

Plays for Young Audiences

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

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The Beggar's Strike

Story by
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Adapted for the stage by
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Music by
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The Beggar's Strike was first presented by The Children's Theatre Company for the 2001-2002 season.

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Characters:

Gorgui

Nguirane

Salla

Jala

Sabar

Sara

Jili

Mour (Father)

Chief

Lolli (Mother)

Rabbi (Daughter)

Serigne (Holy One)

Reporter 1

Reporter 2

Talibe

Ensemble includes: Beggars

ACT I, SCENE 1

Lights up on Nguirane Sam, Salla Niang, Gorgui Diop and the Talibe.

GORGUI

It is said that once not long ago in the great town of Sedo, there lived a King who was rich and powerful. For everywhere all over the country Griots came to sing songs of the King's praises, and the people paid him tribute with gold and silver. One day a Griot came to town to sing the King's praises, and the Griot sang this song:

*The dog is great among dogs
Yet he obeys his master
The hunter is great among hunters
Yet he feeds those who are hungry
And the Griot is great among Griots
Yet he sings for the joy of the King*

"What is the meaning of this song?" said the King.

And the Griot said, "Give me a little of your food O' great one, that which you have not eaten, and I will give it to a poor beggar, and then I will tell you the meaning of my song."

"Yes, all right, go on." Said the King.

"But please, oh great King, hold my Kora while I make my offering to this poor beggar," said the Griot

"Surely." Said the great King of Sedo.

The great King took the Griot's Kora, and the Griot took the King's leftover food and gave it to a beggar who was standing by. When the Griot came back to the King, the King said, "Now tell me what is the meaning of your song."

And the Griot answered, "You are the great King of Sedo, no one can contradict you. Your praises are sung throughout the land, yet you have given a wandering beggar food from your own bowl and guarded the instrument of your servant who has come to sing and serve and entertain you. This is because you wish to serve those of us who are not as great as you. How can a king be a king, unless he wishes to serve the people?"

And the Griot and the King said together,

ALL SAY

Amen

GORGUI Here in this West African country of ours we are Muslims.

NGUIRANE We have been Muslims since days long ago before the holy wars of the desert tribes of the Fulani, who crossed the now dried up rivers and brought Islam to this coast.

SALLA And as our ancestors before us, all you see here are beggars of the faith, messengers from humanity to God. We three are the teachers and guardians of the Begging Bowl bearers.

BEGGARS And we are the children who are the Begging Bowl Bearers.

GORGUI What better way for God to hear you than through the uplifted prayers of a child? When you give the children a donation, God receives your prayers.

SALLA It is said that the greatest of mothers is but a slave to her child. The greatest of warriors gives his life so that others may live in peace. A king may be a king among kings, yet to truly be a king he must first serve the people. Charity! It is your charity that will open doors.

JALA Charity that will bring you forgiveness.

SABAR Charity that will bring you good luck and make you prosperous.

SARA Charity that will give you happiness.

JILI Charity will save your soul.

SONG OF THE BEGGING BOWL BEARERS (Sung by Nguirane and the children):

BEGGING BOWL BEARERS ARE WE
 BEGGARS OF THE FAITH
 BEGGING BOWL BEARERS ARE WE
 BEGGARS OF THE FAITH (children)
 TAKING OUR PRAYERS ARE WE
 TAKING OUR PRAYERS ARE WE (children)
 UP TO GOD FROM HUMANITY
 UP TO GOD (children)

Full Ensemble:

BEGGING BOWL BEARERS ARE WE
BEGGARS OF THE FAITH ARE WE
TAKING OUR PRAYERS
UP TO GOD FROM HUMANITY
BEGGING BOWL BEARERS ARE WE
NYUNNYOUE SA-RA HO
PRAYERS IN THE FLESH ARE WE
HEAVEN WON'T YOU HEAR
DEGLULENSUNUNYAM
ACCEPT THESE PRAYERS FROM HUMANITY
NYUNNY OUE SA-RA HO

Spoken: When a giver puts a coin in our bowls. And we say may
god bless you.

THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT GOD DOES
THE BEGGAR, THE GIVER AND GOD
ALL EATING FROM THE SAME BOWL

Spoken: Shame, rage, and frustration Hunger, pain, misfortune
vanish with a donation

THE BEGGAR, THE GIVER AND GOD
THE BEGGAR, THE GIVER AND GOD
ALL EATING FROM THE SAME BOWL
ALL EATING FROM THE SAME BOWL
AN ALM IS A MESSENGER
A PRAYER, A DEVOTION, A WISH
Carried UP TO HEAVEN
IN THE DOWNCAST EYES
OF A BEGGAR
BEGGING BOWL BEARERS ARE WE
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
PRAYERS IN THE FLESH ARE WE
YONEN TE BE, YONEN TE BE
HEAVEN WON'T YOU HEAR
ACCEPT THESE PRAYERS FROM HUMANITY
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
YONENTE BE, YONENTE BE

Spoken: God eats from the begging bowl. The giver and the beggar too. The begging bowl is the world.

THE BEGGAR, THE GIVER AND GOD (adults)
THE BEGGAR, THE GIVER AND GOD (children)
ALL EATING FROM THE SAME BOWL (adults)
ALL EATING FROM THE SAME BOWL (children)

children:

NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM

adults and children:

NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM

adults:

BEGGING BOWL BEARERS ARE WE
PRAYERS IN THE FLESH ARE WE
HEAVEN WON'T YOU HEAR
ACCEPT THESE PRAYERS FROM HUMANITY

children:(while adults sing the previous chorus)

NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM
NYUN NY OUE SA-RA HO
DE GLU LEN SU NU NYAM

Full Ensemble:
BEGGING BOWL BEARERS ARE WE

Blackout.

ACT I, SCENE 2

THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND PUBLIC SAFETY

MOUR We must get rid of these beggars. The situation is getting worse and worse every day. These beggars, they are everywhere. Attacking people without provocation. You have to fight your way just to get by them. Coming out of a bank, or a shop, or even to get to work in your own office. They are a nuisance. A human pollution problem.

CHIEF A human pollution problem sir?

MOUR Yes, a human pollution problem. That's what they are. They're unclean.

CHIEF Yes mister Minister.

MOUR This is the Department of Health and Public Safety. But are we in health? Are we safe?

CHEF No mister Minister.

MOUR The President has made it clear that he wants the streets and the roads cleared of them. And who does the weight of these responsibilities fall on?

CHEF On you mister Minister?

MOUR They fall on me, minister of this department. And I thought I told you to do something about these beggars.

CHIEF Yes, mister Minister, but we have. We've tried. We have raids every week. We round them up, put them in police vehicles and take them out of town. Sometimes as much as a hundred miles away we

drop them off, and somehow the next day they are right there in the same place where we arrested them the day before. It's beyond me sir. I don't understand it.

MOUR Beyond you? Beyond you! You are the Chief of Police, nothing is supposed to be beyond. Chief, this thing is important man. The Department's reputation is at stake. The President is watching us. Do you want us to look as if we were ineffectual, incompetent, inept?

CHIEF How do you mean mister Minister?

MOUR I mean do you want us to look like fools? Like bunglers who can't do their jobs?

CHIEF No mister Minister.

MOUR Don't you realize that the prestige of the country itself is in danger. The prestige and well being of our health and national economy is in the hands of these beggars. This year the number of tourists has fallen off.. . quite dramatically. Foreign investment is.. . is.. .very low. And property values.. . property values are.. . they are down to the bottom. And these beggars are the cause of it. We must get them out of the city.

CHIEF Yes mister Minister. We will set up a more effective plan. Not just weekly raids, but daily ones. Continuous rounds. That's the thing. And we'll keep a record of their identities. Everyone must have an identity card.

