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Dramatic Publishing

TEXAS in PARIS



Musical by Alan Govenar

“As much about race relations in America as it is about the spirituals and cowboy songs that run through it.”

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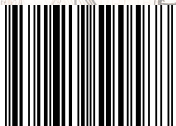
TEXAS in PARIS

Musical. By Alan Govenar. Cast: 1m., 1w. The musical journey, based on true events, of two singers, a man and a woman—one white, one black—invited to France to perform in a concert series. They have never met, have no professional singing experience and face the challenge of working together and co-existing in an unfamiliar world. Apprehensive of each other, they struggle with preconceptions but forge a surprising spiritual bond that transforms their onstage performance and their lives.

Texas in Paris is a metaphor for the dilemma of race that is currently dividing our nation, focusing on two people from the heartland who, like most Americans, want to avoid talking about racism as an issue. But once in Paris, a dialogue emerges that could never have happened in their isolated worlds in the United States. The music—spirituals, cowboy songs and country hymns—is a songbook of American life—everyday songs, lost and found, black and white, remembered and discovered as new. **Flexible set. Approximate running time: 80 minutes. Code: TU9.**

Cover image: The York Theatre Company, New York City, featuring (l-r) Lillias White and Scott Wakefield.
Photo: Alan Govenar. Cover design: Jeanette Alig-Sergel.

ISBN: 978-1-61959-058-8



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Your Source for Plays and Musicals Since 1885

311 Washington Street
Woodstock, IL 60098
800-448-7469

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Texas in Paris

A musical
based on true events
with spirituals, cowboy songs and country hymns

By
ALAN GOVENAR



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(TEXAS IN PARIS)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-058-8

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World premiere off-Broadway production presented by The
York Theatre Company, Jan. 27-March 1, 2015, starring:

Osceola..... Lillias White
John..... Scott Wakefield

Production staff and crew:

Producing Artistic Director..... James Morgan
Executive Director..... Andrew Levine
Chairman..... W. David McCoy
Director..... Akin Babatunde
Musical Supervision and Arrangements..... Amy Jones
based on recordings by Documentary Arts
Scenic Design..... James Morgan
Lighting Design..... Brian Nason
Costume Design..... Christopher Vergara
Projection and Sound Design..... Jason Johnson-Spinos
Photographs, Video
and Location Recordings..... Alan Govenar
with additional footage by Robert Tullier,
Didier Dorant and Kaleta Doolin

Texas in Paris

CHARACTERS

Osceola Mays

John Burrus

*Information on resource materials can be found at the back of the book.

NOTE TO THE READER

While *Texas in Paris* was inspired by a series of concerts that the author produced with Osceola Mays and John Burrus in 1989 at the Maison des Cultures du Monde in Paris, France, he has taken dramatic license in recreating the music performed and the interactions that occurred between the principal characters. The dialogue the author imagined does not necessarily express the views of the individuals upon which the characters were based.

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Texas in Paris

SCENE 1

(#1: “Opening Humming”)

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. We hear the commotion of an airport departure lounge, and in the midst of the announcements and chatter, the humming of a white man [JOHN] mixes with the soft spiritual singing of an African American woman [OSCEOLA].*

(Lights up. Both the man and woman look confused, not sure if they are in the right place.)

OSCEOLA *(pacing back and forth, then stopping in front of the white man, who glances at her but then quickly looks away)*. You ... uh ... don't mean to bother you ... You, Mistah John Burrus ?

JOHN. Yep.

OSCEOLA *(excited but a little jittery)*. Why ... I'm Osceola ...
Osceola Mays.

JOHN. That so?

OSCEOLA. So, you the one goin' to Paris with me?

JOHN. Guess that's right.

OSCEOLA *(not sure how to respond, looks off into the distance. A pause. She sings a cappella to herself)*.

BY AND BY, OH WHEN THE MORNING COMES
WHEN THE SAINTS OF GOD ARE GATHERED HOME

JOHN. Nerves actin' up?

OSCEOLA. Never been on an airplane before ...

JOHN. Nothin' to it. Yep.

OSCEOLA. You get a letter? Came with them airplane tickets.

Mine come registered. I thought I done somethin' wrong.

JOHN. Just the way business is done these days.

OSCEOLA. Letter say we gonna do seventeen shows ... me and you ... I never been paid to sing. How 'bout you?

JOHN (*turning away*). No, ma'am.

