

CAPRICCIO RADIO

A Play in Two Acts

by

Larry Rinkel

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Capriccio:

1: fancy, whimsy

2: caper, prank

3: an instrumental piece in free form usually lively
in tempo and brilliant in style

— <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>

4: an opera by Richard Strauss, subtitled “A
Conversation Piece for Music,” in which essential
questions about the nature of music are left
unresolved at the opera’s end

— S. L. Krinle

5: the business name of a fictional classical radio
station, somewhere in an American city

— K. L. Linser

Cast of Characters

5 male, 2 female

<u>Roberta Siegel:</u>	About 55, founder of the Capriccio Radio station and a former opera and Lieder singer. Tries hard to manage her station, but not the most effective or consistent leader.
<u>Claude Feierstein:</u>	About 60, announcer specializing in 19 th century orchestral music. Imperious and curmudgeonly, he is especially intolerant towards modern music.
<u>Sylvan Phillips:</u>	About 50, announcer specializing in modern music and theory. Learned and intellectual, he is generally supported by Roberta and at loggerheads with Claude. He is close friends with Ed and can play or simulate playing the piano.
<u>Lydia Morolla:</u>	79, announcer specializing in opera and early music. A good friend to Claude and Roberta, she can be sharp-tongued and ironic.
<u>Ed Ramsey:</u>	About 30, sales manager for the station and announcer specializing in piano and chamber music. Mild-mannered, but with reserves of strength that might not be readily apparent. Plays or can simulate playing the violin.
<u>James Godfrey:</u>	28, newly appointed Director of Radio Services for the media conglomerate (founded by his father) that Roberta joined twelve years ago. Arrogant and intolerant towards his elders, he is determined to run his empire with a tighter fist than his father and has little use for classical music.
<u>Noah Brock:</u>	17, a high-school student and would-be composer who listens avidly to Sylvan's modern music programs. Mistrustful of adults and a lonely misfit, he can be a loose cannon but is also desperately in need of approval. Spiked green hair in Act I, Scene 5, orange hair in Act II, Scene 2, natural hair at end.
<u>A few offstage voices (doubled):</u>	Jackie, the receptionist, 20's. A male voice in Act One, Scene One.

Scene

The set represents the employee lounge (with a piano), Roberta's office, and the conference room of a classical radio station somewhere in an American city. Two paintings hang in the conference room: a still life with violin and roses, and an abstract. Characters can also enter from the outside via an imaginary elevator bank. From anywhere on set, a monitor can be turned on for the characters to hear the music being broadcast. Monologues can be delivered from any location.

Since the station in this play is fictional, its call letters are unknown. The station broadcasts at 87.1 kHz, which is outside the frequency band used for FM radio in the United States.

Scene Breakdown

ACT ONE:

- Scene One: Anywhere (monologue for Sylvan).
- Scene Two: Late day, midweek. Roberta's office.
- Scene Three: The Friday soon after, about 5PM. The lounge, then Roberta's office.
- Scene Four: Next morning. The lounge.
- Scene Five: Sometime after, anywhere (monologue for Godfrey).
- Scene Six: A few days later, late morning. The lounge.
- Scene Seven: Next Monday. The conference room.
- Scene Eight: Tuesday afternoon. The lounge, then the conference room.

ACT TWO:

- Scene One: Wednesday morning. The conference room.
- Scene Two: Thursday afternoon (starts with monologue for Godfrey).
- Scene Three: Friday afternoon. The lounge.
- Scene Four: Monday morning. The conference room, then the lounge.
- Scene Five: A few weeks later, anywhere (monologue for Sylvan).

Time

The present.

Brief Synopsis

Capriccio Radio, a prestigious classical radio station founded by Roberta Siegel, has for the past twelve years enjoyed complete creative and financial freedom as part of a media conglomerate headed by Ron Godfrey. But after Ron retires and gives control to his son James, Roberta finds herself pressured to improve ratings and make her station profitable. In the process, the jobs of several of her announcers are threatened, and friendships among them tested. Eventually, James concludes the station to be hopelessly mismanaged and recommends it be dissolved; however, his plan backfires and the station survives but with significant changes.

The Music

All musical compositions heard in the play are in public domain; however, since most recordings of these works are likely under copyright, the author has prepared a set of copyright-free instrumental sound files generated by the Finale notation program. Vocal excerpts from Puccini's *Tosca* and Mahler's *Rückert Lieder* were specially recorded by soprano Julie Allison, accompanied in the Mahler by Teruhiko Toda. Both artists must be credited in any performances where these recordings are used.

Acknowledgment

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Production History

Production (filmed), Rogue Theater Festival, New York City, July 2021. Directed by the author.

<u>Roberta Siegel</u>	Laura Coccimiglio
<u>James Godfrey</u>	Bryon Albert Isaac
<u>Sylvan Phillips</u>	Tom Ciorciari
<u>Claude Feierstein</u>	Jonathan Minchew-Gonzalez
<u>Lydia Morolla</u>	Ginny S. Crooks
<u>Ed Ramsey</u>	Marco Antonio Cunha
<u>Noah Brock</u>	Gabriel Brumberg
<u>Soprano Soloist</u>	Julie Allison
<u>Accompanist</u>	(in the Mahler song) Teruhiko Toda
<u>Videography</u>	Varsell Productions
<u>Artwork</u>	Valeria Hernandez

Staged reading (via Zoom), Variations Theater Company, Astoria, NY, January 2021. Directed by the author.

<u>Roberta Siegel</u>	Laura Coccimiglio
<u>James Godfrey</u>	Bryon Albert Isaac
<u>Sylvan Phillips</u>	Tom Ciorciari
<u>Claude Feierstein</u>	Larry Rinkel
<u>Lydia Morolla</u>	Ginny S. Crooks
<u>Ed Ramsey</u>	Marco Antonio Cunha
<u>Noah Brock</u>	Tyler Holmes
<u>Artwork</u>	Valeria Hernandez

Two monologues from the play (Godfrey and Noah) have been published in Smith & Kraus's *Best Men's Monologues 2022*.

ACT ONE
Scene One

AT RISE:

SYLVAN stands alone as we hear a passage from the first movement of the Mahler 2nd Symphony.

AN OFFSTAGE MALE VOICE

“Hey, turn that crap off!”

SYLVAN

(As the music cuts off abruptly:)

Whenever I listen to anything classical in the car, I’ve formed some unconscious habits. On the highway, crank it up. On a road with lights, turn it lower and always stop behind the adjacent car to prevent being noticed. In slow traffic turn it off. This once I neglected my own rule, with the result you heard.

Lest you think I’m blaming this other driver, he has my sympathy. He thinks I’m a snob and he resents it. But how can I tell this man that Brahms and Beethoven are his birthright too? Or how do I explain that we who love this music feel at once the guardians of a precious treasure and a minority under attack? Every night sitting in my broadcast booth it’s questions like these that trouble me, as I wonder whom the music I play is reaching, or if it’s reaching anyone at all.

(END OF SCENE)

ACT ONE
Scene Two

AT RISE: Late day, midweek. ROBERTA and JAMES GODFREY are sitting in the lounge.

ROBERTA
James, it's been how many years? Five? Your MBA graduation?

GODFREY
About that.

ROBERTA
Ron says you've been managing a couple of country singers since. And now this.

GODFREY
Yeah, already pretty hectic. Big shoes to fill. Takes some getting used to.

ROBERTA
I can imagine.

GODFREY
There was some grumbling — nepotism, too young, inexperienced. . . . But Dad said I was the right man for the job, and that shut them up. Well, mostly.

ROBERTA
Of course. And how does Dad like retirement?

GODFREY
Also takes some getting used to. Not sure he's adjusted yet.

ROBERTA
We had a wonderful relationship. Coffee?

GODFREY
No, thanks. He speaks well of you, too.

ROBERTA
Then I'm sure you and I will get along just fine. But I assume this is not just a social call.

GODFREY

No. See now that I'm director, I'm talking to every manager in the network, review everybody's status, step up performance. I mean, don't get me wrong. My dad was a great businessman. He was an awesome businessman. But towards the end he got a little set in his ways, a little old-fashioned —

ROBERTA

I'm rather old-fashioned myself.

GODFREY

Roberta, let me get straight to the point —

ROBERTA

Always the best —

GODFREY

I have some concerns about your station. I have concerns about all our stations, but yours in particular. Roberta, in the past 6 years, you've been profitable in 7 out of 24 quarters. Where we normally require 16 for that time frame.

ROBERTA

Yes. Because we were specifically exempted from that requirement.

GODFREY

Yes. Well, effective immediately I'm revoking that exemption.

ROBERTA

Revoking? I don't understand. That exemption is stipulated in the contract —

GODFREY

I know that contract.

ROBERTA

— which your father —

GODFREY

— who is no longer running this business —

ROBERTA

— twelve years ago when I sold him this station —

GODFREY

— that was then —

ROBERTA

— made unequivocally clear. May I? Rider A, paragraph 1. “The station doing business as Capriccio Radio shall not be required to maintain a positive balance on its income statement, provided it maintains a level of artistic excellence — “

GODFREY

Forget Rider A. May I? Section 15, paragraph 2: “All provisions in this contract may be re-characterized or revoked by management, with or without notice.”

ROBERTA

Oh that! Just a formality.

GODFREY

No longer.

ROBERTA

But Ron always assured me the music we play —

GODFREY

Forget the music. The goal in running this network is not the music. The goal is revenue from selling ads. And you haven’t turned a profit for two years.

ROBERTA

Mr. Godfrey —

GODFREY

James.

ROBERTA

James. Please let me explain. Your father always told me: “Do the best you can but don’t worry, focus on the music, you’re the crown jewel in our network.”

GODFREY

I’m not my father.

ROBERTA

I can see that. So it’s all about the money.

GODFREY

If it were, I wouldn’t have spent four years managing Carlos Suarez, one of the greatest country singers of our time. I wouldn’t be running rock, gospel, Latin, all the best stations in this listening area —

ROBERTA

But not ours, I suppose.

GODFREY

Yeah, yours too, even though I don't much care for the music you play. But if all I cared about was the money, I'd change my whole lineup in a heartbeat to talk. But I'm not going there. At least not yet.

ROBERTA

So what must we do?

GODFREY

Break even or better at least two of the next three quarters.

ROBERTA

I'm not certain —

GODFREY

Who's your sales manager?

ROBERTA

Ed Ramsey. He's also an announcer.

GODFREY

Then have him announce less, sell more. And you need to run more ads. At least two every fifteen minutes.

ROBERTA

Not with this music. I can't interrupt a Verdi opera every fifteen minutes to play a jingle for the local plumber.

GODFREY

So don't play all these long songs.

ROBERTA

James. I'm sorry, but there's a misunderstanding here. For years after I founded Capriccio, I got numerous offers to buy the station, all lucrative, all wanting creative control. But when your father made his offer, he assured me I would have total creative freedom, and not to worry about the financials because any losses would be absorbed by his other stations.

GODFREY

Old business model. Not going to fly. Not when I've got seven other stations busting their chops to make money, and seven managers pissed you're getting a free ride.

ROBERTA

And if we don't sell enough ads?

GODFREY

Then put some pressure on your lowest performers to improve their ratings. Or find some other ways to reduce expenses.

ROBERTA

I think we're very disciplined about controlling expenses —

GODFREY

Actually, you're not. What's your biggest expense? Salaries, obviously.

ROBERTA

So everyone should take a pay cut.

GODFREY

That's one way. Even better, consolidate some positions, weed out your weakest performers —

ROBERTA

But everybody on my staff has a specific expertise —

GODFREY

No, nobody's indispensable. Take this guy — Sylvan Phillips, consistently has your lowest ratings —

ROBERTA

Sylvan? He's a brilliant man, who's done so much to help me achieve the vision I've wanted / for this station —

GODFREY

/ And I don't care if he's Albert Einstein. Look, Roberta, I've set you a goal. So think about your options, come up with a business plan, and we'll talk again in a month.

(Just before leaving:)

Oh. And I need our logo in the conference room. Not those fancy pictures.

(LIGHTS FADE, and when they come back, SYLVAN is playing the first of Schoenberg's Six Little Piano Pieces, Op. 19.)

ACT ONE
Scene Three

AT RISE:

A Friday soon after, about 5 PM. ROBERTA is sitting in her office with the door ajar. In the middle of the Schoenberg piece SYLVAN started last scene, ED enters carrying a violin case and some sheet music.

ED

I brought the *Kreutzer*.

SYLVAN

Ed. For my Schoenberg program next Friday, would I get too technical for my listeners if I discuss the music using Schenker theory?

