

PLAYING POSSUM

A Trickster Tale from Mexico

by

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Playing Possum was first produced by Pollyanna Theatre Company in Austin TX at the Long Center for the Performing Arts' Rollins Studio Theatre in May 2017. The original cast and crew were as follows:

<u>POSSUM:</u>	Raymond Gutierrez
<u>COYOTE:</u>	Chase Brewer
<u>RABBIT:</u>	Uyen-Anh Dang
<u>GRANDMOTHER TURTLE:</u>	Bethany Harbaugh
<u>SNAKE:</u>	Olivia Jimenez
<u>PUPPETEERS:</u>	Joanna Casey William Swift
<u>DIRECTOR:</u>	Judy Matetzschk-Campbell
<u>STAGE MANAGER:</u>	Andrew Perry
<u>SCENIC DESIGNER:</u>	Chase Staggs
<u>COSTUME DESIGNER:</u>	Teresa Morrow
<u>LIGHTING DESIGNER:</u>	Natalie George
<u>SOUND DESIGNER:</u>	Andrew Perry

Cast of Characters

POSSUM

COYOTE

RABBIT

GRANDMOTHER or GRANDFATHER TURTLE

SNAKE

*All characters may be played by any gender.

Scene & Time

This is a folktale world full of talking animals and pre-human magic. The setting should reflect the Texas/Mexican landscape with its dry boulders, cliffs, and prickly cactus. Ideally there are two separate playing areas- one with a projection for Possum to hang from and another with three large rocks. Between the two areas is a large beehive.

SETTING: A rocky Southwestern terrain.

AT RISE: When the play begins, POSSUM is hanging lazily upside down. He uses a gilded hairbrush to smooth out his bushy white tail, stopping every few strokes to admire how elegant it is.

POSSUM

Ah, bonito! Bonito! Was there ever a tail as beautiful as mine?

(COYOTE comes skulking in the background. Or he thinks he does. The truth is he's a terrible skulker. He runs from hiding place to hiding place noisily and sticks out from whatever he's behind. He's obviously trying, though, and if a young audience member points him out, he should put his finger over his lips. POSSUM keeps brushing.)

Blanco y suave! All the other animals will be so jealous. Celoso!

(COYOTE tries to tiptoe closer, but trips and falls flat with a bang. POSSUM continues calmly, without looking up.)

Buenos Días, Coyote.

(COYOTE freezes and doesn't know what to do.)

Such a fine morning, don't you think?

(COYOTE looks around and then stands up.)

COYOTE

Sí, sí... it's a fine morning. A fine morning to... to finally eat you, Possum! Comerte!

POSSUM

(calmly)

Eat me? Well, that would make a fine morning for you, but not for me.

COYOTE

Well, yes... pero...

POSSUM

But I understand why you'd be hungry! Siempre tengo hambre in the morning. And luckily I know where there are some tacos deliciosos.

COYOTE

Tacos?

POSSUM

¡Sí! Right on the other side of that hill. You should go get us some. Conseguirnos algunos.

COYOTE

Uh...

POSSUM

Don't you like tacos?

COYOTE

¡Sí! Los quiero!

POSSUM

Bueno! You'd better hurry, then. You don't want them to be all gone.

COYOTE

Why would they be all gone?

POSSUM

(pointing)

See all those animals coming for El Gran Fiesta? They've been traveling for days and will be very hungry. You must hurry! ¡Ándale!

COYOTE

Oh... I'll go right now!

(COYOTE turns to go and almost makes it offstage before he stops himself.)

COYOTE (Cont.)

Waaaaaiiitt... This is a trick, isn't it? UN TRUCO! Oh, oh oh, you're not going to fool me again, Possum!

POSSUM

(feigning surprise)

Fool you? Engañarte? I'd never do that! Nunca! Why, poor Coyote, who's been playing trucos on you?

COYOTE

YOU have! Every day!

POSSUM

Me? Are you sure you're not confusing me with another possum?

COYOTE

Another... possum?

POSSUM

Yes. There are many possums! It's easy to get confuso. Tell me what he looked like.

COYOTE

Well, he uh... he had piel blanca like yours and a big, bushy tail...

POSSUM

Okay, but dime... was his head on the bottom and his feet on the top?

COYOTE

Uh... no.

POSSUM

Ah, so his feet were on the bottom and his head was on top?

COYOTE

...Si.

