

MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS

A screenplay

by

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UNDATED FIRST DRAFT

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EXT. KENNEDY HIGH SCHOOL, DAY - 1994

CARL HERRICK, early 50's, gets out of his piece of junk, rusted through the floorboards, ten-year-old Chevy station wagon. He approaches the school entrance. The dull, weathered letters on the building spell out "John F. Kennedy High School". A marquee on the grass in front of the building says, "Home of the Hawkeyes", and "Good Luck! Class of '94".

There are a few cars in the parking lot, fewer people hanging around -- school is out. The rope on the flagpole clangs against the pole. A lonely, desolate sound.

Herrick, battered briefcase in one hand, empty box in the other, trudges into the building.

INT. KENNEDY HIGH

Herrick walks down the hallway. At the far end of the corridor a janitor is sweeping. All of the lockers hang open and empty. Herrick enters a classroom.

INT. MUSIC ROOM

Herrick stands in the doorway and takes in the classroom. The piano at one end -- circling high on the wall are pictures of Stephen Foster, George Gershwin, Art Tatum, Dizzy Gillespie, Hank Williams, Chuck Berry, Brian Wilson and the Beach Boys, one each of the four Beatles, Stevie Wonder, Elton John, The Ramones, Chrissie Hynde, Dylan, Springsteen, and of course, Bob Seger -- this is Michigan after all.

Cluttering the classroom is the detritus of the years -- a dusty, stuffed Opus figure, a .45 record player, records, sheet music, a clear plastic paperweight with a dandelion suspended inside -- a stained glass clef note hanging in the window -- a bust of Beethoven, painted psychedelic.

Herrick breaks himself out of his reverie and walks over to the desk and drops the box and his briefcase. Where to begin.

He pulls open the desk drawers and starts sorting through them. Some things go into the wastebasket, others into the briefcase or the box. There is no joy in his work.

So absorbed is he in his grim sorting that he doesn't hear the entrance of GLEN MEISTER, the boys' gym teacher. Near 60, his head as bald as a baby's butt, a stomach like he was smuggling a watermelon under his sweatshirt.

MEISTER

Hi, Carl... I ... I heard they cut the music program. Damn shame. Damn shame. Won't be too long before the pennypinching bastards start barking at my heels.

HERRICK

You don't have anything to worry about, Glen. When they cancel the sports program in an American high school it'll be a sign of the apocalypse.

MEISTER

Well, it's nice to see you got a sense of humor about the whole thing.

HERRICK

Sense of humor? Look at me, Glen. I'm fifty-five years old, with no job ... not much of anything really. I've never owned a new car. My savings couldn't buy a week at a Holiday Inn. I'm too young to retire and too old to rock and roll. I'm going to clean out my desk and walk out of here -- and in a few weeks this room will be the home for Advanced Algebra and no one will remember I was ever here.

Meister doesn't know what to say.

MEISTER

You need any help here?

HERRICK

No. Thanks.

MEISTER

Well ... hell... You'll be ... missed around here. You know...

There is an uncomfortable silence as Meister looks around the room.

MEISTER

I'll see you around, won't I, Carl?

HERRICK

Yeah, you'll see me around.

Meister pauses a moment, then leaves. Herrick finishes with the desk drawers and goes over to the record player. There is a stack of .45 records on the table next to it.

Sorting through the records brings a nostalgic smile. One record even prompts a laugh. He puts it on the turntable, turns on the record player and lifts the needle into the scratchy groove.

THE TRASHMEN

Well, everybody's heard about  
the bird...

Well, the bird, bird, bird,  
bird is a word...

Well, the bird, bird, bird,  
bird is a word...

The opening lines of the stupidest rock song ever written or sort of sung -- "Surfin' Bird" by The Trashmen.

EXT.

KENNEDY HIGH SCHOOL, DAY - 1964

Herrick parks his '62 Corvaire convertible in the teachers lot. His name has been newly painted on the curb. He smiles. Other cars pull in -- teachers and students going into their respective lots.

Brand new briefcase in hand, Herrick approaches the school entrance. School buses pull up in front and discharge students.

Above the entrance the name of the school is being changed. "James A. Garfield" is now just a shadow on the unfaded brick. The maintenance man is on a ladder scrubbing away the dirt with a wire brush. On the grass below, the new letters are laid out -- "John F. Kennedy". There is no marquee on the grass yet.

Herrick enters the school with the flood of students.

INT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

Herrick gets a few curious looks from the students as he walks down the hall. PRINCIPAL WOLTERS exits a classroom, sees Herrick.

WOLTERS

Mr. Herrick! Morning!

HERRICK

Good morning, Principal Wolters.

WOLTERS

No need to be so formal, you can call me Mr. Wolters. Did I see you pull up in a Corvair? A Corvair, son? Didn't you read Ralph Nader's book?

HERRICK

Yes, sadly. After I bought the car. And unless Mr. Nader wants to buy me a new one I'll have to keep it until the wheels fall off.

WOLTERS

Which might not be too long from now. Have a good first day, Mr. Herrick.

Wolters slaps Herrick on the back and walks away. Herrick checks the room numbers and enters one.

INT. MUSIC ROOM

The same piano, the same bust of Beethoven -- still white faux marble. A scale of notes above the blackboard -- the rest of the room undecorated.

Students drift in. Herrick sets his briefcase on the desk, transfers some papers from it to an empty drawer. He checks the other drawers -- empty except for a stray pencil stub or paper clip.

He takes a music textbook from his briefcase and plops it down on the desk. He stares at it with the same enthusiasm the students probably will.

Turning to the blackboard he prints his name. The bell rings while he is still printing. He takes a breath and turns to face a classroom of kids.

HERRICK

Good morning. My name is Mr. Herrick and that is what I prefer to be called. Mr. Herrick. It is a title of courtesy. I will extend that same courtesy to you.

Now it is the kids' turn to sigh -- it's going to be a long year.

INT. CAFETERIA, DAY

The teachers all eat at the same table. Herrick approaches and puts his tray down. A couple of the other teachers nod or smile in greeting.

Principal Wolters patrols the cafeteria, corralling a group of teenage girls gossiping and giggling in a corner.

Glen Meister, 30 years younger, sets his tray across from Herrick. A full head of hair, flat stomach, sportcoat over his sweatshirt. He runs his fingers through his hair and slaps his stomach for emphasis as he talks.

MEISTER

Hi, we haven't met yet. I'm  
Glen Meister, Phys. Ed.

HERRICK

That would account for the  
whistle. Carl Herrick, Music.

They shake. Meister looks down at the whistle, puzzled, he isn't very quick on the uptake.

MEISTER

Yeah, right. Welcome to Gar...  
Kennedy. Let me give you a  
piece of advice, this being  
your first day...

HERRICK

I know, never let the students  
get the upper hand.

Herrick sees Wolters making the girls kneel on the floor.

MEISTER

Nah, that's a given. A word to  
the wise -- keep your hands off  
the girls' gym teacher.

HERRICK

Pardon?

MEISTER

Your predecessor, Mr. Bunte,  
was caught giving Miss Esparza  
a beef injection on the Home Ec  
room sofa. They fired her cute  
little butt.

HERRICK

And him, too, of course.

MEISTER

No, it wasn't his fault. She was a flirt. Bunte got a reprimand, out his wife hit him with their Buick. He's in Arizona recuperating and the wife is in Chicago, auditioning lawyers I'd guess.

Wolters is measuring each of the girls' skirts. Several of the skirts don't touch the floor when the girls kneel. Wolters barks and the skirts are unrolled at the waist until they hit linoleum. The girls are released, their faces red. Wolters' dress code radar spots one of the boys.

WOLTERS

Mr. Postma, is that a pair of dungarees?

Wolters takes the boy by the elbow and escorts him out of the cafeteria. Herrick shakes his head.

HERRICK

So, keep my hands off the girls' gym teacher, right?

MEISTER

That's the word, though it's easier this year. That's her, there, Miss Jacobs.

MISS JACOBS, a woman in shorts and a Garfield High School T-shirt carries a tray toward their table. Squat, muscular, the shape of a fire hydrant, she looks like a bulldog with breasts.

HERRICK

I'll try to control my lust.

Meister laughs and slaps his stomach.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick writes on the blackboard -- "Lydian Model".

HERRICK

The Lydian mode is equivalent to the white keys on the piano, from F to F. From this we get the Ambrosian and Gregorian modes. Who can tell me where the term Gregorian comes from?

Herrick looks at the class -- they are in a severe trance of boredom. So is Herrick.

HERRICK

Okay... Pope Gregory the First was trying to add to the variety of church composition. Since the 4th Century there had only been allowed...

He's not making things any better.

EXT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

Herrick parks the Corvair in the driveway of a small house. As he gets out of the car and enters the house his briefcase seems to drag him down. It's been a long day.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE

IRIS HERRICK, 20's and pretty, hair always mussed, kneels behind a tripod-mounted camera. Low to the floor, the focus of the camera is a baby on a scrap of carpet.

The living room of the house is a photography studio, lights set up, a large paper backdrop hanging from one wall -- everything crowded among a huge record collection and a small piano.

The baby wails, tears streaming down it's red face. The mother waits in the doorway.

MOTHER

I don't understand this at all.  
He's usually such a happy baby.

Iris and the mother try to amuse the baby, but to no avail.

Herrick enters, takes a look at the bawling kid

HERRICK

Perfect.

He drops his briefcase. Iris gives him a peck on the cheek. The mother shakes a rattle at the baby -- the baby grabs it and throws it in her face.

IRIS

How was your first day?

HERRICK

As expected.

(MORE)



HERRICK (CONT'D)

I don't know what their last teacher was doing, but he wasn't teaching music. Well, actually, I do know what he was doing, but these kids don't know a barcarole from a barber shop quartet.

He goes into the bathroom and walks over to the sink -- there is a pan of developer in it. There is another on the back of the toilet. The shower has a string of 8 X 10's drying and the window has been blacked out. Herrick exits.

Iris and the mother are making faces at the baby. He screams like a banshee.

IRIS

Carl, I don't know what a barcarole is. So, it wasn't a good day. How were the kids?

HERRICK

Dolts. A barcarole is a Venetian boating song.

He goes into the kitchen and runs water in the sink. An enlarger occupies the kitchen table.

IRIS

At least your kids don't pee on you. Of course, it's only your first day.

He washes his face, the splash of cold water is a relief.

HERRICK

Thanks a whole lot.

Eyes closed, he feels around for a towel -- the rack is empty.

Iris and the mother wave toys at the baby -- he tries for high 'C'.

Herrick, feeling blindly for a towel, a doily, anything -- walks toward the living room, trips over his briefcase and takes a header into the sofa.

The baby stops crying -- and bursts into laughter.

FLASH! Iris snaps a few pictures.

IRIS

Thanks, hon!

She tosses her husband a clean diaper and he wipes his face.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick sits at the piano, composing. His dinner, halfeaten, lays on a TV tray next to him. Totally absorbed in making notations on the composing paper, he doesn't hear Iris, wearing a rubber apron over her clothes, come out of the red-lit bathroom. She slips up behind him and kisses his ear.

HERRICK

Oooh, what is that perfume,  
madame? Eau de developer fluid?  
That always makes my blood race.

IRIS

I made thirty-two dollars today.  
(beat)  
Was it really so bad at school?

HERRICK

It's a job. That's what it is,  
a job.

IRIS

Well, it's only for two years.  
Then you can take a year off  
and write your little old heart  
out. After that, the New York  
Philharmonic and the world debut  
of Carl Herrick's "American  
Opus". Then a command  
performance for the President,  
the Queen of England... The Ed  
Sullivan Show. Then, someday,  
after all those years of  
struggle, if you're really lucky,  
you'll be able to hear your  
music on an elevator or in a  
dentist's office.

She's teasing him -- she does it a lot. He smiles and kisses her.

HERRICK

With motivation like that how  
can I fail.

IRIS

You need some motivation?

HERRICK

Twelve more bars and I'm your  
fella.

IRIS

You're my fella no matter how  
many bars you hang out in.

She kisses him again and goes back to the bathroom. He turns back to the piano.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick teaches his class.

HERRICK

If you combine two or more  
melodies within a composition  
you are using what is called a  
counterpoint. There are a  
variety of types of  
counterpoint...

He goes through the motions -- the students do even less.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Iris works at the kitchen table, hand tinting a black and white baby picture.

Herrick sits at the piano, trying to work. He stretches, goes over to his record collection and finds an album. He puts it on the stereo and plays some early Lester Young -- then a little Dave Brubeck -- tasty jazz. He listens to only a few bars, then hurries back to the piano and plays. The few notes don't copy Young and Brubeck, but take the music to another level. He makes notations, totally absorbed.

Iris watches him and smiles.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

A kid does the scales on his trombone. Herrick listens with all the patience he can muster, one eye on the clock.

HERRICK

All right, all right, Perry.  
Nice tones, but you need a little  
work on the right hand. Practice  
the right hand so it flows.  
You're jerking to each note --  
flow.

The kid packs up and leaves.

Herrick slumps, worn out.

HERRICK

Two years, two years... Only  
two years.

There is a knock at the open door. Herrick looks up at GERTRUDE VAN LENTE, 16, thick glasses, body like a broom handle.

HERRICK

Can I help you?

GERTRUDE

I'm Gertrude Van Lente. I'm  
going to learn to play the  
clarinet.

HERRICK

Do you have a clarinet, Miss  
Van Lente?

GERTRUDE

I had my daddy buy me one.

She opens a case and shows him her clarinet.

HERRICK

This is a very beautiful  
instrument. Why did you pick  
it? The clarinet?

GERTRUDE

I saw one on Lawrence Welk. It  
was pretty -- the sound, I mean.

HERRICK

That's as good a reason as any.  
What instruments have you played  
before?

GERTRUDE

None, I can't even read music.  
But I'm determined.

Herrick sighs.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick is at the stereo -- first a little of Dvorak's  
"American Quartet", then some "An American in Paris" by  
Gershwin.

He goes back to his manuscript and reads. Grimacing, he  
rolls it into a ball and throws it across the room -- hitting

Iris in the chest as she enters the room with her camera and equipment bag.

IRIS

Nice to see you, too.

HERRICK

Ah... I just spent three days ripping off Dvorak and Gershwin.

IRIS

Well if you don't tell, I won't either. I brought you some wedding cake.

She puts away her cameras and equipment.

HERRICK

How was it?

IRIS

The groom was nervous, the bride was scared. The mothers cried, the fathers got smashed, I took pictures and fought off the best man. It was fun. How was your day?

HERRICK

I start orchestra auditions tomorrow. I have no strings or woodwinds. I've got an accordion that I'm sure of, if I can figure out how to fit an accordion into an orchestra -- oh, and a third year tuba who's transferred from another school.

IRIS

Well, you could always play polkas.

That gets a smile from him.

INT. GYMNASIUM, DAY

There is a stage at one end of the gym, a circle of aspiring musicians in chairs on it and music stands. Herrick tries to conduct the auditions. It is a music lover's hell.

The notes are flat, discordant, downright ugly. Then a flutist plays sweetly enough to bring a smile to Herrick's face. But right after that is a trumpet player who bleats like an injured goat. And it goes on and on.

Gertrude tries out and fails -- she has a long way to go. The accordion player beams as he lays into "Lady of Spain". Herrick just watches, frowning. The kid stops, puzzled, then launches into a polka, grinning hugely. Herrick grabs the accordion to stop him.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick passes out graded test papers.

HERRICK

I'm very disappointed in the whole lot of you. These papers are... dismal... This is all simple stuff, basic music history and theory...

The kids look at their grades with the same disgust.

HERRICK

What's going on here? Am I talking to myself? I might as well be.

Herrick sits behind his desk and looks at the kids. A few stare back in rebellion.

HERRICK

Fine, this works. Why mess around with all of that paperwork for nothing? I'll stare at you and you stare at me and we'll accomplish just about as much as when I lecture. Your grade point might even improve.

The silence goes on for a long, uncomfortable moment. They are saved by the bell.

HERRICK

Class dismissed. You can go, but I expect things to be different tomorrow. Understand me?

It falls on deaf ears. The room is vacated instantly and Herrick packs up his briefcase and leaves.

INT. KENNEDY HIGH

The hall is emptying quickly, kids grabbing their jackets, slamming locker doors, full of energy for leaving. Hey, school's out.

Herrick passes the rehearsal rooms, two cramped, sound-proof rooms -- semi-sound-proof. He hears the pained notes of a clarinet. Herrick opens the door and sees Gertrude.

HERRICK

Give it up, Miss Van Lente,  
school's out.

