EXTRACT

BLIND CITY

a play

by

Alex Broun

Freely adapted from

Dante Alighieri's

"Inferno"

Translated by Gustave Dore

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BLIND CITY
was performed as part of Two Up ! at
The 2003 Sydney Festival.

“ By that hidden way
My guide and I did enter, to return
To the fair world : and heedless of repose
We climb’d, he first, I following his steps
Till on our view the beautiful lights of heaven
Dawn’d through a circular opening in the cave;
Thence issuing we again beheld the stars.”

- **Dante’s Inferno**
(Canto 36, lines 127-133)

“Life’s throw a curve”

- **Simple Minds**
Promised you a miracle

BLIND CITY

was first performed by

The New Mercury Theatre

at

The Bondi Pavilion Theatre
Sydney, Australia

On March the 20th, 2002

with the following cast:

Sophie Gregg

Jon Pasvolsky

Graeme Rhodes

Sarah Smuts-Kennedy

The production was directed by **Kym Weatherley**
and designed by **Anna Robb.**

Act 1. Isolation

Sounds of a busy city. Lights up on **BRENDA, KEITH, JAMIE** and **STEVE.**

We hear a hum building in the distance. The humming becomes louder and louder.

Suddenly the hum is cut off and the stage is illuminated by a brilliant flash of white light. Blackout.

Lights come back up on **STEVE**. He checks around then goes to the back wall. He pulls out a piece of red chalk and scrawls on the wall:

STEVE : (WRITING AS HE SPEAKS)
" In the midway of this our mortal life,
I found me in a gloomy wood astray."
(TO AUDIENCE) Did you see that light the other night ? The blinding flash. Incredible wasn't it. I was up on the roof, hanging out some laundry. I was standing right on the edge, looking out over the park. Bats screaming in the trees. Then it happened. This huge brilliant light in the sky. Bloody thing almost swallowed me up. Then afterwards -silence. This beautiful silence. I couldn't talk. Made me forget about myself, forget. For a whole five minutes.
You see recently I've become obsessed with the idea of killing myself. I have these fantasies about a train slicing me in two, my guts spilling all over the track. Or throwing myself off a tall building – or not so tall building - smashing my body on the concrete below.
I don't think the anti-depressants are working. Maybe I should increase my dosage. Six a day probably isn't really enough. The problem is I'm just really depressed. I mean really, really depressed. But I'm not letting it get me down.
(HE SMILES) In fact I've come to a decision. It came to me in the flash. Well I saw it in the flash. The graffiti. On the wall, across from my building, scrawled in red paint:
(READS FROM WALL) "In the midway of this our mortal life
I found me in a gloomy wood astray."
Dante. Inferno. You know ? Inferno.
So in that moment – when I saw those words - I thought: "Why not ? If I go through nine circles of hell maybe I can get a little Paradise too."
"Through me you pass into the city of woe
All hope abandon, ye who enter here."
But pass through here we must to attain paradise.

HE CLICKS HIS FINGERS. LIGHTS CHANGE. **KEITH** ENTERS.

STEVE: "And lo ! Toward us in a bark comes an old man !"
Hoary, white with eld, crying "Woe to you,
Wicked spirits ! Hope not ever to see the sky again."

1. GOLDILOCKS.

ART GALLERY. 2am.

KEITH IS THE SECURITY GUARD.

KEITH: I like it here among the paintings. Quiet, peaceful, warm. Funny word that - art. Add an f an what do you get ? Fart. That's what my father used to say. He didn't go much on art. Another one, gone to god. They're all gone now. Mum, Eric, Betty, Tom. All gone. Except me. I've been asking for overtime of late. I need to be here at the moment. Among the warm glow. My wife, Drie, went too you see a couple of months ago and I'm not bearing up too well. We were married for 27 years come Christmas. They say four months is the danger time. It's about then when thing's start to get tricky. At first I didn't think it would. I thought I'd be one of the lucky ones. But it's around then you really start to miss them and you begin to realise how empty your life is without them. You begin to understand the real meaning of the word loneliness.

It's all to be expected of course. It's always hardest for the one who remains. The other one sits on a cloud, sipping nice cups of tea, with cream and sugar, while you're stuck down here, among all the tears and memories. Hope they do have tea in heaven. She always loved a good cuppa. Not too hot, not too cold, just right. Like Goldilocks with her bowl of porridge. That's who she was to me. My very own Goldilocks. Have a cup for me love.