ED

You're already too technical for me.

SYLVAN

No, just take the first of the Six Little Piano Pieces. Ninety seconds long, several distinct moods, and yet it evolves in a totally organic way with absolutely no repetition. How many pieces can you say of that before Schoenberg?

(Before ED can react:)

See, you can't think of any. I can think of the Flower Song from *Carmen*, Pamina's second-act aria from *The Magic Flute*, and the *Marseillaise*, whose phrases are so irregular I can't understand how French children learn their own national anthem. But then again, they're French. And then I realized I might understand these pieces by applying Schenker theory. Which is ironic, because Schenker hated Schoenberg, Schoenberg ridiculed Schenker, and yet Schenker is the only way I can explain what Schoenberg is up to here.

ED

Sylvan, it's a radio show, not a seminar at Juilliard.

CLAUDE

(Entering.)

But in Sylvan's capacious mind, they are one and the same.

ROBERTA

(From her office:)

Sylvan? My office, ten minutes. And is Ed there?

ED

Ed's here!

SYLVAN

Claude. I thought you had the opera tonight.

CLAUDE

Indeed, Lydia and I will be seeing *Tosca* with the great Erica Ruffina, very hard tickets to get. But I suppose, Sylvan, a masterpiece like *Tosca* is too conventional for an unregenerate avant-gardist like yourself.

SYLVAN

Actually I do like *Tosca*, though my favorite Puccinis are *Fanciulla del West* and *Gianni Schicchi*.

CLAUDE

You can keep your damned California cowboys and Florentine schemers. Give me a *Butterfly* I can blubber over; or a *Tosca* — where for two hours I can gorge on a veritable banquet of lust, sadism, politics, torture, and murder, all under the beneficent gaze of the Roman Catholic church.

(Pretending not to see LYDIA, who has just entered.)

But there's no accounting for taste, and I still can't understand why Lydia, who can soak through seven handkerchiefs at a *Bohème* Saturday night, will turn around and broadcast her anemic Renaissance masses each Sunday morning when fortunately most of the world is still asleep. Well hello, Lydia darling!

LYDIA

(Kissing CLAUDE on the cheek.)

Nor will you ever understand, you old goat. It is enough for you to know I love those anemic old masses, and it wouldn't hurt you to try them sometime.

CLAUDE

But if I tried something new I might like it, and if I liked it, how could I dismiss the opinions of others with my customary tone of witty contempt?

ED

I'm not a real operagoer myself, but I hear this Ruffina's dimensions are quite —

CLAUDE

Sylph-like, my good man, I assure you, sylph-like. They say that during a *Traviata* at La Scala, while she was supposedly dying from consumption and the tiny tenor was helping her to a sofa, the effort was so beyond his strength that a voice rang out from the gallery: "*Do it in two trips!*"

LYDIA

Claude is also looking forward to tonight's tenor. A young Texan, Jared Colbert.

CLAUDE

Sings like a billygoat —

LYDIA

— which is why we've brought earplugs —

CLAUDE

— but what a gorgeous man.

LYDIA

— and binoculars.

CLAUDE

When he rips off his shirt to face that firing squad, every opera glass in the house flies up in an instant. They never did that for Pavarotti.

(Offering his arm to LYDIA as they depart:)

Well, Lydia, shall we?

ROBERTA

Sylvan!

SYLVAN

(Joining ROBERTA in her office:)

Roberta. Remember you said Ed and I should work up some violin duets for his next show? We have a whole program ready, including the Beethoven *Kreutzer*.

ROBERTA

That's wonderful, Sylvan, but not why —

SYLVAN

Also you and I should do some Mahler songs someday.

ROBERTA

You know I don't sing any more.

SYLVAN

Best *Rückert Lieder* I've ever heard.

ROBERTA

Sylvan: these playlists for your modern music show. *Pli selon pli* by Boulez, Schoenberg's *Erwartung*, the Alban Berg Chamber Concerto. Then three times in one month for this Elliott Carter thing.

SYLVAN

Right, the *Concerto for Orchestra*. Amazing piece. Incredibly difficult to play, can't possibly be absorbed in one hearing. So I'll play it in three contexts: Carter's own development, American music of the time, other concertos for orchestra —

ROBERTA

Very clever, Sylvan, but your ratings —

SYLVAN

I thought that didn't matter!

ROBERTA

Now it does. I can't have our listeners turning the dial after ten seconds.

SYLVAN

So now I should play only innocuous stuff like *Appalachian Spring* and the *Firebird*?

ROBERTA

That would be a start.

SYLVAN

Can I still do my Schoenberg program next Friday?

ROBERTA

Just don't mention Schenker theory. And once for the Carter. Ed!

(SYLVAN exits; then ED takes his place.)

All right, Ed. How many prospects are in the pipeline?

ED

Ten, fifteen

ROBERTA

And how many ready to sign? Pick your ripest fruit.

ED

Probably Bay Shore Gardens. It's this group of upscale seaside properties. Great campaign. Dorian's written this elegant theme — strings, oboe, harp —

ROBERTA

I don't care if it's for three contrabassoons and a xylophone. When can you close?

ED

A week, maybe two —

ROBERTA

I'll give you three days.

ED

I can't promise —

ROBERTA

Two, then. That's all.

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF SCENE)

ACT ONE
Scene Four

AT RISE: Next morning (Saturday). ROBERTA and LYDIA are having coffee in the lounge.

ROBERTA
After that, all I wanted was a stiff drink.

LYDIA
I would have emptied the liquor cabinet. How old is Godfrey Junior?

ROBERTA
Twenty-eight.

LYDIA
Much too old.

ROBERTA

Ron would review us and say, "Berta, these numbers are terrible, you've got to step up," and then after dinner and drinks it would be back to, "Don't worry about a thing, Roberta, keep doing what you're doing." But now we have to at least break even, so I tell Sylvan to back off his avant garde stuff, I tell Ed to close his best prospects, and all I hear are excuses.

Men. LYDIA

Men. ROBERTA

LYDIA

Is anyone safe?

ROBERTA

Claude most likely. Ed for his piano music, you for the opera. But not your early music. Sylvan, not at all.

LYDIA

I can't make heads or tails of the music he plays, but I'd never want to see him leave —

ROBERTA

I'd never want to see any of us leave —

LYDIA

Even Claude?

ROBERTA

Even Claude. It's bad enough dealing with these middle-aged men who can't accept being managed by a woman. But now I must report to a child with an M.B.A. who's got Daddy issues and thinks he knows everything.

LYDIA

So what are you going to do?

ROBERTA

I'd rather pretend none of this never happened. But I'm not giving the little bastard the satisfaction of seeing us fail. I'll give him his business plan, and I'll make this our most profitable quarter yet without sacrificing any of you.

LYDIA

Ambitious.

ROBERTA

But I'll also have my lawyer comb every syllable of that contract. Precedent has to count for something. And I'll contact Ron to call off his pit bull.

LYDIA

What if he won't?

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF SCENE)

ACT ONE
Scene Five

AT RISE:

Sometime after. GODFREY enters.

GODFREY

You know that crown jewels malarkey my dad keeps feeding Roberta? Well, at home he hardly listened to the stuff, and whenever he dragged us all to a concert he mostly fell asleep. So it wasn't so much he liked classical music, he just thought he was supposed to like it.

Which meant Roberta's music was like something way up in the clouds which couldn't be touched, and Roberta this spoiled little princess who never had any chores so she wouldn't soil her pretty white dress.

This is what my dad didn't get. It's not I'm some kind of son-of-a-bitch wants to put people out of work. It's not even that I don't like classical music. If classical made me money, I'd like classical just fine. But you want to be a good businessman, you gotta get tough on your weakest performers, otherwise the whole structure collapses. It's like when I used to work landscaping college summers. You pruned the sick branches from the trees, so the healthy could survive.

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF SCENE)

ACT ONE

Scene Six

AT RISE:

A few days later. CLAUDE and SYLVAN are sitting in the lounge.

CLAUDE

So you admit there's a rift between composers and audiences.

SYLVAN

Of course, Claude. That was never in question.

CLAUDE

But instead of blaming the composers, you attack the poor embattled audience for its unwillingness to embrace this cacophony you call music! Stockhausen, Boulez, Berio, the aptly named Luigi Nono. Even your boy Carter admitted half the reason he enjoyed his first *Rite of Spring* was that half the audience walked out. And it's this contempt for the listener that leads these charlatans to write incoherent noise the poseurs pretend to enjoy, but which the average listener recognizes instantly as a fraud.

SYLVAN

So now I'm a poseur, Claude?

CLAUDE

No, Sylvan, of course not you. But take this fellow you like so much, Karlheinz Stockhausen. Heavens, what a name: *Stockhausen*! You know what old Tommy Beecham said about Stockhausen: he never conducted any of it, but he'd certainly trodden in some! Marvelous aphorist, that Beecham. You'll recall that quip on the sound of Lydia's beloved harpsichord: "Two skeletons copulating on a tin roof in a thunderstorm." Very clever, though I don't quite grasp the mechanics.

SYLVAN

You know what Beecham said about Beethoven.

CLAUDE

No. Honestly I don't, Sylvan. What did he say?

SYLVAN

He said the 7th is “like a lot of yaks jumping about.”

CLAUDE

Yaks.

SYLVAN

Jumping about.

CLAUDE

Is that what yaks do?

SYLVAN

I don’t know. I’ve never met one.

CLAUDE

Well, who cares what Beecham said? Lousy conductor anyway.

SYLVAN

He did a superb *Magic Flute* —

CLAUDE

(To ROBERTA, who has entered with some papers:)

Ah, Roberta. Sylvan and I were having a learned discussion about yaks.

ROBERTA

Never mind that now. Gentlemen, we have a problem. Do either of you know about this?

SYLVAN

“This” being?

CLAUDE

Can’t say I do.

ROBERTA

“This” being that for two days straight, I’ve been bombarded by phone calls, texts, and e-mails all protesting the imminent closing of this station.

CLAUDE

The station is closing?

ROBERTA

No, Claude, the station is not closing! But someone is spreading rumors to that effect. And our new director Mr. Godfrey believes the intention is to ridicule upper management.

CLAUDE

A most laudable intention.

ROBERTA

So neither of you have any knowledge of these emails?

CLAUDE

No, but I would look at young Jamie Massengill in engineering. I don't trust him; he wears a mustache.

SYLVAN

Roberta, can we read some?

ROBERTA

You can read the whole stack if you like. Just give them back to Jackie for filing.

(Exiting, to herself:)

But if it's not one of you — no, it couldn't be! Yaks!

(LYDIA appears at one side of the stage.)

LYDIA

Of course it could, and who other but the decrepit old woman who plays anemic Renaissance masses every Sunday while half the world is sleeping off its Saturday night drunk? Let Roberta try to appease young Godfrey, or turn to Ron and her lawyer for all the good that would do. But there was no way I was going down without a fight. And so last Sunday, in between the Machaut Mass and a group of Dufay motets, I spilled the beans to my tiny listening public. Subtly, of course. A mere intimation of changes to come. And next thing, the social media were exaggerating wildly, just as I hoped. But what could I lose? Obviously I'd be one of the first to go, the old fossil with her dried-up tits and sour disposition. "Poor Lydia! of course we can't keep her, but she'll get a little severance and her social security, so she'll live out her few remaining years with enough for the rent and her weekly bowl of rice!" So let them fire me if they want. They'll find there's still a lot of pepper in this tomato.

(more)

LYDIA (contd.)

As for those emails, most were deadly dull, one (composed pseudonymously by *moi*) poked wicked fun at Claude, and one was about to change Sylvan's life.

(LYDIA exits.)

SYLVAN

(Reading:)

"Hi. My name is Noah Brock and I am 17 years old."

CLAUDE

Underage. A pity.

SYLVAN

"I'm not what you'd call cool. I'm like your typical skinny teenage mall rat — "

NOAH

(Emerging at one side of the stage.)

"— typical skinny teenage mall rat with dyed spiked hair and an earring. My brother calls me the Human Salamander. So you wouldn't expect a kid like me would spend his Friday nights listening to 'Modern Times' on the radio."

CLAUDE

I wouldn't expect anyone —

SYLVAN

Claude!

NOAH

"Three years ago, I just hung around all day while my folks kept saying how having me was a mistake, they should've tossed me in the trash and just kept my kid brother Brandon who plays football and knocks up cheerleaders and all that typical teenage stuff. Then one night it got so bad, I ran up to my room, I found this music on the radio. Very slow, soft, with these drumbeats, a chorus —

SYLVAN

Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms*.

