

The Analysing Engine

opera in one act for six singers and seven instruments

Libretto

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Characters

Professor Platt - <i>theorist, inventor of the Engine</i>	soprano
Dr Neare - <i>Platt's assistant, maker of the Engine</i>	baritone
<i>Four students:</i>	
Sally Mudd - <i>an idealist</i>	soprano
Jake McCormick - <i>an activist - Sally's boyfriend</i>	tenor
Amanda Palmer - <i>smart, (outwardly) conventional, careful</i>	soprano
Hunter Pyne - <i>privileged, wealthy - Amanda's fiancé</i>	baritone

Setting

A university science laboratory, modern-day.

The set is dominated by a monstrous machine: a complicated assemblage of wires, dials, pipes, brass wheels, levers, cables, and lights. This is the Analysing Engine. It is large enough for Platt and Neare to clamber around inside. Towards stage-rear, there is a space within the Engine where the four students stand during the experiment. In front of this space there is a frosted glass panel which partially covers them leaving their heads and feet visible (like an old-fashioned X-ray machine). The subjects are attached to the Engine with skull-cap helmets, with wires and lights (that illuminate).

The Engine breaks apart catastrophically halfway through the opera.

To one side of the stage there is an old-fashioned lectern, from which the Professor addresses the audience. There are also two control panels, which Platt and Neare crouch over during the experiment. Towards the front of the stage, on either side, are chairs that Neare will grab for the students in scene 6.

The instrumental ensemble may be incorporated into the Engine with wires and cables. The set may spill over into the audience area - as if the whole space is the interior of a laboratory.

Platt (and Neare) address the audience as fellow scientists at a lecture-demonstration. Platt is excited to explain her theory that she can measure the love between couples using the newly completed Analysing Engine. The students have been recruited as test-subjects for the experiment/demonstration.

Platt and Neare wear white lab coats (possibly getting them muddled when they are scrambling around in the prologue). They wear (comical) safety goggles during the experiments.

Professor Platt is short-sighted - perhaps literally - while Neare seethes with suppressed rage and resentment (like a character played by John Cleese).

The students are dressed in line with their "archetypes": Amanda and Hunter are wealthy and ostentatiously privileged, while Sally and Jake are self-conscious political activists. They all carry phones.

Duration: 75 minutes

Special thanks to Rinde Eckert

Program Note

A message from Professor Louise Dorothy Platt:

You are all very welcome to the Neuro-Amatory Analytics Laboratory.

You should know that this presentation will last about an hour.

I will begin by outlining the technical and theoretical background of our research, then Dr Neare and I will introduce the centre-piece of our work: the Analysing Engine.

The Engine is designed to measure the emotional connection between two people with unprecedented accuracy. I call this the “Amorous Coupling Co-efficient”. Imagine, if you will, the great boon this will prove. If we can extrapolate from this value, we will be able to predict the outcome of any given relationship. Think of the time, money and heartache this will save!

We have invited four students to be the first test-subjects for our demonstration. They are two couples, in love (so they say - we’ll soon find out!). For fun, we will award a small cash prize to the pair that attains the highest co-efficient value from the Engine.

Please follow normal lab safety protocols at all times. The components we use are exceedingly fragile and there are high-voltage sonic-capacitors in the machine.

Finally, thank you in advance for signing the non-disclosure confidentiality agreement.

LDP (Professor)

Overlapping dialogue is indicated with a / symbol.

THE ANALYSING ENGINE

PROLOGUE:

A laboratory, dominated by the Engine

*The **PROFESSOR** (Platt) and the **ENGINEER** (Neare) are inside the engine, facing each other, uncomfortably close their heads visible. Their exchange is suggestive of sex. They are actually trying to remove a faulty piece of equipment.*

PLATT: Yes. Oh. Yes, that's it. Yes. Stick it further in. Yes. Wait...

/

NEARE: Wait. Hold on. I can feel it. It's coming... Yes...

PLATT: Slightly to the left!

