

# **NIGHT SINGS ITS SONGS**

**by Jon Fosse**

**Translated from the Norwegian by Sarah Cameron Sunde**

**Translation commissioned by  
Oslo Elsewhere  
Anna Gutto and Sarah Cameron Sunde, Artistic Directors  
New York City, 2004**

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NATTA SYNG SINE SONGAR by Jon Fosse was first presented by the Rogaland Theatre in Stavanger, Norway in 1997. This translation, entitled NIGHT SINGS ITS SONGS, was created for the U.S. debut of the play, and was first presented by Oslo Elsewhere, The Unbound Theatre, and Spring Theatreworks at the Culture Project's 45 Bleecker Theatre, 45 Below, in New York City on June 5, 2004.

The creative contributors and cast were as follows:

Director.....Sarah Cameron Sunde  
Dramaturg.....Marie-Louise Miller

THE YOUNG WOMAN.....Anna Gutto  
THE YOUNG MAN.....Louis Cancelmi  
THE FATHER .....Peter Davies  
THE MOTHER.....Diane Ciesla  
BASTE.....George Hannah

Set Designer.....Lauren Helpert  
Lighting Designer.....Roma Flowers  
Costume Designer.....Maline Casta  
Composer.....Christopher Tin  
Sound Designer.....Ryan Tilke  
Properties Designer.....Faye Armon  
Casting.....Liz Ortiz-Mackes  
Press Representation.....Jim Baldassare  
Stage Management.....Misha Siegel-Rivers

### **CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR THE U.S. DEBUT PRODUCTION:**

“Mr. Fosse (pronounced FAH-suh), who is Norwegian, and Sarah Cameron Sunde, the American who translated his play, have an ear for conversation, particularly for the synergy of repetition and for the fine line between generality and allegory.” - THE NEW YORK TIMES

“Absorbing...this couple merits stopping in.” - THE VILLAGE VOICE

“PICK OF THE WEEK! *Night Sings Its Songs* reaches us with the high beauty of its aesthetics and the tremendous complexity of the characters developed through thoughtful and intelligent acting and directing. It is a minimalist marvel to see, and will leave you thinking about the value and rarity of speaking directly and being heard.” - OFFOFFONLINE

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR:**

Novelist, poet and playwright Jon Fosse was born in 1959 on the west coast of Norway and now resides in Bergen. The author of more than 30 books and 30 plays that have been translated into over 40 languages, he is one of the most provocative, celebrated, and produced European playwrights of today. His novels include *Red, Black, Closed Guitar, The Boathouse, The Bottle Collector, and Melancholia I-II*, and his volumes of poetry include *Angel with Water in its Eyes* and *Dog and Angel*. Since 1993, Fosse has focused primarily on playwriting. He quickly received international acclaim, particularly after Claude Regy (legendary French director of Pinter’s work) came out of retirement to direct his play *Someone is Going to Come*. Afterwards, *Le Monde* dubbed Fosse “the Beckett of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.” Including *And We’ll Never Be Parted, The Guitar Man, Night Sings Its Songs, Dream of Autumn, Sa Ka La, Girl on the Sofa, and deathvariations*, his plays have been produced on major stages across Europe, as well as around the world in countries such as Japan, Australia, Canada and Chile. Norwegian National Television (NRK) calls Fosse “Norway’s biggest cultural export” and he is the recipient of numerous international awards and honors. He was named Best Foreign Playwright by *Theater Heute* (the leading theatrical magazine for German speaking countries); was designated a Chevalier by the French government; and in 2003 he became the youngest person ever to win Norway’s highest cultural honor, Norsk Kulturråd Ærespris (The Norwegian Arts Council Honorary Award).

### **ABOUT OSLO ELSEWHERE:**

Oslo Elsewhere was founded by Anna Gutto and Sarah Cameron Sunde in 2004 with the mission to bring the most innovative plays and ideas about contemporary theater from Norway to the United States, and vice versa. Oslo Elsewhere develops new translations for American audiences and produces bold, relevant theatrical plays that challenge sensibilities and provoke audiences beyond the everyday.

