

Shootout

The Theatre Pavlova Massacre

by Ryan McFadyen

Commissioned by the Young and Hungry Youth Arts Trust, Wellington
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For Elis

My bestest Berlin bro,
'cos he reminds me that playwright is a compound word.

'Bad taste is a terrible thing to waste'
John Waters

Characters

- Stan – Female, 23** The Woman With The Bomb
- Franco Butty – Male, 23** The writer of *Shootout*
- Nat Hills – Female, 20** The director of *Shootout*
- Simon Harmonium–Flint – Male, 23** The producer of *Shootout*
- Marianne Firetruck – Female, 30** Creative NZ representative
- Bill Phillips – Male, 35** Theatre reviewer from The Dominion
- Annette Flout – Female, 35** Theatre reviewer from The Evening Post
- Jam Doughnut –Male, 20** Music reviewer from Loop
- Raewyn Mustang, 22** *Shortland Street* star
- Missy, 20** Her girlfriend
- Shannon – Female, 16** Annoying bossy teen
- Shanon – Female, 16** Annoying gullible teen
- Shanyn – Female, 16** Annoying clever teen
- Paul Bushnell (voice over)** Arts Week radio host
- In Shootout;**
- Jittery Man (voice over)** Shotgun artist from Kaukaupakaupa
- Little Girl (voice over)** Jittery Man’s conscience
- Angst Chorus (voice over)** Express his inner conflicts, constantly

Notes;

The first season of *Shootout* opened as aprt of the Young and Hungry festival of plays at BATS Theatre, Wellington, New Zealand on July 26, 2001 with the following cast;

Franco	Leon Verrall
Stan	Bex Joyce
Nat	Caroline Beech
Simon	Ants Heath
Marianne	Julia Truscott
Bill	Richard Knowles
Annette	Liz Kirkman
Jam	Richard Dey
Raewyn	Kristen Paterson
Missy	Amanda Rodriguez
Shannon	Irene Flanagan
Shanon	Alicia Sutton
Shanyn	Marie Hodson

The director was James Hadley, who I had met the previous year in Dunedin while working on the short play *The Correct Proportions of Eva*. It was James who lent me Tennessee's memoirs when I casually said 'I just wish I was really *good*, you know, like Tennessee Williams.'

James' earlier work on the nature or voyeurism *Visual Pleasures*, along with Jo Randerson's article 'The Perils Of Perfection' (Playmarket News, Summer 2000) were massive inspirations to the final script of *SHootout*.

I am profoundly indebted to the cast and to James for their willingness to enter the anarchic world of *Shootout*, and for their en-mass bravery in sticking it up most of the Wellingtonians we'd all been taught to treat like precious china. The hard work of the cast during rehearsals (especially in their creation of backstories for the characters) and the tactics for subverting theatre that James explored had a major impact on the final performance draft of the play, which you currently hold in your hands.

I am so grateful I'm not gonna try and put it into words. I've already told them a million times anyway.

James' convention of making some stage directions part of the character dialogue during the section following the 'second major turning point' have been annotated in this script as follows;

The character that says the related stage direction is noted with their initial, or if there are two with the same initial, the first two letters. The part that they read is underlined. (Si) For example, Simon would read this bit now, (M) and Marianne would read this bit. Sometimes there are two people like (St & Si) Stan and Simon would be reading this. When it says (C) it means 'The Critics'.

Also in the script I have ripped off Caryl Churchill's device of showing overlapping texts by placing a '/' where the next character begins their text. Thank you very much to Jonathon Hendry for the tip.

Extra special thanks to Jo Randerson, my brilliant dramaturg and wicked new friend. Baby girl, everything you write and everything you live makes me feel brave.

So...
Enjoy!
Or don't!

Ryan McFadyen
August 2001
(3 weeks before Berlin)

A tatty old curtain blocks the stage from view. It is hanging back to front. Early fifties New Orleans jazz/blues plays – Coleman Hawkins or similar.

When the audience arrives, STAN is sitting in the front row. She wears a fifties overcoat with a hat and a fake moustache.

SHANYN, SHANON and SHANNON enter and take their seats with the real audience, but nobody can tell they are actors. They talk and giggle a lot, and have a crinkly bag of chips or something else annoying.

Once everyone has sat down, Stan gets up and looks around the theatre, takes in the audience. She holds onto her coat to stop something from falling out of it. Ticking.

STAN: ‘The Louvre’ I said ‘The Louvre in Paris’ ‘Paris?’ he said ‘In FRANCE’ I said ‘You must have seen it. It’s in France. In Paris. The Mona Lisa?’ ‘Eh?’ he said. ‘In FRANCE’ I said. ‘In France.’ *(Pause)* He never listened. And when he did it only made it worse.

‘So what *did* you do?’ I said ‘Worked on my new play’ he said ‘What’s it about?’ ‘Oh, nothing’ he said, ‘Nothing.’

Stan goes through the gap in the curtain. All of the lights go out.

There is a BOOM of a bomb going off, and a building collapsing and burning. (Maybe even a bit of screaming if you’re feeling particularly gory...)

SHANNON: *(sotto voce)* Bang.

Shanon and Shanyn giggle. The burning noises crackle on – maybe flickering from behind the curtain. They slowly fade out under...

(In the dark)

PAUL BUSHNELL: *(voice over)*: Kia ora I’m Paul Bushnell with Arts Week. Tonight’s show marks the one-year anniversary of the Theatre Pavlova Massacre. A year on, what are we to make of the event and of the new worldwide movement – theatre of the self-destructive – which has emerged from it?

Here now is a section of the interview I conducted with Butty himself, the evening prior to his untimely death...

Flashback

PAUL: I’m here in the Theatre Pavlova where *Shootout*, the second play by acclaimed young writer Franco Butty, opens tomorrow night. You may remember his previous work

The Bubble Microcosm, which shot Franco to overnight success two years ago. The playwright has just returned from a year in Europe where he has been studying progressive approaches to theatre with Berlin's renowned Luftkissenboot Company. Franco?

FRANCO: (*voice over, far away like he is doing something else*) Yeah.

PAUL: Franco, tell us about *Shootout*.

Maybe Franco is chewing...

FRANCO: (*scuttles over to the microphone*) Uh... 'About' is such a subjective term, Paul... I'm not sure I understand it.

PAUL: Alright let me phrase that another way. Franco Butty, can you explain the outline of *Shootout* for us?

FRANCO: (*Pause*) ... sorry, the what?

PAUL: Franco, what is *Shootout*?

FRANCO: A theatre piece.

PAUL: (*getting impatient*) Give us a bit more detail...

FRANCO: Like...?

PAUL: Well what's the *story* of it...

FRANCO: (*Overlapping*) It's not so much a story as a progression of themes, so...

PAUL: (*Overlapping*) ...well then what happens in it?

FRANCO: (*Overlapping*) ...in terms of what *happens*... Some actors come on and do some stuff... for a length of time... and then at the end they stop.

Back to the present

PAUL: Elusive stuff there from Franco Butty. Now let's cast our minds to the opening night performance of Butty's second and final play, *Shootout*...

House lights come up.

Champagne corks pop, muffled noises of people laughing, chatting in the next room.

Louder are sfx of actors warming up their voices (in the really awful, embarrassing ways), trying out lines etc...

This continues as SIMON enters from the BATS foyer side dressed in a baby blue and grey suit, with a swag of cigars protruding from his jacket pocket. He chuffs on a cigar and carries a couple of 'reserved' signs. He is finishing off a conversation over his shoulder.

SIMON: ...well stuff it in the fucking *second* port then.

He stops and claps his hands for attention...

Alrighty actors... let's... ah... can we get ourselves to first positions please? Let's just remember to take it slowly, OK? Remember what Nat's told you all and, hey, lets make theatre, huh? (*waits for enthusiastic response, which never comes*) Huh? Alright. Ok... so house is live, yeah? So...(*holds a finger up to his lips in a 'shh'.* *Wiggles with excitement*) This is gonna be great.

Snaps his fingers several times, points at the lighting operator.

OK, can we have the...er...the lights, please.

House lights go down on one side of the curtain, come up on the other.

Kia ora.

Simon pulls the curtain aside, revealing yet another seating block facing the audience, mirroring their 'real world' back at them. Laughing and chatting continue from behind a door with an EXIT sign above it.

In the front row of the new seating block, Stan sits in the same physical position she was at the start of the play. Simon sees her.

SIMON: You can't sit there.

Pause, Stan looks.

SIMON: Those seats are reserved.

Pause.

STAN: I'm pretty reserved.

SIMON: They're reserved for Raewyn Mustang.

STAN: I'm sorry?

SIMON: Raewyn Mustang? (*waits for response*) Shortland Street? (*waits again*)
Somebody, OK? So if you don't mind moving...

Stan reluctantly rises from her seat and starts up the aisle.

SIMON: Tino pai... Cigar?

Stan throws him a backwards glare, then softens.

STAN: I wouldn't normally smoke – (*aside*) it can kill you. But since tonight is a special occasion...

Takes a cigar.

STAN: (*Blache DuBois-esque*) Do you have a light, young man?

SIMON: (*oblivious*) Uh...no.

Stan goes and sits in the back row of the theatre.

Simon places 'reserved' signs on the front two seats of the theatre.

