

# Libretto

*Dark and ominous, as a group of teenagers begin to assemble on stage. Piano starts to play...*

**ENSEMBLE** This soundtracked our childhood, and will end our story  
As we stand in the rubble of a vengeance  
Vindictive and gory.  
But as life ends in death  
All built will be destroyed  
And fae this rubble  
The shattered bricks  
The fireplace in bits  
The cracked Belfast sink  
This broken doon, broken doon hell  
We may finally dare to dream  
That the sins fae this house  
Might be wiped clean.

Findenterran Farm  
A once holy Hoose for weans  
Weans too wild  
Fur weans forgotten  
For weans unloved  
Fur weans who've been spat upon, shat upon  
For weans who've been left behind  
Like spare change doon the back ae the couch

**DONNIE** I came here on a Monday with nuhin but the claes I wis in

**ANGELA** The polis rushed me in here, not even shoes on my feet

**DIANA** I wis dropped aff by a mother who promised, 'she'd be back'

**CALLUM** A smashed a few windaes, called the lollipop man a bawbag

**ENSEMBLE** The next thing I know I'm in a hoose fur weans  
who've been spat upon, shat upon,  
fur weans who've bin left behind.  
We'd turn up on the doorstep wi aw oor possessions.  
Different day, different year, but the same old shit.

**CHARLIE** I can picture the day  
the social worker led me in there

**ENSEMBLE**

“You’re gonna like it here Charlie.  
That much I can tell  
A bit of discipline and routine  
It’ll do you well.  
Bairns yer ain age  
This is your home  
Not a cage  
This type of place  
It sorts you, sorts you oot  
It sorts you oot”

**CHARLIE**

Through that raven black door  
Across that creaky floor.  
The walls filled with icons on plates  
Moses parts the red sea  
St Francis of Assisi  
And Christ on his cross! Christ on his cross! And Christ on his cross.  
And there from the piano  
A voice said to me...

**ENSEMBLE**

“You must be the new girl. My name’s Lee”

Lee, with a furrowed brow and stick oot ears  
Lee with a smile that never seemed sincere  
Lee with his pudding bowl hair and his denim flairs  
Lee, with hawns on the keys at the piano under the stairs

For hawf his ten years  
He watched weans come and go  
They didn’t always stay long  
While Lee sat at the piano

—

**ENSEMBLE**

The tour was pretty much the same, regardless of the guide  
Whether it was Charlie or Lee or Marianne McBride  
They’d take you round the place, telling you whits whit  
The rooms smelt of detol, sadness, feet and sick

They’d tell you ‘bout the staff, who to try an’ avoid  
They’d tell you who could smuggle stuff,  
Who best not to annoy  
They’d tell you when the football’s on and when wis movie night  
But you never got a sense that  
You never got a sense that

A sense that  
That something wasn't right.  
Naw, cos maybe here you'll be safe and sound  
Maybe here's where the lost are found.

*A sting as the piano lights up. The kids stop singing. They look at the piano for a moment.  
A silhouetted figure comes into view – a soloist who is going to take on the role of Mrs Pearson.*

**DIANA** Her name was Missus Pearson, Comma M  
The M stood for Moira  
We didn't know that then.

**DONNIE** She had the most immaculate nails  
And kept her glasses on a string  
She always smelt of polo mints  
And she never wore a wedding ring.

**DIANA** It wis said she was once married,  
Big hoose near Seeton Sands

**ENSEMBLE** But then her fella went and got himself in debt  
He ran off with the lassie in the ice cream van  
The ice cream van, the ice cream van.

**ANGELA** Dougie said you have to start my music lesson now.

**PEARSON** "Dougie?" I think you'll find it's Mister Anderson.

**ANGELA** Mister Anderson.  
It's Lee. He's kicking off again.  
Dougie said the sound ae the piano is the only thing that  
calms him doon.

**PEARSON** Angela, I hardly think that your rendition  
of the Moonlight Sonata would calm anyone down.

**CHARLIE** Lee was always kicking aff  
We somehow got used tae it.

—

**ENSEMBLE** He'd be watching TV,  
laughing over lunch  
Then the devil stirred  
and his anger would lurch.

Tables would be turned,  
he'd throw chairs like grenades  
He'd spit in your food,  
And scream and cry and rage.  
This wee guy with the soft spoken tone  
Seemed to lose his mind,  
trapped in his own cyclone.

