

MIXOLOGY

By Alan Haehnel

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CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

RICK
DONNA
CHRIS
TERRY
RAY

SALLY
PETER
MONA
NARRATOR
ACTOR(S) 1,2,3,4

PRODUCTION NOTES

Fluidity and flexibility are the key words one should keep in mind when staging “Mixology.” In order to achieve these aims, a simple set would probably work best. Neutral black boxes of various shapes would be optimal; they could be shifted into various configurations to accommodate the four sections of the play.

The show could have a cast of 8, 16 or even 32. If cast with 8, the show would then become an acting tour de force because each actor, though saying the same lines in each scene, would have to adjust his or her character, situation and intentions. The same requirements would be true with a cast of 16, though the actors would need adjust for only two scenes. 32 cast members would perhaps allow for the easiest scene changes, but the versatility of the words would be highlighted, not the versatility of the actors.

Finally, let me be the first to say that my ways of making these disparate script halves work together are not necessarily definitive. For the mixed scenes, I have provided extensive stage directions and clues to line delivery in order to show one way the scene could be interpreted to make sense. However, I am sure that creative actors and directors could discover new angles for justifying the words—angles that use all, some or none of my suggestions. The main gimmick of the play is to illustrate the old adage: “It’s not what you say; it’s how you say it.” My hope is that the audience will be delighted by the various ways the actors take the same words and use them to create vastly different characters, situations and points. The order of the scenes is by no means sacred, either.

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Non-Mixed: The Straight Stories

Scene 1 : The Proposal

RICK: I have something for you.

DONNA: Oh, you shouldn't have.

RICK: Oh, I definitely should have. And I did.

DONNA: It's so small.

RICK: But significant. Open it.

DONNA: All right, I will. (*opens gift*) Oh! Oh, wow.

RICK: Do you like it?

DONNA: It's beautiful. But does this mean. . . ?

RICK: Yes. Yes it does. It means I want you to marry me.

DONNA: I. . . I'm speechless.

RICK: Well, you only have to say one word.

DONNA: But I'm afraid the word I'm going to say isn't the one you want to hear.

RICK: What? You mean you. . .

DONNA: I can't marry you. In fact, I can't see you anymore.

RICK: I'm shocked. I thought things were going so well.

DONNA: From your perspective, maybe, but not for me.

RICK: I see. Well, I guess this is the end, then.

DONNA: I'm afraid so.

RICK: I'll just be going now.

DONNA: I do like the ring, though. Can I keep it?

Scene 2: Unwanted Help

(CHRIS and TERRY have before them the pieces of some complicated thing needing assembly.)

CHRIS: Do you want me to show you how to do that?

TERRY: I don't need your help. I've got it.

CHRIS: You don't look like you've got it.

TERRY: Just give me a second, will you?

CHRIS: I can't stand this. Let me help!

TERRY: Hey, I want to do it on my own!

CHRIS: You are so stubborn.

TERRY: I'm not stubborn; I'm independent.

CHRIS: That piece does not go there.

TERRY: I don't recall asking you for your input.

CHRIS: You are wasting so much time.

TERRY: If you don't like it, don't watch.

CHRIS: Why do you take on projects you can't finish?

TERRY: Why do you try to butt into my business?

CHRIS: All right, fine; I'm leaving.

TERRY: Fine. I won't stop you.

CHRIS: Can't I just give you one little hint?

TERRY: I thought you were leaving!

CHRIS: I know when I'm not wanted!

TERRY: Good. Great. You're not wanted!

Scene 3: The Worst Kind of News

(Doctor's office.)

RAY: I'm afraid I have some not-so-good news.

SALLY: Should I sit down for this?

RAY: That would be a good idea.

SALLY: I'm guessing the tests came back.

RAY: They did. That's why I called you in.

SALLY: How bad is it?

RAY: Well, we certainly need to keep a good attitude.

SALLY: It's very bad, in other words.

RAY: These conversations are always very difficult.

SALLY: I understand. Just give it to me straight.

RAY: You've got about six months.

SALLY: You mean...?

RAY: Given the results and previous cases I've seen, I think that's it.

SALLY: Well, there must be something we can do. What about medicine?

RAY: Well, we'll do everything to keep you comfortable, of course.

SALLY: Comfortable? Is that the best you can offer?

