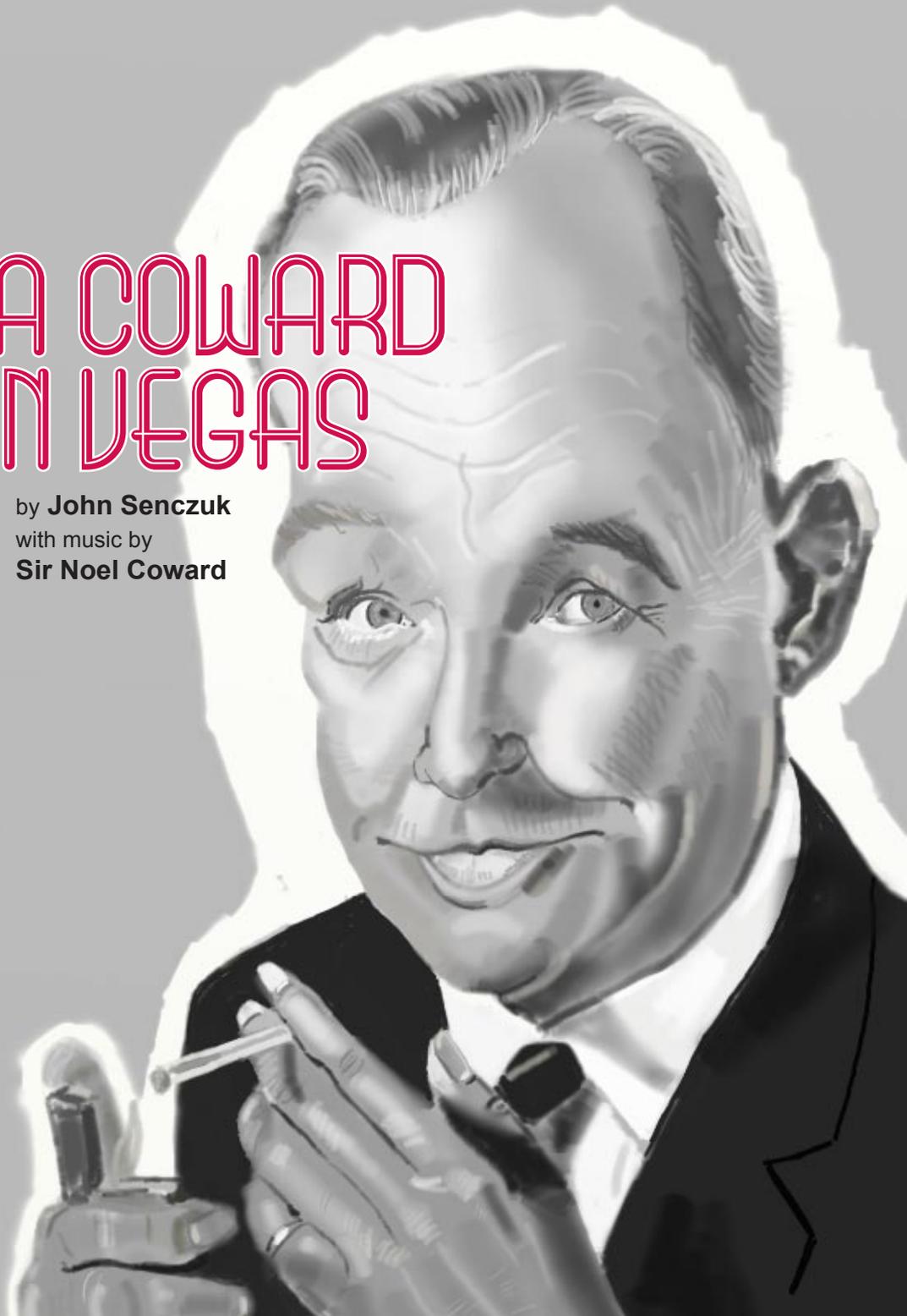


# A COWARD IN VEGAS

by **John Senczuk**  
with music by  
**Sir Noel Coward**



A *Coward in Vegas* as first performed in a production by Mirage Makers at the Old Mill Theatre, South Perth, on Thursday 16 August, 2007. It was directed by John Senczuk with the following cast:

Noel Coward	John Michael Swinbank
Peter Matz	Tim Cunniffe
Musical Director	Tim Cunniffe
Design	John Senczuk
Lighting	Jo Marsh

Poster and production photography by Nigel Etherington

#### Characters

Noel Coward, 56  
Peter Matz, 27 pianist

Summer, 1955; New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas

#### Song List

*Mrs Worthington*  
*20th Century Blues*  
*Alice is at it gain*  
*Uncle Harry*  
*A Room With a View*  
*A Bar on the Piccola Marina*  
*Matelot*  
*Nina*  
*I Like America*  
*Let's Do It*

“To see him whole, public and private personalities conjoined, you must see him in cabaret ... he padded down the celebrated stairs ... halted before the microphone on black-suede clad feet, and upraising both hands in a gesture of benediction, set about demonstrating how these things should be done. Baring his teeth, as if unveiling some grotesque monument, and cooing like a baritone dove, he gave us “I’ll see You Again” and the other bat’s wing melodies of his youth. Nothing he does on these occasions sounds strained or arid; his tanned, leathery face is still an enthusiast’s. All the time the hands are at their task, affectionately calming your too-kind applause. Amused by his own frolicsomeness, he sways from side to side, wagging a finger if your attention looks like wandering. If it is possible to romp fastidiously, that is what Coward does.”

Kenneth Tynan

Performance rights contact:

© John Senczuk, 65 Lysander Drive. HEATHRIDGE WA 6027  
senczuk@bigpond.com  
0407 800343  
www.janusentertainment.com.au

#### Overture: *House of Flowers* (medley)

*(PETER MATZ sits at the piano in his Upper West Side apartment, Manhattan. He is working feverishly between keyboard and charts, completing the arrangements for Harold Arlen’s musical House of Flowers.)*

*(A large parcel of music sits, unwrapped, on the coffee table.)*  
*(It is early evening.)*

#### Scene One

*(NOEL COWARD, immaculate in three piece suit, arrives at the apartment but is clearly somewhat breathless from the drudge of the tenement stairs. He consults a small scrap of paper before entering the apartment.)*

*(MATZ looks up quickly, but says nothing and continues ardently with his task. COWARD, somewhat shocked by the snub, remains rigidly on the spot attempting to gain composure.)*

COWARD *(After a while)*. I don’t usually make a last-minute, dramatic entrance like that unless I have written the play myself ... Mr Matz? I see that the charts have arrived?

MATZ *(Continuing his task)*. Some old guy - called himself ‘Coley’ - threw them at me from the doorway ... didn’t want to lose the cab, he said. You are Mr Coward?

COWARD. My secretary detests Manhattan ... normally we would never travel this far west!

MATZ. The Hudson River’s only a block away - perhaps you should have just kept walking?

*(Pause.)*

COWARD. Did not Marlene call? I’ve just left her at the airport.

MATZ. She said you’d be here at five; it’s seven-thirty?

*(COWARD sits.)*

I haven’t got a lot of time – the choreographer wants another 64 bars by the call tomorrow morning –

COWARD. You’re working on a show?

MATZ. Yes; Harold wants the dance break at the end now, not in the middle. You look fagged -

COWARD. The cab driver was Hispanic; getting here was a nightmare.

And I couldn’t find the lift; I had to walk up five flights of stairs.

MATZ. West Side buildings don’t have elevators.

COWARD. ‘Elevators’? In England we call them ‘lifts’.

MATZ *(Concentrating on COWARD for the first time)*. It was an American who invented the ‘elevator’!

COWARD. Perhaps you’re right ... but an Englishman invented the language. *(He lights a cigarette.)*

(Pause. MATZ goes back to work.)

But - I'm looking for a pianist, and Marlene thought you'd be absolutely brilliant.

MATZ. She said that you'd already said no to eight others. What's the problem: them or you?

COWARD. My usual pianist, Norman Hackforth, has just been refused his work permit.

MATZ. Why me?

COWARD. Marlene said you'd worked together ... and that you were very agreeable.

MATZ. I played the rehearsals for her at the Sahara Hotel in Vegas; we did some cabaret here in Manhattan a few months ago.

COWARD. She's just flown off to London for a season at the Café de Paris; she's using someone called Burt Bacharach ...

MATZ. Yeah, sounds like something she might have picked up in Vegas. She asked me to go but I promised Harold I'd work on the score for *House of Flowers*.

COWARD. Harold Arlen? *House of Flowers*? My dear friend Cecil Beaton is providing the décor. Harold played me the score to Truman's show a couple of months ago; still looking deathly I thought.

MATZ. Capote?

COWARD. No Harold.

MATZ. The ulcer -

COWARD. Ghastly. Truman I met while holidaying at Portofino some years ago; he's an inveterate gossip and I remember we were entertained on a hideous Edwardian yacht by the Luces and Maggie Case.

MATZ. He's a fruit!

COWARD. Harold?

MATZ. No, Capote.

COWARD. 'Capote' dear, not 'compote'! (Pause.) Oh, I see. But one has only to look at the current Broadway listing to know that homosexuality is à la mode this season: Tea and Sympathy indeed! "I can accept anything in the theatre provided it amuses me or moves me. But if it does neither, I want to go home." Truman looks like a child. He has such a wonderful impish face, a kind of 'pre-face' - but a mind like a steel trap.

(MATZ plays a brief tease of 'The Man That Got Away'.)

COWARD. 'The Man that Got Away'.

MATZ. You know it?

COWARD. One of Harold's best songs, I thought. Judy was marvelous, wasn't she?

