

Abel C. Mann, Processed Offshore

a short play

by Trevar Alan Chilver

CHARACTERS

NARRATOR ONE	preferably female
NARRATOR TWO	preferably female
ABEL C. MANN	an actor, male
ORGANISER	} these characters can be played by the same actor, male
COASTGUARD	

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ABEL stands CS, neutral position wearing boxers and a singlet, as NARRATOR ONE and NARRATOR TWO enter with their Box of Props.

ONE

Once upon a time there was an actor.

TWO

An accomplished actor.

ONE

Not terribly accomplished,

TWO

but he was getting noticed.

ONE

His name,

TWO

in case you don't recognise him...

ONE

As if they wouldn't!

TWO

It's been a while.

ONE

His name was

ONE & TWO

Abel Charles Mann.

TWO

Or Abel C. Mann, as he likes to be called.

ONE

Well, liked to be called.

TWO

Back in the day.

ONE

Before the...

ONE & TWO

incident!

Pause.

ONE

It was a hot, humid summer.

TWO hands ABEL a frilly, girly fan.

TWO

There were bushfires raging in the south,

ONE

floods in the north.

TWO

And in the oldest,

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ONE

and grandest

TWO

city in the land,

ONE

the people were preparing to celebrate

ONE & TWO

a national holiday!

TWO

A celebration of the day the land was colonised

ONE

by a powerful nation

TWO

with lots of boats

ONE

on the other side of the planet.

ONE relieves ABEL of the fan.

TWO

The other side of the world!

ONE

The event organiser came looking.

The ORGANISER enters and examines ABEL, inspecting him from head to toe, and comparing him to an image of Captain Arthur Phillip.

TWO

He was searching for just the right person.

ONE

The right performer.

TWO

To play

ONE

the gallant sea captain!

TWO

The captain who led the fleet!

ONE

The fleet of foreigners

TWO

who colonised

ONE

the great southern land!

TWO

It was very exciting.

ONE

The whole city could barely wait for the big day!

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TWO

And what do you know? The organiser

ONE

chose Abel!

The ORGANISER shakes ABEL's hand. ABEL grins wildly. The NARRATORS begin to dress him up as Captain Arthur Phillip.

TWO

Abel was very excited.

ONE

As were we all!

TWO

It was a great honour.

ONE

It was an opportunity!

TWO

To show what he could do.

ONE

To put his face out there.

TWO

To become known in the industry.

ONE

To honour his country.

TWO

His nation.

ONE

His land.

ABEL is dressed as Captain Arthur Phillip. NARRATORS present him to the audience and put a Union Flag in his hand.

TWO

His role was simple.

ONE

He was to get in a boat,

TWO

a tall ship.

ONE

A very tall ship.

TWO

And he would land,

ONE

Just like that captain of so long ago.

TWO

And claim the land,

ONE

just like that brave captain did, centuries before.

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TWO

Abel was overjoyed.

ONE

He would do his country proud!

TWO

The big day came around.

ONE

There were fires in the north,

TWO

And floods in the south.

ONE puts a paper bag over ABEL's mouth, he breathes into it.

ONE

Abel was nervous.

TWO

You'll be fine!

ONE

But the sun rose over the site,

TWO

the landing place

ONE

where a new nation

TWO

was born.

ONE

A nation of migrants.

TWO

Of travellers.

ONE

Of interlopers.

TWO

Now, that's not very inspiring.

ONE

Well that's what they were.

ONE takes a sausage in a piece of bread from the Box of Props and hands it to ABEL.

TWO

The atmosphere was incredible!

ONE

There were flags and banners everywhere.

TWO

There were sausages to sizzle.

ONE

There were singers, and dancers.

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TWO

Indigenous dancers.

ONE

Indigenous artists.

TWO

Indigenous foods.

ONE

Oh, don't be ridiculous! As if anyone would...

ONE sets up a mast with a sail from the Box of Props behind ABEL.

TWO

And there was a tall ship in the harbour!

ONE

A tall ship in the bay.

TWO

A tall ship with its sails gleaming in the sunshine.

ONE

A tall ship with a brilliant actor on board;

ONE & TWO

Abel C. Mann!

TWO

The national hero!

ONE

The national icon!

TWO

The national star!

ONE

The people went wild!

ONE relieves ABEL of the sausage.

TWO

Well, as wild as you can while eating a sausage and watching indigenous dancers.

ONE

Abel raised his hand and waved to the crowds on shore,

TWO

while everyone on shore waved their sausages back at him.

ONE

Then, he climbed into the dinghy.

ABEL turns his back to the audience and mimes climbing down a rope ladder.

TWO

Not very gracefully.

