

Pinocchio in The Bronx

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By Rom Watson

A fable for adults

Loosely based on  
The Adventures of Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi

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Cast:

PINOCCHIO, male, early 20's-early 40's  
GEPETTO, male, late 60's-early 70's  
TV ANNOUNCER, voice over  
CRICKET, male, age open  
LAMP-WICK, male, a child played by an adult  
FOXWORTH, magician, male, age open  
CATHERINE, magician's assistant, female, age open  
ALIDORO, undercover cop, male, age open  
THE BLUE ANGEL, female, age open  
FEMALE BLUE WHALE, voice over  
TRIXIE, female, age open

A minimum of 5 actors are required.

CATHERINE, THE BLUE ANGEL and TRIXIE may all be played by the same actress, who can also provide the FEMALE BLUE WHALE voice-over. CRICKET, LAMP-WICK and ALIDORO may be played by the same actor, who can also provide the TV ANNOUNCER voice-over.

The character of PINOCCHIO is not to be played by a female. An adult male provides the voice of the puppet and plays the character after his transformation.

The location: The Bronx and surrounding environs.

The time: The present.

There is no intermission.

(Bronx Park. Late afternoon. GEPETTO, who looks to be in his 60's or 70's, sits under a PINE TREE. As the audience enters the theatre, they see GEPETTO carving the likeness of a man from a piece of wood. The house lights fade and the play begins. GEPETTO yawns and lies down to nap. A dog enters, played either by a puppet or by an actor in a dog costume. DOG sniffs at Gepetto, then turns its attention to the tree.)

PINE TREE

Oh no.

(The PINE TREE is voiced by the actor who will voice Pinocchio. DOG sniffs the tree.)

PINE TREE

Go away! Shoo!

(DOG raises a hind leg and urinates on the tree.)

PINE TREE

Ohhh; not again.

(DOG finishes and exits.)

PINE TREE

There's gotta be more to life than being peed on.

(Pause. Lights change to indicate evening.)

Psst. Hey. Old man. Wake up.

(Pause. Yells:)

Wake up!

(GEPETTO opens his eyes.)

You. Old man. Behind you. That's right, a talking tree. Deal with it.

GEPETTO

What the . . .?

PINE TREE

I saw you carving. I watched you before you fell asleep. I need your help.

GEPETTO

Me?

PINE TREE

You may be the only person who can help me.

(Blackout. When the lights rise, we are in Geppetto's workshop. It used to be the dining room of his home, but now it contains a workbench, table saws, a wood-burning stove, etc. Adjoining the workshop is Geppetto's living room, which includes a couch. GEPETTO sits at his workbench. HE uses a block plane to smooth a section of tree trunk from which he has removed the bark. The audience cannot see his hands as he works, nor what he holds. If possible, the lighting in this scene should resemble that in the 1932 film Frankenstein. [The creation scene occurs 22 minutes into the film.] )

GEPETTO

Always *with* the grain, never against it.

(GEPETTO continues working. Then:)

I see you, inside the wood, and I'm going to set you free.

PINE TREE/PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Just make me into a man. I'll set myself free.

(GEPETTO, a chisel in one hand and a mallet in the other, shapes the wood, turning it into the torso and head of a wooden boy. GEPETTO secures the wood in

a vise, then begins to paint  
the face.)

GEPETTO

I'm gonna call you Pinocchio.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Suit yourself. Where are we again?

GEPETTO

On Arthur Avenue; in the Fordham section of The Bronx.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Is that far from the park?

GEPETTO

Not too far.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Make me handsome.

(GEPETTO continues painting  
the face, humming to himself  
as he works.)

GEPETTO

There. You're a rock star.

(GEPETTO picks up the wooden  
boy and exits the workroom.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Where are we going?

GEPETTO

To the backyard.

(A hand-made coffin sits on  
the ground next to a shovel  
and a freshly dug hole. The  
hole may be just offstage.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

What about my arms and legs?

GEPETTO

I'll get to those. But first I need you to do something for  
me.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Are we going to play a game?

GEPETTO

No . . .

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Awww.

GEPETTO

Well . . .I suppose it is sort of a game.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

I like games.

GEPETTO

This is like the game of hide-and-seeK. I'm going to put you in this box, and you can't make a sound until I take you out. When I open the box, I want you to say, "I love you, Father." Can you say that? Can you do that for me?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

"I love you, Father."

GEPETTO

(GEPETTO is touched.)

That . . .that was very good.

(GEPETTO hugs Pinocchio.)

Now remember, don't make a sound until I take you out of the box.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Hey wait a minute - that - that box - it's a coffin!

GEPETTO

Shhh. Play along and be quiet until I take you out.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Wait! Wait! No! No, I don't want to be buried alive!

(GEPETTO places Pinocchio in the coffin, puts the lid on and buries it. WE hear Pinocchio's muffled screams throughout. GEPETTO cries, perhaps takes a drink from a flask, then digs up the

coffin. GEPETTO takes Pinocchio out, holds him to his chest, rocks him gently back and forth, and kisses him on the cheek. HE waits for Pinocchio to say his line.)

GEPETTO

Well?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

What kind of freak are you?

(Disgusted the marionette ruined his redemption fantasy, GEPETTO crosses to the workshop and puts Pinocchio to bed on a dog pillow. HE starts to exit.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Hey wait a minute – what about my arms and legs?

