

NOËL & MARLENE

**a play about Noel Coward and Marlene Dietrich
as they might have done back in the 1950s**

**by
PIETER-DIRK UYS**

*WE ARE IN A SMALL OFF-BROADWAY THEATRE.
IT IS A DAY IN 1953 .*

*NOEL COWARD IS REHEARSING HIS NEW LAS VEGAS CABARET.
ON STAGE IS THE PIANO.*

*ON THE PIANO A SELECTION OF BEAUTIFULLY FRAMED POTRAITS OF
FRIENDS OF NOEL COWARD: VIVIEN LEIGH AND LAURENCE OLIVIER,
GERTRUDE LAWRENCE, MARGOT FONTEYN. AND MARLENE DIETRICH.*

THERE IS A CHAIR..

ON IT, A TOP HAT AND CANE.

A DRESS JACKET HANGS OFF THE CHAIR.

SPOTLIGHTS ARE FLASHED AND RESET.

WE HEAR NOËL COWARD SPEAK FROM THE DARKENED AUDITORIUM.

NOËL: I need more light on the piano. Can you hear me up there? The
 piano!

*NOËL ENTERS IN HIS DRESSING GOWN OVER HIS DRESS SUIT, CARRYING A
CUP OF TEA. HE SPEAKS TO THE LIGHTING MAN UP IN THE ROOF.*

I come on without any fuss. Waves of applause. I bow.
Casually waving my credentials. I say, once the applause has
died down and they've stopped throwing flowers and panties
and money
"Greeting, dear Las Vegas audience!
My name is Noël Coward. And this is my delicious cup of tea.
Because, and don't tell a soul because it's my secret – I'm
English!"
Then I put the cup of tea down can I put it directly on the
piano? Is this a Steinway? Never mind I sit down
then hit me with the light gently boy, don't mug me,
illuminate me!
I go directly into Nina!

HE SINGS HIS SONG: "NINA"

Senorita Nina
From Argentina
Knew all the answers
Although her relatives and friends were perfect dancers
She swore she'd never dance as step until she died.
She said, 'I've seen too many movies
And all they prove is
Too idiotic,
They all insist that South America's exotic
Whereas it couldn't be more boring if it tried.'
She added firmly that she hated
The sound of soft guitars beside a still lagoon,
She also positively stated
That she could not abide a Southern moon,
She said with most refreshing candour
That she thought Carmen Miranda
Was subversive propoganda
And should rapidly be shot,
She said she didnt care a jot if people quoted her or not!
She refused to begin the beguine
When they requested it,
And she made an embarrassing scene
If anyone suggested it
For she detested it.
Though no one ever could be keener
Than little Nina
On quite a number of very eligible men who did the Rumba
When they proposed to her she simply left them flat.
She said that love should be impulsive
But not compulsive,
And syncopation
Had a discouraging effect on procreation
And that she'd rather read a book –
and that was that!

Senorita Nina!

Deceptively simple, but a bugger to pronounce clearly.

Nina-nina-nina from Argentina-tina-tina

I think I'll need another light change when I get to "Twentieth Century Blues"

Top of page I think 12?

"Its 1953."

We're halfway through the century.....

HE SINGS HIS SONG "20TH CENTURY BLUES"

*Why is it that civilized humanity
Must make the world so wrong?
In this hurly-burly of insanity
Our dreams cannot last long.
We've reached a deadline –
The Press headline – every sorrow,
Blues value
Is News value
Tomorrow*

*Blues,
Twentieth Century Blues,
Are getting me down.
Who's
Escaped those weary
Twentieth Century Blues.
Why,
Is there's a God in the sky,
Why shouldn't he grin?
High
Above this dreary
Twentieth Century din.*

*In this strange illusion,
Chaos and confusion,
People seem to lose their way.
What is there to strive for,
Love or keep alive for? Say -
Hey, hey , call it a day.
Blues,
Nothing to win or to lose.
It's getting me down.
Blues,
I've got those weary
Twentieth Century Blues.*

Thank you. You're a wonderful audience and I'll soon be in floods of tears.

HE SINGS HIS SONG "IF LOVE WERE ALL"

*Life is very rough and tumble
For a humble disease;
One can betray one's troubles never,
Whatever occurs.
Night after night have to look bright
Whether you're well or ill;
People must laugh their fill
You mustn't sleep till dawn comes creeping.
Tho' I really never grumble,
Life's a jumble indeed
And in my efforts to succeed
I've had to formulate a creed.

I believe in doing what I can,
In crying when I must,
in laughing when I choose.*

*Heigh ho,
If love were all I should be lonely.
I believe the more you love a man.
The more you give your trust,
the more you're bound to lose:
Although when shadows fall I think if only
Somebody splendid really needed me,
Someone affectionate and dear,
Cares would be ended if I knew that he
Wanted to have me near.
But I believe that since my life began
The most I've had is just a talent to amuse.
Heigh ho,
If love were all.*

That one gets them each time. Me too. I shouldn't really be so moved by my own work, but I can't help it! And now my most recent work of art. A tribute to the land who has given me the benefit of the doubt.