ONE

Well there's no graceful way

TWO

to get out of a tall ship and into a dinghy.

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ONE hands ABEL an oar.

ONE

He rowed the dinghy

TWO

capably,

ONE

admirably.

TWO

He'd been practising for this day

ONE

on his swimming pool

TWO

in his back yard,

ONE

so he was a fine rower.

TWO

An able seaman.

Pause. TWO winks at the audience for laughs. ABEL attempts to hit TWO, but ONE relieves him of the oar.

ONE

But as he approached the shore...

TWO

Disaster!

ONE

Horror!

TWO

Woe!

ONE

A Coastguard,

COASTGUARD enters, wearing a pair of Abbottesque budgie smugglers.

TWO

of the new Coast Patrol,

ONE

in the new Coastal Observation Unit,

TWO

under the new CoastWatch Authority

ONE

in the old Coastal Protection Directorate

TWO

of the Department of Coastal Protection, Onshore Security and Nice Little Shells,

ONE

which was overseen by the Minister for Homeland Security, National Defence and Budgie Smuggling,

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TWO
arrived.

Pause.

ONE

And

TWO
he

ONE
wasn't

TWO
very

ONE
happy,

TWO
Jan.

ONE
He wasn't very happy at all.

GUARD
Excuse me sir, I'm going to have to ask you to stay on that dinghy, sir.

TWO
Abel didn't know what to do.

ONE
They always say,

TWO
"the show must go on,"

ONE
But it hadn't occurred to him,

TWO
that he might be breaking the law.

ONE
The new law.

TWO
About the boats.

ONE
About stopping the boats.

TWO
He was a citizen, after all.

GUARD
Do you have your passport, sir?

ABEL looks for his passport, one at a time removing all his costume pieces and handing them along with his Union Flag to the guard to search the pockets, leaving him in his singlet and boxers again.

ONE
He didn't.

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TWO

He didn't think he'd need it.

ONE

He didn't think it mattered if you were already in the country.

TWO

He didn't think it mattered if you were a citizen!

ONE

You see there'd been a change in the laws.

TWO

The prime leader;

ONE

the lead minister;

TWO

the elected official;

ONE

the one we all call

TWO

the 'Right Honourable' MP PM

ONE

had introduced a bill

TWO

that was passed in the green room;

ONE

passed in the red room;

TWO

passed to the postmaster,

ONE

who passed it all the way

TWO

across the sea

ONE

to the other side of the world

TWO

to gain the assent of the monarch;

ONE

the queen;

TWO

the lady of the house of Buck.

ONE

So it was passed into law

TWO

just the day before

ONE

and it said

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The GUARD has put ABEL's costume back into the Box of Props and hands ABEL his oar again.

GUARD

We are going to stop the boats.

TWO

and

GUARD

We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.

A beat.

ONE

And that was that.

TWO

There was no getting around it.

ONE

The law,

TWO

the new law,

ONE

was quite clear:

GUARD

The government's decided that the circumstances will be by aeroplanes, and not by boats, so you can't come back into the country, sir.

TWO

But he was a citizen!

ONE

A national hero!

TWO

A national icon!

ONE

Not that it mattered.

TWO

Only aeroplanes,

ONE

never boats.

TWO

Boats are bad.

ONE

Planes are good.

TWO

And so, as fires raged in the south,

ONE

and swollen rivers flooded the north,

TWO

poor Mister Mann

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ONE

poor Abel

TWO

the wonderful actor;

ONE

the national hero;

TWO

serving his country;

ONE

serving his queen

TWO

had to be sent for offshore processing.

ABEL begins to row away from the NARRATORS and the GUARD, who pause to watch him leave.

ONE

On a foreign shore.

TWO

Which, of course, wasn't offshore at all.

ONE

Well, it was off this shore.

TWO

Though not very far.

ONE

But still,

TWO

But still, far enough to be forgotten.

ABEL has stopped rowing. GUARD leaves.

ONE

And a long way to swim

TWO

from that shore called 'off'

ONE

to this shore called 'on'

TWO

for Abel C. Mann,

ONE

the wonderful actor,

TWO

loyal to his country,

ONE

though it rejected him

TWO

for travelling to his country

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ONE & TWO

in a boat, and not a plane.

Pause.

TWO

How silly.

ONE

Foolish.

TWO

Incomprehensible!

ONE

Such a shame!

TWO

A loss to theatre!

ONE

A loss to the nation!

TWO

Such a tragic waste of potential!

TWO relieves ABEL of the oar.

ONE

There's a moral to this story;

TWO

a lesson we all must learn;

ONE

something to take home

TWO

and never forget:

ONE & TWO

acting is a mug's game.

Lights snap out.

Finis.