



**THE MOTION
OF HISTORY
AND OTHER PLAYS**

by **AMIRI BARAKA**
(LeRoi Jones)

WILLIAM MORROW AND COMPANY, INC.
NEW YORK 1978



CAST

SPEAKING PARTS

AFRICAN SLAVES—VOICES OF AFRICAN SLAVES

1st Man (Prayer—Husband of Dademi)

2nd Man (Curser)

3rd Man (Struggler)

1st Woman (Prayer)

2nd Woman (Screamer—Attacked)

3rd Woman (With Child)

Dancers

Musicians

Children

Voices and bodies in the slave ship

Old Tom Slave

New Tom (Preacher)

WHITE MEN—VOICES OF WHITE MEN

Captain

Sailor

Plantation Owner—"Eternal Oppressor"

PROPS

Smell effects: incense . . . dirt/filth smells/bodies

Heavy chains

Drums (African bata drums, and bass and snare)
Rattles and tambourines
Banjo music for plantation atmosphere

Ship noises
Ship bells
Rocking and splashing of sea

Guns and cartridges

Whips/whip sounds

Whole theater in darkness. Dark. For a long time. Just dark. Occasional sound, like ship groaning, squeaking, rocking. Sea smells. In the dark. Keep the people in the dark, and gradually the odors of the sea, and the sounds of the sea, and sounds of the ship, creep up. Burn incense, but make a significant, almost stifling, smell come up. Pee. Shit. Death. Life processes going on anyway. Eating. These smells and cries, the slash and tear of the lash, in a total atmosphere, gotten some way.

African Drums like the worship of some Orisha. Obatala. Mbwanga rattles of the priests. BamBamBamBamBoom BoomBoom BamBam.

Rocking of the slave ship, in darkness, without sound. But smells. Then sound. Now slowly, out of blackness with smells and drums staccato, the hideous screams. All the women together, scream. AAAAAIIIIEEEEEEEEEEEEEE Drums come up again, rocking, rocking; black darkness of the slave ship. Smells. Drums on up high. Stop. Scream. AAAAAIIIIEEEEEEEEEEEEEE. Drums. Black darkness with smells.

Chains, the lash, and people moaning. Listen to the sounds come up out of the actors. Sounds thrown down into the hold. AAAAAIIIIEEEEEEEEEEEEEE. Of people, dropped down in the darkness, frightened, angry, mashed together in common terror. The bells of the ship. White Men's voices, on top, ready to set sail.



**SLAVE
SHIP**

A
**HISTORICAL
PAGEANT**

1967

[140]

AMIRI BARAKA

(Screams now, as soon as the lights go down
AIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIEIEIEIEIE Gunshots, combination of slave ship and
break up of the revolt. Voices of master and slaves in combat)

WHITE VOICE. I kill you, niggahs. You black savages.

BLACK VOICE. White Beasts. Devil from hell.

(Voice, now, humming, humming, slow, deathly patient hum
HUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM)

(Drums of Africa, and the screams of Black and White in combat.)
(Lights flash on Tom, cringing as if he hiding from combat, gnawing on
pork chop. Voice of white man laughing in triumph. Another chop comes
sailing out of the darkness. Tom grabs it and scoffs it down, grinning,
and doing the deadape shuffle, humming while he eats)

WOMAN 3. (Dead whispered voice)

Moshake, Moshake . . . chile . . . calm calm . . . we be all right, now
. . . Moshake, be calm . . .

MAN 1. White beasts!

ALL. Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh, Uhhh
(As if pulling a tremendous weight)
Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhh. Uhhh. Uhhh.

WOMAN 1. Ifanami . . .

MAN 1. Dademi . . . Dademi.

WOMAN 2. Akiyele . . . Akiyele . . . Lord, husband, where you . . . help
me . . .

MAN. . . touch my hand . . . woman . . .

WOMAN 2. Ifanami!

WOMAN 3. Moshake!

SLAVE SHIP

[141]

(Now the same voices, as if transported in time to the slave farms, call
names, English slaves names)

ALL. (Alternating man and woman losing mate in death, or through slave
sale, or the aura of constant fear of separation . . .)

Luke. Oh my God.

MAN. Sarah.

WOMAN. John.

WOMAN 2. Everett. My God, they killed him.

