

South Coast Repertory

To the 2009-2010 Theatre for Young Audiences
Production of



by **Bathsheba Doran**
Directed by **Stefan Novinski**

Pacific Life Foundation, Honorary Producers

Prepared by Kelly L. Miller
Production Dramaturg & Literary Manager

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Part I: The Play & Playwright

The Art of Magic

by Kelly L. Miller

What would you do with a magic paintbrush? One that made everything you painted come to life? Would you paint a cat? A house? Or a big pile of money?

Ben and his sister Megan face that unusual, magical conundrum in *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush*, Bathsheba Doran's charming play, inspired by the ancient Chinese folktale "Liang and the Magic Paintbrush," receiving its world premiere in SCR's Theatre for Young Audiences series.

Ben and Megan are orphans who've been left to fend for themselves in the world. Megan earns money posing as a human statue, while her brother Ben draws marvelous portraits of people on the street. One day, his talent catches the eye of the evil Mrs. Crawly, who invites him to join a painting competition at her house. The prize? A paintbrush of his very own.

When Ben arrives, he meets his competition, the great artist Pierre Robelinsky, who tells him they're vying for a magic paintbrush, with the power to make paintings come to life. Their assignment? To paint a cat. Pierre's uninspiring picture never moves, but Ben's painting transforms into a real cat, who

"Do you want to know the number one most important thing about being a great artist? You have to believe that anything is possible."

-Artist Pierre Robelinsky
in "Ben and the Magic Paintbrush"



The set design for Cynthia Crawly's house by Keith Mitchell.

twitches and then runs away. Mrs. Crawly captures Ben and Pierre, forcing Ben to paint mountains of money for her and her greedy husband, Harold, while Pierre cleans their massive house. All hope seems lost until Megan arrives with a plan to save the day—and the three of them embark on a magical journey filled with a purple house, a policeman and a trip to the kingdom of Bohemia.

Ben and the Magic Paintbrush is a funny, modern-day fairytale about art, creativity and the importance of believing that

anything is possible. SCR commissioned playwright Bathsheba Doran to write the play in 2008—and it's the fourth world premiere commission SCR has presented in the Theatre for Young Audience series.

Doran began her career as a writer and performer at Cambridge University, where she studied English Literature. Her other plays include *Fifteen Minutes*, *Odes and Gameshows*, *The Parents' Evening*,

The War Play, *Feminine Wash* and an adaptation for young audiences of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* (produced in New York by TheatreworksUSA). She has been produced at the Edinburgh Festival, The Atlantic Theatre in New York City, and The Old Vic Theatre and the Drury Lane in London. Her play *The Parent's Evening* is premiering at The Flea Theatre in New York this season and her newest play, *Kin*, was read as part of SCR's 2010 Pacific Playwrights Festival.

Stefan Novinski returns to direct *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush*, his fifth Theatre for Young Audiences production, having previously directed *Sideways Stories from Wayside School* (2003-04), *The Hoboken Chicken Emergency* (2004-05), *Bunnicula* (2005-06) and *The Only Child* (2006-07). Novinski's cast for the show includes Stewart Calhoun (Ben), Gloria Garayua (Megan), Shannon Holt (Mrs. Crawly), Richard Doyle (Harold Crawly, Taxman), Bill Brochtrup (Pierre Robelinsky, Grumpy Man, Cleaning Woman, Prison Guard), and Veralyn Jones (Queen of Bohemia, Old Woman, Policeman).

Rounding out the creative ensemble are the show's designers: Set Designer Keith Mitchell, Lighting Designer Tom Ruzika, Costume Designer Sara Clement and Sound Designer Kimberly Egan. The design and visual world of the play are partly inspired by the world of the original Chinese folktale.