MATZ. Well, she thought so.

COWARD. I really must play on Broadway again before I am too old to drag myself onto the stage; but a night club is another story.

MATZ. Marlene said you were doing a show.

COWARD. Yes, I'm giving my cabaret in Vegas.

MATZ. Las Vegas!?

COWARD. My American premiere -

MATZ. You? (Beat.) Why choose Las Vegas of all places to make your American night club debut?

COWARD. I didn't choose it ... it chose me ...!

MATZ. Like being born Jewish, in Pittsburgh!

COWARD. I was making my fourth appearance at the Café de Paris, in October last year, when a character called Joe Glaser flew from New York to sign me up!

MATZ. Not the Joe Glaser?

COWARD. In the matter of fact tone of someone discussing the weather, he offered me thirty-five thousand American dollars ... a week - gloriously tax free - to appear at something called Wilbur Clark's *Desert Inn* in Nevada.

MATZ. It's rumoured that there are a few performers playing the Desert ... horizontally ... six feet underground!

COWARD. My only expenses will be (Suddenly recognizing the scope.) ... Coley's board and lodging; Joe's commission of course ... and your salary -

MATZ. And I have Marlene to thank for that assumption? (He goes back to work at the piano.) I assure you it's an assumption.

COWARD. Joe Glaser signed me there and then and shook on the deal. Thank God I had the presence of mind not to kiss the hand I was shaking, but the urge was tremendous.

MATZ. My mother used to say: "In a restaurant choose a table near a waiter." It's never made sense until just now. (MATZ works at the piano during the following.)

COWARD. Joe is a surprising man! At first I thought him a typical sharp, shrewd agent and then discovered that he was untypically kind and gentle, with charming manners. My New York friends were startled that I should have allowed myself to be managed by Joe -

MATZ. I'm not surprised. His usual clients are predominantly, if not entirely, black entertainers ... mostly heavyweight boxers - he's a fight promoter.

COWARD. ... My heart went out to him because he at least took the trouble to fly over to London and make me a concrete offer. That surprised me; or at least my reaction did. As a rule Americans are a race spiritually impoverished. Present company excepted, of course. Their vulgarity is much worse than it used to be ... The

dollar as a god is even more enervating than the Holy Trinity.

MATZ. So why did you accept the offer? Vegas, with Glaser and Clark in your corner, will be like doing eight rounds against Sugar Ray Robinson ...

COWARD. My object, my dear boy, in the whole operation is to make money. Clearly, I'm smitten. Mr Glaser couldn't have known how empty the piggy bank was at that moment. I am nearly £20,000 in overdraft, a situation I could see no way to remedy in a hurry (*Collects his music; going.*) ... especially in England, where ever at my back I can hear the snapping fingers of the UK tax man.

MATZ. Is the money really that important?

COWARD. Someone as young as you probably won't understand. Or maybe you do, looking at how you live; your apartment seriously lacks the feminine touch.

MATZ. I just write music here ... I can write music anywhere. I live when I'm at work.

COWARD. What a pity – I see we have a great deal in common. I live for work – work is much more fun than fun. (*Putting his music and hat down.*) I was a playwright of great promise from 1920 until well into the 30s - success took me to her bosom like a maternal boa constrictor - but after that the mirage faded and all hope died. ...

MATZ. That's having a career, isn't it?!

COWARD. As Shaw said: some careers "can only be traced in stale press notices." The critical laurels so confidently prophesied for me never graced my brow and I was forced to console myself with the bitter palliative of commercial success, which I enjoyed very much indeed.

MATZ. Ah, there's artistic success ... and commercial success ...

COWARD. Looking back, *Private Lives* and *Hay Fever* are as good as anything by Congreve and Wilde, and *Blithe Spirit* will be revived forever. But recently things have not been so good. I am a restless man, Mr Matz. I must twitch my mantle blue .... (*He lights a cigarette.*)

MATZ. What the – now I'm getting twitchy!!

COWARD. *Ace of Clubs*, although not quite good enough, was perhaps ahead of its time. *Relative Values* was definitely a success, with the incomparable Gladys Cooper giving a dazzling display of expert high-comedy acting.

MATZ. Most Broadway writers would be satisfied with just one opportunity ...

COWARD. When I was a little boy, I longed to be a big star and a great success. In those days I was too occupied by somebody asking

6

me for an autograph in a bus ... One gets carried away by glamour and personality and magnetism – they're beastly treacherous things.

MATZ. Look, Mr Coward, you seemed to have had a decent run; most of us would be grateful for a small part of your success. Who cares about the critics? It's the work. I'm sorry, there's nothing I fear more than a pissed off choreographer. (*Shaking hands with COWARD to get rid of him.*) Give my love to Marlene, but I'm not sure that I can help you -

COWARD. To a younger generation of critics I am a has-been, an almost antiquated figure that, having enjoyed a marvelous heyday, it was now quite over. The kitchen sink is in and witty elegance is out. Starving tramps who are unable to communicate are all the rage. If you write a play or made a film about a crippled Mexican peasant shivering in rags and gnawing a dirty turnip in the gutter you are bound to be praised to the skies and awarded several international prizes. I find it a great comfort and make it a rigid rule to stay away from such masterpieces. Hardest of reviews to bear are the pitying ones.

MATZ. You're making me very grateful that I moved back to the States.

COWARD. The British public is more prone to think for itself. (*He goes to the piano and punctuates his line with 'Rule Britannia'.*) In America audiences have to be told what to enjoy and what to avoid, not only in the theatre but in every phase of life.

MATZ. Is that one of yours?

COWARD. Americans, from my observation, are told what to eat, drink and smoke, what cars to buy and what laxatives and sanitary towels to use. ... If enough people told you to put you heads under trucks, I'm sure you would do so. I wonder why no one has thought of doing that? The power of individual thought has been atrophied in them by the incessant onslaughts of commercialism ... and I intend to take full advantage of that phenomenon.

MATZ. You might be describing Pennsylvania ... but Manhattan, Hollywood ... Vegas? If you don't impress the crowd tonight, you're parking cars tomorrow.

COWARD. I've played difficult crowds, believe me. Norman and I had a lot of experience of troop concerts together during the war.

MATZ (*Frustrated*). Was that the Boer War?

COWARD. Roses! I would never have been a success at the Café de Paris if it hadn't been for three years singing to troops.

MATZ. They're a trapped audience.

COWARD. You're absolutely right. Very often – most often - the troops didn't wish to see me at all. They would have loved to have seen ...

7

Marlene - or a comic who could drop his pants and get a laugh. They didn't want to see me coming on and being sophisticated. But I also knew that if I played down to them and altered my material, they would see through it. So I had to make them like what I was doing. And on the whole I succeeded. Not always. I had a few bad moments. Sometimes it would take me about twenty minutes to get them.

**MATZ.** Twenty minutes? Anywhere on the strip, unless you've grabbed them before they've checked out the dinner menu, they're out of the joint. The only reason you're hired is to amuse the gamblers' wives; all Clark wants is happy punters. It's not like Broadway, the dramatic critics are tame compared to a hostile loser from Ohio! They'll throw beer bottles -

**COWARD.** My personal attitude to the critics – from Ohio or anywhere else - after fifty years of varying emotions, has finally solidified into an unyielding core of bored resignation. Every now and then the outer edge of this fossilized area in my mind can be twitched into brief sensitivity by an unexpected word of praise or a stab of more than usual vicious abuse, but these occasions are becoming rarer and rarer. ... What could possibly be worse than playing the trenches with the German Army and Hitler breathing up your arse? Sollocks! (*He grabs the charts and thrusts them at MATZ.*) Pick a chart ... any chart! (*MATZ hesitates.*)

I have often thought of forming a Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Celebrities. Apparently, for certain individuals, men and women in the public eye are fair game to be knocked off their balance occasionally and made to look foolish.

(*MATZ, without looking, hands COWARD some sheet music.*)

*COWARD sits at the piano and accompanies himself; performing for MATZ ... trying to impress.*)

**Song: Mrs Worthington**

**COWARD** (In Café de Paris mode). Some years ago when I was returning from the Far East on a very large ship, I was pursued around the decks every day by an even larger lady. She showed me some photographs of her daughter – a repellent-looking girl and seemed convinced that she was destined for a great stage career. Finally, in sheer self-preservation, I locked myself in the lavatory and wrote this song. You see, I too can work anywhere:

**Regarding yours, dear Mrs Worthington,  
Of Wednesday the 23rd,  
Although your baby,**

**Maybe,  
Keen on a stage career,  
How can I make it clear,  
That this is not a good idea.  
For her to hope,  
Dear Mrs Worthington,  
Is on the face of it absurd,  
Her personality  
Is not in reality  
Inviting enough,  
Exiting enough  
For this particular sphere.**

(*During this song, MATZ unwraps the arrangements.*)

I had no formal music training. I am a self-taught pianist who never took a single piano lesson in my whole life. I'm not alone: Irving Berlin could only play in C Major ... I just ignore the minor keys –

(*MATZ doesn't really know what to think. He wraps the bundle up again.*)

**Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage,  
The profession is overcrowded  
And the struggle's pretty tough  
And admitting the fact  
She's burning to act,  
That isn't quite enough.  
She has nice hands, to give the wretched girl her due,  
But don't you think her bust is too  
Developed for her age,  
I repeat  
Mrs Worthington,  
Sweet  
Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage.  
(*MATZ takes over at the piano; the style clearly changes and COWARD attempts to adapt.*)  
Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage,  
She's a bit of an ugly duckling  
You must honestly confess,  
And the width of her seat  
Would surely defeat  
Her chances of success,**

*It's a loud voice, and thought it's not exactly flat,  
She'll need a little more than that  
To earn a living wage.  
On my knees,  
Mrs Worthington,  
Please  
Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage.*

COWARD. Please don't play while I'm making a joke!