ALL. Mama, Mama . . . Nana. Nana. Willie. Ohhh, Lord . . . They done.

ALL. Uhh. Uhhh. Uhh. Obatala. Obatala. Save us. Lord. Shango. Lord of
forests. Give us back our strength.
(Chains. Chains. Dragging and grunting of people pushed against each
other)

(The sound of a spiritual. "Oh, Lord, Deliver Me, Oh Lord." And now
cries of "JESUS, LORD, JESUS . . . HELP US, JESUS . . .")

MAN 1. Ogun. Give me weapons. Give me iron. My spear. My bone and
muscle make them tight with tension of combat. Ogun, give me fire and
death to give to these beasts. Sarava! Sarava! Ogun!

(Drums of fire and blood, briefly loud and smashing against the dark, but
now calming, dying down, till only the moans, and then the same patient
humming . . . of women, now, no men, only the women . . . strains of
"The Old Rugged Cross" . . . and only the women and the humming
. . . the time passing in the darkness, soft, soft, mournful weeping
"Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . . Jesus . . .
Jesus . . . Jesus . . .")

(Now lights flash on, and preacher in modern business suit stands with
hat in his hand. He is the same Tom as before. He stands at first talking to
his congregation: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus." Then, with

133

(Bodies dragging up, in darkness)

(Lights on the preacher in one part of the stage. He stands still, jabbering senselessly to the white man. And the white man's laughter is heard trying to drown out the music, but the music is rising)

(Preacher turns to look into the darkness at the people dragging up behind him, embarrassed at first, then beginning to get frightened. The laughter, too, takes on a less arrogant tone.)

WOMAN 3. Moshake. Moshake.

MAN. Ogun, give me steel.

ALL. Uhh. Uhh. Ohhh. Uhhs. Uhhhs.

(Humming rising, too, behind. Still singing "When We Gonna Rise." Preacher squirms, turns to see, and suddenly his eyes begin to open very wide, lights are coming up very, very slowly, almost imperceptibly at first. Now, singing is beginning to be heard, mixed with old African drums, and voices, cries, pushing screams, of the slave ship. Preacher begins to fidget, as if he does not want to be where he is. He looks to boss for help. Voice is breaking, as lights come up and we see all the people in the slave ship in Miracles'/Temptations' dancing line. Some doing African dance. Some doing new Boogaloo, but all moving toward preacher, and toward voice. It is a new-old dance, Boogalooyoruba line, women, children all moving, popping fingers, all singing, and drummers, beating out old and new, and moving, all moving. Finally, the preacher begins to cringe and plead for help from the white voice.)

PREACHER. Please, boss, these niggers goin' crazy; please, boss, throw yo' lightnin' at 'em, white Jesus boss, white light god, they goin crazy! Help!

VOICE. (Coughing, as if choking on something, trying to laugh because the sight of preacher is funny . . . still managing to laugh at preacher)
Fool. Fool.

PREACHER. Please, boss, please . . . I do anything for you . . . you know that, boss . . . Please . . . Please . . .

(All group merge on him and kill him dead. Then they turn in the direction of where the voice is coming from. Dancing, Singing, right on toward the now pleading voice)

VOICE. HaaHaaHaaHaa

(Laugh gets stuck in his throat)

Uhh . . . now what . . . you haha can't touch me . . . you scared of me, niggers. I'm God. You cain't kill white Jesus God. I got long blond blow-hair. I don't even need to wear a wig. You love the way I look. You want to look like me. You love me. You want me. Please. I'm good. I'm kind. I'll give you anything you want. I'm white Jesus savior right god pay you money nigger me is good god be please . . . please don't . . .

(Lights begin to fade . . . drums and voices of old slave ship come back)

ALL. Uhh. Ohh. Uhh. Ohh. Uhh. Ohh. Uhh. Ohh.

