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Samuel French Acting Edition

Safe Sex

by Harvey Fierstein

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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Safe Sex premiered on January 8, 1987 at the La Mama ETC as part of their twenty-fifth anniversary celebration. The production was subsequently presented by the Shubert Organization at the Lyceum Theater in New York City with a March 19, 1987 first performance with the following cast:

MANNY AND JAKE

MANNY John Mulkeen
JAKE..... John Wesley Shipp

SAFE SEX

MEAD John Wesley Shipp
GHEE Harvey Fierstein

ON TIDY ENDINGS

MARION Anne De Salvo
JUNE..... Billie McBride
JIMMY Ricky Addison Reed
ARTHUR..... Harvey Fierstein

Directed by Eric Concklin

Original Score: Ada Janik

Lighting Design: Craig Miller

Costume Design: Nanzi Adzima

Scenery: John Falabella

Sculptures: Gretchen Green

Sound: Tom Morse

Casting: Jimmy Bohr

Production Stage Manager: Bob Borod

Stage Manager: Glen Gardali

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Never lose your sense of humor.

MANNY AND JAKE

MANNY AND JAKE

MANNY, an irresistibly beautiful young man, sits alone on a white sofa placed Center Stage.

HE holds in Yoga's "lotus" position, but his arms are outstretched, his palms reaching heavenward. HE stares glassily skyward.

HE is dressed in bright red shirt and pants. HE is barefooted.

JAKE enters strolling slowly. HE too is beautiful, young, irresistible. HE is dressed in pink.

JAKE sees MANNY and is immediately taken with him. JAKE stares, takes a casual look about for eavesdroppers; seeing none, HE approaches MANNY casually. JAKE coyly crosses in front of him but MANNY stares blindly as before.

JAKE tries posing in front of MANNY; HE flexes and stretches alluringly but to no avail. Frustrated, JAKE wanders away.

Pause.

JAKE returns HE strolls once again behind the sofa. No reaction. HE strolls in front of the sofa. No reaction. HE leans on the sofa. Nothing. HE lies across the sofa and still MANNY remains unmoved. Suddenly JAKE lunges at MANNY, grabbing him by the throat and choking. MANNY gags and gasps for air but does not struggle HE remains passionless.

Exhausted, JAKE lets go of MANNY and regains his composure MANNY restores himself as well JAKE begins to leave as MANNY closes his eyes and speaks:

MANNY. Talk.

JAKE (*Stops and looks back.*) You say something?

(*No reply. No movement. JAKE cautiously reapproaches*)

JAKE. What're you doing?

MANNY. Praying for sex.

JAKE. Praying?

MANNY. Uh huh.

JAKE. For sex?

MANNY. Uh huh.

JAKE. (*Turned on.*) Uh huh! (*Strutting closer.*) Your prayers have been answered.

MANNY. (*Opens his eyes and for the first time looks at JAKE.*) I don't want your money.

JAKE. I didn't offer any.

MANNY. I don't want anything from you.

JAKE. And that's what you'll get.

MANNY. You can't promise that. You don't know.

JAKE. I know what I'm willing to give.

MANNY. I know what I'm willing to give. But I can't promise.

JAKE. I can.

MANNY. Not for sure. You don't know.

JAKE. I know.

MANNY. Not for sure. And I need for sure.

(*MANNY returns to his praying position. JAKE stares in confusion HE starts to leave again but stops.*)

JAKE. (*Belligerently.*) So, you wanna do it or what?

MANNY. (*Opens his eyes. Quietly.*) Can you kiss?

JAKE. (*Macho.*) I can't recall any complaints.

MANNY. (*Suddenly an angry order.*) TALK!

JAKE. (*Yelling back.*) What!?

MANNY. CAN. YOU. KISS?

JAKE (*Unsure.*) Yeah. All right? Yeah, I can kiss.

MANNY. (*Returning to prayer.*) Go away.

JAKE. What the hell's so important about kissing all of a sudden?

MANNY. Because you can't.

JAKE. Says you.

MANNY. I'm not giving you anything.

JAKE. I wouldn't take anything from you.

MANNY. You could take it. But you couldn't take it away. I need someone to take it away.

JAKE. (*Frustrated.*) So, you wanna do it or what?

MANNY. Do I inspire you to lust?

JAKE. You fishing?

MANNY. Baiting.

JAKE. (*Playing along sexily.*) What if I said yes?

MANNY. I'd have to say no.

