

The STD's

By Ian Patrick Williams

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *For the last 20 years I've been associated with the non-profit educational organization Enrichment Works. I've written and directed seven plays aimed at grade school kids in the L.A. area on a variety of topics ranging from biographical pieces on Albert Einstein and Edgar Degas to musicals about eating right and exercise.*

A local hospital asked for short pieces to be performed at Middle schools on the topic of sexuality. Figuring it was an embarrassing (but necessary) topic for kids of that age, I chose humor to frame the information about sexually transmitted diseases invading the body as a metaphor for gangs taking over their neighborhoods. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

THE STD'S

by

Ian Patrick Williams

CAST: SYPHILIS (M)
CHLAMYDIA (F)
GONORRHEA (M)

SYNOPSIS: Three sexually transmitted diseases meet to determine how best to spread throughout society

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Setting: Inside the human body

At rise: Three sexually transmitted diseases enter, joking and ad-libbing. They are dressed as gang members, wearing black sweatshirts or leather jackets with their names printed across the front or back: SYPHILIS, their charismatic leader; CHLAMYDIA, a tough chick; and GONORRHEA, muscular and not terribly bright.

SYPHILIS

All right, all right. Let's bring this meetin' of the STD's to order. Role call: Gonorrhea?

GONORRHEA

Here.

SYPHILIS

Hepatitis B? Hep B? Hey, where is he?

CHLAMYDIA

You didn't hear?

SYPHILIS

What?

GONORRHEA

He's in the emergency room.

SYPHILIS

No!

CHLAMYDIA

Yeah. You know how he can be stopped with just three shots? Some doctor got him. Poor guy's just barely hangin' in there.

SYPHILIS

Geez, that's terrible.

GONORRHEA

I'm gonna go visit him later, see if I can spread some infection at the hospital while I'm at it.

SYPHILIS

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O.K., good. Give him my best and tell him I hope he gets sick again real soon. All right, back to role call: Chlamydia?

CHLAMYDIA

Yo.

SYPHILIS

And yours truly, Syphilis, presidin'. I move we shelve the notes from the last meetin' and just get down to current business.

GONORRHEA

I second the motion.

CHLAMYDIA

Me too. O.K., so why DID you call this meetin', Syph?

SYPHILIS

I'll tell you why: for years, we STDs have been the baddest gang in the land. We been controllin' our turf from the genital side to the anal side; even up north to the oral side. Who can even count how many sexually transmitted infections and deaths we've caused throughout the years.

GONORRHEAS & CHLAMYDIA

YEAH!

(Gonorrhea and Chlamydia high five each other)

SYPHILIS

But then you know what happened a while back: the C.I.A. started to crack down on us.

CHLAMYDIA

(snarling)

The C.I.A. Clinically Intensive Antibiotics.

SYPHILIS

That's right. The Feds started funding drug tests to find cures for us. And then all of a sudden, BAM, we weren't fatal any more. It's been tough on us ever since.

GONORRHEA

Yeah, but we're still here! Them lousy Feds haven't been able to stop us completely. We're still the baddest gang around.

(He and Chlamydia are about to hive-five each other again.)

SYPHILIS

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No we're not!! That's what I'm tryin' to tell you! It's true we're the O.G.s: the Original Genital diseases. But now, there are these new gangs movin' in on our turf and tryin' to do all the things we been doin': infectin' people, killin' 'em. They're takin' away our street cred.

GONORRHEA

What? Like who?

SYPHILIS

You've probably seen 'em around. For one, The Southside Genital Warts. They've been poppin' up on genitalia all over town!

CHLAMYDIA

Oh yeah. I hear they been runnin' with that other gang, the Homeboy Herpes.

GONORRHEA

Ooh, I hate them burnin' and itchin' little blisters!

SYPHILIS

Yeah. And the worst part is, WE can be cured with medication and THEY can't!

GONORRHEA

Wait. You mean...

SYPHILIS

That's right, Gono. Together, they're...the Incurables.

CHLAMYDIA

Oh man. That really does cut into our reputation, doesn't it?

