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Triangle

Drama by Laurie Brooks



“The remnants of the past are always with us.”

Triangle

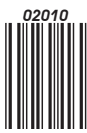
Drama. By Laurie Brooks. *Cast: 4w., plus an ensemble of at least 4m., 4w. (may be expanded).* Set against the backdrop of the historic Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire of 1911, this stylistically thrilling play explores the immigrant experience then and now through the tragedy of the “fire that changed America.” Sophie, a 16-year-old seamstress who died in the fire, haunts Malena, a modern Hispanic girl who is in conflict with her sister, Isabel. Sophie is filled with guilt because she did not save her sister, Rose, from the fire and now cannot find her. When Sophie, along with the ghosts of other dead factory girls, appears to her, Malena encourages Sophie to tell her story, never imagining that they will all be transported back in time to relive the tale. An ensemble of actors portrays the ghosts of those who died in the fire and seamlessly takes on individual roles in Sophie’s story. Sophie has arranged a job at the Triangle factory for Rose to keep her from running the streets with a gang of rowdy boys. But now Sophie owes the foreman, Mr. Jake, a favor. He demands that Sophie spy on the union organizers, who are her friends. If she refuses, Sophie and her sister will be fired and blacklisted. Sophie, unaware that her sister is in love with Max, meets him one night at a dance, and they fall in love. Already angry at Sophie for making her work at the Triangle, Rose discovers this relationship and, in her anger, lies, telling Max that Sophie has “traded favors” with other men. Max, crazed with anger and jealousy, rejects Sophie who, alone and afraid of losing her job, decides the only way out is to give up her dreams and marry Louis, a successful man she doesn’t love. Then someone strikes a match and there is a fire ... In this tale of regret, responsibility and forgiveness, Sophie reveals her terrible secret and finds peace while helping Malena see her sister in a new light. *Triangle* was commissioned and premiered by the School of Theatre and Film at Arizona State University. *Unit set. Approximate running time: 90 minutes. Code: TK6.*

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TRIANGLE

By
LAURIE BROOKS



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(TRIANGLE)

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For Roger, who opened the door
and
For Diane and Patrick, whose door is always open

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Triangle was commissioned and premiered by the the Arizona State University School of Theatre and Film, Tempe, Arizona, on March 28, 2008 at the Lyceum Theatre.

CAST

Malena Brianna Quijada
Sophie Kelsi Zahl
Isabel Valerie Vasilas
Rose Brittany Roa
Max Aaron Wester
Jake/Rory Nick Broderick
Louis/Blanck/Billy Kyle Willis
Papa/Harris/Gentleman Scott Ballou
Paulina Chelsea Gross
Celia Shea Noel Brockway
Lizzie Sabine Perret
Mary Kate Kugler

Director Gary Minyard
Scenic Designer Jayoung Yoon
Lighting Designer Jennifer Setlow
Sound Designer Tom Drewnowski
Choreographer Harper Piver
Stage Manager Steven Gardner
Dramaturg Roger Bedard
Production Manager David Coffman
Artistic Director Linda Essig

This project was made possible in part through the support of the Arizona Commission on the Arts with funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and the ASU Foundation through the Evelyn Smith Visiting Artist Endowment.

TRIANGLE

CHARACTERS

MALENA Latina, sixteen years old
ISABEL Malena's sister, fourteen years old
SOPHIE seamstress, sixteen years old
ROSE Sophie's sister, fourteen years old

Plus an ensemble of at least 4 men and 4 women (may be expanded as desired) who play the ghosts of the factory workers and multiple roles, including:

MAX eighteen years old
JAKE. foreman at the Triangle, mid-twenties
PAPA Sophie's father
LOUIS a dandy, mid-twenties
HARRIS Triangle factory co-owner, forties
BLANCK Triangle factory co-owner, forties
BILLY a rowdy boy from the streets
RORY. a rowdy boy from the streets
CELIA a factory girl, twenty
LIZZIE. a factory girl, sixteen
PAULINA a factory girl, sixteen
MARY a factory girl, fifteen
MAMA Sophie's mother
GENTLEMAN

The play takes place in front of, around and on various levels of a metal scaffold that reaches up into the fly space like the eighth, ninth and tenth floors of the Asch Building in New York City.

The play unfolds in and out of space and time—including the present day and 1911.

The Ensemble wears the clothes and hairstyles of 1911. Once in that time period, they remain on stage in full view of the audience until they disappear again in the present time.