/

NEARE: Yes... Keep your hand - right there...

PLATT: Yes.

NEARE: SLOWLY - yes, Wait!

/

PLATT: It's coming...

Both: AAAHH!!

They pull out a small cube with wires sticking out

NEARE: This unit is old and...

/

Professor sees audience, cuts him off

PLATT: Woah. You're already here?

They scramble to clean up and get ready.

SCENE 1:

Platt addresses the audience as if they are at a lecture-demonstration.

PLATT: Welcome. Thank you for coming.
No doubt you're aware of the broad outline of our research?
I'm Professor Platt and this is my assistant, Dr...

NEARE (*interrupts*): Associate.

PLATT: My *associate*, if you will, Dr...

NEARE: *Just* Associate.

PLATT: That's what I said...

NEARE You said "my associate - if you will". As if it were up to them.
It's not up to them, not open to question.
I deserve the title. I deserve respect.

(*aria*) You're the inventor, the thinker, the dreamer.
I am the maker, the designer, the engineer.
Your head's in the clouds, no grasp of reality.
While I grapple with capacitors, and relays and wires and displays.
And all you do is give speeches: blah blah blah blah blah blah...
Hah!

PLATT: Are you finished?

Neare nods slightly embarrassed

NEARE (*quietly*): This is my associate, Doctor Oliver Neare.

PLATT: Doctor Neare, my associate. And I am Professor Platt.

An alarm goes off. They scramble around again until one of them shuts it off...

PLATT: Quick. Out of time!
Go find the volunteers.

Neare goes off in search of the students.

PLATT: Meanwhile, let me explain the principles of the Analysing Engine.

SCENE 2

As Neare exits, Platt addresses the audience... (aria).

PLATT: In the course of investigating neural pathways in the auditory cortex, I discovered that musical sounds induce resonance-stimulus responses. These can be amplified and multiplexed through pseudo-coherent matrices. I theorised that a carefully adjusted timbral probe can induce an interference pattern, which can be quantised across multiple vectors.

Neare returns with a clipboard, leading two students - AMANDA and HUNTER

NEARE: Ahem. Professor.

PLATT: No doubt you're familiar with these concepts?

NEARE: Ahem. Professor.

PLATT (*ignores him*): Then we made a connection with neural firing patterns in the calcerine sulcus!

/

NEARE: Professor. Professor! PROFESSOR! PROFESSOR!!

These are our first "volunteers": Miss Palmer and Mr Pyne.

PLATT: Ah yes, good. Come in...

Amanda steps forward and offers her hand to the Professor. She flaunts an engagement ring for all to see.

AMANDA: Delighted to meet you. You said two hundred, yes?

PLATT: Goodness, that much?! (*looks at Neare*)

NEARE (*aside*): One hundred - and only to the winners.

HUNTER: Could we re-schedule. Something's just come up.

PLATT: No. We *have* to have everyone together...

AMANDA: Excuse me, who are *they*? (*indicates audience*)

PLATT: Colleagues. They'll be quiet.

Dr Neare, where are the... erm... others?

Neare frowns and consults clipboard.

NEARE: Mudd, McCormick. They should be ...

SALLY *storms in with a phone clamped to her ear shouting into it.*

SALLY: WHERE ARE YOU?!!!
Ah, so sorry.
He's *so* unreliable.
So irresponsible.
Always letting me down.

NEARE: Miss Mudd?

SALLY: *Ms* Mudd. My boy-friend is on his...

JAKE *enters.*

SALLY: Ah, at last.

JAKE: Sorry, Sal...

SALLY: *Don't* call me that!

JAKE: Sorry, Sa-LLY.

NEARE: All here. Finally.

PLATT: Two young couples - in love, eh?!

Do you know one-another?

QUARTET (*frostily*): We may have met? / I don't think so. / Maybe in class? / We've never met.

/

PLATT (*oblivious*): Splendid. Splendid!

PLATT & NEARE: All here? - all here. All present - for science.

/

QUARTET: For science?

