A BRIEF ARGUMENT OF TIME

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Kyle Harpole

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SYNOPSIS: What happens when the Past, Present, and Future collide? This self-effacing comic melodrama considers the question: As time moves on, is society progressing or regressing? Were we better off in the past or should we look to the future?

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(3 FEMALES, 1 EITHER)

PAST.................................................................................................. Female.
PRESENT .......................................................................................... Female.
FUTURE............................................................................................ Female.
BYSTANDER........................................................................ Male or female.

SETTING

No set is necessary.

PRODUCTION NOTES

- The character descriptions and set design are left intentionally vague in order to give the director a great deal of freedom.
- The light changes where specified are not absolutely necessary, but will greatly enhance the overall effect of the production.
- The crashing sound in the play is meant to be a “metaphorical collision of time.”
AT RISE:
All three characters are present. They should start as if they were performing three separate monologues, but quickly begin to interact.

FUTURE: A new beginning.
PRESENT: A bitter taste.
PAST: Ancient civilizations would be proud.
PRESENT: But not the modern ones?
FUTURE: No. They're all too old-fashioned.
PAST: How would you know?
FUTURE: You wouldn't understand if I tried to explain it. You're stuck in the past.
PAST: I am the past!
FUTURE: Exactly my point. Your ways are too... primitive to understand how old-fashioned we are.
PAST: So show me.
FUTURE: No! You don't understand. New is now! We must move forward.
PAST: Reverse!
PRESENT: Green means go!
FUTURE: Stop!

ALL stop. A moment.

PAST AND PRESENT: Why now?
FUTURE: We must move forward.
PRESENT: What other way is there to go?
PAST: Backwards, of course.
FUTURE: Forward is the only direction left.

Beat.

FUTURE: I think I need a new look. They'll be expecting something big.
PRESENT: What are you thinking?
FUTURE: Maybe a perm.
PAST: But perm is for permanent! The past cannot be undone!
FUTURE: It’s only hair.
PAST: The decisions we make today can affect what has happened yesterday!
PRESENT: How does that work?
PAST: I would have to show you.
PRESENT: What about tomorrow? Would they affect tomorrow? I’m afraid of tomorrow!
FUTURE: Tomorrow is today.
PAST: Tomorrow is yesterday.
PRESENT: No. Yesterday is yesterday. The damage has been done!
PAST: But you forgot about the validation. I’ve happened for a reason.
FUTURE: I’ll be the judge of that. Besides, we’ve already forgotten about you.

Enter BYSTANDER.

BYSTANDER: Excuse me. I seem to have lost track of time. Could you by any chance remind me what day it is?

Together:
PAST: Yesterday. PRESENT: Today. FUTURE: Tomorrow.

Pause. BYSTANDER exits, frightened.

PRESENT: I think we scared him away . . .
PAST: Why is everyone so afraid of facing the past?
FUTURE: Why is everyone so afraid of facing the future?
PAST AND FUTURE: We’re nice people. We promise!
PRESENT: (Abruptly,) I need a drink.
FUTURE: I’m with you.
PAST: And I as well, Dionysus willing!
PRESENT AND FUTURE: Who’s that?
A Brief Argument of Time by Kyle Harpole
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PAST: Dionysus, also called Bacchus in both Greek and Roman mythology, was the god of wine. He not only represents the intoxicating power of the drink, but also its social benefits. In addition, he was the patron deity of the theatre.

PRESENT: How interesting!

FUTURE: The god of wine is dead!

PRESENT: But the gods work in mysterious ---

FUTURE: Circumstances?

PRESENT: Ways . . .

PAST: What about means?

FUTURE: Your ways have justified them. Don’t you remember? What use are means anyway? Kindness is the future. It will drive this world to become the best it’s ever been!

PRESENT: How soon will that be?

FUTURE: Whenever you two stop being so childish!

PAST AND PRESENT: Us?!? Speak for yourself!

FUTURE: What are you talking about?

PRESENT: You’re not setting a very good example for us.

PAST: We expect you to be the role model.

FUTURE: Me?!? That’s your job!

PAST: No, I’m the one who does everything wrong, and she’s the one who learns from it. You’re the role model.

FUTURE: I’m trying, but you’re not helping me much!

PAST: Me?!? Don’t blame this on me!

FUTURE: Well, you allowed the slaughter of millions of people because of their race, religion, social status, and/or sexual orientation!

PAST: Well, you led to a nuclear holocaust that killed the entire human race!

FUTURE: You got me there.

PRESENT: Whoa whoa whoa! Calm down. Look. Let’s just forget about this whole thing and have a drink together. Like old times.

PAST: Is that a crack about my age?

PRESENT: No, it is not.

FUTURE: Fine. Let’s just find a bar.

