



GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM

BY
MARTIN SHERMAN



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM
Copyright © 2018, Martin Sherman

All Rights Reserved

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that performance of GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM is subject to payment of a royalty. It is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America, and of all countries covered by the International Copyright Union (including the Dominion of Canada and the rest of the British Commonwealth), and of all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, the Berne Convention, and of all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations. All rights, including without limitation professional/amateur stage rights, motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all other forms of mechanical, electronic and digital reproduction, transmission and distribution, such as CD, DVD, the Internet, private and file-sharing networks, information storage and retrieval systems, photocopying, and the rights of translation into foreign languages are strictly reserved. Particular emphasis is placed upon the matter of readings, permission for which must be secured from the Author's agent in writing.

The English language stock and amateur stage performance rights in the United States, its territories, possessions and Canada for GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM are controlled exclusively by Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 440 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016. No professional or nonprofessional performance of the Play may be given without obtaining in advance the written permission of Dramatists Play Service, Inc., and paying the requisite fee.

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Creative Artists Agency, 405 Lexington Avenue, 19th Floor, New York, NY 10174. Attn: George Lane.

SPECIAL NOTE

Anyone receiving permission to produce GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM is required to give credit to the Author as sole and exclusive Author of the Play on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play and in all instances in which the title of the Play appears, including printed or digital materials for advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. Please see your production license for font size and typeface requirements.

Be advised that there may be additional credits required in all programs and promotional material. Such language will be listed under the "Additional Billing" section of production licenses. It is the licensee's responsibility to ensure any and all required billing is included in the requisite places, per the terms of the license.

SPECIAL NOTE ON SONGS AND RECORDINGS

Dramatists Play Service, Inc. neither holds the rights to nor grants permission to use any songs or recordings mentioned in the Play. Permission for performances of copyrighted songs, arrangements or recordings mentioned in this Play is not included in our license agreement. The permission of the copyright owner(s) must be obtained for any such use. For any songs and/or recordings mentioned in the Play, other songs, arrangements, or recordings may be substituted provided permission from the copyright owner(s) of such songs, arrangements or recordings is obtained; or songs, arrangements or recordings in the public domain may be substituted.

GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM was originally produced in New York by the Public Theater (Oskar Eustis, Artistic Director; Patrick Willingham, Executive Director) in April 2017. It was directed by Sean Mathias, the scenic design was by Derek McLane, the costume design was by Michael Krass, the lighting design was by Peter Kaczorowski, and the original music and sound design were by Rob Milburn and Michael Bodeen. The cast was as follows:

BEAU Harvey Fierstein
RUFUS Gabriel Ebert
HARRY Christopher Sears

CHARACTERS

BEAU

RUFUS

HARRY

GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM

Scene 1

London. 2001. The front room of Beau's flat in Shepherd's Bush. There is a piano, and many, many filled bookcases. One door leads outside; another to a bedroom. There is a kitchenette on the side. Beauregard comes out of the kitchen, carrying two cups of tea. He is sixty-one. Rufus comes out of the bathroom, arranging his clothes. He is twenty-eight. Beau hands him a cup of tea.

BEAU. It's licorice and ginger. With honey and lemon. I didn't put in the honey and lemon myself, it's part of the recipe. All in one little teabag. Isn't it amazing how they do that? No caffeine, of course.

Rufus sips it.

RUFUS. Wicked.

Pause.

So...

Pause.

BEAU. So...

RUFUS. Can I ask you something?

BEAU. Yes.

RUFUS. What was Mabel Mercer like?

BEAU. Sorry?

RUFUS. Mabel Mercer.

BEAU. How do you know about...

RUFUS. (*Grins.*) I know a lot of things.

BEAU. Most probably. But *Mabel Mercer*?

RUFUS. (*Proudly.*) Absolutely. Greatest cabaret singer who ever lived.

BEAU. Well, yes, I suppose, but how did you know that I...

RUFUS. (*Taps his head.*) Ah!

BEAU. The internet's supposed to be anonymous!

RUFUS. It is. Except for someone like me. My head is full of stuff, you know what I mean? Have you done Google yet? It's a new thing, a search engine. Isn't that a wonderful phrase? My mind's a search engine. It stores totally useless facts. Google should install an electric sensor to my brain. I'm going to waste.

BEAU. I haven't the slightest inkling what you are talking about...

RUFUS. I love your accent...

BEAU. But how did you place me with...

RUFUS. Your photograph. The one on your profile. I recognized you. What did you call yourself?

BEAU. Don't. I'm embarrassed.

RUFUS. "Autumn leaf"

BEAU. You have just subjected me to extreme mortification.

RUFUS. What part of the South?

BEAU. What?

RUFUS. Your accent.

BEAU. You should know; it's a useless fact.

RUFUS. But I don't.

BEAU. New Orleans.

RUFUS. I thought New Orleans sounded like Southern mixed with Brooklyn.

BEAU. It does. Keep listening. How did you place me with...

RUFUS. Mabel?

BEAU. Yes. You're making me very nervous.

RUFUS. Someone told me.

BEAU. Someone told you? This assignation was public knowledge???

RUFUS. I love the way you speak.

BEAU. I repeat...

RUFUS. (*Smiles.*) "Assignation"!

BEAU. I repeat...

RUFUS. Oh, keep your wig on. (*Gleeful.*) It's not, is it?

BEAU. (*Sighs.*) You're exasperating.

RUFUS. It's great that you don't dye it. Men look ghoulish with dyed hair, don't you think? People should be proud of their age.

BEAU. Age. (*Suddenly alert.*) Age! What am I doing here with a child?

