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Dramatic Publishing



Brave No World:

Community.

Identity.

Stand-up

Comedy.

You see somethin'
wrong with the world
and there's only
one question you
gotta ask yourself:
What are you
gonna do about it?

Drama/Comedy by
Laurie Brooks

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COMMISSIONED FOR THE KENNEDY CENTER'S
INAUGURAL FAMILY THEATRE SEASON



This imaginative new work asserts that
if you look beyond the surface,
you'll see that the world is what YOU make it ...
and the time to start creating it is NOW.



Cath-ar-tate. Make a change now.

Brave No World: Community. Identity. Stand-up Comedy.

Drama/Comedy. *By Laurie Brooks. Cast: 1m., 1w.* Popular high-school senior John has a secret: He loves books. But he's afraid to tell anyone for fear it'll ruin his "angry-cool" rep. When his mother remarries, John is suddenly step-siblings with Lexie, an honor student who couldn't be more his opposite. Their many differences—from their upbringing and skin color to musical interests and friends—lead each to make flawed assumptions about the other. But when John and Lexie least expect it, they discover that the old adage "never judge a book by its cover" still rings true. Mixing powerful storytelling and contemporary music with stand-up comedy "rants" about culture and society inspired by such literary classics as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Invisible Man* and *Brave New World*, this imaginative new work asserts that if you look beneath the surface, you'll see that the world is what YOU make it ... and the time to start creating it is NOW. Commissioned by and premiered at The Kennedy Center. Standards based high-school classroom materials focusing on the analysis of hip-hop lyrics to "provide students with a greater understanding of rhythm, form, diction and sound in poetry," which include activities, readings, and links to related lesson plans and websites, are available from the National Arts and Education Network (ArtsEdge), a program of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. *Bare stage w/ props. Optional music CD available (underscoring and transition music). Approximate running time: 1 hour, 15 minutes. Code: BC5.*

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Washington D.C., production featuring Daniel Frith.
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Laurie Brooks

DRAMATIC PUBLISHING



BRAVE NO WORLD: Community. Identity. Stand-Up Comedy.

By
LAURIE BROOKS



Dramatic Publishing
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For KPK

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The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
STEPHEN A. SCHWARZMAN, Chairman
MICHAEL M. KAISER, President

FAMILY THEATER

January 2006

Daniel Frith John
Brie Eley Lexie

Director Wendy McClellan
Assistant Director Ian Frank
Co-composer/Sound Designer Kevin Hill
Co-composer Shaun Cozart
Set Designer Jacob Muehlhausen
Lighting Designer Emily Lagerquist
Costume Designer Blair Gullede
Props Artisan Dreama J. Greaves
Production Stage Manager Selena Anguiano
Casting Director Eli Dawson
Understudies Andrew Jessop, Audra Analise Polk
Executive Producer Darrell M. Ayers
Producing Director Kim Peter Kovac
Production Manager Jeff Hill

BRAVE NO WORLD: Community. Identity. Stand-up Comedy.

CHARACTERS:

JOHN 17, white. Takes his style from black culture
in body language, dress and speech.

LEXIE. 17, black. Upwardly mobile, good girl.
More white in style than black.

TIME: Now.

PLACE: Anywhere in America.

SETTING: A bare stage. Two microphones are in the space
and books are scattered everywhere.

MUSIC/SOUND: You are welcome to create your own music
and sound design for this play, or use the CD of music/sound
created for the original production by Kevin Hill (CD available
from Dramatic Publishing). If you create your own music,
please follow the music cues in the script. If you use the CD,
forgo the cues in the script and follow the cues on the cue
sheet provided with the CD.

BRAVE NO WORLD: Community. Identity. Stand-up Comedy.

(MUSIC. SPOTLIGHT on JOHN, 17. He approaches the mike.)

JOHN *(to the audience)*. Y'all are goin' along, livin' your lives, not payin' much attention to what's around. What's goin' down. Your lives are all about you, aren't they? You and your little world. Me, too, until now. So watch my story and ask yourself: Am I livin' in a brave no world or a Brave New World?

(MUSIC RATCHETS UP. Lights change.)

JOHN. Caution: This play may be dangerous to the status quo and may not be suitable for children or those who dislike change of any kind.

Listen up. Yo.

