

THE SIDESHOW

Written by

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Originally Presented at the New Theatre, Nottingham University
12-15 November 2003

Current revisions by Jason Lasky
8 June 2010

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PRE-SHOW

A group of traveling performers, dressed in dazzling arrays of blacks, whites and reds, enter from one side of the venue carrying suitcases of varying colors, shapes and sizes. They make their way across the length of the venue.

Their movements and sounds are radical and stylized. They move as one living creature, trading their suitcases and changing their places from time to time. Between movements they freeze.

They retreat through the stage door.

MOTHER emerges from the side curtain wearing a conservative Sunday dress. She is holding a baby.

MOTHER

Of course, you know, that all I've ever really wanted was to raise a child of whom I could be proud. The anarchy of our existence should not be a detrimental factor to our ability to care for our offspring. A mother's love to her child, and, later, a child's love to, and for, the mother, for the child knows as the child grows that it has mother to thank for its eyes and ears, nose and toes. (To the child) Whatever you become and whatever you do, I will love you. I. Will. Love? You? (To the audience) You.

Mother vanishes.

The curtain opens, revealing a dimly lit stage featuring various odds and ends suspended in mid-air.

A coat rack stands in the center of the stage. Three empty coats hang on their hangers.

Music begins- The Tiger Lillies "Souvenirs".

Increasingly lively hands begin to creep out from the sleeves of the coats. Heads begin to emerge, and legs step out towards the audience.

A chaos of movement erupts as each performer removes their coats and sets the stage.

The focal point of the movement is the positioning of a TOP HAT upon a SMALL STOOL. The hat is originally set upon the stool at center stage by BARKER, but it is continually moved by the other performers.

Once the stage is completely set, Barker, who has become increasingly upset by the repositioning, sets the hat upon the stool one final, triumphant time.

Music ends. Blackout.

A spotlight pops up revealing Barker sitting upon the stool off to the left of the center of the light. He realizes he's been slighted again, looks up at the spotlight, grimaces, and looks at the audience and frowns.

He inconspicuously bounces the chair into the center of the spotlight and takes his position again.

BARKER

Come look at the freaks. Come gape at the geeks. Come examine these aberrations, their malformations. Grotesque physiques. Only pennies for peeks. Come look at the freaks.

He stands. He walks to a WOODEN COAT HANGER. He puts on a long-tail jacket and strikes a pose.

BARKER (CONT'D)

Come *look* at the freaks! They'll haunt you for weeks. Come explore why they fascinate you, exasperate you, and flush your cheeks. Come hear how *love* speaks. Come look at the freaks.

He walks across the stage, picks up his hat, and puts it on.

At the same time, the performers slowly walk onto the stage behind Barker.

BARKER (CONT'D)

(With ferocity)

Come see God's mistakes. The freaks God forsakes. Take a look at monster babies, dog men with rabies, and a bride of snakes. And We don't. Harbor. Any. Fakes! (Playfully) Come see God's mistakes, ha!

Barker slowly turns his back to the audience.

Suddenly he turns around, and the performers bring the stage to life as they prepare the "Invisible Man" display.

BARKER (CONT'D)

Ladies and Gentlemen, step right up. Right this way, there is no wait. We won't waste your time. So little to pay, just one thin dime gains you admission to our Odditorium of De-Light. Never have you seen a comparable emporium of wonders under one tent! Your dime could not be better spent.

All action freezes as PRETTY LISA begins to speak.

PRETTY LISA

The Barnumesque promise of more for your money was realized structurally in the freak show, or in the ten-in-one, where an entire collection of human oddities could be viewed for one price. The sideshow offered a panoramic view of the most sensational forms of alterity at any given historical moment.

The action unfreezes.

BARKER

Come see a tantalizing gal: the Bearded Lady! See a man turned into a reptile as punishment for his sins.

(MONTY)

BARKER (CONT'D)

Come hear the haunting song of the Siamese Twins. Come see our elegant geek: refined, but *deadly*. Chicken necks delight his incisors, their heads decorate the mud. His fav'rite cocktail drink? Why it's warm chicken blood! From the barren desert of the heathen camel trade, for our gentlemen friends, the seraglio of a Hashemite sheik. His harem was freed and we have found it's quite unique that these girls are virgins still. Had I arrived but an hour late that old sheik would have had his fill.

All action freezes.