MATZ. What joke?

COWARD. Listen!

MATZ. Where is it in on the page?

COWARD. It's not written, it's not on the page. I perform the joke; it's me.

MATZ. They say an Englishman laughs three times at a joke. The first time when everybody gets it, the second a week later when he thinks he gets it, the third time a month later when somebody explains it to him -

COWARD. *Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage,  
Though they sad at the school of acting  
She was lovely as Peer Gynt,  
I'm afraid on the whole  
An ingénue role  
Would emphasize her squint,  
She's a big girl, and though her teeth are fairly good  
She's not the type I ever would  
Be eager to engage,  
No more butts,  
Mrs Worthington,  
(To MAZT.) NUTS  
Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage.*

MATZ. It's extremely difficult to follow your lyrics!

COWARD. Sollocks! Just play the music! Don't listen to the lyrics! Listen - to ME!

*Don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage,  
One look at her bandy legs would prove  
She hasn't got a chance,  
In addition to which  
The son of a bitch  
Can neither sing nor dance,  
She's a vile girl and (He tests MATZ with a pause.) uglier than*

*mortal sin,  
One look at her has put me in  
A tearing bloody rage,  
(He tests MATZ with another longer pause.)  
That sufficed,  
Mrs Worthington,  
Christ!  
Mrs Worthington,  
Don't put your daughter on the stage.  
- Or your son -  
Don't put your daughter on the stage.*

MATZ. Is that the sort of material you are thinking of using?

COWARD. I hadn't given much thought to adapting the Café de Paris act at all; Norman and I supposed that we would simply take it lock, stock and barrel.

MATZ (*Looking at Noel's orchestrations*). But surely you're not going to use these?

(*Taken by surprise, COWARD lights a cigarette.*)

Are you? -

COWARD (*A pause.*) Oh no, I want you to re orchestrate all the songs.

(*A long pause.*)

That's why I need you; you'll be my saviour!

MATZ. I'm Jewish; I don't believe in the Messiah. (*Pouring himself a drink*). Bourbon?

COWARD. I rarely drink at this hour ...

(*MATZ pours another shot.*)

Thank you.

MATZ (*Handing COWARD the drink*). Harold has asked me to stay on for his next project.

COWARD. What could possibly be more enticing than four weeks in the desert with Noel Coward.

MATZ. Six months with Lena Horne.

COWARD. Touché! (*Obviously not enjoying the taste*). This is cheap bourbon. (*Gives MATZ his glass.*) So you will come to Vegas?

MATZ. Have you completely thought this through? (*MATZ pours COWARD's drink into his own.*) What happens if you they hate you? What do you do then?

COWARD. Behave exquisitely.

MATZ. Honestly, Mr Coward -

COWARD. Noel.

MATZ. Yeah - I have no idea about your songs or the style of that English Music Hall comedy thing ... I really think you need to find someone else.

COWARD. Marlene with be dreadfully disappointed.

MATZ. Marlene has made a career out of being dreadfully disappointed.

COWARD. You realise I was instrumental in starting Marlene's cabaret career. I encourage her to try her luck at the Café de Paris.

MATZ. How did she go with the London audiences? Marlene doesn't have much of a sense of humour ... in English; though, for all I know, she might have been fucking hilarious in German.

COWARD. The Piccadilly crowd certainly appreciated something! Her success was enormous. In everything she attempted, Marlene knew precisely what she wanted.

MATZ. In Vegas, she was shy – but 'difficult' ... not to me but - for Marlene it's cloth of gold on the walls and purple marmosets swinging from the chandeliers.

COWARD (*He succumbs and pours himself a drink*). Sadly for me ... at the Café de Paris ... I was only ever offered sweet fuck all.

MATZ. But you didn't have to be sewn into your dress!

COWARD. A novelty act I've not yet considered! (*Toasts.*) Bottoms up!

MATZ (*Pause*). With your career, why cabaret?

COWARD. It started, by chance, as it often does: Norman was accompanying Beatrice Lillie while she gave a season of cabaret at the Café de Paris – Summer of 1951 – and I naturally went to see the premiere. After the performance, over a drink with the management, I found myself persuaded – without much difficulty – to try my luck with a four week season that autumn for £750 per week. Princess Margaret came to opening night. I was so successful that the Management offered me a thousand pounds a week if I would extend the season by a fortnight. I did a return season a year later to the same vociferous welcome, and yet again in 1953, this time especially to help celebrate the Queen's Coronation.

MATZ. What type of cabaret do you do ... to celebrate a Queen's Coronation?

COWARD. Mine! (*Pause.*) I've been a personality actor all my life. I'd established in my early years the sophisticated, urbane type, which is in tune with my own personality.

MATZ. Sophisticated cabaret? Isn't that a contradiction in terms? That's not Broadway ... that's not show business.

COWARD. When you've lived for a half a century you are bound to pick up a bit of sophistication here and there. But I was sophisticated at the age of five.

MATZ. America's not like England ... Shouldn't you be trying to be a bit more 'with it'?

COWARD. I have not felt the necessity of being 'with it'. I'm all for staying

in my place. If a person over fifty tries too hard to be 'with it', they soon find they're without everything. I entertain. Nobody can teach you, no correspondence courses, no rehearsals in the studios.

MATZ. Sounds a bit old fashioned!

COWARD. I'm not afraid of appearing old fashioned. Anything else would be like an elderly actress playing the ingénue. Again, you come up against this thing of the image you create in the public mind of yourself.

MATZ. Exactly the same with Marlene.

COWARD (*Raising his glass.*) *Though we all might enjoy Seeing Helen of Troy As a gay cabaret entertainer I doubt that she could Be one quarter as good As our lovely, legendary Marlene.* (*MATZ laughs.*) That's how I introduced her premiere last year. We've known each other for twenty years.

MATZ. That long?

COWARD. That's the most hilarious part: when I first encountered Marlene Dietrich, I hung up on her. She'd seen me in my first American film, *The Scoundrel* in 1935 and called from New York to congratulate me. I was convinced it was a hoax and promptly hung up!

MATZ. Fuck the critics; you've survived Marlene!

COWARD. In our profession the thing that counts is survival. Have you always been a musician?

MATZ (*Quickly changing the subject*). I was studying to become a chemical engineer ... I graduated from UCLA.

COWARD. Clearly a terribly misguided youth!

MATZ. I supported myself through college by playing woodwinds with dance bands; that's how I got to Vegas in the first place.

COWARD. So Pennsylvania ... to California, Nevada ... then New York?

MATZ. I had two years of 'intensive' musical studies in France ...

COWARD. The French countryside, seen from a railway carriage, always looks strangely unfinished, don't you think? Like an unmade bed.

MATZ. Well actually, I got my real education working in night clubs and cocktail bars in Paris ... even a stint at the Folies Bergère.

COWARD. I've never quite seen the theatrical interest in women's breasts; they just keep moving once the music's stopped. A great deal of *merde* in Paris.

MATZ. A whole heap of dog shit as well.

COWARD. Do you speak French?

MATZ. *Un petit peu.*

COWARD. I never think that's really quite enough, do you?

MATZ. I got lured back home to the States, to study music theory and piano - I'm just a few blocks from Columbia if I walk north ... but I walked south down Broadway and got distracted: Harold wanted someone to do the orchestration for *House of Flowers*; Marlene suggested me ...

COWARD. You see, it's comparatively easy if you have talent – comparatively easy to have a success. But what is really difficult is to maintain what you've established. I have learnt the art of apparent casualness.

MATZ. You said you could grab someone's attention in twenty minutes; (*Checking his watch.*) it's only been about twelve minutes since you arrived ... still eight to go ...

COWARD. Don't do it for me. Do it for Marlene.  
(*MATZ rifles through the wad of arrangements and puts a handful on the piano. He plays through a medley of COWARD standards: 'Teach me to Dance.'*)

COWARD. Let's make the most of the whole business, shall we?  
(*MATZ segues into 'You Were There.'*)  
Let's be photographed and interviewed and pointed at in restaurants! ...  
(*To COWARD'S consternation, MATZ still doesn't appear to be too impressed. MATZ segues into 'Someday I'll find You.'*)  
Let's play the game for what it's worth. ...  
(*MATZ is suddenly drawn to one of the songs ['Twentieth Century Blues'].*)  
Don't let's allow one shabby dollar bill to slip through our fingers!  
(*MATZ sings the lyrics, until COWARD can't stand it any more and takes over.*)

SONG: *20th Century Blues*

MATZ. *Why is it that civilized humanity can make this world so wrong*

*In this hurly-burly of insanity, our dreams cannot last long*

MATZ/COWARD. *We've reached a deadline, a press headline, every sorrow*

*Blues value is news value tomorrow*

COWARD. It's from *Cavalcade*, 1931 –

MATZ. It's untidy ... musically.

COWARD (*Petulantly*). It is also exceedingly difficult to sing -

*Blues, twentieth century blues are getting me down  
Blues, escape those dreary twentieth century blues  
Why, if there's a god in the sky, why shouldn't he grin*

*High above this dreary twentieth century din*

*In this strange illusion, chaos and confusion*

*People seem to lose their way*

*What is there to strive for, love or keep alive for*

*Say, Hey hey, call it a day -*

MATZ. It's not really a blues, it is kind of bluesy - I guess. It's like a copy of a 1930's torch song. I know what it is, but what is it trying to be? Let's see, the verse sets out in F minor, then steps over to Eb major in the second eight. ... The chorus starts in D? ... Where are we going with that? ... It's weird, using the dominant sevenths around the cycle doesn't allow it to settle down.

