

AERWAGOL



*for J. Stewart,
and for my friends in the late, great Primus Theatre*

Characters

JOHN MACCOLL, a pig farmer

KIMPY MACCOLL, with a serious fever

DILLARD WELLS, a young student

ISAAC HARPER, former mines inspector

AUBADE HÉBERT, young Québécoise woman

MAN

Production History

Aerwacol was first performed by Theatre SKAM as part of Summer Kamp 2000, indoors at the Belfry Theatre, Victoria, in a slightly different version than the one in this book, on 21 July, under the direction of Amiel Gladstone. The show then toured to Toronto in August, where it played in an old railroad dockyard (which isn't there any more) in the vicinity of Cherry and Mill Streets. From there the show toured to Vancouver in September, where it was presented underneath the Burrard Street Bridge, a stone's throw away from a small community of people who were living under the bridge in a set-up not dissimilar to the one presented in the play.

Toronto's Invisible City was a co-producer, and funding was provided by the Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council and the Toronto Arts Council. Rehearsals were kicked off with a day's workshop at the Playwrights Theatre Centre in Vancouver, with dramaturgy by Chappelle Jaffe. They continued for a week at the Kemp farm in Vernon, BC, and were completed at the Belfry Theatre.

The part of John was played by Matthew Payne. Kimpy was played by Camille Stubel. Ben Lawrence played Dillard, and Sean Dixon played Harper. Aubade was played by Michelle Monteith. The stage manager was Salimah Kassam. The indoor set design was by Amiel Gladstone and Ian Rye, and the outdoor set designs were by Amiel Gladstone and Matthew Payne. Indoor lighting was by Andrew Tugwell; there was no outdoor

lighting. The costumes were by Erin Macklem. The *Aerwacol* theme was written and composed by Lucas Myers. The Toronto producer and publicist was Edward Nixon.

Setting

The story of the play moves steadily across the Canadian Prairies, for the most part in an easterly direction, and comes to a stop at a mine in the middle of Manitoba.

As it is only a play, its action unfolds primarily in the venue in which it is being presented. Technical problems such as the jigger and the hole in the ground should be handled as simply as possible and used to create performance opportunities over and above notions of verisimilitude. In Theatre SKAM's indoor production, Kimpy's bed became the jigger, and the MacColls' kitchen tabletop was folded down in front to be transformed into a mine. When the actors entered the mine they faked a descent by bending their knees and keeping a straight face, after which they were able to slip behind a curtain. The actor playing Harper, in making his descent, was permitted to choose between a spiral staircase, a double staircase with a landing halfway down, an elevator and a slide; everyone else was asked to keep it simple.

In the outdoor production we had the luxury of being able to do some digging, and, even better, all sexual activity was carried out in actual living shrubbery.

Music

I believe it is a great asset to the theatre when show music is performed live by the actors. Any aptitude with a musical instrument, no matter how limited, must be exploited for all it's worth. In the SKAM production John played a guitar, Harper a banjo and Dillard a trumpet. Kimpy danced and Aubade sang. There is no music for John's song because it was more recited than sung, but he played a simple three-chord structure in the key of D to support it. The banjo and the trumpet were added to that, and Kimpy improvised a chorus around the name 'Callyhoo' to break up the song a bit.

Costumes

The costumes for *Aerwacol* (and all these plays) are emblematic rather than realistic, in the sense that nobody should be worried about the fact that a

great deal of time passes in the play and nobody ever seems to change their clothes. Sweaters should be factored into the design if the show is being performed outdoors, in case there's a cold snap. In SKAM's production, Kimpy was in a slip and a bathrobe for the whole trip, John wore work clothes, Harper wore coveralls, black Ray-Ban sunglasses and a head-lamp pinned to a soft hat, Aubade wore bright clean colours, and Dillard was studenty and casual.

A Note on the Title

This play began with a single word, found many years ago in an Anglo-Saxon dictionary: 'aerwacol' means 'early awake.' It was, I thought, beautiful, and it made me wonder who might have been up so early all those centuries ago, and why, and what was on her mind, that she would have spoken such a word for the first time.

