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Family Plays

BIG TROUBLE

**Six 10-minute plays from Actors Theatre
of Louisville and Walden Theatre**

**Blind Alleys • Some More Than Others
• Clean • The Shack Attack •
The Pick-Up • $E=mc^2$**

**Comedy/Drama by
Michael Bigelow Dixon and Valerie Smith**

BIG TROUBLE

“These small works ... are perfect instruments for the training of young actors, demanding all the preparation of a major role but allowing a complete experience in a short rehearsal span.” (Jon Jory)

Comedy/Drama. By Michael Bigelow Dixon and Valerie Smith. Cast: 3 to 12m., 4 to 16w., extras. *Big Trouble* is composed of six 10-minute plays from Actors Theatre of Louisville and Walden Theatre by Michael Bigelow Dixon and Valerie Smith with a preface by Jon Jory. ***Blind Alleys*** (2m., 2w). A blind businessman leads his blind employees through an average work day that is not average. For this group, being blind seems to be more of an asset than a liability. ***Some More Than Others*** (1m., 4w). Can there be surprises in the ballot-counting room for three girls who must make sure the right person gets elected student body president? A focus on honesty versus doing the politically correct thing. ***Clean*** (2m., 1w). While driving on a foggy night, two brothers hit something—or was it someone? Should they notify the police or hide? ***The Shack Attack*** (2m., 4w). Protest and human rights on one side, resentment and prejudice on the other. ***The Pick-Up*** (2m., 2w., extras if desired). A light look at interplay between men and women in a singles bar. ***E=mc²*** (3m., 3w). Ever wonder what really goes on in an office full of high-pressure telecommunications salespeople? *The six plays may be performed separately or in any combination you prefer. For adult and young adult actors and audiences. Approximate running time: 60 minutes. Code: BJ3.*

Family Plays

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Big Trouble

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by

MICHAEL BIGELOW DIXON & VALERIE SMITH

With a Preface by JON JORY

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1. Blind Alleys
2. Some More Than Others
3. Clean
4. The Shack Attack
5. The Pick-Up
6. $E=mc^2$

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PREFACE

The 10-minute play is the best-kept secret in the American theatre. These small works are being written and produced in hundreds of theatres across the country. One has the eerie feeling that they reflect the attention span and fit neatly in the audience’s mind between two commercials. They are highly distilled works, usually focusing on a moment of profound change, and often built like the big scene in a full-length play. You might say they are moments of crisis and, strung together in the evening, they have the sharp staccato feel of a smoke alarm going off or the repeated cry of an ambulance heard approaching and receding.

In the world of the theatre, they are perfect instruments for the training of young actors, demanding all the preparation of a major role but allowing a complete experience in a short rehearsal span.

Michael Dixon and Valerie Smith have a wonderful feeling for this compacted, urgent, explosive form. They couple a dry sense of humor with a penchant for posing ethical questions that speak directly to the audience of today. It’s our modern satirists writing as it were on the head of a pin. Most importantly, these writers deliver surprise after surprise which is, of course, one of the theatre’s greatest pleasures. They always leave you wanting more which, in my mind, is the playwright’s greatest virtue.

—Jon Jory, Producing Director, Actors Theatre of Louisville

FOREWORD

Hamlet: I could be bounded in a nutshell and
count myself a king of infinite space . . .
(*Hamlet* Act II, Scene 2)

In his quip to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the Prince of Denmark describes the universe of the short one-act play, otherwise known as the *10-minute play*. By definition the 10-minute play is circumscribed by time, yet in impact and imagination its possibilities are endless. It is precisely this characteristic—that small plays can carry big sticks—that makes the form so appealing to audiences, to actors, and to us as playwrights.

At its best, the 10-minute play operates like a sneak attack, a wily ambush on audience sympathies and perceptions. Because its life is so short, the 10-minute play must grab the audience's attention at the start and run with it. Once captured, the audience has no time to escape as the play hurtles toward its finish.

The challenge of the form, of course, is its extreme economy. There is no room aboard the 10-minute play for digression or indulgence. Every word, every move must forward the plot while creating character and exploring the ideas in the piece. As a result, each moment has a dimensionality that proves spell-binding in performance.

As playwrights, we have found the most effective weapons in the arsenal of the 10-minute play to be humor, surprise, revelation, and colorful language. We hope you find these elements plentiful in these six published plays. As writers we are also interested in the ability of the 10-minute play to deliver a grand payload. In each of these plays characters encounter big troubles, be they personal, professional, or political. How they respond to these troubles, we believe, says a great deal about the spirit and tenor of our times.

