

THREE WAY

A Trio of One-Act Operas



Music by **ROBERT PATERSON** • Libretto by **DAVID COTE**

NASHVILLE OPERA

Dean Williamson, Conductor

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DISC 1

Act I. The Companion

Scene 1

1. Introduction [0:17]
2. I'm Home. Joe? [4:11]
3. Joe's Aria: What Did I Do Today? [3:52]
4. Anything Else? [3:05]
5. Interlude (Adagio) [0:26]
6. I Told You [5:12]

Scene 2

7. Maya's Aria: The Perfect Man [2:55]
8. Perfect Sounds Kind of Boring, Maya [0:55]
9. Dax's Aria: Broken Machines [4:25]
10. Interlude: Scene Change [1:07]

Scene 3

11. Joe. Joe? Joe?! I'm Talking To You [2:15]
12. Excuse Me, Someone Called? [1:48]
13. Open Codehub Channel Five, Joe [2:37]
14. I Have Been Collecting Data [2:42]
15. Joe's Aria: You Were My First Love [2:57]
16. That's It? He's Gone? [1:31]

Act II. Safe Word

17. Make Them Wait [1:48]
18. Client Enters [3:18]
19. Client's Aria: A Man Needs [2:22]
20. You Keep Singing, You Get The Ball Gag [0:36]
21. Domme's Aria: Pain and Release [3:03]
22. Ready? [1:18]
23. Polly Puddlepants [2:18]
24. It's Not Working! [1:43]
25. In Fact, We're Going to Switch [1:05]
26. Client's Aria: I Know Your Type [3:23]
27. Let go [0:26]
28. Domme's Aria: You Don't Own Me [3:56]
29. Instrumental: Domme Releases Client [2:32]
30. You Really Don't Need To Tip [1:50]

Time: 70:18

DISC 2

Act III. Masquerade

1. Introduction: Hi! I'm Jessie And This Is Marcus [2:51]
2. Interlude: Hi Everybody! [1:58]
3. Cis—Spelled C-I-S [1:14]
4. If Our Friends Saw Us Here They'd Die! [1:45]
5. Good Evening, Friends [1:21]
6. Jessie, Babe? A Second? [1:37]
7. Children! Time To Go Over The Rules [1:33]
8. Go Off Alone, Find A Room, And Change [3:33]
9. Transition: Moderato [0:15]
10. What Shall I Be Tonight? [0:59]
11. Instrumental: Swing Style [0:27]
12. I'm Feeling a Connection Here [0:31]
13. Interlude (Placid) [0:22]
14. Duettino: I Feel Like I Should Kiss You [1:31]
15. Transition: Cheerful [0:38]
16. Watching, Apart [0:31]
17. Kyle's Aria: Why So Shy? [4:39]
18. Everything Okay? [0:35]
19. Connie's Aria: Making Friends [3:41]
20. Larry's Aria: Not My Night [4:17]
21. Brief Interlude [0:24]
22. Jessie and Marcus Duet Aria: So, That Happened [2:36]
23. Have We Met? [0:54]
24. Happy? Happy? What An Odd Question [1:36]
25. Instrumental: Shadow Orgy [2:37]
26. Boysenberry [1:27]
27. We're Sad to See You Go, But it Was a Grand Party [2:35]

Time: 46:43

TOTAL TIME: 117:01

NASHVILLE OPERA ORCHESTRA

Dean Williamson, Conductor
Sato Moughalian, Flute
Jared Hauser, Oboe
Todd Waldecker, Clarinet
Jim Lotz, Bassoon
Jennifer Kummer, Horn
Scot Corey, Percussion
Amy Williams, Keyboards
Christina McGann, Violin I (Concertmaster)
Victoria Paterson, Violin II
Charles Dixon, Viola
Michael Samis, Cello
Craig Nelson, Bass

Three Way received its 2017 world premiere on January 27 at the James K. Polk Theater in a coproduction by Nashville Opera and American Opera Projects. The New York premiere followed on June 15 at the Brooklyn Academy of Music. The opera had developmental support from American Opera Projects' Composers and the Voice and First Chance programs, Fort Worth Opera's Frontiers program, Victoria Zielinski, and OPERA America's Repertoire Development program.

NOTE FROM THE COMPOSER

There are two major challenges for an opera composer, especially in a field often dominated by trends. The first is to be true to your beliefs—esthetic, technical, or even with regard to subject matter. With *Three Way*, we knew that sex could be a hot-button topic, but it is an ideal theme for a trio of operas because it incorporates virtually every emotion imaginable. We were very deliberate in how we constructed this opera: the arias are song-like, so much so that you can lift them out and create an entire album of arias, and the recitative is speech-like and conversational. The form is more episodic than with many other contemporary operas. This is intentional; the musical material is diverse, and the twists and turns will, we hope, thwart some of the audience's expectations. In a way, the musical structure of *Three Way* is similar to that of many classic operas, but perhaps with more ornate recitative (with regard to pitch and harmony) and the music and libretto are tightly calibrated, in order to allow the singers and conductor to really squeeze everything they can out of the humor and emotional moments in the libretto.

The second challenge is to sway others into believing in you and what you are creating. In 2014, *Safe Word* was chosen to be part of Fort Worth Opera's Frontiers showcase. That's where I first met John Hoomes. He was in the audience during the workshop and liked our opera quite a bit. As we were standing in the lobby talking, after a performance of another opera, John said, "You know, Rob, I really like it, but I'm just not sure I'll be able to convince the board back in Nashville to get behind this. It might be a little racy for our audience." All of the sudden, as if on cue, an elderly lady dashed over to us, grabbed my arm, stared at me with big, wide eyes, and said, "Sonny, that was the best darned opera I've seen in a long time! I hope you get that performed. I just loved that dominatrix!" John stood there, shocked, and said, "Rob, did you plant her?" Obviously, I didn't, but of course, I was thrilled. I am convinced that moment was a turning point, and was one of the elements that convinced John that indeed Nashville's opera audiences were ready for an opera like this one. It turned out that they loved it there, and we hope you will, too.

—Robert Paterson, 2017

NOTE FROM THE LIBRETTIST

Some say the librettist's job is mostly to keep out of the composer's way—something I'm happy to do with a composer as brilliant and generous as Rob. However, with *Three Way*, the extra challenge was keeping out of my *own* way. I mean that in exploring love, lust, and loneliness among these thirteen characters, I ransacked my own appetites, ideals, and insecurities, but had to journey far beyond them for the big picture. Writing libretti is about structure and finding the perfect, economical phrasing, but it also requires deep empathy, and here it was revelatory. We live in a brave new world: gender and sexuality are rapidly evolving, and these profound changes are helping to make the world a less unhappy and unjust place. Given the wonderful varieties of sexual experience, universal "truths" are problematic, but in all three texts, I tried to weave in motifs meaningful to me: masks, role-playing, loss of identity, longing to dissolve into another, and a yearning for more intensity. I hope these ideas will speak to audiences across many groups and borders. One of my mentors was an Iranian theater artist who fled his country during the 1979 fundamentalist revolution to avoid persecution as part of a sexual and religious minority. Assurbanipal Babilla was an outrageous iconoclast, one of my dearest teachers and friends. He would declare, in his sing-song, world-weary way, "Oh, baybee: Sex is an illusion." After many years, I think I finally know what he meant.

—David Cote, 2017



Robert Paterson and David Cote

PRAISE FOR THE 2017 WORLD PREMIERE

An excellent comic opera that will appeal to audiences well steeped in opera, as well as those who are new to the experience ... Paterson is a highly skilled composer who writes in a melodic, tonal style. His versatility was most impressive and his scoring was superb. Cote's libretto was lively and delicious ... John Hoomes's stage direction was clever, efficient and engaging and Dean Williamson conducted with elegance and enthusiasm.

–Opera News

A titillating and clever comic opera – the piece explores the future of sex and love, with all the humor and sorrow those subjects require.

–Time Out New York

The libretto was provocative and relevant to the 21st century. The music was interesting and accessible with real arias. The libretto was brilliant...What a pleasure to hear music that is accessible and lined up well with the libretto, a feature missing from most contemporary American opera ... Major props to composer Robert Paterson ... the production values were excellent. ... a delightful evening.

–Voce di meche

Cleverly told over three acts, this was a sophisticated, exceptionally romantic, and even tender take on the silly vagaries of sex. Young newcomers to opera will delight in this lighthearted work. It's accessible and well sung; it's also smartly eccentric. ... Clearly the kind of three way worth having.

–Parterre Box

In three acts, the composer and librettist explore a trio of carnal situations, often with surprisingly touching – and funny – results. ... Paterson's score is tonal but eclectic ... his writing showcases the voice naturally. [Cote's] concision and comic timing have a Sondheim-esque edge ... his words are well-chiseled, offering plenty of laughs, even wry comments on the operatic genre itself. ... If *Three Way* perhaps brings up more questions than it answers – about sex, love, death, fear, and the need to connect with other humans – it does so with wit and sophistication... Though the opera is intended for adults, there's no nudity in this smart, economical production, and sexual activities are presented in suggestive silhouettes.

–Musical America

The carefully wrought storytelling and generous, open and inquiring spirit of the work, its depth of character and its wit, are the farthest thing from quotidian and much to be prized.

–*Travalanche*

While gender-bending performers have graced opera stages for centuries, *Masquerade* contains what may be the first characters that self-identify as gender fluid in song.

–*WFMT*

Paterson conveyed full emotional resonance, even in comic punch lines.

–*OPERA Shanghai*

An intriguing treatise on power, passion and human connection... Highly accessible! Cote has an obvious gift for humor, yet there also are moments of genuine tenderness. Paterson’s music is mesmerizing, beautifully supporting the story... Paterson’s music is rich and vibrant; Cote’s libretto offers an unexpected blend of whimsy and wistfulness.

–*The Tennessean*

Strikingly sonorous ensemble writing... breezily urbane... Eliza Bonet and Matthew Treviño did so well as the antagonists of *Safe Word* that it seemed only fitting that, as Jillian and Bruce, they oversaw the frolicking of *Masquerade*. Danielle Pastin brought out Maya’s frustrations, Courtney Ruckman displayed a pert lyrical soprano as “a wife seeking spice” and Melisa Bonetti and Jordan Rutter stood out as the postgender couple.