PLATT/NEARE: For science.

NEARE: I hope you've signed the consent forms?
Come this way.

SCENE 3:

Neare directs the students to one side to prepare for the experiment.

NEARE: Leave your bags and belongings.
Empty your pockets.
Remove jackets, ties, sweaters, jewellery and shoes.

PLATT (*to audience*): After many years, I theorised that a reverse-angular sonic feedback loop...

NEARE: Everything! (*glares at Jake who is still pulling things out of his pockets*)

... if volumetrically adjusted, could probe deep into the auditory cortex.
We identified a cell-cluster responsible for...

NEARE: Everything! (*glares at Jake again*)

PLATT: ... the mediation of “*Affective-Choice Polarities*”.

NEARE: Switch off your phones and leave them too.

PLATT: And musical tones unlock the mysteries of the heart!

At the word “heart” all turn attention to Platt. Neare rolls his eyes.

QUARTET: The *heart*?

PLATT: Speaking metaphorically, of course!

We can measure with precision...

NEARE (*to audience*): The wiring’s the hard part.

/

QUARTET: For science!

/

PLATT: ... the emotional affinity

NEARE: Then the amplification circuitry...

/

QUARTET: For science....

/

PLATT: We can quantify and measure compatibility.

NEARE: And sixty-seven decoupling aggregators...

/

QUARTET: And knowledge

PLATT: And extrapolate pair-bonding potentiality.

/

QUARTET: And love.

Neare directs the young people to the machine. They stand behind a semi-transparent glass-frame. Their feet are visible below and their heads are visible above. Neare places EEG skull-caps on their heads, with long trailing coloured wires linking them to the Engine.

PLATT: I call it, the “Amorous Coupling-Co-efficient”.

NEARE (*to the students*): Relax, please.

PLATT: For fun: a hundred dollars to the couple that attains the highest value.

QUARTET: For science.

PLATT: First, we calibrate the Engine.

As Platt makes adjustments, assisted by Neare, each of the four young people responds to input from the machine. Then Neare goes over and switches the helmets on for each of the students in turn. As he does so, they each begin singing (inwardly).

AMANDA: Just a hundred dollars - not much.
 Brocade for the dress.
 Bouquets for the attendants. A small wedding.
 Perhaps a hundred guests? Or more? Maybe four hundred?
 A small wedding. We dream.

/

SALLY: One hundred dollars.
 Enough to start a fund. One day a female President.
 A female Chief-Justice, a female Head of the Armed Forces.
 Maybe we won't need an army?! End the military-industrial complex. We dream.

/

JAKE: One hundred dollars - wow, that's a lot.
 We can save a community, build an eco-system.
 Make friends with other species. We dream.

/

HUNTER: An investment opportunity.
 Start a small fund.
 An office, an assistant, investors.
 Growth of five percent. Flotation. We dream!

PLATT (*interrupts*): Excellent. We're ready.

SCENE 4

Platt and Neare prepare. They don safety goggles and take their places at the controls for the engine.

NEARE: This scope shows the numbers.

PLATT: Thank you, Neare.

NEARE: The subjects are ready, Professor.

PLATT: Relaxed? Comfortable?

NEARE: Yes, Professor.

PLATT: And the Engine? All charged up?

NEARE: Yes. In perfect order.

QUARTET: Our hearts are open.
Our minds are clear.
Open. Clear.

PLATT (*very quietly*): Dr Neare. Start the Engine.

The Engine starts very slowly with blinking lights, and whirring motion.

PLATT: Set the frequency-modulation-index to one-point five.

Start the probe-tone.

NEARE: Starting probe-tone... now.

The four students hum with the instruments as the sound grows.

PLATT: Involuntary sympathetic vocalisation. I didn't expect that!

NEARE: All systems nominal.

QUARTET: Our hearts are open.

PLATT: Check the sonic-thyristor.

QUARTET: Our minds - clear!

NEARE: Within normal operating parameters.

PLATT: Amplification-circuitry?