JAKE. What do you want?

MANNY. What are you offering?

JAKE. A good time.

MANNY. That's all?

JAKE. What else do you want?

MANNY. Nothing.

JAKE. Great. You got it.

MANNY. You can't be sure.

JAKE. I'm sure, goddamnit!

MANNY. (*Looking right at him.*) I meant what I said.

JAKE. (*Challenging.*) Yeah? Well, me too.

MANNY. What'd you say?

JAKE. (*"You first."*) What'd you say?

MANNY. You can't kiss.

JAKE. Says you. (*JAKE is fed up and starts to leave again*)

MANNY. I want you.

(*JAKE stops.*)

MANNY. You're very beautiful.

(*JAKE turns back toward MANNY.*)

MANNY. But I can't kiss.

(*JAKE has had his fill. HE starts to leave. MANNY faces forward, eyes open, and loudly recites. JAKE freezes in his path.*)

MANNY. Two men meet in a bar and go home together. They have a drink, lower the lights, climb into bed, and they kiss.

Two grown men, mutually attracted, mutually in need, both of them hoping that this will be more than just another night.

Two grown men lie next to each other, facing each other, cheeks pressed flat to pillows, palms pressed to the mattress, knees firmly planted, thighs comfortably parted, rears raised high and waiting. Two grown men wait next to each other equally willing, equally wanting, equally wishing to please. And they wait. Each waiting for the other to take. Each wanting only to give. And they wait. And they crumble. And they part. No one giving. No one

getting. No one taking. *(Pause, deep breath.)* Safe. *(Pause.)* Safe. *(Pause.)* Unhappy but safe. *(HE smiles at JAKE)* I wonder if you could understand how desperately I want to be with you.

JAKE. With me?

MANNY. No other.

JAKE. How far do you live?

MANNY. I've slept with thousands of men.

JAKE. *(Getting excited)* We'll go to my place.

MANNY. I can't go anywhere.

JAKE. *(Trying to show the way.)* Come on.

MANNY. I can't see anyone.

JAKE. This way.

MANNY. I can't even kiss.

JAKE. *(Suddenly realizing.)* Have you got it?

(MANNY stares straight ahead.)

JAKE. Are you sick?

MANNY. What? No.

JAKE. No?

MANNY. No. You?

JAKE. Me? No. So? Let's go.

(JAKE starts to lead on again but is stopped by MANNY'S recitation.)

MANNY. *(Loud and clear.)* Two grown men stand in a bar. Watching. Each other. They stare at each other. Each wanting the other. Two grown men stare in a bar, feet apart, eyes together, they stare. They sip. They puff. They want. Two grown men stare in a bar and then travel on in

opposite directions. Never touching. Never holding. Never having. And why? Why? They can't kiss. They want to. They used to. They can't anymore. (*Change of tone.*) A moment of silence for what we used to do and how it felt.

(*JAKE puts his hand to his heart out of respect. MANNY begins to weep quietly. JAKE stares. MANNY'S crying builds. Unsure what to do, JAKE reaches into his pocket and takes out a handkerchief [pink] and offers it to MANNY. MANNY stops and looks at the hanky.*)

JAKE. It's all right. I washed it this morning. Hot water. And bleach.

(*Thus assured, MANNY takes the hanky and uses it to blow his nose and wipe his eyes. HE reaches into his pocket and removes a small plastic bag. HE places the soiled hanky into the bag, seals the bag with a knot, and then hands it to JAKE.*)

MANNY. Thank you.

JAKE. (*Putting it back in his pocket.*) You're welcome.

MANNY. I feel better.

JAKE. I wasn't thinking.

MANNY. I was.

JAKE. Sometimes I forget.

MANNY. I try to.

JAKE. But you don't have it.

MANNY. No.

JAKE. And I don't have it.

MANNY. So?

JAKE. (*Suggestively*) So . . .

MANNY. *(Begins to recite again.)* Two grown men stand in a bar looking at each other. Four grown men stand in a bar looking at each other. Eight grown men stand in a bar looking at each other. Twelve grown men stand in a bar looking at each other. Do they have it? Do they think? Do they forget? Can they kiss?

Nine grown men stand in a bar looking at each other. Five grown men stand in a bar looking at each other. One grown man stands in a bar. Safe. Safe. Unhappy, but, safe.

