

Celebrating Australian Playwriting



Australian Script Centre



The Butcher's Dance

by Chris Edmund

EXTRACT

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THE BUTCHER'S DANCE

PRELUDE: BITTER DESTINY BUENOS AIRES 1885

PART ONE: THE RECKONING MANHATTAN 1929

PART TWO: A SAD ACT BUENOS AIRES 1978

PART THREE: FAILED RECIPES MANHATTAN 2001

CODA: LIFE LOOKS GOOD AUSTRALIA 2005

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CAST

THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION HAD A CAST OF TEN WOMEN AND SIX MEN. THE PLAY CAN HOWEVER BE PERFORMED WITH DIFFERENT CONFIGURATIONS. AS FIRST PERFORMED THE CAST WAS AS FOLLOWS:

ACTOR ONE: BUTCHER, ERIC, SOLDIER, LARRY KATZ.

ACTOR TWO: SPANISH SPEAKING WOMAN, AGGIE, LILIANA.

ACTOR THREE: MALE FIGHTER, SOLDIER, PREACHER, CARLOS GARDEL

ACTOR FOUR: MALE FIGHTER, JIMMY, MR CASTRO.

ACTOR FIVE: DOROTHY PARKER, OLD WOMAN.

ACTOR SIX: ROBERT BENCHLEY, SOLDIER, JERRY.

ACTOR SEVEN: POLLY ADLER, ANNA.

ACTOR EIGHT: ASTOR PLAZOLLA, JORGE.

ACTOR NINE: BIANCA, REBECCA.

ACTOR TEN: MAVIS, BEATRICE, HEATHER.

ACTOR ELEVEN: BECKY, GRACE.

ACTOR TWELVE: DAVID, EDUARDO.

ACTOR THIRTEEN: JUNE, HELEN.

ACTOR FOURTEEN: APRIL, SUSAN.

ACTOR FIFTEEN: JESSIE, IRENE, SIAN.

ACTOR SIXTEEN: MILDRED, LOURDES.

SET: IN THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION, A PERSPEX SCREEN WAS USED ON TO WHICH TEXT, IMAGES AND FILM WERE PROJECTED

SCREEN: BITTER DESTINY. BUENOS AIRES 1885.

LIGHTS UP ON A BUTCHER. HE HACKS MEAT ON A ROUGH WOODEN TABLE. PUSHES THE CUT MEAT OFF THE TABLE INTO A BUCKET. HE FINISHES. RINSES HIS HANDS, WIPES HIS HANDS ON A WHITE TOWEL. AS HE WIPES, LIGHTS UP ON A GROUP OF MEN WAITING OUTSIDE A BROTHEL. SOME SIT, READING THE PAPER AND DRINKING, TWO ARE PLAYING A GAME OF CARDS. THE MEN HAVE ROLLED UP SLEEVES AND OPEN SHIRTS AND HAVE COME TO THE BROTHEL AFTER A HARD DAY'S WORK OF PHYSICAL LABOUR. TRAILS OF CIGARETTE SMOKE WAFT UP AND ARE CAUGHT IN THE LIGHT. THE SOUND OF THE CARDS BEING PLACED AND SLID ON THE TABLE BECOMES THE UNDERLYING RHYTHM OF THE SCENE. WE SEE THE SILHOUETTES OF WOMEN ENTERING IN A LINE, TRAILING THEIR HANDS AGAINST THE GLASS. THEY MOVE, GRADUALLY SWAYING IN TIME TO THE INCREASING BEAT. WHILE THE WOMEN ARE DANCING, GETTING MORE AND MORE ACCUSTOMED TO THE POWER OF THEIR SEXUALITY, THE INTENSITY BETWEEN THE TWO MEN PLAYING CARDS INCREASES, WITH ONE MAN SLAMMING DOWN HIS CARDS ABRUPTLY AND STANDING UP. AT THIS POINT THE WOMEN STEP BACK OUT OF THE SIDE LIGHTS, INCREASING THE ATTENTION ON THE MEN, WHO BY NOW ARE BOTH STANDING CENTRE STAGE.

AT FIRST THEY MIRROR EACH OTHER, CONSTANTLY MAINTAINING EYE CONTACT, UNTIL A MALE TERRITORIAL TANGO BEGINS. THE WOMEN COME FORWARD AND PLACE THEIR HANDS ON THE GLASS, BREATHING HEAVILY, SHOULDERS HEAVING. THE MALE TANGO IS THEN INTENSIFIED AS A FEROCIOUS KNIFE FIGHT EVOLVES. ONE MAN IS STABBED. THE WOMEN FREEZE.

A PROSTITUTE SEES WHAT HAS HAPPENED, CRIES OUT, AND RUSHES OVER TO HELP THE STABBED MAN. THE SILHOUETTED WOMEN DISAPPEAR, EXCEPT ONE WHO JOINS ONE OF THE MEN IN A SENSUAL TANGO. THE OTHER MEN RAPIDLY WALK OFF.

