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Family Plays

JUVIE

DRAMA BY
JEROME MCDONOUGH

JUVIE

Drama. By Jerome McDonough. *Cast: 3 to 5m., 8 to 10w.* Shelly O'Day's review in the *Spartan Daily* of the Northside Theatre Company's production in San Jose, California, summarizes the plot: "Set in a juvenile detention center, *Juvie* depicts the life of kids who are scared, lonely and locked up. Some are drug offenders, some have killed and some are just misfits. Although the set never changes, the "juvies" venture out of their cells to tell why and how they were caught. The barren cell and lack of props are effective in keeping with each character's desolation." *The English Journal* called McDonough the "Father of Young Adult Drama" because he was among the first to tackle the problems facing youth today in a straightforward, effective manner without profanity and obscenity. *Juvie* was the most-produced play by National Thespian Society members at one time, and McDonough's *Addict* and *Dolls* later joined *Juvie* on the top ten list. Since McDonough's death in 1999, we continue to get requests for biographical information from students who want to write an essay on the positive influence McDonough's plays have had on their lives. *Set: juvenile detention holding cells. Time: today. Approximate running time: 70 minutes, with suggestions for cutting. Code: J64.*

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A Play
by
Jerome McDonough

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311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

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JEROME MCDONOUGH

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Dedication

To the Lord who has kept the words coming for so many years and whose whispers will, I hope, continue. Blessed be God.
Blessed be His Holy Name.

Gratitude

To the original cast: Ami Davis, Greg Lamm, Steve Austin, Kelly Smith, Carolyn Roan, Suzanne Hurst, Dan Struchen, Phillip Calhoun, Dana Massey, Ramona McKinney, Laura Burch, Debbie Rawls, Karen Boydston, Jodie Gideon, Kristine Huxley, and Barbara Rivers, and to their parents who endorsed the project from day one.

To Stan Stout, Amarillo P. D., police liaison officer to Caprock High School, for tireless consultation and research.

And to June Legacy, principal of Caprock, who believes that a statement worth making should be heard.

JUVIE

Cast of Characters

Jean*	}	The Inmate Ensemble
Sunny		
Skip		
Carey*		
Andrew*		
Ann		
Pinky*		
Jane*		
[Sean] *		
[Phylly] *		
[Leah] *		
[June] *		
[Dina] *		
Guard 1*		
[Guard 2] *		

Voice (over loudspeaker)

*These characters may be played by either sex (minor changes in the text may be required)

[] These characters may be omitted without disturbing the continuity of the play. With slight changes in line assignments, Sunny, Carey, and Ann may also be omitted to farther reduce the cast size.

There are other named characters in the script, but they are all played by members of the Inmate Ensemble.

Time: The Present

Place: Juvenile Detention holding cells. The building is called "Juvie" by its inmates

NOTE: The characters in this play and their names are fictitious. None of the characters is a real person, living or dead.

ABOUT THE PLAY

JUVIE is an ensemble play. All the young people who are being detained in the Juvenile Detention Center form an "Inmate Ensemble." All the roles except the Guard(s) may be played by ensemble members; thus the cast may be as small as six. Or the cast size may be expanded to include not only all the characters listed on the preceding page but also extra inmates whose only function will be to serve as actors in the "recollection" scenes.

Regardless of cast size, the play should not be a star vehicle. It is intended to present the realities of crime and its punishment in the plainest possible terms. Show biz is not the business of JUVIE.

The play is written and loosely blocked for proscenium production but an intimate space, such as an arena stage, might prove even more effective. A means of locking the audience up with the inmates of JUVIE, at least symbolically, could underscore the horror of the situation better than more traditional approaches. Environmental production techniques are a definite possibility.

Progressions

The play suggests an entire night in the holding cells. Therefore, as the play progresses, more and more people will fall off to sleep. By two-thirds of the way through the play, everyone except those directly participating in recollections will be sleeping. The discomfort of this arrangement will help underscore the general unpleasantness of the entire scene.

Another progression is the subtle change from the first moment in jail through learning more about the others in the cell and making certain assumptions about each character's own condition. This progression may be to greater anxiety, to plans of punishment evasion, to plea bargaining, to any of hundreds of other options, pleasant or unpleasant, which may occur to the character.

Another progression is from first moment to realization of future moments. Is release coming or is further detention to be expected?

Each character must evaluate his own progressions—and play them—and, above all, believe them.

