

A Play Named Zhuangzi

Fall 2024

Who?

Director: Anna Zhao
Producer: Crystal Liu
Playwright: Xinning Shao
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What?

Dr. Shoelace and Zi You, characters in the classic Daoist text *Zhuangzi*, are having a rough day. As Dr. Shoelace dutifully recites Zhuangzi's teachings, following "the Way" begins to sound suspiciously like hopeless determinism. Thus begins Zi You's quest to live up to his namesake: freedom. But first, a small problem: the Zhuangzi author sits right behind them, watching and writing.

In this meandering journey through the world of *Zhuangzi*, a philosophical romp plays out with humor, bromance, and a whole lot of ghost metaphors. Take this as "a day in the life of *Zhuangzi*", or a manual on what NOT to do if you wake up in Truman's world.

The production is supported by Ezra Stiles College Creative & Performing Arts Award and Yale Vermilion Theater.

When?

Show Dates: December 5-7, 2024 (Crescent Theater, Morse & Stiles basement)
Tech Week: December 1-4, 2024
Date of First Rehearsal: 27 October 2024 (tentative)

Time Commitment

Weekly commitment of 6-8 hours for leading roles and 3-4 hours for supporting roles, with longer rehearsals leading up to tech week.

Characters

**All roles are open to actors of any race, ethnicity, and gender identity. Knowledge of Zhuangzi & Chinese proficiency are helpful but not required. All dialogue is in English.*

Dr. Shoelace 子綦: a character in *Zhuangzi*, a Daoist in training, a dutiful reader/preacher of Zhuangzi's teachings. Calm, composed, and a little shy at times.

Zi You 子游 (homonym of "freedom 自由"): a character in *Zhuangzi*, curious, bold, a free spirit who questions everything but easily gives in, for some reason.

Zhuangzi 庄子: The Daoist figure and author of the *Zhuangzi*, "wise," witty, unpredictable, always one step ahead with a riddle but seems vaguely amnesic.

Confucius 孔子: The philosopher Confucius, but in Zhuangzi's depiction. A serious, heavy-hearted guru, haunted by unattainable truths. In the process of pivoting to Daoism.

Zi Lu 子路: A disciple of Confucius, always ready to defend Confucius and Confucianism.

Yan Hui 颜回: A disciple of Confucius, but a *Zhuangzi* wannabe. Enjoys sitting and forgetting.

The Madman 楚狂接輿: A passionate, homeless prophet who doesn't like Confucius. Has sat and forgotten.

The Fisher: A wise person who probably lives in the woods.

Hui Zi 惠子: Zhuangzi's frenemy. Just as smart as Zhuangzi but unable to use their intellect in the *Zhuangzi* text because they were written in this way.

The Traveler: Someone from the modern world who got lost in *Zhuangzi*'s world while trying to find the "Way" to the toilet—not some "eternal happiness." A present person grappling with Daoism.

Two Soldiers from the State of Song

Audition Expectations

Please sign up for an audition slot on our [YCA page](#) (you will see slots once you log in). Please also fill out this [audition form](#) so we can learn more about you before your audition!

Please familiarize yourself with one or two of the audition sides below. You are not required to memorize. For sides with more than one character. Someone in the room will read the other lines. We may ask you to redo a side (with certain directions) or read sides you didn't prepare.

Please try to arrive a few minutes before your slot time to check in and prepare. Auditions will run roughly 10 minutes.

Auditions will be held in person. If you require any accommodations (video audition, etc.) please reach out to crystal.liu.sl2782@yale.edu.

Audition Locations

tentatively:

Monday 10/21: WLH

Tuesday 10/22: YK220

Wednesday 10/23: WLH

Sides begin on the next page.

Zhuangzi / Dr. Shoelace / Zi You

ZHUANGZI For your useless big tree - why don't you plant it in a faraway field, and amble beside it, not having to do anything; or lie down under it, at ease, carefree. The tree will not suffer the calamity of being chopped down by axes, or harmed by worldly functions. If the tree cannot be used in any way, how can it be troubled by suffering?

ZI YOU And I guess I'll sit down under the tree now, according to you.

ZHUANGZI Maybe.

DR. SHOELACE Oh my god s/he's speaking to us again.

ZI YOU God telling you to believe in God.

DR. SHOELACE Oooooo -

ZI YOU (*walks beside DR.SHOELACE, sits down next to him*) Pretend s/he's a tree.

DR. SHOELACE I -

ZI YOU And I'll feel good. "At ease, carefree."

ZHUANGZI Do you feel good now?

ZI YOU I do.

