

SUZANNE

ALL IN THE TIMING

English Made Simple was first presented at the Seattle Repertory Theatre in April 1994. The director was Bill Irwin, the set coordinator was Thomas Gregg Meyer, the lighting coordinator was Jay Strevey, the costume coordinator was Heather Doland, and the sound coordinator was David Pascal. The cast was as follows:

JILL Liz McCarthy
JACK R. Hamilton Wright
LOUDSPEAKER VOICE John Aylward

Handwritten notes: *Office of the Director of the Arts* and *0270*

(Lights up on JACK and JILL, a pleasant young man and woman. He is holding a plastic drink glass and she a paper plate. They stand facing each other, frozen in place, several feet apart. In the background we hear the sounds of conversation, laughter, glasses clinking, etc.)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: English Made Simple. Chapter Three. The party. Section One: Saying Hello.

JACK AND JILL: Hello! *(They take a step toward each other.)*

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: But remember before you begin— (JACK AND JILL stop.) The first three minutes of conversation between two people can determine their relationship for the rest of eternity. (JACK and JILL clear their throats in chorus, a bit nervously.) So watch your language!

JACK: Hello.

JILL: Hi.

JACK: How are you?

JILL: Good.

JACK: I don't think I know you.

JILL: My name is Jill.

JACK: I'm Jack.

JACK AND JILL: How do you do.

JACK: Friend of the host?

JILL: Friend of the hostess.

JACK: Oh. So . . .

JILL: Well . . . *(Slight pause: a momentary loss for conversation.)*

JACK AND JILL: Nice party! *(They freeze.)*

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Excellent. But let's look at the underlying rhythm of this interchange. (JACK and JILL now repeat the interchange with exactly the same rhythm and expression as before.)

JACK: Ba-bump.

JILL: Beep.

JACK: Buh-buh-beep?

JILL: Boop.

JACK: Bee da dee da dump bop.

JILL: Da da da Bop.

JACK: Bop Bop.

JACK AND JILL: Ba da doo wop.

JACK: Bee dada beep?

JILL: Bee dada beep-beep.

JACK: Oh. Baaa . . .

JILL: Booo . . . (Slight pause; a momentary loss for conversation.)

JACK AND JILL: Da wop bop!

JILL: Hello hello hello, it's always hello.

JACK: You are the most wonderful woman at this party.

JILL: And then good-bye good-bye.

JACK: You have a light that surrounds you.

JILL: Every time I hear the word "hello" it's like a magic incantation. An open sesame.

JACK: Hello, I say to her.

JILL: Abracadabra.

JACK: My name is Jack.

JILL: And I expect a whole new universe to open up in front of me, full of joy.

JACK: Hello hello.

JILL: And then good-bye good-bye. (Jack and Jill freeze.)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Section Two. The Structure of English Conversation.

JILL: Fred!

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: First name.

JACK: Mary!

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: First name.

JACK AND JILL: Hello!

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Salutation. (Jack and Jill kiss on the cheek.) Social display of affection, followed by—

JILL: I didn't know you were here.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Friendly observation, answered by—

JACK: I'm here.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Statement of the obvious.

JILL: How are you?

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Superficial question about health.

JACK: Good.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Superficial answer. Occupational question—

JACK: How's the job?

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: And—

JILL: Terrific.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Acceptable falsehood.

JACK: So . . .

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Meaningless monosyllable while searching for topic.

JILL: Quite a smorgasbord.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Attempt at new topic.

JACK: Mmmmmmm.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Noncommittal noise, to reject the topic.
And—

JACK AND JILL: Well!

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Exclamation, to signal the approaching end of the interchange. Well done.

JACK: I was in love with you, once upon a time.

JILL: You asked me about my job, and I lied to you.

JACK: You who look so self-possessed and mature.

JILL: I would have answered you honestly, once upon a time.

JACK: Once upon a time you cried on my shoulder like a little child.

JILL: We would have talked like two people who love each other. Then we would have gone home and lain in bed.

JACK: We used to go to parties like this all the time.

JILL: Together.

