



MEN ON BOATS

BY JACLYN
BACKHAUS



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
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MEN ON BOATS
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MEN ON BOATS was produced in New York City in 2016 by Playwrights Horizons, Inc. (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director) and Clubbed Thumb (Maria Striar, Producing Artistic Director; Sarah McLellan, Managing Director). It was directed by Will Davis, the scenic design was by Arnulfo Maldonado, the costume design was by Ásta Bennie Hostetter, the lighting design was by Solomon Weisbard, the sound design was by Jane Shaw, and the production stage manager was Erin Gloria Albrecht. The cast was as follows:

JOHN WESLEY POWELL	Kelly McAndrew
WILLIAM DUNN	Kristen Sieh
JOHN COLTON SUMNER	Donnetta Lavinia Grays
OLD SHADY	Elizabeth Kenny
BRADLEY	Layla Khoshnoudi
O.G. HOWLAND	Hannah Cabell
SENECA HOWLAND	Danaya Esperanza
FRANK GOODMAN	Birgit Huppuch
HALL	Danielle Davenport
HAWKINS	Jocelyn Bioh

MEN ON BOATS was initially developed and produced by Clubbed Thumb in 2015.

CHARACTERS

Aboard the Emma Dean,
the boat named after Powell's wife

John Wesley POWELL—one-armed leader of the expedition

William DUNN—hunter and trapper

John Colton SUMNER—former soldier, current explorer

Aboard the Kitty Clyde's Sister,
the boat named after Kitty Clyde's sister

OLD SHADY—Powell's older brother, Civil War vet

BRADLEY—lieutenant, manic with youth

Aboard the No-Name,
the boat named after nothing

O.G. Howland—printer and hunter

SENECA Howland—O.G.'s quiet little brother

Frank GOODMAN—British, so excited

Aboard the Maid of the Canyon,
the party boat

HALL—mapmaker, old soul

HAWKINS—the cook

THE OTHERS ON LAND

TSAUWIAT—a Ute chief (doubles with O.G. Howland)

THE BISHOP—Tsauwiat's wife (doubles with Seneca Howland)

MR. ASA—a desert settler (doubles with Goodman)

SETTING

On boats in 1869. Traversing the Green & Colorado Rivers from Wyoming to a Big Canyon on the government's first Sanctioned Expedition.

NOTE ON CASTING

The characters in MEN ON BOATS were historically cisgender white males. The cast should be made up entirely of people who are not. I'm talking about racially diverse actors who are female-identifying, trans-identifying, genderfluid, and/or non-gender-conforming.

It is my strong preference that Tsauwiat and The Bishop (so thusly O.G. and Seneca Howland) be played by Native cast members. If there are no Native actors in your production, the Howlands/Utes must at least be cast as non-white.

NOTES ON THE PLAY

—This play is based largely on John Wesley Powell's journals of his 1869 expedition, published as *The Exploration of the Colorado River and Its Canyons*.

—Rapids sections will be divvied by boat assignment (*MAID, KITTY CLYDE*, etc.) or orientation of the character in space on the river (*WATER, ROCK*, etc.), so that groups of actors are talking to each other based on where they are collectively rather than individually. This also comes into play with lines demarcated "ALL"—when a line inside a boat is given to ALL, it is only those in that boat, etc.

—The word ASHLEY sometimes means DANGER.

MEN ON BOATS

ACT ONE

Prologue. The Men on Boats take their places in their boats.

EMMA DEAN

POWELL. We're on the river now, crew
There will be churning, there will be swells
Keep your bearings
Steady! On!
Oars up!
Oars out!

ALL BOATS

ALL. Oars up!
Oars out!
Annnnnnnd

WE TRULY BEGIN!

1.1 The Boats on the Water

The Men on Boats, Rushing a Rapid.

EMMA DEAN

POWELL. Left! Keep Left! Rocks!
DUNN. Rocks Right! Keep Left!
SUMNER. Hug the wall, Dunn

Oars hard left
Rocks! Rocks!
POWELL. Passing rocks!
DUNN. Clear?
SUMNER. Clear. Forward. Swelling
DUNN. Swelling? I see swelling! Major rush!
ALL. Whoa!
POWELL. Steady. Steady, Dunn.
Sumner: Keep an eye on the swell
I'll warn the boats.

EMMA DEAN INTRO

My name is Major John Wesley Powell. I'm the leader of this expedition.
I'm aboard the *Emma Dean*—the boat named after my wife.

DUNN. My name is William Dunn.
I'm a hunter. A trapper. An innovator.
I am aboard the *Emma Dean*.

SUMNER. I'm John Colton Sumner.
Last winter I went snowshoeing in the Rocky Mountains
Obviously I survived.
I am aboard the *Emma Dean*.

EMMA DEAN

POWELL. BOATS! ROCKS!

ALL BOATS

ALL. Rocks! Rocks!

EMMA DEAN

POWELL. No-Name! watch for rocks
And Swelling up ahead!

