

Two Pair

a hip-hop Comedy of Errors

By Lauri Donahue and Bill Jones

based on the play by William Shakespeare

Me@lauridonahue.com

FADE IN:

INT. L.A. FAMILY COURT - DAY (25 YEARS AGO)

Twin boys -- YOUNG JONATHAN and YOUNG JERMAIN, African-American and about 18 months old, squirm in their seats.

Their twin baby brothers, YOUNG DAVID and YOUNG DENZEL, 5 months old, nap in a double stroller nearby.

JUDGE CHAVEZ, 50, murmurs to her bailiff.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

Two sets of identical twins.  
Figure the odds...

She sighs and reads from her prepared ruling.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

"The custody arrangement requested by the parties is unconventional, but I cannot say it is against the best interests of the children."

She looks toward the boys and her expression softens.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

"Therefore, I hereby grant custody of the two minor children Jonathan and David to their father, Reverend Adam Merchant --"

She peers over her glasses at YOUNG ADAM, 30, a black man wearing a clerical collar and an earnest expression.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

"And custody of the two minor children Jermain and Denzel to their mother, Mrs. Amelia Evans Merchant."

She takes a long skeptical look at YOUNG AMELIA, about 25, a strikingly beautiful black woman wearing a very short dress over her very long legs.

Amelia stares back at her, boldly.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

(to Adam)

I understand you'll be taking Jonathan and David back to your home town of Syracuse, Kansas?

ADAM

Yes, your honor.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

(to Amelia)

And you'll remain here in Los Angeles, to pursue your... singing career?

YOUNG AMELIA

Yes, your honor.

Judge Chavez looks from Amelia to Adam and shakes her head in wonderment. How did these two ever end up together?

JUDGE CHAVEZ

(reading)

"The parties have agreed not to seek visitation with respect to the children in each other's custody..."

She looks up at them.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

Now are you really sure --?

YOUNG ADAM

It's bad enough she'll be raising two of my sons with her devil music and sinful ways.

Amelia confronts him. The bailiff moves in to avert a Jerry Springer moment.

YOUNG AMELIA

And it's bad enough he'll be raising MY sons to be Bible-thumpin' hypocrites like their --

YOUNG ADAM

(overlapping)

They'll grow up to be good, Christian --

YOUNG AMELIA

(overlapping)

Prob'ly never have a day of fun in their whole lives, poor babies...

The judge BANGS her gavel as the volume rises and the bailiff moves Adam and Amelia apart.

The noise wakes up the babies and they howl.

JUDGE CHAVEZ

So ordered! Next case.

Adam picks up one of the crying babies, patting his back to comfort him, then turns to one of the toddlers.

ADAM

Come along, Jonathan.

Young Jonathan climbs out of his seat and ambles toward his father. His twin follows.

ADAM

I'm sorry, Jermain -- you're staying here with your mama.

Jermain goes back to hug his mother's leg, sucking his thumb.

Adam holds the heavy door open, fighting back tears, not allowing himself a backward glance, and gestures impatiently for Jonathan to follow.

Jonathan goes through the doorway, then looks back at his mother. She forces herself to keep her back to him, but there are tears in her eyes.

YOUNG JONATHAN

Mama?

The door SLAMS shut on his confused expression.

SUPER: "25 years later."

INT. HIGH SCHOOL GYM - DAY (THE PRESENT)

The sound of hammering echoes the slamming door, then segues into a hip-hop beat. The music's loud, and everyone has to shout to be heard over it.

JONATHAN MERCHANT, late 20's, handsome and athletic, stands on the stage. He wears nerdy glasses and carries a clipboard.

The stage is chaotic with student actors in half-finished costumes rehearsing their blocking, set painters, and the tech crew on ladders changing the gels for the lights.

The student wardrobe mistress pins up the hem for the DUKE, a hefty student sweating in a velvet gown.

Jonathan goes backstage and notices ERIC, a student actor, getting a little too up-close-and-personal with the young hottie dressed as the Courtesan.

JONATHAN

Hey, you two -- save it for opening night.

He notices the boom-box at Eric's feet.

JONATHAN

Could we cut the noise, please?

ERIC

Come on, Mr. Merchant -- my rhymes  
help me 'member my lines.

Jonathan tucks his clipboard under his arm and uses his hands to accentuate each syllable "B-Boy" style.

JONATHAN

(raps)  
If you keep your mind on your  
lines, 'stead of Karen's behind --

The students erupt in laughter. Eric winces and shuts off the music.

JONATHAN

Let's hear some real poetry,  
people! Scene one: Duke, Egeon --  
places!