Previews for *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush* begin May 21 on the Julianne Argyros Stage and performances continue through June 6. The Target Family Performance is May 29 and features an earlier curtain time of 11am and lower-priced tickets. With the generous support of the Pacific Life Foundation, SCR is proud to continue the tradition of offering free weekday matinee performances to Orange County schoolchildren. For more information on weekday school matinees, contact Janis Morrissette at 714-708-5549. To purchase tickets to *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush*, contact the box office at 714-708-5555.

Meet the Playwright: A Few Questions for Bash

Playwright Bathsheba Doran—whose nickname is “Bash”—loves plays that appeal to both kids and adults.



Bathsheba Doran.

What inspired you to adapt this Chinese folktale? When did you first encounter it?

This was a story read to me when I was very young. It came in the form of a tiny children's book with wonderful drawings. One particular image stayed with me—the image of a bird coming to life, flying off the piece of paper onto which it had been drawn. It was an exciting and frightening idea, all at the same time. I never forgot it.

I was telling somebody about that bird coming to life, and how it was like being a playwright, and they said to me, “that's the story you should adapt for South Coast Repertory.” (SCR commissioned me to write this play.) I kept the basics of the myth, but used it as a jumping off point

to write something that I thought children would love—and to do that I thought I had to find a lot of humor, and also a certain moral code that they could relate to.

Have you written any other plays for young audiences?

Yes, I adapted *Great Expectations* for young audiences. You can tell when you're entertaining children, and when you're boring. They present a very satisfactory challenge. I also adapted *Alice in Wonderland*. That wasn't for a young audience in particular, but engaging with Lewis Carroll like that influenced me and this project hugely.

Did you love drawing and painting as a kid?

I was so bad at painting in fact that the art teacher begged me to drop art as soon as I was allowed. But I longed to be good at it...and I think if I maybe had a teacher that was a little more encouraging, things might have gone better...

Do you have any stories of how theatre influenced you when you were a child?

When I was little I got to go and see a production of *Peter Pan* starring Lulu and John Nettles. Someone we knew was involved and I got taken backstage afterwards, which was unbelievably exciting. I looked in a drawer on the set, and I found Peter Pan's shadow. It was made of pantyhose. That impacted me greatly.*

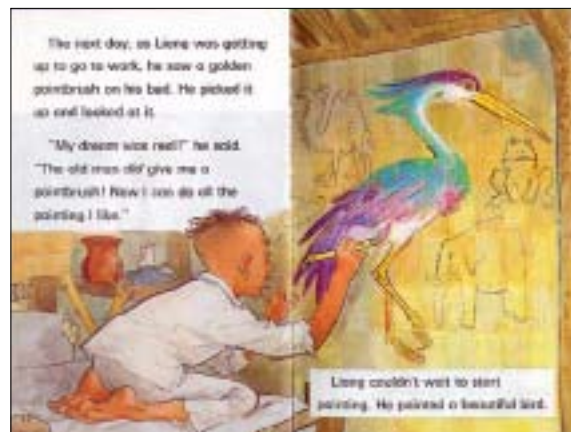
What messages do you want people to take away from the play?

I want little boys to know they can be artists, and little girls to know they can be astronauts. I hope they'll see the merit of loyalty, or sticking together, and that even though they are children they can effect enormous change. Mainly though, I want them to fall in love with going to the theatre, the way that I did when I was a child. So I've tried to write something that they will like, and something that their parents will like, so that they can enjoy the experience all together.

(*Excerpted from an interview with Bathsheba Doran, conducted by Adam Szymkowitz in September 2009.)

***The Magic Paintbrush* Ancient Inspiration**

Playwright Bathsheba Doran was inspired to write this play by the ancient Chinese folktale *The Magic Paintbrush* which she read as a little girl. In that folktale, a poor orphan named Ma Liang dreams of becoming a famous painter, but he's too poor to buy his own brush. One night, he dreams he's given a magical paintbrush and is instructed to paint from his heart. He amazes people when his artwork becomes real and leaps from the page. An evil emperor finds out about Ma Liang's paintbrush and commands him to paint a room full of riches. Knowing in his heart that this is wrong, he paints a tree of gold on a solitary island in the middle of the sea. He paints a boat for the emperor to travel to the island, and he paints wind to fill its sails...until the greedy Emperor is blown away.