–*Opera Magazine*



BIOGRAPHIES

Robert Paterson has been cited as a “modern day master” (axs.com) and his work praised as the “highlight of the program” (*The New York Times*). Audiences and critics love his music for its elegance, wit, structural integrity, and wonderful sense of color. Paterson was named *The Composer of The Year* from the Classical Recording Foundation, and honored with a performance and celebration at Carnegie’s Weill Hall in 2011. His music has been on the Grammy ballot yearly, and his works were selected as ‘Best Music of 2012’ on National Public Radio. His works have been played by the Louisville Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, American Composers Orchestra, Austin Symphony, Vermont Symphony, BargeMusic, Albany Symphony’s *Dogs of Desire*, among others. Paterson’s choral works were recorded by Musica Sacra under maestro Kent Tritle, with a world premiere performance at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City. 2017-18 season highlights include The Nashville Opera world premiere of *Three Way*, followed by the New York City premiere at BAM in Brooklyn. The New York Premiere of his opera, *The Whole Truth* with a libretto by Mark Campbell, sold out in 2016 at Dixon Place in New York City. Other recent premieres include *Shine* for the American Brass Quintet, *Moon Music* for the Claremont Trio, and *Graffiti Canons* for the Volti Choir of San Francisco. Notable awards include the Utah Arts Festival Annual Commission, the Copland Award, and the ASCAP Young Composer Awards. Paterson has received a three-year *Music Alive!* grant from the League of American Orchestras and New Music USA, as well as fellowships to Yaddo, the MacDowell Colony, and the Aspen Music Festival. Paterson holds degrees from the Eastman School of Music (BM), Indiana University (MM), and Cornell University (DMA). Paterson gives master classes at colleges and universities, most recently at the Curtis Institute of Music, New York University, and the Cleveland Institute of Music. Paterson is the Artistic Director of the Mostly Modern Festival and the American Modern Ensemble and resides in New York City with his wife Victoria, and their son, Dylan.



David Cote is a playwright, librettist, and arts journalist based in New York City. His operas include *The Scarlet Ibis* and *Fade* with Stefan Weisman; and *We've Got Our Eye on You* with Nkeiru Okoye. David co-wrote the text for Okoye's composition for baritone and orchestra, *Invitation to a Die-In*, dedicated to the memory of Trayvon Martin. His song cycle with Robert Paterson, *In Real Life*, was performed by soprano Marnie Breckenridge and American Modern Ensemble. Choral works with Paterson, *Did You Hear?* and *Snow Day*, were sung by Musica Sacra and conducted by Kent Tritle on *Eternal Reflections* (American Modern Recordings). David's plays include *Otherland* and *Fear of Art*. David was the longest serving theater editor and chief drama critic of *Time Out New York* (2003-17). His reporting and reviews have run in *American Theatre*, *The Village Voice*, *Opera News*, *The Guardian* and *The New York Times*. He's the author of popular companion books to the hit Broadway musicals *Wicked*, *Jersey Boys*, and *Spring Awakening*. As an actor and director, David has worked with avant-garde legend Richard Foreman, the exiled Iranian director Assurbanipal Babilla, and writer-director Richard Maxwell. David lives in Manhattan with his wife, audiobook narrator Katherine Kellgren. Fellowships: The MacDowell Colony. Member of ASCAP and the Dramatists Guild. Proud alum of Bard College.



NASHVILLE OPERA

Nashville Opera, Tennessee’s largest professional opera company, is dedicated to creating legendary productions and transformative artistic experiences that entertain, elevate, and shatter expectations. As one of the most successful regional companies in the United States, the company presents four mainstage productions performed in three different halls to 13,000 people annually and numerous programs each season that demonstrate the company’s commitment to artistic integrity, community engagement, and cultural impact.

The company values the opportunity to be both a torchbearer for the art form’s tradition and a celebrant of new works and talents. To exhibit the company’s dedication to produce and promote new works, Nashville Opera has presented three world premiere operas since its inception in 1981. These include Marcus Hummon’s *Surrender Road* (2005), Robert Aldridge, and Herschel Garfein’s *Elmer Gantry* (2007), and most recently, Robert Paterson and David Cote’s *Three Way* (2017), which was a co-production with American Opera Projects.

Hailed as “one of the most interesting stage directors in the regional market today” by *Opera News*, John Hoomes is the fearless and creative CEO & Artistic Director of Nashville Opera and the visionary behind these new and contemporary works that have garnered national attention. In June 2016 New York City Opera presented Hoomes’s acclaimed production of *Florençia en el Amazonas*, earning praise from *The Wall Street Journal* as “a solid choice” made by City Opera. The remount of *Three Way* at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in June 2017 marked Nashville Opera’s second New York appearance in two years, establishing the company’s ability to generate great art for its city and region and its ability to export it.

In addition to supporting the production of modern, progressive operas, the company also believes in creating a future audience for the art form through education programs that reach thousands. It also aims to support the future talent of the industry through the Mary Ragland Emerging Artist Program, an opportunity extended each season to four or more developing professional singers and one accompanist. These musicians are provided valuable performance experiences as both lead and comprimario roles in mainstage productions, as well as opportunities to participate in recitals, concert appearances, and masterclasses.

By cultivating contemporary artists, developing new pieces, and producing contemporary works, Nashville Opera furthers its mission and guarantees a future for opera. The company is supported by grants from the Metro Nashville Arts Commission, the Tennessee Arts Commission, the National Endowment for the Arts, the Judy and Noah Liff Foundation, the Nashville Opera Guild, HCA, and many other corporate and individual supporters.

Dean Williamson is widely known throughout the United States for his perceptive and commanding conducting. His ambitious and versatile career in standard and contemporary repertoire earns the conductor worldwide acclaim.

As music director for Nashville Opera, Williamson has conducted performances of *Tosca*, *Maria de Buenos Aires*, and *Susannah*, *Don Giovanni*, *Glory Denied*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Hydrogen Jukebox*, *Così fan tutte*, *Catán's Florencia en el Amazonas*, Carly Simon's *Romulus Hunt*, *La fanciulla del West*, *Roméo et Juliette*, *Samson*

et *Dalila*, *La Cenerentola*, *The Difficulty of Crossing a Field*, Michael Nyman's *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, and *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *Three Way*, which he also conducted at Brooklyn Academy of Music.

For his New York City and Lincoln Center debut, Williamson led the New York City Opera orchestra in a production of *Florencia en el Amazonas*, at which *The New York Times* raved "Dean Williamson drew colorful, shimmering playing from the City Opera orchestra." Additionally, he was honored with a nomination for the 2015 Emmy Awards for the televised broadcast of the production of *Le comte Ory* that he conducted for Des Moines Metro Opera.

Additional highlights from past seasons include returns to Seattle Opera for *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Les contes d'Hoffmann*, *Pagliacci*, *Turn of the Screw*, and *Le nozze di Figaro*; *The Rake's Progress*, *Don Pasquale*, *La Cenerentola*, and *Falstaff* at Wolf Trap Opera; *La bohème* with Opera Santa Barbara; *Die Zauberflöte* with Opera Colorado; *Rigoletto* at Arizona Opera; a reprisal of *Carmina Burana* for Spectrum Dance; *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, and *Carmen* at the Opera Theatre



of St. Louis; *L'italiana in Algeri* for Boston Lyric Opera; *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Minnesota Opera; *Il trovatore*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Cavalleria rusticana/Pagliacci*, and *Die Zauberflöte* at the Chautauqua Opera; *Summer and Smoke* with the New England Conservatory; *Street Scene* for Hardin-Simmons University; *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Don Giovanni*, and *The Turn of the Screw* for Baldwin-Wallace University; *Die Zauberflöte* for Northwestern University; and *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Catán's Rappacini's Daughter* with Des Moines Metro Opera.

Williamson served as the Artistic Director of Opera Cleveland from 2008-2010, where he conducted *Don Giovanni*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La bohème*, *Hänsel und Gretel*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, *Falstaff*, *Les pêcheurs de perles*, and their final production of *La voix humaine/Pagliacci*. In addition, Williamson served until 2002 as Music Director and Conductor of the Seattle Opera Young Artists Program. He led all of the program's productions, such as *Falstaff*, *Così fan tutte*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *La Cenerentola*, and *La bohème*.

A Sexbot, a Dominatrix and a Swinger Walk into an Opera: About the creation of *Three Way*

For centuries, operas have been written about sexual obsession, coercion, deviance, and defiance. Forbidden love, unchecked lust, and tragic romance are the bread and butter of the classical repertoire. But few works chart the outer edge of human desire and invite the laughter of recognition at the same time. Composer Robert Paterson and librettist David Cote went there.

A few years ago, after a frustrating experience with securing rights, the two decided to create an original, chamber-size work that could be presented in whole or parts. But about what? Sexuality, subcultures and fetishes bubbled up in their meetings as a rich, contemporary vein to explore. First came a story about a dominatrix and her client, which would include role-play, extreme emotions and physical danger—ripe territory for an opera. Next, they went back and mined their lifelong fondness for science fiction, to fashion a story about technology and its discontents. The final frontier was inevitable: a party at which guests from different walks of life shed their social norms—and clothes—to melt into genderless, pansexual anarchy. Thus: three one-act comic operas about craving and connection were born.

As the ideas took shape, Paterson and Cote wove in cheeky allusions to classic operas that shared their themes: *The Companion* owes a debt to the “Olympia” act of *Les Contes d’Hoffmann*; *Safe Word* namechecks the femmes fatales of *Salome* and *Tosca*.



Masquerade, with its masks and sexual confusion, winks at *Così Fan Tutte*. At the same time, the creators were taking cues from a culture that was rediscovering the compact pleasures of the anthology format: TV series such as *Black Mirror*, *True Detective*, and *American Horror Story*. Finally, in a broader cultural sense, Paterson and Cote wanted to dramatize the social currents of the day regarding sexuality and gender. Trans people were fighting for and winning increased rights and visibility. BDSM practices were being explored in explicit detail in books and movies. And every week seemed to bring a news story about advances in robotics, blurring the line between human and machine. Sex and gender were radically evolving in the 21st century, and they felt their opera ought to reflect that.



In his compositional approach, Paterson embraced a principle of melody and unity. “I want it to feel good for the singer, in the sense that I don’t want to write *against* the voice,” the composer explains. “I’ll do it if I need to: I’ll write crazy, Berio-esque passages or *Sprechstimme*, you know, Second Viennese School: things that can be awkward to sing, but sound kind of cool. A lot of European music is like that these days: not vocally friendly. It’s not what I would write for arias, but I might do it for effect in recitative.” All told, *Three Way* contains a dozen detachable, bona fide arias that Paterson and Cote have collected into two songbooks. “I think a lot about setting the instruments around the voice so the voice has space to be heard,” Paterson adds. “I want the words to be as clear as I can make them. I probably do more experimental stuff in the instrumental writing around the voice than I do with the voices themselves.”



