

ICED VOVOS

A One Act Play

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PREAMBLE

This script was developed through a collaborative process. A work of stream-of-consciousness prose reflecting on Iced VoVos, an iconic Australian confectionary, penned by Janet McDonald constitutes the heart of the script. This piece was adapted to script form by Dallas Baker, who created characters through which Janet's prose could come to life. The explorative questions that emerged when Dallas and Janet began discussing the adaptation of the text focussed on memory and embodied experience. The context from which the original prose developed was Janet's memory of tearing into a packet of Iced VoVos after years of sugar-censorship, only to be disappointed. A process of economic rationalisation and sparse use of ingredients had made the biscuit unrecognisable.

As a theatre scholar, Janet subscribes to the performance theories of Marvin Carlson on theatre being a 'memory machine' (2011). The emphasis on the 'recycling' of 'existing...already known' narratives provides what Carlson calls a 'ghosting' which is a function of memory (6). Carlson is describing how reception by audience operates in the theatre; ghosting presents something identical that has been previously experienced, and the recognition of the idea's manifestation in a different context is key to how our 'identity becomes part of the reception process' (7). Because the research component of Iced VoVos is performative, that is, occurring within the collaborative interactions of the writer researchers (Janet and Dallas), the 'ghosting' through recycling of our own lived experience was present and informed the process of translation from prose to script.

As the collaboratively-led inducement of material developed, the period of 'handing over' the prose for adaptation engaged further ghosting that resisted what Diana Taylor calls 'the archive' (2003). This is a place relegated in theatre to where performative ideas take concrete form, often as a written script that can be 'published', and therefore maintains an emphasis on discourse to manifest creative enterprise, rather than the lived experience of the work. We therefore unintentionally stumbled into a key on-going debate in the field of performance theory: can the live act of performance be captured in written language (reviews, scholarship, etc.), or can it only be experienced by attending to or 'being there' as it happens on stage? (Tait 2000; Goodall 2008; Power 2008). The antidote to the 'archive', according to Taylor is the 'repertoire' (20) which articulates the 'embodied memory' at work in the process of not only 'attending to' theatre (audience reception), but of the act of making the art. We (Dallas

and Janet) were the first audience of the emerging work, which required our 'presence' and participation to create new knowledge; the key component of this collaboration.

The script demonstrates, in creative form, the ways that collaboration leads to a work that is greater than the sum of its parts. What emerged from the collaboration was a script that took the prose in a different, unexpected yet intriguing, direction. This research was therefore more about exploring the relational aspects of working together. In this sense the knowledge produced by this research collaboration manifests Taylor's 'repertoire' of performance and relates to the richness of both collaborative experience and the creative outcomes arising from that experience.

Works cited

Carlson, Marvin (2011) *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as a Memory Machine*, University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor.

Taylor, Diana (2003) *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*, Duke University Press: Durham and London.

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Author Bios: Janet McDonald received her PhD from Arizona State University (Theatre for Young People) in 1999. She served as the Head of the School of Creative Arts at USQ (2008-2013) and is currently an Associate Professor lecturing in Drama and Theatre Studies in the School of Arts and Communication at the University of Southern Queensland (Toowoomba). Her work in enabling young people in the arts was recognised when she was elected Chair of Youth Arts Queensland, the state's peak body for youth arts from 2008-2012. She is co-recipient of the USQ Excellence in Teaching Award (2008) and an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning (2009). Her research areas are in wellbeing and liminal arts practices in regional areas, which features prominently in her recently published book *Creative Communities: Regional Inclusion in the Arts* (Intellect, 2015), co-edited with Dr Robert Mason, Griffith University.

Dr. Dallas Baker is a Senior Lecturer in writing, editing and publishing at the School of Arts and Communication at the University of Southern Queensland. He has published dozens of scholarly articles and creative works, including, under the pen name D.J. McPhee, three fantasy fiction novels, *Waycaller* (2016), *Keysong* (2017) and *Oracle* (2017). Dallas has also published a number of short scripts in various respected journals. He is special issues editor of *TEXT: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*, the peak journal for the Creative Writing discipline in Australia. He is convenor of the Scriptwriting as Research Symposium and co-editor of *Recovering History through Fact and Fiction: Forgotten Lives* (forthcoming, Cambridge Scholars Press). Dallas' study and research intersect with a number of disciplines: creative writing, scriptwriting, publishing and cultural studies. His current research interests are writing for performance, publishing and 'self-making' in cultural practices such as creative writing, reading and theatre.

SETTING

1963. A Victorian suburb. A ladies lounge in a neighbourhood bowls club. A laminate table with three chairs is haphazardly arranged under a bright light. On the table sits three empty glasses, each with a bright pink straw.

