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The Impracticality of Modern-Day Mastodons

By

RACHEL TEAGLE

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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The Impracticality of Modern-Day Mastodons received its world premiere by Theatre Lab in Boca Raton, Fla., opening on Sept. 4, 2021.

CAST:

JESS..... Gabby Tortoledo
CHORUS 1/BUSTER/PAULA/NORMA/
PALEO 1/NARRATOR..... Rachel Michelle Bryant
CHORUS 2/CLARENCE/JEFFERSON Daniel Llaca
CHORUS 3/DELORES/LEWIS Irene Adjan
CHORUS 4/TRACY/INGA/
COMTE DE BUFFON/CLARK Niki Fridh
CHORUS 5/PAT/TRANSLATOR/
PALEO 2/PEALE Carlos Alayeto
PUPPETEERS Djimon Armani,
Rachel Dawson, Eric Fredrickson, Alyssa Frewen,
Michael Focas, Steven Harding, John Dalton Logan,
Rebecca Lucatero, Ashley Brooke Miller,
Caleb James Williams

PRODUCTION:

Director Matt Stabile
Assistant Director..... Joanna Orrego
Stage Manager Rose Figueroa
Assistant Stage Manager..... Amber Mandic
Scenic Design..... Michael McClain
Lighting Design Thomas Shorrock
Sound Design Matt Corey
Costume Design Dawn C. Shamburger
Props Design & Scenic Painting..... John Shamburger
Puppet Design Jim Hammond
Video Design..... William Smyth
Video Board Operator Jazz Patterson

The Impracticality of Modern-Day Mastodons

CHARACTERS

JESS (w): A recent mastodon.

BUSTER (a): Part of a very sick child who made a wish.
Also plays: CHORUS 1, PAULA, PALEONTOLOGIST 1,
NARRATOR.

CLARENCE/CLINT (m): A struggling, pun-making journalist,
then a hyper-suave super-secret agent. Also plays: CHORUS
2, THOMAS JEFFERSON, FIGURE.

DELORES (w): A cheerful and professional vocational advisor.
Also plays: CHORUS 3, LEWIS, FEMALE VOICE.

TRACY (a): A perky newscaster. Also plays: CHORUS 4,
INGA, COMTE DE BUFON, CLARK.

PAT (a): A sophisticated newscaster. Also plays: CHORUS 5,
NORMAN, PALEONTOLOGIST 2, PEALE.

CASTING NOTES

The voices of the chorus should be played by all available ensemble except for Jess. Buster serves as the leader of the chorus.

The unconventional spacing of the voices is meant to be taken as an invitation to play poetically with the speaking of the lines, not as strict timing notes. Multiple voices at once, elongating words, echoes. It should feel like the voice in the back of your head. The text in these moments is less important than the feeling it creates.

In the stage directions, Tracy is a woman and Pat is a man, but they can be easily changed as needed.

The performers may be any race or ethnicity. There is no reason for this script to be performed with an entirely white cast.

PRODUCTION NOTES

So. There's a mastodon in this play.

Fortunately, the theatre is an act of collective imagination, and we all get to make a mastodon together.

It is very important that Jess is a mastodon and not a mammoth. Mammoths have those goofy head lumps. Mastodons don't.

There is no one way that this mastodon needs to be created. Productions have used puppets, shadows, sound and even the bodies of other actors to form the mastodon. It can be as big as the stage or as simple as an actor in a fuzzy sweater using her arm as a trunk.

The Impracticality of Modern-Day Mastodons

(Cold, clear light breaks through the darkness, underscored by the sounds of the tundra. BUSTER enters from a space beyond reality.)

BUSTER. There are many wonders of the prehistoric world.

(He summons the CHORUS. They become wondrous beasts. Their voices echo in the back of our thoughts.)

VOICES. The bestest wonder of them all

is

the mastodon.

(The shadow of an enormous creature starts to pass by, one lumbering step at a time. It is a mastodon, with huge tusks and enormous feet.)

VOICES *(cont'd)*. No one has ever seen

a living mastodon

out in the frontier.

(The shadow continues to pass, and we see what is casting it: a woman named JESS, more dressed up than she wants to be. She carries her shoes.)

VOICES *(cont'd)*. If you find them,

they'd let you go with them;

they'd let you go with them.

