

BOTTLES, NAILS, & TAMBOURINES

by Zeke Virant

SCENES & CAST

I. WHITE LIGHT.....Glass Bottles

KRIS
JESSE
PAT

II. ORANGE.....Two Musical Improvisers, Radio, Nail Gun, Sump Pump

MEL, a plumber
ROY, his assistant

III. NO LIGHT.....Acoustic Instruments & Singers

FIGURE 1,
FIGURE 2
RADICUS, a singer

ACTING NOTES

Mel: Mel's real name is William. He had an abnormally large head for a child, so his friends called him Melon Head. Eventually, everyone called him Melon Head and Mel for short, until everyone in the neighborhood forgot his real name. He has gone by Mel ever since. He has worked for a plumbing company for about ten years.

Roy: Roy is a recent high school graduate who is working part time at a plumbing company. Since he is young, he's known to the older plumbers as "the boy." Roy isn't a good plumber, so he is always waiting for people to show or tell him what he needs to be doing on the job.

ORCHESTRA NOTES

For two ensembles:

- 1: Singers (Singing Systems)
- 2: Instrumentalists (Orchestra Systems)

The orchestra parts are written as simple procedures, or "Systems." These Systems are written into the dramatic lines of the play. This way, the orchestra has the same script/score as the actors. Just as the actors should try to react and respond to the music, the musicians should be careful of outplaying or overpowering the actors.

The Systems are written as procedures. These procedures give a few simple rules to follow. These rules should be followed closely, but understand that the performers should take breaks, should try to allow the scene to breathe... thus silence is the unwritten part to every System. Performers continue to repeat a System until they reach a new System. A transition between one system to another is done slowly, one instrument at a time, to create a fluid evolution.

HOW TO READ THE SCRIPT

Lighting directions.

A System: Here are the notes for instrumentation.

1. Here the specific procedure the system is laid out.
2. This would be the 2nd step of the procedure
3. 3rd step
4. So on.

[A specific instruction for a sound event]

An Actor: What they say. [*bracketed text is specific instructions for the actor*]

Stage directions are put here.

I. White light (Heaven).

Bottles System: The orchestra performs on all sorts of glass different bottles filled with liquid, sand, or wax. No tuning should be assigned to the bottles. Two musicians start to play. Musicians gradually enter throughout the performance and end when the performance ends (the performance, not the scene).

1. Choose a number between 3 and 10
2. In your head, count to that number.
3. Blow on the top of your bottle to make a sound. If you are low on breath and need to rest, rest.
4. After resting, choose a new number and repeat 2 and 3 until scene ends.
5. Repeat the procedure starting at step 2.

Kris, a bottle collector, is busy collecting glass bottles and putting them into his bag. Jesse is sitting. Pat is asleep.

Kris: *[Kris conducts a self-interview] How long have you been collecting bottles on the beach?*

You know, I've been collecting bottles on the beach for, well, ever since the world ended, I guess. One day, I was a young person on the verge of making love to the most beautiful people in the world, and the next, I was a bottle collector in a sort of... I don't know. I guess you learn to retreat into process, but I don't want to realize it anymore than I am capable. I guess I'm afraid of pushing myself into being someone else, like I think I'm too stupid so I work like a genius instead of a weird, old bottle collector.

What sort of potential?

I think the real problem with goals or potential and... of clarity to a degree, is... balancing it. I wanted to find a gesture that would mean the same thing to everyone because it isn't a gesture or a feeling or anything wonderful or bad or something, it just is... I don't know, art? It's hard enough explaining anything without doubting yourself.

Is this why you talk to yourself?

Lately, all I think about is talking to myself, how my answers change, how my voice changes. You know, I'm trying to figure out a way of appreciating myself through self-interview. When you talk to yourself, you find focal points of what you care about, but also it's a way of appreciating your own voice. You can act anyway you want because people are actually just you, so you figure that out in a big way. You figure yourself out as a thinker, as an artist, a lover, even what you don't know, because it is pretty apparent how little you know about when you can't explain something.

[*Time.*]

Jesse: I think even those bottles are getting a little mind from seeing such a fine light.

Kris: Yeah.

Jesse: I think everyone can feel such a fine light. [*Time.*]

Kris: How are you feeling?

Jesse: I feel great. I woke up and felt pretty good, and now when the sun came up later, I felt better, and right now, I think I am in the best mood I've had all day.

Kris: I feel pretty good too. [*Time.*]

Kris throws a bottle with the intention of breaking it. Hopefully it breaks. Jesse wanders over to the bottle and fetches a note from it.

