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Dramatic Publishing



NOONIE'S MASTERPIECE IN PURPLE

**A Play
by
LISA RAILSBACK**



Dramatic Publishing

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LISA RAILSBACK

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NOONIE'S MASTERPIECE IN PURPLE was first performed by the University of New Mexico Outreach Company, Albuquerque, N.M., in 1998.

CAST

Noonie Norton EVA PUENTE
Ms. Lilly / O'Keeffe..... LAURIE MCGOVERN
Uncle Ralph / Van Gogh TED SCHAEFFER
Aunt Sylvia JUNIPER PAULANTIS
Junior / Picasso EDDIE DEAN
Beverly KIMBERLY PAGE
Reno JOSH HARTVIGSON
Leonard Norton..... DAVID "D.J." JOHNSON

Director AMBER DERNBACH
Tour Manager LISA RAILSBACK
Stage Manager DAVID "D.J." JOHNSON
Assistant Stage Manager..... NATE MULLINS
Headpiece Sculptors S. SANCHEZ and A. DERNBACH
Sets and Paintings..... L. RAILSBACK and N. MULLINS
Movement Specialists .. AMY ELY and CHRISTINA MORRIS
Dramaturges .. A. DERNBACH and SUSAN PEARSON-DAVIS

PRODUCTION NOTES

Noonie's Masterpiece in Purple was performed as a touring production with the University of New Mexico Outreach Company. We toured to 22 schools within the Albuquerque area, and a few schools in more rural New Mexico locations. Primarily, we toured to elementary schools, although we did perform shows for three middle schools. We discovered that many teachers saw *Noonie* as an opportunity to have their classes learn more about Picasso, O'Keeffe and van Gogh. We found that in these schools where they had done some study on art and these artists before we arrived, regardless of age, the students picked up on more nuances within the play. I would encourage the use of a study guide of some sort for school audiences to maximize the art education aspect of this script. I would also encourage a post-show discussion on the more emotional aspects of this play. It offers students the opportunity to share information about themselves. Some teachers told me that during post-show discussions about *Noonie* they learned many things about their students (particularly their students' outside-of-school lives) which they hadn't previously known. We also found that adults seemed to enjoy the show as well as kids, often for different reasons, despite our billing that this was a "play for children."

The script was originally written for eight actors. I intentionally wrote Ms. Lilly to double as O'Keeffe, Uncle Ralph as van Gogh, and Junior as Picasso. Other combinations of actor doubling may be used, although there may be some logistical problems with entrances and exits overlapping. At the Looking Glass Theatre's production in New York City no doubling was done, which is also an option.

We doubled actors in our production merely for the economy and constraints of a touring show.

Our “artists” wore matching white artist coats, which we painted individually to match their painting styles. They all three wore berets. The paintings they carry across stage may be substituted for any of their other works. We just liked those three particular paintings. We also used larger-than-life sculpted headpieces for the “family portrait.” I believe this added to the essence of Noonie’s abstract art.

One aspect that I felt really added to the dimension of the play was our use of “movement specialists,” who worked with the actors during rehearsals. We wanted to have the movement of the artists, in particular, very choreographed. Again, they moved in ways that we felt mimicked their art. Also, when Noonie is painting her “family portrait” the use of choreography really helped the actors and added a quirky, stylized effect.

NOONIE'S MASTERPIECE IN PURPLE

A Play in One Act

For a flexible cast—

usually 4 men and 4 women playing multiple roles.

(Can be played with as few as 8 actors or up to 11)

CHARACTERS

NOONIE NORTON age 10, a brilliant painter

LEONARD NORTON . . her father, a traveling businessman

MS. LILLY Noonie's eclectic art teacher

UNCLE RALPH an unemployed pool player

BEVERLY* a donut-eating baby sitter

AUNT SYLVIA a dental hygienist

JUNIOR age 15, a comic-book terrorist

RENO age 10, Noonie's friend (a boy)

VAN GOGH, O'KEEFE and PICASSO**

*Can be male or female.

**These characters can be played by other actors in the cast but should be played by the same actors consistently. Their costumes can be minimal, i.e., artist coats and berets, for quick entrances.

Approximate running time: 55 minutes

SET

Uncle Ralph and Aunt Sylvia's house can also be done minimally. For their introductions there should be four designated areas of the stage for: 1) Ralph, 2) Sylvia and Junior, 3) Beverly, and 4) the pool hall. Furniture or blocks can be used. Noonie's "room" should be central. It might be a tri-folding flat or canvas with one side plain and the other painted (pre-painted with Noonie's final painting, then simply turned around for efficiency). In our production it had holes or flaps in it large enough for the heads of Reno, Ms. Lilly and Leonard to be seen in the painting (rather like a novelty photo booth at a carnival but with the figures in Noonie's "abstract" style). It is important that these three characters figure prominently in the painting regardless of how it is designed.

