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Black Beauty

An Autobiography of a Horse

By
JAMES STILL

From the novel by
ANNA SEWELL

Optional music by
ROBERTSON WITMER

Dramatic Publishing Company
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Based upon the book by ANNA SEWELL

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(BLACK BEAUTY)

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In addition, all producers of the play must include the following acknowledgment on the title page of all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and on all advertising and promotional materials:

“First commissioned and produced by Seattle Children’s Theatre.”

For my dad
who has always had horses
and loved horses
and made sure I loved horses too.

And for my first horse—
a gentle buckskin named Lady,
who taught me about patience.
And how to ride.
But mostly about patience.

Also Sugar, Suzie-Q, Lady the Second, Prince, Pete, Pally,
Beauty, Dude, Rusty, Dusty, Domino and Appoggiatura, too.
You're all in this play because you had to be.
It was only a matter of time.

Black Beauty was commissioned and premiered by Seattle Children's Theatre. The play was originally workshopped in May 2017 and received its world premiere on Sept. 26, 2019.

CAST:

BLACK BEAUTY Richard Nguyen Sloniker
GINGER/CAPTAIN/MRS. FOWLERAnnelih GH Hamilton
MERRYLEGS/YORK/MAX/
SKINNER/HOST/JOE Reginald André Jackson
GORDON/REUBEN SMITH/
JERRY BARKER..... Conner Neddersen
MOTHER/MISTRESS/MARY/JUSTICE.....Hana Lass
LITTLE JOE/GRANDCHILD..... Keagan Estes & Nava Ruthfield
CHARLES THE DOGMaeve Bradler & Tia Kwanbock
HENRY/COLT..... Leif Coomer & Andy Gantner
DOLLY/COLT Izzy Rampersad & Kaia Rubin
FLORA/GRANDCHILDVritika Gupta & Mikayla Sanchez
YOUNG GIRL/GRANDCHILD Eloise Peterson & Ariadne Taw

PRODUCTION:

Director Courtney Sale
Scenic Designer Carey Wong
Costume Designer Trevor Bowen
Lightning Designer Connie Yun
ComposerRobertson Witmer
Puppet Designer Annett Mateo
Sound Designer Chris R. Walker
Assistant Director..... Ana María Campoy
Stage ManagerCristine Anne Reynolds
Production Assistant..... Kiera Krieg
Youth Cast SupervisorAmy Jurkiewicz

Black Beauty

CHARACTERS

BLACK BEAUTY: A black horse with a white star on his forehead.

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY

MOTHER: Black Beauty's mother.

MERRYLEGS: A smaller and grumpier horse than Black Beauty.

GINGER: Reddish-colored horse, Black Beauty's friend.

MISTER GORDON: Black Beauty's first owner. Kind older man.

LITTLE JOE: Mister Gordon's grandson. Gentle.

FLORA: Mister Gordon's granddaughter.

CHARLES THE DOG: Black Beauty's friend. Lives with the Mistress.

THE MISTRESS: Black Beauty's second owner. Harsh.

YORK: An old groomsman. Works for the Mistress. Worked with horses his whole life.

REUBEN SMITH: New groomsman for the Mistress. No good.

MAX: Another horse owned by the Mistress.

CAPTAIN: Cab horse, former war horse.

JERRY BARKER: Black Beauty's third owner, a cab driver. Kind.

MRS. FOWLER: A passenger in Jerry's cab.

MARY BARKER: Jerry's wife.

DOLLY BARKER: Jerry's 12-year-old daughter.

HENRY BARKER: Jerry's 8-year-old son.

NICHOLAS SKINNER: Black Beauty's fourth owner. Wicked.

JUSTICE: An old, white horse.

JOE: Little Joe grown up. Black Beauty's fifth owner.

OTHERS: Colts (~5), Children, Stable Worker, People of London (~8), Host, Man, Young Girls (2), Crowd, Little Boy.

PRODUCTION NOTES

CASTING: There is opportunity for expansion through nonspeaking roles such as the full moon, morning sun, smoke and clouds, among others.

MUSIC: Customers are encouraged to create their own music; however, optional music is also available for rent from Dramatic Publishing.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: An author's note describing the writing process and tips for performance can be found in the back of the book.

