

Box-Office Break-In!

It's short, punchy and has a real twist in its tale

A One-Act Play by Cenarth Fox

Five non-specific gender roles

© Cenarth Fox 1989

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Synopsis

Rock music dominates the air-waves. Teenagers particularly love its often loud, aggressive presentation. This play takes place during a rock concert. In a huge auditorium, the latest hot property is entertaining thousands of frenzied fans. In the box-office [the play's setting] the promoters count their takings. This is an extra performance with cash-only tickets available. A small fortune has been handed over and cash attracts all sorts of people.

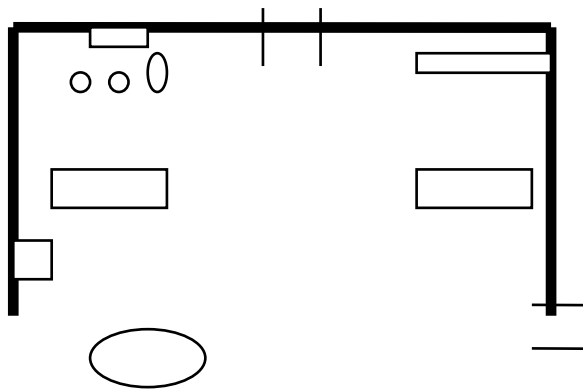
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Time

When loud rock music was popular. The present.

Stage Setting

The office of the entrepreneur. There's a settee and cocktail cabinet DR. It's modern, trendy, flash. At RC there's a work-station with computer, phone, fax, printer, etc. At LC there's a more basic desk. There's a low cupboard UL and a large safe UR. The safe is partly covered by indoor plants. The box-office is only partly seen. It's UC through the opening, the archway. There's a door DL. Large photos of successful performers line the walls. These are fictitious acts, perhaps photos of people in your group wearing outrageous costumes and make-up.



Characters

SILVER - extravagant, high-flying, show-business entrepreneur

TIDY - quiet, unassuming, office-worker

KEYNES - accountant, business-like

DULCET - fanatical, a leader

HEPPO - aggressive fanatic

All characters can be either male or female. Simply change the "him" and "he" to "she" and "her".

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THE PLAY

(As audience enters theatre, sound effects [FX] of rock music can be heard. The music fades as the curtain rises. TIDY and KEYNES are working hard counting cash - folding variety - and lots of it. KEYNES is at the work-station RC punching the computer, getting print-outs, etc. TIDY is counting and bundling notes at the desk LC. His work area is meticulous. SILVER sprawls across settee DR holding different notes up to the light, sniffing them and stuffing them into his pockets. SILVER is over the moon)

- Silver** *(Handling notes)* Beautiful! Beautiful! *(Kisses note and stuffs it into pocket)* A one for you and a one for me. *(Another note into another pocket)*
- Keynes** *(Still working but chides SILVER)* Will you stop that! Give everything to Tidy!
- Silver** *(Continues love-affair with money)* Whoever invented cash deserves a medal. No trace. *(Kisses another note before pocketing same)* No tax!
- Keynes** *(Annoyed)* No tax equals no freedom. The whole world knows about this concert - including the tax department!
- Tidy** *(Takes bundles of folded money to KEYNES)* That's the lot.
- Keynes** You haven't even started. *(Indicates boxes UL)* Over there.
(TIDY goes UL, shakes his head at all the money and takes a box back to his desk. He resumes counting, folding and putting rubber bands around the notes)
- Silver** The trouble with you, Keynes is you have no sense of adventure. There's no risk in your life, no danger.
- Keynes** *(Still working)* I have this strong dislike of prison.
- Silver** *(Hops up and moves UC)* Only risk-takers get ahead in this world, Keynes.
- Keynes** *(Pointing UL)* And leave that cash alone! *(Resumes work)*
- Silver** That's the beauty of cash. It's a no-risk venture. It's untraceable.
- Keynes** It is traceable. Back to me!
- Silver** It's your philosophy, Keynes. You need a change in attitude, a new motto. Take mine. *(Quoting)* There are only two certainties in life - death and no taxes. *(Laughs)*
- Keynes** *(Still working. Sarcastic)* Ha, ha. Very funny.
- Silver** *(Wanders behind KEYNES, looks at figures)* Your problem, Keynes, is you're too serious. Lighten up. Hang loose. Relax and ... *(Suddenly sees figures)* Mama mia! What is that?
- Keynes** They're pre-tax figures. Now go away.
- Silver** Pre-tax! Listen Cactus, I hired you to cut my tax. I'm not in business to feed the government.
- Keynes** *(Still working)* It's the law.
- Silver** *(Annoyed)* Stuff the law. I earned that money. I'm the one who's stuck his neck out. I'm the one who's taken risks. That money's mine.

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Keynes (*Looks at SILVER*) And I'm responsible for the balance sheet. If we're claiming deductions, they must be legal.

Silver Legal? What's legal? Laws are flexible, Keynes. They were made to bend. (*In close to KEYNES*) Start bending.

Keynes You sell the pop-corn, I'll run the country.

Silver (*Pats KEYNES*) That's more like it. Take control. Take liberties. Take the money and run. Now, what's the take so far?

Keynes (*Punching figures*) We'll top half a million.

Silver (*Delighted*) Half a million! (*Whoop of delight*)

Keynes And still counting.

Silver (*Goes to boxes UL*) I love it. (*Tossing notes into the air*) I love it! (*Notes drift down like confetti over SILVER. KEYNES looks around and is furious. SILVER sings a line or two such as "We're in the money" or "Money makes the world go round". TIDY hops up and tidies the money*)

Keynes Hey! Stop it! Silver! (*SILVER keeps on singing*) Silver!

Silver (*Stops singing and heads back to settee*) Money is definitely in. It's flavour of the month ... every month! (*Flops on settee*) It gets you fame, style, luxury, wealth, prestige, honour, importance, ego, class, priority ... the lot.

