

DARK VOYAGER

A play

by

John Misto



FOR ALL ENQUIRIES CONTACT: ORiGiN™ Theatrical
PO BOX Q1235, QVB Post Office, Sydney, NSW, 1230, Australia
Phone: (61 2) 8514 5201 Fax: (61 2) 9299 2920
enquiries@originmusic.com.au www.origintheatrical.com.au
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DO contact ORiGiN™ Theatrical if you have any questions about anything. At all. And we mean anything. One of us that works here (not me) has a peculiar interest in recording the unusual bird calls of the adult hoatzin (a species of tropical bird found in wet forest and mangrove of the Amazon and the Orinoco delta in South America) so we should be able to answer any questions you have about the Hoatzin. Plus we know some things about some other things too.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

The Shoe-Horn Sonata

Harp on the Willow

Dark Voyager

Lip Service

Peace Train: The Cat Stevens Story

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

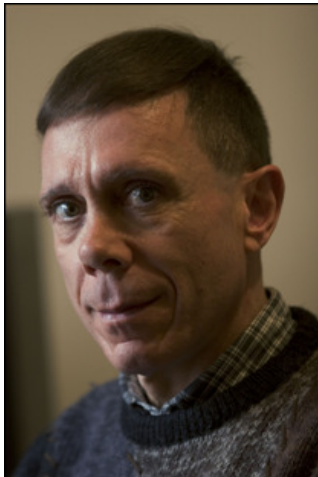
John Misto has been writing plays since 1992. His play, *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* has been reprinted nineteen times and sold more than sixty thousand copies. *The Shoe-Horn Sonata* also won the NSW Premier's Literary Award for Best Play and the Australia Remembers National Playwriting Prize.

Misto's other works include *Dark Voyager* about the turbulent relationship between Joan Crawford and Marilyn Monroe. Misto also wrote the hugely successful play, *Harp on the Willow* which won the Rodney Seaborn Award for Best Play. John Misto is co-writer of *Peace Train: The Cat Stevens Story* which has enjoyed several successful national tours of Australia.

John Misto's most recent play, *Lip Service* had a sell-out season at London's Park Theatre in 2017 (under the title *Madame Rubinstein*) and a successful season at Sydney's Ensemble Theatre and at the Lawler Theatre in Melbourne. *Lip Service* is to be performed in Poland, Lithuania and Israel.

John Misto is also an established scriptwriter and his telemovies and scripts have won many awards including the Queensland Premier's Literary Award, three Australian Film Institute Awards, three Australian Writers' Guild Awards and a Gold Plaque at the Chicago Television Awards.

John Misto has degrees in Arts and Law from the University of New South Wales.



Australian Premiere - Ensemble Theatre, 2014



Kate Raison as Joan Crawford and Lizzie Mitchell as Marilyn in the Ensemble Theatre production (2014) (Photo: Owen Elliott)

CHARACTERS

Bette Davis (54)	An actor experiencing a lull in her career
Joan Crawford (58)	An actor experiencing a lull in her career also
Hedda Hopper (70)	A failed actor who has now become the most powerful columnist in the United States
Marilyn Monroe (36)	An actor with problems
Skipper (24)	A WAM (Waiter-Actor-Model)

THE SETTING

Hedda Hopper's home (popularly known as *The House That Fear Built*) on 79 Tropical Drive, Beverley Hills, California, in August, 1962.

This play is inspired by real events and an actual evening that Hedda Hopper “enjoyed” with Bette Davis and Joan Crawford around the same time that Marilyn Monroe died.

ACT ONE
SCENE 1

From the darkness Doris Day sings "Pillow Talk", an energetic and coyly suggestive song about sex.

On a screen we see the following words -

"Much of what you are about to see is true - or inspired by some very delicious rumours.

79 Tropical Drive, Beverly Hills, California. August, 1962."

The lights come up to reveal the foyer and entertaining area of an elegant house.

The owner of the house, Miss Hedda Hopper, is talking into a telephone.

Hedda Hopper is an imposing, failed-actress in a colourful designer dress. She possesses the destructive energy of the truly self-righteous. The very mention of her name sends a shudder of fear throughout Hollywood, like the aftershock of an L.A. earthquake.

