

# A CONTEMPORARY VERSION OF THE AFRICAN FOLK TALE

## “The Ape, the Snake and the Lion”

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### SILENT MOVIE VERSION

#### CAST OF CHARACTERS

Myron, a 12-year old boy – *countertenor*

Faith, Myron’s mom, a single mother, who works as a maid/temp worker – *lyric soprano*

Lynus, a rich man who is the local landlord involved in redeveloping the neighborhood – *dramatic baritone*

The Bodega owner/beggar – *baritone*

A homeless woman – *contralto*

A mentally ill man - *tenor*

A magistrate - *dramatic mezzo-soprano*

Misc. people (cops, buyers, homeless people, courtroom lawyer, etc.)

#### PLACE

A poor, run-down neighborhood in a small city somewhere in the US

Libretto Outline	Score Outline
<b>Scene 1. The curtain rises on:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Myron, with his head in the refrigerator, which is empty, except for ½ a stick of margarine</li><li>• He searches the cupboards, but they, too, are empty</li><li>• He grabs a spoon, sits at the table and starts to eat the margarine like ice cream.</li><li>• Faith enters, returning home from work, plopping with exhaustion into a chair</li><li>• Myron jumps up and searches her rucksack for food; but there is none</li><li>• Faith reveals that she gave her pay to the church,</li><li>• Myron questions her; Why did she do this? How can she give money to the church and let Myron go hungry?</li><li>• Faith quotes the preacher who said that God will save you if you give him everything.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Music (no dialogue) accompanying Myron’s search for food and eating margarine–tone: somewhat sad, but sweet and curious</li><li>• Faith enters (faith motive) – tone: tired</li><li>• Myron starts with a fast-talking <i>recit (dry)</i>. searching for food in Faith’s bag– tone: frustrated</li><li>• <i>Recit</i> melds into a <i>short duet</i> – tone: argumentative, but lyrical</li><li>• Original music abruptly returns accompanying Myron’s exit – tone: faster and more dynamic</li><li>• Faith’s “faith” motive returns – tone: sad</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myron erupts in rage; he waves the stick of margarine at her in defiance: is this what God provides?</li> <li>• Faith chides him for not having faith</li> <li>• Myron jumps up from the table, snatches her transistor radio, and runs out of the house.</li> <li>• Faith takes a spoon and finishes eating the margarine.</li> </ul>	
<b>Scene 2.</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myron sells the transistor radio to someone on the street,</li> <li>• Myron darts into a bodega. He buys food—a sandwich and 2 bags of chips.</li> <li>• Myron gobbles down the sandwich and one of the bags of chips.</li> <li>• He starts to eat the second bag of chips, but stops.</li> <li>• Myron returns home where he finds Faith praying to God to save them</li> <li>• Myron throws the other bag of chips down on the table in front of her</li> <li>• Faith eats them hungrily, then thanks God for providing the chips</li> <li>• Myron argues that God didn't provide the chips, HE did.</li> <li>• Faith scolds him for stealing her radio and having such little faith that God will save them. "God works in mysterious ways" she admonishes him, as</li> <li>• Myron, furious, snatches his rucksack and storms out of the house a second time shouting "God helps him who helps himself!"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Music accompanying dialogue between Myron and buyer – tone: cunning</li> <li>• This musical style continues as Myron buys food, eats, stops, and runs home ("rescue motive") – tone: still cunning, but more eager, curious</li> <li>• Faith sings <i>aria</i>, a prayer to God (rescue motive) – tone: pleading, but sweet</li> <li>• <i>Duet</i> between the mother and son, musically expanding on Faith's <i>aria</i> – tone: excited, turned argumentative, turned snide</li> <li>• Music abruptly stops and Myron shouts: "God helps him who helps himself!"</li> <li>• Original music from SCENE 1 abruptly returns, accompanying Myron's exit again (introduce Myron's <i>myself motive</i>) – tone: furious</li> </ul>
<b>Scene 3. (Musical sequence: selling)</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Myron darts into the bodega; When the owner isn't looking, Myron steals stuff</li> <li>• Myron sells the items he stole from the bodega on the street</li> <li>• Myron enters the bodega; orders two roast beef sandwiches;</li> <li>• While the owner makes the sandwiches, Myron steals more stuff, telling himself that God helps him who helps himself</li> <li>• Myron pays for the sandwiches and goes home.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite the troubling circumstances, this will be a fun musical sequence—postmodern, regarding the eclecticism of musical styles depending on who Myron interacts with (not stylistic clichés, but rather an introduction of <i>leitmotifs</i>). There will be interesting dialogue (<i>accompanied recit</i>) here and there between Myron and the buyers and the clerk- tone: coercive, smooth, resolute</li> </ul>