OSCEOLA. Mistah John, how that hippie-lookin' man from Boston ever find you?

JOHN. Got my number from a rancher in Aspermont.

OSCEOLA. Well, a lady from my church in Dallas done give him my telephone number. And when that man came and recorded me, I didn't really understand what he wanted and I just sing like I sing to myself. I tell him it not correct singing. It the way Grandma Walker sing, and he like that. And when he sent them recordings off to Paris, they like it too.

JOHN. That so?

OSCEOLA. How'd he ever talk you into doin' this?

JOHN. The money was right. Need to get that engine and transmission in my pick-up rebuilt before Christmas ... Otherwise I'm outta work. Cain't afford a new truck.

OSCEOLA. I need the money, Mistah John, just like you ... Especially since my husband passed ... Year ago tomorrow. Why, he finish supper and he fall over onto his plate.

JOHN. Sorry to hear that, Miss Mays.

OSCEOLA. I can barely step outside my house ... Can't drive ... Don't know how ... And if I don't string barbed wire on the windows, one of them crack heads crawl inside in the middle of the night.

JOHN. My house ... in the country ... No need to even lock the door ... Neighbors need somethin', they just come and get it, put it back when they're done. You on welfare?

OSCEOLA. No. But I only gettin' four hundred dollars a month in social security ...

JOHN. These ... hard times. Yep.

OSCEOLA. Letter say we the "truth about Texas" ... nothin' like the Dallas TV show.

JOHN. Ain't nothin' but nonsense to me. Ain't gonna be part of some freak show. My wife call long distance to that theatre in Paris, France, and tell 'em I gonna sing my cowboy songs and that's it. And the man who answer the phone say that's OK. That's all they want.

OSCEOLA. I never seen money like this ... Kind of worries me.

JOHN. Just another job. That's it. Yep.

OSCEOLA. Figure it's goin' be cold in Paris?

JOHN. Ain't Texas.

OSCEOLA. Didn't know what to bring—letter says one suitcase ... I don't have but one pair of shoes, a couple of dresses and a fancy hat one of the ladies at church make for me ... She tell me to take a few of them special things ... like the little doll baby I keep on the shelf by my bed ... things to keep me from gettin' too lonely.

JOHN. A duffle bag all I got. Clothes? Pretty much all the same. Easier that way.

OSCEOLA. Makes me anxious there's somethin' I forgot.

JOHN. No need.

OSCEOLA. Singin' ... prayin' ... help ... a little ...

JOHN. Yep.

(A gate agent makes a boarding announcement for the flight to Paris as the lights fade.)

SCENE 2

(Airplane sounds mix with a French accodion tune and Paris street noise as the lights dim to signal the passage of time, and as they brighten, two columns of light demarcate what appear to be two hotel rooms. In one room, OSCEOLA repositions herself in her chair, facing away from JOHN, and takes a little doll with blonde hair from her bag.)

OSCEOLA *(picking up the doll and talking to it)*. H'mmm ... oh Lord ... on Santa Claus night Mama only ever give me one doll ... little girl just like you ... Little things make me remember and relax ...

(In the other room, JOHN lifts his guitar and carefully tunes it.)

JOHN. All set. Yep.

(#2: “Miss Mary Mack / Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie”)

OSCEOLA.

MISS MARY MACK, MACK, MACK
ALL DRESSED IN BLACK, BLACK, BLACK
WITH SILVER BUTTONS, BUTTONS, BUTTONS
ALL DOWN HER BACK, BACK, BACK

(OSCEOLA sings to her plastic doll.)

JOHN.

OH, BURY ME NOT ON THE LONE PRAIRIE
WHERE THE COYOTES HOWL AND THE WIND
BLOWS FREE
IN A NARROW GRAVE, JUST SIX BY THREE,
OH, BURY ME NOT ON THE LONE PRAIRIE

JOHN.

I ALWAYS WISHED
TO BE LAID WHEN I DIE
IN THE LITTLE CHURCHYARD
ON THE GREEN HILLSIDE
BY MY FATHER'S GRAVE,
THERE LET MINE BE
OH, BURY ME NOT
ON THE LONE PRAIRIE

OSCEOLA.

