Blue Jay Singing in the Dead of Night

A play in two acts

by

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[EXCERPT]

Scene 4

The Radio Station, Monday, 1:55 AM. A hit song from 1976 is playing. It will be followed automatically by another during the following: JAY comes into his booth, looking a bit bleary, with a large coffee. He notices a stranger: MAX sitting in the engineer's booth. He presses the intercom.

JAY

So I assume you're my new engineer.

MAX

Yep.

JAY

I haven't seen you around the station.

XAM

I'm new.

JAY

Ah. Where'd they put Randy?

XAM

Who?

JAY

My old engineer.

 \mathtt{MAX}

Oh. He's, uh... didn't you read the memo?

JAY

What memo?

MAX

The... "IMPORTANT, ALL ON AIR TALENT MUST READ" memo? Everyone was supposed to get here an hour early to review it.

Wait...

(he rummages through his pockets and pulls out some

crumpled papers.)

You mean this one?

MAX

Yeah.

JAY

No.

XAM

It listed all the changes at the station.

JAY

Yeah. Well if it's anything like sticking me in the graveyard, I don't want to read it.

MAX

I kind of think you do.

(beat)

You know, you're not the only one they changed shifts on. They're moving a lot of talent around.

JAY

Yeah? Like that little act of musical chairs is really going to improve anything. So where did they put Randy?

MAX

Actually, they let him go.

JAY

What? What do you mean? Just like that? They just had a baby!

 \mathtt{MAX}

I heard they gave him a really good package.

JAY

Oh, that makes it better? Why? Randy's as good as they get.

MAX

It wasn't personal. They let all of them go. Today. They brought in all new engineers. They needed guys who are familiar with the new format.

The new... what!?

MAX

You really should have read that memo.

JAY

Start talking.

MAX

If you look behind you...

(JAY turns around and sees four

lists on the wall)

The new format is mainly built around AOR playlists. You'll see there are lists for each hour of your show.

JAY

No... no, wait, wait wait! Playlists! You gotta be kidding me! We don't do playlists here! Whose idea was this? Oh don't tell me! It's that consultant, isnt' it? That fucking consultant! What's his name, Skip, Tim...

MAX

Ken.

JAY

Ken. Yeah that's the asshole.

MAX

I'm afraid it is. Ken felt it was necessary.

JAY

What the hell does he know? We're freeform, for Christsake. We started this fucking FM party!

MAX

People don't seem to want freeform anymore, Jay.

JAY

Who are you? Are you really an engineer?

MAX

I'm just saying.

JAY

Wait a second. What did our program director say? I mean, I'm not always crazy about Lou, but he couldn't have taken this lying down.

MAX

No. More like kicking and screaming. So they, uh, "moved" him. To the AM sister station in Memphis.

JAY

Jesus. It's a blood bath.

(beat)

Who did the asshole consultant replace him with?

MAX

(beat)

Uh. ... The asshole consultant.

JAY

Oh, God.

(JAY sits there a moment in stunned silence.)

MAX

Jay...

(JAY doesn't seem to hear...)

Jay...? You okay?

JAY

I just have to get my mind around this.

MAX

Well, you better hurry.

JAY

Huh?

XAM

You're... on in 10.

(JAY looks up at the clock and realizes the time.)

Right, yeah. Okay!

(shakes himself into action)

No problem.

(He brings up the last bars of music on the currently playing song and as it ends, leans

into the mike:

This is Jay Jarrell coming at you from the wee hours of the morning. Blue Jay singing in the dead of night. How you all doing? Any you truckers or late night partiers want to call in and request a tune, you just do it. Now for those of you who might be saying: "Hey, wait a second! Where's Sleepy Joe?" Well ol' Sleepy Joe Daniker is doing the 12 to 4 afternoons here at K-RITE and he's handed off that graveyard torch to yours truly. They're switching things up a little here at the station, just making sure you're all on your toes. But don't worry, my friends, you're safe with me.

(beat)

Now, for my loyal fans who've tracked me down from my 10:00 show, thanks for staying up late with me, I appreciate. And for my new listeners, let's get to know each other, shall we? I'm opening up the lines, so give me a call here at the station and let's find out what's on your minds. And in the meantime, let's see what's happening in the world...