- He tosses the sandwiches down in front of his mom; again, she thanks God for saving them; again, he reminds her that HE is the one who is saving them from hunger.
- He asks her why she has been home so early the last few days.
- Faith ignores him; he persists in his questioning until
- Faith finally reveals that she lost her job a few days ago; the preacher told her that if she gave her last money to the church, God would protect them and save them.
- Myron reminds her that HE is the one saving the family because of his resourcefulness—not God.

- *Duet* with Myron and Faith, an amalgam of Faith's *faith motive* and Myron's *myself motive* (both introduced in SCENE 1 and SCENE 2, respectively) – tone: tense, sad, unempathetic

#### Scene 4.

- Later that night when Myron is sleeping, Faith sneaks a look in his rucksack and discovers that it is full of all kinds of things he couldn't possibly afford
- In the morning she confronts Myron about where he got them.
- He lies and says that he worked to buy them
- She doesn't believe him
- He retorts that "God works in mysterious ways."
- She warns that "God punishes wrong-doing"
- He retorts that if that is the case, then she will burn in hell for giving all her money to the church instead of feeding her child!
- He grabs the rucksack and leaves the house
- Faith prays for God to save Myron

- Music accompanying Faith's actions – tone: curious
- Short *aria* by Faith about wonder, same music from her prayer in SCENE 2 – tone: reflective
- *Duet* between Myron and Faith– tone: questioning, but not as dramatic as before, gradually more heated
- Return to short *prayer aria* – tone: defeated

#### Scene 5.

- Myron goes back to the bodega and asks the owner if he has any Fritos in the back.
- The bodega owner goes in the back; Myron steals stuff from the store.
- The bodega owner comes out with Fritos; Myron admits he doesn't have money and starts to leave.
- The bodega owner stops him then gives him the Fritos, saying he can pay later.
- Myron takes the Fritos and leaves quickly, embarrassed by the owner's kindness.

- *Recit* dialogue with clerk, music accompanying action – tone: casual, deceitful, and sweet
- Myron short *aria* (prayer motive) – tone: sardonic
- Similar thematic material from the beginning of SCENE 3, but different mood – tone: more anxious
- *Duet* between Myron and Lynus (rescue motive) – tone: casual, ironic
- Music accompanying actions with homeless man, short *recit* dialogue – tone: condescending.

- He exits the store, utters a quick prayer asking God to forgive him for stealing the stuff from the bodega, but ends with a justification that “Hey, God, you help him who helps himself, right?”
- Myron walks the streets which are lined with homeless people who can’t buy
- He bumps in Lynus, who is slapping eviction notices on all of the doors;
- Myron asks what he is doing’ Lynus replies “Saving the neighborhood.”
- Myron objects; he points out that everyone is sleeping in the streets
- Lynus replies: God helps him who helps himself. These people are deadbeats. They do nothing but sit around waiting for a handout. Lynus leaves.
- Someone asks Myron for food, but Myron refuses them even though he has a few candy bars in his rucksack. He tells them that God helps him who helps himself!
- Myron returns to the bodega to steal something decent to eat but it is closed, with an eviction notice on the door
- Myron returns home to find his mother holding an eviction notice, too. She weeps, because they have to vacate the apartment tomorrow and appear in court.
- Myron scolds his mother for mom not looking for work and spending all of her time praying. She needs to help herself and stop waiting for God to provide.