NOAH

Right! And after it was over, I wasn't mad at anyone anymore, I was in some far off place where nobody could bother me, not my parents, not even Brandon. So next day I stole some money from my mom's purse, I bought the CD, I listened to it all day on my headphones, and I decided right then I wanted to write music too. Which is what I've been doing these past three years. So when I heard the station was closing, I wanted to do something — write an e-mail, come down —

(NOAH has by now joined the others. He carries two CDs
and some scores, which he lays on the piano.)

And here I am. I don't even know how I got here.

CLAUDE

Magic of the theater!

NOAH

I know who you are!

CLAUDE

Of course you do. Claude Feierstein, host of "Feierstein Chats" and —

NOAH

No, not you. You're Sylvan Phillips!

SYLVAN

Unfortunately —

NOAH

I'm Noah. Noah Brock. And this is the station.

SYLVAN

Yes, the wondrous place where we disseminate classical music of all shapes and sizes to our ever-dwindling audience.

CLAUDE

Speak for yourself, Sylvan.

SYLVAN

Thank you, Claude. So you say you're a composer, Noah. Do you plan this as a career, or is it just something you enjoy?

NOAH

"Enjoy"? I enjoy pizza. I enjoy my skateboard. But I don't have to eat pizza or go skateboarding every day. I have to compose. Like we're having a class on the Civil War or some dopey poem by Robert Frost, and I'm pretending to listen but actually I'm writing notes when the teacher isn't looking. I don't know how, I don't know why, but it's like this music is always bubbling up from me. It's like my mom's Sunday stew on the stove. It's mostly steam, but every couple of minutes a bubble pops, I reach in to catch it, and I say: "Gotcha!"

SYLVAN

Well. And how did you learn all this? You must've had good teachers at school.

NOAH

No, the teachers there suck. Like the chorus guy's deaf, the band guy's blind, the piano lady's —

SYLVAN

Dumb?

NOAH

They're all dumb.

CLAUDE

If anyone's interested, I'm Claude Feierstein, well-known host of —

SYLVAN

Claude, we're having a nice talk here.

CLAUDE

A nice talk. Far be it from me to intrude on a nice talk. Very well, if I'm needed, I will be in the library, preparing my next "Feierstein Chat." In the library.

(CLAUDE leaves.)

NOAH

There was one good teacher there, the theory teacher Mr. Fiske. He doesn't understand my music, but he told me about this young composers contest, which I entered and I won fourth place, Most Promising. So I thought maybe four people entered, but I asked and it was 178!

SYLVAN

That's — most promising. Your parents must have been proud.

NOAH

My parents? I didn't even tell my parents. My parents think I'm this ugly skinny freak who dyes his hair and writes this weird music nobody understands. It's like my mom's always going, "Why don't you have a game of one-on-one with Brandon. That's why we put up that net." Well, screw you, mom. Why don't any of you listen to my music? And then my dad gets all mad when I don't join in their stupid sports talk at dinner. Like I'm supposed to be Superjock Brandon who's all about who won the game and what coach said about his swing and let's watch some moron getting himself killed doing 200 miles an hour on NASCAR! Don't they understand, if I'm not saying anything it's 'cause I've got this whole world racing around my head and I've got to write down what I'm hearing after dessert. And they'll never know because they don't give a crap about me. I hate my family. I hate my brother, I hate adults. OK, most adults. Not you.

SYLVAN

Noah, I really don't know how I can help / you —

NOAH

/ Oh, shoot! I told myself, "Don't get yourself all worked up; he doesn't care about your pathetic life story." It's just that, I've been listening to you so long — I sorta think of you as a friend.

SYLVAN

Why thank you, Noah. Sitting in that broadcast booth, we never know who's listening. Claude says we're merely disembodied voices floating on the electromagnetic ether. Claude's very poetic. Me, I imagine a different person each night who might want to hear some Bartók or Boulez. But never a green-haired teenager.

NOAH

So you're not mad?

SYLVAN

I have a boy of 17 myself. Now then, Noah. What can I really do for you?

NOAH

Maybe look at my music? Tell me if I have a chance, or should I just spend my life slinging burgers for Brandon and his dates?

SYLVAN

I had much the same question at your age —

NOAH

You compose too? You never said on the radio.

SYLVAN

I don't talk about it much, but when I was 17, I had a portfolio of mediocre compositions that may have been a tad less inept than my competitors' mediocre compositions. And since that portfolio led to a conservatory degree in composition, I suppose I can legally call myself a composer.

NOAH

Wow. So how did you get started? Some piece you heard on the radio too?

SYLVAN

No, actually it was all about a girl.

NOAH

Yeah?

SYLVAN

I was 11. I knew nothing about music. But since Janie Lowner, with her light blonde hair and little budding breasts, was always reading books about composers, I decided I'd be a composer too.

NOAH

That is a very cool story. Do you still compose?

SYLVAN

Haven't written a note for 15 years. My last piece was designed to be completely aleatoric. Aleatoric? Random, chance. So picture a woodwind-brass octet arranged around a set of timpani like the tentacles of a giant octopus. A 64-page score, which the performers would read from computer monitors. And a random generator that controls which pages they see, in which order, and when the piece starts and ends. I named the piece *Octopoda*, and the result was a completely random structure in which the most insignificant element of almost any performance, the page turner, controls the entire design.

NOAH

Cool! Can I hear it?

SYLVAN

I wish you could. Unfortunately, after I came up with this ingenious framework, I had no idea what notes to write.

NOAH

That's a biggie.

SYLVAN

You see, I tend to plan what comes before and after each section in a piece.

NOAH

And since this piece is random, every section could have 63 befores and 63 afters.

SYLVAN

Exactly! Takes a composer to understand. Right, Claude?

CLAUDE

(Who has entered to get coffee.)

Why don't you write some nice songs to texts by Emily Dickinson?

SYLVAN

It's been done. Can we help you, Claude?

CLAUDE

Tell me, young man, do you enjoy any music besides this debased modern cacophony Sylvan has poured into your impressionable ears?

NOAH

I like Mahler, Brahms, some Wagner. But Mr. Fiske gave me *Parsifal* and it was really slow and boring.

CLAUDE

Indeed. Though if they replaced the Flower Maidens with a line of go-go boys in G-strings, one could at least tolerate the second act.

SYLVAN

Claude, he's only 17!

CLAUDE

Old enough to have heard of Flower Maidens.

NOAH

You know who I really don't like? Mozart. Mr. Fiske keeps saying "give it time," but it's still boring.

CLAUDE

I've given it 60 years and I still loathe Mozart.

NOAH

You do, Mr. —?

CLAUDE

Feierstein, Claude Feierstein. Renowned host of "Magic Feierstein Music" for children and "Feierstein Chats" for adults.

NOAH

Oh yeah! I heard your show once.

CLAUDE

Once?

NOAH

Wow, this is so cool! So you don't like Mozart too! Hey give me five, Mr. F!
(Offers his upraised palm. CLAUDE looks at him
uncertainly, then shakes hands.)

Oops.

CLAUDE

Sylvan, despite this young man's crudity of expression, he does seem bright enough to realize that Mozart is mostly pitifully orchestrated, dainty tinkling music for elegant ladies in powdered wigs and little black beauty spots, balancing their teacups at garden parties with outstretched pinkies.

NOAH

Yeah. What he said.

SYLVAN

Mozart is too subtle for Claude, Noah.

CLAUDE

You can keep your damned subtleties, Sylvan.

(Playing to NOAH, who finds this hilarious.)

Real men like Noah and me, we like our music bold and brassy, right, Noah?

Now you take Wolfie the Wimp; he wouldn't use a twombone if his widdle ass depended on it!

SYLVAN

The statue's music from *Don / Giovanni* —

CLAUDE

/ All right, once!

SYLVAN

No, also in the Requiem, the C minor mass, *Idomeneo*. . . . Of course their first well-known use in the symphony is Beethoven's 5th. But there's an earlier example by a forgotten Swedish composer —

CLAUDE

Sylvan, must you be so pedantic?

SYLVAN

Noah, would you like some lunch?

NOAH

Sure. Where are we going?

CLAUDE

There's the Jade Dragon on Wetmore, where we can feast on moo shu pork while making fun of Mozart together.

SYLVAN

Thank you, Claude, we'll be fine.

CLAUDE

Very well! Then I will make fun of Mozart — by myself.

SYLVAN

Noah, bring your scores with you. I'm leaving for the day.

NOAH

So what did I do with them?

(CLAUDE points to the piano.)

Jeez. My mom says if my head wasn't attached —

CLAUDE

Yo-Yo Ma once left a priceless cello in the trunk of a New York taxi. See, now you have something in common with a real musician.

NOAH

Yeah . . . Do you want to hear my music too? Which CD do you want? They're both the same.

CLAUDE

Surprise me.

SYLVAN

Pizza or sushi, Noah?

NOAH

Isn't sushi like raw fish? Am I gonna get sick — ?

SYLVAN

Pizza then. Come.

NOAH

(Starting to leave with SYLVAN:)

Sylvan, could I ask something? You know that girl, the one with the light blonde hair and little budding — ?

SYLVAN

Oh, Janie. Never noticed me. She married the high school quarterback; then three years later they divorced.

NOAH

Yeah, it always goes like that.

(Referring to CLAUDE:)

And is he, like, uh . . . ?

SYLVAN

Yes, Noah. Yes, he is.

ROBERTA

(Emerging from her office as SYLVAN and NOAH depart.)

I thought Sylvan's son had blond hair.

CLAUDE

You might say Sylvan has found a new son. Perhaps he'll like this one — better.

ROBERTA

Just so you know: the person who instigated these e-mails has confessed, and as of ten minutes ago is no longer employed by Capriccio Radio.

CLAUDE

But Roberta, she's a grand old lady, your first employee, our very dear friend —

ROBERTA

And how did you know Lydia was behind this? So help me, Claude, if you two were in collusion —

CLAUDE

But what about her shows? She's got "Matinee at the Opera" in an hour.

ROBERTA

We'll plug something in. And don't give me that look. I had no alternative.

CLAUDE

There are always alternatives.

(LYDIA emerges, followed by ED carrying a heavy box.)

ROBERTA

Lydia, how could you!

LYDIA

Berta, as an operagoer of thirty years you must remember Brünnhilde, who in defying Wotan did what he secretly most wanted.

(ROBERTA shakes her head "No.")

Don't blame Claude for this. It was my idea, I knew the consequences, and at 79 years of age *je ne regrette rien*. But now while I'm sitting home with my cats and my memories, each Sunday at 9 someone else will introduce the masses of Josquin des Prez to the listeners of this station.

ED

Lydia, I apologize, but I was asked to ensure you are taking only personal items, and to escort you out of the building right away.

LYDIA

(Giving ED her hand, as she quotes from *Streetcar*.)

My Rosenkavalier! Allow me a moment.

(LYDIA approaches the still life in the conference room, and traces the violin and roses on it as if painting them. During this:)

ROBERTA

Bay Shore Gardens.

ED

Looking good. Still working on the arrangement, the voiceover —

ROBERTA

The hell with the voiceover. What are the numbers?

ED

Here's the contract.

ROBERTA

Get another 20 percent and lock in one year.

ED

I don't know / if that's doable —

GODFREY (offstage)

/ Roberta!

JACKIE (offstage)

Sir, you can't go in there. You need an /appointment —

GODFREY

(First offstage to JACKIE, then entering.)

/ Do you know who I am, young lady? Roberta, get rid of these people, we need to talk.

ROBERTA

James. How lovely of you to barge in. Tea?

JACKIE (offstage)

Roberta, I tried to stop him —

ROBERTA

Don't worry, dear, he thinks he's important.

GODFREY

Roberta, I'm in no mood to fool around. And I don't drink tea.

ROBERTA

You should, James, it will calm your nerves. But where are my manners? Claude, Ed, Lydia, this is Mr. Godfrey the Younger, who is — who is — well, I'm sure he's something.

ED

(Offering hand, which is ignored:)

Nice to meet you, sir.

GODFREY

And why is this person still here?

ROBERTA

Mr. Godfrey: Ms. Morolla is not only my ex-employee, but also my very dear friend.

LYDIA

If I may: my name is Lydia Morolla, and I single-handedly attempted to create a groundswell of public support, in hopes of counteracting your efforts to sabotage this station.

GODFREY

Sabotage?

LYDIA

*Ragazzino, taci.*¹ And since I knowingly acted in violation of company policy, I have resigned my position and will be leaving immediately.

ROBERTA

Lydia, how could you!