If it were practical to perform a play outdoors at sunrise instead of sunset, I would choose for *Aerwacol* to be performed in such a way, since it begins in darkness and moves steadily towards the light.

Acknowledgements

The text of *Aerwacol* was first published, in a slightly different version, by greenboathouse books, www.greenhousebooks.com by editors Jason Dewinetz and Noah Buchan.



Scouting the Toronto site, spring 2000.

Aerwacol Song

Music: Lucas Myers

Lyrics: Lucas Myers and SKAM

Alto

Top of Show These words, this call, will speed the break of day.
End of Show Sun - down comes round, brings on the fall of night.

Bartone

A

Your eyes, your sight, your love re - turn to me, I pray.
All life goes on, de - spite the fad - ing of the light.

Bar.

A

Sun up, new day, brings on the dawn of light.
These words, this call, will slow the fall of night.

Bar.

A

Earl - ly a - wake, es - scape the cov - er of the night.
Your eyes, your sight, sur - vives the fad - ing of the light.

Bar.

Act 1

Scene 1

(There's a woman in bed with a fever, and a man sitting by her, watching over her. They're in a cabin. In the woods. At the edge of a valley. The man is trying to wash the woman. We hear the sound of the wind.)

JOHN: Hello? Hello? Must be the wind. Are you comfort or are you cold?

You know, my little girl, my Alice, she was scared of that sound of yours. In the eaves and such. Well, you know what I think? I think you should be more considerate; it's not right, scaring little children in their beds at night; particularly too when they're sick, and they need their – [There's just no God in you.]

My wife Kimpy's sick, too, she's been sick for a long time. It's kinda like work because sometimes your gut tells you to – Look, please, could you just – pipe down for a second and let me – I'm trying to be a thoughtful man here and you're not listening.

Fine, you wanna talk? Go ahead, talk.

(mildly sarcastic) That's just terrible ...

Oh, I know. You said that already. You repeat yourself a lot, don't you, did you know that? Bet you didn't, did you? Not too bright, are ya? No. You see? Nothing scary about the wind. You see?

(Pause. The wind dies down.)

JOHN: Sometimes your gut tells you to drop your heart and run like the devil.

(The woman comes to, somewhat.)

KIMPY: Alice?

JOHN: We lost her. The same thing you've got, but she never –

KIMPY: You mean she's –?

JOHN: Yeah.

Do you want to be by the fire?

KIMPY: Everything is backwards and ... and upside down.

JOHN: It's just the fever.

KIMPY: No. I mean that children are not supposed to –

JOHN: I know, Kimpy.

KIMPY: Before their parents.

(Kimpy feels her fever grow. She rises.)

JOHN: Kimpy ...

KIMPY: Yes?

JOHN: Do you want anything?

KIMPY: I can't hold it.

JOHN: What? What can't you hold?

(Kimpy runs.)

JOHN: Bless me, Jesus!

(He runs after her. They run in place, Kimpy just ahead, John just behind. All the while she's talking in short bursts.)

KIMPY: Tree go by. Another tree. Ditch, dark, tree. A path. I'm on a path, got dirt in my mouth. Dirty the nightie, doesn't matter – smelled like dying, the old thing, anyway. I won't die in a nightie, that's what! Passing a pond. Are there wolves, I wonder. Beating this or going under. Don't be frightened, another tree, another ditch, but I didn't see God. The rain gets down this far, doesn't it, into my skin and give me the shivers, so why not God?

Scene 2

(Back at the home of John and Kimpy. She grabs a broom and starts sweeping. After a few moments John enters.)

JOHN: *(after a brief pause)* Kimpy, I guess you're better.

KIMPY: I'm not.

JOHN: Yeah, well, it seems to me you're on your feet and running around.

KIMPY: Yeah, well.

JOHN: Who were you yelling at out there anyway?

KIMPY: God.

JOHN: Oh. Were you expecting Him to ans—

KIMPY: No.

JOHN: Okay.

KIMPY: Yes.

JOHN: That's the sin of pride, you know, to think you earned the ri—

KIMPY: I did.

