

NOISE

By

Alex Jones

Produced and commissioned by Soho Theatre Company, April 1997, further productions include Teatro Valle, Rome, September 2006, Furious Theatre Company L.A. July-August, 2002 - production extended a further two weeks, Profiles Theatre Chicago, October-November 2004, and theatres in Portugal, The Market Theatre, Johannesburg, South Africa, October – December 2015.

Becky and Dan, Teenage newly-weds and parents to be. Full of hope, they're about to start a new life in the housing association flat they've just moved into. The only blot is the constant techno music pounding through the walls next door. As the musical pressure increases, so the expectations start to sour. Fault lines are exposed as the strain starts to show on Becky and Dan's relationship, reaching a climax as neighbour Matt comes crashing into their lives.

**SYNOPSIS & SAMPLE SCENES
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Characters

BECKY - aged 17

DAN - aged 18

MATT - aged 30

The Set

A one-room ground floor flat in a converted house, run by a housing association. Nothing is very old, but it is still verging on the shabby; largely furnished, but not to any particular taste. There is a double bed, sink/sink unit, cupboards, cooker, fridge, table and two chairs. There is a window onto the street. One door opens onto the corridor/hallway, which is a thoroughfare for the rest of the house and leads to the front door.

The play was originally written in Black Country dialect, but can be adapted to fit any particular region.

ACT 1**SCENE 1**

DAN and BECKY enter. DAN is carrying a bin-liner stuffed with clothes, which he drops on the floor. BECKY is obviously pregnant.

DAN What do you think?

BECKY Dan! Oh Dan - it's brilliant!

DAN Like it?

BECKY It's ours? It's really ours?

DAN It's all right, isn't it?

BECKY Yeah, it's great.

DAN We've got our own cooker - look.

BECKY Brilliant - our own cooker.

DAN *(Jumping on the bed)* It's a good bed.
 BECKY is checking out the stove.

BECKY It's got a grill, too.

DAN Can you cook then?

BECKY No - can you?

DAN No.

BECKY Going to have to learn then, aren't you?

DAN Me?!

BECKY I'm going to be busy with the baby, aren't I?

DAN You can get lost - I'm a working man now; I'll expect my dinner on the table when I come home.

BECKY You can expect what you like!

DAN *(Bouncing)* It's a good bed!

BECKY I'll get a recipe book.

DAN I don't like mince, I can tell you that much.

BECKY Same here.

DAN Shepherd's pie's all right.

BECKY Shepherd's pie?

DAN With grilled cheese on the top.

BECKY There's mince in shepherd's pie.

DAN Yeah, but it's not you know -

BECKY What?

DAN Well it's not really mince.

BECKY What the bloody hell is it then?

DAN Shepherd's pie.

BECKY You're barmy!

DAN It's got potato in it.

BECKY And cheese.

DAN That's the continental version.

BECKY Continental cooking? You've got a fussy palate.

DAN You'll get used to it. *(Bouncing)* This bed's great!

BECKY *(Looking around)* There's plenty of storage space.

DAN We have to share the bathroom.

BECKY Where is it?

DAN Along the corridor, up the stairs.

BECKY Oh, never mind.

DAN It's all right, it's clean.

BECKY It'll be all right.

DAN There's only two other rooms to share it with.

BECKY I was just thinkin' of the baby.

DAN We'll get it its own private bath - a little plastic one.

BECKY *(Smiles)* Will we?

DAN I've told you - I'm working now; we'll get what we need.

BECKY It's not much of a rate though, Dan; it won't go far.

DAN We'll manage don't worry, it's better than a bleeding scheme.

BECKY Yeah, you're right, they're just cheap labour; I used to have to run about for everybody; that supervisor was a right cow; always threatening' sack me. 'Sack me then' I said, 'I don't care!'

DAN They won't sack you, they like to keep sweet with the job-centre; keep the free trainees coming. As soon as your time's up they dump you and wheel another one in.

BECKY It was a joke - you could have murdered the manageress in cold blood and have a gang bang on the customer counter as long as you said sorry after.

DAN Yeah, well this is a proper job - warehouse operative.

BECKY You deserve it!

DAN It's not much, I know.

BECKY It is!

DAN It could lead to other things.

BECKY It will.

DAN They've got a proper employee structure - you can get promoted; it's one of the biggest superstores in the country.

BECKY I'm proud of you.

DAN Didn't think I'd get it.

BECKY I did.

DAN They had loads of applicants.

BECKY I knew you'd get it.

DAN It's not much of a job.

BECKY It's a start, Dan.

DAN Yeah.

BECKY We've got our own place and you've got a job.

DAN Hope it goes all right.

BECKY It will.

DAN I want to... you know; do well for us.

BECKY *(Kisses him)* Daddy!

DAN Bloody hell - Daddy, me!

BECKY We'll have to get a buggy though; we'll definitely need a buggy.

DAN And a cot.

BECKY Where shall we put it?

DAN Over there in the corner.

BECKY No we will not! Put it at the bottom of the bed.

DAN *(Stands)* God, it's weird - there'll be another person here, another little life.

BECKY I know.

DAN It's... weird.

BECKY And wonderful.

DAN Yeah... *(Bounces)* This bed's comfortable; it's not bad.

BECKY Oh yeah?

DAN *grabs her and pulls her onto the bed.*

DAN Come on, let's mess about a bit.

BECKY Later.

DAN Let's see your tits again!

He peers down her top.

BECKY *(Laughs)* You dirty sod.

DAN They're bleeding massive - I can't believe it!

BECKY *(Pushes him away)* You're disgustin', you are!

DAN I know.

BECKY They'll be out of bounds to you soon.

DAN Oh yeah?

BECKY Yeah - they'll be full of milk for the baby.

DAN Weird!

BECKY *pulls her top forward and peers down herself.*

BECKY Do they look nice then?

DAN Becky, they're bleeding massive!

BECKY They'll shrink again after.

DAN *pins her down.*

DAN Let's make the most of them then!

BECKY *pushes him off.*

BECKY Oh, so you won't be interested in me when I'm a mother with a flat chest!

DAN Don't be daft; it's just - well a novelty.

BECKY My tits are a novelty - thanks!

DAN *pins her down again.*

DAN Shut up and come and try this bed out.
BECKY pushes *him off again*.

BECKY Not till you've fetched the rest of the stuff in.
BECKY *gets up and begins to unpack the clothes from a bin-liner*. DAN *carries in stuff that has been dumped in the hall - more bin-liners, cardboard suitcase, etc.*

DAN I didn't think we'd get it all in the taxi.

BECKY Neither did the taxi driver.

DAN Yeah he didn't seem too happy, did he? (*Imitating*) It's a taxi, not a bleeding removal van! Miserable git!

BECKY Sod him! (*Watching him pick up box*) Is your back all right?

DAN Just bruised a bit.

BECKY You shouldn't have gone back.

DAN I had to get my documents and stuff for work. I thought he'd be up the pub.

BECKY Well you don't have to see him again.

DAN I'll smack him back one day!

BECKY It's not worth it - he's a moron; they all are. Look at my parents, threw me out!

DAN That's my fault.

BECKY Takes two to make a baby.

DAN Yeah, but I suppose we should have waited.

BECKY Well we didn't.

DAN Should have used something.

BECKY I'm glad I'm pregnant.

DAN Are you?

BECKY Don't you know by now?

DAN Course I do.

BECKY Well then.
BECKY *sits at the table*.
I knew my mum would be mad, but not like that; and my dad called me a slag.
DAN *sits at the table*.

DAN It's only words, Beck.

BECKY Shouldn't have called me a slag though, not my own dad... I'm not a slag.

DAN Of course you're not.

BECKY I'm seventeen and pregnant, that's all - what's wrong with that?

DAN Nothing.

BECKY For God sake, I'm their daughter! How can you throw your own daughter out?

DAN It's me - they don't like me.

BECKY They don't like me. *(Pause.)* You sure your back's all right?

DAN Just bruised, honest.

BECKY At least it wasn't one of your teeth again.

DAN It's a good crown, though.

BECKY What makes them do it?

DAN He's fucked up probably: booze and boredom - who knows?

BECKY Bastard.

DAN Yeah.

BECKY We'll be all right, you know.

DAN *(Smiles)* Yeah.

BECKY We'll be a brand new family.

DAN Our baby will know different.

 They embrace and kiss.

 God - your tits!

BECKY Leave them alone will you! I can't say I feel especially sexy at the moment. How can you fancy me when I look like the side of a lorry?

DAN I've always wanted to be a lorry driver.

BECKY Yeah, well you'm not practising your H.G.V. on me, mate!

DAN You can't deny a man his conjugal rights.

BECKY You had them seven months ago - that's why we're married!

DAN We didn't have to get married.

BECKY I know that.

DAN Not many people bother anymore.

BECKY I want my baby to have a proper name.

DAN Yeah.

BECKY And I wanted t' marry you anyway!

DAN That's big of you.

BECKY Well nobody else would.

DAN You're a heartless bitch, you are.

BECKY The truth can be painful.

DAN It was a brilliant wedding though, wasn't it? Everybody came - Wozza and Big D and Cheesie and Stacie.

BECKY Sally and Mo and Corny.

DAN Cassie and Spider were crap witnesses though, you've got to admit it; they kept laughin'.

BECKY *(Laughs)* At the registrars wig!

DAN It looked like a dead hedgehog on his head!

BECKY I couldn't look at him. All through the ceremony I was staring at the floor biting my lip.

DAN He knew what we were laughing at; he kept touchin' it - like it had slipped or something.

BECKY It was brilliant!

DAN He was all red and sweating; I could hardly repeat the vows.

