

Hearing Art©

By Lee Kitchen

A play in two acts
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What happens when a hearing impaired person who's sexually aroused by art, scuffles with guards at a museum, and an underinsured Van Gogh is destroyed? A story of passion and art layered around a community leader's furor towards the hearing impaired.

Hearing Arto Rev. 10/25/2022

Cast of Characters: 8 actors play 14 speaking characters. Six actors play an additional character.

EUGENE DEWEY (30s), male, HOH (Hard of Hearing) uses American Sign Language (ASL), reads lips.
JUDGE (EDWARD) (50s), male, owns his courtroom.
DEFENSE ATTORNEY (JEAN SUMMERS) (40s), female.
PROSECUTOR (40s), female.
ASL INTERPRETER (30s), female, sign language interpreter.
BARNEY DOBSON (50s), male, museum guard.
LOUIE D'ANGELO (20s), male, off duty policeman, bushy mustache.
PROF. CATHERINE NUENAN (40s), female.
PROF. RONALD LEPIC (50s), male.
MICHAEL BREAM (40s), male, museum curator/director.
SCUDHILL ROWE (60s), male, witness, CEO/museum board member.
HAROLD (60s), male, museum board, sophisticated and sarcastic.
ALEXIS (50s), female, blue blood, HAROLD'S trophy wife.
HELEN (30s), female, JUDGE (EDWARD'S) spouse.
SPECTATOR (50s), nonspeaking female, dropped purse first scene.
CHAZ (40s), nonspeaking male prison inmate.
SPECTATOR AT MUSEUM (50S+), nonspeaking male.

Place: Cosmopolitan City.

Time: Present

Doubling suggestion:

- * HELEN plays PROF. NUENAN.
- * LOUIE D'ANGELO plays PROF. LEPIC.
- * BARNEY plays MICHAEL BREAM
- * JUDGE (EDWARD) plays nonspeaking CHAZ in last scene.
- * ASL INTERPRETER plays ALEXIS.
- * HAROLD plays SCHUDHILL ROWE.
- * VO JURY FORMAN, nonspeaking FEMALE and MALE SPECTATORS by any actor.



HEARING ART, Scene breakdown:

Act I

Scene 1	1-3	Museum
<i>Scene 2</i>	<i>4-7.5</i>	<i>Courtroom</i>
<i>Scene 3</i>	<i>7.5-9</i>	<i>Judge's Chambers</i>
<i>Scene 4</i>	<i>10-11</i>	<i>Courtroom</i>
<i>Scene 5</i>	<i>11-14</i>	<i>Courtroom Hallway</i>
Scene 6	14-15	Bedroom
Scene 7	15	Museum
Scene 8	20-22	Bedroom
Scene 9	23	<i>Judge's Chambers</i>
Scene 10	23-56	<i>Courtroom</i>

Act II

<i>Scene 1</i>	<i>57</i>	<i>Judge's Chambers</i>
<i>Scene 2</i>	<i>57-68</i>	<i>Courtroom</i>
<i>Scene 3</i>	<i>68-69</i>	<i>Courtroom</i>
Scene 4	70-74	Museum
<i>Scene 5</i>	<i>74-75</i>	<i>Judge's Chambers</i>
Scene 6	79-80	Prison Yard

NOTE: Visualize the Courtroom and Judge's Chambers as one set adjacent to each other with lights up, lights down. Courtroom and Judge's Chamber scene highlighted in italics.

Note: Throughout the play, captions in English are projected to wall or somewhere for the hard of hearing (HOH) and the DEAF. Envision the jury consists of cutouts with backs to audience. All cast member appear in last scene as prisoners.

HEARING ART Act I**Scene 1** museum

Velvet ropes connect silver poles, cordoned section of paintings and sculpture in art gallery.

A dapper gentleman stops, tugs on his beard, appears deep in reflection, examines a painting, then casually strolls away.

EUGENE, in torn trench coat and scruffy attire approaches an exhibit containing a small statue of a nude woman. He apologizes to people as he moves closer to the exhibit.

He turns and sees a female spectator can't locate a dropped purse. Eugene sees it in the corner, walks over, picks it up and returns it. The woman thanks him profusely.

Eugene excuses himself with gestures and returns to the exhibit.

He stands in front of the sculpture. Looks right, then left, to see if anyone is watching. He quickly unhooks the rope, steps inside and re-hooks the rope.

