

## Playbill for Premiere Production

### SAND

by Murray Mednick

Presented at Theatre Genesis  
(St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bouwerie, New York City)

Directed by Ralph Cook

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#### CAST

THE MOTHER .....	Jean Granirer
THE FATHER .....	Sully Boyar
THE AMBASSADOR .....	David Scott Milton
1st SOLDIER .....	Glenn Johnson
2nd SOLDIER .....	Sam Black

Setting and lighting design: Kit Jones

Technical director: Kit Jones

Stage manager: Sheila Ferrini

#### Notes to any future production:

Lighting should emphasize the isolation of the characters from one another. THE AMBASSADOR never looks or speaks directly to anybody; he is always "on camera." In the opening section of the play, there are long pauses between each of the speeches, which grow smaller and smaller until the entrance of THE AMBASSADOR. The Offstage Voice should seem to emanate from the television set, if this is possible. All entrances and exits are made through an area of darkness backstage. A hum from an oscillator is heard throughout.

M.M.

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## MURRAY MEDNICK

"I'm the best tambourine player in Boo City. That were no easy pile a shit. I can make a cobra wiggle its ass & eat a hot dog.

"America should be run by the Chief of the Sioux. Who would know better how you don't scratch leave it alone? You'd get your money's worth. Turn everybody loose. Save your napalm for Plutonian Steam Heat.

"My friends are watching me. Cosmic Paranoia Drives My Car. Since I can remember there's been a war on.

"I was an ace Mountain Rat. I could carry 24 Main Dishes from the Kitchen to the Dining Room. I quit."

## CHARACTERS

**THE MOTHER:** in her early forties, run down, wearing a dirty housecoat.

**THE FATHER:** late forties, fixated, but still vigorous. He wears an undershirt, baggy pants, and slippers.

**THE AMBASSADOR:** fifty-five or so, grey, W.A.S.P. type formally dressed in the usual Ambassadorial attire.

**THE SOLDIERS:** disheveled, war-weary degenerates with Brooklyn accents.

THE SCENE: STAGE RIGHT, a large worn out sand-box. In it are some sticks and stones, a little sand, a few bottle caps, pieces of glass . . . STAGE LEFT, a toilet bowl mounted on a small platform. Between the sandbox and the commode, UPSTAGE, is an old armchair. The stage is raked.

An electrical, buzzing noise, just audible and constant, an oscillator noise.

Also, a television set, image flickering but the sound off, is situated to the rear of the house, behind the audience, and is plainly visible to the actors.

The MOTHER sits in the sandbox, playing in a desultory manner with the things there. The FATHER works the toilet bowl with a plumber's helper. The two are oriented by these activities throughout. There is a considerable pause before the MOTHER speaks.

MOTHER. I can't wait 'til your son gets here. I can't wait. He'll fix you—you'll see!

FATHER. He ain't no son of mine.

MOTHER. Whose is he, then?

FATHER. Yours.

MOTHER. You had nothing to do with it, I suppose?

FATHER. Could've been anybody. Didn't have to be me. It's a big hole. Could've been a dog . . . Or a telephone pole . . . For all I know.

MOTHER. Shit! I haven't been out of your sight long enough to get wet!

FATHER. So big, the only thing I remember is the fear of drowning in it.

MOTHER. Not even a little wet . . . (Remembers.) It tickled.

FATHER. Swore I'd never go back in there. (Plunges harder.) And I never will! Never! Never! Never!

MOTHER. Well who invited you, anyway? You stink!

FATHER (struck). A troll! A troll invited me! (He laughs at her.)

MOTHER. Oh I hope he kicks you down the stairs!

FATHER. Who? Who will?

MOTHER. Your son!

FATHER. Hah . . . You know what a troll is? . . . Huh? . . . You know what a troll is? . . . It's a bug! . . . It's a big bug on its hind legs . . . That's right!

MOTHER. I hope he stomps on you.

FATHER. Yes!—That was one time too many! Never again! (Threatening with plunger.) I'm on my guard!

MOTHER. And you better let him go to the bathroom! He's my only child!