Throughout the play, the Ensemble functions as the factory workers who died in the fire, also taking on individual roles in the story. At times, the Ensemble becomes machines, creating the sounds and movements of the Triangle Waist Company. In the transitions marked “Ensemble shifts” the Ensemble moves in stylized high form from one position to another, creating tableaux that set the next scene.

Once we enter the time of 1911, Sophie and Malena are both inside and outside the action.

TRIANGLE

In the near darkness we hear the ENSEMBLE breathing. MUSIC from 1911. Then the garbled, half coherent sounds of the disembodied voices of the ENSEMBLE whispering and ROSE's voice calling above the others. The ENSEMBLE is on stage but in the shadows.

ROSE. Sophie... Sophie...

(MALENA and ISABEL appear.)

MALENA. Listen!

(Sounds continue - MUSIC, ENSEMBLE and ROSE.)

ROSE. Sophie...

MALENA. You hear that?

ISABEL. Nope. I don't hear nothing. There's no girl in your room.

MALENA. She's here, all right. Every night I hear her calling me.

ISABEL. And I know what she's saying. *(Phoney ghost voice.)* Malena is loco. Malena is loco.

MALENA. Ai, it's true, even if you don't believe me.

ISABEL. You ought to get a medal for best liar ever to make up a story like that. Better even than the last one, where you saw that dead kid from down the block.

MALENA. I did see him. Riding his bike near where the car hit him. He waved at me.

ISABEL. Okay. Whatever.

MALENA. He was sad. The girl in my room is sad, too. I can tell.

ISABEL. There is no girl, *Senorita Loco*.

MALENA. Fine. If you won't believe me, then get out! *Vete Ya!*

ISABEL. No, Malena. You have to let me stay. Mami said. Besides, I'm bored. I called Trish but she's "doing her homework." (*Pause.*) Do you like my hair like this?

MALENA. No.

(ISABEL examines herself in the "mirror.")

ISABEL. *Creo que me veo bonita. Como una mujer.*

MALENA. No seas estúpida.

ISABEL. Can I borrow your blue eyeliner?

MALENA. You're too young for eyeliner. And besides, you lost my lipstick, remember?

ISABEL. I know, but I won't lose the eyeliner, I promise I won't. Come on, Malena. I need it. My eyes are too flat.

MALENA. Your eyes are too big.

ISABEL. You sound like Mami.

(Again the faint sounds of the ENSEMBLE and ROSE calling, "Sophie.")

MALENA. Sssshhhhh.

ISABEL. All the time, “shhhhh.” Sssshhhh this and sssshhhh that. Why do I always have to “ssssshhhh.”

MALENA. Because you’re in my room and when you’re in my room you have to do what I say.

ISABEL. Why can’t I have a nice sister, instead of one who’s all the time bossing me?

MALENA. Because. You’re my responsibility. And if you think I like it, you’re the one who’s loco.

ISABEL. I can take care of myself.

MALENA. Right. I don’t think so. I saw you hanging around Guillermo at lunch today. He’s too old for you.

ISABEL. He likes me.

MALENA. Stay away from him, Isabel. I mean it.

ISABEL. You can’t tell me what to do.

MALENA. Watch me. And if I see you with Guillermo again, I’m telling Papi.

ISABEL. You wouldn’t do that.

MALENA. Try me.

(The faint sounds of ROSE calling, “Sophie.”)

MALENA *(cont’d)*. Sssshhhh.

ISABEL. Do you like my hair up? I kind of like it up, ’cause it makes me look older, but if I wear it down my face looks thinner.

MALENA. Para afuera! Get out of my room! You are the most annoying sister ever. You don’t care about anything important. All you think about is boys and parties and makeup and clothes.

ISABEL. I just wanted to borrow your eyeliner.

MALENA. No. And get out of my room! *(She pushes ISABEL out.)*

ISABEL. Let me in, Malena. I don't want to be alone.

MALENA. Too bad.

ISABEL. Malena, please.

MALENA. Go away.

ISABEL. You are too mean to live. Estas celosa! Te odio
con toda mi corazon, hija de perra.

MALENA. Thank you. Now go away!

ISABEL. I'm telling Mami!

MALENA. Go ahead. But she won't be home until late and
you'll get in trouble for staying up when tomorrow's a
school day. And she'll be tired and in a bad mood. "Ai,
chica," she'll say, "Don't I have enough to worry about
with two jobs and your papi, too?"

ISABEL. Why are you so mean to me?

MALENA. Let me see. You never do any chores, you get
everything you want, you take my things and you called
me loco!

ISABEL. I hope you die in there.

MALENA. You wish.

ISABEL. Malena! *(Pause.)* I hate you.

