Live, Onstage!

A one-act by Pat Cook

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THE STORY OF THE PLAY

Professor Featherflowers comes on stage and begins her lecture, “How to Write a Play.” You’re snoring already, right? That’s exactly what the Stage Manager is worried about when he peeks through the curtain and tells the Professor to “jazz it up,” that she needs to open with a joke. The professor then tells him she did.

“You see,” she says, “You don’t really exist – I made you up. YOU are my opening joke!” Needless to say, he doesn’t believe her and calls for his sound person, Shirley, to come out. The Professor then tells them both that they aren’t real and simply characters she invented for to demonstrate her speech.

From there on out it’s all a question of what is real and what isn’t as they are then joined by the Director, a Southern Belle, a Shakespearean Lord and a tap-dancing chicken. Also, a silent woman keeps bringing out props as the Professor makes notes in her speech. Is the Professor making all this up? If so, has she lost control of her characters? Why won’t the woman speak? What is real and what isn’t?

This farcical existential spoof is full of deeper meanings. At least, that’s what the Director believes. “Maybe we all represent the planets?” he questions. “Maybe we’re the Great Lakes!” yells Shirley, “And you’re Erie!”

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(4 m, 4 w)

PROF. FEATHERFLOWERS: Stodgy lady, a writing teacher.
STAGE MANAGER: Argumentative middle-aged techie.
SHIRLEY: Confused sound technician.
WOMAN: Backstage prop person, rather bland.
DIRECTOR: Self-important pseudo-intellectual.
CHICKEN: Tap-dancing, wise-cracking chicken.
JAQUES: Shakespearean Lord.
MAGNOLIA: Stereotypical Southern belle.

A NOTE ABOUT THE PLAY

While the play is written for 4 men and 4 women, some parts, such as the Director, Chicken or even Woman, may be played by either a male or female.

Also, the Chicken is to be played very broadly costume-wise. The player's face may be seen, in fact. One suggestion regarding the tap-dancing section would be to have the player wear yellow tights and tap shoes. Another, probably better one, would be for the player to wear the full chicken outfit, chicken feet and all, and simply have him mime the dancing and play the sound effects of taps.

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(AT RISE: The LIGHTS come up on the stage. There is a podium down SR. After a moment, the PROFESSOR enters from SR and moves to the podium. She is shuffling through her note cards and places them on the podium. She looks out and begins.)

PROFESSOR: *(A bit pompous.)* "How to Write a Play." Such a simple title, isn't it? This is our subject for today and, of course, the reason you came here. Good evening. I am Professor Featherflowers. Now, before we jump into our theme with great vigor let us begin with the basics. First, what is a play? A play is any staged reading or recitation of prose, poetry or other forms of writing in either monologue or dialogue form or, in some cases, pantomime. . Now, many of you may say that the play is also a form of what is known as "the written word." This is true to a certain point. However, it is only when this "written word" is put on stage and acted out does it, in fact, become a play. *(The MANAGER looks out through the curtains.)* Now, we come to our topic – "How to Write a Play." First the beginning or opening. Act One, Scene One, if other scenes are incorporated in the first act. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways, but the best way is to begin with some sort of surprise.

MANAGER: *(Looks at the PROFESSOR.)* Pssst!

PROFESSOR: What sort of surprise you may well ask? There are many schools of thought on that one –

MANAGER: Psssssst!

PROFESSOR: *(Looks at the MANAGER.)* Excuse me. *(Crosses to the MANAGER.)* Yes?

MANAGER: Can you pick it up?

PROFESSOR: What?

MANAGER: You're boring us to the teeth back here.

PROFESSOR: But I just started.

MANAGER: You're kidding. I thought you'd been on for a half hour already. Weren't you going to open with a joke?

PROFESSOR: Oh! I DID put that in my notes, didn't I? *(SHE picks up her note cards.)*
MANAGER: Well, tell it. Something! Or we're going to have to lock the doors.
PROFESSOR: Do you know any jokes?
MANAGER: Sure. *(HE laughs raucously and then looks out.)* Wait, you can't tell that one.
PROFESSOR: Well, let's do this. *(SHE pulls the MANAGER from behind the curtain.)*
MANAGER: Wait! What're you doing?
PROFESSOR: *(To the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen, this is the stage manager. Not very impressive, is he? Well, you will soon find out why.
MANAGER: *(Sheepishly.)* Hello. *(Aside to the PROFESSOR.)* I'm not supposed to be out here.
PROFESSOR: Sure you are. *(To the audience.)* Remember, I mentioned opening with a surprise?
MANAGER: You did? I must've dozed off before you got to that.
PROFESSOR: Well, if anyone would know about my opening surprise, it should be you.
MANAGER: Me? Why me?
PROFESSOR: You're it.
MANAGER: I'm your opening surprise? How you figure?
PROFESSOR: I made notes that just after I began my speech you would interrupt me.
MANAGER: After you began … I would interrupt you? How'd you know I'd do that?
PROFESSOR: *(Holds up her notes.)* I just told you. It's in my notes.
MANAGER: But I didn't know anything about that.
PROFESSOR: You weren't supposed to. You see, you only know what I say you know.
MANAGER: *(Stares at the PROFESSOR for a long pause and then looks out. To the audience.)* We'll have refreshments soon!
PROFESSOR: You haven't figured it out yet?
MANAGER: Figured out what? I just came out here to tell you–

PROFESSOR: That I was boring, I know. I wrote that.
MANAGER: Wait. You WROTE that? But that would mean…?
PROFESSOR: Exactly. I wrote you.
MANAGER: You did? *(HE and the PROFESSOR both nod in unison.)* You wrote me? *(They nod in unison again.)* Did I ever write back? *(They both shake their heads.)*
PROFESSOR: No, really. I wrote you, I created you. So … in a sense, you are my opening joke.
MANAGER: *(Smiles cautiously.)* You're not taking those little pills again, are you?

(The PROFESSOR puts an arm around the MANAGER'S shoulders.)

PROFESSOR: You see, you only exist here. On stage. *(SHE points to the stage and the MANAGER looks down.)* You're fictional.
MANAGER: Uh huh. That punch you were drinking earlier, was it laced with anything we all should know about?
PROFESSOR: You don't really exist; I made you up.
MANAGER: Hey. I'm standing right here!
PROFESSOR: Right. On this stage. Where I wrote you.
MANAGER: And I'm not real?
PROFESSOR: Correct.
MANAGER: I don't believe you.
PROFESSOR: Of course not. *(The MANAGER nods triumphantly.)* I wrote you to be argumentative. *(SHE holds up a note card.)* See?
MANAGER: *(Reads card.)* "Stage manager is argumentative." *(HE steps back.)* That doesn't prove anything!
PROFESSOR: Yeah? Then tell me. What's your name?
MANAGER: My name? Well, it's … it's ….
PROFESSOR: Where were you born?
MANAGER: Hang on, let's not gloss over this name thingie.
PROFESSOR: See?
MANAGER: *(Wide-eyed.)* Son of a gun! *(Calls off.)* Shirley!
PROFESSOR: *(To the audience.)* Shirley is the sound lady. She doesn't have a last name.

End of Freeview

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