Aldous told the truth, he had it right/ 'bout what the world would be and all that dog was tight/ he looked at the future wrote down what he saw/ knew even then how it'd turn out and all/ "Oh brave new world, that has such people in it"/ that's Shakespeare's Tempest island

with a ship that got wrecked on it/ if you dig Aldous'
vision, then you know the drill/ that idea inside your
brain/ you better kill it/ chill it/ will it gone/ thinkin'/?/
that's treason/ you'll be banished/ outcast for no freakin'
reason.

I call it
Brave No World
I call it
Brave No world
I call it
Brave no world

JOHN. "Oh, Brave new world, that has such people in
it..."

(MUSIC OUT.)

That's how the book starts. Maybe you read it and you
already know. The world's all wrong the way it is.
Totally, incredibly, indelibly wrong, know what I'm
sayin'? We didn't get it right yet. We still got poverty,
racial intolerance, elitism, violence, and unfair treatment
of those groups who got no power. Am I right? Well,
am I? That's pathetic. I can't hear you. Am I right?
You're right, I'm right. It's scary how right I am. And
so was Aldous when he wrote that book way back in the
dark ages, 1931.

I know what you're thinkin'. What's this dog talkin'
about? I never read Brave New freakin' World. Don't
worry about it. You'll catch my drift. This here's a call
to action, a wake-up-and-smell-the-scent-of-the-future.

So get ready 'cause this here's rant number one. It's 'bout what pisses me off in this brave no world, turns my blood boiling, starts down in my toes and travels up to my brain like the Indy 500. I got a list, man, been building inside me so that I don't say it, it'll eat me alive, cannibalize me from the outside in. So here's my list, forever and for better or worse 'til death do us part.

(MUSIC.)

JOHN *(shouting)*.

Injustice
lack of respect,
false authority,
curfew,
random stupid rules,
people who are just plain mean, stereotypes,
sex education,
hate mongers and liars and followers and hangovers.

Not that I ever had one. Lemme see, did I forget anything? What boils your blood, sautés your brain? What's wrong with the world?

(MUSIC RATCHETS UP.)

JOHN. Community, identity, all that stability/ allow it to become you/ it's your new reality/ I don't know about you, but I make my own decisions/ it's wack makin' the people live the same freakin' vision/ and freedom, justice, what about all that crap?/ inescapable social destiny, what the bleep is that?/

I call it
Brave No World
I call it
Brave No World
I call it
Brave No World

(MUSIC FADES. Enter LEXIE.)

LEXIE *(to JOHN)*. Get over yourself. You're white.

(MUSIC OUT.)

JOHN *(to the audience)*. Lexie. What a b-i-t...well, you get the idea. Be aware. There's a whole list of words you can't say in the holy space called theatre. Us youngsters got to be protected. It's all about PG-13. And if I break the rules they shut me down just like that. Don't want that to happen, I'm just gettin' started. So I won't be sayin' any a those naughty words, but we all know what they are.

JOHN *(to LEXIE)*. S'up, Lexie?

LEXIE. Hey, John. *(LEXIE turns away.)*

JOHN. That's it. Then she's passing me by. Hanging with her girls or talking to some teacher. You know the type—honor society, vice president of the senior class, yearbook editor, stuck on herself, button-down Lexie.

LEXIE *(to the audience)*. Good grades take time and energy but not always the kind you might think. For instance, I've developed an approach, a method, and it works. Would I steer you wrong? *(To imaginary teacher.)* Mr. Forbes, do you have a minute? I was won-

dering about the homework assignment. Would you rather we concentrate on comparing and contrasting the main characters in *Fahrenheit 451* and *Brave New World* or did you want us to focus on analyzing their literary elements?

JOHN. I got English and government wid her. Highest freakin' grade in both classes.

LEXIE (*to teacher*). I know it's my choice but I just wondered if you had a preference. Huxley's use of satire is so incredible. I mean, he makes the impossible seem sensible. I'd really like to spend some time exploring that, if it's okay with you.

JOHN. Can you say suck up?

LEXIE (*to the audience*). It's not like I really care about the answer to the question. Either essay's okay with me. The important thing is to make an impression. Keep on the teacher's radar. I got it raised to an art form.

JOHN. I never liked her.