Herrick startles her. He smiles and closes the door. The clarinet scales continue as he walks away quickly. Principal Wolters stops him.

WOLTERS

Mr. Herrick, just the man I was  
looking for. We are forming a  
textbook committee for next  
year's curriculum and I was  
hoping for your ideas.

HERRICK

Is this voluntary or required?

WOLTERS

It's totally voluntary, but  
most important, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Then I pass, Mr. Wolters. I  
have a rule -- unless I get  
paid for it I don't do it.

WOLTERS

Mr. Herrick, do you have another  
job after school hours? I know  
a teacher's salary isn't what  
it should be, but...

HERRICK

No, I don't have a second job  
and I agree on the salary. Can  
I go now?

WOLTERS

I've been watching you, Mr.  
Herrick. It's my job to keep  
an eye on my teachers. I've  
never seen a teacher who ran  
out of here after the last period  
with the enthusiasm of one of  
our students. I wish I could  
observe some of that enthusiasm  
in your classroom work.

HERRICK

Mr. Wolters, I write at night --  
compose. I'm writing a symphony.  
I'm here on time in the morning  
and I do my job.

WOLTERS

Teaching is a twenty-four hour  
job, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Not unless you pay me for it,  
Mr. Wolters. Good night.

Herrick starts to walk away.

WOLTERS

Mr. Herrick! You haven't been  
excused yet.

Herrick stops and looks at Wolters.

HERRICK

Am I being made to stay after  
school?

WOLTERS

I was wrong about this being a  
job -- teaching is more. These  
young people, your students,  
are at a crossroads in their  
lives. Confused, hormones going  
berserk, faced with monumental  
decisions that will change their  
lives forever. And we try to  
pump them full of dates and  
formulas, figures and data,  
that have little to do with  
real life -- very little of it  
takes.

(beat)

But it all adds up ... to a  
human being with wants, needs,  
ideals, and hopes. You have  
two jobs. Pump them full of  
data, music data in your case.  
And give them a compass. Point  
them in the right direction so  
it doesn't all go to waste.  
You manage to do that and they  
will remember you for the rest  
of their lives. I don't know  
how you're doing with the data  
input, but as a compass you're  
useless.



HERRICK

Am I dismissed yet?

WOLTERS

Do both of your jobs, Mr.  
Herrick. Teaching is a calling,  
a...

HERRICK

Well, I don't hear the call,  
Mr. Wolters. If I may leave...

Wolters lets Herrick pass.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick makes meatloaf while Iris works with the enlarger.  
He massages the egg and bread crumbs into the hamburger with  
more vigor than necessary.

HERRICK

I hate that man and I hate his  
school. The work is boring and  
the kids are ignorant and  
determined to stay that way.

IRIS

Let me do that, Carl.

HERRICK

No, I can't write when I feel  
like this. I need to decompress.

IRIS

Well, it's taking longer for  
you to decompress every night.  
It's getting a little tired,  
hon. You don't see me grouching  
because I spend my days with  
bawling babies and persnickety  
mothers.

HERRICK

That's different, you like it.

IRIS

Yes, because I go into it saying  
I'm going to have fun. I look  
at every baby as if it's the  
first one I ever saw -- as if  
it were my own. And I pretend  
that every mother is my own --  
that way I don't slap her.

Iris steps over to Herrick and puts her arms around him.

IRIS

Carl, you're not an old stuffed shirt, not yet anyway. You know more about the music these kids listen to than they do. And we've got the record collection to prove it. I know, I've toted it from apartment to apartment for three years.

(beat)

You're not that much older than them, but I've seen you in class. It's like you're some old fuddy-duddy.

HERRICK

Fuddy-duddy? A fine thing to call your sex god.

IRIS

Don't try to change the topic to sex, not yet at least. You know what I'm saying -- you love music. But you sure can't tell it from your classes.

Herrick is about to argue, but he stops himself.

HERRICK

I know ... I don't know what to do.

IRIS

You'll figure it out. You want to talk about sex now?

HERRICK

I'd rather do...

The doorbell rings. Iris and Herrick look at each other. The doorbell repeats. Herrick raises his meatloaf-covered hands.

Iris goes to the door and returns with Gertrude Van Lente.

HERRICK

(surprised)

Miss Van Lente...

GERTRUDE

Good evening, Mr. Herrick. I hope I'm not bothering you...

HERRICK

Not at all. Iris, this is  
Gertrude Van Lente. Gertrude,  
this is Iris, my wife.

Herrick wipes off his hands and leads Gertrude into the living room. Iris looks at him, questioning. He shrugs back. Gertrude walks over to the piano. She touches the keys absently, looks at the sheet music.

GERTRUDE

Did you write this?

HERRICK

Yes, it's a symphony I'm  
composing -- between meatloafs.

GERTRUDE

Oh...

HERRICK

Is there something you want..

GERTRUDE

You're right, Mr. Herrick. I'm  
giving up the clarinet. I'm  
doing what you told me. It's  
for the best.

HERRICK

What I told you?

GERTRUDE

After school today. You said,  
"Give it up". So I am, will...

HERRICK

I meant for the day.

GERTRUDE

I know what you meant. I'm  
terrible, everybody says so. I  
just wanted you to know...

HERRICK

Well, if that's what you want  
to do...

Gertrude breaks into tears and walks toward the door. Herrick pulls her back and into a chair. He looks to Iris for help. She holds up her hands helplessly.

GERTRUDE

Oh, Mr. Herrick, what can I do?  
I've got to learn something.

HERRICK

It's not such a bad thing, just because you can't play the clarinet. Lots of people can't play any instrument.

Gertrude gets up and looks at him, tears in her eyes.

GERTRUDE

You don't understand, you don't know my family. My sister dances, she has a ballet scholarship to Juilliard. My brother is the top-seeded tennis player in the state, sixth in the country. My mother has won the blue ribbon for watercolors at the State Fair so many times they've retired the category. My father sings tenor in the church choir and has sung the National Anthem at Tiger Stadium four times. And my name is Gertrude.

Herrick is nonplussed for a moment.

HERRICK

You could call yourself Trudy.

GERTRUDE

Mr. Herrick, do I look like a Trudy?

HERRICK

Well, keep at the clarinet. You'll get there.

GERTRUDE

But all I make is noise. I do ray scales, I practice until my lips swell up, but it still doesn't sound like anything.

HERRICK

I've heard you play -- you're right, Gertrude. But ... well... one of your problems is that you only play the notes on the page.

GERTRUDE

What else am I supposed to play?

He looks at her, then goes over to his record collection. He sifts through a stack of 45's -- puts one on the turntable.

HERRICK

There's more to music than the notes on the paper.

He lowers the needle and the unmistakable sounds of "The Kingsmen" belting out "Louie, Louie" fill the room.

Gertrude looks at the turntable, at Herrick, dumbfounded.

HERRICK

Listen. These fellas have absolutely no harmonic sense. They can't sing, the lead singer is yelling. They're playing the same boring three chords over and over and over. The recording sucks. The lyrics are awful when you can understand them, if you can hear them. This song is about a decibel away from being noise. But we love it. I love it! Do you love it?

Gertrude nods. Herrick is on a roll.

HERRICK

Why? I'll tell you why. Because it has heart. These guys are playing with everything they have and they're having fun. They love it, so we love it.

He takes one of Gertrude's hands and puts it over her heart.

HERRICK

Gertrude, you go home and pick up your clarinet and play from here. And who cares if it's not perfect? You'll move someone. Sometimes I play that piano and the only person I move is me. And you know what ... a lot of the time that's enough.

Gertrude walks toward the door.

GERTRUDE

Thanks, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Hey, it's part of the job.

She leaves. Herrick turns to find Iris staring at him.

IRIS

You live with someone, you sleep with them, do neat things under the covers ... and every once in a while you look at them and see why you ever went to a kegger with them.

HERRICK

Is that some kind of half-assed compliment? If so, I need proof.

IRIS

Proof? I'll give you proof.

She hugs him.

INT. SALVATION ARMY STORE, DAY

Herrick carries a small record player to the counter and shows it to the woman at the cash register.

HERRICK

Does this work?

WOMAN

Sure does. Everything we sell has been reconditioned.

HERRICK

I'll take it.

He takes out his wallet and pauses.

HERRICK

Uh, I'm the music teacher out at Kennedy High... There isn't some kind of discount, is there? It is for classroom use.

WOMAN

Grades my grandkids get I should charge you extra. Ten ... twenty percent off.

He smiles and gives her the money.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick stands in front of the classroom of dull faces.

HERRICK

Put your textbooks away. Okay,  
how many of you like music?

After a moment, a couple of hesitant hands are raised.

HERRICK

How many of you like the Beach  
Boys?

The kids look at each other and all the hands go up.

HERRICK

How many of you like this Beach  
Boys song?

He puts a .45 on the record player and "Surfin' USA" starts to play. The kids are roused from their trance.

HERRICK

How many of you knew that  
"Surfing, USA" was a rip-off of  
a song by Chuck Berry?

He changes the record and "Sweet Little sixteen" plays. Some of the kids bounce to the music and all are paying attention.

HERRICK

How many of you like this song  
from a new English pop group  
called "The Animals?"

He plays "House of the Rising Sun".

HERRICK

Did you know that this is a  
copy of a version by Bob Dylan  
that Dylan based on a folk song  
by Josh White? This song may  
be over a hundred years old.

(beat)

Music has a history. Ours,  
American music, has a very proud  
history. Very little music  
stands alone. Every once in a  
while a musician comes along  
who is totally original, but  
most are influenced by their  
forebears, by every song they

(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)  
ever heard, whether they know  
it or not. They have a history  
of music that they absorb and  
transform and give to you. You  
have a history of music that  
you're not even aware of. We  
are going to explore that  
history. You may think this is  
unique...

He lays the needle on "Surfin' Bird" by the Trashmen.

HERRICK  
... but I can show you a direct  
link from the jazz scat singers  
of the 30's to the doo-wop sound  
of the 50's and 60's to this.

He lets the song play for a moment.

HERRICK  
This catchy but inane repetition  
of "bird, bird, bird, bird is a  
word" disintegrates into "boppa-  
boppa-boppa-boppa-oo-mau-mau-  
mau-boppa-oo-mau-mau-mau..."

He takes the needle off.

HERRICK  
Well, maybe that's a bigger  
leap of style than we should  
attempt right now. Let's go  
back to the Beach Boys and Chuck  
Berry. Chuck Berry is one of  
the founders of rock and roll.  
Rock and roll has its' origins  
in rhythm and blues. They go  
back to the blues. So today we  
will explore the blues.

He puts on an old Muddy Waters song.

HERRICK  
One of the characteristics of  
the blues is that it uses the  
diatonic scale.

He starts writing on the blackboard.

HERRICK  
These are any of the major or  
minor scales, but staying in  
(MORE)



HERRICK (CONT'D)

that key. The blue notes are flattened notes, usually thirds or sevenths, but I'm getting ahead of myself. The opposite of the diatonic scale is the chromatic scale. We've covered this already -- does anyone know what a chromatic scale is?

He turns from the board and sees several eager hands go up. He smiles -- this could be fun.

MONTAGE --

Gertrude's fingers work the valves of her clarinet, going through the scales. "C" is a bit tentative and falls somewhat flat.

Herrick gets his class up to dance, chiding, begging, ordering them to their feet as The Beach Boys' "Dance, Dance, Dance" plays. One lumbering boy attempts the Twist, all the jokes about jockey shorts riding up apply to him.

HERRICK

Everybody watch Perry! C'mon, Perry, dance! That's it. Watch his arms. One! Two! Three! Four! Count with me. That's the time signature -- four-four!

Even Herrick dances a little.

Gertrude tries for "D" -- better.

Herrick in the practice room with a trumpet, a violin, drums, flute, cymbals, and so on. He coaches, cajoles, and teases the musicians into giving their all to every note.

Gertrude goes for an "E" -- not bad at all.

Herrick writes at home. Iris is photographing twins. She can't get them to look at the camera at the same time. Herrick fills the manuscript paper with note after note.

Gertrude searches for "F" -- it takes a while.

The student orchestra assembled in the gymnasium, their instruments poised for Herrick's direction.

HERRICK

Classical music ... ugh.  
(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)

Classical ... boring, dull,  
dusty... Rossini, who is f  
Who cares? William Tell  
Overture, no fun there... Think  
again -- the Lone Ranger!

And he swings the baton. The kids light into the music with enthusiasm, if not technical skill. You can almost hear "Hiyo, Silver!"

Gertrude hits a "G" -- right on the spot.

A basketball game. Herrick sits in the stands with a small contingent of horns. They let loose a fanfare at every Kennedy High Hawkeye basket.

Iris, a big fan, cheers the team on. The opposing side makes a basket. The trombone player gives out a lone fanfare. Iris glares at Herrick. He jams the mute into the trombone.

Gertrude hits an "A" -- clear, clean, beautiful.

Herrick works at the piano, writing, searching for the right "A" himself.

END MONTAGE.

INT. GYMNASIUM, DAY

Gertrude goes through the scales -- sitting on the stage with the student orchestra.

A banner hangs above the stage -- "Good Luck Class of '65".

The graduating class in their caps and gowns, the parents in their Sunday best in chairs arranged on the floor in front of the stage. On the stage with the school orchestra, are the teachers and speakers. Principal Wolters is at the podium.

WOLTERS

Before the ceremony Mr. Herrick will lead the Kennedy High School orchestra in a rendition of the Class of 1965's song, "Moon River".

Herrick takes his position in front of the orchestra, lifts his baton, and leads the students in the song. Not bad, not bad at all.

Iris watches from the audience. Principal Wolters catches Herrick's eye and smiles.

Gertrude Van Lente stands for the solo and plays it -- from the heart.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY - 1994

Herrick puts "Moon River" in the box with the other records. He looks up and sees TED BOS, a man in blue twill work clothes.

BOS

(uncomfortably)

Mr. Herrick, remember me? Ted Bos? I'm one of the bus drivers. I never took your music classes, but you taught me Drivers Ed... ?

HERRICK

Class of '67 ... ?

BOS

'65. But I graduated in '67, so you're right there.

HERRICK

'65... We wrecked three cars that year, some kind of record.

BOS

I always wondered why anyone would teach Drivers Ed, they'd have to be suicidal or something.

HERRICK

I was probably desperate for the money. I needed every dime I could get back then.

BOS

I know the feeling. Well... I just wanted to say ... I heard you was leaving and ... well, shit... Thanks.

Bos offers his hand and they shake.

BOS

My girl took band with you. Played the viola, still does. It's ... pretty. I was hoping her daughter would take it up, too... Well, I just wanted to, you know, say thanks...

Bos leaves and Herrick looks at the empty doorway for a second, then goes to the locker. He pulls out a weathered, beaten sign -- "Student Driver".

MONTAGE -- COUNTRY ROAD, DAY

A '65 Plymouth with a "Student Driver" sign attached to the trunk hops down the street. Yes, hops!

Gas! Brake! Gas! Brake! We all did this.

On the side door is another sign. "This car courtesy of Nolin Chrysler/Plymouth - Haviland, Michigan."

"Drag City" by Jan and Dean plays.

Trying to parallel park, student jumps the curb. A student piles a line of orange cones that make an obstacle course under the nose of the car.

A student makes a turn -- the wrong way onto a one-way street! Herrick's foot hits the brake on his side of the car.

The car pulls out of a driveway -- right into the path of a semi. The semi driver stomps on the brakes. The huge truck slides to a stop, just kissing the fender of the Plymouth.

A student, using the rearview mirror, steps on the gas - - and lurches forward. There is a crash.

Gears grind -- first, second, third -- and reverse.

The Drivers Ed car winds up -- in a ditch -- on a lawn -- on top of a parking meter -- against a telephone pole -- stalled on the railroad tracks (of course, a train is coming).

Parking in the school lot, a female student loses control, feet scramble for the right pedals -- crash! Herrick's Corvair has been hit. Herrick jumps out and stands in front of the Drivers Ed car.

HERRICK

Just hit me! Just run me over!  
Put it in gear, step on the  
gas, and just now me down!  
What's stopping you?! The gas  
is the one on the right!

The female student starts to cry. Herrick feels like a shit and gets back into the car.

A student practices in an empty parking lot. Backing into a parking space, the car hits a three-foot retaining wall. A six-foot section goes down.

Then, like dominoes, the rest of the wall falls, 120 feet of cinderblock topples.

END MONTAGE.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

Herrick is concentrating at the piano. Iris is trying to take pictures of a reluctant Chihuahua with a bow on its head and another on its tail.