SYPHILIS

There's more bad news. Another leader hasn't been around that long, but he's really makin' up for bein' a newcomer: HIV/AIDS. In just 35 years, he and his boys have already killed over 35 million people.

CHLAMYDIA

35 million? No way!

SYPHILIS

Yeah! And another 35million are infected!

GONORRHEA

Oh man, they ARE bad. Next to them, I feel like a wuss.

CHLAMYDIA

You ARE a wuss...but I know what you mean.
(to Syphilis)

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Why they gotta come into our 'hood? Why don't they go work somewhere else? You know, arms and legs or some place?

SYPHILIS

I wish it was that easy. But it ain't gonna happen; they're here to stay.

GONORRHEA

Aw, why go on? I don't wanna live. Maybe I'll just take some antibiotics and end it all.

SYPHILIS

Hey, hey, don't talk like that. Come on, we've always hung tough throughout the years. We can't let this get us down. Infectin' and killin' millions of people is a record to be proud of.

GONORRHEA

Yeah, you're right, Syph. Sorry, I got a little emotional there for a minute. I'm O.K. now.

CHLAMYDIA

Well, I say if these punks want our turf, they have to rumble for it!

SYPHILIS

Clammy, I love your spirit, but there's too many of them. I don't wanna see you guys get hurt. No, we gotta do what any smart bacteria does: we gotta adapt. We gotta use our brains.

(they both look at Gonorrhah)

Or whatever other talents we have. We just gotta figure out what we can do to keep holdin' onto our rep.

GONORRHEA

Well, I been workin' out a lot recently, so I'm getting' more resistant to common antibiotics, ya know? I infected over 800,000 people last year. That's a whole lotta burnin' and itchin' when you pee!

SYPHILIS

Nice work, Gono.

CHLAMYDIA

800,000? Big deal. You know how many I infected last year? Over a million! That's the most cases ever reported in history! In your face, Gono! WHOOO! Sisterhood is powerful!!

GOGNORRHEA

All right, all right. How about you, Syph?

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CHLAMYDIA

Yeah. How many did you infect?

SYPHILIS

Well, you know, it ain't necessarily about the numbers. So anyway...

(They suspiciously close in on him.)

CHLAMYDIA

Wait. How many?

SYPHILIS

It was about...80,000...

GONORRHEA

80,000?! Hey, I infected over 800,000! That's almost uh...uh...

(He begins counting on his fingers. Chlamydia smacks him.)

CHLAMYDIA

Ten times as many!

GONORRHEA

Yeah! So how come YOU'RE runnin' this outfit anyway? Maybe it should be me!

CHLAMYDIA

Hey genius, did you forget my numbers already? Over a million served! You know how many more times that is than your total?

(Gono starts counting on his fingers again. She smacks him again.)

GONORRHEA

What? I don't have enough fingers!

SYPHILIS

Look, it doesn't matter! If I go untreated, I can cause blindness or brain damage, all right? And babies can catch me from their mothers! And then I can deform or kill THEM too, all right? So there!

GONORRHEA

I still say I should be the boss.

CHLAMYDIA

No, I should!

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SYPHILIS

No way!

(They continue arguing. Gonorrhoea gets Syphilis in a headlock; Chlamydia jumps on his back. They spin around, pulling on each others noses, ears and hair. Finally:)

SYPHILIS

O.K., hold it, hold it! Guys, we shouldn't be fightin' among ourselves; we all do a good job when we work together. Come on; truce?

(They consider for a second and then put their hands together.)

ALL

Truce.

SYPHILIS

O.K., good. Now the real question is: what can we do so these other gangs give us our props? We need a plan to get more people infected. Now how do we do it?

(They pace and think.)

GONORRHEA

Well for one thing, we gotta convince people not to be absorbent.

(beat)

SYPHILIS

WHAT?

GONORRHEA

Absorbent. Wait, is that the right word? No, wait; ab...ab...you know: when they're not doin' it!

(Chlamydia smacks him.)

CHLAMYDIA

Abstinent!

GONORRHEA

Yeah! Ab...abs...what she said.

SYPHILIS

That's true. No sex means no sexually transmitted diseases. That means we have to do everything we can to promote promiscuity. O.K., what else?

