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Dramatic Publishing

SEPTEMBER SHOES

A Play

by

JOSE CRUZ GONZALEZ

Commissioned by Center Theatre Group/Mark Taper
Forum. Latino Theater Initiative.
Gordon Davidson, Artistic Director/Producer.



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(SEPTEMBER SHOES)

ISBN: 1-58342-351-6

For Jill Yip

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“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.”

— Albert Einstein

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September Shoes was originally produced by Geva Theatre Center Rochester, N.Y., June 3-22, 2003, Mark Cuddy, artistic director. The play was directed by Michael John Garcés; scenic design by Troy Hourie; costume design by Meghan Healey; lighting design by Kirk Bookman; sound design by Robert Kaplowitz; dramaturg Marge Betley; assistant director Evan Cummings; stage managers Frank Cavallo, Joel Markus; assistant stage manager Kirsten Brannen; apprentice stage manager Bryan C. Romano; production manager Mary Kay Stone; casting by Elissa Myers and Paul Fouquet. The cast was:

Huilo/Juan David Anzuelo
Gail Maria Elena Ramirez
Cuki/Lily Chu Socorro Santiago
Alberto Jaime Tirelli
Ana/Little Gail Alicia Velez

September Shoes received its second production at the Denver Center Theatre Company. The play was directed by Amy González; set and costume design by Christopher Acebo; lighting design by Don Darnutzer; sound design by Iaeden Hovorka; music composed by Daniel Valdez; production manager Edward Lapine; stage manager Erock; production assistant Kurt Van Raden; production intern Amanda Meneses and artistic director Kent Thompson.

September Shoes was presented at the Ricketson Theatre, October 20-December 17, 2005. The cast was:

Huilo Luís Sagar
Gail Karmín Murcelo
Cuki Wilma Bonet
Alberto John Herrera
Ana Adriana Gaviria

September Shoes was workshopped at Geva Theatre's Hibernatus Interruptus: A Winter Festival of New Plays, January 2002. Directed by Karen Coe Miller; dramaturg Marge Betley; stage manager Kristen Brannen; artistic director Mark Cuddy; design consultant G.W. Mercier. The cast was:

Adriana Sevan, Geno Silva, Ching Valdes-Aran,
Angel David, Abigail López.

September Shoes received a reading at the Mark Taper Forum's Latino Initiative in August 2001 and in 1999 as an A.S.K. Theatre Projects Stage One Reading.

Special thanks to Elizabeth Wong, In-Ching Wang.

SEPTEMBER SHOES

A Play in Two Acts
For 2 Men, 3 Women (with doubling)

CHARACTERS:

CUKI, a middle-aged, dark-skinned Latina woman. She has a large black birthmark on her face in the shape of a tear. A cleaning woman.

ALBERTO, a tall, middle-aged Mexican American male. He is a doctor. Married to GAIL.

GAIL, a middle-aged Chinese Mexican American woman. Slender and aging beautifully. Speaks Spanish very well.

HUILO, a middle-aged Mexican American male. He resembles a desert lizard. He is a thin man. Unshaven and his hair unkempt. Slow and religious.

ANA, a Mexican American girl about 13 years old. A memory. ALBERTO's little sister. She wears a faded China Poblana dress (a traditional Mexican costume). It is the color of faded red. May double as LILY CHU and as JUAN.

Act One

Scene 1

(Onstage is a giant wooden chair leg painted bright red. Carved into the wood are names of people long dead. Surrounding the chair leg are various other locations including a cemetery plot with wooden crosses, a motel bed, a desert highway road, an old restaurant counter, an apartment wall filled with dozens of shoes nailed to it. Everything about the set should appear as if it were violently crushed together.)

Under the intense desert sun stands DR. ALBERTO CERVANTES. He is holding an open umbrella while his wife GAIL CERVANTES stands near a grave. They are dressed in black. HUILO, the cemetery caretaker stands off in the distance. HUILO wears a tattered army jacket. He is a thin man. His face is unshaven and his hair is unkempt. Simultaneously CUKI, a cleaning woman, changes a bed in a motel room. Her hair is still dark with a few strands of gray. Her feet are bare.)

