



DANCING LESSONS

BY MARK ST. GERMAIN



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

DANCING LESSONS
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DANCING LESSONS premiered in August 2014 at Barrington Stage Company (Julianne Boyd, Artistic Director; Tristan Wilson, Managing Director) in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. It was directed by Julianne Boyd; the choreography was by Christine O’Grady; the set design was by James J. Fenton; the costume design was by Sara Jean Tosetti; the lighting design was by Mary Louise Geiger; the projection design was by Andrew Bauer; the sound design was by Will Pickens; and the production stage manager was Renee Lutz. The cast was as follows:

SENGA QUINN Paige Davis
EVER MONTGOMERY John Cariani

DANCING LESSONS was commissioned through the generosity of Judith Goldsmith and is part of Barrington Stage Company’s New Works Initiative.

DANCING LESSONS was sponsored by Sydelle and Lee Blatt and Judith Goldsmith.

Barrington Stage Company received a ten thousand dollar Art Works Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts in support of DANCING LESSONS’ premiere.

CHARACTERS

SENGA QUINN, Dancer

EVER MONTGOMERY, Professor of Geosciences, New York
Institute of Technology

TIME

The present.

“What would happen if the autism gene was eliminated from the gene pool? You would have a bunch of people standing around in a cave, chatting and socializing and not getting anything done.”

— Temple Grandin

“Those who dance are considered insane by those who cannot hear the music.”

— George Carlin

DANCING LESSONS

Music plays pre-show, all depressing: songs like Billie Holiday's "Stormy Weather" or "Hurt" by Nine Inch Nails or Roy Orbison's "Crying" ... Lights up reveal the apartment of Senga Quinn. She sits on her couch, a coffee table before her, covered with three open pill bottles and an empty glass. Irritated, she pushes the remote to change the downbeat song. Instead, a song about "crying," then another, and another. She continues to change channels, faster and faster; the songs get more dire. Senga gives up and leaves the last song on that celebrates the end of the world. She takes one pill from each bottle, then reaches down to the floor for a bottle of wine, pouring the glass half-full. She swallows all the pills, then downs them with scotch. Sound of doorbell. She contemplates answering it, but takes another drink instead. Now a knock.*

EVER. (*Offstage.*) Miss Senga Quinn? I'm Ever Montgomery from 4C. I'd like to speak with you. (*Senga looks at the door: Who is this guy?*) Can you acknowledge that you hear my voice? (*Senga turns the music louder.*) Do you intend that to be humorous or off-putting? (*She turns the music even louder.*) If you're in the lavatory responding to nature's needs I can wait.

SENGA. (*Turns music down.*) Go away!

EVER. I'll be brief.

SENGA. I'll be busy.

EVER. I promise this does not involve sexual assault.

SENGA. I'm calling the super.

EVER. Thank you. Rudolfo will vouch for my personal character. I've lived in this building for seven years, four months, and twenty-three days. (*Senga turns off the music and gets up. For the first time, we see there's a metal brace on her right leg from her foot to above her*

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

knee. Crossing the room is work. Reaching the door, she looks through the peephole.)

SENGA. Hi! Get lost.

EVER. That would be difficult. I know this building too well. *(Senga opens the door.)*

SENGA. If you're not gone before I count to ten, I'll call the police and tell them you're a stalker.

EVER. Technically, I'd need to come back at least one more time to be a stalker.

SENGA. What do you want?

EVER. A dance lesson.

SENGA. Look at me: What's wrong with this picture? *(She points to her leg and holds the pose.)*

EVER. *(Pause.)* You model braces?

SENGA. No, smartass. I don't teach dance. I'm a dancer.

EVER. A crippled dancer. What else can you do now? *(She slams the door shut.)* I think I should apologize. I'd like to pay you two thousand one hundred and fifty-three dollars for one dance lesson. *(Furious, Senga opens the door.)*

SENGA. You sleazy son of a bitch!

EVER. I —

SENGA. What kind of "dance" are you looking for? A lap dance?

EVER. What are you talking about?