HE SINGS HIS SONG "I LOVE AMERICA"

*I like America
I have played around
Every slappy-happy hunting-ground,
But I find America – okay ...
I've roamed the Spanish Main,
Eaten sugar cane,
But I never tasted cellophane
Till I struck the U S A.
All delegates
From Southern States
Are nervy and distraught.
In New Orleans*

*The wrought-iron screens
Are dreadfully overwrought.
Beneath each tree
In Tennessee
Erotic books are read,
And when alligators thud
Through the Mississippi mud
Sex rears its ugly head,
But – I like America,
Every scrap of it,
All the sentimental crap of it,
And come what may,
I shall return one day
To the good old U S A.*

WE HEAR MARLENE CALL FROM THE FOYER:

MARLENE: *(OFF)* Noël?

NOËL: *(CALLS)* I'm working, Marlene!
(TO LIGHTING MAN) Don't worry about her. An old German
refugee. Follows me everywhere! I think we're still fighting
about something, so I won't speak to her!
HE PLAYS ON

MARLENE: *(OFF)* Hello?
MARLENE ENTERS THROUGH AUDITORIUM
What on earth are you doing rehearsing in this horrible theatre,
Noël? I've been looking all over New York for you Why
don't you return my messages?

NOËL: I'm working, Marlene!

MARLENE: Who were you talking to? Hello? Ah, the lighting man up in the gods. Hello. I think you need another light from there. Will make Mr Coward look so much younger.

NOËL: Don't interfere darling.

MARLENE: I'm just passing on what Josef von Sternberg taught me. Pink, not amber? And try some blue at the back.

NOËL: I don't like blue.

MARLENE: Then take away the blue, darling. Mr Coward doesn't like blue! I was in the neighbourhood, shopping for my daughter Maria that's green! Don't ever use green!

NOËL: I'm rehearsing, Marlene!

MARLENE: Ja ja, you must also eat. I brought back the spare key to your apartment.

NOËL: You see, she's one of my dearest friends. If not my oldest?

MARLENE: Green on Mr Coward! Lots of green!
HE PLAYS ON
New song?

NOËL: You've heard it before?

MARLENE: No.

NOËL: No, because it is a new song.
(TO LIGHTING MAN) Let's get some razzmatazz on page 17?
Something vibrantly American!
(TO MARLENE) Forgive me darling.

HE PLAYS ON

- MARLENE: It's very nice.
- NOËL: Marlene darling, it may be charming, exciting, brilliant, unique, extraordinary, even dazzling. But nice? Please God, let is never be 'nice'!
- MARLENE: Sehr schön.
- NOËL: Ah yes, the difference an umlaut can make.
- MARLENE: I mean it well.
- NOËL: 'Nice' is not an English word I like. Nice in France is a charming overpriced resort, but 'nice'? Not nice! Colourless and smells like some cheap lavatory disinfectant.
- MARLENE: I also want to say sorry.
- NOËL: What for darling? Sorry for Hitler? For bombing Poland? Sorry for strudel?
- MARLENE: I don't know why you always say those things. That's not funny, Noël. It's tragic.
- NOËL: It's humour.
- MARLENE: No. It's bad taste.
- NOËL: One cannot use good taste when joking about Herr Hitler.
- MARLENE: I can't laugh about Hitler.

NOËL: But you must admit, Marlene? Thoughts of him sitting in his ghastly teutonic Eagles Nest in Bechtesgaten, shivering in the cold and listening to your old records while dreaming about you as his perfect hausfrau? It is amusing.

MARLENE: I don't think about that. Anyway, every time he invited me back to his Third Reich, I turned him down. I said no. Nein danke. Schwein!

NOËL: Good for you, darling. That Nazi schwein! You won us the war. Listen to this bit . . .

SINGS:

*No likely lass in Boston, Mass from passion will recoil
In Dallas Tex they talk of sex but only think of oil*

*New Jersey dames go up in flames if someone mentions bed
In Chicago Illinois any girl who meets a boy giggles and
shoots him dead*

*But I like America
It's society offers infinite variety
And come what may I shall return some day
to the good old U S A*

SHE DISCOVERS HIS CIGARETTES AND TAKES ONE
Are you smoking again?

MARLENE: No, I'm just pretending. It's been three months last Tuesday! God I need a cigarette. I am so irritated! I can't believe it. Photoplay magazine arranged an interview this morning about my latest film "Rancho Notorious". You saw it? No. Anyway this young reporter was young enough to be my grandchild. And she starts the interview with: "Miss Dietrich? In which year were you born?"

NOËL: You should've told her. 1456!

MARLENE: She didn't know the names of my films. She didn't know the details of my career. She had not done her homework. Typical of the youth of today! They know nothing!

NOËL: Relax, Marlene. Your generation gap is showing!

MARLENE: I will not be treated like an old hasbeen! And don't say anything!

NOËL: My lips are sealed. I don't want to pick a fight again.

MARLENE: Nor do I. Besides, I don't know what our argument was about

NOËL: I don't remember. Besides, darling, I don't have arguments. I am Noël Coward. I have brilliant curtain lines and then exit!

MARLENE: You made fun of me in front of all those people, Noël.

NOËL: That was six months ago!

MARLENE: You said I was an old hasbeen. A faded blue angel gone to seed. It was hurtful and unnecessary.

NOËL: I don't make fun of you, Marlene. I play with you. I tease you with words. I tickle you with laughter. I prick you with the occasional bitchy remark, but I still love you. And sometimes you are a very typical middle-aged German hausfrau, who is today looking rather seedy! Your hair!

MARLENE: What's wrong with my hair?

NOËL: Ask it, darling! I'm sure it will scream at you: TLC!

