

Zoohouse

by
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CHARACTER BREAKDOWNS

1. TURNER - 30-year-old former Black soldier.
2. KRIS - 30-year-old scarred veteran. Should be non-white.
3. DIRECTOR/ABRAHAM LINCOLN - 40-year-old White male.
4. NURSE/HERALD - 40-year-old Black nurse.
5. SLAVE/PATIENT #1 - young Black male
6. SLAVE/PATIENT #2 - young male (non-White)
7. PEACHES/NEFERTITI/SLAVEGIRL- young female.
8. SINGERS - Peaches and slaves in chorus.

STORY

"Zoohouse" is a story of the historical and hysterical. Set in an asylum for the "Black and Criminally Insane." The story involves movement, music, and media into the epic-fable of the "Bhagavad Gita." The ancient Hindu poem is about awakening the inner warrior. It's not necessarily about actual war, nor is it an indictment to always be peaceful. To many what the "Bhagavad Gita" represents is a break from dualistic religious thinking that plagued the world thousands of years ago: right and wrong, good and bad, set in stone.

What's good and bad is even more elusive in a nation like the United States, where disadvantaged and oppressed are often called to fight for the very rights they're denied. In some ways, the story of the black and insane is perfect fit for an epic like the "Bhagavad Gita."

STYLE

Performed as a multimedia piece, "Zoohouse" is formed around ensemble of artists and musicians. The work can take in a traditional theatre or in an alternative venue like an outdoors space or a transformed building complex.

SETTING

Harlem National Hospital. Mental Asylum. 22nd Century.

PROLOGUE

SETTING: Darkness. The Valley of Death. Bodies are engulfed in shadows. They scream in terror while others babble nonsense. Images and video of war and police brutality. Radio communication gets mixed up with music.

TURNER

Unleash medicated magic,
re-make revulsive reality
quiet the murderous mind's riot
this is our daily pharmacy diet.

Lights up. Nurse distributes
the first set of pills.

SINGERS

(singing)
Skylark
Have you anything to say to
me?
Won't you tell me where my
love can be/ Is there a
meadow in the mist/ Where
someone's waiting to be
kissed.

Skylark
Have you seen a valley green
with spring/ Where my heart
can go a-journeying/ Over the
shadows and the rain
To a blossom covered lane

And in your lonely flight
Haven't you heard the music
of the night/ Wonderful
music, faint as a will o' the
wisp

TURNER

Snow White, so bright.
riding my sleigh tonight?
Barbituate for panic attacks
coming off methadone n' shit.
Xanax: Numb like ice.
I could pop ten and still win
Snow White, so bright.
Thank you for the light.

(They take their pills.)

TURNER

Warm sweet potato tone
a late winter sun: Suboxone
Treats nausea and panic
serotonin too low,
heart starts to moan:
Suboxone. /God bless the
sunset.
As it slides down my neck.

(They take their pills)

Crazy as a loon/ Sad as a
gypsy serenading the moon

Skylark
I don't know if you can find
these things

SINGERS (cont'd)

But my heart is riding on
your wings/ So if you see
them anywhere/ Won't you lead
me there

Skylark
I don't know if you can find
these things/ But my heart is
riding on your wings
So if you see them anywhere
Won't you lead me there

PEACHES

Skylark
Skylark
Sky-
-lark
Sky...sky...sky

TURNER

Little boy blue, what can you
do?/ You bring the mellow
melody

TURNER (cont'd)

A song of somber entropy
Valium makes you piss a sea
They pass them out like
Halloween candy.
Deep blue and Holy Mother
Mary,
may the Cerulean symphony
take me.

(They take their pills.)

TURNER

Sinking beneath blankets of
lead
the last and most potent
pixie is red
DXM, Triple C+
Easy to OD
Quick and cheap.
Submerged in the deep.

Toward the end of the song, a
giggle starts and becomes a
wave of laughter. Loud,
maniacal, delirious. The
battlefield becomes a white
asylum. The journey begins.

1. PILL RITUAL

Nurse enters and fills the bowl with selected pills and pours water in the cup.

Bell sounds. The patients pick their color-coded pills out of bowls like candy. They are docile.

2. AN AMERICAN FABLE

DIRECTOR enters and rings
bell. A row of patients sit
behind him rocking
themselves, and scratching
their heads.