BECKY See him when Spider refused to sign his real name - insisted it was Spider Murphy.

DAN *(Imitating)* 'This is a legal document - you're makin' a mockery of the law!'

BECKY And Cassie told him to keep his hair on!

 They both laugh.

DAN Balls to him; it was our wedding not his. Anyway getting married is funny.

BECKY Especially to you.

DAN Watch it Mrs Jones.

BECKY What a common name.

DAN You didn't have to take it.

BECKY Listen, anything's better than Hickinbottom! I'd have married you if your surname was King bloody Kong!

DAN It was a good piss up at the Bell; Wozza and Big D were steaming.

BECKY He was a pain in the neck; kept trying to kiss me.

DAN It is traditional to kiss the bride.

BECKY Not where he wanted to kiss me.

DAN Yeah, he is a bit weird, Big D.

BECKY He's barmy.

DAN Ahh, it was a good night! I bet we're the only married couple to hold their reception at the local Balti.

BECKY It was great!

DAN It's better than curled up sandwiches and my aunt's trifle made with Angel Delight and Dream bleeding Topping!

BECKY We all had starters!

DAN And rice.

BECKY And Nan breads.

DAN And loads of booze.

BECKY *(Laughs)* Yeah and Cassie was sick!

DAN At least it was on her plate.

BECKY She'd had too much at The Bell.

DAN Spider was going to eat it.

BECKY Dirty sod.

DAN Said he didn't want to waste good food, even if it was regurgitated.

BECKY He's disgusting he is.

DAN Hey, fancy popping up The Bell - see who's in?

BECKY Nah not tonight - it's our first night here. Besides you start work in the morning, you want to be fresh.

DAN That's true.

BECKY *crosses to the window.*

BECKY Not sure about the decor, are you?

DAN Decor? What's wrong with it?

BECKY Don't know; the paper's a bit dowdy, isn't it?

DAN It's paper; it covers the walls - it's what paper's supposed to do.

BECKY What an imagination!

DAN Besides, it comes with the room.

BECKY We could change it if we want; we're paying the rent.

DAN It looks all right to me.

BECKY I just want to make the place look bright; make it look like ours.

DAN *carries in the T.V. and places it on the table.*

DAN It's ours now! No home is complete without a telly!

BECKY Good old Cassie - best wedding present of the lot!

DAN It's only a portable though.

BECKY Who cares? It's a telly!

DAN Second-hand.

BECKY Everything's second-hand. (*Looking around*) I'm going to change the paper; get some Cath Kidston type stuff.

DAN Steady on, we've only just moved in.

BECKY We could do the paintwork too.

DAN We were lucky to get this place - I don't want to upset anyone.

BECKY We got it because we deserved it - we needed it.

DAN We got it because you were pregnant and homeless, that's all; and that don't count for much either, I still had to play my face. They'd see you on the street dying before they'd give you a home these days.

BECKY God, they used to give people council houses years ago; now you have to buy the bleeding things.

DAN You want to watch out; you're turning all political.

BECKY No chance - nobody's ever going get my vote, bunch of tossers!

 DAN *finds the kettle.*

DAN Cup of tea?

BECKY Brilliant!

 DAN *fills the kettle, finds tea bags, mugs, etc.*

DAN I can't believe this! Boiling a kettle in our own place.

BECKY (*Sighs*) And a baby in my belly and a telly on the table.

DAN Are we lucky, or what?

BECKY We are the dog's bollocks!

DAN What do you think then? It's all right, or what?

BECKY It's brilliant!

DAN The park's only a couple of blocks away.

BECKY It's brilliant.

DAN We'll take the baby there.

BECKY Just the job, Dan.

DAN Let's have a listen.

BECKY Now?!

DAN Yeah, come on; it's its home; I want to hear what it thinks.

BECKY *lies on the bed.*

BECKY Go on then.

DAN *lies next to her. He puts his ear to her stomach.*

DAN Gurgle bloody gurgle!

BECKY It's the amniotic fluid.

DAN Sounds like soup bubbling away.

BECKY I beg your pardon! That's my child you're talking about.

DAN And mine... wait a bit, I can hear something!

BECKY Bullshit!

DAN I can.

BECKY Yeah?

DAN Shh!

BECKY Honest?

DAN Shh!

Pause.

BECKY What is it?

DAN I can hear it!

BECKY Can you?

DAN It's saying something.

BECKY *(Sarcastic)* Oh yeah, what's it saying then?

DAN *(Softly chanting)* 'Villa, Villa, Villa' - it must be a boy!

BECKY No it's not, it's a girl and she's saying - 'Watch out Dad because there's going to be me and mum and we're going to gang up on you!'

DAN *turns over onto his back, staring upwards.*

DAN Shit Becky; are we going to be all right?

BECKY Of course we are.

DAN How can we be parents? I don't know what to do!

BECKY It's instinctive.

DAN Is it?

BECKY It had better be!

DAN Are you scared?

BECKY A bit.

DAN Me too - a bit.

BECKY It's only natural, Dan; we're both young to be parents, I suppose.

DAN I'm eighteen.

BECKY It's not that old.

DAN Feels like it, feels like eighty-one sometimes.

BECKY What's it saying now?

DAN *listens.*

DAN It's saying - 'What is it like out there?'

BECKY Tell it it's wonderful.

DAN *speaks to her stomach.*

DAN This is your Daddy speaking, are you receiving me?

BECKY *(Serious)* Tell it Dan - please.

DAN It's wonderful kid! It's a wonderful world out here, full of fantastic things to do and see. And when you pop out I'm going to give you a great big hug, and there's a park nearby; I'll take you for walks on a weekend, take you to feed the ducks.

BECKY *(Laughs)* You're a big softy really, aren't yer?

DAN Don't know - just me.

BECKY It's natural to be a bit scared.

DAN It's the responsibility, I suppose.

BECKY You're the best thing that's ever happened to me Dan.

Pause as he looks with affection.

DAN Does that mean I can see your tits then?

BECKY The kettle's boiling.

DAN Come on, Beck - let's take our clothes off and mess about!

BECKY I can't bear to see myself naked just now; I look like an elephant seal.

DAN Ooh don't; I feel like that naturalist - David Attenborough!

BECKY The kettle's boiling.

DAN *gets up to make tea.*

DAN Elephant seals are my favourite sea-creature anyway.

BECKY Flattery's not your strong point, is it? *(Starts to sit up).*

DAN I don't know what you're so sensitive about; pregnancy's a state of health - you're blooming all over like a big rose.

BECKY Oh so now I'm a bleeding plant, am I?

DAN You know what I mean.

BECKY *(Suddenly tired)* God, I haven't eaten all day!

DAN I'll pop round the chippy in a minute. *(He passes her tea)* First cup of tea in our new home. *(Preparing a toast)* Here's to us!

BECKY To us and our baby!

They clink cups and music suddenly starts up next door - techno music, quite loud.

DAN *(Laughs)* Cue the music! Hey we've got to have a party here soon!

BECKY Definitely. *(Indicating)* Who lives in that house?

DAN Don't know, a bloke I think; haven't met him.

BECKY Just a bloke on his own?

DAN Think so. They did tell me who the other tenants were at the housing association; there's an old couple upstairs.

DAN pulls BECKY up from the bed as the music pounds away.

BECKY *(Laughs)* What are you doing?

DAN Come on - let's dance.

BECKY Nutter!

But they dance together anyway, happy to be in their new home. Lights fade to blackout as the volume cranks up and fades as the stage is plunged into darkness.

SCENE 2

It is late at night. DAN and BECKY are asleep in bed. Suddenly music starts up next door, quite loud. DAN wakes.

DAN Bleeding hell!

BECKY What is it?

DAN It's started again.

BECKY What time is it?

DAN looks at the alarm on the floor by the bed.

DAN Two o' clock, two o' clock!

BECKY Ohh...

DAN Two o' clock in the morning!

BECKY Never mind.

DAN He didn't knock off till nearly midnight.

BECKY Well he probably won't play it long - he must be knackered.

DAN He's not the only one.

BECKY turns over.

BECKY Try and ignore it.

DAN pulls the duvet up.

DAN Might be difficult.

Pause.

(Sits up) This is ridiculous!

BECKY Just ignore it, Dan.

DAN How?

BECKY Switch your brain off - pretend it's not there.

They lie down again. Pause.

It'll probably stop soon.

DAN I hope so.

BECKY It will.

DAN It's the bass, it kind of pounds in your head.

Pause.

How do you switch your brain off?

BECKY Erm... I don't know.

DAN Where have we moved to?

BECKY It's only music, Dan.

DAN What if it's like this all the time?

BECKY Of course it's not. He's just having a late night; we've done it ourselves.

DAN Would be tonight; I start my first job in the morning.

BECKY We could tap on the wall.

DAN What do you think?

BECKY It's best to leave it; see what happens.

DAN Yeah, I'm just a bit tired and a bit worried about tomorrow. Its just music like you say.

BECKY It's only a bit of music, Dan.

DAN Yeah.

BECKY Don't worry.

Pause. DAN gets out of bed.

DAN Want a brew?

BECKY What - now?

DAN I can't sleep through that, can you?

BECKY I suppose not - Coke will do.

DAN gets Coke from fridge and pours two mugs.

DAN If he's having a party he could ask us round.

BECKY There's nobody else.

DAN How do you know?

BECKY I haven't heard anybody.

DAN He probably doesn't know anyone's moved in.

BECKY Probably.

DAN *(Passes her Coke)* There you go... How are you feeling?

BECKY Great! I love this place; can't believe we've got it!

DAN *(Looks around)* It's ours all right. Few years time we'll have something better.

BECKY Save a deposit up.