ZHUANGZI Ok.

A beat.

DR. SHOELACE Hmm so, Master Zhuang? Oh it's so weird to call you like that -

No response. ZI YOU doesn't seem so successful at entering into his/her carefree state. Something breaks. ZI YOU stands up. A little tense.

DR. SHOELACE (*to ZI YOU, weakly*) You know, you actually don't have to -

ZI YOU I have to.

CONFUCIUS No, Zi You, you don't.

ZHUANGZI S/he has to.

ZI YOU I am carefree.

CONFUCIUS (*to ZI YOU*) Remember your name.

ZHUANGZI S/he is carefree.

DR. SHOELACE Ok, great! Carefree. I am, too - am I supposed to be -

ZHUANGZI *(to DR. SHOELACE)* And then what?

Spotlight on empty writing booth starts flickering.

DR. SHOELACE Oh, you asking me?

ZHUANGZI Yeah. Who else?

DR. SHOELACE I thought *you* wrote this.

ZHUANGZI Don't blame me for everything.

DR. SHOELACE *(timid)* I'm not blaming you - sorry, I'm just stating a -

ZHUANGZI Everyone says it's me. "Zhuangzi once said blah blah blah" I did NOT. I don't even remember! For God's sake.

DR. SHOELACE Yeah, yeah. I understand. I do.

ZHUANGZI And you think I'm a ghost.

DR. SHOELACE Are you not? - sorry, that sounded offensive, I meant -

ZHUANGZI You know what, let's just move on.

DR. SHOELACE Sure, sure, let's move on.

Silence. ZHUANGZI is waiting for DR. SHOELACE to continue initiating the plot, but DR. SHOELACE waits for ZHUANGZI's command.

ZHUANGZI So?

DR. SHOELACE I don't have the script, I only have your book... Where is it? Oh, here -

ZHUANGZI Can you not think for yourself for just a second?

DR. SHOELACE Can I?

Pause. Spotlight moves onto DR. SHOELACE and ZI YOU. ZI YOU looks up at DR. SHOELACE and ZHUANGZI. DR. SHOELACE grips on to the Zhuangzi book. ZI YOU appears ready to say something, but doesn't.

CONFUCIUS *(to both DR. SHOELACE & ZI YOU)* Just say something - anything.

Silence. DR. SHOELACE stares blankly at ZHUANGZI. ZI YOU searches for something to say, but can't come up with anything.

ZHUANGZI Fine. Just read something from that book then.

DR. SHOELACE Ok, ok, yeah, so, hmmm, let me see - maybe -

DR. SHOELACE flips multiple pages, but doesn't know which one to choose from. ZHUANGZI waits. ZI YOU looks at ZHUANGZI, gets up, and almost gets ready to say something. For some reason s/he doesn't.

DR. SHOELACE still struggles to make a decision. ZHUANGZI gets impatient. Spotlight on DR. SHOELACE and ZI YOU flickers.

ZHUANGZI (*recites*) "Two envoys of Chu enter -"

Spotlight returns to empty writing seat.

DR. SHOELACE Yes, it's so much easier if you give me something to work with -

Dr. Shoelace / Zi You

Note for Dr. Shoelace: whenever lines are in quotation marks, they are recitations from Zhuangzi and should be presented in a different register than regular dialogues.

Dr. Shoelace

““If there’s no “other”, there’s no “me”; if there’s no “me”, there’s no “other”.

This is nearly true, but we don’t know what makes it so.

There appears to be an Ultimate Ruler, but s/he remains lost to our eye.

We sense his/her acts, his/her hidden grace, yet his/her form remains beyond our gaze.”

ZI YOU I thought s/he’s right there. *(points to the general direction of ZHUANGZI, not precisely)*

DR. SHOELACE Is s/he really?

ZI YOU What do you mean?

Spotlight on Zhuangzi for the sentence in quotes, with Zhuangzi writing and mouthing as usual.

DR. SHOELACE Think about what I’ve taught you from the *Zhuangzi*: “‘This’ is also ‘that’; ‘that’ is also ‘this’.” It’s not either there or here, free or not free, alive or dead.

ZI YOU *(pause)* Dead. The author’s dead. S/he’s a ghost then.

DR. SHOELACE That’s not what I meant -

ZI YOU Dr. Shoelace. Do you really believe this, whatever this is - written by a ghost?

DR. SHOELACE Everything we have is written by ghosts.

ZI YOU Then what are we? Some characters of a ghost writer?

DR. SHOELACE Better than characters of some living playwright.

A beat.

ZI YOU You are not wrong.