DIRECTOR

In the cavernous depths, we are pleased
to welcome you all to this staged read.
As director of this artistic project
we hope this workshop has therapeutic affect.
For we aim to please so you can see
America as it is now: in the 22rd century.
In Harlem National Hospital where ancient Manhattan sits
there is a floor for the black n' bruised misfits.
A psych ward several come to clear their wits
their worries, and get back in the right spirits.
Not long these ragged bunch will remain
this is place for the Black...
And criminally Insane.

What does it mean to be black and insane?
To think ancient Gods pick at your brain.
To speak in tribal robes, dressed in strange tongues
To twist slang into bizarre misshapen clothes.
It's an out of body other-worldly reminder
To be watched, searched, and shoved through a meat grinder.

Monsters seem to attack you and you can't tell
Whether it's your imagination or a real jail.
But in the end is there a difference between the two?
Cause both prisons will easily entrap you.

Some of the patients fought for flag
Some bought for pride,
Some stole for hunger,
Most are soldiers who think they've already died.

Institutionalized for their danger and rowdiness
with these pills they do kiss
their future sedated happiness.

And since we have been financially forgotten
and left in dark budgetary drought.
We hope that you can spare a small donation

for the men who fought for this great nation.

DIRECTOR

Cast your eyes on these broken-down toys
men of honor, sons of state, patriotic boys.
Who fought the 'good' war and saved the day
but on the inside they lost their way.

Tonight we will help them to find some peace
and return to their wives as men, not beast.
Our patients will perform in versed glory
tales of Civil War history.

Composed by our talented patient Sgt. Turner
who has a penchant for hip hop and club burners.
Turner is here for the most ignominious disgrace
in fighting for God and country he lost face.

And as his squad came under attack
he simply could not fight back.
And at his feet they fell one by one
Poor Turner couldn't even fire his gun.

DIRECTOR

Officer who betrayed his unit and code
Poor Turner couldn't even shoot his load.
And there he sat in a jail cell of hell
until the government figured he must not be well.
So Turner arrived in disgraceful shame
but if this show goes as plan,
we will salvage his name.
But enough of my words and silly prattle
let's start our story on the eve of a battle.

Lights flicker and dim. Sound
of gunfire outside and mortar
attacks. Director and
patients pause for a moment.

DIRECTOR

Ladies and gentleman, now I admit
the setting may seem a bit counterfeit.
Outskirting New York is anarchist horseplay
of a few militia dead-enders who won't fade away
But rest assure here in the psych ward
is the safest place in Harlem to accord.

Lights go back to full
strength.

DIRECTOR

Splendid.

Now forego labeling these players as 'mad' or deranged
just pretend their method actors who are a bit strange.
And transform this rusted impoverished place
into theatre: the best money could efface.
Therapy and performance as healing baptism
now hear the story of a nation healing its schism.

3. LINCOLN

DIRECTOR steps aside and rings a bell. NURSE comes out as Herald. She carries a giant hardcover book to a lectern. She opens book, rings a bell, and reads.

HERALD

"Lincoln: A Courageous Epic"

In our nation's history there stands one man who healed this dark and divided land. Honest Abe was the treasure sent from above to shower us all with his White Fatherly love.

SINGERS

Lincoln, Lincoln you so fine.
You so fine you blow my mind.
Big big daddy tell us what to do
You're the best we ever knew.

HERALD

The great Emancipator wakes from slumber with a nightmare that breaks his peace asunder.

DIRECTOR

(aside)

I forgot to mention I'll be in Lincoln's role. You see, the patient who was supposed to be playing him lacked a certain...honesty. Before becoming the director, I was quite a darling child actor. I remember a production of *Our Town* in which...

HERALD

AHHHEEEMMM!!

DIRECTOR

Yes. Right. On with the show.

Director tapes on a beard,
puts on a stove pipe hat. He
becomes Abraham Lincoln.

LINCOLN

(mumbling, paused-filled method actor)
I...woke...with...awful...

HERALD

(hits a bell)
We can't hear ye' sonnet Lincoln.
Hear ye', we must know what he be thinkin'.

LINCOLN

I woke with an awful premonition
as the Potomac rains began to pour.
Haunting my sleep, ghostly apparition
Prophetic ravens came forth in four.

Turning in bed, first raven's fruition
whispered soft sensual unguent.
The second warned nation's detrition
flapping scarlet clouds of corpulent scent.

Final two ravens sat on each shoulder
sung scatological superstitions
forewarning a Confederacy bolder
than all the Union's sweetheart volition.

Laid awake in a coat of darkness
on my lips, prophetic black birds do kiss.