DAN That's the idea; get into the housing market.

BECKY I'll get a job once the baby's settled in school; anything just to get a bit of cash, like.

DAN I might get a promotion or something; move on, never know.

BECKY We'll have a car and plasma screen telly and stuff.

DAN Easy!

BECKY It'll be great.

Pause.

DAN Should I pop round; ask him to turn it down?

BECKY Not on our first night; might look bad, you know, new neighbours and that; it's all give and take isn't it? Let it go I reckon, see what happens.

DAN Yeah... I'm tired though; got a headache.

BECKY Remember some of the parties we've had at Cassie's - till dawn sometimes.

DAN You're right; it's a one off.

The music stops. Pause.

(Sighs) Thank fuck!

BECKY Told you!

DAN Yeah. *(Yawns).*

Pause.

You look lovely.

BECKY Bollocks!

DAN No, you do; all sleepy and soft and squidgy.

BECKY I've told you not to try and flatter me.

DAN You do.

BECKY Soft and squidgy?

DAN Yeah, like a trifle.

BECKY Shut up, Dan, and come back to bed.

DAN I don't feel so tired now.

BECKY You will in the morning.

DAN What we gonna call it? You made your mind up?

BECKY *(Smiles)* Can't decide.

DAN I still like Cathy for a girl.

BECKY Nah, it's too plain; don't want anything ordinary.

DAN Nothing too poncey though - I hate poncey names. What about Joe for a boy?

BECKY Joe?

DAN Short for Joseph.

BECKY I sort of worked that out.

DAN What do you think?

BECKY Joseph - Joseph Jones? Jo-Jo; he'll get called Jo-Jo.

DAN 'Jo-Jo', what are you talking about?

BECKY He would.

DAN Crap!

BECKY What about Hamilton?

DAN That's a bleeding surname.

BECKY Could be a first name.

DAN So could Asparagus!

BECKY 'Asparagus Jones?' Got a certain ring to it.

DAN I wouldn't put it past you - Joe for a boy, Cathy for a girl.

BECKY Serena for a girl.

DAN Serena? Now that is poncey.

BECKY There was a girl at school called Serena; had her own pony.

DAN Point proved!

BECKY I'd love to have had a pony.

DAN Not possible - got the wrong name for it, obviously. Now if you were called Pandora or Jessica you might have been in with a chance.

BECKY Must be nice to be rich.

DAN I'll buy a lottery ticket.

BECKY Yeah - buy one; you never know!

DAN I'll get one tomorrow.

BECKY Can you imagine if we won?

DAN Season ticket, executive box.

BECKY Holidays abroad.

DAN Have a massive party; invite everybody.

BECKY We don't know that many people; couldn't invite my family.

DAN You'd know people if you were rich.

BECKY Wouldn't have to work.

DAN I'd have to do something. Eighteen's a bit young to retire; I'd start my own business.

BECKY Doing what?

DAN Don't know, making something, carving wood or something.

BECKY You can't carve wood!

DAN I could learn.

BECKY I didn't know you wanted to carve wood.

DAN Neither did I till I considered being rich. But if you could choose what you could do like, choose your own profession, something like that would be great. I was good at woodwork at school.

BECKY You could carve a rocking horse for Serena.

DAN Cathy, yeah. It would be nice; have a workshop and chip away all day with the radio on; make wooden animals and gargoyles and all that sort of stuff.

BECKY Not much call for gargoyles.

DAN Exactly, because nobody's making them; a whole new market to exploit; traditional craftsmanship like our ancestors did.

BECKY I had an uncle who made concrete garden gnomes; had all sorts of different moulds.

DAN Our ancestors wouldn't have used moulds.

BECKY That's because they didn't have concrete.

DAN They'd make pots and carve and make their own furniture. We don't know how to do anything anymore, apart from set a video.

BECKY Technology does everythin' for us.

DAN And we have to buy everything the machines make; things we could be making for ourself. Yeah, if I were rich I'd carve wood; revive an old craft, make gargoyles.

BECKY Buy a lottery ticket.

DAN We'll get one regular - somebody has to win.

BECKY Maybe it could be us?

DAN It could be! Why not?

BECKY Be great... Ooh, it's just moved.

DAN Has it?

BECKY It's ever so strange, Dan, to feel it move like that. It's kind of like it's remindin' us it's there, like it's trying to talk to us, trying to communicate.

DAN There'll be plenty of communication once it's here, I'll bet. Won't get much sleep then.

BECKY Babies only cry when they're hungry.

DAN You reckon?

BECKY It's true... Come to bed now, Dan; you'll need to get a few hours kip at least.

DAN Yeah - I'd better.

BECKY Come and cuddle your family.
He gets into bed with her.

DAN Move over Asparagus!

BECKY You're barmy, you know that?

DAN You're squidgy, you know that?

BECKY I asked you not to flatter me if you remember.

DAN Goodnight again!

BECKY *(Kisses him)* Love you!

DAN Same here.

BECKY It's funny isn't it, being in our own place? Feels like when I was a kid, playing at being mums and dads.

DAN This is the real thing.

BECKY Does this mean we're grown up?

DAN I think so.

BECKY Shit! Never noticed it happening, did you?

DAN Sort of creeps up on you; takes you by surprise.
Music starts again.
Aw, shit!

BECKY Not again!

DAN I thought he'd finished.

BECKY He probably doesn't know we've moved in; probably thinks the flat's still empty. Be different after he knows.
Pause.

DAN Would be tonight.

BECKY Think you can sleep?

DAN I'll have to.

BECKY Try and sleep - pull the duvet up.

DAN Yeah.

 They try to sleep. Eventually DAN gets up.

BECKY Dan?

DAN There's no point trying; might as well read or something, wait till he's finished... got anything to read?

BECKY No.

DAN Nor me.

BECKY (Gets out of bed) Wait a minute, there's the baby book.

 She pulls the book from a pile of clothes.

DAN (Ironic) Great!

BECKY It's got a section at the back of different names.

 DAN turns to the back of the book.

DAN (Reading) Boys - beginning with A: Aden, Alan, Andrew, Asparagus...

BECKY It doesn't say Asparagus!

DAN I'm sorry about the noise, Beck; never heard anything when I viewed the place.

BECKY It's okay, it's only one night.

DAN I hope so.

BECKY I'm sure it is.

 Pause.

DAN I hope so.

 The music swells as the lights fade to blackout.

REVIEWS

Alex Jones's very good and terribly distressing *Noise* is one of the most upsetting plays I have ever seen. It builds to a climax which, when it comes, has the audience writhing in their seats. Leaving the theatre afterwards, it took a long time to walk off the shock. It is distressing on many counts: and as with all plays that use violence, worrying; there are a couple of moves in it that are so sickening that they provoke objections. But when the shock has burned off, the main feeling is sadness - and that I suspect is the point. Alex Jones, like so many of our young playwrights is concerned with dramatising the hopelessness of the have-nots in today's Britain, and he does so with a force that is like being socked on the jaw. The play is very well written, exceptionally well directed (by Mark Brickman) and superbly performed. You care about Dan (Graham Bryan) and Becky (Samantha Redmond), and you feel you are in the same room with them. Redmond in particular in her perilously short maternity wear is most touching. Andrew Tiernan, meanwhile, as the neighbour from hell is like a caged lion and his sheer presence in the room is nerve-racking. When he finally explodes you feel as if you are cornered yourself, and his assault on the couple is terrifying. No one could accuse Jones of glamorising violence. But there are always worries about violence on stage and the concern here is that it involves a pregnant woman... But then again, we live in a world where a girl can be bludgeoned to death while painting her patio doors and children gunned down in their school hall. Perhaps Jones's terrible picture of an alienated screwball destroying a life-to-be is the only logical response to such a violent world. He certainly writes with fury, passion and compassion about those whose voices are seldom heard - *Sarah Hemming, Financial Times*.

The nightmare that all urban dwellers fear - Plays don't come more upsetting than this one, and even I who have supp'd full of theatrical horrors, found myself trembling uncontrollably. It might therefore seem perverse to recommend the piece. Yet the author, Alex Jones, is clearly a powerful new voice in the theatre, and his shattering play seems particularly pertinent at a time when both major political parties have been criticised by the church for more or less giving up on Britain's underclass. The play explores lives of noisy desperation, the kind of lives we, and many politicians prefer to forget. Jones reveals compassion for his helpless characters, unable to cope, too scared to go to the police. *Noise* isn't gratuitously terrifying. It is terrifyingly persuasive - *Charles Spencer, The Daily Telegraph*.

Alex Jones's bleak new play could hardly be more timely - a paradigm of what has happened to British youth over the past two decades and how the loss of hope or any sense of belonging has led to a similar murderous loss of humanity... anyone who has suffered a similar fate at the hands of a neighbour's over-amped enthusiasm - and five tenths of last night's interval audience could be heard recounting their own particular experiences - will recognise the scenario. Jones has taken what is now a recognised social problem and turned it into a sad, pessimistic lament for today's generation. Jones's bitter-sweet, homely, but horrific warning makes clear, these Black Country lambs (Becky and Dan) are straight out of the *Romeo and Juliet/West Side Story* mould - innocents destroyed by a chaotic malignancy they are powerless to control - *Carol Woddis, The Glasgow Herald*.

Critics Choice - A production which gets deeply under your skin, Andrew Tiernan festers with self-loathing and bristles with threat as mental Matt; his conversation over a cuppa with the nervous Becky is a masterpiece of tension and taut humour. Jones is not a flashy writer, but one who understands the banally expressive form and content of everyday speech - **Time Out**.