He walks slowly to the sculpture and runs his fingers over the breasts and down the legs.

From right we hear a whistle and a museum guard, BARNEY, screaming at Eugene. Hear footsteps as guard's voice becomes louder.

Eugene continues touching the sculpture, emitting sounds of pleasure.

BARNEY

Hey! Mitts off!

(using shoulder-mounted microphone)

Dobson, Gallery East. Need a back up! Got a flagrant violator. Double-time! Over and out.

BARNEY reaches EUGENE, grabs him by the collar, spins Eugene around, knocks off Eugene's hearing aids.

Eugene struggles, shrugs and gestures to communicate, "What am I doing wrong?"

BARNEY

Read my lips, PAL!

(EUGENE nodding)

OK, y-o-u, u-n-d-e-r, a-r-r-e-s-t!

LOUIE

(strolling over casually)

So Barney, what seems to be the problem? Got a (Beat) "Flagrant Violator?" Don't know, Barn, may need the SWAT team.

BARNEY

This sculpture's worth five-thousand bucks, and this guy was running his hands all over it...getting off, real sick-o!

LOUIE

(ignoring BARNEY; turning to EUGENE)

Getting a feel, eh pal? What's the matter? Old lady cut you off?

(laughing, noticing Eugene not laughing; grabbing Eugene's lapels)

Cat got your tongue? Better start explaining things, or I ain't goin' to be as easy on you as Barney.

BARNEY

FOR Pete's sake, Louie, cuff this deaf and dumb guy!

LOUIE

(changing expression;
walking in front of EUGENE;
speaking loudly within
inches of Eugene's face;
waving hand)

That right, Mac? You d-e-a-f?

EUGENE

(speaking loudly; signing
ASL)

I'm hard of hearing. Read lips.

(pointing to Barney)

Jerk ripped out my hearing aids!

LOUIE

Talkin' 'bout you, BARNEY!

EUGENE

Am I (Beat) being arrested?

LOUIE

Stepped over the line, sign says stay out. Barney here claims
you were choking the chicken.

EUGENE

Choking--NO WAY!

BARNEY

Signs say KEEP YOUR HANDS OFF THE ART!

LOUIE

So, BARNEY, want me to bust this here almost deaf guy or what?

BARNEY

(hesitating; Eugene
ridiculing him)

Yeah! Book 'em!

LOUIE

You're the boss, BARNEY!

LOUIE, reluctantly, cuffs EUGENE,
leads HIM away.

Eugene is afraid and confused as
OFFICERS take him away.

Scene 2 Courtroom.

Looking up at JUDGE is DEFENSE ATTORNEY JEAN SUMMERS. At HER table sits EUGENE and an ASL interpreter.

Judge puts on glasses, studies brief before addressing ASL interpreter and prosecutor.

JUDGE

Presume this is the court-appointed ASL interpreter?

PROSECUTOR

Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE

(addressing DEFENSE ATTORNEY)

Does your client fully understand the severity of the charges against him?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Yes, Your Honor but there are mitigating circumstances.

JUDGE

Plead guilty or not guilty?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Your honor, my client is not deaf. He is hard of hearing.

JUDGE

I thought the arresting officer said he couldn't hear.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

True, at the time of the arrest, the museum guard damaged my client's hearing aids. My client suffers from severe hearing loss.

JUDGE

Does he have a hearing aid with a telecoil? The court is wired.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

No, Your Honor. He has an old device.

JUDGE

Reads lips?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Yes, but during the alter...

JUDGE

...Present your evidence when called upon, counselor.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE

Counselors, approach the bench. (Beat) Listen, I've got cases backed up through 2025. Does this man need an ASL interpreter or not?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

We're OK dismissing the interpreter but we need someone to translate for my client.

JUDGE

I'm confused. If not an ASL interpreter, who or what then?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

In a one-on-one conversation, my client can barely hear. Certainly not in a courtroom. He reads lips. We request a stenographer who can transfer the proceedings to a tablet so my client can follow.

JUDGE

This is without precedent. You make it sound like your client is legally deaf.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Close, Your Honor. It's a gray area. But we will prove that his hearing deficiency led to the misunderstanding and wrongful arrest.

JUDGE

Counselor, your client's deafness or hearing impairment is no excuse for breaking the law. (Beat) How does your client plead relative to the charges?

INTERPRETER

(using ASL to EUGENE)

Judge wants you to declare guilty or not guilty.