**PEARSON** 'Mister Anderson, assistance please'

**ENSEMBLE** His rage would turn to panic and he'd scream 'I'm fine',  
Knowing he'd be taken to Room Number Nine.  
Where the sinner was left to simmer  
Where he'd 'reap what he'd sow'  
And his screams would be drowned out  
By the piano below.

*Mrs Pearson shifts one of the children from the piano.*

—

**PEARSON** Let's begin.  
1, 2, 3,  
1, 2, 3, 4,  
1, 2, 3,  
1, 2, 3, 4, 5

**ENSEMBLE** But I'm not wanting to learn to play the piano..  
You have to! Its compulsory.  
Compulsory! Get tae f-

**PEARSON** Learning the piano  
builds both the mind and the soul  
Learning the piano helps a child to grow.  
Music separates the condensed from the semi-skimmed  
Music ensures you will always fit in.  
People judge and exploit  
kids like you, brought up in care  
People can be so unfair.

**ENSEMBLE** Because with music we soar  
As we rise from the dirt  
A simple chord takes away the hurt  
Because with music we soar  
As long as we lengthen the spine

**PEARSON** And?

**ENSEMBLE** Soften the knees.

**PEARSON** Look at this beauty, golden hinges, golden lock  
Strike the black keys, you could be in Bangkok.  
Feet on the pedals, legs loose and apart  
Though you're riding a Harley Davidson,  
Except it's art!

**ENSEMBLE** Because with music we soar  
As we rise from the dirt  
A simple chord  
Takes away the hurt  
Because with music we soar  
Keep your hands on the ivories

**PEARSON** AND?

**ENSEMBLE** Keep your eyes on the keys!

**PEARSON** Greatness, takes practice  
Master, the basics  
And your light shall glow  
And your talent shall grow

**ENSEMBLE** Because with music we soar  
As we rise from the dirt  
A simple chord  
Takes away the hurt  
Because with music we soar

—

**ENSEMBLE** Here he comes  
The jingle jangle jingle jangle of his keys.  
Who's that?  
Mister Anderson  
He's aw right  
"Ah Missus P!" he'd say  
"Playing messages straight from God."

**CHARLIE** Excuse me, Is Lee awright?

**ENSEMBLE** "The wee man just needs space  
And God's good grace  
Now, who's for spag bol?"  
And dinner time would be  
Calm and serene  
As Lee hid upstairs  
Wi ghosts we'd never seen.

---

**ENSEMBLE** The door creaks open  
Like Gabriel breaking out of heaven  
Revealing the frame of  
Jude Lindsay McPherson

**CHARLIE** He's a ride!

**ENSEMBLE** Jude Lindsay McPherson  
Aged 15 and two thirds  
Eyes brown as the Clyde  
Smile wide as the Firth.  
Jude Lindsay McPherson  
With a fag hingin' oot his mooth  
With his flat top hair  
His t-shirt of Sonic Youth.

**CHARLIE** My stomach's just done a back flip.

**ENSEMBLE** That'll be the bolognese...

**CHARLIE** Naw! I'm in love.

**ENSEMBLE** Ya don't even know him.

**CHARLIE** I can see him.

**ENSEMBLE** As he moves into the room  
Jude with all the banter  
Charlie's face turned the colour of Fanta  
She fancied him, for sure, who widnae  
But there was something else  
Something else.  
In this boy framed by light streaming through the windae  
There was somethin' in his stance  
Somethin' in his shoulders

Somethin' in his eyes  
Somethin' in his eyes  
What it might have been?  
Damned if she knew!  
But Jude Lindsay McPherson  
Was gonna change things round here  
That much was true.

**JUDE** D'you want tae get aff with me?

**CHARLIE** Nae danger!

**ENSEMBLE** Course she bloody does.  
Its aw she's thought about these last two weeks.  
Since Jude Lindsay McPherson arrived  
With his smouldering looks  
And his size ten feet.  
Stirring up something she hadnae dare felt.  
Maybe abandoned and alone  
Weren't the only cards she's dealt.