JOHN: Even Christ on the Cross, Kimpy, felt he was —

KIMPY: Christ was on the Cross for what — he suffered for less than a day.
I've been in that bed —

JOHN: That's blasphemy, Kim—

KIMPY: Don't tell me what's blasphemy, John. I wanted it, I earned it.
Whose side are you on?

JOHN: What, between you and God? Land sakes, Kimpy, this —

KIMPY: Land sakes? Sir, if you're gonna curse, at least do it properly. If
you're gonna curse, at least you could say *shit* and *piss* and *fuck* and —

JOHN: This is Canada, Kimpy.

KIMPY: So what?

JOHN: So, you don't see God in Canada.

KIMPY: Well, why in the world not?

JOHN: You just don't, Kimpy. You just don't.

KIMPY: What, do you see God in the States, do you?

JOHN: No.

KIMPY: Down there in sunny California?

JOHN: No. I don't know what I mean, Kimpy. Just – try to –

KIMPY: (*a curse*) Honestly.

JOHN: (*puts his hand on her forehead*) You're still burning, aren't you, somewhat?

KIMPY: Fever's not gone. It's burrowed in further, I think.

JOHN: Fevers don't burrow, Kimpy.

KIMPY: Better not be gone; I'm not finished with it yet.

JOHN: What's that supposed to mean?

KIMPY: I'm going out again.

JOHN: Wh– It's the middle of the night.

KIMPY: Maybe I can snap it off completely.

JOHN: Fevers don't snap off, Kimpy, you stay here now.

KIMPY: I'm not gonna rot away in bed.

JOHN: At least then I could keep an eye out on you.

KIMPY: Maybe you're wanting me back there.

JOHN: No.

KIMPY: Well, good.

JOHN: You'll bang into a tree!

(She goes.)

JOHN: She'll bang into a tree, I just know it.

(Later she's returned.)

KIMPY: I found something.

(John doesn't say anything.)

KIMPY: I found a jigger.

JOHN: You know, I miss how we'd sit at the table and you'd make scalloped potatoes.

KIMPY: I can get further.

JOHN: Get further where?

KIMPY: Are you going to come with me?

JOHN: There aren't any tracks for a jigger.

KIMPY: There's a stretch of track, John. It's underneath the jigger and it goes as far as I can see till it bends into the bush.

JOHN: Uh ... What about the pigs?

KIMPY: Leave them. Set them free. It costs more to raise them than what you sell them for anyway.

JOHN: Now that's true. But they're not wild pigs.

KIMPY: Knock down the corn. They'll find it.

JOHN: Till winter maybe.

KIMPY: Well, then, leave the back door open. And the cellar. They can find my preserves. There's over a thousand jars down there. And there's wood for the fire.

JOHN: They can't open jars.

KIMPY: John. I'm going to go.

(Pause.)

JOHN: Can we bring the chutney?

KIMPY: What's that on your shoulder?

JOHN: What?

KIMPY: It's gone now. There was an angel on your shoulder, John.

JOHN: All right. *(sighs)* But do we have to go?

KIMPY: Yes.

JOHN: All right. But there's no way there's as many as a thousand jars down there.

Scene 3

(Kimpy and John enter in a jigger. John is pumping, Kimpy is sitting.)

KIMPY: Have you ever slept with another woman, John, since you been married to me?

JOHN: I beg your pardon?

KIMPY: You want me to ask you again?

JOHN: No, for the love of God, what kind of question is that?

KIMPY: Could you please answer it?

JOHN: Of course I haven't slept with another wo—

KIMPY: Have you laid with one then?

JOHN: Kimpy!

KIMPY: Or if you haven't done that, have you desired it, with all your self, with all your being?

JOHN: I don't understand you. Must be the fever.

KIMPY: Have you desired it? To lay with a stranger, to try it, once in your life?

JOHN: You say I've been a good and loving husband –

KIMPY: You have –

JOHN: – yet you would have the devil speak from my mouth!

KIMPY: Oh, John.

JOHN: 'Oh, John'? How can you ask a question like that? What are you thinking, that you should ask a question like that? That you could think such a thing of me?

KIMPY: And would you think low of me then, John, if I had?

JOHN: Have you?

KIMPY: What would you think if I had?

JOHN: I would think low of you.

