

MUSICAL CHAIRS

by

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MUSICAL CHAIRS

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MUSICAL CHAIRS

Synopsis

The Mellow Blossom's Orchestra for retired people regularly rehearses in the local St Winifred's hall, a council owned property, that is let out, not only to the orchestra, but also to four other groups. The orchestra members are advised that their tenancy is under threat due to the severe cuts that the council are having to impose, caused by their own reduced revenue.

With the group facing impending eviction, they detect a possible solution when, prior to her engagement with the council to turn on the Christmas lights, a famous superstar arrives at their premises.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Characters

- Maud She runs the Mellow Blossoms Orchestra as well as being the orchestra leader. In her sixties, commanding, amusing and enjoys a drink.
- Jack He plays in the band. Over sixty, witty, inclined to kick against authority. Enjoys his drink.
- Betty Another band member. She should have the capacity for impressions...(West country for Pam Ayres) and to deliver an American accent. Age could be variable...but she should be similar looking to the actress playing the part of Madam Thunder as, in one scene she replaces the American star at short notice.
- Rose Another band member. Aging, scatty, eccentric...not quite the ticket...not adapted to the modern world.
- Madam Thunder Brash American Superstar singer. Loud mouthed, uncompromising, pushy, audacious...must physically resemble Betty to some degree. Age variable...must be able to hold an American (Bronx sort) accent throughout.
- Damson Malibu The Manager and good friend of Madam Thunder. Probably older than Madam Thunder...but equally brash...and from same background. American accent is a necessity.
- Rita Joint leader of the 'Physical Jerks' activities group....probably around the forty mark, but variable. Humorous, but a fairly straight role.
- Jane Joint leader of the 'Physical Jerks' group...much as with Rita.
- Colin Moon Representative from the council audit section.....youngish...in late twenties/early thirties. Formal, precise...but flannelling.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Lady Oxshott Haughty, disdainful, contemptuous...horse loving,
barmy lady mayor. Over forty...but age can be
variable.

Bobby Joe Milkins III Over-the-top, superannuated American
Diamond tycoon.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Act 1

(The Mellow Blossom's Orchestra is in full rehearsal in St Winifred's Hall in East Horsley. Maud is the leader.(conductor) Jack, Rose and Betty are the other three characters within this group. The orchestra can be heard playing out the last few bars of 'English Country Gardens' in their rehearsal room. The stage is empty until the music finishes, whereupon three members walk through to their rest room. (the stage setting).

Date October 29th. Time 10-30 am

(Little is required as a set. There should be sufficient wooden chairs provided for the various members of the cast and any musical instruments carried or stationary, would be useful.)

- Maud (Emerging from the practice hall, but facing back into that room) All right boys and girls. That'll be enough for this morning.
- (Jack and Rose follow, making their entry from the hall)
- Rose Were we all right today, Maud?
- Maud Lovely, lovely. ... but Rose, you mustn't rush the tempo...it's three/four time and no more..... We're not Black Sabbath.
- (Jack and Rose each take a seat)
- Rose I'm sorry...I'll get it right on the night.
- Jack Maud...When *is* this blessed concert coming up.
- Maud Only two weeks away now, Jack.
- Jack And who's this ruddy lot that's coming over here.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Maud 'This ruddy lot' are the Horsham Women's Institute, who kindly asked us to play for them on the fourteenth of next month. They're all anxious to see us perform There's at least fifty of them coming over here.
- Jack Fifty?... That's the most we've had in St Winifred's for years. (with irony) We'll need to get in some extra security to control those wild Horsham hell raisers.
- Maud Jack...I think that's unlikely...but yes, it'll be nice playing to an audience for a change.
- Jack Yeah...instead of just playing for ourselves all the time...
- Maud Indeed.
- Jack I s'pose we'll be going through the same old repertoire.....English ruddy Country Gardens, Shepherds flippin' Hey and the good old Gold and Silver bleedin' waltz. Can't we give them something new?
- Maud Jack.....I must commend you for your ability of infusing an oath between every musical title...but, to answer your question....Our instruments are ancient...the tunes we play are period pieces.....We're *all* past our prime. We're like an antiques shop. We don't do 'new'.
- (Betty enters from stage right)
- Betty Morning everyone. Sorry I'm late.
- Maud Where's your violin, Betty?
- Betty I don't feel like playing this morning.
- Maud Oh shame.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Betty No, I've just come from the town hall. You won't have heard the news.
- Maud News?... These days it can only be *bad* news. They're not planning to make the residents sweep their own streets in future?.
- Betty Not yet... but you won't believe this... it's a bombshell.... I'm afraid they're only going to stop us using this hall.
- Maud What! Oh no... They can't... That would be dreadful... Are you certain.
- Betty 'Fraid so.
- Maud But what about the scouts, the W.I. and the Silver Threads bingo evenings. They all use this hall.... not to mention the Physical Jerkers.
- Jack Er... It's just Jerks, Maud... The Physical Jerks they're called.
- Maud Yes, but they just can't close us down like that. Saint Winifred's Hall. We're a major part of the community here in East Horsley... an institution.
- Betty Well apparently they can... and they certainly intend to.
- Maud Oh surely not. We must fight this... How long have we got before the axe falls?
- Betty Would you believe... immediately.
- Maud You're joking.... that's ridiculous.
- Betty They say they've got to find half a million from somewhere... and we're just an unnecessary expense.
- Maud But this is the only suitable venue for us... there's nowhere else in this small village.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Betty I know.
- Jack So that's it then...the end of a long, glorious road for us...a death knell for the Mellow Blossom's Orchestra.... We can't play in the open air.
- Rose Not with my chest.
- Jack No, we can't play with Rose's chest in the open air.
- Rose But I've got a very large living room you could use.
- Maud No Rose...that would be far from practical...not with your cats, dear.
- Rose Fluffy and Winstone wouldn't mind.
- Maud How accommodating of them to approve.
- Rose They're very well trained.
- Jack (jokes) Yeah, but that's more than you can say for the orchestra.
- Maud (to Betty) But why have the council suddenly cut us off like this.
- Betty It's a sign of the times, I'm afraid.
- Rose Mr Cameron said we're all in this together.
- Jack Well, we certainly appear to be all in *something* together Rose, that's for sure.
- Maud This is all too much for me...and we've got the WI coming here in a couple of weeks....aagh...this is so stressful ...Can we have a house meeting...We need to put our heads together...and quickly.
- Rose Is it all right if I stay?

