE MANAGER: Kassandra Diaz
ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGER: Wylie Hawkes
CHOREOGRAPHER: Lauren Kobza
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER: Aaron Blanco
HAIR & MAKEUP DESIGNER: Cori Johnson
SET DESIGNER & TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: Erin Peters
COSTUME DESIGNER: Nicole Tatro
LIGHTING DESIGNER: Zane Petiford
PROPS & PUPPETRY DESIGNER: Brenda Cranson
ASL INTERPRETERS: Dawn Schoenberger, Sam
STAGE CREW: Anelise Sampson
LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR: Greyson Tuttle
SOUND BOARD OPERATOR: Tanner Morris

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 m, 5 f, 5 flexible, many extras)

ABUYA: (uh-baa-yuh) Grévy's zebra (f).

AASIR: (ah-sir) Lioness (f).

BISHARA: (Bee-Shar-a) Puff adder snake (f).

CHIKU: (Chee – Co) Young elephant (f).

HANUNI: (Ha-Nu-nee) Tighoni reed frog (flexible).

HODARI: (HoDa ree) Poacher (flexible).

JUMA: (ju-MA) Young rhino (m).

KIONI: (Key-on-E) Mama elephant (f).

NATORI: (nuh-taw-ree) Red-billed oxpecker (m).

PILI: (Pee- lee) Great white pelican (flexible).

SEFU: (Sea-FU) Poacher (flexible).

THIMBA: (Theme--Ba) Poacher (flexible).

ZAWATI: (Za-wa-tee) Black rhino (m).

HIPPO: Voiced from offstage.

TASORI: A spider who enacts a story in mime or dance.

EXTRAS

RHINOS: Five rhinos from Zawati's herd.

MUSICIANS: To underscore the action. On stage if possible.

BISHARA'S SNAKELETS: As many as possible.

SPIDERS: Several.

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SETTING

Unit set. Wildlife conservancy in Kenya and the bush. The dark and dangerous bush and the warm and safe wildlife conservancy are shaped with acacia and baobab trees, surrounded by rocks and bushes, all of which are walked around, leaned against, and stood upon. The lights, with their leaf gobos and variegated gels, complete the transformation.

SWAHILI GLOSSARY

ASANTE: Thank you.

KWA HERINI: Goodbye (to many).

HUJAMBO: How are you?

SIJAMBO, ASANTE: I am fine, thank you.

JAMBO: Hello.

TAYARI: (*Tie-yar-ree*) Ready.

PROPS

Fliers

Frog water bag: a variation of a bota bag

3 Poacher rifles

CONVERSION

2,300,000 Kenyan shillings = \$18,760 USD

54 grams = 1.9 oz

400 kilograms = 882 lbs.

Adult male black rhino weights about 2,976 lbs.

MUSIC

The action is underscored with drums, kalimbas, litungus, etc. If possible, the musicians are on stage and in costume; otherwise, it's prerecorded.

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A Tale of Bravery
Of a Zebra, a Lioness and a Very, Very Small Bird

(AT RISE: LIGHTS up on the wildlife conservancy. ABUYA, a Grévy's zebra, is reading a flier that's nailed to an acacia tree, while NATORI, a red-billed oxpecker, is sleeping peacefully under the hot sun.)

ABUYA: NATORI!

NATORI: Shhhhhh.

ABUYA: Natori, we have to go into the bush!

NATORI: Shhhhhh. I am still sleeping.

ABUYA: *NATORI!!!!!!!* Get up! We have to go right now!
There's no time to waste. Get up! Get up! We gotta go!

(NATORI half rises and stretches his "wings.")

NATORI: Why would I want to go? Everyone I know is here and none of them are going. *(Looking around.)* See, no one is going. And now, I am going back to sleep. *(NATORI starts to lie back down.)*

ABUYA: This is important.

NATORI: What is so important that I have to wake up in the middle of the day? Days are for sleeping. Night is for getting up. This is day ... Why am I up?

ABUYA: *(Pulling the flier off the tree.)* Because of this!

NATORI: Going back to sleep now.

ABUYA: *(Waving the paper in HIS face.)* This is important!
This is why we have to go!