LEXIE (*to the audience*). John? (*She play-mocks his physical style.*) I catch him looking at me. He's hot, no doubt, but he should get over himself. He's a playa. And I wouldn't mind that so much, it's how many girls are all over him that creeps me out. And he's never with one girl. Always a herd of heifers. "You're so fine," they say, pushing their chests in his face. "John, will you reach this for me. You're so tall. John, will you open this. You're so strong." Gag me. It's enough to make you lose your lunch. Those girls just don't get it. The more they go after him the less he respects them. Girls, let me give you some free advice. If you think a guy's hot don't treat him like he's hot. Guys don't want some-

thing they know they can have. It's not intriguing. You can see him shut down when those girls start.

And in class he's like a statue with attitude. How he managed to get into AP I'll never know. We're reading *Brave New World* right now. John's like nodding his head all the time in class when Mr. Forbes talks, like he agrees. Maybe he's finally worried about passing. I doubt he has a social conscience and I know he didn't read the book. That's a miracle waiting to happen.

He's way too busy hangin' with his boys. It takes them about an hour just to greet each other. They got more moves than Shaq.

JOHN. S'up, homes. Jamal. Loafer. (*JOHN does elaborate, over-the-top handshakes with his invisible friends.*)

LEXIE. See what I mean? And he's white, but he acts like he's a brotha. Everything about him—his clothes, his style, his speech—is street. Crowd he runs with, I understand it, but I hope it's not just an act, 'cause I can't stand it when people are two-faced.

JOHN. She never liked me.

(*MUSIC.*)

JOHN. So here's my deal. Me and my moms moved to our current crib on accounta the divorce. Translation: poverty. That was the summer before high school. I hid in my room the whole month of August. I did not have cable. So I musta read about a thousand books. *I did not have cable.* That way I could forget, well, sorta, what was actually happenin' in my little world. I was unavail-

able for comment to my moms or my dad. I was not gonna be the go-between for either one.

My favorite books, the ones that made me forget my current situation? *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, Tupak. Yeah. And *The Grapes of Wrath*, John Steinbeck. Tupak rocks, a'ight, enough said. And Tom Joad's my brotha. You never read *Grapes of Wrath*? I prob'ly wouldn't have, if I hadn't been hibernatin'. But I'm glad I did 'cause Tom Joad's a inspiration to me. (*As Tom Joad.*) "Then I'll be all around in the dark. I'll be e'rywhere, wherever you look. Wherever there's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever there's a cop beatin' up a guy, I'll be there." I mean it's the same now as back then. People bein' oppressed. Nothin' much has changed.

So it's all good. I'm survivin'.

Then comes the first day of high school. My moms drags me out of bed and throws me in the shower. I'm twice her size now, but then...I was still waiting for that growth spurt e'rybody was talkin' 'bout. So I'm about this tall and I got size twelve timbs. I looked like freakin' Alfalfa, dog. I got this huge Adam's apple sticks out to about here. I coulda eaten my lunch off that thing. I wore a lot a turtlenecks that year. And trust me, turtlenecks are not cool in the 'hood. I got this hat pulled down tight coverin' my hair which won't do what I want no matter what I put in it. You don't wanna know. And I got a even more singular problem that I cannot hide no matter what. I got zits. Not a few zits, oh, no, I got the Grand Canyon on my face, know what I'm sayin'. Hills and valleys, yeah. I mean it was Abu

Ghraib the first few weeks of school. Two friends saved my life—Jamal and Loafer. They taught me survival, know what I'm sayin'. They watched my back.

I was sick a lot that year. Anything to stay outa school. Stomachache, fever, flu, viruses, pulled muscles, allergies, sore throat, cough, I learned all the tricks. That year I had meningitis, double pneumonia, Asian bird flu, typhoid fever, and the HIV. And most of 'em worked. Well, not the HIV. My moms never did see the humor in that. But she felt guilty about the divorce so I milked it for all it was worth.

(BACKGROUND MUSIC.)

So I'm walkin' the halls and my fantasy life's richer than anything happenin' in the classroom, dog. 'Cause there's girls e'rywhere and they're filled out in all the right places, know what I'm sayin'. But they are off limits to crater-faced, big-footed, upper-octave clowns like me and they are not shy about showin' it. EEEEwww, is the most often overheard comment. I wouldn't go out with him if he won *Survivor*. You get the picture.