He opens the door with the EXIT sign.

Sound effects of a big group of people entering the theatre, murmuring etc, to make it seem like the theatre is fuller than it really is.

First to enter is MARIANNE FIRETRUCK, power-dressed, carrying a champagne flute and a pair of opera glasses. She has a long scarf or similar, which is constantly slipping off and requiring attention. She is looking around for someone, ignoring Simon.

SIMON: Howdy.

MARIANNE: Hi, I was supposed to be met by someone here... a colleague...John McDavitt?

SIMON: You're from Creative New Zealand?

MARIANNE: Yes...

SIMON: Ah.

He hands her a bottle of champagne and a cigar

MARIANNE: Oh. Thank you. He...uh...

SIMON: John...

MARIANNE: John yes, he said...uh...he said he would meet me. Here.

SIMON: Well I'm sure he'll be along soon then. Why don't you take a seat?

MARIANNE: Well I...uh...well... I haven't got a ticket you see?

SIMON: That's fine, that's fine... wouldn't be possible without you and all that.

MARIANNE: What? Oh yes.

SIMON: Enjoy the show.

MARIANNE: Th....thank you.

She goes to take a seat at the back of the seating block, high up, shuffles past Stan with much difficulty.

MARIANNE: *(to Stan)* Hello, excuse me, I'm sorry...

Stan smirks at her. Marianne walks on to her seat. When she gets to it she turns to face the real audience.

MARIANNE: Tena koe - I am Marianne Firetruck, here tonight representing Creative New Zealand, and I am no doubt going to be painted with the same harshly bristled brush that describes most people working in large governmental departments. In my defense I should like to mention that this is the first play I have seen since *Badjelly the Witch* at the Playhouse Theatre in Glen Eden when I was six. So please don't blame me if I don't get it. *(She sits)*

The critics enter, carrying champagne flutes. (Everyone drinks constantly in this play.)

BILL PHILLIPS wears a knitted vest and cravat, and is quietly cruising young, urban JAM DOUGHNUT, who is dressed in funky fly DJ gear.

Quickly behind them comes ANNETTE FLOUT, dark and velveteen. Bill and Annette move like Siamese conversationalists. Annette catches him scoping out Jam

ANNETTE: Billie!

BILL: Annie!

BOTH: So good to see you!

BOTH: *(Reply)* So good to be seen!

BOTH: *(Reply)* Oh stop it.

They both laugh.

BILL: *(to Jam)* Oh, I'm sorry...

Extends a hand

BILL: Bill Phillips. The Dominion.

Annette does the same, shaking rigorously

ANNETTE: Annette Flout. EP.

JAM: Jam.

They look at him.

JAM: Jam Doughnut.

Bill and Annette stare.

JAM: Loop.

BILL & ANNETTE: Ah.

JAM: Yeah well. I don't normally do theatre ok? Theatre Guy's got mumps. I normally do music.

ANNETTE: Music?

JAM: Yeah. Raves and shit...

ANNETTE: *(confused)* Raves?

JAM: Yeah fucken raves ok?

BILL: Ok.

ANNETTE: Raves. Ok. Well...

She and Bill do secret critic salutes.

ANNETTE: Welcome to the inner sanctum. The critics.

BILL: Please, Annette. Arts journalists.

ANNETTE: *(loving the word)* Critics.

BILL: I hardly think there'll be much work to do on a criticism front tonight.

ANNETTE: Franco Butty.

She sighs.

BILL & ANNETTE: Genius.

JAM: Yeah Ok.

They hold up their pencils and tap them together as a toast.

ANNETTE: To the critics.

BILL: To the artists.

BILL & ANNETTE: Divide and conquer.

They all find their seats, equidistant from the center of the seating block.

NAT enters, alone. She is the picture of terrified innocence, she wears a turtleneck that she is permanently retreating into, her champagne flute trembles constantly.

SIMON: Ah, here she is – everyone! Nat Hills, our fabulous director. Doesn't she look lovely - how are you sweetpea?

NAT: Good, f...fine, how's it going?

SIMON: Good, everything under control.

NAT: Sh...should I go backstage?

SIMON: No, I've talked to them, you just enjoy yourself.

Nat nods, her eyes huge, a big lump in her throat... she's having a panic attack.

SIMON: Are you alright? You seem a bit nervous.

NAT: N..n..n...n.n.....no! No I'm n..n..n..not n...n...n..nervous. J...j...just a bit of opening night jitters. Drinking makes me feel hot. Flushed. Don't want to talk to anyone anymore. *(to herself, becoming oblivious of Simon)* Just smile. Smile and breathe. Talk nicely to the people. Talk nicely to the nice people. Relax your shoulders. You are having a great night. Great.

SIMON: *(long since tired of the conversation)* Oh look! Here's Franco!

FRANCO enters carrying four bottles of champagne, one he is already swigging from. He wears sunglasses and a t-shirt for his own play – the design of which places a large shooting target in the middle of his chest. He has the air of somebody who has long gone beyond feeling or caring about much – like he has lost something (or somebody) important that he can never reclaim.

Simon rushes over, leaving Nat to seat herself alone.

SIMON: Franco, darling... you look gorgeous. Did you get a drink? (*Sees bottles*) Oh! Ha ha... Good, good...

He walks alongside Franco as he goes to choose a seat, sucking up as he goes and talking about how well things are going...

NAT: Here he comes. Please come and sit with me. Please come and sit with me. Please come and...

Franco sits on the opposite side of the seating block. Simon finishes his suck up, gives Franco another cigar, and then disappears again to the front door.

BILL/ANNETTE: Franco!

FRANCO nods at them.

ANNETTE: Jamjam! This is Franco.

Jam looks up from reading his programme.

JAM: Who?

ANNETTE: (*Sotto voce*) Butty. Franco Butty.

JAM: Oh. Ok.

Goes back to reading.

ANNETTE: (*Sotto voce*) He's the writer.

JAM: (*Unimpressed*) Ok.

Annette smiles at Franco, Franco looks at Jam.

FRANCO: Hey bro.

JAM: Hey.

Franco looks back to the front, chugs his champagne out of the bottle. Jam goes back to his programme. Annette looks around, doesn't know what to do. Bill gives her thumbs up and she feels better.

Simultaneously RAEWYN MUSTANG enters wearing lots of fun fur, lots of lippy. She looks around for assistance

SIMON: Oh! Raewyn! I'm sorry, Ms Mustang.

RAEWYN: Please, Raewyn.

SIMON: *(repeating)* Raewyn Raewyn. *(introducing)* Simon.

RAEWYN: Simon?

SIMON: Harmonium-Flint, Raewyn.

RAEWYN: Pardon?

SIMON: Simon.

RAEWYN: *(extending hand)* Simon.

SIMON: *(taking and kissing her hand)* Raewyn.

RAEWYN: You're the producer of this affair?

SIMON: Producer publicist.

RAEWYN: How versatile.

Simon laughs. MISSY straggles in behind Raewyn, drinking a milkshake.

RAEWYN: Simon, this is Missy.

SIMON: *(extending hand)* Miss Missy.

MISSY: Ms.

SIMON: Ms Missy

MISSY: Missy. Just Missy.

Raewyn elbows Missy, Missy extends her hand.

SIMON: Missy.

Takes her hand and kisses it.

SIMON: Kissy kissy.

Missy wipes her hand.

RAEWYN: Can we just sit anywhere or...?

SIMON: No no no no no no no no no no babe. No. Please...sit, sit, sit...

He leads them to the two reserved seats.

SIMON: *(announcing her to the audience)* From television's Shortland Street - Raewyn Mustang!

MISSY: *(quietly)* And Missy.

They down. Simon looks lost. He sits next to Raewyn, she is between Missy and him.

RAEWYN: *(to Simon)* Tell you the truth, I'm only actually here to see my best friend Andrew. He's playing the lead role.

MISSY: *(aside)* I'm actually only here because Raewyn is.

Jam is still reading his programme.

JAM & NAT: 'Director's note... *Shootout* is vaguely inspired by the life of Harold Bennett, a little known and artistically average artist from small town New Zealand.

FRANCO: It's a true story. It's not much of a story, to be honest.

JAM & NAT: His experiments with shotgun art, the creation of painting and sculpture via the random impact of bullets, are elusive to describe and even more difficult to look at. / I hope you enjoy the show as much as we have enjoyed making it...

SIMON: After his first play, everybody knew that old Franco was hot property - a winning formula.

MARIANNE: Everyone at Creative NZ knew how bankable Franco was. I mean, who didn't see *The Bubble Microcosm*? / No-one important, that's for sure.

ANNETTE: Butty's first play *The Bubble Microcosm* is nothing short of genius. It is hard to believe this gifted young man / is only twenty-one years old.

BILL: Prosaic yet emotionally tempered, Butty's *Bubble* is fraught with acutely observed dialogue that lets you know this is a young man who has spent time on the street.

MARIANNE: Franco's was a future worth investing in, just the kind of raw, polished talent that we at Creative NZ seek to encourage.

ANNETTE: Depicting the multiple worlds / of a tenement block's occupants...

BILL: Monologues are cleverly woven to build a gentle, yet gritty / web of characters we can all recognise.

ANNETTE: Faultless in it's flawlessness, *Bubble* is a play for us all.

