

LIMB FROM LIMB
a digital play by Steven Gaultney

CAST:

Budi, *also Dionysus*
Carina, *also Agave*
Thomas, *also Pentheus*
Soldier

TIME:

2026

PLACE:

one step forward, three steps back

* * *

SCENES:

Introduction: Meditation, *the performers gather and lead the audience in a meditation*

Monologue One: Dionysus

Monologue Two: Pentheus

Interlude: Survey, *the performers chat with the audience, lead them in a toast*

Monologue Three: Thomas summarizes the Messenger monologue

Monologue Four: Agave

Epilogue: Catastrophe, *the play does not go on*

* * *

A NOTE ON ZOOM:

This play has been written to be performed live over Zoom (or a similar platform).

A NOTE ON CHARACTERS:

The characters of Budi, Carina, and Thomas have been written for three specific actors of the same names. Should the play be performed by different actors, the playwright will need to adapt the roles to fit.

A NOTE ON INTERLUDE:

For Interlude: Survey, the audience will be split into three groups, each led by one of the three actors. They will reconvene when noted, near the end of the scene.

A NOTE ON PAUSES:

I have used “pause,” “beat,” and “silence” in this script. Of these three, “pause” can be most liberally interpreted, the only specification being that action takes place in all pauses. A “beat” is a pause in which one character waits for and expects another to speak. A “silence” is a pause in which the pause itself becomes the dominant action.

A NOTE ON PUNCTUATION:

In this script, an ellipsis (...) in place of a line signals a character attempting, but failing, to speak.

AUDIENCE PREPARATION:

For the current production, prior to the performance the audience was instructed to gather three items to have with them during the performance: 1.) A candle, and something with which to light it. 2.) A pleasing beverage. 3.) A flower, or some other small object that is both fragrant and tactile.

INTRODUCTION: MEDITATION

(BUDI, THOMAS, and CARINA are on screen. BUDI is preparing for his Dionysus monologue - presetting costumes, applying make-up, etc. CARINA is texting.)

THOMAS

(to the audience)

Hello everyone
and welcome
to The Theatre of Others' presentation of *Limb from Limb*
adapted from Euripides' *The Bacchae*.

(to BUDI and CARINA)

Are you two ready?

CARINA

(still texting)

Sorry.

BUDI

I'm here just keep going.

(to the audience)

Sorry everyone.

You get to watch as I...

(dramatic)

prepare.

THOMAS

And Carina texts.

CARINA

Sorry, it's my mother.

BUDI

Is she still sick?

CARINA

She's in the hospital.

My sister's due to visit

but MIA.

BUDI

Sorry, love.

THOMAS

Sorry, Carina.

CARINA

It's fine.

I mean who doesn't know someone who's been to the hospital.

This year I mean.

THOMAS

That's true.

BUDI

Tell them about Chad, Thomas.

THOMAS

Housekeeping note.

Carina's sister's not the only MIA.

We also seem to be missing a performer.

Luckily Chad

our fourth cast member

doesn't appear until midway through the performance

so hopefully he'll choose to join us before then.

If he doesn't...

we'll improvise?

I guess?

BUDI

Steven's writing something.

THOMAS

Now?

CARINA

Of course he is.

THOMAS

Our playwright is working on a solution in real-time

so Chad or no Chad

prepare yourselves for something thoroughly-considered
and dramatically unified.

CARINA

Hear that Steven?

THOMAS

And someone please take the mic away from me.
Carina?

CARINA

Should I introduce us?

BUDI

Yes tell them who we are.

CARINA

Believe it or not
a remote performance of this *Bacchae* adaptation is not what we originally imagined we'd be
sharing
back in 2025
the "before-times"
before COVID-25 drove us back inside /

THOMAS

Again!
Drove us back inside *again*.
Sorry.

CARINA

No.

THOMAS

I still can't fucking...

CARINA

I get it.

THOMAS

Fucking *all of it* again.
Next thing you know they'll bring back Trump.

BUDI

Don't even say it!
That's the last thing we need.

THOMAS

I mean I'm not sure he'd be worse.

BUDI

That doesn't mean I want him back.

THOMAS

That's fair.

BUDI

Sorry, Carina.

(to the audience)

We get distracted.

CARINA

No worries.
Before COVID-25
our intention was to perform the play live
in Singapore
which is where we all met
but now
none of us are in Singapore
and no events are live
so we're coming to you now from all across the globe.
Thomas is in the US
in New Haven.