COWARD. Is that right? (*Pause.*) Can you play it in A flat?

MATZ. Sure can, Mr Coward.

COWARD. I knew we were destined to be lovers!  
*Blues, twentieth century blues are getting me down  
Blues, escape those dreary twentieth century blues  
Why, if there's a god in the sky, why shouldn't he grin  
High above this dreary twentieth century din*

*In this strange illusion, chaos and confusion*

*People seem to lose their way*

*What is there to strive for, love or keep alive for*

*Say, Hey hey, call it a day -*

*Blues, nothing to win or to lose, it's getting me down  
Blues, escape those weary twentieth century blues  
Can you be in Los Angeles tomorrow?*

(*Blackout.*)

## Scene Two

(*Beverly Hills Hotel, Los Angeles; early evening, 29 May, 1955.*)  
(*MATZ is working at the piano on arrangements for 'Why Must the Show Go On' – he is clearly frustrated with the process; constantly looking at his watch.*)

(*A door slams, off stage.*)

(*COWARD saunters in, somewhat disheveled but euphoric; he has a newspaper; he takes his jacket off and throws it over the chair.*)

COWARD. ... *And if you lose hope,*

*Take dope*

*And lock yourself in the John,*

*Why must the show go on?*

*I'm merely asking*

*Why must the show go on?*

MATZ. Cole really needs to get you a watch! We had a rehearsal scheduled or six ...

COWARD. I met Louella Parsons this afternoon –

MATZ. We're due in Las Vegas next Thursday, Noel; I'm only half way through the orchestrations.

COWARD ... It is all very exciting being back in Hollywood.

MATZ. For you, maybe.

COWARD. I know that there will be dramas and irritations and frustrations and nerves and ... And far, far too much publicity ...  
(*Throws down paper.*)

MATZ (*Furious.*) Mr Coward.

COWARD. Something upsetting you, Pete? Don't worry, I intend to watch myself carefully and not get over strained.

MATZ. Where were you this afternoon ...?!!

COWARD. I've been to a marvelous party!

MATZ. We need to rehearse. Isn't that why you brought me over here?

COWARD (*Pointedly*). At great expense! (Relaxing in the chair.) You were invited this afternoon, Peter; surely we can spare some time to relax. Perhaps you might get lucky and meet Miss Right?

MATZ. A party thrown by Frank Sennes isn't my idea of relaxation.

COWARD. "It seems too good to be true – sitting here and talking as though we are old friends."

MATZ. We aren't old friends –

COWARD. "We probably met in another life?"

MATZ. Vegas will be the death of you ... it could be your reincarnation!

COWARD. "You do say ripping things!" (Pause.) It was a stupendous cocktail party ... but hilariously funny. It started at four - and was supposed to have finished by six – you know I was photographed 390 times!

MATZ. I'd be grateful for the opportunity to take just one shot!! (*Bang!*) ... You're behaving like a star-struck chorus girl -

COWARD. Esme Wynn thought me relentlessly frivolous and spiritually indifferent -

MATZ. I can now confirm Esme Wynn's assessment – whoever she is -

COWARD. It was inevitable that the more successful I became, the more people would run after me. I don't believe in their friendship, and I don't take them seriously, but I enjoy them. Probably a damn sight more than they enjoy me! People are greedy and predatory, and if you give them the chance, they will steal unscrupulously the heart and soul out of you without really wanting to or even, meaning to. Let them all come! They'll drop me, all right, when they're tired of me; but maybe I shall get tired first.

MATZ. I'm tired of you already, and if we don't get on with it, I'm on the first plane back to New York! You've got a lot at stake, Noel.

COWARD. You need to get out into the fresh Hollywood air, Peter. You spend far too much time on your own. You are the only person I know who reads Mozart with his breakfast.

MATZ. Mozart wasn't distracted with stars in his eyes!

COWARD. You don't need to be if indeed you are the flame around which the tinseltown moths are fluttering. (*Pause.*) Frank invited three hundred people. But it didn't really take off until Charlton Heston and his wife arrived ... and then the hordes of photographers. Bacall was dazzling in white, Greer Garson in mauve, Jean Simmons in blue -

MATZ. Fucking hell!

COWARD. I don't swear any more, I've just learnt to say "Zsa Zsa Gabor!"

...  
(*MATZ isn't amused.*)

Normally, I used not to care much for Hollywood, I'd rather have had a nice cup of cocoa.

MATZ. I bet Frank wasn't serving cocoa! You were supposed to be giving up alcohol? Cocktails by the pool in one of those grotesque Sunset Boulevard mansions -

COWARD. On the contrary, it's a gracious home ... by Hollywood standards.

MATZ. I'm grateful at least for the isolation.

COWARD. I would have preferred a hotel too. But Clifton insisted; Coley and I are stuck out at his house on North Rexford Drive. Clifton's away – fortunately –

MATZ. Town not big enough for two 'Noel Cowards' eh?

COWARD. How very droll, Peter; but you're learning to play the game. Do you know of his formidable mother Mabelle. Mrs Webb is dreaded by all Hollywood. Apparently she will dance the can-can for you – or at least her version of it. She's nearly ninety. (*Pause.*) The house is comfortable and lovely, but the windows are so creeper-overgrown that we live in subaqueous light. We live in the Nautilus ... Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea..

MATZ. We're the ones drowning, Noel; you're forgetting why we're here.

COWARD. I had no idea that Frank is the booking agent for the Moulin Rouge ... as well as the *Desert Inn*.

MATZ. Frank Sennes is the main man responsible for all the productions shown at *The Desert Inn*.

COWARD. And, I'm reliably informed, had the first SRO signs ever seen in Vegas displayed at practically every show

MATZ. SRO?

COWARD. Standing Room Only ... that certainly suggests that he has some flair.

MATZ. There's not much space left in the room along side Sennes' ego; he boasts that there isn't anyone who isn't anyone who hasn't worked for him!

COWARD. Fortunately I have been someone. (*Looking through newspaper.*) Don't worry, Frank will look after us – look at all the press coverage so far.

MATZ (*Getting fed up; viciously reading from the newspaper*). “How did it feel to be ‘written-off’ as unimportant after the War, Mr Coward?”

COWARD. Well, in the first place, nobody of particular importance wrote me off. And in the second place, I didn't notice it. At any rate, Marlene has assured me that I'll be very successful in Las Vegas. She told me that *The Desert Inn* will be perfect – the only place for me!

MATZ. Wilbur Clark is a big-time gambler from San Diego. He ploughed millions of dollars into the place ... guess where the money came from, Noel?

COWARD. I know Frank Sinatra was keen to invest –

MATZ. And you must have heard the rumours about Sinatra's ‘connections’?

COWARD. If I don't care for things, I simply don't look at them ...

MATZ. From where I'm sitting, you don't seem to want to look at quite a lot.

COWARD. I'm resigned to the fact that any topic in Hollywood or America in general is reduced to dollar signs.

MATZ. That's how it operates; the American Way. Everyone I met when I was here at college was on the make; you couldn't get away from it that desperate, extravagant tactic ... just to get noticed by someone very like Frank Sennes.

COWARD. I applaud taste, and I applaud extravagance. I'm very fortunate to have spent the afternoon in extravagant company. Present company excluded.

MATZ. Fuck you!

COWARD. Zsa Zsa Gabor!! ... There were hundreds of camellias and thousands of rose petals swirling slowly round on the surface of his swimming pool. “You mark my words,” I said to Coley, “Louella Parsons will come up naked out of it, looking unlike Aphrodite!” “Oh, no she won't. I'm right here by your side, Noel darling.” I'm absolutely positive that the illiterate lady had taken the whole thing as a compliment.

MATZ. Are we going to rehearse or not?

COWARD. If you insist. Shall we do Alice?

MATZ. If we must ...  
(*MATZ plays the arrangement as written, but is clearly dissatisfied ...*)

**Song: *Alice is at it Again***

COWARD. *In a dear little village, remote and obscure  
A beautiful maiden resided  
As to whether or not her intentions were pure  
Opinions were sharply divided ...*

MATZ. What is this, some kind of folk song?

COWARD. Yes, it's a very charming folk melody of old England?

MATZ. Which part of England?

COWARD. It's traditional!

MATZ. Are the ‘folks’ still alive?!

(*Pause.*)

We're already rehearsed four songs that sound exactly the same as this one –

COWARD. Not at all –

MATZ. That one about Mad Dogs ... and Mrs Brewster and her fat daughter -

COWARD. Those songs are unique -

MATZ. But they sound the same ...

COWARD. To you perhaps ... the lyrics are different!

MATZ. I have to orchestrate these songs, and there's a major problem if I can't tell them apart. ... Perhaps if we tried something like ... ?  
(*MATZ turns it musically into something else.*)

COWARD. That's not the spirit of the song ... It's meant to be a subtle, clever song –

MATZ. No one in Vegas cares about clever, and especially not subtle; all Wilbur Clark cares about is having a room full of out-of-towners entertained and being generous with their tips.

COWARD. If the song is to work, I need to set up the atmosphere? The gentleness of the evening ...

MATZ. But you're playing to a room full of loudmouth boozers and your competition is a \$5 rump stake!

COWARD. We need the audience to be attentive to the lyrics.

MATZ. You're playing a room in a casino, with a soundtrack of roulette tables and slot machines!  
(*MATZ gives it the full treatment.*)

MATZ. *In a dear little village, remote and obscure  
A beautiful maiden resided*

COWARD. No ...  
*As to whether or not her intentions were pure*  
No ... for God's sake

***Opinions were sharply divided***

COWARD. ... Sollocks! I don't know who wrote that, but it's not me!