BILL: Franco Butty has that x factor. He's a hot young thing worth watching...

EVERONE EXCEPT FRANCO: What a winner.

The onstage house lights start to dim very, very, very slowly...

STAN: When I read *The Bubble Microcosm*, I thought 'this is the most beautiful fucking thing I've ever read'. And it made sense of me. And it made sense of the world. How could we not fall in love with someone who could see like that?

SIMON: When Nat came to me, fresh out of University and said 'I've got a project, I need a producer' I wasn't sure I wanted to put my name on it. I said 'pitch me'. She said

EVERYONE: Franco Butty.

SIMON: I said 'not one more word, darling, I'm in.'

MARIANNE: It was only natural that Franco should be first in line for a grant in the next funding round. 'Luftkissenboot Company in Berlin?' he said 'absolutely' we said 'first in line, how much do you want?' Because we knew he was worth it. Every cent.

NAT: He spent a year in Berlin, working with another writer / called Christofer Michaelis...

JAM: (*Reading the programme notes*) Special thanks to Elis in Berlin.

NAT: ...they did all sorts of experiments together, and over the course of the year Franco wrote the first draft of *Shootout*.

STAN: He arrived back at the airport after a year away with only a brown paper bag 'What's in the bag?' I said 'what's in the bag?' 'Porn' he said.

NAT: We couldn't wait to see what he'd come up with.

STAN: He came back with a pseudo-Spanish name. His real name is Gary.

SIMON: (*dropping in and out of song*) It's a one-way ticket to success, this show. For all of us. All our dreams come true from here... note the date and time.

STAN: It was like a different person came home. Like Gary had been bodysnatched and replaced with a stranger. I read *Shootout* over and over again, trying to find a clue, to try and trace where he had gone. Nothing. About a month after he got back, we broke up. I listened to equal parts of Dusty Springfield and PJ Harvey for weeks. The general sentiment was "I love you, I miss you, and I'm gonna fucken kill you." (*she laughs*) Funny really.

Pause. Ticking.

I don't mind telling you that I have a kilo of Semtex strapped to my tummy and in about fifty minutes I am going to blow this theatre sky high. Boom! As a protest. As an act of war on ugly things. This is a war about art. Bad art.

The house lights onstage are all almost out.

EVERYONE: (*to Stan*) Shhh.

STAN: (*quietly*) Theatre is a dying tradition, you see...

The lights onstage go out. They stay off for a second.

FRANCO: (*in darkness*) The first major turning point.

He pops one of his champagne bottles open.

Footlights come up, and then some spotlights on the real audience. All the characters stare at them. Bill and Annette applaud the set. The characters scan their eyes across the real audience; it should be so the real audience doesn't know for a minute if they are supposed to do something or not. The eyes come to fixate on the same position.

LITTLE GIRL: (*voice over*) I don't remember anymore. I don't remember when I first felt it. Lou lou, skip to my lou... America like the pit stop of my guilt. Like a hand around my liver, like a fist in my pancreas, like tripe left too long in the sun. When did it start to yellow? When will it ever end? The fly-blown foetus of youth, a still-born childhood dream - to own Kaukapakapa, to make something of its dust... its dust... Where is the worm farm now? Gone. Gone. Gone... all that's left is paint and dust, and dust and paint, and the land and the sun. And my gun...and my gun...

The audience starts to respond to this... the 'embarrassed choreography'...

Jam yawns, picks his nails.

Nat sinks down into her chair, covers half her face with a hand.

Raewyn crosses her leg in front of her, twists her body away from the 'stage'

Missy frowns at the stage, paying careful attention

Bill and Annette lean in, agog with pleasure, scribbling notes.

Stan watches Franco.

Franco looks at the stage. He still has his sunglasses on.

Marianne looks desperately at everyone, tries to copy someone.

Simon watches the critics.

Variations on this choreography occur with increasing extremity during the show...

LITTLE GIRL: *(accompanied by gunshots)* And blam! There goes the teaset. And blam! Another videocassette. And blam! And blam! And blam! Like the thump of blood. Like hammer blows. Like a piñata of pain...blam, blam, blam oh the delirium... the release... the awful tintinnabulation of the cups... carved with the unforgiving tenderness of an origami frog...

This kind of voice over continues for ages and ages, it turns into monotonous gibberish that keeps playing underneath...

JAM: What the fuck? *What is this?*

ANNETTE: Shhh.

Pause, they watch the show for another few seconds. The actor they are 'watching' is doing some kind of contemporary dance as she talks...

MARIANNE: Oh my god I don't get it.
I don't get it... (x7)

NAT: They're not getting it... (x3)

SIMON: Shh, shh...
they're loving it...(x3)

MARIANNE: What did she just say? What did she say?

RAEWYN: *(unimpressed)* I think she said she was a cicada.

Missy giggles.

RAEWYN: What?

MISSY: Shhh.

RAEWYN: What?

MISSY: I want to listen to it.

RAEWYN: Why?

MISSY: It's *great*.

SHANNON: Boring.

BILL: Brilliant.

ANNETTE: (*swooning*) Oh Bill... it's so.../
So... (x4)

BILL: (*orgasmic*) I know...(x5)

ALL: Shhh!

SIMON: (*sing-song*) They like it ... they really like it...

*During this the Shannons are getting bored and fidgety, they walk out of the show.
Jam sees Bill and Annette scribbling furiously.*

JAM: I don't get it. How am I supposed to write a review of this?

NAT: (*quietly, to the 'actor' onstage*) Bit more volume...

BILL: Don't review it. Just *notice* it, *annotate* it...

NAT: (*quietly*) Stay with it, stay with it...

JAM: Annotate what? A little girl skipping around covered in... what is that... custard?

ANNETTE: (*has to check*) Paint, I think...

JAM: ...and going on about Kaukapakapa like a lobotomized Laurie Anderson. How do you describe that?

BILL: (*writing*) Lyrical.

ANNETTE: (*writing*) Ground breaking.

JAM: (*writing*) Shit.

Annette and Bill gasp at what Jam has said. They intercut their text for the next while...

BILL: You can't...

ANNETTE: You can't say that.

JAM: Yeah I can. I just did.

BILL: Give it a chance, I mean... (*puffs*)...

ANNETTE: YOU CAN'T SAY THAT.

JAM: Why not?

ANNETTE: IT'S A *FRANCO BUTTY*.

BILL: (*puffs*) it's...(*puffs*) it's just not true...

JAM: Yeah it is.

ANNETTE: It's NOT.

BILL: Not true...not true at all.

JAM: It is.

BILL: Not true. Not at all

ANNETTE: It's NOT.

JAM: It is, what is this show about? Lots of talking so far and not much else.

NAT: (*quietly*) Push through it...

JAM: And all the talking doesn't make sense except maybe the guy who wrote it.

ANNETTE: (*looking back at Franco*) Shh shh shh shh shhhhh....

JAM: Wish I'd stayed at home and done it myself.

ANNETTE: Shhhhhhh!

JAM: Wank. It's called wanking.

Pause. Bill is torn for a moment. He swoops over to sit by Jam.

BILL: Do you think?

JAM: Yeah I think. You watch it.

The critics all stare at the stage for a few seconds.

BILL: My God.

NAT: *(quietly)* Good.

Pause.

BILL: It *is* wank.

NAT: *(quietly)* Goooooood.

ANNETTE: Bill!

BILL: Well he's got a point. I hadn't thought of it like that.

He starts to write on his jotter pad.

ANNETTE: Bill! Bill you can't write that down.

Bill looks up at what is happening. Writes again.

ANNETTE: Bill WHAT ARE YOU WRITING?

Bill keeps writing.

ANNETTE: WHAT ARE YOU WRITING, BILL?

Bill writes.

ANNETTE: Bill?

Bill writes

ANNETTE: Talk to me Bill.

Bill writes.

ANNETTE: *(to Jam)* Jam! Jam! What's Bill writing?

JAM: He's writing that it's wank.

ANNETTE: But Bill...BILL YOU CAN'T PUT THAT IN THE DOMINION.

JAM: Oh yes he can.

BILL: Oh yes I can.

Pause, ANNETTE is miffed.

ANNETTE: Well, nothing's really *wrong* with it.

Bill and Jam are busy writing.

ANNETTE: Bill? Talk to me?

Pause.

ANNETTE: Jam?

Annette looks a bit crushed and left out. Her face slowly twists into a grimace as she looks at the action onstage. She starts to hate it. Finally she pushes her pencil against her jotter and scratches...

ANNETTE: (*gritted teeth*) Disappointing.

There are a lot of banging noises and laughing and talking from backstage.

SHANYN: Omigosh acid? You gave me acid?

SHANNON: Relax Shanyn, it's only a half

SHANYN: You said it was a Women's Weekly clipping

SHANNON: Oh my god Shanyn. As if.

SHANON: Yeah as if. Oh my god Shanyn.

Everyone slowly turns around to look at the theatre doors. The laughing and talking gets louder and louder and then all of a sudden it all stops. The theatre doors are suddenly blown open and the SHANNONS stand in the doorway, dressed almost identically, like Manners Mall Cowboys Just Busted Into The Saloon. Shannon now has bubble gum that she never stops popping and chewing a mile a minute, enough to get lockjaw. If it were a movie, a tumbleweed would roll across the stage. Simon rushes out of his seat to assist them.

