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# Acknowledgments

Among the many individuals and organizations who lent me their assistance with this book, special recognition should be given to Grand Valley State University, which provided me with the much-needed funding and release time from teaching and directing in order to compile and prepare the material. I'm also grateful for the continued support of my editor, Ted Zapel, at Meriwether Publishing.

In addition to the people and groups too numerous to mention who have spread the word about my call for scripts for this anthology, I'd like to thank the following individuals and international organizations, which have been instrumental in publicizing my efforts: Association Internationale du Théâtre Amateur/International Amateur Theatre Association (AITA/IATA); American Association for Theatre in Education (AATE); the Australian Script Centre; United States Center for the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People (ASSITEJ/USA); Women Playwrights International (Australia); Theatre Playwrights Development Collective (Canada); Priscilla Yates of the Australian Writers Guild; Irish Centre of AITA/IATA; Council of Drama in Education (Canada); Australian Capital Territory Drama Association (ACTDA); North European Amateur Theatre Alliance AITA/IATA (NEATA); Replay Productions (Ireland); Gustavo Ott of the South American Regional Alliance AITA/IATA (SARA); and Aled Rhys-Jones of the Drama Association of Wales. Last but not least I owe a debt of gratitude I can never repay to all of the actors and audiences whose performances and responses enabled me to recognize the power and the grace, the subtlety and theatricality of the scenes and monologs contained in this anthology.

# Preface

## Overview of the Collection

This anthology contains over forty monologs and scenes from the work of contemporary playwrights, selected for use by young students and actors age twelve to twenty-four years old. The material is appropriate for all audiences in terms of language and situations, and the selections vary in length from one to two minutes to approximately nine to ten minutes in order to offer a range of challenges for students who are just beginning to find their voice in theatre. The anthology is designed as a resource text for general reading, competitive auditions, forensics activities, playwrighting exercises, literary editing, oral interpretation classes, acting studio exercises, and similar applications.

One of this book's noteworthy features is that it can open doors to many writers who are not widely known within the international performance community. I've relied upon writers' organizations, international drama festivals, new plays programs at established theatres, and Internet-based playwrights' organizations worldwide in order to publicize my call for scripts. Through these, I've succeeded in tapping numerous plays from around the globe that are fresh and exciting. All the excerpts here are fascinating cultural documents that should appeal to students of all ages.

The international flavor of this collection is also noteworthy because it offers some unusual challenges to students or actors from different English-speaking societies. For example, is the piece best presented with or without a dialect? Can one understand the issue at hand without doing research? What does need to be researched about the socio-cultural context or the word usage? And what research methods and skills are needed in order to unleash the full potential of the monologs or scenes?

Readers should note at the outset that with few exceptions, all of the pieces in this collection are taken from unpublished plays. Thus, while the anthology is "fresh," it also discourages students from relying upon the already-existing literary or dramatic context of the selections. This intentional limitation seeks to stimulate the student's imaginative resources by urging him or her to supply original background information, given circumstances, character motivation, biographical details and the like for interpreting the extracts. A brief introduction precedes

each selection in order to highlight some key features and point the student in the right direction. But I hope that the material — “isolated” from the complete script in this way — will encourage students to “think outside the box” of given plays and stories in order to improvise and discover their own unique interpretations.

In some situations it may be desirable, of course, to obtain the full script of a play, and I’ve tried to supply accurate information in the credits section of this anthology to help students and their coaches contact the authors or their agents directly. In fact, most of these authors would love to have you read their complete work because public exposure is a vital elixir for their careers and often leads to full stagings of their plays. But realistically, the contact information at the end of the text may quickly become out of date as writers change their addresses or their agents, and for writers living abroad, the task of contacting them may be daunting. In any case, I feel the value of a fresh collection of very recent and infrequently seen excerpts from contemporary international plays outweighs the drawback of limited accessibility to the full, published script.