From *The Magic Paintbrush*, adapted by Fran Hunia, illustrated by Martin Aitchison.

What is a Folktale?

Folktales are stories that have been handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Folktales often tell the adventures of human or animal characters and attempt to explain the physical or spiritual world. Some folktales, like *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush*, contain elements of magic.

Can you think of a story that's been passed down in your family or community? What other folktales can you think of?

Time and Place

The play takes place over the course of a year, at any time after the invention of airplanes.

The setting is any place where little children might make a living drawing other people, and pretending to be statues, as well as the imaginary Kingdom of Bohemia.

Characters

BEN, a little boy and a painter

MEGAN, his older sister, and a human statue.

CYNTHIA CRAWLY, a rich cruel lady

HAROLD CRAWLY, her spoiled husband

PIERRE ROBELINSKY, a great artist. English is not his first language.

A POLICEMAN with no imagination.

THE QUEEN OF BOHEMIA

A GRUMPY MAN

AN OLD LADY

A CLEANER

A PRISON GUARD

THE TAX MAN

The Play: From the Set to the Stage

Check out these photos of the set model for three scenes from the play. Discuss what you think influenced Kieth Mitchell's designs.



The set design for Scene I of the play.



The design for the interior of Cynthia Crawly's house.



The exterior of Cynthia Crawly's house.

Costumes Galore

Can you guess which character is which from Sara Ryung Clement's fun costume renderings?
Characters: a. Ben, b. Megan, c. Cynthia Crawly, d. Artist Pierre Robelinksy, e. Harold Crawly



1



2



3



4



5



6

Answers: 1-A, 2-C, 3-D, 4-E, 5-C, 6-B

Part II: In the Classroom

Before the Show: Read About It! Think About It!

These introductory exercises are designed to prepare students for their visit to SCR. The more students learn about what they're going to see, the more benefit they are sure to derive from the experience.

1. Introduce the original Chinese folktale *The Magic Paintbrush* – which was the inspiration for the play – to the class by either reading it aloud or asking students to read it aloud.

Here are links to Parts 1-3 of the children's adaptation of *The Magic Paintbrush* the playwright read as a child:

Part 1 - <http://kierenmccarthy.com/2006/04/18/my-favourite-childhood-story-the-magic-paintbrush/>

Part 2 - <http://kierenmccarthy.com/2006/04/20/the-magic-paintbrush-part-ii/>

Part 3 - <http://kierenmccarthy.com/2006/04/24/the-magic-paintbrush-part-iii/>

2. Ask students to:
 - a. Identify the main events of the folktale's plot and how it develops.
 - b. Discuss the traits of major characters, their motivations and contributions to the dramatic action.
 - c. Determine the underlying theme(s) or message(s) of the story.
3. Cast students in the first two scenes of *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush* and have them read it out loud, experimenting with different vocalizations and character choices. Discuss how the play's set-up, plot, and characters differ from the Chinese folktale.
4. Examine the differences between a folktale and a drama. Have the students name other folktales and read one other for reference. (ex. The story of *Cinderella* evolved from a folktale.)
5. Ask students to make predictions about the play they're going to see based upon their knowledge of the source text. The playwright didn't adapt the Chinese folktale, but used it as inspiration for her play, so the characters are different. Based on the scenes you read out loud, what other characters do you expect to see onstage? Who will the actors be? How will the scenery, costumes and props look? Will there be music? If so, how will it sound?
6. Ask them to draw a picture of what they think the set will look like for the first or second scene of the play. Then show them our scenic designs (in the study guide). Compare them and discuss.
7. Ask the students to draw a picture of something they think Ben might paint with his magic paintbrush – that will come to life in the play. How might we—as the theatre presenters—make that happen on stage?

