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Dramatic Publishing

Atypical Boy



Comedy/Drama
by
Laurie Brooks

“This wacky romp incorporating clowning technique and unorthodox storytelling mixes imaginative writing with serious questions ... a rare example of interactive theater that actually works.”

—Robert Trussell, *Kansas City Star*.

Atypical Boy

Comedy/Drama. By Laurie Brooks. *Cast: 2 to 3m., 1 to 3w., 1 to 4 or more either gender.* In a fantastical world (not entirely unlike our own) where “conformity is compulsory,” Boy cannot conform. Others make a desperate attempt to fix him, but neither they nor he can change his nature. Labeled a monster by the experts, Boy is shunned until, heartbroken and alone, he disappears into a world of monsters. There, Boy struggles with Hugo, ruled by his monster side, and is drawn to Girl, who is still in touch with her true feelings. A metaphor for invisible disabilities and disenfranchised youth, this play asks the question: Will Boy hold on to his humanity and accept himself, or will he become a monster? A cautionary tale that presents a comic anti-model of behavior, this entertaining fable for all times and all ages tells about the beauty and danger of being different in a world where conformity is valued and individuality is feared. Pre-show audience interaction with the ensemble sets the tone for this highly original play, and a unique interactive experience called “The Forum” is built into the running time of the play to actively involve the audience in exploring the timely issues of belonging, conforming and individuality. Commissioned by the Jim Eisenreich Foundation and premiered by the Coterie Theatre. *Area staging. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: AK1.*

Cover: (l-r) Heidi Van and Alex Espy
in the Coterie Theatre production, Kansas City, Mo.
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By

LAURIE BROOKS



Dramatic Publishing Company

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For Jim Eisenreich

The Coterie Theatre
Live Theatre for All Ages

Producing Artistic Director..... Jeff Church
Executive Director Joette Pelster

Presents the World Premier of

Atypical Boy
By Laurie Brooks

The Players

The Ordinary..... Martin Buchanan
Ensemble/Puppeteer..... Matt Weiss
Ensemble/Puppeteer..... Corrie Van Ausdal
Ensemble/Puppeteer..... Jennie Greenberry
The Boy Alex Espy
The Girl..... Heidi Van*
Hugo Jason Loverde

Artistic and Production Company

Director Jeff Church
Set Designer..... Scott Hobart+
Costume Designer..... Georgianna Londré Buchanan
Lighting Designer Art Kent+
Puppetry Designers William Hill,
Georgianna Londré Buchanan
Sound Designer..... David Kiehl+
Production Stage Manager Amy M. Abels Owen*+
Technical Director Scott Hobart+
Dramaturg Roger L. Bedard
Assistant Director/Properties Meghann Henry+
Resource Guide Preparation Nancy Marcy+
House Manager Areli Gil
Intern..... Jen Benkert

*Denotes member of Actor's Equity Association, the union of professional actors and stage managers in the United States. +Denotes Coterie resident artist.

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for Children with Tourette Syndrome.

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provided by the The Jim Eisenreich Foundation for Children
with Tourette Syndrome, the Missouri Arts Council MAC and
ArtsKC Fund.

Atypical Boy was developed in a workshop in March, 2008 at
Arizona State University's School of Theatre and Film. The work-
shop culminated in a rehearsed reading. The entire cast functioned
as The Ensemble and Puppet Voices in addition to these individu-
al parts.

CAST

Arielle Hill, Jeremiah Neal	The Ordinary
Cathan Bordyn, Kyle Wills.....	Boy
Shea Brockway, Tifani Pust.....	Girl
Louis Farber.....	Hugo
Molly Gittelman.....	Boy's Puppet
Mat Watkins.....	Drums/Percussion

PRODUCTION TEAM

Playwright.....	Laurie Brooks
Director	Jeff Church
Dramaturg.....	Roger Bedard
Stage Manager	Steven Gardner

ATYPICAL BOY

CHARACTERS

The Ordinary (male or female)

The Boy

The Girl

Hugo

Puppeteer/Ensemble Member

Puppeteer/Ensemble Member

Puppeteer/Ensemble Member

PRODUCTION NOTES

The Ensemble Members play all parts except The Boy, The Girl, The Ordinary and Hugo. The Ensemble is meant to be dressed identically—immaculate, tidy, prim—but nothing quite matches. Everything is slightly, comically off. Their movements and language are stylized, in high form, but wacky, out of sync, as though they think they are perfect but they are not. It is important that the Ensemble enacts the irony of their perceived perfection alongside the reality of their imperfection. The Boy is disheveled, random and radically different from the Ensemble.

In theatre history, The Ordinary was something like our modern day director, with one difference: He followed the actors during the performance, side-coaching the action. In this play, The Ordinary enables the characters to tell the story, directs

and punctuates the action with a percussion instrument, accompanying the “ta-rums” and underscoring various moments in the play.

Ideally, the play takes place in the round or three quarters, among the audience rather than in a separate space from it, so that there is little distance between the audience and the players.

