

You're My Man

by Ross Carter

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YOU'RE MY MAN

CAST OF CHARACTERS

<i>Milton "Buster" Manley</i>	Country singer, 30 to 40
<i>Lance Buck</i>	Country singer, 30 to 40
<i>R J "Squirrel" Bellamy</i>	Agent for Buck & Buster, female, 50s
<i>Axel Hatchett</i>	Country singer, 20s to 40
<i>Audrey Hart Akins</i>	Aspiring country singer, 20s to 30s
<i>Louise McElroy</i>	Radio station manager, 30 to 40
<i>Helen Schwartz</i>	Buster's mother
<i>Charlie Bumpus</i>	Small town entrepreneur, 50s to 70s

PLACE

Nashville and the small town of Nixon, Tennessee.

TIME

The present.

PRODUCTION NOTE

Production of this play requires two audio tracks of the title song: one without vocals, and one with vocals sung by the actors playing Buck and Buster. A track without vocals is available, royalty free and at no charge, from the author.

ACT 1.

SCENE 1.

Setting: Backstage at a small concert hall.

At rise: BUCK and BUSTER, their backs to the audience, perform to an imaginary audience upstage. The imaginary audience is lit so we see BUCK and BUSTER in silhouette.

Music fades in and plays out. Applause and cheers. Alternatively, BUCK and BUSTER are heard from offstage.

BUCK AND BUSTER

Thank you! Thank you everybody! Goodnight! We love you! God bless the U.S.!

Lights fade on the imaginary audience. Perhaps an upstage curtain closes. Alternatively, BUCK and BUSTER enter. In either event, we see that they are backstage having just concluded a performance.

BUSTER

Man, I'm worn out.

BUCK

Are you kidding? Didn't you feel the energy coming off that audience? I feel like I just drunk a gallon of coffee. Say how come you didn't hit that high high harmony?

BUSTER

I just didn't have it in me. I hit the high harmony. That's good enough.

BUCK

But the high high harmony is what makes that song.

BUSTER

I know that, I just didn't have it tonight.

BUCK

You should a told me. I could a hit the high high harmony. High high harmony is what makes that song.

BUSTER

Look, I'm tired, OK?

BUCK

Is something wrong with you?

BUSTER

No.

BUCK

Yes there is, there's something wrong. You always hit the high high harmony. It's what makes that—

BUSTER

I get it, I get it. I'll try to do better. I just need to give my voice a rest. We've been pushing it awfully hard lately. I need to go somewhere and rest up for a day or two.

BUCK

Say, that reminds me. Do you know a good real estate man?

BUSTER

Real estate person. What are you looking for this time?

BUCK

A lake.

BUSTER

You want to buy a lake?

BUCK

My own personal private lake.

BUSTER

What do you need a lake for?

BUCK

Fishing, mostly. I want a big lake.

BUSTER

How big?

BUCK

I don't know. Medium size, I guess. Something that would show up on a map of the United States.

BUSTER

I don't think you're going to find a lake that big for sale.

BUCK

I need a big lake. Something big enough for WBD.

BUSTER

WBD?

BUCK

That's the name of my boat. Weapon of Bass Destruction.

BUSTER

I thought your boat was named Fishin'-ado. [*like "aficionado"*]

BUCK

That was my third boat. Weapon of Bass Destruction is my fourth boat. I've already got a name picked out for my fifth boat.

BUSTER

What's that?

BUCK

Cinco.

BUSTER

Sink-o?

BUCK

Yeah. Get it? Cinco is Spanish for Five, and it will be my fifth boat.

BUSTER

Buck, you can't name a boat Sink-o!

BUCK

Why not?

BUSTER

Because—oh why not. Go ahead, name your boat Sink-o Like A Rock-o for all I care.

BUCK

There *is* something wrong with you. What is it, Buster? You can tell me. Tell your old pal Buck.

BUSTER

Buck, don't you think it's time we took a little break? Doing these shows night after night is grinding me down. My voice can't take it. My nerves can't take it. My back can't take it. I'm beat.