The door bell rings. Herrick and Iris look at each other. He looks down at the keyboard meaningfully. She gestures at the dog. They do "paper-scissors-rock". He loses.

He sneers at the dog and goes to the door. It is the female student from the parking lot. She beams as she shows him her new drivers license.

Herrick opens the screen door and the student gives him a peck on the cheek. Then she runs down to the street and her new Volkswagon Beetle. Herrick smiles as she drives away, hears screeching tires and honking horns. He shakes his head and goes back inside.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

Herrick pulls up and parks his dented Corvair. Students in their new school clothes wave and shout greetings.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick hangs the photographs of Stephen Foster, George Gershwin, Art Tatum, Chuck Berry, Dizzy Gillespie, and The Beach Boys as the students file in. The bell rings.

HERRICK

My name is Carl Herrick. This class is Music Theory and History. If that isn't written on your schedule for the first period you might as well leave and miss the boring speech.

One kid gets up and slinks out. Herrick hands a sheet of paper to the student at the end of the first row.

HERRICK

The rest of you sign in here, first name, middle initial, last name.

(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)

(beat)

In this class we will study the history of music. Not just that classical long-hair stuff, but American music, too. Folk, blues, rock, jazz, country, and pop. Some of these forms are uniquely American, but our study will be unbiased. All music is good music. Some is formal, some is complicated, some even more complicated, but remember ... music is communication. Not necessarily communication of information, but of emotion, feeling, mood. And if any piece of music, any type of music makes you feel something -- it works. Now, how many of you like this new British group, the Beatles?

All the hands shoot up.

HERRICK

Well, before the Beatles wrote "Yesterday", "Help", "A Hard Day's Night", or any of their other great songs, they covered -- remade -- songs by other people. How many of you have heard this song?

He puts the needle down on "Roll over Beethoven" and lets it play for a moment.

HERRICK

This is their cover of a song by Chuck Berry.

He plays a minute of the Chuck Berry version.

HERRICK

Chuck Berry is one of the fathers of rock and roll. He comes from a background influenced by country and blues. Now the blues, twelvebar blues, is a form of music quite unique to America. One of the characteristics of the blues is the use of the diatonic scale...

He starts writing on the blackboard.

INT. CAFETERIA, DAY

The teachers' table is full.

WOLTERS

Mr. Herrick, there have been a few complaints about you teaching the students this rock and roll junk...

HERRICK

Complaints, from who?

WOLTERS

Whom. This is a very conservative little town, Mr. Herrick... You! Wooley! Come here!

One of the boys freezes in his tracks like a deer in a headlight. He walks over to Principal Wolters, who grabs a wisp of hair on the boy's neck.

WOLTERS

A haircut by first period tomorrow or you're out. Nothing over the collar or below the eyebrows. Get a haircut or a dog license.

WOOLEY

Yes, Mr. Wolters.

The kid makes his escape and Wolters turns back to Herrick.

WOLTERS

It's not that I'm interfering in your curriculum, Mr. Herrick, but I do have to answer to the School Board and the parents. Give me an answer for them, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Tell them I teach music. And I use any form of music that will get a student to listen. Everything from the Beatles to Beethoven.

WOLTERS

That's a good answer, Mr. Herrick. I can tell them that. Thank you. Miss Fenning!

(MORE)

WOLTERS (CONT'D)

Is that lipstick or is your  
mouth bleeding?! Miss Fenning!

He holds out a paper napkin to the offending teen. She wipes her mouth. Herrick starts away.

WOLTERS

One other thing, Mr. Herrick...

Herrick grimaces and stops.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

Herrick bursts inside, dumps his briefcase, and hurries over to a book shelf.

Iris sits on the sofa, head in her hands. Herrick shuffles quickly through the books.

HERRICK

Hi, hon. That bastard Wolters  
dumped one on me at lunch today.  
He wants a Kennedy High Marching  
Band! A marching band! I never  
took that course. My roommate  
comped it for me 'cause I had a  
gig at a jazz club. I've got a  
book here somewhere... A marching  
band. I never even saw "The  
Music Man".

He finally notices Iris. She gets up from the sofa, tears in her eyes, and runs out of the room. Baffled, Herrick follows her.

EXT. BACK PORCH, DAY

Iris sits on the steps, crying. Herrick sits next to her and puts an arm around her shoulders.

HERRICK

What's wrong, hon? Bad day at  
the baby factory?

That makes her cry louder.

IRIS

I ... we ... we're ... I don't  
know what happened ... I did  
everything... I'm pregnant!

Herrick is stunned.



IRIS

I took the pills every day. I never missed a day. They say they're almost one hundred percent effective ... I never thought... "almost" ...

HERRICK

A baby ... ?

IRIS

I'm so sorry, Carl...

HERRICK

Sorry ... ? Iris, don't be sorry. We're gonna have a baby -- a baby.

(beat)

You don't want a baby? I want a baby. Wow ... a baby.

IRIS

You don't mean that, I know. We were going to wait until you finished the symphony.

HERRICK

So I work another year... A baby...

IRIS

I don't believe you.

HERRICK

Iris, believe me. This is great news.

IRIS

You're just saying that.

HERRICK

Iris, honey... Remember when I told you about hearing John Coletrane when I was fifteen ... ?

IRIS

It was your birthday, yeah, yeah. What's that old story got to do with...

HERRICK

Just let me finish.

(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)

My father, in his esteemed wisdom, got me a gift certificate at the record store. I ran down there and got as many of the latest records as I could. One was by John Coletrane. I played the others.. "Heartbreak Hotel", Gogi Grant, "The Wayward Wind", the new Platters song, I loved The Platters. Then I put on the Coletrane. I wasn't sure who he was, but the guy at the record store said he knew I'd like it. He knew I'd like it.

(beat)

It changed my life. No offense, but not even marrying you has had the same effect on me.

IRIS

I know that -- it's my cross to bear. But...

HERRICK

Let me finish. Three notes from that horn, that golden horn, and I knew that I wanted to be a musician. That's what I'd do with my life, create music. And that I'd be a great musician someday.

IRIS

You are, Carl, but...

He shushes her with a finger to her lips, then cups her face in his hands and looks into her eyes.

HERRICK

Iris, when you just said we were going to have a baby I got that same feeling -- like I was hearing Coletrane's horn for the first time again.

IRIS

Aww, honey She bursts into tears again and wraps her arms around Herrick.

HERRICK

And now you're crying again. What ... ?

IRIS

Oh, shut up.

And she kisses him.

HERRICK

What I'm trying to say...

IRIS

I know what you're trying to say. Maybe it's a lie, maybe not... I'm not in the best condition to tell. But if it is... it's the best, sweetest, most beautiful lie you've ever told me and I love you for it.

They hold each other for a long time.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD, DAY

The potential band members, with instruments, are standing in rows at one end of the field. The football team practices at the other end.

Herrick tries to line them up according to the book, trombones in one row, drums at the back, etc., but the rows won't come out even and he gives up on that.

He takes his position at the front of the band, raises the baton, and gives the signal to march. The kids start walking, some left foot first, some right. It looks like hell.

He stops them and tries again -- a little better -- a little better still -- until they finally march in unison.

Herrick orders a left turn -- immediate chaos. Kids hit each other with their instruments, trip over their own feet, and pretty soon the whole band is down.

The football players laugh.

Herrick gets them to set their instruments aside, then back in rows. They start marching once more. He orders a right turn -- more chaos, even without instruments.

Herrick sighs, this is going to be a long road. The football players start to heckle, but Meister shuts them up and walks down the field to Herrick.

MEISTER

I was three years in the Army,  
marched my keester off.

(MORE)

MEISTER (CONT'D)

I can get them to march, but  
the rest is up to you.

Meister lines the kids up.

MEISTER

(to kids)

TEN-HUT!

The kids look at him blankly.

MEISTER

(to Herrick)

We got a long way to go.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick is hanging pictures of the Beatles. Gertrude helps.

HERRICK

I don't know. What I want to  
write is a symphony that will  
encompass every major form of  
American music. Melding  
classical motifs with rock and  
roll, jazz with tin pan alley.  
Five movements, some with lyrics,  
some without, but all celebrating  
the American musical idiom.  
Gershwin did the same thing in  
his time -- I'll do it in ours.

GERTRUDE

Good for you, Mr. Herrick.

They finish and Herrick notices LOUIS RUS, a student, waiting  
patiently.

RUS

Mr. Herrick.

GERTRUDE

I gotta go, there's a student  
council meeting in five minutes.

HERRICK

(to Rus)

What can I do for you, Mr... ?

RUS

Rus, Louie Rus. I gotta take  
some music thing.

(MORE)

RUS (CONT'D)

I'm College Prep and it's music or another foreign language. I already flunked German, Spanish, and Latin, what's the point in trying French? So my counselor okayed music as a kinda substitute for a language.

HERRICK

It's late in the term to catch up on "Theory and History".

RUS

I can't do none of that, I want to play something. That counts as music, don't it?

HERRICK

Yes, but ... you need to learn some fundamentals.

RUS

Look, Mr. Herrick, I'll work hard. I know how to work, I'm just not a school kind of person. I don't learn things easy and if I get into college it'll be on a wrestling scholarship. I'm not a brain, I'm a jock, that's it. Let me learn the drum, one of those big ones.

HERRICK

A drum? A big one? Why not a horn?

RUS

No fruity instruments.

HERRICK

A tuba then.

RUS

Tuba's for fat guys with pimples.

HERRICK

Trombone, I need another trombone.

RUS

Twerps.

HERRICK

A triangle -- ding!

Rus just glares at him.

RUS

A drum, something I can just bang on. Hell ... heck, even I can do that. Give me a chance, Mr. Herrick. My counselor, Mr. Meister's just about given up, you're my last chance. I'll work hard.

Herrick looks at the kid.

HERRICK

I could use another drummer.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick is doodling at the piano. Iris enters with several photographs that she begins to frame and package.

IRIS

There was a point there I thought if I never saw another baby again I'd be a happy camper. Now... You're not writing.

HERRICK

I've settled on three names. Tatum, after Art Tatum, of course. Coletrane ... how's that sound? Coletrane Herrick.

IRIS

Like a wrestler.

HERRICK

And Dizzy, after my man Dizzy Gillespie.

IRIS

I thought we settled this "Dizzy" thing. A kid has enough problems without a handicap like that. And if it's a girl?

HERRICK

I thought of that, too! Lena, Eartha or, of course, Ella. Need I say more?

IRIS

I like Ella.

(MORE)

IRIS (CONT'D)

If it's a boy we'll call him  
Kodak or Minolta. I got it, I  
got it -- we'll call him  
Polaroid, Roid for short.

HERRICK

You're not taking this seriously.

IRIS

I guess not. Maybe I'm Dizzy.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

The school orchestra is assembled with Louie Rus on the bass drum next to the kettle drum player. The music is Beethoven's First and it's going okay -- until Rus hits the drum. BOOM! Herrick waves his baton and stops the music.

HERRICK

You're early, Mr. Rus. Again,  
pick it up at bar twenty-four.

He waves the baton and the next few bars go well. Herrick stops them again.

HERRICK

Where were you, Mr. Rus?

RUS

Sorry.

HERRICK

And Miss Lubbers, could you  
find a key closer to the one  
the rest of us are using? Thank  
you. People, let's try to start  
together. Again, from bar twenty-  
four.

He waves the baton and it goes swimmingly for a moment, Miss Lubbers concentrating like the dickens, Rus looking baffled.

BOOM! BOOM!

Herrick throws the baton into the air. The musicians fall apart.

HERRICK

Mr. Rus, if you would, please.  
Let's walk and talk.

Rus leaves his drum and walks over to Herrick. Herrick puts an arm around his shoulder and walks him over to the corner.

HERRICK

Mr. Rus, I thought you said you could read music.

RUS

I can, when it has words. This stuff's got no words.

Herrick looks like he just crapped a pineapple.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

It's Herrick and Rus alone. Herrick points to a musical staff he's put on the blackboard.

HERRICK

E - G - B - D - F... It's easy to remember. Every Good Boy Does Fine. F - A - C - E... Face, that's easy enough. Those are the notes.

RUS

It's like a code.

HERRICK

Exactly! And you have to know that code because it's telling you where to come in.

RUS

And bang the drum.

HERRICK

Exactly!

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

There is snow everywhere.

INT. GYMNASIUM, DAY

The band marches across the gym floor in their stocking feet, without instruments. They aren't doing too bad.

HERRICK

Okay, let's try it with music.  
(to himself)  
And let the saints preserve us.



INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

Herrick is working with Rus.

HERRICK

Just sing the notes on the page.

RUS

I sing like shit ... sorry, Mr. Herrick. I sing like ... you know.

HERRICK

I'm not auditioning you for the Metropolitan opera. Just sing the notes.

RUS

Okay.

HERRICK

That's a sharp. Go on.

EXT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Carolers walk from house to house singing Christmas carols. Herrick pulls into the driveway.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Iris is curled up asleep on the sofa under a pile of blankets. She looks pale and weak. The sound of Herrick entering wakes her up. He pulls off his gloves and coat.

HERRICK

Gotta get the heater fixed in that piece of junk.

IRIS

You're late.

HERRICK

I have this kid... He thinks he's dumb, so he is.

IRIS

Is he? Dumb?

HERRICK

I don't think so. Honey, are you okay?

IRIS

I don't know. At first I thought  
it was just more morning  
sickness, but...

He puts a hand to her forehead.

HERRICK

You feel hot. You had anything  
to eat?

IRIS

I tried to get some lunch down,  
but it didn't stay. I'll fix  
something.

She tries to get up, but he pushes her gently back down and  
looks at her neck.

HERRICK

Honey, you have little red spots.

She pulls the blankets away and looks for herself. She is  
horrified.

IRIS

Oh, my god...!

She doesn't know whether to cry or scream.

INT. HAVILAND HOSPITAL, NIGHT

Iris, wearing one of those stupid open-back gowns, sits on a  
gurney in an examination room. Herrick holds her hand.  
They are both nervous, worried. DR. WEITZMAN enters,  
friendly.

WEITZMAN

I'm afraid, Mr. Herrick, Mrs.  
Herrick, that it is rubella.

HERRICK

Jesus... It's been going around  
school, I could have brought it  
home.

IRIS

I could have caught it from any  
of the 'mothers or one of the  
babies... it's... What about  
our baby, Doctor?

WEITZMAN

It's ... definitely not the best news. You, Mrs. Herrick are at very little risk. On the other hand, the disease is known to cause damage to the fetus.

The news tears Herrick's heart out.

HERRICK

What kind of damage?

The Herricks look at each other and Iris clutches his arm.

WEITZMAN

Possible congenital heart disorder, or hearing loss... some are born blind... I'm telling you the worst prospects, but... it could be minor. It could be nothing, but...

IRIS

Whatever it is, we can handle it. Can't we, Carl?

They look at each other, not so sure.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

Rus is ready in front of a music stand, drumstick in hand, big bass drum waiting. He reads the sheet music.

RUS

Da-da-da-da-da-de-de-dum..

Herrick isn't really listening.

RUS

Da-dum-da-dum-da-da-da...

BOOM! Rus strikes the drum. Herrick is instantly paying attention.

RUS

Da-da-dum-dum-de.

BOOM! BOOM!

RUS

Da-da-da-daah!

BOOM! Rus laughs and beats out a celebratory riff on the big drum.

HERRICK

All right, all right! I don't see any notation calling for improvisation, Mr. Rus.

RUS

I did it! Wow! Hey, Mr. Herrick I can play this shit! Sorry, play this drum.

HERRICK

Yes, Mr. Rus, you can. Maybe you don't know it, but you've also learned a new language. A whole new language.

RUS

Wow, I did. I have.

HERRICK

Maybe all you wanted to do was bang on something, but you, sir, have learned a language.

RUS

Yeah! Wait'll my dad hears this shit... sorry, stuff.

HERRICK

There's nothing to be sorry about, Mr. Rus.

Herrick catches some of Rust enthusiasm.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

It is raining outside. Herrick works at the piano, his back to Iris. She is boxing up her photography chemicals and equipment. Her pregnancy is showing.

HERRICK

You don't have to do that, Iris.

IRIS

The chemicals can't be good for a growing baby. I'm just putting the cameras and equipment out of the way for now. Since I had the measles people haven't been bringing me their babies.

(MORE)

IRIS (CONT'D)

Not that I blame them. I don't  
feel much like taking pictures  
of babies any...

Herrick turns and sees her crying. He wraps Iris in his arms.

EXT. MAIN STREET, DAY

It is May and time for a parade. The sidewalks are lined with spectators, among them a very pregnant Iris, sitting in a lounge chair at the curb.