A Waiter in a white jacket is arranging finger food and drinks on a cocktail bar near Hedda. Like every Californian male of the 1960's, this Waiter is movie-star handsome. His tight dinner-jacket highlights his athletic figure. He is tanned and clean-cut, and although he is often mistaken for Ty Hardin or Troy Donahue, his name is Skip.

When Skip is under pressure - real pressure - he sometimes stutters very slightly - especially on any word beginning with C or K.

HEDDA: *(into the telephone)* Rock - darling - what can I say? I just adored every frame of it - those love scenes with Doris were more than I could bear!... And speaking of love scenes - a dear friend of mine has given me some photos - yes - of you - *(ominously)* - but not the kind you'd want to autograph. I said to him, "J. Edgar - these have to be fakes. Rock would never share a bathtub with two tight-enders from the Oklahoma football team."

Hedda pauses for a few seconds while Rock tries to defend himself. Hedda barely listens. She is much more interested in scrutinizing the drinking glasses for evidence of smears.

HEDDA: Yes, Rock, I know some people call him Gay Edgar Hoover – but he's not the one who's been caught playing ball with those two Oklahomos. *(reproachfully)* If my fifty million readers ever catch a glimpse of these, you'll be as popular at the box office as Gidget with the clap.

Hedda clicks her finger at Skip, then turns her back to him. Skip zips up her dress from behind. He does this calmly, with expertise, as if he has done it a hundred times before.

HEDDA: *(to Rock, with a hint of clemency)* That's exactly what I said to Hoover - you were probably sloshed and those sister-marrying hillbillies set you up... But J. Edgar's not as kind-hearted as me. He says your wedding was a sham - and sticking feathers in your butt doesn't make you a cock, Rock!... All right, all right, stop crying - I promise I'll ring Hoover and beg him not to publish them. But you owe me a favour now, Rock.

As Hedda speaks to Rock, she adjusts Skip's tie or brushes his coat.

HEDDA: *(sternly to Rock)* Is it true that Doris Day has had a secret hysterectomy?... *(irate)* No - it won't affect her voice - that's a tonsillectomy! A hysterectomy is - *(frustrated)* - oh ask your wife. And while you're at it, get her to tell you what a vagina is for. If you were any lighter in your loafers, you'd float away.

And Hedda hangs up. Then Hedda picks up a wine glass and frowns.

HEDDA: *(irate)* Look at this. Not a smudge – not a mark – they must be surgically clean. Joan can sniff out dirt like a pig hunting truffles.

SKIP: Yes, Miss Hopper.

And Hedda stops and re-folds a napkin.

Skip looks around, makes sure Hedda cannot see him. Then stands with his back to Hedda and spits into the cocktails and stirs quickly, before putting the jar in a bar fridge.

HEDDA: Skip? What are you doing?

Skip wonders if he has been caught.

HEDDA: You aren't paid to stare out windows.

SKIP: *(indicating window)* They should be here by now. No one ever keeps you waiting.

HEDDA: Stars like to be a little late - so they can make a grand entrance.

SKIP: Stars? Two has-beens like Crawford and Davis?

HEDDA: Miss Crawford - Miss Davis. You will treat them with respect.

SKIP: (*handing a pre-mixed drink to her*) Of course, Miss Hopper.

HEDDA: And don't forget to ply them with booze. They'll be as testy as albinos under a sun lamp.

SKIP: Why?

HEDDA: Don't you ever read Variety? Jack Warner's screening the rough cut from *Baby Jane* tonight. He told me it's the worst thing he's seen since the bombing of Pearl Harbour. No wonder Bette and Joan would rather come here than sit through their own picture.

Suddenly we can hear the hysterical voices of Women screaming off-stage -

THE FANS: (Voice Only) Joan - over here! Joan! Please!

SKIP: This might get ugly - should I bring her in?

HEDDA: Never interrupt Joan when she's feeding her fans. And no matter what happens, avoid physical violence - unless in self-defence. Understand?