FATHER. O no! He'll have to pay! Like everyone else!

MOTHER. That's not fair!

FATHER. Who does he think he is? It's MY fuckin' latrine! That's all there is to it!

MOTHER. What if he has to do a No. 2 in the middle of the night?

FATHER. O no! O no! The more he contributes, the harder I have to work. He'll have to go next door and use theirs.

MOTHER. They're liable to kill him . . . if he does a No. 2 in their latrine . . . in the middle of the night . . . They might kill him!

FATHER. That's his problem, not mine.

MOTHER. My God! Twenty years I've spent with you! Twenty years!

FATHER. Shut up! How many times have I told you to stop bothering me when I'm working?

MOTHER. You call that work?

FATHER. Are you kidding? Are you kidding? Do you think this is easy? Do you think this is pleasant?

MOTHER. It's smelly and boring.

FATHER. Look who's talking! Look at you—diddling yourself all day long!

MOTHER. I am not diddling myself! I'm trying to concentrate! I'm trying to think! But you—you've got shit on the mind! It's a disease!

FATHER. Someone has got to do it. Someone has got to get this thing cleared up! I've got to unplug this system once and for all!

MOTHER. It'll be clogged up until you croak. You're doomed!

FATHER. Quiet! (*A pause. He listens. Observes M.*) That's right . . . you make me think of trolls . . . Trolls and flushing water . . . that's right . . . God knows where your son came from!

MOTHER. He's YOUR responsibility! He comes from you!

(*A knock at the door. They don't hear it.*)

FATHER. Quiet! Damn you, I'll flush you down here one of these days!

(*Another knock.*)

MOTHER. I dare you!

(*She throws a bottle cap at him. He threatens with the plunger. The AMBASSADOR knocks and enters. A silence.*)

AMBASSADOR. How do you do? May I come in?

(*They scrutinize him. He hesitantly steps forward.*)

MOTHER. You're already in.

AMBASSADOR. Yes. Well . . . I am the Ambassador.

FATHER. Ambassador what?

AMBASSADOR. The Ambassador . . . Yes. From the Embassy.

FATHER (*sarcastic*). No shit?

AMBASSADOR. Yes. Well. I am afraid I have some bad news.

MOTHER. I'm not surprised. What else do we get around here.

AMBASSADOR. Oh? Well . . . It concerns your son—

FATHER. It's HER son. I'm not responsible . . . What did he do now?

AMBASSADOR. Missing in action.

FATHER. "Missing in action"? What kind of action?

MOTHER. The wrong kind, obviously.

FATHER. In Brooklyn?

AMBASSADOR. I'm terribly sorry—that's classified information.

MOTHER. What?—are you high class or something?

AMBASSADOR (*flustered*). Yes . . . Uh, not exactly. I did graduate . . .

MOTHER (*to A.*). Fuck you.

AMBASSADOR. In the top ten . . .

FATHER (*to M.*). Idiot!

MOTHER (*to F.*). Fuck you, too!

AMBASSADOR (*dignified*). I am a civil servant . . .

FATHER (*to M.*). Twenty years ago I thought you'd bury yourself in that stuff. I'm still waiting!

MOTHER (*shouting*). I've told you over and over! I don't have enough sand! I don't have enough sand! I need more sand! Why don't you get a job?

FATHER (*winking at A.*). Because I'm a very busy man, that's why. I have important obligations.

MOTHER (*sorrowfully*). There just isn't enough . . .

AMBASSADOR. Please . . . If I may have your attention a moment . . .

MOTHER. To go around . . . Is there?

AMBASSADOR (*pulling himself together*). Well . . .

MOTHER (*sure now*). Is there?

AMBASSADOR. Yes, of course . . . You see, sand is needed by the complex.

MOTHER. By the complex . . . ?

AMBASSADOR. Yes. It is mixed with chemicals . . .

FATHER. Water!

AMBASSADOR. Yes, water . . . To make . . .

MOTHER. Concrete.

AMBASSADOR. Yes. Concrete.

FATHER (*to M.*). Very good. You pass. You may go on to the third grade.

