



NEW COUNTRY

BY MARK ROBERTS



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NEW COUNTRY
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For Sarah

NEW COUNTRY was originally produced by Fair Trade Productions and Kelcie Beene Cooper, in association with Rattlestick Playwrights Theater, at the Cherry Lane Theatre in New York City, on May 16, 2015. It was directed by Mark Roberts and David Harwell. The set design was by David Harwell and the lighting design was by Tito Ladd. The cast was as follows:

PAUL Malcolm Madera
CHUCK Jared Culverhouse
OLLIE Stephen Sheffer
JUSTIN David Lind
UNCLE JIM Mark Roberts
SHARON Sarah Lemp

CHARACTERS

PAUL

CHUCK

OLLIE

JUSTIN

UNCLE JIM

SHARON

NEW COUNTRY

Lights up on an upscale hotel suite. Through the window we see the Nashville skyline. There's a sitting area with a sofa, coffee table and two chairs, a flat-screen TV, and a fully stocked bar and mini-fridge. A hallway leads offstage, to the bedroom and bath. Pacing the room is Paul, fifties, confident and in control. He's dressed in an expensive Western-style suit and bolo tie and talking on his cell phone in a thick Southern accent. Standing behind him, listening, is Chuck: forties, nervous and high-strung. He is also dressed in a Western-style suit and also speaks with a thick Southern accent.

PAUL. (*Into phone.*) Listen to me darlin', 'cause I'm shootin' arrow-straight with you right now. You cannot get riled at a twenty-five-year-old man for acting stupid, irresponsible, and crazy-reckless. That's just inherent behavior at that stage of life and how that particular package comes wrapped. Man's gonna do whatever he damn well pleases, and truthfully, it's unfair on your part to burden him with things like designated curfews and accountability. Like handin' a scarecrow a book of matches then gettin' miffed when he comes home in an ashtray. (*Pause.*) Well, disagree all you want, but that ain't gonna turn water into wine or give frogs the right to vote. Need to let that boy be who he is and stop tryin' to strap a saddle on him. (*Pause.*) No, I am not "attempting to dismiss or invalidate your feelings." I'm just sayin' they're unfounded, wrong-headed, and flat-out-goofy. The storm clouds overhead are all imagined in your noggin, pre-weddin' jitters that I guarantee will part and pass the minute the car's draggin' cans and you're shakin' rice out of your hair. Alright? Alright, then. See you at the church. (*Hanging up.*) Eight months tops, then that milk is gonna curdle and sour.

CHUCK. Didn't feel the need to address my issues, huh?

PAUL. (*Exasperated.*) No, Chuck, I did not.

CHUCK. (*Sarcastic.*) Slipped your mind, I reckon?

PAUL. Nope. Just felt there were bigger fish to fry.

CHUCK. Did you now?

PAUL. I did. So, I prioritized. That okay by you?

CHUCK. (*Shrugging.*) Hey. (*Pause.*) Not a complicated point I'm trying to make here.

PAUL. Mountain out of a molehill, friend. Mountain out of a goddamn molehill.

CHUCK. I disagree, think it's a valid concern that warrants discussion.

PAUL. And we have discussed it a-plenty.

CHUCK. Okay, fine, forget it. (*Beat.*) "None is so blind as he that will not see."

PAUL. See what? What is it I'm not seeing, Chuck?

CHUCK. Nothing, forget it, moving on.

PAUL. Enlighten me.

CHUCK. (*Angry.*) Said, moving on. (*Pause.*)

PAUL. (*Sighing.*) You are unhappy with the pairing.

CHUCK. Yes, I am. Very, very displeased.

PAUL. Is what it is, buddy boy.

CHUCK. Just tell me how's come I get stuck with the fat chick? Huh? Explain that to me.

PAUL. That's truly your issue here? What this whole crazy conniption is about?

CHUCK. Not a conniption and it's a goddamn reasonable question.

PAUL. No, it's uh, it's really not.

CHUCK. That's your opinion.

PAUL. Here it is: He picks three guys to be groomsmen, she chooses an equal number of bridesmaids, pairing is decided after the fact.

CHUCK. Well, clearly a flawed process.

PAUL. The process is flawed?

CHUCK. Deeply, deeply flawed.

PAUL. Do understand it's completely random.

CHUCK. Please. An event like this? Where every minute detail is discussed to fuckin' death?