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Maud Yes, of course. There's no reason why you shouldn't have your say.
- Jack (wryly...under his breath) There *is* a reason...
- Maud Jack!...behave yourself.
- Betty Just us four will do...Gather round.
- Maud Yes...We'll need a little time to consider our options.
- (The four band members pull chairs up close together...Maud now seated...but with Rose labouring slightly)
- Maud Come on Rose... Fast as you can go.
- Jack This *is* as fast as she can go.
- Betty Come on Jack, you're forgetting, forty years ago, Daphne and Rose used to run in the relay for the Harriers.
- Maud Don't you remember....Rose always ran the first legs.
- Jack It looks more like she's on her last legs now...
- (Just as the group prepare for their discussion, in walk two of the Physical Jerks leaders. ~Jack and Rose remain seated. Maud and Betty get to their feet)
- Jane Hello Mellow Blossoms...not playing? having a pow-wow instead?
- Rita I s'pose you've heard the grim news. We've all got till next Monday to clear out of here...lock, stock and barrel.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Maud Yes, Betty's just told us... We're officially, 'No Fixed Abode'.
- Rita I don't suppose there's any benefactor's around here who could help us out.
- Maud It's not money... it's accommodation we want.
- Jane Have you considered the school.
- Maud I checked with them last Summer. I'm afraid Health and Safety forbids.
- Jane The cosmetic factory.
- Maud Health and Safety again.
- Jane How about the local Bupa Care Home... they're a caring organisation.
- Maud They may care... but not for us.
- Jane You could approach the library.
- Maud That was closed down last April.
- Rita That appears to be it then.
- Jane We can't just accept this lying down.
- Betty Couldn't we get the local community behind us. We could start up a petition.
- Maud Trouble is... they're so apathetic these days... People would rather sit gawping at Strictly Come Dancing than put themselves out to keep the community spirit alive.
- Rita We'll get nowhere if we don't make the effort. We should get on to the local press, make up some banners and parade down the High Street, or something.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Rose Can't we make a stand ...you know...a protest march?
- Maud A good idea, Rose.
- Rose We could get some of those...oh, what do they call them...erm...activists to join us.
- Jack Oh yes Rose.. that's a very good idea...that's all we need, activists and we could all end up taking part in one glorious looting and rioting act in the East Horsley shopping parade.
- Maud I feel that would be counter productive.
- Jack I'd certainly take part..... I could do with one of those plasma TV sets from Curry's.
- Rose Oh dear...Would I have to wear a hood or something.
- Maud No...Don't get carried away Rose. If you start running riot, I don't think the local constabulary would be able to cope.
- Rose It's all very sad. It could be the library next.
- Jack No...that went last April, Rose...along with Meals on Wheels and street lighting.
- Rita It's amazing, isn't it. I recycle all of my rubbish, have private education for my kids... and I even cut the grass verge outside my house...but the council tax spirals upwards each year by leaps and bounds.
- Maud Yesand we pay for the police, yet the Bobbies've completely disappeared from our streets. Even if you hear burglars in the house, you've got to make an appointment before they'll send anybody out.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