Keynes And a tax bill. (*TIDY finishes tidying and returns to counting*)

Silver No more tax jokes, Keynes. Tax is for losers. Just invent the schemes to help me evade tax.

Keynes It's *avoid* not evade.

Silver Preferably zero. Come up with the schemes, friend or we part company.

Keynes You're the one with the schemes.

Silver I am. I am. The money machine. (*Goes to cabinet and pours a drink*) Only a genius makes a mint outa music today. Every kid on the block's got a guitar. Twang, twang, twang. But where's the star? (*Raises glass*) To the genius who makes the stars. Me! (*Drinks*)

Keynes (*To TIDY*) Give me your cash.
(*TIDY takes bundles to KEYNES. TIDY returns to his desk*)

Silver How's it feel, Tidy, handling all that cash? Bet you're tempted to pinch a note or two?

Keynes Leave him alone.

Silver He wouldn't be human if he didn't think about it.

Keynes He's honest, like me. That's why you hired us, remember?

Silver (*Crossing to TIDY*) Oh I remember. Faithful employees. Never late, no private phone calls, work through your lunch-break.

Keynes What lunch-break?

Silver (*Slams desk*) But honesty sucks. I pay you, Keynes, to make my millions stay millions.

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Keynes You might make millions, Silver. You sure as hell don't pay millions.
Silver Ah but it's the thrill, the excitement. You're working for a magnificent entrepreneur.

Keynes Who pays peanuts.
Silver Just watching how I manipulate the trends, turn a talentless twit into a money-making machine. That's gotta be worth thousands.

Keynes *(Still working)* I'd rather have the money.
Silver Whoever invented the teenager deserves a medal. They're an entrepreneur's dream. They think they're smart when really they're sheep, following the trends invented by clever dicks like me. Teenagers are fools. And we all know about a fool and his money. Here's to the two-legged piggy-banks. *(Raises glass)* Teenagers. *(He drinks)*

Keynes One day they'll twig to your phoney promotion.
Silver Never!

Keynes One day a generation of teenagers'll come along who aren't slaves to fashion and social trends. They'll see right through you.
Silver Impossible. Teenagers are addicts. They hit puberty and shoot-up on sex. They're hooked. All you do is link rock 'n roll with sex. The money flows.

Keynes It does indeed. *(Studies figures)* You're going to top a million.
Silver *(Celebrating)* Eee ah! You little beauty!
Keynes *(To TIDY)* Put this lot in the safe.
(TIDY moves to KEYNES, takes bundles of notes and places them in the safe UR)

Silver *(Serious)* Okay, this is serious.
Keynes You said I was too serious.
Silver You can never be too serious about money. Listen. I'm not paying tax on any of this.

Keynes You've gotta be joking.
Silver Find a scheme, invent a scheme but let me keep the lot.
Keynes Oh yeah. And who's going to visit me in jail?
Silver You're not going to jail. None of us will go to jail.
Tidy I've finished. Now what?
Keynes Do the rest over there.
(Indicates boxes UR. TIDY collects them, returns to his desk and continues counting)

Silver There'll be a bonus in it.
Keynes *(Sarcastic)* Oh, thank you, gracious master. I hardly know what to say.
Silver You too, Tidy. There's a drink in this for both of you.
Keynes A drink! Did you hear that, Tidy? Our billionaire boss has promised us a drink. No wonder we love working here.

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Silver And another thing, Keynes. Don't give up your day job. You'll never be a comic.

Keynes Well coming from the world's greatest talent-scout, I know when I'm beat.
(FX: Knocking on door)

Silver *(Heading upstage)* Damn. I told you to close the window.

Keynes He told you to close the window, Tidy.

Tidy I did close the window.

Keynes He did close the window.

Silver *(Re-enters UC)* The window's closed.
(FX: Knocking on door)

Keynes They're knocking on the door. Out there. *(Pointing DL)*

Silver Who is?

Keynes How would I know?

Silver Well are we expecting anyone?

Tidy Cash truck's due in an hour.

Silver *(To TIDY)* Call Security. *(TIDY picks up phone)*

Keynes Security! It's some kids wanting a ticket.

Silver *(Louder)* Go away. We've sold out!
(FX: Knocking sound again even more insistent)

Silver *(To TIDY)* Tidy, see who it is.
(TIDY replaces phone, moves DL, peers through peep-hole in door)

Tidy Can't see anyone.

Keynes It has to be kids. Just ignore 'em, they'll go away.

Silver *(To TIDY. Insistent)* Ring Security.
(TIDY moves back to phone on his desk. FX: Knocking noise heard again)

Keynes We're locked in, Silver. Your money's safe.

Silver *(To TIDY)* Get Security down here, pronto! *(TIDY punches digits and listens. SILVER impatient)* Come on, come on.

Tidy *(Covers mouthpiece)* No answer. I can't get through.
(SILVER moves quickly upstage in a nervous, agitated manner)

Silver What do y'mean? It's an internal line. *(Grabs phone)* Hello. Hello. Security. *(Slams down receiver)* Damn!
(FX: Knocking sound heard again)

Tidy What'll we do?

Silver Call the cops!

Keynes The cops! Are you mad? It's a bunch of kids!