**JUDE** Don't leave me hangin' I'm tryin' to say I like you.

**CHARLIE** You don't even know me.

**JUDE** I know that everytime I come intae the room  
You find an excuse to leave  
And when I'm in the garden  
You act so tough  
But I don't believe  
you're hard as nails

**ENSEMBLE** She's hard as nails.

**JUDE** I think you want to kiss me  
I think you want to kiss me  
I think you want to kiss me  
Right here, at the piano under the stairs.

**CHARLIE** I've never done it before.  
I mean, I've done it, I've practiced it, course I have.  
On the back ae my hawn  
Tae the George Michael poster in my room.  
Diana offered tae practice  
Sorry I'm rabbiting on,

Basically  
Maybes, aye. Maybes naw.

**ENSEMBLE**

And so they move closer  
He puts his hand on her cheek  
She moves hers straight tae his arse  
And they look intae each other's eyes.  
From the outside you'd see,  
Two daft weans, playing at shops  
But that's not what they be  
That's not what they be  
They see  
Fifteen long years, fifteen long years,  
Fifteen long years, fifteen long years,  
Fifteen long years, fifteen long years  
Where naebody touched the side ae their face wi anything but spite  
They see fifteen long years of pillows wet with tears  
And whispered pleas for help that never came.  
And they say:  
Maybe's aye, maybes naw.  
And they say:  
Maybes aye, maybe's naw.  
A flicker, an ember, a flicker, an ember  
Of hope, of hope, of hope

---

**PEARSON**

Mister Anderson, Assistance please!

**ENSEMBLE**

Wee Lee, only ten years old  
Yet again he doesn't do what he's told.  
Jude looks away, disgusted at the sight  
Of wee Lee dragged off to Room Number Nine.

**JUDE**

They're not supposed to touch us like that.

**ENSEMBLE**

The wee man just needs time and space

**JUDE**

It's supposed to be better here.

**CHARLIE**

It is.

**ENSEMBLE**

To breathe God's good grace.

**PEARSON**

Mister McPherson, time for your piano lesson.

**ENSEMBLE**                   The wee man just needs a chance to calm  
To the sounds of our Chopin

**PEARSON**                   It's not a request.

**ENSEMBLE**                   Then we all felt the chill in the air,  
From the look firing outta Jude's starin' eyes  
The way Mister Anderson moves on the stairs  
Gives Jude the creeps, the creeps, the creeps.

**CHARLIE**                   No way, Anderson's no like that, I'd know. I've been here for years!

**ENSEMBLE**                   The creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps  
But she suddenly sees it different now, CREEP!

**JUDE**                        I'm gonna go upstairs and ask Lee ma sel.

**ENSEMBLE**                   Anderson watches Jude go,  
Charlie watches Anderson.  
Gives her the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, the creeps, creeps

*Jude is now outside Room 9. He puts his ear against the door. Nothing.*

—

**JUDE**                        Wee man?  
Are you in there?  
Lee man,  
It's Jude  
Open the door.  
Wee man  
Are you in there?  
Open the door.

I know what it's like  
This part's the worst  
The other part  
When they lay down their hands  
And caw you names yer too wee tae understand.

When they hurt ye  
There's something about the pain  
There's something about them puffing away in yer ear  
They think they've got you trapped  
But you're no longer even here

You're flying off

As they're squashing your ribs  
You're crashing through the ceiling  
As they're pulling back the sheets  
You're getting far from this street  
Higher and higher you soar.  
To the place you go  
They won't follow  
To the place you know  
They won't follow

Mine was a beach  
Not like one of them roon here.  
Like a proper beach from the movies  
Pure yellow sands  
As far as the eye could see  
And just hunners and hunners of babes in bikinis and me

They'd say 'all right there Jude, looking good.  
How's about one of them cocktails out of coconuts?  
Then you're sipping on rum,  
and the sun's beating down on your skin  
And you begin to feel good in the sunlight  
Cos they can't follow  
Into the daylight  
They can't follow

And the sound of the surf gives away  
To the sound of a belt picked up off the floor  
And a whispered voice says  
Good boy  
And you face down in the bed  
And the light from the hall floods the room with shame  
Of knowing this man that did it  
Had the same name.

