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Family Plays

Mixed marriages and the problems of putting on a play are the themes of this comedy in which it's sometimes difficult to tell the monkeys from the humans.

JOCKO

Or, The Monkey's Husband

An unusual one-act comedy by Tim Kelly

Based on the French classic, *Jocko La Singe*

JOCKO

Or, The Monkey's Husband

Drama. By Tim Kelly. After the French classic, *Jocko La Singe*. (Cast: 13+ actors, flexible, 4w., 2m.). Mixed marriage is one theme of this one-act play of fantasy and legend, in which it is at times difficult to decipher the monkeys from the humans. Members of the audience intimidate a conceited playwright who has an idea for a new play. His heroine is a female monkey, Jocko, who falls in love with an exiled European, Don Delgado. Out of disgust for humanity, they retreat to the jungle. Don Delgado's relatives object strenuously, and so does the Great Ape, a simian father figure who insists on the superiority of monkeys over man. Greed invades the Eden when Jocko discovers a gorge filled with diamonds and Don Delgado demands she risk her life again and again to fetch them out. The spectators agree and disagree with the opinions expressed, and it becomes difficult to distinguish the illusions of theatre and the reality of the world. Premiered at Hollywood's Horseshoe Theatre, *Jocko (Or, the Monkey's Husband)*, "an exercise for the intellect," was the rage of Paris boulevard theatre in the 1800s. Boulevard theatre was the popular or free (or illegitimate) theatre that sprang up in France. The great playwrights and great performers, like Sarah Bernhardt, found opportunity to experiment and grow, much like off-Broadway and regional theatre in America today. One of the favorite characters was Jocko. The origin of Jocko is difficult to ascertain. Jocko appears in Italian puppet theatre and elsewhere in Europe. This modern version by Tim Kelly gathers the Jocko tales into a significant avant-garde play, just as the earlier versions of boulevard theatre were the vanguard of their day. *This is not a children's play; high school and university students are intrigued by it. The costume worn by an actress playing Jocko in 1825 was adopted as the costume of the organ grinder's monkey, pillbox hat and all. The setting consists of a few chairs representing boxes in a modern theatre. Time: the present (or the 19th century). Place: a theatre (perhaps in Paris). Approximate running time: 25 minutes. Code: J61.*

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Jocko

JOCKO

Or, THE MONKEY'S HUSBAND

(After the French classic, *Jocko La Singe*)

A Comedy in One Act

by

TIM KELLY

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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TIM KELLY

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(JOCKO OR, THE MONKEY'S HUSBAND)

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IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

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JOCKO

*Cast of Characters
(In order of appearance)*

Playwright

Critic

Patron of the Arts

Incurable Romantic

Inveterate Ticket-Buyer

Don Delgado

Jocko

Stagehands

Mother

Sister

Aunt

The Great Ape

***Denizens of the Pit**

**Can also be portrayed by the Stagehands*

Time: The Present (or the nineteenth century)

Place: A Theatre (perhaps in Paris)

ABOUT THE PLAY

Jocko, “an exercise for the intellect,” was the rage of Paris boulevard theatre in the 1800’s. The “boulevard theatre” was the popular or free (or illegitimate) theatre that sprang up in revolt against the government-subsidized, tightly controlled legitimate theatre of nineteenth century France. In the boulevard theatre the great playwrights and great performers (like Sarah Bernhardt) found opportunity to experiment and grow, much like off- and off-off-Broadway and regional theatre in America today. One of the favorite characters of boulevard theatre was Jocko.

Exactly when and where the story of Jocko first developed is difficult to ascertain. Jocko appears in Italian puppet theatre and elsewhere in Europe. This modern version by Tim Kelly gathers the Jocko tales into a significant avant-garde play, just as the earlier versions of boulevard theatre were the vanguard of their day.

The setting consists of a few chairs representing boxes in a modern theatre. Members of the audience – Critic, Inveterate Ticket-Buyer, Incurable Romantic, and Patron of the Arts – intimidate a conceited playwright who has an idea for a new play. His heroine is a female monkey (Jocko), who falls in love with an exiled European (Don Delgado). Out of disgust for humanity, they retreat to the jungle. Don Delgado’s relatives object strenuously. And so does the Great Ape, a simian father figure who insists on monkey’s superiority over man. Greed invades the Eden when Jocko discovers a gorge filled with diamonds and Don Delgado demands she risk her life again and again to fetch them out.

