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*Dramatic Publishing*



# **THE DANCING SPIDER**

**A One-Act Musical Play**

**by**  
**MARILYN OSTERMAN**  
**and**  
**MARILYN KLUGE**

**Based on West African Folk Tales**

**Music in Orff settings**



**Dramatic Publishing**

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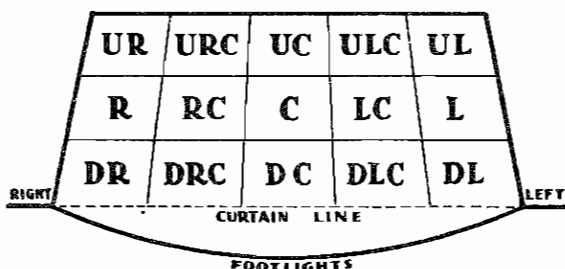
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### CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



### STAGE POSITIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, downstage means toward the footlights, and right and left are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means right, L means left, U means up, D means down, C means center, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: UR for up right, RC for right center, DLC for down left center, etc. A territory designated on the stage refers to a general area, rather than to a given point.

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**NOTE:** Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the Chart of Stage Positions. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

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THE DANCING SPIDER  
A One-Act Musical  
For Fifteen Characters\*

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C H A R A C T E R S

ANANSE . . . . . a spider  
ASO . . . . . his wife  
MAMADI . . . . . his son  
OSANSI . . . . . his son  
CROOKY . . . . . his daughter  
KAMWENDE . . . . . his daughter  
BIAFU . . . . . his mother-in-law

TORTOISE

RABBIT

BIRD

BUTTERFLY

LEOPARD

LION

SPOTTED BIRD

ANTS (may vary from three to eight)

VOICES (may vary from three to eight and may  
also be doubled)

DANCING BUTTERFLIES (optional)

STORYTELLER

PLACE: A West African jungle

TIME: Long ago

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## PRODUCTION NOTES

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This play can be presented in a variety of ways to suit the group of children presenting it and the room or auditorium in which it is presented. Almost all parts can be played by either girls or boys. If few children are available, the voices can easily be doubled with the small animals. (The children can wear robes over their animal costumes for the voices.) The parts for voices and for ants should be divided according to the number of children available. If there are many children, a chorus adds dimension to the play, but is not necessary. The chorus, if used, should be in sight of the audience, either in front of the stage or on either side of the stage, depending on the shape of the room and the height of the stage. It is also effective to have all characters join the chorus when not on stage, making entrances and exits from their chorus position.

If many children are involved, a large group can be in the opening dance. This can be a simple affair, done in a circle using recorded music or a drum. Several children may also join in the "Chase" dance as dancing butterflies. This dance is mainly character pantomime, showing Lion and Leopard chasing all the little animals.

If enough children have strong solo voices, the play is most effective produced as written. Some children can "talk" a song to music most effectively. If the children's voices are weak, or they prefer not to sing alone, there are several alternatives:

Opening Song. Either all voices can sing together or entire chorus can sing entire song.

It's the Easy Life For Me and It's A Sorry Life For Me. Half of the chorus can sing Ananse's or

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other solo parts, while one-fourth sings "High Voices" and one-fourth sings "Low Voices."

Corn Planting Song. Ananse's part can be sung by half of the chorus while Ananse pantomimes. The family will be joined by the other half of the chorus.

The Hat Shaking Dance. Solo parts can be sung by half of the chorus, the responses by the other half.

Little Creatures Can Do Big Things. Chorus can sing all parts.

Leoard's Hunger Ditty. Chorus can sing while Leopard pantomimes.

Scared Song. Chorus can sing while Ananse pantomimes.

I'm the King of the Jungle. Chorus can sing while Lion pantomimes. In the reprise at the end of the play, the chorus can sing the entire song but will sing the first or Lion's version.

NOTE: If there are no extra children for a chorus, all children not on stage can join in a chorus.