Jerome McDonough

May, 1982

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

Most of the props in this play are mimed. Exceptions include the following:

Night sticks or shotguns—Guards

Stretcher, or two thick dowel rods 6' long—Ambulance Attendants in Jean's recollection, p. 19

Costumes

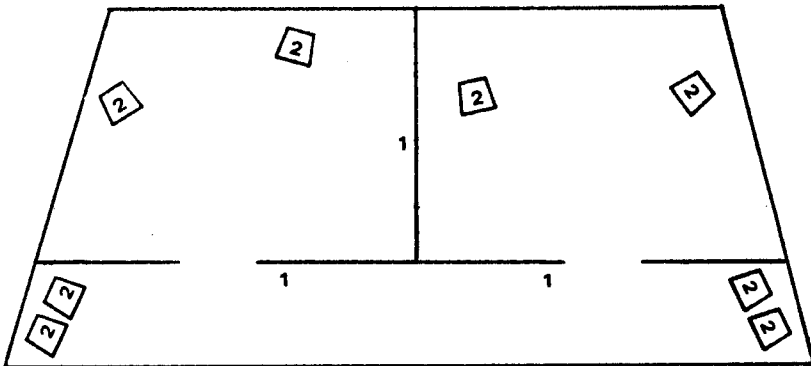
The guards wear police uniforms. All other actors should find clothing suitable for their characterizations (suitable from the skin out). The only stricture is that all belts, jewelry, headbands, and shoes or shoestrings are removed from prisoners before they are placed in the holding cells. A few minor accessory costume elements may be used to help suggest such characters as the Psychiatrist or the Social Worker. Such elements will be placed just offstage when not in use.

Lighting

Any form of illumination will suffice but focus may be aided somewhat by lowering the general setting for the recollection sections and isolating the solo performers with a follow spot or area lighting. The general lighting in this case should include a mix of colors so that the lower setting will give a rather hazy effect.

Setting

A few boards or lengths of dowelling define the downstage edge of the cells and provide a divider between the two cells. No other setting is used. There are two plain chairs in each cell and two more at Down Right and Down Left. There may be a few pallets in each cell; if so, they are not the cleanest in the world.



1—boards or dowel rods on floor to define the two cells (size will vary according to the number of people incarcerated in each cell).

2—Chairs

JUVIE

By Jerome McDonough

[At rise, the stage is virtually bare. Dark wood planks or 1" dowels define the perimeters of two jail cells, one for boys and one for girls. These boards lie flat on the floor and the two areas are divided in rough proportion to the number of each sex in the cast. Many roles may be played by either sex, so the size is flexible. The characters themselves define their incarceration by their movement rather than physical walls doing so.]

Two GUARDS will alternate bringing the inmates into the jail as the charges against each young person are read. (If the optional characters of Diná, June, Leah, Phylly, and Sean are cast, they may already be in place at rise or may stay off until their sections.) Once the action of the play begins, the characters will be "locked up" during reality sections but may wander freely throughout the area when portraying another person or when involved in recollections. Each recollection ends, however, with all inmates locked up again.

As the cells fill with inmates, each establishes his/her own territory or his/her inability to establish it. The uncertainty of the surroundings lends a tension. Each inmate knows only who he/she is—there is no way to know who the others are—even the stories the others tell may be fabrications. This insecurity/instability should color each performer and performance. The feelings of each character within the whole must be constantly on each character's mind. Blocking per se in reality section is less important than maintaining these interrelationships. There are two chairs in each of the two cells. There may also be a few pallets around but they are probably not inviting. Power struggles for the two chairs may form secondary physical/emotional plots]

VOICE. [As GUARD 1 brings on JEAN and locks her up] Armstrong, Jean, female. 15. Apprehended in process of burglary of a habitation. Complaint pending, assault. Probation violation. Two prior convictions. Parent notification attempt unsuccessful. [JEAN will have progressive drug withdrawal symptoms as the play progresses. Cell door is shut (mimed) by GUARD 1 as GUARD 2 brings SUNNY on. Reading of charges should be practically continuous] Collins, Margaret also known

as Sunny, female, 16. Investigation of aggravated assault and unlawful flight to avoid prosecution. Action pending verified information, Woodson P. D. *[She is locked in. Since the action of bringing on each character and locking him/her in the cell is the same for each offender, these stage directions will not be repeated]* Sanderson, Jeffrey, also known as Skip, male, 16. Driving under the influence, second offense; driving without a license, resisting arrest. Probation violation. Parent notification attempt unsuccessful. Miller, Carey, female, 16. Leaving the scene of an accident, hit and run. Parents notified. Marler, Andrew, male, 15. Communicating gambling information, specifically delivery of bookmaking and numbers receipts. Five previous arrests, varying charges—all dismissed on basis of incompetency. Remanded to Department of Human Resources, five times. Guardian notified. Ballew, Ann Elizabeth, female, 14. Theft over \$20 and under \$200, specifically shoplifting. Parents notified. Simpson, Charlotte, also known as Pinky, alias Charlotte Singleton, and C. J. Simpkins, female, 16. Delivery of a controlled substance, possession of a controlled substance, carrying a prohibited weapon, unlawful flight to avoid prosecution, resisting arrest. Probation violation. Five prior convictions. Parents refused to appear. Probation officer notified. *[PINKY will have some drug withdrawal symptoms, even though denying them]* Doe, Jane, Arrest Number 773, female, approximate age 13. Investigation of runaway, resisting arrest. Refuses to give name, address, parent's name or location. Department of Human Resources notified. Parents unknown.

