

*The Cry of the Double Bass:
A Chamber Opera*

Vol. VII

Appendixes

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APPENDIX 1

The Cry Of The Double Bass - Synopsis (by Mike Carter)

This contemporary opera tells the story of an unnamed artist, charting (in episodes) his journey from childhood to being an accomplished musician and composer. The work explores his changing relationship to music and the double bass, as he battles to fulfil his soul's desire. Richly symbolic and told as a mythic 'folk tale', it blends comedy and pathos, as it grapples with challenges many artists will know only too well.

Act One: *The first act portrays the protagonist's childhood, focusing on the conflict between his musical dreams and the narrow expectations of his family and community.*

A Boy is inspired by a mystical tune to make music of his own and he dreams about being a famous musician. But he is dogged by the fantastical Big C: a personification of the negative psychological forces that work against an artist's self-belief and creativity. His Mother's hysterical perception, that he is somehow not 'normal', is confirmed by other authority figures in his life: they believe his artistic tendencies should not be encouraged. The Boy has an ally in the shape of his Grandpa, a retired double bassist who encourages his musical ambitions. When his Grandpa dies, the boy accuses Big C of murder and swears revenge. Grandpa bequeaths the Boy his double bass, but he is too small to play it and his parents discourage him from taking music seriously. He tries to change their perceptions by giving them a concert of pieces he's composed, but to no avail, and his passion is relegated to a hobby. Finally, Big C persuades the Boy to give up the struggle his musical dreams entail.

Act Two: *This central act embodies the protagonist's years as an undergraduate, focusing on the 'seismic shift' from the absence of music in his life to his decision to learn the double bass and study music.*

Years have passed since Act One, and the Boy is now a Young Man. His parents throw a party for him, at which he announces he's going to stay in his home town, live with his Girlfriend and study geology. In a series of escalating episodes, the Young Man struggles with his buried desire for music, in particular to play double bass. He tries to focus on

his studies and be content with his Girlfriend, but the 'call' of the instrument is too strong and he begins to play it in secret. When his Girlfriend discovers this, she's upset, and the Young Man vows to finish his relationship with the double bass. The couple celebrate their engagement with the Young Man's parents, but the Young Man cannot suppress his musical desires and he suffers a breakdown. In a vision, his Grandpa sings an impassioned warning about the consequences of not following your soul's desire. The Young Man announces his resolve to learn the double bass and study music at university, but his parents have sold his instrument, with the knowledge of his fiancée, to pay for the wedding. Furious, the Young Man breaks off the engagement and his parents practically disown him.

Act Three: *The final act presents the Young Man's struggles as a music student, from his first double bass lessons to recognition as a musician and composer.*

Supporting himself in his studies and trying to make up 'lost ground', the Young Man wrestles with various personal and musical challenges. Because he is in pursuit of his dream once again, Big C returns to undermine him and, when the Young Man is diagnosed with tendonitis, his life spirals out of control. He hits crisis point and threatens to quit his studies, but his Professor offers him some 'time out' in his cottage in the mountains. Alone in this place of beauty and peace and with no more 'excuses', the Young Man is forced to confront himself and Big C. The Young Man is 'visited' by the Boy, and together they seek out Big C's cave. There they discover the truth of the foe they have been battling for years: he is an embodiment of their own fears. Empowered by this knowledge, the Young Man finds a new resolve and spiritual calm. He begins to compose and his tendonitis heals. When he returns to university, the Professor, who is impressed by his composition, gives him a double bass: he'd bought it at an auction some years ago and it is the very same instrument left to the boy by his Grandpa. The Young Man gives a concert of his work, and his parents witness his success. Proudly, they see their son off as he embarks on the next phase of his musical life. The Young Man is once again hounded by Big C but, as a result of his experiences, he is able to control him.

APPENDIX 2

The Cry of the Double Bass - Libretto by Mike Carter

CAST & CHARACTERS

Middle-aged Woman (Mezzo-Soprano): MOTHER (Acts 1-3), LANDLADY (3)

Middle-aged Man (Actor/Tenor): FATHER - A DOCTOR (Acts 1-3), BOSS (3)

Young Woman (Soprano): TEACHER (Act 1), GIRLFRIEND (2), LOVER (3)

Boy (Soprano): Protagonist as BOY (Acts 1-3),

Young Man (Baritone): PRIEST (Act 1), Protagonist as YOUNG MAN (2&3)

Old Man (Bass): GRANDFATHER (Acts 1&2), PROFESSOR (3), OLD MAN (3)

Physical Theatre Actor: BIG C (Acts 1&3), WAITER (2)

PROLOGUE

The stage is set for a concert, although the performers have not yet arrived. A BOY enters and surveys the scene. He approaches the toy piano and strikes a few chords. He examines some sheet music. He goes to the conductor's stand, takes up the baton and swishes it around. He creeps over to the double bass and, fascinated, he plays with it. He explores its potential with growing confidence. A booming voice from off interrupts him and makes him jump.

BIG C I say, you - boy - on the stage!
 What on earth do you think you are doing?

BOY *(Defiantly.)* Nothing.

BIG C I saw you. We all saw you.

BOY *(To the audience.)* I was only playing.

MUSICIANS enter and take up their instruments throughout...

BIG C There's a performance about to begin.

BOY *(Nodding.)* And you must be my audience.

BIG C What a precocious -

BOY Ladies and gentlemen -

BIG C Cheek!

BOY - thank you for coming.

BIG C Now find your parents and take your seat!