EUGENE

(signing; shouting)

BULLSHIT!

INTERPRETER

(turning to Eugene; not
translating to Judge)

You're going to be in deep trouble.

JUDGE

(interrupting angrily)

Does your client plead guilty or not guilty, to the charges
of criminal mischief and trespassing at the Barnard Museum,
on the 30th of March?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

(turning to Eugene; slowly
enunciating)

Judge wants to know how you plead, guilty or not guilty to
trespassing.

EUGENE

Guilty.

JUDGE

(eyeing EUGENE suspiciously)

I heard. We'll proceed. What does your client have to say for
himself in light of his plea?

EUGENE

(struggling to hear)

Don't have to pee, Judge.

JUDGE

This is preposterous!

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Apologize, Your Honor. He can't see your lips when you speak.

INTERPRETER

(using ASL; still shaken
from EUGENE'S behavior;
trying to maintain
composure)

Wrong. Judge didn't say that.

EUGENE (ASL)

(signing while shouting;
pounding table)

Well, fuck! How do I know...

JUDGE

Eugene Dewey, LOOK AT ME!

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Your Honor, this is extremely difficult for my client.

JUDGE

I am not addressing you, counselor

EUGENE

What, Judge?

JUDGE

You're trying my patience.

EUGENE

Judges don't have patients.

JUDGE

(holding his head)

Great! This is like talking to a cabbage.

EUGENE

Judge, what about Cabbage?

JUDGE

Recess! Need to talk to counselors. Not the accused.

Judge bangs gavel and motions two attorneys into his chamber.

Prosecutor suppresses laughter.

Scene 3 Judge's chamber.

PROSECUTOR

(admiring paintings on chamber walls)

Marvelous artwork, Judge. I didn't realize you were a collector.

JUDGE

(turning to wall; admiring one painting)

Yes, for years. Hudson River school. (Beat) You know, Bierst, Church, Cole...The one you're looking at is worth, hmm, maybe a hundred grand today.

PROSECUTOR

Impressive.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Your collection is stunning, Your Honor.(Beat)You wanted to talk to us?

JUDGE

Yes.About this mess.Most bizarre.

PROSECUTOR

We could bring in another interpreter. One who matches...

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

...Where'd you graduate? He is HOH, not DEAF. Do you understand the difference?

PROSECUTOR

You seem to have an unusually profound interest in your client.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

We'll compare wins and losses, counselor.

PROSECUTOR

At least I don't get involved with my clients, every Tom, *DICK* and Harry!

JUDGE

Park your animosity, counselors. How do we solve this mess?

PROSECUTOR

New ASL interpreter who signs slower and writes faster?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Are you DEAF? My client has partial knowledge of ASL. May as well hire a Russian interpreter.

JUDGE

Warning you two!

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Can we project the transcription?

JUDGE

Aristocrat software, it's possible, but takes time; it'll be disruptive.

PROSECUTOR

The software allows for captioning over the Internet but tablets and cell phones aren't permitted.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

So, options?

JUDGE

Don't know.

PROSECUTOR

Postponement?

JUDGE

Don't need disruptive advocates from the hard-of-hearing or deaf community!

PROSECUTOR

The deaf probably won't protest. I think they look upon the hearing impaired as the black sheep.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

But you're correct, Judge, if this continues, you'll have a publicity nightmare particularly with the upcoming election.

JUDGE

Settled. I'll offer leniency, probation and community service. Now let's go back and end this circus.

Scene 4 Courtroom.

Judge returns to the bench.

JUDGE

The client has entered a plea of guilty. Upon consideration of his limited ability to hear the proceedings and because it is the accused's first appearance, Court is predisposed to leniency.

(Eugene raising hand)

Please address the court through your attorney.

EUGENE

(turning to defense attorney)

Why would the judge propose a lien?

JUDGE

(holding head; moaning)

Heard it. No need to repeat. (Beat) The sculpture the accused fondled is an irreplaceable and a valuable work of art. Defacing art is analogous to violating a person. Such behavior does not go unpunished in my court. Anything you or your client wishes to share with the court before sentencing?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

I'd like to read my client's statement your Honor.

(nodding by JUDGE)

"How can putting hands on something as beautiful as that woman made of stone hurt? She was made from the hands of a gifted artist who touched her. I didn't hurt or molest the woman. I only touched the stone to feel the smooth contour and the coolness of her body. I felt what the artist must have felt when he created her. JUDGE, I hear through the artist's fingers.