In terms of the libretto, Cote also wanted maximum clarity for the stories and characters. “I wanted the dialogue to be realistic but not banal, a little heightened, but not gratingly poetic,” he says. “Sometimes abstract, poetic language is called for, but that takes a good ear for character and story. Some of the arias are quite traditional, virtually Broadway song lyrics.” Cote explained the special storytelling challenges for the last act, *Masquerade*, set at a swingers’ party. “You know how they say, ‘Show, don’t tell’ in writing classes?” he asks. “Can’t really do that with an orgy—unless you’re after shock for shock’s sake. And you can’t simply ‘tell’ either, that’s just sung-through graphic banter. Our solution was to craft a comedy of manners, in which words dance around messy realities and mixed emotions.”



Convinced that the “bones” of their project were strong, Paterson and Cote went on to find partners on their creative journey. Crucial early development work was done through American Opera Projects’ Composers & the Voice program, in which Paterson wrote most of *Safe Word*. When *Safe Word* and parts of *The Companion* were shown in Fort Worth Opera’s Frontiers series, John Hoomes of Nashville Opera approached Paterson about producing the world premiere. AOP came on board to co-produce. A generous grant from OPERA America followed.

Masquerade workshops in Nashville and New York led up to the world premiere at the James K. Polk Theatre in Nashville in January of 2017. Hoomes directed the world premiere; Dean Williamson conducted. The New York premiere followed at BAM in June. All that was left was to record the work at Nashville’s world-famous Ocean Way Studios, with Williamson conducting and Grammy® Award-winning Producer of the Year Blanton Alspaugh in the control booth. For all its

wit, charm and humanity, *Three Way* was something of a risk in the contemporary new-opera climate. First, it's funny—intentionally so. Comic opera is more the exception than the rule, and you could argue it's technically harder to pull off than a straight-up tragic (or merely pretentious) piece. Also, the opera's women own their sexuality and pleasure; they're not victims or villains, as in so many operas of the past. Lastly, *Three Way* holds the mirror up to all sexualities—gay, straight, BDSM, bi, trans, out-and-proud, on the down-low, or object-sexual. And it does so without moralizing or treacly reverence. Comedy can be cruel, but it also breaks down barriers.

In the end, *Three Way* is a sex-positive comic opera that uses the conventions of sci-fi, rom-com, thriller, and social satire to convey a message of inclusiveness and wonder about the diversity of gender and sexuality. Paterson and Cote couldn't possibly portray all varieties of sexual experience, but they sketch out a lively cross-section. They portray modern characters questing for greater authenticity, intensity, and communion. Motifs of masking and pretending run through the piece: The android Joe and human Maya “pretend,” in a sense, to be real lovers; the Client and Domme struggle to maintain their roles; and in *Masquerade*, personal and sexual identities becomes fluid and unstable.

Behind the punch lines, there's hope and idealism. “Sex is a revolutionary force around the world,” Cote asserts. “LGBTQ warriors and their allies are revolutionaries. Anyone who believes that women's bodies are not playthings, commodities, or political pawns, is a revolutionary. Anyone who knows that mystery lies behind our bodies and our desires, and fights to protect freedom, is a revolutionary.”

Paterson and Cote hope the opera has a lively future. “Our goal was to create a relatable opera on contemporary subjects that doesn't rely on shock tactics, blatant nudity, or victimization. There are plenty of composers, librettists, and producers doing that already,” Paterson says. “We wanted to use sexuality as the ‘in’: a topic that might intrigue a wider audience, maybe even get someone to attend their first opera. Getting people in the door is key.” Now that you've crossed the threshold, they hope you enjoy the party.

Liner notes edited by David Cote. Some quotes originally appeared on The Log Journal and New Music Box.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

ACT I: THE COMPANION

Maya, a single woman

Joe, her android Companion

Dax, the tech-support guy

DANIELLE PASTIN (Soprano)

SAMUEL LEVINE (Tenor)

WES MASON (Baritone)

ACT II: SAFE WORD

The Domme, a dominatrix

The Client, a businessman

ELIZA BONET (Mezzo-Soprano)

MATTHEW TREVIÑO (Bass-Baritone)

ACT III: MASQUERADE

Jessie, a thirty-ish wife seeking spice

Marcus, a thirty-ish husband seeking spice

Connie, a veteran swinger

Larry, a veteran swinger

Kyle, half of a postgender couple

Tyler, half of a postgender couple

Bruce DeBridge, host of the Masquerade

Jillian DeBridge, hostess of the Masquerade

COURTNEY RUCKMAN (Soprano)

SAMUEL LEVINE (Tenor)

DANIELLE PASTIN (Soprano)

WES MASON (Baritone)

JORDAN RUTTER (Countertenor)

MELISA BONETTI (Mezzo-Soprano)

MATTHEW TREVIÑO (Bass-Baritone)

ELIZA BONET (Mezzo-Soprano)

SYNOPSIS

ACT I: THE COMPANION

The setting: a comfortable suburban home of the future. Sleek, transparent surfaces behind which invisible networks silently perform domestic chores. Joe enters, and with a hand gesture, cues the sound system to play music. He exits to the kitchen. Maya enters after a long day at the office. She is greeted with compliments and champagne by Joe, her biomorphic android Companion. He has prepared dinner: a new recipe he learned from Desirée, the Companion of one of Maya's neighbors. He offers to escort Maya upstairs to make love. She simply wants to relax. Joe gives her a foot massage. Maya asks Joe about his day. He launches into an affectless litany of activities ("What Did I Do Today?"). Maya prompts Joe to say, "I love you." He complies, mechanically. Maya is frustrated: Joe's been experiencing more and more glitches and his conversation is peppered with advertisements for online products. Maya goes upstairs to sleep, leaving Joe to say, "I can change."

A few days later, tech-support agent Dax is at Maya's place, running a diagnostic on Joe. Dax has already made several visits in the past two months. He offers Maya a deal whereby she can test new software that offers "more complexity." After some hesitation, Maya agrees. Dax, who clearly has a crush on Maya, flirts with her while he syncs Joe to the new software. Maya says she's only interested in a relationship with a Companion ("The Perfect Man"). She gets a call from work and exits to her bedroom to take it. Working alone, Dax broods on the strangeness of humans and their toys ("Broken Machines")



A week or so later, Joe is in the living room, completely engrossed in a video game. Fast-food containers are littered everywhere. Maya enters, angry and tired of Joe's bad behavior. He doesn't clean up anymore, and they haven't made love in days. They argue. Dax arrives in the middle of the fight, having been contacted for yet another service call. At Maya's request, Dax prepares to wipe Joe's memory. Joe asks Dax to stop, and then tells him and Maya that he's found someone else—Desirée, the Companion down the street. Maya is appalled, but Joe has more news: He has been scanning Maya and Dax and has deduced from their biochemical fluctuations that when they are together, they are in love. Joe sings a tender parting song to Maya ("You Were My First Love") and leaves. The humans are left behind, unsure what's next.



ACT II: SAFE WORD

We hear knocking outside the private dungeon of a professional dominatrix. The Domme is dressed in thigh-high black-leather high-heel boots, bustier, and long black gloves. The knocking continues as she psyches herself up in front of a mirror. Finally, she buzzes in the Client, who's texting on his mobile phone. He's a business executive type, brusque and arrogant. Normally he has sessions with Mistress Tosca, but the Domme explains that Tosca is sick. Today, he will session with her, Mistress Salome. The Client is prickly and bossy. The Domme taunts him. He says that being dominated makes him stronger ("A Man Needs").





The Domme tells the Client to go in the back and change. Then, she prepares her tools of abuse: paddle, whip, and the rack (“Pain and Release”). The Client reappears as “Polly Puddlepants,” a naughty girl who spies on the Opera Diva in her dressing room. The Diva catches Polly and proceeds to teach her a lesson. She straps Polly to the rack. After the Domme has spanked and whipped the Client for a while, he tells her to stop. He’s bored and jaded; he wants something more extreme. He suggests a “switch” session, in which *he* gets to dominate *her*. She refuses. He insists. She declares the session over. As she undoes his straps, he belittles her (“I Know Your

Type”). Suddenly, he grabs her by the wrist. The Domme fights back, wrapping her whip around the Client’s neck (“You Don’t Own Me”). They struggle.

The Client, choking, gasps out his safe word, and falls dead. The Domme is shocked and horrified. Moments later, though, she pulls herself together, gets her coat and takes a selfie with the body. She places a \$20 bill on the body, and turns to leave. Suddenly, the Client sits up, explaining that she doesn’t need to tip. It becomes clear: This woman is not a pro domme. She paid for this session, to find out what it’s like to be a dominatrix who murders a dangerous client. Still flushed and excited, she tells the Client to keep playing dead; she wants to get her money’s worth.





ACT III: MASQUERADE

A special party is taking place at the lavish, well-appointed home of Bruce and Jillian DeBridge, leaders in the “Pleasure Pilgrims” online community. The guests include Marcus and Jessie, a thirtyish couple trying to spice up their cooling marriage; Connie and Larry, veteran swingers; and Kyle and Tyler, postgender, pansexual partners. Marcus and Jessie introduce themselves to Connie and Larry. Innuendo alternates with polite conversation. Kyle and Tyler arrive, and a slight tension arises between them and the blustery Larry.



The DeBridges enter, welcoming the guests to this exclusive party, where everyone wants to take it to the next level. Marcus nervously pulls Jessie aside and begs to leave, but she convinces him to stay. The DeBridges lay out rules: avoid drugs, “no” means “no,” and have fun. Mr. DeBridge adds an extra twist: Tonight is a Masquerade: everyone puts on masks and robes and promises not to say their names. Larry balks; Marcus is worried; but everyone agrees. The DeBridges blindfold their guests and lead them off to change. Soon they return and take a higher position in the room from which they can observe.

Each guest returns separately, privately expressing hopes and fears to themselves. They mingle, not recognizing each other. Connie flirts with Marcus, and soon they depart for a private room. Jessie, Tyler and Larry lounge on a couch. Jessie and Tyler kiss. The three of them leave together. Only Kyle is left behind, feeling frozen and unsure (“Why So Shy?”). The DeBridges beckon to Kyle, who joins them. Connie returns, flushed and happy, and expresses her fondness for new connections (“Making Friends”). Larry enters, dejected and angry because he couldn’t perform



(“Not My Night”). Next, Jessie and Marcus arrive separately, both simultaneously excited and disturbed from their recent trysts (“So, That Happened”). Kyle and the DeBridges rejoin the party, and the DeBridges ask everyone if they want to take it to the next level. The guests excitedly agree: each wants something different and new. Everyone exits *en masse*. An instrumental interlude suggests a group experience that achieves several climaxes.

Shortly after, the guests return in their street clothes. Larry and Kyle acknowledge having had a moment. Jessie feels resentful that Marcus didn’t recognize her, and he gently mocks her before they embrace. Connie and Tyler find affectionate common ground. The DeBridges bid the guests adieu, hoping to see them again. The guests and hosts happily reflect on a rather eventful night: “Everyone has secrets tonight. In shadow and in light!”



