

# SEEN AND HEARD

By Dennis Bush

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**SEEN AND HEARD***A Dramatic One Act Play***By Dennis Bush**

**SYNOPSIS:** In a present-day suburban town in the United States and, simultaneously, in Poland in late 1939 and early 1940, *Seen & Heard* tells the stories of two families, and their connection to each other and to an American girl with a special gift. The evocative one-act play explores how lies can be confused with truth and how what we know can determine either the actions we take or the degree to which we will pretend not to know what we know. Compelling characters and powerful imagery take audiences on a journey of harrowing truths that, ultimately, encourages us to be like sparks flying up into the night sky, filled with all the beautiful possibilities of what life can be.

**CAST OF CHARACTERS***(5 females, 5 males)*

KRISTIANA (f) ..... 17; has a special gift. *(35 lines)*

**BALTIC GERMANS:**

VALDIS (m) ..... 21; a poet; Baltic German. *(32 lines)*

MARKUSS (m) ..... 18; virtuous; Baltic German. *(35 lines)*

LAUMA (f) ..... late 30's; mother of Valdis, Markuss and  
Teodors; Baltic German. *(42 lines)*

TEODORS (m) ..... 15; wholesome and happy; Baltic  
German. *(20 lines)*

**POLISH JEWS:**

ALINA (f) ..... mid- to late 30's; mother of Abram,  
Tuviah, Sala and Janusz; Polish Jew.  
*(46 lines)*

ABRAM (m) ..... 20; realistic, caring; Polish Jew.  
*(41 lines)*

TUVIAH (f) ..... 16; struggling with the world she finds  
herself in; Polish Jew. *(34 lines)*

SALA (f) ..... 18; clear-eyed; Polish Jew. *(33 lines)*

JANUSZ (m) ..... 15; hopeful; Polish Jew. *(37 lines)*

**DURATION:** 30 minutes.

**SETTING:** In the homes, hearts and minds of two groups of people in Europe in late 1939, and, for Kristiana, in the present and past.

### **PRODUCTION NOTE**

Props and costumes should be minimal and only what is essential to convey the essence of the piece. Flashlights (with and without red gels) are strongly recommended.

### **DIRECTOR NOTE**

*Seen and Heard* can be presented with a simple set; ideally, with two separate playing spaces. The original production was presented with two separate playing spaces at opposite ends of a Black Box theater. The audience was split in half, with one half facing one performing space and the other facing in the opposite direction. While watching the performing space they were facing, each half of the audience heard the other half of the performance on the opposite space. There are many staging options that would work effectively and directors are encouraged to be creative with their staging.

### **PRODUCTION HISTORY**

*Seen and Heard* had a reading in New York City in October 2015. The play had its premiere production in Phoenix, Arizona, in January 2016. The original cast included Logan Umbanhowar, Anthony Quezada, Elena Conti, Quintin Shepard, Alexis Ghigo, Lilly Shahgheibi, Breanna Weidner, Alexis Zimmerman, Ryan Bernardino and Ben Collison. The production was directed by the playwright. Rachael Bernardino was lighting designer and stage manager.

The playwright offers special thanks to Meggy Lykins, Hailey Araza, Melanie Payne, Nick Petrovich, Kelsey Torstveit, Joe Pascale, Karen Brown, Pam Eckart, Melissa Ganas, Xavier Reminick and Martin W. Scott for their kind assistance and inspiration, during the creation of *Seen and Heard*.

**PRE-SHOW**

**NOTE:** *The following announcement should precede the start of the play, either with a voiceover or printed in the program – or both:*

**ANNOUNCEMENT:** Prior to the Soviet Union taking possession of the Baltic countries, as part of a pact with Germany in 1939, ethnic Germans living in Latvia and Estonia were relocated to areas of Poland that had been annexed by the Nazi government. The resettlement was called, "Back Home Into The Reich." In all, approximately 65,000 Baltic Germans were resettled from Latvia and Estonia, between late 1939 and early 1940. Many of the homes they were assigned to had been owned and inhabited by Polish Jews, just a few months earlier.