JUDGE

The court's moved by your client's appreciation of art. But this is a court of law. And this is a land of laws, without which, we would have a society where people are free to violate people, institutions, and art. I find the defendant guilty, sentence him to ninety days volunteer work. I fine him \$1,000 although excuse him from the cost of the translator. If I see him in front of me again, I won't hesitate to bring down the full force of the law. That means jail time! Understand?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Understand, Your Honor.

EUGENE

(reading translation)

Understood, Judge.

JUDGE

Approach the bench.

(attorneys moving to bench)

There's another issue dismissed as hearsay. The museum guard alleges your client was fondling himself. (Beat) I'm outraged your client tampered with valuable artwork, and incensed by his alleged sexual deviancy. I order your client three months counseling with Social Services. If he misses one session he'll spend six months in jail, got it?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Understood.

EUGENE

(shaking HIS head side to side; mumbling)

Come on! Like I really get off on marble tits!

JUDGE

(noticing Eugene's gestures)

Take your client out of my courtroom, NOW! His disability barely saved him from the county jail! Next case!

Scene 5 Courthouse hallway.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY prepares to leave. EUGENE, depressed, mopes on a bench.

INTERPRETER walks by, signs "goodbye" to Eugene. He tries to sign "thank you" but signs "I'm tired" by mistake. Interpreter corrects him, takes his hand and demonstrates, "thank you."

Eugene moves his face closer to her.

She abruptly moves away as Eugene signs, "Want to hook-up?"

INTERPRETER
(signing; shouting)

YOU NEED HELP!

Interpreter exits.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

What was that about?

EUGENE

She's pissed because I won't go out with her.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Interesting. Why doesn't she want to go out with you?

EUGENE

It's embarrassing.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Listen, I need to know everything if you want my representation.

EUGENE

All right. I'm kind of known in the DEAF community for being, how shall I say? Rather endowed.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Seriously? Suppose that's something to be proud of. (Beat)
Girlfriends?

EUGENE

None steady. Two won't leave me alone. Guess I left a big impression on 'em.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Very funny, now you've got to make a *BIG IMPRESSION* on the judge.

EUGENE

How?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Keep your mouth shut and your face blank! Your remarks, your attitude pissed off the judge. He's known for nailing sex offenders to the wall!

EUGENE

(using middle finger instead
of Scout sign)

Scout's honor. For you, I'll be good.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

You also have to level with me.

EUGENE

You mean, level you?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Do you have a death wish, rather, a prison wish? Because that's where you're heading if caught again.

EUGENE

Aw, that was a one time deal.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

(staring at Eugene's crotch)

So, you don't masturbate in galleries?

EUGENE

There's a difference in getting off and beating off. Someone with a Yale degree should know that.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Listen. I've represented a lot of creeps, guys who display themselves. Some pillars of society and, some like you.

EUGENE

What do you mean, *SOME LIKE ME*? You don't have any idea what it's like to be excluded from society.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Maybe, but I wouldn't attend to my sexual needs in a public gallery.

EUGENE

In a PRIVATE gallery?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

(laughing)

You're helpless.

EUGENE

You're different from the others.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

Other defense attorneys? How many have you had?

EUGENE

Just one before. Traffic issue. No. I meant other women. You've got...

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

...Listen, here's another card, no, three. Keep them nearby in case you decide to decorate another masterpiece. (Beat) Be sure to show up for your counseling sessions. (Beat) If you'll excuse me, got to find clients who can afford me.

EUGENE

You mean, handle you. You're hot, you know. (Beat) Will call for sure.

SHE pauses, turns to EUGENE for a moment, places her hand on his knee. Pats it condescendingly then, salaciously.

SHE takes her hand away quickly, realizes she is too familiar. She feigns a smile, waves goodbye.

Eugene continues smiling. After the counselor has her back to him, changes his expression to lust.

Attorney walks seductively down the courthouse stairs. Eugene touches himself.

Scene 6 Defense Attorney's bedroom.

EUGENE and DEFENSE ATTORNEY in bed.

EUGENE
Love your briefs, counselor!

DEFENSE ATTORNEY
And, you, sir, are magnum-opus!

EUGENE
You should see my brother's opus!

DEFENSE ATTORNEY
(breathing hard)
How soon can he be here?