MARLENE: TLC?

NOËL: Tender loving care!

MARLENE: I don't like being bad friends. So I swallowed my pride and came here to say sorry.

NOËL: Thank you, darling. Apology accepted.

MARLENE: You should be the one to say sorry.

NOËL: Sorrrryy? Can't get my tongue round all those rrr 's . . .

MARLENE: Peace offering? I brought you some strudel.

NOËL: Oh God, lunch?

MARLENE: You love my strudel.

NOËL: I'm sure I do.

MARLENE: And while I'm here, let me clean this stage!

NOËL: No! I don't mind you carrying plates of doughy Germanic delicacies into my life, but don't try and clean up after me like a nanny.

MARLENE: Your apartment is filthy!

NOËL: My flat is clean!

MARLENE: It's dirty!

NOËL: The only dirty thing there, darling is my mind and that's not on view. Just touch my stage and it'll be total war, Marlene! I'll tell everybody you're over sixty!

MARLENE: You need a woman's touch.

NOËL: Yes. She's called Mrs Pawalovski and she comes in on Tuesday and Friday. Otherwise there's a dear old man called Butch who sweeps and cleans the theatre.

MARLENE: Dust!

NOËL: Atmosphere!

MARLENE: Dirt!

NOËL: Nonsense!

MARLENE: Where do I put the strudel? Next to Vivien Leigh or behind Margot Fonteyn?

NOËL: Leave it right there in front of Gertie Lawrence. Thank you darling. I can't wait to chew my way through it. Now goodbye. My muse calls. Oh, and the key?

MARLENE: OK

SHE MAKES TO LEAVE, BUT HE NOW REALISES THAT SHE NEEDS TO TALK. STARTS TEASING HER GENTLY.

NOËL: I need the spare key. Greta wants one.

MARLENE: Greta? Greta who?

NOËL: Garbo. Comes in Sunday mornings and polishes the old silver.

MARLENE: Garbo comes to your apartment? What does she want there?

NOËL: It's a joke, Marlene.
SINGS A RUMBA
It's a joke, Marlene, it's a joke!
It's a joke, Marlene, it's a joke!
Joking joking über alles!
Just a joke, Marlene, just a joke!

MARLENE: It must be a joke, because I really can't see what Greta Garbo would see in you. She doesn't even understand English.

HE KISSES HER. TRIES TO MAKE UP.

NOËL: I know I'm being a beast. Such a dear little strudel. Thank you. Come, take off your coat. Tell Dad what the problem is.

MARLENE: No. I won't stay.

NOËL: Coffee in the green room?

MARLENE: Not unless I make it myself, in a cup I first clean and on a tray scrubbed by me!

NOËL: Drinkie-poo? It is afternoon? Nice martini or two?

MARLENE: Eh No.

NOËL: A new Coward song then?

HE SINGS WHAT SOUNDS LIKE A LLOYD-WEBBER SONG FROM EVITA. THEN STOPS.

*“I had to let it happen . . .
I had to change . . . “*

I tried that one on the last night of my act, but threw it out.

MARLENE: Sounds like Puccini.

NOËL: Alas, most cheap music does!

MARLENE: Your nightclub act was a great success, was it Noël?

NOËL: Las Vegas. Can you believe it? A new lease of life there in the desert among the crap tables and the fruit machines. When the Mafia man with the cigar offered me the contract, the money was so outrageous I thought I'll just sing the telephone book and hope for the best.

MARLENE: If you're going back, it must have been a success then?

NOËL: You saw my act!

MARLENE: No.

NOËL: You were seen lurking in the shadows making notes.

MARLENE: No, I was here in New York. My grandsons had birthdays. Maria needed me

NOËL: Then there is a man or a woman who looks remarkably like you lurking in the dark corners spying on great artists and stealing their ideas.

MARLENE: How can I steal your ideas. I don't understand half of them most of the time!

NOËL: A mutual friend suggested – never-mind-whom – that you should start planning an act of your own?

MARLENE: Why?

NOËL: Get out of your middle-aged doldrums.

MARLENE: Nonsense, I'm only 39!

NOËL: Reinvent yourself, like I did!

MARLENE: Who suggested that? Orson Welles?

NOËL: A little bird?

MARLENE: Not Orson Welles. A nightclub act? Me?

NOËL: The money's good.

MARLENE: That's a very good reason for you to make a fool of yourself in Las Vegas!

NOËL: Just think: the world's most glamorous grandmother! On stage! Wearing a slinky gown, a big big fur!

MARLENE: And doing what?

NOËL: Scrubbing the stage like a hausfrau!

MARLENE: What do I know about the modern stage. I'm just an old hasbeen movie star, ja?

NOËL: Bake a strudel in a film can? And stop saying that! I teased you! Marlene, life can begin at 50!

MARLENE: Why is it always men who say that with a smile? So? Maybe I could sing? If you can sing, I can sing!

NOËL: I will take that in the spirit in which it was intended and not regard it as a stupid snide comment that belittles your intelligence and my talent!

MARLENE: A joke, Noël, a joke
SINGS IN STYLE OF GOD SAVE THE KING
It's just a little joke,
It's just a tiny joke;
God save the joke!

NOËL: You're a movie star, darling! What do you know about singing live? Voice projection? Technique?