PRETTY LISA

The freak show promised to shock and amaze, but also encouraged their audiences to question what they saw, to remain vigilant about the possibility of deception. As a consequence, the sight of the freak's body seems not to have produced stunned silence, but shouts of laughter or outrage, knowingly incredulous comments, or rude prodding intended to prove its unreality.

The action unfreezes.

BARKER

From the inky jungles of the darkest continent you will witness first hand the ferocity of the Cannibal King. We keep him chained up because we know he's hankering for a taste of one of *you*. And you are here for enlightenment, not as stock for cannibal stew. Come inside! Curiosity satisfied! Come! See the underside! Ah-ha! The inside!

The Invisible Man display is slowly brought forward.

BARKER (CONT'D)

Ah! Stand back ladies and gentlemen! What you are about to see will shock and amaze you. Don't go yet! You're just inside the door and wonders each more sensational than the last await you within!

(MONTY)

BARKER (CONT'D)

What follows is *not* for the faint of heart! But if you proceed, brave onlookers, you will not be disappointed! And to you I present thee...

The performers open the curtain.

BARKER (CONT'D)

Invisible Man!

All performers break into animal sounds and rush the Invisible Man display off stage, reemerging with chairs that have minds of their own.

The chairs are set in a line as far downstage as possible. Each person sits.

They stare at the audience, displaying ambivalence, curiosity, shock, repulsion, curiosity, and, finally, joy. The chuckling builds into a grotesque laughter.

MOTHER

You freaks!

The laughter comes to a complete halt as the other actors stare at her with disgust. One by one, they take their chairs and position themselves in a cross that takes up the stage, each person sitting with their backs to Mother.

Music begins.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Am I invisible... simply because people refuse to see me?

Mother raises her right hand, looking as though she can see her reflection. The others also raise their right hands.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

It is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorted glass.

Mother and the others stand up. She makes her way to each person who has now turned around to face her.

With each new person she encounters, the set of movements changes. After reaching the last person, all the actors step away from their chair and begin to dance in their movements around Mother, who becomes increasingly trapped.

Mother is terrified the closer they get and the more they slither about her.

They dress her in a coat, a tutu and a beard, place her on the coat rack and wheel her away.

Barker closes the curtains.

BARKER

Now here are we, all amazed. We've come to town to show you displays of joy and love and heart-wrenching lust, nothing demure. By the end of this gathering, you'll have been lured into a true sense of self and worth, for I'd wager since your Momma gave birth you've been wondering just where you do stand on this Earth. Well I'm here to tell you that what you see is what you get, and that and this, you will never forget. Now earlier on, I believe I spoke of a virgin of a Hashemite sheik. Here she is to whet your appetites. But I warn you, do not get too close, for she just might bite.

Curtains open revealing THE MASKED DANCER. Music begins. The Barker disappears.

She dances.

At the end of the dance, she removes her mask to reveal her fangs and disfigured face. She lunges for an audience member. The Barker reappears.

BARKER

Get back! Get back!

The Masked Dancer disappears.

BARKER (CONT'D)

I warned you, didn't I? Didn't I warn you? Grotesque physiques!

BARKER (CONT'D)
Grotesque physiques! They'll haunt
you for weeks and weeks and weeks!

He takes a rose from his back
pocket. He viciously smells it.

BARKER (CONT'D)
But love is in the air tonight.
Can you not smell it yourselves?
Can you not feel it all around you?
Can you not see it before your very
faces? Some say that love hurts.
Others say that love kills. I say
that there's nothing sweeter in the
world than the love between a man
and a woman. Unless, of course,
one of them happens to be
"special," and then that turns the
whole damn thing on its shriveled
little head.

The curtains open to reveal a
screen.

"Pretty Lisa" movie plays.

---The video, following the lyrics
to the song, features Pretty Lisa
and DASHING TONY.

Pretty Lisa, the Tattooed Beauty,
performing a balancing act for a
crowd.

Her trainer, Tony, looks on from
the side. He smiles and laughs.
Lisa falls off the wire. She
appears to be really hurt, even
though it was a short fall.

Patrons and Tony argue about money.

Tony seen talking with a woman from
the crowd while Lisa cries.

Domestic violence.

Lisa smiles to the crowd. Tony
sits watching from the side of the
stage.

The crowd watches Lisa.---

Movie ends.