(MANNY turns and looks at JAKE. JAKE turns away and leaves the stage. MANNY looks straight ahead. JAKE returns to the stage dragging a life-size dummy of a man all dressed in lavender. HE pulls it by its arms to Center Stage and drops it at MANNY's feet. MANNY looks down at the dummy. JAKE waits a beat, and then exits again. JAKE returns this time dragging a blue dummy after him. HE dumps this one at MANNY's feet as well. MANNY regards this dummy with an expressionless stare. JAKE waits a beat and leaves again. JAKE returns with a third dummy, this one dressed in turquoise. As HE drops this one onto the others . . .)

MANNY. Don't drag your Ex's into this.

JAKE. They're yours.

(MANNY takes a closer look at the dummies as JAKE exits again. HE returns with a yellow dummy.)

MANNY. No more. Please.

*(JAKE adds this one to the pile and stands next to the sofa.
MANNY regards the dummies sadly.)*

MANNY. I never wanted this. And I've always known what I wanted. Done what I wanted. And never shunned the responsibility of my actions. But not this. Not this.

JAKE. May I sit down?

MANNY. *(Offering a seat.)* Please.

(JAKE sits down next to MANNY and THEY stare together at the pile of dummies.)

MANNY. At fourteen years old I had a goal. A path. A vision all my own. At fourteen years old I could see my destiny so clearly that I could almost reach out with my bare hands and pull myself along the vortex of time. Impressed?

(JAKE nods.)

MANNY. Want to know my goal?

JAKE. May I lie down?

MANNY. *(Offering his lap)* Please.

(JAKE lies down and puts his head in MANNY's lap.)

JAKE. Ready.

MANNY. My goal was to lie in the arms of every man. Every man.

JAKE. *(Repeating.)* Every man.

MANNY. To lie in the arms of every man.

JAKE. Pet me.

(MANNY looks at JAKE. and smiles. HE begins to pet him gently. JAKE is soon purring like a kitten.)

MANNY. Every man.

JAKE. *(Moaning.)* Every man.

MANNY. I never wanted anyone to wait. I never asked names. I offered a basic service; a barter, if you will. All up front. All explained. No small print. All understood. Your body for mine. Your moment for mine. Your knowledge, technique, history, scars . . . Your faults and shortcomings, your talents and abundances . . . No man too old. No face too deformed, weathered or nubile, ethnic or cliché . . . No form too bizarre; pumped up, stretched out, anorectic or bloated. Closet cases and radicals, perfect tens and amputees . . .

No advance too frivolous. No come-on waylaid. Want me? Take me. Be gentle. Be rough. Be generous. Be selfish. Go ahead; have a ball. Enjoy yourself. That's why I'm here. That's what I'm going to do.

JAKE. *(Petted into ecstasy.)* Me too.

MANNY. Satisfaction was my aim. Mine and theirs. Separation was my only rule. My rule. I'm here now. Take. Be. Here. One minute. One hour. One day. Week. As long as the moment lasted. As long or as short as it took to end. But an end, even a pause, was the end. No pleading. No excuses accepted. No arguments entertained. Understand and step aside. Say, "Thanks," and "Goodbye."

My goal: Every man. My rule. My law. No repeats. No attachments. *(Looking down at the dummies.)* And I loved them all. And I missed them when they were gone. Some more than others. And I was tempted to let them stay.

Tempted to be tempted to stay. It would have been so easy so many times. So many Mr. Rights. So many comfortable beds. And lives. So many with so much to offer. Wealth, art, travel, danger . . . So much love, need, comfort . . . And the goodbyes. And the tears. And the smiles. Sweet morning kisses and rumpled sheets. Warm beds and spring breezes. Morning chills by spent fireplaces. Crisp cotton sheets in air-conditioned suites. Damp sleeping bags on forest leaves. Car seats. Theater balconies. Park benches. And coffee. Oh, the coffee. Coffee and goodbyes . . . Off-to-work goodbyes. Off-to-shop goodbyes. Going home. Going on. Goodbyes. So many lives. So many ways to live. So many men. (*MANNY suddenly stops.*)

JAKE. Don't stop.

MANNY. That's all.

JAKE. What about them?

MANNY. There are more.

JAKE. They look happy. Satisfied.

MANNY. That's funny. Do they?

JAKE. What about us?

MANNY. We're doing all we can.

JAKE. We have our problems.

MANNY. As to be expected.

JAKE. I want more.