¹ "Be quiet, little boy!"

LYDIA

(Embracing ROBERTA:)

Tranquilla, carissima!

(LYDIA squeezes CLAUDE's hand, then turns to ED:)

Shall we?

(To GODFREY:)

Che un giovane affascinante.²

GODFREY

What did she say?

ROBERTA

Claude, help them.

(CLAUDE takes a few light items from the box, then marches behind LYDIA and the still over-burdened ED to the exit.)

GODFREY

So this is how you manage your staff.

ROBERTA

I knew nothing about this; she acted entirely on her own.

GODFREY

She should know not to discuss internal matters on air. Your fault for not controlling her.

ROBERTA

But you should be pleased, James. Look at how we're trimming staff.

GODFREY

I've got a board of directors that wants to know why one of my managers has allowed an employee to publicly embarrass this corporation. And seeing how you run this place, it's time for me to get a lot more hands on.

ROBERTA

Two weeks ago I had a month to make a business plan.

² "What a charming young man!"

GODFREY

That was two weeks ago. And already I've got a couple of board members who are not your friends suggesting it's time to rethink the mission for this station.

ROBERTA

You can't do that without a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority —

GODFREY

That's right. Which is why you're the main topic on Thursday's board meeting.

ROBERTA

Your father would never —

GODFREY

I'm not my father. So find me some office space starting Monday. I want to interview everyone on your staff. And don't forget that logo.

(Just before leaving:)

Oh. And Roberta, don't go behind my back talking to my father. This is my company now.

ROBERTA

I can see that, James.

(ROBERTA sits at her desk for a moment, then turns on the station monitor. We hear the "*Vissi d'arte*" from *Tosca*; then the music fades to underscore LYDIA'S VOICE.)

LYDIA'S VOICE

"*Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore.*" "I've lived for art, I've lived for love." It was Maria Jeritza who first sang that aria prone on the floor, after her Scarpia threw her there and Puccini said to "keep that in."

ROBERTA

Lydia!

LYDIA'S VOICE

Please don't interrupt. You're hearing the renowned soprano Erica Ruffina; and this is Lydia Morolla, who is sitting down (though not on the floor) to bring you a *Tosca* retrospective on the Capriccio / Radio station —

ROBERTA

/ Lydia, why are you on air? You've been fired!

LYDIA'S VOICE

Of course I've been fired. This is just a private valedictory for you, love.

ROBERTA

(ROBERTA reads an e-mail.)

Damn!

LYDIA'S VOICE

(As the aria cuts off.)

Bad news, dear?

ROBERTA

(Turning her computer monitor in LYDIA'S direction:)

Read.

LYDIA'S VOICE

Too small.

(Rolling her eyes, ROBERTA moves the monitor closer.)

Ah. E-mail. Nasty modern invention. "Roberta, whether I agree with James's decisions, the job is now his and I can't undermine his authority. All my best, Ron." So much for calling off his pit bull.

ROBERTA

Spare me, Lyddie.

LYDIA'S VOICE

Ever hear from your lawyer?

ROBERTA

Don't rub it in. So what do I do now?

LYDIA'S VOICE

Up to you, dear. But surely if I can stir the pot a little, so can you.

(Her voice fading:)

And now back to Act Two of *Tosca* —

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF SCENE)

GODFREY

Not from what I hear. Actually I got some complaints last Christmas party. Janet Morris, runs our country station: "Several of my staff heard this drunken loudmouth refer to our music as 'harmless little ditties,' 'twang-twang hillbilly crap,' 'monstrous mewlings for the great unwashed,'" etc. You deny this?

CLAUDE

A few pleasantries —

GODFREY

Same hoity-toity our-shit-don't-stink attitude I get from all you classical types. Look, Claude. I've got eight radio stations. I can't have one set of announcers thinking only their music is the best and all the others suck. 'Cause there's people out there, Claude, they love their music maybe more than life itself, maybe even more than you love yours.

CLAUDE

I consider myself a very tolerant person —

GODFREY

I'm going to tell you a story. Before I came here, I spent four years managing Carlos Suarez, in my opinion the greatest country singer of his time. Ever hear of him?

No, I didn't think so. Well, we were touring all these little towns, 'cause Carlos wanted everyone should have a chance to hear him. So one morning we pull into this Alabama truck stop, and this skinny kid behind the counter, 18, 19, scraggly little beard, well he sees Carlos and he goes, "Hey, man, I'm comin' to your concert tonight." So Carlos goes, "Cool, where ya sittin'," and the kid points way up, you know the cheap seats, and Carlos he puts on this wicked grin and says, "Oh no you're not," and he comps the kid four house seats fifth row center, backstage passes, steak dinner on us, and you wouldn't believe this kid's face.

So the kid brings his friend, their girlfriends, Carlos dedicates sets to the girlfriends, and afterwards we give them gift bags — posters, photos, all his CDs, hand-signed, the works. And just that morning here was this nobody behind a counter frying bacon and eggs, but that night he cleaned up, nice threads, boots, a little style, and the kid, he kept shaking Carlos's hand and saying over and over, "Best day of my life, man, best fuckin' day of my life."

(more)

GODFREY (contd.)

And I only saw it then, the kid had these beautiful ice-blue eyes, glowing like sapphires, and Carlos he says to me, "Four little angels, Jim. I just saw four little angels come down from heaven." And are you going to tell me what that kid and his friends went through doesn't matter because it's not your artsy-fartsy highfalutin classical music? You understand me, Claude? Anything you want to say?

CLAUDE

...

GODFREY

And there's one more thing. One of the engineers, this young guy Jamie Massengill, has complained you were making unwelcome advances.

CLAUDE

Merely friendly gestures towards a recently hired colleague —

GODFREY

Not how he took it. And that's not the first time. In any case he's requested a transfer, and until that goes through just leave him alone.

So I'm warning you, Claude. You want to keep this job, you clean up your act.

(Lights dim briefly, and when they come back CLAUDE is gone and SYLVAN is seated, listening to Schoenberg's Piano Piece, Op. 19, No. 2.)

GODFREY

Sounds like the showerhead dripping in my bathroom.

SYLVAN

I know, it's not for everybody. There was a time I was stopped in traffic listening to Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* when the driver next to me shouted, "Turn that stuff off!" Though he used a stronger synonym, of course. But I try to remain open to all kinds of music: classical, rock, early, modern, familiar, unknown —

GODFREY

Country?

SYLVAN

Definitely. I love Hank Williams, Johnny Cash, Loretta Lynn —

GODFREY

Carlos Suarez? I was his manager four years before I started here.

SYLVAN

I know. I have two of his albums — *Carlos Plays Nashville* and *Pretty Texas Palominos*. Great stuff. The title cut from *Palominos* —

GODFREY

His favorite too. And I bet you'd love *Arizona Sunset*. See, that's the kind of music I like. Simple music. Music for everyday people, their joys, their pains. Of course one of your colleagues hasn't even heard of Carlos. Probably hasn't even heard of Johnny Cash; only what's high in the clouds is good enough for him.

SYLVAN

I happen to know that same announcer is a secret fanatic for Broadway show music. But don't tell him I said so.

GODFREY

Very interesting. But not why you're here. I have to decide who to keep based on ratings. And now with the old lady gone, yours are the lowest on staff —

SYLVAN

Roberta has always given me considerable latitude —

GODFREY

Roberta reports to me now. See, you've got three shows. "Modern Times," where you play this wacky modern stuff. "Unsung Heroes," about music no one's ever heard of. Which is not good, 'cause people like things they know already. And then "Just a Theory," with all these intellectual topics every week. "What is a Subdominant?" "Fun with Fugues." Yeah, my favorite thing on a Saturday night. I listened to some of it, Sylvan, and half the time I don't know what the hell you're talking about. "What is a Subdominant?" Damned if I know.

SYLVAN

It's a very familiar sound if it's just identified for you —

GODFREY

So it's identified for me. If I can identify a crankshaft and a piston rod does that make me a better driver? Why don't you just enjoy your music without thinking about it so much?

SYLVAN

Because I enjoy thinking about it. I once analyzed the second movement of the Beethoven F major quartet from op. 59, to discover he modulates through every key on the chromatic scale except the simple subdominant. I found that fascinating.

GODFREY

On your own time. I can't have this dead airspace when nobody is listening.

SYLVAN

Actually, the other day I met a young man who decided to become a composer just from listening to my "Modern Times" show.

GODFREY

One listener. Doesn't help your numbers.

SYLVAN

Forgive me, but is everything always numbers? If one person listening to my show makes a genuine connection with the music, doesn't that matter more than twenty playing Vivaldi in the background while they're dusting the furniture?

GODFREY

But I can't quantify that. Sylvan, you're a smart guy. I respect you. But when I'm rank-ordering my people, all's I've got are the ratings. You ever thought of teaching college?

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF SCENE)

ACT ONE
Scene Eight

AT RISE: Tuesday, the lounge. SYLVAN and ED are playing the third movement from Beethoven's Violin Sonata No. 5 in F, Op. 24. ED breaks off.

ED
Something's not right.

SYLVAN
Ed, you have to count.

ED
I am counting! Sounds like you're putting in some extra rests.

SYLVAN
I strongly doubt that —
(After glancing again at the music.)
I'm sorry, you're right. I play the downbeat, you follow. Stupid mistake —

ED
You all right?

SYLVAN
I'm fine.

ED
Start again?

SYLVAN
Actually, would you mind? I'm not in the best — besides, I'm expecting Noah —

ED
(Loosening bow and packing violin:)
Sure.

SYLVAN

He raked me over the coals. My ratings are too low, I should look for a teaching job. But how do I start in academia now? An article on a Beethoven quartet 10 years ago, a conference paper on Stockhausen's *Refrain* —

ED

He can't fire everyone.

SYLVAN

Tell that to Lydia.

ED

Maybe Lydia was enough to thin the ranks. He said he respects you. You've stopped playing Elliott / Carter —

SYLVAN

/ He said I was behind the eight ball. I had to Google that —

ED

You had to Google — ?

(To himself:)

Cool.

(Again to SYLVAN:)

It's from billiards, means you're in a difficult position. See, if the eight ball is between the cue ball and the ball you're trying / to hit —

SYLVAN

/ I know what it means now!

ED

But he didn't fire you.

SYLVAN

No. Roberta's giving a presentation to the board, in hopes of saving us all. And she's busting my chops to write some justification —

ED

She wants me to close more accounts this week than usual for three months. Sylvan, we'll get through this.

SYLVAN

I hope so.

ED

So what's Claude up to?

SYLVAN

Nothing I can tell, except now that Lydia's gone he's more irascible than ever. He spoke to me just an hour ago: "And why should I not —"

CLAUDE

(Entering apart:)

And why should I not be? I sense no outrage from you, Sylvan.

SYLVAN

Claude, she violated a clearly stated company policy.

CLAUDE

Clearly stated, not so clearly meant.

SYLVAN

What on earth does that mean?

CLAUDE

It means that instead of terminating Lydia, Roberta should have rewarded her for conspicuous bravery.

SYLVAN

How do you know Roberta wasn't ordered to fire her?

CLAUDE

You know this for a fact?

SYLVAN

No. But does that sound like Roberta?

CLAUDE

Takes a crisis to show one's true colors. If Roberta was so ordered, she should have refused. If she wasn't, she betrayed her friend. And if it weren't for Lydia, that green-haired protégé you so eagerly await would never have set foot here.

SYLVAN

He could have contacted me another way.

CLAUDE

(Exiting:)

Could have, did not.

SYLVAN

And where is that boy? Twenty minutes late.

ED

Must be a reasonable explanation.

SYLVAN

If I can be on time, so can he.

ED

Sylvan, do you really think he'd blow you off?

SYLVAN

All right, all right, maybe you're right.

(Pause.)

So what about *your* meeting?

ED

Good. Cordial. Jim and I are looking to reach beyond traditional listeners.

SYLVAN

Now that I agree with. For example whenever I explain what Schoenberg meant by *Sprechstimme*, I always play some Bob Dylan.

ED

More basic, Sylvan.

SYLVAN

All right, the Stones then. *Sympathy for the Devil*.

ED

I mean, how do we attract younger listeners when the whole classical generation is dying out. You go to any concert today; half the audience are on canes and walkers. Mostly male, mostly white. This is what Jim and I were talking about. Like show the kid who's into metal we've got exciting music with drums and a beat too. *Rite of Spring*, *Carmina Burana*, *Iron Foundry*, *Akhmaten* by Philip Glass, Christopher Rouse's *Gorgon* — . I'm calling the show "Orchestra Rocks" —

SYLVAN

Right! They'll listen to a few loud pieces if you can get them to tune in, then it's back to metal.