Curtain closes.

Mother, Pretty Lisa and Lizard Boy
enter and come to center.

MOTHER
What time is it?

PRETTY LISA
Er-

LIZARD BOY
Quarter to ten I think.

MOTHER
Already?

PRETTY LISA
Time flies, doesn't it?

ALL
Yup.

LIZARD BOY
What time does it start?

PRETTY LISA
Ten o'clock.

MOTHER
Best get moving soon then, eh?

ALL
Yup.

Cardboard caricatures of a three-
legged man, a midget standing on a
stool, and a mermaid are placed in
front of each person.

MOTHER
What time is it?

PRETTY LISA
Er-

LIZARD BOY
Quarter to ten I think.

MOTHER
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LIZARD BOY
What time does it start?

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Ten o'clock.

MOTHER
Best get moving soon then, eh?

ALL
Yup.

LIZARD BOY
I messed up half-way through
yesterday.

PRETTY LISA
How come?

LIZARD BOY
My tail fell off.

PRETTY LISA
Ah. (Pause) Did anyone notice?

LIZARD BOY
Had to give them their money back.

PRETTY LISA
Too bad.

MOTHER
I used to have that problem with my
extra leg.

PRETTY LISA
What?

MOTHER
I found gaffer tape usually does
the trick. Keeps all your
important bits in place.

LIZARD BOY
I'll remember that.

All exit.

Barker enters.

BARKER
Jabber-jibber, jibber-jabber. Idle
words and idle palaver. You'd
think they'd blink together. You'd
think they'd think together. You'd
even think they'd stink together.
But they don't. Care to meet our
families' jewels? They're a pair
of gems, I tell you.
(MORE)

BARKER (CONT'D)
Positively polished, and personable
people here to please you, the
paying patrons. An absolutely,
amazingly, astonishingly talented
duo. They are, of course, the two,
the onlies, the Singing Siamese
Twins.

SIAMESE TWINS enter. Music begins.
They sing and dance.

When the song ends, they bow and
exit.

Enter Barker, Pretty Lisa, Lizard
Boy and Mother wearing a tutu and a
beard. Barker, Pretty Lisa and
Lizard Boy line up in a row with
Mother stands opposite them. She
shows her jazz hands and grins.

PRETTY LISA
Yes, but what do you do?

Mother shows her jazz hands and
grins again.

BARKER
What do you do?

LIZARD BOY
What is your show?

MOTHER
What do you mean what's my show?
I'm the fucking bearded lady.

LIZARD BOY
We know that-

PRETTY LISA
But what do you do?

MOTHER
Well I just stand there and look
pretty I suppose.

The three standing in the row look
at each other, move in a mechanical
style, and hold up score cards.

BARKER
Seven?!

LIZARD BOY
Well, it's kind of erotic.

Barker takes out a dunce cap.

BARKER
Here- try this.

Mother goes over and puts the hat
on. She returns to her original
spot.

LIZARD BOY
It's funnier.

PRETTY LISA
Comedy appeal. Very important.

LIZARD BOY
Again.

The three move as before and hold
up score cards.

BARKER
Seven?!

LIZARD BOY
It kind of makes you think.

PRETTY LISA
You need some movement. We need to
offer the audience some aesthetic
stimulation.

MOTHER
Right.

PRETTY LISA
Arms up. Arms down. Up. Down.
Up! Down! Up! Down!

BARKER
Better.

PRETTY LISA
Better.

LIZARD BOY
Again!

The three move as before and hold
up score cards.

BARKER
Six?

LIZARD BOY
Again!

The three move as before and hold up the same cards again.

BARKER

A song. We need a song. We've got the erotic appeal, the aesthetic, now we need the soundtrack. Sing!

MOTHER

Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are. Up above...

PRETTY LISA

Arms up! Arms down! Up.
Down. Up! Down!...

LIZARD BOY

And bend. And up. Bend.
Up. Bend! Up!...

BARKER

(Gasping)...

The three break down into an archaic display of lunacy as Mother continues to sing.

Mother screams and all action halts.

Music plays- opening from "Psycho Circus" by Kiss.

All exit.

Enter Lizard Boy on a leash handled by the Cannibal King in chains.

LIZARD BOY

G'day, mates. How'd you like to hear a gory story that's hunky dory from the one, the only, Lizard Baboy-ey!