BOY Oh, just - shush! We haven't even started yet.

There is no reply. The BOY is relieved.

BOY Sorry about that, ladies and gents.

He takes a tuning fork, taps it and holds it against the top of the double bass. He does this repeatedly on a number of other instruments as they tune up.

ACT ONE

Scene One

1: The Call

The BOY enters a scene of dull domesticity. His MOTHER and FATHER are occupied with embroidery and the newspaper respectively. The BOY plays with toys at their feet. He becomes bored and restless.

The BOY hears some arresting and enchanting tunes and looks round; his parents remain oblivious to it. He creeps away from them and goes over to the toy piano. He tries to copy the tunes and joins in with the orchestra, playing various toy instruments. He sneaks over to his MOTHER, removes a large knitting needle from her basket and conducts with it.

2: Mother

The volume increases until MOTHER and FATHER hear the noise. They glance up at each other. MOTHER puts down her work and watches her son anxiously.

MOTHER What on earth are you doing?

BOY I was only playing. Listen!

The BOY begins to play. His MOTHER stops him.

MOTHER I think we all had enough, don't you?

The BOY is confused. MOTHER's eyes are fixed on the piano.

BOY Will you play something?

MOTHER Oh, no, I'm too rusty.

BOY Oh please, mummy. Please!

Hesitantly, MOTHER sits on the stool and plays. She stops abruptly.

BOY Keep going, mummy. Oh, mummy, you're good!

She bashes the toy piano keys. Playing has awakened some forgotten pain in her.

MOTHER That's quite enough for one day.

MOTHER returns to her embroidery. The BOY is bewildered.

3: Big C

BIG C appears: a black dog standing upright in a suit and carrying a clipboard.

BIG C You're meddling with powers you don't understand!

BOY I was only playing.

BIG C And what is the point in that?

BOY I don't know - it just feels all – tickly.

BIG C Tickly?! *(Making a note.)* Tickly.

BOY Are you the Big Bad Wolf?

BIG C Ah, little boy - full of faddy enthusiasm –
You've no idea where such fancies can lead.

Suddenly loud and angry.

BIG C If you play that thing again,
Be ready to wage war with me!

BIG C exits, snarling. MOTHER approaches and watches the BOY appeal to the audience...

BOY I was only playing.

4: Normal

MOTHER Who are you talking to?

BOY *(To MOTHER.)* Oh, just my audience.

MOTHER Audience? Oh God -
(Screeches.) Father! Get in here!

FATHER enters.

FATHER What do you want?

MOTHER I just caught your son –
Having words - with a wall!

FATHER Which wall?

MOTHER Does it matter? That wall!
Well - what will you do?

FATHER I'll - just - put the kettle on.

FATHER ruffles the BOY's hair. MOTHER is exasperated.

MOTHER I'll take him to the Priest.
He'll know what to do.

MOTHER drags the BOY to see the PRIEST.

CHORUS It's not normal. Not normal.
It's just not normal to talk to a wall -
Much better to talk to no one at all.

MOTHER Oh, Father, help us!

PRIEST What is it, my child?

MOTHER It's my child.
He's talking to people that don't exist.

PRIEST Ah, so - is he praying?

MOTHER Yes! Playing!
He thinks he's on stage.
And he likes to create.

PRIEST Well, my child - to create is divine.

MOTHER So what are you saying?
He must think he's like God!

PRIEST The conceit!

MOTHER The conceit!

TOGETHER The awful conceit!

CHORUS It's not normal. Not normal.
It's just not normal to want to be God;
Much better to want to be nothing so odd.

MOTHER We'll go to his teacher;
She'll know what to do.

MOTHER grabs the BOY and leads him to the TEACHER followed by the PRIEST.

TEACHER I set a task - he goes beyond.
He breaks the rules - he makes his own.
To the rest of the peers he's a pain in the ears:

He sings out weird noises and drums on the desk.

MOTHER & PRIEST That's just the behaviour we've come to expect!

MOTHER What's wrong with the boy? Don't spare me the horror.

TEACHER Your son, I think, might be artistic.

MOTHER Autistic?

TEACHER Artistic.

MOTHER Oh. That's even worse!
An artist! How dreadful!

MOTHER & TEACHER Oh Heavens, we're cursed!

MOTHER We'll go to the doctor.
He'll know what to do.

CHORUS It's not normal. Not normal.
It's just not normal to make noise and fuss
Much better to make him as docile as us.

MOTHER, dragging her son by his ear, and followed by the PRIEST and the TEACHER, enters the office of the BOY's FATHER, the DOCTOR.

DOCTOR Why are you here, dear?

MOTHER It's about our son.
His teacher thinks – he may be - an artist.

DOCTOR An artist?

CHORUS An artist.

MOTHER You know what that means?

CHORUS	Addiction and loneliness –
DOCTOR	Perhaps it's just a phase he's going through -
CHORUS	Squalor and penury –
DOCTOR	But, in my considered medical opinion -
CHORUS	Madness and suicide –
DOCTOR	I prescribe a course of piano lessons.
CHORUS	And he's probably gay!

CHORUS It's not normal. Not normal.
It's just not normal to want to make art
Much better to not want to follow your heart.

During the following, GRANDFATHER collects the BOY, removes him from this scene and they sit together to watch its climax.

