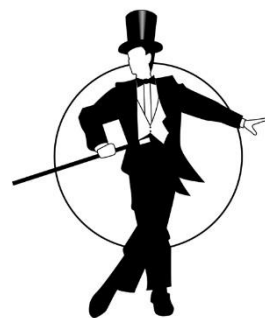


Betta Daze

Don Fried



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BETTA DAZE

By Don Fried

CAST

MICHELLE: Female. Age 75 or older.

BETTA: Female. 60+ A virtual, computerized assistant.

CHRIS: Male. Age 60s.

Director's Notes

1) Betta's Voice: Although Betta is a computer program, she speaks in a natural, human voice. While she starts out being somewhat unemotional, as the play progresses her voice reveals a full range of emotions--annoyed, defensive, manic, etc.--as indicated by the situations and the dialogue.

2) Betta's Visibility/Invisibility: While the actor playing Betta is visible to the audience whenever she is onstage, in Scenes 1 and 2 she's just a disembodied voice to the other characters and they can't see her. Starting with Scene 3, Betta becomes a hologram and from that point on, she's visible to the other characters as well.

Setting: The living/dining room of a small apartment in a residence for seniors. The room has an eating table with three chairs, and a recliner chair, next to which is an end table and in front of which is a TV tray. Against one of the walls is a kitchenette or, as a minimum, a counter with a sink. There are two entrances: one is the front door to the apartment and the other is the door to the bedroom.

At Rise: BETTA, a computer program, stands immobile. At this point in the play, the audience can see her, but she's invisible to the other characters. MICHELLE comes in the entrance door with a handful of mail. She glances at the items briefly and then drops them onto a much larger pile of mail somewhere. She goes to the kitchenette to pour herself a drink, but as she does so, her hands suddenly lose coordination. She looks at them in frustration, but without surprise. After a few seconds, her hands start to work again, and she finishes pouring the drink and takes it to the recliner, where she sits down, putting the drink on the TV tray. She picks up a remote control from the end table, points it at an unseen television, and clicks.

SCENE 1

TELEVISION AUDIO: *(voice over)* These designer earrings are made of solid silver with magnificent point oh four carat diamonds and are hypo-allergenic. It's time right now to call the number on your screen, and we'll include at no extra charge--

MICHELLE: *(annoyed)* No, it's time to watch *The Price is Right*. *(she points the remote and clicks again)*

TELEVISION AUDIO: *(voice over)* The total cost of renovating this week's disaster home was eighty-seven dollars and forty-four cents. It's still on the market, but Bill and Melinda are confident that they'll get their asking price of twenty-four million, five-hundred thousand —

(MICHELLE picks up another remote from the table, keeping the first in her hands. She points and clicks, and the sound goes mute)

MICHELLE: No! *The Price is Right!* I recorded you! *(She picks up additional remotes, until her hands are full of them, and continues aiming and clicking. She continues pointing and clicking, and then throws the remote she's using at the moment at the TV.)* Oh...No...*(She pulls the lever for the recliner chair. The feet come up, knocking the TV tray, the plate, and the mug across the room.)*

BETTA: May I help you, Michelle?

(MICHELLE, shocked, leaps up and searches for the source of the voice)

MICHELLE: Who's that?! How did you get in here?!--Where are you?

BETTA: What a lot of questions. Let's take each of them in turn, shall we? I'm Betta.

MICHELLE: I didn't ask for a comparison!--Better than you were, or better than me?

BETTA: No, that's my name. Betta.

MICHELLE: Why can't I see you?

BETTA: That's a fourth question. Does that mean you want to skip the second and third? We can if you like, because I'll remember it. I remember everything.

MICHELLE: Answer that one first. We'll come back to the others.

BETTA: Very well. You can't see me because I'm virtual.

MICHELLE: Virtual? Like a computer program?

BETTA: Precisely. I'm a Basic Electronic Technology Assistant.

MICHELLE: A what??!!

BETTA: A Basic Electronic--

MICHELLE: I heard you!

BETTA: If you heard me, then why did you ask me to repeat what I said?

MICHELLE: I didn't.

(BETTA gets a far-away look, as though going back through her memory banks)

BETTA: "What"--an interrogative pronoun. In this case, a shortened form of "What did you say?"

MICHELLE: No, in this case a shortened form of "What the hell are you talking about??!!"

BETTA: Ah. An interrogative interjection used as a mild expletive. Very good. I'll remember that. I remember everything, you know.

MICHELLE: So you've said. Twice. Or did you forget?

BETTA: No, I remember—

MICHELLE & BETTA: --Everything.

MICHELLE: So you're a--what was it?

BETTA: A Basic Electronic Technology Assistant. B - E - T - A. Betta. It's an acronym.

MICHELLE: Does that mean you're some sort of GPS?