BUCK

"My back can't take it." Whiner. Crybaby. Where do you think this great country of ours would be if those veterans out there had said, "I can't fight, I'm too tired." Huh? You think they complained? You think they asked for a night off? No, sir! "Where's the fight? Let me at them!" That's what they said. "Reporting for duty, sir!" That's what they said.

BUSTER

Buck, spare me your stump speech. If the survival of the free world came down to me singing country songs, I'd be all in for it. In fact, when that happens, you be sure and let me know. I'll be all, "Buster Manley, reporting for duty!" In the meantime, it doesn't do our act any good to get out there and perform when we're not one hundred percent. And I'm telling you, I'm not a hundred percent. That's all I'm saying.

BUCK

I can't believe I'm hearing Buster Manley say this. You, of all people. Letting me down. Letting your country down. Letting God down.

BUSTER

What, you think God is all bent out of shape if he doesn't get a daily fix of the Buck and Buster show?

BUCK

Don't you joke about that.

BUSTER

And while we're at it, I've had enough of these tiny cow towns and their tiny stages and their tiny audiences.

BUCK

This is God's house.

BUSTER

It's an American Legion Hall! The auditorium only holds a hundred people!

BUCK

So?

BUSTER

Buck, we don't need gigs like this any more. We paid our dues. We came up through the ranks. We worked and we made it. You and I have played the Grand Ole Opry. We should be on tour right now, playing in arenas. Last week you had us singing in a parking lot from the back of a flat bed truck!

BUCK

Whiner. Crybaby.

BUSTER

Buck, look here. It's time we had this out. You know we've always been there for each other. Haven't we?

BUCK

Since we was kids.

BUSTER

And we've always shared every dime we ever made, right? From the little clubs back home to the biggest venues in the country, it's always been share and share alike. Right?

BUCK

That's us, Buster.

BUSTER

And when you said you wanted to run for political office, we both knew it would put a strain on our act, but did I try to stand in your way?

BUCK

No, Buster, you didn't.

BUSTER

No I didn't. And that hasn't changed. If you want to run for Congress, more power to you. But I never said we could take our act to every little campaign stop on the trail. You want to give a speech to the foreign legion—

BUCK

American Legion.

BUSTER

American Legion, fine, good for you, that's OK by me. But don't turn every campaign speech into a concert. You're wearing me out. You're the one who's decided to make himself a candidate, not me. I'm not running for anything. And if I was, I sure wouldn't be stirring up hate and divisiveness like you're doing. I'd be trying to bring people together. All people.

BUCK

Even the gays?

BUSTER

Yes, everyone.

BUCK

Hey, I got one for you. What do you call a gay dentist?

BUSTER

Buck, you've been telling that joke since we were in junior high school, and it was offensive even back then.

BUCK

A tooth fairy. Get it?

Buster rolls his eyes in disgust.

BUCK

Buster, I never asked you this before, but you are going to vote for me, ain't you?

BUSTER

Don't change the subject. Can we shake on this? From now on, it's Lance Buck, candidate, and Buck and Buster, country music's top singing duo.

BUCK

If you say so.

BUSTER

Besides, you'll have to quit the singing business when you get elected to Congress.

BUCK

No way!

BUSTER

You won't have time to learn any new material or write any songs. You'll be busy with fundraisers and committee meetings.

BUCK

No way!

SQUIRREL enters.

SQUIRREL

Boys, what you hanging around here for? I got the car waiting. You both need a good night's rest.

BUSTER

Squirrel, as our agent, you should know about a decision Buck and I just made.

SQUIRREL

No you didn't. You didn't make any decision. Huh-uh. When did you get it into your head that you can start making decisions without me? Let's nip that in the bud. You didn't make any decision cause I wasn't there. No Squirrel, no decision. You got that?

BUSTER

We decided to keep Buck's campaign separate from our act. We'll go on being Buck & Buster as entertainers, but when it comes to politics Buck here is on his own.

