

THE FAREWELL CONCERT OF IRENE AND VERNON
PALAZZO

A play by

Frank Gagliano

Contact

frank@gaglianoriff.com

THE FAREWELL CONCERT OF IRENE AND VERNON
PALAZZO

A play by
Frank Gagliano

*“—no, no don’t stop playing!—even though I see you want to butt in.
—Well, you can’t butt in — you’re not able to butt in except through your
playing — so pleeeeeease butt out! — stay background! Just keep playing!
—Like in the old Warner Brother’s films, I want wall-to-wall, fade in to
fade out, music; I want underscoring throughout this whole shebang!
—Yes! I want — No! — I demand! — no dead spots — in this wino riff I’m
on!”*

On a snowy night in Bodoni County, the songwriting team of Irene and Vernon Palazzo attempt to finish their new and final song -- and wait for a long-lost daughter to return.

Playwright Frank Gagliano plunges Lyricist/Faculty wife Irene Palazzo, into an over-the -edge, wine-induced. monologue of rage, of regrets, thwarted expectations, self loathing, outrageous and raunchy humor, fear, guilt and pain; a tidal wave that breaks on a series of shocking discoveries; receding, finally, to a calming flow of love and reconciliation.

And all underscored throughout by original and standard songs, and by the improvisations of Irene’s brilliant, unable-to-speak, composer/accompanist husband, Vernon.

CHARACTERS

IRENE PALAZZO

(She does all the talking
and the singing and the drinking of the wine)

VERNON PALAZZO

(He can't talk. He plays the piano throughout)

PLACE

BODONI COUNTY, U.S.A.

(A home. Snowing. Waiting)

THE YEAR

1998

The Bodoni County home of
Irene and Vernon Palazzo.

Snow seen falling
outside the almost wall-sized
picture window.

A large fireplace is lit.
Cozy.

Vernon is at the grand piano, playing.
Irene, at a music stand, is singing;
hesitatingly sight-reading
the introduction to a song
they have been writing.

IRENE

IT HASN'T BEEN ALL HARMONY,
THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER;
OFTEN, "SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET--"
MIGHT CHANGE TO "STORMY WEATHER."

ALL OF THAT GAVE CONTRAST
TO THE SONGS WE HAD TO MAKE;
NOW THE MOTIFS HAVE TURNED SOMBER—
THIS ARRANGEMENT IS TOO DISSONANT TO TAKE.

WHAT IS THE ALTERNATIVE?
YOUR RHYTHM'S IN MY BONES.
CAN THE MUSIC YOU STILL BRING TO US
TRANSPOSE OUR SOUR NOTES
TO SWEETER, GENTLER TONES?

PERHAPS. . .PERHAPS. . .
AH, YES, PERHAPS. . .

That's it! I do believe that's it--that cleans it up. And it's good!

—I think it's a good introduction to our song;

—don't you, Vernon?

—So good, I'll drink to it.

. . . Ahhhh. There.

—My lyrics, I mean. Good. Good enough. —Too good—enough—I think; for the Bodoni County Inn—the good ol' BCI—and for their "Farewell Concert of Irene and Vernon Palazzo." . . . —Your music, of course—good, too—right on the money. Vernon Palazzo's easy melodic flow—that Italian/American thing—in the blood—the liver—the DNA—the testicles! —Meeeeel-ody; easy and overflowing

—always right on the money—on the Lira—on the Euro!

. . . And the way you play it! —the way you're playing it—now—even while I babble—always makes me melt. . . no matter how frozen I become—have become. . . these last years . . .

--Yes! --Those wonderful, wonderful chords that you breathe out through your fingertips; that you--**NO!**--**Like speech!** --**Speak out!** --your way of speaking, really. --And I consider us lucky--since you can't actually speak anymore, Vernon--Yes!--lucky--**blessèd**, even, I mean it!-- that you can speak that way--through your music--through your wonderful, wonderful speech-chords; and that I know--through them--after all these years--what you're saying. **And so** we can continue, therefore; You and I, Vernon —to--**attempt** to --communicate tonight.

. . . Until Billie comes. . . .

And I'll drink to **that**—to communication, I mean--certainly not to Billie.

. . . There.

—And not only that!—they are chords—the magical Vernon Palazzo chords—that actually seem to accompany the snow; did you realize that, Vernon? —Seriously. I listen to you now—brilliantly improvising there on our new song introduction for the Bodoni County Inn—the good ol' BCI—and for their "Farewell Concert of Irene and Vernon Palazzo"

—improvising there on the Steinway—our beloved, mirror-finish,
 —went into "up-to-the-eyeballs-hock" baby grand Steinway which, by
 the by, yours truly has always lovingly kept Enddusted; **and your
 chords**—your touch. . .light and tinkly at the moment—**somehow** are
 underscoring for the falling snow; **they conjure up** the falling snow,
 somehow;
 —somehow reinforce the falling snow.

—OH!

--Perhaps it--the snow--might stop Billie from getting here.
 —The way it's falling, the amount, I'll bet it does. . . .God. I pray it
 does—I'll drink to that!—that it does—that the snow stops our Billie
 from getting here tonight ! . . .Salutè. . .Aaaah.