PAUL. Listen ...

CHUCK. Please.

PAUL. So, you're saying they purposefully, perhaps even spitefully, paired you with that heavy-set gal?

CHUCK. Heavy-set? She's two teets shy of bein' bovine. And I got no idea why they did what they did. Women in a room somewhere. Who knows why they do half the shit they do?

PAUL. Look, nobody's asking you to create a life with this lady. Just stroll down the aisle, she veers left, you turn right, "I do, I do, sayonara."

CHUCK. Point I'm trying to make, get a word in edgewise, is the pairing should at least be plausible.

PAUL. "Plausible," how? What's that even mean, "plausible"?

CHUCK. Romantic occasion such as this...?

PAUL. Yes?

CHUCK. ... Want to at least create the illusion that we're actual couples.

PAUL. The fuck for? Everybody knows we're not real couples, don't give a shit.

CHUCK. Once again, your opinion. Me, I believe a certain amount of plausibility helps facilitate, you know ... a mood.

PAUL. What kind of mood you talkin' about?

CHUCK. A joyous, romantic, wedding-type, fucking mood. And nobody is ever going to believe that I'm linked to that chub-a-lub-a-ding-dong.

PAUL. Come on, now. She's got a cute face.

CHUCK. Yeah, restin' on four chins. Like a pumpkin plopped on a stack of tires.

PAUL. Very personable I thought.

CHUCK. Hey, you're tipping the scale at two-fifty and change, you can't be snotty. And if you're so enamored, you yolk her up and yank her down the aisle.

PAUL. We can't trade women. Okay? This is how Lindsey wanted us paired and that's just the way it is.

CHUCK. Lindsey. Who let her decide everything, anyway?

PAUL. She's the bride, asshole. Jesus. Can't you just be a get-along guy for once in your life?

CHUCK. I get along, go fuck yourself. And it's easy for you to be pliable, you drew the hot cousin with the tramp stamp and big jugs.

PAUL. Nothing to do with it.

CHUCK. Bullshit. Meanwhile, I'm sashayin' with Buffalo Gal, everybody shooting me pity eyes because I drew "the fat straw." People see she's not in my league, makes them uncomfortable and I believe, truly believe, it detracts from the actual ceremony.

PAUL. You're a complete and total dick, man.

CHUCK. Well, that's a whole other conversation. *(Pause.)*

PAUL. Fine. Feel that strongly about it, talk to Justin. Not like he doesn't know his sister has a weight problem.

CHUCK. Wait, what? What are you talking about?

PAUL. That stack of tires is Justin's sister.

CHUCK. No, huh-uh, I met the sister. The prison cook with the maroon hair and Junior Mint mole on her eyelid.

PAUL. That's a wart and that's the oldest. Your gal's the younger one, from a different daddy. Did you speak to her at all at the rehearsal dinner?

CHUCK. Yes, of course, I engaged. *(Beat.)* Little bit. She was pretty focused on her food. Brought out that tri-tip, thought she was gonna come. His sister, really?

PAUL. How do you not know this shit? Been working with the man for five years.

CHUCK. Hey, I handle contracts, A&R, and the label. You're the one in charge of hand-holdin', publicity, and private life.

PAUL. *(Sighing.)* Add on weddin' planner, couples counselor, and every other degrading task that son of a bitch throws my way.

CHUCK. Speaking of which, how much longer do we gotta sit here and wait for Uncle Pig Farmer?

PAUL. *(Looking at his watch.)* Should be en route. Car picked him up at the airport ten minutes ago, with a cooler of Dr. Pepper and three rolled joints. *(There's a knock at the door. Chuck crosses to it.)*

CHUCK. President's suite and an Escalade for some Kentucky hog jockey too cheap to rent a fuckin' car.

PAUL. Can't rent a car, no license. Five DUIs in two years. Last one they give him, he was on a ridin' lawn mower.

CHUCK. Great. The whole *Hee Haw* gang. *(Chuck opens the door, revealing Ollie, an aggressive, slightly effeminate, twenty-year-old bellboy. He's carrying a gift basket filled with food and liquor. He also speaks with a strong Southern accent.)*

OLLIE. Greetings, gentlemen. Pardon the intrusion. Just wanted to let you know your guests are starting to trickle in downstairs.

CHUCK. Be there shortly. *(Re: basket.)* What's all this?