THE CHARACTERS

BERNICE: A middle-aged woman, about sixty years old. She is thin, once pretty but wears her lips tightly pursed. Her hair is salt and pepper, and held in place with a lot of hairspray.

FLORENCE: A middle-aged woman, about sixty years old. She is heavy-set and immaculately dressed, right down to her white gloves. Her hair is silver grey and long, worn in a tight bun.

DOT: A middle-aged woman, about sixty years old. She is thin and has a slightly dishevelled look, as though she has not taken much care in her appearance for a long while. Her hair is wavy and mid-length, and died a lurid blue.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Bernice, Florence and Dot take their seats at the table, carrying fresh drinks. Florence, sitting in the middle, has a wine spritzer. Bernice, to Florence's right, has an orange juice. Dot, on the other side of Florence, has a beer with lemonade, otherwise known as a shandy.

DOT

I love a shandy on a Tuesday afternoon.

FLO

So you already said, Dot, twice.

BERNICE

(curtly)

Yes, and it's not just on Tuesday you love a shandy.
You'll have one any old day.

DOT

True, true. Life's too short not to have a shandy
whenever you want one.

Florence does not react. Bernice rolls her eyes and looks away as Dot takes an enthusiastic suck on her straw.

BERNICE

It's obscene the way you slurp on that straw, can't
you act decently for a change?

DOT

It's not indecent to like a shandy. It's indecent to
look down your nose at people whose only crime is
to have a sip of their drink, that they paid good
money for.

FLO

Please, don't the two of you argue. It sets my nerves
on edge.

BERNICE

You're too high-strung Bernice, I've always said so.
I'm always telling everyone: That Flo, she's—

FLO

Florence

BERNICE

What?

FLO

My name is Florence.

BERNICE

Right, Florence. As I was saying, I'm always telling people: That Florence is too high strung. And everyone agrees with me.

DOT

Hunger.

BERNICE

Beg pardon?

DOT

It's 'cause she doesn't eat enough. Always on a diet. I don't bother with diets, they're bad for the disposition, make you cranky.

Bernice rolls her eyes again. Dot rummages around in her handbag. She pulls out a small stack of Iced VoVos wrapped in cling wrap.

DOT

Here you go, Florence, love, have an Iced VoVo.

Dot passes Florence the biscuits. Florence takes the little bundle and turns it in her hand as if she's never seen anything like it. She looks off into the distance, no longer paying attention to what her friends are saying.

BERNICE

As if that'll help, she needs more than an Iced VoVo to set her right.

FLO

(to herself, gazing at the
biscuits)

I haven't wrapped my lips around this little Arnott's delicacy since before I got married.

DOT

Oh, mind your beeswax, Bernie, there my bickies and it's up to Florence if she has one. It's got nothing to do with you, unless your last name is Arnotts?

Bernice's nostrils flare but she doesn't reply, she picks up her orange juice and looks the other way.

FLO

(still to herself)

It's a curious wee triple-threat of a biscuit, rather unassuming despite its fancy filigree back. Topped by three bold stripes of condiment making a simple rectangular pattern. If my memory serves me, the two stripes either side are not just delightfully pink but of a fondant-like texture. Between the two pink stripes, a contrasting jam strip of a garnet-red – approximating a raspberry flavour. That garnet red jam seems to speak to me. It says: I dare you to lick me in-between the pink bits—

DOT

Indecent. (talking to herself). Whose she to call me indecent? If you ask me, not that anyone bothers to ask my opinion on anything, it's always those shouting indecent this, indecent that, who are the suspicious ones.

She looks at Bernice and then down at the surface of the table.

DOT (CONT'D)

Ooh, beer nuts. They'll go just lovely with my shandy, they will.

Dot gathers up a handful of nuts and starts nibbling. Bernice watches her with clear distaste.

FLO

(unwrapping the bundle of biscuits) They are doused in desiccated coconut, these confectioned trinity treats. The coconut leverages itself between your teeth, deposits itself on the roof of your mouth and wrangles its way up your nose if you happen to laugh while eating them. Look at it (she turns one in her hand) – It's like a tiny VFL jersey: vertical stripes like Collingwood if held width-wise and horizontal stripes like Geelong if held lengthwise. If it weren't for the soft and feminine pink colour, I'm sure it would've been adopted as the confectionary mascot of any number of VFL clubs. I bet that pink colour has thwarted many an ad man thinking to use the Iced VoVo to their marketing advantages. To an ad man that pink must seem to softly jeer at them.

BERNICE

Perverts.

Florence and Dot turn sharply and stare at Bernice.

DOT

Who are you calling a pervert now?