SIMON: (*whispering*) Good evening ladies...

The Shannons look at everyone and giggle.

SIMON: I'm afraid there is a play in progress here...

SHANNON: *(normal volume)* Yeah yeah. I know.

SHANYN: Yeah we know it's a play.

SHANON: Yeah omigod as if we wouldn't know that...what's your name?

SIMON: Simon.

SHANNON: *Simon* omigod

SHANYN: Omigod Simon.

SHANNON: We won the tickets off the radio.

SIMON: Right, sorry. You're a bit late...

SHANNON pops a bubble in his face.

SIMON: This way...

He walks towards seats in the aisle towards the back of the theatre, but the girls walk across the front of the stage past Raewyn and Missy, everyone cranes to see around them as they pass. The Shannons see Raewyn, have a moment looking at each other 'omigod it's her' trying to be subtle but absolutely not. They go to sit in the row behind Raewyn.

SHANNON: *(to Raewyn)* I totally think Rick should have stayed with you after the operation, he's a dick for going off...

SIMON: *(gritted teeth)* Shut. UP.

The Shannons shut up, reluctantly.

SHANNON: What a dickhead.

SHANYN: Yeah. What a total dickhead.

SHANON: Omigod, Shannon?

SHANYN/SHANNON: What?

SHANON: Omigod Shannon, I think I can feel it starting.

SHANYN/SHANNON: What?

SHANON: The *acid*.

SHANNON: Omigosh me too.

SHANYN: Omigod Shannon.

SHANON/SHANNON: What?

SHANYN: Omigod me too.

*They all look at each other, then sit down in their seats.
Shannon reads an essay on theatre like she is in front of the class.*

SHANNON: OK so, lemme tell you a little bit about theatre OK? (*clears her throat*) Theatre. Theatre sucks. Not all of it, but most of it. It's boring. It's stink. I hate it and so should you. It costs too much and also you have to do it for school, and also only dickheads like it plus also I said so. The only thing that makes theatre interesting is if you talk to your friends during it, or if it's like really out of it and you smoke like drugs or take trips or fucking something like that before you go. Because otherwise it's all just boring. Almost always. So take it from me cos, shucks man, I know. And that's all I have to say about theatre right now.

Missy is continuing to go with the show – she smiles and nods, giggles occasionally, frowns etc...

LITTLE GIRL: (*voice over*) I'm being good. I'm being brave. Good dog be brave good dog behave. Good dog do it how the other dogs do it... / Good boy. Good boy. Good dog. Good dog. Good dog doggie. Good good doggie. Very good good. Very good very. A good good dog. Good god. Good dog. Good dog god (*keeps going*)

RAEWYN: You can't seriously be enjoying this.

MISSY: Apparently you're wrong.

RAEWYN: What is it? Is it Beckett? Is it...what? What is it? Pinter? Post modern?

MISSY: Raewyn. Just accept it for what it is.

RAEWYN: Is it physical theatre? Or dance theatre? Or...?

Pause. Missy is annoyed.

MISSY: Would you like a label for it?

RAEWYN: Yes.

Pause. Missy almost gives her one. She changes her mind.

MISSY: Why?

RAEWYN: I want to understand it.

MISSY: And you think if you knew how to categorise it...

RAEWYN: I could understand it.

MISSY: Jesus.

Pause.

RAEWYN: So?

Missy ignores her. Raewyn turns to Simon.

RAEWYN: What is it?

SIMON: Hmm?

RAEWYN: This show, what is it supposed to be, is it postmodern?

SIMON: No, no it's not postmodern.

RAEWYN: Is it post-post modern?

SIMON: It's like... it's po po po po pomo if it's anything.

RAEWYN: So it's that? Is it that? It's po po po po pomo?

MISSY: *(sarcastic)* Yes that's it.

RAEWYN: Ah.

SIMON: Ish.

MISSY: Self-referential.

SIMON: Is that po po po po pomo?

RAEWYN: Self-referential?

SIMON: Yeah.

RAEWYN: Not wank? It's not wank is it?

SIMON: What's wank?

RAEWYN: When you do theatre made with you, by you, for you.

MISSY: And not...

RAEWYN: And not made with people by people for people.

SIMON: Made with you by you for you?

RAEWYN: Yeah.

STAN: Nah, that's definitely Pinter.

MISSY: It can't be just wank – that would make us voyeurs...

RAEWYN: Well what is it then? Is it Pinter?

MISSY: *(given up)* No it's not Pinter.

Pause, they watch. Raewyn and then Simon lean their heads totally to one side hoping to see it differently. Everyone does except Missy.

MISSY: Years and years of this. Years and years. Waiting, waiting, waiting...

NAT: Maybe *noone* will ever get it.

Marianne is confused, frustrating in the back row.

MARIANNE: FUCK.

Everyone's heads snap back to upright.

Franco is very pleased with himself. And a bit pissed.

FRANCO: Oh man, I just wish...I just wish Elis were here to see this. Ha ha! *(drinks)* Subversive. Ha ha! *(drinks)* Elis would understand, he'd get it all, he'd be loving this. Every second. Ha ha! *(drinks, for a second he might cry, stops himself)* Wonderful. Wonderful. What a wonderful night I'm having.

He looks around the theatre, sees Stan.

(to Stan) So what are you doing here?

Stan pretends she isn't there. He gets up and walks through the audience to her.

FRANCO: Hello? Yeah you, I can see who you are, what are you doing here?

STAN: I just wanted to come and see it. Just to see...you know...

FRANCO: What it was like?

STAN: Yeah. Just to see what it was like.

FRANCO: Well, thanks.

STAN: For?

FRANCO: For coming.

STAN: Oh. No worries.

FRANCO: Are you enjoying it?

STAN: No.

FRANCO: Oh.

STAN: I hate it.

FRANCO: Good. Good.

STAN: But I know what you're doing.

FRANCO: What's that?

STAN: You deliberately made it bad.

FRANCO: Maybe.

STAN: To sabotage yourself. Your career...

FRANCO: Not myself, no...

STAN: Then what?

FRANCO: I'm sabotaging theatre.

STAN: Oh. I see. Very clever. Do you think they've gotten that?

FRANCO: No. If they did it wouldn't be sabotage.

STAN: Ah.

Pause.

NAT: *(quietly)* Watch the cueing...

FRANCO: And I suppose you're disguised as Peter Plumley Walker?

STAN: Tennessee Williams.

FRANCO: Of course.

STAN: The greatest...

FRANCO: The greatest of them all... yeah yeah.

He goes back to drinking. Stan slips her jacket off her shoulders, she is wearing a slip like a Maggie The Cat one underneath...

STAN: *(Maggie)* Gary honey, why y'all could stop drinkin' at least for long enough to watch yaw own opening night show. Will y'all quit drinkin' that stuff?

FRANCO: *(Brick)* Oh it won't be long Stanley, I'm just waitin' fo' the click that lets me know it all alraht. It's just a mechanical thang.

STAN: *(Maggie)* Oh Gary...

FRANCO: *(Blanche)* Now Stanley – quit all that hollering and moanin' and come and tell me that yuh love me.

STAN: *(Still Maggie)* But I *do* love yuh Gary, uh *do*. Just as much as a wuhman cahn.

FRANCO: *(back to himself)* But you're a man, Stan.

Stan's game is ruined.

STAN: No I'm not.

FRANCO: Yeah you are. You don't know if you're Arthur or Martha.

STAN: I'M MARTHA. I'M MARTHA AS. I'm just in disguise, as Tennessee Williams – the greatest...

FRANCO: The greatest of them all. Yeah, yeah.

He goes back to his seat.

STAN: Gary?

Nothing.

STAN: Gary!

Nothing.

STAN: *(reluctantly)* Franco?

*She feels silly, self conscious. She puts her jacket back on.
Ticking.*

MISSY: Do you know what it's like to come second to a career?

STAN: Standing in the wings.

MISSY: Supportive but invisible.

STAN: Like looking into a restaurant where people are eating and laughing.

MISSY: From outside where it's cold and you're hungry.

STAN: When we went for our first toasted sandwich at the Evergreen, I asked you why you wanted to be a writer, you said 'I want free the entire human race from suffering'.

Look what happened to you....
You fucking coward.

Checks her watch.

Thirty minutes.

Simon scuttles up to Marianne, who is staring through her opera glasses and reading her programme notes for clues.

SIMON: How are you finding it?

MARIANNE: Good, good, good. It's very good isn't it?

SIMON: It is very good.

MARIANNE: Oh is it?

SIMON: Yes.

MARIANNE: It is. Good.

SIMON: And all came in right exactly to the letter of the budget.

MARIANNE: Great.

Pause.

MARIANNE: How much did it cost?

SIMON: Uh, altogether?

MARIANNE: Yes.

SIMON: What is it, about two hundred and fifty thousand altogether.

MARIANNE drops her glass.

MARIANNE: I'm sorry?

SIMON: That's alright.

He picks up her glass and refills it, hands it back to her.

SIMON: I'd better get back. Ciao bella.

MARIANNE: C...ciao.

Simon leaves her again.

Nat is worried.

NAT: Franco?

FRANCO: Yes? Yes? Hello.

NAT: Hello.

FRANCO: Hello.