RAY: I'm afraid so. Obviously, I'm very sorry.

SALLY: I can't believe it's come to this.

RAY: Well, I hate to rush you out, but I have another appointment.

SALLY: Oh. Of course. Thank you. You've been very kind.

Scene 4: Just Breakfast

(Restaurant)

MONA: Good morning. What can I get for you?

PETER: Hmm. I'm having a hard time deciding. Any suggestions?

MONA: Not really. I mean, it's pretty regular stuff.

PETER: No specialties?

MONA: What do you mean by specialty?

PETER: You know. . . things you do well here. Things lots of people get.

MONA: Oh, sure, sure. Lots of people get the toast.

PETER: What's special about the toast?

MONA: It's crunchy.

PETER: That's a specialty?

MONA: Look, are you going to order or not? I've got other customers.

PETER: Fine. You haven't been doing this long, have you?

MONA: What's that supposed to mean?

PETER: Forget it. Just bring me some coffee and a blueberry muffin.

MONA: We're out.

PETER: Of which?

MONA: Both.

PETER: What are you talking about? I see coffee and muffins all around me.

MONA: Yeah, well, those are for the not-rude people.

PETER: Perfect. I'm leaving. Here's your tip. . . get a new job!

(As the set is being shifted to accommodate the first mixing of the scenes, the NARRATOR comes out.)

NARRATOR: Well. That wasn't terribly compelling, now was it?

Truthfully, unless the scene happened to feature your particular son, daughter, significant other, or significant other's son or daughter or significant daughter's significant other's brother. . . Suffice to say, if you didn't have the good fortune to know any of the actors we just observed, you might justifiably have leaned over to your neighbor and whispered something like, "This is boring; let's leave at intermission." I am here, however, to urge you not to follow that impulse. First off, as this is a one-act play, there will be no intermission, thus negating your ability to leave during it. If you leave, you will have to sneak out during the play itself, which would be rude. More importantly, though, I urge you to stay because the play is about to get much more interesting. Do you happen to remember how I began this monologue? With a single word: "well." The simple word "well" can communicate a variety of ideas, depending upon the

circumstances. I will enlist some aid to demonstrate. **(ACTOR 1 comes out.)** Say you have just come upon a hole in the ground circled by stones and containing water deep within it. Someone asks you what it is. You could reply. . .

ACTOR 1: Well.

(ACTOR 1 exits. ACTOR 2 enters.)

NARRATOR: Say you are a mother and you have set a curfew for your daughter of 11:30 p.m. and she comes in at 2:22 a.m. You could query. . .

ACTOR 2: **(angrily)** Well?

(ACTOR 2 exits. ACTOR 3 enters.)

NARRATOR: Say you are feeling particularly chipper one morning and the mailman asks you how you are. You might answer. . .

ACTOR 3: Well!

(ACTOR 3 exits. ACTOR 4 enters.)

NARRATOR: Finally, say you have been waiting in line for twenty minutes to order your favorite meal of a triple-decker moo-moo burger when the person in front of you lets a friend butt in line and that friend orders the last triple-decker moo-moo burger of the night. You might exclaim. . .

ACTOR 4: **(indignant)** Well!

(ACTOR 4 exits.)

NARRATOR: Four wells—well, well, well, well—all communicating vastly different ideas. Thus emerges our thesis, if you will, for this play: It's not what you say. . .

(All actors from the scenes step out from the wings to finish the sentence.)

ALL: It's how you say it.

(The actors exit.)

NARRATOR: Precisely. Our endeavor, then, is to show how the same words, given various circumstances, can function in vastly different ways. **(getting increasingly excited)** The dialogue you heard in the

original, somewhat unscintillating scenes, will take on new meanings as they are mixed and remixed throughout the course of the presentation. You will no longer be bored, oh, no. You will be intrigued and amused—nay, beyond that—you will be intellectually enthralled by the surprising combinations we are about to present. Far from wishing to leave at some non-existent intermission, I suspect that you will become increasingly engaged to the point that, by the time we are ready to bring the lights down after the final moment of our play, you will desperately scream, “No, no, show us more! Reveal more subtle distinctions in our language! I am addicted to the mystery and the wonder and the inventiveness you have shown me! I cannot leave! You cannot make me! Don’t end the play!” **(after a pause)** Or, at the very least, you will want to present a nice bouquet of flowers to your son or daughter or significant other. Well. Thank you. On with the show.