- Music accompanying actions, melding to *duet* between Myron and Faith (myself and faith motives) – tone: extremely sad to anger

#### Scene 6.

- Myron resolves to find work and walks the city, which has even more homeless people.
- He goes to the temp agency, where his mother gets her work. But it’s closed. The agency has been evicted too, like everyone else.
- Myron sees the Bodega owner, who is begging for food.
- The Bodega owner tells Myron that between the shoplifters and the loss of sales due to hard times in the neighborhood, he hadn’t made enough to pay his rent.

- Music only accompanying actions with similar thematic material from the beginning of SCENE 3 but different mood from both – tone: determined, turned helpless, turned sad
- *Duet* between Myron and bodega owner – tone: humble (bodega owner), shameful/guilty (Myron)

- Myron burns with shame. He gives the owner the last candy bar in his rucksack then leaves quickly
- The bodega owner thanks him profusely and promises to repay his kindness someday, which makes Myron feel even worse

### Scene 7.

- Myron heads for his mother's church down the block, to pray for forgiveness for stealing from the bodega.
  - But when he gets to the church it is closed; it too has an eviction notice on the door
  - Outside the church is a half-naked mentally ill man, howling in pain
  - Myron tries to comfort the man, who is also shivering from the cold
  - The man reveals that he is now living on the street because they have evicted the church, which used to provide a shelter for the homeless and the sick.
  - Myron gives the man a T-shirt and a pair of socks.
  - Just then Lynus, enters from one of the apartment buildings next to the church, kicking people out of their homes
  - Lynus shouts at them to get out of the neighborhood so he can clean it up
  - Lynus sees Myron helping the mentally ill man by putting on his socks and tells him to stop; when you help those people you only exacerbate their problem.
  - Myron argues that the man is ill and needs help; Lynus argues that the man is lazy and looking for a handout.
  - The mentally ill man says that Myron is living proof that God provides for those in need
  - Lynus retorts that God helps him who helps himself.
  - Lynus sees a car with a flat tire in the front of the church; he knocks on the window and orders the woman inside to move along. People like her are giving the neighborhood a bad name.
  - The woman tells him she can't move; her car has a flat tire.
- Music accompanying action, musical material includes prayer aria motives – tone: uneasy
  - *Aria* by Myron (prayer aria motive) – humble
  - Mentally ill man has a *short aria* – tone: disjunct, confusing, nonsensical
  - *Aria* interrupted by *recit* dialogue between the mentally ill man and Myron – tone: comforting
  - Meld back into a *short duet*, similar musical material from the mentally ill man's *aria*, but this different mood (rescue motive) – tone: lyrical and coherent
  - Musical exchange (*recit accompanied*) between Lynus and Myron (rescue motive) – tone: dismissive (Lynus); frustrated (Myron)
  - Ensemble piece between Myron, Lynus, mentally ill man, and guy in the car – tone: confident (Lynus), compassionate (Myron), confused (mentally ill man), and concerned (guy in the car)

- Lynus pulls out a cell phone and makes a call, then exits back into the apartment building to evict more people.
- Myron finishes dressing the mentally ill man; the man thanks him and offers to help Myron in return if he can.
- Myron reassures him that he has already helped him.

