

The Harmony Project

By

Andrew W. Bennett

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor JANET EHRLICH COLSON writes...*

Andrew Bennett's play *The Harmony Project* takes us on a delightfully dark dive into depravity. But before you can fasten those seatbelts, you might find yourself in a social experiment strapped onto a different kind of seat, one where you've got one hand taped to the leg of your chair and the other on a button which will determine either your fate or the fate of those closest to you – or both. The trouble is (besides the threat of an imminent and violent death), you might not understand the rules per se - and whether it comes down to cheating on your vapid spouse or if an apology and a renewed commitment to yoga pants might be enough to save your skin. By the way, you've only got a few minutes left to figure it out (in real time as this is a 10-minute play and the clock already started ticking while you were reading this blurb). Talk about pressure! Funny. Creepy. *The Harmony Project* is a helluva read...if you make it that far without being impaled. A little bit Sartre, a little bit rock n' roll, and **five stars** on a sharp spike.

NARRATOR:

The mic clicks off and back on again

TAUPE:

Hey guys, sorry, if you try to pull your hands free the same results will happen. *TAUPE* makes a *crrrrrk* noise. That's a pressure sensor you're taped to. That's it, have a great time!

(Beat)

Get it!? GRATE?!

NARRATOR:

The mic clicks off

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Cast:

JACK

VIOLA or VI

REGINALD

FARRAH

AGENT TAUPE (VOICE)

NARRATOR:

With a blinding flash of incredibly harsh light four figures are revealed in an all white room with a single steel door with no internal handle. The figures are seated at a table. **JACK AND VIOLA** are on one side while **REGINALD AND FERRAH** are on the other. All of them have one hand free and their heads face down on the table. The people have their other hand taped to a small box on the leg of their chair. Each chair is seated on a metal plate with a series of perfectly drilled holes. Seated on the center of the table is a single bright **RED BUTTON** that looks like it was repurposed from an old factory.

ALL rouse at the same time.

JACK:

(**FERRAH's** husband, millennial, brilliant but no common sense)

W-w-w-what's happening? Where are we?

FERRAH:

(**JACK's** wife, millennial, smart enough and pretty enough to have married above **JACK** but she has true love for him.)

Babe...

NARRATOR:

FERRAH points to the button.

REGINALD:

(**VIOLA's** husband, miserable, rich, and tired.)

You did this didn't you, Vi?

(beat)

Fucking the pool-boy wasn't enough, now you have to drag these people into it. I'm not doing it.

I'm not getting into a fucking science foursome with you...

VIOLA:

(**REGINALD**'s wife, kind and calm, but tired of **JACK**'s unfounded constant accusations of adultery)

JACK, for the last time: I didn't fuck the pool-boy, or my acupuncturist, or the rheumatologist, our accountant, that guy at taco loco, the pastry chef from last Christmas, not your brother, or--as much as I cannot believe you would think it, your mother...and most of all my gynecologist.

(Beat)

So, no jack, I have no idea who these people are nor would I have a...science foursome. I'm not even sure what that is. Please stop assuming things.

NARRATOR:

FARRAH and **JACK** look at the couple across from the table and look back at each other.

JACK and **FERRAH** clasp free hands.

(Beat)

Loudspeaker crackles to life with the click of a button somewhere else. A throaty voice comes across the speaker.

AGENT TAUPE (Voice):

Happy Thursday everyone! I would like to take a moment to thank you for your service in this experiment. As you'll see in the center of the table is red button...oooh scary. Now, each of you has a wonderful choice to make: if you press the red button, the other three of you will be eliminated in...

NARRATOR:

Paper rustles against the mic.

TAUPE Cont.

A little away from the mic at the start... wow, they really are inventive. Ok, well let's just say that the three of you who will be made less buoyant ...you know, I don't even know what to call it, but I could probably grate a fine cheese against you after all the spikes impale you. Oh, I guess I should tell you. You have 10 minutes to decide and if no one hits the button you all will be grater...ed. Ok, have fun and the timer started a 6 minutes ago. *Singsongy*: So, you might want to get a move on you love birds.

NARRATOR:

The mic clicks off and back on again

TAUPE:

Hey guys, sorry, if you try to pull your hands free the same results will happen. That's a pressure sensor you're taped to. That's it, have a great time!

(Beat)

Get it!? GRATE?!

NARRATOR:

The mic clicks off

REGINALD:

Pointing accusatorily at everyone. Great Vi, if you wanted to off me you could have just used a gun or choked me to death in my sleep with that colossal dildo you have in your drawer.

VI:

Are you serious right now?

JACK:

I won't push it, I love you Ferrah.

FERRAH:

I love you too.

VI:

Aw, Jack do you remember when we were like that?

REGINALD:

Yeah, so.

VI:

You know I still feel that way. I always have.

REGINALD:

Well, if you wouldn't have spread your legs around the universe we wouldn't be in this mess.

VI:

You know something that's been bothering me? You always blame me time and time again. Maybe I should start blaming you. I'm sure you've been out sticking your herpes laden phallus in every hole that smells the dollars falling out of your pockets...

FERRAH:

Will you two stop it, please! Time is running out. We need to get out of this together, then you can kill each other or fall back in love or whatever.

JACK:

Yeah.

FERRAH:

Jack, I need you to be a bit more helpful right now sweetie.