Silver We're sitting on a fortune in cash, security's dead and some loony's trying to break in. *(Snaps at TIDY)* Call the cops. Fast!
(TIDY grabs phone, dials but has trouble. KEYNES suddenly hops up, strides to door DL. KEYNES wants to settle it once and for all)

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Keynes This is ridiculous. I'll tell 'em to get lost.
(KEYNES starts to unlock door. SILVER panics and attacks KEYNES)

Silver No!
(SILVER and KEYNES struggle. TIDY turns and calls to them)

Tidy It's dead! The phone's been cut!
(Instantly KEYNES and SILVER stop fighting. Pause. Silence. FX: Suddenly loud knocking heard again. All three are uncertain. The combatants disentangle themselves. Pause)

Keynes I still think it's kids.
Silver Yeah, with sawn-off shotguns.
(The mention of the guns frightens TIDY who drops the phone. The noise startles the other two. Pause. Suddenly SILVER takes control. TIDY replaces phone, places a chair against the door and checks the locks/bolts. KEYNES scoops up boxes of money and takes it UR where SILVER stuffs money inside. KEYNES continues fetching the cash. With the door secure, TIDY helps KEYNES. All three are at the safe when suddenly a voice calls from off-stage)

Dulcet (Offstage DL) Open the door! We know you're in there!
Silver Keep barricading the door. And put the money in the safe. Move!
Heppo (Off-stage DL) If you don't let us in, we start shooting!
(TRIO in office freeze. They are really scared)

Silver Kids hey?
Dulcet We have disconnected your phone and taken the security guards prisoner. If you do not open the door in ten seconds, it will be demolished. Is that clear? Ten seconds.
(Pause. TRIO frozen in panic. KEYNES first to react)

Keynes (Moving to door) Okay, we heard you. Don't shoot!
Silver (Distressed about the money) No! Wait! (Stuffs money into safe, money spills free and TIDY, as usual, bends and collects same offering pathetic amounts to the desperate SILVER)

Keynes (Unlocking/unbolting door) Don't shoot! I'm unlocking the door. Don't shoot!

(KEYNES unlocks final lock and drags chair away. KEYNES falls back centre. Pause. Suddenly door is kicked open. TRIO in office face door and freeze. Pause. Suddenly two masked people burst into the room. They carry guns. TRIO raise their hands and notes drift from the hands of a terrified SILVER. Intruders are dressed in black with balaclavas covering all but their eyes and lips. Each wears a backpack. DULCET moves UC and covers the TRIO while HEPPO moves around checking to see no-one else is present. KEYNES is pushed towards the safe and cowers with the others. Satisfied, HEPPO nods to DULCET who beckons towards the settee DR. The TRIO move slowly and in fear. They sit. HEPPO closes and bolts the door then moves RC behind the settee. DULCET moves DL)

Keynes Please don't shoot. We won't do anything. Please.
Silver You've got the wrong place. This isn't a bank.

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(HEPPO moves to safe, reaches in and produces a handful of notes. These are held at the despairing SILVER then lightly tossed in the air. SILVER starts to move to save the precious loot)

Dulcet *(Barks an order)* Freeze! *(SILVER does just that)* Your next move'll be your last.

Silver *(Scared, nervous)* Sorry, sorry. *(Suddenly blubbers like a child)* Oh please don't take my money. Please! It's cash and I'm not insured!

Dulcet *(Not moved)* Shut up! *(DULCET moves C to mime conversation with HEPPO SILVER just keeps on blubbing)*

Silver It's all I've got. Please. It's my only tax-free money this year. Please

Dulcet *(Stops talking to HEPPO and turns on SILVER)* I said "Shut up!".
(DULCET'S command is so strong that SILVER is silenced and reduced to a whimpering wreck. TIDY tries to comfort SILVER who'll have none of it. He's in a huff. DULCET leaves HEPPO and moves back DL)

Dulcet Pay attention. *(SILVER whimpers and is prodded by KEYNES)* Both of us are carrying explosives. *(TRIO shocked. DULCET indicates their back-packs)* The explosion will be minor and no-one'll get hurt if you do as I say.

Keynes But the safe's open. You don't need explosives. Just help yourself.

Silver *(Furious, turns on KEYNES)* No! You idiot! That's my money!
(SILVER continues abusing and slapping the helpless KEYNES who covers up. TIDY tries to stop SILVER. The fight continues ad lib with HEPPO calling for them to stop)

Heppo Stop! Stop it! *(Continues)*
(HEPPO'S calls and the TRIO'S fight sounds mingle and build to a climax. Suddenly DULCET aims his gun at the ceiling and fires. FX: Sound of gun. The noise is loud and scares the life out of TRIO who stop in fear and look terrified. Pause. DULCET and HEPPO are calm)

Dulcet Next time I aim lower. Much lower. *(TRIO scared)* I mean it.

Heppo Tell 'em about the explosives. *(TRIO stunned)*

Dulcet Sit still. Behave and you live. *(To HEPPO)* Set the explosives.
(TRIO whisper "Explosives" and look petrified. DULCET hands his pack to HEPPO who takes it and his own pack UC. HEPPO leaves the packs on the bench and starts looking along the UR wall. He lifts photos/paintings and looks behind them but without success)

Dulcet *(Impatient)* Come on, come on. We haven't got all day.
(HEPPO continues looking along the wall RC again without success. He stops next to safe)

Heppo *(Shrugs to an impatient DULCET)* Nothing. Can't find it.

Dulcet *(Angry at TRIO)* All right, where is it?

Silver *(Still nervous)* Where's what?

Dulcet *(Close to breaking point)* Don't waste my time! Where is it?

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Keynes *(Wanting to stay alive)* It's open. *(Indicates with nod of head)* The safe's already open!

Heppo *(Angry in behind TRIO)* We know that, you idiot!

Dulcet What do you think we are - morons? Just tell us where it is.

Tidy *(Tiny, frightened voice)* Please, we don't know what you mean?

Dulcet *(Suddenly calmer, signals to HEPPPO)* Easy, easy. *(Pause. Tension eases. DULCET, less aggressive wanders UC)* Now let's cut the baloney. Everything was explained in our letter.

Silver *(Genuinely confused)* What letter?

Heppo *(Crazy again, shouts and threatens)* We sent three letters!

Dulcet *(Grabbing HEPPPO and pulling him back UC)* Hey, easy. Easy. *(Pause. HEPPPO fumes)*

Heppo *(To DULCET)* They're lying. We sent three letters. All addressed to *Showtime Promotions*. *(TRIO all spin round and look upstage as one)*

Trio We're *BIG Time Promotions*.

Heppo *(Stunned)* What!?

Dulcet *(A little thrown, moves DC)* *BIG Time Promotions*?