(THOMAS waves.)

CARINA (CONT'D)

And Budi's getting dressed in Melbourne, Australia.

BUDI

I call shade!

CARINA

I call facts.
And Chad
when he arrives
will also be joining us from Melbourne.
Who's got this next part?

BUDI

Tell them where you are first.

Oh right, me.
I'm in London
newly arrived.

CARINA

London in January.

THOMAS

It's...
grey.
And full of COVID.

CARINA

Lovely.

THOMAS

Quite.

CARINA

(Beat.)

Thomas, you want to do the honors?

BUDI

I should do it?

THOMAS

I'm not dressed for it.

BUDI

Okay, just give me a second.

THOMAS

Okay.

BUDI

(Silence.)

I mean I can do it.

CARINA

No, I can.

THOMAS

THOMAS (CONT'D)

It's fine.

CARINA

Okay.

THOMAS

So.

Fucking Chad...

That's not the point.

The point is.

Had we all been here

we would have *led* with

how

as a company

we think that it's important

before we start

to acknowledge what's been happening

in the world

the past few days

which is

of course

a lot.

For those of you who haven't been following news out of the States:

they -

we -

like a number of countries

including Australia

have for months been

expanding

our post-COVID-19 shelters

both in size and in number

as well broadening their purpose

from temporary housing for the economically displaced

to what looks a lot more like

camps

for *particular* displaced groups

groups displaced

for whatever reason

by the government.

Today's reporting is that following a study which claims COVID-25 infection rates are

particularly high among American Indians

the military has been sent to a number of Reservations

THOMAS (CONT'D)

and now are just
rounding people up.
Meanwhile large portions of Detroit, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Atlanta have all been closed off.
It's difficult to get news from inside the targeted areas.
And to top it off the White House press secretary bragged this afternoon that the shelters were
being run with "concentration camp efficiency"
before backtracking and calling that a joke
to quote
fuck with the media.

BUDI

They say fuck now?

THOMAS

Yeah
and concentration camp.
So.

BUDI

And not to single out America.
Like Thomas said
Australia's shelters aren't exactly looking like...

CARINA

Shelters?

BUDI

Right.
Also, they're flooding us with guns now!

CARINA

I saw that.

THOMAS

I mean
welcome to the club.

BUDI

(kind of upset)

What does that mean welcome to the club?
It's fucking scary!
These state premiers

BUDI (CONT'D)

are basically ruling by decree.
Lifting gun restrictions as part of public health orders?
which you know is really just a way to get guns to their supporters
so, militias
we have militias now.
The point is -
okay if I jump in?

THOMAS

I mean
you're in.

BUDI

We're all fucking terrified right now
and we're in our homes
alone
again
and...
So.
I lost my train of thought.
Our company's mission statement says that space is psychology.
Adam what's the whole sentence?
Adam's our director.

CARINA

Are you asking him to read it?

BUDI

He'll type into the Slack.

THOMAS

(while ADAM types, trying to remember)

"We believe space is psychology and it forms..."

BUDI

(reading)

"We believe space is psychology, and it informs the way in which an audience interacts and reacts to what is presented to them."

See?

magic.

Thank you, Adam!

That's referring to space as in theatrical spaces

BUDI (CONT'D)

like a proscenium arch
or the Globe theatre
or like for us we perform in found spaces, site-specific spaces
but our space
now
today
includes our whole stupid fucking world
and our stupid fucking - fucking terrifying global fucking leaders
and that element of our space *will* inform the way you interact and react to this play
especially today
and we want to point out just to be completely clear:
that that's okay
let it happen.

CARINA

Don't ignore the elephant.

BUDI

The white fucking elephants.
Thank you, Thomas
Okay what's next?

THOMAS

Can we just
pause for just a second
actually
after that?

CARINA

Well I think next we're supposed to meditate.

THOMAS

Right
that's okay then perfect.

BUDI

Good
so
this is me.
How do I look?
We'd like to try something
a bit unorthodox

BUDI (CONT'D)

but we think helpful.
Focus
in 2026
as we all know
can be a challenge
so we'd like to lead you in a short meditation.
If you're not already in one
please find a comfortable place to sit.
Yes we're really doing this.
Once you're in a good place
light your candle
straighten your back...
let your arms rest
in your lap
or at your sides...

(BUDI'S screen goes black.)

THOMAS

And...
we've lost Budi.

CARINA

Sorry live theatre!

THOMAS

Adam says, "Carina, can you fill in?"

