

Stage Fright

If Shakespeare was right, and all the world really is a stage... Alex Denton is concerned that, based on his latest performance, he is going to be slain by his critics.

“**S**hh, don’t worry, it happens to everyone.” She said this quietly, lying in the dark. It would have been lovely had it not been so hideous; I would have been touched had I not been dying quite so violently inside. It might happen to everyone, I thought, but it has never happened to me. Not before, not ever.

And incidentally, before I continue, I would like to extend my sincerest thanks (no really) to the kind soul who, in response to last month’s column, accused me of, ‘wasting his time with my burgeoning psychosis.’ I responded badly to that, and the month got worse from there.

The actor takes to the stage more terrified than he should be, and the audience, eager to please, responds too enthusiastically, making its response feel false.

The night described above, or rather, this end to the night as described above - I slept not long after, listening to streets silenced as if in shame - was its lowest ebb, but there have been other things since then that have brought forth its underwhelming memory, and have felt its limpness impacted upon them.

I was in the bank trying in vain to open an account. I was prompt; too prompt as it turned out, and the person I needed to see was not quite ready for me. It didn’t happen. I was in the kitchen, trying to fix a cupboard. It wasn’t a complicated

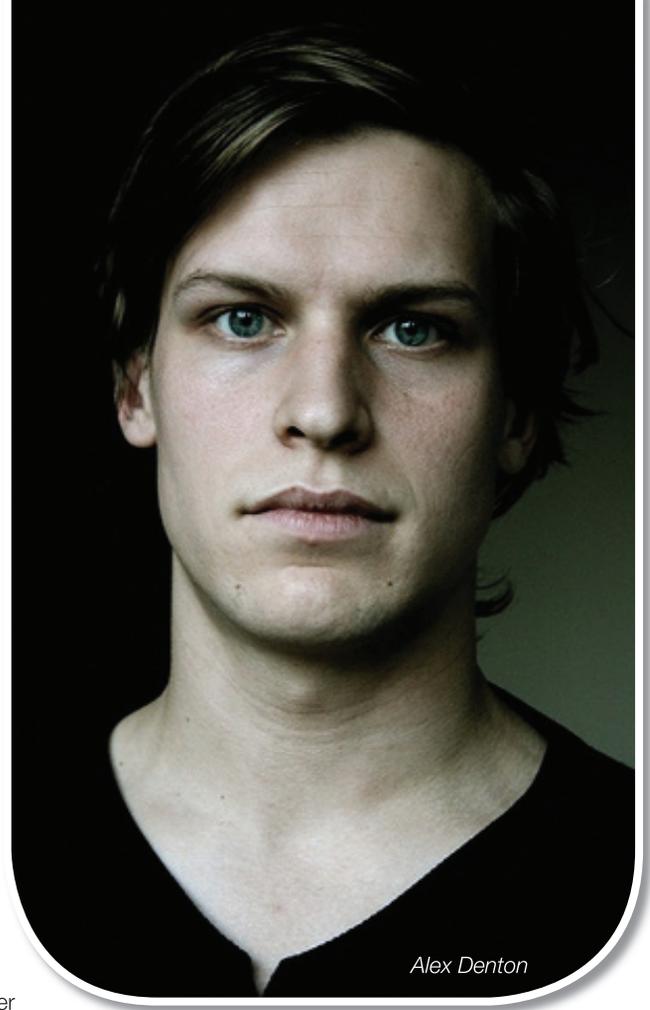
job, but involved me raising a shelf by a few inches whilst simultaneously drilling a hole. It didn’t happen. Driving, distracted by other things, I jumped a red light, only noticing as I was flash-flashed by the camera, earning myself not only derision, but also an embarrassing fine.

That one night has clouded my month and I fear that I will never really get over it. Why then has all this affected me so? I’m not sure. Firstly there is a part of me that just doesn’t believe that it really does, ‘happen to everyone,’ that I have been somehow cursed, that this is yet

further proof of my newfound, accelerated demise.

But I am slowly starting to make sense of it all and in doing so have found some, if not comfort, then order. I have a clearer idea now, of what it is all about.

Imagine an actor, a simple creature, whose only role in life is to please his audience. Any failure to do so is not only bad for his reputation as an actor, but equally, bad for the audience as well. The audience blames itself, and issues false assurances about the performance being OK. But then it start to doubt itself, asking



Alex Denton

if it too had under performed and seeking assurances that the actor still values it as a critic. In return the actor tells lies, starts blaming his workload, his insomnia and his mind. Before long, everyone is worried that they are to blame and worse, is lying to each other to make everyone but themselves feel better and less in pain.

It is a vicious circle, one that leads to performances being cancelled and audiences staying away. Until finally, once a show has eventually been arranged, the actor takes to the stage more terrified than he should be, and the audience, eager to please, responds too enthusiastically to his opening soliloquy, making its response feel false. The show finishes, but not to anyone’s satisfaction. The critics are moot, and any return to this theatre a speculative proposition and not the certainty that previous performances have garnered.

What is the actor to do; what is the audience? I don’t know the answers to these questions, or else I would not be maudlin, pondering the solutions here. Instead I would be aboard the greatest stage on earth, pouring forth my wisdom to everyman: ‘Shouting from the rooftops, having it,’ as some 90’s poplet once phrased it; ‘baby, I’m ready to go.’ ■

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