KIMPY: Because it was behind your back?

JOHN: Have you?

KIMPY: Would it be the thought that it was behind your back?

JOHN: Have you laid with another man?

KIMPY: Uhn-uhn (i.e., 'no').

JOHN: You haven't.

KIMPY: No.

JOHN: You have not slept or lain with another man.

KIMPY: No.

JOHN: Oh my God, Kimpy. Oh my God, the whole – sky – turned upside down for a – I don't know what it is, I don't know what's so – why that's so – I don't know. Let me see your forehead here, you're burning up.

KIMPY: But I'd like to.

JOHN: What?

KIMPY: I'd like to, John.

Scene 4

(The jigger and a bush. Kimpy is lying behind the bush making love with a young man. John is waiting, cleaning up scraps of newspaper he finds.)

JOHN: God's gone from this country, I think. *(finds a scrap)* The wind is easterly. *(reads it)* 'Saskatchewan, Canada: Former Riel Lieutenant Gabriel Dumont joins Buffalo Bill's Wild West Circus Show.'

Don't know if I'd exactly call that current events. Then again, it wasn't delivered by a newsboy, was it? It was delivered by the wind.

(finds another scrap, reads it) 'Cape Town, South Africa: Volunteer firemen save jackass penguins from oil slick.'

Huh.

Don't let me down, wind. Keep 'em coming. We're heading west in the morning, so if you can arrange it I would appreciate it if you could – well, you're the only one I can count on for sage, elevated advice. You see, things are swiftly getting very complicated between myself and my – wife, and I, uh, haven't exactly been granted the mental equipment to figure it out. I'm a pig farmer for christ – But I'm game!

(pokes himself firmly in the head) I'm game!

Only problem is, I'm talking to the wind.

(A figure rises from behind the bush. It's the stranger – a young man, Dillard, conservatively dressed, who doesn't look to be any more than eighteen years old. He's slightly unkempt and is trying to straighten himself up. He starts to walk towards John, realizing too late that he's there and has cut off all avenues for a graceful escape.)

JOHN: Siddown.

(Dillard sits.)

JOHN: How old are you?

DILLARD: Nineteen.

JOHN: Where were you headed before she – deterred you from your travels?

DILLARD: Prince Edward Island.

JOHN: I see. That's a long way to go. What's there for you?

DILLARD: My parents.

JOHN: Good, your parents, your parents, good. Always good for a boy to see his parents from time to time. Where are you coming from then?

DILLARD: Victoria.

JOHN: That's a long way to've come, then, before we swayed you from the true path, so to speak.

DILLARD: Oh no, that's –

JOHN: The path of righteousness.

DILLARD: They're not expecting me.

JOHN: Who, your parents?

DILLARD: Yeah.

JOHN: I see. Where then are you meant to be?

DILLARD: School.

JOHN: Coulda guessed. What kind of school.

DILLARD: Pearson. It's a ... It's a united world college.

JOHN: Really.

DILLARD: It's a ... sp ... ecial school for young people that provides an international persp ... ective on education. For future ... diplomats and ... leaders and such.

JOHN: I see. Prefer the local touch, do you?

DILLARD: Is she your – ?

JOHN: Yes.

DILLARD: Uh, holy jeez, sir, I –

JOHN: Don't worry about it. She's just working on me, but I won't be worked. Hold on. *(goes after a scrap)* Damn, chocolate wrapper. Now, what were you doing heading home early?

DILLARD: I failed an exam. The philosophy exam.

JOHN: I see. Sounds tough.

DILLARD: Yeah.

JOHN: Lotsa questions?

DILLARD: Just one.

JOHN: Just one?

DILLARD: Yeah.

JOHN: Well, that's not really fair, is it? When you just got one question on a test and it's the one you can't answer.

DILLARD: Yeah. Except I thought I could answer it. I thought I – I thought I answered it.

JOHN: What was the question?

DILLARD: What is courage.

(Kimpy rises. Comes forward.)

KIMPY: I didn't like it.

JOHN: Well, that's a relief.

KIMPY: I thought it's what I was after, but it wasn't, not by a long shot.

JOHN: I coulda told you that.