What would it be like to be

so big big big?

One

electric

being.

(JESS raises her hand, and the shadow raises its trunk. They reach for something. The lights take us to an apartment. It's late. The shadow is gone.)

JESS. I'm home! Babe? You still working?

(CLARENCE enters. He is ruffled and a little nebbish.)

CLARENCE. Uh, kind of. How was it?

JESS. Stupid. Like really stupid. I had to tie a hundred and sixty sky-blue satin chair covers.

CLARENCE. Why?

JESS. Because this is the Regional Insurance Adjuster Association Awards and we simply cannot have bare chairs.

CLARENCE. And you had to tie them because?

JESS. Because that's what administrative assistants do. Yay.

CLARENCE. Yay.

JESS. I did make the program into these beautiful cranes.

(She produces several origami cranes made out of very shiny paper.)

CLARENCE. Ooh! So fancy!

JESS. Uh huh. It was like prom. Insurance prom.

CLARENCE. Was there a theme? Like "A Claim to Remember?" "Adjustment Under the Sea?"

JESS. Actually, he wanted to do an underwater thing, but with all the flooding this year, it was in poor taste. Oh! Someone left an old newspaper at the hotel and I found an article you gotta see. *(She produces a clipping.)* You know how they tested the prototype for the flying car?

CLARENCE. Sure.

JESS. Well, turns out the three test pilots all used to work together, but not at a lab or something, at a car wash. The same car wash! Weird, right? *(She starts to exit.)* Maybe it's nothing, but it's definitely worth another look.

CLARENCE. Oh, uh Jess ... ?

(JESS pops back into the room.)

JESS. Wait. What happened to the serial killer wall?

CLARENCE. The what?

JESS. The serial killer wall, you know, with the map and the strings and the pictures. I was gonna tack this up, but it's gone.

CLARENCE. Yeah, I took it down.

JESS. What happened? We've been chasing this story for weeks, how could you—wait. Did you pitch it? Clarence! You pitched it, didn't you?!

CLARENCE. I did.

JESS. Babe! Tell me everything.

CLARENCE. They loved it.

JESS. That's awesome! So, when are they going to run it?

CLARENCE. Soon, I guess.

JESS. You guess? When's the draft due?

CLARENCE. Oh, I'm not writing it. They loved the story so much, they're putting a senior reporter on it.

JESS. What about you?

CLARENCE. I'm still editing the obituaries.

JESS. Did you tell them you wanted it?

CLARENCE. I mean, I did all the research, they knew I wanted it.

JESS. But did you say those actual words?

CLARENCE. Jess.

JESS. I'm serious. You need to stand up for yourself.

CLARENCE. What about you? Why don't you say I'm not gonna tie any more stupid chair covers?

JESS. Because they'd fire me and we couldn't pay rent.

CLARENCE. I knew you'd freak out. It's just one story, Jess.

JESS. No, it was *the story*, and you know it. This could have been your big break. Then all the stupid stuff I've been doing would matter, because it was for your dream, for us.

CLARENCE. I'm churning out puff pieces about cute dogs and sick kids.

JESS. For now. But we were getting somewhere with this story, and—

CLARENCE. I hate it, all right? All of it. I'm not happy. At all.

JESS. And when were you going to tell me.

CLARENCE. Soon.

JESS. You don't want to be a reporter anymore?

CLARENCE. I don't know. I guess I thought it would be different.

JESS. If you could really be anything, I mean anything, like a lion tamer or a bobsled racer, or, what were those guys, flying car test pilots, what would you be?

CLARENCE. I wouldn't be editing obituaries for the *Citizen Register*.

JESS. But what would you be?

CLARENCE. Let's be flying test car pilots.

JESS. I get air sick. And car sick. Game show hosts?

CLARENCE. I hate ties. Jewel thieves?

JESS. Lumberjacks.

CLARENCE. Sumo wrestlers.

JESS. Ice dancers!

CLARENCE. Professional hockey players!

JESS. No, I like my teeth.

CLARENCE. Yeah, I like your teeth too.

(A beat.)

JESS. But what do we really do?

(They do not answer.)

JESS *(cont'd)*. You coming to bed?

CLARENCE. Yeah, later.

