

MR. HERRICK'S OPUS

written by

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EXT. KENNEDY HIGH SCHOOL, DAY - 1994

CARL HERRICK, early 50's, gets out of his 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, folded file boxes 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 starts by trying to put one of the file boxes together.

Without luck. He just can't figure it out.

So absorbed is he in this task 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... Let me help here.
I...I heard they cut the music
program. Damn shame. Damn
shame. Won't be too long
before the penny-pinching
bastards start barking at my
heels.

Meister takes the box from Herrick and assembles it easily.

HERRICK

You don't have anything to
worry about, Glen. When they
cancel the sports program in
this state it'll be a sign of
the collapse of civilization as
we know it.

MEISTER

They did it in Chicago... What
are you going to do?

HERRICK

Clean out my desk.

MEISTER

You know what I mean.

HERRICK

I'm not sure, exactly... I'm
too young to retire and too old
to rock and roll.

Meister assembles another box.

MEISTER

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

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

HERRICK

You think so?

Meister pauses a moment, then leaves.

HERRICK

You really think so?

Herrick 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.

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 Corvair 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, but 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. 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.

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 day?

HERRICK

Fine, fine, fine.

She catches something in his voice.

IRIS

The kids giving you grief?

HERRICK

No more than I'm giving them.

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.

HERRICK

I remember when I was in
school. I always wanted to be
some place else. It never
entered my pubescent brain that
the teacher might feel the
same.

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, you haven't
been there long.

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

HERRICK
Something to look forward to.

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. MUSIC ROOM, DAY

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

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.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, NIGHT

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, 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.

HERRICK

And I made thirty-two kids sleep with their eyes open.

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 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. 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.

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. 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. We meet tonight at the library.

HERRICK

Sorry to bail out again, Mr. Wolters, but I'm in the middle of a whole slew of projects.

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.

Herrick is fidgety, waiting for a release.

WOLTERS

I've been watching you, Mr. Herrick. I've never seen a teacher who ran out of here after the last period with more enthusiasm than the students. I wish I could observe some of that enthusiasm in your classroom work.

HERRICK

Mr. Wolters, I'm here on time in the morning and I do my job.

WOLTERS

Teaching is more, Mr. Herrick. 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. Like, which is more "boss", Fords or Chevys. 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)

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. 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 work it
out.

IRIS

Carl, 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?

IRIS

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.

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 my 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

See you in class.

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 let them unsnap your brassiere.

She hugs him, but he is lost in his thoughts, smiling.

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
"Surfin' 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
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
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.

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.

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 an obstacle course of orange cones 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 mow me down!
What's stopping you?! The gas
is the one on the right! You
know, there's only so much a
man will do for money!

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. He is having trouble. 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.

A banner hangs over the doors, "Welcome Back!".

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.

(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. As far as we're concerned, any music is good music as long as it communicates. 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.

INT. HERRICK HOUSE, DAY

Iris is trying to take a photograph of a big, fat feline wearing a rhinestone collar, who walks out of frame every time Iris gets ready to snap. The OWNER fidgets.

Herrick stares at the piano and the empty page of manuscript paper. Back and forth, back and forth.

CAT OWNER
Maybe if I take her outside.
She might want to do her
business.

The Owner leaves with the cat.

HERRICK
"Do her business"? You get rid
of the owner a sec and I'll
staple the furball's feet down
for you.

IRIS
Trouble writing? We bothering
you?

HERRICK
I'm blocked. I just can't work
and write. I get home and I'm
too tired to think, much
less...create.

IRIS
Just think about next year.
You'll be able to write full
time. No school, no kids, just
you and your piano.

HERRICK
And thou?

IRIS
And me.

HERRICK
I can hardly wait.

IRIS
For which?

He steps toward her, intentions amorous. And the Owner enters with the cat.

HERRICK
I'll go find the stapler.

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! 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. Jeez, 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 in
the darkroom?

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. 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. The guy at the record store pushed this John Coletrane record on me, "Blue Train". I took it home and played it. Over and over and over.

(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.

(more)

HERRICK
(beat, continuing)
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. 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, 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. 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?

(more)

RUS

(continuing)

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

A drum, something I can just bang on. Hell...heck, even I can do that. Give me a chance, Mr. Herrick.

(more)

RUS
(continuing)
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. REHEARSAL ROOM, DAY

The school orchestra is assembled with Louie Rus on the bass drum, next to a kettle drum player. The music, Beethoven's "First", is 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 a 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.

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.

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, those red spots are
rubella.

HERRICK
 Jesus... Measles have 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 Rus' 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. 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 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.

MR. RUS
 That's my boy! Banging on that
 drum! That's my boy! Hey,
 Louie! Louie!

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 '66 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

Iris...? 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

Coal train? 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
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.

HERRICK

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, 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. He begins to play a rolling blues.

HERRICK
I said:
Johnny's at the urinal
He's pissing on the wall,
If he hits the radiator
We'll smell it in the hall.

Schoolteachers' Blues,
I've got them
Schoolteacher Blues,
Schoolteacher Blues,
Nothing to lose, but my pay
And that's nothing.

