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Dramatic Publishing



SEEK

By
PAUL FLEISCHMAN



Dramatic Publishing
Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(SEEK)

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Seek is a play for voices, performed by speakers playing multiple parts. Since radio figures prominently in the story, the play can be staged as a live radio broadcast, with speakers gathered around microphones on a set suggesting a radio studio. More simply, the speakers could approach podiums or lit areas to speak, with touches from Rob's world sprinkled about the stage: A shortwave radio, world map, an accordion, a Giants cap. The set could also recreate Rob's building, with his grandparents on one side and he and his mother on the other, perhaps at different heights. Having fewer speaking areas than speakers provides movement, as actors approach and retreat. For a less static look, the whole stage could be a speaking area, with the actors using it unpredictably, forming scene groupings that then dissolve, perhaps recreating the circular Whispering Gallery at the opening and closing. Lighting can be used to highlight speakers, moving the audience's focus around the stage.

To help the audience keep track of who's talking, the roles of Rob, Boy Rob, and Rob's mother should be read by actors playing no other roles. The other parts can be handled by a cast as large or small as the director sees fit. Though speakers could memorize their lines, they needn't, especially if the play is presented as a radio broadcast. Audiences have quickly accepted the sight of actors reading off the page, and have seemed not to miss costumes, set changes, and physical action.

The intermission can be omitted and the play performed straight through if desired.

SEEK

A Play in Two Acts

For a minimum of 4m., 4w.

May be expanded to as many as 18m., 17w.

CHARACTERS

Males

Rob, 17
Rob's Grandfather
Male Radio Announcer
Mr. McCarthy
Lenny, 22
Boy Rob, ages 8-12
Audiobook Reader
1st Baseball Announcer
2nd Baseball Announcer
Nick
Male Caller, 40
Ray, 40
Zad
Coach
Male Student
Dean
Male Writer
Andy

Females

Rob's Mother, 45
Rob's Grandmother
Exercise Video Host
Aunt June
Spanish TV Actress
Aunt Jessica
Mrs. Kathos, 60
Teacher
Female Radio Announcer
Female Caller
English Teacher
Female Student
Mrs. Druckenmuller, 60
Female Writer
Penelope
Neva
Old Woman

SEEK was given its premiere September 14, 2001, as a radio broadcast before a live audience at the Santa Rosa Central Library in Santa Rosa, Calif., simultaneously broadcast on station KRCB. The performance was produced by Cathy Signorelli, Robin Pressman and Bruce Robinson. It was directed by Walter M. Mayes, with sound design by Ted Crimy. The cast was:

Rob	Steve Rexrode
Boy Rob	Anthony Mayes
Rob's Mother	Corisa Aaronson
Rob's Grandmother	Joan Coleman
Rob's Grandfather	Basil Coleman
Aunt June, Mrs. Druckenmuller	Susan Rexrode
Aunt Jessica, English Teacher	Victoria Brown
Lenny	Tom Viers
Mr. McCarthy, Mrs. Kathos, Ray, Coach, Dean, Andy	Kernan Coleman
Zad, Nick, Male Writer, Teacher	Bruce Edelstein
Penelope	Abigail Heidbreder
Neva	Taylor Anderson-Stevenson
Radio Voices	Kernan Coleman, Abigail Heidbreder, Walter M. Mayes, Corisa Aaronson, Victoria Brown

ACT ONE

(We hear a recording of swamp sounds: frogs croaking, birds calling, water rippling gently. It has a night feel, soothing and mysterious. We hear a different portion of it each time it recurs. It fades out after ten seconds.)

ROB. Remember, Mom, when we went to London?

ROB'S MOTHER. Sure.

ROB. The day we went to St. Paul's Cathedral?

ROB'S MOTHER. Of course I do, Rob.

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER *(reading)*. "The elevator operator was a skinny redhead with more lipstick than lips. 'Well, Mr. Brindle,' she said. 'You're an early bird this morning.' He stubbed out his cigarette. 'I've got a date with a worm.'"

ROB. Remember climbing all those stairs to get up to the dome?

ROB'S MOTHER. Hundreds of them. *Thousands* of them.

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. Boys your age, Robbie, working in the coal mines. Nine-year-old girls in the textile mills.

ROB. And remember, there was a walkway around the inside of the dome?