Cruel but honest, Alex Jones's distressing but powerful Noise is premiered by the Soho Theatre: Back in 1967 the thugs who stoned a baby to death in Edward Bond's *Saved* did not get off scot-free. One of them went to prison amid off-stage displays of public fury. As his subsequent descent into raging Marxism showed, Bond was far from pro-police. Indeed, he pretty clearly regarded them as lackeys of an Establishment ultimately responsible for the very existence of stone-throwing baby-killers. But it did not occur to him that the laws against violence and murder could not and would not be enforced. Thirty years later, all of those baby killers would have remained at large and continued to terrorise a community too frightened, apathetic or callous to call the cops. At any rate, that is the inference of Alex Jones's distressing play. True, the violence in *Noise* is a bit less and extreme than in *Saved*, and its prime victim two months from being born; but if you asked me which urban jungle I would rather inhabit, I would take Bond's south London over Jones's Black Country - *Benedict Nightingale, The Times*.

Alex Jones's *Noise* taps with great effectiveness into the primitive fear that we are just a thin wall away from violence and chaos. As the play moves towards the climax whose menacing violence had one woman in the first-night audience sprinting to the exit, Jones paints an alarming picture of a society oppressed by fear and injustice, where people are left to go mad in boxes with only a sound system to obliterate the space between the walls and where these sick individuals can so terrorise communities that people are too frightened to go to the police. Many beautifully constructed scenes, but for me the most harrowing was the final one with the drained couple packing up to leave, having lost their baby and perhaps their *raison d'être*. Will their love survive a parting while she goes to rest at her parents and he looks for somewhere else? Outside, leaving them on edge through noise to the last, the impatient pipping on his car horn of the father come to reclaim his little girl - *Paul Taylor, The Independent*.

There is a sickening intensity to *Noise*, Alex Jones's debut play for Soho Theatre Company. His dark tale of a hopeful young couple being mentally and physically tortured and physically attacked left me with a shaky feeling in the pit of my stomach. It is a menacingly powerful piece of work. Top marks for Soho TC for being brave enough to stage it - *Adrian Dawson, The Stage*.

AMERICA - LA AND CHICAGO PRODUCTIONS

Critics Pick - It's anything but noise, this remarkably delicate work about a naïve teenage couple facing the cruel world. English playwright, Alex Jones offers a deceptively simple tale, finely wrought with quintessential, but not clichéd characters essaying a fairytale life in the dark forests of modern living... The story has only one possible ending, but the reasons are manifold, and Jones lets us see each one, subtly but clearly. And the sophisticated, economical direction of Sara Hennessey enhances the story's feel of old-age wisdom in the face of dewy youth, while her actors offer clear-cut, gut-wrenching performances. Not a single moment rings false. All honesty occupies the space, putting tiny touches on moments that only a vivid imagination could create. This *Noise* is golden - *Dany Margolies, Back Stage West*.

Critics Choice - With a nod to Edward Bond's *Saved*, Brit playwright Alex Jones has crafted a kitchen-sink drama with a techno beat... Although his presence is palpable in Act 1, the raucous neighbour (an intimidating James C Leary) doesn't appear until Act 2, when he catches the sleep-deprived Becky alone. The drama is structurally shrewd - the tension never stops escalating, and the playwright avoids pat solutions. Sara Hennessey's taut direction is well supported by Christie Wright's imaginative lighting design and Eric Pagac's thunderous sound. Stacie Leary's threadbare costumes convey the underlying hopelessness, and Shawn Lee's intentionally dismal set buttresses the overwhelming sense of desperation - *Los Angeles Times*.

Furious Theatre makes noise with 'Noise' - In front of what may have been the best looking crowd I have seen at a Pasadena theater, the Furious Theatre Company presented the exclusive US premiere of *Noise* by Alex Jones. Well-directed and designed by Shawn Lee with excellent sound and design by Christie Wright, *Noise* captures the dreadfulness of not affording your own space in an increasingly populated world. The only sound anyone here wants to hear is the baby inside Becky's body. Not only good looking, but a full house too - *John Esther, Pasadena Weekly*.

Echoes of John Osborne permeate *Noise*, receiving its US premiere by the Furious Theatre in Pasadena. Alex Jones' slashing drama of the perils of economic depression frequently suggests a latter-day *Look Back In Anger*... the grimy comic atmosphere soon darkens as blaring techno music from next door awakens the couple on their first night out and continually thereafter... Jones's impressive architecture occasionally tips the sociological hat, and the intermission is questionable, given the accelerating tension. But these are quibbles, though, as the nail-biting intensity of the disturbing climax demonstrates the acute impact this haunting work deserves - *David C Nichols, Theater Beat*.

Playwright, Alex Jones draws his characters well; his play is a brutal indictment of contemporary British society and the ineffectiveness of the law, the establishment, or the system to give needed aid and comfort to those who fall outside the tightly sealed box - *Madeleine Shaner, Beverly Press*.

Critics Pick - In its US premiere, this shattering new work looks at the thin boundaries between us all - *David Elzer, Theatre Scope.*

Critics Pick - *Noise* breaks your heart with dark simplicity in Carla Russell's raw, unflinching production of this affecting drama for Chicago's edgy and proficient Profiles Theatre. Alex Jones' one-room *Noise* is extraordinarily violent and desperately depressing. It also has a pair of young and forlorn central characters so empathetic, so lost, so loving, so hopelessly infused with the optimism of youth, you find yourself wanting to scoop them up and get them a gentler place to live. This is the kind of play that bothers you after the curtain goes down. And the next morning, it bothers you all the more. It's a bit like meditating on something by Harold Pinter, except that in this piece 'The Dumb Waiter' comes through the door and kicks the characters in their guts. Yet the oomph of *Noise* lies in its stylistic simplicity. Jones, a well-regarded young scribe from Birmingham, England, details his fledgling couple's hapless attempts at cohabitation with closely detailed affection. And as the neighbour from hell, Joe Hahraus finds that hideous place where brutality can almost be rationalized. And there's something about this aggressor - the noisy neighbour that taps into universals. We've all felt helpless when confronted by something we did not deserve but that brings us misery. Especially when there is little or nothing we feel empowered to do - *Chris Jones, Chicago Tribune.*

The visceral and terrifying *Noise*, with its throbbing sound design, is a very juicy play for actors and is performed swiftly and admirably by Profiles - *Christopher Platt, Chicago Sun-Times.*

Critics Pick - Profiles continues its tradition for intimate, raw and intense dramatic works with *Noise*, Eric Burgher and Amy Spekien are marvellous! This deceptively simple work shocks us into realizing that economic depression sure has a cost in killing the human spirit. *Noise* dramatically jolts Dan and Becky's world and reminds us that a modern society must not leave anyone behind. Alex Jones' play will shake you and remind you to be careful when you challenge a neighbour's noise - *Tom Williams, ChicagoCritic.com*

South Africa

'Noise' is relevant and uncomfortable - Jennifer de Klerk 'Artslink Co Za' - 11/21/2015

Jennifer de Klerk: Music so loud that the walls vibrate, plaster dust sifts from the ceiling and the bass throbs through your head. You can't think, you can't sleep; all you can do is stuff your ears and endure, hoping that the neighbours will come to their senses soon. They never do. It's not an uncommon scenario in my part of the town, so I related well and truly to the dilemma of Danny and Becky, a delightful young couple staking their claim on a flat in Hillbrow. Young, so very young. He's 18, starting his first job. She's 17, pregnant, cast off by her family. It hurts, but she has Danny and the baby and a fresh start as a new family. The first scene is beautifully played, kids in love, having fun, playing house ... then the noise floods through the walls and reality sets in. Exhausted, irritated, bickering, they ask the neighbour to turn it down. He turns it up. They report him to the agents and Matt, physical, psycho, unemployed, drunk and booze-driven, enters their lives. There's another beautifully played scene between Matt (Rowlen von Gericke) and Becky (Nokuthula Ledwaba), a delicate game of connection and withdrawal, a cat playing with a mouse... The end is clear, the future is written – desperately you hope for a resolution, a way out, a way to preserve the innocence, the dreams. But this is reality ... The play was originally set in Birmingham in the UK, obviously then a down-and-out city. Unfortunately it transposes only too well to modern Johannesburg and has been neatly recast in the vernacular. Danny (Thabo Rometsi) and Becky are instantly recognisable and so, unfortunately, is rage-filled Matt lashing out at the world that has denied him. Fear, helplessness, nowhere to turn, where the strongest rule and the weak endure, or leave, or die ... it's a bleak and despondent outlook. This is not a comfortable play, but one impossible to forget, a searing piece acted and directed with exceptional skill. Certainly I will remember it next time the noise shakes the ceiling and no one answers the phone. *Noise* is written by Alex Jones and directed by Dorothy Ann Gould. It runs at the Market Theatre until December 6.

