



MANAGING FRINGE

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CHARACTERS

MANDY
ROBERT
3 BOARD MEMBERS
AND COMPANY MEMBERS

Woman over 40

Man under 40

As the Board Members, they appear on a screen; as
Company Members they wear commedia masks

SETTING

The stage of a theater

Use Zoom or other software to project the Board Chorus.

MANDY

Damn, I've missed the theater. I'm home. The stage, the lights, the musty smell of costumes and makeup. It's positively magical. I belong here. [TO AUDIENCE] You folks are a constant reminder of reality, but up here, the fourth wall protects me and I feel safe. Up here I can explore my inner most feelings. Not that I act anymore. Graduated to director years ago. I love conceptualizing play and then inspiring actors to personalize the nuances of a playwright's vision. What the actors project creeps under your skin and shapes your experience. That's our goal. And when it works? There's nothing like it. Such power, such glory.

[BOARD MEMBERS APPEAR ON SCREEN AND ROBERT ENTERS]

BOARD CHORUS

Welcome to Z Theater.

BOARD MEMBER 1

Will you dance for us like Robert does?

MANDY

If that's what you want, I guess I can oblige.[MANDY DANCES]

BOARD MEMBER 1

You know I meant that figuratively, right? [MANDY AND ROBERT STOP DANCING. THEY LAUGH AT MANDY]

ROBERT

Gotcha, Mandy.

MANDY

Hilarious.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Robert is the Artistic Director. He's brilliant.

BOARD MEMBER 2

Since you're our new Managing Director, we have to ask –

BOARD CHORUS

Can you count?

MANDY

Yes.

BOARD CHORUS

With numbers?

MANDY

Yes.

BOARD CHORUS

Numbers that relate to money?

MANDY

Yes.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Good, because we really need an accountant.

ROBERT

Yes, we do we do. I may be the creative genius behind Z Theater, but I'm a blonde when it comes to numbers.

MANDY

I can do fundamental bookkeeping when a system is in place, but I'm no accountant.

ROBERT

Which reminds me, the taxes are due next month. Thank you in advance for handling them.

MANDY

You want me to do the taxes?

BOARD MEMBER 1

Fill in the blanks like last year. They don't change much.

BOARD MEMBER 2

They were done incorrectly last year, remember?

BOARD MEMBER 3

I'm sure she'll figure it out.

ROBERT

I've done the very best I can and we're all glad you're here to help.

BOARD MEMBER 1

Now you can focus your pretty little head on the artistic and leave the business to – what was your name?

MANDY

Mandy.

BOARD MEMBER 2

We love our artistic director.

BOARD MEMBER 3

He's brilliant.

ROBERT

Thanks.

BOARD MEMBERS

Who do you know?

MANDY

Excuse me?

BOARD MEMBER 3

Let's rephrase so you'll fully understand.

BOARD MEMBERS

Who knows you?

MANDY

I still don't understand.

BOARD MEMBER 2

[BOARD MEMBERS ROLE THEIR EYES] Your connections. You may want to call upon your connections to help raise money for the theater.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Especially if your connections are sleek and sexy.

BOARD MEMBER 1

You dog, you.

MANDY

I do know people, but isn't the board supposed to--

BOARD MEMBER 1

Next month. Gotta go – hungry kids. [SCREEN GOES DARK]

BOARD MEMBER 2

Gotta go – mountain of real work. [SCREEN GOES DARK]

BOARD MEMBER 3

It's been a rough week. My program's on and I need to chill. [SCREEN GOES DARK]

MANDY

Okay.

ROBERT

Aren't they the best? They've trusted me to keep us afloat and that's exactly what I've done. I may not be a numbers guy, but I do know how to manage a theater. You're being here is such a relief.

MANDY

Why not just recruit an accountant and put them on the board?

ROBERT

If you know one, ask.

MANDY

Maybe the board—

ROBERT

Can't. Long story.

MANDY

Can you give me a synopsis?

