

ROOTERS!

by

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(revised edition)

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SET, TIME AND PLACE, CONVENTION

The Set: A grandstand, or bleachers.

The Time and Place: Then and now; here and there.

The Convention: All characters are only in their own time, each amidst the spectators at their particular event. Yet, there is a sense of unity and interrelation, rendering the impression of a timeless, seamless, integrated whole. All lines directed to the participants in the particular event are bold italics.

CHARACTERS

Trinity Witness. A middle-aged German immigrant who works as a cook at the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos, New Mexico. He is at the Trinity site, near Alamogordo, New Mexico on July 16, 1945, the day of the first atomic bomb explosion.

Jesse Owens Fan. A black woman attending the 1936 Summer Olympic Games in Berlin, Germany. She has known Jesse Owens, a black athlete on the United States Olympic team, since he was a little boy. She is witnessing Owens' attempt to win an unprecedented fourth Gold Medal in the Games.

Wrestlemania Fan. A young boy in his late teens attending a contemporary "professional" wrestling match.

Pop Warner Mom. A woman in her late twenties or early thirties attending her young son's "little league" football game.

Roman Grandfather. An old man, a pagan, at the Coliseum in Rome, Italy in the late first century A.D., watching the persecution of Christians.

Woman in Black. A woman attending the execution of the killer of her husband.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Rooters! was first performed on July 6, 1989 at Russell Theatre, Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, under the joint sponsorship of Spokane Civic Theatre and Gonzaga University. The cast included Inez Chubb, Robert B. Nelson (aka Ben Harnetiaux), Freddie Jenkins, Jack Delehanty/H. James Brown, Joan McKenzie, and Scott Duncley. The crew included: Carrie Delehanty, Trish Harnetiaux, Ryan Harnetiaux, and Sue Ann Harnetiaux. This production was directed by the playwright.

(At rise. The TRINITY WITNESS is seated in the grandstand, DC. A security clearance badge is pinned to his clothing. He beams with excitement, staring off at a point some distance away. A lunch box and a pair of goggles are at his side. He tries on the goggles and again stares off into the distance, toward the atomic test site. After a moment, he looks at his watch and then takes an apple out of the lunch box and starts eating it. In time, he removes the goggles and sets them on his lap. JESSE OWENS FAN enters the grandstand and sits UR. She carries binoculars, a bible, and a handbag. Once situated, she scans the field below with the binoculars, finally spotting the American athletes, at which time she lowers the field glasses and smiles.)

JESSE OWENS FAN

Where is he? Gotta be on the track by now.

(Using binoculars.)

"Open thou my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things...." Where are you Jesse? History is lookin' for you.

(An uproar across the stadium catches JESSE OWENS FAN's attention. Using the binoculars she locates Adolph Hitler on the other side. As she lowers the binoculars, the smile is gone.)

Guten morgen, Herr Fuhrer. Yeah, over here. This little black dot in the American section. You look kinda tiny to me. Tiny...

(Looks up German word for "tiny" in pocket dictionary)

Tiny...? Uh, "Winzig." Yeah, "Winzig." "The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him." Huh! This is it, mister. Our time, nineteen thirty six .

(Her attention is again drawn to the field below. Using the binoculars she spots Jesse Owens.)

Jesse.

(Lowering binoculars.)

This is it, Jesse. Number four today.

(WRESTLEMANIA FAN wanders in carrying a variety of concession stand junk food.

He watches intently the ring below as he bolts down food and drink. He ultimately sits DR, below JESSE OWENS FAN.)

I've known Jesse Owens since he was a little one. His mama was a friend of mine. Always was a runner, even as a little boy. He was fast just standin' still, doin' nothin'. They're gonna remember Jesse Owens in Berlin, I'll tell you that. You tell me. He wasn't even scheduled to run the relay. Wins three gold medals - the hundred meter, two hundred meter, broad jump, 'fore they see the light. Fastest man alive. How could they keep him out? Huh! Didn't have any choice. That Negro belonged there from the get go. "Thou, Lord, will bless the righteous." Gonna see one black blur 'round that track, Mr. Hitler! ***You can do it, Jesse!***

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Ah, Jesse don't stand a chance.

(Derisively.)

