

The Guppy Ballet premiered at the Newburgh Free Academy in Newburgh, New York, in 2009. Terry Sandler was the producer.

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CHARACTERS

Four guppies of the same school:

DORSAL: *the head fish*

GILL: *the middle fish*

HERRY: *the bottom fish*

ROXANNE: *the youngest fish*

TIME

The present day.

SETTING

The middle of the sea.

NOTE: THE GUPPY BALLET can be performed with or without music, depending on whether it is being presented as a pantomime or as a choreographed dance-play. All in all, the swimming sections are elongated sequences and should not be rushed.

Just as fish swim in harmonious synchronization due to their highly developed sense of sonar, so too do the characters in this play move (or swim.) as one. They are, in essence, a single character, until . . . well, you'll see.

As the lights come up, the fish swim. They dart, dive, glide, and dance as one. The motion is simultaneously beautiful, mesmerizing, and oddly unsettling in its precision. After a moment, DORSAL, the head fish, comes upon a morsel, eats it, and exclaims to the others with glee:

DORSAL: Seaweed spores!

[A brief feeding frenzy ensues. Once the food is devoured, the fish swim in exuberant, synchronized happiness. The exultation eventually fades back into the day-to-day exploration for food. They swim as one. After a moment, GILL, the middle fish, comes upon a morsel, eats it, and exclaims to the others with glee:]

GILL: Shrimp roe!

HERRY: Shrimp roe?

GILL: Shrimp roe!

[Once again, a brief feeding frenzy ensues. And again, after the food is devoured, the fish swim in exuberant, synchronized happiness. As the exultation fades back into the day-to-day exploration for food, ROXANNE, the youngest fish, bursts out in a unique, expressive solo. Sheer joy overtakes her and she breaks from the group in a spontaneous display.]

DORSAL: [Admonishing her.] Roxanne!

[Sheepishly, ROXANNE conforms, and rejoins the others in their synchronization. They swim. After a moment, as they continue to swim, HERRY, the bottom fish, is struck with a thought.]

HERRY: Say, do you remember Davy?

DORSAL: Davy?

HERRY: Yeah.

DORSAL: What'd he look like?

HERRY: Like you . . . and him . . . and her . . . and me . . .

[The fish think.]

OTHERS: No. Nope. Un-huh.

HERRY: Hm.

[They swim. After a moment, DORSAL comes once again across a morsel, eats it, and exclaims to the others with glee:]

DORSAL: Smelt dung!

OTHERS: Smelt dung! Yea!!!

[With added gusto, a feeding frenzy ensues. After the food is devoured, the fish swim in a particularly jubilant fashion. This sends ROXANNE into a frenzy, and as the other fish's exultation fades back into the normal day-to-day exploration for food, ROXANNE swims with unwavering delight.]

DORSAL: Roxanne! [ROXANNE continues to swim independent of the others.] Roxanne! Stop that at once! There are no solos in the esprit de corps—it's a break of the sonar code.

ROXANNE: I don't care. I don't want to be like all of you. I want to be unique. I want to be a star!

GILL: There are no stars in school . . . only conformity.

HERRY: Otherwise, chaos! [ROXANNE swims dangerously close to HERRY.] Be careful! You might bump me, break my fin, and send me into a life of constant circles.

DORSAL: Roxanne, I implore you. Stop this at once. No good can come from this. [ROXANNE's swimming slowly conforms to the others' and they swim once again in harmonious synchronization. After a moment, HERRY is again struck with a thought.]

HERRY: Say, do you remember Daphne?

GILL: Daphne?

HERRY: Daphne. She particularly enjoyed ameba clusters.

[The fish think.]

OTHERS: No. Nope. Un-huh.

HERRY: Hm.

[The fish swim. ROXANNE looks at the others. The need to express herself builds dramatically within her until she simply cannot hold it any longer. Eventually, she boldly and joyously swims independent of the others.]

GILL: There she goes again.

HERRY: Dorsal, do something. She's going to draw attention to us!

DORSAL: Roxanne! Please, cease this foolishness.

ROXANNE: It's not foolish. It's who I am. It's an expression of me. I call it "Roxanne's Underwater Ballet." Isn't it beautiful? I've got to be true to myself. I don't want to be just like you—just like every other guppy in the sea. I need to be noticed. I need to be loved. I need you to love me for who I am. This is who I am. Love me. Love me! I am a star!

[As she dances, ROXANNE is devoured by a large fish—one rising higher up in the food chain. The OTHERS scurry frantically in perfect synchronized terror to avoid being eaten. After the danger has passed, their swimming eventually fades back into the normal day-to-day exploration for food. A peace, a calm, and an understanding comes over the group. They swim. Then eventually . . .]

DORSAL: Fame is fleeting.

[*They swim.*]

GILL: Her ballet was rather beautiful.

[*They swim.*]

HERRY: We'll certainly remember her. [Pause.] Won't we?

[*They swim. Then, in perfect synchronization, of course, they swim away, as the lights fade.*]

END OF PLAY

LITTLE MOM

Marc Palmieri