But I get up fur school  
Ate my frosties and  
Smile at my mam,  
Cos all I wanted was quiet  
All I wanted was calm  
In the silence I could pretend  
That last night didn't happen  
That last night didn't happen

And the night before  
And the night before

So I know wee man  
You want tae be alone  
Yes I know Lee man  
You think you're better off on your own  
But if you open the door  
They can't follow  
If you open the door  
They can't follow

**CHARLIE** He couldnae open it, even if he wanted tae.  
Anderson has the key.

**DIANA &  
DONNIE** Jude wipes a tear,  
Charlie pretends she didn't hear  
And Jude smiles  
Thankful for her lies.  
He knows she's heard every word  
He can see it in her eyes.

**JUDE** We can't just leave him in there.

**CHARLIE** I know.

*Charlie takes Jude's hand.*

—

**ENSEMBLE** We were called tae the dining room  
Charlie said it was games night  
I wisnae fussed on gaun  
Am no one for board games  
I think monopoly, buckaroo and scrabble are shite.  
Jude said there was no choice  
And there was anger in his voice.  
So we went along  
Fine, we said, fine, we said, we'll be there!

**CHARLIE** I've been staying here five years

**ENSEMBLE** Haven't we all?

**CHARLIE** Since I walked through the door  
And met Lee!

**ENSEMBLE** Lee! with his toothy smile and his Velcro shoes  
Lee! with his fire, rage and awful short fuse.

**CHARLIE** And has he always just kicked aff?

**ENSEMBLE** Of course he has.

**CHARLIE** A danger to himself they say  
But maybe what if

**CHARLIE &  
ENSEMBLE** Lee arrived here shining, full of joy?  
Lee was a bright eyed, just a daft wee boy.

**CHARLIE** What if the rot set in?  
The very first time  
Anderson dragged him upstairs  
We all played piano and it drowned out the cries  
Of a wee boy greetin for help to come

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE** Now tell me, is he the only one?  
  
—

**DIANA** All stayed silent,  
And they straightened their backs  
No-one wished to walk doon a memory lane that was cracked.  
Closed piano lid and the key turned right  
The shame and guilt all hidden from sight.

**ENSEMBLE** Until

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE** Is he the only one?

**ENSEMBLE** Until

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE** Is he the only one?

**ENSEMBLE** Until..  
A hand did rise.

And another,  
And another  
And another  
And another.

**DONNIE**

It wisnae just oor hands roon that table rising  
All oor the country the same thing was happening.  
Maybe not on this same night  
Maybe not in this same year

**ENSEMBLE**

But hands would rise  
Saying no more  
No shame  
We're not the ones to blame.

**CALLUM**

Whether it be nuns with canes

**ENSEMBLE**

Our hands will rise

**CALLUM**

The fear ae god makin' us pish oor beds

**ENSEMBLE**

Our hands will rise  
Saying no more,  
No shame,  
We're not the ones to blame

**ANGELA**

Weans who got away but pushed it down

**ENSEMBLE**

Our hands will rise

**ANGELA**

Weans who grew up but stayed alone

**ENSEMBLE**

Our hands will rise  
Saying no more,  
No shame,  
We're not the ones to blame

**DIANA**

Fifteen weans round that table

**ENSEMBLE**

Seven hands did rise

**DIANA**

Nearly half those hands up

**ENSEMBLE**

Our hands did rise

**DONNIE** The polis won't believe wee radge and thieves

**ENSEMBLE** But our hands will rise

**ANGELA** Missus Pearson's held in high affection

**CALLUM** And Anderson's up for local election

**ENSEMBLE** But our hands must rise

**CALLUM** So we stuffed our carrier bags, and got ready to leave

**ANGELA** Yoyo's in pockets, cassettes shoved up sleeves

**CALLUM** Where we're going, we had no clue  
But that locked door, we'd go through

**ENSEMBLE** To somewhere where  
there's no more, no shame,  
We're not the ones to blame  
no more, no shame,  
We're not the ones to blame.

**JUDE** We get Lee.  
We get the key  
Then we leave

**ENSEMBLE** Then we leave.

—

**ENSEMBLE** That Anderson bastard slept  
In room number eight  
With a sign on the door saying  
'five minutes is on time,  
on time means you're late'.  
Jude entered the room on tiptoe  
Sees Anderson asleep in his bed  
His mouth agape  
His hairy belly on show.