(Unannounced, in walks a council official, Colin Moon. (from stage right). He looks around and coughs to draw attention to himself)

- Colin Er...Hello everyone. Sorry to disturb you all. I'm Colin Moon. I'm from the Audit Section at the Council Offices.
- Betty Talk of the Beelzebub.
- Rita Oh...so you're the little bugger that started all this.
- Colin (holding up his hands defensively) Hold on ladies, hold on...it wasn't my decision to close you down.
- Rita No, but I bet you had *something* to do with it.
- Colin Well I can't say I have any problems with the decision...it really was a no-brainer.
- Maud You can say that again...a no brain decision.
- Colin I'm afraid you have to look at the larger picture, ladies...the facilities we provide for the residents here just couldn't be maintained by the reduced scale of our income...The Prime Minister says....
- Rita Yes, we know what he says.
- Colin I've been discussing this with our mayor, Lady Oxshott. We both have a theory that we've been far too generous to our community groups...and she has a theory that.....
- Jack (interrupting)...Mr Moon....You've got theories at the bottom of your garden.
- Jane With respect Mr Moon, couldn't we have discussed this with someone more senior.
- Colin That isn't possible at the moment...The entire section have gone on a team building exercise for a couple of weeks.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Jack Oh really....So where is the location for this team building exercise?
- Colin (slightly shame faced) erm...it's in the Canary Islands.
- Maud Oh isn't that wonderful...the whole section...off with full pay to the Canaries. Lucky, lucky them.
- Jack Just how many of 'em are there... enjoying this subsidised jolly junket?
- Colin Quite a few.
- Betty How many *exactly*?
- Colin Well...there's twenty four of them.
- Jack Twenty four! That must cost a fortune.
- Rose (diffidently) May I ask what this team is actually building.
- Jack No it doesn't mean th...(hesitates) They're not building anything, Rose...least of all, a team.
- Rose Well what *are* they doing?
- Jack Rose, a team building exercise is a contrived excuse for the manager to get away from his wife for a couple of weeks so that he can make unrestrained romantic progress with at least one of his female staff.
- Rose Oh I see.
- Colin Is that what you think?
- Jack Definitely.... and the whole period usually includes, two occasions of adultery, a law suit, a drunken punch up and a the boycotting of a quiet member of staff who doesn't want to join in with

MUSICAL CHAIRS

all the ribald shenanigans of the rest of the toadying mob.

Rose Oh, I didn't know.

Colin Don't believe him.

Jack Oh it's great fun...the results of the team building can be a total breakdown in morale... and about forty thousand quid neatly frittered down the drain.

Colin That's a complete travesty of the truth. These sessions can be quite productive.

Jane Couldn't you scrap the team building and let us stay here at Saint Winifred's?

Colin It's been well publicised that we have a reduced budget this year... We have to cut our cloth accordingly.

Maud We expect that... but why do you pick on the lower end of the community. It's not just us...but there's the scouts, the W.I. *and* the Physical Jerks group here, as well.

Jane That's us.

Colin What is?

Jane The Physical Jerks. We exercise some of the over fifty fives every Thursday.

Jack And revive them every Friday.

Colin They're low on our list of priorities... We have to cut from the bottom.

Rose Who's bottom is he cutting.

Jack Rose...nobody's...(gives up) (now to Colin) But what about your much hallowed 'white elephant'... The New Crown Theatre... At what

MUSICAL CHAIRS

cost to the council tax payers keeps that monster running.