#### Scene 8.

- Just then, a cop car pulls up alongside the curb and hauls the homeless woman out of her parked car.
- The cop orders the woman to move her car, but she can't because the car has a flat tire
- The police officer barks orders into his walky-talky
- The homeless woman begs the policeman to show mercy
- The policeman kicks him away, then starts writing a ticket for vagrancy
- Myron approaches the homeless woman and offers to help
- The homeless woman shows Myron the flat tire
- Myron opens his rucksack and pulls out a tube of glue
- Myron glues the hole in the tire, then pumps up with air from the pump in the trunk
- The woman thanks Myron profusely and asks how she can repay him?
- Myron suggests she help someone else in need; that will be enough if she pays it forward
- Just then Lynus comes out of the apartment building hauling someone's belongings which he tosses in the street.
- Lynus cuts his hand on the stuff he has just hauled and curses that he's getting blood all over his good suit.
- Myron gives him a packet of Kleenex to wipe the blood
- Lynus snatches it and wipes his hand, without even saying thank you. He thanks the cop for helping to clean up the streets of all these deadbeats and prays to God they leave quickly.
- Seeing that the cop is distracted, the homeless man jumps in the car and drives off before the cop can give him a ticket.
- The cop is furious; he arrests Myron.

- *Recit* dialogue between the homeless woman and the police officer – tone: aggressive (police officer), helpless (homeless woman)
- Warm music accompanying the actions of Myron helping the homeless woman (rescue motive)– tone: eager
- Very short musical exchange (*recit accompanied*) between the Lynus and Myron (rescue and prayer motive)– tone: dismissive (Lynus); naïve (Myron)
- Music accompanying homeless woman's "escape" – tone: sneaky
- *Recit* dialogue between the cop, Myron, and Lynus – tone: searing (cop); scared (Myron); scoffing (Lynus)

- Lynus tells Myron he would do better to save himself instead of everybody else

### Scene 9.

- Back at home, Myron's mother Faith sits on the curb with all of her belongings in a pile. She has been evicted, too.
- She prays to God that Myron will return soon. But he doesn't
- When God doesn't answer her prayers, she decides to do something, quoting Myron "God helps him who helps himself." She takes a few things from her belongings and walks through the city, lined with homeless people
  - She enters a nice neighborhood, arrives at a big house and knocks.
  - Lynus, opens the door,
  - The mother pleads with him to not evict them, but Lynus tells her that she should thank him. He is saving the neighborhood by redeveloping it. It will soon be a place she will want to live.
  - She reveals that she and Myron are hungry. He says that it's not his problem; if she's hungry she needs to do something; God helps him who helps himself. He slams the door in her face.

- Faith sings *small aria* (Prayer Motive)- tone: sad and turned worried
- Music accompanying Faith's travels to the big house - tone: uneasy, helpless
- Faith sings small pleading *aria* (prayer motive) - tone: dramatic, defeated, and discouraged
- Lynus *aira* (rescue motive) - tone: patriarchal and patronizing
- Melds to *recit* exchange between Faith and Lynus - tone: desperate (Faith); dismissive (Lynus)

### Scene 10.

- Faith walks back to the old neighborhood and goes to her church. She is shocked to find it boarded up with an eviction notice
- She stands at the gate of the church, weeping and accusing God of forsaking her;
- It starts to rain. She curses God even more for his cruelty
- The mentally ill man, who is still on the curb joins her under the awning to get out of the rain; he asks if she is OK; she says no, she's been abandoned by everyone and by God
- Just then the homeless woman pulls up in her car; in the front seat is the Bodega owner. She tells Faith and the mentally ill man to jump in to stay dry.

- *Aria* by Faith - tone: dramatic and scornful
- Ensemble piece between Faith, mentally ill man, homeless woman, bodega owner/beggar (faith motive) - tone: comforting and scared

- They all jump in the car and keep each other company through the night. (What would they sing? That they have lost everything? Would someone mention that they haven't? That they've found new friends because of all of this?)