ED

Someone once said Beethoven was heavy metal from the early 19th century.

SYLVAN

That's such bull. Ed, your show — it's a lousy idea.

ED

Thanks. So you're the only allowed to have ideas, Sylvan? What's your solution? More technical discussions of *Sprechstimme*? So maybe they won't become obsessed with our music 24/7. Maybe they just want a few pieces from time to time. What's wrong with that?

SYLVAN

Ed, I have no solution! I don't know how we find this music, or rather this music finds us. Early exposure? Claude's show for kids? do kids even listen? When Jeremy was 10, I'd take him to concerts, he'd sit playing his video games, he even seemed to enjoy the music. And now that he's a teenage monster, those hours of torture in the concert hall are the first thing he brings up. It's as if we say, we've got this treasure for you, this shining Fabergé egg yours for the taking, and they say: "Nah."

ED

We have to try.

SYLVAN

How? By programming crap like *Iron Foundry* and *Carmina Burana*?

ED

It's not crap if there are people who like it. You think I like everything I program? I don't like Brahms!

SYLVAN

You don't — but you play him all the time.

ED

That's right, I play him all the time. Because this station is not about *me*, Sylvan, it's about *them*. And if there's some fat old guy with thick glasses, diabetes, and
(more)

ED (contd.)

bad breath, sitting on his cheap red leather chair sipping a gin and tonic while waiting to hear the Brahms first Piano Quartet, then there's nothing I'd rather do than play that guy the Brahms first Piano Quartet.

NOAH

(Who has entered unseen, today with orange hair.)

Can I say what I think?

ED

I'd like to hear —

SYLVAN

You certainly may not. And where have you been? Coloring your hair again, it seems.

NOAH

So I missed the 29 bus and it's a 12-minute walk to the 26. But my phone was dead so I couldn't call, and the busses, they're supposed to come three times an hour, but sometimes they don't even stop —

SYLVAN

All right, we all know the busses. But if you had been five minutes later, I would have walked out that / door —

ED

/ Sylvan, you would have waited all / afternoon.

NOAH

/ I said I'm sorry —

ROBERTA

(Entering from the elevators.)

A visitor, Sylvan?

SYLVAN

Yes, Roberta. Roberta, this is Noah Brock, who is 17. Noah started composing after hearing my show, and he is among the many who wrote us an e-mail.

ROBERTA

Yes, I remember. Do you know at 17, Noah, Mendelssohn was writing the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture and the Octet. Imagine: a boy that age uncorking such champagne. Sylvan, that assignment?

SYLVAN

I'm working on it, Roberta.

ROBERTA

While you're entertaining visitors?

SYLVAN

I promised Noah last week we would discuss his music —

ROBERTA

This is not the time.

NOAH

So like maybe I should leave? I mean, first I get criticized for being late, then I get criticized for showing up in the first place —

ROBERTA

Don't fret, you're not on the payroll. And thank you for your email.

(Noticing the violin and music:)

Why are you two playing duets now?

SYLVAN

A few sonatas for Ed's show.

ED

As you suggested —

ROBERTA

Not right now. An hour for your visitor, Sylvan. And Ed, you might try selling something —

ED

I'm meeting a prospect at Dianne's for lunch —

ROBERTA

At least someone's being useful.

(more)

ROBERTA (contd.)

(Entering her office, calls reception.)

Any word from Jerome?

JACKIE (voiceover)

I left two messages.

ROBERTA

Leave two more. Evelyn Peters?

JACKIE

Still in Paris.

ROBERTA

(Slamming her door shut.)

Then put her on the next flight home.

SYLVAN

Can't win.

ED

Can't win. Later, Sylvan. Noah, have a good lesson.

(To NOAH as he leaves:)

And don't worry about the hair. Sylvan dyes his too.

NOAH

Who's that guy?

SYLVAN

That guy is Ed Ramsey and my best friend here. He does our chamber music show; he's also our sales manager. Actually most of us wear multiple hats. I'm the librarian. That used to be Claude's job, until we discovered he was hiding all the Stockhausen CDs. Now I have no idea what Claude does.

NOAH

This is all my fault.

SYLVAN

Why is it all your fault?

NOAH

Because if I hadn't been late, she wouldn't have caught you and you could've gotten your work done.

SYLVAN

It would've been something else. Actually, I have something for you. See those scores on the piano? Some duplicates I had lying around. All yours.

NOAH

Really? Oh wow. Strauss's *Don Juan*, *La Mer*, the Beethoven 7th —

SYLVAN

That's the one like yaks jumping about.

NOAH

Huh? And oh my fave, the *Symphony of Psalms*! I don't have any of these. I don't have many scores at all. Thank you.

SYLVAN

A true composer must have his own library of scores.

NOAH

Does that mean I'm a true composer?

SYLVAN

That means a true composer must have his own library of scores. All right, we have an hour. I've been reviewing your music.

NOAH

And?

SYLVAN

Well, there's some good news. For example this one, "Skiing in Florida on the Fourth of July" — great title, by the way, like something out of Charles Ives, or Satie — you've handled the counterpoint quite well in spots.

NOAH

Yeah?

SYLVAN

And some lovely tone colors, like this passage for trumpet, viola, celesta, and bassoon. I would have been very happy to write these five measures.

NOAH

One of those “gotcha” moments I told you about.

SYLVAN

Then we have “Mississippi Grapefruit Sherbet,” “South Carolina Palmettos,” “Poor Little Rhode Island,” which is just one note, any duration, any volume, for any instrument —

NOAH

‘Cause it’s such a small state.

SYLVAN

Are you writing a piece for every state in the union?

NOAH

I’ve done the South and New England. Now I’m on to the Rockies.

SYLVAN

Ambitious. But there are some problems with the instrumentation. Your viola can’t play this double stop.

NOAH

Oh! Because both those notes are only on the C string.

SYLVAN

That’s right. Also trombone can’t play this bit legato. Check a slide chart to see why. And do you know how many timpani you need? Have you planned the pedal changes for your harp?

NOAH

I thought the players would do that.

SYLVAN

No. You have to work it out.

NOAH

So if I fixed those things, everything would be cool?

SYLVAN

That would be a start. But there are deeper problems —

NOAH

Oh geez, I see what's coming. It's like in school you write a composition and they say, "Some good ideas, *BUT*." Then it's 14 paragraphs about what a loser you are.

SYLVAN

Noah: did you come here to be praised, or to learn?

(NOAH is silent.)

Now as I said, your pieces all have their moments. But none of them holds together. Take "Skiing." You come up with promising motifs that you never develop. You start the piece with the strings; then 12 bars later they drop out and you switch to a brass quartet. There's no sense of flow or cohesion to your pieces; they're more like sets of unrelated fragments.

NOAH

But I like fragments. Like the cello and piccolo play for two minutes; then a bassoon and a xylophone take over; then maybe a trumpet, triangle, and tuba 'cause they all begin with T. So what if it's a little chaotic. I like chaotic.

SYLVAN

Time out. You see that abstract painting, next to the still life?³

NOAH

I'm not into painting.

SYLVAN

You should be. Now some people might look at that painting and see only fragments. But that black squiggle in the center, see how it speaks to the white squiggle at upper right? And all the diagonal lines. And the circles.

NOAH

All right, the colors. Blue, yellow, red, white — a little black —

SYLVAN

Exactly. And all those elements are held in place by the background. You see if you look closely, there's truly a design.

³ Sylvan could be describing Joan Miró's *Carnival of Harlequin* (1924-25, Albright-Knox Gallery, Buffalo). But since that marvelous work is unlikely to be on loan to the offices of Capriccio Radio, directors can match the dialogue to whatever similar painting the designer comes up with.

NOAH

I guess. But now I'm confused. I show my stuff to Mr. Fiske, he says no one will understand it. I send it to a competition, they give me a prize. I show it to you, you tear it apart. Who am I supposed to believe?

SYLVAN

"Whom" am I / supposed to —

NOAH

Who, whom, I don't know. I guess you, 'cause you know more than the others.

SYLVAN

So anyone who speaks well of your music is mistaken?

NOAH

Aw, come on, Sylvan! You keep playing games with my head. Sometimes I'm so happy about something I wrote I'm bouncing on my bed like a trampoline. Then two minutes later, it all falls apart, I feel like this little beagle puppy we used to have, Brownie, that we couldn't housebreak him. And once he peed on the kitchen floor, and my mom smacked him so hard I heard him screaming in my room. Then after that, he'd walk around slinking his back way down 'cause he felt like such a loser. I mean it was like his whole life was, how can I get through one day without taking a leak.

SYLVAN

Noah, everybody has doubts. Take Stravinsky. Stravinsky finished *The Rake's Progress*; then he broke down because he felt he had nothing left to compose. But he recovered, and so will you. You've got one more year of high school. Apply to a college composition program. I'll write you a reference; get another from this guy Fiske. You'll study ear-training, orchestration, counterpoint, you'll write canons and fugues — best possible training for a composer — and you'll feel more confident because you're mastering your craft.

NOAH

So that's your answer? More school?

SYLVAN

Absolutely!

NOAH

But I don't want more school. I just want to compose. You went to music school, right?

SYLVAN

Of course I did —

NOAH

And how did that help *you* when you stopped composing?

SYLVAN

This is not about me, Noah.

NOAH

It's not? I don't get it, Sylvan. You went to this great music school, you wrote all these canons and fugues, and then you stopped composing. Why did you stop, Sylvan? I can't believe it was some stupid piece about an octopus.

SYLVAN

Composers stop composing for all kinds of reasons. The notes won't come any longer. They can't get performances. They get lazy, they turn to drink. Maybe they lose their drive, their nerve —

NOAH

I don't believe you turned to drink. You don't seem lazy. So what was it, Sylvan? Did you lose your drive, your nerve?

SYLVAN

Maybe I did, Noah, maybe I did.

NOAH

But I don't want to lose mine! And if I go to school and learn all these canons and fugues when I want to write my piece about Mt. Rushmore, what's going to happen to me? I thought I'd come here, you'd say, "Hey, this is really good, Noah! Keep it up, Noah!" But instead the trombone's wrong here, the flute can't play that, I'm not developing anything, and now you want me to learn all this crap I'll never use so I can wind up a quitter like you.

SYLVAN

Noah, that's absurd —

CLAUDE

(Who has entered during the above:)

That's enough, young man.

NOAH

Yeah? Then you say you'd be proud to write those five bars from "Skiing in Florida." So which is it, Sylvan? If my music was such a mess, why did I win that Most Promising award? First contest I entered, no canons and fugues, and I got fourth out of 178! That must mean something, Sylvan!

CLAUDE

That's right. It means you're one of hundreds entering one of hundreds of competitions all over the world. It gives you no right to speak so disrespectfully to this kindly and learned man, who has so generously helped you.

NOAH

Right, he's so learned he's afraid to write a quarter note!

CLAUDE

And who's to say you won't be just as afraid once you discover how cruel the world can be. You win a nugget of recognition and you've talked yourself into a major career.

SYLVAN

You don't have to fight my battles, Claude.

CLAUDE

I choose to fight this one. I will not have this twerp belittle one of the finest colleagues I have ever known. And as for you, boy, you owe Mr. Phillips an abject apology.

NOAH

Why should I? I have my pride!

CLAUDE

Your pride, is it? Your pride? Then I suggest you take your pride, your music, and your orange hair, and proudly make your way towards the elevators.

NOAH

Only if I hear it from him.

(Silence from SYLVAN. As NOAH gathers his own scores:)

Fine! I'm outta here! And some day while you're still hosting a radio show that's going off the air in a month, my *Suite USA* will win a Pew-litzer prize!

CLAUDE

That's "Puhl-itzer."

NOAH

Pulitzer?

CLAUDE

Pulitzer.

NOAH

Oh, who gives a crap!

(Exiting, flinging the scores SYLVAN gave him on the floor:)

And I don't want these either!

SYLVAN

Maybe there's some truth in what he's saying.

CLAUDE

Rot, Sylvan. If he's that ungrateful, you're well rid of him.

SYLVAN

(Picking up the scores:)

I told him these were all duplicates. I didn't tell him I bought the *Symphony of Psalms* especially for him because he likes it so much.

CLAUDE

I understand.

SYLVAN

Maybe I need to be more encouraging, not so analytical.

CLAUDE

Sylvan: I commiserate. But if you want my advice, cut your losses.