A band marches down the street playing "Seventy-Six Trombones". The musicians are high-stepping, great-looking, all-American kids. They pause in front of Iris and do a few fancy steps and flourishes and move on -- very impressive. The people applaud enthusiastically.

A float is next -- a salute to sugar beets.

EXT. SIDE STREET, DAY

Herrick runs around madly, trying to get the band together.

HERRICK

Strull! Where the hell is  
Strull?! Anybody... Doel, where  
did those brown shoes come from?  
The uniform is black shoes, you  
were given black shoes, where  
did those brown shoes come from?!  
Has anyone seen Strull?!  
Grossman, where's your music?  
Pay attention to it! Everybody  
stay calm. It's just like  
rehearsal, except for thousands  
of people out there.

EXT. MAIN STREET, DAY

Iris watches another band approach, playing the "Colonel Bogey March". Their maneuvers are intricate, weaving in and out of each other, pauses, deep bows, twirling their instruments in precision. They provide an exciting show -- next week they'll be on Ed Sullivan. Major applause from the audience.

Another float pulled by a John Deere tractor -- the National Pickle Harvesters Association.

EXT. SIDE STREET, DAY

Herrick has the kids in formation.

HERRICK

One, two, three, four, March!

Instant chaos. A waiting band and band master start to laugh.

HERRICK

Hold it! Hold it! HOLD IT!  
All right, people, let's all  
take a deep breath, get back in  
formation.

A parade official is waving them onto the parade route.  
Herrick turns on him.

HERRICK

WE'RE DOING THE BEST WE CAN,  
DAMNIT!

The band stares at him in surprise. He smiles weakly.

EXT. MAIN STREET, DAY

Iris and another pregnant woman are sharing cotton candy.  
Down the street come a majorette and two standard-bearers  
carrying a big cloth banner.

John F. Kennedy High School

Marching Band

Haviland, Michigan

The band isn't playing, they're concentrating on their  
marching. My, they do look spiffy in their new uniforms  
Herrick, in his matching band leader's uniform, winks at  
Iris.

Herrick nods to the majorette. She raises her baton.

BAH! BAH! BAHMP!

BAHMP! BAHMP!

BAH! BAH! BAHMP!

It's "Louie, Louie"'.  
'

The crowd goes nuts, applauding, cheering, yelling. And the  
Kennedy High School Marching Band parades down the street.

Louis Rus is proud of himself, and rightly so. But Herrick is swelled up like a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade balloon.

INT. GYMNASIUM, DAY

Graduation day -- "Good Luck to the Class of 1966".

Gertrude isn't with the orchestra, she's in cap and gown with the other graduates. But Louis Rus is in the orchestra. They play "Yesterday".

EXT. COUNTY ROAD, DAY

A '67 Plymouth careens down the road. It's the Drivers Ed car, there's that sign on the trunk. The car speeds through a stop sign. The music -- "Baby You Can Drive My Car".

INT. PLYMOUTH, DAY

Herrick is driving, a madman behind the wheel. DARYL is the student in the passenger seat. Two more students are in the back, one terrified, one getting off on the trip.

DARYL

That was a stop sign you went through back there, Mr. Herrick.

Herrick ignores him.

DARYL

You are definitely speeding, Mr. Herrick, definitely. Oh, that's another stop sign. You cut that lady off back there.

The car turns off the road and into the outskirts of a town.

DARYL

I don't think you can pass on the right, Mr. Herrick. Oh, my gosh ... this is a one-way street, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Mr. Hosta! Shut the hell up!

DARYL

Shuts up.

EXT. HAVILAND CITY HOSPITAL, DAY

Herrick pulls to a stop in front of the hospital and runs inside.

INT. MATERNITY WARD, DAY

Herrick runs into the corridor, past the nursery -- skids to a stop, backs up, looks at the babies, realizes he won't be able to recognize his -- and runs to the nurses' station.

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM, DAY

Iris is propped up in bed, a baby in her arms, a nurse making a notation on her chart.

Herrick bursts into the room, sees everything all right, and tries to calm himself.

HERRICK

Are you all right?

IRIS

I'm fine. Come meet your son.

HERRICK

A son...? I came as fast as I could, but we were all the way the other side of Allegan County. I called in and... A son ... ?

IRIS

My water broke and Wendy brought me to the hospital. It was easy, everybody's been telling me how lucky I am.

HERRICK

A son... Is he...

IRIS

He's fine. I counted all the toes and fingers. The doctor says he's perfect.

HERRICK

Perfect...

He kisses her. There is a noise at the door. Daryl and the other two students.

DARYL

We can't get back to school.



HERRICK

Keep the car, I'll manage.

DARYL

(sarcastic)

We don't have licenses, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Okay, okay, give me a few minutes. Come on in, Meet Coletrane Herrick.

The kids take a look at the baby.

DARYL

Coletrane? What kind of name is that?

HERRICK

You're on thin ice, Daryl.

IRIS

I think just Cole will be fine.

Herrick bends over to Look at his son.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

A school bus pulls up to the curb and unloads students. Fallen leaves litter the grass. The marquee is being erected on the lawn.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

The bell rings and the students settle in. Herrick is smiling, full of enthusiasm.

HERRICK

Welcome to Music Theory. Look at your schedule. If Music 101 isn't listed for this hour then it's your tough luck.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

Herrick and JILL LOHMAN, one of the students, are alone. The girl looks at the floor, at the walls, at her hands, never at Herrick.

HERRICK

Your grades are excellent, Miss Lohman, excellent. But you never speak in class, not even when I call on you. The girls' counselor, Mrs. Ahlberg, says you won't talk even to her. As your faculty advisor I've been asked to help you, but I can't if you don't tell me what the problem is.

She is silent.

HERRICK

Your grades prove you do the assignments... is there a problem at home.

She shakes her head.

HERRICK

Are you afraid of something?

She nods.

HERRICK

Really, what? The teachers, the other students?

She nods again.

HERRICK

Which is it, the teachers or the students? C'mon, Miss Lohman. One word will make my day. Students or teachers?

LOHMAN

(softly)

Both.

The word is so low it could have been a sigh instead of a word.

HERRICK

Both? Both. Now we're getting somewhere. You're shy, aren't you, Miss Lohman? Shy ... that's not such a bad thing. Well, it can be when you think everyone is staring at you. I was shy when I was your age.

She looks at him briefly.

HERRICK

I was so shy I had a permanent crick in my neck from looking down to see if my fly was open. She almost laughs. Here's a trick that worked for me. Every time you have to speak just look at the person you're addressing and imagine them naked.

LOHMAN

(softly)  
Naked... ?

HERRICK

Naked. It takes all the threat right out of their presence.

LOHMAN

Naked...

HERRICK

It worked for me, try it.

She seems to be thinking seriously -- she finally nods.

LOHMAN

I will, Mr. Herrick. Thank you.

There is a knock and Principal Wolters enters. The girl gets up.

WOLTERS

Good afternoon, Miss Lohman.  
How are we today?

She lowers her eyes and starts to scurry past him.

HERRICK

Miss Lohman...

She looks briefly at Herrick, then at the Principal. She looks him up and down, imagining. Wolters starts to frown under her focused gaze. She starts giggling.

LOHMAN

We are fine today, Mr. Wolters.

And she scurries past him and out the door.

Wolters looks at Herrick, who shrugs innocently.

EXT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Fallen leaves have been raked into piles.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE

Herrick composes at the piano. Iris is making a cradle from an orange crate and two wooden coat hangers.

The baby is in a floor-mounted baby swing, being rocked with Herrick's left foot. Herrick plays, slowly at first, then faster and faster. Preoccupied, he doesn't realize he's rocking the baby faster, too. Soon the baby is swinging like the tail of a happy pup.

IRIS

Carl!

He is jerked out of his concentration. Iris points her hammer at the baby. Herrick stops the swing.

IRIS

Write a waltz.

Herrick smiles and chucks the baby under the chin.

HERRICK

You kidding? This kid's got a rock and roll soul and a boogie woogie heart.

Herrick goes back to work.

EXT. TRAILER, DAY

ED CLAYPOOL, a teenage boy, shovels snow on the long path from the weather-beaten trailer to the mail box on the road. Junk cars and tractors poke through the snow.

Herrick pulls up in his Corvair and parks. The boy sees Herrick and runs back to the trailer. Herrick gets out of the car and sees the trailer door slam closed. He checks the mail box --"Claypool".

Herrick wraps his scarf more tightly against the cold and walks up the driveway through the snow. He knocks on the trailer door. No one answers.

Herrick sees the curtain at one of the windows move. He knocks again.

HERRICK

Mr. Claypool, I know you're in there. I saw you shoveling snow.

There is a muffled, desperate conversation inside, shuffling around. The door is opened. Seen up close, Ed Claypool needs a haircut, his clothes are too small, and he is most uncomfortable to see Herrick.

ED

Hi, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Mr. Claypool, are your parents home?

ED

No, they got a couple days work in Benton Harbor.

HERRICK

Oh, what kind of work?

ED

They haul scrap, old cars and stuff. They got to pick it up in Benton Harbor and haul it to Pennsylvania, I think. We own our own truck.

HERRICK

That's nice. Could I come in? It's cold out here.

ED

I guess so.

He opens the door for Herrick to enter.

INT. TRAILER, DAY

Ed Claypool comes from a poor family. Everything is worn and threadbare, the trailer cluttered. Ed is nervous, self conscious.

Herrick takes off his gloves and scarf, opens his coat.

HERRICK

Heater in my car's worthless.

He sits. The boy sits.

HERRICK

We've missed you in school this week.

ED

Uh, I was sick ... a cold.

Ed snuffles for effect. Herrick is doubtful.

ED

Maybe the flu...

HERRICK

Sure. But you seem okay today.

(beat)

Ed, you're a bright kid, and your grades are pretty good. But these unexplained absences have a terrible effect on your record. Mr. Wolters wants to expel you unless you can come up with a good excuse.

Ed doesn't know how to respond. He looks at the floor. Herrick waits him out, also looking at the floor.

Then he sees it -- Ed Claypool's shoes. Old, ratty tennis shoes with holes through the canvas, rubber peeling. In the relative warmth of the trailer the snow on them has melted and water squishes out of the holes.

Ed sees Herrick staring at his shoes. He panics, embarrassed -- he looks like he might cry.

Herrick looks away self-consciously -- and sees EDNA, the boy's eight-year-old sister as she steps out of a small closet.

EDNA

I have to pee.

She points toward the bathroom. Herrick can't help looking at her feet -- worn out tennis shoes.

Herrick looks at Ed Claypool.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

The baby rocks in the completed cradle. Iris has decorated it with daisy stickers and painted his name on the headboard. She's taking photographs of the baby while Herrick works at the piano.

HERRICK

The bus pick-up is a quartermile from their house. It seems that the little girl got frostbite walking home during the first cold snap. So the parents told them to stay home on real cold days.

IRIS

Couldn't the bus go the extra quarter-mile and pick them up?

HERRICK

I told Wolters about it.  
(beat)  
And I took them downtown and bought them each a pair of winter shoes. Okay ... ? Out of the "opus" fund.

IRIS

That's real nice, Carl.

HERRICK

I got them-some galoshes, too.

IRIS

It's your opus.

HERRICK

And a good winter coat.

She takes a picture of him at the piano.

HERRICK

What was that for?

IRIS

Posterity. I think I'll send it to the National Geographic. A dying species -- the last real mensch.

INT. GYMNASIUM, DAY

Graduation day finds Herrick at his usual post on the stage with the orchestra. "Good Luck! Class of 1967!" Reads the banner.

The orchestra finishes the last few strains of "To Sir, With Love". Wolters takes the podium.

WOLTERS.

And now, our Salutatorian, Jill Lohman.

Miss Lohman takes the podium and waits for the applause to die down.

LOHMAN

Fellow graduates, our honored  
faculty, parents, friends...

She looks into the audience -- and freezes. She sees them looking back at her. She averts her eyes, looks around the gym, at her notes.

LOHMAN

Panicky, she catches Herrick's  
eye. He takes a deep breath --  
so does she.

She looks back at the audience -- and smiles. She looks back at Herrick -- and smiles. He crosses his legs and shifts in his chair. She turns back to the audience.

LOHMAN

I would like to begin by  
paraphrasing a popular rock  
song. So as not to offend the  
more conservative members of  
our audience I would like to  
remind them that this song was  
originally recorded by the folk  
singer, Pete Seeger. If even  
that offends you I'd like to  
point out that the words were  
taken from the Book of  
Ecclesiastes, the Old Testament.  
"To everything, there is a  
season, turn, turn, turn. And  
a time for every purpose under  
heaven.  
A time to gain, a time to lose.  
A time to rend, a time to sew.  
A time to love, a time to hate.  
A time for peace, I swear it's  
not too late... "

She smiles at Herrick triumphantly.

LOHMAN

Fellow graduates, it is our  
time. We live in a country  
that has traveled to the moon  
twice, but only sixteen percent  
of black children in the south  
attend an integrated school.

(MORE)



LOHMAN (CONT'D)

We have a generation of young  
people calling for peace while  
our country is at war in  
Southeast Asia...

Give 'em, hell, Miss Lohman.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick, without his tie, is at the piano, working on his  
music. A girl knocks on the door and enters.

GIRL

Mr. Herrick, will you sign my  
yearbook?

She is dressed for vacation in shorts and a T-shirt.

HERRICK

Sure.

She opens the yearbook for him and he writes something.

GIRL

Oh, that's sweet. Thanks, Mr.  
Herrick. You have a good summer  
vacation.

He nods, wanting to get back to his work. She leaves and he  
plays a couple notes on the piano. That's it. He's done!

Herrick smiles at the pages of his composition. He gathers  
up the notated pages and walks out of the room.

INT. HALLWAY

Herrick's walk quickens and he is almost running by the time  
he reaches the Principal's Office.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

DONNA, a lone secretary is working at a desk.

HERRICK

Donna, use the phone?

The request is perfunctory as he grabs the phone and dials.

HERRICK

(into phone)

Iris! I finished it! The first movement! Oh, there's some notation that needs to be cleaned up, but damn, it's really done! Sorry, Donna.

(beat)

Well, I was thinking you could drop off Cole at the baby sitter and I'll stop downtown and pick up a bottle of wine...

Herrick is self-conscious, even though Donna is trying not to listen in.

HERRICK

Whatever the sitter wants. Let's splurge a little. I'll stop by the record store and get some mood music.

(beat)

No, I know I don't need another album... Hon, we're celebrating!

(beat)

About an hour... see you!

He hangs up, grins at Donna, and gives her an impulsive kiss. Donna is nonplussed -- she has never been kissed at work -- ever. Herrick runs out.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

The marquee is being changed. Down with "Congratulations Class of '67" and up with "Drivers Education Program starts June 20".

Herrick drives away from the school, top down, radio blaring, singing "Seventh Son" along with Johnny Rivers.

EXT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

The Corvair is parked in the driveway.. Iris pulls in behind it in her VW van. She gets out, checks her new hairdo, and enters the house.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE

Herrick sits on the sofa, his back to the doorway. On the coffee table are a bottle of wine and two glasses and the pages of music.

IRIS

Sorry I took so long, Carl, but  
I got my hair done so you can  
mess it up.

She is flirty and girlish. Herrick turns to face her -- his eyes are rimmed in red, his face twisted in grief.

IRIS

Carl, what's wrong?!

He gathers up the pages of music.

HERRICK

This. This! It's crap...  
junk... It's not worth the paper  
it's printed on. It's shit!

IRIS

Oh, honey, no it's not. I've  
heard some of it... You're  
just...

HERRICK

I know what I'm talking about.  
Listen... I got the new Beatles  
album.

He goes over to the stereo, drops the needle on a record.  
The cover for "Sergeant Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band" is  
on the floor.

The unmistakable strains of "A Day In the Life" begin.

HERRICK

Listen, listen... They did it...  
and it's great. Nothing I've  
written can ever come close to  
this. It's... perfect... And I  
wrote... crap...

He shoves the pages of sheet music into a desk drawer -- he  
is destroyed.

HERRICK

They did it. Better than I  
ever could ... ever will...

Iris puts her arms around him. They are silent. "A Day In  
the Life" plays on.

MONTAGE -- STREETS & ROADS, DAY

The music, "on the Road Again" by Canned Heat. The Drivers Ed car, the '67 Plymouth, frog hops along a street.

Then a '68 Plymouth.

END MONTAGE.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Iris is assembling wooden toys. No nails, no screws, just Elmer's glue and well-cut pieces. A few completed, brightly painted ones lay around the room.