SENGA. Sex!

EVER. You charge that much for sex?

SENGA. I don't charge for sex!

EVER. That's very kind of you. But what I need is a dance lesson.

SENGA. A two-thousand-dollar dance lesson?

EVER. Two thousand one hundred and fifty-three. I've done research. A Broadway dancer is paid, minimum, one thousand six hundred and fifty-three dollars per week and a dance captain earns five hundred dollars more. That totals two thousand one hundred fifty-three dollars, pre-taxes. If I pay you one week's salary for one hour of instruction it seems counterintuitive to say no.

SENGA. No.

EVER. Miss Quinn, I've never danced before. There is a mandatory social event and I'd like to be as inconspicuous as possible.

SENGA. Call me crazy, but I don't see that happening.

EVER. This is very important to me. I wouldn't be wasting our

time if it weren't. (*Pause.*) Please help me. If you don't recognize it in my tone of voice, this is desperation.

SENGA. I recognize desperation. (*Decides.*) I have a date coming in ten minutes. You have three. (*Ever enters, uncomfortable. He's dressed conservatively. He makes only sporadic, minimal eye contact.*)

EVER. I'm happy to hear that. Rudolfo says you haven't left the building since you're home from the hospital.

SENGA. Rudolfo and I need to talk.

EVER. He's very good at conversation. He likes sports, so I pretend to. We can do the same. Go New York Mets, Jersey Giants!

SENGA. New York Giants.

EVER. Then why is their stadium in New Jersey?

SENGA. They never told me.

EVER. Do you like sports?

SENGA. No.

EVER. I'm relieved. It's baffling to me that anyone would want to throw balls back and forth after they were forced to in adolescence. It's even stranger that other people pay to watch them and build imaginary bonds with organizations that exist only to take their money.

SENGA. Who *are* you?

EVER. Ever Montgomery from 4C. I mentioned that, but I know from teaching that repetition's helpful.

SENGA. You're a teacher?

EVER. I just said that, too. I'm a professor of geosciences at the New York Institute of Technology. Global warming, ecological extinction, and other inevitabilities. (*Sees the pills.*) Did I interrupt a suicide attempt? I can come back.

SENGA. I never considered suicide until right now. Look, I can't teach you anything even if I wanted to. I can lurch, I can wobble; I can't dance.

EVER. You can instruct. Boxing trainers don't box their boxers. Life coaches don't live your life for you. Birthing coaches don't have your baby —

SENGA. I get it. (*Pause.*) Two thousand dollars for one lesson?

EVER. Two thousand one hundred and fifty-three. Preferably a one-hour lesson.

SENGA. You can't learn to dance in one hour.

EVER. I don't need to learn more than minimal steps to a single song.

SENGA. What kind of "mandatory social event" is this?

EVER. An award dinner. Formal dress with dancing post-dessert.

SENGA. How old's the crowd?

EVER. Twenties to pre-expiration.

SENGA. When is this shindig?

EVER. Saturday.

SENGA. A slow song's the easiest to learn.

EVER. I'm sure you're right. But it can't be slow. A fast song, the faster the better.

SENGA. Why's that?

EVER. I don't like to be touched. (*Blackout, except for the light on the phone. It rings — Senga's machine answers.*)

ANSWERING MACHINE. (*Senga, voiceover.*) It's me. Your turn. (*Beep.*)

AUNT LYNN. (*Voiceover.*) Senga, it's Aunt Lynn. If you're there, pick up. (*Lights up on Senga, staring at the phone.*) Did you go back to the doctor? I've been reading a lot about tibias on Miriam's internet. She uses it to meet men. God bless whoever invented that. If they had it thirty years ago, I never would have married your uncle. Honey, Miriam has a friend at the medical center who knows lots of surgeons. She'll get one of them to look at your X-rays. For free. (*Pause.*) Senga? I'm coming to New York City to help you —