MATZ (*Totally frustrated, he throws the chart at COWARD*). It's all wrong! You can't do it –

COWARD. It's worked for four years to astonishing success in Piccadilly.

MATZ. But this is Vegas, not London!

(*A stoney ilence.*)

COWARD. I wrote *Sweet Alice* for *Pacific 1860* ... but it was cut in rehearsal –

MATZ. Why?

COWARD. Well ... because Mary Martin refused to sing it.

MATZ. Clearly, a woman of impeccable musical taste -

COWARD (*Persistent*). But I rewrote the lyrics to make them more “modern” ... and have been using it in my Cabaret performances very successfully ever since

(*COWARD ploughs on in his traditional rendition.*)

COWARD. ***She loved to lie out 'neath the darkening sky***

(*MATZ begrudgingly accompanies him.*)

***And allow the night breeze to entrance her***

***She whispered her dreams to the birds flying by***

***But seldom received any answer.***

MATZ. I don't get the lyrics either? “Whispered her dreams to the birds ...?” They don't “answer”? What do you expect? They're birds for Christ's sake; birds don't speak English ... and definitely not American. These lyrics might be modern to your generation, but this little pianist from Pittsburgh has got no idea what's going on.

COWARD. You have to wait until the end of the song to get the punchline.

MATZ. But it's just another dreary song about a gormless girl, trapped in some godforsaken village in soggy England. What the fuck's this got to do with an American audience ...

COWARD. It's the fact that Alice does get fucked ... that is the point! If you were patient, you'd get to learn that Alice is not all she appears to be!

MATZ. Just so you know, my mother's name is Alice ...

**Song: *Alice is at it Again***

COWARD. ***Over the field and along the lane***

***Gentle Alice [Peter's mother] would love to stray***

***When it came to the end of the day***

***She would wander away unheeding***

***Dreaming her innocent dreams, she strolled***

***Quite unaffected by heat or cold***

***Frequently freckled or soaked with rain***

***Alice was out in the lane. ...***

MATZ. Musically, this is just going around in circles; the melody isn't developing. *Mad Dogs* was witty, this one ... it's not even funny.

COWARD. You don't always have to be complex to be clever. You have to trust the material. I got standing ovations with this song ... for four years!

MATZ (*Deliberately*). It's not sexy! (*Pointedly.*) Have you ever had sex with a woman?

COWARD. Have you!

(*Embarrassed pause.*)

I am, if you must know, the world's sexiest man. Mr Sinatra and Mr Martin take second place to me in the sex appeal stakes. Sex appeal isn't just straight teeth, a square jaw and a solid torso. Look at me. I'm 55 and first thing in the morning I have a face like a woolen mat. And yet I am the most desirable man in the world. Indeed, if I put my mind to it I am sure I could pass the supreme test and lure Miss Taylor away from Mr Wilding. My stage persona is enameled, flippant and cynical, as well as irresponsible and very slightly sexually dangerous. That's why they are paying me a very large sum of money.

MATZ. You're not paying me enough to put up with this shit.

COWARD. Sollocks!

MATZ. What the fuck does that mean, anyway?

COWARD. What you don't understand is that both lyrics and music have to set up the scene ... at the end of the song, all will be revealed.

MATZ. I'm pleased they'll be serving alcohol ... for endurance; and I'll be ordering doubles.

COWARD. Alright, how would you like to do it then?

(*MATZ plays his version; COWARD begrudgingly and unsuccessfully tries to sing it.*)

MATZ. From the top -

COWARD. ***In a dear little village, remote and obscure***

***A beautiful maiden resided***

***As to whether or not her intentions were pure***

***Opinions were sharply divided***

***Listen!***

***She loved to lie out 'neath the darkening sky***

***And allow the night breeze to entrance her***

***She whispered her dreams to the birds flying by***

***But seldom received any answer.***

***You're not listening ...***

***Over the field and along the lane***

*Gentle Alice would love to stray  
When it came to the end of the day  
She would wander away unheeding*

Listen to me, please ...

*Dreaming her innocent dreams, she strolled  
Quite unaffected by heat or cold  
Frequently freckled ...*

Hideous! This is impossible! It's vulgar ... and as subtle as a draft horse's fart!

*(The MATZ way; pointedly at COWARD.)*

MATZ. *Whom she met there, every day there*

*Was a question answered by none*

*(COWARD, childishly, covers his ears.)*

*But she'd get there and she'd stay there*

*Till whatever she did was undoubtedly done*

COWARD. That's that then. I believe we've arrived at what they call a stalemate!

MATZ *(Taking his time)*. Look Noel. It's not the arrangement!

COWARD. Thank you.

MATZ. It's not the lyrics ...

COWARD. At last some sense –

MATZ. It's how you sing it!

COWARD *(Shocked)*. What's wrong with the way I sing it?

MATZ. You're contracted for two shows nightly for four weeks.

COWARD. Yes?

MATZ. It's not one show like at the Café ... and you do realize that there won't be any nights off.

COWARD. Not even Sunday?

MATZ. Especially not Sunday.

COWARD. Joe didn't mention that -

MATZ. Wilbur needs to keep his punters out of church. ... How will you survive this?

COWARD. By my charm!

MATZ. Be serious, Noel. You certainly know how to put a number across, but the dry Nevada air is notorious for its adverse effects on singers.

COWARD. Marlene survived ...

MATZ. Marlene talked her way through most of it -

COWARD. I'll manage!

MATZ. Yours is a rather thin, breathy voice and we have to do something to bring it down.

COWARD. I caught a hideous cold on the plane and took some tablets ... called *Super Anahist* (sounds like Ziegfeld's mistress); it cured it at

once with no side affects at all. A miracle! ... I have bought eight thousand bottles.

MATZ. Because of your training as an actor, you seem to have also developed the habit of reaching –

COWARD. Reaching?

MATZ. ... Trying to take too much in one breath.

COWARD. I had a mildly consumptive lung at fifteen.

MATZ. Not helped by your smoking too much -

COWARD. Smoking? A cigarette is only a prop. It is an aid to outward nonchalance.

MATZ. And I'm using it as a stick to beat you with!

COWARD. I haven't had a cigarette since lunch –

MATZ. Your cigarette was lunch.

COWARD. I've been eating very well: I'm lunching on lettuce and cottage cheese and grapefruit quarters, served on trays ...

MATZ. I've learnt to pay no attention to these diversions, Noel -

COWARD *(A long pause)*. Very well, what's to be done?

MATZ. You need to learn how to sing like an American.

COWARD. But do I want 'to learn how to sing like an American'?

MATZ. If you want to survive the next month!

COWARD. The only thing that intrigues me is that at the age of 55 I can still command such general abuse from the very young.

MATZ. It's a well known technique, used by a New York vocal teacher. His name is Alfred Dixon; Katharine Hepburn swears by it.

COWARD. If it's good enough for Katie ... "Okie-dokie!"

MATZ. What you're doing at the moment is that you're breathing up here ... *(Indicating his chest)*; you need to get it down into your diaphragm. We need you to learn to breathe properly.

COWARD. But I've been breathing from a very early age!

MATZ. Now, just breath in – start naturally; lips closed; feet apart. Over a count of four: one ... two ... three ... four – *(COWARD takes in short breaths after each count.)*

No, one long breath in – one ... two ... three ...

*(COWARD does so, but collapses into a fit of coughing.)*

Try again: one ... two ... three ... four.

*(COWARD tentatively cooperates.)*

Let it out. Very good.

COWARD. Shall I regard that as my first good review from my harshest critic.

MATZ. Now this time, a breath down onto your diaphragm ... two ... three ... and ... now breath out to a hiss - "Hisssss" ... one ... two ... three ... four. Again ... now, all in one breath; feel the breath here on you diaphragm.

*(COWARD fumbles, but eventually succeeds.)*

You'll find that if you take that one breath, you get connected to the phrase ... now you've got a sound you can sit on. Now, breath out over eight: "Hiss" ... two ... three ... four ... five ... six –

*(COWARD almost faints!)*

COWARD. I have never experienced such humiliation in my entire career!

MATZ. We'll let's fix that. I want you to vocalize now. Make a mooing noise with lips closed. Like a cow: 'Mooooo.' *(Up and down the scale.)*  
'Mooooo.'

COWARD. You sound like a bovine air raid warning!

MATZ. 'Mooooo' ....

COWARD. Let me get this straight: I'm to imagine that I'm a cow, only I'm to moo with my mouth shut?

MATZ. Most definitely with your mouth shut.

*(COWARD attempts the exercise; MATZ corrects him; they have a 'Mooooo-off'.)*

Your problem is that your mooing like an English cow – you really need to learn how to moo more like an American cow.  
'Mooooo'.

COWARD. Cows for you, dear; bulls for me! *(An affected masculine Moo.)*  
'Mooooo'.

MATZ. Place the sound up here in the mask; but the breath must be firm on the diaphragm.

COWARD. 'Mooooo'. *(Satisfied with the new sound, he tries again, but gulps in a big breath.)* 'Mooooo'.

MATZ. Use the smallest amount of breath possible, and sip in a little more when you need to. Never breathe deeply; even the longest musical phrase can be sung – will be better sung – on very little breath. Just inhale the merest sip ...

COWARD. As once sips tea?

MATZ. But only when you have to and it will carry you through to the end.

*(COWARD consciously 'sips' breath.)*

COWARD. 'Mooo.' I don't know if I'm coming or going, but it is the best loosener-upper in the world.

