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*Dramatic Publishing*

# FACES OF FREEDOM

By  
CYNTHIA MERCATI



**Dramatic Publishing**

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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*Faces of Freedom* was originally commissioned and produced by the Iowa Touring Theatre Company, Des Moines Playhouse, Des Moines, Iowa. It was first performed at Drake University, Des Moines, for the Thresholds Arts Festival on Global Citizenship on February 7, 2003 with the following:

CAST

Actor 1 (Maria's Sister; Seema; Juana's Mother). . . . ANN  
WOLDT

Actor 2 (Maria) . . . . . AMBER WINES

Actor 3 (Tron) . . . . . ERIC MOU

Actor 4 (Juana; Vida) . . . . . APRIL SAULS

Actor 5 (Vietcong Guard; Kaleel [Hawa]). . . CHRISTOPHER  
POWELL

Actor 6 (Juana's Father; Tron's Father; ESL Teacher). . TOM  
MILLIGAN

Actor 7 (Aldjana [Semir]; Elena) . . . . . SARAH CRAMER

Actor 8 (Carlos; Luis) . . . . . JORDAN GARCIA

PRODUCTION STAFF

Director . . . . . KATHY PINGEL-POWELL

Stage Manager. . . . . GAIL STELMACHER

Scenic Designer . . . . . KEVIN SHELBY

# FACES OF FREEDOM

A Play in One Act  
For 5 Men and 5 Women\*

## CHARACTERS

These roles continue throughout the show:

OLD MARIA - An adult woman, remembering

YOUNG MARIA - Italian girl, 17

TRON - Vietnamese boy, 17

These actors make up the chorus and will double the other characters if needed:

ACTOR ONE      ACTOR FOUR

ACTOR TWO      ACTOR FIVE

ACTOR THREE    ACTOR SIX

Roles in monologues that can be doubled:

JUANA - Young girl from El Salvador (can be male).

HAWA - Young girl from Liberia (can be male).

SEMIR - Young boy from Bosnia (can be female).

VIDA - Young girl from Guyana.

LUIS - Young boy from Mexico.

ELENA - Young girl from Mexico.

ESL TEACHER - Male or female.

CARLOS - Young boy (can be female). The country of origin  
can be changed to any country that plays soccer.

HALIMA - Young girl from Afghanistan.

Roles with one or two lines that can be doubled:

SOFIA (MARIA'S sister)

LADY

TRON'S FATHER

MAN

JUANA'S MOTHER	GIRL
JUANA'S FATHER	TICKET SELLER
VIETCONG PRISON GUARD	OFFSTAGE VOICES
LUIS & ELENA'S MOTHER	YOUNG GIRL
OFFICIAL ON ELLIS ISLAND	WOMAN AT TRAIN STATION

\*The casting is flexible, and the show can be done with a minimum of ten, five women and five men, doubling, or easily expanded into a cast of twenty or more.

#### DOUBLING

Blind casting is suggested, to reinforce both the theatricality of the piece, and the theme of universality.

#### TIME

The time is fluid. YOUNG MARIA's scenes are set in 1907. TRON's scenes are set in 1978. The other scenes are present day.

#### PLACE

The set is fluid, too, and extremely simple, requiring only a variety of platforms and set pieces on which the actors can sit, stand and climb. The show can be accompanied by slides of past and present immigrants, or a backdrop can be used, interweaving pictures of past and recent immigrants with objects symbolic to the show—a satchel, a star, maps.

It's also suggested that at the conclusion of the show, the audience be invited to write their names and the names of family members, and their countries of origin, on the backdrop, reinforcing the theme: Out of many, one.

#### CLAPPING

Handclapping is a suggestion only. Simple instruments, native to various countries—i.e., rain sticks, drum—can also be added.

## FACES OF FREEDOM

*AT RISE: The whole cast is on stage. With rhythmic hand-clapping, they generate a single, insistent beat. After a moment, and to their rhythm, they speak to the audience.*

ACTOR ONE. Ever since I got here...

ACTOR TWO. Ever since I got here, I been trying to get the rhythm.

ACTOR THREE. You know...

ALL. THE RHYTHM OF AMERICA!

ACTOR FOUR. So I'm listening.

ACTOR FIVE. On the streets.

ACTOR SIX. In the halls.

ALL. AND I'M WONDERING!

ACTOR FIVE. Where to find it.

ACTOR SIX. How to hear it.

ACTOR ONE. 'Cause I want to know.

ALL. I WANT TO KNOW THE RHYTHM OF AMERICA!