The spectators agree and disagree with the opinions expressed, and it becomes difficult to distinguish the illusions of theatre and the reality of the world. Everything from Rousseau’s theory of “the noble savage” and “worship of nature” to the conventions of the stage come under attack in this charming, simple-to-produce one-act fable.

Originally produced at Hollywood’s Horseshoe Theatre as part of *I Remember Paris*, it evoked comments like these from the critics: “A witty and clever mixture of cynicism and fantasy.” (Bordy, *On Stage*)

The costume worn by an actress playing Jocko in 1825 – consisting of a pillbox hat and short jacket – was adopted as the costume of the organ grinder’s monkey, and can still be seen today at carnivals and other festivities.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Onstage at opening curtain:

6 chairs

Brought on:

Manuscript, pencil, cane – PLAYWRIGHT

Prop moustache – DON DELGADO

Small table

Jewel chest

Jewels

2 notes

3 chairs

Blanket

3 gem stones – JOCKO

Crutch – JOCKO

Watch – PLAYWRIGHT

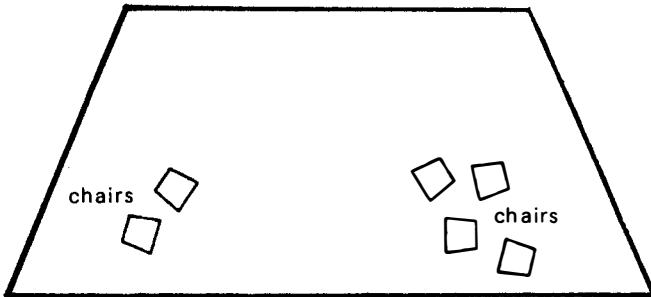
Guitar, accordion, or hand-organ – DON DELGADO

Tin cup – JOCKO

Coins – SPECTATORS

STAGEHANDS

Floor Plan



Staging should be kept as simple as possible. Most of the roles can be played by either men or women. Naturally, there is no attempt to have the actress portray - ing Jocko or the actor portraying Great Ape imitate simians except for a few ges- tures. A few sound effects for the jungle scenes (bird calls, drums) prove effect- ive. Jocko should wear a pillbox hat in the final scene. A guitar may be used by Don Delgado because it is easily obtained. A hand-organ or an accordion (or concertina) would be even better.

The episodes in which the Denizens of the Pit beat Jocko should be stylized story-theatre moments, perhaps with the stage lights flickering for added impact.

The costuming may be modern. However, costumes of 100 to 150 years ago add a distinct flavor to the play.

JOCKO

[At down left are four chairs; at down right are two chairs. They face stage center to suggest theatre boxes. At rise THE PLAYWRIGHT enters up right at a brisk pace. He uses a walking stick for affectation, thrusting it about for emphasis. Under one arm, he carries a manuscript. He comes down stage center, surveys the audience, nods perfunctorily, mutters a barely audible greeting, turns his back, and considers the empty stage.]

PLAYWRIGHT. Not enough depth . . . *[looks left and right]* . . . miserable storage space . . . *[looks up]* . . . I doubt if I'll be able to fly the backdrops. *[Ponders]* No orchestra pit, I suspect . . . *[turns, walks to the edge of the stage, peers down]* . . . barely room enough for a piano. *[Shrugs]* Ah, well, I shall cut the overture. *[He plucks a pencil from a pocket, opens the manuscript, grandly strikes out some notation.]* Overture . . . is . . . out. *[Slams the manuscript shut, strikes a pose with his walking stick, addresses his public.]* Here I am and there you are. I must warn you — my mind is on fire. *[Holds up a hand as if he's been met with some objection]* There is absolutely no cause for alarm. Occasionally, my prose is incendiary, but this building, I assure you, is perfectly safe. I have been known to break the rules when it comes to playwriting, but the rules of the Fire Department are sacrosanct. *[Holds up manuscript — as if responding to someone in the audience]* Of course, I am a playwright. Can't you tell that by my air of observation? Also, I'm carrying a manuscript. Too thin for a novel, too fat for a score of music. What else could it be but a play? *[Briskly]* So, we have our playwright and we have our manuscript. Or, rather, within the manuscript we have "the beginnings," "the seedlings," "the murmurs" of stage creation. Each beginning, each seedling, each murmur we shall test for truth. Peering onto a dimly lit platform, we will watch actors move and hear them deliver lines. They will play to our emotions and fantasies. Laughter, sadness and interaction will pass before us. *[Pause]* I have written — a love story.

