

# SPEAKING IN TONGUES

BY ANDREW BOVELL



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*Theatre Program at end of playtext*

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*Speaking in Tongues* was first produced by Griffin Theatre Company at the Stables Theatre, Sydney, on 6 August 1996, with the following cast:

JANE & VALERIE

SONJA & SARAH

PETE, NEIL & JOHN

LEON & NICK

Elaine Hudson

Glenda Linscott

Geoff Morrell

Marshall Napier

Director, Ros Horin

Designer, Liane Wilcher

Composer, Sarah de Jong

## **CHARACTERS**

The play is in three parts.

Each part has been written for four actors: two men and two women.

Part One:

LEON, Sonja's husband

SONJA, Leon's wife

JANE, Pete's wife, Nick's neighbour

PETE, Jane's husband, Nick's neighbour

Part Two:

VALERIE, John's wife, Sarah's therapist

SARAH, Valerie's client, Neil's ex-girlfriend

NICK, Jane and Pete's neighbour

NEIL, Sarah's ex-boyfriend

Part Three:

JOHN, Valerie's husband

LEON

SARAH

VALERIE

## **TEXT NOTE**

Whenever the / symbol appears within the dialogue, it is to indicate that the remainder of the speech is spoken simultaneously with the speech following.

## PART ONE

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*Meet PETE and JANE and LEON and SONJA. PETE is married to JANE. SONJA is married to LEON. PETE meets SONJA in a bar and they go back to a cheap hotel room. LEON meets JANE in a bar and they go back to a cheap hotel room. A double infidelity. Except PETE and SONJA don't go through with it. While LEON and JANE do. SONJA leaves LEON. PETE leaves JANE. PETE meets LEON in a bar. They talk. JANE meets SONJA in a bar. They talk. When PETE goes back home JANE tells him a story about a neighbour who throws a woman's shoe into a vacant block. When SONJA goes back home LEON tells her a story about a man who wears brown brogues.*

*Two bars. The city.*



*Music rises... a little sexy. Latin. Two couples are dancing. PETE and SONJA are in one bar. LEON and JANE are in the other. The dancing is close... and it's good, more than a simple shuffle. The dancing is identical. Both couples are like mirrors of the other. The lights fade on the couples dancing.*

*Two rooms. Cheap. Spartan. Faded.*

*SONJA and JANE enter. They look around the room. PETE and LEON follow. They look around the room. Each couple holds a stillness for a moment.*

PETE/LEON: It's not much.

SONJA: It's what / I expected.

JANE: I expected—I don't know what I expected. It makes me feel / cheap.

SONJA: Cheap. Sordid.

PETE/LEON: Do you want to leave?

SONJA/JANE: No.

SONJA: I like it. / Do you?

JANE: Do you?

LEON: We could go somewhere else.

PETE: I'm not sure.

JANE: We're here now.

PETE: I'm sorry.

SONJA: Why?

PETE: It's just that / I haven't done this sort of thing before.

LEON: I haven't done this sort of thing before.

SONJA/JANE: Nor have I.

LEON *looks at* JANE. PETE *looks at* SONJA. *They both look away.*  
LEON *and* PETE *each touch their heart.*

LEON: I've got this pain in / my chest.

PETE: My chest is pounding.

SONJA/JANE: Are you alright?

PETE/LEON: Yes.

SONJA/JANE: Are you sure?

PETE: I said / I'm alright.

LEON: I'm alright.

PETE: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap.

JANE: You're not having / a heart attack?

SONJA: A heart attack is something I couldn't cope with / right now.

LEON: Right now I could do with / a drink.

PETE: A drink would go down well.

JANE: Do / you want to go back?

SONJA: You want to go / back?

LEON: Back to the bar?

PETE: No.

JANE: Yes.

LEON: No.

PETE: We're here now.

JANE: Good.

PETE: What would you do?

JANE: Because nor do I.

PETE: If I was having a heart attack?

SONJA: What?

LEON: Good.

PETE: If I was having a heart attack, what would you do?

SONJA: I'd get help.

PETE: It's just that / we hardly know each other.

JANE: We hardly know each other.

SONJA: I'd help a stranger.

PETE: Yes. But it would mean being found out. There would be an ambulance, perhaps police. I'm not sure, but you would have to explain.

SONJA: But if it was a matter of life and death.

JANE: I feel a little awkward.

PETE: Yes. I wasn't sure. For a moment I wasn't sure. / I'm sorry.

LEON: I'm sorry.