MARLENE: Nothing I can't learn? At least I know more about lighting, wearing make-up and dresses than you!
(CALLS OUT) Could you make this microphone live?
(INTO MIKE) Hello? Yes, mike, lighting, good orchestrations? All I need is people to remember the films. I'll be a scrapbook of cinematic memories!

NOËL: And what would you sing?

MARLENE: I eh I don't know Do you have some ideas?

NOËL: Wagner!

MARLENE: What?

NOËL: Sing Wagner naked in a foxfur!

MARLENE: That could be funny! What about something by Kurt Weill?

NOËL: Too depressing. Even naked in a fur!

MARLENE: Mack the Knife maybe?

NOËL: Oh I'm sorry, that's different. Mack the Knife! Great fun.
Lovely song about a man and his knife! Perfect for the family.
Which key?

MARLENE: Key? I don't need a key. I start and they find me.
SINGS "MACK THE KNIFE"
Und der Haifisch, der hat Zähne
Und die trägt er im Gesicht
Und Macheath, der hat ein Messer
Doch das Messer sieht man nicht
La la la la . . .
(SMILES AT HIM) So? What you think?

NOËL: Sorry darling, you make it sound like Wagner!

MARLENE: Maybe we leave Weill. His wife Lotte Lenya will kill me.
What about the songs from my films?

NOËL: Really? You sang?

MARLENE: Of course. 'Falling in Love Again'. In 'The Blue Angel'?

NOËL: Never say that. I was too young. They wouldn't let me in.

MARLENE: I sat fatly on a barrel and shouted the words!
SHOUTS "FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN"
Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss
auf Liebe eingestellt
Und das is meine Welt
un sonst garrnicht . . .

NOËL: Very nice.

MARLENE: Quatsch und drek! And what do you mean you were too young. Sometimes you're so much older than me.

NOËL: Not always. Certainly not this afternoon.

MARLENE: I'm not on show this afternoon!

NOËL: Good. In this light you look old enough to be my mother's spinster sister Mabel.

MARLENE: You can really be mean sometimes! Beastly!

NOËL: Ah. Don't let's be beastly to the Germans!
SINGS
Don't let's be beastly to the Germans
When our victory is ultimately won
It was just those nasty Nazis
who persuaded them to fight
and their Beethoven and Bach
are really far worse than their bite
Let's be meek to them
and turn the other cheek to them
And try to bring out their latent sense of fun
Let's give them full air parity
and treat the rats with charity
But don't let's be beastly to the Hun!

MARLENE: So easy for you to make fun of the Germans. You just don't know how we Germans also can laugh at you English!

NOL: So do I! Those Mad dogs and Englishmen!

MARLENE: I know that song! Yours?

NOËL: Actually, yes.

MARLENE: I thought it was by Ivor Novello! I sang it to Alfred Hitchcock at his birthday. I said: Mr Hitchcock, here is a special song for you, some people even say, about you

SINGS

Mad dogs and Englishmen

Go out in the midday sun

The Japanese don't care to

The Chinese wouldn't dare to

Hindus and Argentines

sleep firmly from twelve to one

But Englishmen detest to siesta

In a jungle town

where the sun beats down

to the rage of man or beast

The English garb of the English Sahib

merely gets a bit more creased

In Bangkok at twelve o'clock

they foam at the mouth and run

But mad dogs and Englishmen

Go out in the midday

out in the midday

out in the midday

sun

NOËL: Hun!

MARLENE: Remember I escaped the Nazis.

NOËL: Don't forget I escaped the English!

MARLENE: Your funny songs are so silly. They all sound the same to me .
. . . .

NOËL: Then don't put your daughter on the stage, Mrs . . . What was
your mother's name?

MARLENE: Frau Von Losch?

NOËL: Rhymes with Bosch!
SINGS
Don't put your daughter on the stage
Frau von Losch my dear
Don't put Marlene on the stage
One look at her bandy legs should prove
She hasn't got a chance
In addition to which
the crafty old bitch
can neither sing or dance

She's a Kurt Weill girl
and uglier than mortal sin
One look at her has put me
in a tearing bloody rage

Du Lieber Gott! Frau von Losch my dear!
Rot, Frau von Losch my dear!
Don't put Marlene on the stage!

MARLENE: Now me!
SINGS
Regarding yours, dear Mrs Coward
Of Wednesday 23rd?

*Although your baby maybe
keen on a stage career
how can I make it clear?
This is not a good idea!*

*For him to hope, dear Mrs Coward
Is on the face of it absurd
Noël's personality
is not in reality
exciting enough
inviting enough
for this particular sphere!*

NOËL: Balls!

MARLENE: Typical male reaction!

NOËL: *Don't put this woman on the stage
Dear Producer Chum
Don't put Miss Dietrich on the stage!*

MARLENE: Why not?

NOËL: *She's a bit of an ugly duckling
You must honestly confess*

MARLENE: Quack quack!

NOËL: *And the width of her seat
Will surely defeat
Her chances of success . . .*

MARLENE: Nein nein nein!

NOËL: Nein?

MARLENE: Ten!

NOËL: *It's a loud voice
And tho it's not exactly flat
She'll need a little more than that
To earn a living wage*

*On my knees Producer Worthington
Consider her fee Mr Worthington
Don't put Marlene on the stage!*

MARLENE: Thank you for that great show of support!

NOËL: Marlene, you'll be wonderful. It's never been done before.

MARLENE: Box Office poison coming back from the dead?