Oslo Elsewhere has produced US-premieres of *Night Sings Its Songs, deathvariations* and *Sa Ka La* by Jon Fosse, as well as a contemporary adaptation of Henrik Ibsen’s *Rosmersholm*. PAJ (Performing Arts Journal) published American-English translations of *deathvariations* (Fall Edition, 2007) and *Sa Ka La* in their book *NEW EUROPE plays from the continent* (2009).

Sarah Cameron Sunde and Anna Gutto are experts on Jon Fosse and contemporary interpretation of Henrik Ibsen, and active advocates for the importance of American-English translations for American audiences. They have spoken on several panels about translation as well as written essays for a variety of publications such as *PAJ, The Brooklyn Rail, Stikkordet* (Publication of the Norwegian Actors Union) and the Norwegian book *Ibsen’s Women*.

## **NOTES ON TRANSLATION:**

In translating plays there are always things that are 'untranslatable'. Since plays are meant to be experienced live, one cannot simply translate words; one must translate the action that lies underneath the words. Actions and subtleties are cultural, and it is imperative to translate specifically for the culture that one is working in. Thus, Oslo Elsewhere creates American-English translations for American audiences as opposed to using pre-existing British translations.

The Translation Think Tank (a loose affiliation of translators interested in investigating the current status of theater-in-translation in the U.S.) and Oslo Elsewhere have come to the conclusion that in order to create a successful translation, it is necessary for two things to be present in the individual or the group of collaborators working on a new translation: 1) that at least one person understands both cultures and speaks both languages and 2) that at least one person understands theatrical language and the way actions function in a play.

## **NOTES FROM THE TRANSLATOR:**

To translate Jon Fosse is to allow his unique voice come through in the American English language. He has established a new voice in theatre – a voice unlike any we have heard before. A voice that is equally new in Norway as it is in the rest of the world. I want *that* voice to work for an American audience.

### Note on the use and meaning of "yah":

Yah = Norwegian "ja" = yes

Yah = American "yeah", only not so nasal, please.

Also, Yah = yep, hmm, ok, so, well, fine, oh, sure, yeah, uh-huh, tsk, ugh...

These other words have not been inserted in place of the 'yah' because rhythm and repetition is vital in Fosse's writing. My goal is to provide an affirmative in American-English that lives somewhere between 'ja' and 'yeah' and carries a lot of flexibility. It should be simple and not sound foreign. It can be used for emphasis in certain cases, but it should primarily be used as a 'filler' where the breath or thought holds for a moment. The 'yah' serves to link the characters, while also allowing the interpretation of this one word to be character specific. In all cases, the 'yah' should be of help, not of hindrance. I encourage the creative team to find ways into the sound that allows the repetition to help tell the story without putting too much emphasis on it. When the 'yah' appears at the beginning of a line, please do not make the mistake of thinking that there is a comma after the yah, before the rest of the phrase. Instead, try to think about it as if the 'yah' simply leads to the rest of what is being said.

Lastly, every choice has been made to serve the action of the play, with the knowledge that these words will be spoken out-loud, by live actors on the stage. Please do not hesitate to contact me at [sarah@osloelsewhere.org](mailto:sarah@osloelsewhere.org) if you have any questions about the translation.

*This translation would not have been possible without invaluable insights and support from the following people: Jon Fosse, Anna Gutto, Marie-Louise Miller, Nora Schjoldager, Øivind Frisvold, Einar & Cammy Sunde.*

## CHARACTERS

The young woman

The young man

The father

The mother

Baste

I

*Black. Lights up. A living room, a sofa, an easy chair and a coffee table a bit to the right at the front of the stage. A large window at the back a bit to the left; it is light outside. On the right side of the window, somewhat high up, hangs a clock; it shows 2:45 p.m. Under the clock, a bit to the right, hangs a picture of a baby boy. To the left side of the window is an unusually large sideboard. One door in the short wall on the left, and one door in the short wall on the right. The young man lies on the sofa, reading a book.*