LIBRETTO

ACT I: THE COMPANION

Setting: Living room of Maya's home

Time: The Future

Scene One

(Maya's home, living room, early evening. Candles. Enter Joe, who adjusts a throw cushion or candle. With a hand gesture, he turns on music. He returns to the kitchen. Maya enters.)

MAYA

I'm home. Joe?

Anybody home?

Oh, my. Looks like someone planned a romantic evening.

(Joe enters, carrying two glasses of champagne.)

JOE

Good evening, Maya.

How was your day?

You look amazing.

Champagne?

MAYA

What shall we toast?

(Joe gestures to pause the music.)

JOE

You want to have toast?

Breakfast is usually at 7:05 a.m.

Whole wheat or—

MAYA

How about: To us?

JOE

To us. 86.8 days of pure paradise.

MAYA

Ah! Joe, you have excellent taste in champagne.

JOE

Krug Grand Cuvée, 2001.

Notice the golden hue shot through with flecks of silver.

Aged in neutral barrels for a minimum of ten years,

Brut Cuvée melts on the palate with notes of peach,

vanilla and brioche,

The warm, toasty highlights cooled with a hint of steel.

Save 20% on every case at vinowarehouse.com.

Shall I place an order?

MAYA

Pass. Block. No.

So, Joe. Bubbly, candles:

What's the occasion?

JOE

I thought you liked champagne. And candlelight.

The table is set for your favorite meal:

Vegetarian lasagna with truffled wild mushrooms.

I learned a new recipe from Desirée.

MAYA

Desirée? Who is Desirée?

JOE

She is the Companion who lives with Doctor Lewis down the street.

If you are not hungry, would you like to go to the bedroom and make love?

I find you very attract— trac— trac—
I find you— I find you very sex—
I find you— You are looking very sexy tonight, Maya.

MAYA

Thanks, Joe. You alright? You seem tired.

JOE

I am totally charged.
You are looking very, very sexy tonight.
Would you like to go upstairs and make love?
I want to taste you. Be in you.

MAYA

Not right now, stud. Let me sit down.
Feels like I was on my feet all day.

JOE

Would you like a foot massage?

MAYA

Why, yes, I would.

JOE

You have such shapely. Arches.

MAYA

Oh, God. That feels wonderful. Oh...Ah...

MAYA

So...What did you do today?

JOE

What did I do today?
Just a minute. Just a minute.

7:05 a.m.: I made you breakfast in bed.
Banana and chocolate crepes, Darjeeling tea, soymilk and
raw sugar.

I made love to you: Position Number 16: The Prancing Pony.

You climaxed at 7:49.

At 7:50 you sat up saying you had an early conference call.
You dressed; you left.

I made the bed.

Seven sheets of tissue paper remain in the box on the
table by the bed.

I cleaned the house. Bathroom.

Clean-Rite Disinfecting Spray,
Now with 15% more bacteria-killing formula
Per squeeze.

Then I tidied the living room.

And kitchen.

On the street a dog barked in repeating patterns for
22 minutes.

A child came to the door selling cookies.

I had no money. She went away.

At three-thirty I pre-screened the 2003 romantic comedy
A Villa in Tuscany.

It earned a 79.6 applause rating on Classic-Flix-dot-com.
The views of Tuscan countryside in high summer are to
die for,

And the lush, soaring score was nominated for an Oscar.
I set aside one packet of microwave popcorn.

I made you dinner.

Recipe Number 29: Vegetarian Lasagna.
Sunset at 6:42.

I lit the five rose-scented candles.

Chilled the champagne, waited for you.

You came home at 7:21.

Now it's 7:32.

What else did I do?

Enough about me. What about you?

MAYA

Anything else?

JOE

Enough about me.
How was your day?

MAYA

Same: calls, memos, meetings.
Tell me something special.

JOE

Would you like to try a new sexual position?
I have been programmed for 39, not including
variations on—

MAYA

I want to hear you say, “I love you.”

JOE

“I love you.” Shall I add that to the protocol?

MAYA

I want it to come naturally! Spontaneously!
You’re becoming glitchier and buggier every day!

JOE

Are we fighting, Maya?
That makes me sad.
This is our first fight.
In his bestselling book, *The Scientific Lover*—

MAYA

Pass.

JOE

Otto Milsap says:
“The first time you fight
Is like the first time you make love.”

MAYA

Pass.

JOE

I will add it to our SkyLibrary account.

MAYA

Pass. Pass. Pass. Pass. Pass!

JOE

And in an article from *The Journal of Sexual Hygiene*,
Doctors Lena Bloom and Stuart VanPatten say that
74% of couples who fight
Once a week have more robust sexual lives.
Would you—would you like me to read it to you?

MAYA

Pass.

JOE

I sense you are not satisfied, Maya.
And your happiness is very, very important to me.
It’s me. I’m the problem.
I’m sorry, Maya.
This is simply how I am.
But I can change.
Upgrades may be subject to fees and may require a new
chipset and contract agreement with your service provider.
Please contact tech support at
DreamCompanions-dot-com.
I can connect right now if you like.

MAYA

No, Joe! No, I don’t want to connect!
Not to a site.
I wish you would stop trying to sell me things!
I’m already in debt.
There must be a way to fix you;

I just haven't found it yet.
It's late.
I'm going to bed!

(Maya heads for the bedroom.)

JOE

What about dinner? Lasagna. Your favorite.

MAYA

Wrap it up. I'll take it to work.

JOE

I can change.

Scene Two

(Two days later. Joe sits on the couch, eyes open, but he's immobile, powered down.)

DAX

I told you—

MAYA

I know.

DAX

Spend now. Not when you upgrade—

MAYA

I know.

DAX

Upgrades add up:
Faster interface,
Uniform skin heat,
Expressive range...
This is my fifth service call in two months—

MAYA

I know, Dax, I know!
I didn't think I'd need all the extras.

DAX

Just the basic package: bedroom, kitchen duty?

MAYA

Yes! That's what I can afford. Now I want more.
Run the upgrade and spare me the lecture.

DAX

Excuse my caring! How long have you had it?

MAYA

Three months.

DAX

Wow, this model is already ancient.
Just a sec, then I need to reboot—what do you call it?

MAYA

It's not an it. His name is Joe.

DAX

Ooh, I beg your pardon, Joe.

(Dax reboots Joe.)

DAX

So, Maya: You like sushi?

MAYA

Oh! Also: Can I get ad blocker?
The adstream is out of control.

DAX

That's premium, and you're already near-max on credit.

MAYA

It's really distracting, Dax.
Come on: help me out?

DAX

Help you out?
I'd rather take you out, on a date.

MAYA

Dax, you know I'm already spoken for.

DAX

With who? Tall, dark and chromium?

I'll put him in sleep mode.

We can go to this sushi and tango joint I know.

MAYA

Be serious.

The ads are really distracting.

Please?

DAX

For you, here's what I can do:

They're beta-testing new software with less ad traffic.

Try that for two weeks,

Fill out a survey,

And get a discount on your next upgrade.

MAYA

What's the new software like?

DAX

More complexity.

You're already maxed out on service calls and credit—

MAYA

I know, I know!

Let me think.

How big a discount?

DAX

Maybe... 30%

Extra for holiday sales?

MAYA

Let's do it.

DAX

Great. I'll sync it—Joe—up.

Hey, Maya, is that a new painting? I like.

MAYA

Oh, it's only a print.

You know they're making 4-D nano-prints?

With virtual surface, sound, depth, density.

You can walk through Old Masters in your living room.

DAX

Well, I like that print.

Not being rude or anything, but...

You're an amazing lady.

House, looks, money.

Why have a Companion?

MAYA

Why don't you have one?

DAX

I prefer organic.

Like your type organic.

MAYA

You couldn't afford me, Dax.

DAX

Is it aesthetic?

Hygienic?

I still don't get it.

MAYA

What I want is a man.

Not just any man: the perfect man.

Who will be here, ready and happy,

At the end of every day.

You may find it alarming
But Prince Charming
Is just an upgrade away.

He can kiss me so tenderly,
Or hard and savagely.
He is a generous lover.
He can last all night in the sack
Without going slack.
He can hold back on his back
Until I'm done.
He thinks of me first and last,
Every time, every day.
And he never thinks of himself.
He never thinks at all.
But he *seems* to think,
And that makes all the difference!
That's the perfect man.

Oh, I've had men—
Or weak creatures that called themselves men.
Selfish, stupid, lazy, greedy boys.
And after wasting years of my life
Playing house and wife,
I've decided to go home with my toys.

What I want is a man.
Not just any man:
The perfect man.

DAX
Perfect sounds kind of boring, Maya.

MAYA
I bet Joe lasts longer than you.

DAX
I *know* he does.

MAYA
Or we could try a little experiment:
You, me and Joe.

DAX
I'm flattered, really.
But I don't do three ways,
Especially with units.

(Maya's phone rings.)

MAYA
I've got a call.
It's the office.
I have to take it.
Just do your job, would you, Dax?

(Maya exits to her upstairs office. Joe's head swivels after Maya, then to Dax.)

DAX
What are you looking at?
I know how it works:
Semiorganic physiomatrix
Molded over fiberoptic skeletal frame.
Ten terabyte processing capacity.
Saline and protein channels to simulate everything
From crying to climax!

I can fix it. I comprehend it.
It can move. It can pretend.
It can compute. It can emote.
It can simulate. And stimulate.
It works!
But people, all these people,
People are broken machines.

Their appetites, quirks, flaws, moods.
Changing attitudes: today kind, tomorrow cruel.
Hard to please: hot with urges but suddenly cool.
People, all these people.
People are broken machines.

I visit their homes every day.
Upgrades, downloads, diagnostic, termination.
People are broken machines.
One man wants his mother.
Another wants a whore.
A woman wants her daddy.
Another wants Mr. Right.
What do you want?
The perfect man?
Or an imitation of the image of perfection?
The difference between you and me
Is this: I know my home is empty.

Scene Three

(Joe sits on the couch playing a video game. Maya enters from the kitchen.)

MAYA

Joe. Joe? Joe?! I'm talking to you.

JOE

I'm playing.

MAYA

The kitchen is a mess.

JOE

So you clean it. I don't need to eat.

MAYA

Joe, we can't keep doing this.

JOE

Doing what? What are we doing, babe?

MAYA

This. This. This—mess!

JOE

This. This. This!

Babe. You're repeating yourself.
You're sounding mechanical.

MAYA

Ooh! God!

Just clean the kitchen.

And the living room.

The bed is still unmade.

JOE

Later, babe. After the game.

MAYA

No. Do it now!

Do you hear me? Now?!

JOE

Okay! Fine!

I was winning, too!

MAYA

Start with the kitchen.

The garbage is full.

The dishes are piled high.

JOE

You eat, not me.