8. Listen for these vocabulary words in the play:

academy	conjured	gutsy	pathetic	tricksters
artist	deliberately	imagination	practical	unconscious
astronaut	disgusting	improbable	remarkable	unsubstantiated
boggles	disrespecting	intimidate	renowned	
charity	exhausted	nincompoop	resourceful	
compassion	flummoxed	orphan	responsibilities	
competition	genius	noble	stupendous	

9. Ben dreams of studying art at the great academy in the Kingdom of Bohemia. Ask the students what they dream of doing when they grow up? Where will they study to learn their trade or art?

After the Show: Talk About It! Write About It!

1. Discuss ways in which the play differed from students' predictions, paying special attention to the parts of the play inspired by the Chinese folktale.
2. Ask students to use the vocabulary of theatre (see Part IV of this guide) to describe the performance.
 - a. How did the actors look (costumes, makeup, movement)?
 - b. How did the adult actors prepare to play the child roles?
 - c. How did the stage look (scenery, lighting, props)?
 - d. How did the play sound (music, singing, special effects)?
3. Give students an opportunity to create their own versions of the play:
 - a. Tell the story from the point of view of another character.
 - b. Choose another ending by rewriting the last scene.
 - c. Add a brand new character and see what happens.
 - d. Imagine a continuation—what happens after the last scene?
4. At the opening of the play, Ben paints portraits of people on the street to survive. Have the students draw a portrait of the person sitting next to them. Have them act out playing a statue, like Megan does.
5. Story circle – One person begins a story featuring one character from *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush* with whom students are familiar. The first person stops after a few sentences, next person adds to it and so on until the tale comes to a resolution. You may wish to provide a title to guide the exercise.
6. Artist's Delight – Ask each student to pick their favorite artist or artistic style from the program piece "The Art of Painting a Cat." Have them research the artist's life and work, draw something in their style, and present it to the classroom pretending to be the artist, showcasing their work. (Students can pretend to be a specific artist, like Renoir, or represent a culture, ex. a Chinese painter or Egyptian Pharaoh.)
7. Ask students to come up with definitions for some of the vocabulary words listed in # 9 on the previous page. Have students locate the words in the script in order to discover how context offers clues to their meaning.
8. Motifs are recurring elements found in many folktales. They include everything from stock characters, such as tricksters, to magical objects, such as flying carpets. What motifs from the original Chinese folktale made it into the final stage play?
9. What types of responsibility come with owning a magic paintbrush? What would you paint if you had the magic paintbrush? How would you stay true to the intentions of the paintbrush?
10. Write letters of thanks to Pacific Life Foundation describing the most memorable aspects of attending a performance of *Ben and the Magic Paintbrush*. Feel free to draw a picture of your favorite painting in the show.

Please send all letters to:

South Coast Repertory
Attn: TYA
PO Box 2197
Costa Mesa, CA 92628-2197

Part III: At the Theatre

Welcome to the Argyros

The 336-seat Argyros Stage is the newest theatre space at SCR. It opened in 2002 with a huge celebration and we are delighted that thousands of Orange County school children fill this state-of-the-art facility each season to enjoy our Theatre for Young Audiences productions. The Argyros is a proscenium theatre designed to provide audiences a feeling of intimacy, with no seat more than 39 feet from the stage.



Theatre Etiquette

Theatre is an art form that depends on both the artists and the audience. A performance is influenced by an audience, just as an audience is influenced by a performance. The artists and staff of South Coast Repertory are creating a special new world for you to visit. When you walk into the theatre, you will feel that behind the curtain lies the secret of that new world which is about to come to life before your eyes. Sometimes it's so exciting, you can barely hold still. But remember that once the play begins, you have a very important job to do. Everybody in the theatre is a part of the play. You are connected to all the other people in the audience, as well as to the actors on the stage. Remember, you're all in the same room. They can SEE you, HEAR you, FEEL you, just as you can SEE, HEAR, and FEEL them. Your attention, involvement, responses, and imagination are a real part of each and every performance. The play can actually be made better because of you!