Atypical Boy is a cautionary tale of a world that presents a comic anti-model of behavior. The movement is highly stylized and not intended to be realistic in any way. In the original production, the second world the play presents took inspiration from Japanese anime style in costuming and movement.

The play is presented with a 10–15 minute preshow experience where Ensemble Members attempt, in silent European clown fashion, to “perfect” the audience’s seating, posture, facial expression and other perceived “imperfections.” This is intended to warm up the audience and prepare them for the wacky comedy to come.

The play was originally written for four players but the first production employed seven. The three ensemble members became puppeteers in the second half of the play and were dressed all in black, their faces half covered.

The monster inside The Boy is not meant to be his perceived or real disability but the result of society’s expectations and the attempts to normalize him. Hugo, The Girl and The Boy are experiencing a kind of PTSD.

ATYPICAL BOY

(Low hum. ORDINARY appears among the audience in a pool of light.)

ORDINARY. I am the Ordinary and these are the players.

(ORDINARY creates sound cue. ENSEMBLE enters as actors. They bow to the audience.)

ORDINARY *(cont'd)*. We present for you our story—not long, not short. Unembellished. We offer you gentle tale telling ... and hard truth.

(ENSEMBLE gathers and marches in their comically imperfect way, unreasonably proud of their perceived success at achieving sameness. GIRL follows, imitating the others. Throughout the following, ENSEMBLE proudly accompanies their marching with the phrase below and variations of “ta-rums.”)

ENSEMBLE. Ta-ra-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum. Ta-ra-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum.

(GIRL becomes distracted and falls out of step. The others stop and correct her. They march again until they realize that GIRL is not in sync with their movements. They correct her again. They march. GIRL is out of step a

third time. ENSEMBLE disapproves again, wagging their fingers at her.)

GIRL. Sorry.

ENSEMBLE. No excuses!

(ENSEMBLE leads GIRL to the edge of the space and kicks her out! Lights shift.)

ORDINARY. Once upon a time, there was a world ... a world very much like our own ... a wonderful world, rich with sights.

(ORDINARY gestures. Colored lights blink on and off in the space.)

ENSEMBLE *(in wonder)*. Ta raaaaaa!

ORDINARY. ... and sounds.

(ORDINARY gestures and we hear the sounds of chirping birds.)

ENSEMBLE *(in wonder)*. Ta-raaaaaa!

ORDINARY. It was, in fact, a world filled with an embarrassment of riches. Everyone had sooo much stuff, way more than they needed really.

ENSEMBLE *(as if listing their possessions)*. Ta-ra. Ta-ra. Ta-ra. Ta-ra. Ta-ra. Ta-ra. Ta-ra.

ORDINARY. Yes. All that, and more. And like every community that doesn't have to worry about where their next meal is coming from or who might attack them ... they

developed a sophisticated set of rules that organized their way of life.

(ORDINARY creates sound cues during the following action. ENSEMBLE illustrates with movement. Sound cue.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Neatness ...

ENSEMBLE. ... of body and thought.

(Sound cue.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Control ...

ENSEMBLE. ... in all we do.

(Sound cue.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Behave ...

ENSEMBLE. ... according to standards.

(Sound cue.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Perform ...

ENSEMBLE. ... strive for perfection.

ORDINARY. Precisely.

(ENSEMBLE continues under the following.)

ORDINARY *(cont'd)*. Over time, these rules became more and more rigid until the people were very, very sure about exactly what was good and what was bad.

ENSEMBLE *(marching)*. Ta rum!

ORDINARY. Everyone knew exactly what was expected of them and what they could expect from others.

ENSEMBLE (*still marching*). Ta-rum!

ORDINARY. And everyone felt safe because contradiction was ...

ENSEMBLE. ... banned.

ORDINARY. There was ...

(ORDINARY creates sound cue, ENSEMBLE stops and responds gleefully.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. ... no dialogue ...

(Sound cue.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. ... no debate ...

(Sound cue.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. ... no choice ...

(Sound cue.)

ORDINARY. ... so there was no moral ambiguity and no questioning. Such a relief!

ENSEMBLE. Ta-rum!

ORDINARY (*proudly*). And of all the rules, there was one single rule that ruled all the other rules, a rule so vast in its importance that all the other rules rested on this single rule—a rule of deep meaning, a rule to end all rules.

(Marching stops.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER (*amazed*). You just said “rule” ten times in one sentence.

ENSEMBLE. Well done. (*Applauds.*)

ORDINARY. Thank you. And the all-important rule is ...

ENSEMBLE. Conformity is compulsory.

ORDINARY. Be like your neighbors as they are like you.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Be like your neighbors ...

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. ... as they are like ...

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. ... you!

ENSEMBLE. Ta rum.

ORDINARY. Yes, this world was just about perfect, except ...

(Low hum.)

ENSEMBLE (*darkly*). Ta-ra-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum. Ta-ra-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum.

(Chanting continues underneath the following.)

