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Dramatic Publishing

Vincent

A Full-Length Play

By

LEONARD NIMOY

Based On The Play
"Van Gogh"

By

PHILLIP STEPHENS



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(VINCENT)

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VINCENT

A Full-Length Play

for One Actor

VINCENT VAN GOGHthe artist

THEO VAN GOGH the artist's brother

ACT I: The time is July, 1890, the week after Vincent's death. The period of time covered in this act ranges from the late 1870's until Vincent's first hospitalization in an asylum on September 24, 1889.

ACT II: The time is continuous until after Vincent's death which occurred on the morning of July 29, 1890.

THE PLACE: A lecture hall in Paris, France.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set Description

The UC area is filled with two large screens on which there will be projections from the rear of the stage.

The images will include photographs shot for the purpose of suggesting a place, time or incident. Throughout the play, wherever feasible, the images will depict drawings, sketches and paintings by Vincent as well as reproductions of some of his letters, some of which have self-contained sketches.

These images will either pop on, dissolve on, or cross-fade, depending on the dramatic needs of the moment and the capability of the equipment.

The setting includes an area at L that will be identified as belonging to Vincent. Here there will be an easel holding a canvas that will be turned facing upstage, away from the audience. There should be a small writing table as well as a small wood stool. Both of these pieces, as well as the easel, should be crude and of the period.

Props should include writing instruments, paper, a tobacco pouch, a pipe, a palette, brushes, and one or two items of clothing in a very sad state of repair (possibly a smock, scarf or hat).

The area at R will be referred to as Theo's area and should include a small writing desk with a draw or drawers and a chair.

This furniture should be representative of the home of a middle-class Parisienne.

During the course of the play, the actor playing Theo/Vincent will move between the area of the two characters. The essential character played is that of Theo. When the actor plays Vincent, there will be no attempt to completely lay claim to the character. Rather, it would be as if Theo were acting out for Vincent. Wherever possible in that case, it may be useful to slip on an item of Vincent's clothing, to work at his easel, or to sit and read or write at his table. There will also be moments where it is useful for Theo as himself to play in Vincent's area, perhaps handling some of Vincent's props but still functioning as Theo.

The directions written within the play, particularly those which suggest the movement to and from the two areas, are not rigid. They will surely be more realistically developed in the rehearsal and the playing. These are offered as a skeleton of the concept for the use of the two areas.

Colored slides are available for projection during a performance of this play. These slides are cued to the script and arrangements may be made to rent them for your performance. As we have only one set, the use of the slides should be scheduled well in advance. These slides are unique and valuable and must be insured by you. However, they will greatly enhance your production. Write for information to: The Dramatic Publishing Company, 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

ACT ONE

(Check FOCUS slides L-1 and R-1 then set up for Act I: L-2 LOGO, on. R-2 BLACK, ready.)

When audience enters the theatre, the stage is dark and the screens are black except for the simple white logo which says "Vincent." *(Slide L-2 LOGO.)* The house goes to black and the logo dissolves to black *(Slide R-2 BLACK)* as well. Church bells ring during the blackout as slides appear on screens. *Slides: Series of Portraits of Vincent Van Gogh. (L-3, R-3, L-4, R-4)* The stage lights dissolve up. THEO enters from R with a newspaper. He moves DC and scans the audience. Somewhat ill at ease and distressed, he searches for his opening words.

THEO. Last week when we buried my brother, there was so much I wanted to say, I couldn't do it. You see, I simply couldn't speak. I didn't express myself. It's been a burden on my soul . . . what I wanted to say and I couldn't . . . I couldn't speak . . . I couldn't find the words. I didn't express myself. So, I thank you for this second opportunity and I'll do my best to tell you some things about Vincent.

(He moves into his area and puts the newspaper in his desk drawer. He takes his jacket from the chair and puts it on.)

I'm not really sure how to begin. I suppose I should tell you he was a lover. It's true. My brother, Vincent Van Gogh, the lover. He was a lover of God, a lover of love, and of course, a lover of art. In his lifetime, he thought that he had failed at all three.

(He starts to cross to Vincent's area and around.)

To say that he worked hard at all three would simply not be true. He didn't. He did not work at them. He . . . he attacked them, he surrounded them, he schemed, he planned . . . he . . . he gathered his forces like a general going into battle, and then, with what might be referred to as an "over-developed" sense of drama, he attacked. For years he battled against everything.

(He walks back to C.)

From the time he was twenty-seven, ten years ago, until he died last week . . . he poured more energy, more passion, more love into his life and work than any ten men.

(A pause.)

