

**I'D LIKE TO BUY A VOWEL**

by Cass Brayton

September 10, 2003

Copyright © 2003 by Cass Brayton  
48 Divisadero, San Francisco, CA 94117  
(415) 608-9808 • sfcass@aol.com

I'D LIKE TO BUY A VOWEL was premiered at PlayGround at the 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Best of PlayGround (2003) festival on June 14, 2003 in San Francisco, California. It was directed by Lee Sankowich.

**CHARACTERS**

WANDA LUST, a drag queen

PETER, a teenage student

DUSTIN, a teenage hustler

**NOTE:**

The following credit must appear the title page of programs:

"PlayGround developed and subsequently produced the World Premiere of I'D LIKE TO BUY A VOWEL in San Francisco in 2003. James A. Kleinmann, Artistic Director"

*Darkness. Music plays, something tuneful, but suggestive of longing for an absent someone, maybe "Come Back From San Francisco" by Magnetic Fields.*

*Song fades. Lights up. WANDA LUST is on her knees, wiping a shag rug. She's dressed down in something like a kimono. As the play progresses she gets dressed up for a night out.*

WANDA LUST

Drag queens don't do love letters.  
They just don't.  
If you ever find yourself entangled  
in a relationship with a she-male  
don't go sending her -- him -- her any love letters.  
You'd just be asking for trouble.  
Now, you're probably thinking  
that if you manage to get yourself implicated  
in some kind of gender-blend, booze-drenched,  
meth-propelled, Hollywood-sized psychodrama--  
you hear what I'm saying?--  
If you get yourself involved  
in an interlude with someone squished like a sausage  
into a neon-hued, eyeball-searing, quasi-pussprint  
camisole-and-hot-pants-type ensemble,  
an outfit that when you get back to her place  
she pops out of  
so she can turn up the heat  
by slipping into one of her  
Fredericks-Foxy Lady baby dolls,  
if that's where you suddenly find yourself,  
you're probably thinking right about then  
that the concept of trouble is simply redundant.  
And you'd have a point.  
You probably -- you definitely -- don't want to be  
mailing that person letters of love.  
Like I said,  
you'd just be asking for trouble.

PETER

Dear Wanda:

I really really really want to thank you  
for such an interesting time last night.  
The whole experience was enlarging.  
You really opened my mind.  
Big time.  
Your friends were really interesting too.  
And all the places you took me to.  
I never knew all those places with no signs  
Were really bars.  
Glad they didn't ask for ID.  
We must look fairly sophisticated together,  
huh? you and me?  
"I bask in your reflected glory."  
I'll be kind of busy with finals for a while...

WANDA LUST

It's only February.

PETER

... but will definitely, definitely  
want to hook up again  
sometime in the future.  
Yours always and forever.  
Peter (the Great)  
P.S. My mother says  
that presoaking with baking soda  
will definitely get the puke stains  
off a shag carpet.  
P.P.S. Could you send me Dustin's phone number?

WANDA LUST

Drag queens -- as a species --  
see themselves  
as practitioners of psychic surgery  
on all the Peters of the world.  
Schools fuck with their little brains.  
Queens fuck them back to normal.  
It's a calling.  
Someone has to teach them  
all the shady and taboo subjects  
that never make it  
to the state-approved curriculum.  
Don't they?

DUSTIN

Hey Wanda:  
What a kick running into you  
Saturday night.  
I meant to call you  
since I got out of Juvey.  
And there you were.  
Like a vision that comes to me  
when I wish it to be so.

WANDA LUST

The Aleister Crowley of the Tenderloin.

DUSTIN

That stuff I sold you?  
It might have been cut with something  
totally unbeknownst to me.  
Sorry.  
If I ever thought  
I was responsible  
for the most microscopic misfortune  
wafting down upon your weary head,  
I would rather  
cut off my left testicle instead.  
This I vow to you.

WANDA LUST

Vow? Forget the vow.  
If you try to pull that shit on me again,  
I'll shred your scrotal sac with my own fingernails.

DUSTIN

Now I know where to get better stuff  
so next time, we can rock.  
I'm still working on putting that band together  
so keep up those vocal chops.  
Shine on.  
Dustin (the Wind)  
P.S. That guy you were with. Peter?  
Does he play an instrument?

WANDA LUST

One of the reasons I hate love letters  
is that they never come.  
Or they come from the wrong person.  
And once in a long while,  
instead of pacing through another night  
rendering that shag carpet even shaggier,  
as you wait for some word from the right person  
you decide to take a little pleasure  
wherever you can find it.  
But then, a few days later, the mail arrives,  
shattering the comforting little fantasy you've concocted  
that this latest guy,  
maybe, just maybe, dear God,  
this one won't be a delinquent  
who spent his formative years  
smoking in a pissoir  
AWOL from English classes,  
trying to get by on little more than  
grunts and charisma.

PETER

Dear Wanda:  
A Valentine 4 U

WANDA LUST

*(miming with her hands)* That's 4 U.

PETER

Thank you forever  
For helping me see it.  
The only true life  
Is don't dream it, be it.

WANDA LUST

The Love Song of J. Alfred Frank N. Furter.