SENGA. (*Awkwardly lunges for the phone.*) Hi! Aunt Lynn? I just got in ... Great! ... I was at the gym ... Yes! ... The doctor says I'm doing really well ... It's just a matter of time before! ... No. Stay home. I appreciate it, but I'm so much better and you know you hate New York. It's so crowded this time of year. And it's getting hot. That makes the crime rate go way up ... Gangs ... They target seniors. Stay home ... I miss you, too ... (*Annoyed.*) What? Wait. Why would Frank call you? (*Lights up on Ever, lecturing a class.*)

EVER. How long will it take before New York City is underwater? At our highest, we are two hundred and sixty-five feet above sea level, but most of Manhattan is at five feet, six inches above sea level. Over the last century, the water level rose only eight inches, but with climate change and the melting of the Greenland and West Antarctic ice shelves, a five-foot rise is expected by 2100. Factoring in the destruction of expected superstorms such as Sandy, we will drown as early as 2075. Fortunately, life expectancy in America is seventy-eight-point-six-four years, so we'll all be dead. (*Pause.*) Pardon? ... What's insensitive? (*Lights up on Senga.*)

SENGA. (*Into phone.*) It has nothing to do with sex! ... Of course I still can! ... Yes! That too, will you stop now? ... I never promised

him that, he's lying. Aunt Lynn, that's his side ... Lots of things caused it. (*Aunt Lynn asks her, "What?" Senga pauses.*) Since the accident, he treats me like I'm something broken ... No, I am not broken! (*Lights down on Senga, up on Ever. He listens to the recording of the lecture he made, trying to discover what he did wrong.*)

EVER. (*Voiceover.*) "... Fortunately, life expectancy in America is seventy-eight-point-six-four years, so we'll all be dead. (*Pause.*) Pardon? ... What's insensitive?" (*He turns it off. Live.*) Think. Edit. (*Pause, he thinks.*) Ah ... "The latest research predicts that by 2075, there will be a new case of Alzheimer's-related dementia every forty-five seconds, so odds are, if you're still alive, you won't even realize it." (*Pause.*) Better. (*Lights down on Ever, up on Senga's apartment. Sound of doorbell. Senga enters from her bedroom. She checks the time, annoyed, and moves to the door as quickly as she can. Offstage.*) Miss Quinn? It's Ever Montgomery. (*Senga opens the door.*) I'm early.

SENGA. By forty minutes.

EVER. Being late is rude.

SENGA. You live two floors above me. We're in the same time zone. Being early's just as rude.

EVER. Understood. I'll be back in thirty-nine.

SENGA. The anticipation would kill me. Let's get this over with. (*He enters.*)

EVER. Would you prefer a check or cash?

SENGA. Either.

EVER. I have both.

SENGA. Cash, then.

EVER. (*Takes out a wad of cash, puts it on a chair.*) For your services.

SENGA. That is a sight I hoped I'd never see. (*Ever holds out more cash.*) What's that?

EVER. A twenty percent gratuity.

SENGA. No.

EVER. (*Reaches into his pocket for more.*) Do you get more?

SENGA. Take it back. (*He does.*)

EVER. (*Looks around him.*) You have a very nice apartment. Cheerful. (*Runs fingers over a furniture surface, finds dust, then wipes it on his pants.*) Lived in. Is that plant plastic?

SENGA. No. It might be dead.

EVER. And that one?

SENGA. It's a cactus, I can't tell.

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by Mark St. Germain

1M, 1W

DANCING LESSONS centers on Ever, a young man with Asperger's syndrome, who seeks the instruction of a Broadway dancer to learn enough dancing to survive an awards dinner. The dancer, Senga, however, is recovering from an injury that may stop her dancing career permanently. As their relationship unfolds, they're both caught off-guard by the discoveries — both hilarious and heartwarming — that they make about each other and about themselves.

"You don't want it to end ... "

—**The Boston Globe**

"Laughs abound in this play and so do those plucked heartstrings ... a perfect evening of theatre."

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"DANCING LESSONS goes beyond the conventions of a romantic comedy to an enthralling evening ... totally absorbing ... brilliantly conceived ... "

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—**Albany Times Union**

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ISBN: 978-0-8222-3268-1



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