

The States Collection
Mississippi – The Mad Potter of Biloxi

CAST: 3 (2 male, 1 female)

George E. Ohr – as the title suggests – an eccentric potter ahead of his time

John Anderson – gentleman in his 20's or a bit older; trying to please his wife

Jane Anderson – his wife who thinks she knows art

Anne Anderson-Smith (female) 16-18 – should be played by same actress as Jane; 1970's

PLACE: Biloxi, Mississippi

TIME: Winter day, 1909* (last page is today) the time can be suggested with costumes but don't go for an authentic look. A long coat and hat for JANE. Overcoat for JOHN. Dungarees and colorful suspenders if handy. Suggest with hats. For ANNE: have Jane simply remove hat and coat for

SYNOPSIS: A couple stops at a potter's studio. Both the Potter and the pottery are bis surprises.

TAGS: Comedy, art, artist, small town America, George E. Ohr

Lights up on a small, crammed pottery studio. There are signs everywhere. I know it's 1909, but feel free to use posterboard! It's a short play. The signs say: "Greatest Pottery on Earth," "Invest now! These pieces will be worth a lot after I'm gone," and "Potter-Ohr-E!"

JANE

Oh my – a bit dusty.

GEORGE

Welcome! Welcome! I am just finishing something up – but please. Have a look.

JOHN

We saw your ... unusual sign. My wife is something of an art collector.

GEORGE

Then surely you will see what others don't.

JANE

Jane Anderson. This is my husband John. I am fond of the current Arts and Craft craze. So elegant and tidy. Nature at its finest.

GEORGE

The current craze bewilders me. What is tidy about nature? Gnarled tree roots, broken branches, untidy bushes growing hither and yon. Weeds that plant themselves in rocks and splash themselves in crevices and the sides of building. It's such an amazing, untidy mess.

JANE

Your pots are unusual. I have never seen corners gape and knot themselves in such a fashion.

GEORGE

But that's what the world does to life – isn't it? And I like to create the way the world creates.

JOHN

There are some amazingly vibrant colors here. Very pretty.

GEORGE

Pretty is as pretty does. I am more interested in form. The glazes just help keep me awake. Maybe I should stop adding color.

JANE

They're very thin. I am not sure how long they'd last in a home with children and cats.

GEORGE

I agree. My pieces are really for museums to display.

JOHN

And have they?

GEORGE

It's coming.

JANE

That blob here – was that a mistake?

GEORGE

Blob? That's hardly a blob. It's a bubble waiting to be popped. The side was too smooth. I considered having a long drip piece but in the end, I thought the bubble would arouse interest. I make no mistakes. Of course, it could be said that I am the mistake – my manner of working. My belief in the mud. But when I am gone, I have no doubt that my work will be praised and cherished. You see, I am a duck.

JOHN

Are your feet webbed?

GEORGE

Maybe! Imagine a duck living among chickens. Always questioning why his feet were webbed and his feathers were not the norm. But then I found mud. And when I combined that with the potters wheel, I was a wild duck in water.

JOHN

You are - different than most artists we have encountered.

GEORGE

Some think I am crazy – but it gets attention. Art needs attention.

JANE

I would be interested in this piece. I'd like a reminder of our encounter.

GEORGE

Fifteen dollars.

JOHN

You do think a lot of yourself! Five at best.

GEORGE

Twenty.

JOHN

I am not sure you understand how bargaining works. I go low and you – also lower your price.

GEORGE

Twenty-three. Not a penny less.

JANE

It's getting out of our league.

GEORGE

Twenty-five. That's my final offer.

JANE

I don't think you want to sell your pieces.

GEORGE

It's a fair price for an undiscovered but brilliant potter.

JANE

Thank-you. You have given us a most unusual afternoon.

GEORGE

Wait just a minute.

(GEORGE exits.)

JOHN

I bet he's reconsidering. Poor chap. Probably doesn't sell much. I won't go higher than ten.

JANE

You are a softie. They are good conversation pieces.

(GEORGE returns. He hands JANE an envelope.)

GEORGE

For your grandchild – possibly your great grandchild. Keep it filed away. Trust me. It will be worth it. Will you do that?

JANE

Of course. Thank you for your time, Mr. Ohr.

GEORGE

George.

JANE

George.

JOHN

It's been a pleasure.

(JANE and JOHN exit.)

GEORGE

My little mud-babies. I really cannot part with you, can I? One day, people shall take notice. One day, people shall see that this wild duck of a man could do things with mud that nobody ever tried to do. You shall outlast me. But you will always carry my name. Now, it's time to add to the collection.

(GEORGE exits. Light changes. ANNE enters reading the letter.)

ANNE

Dear Future Child of the Anderson Family,
Mr. and Mrs. Anderson dropped by my studio. They didn't buy anything which is too bad. Because the worth of my pieces has certainly increased by now and you would have a tidy sum of money. Look me up. I am sure you will find me in all the best places. But who knows? Maybe this note will be worth something. But the pottery would have been better." Sincerely, George E. Ohr also knows as "Potter-Ohr-E."

(ANNE quickly looks up OHR on her phone.)

"In the 1970's, Andy Warhol bought a piece of Ohr's potters and soon art collectors were clamoring for his pieces. Today his collection is worth millions. George Ohr did not see his success but he was one of the earliest innovators of the abstract art movement. To this date, nobody has been able to replicate the thin, twisty swirls in his work. He was a genius with mud. A museum bearing his name is a Biloxi treasure."

END OF PLAY

