DAISY

BY SEAN DEVINE

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DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.

For Alexa

DAISY was first produced by ACT—A Contemporary Theatre (John Langs, Artistic Director) in Seattle, Washington, on July 14, 2016. It was directed by John Langs, the set design was by Shawn Ketchum Johnson, the costume design was by Kimberley Newton, the lighting design was by Robert J. Aguilar, the video/projection design was by Tristan Roberson, the sound design was by Robertson Witmer, and the stage manager was JR Welden. The cast was as follows:

LOUISE BROWN ..... Kirsten Potter
TONY SCHWARTZ ..... Michael Gotch
CLIFFORD LEWIS ..... Tré Cotten
BILL BERNBACH ..... R. Hamilton Wright
SID MYERS ..... Connor Toms
AARON EHRLICH ..... Bradford Farwell

DAISY was developed in part at the Icicle Creek New Play Festival (Allen Fitzpatrick, Artistic Director).

DAISY was developed in part by Horseshoes & Hand Grenades Theatre (Sean Devine, Artistic Director).

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PREFACE

Sean Devine has written a powerful play about a remarkable moment in history—a moment so decisive that one 30-second television commercial could determine the direction of a country. To this day, that commercial, the "Daisy" spot, is studied, argued over, and talked about 53 years after it aired—just once.

The play is *Daisy*.

One of the play's central characters is a man named Tony Schwartz. I knew the *real* Tony.

Tony Schwartz was a genius.

And yes, that word gets thrown around a lot. As the joke goes, "If your hairdresser is a genius, where does that leave Mozart?"

But Tony was a genius. There was always a sense, when you were with him, of the questions and theories that were swirling around in his mind. It felt as if some floodgate was barely holding back the ideas and puzzles that delighted him. And they would spill out with wonderful energy.

Tony was human. He could be irascible. He could be impatient with those who refused to listen or who didn't want to understand. He was turning communications theory upside down. And there were a lot of people who didn't like that. But Tony was also as gentle a soul as anyone I've ever met.

Tony was agoraphobic. As far as Tony was concerned, in a perfect world, he would never have stepped outside his house or, at the very least left the familiarity of his own New York City neighborhood. Anywhere beyond that, there were dragons.

He would walk. He literally invented the portable tape recorder so he could walk through his neighborhood, recording all of its sounds—its reality—and his.

I had bragging rights to say I'd actually walked down a city street with Tony. We left his house and walked two blocks. And then we

walked back. I can remember every step. And Tony would have too. He was listening. He was always listening.

I remember Tony once admonished me for believing the rumor that he had never left Manhattan. "I left once," he said to me. Then he added, "I won't do THAT again." And I'm pretty sure he didn't.

In 1964, the team from DDB in charge of advertising for President Lyndon Johnson's election campaign came to Tony's home and studio in Hell's Kitchen. They were seeking Tony's help. Some didn't think they needed it.

Tony gave them a brilliant idea and a road map to create what is now considered the most powerful political ad ever made.

There have always been differences over who did what to produce that ad. But if anyone could do a DNA test on the "Daisy" ad, Tony Schwartz's DNA is all over it. The use of a child's voice; the innocent and hesitant count of the daisy petals, turning into the ominous male voice's countdown, and most of all, the use of Tony's unique theory, the Responsive Chord.

The "Daisy" ad played just one time, yet its effect on the Goldwater campaign was devastating. It touched a true chord in the American public that was already there. It elicited a response against Goldwater's admitted potential use of nuclear weapons in the Vietnam war, without needing to mention Goldwater's name.

Tony's Responsive Chord theory held that the message of any commercial is created by the audience, not the commercial itself. In the "Daisy" commercial, presidential candidate Barry Goldwater is never mentioned. Tony told me that if Goldwater's name been spoken the spot would have not worked. Instead, Tony understood the audience would create the message themselves and fill in the name.

In his play *Daisy*, Sean Devine has pulled off something that seems effortless, but in fact is extremely rare and hard to do. Devine has created characters that actually existed in history. That's never easy, and hard to do well. Yet these characters come to life, ring true, and make us want to hear more.

It's history. We know how it all turns out. Yet this playwright makes us want to find out how it all turns out. That's a bit of magic. And why we go to the theatre. And why we read plays.

Each time I read the play and come across one of Tony's lines, I say to myself, "Yes. That's Tony. That's exactly what Tony would say and how he would sound." And that's not at all easy to accomplish.

I'm grateful and honored to have this opportunity to give back something of what Tony meant to me. I'm proud of my reputation for having trained a great number of the next generation of Democratic media consultants, and that is due to what Tony did for me, and how he taught me.