MALENA. I hate you, too. Now go away! *(The sound of a
lock turning.)* And don't come back! *(MALENA listens.)*

(ISABEL fades.)

*The faint sounds of MUSIC from 1911 and the ENSEMBLE
murmuring. Emerging from the cacophony is the
eerie sound of a girl crying.)*

MALENA *(cont'd)*. It's all right. I'm here. *(Pause.)* Oh,
don't cry. I hate crying. *(Crying stops suddenly.)* Don't
go! You can cry if you want to. But you should know,

when somebody cries it makes me want to cry and I never cry. I mean it's just hard for me. I feel so helpless.

ROSE (*calling as if from far away*). Sophie!

MALENA. Sophie? Is that your name? (*Pause.*)

SOPHIE. She's calling for me.

MALENA. Who?

SOPHIE. My sister. Rose.

ROSE (*still from far away*). Sophie...

SOPHIE. Rose!

MALENA. Sophie? Can I see you? (*Silence.*) Don't be afraid of me. I'm not afraid of you.

(The sound of sniffing and a huge sigh.)

SOPHIE. You're not afraid of me?

MALENA. No, I'm not. (*She holds out her hand.*) See? I'm not afraid.

(SOPHIE emerges from the shadows, a shadow herself.)

MALENA (*cont'd*). Madre Dios! I knew it. I knew you were here. Well, I didn't really know, but I knew! I knew that someone was here. I mean I was alone, but you were here with me. That doesn't make any sense.

SOPHIE. Do you always talk this much?

MALENA. I talk all the time. I'm a talker. Talk, talk talk. I even talk to myself. When I'm alone.

SOPHIE. We are never alone.

(ENSEMBLE shifts, a rustling of skirts and low voices.)

SOPHIE (*cont'd*). The remnants of the past are always with us. (*ENSEMBLE shifts.*) ...and all that is happening in a single moment. (*ENSEMBLE shifts.*) ...the murmuring of what is to come. But you have to listen very hard to hear the future.

MALENA. I'm not sure I wanna know the future. Do you know the future?

SOPHIE. No. The future is what we decide it will be.

MALENA. This is too weird. (*Pause.*) I love it!

SOPHIE. All the people who have lived here since I died, so many. I have tried to reach across to them. I called to them but they didn't hear me. But now you are here.

MALENA. I heard you right way. I been staying up every night hoping you'd talk to me. Ms. Sanders is really mad at me because I keep falling asleep in history class. That's funny. I've got history right in the room with me. I mean, look what you're wearing. Whoa. Wait'll I tell Ms. Sanders. No. I can't do that. She'd never believe me.

SOPHIE. I used to live here, you know. In this room. The kitchen was here and over here is where I slept, next to my sister...Rose.

MALENA. Younger sister or older sister?

SOPHIE. Rose was my little sister.

MALENA. Rose is a pretty name, not ugly like Isabel, my little sister. She's a spoiled brat who doesn't care about anyone but herself.

SOPHIE (*suddenly*). Oh! Your grandpa. He asked me to tell you that he misses you.

MALENA. My papi Jorge?

SOPHIE. He watches over you.

MALENA. I love my papi Jorge! He used to give me rides on his shoulders and make me these little carved animals out of wood. I think of him every day.

SOPHIE. Ja. He misses you, too. Very much.

MALENA. Is he...a ghost?

SOPHIE. No, no. He is restful and satisfied with his life... and his death. He ain't like us.

MALENA. Us?

ENSEMBLE. We want...

MALENA. How many of you are there?

SOPHIE. One hundred forty-six of us died in the fire. One hundred twenty-five dead girls like me. Seven bodies never identified...

MALENA. You died in a fire.

SOPHIE. Not just any fire... (*like a headline*) ...the fire that changed the world! That's what they called it. But nothing has changed. The survivors told their stories over and over again, but no one cares. The sweatshops, they still exist, and the girls who work there are still in danger. We have been forgotten.

(*ENSEMBLE is in half-light.*)

ENSEMBLE. Tick...tick...tick...tick...tick...five o'clock!

SOPHIE. The fire started just at quitting time. A few more minutes and we'd all have been gone.

ENSEMBLE. We want. To tell our story. (*ENSEMBLE shifts.*) We want. To be remembered. (*ENSEMBLE shifts.*) We want. To find America.

SOPHIE. I want...

MALENA. What? What do you want?

SOPHIE. I got to find my sister. Don't you see? She cannot rest. That's why she's calling for me. All these years. All these years we ain't found each other. (*SOPHIE sobs. Calling.*) Rose! I never forgot you!

(*Silence.*)

MALENA. I'll help you. Maybe we can find your sister.