MOUR Whatever you do, just do a good job like I told you to do. As I said before, the President is watching us. This could be a step up for the both of us. Salary increases, promotions, vacations to France. Who knows? We must get rid of these beggars.

The phone rings.

MOUR Hello. Who is this? . . .Who? . . .Oh, yes sir. Yes sir. (*To the CHIEF*) It's the President. (*Back on the phone.*) So good of you to call.. . No, not at all, you were not disturbing me a bit. Of course I'm quite

busy, but I always have time for you mister President. (*To the CHIEF*) I have to talk to the President. Now, go and get your men to their posts. Keep those beggars running. I want the streets and cleaned up and rid of them. (*Exit Chief.*) No mister President, I was just chastising one of my workers. You know how they are. . . .I'm working on that right at this very moment mister President. I've developed a new plan of campaign, which will go into effect immediately. Daily raids, continuous rounds. That's the thing. We will not fail mister President. This human pollution problem will be cleared from our streets before you know it. . . . Oh yes mister President, the streets will be clear of the beggars long before the elections. . . .You want them gone in three days? . . . Yes, I know how much this means to you mister President. . . .You have my word mister President. . . . Oh, mister President. . . .Yes mister President. . . .Thank you mister President. . . . Good-bye mister President.

Mour hangs up and dials another number. The phone rings and lights up on Lolli.

LOLLI Hello?

MOUR Hello. Lolli?

LOLLI Who is this?

MOUR This is Mour.

LOLLI Mour?

MOUR Yes Mour. Your husband Mour Ndiaye, who else would I be?

LOLLI Mour? I didn't recognize your voice. You don't sound like yourself.

MOUR That's because I'm not myself today Lolli. And do you know why?

LOLLI No Mour, why are you not yourself today?

MOUR Because I've just spoken with the President.

LOLLI1 The President? The President of what?

MOUR The President of the country, woman.

LOLLI The President, he spoke to you?

MOUR Yes, he called me today. Just now. He called me himself. Called me personally.

LOLLI What did he say Mour?

MOUR He wants me to clear up this problem with the beggars.

LOLLI I hope you put the Chief to work on it.

MOUR Yes, I've got the Chief working on it.

LOLLI The Chief is a very capable man.

MOUR Never mind the Chief, I've just spoken with the President. And do you know what Lolli?

LOLLI What Mour?

MOUR I think he likes me.

LOLLI The President, he likes you?

MOUR Yes, he likes me. I think so. I could tell by his voice.

LOLLI This is wonderful Mour. And do you know that the elections are coming up soon?

MOUR Yes, I know. And soon he will be selecting a new Vice-President. Oh, I pray to God if that could be me. Listen Lolli. I want you to pack up the car. Bring rice, a box of dried milk, soap bars, sugar, tea, and whatever else you can find. I'm going to Keur Gallo to see the holy man. I'm going to make an offering and ask the Serigne to pray for us. To pray that the President will like me.

LOLLI You are going to ask the Serigne to pray for the President to like you?

MOUR Yes Lolli. Why not? That is what prayers are for. We pray for good health, we pray for prosperity. Now I am getting specific. I pray for the President to like me.

SONG: MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME

MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT
DON'T MAKE HIM HESITANT

MAKE THE PRESIDENT THINK OF ME
WHEN ATTENDING HEADS OF STATE
LET ME COME INTO HIS MIND
SIGNING BILLS HE ADVOCATES
PUT ME IN HIS PRECIOUS THOUGHTS
AS HE FLUTES A STUNNING SPEECH
LET ME BE IN HIS REVERIE
RUNNING BAREFOOT ON THE BEACH

MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT
DON'T MAKE HIM HESITANT

PUT ME IN HIS FANTASY
AS HE 'S Golfing 'ROUND THE COURSE
LET IT BE HE IMAGINES ME
WHEN WARMING DOWN HIS PORSHCE '
PUT ME IN HIS CONTEMPLATIONS
MUSINGS, DAY DREAMS, RUMINATIONS
MAKE HIM SHOUT E VER Y HOUR
WHERE IS MY FRIEND MOUR

MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT

DON'T MAKE HIM HESITANT

MAKE THE PRESIDENTLIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME
MAKE THE PRESIDENT
DON'T MAKE HIM HESITANT

MAKE THE PRESIDENT LIKE ME

Cross Fade.

