

BLACK BAG JOB

MLK — Audition Sides

Voice / V.O. Performance

an unAmerican new play by Christian Levatino
Gangbusters Theatre Company · Hollywood Fringe 2026
Broadwater Black Box · Opens June 11, 2026

ABOUT THE ROLE

MLK never appears onstage. His voice comes through a vintage Sony TC-250A reel-to-reel tape recorder operated by one of the federal agents. In the play's climactic Scene 9, he is heard live — speaking through a partially open door to a man he doesn't know is surveilling him. Throughout the rest of the play, his voice filters through as recorded surveillance audio: intimate, domestic, unguarded.

The performance requires two distinct registers:

1. **Surveillance audio** (V.O.) — King speaking privately, in-room, unaware he is being recorded. Not the public orator. The man. Tired. Funny. Tender. Afraid.
2. **Live encounter** (V.O./LIVE, Scene 9) — King speaking directly to Bravo (Curtis Holloway), one of the agents, who has entered Room 306 posing as a TV repairman. King doesn't know who he is. The scene is gentle, probing, and devastating.

The date is April 4, 1968. Memphis, Tennessee. The Lorraine Motel.

WHAT'S IN THESE SIDES

This packet contains every MLK line from the production script (Draft 19 — Tech Draft, 5/11/26), organized by scene. Surveillance audio lines are labeled V.O. Live encounter lines are labeled V.O./LIVE. Stage directions are included only where they clarify tone or staging context.

PART ONE

SURVEILLANCE AUDIO (V.O.)

These lines are heard through the reel-to-reel. King is speaking privately — to Abernathy, to Jackson, to Kyles, to himself. He does not know he is being recorded.

SCENE 4 — THE REEL COMES ALIVE

First surveillance audio. King's voice arrives mid-sentence.

MLK (V.O.)

"...I told Coretta last night I don't feel safe here. But I told her the movement's not about safety."

MLK (V.O.)

"It's about choosing to walk through the fire anyway..."

MLK (V.O.)

"...besides, I've never felt safe. Not in Montgomery. Not in Chicago. Not even in my own house."

Silence. Tape hiss.

SCENE 5 — THE SYMBOL

Surveillance audio. Intimate, unguarded.

MLK (V.O.)

"...that's the hard part about becoming a symbol. People stop letting you be human."

Later — the same tape, a different moment:

MLK (V.O.)

"...I wasn't always faithful. I wasn't always kind. But I loved her."

SCENE 7 — THE VOICE

Surveillance audio. The fear of losing his own voice.

MLK (V.O.)

"...you worry you'll lose the sound of your own voice... that
someday you'll speak, and it —"

(fade into static)

"...won't matter."

A long silence. The reel ticks.

SCENE 8 — PRAYER

Surveillance audio. Overheard, not meant to be.

MLK (V.O.)

"...Lord, give me strength to walk through it one more time..."

Lights fade on 306. Only the surveillance room remains.

SCENE 10 — THE BLUE TIE

Surveillance audio. Domestic. Mundane. Heartbreaking in retrospect.

MLK (V.O.)

(faint, through the reel to reel)

'...no, no, the blue tie. The other one wrinkles too easy... (soft
movement) '...just put it on the hanger, Jesse...yeah, that's
fine...'

SCENE 11 — PREPARATION

Surveillance audio. King and his people getting ready.

MLK (V.O.)

Did they ever fix that microphone from last night?

Jesse (V.O.): They say they did.

MLK (V.O.)

(laughs softly)

Well, if it squeals again we'll just keep preaching over it.

MLK (V.O.)

Listen — this thing was never about me anyway.

A small pause.

MLK (V.O.)

If I drop dead tomorrow, this movement better be marching by morning.

Silence from the surveillance room. Delta's pencil stops moving. Charlie lowers his head. Echo watches the levels.

Jesse (V.O.): Don't talk like that.

MLK (V.O.)

(smiling)

I'm serious.

MLK (V.O.)

Let's go see what Memphis looks like tonight.

SCENE 12 — THE PLAN

Surveillance audio. King coordinating dinner logistics with Jesse.

MLK (V.O.)

Alright, Jesse.