Silver Yeah, *Show Time*'s a crummy outfit the other side of town. No style, no class. *(Pause. DULCET looks at TRIO then at a sheepish HEPPPO)*

Dulcet You idiot!

Silver Look, we can work something out. I'll tell you how to find *Show Time* and we won't tell anyone you were here. Okay?

Heppo *(Angry)* Stop telling us what to do! *We're* in charge.

Keynes *(Wants to save his own skin)* Of course you are. But look, you've got the wrong address. Please, if you don't harm us, I promise we won't say a thing.

Dulcet Does *Show Time* stage rock concerts.

Silver *(Scoffs)* Nah! They're nothing. I'm the only promoter of rock music in town.

Dulcet Then we're in the right place. *(TRIO stunned)*

Trio What!?

Keynes But you said you wanted *Show Time*.

Tidy And we're *BIG Time*.

Dulcet Simple mistake. All right? *(Glares at angry HEPPPO)* Made by a simple idiot. *(Back to TRIO)* Oh no, this is the right place. The rock music specialist.

Silver *(Wants to agree but is hesitant)* That's me.

Dulcet Our letters were demands. Threats.

Trio *(Scared)* Threats!

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Heppo Which you refused to obey!
Silver How could we? You sent the letters to the wrong address.
Dulcet We accept that. But I doubt if you'd have followed our orders.
Keynes I always follow orders.
Tidy Me too!
Silver We'll follow them now. We'll do anything! Please, take some of the money and leave.
Heppo *(Annoyed at TRIO's ignorance.)* We don't want your money! We want power!
Silver Fine, no problem. I'll vote for you. I'll doorknock, lick envelopes, make a donation. What's your party? How much do you want?
Dulcet Not political power. Electrical power.
(TRIO stunned. What do crazies want? HEPPO is growing impatient)
Heppo So I'll ask you again. Where's the fuse-box?
Trio *(Sitting up in fear)* Fuse-box!
Dulcet You've got ten seconds. Show us the fuse-box or we get really mad.
(DULCET waves gun and TRIO are scared. Suddenly SILVER falls on his knees and begs DULCET)
Silver *(Grovels)* Oh please don't shoot. Please, I'm begging. Take the money. It's cash. Take nearly all of it. Better still, take my car. *(Produces car-keys and tosses them to DULCET who catches them and throws them aside.)* It's a Jag. Only done fifteen K. Oh and here, my credit cards. Please, take them. All of them. *(SILVER offers container of plastic credit cards. The wallet flips open revealing at least a dozen. These are offered, taken by DULCET and like the keys, scornfully tossed aside.)* And there's my house, my holiday house, my dogs, all pure-breed, my boat, my paintings, my ...
Dulcet Shut up.
Silver *(Beg, beg, begging)* I've got some fabulous paintings. There's a fake Van Gogh no-one knows about. They think it's real. You'll make heaps. Please, please, take everything ... *(Starts to sob)* but don't hurt me.
Heppo If you don't shut up we'll set the explosives in your underpants!
(SILVER suddenly recovers but still whimpers a bit)
Silver You mean, you might let me live?
Dulcet If you co-operate!
Silver *(Crawls to nearest raider and kisses their feet)* Oh thank you, thank you. I knew you were kind robbers. I knew you had a heart.
(SILVER is half-kicked and threatened by both robbers. SILVER crawls back to the settee. HEPPO and DULCET are running out of patience)
Dulcet This is your last chance. Where's the fuse-box?
Tidy It's over ...

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Silver *(Suddenly spins round and threatens his staff)* Don't tell them! One word and you're fired!

Dulcet *(Bending towards SILVER)* One word or you're fired - upon!
(SILVER turns to see DULCET'S gun pointed at him. SILVER gulps)

Silver You wouldn't. You just said ...

Dulcet Try me.

(Tense pause. SILVER looks from DULCET to HEPPPO. Both are desperate and are totally prepared to shoot. Finally SILVER cracks. He points LC, speaks, then slumps back on the settee)

Silver Over there.

(SILVER climbs back onto settee and quietly sobs again. DULCET and HEPPPO move to wall LC and open out a painting hinged to the wall. The painting opens upstage and we see the fuse-box mounted in the wall. DULCET keeps an eye on the TRIO but none struggles being resigned to defeat)

Dulcet *(To the busy HEPPPO)* Hurry. Set the explosives.
(HEPPPO places explosives [timer and wires are obvious] on fuse-box. This takes a few seconds. DULCET wanders DC and speaks to the TRIO)

Dulcet I suppose you're wondering who we are.

Silver *(Sobbing)* I don't wanna die. I'm a genius. I'm going to be the first rock billionaire. *(More heartache)*

Keynes You're very smart thieves. *(Indicating safe)* This is undetectable cash! Used notes. It can never be traced.

Dulcet You don't understand. We're not thieves. We're from CALM.

Silver *(Almost delirious)* This isn't in my horoscope. It's not happening.

Dulcet CALM stands for Citizens Against Loud Music.

Keynes That's very good. Very clever. And explosives are calm I suppose?

Dulcet We object to the soundwaves being hijacked by loud, raucous music.

Silver Please don't kill me! *(Suddenly stops sobbing and becomes indignant)* Raucous! How dare you! That's a slur on my good name. *(TIDY tugs at SILVER's sleeve who shrugs away and continues to attack)* Just because we play with a bit of volume doesn't mean our music is raucous. *(TIDY has continued to tug at SILVER's sleeve. SILVER is now just as angry with TIDY as with DULCET)* Oh for heaven's sake, what is it?

(TIDY cups a hand and whispers in SILVER's ear. We see SILVER'S angry face turn to an expression of shock and horror)

Silver *(Whispers in fear)* Blow the fuse-box! *(Suddenly loud at DULCET)* Blow the fuse-box!

(SILVER starts to rise but DULCET threatens with the gun)

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Dulcet Don't move! Stay exactly where you are!

