

THE MILLI VANILLI ORCHESTRA

A one-act comedy by
Ed Shockley

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ARMSTEAD, trumpet. British exchange student.

VIOLA, violin. Potential valedictorian.

ANTOINETTE, flute. French speaking immigrant.

TIFFANY, timpani.

BONNER, trombone.

PARKER, saxophone. Slacker.

ELLIOTT, piano.

BENEATHA, clarinet.

THOMAS, tuba.

RANGEL, triangle. Rarely speaks.

LIONEL, xylophone.

JEAN, French horn. Exchange student.

SANTANA, guitar.

JESSICA, cello. Obsessed with food.

LATIMER, sound engineer.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

The ideal scenario for this play is the breakdown of characters as listed. However, since it is constructed around the structure of a band, it is possible to divide each instrument into multiple parts in the same way that one would have first, second and third trumpets. Each production is granted license to make its own "arrangement" in order to accommodate larger casts. The author requests that the expansion be confined to each instrument individually. In other words, saxophone player lines can be divided among multiple actors but sax and trumpet players should not share lines or clarinet and guitar. Also, no lines may be cut or added.

SCENE 1

(The entire band plays several bars of the William Tell Overture really badly.)

ARMSTEAD: We're monumentally bugged.

ANTOINETTE: Eff that means we are deep into the trouble then, "Yes."

PARKER: Not necessarily.

LIONEL: Not necessarily?! Semester ends Monday, Parker.

ELLIOT: Don't remind me.

VIOLA: And we can barely bumble our way through the intro.

PARKER: Where there's a will there's a way.

TIFFANY: I'm gonna need a will after my mom kills me.

PARKER: We need a plan.

VIOLA: What we need is practice and since you bagels have not been doing it all trimester it is now impossible for any of us to pass independent study.

BONNER: Like you've been practicing.

(Viola plays a section of the overture with facility.)

Can you say, "Suck up?"

VIOLA: Just because I dedicate myself to the tasks that I am assigned doesn't make me a brown noser.

(Bonner makes a KISSING noise.)

Kiss my bow.

PARKER: Guys—

BONNER: You're still going to fail like the rest of us.

PARKER: Come on now —

VIOLA: Not for lack of effort.

PARKER: We don't have time for this.

BONNER: That only counts in horseshoes, Viola.

PARKER: Are we gonna have a pity party or figure out how to get in front of this train?

TIFFANY: We could repeat it in first summer session.

(Everyone throws music.)

I'm just trying to help.

JESSICA: Do me a turn, Tiff, and don't help.

ELLIOTT: I'm cleaning pools for car money this summer.

BENEATHA: Get real, Elliott; do you actually believe your folks will co-sign for a car when you've got a fat F on your year end report?

PARKER: Nobody's flunking a stupid one-credit independent study band course.

VIOLA: So what do you propose?

(Beat.)

PARKER: Milli Vanilli.

THOMAS: What's ice cream got to do with this?

ARMSTEAD: They were a duo of freaky German blokes who got caught lip syncing songs.

THOMAS: Everybody does that.

BONNER: Not back in the day.

THOMAS: So they were some kind of music pioneers?

BENEATHA: Except that they sort of didn't actually sing the songs themselves.

JEAN: And it didn't come out till after they won the Grammy.

PARKER: Could we stay on topic people?

TIFFANY: What were we on about?

ELLIOT: Milli Vanilli, right? So?

VIOLA: Please tell me you're not serious.

PARKER: Anybody have a better idea?

THOMAS: I don't get it.

BENEATHA: No way we pull it off.

THOMAS: What?

PARKER: Why not?

BENEATHA: For one thing, she'll be able to tell that the sound is coming from speakers and not the stage.

SANTANA: Not necessarily.

THOMAS: What sound?

SANTANA: My cousin, Latimer, does audio work for theatres and he did a play about some old blues singer in the 1920s –

TIFFANY: We don't have all semester, Santana.

SANTANA: He has got special mini speakers that fit inside the instruments and broadcast the sound wirelessly.

THOMAS: What are you guys talking about?

RANGEL: We're going to lip sync the William Tell Overture.

VIOLA: This is crazy.

PARKER: Why?

VIOLA: Why?

BONNER: It's a fair question, Viola, considering our predicament.

VIOLA: I can't believe you guys are even considering this.

ANTOINETTE: We have to do something.

VIOLA: This is cheating, people.

ARMSTEAD: Not if it works.

VIOLA: How could it possibly work?

PARKER: You can play the violin part.

VIOLA: Because I practiced.

PARKER: Exactly.

SANTANA: We probably couldn't mike the violin anyway.

TIFFANY: My part is easy.

(She bangs on the drum.)

SANTANA: If we get a mixing board we could even play the parts that we know.

ELLIOTT: Like the intro.

PARKER: Now you're talking.

JEAN: Could we somehow place the speakers on the stage?

ANTOINETTE: We could cover them over with cloth and sit on them like chairs.

PARKER: You have a devious mind, Antoinette. I love it!

VIOLA: You really think Miss Spears would believe for one second that we sound like the Philadelphia Orchestra?

PARKER: Of course not.

JESSICA: So what recording do we use?

PARKER: Ourselves.

VIOLA: We can't play the symphony, remember, genius?

