

KANGAROO COURT

By Nicholas Checker

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FIRST PERFORMANCE

Kangaroo Court was first performed on August 24, 1994, at Ocean Beach Park, New London, CT, under the auspices of "Local Playwrights '94." It was staged again on October 28 and 29, 1994, by the Mystic River Theatre at the Meeting House in Olde Mistick Village, Mystic, CT, with the same cast, director and crew.

DIRECTOR: Arthur A. Pignataro

STAGE MANAGER: Greg Bliven

SOUND EFFECTS: Bob Calabro

COSTUMES/PROPS: Nicki Boenig and Ellen Lazerow

CAST IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

DEER/LAB TECHNICIAN/HUNTER: Bill Martuscello

WOLF/FARMER/RINGMASTER: Soshana Dos

MAN/CALF/BEAR: Kim Patterson

WOMAN/RABBIT/RACCOON: Carol Pratt

JUDGE: Thomas Kelly

CAT (MISTY): Darla Allen

Special Thanks

A special thanks goes out to director Arthur A. Pignataro for believing in this play from the onset and using his theatrical savvy in bringing it to the stage for the first time.

DEDICATION

Kangaroo Court was written with the intent of raising people's awareness of the need to put aside a self-imposed arrogance and recognize that we, as a species, are not so sacrosanct that we have the right to treat other living creatures as disposable items.

My childhood was blessed by a mother who raised me to regard animals as magnificent creatures deserving of our compassion and our respect, due simply to the wonder of their existence, not whether they can serve humans or not.

Having seen more than my share of cruelty and neglect on the part of humans toward animals (and made nauseous by the pathetic rationale offered by perpetrators), I sat down at my backyard picnic table - with my loyal cat, Prowler, sitting and watching me scribble every word - and wrote the first draft of *Kangaroo Court*. It is dedicated to every animal that ever suffered ill-treatment by humans - and inspired by those of you who do demonstrate compassion for other living things, human and non-human.

The playwright, Nicholas Checker

Nicholas Checker is an associate member of the Dramatists Guild, Inc.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Kangaroo Court is a surreal satire where rebellious animals put humans on trial. It is both a director's delight and a fun fest for actors, since it can be staged in any number of creative ways — ranging from bare suggestive elements to elaborate costumes, puppets, and masks. It has been performed successfully using a variety of styles. The play is a zany one that packs a real wallop.

In collaborating with a mysterious judge, who remains cloaked and hooded till the story's end, the Animal Kingdom whisks two very ordinary people into a "void between worlds," where Judgment Day for all of Mankind is imminent.

In a tongue-in-cheek manner, the Animal Kingdom vividly expresses its displeasure with the callous attitudes displayed too often by many humans towards animals. The humans find their defense to be a futile one, as the stock rationale they offer is frequently twisted and turned back around on them by the animals. It is indeed a "kangaroo court" (complete with a kangaroo juror), which features an ironic reversal of roles where the animals finally get to mete out a long overdue "what-goes-around-comes-around" on the "superior species."

The play's overall intent is to give viewers a deeper, more compassionate outlook on animals via a biting satire that offers laughter with a sting. (No pun intended.)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 3 w, 3 flexible, extras)

MAN: American male who pays his taxes and knows his rights. Also assumes roles of the CALF and the BEAR.

WOMAN: American female who knows how to cook and stands by her man. Also assumes roles of the RABBIT and the RACCOON.

JUDGE: (Male or Female) Sardonic and cryptic; relishes the ironies; foppish at times.

DEER: (Male) Baffled by humans; comically innocent at times; occasional wit. Also assumes roles of the LAB TECHNICIAN and the HUNTER.

WOLF: (Female) Sullen; intolerant of humans; humorless. Also assumes roles of FARMER and RINGMASTER.

CAT: (Female) Torn between resentment toward humans and a pet's natural sense of devotion.

MINIONS OF THE VOID: (2, male or female) They can best be described as oddly-garbed, or outrageously made-up "hobgoblin-type creatures," which inhabit the "Void Between Worlds" where the trial takes place. They serve nicely as a vehicle for "capturing" the Man and Woman initially, reading off the various broadcasts that occur throughout the script (in most unusual voices), serving the Judge whenever they are called upon, (e.g., running out onto the stage with various masks when the animal jury is announced), and being a general nuisance to the Man and Woman. Their use is entirely up to the director's creativity.