CANNIBAL KING

Not now. I'm hungry.

LIZARD BOY

No, no. It's time for a gory story that's hunky dory from the one, the only-

CANNIBAL KING

Will you quit it?

LIZARD BOY

But, King, we don't to leave them dried and borey, now do we? You see-

CANNIBAL KING

I don't want to-

LIZARD BOY
(singing to "It Was a Very
Good year")
When I was a young Lizard Boy-

CANNIBAL KING
Here we go again.

LIZARD BOY
It was a great thing to sin. It
was a great thing to sin from night
to the morn'-

CANNIBAL KING
All the time with this-

LIZARD BOY
I would lie, cheat, and kill-

CANNIBAL KING
You, kill? Get out of here.

LIZARD BOY
I did it for thrills-

CANNIBAL KING
I kill every night.

LIZARD BOY
So many people's blood I would
spill. When I was a young Lizard
Boy.

CANNIBAL KING
And he expects to get paid! Hello
there, my sweet.

LIZARD BOY
You see something you like?

CANNIBAL KING
I do. Say, what's your name?

LIZARD BOY
Leave them be. Let me get on with
my gory story that's-

CANNIBAL KING
You know, you're getting on my
nerves

LIZARD BOY
You could set me free!

CANNIBAL KING
Then I wouldn't get paid.

LIZARD BOY
So what will you do then?

CANNIBAL KING
If you're not careful, I will eat
you.

Music begins. Cannibal King sings.
"I Will Eat You (The Cannibal
Song)" by Cait Sith- Parody song of
Kylie Minogue's "I Believe in You".

LIZARD BOY
Now *that* was hunky dory, eh?

CANNIBAL KING
Let's grab a bite.

Lizard Boy and the Cannibal King
exit.

Mother enters, looking haggard.
Her makeup is smeared. She's
holding her baby by it's tentacled
leg. The baby has the head of an
elephant, an arm of a monkey, an
arm missing it's hand, and a leg of
a moose.

Mother frantically speaks.

MOTHER
Of course! You know that! All I've
ever really wanted, was to raise a
child of whom I could be. Proud?
The anarchy, of our existence,
should not be a detrimental.
Factor! To our ability to care for
our offspring! A mother's love to
her child! And, later, a child's
love to, and for, the mother? For
the child knows? As the child
grows, that it has mother to thank
for its Eyes and Ears! Nose? And
toes! (To the child) Whatever you
become and whatever you do, I will
love you? I? Will? Love? You.
(To the audience) You?

She breaks down crying, dropping
the baby into a bucket behind her.
She disappears.

The curtain opens. Music begins.
Projections behind them.

Two faceless figures stand far away
with their backs to each other.

One of them has lobster hands, the other is bent over with a hump and a shortened arm.

They turn and search. They rise and fall as the tides of the sea. They move closer to one another. They eventually find each other and embrace. They lay down with one another and die, arm in arm.

The curtain closes.

All enter onto the stage and take on various poses that will slowly change. Barker at center stage does not move.

CANNIBAL KING

Come look at the-

MOTHER

Freaks! Come see-

PRETTY LISA

A panoramic view of-

LIZARD BOY

Its unreality. An entire collection of-

SIAMESE TWINS

Curiosity satisfied! The whole damn thing-

THE DANCER

Under one tent. The anarchy of-

LIZARD BOY

God's mistakes! Hunky dory-

CANNIBAL KING

Jibber-jabber. Hard distorted glass-

PRETTY LISA

For enlightenment. Comedy appeal-

MOTHER

Positively polished. A mother's love-

SIAMESE TWINS

Love kills! The soundtrack-

THE DANCER

It's kind of erotic. Well just stand there and-

LIZARD BOY
Twinkle, twinkle little-

PRETTY LISA
Virgin. We need to offer the
audience-

MOTHER
Their money back. Best get moving
soon.

ALL
Wait!

The curtain opens. The music
begins. Excerpt from The Tiger
Lillies "Send in the Clowns"

The stage is cleared.

Barker, still frozen in a pose, is
dressed in a trench coat, given a
suitcase, and a balloon is tied
around his left wrist. The
Barker's pose will slowly shrivel
until he has taken on the form of
an old man.

He is left alone. He picks up the
suitcase.

The curtains close.

The curtains open revealing a top
hat on a stool under a spotlight.

The curtains close.

End.