PRIEST	And the Lord sayeth, "Thou shalt be normal and mediocre," And it's hubris to tempt him by dreaming of grandeur. "And thou shalt be damned on the face of the earth If you aspire to be something much more than you're worth."
DOCTOR	It won't hurt to have something to keep you occupied - Just as long as you keep the noise down, old son. But don't you get too big for your boots. Do what you're told and try not to worry your mother.
TEACHER	Rest assured that the education system is designed to develop an acute fear of failure and eradicate all traces of original thought and creativity. We're only interested in a small part of one side of the brain.
MOTHER	I see the fire in your eyes, my son and it chills me. I don't want you to suffer, like I did, When you learn in your heart that your dreams won't come true.
G.FATHER	I see the fire in your eyes, my lad, and it thrills me. I don't want you to give up, like I did, When you learn in your heart That your dreams will come true

MOTHER Oh, my boy. Oh, my boy. Oh, my boy!

CHORUS Normal! Normal! Normal!

G.FATHER wipes a tear from his eye and the BOY applauds enthusiastically.

Scene Two

5: Grandfather

BOY Grandpa - why are they singing instead of talking?

G.FATHER That's opera, my lad!
Puccini - something of a special case.

BOY Mum says I'm special.

G.FATHER Lots of parents tell their children they're special.
But they don't mean it. Not in that way.

BOY But, grandpa, I think I really am special – like Puccini.
I think I'm meant to do great things!

G.FATHER And I don't doubt it an instant, my lad.
But if that's the case, then now is when hard graft begins.

GRANDFATHER leads the BOY to his piano lesson, imparting the following...

G.FATHER Beware the lies of words and mind,
For lies are always told with words.
Your mind can lie to you the worst
For it can only think in words.
There's just one voice you need to hear,
In peaceful stillness, stop your thoughts:
Your own soul speaks and it's always clear -
Leading you through feeling – it's like music.
Learn to listen and follow that voice -
Right to the end of the world, my lad.

6: Lesson

The BOY plays the toy piano and makes progress, but he struggles to keep up his enthusiasm. The TEACHER (the pianist in the orchestra) cuffs him occasionally. Finally, the TEACHER dismisses the BOY, who hurriedly gathers his music and leaves his lesson, dejected.

7: Climbing the Hill

BIG C enters and hounds the BOY on his journey home.

BIG C You know you'll never be any good – just like your mother.

You heard that girl who has lessons before you:
You know she's a million times better than you.
And those bullies who used to be your friends:
They'll make darts from your music when you trudge up that hill.
And when you get back, there'll be no soothing hug,
Just, "You're late for your tea. Have you got any homework?"

BOY You're wrong!
There is someone who knows me and cares.

BIG C *(Musing.)* Yes, too true - that grandpa of yours is a problem.
He's one that slipped my grasp.
I must think of a way to deal with him.

The BOY glares at BIG C, who makes a note on his clipboard and withdraws.

8: The Double Bass

Downcast, the BOY enters 'GRANDFATHER's home'. GRANDFATHER gestures to the piano.

G.FATHER Now, nothing would give me more pleasure
 Than to hear my grandson play.

BOY I'll play if you do - your bass, I mean.

GRANDFATHER laughs and lifts his double bass. He sings with a warm irony.

G.FATHER Look at this old beast! Useless piece of junk!
 She sounds just as ugly as she looks.
 It was like falling in love when you've had too much wine,
 Then waking up next to a moose.
 At first, I thought she was deep and profound,
 But she just trots out the same old boring lines, like a cracked record.

BOY But if you don't like the music you play -
 You can always make something up.

G.FATHER *(Laughing.)* Compose for a crate like this!
 No one composes for the double bass.

BOY Well - I've written a piece for you and me to play.

The BOY hands his GRANDFATHER a manuscript. GRANDFATHER takes it and reads with a tear in his eye. He takes up his bow. They play together.

GRANDFATHER 'dies'. He props his instrument on a stand and kisses the BOY tenderly. He exits the stage. The BOY grieves at his GRANDFATHER's absence.

Scene Three

9: Requiem for Grandpa

MOTHER and FATHER enter and console the BOY. MOTHER weeps.

During the following, MOTHER dresses the BOY in black tie (and armband) and combs his hair. The PRIEST leads a procession with a double bass case carried like a coffin. MOTHER, FATHER and BOY join the procession, ending in a graveside tableau. Towards the end of this piece the mourners disperse and the family goes 'home'.

SOPRANO Lux aeterna luceat eis Domine
 cum sanctis tuis in aeternum:
 quia pius es.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine;
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum:
quia pius es.

10: Legacy

FATHER sits with his newspaper, MOTHER takes up her embroidery and the BOY sits at their feet, bereft.

The BOY goes over to G.FATHER's double bass, propped up on the stand, and sings to it..

BOY I do what you said and listen –
 Listen for that still, small voice that speaks through my soul.
 But it's so hard to hear it now -
 I don't think you're ugly at all.
 I'll write music just for you
 And if nothing else of you and me can live,
 At least I'll have said it; it's the gift I give.

FATHER joins him.

FATHER It'll soon be time to go, old son.

BOY Why did he leave it to me
 If I'm too small to play it?

FATHER It's worth a great deal, I believe -
 We could sell it and put the money towards your education.

BOY No! I can play this when I am big enough!

FATHER Music won't make you a living –
 Unless you're really good.

BOY It made Grandpa a living -
 And I am really good!

FATHER You need to grow up and get real!
 Music – it's just froth and childish nonsense.

FATHER exits.