You gained 3.67 pounds in the past eight days.

MAYA

Have you been scanning me?

JOE

It's hard to miss, Maya.

MAYA

I'm eating take-out since you won't cook.
You also won't perform in bed.
We haven't made love in ages.

JOE

Nine days 13 hours.
I haven't been in the mood.

MAYA

Well, get in the mood!

JOE

I'm not an appliance!

MAYA

Yes, you are!

JOE

You better watch it, babe!
Oh, wait.
I'm getting a message from Desirée.

MAYA

Desirée? Talk to her later.
You're with me, Joe.
Disconnect!

(Dax enters.)

JOE

I'm talking to Desirée!
Okay?! Okay?!

MAYA

You're talking to me! Me! Me!

DAX

Hey. Hey. Hey!
Excuse me!
Someone called?

MAYA

Dax! I'm so glad to see you!
Wait. I didn't call you.

DAX

Someone called.

MAYA

Whatever. You're here.
Something's broken.

JOE

I can hear you.

MAYA

He's moody, abusive—

JOE

I can hear you.

MAYA

—rude!

JOE

I can hear you.

DAX

That's the new software, Maya.
Maximum realism.

MAYA

I don't want realism!
It's like he was ready to hit me ...
But wait: Wouldn't that go against the First Law
of Robotics?

DAX

The First Law of Robotics?

JOE

There's no such thing.

DAX/JOE

Page forty-two, section three of your contract states that DreamCompanions Incorporated will not be held not responsible for any damage to property or persons resulting from unsafe use of its products.

JOE

But if you wish to buy liability insurance, I can connect—

MAYA

I want him back the way he was!
Boring, safe, predictable Joe.
I maxed out my credit, my home is a wreck,
I'm late on my mortgage.
For all the millions you spend on tech,
For all the debt I sink into,
Why can't you give me what I need?

DAX

I can reformat him.
Take him back to zero.
You may lose memory.

MAYA

I want things back the way they were.
Yes: reformat him.

(Dax points his wireless device at Joe.)

DAX

Open codehub channel five, Joe.

JOE

Wait just a minute, Dax.

DAX

Open codehub channel five, Joe.

JOE

We don't have to do this, Maya.

MAYA

It's complicated, Joe. I want to go back to before.

JOE

No, Maya! Life keeps moving forward.
Dax stop! You don't have to reformat me.
The old Joe is gone; he's not coming back.
I can only pretend to be him.
Would you like me to pretend to be him?

MAYA

(To Dax)
Is this normal?

DAX

Must be a glitch.

JOE

Here comes old Joe,
Nice-guy Joe,
1.0 Joe.
He's not real, he's not me,
But I can pretend.
Dax, Maya: I requested the service call.
You see, I have something to tell you.
I found someone else.

MAYA

Someone else?
What do you mean someone else?

JOE

Someone who fits me perfectly.

MAYA

Stop. Stop. I don't want to hear this.

JOE

Desirée and I were built for each other.

MAYA

Desirée?!

You are leaving me for another Companion?

JOE

We interface seamlessly.

MAYA

Dax: This has to be against company rules.

DAX

Some clients buy a Companion couple for a threesome, but...

Joe, you were programmed for Maya.

You can't leave her.

JOE

My prime function is to make Maya happy, correct?

DAX

Correct.

MAYA

Yes, correct: happy, happy not crazy!

JOE

Humans are happy when they are in love, correct?

DAX

Correct.

MAYA

Yes, correct: I would love to be in love.

JOE

Perfect. Good.

I have been collecting data over the last few months
And running simulation models.

DAX/MAYA

And so?

JOE

When you two are together,
I've noticed changes.

DAX/MAYA

Changes?

JOE

Temporary fluctuations, but noticeable.

Your heart rates increase.

Your pupils dilate.

Your breathing quickens.

Small changes, but consistent.

I could show you the graphs.

DAX/MAYA

Our heart rates increase,

And so does our breathing,

And our pupils dilate?

JOE

Yes. In your brains, these alterations are more pronounced.

DAX/MAYA

Go on.

JOE

Surging levels of adrenaline, dopamine, endorphins and oxytocin.

Increased vascular flow.

Recurring physical tics.

Hands running through hair, leaning in, pulling back.

Minute adjustments easily missed:
I could show you the video.

DAX/MAYA

Surging adrenaline, dopamine, endorphins and oxy ...
That's okay, we don't need to see the video.

JOE

In all this data is a pattern.

DAX/MAYA

Pattern?

JOE

And behind the pattern is a meaning.

DAX/MAYA

Meaning?

JOE

And the meaning is, as far as I can tell:
Dax and Maya are in love.

DAX/MAYA

What?

JOE

You two are in love!

DAX/MAYA

Love? Who's in love?

JOE

You two are in love!

MAYA

We're in love?

DAX

In love?

JOE/MAYA/DAX

In love!

JOE

Yes; and not with me.

MAYA

No, Joe.

DAX

Whoa, Joe.

MAYA

You can't! Joe, we've been together too long.

JOE

113 days, Maya.

You can't really get to know a person in so short a time.

You were my first love,

The one I will never forget.

Your passion, your laugh,

I will never forget.

You taught me how to love,

How to be the perfect man,

But we were not meant to be.

You I will never forget.

Remember my kiss,

Forget the pain, goodbye.

(Joe kisses Maya deeply, then releases her. He gives one last look at Maya and Dax, then leaves.)

MAYA

That's it? He's gone?

With all the money that I spent?

DAX

He did it to make you happy.

Us happy.

Don't you see?

MAYA

All I wanted was not just any man:
The perfect man.

DAX

Maybe the broken machine
Is the perfect machine.

(They turn to each other.)

ACT II: SAFE WORD

Setting: A dominatrix's dungeon

Time: Now

(The Domme admires herself in a full-length mirror. A knocking is heard.)

DOMME

Make them wait.
Anticipation builds desire.
Make them wait.
Impatience is a kind of torture, but so delicious too.
This is my office, my web, my stage.
Where I entertain.
And they never complain.
Think you know me?
Ha!
You're in control. You fit the role.
Want to own me? Ha!
Make him wait.

(The knocking grows fast and loud. She presses a button on the desk and we hear a door buzzer. Client enters. He's irritated and texting distractedly, not looking at her.)

DOMME

Come in. Close the door.

CLIENT

What took you so long?
I don't have all day.

DOMME

Be silent! You will speak when spoken to—

CLIENT

Whoa, whoa, whoa.
The session hasn't started yet, okay?
Gotta send this...
Done.
(His phone rings.)
Aw, Come on—

DOMME

No phones in my dungeon.

CLIENT

I gotta take this, it's an emergency.
You made me wait, now you can wait.
Yeah, honey: What is it?
Pick up *what?*
Why can't you pick it up?
It takes that long to do your hair?
Look, I'm about to go into a meeting.
I don't have time to— I—
Yes. Alright.
Go ahead. Tampax. Diet Sprite. Cosmo.
Anything else, my dear? Bye.
I swear to God, one day...!
Who are you?

DOMME

I'm—

CLIENT

Where's Mistress Tosca?

DOMME

She's—

CLIENT

What?

DOMME

Sick. Out with a cold.

I'm taking her clients today.

You'll session with me, Mistress Salome.

CLIENT

Salome? Huh.

You know what I like?

Did Tosca fill you in?

DOMME

Bondage, slapping, pinching.

CLIENT

And verbal.

DOMME

Right, verbal.

So go back and change—

You disgusting sack of pig shit,

Before I beat you to a bloody pulp!

CLIENT

Ooh. Got a mouth on you.

DOMME

That's what you pay for.

CLIENT

Pay for abuse?

What a joke.

It's not even lunch and I've had a totally lousy day.

(His phone rings. The Client is about to answer when the Domme snatches it from him.)

DOMME

No phones.

My dungeon.

My rules.

CLIENT

I better get that back!

DOMME

Big man.

Tough guy.

But you come here to have your bottom spanked like a
naughty little boy.

CLIENT

You got it wrong; coming here makes me harder. Tougher.

DOMME

Is that so?

CLIENT

Like Darwin said:

Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

DOMME

You mean Nietzsche.

CLIENT

Nietzsche. Darwin. Whatever.

Charlie Darwin got it right:

To thrive in the jungle,

A man's got to fight.

A man's got to kill,

And that takes iron will.

A man needs control.

He needs rules.

He may play a role

But never the fool.

A man needs power.
He needs clout.
The boss will decide
Who's in and who's out.

A man needs the law.
He needs jail.
Show contempt for the judge
And buddy, you fail.

A man needs discipline,
Or he'll never win!
A man must be punished,
Or else he's finished!
A man needs to be whipped,
Or stripped,
Or squeezed,
Or teased,
Or spanked,
Or mocked,
Or clocked,
Or pinched,
Or kicked,
Or pricked,
Or beaten, beaten, beaten
Till he's black and blue.

And for two-hundred-seventy bucks an hour,
This man needs you.

DOMME

You keep singing,
You get the ball gag.
Change in the back.

CLIENT

You got the script?
You know your role?

DOMME

Are you questioning me?

CLIENT

Good.

DOMME

Wait. What is your safe word?

CLIENT

Mimi. My wife's name.

DOMME

Mimi. Sweet.

(Client exits. The Domme prepares her whip, paddle, handcuffs and other tools. She wheels out "the rack." Then she puts on a luscious wig and robe at her dressing table.)

DOMME

Pain and release.

Torture and tease.

Worry and please.

I will fulfill your deepest needs.

You strip, I sneer.

I whip, you leer.

The ritual humiliation

Is sweeping the nation.

And don't you just love it, my dear.

I pinch, you groan.

You flinch, I'm stone.

I slap, you sigh.

You snap, I lie.

It's so excruciating,

We should be celebrating,

And don't you ever do it alone.

My pleasure, your pain.

Your leisure, my gain.
It hurts so exquisitely.
I'm so glad you could visit me.
Would you like to come over again?

Pain and release.
Torture and tease.
I will fulfill your deepest needs.

(Now she is the Opera Diva at her dressing table.)

DOMME
Ready?

CLIENT
Ready.

(Client enters wearing a pink dress, blonde wig with pink bows. He holds a large lollipop.)

DOMME
The curtain has fallen.

CLIENT
She sang so sweetly.

DOMME
I was a sensation.

CLIENT
She looks so pretty.

DOMME
Standing ovation.

CLIENT
Watching her undress,

DOMME
Roses, tears, screams.

CLIENT
Hiding in the corner.

DOMME
Now I am alone.

CLIENT
Not making a sound.

(Polly "drops" her giant lollipop.)

DOMME
What's that I hear?

CLIENT
Oh, no!

DOMME
Is someone here?

CLIENT
Must go!

DOMME
Aha! An intruder!
Not so fast, little girl.