Jesse: A note. [*reads the note*]

Dear God,

I am stuck on a desert island with two assholes. Both of them appear equally manly but act like neuters. I need help figuring out which one to kill first. If you will help me, [Pat awakens and finishes reciting the note with Jesse] I will read a chapter of the Bible.

All my best,

Pat

Jesse & Kris: Pat! Pat! [*over and over while Pat speaks*]

Pat: Now, come on. I love you both, but sometimes love is cruel and worthless.

Kris: [*Jesse continues saying "Pat!"*] A whole chapter of the Bible?

Pat: I was going to make sure it was nice and short [*Kris and Jesse toss bottles at Pat*]*—hey!*

Jesse: You're in trouble now.

Pat: Cut it out!

Kris: Sure thing. [*continues tossing bottles*]

Pat: Somebody save me!

Kris: Alright! Alright! [*Time.*]

Pat: Well, you're still assholes. And equals.

Kris: How'd you sleep?

Pat: I feel sick.

Jesse: Well, you should've drunk some water before you slept.

Pat: Yeah, I suppose, but with all this... sickness, I figured what the world needs is somebody drinking from a bottle.

Kris: Nothing better than hot beer in the morning sun. [*Time.*]

Jesse: I don't know. Maybe heaven is better. [*Time.*]

Pat: That or being shot in the head.

Jesse: Both could put you in heaven.

Pat: Precisely. But you'd still be right here... physically... granted that you didn't shoot yourself.

Jesse: It could be an accident.

Pat: Yes, but you're still in two places at once, even if it wasn't an accident.

[*Time.*]

Kris: But you wouldn't be here, I mean consciously. You'd be in heaven.

Jesse: Sure, but you're still here.

Kris: No. Whenever I say here, I mean consciously here.

Jesse: Oh, in that case, I guess you wouldn't be here. [*a beat*] Wait—

Pat: Where'd you go? Kris? Kris?

- Kris:** Whoa.
- Jesse:** Kris? Where'd you go?
- Kris:** [*with truth*] I've been to heaven.
- Pat:** Really?
- Kris:** Yes, I was really there.
- Jesse:** What'd you see?
- Kris:** I don't know. Maybe I was dreaming—
- Jesse:** My God.
- Kris:** Yes, and no.
- Pat:** Jesus.
- Kris:** Mary and Joseph. [*suspense*] But, it could just be things I read about. I was really trying hard.
- Jesse:** You saw God?
- Kris:** Yes, and no.
- Jesse:** What do you mean? You keep saying that!
- Kris:** I mean, this is what happened. [*linger*] CLOSE YOUR EYES. Okay. So. I was sitting in a waiting room, and I was waiting on something—I don't know what. And I was looking down in a kind of tree-branch, tree-house sort of perspective the whole room was a bluish, lavender color with blue plastic seats and metal legs. And I felt as if everyone in the room knew each other. I was sure of it. It seems odd, now, but I knew they were altogether, and it had its effect, a sort of shift, like I believed in a shift, that was what I was thinking of, a shift in the place, and I fell through it. I could feel my face begin to swell and tighten... but, it made me realize how hard I was trying. I don't know if it was anything, so if you want me to stop, yeah I'll stop.
- Jesse:** No, no. What happened?

- Kris:** They took me to a place where I grew up, and they asked me to clean it, to help them clean up the town square. So I looked around and I was surrounded by a vision of purpose. I saw bottles to be collected and sorted, I wanted people to woo and love, to share my life with... [*Kris begins weeping.*]
- Pat:** Oh, Kris.
- Kris:** ...and I was on the beach, and they we're cheering me on... and... we all blew on the bottles together... I felt like a golden child.
- Jesse:** Shh... shh... it's all right. Shh...
- Pat:** You're putting too much pressure on yourself. It's all right.
- Kris:** I know! I just get so upset. I see this whole thing, like I see this, I don't know. I feel so stupid. I always feel so stupid.
- Jesse:** No.
- Pat:** You're not stupid.
- Jesse:** I've known you forever, and nobody thinks you're stupid.
- Kris:** I know. I don't think I'm stupid. I'm fucked up.
- Pat:** Come on! I'm the one who always fucks up around here.
- Jesse:** You've been up all morning collecting bottles and going to heaven and thinking about yourself. I haven't done anything all day.
- Kris:** I know. I'm sorry.
- Jesse:** It's all right. Don't worry about it.
- Kris:** You must think I'm some sort of idiot.
- Jesse:** You're not an idiot.
- Pat:** Come on, Kris. Let's hear the rest of your story.
- Kris:** Okay! [*clearing up tears and badness*] So, I was on the beach.
- Jesse:** Uh-huh.

