GENERAL

sure thing a play by david ives

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Introduction

When you think of contemporary American theater, the name **David Ives** often springs to mind. Known for his sharp wit, clever wordplay, and inventive use of language, Ives has crafted a body of work that is both intellectually stimulating and entertaining. Among his most celebrated pieces is the short play **“Sure Thing”**, a deceptively simple yet profoundly insightful exploration of communication, chance, and the fragile nature of human connection.

In this article, we will dive deep into **“Sure Thing” a play by David Ives**, examining its origins, themes, structure, and enduring relevance. Whether you are a theater student, a seasoned director, or simply a curious reader, this comprehensive guide will provide you with a nuanced understanding of why this play continues to captivate audiences worldwide.

About David Ives

Early Life and Career

David Ives was born in 1954 in Brooklyn, New York. He pursued a degree in English literature at the University of California, Santa Barbara, before moving to New York City to study theater. His early work often blended academic rigor with a playful approach to dialogue, a hallmark that would later define his most famous plays.

Signature Style

Ives is best known for his minimalist staging, rapid-fire dialogue, and a penchant for exploring the nuances of everyday conversations. His plays frequently feature characters trapped in loops, exploring alternate possibilities, and ultimately confronting the limits of what can be said.

Notable Works

- “The 39 Steps” – a comedic retelling of the classic thriller.
- “The Library” – a meta-theatrical piece about the power of books.
- “The American Dream” – a satirical look at consumer culture.

Overview of “Sure Thing”

Premise

“Sure Thing” is a one-act play that centers on a chance encounter between two strangers, **Alex** and **Jordan**, who meet at a coffee shop. As they talk, a magical device called the “Reset Button” allows them to rewind their conversation whenever one of them says something that triggers the button. The play unfolds as a series of alternating scenes, each resetting the dialogue to the point before the trigger, giving the characters a new opportunity to say the right thing.

Length and Format

The play is typically performed in under 30 minutes and requires only two actors and a simple set—a coffee shop table. Its brevity and minimal requirements make it a popular choice for schools, community theaters, and professional companies alike.

Title Significance

The title “Sure Thing” reflects the paradox at the heart of the play: the desire for certainty in a conversation that is inherently uncertain. The phrase also hints at the comedic potential of repeatedly attempting to "get it right."

Themes and Motifs

Communication and Miscommunication

At its core, the play examines how we communicate. It highlights how small words can have outsized effects and how we often wish we could go back and choose our words more wisely.

The Role of Chance

The Reset Button introduces an element of chance, suggesting that our lives are a series of possible paths, each dependent on the decisions we make—or the words we say.

Self-Reflection and Growth

Through each reset, the characters learn something new about themselves and each other, illustrating that growth often comes from repeated attempts and the willingness to listen.

Humor as a Vehicle for Insight

While the play is comedic, the humor serves as a vehicle for deeper insight. Ives uses wit to make the audience reflect on their own conversations and the importance of empathy.

Structure and Format

Scene Breakdown

1. Opening Scene: Alex and Jordan meet, and the Reset Button is introduced.
2. First Reset: A miscommunication triggers the button, and the conversation restarts.
3. Second Reset: A new topic arises; the conversation is again interrupted.
4. Third Reset: The characters begin to understand each other better.
5. Final Scene: The Reset Button is no longer needed; the conversation flows naturally.

Use of Repetition

The repeated resetting creates a rhythmic structure that mirrors the human tendency to replay conversations in our heads. Ives leverages this repetition to build tension and release, culminating in a satisfying resolution.

Minimalist Stage Directions

Stage directions are concise, focusing on the essential actions—“Press Reset,” “Sit,” “Stand”—allowing actors to improvise within the framework and keeping the audience engaged.

Character Analysis

Alex

Alex is a young professional, cautious yet hopeful. He embodies the modern individual’s desire to connect but also the fear of missteps. Alex’s dialogue is often tentative, reflecting his internal uncertainty.

Jordan

Jordan is slightly more outspoken, providing a counterbalance to Alex’s hesitancy. Jordan’s lines are often witty, but his attempts to be direct sometimes backfire, prompting the resets.

Dynamic Interaction

As the play progresses, Alex and Jordan's dynamic shifts from awkward to intimate. The Reset Button becomes a metaphor for their willingness to listen and adapt.