GEPETTO

You'll get arms and legs when you learn to do what you're told.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Listen, I'm sorry your kid died, but don't take it out on me.

GEPETTO

Don't you talk about him!

(GEPETTO exits.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

I'm trapped with a lunatic.

(Slight pause.)

I gotta get outta here.

(The lights fade to black. When they rise, GEPETTO and PINOCCHIO watch TV from the couch.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Please Father. Please give me arms and legs. It's been weeks and weeks since you made me.

GEPETTO

How do you know how long it's been?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

All we do is watch TV. When you made me, basketball season was starting, and now March Madness just ended. Please Father. I promise I'll be good.

GEPETTO

Would you even know how to be good?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Hell yeah. I've seen enough episodes of Law and Order to know right from wrong.

GEPETTO

How do I know you won't run away?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

I . . .I . . .I got no place else to go. Please, Father. If you give me arms and legs I promise I'll do whatever you say.

GEPETTO

Hmm. I wouldn't have to lug you around.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Yeah, and I'd be able to get you a beer from the fridge whenever you want.

GEPETTO

Yeah. You could rub my feet, too.

(HE thinks.)

Alright, but you better behave, or I'll take 'em right off, you hear me?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Yes, Father.

(GEPETTO takes Pinocchio to his workbench and begins to attach arms and legs to the marionette.)



GEPETTO

Tell me something. How could a tree talk?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

I grew over an ancient Native American burial ground.

GEPETTO

Native Americans live in The Bronx?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

They used to. The Weckquasgeck.

(GEPETTO finishes attaching arms and legs, then dresses him in a costume with roomy pockets for holding props. GEPETTO sets the puppet on the floor.)

GEPETTO

There. Stand up. Let's see if you can walk.

(Up until this point, the PINOCCHIO PUPPET has been operated by GEPETTO. Now the PINOCCHIO PUPPET begins to be animated by puppeteers. Perhaps by one, two or three Ningyotsukai puppeteers, in the style of traditional Japanese Bunraku theatre. Pinocchio is NOT animated in the style of Avenue Q, where the puppeteer's face is clearly visible. The actor providing the voice of Pinocchio must not be seen until the character becomes real. PINOCCHIO PUPPET takes a few halting steps, then stops.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Aren't you going to record this?

GEPETTO

I don't have a video camera.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Loser.

(PINOCCHIO PUPPET resumes his cautious walking.)

GEPETTO

You remind-- I mean, . . .very good, Pinocchio.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

I'm the best marionette ever.

(GEPETTO hugs him.)

GEPETTO

Now go get me a beer.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Comin' right up. A nice cold one.

(PINOCCHIO PUPPET gets a beer from the offstage fridge as GEPETTO sits on the couch.)

GEPETTO

Rub my feet.

(PINOCCHIO PUPPET hands the beer to Geppetto, then gives him a foot massage.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Did ya ever think of trimmin' these nails?

GEPETTO

I wish you could be a real boy.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Ugh. I don't.

GEPETTO

Pinocchio; don't you want to be real? Like me?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Are you kiddin'? If I were real I'd have feelings.

GEPETTO

What's wrong with havin' feelings?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

You have feelings and they cause you nothin' but grief. I've seen you late at night, lookin' at that album of pictures and cryin' like a baby.

GEPETTO

Some feelings do cause pain, but not all. Some feelings . . .are wonderful.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

The good ones can't be worth the bad ones. Your arthritis causes you terrible pain, so bad you have to take those pills. Sometimes you have to tie up your arm and take medicine from a needle.

GEPETTO

(Guiltily.)

You saw that?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Why would you want me to have feelings?

GEPETTO

. . .I have feelings for you; feelings of pride, protectiveness . . .What father doesn't have feelings for his son?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

I'm not really your son. I'm made of wood, remember?

GEPETTO

I . . .have feelings for you anyway.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Even though I'm a smartass?

GEPETTO

Yeah.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

That's not logical.

GEPETTO

What're you--Spock? No, it's not logical.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Logic is all I've got to go on. Why should I join you in your misery?

GEPPETTO

You think it over. Maybe you'll come up with the answer. It's time for bed. You want me to read you a story?

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Does it have feelings in it?

GEPPETTO

Yeah.

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

I'll pass. What's on TV?

(GEPPETTO picks up a remote and turns on the TV. As they watch the news, the lights fade to black.)

TV ANNOUNCER (VOICE OVER ONLY)

Dick Whittington was found dead this morning, killed by an apparent overdose of crystal meth. Whittington's death is only the latest in a series of deaths caused by the drug. Police have closed down many small meth labs, but have been unable to locate the large meth lab believed to be here in Manhattan. Apparently this large meth lab has created a deadly version of the drug that is responsible for the recent deaths. Whittington is survived by his cat.

(When the lights rise, empty beer cans surround Geppetto. HE can barely keep his eyes open. PINOCCHIO PUPPET watches Geppetto, waiting. Finally, GEPPETTO passes out. PINOCCHIO PUPPET takes the can of beer out of Geppetto's hand. Geppetto doesn't waken, so HE sets the can down and quietly exits the house.)

PINOCCHIO PUPPET

Thanks old man. Now I can finally see the world.