NATORI: And now I am up again. *(Trying to focus on the moving paper.)* You woke me up to read a paper nailed to a tree? *(Reading with no expression.)* "Two million three hundred thousand shillings for rhino horn" ... Your point is?

(ABUYA goes from tree to tree pulling off the fliers as she continues trying to convince NATORI.)

ABUYA: We have to save them!

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NATORI: I am a bird. You are a zebra. We are not rhinos.

ABUYA: BUT...

NATORI: We are us. They are them.

ABUYA: We have to go into the bush and bring them back here. They'll be safer here. Come on. Get up!

NATORI: I am a very, very small red-billed oxpecker. I weigh fifty-four grams on a good day. You are a Grévy's zebra. You weigh four hundred kilograms on the same day. Combined we do not weigh what any good-sized rhino weights on *any* day.

ABUYA: But ...

NATORI: Let me put it another way. It is a very, very, very bad idea for a tiny bird and a hairbrained zebra to go out into the very dangerous bush for *any* reason.

ABUYA: I have a plan...

NATORI: That won't work.

ABUYA: You haven't heard it yet.

NATORI: I base my decision on the previous plans.

ABUYA: This one is different.

NATORI: Here is safe. (*Pointing to the bush.*) There is not. (*Counting off one by one.*) One. Guards with dogs protecting us ... HERE ... Two. Rangers keeping track of us ... HERE. Two very good reasons to stay RIGHT HERE. And not go out THERE.

ABUYA: But ...

NATORI: And two very good reasons not to go out THERE (*Counting on his feathers.*) One. THERE ... Humans with guns aimed at us ... (*Pointing to the bush.*) Two. Oh, wait. I don't need another reason. That one is good enough.

ABUYA: This time I calculated my calculations differently. The last method was good, but this one is better. This time I factored in the time it takes to get to the gate without being seen. Unlock the gate without being heard. Cross the road with the trucks without being squished. Walk through the bush without stepping in snake holes. Find three or four rhinos and explain the plan. Retrace our way back here, following all the steps backwards, and finally unlocking the gate without being seen or heard. All of which I've calculated at a sixty-two point seven percent chance of success.

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ABUYA: (*Cont'd.*) Better than my other plans. Like the one to save the Bonobos and the Mountain gorillas. This one's better because the giraffes helped me.

NATORI: Did they have any ideas about poachers?

ABUYA: Newton had the best one. It was his third idea. He said if you run at them real fast, they'll go the other way.

NATORI: And you got that from a giraffe?

ABUYA: From Newton. He's really tall. Do you want to hear his other two ideas?

NATORI: No, no. I am fine. Moving on. What if we are not able to convince *very, very big* animals to come with us?

ABUYA: Why wouldn't they want to?

NATORI: What kind of rhinos did you have in mind for this in-depth conversation?

ABUYA: Black ones. They're the ones the poachers want. All you have to do is explain to them why it's a good idea to come back here with us.

NATORI: That is a really *bad* idea. You wouldn't want to save the friendly ones first? The white ones that just stand around eating all day, instead of the ones with a bad sense of humor?

ABUYA: All you have to do is walk up to them and explain why it's a good idea to come back here with us. You're a rhino bird. You talk to lots of rhinos all the time, so it'll be easy.

NATORI: I sit on their backs and pluck off bugs ... I do NOT have conversations on the pros and cons of bush living versus conservancy living.

ABUYA: And next time we'll save elephants.

NATORI: Don't get me started on elephants. Trying to have a conversation with an elephant is absolutely impossible. Every time I've tried to have a conversation with them, they swing their trunks back and forth without giving a second thought to who might just be flying past. I can't count the number of times I've been swatted against a baobab tree or flicked into an acacia bush by elephants not looking where their trunks were going. And not a single, "Gee gosh, I'm sorry. Didn't see ya there." Not once. Elephants. Don't get me started.

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ABUYA: I have a separate plan for them. This time I've got a really great rhino plan! Trust me.

NATORI: Every time you say that hyaenas circle us, wildebeest charge us, and the leopards last time! Do you remember what happened with the leopards?

ABUYA: It would have been better if I hadn't woken them up. I didn't...

NATORI: ...know that leopards SLEEP in the daytime. And when you woke them up to ask directions to the watering hole...