ROBERT

Let's just say that other theaters haven't appreciated the members of our board like we do because our board maintains stricter personal boundaries.

MANDY

In other words, they won't call upon their professional contacts.

ROBERT

Let me introduce you to the company.

[COMPANY MEMBER 1 SITS. THE OTHER
COMPANY MEMBERS ENTER JUGGLING.
ROBERT JOINS THE JUGGLING]

MANDY

I'm impressed. I take it you don't juggle.

COMPANY MEMBER 1

Ya think? And no, I do one thing at a time.

ROBERT

She's/He's new. Got kicked out of the theater down the street, but we happily took her/him in.

COMPANY MEMBER 1

I'm a good person, but they didn't like me.

ROBERT

You juggle, don't you?

MANDY

Not literally, no.

ROBERT

Here. Clang them together in time with the juggling [HANDS MANDY TWO CLAVES]

MANDY

And we are doing this, why?

COMPANY MEMBERS AND ROBERT

Welcome to Z Theater.
We're clever and innovative
Dynamic and dramatic
We make art out of anything
From the profound to the traumatic
We are cutting edge performers
Our content can be risky
We're not afraid to work hard
And later down some whisky
Glug glug glug

ROBERT

Welcome, Mandy, to Z Theater. [COMPANY MEMBERS CHEERS AND SLAP EACH OTHER ON THE BACK]

MANDY

Thank you.

ROBERT

Unlike other theaters, our board trusts us so we can do whatever types of performances we want.

COMPANY MEMBER 1

The other theaters are jealous..

COMPANY MEMBER 2

We love everything we do.

COMPANY MEMBER 3

Nor have we ever failed to entertain.

ROBERT

At least someone. Anyways that's how we see it.

COMPANY CHORUS

We see it our way and our way is always the best way.

MANDY

Okay.

ROBERT

We're so glad you're here because sometimes there's too much to juggle. Like the taxes.

[ALL DROP THE ITEMS THEY WERE JUGGLING]

COMPANY MEMBERS

Anon. [THEY EXIT]

[MANDY AND ROBERT COLLECT DROPPED
ITEMS]

ROBERT

I'll trade you a ride home for ten boxes of theater files.

MANDY

I wouldn't call it a fair trade, but I'm happy to take you home.

ROBERT

I thought you wanted this gig.

MANDY

I was trying to be clever.

ROBERT

I see. Can I load up these props into your car? I need to take them home. Hopefully, my cat won't destroy them.

MANDY

I can store them in my garage.

ROBERT

That's okay, I never know when I need creative inspiration, and you have numbers to crunch and files to organize. I'll take all that. [MANDY HANDS ROBERT THE ITEMS SHE HAS COLLECTED] Get the lights.

MANDY

So you can go home and juggle your cat.

ROBERT

I would never hurt my cat.

MANDY

Of course not.

ROBERT

Did I mention there's a company meeting at The Darkside Bar next week? I'll let you buy me a drink. [EXITS]

MANDY

The Darkside is a funky place, but it was too loud for a meeting. Gave me a monster headache. We got a few things done in between the posturing and clever quips which increased as the alcohol kicked in. I guess the company likes me. Or not. I'm not even sure they like each other.[TO AUDIENCE] Soon, all of us will recognize the magic of Z Theatre. We see it our way and our way is the best way. That didn't sound right.

[BOARD MEMBERS APPEAR ON SCREEN
LOOKING AT PAPERS. ON ROLLER SKATES,
ROBERT CIRCLES AROUND MANDY]

BOARD MEMBERS

This is grim.

ROBERT

[WHISPERS TO MANDY] You're giving them bad news. They hate that.

MANDY

These numbers are real, and we have to deal with it.

ROBERT

I'm just saying, girlfriend.

BOARD MEMBER 1

I'm very disappointed. The format of this report is wrong. I used to do your job, you know.

MANDY

Then maybe you can show me—

BOARD MEMBER 1

Use the format we always use. You have the files, yes?