(She exits. He picks up the clipping, looks at it briefly and puts it back down.)

The lights fade to darkness.

A phone rings.

A small pool of light reveals CLARENCE on the couch where he fell asleep.

The phone rings again.

He rolls over to pick it up.)

CLARENCE *(cont'd)*. Hello?

(INGA is on the other end. We see as little of her as possible. She is mysterious, confident and utterly inscrutable. She has a sexy accent.)

INGA. I need you to listen to me very closely and do exactly as I say.

CLARENCE. Who is this?

INGA. You don't know me, but I have information vital to your safety.

CLARENCE. No, seriously, who is this?

INGA. There is no time for pleasantries! Your residence has been compromised.

CLARENCE. How?

INGA. Look around you. Is there anything unfamiliar?

CLARENCE. No, I don't think so.

INGA. Are you absolutely certain? Our enemies can be extremely subtle.

(He looks around the room. Lights reveal a large, cheerfully sinister stuffed bunny that was not there before.)

CLARENCE. Oh! Got it.

INGA. What is it?

CLARENCE. It's a bunny. A great, big stuffed bunny.

INGA. Oh no.

CLARENCE. What?

INGA. It could be nothing. Or! It could be everything.

CLARENCE. Oh no.

INGA. Now listen, I need you to carefully grasp the bunny by the head and rotate it 180 degrees.

CLARENCE. OK, OK. Grasping the head now

INGA. Slowly, damn you! This is a delicate operation.

CLARENCE. Yes, yes, slowly, rotating, rotating ... IT'S A BOMB

(It totally is. Wired to the back of the bunny is a large ticking bomb.)

INGA. AAAH!

CLARENCE. AAAH!

INGA. AAAH!

CLARENCE. AAAH!

INGA & CLARENCE. AAAAAAH!

INGA. Pull it together! I need you to defuse the instrument.

CLARENCE. Defuse it? How am I supposed to do that?!

INGA. It's actually pretty simple. Just reach in and remove the thickest wire from the timing device.

CLARENCE. Got it. Grabbing the wires.

INGA. Just whatever you do, don't touch the blue wire.

CLARENCE. The blue wire?

INGA. Don't touch it!

CLARENCE. Uh.

(He has a fistful of wires.)

INGA. What?

CLARENCE. All the wires are blue!

INGA. AAAH!

CLARENCE. AAAH!

INGA. AAAH!

CLARENCE. AAAH!

CLARENCE & INGA. AAAAAAAH!

INGA. You don't have much time.

(CLARENCE panics.)

INGA *(cont'd)*. Ten seconds left ... nine ...

(The countdown continues.

He stuffs the bunny into a throw pillow and throws it out the window.

It explodes offstage, sending a shower of stuffing back through the window.)

INGA (*cont'd*). Hello? Are you there? Is everything all right?

(A single severed bunny ear lands at his feet.)

CLARENCE. Yeah. Actually it is.

INGA. Congratulations. You passed.

CLARENCE. Passed what?

INGA. In your back pocket you'll find a stick of gum printed with geographic coordinates. Memorize these coordinates, then chew and swallow the gum. We'll expect you there at 1300 hours sharp to begin your training.

CLARENCE. Training? For what?

INGA. For the rest of your life, agent.

CLARENCE. Agent?

INGA. Yes, welcome aboard.

CLARENCE. But, I'm not a secret agent, how did you even get this number?

INGA. This isn't your phone. Remember 1300 hours sharp. Ta-ta.

(INGA hangs up. CLARENCE looks from his phone to the bunny ear and back again.

The phone beeps.)

PHONE VOICE (*recording*). This phone will self-destruct in ten, nine, eight, seven, six ...

(He panics and throws the phone out the window. It implodes with the smallest explosion noise.)

CLARENCE. Jess? Jess! Holy crap, Jess! I think ... I think something just happened.

JESS *(offstage)*. Yeah ...

(She enters.

She is now a mastodon.)

JESS *(cont'd)*. Something definitely happened.

(CLARENCE stares up at her.

The theme to Nightly News Now kicks in. Lights come up on PAT ST. JOHN and TRACY WEATHERS, two news anchors. They have been fighting over the single anchor chair, jostling for position. The lights catch them completely off-guard.)