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## NOTES ON SET

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The stage looks like a West African jungle. Greenery can be painted on flats or made of cardboard paper. Real plants add interest. There are three trees on stage -- one DL, DR and RC. The RC tree must be rigid enough so Lion can be tied to it. Ananse's banana leaf house is LC. It can be made from a large packing crate or box. If it is rigid, Ananse can stand on top of it. If it is not rigid, a platform or stepladder must be placed behind it so it gives the effect of Ananse standing on top of the house. It can be covered with yellow pieces of paper to make it look like yellow, dried banana leaves. On top of the house is a huge spider web. Another web is between the house and the tree DL. It must be big and strong enough so that Leopard can be caught in it. An effective web can be made by tying strings in a circular design and tying them to the ceiling. In front of the house is a grate, a pile of logs, or something to look like a cooking fire. Beside the fire is a flat pan which Ananse uses when he pretends to cook fish. Beside the house is a large bag (Ananse's bag of tricks). Inside the bag is a long green rope (the vine). The rope must be long enough to circle around Ananse's waist three times and extend to either side of the stage. In front of the tree DR or in front of the curtain DR there is a stump or a stool where the Storyteller sits.

### PERSONAL PROPERTIES

Biafu: A pot of beans and a sack of seed.

Ananse: A fishing rod and dish.



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## NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

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**ANANSE:** Ananse, the Spider, is portrayed as a lovable character in spite of his short-sightedness and selfishness. He is dressed entirely in black with long sleeves and tights. He wears a tightly fitted black cap which covers his hair and ears. The middle part of his costume is very large. On the outside are two pairs of legs which are attached with string or fish line to the child's arms. They then stand out, giving the effect of an eight-legged spider. Ananse is made to appear very fat by taping several inflated plastic food storage bags inside the middle of his costume. When he loses his waist, the bags can be punctured with a pin or needle which Ananse has concealed in his costume. As he pretends to writhe in discomfort, he pushes the air out of the bags. They will deflate slowly and easily in about thirty seconds. A sash, which is already attached to the costume, can then be tied, giving the effect of a very small waist. Ananse also wears a wig over his cap. The wig can easily be removed when he scalds his hair. He has a hat which he wears in this scene.

**SPIDER FAMILY.** Aso is a helpful but skeptical wife. Mamadi, Osansi, Crooky and Kamwende are fun-loving, adventuresome children. Biafu is a very determined, hard-driving person who says what she thinks. All the family are dressed identically to Ananse except they have small waists from the beginning. They wear tightly fitted cummerbunds with two pairs of legs attached with fish line to their arms. They also have black tops and tights and tightly fitted caps. They do not need wigs, but the women and children may wear gayly colored scarves on their heads.

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RABBIT: Rabbit is a quick moving, lively creature. He is dressed in a costume of brown fur cloth, or he can wear a brown top with long sleeves and brown tights. He has jaunty brown ears and a tail.

TORTOISE: Tortoise is slow moving and slow of speech. He wears a green top with long sleeves and green tights. His shell can be made from painted egg cartons, cardboard or papier mache.

BIRD: Bird's top and tights can be of almost any color with wings to match. The wings are attached from the arms to the body. As bird moves, his wings are constantly flapping or out-stretched as if soaring.

SPOTTED BIRD: Spotted bird is dressed much the same as Bird, except there should be large, brown spots on his top and wings.

BUTTERFLY: Butterfly wears a dark top and tights. Her wings are much larger than Bird's and much more colorful. (The additional butterflies for the dance should have costumes alike but of varied colors.)

LEOPARD: Leopard is a menacing character, who uses large movements. He wears a costume of fake leopard fur, or he can wear a tan top and tights covered with spots. He has ears and a tail.

LION: Lion is a menacing character who uses large movements also. He wears a costume of fake fur or he can wear a tan top and tights. He has a shaggy mane around his head, ears and a tail.

ANTS: Ants use very small movements throughout. They wear brown tops and tights. They each have a cummerbund around their waists with one pair of legs. This simulates a six-legged insect. They also have tightly fitted caps with two feelers.

VOICES: These children can be dressed very

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simply in robes made from tie-dyed sheets.

STORYTELLER: The Storyteller has flowing robes which touch the floor. These may also be tie-dyed sheets.

CHORUS (optional): These children may be in robes of tie-dyed sheets or it may be effective to simply have them all dressed alike in something like blue jeans and white tee shirts.

## THE DANCING SPIDER

SCENE: The auditorium is dark. We hear a fast drum beat as the curtain opens.)

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: A dim light shows children dressed in gay, flowing robes. The children form a circle and dance to African music or a drum beat. At the end of the dance a voice is heard shouting.)