I'm not going to ask you to believe that he was perfect. He was far from perfect and he seemed to thrive on failure . . . forgive me, Vincent, but it's true. He never accepted even the slightest success . . . he wanted it . . . oh, yes, he hungered for it . . . but he was terrified of it. He used to say, "Theo, let me tell you about success . . . The fireflies of South America are extremely successful. They burn so brightly ladies stick pins in them to wear them in their hair . . . so much for success." Terrified of it. He never allowed himself to believe that he had accomplished anything!

(He crosses DR to the desk and picks up a letter.)

For example . . . I sent him that recent piece by Albert Aurier.

(Slide L-5, NEWSPAPER)

Some of you probably read it . . . Now, Aurier is the most respected art critic in France today. He referred to Vincent as "the vanguard . . . the leader of the Impressionists . . . He perceives the imperceptible and secret characteristics of line and form . . . under an incessant and awesome shimmering of every imaginable effect of light . . . polished to a brilliant and enchanting iridescence. Gardens of flowers which appear like the most luxurious jewelry made from rubies, agates, onyxes and emeralds." Etc., etc. Very flattering, wouldn't you say? . . . Vincent's response.

(He picks up a letter and reads.)

"Dear Theo. Thank you very much for sending me the article. Please ask Monsieur Aurier not to write any more articles on my painting . . .

(Slide R-5, SKETCH OF BOAT SCENE)

. . . Insist upon this. To begin with, he is mistaken about me. To make pictures is difficult enough, but if I hear them spoken of, it gives me more pain than he knows.

(Slide L-6, VINCENT'S LETTER)

. . . Yesterday, I sent off three parcels by post, mostly studies of autumn, giving me . . .

(Slide R-6, LETTER "307")

. . . a lot of trouble. Sometimes I think they are ugly, sometimes they seem good to me . . . You tell me not to worry too much . . .

(Slide L-7, SKETCH OF HUT AND PEOPLE)

. . . better days will come. If I could one day prove that I have not impoverished my family, that would comfort me."

(He puts down the letter and sits.)

I doubt it. I doubt it . . . Comfort . . . Vincent could never accept comfort. He gave it, but he could never accept it. For some reason, for Vincent it always seemed necessary to find the hardest way. Was it comfort he was after thirteen years ago when he decided to spread the word of God?

(Slide R-7, CROSS)

That was his first great passion. He wanted to follow in the footsteps of our father and grandfather . . . to be a minister . . . to preach!

(He stands and starts to cross to Vincent's area. He picks up a scarf on the way.)

For two and a half years, his letters were full of God and the gospel.

(He picks up letters from Vincent's table.)

“Dear Theo. No day passes without praying to God and without speaking about Him. May God give me the wisdom I need, and grant me what I so fervently desire.”

(He reads another letter.)

“Dear Theo. I have applied for a position as evangelist among the miners in the coal mines . . .

(Slide L-8, COAL FACTORY)

In Belgium, in the south, there is a district called the Borinage with a population of laborers who work in the mines. I should like very much to go there as an evangelist, preaching the gospel to the poor . . . ‘light that rises in the darkness,’ . . .

(Slide R-8, COAL MINERS)

says the gospel . . . Who will need this most? Who will have ears for it? Those who walk in the darkness in the center of the earth!”

(He turns and confronts the audience.)

I begged him not to go, to come home, work with me in the gallery. Wait for a better position. No, he had to go . . . to bury himself in the miserable coal mines of the Borinage. That’s where he went to “seek his comfort.”

(Slide L-9, OLD MAN SPINNING)

(He reads.)

“Dear Theo.

(He sits.)

I write to you from the Borinage. There have been many cases of typhoid and fever. Most of the miners are thin and pale and look tired and emaciated, weather-beaten and aged before their time. The women, as a whole, faded and worn . . .

(Slide R-9, SKETCH/LITTLE COTTAGE)

Around the mine are poor miners' huts with a few dead trees black from smoke, thorn hedges, dunghills, ash dumps and heaps of useless coal.”

(A pause.)

Sounds very comfortable, doesn't it?

(He reads.)

“Theo: I am a man of passions.”

(Aside to the audience.)

That, my friends, is an understatement.

(To the audience.)

He wanted to stay there!

(Slide L-10, SKETCHES VARIOUS)

He wanted a permanent appointment in that misery. To spend his life in that hole. Because he was at home with those people . . . with the poor, with the peasants, with the outcasts . . . with them, he felt at home, and he preached.

(Slide R-10, RUGGED CROSS)

(He rises and crosses C.)