MANNY. (*Reciting again and stops petting.*) Two grown men stand in a bar. They look. They touch. They take. Two grown men forget. Want to forget. And they go together. One gives. One gets. One gets what the other does not intend to give. Doesn't even know he's giving. Doesn't even know he had it to give. Doesn't even have it himself. But can give. Two grown men take. One gives.

One gets. One weakens and dies. (*Looking at the dummies.*) I didn't know.

JAKE. I believe you.

MANNY. I never wanted this.

JAKE. You have it.

MANNY. No, I give it. I give and give and give . . .

JAKE. What if I'm willing to take the risk?

MANNY. There's no risk. There's no question.

JAKE. You don't know.

MANNY. Ask them.

JAKE. But you didn't know then. Now you do.

MANNY. (*Returning to prayer position.*) Now I do. So, now I don't.

JAKE. There *are* ways around it. Things you can still do.

MANNY. Omissions.

JAKE. Precautions to take.

MANNY. Deletions.

JAKE. Alternate activities.

MANNY. Bastardizations.

JAKE. Positive, health-conscious acts of love and fulfillment.

MANNY. (*Looking him in the eyes*) Can you kiss?

(*This silences JAKE, who sits upright next to MANNY*)

MANNY. A moment of silence for what can't be done. Another for what can't be undone. A moment of silence for letting go of dreams. And one for stifled lives. For loss. For want. And a toast to those who can change. Who have changed. Who want to change and not forget.

JAKE. Come home with me.

(MANNY looks at him and laughs ironically.)

JAKE. I'm not scared. I know what I'm doing.

MANNY. You don't know anything. One moment of passion, one lapse of concentration, a second out of consciousness, an instant of ecstasy and it's done.

JAKE. No one knows for sure.

MANNY. Doesn't matter. I'm done.

JAKE. We'll be careful.

MANNY. We can't kiss.

JAKE. I don't care.

MANNY. *(Laughing again.)* I do!

JAKE. You shouldn't be alone.

MANNY. But I am.

JAKE. People shouldn't be alone.

MANNY. I'm not people anymore. I'm not even a disease. I'm a carrier of a disease. Another body in a hospital waiting room. Not a patient. Not a survivor. A fact. A statistic. No will. No dream. No choice.

(JAKE stands and watches MANNY as HE begins to slip back into his prayer. MANNY'S eyes slowly close and his hands begin to rise.)

JAKE. I'm sorry.

MANNY. *(Stops his progression and looks at JAKE.)*
Thank you.

JAKE. Well, I guess I'd better move on.

MANNY. *(Sweetly)* Goodbye.

JAKE. What are you going to do?

MANNY. I can't change. I can't. So, I'll sit. And remember. And pray for everything else to change. And when it does (and it will), I'll remember how to kiss. (*HE smiles.*) And I will give only what I choose to give. What I mean to give. What I want to give. And I'll take only what I want from that which is offered. I will give and I will take without fear of small print or hidden clauses. (*Quiet ecstasy*) And I will kiss . . . ! I will kiss having learned nothing.

(*MANNY'S smile freezes on his face as HE returns to silence. JAKE stares as the LIGHT fades away.*)

THE END

SAFE SEX

SAFE SEX

As the houselights dim we hear the crashing of waves on a beach. As the darkness grows so do the SOUNDS. The waves are joined by the breathing and guttural whispers of TWO PEOPLE making love. The sounds slowly become words.

GHEE. Oh.
MEAD. Hah.
GHEE. Ho.
MEAD. Ah.
GHEE. No.
MEAD. Wha?
GHEE. No.
MEAD. Ya.
GHEE. Oh!
MEAD. Yeah.
GHEE. No!
MEAD. Why?
GHEE. Stop.
MEAD. No!
GHEE. No!
MEAD. Come on.
GHEE. You can't do that.
MEAD. It's all right.
GHEE. It's not.
MEAD. Don't stop.
GHEE. You can't do that.
MEAD. It's all right.
GHEE. It's not on the list.

MEAD. I need you.
GHEE. Check the list.
MEAD. Please.
GHEE. Where's the list?
MEAD. Don't.
GHEE. I'm checking the list.
MEAD. It's all right.
GHEE. Where's the light?
MEAD. Come on.
GHEE. I can't find the light.
MEAD. Come back here.
GHEE. (Yelling.) It's not safe. Stop!