Silver *(Begging)* Oh no, not the fuse-box. Please. Anything but the fuse-box.

Heppo *(From fuse-box)* The explosives are almost set.

Dulcet *(To TRIO)* Right, everyone on the floor.

Trio *(Stunned, horrified)* What?!

Dulcet That's if you wanna live!
(SILVER kneels in front of settee and TIDY and KEYNES do likewise. SILVER eventually crawls to DR side of settee for extra protection)

Silver You're making a terrible mistake.

Keynes Cash is cash. Take it all!

Dulcet I told you. We don't want money. We want pollution-free airwaves!

Tidy *(Sotto voce)* They're nuts!

Dulcet Free from deafening decibels perpetrated by monsters ... *(Points at them)* like you!

Silver Monsters! We're keeping millions of teenagers off the streets!

Dulcet And destroying the ear-drums of a nation!

Silver *(Pleading)* Please let us go. We won't grass. Honest.

Dulcet Nobody leaves. *(TRIO desperate and groan with concern)*

Keynes I can show you heaps of tax scams.

Silver *(Momentarily side-tracked)* You said you didn't know any.

Heppo *(Finishes working)* It's set.

Dulcet *(Checking watch. [FX] Ticking of clock a la time-bomb)* You've got ten seconds. Take cover.
(DULCET & HEPPPO move rapidly RC and take cover behind KEYNES' desk. Suddenly SILVER stands and starts to head for the door DL)

Silver *(Drawn-out cry of panic)* Noooooo!
(KEYNES and TIDY hop up, go after SILVER, grab him and drag their protesting boss back DR behind the settee. SILVER protests - "Let me go!" etc and DULCET and HEPPPO half stand and cry "Get down!" etc. Finally everyone takes cover. Pause. DULCET calls the count-down)

Dulcet Four, three, two, one ...
(Nothing. Pause. The RAIDERS are the first to rise. The TRIO are flat on the floor fearing the worst)

Heppo It didn't go off.

Dulcet Check it.

Heppo *(Afraid)* No. It might go off. *(Indicates TRIO)* Use one of them.

Dulcet Good thinking. *(To TIDY)* You. Get up.

Silver What happened to the bang?

Heppo It's coming.

Dulcet Get over there and read the timer.

Tidy *(Frightened)* Me? I can't. I don't understand.

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Heppo *(Screams)* Just do it!

Keynes That's murder. If that goes off he'll be killed.

Dulcet *(Brandishing gun)* If he doesn't get up, this gun'll go off. Take your pick.

Tidy *(Rises slowly)* Okay, okay. Don't shoot.

Heppo Smart move, friend. Now move!
(TIDY moves to explosives. OTHERS take cover)

Dulcet Look at the clock. What does it say?

Tidy *(Studying explosives)* It's ticking.

Silver It's ticking! Get down!
(TIDY hits the floor. Pause. Nothing. BANDITS are furious)

Heppo Of course it's ticking. It's a bomb!

Dulcet Stand up and read the timer.
(Gingerly TIDY rises and again studies the explosives)

Heppo I set it for ten seconds.

Tidy It says ten minutes.

Dulcet *(Angry)* What!?! *(Strides to wall)* Out of the way! *(TIDY pushed aside. DULCET studies timer then turns back to HEPPPO)* You set it for ten minutes!

Heppo *(Sheepish)* Sorry. *(Turns on TRIO)* It's their fault! They made me do it!

Dulcet *(To TRIO)* Right, everyone up and sit. *(TRIO rise/move to settee and sit)* We have a few minutes to kill. No big deal. Just sit tight. *(To HEPPPO)* Check the door.
(HEPPPO moves to door DL, checks to see it is locked and bolt is drawn)

Silver What's happening?

Dulcet Nothing. Yet.

Keynes Can't we talk this out? Can't you just take the money and go?

Dulcet When will you learn? We don't want money. We want a return to peace and quiet. We want the removal of rock.

Silver You can't be serious. Rock music is a part of our culture, the world's culture!

Heppo *(Moving back)* Door's secure.

Dulcet Every movement's gotta start somewhere. Our push for silence starts here.

Keynes With a bang.

Heppo Don't get smart.

Dulcet There'll come a time when the world will thank us. *You'll* thank us. What we're doing is right.

Silver If you blow that fuse-box, you'll have ten thousand screaming fans hammering on that door. You call that silence?

Heppo Eight minutes to go.

Box-Office Break-In! 14

Dulcet You're all part of history. People will look back on this day as the beginning of silence. Order has triumphed over disorder. Soft over loud.

Heppo Peace over war.

Silver *(Despairing)* I don't want to die.

Keynes It won't work. Even if you manage to cut the power here, the emergency generator automatically takes over.

Dulcet That's if the back-up generator hasn't been sabotaged already.

Trio *(Stunned)* What!?

Heppo We're not idiots, you know. We're professionals.

Tidy *(Under breath)* Except when it comes to setting timers.

Heppo *(Angry)* What did you say?

Dulcet Leave them.

Silver You realise what'll happen if you cut the power?

Dulcet Indeed. There'll be calm. A beautiful, tranquil sound of silence will once more fill the airwaves.

Heppo We'll hear birds singing, the breeze beckoning, children laughing, soft, gentle non-amplified sounds.

Keynes Oh no you won't.

Silver You cut the power and ten thousand fans'll riot. They paid for volume. They measure the show by the number of decibels. If their ears aren't bleeding, it's a rip-off. You cut their power and they'll want blood. *Your* blood.

Heppo You can't frighten us.

Keynes It's true.

Dulcet We don't care. We're prepared to die for the cause.

Silver Well at least let *us* go. We're not greedy. We'll just take the cash and leave you two as martyrs. That's fair. You can have the fame all to yourselves. Forever. *(It's not working and SILVER is desperate)* Aw, come on. Please.

Dulcet Nobody leaves. *(TRIO groan with despair)*

Silver *(Back to sobbing)* But I don't wanna die.