- Kris:** And on the beach there was a man—a big, burly man with a big bass drum and a huge gut, and a weird, rag-tag Boy Scout troop was following him. They were singing and laughing and they were just, beautiful. You know? It's like, they didn't do anything, but it was what I needed.
- Jesse:** Like a song you don't like but you hear it at the right time and you like it.
- Kris:** Yeah. *You* know!
- Pat:** Yeah.
- Kris:** They were all going to the ocean, and the sun was going down, and I could hear myself in that dream. Like, when I was a kid, I had the same dream, and that's how I felt on the beach.
- Pat:** Yeah. Sometimes, you can just...
- Kris:** Remember.
- Pat:** Yeah. [*Time.*]
- Jesse:** So that's heaven, huh?
- Kris:** I guess so!
- Pat:** Sound's great.
- Jesse:** Yeah.

Black out.

II. Orange.

Orange Overture: The bottles begin dropping out slowly, one by one, as a Soloist in the orchestra performs an improvised solo.

While the soloist performs, another performer builds a chair. After the chair is built (or suitable for sitting), the performer turns on a radio.

Sound System A: As the Overture begins to conclude:

1. A radio receiving white noise from lack of a station is faded in and overwhelms the duet. The performers conclude their piece.
2. A sump pump is turned on. If a pump is unavailable, a group of singers can sing a drone, or another loud machine can be turned on.
3. Mel fires his nail gun (or bangs on nails with a hammer).

In the background of the scene, a noisy sump pump drains water from the basement. It makes a lot of noise.

Mel is holding a nail gun and nailing two pieces of wood together.

[Mel walks over to the radio and turns it off.]

Roy enters.

Roy: *[calling out to Mel]* There ain't anyone here.

Mel: Yeah, it's all right. I talked to the woman who owns the house. I just needed to get this done.

Roy: Oh all right. *[sits down.]*

Mel: What's it look like upstairs?

Roy: It don't look too good.

Mel: Well, is it dry?

Roy: I don't think so.

Mel: Alright. What about the pipes? Did you look at them?

Roy shrugs.

Mel: Take a break. I'll go check on it.

Mel starts shooting nails into the wood. He shuffles and looks for something in his bag.

Mel: I'll be right back. I'm going to look upstairs.

Roy: Okay.

Mel exits. Roy relaxes, then he looks at Mel's nail gun. Mel comes back with something.

Roy: [*looking at the nail gun*] I worked with a guy who said that he could hunt geese with one of these.

Mel: I ain't ever heard about that. Are you tired?

Roy: Just hungry.

Mel: What?

Roy: Hungry. [*Time.*] You need me to do anything?

Mel: There ain't really anything to do. I just need to finish nailing these boards together. You ain't working tomorrow, are you?

Roy: Yawp.

Mel: Well, maybe we can get started on the upstairs tomorrow..

Roy: What?

Mel: The upstairs!

Mel tries to motion that "the upstairs of the house looks alright."

Roy: What?

Mel points at the pump. Roy walks over to turn off the pump. Mel continues nail gunning sporadically throughout the scene.

Mel: Charlie said something about you going to school?

- Roy:** Yeah. I'm taking some night classes.
- Mel:** The college?
- Roy:** Yeah.
- Mel:** Mm hmm. I tried some classes, but it was pretty terrible.
- Roy:** Yeah, I hated it, but I'm trying again.
- Mel:** Mm hmm. That's good. You know what they say, it's all the ups and downs of being in a shit stream.
- Roy:** Nah. I never heard that, but that's pretty good.
- Mel:** Yeah, I mean that's more pertinent to high school, but you know, it's all a bit relevant or irrelevant or something. I mean, my last day of high school was a fucking joke.
- Roy:** Yeah? What happened?
- Mel:** Well, my senior English teacher, instead of giving us an exam, she used to have a spelling bee on the last day classes as a sort of treat for the seniors.
- Roy:** That's nice.
- Mel:** Yeah, I mean, yeah. We were all looking forward to it. But then, our year, she brought in her son. Now this kid was being home schooled by her husband, and it was just sad, like some kind of stupid joke. Like, you've been going to school for your entire fucking life and then they bring in this kid to shit on you. It was ridiculous. Like everyone was laughing because he was like ten or eleven years old but he could spell better than everyone in the class.
- Roy laughs.*
- Mel:** Well, you know, he made me feel kind of stupid.
- Roy:** Yeah. You know, but you kind of have to feel bad for him. He's like a slave to it.
- Mel:** Yeah, like, he's a robot. He doesn't know how to talk, he doesn't go outside, he doesn't have any friends; he stays at home all day.
- Roy:** Yeah, that's fucked. It was probably hard for him.

