The Bands of Syria

*II Kings 6:8-23*

PERCUSSIONIST

KING OF SYRIA

KING OF ISRAEL

ISRAELITE SOLDIER, VOCALIST

SYRIAN SOLDIER

STORYTELLER, SYRIAN ARCHER

ELISHA

ELISHA’S SERVANT

AT RISE: Two stools create the Israelite King’s throne, and one stool is in Elisha’s house.

A solo singing voice, no lyrics, no recognizable melody. This voice will later be joined by percussion. After percussion has joined, actors enter to three separate locations.

At the start of the play, there are depictions of three separate tableaux. At stage left is Elisha’s cottage, with his servant serving the evening meal. At center, is the King of Israel, with a soldier kneeling to serve something to the King. This image is the most important one, since it is the opposite of what we’ll see the King doing near the end of the play. At stage right is the King of Syria preparing to go to war.

The Storyteller moves in among these three tableaux, noticing each one.

STORYTELLER

The bands of Syria. II Kings 6: 8-23. Then the king of Syria warred against Israel.

(SYRIAN SOLDIER and SYRIAN ARCHER move into position to receive the plan. KING OF SYRIA kneels pointing to the place when the secret attack will be encamped. Note that in general, the movement to another position will happen prior to the narrative description of what that position represents. Another general note is that actors will rest in tableaux or frozen images except when they are speaking or in action as necessitated by what the narration is describing.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And took counsel with his servants, saying.

KING OF SYRIA

(pointing)

In such and such a place shall be my camp.

(SYRIAN SOLDIER moves into position of hiding to attack. SYRIAN ARCHER and KING OF SYRIA move to worship their god. ELISHA’S SERVANT moves to bow in the presence of the KING OF ISRAEL.)

STORYTELLER

And the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying.

ELISHA’S SERVANT

Beware that thou pass not such a place; for thither the Syrians are come down.

(ELISHA’S SERVANT departs. KING OF ISRAEL speaks to ISRAELITE SOLDIER.)

STORYTELLER

And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of.

(KING OF ISRAEL prays upstage. ISRAELITE SOLDIER approaches the place of attack, and the SYRIAN SOLDIER springs up, quickly running him through with a sword. This is mimed. SYRIAN SOLDIER thinks his has killed the Israelite King, but when he raises the man’s visor, he is disheartened. Another general note is that all props are mimed, no period costumes are necessary, and any actor can play either male or female characters. In other words, the emphasis is on the storytelling, not any sort of realism.)

STORYTELLER

And saved himself there, not once nor twice.

(SYRIAN SOLDIER returns to bow before his king.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them.

KING OF SYRIA

(threatening his soldier with a knife to the throat)

Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel?

(SYRIAN ARCHER rushes in to bow before the king, but also to attempt to save his fellow soldier’s life, even to the point of grabbing the king’s hand. They all remain in this deathgrip through the next soldier’s line.)

STORYTELLER

And one of his servants said.

SYRIAN SOLDIER

None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber.

(KING OF SYRIA rises, angry, yells, and flings the knife away. The soldiers and the STORYTELLER all flinch and turn away for a moment. Another general note is that as much as possible, the STORYTELLER gets involved in whatever scene that is being described. For example, when the two soldiers are trying to keep the king of Syria from committing a murder, the STORYTELLER can be right in there, kneeling and helping.

When the KING OF SYRIA collects himself, he kneels to speak again to his soldiers.)

STORYTELLER

And he said.

KING OF SYRIA

Go and spy where he is, that I may send and fetch him.

(KING OF SYRIA prepares for war, as does his archer. The SYRIAN SOLDIER sneaks upstage. ELISHA stands watching. He knows that someone is coming looking for him. The SYRIAN SOLDIER finally sees ELISHA and ducks down and sneaks home to speak to the KING OF SYRIA. The SYRIANS all gather around a map on the floor, and the SYRIAN SOLIDER points to the precise place of ELISHA’S home.)

STORYTELLER  
And it was told him, saying.

SYRIAN SOLDIER

Behold, he is in Dothan.

(SOLDIERS get ready to go to war; the KING OF SYRIA sends them with a gesture of great power.)

STORYTELLER

Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host.

(KING OF SYRIA lies down to sleep at his own home. ELISHA and his servant are also asleep. SYRIAN SOLDIER and SYRIAN ARCHER have arrived at Dothan, and freeze in waiting. They are upstage of the sleeping ELISHA and servant. In this next scene, use split focus—with ELISHA and servant looking straight front to “see” the distant soldiers who are physically standing just behind them.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And they came by night, and compassed the city about.