Mix One

Scene 1: Sorry, You’re Fired

(RAY is in his office, looking at a newspaper article. HE shakes his head, opens the door and motions for DONNA to enter.)

RAY: **(holding up the paper)** I’m afraid I have some not-so-good news.

DONNA: **(angry)** Oh, you shouldn’t have.

(SHE takes the paper from him and rips it up.)

RAY: **(sarcastic)** That would be a good idea.

DONNA: **(regarding a ripped piece of the paper, which SHE tosses to the floor as if it doesn’t matter to her)** It’s so small.

(RAY goes to his desk and takes out a new paper. HE jabs his finger at the article.)

RAY: They did. That’s why I called you in.

DONNA: **(taking the paper)** All right, I will. **(SHE reads, shocked and depressed. The article damns her.)** Oh! Oh, wow.

RAY: Well, we certainly need to keep a good attitude.

DONNA: **(sarcastic, tossing the article aside)** It’s beautiful. **(Suddenly looking at RAY, her boss)** But does this mean. . . ?

RAY: These conversations are always very difficult.

DONNA: I. . . I’m speechless.

RAY: You've got about six months.

DONNA: (**angry and threatening**) But I'm afraid the word I'm going to say isn't the one you want to hear.

RAY: (**"what am I supposed to do?"**) Given the results and previous cases I've seen, I think that's it.

DONNA: (**as if bitterly remembering a past conversation when SHE was jilted**) I can't marry you. In fact, I can't see you anymore.

RAY: Well, we'll do everything to keep you comfortable, of course.

DONNA: From your perspective, maybe, but not for me.

RAY: I'm afraid so. Obviously, I'm very sorry.

DONNA: (**mockingly**) I'm afraid so.

(**RAY's phone starts to ring.**)

RAY: Well. I hate to rush you out, but I have another appointment.

(**DONNA grabs RAY's cell phone from him.**)

DONNA: I do like the ring, though. Can I keep it?

(**SHE throws the phone out the window, then exits angrily.**)

Scene 2: King of the Mountain

(**RICK sits atop a mountain. TERRY is below him, struggling to get up the last incline to join RICK. RICK looks over the side and dangles a rope down to TERRY.**)

RICK: I have something for you.

TERRY: I don't need your help. I've got it.

(**RICK shrugs, pulls the rope back up, begins to rummage in his pack for food.**)

RICK: (**to himself**) Oh, I definitely should have. . . (**pulling out a large candy bar**) And I did!

TERRY: (**struggling, exhausted, but tenacious**) Just give me a second, will you?

RICK: (**still to himself, relishing the candy bar**) But significant. Open it.

TERRY: (**slipping**) Hey! (**HE regains his footing, takes a few deep breaths.**) I want to do it on my own.

RICK: (**tantalizing TERRY with a piece of the candy**) Do you like it?

TERRY: *(trying to push the candy away, losing balance, grabbing desperately at the rock again)* I'm not stubborn; I'm independent.

RICK: *(playfully talking to the candy, holding it to his ear as if it's talking back to him)* Yes? Yes, it does. It means I want you to marry me.

(HE gobbles the piece of chocolate, then looks down at the still-struggling TERRY. After a moment, TERRY looks up.)

TERRY: I don't recall asking you for your input.

RICK: Well, you only have to say one word.

TERRY: If you don't like it, don't watch!

(RICK shrugs, then turns away from TERRY. TERRY finally gets to the top, but RICK doesn't see him. TERRY taps him on the shoulder.)

RICK: What? *(happily rising to give TERRY a congratulatory hug)*
You mean you. . .

TERRY: *(rebuffing him)* Why do you try to butt into my business?

RICK: I'm shocked. I thought things were going so well.

TERRY: Fine. *(HE shoves RICK, who starts to swing his arms as if about to fall.)* I won't stop you!

(RICK falls, but clings to the top of the mountain. TERRY lifts his foot as if to stomp on RICK's hand.)

RICK: I see. Well, I guess this is the end, then.

TERRY: *(crouching down to look RICK in the face)* Good. Great.
You're not wanted!

RICK: I'll just be going now.