Jesse the Juggernaut, meanest wrestler alive. ***Jesse the Juggernaut, hah!*** Mad Monk 'll eat him alive. ***Yeah, Monk, you're ready guy.***

(To other spectators, leading a cheer:)

Hey, let's hear it for the Mad Monk from Muskegon - hip hip hernia, hip hip herpes, hip hip her way! Yeah. This is the grudge match, man. The Monk gets even today. Jesse took the crown in

[insert two years back, i.e. "05"] with that bogus pin. Twisted the Monk's jewels when the ref couldn't see. Monk settles the score today. **Rock 'em, Monk. Pin him in a minute! Make it thirty seconds! Tops!** Jesse says he'll cool the Monk in two -

JESSE OWENS FAN

Woowee, that boy is ready.

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

No way. He says it's a done deal. **Hah!**

JESSE OWENS FAN

(Stands.)

They're gonna write books about today, and we are here.

(Simultaneously.)

JESSE OWENS FAN

We're watchin', Jesse!

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

We're watchin', Jesse!

JESSE OWENS FAN

Gonna wipe that leer right off that little Aryan's face. **Right, Adolf!**

(JESSE OWENS FAN sits self-consciously. POP WARNER MOM enters hurriedly, watching the action below on the football field. She is late and frenzied. As she finds her seat:)

(Overlapping, slightly.)

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Know how many Monk's won straight?

JESSE OWENS FAN

There's a seat here?

POP WARNER MOM

Nine! [Nein.] Number nine's my boy.

(She sits DC as the TRINITY WITNESS moves L to make room for her. JESSE OWENS FAN consults her bible when not watching Jesse Owens. WRESTLEMANIA FAN continues to eat, eyes riveted on the ring. TRINITY WITNESS cleans the glass on his goggles.)

Bobby. He's supposed to start today. About time. God, I got hung up in traffic. Told him I'd make the kickoff. Did he start? Where is he? Why isn't he on the field?! That damn coach.

Wait 'til I . . . Oh, that's the defense. Bobby's quarterback.

(Waving to the sidelines.)

Bobby! Oh, Bobby! He's ignoring me. Says I embarrass him. That's just too bad.

(Settling in.)

Aren't they cute. All dressed up like little men, those shoulder things and all. Oh, good. It's our turn. **Okay, Bobby, you can do it!** Coach didn't think Bobby was quick enough to play quarterback. Hah! Couldn't do any worse than his son - kid falls down anytime somebody gets near him. Well, it's Bobby's turn. **You can do it, honey!** These guys are losers. **Hey, these are the Lions.** Beat us on that cheat play, where the ref didn't see the ball hit the ground. **Crush the**

Lions! We saw it perfectly up here. Oh, God, it's the same ref! This guy's blind. You coulda seen it from a helicopter. **You owe us one, buddy!**

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

B-o-o-o! Let 'em wrestle, man. Rules. Don't talk technical. **There are no rules. Poke him in the other eye, Monk.**

JESSE OWENS FAN

Nobody's gonna stop you today, Jesse. **Nobody!**

POP WARNER MOM

Oh, run Bobby, run. Go,... oh, behind you! Hey! Where is Roger? Roger thinks this is a great experience for Bobby.

(ROMAN GRANDFATHER enters wearing the Roman dress of the day. He carries a wine skin from which he frequently takes a pull. He sits UC, next to JESSE OWENS FAN.)

Come on, ref! He put the ball right back where it was before. Shoulda given Bobby some credit for all that running around. **It's okay. Smile, honey. Daddy said he'd be here by half.** He better! I don't like begging to get my boy a start. It is Roger's insurance agency that sprung for the uniforms. Coach plays that neighbor boy like he's his own son. Throw it, Bobby! **Hey, go easy, kid - - you, number fifty.** Barbarian. **Come on, you can do it. Crush the Lions!**

(WOMAN IN BLACK enters and sits UL. She is very still and austere.)

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Crunch the Christians! Where's Jesus now!?

JESSE OWENS FAN

Be with Jesse Owens today, Sweet Jesus.

WOMAN IN BLACK

Jesus [heysoos] Rivera. So you die today. And you invite me. I should have worn red. Eight years it takes. Appeals and appeals and more appeals. And now you are going to die. Eight years. You made an old woman out of me. I was young when I married Joe. It took you eight seconds to kill him, before my very eyes. So now you invite these eyes to watch you die because you've found Jesus.

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Where's Jesus, now?

JESSE OWENS FAN

Sweet Jesus, be with Jesse.

POP WARNER MOM

Geez, Bobby, look out!

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Jesus, Monk, get him!

WOMAN IN BLACK

You want forgiveness, Jesus? You want to show me? Your remorse, your sorrow.