The students hustle to clear the stage. The Duke takes his place opposite EGEON -- a lanky basketball player in a long gray wig. Jonathan watches from the wings.

JONATHAN

And ... lights!

The lights come up with a HUM.

EGEON

"In Syracuse was I born and wed,  
unto a woman, happy but for me --"

A huge ZAP of electricity is followed by a shower of sparks from the lights. The sparks ignite the gray wig which crackles and burns.

ERIC

(enjoying the show)  
Dang...

Egeon shrieks, snatches the wig from his head and throws it to the stage.

Jonathan runs out from the wings and attacks the smoldering wig with a fire extinguisher, stomping on the sodden mess for good measure.

The PRINCIPAL's voice comes from the back of the gym.

PRINCIPAL (O.S.)

Mr. Merchant?

The students all go silent. Jonathan looks up with a sickly "I am in deep trouble" smile.

The middle-aged high school principal approaches the stage, her expression solemn.

## PRINCIPAL

Jonathan -- I'm afraid I have some  
bad news.

INT. SYRACUSE STAR NEWSPAPER OFFICES - DAY

DAVID MERCHANT works at his desk, which is heaped high with files and papers. He's about 25 and his clothes are pretty hip -- for Kansas.

He wears headphones and types in rhythm with the unheard music. A framed Kansas State diploma and several journalism awards hang over his desk.

His phone rings. He sees the flashing light and takes off his headset to answer.

## DAVID

Syracuse Star. David Merchant.

He listens, with increasing shock.

INT. HOSPITAL WAITING ROOM - DAY

David bursts into the room and runs to the admitting desk.

## DAVID

They brought my Dad here --  
Reverend Adam Merchant.

While the clerk checks the records, David spots Jonathan talking to a petite, grey-haired church lady, AUNT MAVIS, and hurries over to them.

## DAVID

Hey, Aunt Mavis. What happened?

## AUNT MAVIS

He was cookin' barbecue at the old  
folks' home and he just suddenly  
keeled right over. Broke his arm  
on the picnic table on the way  
down.

A bellow comes from the admitting desk.

## SISTER EVANS (O.S.)

You just tell me where the hell he  
is, goddammit!

Aunt Mavis shakes her head.

SISTER EVANS marches toward them. She's an elderly black woman in a flowered dress that makes her look like a chintz-covered sofa. Her blond wig is on crooked and she carries a patent-leather purse large enough to hold a young child.

SISTER EVANS

Bitch got the nerve to tell me I ain't family.

AUNT MAVIS

She's just doing her job, Sister.

Adam's sons brace themselves for Sister Evans's group hug.

SISTER EVANS

How you doin', babies?

DAVID AND JONATHAN

(by rote)

Fine, Sister Evans.

A NURSE appears.

NURSE

I can take you to him now.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY

ADAM, now about 55, lies in his hospital bed with his eyes closed and his right arm in a cast, hooked up to monitors.

The nurse opens the door and Jonathan and David hurry to their father's bedside.

JONATHAN

Daddy? Can you hear me?

DAVID

Dad? It's me, David.

Rev. Merchant slowly opens his eyes, gazes weakly at his sons, and smiles. He's groggy and his speech is slurred.

ADAM

Now don't you-all look so worried. It's enough to give a man a heart attack!

JONATHAN

Dad... Is there anyone we should call? Aunt Mavis is already here...

AUNT MAVIS

We'll be praying for you, Reverend. The whole congregation. We'll hold a candlelight vigil right here at the --

ADAM

A vigil? What are you --?

He sees the worry on their faces.

ADAM

Oh, sweet Jesus! Are you telling me I'm going to die?

DAVID

We don't know that, Dad. We haven't even talk to the doc--

ADAM

Your mama.

JONATHAN

What?

ADAM

I want to talk with your mama before I die.

Jonathan and David exchange a confused glance.

JONATHAN

Dad... Mama's dead. She passed away when we were --

Adam's starting to fade out.

ADAM

I just want to tell your mama... I still love her...

He closes his eyes. His sons look at him in alarm.

DAVID

Is he --?

The nurse checks the monitor.

NURSE

It's just the sedative taking effect. He'll sleep until the morning now.

She leaves. Jonathan looks at his father with concern.

JONATHAN

Do you think there's brain damage?

DAVID

Maybe it's the medication...

A huge sigh catches their attention. They turn to see Aunt Mavis with the pained expression of someone dying to let out a secret.

AUNT MAVIS

He told me not to say anything. Made me promise on a Bible.

DAVID

Aunt Mavis, what are you --?

She glances at Adam, then let it all out in a rapid-fire undertone.