ORDINARY. Into this perfect world came a boy who was not perfect. And this is where our story really begins.

(Chanting stops as BOY appears suddenly in spotlight. BOY smiles sheepishly at the audience, then hides his face. ORDINARY creates sound cue, then urges BOY forward. ORDINARY hands ENSEMBLE a baby puppet. During the following, BOY voices the baby puppet, watching the action.)

BOY. Waaa! Waaa!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. It's a ... it's a ...

(ENSEMBLE member looks between the baby puppet's legs.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. ... boy! It's a boy!

BOY. Goo-goo.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. He's beautiful. Look, ten fingers and ten toes and he has blue eyes.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. He's everything anyone could ever want!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. He's perfect!

ENSEMBLE. We love him already! *(Singing.)* Rock a bye baby on the treetop ... when the wind blows the cradle will rock.

ORDINARY. Perfection in a perfect world. How perfect.

ENSEMBLE *(singing)*. ... When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall ...

(Silence.)

ORDINARY. But the Boy was imperfect.

(The baby puppet and BOY thrash and jerk simultaneously. The baby puppet makes strange, ugly sounds, voiced by BOY.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. What's wrong with him?

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Shhh. Hush, baby Boy.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Be quiet. You're embarrassing us.

ORDINARY. What ugly, extraordinarily awful sounds the Boy made.

(ENSEMBLE put their hands over the baby puppet's mouth to stop the sounds. Sounds are muffled but do not stop.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Stop it!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Stop!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Stop!

(The baby puppet does not stop.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Be like other babies!

(ORDINARY hands ENSEMBLE a blanket which they throw over the baby puppet's head. Sounds stop.)

ENSEMBLE. Whew.

(ENSEMBLE smile hugely, apologetically at the audience.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Sorry!

(Note: When saying the following "rule" ENSEMBLE point fingers at one another.)

ENSEMBLE. No excuses!

ORDINARY. So as the Boy grew, they tried to ignore the imperfections and hoped they would go away.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Maybe he'll be perfect tomorrow.

ORDINARY. But even shopping became difficult.

(ORDINARY wheels out a shopping cart, BOY as toddler climbs in. ENSEMBLE shops, accompanied by cheesy grocery store music. BOY as toddler barks like a dog. Music stops. ENSEMBLE freezes, embarrassed. BOY stops. ENSEMBLE shops. Music begins again. BOY as toddler howls like a wolf. Music stops. ENSEMBLE freezes, embarrassed. BOY stops. ENSEMBLE shops. Music begins again. BOY as toddler barks happily, then growls and hisses. His hands dance in the air. His body jerks. Music stops.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER *(as though heard through a loud speaker)*. Disturbance on aisle three.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER *(to audience)*. He's playing. That's all.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. That's it! He's just playing.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. He's not hurting anyone.

(BOY snorts like a pig, howls like a wolf.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. We know he's not playing right.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Make him stop!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. We're working on it.

(BOY growls and snaps at the air, hands dancing.)

ENSEMBLE. Stop that!

(BOY does not stop.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER *(to audience)*. We're trying.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. We are! Give us a chance.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Don't be angry. We're doing the best we can.

(ENSEMBLE back up as though threatened. They surround BOY to protect him.)

ENSEMBLE. STOP!

(ENSEMBLE throws blanket over BOY.)

ORDINARY. And so, they kept the Boy out of sight. What else could they do? It was for his own safety. No one likes to be reminded of imperfection.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. This isn't fair.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. We've been cheated.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. This is not the boy we expected.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Not the Boy we wanted.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. We're so disappointed.

ENSEMBLE. It's hopeless.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Sorry.

ENSEMBLE. No excuses!

(ORDINARY creates sound cue and ENSEMBLE marches.)

ENSEMBLE. Ta-ra-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum. Ta-ra-ta-tum-ta-tum-ta-tum.

(The boy sings, it is charming.)

BOY. La. La, la, la, la, la, la, la.

(ENSEMBLE put their hands over BOY's mouth to stop his singing.)

ORDINARY. This ... singing ... was appalling to them!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. This is not right.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. I don't recognize this tune!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. I never heard it before!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER *(disgusted)*. It's new!

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. We are so ashamed.

ORDINARY. Ah, life has a way of interfering with our most carefully laid plans. Try as they might, they could not hide the Boy's imperfections. Soon, everyone knew of the strange Boy. And although he was recognized by everyone, he was unrecognizable to himself. Because he was ...

(ENSEMBLE inspects BOY from a distance: up, down, all around.)

ENSEMBLE *(whispers the word)*. Atypical.

(ORDINARY leads BOY to audience. BOY takes paper heart out of his pocket and gives it to an audience member. ENSEMBLE quickly whisks BOY away from audience.)

ORDINARY. What was to be done? They quietly enlisted the help of Professional Correctors.

(ORDINARY creates sound cue and ENSEMBLE becomes Professional Correctors.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER. Hello, Boy.