These plays may be used in the classroom or for production. They offer an advantage in scene-study classes because they are self-contained and age-appropriate for young actors. They also have minimal technical, costume, and property demands. As an evening's entertainment, the six plays offer variety in subject and style—from romantic comedy to political drama to social satire. At Actors Theatre of Louisville and Walden Theatre these evenings of 10-minute plays have been rewarding for both the audience and the actors.

—Michael Bigelow Dixon & Valerie Smith

ABOUT THE AUTHORS AND THEIR THEATRES

Michael Bigelow Dixon is literary manager at Actors Theatre of Louisville. He has written more than 20 plays which have premiered at theatres such as the Alley Theatre in Houston, South Coast Repertory in Southern California, and Indiana Repertory Theatre in Indianapolis. Many of these plays are published and several have been televised. His **TALES FROM THE ARABIAN NIGHTS**, published by I. E. Clark, Inc., premiered at the Alley Theatre. Mr. Dixon has also been a Fellow in the Theatre Program of the National Endowment for the Arts.

Valerie Smith is resident playwright at Walden Theatre in Louisville, Kentucky. Several of her plays have premiered there, including **BEHIND THE MASK**, a one-man play about Paul Dunbar, a turn-of-the-century African-American poet. Ms. Smith's collaborations with Michael Dixon have also premiered at South Coast Repertory and the Alley Theatre. Their **STRIKING OUT!**, a play in six innings about a co-ed little league baseball team, has been performed throughout the United States and was produced for cable television in Southern California.

Jon Jory has been Producing Director of Actors Theatre of Louisville since 1969. During the past seasons, he has directed over eighty productions including many Humana Festival world premiere productions. Mr. Jory directed **MY SISTER IN THIS HOUSE** for ATL's engagement at the Hong Kong Arts Festival and has also directed and taught in Greece, Canada, Bulgaria, Australia, Hungary, Israel, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Poland, Egypt, and Syria. He has directed both on and off-Broadway, most recently at the Manhattan Theatre Club. Mr. Jory has gained national and international recognition for the theatre through the creation of The Humana Festival of New American Plays, the **SHORTS** Festival, and the Classics in Context Festival. As a result of these efforts, he and ATL have received the Margo Jones Award for the production of new plays, the Shubert Foundation's James N. Vaughan Memorial Award for exceptional Achievement and Contribution to the Development of the Professional Theatre, and the Special Tony Award for Achievement in Regional Theatre. In addition, Mr. Jory has been the recipient of the Kentucky Arts Commission's Milner Award, given for outstanding contribution to the arts in the state; has been the

keynote speaker at the World Theatre Symposium of ASSITEJ, the international children's theatre organization, and P.A.C.T., the Canadian Theatre's National Conference; and has received the Person of the Year Award from the National Theatre Conference and the Award for Distinguished Service to the Theatre from the American Theatre Association.



ACTORS THEATRE OF LOUISVILLE. Founded in 1964, Actors Theatre of Louisville produces up to 35 plays a year in its two-theatre complex. Under the artistic leadership of Producing Director Jon Jory, ATL has championed the new American playwright in its annual Humana Festival of New American Plays and SHORTS festivals of one-act plays. Since 1976, these festivals have premiered more than 250 works by more than 150 American playwrights. The newer Classics in Context Festival has attracted international recognition for its innovative programming and rediscovery of neglected classical plays. ATL also tours internationally.

WALDEN THEATRE. Founded in 1976 by artistic director Nancy Niles Sexton, Walden Theatre is a pre-university school for young people in theatre arts. The Young Playwrights Festival has been an annual event at Walden Theatre since 1981, and Walden Theatre has also toured a production to the Edinburgh Festival in 1989.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The plays in this collection may be performed singly or in any combination. The order in which they are arranged here was chosen with a full evening's presentation in mind. In the opinion of the publishers, whose staff works with theatres of all types, one of the worst things a producer can do to audiences is leave them sitting idly in the dark or facing a closed curtain. Our policy is that a blackout should not last more than five seconds.

With that in mind, the plays are presented in this order:

BLIND ALLEYS—on the full stage

SOME MORE THAN OTHERS—on the apron, with curtain closed (or main acting area blacked out) for set change

CLEAN—on the full stage

Intermission (set change)

THE SHACK ATTACK—full stage

THE PICK-UP—on apron (for set change)

E=mc²—full stage

With this arrangement action can be virtually continuous, with only a five-second blackout (or less) to bring out the few set props needed for the apron scenes, and another to strike them.

