

# *Dash* cLIMBS a R..O..P..E...

By James S tills

**WHY I LIKE IT: Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...**

*I love this play. To start with, there's the versatility of a play that can be performed with several actors or as a one-person show. But that's just an entrée into a world of possibilities in a coming of age play that takes place in the past and the present, adolescence and adulthood all at once. James Still's DASH CLIMBS A ROPE is introduced by Dash (named to be a runner but isn't one), in a first person monologue to the audience that gets us right into his voice and his head. Then other characters come forward giving their spin on the seminal event of the play, when Dash climbs up the rope in gym class, but doesn't climb down. These characters include gym teacher Mr. Smith and Fireman Joe (yes, a FIREMAN!). There's also John Ransom, everyone's junior high school crush and future Homecoming King. While most of the story is told in monologues through the fourth wall, there's a scene of dialogue that's as loaded as a first kiss. This play is such a good read it could easily be in the fiction category. I can't say enough about DASH CLIMBS A ROPE, so I won't. You'll just have to experience it yourself.*

*Here's Dash:*

Wait, again, being completely honest --  
when I say "crazy sex" I don't really know what I mean  
because it's 1973 and I haven't had crazy sex.  
Yet.

DASH (CONT'D)

Or any sex.  
Yet.  
I've just had dreams.

***Five Stars***

**THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS:** *What inspired DASH CLIMBS A ROPE... hmmm. All stories are a gift to the writer (even when you don't know it) but some stories come at you with such force that you can't say no, you simply must put your ear to the ground and let it bloom everywhere in and around you. Since my writing career has been inspired more by curiosity than by ambition or strategy, I said "yes" to this play almost as soon as it announced itself. I had had an unremembered dream about a guy named "Dash" and I let him lead the way into the story that needed to be told. Looking at the play now I'm struck by Dash's confidence as a storyteller so maybe I was writing about the ways that strange and scary experiences can sometimes shape us in positive ways. What could have been a story about shame is instead a story about tenderness and triumph. I remember also immediately sensing Dash's sexual energy and how he ravenously wanted his future even if he wasn't sure what that future might be. And influences? If I get stuck and don't know what comes next I just say to myself "What would Caryl Churchill do?" I've always loved her fearless theatricality and the artistic restlessness that seems to connect all of her plays. The short story writer Alice Munro has taught me about the art of telling complex and moving stories in fewer pages. The fiction writer Louise Erdrich has taught me about point of view and structure. And my own 4 year-old self continues to teach me about determination and playfulness.*

**AUTHOR BIO:** JAMES STILL's plays have been produced throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, South Africa, China and Japan. He is an elected member of both the National Theatre Conference in New York and the College of Fellows of the American Theatre at the Kennedy Center. Four-time Pulitzer nominee, five-time Emmy nominee, the Playwright in Residence at Indiana Repertory Theatre and an Affiliated Artist with American Blues Theater in Chicago. He is proud to call Los Angeles home

where he continues to shelter in place. he/him/his