### Scene 11

- The next day, the homeless, mentally ill and beggar man take Faith to the court house.
- They go in with her, to get out of the cold
- Sitting on the front bench is Myron, the cop and Lynus
- Myron is called before the judge to answer the charge of interfering with the law
- The Bodega owner, homeless man and the mentally ill man ask to testify about this charge because they were witnesses.
- They testify that Myron wasn't interfering with the law, he was showing them kindness
- The judge listens patiently, then orders them to sit down, then orders the cop and Lynus to stand before the bench.
- Lynus tells the judge that he was a witness too; Myron was interfering with the law by helping the homeless woman getaway and also perpetuating the awful conditions in the neighborhood by helping the mentally ill and beggars.
- The judge states that the charges against Myron will proceed.
- The judge orders Faith to stand before him, which she does
- The judge takes her eviction notice, looks it over quickly then orders that in addition to being evicted she must pay back rent.
- Faith says that she doesn't have it because Myron's father didn't pay child support.
- Myron confronts Faith; he thought his father was dead.
- Faith reveals that he is very much alive; in fact, he is the rich man sitting right there with the cop.
- Lynus objects and calls Faith a liar.
- Faith pulls out a legal document and gives it to the judge who reviews it
- Myron approaches Lynus who refuses to look at Myron
- Music accompanying action – tone: suspensive, nervous
- *Recit* dialogue between the judge and Myron – tone: formal (judge), scared (Myron)
- Ensemble piece between the judge, homeless woman, mentally ill man, bodega owner/beggar, Lynus, Myron, and Faith – architecture and tone: fast-paced, dramatic, and an amalgamation of musical themes associated with each person with various side conversations/interactions, culminating with Faith producing the paternity document
- *Trio* between Faith, Myron, and Lynus – tone: surprised, liberated, confused
- Lynus sings *aria* about saving community (rescue motive) – tone: melodramatic
- Judge sings *aria* with a few interactions by Lynus (who also maybe has short *aria*) – tone: bold, commanding, dramatic,
- Faith sings short *aria* turns into a *duet* with Myron – tone: apologetic, forgiving.
- *Duet* between Myron and bodega owner/beggar – tone: forgiving
- Ensemble piece between the homeless woman, the mentally ill man, bodega owner/beggar, Myron, and Faith – tone: disbelieve, relief, and hope
- Lynus sings *aria* over ensemble piece (rescue motive, perhaps singling redemption) – tone: defeated



- Lynus bargains with the judge; if the judge will overlook the NDA, Lynes will let Faith and Myron return to their apartment.
- Faith jumps in and agrees to the proposal.
- Myron jumps in and disagrees with Faith, asserting that it's not enough. He implores the judge to make Lynus pay the full back-child- support due, **and** return everyone in the community to their homes.
- Lynus pleads with the judge; he argues that if he pays back child support, he won't have the money to save the neighborhood with the redevelopment project.
- The judge suggests that he sell his mansion to support his child
- Lynus admits that his mansion is collateral for the redevelopment project; if he sells the mansion, the project can't proceed
- Lynus pulls out some cash which he slips to the judge;
- The judge takes the money then charges Lynus for bribery
- Lynus protests, but the Judge hits the gavel to shut him up
- The judge hands Faith the money he received from Lynus;
- Faith gives the money to Myron and apologizes for the hardships he has endured;
- Myron gives some of the money back to Faith to give to the church, who he now sees took care of the community who ended up saving him.
- Myron tells his mother that God helps him who helps other; to which Faith adds: and also, those who help themselves.
- Myron gives some of the money to the Bodega owner and apologizes for stealing from him
- The Bodega owner tells Myron that he knew he was stealing all along, but that it pained him to see a kid go hungry and so he overlooked the theft.
- The judge hits the gavel, then announces that everyone's eviction notices are vacated and that the redevelopment permits are cancelled.

- As punishment for bribery, the Judge orders Lynus to sell his house
- Lynus protests; if he does that he will be homeless
- The judge says so be it
- Myron, Faith and the Bodega Owner, homeless and mentally ill man leave the court and go to the bodega, where they share a meal with the food that's been left inside.
- Lynus stands alone, outside the bodega, looking in the window as everyone enjoys the meal and celebrates their return to their homes?

Motives:

- Prayer motive
- Myself motive
- Faith motive
- Rescue motive
- "God helps him who helps himself" is a motive that is closely tied to the faith, myself, and rescue motives