/

QUARTET: We sing!

/

NEARE: Functioning normally.

PLATT: Nothing on the 'scope?

/

QUARTET: Our hearts surge...

/

NEARE: Nothing here.

PLATT: That's odd.

/

QUARTET: We reach...

/

NEARE: Nothing here either.

PLATT: Nothing? It must be a wiring problem?!

/

QUARTET: Beyond ourselves...

/

NEARE: The cables are fine.

QUARTET: We sing...

/

PLATT: The connectors?!

/

QUARTET: We sing...

/

NEARE: I can *see* they're fine!

PLATT: The conduction-inverters?

/

QUARTET: Our hearts...

/

NEARE: Working perfectly!

PLATT: Something's wrong.

/

QUARTET: Our minds.

/

PLATT: Stop. Stop - stop - please. STOP! Cut the power! CUT THE POWER!

The Engine comes to a grinding halt.

SCENE 5:

PLATT: There should be *something*.

NEARE: It's working perfectly.

PLATT: Yes, but there's nothing here.

NEARE: Perhaps if we increased the resonance?

PLATT: Yes! Amp everything up!

NEARE: Ah - but what about safety protocols: these components are delicate.

PLATT: Increase the voltage only to the sonic probe.

NEARE: Very well...

PLATT (*to audience*): Ahem.
As you may observe, we didn't get a reading. Most peculiar.
We'll re-tune the sensors and try again.

Levers are pushed, wheels turned.

(*to Neare*) Doctor Neare. Start the Engine.

The engine starts up - with a noticeably deeper more urgent sound (the quartet moan sympathetically)

PLATT: Switch in trilateral circuit modifiers.

NEARE: Yes.

PLATT: Raise centre frequency manifold twenty per cent.

NEARE: Done that!

PLATT: Increase the frequency modulation spectrum-resonance!

/

QUARTET: Ah...

/

NEARE: She's *really* going, now.

QUARTET: Ah...

/PLATT: Increase SPL.

QUARTET We sing...
/
NEARE: All good. She likes to run! Oh, my *beauty*!
/
QUARTET: Love's pain...

PLATT: Increase the probe-tone!
/
NEARE: No - too much...
/
QUARTET: ... That crushes and pulls...

PLATT: More!

NEARE: You're pushing her.

PLATT: Do it!
/
QUARTET: ...Plucks...
/
PLATT: Higher!

NEARE: She's not built for this...
/
QUARTET: ... and tears...
/
PLATT: Still *NOTHING*????!!?

NEARE: She can't take it!
/
QUARTET: PAIN!!!
/
PLATT: Keep going!!

NEARE: Too much!
/
QUARTET: Our hearts...
/
PLATT: MAXIMUM!

NEARE: NO!!!
/
QUARTET: Explode!
/
PLATT: MAXIMUM, MORE!!

SCENE 6:

An almighty explosion. The students slump.

STUDENT QUARTET: Ahhhhh!

The engine breaks apart with bits rolling everywhere. Eventually all is still, except for Platt, who is so deeply intent on the dials and displays that she is oblivious to what has just happened. She keeps hitting the display and pushing levers - as if she can coax a response. Finally, she notices the silence around her and pops her head up.

PLATT: Too much - perhaps?

Neare stares aghast at the wreckage, unable to move a muscle. Platt addresses the audience.

PLATT (*to audience*): Ladies and Gentlemen. No need for panic. This is...
(*whispers*): *Neare.*

Neare remains motionless

PLATT: That is to say: Please don't leave.
We'll have this fixed in a moment. *Neare!!*

QUARTET: Mmm.

PLATT: *Neare!!* The subjects - quick - help them.

QUARTET: Mmm-aah.

PLATT: *Neare! Neare!! ... NEARE!!!!*

NEARE: FUCK!!!!

PLATT: Get them out - *NOW!*

Neare finally goes over to untangle the students from the wreckage of the Engine.

QUARTET: Ahhh.