Have fun. It's a good story.

—Joe Slade White
East Aurora, New York
July 21, 2017

WORD FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The commercial played only once. And we're still talking about it.

History plays are more than reflections on our past. They shine new light on our present. And if they're based on incidents of enduring currency, if they dramatize individuals of rare genius, then our ever-shifting present will continue to be illuminated by these stories.

Early in my research, I came upon the controversy over authorship of the "Daisy" ad. It was soon clear that the controversy hadn't diminished since the spot aired in 1964. There were two camps, each fiercely defended. One claimed that Tony Schwartz was the genius and sole inspiration behind the ad. The other held the position that the "ad men" at Madison Avenue top agency Doyle Dane Bernbach were the brains behind "Daisy."

Despite the uncertainty, several things are clear. To me, at least. First, the "Daisy" ad, which was created in 1964, would not exist if it weren't for a remarkably similar radio spot that Schwartz created on his own in 1962. Second, and despite the first point, the most famous political commercial ever made was the result of a creative collaboration in which many hands played instrumental roles in its conception and execution: Tony Schwartz, Sid Myers, Stan Lee, Aaron Ehrlich, Lloyd Wright, and of course Bill Bernbach. If it weren't for each of their influences, we would not have such an incredibly nuanced and perfectly packaged spot. And third, all of these magnificent figures deserve their place in the history of modern communications.

Bill Bernbach ushered in advertising's Creative Revolution, bringing excitement and renewed appreciation to a then-tired industry that lacked in lustre, and had surfeit of cynicism. The tasteful maverick whose quotes adorn the walls of ad agencies everywhere taught his leagues of offspring that whereas advertising is persuasion, persuasion itself is not a science, but an art.

Tony Schwartz was a man ahead of his time, and though he faced restrictions of space and conventionality, he broke the barriers of each. A man-of-the-people, he'd converse with his colleague Marshall

McLuhan, or with a sitting president, or with the fruit vendor down the street. It was all of equal value. And it's all stored in the collection that bears his name at the Library of Congress.

These two giants revolutionized the way we transmit, and even understand ideas and information. And they made their greatest impact at a time when our species was ill-prepared for an unstoppable wave of persuasion, delivered upon our defenseless senses through the unprecedented power of television.

The effect of electronic media, and specifically television, on politics and campaigning—the effect of television on EVERYTHING—is one of paradigm shift. Campaigns which failed to understand and incorporate these new technologies to their full potential were decimated. We've seen the same thing in recent years with campaigns that lack effective strategies for social media.

Speaking of media, it's impossible to get a true sense of the new realities described in this play without experiencing the various media elements referenced in this script. A weblink has been provided on the following pages as a useful reference for any reader who wishes an extra-dimensional experience of the play. But I'd like to highlight some foundational elements here.

If the 1964 U.S. presidential election was the first American contest that saw the impact television commercials could have on a campaign, then it's the creative minds at Bill Bernbach's flagship agency who are responsible for that. The best place to see the whole of their work on the 1964 campaign is at www.livingroomcandidate.org. This site includes a history of American presidential campaign commercials—Republican and Democrat—dating back to 1952. By comparing the ads that Bernbach's team created for Lyndon Johnson with Barry Goldwater's tired missives, it's easy to see their game-changing effect. And while you're there, take a look at the ads that helped propel Richard Nixon to the presidency in the 1968 campaign, and which demonstrate, in hindsight, just how wary we must be about the power of advertising.

Which brings me, finally, to Tony Schwartz, a man whose work still resonates throughout our heavily mediated world. And it's hardly an

exaggeration to say that his book *The Responsive Chord* is a sacred text in some circles. Though it may seem simple now, Tony's "resonance theory," derived from his understanding of the mechanics of hearing, is still a mind-blowing concept. And it's a concept that, frankly, will stand the test of time no matter where technology takes us, because nothing will outpace the electronic speed that the theory is based on.

I hope you enjoy the play, and that its arguments and discoveries are as relevant now as they were in 1964. I hope the story resonates.

Or as Tony might say, I hope you remember it for the rest of your…

—Sean Devine
Ottawa, 2017

CHARACTERS

LOUISE BROWN — Late 30s. A copywriter with the advertising firm of Doyle Dane Bernbach.

TONY SCHWARTZ — Early 40s. A sound archivist, media specialist, and agoraphobe.

CLIFFORD LEWIS — Early 30s. African-American. A White House lawyer.

BILL BERNBACH — Early 50s. The creative director of the firm that bears his name.

SID MYERS— Mid-30s. An art director with Doyle Dane Bernbach.