CARINA

I see it.

(to ADAM)

I don't
know the meditation.

(softer)

I mean I *know* it, but...

THOMAS

Adam says it's in the dropbox.

CARINA

Okay...

(CARINA searches her computer for the meditation.)

CARINA (CONT'D)

Apologies everyone...

(Pause.)

Can you say something?

THOMAS

Right

umm...

bear with us.

The purpose of starting with a meditation was

believe it or not

to *not* be stressful

but like everything else in this nightmare of a year...

CARINA

Found it!

THOMAS

Good cause I've got nothing.

CARINA

Still no Budi...

(Beat.)

Okay.

After *that*

let's start slowly

yeah?

let's see, where was he...?

Okay.

Okay.

Find a comfortable place

straighten your back...

let your arms rest

in your lap

or at your sides...

and close your eyes.

Soften your face...

(Pause.)

Let your shoulders

fall...

(Pause.)

CARINA (CONT'D)

Soften you belly...

(Pause.)

Take a deep breath in
and then exhale.

Release
everything...

(Pause.)

Now
your thoughts
right now
might be confused...
They might say
“I thought this was supposed to be a play.
Why are our eyes closed?”
That’s okay
it’s okay to feel displaced
uprooted
but if you can
try
perhaps just for this moment
to forget...
Forget about the play...
about the actors on your screen...
Forget COVID-25...
Forget assassin wasps.
Imagine each of these things
and any other thought
or anxiety
as leaves
floating past you on a river...
Watch them approach
and pass
and disappear
out of view...
And now return to your breath.
Feel the cool air
flowing in
and the warm air
flowing out.
Allow your natural breath to come
and go
freely

CARINA (CONT'D)

in and out
like waves.

(Long pause.)

Now.

I'd like to take this time to lead you in an exercise
to ground you in the present moment
using each of the five senses.

So first
keeping your eyes closed
bring your attention to your internal sense of sight
the room beyond your eyelids.

And one-by-one
focus on
and count
five objects you know are in the room.

See them without judgment
simply taking in their features
perhaps their weight
or coarseness.

Count them
one to five.

(Long pause.)

Next

let your mind move
and settle
on four things that you can feel.
Perhaps the floor or chair beneath you.
Perhaps a gentle flow of air.

Feel one
and the next
and the next
and the next.

(Long pause.)

Now bring your attention to three things that you can hear
again without judgment
simply noting the sounds

in
and of themselves.

Count them
three sounds
here in the space
around you.

CARINA (CONT'D)

(Long pause.)

Now allow your focus to move once again
this time to your sense of smell.
See if you can notice two scents
here with you
in the air.

One could be your own shampoo.
One could be a candle burning.
Whatever's with you in this space.

(Long pause.)

And last
bring your attention to taste.
And though you may not be actively tasting at this moment
there may be something you can notice.
You may have brushed your teeth
and still taste toothpaste.
Or perhaps something you ate
still subtly lingers.
And if not
that's okay too
there's no judgment here.

(Long pause.)

Now
take in one last deep, full breath
inhale, inhale, inhale...
and exhale.

(Pause.)

Now relax your attention.
Notice how you feel.
And when you're ready...
open your eyes.

(We open our eyes. BUDI is back on camera. He's holding
a little black dog as he would a baby.)

BUDI

Thank you, Carina.

CARINA

Aww!

THOMAS

(to the dog)

Oh, hi!

BUDI

My baby heard his daddy screaming at the internet.
And he wanted to help.
Didn't you?

CARINA

What's his name...?

BUDI

You know his name!

CARINA

I know *I* do.

BUDI

(laughs)

Oh right
we have an audience.

THOMAS

What audience?

BUDI

This is Chadwick.

THOMAS

Not to be confused with our Chad.

BUDI

Not to be confused with White Chad - no.
This is Chadwick
aka T'Challa
and he helped fix daddy's internet.

CARINA

What happened?

BUDI

I don't know

Australian broadband's the worst.

BUDI (CONT'D)

Is it really?

CARINA

Yes!

BUDI

Not to...
change the subject
from Australia
and T'Challa.

THOMAS

How dare you.

BUDI

Have we heard from Chad?
today
like, at all?

THOMAS

He sent that post to the group chat.

CARINA

That was yesterday.

THOMAS

Adam - has he checked in?

BUDI

(reading)
He just says, "No."

CARINA

Is everything okay down there in Melbourne?

THOMAS

What do you mean?