That's what I reckon that flash was all about. I was up in the canteen, on me break. It was so bright it went right through the whole building. Like an xray. They said it was dry lightning. Lightning out of a cloudless sky ? I never seen lightning like that. Then they said it was some build up of static electricity due to the new power station. But I reckon it was something else. (WHISPERING) I reckon it was them over there - sending us a sign that they were okay. Saying hello. It was Drie. Telling me I'm not alone.

Things like that happen. You get little signs and you gotta be aware of them. Like this bloke the other day. He was standing in front of the Magritte for hours, with this intense look on his face. I thought at first that he was, pardon the expression, a little barmy. We get them in here some days, trying to scribble on the Picasso. He wasn't like that though. In fact, he was quite the opposite. "Purify". That was his first word. Not a "Hello" or "What's the time ?", or even "What's this one called ?" Just "Purify." Then he went on. "Sit with it. Go through it. Emerge cleansed." Then he stopped for awhile. Went all silent. And then he said, real quiet like: "Begin now." Then he picked up his bag and just walked off. "Purify. Emerge cleansed. Begin now." Heady stuff. I remember it cause I wrote it down on the back of a piece of newspaper and stuck it in my wallet. I take it out and look at it from time to time. Especially at night. It helps me sleep. Not sure why. But it

KEITH: (CONT) helps me nod off. I don't who he was or where he come from but I'll tell you something, I think that chap had a direct line to him up there. You're gonna think I'm crazy but I think he was some kind of angel sent down to help me out. Those words he said, and the flash, they've given me renewed faith. And nothing, nothing on earth, is more important than that.
You see, that light cleansed us all. It's given me courage to go on. To wake up each morning and try to smile. But never forget she's there with me. Watching, laughing –gazing down at me through the flash. Sit with it. Go through it. Emerge cleansed. Begin now.

KEITH EXITS.

STEVE: "Now let us to the blind world there beneath descend
I go the first and thou shalt follow next
And entering lead you with me, on the bounds
Of the first circle that surrounds the abyss.
Suspended in that Limbo many a soul of mighty worth"

JAMIE ENTERS, FEELING HER WAY WITH A CANE.

STEVE: "There mark'd I Helen, for whose sake so long
The time was fraught with evil"

2. **Beer and Newspaper**

JAMIE: How we met.
I left work at 7.45pm exactly as usual. I came down the stairs of the hospital and walked across Macquarie Street and into Martin Place, past the fountain trickling on my left and the smell of garbage at the cafe where I buy my lunch. As I reached the corner of Bridge Street, I felt a slight cool breeze, ruffling my hair – and a warm glow on my face, like someone had lit a match - then silence. No cars, no traffic lights, no people. Nothing, except the trickling of the fountain. Then suddenly an explosion of sound.
A woman screaming - car horns, drowning each other out. Footsteps, a man's footsteps, running towards me. I'm knocked to the footpath by a middle aged man in a thick jacket. He grabbed my hand and tried to pull me up. "Leave me alone. I'm alright. You're the one who's confused. I know exactly where I'm going."
I check my watch. 7.57pm. I had three minutes to get to my bus stop. He'd be waiting. But first I had to get across Bridge Street and the lights have stopped working. I couldn't hear any cars moving so I stepped on to the road. It was unsafe I know but all I was thinking is that I have two minutes to get to my bus stop or he'll be gone. I took another tentative step. Ten more quick steps and I reached the other side. Now it was 7.59. One minute ! I walked quickly down the slope to