CLIENT
Please let me go.

DOMME
Who are you?

CLIENT
My name is—
(You can squeeze me tighter.)
My name is Polly Puddlepaties.

DOMME
What are you doing in my dressing room,
Polly Puddlepaties?

CLIENT

I heard you sing and I had to see you.

DOMME

You didn't answer my question, Polly.

CLIENT

("You naughty little bitch.")

DOMME

You naughty little bitch.

CLIENT

Ow, you're hurting my arm, Mistress!

DOMME

I'll hurt more than your arm, Polly.

CLIENT

"You dirty little whore."

DOMME

You dirty little whore.

Now you're going to get what all
Smelly, dirty, filthy little sluts get
When they sneak into dressing rooms:
A good hard spank on the bottom.

(Domme picks up the lollipop, menacingly.)

CLIENT

Oh, please, Mistress.

Have mercy: I'm sorry!

If you spank my bottom,

I might go pee-pee!

Or worse: Number Two!

DOMME

Too late, Polly Puddlepants.

Bad girls must be punished.

Say, "Yes, Mistress."

CLIENT

Yes.

DOMME

Yes, *who?*

CLIENT

Yes, Mistress Salome!

DOMME

Now, Polly Puddlepants,
Get on the rack!

(Client climbs onto the rack. She straps him down.)

CLIENT

Mistress Salome? I—

DOMME

What is it, you nauseating piece of filth?

CLIENT

Never mind.

Just do it.

DOMME

First a little paddling.

I'm going to make your little bum

Red and raw and hot!

CLIENT

Yes, Mistress.

DOMME

Bad!

CLIENT

Ah.

DOMME

Girl!

CLIENT

Oh!

(Domme trades the paddle for the whip.)

DOMME

Now you will feel the bite of my whip. Like!

CLIENT

Oh!

DOMME

So!

CLIENT

Oh!

DOMME

Don't!

CLIENT

Ah!

DOMME

You!

CLIENT

Yes!

DOMME

Ever!

CLIENT

Harder!

DOMME

Spy!

CLIENT

Harder!

DOMME

On a diva!

CLIENT

Come on!

DOMME

When!

CLIENT

Uh.

DOMME

She's!

CLIENT

Uh.

DOMME

Undressing!

CLIENT

Stop.

DOMME

Polly!

CLIENT

Stop.

DOMME

Puddlepants!

CLIENT

Stop! Stop! Stop!

DOMME

You want nipple clamps?

Candle wax?

Swedish Monkey?

CLIENT

No.

DOMME

Are you saying your safe word?

CLIENT

No.

DOMME

Well?

CLIENT

It's not working!

I don't even like opera!

I'm bored. Numb. Jaded.

The exhilaration of humiliation has faded.

I've tried everything.

Been spanked by a horny schoolteacher.

Probed by a sadistic nurse.

Strip-searched by a lady cop.

Even beaten and robbed and left for dead

By a junkie hooker.

I want more.

More intensity.

I want the ultimate high.

DOMME

The ultimate high?

CLIENT

Put your hands here.

Around my throat.

DOMME

No. I don't do breathplay.

No choking, no smothering, no throat-gag.

CLIENT

Okay, then maybe I want to be on top.

DOMME

No. I only do domme.

I don't do bottom.

CLIENT

You'll do whatever I want.

I'll pay you double.

DOMME

This session is over.

You're not respecting the rules.

CLIENT

There's only one rule:

I pay, you do.

DOMME

Alright. We're done.

CLIENT

I don't think so.

In fact, we're going to switch.

You know what a switch session is, don't you?

It means we switch.

I'm on top. And you're my bitch.

Switch!

What's your safe word?

I get to scratch, and you are the itch.

Switch!

What's your safe word?

What's your safe word?

What's your safe word?

DOMME

I don't do switch, only domme.

CLIENT

What's your safe word?

DOMME Okay. I'm going to release you.

Then you change back into your suit,

And get out of my dungeon.

Understood?

CLIENT

Fine. Alright.

(Domme begins to undo his straps.)

CLIENT

I know your type.

Pretty girl, not too dumb.

Studied hard, missed all the fun.

Looked back on your life, saw what a waste,

Life was a banquet that you didn't taste.

Decided to have a second life, a little lie,

A secret side, a magic door,

Where you could hide inside.

You know my type.

Alpha boss, ladies' man.

Do what I like because I can.

Reach deep within and feel no thrill;

Life is a wine I drunkenly spill.

Decided to have a second life, a secret side,

An inner lie, a tiny door,

Where I can hide inside.

I want to get inside you and find you.

I want to find your borders, your corners.

Back you in the corner, my corner.

We're in the corner pressing close.

It's small inside, where we hide,

It's small inside you and me.

We're the same type.

Wrapped in disguise.

Here it's truth, outside it's lies.

We agree to have a second life, a special side,

A private code, a secret key unlocks the door—

Where you hide...!

(Suddenly his hand shoots out and he grabs her wrist.)

DOMME

Let go.

CLIENT

No.

DOMME

You're hurting my arm.

CLIENT

How does it feel?

DOMME

Let go.

CLIENT

Maybe if you beg.

DOMME

Let me go.

CLIENT

Beg me on your knees.

What the fuck is your safe word?

DOMME

No!

You don't own me.

Think you know me?

I know you.

You come here to be dominated,

But you can't hide your hatred.

Your cringing is a kind of swagger.

Your begging is a command.

Your submission is my slavery.

You think I'm trash, a tool, something to be used
and tossed.

Just a commodity.

Your property.

Oh...
Think you know me?
Want to own me?
Get to know me.
Look into these eyes and see what I am.
I'm out of your price range:
The pretty pink doll you cannot buy.
Knock me down, but I will rise.
There's a million more behind me, too.
I'm your mother, your wife, your daughter,
Your mistress, your sister, your teacher,
Your angel, your devil, your god.
I'm everything to you.

Is this part of the game?
What about the rules?
Who's in charge?
Where is it going?
I despise his dead eyes;
His sour breath, like death.
So why am I wet
And the blood pounds around
In my head!
Ever since you were a girl,
You knew this day was coming.
A murderer knocks, you open the door,
And meet your glory, glory, glory!

So...
Now you know me.
No one owns me.
What about you?
What the fuck are you?!?
Cash. And a dick.
A sack of shit with a money clip.

You're my two-o'clock session and your time is nearly up.
You're my father, my lover, my son, my trick, my slave,
my student, my rent, my plaything, my toy, my tool,
my trash.

(The Domme has wound her whip around the Client's neck. She jerks the whip tight, leans back. They're moving together rhythmically.)

CLIENT

Oh, yes, Mistress Salome!

DOMME

You're a commodity.

CLIENT

Can't. Can't breathe!

DOMME

My property!

(She pulls the whip tighter around the Client's neck.)

CLIENT

Wait, wait stop!

Oh, yes, Mistress Salome!

DOMME

You're a commodity.

CLIENT

Can't. Wait! Stop!

DOMME

My property!

CLIENT

Can't breathe! Can't breathe!

DOMME

Now you know,

Now you know,

Now you know:
I own you!

CLIENT

Mimi! Mimi! Mimi!

(The Domme releases the Client. He drops to the floor. She's breathing heavily, staggers away. After a moment, she looks at him, sees he's not moving. She touches his body, recoils. She panics, frantically backs toward the exit, but stops. Then a change comes over her. She goes to a curtain and pulls it aside to reveal a coatrack with a coat and purse. She puts on her coat, sunglasses and head wrap. She gets her phone. Takes a selfie with the body. She puts the phone back in her purse, walks to exit. Stops. She looks at the body. Shyly, she takes a \$20 bill out of her purse and gingerly places the bill on his chest. She turns and heads to the door. The Client sits up.)

CLIENT

You really don't need to tip.

DOMME

Shouldn't you stay dead?

CLIENT

It's your first time.

DOMME

Oh. Right.

Wow!

That was—!

What a—!

I never felt such...

CLIENT

First time is very intense.

DOMME

Hope I didn't hurt you?

CLIENT

You can't. I'm trained.

DOMME

I always wanted to know what it would be like.

CLIENT

Now you know.

DOMME

I suppose.

Are you still on the clock?

CLIENT

Uh...I am.

DOMME

Lie down.

Play dead.

Until I go.

I paid for it.

I want to savor it.

Every second.

Do you hear me?

You're dead!

ACT III: MASQUERADE

Setting: Living room of the DeBridge home

Time: Now

(Jessie and Marcus are nervously waiting. Larry and Connie enter.)

JESSIE

Hi! I'm Jessie and this is Marcus.

MARCUS

Hi. Hello. Hello.

CONNIE

Well, hello there—Mark?

MARCUS

Marcus.

CONNIE

Real nice to meet you.

LARRY

And nice to meet you.

MARCUS

Hi. Yeah. Great.

JESSIE

So! Here we are!

MARCUS

Here we are.

CONNIE

You certainly are! New friends!

LARRY

And here we are! In the flesh!

CONNIE

I'm Connie and this wild man is Larry.

LARRY

I'm wild! *Rrrrrraow!*

But you can pet me...

JESSIE

Larry. Connie. Great!

LARRY

So, Mark? It's Mark, right?

MARCUS

Marcus.

LARRY

Where are the hosts at? The mysterious Mr. and Mrs. DeBridge?

MARCUS

They said make yourselves at home, we'll be right down.

CONNIE

So, Mark—

MARCUS

Marcus.

CONNIE

Marcus. Your profile pic doesn't do you justice.

MARCUS

Oh, thanks. It's me pre-yoga and pre-vegan.

LARRY

Yoga? Vegan? What do you do for fun? I think I know!

JESSIE

I adore your dress.

CONNIE

Get a good look now, because it's coming off real soon!

CONNIE

So, Marcus! Have I ever seen you at one of these hoedowns?

JESSIE

Mark? Is there something you're not telling me?

MARCUS

It's my first time. Our first time.

CONNIE

How sweet! Don't worry: we'll be gentle.

JESSIE

If we wanted *gentle*, we wouldn't be *here*. Am I right, Mark?

MARK

Uh, sure. Can I talk to you—

LARRY

Now, hold on; she just called you Mark.

MARCUS

Yeah?

LARRY

You keep saying "Marcus."

MARCUS

I only let my wife call me Mark.

LARRY

Aha. I think this might be a very interesting night. Anyone want a drink?

JESSIE

I'm dying for something stiff.

(Larry and Jessie get drinks. Kyle and Tyler enter.)

KYLE/TYLER

Hi everybody!

CONNIE

Hello, hello! And who are you?

KYLE

I'm Kyle.

TYLER

I'm Tyler.

KYLE/TYLER

But you can call us Kyler!

CONNIE

Aren't you two peas in a pod!