BROADCASTING VOICES: (Interludes) Are done by various cast members. Choices are director's discretion.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Stage is dark and still, as select CAST MEMBERS call out in broadcasting fashion.)

BROADCAST: In Grants Pass, Oregon, environmentalists protested the US Forest Service's decision to allow logging in the Northwest Woods, saying the plan would devastate the habitat of the spotted owl and cause serious damage to old growth forest.

BROADCAST: Animal rights activists gathered today in Norwalk, Connecticut, protesting US Surgical's use of live dogs for training sales personnel to demonstrate the application of surgical staples.

BROADCAST: In Alaska, Governor Walter Hickel and the Fish and Game Department announced plans for an aerial wolf hunt as a means of curbing the wolf population, and ensuring expansion of caribou herds. Hunting and trapping groups have endorsed the plan, while animal rights activists are venting their outrage.

BROADCAST: Marksmen were employed today to shoot seagulls that stray across runways of John F. Kennedy Airport in New York. A spokesman for the Port Authority said, "We don't want to kill any live species, but people are more important than birds."

BROADCAST: In Groton, Connecticut, the Department of Environmental Protection announced its plans for special hunting seasons to be held periodically at the Bluff Point Coastal Reserve. DEP officials say the 802-acre sanctuary is too small a patch of land to accommodate the herd, and that an absence of natural predators has caused the problem. Local politicians, members of the hunting community, and gardeners who have seen their decorative shrubs eaten by the deer, agree that the hunt is in the best interest of the herd, which officials have assessed as being in poor health.

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(LIGHTS up. The stage is dimly lit. Enter DEER who glances about nervously, then begins munching on "plants." Quiet sounds of nature in background. WOLF enters. Animal characters may be partially masked with costumed suggestion of hooves, paws, tails, ears, snouts, etc.; traits may also be conveyed through make-up, body movement or simple facial expressions. Deer sees Wolf and starts to flee.)

WOLF: Wait! I'm not going to hurt you!

DEER: You're a wolf, aren't you?

WOLF: *(Chasing.)* I can't help my instincts.

DEER: Well, I'm a deer. I can't help mine, either.

WOLF: You don't understand: I'm the other one they chose.

DEER: *(Stops.)* You? Why?

WOLF: They're killing my kind up in the north. They say there's too many of us killing off your kind.

DEER: Now that's a laugh. Down where I come from, they say they're killing off my kind because there's not enough of you to do it.

WOLF: I thought these humans were supposed to be intelligent.

DEER: Some of them are.

WOLF: Not enough.

DEER: So what happens now?

WOLF: We wait until we're called. There's a pair of ordinary ones that have been picked out for us.

(LIGHTS up on MAN and WOMAN.)

DEER: Is that them? Those two sitting there, eating?

WOLF: That's them, all right.

DEER: They look pretty ordinary to me. Anybody offer to defend them yet?

WOLF: No one.

DEER: So what happens?

WOLF: The Judge will find someone.

DEER: Wonder who?

WOLF: Guess we'll find out soon enough. Ready?

DEER: Yeah, let's get this over with.

(BLACKOUT. ANIMALS exit. Stage is dark and still.)

BROADCAST: In Moscow Square, women wearing nothing but sheets — in protest of Russian fur fashions — were hustled off by militiamen. "I'd rather be naked than wear fur," the protesters chanted, all of whom were immediately arrested.

End of Scene

Scene 2

(AT RISE: MAN and WOMAN are sitting at dinner table, eating. Set is suggestive and surreal. SOUNDS of DOWNPOUR and occasional THUNDER.)

MAN: *(Reading paper as HE eats.)* Great steak, dear. I love it when you do 'em up rare like this.

WOMAN: Wait till you taste the veal I'm making for tomorrow. Talk about tender.

MAN: Can't wait.

(Silence as THEY eat. Woman picks up "steak bone" and gnaws at it.)

MAN: Paper says they're gonna expand that zoo down at the metro-park. Might be nice to go down there and check it out.

WOMAN: Oh, let's. I just love all those adorable little monkeys.

MAN: Yeah, it's pretty neat. Nice little slice of the wild right here in our own city.

WOMAN: I hope they keep it clean, though. Some of those zoo cages just stink! *(SCRATCHING offstage.)*

End of Freeview

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