

Here We Sit

By L. Don Swartz

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DEDICATION

*To Michael Thomas for keeping me young
and lots of other reasons. - Love, Dada*

STORY OF THE PLAY

"Here We Sit" is an outrageous comedy that puts the audience on the hot seat through a series of sixteen, quick-paced scenes, all illuminating the joys and tribulations of the modern theatre-going experience. In "An Audience of One," a single theatre patron delivers an impassioned monologue to convince the actors to perform the show just for her. The scene, "What the Crowd Is Thinking," allows us to hear the real thoughts of an audience sitting through an uninspired performance. In "Uber Ushers," a band of ushers, driven to the brink of madness by the boorish behavior of an audience, stages a ferocious uprising to reclaim their theatre.

The scenes are propelled by two feisty old ladies, Lottie and Bernice, who keep popping up to express their contempt for the theatre. Having been given free tickets, the two outrageous seniors turn the theatre upside-down with their constant talking and their non-stop snacking from enormous purses stuffed with groceries and candy, wrapped in crinkling paper, of course!

The comedy's ultimate conclusion is that the actors and audience desperately need one another and that this timeless dance we do, as crazy as it can be sometimes, will go on.

ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

*World premiere cast, May 4, 2006, Ghostlight Theatre,
North Tonawanda, New York.*

Lottie: Joann V. Mis
Bernice: Debby Koszelak Swartz
Actor One: Jesse Swartz
Actor Two: Lauren Aquilina
Actor Three: Don Swartz
Actor Four: Mollie McDermott
Actor Five: Charlie D. Hahn
Actor Six: Pat Faulhaber
Actor Seven: Sharon Priest
Actor Eight: Paul McGinnis
Actor Nine: Sarah Averill
Actor Ten: Chris Fire
Actor Eleven: Vanessa Stipkovits
Actor Twelve: Joy Ann Wrona

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(5 m and 9 w)

MEN

1. Announcer, Actor Ten, John, Flannel Shirt, Uber-Usher #2, Acrobat, Usher.
2. Actor One, Tall Man, Michael, Assistant Director, Uber-Usher #1, Box Office Manager, White.
3. Actor Three, the Man, Blank Slate, Director, Sneezzer, Cover.
4. Actor Five, Well-Dressed Man, the Sleeper, He-Talker, House Manager, Duddy, Maurice.
5. Actor Eight, Wide Man, Scientist, Gurgles, Fish Fry, Brave Husband, Braun, Bender.

WOMEN

1. Lottie.
2. Bernice.
3. Actor Two, Young Mother with Baby, Intern, Uber-Usher #4, The Screamer, Sky.
4. Actor Four, Big Coat #2, Sour Grapes, Fast Wife, Usher, Prone, Frump.
5. Actor Six, Mom, Cough Drop, Launch, Aunt Edna.
6. Actor Seven, Strange Lady, Big Hat, She-Talker, Fuddy, Gray.
7. Actor Nine, Pretty Girl, Bored Member, Sinister Voice, Fan, Vapours, Tweed.
8. Actor Eleven, Artsy Woman, Debby, Nice Dress, Colleen, Uber-Usher #3, Rage, Mrs. Brown.
9. Actor Twelve, Big Coat #1, Jingles, Young Woman, Emily, Duck.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT I

- Scene 1: Dueling Audiences**
Announcer, Actors 1-12
- Scene 2: The Art of Picking Your Seat**
Usher, Man, Tall Man, Wide Man, 2 Ladies with Big Coats, Young Mother, Pretty Girl, Strange Lady, Well-Dressed Man, Artsy Woman
- Scene 3: The Curse of the Free Tickets**
Lottie, Bernice, Audience
- Scene 4: Second Choice**
Michael, John
- Scene 5: Glass Eyes: "O Fortuna!"**
Actors 1-12
- Scene 6: Research Says...**
Scientist, Audience, Usher
- Scene 7: Actor Meltdown**
Audience, Woman opening a cough drop, Debby
- Scene 8: What the Crowd Is Thinking**
Assistant Director, Intern, Sleeper, Blank Slate, Nice Dress, Flannel Shirt, Big Hat, Gurgles, Jingles, Mom, Bored Member, Sour Grapes
- Scene 9: Surviving Act I**
Lottie, Bernice

ACT II

- Scene 1: Surviving Intermission**
Announcer, Lottie, Bernice
- Scene 2: Director Meltdown**
Director, Colleen, Father
- Scene 3: Uber-Ushers**
4 Ushers, Cough Drop, Fan, He-Talker, She-Talker, Sneezzer, Young Woman, Brave Husband, Fast Wife

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SYNOPSIS OF SCENES – Continued

Scene 4: An Audience of One

Usher, Emily, House Manager, Other Actors

Scene 5: Sorry, No Refunds

*Manager, Launch, Duck, Cover, Fuddy, Duddy, Vapours,
Braun, Prone, Rage, Scream, Acrobat*

Scene 6: Open Forum

*Mrs. Brown, Tweed, Frump, Aunt Edna, Maurice, Bender,
Gray, Sky, White, Usher*

Scene 7: Trapped Like Rats

Lottie, Bernice

Curtain Call

Notes from the Playwright

In our original production, we were all amazed how hard the audience laughed at the very first scene. We played it kinda-Beckett, and my intent was to scare them a little...and they saw right through my bluff and laughed right through it.