A WOMAN WALKS ON. SHE IS SIMPLY ATTIRED IN A 1970'S DRESS. SHE WEARS THE WHITE HEADSCARF WE ASSOCIATE WITH THE MADRES DEL PLAZA DE MAYO. SHE SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE. THE SPEECH IS REPEATED BY THE SAME WOMAN, IN ENGLISH, AT THE END OF THE PLAY.

WOMAN En mi Tierra, Argentina, es como si recién estuviér estuviéramos despet`andonos de un largo sue`no. uno de esos sue`nos que borran todos los recuerdos. Y recién ahora estamos empezando a recordar, a movernos de Nuevo, a encontrar el ritmo de nuestras vidas. Recién ahora nos atrevemos a tocar y a redescubrimos. BANDONEON MUSIC BEGINS.

A veces, de noche, al caminar bajo la lluvia, oimos nuetros nombres, como si un dios lejano nos estuviese llamando. Dejemos que los dioses nos hablen nuevamente, para asi volver a encontrar lo perdido.

A traves de la danza mi tierra.

La danza de Argentina. El Tango.

LIGHTS FADE ON HER, THE DANCING COUPLE, AND THE PROSTITUTE WHO CRADLES THE DEAD MAN IN HER ARMS.

IMAGES OF NEW YORK IN THE TWENTIES APPEAR ON THE SCREEN AS MUSIC FROM THE PERIOD PLAYS. SKYSCRAPERS ROCKET UPWARD, WITH WORKERS POISED AT ALARMING ANGLES AS THEY BUILD THE CITY. OTHER NEW YORKERS PARTY IN THE DYING YEARS OF THE JAZZ AGE.

SCREEN: THE RECKONING

MANHATTAN 1929

A TIME WHEN DUES ARE PAID

LIGHTS UP ON DOROTHY PARKER AND ROBERT BENCHLEY AS THEY WALK ALONG A MANHATTAN STREET AT NIGHT. THEY PAUSE UNDER A STREET LAMP.

BOB You gotta pay the bills Dotty.

DOTTY : Fuck 'em

PAUSE

Oh Bob, I can't write, my toes are very very cold , because the damn heating in that flop house masquerading as a Manhattan Hotel which I rashly call home, is terminally screwed . And talking of screwing, this morning I had what is laughingly called intercourse with someone who is without doubt , the world's lousiest fuck!

BOB How IS Elmer?

DOTTY Unimaginable.

BOB Don't sleep with writers, all lousy in bed.

DOTTY But hey I'm out with my best friend Bob. I need a drink, Mr. Benchley. Bob I need a drink. Bobby? Drink Bobby? Kill the pain for me? Bob? What do you say?

BOB How ya doin' Mrs. Parker?

DOTTY Not too good.

SHE PULLS BACK HER COAT SLEEVES AND SHOWS THE PINK RIBBONS ON HER WRISTS, WHICH COVER RECENT SCARS FROM A SUICIDE ATTEMPT. SHE PULLS THE SLEEVES DOWN AGAIN.

DOTTY But I put pink ribbons on to celebrate.

BOB A change of colour at least.

DOTTY Blue didn't go with my eyes.

BOB You can't go on like this.

DOTTY Yeah, yeah.

PAUSE

BOB PUTS HIS ARM THROUGH HERS, MAKES A DECISION.

BOB Let's go to Polly's.

DOTTY And nothing else will go wrong tonight!

THEY MOVE OFF. SHE TREADS IN SOME DOG SHIT

DOTTY: Oh yeah, just fucking GREAT!!

SUDDEN LIGHTS UP ON POLLY ADLERS BROTHEL. MUSIC IS PLAYING LOUDLY FROM A GRAMOPHONE. THERE IS ALSO A PIANO AND A LARGE TROLLY WITH A VARIETY OF DRINKS ON IT. DAVID AND ERIC SIT SURROUNDED BY POLLY'S GIRLS. ALTHOUGH EVERYONE IS HAVING

FUN, IT'S A SLOW NIGHT FOR THE HOOKERS. THERE IS CONSTANT MOVEMENT AND THE HUM OF CONVERSATION AND LAUGHTER THROUGHOUT THE SCENE.

POLLY WALKS OVER TO DAVID WITH A BOTTLE OF IMPORTED GIN.

POLLY David, my friend, how about a little Beefeaters then (indicates Aggie) a little BEEFeater, if you know what I mean?

DAVID That's low!

POLLY She'll go as low as you want.

AGGIE I don't eat beef I'm a vegetarian.

POLLY You'll do as you're damn told!

LAUGHTER

BIANCA WALKS IN WITH CARLOS GARDEL AND A RELUCTANT AND YOUNG, ASTOR PIAZZOLLA.

POLLY GREETES GARDEL

POLLY Mr. Gardel, how nice to see you again!

GARDEL May I present Astor Piazzolla!

POLLY Hi, how are ya Astor?

ASTOR Well, Madame.

POLLY I heard all about you from Mr Gardel.

ASTOR What did he say?

POLLY He said, um, you tinkle the ivories good.

ASTOR *SMILES* Yes, I tinkle the ivories good.