

Freedom Train

The Courage of Mandy Kate Brown

by
Kate Emery Pogue

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DEDICATION
To Chesley

STORY OF THE PLAY

When Mandy Kate, a young slave girl, overhears a threat to sell her brother-in-law Robert, she rushes to warn her sister Sarah. The family plans to escape together, but Mandy Kate is inadvertently left behind when trying to help another slave, Old Job. Together the old man and young girl must set off on their own. They disguise themselves -- Old Job as a woman (Josephine) and Mandy Kate as a boy (Abe) -- and are initially helped by a clever country boy and his eccentric elderly aunt. Mandy Kate and Old Job are later guided through several stops on the Underground Railroad and endure a hair-raising chase. Finally, the two summon up the courage to cross a dangerous bridge to the safety of Canada. An ensemble singing Negro spirituals adds haunting, poetic beauty to this gripping tale of reaching for freedom. Full evening.

PREMIERE PERFORMANCE

Freedom Train, (then called "The Courage of Mandy Kate Brown") was commissioned by EarlyStages, the family theatre branch of Stages Repertory Theatre in Houston, Texas. Produced by Chesley Krohn. Directed by Rachel Hemphill Dickson. The cast included:

Mandy Kate: Kimberly Nicole. Sarah: Tamiyka White.
Old Job: Sterling Vappie. Cecilia: Rozanne Curtis.
Rose Anne: Sara Gaston. Taggart: Josh Morrison.
Sylvester: Dwight Clark. Robert: Ted Davis.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Four actors are African-American and four Caucasian, two women and two men in each group. Plus ensemble)*

MANDY KATE: A girl about 14, Sarah's half-sister. She is a house slave on the plantation and is shy and fearful.

SARAH: A young slave woman who hates and fears Taggart. She is Mandy Kate's half-sister and married to Robert whom she loves.

ROBERT: A strong young man, Sarah's husband. A slave assigned to work in the fields, Robert despises Taggart, the cruel overseer.

OLD JOB: A frail old slave, physically weak but wily and wise.

CECELIA MORGAN: The young widow of the owner of the plantation. She is the mother of two children but at the opening of the play reclusive and grief-stricken.

ROSE ANNE WITHERSPOON: Cecelia's sister from the North, visiting to help her sister. Rose Anne is an assertive and outspoken abolitionist.

SYLVESTER: Cecelia's son, about 13. His anger at the loss of his father has made him cruel and embittered, ready to follow the example of Taggart.

TAGGERT: A vicious, cruel and vindictive overseer.

MOSES: The great Harriet Tubman whose mission was to lead slaves to freedom. (Role may be doubled with Sarah.)

BUCKLEY: A country boy of about 14, clever and sharp, eager to help runaway slaves. (Role may be doubled with Sylvester.)

BELINDA: Buckley's aunt, a spunky and eccentric elderly lady. (Role may be doubled with Cecelia or Rose Anne.)

OTHERS IN THE ENSEMBLE: Townspeople and families in the Underground Railroad. They sing and speak in unison.

**NOTE: The play can be performed by as few as eight actors, using everyone in the ensemble and doubling a number of roles. The cast can be expanded as much as any production might wish by enlarging the ensemble and spreading out all the roles.*

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SETTING

ACT I

Scene 1: The area suggesting the plantation house in Virginia.

Scene 2: The area outside Sarah and Robert's house.

Scene 3: Outside the plantation house.

Scene 4: In the woods.

ACT II

Scene 1: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania at the time of the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law, 1850.

Scene 2: Outside the plantation house.

Scene 3: In front of a small, rural Pennsylvania farmhouse of Buckley's aunt, Belinda McKinley.

Scene 4: A street in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Several posters are tacked around advertising a reward for the capture of Sarah, Robert, Old Job and Mandy Kate. The reward is for \$500.

NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The Underground Railroad was an idea, an image, what we call a metaphor for the real thing – a train of the mind and of the spirit. When I was young that train seemed to me a miraculous and wonderful thing. That hundreds of people were willing to create a chain of help for escaping slaves, to establish a series of safe houses to hide and protect them often at great risk to the host families themselves, said something wonderful about the capacity of human beings to be just and good. At the turn of the millennium the United States National Parks Service opened a new National Park which consists of the restoration of a trail of these safe houses leading from the former areas of slavery north towards freedom. So it seemed an ideal time to write a play for young people that would tell a story from that time, of some slaves who had the courage to flee, and who, thanks to the Underground Railroad, made the momentous trip from slavery to freedom. None of these characters is a real person from history except for Moses, the great Harriet Tubman. But I hope all of them are true. I hope they represent well the courage and vision and spirit that motivated generations of slaves to seek, find, and treasure their freedom. And that this play honors all who helped them.

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PROLOGUE

(In the darkness "Go Down Moses" sung in chorus begins. As the LIGHTS come up, eight performers are on stage dressed in basic costumes of about 1850. Four actors are African-American and four Caucasian, two women and two men in each group.)

ENSEMBLE:

WHEN ISRAEL WAS IN EGYPT'S LAND
LET MY PEOPLE GO
OPPRESSED SO HARD THEY COULD NOT STAND
LET MY PEOPLE GO
GO DOWN, MOSES,
WAY DOWN IN EGYPT LAND
TELL OLD PHARAOH
TO LET MY PEOPLE GO.

ACTRESS ONE: *(MANDY KATE.)* This story takes place over a hundred and fifty years ago.

ACTOR ONE: *(TAGGERT.)* It starts on a big farm -- a tobacco plantation in the state of Virginia.

ACTRESS TWO: *(SARAH.)* It's a tale about slavery --

ACTOR TWO: *(OLD JOB.)* And freedom --

HALF THE ACTORS: About your ancestors and mine.

ALL: It's our history. But most of all ...

ACTRESS THREE: *(ROSE ANNE.)* It's a story about --

ACTRESS ONE: *(Steps forward.)* Mandy Kate Brown.

ALL: A young slave girl who learns to be free.

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ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: MANDY KATE stands beside a bassinet or cradle, crooning as she rocks it.)

MANDY KATE:
HUSH, LITTLE BABY, DON'T SAY A WORD
MAMA'S GOING TO BUY YOU A MOCKINGBIRD
AND IF THAT MOCKINGBIRD DON'T SING
MAMA'S GOING TO BUY YOU A DIAMOND RING

(SFX: Sound of thunder.)

MANDY KATE: *(Looks up uneasily. Continued.)*
AND IF THAT DIAMOND RING TURNS BRASS
MAMA'S GOING TO BUY YOU A LOOKING GLASS –

(From offstage CECELIA calls.)

CECELIA: Mandy! Mandy Kate -- bring that baby in, it looks like rain!

(MANDY KATE turns towards the house when suddenly she hears SFX of dogs barking, or hounds baying, and running through the house. CECELIA shrieks.)

CECELIA: Ahh!
MANDY KATE: The dogs be loose! *(To the baby.)* We don't go in there.
ROSE ANNE: *(From within the house.)* Sylvester, how dare you let those dogs in here?

(SYLVESTER comes running onstage from the house, laughing. ROSE ANNE and CECELIA are still offstage.)

CECELIA: Out! Out! Down, Barker! Get down!
ROSE ANNE: Pull yourself together Ceci! Here, Daisy, here, Barker! Where's that boy?

End of Freeview

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