. . .—Does, though, make it all cozy in here; the snow. And the magic of
 your speech/chords. And the soft lighting. The fire in the fireplace;
 flickering shadows— . . ."—Flickering shadows."
 —There's a song—"flickering shadows" in the lyric.
 —Damn! I can't—. . .Oh, right, Vernon. That's it:

"Just a song at twilight,
 when the lights are low;
 and the 'flickering shadows' softly come and . . ."

Right again; Mr. "Song-Always-At-Your-Fingertips." —And thank you for
 playing it straight, Vernon; not making fun of it. It's a sturdy old thing--
 like a lot of us; honest, for its time. Like a lot of us.

". . .comes love's old song.
 Comes love's old sweet song."

--Can you see it from there, Vernon? the snow? from the piano?
 --No! don't get up! —No wasted effort!—you'll tire yourself. And no
 silence!—No dead spots tonight! Please! —don't stop playing!
 . . .Good. —I will be your Weather Anchor Person —except that I won't
be anchored—I'll be moving around--all antsy; this rarely-empty wine

glass in my hand—the wine rack, close by; filled, of course—with
 corkscrew at the ready; --and I'll give you all the snow data you'll
 need; —tell you if they close the schools
 --the roads--how far and fast the barometer falls--tell you when I spy
 Billie materializing at the gate, walking up the path to the porch, passing
 the old swing on the porch. . ."Creaker" she called it; the creaky swing
 she loved--going to rust; to sit on, she did. . .for hours. . . to day dream;
 to listen, out there, to us working in here; making our songs—she loved
 doing that—remember?--swinging on "Creaker;" still there, on the porch.
 . . — You just keep playing!
 --breathing the music out—speaking through your fingertips—now;--
 while—with my fingertips—I decork Messieurs Merlot: Bottle number
 two!
 . . .There!. —And I will also try to. . .—"conjure up and reinforce?"
 --our new song! —The new song we will finish tonight. —PLAY OUR
 INTRO—MY WORDS—VERNON! AGAIN!.

IT HASN'T BEEN ALL HARMONY,
 THE YEARS WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER;
 OFTEN, "SUNNY SIDE OF THE STREET--"
 MIGHT CHANGE TO "STORMY WEATHER."

ALL OF THAT GAVE CONTRAST
 TO THE SONGS WE HAD TO MAKE;
 NOW THE MOTIFS HAVE TURNED SOMBER,
 THIS ARRANGEMENT IS TOO DISSONANT--

CUT!. . .—am I . . ."beating the musical allusions to death," do you
 think, Vernon? —which is what our long-lost daughter, Billie, will say
 . . .our disappeared-ten-years-ago daughter, Billie, will say
 . . .Billie. . .God bless the poor child, Billie; —named after Billie Holiday,
 Billie—at the insistence of papa/daddy Vernon—who dived, Billie did, out
 of our lives, Billie did, ten. . . years . . .ago! —Ten years! would you
 believe!/? —and who suddenly, apparently, resurfaces—will,
apparently, resurface tonight—will say when she resurfaces—and of
 her mother Irene in particular—will undoubtedly say! —when Billie

resurfaces and hears it—the song; daughter Billie--for Holiday--will say: "you are beating the musical allusions to death, mother!--as usual." —IF she hears it—if Billie really does come home—if if she talks to me at all . . .to her mother at all. . .

—and why is she coming here--home, Vernon? —after ten years of only appearing as old Junior High School head shots? —On morning containers of 2% milk?--WHY?. . .

—After all that: The police, the private investigators, the money, the energy it all took, the exhaustion; —the leads that went nowhere—the guilt—the avoidance of eye contact. . .of body contact, yours and mine—years of it—years of avoidance. Years of ache, these aching years. —Who needs it--Billie coming back!?. .—Oh yes! That song. —You need it! Don't you, Vernon? You'd like her back--playing that old song of yours:

I WANT HER BACK;
I WANT MY GIRL BACK.
WHY DID SHE GO AWAY?

—Both music and lyrics, if you please, by Vernon Palazzo!

WE OFTEN TAKE A WALK,
BICKER THROUGH OUR QUIET TALK;
BUT WHEN THE TALK ENDS, WE'RE STILL FRIENDS.

That famous, "My daughter, Billie and I, are more than father and daughter, you know: We're friends—no! Pals!" —Ugh! —Well, I don't want to find out—why she left. And I don't want to face her. Okay? --Clear and simple—Okay?

—Okay! I'm afraid to face her--to find out. Why she left.

—Why she put us through--? --Because whatever it is, It has to be something against me! --Right? —Mothers and daughters! --Mothers and daughters!--Never "pals!"

—God! —So there'll be --what--Accusations! Then regrets and recriminations! --Confrontations! --Dredging! Dredging! —Is that why she's coming back? --To dredge up some muck? -- Against me?

—Against Irene?--against her mother? --FOR WHAT? --Who needs it? I certainly do not! And you, recuperating "daddy/pal," certainly do not!--no matter what misguided, romantic, guilt/longings for reconciliation and redemption you—

—and why did she have to leave the message with Peter?