SKIP: Yes, M'am.

THE FANS: (Voice Only) We love Joan! We love Joan!

Meanwhile Hedda begins to inspect Skip, adjusting his collar, brushing lint away.

HEDDA: The only people who can stand their company without wanting to kill them are faggots. You aren't a faggot, are you Skip?

SKIP: You know I'm not, Miss H.

HEDDA: Pity. It would have made tonight easier for you.

The doorbell rings.

HEDDA: Go on - let Joan in. And tell her I'll be down when I've finished my make-up... It's my turn to keep her waiting.

Hedda departs. Skip opens the front door and admits a small woman wearing a not-too-flattering dress and beret. She is in her early 50's and so totally nondescript that it is hard to believe this is Bette Davis.

SKIP: *(brightly)* Good evening Miss - *(stops suddenly, stares at her, then says without enthusiasm)* Oh - I thought you were Joan Crawford.

BETTE: *(striding in)* I'm sorry to disappoint you.

Skip begins to do a last minute clean-up, hardly looking at the new arrival.

SKIP: (*reproachfully*) Servants and Negroes use the back door. Miss Crawford should have taught you that. She must let her help get away with murder.

BETTE: Her help! (*grimly*) Do you know who I am?

SKIP: (*unapologetic*) Let me guess - she calls you her “personal assistant” - (*indicates a chair*) - well - go on - wipe this down so it’s clean for her fat ass.

BETTE: Hedda must have been desperate when she put a bow tie on you.

Bette looks around the dining room.

BETTE: Speaking of which - where is our Medusa?

SKIP: Huh?

BETTE: Satan’s daughter. Your employer.

SKIP: Upstairs - filling the cracks with Max Factor.

Bette makes a bee-line for the liquor cabinet but Skip blocks her and redirects her to another door.

SKIP: (*points*) Kitchen’s that way.

BETTE: You’d banish me without a drink? I thought servants were meant to look out for each other.

SKIP: (*conspiratorially*) If you want a scotch, be quick about it. And don’t touch Madam’s soda water. I’ve just topped it up.

And Skip makes a spitting gesture.

BETTE: (*fascinated*) How refreshing to see a man so devoted to his boss.

SKIP: (*slightly defensive*) And I suppose you love Joan Crawford?

Bette laughs. It is not a joyous sound.

BETTE: (*almost accusingly*) Where do I know your face from?

Skip looks at her - hoping to be recognized.

BETTE: (*scornfully*) You probably parked my car once.

SKIP: (*proudly*) ***Gunsmoke***. Episode Ninety-Three. I was Sitting Bull's long-lost nephew. I had seven words. (*reenacting it with angry intensity and hand-gestures*) "White Eyes steal Running Dog's fire-water!"

BETTE: (*pouring herself a drink*) I should have guessed it. (*almost wearily*) You're a WAM.

SKIP: (*What's*) A WAM?

BETTE: Waiter-actor-model. Every restaurant in Hollywood's full of them. They recite what's on the menu like the soliloquy from Hamlet.

SKIP: My agent's convinced I'll make it one day.

BETTE: (*studying him*) With a profile like that? I doubt it. (*touching his cheeks*) Jelly jaws. They'll ruin you for close-ups.

Skip, unnerved, glances in the mirror.

BETTE: Cary Grant had the same problem. But he fixed it.

SKIP: (*eagerly*) How?

BETTE: By doing lots and lots of... blow-jobs.

SKIP: (*feeling his chin, suspicious*) How come you're such an expert? I'll bet you were an actress once - til the talkies arrived - and they heard your voice.

BETTE: (*irritated*) And what's wrong with my vocal instrument?

SKIP: Nothing - if you like the sound of gravel in a blender.
(*accusingly*) You're a WAM too - aren't you? Waitress - actress - maid.

Skip is interrupted by excited shouts outside. Unseen Women are calling out -

WOMEN: (Voice Only) Miss Crawford! Miss Crawford!

BETTE: Ah - Joan has brought her menagerie.

SKIP: (*It*) Sounds like they're attacking her.

BETTE: Yes. The fans have hit the shit all right.

