

INT. TRANSIT LOUNGE. AIRPORT - NIGHT

David HELFGOTT wakes with a start in an indistinct place somewhere in the world. Late thirties, eyelids at half-mast, he stares into the wet night, mesmerized by a flashing red light.

David

(mumbling)

Kissed them all, I kissed them all, always kissed cats, puss-cats, kissed them, always did; if a cat'd let me kiss it, I'd kiss it - Cat on a fence I'll kiss it - always, always, I will - didn't I? I did because I was different wasn't I, I was - gotta be different again, haven't I darl -

He realizes the seat beside him is empty and panics.

David

Where-oh-where, Gillian? Where did she go, where-oh -

His weird behaviour draws attention.

Gillian

(returning)

It's alright David, I'm right here.

David

Here - here Gillian, right here. The thing is I thought you were gone.

She emanates calmness, warmth and is an endless source of energy. The effect is instantaneous. David settles

Gillian

Where is there to go?

David

I don't know darling, I don't know, I'm hopeless without my glasses.

Gillian

You've got your contacts in, silly.

David

I'm a silly, it's true, it's true.

A braying laugh.

Whooahh!

Gillian  
Shhhh.

David  
Ooh, shhh - shhh, sorry darling, sorry -

Gillian  
It's alright. Stretch your legs.

David  
Do you think so? Perhaps I should, perhaps I should stretch  
my legs, should I stretch my legs?

He stands.

Gillian  
Good idea.

David  
Good idea, that's right -

AIRPORT ANNOUNCEMENT : Flight 313 to London via Frankfurt  
will be re-boarding in 15 minutes -

David  
Whooahhh, London, Gillian, London!

Gillian  
Yes Shhh.

David  
Shhh

He looks out the rain-spattered window at the flashing red  
light from an aircraft being fuelled immediately outside the  
window.

David  
Shhh, softly, softly, new story

Dissolve to iridescent neon raindrops coursing down a window  
in the night somewhere, Suddenly a desperate face fills the  
frams. It's David in his late twenties. The full head of  
hair, falling around his soaking wet face, tells us this is  
years earlier; a sodden cigarette hangs from his lips  
spectacles dangle off the end of his nose. He's looking  
into ...

INT/EXT. MOBY'S WINEBAR - NIGHT

A pianist croons the last few bars of "Only the Lonely". A waiter, TONY, shows the last two patrons to the door. TONY and a woman in her mid-forties, Sylvia, put up chairs; the PIANIST, SAM, slips into a stool at the bar. They chat but all we hear is David's anxious breathing as we are seeing it all from his POV. He raps on the window.

Sylvia  
What does he want?

Sam  
A drink probably. Get lost!

David disappears from the window and appears at the door.

Sylvia  
Poor thing. Let him in.

Tony  
He's a derro!

Sylvia  
He's saturated.

Resume David's POV as more words are exchanged then TONY comes over and opens the door to him.

Tony  
What's the problem, mate?

David  
(a hundred miles an hour)  
Sorry, sorry, sorry, mate, I'm the problem, I think I'm the problem, such a problem. And wet! But it's not an ideal world. Is it an ideal world? We just have to make the most of it, I mean, this is the way we find it isn't it, yeah-yeah-yeah! But it's more ideal than it was, I mean, you know, we're privileged, we're privileged, we're privileged, aren't we, because not long ago, people would be burned to a steak wouldn't they, er

He sees "MOBY'S" embroidered on TONY's tunic.

David  
Moby, yay Moby, pleased to meet you -

Tony  
Tony. Who are you?

David  
(hugs Tony)  
Tony, Tony not Moby Tony. Who am I Tony? Who knows Tony?  
I don't know myself. Whoohh! David, I'm David, I'm David  
Tony How does that sound?

Sylvia  
Hello David. How can Sylvia help?

David  
Sylvia? Is it Sylvia? How are you Sylvia? Good to see  
you, Sylvia.

He throws an arm around her neck as though greeting a  
long-lost friend.

David  
Sylvia Tony, Tony Sylvia.

Sylvia  
What can we do for you, David?

David  
Do for me, Sylvia, what, yes, got to stop talking, got to  
stop, got to stop, it's a problem isn't it? Is it a  
problem?

Sylvia  
It's alright David; just tell Sylvia why you're here.

David  
Ahhhh! Well it's a mystery, a mystery, a mystery -

Sylvia  
Are you lost?

David  
Am I lost? Perhaps that's it. I'm lost, I'm lost, I'm  
lost. How does that sound?

He sees the piano.

David  
Ooh you have a piano. Is that your piano, Sylvia?  
Beautiful Sylvia,. Isn't Sylvia beautiful Tony? You too

Tony. Perhaps I could play it. Could I play it? You say, you say.

Sam  
Like hell baby.

Sylvia  
Shut up, Sam.