AARON EHRLICH — Early 40s. A television producer with Doyle Dane Bernbach.

Other supporting characters appear in various forms.

The symbol / indicates where one speaker is interrupted by the next.

NOTE ON DESIGN

For the original production of *Daisy* at Seattle's ACT Theatre, directed by John Langs, the central focus for the set design was a massive upstage wall consisting of dozens of television screens, onto which was projected any number of orientations of the play's many video elements. The remaining physical elements were minimal but highly functional, allowing for the scenes to shift quickly between numerous locations. Three wooden desks and two movable wooden benches presented the large workspace at Doyle Dane Bernbach. The centre desk served as the main console in Tony Schwartz's studio, with a shelving unit upstage of the desk. (For the Seattle production, the shelving unit was able to rise up from the floor thanks to a hydraulic lift, but few productions will be able to pull that off!) Each of the desks and benches had drawers and compartments—some obvious, some custom-built—which allowed for props to appear and disappear with ease. Other scenic elements were brought in from the wings or the fly system as needed.

As mentioned above, the script has numerous references to projection as well as sound elements, and these elements will be instrumental for any production of *Daisy*. Files and/or clips of the media can be found on the playwright's website:

www.seandevine.ca/daisy-links/

Recordings of Tony Schwartz's life works and Democratic campaign ads are used throughout the play. The performance rights to these materials are included with the written production license for *Daisy*. An asterisk (*) in footnotes indicates the media mentioned is legally available for use in production.

Rights to other real-life footage, such as Walter Cronkite and other news network footage, ***are not included with the performance license***. (See special note on songs/recordings, images, and other materials at the back of this volume.)

Advertising is tax deductible. So we all pay for the privilege of being manipulated and controlled.

—Noam Chomsky

DAISY

PROLOGUE

Projected are snippets of history and commercialism which bring us back to the years just prior to 1964. Kennedy and Nixon squared off on televised debate. Kindergarten students learning to duck and cover under their desks. Water cannons discharging on black Alabamans. A limo speeding away in Dallas. A dutiful vice-president being sworn in.

Blending into this, ad after ad make their pitch for products that are better, faster, sharper, stronger, cleaner and leaner than all the rest.

And then it all disappears into darkness, and near quiet.

ACT ONE

Scene 1

From the dark, a voice speaks.

TONY. Hello? Are we ready to begin? Does everyone have a seat?

Beat.

How do I sound? Do I sound close? It doesn't feel close. Let's adjust that.

A light comes up on Tony Schwartz. He's giving a lecture. Beside him is a tape player.

1, 2, 3. Co-munication. Partipulation. That's better. Let's begin.

Beat.

Hello, everyone. I'm honored to be speaking to you all today. My name is Tony Schwartz. If there's a subject I can speak about with some level of expertise, it would be the area of sound. Of closeness. We had our earliest experience of closeness through sound.[1]

Tony turns on a tape player. It plays a slow, regular heartbeat.

The sound of our mother's heartbeat.

Another heartbeat emerges, faster.

Of our own heartbeat. We developed our sense of rhythm through these two heartbeats playing in counterpoint. Our first communication was hearing speech inside the womb, resonating through bone and water conduction. Long before you could see the difference between a smile or a frown, you could hear the difference in the sound of a word. In the sound of anger. The sound of love. The sound of fear.

Tony stops the tape player.

There was a composer who performed an experiment on the nature

1 Several of the character Tony Schwartz's monologues are based on actual writings and recordings by the real Tony Schwartz, including segments from his book *The Responsive Chord* (1973). This segment is based on a video lecture of Tony Schwartz called "The Power of Audio with Tony Schwartz."*

of silence.[2] He placed himself inside an "anechoic chamber," which is a room without echoes. A room without sound. But inside the chamber, the composer heard two sounds. One high. And one low.

Tony starts another playback. We hear two frequencies: one high and one low.

He asks the technician "Why, if the room is silent, do I hear those two sounds? One high, and one low." The composer is told that the high frequency is his nervous system in operation. The low frequency is his blood in circulation.

Tony stops the sound.

Even when we are quiet, there's no such thing as silence. Even when we are lonely, there's no such thing as empty space. The vastness of human consciousness is a bottomless well that we as communicators can draw from. Can you *see* what I am saying?

Scene 2

A workroom inside the New York City advertising agency of Doyle Dane Bernbach. Sid Myers is pitching an idea to Louise Brown. Sid stands in front of an easel with a display board. It shows the logo for American Airlines.