AUNT MAVIS

When he came back home with you two after living in Los Angeles all those years, nobody even knew he'd been married. He let out his wife had died. But it was too big a secret for him to keep inside, so one day he told me they'd been divorced, and he thought it'd be easier on you boys not to think your mama'd ... abandoned you.

Jonathan and David are thunderstruck.

DAVID

This is too much for me, man.  
First Dad, and now --

JONATHAN

(overlapping)

Did he say where she lived or --?

SISTER EVANS

(overlapping)

Why didn't you ever tell ME about --?

AUNT MAVIS

That's all he said, and then he made me swear on the Book. I just hope I don't burn in hell for breaking his confidence.

David gives her a squeeze.

DAVID

Don't you worry about it, Aunt Mavis. You've got your place in heaven reserved and confirmed.

He stares at his father, deep in thought, then turns back to the church ladies.

DAVID

Aunt Mavis, Sister, would you mind staying here with Dad for a while?

AUNT MAVIS

We'd be happy to.

David heads for the door.

DAVID  
(to Jonathan)  
Come on! We got work to do.

JONATHAN  
What are you --?

David leaves, Jonathan following.

INT. MERCHANT HOME - DAY

David rummages in the desk drawers in Adam's book-lined study while Jonathan watches from the doorway.

JONATHAN  
I don't think Dad would like you  
messing around with his stuff.

DAVID  
He wants us to find Mama, right?

David turns his attention to the bookshelves. One shelf is devoted to LPs, cassettes, 8-tracks, and CDs. David pulls out an album from 25 years ago. On the cover is a photo of an R&B singer under the title "Lia -- A New Leaf."

It's Young Amelia. He picks up a brand-new CD: "Lia! Live in Las Vegas."

DAVID  
Wonder what these'd go for on eBay?

Jonathan shoots him a dirty look.

DAVID  
Just tryin' to lighten things up.  
Dad told us Mama was a singer,  
right?

He pulls out some more albums, then notices something hidden behind them.

DAVID  
There's somethin' back here.

He reaches in and withdraws a bundle of unopened envelopes held together with a rubber band.

The most recent envelope on the top of the pile is addressed to "Mrs. Amelia Evans Merchant, c/o New Leaf Music, 17 Rodeo Drive, Beverly Hills, CA 90210."

DAVID  
I do believe this is what we call a  
clue.

He flips through the rest of the envelopes. All of them have Rev. Adam's return address and all are stamped "REFUSED - RETURN TO SENDER."

DAVID

Why do you think we don't have any pictures of Mama in the house?

Jonathan shrugs.

JONATHAN

I guess it was too hard on Dad, after she... whatever...

David searches in his father's desk drawer.

JONATHAN

What are you looking for now?

David triumphantly retrieves a small leather photo portfolio.

DAVID

This! I think...

He puts the oldest New Leaf album on the desk and places the portfolio next to it. With theatrical trepidation, he flips open the portfolio:

It's Adam and Amelia's wedding picture.

Jonathan's eyes widen as he compares it to the old album cover: Amelia is Lia!

LATER

The afternoon sun's low in the sky...

David comes in with two mugs of coffee and sets one on the desk near his brother. Jonathan's holding the phone to his ear and doodling on the note pad.

DAVID

You still on hold?

JONATHAN

They seem to think I'm some kinda stalker.

DAVID

Yeah, wonder why, us calling out of the blue and --

Jonathan holds his hand up to shush him.

JONATHAN

(into the phone)  
Yeah, I'm still here.

He listens and jots notes on the pad.

JONATHAN

(into phone)

OK, I'll do that. Thanks. I appreciate your help.

He hangs up.

JONATHAN

They finally gave me the name of the lawyer -- Ms. Yamamoto. They say if I fax her a letter with copies of our driver's licenses and birth certificates and all, she'll look into it and --

DAVID

And how long's that gonna take? Dad could be gone by the time she --

JONATHAN

What else are we supposed to do? Just show up at New Leaf and --?

DAVID

That's exactly what I think we should do.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - NIGHT

Adam's still asleep. Jonathan and David stand by the bed, dressed for travel.

Aunt Mavis sits by the bed with her open Bible in her lap.

Sister Evans snores loudly in the one comfortable chair.

DAVID

You'll tell him we went to find Mama, soon as he wakes up?

JONATHAN

We should only be gone a few days.

AUNT MAVIS

Now, don't you worry. Someone from the church will be here all the time.

They leave. Aunt Mavis watches them go then bows her head in prayer.

AUNT MAVIS

Lord, keep those boys safe out there among the heathens...

Sister Evans snorts rudely in her sleep.