THE YOUNG WOMAN

*Comes in from the door on the right*

I cannot stand it  
anymore

*Short pause*

No I can't handle it  
We can not live like this

*The young man sits up slowly, closes the book, but keeps his place with his index finger*

You lie there reading

You don't go out

You don't do anything

*She rattles off a list*

We don't have any money

You don't have any work

We don't have

anything

*She goes and sits down in the easy chair*

And y'know you go out less and less  
before at least you went to the store  
to buy food

went to the post office

I mean you've never liked going on walks

I have always loved to go on walks

Before

yah before I met you

I always went on long walks

Every Sunday I went on a walk

And other days too

And I had friends

maybe not a ton of friends

but I had friends

girlfriends

But they

they never really come here

Not even Marte comes over anymore

She'll ring the doorbell

stand outside and talk to me

but she won't come inside

Because you just sit there

radiating gloom

My girlfriends came here a few times

but you just sat there  
stiff and awkward  
didn't say a word  
*Laughs resignedly*  
What an atmosphere  
No it was unbearable  
and that's why  
*Looks at him*  
It's no wonder they don't come anymore  
No one comes here  
*Short pause*  
You're not okay  
You can't stand people  
Yah  
*The young man sighs, looks at her*  
No I can't handle much more of this  
*The young man nods. Pause*  
And now that someone is finally coming  
to visit  
it's your parents

THE YOUNG MAN

*Defensively*  
It just so happens your parents  
come here  
too  
*Short pause*  
Not so long  
since the last time they were here  
Besides I'm not the one  
who asked my parents to come

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Well at least  
they won't  
stay very long

THE YOUNG MAN

Yah yah  
*Short pause. He looks at her*  
It's not that strange  
That they want to see their grandchild  
though  
*Somewhat angry*  
Isn't that allowed  
They're coming here to see their grandchild  
You understand that  
There isn't any other reason  
they would come

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Yah yah  
*Short pause*  
And it is about time  
they come to see the baby  
Hard to believe  
they're interested at all  
They could have come before  
Yah I mean that  
*The young man looks down. Pause*

THE YOUNG MAN  
They just don't want to be a  
burden

THE YOUNG WOMAN  
Yah well they have to come  
Of course  
Of course they have to come  
*She looks around the living room, sighs*  
So I guess I have to clean up  
now  
before your parents arrive  
It should be nice and clean  
when a mother-in-law comes to visit  
isn't that right  
*The young man puts the book on the table, rises and walks around the room*  
You can stay put  
*Louder*  
Stay put  
I can't handle watching you  
pace around the room  
*resignedly*  
I'll straighten up  
So don't you worry  
yourself  
*The young man goes back to the sofa; sits down*  
I'll take care of everything  
You just relax  
you  
Read  
just keep reading your book  
you  
Just keep reading  
*She laughs a bit*  
Or maybe you would like to  
go do the shopping  
*He looks with some trepidation at her*  
Or do I have to do that too  
I'll do the shopping  
clean the house  
fix food for your parents



*Louder*  
No you can do the shopping

THE YOUNG MAN  
*Reluctantly*  
Yah

THE YOUNG WOMAN  
*Surprised, questioning*  
You dare to go out  
But you don't dare go to the store anymore  
*The young man shakes his head, resignedly*  
So why are you saying yah

THE YOUNG MAN  
Should I have said no

THE YOUNG WOMAN  
No you just lie there  
lie there just  
lie there and read  
*Short pause*

THE YOUNG MAN  
I can clean up the house

THE YOUNG WOMAN  
Good  
*Short pause, ironically*  
But shouldn't you be writing  
now  
Reading  
How's it going with your writing anyway  
Are you writing  
Or are you just lying on the sofa

THE YOUNG MAN  
*Thinks of something. Short pause. With a little enthusiasm*  
Well actually  
I think maybe  
yah I sent something to a publisher  
a while ago