CUKI. When I was a girl I lived on a mountaintop among the clouds where eagles soared, the unknown was still mysteriously magical, and where God could be heard snoring at night. I came from a proud family whose people were born with large feet. My father had big feet.

And so did my brothers. Shoes were unnecessary because we had no paved roads or automobiles. But Sister *Manuela*, the parish nun, believed bare feet were a sin, “Dirty feet mean a filthy soul.” It took Sister *Manuela* quite a long time to get the entire village to wear shoes. “City people have all kinds of shoes. Shoes for work, shoes for play.” But they looked like tiny little coffins to me. Soon after shoes were introduced to our village, the village transformed. Roads became paved and sidewalks were created. Buildings were erected and trees were cut down. Kindness was forgotten and crime became rampant. Our feet no longer felt the earth. We lost touch with it. My family left our village and moved down to the city. I never saw so many shoes there in my life. They never stopped moving. There were thousands and thousands of them just roaming the earth.

ALBERTO. Gail, it’s time.

GAIL. Goodbye, Aunt Lily. (*GAIL touches the grave.*)

HUILO (*with a distinct Tejano accent*). Lord, it’s *Huilo* callin’. Will you please bless Lily and watch over her? (*HUILO wipes his palms with a rag. CUKI picks up a man’s shoe.*)

CUKI. Shoes can tell you a lot about a person. I know. I clean rooms for a living. I can tell you everything about a person by looking at their shoes. Whether they’re happy, sad, divorced, young or old. Take this shoe. It belongs to a man.

(*ALBERTO’s cell phone is heard. He answers it. HUILO exits.*)

ALBERTO. Hello? Hello? Damn it!

CUKI. He's about fifty, a professional, perhaps a doctor. He drives a brand new red convertible Porsche but it's going to break down. He's a good dresser but he's got flat feet. Likes classical music. His soles are slightly worn. He's troubled. Is he ill? No. Is he having an affair? No. It's something else. He has trouble sleeping. He carries a heavy burden. What could it be?

(ALBERTO and GAIL cross to the hotel room. CUKI takes the shoe and hides it, keeping it with her.)

ALBERTO. Hello there.

CUKI. *¡Ay, perdon, Señor, estoy limpiando su cuarto!*

ALBERTO. I don't speak Spanish.

GAIL *(entering. To CUKI)*. *Todo esta bien. Siguele por favor.*

CUKI. *Gracias, Señora.*

ALBERTO. I need a drink.

GAIL. Albert, it's too early.

ALBERTO. Gail, it's over a hundred and fifty thousand degrees out there. It's never too early to drink in Dolores.

GAIL. You're right. I'll have a scotch.

ALBERTO. I'll make it a double. *(GAIL exits to the bathroom. ALBERTO prepares two drinks.)* How do you turn up the air?

CUKI. *¿Cómo?*

ALBERTO. The button to the air, where is it?

CUKI. *No entiendo.*

ALBERTO. Gail!

GAIL *(offstage)*. What?

ALBERTO. Tell her to turn up the air conditioner.

GAIL. Albert, when are you going to learn Spanish?

ALBERTO. Well, not today, definitely not today. (*To CUKI.*) No offense. Gail!

GAIL (*offstage*). *¿Nos haces el favor de prender el aire acondicionado a lo alto?*

CUKI. *Claro que si, Señora. (CUKI turns up the air conditioner.) ¿Esta bien, Señor?*

ALBERTO. Thank you. Sí, gracias.

CUKI (*in perfect English*). You're welcome.

(CUKI exits. ALBERTO crosses to the bed and picks up his one shoe. GAIL enters in a robe.)

GAIL. Oh, that's better.

ALBERTO. Your drink. Cheers.

GAIL (*cools herself off by standing in front of the air conditioner*). Oh, that's nice.

ALBERTO. That cleaning woman...

GAIL. What about her?