ROB'S MOTHER. Sure I remember. The Whispering Gallery.

AUNT JUNE (*reading*). “Slate-black except for white belly and outer tail feathers. Catches insects on wing, hunting from perch. Voice: a thin, strident *FEE-bee*.”

MALE RADIO ANNOUNCER. This is HCJB, the voice of the Andes, broadcasting from Quito, Ecuador—

ROB. Remember how voices moved around the dome, so you could hear what someone was saying way across on the other side?

ROB’S MOTHER. And then that whole class of school kids came up, all talking at once.

SPANISH TV ACTRESS. *Te juro, mi vida. ¡Te amo! ¡Con todo mi corazón, te amo!*

ROB. That’s what it’s like in my head. Exactly. Voices bouncing everywhere.

MR. McCARTHY (*reading*). “—will serve as your senior thesis in English. Like the autobiographies we’ve read this year, yours should probe the themes in your life, analyzing signal events and charting the influences of family, community, and your historical era on your development. All information will be treated as strictly confidential. On the brink of your departure from high school, this is a chance for you to look back and use both your literary and critical thinking skills—”

ROB. Ever since McCarthy gave us the assignment.

MALE RADIO ANNOUNCER. Two on, two out. The Giants really need a hit here.

ROB. Except instead of looking back, it’s like I keep...listening back.

(Here, as later, the swamp sounds come up, playing before, during and briefly after the excerpt from LENNY’s tape.)

LENNY. It's eleven o'clock at Oldies-93. Another Tuesday night, I'm Lenny Guidry, and it's request time. A little show we call the "The Ghost Raising." Most appropriate at this Halloween time. You know what trick-or-treating's really about? Making the dead one's favorite foods. That's what brings 'em back home. Down in Mexico, at Day of the Dead, they bring the meal right there to the cemetery. For my old ones, I always make gumbo. That's why I was driving all over the whole Bay Area yesterday looking for okra. Put another hundred miles on Anne-Marie, who's already got three hundred thousand on her and arthritis in both axles, but you just can't make gumbo without okra. What do you do if it's not Halloween and you got somebody you want to bring back? You call me up right here and leave a message about what you want to hear. 'Cause music works as good as food. Brings back the old times and the old folks. Makes your wallpaper change right there on the wall to what you had when you were a baby, or maybe to when you and your sweetie first met. So let's turn back the clock and raise a few ghosts. Maestro, the message machine.

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. So the longshoremen decided to go on strike. They stopped loading and unloading ships and they blocked the docks with picket lines. You know about the Fourth of July. But did they teach you in school about the *fifth* of July, Robbie?

ROB (*reading*). "Autobiography of Robert A. Radkovitz. By Robert A. Radkovitz... Part One... Chapter One... Preface... I grew up in a house built of voices."

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. The fifth of July is famous in San Francisco. It's called "Bloody Thursday," because that's when the big businessmen—

BOY ROB. Are they the bad guys?

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. Right. Very bad. So bad that they paid for scabs to drive trucks right into the line of strikers, right down there at Pier 38.

BOY ROB. I have a scab. On my elbow. Look.

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. Grandpa sees. But this kind of scab is different. It's a man who doesn't belong to a union. Grandpa sees. Remember unions? They're like a team. Grandpa sees, Robbie. Put your arm down now.

ROB (*reading*). "Neither of my grandparents could be described as sugar-sweet or marooned in easy chairs. My grandfather was and is a history professor at U.C. Berkeley, specializing in labor history. He may be the very first to attempt teaching it to a six-year-old."

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER (*reading*). "'And Lady Emma, it may interest you to know, has not been taking painting lessons in London, but rather has been visiting a doctor tucked well out of view in Lambeth.' 'Good God! Abortion?' 'Worse,' Marston replied. 'Syphilis.'"

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. Doris—the kid's only in kindergarten!

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER. Yes, dear, I know. But he so loves being read to.

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. He loves it? He's *asleep*!

BOY ROB. No I'm not.

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER. You see.

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. Well, he oughta be. How's he supposed to keep the barristers separate from the solicitors, or understand why the rector's blackmailing the vicar? They don't get to blackmail till sixth grade.

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER. The sense is for me. The *sound* of the language is what he's getting.