A beat before SQUIRREL laughs.

SQUIRREL

I don't think so! Who do you think set up all these shows in little-bitty houses like this one?

BUSTER

Either Buck or his campaign manager.

BUCK

Buster, I been meaning to tell you something.

SQUIRREL

And just who do you think's his campaign manager? Keep the Buck & Buster act out of the campaign? I don't think so! Look, Mister Buster Manley, it's your job to do the singing, not the thinking. Buck, whose job is it to do the thinking?

BUCK

Yours, Squirrel, I think.

SQUIRREL

That's right. You sing, I think. And this election business is the best thing I've thought of in years.

BUCK

Buster says if I win the election I'll have to quit singing.

SQUIRREL

Don't you worry about that.

BUCK

But he says—

SQUIRREL

Buck, listen to me. You got nothing to worry about. You'll still be singing after the election, I guarantee it. You hear me? Now, boys I got some good news and some not so good news.

BUSTER

Are you telling me you've been behind this running for Congress business all along?

SQUIRREL

Are you telling me you haven't noticed that this act is slipping down the charts? You tell him, Buck. How do you measure success in country music today?

BUCK

That's easy. Billboard ranking.

SQUIRREL

And Billboard ranking is based on what?

BUCK

Airplay, downloads, and streaming. Everybody knows that.

SQUIRREL

And how have we been doing over the last twelve months? I'll tell you: down, down, and down. Boys, you're losing it. Nobody talks about Buck and Buster any more.

BUSTER

That's not true.

SQUIRREL

Now when Buck here announces he's running for Congress, what's gonna happen? Is your Billboard ranking gonna keep going down, down, down? I don't think so!

BUCK

It's gonna go up, up, and up!

SQUIRREL

See there? That's the kind of intelligent thinking we need in Congress. And that's why we been playing the VFW / American Legion circuit. Rodeos. County fairs. Demolition derbies. Dog races. We've been building up a constituency.

BUCK

Wow!

SQUIRREL

I'm working on NASCAR. Now when it comes to vote, are these people gonna go with some guy in a suit who makes a lot of hot air promises? I don't think so! They're gonna vote for the guy that gave them a free concert. Win or lose, the publicity is worth a gold mine!

BUCK

You think I might lose?

SQUIRREL

Don't you worry about that, son. Now as long as I'm in charge of your act—which is forever, don't forget—we're gonna keep playing the circuit. I don't make mistakes. Now what was I gonna tell you all?

BUSTER

Good news and bad news.

SQUIRREL

Right. You know I should have called it, not so bad news and great news. Here's the not so bad news. We have to go back into the recording studio.

BUSTER

Not again!

SQUIRREL

I listened to the track of "What's Right Is Right" and you both were a little flat on the chorus. You'll go back in tomorrow morning and fix that one little thing. Now for the great news. The Academy of Nashville Artists has nominated Buck and Buster for Country Music Entertainer of the Year!

BUCK

That *is* great!

BUSTER

We get nominated every year.

SQUIRREL

True. But this year, every other nominee is a newcomer, never been nominated before. And a newcomer has never won the award. And of course, Axel Hatchett is out of the running.

BUCK

I wish he was out of the country. Out of the world. Out of the ... planet. Sniveling snot-faced song-stealing sissy. He just outright stole our best song, "Tennessee Trouble."

BUSTER

We know, Buck. Don't get started.

BUCK

Country songs are supposed to be about steam trains and mining coal. Axel Hatchett sings about wind turbines and mining Bitcoins. I don't even know what he's talking about half the time. Why's he out of the running?

BUSTER

Because he won it last year.

SQUIRREL

And you can't win Entertainer of the Year two years in a row. It's in the rules. This year you've got no competition! Can you possibly lose?

BUSTER

I don't think so.

BUCK

Say, Squirrel, have you heard anything about the convention?

SQUIRREL

Shhh, keep your voice down. That's a state secret.

BUSTER

What are you talking about?

BUCK

Squirrel here got us booked to perform at the convention!

