

STUPID FUCKING BIRD

BY AARON POSNER

SORT OF ADAPTED FROM
THE SEAGULL BY ANTON CHEKHOV



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

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SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS

Sheet music for the three songs in the Play, composed by James Sugg with lyrics by Aaron Posner, is required for production. The music will be provided upon written application and approval of a performance license.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For Howard Shalwitz... for the opportunity, the insight and the... endlessly intelligent interrogation. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for making this thing happen.

For Maisie Ann Posner... for the inspiration... and All The Feelings.

For Chuck Mee, William Shakespeare, Frank Galati, Brian Mertes, Melissa Keivman, Miriam Weisfeld, Misha Kashman, James Sugg, Craig Wright and, of course, Anton Chekhov... without whom this play would not be whatever the hell it is.

For the many, many actors and other theatre artists—particularly the amazing folks of the original cast and creation team—who helped bring STUPID FUCKING BIRD into being in workshops and readings, and at the Lake George Theater Lab, Woolly Mammoth Theatre, the Theatre @ Boston Court, the Pearl, and so many other places while it continued to grow and change... I have learned from each and every one and I am eternally grateful.

For all the fierce, fervent young artists who seem to be connecting with the passions, fears, frustrations, needs, hopes and longings of the young artists of this play. Chekhov was really on to something! Keep striving. Keep discovering. Make better things! Make things better!

And, of course, for Erin Weaver... for All The Things.

STUPID FUCKING BIRD was originally produced by Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company (Howard Shalwitz, Artistic Director; Meghan Pressman, Managing Director) in Washington, D.C., opening on May 27th, 2013. It was directed by Howard Shalwitz; the scenic design was by Misha Kachman; the costume design was by Laree Lentz; the lighting design was by Colin K. Bills; the sound design and original music were by James Sugg; the dramaturg was Miriam Weisfeld; the production stage manager was Maribeth Chaprnka; the resident assistant stage manager was Jason Caballero; the assistant stage managers were Katie Chance and Becky Reed; the assistant director was Hannah Greene; and the assistant dramaturg was Sam Lahne. The cast was as follows:

CONRAD Brad Koed
DEV Darius Pierce
MASH Kimberly Gilbert
NINA Katie DeBuys
EMMA ARKADINA Kate Norris
DOYLE TRIGORIN Cody Nickell
DR. EUGENE SORN Rick Foucheux

STUPID FUCKING BIRD was subsequently co-produced by the Theatre at Boston Court (Michael Seel, Executive Director; Jessica Kubzansky, Co-Artistic Director; Michael Michetti, Co-Artistic Director) and Circle X Theatre Co. (Tim Wright, Artistic Director; Camille Schenkkan, Managing Director) in Pasadena, CA, opening on June 19th, 2014. It was directed by Michael Michetti; the scenic design was by Stephanie Kerley Schwartz; the costume design was by Mallory Kay Nelson; the lighting design was by Elizabeth Harper; the sound design was by Rob Oriol; the video design was by Sean Cawelti; the props design was by Jenny Smith; and the production stage manager was Andrew Lia. The cast was as follows:

CONRAD Will Bradley
DEV Adam Silver
MASH Charlotte Gulezian
NINA Zarah Mahler
EMMA ARKADINA Amy Pietz
DOYLE TRIGORIN Matthew Floyd Miller
DR. EUGENE SORN Arye Gross

The New York City premiere of STUPID FUCKING BIRD was produced by the Pearl Theatre Company (Hal Brooks, Artistic Director), opening on March 15th, 2016. It was directed by Davis McCallum; the scenic design was by Sandra Goldmark; the costume design was by Amy Clark; the lighting design was by Mike Inwood; the sound design was by Mikhail Fiksel; the original music was by James Sugg; the production stage manager was Katharine Whitney; and the technical director was Gary Levinson. The cast was as follows:

CONRAD Christopher Sears
DEV Joe Paulik
MASH Joey Parsons
NINA Marianna McClellan
EMMA ARKADINA Bianca Amato
DOYLE TRIGORIN Erik Lochtefeld
DR. EUGENE SORN Dan Daily

CHARACTERS

CONRAD

DEV

MASH

NINA

EMMA ARKADINA

DOYLE TRIGORIN

DR. EUGENE SORN

THE SYMBOLS IN THE TEXT

/ means that that next line begins here.

— means that the line is interrupted.

... means some new thought, or choice, or change of mental or emotional direction... It also means that the thought continues on beyond the end of the written line. While the actors should pay attention to these shifts, to do so does not require long pauses. The dialogue should be swift and fluid...