POSSUM

Well, then he couldn't have been me! Where is my head, mi cabeza?

COYOTE

On the bottom. Abajo.

POSSUM

And where are my feet, mis pies?

COYOTE

On the top. Arriba.

POSSUM

So... he couldn't have been me! Verdad?

COYOTE

Uh....

POSSUM

(climbing down and
standing)

See? Head on the top and feet on the bottom!

(He climbs again and
hangs.)

Now: Head on the bottom and feet on the top!

COYOTE

Uh...

POSSUM

A different Possum! See?

COYOTE

...Sí.

POSSUM

Sí, you see?

COYOTE

Uh, sí... I see.

POSSUM

Bueno!

COYOTE

But... WHY are your feet on the top and your head on the
bottom?

POSSUM

Ah, I'm performing a very important service to the community!

COYOTE

You are?

POSSUM

Sí! I'm watching the sky- mirando el cielo- to make sure it doesn't fall down.

COYOTE

(worriedly)

The sky might fall down?!? Caer?

POSSUM

Sí! Es un gran problema! Remember when it knocked all the leaves off the trees in the fall?

COYOTE

The sky did that?

POSSUM

Sí! And I've been hanging here ever since to keep an eye on it. The problem is, I'm getting really, really hungry. I'd love to get some of those tacos deliciosos.

COYOTE

The ones on the other side of the hill?

POSSUM

Sí! And I have a buena idea. Why don't YOU watch the sky para un poquito and I'll go get tacos for both of us. Voy a conseguir los tacos.

COYOTE

Okay... but how do I put my feet in the air like that?

POSSUM

No problema! I'll show you.

(POSSUM gets down.)

Now just climb up, subir así...

(POSSUM works to get the frightened COYOTE up on the branch. He pushes, shoves, and generally cajoles him,

until COYOTE is clinging by all fours with a terrified expression.)

COYOTE

AAH! I'm so high off the ground!

POSSUM

Well, don't look at the ground! Look at the sky, el cielo!

COYOTE

Uh... uh...

POSSUM

I'll be right back with the tacos, lo prometo! Of course there might be a long line. And then I'll probably want to eat them right away while they're calientes. And then afterward, I wouldn't mind a nice, long siesta...

COYOTE

NOOOO! Don't leave me here!

POSSUM

Adiós, Coyote.

(POSSUM picks up his tail carefully and leaves, whistling.)

COYOTE

WAIT DON'T LEAVE ME HERE!!!! ESPERE!!!

(Lights fade on COYOTE. POSSUM walks a little further and comes up to a large beehive.)

POSSUM

Good morning, Bees.

(He leans close and there is a loud, angry buzz.)

What are you making?

(There is an angrier buzz.)

Aw... you Bees are so cute and cuddly! Let me pet you.

(He reaches in and comes out with his fingers stuck together.)

POSSUM (Cont.)

Bleggk... sticky! Cera Pegajoso! You're making wax!

(He flicks his wrist a few times until the wax goes flying. He looks where it landed.)

Hmm. Hope nobody steps on that.

(The Bees buzz angrily.)

You know what you cute little Bees need? A way to protect your hive! Protegerse! Perhaps I can think of a way. Adiós!

(POSSUM walks a little further and hears a long, evil hiss.)

SNAKE'S VOICE

Possess-ummmm...

POSSUM

(looking around)

Who said that?

SNAKE'S VOICE

It'ssss me, Ssssssnake. La Vibora. I'm under thisssss rock.

POSSUM

Which? This one...? Aqui?

(He walks over and purposely addresses a rock on the opposite side.)

SNAKE'S VOICE

Nooooo. I'm under thissssss rock.

POSSUM

Which? This one...? Aqui?

(He walks over and purposely addresses a rock on the opposite side.)

SNAKE'S VOICE

(annoyed)

Nooooo. I'm under thissssss rock. THISSSSSS ONE.

POSSUM

Ah! THIS one.

(He walks over and sits himself down with a heavy plop. SNAKE's head pops up on the opposite side.)

SNAKE

OWWWWWW! GET OFFFFFF!

POSSUM

(continuing to sit)
Not until after I've brushed my cola.

(He takes out his brush and uses long strokes.)

SNAKE

Posssss-ummm, you are ssssoooo heavy!

POSSUM

Sí. And I'll probably be much heavier- muy gordo- after eating all the food at El Gran Fiesta.