**JUDE** How many weans?  
Another man lies sleeping  
While a wean muffles their cries down the hall  
How many weans?

Praying to a God they don't believe in  
that he never wakes up

**ENSEMBLE**

How many weans?

**CHARLIE**

The judges and the social workers  
The neighbours and the teachers  
And the lollipop wummin  
And the postie

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE**

Sleep like the dead

**ENSEMBLE**

How many weans?

**CHARLIE**

They never wake to realise the monster's real  
It just doesn't stay under oor beds.

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE**

How many weans?

**ENSEMBLE**

Have had to live with all this rage.

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE**

How many weans?

**ENSEMBLE**

Had to keep it bottled up

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE**

How many weans?

**ENSEMBLE**

Resist the urge to strike a match?

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE**

How many weans?

**ENSEMBLE**

And burn this shit down.

**JUDE**

How many weans  
have watched a man like this and thought,  
Thank god he's asleep  
Thank god I'm safe now

**CHARLIE**

(quiet, almost a whisper) Jude. Jude.... We have to go get Lee.

*Jude and Charlie move quickly now, they run to get Lee.*

—

**PEARSON**

Sip, then a swig, then a gulp, repour drink  
Sip, then a swig, then a gulp, repour drink

Noises down the hall  
Children up late  
I should go check  
That can wait

First a sip  
Then a swig, then a gulp  
Repour drink  
Sip, then a swig  
Then a gulp, repour drink  
Sip, then a swig  
Then a gulp, repour drink.

A pain in my chest  
My heart's beating fast  
Calm the beast  
Let the panic pass with a

Sip, then a swig, then a gulp  
Repour drink  
Sip then a swig  
Then a gulp, repour drink  
Sip, then a swig  
Then a gulp, repour drink

Don't go opening doors  
To worlds you don't wish to see  
Keep your eyes on the keys  
Keep your eyes on the ivories.

**ENSEMBLE**

Lee tries to stand but his legs buckle and twist  
Jude reaches out his hand, and takes him by the wrist  
'Lee, let's get out of here, let's get out of here  
Let's get out of here.'

*Mrs Pearson hears noises, looks up, decides not to bother investigating.*

**PEARSON**

It's been a cold life  
But I've kept on playing  
Drown out the noise  
Can't hear what they're saying

With a sip  
Then a swig, then a gulp  
Repour drink  
Sip, then a swig

I don't ask, don't think  
I stick to my drink  
Sip

*The noises are louder now from upstairs, more difficult to ignore.*

Swig  
And a gulp

Don't go looking for trouble  
Let the chords be a bubble around you.  
Keep your eyes on the keys  
Keep your eyes on the ivories.  
Keep your eyes on the keys  
Let your ears be deceived  
But maybe tonight

Another sip  
And a swig  
And a gulp  
And a melody  
Can wait.

*Mrs Pearson stands, she's going to investigate the noises from upstairs.*

*Meanwhile back in room nine –*

**ENSEMBLE**

Lee! Let's get outta of here,  
Let's get outta of here,  
Let's get outta of here.

Lee, let's get you on your feet,  
Let's get you on your feet,  
Let's get you on your feet.

Lee, let's get you outta of here  
Let's get you outta of here  
Let's get you outta of here

*Charlie and him make to the door when –*

**PEARSON** You shouldn't be in here.

**ENSEMBLE** Missus P, stinking ae drink  
Her eyes boring through our skulls

**JUDE** No-one dare even fucking blink.

**ENSEMBLE** And she takes in the view  
And her eyes cast to the corner of the room  
Lee's clothes in a pile  
And she opens her mooth to speak  
But after years of covering the sounds of tears  
What words can you speak?  
What words can you speak to make it better?

Come on Lee! Let's get you outta of here,  
Let's get you outta of here,  
Let's get you outta of here.