MOTHER. That's why . . .

AMBASSADOR (*almost whispering*). Yes.

MOTHER. There's a shortage!

AMBASSADOR. Yes.

(*A pause. She thinks. F. stops plunging and watches her. A. is distracted.*)

MOTHER. Concrete . . .

AMBASSADOR. Yes . . . Uh . . . May I sit down?

FATHER (*to A.*). How come you say "yes" all the time?

AMBASSADOR. What?

(*F. plunges. M. points and laughs at him.*)

MOTHER. Shmuck!

FATHER (*to M.*). Shut up! (*To A.*) Sit down.

AMBASSADOR. Yes . . . (*Pause. Sits. Resumes.*) The

complex needs a great deal of cement. (*Pause.*) A great deal. (*Sighs.*) To fill in all the holes, you understand . . .

FATHER. What holes?

AMBASSADOR. Yes. Holes. Everywhere. So many holes to fill. (*Sighs.*) So many. (*Pause.*) Holes.

MOTHER (*coming to life*). Maybe I'll do that, Daddy.

FATHER. Don't call me "Daddy"!

MOTHER (*concentrating*). I'll make it into concrete and I'll sell it to the complex.

FATHER. You can't.

MOTHER. Why can't I?

FATHER. You don't have the right chemicals. You need chemicals. Give it up.

MOTHER (*shouting*). Water! I need water!

FATHER. And chemicals! (*To A.*) Right?

AMBASSADOR. Yes. Some.

MOTHER. What chemicals?

AMBASSADOR. Yes. Well . . . That is to say . . .

MOTHER (*shouting*). Get me some chemicals!

FATHER. I don't know which ones they are, stupid!

MOTHER. Get them from him! He's an Ambassador!

AMBASSADOR (*firmly*). I'm afraid that's impossible.

FATHER. Besides, I'm occupied at the moment.

MOTHER. And some goddamned water!

AMBASSADOR. May I—?

FATHER. You know we can't spare any water! What's the matter with you? I use water in my work! You know that! Without water—it's incredible! . . . It won't go down! (*Again she points and laughs. A pause.*)

FATHER. I know where there's one big old hole for you to fill, Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR. Yes! Everywhere! In all directions! And yet—it must be done. And we are the ones who have to do it.

MOTHER (*to F.*). Excuses! All I get from you is excuses! You're just not big enough!

FATHER. It's gigantic, Ambassador. Believe me. A cavern is what it is. A cavern! With a huge lake at the bottom of it.

MOTHER. See—he's afraid of drowning. He admitted it!

AMBASSADOR. Ah, yes, a common affliction . . . heh, heh, like the cold . . . Uh, unfortunately, we've none to

spare. Nothing at all. Nevertheless, we MUST take care of it, of course. A continent at a time, to be sure. But we MUST take responsibility for the filling of holes.

(*F. and M. have ceased their activities and are staring at him. A pause. He grows discomfited.*)

Yes . . . A single continent . . . Now, to arrive at the point of this . . . visit . . .

MOTHER. The point?

FATHER. What's on your mind, Ambassador?

AMBASSADOR (*to M.*). Yes. About your son . . .

MOTHER. MY son! It's his, too!

FATHER. Impossible! He never could've made the distance!

MOTHER. What distance?

FATHER (*gesturing*). Up. The distance UP.

AMBASSADOR. I beg your pardon?

FATHER (*dreamily*). Upstream all the way . . .

MOTHER (*to A.*). Do you know what he did? He tried to flush him down there once! That's right! A little boy! He said our SON was clogging the system!

FATHER. He was!

MOTHER. It's been a hassle from the beginning, Ambassador. It's been no picnic living with that man.

AMBASSADOR (*embarrassed*). Oh? Well, these are difficult times . . . For the youth especially . . . The nation's youth is quite confused . . .

MOTHER. Right from the start, he wasn't safe. My little boy! I had to keep a constant lookout—for him! (*Pointing at F.*) I had to watch him every step of the way! My boy and I! We stuck together! We took our nap. We went to the bathroom. We had to! We went to bed . . . on time! My boy and I! We took care of each other! I made sure . . . I kept him nice and clean . . . I wiped his ass . . .