Summer of my sophomore year, I wized up. I went to the derma-dude to deal with my acne, as Moms called it. Really sounds like what it is, dog, ack-nee. So the derma-dude looks me over and gets this look on his face like I'm terminally ill. "That's quite a face you've got there," he says, and I want to punch him in his little, smiling, puny mouth. Kill yourself. Die slowly. But he gives me these miracle pills. Antibiotics. Yo, in two

weeks the zits magically disappear. And I grow about a foot, my Adam's apple shrinks to fit my neck and my voice drops two octaves. Miracle drugs, dog. Pretty soon e'ry dime piece in school wants to get wid me. How did that happen? Now I like havin' 'em all available, but word, dog, I can't stop thinkin' about how they was toward me when I was a troll.

LEXIE. Since Mama died it's been me and Daddy. I look after him, like she used to look after both of us, cook our favorite dishes, keep the house clean, hang up his shirts when they come back from the laundry. At night, after dinner, Daddy and I sit together in the study. He works on his cases and I do my homework. Sometimes when we're together like that I look up and see Mama reading on the couch, like before she died. She's not really there. She's just in my memory. Wishful thinking I guess. Everyone tells me I look like her, but I can't see it. She was so beautiful and sophisticated. I try to be like her, at least what I can remember.

Daddy and I are doing okay on our own. Don't laugh, okay? I'm gonna be a lawyer, too, and maybe do some good in the world. I take a lot of flak at school for having a social conscience. I mean, if you don't fit in some little pre-measured box then you're fair game. The street kids call me names that suggest I'm one color on the outside and another color on the inside. You know what I'm talking about. But just because I don't come from the 'hood and speak Ebonics does that mean I'm any less black?

(BACKGROUND MUSIC.)

JOHN. So how this whole thing started, my moms goes on a date. A date! How twisted is that. I mean, that calls up thoughts that I do not want to share, know what I'm sayin'. I mean, she can talk to guys, but that's all. And the idea of her being alone with some playa? Too much information. It is the first time I've seen her knees in two years and she is decked out in old-lady bling.

So she comes home from this "date" and she's all singing and glowing. Don't get me wrong, I want my moms happy. But not this happy—ever. She's all, "Did you see the stars tonight?" Does she seriously think I look at stars? "Aren't they beautiful, honey?" That's when I start to worry. And I got reason 'cause she starts talking about this dog and how great he is. Name's Lincoln. Like he's the freakin' president or something. No, wait, it gets worse. Turns out his daughter goes to my school. Moms wants me to "be friends" with her. And guess who it is. (*JOHN indicates LEXIE.*) Go ahead, say it. (*Audience response: Lexie.*) You got that right.

LEXIE (*to the audience*). So Daddy's never home anymore. And he's acting weird. No, I mean really weird. It's like he's off in another world. I'm talking to him and I can tell he's not even listening. And he bought himself new underwear—not the tightie-whiteies he used to wear, oh, no, Joe Boxers. And here's the final straw. Get this, he's listening to Lionel Ritchie. Uh-huh. It's bad enough I have to listen to Lionel Ritchie (gag me.) but when he's not playing the CDs he's singing the songs. It's all Lionel Ritchie, all the time. Retro power ballads. Agggg! I figure it can only be one thing. Go

ahead, say it. Go on. (*Audience response.*) No, not love. Y'all are so lame. It's sex.

LEXIE & JOHN. Aaaahhhhh!

JOHN. So pretty soon, all my moms can talk about is this guy, Lincoln. Lincoln says, Lincoln does, Lincoln is. Lincoln's a lawyer, pro bono cases that help poor, down-trodden folks like us. I want to eradicate him. So I say to Moms, You gettin' serious with this dog or what. Be careful, a lot a playas out there. Don't want you to get hurt. But she's throwing caution way, way into the wind.

"You know Lincoln's daughter, Lexie, right?" Yeah, I know her. "Lincoln wants to invite us for dinner, but it might be awkward for Lexie not knowing us and all, so could you help me make her feel comfortable?" Make her feel comfortable? What about me? I'm your own flesh and blood. How about my comfort? I say, I don't know, Moms. "She's in your English class, isn't she?" She's done her homework, gotta give her that. I'm trapped. "Be nice to her so she'll feel like she knows you when we go over there Friday night." Friday night? When was she gonna tell me?

(*To LEXIE.*) S'up, Lexie?

LEXIE. Hey, John. (*LEXIE turns her back.*)

JOHN. Then she gives me her back. Yo, Miss Honor Society, third in the class, freakin' teacher's pet, think you're better than everyone else, Lexie. (*LEXIE ignores him.*) Later I'm glad she didn't hear me. I tell Moms, me and Lexie move in different packs. Enough said.