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Plays on Principle: Ten 10-Minute Plays

By

PAT MONTLEY

Dramatic Publishing Company

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Plays on Principle (which originally included seven of the ten plays here) was premiered at the First Unitarian Church of Baltimore in 2019 as part of a bicentennial celebration. The production was funded by a Creativity Grant awarded to the playwright by the Maryland State Arts Council.

CAST:

Christine Demuth	Michelle Lee
Chris Edwards	Richard Peck
Flinn Leigh Eng	Vernon Rey
Melissa Feliciano	Molly Ruhlman
Layla Hodge	Owen Sahnnow
Timothy Johnson	Sally Wall

PRODUCTION:

Director	Pat Montley
Set, Sound & Lighting Designer	Daryl Beard
Stage Managers	Naomi Berkenbilt, Javier Jaramillo
Set Crew	Jim Houston, Scott Macleod, Richard Peck, Owen Sahnnow

Foxholes

CHARACTERS

DEVON: 18 to 25 years old, a soldier, male, any race.

JAMIE: 18 to 25 years old, a soldier, any gender, any race.

(For purposes of pronoun efficiency, Jamie is referred to as “she.” Please adjust pronouns as needed.)

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A foxhole in a war-torn country.

PRODUCTION NOTE: Profanity may be substituted as needed.

Question: What gives meaning to life?

(At lights up, we hear ear-splitting sounds of battle: bombs dropping, helicopters hovering, machine guns firing, soldiers shouting. Two soldiers—DEVON and JAMIE—fire in the direction of the enemy. While continuing to fire, DEVON sings.)

DEVON *(singing loudly, defiantly).*

AMAZING GRACE, HOW SWEET THE SOUND,
THAT SAVED A WRETCH LIKE ME ...

(The battle noise subsides. The soldiers take a breath. DEVON remains facing the direction of the enemy with gun poised.)

JAMIE. Do you think you're a wretch?

DEVON. Say what?

JAMIE. "That saved a wretch like me."

DEVON. Well now, that wouldn't reflect a very healthy self-image, would it?

JAMIE. So why are you singing it, Devon dear?

DEVON. 'Cause if I sing loud enough, Jamie darlin', I can't hear the ... (*Gesturing towards enemy line.*) racket. Besides, my singing's so bad and loud and foreign, it's gotta scare the shit outta *them*, right?

JAMIE. What makes you think that?

DEVON. One time I was walking home after my night shift, and this guy comes outta nowhere with a knife and says, "Gimme your wallet and you won't get hurt." Now I don't believe him, and I am not gonna hand over my wallet. So I just channel my choir-boy training, point my four fingers at his eyes, and start screaming:

*AVE MARIA, GRATIA PLENA, DOMINUS,
TECUM, BENEDICTA TU IN MULIERIBUS!*

Before I could even get to "Pray for us sinners," his ass was gone. (*Delivering "the lesson."*) People— (*Gesturing to the enemy.*) even people with weapons—are afraid of "crazy."

JAMIE. Or maybe it was the power of prayer.

DEVON. Yeah, right. And what about here? Don't you think the other side's praying too?

JAMIE. Sure. But maybe they don't have "right" on their side.

DEVON. Like six million Jews, a gazillion Native Americans, millions of African slaves and twenty Sandy Hook first-graders didn't have "right" on their side?

JAMIE. So ... you don't think it's worth praying?

DEVON. I just don't believe there's anybody listening.

JAMIE. But what if there is?

DEVON. I'm not a "what-if" kinda guy. If somebody's making nice with me "just in case" I might be a generous god, I'm not giving 'em what they want ... even if they need it.

JAMIE. So you ... you're an atheist because you're too damn selfish to be an agnostic?

DEVON. Shit, you ask a lotta questions.

JAMIE. You sing. I ask questions. Whatever works.

DEVON. And *is* it working for you, Jamie? Is it taking you mind off our ... situation? 'Cause it sure as hell ain't working for me.

JAMIE. What *would* work for you, Devon? What would ... distract you?

DEVON. We can't afford to be distracted—don't you forget it. But I'll tell you what could make me happy, even right here and now. A pair of clean, dry socks.

JAMIE. Happy, huh? Who cares? Maybe none of it matters. Happiness ... misery ... life ... death ... money ... poverty. The Buddhists believe that, you know. My sister's dating a Buddhist. "All illusion." That's what he keeps saying. "Illusion." Like that's some magical explanation that makes all the suffering shit OK. Like if we just don't care, it won't hurt. Like if we ignore the bad things, they'll go away. And if we don't get "attached" to the good things, we won't miss them when *they* go away. Well, it's not. It's not OK! Suffering is not OK! (*Shouting in the direction of the enemy.*) Do you hear me?! (*Suddenly stands and shouts.*) SUFFERING IS NOT OK!

(*JAMIE fires her machine gun at the enemy. DEVON grabs JAMIE, pulls her down.*)

DEVON. Get down! You fuckin' crazy? Why don't you just pin a target to your chest?

JAMIE. Sometimes I want to. Just to get it over.

DEVON. You don't mean that.

JAMIE. Yeah, I do.

DEVON. Snap out of it, soldier! You can't be thinking like that. I need you to have my back—just like I got yours. I don't want to hear that suicide shit.

JAMIE. OK, OK, you're right. Dying is some kinda luxury we can't afford just now.

DEVON. A luxury?

JAMIE. Compared to living in this damn hole ... especially if there's a heaven.

DEVON. You believe that crap?

JAMIE. Stranger things turn out to be possible.

DEVON. Like what?

JAMIE (*shrugs*). The earth being round. Electricity. Heart transplants. Love. Artificial intelligence.

DEVON. Come on—a robot that vacuums your floor ain't exactly a miracle.

JAMIE. Some robots are a lot smarter than that.

DEVON. Yeah, well, too bad they didn't come along sooner—so they could've been fighting this friggin' war instead of us.

JAMIE. Tell the truth—would you rather be sharing this foxhole with a robot?

DEVON. At least I could hide behind the bot when the bullets start coming.

JAMIE (*teasing*). But what would you do for ... conversation?

DEVON. Are you kidding? The bot would be teaching me to