MATZ. Don't be so aware of the physical aspects of singing. Use the smallest amount of breath possible. Once more ...  
*(COWARD is amazed at the new sound he creates.)*

COWARD *(A big moo finish)*. 'Mooooo!' *(Excited by his achievement)*. I don't believe it; there is the voice ... clear as a bell ... with no fluff on it.

MATZ. The objective is to extend your vocal range.

COWARD. My dear boy, we must extend your contract.

MATZ. You need to do these exercises, just five minutes a day ... put that in your dairy!

COWARD. There are some things at which even I must draw the line!

MATZ. Come on then, you silly old moo; let's have another go at Alice ...

COWARD. Oh, all right!

COWARD *(Taking it slowly at first.)*

***Though that dear little village surrounded by trees***

MATZ. Take it slowly ...

COWARD. ***Had neither a school nor a college***

***Gentle Alice acquired from the birds and the bees***

MATZ. Feel the connection to the breath -

COWARD. ***Some exceedingly practical knowledge***

***The curious secrets that nature revealed***

***She refused to allow to upset her***

***But she thought, when observing the [cows] of the field***

***That things might have been organised better.***

***Over the field and along the lane***

***Both her parents would call in vain***

***Sadly, sorrowfully, they'd complain***

***Alice is at it again!***

I think I've got the voice of a twenty-five year old.

MATZ. Well, I think he wants it back.

COWARD. I just love the plush and honky tonk. I will so enjoy being the modern day Jenny Lind.

***Over the field and along the lane***

***Gentle Alice would make up and take up her stand***

***The road was not exactly arterial, but it led to a town nearby***

***Where quite a lot of masculine material caught her roving eye***

***She was ready to hitch-hike***

***Cadillac or motorbike, she wasn't proud or choosy***

***All she was aiming to be***

***Was a pinked-up, minked-up, fly-by-night floozy***

***When old Rajahs gave her pearls***

***As large as nuts on a chestnut tree***

***All she'd say was "Fiddle-dee-dee,***

***The wages of sin'll be the death of me"***

***Over the field and along the lane***

*Gentle Alice's parents would wait hand-in-hand  
Her dear old white-headed Mother, wistfully sipping  
Champagne, said  
"We've spoiled our child, spared the rod, open up the caviar  
And say 'Thank God', we've got no cause to complain  
Alice is at it  
[Coward has cracked it]  
Alice is at it again!"  
(Blackout.)*

### Scene Three

**Entr'act:** *London Pride/If Love Were All/I'll Follow My Secret Heart*  
(*The Painted Desert Showroom, Wilbur Clark's Desert Inn, Las Vegas [early June].*)  
(*Big Ben strikes.*)

VOICE OVER. Ladies and Gentlemen. Wilbur Clark takes great pleasure to welcome one of the great stars of the British Theatre to perform live for you, here in the Painted Desert Showroom at the *Desert Inn* ... please welcome to the stage, Mr Noel Coward!  
(*COWARD, dressed in a double-breasted dinner suit, with a red carnation, makes a grand entrance. Applause. He stands before a microphone.*)

COWARD. Thank you for stopping the applause –  
Well, here we are in Nevada ... in the desert for the next 28 days and nights ...  
*The Desert Inn's* trademark is highlighted by a large Joshua Tree cactus, a species indigenous to desert regions that derives its name from early Mormon settlers who envisioned its angular branches as the outstretched arms of the Prophet Joshua beckoning them from the wilderness. Standing before you tonight, I feel as the Israelites might have felt as they left Egypt on their exodus. I only hope I too will be fortunate enough to enter 'the promised land' ... England, for me, at this moment, seems a very, very long way away.  
Las Vegas is like a vast luxury cruise ship, so organized that nobody has to worry about any initiative in enjoying himself. I feel there is a lot less here than meets the eye.  
The Strip is The Sahara, The Tropicana, The Sands, the Flamingo ... and *The Desert Inn*. That's it.  
But Wilbur Clark's *Desert Inn* is different. This is a high-class 'resort', offering the finest in nightclub fare. This casino is one, if not the, largest in Nevada. Beyond the casino lies the coffee shop, and the dining room, which overlooks the pool. Americans love ice

and hate cold water and so the swimming pools are as hot as bouillabaisse.  
Coley and I have been to see supper shows at the other hotels. Rosemary Clooney ... really charming. Jane Powell a very pretty little thing with a fine soprano, but with a slight gear-shift. Sammy Davis Jr is a rich talent and a brilliant performer. Liberace is also in town ...  
We've hired a car ... for "50 bucks a week." It is a yellow and black Ford convertible with automatic drive and every known gadget. It also shuts and opens itself when one presses a button.  
The daily temperature is generally over 100°, which I love. My voice is in fine form and I have cut down smoking to the minimum. I've no choice in the matter: Peter Matz, my accompanist, frisks me three times a day! That is, when he's not loitering furtively around backstage; it is clear to me that in the very short time we've been at the hotel, at least one of the Don Arden dancers has made a big impression on my nicotine Nazi ...

**Underscore:** *Uncle Harry (Pacific 1860)*

It was while I was convalescing in Jamaica some years ago that the creative urge, seldom long in abeyance, reared its sprightly head and I wrote this song. I hammered it out interminably on Florence Reed's piano until it was so firmly stamped on my memory that I knew I couldn't forget it. I don't suppose the staff have forgotten it either.

**Song:** *Uncle Harry*

*We all of us have relations,  
Our crosses in life we bear,  
A gloomy group of uncles, cousins and aunts,  
We meet them in railway stations,  
In Harrods or Chester Square,  
And always on the Channel boat to France.  
We have to be polite to them,  
They sometimes send us pheasants,  
We always have to write to them  
To thank for Christmas presents.  
These family obligations  
Admittedly a bore  
But I possess one uncle that I positively adore.*

*Poor Uncle Harry  
Wanted to be a missionary  
So he took a ship and sailed away.  
This visionary,*

*Hotly pursued by dear Aunt Mary,  
 Found a South Sea Isle on which to stay.  
 The natives greeted them kindly and invited them to dine  
 On yams and clams and human hams and vintage coconut  
     wine,  
 The taste of which was filthy but the after-effects divine.  
 Poor Uncle Harry  
 Got a bit gay and longed to tarry.  
 This, Aunt Mary couldn't quite allow,  
 She lectured him severely on a number of church affairs  
 But when she'd gone to bed he made a get-away down the  
     stairs,  
 For he longed to find the answer to a few of the maiden's  
     prayers.  
 Uncle Harry's not a missionary now.*

*Poor Uncle Harry  
 After a chat with dear Aunt Mary  
 Thought the time had come to make a row,  
 He lined up all the older girls in one of the local sheds  
 And while he was reviling them and tearing himself to  
     shreds  
 They took their Mother Hubbards off and tied them round  
     their heads.  
 Uncle Harry's not a missionary now.  
 He's awfully happy  
 But he's certainly not a missionary now!*

*Now Uncle was a just a 'seeker',  
 A 'dreamer' sincerely blest,  
 Of this there couldn't be a shadow of doubt.  
 The fact that his flesh was weaker  
 Than even Aunt Mary guessed  
 Took even her some time to figure out.  
 In all those languid latitudes  
 The atmosphere's exotic,  
 To take up moral attitudes  
 Would be too idiotic,  
 Though nobody could be meeker  
 Than Uncle had been before  
 I bet today he's giving way  
 At practically every pore!*

*Poor Uncle Harry  
 Have become a missionary  
 Found the native's morals rather crude.  
 He and Aunt Mary  
 Quickly imposed an arbitrary  
 Ban upon them shopping in the nude.  
 They all considered this silly and they didn't take it well,  
 They burnt his boots and several suits and wrecked the  
     Mission Hotel,  
 They also burnt his mackintosh, which made a disgusting  
     smell.  
 Poor Uncle Harry  
 After some word with dear Aunt Mary  
 Called upon the chiefs for a pow-wow.  
 They didn't brandish knives at him, they really were awfully  
     sweet,  
 They made concerted dives at him and offered him things to  
     eat,  
 But when they threw their wives at him he had to admit  
     defeat.  
 Uncle Harry's not a missionary now.*

*Poor dear Aunt Mary  
 Thought it were revolutionary  
 Thought her time had come to take a bow.  
 Poor Uncle Harry looked at her, in whom he had placed his  
     trust,  
 His very last illusion broke and crumbled away to dust.  
 For she'd place a flower behind her ear and frankly exposed  
     her bust.  
 Uncle Harry's not a missionary now.  
 He's left the island  
 But he's certainly not a missionary now.*

Well, it is all over bar the shouting ... which is still going on. I have made one of the most sensational successes of my career and to pretend that I am not absolutely delighted would be idiotic. I am also touched and warmed by the generosity of the press reception of me. I have had screaming rave notices - "Las Vegas, Flipping, Shouts "More!" as Noel Coward Wows 'Em in Cafe Turn" enthused *Variety*. - and the news has flashed round the world. I am told continually that I am the greatest attraction that Las Vegas has ever had and that I am the greatest performer in the world.

The first night, from the social-theatrical point of view, was fairly sensational. Frankie Sinatra chartered a special plane and brought Judy Garland and the Bogarts, the Nivens; then there were Joan Fontaine, Zsa Zsa Gabor, the Joe Cottons, Peter Glenville and Larry Harvey.

The orchestral arrangements are incredible – vital and imaginative. Peter Matz, at the age of twenty-six, knows more about the range of various instruments and the potentialities of different combinations than anyone of any age I have ever met in England. I'm delighted to see that he has been distracted away from his helping of Mozart at breakfast by a diet of another kind entirely ...