Herrick doodles on the piano with young Cole on his lap. Cole, a two-year-old, wears glasses.

HERRICK

I wonder if I can get the school board to let the band play something by Jimi Hendrix or Creedence ... or maybe Santana or Marvin Gaye. Something a little more modern.

IRIS

As long as it has no reference to drugs, sex, or teenage rebellion I think you'll be okay.

She looks at him, a little worried.

HERRICK

Well, that just about cuts out everything but the Partridge Family and the Archies and I have my doubts about "Sugar, Sugar". What do you think, Cole, should we give them a little Howling Wolf?

Herrick starts pounding out "Back Door Man", bouncing Cole up and down on his knee. Cole pounds on the keys with his little hands.

HERRICK

Look, Honey, he's got the beat. The kid's a natural, he's gonna be a musical genius.

(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)

It's all that music I played  
for him while you were pregnant,  
it's in his blood. Now appearing  
at Radio City Music Hall, Cole  
Gershwin Herrick! Ta-dah!

Cole laughs. Iris walks over and lays a hand on Herrick's  
shoulder and waits for him to stop playing.

IRIS

Carl ... he's deaf.

HERRICK

What? That's impossible.

IRIS

The doctor finished the tests  
today. The measles ... he can't  
hear, at all -- and probably  
never will.

Herrick looks at his son, disbelieving.

HERRICK

That's impossible.

He puts the boy on the floor, stands behind him and claps  
his hands together sharply. Cole doesn't respond. Herrick  
tries it again -- nothing.

Herrick stomps his feet. Cole turns around.

HERRICK

There! See, he heard me.

IRIS

He felt the vibration through  
the floor, Carl. They ran all  
sorts of tests. He's deaf.

Herrick slumps onto the piano bench, looking at Cole. Bam!  
He slams the cover over the piano keys. The boy doesn't  
respond. Herrick stares at the floor, destroyed.

MONTAGE -- ROAD, DAY

A '69 Plymouth -- jerking and jolting along the road with  
Canned Heat.

A '70 Ford. A '70 Ford? Yes and the sign on the door is  
new. "This Drivers Education 1970 Ford Compliments of  
Alliance Ford".

A '71 Plymouth -- Nolin Plymouth/Chrysler is back.

END MONTAGE.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

The bust of Beethoven is wearing psychedelic paint. Herrick is talking to a class of new students. The class is becoming more ethnically mixed.

HERRICK

How many of you like classical music?

A few tentative hands are raised -- brown-nosers.

HERRICK

What would you think if I told you that Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale" is a new version of the Bach cantata, "Sleepers Awake"? How many of you like The Rolling Stones?

He plays a couple bars of "Jumping Jack Flash".

HERRICK

How many of you know that this song was based on a Chuck Berry riff?

He plays a little of Chuck Berry.

HERRICK

Chuck Berry is a rhythm and blues artist and the blues is a truly American form of music based upon the diatonic scale. The diatonic scale...

Herrick turns to the blackboard and starts writing.

YNTEMA (O.S.)

How lame...

Herrick turns back to the class.

HERRICK

Pardon me?

YNTEMA

Lame... I said what a lame way to get into scales.

Herrick finds the sarcastic voice and the little snout named YNTEMA that it belongs to. He checks the seating chart.

HERRICK

Mr...Yntema, I am not here to be graded by you. You are here to be graded by me. Keep your criticisms to yourself.

He goes back to the blackboard.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick works at the desk. Iris enters with five-year-old Cole, cute as a bug in his little glasses, dressed up, hair slicked back.

IRIS

We're all ready!

HERRICK

I'm not.

IRIS

We'll wait, won't we, Cole.

She chucks Cole under the chin.

HERRICK

Iris, you go ahead. I have to transpose all these parts for the homecoming concert.

IRIS

This is the second signing class you've missed...

HERRICK

I'll catch up.

Iris stands there a second, debating whether to push it.

IRIS

All right. Cole, say good-bye to Daddy.

She signs to Cole. Cole signs to Herrick -- Herrick waves good-bye.

INT. HALLWAY, DAY

Herrick hurries toward the Principal's Office.

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

Donna is typing. It is raining outside. Herrick enters.

HERRICK

Mr. Walters wants to see me.

DONNA

Go right in, Mr. Herrick.

Walters sits at his desk writing. Yntema sits opposite him, tending a bloody nose.

WOLTERS

Mr. Herrick You're Mr. Yntema's counselor, aren't you?

HERRICK

I am? I, yes, I remember, he is one of mine. He never ... he and I ... haven't had many meetings.

WOLTERS

Schedule a few. Mr. Yntema has been fighting again. The next fight will involve a meeting with his parents and some disciplinary action. Take him out of here.

Yntema stands and leaves with Herrick.

INT. HALLWAY

HERRICK

You're supposed to meet with your counselor once a month. You've skipped every one of our sessions.

YNTEMA

I don't need any counselor, man. I know what I need and it isn't this school.

HERRICK

Look, Mr. Yntema, you're not making any friends among the teachers or staff -- obviously you're doing no better with the other students. Do you have problems at home?



YNTEMA

I got problems here. Look,  
when I left Grosse Pointe High  
they'd skipped me ahead a grade.  
Here, at Cowflop High they put  
me back. What did I do to  
deserve that?

HERRICK

I'm sorry, but Principal Wolters  
doesn't believe in skipping  
grades. He wants you to complete  
four years of high school.

YNTEMA

Christ, you get time off for  
good behavior even in prison.

HERRICK

Good behavior has not been your  
strong suit.

YNTEMA

I get all A's, don't I? That's  
all you should be interested  
in. The rest is my business.  
So leave me the hell alone.

And he walks away. Herrick, frustrated, lets him.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Iris and Cole work on the wooden toys. Herrick grades papers.  
He pauses a moment and watches them signing to each other,  
fingers flying in conversation. They say something funny  
and both laugh.

Herrick frowns and goes back to his papers.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick faces his class.

HERRICK

So, how can we tell what key a  
piece of music is written in?

Hands go up.

HERRICK

Mr. Tidd...

TIDD

It's written on the front page.

YNTEMA

(laughing)

What a dipstick.

The rest of the class laughs and Tidd feels like shit.

HERRICK

You're so smart, Mr. Yntema, go ahead and tell us.

YNTEMA

You count the number of flats and sharps next to the time signature.

It's the correct answer, but it doesn't please Herrick.

HERRICK

Fine... Are there any other ways?

Several hands go up. Yntema looks at the others smugly, inviting someone to wipe away his smirk with a fist.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, LATER

The bell rings.

HERRICK

Page 280 to 314 for tomorrow. Mr. Yntema, I'd like a word with you.

Yntema, halfway to the door, saunters back. Herrick waits until the others have left.

HERRICK

Mr. Yntema, I'm damn sick of your smart mouth. You're smart, everyone knows it, so shut the hell up unless I ask you a question. This is a music class and I'm the teacher. You pay attention... to me.

YNTEMA

What for? Look, I know all this already. I know more about music than any of these pinheads. I don't need this.

HERRICK

Then maybe I should turn over  
the class to you,

YNTEMA

I wouldn't stoop that low.

Right now Herrick would like to hit this smart ass.

HERRICK

I'm about this close to  
suspending you, Mr. Yntema.

YNTEMA

Look, Mr. Herrick, I can play  
my scales backward and forward.

He demonstrates on the piano.

YNTEMA

I can recite all the names and  
dates you want. I know the  
Lydian mode, the Ambrosian chant  
modes, the Gregorian modes. I  
know the difference between  
invertible counterpoint, strict  
and free counterpoint. Just  
give me the final and let me  
out of here.

HERRICK

Music is more than that, it's a  
language of emotion.

YNTEMA

Bullshit.

Herrick is pissed. A student pokes her head in the door,  
enters and gives Herrick a note.

He glares at Yntema, fixing him on the spot, and reads the  
note. The energy drains out of Herrick. He looks at the  
girl who waits expectantly.

HERRICK

Please tell Mr. Wolters I'll  
take care of it. I'll probably  
send Bobby Tidd.

YNTEMA

The dipstick.

Herrick turns on Yntema so fast that Yntema ducks. Herrick  
might hit him, wants to, but ... takes a breath. The girl  
leaves.

HERRICK

Watch your mouth, Mr. Yntema.

YNTEMA

Look, I know this is a Liberal Arts program, but I'm a Math major. I plan to get my college degree in economics. I already have twelve college credits from summer school.

HERRICK

We're talking about music.

YNTEMA

I know, the language of emotion and that whole yawn. You know what I think, Mr. Herrick, emotions are part of our Neanderthal past. We don't need them. They just get in the way of progress. We should get rid of them -- and we certainly don't need a language for them.

Herrick is primed to argue, but looks at the note and stops himself.

HERRICK

Meet me here tomorrow at ten a.m.

YNTEMA

But tomorrow's Saturday.

HERRICK

Be here tomorrow or you've just gotten your first "D", Mr. Yntema. For attitude.

YNTEMA

You can't do that.

HERRICK

Try me.

Yntema looks at Herrick for a moment, decides not to press his luck, and leaves.

Herrick falls into his chair and stares at the note.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

It is Fall. Yntema waits by himself in front of the deserted school. Herrick pulls up in the VW van and Yntema gets in.

EXT. HAVILAND CEMETERY, DAY

A military funeral, flag-draped coffin, color guard. Family and friends are gathered around the grave. Herrick leads Yntema to within a few yards.

YNTEMA

What are we doing here?

HERRICK

Just be quiet and listen.

The minister speaks in a low voice, the service already in progress. Meister, in an ill-fitting suit, walks over to Herrick. His hairline is starting to recede.

MEISTER

(noting Yntema)

Damn, Carl, you are a glutton  
for punishment.

Meister and Herrick look over at the mourners.

MEISTER

Too bad ... Louie Rus. He was  
on the wrestling team, you know.  
Letter man three years running.  
Good kid.

HERRICK

I know. He sent me a letter  
only ... two months ago. He  
was learning Vietnamese.

MEISTER

What a waste. I'm thinking  
Miss Wooley might be right about  
this war. What a waste. See  
you at the house.

Meister walks away.

YNTEMA

Who was this guy? The one ...  
you know.

HERRICK

Just some kid I taught to bang  
on a drum.

The minister finishes a poem, "In Flanders Fields", by John McCrae.

Gunshots! The salute from the honor guard. The noise startles everyone.

"Taps" plays. It is Bobby Tidd on a rise a short distance away.

Everyone cries. The stolid father, the drained mother, the young wife with her child in his best Sunday suit. Family and friends -- even Yntema.

HERRICK

That's Bobby Tidd on the bugle  
... the dipstick. He's not as  
smart as you are. He's not  
that good on the horn, either,  
he's lucky that bugle has only  
one key. But he's playing well  
today.

"Taps" dies away.

HERRICK

Louie Rus was his cousin. But  
the point is ... that music  
moved everyone. You didn't  
even know Louie Rus and you had  
a tear in your eye. Don't feel  
embarrassed. That music has  
had that effect for many, many  
years. It expresses what we  
are all feeling at this moment.  
It spoke to us -- for us.

The flag is folded and presented to the widow.

HERRICK

The language of emotion. Louie  
Rus worked very hard to learn  
that language, very hard. Just  
because it's easy for you --  
don't cheapen it.

Yntema looks away.

HERRICK

I think you owe Mr. Tidd an  
apology, maybe you don't... Do  
whatever you want. Just go  
away. I'd like some time alone  
with one of my former students.

The family and friends are leaving the grave. Herrick walks across the grass and stands next to it.

Yntema walks slowly over to where Bobby Tidd, in his best suit, sits on a headstone.

Herrick looks over and sees Yntema offer Tidd his hand. They shake. Herrick stands at the grave for a moment. The grave diggers are waiting with their shovels. He finally notices them and walks away.

Herrick walks through the cemetery, a small one, looking at the headstones. Many of them have a common thread -- a metallic American and Vietnamese flag crossed in the ground in front of the marker. The dates on the headstones show lives cut short. Young men cut down in the prime of their lives, one after the other.

Herrick knew many of these young men. Finally, he can take no more. He sits on the ground and cries.

INT. GYMNASIUM, DAY

"Good Luck Class of 1972". A good number of the students wear black armbands over their graduation gowns, and buttons that say, "Stop the War".

The ceremony is over and everyone is milling around. Back slapping, hugs, tears, handshakes, and kisses. Flashbulbs go off -- a Kodak contest.

Herrick is grabbed by one student after the other to pose for a photo. Yntema and Tidd and other graduate run over and lift their robes to their thighs.

YNTEMA/TIDD/GRADUATE

We don't have pants on!

And they run off looking for someone else to shock.

WOLTERS

They have their gym shorts on,  
I checked.

HERRICK

You're a braver man than I am,  
Gunga Din.

Wolters takes Herrick aside.

WOLTERS

I want you to know that I won't  
be back next Fall.

(MORE)

WOLTERS (CONT'D)

I've accepted the position of Superintendent of the Manistee County School District. Good fishing up there.

(continuing)

Don't tell anyone else, you're the only one I want to know right now. Let the others read it in the paper.

HERRICK

Why tell me?

WOLTERS

You're surprised?

HERRICK

Well, yes, as a matter of fact.

WOLTERS

I don't know why, Mr. Herrick, but -- you're my favorite teacher.

Herrick is even more surprised.

WOLTERS

You're a hell of a teacher, Carl. That's why I gave you the hard cases, like Louie Rus, Jill Lohman, Ed Claypool, Yntema over there.

HERRICK

Well, thanks ... Mr. Wolters. You'll be missed -- I, uh, learned a lot from you.

WOLTERS

Always remember one thing, as long as they are dressed properly they will behave properly.

Wolters slips a small box into Herrick's hand and melts away into the crowd. Herrick opens the box -- a small, gold compass.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY - 1994

Herrick looks at the scratched and battered compass on his key chain. One of the keys is poised at a desk drawer lock.



The janitor, MR. FEJEDELEM, enters, wielding his dust mop across the tile floor.

FEJEDELEM

Mr. Herrick, you need some boxes or something?

HERRICK

No, I don't have much. Thanks, Jay.

FEJEDELEM

I saw you earlier ... thought I'd...

Fejedelem looks around the room wistfully.

FEJEDELEM

You know, both me and my son took music from you in this room. Well, I always felt bad that I was such a pain in the ass when I was a kid.

HERRICK

Yeah, Jay, we all do things we regret later. We all wish we'd done some things differently.

FEJEDELEM

Yeah, I guess so. Anyway, we were kids then, right? That gives us some leeway.

HERRICK

That's right.

FEJEDELEM

Well, you take care. I'm around for a while if you change your mind about the boxes.

Fejedelem dusts his way back out.

Herrick continues sorting his things. He picks up the clear plastic paperweight with the dandelion puff suspended inside. He holds it up and looks at the delicate froth sealed forever. He smiles, then his eyes become sad.

MONTAGE -- COUNTY ROAD, DAY

A succession of Plymouths frog-hops through the years, to "Bad Motor Scooter" by Montrose.

1972, 1973, 1974, 1975, 1976.

The sign on the 1976 car reads "Nolin Chrysler/Toyota"

END MONTAGE.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

The living room is cluttered with Iris' latest business venture. There are jugs of liquid plastic resin, cans of acetone, and stacks of molds spread out on a table. Flowers dry suspended by their stems from a clothesline.

Flowers are also being placed in flat tubs of silica gel and borax to dry. That's where Iris, Herrick, and ten-year-old Cole are working right now.

IRIS

You should have been there.  
The field was full of Queen Anne's lace and brown-eyed susans. Right in the middle was this purple thistle and Cole goes to get that when a partridge just bursts out of nowhere and scares the dickens out of both of us. You should have been there.

HERRICK

I told you we had a curriculum committee meeting.

IRIS

I know, I'm not trying to start an argument. I was just...  
I'll do the zinnias...

Iris reaches over to take several of the flowers from Herrick.

HERRICK

No, I've got them. I need some more borax, ask Cole to get it.

Herrick touches Cole on the shoulder and points to Iris. Iris signs to Cole, who goes into the kitchen and returns with a box of borax. The interchange is routine -- Iris speaks to Cole for both of them.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

Students are gathered on folding chairs, a girl is at the piano, and MRS. OLMSTEAD, the theater advisor, is running the try-outs. Herrick watches from the sidelines.

MRS. OLMSTEAD

Since we've all decided to do a musical for the Senior Play this year, and because I can't carry a tune in a bushel basket, I've asked Mr. Herrick to help us out. We will begin the try-outs with the role of Maria. Oh, we're putting on "West Side Story", but you all know that, don't you? So let's see, we'll start with Ardeth Huizenga.