[CRITIC enters down left, moves to chair in "box."]

CRITIC. *[Outraged]* You call this a love story! Call it a travesty, a lampoon, a joke if you will. I call it trash.

PLAYWRIGHT. [*Points to Critic with the walking stick*] The local critic. He writes under the appellation – “Avenging Angel.”

CRITIC. Complete waste of time, boring, dull, insipid . . .

PLAYWRIGHT. Why don't you wait until you've heard the play?

CRITIC. . . .idiotic, a disgrace, complete waste of talent . . .

[*PATRON OF THE ARTS, a handsome woman, enters down left.*]

PLAYWRIGHT. Ah, this is more like it. A patron of the arts. Not an avenging angel, but an angel in every sense of the word.

CRITIC. . . .derivative, repetitious, absurd. What has become of the sanity of theatre management!

PLAYWRIGHT. Shut up and sit down. [*CRITIC shuts up, sits down, facing the blank stage.*]

PATRON. It will be wonderful . . . it will be inspirational . . . it will be morally . . . uplifting

PLAYWRIGHT. That depends on one's point of view. Myself, I prefer to see all sides of an issue.

PATRON. . . .I am delighted to contribute to the cultural revival now sweeping the country.

PLAYWRIGHT. I'm delighted that you're delighted to contribute to the sweep. Please be seated. Curtain up momentarily. [*She sits beside Critic.*]

CRITIC. No sense hoping for anything decent. It's bound to be a drag. They're not writing plays the way they used to.

[*INCURABLE ROMANTIC, a young girl, enters down left.*]

ROMANTIC. I'd walk a mile for a love story.

PLAYWRIGHT. [*To audience*] She arrived by subway. I don't know what playwrights would do without her. The Incurable Romantic.

ROMANTIC. It will end happily. I feel it. [*Hand over heart*] Here, where it counts. The empire of the heart.

PLAYWRIGHT. I don't know about that, but I can promise you a good cry.

ROMANTIC. [*Delighted*] That's even better than a good play. [*She sits behind Critic and Patron.*]

PLAYWRIGHT. [*Looks left*] Someone's missing. Who's missing?
[*TICKET-BUYER enters, stub in hand.*]

TICKET-BUYER. Right box, lower tier.

PLAYWRIGHT. The Inveterate Ticket-Buyer. Bless him.

TICKET-BUYER. [*To Romantic*] Is this the lower tier?

PLAYWRIGHT. What does it matter? Find a chair and sit down.

TICKET-BUYER. There's only one chair left.

PLAYWRIGHT. Undoubtedly, it matches the numerals on your ticket-stub.

TICKET-BUYER. I enjoy coming to previews. You get thirty per cent off. [*Sits, addresses Patron*] I hope it's a mystery.

PATRON. I hope it isn't.

ROMANTIC. What's the title?

CRITIC. Perhaps we ought to ask him.

TICKET-BUYER. Who?

CRITIC. That lunatic over there with the walking stick and manuscript. The one talking to himself. [*All rivet their attention on Playwright.*]

PLAYWRIGHT. I am the playwright. [*He bows. Others applaud.*]

PATRON. Bravo!

TICKET-BUYER. Encore!

PLAYWRIGHT. You have been brought here this evening to assist me in the denouement of my ripening epic.

ROMANTIC. What's he talking about?

TICKET-BUYER. I haven't any idea.

CRITIC. Pretentious drivel. His sort is always half-mad.

PLAYWRIGHT. I have written the story of Jocko.

PATRON. Jocko?

PLAYWRIGHT. She who loved not too well, but too wisely.

ROMANTIC. [*Takes out handkerchief, weeps*] It's so beautiful.

PLAYWRIGHT. The setting is Brazil.

ALL. Brazil?

CRITIC. Plays set in Brazil are never successful. Make it Paris.

PLAYWRIGHT. [*Bangs the walking stick for attention*] Please limit the interruptions.

CRITIC. Touchy, isn't he?

PLAYWRIGHT. A jungle in Brazil to be precise. Here, in with the mango and the quinine tree, she met Don Delgado . . .

ROMANTIC. Such a romantic name

PLAYWRIGHT. . . . Don Delgado, a man as disillusioned with life as Jocko herself had become.

CRITIC. It's going to be one of those dreary Latin things.

PLAYWRIGHT. Together, they decided they would love each other eternally . . .

ROMANTIC. That's a long time.

