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Dramatic Publishing



A PROMISE IS A PROMISE

by

ROBERT MUNSCH and MICHAEL KUSUGAK

Adapted for the stage by

BARBARA POGGEMILLER

Music by

HOLLY HARRIS

Lyrics by

HOLLY HARRIS

BARBARA POGGEMILLER

ROBERT MUNSCH and MICHAEL KUSUGAK



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BARBARA POGGEMILLER
Music, Musical arrangements by
HOLLY HARRIS
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HOLLY HARRIS, BARBARA POGGEMILLER,
ROBERT MUNSCH and MICHAEL KUSUGAK

Adapted from the book by
ROBERT MUNSCH and MICHAEL KUSUGAK
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A PROMISE IS A PROMISE

A Play in One Act
For Two Men and Two Women and
Four Children from the Audience*

CHARACTERS

ALLASHUA
MOTHER/NARRATOR
FATHER/QALLUPILLUIT
QALLUPILLUIT
BROTHERS and SISTERS (four children from the audience)

TIME: The present.

PLACE: Rankin Inlet-The Hudson Bay. N.W.T.

*The actress playing Mother and Allashua should have ten minutes before the show to "rehearse" the four children playing Allashua's brothers and sisters in their actions. When the children are not in a scene they can watch the show from the bed.

A PROMISE IS A PROMISE was first produced by Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg, January, 1994 with the following company:

Allashua *Tiffany Taylor*
Mother/Actor *Missy Christensen*
Father/Actor *Adam j. Gaudreau*
Qallupilluit *Guy Stewart*

Directed by: *Barbara Poggemiller*
Designed by: *Shawn Kettner*
Original Music by: *Holly Harris*
Stage Manager: *Tamara Mauthe*

AUTHOR'S PRODUCTION NOTES

a) This adaptation is created with a story theatre style of presentation in mind. In this way the characters can narrate their own action or the actions of others. (Example: as the actress playing ALLASHUA begins to run up the long snowy path...she says—ALLASHUA: Allashua began to run up the long snow-covered path that led to her home.) In this way the narration is invested with the emotional energy of the characters, and the environment is being created/described through the actions. Characters' narrative lines will be underlined and their dialogue will not.

b) It is suggested that the actor help to create the music and sound within the production—taped music may also be used to enhance the storytelling. The music will have an essence of traditional Inuit chanting combined with modern Inuit music.

c) The water will be represented by a piece of transparent fabric attached to a hoop and supported by poles. It needs to be large enough for the two actors playing QALLUPILLUTT and ALLASHUA to move inside. When the structure (hoop/fabric) is on the floor it will look like the ice cracks where ALLASHUA fishes.

d) The ice fabric will cover the stage area and surround 3/4s of the water/ice structure. It will come to the edge of the house area. The ice fabric will be neutral enough to become many shapes and images, allowing the actors to suggest the northern environment with the fabric through their movements.

e) The water cloth will be transparent so the action can be seen when actors are behind it.

f) The Qallupilluit will be a combination of puppet and mask to be manipulated by one actor.

g) Four children from the audience will play the brothers and sisters. The actors will guide them in their actions throughout the story. Their tasks will be simple, clearly defined and guided throughout. Their presence will add tremendously to the magic of the story.

PRODUCTION NOTES ON SOUND DESIGN

by Holly Harris

Three types of sound were used for the premiere production of *A PROMISE IS A PROMISE*:

1) Vocal Music—three songs were sung live by the actors: the “Juggling Song,” “Tooth Fairy Song,” and the “Pleading Song.” These were all sung unaccompanied.

a) “Juggling Song” is a traditional Inuit song taught to us by Joyce Ayaruak, whose family had passed it down for several generations. It may be sung as a “round,” several times through as necessary, as Mother juggles bean bags in time with her singing.

b) “Tooth Fairy Song” was sung by Allashua, joined by Mother/Actor and Father/Actor who are manipulating the ice cloth at this point. The song is written in a “call-and-response” style and is based on traditional Inuit storytelling songs where one person sings accompanied by a “chorus” which sings a refrain. “Ai yah hah hai ya” are typical nonsense syllables that are included in many Inuit songs; in this particular song, Mother/Actor and Father/Actor should sing

“hai yah hah” very softly in order to create an echo effect (e.g., bars 5, 9). It should be sung with great joy and playfulness.

c) “Pleading Song” was sung by Mother and Father. It should begin slowly and then build in speed until Mother breaks into “Ya hai, ya hah hai ya ha,” creating as much emotional intensity as possible. The Qallupilluit should overlap his lines over their singing as well to create and build the momentum of the song. He may also mutter lines under his breath (e.g., “A promise is a promise”) as Mother and Father are singing, adding to their distress as they plead for the freedom of their children. This song ends very rhythmically, with the Father providing a strong syncopated rhythm under Mother’s more fluid “Ya hai, ya hah hai ya ha” refrain.