PLATT (*to audience*): May I - remind you that you - you *all* - signed ...
a Confidentiality Agreement?
Please don't mention this to...
especially... to the Press.
Obviously, I've had bad luck.
Muckrakers.
All in the past, of course.

QUARTET: Aahh- Ahh Ahh....

PLATT (*to Neare*): Are they OK? Conscious?

NEARE: A little shaken. They'll be fine.

PLATT: Very good.

NEARE: My capacitors, on the other hand...

/

PLATT(*to audience*): As you may have observed,
we didn't get a reading that time either.
It's baffling.
We'll make adjustments and try again.

NEARE: Arghh!!!! Professor!! (*gestures - look at this wreckage!*)

PLATT: Sit tight. And - er - please don't use your phones?

QUARTET: Mmm- Mmm. Ah-aah!

Neare releases the students who slump forward, then groggily move out of the wreckage.

QUARTET: Ah-ah-ah-AHH!

NEARE: Whoa - watch your feet!

QUARTET: Ahh-Ahh-Ahh!

Neare tries to guide the students away from the debris - his concern is more for the components than the students... but it's a losing battle as they wander, zombie-like, through the space.

NEARE: Watch out!! That's a Sonic Capacitor!! No - not THERE!!
Professor - help me!! Whoa - WHOA!!! NOT *THERE*.... This way.

Platt and Neare guide the students to chairs on either side of the stage (near the front) - the two men together on one side, the two women together on the other.

NEARE: Just stay THERE.

PLATT (*aria*): What happened?
It's impossible that *nothing* registered. Nothing? Nothing? *Nothing???*

JAKE & HUNTER: My eyes hurt...

PLATT: Perhaps it's a cascading error?

NEARE (*also musing*): We'll never get this lot back together...

AMANDA & SALLY: Our heads...

PLATT: Perhaps if we re-routed the co-axial asymmetric inverters?

NEARE: Eight *months* on the wiring. Blown away...

JAKE & HUNTER: Lights... colours... so bright Ohhh...

AMANDA & SALLY: Purple blotches, orange, yellow - so vivid - Argh...

PLATT: Or *maybe* I should change the re-normalisation algorithm? Impossible!

JAKE & HUNTER: Flickering...

AMANDA & SALLY: Dancing...

PLATT: Impossible. Completely impossible.
It doesn't make sense:
the theory's good, the Engine works -
And the subjects: they're *young*.
And they say they're in love. In Love?
In *LOVE*???!
The theory's good, the Engine works.
They say they're in love.
Impossible. Impossible. *Impossible!*

SCENE 7

Jake and Hunter nearly fall off their chairs, prompting Platt and Neare to snap out of their musings.

STUDENTS: Ah. Ah. Ah.....

PLATT: Neare. Help them.

Neare goes over to Jake & Hunter and tries to rouse them, while Platt examines Amanda & Sally.

NEARE (*loudly to Jake*): Can you hear me?
What's your name?
Do you remember where you are?

(*almost hitting him*) Do you remember *anything*?!

PLATT: Neare?!

NEARE: He's coming round.

JAKE (*very groggily*): I... I... I remember...

PLATT: Hmm. Perhaps masculine brain-types are more robust?

JAKE: When I was young...

NEARE: This one's OK. They're all coming round.

Neare and Platt are distracted by an alarm from within the machine. They rush to investigate.

JAKE (*aria*): I saw a heron on a lake.

HUNTER (*blearily*): *What?*

JAKE: I remember:
Early morning, everything still.
Not a breath of wind.
A heron glides across the lake.
A perfect reflection mirrored below.
A moment of silent exultation.

HUNTER: *That's why you became an eco-freak?*

JAKE: It was magical, precious.

HUNTER: *A bird?*

JAKE: A rare bird.

HUNTER: *A damn bird??*

JAKE: A Great Blue Heron.
They filled in the lake and built a Mall. And called it "Lake-View".

HUNTER: Developers - enterprise - that's good!!

JAKE (*angrily*): But the heron was gone forever.