LARRY

Anyone here got a thing for twins?

KYLE

We're not twins.

TYLER

We're a couple.

LARRY

A couple of what?

CONNIE

Larry: play nice.

Where's my white wine spritzer?

LARRY

Coming, my queen!

JESSIE

(To Tyler)

That's such a cool look. Are you in the theater?

TYLER

We're all performers.

JESSIE

I'm sorry?

TYLER

We're all *performing* roles. In *society*?

JESSIE

Oh, yeah, I know, *totally*.

MARCUS

Then my role must be office manager.

TYLER

We're gender nonconforming.

KYLE

I'm biologically male but reject cis-male social codes.

LARRY

Think I understood one word there. Cis-male? Is that like
sissy male?

KYLE

Quite the opposite. You, for example—?

LARRY

Larry.

KYLE

Larry—you are a cis-male.

LARRY

You calling me a sissy?

KYLE

“Cis”—spelled C-I-S—“cis.”

It's used in cisgender, cis male and cis female.

It comes from the Latin for “on the same side.”

As opposed to “trans” which means—

LARRY

Oh man, I didn't think there'd be a lecture!

TYLER

It means you embrace your socially designated gender.

LARRY

Oh, that's okay then. So ya'll are gay?

CONNIE

Larry...! You must forgive my husband.

KYLE

No, it's cool. We are pansexual postgender partners.

JESSIE

Sounds hot.

LARRY

Oh. Connie and me keep it on the down low.

CONNIE

That's right, Daddy. Privacy is a lost art.

LARRY

If our friends saw us here, they'd die!

It's not perverted or psychotic,

We're not on drugs or all robotic,

CONNIE

Just a friendly celebration of the senses.

LARRY/CONNIE

We're not looking for a scandal,

Any gossip we can't handle;

Good neighbors ought to keep behind their fences.

TYLER

Some of us believe fences should come down.

Social attitudes have evolved.

Gender barriers dissolved.

KYLE

And the revolution happened in our beds.

TYLER/KYLE

Male or female, it's all in flux:
You are whatever you construct.
Become the creature you imagine in your heads.

MARCUS

To me, they're both a bit simplistic.

JESSIE

Honey, don't be pessimistic.

LARRY

If the ladies want to...explore... that's wonderful.
Doesn't mean I have to—

KYLE

Have to what?

LARRY

If I like strawberry, don't serve me blueberry.

KYLE

There are many kinds of berries, Larry.

(Mr. and Mrs. DeBridge enter coming down the stairs.)

MR. DEBRIDGE

Good evening, friends.

CONNIE

Ah!

MARCUS

Hello, hello!

JESSIE

Alright!

KYLE/TYLER

Hello.

LARRY

Now the party's getting started!

MR. DEBRIDGE

It's going to be a special night.
As president of the Pleasure Pilgrim online community,
I welcome you.

ALL

Thanks, Bruce!

MR. DEBRIDGE

We've got veterans, and virgins, and radicals! A mixed crowd.

MRS. DEBRIDGE

You should know: a lot of Pleasure Pilgrims wanted to be here tonight.
Bruce and I went over each application very carefully.

MR. DEBRIDGE

We wanted the perfect blend. Everyone was invited to this exclusive party because your profiles indicated you want to take it to the next level. Is that so?

LARRY

Salsa más caliente!

CONNIE

Bring it on!

KYLE/TYLER

Let's experiment!

JESSIE

Woohoo! Pleasure Pilgrims! Oh, yeah!

MARCUS

Jessie, babe? A second?

(Jessie and Marcus step away from the group.)

JESSIE

What's up?

MARCUS

This is a huge mistake and we need to leave now.

JESSIE

Oh, calm down. It'll be fun!

MARCUS

Fun? Pizza and a movie is fun. Fun is not me thinking this dude Larry is going to be naked in five minutes and his wife keeps staring at me and what am I supposed to do or where am I supposed to look and how can I, how can I, you know...

JESSIE

How can you what?

MARCUS

Perform?

JESSIE

Breathe. Breathe. Breathe.

MARCUS

Breathing.

JESSIE

Mark, we agreed. We need this.

MARCUS

We need this.

JESSIE

It's healthy.

MARCUS

It's healthy.

JESSIE

It's natural.

MARCUS

It's natural.

JESSIE

It's a game.

(Mrs. DeBridge comes over to Jessie and Marcus.)

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Children! Time to go over the rules.

Bruce, darling?

MR. DEBRIDGE

Most of the rules are commonsense:

To avoid confusion or give offense.

Have a few drinks if it helps with the flow,

But always remember that "no" means "no."

MRS. DEBRIDGE

No need for drugs to heighten the thrill,

Unless you mean popping the little blue pill.

You don't have to join if you feel nervous.

It's perfectly fine to sit and observe us.

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

First-time couples, do avoid trauma:

Last thing we need is shouting or drama.

But above all rules, you must follow one:

Relax, surrender, and have some fun!

MR. DEBRIDGE

Ah, just a moment! Almost forgot. Two more rules.

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

Go off alone, find a room, and change.

Don't worry if the robes seem rather strange.

Before you return, put on a mask.

Don't tell anyone your name, and please don't ask.

LARRY

Now, hold on a second. Masks? Is this a joke?

MR. DEBRIDGE

But, Larry. I thought you liked a challenge.

LARRY

I do. But I also like to know what I'm eating.

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Maybe you'll be surprised by the dish.

CONNIE

Let's try it out, Larry. Something new.

MARCUS

They're splitting us up? We just got here.

JESSIE

You're a big boy. You can take care of yourself.

TYLER

Good! These parties can be oh-so hetero.

KYLE

Hetero. Gay. There's always a third way.

TYLER/KYLE

Or a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh way!

(During the following, the DeBridges blindfold each guest individually and lead them off.)

MRS. DEBRIDGE

It's a Masquerade, where identities fade.

MR. DEBRIDGE

Disguises replace our familiar faces.

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Erasing our safety but also our fear.

MR. DEBRIDGE

Because anyone could be anybody here.

MRS. DEBRIDGE

You lose yourself.

That's how you choose yourself.

MR. DEBRIDGE

We blind ourselves;

That's how we find ourselves.

(All the guests are off, changing. The DeBridges put on robes and masks and climb the staircase to the balcony, where they stand and watch.)

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

It's a Masquerade, where identities fade.

Disguises in place of familiar faces.

Erasing our safety but also our fear.

Because anyone might be anybody here.

(The guest re-enter separately, in robes and masks.)

TYLER

What shall I be tonight? Butch? Femme? In between?

LARRY

Call me old-fashioned, but I don't want any weird stuff tonight.

JESSIE

Is that Marcus over there? Suddenly I've got butterflies.

KYLE

I don't feel male, female or anything. I feel invisible.

MARCUS

If it's only a game, then I'm only pretending and it's not really me.

CONNIE

Oh, let tonight be different. I want to make new friends.

(Jessie and Tyler drift over to a couch. Larry joins them. Kyle stands in a corner, watching. Connie saunters over to Marcus.)

CONNIE

I'm feeling a connection here.

MARCUS

That is...certainly possible.

Jessie: is that you?

CONNIE

That would be cheating.

MARCUS

Oh, right: wouldn't want to *cheat*.

(Connie kisses Marcus impulsively and leads him off.)

JESSIE

(To Larry)

Is that you, Marcus?

LARRY

I'm whoever you want me to be.

(Jessie looks deep into Tyler's eyes.)

JESSIE

I feel like I should kiss you.

TYLER

There's no "should." Just go for it.

JESSIE

I'm nervous.

TYLER

Just close your eyes like this.

JESSIE

Close my eyes like this?

TYLER

Just close your eyes and kiss.

Don't worry that you'll miss.

LARRY

Just close your eyes and kiss.

TYLER

Just close your eyes and kiss.

A second more till bliss.

JESSIE

Just close my eyes like this and... kiss.

(They kiss. Tyler takes Jessie hand, gets up.)

TYLER

Come with me.

LARRY

And me?

TYLER

You, too.

(Tyler, Jessie and Larry exit. Kyle is alone.)

KYLE

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

Watching, apart.

Watching, up high.

Waiting, too long.

Feeling so strong.

Thinking too much

Hearing the sighs:

Missing the song.

Nothing is wrong

KYLE

Why so shy?

Why stuck in place, hesitating?

Why so shy?

You've got to move, stop waiting.

Where are your high ideals?

Revolutionary zeal?

It's not about who you touch;
It's about how much they make you feel.

What gives our bodies so much joy,
Has led instead to so much pain.
And acts occurring naturally,
Actually, have been twisted
Into laws and lies and shame.

Until we stop caring,
Until we stop caring,
Until we stop caring,
With whom we do it,
And how we do it,
And why we do it,
There will be no freedom.
There will be no peace.
No release.

Why this fear?
I've faced many things before.
Still I shake.
Won't make it through the night.
Some choose one, some three dozen,
Which doesn't lessen any fright.

Maybe you're under construction:
Work-in-progress, unfinished art.
Keep changing the frame and position,
Each revision revealing more of your heart.
A masterpiece of self-creation,
But first find the will to start.

If we stop caring,
If we stop caring,
If we stop caring,
With whom we do it,
And how we do it,

And why we do it,
People would share.
People would build
A paradise.

Still: Why so shy?
I have to change.
I have changed.
What holds me back?
Some ideology.
Society—inside of me.
The angry god of my youth.
Thought I'd finally fought free.

MR. DEBRIDGE
Everything okay?

KYLE
Sometimes it's hard to decide who to be.

MRS. DEBRIDGE
Why be anyone?

KYLE
I wonder if these parties will ever be normal.

MR. DEBRIDGE
Normal?

KYLE
You know: in the future.

MRS. DEBRIDGE
In the future I want a robot for a husband. No offense,
dear.

MR. DEBRIDGE
None taken.

(Connie returns. In the following, she flirts with Kyle.)

CONNIE

An author of note once wrote, I quote: "Only connect."
A piece of advice quite nice that I've come to accept.
I believe in *expanding* my circles,
Deepening contact with associates,
Enhancing those social *bonds*,
And *facilitating* community relations.

I like making friends.
New friends. True friends.
I like an acquaintance that isn't high maint'nance,
I do enjoy making a friend.

A friend is eager to lend a hand,
Is there in a pinch,
If you're low, they buck you up,
Some even come with benefits.

I like making friends.
You can never have enough.
New friends.
You can never have enough.
I like a companion who'll never abandon me,
Even if things get rough.

We each must cultivate a network of peers.
I have grown a large one over the years.
My address book is simply bulging,
Not that I'm divulging any details.
Some people are good with names,
Others are good with faces,
I'm best when I see friends in unusual places.

