

The Good Audition Guides

**CONTEMPORARY
DUOLOGUES:
TWO WOMEN**

edited and introduced by

TRILBY JAMES

N

H

B

NICK HERN BOOKS

London

www.nickhernbooks.co.uk

Contents

- INTRODUCTION 7
- 3 Winters* 12
by Tena Štivičić
- Blue Stockings* 20
by Jessica Swale
- Bracken Moor* 26
by Alexi Kaye Campbell
- Consensual* 34
by Evan Placey
- Eggs* 40
by Florence Keith-Roach
- Elephants* 49
by Rose Heiney
- Firebird* 58
by Phil Davies
- Forever House* 73
by Glenn Waldron
- Freak* 98
by Anna Jordan
- The Girl's Guide to Saving the World* 111
by Elinor Cook
- Honour* 125
by Joanna Murray-Smith
- How Love Is Spelt* 132
by Chloë Moss
- Intimate Apparel* 145
by Lynn Nottage
- James I: The Key Will Keep the Lock* 153
by Rona Munro

- Low Level Panic* 161
by Clare McIntyre
- Mary Shelley* 172
by Helen Edmundson
- Our New Girl* 178
by Nancy Harris
- Pests* 191
by Vivienne Franzmann
- Push Up* 201
by Roland Schimmelpfennig
- Queen Anne* 213
by Helen Edmundson
- Ruined* 219
by Lynn Nottage
- The Sugar Wife* 224
by Elizabeth Kuti
- This Wide Night* 231
by Chloë Moss
- The Thrill of Love* 237
by Amanda Whittington
- The Wardrobe* 245
by Sam Holcroft

Introduction

☞ WHY DUOLOGUES?

Whether you are doing theatre studies at school, taking part in a youth theatre, at drama school (perhaps in your final year and looking for showcase material), or attending a professional acting workshop, the duologue will arguably provide the most intense form of character exploration and analysis. It will draw on all the essential skills of the actor – namely playing an objective, identifying obstacles, incorporating backstory, staying in the moment and listening. It is what any Stanislavsky-based acting technique is all about, and a well-crafted duologue will allow you to put all these elements into practice.*

The twenty-five duologues in this volume are from plays that have largely been written post-2000. With the odd exception the characters range in age from fourteen to forty. There is a wide variety of character types and styles of writing from which to choose. They are all drawn from the extensive list of new plays published by Nick Hern Books.

☞ CHOOSING YOUR DUOLOGUE

Not surprisingly the majority of these duologues for two women explore feminist themes. Many are about female friendship and female rivalry. Some involve the dynamic between older and younger women and some are between sisters. Many have historical backgrounds and tell the stories of real-life people. Several of the duologues are ethnically or geographically specific, but the majority can be played in any accent and by any ethnicity. Similarly, out of context, some of the duologues can be played either younger or older than specified. Use your judgement and change place names or other references to suit your own purposes. You will also find a good mix between the dramatic and the comic, the overtly political and the more

* Konstantin Stanislavsky (1863–1938) was a Russian theatre practitioner who developed a series of techniques in order to help the actor towards a more realistic portrayal of his character.

playful. Some contain strong language and deal with adult themes. All provide a particular challenge and represent the pressing interests of some of our leading playwrights.

✍️ PREPARING YOUR DUOLOGUE

To understand the characters and the context in any one piece, you will need to read the whole play and to undertake all necessary research. Work with your scene partner to create detailed character histories and a backstory. Work out what it is that you want in the scene, where your characters are in agreement and where they are in conflict. Is there a power struggle? Ask yourselves what the scene is about (see below) and think about the story you wish to tell and why. The duologues in this volume concern themselves with the human condition. They explore our deepest longings, fears and needs. They pose complex questions about how we relate to each other and to the world around us. By engaging in the characters' psychology you will be able to reveal what lies at the heart of a scene.

✍️ PERFORMING OR PRESENTING YOUR DUOLOGUE

As obvious as it may sound, remember that the playwright has written a *conversation*, so you will need to listen and to reply accordingly without preempting any outcome.

Allow yourself to be affected by what is said to you as you respond, and think about the effect you want to have on your partner. Stay in the moment and remain flexible and open to any impulses you or your partner might experience. The best kind of duologue is like an exciting tennis rally in which the audience are gripped, not knowing which way it will go. Several of the duologues in this volume are highly physical. Perhaps you will be working with a director who will have their own ideas about how to stage the scene. If you are working just the pair of you, think about how and where you will move in the space and what sort of physical dynamic there is between the characters. In some cases the writer has given a detailed

description of what happens physically. Follow their stage directions and think of it as ‘choreography’ as you would a dance. Some of the writers use forward slashes (/) to indicate when the other character interrupts with their next speech.

☞ THE USE OF PROPS

Several of these duologues require the use of props. As far as you are able you will want to seek out items that are as close to the specified article/s as possible. Most actors enjoy working with props. The challenge of how to handle them during a scene, and the comic and dramatic possibilities they offer are all very much part of the actor’s craft. Be sensitive to anything that you handle on stage. Is it an item of rare or precious value? Is it something that disgusts you? Is it something that is dangerous and might frighten you? If you cannot get the ‘real’ thing, use your imagination to endow the object with all the qualities of the original.