On Friday I was driven out into the Nevada desert, where I was photographed for Life magazine in my dinner jacket sipping a cup of tea. The temperature was 118°.

*(MATZ plays 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen!')*

*The Desert Inn*, I now gather, was Wilbur Clark's idea. He started the building in 1947, ran out of money, and his deserted site became a joke to locals for months. Wilbur turned to a former illegal bootlegger from Cleveland, Moe Dalitz, for the finance. I'm very happy, none-the-less, to take advantage of his extraordinary hospitality, but I'll treat Wilbur as if he were as honest as his neon lights.

**SONG: *A Room with a View* (This Year of Grace)**

*A room with a view – and you,  
With no one to worry us,  
No one to hurry us – through  
This dream we've found,  
We'll gaze at the sky – and try  
To guess what it's all about,  
Then we will figure out – why  
The world is round.  
We'll be as happy and contented  
As birds upon a tree,  
High above the mountains and the sea.  
We'll bill and we'll coo-oo-oo  
And sorrow will never come,  
Oh will it ever come – true,  
Our room with a view.*

A view of the world from a position of exquisite success is quite marvelous, but one soon senses that it is a somewhat dangerous

and lonely vantage point. In my youth, all I ever wanted to be was a star and to see myself up in lights; here in Las Vegas, the lights couldn't be bigger or brighter! But time's winged chariot, it appears, is beginning to goose me and it is a cheapened experience without being able to share the plaudits with my dearest loved ones ...

**We'll watch the whole world pass before us  
While we are sitting still  
Leaning on our own window-sill  
We'll bill and we'll coo-oo-oo,  
And maybe a stork will bring  
This, that and t'other thing – to  
Our room with a view.**

Charlie Cochran – gone! Ivor Novello, gone! Then, poor, darling Gertie – a life long friend. I am terribly, terribly unhappy to think that I shall never see her again. They wanted me to fly to New York for the funeral, but I refused. There was a public lying-in-state for her, in which she wore the pink dress in which she danced the polka in *The King and I*. Vulgarity could go no further. I wish so very deeply that I could have seen her just once more playing in a play of mine. Her quality was unique and her magic imperishable. Violet, my mother, celebrated her 91st birthday last year and died shortly after ... during a solar eclipse. Owing to my inability to accept any of the comforting religious fantasies about the hereafter I have no spurious hopes that I shall meet her again on some distant Elysian shore. I know that she has gone. We have quarreled violently over the years, but she has never stood between me and my life, never tried to hold me too tightly, always let me go free. There was no fear in her except for me.

**Song: *A Bar on the Piccola Marina* (As sung at Las Vegas.)**

I resent the basic assumption that the first gesture of any young man who makes good is to kick his mother in the teeth. She was a great woman to whom I owe the whole of my life. I am her legacy. It's funny how our mother's generation always longed to be old when they were young, and we strain every nerve to keep young. ... I presume it's because we see what's coming more clearly.

*I'll sing you a song, it's not very long  
Its moral may disconcert you  
Of a mother and wife who for most of her life*

*Was trained for domestic virtue  
She had two strapping daughters and a rather dull son  
And a much duller husband who, at sixty-one  
Elected to retire ... and later on expire  
Sing Halleluhua, heigh-nonny-no  
Heigh-nonny-no, heigh-nonny-no  
He joined the feathered choir*

*Having laid him to rest by special request  
In a family mausoleum  
As his widow repaired to the home they had shared  
Her heart sang a gay TeDeum  
And then in the middle of the funeral wake  
While adding some liquor to the Topsy Cake  
She briskly cried "That's done,  
My life's at last begun"  
Sing Halleluhah, heigh-nonny-no  
Heigh-nonny-no, heigh-nonny-no  
"It's time I had some fun"  
Today, though hardly a jolly day  
At least I'll set me free  
We'll all have a lovely holiday  
On the Island of Capri*

*In a bar on the Piccola Marina  
Life called to Mrs. Wentworth-Brewster  
Fate beckoned her and introduced her  
Into a rather queer, unfamiliar atmosphere  
She'd just sit there, propping up the bar  
Beside a fisherman who sang to a guitar  
When accused of having gone too far  
She made reply "Funiculi, just fancy me, funicula"  
When he bellowed "Que bella Signorina"  
Sheer ecstasy at once produced a wild shriek  
From Mrs. Wentworth-Brewster  
Changing her whole demeanour  
When both her daughters and her son said "Please come  
home,  
Mama"  
She answered, rather bibulously "Who do you think you  
are?"  
Nobody can afford to be so la-di-bloody-da  
In a bar on the Piccola Marina*

*Every fisherman cried "Viva, viva and que ragazza  
When she sat on the grand piazza  
Everybody would rise  
Every fisherman cried "Viva, viva, que belle Inglese"  
Someone even said "Whoops-a-daisy"  
Which was quite a surprise*

*Each evening, with some light excuse and beaming with  
goodwill  
She'd just slip into something loose and totter down the hill  
To that bar on the Piccola Marina  
Where love came to Mrs. Wentworth-Brewster  
Hot flushes of delight suffused her  
Right round the bend she went, picture her astonishment  
Day in, day out, she would gad about  
Because she felt she was no longer on the shelf  
Night out, night in, knocking back the gin  
She cried "Funicula, funiculi, funnic-yourself"*

*Just for fun, three young sailors from Messina  
Bowed low to Mrs. Wentworth-Brewster  
Said "Scusi", and abruptly goosed her  
Then there was quite a scene  
Her family in floods of tears said "Leave these men, Mama"  
She said, They're just high-spirited, like all Italians are"  
And most of them have a great deal more to offer than Papa  
In a bar on the Piccola Marina*

God in his infinite wisdom struck me down with a violent fever on Monday. I staggered through two performances and on Tuesday the doctor absolutely refused to let me play ... my temperature chart resembled an outline of the Rocky Mountains drawn by a drunken child ... so I lay in bed, sweating and writhing and feeling terrible. (*At the piano; to MATZ.*) Good to see you again Pete; I thought you might have been swallowed up by the desert sands. I never seem to catch you (or Mozart) at breakfast these days?

MATZ. Sorry Noel. ... I've been doing some sight seeing.

COWARD. ... Anyone I know?

MATZ. Her name is Janet – Janet Perry. She's a dancer.

COWARD. Good for you, Peter. Mazel Tov. It's about time. But 'Perry' doesn't sound particularly Jewish – what will Alice think?

MATZ. Oy veh! ... I've completely forgotten about mother!!

COWARD. On Wednesday I tottered back and have not missed a performance since.  
On Monday and Tuesday Goddard Lieberon was here with his myrmidons, and four performances were recorded for a long-player of me. Happily all four audiences were wonderful and applauded and laughed like crazy. The experts are delighted with the recorded results and so at last I shall have a good American LP on the market.

MATZ. ... Are you happy Noel?

COWARD. I'm not unhappy.

MATZ. In love, I mean ...?

COWARD. Ah - I was, you know, described by the non-respectable media "as the highest paid English tulip to play Las Vegas". I thought tulip was better than pansy. Bea Lillie and I were in Paris once. Adjoining rooms, of course. One night, she felt mischievous, so she knocked on my bedroom door. I said, "Who is it?" She lowered her voice and said, "Hotel detective. Have you got a gentleman in your room?" "Just a minute, I'll ask him," I volunteered! Please don't play while I'm making a joke!

MATZ. So ... you and Coley ...?

COWARD. Me and Coley?! Don't be preposterous! He's family! ... You're yet to meet Graham. Graham Payne. He is my life partner. I've never made a song and dance about the fact ... there may still be a woman in Paddington Square who wants to marry me, and I don't want to disappoint her.

**Song: *Matelot* (Sigh No More)**

At the age of fourteen Graham auditioned for me and I gave him a part in my revue *Words and Music*. His audition consisted of a tap dance routine which he performed while singing "Nearer, My God, to Thee". I wrote him a leading role in *Sigh No More*, and I composed 'Matelot' specifically for him.

*Jean Louis Dominic Pierre Bouchon,  
True to the breed that that bore him,  
Answered the call that held in thrall  
His father's heart before him.  
Jean Louis Dominic sailed away  
Further than love could find him  
Yet through the night he heard a light  
And gentle voice behind him say:*

*Matelot, Matelot,*

*Where you go my thoughts go with you  
Matelot, Matelot,  
When you go down to the sea  
As you gaze from afar on the evening star  
Wherever you may roam  
You will remember the light through the winter night  
That guides you safely home.  
Though you find womenkind to be frail,  
One love cannot fail, my son,  
Till our days are done....  
Matelot, Matelot,  
Where you go my thoughts go with you  
Matelot, Matelot,  
When you go down to the sea.  
(During the sequence, COWARD resumes his 'performance' on stage.)*

*Jean Louis Dominic Pierre Bouchon  
Journeyed the wide world over  
Lips that he kissed could not resist  
This loving roving rover.  
Jean Louis Dominic, right or wrong,  
Ever pursued a new love  
Till in his brain, there beat a strain  
He knew to be his true love song:*

*Matelot, Matelot,  
Where you go my heart goes with you  
Matelot, Matelot,  
When you go down to the sea  
For a year and a day you may sail away  
And have no thought of me,  
Yet through the wind and the spray you will hear me say  
No love was ever free.  
You will sigh when horizons are clear,  
Something that is dear to me  
Cannot let me be,  
Matelot, Matelot,  
Where you go my heart goes with you  
Matelot, Matelot  
When you go down to the sea.*