ROB (*reading*). “Books are something I hear, courtesy of my grandmother. She’s a vocal quick-change artist: narrator, chimney-sweep, murderer, maid. Mysteries are her dessert. She reads constantly, and did so for a living: proofreader, newspaper copyeditor, then editor at publishing houses. I’ve seen her read the dictionary for an hour. When I opened it to look up a word, it was my grandmother’s voice I always heard in my head.”

ROB’S GRANDMOTHER (*reading*). “Pubis: That part of either innominate bone that, with the corresponding part of the other, forms the front of the pelvis.”

ROB (*reading*). “Even if I didn’t want to.”

ROB’S MOTHER. Good night, angel.

BOY ROB. No—in French.

ROB’S MOTHER. *Bonne nuit, mon ange.*

ROB (*reading*). “My mother teaches high-school Spanish and French and also speaks Italian and some German.”

BOY ROB. Now say “sweet dreams.”

ROB’S MOTHER. *Fais de beaux rêves.*

BOY ROB. How do you *do* that?

ROB (*reading*). “When we go to the opera, she doesn’t need to read the translation. She writes poetry and has kept a journal for more than twenty years. She belongs to a writer’s group that meets once a month at our—”

SPANISH TV ACTRESS. *Canalla! Déjame! Este momento!*

ROB (*reading*). “I used to love the Spanish soap operas she watched to keep up with the language.”

BOY ROB. Why’s she so mad at him?

ROB’S MOTHER. Well, he married two different women at the same time. This one, and that one in the very tight dress.

BOY ROB. He forgot?

SPANISH TV ACTRESS. *Que los testículos se te asen en el infierno! Y que las cabras orinen sobre tu tumba!*

BOY ROB. What did she just say?

ROB'S MOTHER. That she hoped his testicles will roast in Hell and that goats will pee on his grave.

ROB (*reading*). "I learned more from them than from health class, psychology class, and the dictionary combined."

MALE RADIO ANNOUNCER. —from Kenosha, Wisconsin, has sent a question she hopes will stump our Opera Quiz panel. "Lohengrin," she writes, "makes his famous entrance in a boat pulled by a swan. But large freshwater birds have played a part in a number of other operas. Listen to the following—"

ROB (*reading*). "Not having siblings, I was raised among adults and treated as one. It's as if they couldn't wait for me to catch up to them—to history and opera and politics and Lord Peter Whimsey—and so they didn't."

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER. And frankly, dear, I'd much rather he be exposed to the prose style of Agatha Christie than Karl Marx. Marx really had no ear for dialogue.

ROB (*reading*). "My grandparents' house is a Victorian on Potrero Hill. It was divided vertically into a duplex before they bought it. My mother and I moved into the right side when I was a baby and she needed a place. Since my grandparents helped take care of me when I was little, we put in a connecting door on the second floor for convenience. My mother preferred it closed for privacy, but I liked all the different voices coming from—"

MALE RADIO ANNOUNCER. Coming up on KPFA, "Delano Diary," a radio portrait of the United Farm Workers' historic grape boycott and a look at its long-term—

EXERCISE VIDEO VOICE. Keep it going, keep it going, this is gonna tone your quads *and* your glutes, so you're really killing two flabs with one—

AUDIOBOOK READER. It was half past five before Holmes returned. He was bright, eager, and in excellent spirits.

SPANISH TV ACTRESS. *Maléfico! No me digas mas!*

ROB'S GRANDFATHER (*reading*). "This patently asinine view of free trade, so beloved by the well-heeled dim-wits who bankroll your dismal newspaper—"

ROB (*reading*). "—the Saturday opera on the radio, my grandfather reading his never-published letters to the editor, the writer's group reading poems and stories, the Giants games I listened to in the evenings—"

1st BASEBALL ANNOUNCER. I mean a *huge* gap between first and second. If Butler could manage to poke one through, and Thompson and Clark could somehow get on—

2nd BASEBALL ANNOUNCER. —that would bring the tying run to the plate.

ROB. "—the announcers openly rooting for the home team, concocting improbable comebacks, willing balls to stay fair or go foul."

1st BASEBALL ANNOUNCER. A lazy fly to center. GOO-tee-air-ez under it—

ROB'S MOTHER. *Goo-TYER-ez!*

ROB (*reading*). "—and mercilessly mangling the Spanish names."