2) Recorded Music and Sound was used almost continuously throughout to create the soundscape of the play. An emphasis was placed on incorporating “natural” sounds of the actors which were then recorded and used extensively in the score. For example, we used: breath sounds, extended vocal technique, singing, cries, and whispers. Many of the sound cues were also layered as need dictated, creating an even richer texture and fluidity. For example, the “Marine Music,” associated with the Qallupilluit, was faded in and played simultaneously with the “Outdoors Loop” with each appearance of the Qallupilluit and then faded out, leaving only the peacefulness of the “Outdoors Loop” cue.

a) “Outdoors Loop” underscored most of the play and was associated with the outdoors environment. We included abrupt level boosts when Allashua taunts the Qallupilluit (e.g.,

“Qallupilluit can’t catch me!”) to represent gusts of wind as well as the frightening response of the Qallupilluit to her teasing.

b) “Marine Music” was the “theme” of the Qallupilluit and was faded up with each of his appearances from the sea ice. It is particularly effective if the level is gradually increased when the Qallupilluit “freezes Allashua with her powers” and pulls her into the water hoop, thereby heightening the suspension of the “trance-like movement.”

c) “Throat Singing” was brought in at level, very loud, at the moment Allashua is pulled into the water hoop and may be thought of as the terrifying amplification of sound heard underwater. It continues throughout this sequence, and was snapped out abruptly when Allashua was thrown out of the water hoop to safety.

d) “Clicks” were recorded from the actors “clicking” their front teeth with their thumbnails. It was used when Allashua “comes to her feet, shaking with cold” after nearly freezing to death in the ocean. It may be used as Allashua “runs” back home, and may continue during the subsequent transition/set change.

e) “Jaw Harp” was brought in at level, very loud, and was used in two places: during the tea-making scene with the children; and during the Qallupilluit’s frenzied chase throughout the audience after realizing he had been tricked by Mother.

3) Live Music and Sound—various percussion instruments were played by the actors during performance to punctuate and underscore the drama of the play. For example, we used wind chimes, finger cymbals, rattles, a rain stick, drums,

wood blocks and bells, which were all incorporated into the action and helped to create a greater intimacy and immediacy to the story. Breath and vocal sounds were also used, and were layered with the recorded music and sound. Some examples of how live sound was used are: the wind chimes were gently struck by Father/Actor when Allashua first ventured outside to create the image of ice crystals; dialogue was punctuated by a drum played by Mother/Actor during the first meeting of Allashua and the Qallupilluit; and Mother/Actor created panting sounds with her breath and shook a string of shells when Allashua “ran” back home, amplifying the emotion of the moment. As much experimentation as possible is encouraged during rehearsal in order to obtain the maximum and best use of this type of sound.

Finally, pre-recorded music was also required for Mother and Father’s dance scene with the Qallupilluit, as well as several voice-overs by the Qallupilluit (e.g., “A promise is a promise,” and “human child, human child”), which may be live or recorded. We used a combination, layering recorded sound with the Qallupilluit’s live voice to create the effect of several haunting cries together. If the voice is pre-recorded, it’s suggested that the sound be digitally processed and altered to create as unworldly, and ideally as female, a voice as possible.

A PROMISE IS A PROMISE

(Action begins with the FOUR ACTORS creating the environment using the ice cloth—movements are stylized, dance-like and playful.)*

An icescape settles into place—MOTHER gathers the CHILDREN and brings them to the area which will be their “home.” MOTHER and CHILDREN push the bed into place.)

MOTHER. Allashua’s mother gathered her children about her and began to sing: *(Actor playing QALLUPILLUIT will move into position under the hoop structure. Sound of snow blowing over ice. ALLASHUA gets her parka and comes to where MOTHER is singing to the children. MOTHER is juggling bean bags as she sings.)*

(“JUGGLING SONG”)

**Kolukpa, kolukpa
Aituninii tuninii tuninii
Aiya luktikuut
Kitudlii Anguuglipigiit
Sokutikut miakutikuut**

(Repeat as necessary.)