FATHER (*shaking plunger*). I caught him! I caught him in the act! Red-handed!

AMBASSADOR. Yes.

FATHER. Yes—what?

AMBASSADOR. Your son. Caught, probably.

MOTHER (*dazed*). They caught him.

AMBASSADOR (*sighing*). Yes.

(*A silence.*)

Of course, we could trade for him. If we knew.

MOTHER. You don't know?

(*A silence.*)

FATHER. I think you're full of shit. That's what I think.

AMBASSADOR. I beg your pardon?

MOTHER. He thinks everything is full of shit.

FATHER. Everything is! Ask him!

AMBASSADOR. Well . . . I wouldn't put it that way . . . Ahem . . . Various interpretations of the situation. (*Pause.*) In any case, there are two alternatives—trade, or pay.

FATHER. The drainage system must be improved all around! And the pipes! The pipes must be cleaned out immediately! For Christ's sake! They oughta take one of them flamethrowers and blow all that shit out of the pipes! Miles and miles of shitty pipes! For Christ's sake!

MOTHER. The Ambassador is trying to tell us something . . . Aren't you, Ambassador?

AMBASSADOR. Yes . . . We must now use the term "Revolutionary Development."

(*A silence.*)

FATHER. He's a communist!

AMBASSADOR (*chuckling*). No, no. No, no. I mean, simply, that the phrase—"Revolutionary Development"—is to be preferred to the former term . . . "Pacification" . . . which described the very same . . . process . . . of course.

MOTHER. Of course.

FATHER. I don't care what you call it! It's all the same shit to me!

MOTHER. Naturally . . . But that's interesting, Ambassador . . . ?

AMBASSADOR. Well, yes. Yes.

FATHER (*plunging furiously*). Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes!

MOTHER (*to A.*). He's out of his mind.

FATHER. Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! (*Stops abruptly.*) Let me tell you about that hole of hers, Ambassador. It's . . . (*He makes a picture with his hands, at a loss for words.*) It's . . . a revolutionary development!

AMBASSADOR. Precisely.

MOTHER (*amazed*). My, My. Holy mother of Jesus!

FATHER (*winking*). You think you could fill that hole, Ambassador? Heh, heh.

AMBASSADOR (*subsiding*). Yes. Oh. Well. That is to say—All the holes will be filled. In due time. According to plan. I am myself . . . I am a civil servant. Nevertheless, the former term is to be discarded, and the new one is to be employed.

MOTHER (*flirtatious*). No question about it. There's no question about it. Not to my mind. That's fascinating, Ambassador.

FATHER. Heh, heh.

MOTHER. Him, of course, you might as well forget. He doesn't think much.

FATHER (*giggling*). Heh, heh. I'd really like to see that. Ha! I really would like to see that.

AMBASSADOR. Well . . . Not all at once. Perhaps a continent, a single continent . . . at a time. It will take years! Decades! But we are acting from strength! We are marshalling our forces! Our sand! Our water! Our precious natural resources! So that one day . . . One day the entire planet will gleam like a fresh new highway in the rain! A shining, happy star! (*He leaps to his feet.*) Peace on earth! The Second Coming!

MOTHER (*clutching her breast*). My O my! God help me!

FATHER (*plunging harder*). Yes, indeed. I want to be there for that one, alright! I want to be alive for that one.

AMBASSADOR (*coming to his senses*). Thirty-three dollars and ninety cents a body is the current rate of exchange. Thirty-three dollars and ninety cents . . .

(*Everything stops. A silence.*)

MOTHER. What did you say?

FATHER. He said the going rate is thirty-three dollars and ninety cents a body. Heh, heh.

MOTHER (*indignant*). WHOSE body?

FATHER. That's the going rate, eh? More than it's worth, heh, heh. (*To M.*) You ought to take it before the price goes down.

AMBASSADOR. No. You don't understand. You see—a given number is unavoidably sacrificed. A fraction of the population. There's no help for it. Of necessity . . .