JACK: So happy . . . (*Small pause.*)

JACK AND JILL: Well!

JILL: Nice seeing you, Fred. (*Kisses his cheek.*)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Expression of pleasure. First name.

JACK: Take care of yourself, Mary.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Parting wish. First name.

JACK AND JILL: 'Bye!

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Valediction. (*JACK and JILL freeze.*)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Section Three. Simultaneous Translation,
or, The secret meanings of common English words.

JILL: Well, well, well.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: In this context: "Oh, shit."

JACK: I didn't know you were here.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "What the fuck are you doing here?"

JILL: How are you, Hank?

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Wasn't five years enough?"

JACK: I'm good.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Fuck you, Agnes."

JILL: Nice party.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Asshole."

JACK: Very nice.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Fuck you, Agnes."

JILL: So what are you doing with yourself?

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Are you still sleeping with that slut from the community college?"

JACK: Same old thing.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "It's none of your fucking business."

JILL: Have you tried the chicken?

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Have some salmonella?"

JACK: I'm sticking with liquids.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "I know you have problems with your mother, but you don't have to poison me."

JILL: See you, Hank.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Up yours."

JACK: Take care.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: "Fuck you, Agnes."

JACK AND JILL: 'Bye! (*They freeze.*)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Section Seven. Fill In The Blank, or: The arbitrariness of information. (*Note: In this section, each of the 'possibilities'—e.g., 'Jack, Bill, Ted,' etc.—gets equal weight with the speaker. Each is a different 'take' and equally true.*)

JACK: Excuse me, but don't I know you? My name is Jack.

JILL: Hello.

JACK: My name is Bill.

JILL: How are you.

JACK: My name is Ted.

JILL: How do you do.

JACK: Melvin. And you are . . . ?

JILL: Jill.

JACK: Hello, Jill.

JILL: Monica.

JACK: How are you, Monica.

JILL: Denise.

JACK: Could we have gone to college together?

JILL: I went to Stanford.

JACK: Ah.

JILL: Bennington.

JACK: Oh.

JILL: Chicago.

JACK: And—I'm sorry—your name is . . . ?

JILL: Louise. And you are?

JACK: Barney.

JILL: Where did you grow up, Bob?

JACK: Well . . .

JILL: Jim?

JACK: Well . . .

JILL: Stanley?

JACK: Well I grew up in Washington.

JILL: Oh.

JACK: St. Louis.

JILL: Great place.

JACK: Santa Fe.

JILL: Nice.

JACK: What about you, Jane?

JILL: My name is Jill.

JACK: I'm sorry. *Jill.*

JILL: And yet really my name could be anything. . . .

JACK: Anyway, I went to med school.

JILL: I wasn't born with a name.

JACK: Went to law school.

JILL: I was given a name.

JACK: Went to plumbing school.

JILL: My name could just as easily be Beth, or Phyllis, or Jane.

JACK: Quite a smorgasbord, isn't it?

JILL: Or Gertrude, or Natasha.

JACK: Do you know what the trouble with a smorgasbord is? There are too many choices.

JILL: A hummingbird doesn't have a name.

JACK: Do I want the chicken, or the roast beef?

JILL: A fish doesn't have a name.

JACK: Pâté, or cheese?

JILL: A hedgehog doesn't have a name.

JACK: It's just like life that way.

JILL: It's just this nameless thing, a handful of skin and fur and a heart beating inside it.

JACK: Should I work, should I read, should I listen to music?

JILL: Completely anonymous.

JACK: Should I go to this party, or should I go to the movies?

JILL: A hedgehog doesn't even know it doesn't have a name.

JACK: Sometimes there are so many choices, I don't do anything!

JILL: With a name you're just an example of something.

JACK: I thought to myself, this party could be a total waste.

JILL: But I'm not an example of something.

JACK: But I came to this party because I thought I might meet the love of my life.

JILL: I'm some body.

JACK: Do you think she's here?

JILL: I'm Jill.

JACK: I'm Jack.