VOICE. Let's call the storyteller! (The STORYTELLER walks over to a stump or a stool DR. Several children, who are the voices, follow him and form a circle around him. The other dancers go off L.)

VOICE. Let's sit by the storyteller!

VOICE. He always has good things to tell.

VOICE. Tell us a story.

STORYTELLER (calmly arranging his robes; beginning to speak in a slow, deliberate voice). All right, but all of you . . . (Indicating audience.) . . . will have to use your imaginations. You'll have to pretend you live in a West African village.

VOICE. We will.

STORYTELLER. Your little round houses are empty now because everyone has gathered here in the clearing. Everyone is ready to hear a story which has been passed down from grandfather to father to son. (Very slowly.) This is a magic time of day.

VOICE. What story are you going to tell us?

STORYTELLER. My story is about the most favorite character in all of West Africa.

VOICE. A story about Spider?

VOICE. Ananse, the Spider?

STORYTELLER. You guessed it. Spider is everyone's favorite. But what do you like about him so much?

VOICE. He's like me when I eat all the time.

VOICE. He reminds me of when I'm naughty.

VOICE. I like being lazy like him.

STORYTELLER. Yes, he is all of those things. Which is what makes him so much fun. (The STORYTELLER and the children sing the opening song. The STORYTELLER may sing a verse alone. A child or two may sing a verse alone, or all may sing together. The optional chorus may be used.)

### OPENING SONG

STORYTELLER.

My. Spider, he's fancy free,  
And as full of tricks as can be;  
Others do his work, so you see,

(Children point to the audience and to themselves.)

VOICES.

Sometimes he's just like you and me.

VOICES.

It's the easy life he'll pursue,  
And the deeds he does are so few,  
Many hours of work he never knew:  
(Children point to themselves and audience.)  
Sometimes he's just like me and you.

Mr. Spider does love to eat  
Vegetables and fruits, roasted meat:  
But it's other's food he'll deplete:  
Sometimes we think he's quite a cheat.

He forgets to be courteous,  
And for gourmet food makes a fuss  
And some folks say he's humorous,  
Sometimes we think he's just like us.

And sometimes we can't comprehend,  
For he'll do good deeds, then offend:  
Of both good and bad, he's a blend,  
But Spider really is our friend.

STORYTELLER. And that's why we love Spider.  
But, you know, all creatures change. Even  
Spider.

VOICE. You mean, he isn't always naughty?

STORYTELLER. Not any more than you're always  
naughty.

VOICE. And he isn't always lazy?

STORYTELLER. Well, I guess he still likes to be  
lazy some of the time. Just as we all do. But  
he learned it doesn't always pay to be lazy.  
In fact, he learned a lot of things. By the  
way, do you know what Mr. Spider looks like?

VOICE. He has two eyes.

VOICE. And a skinny waist.

STORYTELLER. Yes, he has a skinny waist. But  
Mr. Spider once had a very big waist. He was  
very fat, indeed.

VOICE. What happened to him?

STORYTELLER. One day, many years ago,  
Mr. Ananse Spider had quite an experience.  
(STORYTELLER and CHILDREN exit DR.)

(ANANSE enters from L, followed by ASO,  
CROOKY, MAMADI, OSANSI and KAMWENDE.  
They are all dressed in black. Each has two  
extra pairs of legs coming from a cummerbund  
around their waists. They all wear close fitting  
caps. In addition, ANANSE wears a wig,  
which can be easily removed, and a hat. He is

made to look very fat by having many inflated plastic bags inside his costume. See costume notes. He walks on stage with his nose in the air.)

ANANSE. Ummmmmm! What good smells! Is it roasted hen with peanut butter sauce, or yams and cassava?

ASO. The people in the village to the West usually have roasted meat with mangos. It's harvest festival time, you know.

ANANSE. Harvest festival! That means food time. (ANANSE and family, plus optional chorus sing the following. The song may be broken into individual solo parts if desired.)

#### HARVEST SONG

ANANSE and family.

Now is the time of the harvest.

Now is the time for our treat.

We will eat roasted meat and melons sweet.

Now is the time of the harvest.

Now is the time of the harvest.

Food is all picked and all clean.

Good cuisine, soup tureen, fresh mangostine,

Now is the time of the harvest.

Now is the time of the harvest.