BOY I fill your house with music
 That washes over you like over a stone.
 You gave me life, but you don't hear me
 And you don't know my soul at all.
 If I could write music that would pierce your heart,
 You might believe in my dreams.

11: Condolences

BIG C enters. BOY confronts him angrily.

BOY I know your name now; you're Big C!
 You killed my Grandpa, you murderer!

BIG C *(Shaking his head.)* I have no power over life and death –
 It's your souls on this earth that I'm interested in.

BOY Liar! I heard a woman whisper -
 "It was Big C killed him," she said.

BIG C Ah, I see. *(Making a note.)* 'Big C'.

BOY And when I grow up, I'll come to your cave,
 high up in the mountains – and finish you off!

BIG C Oh, I don't think we'll be bothering each other much longer:
 Without your grandpa on your side, you'll be easy to beat.

BOY I won't. I won't. I'm going to fight you more than ever -
 And one day I'll be a great musician –

BIG C exits, laughing. The BOY removes his armband and reties his tie into a bow. He takes up the knitting needle and conducts the orchestra.

12: Concert

The BOY grabs his PARENTS and pulls them on stage.

BOY This evening's concert will begin very soon.
 Lady and gent, will you please take your seats?

MOTHER A concert? How grand! In our own front room?
 I'm not sure I'm dressed for such a treat.

FATHER Haven't you got homework? I've had such a long day.

MOTHER It'll help you unwind then, to hear the boy play.
 Now then maestro, what's on the bill?

BOY Some pieces I've written - I want you to hear.

FATHER You've written the music?

MOTHER Oh what a thrill!

FATHER I'll just get a beer.

MOTHER pulls FATHER into his seat.

BOY Please give my music the respect it deserves,
If I think you're reluctant, it rattles my nerves.

MOTHER Now don't get all worked up and in a state.
We believe in you darling, don't we dear?

FATHER Just play them, really, I can hardly wait.
Play us your tunes, we want to hear.

BOY All right, here's the first - called The Magic Zoo.
It's inspired by animals and Mozart too.

BOY plays his piano piece. MOTHER and FATHER smile and stifle laughs. They're touched by the music but don't take it seriously. When it ends they applaud politely.

BOY Tell me what you think then. Well?
You didn't like it. I can tell.

MOTHER What a quaint little ditty!

FATHER Bravo! What she said.

MOTHER Very nice.

FATHER Kiss your mother then straight up to bed!

FATHER ruffles the BOY's hair and exits. The BOY calls after him.

BOY I've got some more; I'm not a phony.
Do you think I'm just a one-trick pony?
Stay, Dad!

MOTHER Play it for me - and then not a peep.
It's school tomorrow and you need your sleep.

BOY This one is special, it's about Grandpa dying.
Because writing music is better than crying.

BOY plays his piece and conducts the ensemble with his right hand. When the piece ends, MOTHER is moved.

BOY Don't you like what I've composed?
This is not the reaction I'd supposed.

MOTHER Why did you have to open up my grief this way?
That's quite enough composing for one day.

Oh my boy,
I see the fire in your eyes and it chills me;
I don't want you to suffer like I did,
When you learn in your heart that your dreams won't come true.
Oh my boy –

MOTHER exits, distraught. The BOY, left alone, weeps.

13: Let Go Your Dreams

BIG C enters.

BIG C Now then - We don't need to fight and delay the inevitable.
Let go your dreams now and be at rest.
Just let go this torment you choose -
Breathe and let go your dreams.

CHORUS *(Distant.)* It's not normal. Not normal.
It's just not normal to strive for great things.
Much better to go with whatever life brings.
It's not normal. Not normal.
It's best to want no more than just what you've got
For that way you can't be fed up with your lot.

BIG C Breathe and let go your dreams.

Finally, the BOY releases his dreams in a powerful sigh.

BIG C There. That wasn't so hard, was it?
And now I shall leave you in peace.
Yes, complete peace.

BIG C scribbles on his clipboard and closes it as the BOY takes off his bowtie. BIG C slaps a label across the front of the file saying 'CASE CLOSED'.

Blackout. End of Act One.

ACT TWO

Scene One

14: Geology

A bottle of champagne pops open and we are at a party hosted by MOTHER and FATHER. The Y.MAN drinks, and he and his GIRLFRIEND pet. MUSICIANS become guests at the party...

MUSICIANS Speech! Speech!

FATHER Thanks everyone, if I could have your attention –
Yes, I'll keep it brief, but there's a few things to mention.
As you know, we're here to say well done

MOTHER Yes, really well done.

FATHER And drink to the continued success of our dear son.
He's not been much trouble /

MOTHER Not too much trouble.

FATHER these past eighteen years -

MOTHER That he'd be a musician was the worst of our fears!

Laughter from the MUSICIANS.

FATHER Now he's leaving our home but he's hanging around
To study at the university here /

MOTHER Here in town.

FATHER That's not a choice based on the education he'll receive -
A certain sweetheart's (G.FRIEND.) to thank for that, I believe.

MOTHER mouths, "Thank you," to G.FRIEND.

FATHER Well – he's his own man now, and we're extremely proud.

MOTHER We couldn't be prouder!

FATHER Tell everyone what you're studying, old son –

Y.MAN *(Mutters, distracted by G.FRIEND.)* Geology.

MUSICIANS Speak up!

FATHER Louder!

Y.MAN Geology.

MUSICIANS Geology?

MOTHER Geology.

FATHER An excellent choice. Rock solid, I'd say!

