

the beginning of

THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PRIMORDIAL OOZE

a short comedy by Rich Orloff

(from **SMALL WONDERS**)

Place: A swamp.

Time: Millions and millions of years ago, late afternoon.

Characters: BARRY, a male primordial creature, newly amphibious
MARJORIE, a female primordial creature, at home in the water

As the play begins, BARRY swims to the edge and surfaces. He looks around him to make sure he's alone. When he's confident he's alone, he inhales and then exhales. This is a new experience for him, and when he finishes, he shuts his mouth and absorbs the significance of what just happened – as much as a primordial creature can. He inhales and exhales again. With sudden confidence, he inhales and exhales with the grandiosity of an opera singer performing an aria. When he finishes, he raises his hands in triumph.

He looks at his hands. Until now, they've been cupped. He looks around again and, when he's sure he's alone, he opens them. Fingers! He wiggles them. Perhaps he wiggles them to each side, as if dancing.

From afar, MARJORIE calls out:

MARJORIE

Barry!

Barry quickly submerges. Marjorie swims around looking for him.

MARJORIE (cont'd)

Barry... Barry... I see you down there.

Barry surfaces. He hides his fingers.

BARRY

Hi, Marjorie.

MARJORIE

Where have you been?

BARRY

Around.

MARJORIE

Everybody in the swamp is asking about you.

BARRY

I-you know, I just needed some time alone.

MARJORIE

You're not spawning by yourself again, are you?

BARRY

That was a rumor!

MARJORIE

Well, you do spend a lot of time by yourself.

BARRY

I was thinking.

MARJORIE

We're primordial creatures with brains the size of peas. What's there to think about?

BARRY

You'd be surprised.

MARJORIE

Were you thinking about me?

BARRY

No.

MARJORIE

You think too much.

BARRY

Marjorie, can I trust you?

MARJORIE

Cross my heart and swear to be eaten.

Barry slowly lifts his hands and displays his fingers. Marjorie gasps.

MARJORIE (cont'd)

What happened to your fins?!

BARRY

I don't know.

MARJORIE

Did they get ripped on some coral?

BARRY

No, they –

MARJORIE

Did you get into another fight with a swordfish?

BARRY

They – they've been like this for years.

MARJORIE

I never –

BARRY

I've covered them with prosthetic fins.

MARJORIE

You mean, all those times we swam by the lily pads at sunset, and you put your fin around me, it was covering *those*.

BARRY

Yeah.

MARJORIE

Oh, Barry, you poor, poor – You know, I know a sturgeon who could sew them up.

BARRY

I don't want them sewn up.

MARJORIE

Don't you want them fixed?

BARRY

I used to, but now I think it's, it's...
(with pride:)
evolution.

MARJORIE

You definitely think too much.

BARRY

Look what they can do.

Barry wiggles his fingers.

MARJORIE

Well, that should help you pick up babes at the sand bar.

BARRY

They're very versatile.

He pokes himself in the eye.

BARRY (cont'd)

Ouch!

MARJORIE

I think you should get them fixed.

BARRY

I call them "fin-gers".

MARJORIE

Why?

BARRY

Because they're part "fin" and part –
(turns them into claws:)
grrrrrrr. With these things, I can grab,
I can hunt. All sorts of animals and
vegetables will become fin-grrr food.
I am *so* powerful.

MARJORIE

You need help.

BARRY

Jealous.

MARJORIE

Shredded fin freak.

BARRY

I am not!

MARJORIE

Nobody in *my* family has fin-gers. Nobody
else in *your* family has fin-gers. Nobody I know
has fin-gers. Nobody I know *wants* fin-gers.

BARRY

I'll be able to do great things with these!

MARJORIE

Like what?

BARRY

I'll be able to crawl!

MARJORIE

So can a crayfish – big deal!

BARRY

On land!

MARJORIE

Great, and every few minutes you'll have to crawl back to the swamp to get some oxygen –

BARRY

Nope.

MARJORIE

You planning on carrying a flask?

BARRY

I can breathe – air.

Barry inhales and exhales deeply.

BARRY (cont'd)

Impressive, huh?

Marjorie doesn't reply. In fact, she seems a bit sad.

BARRY (cont'd)

Marjorie?

MARJORIE

You always have to be different.

BARRY

I didn't ask to be this way. I think it's part of some grand design.

MARJORIE

Oh, sure. The creatures who've evolved are always telling the creatures who haven't evolved that *they're* part of some grand design.

BARRY

Well, maybe it's true.

MARJORIE

You know, I could stick some bamboo shoots on my fins and pretend I have fingers –

BARRY

– Go right ah–

MARJORIE

– but I won't, and do you know why?

BARRY

Why?

MARJORIE

Because they're stupid!

BARRY

They're not –

MARJORIE

They're no good for swimming.

BARRY

I can move through water just
as good as you can.

MARJORIE

Oh, sure. As long as you can stop every
five feet to poke yourself in the eye.

BARRY

Race you across the swamp.

MARJORIE

You're on.

BARRY

On your mark, get set, go.

They race. She's fast and direct. He zigzags and stops
in the middle of the water.

BARRY (cont'd)

How are you supposed to steer
with these stupid things?!!!