SYLVAN

Still, there was a spark there. Not consistent, not mature, but worth nurturing —

CLAUDE

You see, we're both in mourning now. I for Lydia, you for this twerp. Sylvan, would you therefore honor me by drowning our sorrows over a few beers?

SYLVAN

Claude, thank you, but I've got this document, Jeremy's terrorizing the twins, / and —

CLAUDE

/ And you may never get this offer again. Come, we can quarrel over Mozart and Stockhausen, get totally sloshed, and make fun of that preposterous fool of a manager who considers his country ditties the equal of Beethoven's 9th.

SYLVAN

If I don't finish this thing — Oh, why not. Calico or Frenchy's?

CLAUDE

Ah. The tanned and fit Benjamin, he of the green eyes and golden hair, tends bar tonight at Frenchy's.

SYLVAN

What happened to — ?

CLAUDE

Oh Helmut. With the swelling biceps and chocolate hair. Terminated for fraternizing too intimately with the clientele, if you take my drift.

SYLVAN

Claude, if you don't mind my asking — you're getting on in years, Lydia's your only friend. Did you ever think of hooking up with one of those beautiful boys you're always swooning over?

CLAUDE

Good heavens, no. They'd want nothing with a curmudgeonly queer old Jew like me, and ten minutes speaking with any of them I would be hopelessly bored.

SYLVAN

You can't know that —

CLAUDE

Sylvan: you mean well, but I must be adamant. Look but don't touch is my motto; anything beyond leads to trouble. So flip a coin. Frenchy's or Frenchy's? My treat.

SYLVAN

Might as well. Two days until the Board decides our fate.

CLAUDE

Ah, heads it is. So eat, drink, and be merry, for in two days — well, who knows?

(They exit as:)

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF ACT)

ACT TWOScene One

AT RISE:

Next morning (Wednesday). ROBERTA, SYLVAN, ED, and CLAUDE are seated in the conference room.

ED

(Rising to address the audience:)

Mr. Godfrey having completed his review, Roberta summoned the troops to finalize her presentation for next day's board meeting. My role was to show progress in sales. Claude's, I'm not quite sure. Sylvan as our resident intellectual had been asked to make a case for the survival of our station. It should have been fairly simple, but Sylvan being / Sylvan —

SYLVAN

(Reading his paper, slightly hungover.)

/ “And so this idea of a permanent canon was a radical departure when it emerged in the early 19th century, because previously, composers never created ‘works’ intended for posterity, but were expected to produce new music — much like the popular artists of today. But starting roughly with Beethoven, the music thought most worthy of preservation joined the developing canon — while at the same time the musical language expanded to the point, starting with Wagner but most radically with Schoenberg and his followers, that this music still meets resistance from listeners and has not yet been absorbed into the canon as generally understood.”

CLAUDE

Exactly my point, Sylvan.

SYLVAN

Please don't interrupt. “The result is a canon centered above all on nineteenth-century orchestral music” — what I often call “Claude music,” though of course that little joke is not part of my actual paper —

ROBERTA

Good to hear, Sylvan. Is there much more?

SYLVAN

Bear with me, please. "And now let's — let's" — where was I?

ROBERTA

Sylvan, are you well?

SYLVAN

Sorry, not much sleep. Ah. "And now let's add one more essential element — "

CLAUDE

Good God, Sylvan, spare us.

SYLVAN

" — that emerges around 1890: the preservation of music through recorded sound." Would you all pay attention? "Now of course today people experience classical music primarily through recordings. But recording also has abetted the deepening rift between living composers and living audiences. For what better way for a listener to escape the hated music of the present, than to retreat into a private recorded shrine of the past."

CLAUDE

Blaming the audience again.

SYLVAN

No, not blaming — but trying to account for our present impasse, "the effects of which include the decline in amateur music-making, the problem of replacing greying audiences with younger listeners, and even the accusation that this music — whose central canon is primarily the output of dead white European males — is a symptom of white supremacy and prejudice against women and people of color. And all these factors have contributed to a sense of confusion and anxiety among many who care about classical music, because how this impasse will resolve itself, or if it ever will, is anyone's guess." Comments?

ED

Very interesting.

SYLVAN

That's all?

CLAUDE

What Ed means, Sylvan, is that once again we are gobsmacked by the depth of your scholarship and the superiority of your intellect.

SYLVAN

I am simply offering a framework for why classical music has become so marginalized in today's culture. And obviously none of you understands a word I'm saying.

CLAUDE

Sylvan, no one ever does.

ROBERTA

Sylvan, it's wonderful, but I asked you for a few bullet points I can use with the board, not some lengthy dissertation about the sad state of music today.

SYLVAN

I cut this from 3000 to 500 words.

ROBERTA

I don't care if you cut it to five. I'm facing a board tomorrow with a director who's threatening to toss us on the garbage heap, and the last thing I need is a scholarly funeral oration. And there's not a word there about radio.

SYLVAN

Every point was directly relevant to radio.

ROBERTA

Ed?

ED

You both make good points —

CLAUDE

Good God, man, can't you ever take a stand?

ED

Sylvan, it's great, but you can't always keep talking over everybody else's heads. Keep it simple. Say what radio is all about. Like: introducing listeners to new pieces. Or new versions of familiar pieces. Building relations with our audiences. Inspiring a career in music. You of all people should know that.

ROBERTA

Much more like it.

SYLVAN

So have him write the damned thing. And say something about "Orchestra Rocks," or "Adagios for Lovers."

ROBERTA

Temper!

ED

Just suggestions, Sylvan —

SYLVAN

Not very good ones.

CLAUDE

For once Sylvan is / right.

ED

/ Guys, our careers are at stake here.

CLAUDE

Not just our careers. The survival of Western music —

ROBERTA

I wouldn't go *that* far —

CLAUDE

Nonsense. The same thing happening all over the country. This music marginalized, shat upon by those deaf to the greatness of the most glorious productions / of the human soul —

SYLVAN

/ This from someone who despises Bach and Mozart! Not to mention Boulez —

ED

Can we please all stop fighting already! Which side are we all on?

SYLVAN

I put a lot of work into that document —

ROBERTA

Then submit it as an article, and hand me a revision along Ed's lines first thing tomorrow. All right, Sylvan?

SYLVAN

...

ROBERTA

Very well.

(Pause, then smiling sweetly:)

And now Claude, what about your project?

CLAUDE

I would say it is going well.

ROBERTA

Yes. But can you be more specific?

CLAUDE

(Thinking this over:)

Ah. I would say it is going extremely well.

ROBERTA

Thank you, Claude.

CLAUDE

My pleasure.

ROBERTA

All right, Ed. Bay Shore Gardens, Calico, Eastside Hospital — where are we?

ED

I should hear from all three soon. Plus Corner Bookstore, the junior college —

ROBERTA

No. It's too late for "soon." I need answers now. And no matter what I'm doing, tell me once you know.

JACKIE (voiceover on intercom)

Roberta? Jerome Pereira.

ROBERTA

My private line.

(ED leaves. ROBERTA enters her office and shuts the door.)

SYLVAN

"I would say it is going extremely well"?

CLAUDE

Sylvan, in my long history with Frau *Robayrta*, I've found the best approach is to tell her whatever she wants.

SYLVAN

And what was your assignment?

CLAUDE

A trivial but tedious task, donating what we've bought but haven't played in five years to the schools. For the tax break. I put in perhaps an hour a day.

SYLVAN

That's all? When Roberta's been spending hours on the phone with board members, her lawyer, her accountant. Jackie says she's sold most of her stock, liquidated her 401(k), all to raise more cash —

CLAUDE

She'll get clobbered on the taxes.

SYLVAN

And the one time Roberta has asked for our help, this is all you can do.

CLAUDE

Not after what she did to Lydia.

SYLVAN

Lydia's gone! Forget about Lydia!

CLAUDE

She didn't show much liking for your encyclopedia article just now.

SYLVAN

Neither did you!

(Fuming, SYLVAN exits as ED enters.)

ED

Have you seen Roberta?

CLAUDE

No, but I imagine she has.

(CLAUDE exits. ED knocks on ROBERTA's door.)

ROBERTA

(Opening her door, on the phone.)

Jerome, excuse me.

(To ED.)

Don't ever disturb me when my door is shut.

ED

You said I should see you when I had news.

ROBERTA

One moment, Jerome. Fast.

ED

I've got some good news and some not-so-good.

(ROBERTA gives him an exasperated look.)

The good news is: a small deal with Calico Tavern, and an agreement from Bay Shore Gardens. The not-so-good: Bay Shore wants a two-month trial before committing.

ROBERTA

You said a one-year contract.

ED

No, *you* said a one-year contract.

ROBERTA

Ed: call them back, and don't budge until you have one year with two quarters up front.

ED

Roberta, if I push this any harder, I'll lose it completely.

(ED leaves.)

ROBERTA

Damn.

(Into phone:)

Jerome, I'm sorry. I'll offer 20% above last close for the first 200 shares, 10% for the rest. | But I'm giving you far more than they're worth. | Jerome, we've been friends ten years. | I'm sorry, too. See you at the meeting.

(She ends the call.)

Godfrey.

CLAUDE

(Entering.)

Roberta, if it helps, I hereby volunteer to work for one dollar a year effective immediately. But I insist on a dollar raise each year following.

ROBERTA

Thank you, Claude. I can't ask for that.

CLAUDE

Then fifty cents for one year! And twenty-five cent raises after!

ROBERTA

Excuse me, Claude, I have a meeting tomorrow.

(ROBERTA closes her door as CLAUDE stands there.)

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF SCENE)

ACT TWO
Scene Two

AT RISE:

About the same time as the previous.
GODFREY reads an email he has written.

GODFREY

From James F. Godfrey to the Board of Directors, dated etc., etc., subject Capriccio Radio station, copy to Ronald B. Godfrey director emeritus, copy to Roberta G. Siegel.

“Capriccio Radio was founded 25 years ago by Roberta G. Siegel and acquired by this Corporation 13 years later. Capriccio is considered one of the country’s most prestigious classical stations.

“Nevertheless, after spending a week closely monitoring Capriccio Radio’s daily operations, I have deep concerns about various managerial, financial, and staffing issues that affect the long-term survival of this station:

- Bullet point 1: Unsustainably small listener base.
- Point 2: Outmoded technology, no website, no Internet streaming. They even still play LPs.
- 3: Library has many duplicate items.
- 4: Musical selections often very long and boring, without breaks for commercials.
- 5: No way to share this specialized music over multiple networks.
- 6: Insufficient advertising revenue, questionable financial ratios, virtually total lack of financial responsibility.
- Point 7: No fund-raising, listener interaction, call-ins, or contests.
- Bullet point 8: No control over staff. Infighting common. Four senior announcers. One overpaid announcer terminated at my insistence, one qualified but a bad team player, one totally unsuited for radio work, and only one capable of adapting to modern times.
- Last but not least, refusal to display our logo in the station's offices.

(more)

GODFREY (contd.)

“Based on the above, the undersigned concludes that Capriccio Radio is the weakest performer and most significant problem in this entire network. And he therefore recommends putting the station up for sale, or changing its mission to something more profitable like talk radio.

“Respectfully submitted, James F. Godfrey, Executive Director, Media Services.”

LYDIA

(Entering as GODFREY exits. To audience:)

Now don’t get confused. I haven’t been hired back, but they were too cheap to find more actors to play the Board, so like a chorus in Greek tragedy I’ll be narrating this boring but necessary plot material we want to get through quickly.

So: as expected, Mr. Godfrey made his case for dissolving our little station, and he mustered considerable support from the Board. A scheduling change, however, was not communicated to Roberta, so when she arrived there was no time for her defense at all.

(GODFREY and ROBERTA enter on opposite sides of the stage.)

GODFREY

It was an oversight.

ROBERTA

It always is.

LYDIA

But sometimes the engineer is hoist with his own petard, and James’s father Ron, alarmed at his son’s zeal, arrived unexpectedly — reversing his earlier pledge of non-interference and making an eloquent case for preserving the station. I won’t go into the disputes between father and son —

GODFREY

Easier to give the old fart his way. Crown jewels and all that shit.

LYDIA

— but seeing how the wind was blowing, the Board that had so strongly supported James an hour earlier now lined up behind Ron, so that Capriccio Radio by a large majority was allowed to survive. But the son did win a few concessions.

ROBERTA

Since it was decided (unjustly) that I was managerially incompetent, I could either resign and take a small annuity, or accept a demotion to staff announcer where I would take over Lydia's opera show. The money was insulting either way, but my new show airs Saturday nights.