Keynes You won't die. You'll just go bankrupt.

Silver *(Mortified)* Bankrupt? *(Distressed)* Oh that's it. Bankrupt is worse than dead. I have to die. *(Rises)* Shoot me. Shoot me now! *(RAIDERS are nervous and threaten SILVER)*

Heppo Cool it!

Keynes Silver, sit down!

Silver If rock music is dead, I'm dead. You kill my music, you might as well kill me.

Box-Office Break-In! 15

Dulcet Sit down. Now!
(TIDY and KEYNES grab SILVER pulling him back onto the settee)

Silver *(Sits and sobs)* Not bankrupt. No. No!

Keynes *(Angry at RAIDERS)* You fanatics are all the same. The end justifies the means. You don't care if you hurt innocent people along the way.

Dulcet Innocent? *(To SILVER)* He's a cheat, a liar and a fraud. And they're his good points.

Tidy *(Defending the boss)* Yeah, but at least he's honest about it.

Heppo *(Sarcastic)* Oh I like that. An honest crook.

(Pause. Suddenly SILVER leaps to his feet and, calling loudly, makes a dash for the door DL)

Silver *(En route DL)* Let me out! I'm gonna escape! Help!

Dulcet *(Screams at HEPPPO)* Stop him!
(HEPPPO takes off after SILVER. TIDY and KEYNES are worried. DULCET quickly covers them)

Dulcet Nobody move.

Heppo *(Grabs SILVER at door)* Hold it!

Silver *(Struggles in vain)* I have to escape. Let me out!

Heppo *(Threatens)* Stop or I shoot.

Tidy Boss!
(SILVER gives up and collapses DL in a heap. He's distraught. HEPPPO towers over him)

Silver *(Sobs)* I don't wanna die.

Dulcet Bring him back.

Heppo *(To DULCET)* Let me have a little "chat" with him.

Dulcet No. We're against violence.

Heppo No violence. Just a friendly chat. I'll make him a convert to CALM.

Dulcet All right. But hurry. *(To OTHERS)* And don't you two try anything.

Heppo *(In close to SILVER)* Right, Sunshine, let's have a chat.

Silver *(Still sobbing)* Please, I don't wanna die.

Heppo *(Suddenly bends and whispers to SILVER)* Shut up and listen. Listen!

Dulcet What's happening?

Heppo *(To DULCET)* Nothing. Just whispering in a calm voice.

Dulcet Don't let him escape.

Heppo No worries. Why don't you give them a screed on CALM?

Dulcet Good idea. *(Produces papers from pocket)* Here, read about CALM.

(DULCET tosses papers to TIDY and KEYNES who take them reluctantly and read)

Box-Office Break-In! 16

Heppo (Back whispering to SILVER) Now shut up and listen. I'm a mole.
Silver (Still distraught) Don't shoot!
Heppo (Angry. Spits it out) I said I'm a mole!
Silver I don't care if you're Pole, a Mexican or from outback Australia.
Heppo (Angry whisper) Mole! Mole! I'm a double-agent.
Silver (Snaps out his despair) What?
Dulcet (Calls to HEPPPO) What's he saying?
Heppo (To DULCET) Good news, comrade. I think he's coming round.
Tidy (Indicates screed) What's this mean?
Dulcet (Distracted, moves to TIDY) What? (DULCET mimes explanation)
Heppo (Back whispering to SILVER) Listen you fool. I work for the rock industry.
Silver (Staggered) What?!
Heppo (Suddenly loud voice) That's right. CALM is the answer. (Suddenly softer) You know Harry Smith from *Unbelievable Records*?
Silver Harry? Of course.
Heppo I'm working for him. I've infiltrated CALM. I report back to the music industry.
Silver I don't believe ... I mean, that's fantastic.
Heppo (Louder again) So do you understand CALM? (Whispers) Say "yes".
Silver (Needs to be prodded) Oh yes. (Louder) Yes.
Heppo (Whispers) Play along. Pretend you've been converted.
Dulcet (To HEPPPO) Get him back here.
Heppo (To DULCET) Right, comrade. (Loud to SILVER) Come on, get up. (HEPPPO helps SILVER giving him a wink. SILVER nods agreement)
Silver Okay. I'll come quietly.
Dulcet Now the explosive is about to go. Everyone take cover. (SILVER joins TIDY and KEYNES and the three huddle on the settee)
Dulcet (To HEPPPO) Check the timer. (HEPPPO does so. To TRIO) Listen and listen well. The jelly is set to explode. The power will be cut and your lousy music will be dead. If you behave yourselves, you won't be hurt. Try anything funny and you're dead. Okay?
Heppo (From timer) Thirty seconds.
Dulcet Take cover. (Louder) All of you.

(TRIO take cover but SILVER is slow to move and has to be dragged by the other two. The RAIDERS move DL and shelter behind a chair. Pause. The tension mounts. FX Increase the ticking sound so that it becomes very loud - easily heard by the audience. Just as it reaches its loudest, HEPPPO speaks)

Heppo Here we go.

Box-Office Break-In! 17

(Bang. FX: A muffled explosion takes place. BLACKOUT. Eerie light from the moon through high-up windows. The painting by the fuse-box sways open. It's a tiny bang. Bits of plaster/powder float down. The RAIDERS are soon up and inspecting the damage. They're delighted)

Dulcet Congratulations, comrade.
Heppo And you, comrade.
Silver *(Groaning)* We're dead. In two minutes they'll riot. Screaming teenagers! Ohhhh. *(Continues to mutter)*

Tidy *(Moving to his desk)* I've got a lamp over here.
Keynes I think we should lock the safe.
Silver Who cares about money. You can't take it with you.
Tidy Here it is.
(TIDY turns up battery-operated lamp which allows limited lighting to return. HEPPPO and DULCET are smug and delighted)

Heppo *(Patting DULCET on the back)* Brilliant, comrade, absolutely brilliant!
Keynes I thought we'd be able to hear the screaming by now!
Silver *(Despairing, collapses on settee)* I can. My head is filled with deafening screams. They want blood. *(Despairs to heavens)* Mine!