**SCENE 1**

**AT RISE:** *Two playing spaces are visible- one with a family of Polish Jews, and one with a family of Baltic Germans. At various times, characters in one group are speaking at the same time as characters in the other group. Ideally, half of the audience faces one space and the other half of the audience faces the other, so that everyone is watching one version of the performance and hearing the other version of it. Having one playing space visible beside or behind the other playing space could also be effective.*

**KRISTIANA, LAUMA, and ALINA:** When you live in a place like that...

**VALDIS and ABRAM:** At a time like that...

**MARKUSS and TUVIAH:** You don't have a lot of options.

**LAUMA, ALINA and SALA:** Options are a luxury. People who have options don't appreciate that – until the options are taken away.

**TEODORS and JANUSZ:** Or the *people* are taken away.

*A beat. KRISTIANA, who exists in the present, moves among the other actors – all in the past – and the playing spaces in a way that the other characters can not.*

**KRISTIANA:** It started with the people in the chair.

**VALDIS and ABRAM:** (*A correction, sharply.*) It started before that.

**MARKUSS and JANUSZ:** Before the people in the chair...

**KRISTIANA, LAUMA and ALINA:** (*Continuing without interruption.*)

Were the people in the chair.

**TEODORS, TUVIAH and SALA:** Before the *chair* was the *chair*.

**KRISTIANA:** As long as I can remember, I could see them. And hear them. They talked to me. Sometimes, for hours at a time. Nobody else could see or hear them. Except Rebekah, my cat. She could see them, but I don't think she could hear them. Or else she just pretended not to hear them. Rebekah was aloof, in that way that most cats are aloof. But when one of the people in the chair was sitting in the chair, Rebekah stayed away. Sometimes, she hissed. She didn't want anything to do with the people or the chair. Which is a shame. She missed out on some interesting conversations. (*Pause, explaining.*) The people in the chair talked to me before I could answer them. (*Quick pause, clarifying.*) I could answer them in my thoughts, but not with words. (*Simply.*) Before I could walk or talk, the people in the chair were my friends.

**MARKUSS:** We didn't know that people were being moved out of their houses so we could move in. We were a long way away, when they were being moved out of their houses and off their land, just like we'd been moved, What we knew was that, if we didn't move, we'd be killed.

**MARKUSS, SALA and JANUSZ:** There was no doubt about that.

**LAUMA and ALINA:** When you live in a place like that, when the people who run the government make a deal with a different bunch of people who take over the government, you know that – even if they say you're going to be safe, you know you're not. You're not safe. And, if you don't leave, you'll be dead. Because they don't care about you or your family or any of the people you know. They care about their own people and their power. And making other people feel afraid and unsafe makes them feel more powerful.

**TEODORSSALA and ABRAM:** So we did what we were told.

**LAUMA and ALINA:** We left.

**VALDIS and ABRAM:** We didn't have a lot of options.

**MARKUSS:** We had *two*. Two options: Move and live, or stay and die.

**TUVIAH and JANUSZ:** That's what they said.

**VALDIS:** And while we were moving to what was going to be our new home, the people who lived there before us were being relocated.

**LAUMA:** Just like us.

**LAUMA and SALA:** That's all we knew. We didn't ask questions.

**MARKUSS and TUVIAH:** We found out later what "relocated" meant.

**MARKUSS:** But it was much later.

**VALDIS:** Long after we'd moved to our new home.

**VALDIS and ABRAM:** Long after we'd done what we told..

**TEODORS and JANUSZ:** They told us we didn't belong where we'd been living.

**LAUMA:** So, packing our things – our *lives* – and moving to a new place was really a homecoming.

**TEODORS and JANUSZ:** That's what they told us.

**ALINA:** People will lie to you in the night, when you can't see their faces very clearly.

**VALDIS:** They said we were coming back to where we belonged.

**ABRAM:** They'll tell you anything, to get you to do what they want without having to drag you out of your home, so your neighbors won't see you and be afraid.