SKIP: (*looking out the window at Joan*) She'll need every fan she can get once her latest picture comes out.
(*confidentially*) Jack Warner showed Hedda some "rushes". She said it's easier to stay awake under ether. Who wants to see a show about two old broads anyway?

BETTE: (*defensive*) Those “two old broads” have notched up - between them – one hundred and forty-six films and three Oscars.

SKIP: (*grins*) You forgot the eight abortions and nine husbands. They walked down the aisle so often, they wore out the carpet.

BETTE: (*not pleased*) Hedda told you that?

SKIP: I dust her memoirs from time to time.

BETTE: And what else does she say in that dirty book of hers?

SKIP: (*amused*) The only people who can stand their company without wanting to kill them are –

Skip is interrupted by Hedda's loud voice -

HEDDA: Bette!

And the force-field of charm that is Hedda rushes forth to greet her guest.

BETTE: At last - our hostess - how kind of you to make an appearance.

Hedda and Bette exchange air-kisses.

HEDDA: Have I kept you waiting, darling? I was upstairs and -

BETTE: (*finishing for her*) - and Mammy took forever pulling in your girdle.

HEDDA: (*to Skip*) Fix Miss Davis a drink. (*to Bette*) Scotch?

BETTE: Without soda... Miss Crawford will have Formaldehyde.

Skip moves off to make the drinks.

HEDDA: *(to Bette)* If you detest Joan so much, why make a movie with her?

BETTE: Because the loneliest moment in a woman's life is when she's sitting in her kitchen reading her divorce papers. I ought to know. I've done it four times. So when the studio offered me *Baby Jane*, I jumped at the chance to get back to work. Besides, it's time somebody taught Joan how to act.

More yells from outside.

HEDDA: *(concerned)* Oh dear - it's time to rescue her.

BETTE: Just send out a Saint Bernard with a Pepsi round its neck. Joan'll think it's her last husband and follow him inside.

But Hedda has already gone through the door.

Skip and Bette are alone now. Skip stares at Bette nervously. Bette calmly walks to the sofa but it is clear that she is smouldering with anger. She removes her coat, folds it neatly and then drops it calmly onto the floor.

SKIP: Miss Davis - I'm so sorry. I thought –

BETTE: If God wanted you to think, he would have given you a brain.

SKIP: (*picking up Bette's coat*) You look so different off the screen - and we never saw old movies in the navy.

BETTE: A sailor boy, huh?

SKIP: Did a three year stint before I landed this job.

And Skip passes the first of many drinks to Bette. Bette takes the drink, then moves one finger to the middle of the glass.

BETTE: (*showing the glass to Skip*) Well then, Popeye, take a careful look: that is my personal Plimsoll Line. If the booze level drops below here, watch out!

SKIP: Yes, M'am.

Bette looks around the room, appraising it.

BETTE: So this is Hedda's lair.

SKIP: She calls it The House That Fear Built. (*anxiously*) You won't tell her about my mistake?

Bette does not appear to have heard Skip. Instead she picks up a vase and ashes her cigarette in it.

SKIP: (*nervously*) Miss Davis - please - she doesn't like anyone touching that.

BETTE: (*examining the vase with admiration*) Tiffany's... hmmm... I'll bet it's an original.

Then Bette tosses the vase in the air -

SKIP: No!

But Skip catches it by diving through the air and landing on the floor with the vase in his hands.

SKIP: Sweet snivelling Jesus! Do you want her to bite my balls off?

BETTE: I'll keep your secret if you keep mine.

SKIP: What secret?

And Bette calmly scratches the side of the vase with her cigarette lighter. Skip, who is still kneeling on the floor, reacts in horror.

SKIP: No... no... no...

Bette holds the vase up, ready to smash it on Skip's head.

BETTE: (*grimly*) Now tell me the truth. (*accusingly*) You recognised me when you opened that door, didn't you?

SKIP: I'm terribly sorry. I should have looked closer.

BETTE: My face is better known than the Mona Lisa's. Did Hedda put you up to this?

SKIP: I didn't know you. Honest. I always thought a movie star would look a lot like –

BETTE: Like?