LYDIA

Roberta's position as general manager has been given to Ed, who was never very good at sales anyway, but who will continue playing Brahms quartets while sales will be handled at the corporate level.

GODFREY

Good man, Ed. Someone we can work with.

ROBERTA

Someone passive and pliable.

GODFREY

Someone sensible and cooperative.

LYDIA

As for Sylvan, he will (without Roberta's knowledge) be terminated — a task James has delegated to Ed, since these corporate shits never do their dirty work themselves.

GODFREY

(As he and ROBERTA exit:)

Gotta prune the weakest branches.

LYDIA

And as for *moi*, it's not that I no longer care. But once one leaves a place, memories fade, worries dissolve, so that I and my cats — Rigoletto, Butterfly, and Brünnhilde — now float blessedly above it all. We garden, we listen to Monteverdi and Puccini, and we discuss the affairs of the world while sipping green tea and nibbling almond croissants. But enough about me. Shall we see how the others are getting on?

(LIGHTS DIM, END OF SCENE)

ACT TWO
Scene Three

AT RISE:

Friday afternoon. The paintings have been stacked facing a wall and replaced by a slick corporate logo. CLAUDE is listening to and “conducting” a particularly explosive passage from the first movement of the Brahms 4th Symphony.

CLAUDE

So you don’t like Brahms, Ed? | Take that, Arnold Schoenberg! You want to hear a real composer?

(CLAUDE turns and sees ED, who has just entered. The music cuts off.)

Oh, it’s you. Do I grovel, or will a simple bow suffice?

(ED doesn’t answer.)

Surprised I can still hear Brahms here. I was expecting “Orchestra Rocks.” And look what they’ve done to Lydia’s painting.

ED

Sylvan’s too.

CLAUDE

Sylvan’s never looked better.

ED

You missed a nice lunch. A dozen of us, private room at Dianne’s — salmon mousse, roast lamb, lemon tarts, then the usual tributes.

CLAUDE

Indigestion.

ED

(Noticing a pizza box:)

Claude, she lost her job too. If Lydia doesn’t hold a grudge, why should you?

CLAUDE

Because someone has to. Was Lydia treated to roast lamb and lemon tarts when she told our public this station needs their help? Was Lydia given the usual tributes when she showed more backbone than any of us wimps with twigs between our legs? No, all Lydia got was a pink slip at 79, after which she was dropped on the curb with 40 years of memories and whatever she could fit in a little box.

ED

That can't be helped now.

(Pause.)

Claude, before the others get back: Jim is creating a position for a program director. And he's looking at you.

CLAUDE

Surprised he even wants to keep me.

ED

Still our best performer.

CLAUDE

Never needed any of that under Roberta.

ED

Jim wants more structure. Someone to coordinate playlists, schedule ads. Also run contests, pledge drives, listener's choice —

CLAUDE

Gimmicks.

ED

Survival mechanisms. Good opportunity, Claude.

CLAUDE

For some puppet who'll kow-tow to this Jim of yours.

ED

For some pro who'll help expand our listener base. Which means more light classics, film music, jazz, Broadway — that should appeal to you —

CLAUDE

Not on a classical station!

ED

Right. Can't let others share our own guilty pleasures.

CLAUDE

I'll ignore that. So that's your strategy? Dumb down the repertory, in some futile attempt to attract new listeners while alienating the perfectly good ones we've already got? It won't work. Because the music we play should challenge people. It should scare them, shake them to their depths. This Jim offers rice pudding to toothless infants; I serve real men and women steak, potatoes, and creamed spinach, with a tankard of stout to wash it down.

ED

And this from the man who created "Magic Feierstein Music" for kids. You can't expect people used to 5-minute pop songs to all of a sudden sit through a Mahler symphony. But there's so much we can do to bridge the gap. Here, just yesterday Jim gave me this album by a young country singer, Donny Golden —

CLAUDE

More country crap!

ED

— all based on Chopin and Tchaikovsky. So if I play Donny's song side-by-side with the "Rose Adagio," who knows maybe I'll reach someone who'll want to hear the whole *Sleeping Beauty*.

CLAUDE

Ed, you mean well. But it's a fool's errand. Because these toothless infants despise our music, they call it crap, all they want is their punk rock emo country grunge or whatever it is. And if they'd rather dwell in their caves taking the shadows they see for reality, then they don't deserve Chopin, Tchaikovsky, or anything else.

ED

Oh. So now it's they don't deserve.

CLAUDE

That's right. And high time someone was honest enough to say so.

ED

So this is who you truly are, Claude. Just a petty little man, insulting and belittling everyone who doesn't share his narrow musical tastes.

CLAUDE

Don't turn this on me. If you're so tolerant towards the cave-dwellers, Ed, then tell me why they're entitled to call Beethoven and Bruckner crap, while if I say one word against their so-called music, I'm an elitist and a snob. Fine: if being a snob means I refuse to apologize for the best that's been accomplished in this sorry world, then I'm proud to accept the appellation — until they cart me off to whatever prison has been set up for reprobates like me who won't settle for anything less than what they unreservedly love.

ED

You can cart yourself off to wherever you want, Claude. But I'm running this station now and I have to turn a profit. And if that means playing a lot more short and simple things, and scaling back the Wagner and the Bruckner and the early music and the modern stuff (you should be happy about that!) and even my favorite music in the whole world the late Beethoven quartets, then those are just compromises we'll have to accept.

CLAUDE

Fuck compromise, fuck this Jim of yours, fuck Donny Goldman —

ED

Golden —

CLAUDE

— if we're to be enthralled ten hours a day by bubble-gum versions of music that ought to be performed by an 80-piece orchestra. And while we're at it, Ed, fuck you for taking a job kissing Godfrey's ass, when just yesterday you were ready to play the Brahms First Piano Quartet to some fat old guy in a red leather chair.

ED

And I'll still play it for him. But I was not going to turn down the best offer I've ever had because it might not suit Claude Feierstein. Not when this man Jim has treated me so well. Not when this man saw something in me, when perhaps others did not.

CLAUDE

I'll tell you what he saw —

ED

No, you won't either. You've been insulting and sarcastic to everyone here since I've known you, Claude, and that stops this minute.

CLAUDE

Mighty courageous, aren't we.

ED

Do you think I like these changes, Claude? Just last night, Sylvan and I were going to play a few violin sonatas for my chamber music show. Hours of work, then ten minutes before airtime I get a text from Jim: "Live music too expensive. Play a CD."

CLAUDE

Then you should have told him to stuff it.

ED

Easy for you to say. The fact was, we got lucky. Two days ago, this station might have shut down for good. But we got a reprieve. With conditions. And if we don't accept these conditions, this station will die.

CLAUDE

Then perhaps it should.

ED

You don't mean that and you know it.

CLAUDE

(After a long pause.)

What are these "conditions"?

ED

I'm not at liberty to say —

CLAUDE

Sylvan?

ED

...

CLAUDE

Damn it, man, your best friend.

ED

I don't make these decisions.

CLAUDE

No. You just follow orders.

(SYLVAN enters with ROBERTA, who is carrying a few gifts.
She takes CLAUDE by the hand.)

ROBERTA

Claude. So sorry you had to miss lunch.

CLAUDE

(Trying to hide pizza:)

Sorry, a touch of . . . much better now, thank you.

ROBERTA

Lydia missed you too.

CLAUDE

Lydia.

SYLVAN

(To ROBERTA:)

I think you'll like that *Così*. I was going to get you the Berg operas, but Lydia thought that too festive.

ROBERTA

Indeed. I don't know which is more jolly: the one about the demented soldier who kills his mistress, or the one about the *femme fatale* killed by Jack the Ripper.

SYLVAN

Can't decide myself. Roberta, can we help you pack?

ROBERTA

Thanks, almost done. A few mementos left, like my first edition of *Aida* and that signed photo of me kissing Pavarotti. Or was it Pavarotti kissing me?

ED

Roberta — if you don't mind — how much time will you need? No rush, but just so I know when I can move in.

ROBERTA

One hour, 23 minutes, and 16 seconds, 15 if I rush. And then every trace of me will vanish as if I had never existed. Will that do?

ED

Oh sure. I have a meeting with Jim now, so I won't be back till 4.

SYLVAN

(Aside, with eye-roll.)

Jim!

ED

Claude, that last conversation — it never took place. But I'll need your answer Monday.

(To ALL, as he leaves.)

OK, folks, have a good weekend and don't forget. Jim's having a meet-and-greet for the team next Monday at 10.

CLAUDE

Team? Are we going to play basketball?

ROBERTA

In a way, it's a relief. I won't have to worry: can I make payroll, will they turn off the lights, can I find where Claude hid the Stockhausen CDs? I just never thought I'd get kicked out on my ass with an order to vacate from the impatient next tenant.

SYLVAN

Maybe you'll start singing again.

ROBERTA

Sylvan —

SYLVAN

But Roberta, why not?

ROBERTA

Honestly, Sylvan? Because even when I tried to convince the doctors it was spots on the vocal cords, I knew it was only fear. But don't worry, I'll go home, take the weekend off, and lay low at Monday's meet-and-whatever it is. So I'll leave you two to pull things together, and whatever happens — happens.

(ROBERTA leaves.)

CLAUDE

She gives away the store, and we're left to clean up her mess.

SYLVAN

I just wish people would level with me. I tried to get some news during lunch. "Sylvan, I can't talk now." My best friend for eight years, and he can't talk? I know I'll never play Elliott Carter again, but what do I do instead — hip-hop, salsa, new age crap for lovers? I don't give a damn anymore.

CLAUDE

Doesn't sound like the Sylvan I know.

SYLVAN

I'm sorry if I'm not basking in your approval.

CLAUDE

The hell with my approval. But I've never known you to give up without a fight.

SYLVAN

I — have — a *family*!! I have a wife, three kids, a mortgage. I can't get by teaching a dozen piano students and writing a few reviews. What family do you have, Claude, besides your CD collection and your Friday night opera series?

CLAUDE

Sylvan, if you ever need help —

SYLVAN

I don't want your charity.

CLAUDE

But whatever happens —

SYLVAN

Something you're not telling me, Claude?

CLAUDE

No, no, all I meant was: however this all falls out, you and I are a pair of wheezing old dinosaurs incapable of change. So until the final extinction they'll just have to take us as we are.

SYLVAN

You mean an academic, dry-as-dust, over-intellectual purveyor of atonal crap?

CLAUDE

Sounds right. And a pompous blowhard wallowing in empty bombast, and unable to appreciate anything more subtle than a 90-piece orchestra playing triple forte.

SYLVAN

Don't forget "curmudgeon."

CLAUDE

Ah yes. I was born a curmudgeon. My mother knew it, carrying me in the womb.
(Seeing NOAH, who has just appeared.)
And lo, the prodigal returns.

NOAH

I walked around the block 17 times, no 18, thinking, and what I thought was, writing music is the only thing I ever cared about, and if they take that away from me, I'm just this dumb kid with orange hair and an earring who looks like a salamander and can't get a girl to save his pathetic life.

CLAUDE

You realize the salamander can regenerate lost limbs. Not all life forms are so resilient.

NOAH

(To CLAUDE:)

I don't know what you're talking about.

(To SYLVAN:)

It just hurt when you said my music sucked.

SYLVAN

Noah: if I thought your music sucked, I would have said something non-committal and put you on the bus in five minutes. I said you have talent. But you need guidance.

NOAH

And how do I get this guidance? Maybe you?

CLAUDE

Didn't see that one coming.

SYLVAN

I don't know. What can I possibly offer someone destined to win a Pew-litzer –

CLAUDE

– Puhl-itzer –

SYLVAN

– Pul-itzer Prize, who's already won a Most Promising Award –

CLAUDE

4 out of 158 –

SYLVAN

178.

CLAUDE

Even more promising –

NOAH

Please don't mock me. I'm being Brownie now. I don't have much for lessons –

SYLVAN

You'll pay what you can. But I won't make this easy for you.

NOAH

OK.

SYLVAN

You'll get the same training I had at the conservatory. I'll drill you on sight-singing and dictation –

NOAH

Sounds good –

SYLVAN

You'll learn four-part harmony; you'll write canons, fugues, then more fugues; you'll study orchestration, music history, repertoire; and you will come on time, prepared, cooperative, your hair its natural color –

CLAUDE

Oh give him the hair, Sylvan. We can take bets each week on the hue *du jour*.

SYLVAN

And one thing more, Noah. You will let your parents into your life.

NOAH

My parents?

SYLVAN

And your brother.

NOAH

My brother couldn't care less

(Long pause.)

All right. What about my own pieces?