(And then the terrible humming, turning to the OMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM sound, broken now, by the finally awful scream of the killed white voice)

VOICE. AWHAWHAEHAHWAWHWHAHW

(All players fixed in half light, at the movement of the act. Then lights go down. Black)

(Lights come up abruptly, and people on stage begin to dance, same hip Boogalooyoruba, fingerpop, skate, monkey, dog . . . Enter audience; get members of audience to dance. To same music Rise Up. Turns into an actual party. When the party reaches some loose improvisation, et cetera, audience relaxed, somebody throws the preacher's head into center of floor, that is, after dancing starts for real. Then black)



**PROGRAM NOTES
FIRST PERFORMANCES
OF SLAVE SHIP**

Slave Ship was first presented by The Spirit House Movers in Newark, New Jersey, in March, 1967

THE COMPANY CONSISTED OF:

Sylvia Jones
Yusef Iman
Doris Iman
Justice Iman
Malaika Iman
Ife Iman
Oba Iman
Olugabala Iman
Barry Wynn
Lubaba Lateef
Clarence Reed, Jr.
Damu
Aminifu
Ben Caldwell

Directed by LEROI JONES

Slave Ship was presented at Theatre-in-the-Church at Washington Square, New York City, in November, 1969

THE COMPANY

FRANK ADU	(Atowoda, Auctioneer)
GWEN D. ANDERSON	(Tawa)
PRESTON BRADLEY	(Akoowa, Modern Day Preacher)
LEE CHAMBERLIN	(Oyalosa [Tsia])
BILL DUKE	(Akano)
PHYLLIS ESPINOSA	(Adufe)
RALPH ESPINOSA	(Oiala)
BARRY FRAZIER	(Salako, Reverend Turner)
MAXINE GRIFFITH	(Dademi)
TIM PELT	(Lalu, Plantation Tom)
C. ROBERT SCOTT	(Sailor)
SERET SCOTT	(Noliwe)
SYLVIA SOARES	(Segilola)
MARILYN THOMAS	(Imani)
REETA WHITE	(Oyo)

and

LEOPOLDO FLEMING (congas), CHARLES DAVIS (soprano saxophone),
RICHARD FELLS (bass), BEAVER HARRIS (drums),
BOB RALSTON (saxophone), MICHAEL RIDLEY (trumpet).

Produced by OLIVER REA (a Chelsea Theatre Center Production) in association
with WOODIE KING
Directed by GILBERT MOSES



GLOSSARY OF YORUBA TERMS

OYO MAA BO, OYA KALO OYA—IF YOU ARE READY FOR A FIGHT,
COME ALONG.

MASE (ma-shay)—don't
DURO (doo-row)—stop
ORO-O-O-O—cry of pain
ORUN (oh-oh-roon)—it smells
KABIYESI (Ka-bee-ay-see)—oh my Lord
OBATALA—name of the arch divinity
SANGO (Shango)—a deity, god of thunder and lightning
ORISA (Or-ee-sha)—name of the supreme deity
IFA (Ee-fa)—deity-wisdom
RAN WA LOWO (rahn-wah-lowo)—help us
OLUWA (oh-lou-wah)—oh Lord
BENI (beh-a-nee)—yes
BEKO (bay-a-ko)—no
RARA O (rah-rah-oh)—it can't be
SE SURU (shay-sou-rou)—patience
DAKE (da-kay)—be quiet
O TO } —shut up, hush, quiet
PANUMO }
O TI (oh-tee)—o

GBADURA (bah-dur-rah)—pray
 L'AGBARA (ag-bwah-rah)—have strength
 AGBARA (ag-bwah-rah)—strength
 FUN WA (fung-wah)—give us
 BABA OMO—father of us all
 NIBO L'AWA? (Nee-bo lah-wah)—Where are we?
 LU (lou)—beat
 JOWO } (dah-koon)—please
 DAKUN }
 IGBE (eeg-bay)—shit
 O O LE SE BAYI FUN MI—You can't do this to me
 SE ALAFIA NI? (shay allah-fee-ah-nee?)—How are you?
 ALAFIA NI, MO DUPE (allah-fee-ah-nee mo dou-pay)—I am fine,
 thank you
 ILE NKO? (ee-lay en-do)—And your family?
 O DABO (oh-dah-bow)—goodbye
 O DARO (oh-dah-row)—goodnight
 E KARO (eh kah-row)—good morning
 E KASAN (eh kah-san)—good afternoon
 E KUROLE (eh kou-rolc-ay)—good evening (before dark)
 E KALE (eh kah-lay)—good evening (after dark)
 MINI MINI POKAN } (meany meany pokahn) etc.—Yoruba nurse
 MINI MINI POKAN }
 K'AIYE WON O TORO BI OMI A F-ORO-PON—May their lives be
 clear and pure like water drawn early in the morning