SKIP: That.

And Skip indicates the doorway where a very slim, elegant Joan Crawford is standing, clutching a bottle of Pepsi in her outstretched arm.

Joan's outfit is stylish, soignée and flattering - although her shoulder pads might be a little overdone. But Skip is correct - she looks like a star.

Outside frantic cries of “We love you Joan” and “Please don’t leave us” can be heard from her Adoring Fans as well as the blinding lights of flashbulbs popping.

JOAN: *(blowing kisses to her unseen fans outside)* God bless you for such kindness.

HEDDA: *(to Joan)* Are you sure you’re OK? They were scaring me out there.

JOAN: *(who has enjoyed every second)* They scare me too - all that unrestrained love - but what can I do?

BETTE: *(calmly)* You could stop paying them to follow you around.

HEDDA: *(tactfully)* Bette’s in a... playful mood tonight.

JOAN: *(sweetly)* It’s just her way of expressing affection.

As Joan and Bette exchange very frigid air-kisses -

JOAN: This darling woman is the older sister I’ve always wanted.

BETTE: *(sweetly)* Young Joan’s talent is truly sensational. Why she carries our movie - on her very broad shoulders.

Joan suddenly notices Skip. And she's impressed

JOAN: And whose leading man is this?

SKIP: I'm -

BETTE: Oh that's just Sitting Bull.

JOAN: *(trying to remember where she has seen him)* Were you ever in one of my films?

SKIP: No, M'am.

JOAN: What a pity.

HEDDA: *(to Skip)* Pour Miss Crawford a drink. *(to Joan)* Vodka is it?

BETTE: Joan only drinks Pepsi.

SKIP: *(puzzled)* At dinner?

JOAN: *(calmly to Bette)* Stop confusing this poor waiter. *(to Skip)* My late husband - Alfred Steele - was the manager of Pepsi. No - goddamn it - he was Pepsi -

BETTE: He even looked like the bottle - short and stubby.

HEDDA: You know how sorry we all were about him.

BETTE: *(raising her glass)* Hear! Hear! To dead husbands - of whom you cannot have too many.

JOAN: *(almost tearful)* When Alfred died, Pepsi adopted me. They even asked me to sit on the board.

BETTE: *(mutters)* Really? Normally you do your best work lying down.

A telephone rings off-stage.

HEDDA: *(to Skip)* Answer it, Skipper. And tell them I'm out.

SKIP: *(as he exits)* Yes, M'am.

HEDDA: *(to Joan and Bette)* Now... my readers are desperate to hear about your movie. Who gets top billing?

BETTE: *(archly)* We are still discussing that.

JOAN: *(sweetly)* I really should give it to Bette. So many of her fans wouldn't recognise her now - while I haven't gone up a dress size since 1930.

BETTE: *(sweetly)* She's right. Our costume designer constantly says "Joan's waist is as tiny as her I.Q."

And Skip returns.

SKIP: *(discreetly)* Miss Hopper -

HEDDA: I told you - no interruptions!

SKIP: It's him.

HEDDA: Oh...*(brightly to Joan & Bette)* Then you must excuse me. I'll leave you in Skip's more-than-capable hands.

And Hedda exits.

JOAN: (*angrily to Bette*) I thought we agreed to be civil to each other!

BETTE: You can't lock up a dog with a flea and expect it not to scratch.

JOAN: Especially when the dog's a bitch.

Bette is about to give Joan a thump but Skip intervenes quickly and tactfully.

SKIP: (*to Bette*) Your Plimsoll Line's showing.

And Skip fills Bette's glass, then Joan's.

BETTE: (*to Joan*) Why did Hedda invite us here? She must be up to something.

JOAN: Maybe she wants to promote our film.

BETTE: *Baby Jane* is a celluloid abortion.

JOAN: But Hedda doesn't know that.

BETTE: All Hollywood knows it. (*to Skip*) Isn't that right?

SKIP: It's not my business to repeat Miss Hopper's -

Suddenly Joan grabs Skip by his shirt collar and yanks him upwards with terrifying ferocity.