[Silence as the inmates regard each other carefully. Some shifting of locations may occur as value judgments are made. The GUARDS reappear at the periphery of the stage. They will walk the perimeter of the performance space and even the audience area itself during the play, abandoning this activity only when needed within the action of the play. They carry nightsticks or shotguns. PINKY rises and surveys the crowd in the holding cells. She acts disappointed]

PINKY. My, my. Is this Saturday night or not? Where are the regulars? *[Sees Andrew Marler and crosses to near the bars separating the boys' cell from the girls' cell]* Ah, here's a familiar face—Andy the Vege.

ANDREW. Don't you call me that.

PINKY. Andy the Vege, why don't you want me to call you Andy the Vege?

ANDREW. Don't. I know you. Don't call me that.

PINKY. What shall I call you?

ANDREW. Why do you call me that?

PINKY. What's two and two?

ANDREW. Four.

PINKY. Four and four?

ANDREW. . . . Eight.

PINKY. Eight and eight?

ANDREW. . . . Why do you call me that?

PINKY. What they got you for, Andy the Vege? White-collar crime? Counterspy intelligence ring? What, Andy the Vege?

ANDREW. Don't you call me that. I don't know why they got me. But I've got to get out. I've got to deliver the bags.

PINKY. Plastic bags?

ANDREW. No. Brown bags. With papers in them. If I don't deliver them, they'll fire me. I don't want to get fired. I have trouble getting jobs.

PINKY. No!

ANDREW. I've got to buy presents. I can't get fired.

PINKY. Maybe you can get a job in a salad, Andy the Vege.

ANDREW. Don't you call me that.

JEAN. *[Interrupting Pinky's next barb]* Back off from him.

PINKY. *[Turning to Jean]* What's it to you?

JEAN. You've got him enough.

PINKY. So who are you—Blondie-the-Vege?

JEAN. Jean. And I like being left alone.

PINKY. I'll bet that's how the guys spend their weekends.

JEAN. You've got a mouth that needs shutting.

PINKY. Come zip it, sister. *[They start for each other. GUARD calls out]*

GUARD. Knock it off in there.

PINKY. What, no square dancing? *[Quietly, to Jean]* We'll settle this later.

JEAN. When you get out? Bring your Medicare card. *[JEAN turns away and PINKY abandons the effort and settles to a chair]*

SKIP. Too bad. I thought we'd see a cat fight. *[To Andrew]* Want to see a cat fight, Vege?

ANDREW. Don't you call me that. *[To Pinky]* See what you did?

PINKY. Can you ever forgive me?

ANDREW. I don't like that name.

JEAN. *[To Skip]* Why can't everybody leave him alone?

CAREY. Yes, leave him alone.

SKIP. Aren't mothers getting younger these days! You want to rock him to sleep? I'll find a rock for you.

JEAN. *[To Skip]* What've you got to be so mighty about?

[During the following (and the rest of the recollections) the lights may remain the same or some device to set the solo performer apart may be used. For example, the general illumination may drop to fifty percent and a follow spot may isolate the performer. In this and all other solo sequences, the character portrays himself/herself in the recollection and is not confined by the imaginary cell walls. The other inmates (the "Inmate Ensemble") take roles as indicated]

SKIP. I shouldn't be in here. So I was a little drunk, so I've got balloon breath, so what? If booze rots my guts, they're mine to rot.

JEAN. I'm for that.

SKIP. Anyway, I'm not the menace on the streets. Do you know who is? Old people. *[SKIP picks up a chair and brings it down to the apron. Another male inmate also takes a chair and places it next to him, assuming the role of SAMMY. These two will mime Skip's story as narrated by him]* I was out on the Interstate on Monday. Rush hour, bumper-to-bumper but we were movin' OK, sixty, sixty-five. Then it's like somebody put up a wall. Two old geezers are pokin' along in the center and right lane, maybe fifty miles an hour. Happy hour was sliding away and I was sitting there, practically parked. The left lane was full of people going ninety but this long clear stretch was comin' up on the right so I just whipped it over on to the shoulder, two wheels on the grass and two on the pavement and I opened her up. I hit seventy, eighty and passed those fools. I started to pull back on but then I saw this light pole a couple of hundred feet in front of me. Sammy was ridin' with me that day and he's always been a real old lady about my driving so I figured here was my chance. I headed straight for that pole. I thought Sam was going to climb out through the vent window.