*Matelot, Matelot,  
Where you go my heart will follow*

*Matelot, Matelot,  
 When you go down to the sea  
 When there's grief in the sky and the waves ride high  
 My heart to yours will say  
 You may be sure that I'm true to my love for you  
 Though half the world away.  
 Never mind if you find other charms,  
 Here within my arms you'll sleep,  
 Sailor from the deep ...  
 Matelot, Matelot,  
 Where you go my heart will follow  
 Matelot, Matelot,  
 When you go down to the sea.  
 Sail away  
 Sail away.*

One more week to go. The time has certainly passed incredibly swiftly. The stars continue to swoop down from the Hollywood Hills. The Goldwyns came the other night and were wildly enthusiastic. Sammy Davis Jr, playing across the strip, ends his act with the instruction: "Now, cross the street and see The Master at work". Everybody worships me, it's nauseating. Obviously on certain nights creamed with movie stars and chums I've had no difficulties, but the dinner shows, filled with people from Kansas, Nebraska, Utah ... Illinois are what really count and their response is usually splendid. I've dubbed them the "Nescafe Society." I am really proud that I have succeeded in doing what no one suspected I could, and that is please the ordinary audiences. Last night, however, was the let down of all time, both audiences stuffed cod's heads, but the supper show really vile. I pressed on and got them in ... twenty minutes. How much I owe now to those hellish audiences, during the War, when I traveled around the world to entertain the troops. What few realized, of course, was that I was also engaged by the British Secret Service – MI6 – to conduct propaganda and intelligence work: "an exploration of official American attitudes to the War in Europe." My celebrity value was wonderful cover. Nobody every issued me with a false beard ... my disguise was my own reputation as a bit of an idiot. But my espionage activities had me sending reports back to England while traveling, especially through Latin America. It was while I was in Argentina – 'undercover' - that I became intoxicated by all things Latin ... including the music and its

rhythms ... and Canasta!

**Song:** *Nina (Sigh No More)*  
*Señorita Nina  
 From Argentina  
 Knew all the answers  
 Although her relatives and friends were perfect dancers  
 She swore she'd never dance a step until she died.  
 She said, 'I've seen to many movies  
 And all they prove is  
 Too idiotic,  
 They all insist that South America's exotic  
 Whereas it couldn't be more boring if it tried.'  
 She added firmly that she hated  
 The sound of soft guitars beside a still lagoon,  
 She also positively stated  
 That she could not abide a Southern Moon,  
 She said with most refreshing candour  
 That she thought Carmen Miranda  
 Was subversive propaganda  
 And should rapidly be shot,  
 She said she didn't care a jot  
 If people quoted her or not!  
 She refused to begin the Beguine  
 When they requested it  
 And she made an embarrassing scene  
 If anyone suggested it  
 For she detested it.  
 Though no one ever could be keener  
 Than little Nina  
 On quite a number  
 Of very eligible men who did the Rhumba  
 When they proposed to her she simply left them flat.  
 She said that love should be impulsive  
 But not convulsive  
 And syncopation  
 'Has a discouraging effect on procreation  
 And that she'd rather read a book – and that was that!*

*Señorita Nina  
 From Argentina  
 Despised the Tango  
 And though she never was a girl to let a man go*

*She wouldn't sacrifice her principles for sex.  
 She looked with scorn on the gyrations  
 Of her relations  
 Who danced the Conga  
 And swore that if she had to stand it any longer  
 She'd lose all dignity and wring their silly necks!  
 She said that frankly she was blinded  
 To all their over-advertised romantic charms  
 And then she got more bloody-minded  
 And told them where to put their tropic palms.  
 She said I hate to be pedantic  
 But it drives me nearly frantic  
 When I see that unromantic  
 Sycophantic  
 Lot of sluts  
 For ever wriggling their guts,  
 It drives me absolutely nuts!  
 She declined to begin the Beguine  
 Though they besought her to  
 And in language profane and obscene  
 She cursed the man who taught her to,  
 She cursed Cole Porter too!  
 From this it's fairly clear that Nina  
 In her demeanour  
 Was so offensive  
 That when the hatred of her friends grew too intensive  
 She thought she'd better beat it while she had the chance.  
 After some trial and tribulation  
 She reached the station  
 And met a sailor  
 Who had acquired a wooden leg in Venezuela  
 And so she married him because he couldn't dance!*

*There surely never could have been a  
 More irritating girl than Nina,  
 They never speak in Argentina  
 Of this degenerate bambina  
 Who had the luck to find romance  
 But resolutely wouldn't dance!  
 She wouldn't dance! – Hola!!*

Well, it's all over. The bags are packed, the farewell presents given, and the paper streamers drooping in the hot desert wind. Last

night was exciting and strangely moving. The management presented me with a beautiful silver cigarette box and I made a speech and everyone became very sentimental. Then I gave a party in the Sky Room to celebrate Peter and Janet's engagement. Las Vegas has been an extraordinary experience and one of the most reverberant successes I have ever had. Perhaps my success has even given me a little extra glamour, and I thank God that Peter Matz introduced me to the American cow. This afternoon we fly to Hollywood. I have a concrete offer to do three American television shows: an hour's singing with Mary Martin; *Present Laughter*; and; *Peace in Our Time*. For these three programs I get \$500,000 ... this, of course, is enormous money. I can feel secure, or at least calm about the inroads of old age. I can easily afford the few thousand required to fulfill my dream of building my very own, ideal house on my beloved Firefly Hill in Jamaica. After a long period of comparative non-success, it was brought home sharply to me that the big money, plus much greater appreciation of my talents, is to be found not in England but outside it.

My importance to the world is relatively small. On the other hand, my importance to myself is tremendous. I am all I have to work with, to play with, to suffer and to enjoy. Although, it is not the eyes of others that I am wary of, but of my own. Conceit, as you may already know, is an outward manifestation of inferiority.

**Song:** *I Like America (Ace of Clubs)*

There's success, and then there's American success! My life truly has been one long extravaganza.

*I don't care for China,  
 Japan's far too small,  
 I've rumbled the Rio Grande,  
 I hate Asia Minor,  
 I can't bear Bengal  
 And I shudder to think  
 Of the awful stink  
 On the road to Samarkand.  
 The heat and smell  
 Must be sheer hell  
 On the road to Samarkand.  
 But ... I like America,  
 I have played around  
 Every slappy-happy hunting ground  
 But I find America – okay.*

*I've been about a bit  
But I must admit  
That I didn't know the half of it  
Till I hit the USA.  
No likely lass  
In Boston, Mass.  
From passion will recoil  
In Dallas, Tex.  
They talk of sex  
But only think of oil  
New Jersey dames  
Go up in flames  
If someone mentioned – bed.  
In Chicago, Illinois  
Any girl who meets a boy  
Giggles and shoots him dead!  
But I like America  
Its Society  
Offers infinite variety  
And come what may  
I shall return some day  
To the good old USA.*

*But ... I like America,  
I have traveled far  
From Northumberland to Zanzibar  
And I find America – okay.  
I've roamed the Spanish Main  
Eaten sugar-cane  
But I never tasted cellophane  
Till I struck the USA.  
All delegates  
From Southern States  
Are nervy and distraught.  
In New Orleans  
The wrought-iron screens  
Are dreadfully overwrought.  
Beneath each tree  
In Tennessee  
Erotic books are read.  
And when alligators thud  
Through the Mississippi mud  
Sex rears its ugly head.*

*But – I like America,  
Every scrap of it,  
All the sentimental crap of it  
And come what may  
Give me a holiday  
In the good old USA  
In the good old USA*

*(Curtain.)*

*Curtain Call: Let's do it  
Mr Irving Berlin  
Often emphasizes sin  
In a charming way.  
Mr Coward we know  
Wrote a song or two to show  
Sex was here to stay.  
Richard Rodgers it's true  
Took a more romantic view  
Of this sly biological urge.  
But it really was Cole  
Who contrived to make the whole  
Thing merge.*

*He said the Belgians and Greeks do it  
Nice young men who sell antiques do it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.  
Monkeys whenever you look do it,  
Aly Khan and King Farouk do it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.  
Louella Parsons can't quite do it,  
For she's so highly strung,  
Marlene might do it,  
But she looks far too young.  
Each man out there shooting crap does it,  
Davy Crockett in that dreadful cap does it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.*

*Our famous writers in swarms do it,  
Somerset and all the Maughams do it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.  
The Brontes felt that they must do it,  
Ernest Hemingway could-just-do it,*

*Let's do it, let's fall in love.  
E Allan Poe-ho! ho! ho!-did it,  
But he did it in verse.  
Pete Matz and I do it,  
But we had to rehearse.  
Tennessee Williams self-taught does it,  
Kinsey with a deafening report does it.  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.*

*In the Spring of the year  
Inhibitions disappear  
And our hearts beat high,  
We had better face facts  
Every gland that overacts  
Has an alibi  
For each bird and each bee,  
Each slap-happy sappy tree,  
Each temptation that lures us along  
Is just Nature elle-meme  
Merely singing us the same  
Old song.*

*In Texas some of the men do it  
Others drill a hole-and then do it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love  
West Point cadets forming fours do it,  
People say all those Gabors do it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.  
My kith and kin, more or less, do it,  
Every uncle and aunt,  
But I confess to it-  
I've one cousin that can't.  
Teenagers squeezed into jeans do it,  
Probably we'll live to see machines do it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.*

*Each baby bat after dark does it,  
In the desert Wilbur Clark does it  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.  
We're told that every hormone does it,  
Victor Borge all alone does it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love.  
Each tiny clam you consume does it,*

*Even Liberace-we assume-does it,  
Let's do it, let's fall in love!*