JOAN: (*fiercely*) What's Hedda telling people about me in *Baby Jane*?

SKIP: (*gasping*) She said your falsies make your boobs look like the Hollywood Hills in an earthquake.

BETTE: (*triumphantly*) Hah!

JOAN: (*to Skip, indicating Bette*) And her?

SKIP: She looks like a painted whore who couldn't get screwed in Alcatraz.

Joan releases Skip, turns calmly to Bette and says -

JOAN: Then why has Hedda asked us here?

Skip realises Joan has spilled some booze on his pants.

SKIP: (*to Joan, annoyed*) Look what you did!

BETTE: (*sternly to Joan*) Is that any way to treat the star of ***Gunsmoke?***

JOAN: (*puzzled by this non-sequitur*) ***Gunsmoke?***

BETTE: Popeye here played a blue-eyed Apache. He had seven lines.

SKIP: (*trying to sponge the stain off his pants*) Seven words. But I turned them into lines.

BETTE: (*calmly to Joan*) Yet they never asked him back. Of course we both know why.

SKIP: (*paranoid*) Huh?

BETTE: Oh - come on. With a body like yours you should be starring in Cheyenne. You think Hedda can't see your potential?

SKIP: Wait a minute - what are you (*getting at*) -

BETTE: She's blacklisted half of Hollywood. Why should Hedda spare you?

SKIP: No - no. She's always saying how much she needs me - how she couldn't get by...(*realising*)...without me.

JOAN: (*catching on*) She calls you her "Downstairs Adonis".

BETTE: Her "hunky houseboy".

JOAN: She'll never let you leave.

BETTE: (*to Skip*) So don't waste your loyalty on Hedda. Why did she ask us here tonight?

SKIP: I'm really not sure but - (*indicating the phone extension*) Hedda's talking to Hoover - right now.

BETTE: (*surprised*) Herbert Hoover?

JOAN: J. Edgar Hoover.

BETTE: (*surprised*) They're friends?

SKIP: She calls him Jedgar.

JOAN: (*to Bette*) Where do you think she gets her gossip? I heard it from Richard Nixon's own lips.

BETTE: *(to Joan, stunned, almost speechless)* Oh my God - you're screwing Nixon?! Not even his wife will do that.

JOAN: He's the attorney for Pepsi Cola.

SKIP: If Hoover wants to ruin someone, he gets Miss Hopper to expose them in her column.

BETTE: *(with disbelief)* Don't be ridiculous. The FBI would never stoop to that.

SKIP: *(to Bette)* All week she's been discussing you - on the phone - with him. That's probably why you were summoned tonight.

BETTE: Nonsense. *(to Joan, indicating Skip)* Sitting Bullshit here couldn't lie straight in a tepee.

JOAN: *(with concern)* But my dear, what if Skipper is right? What if it's you Hoover's after?

BETTE: Me!?

JOAN: Nixon's running for Governor - and Hoover's promised to help him.

BETTE: So?

JOAN: You are the one who's been shouting at parties - *(with enthusiasm)* "Dick Nixon - before he dicks you."

BETTE: *(accusingly)* And I wonder who told him that? *(striding towards the telephone extension)* There's only one way to find out.

And Joan follows eagerly.

SKIP: No - you can't!

But Bette picks up the phone before Skip can stop her.

Bette, Joan and Skip all listen in - and we can hear the conversation -

HEDDA: (Voice Only) They'll be sloshed in another ten minutes. I'll get it out of them then.

J.EDGAR: (Voice Only) Is Crawford a dyke?

Joan flinches. Bette smiles.

HEDDA: (Voice Only) What do you think? Her shoulders are so broad by now they have to shoot her in Cinerama - just to fit them on the screen.

Bette laughs.

J.EDGAR: (Voice Only) Someone's on the line.

Skip grabs the phone and slams it down.

JOAN: (puzzled) J. Edgar's after both of us. What the hell have I done to the FBI?

BETTE: Hoover's just mouthing off. He gets Eczema from his panty hose.

SKIP: (astonished) J. Edgar Hoover wears panty hose?

BETTE: We share the same dressmaker.