JAMIE: (CONT) Elizabeth Street and made it to my bus stop. Eight o'clock exactly. But where was he ?
Where was the man who smells of beer? Not badly - he's not an alcoholic - just a faint smell. One or two after his hard day at the stock exchange. And he always has a paper which he reads on the bus. That's why I christened him Beer and newspaper. Before I knew his real name. Now it was 8.02. I had missed the bus. But no. Surely it had been delayed. But then where was he? Chanel and leather bag was there, standing on my right. She catches the bus two before mine at 7.58 and she was still there. My bus must've still been coming. 8.07. Chanel and leather bag sat next to me. "Did you see the flash ? What did you think it was ?" I did not answer. I sensed her embarrassment as she sees the cane I'm holding in my hand. 8.12. Still no beer and newspaper.
Cigar and umbrella arrived. Almost fifteen minutes late. "Somebody said they've blown up the Opera House" I heard him say. "If they've blown up the Opera House why didn't we hear the bang ?" replied Chanel and leather bag. 8.20. I couldn't bear it. Where was he ? Someone else began to speak. He shouldn't have been at my bus stop. "I reckon it was a nuclear bomb." What was he doing at my bus stop ? "One of those ones that just blows up the people and leaves all the buildings standing." 8.28pm ! I was going to scream. He'd caught a taxi home or worse still he'd been hurt in the flash.
Then suddenly I heard it - about a block away. A bus. Where is beer and newspaper ? The bus stopped. The doors open. Was it my bus ? I'm just about to ask Cigar when at last – the rustle of newspaper and the faint smell of beer. Only one tonight. 8.32. Beer and newspaper had arrived. I could feel him looking at me. Play it cool. Blind and independent is mysterious, sexy. Blind and needy is pathetic. "I see you made it." Was he talking to me ? "I was worried about you." "Don't worry about me" I thought to myself, "it's everybody else who's running around like idiots." But then beer laughed and I suddenly realised that I said it out loud. I was embarrassed but I could feel a smile growing on my face. "Well that's alright then." Beer and newspaper was worried about me. Another bus pulled up. "Come on" he said, "that's us." That's us. I felt him gently take my arm. Together we walked over to the kerb and stepped up on to the bus.

JAMIE EXITS.

STEVE: If they had a competition for the most depressed person in the world I'm absolutely sure I'd win. Or at least come a close second. My sister would come first. She's depressed too. She's been in therapy for six years but her psychiatrist isn't as expensive as mine.
It's not much fun this greyness. I think it's a family trait. An overabundance of angst. Strindberg, Van Gogh, Beckett and Morrissey all rolled into one. Maybe I should just die. But what if you still get depressed even after you're dead ? Think about it. I mean

STEVE: (CONT) what do you do then ? I don't think the pharmacy in heaven is that flush with anti-depressants. And you can't commit suicide. You're already dead.

BRENDA ENTERS, CARRYING A TRAY OF SANDWICHES.

STEVE: “From the first circle I descend thus
Down to the second,
There I saw Electra, accompanied by many”

3. PARTY 1

Drinks Party. 9pm.

BRENDA: They’re at it. Not right now, but they are at it. (BEAT) Like dogs. On heat. (BEAT) How do I know ? Put it this way, it isn't hard to guess. I know what you're thinking. I'm just being paranoid. Final confirmation came the night of the flash. I came in to collect him from the office and surprise, surprise. She was there. Taking dictation. And then came the light in the sky - blinding, hideously bright.The little mouse got so scared she virtually leapt across the desk and into his arms. A split second later the lights went out. But I’d seen all I needed to see.
Her name is Cheryl. Cheryl. Who in their right mind would have an affair with a girl called Cheryl. Sounds like a new brand of washing powder. "Use Cheryl on all your household stains." Her name is Cheryl and they’re screwing. Everyone can tell. It's so bloody obvious. We're the laughing stock of the whole party. Scratch that. I'm the laughing stock of the whole party. "There's Brenda Williams. Did you know her husband is doing his PA ?"
Look at her. She makes me want to vomit. Nineteen. Nine-teen. I mean, look at that dress. Could it be any shorter ? Could her tits be pushed up any higher ? Does she have to be so bloody cute though ? Look at that face, angelic, and where did she get that tan ? Skin like that doesn't exist. I've got to give it to him. He always had taste. After all - he picked me. (LAUGHS) I'm pissed, and I don't care. In fact, I might get really sloshed and put on a show. Liven things up. Go over, slap her on the face, call her a tart and pour my champagne all over those pushed up, pulled out, over cooked tits. Why in the world did he have to bring her here ? Some decorum please. These people are my friends, for Christs' sake. How am I meant to look them in the eye when my husband has brought his work home with him ? His office floozy. His afternoon screw. His mistress. Such an exotic word for such a little slut. I wonder where they do it. A quickie bent over the photocopy machine. A coffee break bonk in the broom closet. Or do they sneak off to a little hotel for a sunset rendesvous ? I wonder how long it's been going on ? Quite a while I would say. I'm not sure when it started but it soon became apparent. Listen, when your husband is sleeping with someone else four times a week you don't have to be