Ardeth gives her music to the pianist -- and sings -- sort of. You could get a prettier sound from a cat in a Cuisinart.

Next

-- a 'Maria' from hell, she yells the lyrics.

-- flat, off-key, and can't remember the lyrics to a Bee Gees song.

-- a pretty face, but a voice like Ernest Borgnine.

-- too shy to sing loud enough to be heard.

-- breaks into giggles every other line.

-- Grace Slick doing "West Side Story".

-- too many opera lessons.

And then -- ROWENA DENEVE sings the hell out of "Somewhere".

Herrick, nodding off in boredom, is suddenly awake. And she looks as pretty as her voice -- young, confident, the sound of an angel. She finishes.

HERRICK

That was very nice Miss...  
DeNeve. Very nice. DeNeve...  
? Did I have your younger sister  
in Music 101 a couple of years  
ago?

ROWENA

That was me. I ... blossomed.

HERRICK

I guess you did.

(beat)

Let's go on to the male lead,  
that's, uh...

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick is watching "Tony Orlando and Dawn". Iris and Cole are cutting self-stick green felt for the base of the paperweights.

HERRICK

Iris, can I dip into the 'opus'  
fund for about a hundred dollars.

IRIS

Sure... for one of your Oliver  
Twists?

HERRICK

Yeah. He has a chance for a  
scholarship at Western and I'd  
like to give him the bus fare  
and a decent set of clothes.

IRIS

Sure. Are you going to come to  
the Arts and Crafts fair Thursday  
night and help Cole and me set  
up the booth?

HERRICK

Sorry, Sophie Lappingals getting  
a root canal and I said I'd  
take her place on the field  
trip -- Battle Creek again.

IRIS

The Kellogg factory? Maybe you  
can bring back some Cocoa Puffs  
back for us.

Iris signs back and forth with Cole excitedly.

COLE

(signing)

I like Lucky Charms better --  
best.

IRIS

Maybe Cole can go along and see  
them make Lucky Charms.

HERRICK

Juniors only.

IRIS

That's okay, Cole and I will go out to Meijer Market and buy six tons of Lucky Charms and that's all we'll eat from now on.

She and Cole sign back and forth and laugh. Herrick, left out, goes back to Tony Orlando and the canned laughter.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, NIGHT

Herrick directs the boys as they mutilate "Gee, Officer Krupke!". Rowena and some of the other students watch from the audience.

Every time Herrick looks in Rowena's direction he finds her staring at him. It distracts the hell out of him.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, NIGHT

Herrick walks across the nearly empty parking lot. His Corvair, newly painted, badly painted, sits alone in the teachers' section. Rowena is waiting there.

ROWENA

Classic car, Mr. Herrick.

HERRICK

Really? I never thought of it that way. I suppose it will be a classic if it holds together for a few more years. That's better than calling it a piece of worn-out junk. Classic... I like that.

ROWENA

No, classic like, genius, like perfect. It's perfect for you, it's cute.

HERRICK

Really..

ROWENA

Look, Mr. Herrick, I was supposed to catch a ride with Toby Klein, but I think he wants to rehearse  
(MORE)

ROWENA (CONT'D)  
the love scenes -- for real.  
So I told him I'd catch a ride  
with someone else ... could  
you... ?

HERRICK  
Of course.

He opens the door for her and she jumps inside.

INT. CORVAIR

He gets behind the wheel, pumps the gas pedal. Rowena looks around the car and at Herrick.

ROWENA  
Classic... Just drop me by my  
parents' restaurant. You've  
been there, right?

HERRICK  
Yeah, the pizza place.

He drives away.

EXT. BOWSER'S PIZZA, NIGHT

A mom and pop pizza parlor. Herrick pulls up across the street.

INT. CORVAIR

HERRICK  
There you go.

ROWENA  
Are you hungry? Pizza's on me  
... on my folks.

HERRICK  
Pizza sounds good. I'll have  
to call home.

ROWENA  
Great! I'm starving!

INT. BOWSER'S, NIGHT

Herrick and Rowena eat, though she talks more than she eats.

ROWENA

I love the way you teach music.  
I mean, you have this ... thing,  
this aura that you give off...  
like, I don't know, like this  
energy field. You love music  
and you make people love it  
with you. I have different  
ears because of you.

HERRICK

I'm not a plastic surgeon.

ROWENA

Don't make fun of me. I hear  
things differently now, that's  
special.

HERRICK

I'm just a teacher.

ROWENA

No, you're not. Mr. Prins is  
just a teacher.

INT. BOWSER'S, LATER

Herrick and Rowena finished the pizza a long time ago. There are a number of empty Mountain Dew and Dr. Pepper bottles on the table. "Spanish Harlem", the Aretha Franklin version, is playing on the jukebox.

ROWENA

Have you ever read "Even Cowgirls  
Get the Blues"? No? You should,  
you should. It's genius, really.  
It changed my life. How about  
"Ragtime"? Classic... "Stranger  
in a Strange Land"? Genius.  
(beat, listening)  
I love Aretha Franklin, isn't  
she genius? I wish I could  
sing like that.

HERRICK

You have the voice.

ROWENA

The voice is nothing. She has...  
feeling. It's pure, raw sex  
and pain and heart and soul  
and... life. There's living  
behind that voice. I haven't  
lived yet.

HERRICK

I think I know what you mean.  
I felt that way the first time  
I heard John Coletrane play.

ROWENA

Who's that?

HERRICK

Where do I start? He was...  
genius, classic ... perfect.

ROWENA

You're making fun of me again.

HERRICK

No, no, never. John Coletrane  
was all those things and more  
... he was...

INT. BOWSER'S, LATER

The place is empty except for Herrick and Rowena in a booth  
and one guy mopping out the kitchen.

HERRICK

...a symphony that took what  
George Gershwin and Aaron Copland  
did with the music of their  
time and brought it into the  
world of rock and roll. Took  
American music to the next step.  
A grand opus of American music.

ROWENA

Opus? The only Opus I know is  
in that comic strip, Bloom  
County. You know, with Milo  
and Bill the Cat. So when can.  
I hear this ... opus, symphony  
thing?

HERRICK

I never finished it -- I gave  
it up. I worked on it for...  
five years and then... Other  
people did it better than I  
ever could.

ROWENA

Oh, but not like you'd do it.  
You should finish it.



HERRICK

I only got to the first movement.

ROWENA

So... finish it. You have great things in you, Mr. Herrick. You're a talented man. I've watched you, you've got genius in you.

She reaches over and takes his hand -- the intimacy overwhelms him.

HERRICK

God, look at the time. Tomorrow's a school day, for both of us.

He rises and goes for his wallet.

ROWENA

I told you, my treat.

HERRICK

Well, thanks... Can I give you a ride home?

ROWENA

No, my dad'll be here soon to cash out. Thanks for the talk, and everything.

Herrick smiles and nods.

HERRICK

See you at rehearsal.

ROWENA

You bet!

He leaves.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick enters quietly and puts down his briefcase. He stands in the dark room for a while, then walks over to the desk. He switches on the desk light, opens a drawer, and takes out his sheet music, the opus.

Sitting down, he begins to read the pages, whispering the notes, smiling as he does. Not bad.

INT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

Lunch in the cafeteria. Herrick is eating at the teachers' table. Across the room Rowena reads "Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance". She looks over the top of her book at Herrick from time to time. She gives him one of those smiles that drives lesser men mad.

Meister sits next to Herrick. He's beginning to show a little potbelly and his hairline has begun an unstoppable retreat. He sees the look between Herrick and Rowena.

MEISTER

Cute kid. That the DeNeve girl?  
She's filled out nicely.

HERRICK

I guess so, they all do  
eventually.

MEISTER

Melody Kleis never filled out.  
So skinny she had to tie knots  
in her legs for knees.

Meister leans closer to Herrick and speaks confidentially.

MEISTER

It's just a friendly question,  
Carl, but does the phrase "jail  
bait" apply here?

Herrick gets the hint -- he stares at Meister angrily.

MEISTER

It's just, you know, putting my  
nose where it don't belong, I  
know. It's not like I have  
pretty young girls knocking on  
my door asking for personal  
attention. I'm the boys' gym  
teacher. All I get are questions  
about jock itch and athletes  
foot.

(continuing)

Once in a while I get to see  
the girls' dirty gym towels,  
but that's all. You don't think  
I made a bad career choice, do  
you?

Meister is dissimulating like crazy, but Herrick gets up and leaves.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick sits at the piano, his manuscript pages in front of him, going over a passage. Iris enters, surprised to hear the music.

IRIS

You're working on it again?!

HERRICK

Just noodling.

IRIS

That's great, hon. What started you again?

HERRICK

Did something have to start it?! I'm just noodling.

IRIS

All right, don't get your shorts in an uproar. I'll go mind my own business.

She leaves. Herrick looks guilty for a moment, then starts playing again.

EXT. FOOTBALL FIELD, NIGHT

Kennedy against Hamilton High. Herrick sits in the stands next to the band. The kids play flourishes between scores and attempts. Rowena comes down and sits next to him.

ROWENA

We're getting creamed.

HERRICK

There's no sense in breaking with tradition.

ROWENA

I was a cheerleader last year, but I quit. It seemed so... Republican.

Herrick laughs, then looks around to see if anyone is watching them. He sees Meister down on the bench, but Meister is involved in the game. Herrick's laugh dies.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick works hard at the piano, inspired. He's having a ball, finding an energy he hasn't had in years. Iris quietly brings in a TV tray with a sandwich and a glass of iced tea over to the piano.

Herrick looks up and she smiles. He avoids meeting her eyes.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, NIGHT

The students work on one of their songs. "America!" Like you've never heard it before. At least they never heard this way on Broadway.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, NIGHT

Herrick works on his symphony, alone in the room. He eats pizza.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, NIGHT

The Sharks and the Jets -- the most white-bread bunch you've ever seen -- try to dance "The Rumble". Try.

These clodhoppers are as graceful as a herd of cows slogging through mud.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick and Iris argue.

IRIS

You can work at home!

HERRICK

There are too many distractions.

IRIS

Is that what your son and I are, distractions?! You can write here. You did before.

HERRICK

I can't now.

IRIS

We only see you one or two days a week as it is.

(MORE)

IRIS (CONT'D)

You're volunteering for every damn extra-curricular activity you can think of. You don't like it here anymore? Is that it?

HERRICK

I'm late.

He leaves.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, NIGHT

Herrick plays the second movement of his symphony for Rowena. She is paying rapt attention. He finishes -- and looks at her.

ROWENA

It's ... beautiful.

HERRICK

Not classic? Or genius?

ROWENA

It's ... just ... plain beautiful.

And she kisses him impulsively. She's too quick for Herrick to stop her or respond. But it was a kiss.

They look at each other -- Herrick is stunned -- will it go any further?

HERRICK

I gotta go.

ROWENA

(softly)

Me, too. Catch a ride home?

HERRICK

All right.

INT. CORVAIR, NIGHT

Herrick drives -- neither of them speaks. Rowena lays a hand over Herrick's -- he allows the intimacy.

EXT. ROWENA'S HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick pulls up to the curb.

INT. CORVAIR

They sit there quietly, the engine ticking as it cools.

ROWENA

I'm thinking of leaving school  
and going to California. Just  
leave ... the town and  
everything.

Herrick opens his mouth to protest.

ROWENA

Don't tell me to stay in school  
and all that. School won't  
help me a bit with what I want  
to do with my life, and I don't  
want anything to "fall back  
on". I'm going to be a singer  
a professional singer. I'll  
stay until the play is over,  
can't let Mrs. Olmstead down.

HERRICK

But you can go to college and  
sing at the same time. I worked  
more as a musician in college  
than I have since. Stay...  
finish school.

ROWENA

That's the teacher in you  
talking. The real Carl Herrick  
would go with me. We can go  
together. You write the songs --  
I'll sing them! Come with me,  
Carl!

HERRICK

I'm a married man.

ROWENA

We could change that, too.

Herrick looks down at his hands.

ROWENA

I don't care one way or the  
other. I want you to come with  
me. I'll be your muse, I'll  
inspire you to create great  
music. We can do anything we  
want to if we try. That's what  
you teach in your class.

Her look is desperately sincere.

ROWENA

I love you...

And she kisses him again -- a big one. Herrick responds. Rowena pulls away, jumps out of the car and runs into the house.

INT. GARAGE, DAY

A lazy weekend afternoon. Iris and Cole are working in the garage, sanding the bases of the paperweights on the belt sander. Their dust masks have painted faces on them.

The piano is heard from inside the house.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

Herrick is working on a slow, romantic piece of music. The title on the sheet music is "Rowena's Theme".

Cole appears at Herrick's elbow and pulls on his sleeve. Herrick hardly looks at the boy.

HERRICK

Not now, Cole. Go play.

Cole tugs more insistently. Herrick turns so Cole can see him to lip-read.

HERRICK

Not now! Go play!

He enunciates right in the boy's face shouting. Iris appears in the doorway.

IRIS

He's deaf, Carl, totally deaf.  
Shouting won't make him hear.

HERRICK

I wasn't shouting, I was  
emphasizing.

IRIS

He just wants to give you  
something.

HERRICK

Later, later...

IRIS

He made it himself. He's very proud of it.

HERRICK

Fine, fine.

Herrick holds out his hand without looking. Cole gives him something, but Herrick just puts it on the piano without looking at it.

HERRICK

Thanks, Cole.

IRIS

Look at it, look at it!

Herrick looks at Iris, ready to argue, but he changes his mind and looks at his son's gift. A dandelion puff suspended in plastic -- delicate, beautiful.

IRIS

It was hard. He tried again and again, but the dandelions kept falling apart when they hit the plastic. Some of those looked nice, like you'd blown on it and it was just floating away, but Cole wanted a perfect one. For you! Why, I'll never know! So take the damned thing and ... and stick it where the sun don't shine!

Herrick looks at Cole, who taps his temple with a fist, thumb extended. Iris grabs Cole and stomps out of the room. Herrick is surprised.

INT. BACKSTAGE, NIGHT

The students are making last minute, semi-hysterical preparations. The overture starts. Rowena, in costume, peeks through the curtains. A student is conducting the band.

One of the student cast members joins Rowena and looks, too.

ALENE

Oh, God, there's my mom.

ROWENA

Where's Mr. Herrick?



ALENE

I don't know, but Donnie's  
conducting.

ROWENA

But we need Mr. Herrick..

ALENE

Donnie'll be okay, we had more  
than enough rehearsals.

Rowena scans the audience, disappointed. Mrs. Olmstead yanks  
her away and into position.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick is writing at the piano.

IRIS (O.S.)

Who's Rowena?

Herrick jerks around, startled. Iris is right behind him.

HERRICK

Huh?

IRIS

Rowena ... who's Rowena?

HERRICK

Uh, from an English legend a...  
heroine. Mythology.

Iris nods and walks away. Herrick has trouble going back to  
the piano.

INT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

The halls are flooded with kids. Herrick navigates toward  
the music room when Rowena stops him.

ROWENA

Are you avoiding me, Mr. Herrick?

Herrick looks around, self-conscious. He slips into the  
music room. They are alone.

INT. MUSIC ROOM

HERRICK

I've been writing.

ROWENA

That's good... You haven't seen me in the play yet.

HERRICK

I will. I've been working on a surprise for you.

ROWENA

(brightening)

Really?

HERRICK

Yes, but you can't run off to California until I'm done with it.

ROWENA

I don't know if I can wait.

The bell rings and kids surge into the room. Herrick and Rowena are parted by the wave of incoming students. Rowena leaves.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

The clock says 3:00 a.m. Herrick is working at the piano. Iris comes in, sleepy-eyed. Herrick sees her and stops.

IRIS

What? You can't work with me around? What's the hurry anyway? You let it get dusty for years and now you have to get it done tomorrow?

Herrick just looks at her impatiently.

IRIS

Sorry...

She leaves him alone.

INT. BACKSTAGE, NIGHT

The cast is assembled before the performance.

MRS. OLMSTEAD

This is our last night, so let's loosen up. We've got nothing to be afraid of, so give it your best.

Rowena has a dozen roses she displays for the other girls.

GIRL #1

No card? I'll bet they're from  
Hank Dykhuis.

GIRL #2

Probably your parents.

Rowena peeks through the curtains. Herrick is in the front.

INT. STAGE, NIGHT

"West Side Story" is unfolding without a hitch -- well, it  
is a High School production.

Rowena plays to Herrick, singing her heart out, showing off.

INT. BACKSTAGE, NIGHT

Intermission.