ABUYA: They were a little grumpy.

NATORI: Grumpy is not the word I would have chosen to describe what would have happened if it had not been for that herd of Cape Buffalo galloping between us and them at precisely the right moment, giving us enough time to get away.

ABUYA: This time it'll be different.

NATORI: That is what I am afraid of. Have you given any thought to the fact that there are only two of us and one of us is very, very, very small?

ABUYA: Do you remember the lion we saw last week at the watering hole?

NATORI: The one who kept snarling at everyone?

ABUYA: I figured if she came with us—

NATORI: You are talking about a LION!

ABUYA: The one over there. The one who's looking at us.

NATORI: As a snack.

ABUYA: All you have to do is fly over, sit on her head and explain our plan to her. It'll be easy. You know all kinds of animals. She's another animal, just like us.

NATORI: No, no. Lions are not like us. They're LIONS!

ABUYA: But you sit on the backs of lots of animals.

NATORI: *NOT LIONS!*

(AASIR, the lioness, enters USL and NATORI freezes.)

ABUYA: Look! She's coming over here. You can talk to her now. Hello! We were just talking about you and—

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(AASIR roars sending NATORI back on his heels, but ABUYA doesn't flinch.)

ABUYA: *(Cont'd.)* ... about how Natori here was going to fly over, sit on your head and tell you all about our plan.

AASIR: *(Surprised and confused.)* I just roared at you.

ABUYA: Yes, and it was a very nice roar. It was one of the loudest roars I've heard in a long while. Don't you think so, Natori? ... Natori?

NATORI: Ahhh, ahhhh, yyyeess. Nice roar. Real nice roar. Very, very, very nice roar. *(Backing up slowly.)* I'm going to go now, if that's alright.

(AASIR roars and NATORI stops.)

NATORI: *(Cont'd.)* Or not, as the case may be.

ABUYA: *(Offering AASIR a flier.)* I have this really good plan. My plan involves going out into the bush and bringing some rhinos back here. It's dangerous for them out there and if we can talk them into coming back here with us, it'll be a lot safer for them. And we thought—

NATORI: *You thought.*

ABUYA: I thought you could come with us.

NATORI: *I thought that we shouldn't bother you. Shouldn't disturb you from your much deserved rest. Which I am sure you really deserve after a long day of doing "lion things." So, I thought it best to just let sleeping lions lie ... over there. Where you were before you came over here. Where we are now.*

AASIR: *(Reading the flier.)* Hummm? This is pretty serious stuff.

ABUYA: And we can help them! Only, the bird and I thought—

NATORI: *You thought. (To AASIR.)* I was just here, sleeping, not doing a thing when the zebra woke me up and...

ABUYA: ... that if we had some...

AASIR: Protection?

ABUYA: Exactly.

AASIR: Hummmm. And you've got a plan?

ABUYA: *(Simultaneous.)* Yes!

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NATORI: *(Simultaneous.)* NO!

(AASIR looks back and forth between the TWO.)

ABUYA: One that I'm sure will work!

(AASIR looks back at NATORI.)

NATORI: Ahhhhhh, wellll, sure. Yes ... of course it will.

AASIR: I knew a rhino once. Nice chap. We used to hang out together at the watering hole. But he got mixed up with the wrong crowd. They went out one night into the bush ... nobody ever saw them again... Nope. No more.

AASIR: *(Cont'd.)* Heard stories. Bad ones about what's out there in the bush. Nice chap, Simon.

ABUYA: So, will you help us? Will you go out into the bush with us and save the rhinos?

AASIR: Hummm... Alright. You're on ... for Simon.

ABUYA: We're going to be a great team! A zebra, a lion—

NATORI: *(With not a lot of confidence.)* And a very, very, very tiny bird.

(THEY start off but AASIR stops.)

AASIR: Do you hear that? It's a sort of clicking sound. Really fast.

ABUYA: Oh yeah. What is that?

(AASIR looks left; ABUYA looks right until they simultaneously end up looking at NATORI.)

NATORI: My beak is chattering.

(Continuing on AASIR and ABUYA shake their heads and NATORI tries to control his nerves.)

NATORI: *(Cont'd. To himself.)* I'm going into the bush with a lion. What could possibly go wrong?

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