Forgiveness...

(Stands up.)

Yes, it's me. I'm here. You know I'm here. How does your little chair feel? Dark and cold? You want to feel warm? Soon enough you'll feel warm. *Forgiveness - I spit on your forgiveness. I did not come to forgive. I come to laugh. I hope you can hear me laugh.*

(WOMAN IN BLACK laughs, joined by WRESTLEMANIA FAN, POP WARNER MOM and ROMAN GRANDFATHER.)

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

That's the stuff, Monk. *What's wrong, Jesse?*

(WOMAN IN BLACK sits.)

POP WARNER MOM

That's it, Bobby. Great!

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

(Stands.)

There he is! Old Gums himself. *Hey, Gums! Crunch the Christians!*

POP WARNER MOM

Crush the Lions!

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

There's a new one. Not more than a cub. Probably never et Christian. They say once they get a taste of a Christian, won't touch nothin' else. Oh, they'll gnaw on a Carthaginian once in a while. Old Gums there, he's been around forever. *You still got it, Gums!* He's the one with the black patch on his mane. There, that one. Had it since he was young. Called him Patch back then. Now it's Old Gums. Gertes was just a cub himself when I used to bring him here. Gertes, that's my grandson. Gums could really tear 'em up, back then. *Get ready, Gums!* Those were good times. Me and Gertes, we'd bring a lunch. Gertes wasn't more than four or five. We'd have a ball. They grow up, they move away. Times change. I don't hear a thing. Young people. But Old Gums is still at it!

POP WARNER MOM

Crush the Lions!

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Crunch the Christians! Ah, they got six lions and a dozen or so Christ-lovers, so Gums oughta get his share. Oh, he's slowed down some. But that hasn't stopped him. One of the keepers says he's only got three or four teeth left. You watch, first one down he'll go straight for the buttocks. About all he can handle these days. *Crunch the Christians, Gums!*

POP WARNER MOM

Bobby! Kick him back! The little . . . Crush the Lions!

JESSE OWENS FAN

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee." You can do it, Jesse!

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

You're a loser, Jesse. Yeah, Monk, slam the man. Take him. Yeah!

TRINITY WITNESS

(With German accent.)

Yah, it should be good today. They invite me to come watch.

(Indicating security badge.)

Yah.

(Finger to lips.)

Very quiet. Careful.

(Mimes taking loyalty oath.)

Yah. Oppie, ah, Dr. Oppenheimer, says I should come.

(Indicating goggles.)

They gave me these. A long ride from Los Alamos. But worth it, yes. New Mexico very big. I like this Trinity. It is a good name, Trinity. I cook for them. The scientists. They work very hard. Sometimes all night. They work better with good German food. Eh, some Italian, some French. And hot dogs.

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Anybody got some food?

TRINITY WITNESS

(Indicating goggles.)

They say I should wear them. The light from the explosion may be bright, yes. But not too big, huh. Just a test. Maybe I not need.

(Pointing to ground zero in the distance.)

Six miles.

(Uses thumb and forefinger, measuring horizon.)

No pictures. (Fingers to lips again.) Shhh. Maybe we have something to be proud of, huh.

Help America. Nothing to be proud of at home, now. Hitler. A coward.

(Mimes suicide, gun to temple.)

WOMAN IN BLACK

You afraid, Jesus? I see it. I taste it.

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Hey, Christians.

(Chicken sounds.)

Bok, bok, bok, bok, bok, bok.

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Keep him in the ring, ref. The man is gutless.

TRINITY WITNESS

A coward. I would have shot him myself. We were good people. This is my country, now. We will see. It should be very beautiful. Boom, like Fourth of July. I cook for celebration later.

POP WARNER MOM

(Perhaps handing out flyers.)

Oh, everybody, don't forget the barbeque after the game. The address is on the map. If you don't have one, I've got some extras. And bring your swim suits. Isn't this great. Bobby doesn't realize how good this is for him. *Okay, honey, get a touchdown! Crush the Lions!*

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Crunch the Christians!

JESSE OWENS FAN

And the Philistine said ". . . come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth." *You loose, Jesse!?! You gotta do it! They say he wants to grind us into sausage, Jesse. Sausage!*

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Hey! It was a righteous hold, ref! Ease off the Monk, man. We don't wanna see polite! The man in the stripes is a dufus. Monk wants to fight outta the ring, what's the big raw deal. *Get rude, ref!*

JESSE OWENS FAN

(Singing. See the Traditional Spiritual entitled "You'd Better Run," behind the script.)
You'd better run, run, run run . . .