**TUVIAH and SALA:** But they *should be*. They should be afraid.

**MARKUSS and LAUMA:** They said we were coming home.

**ALL:** (*Except KRISTIANA.*) So, we did what we were told.

*Blackout on ALINA, ABRAM, TUVIAH, SALA, and JANUSZ.*

**ALINA:** They turned off our power.

**MARKUSS:** The people who lived in our house, before it was our home, left in a hurry.

**ABRAM:** They kept us in the dark.

**TEODORS:** We figured they were excited to leave.

**JANUSZ:** We looked for flashlights and candles, but it's hard to find things in the dark.

**VALDIS:** Or they were just messy people who didn't care what we thought of the way they left things when they moved away.

*ALINA, ABRAM, SALA, TUVIAH, and JANUSZ hold flashlights under their chins.*

**ALINA, ABRAM, JANUSZ, SALA and TUVIAH:** (*Whisper.*) Help us.

**LAUMA:** They wouldn't be coming back, so what would they care?

**ALINA, ABRAM, JANUSZ, SALA and TUVIAH:** (*Spoken softly.*) Help us.

**VALDIS:** They wouldn't have to look us in the eye knowing that we knew they left their house in a big mess—

**ALINA, ABRAM, JANUSZ, SALA and TUVIAH:** (*Shouted.*) Help us.

**LAUMA:** Like they'd had a big party and didn't clean up afterward.

**ALINA, ABRAM, JANUSZ, SALA and TUVIAH:** (*Even louder.*) Help us.

**MARKUSS:** (*Conspiratorially.*) Things were broken.

**ALINA, ABRAM, JANUSZ, SALA and TUVIAH:** (*Screamed, with desperation.*) Help. Us.

*Flashlights off. ALINA, ABRAM, SALA, TUVIAH and JANUSZ are in darkness.*

**LAUMA:** They left furniture and clothes. Like they thought we were a charity case.

**ALINA:** But your neighbors won't help you – even if they hear you or see you – if they're afraid.

**TEODORS:** They must have been told that we were poor. And we *were*. But not so poor that we needed their furniture and clothes.

**ABRAM:** Your neighbors will pretend they don't know you, if they think it keeps *them* safe.

**MARKUSS:** Most of the chairs were broken. Some were missing legs. A couple had legs but no seat to sit down on. One chair looked like it had been hit with an ax – over and over again – like somebody was trying to chop it up for firewood.

**LAUMA:** And who would do that? What kind of people would do something like that. It's not like they were living in a gypsy camp. They were in a house – a *home* – and they were turning their furniture into firewood. It's barbaric.

**ALINA, ABRAM, JANUSZ, SALA and TUVIAH:** You do what you're told.

**KRSTIANA and ALINA:** When you don't have a choice...

**MARKUSS, LAUMA and VALDIS:** You make the best of your situation.

**ALL:** You do what you're told.

*Lights up, slowly, on ALINA, ABRAM, JANUSZ, TUVIAH and SALA.*

**LAUMA and ALINA:** There was a lot of talk about a labor camp nearby.

**ALINA:** They tore down dozens of houses near an old military barracks, so they could build it.

**LAUMA and ALINA:** (*Clarifying.*) The labor camp. (*Quick pause.*) They said we didn't have to worry. Our house was far enough away from the labor camp that we didn't have to worry. (*Quick pause.*) So we didn't worry. When the government tells you not to worry, you don't worry.

**ALL:** (*Except KRISTIANA.*) So, we didn't worry.

**LAUMA and ALINA:** At least, not at first.

*ALL look up, as if it a sign in front of them.*

There was a sign over the gate at the camp.

**ALL:** (*Except KRISTIANA. Sharply.*) Arbeit Macht Frei. [AR-bite mahkt FRY]

**KRISTIANA:** "Work will set you free." (*A beat. Quietly and slowly, with intensity.*) Work will set you free.

**TEODORS and JANUSZ:** When you're young, it's hard to find work. And when you need to earn money to help your family, and you can't find work you feel like a failure – like you're letting your family down.