(he pulls over some copy:)

Well, it looks like same old same old: Syrian troops and Lebanese Christians are still battling Palestinian guerillas and Lebanese Moslems outside of Beirut... The civil war in Angola is continuing to force thousands of refugees into neighboring Namibia. Oh, and Quebec is still talking secession from Canada. I don't know about you folks. But looking at all this from this deep of the night perspective, it seems to me, we're all on this little planet hurtling through space together. What is it, really, that we're all fighting over? B.F. Skinner once said: "The real problem is not whether machines think, but whether men do." Personally, I'm inclined to agree with him. Now on that little provocation, why don't we take our first call. Hello, you're on with Jay Jarrell.

CALLER #2 (ARNIE)

Whoa.

JAY

Excuse me?

ARNIE

(obviously stoned)

Whoa, man, that's heavy. Right on, brother.

JAY

So you agree with Mr. Skinner?

ARNIE

Who?

JAY

The psychologist I just-- nevermind. Was there something you wanted to talk about?

ARNIE

Yeah, I want to talk about these women, man, these women won't give us a fucking break.

(JAY quickly presses the bleep button.)

JAY

What women are you talking about, uh...?

ARNIE

Arnie. I'm talking about all of them, man! They're trying to cut our balls off, that's what they're trying to do.

JAY

(bleeping him again)

Hey, we're on the radio, here, friend. Wanna clean up your language and get to the point?

ARNIE

Yeah, sure. It's this liberation thing, see? I mean, they get liberated, we get screwed, you know what I mean?

JAY

Can't say that I do, Arnie. Seems to me, the less oppression in this world, the better.

ARNIE

Yeah, but look who's getting oppressed now? My ol' lady don't even cook me a meal anymore. What does she want me to do, starve?

JAY

Ever heard of a can opener, Arnie?

ARNIE

What?

JAY

Look, it's been nice chatting with you, but we gotta break here--

ARNIE

Wait, I got a song I want you to play.

JAY

What is it?

ARNIE

"Under My Thumb." And would you, like, uh, dedicate it to Janet.

JAY

We'll see if we have time. You take care now.

(He clicks the caller off)

Whoa! "What a piece of work is a man. How noble in reason. How infinite in faculty." Mr. Shakespeare obviously never met our friend, Arnie, here. Okay, so...

(with some reluctance, He

checks the playlist)

...how bout a little cut from the Queen of R & B: Miss Aretha Franklin... Oh and Arnie? This lady could eat you for breakfast!

(Bars of music come up. JAY presses the intercom button to speak to MAX)

So wait a second. What about requests?

XAM

If it's not on the list, just tell them you'll play it if you can. Or stop taking calls. You're limited to three an hour anyway.

JAY

Excuse me?

MAX

It's all in the memo.

JAY

Oh yes, the memo. "In a corporate coup the dagger is a memo."

MAX

What?

JAY

Nothing.

MAX

Look. It's all stated very clearly:

(reads from his copy of memo:)

"On air talent is instructed to play strictly playlist, take no more than three calls an hour, avoid derogatory comments over the sponsor's messages, keep political opinions to themselves, and between song patter to a minimum."

JAY

Jesus. Wanna tell me what's left?

MAX

I'm just reading what it says.

JAY

And you don't have a problem with this?

XAM

I like having a job.

JAY

You aren't by any chance a Republican?

MAX

Excuse me?

Forget it. I just have this feeling I woke up this morning in an alternate universe.

MAX

Maybe you're just catching up with this one.

JAY

(beat)

I'm not sure I'm going to like you, Max.

MAX

I'm not sure I need you too, Jay.

JAY

Right.

(turning up the last bars on

the song)

Sing it to us, Aretha! That woman was born with a fire in her belly. And they call it "Soul!" Right! Let's take another call, shall we? Hello, you're on with Jay Jarrell.

CALLER #2

Hello? Jay? I'm... a little nervous.

JAY

Don't be. I won't bite.

CALLER #2

I've never called a station before.

JAY

So what made you call now?

CALLER #2

Well I've been listening to Joe Daniker for a long time. I don't sleep so good, you know?

JAY

Uh huh.

CALLER #2

And he's like, great and all, but you sound different, I mean, like so... welcoming, you know?

Well, thanks for saying that. And what's your name, caller?

CALLER #2

I'd rather not.. say.

JAY

Well that's perfectly fine.

CALLER #2

I'm kind of shy.

JAY

I would have never known.

CALLER #2

But I really really like the radio. It keeps me company. I try to picture the people that go with the voices. What their faces look like? It helps a lot. Especially when I'm, you know, by myself.

(MAX is making a big cut sign to JAY.)