☞ TIMING/EDITING


For the most part, the duologues are the same length as they appear in the original playscript. Unless you are looking for showcase material, where you will be obliged to edit a scene to the standard one to three minutes, you will find it more useful to have the complete scene as it is written. Occasionally I have modified a duologue to make it flow more easily, and where a duologue is exceptionally long I have shortened it. In these cases, I have inserted this symbol [...] to show where a cut has been made.


☞ HOW TO USE THIS BOOK


For each duologue I have provided a list of the following:


☞ WHO The characters’ names, their ages, and where they come from. In many cases, the characters can be played either younger or older than in their original context. If a character’s


accent is not native to you, you may like to try playing it in your own accent. However, watch out for duologues that have been written with a strong dialect or idiom and where the essential rhythm of the piece needs to be maintained.

 **WHERE** For the most part, this is specified in the text. However, you may prefer to change place names if you wish to transpose the scene to suit your own accent.

 **WHEN** Most of the duologues in this volume are set in the present day. Some are historical. Read the whole play to make further decisions about the time of year it is, day of the week and the time of day.

 **WHAT TO CONSIDER** This will include the style of the play, its themes and use of language, the characters' backstories and some indication about what happens next.

 **WHAT THE CHARACTER WANTS** Objectives to play. Once you have learned your scene and have done all the necessary research and preparation, the only thing you should be actively playing is the 'What do I want?' or the 'What do I have to have?'


 **WHAT THE SCENE IS ABOUT** It is important to think beyond what your character says and does to the wider implications of a scene. This will enable you to play the scene with intelligence, sensitivity and a greater understanding and awareness of what the play is trying to say.

*

These lists are suggestions only. When you become increasingly familiar with your duologue you will find you have opinions of your own; you may even find yourself in disagreement with my notes. Use this book as a springboard from which you will form your own opinions and ideas. My notes are by no means a substitute for reading the play or for thinking for yourself about the characters and their situations; they are rather a tool intended to help, to provoke and hopefully to inspire.

3 Winters

Tena Stivičić

 **WHO** Alisia Kos, thirty-six, and her sister, Lucija Kos, thirty-three. (Out of context these characters could be played younger.)

 **WHERE** The Kos' family home in Zagreb, Croatia.

 **WHEN** November 2011. After midnight.

 **WHAT HAS JUST HAPPENED** The play tells the story of four generations of the Kos family. It travels forwards and backwards in time charting war and political upheaval during the years 1945, 1990 and 2011 in what is now Croatia, a part of the former Yugoslavia. Central to the story is the house in which they live. In the duologue that follows, the year is 2011. Lucija is about to be married to entrepreneur Damjan. Her sister Alisa, visiting from England where she is studying for her PhD, is concerned about how Damjan has managed to purchase the house, which was once partitioned by the state and shared between three families.

 **WHAT TO CONSIDER**

- The historical and political background. Take time to research the key events as described in the play.
- The tension between the sisters. Like many sisters they are rivalrous but also close.
- Lucija was a fat child while Alisa was the one with boyfriends.
- Alisa has had several failed relationships, some of them gay.
- Alisa has travelled and forged an academic career; while Lucija has stayed at home to be married to a local entrepreneur.
- Karolina was daughter to the original owners of the house – the aristocratic Amruš family. After the Second World War Karolina's father fled to Argentina, along with other Nazi sympathisers. Read the play to find out how the family are related to Karolina and why it is that Karolina insists that the house is theirs by rights.

- Their great-grandmother, Monika, was a maid in the Amruš household.
- General Tito was the Prime Minister of former Yugoslavia, and the 'Party' is the Communist Party. Their Grandma Rose was a loyal Party member.
- Dunja is their aunt.

☞ WHAT ALISA WANTS

- To prick her sister's conscience.

☞ WHAT LUCIJA WANTS

- For Alisa not to judge her.

☞ WHAT THE SCENE IS ABOUT Sisterly rivalry, sisterly love, change, survival, social conscience versus greed.

☞ NB This play offers a number of other duologues from which to choose.

ALISA walks into the dining room, carrying a bottle of whiskey. She finds LUCIJA in her pyjamas, at the table, eating the apple cake from the tray. An old trunk is pushed to the side of the room.

ALISA. What are you doing?

LUCIJA. Couldn't sleep.

ALISA. Nervous?

LUCIJA. Hungry. I haven't eaten properly in a week.

ALISA sits at the table, pours herself a drink.

ALISA. You haven't eaten properly in a decade.

LUCIJA. Not true. I had a very indulgent Sunday lunch in 2007. What about you?

ALISA. Can't sleep either. (*Re: the trunk.*) Where did that come from?

LUCIJA. The attic. Everyone seems to think that old crap from every nook and cranny in the house should be dumped on me to deal with.