**KRISTIANA:** At first, I didn't tell my mom or dad that the people in the chair were talking to me. I guess, I didn't think they'd understand. So, I didn't tell them. I didn't tell *anyone*.

**JANUSZ:** So I thought being taken to the camp would be a good thing. I could work. I could help my family.

**KRISTIANA:** When I was seven, I was at the grocery store with my mom – in the frozen food aisle – and a lady pushing a cart walked past us and there was an old man walking behind her. And he said, “Tell my daughter that I love her. Tell her I’m sorry I left when she wasn’t home, but I love her and I’ll always be with her.” So, I ran over to the lady pushing the cart and told her what the old man said. And she stared at me like she’d never seen a little girl before.

**TEODORS:** You hear things from your friends. From other people you know. From people you see at the market. But you can’t believe everything you hear. You can’t.

**KRISTIANA:** My mom apologized to the lady and said I had a vivid imagination. The old man told me to tell the lady that she was wearing a necklace he gave her for her birthday. It made the lady cry. And she hugged me, when I told her everything else the old man told me to tell her. She cried and she hugged me in the frozen food aisle at the grocery store. And she told my mom that I have a gift – a special gift.

**JANUSZ:** But I was wrong. I was dead wrong.

*A quick beat.*

**KRISTIANA and JANUSZ:** That was a joke. You don’t lose your sense of humor, when you die.

**KRISTIANA:** My mom drove us to the mall. With the ice cream and all the rest of the groceries still in the car. She said we were going to the food court. Even though I wasn’t hungry. She said it didn’t matter. She got me some root beer and we sat at a table in the middle. And she said, “Keep an eye out for dead people.” She said it pretty loud, so the people around us looked at her. And at me.

**TUVIAH, ALINA, SALA, ABRAM and JANUSZ:** They cut my hair. They cut it all off.

**TUVIAH, ALINA and SALA:** So I looked like a boy.

**KRISTIANA:** And I cried. (*A beat.*)

**KRISTIANA:** She slapped me and said, “Stop it. Stop crying.”

**TUVIAH:** (*Simultaneously with KRISTIANA.*) They slapped me and said, “Stop it. Stop crying.”

*A quick beat.*

**TUVIAH:** (*A simple fact.*) A person's hair is a defining characteristic. It's part of you.

**KRISTIANA:** But I wasn't going to pretend to see or hear anyone I didn't really see or hear.

**TUVIAH:** It matters.

**KRISTIANA:** But that didn't matter to my mother.

**TUVIAH:** It does.

**KRISTIANA:** She said, "I don't know how you do it, but you better stop being so difficult, and do it, again."

**ALINA:** They came for us in the middle of the night.

**KRISTIANA:** She said, "I'm not playing around."

**SALA:** After they turned off our power.

**KRISTIANA:** "I'm serious."

**ABRAM:** And slit the tires on our cars and bicycles.

**KRISTIANA:** "So stop being so selfish!"

**ALINA:** We could only bring a small bag of our things with us.

**KRISTIANA:** "Do you hear me?"

**ABRAM:** Everything else was left behind.

**KRISTIANA:** (*Louder, with more intensity.*) "Do you hear me?!"

**SALA:** Or broken. Or stolen by the people who came for us.

**KRISTIANA:** "*Your gift is my gift.*"

**JANUSZ:** And they put us in a room. And little cans dropped through holes in the ceiling. And, then, the holes got covered up, again... And it was hard to breathe... *Impossible* to breathe.

**KRISTIANA:** And she grabbed my hand and dragged me out of the food court and didn't say a word the whole way home. And, then, while we were standing in the driveway, where everybody could see us, she yelled, "You're grounded."