NOËL: It's 1953, darling. Plug into the new alphabet! Get a nip here, a tuck there. I know a marvellous Swiss doctor with an inexhaustible supply of little bull's glands! Publicity. Television. There are new young people out there rediscovering Dietrich on the late late show!

MARLENE: It's very tempting. You make it sounds so easy . . . I could start my nightclub act with songs from my films. 'Falling in love again'. There's also 'Go see what the boys in backroom will have'

NOËL: I should have written that

MARLENE: 'Lola'?

NOËL: I should have been that! Lola Coward! Bellydancer
Extraordinaire!

MARLENE: And then one or two of your little songs? Etwas schön, Noël?

NOËL: I don't know about my songs, darling, but I'll certainly write
you an introduction.

MARLENE: Yes. Dietrich introduced by Coward!

NOËL: And I don't think you should do Las Vegas. Start in London.
It's gentler. The Café de Paris. I'll speak to Binkie.

MARLENE: And how will you introduce me?

NOËL: I don't know . . . something with deep religious overtones?
*"We know God made the trees
And the birds and the bees
And the sea for the fishes to swim in
We are also aware
That he had quite a flair
For creating exceptional women . . ."*?

MARLENE: But I don't know what to wear?

NOËL: They'll expect you to wear the full Joseph von Sternberg drag.
Feathers and furs

MARLENE: I'm so sick of feathers and furs! And must they always get
what they expect?

NOËL: Now you're sounding like someone I can talk to! No! Give
them the shock of their lives! Darling, go to my dressingroom.
Second to the left down the passage. In the cupboard you'll
find my spare dress suits. Try it on.

MARLENE: Your dress-suit? You want Marlene Dietrich to wear a man's trouser suit? Shocking!

NOËL: Yes. Don't give them what they expect

MARLENE: But my hair, I have no make-up

NOËL: Tallulah Bankhead always keeps a spare pair of eyelashes in my make-up box. And there's also a Bloomingdale bag with a blonde wig in it. Try that for style.

MARLENE: Also one of yours?

NOËL: No. Actually your friend Yul came to my party last week wearing it. He asked me to return it to the shop on 27th Street.

MARLENE: Yul Brynner? My friend? What do you know about me and Yul Brynner?

NOËL: You're fucking like rattlesnakes!

MARLENE: No one knows.

NOËL: Everyone knows, except Mrs Brynner.

MARLENE: Gossip.

NOËL: Unbridled Sex. Yul came to my party dressed as you!

MARLENE: Yes, I heard you had a marvellous fancy dress party!

NOËL: You weren't invited, Marlene. We were still fighting, remember?

MARLENE: I wouldn't have come.

NOËL: So Yul came as Marlene. Bit short, but those eyes! Those lips. Those legs.

MARLENE: He was with me all last week!

NOËL: Ha, but even Lorelei sleeps! He slipped away and came to my birthday party. He came as you, as opposed to in you or on you!

MARLENE: Yul Brynner does not dress up as a woman.

NOËL: No, darling, you dress up as a woman! And how well you do it too.

MARLENE: I'm going home if you're going to be satirical with me!

NOËL: Marlene darling, trust me. I love you.

MARLENE: I don't know; you laugh at me

NOËL: You don't have to understand me, just trust me. When we laugh, we laugh with Marlene. Not at Dietrich. Join in the laughter.

MARLENE: I would, if I thought something was funny. I'm now sorry I never made it to your fancy dress party. It really sounds very . . . nice? I could've come as that funny little manNoël Coward.

EXITS

NOËL SINGS: "POOR LITTLE RICH GIRL"

*You're only a baby
You're lonely and maybe
Someday soon yo'll know
The tears you are tasting
Are years you are wasting
Life's a bitter foe
With fate it's no use competing
Youth is so terribly fleeting
By dancing much faster
You're chancing disaster
Time alone with show*

*Poor little rich girl
You're a betwitched girl
Better beware!
Laughing at danger
Virtue a stranger
Better take care!*

*The life you lead
sets all you nerves ajangle
Your love affairs
are in a hopeless tangle
Though you're a child, dear
Your life's a wild typhoon
In lives of leisure
The craze for pleasure steadily grows
Cocktails and laughter
But what comes after? Nobody knows
You're weaving love into a mad jazz pattern
Ruled by pantaloons
Poor little rich girl
Don't drop a stitch too soon*

MARLENE ENTERS IN TAILS AND WIG

NOËL: Good God darling, now you really look like Yul Brynner!

MARLENE: Your trousers don't fit. And the hair feels funny.

NOËL: It works! The eyelashes!

MARLENE: I can't see a thing!

NOËL: And use that top hat.

MARLENE: Someone sat on it?

NOËL: Tallulah was sick in it! Joking, darling, joking!

MARLENE: Didn't you use this cane in one of your shows?

NOËL: And late at night on naughty fans.

MARLENE: Joking?

NOËL: No. Good? Now put Lilli Marlene back under the spotlight!
There's nothing like a live audience, Marlene!

MARLENE: I have little experience of live audiences

NOËL: The War? Tell your audience, Marlene!

MARLENE: Ah yes, the war.
*"I am going to sing you a song I sang during the war. I sang it
for three long years. Through Africa, Sicily, Greenland,
Iceland. Through Italy, France, Belgium, Holland. Through
Germany into Czechoslovakia. The soldiers loved it.*

'Lilli Marlene'!