HERALD

And who shall Abe Emancipate,
but those poor souls bonded in hate.

SINGERS

Slaves!

HERALD

And who shall Abe liberate,
but those souls who can not wait.

SINGERS

SLAVES!

HERALD

And hearing the words of Emancipation
some slaves shouted in jubilation.
While others sighed and continued ploughing
some did what was beyond allowing.
And fled the farm and crossed the line
of Mason Dixon into Northern minds.
And gathered under Abe's mighty wings
to sing his praise, shout, and sing.

SINGERS

Slaves love singing
Slaves love rapping
Slaves love dancing
Slaves love acting
For the great, great, great, great
superwonderful, magic Pimp Daddy.
ANY-THANG!
I said anything... is possible.

As they sing, four slaves
form a Soul Train Line. Each
one does a contemporary dance
(the running man, The Prep,
'wind-me-up' "lawn sprinkler,
etc.) Abraham Lincoln dances
down the line doing the robot
and 'funky chicken.'

LINCOLN

This is fun.
And therapeutic.
And very historical.

HERALD

Let us hear more of their praise
they lavish the Emancipating sage.
Before we return to his bravery
let's hear a brief sonnet on slavery.

TURNER steps out from the
group of slaves who plough
the ground. They move around
the entire space, encircling
and penetrating the audience,
making chain gang noises so
the audience feels
surrounded.

TURNER

I can hear the shackles in my bones
like a chain gang in Carolina fields
Hot iron weeps the mutilated tones
of the cross that guilty men do yield.

Corrosive red teeth bite down into flesh

as metal mouths chew as the rawness.
Wailing widow songs serenade the thresh
Southern sorghum laid for a distiller's press.

Men no longer cry at outrageous deeds
the pitiless world laureled on their brow.
But swing sling blades low and uproot the weed
choking the sharecroppers buried field ploughs.

In rusted marrow these cutlass chains turn
as war-ravaged pyres of corpses burn.

The chain gang noise stops
when Peaches blows a kazoo
enters in regal Egyptian
pose, being carried by Slave
One and Two. She goes
unnoticed at first.

LINCOLN

Dear sweet slave, I wage
your words upon my Proclamat-ed page
the hour soon strikes and shall not miss
angels will bless thee with a kiss.
And...(noticing Peaches) And...Peaches
Very cute in your get-up there,
Say your name and from place thee where?

Peaches continues to look out
among the crowd like a queen.

LINCOLN

Are you some sort of ghost?
Oh, a wretched slave whore?
A spiritual host of oppression,
Raped and ripped out core?

PEACHES

No, I am a queen of the Nile
Huntress of men from Rome to the Serengeti
A regal vintage sashaying bile,
My name is Nefertiti.

LINCOLN

Nefertiti: a slave of delusional woe.

PEACHES

A great female pharaoh.

LINCOLN

Dear Peaches... this is a Civil War play
There is no place for this so-called queen.
Turn your strut into a shuffle way
And remove your sashaying preen.
And who are your companions?

SLAVE ONE

My name is Hannibal Garvey Shaka Obama.

SLAVE TWO

Hey. I'm Bill.

SLAVE ONE

Your name is Wild Willie Kenyatta Bambatta

SLAVE TWO

That's what I said. Bill.

PEACHES

These are my kings.
Who will seed my regal womb
With a thousand princes.

SLAVE ONE

333 sons will rule the earth,
333 sons will rule the sea,
and 333 will rule the sky.

SLAVE TWO

And the one thousandth son shall rule man.

PEACHES

And his reign will be as long as our suffering.

LINCOLN

And who am I in your little fantasy?

PEACHES

You are a nobleman from a land of light:
A Duke known as Benjamin B. White.

LINCOLN

As flattering and charming as you are Peaches,

PEACHES

Josephine Peaches Nefertiti

LINCOLN

Let's come back to our regular scheduled slavery.

PEACHES

But...but I am a queen.

LINCOLN

Are you sure?

PEACHES

But I am...or will be.

LINCOLN

If you are queen why do you sound so uncertain?

PEACHES

I...I...

LINCOLN

Come back to what you know.
There's a nobility in suffering.
And your knowing safe history
Not some half-baked mixed up mystery
With this Civil War festivity.

PEACHES

What do you want, Daddy Lincoln?
Let us put up our face.
Tell us what would soothe your worries
And help us keep our place.

LINCOLN

I do love your soulful field songs,
You keep such sharp and on-point timing
I almost forget they're about all the wrongs
And yet I can't help but wanting to sing along.