PARKER: That's not entirely true.

THOMAS: If we could play it then we wouldn't be trying this Villi Manilli thing.

PARKER: It's the twenty-first century, people.

VIOLA: And?

PARKER: One word...Macintosh.

(Beat.)

BONNER: I need a few more words.

SANTANA: We can record each of the parts super slow in Finale, then we speed the tape up.

LIONEL: That would work?

SANTANA: We could even noodle the wrong notes electronically.

PARKER: Really?

SANTANA: Is pizza power food?

(Everyone is unsure.)

Like, heck yeah!

BONNER: Awesome!

VIOLA: This is insane.

PARKER: But possible.

BENEATHA: And necessary.

TIFFANY: Crazier things have gone right...on occasion.

ELLIOT: We're sitting on a definite F if we don't do something.

VIOLA: Guys, I would hate an F as much as anyone, more probably considering that it would completely kablooey any chance that I have of being valedictorian but this is more than just crazy, it runs counter to the very idea of education. I mean, we're here to learn, to grow, to prepare ourselves for the life that is to come. If we do something like this just for a grade then what's the use in studying for anything? We could trick and weasel our way through all of our classes, graduate with great grades and be as slow as a flock of stuffed ducks when we leave Filmore High.

PARKER: She can't even curse like a regular kid.

VIOLA: *(To the others:)* I know it's hard to face the consequence of our actions but we painted ourselves into this corner so maybe we should just practice as hard as we can with what time remains and hope for the best. The absolute worst that could happen is we fail a half credit course. Whatdaya say?

(Pause.)

PARKER: It's settled then?

SANTANA: I can maybe get my band buddy's garage for the session.

JESSICA: Maybe we could each bring something to eat.

ARMSTEAD: We have the whole of the weekend to pull it tight.

JEAN: We certainly cannot be in any worse shape come Monday.

RANGEL: Let's do it.

ARMSTEAD: Rangel spoke?

ELLIOT: I think she did.

LIONEL: She never speaks.

JEAN: Leave her alone, guys.

PARKER: Shall we?

(He puts his hand in the center like an athlete. Others join in one by one. Reluctantly, Viola joins in last.)

BENEATHA: To infinity and beyond!

(End Scene 1.)

SCENE 2

(A garage/practice room. The William Tell Overture is played very slowly on tuba. Lights reveal a room devastated by long hours of adolescent occupancy and musicians strewn everywhere.)

LATIMER: That's it.

PARKER: What do you mean, "That's it?"

LATIMER: The last one.

PARKER: Don't play with my head, Latimer.

LATIMER: We've finally recorded every instrument in the band playing their part.

ANTOINETTE: Hallelujah.

SANTANA: You the man, dude.

(Latimer and Santana execute a strange handshake complete with sound.)

LIONEL: *(Waking up:)* What? What did I miss?

JESSICA: We're done.

LATIMER: Not done done...

LIONEL: So what done?

PARKER: Listen. *(To Latimer:)* Maestro, if you please?

(Latimer hits a button and a cacophony of instruments plays the overture at varying tempos.)

ANTOINETTE: God help us.

LATIMER: All we need is the miracle of electronics... Observe.

(He plays buttons as if the digital recorder were an instrument.)

First I speed the lumbering tuba up to tempo.

(The tuba part changes.)

Then I adjust the violin.

VIOLA: Hey!

SANTANA: You were a tad fast and a smidge shrill.

VIOLA: At least I can play the thing.

PARKER: We're going to erase your track and let you go live anyway.

LATIMER: I sync each of the other instruments, alter a few of the most rad-awful notes, run the whole taco through a grater that catches the squeaks and bumps and...

PARKER: And?

(Latimer pushes the final buttons and the song plays recognizably.)

ELLIOTT: Is that us?

VIOLA: That's disgusting.

BENEATHA: That's beautiful.

RANGEL: That's hope.

VIOLA: Who needs musicians if you can take noise and fix it in a computer?

PARKER: The project is about making music and that's what we've done.

VIOLA: If you feel that way about it then tell Miss Spears and see what grade you get.

THOMAS: Are you insane?

PARKER: We're not going over all of that again. We agreed to do this concert this way. Everybody's in it together. We've got the music so we are going to practice the fingering, pass this gut and get on with our lives. I'm not going to be the next

Kenny G and ten years from now nobody will give a mocha frappe about how I got through this silly course.

VIOLA: That's all it is to you, Parker, isn't it?

PARKER: What?

VIOLA: A half credit, a grade. Something to get done.

PARKER: Very perceptive.

VIOLA: But if school is just grades and you cheat your way to a diploma then you're likely to leave here as dumb as when you came in.

PARKER: Did she just call me dumb?

VIOLA: *(To the others:)* I know you don't want to hear this but what about the crazy idea of learning, guys?

PARKER: I am many things...

ARMSTEAD: This is school, Viola; learning has nothing to do with it.

PARKER: I'm lazy...

VIOLA: Pathetic...

PARKER: A little conceited...

BONNER: They teach to the next test, learning just ain't part of the equation, Viola.

VIOLA: Isn't.

BONNER: Huh?

VIOLA: Point made.

PARKER: I may be devious...

TIFFANY: At graduation my mom is not going to ask how I passed this elective before she snaps the picture.

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