JAY

Sure. Well, caller. I'll tell you what. I've gotta go now. But you stay tuned to our station, because later in this hour I'm going to dedicate a song, just for you. Since I don't know your name it'll be to Caller Number 2. You'll remember that, right? Caller Number 2.

CALLER #2

Yes, I'll remember!

JAY

Good, so you listen real well, Caller Number 2.

CALLER #2

I will.

Take care now.

(he presses the button and

leans into the mike)

And remember. It is no shame to be shy. "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul" said Emily Dickinson, a poet so reclusive she barely left her home. ... All right! We have time for one more call, before we start rocking these airwaves.

(pressing a line)
Hello, you're on with the Blue Jay.

CALLER (LIONEL)

Jay.

JAY

Lionel. You found me.

LIONEL

Have I ever missed a show?

JAY

Not that I can remember.

LIONEL

Haven't missed one since I heard you playing Jerry Lee Lewis on that renegade station in '56.

JAY

I wish you'd stop reminding me, Lionel. That was a long time ago.

LIONEL

Yeah, well, you're my man. Always have been, always will be.

JAY

Thank you, my friend.

LIONEL

So, what if this is the middle of the night! I'm setting my alarm every morning so I can catch your last hour. Of course, tonight, it's your inaugural show, so I'm staying up for the whole thing!

JAY

You go beyond the call.

LIONEL

But why the hell did they move you?

JAY

Hey, like I said, they're just changing things up a little here at K-Rite.

LIONEL

But you've been 10 PM to 2 since 70! It's your groove.

JAY

You can wear a groove into a rut, Lionel.

LIONEL

Well if anyone can bring the middle of the night alive, you can.

JAY

I'll do my best.

(MAX again does cut signal)

Anyway... It looks like that ol' clock is ticking down, but thanks for calling in, Lionel, and letting me know you're still with me.

LIONEL

Wait, aren't you going to play it for me?

JAY

Play...? Oh, yeah, right, of course! What was I thinking?

(Without consulting the playlist, he turns to locate a cassette, while still talking

into the mike)

For all my new listeners who don't know Lionel, he chooses a favorite song each year and that's the one he requests on my show whenever he calls. Luckily Lionel has great musical tastes. This one in particular is one of my own personal favorites. It speaks to us of a world that may never be, but one that we can all imagine!

(JAY shoves in the cassette and John Lennon's "Imagine" comes up. Within 10 seconds, however, a competing sound is heard.

It is a commercial playing over the song. JAY looks up at MAX, consternated, and then, the consummate professional, quickly ejects the Lennon tune so that it no longer competes with the commercial [which will continue to play softly in the background].)

JAY

(To MAX)

What the hell are you doing?

MAX

Hey listen, I tried to tell you--

JAY

You just overrode the song!

XAM

It wasn't playlist. I told you, if it's not playlist--

JAY

(realizing)

Jesus, you're a management plant!

MAX

I wouldn't put it like that, Jay. I'm just doing my job.

JAY

No, no! You're an engineer, man! You're supposed to be on the side of the talent!

MAX

There aren't any sides anymore, Jay. FM is a business now. And we're all in this business together.

JAY

It's only a business because we turned it into a goddamn success!

MAX

Maybe so, Jay, but you know as well as anyone that to stay successful you've got to go with the times! And the times have changed.

JAY

But you honestly think--

(JAY sees the commercial is nearly at an end. He quickly locates a cassette and pulling up the volume on the commercial, sticks it in just as the commercial ends.)

VOICE ON CASSETTE

This is an editorial from your station manager and I'd like to talk to you about...

(JAY turns the volume down.)

JAY

You think putting a straight jacket back on talent is going to improve radio?

XAM

I think a little consistency in material played and how the talent conducts itself can be a good thing, yes. Talent's had free rein for too long in my book.

JAY

Really?

(beat)

So. Let me see if I've got this straight. If I go off the list again, you'll pull another prank like the one you just pulled?

MAX

Well. I really hope you won't make it necessary, Jay.

JAY

Right. I see.

(He eyes the clock and leans

into the mike)

Sorry, folks, about the confusion. We just had a little... engineering glitch there. Well, let's move back into some music here, shall we?

(He checks the playlist, lights upon a number and, with a somewhat twisted smile,

reaches for a cassette)

Here's a little... Barry Manilow to finish up the hour.

(JAY shoves in the cassette, his smile fading, as the song comes up and...)

LIGHTS FADE

End of Scene