This is a powerful piece of theatre, but you have to wonder why anyone would want to see it. We live amidst brutality and madness, where the abuse of women is rife, and men and women, alike, carry ourselves with a constant tinge of wariness. Noise heightens this in 90 minutes of domestic soapy cum thriller. *Theatre Review by LESLEY STONES. 'Daily Maverick'*

A play now running at the Market Theatre in Joburg is stunningly well performed, and excellently directed. But I would not recommend it to anyone. I came out of Noise feeling traumatised, as if I had lived the experience of the characters with them. Noise was written by Alex Jones more than 20 years ago, and set in Birmingham in the United Kingdom. But the play feels like it has always belonged in Hillbrow, where it's now set thanks to director Dorothy Ann Gould, and Mark Graham Wilson, who helped to adapt the script. It is a powerful piece, but you have to wonder why anyone would want to see it, or why Gould wanted to revive it. We live amidst brutality and madness, where the abuse of women is rife, and men and women, alike, carry ourselves with a constant tinge of wariness. Noise heightens this in 90 minutes of domestic soapy cum thriller. When we meet a young and decent couple, excited to be moving into their new flat in Hillbrow, we just know something bad is going to happen. And it does, when the neighbour's music comes boom-boxing through the walls at all hours of the day, and night. That is intolerable by itself, but when they meet the source of that noise, the drug-addled, psychotic and unemployed Matthew, the trauma escalates. Gould writes in the programme notes that *Noise* is "searing, brutal, and cathartic." I missed the cathartic part, sitting through the show and jumping every time the music began, tense for what was about to unfold. Actors Rowlen von Gericke, Thabo Rametsi and Nokuthula Ledwaba are all excellent, but it the men who control this story. Von Gericke is terrifying as the psychotic neighbour, clearly unhinged and swinging from lost and lonely to violently deranged in a second. He is utterly believable, as is the entire story about a young couple whose hope and optimism is ground down, and snuffed out brutally by this third party. Rametsi as Dan and Ledwaba, as his young wife Becky, capture a playfulness and almost tangible love between their characters in the early scenes, although their chatter drags on for too long, when you know that action is lurking in the wings. Rametsi is a powerful force, an open book of an actor, who has you initially sharing his enthusiasm and delight for life, then later feeling his fear, and helplessness, despair and loss. It is the searing combination of Von Gericke's mania, and Rametsi's shattered dreams, that make this play so viscerally gruelling, aided by the brutality that stunts Ledwaba's Becky. The noise that erupts from time-to-time hammers home the inhumanity of it, often so loudly that you cannot hear the words until the volume is toned down to let the dialogue continue. The pounding in your eardrums is another reason why you feel you are living the trauma with them. You leave wondering what you would do in the same situation. Call the cops? Resort to violence yourself? Be defeated and broken? You'll admire the intensity, and talk about the actions, and emotions, for sure. But I doubt you will, actually, enjoy it. **DM**

Disturbing, but beautiful, theatre - Trending on IOL - Diane de Beer

Dorothy Ann Gould is very clear about her choice of play for her debut directing gig Noise at The Market's Barney Simon Theatre. "*I have always liked work that ruffles feathers,*" says the actress and immediately her personal roles like Yaël Farber's Molora or People are Living There pop into your head. She first saw Noise by Alex Jones 20 years ago when she was in London and knew then this was something she could get stuck into.

Set in a poor area of Birmingham in the UK, she describes it as "*searing, brutal, robust, muscular but cathartic*". Yet she needed to change the language and the place to this country and for that she turned to her good friend writer/director Mark Graham Wilson. The two of them got together, working and talking their way through the text until they were happy.

But they still didn't know whether it would work for two young black actors cast in the roles. "We read it in our own voices," she notes, "but we still had to test whether that which sat well in white mouths would work for the two young black actors."

Her casting had nothing to do with race, though. The fact they have a black couple and a white antagonist is incidental. "I wanted the best three young actors for the job," she says. She auditioned a large number, more than 100, before she decided on three young actors who have never played at the Market before – Rowlen von Gericke (a Free State University graduate), Thabo Rametsi (who plays the lead in the Kaleshi film to be released next year) and Nokuthula Ledwaba (who has many TV roles to her credit).

Noise is about the loss of a moral centre, the worrying disintegration of the nuclear family, how damaged you are and how that will impact your life and those around you, education and the difficulty of getting the best or any education, and the list goes on.

It's disturbing, but at the same time there's a beautiful tender line. Two youngsters of 17 and 18 years have married and moved to Joburg where they have found a flat in Ponti. She is pregnant, but they are hopeful about their life together and their new family. "When they find themselves at Ponti, they have found their little piece of peace," says Gould. Then the music in the flat next door becomes overwhelming...

Working with actors comes naturally to Gould, who has been teaching since she was 18. "There are three things I tell them right at the beginning; If it doesn't cost you, don't bother; make a total gift, physically, spiritually, heart and soul; there's no point in giving 60 percent."

But at the same time, she is protective of her cast and wants a clean, uncluttered rehearsal room. She says she teaches in love rather than fear. That's what has always worked for her as an actress, and what she believes will work for her actors.

"It's about these youngsters finding their truth." And listening to this seasoned actress talking about the work, I wonder whether the fledgling actors understand the gift they are about to receive.

In addition to Wilson, the rest of her team sparkles with experience with partner Michael Maxwell doing the lighting, Paul Riekert (from Battery Nege) creating a soundscape and Nadya Cohen the sets.

It's an extraordinary group, but that's who Gould is, she surrounds herself with the best. Working with Maxwell is just an added bonus. "I can talk to him about anything I want and I know it will be there."

Returning to her thoughts on theatre, she says she loves work that illuminates the challenges of life. As actors, she believes they should tell stories that throw light on life's problems and in that way, make space for change.

"It's not about making statements," she says, "but about dealing with what is out there."

Noise, says Gould, is also about the loss of innocence and about growing up. For her, directing and telling stories is about finding the right buttons to release the potential in her actors and thus the story.

That's why Noise should be explosive.

Performance times: Tuesdays to Saturdays at 8.15pm and Sundays at 3.15pm.

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Infernal Sound Cues: Aural Geographies and the Politics of Noise

[Beth Meszaros](#)

Every time Hamlet dies, "the world," as Shakespearian scholar Wes Folkerth puts it, "fills up again with sound [...] To hear, Hamlet tells us with his final breath, is what it is to be alive" (119). While that sentiment would be rightly and hotly contested by the Deaf community, it strikes those of us who can hear and who have no experience of Deaf culture as axiomatic. In his study of the "sonic landscapes" of Robert Ashley, Arthur J. Sabatini valorizes sound as "ultimately, the more dominant phenomenon in the context of the theatre experience [...]" (343). One need not go this far, however, to advance the claim that despite the tyranny of the gaze in the society of the spectacle, the materiality of the ear, as acoustic agent, is still maintained by the language of the theatre: actors still audition, and the space of an auditorium is inhabited by an audience that listens as much as watches.

Dramatists who are especially attentive listeners reproduce the soundtracks of their contemporary culture and embed them within the spatial landscapes of their plays. The playwrights to be considered here – Edward Bond, Alex Jones, Stephen Poliakoff, and Jim Cartwright – demonstrate a particularly keen ear, a heightened awareness of the interplay of soundscape and human figure. As will become apparent, this dynamic is political, indirectly determined by the construction of social class. In other words, the aural characteristics of the urban environment are traceable to certain physical properties of the urban slum – overcrowding and shoddy housing, for example. There is nothing new here, one could argue: one need merely read Ben Jonson's *Epicoene* (a noisy play, indeed) to get some sense of the din produced by early modern London. The salient difference between the soundscapes of Bond, Jones, Poliakoff, and Cartwright and that of Ben Jonson is attributable to the cheap availability and propagation of audio-electronic sound. **[End Page 118]**

Making Sense Of/With Sound

Before we attend to these specific theatrical soundscapes, however, we need to understand how and why the aural environment of the urban poor has become so toxic. Since sound is vital to making sense of space (Diane Ackerman points out that there is a "geographical quality to listening" [178]), soundscapes that frustrate the human attempt to get one's bearings can be said to be undecipherable, sometimes even to the point of toxicity. Acoustemologists refer to such overpopulated sonic environments as "polluted." Acoustemologist R. Murray Schafer explains that "individual signals are obscured in an over-dense population of sounds. [...] [T]here is cross-talk on all channels, and in order for the most ordinary sounds to be heard, they must be increasingly amplified" (43). This over-density (referred to as "low-fidelity" sound) is most likely to occur in urban landscapes because the architecture and configuration of the modern city creates the so-called canyon effect. In his study of the perception of auditory events, Stephen Handel argues that cities are noisier in part because they provide more reflective surfaces, rather than because they are noisier *per se* (80). As Handel claims, multiple, non-absorbent reflective surfaces arranged in horizontal rows (as along city streets) or vertical rows (as in tall buildings) create extra sound paths, the result being that sounds become amplified and more penetrating (80–81). Worse still, in urban areas populated by the poor, the cheaper materials used for housing construction tend to provide poor sound absorption. Increasingly, the effect on these inhabitants is a kind of "aural claustrophobia" (Truax, *Acoustic Communication* 62).

The Geopathology of Noise

Although it is routinely observed by the medical community that high decibel sound can cause "headaches, nausea, [...] impaired cardiovascular [...] and respiratory function," and eventual deafness (Schafer 184), there is less consensus about the specific socio-psychological effects of noise. Some environmental psychologists claim that any sound that is deemed "noise" (that is, unwanted sound) by a listener can become a stressor, regardless of its actual volume. There is agreement that a listener's inability to control his or her sonic environment tends to provoke irritability and belligerence in a person who is already distressed by other features of that environment. Along with an increased level of aggressivity, populations that inhabit "acoustically oppressive environment[s]" (Truax, *Acoustic Communication* 62) come to manifest a decreased ability to handle cognitive tasks. When background sound is lo-fi, that is, characterized by a wide band of signal frequencies and volumes, the brain is taxed by the need to screen out unwanted signals (Truax, *Acoustic Communication* [End Page 119] 23). This overload condition is registered by the colloquial expression, "I can't hear myself think." Thus, acoustically polluted landscapes can render their inhabitants inattentive, distracted, heedless, and, in some cases, hostile, even violent. In such acoustic communities, "sonic one-upmanship" becomes the norm: first, one has to shout to be heard; second, latent irritability manifests itself in shouting; and third, the production of (more) noise is frequently the only means by which the powerless *can* exert power (Reed 23). Western culture has long equated power with loudness, even if that power is founded on illusion. "Without the loudspeaker," wrote Hitler in 1938, "we would never have conquered Germany" (qtd. in Attali 87). Today, the ghetto boom-box can be said to be the aural icon of economic and political powerlessness. In any case, the result is an escalating spiral of noise produced by the community itself: as Vicki Reed argues, such a community is "annoying itself" (22).