(The LIGHTS pop on brightly. The waves and all other SOUND ends abruptly as we stare at a bright white lit stage that is bare except for a giant fire-engine red seesaw [teeter-totter]. As simply designed as possible, the balancing board has no handles; the base is triangular. GHEE and MEAD lie flat on the plank, facing up, their bare feet touching in the center, their heads at opposite ends. THEY are clothed in the sheerest of fabrics, the palest of pastels. THEY are perfectly balanced; the plank is perfectly horizontal. THEY BOTH pant, out of breath, from the struggle.)

GHEE. (Slow and definite.) Don't touch me.

(MEAD does not move or react.)

GHEE. Did you hear what I said?

(No reaction.)

GHEE. I'll get the list.

MEAD. Don't bother.

GHEE. I'm sure it wasn't safe.

MEAD. Sure.

GHEE. I'll show you right on the list. *(Pause.)* You want to see it on the list?

MEAD. Forget it.

GHEE. 'Cause you know I'm right and you know that if I show it to you right on the list in black and white then you'll have to admit that I'm right. Right?

MEAD. Right.

GHEE. You don't believe me. I'll get the list.

MEAD. *(Covering his face with his hands.)* Forget it. Just forget it. It doesn't matter. It's over.

(Silence between them.)

GHEE. There aren't many things that I know a lot about, but on "Safe Sex" I happen to be an expert.

(Another silence.)

GHEE. Did you say something?

MEAD. No.

GHEE. I hate when you get like this. Now you're mad at me when all I was trying to do was protect us both.

(No response)

GHEE. Why can't you stop when I ask you to? Huh?

(No response.)

GHEE. Why does it always have to come to hurt feelings? *(GHEE sits up straight. HE sees that MEAD is withdrawn. HE drops his head.)* I'm scared, all right? What's so hard to understand? I'm scared!

(No response.)

GHEE. Being scared is smart. You have to be scared. You're supposed to be scared. You're not normal if you're not scared. Everyone's scared.

(No response.)

GHEE. And I suppose you're not scared?

MEAD. I'm concerned.

GHEE. You're scared.

MEAD. I'm tired.

GHEE. You're angry.

MEAD. Don't tell me what I am.

GHEE. Don't yell at me.

MEAD. Don't tell me what to do.

GHEE. Don't touch me!

(THEY turn their backs to each other, their legs hanging off the ends of the board. Balanced)

GHEE The honeymoon is over. (*Pause.*) Would you say that was a safe assessment?

(*No response*)

GHEE. Lovers for five and a half years, separated for nearly two years, back together for less than a week and already the honeymoon is over.

MEAD. (*Under his breath.*) Jerk.

GHEE. Fine. It's all my fault. Dump the blame on me. Like I don't feel guilty enough as it is.

MEAD. I said you were a jerk. I wasn't blaming you for being a jerk. I didn't say that being a jerk was your fault. Nor was I attempting to make you feel guilty for being a jerk. I made a simple observation. You're a jerk. Now just drop it.

GHEE. I'm a jerk because in the face of this devastating epidemic I insist we take a few precautions?

MEAD. No. You're just a jerk.

GHEE. Well, that's obvious. Who else but a jerk would want you back? Who else but a jerk would *take* you back? Who else but a jerk would fall in love with you in the first place?

MEAD. Want to see a list?

(*GHEE spins around and bounces on his end of the seesaw, throwing MEAD up into the air.*)

MEAD. Damn!

(*GHEE, enjoying the advantage of having MEAD at his mercy, bounces the board for emphasis as HE speaks.*)

GHEE. Well, come on. I'm waiting. Let's hear the list.
How many?

MEAD. You know.

GHEE. No, you see, I only know about your little Larry. But you said that there's a whole list. And much as you cared for him, I'd hardly call little Larry a list.

MEAD. You want to stop?

GHEE. I want to know how many. Larry and who else?

MEAD. Someone else.

GHEE. Who?

MEAD. You wouldn't know them.

GHEE. Them? How many of "them," Casanova?

MEAD. A few. All right?

GHEE. Fine with me, but I wonder how little Larry felt about your "thems."

MEAD. Once I met Larry there was no one.

GHEE. No one?

MEAD. No one! (*MEAD bounces hard on the board, tossing GHEE off the ground, restoring the balance*) He left me. I didn't leave him.

GHEE. And you came crawling back to me.

MEAD. You begged me to come back.

GHEE. I never begged!

MEAD. I never crawled!

(*THEY face off, staring each other down MEAD breaks it*)

MEAD. I hate when you do this! You're not happy unless you've got me bashing your head into a wall.

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