NAT: How do you think it's going?

FRANCO: Great! Marvellous! The best.

NAT: Truly?

FRANCO: Truly. It's the greatest, the greatest thing. I'm very pleased.

NAT: Oh good.

FRANCO: Good.

NAT: Good, I didn't think they were getting it.

FRANCO: Oh they're not. Not a bit of it.

NAT: Not a...?

FRANCO: Not one bit. Ha ha! (*drinks*) Not one little bit.

He goes back to drinking his champagne, Nat puts her head in her hands.

MARIANNE rustles through her bag, comes up with a funding proposal.

MARIANNE: (*reading*) Proposal to Creative New Zealand for the funding of *Shootout*, a new work by Franco Butty, compiled by Simon Harmonium-Flint.

She flicks through, looking for something.

Innovative...cultural...(arrives at something) Budget.

Stan is watching Nat.

STAN: It's not your fault, Nat.

NAT: Pardon?

STAN: You know he deliberately made it bad?

NAT: I'm sorry, what?

STAN: He deliberately made the play bad. To annoy people.

NAT: N...n...no he didn't. Don't be silly.

STAN: He only chose you to direct it because he thought your directing was terrible.

NAT: (*blocks her ears*) Shhhh.

STAN: Didn't you, Franco?

FRANCO: I don't know *what* you're talking about.

NAT: Shh shhh. I'm not going to think like this. I am *not* going to think like this. I'm going to think nice thoughts...

Closes her eyes and blocks her ears.

everydayineverywaythingsaregettingbetterandbetter,
everydayineverywaythingsaregettingbetterandbetter,
everydayineverywaythingsaregettingbetterandbetter...

Back to Marianne, she has set up an office desk in the back of the theatre, with a Tino Rangatiratanga flag, her name placard, and an adding machine that whirs and ticks during this next bit...

MARIANNE: Return airfare to Berlin: three thousand dollars, per diems in Germany: twenty thousand dollars, telephone from Germany: eight hundred dollars, stamps: two hundred dollars, fax: seventy dollars... (*continues*)

Stan is in half-light

MISSY: It's easy when you're away. When all I have are the emails, the occasional phone-call, you can be whatever I imagine you to be. I can turn you into a pop star and all our memories into love songs. Like the stories that you tell too many times and suddenly you can't remember the real event, you just remember the order the words come in to tell it. In my memory you are gentle, happy. In my mind we're still seventeen.

MARIANNE: (*continued*) ...Graphic design: two thousand dollars, poster printing: one thousand dollars, poster distribution: one hundred dollars, venue hire: two thousand dollars...

SIMON: (*sing-song*) Budgeting is very important. Good budgeting. It's an important skill for every producer. How to make everything happen on the smallest budget.

MARIANNE: Administration fees (*she looks at Simon*) two hundred thousand dollars.

She looks at Simon, looks at the budget. Her face gets all twisty. She pulls out a telephone, dials someone..

MARIANNE: Christ, Raymond. Is June there? Teatime. Is it? I suppose it is.

She is fiddling with the Tino Rangatiratanga flag, she accidentally flips it off the desk onto the floor, leaves it.

Can you get her back to the office please? Because I need her. Because I do. It's an emergency. Just do it please. *(hangs up)* You silly man.

SIMON: *(singing where appropriate, massaging Marianne's back and shoulders)* This show is nothing to me, really. What I really want to do is collaborate with the Really Useful Company - they do all of Andrew Lloyd Webber's stuff. That's where the *real* money in theatre is, middle-aged ladies. Really Useful. Yeah. I imagine I'll be working with them soon after I get to London. Oh yeah, I'm going to London. I have a 'friend' at the Royal Court Theatre, you see? From there it's just a case of networking. I want to be the person who drops the chandelier in *The Phantom of the Opera*. Not the actor, the technician. It's the techs that these things happen, really.

Marianne is almost orgasmic enjoying her massage. Simon looks at the stage.

Excuse me, my cue...

Simon fires three shots on a stage gun and then blows a duck call...which goes for a long time and finally peters out.

ANGST CHORUS: *(voice over)* What have I done? What have I done?

CHORUS 1: Is it better for a duck to die?

CHORUS 2: Is it better for the art to live?

ANGST CHORUS: Better, better, what means better? What could be better than a duck as paint?

(This keeps going straight through under the Shannon's next section)

SHANYN: Omigosh.

SHANNON/SHANON: What?

SHANYN: This is *so weird*.

SHANNON: It's so out of it eh? Your tummy feels like its all upside down and stuff.

SHANON: Totally. Totally upsidedown.

SHANYN: No, not that. This thing. The play.

SHANNON: Oh yeah.

SHANON: Yeah.

SHANYN: This play is weird man.

SHANNON: Nah, you're just tripping.

SHANON: Yeah just relax Shanyyn, it's just the drugs. Stop bugging out man. You're totally bugging out.

SHANYN: No look really, watch it. It's totally weird.

ANGST CHORUS: (*voice over*) What can you say? Am I bad? Am I bad? When they say that my art shows an artist who's mad? Is that *bad*?

JITTERY MAN: They say my work is ugly.

ANGST CHORUS: Ugly, ugly, what means ugly?

JITTERY MAN: They do not believe it is viable art.

ANGST CHORUS: And what means my life, if my work is not art? To mistrust something pretty, to shoot it apart?

JITTERY MAN: If beauty is in the eye of the beholder then surely ugliness is the same...

(The Shannon's section should finish in time for...)

Gunshot. The audience jumps.

ANGST CHORUS: Another funding round rejection and...

Gunshot

ANGST CHORUS: ...how I need that approval. This denial of money has turned my head funny...

JITTERY MAN: Now I always have my gun in case I find something that needs some removing...

ANGST CHORUS: A little wee bit of artistic improving.

JITTERY MAN: All I do is break it apart and show all the ugliness hiding inside...

ANGST CHORUS: Well what would *you* do? And *you*, and *you*? What can you do when the world is so poo?

Everybody groans, cringes.

FRANCO is laughing...

RAEWYN: Oh Christ. Poor Andrew. I wonder if he knew what he was getting into. Shit. What am I supposed to say afterwards?

Flashforward.

JITTERY MAN: (*voice over*) So what did you think?

RAEWYN: What do you mean?

JITTERY MAN: How did you find it?

RAEWYN: (*dismissive*) Oh! We caught a cab (*laughs*).

JITTERY MAN: No, I mean did you like it? The show?

RAEWYN: I had reservations (that's good) I had reservations about the other actors and the script...

MISSY: And the direction.

RAEWYN: And the direction. But I thought you were good. You were great. You shone.

JITTERY MAN: Really?

RAEWYN: Yes really. Really truly. You were... great.

JITTERY MAN: What did you make of the cups?

RAEWYN: The cups...?

JITTERY MAN: You know, the cup chorus...

RAEWYN: Oh....great...really interesting.

JITTERY MAN: And the...

RAEWYN: OH ALRIGHT I HATED IT. I HATED IT ALL. IT WAS CRAP.

MARIANNE: WHAT DID YOU WANT ME TO TAKE FROM IT?

BILL: AN INSULT TO THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THEATRE.

ANNETTE: SOME MODERATION, *PLEASE*.

JAM: TOTAL WASTE OF TIME

NAT: SIMON!

SIMON: WE'RE DOOMED! WE'RE DOOMED! MY LIFE IS OVER!

Everyone pants heavily, growls at the person who is pissing them off the most. Missy giggles hysterically.

(F) Franco has finished his bottle of champagne

FRANCO: The second major turning point.

(F) and he pops open another...

(R) Raewyn stares at Missy. Her laughing is only making it worse.

RAEWYN: It's *horrible*. It's the most horrible thing I've ever seen.

(M) Pause. Missy stops laughing.

MISSY: It's no worse than what you do at work.

RAEWYN: Missy!

MISSY: What?

RAEWYN: How can you say that?

MISSY: It's true. I reckon this is much better than that bullshit they stick on the TV.

RAEWYN: But...but you're so supportive of it...

MISSY: No, no. I'm supportive of *you*, hon. I can't stand the show.

RAEWYN: What are you talking about?

MISSY: Oh come on Rae, don't pretend you don't know how crap it is.

RAEWYN: It's not crap. It's highly topical.

MISSY: Yeah yeah, it's highly topical crap, but it's crap.

(R) Raewyn is hurt.

RAEWYN: But what about my acting?

MISSY: 'Salright I suppose.

RAEWYN: But not as good as this?

MISSY: *(torn)* Hmm. N....uhhh...no. No. Not really.

(M) Missy turns back to watch the play, oblivious. (R) Raewyn pouts hard and tries not to cry.

(C) The critics have turned on Franco, still drunk...

ANNETTE: *(to Franco)* I suppose you think this is clever? Taking the piss out of us all...

FRANCO: Nope.

ANNETTE: What is it – 'theatre of the self-involved'?

FRANCO: Call it 'youth theatre'. I dunno. Just trying to sort out some ideas...

BILL: You've got to be the worst writer this country has ever seen. Who do you think you are doing this with the form?

FRANCO: I'm an explorer.

BILL: You're an idiot.

FRANCO: I'm ahead of my time.

BILL: You're an idiot.

FRANCO: Hey I guess your work must be pretty incredible, Bill. Must really be beautiful, lyrical stuff for you to be in a position to judge...

