

# THE SOUND CALLED MUSIC

a short play by

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adapted from his own story

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## **THE SOUND CALLED MUSIC**

### **CHARACTERS:**

THE MAN - 45.

THE WOMAN - 20.

THE BARTENDER (may be drawn from the CHORUS)

THE CHORUS

The chorus may consist of as few as four (2M, 2F), or expanded to as many members as the production may wish to use. (As written, the play calls for a Chorus of six.) It is suggested, however, that all chorus members speak, and that the ensemble be equally divided between women and men.

### **THE TIME:**

Approximately the present.

### **SETTING:**

A dance club; its parking lot; an apartment, all in a major American city.

Note: The CHORUS is intended to function in the classic manner, both as an integral part of the action and as a comment upon it. The MUSIC itself is also integral -- it's almost a character, and the music cues are very much that character's "lines." It should not be treated merely as background for the other characters' speeches, or to the setting.

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

--- William Butler Yeats  
"Among School Children"

Dedicated to Joan and Charles Plock

For George Wilson and Torry Cavanagh

**AT RISE:** SPOT UP on the MAN, looking at a photograph. HE puts it into a pocket; there is a LOUD JOLT OF DANCE MUSIC; HE dances. The MUSIC ends, but the MAN continues to dance; LIGHTS of VARIOUS COLORS flick on and off through the SPOT. The CHORUS, onstage, remains in black. The CHORUS' lines, prior to the rise of the generals, should come immediately after each other, almost overlapping.

He moved

MALE CHORUS #1

Through glancing bodies,

FEMALE CHORUS #1

Between vibrating speakers,

MALE CHORUS #2

Within lambent rays of color,

FEMALE CHORUS #2

Deaf and blind and dumb

MALE CHORUS #3

All neurons,

ALL CHORUS

Gliding.

FEMALE CHORUS #3

(There is a another JOLT OF LOUD DANCE MUSIC. The MAN continues to dance. SPOT UP on the WOMAN, dancing.)

The woman with whom he danced was half his age

MALE CHORUS #2

And smiling.

FEMALE CHORUS #3

Spangles,

MALE CHORUS #1

Like rows of gilded teeth,

FEMALE CHORUS #2

MALE CHORUS #3

Cast gleaming gold light from her blouse and pants.

(There is a third JOLT OF MUSIC. SPOTS OUT, GENERALS UP. They reveal a long "bar." The MAN and WOMAN dance together.)

FEMALE CHORUS #1

Time, like the music, rocked by;

MALE CHORUS #1

Amid the coruscating rhythms, he felt

ALL FEMALE CHORUS

The warmth of the room,

ALL MALE CHORUS

The heat of the dancers,

ALL CHORUS

The fever of the sound.

(Very loud DANCE MUSIC up. During the following the CHORUS will stand at the bar, posed or miming interaction among itself.)

MAN

Drink?

(The WOMAN shrugs her shoulders, indicates: I can't hear you; and cups her hands to her ears.)

(Louder)

You want a drink?

(HE mimes: A drink, then waves toward the bar. SHE nods. HE starts toward it; SHE follows. THEY sit or stand at the bar. HE waves at a BARTENDER who heads toward them. The MUSIC dims, but remains loud, forcing the following to an unnatural volume.)

What are you drinking?

WOMAN

Gin and tonic.

MAN

(To BARTENDER)  
Two gin and tonics.

(The BARTENDER nods and gets the drinks.)

WOMAN

You're really great. Out there, I mean.

MAN

So are you.

WOMAN

I've never seen you here before. Most of the guys who come in here are, well, under thirty.

MAN

I'm forty-five.

WOMAN

I'm twenty. Don't tell the bartender, okay? I've got ID.  
(MUSIC to SOFT.)

MALE CHORUS #2

Her foot moved in time with the sound.

FEMALE CHORUS #1

They drank their drinks.

MALE CHORUS #3

In the mirror that ran the length of the bar, he watched the people crowded around it,

FEMALE CHORUS #2

The dancers crowded on the floor,

MALE CHORUS #1

Watched her

FEMALE CHORUS #3

And himself.

(MUSIC VOLUME UP.)

WOMAN

You don't look forty-five.

MAN

Don't tell the bartender, okay? I've got ID.

(SHE laughs)

You've got ID? How'd you get it?

WOMAN

... There was, there was this - guy; he's in California. Now. That's where it says I'm from.

MAN

*Is that where you're from?*

WOMAN

Unh-uh. I *was* there; a while. L.A. Once we went to San Diego...

(HE nods)

You ever been there?

MAN

Los Angeles.

WOMAN

Vacation or what?

MAN

Or what. You want a cigarette?

WOMAN

Unh-unh. But thanks ... I liked California. Warm *all* the time.

MAN

Yes.

WOMAN

You know people there too?

MAN

(Slowly; distractedly)

I used to. I knew people. Is that where you're from?

WOMAN

You asked me that.

MAN

Oh. I did. I -... Sorry.



WOMAN

That's okay.

MAN

Are you ready to dance again?

WOMAN

Yeah. In a minute. When we finish these. I hate it when the ice melts and they get watery.  
(Pause, as various CHORUS leave the bar and move to the "dance floor."  
THEY dance.)

MAN

I've never been in one of these places before.

WOMAN

You're kidding. Never?

MAN

Never.

WOMAN

How come?

MAN

We --- - I just didn't.

WOMAN

What d' you think?

MAN

I'm not used to it. The music.