RUFUS. I'm hardly a child. I'm twenty-eight. I have a law degree. I'm a serious person.

BEAU. Nonetheless, I'm old enough to be your ancestor. I shouldn't have gone onto that idiot machine. What kind of name is Gaydar? But then I thought no one would bother with me. And then you popped up, chasing me through cyberspace. Coming on to me. Making very enticing sexual suggestions, I might say. Which I hadn't expected. Not at my age. And, admittedly, it was very flattering, But look at you... You're so young you make me feel like a priest.

RUFUS. But I fancy you.

BEAU. How can you fancy me?

RUFUS. I like older...

BEAU. *Old...*

RUFUS. Old men.

BEAU. This probably has something to do with a father.

RUFUS. Why are you looking for an explanation?

BEAU. Or some kind of abuse early on...

RUFUS. No. Nothing like that. I just like older men.

BEAU. There has to be something lurking in your past...

RUFUS. You're so American.

BEAU. What does that mean?

RUFUS. Everything has to have a reason. In England, nothing we do makes any sense. That's why we're so vital, and why you're sinking fast, you know what I mean?

BEAU. Yes, well, I am certain that's a delicious sociological insight, but nonetheless...

RUFUS. Yes! Yes! I heard the Brooklyn!

BEAU. What?

RUFUS. When you said "I am certain." Don't you think that's amazing? How did Brooklyn work its way into a Southern accent?

BEAU. *I don't know!*

RUFUS. Don't be upset. We had such nice sex. Didn't we? I thought we did... I'm sorry. Sorrrrrry. I talk too much.

Rufus playfully rests his head against Beau's chest.

BEAU. (*Stares at him.*) Law degree?

RUFUS. I know, I know, I know, can you believe it? I'm a junior, in the City, mergers and acquisitions, doesn't that phrase just suggest a life...

BEAU. How did you know about Mabel?

RUFUS. A friend of mine, an older friend, who knows I'm fixated on the middle of the twentieth century, particularly in America, mentioned it when we were in Covent Garden.

BEAU. Covent Garden?

RUFUS. At Ralph's.

BEAU. Ralph's?

RUFUS. Yes.

BEAU. You saw me there?

RUFUS. Yes. Playing.

BEAU. Oh.

RUFUS. I'd seen you before. You play the piano there every night.

BEAU. Five nights.

RUFUS. Oh?

BEAU. Only five nights. So you knew everything about me when you came over for...

RUFUS. An "assignation."

BEAU. Indeed.

RUFUS. Not everything. Just that you accompanied Mabel Mercer in the early sixties. That's all.

BEAU. You make me feel like...

RUFUS. What?

BEAU. Trivia.

RUFUS. (*Takes his hand and kisses it.*) Sorrrrry... (*Kisses his lips.*) You wouldn't like me if all I had to talk about were mergers and acquisitions. Tell me about Mabel Mercer.

Beau is quiet, a bit lost in the past, a bit discombobulated by the present.

Please.

Pause.

BEAU. She sat on a chair and she sang.

RUFUS. That's it? Come on...I really want to know.

BEAU. You do, don't you?

RUFUS. Yes, come on.

BEAU. Well, she sang in a little club. In New York. In the forties and fifties. And sixties. She'd play an engagement at a club for seven or eight years—*years*—and then move on to another club. Usually downstairs. Not that many tables. She was big, I suppose overweight, but that wasn't a consideration, she was beautiful. Regal. She sat with her hands clasped in her lap. She barely moved. And she sang.

RUFUS. Her voice?

BEAU. By the early sixties, not much. It had always been light. It got lighter. But it didn't matter. She made sense of a lyric in a way that no other singer had before. It was the phrasing. And, of course, the pronunciation. Her wonderful British enunciation, emphasizing every vowel. She was born in Staffordshire. Her mother was English, white, a music hall performer; her father a black American jazz musician, who did a runner. She was, I suppose, a strange mixture of Harlem and Buckingham Palace.

RUFUS. The songs?

BEAU. Ah. The songs. Written for her. Or rescued from a Broadway show that had closed after a short run. They were almost always melancholy and sophisticated and meant something other than what they meant.

GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM

by Martin Sherman

3M

Beau, a pianist expat living in London, meets Rufus, an eccentric young lawyer, at the dawn of the internet dating revolution. After a life spent recovering from the disappointment and hurt of loving men in a world that refused to allow it, Beau is determined to keep his expectations low with Rufus. But Rufus comes from a new generation of gay men who believe happiness is as much their right as anyone else's, and what Beau assumed would be just another fling grows into one of the most surprising and defining relationships of his life. A remarkably moving, brilliantly funny love story, GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM reflects the triumphs and heartbreaks of the entire length of the gay rights movement, celebrating and mourning the ghosts of the men and women who led the way for equality, marriage, and the right to dream.

"...Sherman paints a portrait of endurance in the face of discrimination, and of how gay men...formed new families when their blood ones abandoned them. Now there are marriage and children, but Beau, while awed by this brave new world, is a daily reminder of the price that had to be paid. Left unsaid, but looming over the show, is that...rights come, but they also go."

—**The New York Times**

"Martin Sherman's tender, funny and unconventional romance...deals with seismic shifts in culture, attitudes and the differing expectations for happiness. ...[GENTLY DOWN THE STREAM] is hopeful, healing and forward-looking, even as it reflects an old-fashioned boy-meets-boy template but with a new twist."

—**Variety**

Also by Martin Sherman
A PASSAGE TO INDIA (Forster)

ISBN 978-0-8222-3774-7



DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE, INC.

9 780822 237747