- Colin The Crown is...well... our crowning glory... Worth every penny in my estimation.
- Rita I've seen a recent programme of productions... and in my view, they're all pretty sub standard.
- Jack Yes, the shows are playing to only half filled houses and they're so heavily subsidised, we'd be better off without the damned monstrosity.
- Colin However, we endeavour to bring the cream of entertainment to the theatre.
- Betty Who've we had down here recently?
- Colin We had Pam Ayres here only last week.
- Jack (in mock admiration) Not the superstar herself... Wow... Pam Ayres....Have you seen Pam Ayres, Betty?
- Betty Oh I've seen her (now adopting a West country accent to parody Pam Ayres) You mean, ' I don't like riding my bicycle behind those lorries and those tankers, cos' when they cut me up I shout out, "Push off you rotten
- Maud (interrupting) Yes, well I think that's enough Betty.
- Jane I haven't seen a decent play down there for ages.
- Colin We've had some splendid Shakespeare works this year.
- Jack Shakespeare! You only present it for the few money men you're trying to impress and for a minute sprinkling of egg head culture vultures.
- Colin I beg to differ. Shakespeare is very popular.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Betty But who can understand all that rubbish?
- Colin I certainly can.
- Jack You can understand Shakespeare?... Well how about this...listen...I learnt this at school...
- Colin (interrupting) What is it?
- Jack Hamlet.(dramatically lapses into a few lines from Hamlet) ‘ I have of late, but wherefore I know not lost all my mirth, ...forsaken every custom of exercise, and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition, that this goodly frame the earth, seems to me no more than a sterile promontory‘ ...I mean, what *is* that all about?
- Colin I would say that’s quite simple, this Hamlet quotation would suggest, I’m bored and depressed...and the world has lost its appeal.
- Jack *That* I can understand... or what about, ‘I’m peed off and the world’s lousy’ even shorter.
- Colin I concede... *much* more succinct... but perhaps sadly lacking in style and poetry of speech...no I can’t see us closing down our flagship theatre.
- Rita But it’s still running at a thumping big loss...while the town has lost all its amenities...there’s no police station, no local A & E Unit and there’s not a single public loo in the area.
- Maud Since the last loo was closed, the hedgerows of East Horsley just haven’t had that same environmental allure.
- Colin You won’t worry about that when you see what we’ve lined up this November.
- Rita Surprise us.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Colin Guess who we've got coming to switch on the Christmas lights?
- Jack Not Pam Ayres, is it,
- Colin No, no... think big...think 'A' List.
- Jack The mighty Keith Chegwin?
- Colin No...stand back...it's Madam Thunder!...(waits for a reaction)... Well...are you impressed? and her song writer and agent ...Miss Damson Malibu is coming along too.
- Rita How much is all that costing.
- Colin [uneasily] Well obviously they won't come for peanuts.
- Rita Here we go.
- Colin And they're bound to draw a large crowd to the town.
- Rita So what's the fee?
- Colin We had to draw a bit extra than we'd planned.
- Rita, Jack and Maud (together) How much?
- Colin O.K. it's Five thousand (amid multi protests from the group) It'll be well worth it.
- Jane Five thousand!...Just for pulling a switch?
- Colin She'll be with us for most of the day.
- Jane So we can also expect the hospitality costs to go through the roof, as well.
- Colin We can't let her fend for herself.
- Jane I don't think she's *ever* gone short...of anything.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Colin She's promised to be here on the thirteenth.
- Maud That's the day before we were *supposed* to be entertaining the Horsham WI.
- Colin You'll still be all right. We've decided there's no immediate need to evict you.
- Maud We were told it *is* immediate.
- Colin We've generously allowed you to have an extension.
- Maud (sarcastically) Ring a ding ding.
- Colin No, you've got to end of the year if you want to.
- Maud Can't we stay longer?
- Colin Oh no...cos' from January the first, this building will then house the council's new think tank.
- Rose Think tank?....
- Jack No Rose...don't even bother.
- Rose But I'd like to know.
- Jack It's not a tank...and actually, there's not much thinking connected with it. It bears no resemblance to its description or title....like...for example..... 'Financial Advisor'.
- Colin If you want to know, they're going to investigate and promote ways to aid the local authority's spending costs. We may also have to set up the odd quango or two to oil the wheels a bit.
- Jack Let's see....You're going to save money by closing us down so that you can pay mega bucks to house some well heeled laymen to investigate why

MUSICAL CHAIRS

the council's so extravagant...(sarcastically) yes, that makes sense.

- Betty So we're still all right for our rehearsals on the thirteenth...and for the next day's concert for the WI.
- Colin Absolutely...and that could be very convenient because we'll need to fill in the time with Madam Thunder when she arrives. We *could* bring her along to see a bit of East Horsley's local culture.
- Betty While it lasts.
- Maud You'd consider bringing Madam Thunder *here*....I wouldn't think our type of music would really be her scene.
- Rose Who *is* this Madam Thunder?
- Rita Oh surely you've heard of her, Rose. She's American, very outrageous...and she gets through men like most people get through....(thinks)...takeaways.
- Rose I haven't had one for ages.
- Rita What a....
- Rose A takeaway.
- Colin Well that's about it ladies and gents. I've got to hurry back to the guildhall for a de-briefing session with my secretary.
- Jane Is *that* what they call it these days.
- Betty Well thank you for coming, Mr Moon...and I'm sorry they left you behind when the rest of your lot all shot off to Gran Canaria.

MUSICAL CHAIRS

Colin That wasn't the case...I had my reasons for not going.

Betty (undaunted) Well perhaps they'll take you next time, eh?

Jane (amid giggles from the group) Unless the Think Tank decide you're surplus to requirements.

(Colin Moon exits (Stage right) without any further comment)