WOMAN

It's not really music. It's just sound; you know? I mean, they call it music but it's not. I mean, it *is* ... but it isn't, it just sort of keeps things - *going*. You know what I mean?

MAN

All very present tense. No past. No future. No thinking.

WOMAN

(Laughs)  
You like it?

MAN

I like the proximity, the immediacy. The - detachment.

WOMAN

(Without concern)  
What does that mean?

MAN

(Short beat. With the start  
of a smile)  
Come on, let's dance.

WOMAN

(Laughs)  
Okay. But what does that mean, what you said.

MAN

Oh ... nothing.

WOMAN

(Brightly, musically)  
All *ri*-ight.

(SHE takes his hand, as if to lead him to  
the dance floor, but SHE does not move.)

You're nice. A little weird maybe. But I like you. I'm glad you asked me to dance.

MAN

(Clears throat)  
Let's dance, then.

(Impulsively, SHE kisses him, a long,  
deep kiss. When SHE breaks it, HE  
stands there, his eyes still closed.  
CHORUS stands at their positions,  
while the MAN and WOMAN move  
to the dance floor. MUSIC dims.)

ALL CHORUS

They danced.

MALE CHORUS #3

He lost track of everything

MALE #2 AND FEMALE CHORUS #2

But the rhythm,

MALE #1 AND FEMALE CHORUS #3

The sound,

ALL CHORUS

The motion

MALE CHORUS #2

And he was surprised when he felt his heart pounding in his ears, the sweat soaking his chest, his breath coming in short, thick gulps.

FEMALE CHORUS #1

He looked for her then

FEMALE CHORUS #2

And found her in front of him,

MALE CHORUS #1

Flecks of light masking and revealing her face,

FEMALE CHORUS #3

Her eyes closed.

MALE CHORUS #2

While he watched, she opened them and smiled,

FEMALE CHORUS #1

Then moved closer to him.

(MUSIC VOLUME UP.)

WOMAN

Getting tired?

(HE nods)

Want to sit down? Or get some fresh air?

MAN

(Pointing toward the door)

Air.

WOMAN

I'll get my sweater. Wait for me?

(HE stands at the dance floor. SHE gets her sweater, then returns to him and leads him "out." As THEY move, the MUSIC dims. Once THEY are out, HE takes off his jacket and sits on a "rail." That action occurs over the following.)

FEMALE CHORUS #2

The night was cool.

MALE CHORUS #3

He sat on the parking lot guardrail,

MALE CHORUS #1

Letting the light breeze dry the sweat.

FEMALE CHORUS #3

She stood beside him, listening to his breath come,

MALE CHORUS #2

First in soft rasps,

FEMALE CHORUS #2

Then gradually in a regular rhythm.

(MUSIC OUT. For the rest of the scene,  
there are NIGHT SOUNDS and the  
SOUNDS OF PERIODIC TRAFFIC.)

WOMAN

You okay?

MAN

Yes. A little out of shape, I guess.

WOMAN

(SHE dabs his temple with a tissue.)

You're really forty-five?

MAN

Really.

WOMAN

I've never - been with a guy that old.

MAN

(Refusing to laugh)  
I'm an adventure; is that it?

WOMAN

(Smiles)  
No. I just like you.

(SHE kisses him, not on the mouth.)

You close your eyes when I kiss you.

MAN

Yes.

WOMAN

That's nice ... Want one?

(SHE offers a breath mint.)

MAN

No. Thanks.

(SOUNDS UP. THEY listen.)

WOMAN

(After a long pause)  
You live near here?

MAN

Not too far. A couple of miles.

WOMAN

Alone?

MAN

... Yes. Alone.

WOMAN

Me too. Me too.

(LIGHTS FADE. There is a JOLT OF LOUD DANCE MUSIC. THEY start off. As THEY do, Albinoni's "Adagio" is heard. and the CHORUS comes downstage, left and right. The LIGHTS hold at a dim level. The MAN and WOMAN come to center and suggest the next morning.)

FEMALE CHORUS #1

In the morning she kissed him lightly when she woke and watched him recognize her face.

MALE CHORUS #1

She held to him, just a long moment;

FEMALE CHORUS #2

Then she showered,

MALE CHORUS #2

Managed the very bitter coffee he made with more cream and sugar than she usually used

MALE CHORUS #3

And smiled through some small talk backgrounded softly by Albinoni.

(MUSIC plays. The MAN and WOMAN mime a light conversation for several moments. Then:)

FEMALE CHORUS #3

As she gathered her things to leave she noticed something she hadn't seen in the darkness the night before:

MALE CHORUS #1

There were pale, rectangular spaces on the walls of every room, and no photographs. Anywhere.

(The MAN and WOMAN mime a "goodbye." SHE kisses him, steps away, then all-at-once kisses him again very lightly and quickly and leaves. HE stands a long moment, then reaches into his pocket, removes the photograph and looks at it. [The production may, if available, project onto a scrim the image of a photograph of a woman in her early 40s, attractive and smiling. The photo must not be able to be mistaken for the WOMAN.] MUSIC UP. HE moves to center, still looking at the photo, then returns it to his pocket. Abruptly, the GENERALS BLACKOUT as, simultaneously, a SPOT comes UP on the MAN; and the MUSIC, with a jolt, changes to LOUD DANCE MUSIC. HE closes his eyes and begins to dance. MUSIC OUT. Quick BLACKOUT.)

CURTAIN