Noonie's paintings, including her "masterpiece" and the large painting on the wall, can be painted by a child, or with a child-like style of painting. Also, the family portraits at the school contest—hanging next to Noonie's—would be most effective if painted by kids. Noonie's large painting on the wall is created from using what she finds and collects throughout the play and places in her suitcase. The painting should ultimately reflect this. We *did* use colorful twine, newspaper, sprinkles, a sock, the stone from Dad, the TV dinner, and other items and colors that are important to Noonie's artist mind, and have been collected in her suitcase. Therefore, don't dismiss Noonie's act of ceremoniously placing each item in her suitcase. These actions, although they may take a little extra time, are imperative for the final masterpiece, and for the play as a whole.

NOONIE'S MASTERPIECE IN PURPLE

AT RISE: As the audience arrives, a soft light appears on NOONIE NORTON, painting. Her easel faces away from the audience, and there are paintbrushes and paints beneath it. NOONIE wears a beret and looks a bit raggedy. She puts finishing touches on her painting.

NOONIE. There. I think it's finished. *(To audience, pointing to self.)* This is me. My name is Noonie Norton and I'm a brilliant painter who is still not discovered. *(She turns painting around to show audience. The painting vaguely resembles herself, wild and colorful, although very abstract.)* And this is my first self-portrait. Sometimes it's hard to paint yourself because you can never know exactly what you look like. My art teacher, Ms. Lilly, said my self-portrait was a little... "abstract." My head is on one side and my body is way over here. I told her that people would probably understand it much better in a hundred years. See, most brilliant painters are never discovered until they're dead, so I thought I'd explain my paintings to you while I'm still alive. So there's no possibility of misinterpretation. Because...well...I may be dead tomorrow. Artists die very young. *(She writes a letter in the air with her paintbrush. [With all letters she can simply write the "Dear Dad" and "Love Noonie" for the effect].)* Dear Dad, I'm afraid I'm dying of a fatal

sickness. I think you better come and get me very soon...before it's too late. You said I'd only be here a little while, but that was when I was in kindergarten. Now, I'm in the fourth grade. I painted you a picture of... me...so you wouldn't forget what I looked like. (*Calling.*) Dad!?

(*LEONARD NORTON appears at a distance, wearing a Chinese-style hat. He holds a little painting, and there is a little suitcase at his feet. NOONIE listens.*)

LEONARD. Dear Noonie, Hope you're feeling better. I'm in China now and I'm very busy with business matters. I'm also learning how to use chopsticks. Thanks for the nice picture. Although, how come your face is painted... blue? Wish you were here. Love Dad.

NOONIE (*sighs, to audience*). In a hundred years all the history and art people will want to know everything about me. I'll tell you now so there's no possibility of misinterpretation. My dad said that my mom...

NOONIE & LEONARD. "Flew up to the sky..."

NOONIE. When I was just a little baby. (*LEONARD walks toward NOONIE and sets the suitcase down. NOONIE slowly walks toward him and picks up the suitcase, facing him.*) She left me this little suitcase, which is the one thing I had when my dad sent me to live here, with Aunt Sylvia and Uncle Ralph. *Only until I get a little older.*

(*AUNT SYLVIA and UNCLE RALPH appear at a distance.*)

RALPH & SYLVIA (*tapping toes*). NOONIE NORTON!

You're late for school AGAIN!

NOONIE (*looks at them, at her dad*). He said I'd be...

NOONIE & LEONARD. "Better off."

(*LEONARD sadly walks away from NOONIE.*)

NOONIE (*calling*). Dad?!!

(*UNCLE RALPH and AUNT SYLVIA exit. NOONIE takes small paintings from her suitcase. [LEONARD takes on the positions of NOONIE's paintings below].*)

NOONIE. I've painted about a hundred pictures of him so I wouldn't forget what he looked like. Dad being a busy person (*she throws painting in the air*), Dad in China (*throws painting*), Dad at meetings (*throws painting*), Dad in Kenya (*throws painting*), Dad going away after my mom died... (*Calling.*) Dad?!!

(*LEONARD moves to NOONIE's paintbrush and goes away. NOONIE throws last painting to floor.*)

I'm ... painting ... you ... Dad... (*A big sigh.*) When I'm really really sad I think of beautiful paintings and the people who painted them. Georgia O'Keeffe's *Chicken in Sunrise* ...