SAMMY. Get back on the road, man! *[PINKY laughs]*

SKIP. I was maybe ten feet from the pole when I cut back on to the highway. Couldn't have missed it by a foot. Sammy just fell over.

JEAN. Great joke. Almost kill yourself and your friend.

SKIP. *[As SKIP and the other inmate return the chairs to the cell]* Never even came close. I can tell how far something's in front of the

car, no matter how fast I'm going. And I can judge even better after a few drinks. Really. Better. *[Lights up fully if not already so]*

JEAN. Stinking thinking.

SKIP. What?

JEAN. My brother was an alcoholic. They sent him to A. A. after his third fall. They call that stinking thinking.

SKIP. Who you calling an alcoholic?

JEAN. Drunks rationalize everything.

SKIP. It's OK. I'm coming off my little buzz every second, but how about you? You think I don't see the signs coming on? The moves, the eyes darting around? I'm getting better every second but how about you? *[Indicating Pinky]* How about her? Maybe some of the others, too. I haven't made a comprehensive junkie count.

JEAN. Shut up!

SKIP. Sure. I'm getting better every second. How about you?

[Everything quiets. The cells are silent. CAREY rises and comes slowly to the edge of the cell area and looks out. The rest of the cast will animate Carey's story as indicated]

CAREY. I wonder if there's some primitive place left in the world, a place with trees and beaches and warm weather all year and lots of children to play among it all. *[During speech, cast moves to Up Center and forms two circles, one inside the other, both facing inward. In slow motion, the circles start to move in opposite directions, symbolizing some universal children's game]* They could run on the sand and chase each other in the surf like dolphins.

CHILD'S VOICE. *[From within the circles]* Aunt Carey, you're sitting with us tonight, aren't you? You promised.

CAREY. Of course. I'll be there. *[Back to the island portrait fantasy]* I wouldn't need much. Just a quiet place near the beach so I could watch the children. *[Circle game stops and the two circles start to slowly move their still-joined hands and arms in slow-motion suggestion of the ocean's waves]* And if one got too far into the surf I could swim out and bring him back. Or if the weather turned bad, I could shout to them so they'd run and cuddle in their huts with their families until the storm had passed. *[During this last, the waves cease and the circles move together, arms raised and joined, suggesting the pointed thatched roof of a hut. Freeze]*

CHILD'S VOICE. Don't go, Carey. Stay tonight, too.

CAREY. I'll keep you Friday again. You pick the books we'll read.

[Back to the island] I wouldn't need much. I'd stay there forever. Or until machines started coming in. Machines are the evil in us. We look for something to kill—like I killed.

MOTHER'S VOICE. He isn't dead, Carey. Don't think about it.

CAREY. What else can I think about? *[The hut breaks up and several people take sides for touch football. Others watch from upstage. The quarterback takes the ball, fades back, and throws to a boy who runs toward the apron. CAREY mimes driving. On cue, a "car" hits the boy. CAREY mimes panicked driving in place. The rest rush to the boy and watch him helplessly for balance of speech. Freeze]* Every night for the rest of my life I'll see that blonde head and that striped shirt. I'll see it for the split second before I crushed it under the machine, before I tried to drive so far and so fast that it didn't ever happen. And I'll see the red and the water from the Mother's eyes and the wheeling bed and the doors swinging closed, redder and more horrible than if I'd really seen it. Then I'll see it again and I'll open my eyes and try not to scream because my throat already hurts so much but I'll scream anyway. And it won't dry even one drop of the red and I'll try to keep my eyes open but they'll sink again and I'll see it all over.

CHILD'S VOICE. Aunt Carey? . . . Aunt Carey? . . .

CAREY. I—hope I don't—have many nights. *[The scene breaks and the inmates return to the cell. CAREY stands at the downstage edge of the cell, her hand slightly before her, as if half-reaching for something]*

GUARD. Hands inside the bars, girl.

PINKY. What's she gonna do, bend 'em?

GUARD. You know the rules, Pinky.

PINKY. Yeah, I know 'em.

GUARD. *[Toward JANE DOE, who has taken up residence in a far corner]* You, in the corner. You ready to talk? *[No response from Jane]* You're just makin' it tough on yourself. *[No response]* OK. *[GUARD moves back to patrol. SKIP turns toward Jane]*

SKIP. Keep it up, kid. Don't say anything and they can't hang anything on you.

JEAN. Or they can stick you with everything.

SUNNY. You don't have to *do* anything. You just have to be around when something happens.

SKIP. Oh, yeah. *[Mimicking]* "Really, officer, I was just standing there and these seven guys jumped in front of my machine gun."

SUNNY. You don't have to do anything. *[Indicating Guard]* Can he (she) hear me?