Black Beauty

PART I

(Full COMPANY of beautiful actors.)

COMPANY *(rhythmically reciting).*

As black as night with one white foot

A star upon my forehead

Make a wish, make two, make three:

My beautiful, beautiful Black Beauty ...

(Soft, deep, velvety darkness ... the head and neck of a horse stretches long over an opening of a stall from inside a dark stable. This horse is black with a white star marking his forehead ... looking at him makes you want to make a wish.

Now he looks out at us ... and us at him.

This is how we first meet BLACK BEAUTY. He is as curious about us as we are about him. This is a relationship we want to have. Now there is music; there has to be music. Nothing stuffy, something surprising. BLACK BEAUTY's mixtape.

Now there is a tiny window in the dark stable and through the window—a single star in the night sky.)

BLACK BEAUTY *(making a wish).*

As black as night with one white foot

A star upon my forehead ...

(Now the tiny window gets bigger, and a gorgeous full moon shimmies and shimmers into view.

BLACK BEAUTY stares up at the full moon, which yawns and stars tumble out of its mouth like jewels trying to find their way home.)

BLACK BEAUTY (*cont'd, urgent*).

*As black as night with one white foot
A star upon my forehead ...*

(BLACK BEAUTY is an audience of his own life. A dream, a memory, a story he tells himself when he can't go to sleep.)

BLACK BEAUTY (*cont'd, more urgent*).

*As black as night with one white foot
A star upon my forehead ...*

(The morning sun rises, playfully bumping the full moon out of the sky. Pink, orange and violet light spills over green and gold rolling meadows. And yes, it is as idyllic as it sounds.

A rooster crows, just like every morning at sunrise. He is necessary and knows it. A rabbit darts under a fence and wrinkles her nose at the warm morning sun before disappearing in tall, dewy grass.

Now a nightingale swoops in and lands on BLACK BEAUTY's head, which becomes her tiny concert stage. The nightingale sings her impromptu song for an audience of every living thing.

Now far, far away, appearing over a hill as small as a dot—YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY. He is coming toward us at a gallop—trying to gallop—his enthusiasm more than making up for his wobbly legs. He's going faster and coming closer!

He tries to come to a sudden stop, but his gangly legs inexplicably get tangled up and he falls split-splat to the ground. He's not moving ... still on the ground ... is he ... breathing? Is he ... hurt? Is he, is he, is he??

Two COLTS trot onto the scene.)

COLT 1 (*calling out*). You win! You win! You win!

COLT 2. Is he ... ?

(No answer.)

COLT 1. Are you ... ??

(And then the unequivocal answer: YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY begins to giggle, which turns into laughter.

The COLTS also begin to laugh as YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY rolls around on the ground, scratching his back, laughing. This is childhood at its purest. Trust me.

MOTHER trots on, amused by her son's latest antics.)

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY. Mama! Watch me! Watch me!
Watch how fast I can run!

See see see see see see seeeeeeeeeeeee!

(YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY scrambles up onto his wobbly legs, and the COLTS join him. They run in a circle around MOTHER. It's a game that never gets old.)

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY & COLTS.

Horsey horsey don't you stop
Let your feet go clippity-clop
Clippity-clop, clippity-clop,
Clippity-clop, clipptty-clop

COLT 1. STOP!!

(They try to stop, but YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY's gangly legs get tangled up, and they all fall to the ground.)

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY (*suddenly serious*).

I run the fast-est!

But when it comes to stopping,

I'm not the best-est.

MOTHER. Best—

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY (*noting the word*). Best.

MOTHER (*amused*). You'll learn.

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY (*demanding*). When??

MOTHER. No time better than now.

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY (*trying out the word*). Now.

MOTHER. Get up, try again,

always try again,

always do your best.

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY (*saying the word again*). Best.

MOTHER. Never give up, Black Beauty. Never. Give. Up.

Always make that part of your story.

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY. Part of my story?

(The COLTS scramble to their feet, one chasing after the other in fun.)

COLTS.

