

THE SOAPBOX

a play in one act

by Brent Englar

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CHARACTERS

AVEE (pronounced “AY-vee”), an ex-convict

AGNEW, a Sadmin¹

ROBIN J

SPEAKERS 1, 2, and 3

All characters may be played by men or women. AVEE is 28; AGNEW is older; the others may be any age. SPEAKERS 1, 2, and 3 should be played by the same actor.

TIME

Any time.

PLACE

Soap North, the principal soapbox in a major population center.

Ideally, a platform on an actual street corner. Beside the platform is the Sadmin’s desk and chair. Hanging from the front of the desk is a sign that reads “Open” on one side and “Closed Temporarily” on the other.

¹ Soapbox Administrator

(ROBIN J, AVEE, and SPEAKER 1 wait in line for the soapbox. After a long moment, AGNEW enters and, without acknowledging the others, sits behind the desk. Rearranges some papers. Makes a few notes. Finally flips the sign from “Closed Temporarily” to “Open”)

AGNEW

Next, please.

(ROBIN J clammers onto the soapbox and faces the audience)

ROBIN J

Would someone explain to me the etiquette of voicemail? When I went to bed last night I saw I’d missed a call from my friend Stevie. Some of you may know him—Stevie Bell? Works at the soapbox downtown—Soap South.

(to AGNEW)

You know him?

AGNEW

No.

ROBIN J

He does tech support.

SPEAKER 1

Man, the south is never clean.

ROBIN J

I have the soapbox, thank you.

SPEAKER 1

Excuses.

ROBIN J

Acceptance. So—Stevie called but left no message. It’s late, I go to bed. As I’m walking here today, he calls again. Full furious I never called him back. He’s got a real foul mouth, I’m noticing. He’s not a close friend. But he wanted to borrow my crock pot for a stew, and now it’s too late—even if he started stewing now there’d be no time to simmer. So—“Stevie,” I said, “next time leave a message.” Well, you’d think I said next time leave the stew to people who can cook. Because apparently people don’t leave voice messages anymore. Apparently people are supposed to infer the motive behind every call they miss. I’ll grant—some people muck the voice messaging experience for the rest of us. I don’t need to know the time you called—I’m sorry, Grandma—and I don’t need to know what your doctors said. Just tell me

how important it is I call you back. Maybe we could agree on a five-point scale. Like one means “when you get a second” and five means “I need a fucking crock pot now.” I’m done. Thank you for your audience.

(ROBIN J steps down from the soapbox and exits)

AGNEW

Next, please.

(AVEE mounts the soapbox. At some point during the following, ROBIN J re-enters and gets back in line)

AVEE

I—

AGNEW

—Your name, please?

AVEE

What?

AGNEW

Before you speak, you need to register.

AVEE

That other speaker didn’t register.

AGNEW

Robin J speaks every day.

AVEE

Who?

AGNEW

Robin J I know. You I don’t.

AVEE

My name is Avee.

AGNEW

Avee ...

AVEE

Van Westin.

Why is that familiar?	AGNEW
May I speak now?	AVEE
What's your OI? ²	AGNEW
I don't have an OI.	AVEE
Every user has an online identity.	AGNEW
I've been in prison.	AVEE
Even prisoners have OIs.	AGNEW
Not prisoners who violate PL Version 2.0.	AVEE
You disrespected the soapbox?	AGNEW
According to the judge.	AVEE
How?	AGNEW
Vomit.	AVEE
You spewed on the— (standing)	AGNEW
I remember now. You spewed on <u>my</u> soapbox.	
I did.	AVEE

² Pronounced “oy”

AGNEW

Has it really been ten years?

AVEE

They released me today.

AGNEW

And every day deserved. It's respect binds this world together. Respect that begins and ends with the soaps.

AVEE

I respectfully disagree.

AGNEW

I'll warn you once more to watch what you say.

AVEE

You know my name. I have the soapbox. I can say whatever I like.

AGNEW

Very well.

(sitting)

Say what you like.

AVEE

(looking around)

It's like nothing has changed. Same hoardings. Same desk. Same pigeons, probably. Same Sadmin.

AGNEW

Are you disappointed?

AVEE

No. I'm very glad you're here.

AGNEW

Why are you here?

AVEE

To see you.

(A bell rings)

AGNEW

Time.

AVEE

What?

AGNEW

Please cede the soapbox. There are people waiting.

AVEE

I've waited ten years!

AGNEW

I'm sorry, the rules are rules. You see we're busy.

AVEE

Two people!

AGNEW

With as much a liberty to speak as you.

(to SPEAKER 1)

Next, please.

(SPEAKER 1 leaps onto the soapbox. AVEE does not move)

SPEAKER 1

I'm next.

AGNEW

(to AVEE)

Please cede the box.

(AVEE shrugs, steps down, and gets in line behind ROBIN J)

SPEAKER 1

(to AGNEW)

My name is Chris Van Westin.

(to AVEE)

No relation.

AVEE

None taken.

AGNEW

Your OI?

greenT42
SPEAKER 1

“T” is—
AGNEW

—Just the letter.
SPEAKER 1

Very well.
AGNEW
(making a note)
Speak.