MANDY

Yes. I just thought that---

BOARD MEMBER 3

I must admit, I'm very concerned by these numbers. I thought you'd fix that.

MANDY

I'm merely the messenger.

BOARD MEMBER 1

From what I can tell from this overly complicated report, you're almost broke.

MANDY

The grant Robert got is almost gone. And there are a few big outstanding bills, like rent.

BOARD MEMBER 2

Can you do your thing with the landlord, Robert?

ROBERT

Isn't that why we now have Mandy? Maybe the face of a new beggar for extensions will keep us afloat.

MANDY

We need more money. We need your help.

BOARD MEMBER 1

Don't look at me. I donate every year.

ROBERT

Board members are asked to donate \$1,000 per year if they can and most of them do.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Obviously we need more board members, Mandy.

BOARD MEMBER 2

If you need help just ask.

MANDY

I'm asking for help right now. We run a \$3,500 per month deficit. Even with ten new board members, that isn't enough to keep the theater afloat

BOARD MEMBER 1

The company could also help, you know.

ROBERT

I'm not so sure about that. Most of them live on a shoestring. Like me.

MANDY

And me.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Then get other company members.

MANDY

Isn't raising money your job?

BOARD MEMBER 1

We're volunteers. Let's revisit this next month. Gotta go – walkies for doggies. [SCREEN GOES BLACK]

BOARD MEMBER 2

Gotta go – going to the opera. [SCREEN GOES BLACK]

BOARD MEMBER 3

You'll figure it out Mandy. You and Robert are brilliant. [SCREEN GOES BLACK]

ROBERT

You know I'm glad you're here, right?

MANDY

You've known the theater is fading all along.

ROBERT

I know no such thing.

MANDY

Because numbers are not your friend.

ROBERT

I've great news. You're going to direct our next show.

MANDY

You didn't find a director? Rehearsals start next week.

ROBERT

The five directors I contacted are all busy or on vacation, which is why we settled for you.

MANDY

Settled?

ROBERT

Easy, girl, I was kidding – you take everything so personally. I'll be by your side the entire time after I get back from my three week vacation which starts next week. The company will probably help.

MANDY

Probably?

ROBERT

You can't demand too much of volunteers.

MANDY

I'm a volunteer too.

ROBERT

That's what you get for becoming the big cheese.

MANDY

I thought you were the big cheese.

ROBERT

Only until it gets stinky and moldy. Ha ha, I'm more clever than you are.[EXITS]

[COMPANY MEMBERS ENTERS, ALL BUT
COMPANY MEMBER 1 JUGGLING]

MANDY

Auditions went well. We have a cast. I was surprised none of you auditioned.

COMPANY MEMBER 1

I'm your stage manager. Lucky me.

COMPANY MEMBERS

Hurray hurray yippy skippy do! The die is cast yippy skippy do!

MANDY

Since none of you are in the show, can I get some help with a set?

[ALL COMPANY MEMBERS EXIT. COMPANY
MEMBER 1 RETURNS]

COMPANY MEMBER ONE

Robert said he'd do it. You just have to wait and trust him. Also, you'll have to get costumes from that theater-who-will-not-be-named. They hate me over there but have a bunch of costumes. I guess I can be the costume person AND the stage manager. Actually, Robert just broke up with his beau which is why he's leaving town so I'm not sure he'll do much of anything. [EXITS]

MANDY

I guess I'll use the actors who are not onstage as furniture. But I get to rummage through costumes. That'll be fun – maybe, hopefully.

[ROBERT ENTERS SURROUNDED BY COMPANY
MEMBERS ASKING HIM QUESTIONS. ALL BUT
ROBERT EXIT]

ROBERT

I haven't had a vacation in almost a year. Do I feel better now? Kinda sorta. How are rehearsals going?

MANDY

Better than I expected.

ROBERT

I know I said I'd build a revolving set, but we don't have the budget for it. How about a brick wall instead?

MANDY

We've blocked for a revolving set.