SALLY & AMANDA: *Ohh....*

HUNTER: Perhaps we could work together?

JAKE: What? - with *you*?!

HUNTER: It's not so stupid.
You know about nature, the planet - all that good stuff.
I know about investment, technology, disruption.
Instead of fighting, let's collaborate.

JAKE: Huh?

HUNTER: An Ethical-Portfolio. For the planet.

JAKE: Combine our skills and passions?

HUNTER: Consultation and investment.

HUNTER/JAKE: For a New World!

SALLY & AMANDA: *Ah...*

JAKE & HUNTER: Save the planet - *and* make money! We have a plan.

JAKE: A company.

HUNTER: A logo.

JAKE: A *logo*?

HUNTER: The heron, of course!

/

JAKE: Of course: the heron! Yes.

JAKE & HUNTER: Yes, yes, YES!!!

SALLY & AMANDA: Ah!

JAKE & HUNTER: We'll save the heron - together. Yes!
We'll build and prosper together. Yes!
The planet's our project, our investment, our work. Yes!
And the Great Blue Heron soars again!
A partnership. For Planet. For profit! A contract.
YES! - together!

Jake and Hunter dance for joy then exit (fast) together.

SCENE 8:

As Jake and Hunter disappear, Platt and Neare pop up from behind the Engine.

PLATT: NO!!!! Neare! Neare !
Oh my God. Were they... were they *dancing*?
That's a *bad* sign, right?

NEARE: They're fine.

PLATT: Hmm. Masculine-brain-type; not as robust as I thought.

NEARE: Don't worry about them.
This is going to take forever.

Platt and Neare return to the innards of the Engine. Amanda and Sally begin to stir.

AMANDA: Where'd they go?

SALLY: I dunno.

AMANDA: We were supposed to choose flowers this afternoon.

SALLY: So unreliable. So irresponsible. Always letting me down.
/

AMANDA: I wanted lilacs... maybe crocuses?
I really *like* magnolias...

SALLY (*interrupts*): I have to ask:

AMANDA: What?

SALLY: *Why* are you marrying *him*?

AMANDA: Well. My Mother advised me:
Go to college; find a husband.
"After college - she said - the available choices diminish rapidly".

SALLY: But he's so - *boring*.

AMANDA: There's a building with his name on it. He's wealthy and... and... *and* he's smart.

SALLY: But don't you want something more?

Platt and Neare briefly re-appear from behind the Engine and watch the two young women talking.

PLATT: Interesting.
 (approving) See, Neare. The feminine brain-type actually recovers much better.
 No dancing whatsoever.
 Maybe I'll write a paper after all.

NEARE: Humph!

Platt and Neare dive back into the Engine as the two women resume.

AMANDA: Well, there is... one thing.

SALLY: What?

AMANDA: He likes to stay at home, watch TV.
 while I want to travel.
 He doesn't have a passport.
 while I want to see the world...

SALLY: That's *more* like it!

AMANDA: An adventure!

SALLY: Tell me. Tell me!

/

AMANDA: I want to fly - everywhere.
 (*aria*) Mexico, Canada, Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia, India, China, Antarctica,
 ... and France - and Spain!

Paraguay, Uruguay, Panama, Ecuador, Kosovo, Portugal,
 Italy, Switzerland, Swaziland, Senegal, Singapore, Latvia, Lebanon, Cameroon
 Mozambique, Martinique.
 Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Montserrat, Guadeloupe, Gambia, Bosnia,
 Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Tuvalu, Poland and Spain!

SALLY: Let's go.

AMANDA: Let's swim the Dead-Sea,

SALLY: Let's swim the Red-Sea,

AMANDA: The Black Sea,

SALLY: The White Sea,

AMANDA: The North Sea,

SALLY: The South Sea,

AMANDA: The Caspian Sea,

SALLY: The Coral Sea,

AMANDA: The Ross Sea,

SALLY: The Tasman Sea,

AMANDA: Sargasso,

SALLY: Ionian,

AMANDA: Ligurian

SALLY: the Baltic

AMANDA: Atlantic

SALLY: Pacific

AMANDA & SALLY: Let's go.