PAT. Uh ... good evening! I'm Pat St. John—

TRACY. And I'm Tracy Weathers!

PAT. And this ...

TRACY & PAT. Is your *Nightly News Now*!

(The theme continues as the camera angle shifts. PAT and TRACY bicker briefly as they jostle to new positions.)

PAT. Negotiations continue this evening for the newly formed Ice Cream Tasters Union over in Milwaukee—

TRACY. Workers have picketed factories across the city demanding shorter hours, wider fudge ribbons and comprehensive dental coverage.

PAT. Industry experts hope an agreement is brokered quickly, as the ICTU represents one of the fastest-growing sectors in employment today. In a San Diego Marine Park—

TRACY. Lelu the orca whale broke records this evening as she performed three triple backflips through a hoop of fire. We go now to trainer Paula Davison for the story. Paula?

(Lights up on whale trainer PAULA. She makes a whale signal gesture, and we hear the splash of the whale as it finishes a trick.)

PAULA. Hi Pat! And uh ...

TRACY. Tracy! Tracy Weathers.

PAT. She's new.

PAULA. Like, how new?

TRACY. Like now new.

PAULA. Oh my goodness, me too!

TRACY. No way.

PAULA. Yeah! I've been here, what, three days, four maybe?

PAT. Paula, this is quite an impressive feat. Do you mean to tell us that you don't have any prior whale training experience?

PAULA. Not really. I mean, I always loved whales, but I didn't think I'd get to do it for real. You wish for stuff all the time—no one really thinks it'll come true.

TRACY. Until now?

PAULA. Until now!

PAT. Until now. Thank you, Paula, for that fascinating report. Coming up—

PAULA. Ooh, ooh! Lelu's coming around for another pass!

(PAULA makes elaborate whale signal gestures. PAT, TRACY and PAULA look on in awe, tracking the whale's magnificent leap, triple backflip and final plunge. We hear an enormous splash.)

Lights out on PAULA, with one arm up in the air like in Free Willy.)

PAT. Now that's what I call a whale of a tale.

(They both laugh, briefly.)

PAT (*cont'd*). Coming up, more inspiring real-life stories as reports flood in that our dreams are coming true.

TRACY. That's right, dreams are actually coming true.

PAT. And in light of this recent shift, *Nightly News Now* is pleased to announce that twenty-five-year veteran anchor Pat St. John will be joined, permanently, by newcomer Tracy Weathers.

TRACY. That's ME!!

PAT. Yes it is.

(PAT's sensible and professional show graphic is suddenly joined by TRACY's exuberant graphic, which is shot on by a rainbow and constantly sparkling.)

TRACY. That's my graphic! That's great, guys.

PAT. Doesn't it seem a little—

TRACY. Ooh! Can ya make it spin?

(They can. TRACY squeals.)

PAT. Is this necessary?

TRACY. Do it again!!

(They do.)

PAT. When we return, "Behind the Stripes: Tiger Tamers Tell All."

TRACY. Surfers sponsor super scientists to synthesize a safe tsunami at one-sixth scale.

PAT. And a young man takes the art scene by storm with his critically acclaimed and commercially successful abstract sculpture. *(He breaks from the teleprompter.)* Really?

TRACY. Oh, yes.

PAT. The sky's the limit. Apparently.

TRACY. Even a small-town girl, with empty pockets and big dreams, could wake up to find herself reading the news off fancy sheets of paper in a snappy blazer.

PAT. Imagine that.

TRACY. Yeah! And to our viewing audience, if you, too, wake up with a new sense of purpose and drive, don't panic! Professional, knowledgeable vocational advisors are standing by at a branch near you to help steer you in the right direction.

PAT. They can help you find a place for your unique talents to be fully realized and utilized for the betterment of all. A place where you have room to grow and thrive. Say, Tracy, with your brand-new news aptitude, they can probably find a great spot for you!

TRACY. They did! Right here. By you!

PAT. Oh. Great. Just absolutely great. More on this, when we return, after a few brief messages.

TRACY. Hi Mom! I'm on TV!

(TRACY's logo bursts into fireworks. She lingers, enjoying her graphics.

JESS walks into an office, catching the tail end of the previous session. DELORES, a vocational advisor, is speaking to NORMAN, a new astronaut, who is changing offstage.)