BRENDA: (CONT) Einstein to work out something's changed. Christ. Now he's introducing her around. Like she was his bloody wife or something. Or his daughter. Christ knows he's old enough to be her grandfather.
She keeps looking over at me. Like a cat guarding it's food. She thinks she's got a future with the boss, if only she could get rid of the old hag. I wouldn't hold your breath lovey. He'll get bored with you, just like he got bored with me. So how do I exact my revenge on this superhuman prick? An affair. Hit him with his own medicine. See how he likes it. A nice public one too. With someone really close to him. Chosen to cause maximum humiliation. Terry. Too old.
Lionel. Too married. Barry. Perfect. The trustworthy, second in command. Good old Bazza. See how he likes them apples. And I'll make sure he knows. Rub his face in it, just like he's doing to me. Leave some stained undies under the bed. Or casually put Bazza's tie in with the dry cleaning. He'll soon get the picture. I'm having an affair with Barry. Ha, ha, ha.
But there 's one problem. Just a teensy, weensy one. I don't want to have an affair with Barry. Or even Terry. Even after everything the prick's done to me I still love him. I don't want to sleep with anybody else. I don't want to cuddle up to anybody else in the middle of the night. He's the man I raised two children with and I don't want anybody to be with anybody else - now or ever. Pathetic isn't it? Guess I can't say the same for him.
Are you sure you wouldn't like a sandwich ?

BRENDA SCREAMS AND HURLS SOME SANDWICHES ACROSS STAGE. SHE EXITS.

STEVE: "Thy city heaped with envy to the brim,
Held me in brighter days. Ye citizens
Were won't to name me Ciacco. For the sin
Of gluttony, damned vice, beneath this rain."

THROBBING DANCE MUSIC. CLUB LIGHTING.

4. Nothing less will do

Another party. 2am.

BRENT: There is a better party than this, I just haven't found it yet. There's a better drink than the one I'm drinking, I just haven't drunk it yet. There's a better drug than the one I'm on. I just haven't discovered it yet. If I had to give tonight a score out of ten it would be a six. The first party I went to was to a five – pretty groovy but boring. The next party was definitely a three. A half empty room full of losers. The one before this was really good. It was about an eight and a half. Lots of beautiful girls, lots of expensive booze, nice, mood lighting. I probably should've

BRENT: (CONT) stayed there but hey, I'm on the look out for the perfect ten. Nothing less will do. I haven't found it yet but I've got a feeling I'm not that far away.
This party is somewhere between a four and a six. If some more people turn up it could be a five. If they have drugs it could be a six and a half, and if the most beautiful girl amongst them thinks I'm attractive it could even push to a seven. If no one comes it will remain a four, and if that jerk in the green corduroy jacket keeps playing that stupid record it may even drop to a two. I have three more parties to go to tonight. Either of them could be the magic ten. The second one looks good, and I've got high hopes for my last stop but as for now I'm here, stuck between four and six. I won't stay much longer. It's too bright, I'm a bit hot, that jerk in the jacket is playing that song again and last but by no means least - I'm running out of drugs.
I'll keep moving. Keep rolling on in search of the perfect ten. I know it's out there. I can feel it. I'm getting closer too. I'm warm, very warm. It's just around the next corner. Nothing less will do.
It's like that light in the sky. That's what I'm really looking for. Something like that. I remember when it happened. It went right through me like a shot of ecstasy. And for a spilt second I got this feeling I never had before. This feeling of total ... ten.
I need something like that tonight. Something like that flash. And I will find it. There is a better party than this, I just haven't discovered it yet. There is a better drink than the one I'm drinking, I just haven't drunk it yet. There is a better drug than the one I'm on, I just haven't discovered it yet. Nothing less will do. I'm going. Soon.

LIGHTS CHANGE.

STEVE: "In the third circle I arrive
There I saw the livid stone, full of apertures
All equal in their width and circular each
From out the mouth
Of every one emerged a sinner's feet"

CLIVE ENTERS, CARRYING A SMALL TABLE AND BOUND VOLUME. HE SETS UP THE TABLE.

STEVE: If thou be able, utter forth thy voice."

5. INFIDELITY

MUSIC: Dido's lament from Dido and Aeneas. FADES.

CLIVE: Shakespeare was wrong.
Not in all respects of course. In most respects, he was often quite right, but in this respect he is most definitely - wrong. "The readiness is all". Hamlet, Act 2, Scene 4.