BUDI

THOMAS

I mean
there's just
a lot going on.
And Chad's...

BUDI

That's true.

THOMAS

Carina - worth checking with your sister?

CARINA

Why?

THOMAS

Does she know people in Melbourne?

BUDI

Thomas I'm *in* Melbourne.

THOMAS

I know but you're not Carina's sister.

CARINA

Let's not
talk about my sister.
Here.

BUDI

That's fair.

(laughs)

Thank you, Adam.
Adam says "Instead maybe talk about the play?"
Thomas, I think this is you.

THOMAS

Sure
I just...

BUDI

Offline, Thomas.

BUDI (CONT'D)

Text.

You have our numbers.

THOMAS

Right.

(to the audience)

Sorry everyone.

I swear

we do know what we're doing.

CARINA

Kind of.

THOMAS

Kind of.

So.

A few things.

So that you're not *too* surprised.

Midway through the play
we'll take a break from the action

to stretch

and to discuss

the things we've seen so far.

Kind of like an intermission

but with the cast.

We call it an Interlude.

For this

you'll be split into four groups

or

three if we're still waiting on...

BUDI

White Chad.

THOMAS

White Chad.

When it's time to split up

Adam

our director

will come back up on screen

to assign each of you a group number

and to let you know how to get to your specific virtual room.

THOMAS (CONT'D)

Each group will meet with a different one of us
so we can get to know you better.

BUDI

We want to look you in the eyes.

THOMAS

We also may have questions
for you.
We may want to bring you up on screen.

BUDI

So do your hair...
clean your room...

THOMAS

For this
you may have to unmute yourselves
or give us access to your cameras.
We can't turn them on without you
so don't be shy
please do say hello.

CARINA

Especially to me.

THOMAS

Especially to Carina
forget both me and Budi.

CARINA

They can say hi to Chad.

BUDI

Ouch!

THOMAS

The point is:
we want to hear from you.

BUDI

Because you're a part of this.

BUDI (CONT'D)

We're all creating
all of us together.

THOMAS

And because what's the fucking point of fucking
shit
fucking any of this shit
what's the point...
if not connection.

BUDI

(laughs)

Anyway...
Are we ready?

CARINA

Ready.

BUDI

(breathes in deep)

So inhale...
and exhale...

THOMAS

And enjoy.

CARINA

Limb from Limb: A Catastrophe in Four Monologues.

BUDI

Take us away, Adam!
Did we say?
Adam's our director and Zoom maestro for the evening
so he'll be /

(End of Introduction: Meditation.)

MONOLOGUE ONE: DIONYSUS

(BUDI performs the following monologue directly to the camera. He wears a mask. The mask should be youthful and conducive to a smile.)

DIONYSUS

Are you ready?

You're not.

Let's start.

(smiles)

I'm going to ravage you.

I'm going to tear you apart.

By which I mean

you're going to tear you apart
while I watch.

Sue me

it's my thing.

And I get all the things I want.

I'm a god.

You don't like that

do you?

Me:

a god.

Me

a body

arms torso face

this body:

divine.

You prefer gods you can't see.

Or gods you don't have to look at.

At some point

people stopped wanting gods with scars

or outside voices

or

I don't know

nipples.

Look at you:

beet red already.

But I digress.

My point is

I'm going to devour you whole.

You look confused.

DIONYSUS (CONT'D)

How 'bout I reset the scene.

We're in Thebes.

"Where's that?"

Do I look like an atlas?

Thebes

where you are

is also where I'm from.

I

a god

was born right here

amongst you.

And you...

you don't even remember me

let alone you rejecting me.

Again

I can help:

it started with sex.

Most things do.

My mother and Zeus had a thing.

Mom got pregnant.

And Thebes didn't like that information.

Said her father

my grandfather

made up the whole Zeus thing to hide an ordinary human non-god-entangled escapade
and well

now

that's the story.

Doesn't seem to matter that my mother burst to flames

as all do

when they see a god

full on.

That's why I have a body now

by the way:

you're welcome.

Doesn't matter that nowhere in the smoking bones and ashes of the woman you cared about
enough to slander but not enough to mourn was there a trace of the child who'd filled
your gossip rags for months

he was gone

poof.

You shrugged.