SOPHIE. You would do that for me?

MALENA. Of course.

SOPHIE. But how?

MALENA. I don't know. (*She thinks.*) Tell me the story. Ms. Sanders says that when we tell stories about the past they come alive again in the present. See? We relive the past when we talk about it.

SOPHIE. And you think we can find Rose?

MALENA. Well, that's the plan. Start right at the beginning. Tell me everything. I'll stay up all night with you. I'll even stay home from school tomorrow if you need me. That'd be great!

SOPHIE. You will stay through it all? The whole story?

MALENA. Of course. Is there anything we need? Candles? A flashlight?

SOPHIE. Promise you will stay until the end of the story. Promise you won't leave me.

MALENA. I promise. I have a Ouija board. Will that help?

SOPHIE. Come by me, Malena.

MALENA. You're shivering. Are you cold?

SOPHIE. I am afraid.

MALENA. Don't worry. I'll keep you safe. I'm not afraid of anything. (*She reaches out her hand. SOPHIE takes it. A moment of connection.*)

(ENSEMBLE sighs with satisfaction. Lights shift. MUSIC of 1911. ENSEMBLE appears. MALENA sees the ENSEMBLE. They acknowledge and greet her. ENSEMBLE individually and as a whole group speaks the following to MALENA, a litany:)

ENSEMBLE. We are searchers,
We came in search of
Freedom
A better life
America beckoned
The golden door.
The lady with the lamp
Offered a kiss.
Land of opportunity.
Streets paved with gold.
Here we will be safe.
No more
Famine
Poverty
Oppression
Pogroms that cut us down like
Cattle in a charnel house.
Our hopes
Our dreams
Our miracle
We came by the thousands
Searchers
Where is America?
The golden door.

MALENA. Searchers. I like that. Now if we don't have papers, they call us illegal aliens.

SOPHIE. Illegal what?

MALENA. Aliens. You know, people from outer space.

SOPHIE. Outer space?

MALENA. Never mind. They call us illegals because now you can't come to America without permission. You have to have a visa. But people come anyway. They die every day trying to cross the border from Mexico or they drown in the Caribbean sea in tiny boats trying to get to Florida. It's not fair. All we want is a better life, just like you did. (*Pause.*) They should call us searchers, too.

ENSEMBLE. Where is America? The golden door.

(Whistle blows. Sounds of the factory made by the ENSEMBLE. ENSEMBLE, dotted on the scaffold, makes the repetitive movements of the machines—cutting, sewing, pressing. This continues during the following, spoken by both individual ENSEMBLE members and the entire ENSEMBLE.)

ENSEMBLE. One hundred thousand workers in four thousand factories, from Italy and Germany, Russia and Ireland. Mostly women. We know how to sew. We are more docile than men. We make shirtwaists with tucks and buttons and stand-up collars. Pretty blouses for pretty girls. Eight dollars a week, working until after dark. Climbing the stairs, the vibrations, the whir of the machines, the air thick with dust from cotton fabric. The foremen! Keep pace with the swiftest workers. Some of us fall behind. Lose our pay. Filthy windows, always shut. Not a breath of fresh air! If I talk, a fine of ten cents. If I lose a piece of fabric or soil a garment, ten cents. If I am late, one cent for each minute. If I am

hurt, I do not cry. Shortchanged, mocked for complaining, searched like criminals at the end of the day for stolen goods. I am not a thief! One hundred fifty cubic feet of air required. Per person. It is all above us. We are shoulder to shoulder at our machines. We work at the Triangle Waist Company, on the ninth floor. It is a wonder. A fireproof building, completely safe. We are lucky. In America, they don't let you burn. America, the golden door. (*ENSEMBLE sighs and shifts.*)

SOPHIE (*to MALENA*). The days are long. The work is hard. I can finish twenty sleeves in an hour but in my mind I am free.

(*ENSEMBLE become images of birds as SOPHIE speaks.*)

SOPHIE (*cont'd*). I imagine I am a bird. I fly to all the places I read about in books—Boston, where this country was made free, Washington, with the beautiful White House and Philadelphia where I can take a train to the great plains where land is free for anyone who will work on it. I could stand in a field of rich, black earth and see all the way to the end of the world... (*ENSEMBLE stops.*) ...not like in this city with only patches of sky.

(*Whistle blows. ENSEMBLE works, makes sounds and movements of factory. The owners of the factory, Max BLANK and Isaac HARRIS, appear. SOPHIE and MALENA watch.*)

HARRIS. Yes, yes, yes, I know all that, but it does my heart good to see all these workers.