Horsey horsey don't you stop

Let your feet go clippity-clop

Clippity-clop, clippity-clop

Clippity-clop, clippity-clop

(Their voices are replaced by the sound of their feet clippity-clopping, fading away, with MOTHER, in the distance.)

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY & BLACK BEAUTY.

What does that mean? What does that mean?

"Always make that part of my story"?

(Back in the stable under the full moon.

MERRYLEGS' head appears over the top of his stall, which is shorter to accommodate his smaller size. He is energetically dappled—a 19th-century Jackson Pollack painting.)

MERRYLEGS. You're talking in my sleep!

BLACK BEAUTY. I wasn't sleeping.

MERRYLEGS. No *I* was—

You're talking in *MY* sleep,
and you *WOKE* me UP!

(Cynical, mocking.) “Horsey horsey, don't you stop—”

BLACK BEAUTY. Let your feet go clippity-clop!

Clippity-clop! clippity-clop!

That's a game we used to play when I was little,
when I was a colt.

(MERRYLEGS blows air through his lips.)

BLACK BEAUTY *(cont'd)*. What do *YOU* remember—
about being a colt?

MERRYLEGS *(the eternal grump)*. I remember nothing about
that. I was born an old horse, and I will die an old horse.

BLACK BEAUTY. Oh.

MERRYLEGS. I never had time for fun and games.

BLACK BEAUTY. Not even when you were young?

MERRYLEGS. I was never young!

BLACK BEAUTY. Clippity-clop, clippity-clop—

MERRYLEGS. Stop stop stop!

BLACK BEAUTY. Can I ask you a question?

MERRYLEGS. No!

BLACK BEAUTY. What was your mother like?

MERRYLEGS. I said no questions!

(GINGER sleepily stretches her long, beautiful neck over a third stall ... clearly unhappy to be awake.)

GINGER. Why all this TALK TALK TALK
in the middle of the night??

MERRYLEGS. That's another question question question!!

BLACK BEAUTY. Hello.

GINGER. "Hello??" "Hello??"

Have you confused the moon for the sun?
I don't know where you came from, but here:
we sleep at night! Talk no more and eyes closed tight!
Good night! Good night! Good night!

(GINGER disappears back into her stall.)

MERRYLEGS. Psssst. Better be careful with that one.

They call her Ginger.

(In the know.) But her full name is ...

"Ginger Snaps."

BLACK BEAUTY. Ginger Snaps?

MERRYLEGS. She's been known to bite.

(GINGER suddenly reappears again, her long neck stretching over the stall, ears flattened in anger.)

GINGER. What did you call me??

BLACK BEAUTY. What was *your* mother like?

GINGER *(thrown off by the tenderness)*. My mother?

Why are you asking me that?

I—I don't remember.

BLACK BEAUTY. You don't remember your mother?

GINGER (*defensive*). I'm not as young as you, and I'm not as foolish! And I don't have TIME to think about such things.

BLACK BEAUTY. No one has time here.

My mother is beautiful. And kind.
Mama's name is Duchess,
and her breath always smells like clover.
She lives on the farm where I grew up.
This morning we said,
"Goodbye."

(*BLACK BEAUTY'S MOTHER appears in the shadows.*)

MOTHER. "Goodbye."

BLACK BEAUTY. This is my first night away from her.

(*MOTHER teaching YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY the incantation.*)

MOTHER. Know your story, Black Beauty.

Know who you are.
Know that YOU are a beautiful horse:
Black as night with one white foot
A star upon your forehead ...

BLACK BEAUTY & MOTHER.

Make a wish, make two, make three.

MOTHER.

My beautiful, beautiful Black Beauty.

GINGER. I never knew a horse who spent so much time
WISHING and THINKING.

BLACK BEAUTY. Not just thinking.

Dreaming!
Remembering!
Remembering myself as a colt.
Remembering where I came from.
Why should horses have no pasts?

GINGER. I don't know.

Maybe ... because—

(*Genuine.*) I don't know.

MERRYLEGS. Maybe because we have to grow up.

Quickly.

GINGER.

MERRYLEGS.

And then our owners
sell us to NEW owners—

Goodbye and hello,

who then sell us to new
owners—

and goodbye and hello,

who then sell us to new
owners—

and goodbye and—

BLACK BEAUTY. Hello. My name is Black Beauty.