Dragged my mother to a grave

by her feet

DIONYSUS (CONT'D)

head thumping.
Moved on.
Well guess what?
I was saved
by Zeus.
I didn't burst to flames.
Zeus took me
unborn
and sewed me
into himself -
gods can do that -
and now
here I am.
Dionysus.
A god.
And I have thoughts.
For instance
why should you
get to live without me?
You drinking the wine I taught you how to press
you swaying
and stamping your feet
and dancing the dance I whispered in your ears
spine tingling
to my electric caress.
I mean...

(He throws his hands in the air.)

DIONYSUS (CONT'D)

Slandered my mother
closed your eyes to my existence
the least you could do it seems is tag me.
But don't worry.
I'm not worried.
See this is why I'm here.
When I'm finished
I'll be front page news.
Front page
back page.
In obituaries:
likely.
I'll be on each and every one of your lips.

DIONYSUS (CONT'D)

And I bite.

I've started things already.

First with the women -

I mean come on
your men are boring.

The women
most of them

I've sent up to the mountain.

And by sent -

(smiles)

you keep forgetting I'm a god -

by sent

I mean I've taken them

their minds

and filled them with myself

until they cannot

wouldn't *choose* to

see anything

but me.

Until they don't *need* any sound except the sound of my voice

and my voice has instructed them

to go up to the mountain.

And to dance.

Now

the men they left behind might call this dancing

other things.

And it's true

not all dancing is strictly

up-and-down.

And wouldn't you like to know what the women are all doing
up there in the mountain thickets...

So anyway

that's the first thing I've done.

Next

I got arrested.

Which wasn't difficult

for me.

I mean:

word spreads when there's

suspicious activity.

Pentheus

ruler here in Thebes

DIONYSUS (CONT'D)

my mother's sister's son
actively opposes me
censors
every mention of my name
blames my followers for everything from petty crimes
to not so petty crimes
to his own lagging numbers in the polls.
I wanted to meet him.
Make clear to Pentheus his error -
Pentheus
and thus
all of Thebes.
He is my cousin
I thought
so surely he would listen.
He did not.
I couldn't even get a word in.
And *I* can talk.
He walks up
chest puffed out
he's a fragile little thing...
He paces
for effect -
you know he's practiced in the mirror -
and proceeds to tell me
in lecture form
that I
am not a god
I was not born of Zeus
my rites are bullshit
I'm a cult leader
women may love the smoothness of my skin
but *he* could do without it...
Yeah I know.
He'd be putting me in prison
which was the stables
for some reason.
I did warn him.
I told him prisons don't hold gods.
If they did
we'd be in prison.
He sent me away.

DIONYSUS (CONT'D)

Then sent his men to arrest my women on the mountain
which of course I couldn't have
but first
I thought
I could have some fun.
He walked with me to the stable
and while his back was turned
I turned my handcuffs
all at once
into a serpent
which then slithered through his feet:
sent *him* dancing.
Once he'd finished his jig
and saw my hands unbound
he grabbed a rope
and lassoed
what he perceived to be my arms
but were in fact
the hind legs of a bull.
He then wrestled that bull
which again
he thought was me
because again
for a god
the mind's fair game.
I sat back
and watched
with my new friend
the snake.
We discussed the king's technique.
He used to be handcuffs
so
he had opinions.
Company aside
things started getting boring
so I set the house on fire.
Seeing the flames
the king abandoned the bull
and started running
back and forth
and shouting at his servants
as if he had a clue of what to do.

Then recalling I was free
he forgot about the fire
so I cloaked myself
invisible
and spawned a phantom
which looked exactly like myself
but was in fact no more than air.
The rest is as you'd think.
He tried to tackle the phantom and flew straight into a wall and then to underscore the point I
pulled his house down.

Next
emerging from the ruins of his ancestral home
he'll be greeted by news from his men back from the mountain
news that my women took up arms against those he'd sent to take them and after routing the
intruders they decided let's keep going and sacked town after town but even that was
not enough so then they swarmed a herd of cows which they then ripped apart
barehanded and devoured
flesh torn straight off the bone.

So.
He's still got that news coming
which...
is a lot to take in.
But man against god
I'm not sure what he was expecting.
Don't give me that look.
He's lucky
you know.
I could have come without a body.
He should see this as a gift.
There's still a chance for Pentheus
to see me for what I am -
to call me what I am -
if he wants it.

What do you think he'll say?
(smiles)

You won't have to guess.
He'll tell you.
He'll tell everyone
he's a talker
he will be
just give him time.

(End of Monologue One: Dionysus.)

THIS PLAY IS FAR FROM OVER!

Email steven@stevengaultney.com to request the full script.