SID. Now, if we are going to succeed in making American Airlines stand out from all other airlines, then it behooves us to ask what is it about air travel in general that begs improvement. And can we change it? Can we change the fact that you're in a fart-filled steel box for five hours? No. Can we change the fact that sometimes you get stuck next to the crying baby? No, we cannot. But what we can change, what American Airlines can offer is that one special person who invites the customer to "fly away with me."

LOUISE. *(Teasing.)* You mean the pilot.

SID. The stewardess! It's a known fact, it is practically science: Men have a natural attraction to stewardesses.

2 This segment is based on an actual experiment by composer John Cage.

LOUISE. That's science, huh?

SID. I have three college friends who married stewardesses.

LOUISE. How many of them are still married?

SID. One, and they have a beautiful relationship.

Aaron Ehrlich enters with a book. He always wears dark-tinted glasses.

AARON. Sid, I'm telling you, you've got to read this book. It's terrifying.

SID. Aaron, I'm in the middle of something.

AARON. I'm on the chapter where it describes how the Soviets have targeted our cities.

SID. I don't want to hear about that book. Now if you don't mind.

AARON. Don't we have a meeting with Mr. Bernbach?

SID. He's on his way.

AARON. Did he say what the meeting's for?

SID. No.

AARON. Whatever it is, it's big. The corridors are buzzing.

SID. Aaron, I'm trying to pitch an idea on Lou.

AARON. So she can turn around and make it better?

SID. Hey! *(To Louise.)* Lou, how long do you think the career of a stewardess is?

AARON. *(In the book.)* In Alabama's bigger cities, like Birmingham, the Soviets would hit with ten megatons. Why so many megatons?

SID. The average career of a stewardess is two years. Do you know why it's only two years?

AARON. Because they marry the customers.

SID. Because they marry the customers.

AARON. *(In the book.)* But in Alabama's smaller cities like Tuscaloosa, the Soviets would hit with only half a megaton.

LOUISE. *(To Sid.)* So what's your pitch, Sid?

AARON. *(Flipping pages.)* What's it say about New York?

LOUISE. American Airlines starts offering weddings on trans-Atlantic flights?

SID. You got a better angle? Be my guest.

LOUISE. Right, so you can tell Bernbach it's yours.

SID. What's that supposed to mean?

AARON. *(In the book.)* Aw, geez. New York's going to be hit with a hundred megatons. My wife's going to lose it.

LOUISE. I know how things work, Sid. A bunch of ideas get tossed around. You put in your two cents, I put in a nickel. All of a sudden, you're walking around with seven cents.

AARON. You should've heard Vera when she read about radiation burns. I thought only bats could hit that frequency.

SID. Aaron, if you don't shut up about that book—

LOUISE. What's this book?

AARON. *(Gives it to her.)* Lou, you got to read this. It's important.

SID. It's depressing.

LOUISE. *(Reading the title.) Strategy for Survival: A Comprehensive Account of Thermonuclear War*.

SID. *(To Aaron.)* I'm surprised Vera sleeps with you.

AARON. Vera's the one who bought it. She's more scared than I am. I'm the voice of reason. When is Mr. Bernbach going to get here?

SID. Stop acting so nervous!

AARON. I can't help it. He's intimidating.

LOUISE. Mr. Bernbach's not intimidating. He's formidable. Just don't disappoint him.

AARON. I don't think Mr. Bernbach likes me. He always looks at me like I'm peculiar.

SID. Maybe it's the glasses.

AARON. They're prescription! I've got a condition!

SID. So, Lou, what do you think the meeting's for? Betcha five bucks it's a merger.

LOUISE. Five bucks. That's dinner and a movie.

SID. Dinner and a movie wouldn't cost anything if you had someone paying for it.

AARON. I'll tell you what the meeting's about. I think I'm getting fired.

DAISY
by Sean Devine

5M, 1W

It's the fall of 1964. Bloody turmoil over civil rights is spilling onto the streets. A fearful ideology is growing from the conservative right. The threat of nuclear war is palpable. And a little skirmish in the far-off nation of Vietnam just won't go away. With a presidential election looming, a group of "ad-men" working for Lyndon Johnson unleash the most devastating political commercial ever conceived, the "Daisy ad." Based on true events, DAISY explores the moment in television history that launched the age of negative advertising, and forever changed how we elect our leaders. War was the objective. Peace was the bait. Everyone got duped.

"[DAISY] is a story that, through history's irritating tendency to repeat itself… resonates so deeply with our current moment that it should be required viewing for all registered voters."
—Seattle Weekly

"…engaging and powerful… [A] fascinating piece of historical theatre…"
—BroadwayWorld.com

"Devine's writing is sharp and clever, and DAISY is clear, concise and even-handed."
—City Arts (Seattle, WA)

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