AMANDA & SALLY: *Screw the Wedding. Screw the wedding!*

SCREW THE WEDDING!!

Let's go:

Canada, Mexico, Paraguay, Uruguay, Panama, Ecuador, Kosovo, Portugal,
Italy, Switzerland, Swaziland, Senegal, Singapore, Latvia, Lebanon, Cameroon,
Mozambique, Martinique.

Germany, Austria, Luxembourg, Guadeloupe, Bosnia, Bangladesh, Pakistan,
India, Tuvalu, Malta, Mali, Poland, Jordan, Finland, Egypt, Kenya, Bhutan,
Israel, Gambia, Turkey, Tonga, Togo, Taiwan, Thailand, Chile, Denmark,
Norway, Spain and France!

Let's go!

Let's go!!

Amanda and Sally hold, exulting in the moment, then run off together.

SCENE 9

Platt tries to stop them - but fails. Neare follows Platt.

PLATT (*claps hand to head*): No, no, no - no, no, no, no, no, no NOO!!!!

Now, they're gone too.

NEARE: A temporary phase-inversion. It's bound to wear off.

PLATT: But what if they don't come back?

NEARE: Don't worry.

PLATT: O my God, Neare:
What if they *sue*?!!
Any trouble and all this ends.
I've no other funding.

NEARE: Is *that* what you care are about?

PLATT: Well *your* job's at risk, too.

NEARE: Well, I can always switch Labs.

PLATT: Oh *Neare*.

NEARE: What?

PLATT: I'm sorry.

NEARE: What?
(*beat*)

What?!

PLATT: No-one else - wants you.
I'm ... sorry.

Neare drops his tools.

NEARE: Why?

PLATT: Well, you have a reputation.
You're a bit ... difficult...

NEARE: I'm not difficult.
I never shout.
I never lose my temper.
I'm NOT *DIFFICULT!*
I... I... I...

PLATT: I'm so sorry.
I... I shouldn't have said that.

In the distance, the sound of the two young women.

(duet) I'm not difficult / We need data:
I never shout. I never lose my temper. / Results I can interpret.
I never shout. / Publish or perish.
I never lose my temper / Reviews, citations - the academic metrics.
We need to fix this.
We have to fix this / It's hard, so very hard.
We have to fix this / So hard. Impossible. Impossible.

Neare nods glumly.

SCENE 10

Platt and Neare are interrupted by the sudden reappearance of Hunter and Jake.

HUNTER: You fucking idiot!

JAKE: What?

HUNTER: Sentimental fool.

JAKE: What??

HUNTER: We have to make money.

JAKE: What?

HUNTER: You lazy leftie eco-Fascist!

JAKE: What?

HUNTER: Enterprise, that's what *we* do!

JAKE: *What??*

HUNTER: *We're* creators:
 We *make* financial instruments.
 We engineer profits.
 And all you do is talk about *birds* and *bees* and *clouds*.
 Sustainability? Hah!
 Productivity. That's what matters!

(aria) I'm a warrior:
 Tough decisions. Decisive action.
 Nerves of steel,
 lightning choices.
 Investment,
 leverage, progress.
 Driving the economy.
 A warrior!

Only those with the courage to struggle
 Succeed in *this* financial jungle.
 And remember:
 Without a vibrant economic sector,
 there *is no* environment!

JAKE: You heartless capitalist!

HUNTER: You liberal jerk!

JAKE: Rightwing Nut!

HUNTER: Marxist Scumbag!

JAKE & HUNTER: How did we think we could work together?
 - Absurd!
 How did we think we could pull this off?
 - Ridiculous!
 How could I contemplate working with *you*?!
 - Absurd!
 What possessed us?
 -RIDICULOUS!!
 - ABSURD!!!!

(J and H) This partnership is void!

they fight, crash into each other then collapse.