* * means that the line between these symbols should be re-written to fit the actual physical attributes of the actor playing the role or the location of the production. It should stay in the tone of what I have written in this version, but should be as detailed (and dicey) as possible in terms of fitting the actual actor. Some variations on “swarthy, talentless fuck-headed pirate” include “smarmy, big-nosed, Ichabod motherfucker” and “smiling, toothy, beady-eyed shithead.” Rhythmically, they should all be relatively close to what is now in the script.

THE SET

The first and third acts are designed for some manner of a raw, practical, multi-purpose, transparently theatrical playing space. There is a great deal of flexibility about how it should look, what furniture or props or other things are there, how the play is actually staged, and the use of live music, lighting, sound effects, etc. The action, however, should be relatively fluid and rapid, quite like a

Shakespeare play... The actors who are not in the primary scene are very likely onstage a good deal of the time, around the periphery, playing music, eating, watching, etc. This could vary greatly depending on the space. The second act, however, is imagined to take place in a relatively realistic kitchen with a refrigerator, kitchen sink, etc. Or not. The intention is that it feel somewhat—or even significantly—different than the first and third acts. Or not...

THE ACTING

The acting, of course, should be very, very good: emotionally grounded, deeply passionate, intention-driven, and relatively realistic. Also funny. Pretty much like a really good Chekhov play. Only different, too... In this odd little world, moreso than in Chekhov, everyone is actively grappling for the best way to express themselves nearly all the time, to give words to their frustrations, hopes, passions, and desires. Therefore words often come tumbling out before the thoughts are entirely formed. Everyone thinks relatively quickly. Contemplative is not our friend. The way the actors engage with the text and with each other should be fierce and visceral. Also... love is important. Very important. Love is all over this play. Genuine, deep, real, complex love. If you are ever at sea around choices... tip towards more love and you won't be far off.

THE THEATRICALS & META-THEATRICALS

The characters are “real” people living the story of the play. They are also characters in a play. Both things are true at the same time. They should all be fully invested in the reality of their lives in the play and the stakes are high and entirely serious. At the same time they always know that they are in a play, that there is an audience out there, etc. etc. There is no “real life” equivalent to this theatrical reality, no matter how much some actors might want there to be one. This is a play. There is simply more than one reality going on at a time. That means the actors can “watch” or be present for other scenes they are not in and they don't have to have the information contained in that scene. They are all part of a play. But there is no separate “actor” character.

STUPID FUCKING BIRD

ACT ONE

0. Start

Con comes onstage, perhaps alone, perhaps with the whole ensemble. He looks hard at us—his intrepid audience—and then talks directly to us...

CON. The play will begin when someone says: “Start the fucking play.”

(When someone does, the actors take their places, music starts, lights shift...)

By the lake. In the fall. Late afternoon...

1. Disappointing

Dev and Mash—pronounced “Mosh,” like the pit, not like what you do to potatoes—are mid-conversation. They are close, complex, long-time friends. There is a kind of love there, and some odd but powerful kind of connection and familiarity... just not the kind of love either of them wants from the other...

DEV. Seriously. Why?

MASH. Why do I...? *(She touches her black clothes somehow...)*

DEV. Yes. Why?

MASH. What do you think?

DEV. I, ummm...

MASH. (*Absolutely dry/ironic.*) Black is slimming.

DEV. (*Beat. Realizes she is joking...*) Seriously.

MASH. (*Can you be honest, ironic, angry, and funny, all at the same time...?*) I'm in mourning. For my life. I'm unhappy.

DEV. Wow. Okay...

Are you *that* unhappy?

MASH. You're an idiot.

DEV. Yeah, maybe. But...

MASH. What?

DEV. Nothing.

MASH. What??

DEV. Nothing.

But... my life is worse than yours. I mean... *so* much worse... And you don't see me wearing black. (*He is dressed partially in black.*) I mean, sometimes, but it's not, like, a *thing*... But, Jesus, my life is way worse than yours, you know?

MASH. How is that even possible?

DEV. I'm poor.

MASH. *I'm* poor.

DEV. I'm way *poorer*. And lonely and, you know... *sad* most of the time. And I tutor kids for tests I utterly don't believe in, which is just an insane way / to spend—

MASH. Well, I'm a cook. Part-time! That's not even a real job...

DEV. I have flat feet... which hurt, you know... all the time.

Plus I'm an orphan, so that's... you know... *unsettling*.

MASH. (*Almost tossed off...*) What are we, in a fucking Dickens novel?

DEV. And I'm unhappy in love! *I'm unhappy in love*... I mean, you know I love you ridiculously and you, you know, barely tolerate me... But mostly I'm really, really *poor*. *And *lonely* and *chubby* and *bald*.* And I'm sorry, but that's actually much harder than mourning your lost... lonely... broken... *whatever*.