ALBERTO. I think she stole my shoe.

GAIL. Why would she do that?

ALBERTO. She's got big feet. I don't know.

GAIL. Why would she steal just one shoe?

ALBERTO. Ask her.

GAIL. Albert, I'm sure it's around here somewhere. You just have to look carefully. You're like a tornado. Everything lies scattered with you. You never find things until days later.

ALBERTO. Okay, I'm a messy pig I admit it but you're a neat freak.

GAIL. No, I'm not.

ALBERTO. Yes, you are. Why is it you clean our house every time the cleaning lady arrives?

GAIL. People's impressions are important to me.

ALBERTO. She's a cleaning lady. It's her job.

CUKI. That's the way I was raised, end of discussion.

ALBERTO. Clean freak.

GAIL. Pig.

ALBERTO. Did you happen to notice that woman wasn't wearing any shoes?

GAIL. No.

ALBERTO. What kind of person goes to work without wearing shoes? You think she'd get fired for something like that.

GAIL. You're forgetting this is *Dolores*.

ALBERTO. Yeah, a town called "Sorrow." Population: 129 forgotten souls. Where the odd and eccentric are just part of the colorful landscape. You know, I've seen her before.

GAIL. Who?

ALBERTO. That barefooted woman, but I just can't place where.

GAIL. Albert, she didn't take your shoe. It'll turn up. Trust me.

ALBERTO. This town is still suffocating. It's as if we stepped back into the 1950s.

GAIL. I know it wasn't easy for you to return.

ALBERTO. That's an understatement.

GAIL. But we'll make the best of it.

ALBERTO. So I should stop whining?

GAIL. It isn't easy for me either, you know?

ALBERTO. Your Aunt Lily found a way to bring you back.

GAIL. I don't think dying was part of her plan.

ALBERTO. I'll miss the old lady.

GAIL. You never really knew her.

ALBERTO. Hey, I tried.

GAIL. She never wanted me to leave.

ALBERTO. She chose her life and you chose not to follow it. No regrets.

GAIL. No regrets.

ALBERTO. We survived this awful place, and we'll get through this too. We're still a team?

GAIL. Team.

ALBERTO. Good. Rest in peace, Lily. (*ALBERTO finishes his drink.*)

GAIL. There were faces of people I didn't recognize at her funeral today.

ALBERTO. We've been gone a long time.

GAIL. I couldn't remember her friends' names.

ALBERTO. I didn't understand one conversation. They all spoke Spanish way too fast.

GAIL. I'm sure they think I'm rude for not recognizing them.

ALBERTO. The desert heat is still unbearable and the air foul.

GAIL. Aunt Lily looked so peaceful.

ALBERTO. I promised I would never come back.

GAIL. But you did.

ALBERTO. I'm not good at keeping my word.

GAIL. I'm glad you didn't. Thank you.

ALBERTO. This place conjures memories I thought I'd long ago buried.

GAIL. Such as?

ALBERTO. Unfinished things. Things unsettled.

GAIL. You're being cryptic.

ALBERTO. Never mind.

GAIL. There isn't one good memory of this town?

ALBERTO. No, not really.

GAIL. We made love in this room over thirty years ago.

(Beat.)

ALBERTO. Okay, that was a good one.

GAIL. We'll only be here for another day, finish some details—

ALBERTO. And we'll go back to our lives, promise?

GAIL. ...promise. *(He goes to kiss her. She turns her head away. Lights fade.)*

Scene 2

(Desert moonlight. ANA steps into the moonlight singing a traditional lullaby in Spanish. She wears a China Poblana dress (a traditional Mexican costume), and her hair is braided into ponytails with ribbons and a flower in her hair. Everything about her is the color of faded red. ANA dances momentarily. She stops when HUILO enters carrying a lantern and climbing up the giant red chair leg. He resembles a desert lizard. He removes his welding glasses and takes out a slip of paper from his jacket pocket.)

HUILO *(slowly)*. Francisca Acevedo, Arnold Acosta, Gaudencio and Licha Adame... Adame...