DR. SHOELACE I’m not.

The Madman / Confucius / Yan Hui (/ Zi Lu)

The Madman *(enters and approaches Confucius)* Oh isn't this our Great Phoenix Confucius!

CONFUCIUS Chirp.

THE MADMAN Oh "virtuous" master! Tell me, why has Virtue declined as such!

CONFUCIUS Did I ever call myself that?

YAN HUI Sometimes, Master.

THE MADMAN The future is a world we cannot hope for,
The past, a time we cannot reclaim.
When the Way prevails, the sage thrives;
When the Way fades, the sage survives.

ZI YOU This sure sounds like Zhuangzi, too.

THE MADMAN *(gradually more impassioned)* Look around - in the time of today,
It's about nothing more than avoiding persecution.
Happiness - lighter than a feather,
yet we do not know how to grasp it;
Misfortune - heavier than the earth,
yet we do not know how to avoid it.
Enough, enough! All your condescending others with Virtue!

YAN HUI S/he didn't know you've changed.

CONFUCIUS S/he didn't.

THE MADMAN Beware, beware! Man-made paths lead to peril.
All your obscured enlightenment -

YAN HUI Relax now.

THE MADMAN All your hollow teachings -

YAN HUI Would you like to sit and forget, too?

CONFUCIUS S/he must have done it already. That's why s/he thinks I'm stupid.

YAN HUI *(pause, to the madman)* Please, accept me as your humble follower.

CONFUCIUS and YAN HUI bow to THE MADMAN. The three exit together. ZI LU watches them, confused.

Zi Lu / Confucius (/ Yan Hui)

ZI LU Master Kong, we are surrounded by the army of Song!

CONFUCIUS I see.

ZI LU What do they want? We are just out here chilling.

CONFUCIUS I wonder, too.

ZI LU Ergh, so, are we gonna run?

CONFUCIUS If they've surrounded us, how can we run?

ZI LU Yeah, but like, we are gonna get killed by these barbarians! They -

CONFUCIUS Come, let me tell you! I've dreaded being of no use to my country, yet I'm destined by the Great Order to pass away in oblivion. I've been seeking Truth all my life, yet the Time I live in makes it simply unattainable.

ZI LU Master, that's called "giving up".

YAN HUI That's called self-knowledge.

ZI YOU *(To DR. SHOELACE)* So Zhuangzi wrote this too?

DR.SHOELACE Yep.

ZI YOU It sure sounds that way.

CONFUCIUS There was no suffering under a virtuous emperor's rule, but it's not because he had the Truth; there was no joy under an incompetent emperor's rule, but it's not because he didn't have the Truth. It was all because of the times.

YAN HUI The tides of nature, the crushing waves of -

ZI LU We're gonna die here! That Daoist bullshit can't save us!

ZI LU turns in exasperation, suddenly notices something. S/he stands up and panics.

ZI LU Master, someone's coming at us! What do we do now? Fight or flight -

CONFUCIUS

To sail through waters, unafraid of dragons deep;
That's the courage of a fisherman.
To walk the land, undeterred by roaring beasts;
That's the courage of a huntsman.

As CONFUCIUS goes on, ZI LU shouts to YAN HUI, who doesn't look worried either.

ZI LU What on earth happened to him/her?

ZHUANGZI Me.

CONFUCIUS

But to know that the Great Order bestows upon us oblivion,
that Time obscures our passage to truth,
and to stand unshaken in the face of great trials -
That's the courage of a sage.
(To ZI LU) Sit down! My lot has been set.

Two armed soldiers enters. ZI LU jumps in front of CONFUCIUS in a gesture to protect him/her, but trips and his/her hat falls on the ground.

ZI LU A person of virtue may fall but his/her hat cannot...

SOLIDER 1 shoves ZI LU away. ZI LU struggles to get up.

ZI LU Oh, to be or not to -

The two soliders bow to and address Confucius.

SOLIDER 1 Good morning, Master Kong. Please accept our apologies for our mistake. We surrounded you because we mistook you to be the General of our enemy.

Silence.

ZI LU Oh.

ZHUANGZI *(writing)* Oopsies.

SOLIDER 2 We regret having disturbed your peace. We will proceed to exit immediately.

The two soldiers exit.

ZI LU Well.

YAN HUI *(to Zi Lu)* "Daoist bullshit".

ZI LU It's not about that. We could have died.

CONFUCIUS No, we could not. We'll never.

ZI LU Never?

CONFUCIUS Yes.

ZI LU Why?

CONFUCIUS *(points to ZHUANGZI)* Because s/he writes our story.