They all start to exit.
PAST: Wait. We can’t go.
FUTURE: Why not?
PAST: I forgot my wallet!
FUTURE: History repeats itself.
PAST: Your hair looks atrocious, by the way.
PRESENT: It really does.
FUTURE: (To PAST.) What do you know, anyway? On April 14th, Abraham Lincoln was shot in a theatre, the Bombay docks exploded, the Titanic struck an iceberg, and my mother was born.
   What a glorious past!
PAST: Death keeps things moving.
PRESENT: But what direction?
FUTURE: Forward!
PAST: No! Reverse!
PRESENT: Look out!

A loud crashing sound is heard, preferably the sound of a car crash.

PAST: 911, there’s been an accident. People are hurt.
FUTURE: It hasn’t happened yet. It’s not supposed to happen until tomorrow!
PRESENT: It happened today.
PAST: It happened yesterday! People are dying.
PRESENT: We speak of time like we know it.
PAST: Thyme . . . my favorite spice.
PRESENT: I prefer rosemary.
FUTURE: That’s my sister’s name. She’ll die in two years. It’s a touchy subject.
PAST: So cherish the past, but live for today.
PRESENT: For today? Do you really mean that?

PAST nods.

PRESENT: I have a new respect for the past.
PAST: (Enthusiastically.) Oh, that so great! ... Because you know, there’s really nothing more important than our past. It’s how we maintain knowledge and constantly reassess where we should be going. And just think of how far we’ve come since the 18th century. I mean, we’ve declared independence from an oppressive nation, we’ve ---

PRESENT: ... Okay, I’m bored.

PAST: What about respect?

PRESENT: Nothing lasts forever.

FUTURE: Tomorrow does.

PAST: ... But yesterday will be all that’s left when time stops.

FUTURE AND PRESENT: Time is stopping?

PAST: It might. It tends to happen every so often.

PRESENT: I thought my watch has been slow lately.

FUTURE: It’s about to stop!

PAST: It has already stopped!

Pause. ALL are still.

FUTURE: Can we move yet?

PAST: I wish it were yesterday.

PRESENT: Don’t move!

A moment. PAST and FUTURE move.

PAST AND FUTURE: We refuse to stand still!

FUTURE: I have a hair appointment ... 

PAST: I just got mine done. Do you like it?

FUTURE: Not really.

PRESENT: I deny you the right to move!

PAST and FUTURE freeze.

PRESENT: Wow ... I didn’t expect that to work. I like this. A stasis. Some peace and quiet. I wish things could be like this forever ... without time.
PAST and FUTURE unfreeze.

PAST: I used to think you had everything right!
FUTURE: I always knew you had nothing right!
PAST: What about democracy?
FUTURE: Overrated! At least I’m going somewhere!
PAST: At least I’ve been somewhere!
FUTURE: At least I’m moving forward!
PAST: Oh, is that what you call it!?!?

PAST and FUTURE continue to argue and perhaps physically fight. PRESENT addresses the audience.

PRESENT: . . . But I knew it couldn’t last. This is becoming too much. I find myself longing for something to ease this . . . madness. Like that little blue pill . . .
PAST AND FUTURE: You mean Viagra? But you’re a woman!
PRESENT: No. Cyanide.

A light change, preferably to blue. PAST and FUTURE fixate on the sky.

PAST: The sky was blue yesterday.
FUTURE: And it will be tomorrow.
PAST AND FUTURE: Like cyanide.
PRESENT: (Still addressing the audience.) But nowhere near as bitter as this moment in which I now stand. And all this talk of direction? There is no forward. No reverse. Only down. You would do the same thing, wouldn’t you?

PRESENT reaches for a cyanide pill, bites it, and dies. PAST and FUTURE are staring at the sky. After a moment, they notice PRESENT is dead. They look at each other.

FUTURE: What did you do?
PAST: Don’t blame me!
FUTURE: You! You are responsible for this diplomatic crisis that I will soon have to deal with. I hope that I am as happy leaving the presidency as you used to be when you held it. Blamelessly, I might add, but it all comes back to get you eventually!

PAST: So the truth comes out!

FUTURE: To ensure the future!

PAST: But nothing will be left in the future. I will be all that’s left.

FUTURE: You’ll be forgotten. We’ve done it before, and we’ll do it again! Either way, now is no more!

Pause.

PAST: Should we . . . say something?

FUTURE: I think we should.

Perhaps another light change.

PAST: She was a good woman, but she had no direction.

FUTURE: I’ll never forget her.

PAST: Neither will I. She’ll always be in my memory.

FUTURE: I’m sad. I wish it were tomorrow.

PAST: It will be soon.

FUTURE: And nothing else will be left when today becomes tomorrow.

PAST: And tomorrow becomes no better than yesterday . . .

FUTURE: (Sarcastically.) Like that would ever happen.

Freeze. A moment, then slow fade.

THE END