Herrick comes backstage and congratulates the kids -- hugs  
and attaboys all around. When he reaches Rowena they step  
away from the others and speak quietly.

ROWENA

How am I ... the truth.

HERRICK

Transcendent. I finished the  
second movement and... I, uh...  
named it after you.

ROWENA

That's sweet, really, really  
sweet.

(whispering)

I wish we were alone.

HERRICK

I'd like to play it for you  
tomorrow.

ROWENA

Tomorrow? But... I'm leaving  
tonight.

HERRICK

Tonight?

ROWENA

I told you, I'm leaving as soon as the play is over. Will you come with me? Please come with me.

HERRICK

I... Don't you want to hear your music?

ROWENA

I Will, in California. Come with me!

HERRICK

I can't... Wait a while. I just ... can't right now.

ROWENA

If I don't leave tonight I never will. I'm all packed. I've... I'm going. I want you to come with me, but... I'm going either way.

Herrick is speechless.

ROWENA

There's a party at Mrs. Olmstead's after the play. I'm going. Sort of say good-bye to all my friends. They don't know that, but... There's a bus at four in the morning. Come with me.

Herrick can't look at her. Mrs. Olmstead comes around, herding the students back to the stage.

MRS. OLMSTEAD

Everyone in their places, c'mon.

ROWENA

You're wasting your talent here. You were meant for great things ... Carl. Great things.

HERRICK

I can't just run away.

ROWENA

You're not running away, you're running to something new.

The music begins to play, that's her cue.

ROWENA

Four o'clock, the bus stop at  
King's Drugstore.

She squeezes his hand and runs off. Herrick stands there.

INT. STAGE

Herrick watches the last act from the audience. Rowena seems to be singing "Someday, Somewhere" to him alone.

EXT. MRS. OLMSTEAD'S, NIGHT

Herrick pulls up outside the house. The street is full of parked cars, the house lit up with music and chatter flowing into the street. Kids are dancing and laughing.

Herrick sits in his car. He can't summon up the courage to get out.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick walks through the house. Iris is reading in bed.

IRIS

How'd it go?

HERRICK

Mrs. Olmstead outdid herself,  
tin ear and all. Think I'll  
work for a while.

He walks through the house, not turning on the lights.

He sits at the piano.

He picks up the dandelion paperweight and holds it in his hand.

EXT. KING'S DRUGSTORE, NIGHT

A corner drugstore, a sign and bench in the parking lot are the bus stop. The store is closed.

Rowena sits on the bench, her suitcase at her feet and the wilting roses in her hands.

There is no traffic, nothing. She could be alone on the planet.

A bus pulls into the parking lot and stops.

Rowena stands and looks around.

INT. CORVAIR

Parked in the deep shadows, Herrick watches Rowena. His heart is breaking.

EXT. KING'S DRUGSTORE

Rowena can't see the Corvaire in the darkness. She picks up her suitcase and boards the bus. The bus hisses and sighs as the door closes and it glides out of the parking lot and out of town.

INT. CORVAIR

Herrick almost cries.

HERRICK  
(softly)  
Break a leg, Rowena...

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick walks quietly into the dark house. He puts his sheet music into the desk drawer and closes it.

He undresses automatically in the darkness as he walks toward the bedroom. In the dark he climbs quietly into bed.

Iris is awake. She looks over at him. He stares at the ceiling. Iris rolls away from him.

HERRICK  
(softly)  
I do love you, you know.

IRIS  
I know.

She offers him her hand -- he takes it.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick enters. On his desk is a stuffed Opus penguin doll, with a note -- "To Mr. Herrick. Before I met you this was the only Opus I'd ever heard of. Thank you for all you've taught me. Rowena".

He puts the stuffed penguin on a file cabinet.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, 1994

Herrick picks up the now-motley Opus doll. Dust puffs up as he taps it against the cabinet. He drops it into his box and looks around.

That's almost it. The stained glass treble clef in the window and the photographs of musicians on the walls. He starts taking them down -- Tatum, Coletrane, Chuck Berry, The Beach Boys, The Beatles -- Paul, Ringo, John... John Lennon ... Herrick looks at the photograph of John Lennon ... kind John...

MONTAGE -- COUNTY ROAD, DAY

Student drivers through the years. Eddie Rabbitt is "Driving My Life Away". 1977 - 1978 --

-- and for '79 and '80 the cars are Toyotas.

END MONTAGE.

INT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

Outside it's the beginning of winter. There isn't snow yet, but the ground has been frozen and the trees are bare of leaves.

Herrick unbundles as he enters the building and walks down the hall to his room.

Christmas decorations are up -- a basketball game is announced with a banner. One of the students runs over to Herrick.

STUDENT

Mr. Herrick! Did you hear?  
John Lennon was shot last night.  
Killed ... by some nut!

Herrick stops in his tracks, like he was hit.

The kids flow around him, snatches of conversation and surprise confirm the news.

Herrick goes with the flow into his room.

INT. MUSIC ROOM

Herrick goes to the front of the class, trying to shake himself out of his trance. The bell rings. The kids settle in.

HERRICK

We were ... where were we ...  
time signature. Beginning every  
piece of music is a notation  
that indicates the number of  
beats to the bar...

(beat)

There are a variety ... of common  
time signatures...

(beat)

Those we are familiar with are  
the waltz, at 3/4 time, 4/4  
common time, a march at 4/4 or  
6/8 ...

Herrick stops as he focuses on the photograph of John Lennon.

HERRICK

Who can name me a song that is  
an example of...

Herrick stops again, unable to concentrate.

HERRICK

... Of... I'm sorry...uh, class  
dismissed ... uh, no. Use the  
rest of the hour for study.  
Excuse me.

And he walks out, to the bafflement of the students.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

Herrick walks around the grounds aimlessly, then sits in the  
football bleachers. They are empty except for him. Soon,  
without his coat, he is too cold and he leaves. A medley of  
Lennon/McCartney songs plays in his head. He returns to the  
school buildings.

INT. KENNEDY HIGH, DAY

It is lunch time. Noisy kids mill around, grabbing their  
lunches from their lockers.

Herrick, not ready to face anyone yet, ducks into the  
gymnasium.

INT. GYMNASIUM

The piano is up on the stage -- the gym is empty.



Herrick walks up onto the stage and sits at the piano. He sits there for a while, looking at his hands. Then he begins to play...

"A Day In the Life" ... that masterpiece.

The melancholy intro, then, "I read the news today... "

Herrick plays with all the heart he has in him. Tears well in his eyes and fall down his cheeks.

He finishes the song and turns around.

The gym has filled, kids in the bleachers, sitting on the floor. Silent, sad, some crying. Herrick stares at them.

MARTY

Play something else, Mr. Herrick!

He turns back to the piano and plays, "Give Peace A Chance"

Someone begins singing. Other voices join in and the song fills the gym. Teachers and more students look into the gym curiously, then join in.

"All we are saying, Is give peace a chance..."

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

Herrick enters. Iris has expanded into stained glass. Sun catchers crowd the windows. Colored glass and lead channel litter the work table. She's soldering.

HERRICK

Did you hear? About John Lennon?

IRIS

Yes, the world's gone crazy.

(beat)

Cole got into another fight today.

(beat)

Dinner will be in an hour or so. Tuna and rice casserole.

HERRICK

I'm not real hungry...

(beat)

I'm thinking about trying to finish my opus again.

IRIS

(smiling)

That's great, Carl. That's really nice.

HERRICK

I'm... I'm gonna go rake the leaves or something.

IRIS

They're all ... put on your gloves.

HERRICK

He left us a lot. All that music, it will live forever, won't it.

He is not looking for an answer and goes outside.

EXT. HERRICK HOUSE

Cole, now fourteen, works on a go-cart, installing the lawn mower engine. He's good at tinkering and he likes it. He looks up as Herrick enters the garage. Cole has a bruise under one eye.

Herrick takes a rake from the hook on the wall. He walks across the yard. Cole runs after him and signs to him.

COLE

(signing)

Come look at what I'm building.

HERRICK

What? I don't... later, Cole. I'm not in the mood.

Cole taps his temple with a closed fist, thumb extended. Herrick notices it and Cole tries again.

COLE

(signing)

You have to look. Please

HERRICK

Write it down, Cole. Someone died yesterday, I ...

Cole goofs off, miming hanging himself.

HERRICK

That's not funny. A great man was killed ... murdered.

Cole mimes shooting himself in the head.

HERRICK

It's not funny. Stop it!

Cole mimes aiming at Herrick -- pow, pow! Herrick grabs his hand. Cole pulls away.

The contact quickly becomes serious and they're flailing at each other on the ground.

Iris runs out of the house.

IRIS

Stop it! Stop it!

She pulls them apart.

IRIS

(to Herrick)

What the hell is going on, Carl?

HERRICK

Cole was making fun of Lennon's murder. I was just trying to stop him.

IRIS

He doesn't know Lennon from Liberace, Carl. He was just joking around.

HERRICK

It's not funny... it's Lennon...

IRIS

He's never heard the Beatles, Carl. Or any other music. And he certainly has never learned anything about it from you.

She goes back into the house. Cole returns to the garage.

Herrick picks up the rake and attacks the few leaves he can find. He gives up on that and heads back to the garage.

Cole sits on the bench, viciously cleaning a part.

HERRICK

Cole, I'm...

He grabs a rag and starts wiping a sparkplug. Cole takes it away from him.

HERRICK  
I want to apologize.

Cole looks at him stubbornly.

COLE  
(signing)  
I don't understand.

Herrick mouths the words carefully.

HERRICK  
I want to apologize.

Cole shakes his head, shrugs, and signs again.

HERRICK  
(signing)  
I don't understand. Pay  
attention. You know damn well  
what I'm saying.

Cole shakes his head stubbornly. Herrick stomps into the house, mad.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE

Herrick slams the door behind him. Iris is at the stove, checking the casserole.

HERRICK  
I can't talk to that kid.

IRIS  
That's because you never learned  
how.

That stops him in his tracks.

EXT. HAVILAND COUNTY HEALTH CENTER, DAY

Herrick stands in front of the building. A little snow is on the ground. He finally enters.

INT. COUNTY HEALTH CENTER

Herrick sits in an office with MRS. BOULLOSA. "Services for the Hearing Impaired" says the sign on the door.

A maintenance man is taking down Christmas decorations.

HERRICK

I need to learn sign language.  
My son is deaf.

MRS. BOULLOSA

How old is he?

HERRICK

Fourteen.

Mrs. Boullosa looks a little surprised.

MRS. BOULLOSA

Does your son sign?

HERRICK

Yes, pretty well, I'm told.

MRS. BOULLOSA

And how long has he been signing?

HERRICK

Since he was four or five. His  
mother, my wife, she can do it,  
too. I ... I never got around  
to it. I know that's a flimsy  
excuse, but... I just need to  
learn it, all right.

MRS. BOULLOSA

No one's passing judgment on  
you, Mr. Herrick. When would  
you like to begin?

HERRICK

Immediately.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

The bell rings and the kids settle in.

HERRICK

Welcome to Music 101. Look at  
your schedule... if it doesn't  
say Music 101, leave now. I  
hope you all had a nice Christmas  
and that you put the same  
enthusiasm into this term that  
you put into your vacation.  
Now ... how many...

The door opens and MRS. KIERNAN, the principal, enters with  
three Michigan punks. Black jeans, black leather jackets,  
bad haircuts and safety pins.

Mrs. Kiernan sits them in the back and gives their cards to Herrick.

MRS. KIERNAN

Here's a fine test for the  
"teacher of last resort". Mr.  
Schiff, Goodrich, and Groves.  
Three signs of the coming  
apocalypse.

HERRICK

And they're mine? Thanks, Mrs.  
Kiernan.

Mrs. Kiernan leaves. Herrick looks at the three punks.

HERRICK

All right, where was I? Okay,  
how many of you like music?

The usual few hands.

HERRICK

Who likes the Rolling Stones?

A few hands.

HERRICK

Elton John? Hall and Oates?  
Queen?

The punks keep their hands in their laps. He talks to them.

HERRICK

Blondie? Mister Schiff,  
Goodrich, and Groves... is there  
any music you do like? Kenny  
Rogers maybe? What music do  
you listen to?

SCHIFF

We listen to Fear ... X ... The  
Clash...

GOODRICH

The Sex Pistols and The  
Ramones... The Cramps...

GROVES

The Dead Kennedys...  
(laughing)  
Black Flag, Oingo Boingo...  
Springsteen.

SCHIFF

Springsteen sucks.

HERRICK

What is it about this music,  
these artists, that you like?

SCHIFF

They're anarchists. They don't  
cop out to all that corporate  
music bullshit.

GOODRICH

Music for the people, not for  
bucks.

GROVES

Anybody can make music. You  
pick up a guitar, or something,  
and you, you know, wham! No  
rules. No censorship, you play  
what you feel.

SCHIFF

Yeah, it comes from your guts.

HERRICK

That's a beautiful thought.  
All right, let's move on. For  
now, we'll talk about Elton  
John...

INT. COUNTY HEALTH CENTER, NIGHT

Herrick works with Mrs. Boullosa, trying to learn sign  
language.

HERRICK

Every letter? You're kidding.  
Okay, okay.

He starts going through the alphabet, but has some trouble.  
A lot of trouble, really, but he's trying hard.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick looks out the front window at Cole in the driveway.  
There is snow falling, but Cole is testing his go-cart.  
Iris is cutting stained glass.

IRIS

Would you go get Cole? It's  
getting too cold outside.

HERRICK

He'll come in when he's cold  
enough.

He watches Cole. The engine starts.

HERRICK

I wonder what it's like. Do  
you think it's just silent, or  
a droning noise like, you know,  
after a loud concert? That  
kind of ringing noise... But he  
can't tell me, can he? He has  
no basis for comparison. No  
sound, no music, ever... No  
lullaby, no song of love, or  
sadness, or just for fun. No  
Mozart or Jerry Lee Lewis...

He watches as Cole puts a screwdriver to the engine block,  
then presses his temple against it. Cole adjusts the gas  
feed as he "listens". Herrick is fascinated.

IRIS

Carl, bring him in.

Herrick finally goes outside.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

Herrick passes out graded test papers.

HERRICK

Mr. Schiff, Mr. Goodrich, and  
Mr. Groves will see me after  
class.

The three punks look at their test papers and grimace.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, LATER

The three rebels slouch in front of Herrick's desk. Herrick  
takes several new albums from a bag.

HERRICK

All right, here's the deal.  
You three seem intent on  
flunking...

SCHIFF

It's not a personal thing, Mr.  
Herrick, it's political.



GROVES

We don't believe in your kind  
of music.

HERRICK

I understand that, so I'm going  
to ask you to meet me halfway.

GOODRICH

Compromise leads to cop-out.

HERRICK

Hear me out. Here's the deal.  
I went out and bought a few  
albums by some of your favorite  
artists.

He hands out the albums -- Black Flag, The Dead Kennedys,  
etc.

GROVES

The new Plasmatics, cool.

HERRICK

Now I will pick one song from  
one of these albums and you  
three have a choice... Learn to  
play it or write down the music  
... and you pass.

SCHIFF

Pass? What grade?

HERRICK

Just pass or fail. I cleared  
it with Principal Kiernan.

GOODRICH

Write it down or play it?

HERRICK

And be able to read it back to  
me, note for note, or chord.

SCHIFF

How good we gotta play it.

HERRICK

That's my judgment call. I  
will use the standards of the  
original group performance. I  
will even provide the  
instruments.

SCHIFF

Deal.

The other two nod their agreement.

HERRICK

Would you say Black Flag best  
represents your particular  
philosophy of music?

Herrick slits open the album and puts it on the turntable.

The three punks nod again.

Herrick lowers the needle -- "Louie, Louie" plays -- a nasty,  
crude, ugly version, but it's recognizable.

SCHIFF

Hey, we can do that. Anybody  
can do that.

INT. MUSIC STORE, DAY

One side of the music store is dedicated to classical  
instruments, horns, violins, sheet music, pianos, etc. The  
other side is rock and roll heaven -- guitars, amps, drums  
and a sign -- Any playing of "Stairway to Heaven" is  
Forbidden.

Herrick enters and walks over to the rock and roll section  
BUDDY MEDILL, the owner, sees Herrick.

MEDILL

Carl, when is that damn  
basketball team of ours going  
to do some scoring?

HERRICK

That's not my area, take it up  
with Meister. Buddy, I've been  
a faithful customer of yours  
for, what ... how long now?

MEDILL

(suspiciously)  
Fifteen years or more. I hate  
it when customers quiz me on  
their buying history, it always  
winds up costing me.