When we tune in to the soundscapes produced by Bond, Jones, Poliakoff, and Cartwright, we hear acoustic communities that are indeed annoying themselves, even making themselves ill. The privation of these urban canyon dwellers is conveyed not only in semiotically conventional terms (threadbare clothing, dirt, flimsy furniture, mismatched decor, etc.) but equally in an unrelenting soundtrack of nerve-fraying noise. The "geopathic disorders," which, as Chaudhuri explains in a spatial context, are "the suffering[s] caused by one's location" (58), manifest themselves in these urban landscapes through sound as much as place. The "geopathic disorders" that erupt are responses to bone-jarring, soul-rattling vibrations, vibrations to be literally understood. In such contexts, "noise" is noisome – toxic and nauseating. If we lower the volume on the spoken script "channel" and instead tune in to the music, noise, and paralanguage that are produced and processed in these acoustically oppressive environments, we begin to hear the excruciating orchestrations of an unemployment culture. As Folkerth claims of Shakespeare's dramaturgy, such plays beg to be heard as much as read or seen.

Acoustic Communities of the Urban Poor

In 1965, Edward Bond's *Saved* exploded onto the already turbulent London theatre scene, setting off a furor that remained unmatched until the Royal Court production of Sarah Kane's *Blasted* in 1995. The fiercely uncompromising portrayal of London ghetto life in *Saved* left contemporary observers stunned and revolted. Today, the play is considered one of Bond's finest and has garnered much critical attention. None of the commentary on it, however, takes more than cursory note of its aural dimensions. Read with an attentive ear, *Saved* registers the daily torture of being bombarded by unendurable noise.

At the core of *Saved* is the wail of a baby in acute distress. The other noises of the play orbit this centralized squalling. The baby's cries serve only to generate more noise – quarrels about why it is crying and what would serve to [End Page 120] make it stop. This is a world "crowded with acoustic disturbances" (Folkerth 109) and acoustic distortion. The baby's mother, Pam, never manages to get her radio tuned properly – it emits nothing but incomprehensible static. And it is one of the many ironies of the play that one of the longest and loudest arguments erupts out of Pam's inability to locate

her weekly copy of *Radio Times*, as if a level of purposeful, selective listening were even possible amid the din.¹ In the noise-polluted world of *Saved*, "Why don't yer shut that kid up?" (47) is merely a rhetorical question. Amid the ruckus of *Saved*, the healthy, normal response of a newborn to acute distress is distorted into a harrowing leitmotif, and a lullaby is the overture to violence. The appalling fact of *Saved* is that the infant's sobs evoke not pity, but annoyance. Its mother neglects it because she "ain' sittin' there with that row goin' on" (51). Later on, the infamous pram scene demonstrates how aurality can run counter to visuality. The blue balloon tied to the baby carriage misleads the audience into believing that Pam has suddenly got motherhood the way some people get religion. However, the baby's uncharacteristic silence conveys the true state of affairs: this is not the silence of contentment but the silence of stupor. Pam has liberally dosed the baby with aspirin to keep it quiet. The resulting hush will, in turn, be followed by the silence of *kindermord*.

The only listener in the play is Len, but the quality and purpose of his listening is highly suspect. In her study of Bond's dramatic strategies, Jenny Spencer notices Len's propensity for eavesdropping (Spencer 33). Len, like Desdemona, manifests a "greedy ear" (*Oth.* 1.3.149; 400). From the beginning, he establishes himself as a practitioner of aural surveillance. In the play's first scene, it is he who tenses as he hears Harry's movements in the house, whereas Pam hears nothing. Later on, as Spencer points out (33), he deliberately lets Fred know that he has listened in as Fred and Pam made love in the room below his. Scene twelve finds Len prone on the floor, one ear pressed to the floorboards so that he can monitor whether Pam and a lover are "on the bash" (Bond 63). Listening, as Len practices it, is either for prurient or intelligence-gathering purposes – or both.

As for the judicial "hearing" in the play, Fred's trial and conviction for his role in the murder, the ability of the ear of justice to sound out the evidence is compromised even before the crime is committed. Pete, one of Fred's cronies, recounts *his* earlier court adventure for his buddies, smug in the knowledge that he has put one over: he's doubly pleased that he's been paid to testify and that the "coroner-twit" has apologized for "troublin'" him (Bond 38). Later, after Fred has been arrested, it becomes clear that the true story of how a baby came to be stoned to death will never be heard.

The final scene of *Saved* transpires in an indeterminate silence that seems to be more akin to what Stanton B. Garner Jr. calls "perceptual blankness" (163). In auditory terms, the dramaturgy seems a rough approximation of what audiologists call a "temporary threshold shift," or temporary deafness occasioned [End Page 121] by subjection to high-decibel, low-frequency sound (Truax, *Handbook*). Some observers have argued that Len's mending of the broken chair signifies reconstruction, and so the hush of this scene has been construed as recuperative. I would argue that the dead calm is merely the obligatory pause before the soundtrack loops back and replays itself and that the chair is being mended only that it may be broken again; in fact, the percussive hammering and pounding that accompanies the repair is an acoustic signal that merely accents the leaden, uneasy quiet.

Saved leaves little or nothing in the way of a quiet zone either for the characters or the audience, even though Bond does resolutely maintain the proscenium barrier. As W.B. Worthen observes, "[T]he play reifies the proscenium as an instance of the more insistent boundaries of class" (98). However, the audience of *Saved* does get quite an earful of slum living. While the landscape itself may be sealed off, the sounds of that landscape penetrate the audience's space as well as the individual bodies inhabiting that space.

Alex Jones' *Noise* (1997) is clearly indebted to Bond's *Saved*. As one reviewer of the play's American premier production noted, "With a nod to Edward Bond's *Saved*, Brit playwright Alex Jones has crafted a kitchen-sink drama with a techno beat" (Ross). Taking full advantage of thirty years' worth of electronic advances in the production of amplified sound, the play pummels both audience and characters with an in-er-ears soundtrack of deafening, hard-driving techno music.²

The entire action of the play transpires within the tiny flat rented by teenaged newlyweds Dan and seven-months-pregnant Becky. Thrilled to be in their own place at last, the two don't even realize

their own desperate poverty and fragility. Dan is delighted by the gurgle of amniotic fluid as he presses his ear against Becky's stomach. As they clink teacups, toasting themselves, their new home, and their little one to be, their domestic tranquility is disturbed by a driving beat rhythm emanating from the flat next door. "Cue the music!" chuckles Dan (17). But the joke soon wears thin. As the days go by, their love nest is repeatedly invaded at all hours of the day and night by raucous music. At first, the two are inclined to be forgiving, remembering with some ruefulness their own noisy adolescent escapades: "Remember some of the parties we've had at Cassie's – till dawn sometimes" (20). In time, however, the two become sleep-deprived, jittery, and demoralized. Downscale Becky and Dan have no means of blocking out the noise. The walls "are like paper" (43). They are too poor to afford a phone; the nearest phone with which to call the police is in the local McDonald's and, like everything else in the world of *Noise*, "it's always bust" (70). Finally, after some days and nights of sleepless torture, driven to distraction, Dan approaches the perpetrator, hoping to settle the matter civilly.

At this point, Jones begins to make explicit the latent connection between noise and violence. Matt, the source of the racket, responds to Dan's modest request with deranged fury: "I was reasonable, honest," Dan tells Becky, "but **[End Page 122]** he just went crazy, y' know, jabbin' his finger, that sort of stuff. Said he'd rip me fuckin' 'ead off; that sort of stuff. So I just sort of left it – walked away" (36). Later, after Dan has complained to the Housing Council, Matt manages to convince naïve Becky, home alone, to let him in just "t' talk." He explains to Becky that he turns up the volume "t' fill an empty space" (42) and because he has "no money, nothin' t' do" (44). During the conversation, Matt's language and tone grow increasingly aggressive. "[L]ife's shit when it cums down to it" (45), he sneers in counterpoint to Becky's cheerful patter about the joy of babies and grass and trees. Finally, Matt, as if about to leave, instead attempts to rape Becky, forcing her onto the bed and mauling her. When she resists, sobbing hysterically, he becomes disgusted and gives up: "I cum round 'ere t' mek peace [...] you piss me around all afternoon, gerrin' me all worked up – then start all this shit! [...] Fuck you! [...] An' from now on I play mar fuckin' music when I like an' as loud as I like – get it?" (58–59).

As in *Saved*, babies don't fare very well in *Noise* either. Becky's baby doesn't even manage to get itself born. Matt, who "can't stand the sound of cryin' babbies," sees to that (43). In the fierce climax of the play, Matt, furious that Dan has been pounding on the wall, manages to invade Dan and Becky's home one last time. He beats Dan, then pummels Becky, pulling a knife on her, threatening to "slice [her] open like a chicken an' see what color" her baby is (77). The about-to-be born is about-to-be-buried as Matt demolishes the baby cot. Small wonder Becky miscarries. Matt has no ears for Dan's pleas for mercy: "[N]obody cares anymore, ay yer noticed? [...] we 'm all on our own now: with nuthin' but a sound system t' drown the space between the walls. But even that's a problem; can't even get numb an' dumb in an empty box without some smart-arsed cunt has t' complain [...]" (78).