PETER

You're so easy to love.  
Happy VD Day.  
Guess Who?  
P.S. Could you send me Dustin's phone number?

WANDA LUST

The way I see it,  
 in the alphabet of life  
 lovers are the vowels.  
 That's VOWEL, with a V.  
 You may think that for you  
 it's all coming together,  
 that you've almost got the whole puzzle figured out.  
 But believe me,  
 it won't all click into place  
 till you start turning over those E's and O's.  
 Now you may think there are  
 just a few too many I's  
 for your liking,  
 but when the big wheel ratchets to a stop,  
 who do you think's going to be there  
 to help you hit it big?  
 It won't be Miss Vanna, my friend,  
 the mute ambulatory mannequin of American letters.  
 That bitch will give you nothing  
 till you start buying vowels.

DUSTIN

Wanda:  
 Why don't you pick up when I call?  
 And why don't you get a computer?  
 I can help you set it up.

WANDA LUST

I'm enjoying my reign as  
 Queen of the Luddites.

DUSTIN

We could do e-mail  
 so I wouldn't have to  
 hand-deliver letters  
 over to your place all the time.

WANDA LUST

If you quit peddling your boney ass  
 in the alleys off of Polk Street  
 long enough to get down to the post office,  
 you could buy some stamps and wouldn't have to--  
 Oh why bother?  
 I happen to like letters.  
 You can fondle them.  
 They're like e-mail with molecules.

DUSTIN

You wanna get together and  
 do some music (or whatever) sometime?  
 Don't forget,  
 you are the lust of my life.  
 Let me know, you crazy diamond.  
 Dustin  
 P.S. How do I get ahold of  
 that guy Peter?

WANDA LUST

However creepy and puerile  
 Dustin's attempts at manipulation might be,  
 You've got to love him for being calculating enough  
 to throw an occasional bone your way,  
 while trying to wheedle out of you  
 what he really wants.  
 I know it's not my carcass  
 that vulture wants to munch on.  
 I may be no Dolly Levi,  
 but I can play along. Hel-lo!

DUSTIN

Hey Wanda:  
 That dude Peter--  
 it's so cool. He's a drummer.  
 Got his own kit and everything.  
 I don't know what's up with him.  
 He acts kind of weird.  
 But who cares as long as he can keep a beat.

WANDA LUST

I think I hear it now,  
the beat beat beat of the tom-toms.

DUSTIN

Looks like we'll be laying down some tracks  
after all.  
The first good thing that happened  
since I got out.  
Let's write some songs.

PETER

Dear Wanda:  
Dustin called me out of the blue.  
I wasn't going to bother him  
what with the syphilis and all.  
He looks so healthy.  
Thanks for letting me know.  
He never brought the subject up.  
He said he might let me  
sit in with his band sometime.  
My big break!  
You bring magic to my life.

DUSTIN

Syphilis!!!! You stinky ho!!

WANDA LUST

A poet in touch with  
the temper of his times.

DUSTIN

Stay away! Far away from me!  
You are one twisted cookie!

WANDA LUST

Does that make me a cruller?  
I was just trying to help him  
stay focussed on his art.  
It's the only thing that lasts.

PETER

Dear Wanda:  
 I hope you don't get mad at me  
 but I have to let you know  
 I met someone else.  
 We go to the same school.  
 I really want him to get to know you,  
 the coolest person in the world  
 (that I met so far).  
 Soon as finals are over.  
 Thanks for everything.  
 Pete

WANDA LUST

If one day a letter did manage to find its way  
 into your mail slot,  
 wrapped in an envelope  
 plain as the smock  
 on a Walgreen's cashier...  
 If one day you found your name glowing  
 in some scrawl you could never forget,  
 wild and potent  
 like hieroglyphics on a tomb,  
 patterns so familiar  
 they evaporate all distance,  
 receptors in your brain  
 shifting to overload,  
 popping as your heart starts to palpitate,  
 thumping hard, so hard  
 you don't even register  
 the spelling mistakes...

*PETER and DUSTIN enter dressed up carrying  
 letters, flowers, balloons, sparklers, etc.*

WANDA LUST

If this is what showed up one day--  
 what some would call a letter of love--  
 it might not be all that bad.  
 If you tore your way into that envelope,  
 if you saw those tender words:

PETER  
Come back.

Hurry home.

Need to feel you.

Read me a poem.

Let's do it again.

I bought you a book.

I made you some breakfast.

DUSTIN

Come back to me.

I need you.

Need to taste you.

I wrote a song for you.

Never leave me.

Let me dream beside you.

Use my credit card.

*As WANDA moves toward them, PETER and DUSTIN  
withdraw and exit.*

WANDA LUST

You could wait a long time Miss Havisham,  
a long time for that bonus round.

In the meantime  
drama will have to serve.

I mean, love never lingers  
but drama just goes on and on.

A consonant searching for vowels.

*Music fades in, perhaps "Dancing Queen" by  
Abba. WANDA finishes dressing, checks herself  
in the mirror, turns off a lamp, and exits.  
Lights fade. Music fades.*

END OF PLAY