

EVERYTHINGAOKE

by Joe Zarrow

*LiveWire Vision Fest 5 Performance Draft
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Joe Zarrow
1218 N Rockwell St, #2
Chicago, IL 60622
773 541-0425
jzarrow@gmail.com
<http://www.joezarrow.com>

Everythingaoke was produced by LiveWire Theater Company (Joel Ewing, Artistic Director) at Intuit Gallery in Chicago in July 2013 as a part of VisionFest 5. It was directed by Elly Green. The cast was as follows:

ANNE - Lea Pascal
CHARLES - Dan Granata
KEVIN - Justin Harner
ISAAC - Ryan Hallahan
MARLENE - Kelly Parker
NORA - Meghan Reardon
ROBOT - Dave Fink

ANNE, MARLENE, and NORA are young women

CHARLES, KEVIN, and ISAAC are young men

ROBOT is a robot, and has been played by men in the past, but could be played by an actor of any gender

There is maybe some copyrighted material in here that would maybe have to be changed in performance, maybe.

(The near future. A few friends are in a rented karaoke room somewhere in Chicago. Suspicious upholstery, plates of salty snacks, disco balls, hideous wallpaper, and empty beer bottles abound. The room is dominated by a big screen TV with a complicated karaoke console and remote control. Most are engaged in the proceedings, though CHARLES constantly returns to the binder, anxiously flipping through songs during the entire play and never entering anything. ISAAC sits off to one side, attentive but quieter than the rest.. As the audience enters, ANNE is enthusiastically singing the end of Bonnie Tyler's "Total Eclipse of the Heart," starting at approximately the 2:45 mark. KEVIN, MARLENE, and NORA are fully engaged in ANNE's performance.)

(NOTE: throughout the script, I've tried to capture a sort of hypernaturalistic karaoke room feel -- cacophonous, disorienting, people talking over each other. To that end, the dialogue in the left hand column is a guide to the key points, but amidst all of this I imagine there would be a lot of improvised words and sounds between the human characters. Proofreading errors in the righthand column are mostly intentional.)

Dialogue and Stage Directions

ANNE: Every now and then I fall apart.
 NORA: Sing, you bastards! *(They concur.)*
 ANNE: Every now and then I fall apart.
 And I need you now tonight.
 And I need you more than ever.
 And if you'll only hold me tight,
 we'll be holding on forever.
 And we'll only be making it right
 cause we'll never be wrong together
 We can take it to the end of the line.
 Your love is like a shadow on me all of the time.
 I don't know what to do and I'm always in the dark.
 We're living in a powder keg and giving off sparks.
 I really need you tonight!
 Forever's gonna start tonight.
 Forever's gonna start tonight.
 NORA: Shhhhhh! *(They fall quiet for ANNE's big finish.)*
 ANNE: Once upon a time I was falling in love,
 but now I'm only falling apart.
 There's nothing I can do:
 a total eclipse of the heart.

On the screen of the Everythingaoke machine

EVERY NOW AND THEN I FALL APART
 EVERY NOW AND THEN I FALL APART
 AND I NEED YOU NOW TONIGHT
 AND I NEED YOU MORE THAN EVER
 AND IF YOU'LL ONLY HOLD ME TIGHT
 WE'LL BE HOLDING ON FOREVER
 RIGHT
 CAUSE WE'LL NEVER BE WRONG
 TOGETHER
 WE CAN TAKE IT TO THE END OF THE
 LINE
 YOUR LOVE IS LIKE A SHADOW ON
 ME ALL OF THE TIME
 I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO AND I'M
 ALWAYS IN THE DARK
 WE'RE LIVING IN A POWDER KEG
 AND GIVING OFF SPARKS
 I REALLY NEED YOU TONIGHT
 FOREVER'S GONNA START TONIGHT
 FOREVER'S GONNA START TONIGHT
 ONCE UPON A TIME I WAS FALLING IN
 LOVE
 BUT NOW I'M ONLY FALLING APART
 THERE'S NOTHING I CAN DO
 A TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART

Once upon a time there was light in my life,
but now there's only love in the dark.
Nothing I can say.
A total eclipse of the heart.
(ANNE finishes and her score comes up onscreen. All applaud. There are high fives.)