BERNICE

No-one, well, not directly. I was just thinking, thinking about all the perverts and how it's their fault that no-one shows any common decency anymore. The perverts have made bad manners normal, that's what. And now people eat beer nuts in a public establishment, with her bare hands no less.

DOT

Well, I'm not going to eat them with a knife and fork, now am I? And it seems to me you *are* calling somebody a pervert, and that somebody is me. Well, Bernice, you listen here, I may eat some beer nuts in a ladies lounge once in a while, but at least I'm not a know-it-all, uptight god-botherer.

Dot turns her back on Bernice, then takes a conspicuous suck on her straw. Bernice turns her back on Dot, swirling the ice in her orange juice in an agitated fashion. Flo shrugs, disinterested, and then returns to pondering the package of biscuits.

FLO

I haven't even been in the biscuit aisle of a supermarket for years, long ago spurning it as one would spurn a relative with a cold sore. In the years after having children, and middle-age flab became my constant companion, I had to make sugar my enemy. But that aisle still called to me. Sometimes I would nervously go down that aisle, on the pretence of scanning the shelves for crackers. And there they would be — in the pink wrapping, gleaming brightly like an unwrapped birthday present. I would stare at the words "Iced VoVo" on the sides, and on the top. What does the VoVo part of the name mean? So mysterious. All I know is that Arnotts registered the trademark in 1906. Imagine that, 1906. The same year that the world's first surf lifesaving club was formed at Bondi Beach. The year the first electric trams started running in Melbourne. The year that Alfred Deakin was returned to power as Prime Minister. And the year I was born. The year my mother died while giving birth to me.

DOT

Nuts. That's all it takes to get called a pervert around here, just a handful of beer nuts and passing an Iced VoVo to a friend. Well, Bernice is the one that's nuts, with her stiff hair and cat's bum lips.

FLO

Just once, mere days after my husband died in an accident on the Hume Highway, I slipped a package of Iced VoVos into my trolley, burying them under other items, as if hiding a sin. They sat there, unseen but somehow making their presence known, pressed beneath sanitary napkins, a voluminous bag of seedless grapes, a jar of honey, a litre of milk, and a packet of frozen peas. None of it I needed. All taken from the shelves purely to hide my fall from grace, to hide the Iced VoVos. At the checkout, the biscuits were the last thing to be pulled from the firmament of the trolley and placed under the harsh fluorescent lights of the checkout counter. I didn't breathe as the young lady rung them up and bagged them. Scurrying home, the bright pink packet retrieved from the shopping bag and placed on the passenger seat beside me, gleaming, enticing me to tear it open right there in the car. The memory of coconut and jam like a force pressing my foot down on the accelerator, hurtling me through the streets towards a kettle and a tea bag. What was happening to me?

BERNICE

Broken in the mind. That's what. Why else would she do that? Grab at those beer nuts like a monkey at the zoo, bare fingers and all.

Bernice shakes her head, as if to chase that image away.

DOT

Obsessed.

She looks over her shoulder at Bernice.

DOT (CONT'D)

Thinks of nothing but perverts. Can't even have a shandy at the ladies lounge of my own local Bowls club without her and her perverts ruining it. What will she do next?

FLO

I left all the other groceries in the car, where they spoiled. It was a warm day. The grapes turned to throbbing pustules, the milk to sour gloop. I didn't hesitate for a moment. Once inside and out of sight of the neighbours, I flicked on the kettle and unceremoniously ripped the pink packet open. I picked the little delicacy up. It felt lighter than I remembered, more brittle somehow. Had they changed the recipe? But there was the filigree design, still etched in the back like a lace pattern more appropriate to an Edwardian drawing room. The first bite confirmed my suspicion. It was different. The biscuit, although crisper than I remembered, was noticeably thinner. Similarly, the fondant was not as thickly applied as it once was, not even enough to melt into my teeth and cake them in sugary goodness. The raspberry jam strip could not be gouged with a tongue. The jam was not nearly pliable enough but sort of stiff. The coconut shavings on the top were few enough to be easily countable. A smothering feeling.... This is the way the world ends ... not with a bang but a whimper. I carefully placed the remaining biscuits in the kitchen bin and went to my room to change out of my funeral clothes.

Pause.

Florence turns to Dot and says in a whisper:

FLO

I buried my husband that day. The last time I had one of these.

Bernice spins around to look at Florence, alarmed, then glances at Dot. Dot looks into Florence's eyes, nods as if she understands what Florence has said and then takes the Iced VoVos away. She pats Florence on the shoulder.

DOT

Here, have some beer nuts instead, Florence, love, they're a real treat.

Bernice moves Florence's glass of bubbly wine closer to her hand.

BERNICE

And drink your wine spritzer, Flo, you don't want it going flat.

Florence picks up her glass. She smiles weakly at her two friends before taking a small sip.

THE END