SHE ASKED HER MOTHER,
MOTHER, MOTHER
FOR FIFTY CENTS, CENTS,
CENTS
TO SEE THE ELEPHANTS, ELE-
PHANTS, ELEPHANTS
JUMP OVER THE FENCE,
FENCE, FENCE
THEY JUMPED SO HIGH, HIGH,
HIGH
THEY TOUCHED THE SKY, SKY,
SKY
AND THEY NEVER CAME
BACK, BACK, BACK
TILL THE FOURTH OF JULY,
LY, LY

(The following is an optional ending as indicated in the score.)

JOHN (*cont'd*).

LET MY DEATH SLUMBER
BE WHERE MY MOTHER'S
PRAYER
AND A SISTER'S TEAR CAN
MINGLE THERE
WHERE MY FRIENDS CAN
COME AND VISIT ME
OH BURY ME NOT ON THE
LONE PRAIRIE.

OSCEOLA (*cont'd*).

MISS MARY MACK, MACK,
MACK
ALL DRESSED IN BLACK,
BLACK, BLACK
WITH SILVER BUTTONS, BUT-
TONS, BUTTONS
ALL DOWN HER BACK, BACK,
BACK

(OSCEOLA laughs and then reaches into her purse for her bible. She thumbs through the tattered pages.)

OSCEOLA (*cont'd*). Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.

(After OSCEOLA finishes, she pauses and places her hand on the pages of her bible as if God is speaking to her heart.)

OSCEOLA (*cont'd*). It is the Lord who goes before you ... even in Paris ... Paris, France.

SCENE 3

(As the lights change, we hear Paris street noise and the sound of the audience milling around in the theatre. OSCEOLA and JOHN move toward their seats onstage from different directions and sit side-by-side in silhouette. We hear an overhead pre-show announcement.)

ANNOUNCER (*pre-recorded voice*). *Mesdames et Messieurs, Bienvenue à la Maison des Cultures du Monde.* How many generations of French people have dreamt of the American West? Tonight, we bring the real Texas to you and are pleased to present for their first concert onstage, John Burrus and Osceola Mays.

(Lights come up. OSCEOLA looks starry-eyed into the audience.)

OSCEOLA. I can't believe I actually here.

JOHN. Yep. (*Tips hat.*)

(#3: "Windy Bill")

JOHN (*cont'd*).

WINDY BILL WAS A TEXAS MAN,
AND HE COULD ROPE, YOU BET.
AND A STEER HE COULDN'T TIE,
WELL, HE HADN'T FOUND HIM YET.
US BOYS KNEW OF AN OLD BLACK STEER,
KIND OF AN OLD OUTLAW
THAT RAN DOWN IN THE BOTTOM
AT THE FOOT OF A ROCKY DRAW.

WELL, THE OLD BLACK STEER HAD STOOD HIS
GROUND
WITH PUNCHERS FROM EVERYWHERE,
AND WE BET OLD BILL THAT TWO TO ONE,
HE COULDN'T GET QUITE THERE.
THEN BILL LET OUT HIS OLD ROPE HORSE;
HIS WITHERS AND BACK WERE RAW.
AND PREPARED TO TACKLE THAT BIG BLACK STEER
THAT RAN DOWN IN THE DRAW.

THE OLD ROPE HORSE FLEW AT HIM
LIKE HE'D A-BEEN EATIN' CORN.
AND BILL LANDED HIS MAGUEY
AROUND OLD BLACKIE'S HORN.
THE OLD-TIME HORSE, HE STOPPED DEAD STILL,
AND CINCHES BROKE LIKE STRAW.
BILL'S SAM STACK TREE AND SLICK MAGUEY
WENT A-DRIFTIN' DOWN THE DRAW.

NOW BILL LANDED IN A BIG ROCK PILE;
HIS HANDS AND HIS FACE WAS SCRATCHED.
HE'D VOWED HE COULD ALWAYS TIE A STEER,
BUT HE GUESSED HE'D MET HIS MATCH.
HE PAID HIS BETS LIKE A LITTLE MAN
WITHOUT A BIT OF JAW.
AND HE 'LLOWED OLD BLACKIE WAS THE BOSS
OF ANYTHING IN THAT DRAW.

WELL, THE MORAL TO MY SONG BOYS,
AS YOU ALL CAN SEE:
WHENEVER YOU START TO TACKLE A STEER,
NEVER TIE HARD YOUR MAGUEY.
PUT ON YOUR DALLY WELTER
ACCORDIN' TO TEXAS LAW
AND YOU'LL NEVER SEE YOUR OLD RIM-FIRE GO
DRIFTIN' DOWN THE DRAW.