Mel: It's pretty funny that it affected me, but you know, I felt cheated. Anyway, where'd you go to school?

Roy: I'm from Jacksonville. I moved in with my brother. He's working at Southeast Paper.

Mel: Oh, that's cool. I used to know a lot of folks from Jacksonville. My mom grew up there.

Roy: Oh, that's cool.

Mel: I used to go down there all the time to see my cousins. It's been a while now. Did you ever go to the county fair in Jacksonville?

Roy: You know, I always heard about it, but I never went.

Mel: I went with my cousin one time.

Roy: Yeah?

Mel: It was terrible. I mean, the rides were nice, but you know, even then, I must've been eighteen, nineteen, I can't stand it when I see kids, you know, children, eleven or twelve years old, smoking cigarettes. You know? And then, how the boys and girls hit each other and run away, like the dumbest flirting, well, it seemed like that's all anybody came there to do.

Roy laughs.

You know? And to top it off, I was on the Ferris wheel with my cousin, and I saw, it must have been a couple no older than ten, making out on the Ferris wheel. And I was like your age, thinking, "What the fuck? What kind of fair is this?" [*Time.*] So, uh, Jacksonville.

Roy: Jacksonville is charming.

Roy continues laughing.

Mel: I'm not knocking it. It's like going to church or a football game. The people come with the turf.

Roy: Yeah, nine year olds.

Mel: Exactly! Keep them away from the fair. It ain't good for anybody.

Roy: I'll keep that in mind.

Mel: Yeah, man. You still hungry?

Roy: Yeah. I'm starving.

Mel: Alright, me too. Let's get something.

Roy: Alright.

Black out.

III. No light.

Orchestra System A: For instrumentalists.

1. Each instrumentalist chooses a number between 5 and 11.
2. Members of the orchestra play a note (any note) and sustain it as they count to their number.
3. Repeat step 2, with the intention of matching the note of other members of the ensemble. With each new note, the orchestra should try to get closer to all having the same note (by octaves). Musicians should try to find a note by simply listening.
4. After the note has been realized and found, the musicians play into a silence by decrescendo.
5. Repeat the System.

Singing System A: For singers.

1. After orchestra has spent some time with their system, choose a number between 20 and 40.
2. When you get to your number, sing the highest note you can play sing as softly and long as possible. Disregard tonality as a limit. The orchestra should find their highest note while performing and then learn how to play it softer and longer.
3. Choose a new number and repeat step 2.

After a few of the singer have begun, Figure 1 and Figure 2 enter with tambourines. They converge in the darkness and rattle their tambourines as they deliver their lines.

Fig. 1: Look who's here.

Fig. 2: I don't see anything.

Fig. 1: I know you. Yes, I know you. You're a liar.

Fig. 2: You put it so well.

Fig. 1: Some say I'm well learned and pretty. I love being it, that is, me.

Fig. 2: Everyday a new day.

Fig. 1: Yes. Never enough.

Fig. 2: And waking up.

Fig. 1: Yes.

Fig 2: Aren't you tired yet?

Fig. 1: What do they call you?

Fig. 2: My, you are curious! I don't like it.

Fig. 1: I'll call you, Vegetable.

Fig. 2: Vegetable? You're making my hair fall out. Give me my vegetable back!

Fig. 1: The table holds me, too. I'm all chopped up.

Fig. 2: It's what purpose affords you. Morning glory, flowers and thickets—

Figure 1 and 2 together: —Clear, clear skies.

Fig. 2: They don't bother me. I like them.

*Fig. 1: I find myself lost with them and my eyes water, and then I get sick and fall asleep.
Stupid... almost. You're hungry?*

Fig. 2: Yes.

Fig. 1: What do you see?

Fig. 2: I see a child inside a window.

Fig. 1: Can you eat the window?

Fig. 2: I'd eat the whole day.

Fig. 1: The whole day is gone now.

Fig. 2: Everyday. All the time.

Fig. 1: The whole thing.

Fig. 2: And waking up.

Fig. 1: It makes me nervous. Lay down with me.

Fig. 2: Now.

Fig. 1: Simply so much to see.

Fig. 2: Now!

