



PREFACE to "ROCK!...AND A SOFT PLACE"

by Jerry L. Crawford

This full-length play concerns a special U. S. army military squad at Ft. Carson, Colorado, in 1958, with dire repercussions for the American political landscape in the 1960's. Based upon "special op" training I experienced during my two years of active duty, the play is focused on a tough, African American sergeant known only as, 'Rock.'" All men in the squad he trains are called by Rock's coded nicknames. As part of discipline and training, Rock teaches the men to tap dance as well as learn how to use special weapons to kill 'targets' silently by striking a 'soft place' on the target.

When my service drafted time ended, I was offered the opportunity to re-enlist as an officer and 'teach' at West Point; but, when I learned the 'teaching' would be in the workings of our 'kill squad,' I declined.

In fact, I viewed the squad as elite assassins.

Over 40 years later, another squad of men I worked with at Ft. Carson organized a delightful reunion at the old base. The year was 1999. This squad of men worked in "Classification and Assignment" at the Reception Station. These men, led by Jim Bauer,

Bob Klings, Wayman Bradley, Curt Schaffner, and others, had no idea I had done "special op" training at night in 1958-59. Our wives were with us at the reunion as we reflected and laughed about our military past. The only absentee at this reunion was our famed (or, infamous) sergeant, Warren 'Rock' Caldwell. All records involving him had been lost in a St.Louis fire, or,so the military informed us. We could not locate him. He was like a ghost hovering over us at the reunion.

All this led me to finally write my play about the secret training I had back in 1958-59, I substituted our sergeant in Classification and Assignment ('Rock') for the drill sergeant from the night training, and, I used 'Rock's' nicknames for our C&A unit for the men in the 'Kill Squad,' thus protecting everyone involved.

Finally,I added the element of dance from our company night cook,a southern, African American named, Jessie, who made delicious "greens and pig's feet soup," serving it with expert tap dance steps. From all this, I sculpted my play.

In 2004, Broadway director, Ed Sherin, directed a workshop, staged-reading performance of the play in New York City, starring the incomparable actor-dancer, Andre de Shields,



(Actor Andre de Shields)

in the role of 'Rock.' My son-in-law, Paul Truckey, former Broadway actor and singer (now a professor at Northern Michigan University in Marquette, far north in the Upper Peninsula), assisted me as Dramaturge.

My New York agents, Robert Freedman and Selma Luhnger, saw the performance and believed that de Shields would win a Tony if we got it full produced. Everyone felt the play worked, needing only some tightening. However, Ed and Andre wanted to do a

longer workshop, adding more music and dance (the piece already included a poignant, yet deathly, song/dance number for 'Rock' plus a climactic scene titled, "DeathBallet").

Ed and Andre even lined up a top Broadway composer and a choreographer if we moved forward. However, two things stopped us--as author, I had to finance the work (I could not), plus, I felt my vision and imperative for writing the play would surely be compromised. The art of collaboration in the theatre is at once necessary, glorious, and, dangerous.

I believe this is the best of my 33 scripts, albeit I would tighten/shorten it some were it to be full produced. Regardless, I feel fulfilled by the piece from just that one New York staged reading performance.

I saw and heard it "work" for an audience. I saw a remarkable talent bring 'Rock' very much alive. Also, as one ages, almost all satisfaction comes simply from the creative act of writing a play. My friend, Edward Albee, once said to me, "A committee cannot write a play."

Perhaps I will have a talented college or university director do the play. Perhaps my agents will yet find a producer and theatre willing to risk a very controversial script. I do not claim the assassinations of the 1960's in this country found root at Ft. Carson in the late 1950's, but, it raises interesting and disturbing questions, nonetheless.

Well, this play deserves actors and audiences, or, at the least, readers. Plays should be seen, not read, but, in these economic times, one cannot be selective. A playwright, by nature, must, "LetGo." To get a play mounted today at any level is extraordinary; one needs, talent, timing, connections, and, as David Milch might put it, "Luck." (David and I were both students of the renowned mentor of playwrights, Howard Stein, I at Iowa and David at Yale.) By the way, Howard is one who believes that 'ROCK'...AND A SOFT PLACE is my finest script, though he thinks my most recent effort (therapy?), CHAOS IS COME AGAIN, to be my freest, crazed, and 'funniest' play.

As I used to say to my student playwrights at UNLV, "A writer writes." He or she does not think about writing or talk about writing--it's more perspiration than inspiration, it is putting the butt to the chair to use a pen, typewriter, or computer.

As Stephen Sondheim knows, it is all about a blank page or canvas. My late buddy, director, Davey Marlin-Jones, put it this way: "Playwrights are disturbers of a counterfeit peace." One need not kick a snake on its way to Snakedom, as it will get there on its own; however, a playwright does give it a kick because a writer writes.