WINDY BILL WAS A TEXAS MAN AND HE COULD ROPE
YOU BET!

(When JOHN finishes, OSCEOLA stands and sings. She is timid at first and gains confidence as some people in the audience begin to snap their fingers.)

(#4: “All God’s Children Got Shoes”)

OSCEOLA.

I GOT SHOES YOU GOT SHOES
ALL OF GOD’S CHILDREN GOT SHOES
WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN
GONNA PUT ON MY SHOES
GONNA WALK ALL OVER GOD’S HEAVEN
HEAVEN, HEAVEN
EVERYBODY’S TALKIN’ ’BOUT HEAVEN
AIN’T GOIN’ THERE HEAVEN, HEAVEN
GONNA WALK ALL OVER GOD’S HEAVEN

I GOTTA ROBE YOU GOTTA ROBE
ALL OF GOD’S CHILDREN GOTTA ROBE
WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN GONNA PUT ON MY ROBE
GONNA SHOUT ALL OVER GOD’S HEAVEN
HEAVEN, HEAVEN
EVERYBODY’S TALKIN’ ’BOUT HEAVEN
AIN’T GOIN’ THERE HEAVEN, HEAVEN
GONNA SHOUT ALL OVER GOD’S HEAVEN

I GOTTA SONG, YOU GOTTA SONG
ALL OF GOD’S CHILDREN GOTTA SONG
WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN
GONNA SING MY SONG
GONNA SING ALL OVER GOD’S HEAVEN
HEAVEN, HEAVEN
EVERYBODY’S TALKIN’ ’BOUT HEAVEN
AIN’T GOIN’ THERE HEAVEN, HEAVEN
GONNA SING ALL OVER GOD’S HEAVEN
HEAVEN, HEAVEN
GONNA SING ALL OVER GOD’S HEAVEN

(JOHN nods, and OSCEOLA lifts her right hand to her heart to show her gratitude. The lights change, and we are transported out of the scene to the next morning.)

SCENE 4

(OSCEOLA and JOHN are sitting across from each other at a small round table. They both look at each other, a little surprised there isn't more to eat.)

JOHN *(lifts his cowboy hat and brushes back his hair with his hand)*. Just wanna get a little more sleep ... Just wanna get a little more sleep ...

OSCEOLA. Don't know what time it is?

JOHN. They call it jet lag, Miss Mays ... Done turned me upside down ...

OSCEOLA. Jet lag? I doin' fine, Mistah John ... mighty fine ... Never been much of anywhere ... and here I am ... Paris, France ... I love my hotel room, my bed, my pillow ... Never stayed in a place like this.

JOHN. Ain't nothin' special.

OSCEOLA. What you say, Mistah John?

JOHN. I say it ain't nothin' special ... Now I been here before ...

OSCEOLA. You has?

JOHN *(straightening up)*. That's right, Miss Mays ... Been here during the war ... August 25, 1944 ... I was with the allied troops that liberated Paris ... They was dancin' in the streets.

OSCEOLA. Wasn't that a mighty time!

JOHN. I was just a boy, Miss Mays. Just turned 18 before they sent me overseas. I just did what they told me ... stayed outta harm's way.

OSCEOLA (*sings a cappella to herself*).

I'M SO GLAD ...

TROUBLE DON'T LAST ALWAYS

So, Mistah John, you ready for another show?

JOHN. Yep.

OSCEOLA. Never heard folks do that ... Snappin' their fingers like this ... Keepin' time to my song as if they knew in advance what I was goin' to be singin'.

JOHN (*muttering, remembering that the theatre audience was not as enthusiastic about his singing as they were about OSCEOLA's performance*). Nothin' like that.

OSCEOLA. What you say, Mistah John?

JOHN (*forcing a smile*). Guess they don't like them cowboy songs as much.

OSCEOLA (*giggling*). No need to fret about that.

JOHN (*tersely*). Don't you worry, Miss Mays. I can handle it. All in a day's work.

(OSCEOLA looks away, picking up a croissant, wanting to change the subject.)

OSCEOLA. Looks like some kind of roll to me ...

JOHN. They call it a craw-sount. Haven't changed a bit since I was here durin' the war ... They look just the same ... Course I never did taste one.

OSCEOLA. That so?

JOHN. Yep. Don't like tryin' new things ...

OSCEOLA. You think I should slice it long ways or across the middle?

JOHN. Don't think it matters ...