BLIND ALLEYS

By Michael Bigelow Dixon & Valerie Smith

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BLIND ALLEYS*Cast of Characters*

Mr. Charles, the blind president of a pencil factory; likes to laugh and throw darts

Miss Wise, a reporter for *The Observer*; polite, sincere, and very careful never to offend

Ms. Leeds, a blind secretary with a chip on her shoulder

Chauffeur, blind but eager to drive

Δ

Place: The executive office suite of Mr. Charles

Time: The present

Δ

First presented at Actors Theatre of Louisville, Jon Jory, producing director.
The original cast, under the direction of Mark Sawyer-Dailey:

Mr. Charles	Donald Kimmel
Miss Wise	Rebecca Julich
Ms. Leeds	Debra Lynn Reichler
Chauffeur	Dan Boden

BLIND ALLEYS

[An executive office tastelessly decorated. The colors clash; the styles represent the worst of each period of American office furniture. There is a door, a desk and chair, and at least one other chair. On the desk are a box of cigarettes, a phone, darts, and a cup of pencils. On the walls are a dart board, photos hanging crookedly, baseball bats, and a window. As the LIGHTS come up MR. CHARLES is throwing darts. He wears sunglasses and his attire is as poorly coordinated as the office decor. After the last dart he approaches the dart board, carefully circumventing the chair in his path. He retrieves the darts with no problem. The PHONE RINGS. MR. CHARLES picks up the receiver]

MR. CHARLES. Yes. *[Long pause]* Uh-uh . . . *[Pause]* Well . . . *[Pause followed by pause]* Umm-hmmmm . . . Ummmm-hmmmm . . . Well, don't worry about . . . *[Another pause. MR. CHARLES raps the receiver sharply on the desk several times, then speaks into it]* Just bring her in, Ms. Leeds. *[As CHARLES places the phone not on but next to its cradle, the office door opens. MS. LEEDS enters. Her lipstick is off center, her dress askew. She also wears sunglasses. She is followed by KATIE WISE, a well-groomed young reporter]*

MS. LEEDS. *[Loudly]* Miss Wise from "The Observer."

MR. CHARLES. Come on in, Miss Wise. Thank you, Ms. Leeds.

MS. LEEDS. Well!?!

MR. CHARLES. Well what?

MS. LEEDS. Is she in yet?

MR. CHARLES. I don't know. Are you in the room, Miss Wise?

MISS WISE. Yes. Yes, I am.

MS. LEEDS. Well, great. Something to be thankful for. *[MS. LEEDS exits]*

MR. CHARLES. Welcome, Miss Wise.

MISS WISE. *[Unsure of whether to approach him or not]* How do you do, Mr. Charles. It's so good of you to see . . . me.

MR. CHARLES. *[Snaps pencil in his hand]* Please, have a seat.

MISS WISE. Oh . . . thank you very much. *[She sits in chair across from desk]*

MR. CHARLES. *[To spot beside the desk, where chair isn't]* So you work for the "Observer"? I used to read it all the time, before . . .

MISS WISE. *[She moves the chair so that she is sitting where he is looking, then speaks]* Oh, but you've accomplished so much more than most uh . . . uh . . . *[doesn't want to say "seeing" or equivalent]* . . . other people.

MR. CHARLES. You flatter me, Miss Wise. Wouldn't you like to sit down?

MISS WISE. *[She is sitting]* Why . . . all right. Thank you. *[She stands up part way, then sits again so he'll hear her]* What a comfortable chair.

MR. CHARLES. I understand you're doing a whole series on the handicapped.

MISS WISE. Yes, you've probably seen our . . . *[MR. CHARLES snaps a pencil. It's an annoying mannerism. Like a twitch]* . . . we try to report the good news as well as the bad, and yours sounds like such an inspiring story.

MR. CHARLES. That's me. Horatio Alger and Helen Keller in one ball o' wax! Aha hahahaha!

MISS WISE. *[Sincerely]* Yes, exactly. Say, would it bother you if I used a tape recorder?

MR. CHARLES. Certainly not.

MISS WISE. *[Sets it up on his desk]* It just makes it easier . . . Let me just see if it . . . *[MR. CHARLES snaps another pencil]* . . . I guess it works.

MR. CHARLES. *[He lifts a box from his desk and offers it to her]* Before we begin, would you care for a cigarette? *[He knocks her tape recorder to the floor with the box]* What was that?

MISS WISE. Oh. Nothing. Nothing at all. *[She tries it; it doesn't work. She puts it back in her purse]* I've decided to use my note pad after all.

MR. CHARLES. In that case, you must use one of Charles's Fine Quality World-Renowned Number Two Pencils. Hahahaha! *[MR. CHARLES thrusts sharpened pencil toward MISS WISE, perforating her jacket sleeve]*

MISS WISE. Oh!

MR. CHARLES. *[Concerned]* Oh dear, did I poke you?