Dulcet You're all part of history. People will look back on this day as the beginning of civilisation. This is the new renaissance. Order has triumphed over disorder. Soft over loud.

Heppo Dispassionate over passionate.
Dulcet We're happy to die. Tranquillity triumphs over turbulence.
Silver *(Disgusted with their boasting)* Oh, shut up!
Keynes Why can't we hear anything?
Silver They say death destroys the senses.
Tidy I'll take a look.
Heppo *(Threatens with gun)* Stay where you are.
Dulcet Let them go. We've done our job.

(TIDY looks at DULCET then SILVER who gives a resigned wave meaning "Go". TIDY quickly exits DL. Pause. DULCET and HEPPPO continue their self-congratulations. SILVER and KEYNES continue to despair)

Dulcet Placid over turbulence.
Heppo Peace over war.
Dulcet Serenity over tumult.
Silver *(Turns sarcastic)* Yes, all right. You've won. Take your damn trophy and clear out.

Box-Office Break-In! 18

(HEPPO and DULCET look at one another. HEPPO goes towards SILVER to inflict some punishment but is stopped by DULCET)

Dulcet No Heppo. Remember, CALM people are calm. Come on.
(DULCET and HEPPO start to exit but are forced back at the door DL as TIDY bursts in puffing. HEPPO and DULCET move C as TIDY addresses everyone)

Tidy *(Puffing)* You won't believe this. It's ... it's fantastic!

Silver *(Alarmed)* They're coming! *(Desperate)* They're armed! Oh! *(Buries head and sobs)*

Tidy No! They still in the theatre!
(Shock waves. Pause. OTHERS stunned and stare at TIDY in disbelief)

Keynes Still in the theatre!

Silver They're not coming?

Dulcet What are they doing?

Tidy Listening to music.

Others What!?

Heppo What music?

Silver There's no power!

Tidy Music without power!

Silver But that's impossible.

Dulcet Acoustic music?

Silver What's that?

Keynes Music without amplification?

Tidy Exactly. You can hear all the words and the melody and ...

Heppo *(Stunned)* The words? You can hear the words?

Dulcet *(Excited)* The melody? You can hear the melody?

Tidy Easily

Silver What's melody?

Keynes But what about the kids? What about the riot?

Tidy There *is* no riot. The kids are still inside and I've never seen them like this.

Keynes Like what?

Tidy Quiet. They're deadly quiet.

Silver I don't believe it. Kids at a rock concert can't be quiet. It's impossible!

Tidy It's true. They think it's some new gimmick. Rock music you can hear and understand.

Dulcet This is wonderful.

Silver Understand? You can't understand rock music. It's a contradiction in terms.

Tidy This could be a whole new era of popular music.

Box-Office Break-In! 19

Heppo We said you'd be part of history.
Silver *(Scoffs)* Music without amplification isn't music.
Tidy See for yourself.
Silver *(Now up and excited)* Hey! Just a minute. It could ... It might ... Yeah! A new gimmick! The softer the better. Quiet is cool.

Keynes Silence is golden.
Silver Big bucks. Big, big bucks. *(To OTHERS)* We must patent it. Quick. Register these names. *(TIDY takes notes)* *Silent Rock.* *(SILVER is thinking aloud)* *Inaudible Chartbusters. Muffled Mayhem.*

Heppo *(Gets the idea)* How about *Gentle Gyration*s?
Silver *(Pleased with the contribution)* Yeah, that too.
Dulcet *(Also in on the act)* Or *Hushed Headbangers*?
(EVERYONE is excited. The CALM people have won their cause. The rock entrepreneurs think they've hit on a new gimmick to make money. Oh happy day!)

Silver Listen, I've gotta patent this stuff. I must get copyright on all these titles. *(Grabs pen and paper from TIDY)* Now tell me again. *(Writes)* *Silent Rock*

Keynes *Acoustic Heavy Metal.*
Silver *(Writing furiously)* *Acoustic ... Heavy ... Metal.*
Dulcet *Unamplified Acid.*
Silver *(Scribbling, delighted)* Oh that's fantastic.
Heppo *Hushed Headbangers.*
Silver *(Writing)* Hang on. ... *Acid. Hushed ... Headbangers.*

Tidy Why don't you get government approval?
Silver What?
Tidy If it's endorsed by the government, it'll become respectable.
Dulcet Brilliant. Excellent idea.
Silver *(Ridicules idea)* But the government doesn't make money.
Keynes And if it did you'd want me to find a way to get it back.
Dulcet Do you know some tax dodges?
Silver Do we know some tax dodges? *(Indicates KEYNES)* This accountant stroke genius has invented more schemes than you've had weird ideas.

Heppo Hey, CALM needs some schemes.
Silver Well, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours. Now, where were we?
Tidy How about *Symphonic Chartbusters*?
Silver *(Writing)* Now that is brilliant. ... *Chartbusters.*
Dulcet If this new acoustic rock takes off, you'll put CALM out of business.
Heppo Don't forget our supermarket deal.
Keynes What's that?
Heppo We're against background music in shops, stores, lifts, escalators etc.