ANNETTE: You leave him alone you fucking upstart...

Franco pulls the finger over his shoulder, turns back to the front.

NAT: Hey, hey everyone settle down, I don't think this doesn't need to get so hairy. It's a good play, it's good as.

ANNETTE: Who are you?

(C) The critics all turn around and look at her.

NAT: I'm Nat.

Pause

NAT: Nat Hills...

Pause, (C) the critics all look at each other like 'do you know her?'

NAT: The Director.

JAM: Oh God help us.

(Si) Marianne's mobile rings. (M) She fumbles to try and answer it, (All) everybody gets really annoyed with her.

MARIANNE: Tena koe e hoa, ko Marianne Firetruck ahau.

She loses reception.

MARIANNE: Ahau?

(M) She wanders around the theatre trying to get better reception

MARIANNE: Ahau? Ahau June? Ahau can you hear me? Oh yes hello June, sorry to drag you back to the office...look I'm just wondering if you can double check something for me...with the application to fund (an *OHP machine lights up the budget on the back wall, she reads the title*) Shootout... what grounds did we fund them on? Innovative...mmm...low risk...ok...and how much did we give them? (*checking*)...yes that's what I've got too. Can you send that file through to my lappie? Cheers. Ko kuri koe.

Marianne goes back to her 'office', pulls a laptop out. She fiddles with it, making it make the 'eeps' noise or something else annoying for the next wee while.

(C) Back to the critics

BILL: Nat Hills, is it?

NAT: Yes.

(C)The critics note this down.

ANNETTE: Is that 'I-L-L-S'?

NAT: Yes. It is.

ANNETTE: I've never heard of you.

NAT: It's my first show outside university. And, like I said, I think it's good...

BILL: Look, Nat, its best that you don't get involved in this...

(M) Marianne shuffles down to Simon's seat.

MARIANNE: Excuse me?

SIMON: Heya doll, you alright for a drink?

MARIANNE: Y...yes thank you. Look, I've just been going over your budget...

SIMON: Oh yeah? Good huh?

MARIANNE: Well, this is the thing Simon, is that this is a very nice show...

SIMON: Work.

MARIANNE: It's a very nice work...

SIMON: Good, good, glad you're enjoying it ...

MARIANNE: Yes, but you see, the thing is that I think you've made a little mistake with your calculations.

(Si) Pause. Simon is incredibly icy.

SIMON: How's that?

MARIANNE: Well, I just notice that everything seems really good figures wise except that...

SIMON: *What*, Mary Beth?

MARIANNE: Marianne, except that you seem to have spent eighty percent of the money we gave you for this show paying yourself.

SIMON: So what?

MARIANNE: Well, do you think that's fair...?

SIMON: Look, Marie Claire, I don't know who the fuck you are up there at CNZ, but you obviously don't have any idea what you're talking about. If you have a problem with people being paid what they're worth...

MARIANNE: But you're earning more than the Prime Minister does...

(Si) Simon grabs her by the throat.

SIMON: Listen to me you little freak. I earned that money. Alright? I earned it. Who wrote that proposal? *Me*. And who produced this whole thing here tonight? *Me*. Without *Me*, there is no Franco Butty. So listen to *Me*, sister, if you have a problem with that, I suggest you take it up with your superiors.

(Si) Her drops her.

MARIANNE: *(choking)* But...I...I don't have any superiors.

SIMON: What?

MARIANNE: I'm... I'm the head of the department.

Franco laughs loudly at something onstage.

(C) Back to the critics

ANNETTE: No-one is blaming you Nat, you've worked really hard, the actors are working really hard. It's just a bad script. It's not your fault.

JAM: Yeah it is, she's the one who agreed to direct this crap in the first place. She's just as guilty of wasting my time as he is.

NAT: Hey no wait a second... I am very proud of this play. I've worked hard on this – eighty hour weeks for the last fortnight, I haven't slept in three days worrying about it and, all in all you know – I think I did a good job. I did my best my very very best. And I feel proud. I feel good.

BILL: Well then Nat, I feel really sorry for you. So young and idealistic. I know what that's like Nat, but you're just going to have to grow out of it.

ANNETTE: Yes, because what you apparently don't realise...

BILL: And really, love, how could you?

ANNETTE: Is that we have been in this game a lot longer than you have and we *know* what is good theatre and what is bad theatre, and this is bad theatre.

NAT: It is not bad theatre. Just because you don't get it doesn't mean...

ANNETTE: Look missy, I can tell you right now if you keep this attitude up you can forget all about the Chapman Tripp's...

NAT: Oh stick the fucken Chapman Tripp's up your bum.

(B & A) Shock recoil from Bill and Annette.

NAT: That's right, stick it right up your bum. We're trying to do something new here, you know, and maybe it's working and maybe it's not. But at least we're trying...

BILL: Take it easy, Nat, you don't want to say things that might come back on you...

NAT: Oh why, because I might offend you?

(A) ANNETTE scoffs.

NAT: And you might not be nice to me ever again? Well fuck it. Who cares? Who are you anyway? A couple of nasty, bored people writing in rag newspapers for a tiny group of islands at the arse end of nowhere that *no-one* gives a shit about anyway...

Bill and Annette go even further into shock recoil

BILL: But...*(puffs)*

ANNETTE: You can't say that.

NAT: ...if you think that *anything* that goes on here is really that important that it needs you to be so mean then *I* am sorry. I am really sorry for you. And I'm glad if you don't like what I do 'cos I DON'T WANT TO BE LIKED BY PEOPLE LIKE YOU ANYWAY.

Now shut up and watch the play.

She goes down to sit with Franco, still nervous but feeling much better. Franco shares his champagne with her. SHANON whoops and applauds.

ANNETTE: Well there's really no need to be so *critical*.

Pause. Bill is crying. Jam is very amused and a bit excited, for the first time. Annette cricks her neck and smoothes her outfit, then looks back at the stage.

JAM: *(writing)* Awesome.

ANNETTE: Little bitch.

Nat does the finger over her shoulder.

ANNETTE: She can forget about working in this town again. Can't she, Bill?

Nothing

ANNETTE: Bill?

Nothing

ANNETTE: Bill are you crying?

BILL: *(crying)* Shut up.

ANNETTE: Oh Bill, what's the matter love?

BILL: *(sniffs)* She's right. This is dumb. Look what's happened to me. I used to write you know. I used to write plays. Not very good ones but I used to write them. And now look at me.

ANNETTE: There's nothing to be ashamed of being a critic.

BILL: Arts journalist...

ANNETTE: Arts journalist. It's a respectable thing to do for a job, there's a great history behind it.

BILL: R...really?

ANNETTE: Yes love.

BILL: Is it a good thing to write?

ANNETTE: Yes love yes, it's a good thing to write.

Pause. Bill sniffs.

BILL: The Dom's real writing isn't it?

ANNETTE: Yes love.

BILL: It's not a rag, is it?

ANNETTE: No love. It's just tall poppies, that's all, you pay no attention to her.

The audience are really seething now, practically crawling up the walls...

JITTERY MAN: *(badly, vaguely to the tune of 'Small Pleasures' from Oliver)*

Tall poppies, tall poppies,
Dogs that are fraught with fleas.

Big ploppies, long droppies,
Art is a load of...

ANGST CHORUS: (*screaming*) WEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEES!

*The audience has gone mental with discomfort, no-one knows where to look anymore.
Missy is rubbing her heart.*

JAM: Oh god, I feel like I've got one of those things in Aliens in my chest.

(Si & M) Back to Simon and Marianne

SIMON: You're the h-h-head of the department?

MARIANNE: Yes.

SIMON: I'm terribly sorry.

MARIANNE: You're sorry? I'm the one who signed away all that money. Do you have any idea of the growling I'll get if this gets out?

SIMON: But I said in the proposal what it was for...

MARIANNE: Oh for Christ's sake, do you think I actually *read* those bloody things?

SIMON: Well I would hope...

MARIANNE: (*to herself*) It'll be that bloody McDavitt man, I swear... sabotaging me at every turn, consistently making me look bad in front of the board...
Fuck. Fuck. FUCK.
And YOU. You. Yes, this is all *your* fault...

SIMON: My fault?

MARIANNE: Yes...applying for such a ridiculous amount... don't you know there are artists are living in absolute poverty. I'm told. Who do you think you are?

SIMON: I'm a professional...

MARIANNE: (*over the top of him*) Well I'm afraid that there has been an unfortunate mistake made. SOMEbody... (*to herself*) somebody, yes...has made a very unfortunate mistake indeed, Mr. Harmonium-Flint, in funding a nasty piece of knitting like yourself... Fuck. I'll have to write a whole new report...

(M) Marianne goes back to her laptop to start work on it

SIMON: But... what about my money?

MARIANNE: (*dismissive, typing*) Oh you'll have to give it back.

SIMON: B...back?

MARIANNE: Yes. All of it... The sooner the better...

SIMON: But I need that money... I'm going to London...

MARIANNE: Not any more. You're a terrible producer, Simon, you know that don't you?

(M) She dials someone on her mobile. (Si) Simon thinks. He reaches out and lowers the cellphone...