*(Their clapping peaks in intensity, then sudden silence. OLD MARIA crosses DR to speak to the audience. She will remain in this area until the conclusion of the show.)*



OLD MARIA. I was born in 1907. In Italy. Going to America was my dream since I was little.

*(YOUNG MARIA steps to C and kneels, enacting OLD MARIA's words.)*

I was so sure I would get there, that one day, I took my doll, and I wrapped her in a cloth and I put her in a box. I put the box in the stream. The stream, I knew, would run to the river, and the river to the ocean. And over the ocean was America.

*(SOFIA, MARIA's SISTER, crosses to YOUNG MARIA.)*

SOFIA. Get going! Do you want to be out here all night?

OLD MARIA *(indicating SOFIA)*. My sister. My older sister. Every night we had to bring the geese back to the barn. One night I told her my dream.

SOFIA. What's so good about America?

YOUNG MARIA *(excited)*. In America, women can have—more. More life! In America, I can have a job. I can tell people, I will go there—I won't go there. I will do that—I won't do that. I can tell people, I will marry this man—I won't marry that man.

SOFIA. You're not going to tell anyone, anything. Here you were born, and here you'll stay.

YOUNG MARIA. Papa says when he saves enough money, he's going to send one of his children to America.

SOFIA. It's Gianni he's sending, the oldest brother always goes first. Gianni will get a job and save money, and bring Ernesto over. Then Ernesto will bring Guiseppe

over. *(Triumphantly.)* And Guiseppe will bring me over!  
By that time, you'll have a husband and he won't let  
you go.

YOUNG MARIA. You don't know.

SOFIA. I do know!

OLD MARIA. But she didn't know. She didn't know my  
secret. One night, when I was waiting for the geese, the  
stars were brighter than I had ever seen them. Bright and  
thick, just made for wishing. *(Both YOUNG and OLD  
MARIA look skyward.)*

YOUNG/OLD MARIA. I wish to go to America!

OLD MARIA. Just as I said my wish, one of the stars shot  
down to earth. Right then I knew. My wish would come  
true.

*(The cast explodes into rhythmic handclapping for a  
beat or two, then they shout out the line. The handclap-  
ping may signal each of these announcements, presaging  
the mood of the scene.)*

ALL. FAST FOOD!

*(JUANA uses a set piece to represent her counter, as the  
others become customers, ad libbing orders. She speaks  
to the audience.)*

JUANA. I was born in El Salvador. *(To a customer.)*  
Would you like to super size that, sir? *(To the audience.)*  
In El Salvador, when I was little, there were rebels and  
there was the army. The army said the rebels were  
wrong. The rebels said the army was bad. Things were  
always in a mess. My parents worked all the time, to

save enough money to send my father to America. When he got here, he was going to get a job, and bring me and my mom over. He was our hope. That's what my mom said. She said—

JUANA'S MOTHER (*to the audience*). I said, Your father is our hope for the future!

JUANA. We didn't hear anything from my father for a long time. Some days, my mom was sure the rebels had killed him. The next day, she was sure the army had killed him. She was always crying. Finally, we got a letter. My father told us how it was. He told us—

JUANA'S FATHER (*to the audience*). I told them, It's too hard to be alone here. Too hard and too lonely. I have a new wife now, an American wife, and a new family. I'm sorry, but don't bother me. I don't want to be reminded of anything. That's how it is.

JUANA. The day we got the letter, my mom stopped crying. She told me to stop crying. She said—

JUANA'S MOTHER (*fiercely, to JUANA*). I said, *This* how it is. You're our hope now.

JUANA. My mother wrote to my aunt in America. She wrote—

JUANA'S MOTHER (*to the audience*). I wrote, Can I send your niece to you? She would work in your house to pay off the trip. She would work hard. You could send her to school.

JUANA. So I went to America, to my aunt and uncle's house. They told us they lived in the heartland. (*Wryly.*) It's cold in the heartland. I did the cooking, I did the wash. I cleaned the house, I cleaned the car. I cleaned the dog. I minded the kids, I mowed the lawn. I did everything! My uncle and aunt never said anything about

school. I never even got out of the house! Pretty soon, I made a plan. When everyone was gone, I watched TV. “Mash.” “The Brady Bunch.” “Diffn’t Strokes.” I learned English pretty good. Then I talked to my aunt. *(As if to her aunt.)* I paid you back for my trip a long time ago. Now I work day and night for a crummy room and a little food. So *this* is how it is. I’m gonna get a job and pay you a little rent, and buy my own food. I’ll clean the house, but the rest of that junk, I’m not doing it anymore. *(To a customer.)* Would you like fries with your burger, ma’am? *(Proudly, to us.)* I am a fast-food worker! *(With a shrug, she knows the truth.)* Hey, it’s a start. *(Fiercely dreaming.)* I’m gonna get my GED—and then I’m gonna get a better job, that pays more. Then I’ll bring my mom over. Then I’ll start saving for college. I’m gonna be a lawyer—I’m gonna be a citizen! The other kids tell me—

ACTOR ONE. We tell her, It’s a long road to where you wanna end up.