A cursory reading of the play would diagnose Matt as a mutant, an aberration, but the fact of the matter is that Matt is perfectly attuned to his world. Matt's music is the voice of that world, his practice, the practice of that world – the abuse of music as "audioanalgesic," "a pain-killer – a distraction to dispel distraction" (Shafer 96). (One is inevitably reminded of *Saved*'s aspirin-pacified baby.) Furthermore, the stories Dan and Becky tell actually harmonize with Matt's tirades. Becky's recollection of her run-in with a friend of Dan's suggests that the percussive, concussive world to which Matt belongs is all there is:

He gid me a lift once; did the ton down the Newton Road. I was screamin', but he wouldn't stop; kept hittin' him on the back. [...] When he stopped, I smacked him in the face an' threw his crash helmet on a passin' lorry. [...] He chased after it flashin' his lights an' beepin' his horn. Eventually, the bloke stopped, got the wrong end of the stick an' did a bit of road-rage on him.

(63)

Embedded in Becky's narrative is the roar of a motorcycle, the slap of a [End Page 123] hand on flesh, the blaring of a horn, and finally, the thud of "the stick" as it slams into a body.

Ironically, it is the silence of the silent majority that destroys any hope of a peaceable existence. "If on'y one of the neighbours'd cum forward as witnesses," agonizes Dan as the couple pack what's left of their pitiful belongings (82). Even if the neighbors hadn't seen anything, "they must've 'eard summat" (82). "They'm scared," is Becky's stolid rejoinder, "It's life; nuthin' y' can do about it" (82–83). Moreover, "Peace an' quiet's expensive" (82). As is the case in *Saved*, pure sound gets the last word. After the couple vacate the flat, Becky to move in with her parents, Dan to bunk in with a friend, the room becomes once again an empty space permeated by noise: "*As the front door closes, the music next door clicks into gear and floods the empty room with its thumping repetitive rhythm*" (84).

The indictment of noise as an index of poverty and violence can be found likewise in the work of Stephen Poliakoff. Like that of Jones, Poliakoff's dramaturgy takes into account the electronic amplification of sound. As Matthew Martin observes, "[E]lectronic and mass media (including practically all forms of electronic communication from radios and telephones to video cameras, VCRs and public address systems), music (in a variety of forms, including muzak, characters' singing, and a huge outdoor rock concert) [...] are the environmental terms in which all of Poliakoff's [characters] define themselves" (199). Muzak in particular often becomes a kind of aural wallpaper in Poliakoff's urban canyon plays. Martin argues that Muzak "serves as a reminder that this [the urban canyon] is an unnatural and inescapable landscape" (200). Thus, for Poliakoff, noise is not just an invasive force; noise is a given, a non-negotiable, palpable presence. It therefore makes no difference where one goes in a Poliakoff urban canyon. As one of his characters puts it, "Simply everywhere we go there's noise" (*Hitting Town* 22). Another difference between Poliakoff's soundscapes and those of *Saved* and *Noise* is that their occupants attempt to articulate the ecological connection between noise and overall quality of life. They don't need to spend a fortnight in Dan and Becky's apartment; they are already at least spasmodically aware.

Ralph, of *Hitting Town*, is obsessive about noise, calling attention to its presence and impact with a manic persistence tantamount to that of the narrator of Poe's "The Tell-Tale Heart." His first extended speech recalls Len's eavesdropping activities: he complains about the noises produced by a couple making love in a train lav, private noises that intrude into public space. Just like Len also, he tenses, hearing noises that sometimes only he can hear. Ralph hears insects behind the wall, burglar alarms, car bombs about to explode, "the rumble of the city" (50). In the context of the soundscape of the play, however, Ralph's fixation comes to sound more and more intelligible. Played against the overall tonal background of the play, his hysterical arias are of a piece with it. Folkerth observes of Shakespeare's *Richard III* that his sensitivity [End Page 124] to sound enables him to "harness the acoustic disturbances created by others [...] to produce and manage the sound waves that control and define the space around him" (29). Ralph, on the other hand, seems more like Othello, utterly unable to control the "acoustic field" (Folkerth 110). His personal radar, his hypersensitivity to noise, a sensitivity that seems unavailable to the characters of *Saved*, leaves him helplessly adrift in "a sea of sound" (Folkerth 108). If the geopathology of *Saved* is a desensitization, a kind of willful deafness, the form of it here is more akin to vertigo, the loss of balance associated with disorders of the middle ear.

Christine, of *Shout across the River*, unlike Ralph, wages a relentless battle against noisy things and people. She commands telephones to stop ringing and then snips their wires when they prove recalcitrant. When her mother sobs, she threatens to seal the woman's lips with epoxy. Christine's harangue about life in the ghettos of South London becomes that shout across the river, the shout that crosses the Thames to West End London, where well-heeled, well-fed theatre-goers crowd matinee performances of plays as unlike *Shout across the River* as possible. "I hate all this place," she screams, "I hate all this muck they give us!" (54). Her fury boils over, surges across the proscenium

barrier, as if *that* were the river across which one must shout to be heard. The proscenium, like the Thames, becomes a demarcation between working class and leisure class – those on one side trapped, noisy, and angry; those on the other, free, calm, and politely silent.

Poliakoff has sometimes been faulted for a certain lack of rhetorical rigor in his presentations of urban decay and pollution. For example, D. Keith Peacock makes the point that Poliakoff offers "no analysis" of the "economic or political causes" of urban blight (496). Una Chaudhuri draws a similar conclusion in the context of her discussion of another Poliakoff play, *Coming in to Land*. She argues that Poliakoff's "sociocritique" is "barely articulated" and "muted" (181). I think that her choice of the word *muted* is telling. It suggests that we might need to listen bi-aurally. In other words, in Poliakoff's dramaturgy, rigorous sociopolitical analysis rendered as linguistic text is likely to be played *pianissimo*. The fracas of poverty and deprivation, rendered *forte*, tends to drown out the other sub-channel. Poliakoff, because he is playing to our ears so intensely, tends to convey an impression of political naïveté or nostalgia. Matthew Martin argues that "serious speculation into their environment or social relationships seems beyond" Poliakoff's urban canyon characters (203). Serious speculation is beyond anyone forced to endure an environment so aurally oppressive. "When this noise stops," Clare announces in the last line of *Hitting Town*, "[...] I'm going to work" (51), but as the light fades and the music is still going strong, the "work" of critique and political theorizing remains undone.

Possibly the noisiest play I consider is Jim Cartwright's *Road*. Unlike *Saved*, *Noise*, *Shout across the River*, or *Hitting Town*, *Road* openly acknowledges [End Page 125] the presence of the audience and purports to regard the audience members as so many houseguests. Scullery, the audience's guide to this Brit-side Hell's Kitchen, addresses them with studied politeness: "THIS IS OUR ROAD! But tonight it's your road an' all! Don't feel awkward wi' us, make yourselves at home" (5). However, beneath this cheery greeting lies the insinuation that he knows his "guests" for what they are – dabblers and day-trippers, tourists who have dropped in for a night of fashionable slumming. As Una Chaudhuri argues, *Road* is presented as "the photographic negative of the world from which the spectators come" (47). To borrow audio-electronic taxonomy, *Road* plays the tape hiss and the feedback squeals that middle-class audiences pay not to hear. Nonetheless, as Chaudhuri argues, despite the trappings of environmental theatre and its apparent hyper-inclusion of the audience, *Road* keeps its spectators "safely distanced" (47). Regardless of appearances to the contrary, Cartwright, like Poliakoff, Jones, and Bond, maintains the boundary between the world of the play and that of the audience, with the notable exception, as we have noted, of aural leakage between stage and stall.

In Cartwright's play, however, this aural leakage is two-way. To be sure, there are what the stage directions call the "*sounds of Road*" (17). Doors and windows are slammed open and shut. A kicked dustbin lid clatters, spins, and falls. Toilets flush noisily and dogs bark while an offstage voice sobs on and on. The pub's disco pumps out James Brown, Madonna, and Jerry Lee Lewis. As the Royal Court production made clear, control of the sound system is absolutely coterminous with control over physical space: as Eddie's father ratchets up the television "*full, rocketing blast*" (8), Eddie responds by turning up the volume on his cassette player. According to the production notes, the scene is meant to play as "an unspoken battle" (84), an acoustic turf war. Before long, this duet evolves into a quartet as an unseen neighbor obligingly provides percussion by pounding on the wall (whereupon Eddie pounds back). Chamber music indeed.

Television is assigned much the same role that it had played in *Noise* – mere producer of white noise. Young Clare makes this point explicit. "Any clever talk on the telly" is to be disregarded, since "that way madness lies" (36). Clare is clearly articulating the "just get on with it" singsong unimaginativeness that is the through-line for *Noise*'s Becky. In *Road*, television seems to serve much the same function as Techno music serves in *Noise* – like cheap beer, a means by which to get "numb and dumb" (Jones 78). This characterization of television is sharply at odds with a more politically aware appraisal of television. Stephen Watt explains: "[T]elevision's potential to isolate its consumers – particularly its minority or oppressed consumers – inevitably impairs their ability to

resist the sources of their domination. [...] television is antithetical to freedom and community – to the struggles for self-knowledge and social justice" (160). However, television, despite its ubiquity, is paid so [End Page 126] little heed in *Road* that "its potential to isolate" is neutralized. The inhabitants of *Road* are not isolated. In fact, most of them socialize frantically – carousing, pub-crawling, coupling, and brawling at the top their lungs. In *Road*, lack of community and lack of the "self-knowledge" of which Watt writes cannot be attributed to the presence of television. The culprit is noise and a community that is "annoying itself" (Reed 22); television is culpable only insofar as it contributes to the pandemonium.