SONJA/JANE: Don't be.

PETE: It was a stupid thing to ask.

*An awkward silence passes between them.*

SONJA/JANE: Have you really never done this before?

PETE/LEON: No.

JANE: That's reassuring.

LEON: Why?

JANE: I don't know.

SONJA: I wish you had. I wish

JANE: I suppose

SONJA: You were an expert. Then at least one of us would know where to start.

JANE: It's reassuring to know that I'm not one of many.

LEON: That you're special?

JANE: Yes.

LEON: You are.

JANE: Thank you.

LEON: It's alright. / What we're doing is alright.



PETE: What we're doing is alright. / Isn't it?

JANE: Isn't it hot?

SONJA/LEON: Don't back out on me now.

JANE/PETE: I'm not.

JANE: It's just that / it's been a long time since I've been with another man.

SONJA: It's been a long time since I've been with another man.

JANE: You see / I'm married.

SONJA: I'm married.

LEON/PETE: I know. So am I.

JANE/PETE: Happily married.

SONJA/LEON: Me too.

JANE/PETE: I couldn't get my wedding ring off.

LEON: I don't wear one. My wife would like me to but it irritates me. My finger flares up. It swells. So I don't wear one. Listen to me. I can't stop talking. My mouth. I can't turn it off. Tell me to shut up.

JANE/SONJA: You're nervous.

LEON: Yeah / a little.

PETE: A little.

SONJA/JANE: So... why are you here?

PETE/LEON: I don't know.

PETE: There's something inside which is saying / it's not enough.

LEON: It's not enough.

PETE: I'm a fool but / I want more.

LEON: I want more.

PETE: I just want more. I want to feel something.

LEON: I just want to feel something.

LEON/PETE: Something inside.

LEON: Like when I was a kid.

PETE: Something intense.

LEON: Something that will make me stop.

PETE: Something wrong. / I just want to feel something.

LEON: I just want to feel something.

PETE: Anything. / Because I'm numb.

LEON: Because I'm numb.

*Beat.*

PETE/LEON: Why are you here?

JANE *and* SONJA *each touch the side of their face.*

JANE: I don't know. / Because you asked me?

SONJA: Because you asked me.

PETE: I didn't ask you. You asked me.

SONJA: But you said yes.

PETE: So...

LEON: But...

PETE/LEON: But why were you in that bar?

SONJA: Because I was hoping that someone like you would come along  
and try to pick me up. / I don't know.

JANE: I don't know. Because I was hoping that someone like you would  
come along and try to pick me up.

SONJA: The funny thing is / I had no intention of accepting.

JANE: I had no intention of accepting.

SONJA: Isn't that funny?

JANE: It's just that / I wanted to know if I was still attractive. If a man

SONJA: I wanted to know if I was still attractive. If a man, a stranger

SONJA/JANE: Found me attractive.

PETE/LEON: I find you attractive.

JANE: Thank you.

SONJA: Do you? It's funny how a woman starts to doubt it.

JANE: My husband hasn't told me that for a long time.

LEON: Do you need to be told?

JANE: Yes, yes I do, / once and a while.

SONJA: Once and a while I need to be told.

PETE: I'm telling you. I think you're attractive.

SONJA: Thank you.

*Beat.*

SONJA/JANE: Tell me about your wife.

LEON: Who?

JANE: Your wife.

PETE/LEON: Why?

SONJA/JANE: Is she happy?

PETE/LEON: With me?

SONJA/JANE: With life.

PETE/LEON: Yes.

LEON: Maybe. / I don't know. Why do you want to know?

PETE: I don't know. Why do you want to know?

SONJA/JANE: I want to know something about the woman I'm hurting.

LEON: Let's get something clear. / You're not hurting her. I am.

PETE: You're not hurting her. / I am.

SONJA/JANE: Then I want to know something about the woman you're hurting. [*Beat.*] What's her name?

PETE: Jane.

LEON: Sonja.

JANE/SONJA: Nice name. I'm sorry

SONJA: Jane.

JANE: Sonja.

PETE/LEON: Don't.

JANE/SONJA: What?

PETE/LEON: Talk as if she was here.

JANE: Sorry. / What's she like?

SONJA: What's she like?

PETE/LEON: She's attractive.

LEON: Strong.

PETE: Fragile. She depends on me.

LEON: I depend on her.

PETE/LEON: It drives me mad.

LEON: Her strength.

PETE: Her fragility.

LEON/PETE: And yet that's what attracts me. Isn't that strange?