

The Raven's Tale

By Will Huddleston

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Here an exuberant play composed of five spellbinding stories from Native American lore. Each is full of song, comedy, lively ritual, and dance.

In the first story, **Creation**, the Raven, great trickster bird of all the Northwest Native American tribes, creates the world and the creatures in it. When Man complains that the darkness keeps him white as a fungus, Raven fills the sky with the sun, the moon, and the stars. These fine new inventions are soon monopolized by greedy Ganuk and hidden in a box in his house. Raven infiltrates Ganuk's household by turning himself into a feather and getting himself swallowed by Ganuk's daughter. Soon Raven, disguised as Ganuk's infant grandson, is born. In fine comic fashion the sun, the moon, and the stars are returned to their proper place in the sky.

The next story, **The Feather**, tells how Raven caused a giant bloodthirsty Cannibal to be disintegrated into all the mosquitoes in the world.

The third story, **Cannibal**, tells of Raven's tragic love affair with the beautiful spirit found inside a whale. (Even the creator of the world is unsuccessful in love.) When greedy seals try to eat the body of the dead whale, Raven glues their eyes shut with pine sap and convinces them that the entire world is the dark inside of a whale. The seals set about to eat everything including a wolf who quickly turns the meaning of "seal food" around.

In **The Whale**, the fish have disappeared and mankind is starving. Once again Raven must come to their rescue. Raven finds a strange creature living in a house far out on the waves who can catch all the fish he wants. Raven steals the house (around which all the fish are gathered) in order to bring the fish back to man. But the creature rises out of the sea and beats Raven who discovers that the one he has betrayed was the soul of Halibut, the greatest fish of them all.

In the final story, **Halibut**, Raven convinces Halibut to return, and all the creatures of the world celebrate the unending bounty of the ocean.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(Flexible cast of 5-15)

THE NARRATOR

RAVEN

HUMAN

OTTER

EAGLE

GANUK

ANANA

DEER

BEAR

ELDER BROTHER

YOUNGER BROTHER

WOMAN ROOTED TO THE FLOOR

CANNIBAL'S WOMAN

CANNIBAL OF THE NORTH

SPIRIT OF THE WHALE

SEALS (4-6)

FISHERMAN/HALIBUT

FIRST BOY

SECOND BOY

***ANY EXTRAS DESIRED**

*Parts may be doubled and even tripled or more performers
may be added.*

PRODUCTION NOTES

Much of the music should be live, if possible. The set is basically an open stage. For the first production of "The Raven's Tale", designer Tom Hird created a large drop on which 'The Everlasting House' was represented. For the Alaska Youth Theatre production, designer Paul Vallergera made large whale bones that could be assembled in interesting ways.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

THE RAVEN'S TALE was first presented in the spring of 1992 by the Theater Department of California State University at Hayward with Regina Cate acting as Producer. The production was directed by the author and Anna Marie Matthews as Assistant Director. Set and lights were designed by Tom Hird. Greg Ojeda designed the costumes, and Judi Galantowicz was the Stage Manager. The cast included: Mike Singer; David Ledsinger; Priscilla Page; Tommy Drake; Bill Rontonj; Anna Marie Matthews.

1992 Honorable Mention in the Alaska Native Plays Contest sponsored by the University of Alaska at Anchorage.

1995 the Alaska Youth Theatre produced a production under the direction of Lynn Pace which toured internationally.

Scene 1: Creation

(AT RISE: The PERFORMERS enter, singing and dancing. The storytelling begins.)

NARRATOR: In the beginning before the humans came, before the animals and before the sun and the moon, before the stars in the sky there was only blackness.

(RAVEN is dressed in his feathered cape and a mask.)

NARRATOR: *(Cont'd.)* And what in all the world that wasn't yet is blacker than a Raven?

RAVEN: A black hole in all there is, is what a Raven is. Obsidian black with wings and claws. A hole that walks. A hole that caws. A hole that you can see stars through. And that is why the Raven came first.

(RAVEN dances and drives the PERFORMERS from the stage. The sound of the void is heard.)

RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)* I am Raven.

(MUSIC - RAVEN flies and dances.)

RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)* And I have decided that I don't wish to fly forever through blackness.

(MUSIC - RAVEN lands.)

RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)* So I have made a giant ball of snowflakes to stand upon so that I can rest my wings.

(MUSIC - RAVEN dances and scratches.)

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RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)* Hai yah! What's going on? I scratch the ball of snow I made and underneath is earth and clay.

(PERFORMERS appear, holding pine branches.)

RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)* Everywhere I brush my wings. Are sprouting pine trees, growing things. This forest will be useful one day. I will call this little thing a pea pod. Yah! *(RAVEN throws the pea pod.)* The pea pod has something inside that is moving.

(A HUMAN rolls onstage.)

RAVEN: Where did you come from?

HUMAN: I crawled out of the pea pod.

RAVEN: Who are you? I will call you a human.

HUMAN: Why is it so dark? My skin will stay white as a fungus unless you make some light. And why am I the only one here?

RAVEN: Since I've made you, I will be your friend and give you what you want.

HUMAN: I would like an end to all this darkness.

RAVEN: I will put lights in the sky. And they will be the stars...

(SOUND - the stars appear.)

RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)*... the moon,

(SOUND - the moon appears.)

RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)* ...and the sun.

(SOUND - the sun appears.)

HUMAN: This is good, Raven. But there is something else.

RAVEN: What is it now!

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HUMAN: I am lonely, Raven. You made me. Can you make me some companions?

RAVEN: Why not? Pea pods are growing all around.

(RAVEN throws more pods. HUMANS roll onstage.)

HUMANS: Raven, we're hungry! *(THEY complain loudly.)*

RAVEN: All right! Silence! I am Raven and I will set things right.

NARRATOR: He sprinkled the pools of melted snow with alder leaves. The leaves began to tremble and leap and soon the pool was full of fish.

(The PERFORMERS become SALMON, leaping over each other. A HUMAN catches one. There is a feast.)

HUMAN: The salmon is certainly delicious.

RAVEN: I will divide the people of the earth into groups. And to each group I will give a name and something to do.

(As RAVEN assigns a name a Mask or Totem is produced.)

RAVEN: *(Cont'd.)* Some people will be called Eagle. You must ride the winds and eat the fish that wash up on the shores. Some people will be called Bear. You must scratch the trees and turn over logs in search of grubs and honey. Some will be Seals and Otters. You will populate the villages that lie beneath the waves of the sea. There will be Otter, Deer, Fish and Bird. And the world will be yours.

(Song and dance.)

NARRATOR: And the earth grew fat and rich with all the plants and animals. But one day the sky grew dark again.

EAGLE: Raven, Raven. Help us! We are miserable. Why did you make the world anyway?

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