SIMON: Look Marybelle, I appreciate your situation here, I understand how much hassle I've caused... there's no need to go involving anyone else. It'll just make us both look silly, right? What's say I just give all the money back to you right now, here, tonight. I've got it all with me.

MARIANNE: (*soothing slowly*) Well... how convenient. Why didn't you say so...?

SIMON: It's all bagged up in the back row...

Marianne thinks, she closes her cellphone.

MARIANNE: Not one word about this ever happening, right? To anyone.

SIMON: Right.

MARIANNE: Right. Let's go.

He escorts her up to the back row of the theatre...

JITTERY MAN: All this time something horrible has been happening inside me, something sick. I am a festering boil

ANGST CHORUS: Let me be lanced...

(Continues)

SIMON: If you just pop your head down there and grab it out from under the seats...

The exit sign goes out.

MARIANNE: Ok...

Franco pops champagne.

FRANCO: The third major turning point.

She gets down on all fours, disappears from view...

MARIANNE: Gosh, this really is an awful lot of money...

Simon draws his stage gun and shoots Marianne over and over again. Her arms and legs bounce up from behind the seats...all the people in the audience are watching something onstage with lots of shooting, they are screaming and laughing, getting excited...

ANGST CHORUS: What have I done? What have I done?

JITTERY MAN: Down the main street of Kaukapakapa BLAM! There goes the butcher and BLAM the greengrocer, and BLAM and BLAM and BLAM.

During this Simon is desperately grabbing bags of cash, throwing them over the back of the theatre, one bursts open and monopoly money spews out – Simon is grabbing at cash, stuffing it into his suit pockets... he is about to climb over after the money when he sees that Stan is in the same row, between him and the loot, with the stage gun pointing straight at him.

STAN: Where do you think you're going?

Raewyn And Missy.

RAEWYN: I have to get out of here... this is getting too ugly, I can't handle it.

MISSY: Raewyn, you can't just walk out.

RAEWYN: I can and I fucking well will.

MISSY: We're so far in - just leave it a bit longer. It'll be over soon.

Raewyn is leaving.

RAEWYN: MISSY!

Missy throws her milkshake in Raewyn's face. Long pause, milkshake drips. Raewyn is stunned.

MISSY: Stay. Just stay, Raewyn.

Everyone is staring at Raewyn with milkshake dripping off her face. Traumatized, she sits.

RAEWYN: (*almost crying*) Well I'm not going to look anymore.

MISSY: Just look at the lights then, bub. Look at the lights.

Everything is calm for a while. Bill is talking to Jam at first, then to everyone.

BILL: I did think about going into theatre, for a while. After university. I was a bit nervous, I showed a piece that I had written to a director friend and they said it was great, that it should definitely be put on and they wanted to direct it. This was back in 85, and someone managed to wrangle a space to have it performed through the Bain and Austin Touring Society, a little theatre back then, it's become quite popular since I believe. And it was all go, actors and directors and designers and the whole works, and it rehearsed and it was workshopped and we did readings of it and everyone was very supportive. Yes yes Bill they say, yes yes William, what a talent, what a gifted young writer they said Dario Fo they said. I think.

And finally it went on and it had a season. A one-month season. And nobody liked it. Nobody really *disliked* it either. They were just like 'Oh yep'. And in some ways it would have been better if they had hated it because then I could have at least gone 'oh well, they don't understand, they don't understand me'. Like Van Gough, how he never sold a work in his lifetime, and when he tried to donate one once he was turned down. People just don't understand me I could have said noone understands. But really it was 'yes we understand, we just don't care.' And it closed after the first week.

And I didn't really write again after that.

Bill has almost reverted back to being a little kid, he is hunched in the corner of the stage. Annette comes over and tries to fix him up.

ANNETTE: I never thought of writing for theatre. Apart from reviews. It's all I really wanted to do, criticize. I mean, its still part of it isn't it? It's still part of the theatre.

JAM: You don't even write for theatre?

ANNETTE: Well, no. But I write reviews. It's sort of involved.

JAM: Fucken hell. You don't even write the stuff.

ANNETTE: Well what qualifies you to be a music reviewer?

JAM: I'm a DJ.

ANNETTE: A DJ? (*to Bill*) Disc Jockey.

BILL: I know.

ANNETTE: On the wireless?

JAM: No.

ANNETTE: What then? In... what is it...discos?

JAM: Clubs.

ANNETTE: Clubs? So you're a DJ in clubs then?

JAM: No.

ANNETTE: Pubs?

JAM: No, not in pubs.

ANNETTE: Well what then?

JAM: *(mutters)*

ANNETTE: Pardon?

JAM: Roller rink. In the Hutt.

Pause. Annette starts to laugh hysterically.

JAM: What? What's wrong with that?

ANNETTE: A roller rink?

JAM: Yeah.

ANNETTE: Do they even have those anymore?

JAM: *(increasingly annoyed)* Yes.

She speeds around and around him in circles, sending chairs flying.

ANNETTE: Only couples skating please, speed skates, going round in circles getting nowhere fast everyone back to skating in the rrrrrrrregular direction?

JAM: What's so fucken funny?

ANNETTE: (*laughing*) Nothing. Nothing.

JAM: It's closer to what I want to do than working in a café.

BILL: Or at some newspaper.

JAM: Or at some newspaper.

ANNETTE: Bill!

BILL: What?

She grabs him by one of his ears and swings him around, scattering more chairs.

ANNETTE: There's nothing wrong with writing for a newspaper.

BILL: Except when you do it because you're scared.

ANNETTE: I'm not scared!

BILL: I didn't say *you* were scared, Annette.

ANNETTE: Yes you did, you implied it.

BILL: I was talking about myself.

ANNETTE: No you weren't, you said there's nothing wrong with working at a newspaper, *except* when you do it because you're scared.

BILL: It was a rhetorical statement. I was expressing myself...

She grabs him by his cravat.

ANNETTE: Oh for God's sake Bill, please don't try and express yourself again...

*(St & Si) Back to Stan and Simon,
Stan has ushered Simon into the chair beside Marianne.*

SIMON: You'll never get away with this.

STAN: Sorry? *I'll* never get away with this?

SIMON: Killing the head of Creative New Zealand...

STAN: Excuse me?

SIMON: And abducting a well respected producer...

STAN: I haven't done anything of the sort.

*Marianne's phone rings, her dead hand thrusts it into the air.
Stan takes it off her and switches it off.*

SIMON: I can assure you, my parents have exceptional lawyers. You'll be in the clink before you can say Faldenkrais.

STAN: That's nothing... Give it another fifteen minutes and I'll be dead.

SIMON: Wh...what?

STAN: Oh yeah. I'm going to blow this whole building up.

She opens her coat to reveal her bomb.

STAN: See? Call it involuntary censorship

Dead Marianne hands her a roll of gaffer tape, she starts wrapping Simon up.

SIMON: Please...please... I'll cut you in...fifty percent...

She keeps going...

SIMON: Alright then, sixty.

STAN: Don't you people ever get it? It's not about the money, it's about *expression*.

SIMON: Please...

STAN: Shhh.

She stuffs money into his mouth.

STAN: The Show Must Blow Up, Simon. I'm a desperate woman, see? I'm worryingly passionate about the arts.

Marianne's phone rings again, she holds it up for Stan to take. Stan answers the call.

STAN: Screaming fireball of death, Stanley speaking...

Simon screams are muffled by the money.

Jam, Bill and Annette are all like schoolchildren now, Annette retains some of her adult power.

JAM: *(to Annette)* I don't like you 'cos you're old.

ANNETTE: *(to Jam)* I don't like you 'cos you're thick.

BILL: *(to Annette)* I don't like you 'cos you're mean.

ANNETTE: *(to Bill)* I don't like you 'cos you're *You*.

BILL: You've never supported me, Annette.

ANNETTE: I'm not your mother.

BILL: You were supposed to be my friend.

ANNETTE: What was to support? The stuff you wrote was terrible Bill, everybody knew it. Did you want to see all of those people laughing at you for the rest of your life? I did you a favour getting you into the Dom.

BILL: I might have gotten better.

ANNETTE: But you might not.

BILL: I might have! You don't know that!

ANNETTE: Love, I know.

BILL: You were always jealous of me, always trying to pull me down.

ANNETTE: Jealous?

BILL: Jealous... /all the way through varsity...

ANNETTE: What was to be jealous of? You were terrible.

BILL: I'm not terrible. I'm just...I was just...

ANNETTE: Misunderstood, / were you?

BILL: Misunderstood, yes, / and...

ANNETTE: *(laughing)* Oh love, you poor, pathetic little man. Face it, Bill. Your minority was hip in the eighties. It's *Pacifica* now, Bill. *Pacifica*.

Bill snaps, he lunges at Annette. She springs out of his way, like a cat. He chases her around the stage.

ANNETTE: Tragic faux faggot.

JAM: Woah...woah...

ANNETTE: Third-rate Stoppard.

BILL: Shut up!

Jam jumps up on a chair.

JAM: Please, please, everybody back to skating in the regular direction...

Annette is much more agile than Bill, she springs around the theatre, tiring him out.

ANNETTE: You're nothing.

BILL: I'm something!

ANNETTE: You're nothing. *Nothing.*

MISSY: Are you OK?

RAEWYN: I feel sick.

MISSY: It's just a story, Rae.