HERRICK

Well, I figure my students and  
I have been responsible for  
(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)  
nearly half of your profit  
margin...

MEDILL  
Here it comes. Should I just  
bend down and grab my ankles?

HERRICK  
I need a favor ... two favors,  
actually.

Medill starts toward the classical section.

MEDILL  
What is it this time? I can  
give you a hell of a deal on a  
glockenspiel.

HERRICK  
No, what I need is in here.

Medill is surprised as Herrick goes into the rock section.

INT. COUNTY HEALTH CENTER, NIGHT

Herrick is working with Mrs. Boullosa.

MRS. BOULLOSA  
You can't learn all this in a  
couple of weeks, Mr. Herrick.  
This is a six-month course.

HERRICK  
Yeah, yeah, yeah...

MRS. BOULLOSA  
For a teacher, you're one lousy  
student.

HERRICK  
Sorry. Let's try it again.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Herrick is sitting on the toilet, working from his sign  
language book. There is a knock at the door.

IRIS (O.S.)  
Carl, you okay in there? You  
fall in or something?

HERRICK

Yeah, just a minute.

He hides the book in his shirt and flushes the toilet.

INT. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

The three punks are standing there with their guitars and amps. Herrick enters.

HERRICK

So, what's the problem?

SCHIFF

We can't quite figure this one part out...

HERRICK

Which part?

The three punks look at each other.

GROVES

The whole damn thing. All we make is noise.

GOODRICH

Yeah, you tricked us. This song's hard, man.

HERRICK

It's only got three chords, Mr. Goodrich. You find a song with less and I'll give you an 'A'.

SCHIFF

What's a chord, man?

HERRICK

(smiling)

What is a chord? Sit down, gentlemen.

They sit.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

Cole is working on a car model. Iris is tracing a pattern onto glass.

Herrick enters, dumps his overcoat and briefcase. He walks over to Cole and hands him a small envelope. Cole opens it, looks at the tickets inside, scowls and throws them aside.

Herrick touches Cole's shoulder.

HERRICK

Please...

Iris picks up the tickets.

IRIS

Is this a joke, Carl? If it is, it's an exceedingly cruel one.

HERRICK

No, I'm serious.

Cole looks to Iris -- she nods. Cole looks at Herrick and nods.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, NIGHT

"Concert - 8:00 p.m." says the marquee. Iris pulls into the parking lot in the VW van, with Herrick and Cole. They get out and walk toward the gymnasium with other adults and students.

HERRICK

I could have driven.

IRIS

I'm not riding in that death trap. One of these days you'll hit an ant and the whole car will disintegrate.

Cole sees a friend and runs ahead. The two kids talk animatedly in sign language.

IRIS

Carl, if this hurts him I will never forgive you.

HERRICK

Neither will I. I've got to get ready.

INT. GYMNASIUM, NIGHT

A banner is hung over the stage -- "Concert for the Hearing Impaired".

The orchestra is setting up on the stage. Microphones have been placed in front of each section.

The usual folding chairs have been moved back from the stage, leaving room for two rows of huge Marshall speakers. On top of each speaker is a plywood platform with a chair.

Cole and other deaf children are shown to the chairs on the speakers. The rest of the audience take their places toward the back.

The orchestra is soon ready and Herrick steps to the podium. A sign language interpreter stands to one side of the stage.

HERRICK

Thank you all for coming.  
Tonight is an experiment... I  
hope it works. I had prepared  
a big speech about the importance  
of music in our world, but it  
went on for pages and pages.  
So, I decided the best way to  
explain music to the hearing  
impaired is to give it to you  
and let you make of it what you  
will.

(beat)

Our first selection this evening  
is by George Gershwin, "Rhapsody  
in Blue". In this music Gershwin  
was trying to give us his  
impression of the city of New  
York. Here we go.

He faces the orchestra and raises his baton. And the music begins. From the instruments, into the microphones, through the amplifiers, and out of the Marshall speakers. The chairs on top of the speakers vibrate with the music.

The gorgeous Gershwin sound fills the room.

Cole holds onto his chair and his eyes widen. He and the other kids look at each other. And each one begins to smile. They can feel the music! It courses through their bodies!

Herrick looks over his shoulder at Cole -- it's working!  
The deaf children begin to sway to the music.

INT. GYMNASIUM, LATER

Herrick stands at the podium.

HERRICK

I find it hard to believe that  
there is anyone alive today who  
has never heard the words of

(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)

Lennon and McCartney, with or without the Beatles. So, for our final selection tonight, we would like to perform a song by John Lennon...

Herrick hands the baton to the student conductor.

HERRICK

And, uh, for the hearing impaired in our audience, this may be the one time you are grateful for your hearing difficulties -- I am going to sing. To the hearing portion of our audience, my profound apologies.

A ripple of laughter runs through the audience. Iris is stunned.

HERRICK

And ... on a personal note... I'd like to dedicate this to my son, Cole.

Herrick nods to the student conductor. The music begins. Herrick begins to sing -- not a good voice, but sincere.

HERRICK

(singing)

Close your eyes, Have no fear,  
The monster's gone. He's on  
the run and your daddy's here.  
Beautiful,  
Beautiful, beautiful,  
Beautiful boy.

As Herrick sings, he signs the words! He sings to Cole, whose eyes well with tears. Iris is crying.

Herrick stumbles here and there, but he manages to sing and sign the words of this touching tribute by John Lennon to his son.

HERRICK

Before you cross the street  
Take my hand.  
Life is what happens to you  
While you're busy  
Making other plans.  
Beautiful,  
Beautiful,  
Beautiful boy.

(MORE)

HERRICK (CONT'D)

Darling,  
Darling,  
Darling, Cole.

The audience breaks into applause. But Cole and Herrick just look at each other, oblivious to the others. They just look at each other, both in tears.

EXT. KENNEDY HIGH, NIGHT

Herrick shakes hands with people as they leave the concert. A lot of thanks and congratulations. Medill, the owner of the music store, slaps Herrick on the back.

MEDILL

Chairs an top of speakers,  
Herrick. One chair falls  
through, that's a couple of  
grand down the toilet. Great  
show.

Herrick watches Iris and Cole talking animatedly next to the VW van.

Medill shakes Herrick's hand and he's the last person out. Herrick, rather full of himself, walks over to the parking lot.

Iris and Cole are already inside when Herrick opens the door and gets in.

INT. VW VAN, NIGHT

Iris drives. Herrick leans back to talk and sign to Cole.

HERRICK

What say we to the drag races  
this season, huh, Cole? Cha  
Cha Muldowney! Cha ... Cha...

Herrick has trouble signing "Cha Cha"

COLE

(signing)  
I can read your lips.

HERRICK

Right.

So what about it?



COLE

Maybe.

HERRICK

Maybe? You love the drags.

IRIS

Don't push it, Carl.

HERRICK

Don't push it? What's wrong here?

IRIS

What you did tonight was very nice... it was beautiful, Carl, really.

COLE

But it doesn't make up for everything else.

HERRICK

I ... I know that. I don't expect to clean the slate in one night. But it's a start, isn't it? I mean ... a person should get a second chance, shouldn't they? We all screw up. We should get another chance, a chance to change.

Herrick's appeal is heartfelt.

HERRICK

A second chance. Then if they blow it -- shut them out. But a person should get a chance.

(beat)

I'd give it to you. Iris?

IRIS

Carl, I'm not the one you should ask.

HERRICK

Cole? Please. I can't make everything up to you, but I can...

COLE

We will go to the drag races.

HERRICK

And more.

COLE

And more.

EXT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

The van pulls up. Cole is out first. He goes into the house. Herrick and Iris follow slowly.

IRIS

He's a good kid.

HERRICK

Yes, he is. Thanks to you. By the way, what's this mean? I can't find it in any of the books.

He taps his temple with his fist, thumb extended.

IRIS

Uh... it means ... asshole.

Herrick laughs.

HERRICK

Asshole! Hah! I can use that.

EXT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

A Spring weekend. The garage door is open to the fresh air. The Corvair is inside with the hood up. Herrick and Cole are working with the engine. They argue in sign language.

HERRICK

Junk, my rosy red butt. It's a classic.

COLE

It should be shot and put out of it's misery. You're lucky it hasn't blown up in your face.

Herrick signs "asshole". Cole does the same. They laugh and go back to work.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE

Iris is hanging a sun catcher in the window. She sees Herrick and Cole arguing about the car -- she smiles.

INT. GYMNASIUM, NIGHT

The Senior Prom is in progress. A student disk jockey plays the latest hits of 1981. Kids dance in their formals and tuxes.

The song ends and Herrick takes the stage.

HERRICK

We have a special treat for you  
Seniors tonight. A group of  
our own students has been  
persuaded to make their  
professional debut right here  
at Kennedy High. Ladies and  
gentlemen, the Sex Dwarfs!

And the curtain parts to show Schiff, Goodrich, and Groves in their leather best. Guitar, bass, and drums.

They launch into "Louie, Louie" -- particularly raucous and obnoxious, but faithful somehow to both Black Flag and the Kingsmen.

Principal Kiernan and Coach Meister both turn on Herrick, who beams proudly.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

Herrick is reading the Michigan Motor Vehicle Code, newly revised for 1981.

Cole walks in and out, humming something that sounds barely like Gershwin, out of key, preoccupied.

Herrick winces at the whistling. Iris is soldering, but she notices Herrick's reaction.

IRIS

You started it.

Herrick can only shrug.

Cole walks back through again. Herrick stops him this time, signing.

HERRICK

Is something wrong, Cole?

COLE

Dad, will you teach me how to  
drive?

Herrick's chest swells with fatherly pride.

HERRICK

I'll be glad to.

EXT. ROAD, DAY

The Corvair jerks along the road, Cole at the wheel.

INT. MUSIC ROOM, 1994

Herrick takes the glass treble clef off the window, deep in thought. He is jerked back to the present by the Corvair pulling up outside.

The Corvair has been restored beautifully, perfectly. A twenty-eight year-old Cole gets out of it. He sees Herrick at the window.

He bows and waves his hand at the Corvair -- Ta Dah!

Herrick claps his hands so Cole can see. He puts the treble clef in the box and looks around the room.

Iris is sitting in the back working on a needlepoint project.

HERRICK

Iris ... how long have you been here?

IRIS

A while.

Are you ready to go?

HERRICK

Yes, I guess so. What are you working on?

IRIS

Something for you. It's a surprise.

She rolls it up so he can't see it. Cole enters. He's wearing mechanic's overalls, spotless, with a patch over one pocket -- "Herrick Body and Engine".

HERRICK

(signing)  
The car looks good.

COLE

It's a classic. And you can't have it back. We made a deal, fair and square.

HERRICK

(signing)

Did I say I wanted it back?

COLE

All right, you can drive it on weekends, but you have to have it back by eleven. Need help with the box?

HERRICK

(signing)

No, I can manage. You didn't have to come.

COLE

Didn't want an old fart like you to strain himself.

Cole picks up a box, Herrick the briefcase, and they head out.

HERRICK

Oh, my keys!

He goes back and gets his keys off the desk. Herrick pauses and looks over the room that was his for thirty years.

He sees faces at the desks, young faces. Gertrude Van Lente, Louis Rus, Jill Lohman, Ed Claypool, Yntema, Tidd, Rowena, Schiff, Goodrich, Groves, and many more. Ghostly faces, his former students. His memories. He leaves.

INT. HALLWAY

Their footsteps echo in the empty hall.

Herrick hears something.

HERRICK

What was that?

BOOMP! BOOMP! BOOMP! Somebody is pounding on a piano.

HERRICK

Somebody's fooling around in the gymnasium.

IRIS

Leave it be, Carl.

BOMP! BOMP!

HERRICK

No one should be in there.

BOMP! BOMP! Herrick walks toward the gymnasium.

HERRICK

Besides, that piano is just one  
step away from firewood as it  
is.

Cole and Iris follow Herrick to the gym. He enters.

INT. GYMNASIUM

BOMP! BOMP! BOMP!

BOMP! BOMP!

BOMP! BOMP! BOMP!

"Louie, Louie" fills the air, played by the school band.  
The gymnasium is full, crammed to the rafters with students  
and townsfolk.

There is a banner over the stage -- "Good-bye, Mr. Herrick".

Herrick is overwhelmed. Meister takes his briefcase and  
Principal Kiernan escorts him toward the stage.

People reach out of the audience to shake his hand. Soon we  
recognize older versions of Schiff, Goodrich, Groves --  
Lohman, Ed Claypool, Yntema, then Tidd -- maybe a very womanly  
Rowena near the back.

Mrs. Kiernan leads Herrick up the steps to the stage, to the  
podium in front of the band.

A stunned Herrick looks for Iris. She and Cole wink at him.

The applause finally dies down and Mrs. Kiernan addresses  
the crowd.

MRS. KIERNAN

I've only been here, what,  
thirteen years already? But  
when the word got out that the  
Music Program was cut, and about  
the subsequent retirement of  
our Mr. Herrick ... well, I  
have never seen such a response  
from this community -- never.  
So we put together a little  
send-off.

(MORE)

MRS. KIERNAN (CONT'D)

We were going to buy you something, Carl, a watch, or whatever... We asked your wife Iris what you might want or need, she was no help at all.

(beat)

The one thing she did mention was your writing. And I remember all those school board meetings, faculty meetings, and so on. I always saw you scribbling away, what I thought were pertinent notes, but I looked over your shoulder once and discovered it was quarter-notes and flats. I was so glad when you finished the damned thing so you could concentrate on your teaching again.

There is good-nature laughter from the audience.

MRS. KIERNAN

Seriously, though, I don't think I have ever come across a more dedicated, selfless teacher. The only way we can ever pay you back is to perform, for the first time, "The American Opus", by Carl Herrick.

She hands him the baton. He turns to the orchestra.

The instruments are poised and ready.

He looks down at the music stand.

The sheet music is a copy of the original, in his handwriting. "The American Opus" by Carl Herrick. He touches the sheets of music, looks at Iris. His Iris. He loves this woman. She motions him to get on with it.

Then raises the baton, taps it once on the music stand and ... the orchestra plays. The opening strains of the music fill the gym.

Herrick's face glows and his chest fills with pride.

There is a quiet murmur in the audience behind him. It gets louder, disrupting the music. Herrick looks over his shoulder.

Two Highway Patrolmen can be seen in the back of the gymnasium.

The murmur in the audience increases. A few words are audible. "The Governor ... "It's the Governor!" "Here!" "Where?" "I can't see ... " "Look, over there!"

Herrick drops his baton and the music peters out.

The two Highway Patrolmen walk down the aisle ahead of a middle-aged woman in glasses. She is followed by two more Highway Patrolmen and a couple of staff members.

She strides up the stage. Principal Kiernan takes the podium, startled.

MRS. KIERNAN

Ladies and gentlemen, may I present our Governor ... and former Kennedy High School alumna, the Most Honorable Gertrude Van Lente.

By God, it is Gertrude. She takes the microphone, waits for the applause to die down.

GERTRUDE

Thank you, Principal Kiernan. I'm sorry I arrived late and spoiled the music, but we'll get right back to it. I came here today to say my thanks to Mr. Carl Herrick. I remember him well... He had a great influence on my life. On a lot of lives, I know. And I have the feeling that Mr. Herrick considers a great part of his life was misspent. He wrote this symphony of his to be performed, possibly to make him famous or rich, probably both. That is the American dream... that is how we measure success, by being rich and famous. On that scale, Mr. Herrick is a failure -- but I think he has achieved a success beyond riches and fame. Look around you, Mr. Herrick. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched. And each one is a better person for meeting you, or being your student. This is your symphony, Mr. Herrick. These people are the notes and melodies of your opus. And this is the music of your life.



The audience gives Herrick a standing ovation. He looks out at the audience, each face a memory, a moment of his life.

GERTRUDE

One last thing, Mr. Herrick.  
As long as I am Governor of  
this State there will always be  
a Music Program in the High  
Schools. Let's get back to the  
music. Mr. Herrick...

Herrick steadies himself and goes back to the orchestra. He raises the baton. The music begins again.

It is a great symphony with elements of jazz, rock, country, tin pan alley, and classical. Gertrude goes over to one of the girls playing the clarinet and whispers in her ear.

And she takes the clarinet, takes the student's seat, and plays.

Then, out of the audience, one or two at a time, other adults approach the stage and -- one by one -- replace the students in the orchestra.

Eventually the orchestra is composed completely of adults.

Herrick cries openly as he leads them.

And in the audience, resting in Iris, lap, is the needlepoint -- words encircled by twining ivy --

"Life Is What Happens  
While You Are Making  
Other Plans"

THE END