(*O'KEEFFE enters with painting, other actors may move with the painting.*)

NOONIE. ... Vincent van Gogh's *Starry Starry Night* ...

(VAN GOGH enters with his painting, actors move.)

NOONIE. ...and Pablo Picasso's *Girl Before a Mirror*.

(PICASSO enters with painting, actors move.)

...and lots of others. The artists have died already, but it doesn't matter, because I *feel* like I *know* them. And I know that someday I'll make beautiful pictures...just... like... them...

(ARTISTS exit. MS. LILLY enters. NOONIE stares off, dreaming. She is now in the hallway of her school.)

MS. LILLY. Noonie...? Noonie... *(No response, louder.)*
Are you all right, Noonie?

NOONIE *(startled)*. Oh... Hello, Ms. Lilly. I was just... thinking.

MS. LILLY. What are you doing out here in the hallway?

NOONIE. I got kicked out of math.

MS. LILLY. Again?

NOONIE. Uh-huh. I forgot to do my homework. My dad thinks I shouldn't waste my time on math. Or school, anymore. He's coming to pick me up any second now. He says I have more important things to—

MS. LILLY. More important things than school?

NOONIE. That's what he thinks.

MS. LILLY. Well, I did want to tell you about an art contest. Here at school. But if your dad—

NOONIE. What kind of art contest?

MS. LILLY. It's about the family. We want students to paint their families.

NOONIE (*looks down*). Oh... (*Pause.*) It has to be of a family?

MS. LILLY. Not just any family, Noonie. YOUR family. Is there something wrong?

NOONIE. No. No, there's nothing wrong.

MS. LILLY. Of course, you'll have to hurry a bit. The deadline is tomorrow.

NOONIE. TOMORROW?!

MS. LILLY. You haven't been in school much lately, or I would've—

NOONIE. I can try, Ms. Lilly... But, really, my dad feels that school is very very silly.

MS. LILLY. I hope your dad knows that you have quite a talent for painting.

NOONIE. I do!? Oh, my dad knows that.

MS. LILLY. What's that you're reading, Noonie?

NOONIE. It's about famous painters. I'm mostly just looking at the pictures.

(PICASSO and VAN GOGH enter behind NOONIE and MS. LILLY. They move in vaudevillian style. VAN GOGH has a pair of extra-large scissors.)

MS. LILLY. Hmmmm... Picasso, and van Gogh—

NOONIE. I like van Gogh.

MS. LILLY. So do I.

NOONIE. But he died when he was very young. After he chopped off his ear.

MS. LILLY. Van Gogh wasn't always a happy man. Even so, he painted quite a bit in his life. *Before* he died.

NOONIE. Are all artists unhappy, Ms. Lilly?

(PICASSO and VAN GOGH look at each other, exit.)

MS. LILLY. Not at all, Noonie. Some are very very happy.
(Looking at watch.) Well... I should get off to my class. I hope your dad comes soon.

NOONIE. Oh... he will.

MS. LILLY. And I hope I see your painting tomorrow, okay?

NOONIE. I'll try.

MS. LILLY. Remember, Noonie, artists have the power to change the world. *(Exits.)*

NOONIE. What kind of power? Ms. Lilly? What kind of—
 MS. LILLY *(voice)*. You really have quite a talent for painting, Noonie.

(Voices are heard from all sides. NOONIE looks around.)

VOICES. Quite a talent... Talent for painting, Noonie. You really have quite a talent... For painting, Noonie...
(Voices continue.)

NOONIE *(calling out)*. Really? Really, Ms. Lilly?! *(To self.)* No one ever told me I was good at something before.

VOICES *(softly, overlap)*. Artists—have the power to change the world! Artists have—the power to—change the world— Artists have—the power to—

NOONIE *(dreamy, to self)*. Maybe someday I can change the world...

(She paints with a brush in the air. O'KEEFFE, PICASSO and VAN GOGH come out in a line behind her,

with brushes. Classical music plays. They paint the air, with NOONIE.)

NOONIE. O'Keeffe and Picasso and van Gogh would understand that I'm a future genius in a child's body—just like Ms. Lilly does. They would understand what it's like to have more important things than math to think about. And...and to not have any friends. Friends aren't important anyway. They would understand everything, 'cause they were probably just... like... me.

(O'KEEFFE, PICASSO, and VAN GOGH look up, with understanding. They exit, music stops. NOONIE writes a letter in the air with her paintbrush.)

Dear Dad, Ms. Lilly says I have quite a talent for painting. For the painting contest at school we have to paint our families. If you don't mind I'm going to paint Uncle Ralph and Aunt Sylvia and Junior and Beverly. They don't like me much, but if I win I think they'll be very happy. Here's a painting of me, so you won't forget. Love Noonie.