* Author’s Note: For the Prairie Theatre production we created a whale, a woman paddling a canoe, a hunter waiting by an ice hole and spearing a seal, an igloo, a dogsled, etc.

ALLASHUA (*putting on her parka*). On the very first nice day of spring, Allashua said, "I'm going to go fishing. I'm going to go fishing in the ocean. I'm going to go fishing in the cracks in the ice." (*ALLASHUA gets her fishing pole ready.*)

MOTHER (*still with CHILDREN around her*). "Ah, ah, don't go fishing on the sea ice. Under the sea ice live Qallupilluit. They grab children who aren't with their parents." (*She gently, playfully "grabs" one of the CHILDREN.*) "Don't go fishing in the ocean. Go fish in a lake."

ALLASHUA. "Right." (*Looking away from MOTHER, to audience.*) "I promise to go fishing in the lake and not in the ocean and a promise is a promise." (*She looks back at MOTHER who gives her a warning look. MOTHER and CHILDREN push bed to side of the stage. CHILDREN sit on bed watching the following scene.*)

(*During this transition from inside to outside we hear the QALLUPILLUIT's music which gradually becomes the sound of snow blowing over ice (can be taped or live sound depending on the nature of the production). As ALLASHUA walks to the ocean and sings, the two actors (MOTHER and FATHER) manipulate the ice cloth to create images of icebergs and blowing snow.*)

ALLASHUA. Allashua set out like she was going to the lake near her house, but when she got to the end of the street she didn't go to the lake. She walked down to the long snowy path that led to the ocean.

MOTHER/ACTOR. At the edge of the ocean were large cracks where the tide broke and jumbled the ice. (*Sound of waves breaking over the ice.*)

ALLASHUA (*looking around for QALLUPILLUIT*). "On TV I have seen Santa Claus, Fairy Godmothers and the Tooth Fairy, but never any Qallupilluit." (*ALLASHUA sings as she journeys to the sea. She is joined by MOTHER/ACTOR and FATHER/ACTOR.*)

(**"TOOTH FAIRY SONG"**)

ALLASHUA	M/ACTOR & F/ACTOR
I have seen Santa Claus on the TV,
Ai yah hah hai ya.	Ai yah hah hai ya, hai yah hah.
I've seen the tooth fairy on the TV,
Ai yah hah hai ya.	Ai yah hah hai ya, hai yah hah.
Ai yah hai ya,
Ai yah hai ya,	Ai yah hai ya,
Ai ya, ai ya.	Hai, yah hah yah.
Dragons and witches and paperbag princesses
All of these things
I have seen on TV,	
Ai yah hah hai ya.	Ai yah hah hai ya, hai yah hah.
(Chorus—repeat twice.)	(Chorus—repeat once.)
But never no never,
I've never seen ever—	
An icy cold scary old
very scary icy cold	
Qallupilluit!
Ai yah hah hai ya.	Ai yah hah hai ya,
(Chorus—repeat twice.)	(Chorus—repeat twice.)
I think my mother is wrong.	

(As she sings, ALLASHUA skips and dances around the cracks in the ice—very dangerous! She slowly approaches the crack in the ice cloth through which the fish will appear. During this scene and the scene with the QALLUPILLUIT, FATHER/ACTOR continues to manipulate the ice cloth and MOTHER/ACTOR creates live sound effects for the scene.)

ALLASHUA. "Qallupilluit have dirty noses!" *(Sound of snow blowing and water breaking. ALLASHUA runs from the crack in the sea ice and waits for a response; then she slowly approaches the crack in the sea ice again.)* "Qallupilluit smell like a dead whale in the summer." *(Sound of snow/water. ALLASHUA runs away again and waits. She looks around then walks right to the crack in the ice cloth and yells.)* "Qallupilluit, Qallupilluit can't catch me!" *(She runs—stops—looks back and decides it's safe to go fishing. ALLASHUA fishes—pulling up fish from the sea ice—she softly sings the "Tooth Fairy Song." As she fishes the snow blowing/water sound gradually become the QALLUPILLUIT's theme music. The QALLUPILLUIT/ACTOR hooks fish on the line from under the water hoop. ALLASHUA yells.)* "I am the best fisherman in the world!" *(She strings the fish she has caught on a "stringer.")*

(QALLUPILLUIT's body begins to appear through the crack in the ice fabric. As QALLUPILLUIT is emerging, the heads of the puppets are talking to each other as they discover—and delight in discovering—ALLASHUA. The "human child" sequence may be expanded to include improvised comments re: the discovery. The Qallupilluit puppets are most effective if they speak "gibberish.")