WOMAN IN BLACK

Eight years I still see you. He was kneeling, begging for his life. The knife, the blood.

JESSE OWENS FAN

(Singing.)
You'd better run, run, run run . . .

WOMAN IN BLACK

You beg now. He cried like a baby and you laughed. *You beg. You beg and I'll laugh!*

(She laughs.)
God will laugh, you born again animal.

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

(Laughing, he gestures "thumbs down.")

Send them all to Jesus! Where is he now!

(Baas like a sheep.)

Crunch the Holy Holies!

JESSE OWENS FAN

(Singing.)

You'd better run to the city of refuge . . .

TRINITY WITNESS

In Germany, terrible things. Terrible things. You lay awake and no sleep. Maybe it is better now. My sister is still there. We should not do such things to each other. Many innocent people. My family cook for one of the scientists. My father was brilliant chef. He make amazing things. The scientists come here, we come, too. He say we go to America and help the world. Smile again. No one smiles in Germany. Here, we smile. But, no good sausage since I leave New York.

JESSE OWENS FAN

Sausage, Jesse!

POP WARNER MOM

Way to go! Did you see Bobby give him the ball. ***Great, honey. You're almost there.*** Oh, where is Roger with the videocam. He's going to score his first touchdown and we're going to miss it. ***Oh, watch out, Bobby!***

(She turns her head away.)

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Gertes turned his head at first. Right before they turned 'em loose. Heh, he was small. He got over it. Learned about respect for the law - and a little anatomy.

(He guffaws.)

Crunch the Christians!

JESSE OWENS FAN

It's your time, Jesse. Our time. He's watching. The world is watching. You've got to run beyond yourself. You're carrying all of us. ***It's our time, Jesse!***

TRINITY WITNESS

(Checking his watch.)

It should be soon, huh. We will see what good can be done.

WOMAN IN BLACK

One minute. Beg you bastard. Like Joe. Call the governor and beg. ***You're going to hell, you hear!***

POP WARNER MOM

Okay, Bobby. *This is it, honey.* Half a yard and touchdown. His first one. *You can do it, honey!*

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Hey! Get one, Gums! Yeah, there. That one over there. The young one. Stumbled over his own feet. *He'll be tender, Gums. Where's Jesus, now!?*

(A puzzled look.)

Hey.

TRINITY WITNESS

They say it may be bright. It will look better with these.

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

No mercy, Monk, my man. Mad Monk can taste it now. *Read 'em and weep, Jesse boy!*

JESSE OWENS FAN

Okay, Jesse, okay. Grab it clear, now. Do it for us, Jesse. Thata boy. Good. *Run!*

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

No, the boy, no.

POP WARNER MOM

Maybe he should try the quarterback sneak. *Bobby, try the quarterback sneak, honey!*

JESSE OWENS FAN

Go, Jesse!

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Die, Jesse!

POP WARNER MOM

Go, Bobby!

WOMAN IN BLACK

Die, Jesus!

TRINITY WITNESS

(Puts on goggles.)

This will help the world.

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

(Recognizing his grandson.)

No, Gums, no. Gertes!

TRINITY WITNESS

(Adjusting goggles.)
I am part of this. I nourish them.

JESSE OWENS FAN

Just a little more.

POP WARNER MOM

Bobby, no!

WOMAN IN BLACK

You are not forgiven!

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

Do it Monk, dust him!

POP WARNER MOM

Bobby, you're going the wrong way!

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

Gertes, look out! No ... Gertes!

TRINITY WITNESS

(Takes goggles off.)
We are good people.
(A intense flash occurs. All ROOTERS freeze, suspended in the same moment. When the freeze dissolves, WOMAN IN BLACK turns away as if jolted by the same current sent through Jesus Rivera.)

JESSE OWENS FAN

You got it, Jesse!

(Singing.)

He had to run to the city of refuge . . .

TRINITY WITNESS

No, no . . .

POP WARNER MOM

Bobby, come back! The game!

ROMAN GRANDFATHER

GERTES!

JESSE OWENS FAN

(Singing.)
He had to run, run, run.

TRINITY WITNESS

(Horror stricken; blinded.)

I don't see!

(WOMAN IN BLACK GROANS.)

JESSE OWENS FAN

Amen.

WRESTLEMANIA FAN

(As with a prolonged sigh.)

Yeah!

(Tableau.)

June, 2007
Revisions