The quarrels of the shoddily housed pour out through paper-thin walls and mingle with the pandemonium of the streets below. Private noise continually penetrates public space, and community noise invades private space. This colonization of both kinds of space is so thoroughgoing that, to all intents and purposes, there is no clear demarcation between private space and public space. Simply everywhere one goes, there's noise. The denizens of *Road* must shout to be heard, and shout they do. They pound on walls and doors; they kick, they scream. Those on the other side of the wall pound back. The bedlam is punctuated by the running refrain of the plea for silence – "Shut it!" (52) – inevitably rendered more vociferously than the original offending racket. The "request" that somebody "turn that bleeding music down or off or summat" is screamed at full decibel (59). A mother, as if to echo Ralph's irritation about the couple in the train lav, complains to her daughter that she is sick of the noise of lovemaking produced by her daughter and boyfriend in the room above hers.

Such is the "A"-soundtrack of *Road*, a lo-fidelity soundtrack identical to those composed by Poliakoff, Jones, and Bond. The "B"-soundtrack, a kind of contrapuntal music, emanates from outside of *Road*, from a faraway world to which the inhabitants of *Road* have no real access. This soundtrack is very tinny and relatively faint. The sound cue that launches the play proper – a recording of Judy Garland's "Somewhere over the Rainbow" – is the first manifestation of this B-soundtrack. The tinkling strains of "When You Wish upon a Star," produced by Scullery's trash-picked music box, is another. The sounds of American schmaltz – Barry Manilow, Andy Williams – likewise belong to track B. Also affiliated with track B is Clare's sad little rendition of "Wonderful World": "Don't know much about history. Don't know much about society. But I do know that I love you and I know that if you'd love me too what a wonderful world this would be" (40). Track B is a paean to uncomplicated feeling as a solution to all of life's ills, instrumental chicken soup. Periodically, this soundtrack is foregrounded, only to be drowned out by the collective sonic boom of the A-soundtrack. The salient feature of this B-soundtrack is its reassuring sentimentality.

Sometimes, however, as in the monologue delivered by "middle-aged, soft-spoken, threadbare" Jerry (26), this soundtrack is associated with a past of hard times but communal purpose – the Big Band era: "[...] that big silver ball turning there and all the lights coming off it onto us lot dancing below, and the [End Page 127] big band there. [...] There was so many jobs then. [...] We all felt special but safe at the same time. [...] I can't see how that time could turn into this time" (26–27). If track A is the woofer, track B is definitely the tweeter. Track A is the music of the lower depths; track B, *Road* seems to suggest, is the music of another time, an elsewhere – not necessarily a finer world, but a world that felt "safe." Track B sings the praises of what Chaudhuri would call an "unreflective," "unproblematized" "bourgeois discourse of home" (8). While "Somewhere over the Rainbow" may celebrate the exotic lure of Oz, the Depression-era film *The Wizard of Oz* ringingly insists that "there's no place like home" and that all of one's desires can be satisfied within the confines of one's own backyard.³ Track B is not necessarily or consistently the butt of satire; it is simply irrelevant to the anti-home space of *Road*. Track B is the music of fantasy and/or nostalgia; for the most part, it simply cannot stand up to the jarring rhythms and coarse, earthy libretto of track A. Track B is also by extension, given the logic of the play, the music of the audience, the privileged ones who can afford to believe that "when you wish upon a star, makes no difference who you are." They are also the ones who have access to an elsewhere; they can go home to their nice, quiet houses once the show is over.

The inhabitants of *Road* can hear the music of the audience, but they cannot pinpoint or analyze the source of that sound. It simply emanates from somewhere over the rainbow.

The play's penultimate scene is the one instance when both soundtracks not only come together, but actually harmonize. The scene transpires in Brink's living room, a room dominated by "a massive stereo speaker, like bands have" (65). Two couples arrive, the girls having been picked up in a bar by Brink and Eddie. Drinks are passed around, and it looks as if this scene will degenerate into yet another orgy of groping, sex, passing out, and throwing up. But something unexpected happens. Carol decides she's had enough. She wants "somethin' else to happen for a change" (74). "Surprisingly," as Chaudhuri points out, "the men take up the challenge" (51). "Do you like good music?" Eddie asks Carol and Louise (75), and the offstage audience braces itself, fully anticipating a barrage of punk rock or at least more of track A. Instead, the sound that emerges from those massive speakers is a gentle, Depression-era ballad, performed in a soft, Southern soul version by Otis Redding. The stage directions indicate that "Try a Little Tenderness" not only plays out to the end, but that the foursome listens to it in complete silence. The song is aptly chosen, for it can be read as a song about retaining the ability to be compassionate, even in the face of deprivation and grinding poverty.⁴ After listening, each renders his or her own lament about life in the warren that is *Road*. Louise concludes with her own shout across the river: "If I keep shouting somehow a somehow I might escape" (79). The others take up the line and turn it into a choral chant that grows louder and faster with each iteration. The collective act of listening with attention to track B has culminated in the performance [End Page 128] of an antiphonic version of track A. As the chant reaches its crescendo, the scene culminates in a blackout and silence.

The offstage ear-witnesses have to wonder whether they have just heard the curative primal scream, a barbaric yawp, or merely the howls of the damned. *Road* ends quietly enough – the muffled thud of a dropped shoe, "The sound of dreamy humming," "The sound of a bottle rolling" (81). Scullery does not ask for applause; he merely, with light mockery, dismisses his "guests": "If you're ever in the area call again" (81). *Road* stops, apparently, merely because everyone is too tired to talk, let alone scream. Tomorrow, at the next performance, all of the noises of *Road* will start up again. (Every time Hamlet dies, "the world fills up again with sound.") Chaudhuri argues that the spectator of *Road* "is subject to a discourse of difference [...] which has the effect of putting his or her 'seeing' of the play deeply in question" (52). To this, one could add that a hearing of the play is no less problematic.

What do audiences "hear" when they listen to *Road*, or, for that matter, *Saved* or *Noise* or *Shout across the River*? Herbert Blau points out that any audience attending any given production, regardless of how collectively engaged it may appear to be, is in reality "an immeasurable aggregate of divisive audition [...] a network of noise, static, feedback, overtones, and phasings out; synapses, blank spaces" (99). Then, of course, there is disengagement: "What the theater always struggles with is amnesia and inattention" (119). The conclusion, however, that "[m]issing the point is [...] mostly what an audience does" might be a bit overhasty (126). Instead, the tentative claim that William Demastes makes for the work of Poliakoff might apply equally well to any of the contemporary plays discussed here: "Perhaps Poliakoff is in fact advocating a change of spirit rather than legislative, political, and/or social change [...] [His] theatre may in fact provide the actual direction for substantial change: a fresher look at what the theatre can do (advise the critics) and what society must do (advise fellow citizens)" (33). For anything to happen at all, however, audiences would be well-advised to "listen up and listen good."

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which appeared in *Modern Drama* (1993), studies the staging of public execution and contemporary scaffold plays by Peter Barnes, Trevor Griffiths, and Timberlake Wertenbaker. She has also written on performance art: "Beyond Offending the Audience: Violating the Audience Body" is a study of the California "risk/pain" artists of the 1970s (*Contemporary Theatre Review* 1996).

Endnotes

1. In teaching this play to undergraduates, I have often found it useful to press into service the static noise produced by an untuned television. As I wheel in the VCR cart, the students are delighted, thinking that they are about to watch a film. Instead, I turn on the TV, set it to produce static, then turn up the volume as loud as I dare. Finally, I choose a few students to shout the lines from one of the play's many argument scenes over the static. In short order, the actors are red-faced and breathless, and the listening audience is visibly irritated by the din. (If I turn up the volume too high, I can expect to be interrupted by a justifiably annoyed colleague.)

2. Techno is a genre of very fast disco music, emphasizing electronic sound effect and **[End Page 129]** strongly influenced by technology—in fact, it uses electronic instrumentation only. It is characterized by a 4/4 beat and eight-bar repeating structure featuring predominantly percussive tracks. Techno features repetitive looping and eschews melody. Techno, which originated in Detroit, can be associated explicitly with "the monotonous, robotic aspect of living in Motor City." Its "hard and minimal nature" is an "artistic response to dilapidated [*sic*], industrial environments" ("*Techno*"). See also Fritz.

3. "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" is presented in another version as well. Mrs. Bald's screeched version actually belongs to Track A and offers an ironic commentary on the July Garland recording. Another Depression-era musical allusion turns up in Eddie's speech immediately following the Otis Redding song: "I got me suit I got me image, suit, image, (He sings) "Who could ask for anything more?" The line is from George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm" (*Girl Crazy*, 1930).

4. "Try a Little Tenderness" was written by Harry M. Woods, James Campbell, and Reginald Connelly. It was first recorded by Ruth Etting on 8 February 1933. The Otis Redding version improvises a bit on the lyrics, but retains the essential wording and feel of the original. The original first verse reads as follows:

<p>She may be weary, Women do get weary Wearing the same shabby dress And when she's weary, Try a little tenderness.</p>
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The song's refrain, as if sensing the male listener's rejection, claims that tenderness is "not just sentimental." The song seems a made-to-order response to Clare's catalog of feminine deprivation: "I can't stand wearing the same clothes again and again. Re-hemming, re-stitching [...] I can't buy my favourite shampoo. Everybody's poor and sickly-white" (32). A more cynical reading of the song would argue that tenderness is merely a male sexual ploy and/or that tenderness is a woefully inadequate response to the living conditions created either by the Great Depression or the unemployment culture of post-capitalist life in cities such as Manchester or Birmingham.

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