EUGENE
(rolling over; propping on
an elbow)
Don't share.(pause)So, why'd you take my case? I'm broke.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY
Really don't know?

EUGENE
All I know is you showed up at my door wearing that catch-me-fuck-me dress and a briefcase.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY
You started me thinking. The hearing impaired are not getting fair trials, and some are very wealthy.

EUGENE
So, I'm just an ad for you?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY
Baby, you thrill me, OFF THE RECORD. ON THE RECORD, I'll parlay HOH representation. Law Review, more. You've opened a gold mine, defending HOH's.

EUGENE
Glad I was helpful. (Beat) Going to dismiss me after dismissal?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY
What we're doing is out of line. I could be disbarred. Totally unethical although delectable.

EUGENE

Turn to me when you talk. Need to see your lips.

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

They need to kiss you.

EUGENE

Seriously, I'm your poster boy?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

(pushing up; facing him)

So what? Better than spending time in prison.

EUGENE

Do prisons have a section for hard of hearing?

DEFENSE ATTORNEY

(moving down)

Yeah, called doing this with a mean boyfriend.

Scene 7 Art Gallery, Month Later.

Reception at art opening. Older couples mix, hold flutes of champagne, dressed formally, high pitched, affected accents. Paintings in background are Van Gogh's.

Crowd is more interested in exchanging pleasantries than art.

JUDGE (EDWARD) and his wife HELEN greet HAROLD.

HAROLD

(approaching)

HELEN! EDWARD! How very nice to see you. Have the checkbook ready, old boy? I mean you need to upstage that postage-size Delacroix in your study! Based upon dollars per volume, I'd say you paid \$30,000 an inch for that relic (pause) eight by ten correct?

(turning to Helen)

Helen, you look stunning! Lovely dress. What magnificent stones dangling over your sumptuous charleys.

JUDGE

Evening, Harold of the golden tongue. Fixated on Helen's new breasts instead of this incredible art?(Beat)Your Alexis is ravishing in her sequin gown—appears almost grown up! Amazing what a haberdasher can do for such an age discrepancy.

HELEN

Pay no attention to HAROLD. HE hasn't gotten over the fact you spend your money on younger women while he spends his on art. Two distinctly different assets, wouldn't you say? Oh, I suppose then again, it all depends upon what you truly value, I mean, as a collector. Both appreciate, but I'm afraid (Beat) one fades under time's cruel hand. (Beat) Do give our affection to your child bride.

JUDGE

(turning to exhibit)

Yes, old boy, please do. Now, if you will excuse us, we must savor this artistic feast.

ALEXIS

(walking over to Harold
after JUDGE and HELEN leave)

I see his pompous ass reigns while Helen decapitates me within her circle of magpies. When will you get rid of him?

HAROLD

Now, dear. Must develop a thicker shell. It's the nature of our societal beast to joust. Just a matter of time.

ALEXIS

I'm fed up with this constant social spanking!

HAROLD

Please, let's not revisit that discussion. Here...
(grabbing arm; turning her
around)

...gander at the cost of these lovely paintings. The curator whispered that the smallest is worth seven million. Can you imagine?

ALEXIS

The larger ones exceed eighty million. To think, the poor earless fellow died a pauper.

THEY move closer to the ropes
separating the paintings from
spectators.

EUGENE is to the far left dressed in a cleaning worker's overalls, a hat pulled down over his forehead. He holds a mop and pail. His back faces the crowd. Eugene looks right then left.

BARNEY (museum guard) is stage right with his back to Eugene. Barney turns and sees the worker. He eyes Eugene suspiciously wondering why a cleaner is working during the reception.

Barney steps closer to the exhibit.

Eugene clears the rope, runs to the nearest Van Gogh. His fingers move up and down the frame of the painting.

His left hand is on the outside of his trousers, touching himself. He emits sounds of ecstasy.

Barney rushes to Eugene.

LOUIE, (second museum guard) nightstick in hand, hops the rope to assist BARNEY.

BARNEY
 (crawling under rope)
 Get your filthy hands off of that!
 (lunging for EUGENE; trying
 to pull Eugene's hand off
 the frame)
 I said, get your hand off NOW!

Eugene continues ignoring Barney.
 LOUIE joins the struggle.

The Van Gogh painting falls,
 crashes to the floor, ripped.

BARNEY and LOUIE fall on top of Eugene.