SNAKE

El Gran Fiesta! I want to go tooooo. Lift up the rock-levanta la roca- and let me out.

POSSUM

Oh, no Snake! The last time you flew up into the sky and curled your cold belly around the sun. Bloqueo el sol! The whole world was dark and cold.

SNAKE

I won't do that thissss time... lo prometo! And if you let me out, I can ssssing your praisssses, Posssss-umm. I'll tell all the animals how clever you are. Muy astuto! And what a beautiful tail you have.

POSSUM

(holding it up)
You don't need to tell them- they will see it for themselves.

SNAKE

I doubt that. Rabbit is planning a long speech to start the fiesta! By the time she's done speaking it will be night, la noche. Nadie podrá ver. Nobody will be able to see your tail at all.

POSSUM

Hmmm. Such a shame we don't have any light at night.

SNAKE

Let me out, and not only will I sssssinnng your praiisssees, but I'll go up into the ssssky- subiré al cielo- and bring back a ball of fire from the sssun.

POSSUM

Una bola de fuego! That would be wonderful. No one's ever seen fire close up.

(He looks up into the sky.)

But how do I know that you wouldn't just keep the sun all for yourself- todo por ti mismo?

SNAKE

I won't! Lo prometo!

POSSUM

Hmmm. Here comes Grandmother Turtle, I will ask her. She is very wise- tortuga muy sabia.

(There is a rustle and GRANDMOTHER TURTLE is seen entering. She walks comically slow. For instance, each foot should hang in the air for several seconds before coming down.)

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

Did someone say my name?

POSSUM

(getting up and giving a respectful bow)

Ah, Grandmother Turtle! Bienvenido! Have you come for El Gran Fiesta?

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

Yes. I have been traveling for many months.

POSSUM

Many months? But don't you live... right there?

(He points just a few feet
away.)

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

Yes. It's been a loooooooooonnnng journey.

POSSUM

Ah.

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

And I am glad to see that Snake is still where I put him.
Bajo una roca.

SNAKE

(angrily)
Sssssssssss.....

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

This Fiesta is very important- muy importante! On this ONE DAY- UN DÍA, we get to choose what we'll look like forever. Elegir nuestra apariencia para todo el tiempo. Like Parrot, who has a colorful personality is hoping to get some very colorful feathers. She is so tired of being solid gray. But that could all change today!

POSSUM

Hmm... a colorful parrot...

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

...And when they choose what they want- elegir lo que quieren, I get to record it in this book for all time!

(She proudly holds up a big
book.)

POSSUM

Does every animal get to choose? Cada animal consigue elegir?

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

No. Some animals might get their shapes and colors by accident. Por accidente. That's why we have to be very careful today! Tenemos que tener mucho cuidado hoy! Like Beaver. She was chewing on a tree and not paying attention

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE (Cont.)

when the whole thing came down on her tail! Squashed it flat. Now she has a big, flat paddle instead of a round tail.

(Beaver and her tail are shown.)

But she's actually quite happy with the change! She can now swim very fast. So, I wrote it down in the book- lo escribió en el libro- and she'll have it forever. Para siempre.

POSSUM

But Grandmother Turtle, we won't be able to see these great changes! Snake said that Rabbit is planning a long speech- un largo discurso. By the time she's done speaking it will be night.

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

That's true, but it's siempre oscuro por la noche.

POSSUM

What we need is some of the sun's fire...

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

Yes!

(looking into the sky)

And Possum, if you could find a way to get it- ilumina nuestra noche- we'd have it forever. Think of it! A bright, burning fire!

POSSUM

Un fuego brillante...

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

You'd be helping us for all time! Now wouldn't that be better than just playing tricks?

POSSUM

Playing tricks? I don't do that! Nunca! Why Grandmother Turtle, what makes you think haciendo trucos?

(We suddenly hear COYOTE wailing for help.)

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

(scolding)

POSS-UMM...

POSSUM

Well, I was going to go back and help him....

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

You were?

POSSUM

Yes... In fact I'd go right now... except, uh... I suddenly feel a little...

(He grabs his body.)

...Ugh! My chest... ack... ack... ACKKK!!!

(He suddenly spasms and stiffens. All of his limbs go rigid. When he falls over, all four feet stick in the air and his tongue lolls out.)

GRANDMOTHER TURTLE

(eyeing him skeptically)

Nice try, Possum. But save it for someone who will be fooled.

