

The Arc

A site specific community performance set on the
beach at low tide in Sheringham.

by
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Characters

Captain: thinks they are in charge

Warrior: likes to take a lead

Sage: has an opinion

Stormy: has a long memory

Eric Eristic: knows nothing, argues anyway

Bird: sits tight.

Refugee: puts up with everyone and everything

Scene 1

Sheringham beach at low tide. A large dining table crowded with candelabras, dinner service, cups etc an hourglass, and with 7 chairs is placed on the shoreline. Bird, Eric Eristic, Refugee, Stormy and Sage are seated, chatting animatedly to each other. There is much laughter and merriment.

Scene 2

The Promenade Sheringham

Captain and Warrior mingle with the crowd (the audience) before bringing themselves to everyone's attention. They stand at opposite ends of the crowd. Warrior echos Captain's speech so that all can hear.

CAPTAIN: Gather round, gather round my friends. Can you hear me?

WARRIOR: Gather round. Can you hear one of us?

CAPTAIN: Welcome to the Arc - Our story arc. It is the story of the land. And the story of the sea. And what it means for you and for me. Shall we?

WARRIOR: For those at the back this is our story of sorts. No beginning, a muddle in the middle and none of us can face the end. Captain, I say, Captain. This is not how stories are supposed to work... Captain. CAPTAIN!

Captain is striding down the beach towards the dinner party.

The Captain stops at the table, while Warrior arranges the audience at a modest distance from proceedings.

Scene 3

Close to the shoreline, waves lapping

STORMY: 53! Waves 6 metres high, roll onto the land. All told, thousands are to die.

CAPTAIN: No no no. This will not do.

SAGE, STORMY, REFUGEE AND WARRIOR: But it's true.

They all start talking at once, shouting over each other.

Canvey Island - Perfect Storm! The Wash Netherlands, Stiffkey too Sea Pauling. End o January, 1st of Feb

WARRIOR (*stands on the table with arm above her head*); In Blakeney the water was this high.....!

CAPTAIN: No. I mean, it's time to move. Away from the shore

Everyone looks towards the sea aghast.

EVERYONE: A one a two a one to three four

The band begins to play Alexanders rag time band. The characters move the chairs and the table. They dance round the table. One chair is removed. The music stops. Everyone rushes to sit down.

ERIC ERISTIC: It couldn't happen.

REFUGEE: I lost my seat

SAGE: It could and it did

REFUGEE: Will anyone share

SAGE: Refugee come share with me

WARRIOR, STORM REP, SAGE, REFUGEE (together): Low pressure, high winds, a storm surge squeezed. It flooded then it flooded some more

SAGE: Came up the drains

STORMY: Came through the floor boards

WARRIOR: It raged up the stairs

REFUGEE Those, asleep downstairs were caught unawares

BIRD: A one off!

ERIC ERISTIC: I don't believe it. Never happened. I'd know. I'd know.

STORMY: there's news reels and photos. Academic papers

WARRIOR: And it will happen again. Sooner or later

CAPTAIN (grabs the hour glass): It's time. Time to move away once more

EVERYONE: A one, a two, a one two three FOUR!

Musicians play Alexander's ragtime band. The cast pick up the table and move it up the beach so it no longer has water lapping at the legs.

BIRD (*shouting over the music*): I'm not moving. I'm staying here

A second chair is removed. Bird fails to move. Warrior grabs him and drags him up the beach. The actors dance around the table until the music stop and they rush to the chairs.

Refugee and Sage no longer have a seat.

REFUGEE: I arrived by boat with nothing. Once again I have nothing. I will stand.

ERIC ERISTIC: Here, make yourself useful and pour the wine.

Refugee moves towards the wine.

ERIC ERISTIC: No. Not you. I don't trust you. Coming over here. Expecting to pour the wine. I'm talking to the Sage. Sage, less thinking more drinking

Everyone is embarrassed. They cough. Look away. Sip their drinks.

WARRIOR: It's not just the rising tide we must fear. We must also be aware of what is coming up the rear.

SAGE: The tide comes before a cliff fall

STORM REP and WARRIOR: Oh yes, very good. Very droll, the tide comes before a cliff fall.

ERIC ERISTIC: It's what the powers that be want us to believe

BIRD: I'm not moving.

ERIC ERISTIC: Sit tight, sit tight Bird. No Surrender!. Never give in.

CAPTAIN: I'm calling it. Time to go. Let's go go go.

EVERYONE exhausted. A one.....a two....a one two three four....

The musicians play Alexander's Ragtime Band. Everyone slowly moves the table. They move around the table with little to no joy. Two chairs are removed this time.

The music stops. They rush for the chairs. Captain grabs one. Refugee grabs one. Warrior grabs one.

Bird, Sage and Eric are left standing.

REFUGEE (to Eric): We can share.

Eric walks over to Refugee and pushes him off the chair

There is an awkward silence

WARRIOR: I'll share.

REFUGEE. Sage. Please, You sit.. I will stand

BIRD: I lost my chair it isn't fair. I need to sit, I need a chair

CAPTAIN: Perhaps we could take it in turns to sit. Here, take a seat. Sit tight for a while.

The Captain stands. Bird leaps onto the seat.

BIRD: That's it. I'm not moving again. You lot, you can go. But me I'm sitting tight. Right here.

The band starts to play once again.

EVERYONE: REALLY?

(Lots of muttering): This is exhausting. I can't. Just can't.

The band stops playing

CAPTAIN: I'm afraid we must.

SAGE: Perhaps if we packed our things away and each carried some it would be easier to move. We have too much baggage

WARRIOR: I fear it might be best to leave the table altogether.

EVERYONE: Leave our things? Our stuff? Are you out of your mind.

WARRIOR: No. I'm not out of my mind. But I am afraid we might be out of time.

CAPTAIN (*to the musicians*). Play. Please. It will help with morale.

The musicians play Alexander's Ragtime Band like a funeral dirge. The characters move slowly around the table, stacking plates and cups. Two chairs are removed, leaving just one chair.

Bird and Eric rush for the chair. Everyone else keeps on packing. They hand the dinner service etc to members of the audience to carry.

BIRD: I'm staying put. I'm sitting tight.

ERIC: You do that my friend. You have every right. We'll call the press, we'll write to our MP. We demand the government holds back the sea.

Captain and Warrior hand Eric and Bird a life jacket.

Stormy Sage and Refugee hand out song sheets to the audience.

WARRIOR (*shouts to Eric and Bird*): You've run out of land. The sea is endless. Consider yourselves now, alone and friendless.

REFUGEE: I can't leave them. I have seen what the sea can do. I will go help.

Warrior hands Refugee a life jacket.

The band strikes up with Nearer My God to Thee

The cast and audience sing

Refugee runs back onto the beach and cajoles and encourages them to leave. He persuades Eric first and together they drag Bird off the beach.

ENDS

The performance is followed by a Q&A session in the warm, somewhere in Sheringham.

The performance may be replicated on other beaches where it is safe to do so.

Performers are encouraged to learn more about the flood of 53 to enhance their dialogue and performance.

An exhibition of photos and testimonials exploring events of 31st January and 1st February 1953 could accompany the Q&A.

It is anticipated the first performance of Arc could be included in the programme for Creative Sheringham.