MISS WISE. *[Covering up]* No, no, no. Clumsy me. *[Examining her jacket and the pencil]* A lovely souvenir. Thank you so much. Now,

Mr. Charles, if we can get started, the truly remarkable aspect of your story, it seems to me, is that you not only triumphed over a potentially discouraging, ah, impairment . . . *[MR. CHARLES snaps a pencil]* . . . Oh!, uh . . . you also had the vision . . . *[MR. CHARLES snaps another pencil]* . . . that is, the foresight . . . the talent, the talent to turn a small concern into a highly successful financial enterprise.

MR. CHARLES. Are you nervous about something, Miss Wise?

MISS WISE. Me? Nervous? No, no. Of course not. It's just been . . . one of those days. Shall we begin with your childhood, before you were . . . uh . . . hmm . . . *[doesn't want to say "blind"]* . . . when you were young.

MR. CHARLES. Well, my youth was fairly typical. I loved baseball. *[He picks up a baseball bat and begins swinging it]*

MISS WISE. You've had to give that up, I suppose? *[She discovers that the pencil won't write. She looks at it, then holds it up to MR. CHARLES just as he's swinging the bat wildly]*

MR. CHARLES. Yes, but in my time I was quite the center fielder. Batted three hundred my sophomore year. *[He swings and MISS WISE ducks]*

MISS WISE. Oh!

MR. CHARLES. Something wrong?

MISS WISE. *[Covering up]* No! It's just, that's quite a swing! You must have been a real powerhouse out there.

MR. CHARLES. Oh, I was. At least . . . until the accident.

MISS WISE. Oh my. *[Again the pencil doesn't write. She searches the desk, finds another one triumphantly]*

MR. CHARLES. Wild ball. WHAM! *[Brings the baseball bat down on the desk for emphasis. MISS WISE throws the pencil in the air]* Never saw it coming. Still got the scars. See? *[He thrusts his head across the desk to show his scars]*

MISS WISE. *[Reacts silently in disgust, but tries to sound chipper]* You certainly managed a remarkable comeback.

MR. CHARLES. This was a long time in coming, Miss Wise. *[Knocking a pencil out of her hand with a gesture of the bat]*

MISS WISE. *[With awe and respect]* It must have taken a great deal of courage, Mr. Charles. *[She gives up with the pencils and takes a pen out of her purse and begins writing]*

MR. CHARLES. A high school hero, and then . . . WHAM! *[He slams the bat down on her purse]* It was quite a shock. I dropped out of

school. Couldn't keep a job. I figured, hey, it wasn't me they was hiring. Naw, it was some blind guy they felt sorry for. Some blind guy they felt they hadda be nice to. They didn't care about me . . . it was their own consciences they were worried about. Pity, Miss Wise, pity is a very destructive thing. *[She retrieves the shattered tape recorder from her purse]*

MISS WISE. Yes, Mr. Charles. Very destructive.

MR. CHARLES. What was that?

MISS WISE. Nothing. Nothing. I just got caught up in your story. Please, go on.

MR. CHARLES. Well, there I was. Depressed. Out on the street corner selling pencils. I'd been pitied right into a cliché.

MISS WISE. That is just awful.

MR. CHARLES. Thank God I found the dog.

MISS WISE. A seeing-eye dog?

MR. CHARLES. No, a stray. Mangy. Mistreated. We had a lot in common. *[Throws dart. It hits dartboard]* Where'd it hit?

MISS WISE. *[This impresses her to no end]* It's practically a bull's-eye! That's amazing!

MR. CHARLES. Anyhow, that's how it all started. I teamed up with this mutt and all of a sudden I'm selling more pencils than ever before. And then it comes to me! Sure. People are worried about the dog having enough to eat. And then it occurs to me that maybe pity ain't such a bad thing after all. In fact, it *could be* pretty lucrative. *[Throws dart. It doesn't hit target]* How's that?

MISS WISE. Uh . . . great aim. It's uncanny.

MR. CHARLES. So then I had an even better idea. I'd distribute my pencils and go big time. P. R., Miss Wise, P. R. Well, you're in the news biz, I don't have to tell you the power of P. R. *[Throws dart. Wilder yet]*

MISS WISE. Close. Very close.

MR. CHARLES. Pretty soon orders are pouring in from all over the nation. Suddenly everybody wants a pencil bought from a bonafide blind guy. *[Wilder dart throw]* I was hotter than whoopee cushions, hotter than pet rocks, hotter than Cabbage Patch dolls. *[Wilder dart throw]* HAHHAHAHA! It was funny. It was the latest rage and I was a joke. *[Wilder dart toss]* A sick joke. HAHHAHAHAHA! But, Miss Wise, a rich joke!

MS. LEEDS. *[From offstage]* MR. CHA-A-ARLES?