REGINALD:

To VI: You know, *motioning to JACK*, he's probably out getting all of the tail he wants whenever yoga pants there turns around.

JACK:

No, I'm not. I'd never hold another above my love.

VI:

To FERRAH: I hate to admit the old bastard is right. Has there been any time he's been unfaithful?

(Beat)

FERRAH:

Jack, I need to ask you a question and I need you to answer me truthfully.

NARRATOR:

FERRAH breaks hands with JACK

JACK:

Anything you want.

FERRAH:

Where were you last week when you wouldn't return my texts?

JACK:

A movie.

VI & REGINALD TOGETHER:

Knew it.

NARRATOR

REGINALD and VI's hands slowly begin to move together.

FERRAH:

With who?

JACK:

Why are you siding with these fucking people?

FERRAH:

With who?

JACK:

Does it really matter? It's not like it will change anything now. One of us is going to die.

FERRAH:

So, should it be you?

(Beat)

You never answered the question.

JACK:

Fine!

(Beat)

I fucked up.

(Beat)

I slept with someone. I'm human.

NARRATOR:

A single tear runs down FERRAH's beat red face.

VI:

To FERRAH: Sweetheart, you'll be alright. You're young, you'll bounce back. I was married before Reginald. As much as the two of us have had our moments we still love each other. Go ahead and press it. You still have a full life ahead of you. Find someone you can fully trust and love for all of your days. Build a family. Just remember this moment. Remember that no matter how hard life is you will find that respite you deserve, never settle. I didn't and despite his flaws, I will love him no matter how long my life lasts, even if it's only a minute more.

REGINALD:

I'm sorry Vi.

VI:

I know.

JACK:

Fuck all of you.

NARRATOR:

JACK goes for the **BUTTON**. **REGINALD** releases **VIOLA**'s hand and grabs **JACK**'s wrist.

The two men struggle. **VI** reaches over and grabs **FERRAH**'s hand and leads it toward the

BUTTON. **VI** mouths the words "go on" to **FERRAH**.

The speaker crackles back to life.

TAUPE:

Tick tock children.

(Beat)

The end waits for no man or woman or whatever, except rocks. Those things seem to last forever. But I guess they really have an end too. So, yeah, the end waits for no rocks too.

NARRATOR:

The men continue to arm wrestle over hitting the button. Slowly but surely **VI** coaxes **FERRAH's** hand to the button, then **VI** releases **FARRAH's** hand and nods silently to **FERRAH**, tears stream down **VI's** face. **VI** turns to **REGINALD** and smiles at the man she has always loved.

(Beat)

JACK breaks loose of **REGINALD's** grip and rips **FERRAH's** hand off the button. **JACK** quickly slams his hand down on the **BUTTON**. From under **JACK's** chair hundreds of barbed metal rods fire up into him from below at various angles. **JACK** is impaled to the ceiling his arm outstretched like a hellish crimson version of Adam from the ceiling Sistine Chapel.

(Beat)

The room lights go out.

(Beat)

Many rooms away **AGENT TAUPE** watches a **MONITOR**: agents grab the other three participants and remove them from the room, after injecting their necks with a needle. He flips through a file folder and pulls out a small audio recorder.

TAUPE:

To Audio Recorder: Agent Taupe, FCC, Bureau of Moral Standards report... um...114-11-Q
Harmony Project. Test was successful, Adulterer in room outted self. Debriefing and mind wipe
of participants underway. Next test will be...uh...at zero dark thirty tomorrow. End of report.

[End]

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *I wrote The Harmony Project for Take Ten—a small production at Goddard College where students submit and perform shows allowing us to celebrate each other’s work in person. Harmony Project was not actually selected for Take Ten. So, I mothballed it and honestly forgot about the piece. I came across Fleas on the Dog online. My writing partner has been encouraging me to submit pieces, and push my writing more. I’m not a dramatic writer by skill set. But I said, what the heck, and submitted it.*

Harmony Project is grounded in the world that I have been creating and expanding upon for some years now. I always planned to have the federal government have a group that deals with supernatural affairs and human behavior while it is hidden within the FCC. Because it’s a silly branch of the government that has no real purpose anymore. So, why not. I love the idea of the unspoken character reversal. I know it’s a trope, but it works when it’s not overused.

My influences are as strange as my thought processes. I really am the bastard love child of a one-night stand between Neil Gaiman, Stephen King, Anne Rice, Raymond Chandler, Chuck Palahniuk, & H.P. Lovecraft, while Cormac McCarthy reads gothic literature in the corner. I wasn’t lying. I learned to write dramatic fiction from David Ball’s Backwards and Forwards, which Rogelio Martinez, my graduate advisor, made me read. I’m still not sad about it. It has been a great influence on my novel writing.

AUTHOR BIO: Bennett is an aspiring author and general miscreant. He holds a BA focused in English Literature and an MFAW in Fiction from Goddard College. He is currently shopping his first novel *Dextra Domini, or The Right Hand of God*. Bennett was also the Editor in Chief and Submission Editor of the *Pitkin Review*. His story *Inside You* was published in the *Pitkin Review* in its Spring ‘19 issue. He is originally from Pennsylvania but currently lives outside of Charleston, South Carolina; where he resides with his wife, stepson, and his surly and aloof yet loveable cat.

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