MLK (V.O.)

(filtered; weary but warm)

"...make sure they know we're meeting at six-thirty. Reverend Kyles said the house is just ten minutes from here."

MLK (V.O.)

(chuckles)

"Come on now, Ralph. I don't need a coat to eat chicken and biscuits."

SCENE 13 — ONE DAY WITHOUT

Surveillance audio. The weight of it.

MLK (V.O.)

"...You know what I'd do for one day without someone trying to kill me? Just one. Just to remember what silence feels like."

SCENE 14 — BEFORE THE BALCONY

Surveillance audio. Moments before 6:01 PM.

MLK (V.O.)

(clear now, just across the wall)

"...Jesse, make sure you bring a coat. It's colder than it looks..."

Later — laughing, alive:

MLK (V.O.)

(laughing, alive)

Jesse — did you grab my coat?

SCENE 15 — THE TAPE BREAKS UP

Surveillance audio — fragmented. The tape degrading.

MLK (V.O.)

"...a man dies..."

"...keeps silent..."

"...the promised —"

SCENE Final — THE MOUNTAINTOP

The last thing heard. Warped. Degraded. The tape dying.

MLK (V.O.)

(warped / distant / degraded)

"Like anybody... I would like to live a long life, longevity has its place..."

Dropout.

MLK (V.O.)

"But I'm not concerned about that now..."

Static.

MLK (V.O.)

"...I just want to do God's will..."

Tape wobble.

MLK (V.O.)

"...Mine eyes have seen the glory..."

The voice wears out. Not sudden. The way recordings die: thinning, dragging, until the words are just the shape of words. Then silence.

PART TWO

THE LIVE ENCOUNTER (V.O./LIVE) — SCENE 9

Bravo (Curtis Holloway) has entered Room 306 posing as a TV repairman sent to fix a rolling picture. King doesn't know who he is. King never fully appears — we see only partial silhouette, framed in the corridor. The surveillance team hears and records every word. This is the moral center of the play.

BRAVO's lines are included for context only — the auditioner reads only MLK.

(SC) The door opens — crisp, intimate.

Abernathy (V.O.): They say the picture's rolling?

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

(tired, wry)

No.

But if they're here, might as well let 'em work.

Echo raises levels. The red pilot light glows.

BRAVO

(in-room now)

Evening. TV repair. They said you had a rolling picture.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

(chuckles)

Story of my life.

Be my guest.

Delta can't look away. Bravo taps the TV. Adjusts the vertical dial.

ABERNATHY (V.O.)

(off) You from around here?

BRAVO

(a beat too long)

No, sir. Just passing through.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

You got a name, son?

Echo's pencil stops mid-stroke.

BRAVO

David, sir.

King rises — closer now. Still only partial.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

(smiling, gentle)

Well, David-from-out-of-town, I appreciate you coming.

We been running all day.

Everybody's tired but the devil.

Delta's eyes glass up. Charlie swallows hard.

BRAVO

Picture should hold now. If it acts up, they'll send someone else.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

They always send somebody else.

He says it like a joke. It doesn't sound like one.

King moves to the window. A blade of Memphis light cuts in.

From the surveillance room: only his silhouette, framed in the corridor.

DELTA

(barely a breath)

Don't step out there...

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

You see the river from up here?

BRAVO

(lying)

No, sir. Just parking lot and sky.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

Tell me something, David —
you like this work?

Bravo freezes, mid-step.

BRAVO

(after a beat)

It...pays steady, sir.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

(smiles, weary)

Steady's a blessing.

Just make sure it don't cost you your sleep.

Surveillance side: Charlie closes his eyes. Delta grips the chair.

BRAVO

Yes, sir.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

Well...thank you, David.

(beat)

World's watching this little balcony anyway.

Nice to know somebody's fixing the picture.

(SC) Echo adjusts gain down a hair.

BRAVO

(beat)

Now.

Bravo nods. Breaks his own stillness.

BRAVO

Have a good evening, sir.

MLK (V.O./LIVE)

You too, son.

(soft)

Be careful out there.

Bravo pauses at that. Just for a breath.

(SCB) Then he's gone — out the 306 door.

END OF SIDES

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