RAEWYN: I want to go home.

Bill is alone, panting.

BILL: I'm nothing. I'm a big fat useless nothing.

MISSY: Raewyn?

Pause

MISSY: Rae?

RAEWYN: What?

MISSY: What do I mean to you?

RAEWYN: What?

Shortland Street muzak plays.

*Nat scuttles over, sits in front of them and tries to direct them to get closer.
Raewyn is lost, confused, she looks at Nat to tell her what to do..*

MISSY: Year have gone by, Raewyn. And I ask myself after all this time why do I stick around? What is it that I feel for you? Do I love you, do I hate you, am I in love with you, is this a stupid teenage infatuation? And the answer comes back, every time, 'yes'.

I just want to know, is there any point in me staying if you... if you don't feel anything?

RAEWYN: *(slipped into Shortland Street acting)* But I do love you, Missy. Just as much as a woman can.

They go to kiss. Missy is freaked out...

NAT: CUT!

Jam has wet himself.

JAM: What have I done? What have I done?

PLAYGROUND VOICES: Mikey's pissed his trousers, Mikey's pissed his trousers...

JAM: I want to go home. Mummy? Daddy? When will I be cool?

Shortlans Street-eque muzak

MISSY: Raewyn, be serious, I want to know what's happening with us...

RAEWYN: *(still acting)* Shhh, quiet now...

She goes to kiss Missy

MISSY: RAEWYN! STOP IT! STOP ACTING!

NAT: Cut, cut, cut, cut CUT!

Bill screams. He cuts off his ear with his ballpoint pen.

ANNETTE: *(hysterical, cracking up)* You're nothing, every one of you. You'll never be good enough for me.

STAN: *(singing)* When I was just a little a girl, I asked my mother, what will I be?

Everyone gets up including Marianne, everything turns into a very bad Broadway musical.

EVERYONE: *(singing)* Will I be pretty, will I be rich? Here's what she said to me...

ANNETTE: No.

NAT: CUUUUUUUUT!

Bill has bandaged up his head, puts a picture frame around him so that he looks like Van Gogh's self portrait after he cut off his ear.

Jam is dancing like he is at a form one social, very uncoordinated, doing bad caterpillars.

BILL: *(singing badly to the tune of Starry, Starry Night)*

Now I think I know, what I tried to say to me
And how I suffered for my vanity,
I'm not Duncan Sarkies.

They didn't listen, they're not listening Bill,
They prob'ly never will.

Everyone has melted to the floor.

BILL: For fuck's sake Bill.

Everyone sits up, looks at him.

BILL: What are you doing here?

Everyone falls down again except the Shannons and Annette, who is quietly weeping in the corner.

SHANYN: Why did he say that like that?

SHANNON: What?

SHANYN: *(copies Bill)* 'What are you doing here?' I didn't want him to say it like that.

SHANNON: It totally weakened the throughline.

SHANON: The what?

SHANYN: The throughline. Like the line through it.

SHANON: I can't see any line.

SHANNON: It's not a line like actually a line, it's...it's a metaphorical line.

SHANON: I don't get it.

SHANYN: The story. The storyline.

SHANON: It doesn't have a storyline. Does it?

SHANYN: Well no, not a story like a beginning-middle-end story, but a progression.

SHANNON: A Progression of Themes.

SHANYN: Yeah, A Progression of Themes.

SHANON: Oh. OK. What are the themes then?

SHANNON: Well, obviously it's...it's stuff about...

SHANON: What?

SHANNON: Well *feelings*, you know.

The other characters have all become like the show they have been watching, they writhe around each other and the Shannons in bad contact improv and take on extreme gestus...

The Shannons are totally tripping out, enjoying every second.

SHANYN: Like sad.

SHANNON: Yeah like sad like 'why are we all so hard on people and why don't we just be cool with each other and not be so critical' and also a bit of angry and also that sad and angry are byproducts of when people are hard on each other.

SHANYN: Yeah and also when you're hard on yourself maybe?

SHANNON: Yeah like that and so I think that the themes are like fear and sad and why don't we just all be cool and then things would be sweet. Sweeter. Than they are usually.

SHANON: I don't even know if it has got any themes I just think it looks weird.

SHANYN: Yeah well, I just wish he had said that line more sadder and less angry

SHANON: Yeah cos he said it like 'what are you DOING here?'

SHANNON: Yeah he should have just said it like ‘what are you *doing* here?’

SHANON: But not ‘what are *you* doing here?’

SHANYN/SHANNON: Oh no. Omigod Shanon.

SHANNON: Shanon Omigod.

SIMON: (*mouth full of money*) Wffff rrrrrr gu duuuuun hrrrr?

STAN: (*to herself*) ‘What are you doing here?’

NAT: ‘What are you... doing Hair?’

MISSY: ‘What a to-doing here.’

ANNETTE: ‘Lotta poo-pooing flair’

RAEWYN: ‘Vat of glue-stewing mare’

BILL: ‘Spot a shoe-screwing bear’

JAM: ‘Weigh a voodooing chair’

MARIANNE: Uh Uh OOOOOOOOOOoooooooooh, Ooooooooooooooooooing,
 EEE
 EEE?

Everyone has melted back to the floor, Franco and Stan are left alone.

FRANCO: What were you doing here?

STAN: What do you mean, I already told you.

FRANCO: It isn’t about the play, is it? Really. You’re here because you knew / I’d be here.

STAN: I’m here to protest.

FRANCO: Protest what?

Nothing. Franco leaves the theatre.

STAN: (*calls after him*) Why did you have to go and change so much?

Pause. Franco comes back.

FRANCO: People change.

STAN: I know that. Jesus. Of course I know that people change it's like *of course* people change but I didn't think that would be you too. Not like this.

FRANCO: What's so different?

STAN: Look at what you're writing.

FRANCO: What?

STAN: Your play, this play.

FRANCO: What about it?

STAN: I don't get it. I don't get any of it.

FRANCO: So? You don't get it. So what?

STAN: I used to get everything.

FRANCO: Oh well...

STAN: And I have read it and read it, I read this play hundreds of times trying to understand. And it's a dead end. It taunts me. I can't understand it and we can't understand each other and I've lost you. I've lost you.

Pause.

Why did you let us down?

FRANCO: I didn't. It's a *play*. I'm playing.

STAN: You're playing with these people's lives. All these people who have nurtured you and supported you and believed in you.

FRANCO: And paid for me?

STAN: (*spits*) And *paid* for you. And you give them this? This piece of shit...this *finger painting*? Jesus, how cruel are you?

FRANCO: (*soothing*) Listen. Just...listen. When I got Berlin, I looked back at everything I had here –I had my whole life in front of me. And... I didn't want it. I didn't want *any* of it. And I thought maybe I could just blow all of that up and start again.

STAN: And so you wrote this ugly play?

FRANCO: I didn't think anyone would take it so seriously.

STAN: I spose people want other people to be successful

FRANCO: But they don't always like them to do what they want, huh?

STAN: Not always I guess.

Pause.

FRANCO: What are you doing here Stan?

STAN: It's...it's a protest

FRANCO: How can you protest a broken heart? Would you hate the play as much / if you didn't hate me?

STAN: Shhhh.

Stan peels off her moustache.

STAN: I don't want to think about it anymore. You can call me Emma, by the way. I'm not in disguise anymore.

FRANCO: Emma? I'm truly sorry it didn't work out for us.

STAN: Same.

They hug. She kisses him, uncomfortably at first, but they muddle it out somehow. Ticking.

STAN: *(remembers)* Oh God, Gary?

FRANCO: What?

STAN: I have a kilo of Semtex strapped to my tummy, I think it's going to explode in a sec.

Pause

Shannon suddenly sees the real audience.

SHANNON: Omigod.

SHANON/SHANYN: What?

SHANNON: Omigod there are like all these people looking at us. Like staring. Just totally staring at us.

SHANON: Where?

SHANNON: There...there!

SHANYN: It's just the stage

SHANNON No there are like totally a whole load of other people just staring at us, like they've been there for ages just totally looking at us and not saying anything.

Shanon looks for them, disapproving...

SHANON: Boring.

SHANYN: Well I'll ask them to go away, shall I?

SHANNON: Yeah.

SHANYN: Excuse me can you please go away and leave my friend alone...?

Pause.

SHANYN: See, they're gone now.

SHANNON: No they're not, they're still there.

SHANON: I can't see anything.

SHANYN: It's just the drugs Shannon, settle down.

SHANNON: Why don't they do something? Why don't they do something?

AUDIENCE PLANT: Not our job, sorry.

The Shannons freeze.

The actor playing Nat gets up and comes to the front of the stage.

ACTOR:

This is a true story. I used to be really into art at school. Heaps. And there was this one art teacher, Mr. Denly, who didn't like me. No reason. Just personality clash I guess. But for whatever reason, he didn't like me. So he used to come in to my art class - and he

wasn't even the teacher, you know, he was the head of the department - he would come in *every single day* and look over my shoulder at *whatever* I was doing and say; "That's particularly ugly work you're doing today, Ryan".

EVERYONE: And that's a true story.

Blackout.

The bomb explodes. The lights flash up briefly, and we see what is left of the Theatre Pavlova – the seats scattered, the structure obliterated, the bodies of the people who are in every way destroyed.

Curtain.