MARLENE: That was amazing.

ANNE: It's a standard of the repertoire.

NORA: Who's next? Panda!

KEVIN: Me! I'm a panda!

(KEVIN rushes up to grab the mic and look at the screen. He waits anxiously for his moment. The others, slightly drunk, try to be respectfully silent in anticipation.)

KEVIN *(his timing is slightly off)*: ACHOO!

ANNE: Timing's tough on that one. Good effort.

ISAAC: I couldn't have done that.

MARLENE: Ooh! That's me! That's me!

(The friends all cheer for MARLENE -- "Classic!" "You go girl!" -- et cetera as she gets up to sing the song. She starts out a little late, but enthusiastically. She quickly gets less enthusiastic.)

MARLENE: Four score and seven years ago! Our fathers brought to this continent a new -- nation conceived in lib-liberty and dah duh duh -- continent...oh god.... Oh god, it's too fast. I don't know this at all. Press cancel. Press cancel!

(They frantically press at all the buttons. ANNE, who is clearly the expert, comes over to the remote.)

ANNE: Guys; let me.

ONCE UPON A TIME THERE WAS
LIGHT IN MY LIFE
BUT NOW THERE'S ONLY LOVE IN
THE DARK
NOTHING I CAN SAY
A TOTAL ECLIPSE OF THE HEART
SCORE: 90

SNEEZING BABY PANDA in the style of
YOUTUBE

(No text. Instead we see the famous youtube video of the sneezing baby panda with a superimposed "4-3-2-1" countdown to the moment of the sneeze, plus the word "ACHOO.")

SCORE: 85

GETTYSBURG ADDRESS in the style of
ABRAHAM LINCOLN

FOUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS
AGO OUR FATHERS BROUGHT
FORTH ON THIS CONTINENT A NEW
NATION, CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY,
AND DEDICATED TO THE
PROPOSITION THAT ALL MEN ARE
CREATED EQUAL.
NOW WE ARE ENGAGED IN A GREAT
CIVIL WAR, TESTING WHETHER THAT
NATION, OR ANY NATION, SO
CONCEIVED AND SO DEDICATED,
CAN LONG ENDURE--

(ANNE presses one button. The screen changes.)

MARLENE: Oh, thank god.

GAVE UP - SCORE 35

CHARLES: It was a good try.

NORA: Noble.

ANNE: People think they know it, but they only know the first couple lines. The Gettysburg Address is, like, the "Baby's Got Back" of presidential orations.

KEVIN: Wait, "queue depleted." Do we need to enter more songs?

QUEUE DEPLETED - PLEASE ENTER MORE ITEMS

(All except for CHARLES cluster around the remote with one of the song binders and enter more songs. CHARLES is still looking in his own binder.)

MARLENE: Charles? Are you going to grace us with a song?

CHARLES: *(Indicating the binder.)* I'm only up to the "Ps."

NORA: Amateur!

(A ROBOT waiter enters. This ROBOT does not speak in a monotone, but rather with the empty, stuttering jocularity of automated credit card lines.)

ROBOT: Hi guys. I noticed you finished your beers. Can I get you something else?

CHARLES: Yeah! Three more Miller Lites and another plate of bugles.

NORA: *(loudly over the last line, directed at ANNE, who is holding the remote)* The fuck you're singing "American Pie." It's like twenty minutes long.

ANNE: It's my favorite song.

ROBOT: I'm sorry. I didn't get that. Can you tell me your order again?

CHARLES: Guys. Shhhh. Please? I'm trying to order. Three Miller Lites and one plate of bugles.