NO-NAME

O.G. Swell. Swell. Rocks?
SENECA. Almost through
O.G. And hold Hold keep left
GOODMAN. How are they doing back there—

SENECA. Eyes to the front Keep your eyes in front of you Don't worry about them.

O.G. Go around the swell! Round it.

SENECA. Rounding!

GOODMAN. Shouldn't we portage?

SENECA. Keep your eyes to the front We won't portage unless we can find a bank

GOODMAN. No bank I see no bank

SENECA. Row Row Keep rowing. Hard. HARD!

O.G. HARD! Keep rowing!

GOODMAN. I'm ROWING

O.G. Through!

NO-NAME INTRO

My name's Oramel Howland.

My friends call me O.G.

Laughs to himself.

Nah, I'm kiddin

I don't have any friends.

This is my little brother

SENECA. Seneca Howland.

People think we're twins but we're not.

O.G. and SENECA. We are aboard the *No-Name*

GOODMAN. My name is Frank Goodman.

I'm here and I'm quite thrilled to be here in the American West!

I am aboard the *No-Name*!

NO-NAME

Kitty Clyde's Sister!!

Watch the Swell!

KITTY CLYDE'S SISTER

BRADLEY. Swelling! Swelling! Didja hear that?

OLD SHADY. Rocks. Swelling.

BRADLEY. Use our oars, right? Row hard, right?

I mean right like "right" not like turn right

Keep straight! Keep straight!
Should I call for a line?

OLD SHADY. No lines unless we need em

BRADLEY. Swelling swelling rushing fast!

Swelling! Swelling!

Should I call for line?

OLD SHADY. No.

KITTY CLYDE'S SISTER INTRO

BRADLEY. My name's George Young Bradley!

This is my first expedition!

I'm a little nervous but I'm also excited!

Did I forget anything?

Oh!

I am aboard the *Kitty Clyde's Sister*!

OLD SHADY. .

BRADLEY. Introduce yourself, Old Shady!

OLD SHADY. No.

BRADLEY. Old Shady is Major Powell's older brother.

KITTY CLYDE'S SISTER

OLD SHADY. THROUGH! Kitty Clyde is Through!

BRADLEY. We're through! Oh no. Maid of the Canyon? Watch out!

The other boats have passed danger, and they are watching the Maid of the Canyon struggle now.

EMMA DEAN, KITTY CLYDE'S SISTER, AND NO-NAME

ALL. Hug the wall. Hug the wall! HUG THE WALL

MAID OF THE CANYON

HAWKINS. Here's the swell Here it comes

HALL. Stay to the side

HAWKINS. Hug the wall

HALL. Huggin the wall!

HAWKINS. We got this Hall! We got this! Left!

HALL. Don't get caught Don't get caught

HAWKINS. We won't get caught

MAID OF THE CANYON INTRO

Hi. I'm William Robert Hawkins.

I can make eggs all styles!

I am aboard the *Maid of the Canyon*.

HALL. I'm Andrew Hall and I don't have time for this shit!

MAID OF THE CANYON

HAWKINS. HALL We're getting caught We're getting caught

HALL. It's pulling, it's pulling

HAWKINS. Left! Left! We need help—

HALL. Line

BOTH. Line!

KITTY CLYDE'S SISTER (TO MAID)

BRADLEY. Line?

OLD SHADY. Need a line, Maid of the Canyon?

MAID OF THE CANYON (TO KITTY CLYDE)

HAWKINS. Line, Kitty Clyde's Sister

HALL. Hold your oar Hawkins

HAWKINS. Grab the line, Hall

Grab it when they pass it over

KITTY CLYDE'S SISTER (TO MAID)

BRADLEY. Line, Maid! Line!

OLD SHADY. Passing line!

MAID OF THE CANYON (TO KITTY CLYDE)

HAWKINS. Line caught, Kitty Clyde!

HALL. We got it! Shady, Pull!

KITTY CLYDE'S SISTER (TO MAID)

ALL. Pull

Pull

MEN ON BOATS

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Ten explorers. Four boats. One Grand Canyon. MEN ON BOATS is the true(ish) history of an 1869 expedition, when a one-armed captain and a crew of insane yet loyal volunteers set out to chart the course of the Colorado River.

"...off-the-canyon-walls funny..."

—**Variety**

"[MEN ON BOATS] is marvelously destabilizing both as history and theater. The stalwartness and selfishness of the adventurers—their cockiness and cluelessness—become biting satire when sent up by women."

—**New York Magazine**

"...you will surely want to spend time with the hearty title characters of MEN ON BOATS...[a] rollicking history pageant... MEN ON BOATS makes canny use of the obvious distance between performers and their roles to help bridge the distance between then and now. ...The tone is comic, but never cute or camp. And ultimately, you feel, the play respects its bold if fallible pioneers, in all their natural bravery and fearfulness."

—**The New York Times**

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