**ABRAM:** After the bodies were dead, I took them to another part of the camp, where they were burned. That was my job. Somebody else shoveled the ashes into a pile, after the bodies got burned. That wasn't a bad job to have. Because they were ashes and not bodies. Because you can look at the ashes and not think of the people who were the bodies, before they were bodies and before they were ashes. And shoveling ashes was easier than moving bodies. *Having* a job was better than *not* having a job. Because, if

you weren't a worker, you were one of the bodies being moved and burned and shoveled. There were other workers who came in and cleaned up in the first room, after the bodies were dead. They whitewashed the walls and used a lot of bleach, so it was fresh and clean for the next people they put in there. (*Explaining.*) So the people would think they were going into someplace clean and fresh and safe, not someplace where they were going to be killed. That way, nobody would scream or throw themselves against the door or the walls or each other. People are much more calm, when they think something nice and normal is going to happen.

**LAUMA:** We heard things. From neighbors. From people you'd see at the market. People will talk about anything. They'll invent stories for their own amusement and make it seem like it's true. People should keep their mouths closed. As a general rule. Especially when what they're saying could get them in a lot of trouble with the police. With the *government*. And I didn't have time to listen to gossip. I didn't. I was busy making our new home comfortable. (*Correcting herself.*) *Livable*. And that wasn't easy. Not the way the previous owners left things. But I wasn't going to complain about that. People complain too much, in general. But you should be especially careful complaining about the government. Because that's who moved you from where you were to where you are, and they could move you someplace else, if they wanted to – if your complaining didn't give them any other choice. So, I kept my mouth closed. As a general rule. (*Proudly.*) I planted a garden!

**ABRAM:** They used the ashes and ground-up bones from the burned bodies to make fertilizer that could be sold to people near the camp. Some of the ashes were used as an ingredient in building materials and a lot got dumped into the rivers in the area. Rivers that ran all through the countryside.

**VALDIS:** I tried to build some furniture, since most of what was left behind was broken, and we weren't able to bring much of our own furniture with us, when we moved. But I'm a poet, not a furniture maker. I don't have any carpentry skills. Nobody wants to hire a poet, especially when they don't know you. I tell them that I moved here because the government told me to move here, and that, where I came from, I was a poet and I worked in a bakery, but no one believes me, because they don't know me. And they don't know me because I moved here from someplace else. And because the government made me move here, they think I'm in trouble with the government or that I'm *spying* on them for the government and they can't trust me. And *I* don't trust *them*, because I don't know them, and because *they* could be spying on *me* for the government. And because they're different from me. *That* most of all. *(A simple fact.)* Nobody trusts anybody who is different from them.

*While KRISTIANA speaks, JANUSZ, ABRAM, ALINA, SALA and TUVIAH cover their flashlights with red gels.*

**KRISTIANA:** My grandmother – my *mother's* mother – died when I was a baby. I didn't really know her, because you can't really know somebody, when you're a baby. But when my grandmother appeared to me, when I was playing with the sparkly things in my mother's jewelry box, I knew it was her. Even before she told me which pieces of jewelry had been hers. My grandmother was born in Canada and married my grandfather, before they moved here. She brought some jewelry and a chair with her, when they moved from Canada. The chair belonged to my great-grandmother, who was born in Latvia but moved to Poland, when it was controlled by Germany. I didn't learn that in school. My grandmother told me. And her mother –my great-grandmother –told *her*.

*They turn on their red-gelled flashlights.*

**TEODORS and JANUSZ:** It takes a spark to start a fire *(Quick pause.)* That's what my mother told me. But there are sparks *after* a fire, too. *(Quick pause.)* Or are they *embers*?

**VALDIS and ABRAM:** After a fire, the embers stay hot for a while. The red glow fades, but the embers are still hot. They can burn you if you touch them.

*They cover their red-gelled flashlight beams with their hands, then, uncover them, like embers fading. Each in his or her own individual rhythm.*

**TEODORS, SALA, TUVIAH, JANUSZ, ABRAM and ALINA:** *(As if enraptured by a dream.)* The fire crackles. It actually makes a cracking sound, like when a whip gets cracked.

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