Well, athletes, politicians,
jet-set snort cocaine
All I snort is chalk dust,
And it's blowing out my brain.

Herrick bounces Cole up and down on his knee as he plays. 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. 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.

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 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 plays in his crib. Iris has decorated it with daisy stickers and painted his name on the headboard. She's taking photographs of Cole while Herrick works at the piano half-heartedly.

HERRICK

The bus pick-up is a quarter-mile from their house. It seems 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...? I dipped into 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.

He plays a few notes, looks at Cole.

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 "Cherish", by The Association. 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

I...

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 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.

(more)

LOHMAN

(continuing)

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.
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 is stretched out on the piano bench, one arm over
his eyes. Iris knocks gently at the door, Cole on her hip.

IRIS

I was in the neighborhood.
Since you started writing here
Cole and I haven't seen much of
you.

HERRICK

I was trying to make the most
of my time before Drivers' Ed
starts.

IRIS

I know, I know. I'm sorry if
we... "Was"?

HERRICK

I finished.

IRIS

You did?! Carl! And you
didn't tell me?!

HERRICK
Just the first movement.
There's some notation that
needs cleaning up...but, yeah.
One giant step.

Herrick is starting to get enthusiastic.

IRIS
That's great! Cole, you're
daddy's gonna be famous!

Hugs and kisses. He laughs.

IRIS
We should celebrate!

HERRICK
I could get into that.

IRIS
Big or intimate?

HERRICK
Intimate?

IRIS
I'll drop Cole off at the baby
sitter's. I'll stop downtown
and pick up a bottle of wine!

HERRICK
I have to make a stop at the
music store. I'll meet you at
the house? Date?

IRIS
Date!

A kiss and she is away. Herrick excitedly gathers up his
manuscript.

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.

IRIS

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

She is flirty and girlish, carrying a bottle of wine.
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 picked up the new
Beatles album on the way home.

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.

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 snot 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 goodbye
to Daddy.

She signs to Cole. Cole signs to Herrick -- Herrick waves
goodbye.

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. Wolters wants to see me.

DONNA

Go right in, Mr. Herrick.

Wolters 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 plan to get my college
degree in economics.

HERRICK
We're talking about music.

YNTEMA
I know, the language of emotion
and that whole yawn. C'mon,
Mr. Herrick, get the little
lecture out of your system and
let me get on with my life.

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.
Made the finals 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. 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.

"Taps" dies away. The flag is folded and presented to the
widow.

HERRICK

The language of emotion, Mr.
Yntema. Bobby Tidd, the
dipstick, is not that good on
the horn, he's lucky that bugle
has only one key. But he
played well for his cousin
today.

(beat)

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. I've
accepted the position of
Superintendent of the Manistee
County School District. Good
fishing up there. Don't tell
anyone else, you're the only
one I want to know right now.

(more)

WOLTERS
(continuing)
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 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. (more)

IRIS

(continuing)

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 BeeGees 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 Lappinga's 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

Sophmores 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 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. 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 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... classic...perfect...genius.

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. But isn't that all just a kinda technical exercise? I thought you'd be more into some kind of personal expression.

HERRICK

Sergeant Pepper did it. I don't think you could find a more personal expression than the music on that album.

ROWENA

Exactly. Sergeant Pepper isn't about how many different kinds of music they could put together. It's about the places these guys grew up. The people they knew, how they felt. Look, here I am telling you all about music. So, where is this...opus? When can I hear it?

Herrick is deep in thought, thinking about what Rowena has just said. He pulls out of it.

HERRICK

I never finished it -- I gave it up. 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 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. 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 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. 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, please...

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. The manuscript paper is titled "Rowena's Theme".

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. 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, a rose in his lapel.

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'll be there. Sort of say
goodbye 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.

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.

HERRICK
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 judgement 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.

(more)

HERRICK
(continuing)
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 judgement 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
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
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.
Darling,
Darling,
Darling, Cole.

The audience breaks into applause. But Cole and Herrick
just look at each other, oblivious to the others, 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 on 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 -- "Goodbye, 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 orchestra.

A stunned Herrick looks for Iris. She and Cole wink at him.

The applause finally dies down. Mrs. Kiernan argues with a
few folks about it, but finally takes the podium.

MRS. KIERNAN

I, uh, 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.

(beat)

You know, I always saw you
scribbling away, what I thought
were pertinent notes.

(more)

MRS. KIERNAN

(continuing)

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 a quiet murmur in the audience. Mrs. Kiernan stops. The noise gets louder. Herrick looks around.

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!"

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. My profound apologies to everyone for my tardiness. But I brought a note from my mother. First thing, Mr. Herrick. As long as I am Governor of this State there will always be a Music Program in the High Schools.

She waits for the applause to die down.

GERTRUDE

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 was always writing this symphony of his, this opus. Possibly to make him famous or rich, probably both. That is the American dream... But Mr. Herrick isn't rich, or famous, outside our little town. And that doesn't mean he's a failure. 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 because of you. 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

And now we would like to thank you, give you something back. Mr. Herrick, if you would take the baton and begin the first public performance of "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.

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 the various themes become clear -- Gertrude's theme, the music for Louis Rus, an ode to Coletrane, Rowena's theme.

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