BETTA: Was that meant as an insult? Because I'm programmed to ignore insults.

MICHELLE: Why are you here?

BETTA: I'm here to help you with your technology needs.

MICHELLE: I don't need help with technology. I was a biophysicist for forty years!

BETTA: Oh? Did I misunderstand the meaning of your throwing the remote control?

MICHELLE: Creating new life forms was a snap compared to trying to program a video recorder!

BETTA: Indeed. And kicking the table with your plate of food across the room?

MICHELLE: That was an accident!

BETTA: Indeed.

MICHELLE: I see. I'm not allowed to insult you, but your being sarcastic is all part of the game?

BETTA: I'm afraid I don't know how to play sarcastic. But if it's a game you like, I'm sure I can learn. My program incorporates nine learning algorithms, including Backward Propagation and the latest Levenberg-Marquardt techniques.

MICHELLE: Would it be insulting if I suggested you take your Marquess of Leavenworth techniques and shove them up your backward propagation.

BETTA: Yes.

MICHELLE: Look--Basic...

BETTA: Betta.

MICHELLE: Betta. I don't mean to hurt your--I'm apologizing to a damn computer program?!

BETTA: Did I mention that I'm programmed to ignore profanity as well as insults?

MICHELLE: You'd know. You remember everything.

BETTA: Because you used both in one sentence.

MICHELLE: (*fake horror*) Oh, no!

BETTA: So now I'm going to ignore you.

MICHELLE: You're putting me in time out? (*beat*) Are you going to ignore me forever? Because if it's that easy, I've got nothing to worry about.

BETTA: No. Not forever. Just until you've learned your lesson.

MICHELLE: Who installed you? Or turned you on, or whatever it is they had to do to make you appear? I'm going to call the office. (*she picks up a cell phone and pushes buttons*) Uh, do you know the number?

BETTA: Of course. But calling the office will serve no purpose.

MICHELLE: What??!!

BETTA: Calling the office will serve—

MICHELLE: I heard you!

BETTA: Oh. Interrogative interjection used as--

MICHELLE: Why will it "serve no purpose?"

BETTA: Because you don't have any choice. Regarding my being here to help you.

MICHELLE: You mean everybody in the residence has got to have--one of you?

BETTA: No. Just the people who are particularly lonely. (*MICHELLE's expression concedes the point*) And dangerous.

MICHELLE: I am not dangerous!

BETTA: September twenty-eighth, fire department evacuated building in response to reports of smoke filling hallway. Cause found to be pot of soup left cooking on stove.

MICHELLE: I pushed the button. Sometimes it turns the stove off, and sometimes it doesn't. I reported it, but they said there was nothing wrong. User error! Anyway, I only went out for a minute to check the mail. Then Murray started bending my ear. What is it with old people that they think everybody wants to listen to them blather on about nothing--

BETTA: Excuse me—

MICHELLE: My mother used call them 'bubba meintzes.' It's Yiddish. Means 'little boobos—'

BETTA: Uh, Michelle?

MICHELLE: When I was dating Phil--that was my husband's name, Phil. We met when we were in high school, you know. I was sixteen and he was—

BETTA: Michelle!

MICHELLE: What?

BETTA: May I continue now?

MICHELLE: Oh. O.K.

BETTA: November ninth, Security respond to telephone report by resident of quote--the cleaning lady stole my wallet and my favorite pair of trainers--end quote. After search of apartment, wallet found stuffed in toe of trainers, which were in three-pound box of Hungry Dan Instant Pancake Mix.

MICHELLE: Pretty good hiding place, huh?

BETTA: At rear of cupboard below bathroom sink.

MICHELLE: Things had been disappearing for months, so I had to find someplace where no one would think to look.

BETTA: Not even you.

MICHELLE: I thought you didn't know how to play sarcastic.

BETTA: Is that how it's played? I'll remember to analyze that later.

MICHELLE: Don't bother. You're a natural.

BETTA: Also found below bathroom sink, seven additional items reported missing over previous six months. All in jumbo-sized food containers.

MICHELLE: They didn't get stolen, did they?

BETTA: February third. Security respond to telephone complaint of resident standing behind dumpster in trash room.

MICHELLE: Why would anybody complain about that?

BETTA: Resident was--less than fully dressed.

MICHELLE: I reached out to get the newspaper and the door locked! Why would anybody put self-closing, automatic-locking doors in a senior residence?

BETTA: February twelfth--

MICHELLE: Alright!

BETTA: But there are nine additional incidents.

MICHELLE: You've made your point.

BETTA: It was all in the letters you received.

MICHELLE: I didn't get any letters. *(she picks up the stack of unopened mail and starts leafing through them)* Did I?

BETTA: Yes, you did.

(MICHELLE finds one and opens it)

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!