NEARE *(perks up)*: See - completely normal!

JAKE & HUNTER: O my *head*...

PLATT: What a relief.

NEARE: The effects wore off - just as I said.

PLATT: They re-adapted all right.

NEARE: Everything's going to be OK!

Again, the sound of the two young women's voices from afar.

PLATT: But what about the others?

NEARE: They'll be back!

PLATT: You're confident?

NEARE: Everything's OK.

JAKE & HUNTER: Oohhh!

NEARE: Don't worry.

The young women's voices still off-stage

SCENE 11:

Sally and Amanda enter together with great deliberation.

NEARE *(triumphantly)*: There. See: everything's...

Consternation as Platt, Neare, Jake and Hunter notice that Sally and Amanda are holding hands. It dawns on all of them simultaneously that there is an emotional/erotic connection between the two young women.

NEARE: Oh - I didn't expect *that*.

HUNTER: Amanda!?

PLATT: Sshh!!
(*whispers*) Neare!

JAKE: Sal!?

PLATT: Sshh! *Quiet!!*
Neare. Neare. NEARE! Quick. Quickly...

NEARE: What? What?

PLATT: Get the - the what's-it - the *scope*...

NEARE: What? The *scope*??

JAKE & HUNTER: What's happening?

PLATT: QUICKLY!
I *know* what was wrong.
We can get a reading...

JAKE & HUNTER: What is this?!

PLATT: SSSH! QUIET!!
Neare - *NOW!*

Jake and Hunter hesitate for a moment as if they might intervene - but Neare holds them back. Goaded into action, Neare swiftly collects cables and components... Platt and Neare race to get everything connected. Then they wait, with bated breath.

SALLY (*aria*): My heart is open
And my mind is clear.
Unfold love's delicious pain:
crushing, pulling, melting.
(*to Amanda*) My eyes are open - for you.
/
PLATT: Psst. Neare! - I think it's working!

SALLY & AMANDA: My heart is beating /
My heart is open /

My mind's confused /
My mind is clear /
My hand is trembling /
My hand is still.
Our eyes lock together.

PLATT: Yes! Look! We have a reading!

/

SALLY & AMANDA: Our hearts are open.

/

JAKE & HUNTER: SAL-LY!!!?? / AMANDA!!!???

/

JAKE & HUNTER: Our hearts are broken.

SALLY & AMANDA: Our minds are clear.

PLATT & NEARE: Our hands are trembling!

SALLY & AMANDA: Our hearts are open.

Your breath inside me / Your voice beside me.
Unfold love's delicious pain.
crushing, pulling, melting.
My hand on your heart / your hand on my heart.
Your hand on my heart / My hand on your heart.
I see you. I see you. I see you.

Sally and Amanda embrace

PLATT (*reading scope*): Sixty-seven... point ...

SALLY & AMANDA: Your breath inside me.

PLATT: five ...

zero...

Neare, Jake, Hunter: For science?

PLATT (*pops her head up triumphantly*): three!

Pl, Ne, Ja, Hu: For science.

/

SALLY & AMANDA: Your hand on my heart. Your hand on my heart.
My hand on your heart.

JAKE & HUNTER: Our hearts are broken - for Science?!

/

PLATT & NEARE: Our hearts are full - for Science.

/

SALLY & AMANDA: Your breath inside me.
And your voice beside me.
Your breath inside me.

Pl, Ja, Nr, Hu: For Science? For Science. For Science.

EPILOGUE

The four students are completely still. Platt and Neare have ended up facing each other across the room. In the course of the scene they gradually move together until very close (echoing the prologue). Their exchange suggests a tenderness between them, understood but (still) not stated.

PLATT (*quietly*): Doctor Neare.

NEARE: Yes?

PLATT: Let's...

NEARE: Yes...?

PLATT: Let's...

NEARE: Yes?

PLATT: re-build ...

NEARE: Yes...?

PLATT: the Engine.

(Neare nods his head)

NEARE: Yes.

end.