MOTHER. I resent that! I truly resent that!

FATHER. Prices are bound to fall. That's the way it goes.

AMBASSADOR. Trade, or pay . . . Trade, or pay . . .

(*A silence. M. and F. observe A.*)

That is to say . . . The missing body . . .

VOICE ON TAPE. We have FOUND the body.

AMBASSADOR. Yes.

(*F. clears throat, plunges madly. M. gazes at A. Gazes, shifts.*)

FATHER. What the fuck! What the fuck!

(*A. takes out rumpled piece of paper, writes.*)

AMBASSADOR. I must revise my previous statement.

FATHER. Ah, the hell with it!

AMBASSADOR (*putting it away*). Perhaps I should explain . . .

MOTHER (*fixedly*). You should get me some water at least. At least some goddamned water.

FATHER (*by rote*). I've told you a million times—no noise. No noise.

AMBASSADOR. If, for example, a suit is brought against us—

FATHER. A million times!

AMBASSADOR. —we must pay . . . For one of them—

MOTHER. I just don't understand it.

AMBASSADOR. —at the rate of thirty-three dollars and ninety cents a body—

FATHER. That's too high! That sounds too high to me! It's inflationary!

AMBASSADOR. —to the family of the deceased.

FATHER. It's inflationary!

MOTHER (*aloud to herself*). Never enough. There's never enough. I don't understand it. (*To F.*) Just get the money, will you?

AMBASSADOR. For one of them, as I say, if it is a civilian. As the case may be.

FATHER. How about one of us? US?

AMBASSADOR. Yes. Well, it costs us two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to kill one real guerilla. Those are the latest figures.

MOTHER (*intensely frustrated, almost crying*). Why can't we hear it? Why can't you turn it up?

AMBASSADOR. It's quite complicated, as you can see. It's not clear-cut. Not at all. There are: insurance plans . . . Defoliation . . . Graduated income . . . Revolutionary development . . .

FATHER. Too much noise!

AMBASSADOR. I should say, however, that one of ours is worth five of theirs! Five times as much. A five to one ratio. That comes to one hundred and eighty-five dollars.

FATHER. I don't get it. Something's wrong there.

AMBASSADOR. Things change. The pressure of events, the balance of payments et cetera.

FATHER. What about the two hundred and fifty thou?  
MOTHER (*to herself*). Sand is expensive.

AMBASSADOR (*encouraged*). Yes. Now, exchanges are possible—in certain situations. Depending on the terrain, the conditions, the price, as well as other, equally unpredictable . . . contingencies.

FATHER. Hmm. We've GOT to go easy on the moisture supply!

MOTHER. Water, water, water, water . . . Why don't you DO something?

FATHER. Do something? . . . I'm DOING SOMETHING!

AMBASSADOR. In this particular . . . instance . . . that concerning your son . . .

MOTHER (*by rote*). My son! my son!

AMBASSADOR. Yes.

FATHER. What the fuck?

AMBASSADOR (*matter of fact*). History presses down on us. Craters proliferate. Proliferate. They must be filled up. We must hold the line. Times are hard.

(*F. plunges ferociously, muttering.*)

MOTHER (*sad, sifting twigs, etc.*). A shortage of sand?

AMBASSADOR. Whenever possible, a habeas corpus is to be preferred above the other, less fiscally sound, alternatives.

VOICE ON TAPE. You may have the body.

AMBASSADOR. Yes.

MOTHER (*to F.*). Can't you turn it up? Please! Can't you turn it up?

FATHER. Too much noise! Too much goddamned noise!

MOTHER. I don't understand. I just—

AMBASSADOR. We try to deliver. We keep our word. We save face. We honor our commitments.

FATHER (*plunging away*). Yes—Yes—Yes—Yes—!

AMBASSADOR. We are moving forward. We are flexible. We are reliable and rich. We are viable. We are voracious. We have an appetite—

FATHER. YES —yes—yes—yes—yes!

AMBASSADOR. —We fill the holes. We create a free and solid order among men. A grey, concrete, secure . . . temple! Freedom! Founded on goodwill, on a universal respect for cement! For the hard economic facts!