Box-Office Break-In! 20

Silver That's not loud.
Dulcet Yes but it's an infringement of an individual's right - the right of not having to listen.
Heppo No-one listens anyway. They hear it, they sure don't listen.
Silver You're against background music?
Dulcet If you have no choice but to hear it, yes.
Keynes You *are* mad.
Silver No, no, no. So what do you replace background music with?
Heppo Silence.
Trio Silence!?
Dulcet Natural sounds. People talking, laughing. Birds singing, waterfalls falling, the wind.
Tidy Supermarkets don't have waterfalls!
Keynes What, parrots doing their business in the fruit and vegie section?
Heppo Remove the tapes, the mechanical disc-jockeys and their mindless music. Build a space for birds, waterfalls, trees, ferns, flowers, bees.
Keynes You want a zoo and a forest in a department store?
Heppo Why not? Put nature back on top. The greatest sounds are the natural sounds.
Silver Brilliant. What a gimmick. What a goldmine.
Dulcet People have been told they must have background music. It's been forced on them. They have no choice. Buy, buy, buy. It's commercialism gone mad. Bring back nature. Bring back peaceful, unhurried, gentle, natural things. The customers relax. There's no pressure. No hard sell. They want to go shopping.
Silver *(More excited)* They want to spend.
Heppo Exactly.
Silver This is unbelievable. You've given me the chance to make a fortune. These ideas'll sweep the nation, the world!
Keynes They're not your ideas.
Silver *(To ROBBERS)* Have you patented them yet?
Dulcet I'm not sure you can patent ideas.
Heppo And besides, we're not interested in making money.
Silver Oh, that's disgusting.
Dulcet We're interested in changing the world. We don't care how it happens so long as it happens.
Keynes So you'd let Silver here race off and make a mint out of your ideas?
Heppo The money's immaterial. It's the results that count.

Box-Office Break-In! 21

Silver Look, we've got to sort this out. I'm prepared to do anything to get the rights to your ideas - the soft rock, sounds of nature, etcetera. All I want ... *(Stops suddenly)* You haven't got any more ideas, have you?

Dulcet Heaps.

Heppo But they're only for members of CALM.

Silver I'll join. *(Offers money)* Where do I sign? How much?

Dulcet Nothing.

Silver Nothing! You can't charge nothing. It's obscene.

Heppo We require a pledge to all that's natural and peaceful.

Silver Well I support that.

Heppo Without commerce. The cause is our only motivation.

Silver No commerce? No cash?

Dulcet Exactly.

Silver But where's the challenge? Where's the thrill of the chase? The danger? The financial killing?

Dulcet The thrill's in discovering the meaning of life.

Keynes What's that mean in English?

Silver What's it worth?

Dulcet *(Amused)* And you reckon we're fanatics.

Tidy You'd better get going, boss, if you want to register those patents.

Silver You're right. Good thinking. *(Starts to leave)* I'll slip out the back.

Heppo *(Runs to block his path)* Hold it! Nobody leaves.

Silver But why? You've made your point. The power's cut. What more do you want?

Dulcet You leave when we say.

Keynes Oh, so you want real power after all.

Dulcet Maybe we should think about those ideas. Maybe if we obtained the copyright on *acoustic heavy metal*, we could make some money.

Heppo *(Catching the bug)* Yeah. And with that money we could build waterfalls in supermarkets.

Silver *(Despairs, angry)* No! I'm the entrepreneur. I'm the capitalist.

Dulcet Maybe we've got it wrong. Maybe we should be aggressive.

Heppo Exactly. Let's keep our ideas and sell them for profit.

Silver *(Admits defeat)* Okay, fair enough. You win.

Tidy *(Stunned)* What?!

Keynes I don't believe I heard that.

Silver Look, they thought of them, it's their work. They deserve the spoils. *(Offers hand to DULCET)* And all I can say is good luck. *(They shake hands)*

Dulcet Thanks. *(SILVER pushes DULCET who falls over)* Hey!

Silver *(Racing to door DL)* Stop them, Keynes. Stop them!

Box-Office Break-In! 22

Heppo Come back!
Dulcet Get him!

(At the door, SILVER struggles to open it. HEPPPO grapples with him. HEPPPO suddenly drops his gun and clutches his face. He wasn't really hit but pretends he was, falling to the floor. This allows SILVER to get the door unlocked. DULCET is furious)

Dulcet Stop or I'll shoot!

(SILVER opens the door but freezes. He doesn't want to be shot)

Silver You'll have to shoot. I want to get those ideas registered in my name.

Dulcet Don't push your luck.

Silver I'm going to walk out this door.

Dulcet Move and you're dead!

Keynes No, Silver!

Tidy Don't, boss!

(Pause. SILVER inches towards door. DULCET levels his gun. Just as he's about to shoot, HEPPPO leaps to his feet, as if in a trance. HEPPPO'S between DULCET and the door)

Heppo I'll get him!

PREVIEW ENDS

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Dead in the Morning

Another one-act play by Cenarth Fox

The play went very well ... everyone who saw it thought it was wonderful"

Judi Munro, Texas USA

It's a wet and cold winter's night in the small village pub. The locals gather for the company, a stiff drink and the open fire. The landlord is a surly, middle-aged grump with an attractive younger wife. She has trouble with the language. There's a middle-aged married couple from the local university. Their sarcastic comments towards each other are razor sharp. Then there are the two elderly spinster sisters. One's a wag and enjoys a tippie. Her sister is much more quiet and has "just the one".

Buck is just that. A young buck. He'll play darts with anyone and chat with the publican's wife. Despite the weather and sarcastic undercurrent, things are okay until a stranger arrives. That in itself is a talking point but when the stranger lets slip he can tell you the exact date of your death, things certainly hot up. Surely it's a joke, a con. Nobody can see into the future. If they could, what are the lottery numbers for next week and who's going to win the premiership this year?

Edward is not pushy and regrets having made his big statement. But two of the regulars take him very seriously. They want to know. One of the elderly sisters wants to know and is told. She's not going to die for another ten years. But young Buck also wants his date of death. Edward shudders. It's today!

Of course the sceptics laugh at this but there's not much of today left. The storm increases. Suddenly the lights go out. With flickering candles the group sit and argue about Edward's prophecy. Midnight approaches. Now it's down to the last minutes, the final seconds. There's a countdown. Will Buck die and prove Edward's a prophet? The play is not resolved until the very last line.

Dead In The Morning runs for about 40 minutes, has 8 roles [4F/4M] and one simple set. It's enjoyed some exciting performances and is ideal for drama competitions and festivals and as a double-hander with *Box-Office Break-In*. Preview script at www.foxplays.com