THE YOUNG WOMAN  
You sent something to a publisher

THE YOUNG MAN  
*Nods*  
Yah  
*Short pause*  
But they probably

won't want it

THE YOUNG WOMAN

I'm sure it'll be ok

*The young man nods. Suddenly supportive*

I think

it will

You know you've

*Short pause*

yah ever since I've known you

you've just been writing and writing

The years

add up

after awhile

With you

writing and writing

*The young man nods*

Writing and more writing

*abruptly*

Shhhhhh

Did you hear something

*The young man shakes his head*

Is he crying

*The young man again shakes his head*

I can go check on him

*The young woman exits the door to the left, and the young man takes the book, leafs through the pages looking for his place, lies down on the sofa, finds his place and begins to read. The young woman comes in again*

No are you reading again

We have so much to do

Weren't you going to clean up the house

*The young man closes the book, marking his place with his index finger*

THE YOUNG MAN

He's asleep

THE YOUNG WOMAN

Yah

*Short pause*

You don't want to go shopping

*The young man looks at her, desperately pleading*

You wouldn't dare

No

*She resignedly shakes her head*

No I cannot handle much more of this

You never go out

I don't understand you

*Almost crying*

I can not handle much more

*The young man sits up, looks desperately around him. The young woman shakes her head, resignedly.*

No

*Pause. The doorbell rings. The young woman looks at the young man.*

Your parents

Are they here already

They were supposed to come later

well

*He looks toward her, confused*

You think

it's your parents

*He remains seated, puts the book on the coffee table.*

Should I open the door

*He just sits there, and she exits the door to the right. He gets up, goes to the window, looks out, turns, looks toward the door on the right where a man in his 60s appears, dressed in a blue quilted down parka, he is carrying a brown shopping bag, the father looks down, looks up when he sees the young man, takes the bag in his other hand and, with his arm outstretched and head bowed, goes toward the young man, they meet and shake hands but they do not look at each other.*

FATHER

Yah hello hello

And I must congratulate you on the baby

THE YOUNG MAN

Thank you thank you

*The young woman and mother come in, the mother has a coat on, the young man looks toward the mother*

MOTHER

Oh there you are

there you are

*She puts her hand out, goes toward the young man, who goes toward the mother, they shake hands, she stands there, holding his hands*

And I must congratulate you

on the little one

*She looks toward the young woman, lets go of his hands*

Oh this is so nice

Finally we get to see our grandchild

I have

*Looks toward the father*

yah we have

waited a long time for this

haven't we

FATHER

*Drags out the word*

Yah

MOTHER

*Decisively*  
Yah we have  
*Toward the young woman*  
But where is the child

THE YOUNG WOMAN  
He's sleeping  
In the bedroom

MOTHER  
Ah  
But I need to see him  
right away  
*The young woman nods. The father looks around, confused, doesn't really know what he should be doing, remains standing*

THE YOUNG MAN  
*Toward the father*  
You can have a seat

FATHER  
Oh yah thank you  
*The father goes and sits down in the easy chair, sets the bag by the chair, the young woman and the mother go toward the door to the left*

MOTHER  
*Toward the father*  
You have to come  
too  
You've got to see the little one

FATHER  
No no  
I can wait until he wakes up  
*The mother goes out the door and the young woman follows her*  
*Pause*  
*Toward the young man*  
Yah so this is where you live

THE YOUNG MAN  
I live here  
yah

FATHER  
Yah hmmm.  
*Pause*

THE YOUNG MAN  
And you  
is everything ok with you two

FATHER  
Everything's basically the same  
yah

THE YOUNG MAN  
With the others back there  
too

FATHER  
Yah I can't think of any news  
not off hand  
anyway

THE YOUNG MAN  
Well  
that's how it goes

FATHER  
Yah  
*Pause*  
And you are well

THE YOUNG MAN  
I can't complain  
Things are pretty much the same

FATHER  
*Somewhat abruptly*  
But do you have any work  
*The young man shakes his head*  
No well  
It's probably not that easy  
to find something to do  
though