BUSTER

What convention?

SQUIRREL

I said keep your voice down! It's not official yet. I can tell you this much though: any day now I expect to sign a contract for you two to perform at the next Republican Presidential Convention!

BUCK

I can't wait!

SQUIRREL

And not only that. We're talking prime time. Hooooee! Does it get better than this?

SQUIRREL, BUCK, AND BUSTER

I don't think so.

SQUIRREL

Now you boys hurry up. I'll be in the car waiting. You got an early day tomorrow.

SQUIRREL exits.

BUCK

We're right behind you. Say, Buster, what do call a squirrel with no nuts?

BUSTER

Shhhh!

Exeunt. Lights fade.

SCENE 2.

Setting: A recording studio.

At rise: AUDREY stands at a microphone, holding a sheet of music, fighting tears.

AXEL enters and crosses to AUDREY to comfort her.

AXEL

That's OK honey, first-time jitters. Don't you worry about it. Happens to everybody. Give us one minute, fellas.

AUDREY

Axel, I can't do this.

AXEL

Yes you can. Yes you can. You're gonna be fine. Just remember everything I told you.

AUDREY

That's the problem, Axel. I can't remember everything and sing at the same time.

AXEL

Listen, Audrey. You've got a good solid song there. I wish I could write songs as good as yours! Now all you got to do is step up to that microphone and think, "soft palate." Relax your soft palate. That's where your tone comes from. *(Sings.)* Soooooft palaaaaaaaate.

AUDREY

It's no use. We're out of time.

AXEL

You've got time for one more take. Show me what you got.

AUDREY

I need a break first. Can't you get me another half hour?

AXEL

Darling, I would if I could. The owner of this place owes me a big favor. But there's somebody booked right after you. So we got to get it right on this take. Now breathe from the diaphragm and ...

AUDREY

Soooooft palaaaaate.

AUDREY's voice disintegrates into a guttural growl.

AUDREY

I can't do it!

AXEL

You're not trying!

AUDREY

I am trying. You're making it worse!

AXEL

I book you into the best recording studio in Nashville and this is the thanks I get?

AUDREY

This is a waste of my time.

AXEL becomes petulant.

AXEL

And a waste of my money!

AUDREY

Axel!

AXEL

Fine, then. I got better things to do than hang around here while you pout and whine. I paid for an hour of studio time and what do I get? Not one song, Audrey, not one song! That's it fellas, we're done!

AXEL stomps out. AUDREY glowers at him for a moment, then gathers her strength.

AUDREY

No, we're not done! One last time! Go!

AUDREY puts on headphones. We do not hear what she hears, but from her movement we can clearly tell that she is singing to accompaniment. AUDREY sings, on pitch but without energy.

AUDREY

EVERYBODY TELLS ME THAT LOVIN' YOU IS WRONG.
I GOT MY WORLD AND YOU GOT YOURS, AND THAT'S A PLACE I
DON'T BELONG. BELONG? BELONG...

*AUDREY can't find the note. AUDREY gives up and sobs. BUCK
and BUSTER enter, oblivious to AUDREY.*

BUCK

What's wrong with telling a squirrel joke? I got lots of them. Where do they send a crazy squirrel?

BUSTER

Buck, it's not the squirrel part of the joke, it's the nuts part. How many times have I told you, no gay jokes around Squirrel?

BUCK

She ain't gay! She has dates with guys. Buster, you can be downright weird sometimes.

BUSTER

We'll discuss it later. For now, just try to remember: Squirrel is a trans-sexual. Do you know what that means?

BUCK

Of course I know what that means. She drives a Trans Am and likes sex. I'm a Camaro-sexual. That don't mean you can't tell me a good squirrel joke!

BUSTER

Oh, hello.

BUCK is immediately attracted to AUDREY.

BUCK

What my friend means to say is, hell-OOOOOOOO!

AUDREY

Hello. I'm sorry.

BUSTER

No, that's OK. How'd do. I'm Buster Manley and this here is—