

MUSIC UNDERGROUND
A Busker's Opera in Two Acts

Words and Music

By

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Synopsis:

Music dominates the soundscape of Central City's main subway station, where life is good for the musicians who perform for a few coins and a smile. That is until the newly elected mayor announces a plan to give the city a "clean sweep" — a plan that includes a ban on music in public places. When police arrive to tell the troubadours they have one week to clear out, an unlikely leader emerges to defy the order, and go down singing. Will her compatriots follow, especially the handsome new boy with the cool guitar licks and soulful songs? Will the commuters rise up and demand the mayor retract her edict? Will they even notice if the music is gone? *Music Underground* is a rock opera that explores an array of timeless themes: an artist's need for expression, authority's need for control, young people's need to rebel, the complexity of relationships, love's ability to conquer all, and, of course, the power of music to change the world.

Characters:

Melody Tanglewood: 20-something singer/songwriter and mainstay in Central City's main subway station. A passionate and strong young woman, Melody organizes and leads the resistance when Mayor Payne orders the musicians to leave the subway.

Charlie Roberts: 20-something singer and founder of The Undertones, an a-cappella group that consists of himself and three women, Tina, Nadia and Nina. A gentle soul, Charlie secretly loves Melody and wishes they could be more than just friends. Charlie nearly sacrifices his life for Melody.

Tina Fox: 20-something singer in The Undertones. A friend and confidante of Melody, the two share a passion for music and a desire to stand up for what's right. Tina also is secretly in love with Melody.

Dennis Payne: 20-something cool guy who enters the subway one day unexpectedly and starts playing his seductive music. He is handsome, charming and starts to win over Melody with his music and charismatic smile. What Melody doesn't know is that Dennis is the son of Mayor Payne, who will soon become Melody's arch enemy. When Melody asks for his allegiance to fight the ban on musicians, he betrays her, telling his mother and police chief the plans of the musicians.

Mayor Payne: 55-plus newly elected mayor of Central City. She travels with her entourage of compliant assistants and reporters. Mayor Payne won the election on her platform of doing everything possible to clean up the city—i.e., remove graffiti, get the homeless off the streets and clear public spaces of any “unauthorized” activities, including musical performances. She moves in with an iron fist, using her police chief to carry out her orders if necessary.

Police Chief Boone: Of indeterminate age, Boone is head of the police force tasked with cleaning up the city. He is big, mean and and certainly not sensitive to the arts. Boone does Mayor Payne's bidding and his officers are feared throughout the city for their rough tactics. He's not afraid you use his baton and when things get rough.

Police Lieutenant Darla Heath: 20-something officer who works with Chief Boone to clear out the musicians. She loves to use force and ends up shooting a Taser at Melody. Eventually she and Dennis get together.

Homeless Man Jake: Of indeterminate age, Jake has been a constant fixture in the underground for as long as anyone can remember. He spends his days on a bench watching people and enjoying the music. Although he is homeless, he has pride and speaks for the dignity of the underclass. Jake falls in love with the station manager, Sally.

Station Manager Sally MacDonald: Of indeterminate age, Sally is charged with making sure the station runs smoothly and that passengers get safely on and off the trains. She loves the station, describing it as her home, and ends up with Jake.

CHARACTERS OF THE CHORUS:

Commuters: various people who come and go on the subway. They enter at random and “get on the train” and then ride off the stage in a stylized manner at regular intervals. Mostly they don’t pay attention to the musicians but when the music is gone, they suddenly gather in protest, demanding the return of the music. (spoken parts) Child who “wants the music back”; Mother of this child; A couple that observes the child having a tantrum.

Homeless: a group of rag-tag individuals who are persecuted by punks and police. Homeless sing about why they’re homeless: because they can’t “put words together so they sound pretty” — i.e., rhyme.

Police officers: mean looking police who march in lock step the orders of Chief Boone.

Mayor Payne’s entourage: A group of assistants and reporters who fawn on Mayor Payne’s every word. (spoken part) Aide who announces Payne at speeches and press conferences.

Reporters: (spoken parts) TV reporters Kirk Jenkins, Katie Kurckback, Hunter Thompson, and Newspaper reporter Bob Blatt.

Musicians: individuals who are set up throughout the subway to provide the musical accompaniment to the singers.

Musical Accompaniment

String trio – two violins and cello

Saxophone quartet – sax, piano, bass, guitar, drums

The Undertones – four a cappella voices: Charlie, Tina, Nadia and Nina

MUSIC UNDERGROUND Song List:

1. Doo-wop warm-up (Undertones – Charlie, Tina, Nadia, Nina)
2. String trio (string trio – two violins and cello)
3. Jazz combo (piano, bass, guitar, saxophone, drums)
4. Music Underground (Melody, cast)
5. I've Got a Dilemma (Tina, Melody, cast)
6. Trouble (punks, Tina, Jake, Charlie, Mayor Payne)
7. It Ain't Perfect, But It's Home (Sally, cast)
8. Ticket to Ride (tourists and commuters)
9. Slide on Over Next to Me (Dennis, Melody, Tina)
10. Where Are You From? (Dennis, Melody)
11. I Love This City, Hate the Dirt (Mayor Payne)
12. Joined the Police/Things We Won't Tolerate (Boone/Police Chorus)
13. What Just Happened Here? (Melody, Charlie, Tina, Musicians)
14. What About Us? (Jake, Sally, Melody)
15. The Cat in the Banana Peel (Jake, Homeless)
16. Listen Up Tango (Boone, Melody, Charlie, Tina, Dennis, Heath, Jake, Sally)
17. I Stand Alone (Charlie, Tina)
18. I Have a Plan (Melody, Chorus)
19. What Do You Hope to Gain? (Dennis, Melody)
20. We're Musicians (Charlie, Melody, Musicians)
21. Yes Son (Dennis, Mayor Payne)

End of Act I

22. entr'actes
23. Excellent Question! (Mayor, reporters)
24. Circus Came to Town (Mayor, Boone)
25. I Want to Use Force (Boone, Heath)
26. You Mean the World to Me! (Melody, Tina, Charlie, Musicians)

27. Oh, How I Loathe Myself (Dennis)
28. Freedom (Melody, Boone, Heath)
29. Outlaw (Melody, Boone, Dennis, police, musicians)
30. I Want the Music Back (Child, couple and commuters)
31. Bring it Back (Boone, Mayor, Bob Blatt, commuters)
32. Grand Finale: Music Underground (leads, full cast)

End of Act II