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CHLAMYDIA

No check-ups!

SYPHILIS & GONORRHEA

Yeah!

CHLAMYDIA

Used to be, somebody would say, "Hey, I feel fine, I don't need no doctor." 'Cause you know, when I infect people, I'm sneaky. I don't leave no symptoms.

SYPHILIS

You know Clammy, I always loved that about you: you're like the Ninja of STD's.

CHLAMYDIA

Aw, thanks, Syph. And if I'm not treated, I can spread the infection. That means that sometimes when a girl grows up, she can never have a baby!

GONORRHEA

(laughing)

You are so bad!

CHLAMYDIA

Yeah, but now, people are going to their doctors more often to get urine or swab tests. And that lets them know right away that I'm there. And you know what happens next.

ALL

Antibiotics!

CHLAMYDIA

Right. So how am I supposed to do my thing if people keep going to the doctor?

SYPHILIS

Good point. O.K., No abstinence and no check-ups. How about this? Once you're infected, don't tell the ones you been with.

CHLAMYDIA

Good one!

GONORRHEA

Yeah. Let 'em figure out for themselves what that rash or discharge is from.

SYPHILIS

O.K., we're on a roll here. Come on, one more.

GONORRHEA

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I tell you what I hate: condominiums. No, wait...condiments. No, wait...

SYPHILIS & CHLAMYDIA

CONDOMS!

GONORRHEA

Yeah, them.

SYPHILIS

I hate 'em, too.

CHLAMYDIA

Makes my job almost impossible.

GONORRHEA

I've tried to punch my way through them, but it's really hard. It's like they're made out of rubber or something. (beat) Maybe if we carry little knives or razors. Whatdya think?

SYPHILIS

No, Gono. What we have to do is discourage people from using them in the first place. Or make sure that they don't get information about how to put them on the right way.

CHLAMYDIA

Yeah. And make them think that even if they've used condoms before, they never have to use them in the future.

SYPHILIS

Good! Now, for a slogan or something.

CHLAMYDIA

Uh...how about 'CONDOMS ARE FOR LOSERS'!

SYPHILIS

O.K. Or 'NO LOVE IF YOU'RE WEARIN' A GLOVE'!

GONORRHEA

You know, I don't really care if they're wearin' gloves; it's the condoms that bother me.

(Syphilis and Chlamydia stare at him for a moment. Then:)

SYPHILIS

O.K., maybe that's enough plannin' for one day. All right STD's: we need to go out there and get busy! We got serious rivalry now from Genital Warts, Genital Herpes and HIV/AIDS. But I know if we work really hard, we'll be able to infect more people than ever before and reclaim our rep as the baddest gang ever! Are you with me?

ALL

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Yeah!!

SYPHILIS

All right! In that case, I declare this meetin' over. But before we go out into the bloodstreams of people everywhere, let's sing our club anthem.

(He pulls out a pitch pipe and hums a note.)

SYPHILIS

'YOU'VE GOT US UNDER YOUR SKIN...*

GONORREAH

YOU'VE GOT US DEEP IN THE HEART OF YOU

CHLAMYDIA

SO DEEP IN YOUR HEART THAT WE'RE REALLY A PART OF YOU

ALL

YOU'VE GOT US UNDER YOUR SKIN!!!'

SYPHILIS

All right, let's get busy!

ALL

Yeah!!! WHOOO!!!

(They all race out.)

THE END

*words & music by Cole Porter

AUTHOR'S BIO: *Ian Patrick Williams shared the Chicago Emmy award for co-authoring the PBS teleplay BLEACHER BUMS, which was later adapted and produced as a M.O.W. by SHOWTIME. After moving to L.A., he worked for the not-for-profit organization Enrichment Works, writing and directing seven one act plays that toured the LAUSD school systems. His play PROVENANCE was recently produced at Ensemble*

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Studio Theater's One Act Play Festival. His short play NORMAL SHNORMAL won the first place Gold Quill award at the 2017 Tehachapi One Act Festival. His poem LIBERTY SLAM was recently published by Smith & Kraus.