TERRY: *(prying RICK's fingers from the rocks as he speaks)* I. . .
thought. . . you. . . were. . . leaving!

(On this final word, TERRY manages to send RICK tumbling off the mountain.)

Scene 3: Mad Hatters

(PETER and CHRIS are working on hats. Plastic fruit and other decorations surround them, as well as various straw hats in need of finishing.)

PETER: **(holding up various decorations to a hat)** Hmm. I'm having a hard time deciding. Any suggestions?

CHRIS: Do you want me to show you how to do that?

PETER: No! **(scolding, as if to say, "you deal with your area, I'll deal with mine")** Specialties.

CHRIS: You don't look like you've got it.

PETER: **(trying to be patient, still stressing the concept of specialties)** You know things. You do well here. **(implying the insult that CHRIS's work is too ordinary)** Things lots of people get.

(After PETER's slight, CHRIS goes back to his hats, but HE can't help looking over at PETER, who still fusses at making just one decision.)

CHRIS: I can't stand this. Let me help!

(PETER holds up his hand to stop CHRIS, then comes over with an air of superiority and examines CHRIS's work.)

PETER: What's special about the. . . **(holding up a decoration that CHRIS has used)** toast?

CHRIS: You are so stubborn.

PETER: **(tossing aside the hat with the toast)** That's a specialty?

CHRIS: **(putting the toast hat back)** That piece does not go there.

PETER: Fine. **(going back to his hat)** You haven't been doing this long, have you?

CHRIS: You are wasting so much time.

PETER: Forget it. **(The two go back to their separate projects. Suddenly, PETER has "brilliant" idea. HE snaps his fingers urgently.)** Just bring me some coffee and a blueberry muffin!

(CHRIS sighs and brings PETER the decorations—plastic coffee cups and a large blueberry muffin cut out of fabric. PETER holds them up to the hat, then puts them beside the hat, then puts them on the other side.)

CHRIS: Why do you take on projects you can't finish?

PETER: **(fiddling with the decorations, trying to decide where to place them)** Of which?

CHRIS: (*finally fed up*) All right, fine; I'm leaving.

PETER: What are you talking about? (*expressing his vision for this hats*) I see coffee and muffins all around me.

CHRIS: (*exasperated*) Can't I just give you one little hint?

(*PETER gathers up the coffee cups, the muffins and several other decorations, piles them all on top of the hat, then violently tacks them all down with several hammer blows. HE steps back, satisfied.*)

PETER: Perfect! I'm leaving. (*HE begins to exit, then turns to CHRIS.*) Here's your tip. . . get a new job!

(*PETER exits. CHRIS turns his back.*)

CHRIS: I know when I'm not wanted!

Scene 4: A Common Malady

(*SALLY is standing in a room, looking quite nervous. SHE scratches her head several times. MONA enters, a bustling nurse reading a chart.*)

MONA: Good morning. (*rummaging through a drawer, talking to herself as SHE looks*) What can I get for you?

SALLY: Should I sit down for this?

MONA: (*pulling out two sticks for looking through hair*) Not really. I mean, it's pretty regular stuff.

(*SHE starts looking through MONA's hair with the sticks.*)

SALLY: I'm guessing the tests came back.

MONA: What do you mean by. . . ? (*SHE pulls something out of SALLY's hair, gets a magnifying glass, puts the thing on the table, looks at it.*) Specialty!

SALLY: (*trying to get a look*) How bad is it?

MONA: (*dismissive*) Oh, sure, sure. Lots of people get (*crushing what SHE pulled from SALLY's hair*) the toast.

SALLY: It's very bad, in other words.

MONA: (*regarding the specimen*) It's crunchy.

SALLY: I understand. Just give it to me straight.

(*MONA pulls out three bottles for SALLY to consider, all treatments for "the toast." SALLY looks at each one, trying to decide.*)

MONA: Look, are you going to order or not? I've got other customers.
SALLY: You mean. . . ?

(MONA pulls out a poster that reads: "Don't Be Ashamed! Get Checked for Toast!" MONA taps her finger on it.)

MONA: What's that supposed to mean?

SALLY: Well, there must be something we can do. What about medicine?

MONA: We're out.

SALLY: ***(reading the labels on the bottles again)*** Comfortable? Is that the best you can offer?

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