Student Tips for Theatre Trips

- Stay with your group at all times and pay attention to your teachers and chaperones.
- Listen carefully to the SCR staff member who will board your bus with last-minute tips.
- Take your seat in the theatre before going to the bathroom or getting a drink of water.
- Make yourself comfortable while keeping movement to a minimum.
- Please do not stand up, walk around, or put your feet on the seat in front of you.
- Absolutely no chewing gum, eating, or drinking in the building.
- No backpacks, cameras, or electronic devices are permitted in the theatre.
- Feel free to talk quietly in your seats before the show.
- Show your appreciation by clapping for the actors at the end of the play.
- After the lights come back up, wait for the ushers to escort your group out of the theatre.

Programs

Everyone who attends a Theatre for Young Audiences performance at SCR receives a program, also called a playbill. Patrons at weekend public performances receive their programs from the ushers upon entering the theatre. At the conclusion of each weekday matinee, teachers will be given programs for their students which can be distributed back in the classroom. In addition to the customary information about the play and the players, the program contains features and activities that students will have fun working on after the show, either in class or at home on their own.

Part IV: Education Station

California Visual and Performing Arts Framework

Education in the arts is essential for all students. California's public school system must provide a balanced curriculum, with the arts as part of the core for all students, kindergarten through grade twelve, no matter what the students' abilities, language capacities or special needs happen to be. Each of the arts disciplines maintains a rich body of knowledge that enables the students to understand their world in ways that support and enhance their learning in other core subjects. In addition, through this rich body of knowledge, students learn how each of the arts contributes to their own sensitivity of the aesthetic qualities of life. Students learn to see what they look at, to hear what they listen to, feel what they touch and to understand more clearly what they integrate into their own experience.

Five Strands of Arts Education

Students in a comprehensive program are expected to master the standards of an arts discipline, which includes the following five strands:

1.0 Artistic Perception refers to processing, analyzing and responding to sensory information through the use of the language and skills unique to dance, music, theatre and visual arts.

2.0 Creative Expression involves creating a work, performing and participating in the arts disciplines. Students apply processes and skills in composing, arranging and performing a work and use a variety of means to communicate meaning and intent in their own original formal and informal works.

3.0 Historical and Cultural Context concerns the work students do toward understanding the historical contributions and cultural dimensions of an arts discipline. Students analyze roles, functions, development in the discipline, and human diversity as it relates to that discipline.

4.0 Aesthetic Valuing includes analyzing and critiquing works of dance, music, theatre or visual arts. Students apply processes and skills to productions or performances. They also critically assess and derive meaning from the work [. . .] and from performances and original works based on the elements and principles of an arts discipline.

5.0 Connections, Relationships, Applications involves connecting and applying what is learned in one arts discipline and comparing it to learning in the other arts, other subject areas and careers. Students develop competencies and creative skills that contribute to lifelong learning.

Basic Theatre Vocabulary

Acting The process by which an individual interprets and perform the role of an imagined character.

Action The core of a theatre piece; the sense of forward movement created by the sequence of events and the physical and psychological motivations of characters.

Ad-Lib To extemporize stage business or dialogue; to make it up as you go along.

Apron The area of the stage that extends toward the audience, in front of the main curtain.

Backstage The space behind the acting area, unseen by the audience.

Balcony An upper floor of seats projecting out over the main seating area of a theatre.

Blocking The movement and stage business, designed by the director and performed by the actors.

Boxes Seats separated from the main seating area located on the upper level near the stage.

Box office A windowed space at the front of the theatre building where tickets are sold.

Business Any action performed on stage.

Character The role played by an actor as she or he assumes another's identity.

Choreography The art of creating and arranging dances onstage.

Conflict The problem or incident that creates the action and is resolved by the end of the play.