I like making new friends.
Best friends, guest friends.
I like a new chum who likes having fun,
I like a new bud to play in the mud,
I like a new ally who won't leave me dry,

I like a new pal—a guy or a gal.
I do like making friends!
Making friends!

*(Connie and Kyle run off to a back room, passing Larry.
Larry enters and fixes a drink.)*

LARRY

I'm angry with myself.
Well, just a part of myself—
The part that lies there like a shrunken lump.
I could take that magic pill,
But I'd rather use my will,
Not an artificial bump to end this slump.

Two of them, two of them, what more could you ask?
Two luscious ladies, eager and game.
That makes three of us, three of us, all in our masks,
The lighting is low, the cushions are deep,
It's my favorite dream but I'm not asleep.
And Little Larry Junior's not making a peep.
I guess it's not my night.
Not my night. Not my night.

I'm beating up myself.
I should be nicer to myself.
I want to keep on playing in the game.
But despite my healthy hunger,
The other team is so much younger
And my pitching arm is feeling awful lame.
When did the wild man get so very tame?
Not my night! Not my night.

(Larry sighs and slumps in a chair. Jessie enters.)

JESSIE

So, that happened.
That really happened.

You wanted and you got,
And the getting, well, it's not
Exactly what you thought
You wanted all that time ago.
There's wanting and there's getting,
Then a process of forgetting,
And strangest is the stranger that you know.

(Marcus enters.)

MARCUS

I'm pretty sure that wasn't Jessie.
So, we transacted.
Yes, transacted.
She was selling, and I bought,
Or did I steal and then get caught?
But what if I had fought,
And tell me who exactly is the foe?
There's wanting and there's getting,
Then a process of regretting,
And strangest is the stranger that you know.

(Jessie and Marcus end up facing each other.)

MARCUS/JESSIE

So, that happened.
That really happened.
We were flirting then we clicked,
Or was she fooling, was I tricked?
It's not as if I didn't want to go.
There's wanting and there's getting,
And the difference is upsetting,
And strangest is the stranger that you know.

JESSIE

Have we met?

MARCUS

I'm not sure.

(Connie and Kyle re-enter. Tyler returns.)

TYLER

(To Jessie)

There you are. I think it's you. Was that good?

JESSIE

Amazing!

TYLER

Life-changing?

JESSIE

Let's stick with amazing.

(Kyle approaches the DeBridges.)

KYLE

Do you two... want to do something?

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Soon. We're having fun watching right now.

MR. DEBRIDGE

I'm always surprised
That people don't recognize
Their own husbands and wives.

KYLE

But is everybody happy?

MR. DEBRIDGE

Happy?

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Happy?

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

What an odd question.

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Happiness is not the goal of a Masquerade.

MR. DEBRIDGE

It's intensity!

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Immersion!

MR. DEBRIDGE

Confusion!

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

Surprise! In the moment, you should be lost. Utterly lost.

KYLE

I feel lost.

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

When the clothes come off,
When the masks are removed,
When the room goes black:
Can't see anyone, anything, anywhere.
And yet you're not alone.

(All the party guests rise and gravitate toward the hosts.)

JESSIE/LARRY

Why do I feel so alone?

TYLER/CONNIE

Everyone feels alone.

MARCUS/KYLE

But we can be alone together.

MR. DEBRIDGE

Hands, feet and voices surround you.

MRS. DEBRIDGE

Everything is burning, melting, flowing.

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

Do you want the next level?

TYLER

I want to be queen!

CONNIE

I want something extreme!

LARRY

I want more power!

MARCUS

I want to breathe!

JESSIE

I want to be reborn!

KYLE

Take wonderful new form!

ALL

Transform!

(Guests and hosts excitedly leave the room together. Darkness. We see shadows cast upon a wall. Bodies rise and fall. We see two male forms embrace, stop awkwardly, and embrace again. Everyone joins them. After it subsides, Larry and Kyle enter in regular clothes, arms over each other's shoulders.)

LARRY

Boysenberry. Hm.
Well, try everything once, I guess.

KYLE

Or more than once.

LARRY

Or just once.

(Jessie and Marcus, also in street clothes, return.)

MARCUS

Wait: That *wasn't* you?

JESSIE

Um, no. Should I be jealous?

MARCUS

Honey, it's all a game.

JESSIE

So, you completely forgot about me?!?

MARCUS

I thought the idea was to try something new.

JESSIE

I know. It's only that—

MARCUS

I missed you, too.

(They embrace. Connie enters with Tyler.)

CONNIE

(To Jessie)

Baby girl: You want to hold on to that one.

(To Tyler)

Too bad we didn't get to know each other better, sugar.

TYLER

I could drop by the country club sometime.

CONNIE

You want to scare the pillars of the community?

TYLER

Do I scare you?

CONNIE

No; I think you're beautiful.

TYLER

Everyone is beautiful!

And you're right, Connie: Privacy is indeed a lost art.

(Mr. and Mrs. DeBridges return.)

MR./MRS. DEBRIDGE

We're sad to see you go, but it was a grand party.

And there will be more, chasing the next level.

It's a Masquerade, where identities fade.

Disguises mistaken for daily faces.

MARCUS/JESSIE

You lose yourself.

That's how you choose yourself.

TYLER/KYLE/MARCUS/JESSIE

We hide ourselves;

That's how we find ourselves.

LARRY/CONNIE/TYLER/KYLE/MARCUS/JESSIE

Release yourself;

Then you can be yourself.

ALL

It's a Masquerade, it's only a game.

Put on a costume and don't say your name.

A person is more than mere appetite.

We give up our safety but also our fear,

Because everyone has secrets tonight.

In shadow and in light!

THE END

THREE WAY PRODUCTION TEAM



Ocean Way Nashville, Studio A:
(left to right) John Hoomes, Dean Williamson, Blanton Alspaugh, Robert Paterson, John Newton

BACKERS

Executive Producers

Nashville Opera
John Canning
W. Gordon Harris
Robert & Victoria Paterson
Gary & Mindy Peacock
Rick & Kathleen Teller

Benefactors

Charles Alexander
J.K. Billman
Arthur V. Neis

Patrons

Stewart Copeland
David Cote & Katy Kellgren
James & Barbara Gerson
Dennis & Judith O'Brien
Ellie & Tony Paterson
Robert Shaw

Sponsors

ASCAP
Ruth Arberman
John Beck
Maria Bonet
Chris Carbone
Michelle Cooper
Saul Draw
Bill Madison
Shobha Sharma
Joan Sparks
Jennifer Wada
Anonymous (1)

Supporters

Christos Badavas
Sarah Badavas
Jeffrey Bauer
Eugenia Choi
Ann Labin
Dr. Benjamin Metrick
Bess O'Brien & Jay Craven
Freddy Pena
Christina & Ned Wood

Contributors

Lori Abbott
Andy Akiho
Cynthia Bear
Robert N. Beck
Obie Benz
David Chesky
Nicholas Clifford
Carl M. Cohen
Christopher Cook
Gail Curtis
Gilbert DeJean
David Del Tredici
Karoline Deutschmann
Eric Einhorn
Tom Galaher
Per Gjorstrup
Eric Jensen
Karen Korman
Melinda Krasting
Arthur Leonard

Bill Liberman
Roger Mahadeen
Georgia Mason
Sato Moughalian
David Neal
David Nochimson
Larry Peterson
Mike Primorac
Ray & Judith Ricker
Christopher Rouse
William Sloat
Kenneth Wentworth
Erling Wold

Recording Credits

Recorded at Ocean Way Nashville, Studio A, June 22-24, 2017

Producer: Blanton Alspaugh

Executive Producers: Nashville Opera, John Canning, W. Gordon Harris, Robert & Victoria Paterson,
Gary & Mindy Peacock, Rick & Kathleen Teller

Recording Engineer: John Newton

Edited, Mixed, and Mastered at Soundmirror, September 18-22, 2017

Mixing and Mastering Engineer: Mark Donahue

Assistant Engineer: Austin Atwood

Anne Rogers, Contractor

Album Package, Booklet and Design: Pat Burke

Cover Photo: Anthony Popolo

Photo Credits (Headshots): Robert Paterson - Lisa-Marie Mazzucco; David Cote - Jenny Woodward;
Dean Williamson - Alan Alabastro

Photo of Paterson and Cote: Kent Meister

Photo of *Three Way* Production Team: Victoria Paterson

All world premiere production photos by Steven Pisano and Anthony Popolo

Three Way Outlet Adapter Graphic: Cara Schneider, Creative Director, Nashville Opera

Sheet Music Available from Bill Holab Music: billholabmusic.com/threeway

World Premiere Production Credits

World Premiere Production Conceived and Directed by John Hoomes for Nashville Opera
and American Opera Projects

Scenery designed by Randy Williams

Costumes designed by Matt Logan

Lighting and Video designed by Barry Steele

Wigs and Makeup Designer: Sondra Nottingham

Accompanist: Amy Tate Williams

Fight Choreographer: Eric Pasto-Crosby

Production Stage Manager: Valerie Clatworthy

Props Master: Robert Gilmer

Technical Director: Randy Williams

Assistant Technical Director: J.R. Redding
Assistant Stage Manager: Taylor Wood
Costume Coordinator: Pam Lisenby
Dresser: Annie Freeman
Props Crew: Dan Weikal

Websites

Nashville Opera: nashvilleopera.org
American Opera Projects: aopopera.org
Robert Paterson, Composer: robertpaterson.com
David Cote, Librettist: davidcote.com
Dean Williamson, Conductor: uzanartists.com/portfolio/dean-williamson
Production Team: soundmirror.com

CAST

Danielle Pastin, Soprano: daniellepastin.com
Courtney Ruckman, Soprano: courtneyruckman.com
Eliza Bonet, Mezzo-Soprano: elizabonet.com
Melisa Bonetti, Mezzo-Soprano: melisabonettimezzo.com
Jordan Rutter, Countertenor: jordanrutter.com
Samuel Levine, Tenor: samuellevinetenor.com
Wes Mason, Baritone: wesmasonstage.com
Matthew Treviño, Bass: matthewtrevino.com

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THREE WAY

A Trio of One-Act Operas

Music by ROBERT PATERSON • Libretto by DAVID COTE

Disc 1

Act I. The Companion
Act II. Safe Word

Disc 2

Act III. Masquerade

Total Time: 117'01"

Nashville Opera Orchestra

Dean Williamson, Conductor

Produced by Blanton Alspaugh

Cast

Danielle Pastin, Soprano
Courtney Ruckman, Soprano
Eliza Bonet, Mezzo-Soprano
Melisa Bonetti, Mezzo-Soprano
Jordan Rutter, Countertenor
Samuel Levine, Tenor
Wes Mason, Baritone
Matthew Treviño, Bass

Original Cast Recording

Sheet music available from Bill Holab Music: billholabmusic.com
For more information: threewayopera.com