Clippity-clop, clippity-clop ...

And I want to remember where I come from!

I want to remember what happens,

and what happens after what happens, and after that too.

I want to remember EVERYTHING.

I want to remember YOU and YOU.

I want to know my story.

GINGER. Your story?

BLACK BEAUTY. I have a story. MY story:

"The True Life Story of a Horse Named Black Beauty."

MERRYLEGS. You aren't old enough to have a life story!

You haven't even had a life.

BLACK BEAUTY (*bringing MERRYLEGS along*).

"The True Life Story of a Horse Named ... "

MERRYLEGS. Merrylegs.

BLACK BEAUTY. *"The True Life Story of a Horse Named Merrylegs."*

(This seems to work some strange magic.)

MERRYLEGS. *“The True Life Story of a Horse Named Merrylegs ...”*

BLACK BEAUTY. *“The True Life Story of a Horse Named Ginger Snaps.”*

GINGER. Just Ginger.

BLACK BEAUTY. *“The True Life Story of a Horse Named Just Ginger.”*

(The three horses all look out at us—and for a moment, we are their dreams, we are their stories.

But then MERRYLEGS’ common sense wins out and abruptly breaks the spell.)

MERRYLEGS. I’ve known many a horse—
but never a horse,
never ever a horse
like YOU.

BLACK BEAUTY *(sincere)*. Thank you.

GINGER. Wasn’t a compliment.

BLACK BEAUTY. I know you’re going to like me,
and YOU will too.
Admit it.

MERRYLEGS. I admit nothing of the kind.

(Sly.) Even if it’s true.

Now I have a story for YOU—a very TRUE story:
Tomorrow we have to WORK.

And I need my sleep.

The grandchildren will be wanting to ride me all day long,
tying silly ribbons in my mane and braiding my tail and
calling me “*Pet*” and “*Pal*” and “*PONY*.”

They'll be climbing all over me, expecting me to do
whatever they wish,
whenever they wish,
treating me like some modern machine who never gets tired.
I hate children.

BLACK BEAUTY. I don't believe you, Merrylegs.

MERRYLEGS. I hate children!

(What a relief to finally say it!)

BLACK BEAUTY. You love children.

MERRYLEGS. Good night, Black Beauty.

(MERRYLEGS disappears inside his stall.)

GINGER. He really does hate children.

(GINGER disappears inside her stall.)

BLACK BEAUTY looks up at the full moon and starts dreaming again.

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY appears as a black dot coming over a hill in the distance as in the opening. As BLACK BEAUTY recites, YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY is continuously coming closer and going faster.)

BLACK BEAUTY.

As black as night with one white foot

A star upon my forehead ...

Clippity-clop, clippity-clop

Clippity—

MERRYLEGS & GINGER *(offstage)*. Stop stop stop!

(YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY tries to stop, but his legs get tangled again. He falls in a heap but gets right back up.)

YOUNG BLACK BEAUTY. Never give up!

(Shift. BLACK BEAUTY enters alongside GINGER pulling a carriage that is driven by MISTER GORDON.

Now it's weeks later, and BLACK BEAUTY wants to go faster.)

MISTER GORDON. Steady there, Black Beauty, steady now ... as soon as we're out on the open road, we'll run that tickle right out of your feet.

(BLACK BEAUTY and GINGER continue pulling the carriage.)

BLACK BEAUTY *(to GINGER, nonstop)*.

Where did you live before you lived here?

And how long have you been with Mister Gordon?

Do you like your life here, Ginger?

GINGER. You and your questions.

BLACK BEAUTY. Do you?

GINGER. Well Mister Gordon is fine, and the stable is clean, and there's always plenty of food.

What more could I want?

BLACK BEAUTY. What more? Liberty!

GINGER. Liberty?

BLACK BEAUTY. Freedom!

It's week after week after month after month,

and still we're standing in a stable

night and day and day and night

waiting waiting waiting

"for when they might finally want us??"

GINGER. Yes. And that is

"The True Life Story of Every Horse Who Ever Lived."

BLACK BEAUTY. Straps here and straps there, a bit in my mouth, and blinkers over my eyes.