Lee! Let's get you on your feet,  
Let's get you on your feet,  
Let's get you on your feet

Lee! Let's get you outta of here,  
Let's get you outta of here,  
Let's get you out a -

*A shadow looms on the floor. It's Mr Anderson. The full ensemble talk in unison as Mr Anderson.*

**ENSEMBLE** "What's going on?"

**JUDE** We're leaving. We... I... I know what you did to Lee.  
To Michael, to Jordan, to Cami, to Desi, to Tam.

**ENSEMBLE** "It's okay Jude. I understand what happened to you,  
what your father did, that was wrong,  
but that doesn't excuse you making up these lies...  
Not everyone's life is as... misplaced and twisted as yours."

**JUDE** Lee told me.

**ENSEMBLE** "Lee? Tell them it's all lies. Isn't it?"

**CHARLIE** Lee can't even look, can't even raise his eyes  
Lee all he can do is try not to cry

**PEARSON** Mister Anderson asked you a question Lee.  
I suggest you answer immediately.

**ENSEMBLE** "The poor boy's exhausted Moira!  
The last thing he needs is an interrogation."

**PEARSON** Answer the question, Lee.  
Did Mister Anderson touch you?  
Answer the question.

**CHARLIE** Lee, shaking in my arms, like a fallen leaf  
Anderson just stares in disbelief.  
Lee, he blinks, a final moments doubt  
He reaches over, whispers,  
Lets the truth pour out.

**PEARSON** There are 24 of you in my care.  
Charlie, Jude - get everyone out.  
Go to the Police Station.

Go! Lock the door behind you  
And go!  
Now!  
Go!

**ENSEMBLE** "Moira! Have you lost your mind?"

*Charlie, Lee, Jude (and the rest of the children) run out the door.*

**ENSEMBLE** We were ready to go  
Ready to go  
Grabbed our yoyos  
And ran doon the stairs  
Grabbed out photos and tapes  
And rushed for the door!

**PEARSON** So many children  
So many years

**ENSEMBLE** "I'm a good man Moira!"

**PEARSON** So many scales  
And arpeggios  
So many sonatas  
And concertos  
While you fooled  
Upstairs  
And I sat there like a fool

I've drowned out the screams for years  
I've played through the cries and tears  
I've drowned out the sounds  
Every single night

**ENSEMBLE** 1, 2, 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 1, 2, 3

"They won't believe them! They won't believe you!"

**PEARSON** I know, I know, you're right, you're right.

—

**JUDE &  
CHARLIE** We were the last to leave,  
Head count twenty-three, twenty-four,  
Turn the key  
Lock the door!  
We looked back through the letter box  
Mister Anderson charging at us in his socks

**ENSEMBLE** "Open the door you little snitch!  
Open the door you little bitch!"  
Missus Pearson's busy in the kitchen.  
Turning the hob on  
The smell of gas is in the air!

"Open the fuckin door! Open it now you fuckin"  
She finds the matches  
As we ran, for oor lives!  
From the smell of gas  
And the sound of that piano  
Past the gate  
Away from this hoose  
For weans too wild and unloved!  
For weans who were left behind!

"Come back here you little snitches,  
come back here you little bitches!"

**PEARSON** I've drowned out the screams for years

**ENSEMBLE** You drowned out the screams for years

**PEARSON** I've drowned out the cries and tears

**ENSEMBLE** You drowned out the cries and tears

**PEARSON** I've drowned out the cries and tears

**ENSEMBLE** You drowned out the cries and tears

At the bottom of the hill  
We turn around and watch the flames  
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

**PEARSON** I will let it out  
All that fury  
That shame  
All that pain  
I have lit a fire  
I will lit a fire  
I have lit a fire  
I have lit a funeral pyre

I will burn it down!  
I will burn it down!  
I will burn it down!  
I must burn it down!

Light the way  
Light the way  
Make it burn  
Light the way  
Make it burn  
Let it burn

*And the flames continue ever higher.*

**ENSEMBLE**

Only this is just a story  
Some made up words that rhyme  
Set to music  
Which we've rehearsed in time  
Because in our world  
Which is your world  
Which is my world  
Which is this world

These children still walk the streets  
Silent, in pain, in shame  
Cause fiery justice never came  
It got lost in he said, she said, he said, she said  
No fire will be lit, no piano will be played  
Because the monster's not dead  
It's still at the top of the stairs

Until we say  
There is no shame, no pain  
No shame, no pain  
We are not the ones to blame.