

Shearwater River

**a play
by
Edward Mast**

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cast:

CHORUS of at least three people
WOMAN
GUARD
BOY

setting:

No realistic settings or water or chain-link fences.

In the first production, large masks and silhouette characters were hand-held and choreographed, with voices coming from separate actors at the side.

Or actors could both speak and move with the chorus members doubling as the other roles.

But surprise me.

SHEARWATER RIVER was first performed by the Underground Theater in Seattle on May 15 2009, directed by Carmel Baird.

CHORUS

The sun moves through the sky
boom boom
The sowbug scrabbles across the ground
tickticktick
Grass where there is grass bends away
low low low
Asphalt heats and crackles and cools
shat shat shat
The sand in its place embraces itself
shh shh
The sand scatters and endures
wish wish
The stars make invisible rain
silent silent
The moon remembers
oh you oh you oh you

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Those seabirds cluster in the heat.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

When will these birds stop pestering us?
Shoo! Shoo!

ONE OF THE CHORUS

They're hovering over that woman.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

She has all her possessions in a bag.
She stares and stares.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Who is she?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Never seen her.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Why would she come here?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Why would anyone come here?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

You. What are you looking for?

WOMAN

What kind of tree is that?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

A redwing tree.

WOMAN

Oh. This is the Redwing Valley then.

Such a long way.

Such a long way along this river.

What is the wind saying?

shooo shoooo

What kind of bird makes that sad cry?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

See for yourself.

WOMAN

I don't see so well.

Too much time in the sun.

What kind of bird?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

A river gull is all.

Get away! Shoo!

WOMAN

Why do you shout?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Nasty creatures. Not from here.

They come from the sea somewhere,
far away.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

They never nest. Just stab the water
and hover looking for garbage to eat.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

More of them every day.

Get away!

WOMAN

They're looking for something.

HEre HEre they say.

I know them now.

You call them gulls,

but where I'm from we called them shearwaters.

Where I was from.

CHORUS

Shearwaters.

WOMAN

HEre
They've come so far inland.
What are they looking for?
When when when they say.
REgret REgret
The river speaks too.
What is the river saying?

CHORUS

We've heard of this crazy woman.
She wanders the river and talks to stones.
She saw too many dead.

WOMAN

Not dead. Not dead. Do not say dead.

GUARD

Move along, woman. This is not your place.

WOMAN

No place is my place. HEre.

GUARD

Move along then. This is off limits.

WOMAN

Have you seen a boy? With a key round his neck?

GUARD

There are many boys here, and girls and women and men.
Move along or show your card to say this is your place.

WOMAN

I don't have a card.
I don't exist.
A dark haired boy. With a key round his neck.

GUARD

Where are you from?

WOMAN

Why do you ask me that?
You'll only say it doesn't exist.
Or that I don't.

GUARD

What's your name?

WOMAN

My name?

I'm punished when I have a name.
I'm sent away or kept under lock.
If I want to keep searching I have to hide
till I hear some sound of hope.
Your metal fence
around this place
wobbling and jangling,
that gives some hope.
There are others without names here.

CHORUS

Others without names here.

GUARD

Everyone is from somewhere.

WOMAN

So long ago.
Sometimes I think I've come back.
I knock on the ground with my foot.
Hello I say.
Hello I say.

CHORUS

Hello I say.
Hello I say.

WOMAN

But it's never my home.

GUARD

This is not your home. Move along.

WOMAN

Have you seen a boy with a key round his neck.

GUARD

Move along.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

We have such a boy.

WOMAN

You're making fun.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

We have a boy who carries a key. Who are you?

WOMAN

You're making fun.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Maybe he'll come. Tell us who he is.

WOMAN

The wind is saying Now Now
The river is saying At laasst At laasst

OTHER

Who is he? Who are you?

WOMAN

I saw him last on the roof of my home.
When the flood came, there was no sky.
Or when there was sky, it killed.

CHORUS

Or when there was sky, it killed.

WOMAN

So many gone already.
There was thunder.

CHORUS

Falling from the sky like thunder,
blasts and detonations from the sky.

WOMAN

We clung to the shingles of our roof.
After days there came a boat, one boat.

CHORUS

One wagon.
One car.
One makeshift sled pulled by a neighbor.

WOMAN

It was almost swamped, so many people.
I begged them, I begged them,
they took my child on board.
I knew I was gone. The boat went away.

CHORUS

So many gone already.

WOMAN

I stayed on the roof more days, more nights,
the house sank, the roof came off,
I floated to dry land somewhere.
I almost didn't get off. They had to pull me.
No word of my son. No one remembered him.
He was put on a truck, I think. I was put on a truck
with others. Many many others.
Many trucks to many places.

CHORUS

Many many others.

WOMAN

Took us to a place. A place like this.
With a metal fence. But I didn't stay.
I had tied a key around his neck
so when I was gone he would have a house
to come back to.
But the flood hasn't gone. I haven't gone.
I have come this way up the side of this river.
I should be dead. But no distance is far.
And the river is always my friend.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Did you search at your house?