KIMPY: You'd tell me I was after getting back home.

JOHN: I think you are and you just don't know it.

KIMPY: Well, that may be true, John, maybe once I've seen the rest of the world and compared, I'll know for sure whether or not I want to be back home.

JOHN: You could save yourself some sweat.

KIMPY: Yes, I could thump myself real hard on the head with a rock. That'll save me some sweat, John.

JOHN: You gonna be sleeping with any more boys?

KIMPY: No.

JOHN: Good.

KIMPY: I thought I'd try to find a man.

(John rises up and looks at her.)

KIMPY: Just kidding!

JOHN: Oh yeah.

KIMPY: It was a cul-de-sac.

JOHN: *(climbing back on to the jigger)* What does that mean: cul-de-sac?

KIMPY: It's French. It means –

JOHN: French?

KIMPY: *(climbing onto the jigger)* Yeah.

JOHN: What, are you gonna be speaking in tongues now, Kimpy?

KIMPY: It's a common expression. It means a dead end in the road.

JOHN: Oh. You hear that, kid?

DILLARD: What?

JOHN: You're a cul-de-sac.

DILLARD: Oh.

JOHN: A dead end in the road.

DILLARD: Yeah.

JOHN: Oh, you know?

(to Kimpy) You got him speaking in tongues now, too.

(as they set off) I have a feeling there'll be more than one of these cul-de-sacs on this particular journey.

(They exit with the jigger. Dillard stands and watches them for a long time. He looks distressed and uncomfortable in his clothes.)

DILLARD: Oh, jeez. I left my luggage on the bus.

My wallet, I left my wallet on the bus.

(He starts to cry. Pause.) I left my clothes and money on the bus! Where am I? This isn't even a city, it isn't even a town, it's just the middle of the – just the middle of nowhere. Why does a bus stop in the middle of nowhere?

They're heading east.

Hey are you – ? You're heading east! Can I – ? Oh, man. *(running off after them)* Can I hitch a ride with youse?

(He runs off after the jigger.)

Scene 5

(Dillard runs through, pausing to catch his breath.)

DILLARD: When I get home, I'll apply to Yale and do everything by correspondence; Mother will be right there, Dad, apply myself, it's a good idea ... *(sits down, depressed)*

Failed. And now I've sullied myself, salty sweat dirt, and my parents will be able to smell it on me. Filthy dirty dirty boy. Filthy dirty boy.

(He gets up. There is a hole in the ground. He doesn't see it.)

DILLARD: Never will I ever allow anything like that to happen again.

(He starts off again and, whump, falls into the hole.)

HARPER: Ouch!

(A man appears, covered with dust, carrying a shovel, from out of the hole. He's wearing dark glasses. He speaks as Dillard appears again, rubbing his head.)

HARPER: Oh, now, there's a safety precaution missed: I shoulda put boards over the hole, or else a sign that says 'Look out: Hole!' or something to that effect. As well, I've neglected to bring medication to deal with the bump on my head, plus whatever injuries have been sustained by the boy.

(Dillard jumps out of the hole and starts to run offstage SR.)

HARPER: Hey. Hey! Come back here!

(Dillard returns, hoping to make this quick.)

DILLARD: Uh, sorry about that, I didn't realize there was a hole there.

HARPER: Are you hurt?

DILLARD: No, oh no, I'm fine, and I'm in a bit of a –

HARPER: Well, I am.

DILLARD: Oh.

HARPER: I've got a bump on my head. You hit the shovel and the shovel hit me in the head.

DILLARD: Sorry, I – are you all right?

HARPER: No ... No ...

DILLARD: Oh.

HARPER: It's not because of my head, lad, that'll be fine. Someone shoulda hit me in the head a long time ago, put me right out and set off an imbalance so that I'd be medically unable to go below, assuming there's some kind of – difference in pressure; you know, I don't even know if there is a difference in pressure!

DILLARD: Between what?

HARPER: Between the surface of the earth and the air in the mines below. Is it possible they could get the bends?

DILLARD: Who?

HARPER: The miners, dammit!



Harper, sans sunglasses.

DILLARD: Are you sure you're not injured?