Scene Two

16: Seismic Activity

Y.MAN and G.FRIEND sit silently at each end of a 'sofa'. She reads a magazine and he reads a tome on seismology. Y.MAN grows restless and hums, unconsciously. G.FRIEND looks up and smiles. Y.MAN stops. But it happens again...

G.FRIEND You all right, babe?

Y.MAN Fine. Why?

G.FRIEND You keep singing.

Y.MAN Do I?

She beckons him to sit close to her. He does, but he has to battle to stop himself singing. He focuses on his book and reads aloud, but he lapses into song...

Y.MAN Whole cities and civilisations are built on fault lines
Where the great tectonic plates of the earth
Butt up to each other and grate and struggle -

G.FRIEND *(Irritated.)* What's the matter with you tonight?

Y.MAN Nothing. I'll go for a walk.

He makes to exit. She points to her cheek where he must kiss her. And he does.

G.FRIEND Oy! Don't be long.

The Y.MAN leaves the room (and lights fade on G.FRIEND). G.FATHER's double bass stands in its case in a spot, 'calling'. The Y.MAN is drawn to it. We hear him humming. Tentatively and guiltily, he approaches and reaches out to the instrument, but, as soon as he touches the case, he runs away.

Time passes.

In the 'flat', G.FRIEND sits on sofa, reading from magazine. She looks over to Y.MAN sitting at his desk, reading from his book on seismology. He recites...

Y.MAN Though these seismic shifts happen randomly,
They can now be detected before they occur.

But, once again, he finds himself singing and, this time, also miming some double bass fingering on his arm. It's involuntary and the anguished 'attack' grows throughout. G.FRIEND grows anxious and approaches. Y.MAN lost in his own thoughts.

G.FRIEND What have you done wrong today?

Y.MAN Nothing! I've been here – swotting – all day.

He closes his book and leaves. Again lights fade on 'home' and he runs compulsively to the double bass. This time he dares himself to open the case to reveal the instrument. Breathlessly, he strokes the wood and caresses the strings.

Y.MAN Oh my soul, oh how I've missed you! Oh my soul.
 And why does this feel like betrayal? Why?
 I can't do this. I can't go down this unknown road.
 Somehow I'm playing with fire.
 I can't do this. Oh, my soul! My soul -

Stricken with guilt, Y.MAN wrenches himself away and flees. FATHER enters.

Y.MAN Dad, what would you do if your life is good, but there's something
 you miss - you've made the right choice, but you can't be sure

FATHER We have more possibilities than our time on earth can hold
 So many lives unlived, so many loves unloved -
 The trick of finding contentment is
 Never to dwell upon what you might lack,
 Throw yourself into what you've got
 With all your might and don't look back.

 Is it another woman?

Y.MAN *(Lost in thought.)* What? Oh - Something like that. Thanks, Dad.

The Y.MAN leaves his FATHER and visits the double bass. This time he is mournful. He picks up the case, determined to pack the instrument away for good.

Y.MAN How do you do that to me?
 I can't – I can't do this anymore.

He begins to put the bass in its case, but he wavers; it's just too tempting. He tears the case away and begins to play it. The joy of being reunited with music pours out of him. His G.FRIEND enters and catches him 'red-handed'...

G.FRIEND *(Enraged.)* What is this?!

Y.MAN I was only playing the double bass.

G.FRIEND What? Why don't you waste your time on me?!

 There's a fire in your eyes and it chills me, my love -
 (Aside.) A passion for something that's greater than me.
 You've been acting so strange; can't you see it's not normal?
 (Embracing him.) All that we've built and all that we're building

Are you going to throw it all away?

(Gently.) Promise me – promise me you'll stop this nonsense.

Y.MAN I promise.

The Y.MAN breaks away and finishes zipping the double bass into its case. He sighs with deep remorse before he closes it completely - forever.

Y.MAN cuddles up with G.FRIEND on the sofa and reads his book. Lights fade first on the double bass and then on the couple.

Scene Three

17: Restaurant

A table is set for a formal meal. Much jollity. The Y.MAN and his G.FRIEND have got engaged and they are congratulated by MOTHER and FATHER. MOTHER fusses over G.FRIEND, makes much of her ring and they take their place at the table. FATHER has a private word with his son...

FATHER So you resolved everything –
 With the other woman?

Y.MAN What? Oh – yes! It was nothing.

FATHER smiles and leads him to the table. A WAITER tends to them.

MOTHER So when do I need to buy my new hat?

FATHER Yes, when's the big day going to be?

The Y.MAN and G.FRIEND's voices overlap.

G.FRIEND We thought next summer.

Y.MAN The summer after next.

Y.MAN There's no real rush.

G.FRIEND The sooner the better.

Y.MAN We haven't actually discussed it yet.

FATHER *(Sardonic.)* Get used to it, old son:
 You're not going to make another decision in your life!

Y.MAN I'll need to work for at least a year;
 We've got some saving up to do.

MOTHER, FATHER and G.FRIEND all smile. They know something he doesn't.

Y.MAN What?!

ALL Nothing.

The WAITER hands them menus and pours their drinks. A BOY enters and sits at the piano. He begins to play quietly. Only Y.MAN notices him.

G.FRIEND Lots to do and lots to plan!

MOTHER I'll help in any way I can.

G.FRIEND I already know just where I'm getting my dress.

MOTHER And for flowers and cake I know where is best.

FATHER *(To Y.MAN, chuckling.)* See - It's out of your hands, old son.

The Y.MAN stares at the BOY playing the piano.