SPEAKER 1
(to the audience)
Friends, I look around and find myself agreeing with the convict here.

AVEE
Ex-convict.

SPEAKER 1
Of course, excuses—ex. Ex-convict. Nothing changes. We all know the headlines: Unemployment stuck at two-percent. Every year, it seems, another college dropout, another property crime, another lousy ball team. And what do the do-nothings in the capital do about it? It’s OK to say it ...

AVEE
Nothing.

SPEAKER 1
Say it with me!

SPEAKER 1 & AVEE
Nothing!

SPEAKER 1
Now, imagine Mrs. Governor, Mr. Mayor, the council chambers—imagine they wake up tomorrow and open their quicksheets and find an extra ten—fifteen—twenty-five percent to spend! You all know me—I’ve lived here all my life. I love this city. How the sunlight glitters in the morning off the solar panels. And our network of free clinics—did you know yesterday the Municipal Shelter neutered its one-millionth cat? But imagine all we might achieve—“imagine” equals “I” plus “magine,” “magine” coming from the Greek for “make it so”—imagine such a budgetary windfall! The grants that could be funded. The pets we could finally insure. I won’t presume my wish list mirrors yours, but I know one thing we can all agree on: That

imagined day won't come until our leaders—our elected representatives—muster the will to sacrifice. Governor, Mayor, I'm speaking right at you: You want my vote, then raise my taxes. Or I'll find someone who will.

(SPEAKER 1 steps down from the soapbox and exits)

AGNEW

Next, please.

(ROBIN J clambers back on the soapbox. At some point during the following, SPEAKER 2 enters and gets in line behind AVEE)

ROBIN J

Would someone please tell me exactly what we can and can't recycle? I was on my way to work, I was cutting through the park just now, and who do I meet but my friend Fazma with an ice milk cone. I don't expect you know her—she typically uses the Fifty-Ninth Street Soapbox, on the bridge—but to ensure there's no confusion, her full name is Fazma Jones, Jr.

(to AGNEW)

Do you need her OI?

AGNEW

No.

ROBIN J

OK, just tell me. So, you know these ice milk cones—they're wrapped in paper. And Fazma and I walk a bit, and as we talk, she eats the cone and tosses the paper—encrusted with soggy wafer bits and stained green with ice milk (it was mint)—into the nearest blue bin! Now I'm thinking for the purposes of recycling this is food scrap and should go in the red bin, not the blue, but Fazma's already turned the corner, and anyway, I know her—she's very skeptical of recycling. "It all ends up in the same place eventually" is what she says, which seems to me uninformed, or at least awfully farsighted. So I reach in the bin to retrieve the paper-scrap, because "one rotten apple" is what I say, and inside is a total trove of non-recyclables. Batteries, fluorescing light bulbs, children's diapers. Not to mention this wallet ...

(displaying a wallet)

Did anybody try to recycle a wallet? It's empty, there's no currency ...

(flipping through the wallet)

Wait, here's a card. The name reads [*name of person in audience*], and you have an appointment next Tuesday with some kind of specialist. Excuses, I don't recognize the word ...

(to audience)

Is [*same name as before*] within earshot?

(shouting)

[*same name as before*]!

(If the audience member whose name is called identifies himself or herself, ROBIN J should chastise the person for unlawful recycling and demand to meet later at the nearest resolution station; if the person attempts to speak, ROBIN J should interrupt: “I have the soapbox. Please wait your turn.” AGNEW may echo this point if necessary.)

If the audience member whose name is called does not identify himself or herself, ROBIN J should chastise the person in absentia. Whichever happens, ROBIN J concludes with the following lines)

ROBIN J

This incident has only confirmed my views on humanity. I don't know if we're unmindful, willfully perverse, or just stupid, but any way you slice the bread, it's moldy.

(ROBIN J steps down from the soapbox and exits)

AGNEW

Next, please.

(AVEE remounts the soapbox)

AVEE

I—

AGNEW

—Your name, please?

AVEE

You know my name!

AGNEW

Excuses, no.

AVEE

Avee. Prison. I threw up on your box.

AGNEW

What?

AVEE

Ten years ago.

AGNEW

Ah yes. What on this Earth were you thinking?

AVEE

I was drunk.

AGNEW

Are you drunk now?

AVEE

I've been drunk exactly once in my life. I was celebrating—it was my senior commencement. Ten years ago. My birthday too—

SPEAKER 2

—Today's my birthday!

AVEE

I HAVE THE SOAPBOX!

(A different bell rings. AGNEW stands)

AVEE (Cont'd)

Oh no—no! Sit. My time's not up.

AGNEW

Certainly not.

AVEE

Then what was that?

AGNEW

My break.

AVEE

What break? You get a break?

AGNEW

My bladder does.

AVEE

You need to hear me. I'm speaking!

AGNEW

Who's stopping you? Don't loiter when you're done. For the rest ...

(to SPEAKER 2)

Keep the line orderly, please. I shouldn't be long.

(AGNEW flips the sign from "Open" to "Closed Temporarily" and exits)