MASH. Ah.

DEV. But I'm still... *whatever. Hopeful*. I still have hope. You know?

MASH. Wow, "hope." (*Pause...*) You can be happy if you're poor.

DEV. Yeah?

MASH. Yes.

DEV. Oh. Well...

(He genuinely considers this. Then, having reached a conclusion:)

No.

So when is Conrad's... *thing* starting?

MASH. Soon.

DEV. And what is it, exactly?

MASH. It's a "Site-Specific Performance Event."

DEV. What's a...?

MASH. It's kind of like a play but not so stupid.

DEV. Stupid?

MASH. No one's pretending to be someone else.

DEV. Oh. (*Quick beat, working that out...*) Then what do they do?

MASH. They... *behave*. They say things and do things, or whatever, but they're not pretending to be, you know, *Bob* and *Trudie*. Like fucking five-year-olds playing house. It goes deeper than that. It's *art*...

DEV. And Nina is in it right?

MASH. (*Dark and small.*) Yeah...

DEV. That's nice. That Con and Nina can connect that way. (*She sees where he is going with this from before the word go...*) That she can be part of his... *creation*... part of his *work*, you know? That they have that in common. That they can *connect* on a whole other level, while we—

MASH. Please shut the fuck up, okay? For a minute. Could you do that?

DEV. Okay.

MASH. Please?

DEV. Okay.

MASH. Please?

DEV. I said okay.

MASH. Thank you. (*Beat. Big picture.*) I'm sorry. I just... *can't*. *This*... (*She gestures to him and her together, somehow...*) I just *can't*. Okay?

DEV. I know. (*Beat.*) It sucks.

MASH. Sorry.

DEV. Yeah. Okay. (*Dev starts to leave...*) See you at the... *thing*.

MASH. (*Sits... Then turns to us.*) I wrote this. It sucks, but... Don't judge.

YOU'RE BORN AND THEN YOU LIVE AND THEN
YOU DIE
YOU NEVER GET TO KNOW THE REASON WHY

STUPID FUCKING BIRD

by Aaron Posner

4M, 3W

An aspiring young director rampages against the art created by his mother's generation. A nubile young actress wrestles with an aging Hollywood star for the affections of a renowned novelist. And everyone discovers just how disappointing love, art, and growing up can be. In this irreverent, contemporary, and very funny remix of Chekhov's *The Seagull*, Aaron Posner stages a timeless battle between young and old, past and present, in search of the true meaning of it all. Original songs composed by James Sugg draw the famously subtextual inner thoughts of Chekhov's characters explicitly to the surface. STUPID FUCKING BIRD will tickle, tantalize, and incite you to consider how art, love, and revolution fuel your own pursuit of happiness.

*"Aaron Posner's savvy, petulant blitz through Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* [is] less an adaptation of Chekhov's landmark drama than a funny, moving slugfest, a ripe mashup of mock and awe. ... sometimes it blows Chekhov up, and sometimes the play explodes with a genuinely Chekhovian release of emotion. The show is smart enough to have it both ways: It mines *The Seagull* for classical heft even while giving it the bird."*
—The Washington Post

"Like the play that inspired it, this adaptation offers a unique glimpse at the state of the theatrical art form and more broadly, the difficult pursuit of art and creativity. Angry, raw, and real, this play does not shy away from the hard, but well-discussed philosophical questions about art, reality, love and life and what it all means. Yet, it does so in a way that's likely to engage contemporary theatrically savvy audiences."
—BroadwayWorld.com

"... an accessible and unfailingly delightful jaunt into misery (or maybe we should say compromised happiness). ... It's absorbing in its every glance and revealing in its every sigh."
—Washington City Paper

*"STUPID FUCKING BIRD, like *The Seagull* before it, demands a realer theater. ... It is an act of historical importance to tear theater down in order to have it start anew. But it is an act of grace to challenge theater to become greater without tearing it down."*
—DCTheatreScene.com

*"STUPID FUCKING BIRD, Aaron Posner's splendid, irreverent adaptation of Anton Chekhov's *The Seagull* [is] a refreshing splash of cool water on dry, well-trod terrain. ... STUPID FUCKING BIRD is what you get from a writer who not only adores the material he's adapting, but understands it precisely."*
—DCist.com

Also by Aaron Posner

THE CHOSEN

MY NAME IS ASHER LEV

WHO AM I THIS TIME? (& OTHER
CONUNDRUMS OF LOVE)

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

ISBN 978-0-8222-3250-6



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