ROBOT: Did you want. Three. Millers. Lite. And one. Plate of. Bugles?

NORA: Yes!

ROBOT: Got it. I'll be right back.

(the ROBOT leaves.)

ANNE: *(noting that the screen has changed to "LOADING")* We're back in business.

LOADING...

ISAAC: This is me.

RECENTLY LAID-OFF FACTORY
WORKER in the style of FLINT,
MICHIGAN

KEVIN: Bold choice.

(The friends ooh and ah, impressed with ISAAC's choice. There is an amazing, quick transformation from happy partier to someone down on his luck. ISAAC huddles on the floor like he's begging for change on a street corner..)

(No text. Just a shot of a decrepit, post-industrial cityscape at eye level. Maybe some ambient. city sounds in the background.)

ISAAC: Spare change, somethin' to eat? Spare change, somethin' to eat? You gotta help me. I'm dyin'. I'm dyin!
(He breaks down into quiet sobs.)

(ISAAC recovers. Thunderous applause. He shyly bows.)

SCORE: 99

ANNE: Awesome work.

MARLENE: I totally believed your were a member of the urban poor.

KEVIN: Did you practice that?

ISAAC: No, it just came to me.

SWTP S/09 in the style of SOUTHWEST
TECHNICAL PRODUCTS
CORPORATION

ANNE: Really good karaoke is never about rehearsal, it's about--

NORA: *(interrupting)* Who entered a robot song?

ANNE: Oh, I'll fix it.

(No text. Just a diagram of an old-fashioned circuit board. Various lights move around. Maybe some binary scrolls by. Incomprehensible.)

NORA: No, I wanna sing it.

(NORA grabs the mic and starts singing in a stereotypical monotone, perhaps doing a robot dance.)

NORA: Boop boop boop. I am a robot.

(The friends laugh uncomfortably, half entertained and half horrified.)

NORA: Boop. I sing shitty songs about computers. I cannot know love. Boop boop.

MARLENE *(laughing)*: Omigod, stop! That is so racist!

ISAAC: It's pretty robocist.

NORA *(to ROBOT)*: Boop boop. What is love? Please explain love?

CHARLES: Nora, c'mon.

ROBOT: *(serving drinks and clearly not understanding it is being mocked)* I don't know "boop boop what is love please explain love."

NORA: Boop boop.

SCORE: 72

MARLENE *(laughing)* Nora, stop.

ROBOT: It sounds like you don't need anything right now. I'll come back to check on you later. Have fun and please enjoy Everythingaoke!

(The robot leaves.)

KEVIN: Nora.

NORA: What?

KEVIN: That was a little over the line.

NORA: What?

KEVIN: He's a robot.

NORA: IT'S a robot. It can't tell. It has no feelings.

KEVIN: Well, it makes me slightly uncomfortable.

QUEUE DEPLETED - PLEASE ENTER
MORE ITEMS

CHARLES: Me too.

NORA: Whatever. Fuck y'all. I do what I want.

(NORA grabs the remote and enters a code.)

ANNE: Maybe you should put down the remote.

ISAAC: Seriously? Nora? Too soon.

MASSACRE OF CIVILIANS in the style
of MUAMMAR EL-QADDAFI

(NORA holds on to the mic and performs as Qaddafi.)

NORA: How can you justify such misbehavior from people who live in good neighborhoods? All African nations look up to Libya, all the rulers of the world look up to me, Qaddafi! Fuck y'all! I'ma kill y'all! Protesters are the...uh....evil...

HOW CAN YOU JUSTIFY SUCH
MISBEHAVIOR FROM PEOPLE WHO
LIVE IN GOOD NEIGHBORHOODS?
ALL AFRICAN NATIONS LOOK UP TO
LIBYA, ALL THE RULERS OF THE
WORLD LOOK UP TO LIBYA.
PROTESTERS ARE SERVING THE
DEVIL.