—why did we have to hear about it--her coming home--from a colleague of yours? From Peter? Why—? —And who told her about your throat operation, Vernon?

. . .—and since she knew, why didn't she show up at the hospital!? Why plan to come here? and why this night, Vern—? —AND WHY DO YOU HAVE A SHIT-EATING GRIN ON YOUR FACE, VERNON?! YES YOU DO. YOU HAVE IT NOW—EVEN WHILE YOU IMPROVISE ON THAT SILLY SONG--THAT, "I WANT HER BACK" SONG YOU WROTE. . .—BUT YOU'VE HAD IT ALL EVENING, THAT GRIN; SOME SHIT-EATING SECRET BEHIND THAT GRIN -- THAT PROTECTS YOU FROM BEING IRRITATED BY MY CONSTANT IRRITATIONS, WHICH SHOULD IRRITATE YOU RIGHT DOWN TO YOUR IRRITATING MUSICAL TESTICLES; A SHIT-EATING GRIN THAT MAKES YOU IGNORE MY WINE-SOUSED RAVINGS TONIGHT--THAT KEEPS YOU GRINNING--OR—!

. . .--is it a cover? a way to cover. . . —the pain? . . .I do that sometimes. When I have gas--grin. . . .I sometimes forget you might be in pain. Still. . . .I'm sorry, Vernon; if that's what you're doing; grinning, to cover the pain. . . .It's tough for me, Vernon; when you're in pain. Always has been. . . .

* * * * *

IRENE

—COURTROOM SCENE.--Grand Jury, actually. --Oh, yes! I testified before a Grand Jury once —and you never even knew.

—How could you? Grand Jury's are secret and you were away--on that sabbatical research tour--for the book you needed to write—for tenure. —With that graduate Teaching Assistant, “Ms Research Bimbo,” you took with you. --No! don't stop playing!--No need to deal with that—I knew it was going on—I was glad it was going on—I know you needed—and, anyway, it freed me from having to—**PLEASE--PLAY AGAIN!--I tell you it didn't matter--it doesn't matter; I'm sorry it spilled out. It was Billie—only Billie that mattered then—that I was living through! Play! Play!**

"Yes! —gentlemen and ladyhumans of this grand jury investigation! I have been drinking—but I am lucid—and articulate; god knows! I'm always articulate!—Well, I was Summa Cum Laude, after all; English Lit.—with a minor in music! —But look—I don't know—for some crazy reason Bodoni County has this famous camp--you all know it—the Performing Arts Camp—the damn thing is even mentioned in the back of the New York Times Sunday magazine--and the director of it—he's known in the business, it seems—has contacts, he says—can maybe send on the gifted ones to New York —to Hollywood--to London—to Tokyo—to fame!—to **CELEBRITY!!!** And CELEBRITY is sainthood, royalty, riches--**right?!** you all know that. With celebrity the world is yours and insures your getting out! Might even get you out of this armpit—this Cul-De-Sac—called Bodoni County! — so he summons me to the bodoni county inn and he's a charmer a cultured boyish sandy-haired man who talks of billie, billie the beauty billie with the sexy prone-to-crack voice who stays stage vivid with her bible black hair and black onyx eyes the size of compact discs and pert c cups and ample thighs and about how the sway of her tush turns every man to mush and he laughs because he knows that mushtush is not a true rhyme and even apologizes for that rhyme-impaired ineptitude to billie's lyricist mum sipping vino across the table from him and all the mum really wants to ask him anyway is if he keeps his kiwi clean, no cheese please in his prepuce if he has one and does he use a condom and if he's tested plague positive or plague negative, but I don't, just merely think all that and he mostly talks on and drinks a couple of martini's and looks me deep in the eyes and tells me how he wants permission to take billie

along with his other elite female students and how he now wants to take them on a weekend retreat to prime them for bigger things and even recites a lyric he's made up to impress me regarding billie specifically that goes and i will never forget

priming billie for primo gigs
is the thing we all want for billie
mixing fame with sweet cream and figs
is the thing we all want for billie

and he keeps droning on about bringing the retreated camp lovelies eventually to the big apple his own special showbiz showcase for all his special agent producer television and movie mogul contacts at his own expense and says of course the retreat here with the girls is necessary essential pivotal as a spiritual as well as an ensemble thing a family thing to have the girls stand out from all the other tushmush girls and all this mother wants to know is if when nude his feet and crotch smell and how hairy he is especially his chest shoulders and ass but I don't and he keeps talking talking talking on about billie's natural talents never hiding her own vulnerability and all this is true and i'm impressed that he's impressed and then he tells me that i must sign something because i must understand that there are exercises and such that get the beauties to open to the very soul their centers of pain that artists must reveal and he must be protected and free to use these dig-deep techniques that always work for him and all i can think of is if he'll expect my billie to swallow him and what happens if my billie gags but i only think that and voice my concern about her age and he says that sixteen is the magical age the wondrous age the translucent age the what he calls the on-the-cusp age when fathers still see their little girls as girls yet see too the woman on the way and think bad thoughts about it and so it is a dangerous age and that bit of danger gives sweet sixteen an edge . . .