SYLVAN

No free composition at first. Not until we've built a foundation.

NOAH

Oh. 'Cause I was thinking. You know that piece about the octopus where you couldn't find the notes?

SYLVAN

Of course. . . .

NOAH

So remember you said I wrote all these fragments, but nothing holds together? That's what you need for the octopus piece — a lot of fragments! So I could write the notes for you! It would be a collaboration — like, like —

(NOAH appeals to CLAUDE, who just shrugs.)

SYLVAN

I don't think so, Noah. Time to pick up the pieces and start writing my own music again.

NOAH

OK. That's cool. Well, I gotta go now, or I'll miss the bus and it'll take me like 75 hours to get home. But could I ask Mr. F something?

CLAUDE

Only if you stop calling me Mr. F. You make me feel like a flunking schoolboy.

NOAH

Sorry, Mr. — Mr. Claude. Did you listen to my CD?

CLAUDE

Yes I did.

NOAH

And?

CLAUDE

I liked it.

SYLVAN

Claude!

NOAH

You did?

CLAUDE

If I were a teacher, I'd give you an A.

NOAH

(Touched in a way he can hardly understand.)

You really liked my music? Thank you.

(Beat, back to normal.)

How about my piece "42-Car Pileup on Glare Ice on I-94 in North Dakota
Because One Car Had a Stuck Accelerator," which is all for tire chains and car
horns and trombones?

CLAUDE

Oh, yes. Nearly put me in the hospital.

NOAH

Awesome!

(About to exit, he comes right back.)

Oh — and can I still have these?

(Meaning the scores on the piano. SYLVAN nods "yes.")

Thank you. Did I say thank you to Claude too?

CLAUDE

Yes, you did.

NOAH

Sometimes I forget. My mom's always bugging me about that.

(Gets a little farther, comes back.)

Wait. When I came here, I wanted to help the station. Now you're just helping me.

SYLVAN

You helped more than you know.

NOAH

Cool. So you're still going to play Carter and Stravinsky every Friday night?

SYLVAN

Not sure, Noah. I may have a new show, playing highly rhythmic music with lots of percussion to attract younger listeners.

NOAH

That's cool too. But maybe you can still talk about Schenker theory and what is a subdominant and fun stuff like that. Hey, I know! What if I got up a petition at school, like: "Save Sylvan's Shows!"

SYLVAN

It wouldn't work, Noah.

NOAH

OK, if it was just me, maybe I'd get two, three signatures. But if I gave Katie Williams fifty bucks to do it, all the guys would sign, 'cause she's got big tits.

CLAUDE

Worth a try.

NOAH

Well, I gotta go now, or my mom'll get worried. You know moms.

(Finally leaving:)

I hope I have enough for the bus.

CLAUDE

And this is how classical radio stations are saved. By "Big Tits."

SYLVAN

Claude. Did you really like his music?

CLAUDE

Sylvan, have you ever known me to lie? Do you really think he's got talent?

SYLVAN

Yes. Yes I do.

CLAUDE

You know, this plink-plonk music means nothing to me. One plink sounds like another, and I can't tell a plink from a plonk. But does he realize how hard it is to become a composer, in a world where no one will want to hear anything he'll write?

SYLVAN

Claude, just because I failed as a composer doesn't mean he will.

CLAUDE

Yes, but it would be cruel to make him live the life you wanted, only to find at 30 he's fit to do nothing.

SYLVAN

Just as cruel to tell him to forget his dream and get a degree in accounting.

CLAUDE

Tough decision.

SYLVAN

I know. But I say, let him write his music while it's still alive in him. Isn't that what we both want, Claude: to keep the music alive not only for us, but those who follow?

THE ACTOR PLAYING NOAH

(Returning to read to the audience in his own voice. His hair is now its natural color and neatly combed.)

In an interview, the composer Roger Sessions said that as a boy of twelve, "I told my parents that I had decided to be a composer. I suppose they were a little anxious about such a decision and so, surreptitiously, they asked the advice of a lot of musicians, including Humperdinck, who was in New York at the time. My father was going to see Puccini — "

SYLVAN

Most likely in 1907, the first of Puccini's two New York visits.

THE ACTOR PLAYING NOAH

“ — but he didn’t succeed. I heard, years later in Italy, that Puccini had told a story of having been asked to see the music of a young boy in America and to advise his parents whether he ought to go on with it. He paced the floor all night and decided he couldn’t take that responsibility, so he called off the appointment. I don’t know whether it was I or not but I assume it was, because Puccini did call off the appointment.”⁴

(GODFREY, ED, LYDIA, and ROBERTA enter.)

GODFREY

Like I said, my father never really liked classical, but he loved jazz and Broadway. When he was 7 or 8, there was a telecast of Leonard Bernstein’s *Wonderful Town* that ended too late for his bedtime. But there was a spot in the hallway where he could watch the TV unobserved. Of course, after 20 minutes my grandparents caught on and sent him back to bed. Ten minutes later he crept out again, same thing. Then about midnight when the adults turned in, they found a small boy in pajamas asleep in the hallway.

NOAH

(Again in character.)

Today, they could have just DVR’d it for him!

GODFREY

Dude, you’re missing the point.

CLAUDE

“Is it not strange, that sheep’s guts should hale souls out of men’s bodies?”

ED

It’s like a calling.

SYLVAN

A benediction.

CLAUDE

An appetite that can never be sated. A reason to carry on despite all our own mistakes and the mistakes of the fools of the world. A reliquary of so much the human spirit has produced that’s good and holy. An orgasm without end.

⁴ Edward T. Cone, “Conversation with Roger Sessions,” in *Perspectives of New Music*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1966), p. 29. Used by permission.

LYDIA

You unrepentant satyr! People ask what I hear in this boring early music, and I say that when I die — roughly 8 years, 3 months, 19 days, 16 hours, 37 minutes, and 24 seconds from now, give or take — I hope it is to the strains of the third Agnus Dei from Josquin's *Missa l'homme armé sexti toni*. Such gentle music, like a lullaby rocking the earth to sleep.

CLAUDE

And I'll conduct the choir for you, Lyddie. But nothing gentle for my exit. When I go out kicking and screaming, make mine the Verdi Requiem, with those crashing chords, those shrieking trumpets, that bass drum walloping its way into your insides! But the very idea of my dying is preposterous. Who'd host my shows?

ED

For Claude, Mozart and Schoenberg are insults to his experience of the world, while for me, Brahms is just a composer I don't much like. But Brahms is the composer who brings my father the most comfort as he sits by the radio in his red leather chair, and that's why I play Brahms as much as I can.

SYLVAN

I'd never tell Claude this, but part of the pleasure I take from modern music is knowing how much he despises it. But Claude can never understand either how, at music camp at age 16, I discovered not only the joys of fucking Maryanne diGiacomo, but the wondrous new sounds of Webern and Boulez. And I don't know if sex and music became forever intertwined for me that summer, but on hearing those thousand twangling instruments humming about my ears, it was as if my tastebuds came alive with the flavors of lemon and cardamom and pomegranate and Maryanne. Who was also by the way, quite a fine oboist.

LYDIA

You men and your dicks. You're as bad as Claude.

NOAH

Girls won't even look at me, but I have this fantasy I'll walk up to some girl I like, and instead of sounding like a total douchebag, I'd open my mouth and out would come —

(And as NOAH silently voices the word "Mahler," we hear the opening of the slow movement from Mahler's 2nd Symphony.)

ROBERTA

Twenty-five years ago, I sang the Mahler 2nd under Gianfranco Lombardi.

LYDIA

Twenty-five years ago, I heard that performance sitting next to Claude.

CLAUDE

Twenty-five years ago, a friendship began —

ED

But no recording.

SYLVAN

Unfortunately.

CLAUDE

I prefer it as a memory. Eighty glorious minutes.

GODFREY

Eighty fucking minutes for one song!

LYDIA

And no commercials.

GODFREY

I've heard worse, but he really should concise it a little.

CLAUDE

We'll let him know.

NOAH

Wish I could have heard it.

ROBERTA

Darling, you're only 17.

(The Mahler continues as all except GODFREY listen enchanted — though even GODFREY is despite himself impressed. LYDIA squeezes ROBERTA's hand. SYLVAN shakes hands with CLAUDE, nods curtly to ED, awkwardly hugs a surprised NOAH. Then ALL exit as LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK and the Mahler segues to the Brahms in the next scene.)

ACT TWO
Scene Four

AT RISE:

Monday morning, full lights. Music: The first minute of the finale (the so-called "Gypsy Rondo") to the Brahms 1st Piano Quartet.

Accompanied by the Brahms, in the conference room on either side of the logo CLAUDE and SYLVAN re-hang the paintings that were removed in the last scene. As SYLVAN continues adjusting the paintings, ED enters.)

ED

Not sure Jim will like that.

CLAUDE

I have not learned to tremble before this — Jim.

ED

(Mostly to himself:)

You will.

(Taking CLAUDE aside:)

Claude, that job. I need an answer.

CLAUDE

My answer is "no."

ED

There's no one as qualified —

CLAUDE

Quite the contrary.

ED

No. I can't.

(CLAUDE grips ED by the wrist, as if to say: "Do it!" ED takes a deep breath.)

SYLVAN

(Finally satisfied, though the paintings seem to be just where they were originally:)

Rather nice, don't you think? Like a meeting of the old and new. Is it time now?

(GODFREY enters. If he notices the paintings, he says nothing. ED approaches and shakes hands.)

ED

Good to see you, Jim.

SYLVAN

(Aside — eye-roll.)

Jim.

GODFREY

Ed.

(Referring to SYLVAN.)

Don't put that off. All right, let's get started.

ED

You have a minute?

(ED ushers GODFREY into ROBERTA's former office and shuts the door. ROBERTA enters elegantly dressed, and places some music on the piano in the lounge.)

SYLVAN

Ah! The *Rückert Lieder*.

(As CLAUDE nods in satisfaction, SYLVAN starts playing "*Liebst du um Schönheit*" from the Mahler *Rückert Lieder*.)

ROBERTA

(Singing:)

*Liebst du um Schönheit, o nicht mich liebe!
Liebe die Sonne, sie trägt ein gold'nes Haar!
Liebst du um Jugend, o nicht mich liebe!
Liebe den Frühling, der jung ist jedes Jahr!*

GODFREY

(Behind closed doors, during the first verse.)

Absolutely not!

ROBERTA

Liebst du um Schätze, o nicht mich liebe —

(SYLVAN and ROBERTA abruptly break off as ED and GODFREY emerge from the office.)

GODFREY

If he slips even once —

ED

He won't.

GODFREY

Two months trial.

ED

Two months. You won't regret this.

GODFREY

I better not, Ed.

ED

(Beckoning to SYLVAN, CLAUDE, and ROBERTA, as ALL take their seats in the conference room.)

Ready, folks?

(LIGHTS FADE BRIEFLY. Music: the slow movement to the Mahler 2nd Symphony. When the lights come back, SYLVAN is standing alone on stage.)

ACT TWOScene Five

AT RISE:

Some weeks later. SYLVAN is alone on stage.
The slow movement of the Mahler 2nd
continues.

SYLVAN

And so we all survived, even me. Mr. Godfrey — James — still calls our group the biggest bunch of misfits he's ever seen, and Claude especially feels flattered by the description.

But James to our mutual surprise appears well-satisfied with my performance as program director. Thanks to a professional sales staff, we're even turning a small profit. And Jim has also accepted Ed's suggestion for an online subscription series where I could play the same weird music that put us in the red to start.

Despite the occasional tantrum, Noah continues his lessons, gets along famously with his brother, and actually enjoys writing canons and fugues. While I believe his "Arizona Sunset, Reds and Golds" (written with my help and inspired by the music of Carlos Suarez) is the best thing he's yet composed.

As for Claude, he approached the handsome blond boy dancing the lead in Stravinsky's *Apollo*, invited him for coffee, found he was a devoted listener to Claude's shows, and since then — well, let's just say that for the first time I've known him, Claude seems actually happy.

When I listen to classical music in the car, I've formed some unconscious habits. On the highway, crank it up. On a road with lights, turn it lower. In slow traffic, turn it off. But once when listening to the slow movement of the Mahler 2nd symphony while stopped at a light, I decided, "The hell with it. I love this stuff, I don't give a damn what anyone else may think." And the driver next to me leaned over to say, "That's nice music, mister. That's mighty nice music."

(The Mahler ends just beyond SYLVAN's final speech.)

(LIGHTS DIM SLOWLY, AND FADE TO BLACK AT THE
LAST CHORD. END OF PLAY.)