(He puts the paper away and begins to chisel a name into the chair. ANA crosses to GAIL and ALBERTO asleep in bed.)

ANA. 'Beto, wake up. It's time. 'Beto. (*She shakes ALBERTO awake.*) 'Beto, wake up!

ALBERTO. Huh?

ANA. How do I look?

ALBERTO (*sitting up*). ¿Ana?

ANA. Wake up, sleepyhead, I'm ready. (*She picks up her dress skirt and dances a few steps in the moonlight.*)

ALBERTO. What are you doing here?

ANA. I'm from here, loco. Waiting in this desert landscape of dreams. Come on!

ALBERTO. What do you want with me?

ANA. Take me to the school dance.

ALBERTO. What school dance?

ANA. The most important one in the whole valley, ¡Tonto!

ALBERTO. No, I'm not taking you.

ANA. But I have to go.

ALBERTO. No.

ANA. If you don't take me you'll be sorry.

ALBERTO. What are you going to do, tattle on me?

ANA. If that's what it takes. I'll tell *Papi* you sneak out at night and run with your crazy *vago* friends.

ALBERTO. You better not say anything or you'll be in big trouble.

ANA. Oh, I'm scared!

ALBERTO. Brat!

ANA. Stupid!

GAIL. Albert...

ALBERTO. ¡*Mocosa!*

ANA. ¡*Cabezón!*

GAIL. Albert? (*ANA steps into the shadows.*)

ALBERTO. ¿Ana?

GAIL. Who are you talking to?

ALBERTO. What?

GAIL. You're talking in your sleep.

ALBERTO. Was I?

GAIL. Did you take your sleeping pills?

ALBERTO. No. I'm fine. Go back to sleep.

(GAIL lies back in bed. ALBERTO gets up. ANA dances in the moonlight. CUKI enters with armful of shoes. She drops them near the wall and exits. HUILO removes a small piece of paper from his pocket.)

HUILO. *Luz Marina Amaya, Javier Alfonso Angulo, Delfino Arroyo, Maximino Avila...Avila.*

(He begins to chisel away as ANA bounces back into the room.)

ANA. 'Beto, please take me to your school dance!

ALBERTO. You're not old enough.

ANA. But you promised.

ALBERTO. Not this time.

ANA. Why not?

ALBERTO. Because big brothers don't bring their little sisters to a high-school formal, it's embarrassing.

ANA. You don't want to take me 'cause you met a girl.

ALBERTO. No.

ANA. But I taught you how to dance.

ALBERTO. I know you did.

ANA. Mom helped me make this dress 'cause you said you'd take me!

ALBERTO. Well, I changed my mind!

ANA. Oh, please, 'Beto!

ALBERTO. No!

ANA. I hate you! (*ANA cries.*)

ALBERTO. *Ana*, your face—

ANA. You make promises—

ALBERTO. Those tears—

ANA. —and break them.

ALBERTO. They're red.

ANA. '*Beto*, why am I bleeding?

ALBERTO. What's happening, *Ana*?

ANA. Please make it stop!

ALBERTO. I don't know how!

ANA. Make it stop! (*ANA disappears into the darkness.*)

ALBERTO. *Ana*, don't go! *¡No te vayas! ¡Ana!*

GAIL. Albert?

ALBERTO. *Ana* was here.

GAIL. *Ana*, your sister, *Ana*?

ALBERTO. She spoke to me.

GAIL. Albert, she's been dead for many years.

ALBERTO. She wouldn't stop bleeding.

GAIL. It was a nightmare. You're sleepwalking again.

Come to bed. I'll rub your back.

ALBERTO. I can't sleep now.

GAIL. You want to talk about it?

ALBERTO. No.

GAIL. Don't stay up late. Remember, we've got a long day tomorrow.

ALBERTO. You know, we don't have to do this. We can go straight home right now.

GAIL. I have things to settle.

ALBERTO. But, Gail—

GAIL. I'm not leaving until I do.

ALBERTO. Fine!