In Scene 5, the recording "O, Fortuna," played 3 minutes. It has to be the most mentioned piece. High school and college patrons loved it and giggled all the way through it. Patrons of a certain age were baffled by it, and were disturbed by the lack of narrative. Ultimately, the scene is a prank in the Monty Python tradition and possibly the most cutting commentary we make about our audience the whole night. (Some nights we feel we'd be better off playing to a house of stuffed animals!) The fact that the targeted audience didn't get it made it all the more irresistible to the company. My response finally became: 20 years from now, it will be the only scene you remember. No matter who questioned me about it, and I'm still getting questions, I made a game of refusing to explain it to them. I guarantee the high school kids who hopefully will be in this some day will love the scene. Their parents? If they like absurd humor and are Monty Python fans, they will enjoy it. If not, all bets are off. And that not-knowing...was wonderful!

I was very pleased with the audiences' acceptance of the very Polish Lottie and Bernice. An African-American woman told me they WERE her grandmother and aunt, and we got a letter from a high school student who said her favorite part was the Russian ladies. We have a large Polish population in Western New York where I live, and they play very well here, but I just know they will play in the heartland also. I was very careful to make them real people. Smart and no nonsense, and no stereotype, and the audiences embraced them.

This play grew out of little scenes I started writing 15 years ago. I knew some day I would have enough material to tie them into a play.

ACT I

Scene 1: "Duelling Audiences"

(AT RISE: The auditorium of a small theatre. Twenty chairs are on risers, 10 chairs on either side of a wide aisle. The house lights fade. A moment of awkward darkness, then the ANNOUNCER'S voice is heard.)

ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the _____ Theatre's production of "Here We Sit." There will be one 15-minute intermission ... wait. I can't do this. I can't. I'm sorry. I've had this really terrible week, you know? And I don't exactly feel like being Mr. Cheerful Announcer-Man tonight. My girlfriend broke up with me five days ago. On my birthday, no less. Yes, on my birthday. She didn't even have the decency to do it in person. She sent me one of those cookies from the mall. You know those big chocolate chip cookies the size of a manhole cover? In red frosting it said, "Happy Birthday, we're through." I was devastated. It was all I could do to finish it. I tried to call her. She won't pick up. Oh Laura, how could you? I thought she was the one I was going to grow old with. Sure, there were signs, but I thought we could work through them. Our last two dates she didn't even show up. She sent her brother, instead. Oh, he's not a bad guy and we had a fine time. But it just wasn't the same. And then there were the disguises when we went out in public. I thought it was some kind of kinky game she was playing so I wore them. She's been trying to tell me how unhappy she was, but I kept missing the signs. The frequent change of address, the guard dog, the restraining order, were all cries for help. I see that now. Oh, Laura. Where are you? Laura? Laura!!! *(Begins to weep.)* Oh God, I do not want to live! *(HE weeps some more. Eventually he stops.)* Oh, what do you care? Just sit there and watch your stupid play and leave me alone! Laura!

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(The LIGHTS come up. The ACTORS have taken their seats on stage and the two audiences simply stare at one another. It becomes a standoff of epic proportions. Finally, the audience on stage begins to speak.)

ONE: What are they doing?

TWO: They're just sitting there.

THREE: This is stupid.

FOUR: I want my money back.

FIVE: Me, too.

FOUR: I thought this was supposed to be funny.

SIX: What are we supposed to do?

SEVEN: Surely, they don't expect us to do anything. To perform. To present something. That's not how it works.

It's not what we do. We have paid a price to do nothing.

EIGHT: The lights aren't supposed to be on us.

NINE: Something is wrong here.

TEN: This is unbearable.

ELEVEN: I may scream.

TWELVE: For God's sake, somebody do something! Wait. I think the man is dimming the lights.

ONE: Is he?

TWO: Yes.

THREE: Soon we will be in the dark, and the dark will be better.

FOUR: What will we do in the dark?

FIVE: We'll sit and we'll wait and we'll watch.

SIX: We'll watch?

SEVEN: Yes, we'll watch. It's what we do. We sit in the dark and we watch.

SIX: Why?

SEVEN: Because someone has to.

SIX: I see.

(The LIGHTS fade to black.)

EIGHT: Ah, the darkness. Here it is at last.

NINE: That's much better. Yes. At least they can't see us now.

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TEN: It is as it should be.

ELEVEN: What if they still won't do something, now that it's dark?

TWELVE: Wait. And watch. We'll cross that bridge when it comes to us. Sit in the dark and watch.

(The OTHERS pick up the echo of "Sit in the dark and watch" until it becomes a whisper.)

Blackout

Scene 2: "The Art of Picking Your Seat"

(AT RISE: Lights come up on an empty auditorium. A delicate aria plays.)

(USHER is standing near the entrance holding a stack of programs.)

(The MAN enters and receives a program from the Usher. He is delighted to be the first person in the auditorium. Choosing just the right seat is a fine art form and he wastes no time scouting out the perfect seat. After careful consideration, he selects a seat in the center aisle on the stage right side of the auditorium. He is content. All is well. He begins to read his program.)

(The TALL MAN enters and without any hesitation, crosses directly to the chair in front of the Man and sits. The Man rises slowly so his head peeks above the Tall Man. He cannot see. He decides to move. He gives the Tall Man a dirty look and crosses to the other side of the auditorium and takes the center seat in the center aisle. This will do, and he begins to happily read his program.)

(The WIDE MAN enters and takes the chair directly in front of the Man. The Man peers out from each side of the Wide Man. This is too much. Giving the Wide Man a dirty look, the Man crosses to the other side of the auditorium and selects a seat on in the top row. He tries for the third time to enjoy his program. TWO LADIES IN BIG COATS enter and sit on either side of the Man. They begin to remove what turns out to be several layers of coats, sweaters, scarves. In the flurry of elbows, the MAN is knocked to the floor between the rows of seats and disappears from view. Eventually we hear a scuttling noise beneath the seats, and before long the Man's head appears beneath the seat of the Tall Man. He crawls out from under the seat of the now agitated Tall Man and giving him a dirty look, he crosses to the stage left side of the auditorium and sits in the center row.)

End of Freeview

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