ISAAC: Nora, people are dying right now in [INSERT
TIMELY COUNTRY NAME HERE.]

ANNE: C'mon, that's enough.

WE WILL CONTINUE TO FIGHT. WE
WILL DEFEAT THEM. I STAND AMONG
THE PEOPLE AND WE WILL FIGHT.

NORA: Fuck you! It's in the binder! I'm Qaddafi! I'm a
Dead Dictator! I do what I want!

*(ANNE tries to get the mic away from NORA. It gets
rowdy. They knock a beer onto the everythingaoke
machine.)*

*(The everythingaoke machine starts making horrible
noises.)*

SF12323498DIUSF0(* MLNDSF35-
MESSAGE.

NORA: Goddammit. Why did you do that?

CHARLES *(poking his head out into the hallway)*:
Help! Robot! We need help!

ANNE: Why did I do that?

NORA: Yeah!

CHARLES: It's your fault.

NORA: I was just singing everythingaoke.

ROBOT: *(poking head inside the door)* Hi there! It looks like you're having technical difficulties. Could you use some help?

ISAAC: Yeah, we spilled a beer on the thing.

ROBOT: Let me look at that for you.

(The ROBOT goes over to the machine, which is still making awful noises. It unplugs the microphone and pulls a cord out from its own body so that it can interface with the machine.)

(The noises stop.)

(The screen clears. It's now just a blinking cursor.)

ROBOT: Please be patient while I sing the reset song. It will just take a moment.

(The ROBOT peacefully positions himself to perform.)

CONSCIOUSNESS in the style of THE
UNKNOWABLE OTHER

(No images. Just a spot on the ROBOT, whose voice now booms through the sound system--it's more of a declaimed chant than a song.)

ROBOT: O muse! O goddess technological!
Let us delight in acts of transformation.

MARLENE: What is he talking about?

ROBOT: *(overlapping, to all)* Everythingaoke, bastard art!

Your worshippers diverse but with one goal,
They dream of paths emerging from their heart
To close the gap from surface to the soul.
Their human limitations strike them dumb
Their parts are rarely greater than the sum.

(The ROBOT pauses dramatically. The human observers aren't sure what to do, so they clap for a second.)

ROBOT: Hold on. The reset procedure is not yet complete. *(To NORA)* Please step forward.

(She does so)

ROBOT: Now please hold my hand and gaze into my eyes.

NORA: The fuck?

ROBOT: Now please hold my hand and gaze into my eyes.

NORA: No!

ROBOT: I know this may seem awkward, but it is the only way to reset the everythingaoke machine.

ANNE: We paid a ton of money for--

NORA: Fine!

(NORA holds the robots hand and looks into its eyes.)

ROBOT: Good job. Now we will gaze into one another's eyes until we have the sensation of seeing the soul of the other entity, as everythingaoke depends for its proper functioning upon the immaterial empathic connections between self and other.

NORA: What?

ROBOT: Good job. Now we will gaze into one another's eyes until we have the sensation of seeing the soul of the other entity, as everythingaoke depends for its proper functioning upon the immaterial empathic connections between self and other.

NORA: *(overlapping with the above)* This is fucking weird. I don't wanna do this.

CHARLES: Just look in the robot's eyes.

KEVIN It doesn't mean anything.

NORA: Fine. Fine.

ROBOT: *(stopping in its speech wherever NORA says "fine")* Great. Are you ready?

NORA: Ready.

(There is a beeping sound as the karaoke screen counts down.)

ROBOT: Shhhhhhh.

GO

(Silence, maybe the first silent moment in the play. ROBOT and NORA stare into one another's eyes. It's weird, it's funny, it's awkward, and so forth. It goes through different phases. At some point NORA relents and there, between human and robot, some strange beautiful moment of silent connection.)

(blank screen)

(NORA and ROBOT look at the screen, which now says:)

SCORE: 100

(A gasp from the crowd. Beat.)

ROBOT: Great job.

(Blackout.)