Costume The carefully selected or specially designed clothing worn by the actors.

Cross The actor's movement from one stage location to another.

Cue The last words or action of an actor immediately preceding the lines or business of another actor.

Dialogue The stage conversation between characters.

Diction The clarity with which words are pronounced.

Director The person who oversees the entire process of staging a theatrical production.

Downstage The part of the stage closest to the audience. At one time stages were raked, or sloped, with the lower ("down") part closest to the audience, and the higher ("up") part further away.

Ensemble A cast of actors working together effectively to present a theatrical performance.

Flats Canvas or wood-covered frames that are used for the walls of a stage setting.

Green Room A room near the stage where actors await entrance cues and receive guests. The room's name comes from Elizabethan times, when actors waited on a real "green" (or patch of grass).

Improvisation The spontaneous use of movement and speech to create a character.

Lobby The public waiting area outside the theatre space.

Mezzanine Lower level seating area beneath the balcony overhang.

Monologue A solo speech during which the character reveals personal thoughts.

Narrator A character who tells the story of the play directly to the audience.

Orchestra Lower level seating area immediately in front of the stage.

"Places" Direction given by the Stage Manager for actors to be in position before each act begins.

Plot The "what happens" in a story: beginning (the setting, characters, and problem); middle (how the characters work to solve the problem); and the ending (resolution of the problem).

Project To speak loudly so the entire audience can hear you.

Props All the stage furnishings, including furniture, that are physically used by the actors.

Proscenium Stage A traditional theatre with the audience seated in front of a proscenium arch framing the stage.

Run Length of time the play will be presented (i.e two weeks, two months, two years).

Script The text of the play, including dialogue and stage directions, all written by the playwright.

Set All of the scenery that makes up the physical environment of the world of the play.

Stagecraft The knowledge and skills required to create the physical aspects of a production; i.e., scenery, lighting, costumes, and props.

Stage Left That part of the stage to the actor's left when the actor faces the audience.

Stage Manager The person who supervises the physical production of a play and who is in charge of the stage during the performance.

Stage Right That part of the stage to the actor's right when the actor faces the audience.

Strike Dismantling the set, costumes and props at the end of the run of a show.

Theme The central thought, idea, or significance of the action of a play.

Upstage The area of the stage farthest way from the audience and nearest to the back wall.

Part V: Resources

Online Resources:

Another interview with playwright Bathsheba Doran:

<http://aszym.blogspot.com/2009/09/i-interview-playwrights-part-57.html>

A shorter retelling of the Chinese folktale:

<http://www.topics-mag.com/folk-tales/folk-tale-good-greed-china.htm>

Links to the children's adaptation of that folktale which inspired the playwright:

A cartoon version of The Magic Paintbrush (1993)*:

Part I - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6BfQN9njQ0>

Part II - http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8mX_tQdm_dI

*The story was also turned into an animated film in 1992:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0186330/>

Here are links to Parts 1-3 of the children's adaptation of The Magic Paintbrush the playwright read as a child:

Part 1 - <http://kierenmccarthy.com/2006/04/18/my-favourite-childhood-story-the-magic-paintbrush/>

Part 2 - <http://kierenmccarthy.com/2006/04/20/the-magic-paintbrush-part-ii/>

Part 3 - <http://kierenmccarthy.com/2006/04/24/the-magic-paintbrush-part-iii/>

A timeline of art history – Metropolitan Museum:

<http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/>

Additional Study Guides about Chinese Folktale The Magic Paintbrush:

From the Animated Tales of the World series – “China: The Magic Paintbrush”

<http://www.libraryvideo.com/guides/V6950.pdf>

Reading Rainbow Teacher's Guide: (1983. Season 1, Episode 7)

<http://www.shopgpn.com/guides/rr/7.pdf>

Theatre Building Chicago

http://www.theatrebuildingchicago.org/documents/Magic_Paintbrush_Guide_000.pdf