MOTHER Are you quite all right, dear?

FATHER He's getting married; the lad's in shock!

Y.MAN Of course I'm all right. Cheers!

They toast.

FATHER Congratulations!

MOTHER To many happy years – and lots of grandchildren!

The BOY plays with more confidence.

G.FRIEND Look at that amazing kid at the piano!

MOTHER *(Nodding to her son.)* Yes, you know who he reminds me of?

G.FRIEND Aw! I bet he was a real cutie.

MOTHER He was ever so serious!

MOTHER and G.FRIEND laugh and G.FRIEND strokes Y.MAN's face.

FATHER He's very good, isn't he?

MOTHER He's excellent!

FATHER He is! He could go places, that one.

Y.MAN Really?! He's no better than I was at that age!

PARENTS answer him with looks of amusement and disbelief. A tidal wave of emotion sweeps over the Y.MAN, who staggers towards the piano and slams down the lid. He and the BOY stare at each other. Y.MAN faints to the floor. MOTHER, FATHER and G.FRIEND freeze in a tableau of distress. Light dims on them.

18: Grandfather's Song

The Y.MAN enters a dream. G.FATHER appears...

G.FATHER Whenever you played me the music you wrote,
I could barely speak for pride and awe.
"How blessed your talent!" got stuck in my throat
If I'd lived you might stretch for your star.
There's many with greatness who don't make the stage -
But you've reached for so little and both our hearts break -
With gumption and guts you'd not be on this page.
Maybe you just haven't got what it takes.

It seems to be life that we go with the flow,
unless we're bothered to fight it.
And what is our story? We just don't know,
unless we endeavour to write it.
Wherever you are, there is always a choice;
It's got to be yours, or it's theirs they'll impose.
My wisdom is this and I'll give it my voice:
Play or be played. Compose or be composed.

G.FATHER exits and the Y.MAN comes to.

19: My Life Has Got To Change

Y.MAN Grandpa!

FATHER You with us again, old son?

MOTHER This is so humiliating!

G.FRIEND What the hell was all that about?

Y.MAN My life has got to change.
(Standing.) My life has got to change!

ALL 3 What's wrong with your life?!

Y.MAN I've got to be a musician!

PARENTS look at their son, then at each other, then at their son...

PARENTS Ridiculous!

Y.MAN I'm going to study music – and learn the double bass.

MOTHER Well you can't!

FATHER The double bass went to an auction last week.

Y.MAN You mean to say you sold my –

FATHER It made a good price.

Y.MAN No!

G.FRIEND It'll pay for our wedding.

MOTHER Your Grandpa would be so happy -

Y.MAN Grandpa was in that instrument - a piece of my soul too!

G.FRIEND We wanted to surprise you.

Y.MAN You knew about this?! Argh!
You put a price on something divine
Well you shouldn't have bothered: the wedding is off!

ALL 3 What?!

G.FRIEND You said you were done with this nonsense.

Y.MAN I'm done with you!

G.FRIEND bursts into tears, removes her ring and throws it at him. MOTHER comforts her.

MOTHER & G.FRIEND What have we done to deserve this?
We only wanted what was best for you
And what are we going to tell everyone?
You silly, selfish little boy!

MOTHER and G.FRIEND exit together.

FATHER You're throwing your life away!

Y.MAN *(Shakes his head.)* My life is my own now and all the more precious;
I'm chasing my soul where it wants to lead.

FATHER Well don't run to us when it leads you to ruin.

The Y.MAN waves the ring at him.

Y.MAN I'll work. I'll make it work. I only need your love.

FATHER looks at him with pity and shame and exits.

Y.MAN You all think I'm feckless, ungrateful and reckless
 But I've never been more responsible, nor seen so clearly.
 We drown the voices of our souls with noise and chatter.
 We'll do anything not to listen to what matters.
 But I'm all ears now, Grandpa. I hear you - you hear me?!

End of Act 2.

ACT THREE

Scene One

20: Lesson No. 2

The YOUNG MAN enters carrying a cheap, tatty double bass. He plays the instrument throughout, until indicated otherwise. The double bass PROFESSOR enters and examines the Y.MAN, who stares, open-mouthed, at the PROF's resemblance to his G.FATHER.

PROF Ah, so - It falls to me to teach you for my sins.
 Don't stand there gawping; time is not on your side.

Y.MAN continues to play. PROF occasionally gives encouragement or criticism, and improves Y.MAN's technique throughout the lesson...

PROF The double bass is not, as some romantics say,
 The body of a Rubenesque woman:
 It's a leviathan! With a cavernous, toothless mouth,
 Yawning to swallow the man who would tame it.
 On a few bright days you will love me and the beast,
 But mostly you will loathe one, the other, or both of us.

BIG C enters, carrying the file he compiled for the BOY in Act One. He blows a cloud of dust off it and tears away the label saying 'CASE CLOSED'.

BIG C Well, this is most irregular - but your idiocy cannot last.

Steadily, in response to PROF and BIG C, Y.MAN grows anxious and plays harder.

PROF I trust you are not romantically snared -

BIG C No, you shunned the loving bosom of that young lady -

PROF And there won't be time for hanky-panky.

BIG C Tch! You will be such a dull, lonely geek.

PROF And I hope you have funds and you don't need to work;

BIG C No, you threw away the proud support of your parents -

PROF An artist must be a slave only to his art.

The Y.MAN develops a pain in his left wrist and his playing falters.