POSSUM

(popping up)

Thank you, Grandmother. I will!

(She shakes her head and exits. POSSUM carefully dusts off his tail and exits whistling in the opposite direction. Lights fade on the SNAKE area and come up full on COYOTE who is still clinging fearfully from all fours.)

COYOTE

Help! Ayuda! Won't somebody help me! OHHHHHHHH!!!

(RABBIT comes walking on. She looks like an ordinary hare, except she has a large, extremely bushy tail and tiny little ears. She is holding a huge scroll, a

pen, and a large bottle of
ink.)

COYOTE (Cont.)

OHHHH, RABBIT! HELP ME! I'M SO SCARED!

RABBIT

Oh, for goodness sake. Que estas haciendo?

COYOTE

Well, Possum told me to watch the sky- el cielo. Podría caerse!

RABBIT

What are you talking about? The sky can't fall down.

COYOTE

Yes it can! Possum told me it knocked all the leaves off the trees in the fall.

RABBIT

That's ridiculous! Leaves always fall in the fall. That's why it's called... fall.

COYOTE

But what about when it's called "Autumn"?

RABBIT

Well, that's different, of course. Now would you get down? You look ridículo.

COYOTE

I don't know how to get down. No se como bajar.

RABBIT

Just do the opposite of how you got up.

COYOTE

Well I climbed up... so...

RABBIT

...You should fall down.

COYOTE

You'll catch me, won't you Rabbit? Atrapame?

RABBIT

No, I'm not going to catch you.

COYOTE

How about my foot? Can you just catch mi pie?

RABBIT

Okay... just your foot...

(He puts his foot on
Rabbit's head.)

Not on my head, you fool!

COYOTE

Now catch my other foot!

RABBIT

Wait, I can't...

Ow!

Not so fast!

OWW!

COYOTE (Cont.)

Do you have it...?

Catch this, too!

Got me...?

Here I coooooome!

(COYOTE lets go and falls
on top of RABBIT.)

COYOTE (Cont.)

Ah! I'm like a leaf in Autumn.

RABBIT

Get off me!

(He does. She sits up.)

COYOTE

What happened to your face?

RABBIT

(feeling it)

Oh! Oh! You thplit my lip! Labio partido!

COYOTE

Ha ha! You're talking funny.

RABBIT

Because I thplit my lipth! When Grandmother Turtle thees
this she'll write it in the book for all time!

COYOTE

All rabbits will have split lips!

RABBIT

Ugh! And tonight I have to make a Great Thpeech! Un Gran Discurso!

(She holds up the scroll.)

COYOTE

(eyeing it worriedly)

Um... is it a long speech? Un largo discurso?

RABBIT

Well, it used to be three hourth long, but not anymore.

COYOTE

That's good.

RABBIT

Now it's THIX hourth long! I'm going to thtand on a big rock and all the animalth will be listening to me. All of them! Rather than looking at that ridiculouth Pothum. I'm so tired of him showing off! Presumiendo!

(mimicking POSSUM)

"Ooh, look at my tail. Muy bonito!" Humph! It's time we out-tricked that Trickthter!

COYOTE

But I've tried...

RABBIT

Yeth, but thith time I have a PLAN. I want you to offer to give his tail a trim- un corte de pelo. You can use these thcissors.

(She takes out a big pair.)

Tell him that you're going to make it fancy for El Gran Fiesta.

COYOTE

(taking the scissors)

Okay, I'll make it real fancy!

RABBIT

No, you're not really going to make it fancy. You're just going to pretend- pretender. And when he's not paying attention, you're going to cut off ALL the hair. Cortar

RABBIT (Cont.)

TODO el pelo! Then you'll tie it back- with this red ribbon. Ciérralo con esta cinta roja. That way, when he gets up to dance at El Gran Fiesta, the whole thing will fall off and everyone will laugh!

COYOTE

Se caerá!

RABBIT

Si! And when he thinks off in embarrassment- cuando se avergüenza- then you'll lift me onto a big rock and call all the animals to listen to my Great Thpeech.

COYOTE

Can't you just hop onto a big rock?

RABBIT

Don't be ridiculous! Rabbits don't HOP.

COYOTE

Oh.

RABBIT

I'm counting on you, Coyote! And... DON'T LET POSSUM TRICK YOU.

COYOTE

No! No trucos!

RABBIT

Muy bien.