OLLIE. A few snacks and goodies for Mister Spears and entourage to help celebrate his impending nuptials.

CHUCK. Great. Set it wherever. *(Ollie crosses to the bar area.)*

OLLIE. Imported cheeses, chocolates and charcuterie. Plus assorted breads, crackers, five different kinds of Italian olives, dried fruit, and three gourmet mustards. Brown, spicy brown, and wasabi. Also, a bottle of Knob Creek sippin' whiskey, which every true Justin Spears fan knows is his preferred libation. *(Looking around.)* By the way, is

the guest of honor here yet? Perhaps in the shower, or...? *(Paul crosses to him, taking out a wad of bills.)*

PAUL. Thanks a bunch and thank the management for us. *(He offers Ollie a twenty.)*

OLLIE. Oh, no tipping allowed, hotel policy.

PAUL. *(Pocketing the cash.)* Even better.

OLLIE. Plus, I happen to be one of those aforementioned fans. Actually, I was the one who gave the manager the inside scoop on the Knob Creek.

PAUL. Appreciate it.

OLLIE. He was gonna toss in a bottle of Jack Daniel's, figuring that's what all country stars drink. But I swiftly corrected his heinous, idiotic misstep.

PAUL. Great. *(Beat.)* Thanks again.

OLLIE. And for clarification, when I say I'm a "fan" I do not mean one of those pathetic lost souls lollygagging starry-eyed around the tour bus hoping Justin will peer out a window and offer up a half smile, maybe a casual nod. Or pining away at a concert, throwing themselves at the lip of the stage, praying that he'll make eye contact or anoint them with a few drops of his sweet, blessed perspiration. No, my definition of "fan" would be more along the lines of someone who has a spiritual, almost divine connection to his music and artistry. A "soulmate" would probably be a more accurate description of mine and Justin's ... relationship. *(Chuck and Paul stare at him.)*

PAUL. Autographed T-shirt?

OLLIE. Already own two signed T-shirts, nine autographed eight-by-tens, and seven used guitar picks that he's discarded on various stages in and around Davidson County.

CHUCK. Build a creepy shrine at this point.

OLLIE. *(Laughing.)* Hardly. *(Seriously.)* My simple mementos have been lovingly, respectfully mounted on a crushed velvet backing and framed in museum-quality glass. Hung in my home office, above my desk. Something to gaze at as I seek inspiration for my own work, my own music.

PAUL. Uh-huh. *(Beat.)* You said one of those mustards is wasabi?

OLLIE. What I don't have and would appreciate more than monetary compensation is contact information for Mister Spears, to present him with a demo tape of my songs to enjoy, perhaps inspire.

PAUL. Yeah, unfortunately, we can't accept unsolicited material from unknown songwriters.

NEW COUNTRY

by Mark Roberts

5M, 1W

Country music star Justin Spears is young, handsome, hugely famous, hugely wealthy, and has an ego at the top of the charts. On the eve of Justin's wedding day, his ruthless managers, Paul and Chuck, try in vain to keep an unruly entourage under control. Enter Ollie, the star-struck hotel bellboy with a cockeyed view of fame; Sharon, Justin's vigilante, scorned ex-girlfriend; and dirty old pig-farming Uncle Jim who arrives with inflatable lady, Wanda June Whitmore. So how does this raucous rodeo go so wrong ... so fast? Welcome to the NEW COUNTRY, where the hits just keep on comin'.

"Critic's pick ... Two and a Half Men was often among network prime time's raunchier shows during its long run, but Mark Roberts, one of the brains behind it, apparently was holding a lot back. His raucous NEW COUNTRY is full of the kind of lines television censors snip out. But Mr. Roberts does a pretty good job of slipping in a bit of heart amidst the offensiveness." —**The New York Times**

"Roberts' characters are clear and their motives are uncomplicated. His humor is sharp ... and his timing is spot on. In the end, after some very clever writing ... nearly everyone has a firm grip on a knife sticking out of someone else's back. And you leave being grateful you are not one of them."

—**NewYorkTheatreGuide.com**

"In Mark Roberts' delightful and moving play NEW COUNTRY ... these Southern characters [are] funny without making fun of them. The jokes are validated by the logic and drama ... all laughs are earned. ... [a] hilarious, poignant, and at times heart-wrenching comedic drama."

—**StageandCinema.com**

Also by Mark Roberts

PARASITE DRAG
RANTOUL AND DIE
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