BIG C All those bright young talents you study with -
 They didn't have years where they barely played.
 You'll never catch them or match them at your age.
 You left it too late, old man.

Y.MAN stops playing and clutches his wrist. BIG C is pleased with himself.

21: Tendonitis

FATHER (DOCTOR) enters and examines his son's wrist.

DOCTOR Yes it's badly inflamed. It's called tendonitis.
 It seems you've been overdoing it rather.

Y.MAN What can you give me to cure it?

DOCTOR gives Y.MAN some pills, then ties his left arm into a sling.

DOCTOR These will help the pain and inflammation.
 But there's nothing for it but complete rest.

Y.MAN I can't stop my practice!

DOCTOR You'll have to.

Y.MAN How long?

DOCTOR As long as it takes -

Y.MAN A few days?

DOCTOR Weeks! Maybe months.

Y.MAN Months?! I can't: I'll fail!

DOCTOR No strenuous exercise - of any kind.

Y.MAN But I work in a warehouse. I'll lose my job!
I know what you're thinking. And don't look so smug!

DOCTOR What am I thinking?

Y.MAN I told you so.
I told you so.

22: Out of Control

Y. MAN takes pills and tries to play wearing the sling. Frustrated, he removes it and plays in pain. A CHORUS sings in the shadows: his PROFESSOR, his LANDLADY, his BOSS and his LOVER. The Y.MAN struggles to keep playing the bass, but his growing anxiety and the worsening pain in his arm thwart him. BIG C hovers and 'conducts', enjoying the Y.MAN's failure.

LANDLADY Will you STOP that monstrous noise?!
That bloody bass makes this house shake.
PROF Your playing gets worse instead of better.
It's clear you are neglecting your practice.
BOSS What's wrong with your arm, you lazy squirt?
It can't be that bad. You can't let me down.
LOVER Oh - come play with me.
Oh - I'm so alone.

LOVER Oh - you're always working.
Oh - you're always tired.
BOSS I'm not paying you to be late
Then sleep in the staffroom on your break.
LANDLADY I don't care about your arm!
You want to stay here - you'll pay your rent.
PROF This is not music - it's just a mess!
Play it again. Play it again.

BOSS I can't pay a cripple and a shirk.
LANDLADY You can't pay your way then you're out on your ear.
PROF You can't miss deadlines - you will fail.
LOVER Oh - you cannot make me happy.

BOSS Pack up your locker - you've got the sack.
LANDLADY Just pack up your rubbish, clear out of here.
LOVER I'm sending you packing. That's it. Goodbye.
PROF You may as well just pack it all in.

The Y.MAN sings a cry of agony and despair. Exhausted and clutching his arm, he drops his bow and sinks to the floor by his bass. BIG C stands over him, victorious. He makes notes, signs off the 'case', closes the folder and exits.

23: A Way Out

Y.MAN lays down his bass. He doesn't notice PROF listening to the following...

Y.MAN This is not how it was meant to be!
 The dreams I had seem childish now -
 They are but dust
 And I am nothing without them.
 I'm sorry, Grandpa – but I've failed.
 Who was I fooling to even try?!
 I should have never listened to my own soul.

PROF I knew him, your Grandpa - a lovely gent.
 We were colleagues in the National Orchestra.

The PROF produces a long, old-fashioned door key.

PROF I have a cottage up in the mountains.
 It's Spartan but it's beautiful
 Time loses meaning in such a place.
 You need to compose yourself - heal - and find your peace.

*The Y.MAN is about to protest, but PROF bars his lips with his index finger.
The Y.MAN's takes a rucksack and journeys high into the mountains.*

Scene Two

24: The Silent Struggle

The Y.MAN reaches his destination and perches on a 'ledge'. The silence becomes deafening; he covers his ears.

He jumps to his feet and paces around. He notices the (toy) piano. He tries to play, but his left arm aches. He swallows some pills, puts his arm back in the sling. He takes a folder of manuscript paper from his bag. He begins to compose.

The voice of BIG C echoes around the mountains...

BIG C What are you dabbling with now? Composing?!
 But you have to be creative to do that -
 And who's going to want to suffer this?
 Alone, here, you've got no excuses;
 There's nothing to blame but your own inadequacy.
 Face it, boy - you're simply not good enough.

The Y.MAN stops, screws up the manuscript and throws it down. In frustration he lays down under the stars. The stage darkens.

25: The Cave

Voices are heard in the dark.

Y.MAN Where have you brought me?

BOY Who lives in a cave high up in the mountains?

Y.MAN *(Thinks.)* Big C? This is Big C's cave?! We can't go in!

BOY Of course we can.

A pair of torches flicker on in the darkness and scan the space.

Y.MAN But where's Big C? There's no one here -

BOY Except us.

Y.MAN Except us.
Big C doesn't really exist, does he?

BOY Oh, he exists all right! Look!

His torch beam lands on the file compiled by BIG C. The Y.MAN approaches it.

BOY Open it.

Y.MAN I daren't.

BOY Open it and read.

The Y.MAN does so, hardly able to breathe. He scans the pages by torchlight.

BOY There you see our whole life story:
How you conspired with others to murder my dreams.

Y.MAN That wasn't me: it was Big C!

BOY He's all the negative voices you've ever heard -

Y.MAN You know what he's like; he never shuts up.

BOY He's all your doubts and all your fears -

Y.MAN He makes me small - that's not what I am!

BOY But, in the end, he's you. He's you. He's you.
You let Big C in and you let him win.
You must name his power as fear.
What does the C stand for - in his name?