Happiness past all belief.

Tasty beef, lettuce leaf fit for a chief,

Now is the time of the harvest.

Now is the time of the harvest.

Now we will all entertain.

Golden grain, sugar cane, ripe green plantain,

Now is the time of the harvest.

(Spoken.) Let's eat!

ANANSE. Where is the food for our harvest festival? Why aren't you cooking something, Aso?

ASO. Because, Mr. Ananse Spider, you didn't plant one single seed in the spring. Not one yam or potato. You have not pulled one single weed. And there is absolutely nothing to harvest.

ANANSE. Nothing? No corn came up with the weeds?

MAMADI. I've had nothing to eat for a week but berries.

CROOKY. And all I've had is coconut milk.

OSANSI. I'd give anything for a good, juicy mango.

KAMWENDE. Or some corn fritters.

OSANSI. How can you make fritters without corn?

ASO. You see what your laziness is doing to your whole family?

ANANSE. You mean, there is nothing to eat? Nothing for any of us?

MAMADI. We do have some friends in the towns to the East and the West. Maybe they'll invite us to their harvest festivals.

ASO. Why should they? They've done all the work. Your father's done nothing.

ANANSE. It's true. I haven't done any work. But the children may be right. We may get food from the other villages. It's a rule of the jungle that nobody turns a hungry man away from his table. And I am hungry.

CROOKY. Why don't you try?

KAMWENDE. And bring back plenty of food for us while you're there.

ANANSE. I will. I'll go to the festivals.

MAMADI. The food from the village to the West smells good.

KAMWENDE. Fried plantains, I think.

OSANSI. I like the smells from the East better.



CROOKY. Kernels of palm nuts, I think.

ANANSE. These smells are too much for my big stomach. I'd better be off and get some food. Nobody's ever turned down good old Spider yet. But which village should I go to? They both smell terrific. I think I'll go to the West . . . (He starts walking L.) . . . no, on the other hand, I think I'll go to the East. (Starts to walk R and then returns.) Oh, Dear! Which way? (Sits down in helpless indecision.) Why do I have to make such terrible decisions?

KAMWENDE. You could go to both.

ANANSE. Of course, Kamwende. (Stands.) I was just about to think of that myself. I'll go to both. (Hesitates again.) But which should I go to first?

MAMADI. I'd go to whichever is serving first.

ANANSE. Of course. Again, I was just about to think of that myself. But how am I going to know who is serving first? I can't be in both places at once.

CROOKY. Maybe we could help you. Two of us could go to the East, two to the West, and we'll tell you who is serving first.

OSANSI. Your idea is good, Crooky, except for one thing. The villages are both five miles away. Can you shout that loud? I can't.

ANANSE. That is a problem. How can you children let me know who is serving first? I'll never hear you calling. I've really got to pull something out of my bag of tricks. Luckily, I've got it right here. (He picks up a large bag which has been leaning against the house.)

ASO (sarcastically). You're good at pulling tricks. Good luck this time.

ANANSE (an idea has just hit him). Pulling . . . pulling. . . . I was just about to think of that

myself. I just happen to have a pulling vine in my bag. (Takes a large green rope from his bag.)

ASO. What are you going to do?

ANANSE. The children are going to help me.

I'm going to tie this vine around my waist. If I twist it around like this, I can feel it if anyone tugs on it. (He loops the vine once around his waist.) Now, you children will go to the villages and tell me exactly when the food is served so I'll know which one to go to first.

MAMADI. I want to go to the village to the West. The smells are great.

ANANSE. All right. Now you take this end of the vine. Loop it around me once more so I'll be sure to feel when you tug. (MAMADI walks around ANANSE with the vine, making a second loop.) Now, when the food is served you give the vine a tug and I'll come.

KAMWENDE. I'll go with him. I'll pull on the vine exactly when the first course starts.

ANANSE. But the village to the East might serve first.

OSANSI. Crooky and I will go there.

ANANSE. All right. Now, you loop your end of the rope around me, too. I wouldn't want to miss a morsel if the East served first. (OSANSI walks around ANANSE making a third loop in the vine.)

CROOKY. I'll help watch. And I'll help pull when the food's ready. But are you sure you can eat that much?

ANANSE. Me? Don't worry about me. I didn't get this big waist for nothing. Hurry, now. Go! I'm starved!