1st BASEBALL ANNOUNCER. He squeezes it for out number two. That brings JIM-a-nez to the plate.

ROB'S MOTHER. *Hi-MAY-nez!* Can you believe that? I swear I'm going to write a letter to the team.

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. A letter? Good luck, Rose!
Here's a stamp. Be my guest!

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER (*reading*). "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness."

AUNT JUNE. "Two white wing-bars, partial eye-ring."
Robbie—that's it. A Hutton's vireo!

ROB (*reading*). "My two wonderful aunts were there a lot, my mother's sisters, neither of them with kids of their own: June, the biologist who took me birdwatching, and Jessica, a teacher who knew boys love big trucks and who drove me on Saturdays to construction sites."

AUNT JESSICA. Look—a grader!

BOY ROB. Wow!

AUNT JESSICA. Man, it's huge! Check out that blade. We are *so lucky*!

ROB'S GRANDMOTHER (*reading*). "It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness."

ROB (*reading*). "Next door there were our old Greek neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Kathos, who treated me like their own grandchild and overpaid me for the simplest chore with square after square of sweet baklava."

MRS. KATHOS. That's enough sweeping, Robbie. You sit now and eat.

ROB'S GRANDFATHER. Let me get this straight. They're paying you with *pastry*? What the hell kind of wage is that?

MR. MCCARTHY (*reading*). "You may wish to interview relatives or other significant figures in your life. Like autobiographers before you, you can draw upon letters, journals, diaries, memorabilia—"

ROB (*reading*). “Everybody wanted me. I was respected and courted and adored.”

ROB’S MOTHER, GRANDPARENTS, AUNTS (*singing*).

Happy Birthday to you,

Happy Birthday to you—

ROB (*reading*). “I was also dissatisfied. No matter how loudly they sang, I knew there was a voice missing from the chorus. My father’s voice.”

ROB’S GRANDMOTHER (*reading*). “It was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us—”

ROB (*reading*). “Somehow, that missing voice seemed to outweigh all those that were present. By the time I was seven or eight, I’d made up my mind. I would find him.”

ROB’S GRANDMOTHER. Now make a wish.

ROB’S GRANDFATHER. Think about it.

AUNT JESSICA. Take your time.

AUNT JUNE. That was fast. The kid knows what he wants.

ROB’S GRANDPARENTS. And look at him blow!

(We hear the swamp sounds before, during and after LENNY’s excerpt.)

LENNY. The Beatles doing “Yesterday” for another satisfied customer here on “The Ghost Raising.” Lenny here with you till one a.m. Next up, risking excommunication from the AM airwaves for playing anything longer than three minutes—but also knowing the station manager never listens to the show—by request from a seriously homesick Russian cabdriver, we’re gonna hear the entire first movement of the Tchaikovsky Fifth Symphony—

ROB (*reading*). "I'm a night person. I was formerly a night boy, and before that a night baby. I was born at night—three twenty-two a.m. Night's my hometown, the place I'm comfortable. The sun is so bright it hides. The constellations are always there above us, but can only be seen after dark. Day-submerged sounds come out with the stars: crickets in the grass, a piano half a block away, the car-trailing-tin-cans clatter of a river heard from a cabin. Moths, the night's butterflies, emerge, pollinating the night-blooming flowers. And most important: radio waves travel farther at night."

ROB'S MOTHER. We were so incredibly young, both of us. I was young, and Lenny was younger. Remember "The Jumblies," the Edward Lear poem? When you were little, you could recite the whole—

BOY ROB. "They went to sea in a Sieve, they did,
In a Sieve they went to sea."

BOY ROB AND ROB.

"In spite of all their friends could say,
On a winter's morn, on a stormy day—"

ROB'S MOTHER. I'd hear those first words, and I'd think:
That was us.

ROB. How old were you when you met?

ROB'S MOTHER. I was twenty-five, just finishing my teaching credential. He was twenty-two. He'd worked at music stores and radio stations, playing accordion for dances. Then he decided to see the world outside Louisiana. He had a red Volvo station wagon. He drove all over the country for six months, pulled into Berkeley, liked the feel, and stayed. I've told you all this, in slightly different words.

BOY ROB. Did he go to college with you?