SINGS:

*Outside the barracks by the corner light
I'll always stand and wait for you at night
We will create a world that's true
I'll wait for you
the whole night through
for you Lilli Marlene
for you Lilli Marlene"*

NOËL: Yes, darling, yes! Get back on your barrel and give it to them!
Talk to them! They're your audience!

MARLENE: *" I'm going to sing you some songs from my films. But first let me tell you how I got into films. I was in a theatre school in Europe, when a very famous film director, Mr Joseph von Sternberg came over to make a picture. The name of the picture? The Blue Angel. He'd looked at all the actresses and then he looked at us students. And one day I was asked to come and make a test for the part. And I was told to bring along a very naughty song. Well, I was sure I wouldn't get the part that I went there without the song. But the director had great patience with me and said: 'as long as you didn't bring along any naughty songs, sing any song you like.' And I said: 'I like American songs.' So he said: 'Sing an American song.' And here is the song that brought me into films."*

NOËL: What was the song?

MARLENE: I think one by the greatest songwriter of them all. Cole Porter?

NOËL: I'll throw the cup at you, Marlene!

MARLENE: But remember Noël, you were not yet born then? And here is the song from the Blue Angel.

SINGS FALLING IN LOVE AGAIN

I often stop and wonder

Why I appeal to men

How many times I blunder

In love and out again

They offer me devotion

I like it I confess

When I reflect emotion

There's no need to guess

I'm falling in love again

Never wanted to

What am I to do

I can't help it.

Love's always been my game

Play it how I may

I was made that way

I can't help it

Männer umschwert mich wie Motte um das Licht

Und wenn sie verbrennen

Ja da für kann ich nicht

Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss

Auf Liebe eingestellt

Ich kann halb Lieben nur

Und sonst garnicht

NOËL: Good, darling! Now try one of my really naughty ones! Nina!

MARLENE: It's another of your funny songs, Noël. I don't think that's for me

NOËL: Come. I know you can't read music, but follow my lips!
SINGS "NINA"
"Senorita Nina from Argentina
Knew all the answers"

MARLENE: No wait! These words are very silly
READS:
"She said I've seen too many movies
And they all prove is
too idiotic
They all insist that South America's exotic
Whereas it couldn't be more boring if it tried"
 Too many words.

NOËL: It's called the English language.

MARLENE: Not for me.

NOËL: Oh come now, Marlene! It's so simple

MARLENE: Simple? Everything to you is simple! OK? So now you try some of my complicated Wagner? "Johnny"! And you will have to sing it in German because no English words were ever written for it! But I'll tell you what it's about; it's very simple. It's about a girl telephoning her man. Asking him to come over. If he's not free in the evening? The afternoons will do!
SINGS
"Johnny . . .
Wenn du Geburtstag hast . . ."

NOËL: "Johnny
 Why don't you come to tea".

MARLENE: *“Bin ich bei dir zu Gast
die ganze Nacht”*

NOËL: “I want you just to see
me in my bed “

MARLENE: That’s not the right translation!
SINGS:
*“Johnny
Ich träum so viel von Dir”*

NOËL: ”Johnny
I dream of you each night”

MARLENE: *“Ach kom doch mal zu Mir
Nachmittags um halb vier
Ohhh “*

NOËL: “I look a proper sight
Without my wig and teeth and tits and . . .
Oh . . . Johnny”

MARLENE: Teeth? Tits? No! You make everything sound like you wrote it
first.

NOËL: Maybe I did.

MARLENE: I can’t sing it like that. My audience won’t like it.

NOËL: If you sing it in German, they won’t know the difference. Now
sing what do you know of mine? Besides Ivor Novello’s
version of Mad Dogs and Englishmen?

MARLENE: 'A Womb with a View'. I was going to surprise you with it at your party, but you never invited me so I learnt it all for nothing.

NOËL: A Rrrrrrooom with a view.

MARLENE: Yes, wwwomb with a view.

NOËL: You must roll your arrs.

MARLENE: No darling, you roll your arse. Begin

SINGS "A ROOM WITH A VIEW"

I've been cherishing

through the perishing

winter nights and days

A funny little phrase

that means

Such a lot to me

that you've got to be

with me heart and soul

For on you the whole thing leans

Won't you kindly tell me

what you're driving at

What conclusion you're arriving at?

Please don't turn away

Or my dream will stay

hidden out of sight

Among a lot of might-have-beens

A room with a View

And you

and no one to worry us

no one to hurry us through

this dream we've found

*We'll gaze at the sky
and try
to guess what it's all about
when we will figure out
why the world is round*

*We'll be as happy and contented
as birds upon a tree
High above the mountains and sea
We'll bill and and we'll coo-ooo
And sorrow will never come
Oh will it ever come true?
Our room with a view*

HE APPLAUDS

I wonder what it will sound like in German?
"Ein Zimmer mit eine Schöne Auzzicht!
Und dich!"
Nein, Vile!

NOËL: Weill!

MARLENE: I like this one. "Matelot". I used to sing it with Jean Gabin.
We were on his boat off Cap Ferrat. He had such a beautiful
deep voice. Deeper than mine.

NOËL: You loved him very much?

MARLENE: My love has no past tense. Play it?

NOËL: *SINGS "MATELOT"*
"Jean Louis Dominic Pierre Bouchon
True to the breed that bore him
Answered the call
That held in thrall
His father's heart before him

Jean Louis Dominic sailed away
Further than love could find him
Yet thro' the night
He heard a light and gentle voice
behind him say . . .