THE YOUNG MAN  
No

FATHER  
But you (two) are getting by

THE YOUNG MAN  
*Reluctantly, drags it out*  
Yah

FATHER  
*Looks around him*  
You have a nice  
place  
in any case  
And it's

pretty central  
right

THE YOUNG MAN  
It is yah

FATHER  
But it must be expensive to live here

THE YOUNG MAN  
Pretty expensive  
*Pause*

FATHER  
But you (two) are getting by

THE YOUNG MAN  
We are  
*Laughs a bit*  
in a way  
anyhow

FATHER  
Yah we had to come into town  
me and your mother  
Had some errands  
to run  
So we just had to  
*Stops himself abruptly*

THE YOUNG MAN  
Yah well  
that's  
how it goes  
*A crying baby is heard*

FATHER  
*Looks at the young man*  
I guess he woke up

THE YOUNG MAN  
Yah  
*Pause*  
He sleeps most of the day

FATHER  
He doesn't cry too much  
*The young man shakes his head; the crying subsides*

THE YOUNG MAN  
I guess he calmed down again

*Short pause*  
He sleeps a lot  
yah

FATHER  
Yah well  
that's how it goes  
*Short pause*  
Well we just thought we'd  
stop by  
since we were down in town anyway  
yah

THE YOUNG MAN  
Yah makes sense  
*Short pause*

FATHER  
We won't be long  
just stopping by

THE YOUNG MAN  
Yah  
*Short pause. The young woman comes in*

THE YOUNG WOMAN  
He woke up  
for a second  
but he went to sleep again  
right away  
*The mother comes in*

MOTHER  
*Toward the young woman*  
It was stupid of me to wake him up  
I didn't mean to do that  
no that was really stupid  
*She goes and takes a seat on the sofa*  
*Toward the father*  
You have to see him  
A beautiful little boy  
You have to see him

FATHER  
Yah  
*The young woman exits the door to the right*

MOTHER  
*Toward the father*  
It's not easy to tell  
who he looks like

but  
My he's beautiful  
He certainly doesn't look like you  
*Then looks toward the young man*  
And not you either  
No he definitely doesn't look like you at all  
*Short pause*  
And he doesn't look like me  
either  
as a matter of fact  
And not  
*Nods toward the door to the right*  
like her  
either  
*Quietly toward the young man*  
But how are things with you two

THE YOUNG MAN  
Oh yes  
everything's fine thanks

MOTHER  
*Worried*  
And the baby's doing well

THE YOUNG MAN  
Yah everything's fine

MOTHER  
But  
*Stops abruptly. Short pause. She looks at the father, he looks down.*  
*Pause*

THE YOUNG MAN  
*Toward the mother*  
So you came into town today  
yah

MOTHER  
Yah we had to come and meet  
the little one

THE YOUNG MAN  
Yah  
*Short pause*  
*Toward the mother*  
And you had some errands to run

FATHER  
Yah



MOTHER

*Hurriedly*

But we mainly came to

*Stops abruptly as the young woman comes in*

THE YOUNG WOMAN

I guess I should go out

and get some

food

for the guests

*Laughs a bit*

MOTHER AND FATHER

*Both talking almost at once*

No not at all

No need to

THE YOUNG MAN

Yah you surprised us a bit

MOTHER

Yah

we came a bit early

*Toward the young woman*

Yah please forgive us

THE YOUNG WOMAN

It's ok

MOTHER

*Toward the young woman*

We just wanted to stop by

for a few minutes

We should go soon

*in explanation*

Yah they've changed the bus schedule

THE YOUNG WOMAN

*Toward the father*

But you have to see

him

you too

FATHER

*Looks shyly down; drags out the word*

Yah

THE YOUNG WOMAN

You two

*Looks toward the young man, then at the father*

why don't you go and have a look at him