ASO. In the meantime, I'll go see if I can find any scraps. (She exits R. MAMADI and KAMWENDE go L in front of the proscenium with their end of the vine. They stand, looking

into the audience as though looking at a far village. OSANSI and CROOKY do the same on the other side of the stage.)

MAMADI. This should be easy.

KAMWENDE. Father will come quickly when he knows there's food.

OSANSI. The food smells almost ready.

CROOKY. And Father will eat soon!

ANANSE (standing C in a position of relaxation).

Well, that's good thinking on my part, if I do say so myself. I'll just take a little rest before dinner. It'll take the children a few minutes to get to the villages. A rest helps whet the appetite. Why work if you don't have to?

(The following song may be sung as indicated, or by family in unison, or by optional chorus. See production notes.)

### IT'S THE EASY LIFE FOR ME

ANANSE.

As you can see, this is the easy life,  
As you can see, this is the lazy life.  
I never plow the soil nor work and toil,  
It's the easy life for me.

REFRAIN (children plus optional chorus).

#### HIGH VOICES

Easy life, easy life

It's the easy, easy  
life.

It's the easy, easy  
life!

#### LOW VOICES

It's so easy, very easy,  
It's so easy, very easy,  
It's so easy, very easy,  
It's so easy, very easy,  
It's so easy, very easy,  
It's so easy, very easy,  
It's so easy, very easy,  
It's so easy, very easy!

MAMADI and KAMWENDE.

As you can see his is the easy life.  
As you can see his is the lazy life.  
He never plants a seed or pulls a weed.

ANANSE.

It's the easy life for me.

REFRAIN.

(Repeated as before.)

OSANSI and CROOKY.

As you can see his is the easy life.

As you can see his is the lazy life.

He loves to sit and rest and work detests.

ANANSE.

It's the easy life for me.

REFRAIN.

(Repeated as before.)

ANANSE.

As you can see this is the easy life.

As you can see this is the lazy life.

I never lift a hand to till the land.

It's the easy life for me.

REFRAIN.

(Repeated as before.)

ANANSE. I hope there's no delay in the food.

My appetite's ferocious.

MAMADI (from DL). They're putting the fish and peppers on the table. It's getting near the time to call Father.

KAMWENDE (from DL). I'll get ready to pull the vine.

OSANSI (from DR). The chicken with peanut butter sauce is served. Father will want to know.

CROOKY (from DR). I'll tug on the vine when you tell me.

MAMADI. I think it's time.

KAMWENDE. Let's call Father.

CHILDREN (in unison). The banquet is served!  
(They all pull on the vine at the same time.)

ANANSE (jumping). Someone's tugging. The food's ready. But which way? (The vine begins to feel tight. ANANSE starts to let some

air out of the plastic bags with a pin.) Oh, my! I can't tell which way. I'll go to the West. I'm sure it's Mamadi and Kamwende pulling. I can't move that way. I'll go to the East. It must be Crooky and Osansi telling me it's food time. (Starts to panic.) I can't move that way, either. I can't move either way. They're pulling from both ways at once. Help! Stop pulling! I can't move! (As he wiggles to get free he presses more and more air out of the plastic bags.)

MAMADI. I wonder why Father doesn't come.

People are starting to eat.

KAMWENDE. I think we'd better pull harder. I guess he doesn't know we're calling him.

OSANSI. It's strange that Father isn't on his way by now. The vine would loosen if he were.

CROOKY. I'd hate to have him miss the banquet. We'd better pull harder.

ANANSE. Stop! Help! Don't pull! I'm shrinking. My waist is wasting away. (By now ANANSE is noticeably thinner. As he wiggles in discomfort he pushes the rest of the air out of the bags.)

KAMWENDE. They're almost ready for the second course.

MAMADI. Let's pull even harder. (They throw the vine over their shoulders, turn their bodies away from ANANSE and appear to pull with all their body weight.)

CROOKY. I'd hate to have Father miss the food.

OSANSI. We've got to pull even harder so he really knows it's time to come. (They, too, throw the vine over their shoulders, turn away and appear to pull with all their might.)

ANANSE. Help! Stop!

MAMADI and KAMWENDE. One, two, three, pull!

OSANSI and CROOKY. One, two, three, pull!

ANANSE. Stop! Help! My belly's disappearing!