David  
(lurches towards SAM)  
Hell baby, the Devil, Diablerie Sam baby!  
SAM  
Get outta here.

TONY is in fits of laughter ❖

Sylvia  
David -

David  
Sylvia, such a beautiful piano exquisite Sylvia, Sylvia-Tony.

He moves towards it.

David  
Could I play, you say, you say?

Sylvia  
Why don't you tell Sylvia where you live?

David  
Live, Sylvia, live - live and let live - that's very important isn't it? Molto, molto. But then again it's a lifelong struggle, isn't it Sylvia-Tony, to live, to survive, to survive undamaged and not destroy any living breathing creature. The point is, if you do something wrong you can be punished for the rest of your life so I think it's a lifelong struggle; is it a lifelong struggle? Whatever you do it's a struggle, a struggle to keep you head above water and not get it chopped off. I'm not disappointing you am I Sylvia-Tony-Moby-Sam, yay Sam!

EXT. STREETS - NIGHT

Sylvia's old Humber belts past in the heavy rain.

INT. Sylvia'S CAR - NIGHT

TONY is driving. Sylvia is in front, both laughing along

with David in the back.

David

(a braying laugh)

◆Helfott◆ - ◆with the help of God◆ - that◆s what it means Sylvia. How◆s that? You see, Daddy◆s daddy was religious, vee-eery religious, very strict; and a bit of a meanie. But he got eterminated, didn◆t he, so God didn◆t help him. Whoohhh. Not very funny is it, Sylvia? Very sad, really sad - I◆m callous aren◆t I, such a meanie because I haven◆t got a soul, is that right - that◆s right isn◆t it?

Sylvia - (O.S.)

What do you mean?

David

Daddy, daddy said so. No such thing as a soul.

A train whiste sounds in the distance.

Sylvia

That◆s ridiculous

David

Ridiculous; you◆re right. I◆m ridiculous Sylvia-Tony, and callous Daddy said because it was a tragedy, a tragedy ◆

The car drives into a tunnel. Blackness in the tunnel.

David - (V.O.)

◆ a ridiculous tragedy.

The sound of the train wheels rattling, blasting a signal sweeps us into bright light.

INT. OLD HALL - DAY

As if in a dream, children◆s faces turn to look at camera in soundless slow-motion. Some are made up, prissy, perfectly dressed for a performance, accompanies by ◆stage mothers◆, fanning themselves in the stifling heat, all eyes focused on the next contestant as he makes his way up the centre aisle.

His POV. Over this we fade up.

ANNOUNCER

Let◆s hear it for our next young contestant, David Helfgott.

David, nine, makes his way down the aisle clutching a score. His hair is meticulously parted and he wears spectacles. A little uncertain, he stops and looks back to his father. Peter HELFGOTT is a thickset Polish man in his fifties. He motions for David to keep going, then sits, anxious and excited. David walks up some steps onto the stage.

Announcer

David's going to play the piano for us, aren't you David?

David

Yes.

He's stage-struck by all those faces looking at him, including three judges - two elderly females and a man in his thirties. His name is BEN Rosen.

Announcer

What are you going to play?

David's attention is taken by a fan nearby, blades whirring.

Announcer

David, what are you going to play?

David snaps out of it, when from the audience

Peter

(stands)

Chopin! The Polonaise!

Peter smiles full of charm, and a little embarrassed at all eyes on him; he applauds encouragingly then sits.

David's heels click on the bare boards as he crosses to the old upright piano centre-stage. HE adjusts his music. His bony legs barely reach the pedals. HE difgets, looks into the spotlight. He takes a deep breath, then launches into Chopin's Polonaise in A Flat, the first few bars ring out with unusual power, surprising everyone - BEN Rosen in particular.

David attacks the keys with such gusto that the piano inches forward. HE hooks his foot around the leg of the stool and drit in. He plays on. The piano moves again. He blurs some notes. Again he readjusts the stool without missing a beat; pages of his score flutter to the ground but David plays on, undaunted, to the end. Rosen watches the courageous performance with wry amazement. Peter arrives

backstage flustered. To the ANNOUNCER :

Peter  
The piano, it is disgraceful.

The piano slews forward. David stands and plays the final few bars with awesome intensity.

Announcer  
This kid's good; he's great.

A moment.

Peter  
He's my son!

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - DAY  
The expectant faces of two young girls loom large as they look down the street from their perch in a tree - Margaret, 12, and SUZIE, 5.

Suzie  
Did he win or lose?

Along the street, David walks a few paces behind Peter.

Margaret  
He lost.

David jumps over the cracks in the pavement.

Margaret  
Now we'll all cop it. Damn you David Helfgott.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - DAY  
Peter broods, his mind turning over. A scratch recording of Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto plays on the gramophone. David moves a chess piece and waits for Peter.  
RACHEL HELFGOTT, Peter's wife, lights the woodstove. Her face, once beautiful, is now blanketed by the gollow look of years of submission. Margaret is doing homework on the kitchen table.