PLAYWRIGHT. . . . forever shutting out the cruel and cynical world. [*He bows again. Others applaud. PLAYWRIGHT moves down right, sits, stands quickly.*] One small point I forgot to mention — Jocko is a monkey.

OTHERS. A MONKEY!

[PLAYWRIGHT sits again. Lighting dims somewhat and "the play" begins. DON DELGADO enters up left, followed by JOCKO, who wears a floor-length dress or skirt. They move center. In speech and gesture, both tend to overact.]

DON DELGADO. Oh, Jocko, I trust we have done the right thing — fleeing the wicked and corrupt city of Rio de Janeiro with its lust for gold, fame, and heartlessness.

PLAYWRIGHT. You forgot the moustache.

DON DELGADO. *[Upset]* I am sorry. Terribly sorry. So sorry. The moustache, yes, the moustache. *[He fumbles out a fake moustache from some pocket, attempts to stick it on his upper lip. No luck]*

PLAYWRIGHT. Forget the moustache.

DON DELGADO. Yes, yes, whatever you think best. It doesn't seem to want to stick.

PLAYWRIGHT. Continue.

DON DELGADO. *[Back to the play]* . . . fleeing the wicked and corrupt city of Rio de Janeiro with its lust for gold, fame, and heartlessness.

JOCKO. We are blessed, Don Delgado. We have our love.

DON DELGADO. *[Sighs happily]* Amour, amour.

JOCKO. Alas, I have seen the same vices in the animal kingdom as you have witnessed in the kingdom of Man. Together, we shall find some oasis and save ourselves.

ROMANTIC. Bravo, Jocko.

OTHERS. Sssssshhhhh.

DON DELGADO. We must shun society with all its pomp and vanity. Little monkey, you have stolen my heart. *[They embrace.]*

JOCKO. I know a path to a clearing.

DON DELGADO. *[Melodramatic gesture]* Lead on. The future is ours.

JOCKO. *[Takes him by the hand, leads him off right]* I hope you like bananas.

[LIGHTING resumes full. Faint applause. CRITIC stands, speaks across to Playwright.]

CRITIC. It's all quite charming in concept, I must admit. But so naive. I can appreciate the influence of "the noble savage," "the worship of nature," and all that Rousseau sentiment, but ultimately what do we have here? All sugar and no spice.

ROMANTIC. A love story should be all sugar.

CRITIC. If something is all sugar, where is the contrast?

TICKET-BUYER. Personally, I like a story with a bit of ginger.

CRITIC. There, you see. I have an ally.

PATRON. [*Stands*] I thought the line about the banana was out of place.

PLAYWRIGHT. Oh?

PATRON. Don't take offense — but you seemed to be reaching for a — oh, dear, what am I trying to say?

CRITIC. The banana line was reaching for a cheap joke.

PATRON. Exactly.

ROMANTIC. I wouldn't change a word. I might add a few — tenderness, understanding, warmth.

CRITIC. [*Makes a raspberry*] Useless sentimentality.

ROMANTIC. I would take out the banana mention.

PLAYWRIGHT. [*Stands, indignant*] So! Everyone has a suggestion, everyone knows better than the playwright what should go and what should stay. [*With great feeling*] I STRIKE! [*All react, alarmed. ROMANTIC and TICKET-BUYER jump up.*]

ALL. [*Ad lib*] Take care!

The play must go on!

Don't be so sensitive!

Think of Jocko and Don Delgado!

What about us!

Etc.

PLAYWRIGHT. I STRIKE — out the banana joke. [*He opens his manuscript and with his pencil he draws a line across some dialogue.*] Done. [*All sigh in general relief, take seats.*]

TICKET-BUYER. What will his mother say?

PLAYWRIGHT. What mother?

TICKET-BUYER. Don Delgado's.

CRITIC. Nice touch of conflict there.

PLAYWRIGHT. You anticipate. [*An announcement of great importance*] “Lost in a jungle clearing, Don Delgado is subjected to a visit from his mother . . .

CRITIC. Splendid.

PLAYWRIGHT. “. . . and his sister . . .

PATRON. Better yet.

PLAYWRIGHT. “. . . and his aunt, a lesser-known poetess from the suburbs of Rio de Janeiro.”

[*All applaud politely. STAGEHANDS enter left and right with three chairs and position them center. LIGHTING dims. STAGEHANDS exit; PLAYWRIGHT sits. Don Delgado's MOTHER, SISTER, and AUNT enter left. “The play” resumes.*]