ROBERT

That's showbiz. There's this thing called theatricality. Look it up.

MANDY

Are you fucking kidding me?

ROBERT

What's with the attitude?

MANDY

This isn't attitude, this is me being pissed off. No one in this theater is helping me, including those who volunteered to do so.

ROBERT

Sucks to be you. The others are making sure we have an audience, if that's okay with you. They're kind of mad at me because they needed my approval on something, but I was gone so I couldn't help. Sad, but such is life.

[BOARD MEMBERS APPEAR ON SCREENS]

BOARD MEMBER 1

This meeting needs to come to order.

MANDY

Since when is there order? [SILENCE]

ROBERT

I stepped in for Mandy and came up with a fundraiser. We invite special people – special as in those who have money -- to a special performance of the play she is directing. We ply them with wine and pastries before the show in case they don't like the play. We charge them \$50 for the privilege and then get them to buy a plaque with their name on it that we attach to one of the seats.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Brilliant! We can always count on you.

BOARD MEMBER 2

I'll bring pastries from my shop.

MANDY

The actors are not contracted to do additional performances.

BOARD MEMBER 1

Quit being so negative. Maybe they could perform something else – an entirely new show. I'll donate a case of wine.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Mandy, would you introduce me to your lead actress? She's hot.

MANDY

So if we get ten special people, whatever that means, we raise \$500. If they pay, say, \$100 for a plaque, we'd make an additional \$1,000. If we do this once a month, we could cover the theater's monthly deficit, but that's a lot of special people and we still owe \$8,000 in back rent.

BOARD MEMBER 3

Once a month? I thought this was a one-time thing. No way I'm going to donate that much pastry.

BOARD MEMBER 2

\$3,500 per month deficit and we owe \$8,000? Why didn't I know we were in such bad shape?

MANDY

We went over the reports last month and then I emailed them to you.

BOARD MEMBER 2

That was eons ago. Besides, I can't be expected to read everything you send.

MANDY

Yes, you can, especially since the theater is in serious trouble and as a board member, you could be liable.

ROBERT

Z is always in trouble. Haven't you worked in a fringe theater before?

BOARD MEMBER 1

I'm beginning to wonder if she can.

MANDY

What do you want me to say to the landlord?

BOARD MEMBERS

We're in transition, please be patient. We'll pay you as soon as we can.

MANDY

How long have you been telling them that?

ROBERT

The last one or two years and it works.

MANDY

They're not buying it any more. I did some research. Most theaters raise 40% of their budget through means other than ticket sales. Is there another way to raise some serious money?

BOARD MEMBER 1

This year, the board has sponsored a gambling night and that pre-show event. Sadly, only seven people showed and only three bought a plaque. All together we raised an impressive \$1,200. But those events took a ridiculous amount of work by the board. The company needs to do their part.

MANDY

What about grants?

ROBERT

I wrote two grants last year.

BOARD MEMBER 3

I've chatted with a few foundations, but the economy is bad and I've been waiting for you to get the books together.

MANDY

Here's another copy of the accounting. I can mail and email you copies. Again.

BOARD MEMBER 3

No need to get snippy.

BOARD MEMBER 1

Can you email it to me too?

BOARD MEMBER 2

And me.

ROBERT

Not me, thank you.

MANDY

Yes, I'll email it again.

BOARD MEMBER 1

Gotta go – husband's boss for dinner. [EXITS]

BOARD MEMBER 2

Gotta go – kids back from college. [EXITS]

BOARD MEMBER 3

It's been a rough week. Gotta get ready for my hot date. [EXITS]

ROBERT

When you're nice and tell them they're doing great, it makes all of our lives a lot easier. I told you this before.

MANDY

We're drowning in debt. Making nice won't change that.

ROBERT

Aren't you late for rehearsal? [EXITS]

MANDY

[TO AUDIENCE] Any of you want to join the board of a theater on the verge of bankruptcy? Anyone? For \$50 you can eat pastries and see the closing of my show.