## **Criteria for Selecting Material**

One of the basic criteria governing my choice of scenes and monologs has been the requirement that all the pieces be taken from plays that have been produced in some form: full productions, staged readings, workshops, etc. I feel this is the only way for writers to develop speakable dialog, compelling character traits, dramatic development, and so forth. Unlike the solitary working methods of poets, novelists, and authors in literary forms, playwrights need to forge their dramas in the crucible of actor-audience interaction. They need to ensure that their words communicate vividly, vitally, and immediately to spectators across the footlights and score an impact on the audience. After all, plays are designed to be spoken, not read. Not all writing, however colorful, functions theatrically in this way, but I feel that all the material in this collection does.

I’ve also been keenly concerned with the suitability of this material for educational purposes. Hence, I’ve included some brief tips in the book’s introduction on how to rehearse and present the selections either for forensics interpretation and training or for acting classes, auditions, and the like. I’ve also tried to select only those pieces with characters able to be played by young actors between twelve and twenty-four years of age. This

ensures that the scenes and monologs will present opportunities for students to “use themselves” and closely identify with the material they’re presenting.

Third, I’ve tried to focus on plays containing themes of interest to this age group. Some of the dramas, such as *Blue Girl* by Deborah Aita (New Zealand), *Halls Of Horror* by Josh Overton (U.S.A.), and *The Minotaur* by Neil Duffield (United Kingdom) have been specifically written for young audiences. However, readers will soon discover that the majority of these plays have been written for general audiences, although the selections here contain themes or characters especially appropriate for younger students to examine and develop. As a stage director, I’ve always felt the plays that best entertain and serve young audiences are those that work with general audiences as well.

Finally, the need to balance the treatment of gender, ethnic, and racial diversity in the collection has also governed my choice of material to some extent. For example, the number of male and female writers represented in this collection, as well as the number of male and female roles, is roughly equal. In the category of ethnic diversity, I’ve sought to include characters from Arabic, African-American, Jewish, and other racial or ethnic backgrounds in order to reflect the increasing cultural pluralism both in our schools and in society at large. Where necessary, I’ve indicated specific gender and ethnic features of the characters in the acting prefaces to the various selections.

My hope in doing all this has been that the book will serve the special needs of teachers and students in middle school, high school, and university classrooms as a reading text, a class performance text, and a competition resource.

## **Editorial Changes**

I haven’t modified any of the pieces, except to remove them from the context of the entire play, number the lines for reference, and preface each with brief suggestions on performance approaches. All the extracts have been reviewed and approved by the authors, and in most cases the authors have also had a hand in shaping the prefatory comments preceding each extract.

One of the collection’s most interesting features is the variety in length of the selections. Longer pieces offer teachers the opportunity to discuss editing methods, and they challenge students to explore ways of condensing and focusing the text.

Coaches and students preparing for competitive auditions — scholarships, casting, forensics competitions, etc. — might therefore find value in learning how to trim and compress their selections to a shorter length. And at least five or six of the selections can stand on their own as short one-acts.

Students and their coaches should also remember that the printed length of a monolog or scene is never a good indication of its performance length, which always depends on the number of heartbeats — not the number of words. All the selections must therefore be studied and presented aloud, if only to judge their length and the emotional power they contain.

### **A Reminder about Intellectual Property**

In all the anthologies I edit, I feel compelled to remind readers that the work in the collection is intended *only* for studio exercises or for reading. When it comes to performing it, producing it in public readings, or adapting it in any way via the electronic media for other audiences — educational, amateur, or professional — permission *must* be obtained and royalties paid to the agent or author.

Perhaps this “caution” needs to be frequently restated in this age of the Internet, where so much is available online or otherwise reproducible at little or no charge. Readers must remind themselves that plays — like other unique, cultural artifacts — are not equivalent to the cheapened bytes and “factoids” we slug through and manipulate by the thousands every day. They are the intellectual property of human beings who have spent many years earning, and who therefore deserve, proper acknowledgment and compensation for producing and distributing them to the public.

**Bear in mind that in this book I’m attempting to highlight and promote the work of a handful of uniquely talented and very highly motivated artists whose worth, importance, and cultural value in our society is already deeply discounted, frequently ridiculed, and even despised. Their plays are their honest work, their “products.” Pay for them. If you wish to perform any of these monologs in public, credits appear at the end of this volume; call or write for permission. These artists are not unreasonable in what they expect from us.**