ACT I, SCENE 3

Lolli hangs up the phone. Rabbi enters.

RABBI Who was that Mama? Was it Papa?

LOLLI Yes Rabbi, it was your father.

RABBI Is he coming home soon?

LOLLI Yes he is coming home soon, but soon he must go away again.

RABBI Where Mama?

LOLLI As soon as he gets home he has to go to Kew Gallo to see the Serigne.

RABBI No Mama, he is not going to see that Marabout again?

LOLLI He is not just a Marabout, he is Serigne, a high holy man.

RABBI Papa is always so busy. And when he has time he is always going all the way to Keur Gallo to see the Serigne. We never see him anymore Mama.

LOLLI This is the price we have to pay to live a good life Rabbi. Prayers and hard work are our only hope. Now come, help me gather the gifts your father will give to the Serigne for our prayers.

RABBI Why can't Papa pray at home? Why does he have to go to see the Serigne?

LOLLI Because we all need help with our prayers Rabbi. The Serigne is a messenger to God.

RABBI If he is God's messenger, then why do we have to give him gifts?

LOLLI Because we must give if we are to receive. Your father is going to ask the Serigne to pray for us. To pray that he gets a higher position in government. To assure our future.

RABBI But Mama, how can some old man in rags assure our future?

LOLLI There are lots of things you don't understand Rabbi. You're educated, but you're not wise. The Serigne has never failed us. He has never been wrong. Don't you understand? The Marabouts are part of our religion. Why won't you believe in them?

RABBI What I believe Mama, is that it is not the prayers of the Serigne that makes our lives happy. It's Papa.

LOLLI You do love your father, don't you Rabbi?

RABBI Yes Mama, I do.

LOLLI So do I Rabbi, but your father is not perfect. He is not God. He is just a man.

RABBI Papa is more perfect to me than the Serigne or any Marabout could ever be.

RABBI'S SONG:

PAPA IS IN CHARGE
PAPA IS THE BOSS
EVERYBODY LISTENS TO MY PAPA

PAPA GIVES THE ORDERS
PAPA CRACKS THE WHIP

EVERYONE OBEYS MY PAPA

HE IS HANDSOME
HE HAS CHARM
HE'S GOT MUSCLES IN HIS ARMS
HE'S THE BEST
THERE'S NOTHING YET
LIKE MY PAPA

HE IS TALL
HE IS STRONG
AND HIS VOICE IS LIKE A SONG
HE'S THE BEST
THERE 'S NOTHING YET
LIKE ME PAPA

FOR WHERE EVER HE IS KNOW
HE BELONGS TO US ALONE
THERE'S ME AND YOU, MY MAMA
AND MY PAPA
MY PAPA

MOUR *(off stage)* Hello!

LOLLI Mour !

RABBI Papa!

Enter Mour and the Chief.

MOUR Lolli, you know the Chef?

LOLLI Yes I do. Hello Chief.

RABBI Hello Papa.

CHIEF Good day Misses Ndiaye.

RABBI Hello Papa.

MOUR And my daughter Rabbi.

CHIEF Yes, I know Miss Rabbi. Hello Rabbi.

RABBI Hi Chief.

MOUR The Chef is driving me to Keur Gallo.

RABBI Papa.

LOLLI What are you thinking Mour? Keur Gallo is a whole day away, another day praying with Serigne, and paying your respects, and then another day for you to come home.

RABBI Papa.

LOLLI Three days in the city without the Chef of Police. How are you going to get rid of the beggars without the Chief to chase them away?