(LEONARD appears at a distance, in a safari hat. He holds a little painting, and NOONIE listens.)

LEONARD. Dear Noonie, I'm busy traveling through Africa right now, trying to settle important peace matters. I'm glad you're painting—like your mother used to. Just don't forget about math. Oh, and here's a little stone for you that I found in the desert. *(NOONIE and LEONARD each hold up stone.)* Wish you were here.

LEONARD & NOONIE. "Love Dad." (*LEONARD exits. NOONIE puts the stone in her suitcase.*)

NOONIE. This was the very first painting I made after I got sent to live at Uncle Ralph and Aunt Sylvia's house. It was done in my Blue Period, a long long time ago. Around kindergarten. (*She puts a painting on the easel. There are four stick people on the canvas, with leaves growing from them.*) They couldn't understand why I painted leaves growing from them. I don't think that's such a bad thing. Lots of nice things grow leaves.

(*UNCLE RALPH enters in his pajamas. He mimes swinging a lasso.*)

RALPH. HOW-DEE! Mr. Ralph, the Wrangler, here, roundin' y'all up for a rodeo of good deals.

NOONIE (*points to the uncle stick in the painting*). This is my Uncle Ralph. He doesn't have a job right now, but he's a very good salesman. (*She snaps her suitcase closed. She enters his area cautiously with her suitcase. Stands there. Clears her throat.*) Um... Uncle Ralph? (*Pause.*)

RALPH. No need to saddle up anymore on some ol' Lucy when you can buckle yourself in to a New or Used car! Now, don't dilly-dally. Giddy on in here TODAY!

NOONIE. Uncle Ralph? (*Pause.*)

RALPH. YEE-HA! (*He pulls out mirror, looks into it.*)

NOONIE. UNCLE RALPH?

RALPH. How am I lookin', kid?

NOONIE. Lookin' good, Uncle Ralph.

RALPH. Are ya sure?

NOONIE. Uh-huh.

RALPH. Are ya sure you're sure...

NOONIE. Yes, I'm sure.

RALPH. I think I'm lookin' pretty good myself. (*Into mirror.*) Have I got a DEAL FOR YOU! (*Different persona.*)

Have I got a deal for YOU! (*Different again.*) Have I—

NOONIE. Uncle Ralph?

RALPH. Don't interrupt me, kid.

NOONIE. Aunt Sylvia said I should bring you the newspaper so you can look for a job.

RALPH. Job-Schmob. I have more important things to do. I'm practicing for my commercial.

NOONIE. What commercial?

RALPH. The commercial I'll have when I make it big in the car biz.

NOONIE. I'm going to be a famous painter some day.

RALPH. You? HA! (*Regarding painting on easel.*) A kid in kindergarten could've painted that.

NOONIE. I was in kindergarten. My Blue Period.

RALPH. How's your math going?

NOONIE. Not so good. But—

RALPH. You need math in life. Math'll get you through. Math is like football. You use your brain. Assess the terrain. Calculate the moves.

NOONIE. My art teacher, Ms. Lilly, said I have a talent for painting, and—

RALPH. Did I ever tell you that I was the star of my high school football team?

NOONIE. Yes...

RALPH. I made the winning pass. Threw it fifty yards. We won the gold that year.

NOONIE. I know.

RALPH. Have you considered trying out for the high school football team?

NOONIE. I'm only in the fourth grade.

RALPH. It's never too early, Sport.

NOONIE. But, Ms. Lilly said—

(UNCLE RALPH slicks back his hair with a comb and smiles a big smile.)

RALPH. Have I got a DEAL FOR YOU... Have I—

SYLVIA *(calling)*. Noonie!

(RALPH freezes. NOONIE puts the paper at his feet and takes a section for herself. Returns to painting, opens the suitcase and puts the paper inside. NOONIE points at another stick person.)

NOONIE. This is my Aunt Sylvia.

(Light appears on AUNT SYLVIA. She dons a big hair-do.)

SYLVIA. NOONIE NORTON?!

NOONIE. Aunt Sylvia has the cleanest teeth of anyone I know. *(Tired, calling.)* Coming!

SYLVIA *(calling)*. Did you remember to floss this morning, Noonie?

NOONIE. She's a dental hygienist. *(Big sigh as she snaps her suitcase shut and walks to SYLVIA's area.)*

SYLVIA. Now, open UP. *(NOONIE opens her mouth, "Ahhh." SYLVIA looks in.)* Good Lord, just look at the state of things in there!

NOONIE. I ran out of floss, Aunt Sylvia.

SYLVIA. There is plaque all over the place!