Y.MAN I don't know. Cancer?

BOY He's a lot of Cs.
(Shouts.) Big C! Come out you coward!

Y.MAN *(Catching on.)* You castigator! You chiding, conniving -

BOY Cabbage!

Y.MAN You complaining conformist! You captious -

BOY Cannibal!

Y.MAN You calcified conservative!

BOY You carbuncle.

Y.MAN You callous clot. You caustic cacophony.

BOY Conman!

Y.MAN Censor!

BOY Choker!

Y.MAN Clencher!

BOY Creep!

TOGETHER But worst of all: you critic!

There is no response. They laugh. Their torches go out.

26: Composed

Lights fade up. It's dawn and the Y.MAN wakes and enjoys the silence and the landscape. The BOY sits apart, watching, but Y.MAN doesn't acknowledge the BOY.

Y.MAN The stars are closer here -
And there's so many more of them
Than I ever could see before.
The old man was right:
Time stands still in peace like a blank manuscript.
The only measures are day and night - and the work I do.
The seconds must still tick
But there is more space between each one -
A wider silence between the notes.

Y.MAN springs to his feet and begins, tentatively at first, to compose at the piano. As he grows in confidence, the BOY dances round him with increasing joy. As the sequence reaches climax, the Y.MAN makes the final touches to his composition with a flourish, and closes the finished manuscript. Excitedly, he runs 'down the mountain'...Blackout.

Scene Three

27: A Reunion

The Y.MAN presents the finished manuscript to the PROF, who reads it sternly.

Y.MAN You don't like it, do you?
 Oh well. I tried.
 Thank you for believing in me.
 I'm sorry I let you down.

The PROF lifts over a double bass, still in its case. Y.MAN opens it throughout...

PROF While you were gone, I made some decisions:
 It is a custom for retiring professors
 To pass on their instruments
 To the most deserving of their students.
 It's not lightly that I part with this: I envied her for many years,
 Perched at the back of the pit beside your grandfather.
 But I got it for a snip in an auction some years ago.
 You've earned it now - and I honour you both.

They admire GRANDFATHER's double bass. The Y.MAN removes his sling and flexes his arm without pain. He smiles at the PROF.

PROF So now we know you can compose –
 But can you perform?

28: Concert No.2

The Y.MAN dons a bow tie. He takes centre stage, in a spotlight, with his double bass. He performs his piece for double bass and orchestra.

When the piece ends there is silence, followed by thunderous applause. His PARENTS and the PROF stand to applaud. Y.MAN bows with deep satisfaction.

29: And in the End

*Y.MAN pulls off his bow tie, beaming with excitement. His bass is packed.
His FATHER hands him a holdall. His MOTHER is tearful. They sing a duet...*

FATHER We only ever wanted what was best for you, old son.
BOTH How could we know better than your own soul?

When we saw you play – up on that stage –
You were so good! You were so good!
We didn't know you could be that good.
You made us proud, now go make us prouder.

MOTHER Oh, my boy!

MOTHER gives Y.MAN a wrapped gift. The Y.MAN hugs his MOTHER and FATHER. They exit, waving.

BIG C enters, rather sickly and weak and with a suitcase of his own.

Y.MAN Don't you know when you're beat?

BIG C I'll get my chance yet if I bide my time.

Y.MAN clips a dog lead to a collar around BIG C's neck.

BIG C You can't do that! It's against the rules.

Y.MAN Exactly how I like to play.

The Y.MAN ignores BIG C and opens his parents' present. It is a case for a baton.

BIG C Your parents think you're a dropout, boy!
Too puffed up and too indolent to get a proper job -
And one day soon, you'll come crashing down
And you'll have to learn humility and fall back on geology -

Y.MAN interrupts BIG C by stuffing the wrapping paper in his mouth. BIG C pulls it out and continues.

BIG C Who do you think you are? You're a nobody!
What's the point in your music if no-one hears?
What a let-down! What a waste!
It's not normal – It's not normal -

Y.MAN opens the case and produces the long, fat knitting needle, used by the BOY in Act One. The BOY and the OLD MAN enter and Y.MAN shows them the knitting needle. BIG C's voice fades away as Y.MAN, BOY and OLD MAN sing together and pass the knitting needle between them...

BOY I'd play records of symphonies far too loud
Y.MAN And watch my reflection in the window tall and proud
O.MAN And with this old knitting needle waving in my hand
ALL 3 I'd conduct my orchestra from a score on a stand
In those moments I'd shiver in a musical shower
And tears would flow in the face of its beauty and its power.

BOY I remember the future

O.MAN And I foresee the past

Y.MAN says farewell to his 'other selves'

Y.MAN I have no idea what will become of me
 But today I'm going to do what I love.

Y.MAN walks up the aisle through the audience (like the steps to a plane), carrying his bag, and with BIG C whining on his lead.

CHORUS And in the end –
 We're writing the same piece all over our short lives
 We're all just writing one, long, great work.

BOY and OLD MAN wave Y.MAN up the stairs until he's gone.

EPILOGUE

The OLD MAN watches the BOY recede from the stage and conducts the orchestra as, one by one, musicians drop out of the music and exit. Eventually, only one double bass remains calling to the last. Then the OLD MAN is left alone in silence, conducting with the knitting needle. BIG C's voice booms out...

BIG C I say! I say, you boy! On the stage. What are you doing?

The OLD MAN freezes, stares at the audience and points to himself, open-mouthed.

*Blackout. **END***

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