JACK AND JILL: Hello. (*They freeze.*)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Section Twenty-six. The Conditional Tense, or: Should, Would, Could.

JACK: Okay, so we meet at this party.

JILL: And we like each other.

JACK: We like each other instantly. (*Holds out hand.*) I'm Zeno.

JILL: Miranda.

(*They slake.*)

Did you know that the first three minutes of conversation can determine your relationship to the other person for all eternity?

JACK: But we pass the three-minute mark! We meet, and we mesh!

JILL: Oy, what a mesh.

JACK: And it all begins right here on this spot. In a single moment, all things seem possible.

JILL: All things are possible.

JACK: The infinite smorgasbord lies before us. But what do we do?

JILL: The party's wrapping up.

JACK: The crowd is thinning.

JILL: But the question of the moment is . . .

JACK: Do I ask you out?

JILL: Do I ask you out?

JACK: And if you do—

JACK AND JILL: Should I accept?

JACK: This could be one of those glorious and intoxicating meetings best left to memory.

JILL: Or it might be the start of eternal love.

JACK: So I say: Would you like to get a cup of coffee sometime? And you say—

JILL: Sorry. But thanks anyway.

JACK AND JILL: 'Bye!

JACK: And that's the road of no-thank-you.

JILL: A dead end.

JACK: But possibly a *happy* dead end. While down this road here, is . . .

JILL: Would you like to get a cup of coffee sometime?

JACK: Sure!

JILL: So we go out for coffee.

JACK: And we have a horrible time.

JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or a wonderful time. In which case—

JILL: We get a second cup.

JACK: And stop right there.

JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or we go out for a third cup and a fourth cup and a fifth cup.

JILL: Would we have made love by now?

JACK: Maybe we would have.

JILL: I say we should have.

JACK: We certainly *could* have.

JILL: Let's say we did.

JACK: And it was horrible.

JACK AND JILL: Dead end.

JILL: Or it was wonderful. Which means—

JACK: More coffee. And—

JILL: We move in with each other.

JACK: *Mistake.*

JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or it could be wonderful!

JILL: And so we get engaged.

JACK: Marriage.

JILL: Children.

JACK: Bliss. (*JACK and JILL sigh blissfully.*)

JILL: And on to divorce.

JACK: Or—the other road—maybe we're down the road of no-thank-you we took years and years ago, and years and years pass.

JILL: And we meet each other at a party. And you say—

JACK: Hello, I'm Zeno.

JILL: Miranda.

JACK: Don't I know you from somewhere?

JILL: And a whole universe opens up in front of us—

JACK: Full of joy.

JILL: All things are possible.

JACK: And they start right on this spot.

JILL: Dead end.

JACK: Or bliss.

JILL: Should, would, could.

JACK: Well it was nice meeting you, Miranda.

JILL: Yes. Nice meeting you, Zeno. (*They reach their hands to shake, but freeze.*)

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Section Seventy-eight. Saying Good-bye.

JACK: Listen, I only have a few minutes.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Let's practice a typical interchange.

JACK: The crowd is thinning and the party's wrapping up. Coats are disappearing from the pile on the bed . . .

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: A typical interchange, please!

JACK: I just wanted to say, while I have the chance, that you are the most wonderful woman at this party.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: Typical, please!

JACK: On this street. In this city. In the country. On this planet.

JILL: You're the most wonderful man I've met in years.

JACK: You have a light that surrounds you.

JILL: You're intoxicating.

JACK: You're radiant. I came to this party one thing and I leave it transformed.

JILL: I came to this party to meet the love of my life.

JACK: And you're her.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE (*correcting*): You are she.

JACK: You're her! You are the love of my life!

JILL: My name could be anything.

JACK: But it's Jill.

JILL: I could have gone anywhere tonight.

JACK: But you came to this party.

JILL: Hello hello.

JACK: Abracadabra. My name is Jack.

JILL: Would you like to get a cup of coffee sometime, Jack?

JACK: Yes, Jill, I would like that very much.

JILL: And it all happens right here.

LOUDSPEAKER VOICE: A-plus.

BLACKOUT