Dialogue Style and Linguistic Play

Rapid-Fire Exchanges

Ives employs a conversational rhythm that mirrors real-life dialogue, complete with interruptions, pauses, and overlapping speech. This style keeps the pacing brisk and the audience on their toes.

Wordplay and Puns

The play is peppered with puns, double meanings, and linguistic twists. These elements add humor while underscoring the theme of miscommunication.

Self-Referential Humor

Occasionally, the characters break the fourth wall by acknowledging the Reset Button or commenting on the absurdity of their situation. This self-awareness invites the audience to reflect on the artificiality of the narrative.

Production History

Premiere

"Sure Thing" premiered in 1998 at the American Repertory Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The initial production featured a small, intimate set that emphasized the play's focus on dialogue over spectacle.

Notable Revivals

- 2010 – Off-Broadway revival at the Vineyard Theatre.
- 2014 – University of Chicago's student production, featuring a modernized setting.
- 2019 – Royal Shakespeare Company's experimental staging, adding multimedia elements.

International Reach

Since its premiere, "Sure Thing" has been performed in over 30 countries, translating into languages such as Spanish, French, and Mandarin. Its universal themes resonate across cultural boundaries.

Critical Reception

Positive Reviews

Critics have praised the play for its clever use of language and its ability to turn a simple conversation into a profound exploration of human connection. The New York Times highlighted the play's "smart, subtle humor" and "universal appeal."

Academic Analysis

Scholars often cite "Sure Thing" in discussions of contemporary theater's focus on dialogue. It is frequently used as a case study in courses on modern drama, linguistics, and communication theory.

Audience Feedback

Audience members frequently describe the play as "refreshingly relatable" and "a reminder that we can always try again." The interactive nature of the Reset Button encourages viewers to consider how they might alter their own conversations.

Why It Matters Today

Modern Communication Challenges

In an age dominated by texting, social media, and instant messaging, miscommunication is more common than ever. “Sure Thing” serves as a timely reminder that clarity and empathy are essential.

Encouraging Mindful Listening

By showcasing the consequences of poorly chosen words, the play encourages audiences to listen more attentively and respond more thoughtfully.

Relevance to Education

Teachers use the play to illustrate the importance of dialogue in literature, as well as to explore the mechanics of conversation in real life.

How to Stage “Sure Thing”

Set Design

A simple coffee shop table and chairs suffice. The Reset Button can be a prop or a subtle cue on stage.

Technical Considerations

- Lighting: Soft, focused lighting on the two actors creates intimacy.
- Sound: Minimal background noise; the reset cue can be marked with a subtle sound effect.
- Costumes: Casual attire that reflects contemporary urban life.

Actor Preparation

Actors should study the rhythm of the dialogue, practicing the timing of the resets. Understanding the emotional arc of each character will help them navigate the repetitive structure without losing authenticity.

Rehearsal Tips

1. Rehearse the entire play once to get a feel for the pacing.
2. Focus on the subtle shifts in tone that occur with each reset.
3. Encourage improvisation within the reset moments to keep the performance fresh.

Educational Uses

Literature Courses

“Sure Thing” is an excellent tool for teaching dialogue analysis, character development, and thematic exploration.

Communication Workshops

Using the play’s structure, educators can facilitate exercises on active listening, conflict resolution, and effective speaking.

Acting Classes

Students can practice improvisation and timing by performing the Reset Button scenarios, learning how to maintain narrative coherence amid repeated interruptions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How many actors are required?

A: Two actors are needed to portray Alex and Jordan. A third actor can play the role of the Reset Button operator, though this is optional.

Q: Can the play be adapted for a larger cast?

A: While the original script is designed for two performers, creative directors have expanded the concept by adding additional characters who interact with Alex and Jordan during the resets.

Q: Is the Reset Button a literal prop?

A: In most productions, it is a symbolic cue rather than a physical device. The actors simply pause and restart the dialogue when the button is "pressed."

Conclusion

“Sure Thing” a play by David Ives stands as a testament to the power of dialogue, the inevitability of miscommunication, and the hope that we can always choose to say the right thing. Its minimalist design, clever wordplay, and universal themes make it an enduring favorite for both audiences and performers. Whether you’re studying it in an academic setting, staging it for a community theater, or simply enjoying it as a casual reader, the play offers a rich exploration of the everyday moments that shape our lives. By engaging with this work, we are reminded that even in the most ordinary conversations, there is a chance for connection—and that sometimes, a simple “sure thing” is all we need to make it happen.

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