JUANA. I was born on the road! But now I can see the end. I can see hope. *(As if to a customer.)* Thank you—and have a nice day! *(Again, the cast gives us a few beats of rhythmic handclapping, as they call out.)*

ALL. WE INTERRUPT THIS REGULARLY SCHEDULED PLAY TO BRING YOU SOME THOUGHTS ALREADY IN PROGRESS!

*(Now the ACTORS form a circle, some with hands on hips, some with arms folded, the dialogue bubbling back and forth, as if we’ve come into the middle of a heated discussion.)*

ACTOR TWO. There are too many foreigners coming over here. They're taking up all the room.

ACTOR THREE. There's lots of states with hardly any people at all—Montana, Wyoming, North Dakota. Maybe the immigrants could fill up those places. (*ACTOR TWO shows his/her scorn at this idea.*)

ACTOR FOUR. The foreigners are taking all our jobs!

ACTOR FIVE. If the job was open to begin with, who are they taking it from?!

*(ACTOR FOUR opens his/her mouth to give a spirited reply—but can think of nothing to say, and is left standing there, mouth open, as the other ACTORS move away. With ACTOR FOUR still standing in position, TRON crosses DL to speak to the audience. He will remain in this area throughout.)*

TRON. I was born in 1961. In South Vietnam. My dream of America started when the Communists took over our country.

Before I was born, Vietnam was divided into two parts. North and South. The Communists were in the North, they were called the Vietcong. My family lived in the South. There was a big war between the two halves. South Vietnam was helped in the war by the United States. By the time it was over, many of our people were dead. And many Americans.

I grew up in the city of Da Nang. On one side of Da Nang is the sea. On the other side is Laos. The Vietcong would sneak through Laos and bomb Da Nang. Then my

family and all our neighbors would run to the underground shelter. We slept there and cooked there.

April 30, 1975. Everyone knows that day. That's when the Vietcong took over the whole country.

Right away, the Vietcong started arresting anybody who had fought against them. They arrested my father. They came right into our kitchen, and took him prisoner.

TRON'S FATHER (*to the audience*). The Vietcong told me they were going to teach me to be a better person. A Communist person.

TRON. They told my father he was going to a re-education center.

TRON'S FATHER. It was a prison camp.

TRON. They told my father he would be gone for four months. We didn't see him again for four years.

TRON'S FATHER. Every day, from sunlight to past dark, we worked. We barely got any food. The Vietcong beat us, and while they beat us, they lectured us.

VIETCONG SOLDIER (*to TRON'S FATHER*). We will break you and when you are broken, we will pour our thoughts into your head.

TRON'S FATHER. Some of the men gave up and killed themselves. But every morning, I told myself, Just get through today, anyone can get through one day. Day by day, I survived.

TRON. After so much time, the guards got lazy. They stopped watching the men so closely. One day—

TRON'S FATHER. One day, when their backs were turned, I ran. The soldiers didn't follow me. They thought I'd die in the jungle. But I just kept running, and

while I ran, I told myself, One more step. Just take one more step.

TRON. Step by step, my father got home.

*(Spots up on TRON and OLD MARIA. Their words almost overlap.)*

TRON. One night, not long after he was back, my father gathered our family together.

OLD MARIA. One night, my father gathered the family together.

TRON. My father told us that if the soldiers found out he was alive, they would kill him. They would kill us, too. He told us, he had to escape. America, he said, was his only chance for life.

OLD MARIA. America is the future for this family!, that's what my father said.

TRON. I can only take one of the children with me, that's what my father told us.

OLD MARIA. It's time to send one of the children to America, that's what my father said. But it's not Gianni I'm sending—it's Maria.

TRON. It's Tron I'm taking with, that's what my father told us. He's not the oldest, but I think he will do the best.

OLD MARIA. Maria is the smartest, that's what my father said. She will do the best.

TRON. That night, when I looked up at the stars...

OLD MARIA. When I looked up at the stars that night...

OLD MARIA/TRON. I prayed not to let my family down.

*(Into the quiet, falls hard, harsh clapping.)*