(ELISHA’S servant gets up and goes to the window.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth.

(ELISHA’S SERVANT, sees the Syrian army and ducks down in terror.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

Behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots.

(ELISHA’S SERVANT goes and wakes ELISHA.)

And his servant said unto him.

ELISHA’S SERVANT

Alas, my master! how shall we do?

(ELISHA crosses to the window and looks out at the army.)

STORYTELLER

And he answered.

ELISHA

Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.

(ELISHA prays for his servant by placing his hand

over his eyes.)

STORYTELLER

And Elisha prayed, and said.

ELISHA

LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see.

(ELISHA removes his hand.)

STORYTELLER

And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man.

(ELISHA’S SERVANT opens his eyes and he sees the chariots of fire up and away behind the Syrians! He responds to this awesome sight, and so does ELISHA.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

(SYRIAN SOLIDER draws his sword, and the SYRIAN ARCHER draws back an arrow on his bow to shoot.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And when they came down to him, Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said.

(ELISHA’S raises his arms to pray.)

ELISHA

Smite this people, I pray thee, with blindness.

(Another general note is that sometimes the STORYTELLER can help create the miraculous influence of God with a gesture. In this case, it is a dance-like gesture of the STORYTELLER during the next line that causes the Syrian soldiers to drop their weapons, having lost their sight.)

STORYTELLER

And he smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

(ELISHA and his servant move upstage to the

soldiers. ELISHA grabs one of their hands, and the servant gets in between them, grabbing both hands, creating a line.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And Elisha said unto them.

ELISHA

This is not the way, neither is this the city.

(ELISHA begins to move, pulling the line along behind him in a large circle around his house.)

ELISHA (continued)

Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom ye seek.

STORYTELLER

But he led them to Samaria.

(The line arrives at Samaria, where the KING OF

ISRAEL is now awake and waiting, starting to

pick up a bow and arrow.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said.

ELISHA

LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.

(ELISHA and his servant move away, leaving the soldiers on their own, blind and frightened. Again, the STORYTELLER gestures the miracle.)

STORYTELLER

And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw.

(The Syrian soldiers sink in despair, knowing they have been trapped and are going to be killed.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria.

(ELISHA moves around to stage right of the KING OF ISRAEL, who looks at the soldiers and prepares to draw his bow toward them.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And the king of Israel said unto Elisha, when he saw them.

KING OF ISRAEL

(drawing his bow)

My father, shall I smite them? shall I smite them?

(ELISHA rushes around to the King’s left so that he is now between the King and the Syrian soldiers. The King lowers his bow so that ELISHA is not in danger.)

STORYTELLER

And he answered.

ELISHA

Thou shalt not smite them: wouldest thou smite those whom thou hast taken captive with thy sword and with thy bow? set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, and go to their master.

(The KING OF ISRAEL now has a decision to make. He attempts to get ELISHA to back down by threatening him, pointing the bow directly at him! The percussion builds to a furious climax and stops. There is frozen silence as we wait for one of the two powerful leaders to back down. Finally there is a sharp click with a percussive instrument. Then one more, and the KING OF ISRAEL backs down. He sets his bow aside and moves to stage left to get some food for the soldiers. ELISHA’S SERVANT gets the idea, and leads the Syrian soldiers upstage to sit on the KING OF ISRAEL’S throne. The King brings them food, kneeling to them. ELISHA and his servant also kneel. The soldiers finally decide to reach for the food, and there is a freeze.)

STORYTELLER

And he prepared great provision for them.

(The soldiers are finished feasting, and they get up and leave, one of them turning to raise a hand to wave to the King who also raises a hand to wave.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And when they had eaten and drunk, he sent them away,

(The Syrian soldiers kneel at the side of their own King, who partially sits up, listening to their amazing story. Freeze.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

And they went to their master.

(Now all are up and starting to move slowly offstage in opposite directions, Syrians to the right, and Israelites to the left. The two kings pause and turn their heads to look at one another. Freeze.)

STORYTELLER (continued)

So the bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel.

(STORYTELLER moves upstage, all turn offstage and take a step or two and freeze, and hold until final vocal tone and final click of percussion signals the end of the play. Typically, the STORYTELLER for the next story will break the freeze alone and speak the next title and reference.)