[COMPANY MEMBERS AND ROBERT ENTER, CONGRATULATING ONE ANOTHER, MAKING POSITIVE COMMENTS ABOUT THE SHOW'S SUCCESS WITHOUT TALKING ABOUT THE SHOW ITSELF]

COMPANY MEMBERS

We're clever and innovative
Dynamic and dramatic
We make art out of anything
From the profound to the traumatic
We are cutting edge performers
Our content can be risky
We're not afraid to work hard
And later down some whisky
Glug glug glug

ROBERT

Looky what I have. [COMPANY CHEERS AND PASSES AROUND THE BOTTLE OF WHISKY]

COMPANY MEMBER 1

[WHISPERS TO ROBERT] Can you believe she let them do those accents? I could have done better. [MANDY JOINS THEM] I just made sure they kept the pacing going.

MANDY

So that's why I could barely understand them.

COMPANY MEMBER 1

You are the rudest director ever, but congratulations.

ROBERT

The author of the original book has fans up the wazoo and you know how I love a wazoo.

COMPANY MEMBER 2

Too bad you were on vaycay when we needed you to sign off on appearing in their newsletter.

ROBERT

I'm sad that happened..

MANDY

I'm sad we could have doubled our paltry audiences if someone came to me.

ROBERT

You really are rude. We're here congratulating you and all you can do is bitch.

COMPANY MEMBER 1

I left all the costumes for you to get cleaned and returned to that asshole theater who loaned them to us.

MANDY

Can anyone else help me with this?

COMPANY MEMBER 1

[HANDS MANDY A PILE OF RECEIPTS] Can I get reimbursed for all the props I bought?

MANDY

Of course. Wow, this is a lot more than we talked about.

[COMPANY MEMBER 1 MOTIONS FOR THE
OTHER COMPANY MEMBERS TO LEAVE. THEY
EXIT]

COMPANY MEMBER 1

I had no choice. I couldn't afford to fix my car, so I had to buy everything at the corner store.

MANDY

I didn't bring the checkbook. Can I mail a check to you?

COMPANY MEMBER 1

Do I look like I'm made of money? [EXITS]

ROBERT

We see it our way and our way is always the best way. Speaking of which, I have some bad news. The board has asked me to tell you that Z Theater is going in a different direction and would like you to return all of the files to me by the end of the week.

MANDY

I'm fired?

ROBERT

They know you meant well.

MANDY
Does the company agree with the board?

ROBERT
How would I know?

MANDY
They talk to you.

ROBERT
I can't help that.

MANDY
Do you have a replacement?

COMPANY MEMBER 1
[ENTERING] I was wondering when I'll take over for — oh, sorry to interrupt. We'll talk later at home. [EXITS]

MANDY
You two live together?

ROBERT
Let me know when you're going to drop off the boxes. It was a pleasure working with you. [EXITS]

MANDY
I feel like I'm back in junior high and all the popular kids have rejected me. I hated it then and I hate it now, but not for long. I'm more relieved than anything else. However, that doesn't mean I won't have to grieve this loss. First stage, denial — no, they're the ones in denial. Or maybe they've accepted it all along and I'm the one who was in denial. Second stage, anger — what the fuck is wrong with these people? Why didn't I leave sooner? The board is dysfunctional, and the company doesn't trust anyone over 45. Third stage, bargaining — not a chance. Fourth stage, depression — This isn't as bad as some of the other theater deaths, but it was pretty damn bad. I'm too old for this and I will no longer work with the entitled. Fifth stage, acceptance — I won't be around for the death blow to the theater. Someone else can clean out that space. There's more trash than anything useful anyway. No, enough drama. I'm not perfect but I can live with myself [TO AUDIENCE] Excuse me for breaking the fourth wall again but I feel pretty damn silly. I really don't belong here. But don't let that stop you from enjoying the show. We see it our way and our way is always the best way. Oh my God, that doesn't even make sense.

[END OF PLAY]