Peaches sings and they all
turn back to slaves. They
plow endless cotton rows.

PEACHES

(singing)

Skylark

Have you anything to say to me
Won't you tell me where my love can be
Is there a meadow in the mist
Where someone's waiting to be kissed

The sound of whips whistling
through the air. Some of the
men fall to the ground. They
get back on their feet.

LINCOLN

Please don't stop the singing.

TURNER

But the whips-

LINCOLN

Whips? There are no whips.
But I like your imagination.

PEACHES

(singing hesitantly)

Skylark

Have you seen a valley green with spring
Where my heart can go a-journeying
Over the shadows and the rain
To a blossom covered lane

And in your lonely flight
Haven't you heard the music of the night
Wonderful music, faint as a will o' the wisp
Crazy as a loon
Sad as a gypsy serenading the moon.

Whips whistle through the
air. A lash seems to hit
Peaches and she screams.

LINCOLN

What is wrong with you?
Hysterics are good and fine
In keeping with this civil view,
But control your imaginings
And keep harmonizing

Or more pills will surely be due.

PEACHES

Skylark

I don't know if you can find these things

PEACHES (cont'd)

But my heart is riding on your wings

So if you see them anywhere

Won't you lead me there?

Skylark

I don't know if you can find these things

But my heart is riding on your wings

So if you see them anywhere

Won't you lead me there?

LINCOLN

(applauding)

More more, my children

please emote and fabulate black tears!

The only thing missing from this piece

Are the intimate terrors that brought you here.

TURNER

What would you like us to do?

LINCOLN

Share something personal and painful

And blackfully tragic tale

So we can feast...I mean enjoy...

I mean feel good about ourselves.

The patients look at each
other. And then they start
lying the lie they know
others like to hear.

TURNER

My Dad left me and my momma's on smack

LINCOLN

-Delicious-

KRIS

My sister's hooking and my brother slings crack.

LINCOLN

-so sad-

PEACHES

I'm an illiterate type-two diabetic,
who can't count to three.

LINCOLN

-And the Oscar goes to-

SLAVE ONE AND TWO

(blues song starts)
So won't somebody please, please please...
help me.
Cause it's sad.

LINCOLN

So sad-

SLAVE ONE/TWO

We're black and so mad

LINCOLN

-and it's all bad.

SLAVE/TWO

Reliving slavery and oppression
White micro-aggression
Putting on rags to haul bags.
Some times I think the reason we're born
Is for your torture porn!!!

LINCOLN

And what about you nurse?

HERALD

Herald. And I am without a care.

LINCOLN

But wouldn't you like to share?
You must have some pain
That can be used for common gain.
Isn't your brother in a ward
That is just like this?
For the black and insane
And the deranged misfits.

KRIS

Nurse got the crazy gene
That's why she's so mean-

HERALD

NO!

PEACHES

She's scared of becoming like us,
Sitting at the back of America's bus.

HERALD

Lincoln, that was personal information
Not meant to be used for this celebration.

SLAVE ONE/TWO

Nigger nurse got the crazy gene
That's why she's so black and mean!
Nigger nurse got the crazy gene
That's why she's so black and mean!

LINCOLN

I mean this is good clean fun
And entertainment
No need to get upset
I just wanted you to add to thee event
Besides...
sharing is caring

HERALD

And then you shouldn't care
If I spilled your tea
About your family and what you shared with me-

LINCOLN

Now, Herald-

SLAVE ONE/TWO

Share! Share! Share!

PEACHES

Share some freaky sexual conditions,
What he look like in a compromised positions?

SLAVE ONE

And who his kinfolk and why he always sneaking off?

SLAVE TWO

Is he doing drugs or just beating off?

LINCOLN

Right now, you will stop this.
I am the founding father of this asylum
And you will respect my wish.
And in this play I am your savior
Not some reality tv media whore.

KRIS

(ploughing away)
Then we aren't either
Respect is a two way street or neither.
And we don't just want to dance
but help our people to advance.

LINCOLN

You are rather noisy and rude.
Not like Turner, much too crude.
But both of you are my sons,
my good son (points to Turner)
and the bad one (points to Kris).
So your very lovely words I hear
And in my heart I hold them dear-

KRIS steps out from line of
Slaves.

KRIS

Then we will fight with a knife and gun
plus why should you Emancipators have all the fun?

Slaves bring out several
sticks. They hand them out as
rifles.

LINCOLN

Wait!!! Wait, hold it!!