WOMAN

No house there. No town there.
The place is gone where he was born. Where I was born.
Every place that knew me is gone.
No record of me. No record of him.
Someone else owns what is under the flood.
Someone else lives in my home. If a home exists.
I'm not allowed to go there.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

We're not allowed to go there.

GUARD

Stop this noise. You. Move along.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Wait.
Let her see the boy with the key.

WOMAN

The wind says Now Now
At lassst says the river
HEre HEre

GUARD

Bring the boy then.

CHORUS

The flood was only water, they say.
The flood that crushed my city.
The flood is an ancient tale, they say,
but now someone else lives in my home.
The flood was sent by the will of god
or fate or atmosphere, they say.
They did not bring the flood, they say.
They call it a flood. They call it a flood.
But the flood left bullet wounds.
And someone else lives in my home.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

Here is the boy. Is this your key?

WOMAN

I think you are tall. Are you tall?
Do you know my face?

BOY

I don't know. Maybe. I don't know.

WOMAN

You were young. You are limping. Are you hurt?

BOY

I was very young when I got this. I don't remember how.
Some were taken to war. Not me, because of this.

WOMAN

Is your hair dark?

BOY

I am mostly outside in the sun. My hair used to be darker.

WOMAN

His skin was pale.

BOY

I have freckles now.

WOMAN

He had a dimple. Just here.

BOY

When my leg was hurt, I got a scar as well. Just here.

WOMAN

Let me look close. Your eyes were
just this color, I think.
Do you remember
anything at all?

BOY

It was long ago.
Your skin.
You held me.

WOMAN

Yes.

BOY

You sang a song.

WOMAN

Who made the tree, Mama, who made the tree?
Ground made tree, so he could see. Ground made the tree.
That?

BOY

I think so.

WOMAN

I sang that song.
That was me.

BOY

That was you.

WOMAN.

Yes.
Yes.
Will you call me mama?

BOY

Mama.

WOMAN

Will you come here and rest your head on me?

CHORUS

Who made the wind, Mama, who made the wind?
Sky made wind, for tree to play in. Sky made the wind.
Who made the sky, Mama, who made the sky?
Bird made sky, so she could fly. Bird made the sky.
Who made the bird, Mama, who made the bird?
Song made bird, so she could be heard. Song made bird.
Who made the song, Mama, who made the song?
We made the song, for the road is long. We made the song.
Who made we, Mama, who made we?
I make you, and you make me. We make we, dear one, we make we.

WOMAN

Thank you.
Thank you.
It's very sweet.
But it's too much for me.
I can't anymore.
You're not him.

BOY

No.

WOMAN

How did you get that key?

BOY

We drove all night and all the next day.
It was raining. We were in the back of a big truck.
With others. Lots of others.
I was sitting next to him.
He was coughing. But they wouldn't stop the truck.
I held him to keep him warm.
He couldn't stop coughing.

He told me you would need this key.
He knew you would come for him.
I promised to keep it for you.
His lungs filled up with fluid and he died.

WOMAN

Drowned.

BOY

I would have told you right away. But your face was so sad.

WOMAN

Where did they take him?

BOY

No one knows.
He was a good friend.
Do you want this back?

WOMAN

It's not mine.
It opens no home.
Somewhere under water is my home.
Now I hear what the water is saying.

CHORUS

Lossst Lossst

WOMAN

So many. So many.
This water here flows down to the sea.
This river has teeth and will eat this land
and carry all down to the sea.
You and you and you and he
will travel with this water
and we will end as we began
in mud
and I will see my little one
again
oh your face
oh your little life
your tiny warm body
under water
under ground
come
end of the world
come
end of the world in mud
come soon
oh my little one we will meet again
but how
how

CHORUS

She cries like a wild river bird.

Her fingers grow stiff and flat.
She sings and stands on one thin leg.
Her neck curves over and long.
Her neck hunches down.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

What is she singing

CHORUS

She sings
whenwhenwhen
She spreads her feathered arms
and her song lifts her
How
How
Words are drowned in her throat.
All she can say is

WOMAN

How
whenwhenwhen
How

CHORUS

She presses the wind
and off she steps into the air
floats away with arms spread wide
stroking against the wind
she hovers above the pulsing river
scooping the air across the surface
and stabbing the water searching searching
with all the rest of the river birds
all the rest
so many
so many
How
How
whenwhenwhen
REgret
REgret
so many lost
whenwhenwhen

ONE OF THE CHORUS

When we go back

ONE OF THE CHORUS

When we go back

CHORUS

When we go back
our homes will still be alive.
The trees will lift their arms and dance.
The blossoms that hid like winter will awake
and fill the air with petals.

Our brothers and sisters will smell the pollen
and their hands will tingle from clapping.
The moon will rise at night
and the sun will shine in the day.
The stones will speak.
The stones will speak.
The rivers will clear their throats of poison
and the water will sing like crystal.

ONE OF THE CHORUS

When will the seabirds return to the sea?

ONE OF THE CHORUS

And the water will sing like crystal.

WOMAN

whenwhenwhen
How

end
shearwater river