Radicus: [*improvised singing with breaks of recitation and melodrama*]
 another score of sore lonely—
 song of red walls and
 sun— on the color red?
 why so tricky, little sunlight?
 You're my god, remember?—
 Young and useless youth:
 a picture of gift and heart,
 where you lose to memory

the tinny speech-like moan from thing,
 share with me song of
 tinny moan song
 shares tears with the spelled out vastness
 looms or states nothing,
 the sad songs of our fathers,
 sit, are sad, and brother is not listening

I know nothing about billows
 clouds stretch to me
 eyes
 See the whip windy straw whip
 the rain fall, the sad song sings

crystal night sun
 god glow orb
 cold vast night
 soft and fine

-----late into the sunset
 I know nothing
 the long afternoon, the moon's icy rock
 leveled red noon is lost.

[*bel canto or soul singing*] I!—

[A snare drum is hit loudly while the singer is embellishing the note (DOUBLE FORTE). Radicus cuts off his note.]

[*sarcastically spoken*] A visitor?

[snare hits a beat after]

[*spoken*] Again!

[snare hits a beat after]

Again!

[Snare hit. As the singer teases the snare, it goes into a soft roll and increases speed and volume as the singer becomes closer and closer to saying, "Again."]

[teasing] Ahhh... ah... ah... [etc.] AGAIN!

[Snare hit! (a beat after)]

[teasing...] Ahhh... ah... ah...

[Snare hits early]

[Time.]

[snare hits with each number Radicus counts]

1, 2, 3, 4, 5... [etc... go as long as you want]
[excited] Yes! Woo!

Fig. 2: That's right! All the time it is as it is. Let it be.

Radicus: What do you mean?

2: I mean shut up—we're glad you could make it.

[Snare drum plays a quiet roll and crescendos into a loud roll. As Figure 1 talks, the snare slowly overpowers Figure 1's voice. When Radicus delivers his next line, the snare drums awkwardly stops playing.]

1: Yes, glad you could come around. Now listen up. My vegetable friend and I, we want to eat, but we need your help. We know you singers need your love, so we've worked up a little plan that could help us to nab up some little virgins. Personally, I would eat anything with unripe potential but vegetable here is always rapping on about blood and wine. I'm fine eating anything young and capable of tears. You know?

[The following spoken part should be inaudible due to the volume of the snare drum.]

As long as the tears are all coming from the same place in somebody, I'll have the blood and the boil and all the right wine in the right... right? Right? Right?

Figure 1 and 2 laugh uncontrollably for a bit of time.

Radicus: What do you want?

Laughter stops, and Figure 1 shushes Radicus.

Orchestra System B: The orchestra gradually fades out of System A into silence.

Singing System B: Singers continue to make buzzing sounds, like a child imitating a bumblebee, while Figure 2 delivers his poem.

2: When days are windy and nights are damp,
Where days say nothing and nights are traps,
How days can leave you and nights are found,
Why nothing is happy and nothing is found.

The savior is singing and heaven is bored,
A savior is wretched and heaven wants more,
That savior is falling and heaven is hell,
My savior is happy and heaven is hell.

Oh the nights are lovely and the days are cold,
Fie! in the evening and the days are gold,
Why? at the moonlight and the sunlight is fine,
Yea, lonely moonlight, the sunlight is fine.

Singing System C: Singers continue Singing System A this time choosing a number between 10 and 20.

A red light illuminates Radicus.

*The figures are holding Radicus
down but out of the light.*

Radicus: What do you want?

1: How about a song? I know the perfect one.
*Girls are hot and
Boys are hotter,
But I like lovers boiled in water*

Radicus screams.

2: You must have been a little lonely before you got here. You think we don't know?

Radicus: Don't eat me! Please, don't eat me.

1: What kind of... person would I be if I let you tramp around here all day?
It's virgin meat we want!

Radicus: Please. I'll do anything! Please!

1: Darling. Look at me. Calm down.

2: Okay. I'm fine. I'm fine.

1: Why do let these old men bother you? The most harm they'll give a girl is a little bit of fun.

2: They have no respect for you.

1: It's a drunken ball. Nobody respects anything.

Radicus: *[melodramatically] I know you love me,
I know you need me,
But darling, I can't be true.*

*Because you love me,
Because you need me,
Your love is like singing the blues.*

1: This isn't right.

2: What do you mean?

1: I have to go... I can't do this anymore...

2: Wait... just...

1: No! I'm hungry! *[violently shakes]* Come here little one! It's time!

*Radicus begins crying. Figure 1 and
2 eat Radicus.*