FATHER. Yes! —Yes! —Yes! —Yes!

MOTHER (*deranged*). STOP! PLEASE!

(*A long pause. F. and A. regard M.*)

My . . . ? It's so cold . . . I just don't understand it . . . (*Shivers.*) My . . . ? Silently flickering . . . (*Shivers.*) Always silently flickering . . . (*She stares steadily back at A.*)

AMBASSADOR. I'm sorry.

FATHER. Ha! I think it's going down! It's going down!

MOTHER (*by rote*). Go down! Go down with it!

AMBASSADOR. You seem extremely . . . This is very difficult . . .

FATHER (*shouting*). Forget it! Forget it!

MOTHER. Vile. Vile air. Vile talk. So thick you can hardly breathe. (*She breathes into cupped hands.*) Bad breath by the millions. Can't understand it . . . Never get through the muck! Millions!

FATHER (*muttering*). Never quite makes it . . . The shit will not go down . . .

AMBASSADOR. Nevertheless, I have heavy duties. Yes. Burdens. (*Looks at watch.*) Time is running out. Your son . . .

FATHER. Shit!

MOTHER (*to A.*). I don't know what you're talking about. What are you talking about?

VOICE ON TAPE. Ambassador! Here is the body, Ambassador!

AMBASSADOR. Yes. We keep score, you know. Not always accurate, of course . . . Due to the constant un-

known. The probabilities. Something like that . . . Yes, we do count—you can bet on it.

MOTHER (*to F.*). Did you hear it?

(*A pause. F. cocks ear and observes A., who ~~has~~ takes out a checkbook and is writing in it. We hear the sounds of wheels and pulleys offstage. The two soldiers enter with a young corpse in uniform. The bloodied corpse is hung on a large meat-hook, which is attached by a chain to a pipe overhead. The soldiers maneuver it to CENTER STAGE where it slowly revolves.*)

AMBASSADOR. One hundred and eighty-five dollars and . . . no cents.

1st SOLDIER. Phew! What a stench!

2nd SOLDIER. I can't stand it anymore!

MOTHER (*like a frustrated child*). No! No! No!

FATHER. Shut up! Shut up!

(*AMBASSADOR ~~shuts~~ tears off check, sighs, holds breath, places check in vestpocket of corpse. Composes himself, nods to F., takes a step toward MOTHER.*)

AMBASSADOR. Thank you so much. You have been most cooperative. I am terribly sorry. Goodbye. (*AMBASSADOR bows, exits. 2nd SOLDIER does the Up Yours with his arm, spits into sandbox.*)

2nd SOLDIER. I've got to get away from this stink! It's all over me!

1st SOLDIER. You need a hot bath, that's all.

MOTHER (*softly*). I held his hand. I wiped his ass.

FATHER (*fierce whisper*). Shut up! Shut up!

(*1st SOLDIER approaches F. and toilet bowl as FATHER cringes.*)

1st SOLDIER. Move out, Daddy! Move! Move!

(*He throws FATHER to his knees and takes a piss as 2nd SOLDIER discovers blood on his hands.*)

2nd SOLDIER. Damn! Look at this!

(*He tries wiping hands on corpse's uniform.*)

Fucking meat!

(*He turns, goes to sandbox where MOTHER is rocking to and fro with her head in her hands. He picks up handful of sand, dirt, etc. and rubs his hands briskly, then lingers a moment.*)



1st SOLDIER (*buttoning up*). What are you waiting for? Let's get out of here.

(*Pause.*)

Come on, Man. She's all dried up. You couldn't get into that with an ax.

2nd SOLDIER (*rubbing his hands*). Yeah, let's get out of here.

(*They exit.*)

(*A long pause. FATHER rises. They watch the corpse a moment, then turn away.*)

MOTHER. Why don't you turn it up? I can't hear it. Why don't you turn it up?

FATHER (*plunging again, through clenched teeth*). I've told you a million times! Too much noise! Too much goddamned noise!

(*A pause. Blackout.*)