HARPER: I don't know anything about it.

DILLARD: I don't know anything about it either.

HARPER: Well, you're not a mines inspector, are you?

DILLARD: No, I—

HARPER: No. I didn't think so. So it don't mean nothing when you don't know something.

DILLARD: Are you a mines inspector?

HARPER: I was ... I was ... But you know what I am now?

DILLARD: What?

HARPER: A miner. And this is my mine.

DILLARD: This is your mine? What are you digging for?

HARPER: Digging for?

DILLARD: Yeah, like what minerals, or—

HARPER: No. None of that bullshit.

DILLARD: Oh.

HARPER: Just a mine. That's all.

DILLARD: Oh, uh—

HARPER: Only one problem, though.

DILLARD: What's that.

HARPER: I've been at it for three weeks and I'm nearly out of money.

DILLARD: Really.

HARPER: Nobody pays you to learn how to do your job when you've already been at it for ten or twelve years – they don't!

DILLARD: You mean the mine inspec–

HARPER: Particularly, too, when the learning of how to do your job prevents you from doing your job back home!

DILLARD: I see.

HARPER: Course I've got pickles still to last me more than two months at the least. But I'm getting awfully tired of pickles.

DILLARD: I'm practically out of money, too.

HARPER: Are ya?

DILLARD: The only way home, I thought, was that jigger.

HARPER: What jigger?

DILLARD: Forget it. It's a complicated story, of which I am somewhat ashamed.

HARPER: Ah! You're ashamed! Ah! Well, boy! You've come to the right place.

DILLARD: I have?

HARPER: Indeed. Ashamed is he, he says? Well, here you – *(he starts climbing out of the hole)* Here you go – I'm going to give you a shovel, and here you – *(he's still trying to get out of the hole)* here, you can dig, until you've dug away your shame. Course you'll need a helmet and, uh, well, you can take mine.

(He's out of the hole and offering a shovel.)

DILLARD: Uh, that's a generous offer, sir, but I –

HARPER: Ah, he'd rather live with his shame.

DILLARD: No, but I'm just not sure that it'll do me any good poking around some – hole in the ground.

HARPER: Oh. Suit yourself, lad.

(It becomes apparent that he's practically blind.)

DILLARD: You're blind.

HARPER: No. Not blind. My eyes are just having a bad day, that's all.

DILLARD: Oh, uh, thanks for the offer, but I, uh, better be on my way.

HARPER: I see... Ah well. Well, I done my best, in this instance.

(After a moment, Harper heads back into the hole with his shovel.)

DILLARD: Yes, thank you.

HARPER: Three hours till sunset, not yet whacked, I got a mine to dig, thirty-four dead miners cheering me on, that I might not add one single more to their ranks. They surround me, down here, and they play cards, and they talk to me, and they wait for the day I become the man to protect their sons and daughters from what got they themselves.
(Dillard turns) You want to see?

(Beat. Dillard comes to look.)

Scene 6

(John and Kimpy are heading east on the jigger.)

JOHN: I wonder what that question was.

(They continue to pump. After a few moments of this, John hits the brake.)

JOHN: I'm getting concerned about that boy.
I wonder if that boy had any money.

KIMPY: What are you wondering that for?

JOHN: 'Cause you took him off his bus.

KIMPY: I wouldn't worry about it.

JOHN: I am. And you should be, too.

KIMPY: I'm not.

JOHN: I want to go back and get that boy. He was heading east.

KIMPY: Oh, was he now?

JOHN: Yes, he was. To Prince Edward Island. Which, if I may add, is a much saner destination than yours.

KIMPY: Where's mine then?

JOHN: What?

KIMPY: Where is my destination?

JOHN: How should I know?

KIMPY: Then how can you say that his is better?

JOHN: You don't know yourself.

KIMPY: Oh, you know that, do you?

JOHN: It's just what I think.

KIMPY: You do just fine on your own, don't you?

JOHN: So do you.

KIMPY: You don't know anything about me.

JOHN: Except what I think.

KIMPY: So you really think you know.

JOHN: Sure, why not?

KIMPY: You do just fine on your own.

JOHN: Yes, I do.