MARLENE: *Matelot Matelot*
Where you go
My thoughts go with you
Matelot Matelot
When you go down to the sea

NOËL: *As you gaze from afar*
On the evening star
Wherever you may roam
You will remember the light
That guides you safely home
Tho' you find womankind to be frail
One love cannot fail, my son
Till our days go done

MARLENE: *Matelot Matelot*
Where you go
My thoughts go with you
Matelot Matelot
When you go down to the sea"

NOËL:

This song can only be sung by a man

SINGS "MAD ABOUT THE BOY"

*I met him at a party
just a couple of years ago
He was rather overheartly
and ridiculous
But as I'd seen him
on the screen
He cast a certain spell
I bask'd in his attraction
for a couple of hours or so
His manners were a fraction
too meticulous
If he was real or not
I couldn't tell
But like a silly fool
I fell*

*Mad about the boy
I know it's stupid to be
mad about the boy
I'm so ashamed of it
But must admit
The sleepless nights
I've had about the boy*

*On the silver screen
He melts my foolish heart
in every single scene
Although I'm quite aware
that here and there
are traces of the cad about the boy*

Lord knows I'm not a fool girl

*I really shouldn't care
Lord knows I'm not a schoolgirl
in the flurry of her first affair
Will it every cloy
This odd diversity of misery and joy
I'm feeling quite insane
and young again
And all because
I'm mad about the boy!*

MARLENE: Maybe this song could also be sung by a woman?

NOËL: An older woman?

MARLENE: An older woman.

NOËL: A lonely woman?

MARLENE: *SINGS "MAD ABOUT THE BOY"*
*It seems a little silly
For a girl my age and weight
To walk down Piccadilly
in a haze of love
It ought to take a good deal more
to get a bad girl down
I should have been exempt for
My particular kind of fate has taught me
such contempt for
Ev'ry phrase of Love
And now I've been and spent my last halfcrown
To weep about a painted clown*

NOËL: *I'm mad about the boy*

MARLENE: *It's pretty funny
but I'm mad about the boy
He has a gay appeal
that makes me feel
there's something
sad about the boy
Walking down the street
His eyes look out at me
from people that I meet
I can't believe it's true
but when I'm blue
In some strange way
I'm glad about the boy*

NOËL: *I'm hardly sentimental
Love isn't so sublime
I have to pay the rental
And I can't afford to waste much time
If I could employ
A little magic
that would finally destroy
This dream that pains me
and enchains me
but I can't because
I'm mad about the boy*

THE PHONE RINGS

NOËL: Hello. Collect call from London? Laurence Olivier? Yes yes.
Larry darling. Dear boy dear boy? Where is she now?
(TO MARLENE) Vivien's having a turn
Will that help? Of course if it will help
Scarlett O'Hara needs a bit of tender loving care!

MARLENE: Are she and Olivier coming to New York?

NOËL: No shhhhh.
 Vivien my darling. Darling darling darling. Darling! Yes yes of course. I'm here with Marlene. She's popped into my rehearsal to give me notes. Oh yes, we're cleaning the whole theatre!

MARLENE: Did she get the strudel?

NOËL: Did you get strudel?
 (She says thank you for the strudel)

MARLENE: I sent it by courier

NOËL: Vivien darling, you sit comfortably? This is specially for you Marlene, hold the phone.

MARLENE: You're singing a song over the phone to London reversed charges? Ganz vorrückt!

NOËL: *SINGS " I'LL SEE YOU AGAIN"*
I'll see you again
Whenever spring breaks through again
Time may lie heavy between
But what has been
is past forgetting
This sweet memory
Across the years will come to me
Tho' my world will go awry
In my heard will ever lie
Just the echo of a sigh
Goodbye

NOËL: How do you feel darling?

MARLENE: Noël, this call is costing your whole next Las Vegas fee . . .

NOËL: Marlene, she wants you to sing something for her.

MARLENE: What's wrong with her?

NOËL: Life?

MARLENE: Nonsense, she's not eating properly.
TAKES THE PHONE
Hello, Vivien?
Yes, I'm alright? Noël is being silly as always. I don't know
that one, Vivien?
(The other song from Private Lives?)
Noël has the music
Mein Gott, the print is very small
HE GIVES HER HIS GLASSES
And Noël, don't ever joke and say I can't read music!
SINGS "SOMEDAY I'LL FIND YOU"
Someday I'll find you
Moonlight behind you
True to the dream I am dreaming
As I draw near you
You smile a little smile
For a little while
We shall stand
Hand in hand

I'll leave you never
Love you forever
All our past sorrows redeeming
Try to make it true

*Say you love me too
Someday I'll find you again
Wiedersehen*

NOËL: Now sleep darling. We love you.

REPLACES PHONE

MARLENE: I didn't know she was so bad.

NOËL: It comes and goes. Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh? It should be so perfect, but it's such hell for them both. Thank God we're single, Marlene?

MARLENE: Yes, thank God.

NOËL: How's your husband?

MARLENE: Rudolf's farming the chickens somewhere near Nevada. And how are your dear boys?

NOËL: And my dear boys are doing errands out there for their Master. In fact, one of them is up there helping with the lights.

MARLENE: *(LOOKS UP)* You're very very good, you know?

NOËL: But when push comes to shove, it's just us – out here alone against the world.