(He is hit with a hard white circle of light from overhead. All other lights go to black simultaneously. With all the fervor of a passionate evangelist, he preaches as VINCENT.)

I am a stranger on the earth, hide not thy commandments from me. There is an old belief, and it is a good belief, that our life is a pilgrim's progress and that we are strangers on the earth, but that though this be so, yet we are not alone for our Father is with us. We are pilgrims, our life is a long walk or journey from earth to heaven. Yet we may not live on casually hour by hour . . . we have a strife to strive and a fight to fight. The end of our pilgrimage is the entering in our Father's house, where are many mansions, where He has gone before us to prepare a place for us. There is sorrow in the hour when a man is born into the world, but also joy unspeakable, thankfulness so great that it reaches the highest heavens. Yes, the angels of God they smile, they hope and they rejoice when a man is born in the world. There is sorrow in the hour of death, but also joy unspeakable when it is the hour of death of one who has fought a good fight. There is one who has said: "I am the resurrection and the life. If any man believe in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." God, by the things of daily life, teaches us higher things; that our life is a pilgrim's progress, and that we are strangers on the earth, but that we have a God and Father

Who preserveth strangers, and that we are all brethren. Amen.
And now the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of
God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with
us forever more. Amen.

(Applause.)

(The white spot fades as area lighting returns. He removes
Vincent's scarf. As THEO.)

He was just a little bit over-zealous . . . don't you think?

(Slide L-11, MINERS)

(He crosses R to get out of mood.)

In the mine there was a terrible fire. Many miners were killed.
One man was so badly burned about the face and hands the
doctors gave him up for lost. Vincent nursed him day and
night. He tore his own clothes into rags and soaked them in
oil to make compresses for the burns. He nursed him back to
health. And because of this very act, this act of charity and
mercy, tonight our good friend Paul Gauguin, who refused to
come here to debate the question, Paul Gauguin is probably
holding court in some cafe here in Paris telling people that my
brother is crazy . . . because Vincent believed that this
Christian soul could be saved, could be brought back from the
dead . . . and he did it! . . . And Gauguin knew that he did
it . . . but because Vincent *believed* he could do it, Gauguin
is telling people that my brother was mad . . . certifiably mad.
And when that miner went back to work in the shaft, Vincent
said, "Theo, I swear . . .

(He crosses C.)

. . . to you, in the scars on that man's forehead, I could see the crown of thorns of Jesus, the Martyr." His parishioners loved him . . . they trusted him.

(He crosses UL.)

He actually believed that one must be poor to preach to the poor, so he gave away all his possessions . . . covered his face with soot . . . He lived on bread and coffee . . . gave away his bed . . . slept on a straw mat on the floor of a hut.

(He puts Vincent's scarf down.)

It was too much . . . too much . . . too much for the church authorities. He was not exactly their ideal image of a proper "servant of God" . . . so they forced him to give it up. They forced him out of the job and he was lost . . . cut off . . . cut off from everything he believed in. For a year he drifted . . . lost . . . searching for himself and for his life.

(He crosses C.)

God knows, I didn't help. I did a stupid thing . . . I'll never forgive myself for it. I told him he was being idle! He said, "Theo, you might see a bird in a cage. You might say, 'Look here, this bird has everything it needs . . . and yet it is idle' . . . but Theo, don't you understand, that bird is longing to fly . . . and I am that bird."

(He crosses to the desk at R and picks up a letter.)

At last, a year later, he wrote to me from Brussels. "October,

eighteen eighty . . . Dear Theo: If I had stayed a month longer in the Belgian Black Country, I should have been sick with misery. My only anxiety is, how can I learn more? How can I be of some use in this world? How can I serve some purpose and be of some good? . . .

(Slide R-11, SANDPIT AT DEKKER'S DUNE)

. . . For almost two years, I endured misery in the Belgian Black Country and my health has not been very good lately but if I can only succeed someday *in learning to draw well* . . ." And there it was! Now he knew . . . now Vincent knew the Black Country was not an end, it was a beginning . . . His passion led him to the Borinage and there he began to see and he began to *draw*! A new passion . . .

(Slide L-12, PEATERY)

"I have sketched a drawing representing miners . . . men, women, going to the shaft in the morning through the snow, by a path along a hedge of thorns; shadows that pass, dimly visible in the twilight. In the background, the large constructions of the mine stand out vaguely against the sky. I should like very much to make that drawing over again, better than I have done it now."

(Slide R-12, DIGGERS)

(THEO is exultant.)

A new passion! Now what could stop him? What could stand in his way? He came up from the bowels of the earth, stepped out into the sunlight . . .