MOUR But Lolli, it is a long and lonely journey to Keur Gallo.

RABBI Papa.

LOLLI Listen to me Mour. The elections are nearly two weeks away. We haven't much time. How is the President going to like you, if you don't clear out the beggars as he told you to do. Leave the Chief here to do his business. You must go to Keur Gallo alone.

RABBI Papa!

MOUR What is it Rabbi?

RABBI You haven't said hello to me Papa.

MOUR Oh, hello my Rabbi. You see how smart your mother is Rabbi? How wise. When you grow up to be a young woman, you should be so wise as your mother. Now, do you hear my wife Chief, when I get back from Keur Gallo I want the beggars gone.

CHIEF Yes mister Minister.

MOUR Is this the box of gifts for the Serigne?

LOLLI Yes Mour.

MOUR Put these in the car Chief.

CHIEF Yes mister Minister.

Balancing the bags on his hear, the Chief exits.

LOLLI I will just go and gather the rest of the gifts for the Serigne, and leave you to have a moment with your daughter now Mour. (*Exit Lolli.*)

MOUR So, how are your studies coming along Rabbi?

RABBI My studies are going well Papa. Today I got an "A" in penmanship.

MOUR An "A"?

RABBI Do you want to see?

MOUR Yes, of course Rabbi. Show me. ... This is very good Rabbi. You know, it is said that a person's handwriting is a picture of their heart's beating. That their written words are a window to their soul. And your handwriting speaks so beautifully of you Rabbi. You make your Papa proud.

RABBI Thank you Papa. . . .Papa?

MOUR Yes Rabbi?

RABBI Why do you have to go to see the Serigne now? We haven't seen you since yesterday.

MOUR Your Papa is very busy Rabbi.

RABBI Can't you go and see the Serigne tomorrow or some other day?

MOUR No Rabbi, I must go and see the Serigne now.

RABBI But why Papa?

MOUR You wouldn't understand Rabbi. I just have to go. But I'll be back in three days time, I promise.

RABBI Do you know what is happening in three days Papa?

MOUR Three days from now, when I get back from Keur Gallo, all the beggars will be off the streets.

RABBI No Papa, three days from now will be Mama's birthday.

MOUR Your mother's birthday?

RABBI You see, you forgot. And now that you are going all the way to Keur Gall to see that Serigne, you won't have time to get her a gift.

MOUR Oh no, I did forget. What will I do? There's no time. I know. I'll have something delivered. You must help me Rabbi.

RABBI No Papa.

MOUR No? Why no?

RABBI Because Mama will know. You can't fool her Papa. She will know that the gift was not from you.

MOUR You're probably right. Well, at least write me a note Rabbi, in your beautiful handwriting, to go with the present. Here's pen. Here's paper. Official department stationary.

RABBI What shall I write Papa?

MOUR "To be delivered with the utmost care to Misses Lolli Ndiaye, from her loving husband Mour."

Rabbi writes the now. Enter Lolli balancing a large box on her head.

LOLLI Ready Mour?

MOUR *(He quickly stuffs the note in his pocket.)* Ready Lolli.

Lolli gives the box to Mour, who cradles it in his arms.

LOLLI Say good-bye to your father Rabbi. He has to go. It's a long way to Keur Gallo.

RABBI Good-bye Papa.

MOUR Three days Rabbi.

RABBI Three days Papa. *(Exit Mour.)*

PAPA'S IN CHARGE REPRISE

(Not sung only instrumental)

PAPA IS IN CHARGE

PAPA IS THE BOSS

EVERYBODY LISTENS TO MY PAPA

(Sung)

PAPA GIVES THE ORDERS

PAPA CRACKS THE KHIP

EVERYONE OBEYS MY PAPA

FOR WHERE EVER HE IS KNOWN

HE BELONGS TO US ALONE

THERE'S ME AND YOU, MY MAMA

AND MY PAPA

MY PAPA

End of Scene.