MARLENE: *SINGS:*
*Men cluster to me
like moths around the flame
and when their wings burn
I know I'm not to blame*

NOËL: *SINGS:*
But I believe
that since my life began
the most I've had
is just a talent to amuse

BOTH: *Heigh ho –*
if love were all

MARLENE: I'm sorry, the Master must rehearse! Anyway I must go and cook for Maria and my grandsons. Do you mind if I tidy the dressingroom? Just some order?

NOËL: Touch the chaos and you're a dead Kraut, woman!

MARLENE: Let me get changed

NOËL: Marlene, you look wonderful in my clothes.

MARLENE: I should. I do you at parties. Didn't you know?

NOËL: No

MARLENE: Trust me, Noël. You don't have to understand me, just trust me. When I laugh, you don't have to laugh with me. Just be frightened. Be very frightened.

SHE LAUGHS AND EXITS

NOËL: Are you still up there? Thank you for being so very very patient. You're a wonderful bunch of technicians! I'll do the one before the end?

SINGS: " THE PARTY'S OVER NOW"

*Night is over
Dawn is breaking
Everywhere the town is waking
Just as we are on our way to sleep
Lovers meet and dance a little
snatching from romance a little
souvenir of happiness to keep
The music of an hour ago
was just a sort of let's pretend
the melodies that charmed us so
at last are ended
The party's over now
The dawn is drawing very nigh
the candles gutter
the starlight leaves the sky
It's time for little boys and girls
to hurry home to bed
for there's a new day
waiting just ahead
Life is sweet
but time is fleet
beneath the magic of the moon
Dancing time may seem sublime
but it is ended all too soon
the thrill is gone
to linger on would spoil it anyhow
let's creep away from the day
for the party's over now*

MARLENE COMES BACK IN HER FUR COAT

So? What do you think? Are you going to give in to that grandmother in you? Or are you going to dazzle the world with that great star?

MARLENE: Well, Noël, as I said: if you can do it, I can do it.

NOËL: Reinvent yourself for a new generation?

MARLENE: Why not? Every generation needs a Dietrich.

NOËL: And a Coward.

MARLENE: And a Coward who is not a coward. Tell Tallulah the eyelashes now live in my makeup box! And eat the strudel soon. Boys? I brought some nice strudel.

NOËL: Wait, you can take the plate.

MARLENE: No, keep the plate. It's so ugly.

NOËL: Ah! I recognise it. It's my plate. Gertie gave it to me.

MARLENE: Ja? It's still ugly!

NOËL: Marlene? Why did you come here this afternoon? Surely not to relight the show?

MARLENE: I just needed to see you . . . I was lonely . . . after all, I'm one of your dearest, certainly your oldest friend?

NOËL: Most beautiful strudel maker in the world!

MARLENE: And your apartment key!

NOËL: Keep it for good luck.

MARLENE: Good luck? Luck has nothing to do with it, darling. It's just hard, hard work. You know and I know.

NOËL: Our secret?

MARLENE: So I'll see you again? At the Café de Paris in London? We'll put "Marlene Dietrich" in Cabaret!

NOËL: And I'll bring "Noël Coward"!

MARLENE EXITS

HE SINGS "PLAY ORCHESTRA PLAY"

Play orchestra play

Play something light and sweet and gay

For we must have music

We must have music

to drive our fears away

While our illusions swiftly fade for us

Let's have an orchestra score

In the confusions that years have made for us

Serenade for us just once more

Life needn't be grey

although it's changing day by day

Tho' a few old dreams may decay

Play orchestra play!

HE GETS UP AND BOWS

EXITS

WE ARE NOW AT THE CAFE DE PARIS IN LONDON ON THE OPENING NIGHT
OF MARLENE'S SHOW.

NOEL COWARD RE-ENTERS IN A SPOT AND INTRODUCES MARLENE
DIETRICH

NOEL: *We know God made the trees
 and the birds and the bees
 and the seas for the fishes to swim in
 We are also aware he had quite a flair
 for creating exceptional women
 Though we all might enjoy
 seeing Helen of Troy
 as a gay cabaret entertainer
 But I doubt if she could
 be one quarter as good
 as our legendary lovely Marlene.*

(MARLENE ENTERS TO MICROPHONE AND COWARD GOES TO PIANO)

MARLENE DIETRICH ENTERS IN THE FAMOUS OUTFIT. SHE DOES THE
ENTRANCE, THE MOVES, THE GESTURES.

SHE THEN SINGS "LOOK ME OVER CLOSELY"

*Look me over closely
Tell me what you see
The lady likes to look her best
Before she pours the tea
You'll see a diamond studded gown
That makes the evening sun go down
So look me over closely
Tell me what you find
But don't get over-anxious
I'm not the marryin' kind*

*I'm a port in a storm
A harbour where it's warm
In my arms you can hide
From the great big world outside
But when you come to see me
Don't try to change my ways
I have a part within my heart
And it will always stay
There's room for all
There's love for all
But please don't blame me if you fall
So look me over closely
For I may be the marryin' kind.....
For I may be the marryin' kind....
For I may be the marryin' kind!*

INTO

*Men cluster to me
Like moths around the flame
But when their wings burn
I know I'm not to blame
Falling in Love again
Never wanted to
What am I to do?..
I can't help it....*

A CURTAIN CALL THAT DOES THEM BOTH PROUD

END