David  
IT's your turn, Daddy.

Peter flicks a look at the board a moves a piece.

Peter

You know, David, when I was your age, I bought a violin, I saved for that violin, it was a beautiful violin. All listen to the story they've heard before. Do you know what happened to it?

David glances at a photo of a stern rabbi high up on the wall.

David

He smashed it.

A moment, the Peter slams his fist on the small table, knocking some chess pieces off.

Peter

You are a lucky boy. MY father never let me have music.

David

I know, Daddy.

Peter

You are very lucky.

David

Yes Daddy.

(lights up.)

Will I play for you?

Peter

No. You pick up these pieces.

David proceeds to on hands and knees while Peter goes to switch the gramophone off.

Margaret

(to David)

I bet I could've won.

Peter

(in Yiddish)

Quiet.

David pokes a face at Margaret. She does the same to him, careful for Peter not to see. David gallops the knight across the board. There's a knock at the frond door. Margaret makes to go.

Peter

Margaret!

She stops.

Peter

I told you, tell your friends not to come.

She sits. There's another knock which Peter ignores.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. SIDEWAY - DAY

BEN Rosen walks around the sideway of the dilapidated old house, uncertain if there's anyone home. He spots someone in the backyard.

Rosen

Hello.

It's SUZIE.

SUZIE

Hello.

Rosen

Who are you?

INT/EXT. HELFOYY HOUSE. BACKYARD - DAY

Peter looks across.

SUZIE - (O.S.)

Daddy, there's someone here.

Rosen appears at the back door.

Rosen

I hope I'm not interrupting ?

Peter stands in the doorway looking down at him, resenting the intrusion.

Rosen

Ben Rosen. I was one of the judges.

Peter doesn't accept the proffered handshae. He motions SUZIE in.

Peter

(to Rosen)

Yes?

Rosen

You left before all the prizes were announced.

David appears behind Peter.

Rosen  
You were very good this afternoon, David.

David  
Thank you.

Peter  
He can play better.

Rosen  
Maybe he was a little too good. Some people don't like that. We gave him a special prize for his courage.

Peter takes the envelope from Rosen and peels it open.  
Margaret starts playing the piano in the background.

Rosen  
It was a very difficult piece you chose, David.

David  
Daddy chose it.

Rosen notices RACHEL sneak a look out the window at him.

Rosen  
Even great pianists think twice before tackling the Polonbaise.

David's eyes light up as Peter takes a pound note from the envelope.

Peter  
A prize for losing!

He pockets the money.

Rosen  
I wouldn't call him a loser.

Peter  
(in Yiddish, to Margaret)  
Stop, that is enough!

She stops playing.

Rosen  
(in Yiddish)  
She plays well too.

The Yiddish catches Peter out.

Peter  
(disdainful)  
They all play.

Rosen  
I'm quite sure David could win lots of competitions with the  
right tuition.

He offers a business card showing his qualifications.

Peter  
I teach him.

Rosen  
You've obviously done well.

Peter  
Yes - and no one taught me; no music teachers Mr. Rosen.

Rosen  
Of course, it's just that a few bad habits can sometimes  
mean the difference between winning or losing.  
He knows which strings to pull.  
If you'd like to think about it.

He hands Peter the card. Peter holds his look and closes  
the door on him.

EXT. STREET OUTSIDE HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT  
The house is in darkness

INT. HELFOTT HOUSE - NIGHT  
In the bedroom Peter wakes to the sound of the piano  
filtering through from the living area.

He walks down the hallway, drawn by the sparse, haunting  
music which is familiar: Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto.  
Entering the living area he sees David playing the piano in  
near darkness. David struggles to get his small fingers  
across the keys, faltering to a stop ❖

Peter  
Rachmaninov?

David  
It's beautiful.

Peter sits beside his son.

Peter  
You taught yourself?

David  
From the record.

Peter  
The record?

David  
You always play it.

Peter smiles.

Peter  
It is very difficult, the hardest piece in the world, David.

David  
Will you teach me?

Pause. Peter deflects.

Peter  
One day you will play it, you will make me very proud.

Peter hugs his small son.

Peter  
Next time, what are we going to do?

David  
WE're going to win.

Peter  
We're going to win!  
(Kisses him.)  
Now go to bed.

David  
Goodnight, Daddy.

Moments later Peter takes a score from a battered suitcase full of music: Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto. IT's

awesome in its complexity, page after page. Peter positions it on the piano, then contemplates the keys with his own thickset, clumsy hands. The framed photo of the rabbi looks down at him. Peter clenches his fists in frustration.

EXT. BEN ROSEN'S HOUSE - DAY

David and Peter walk along a cobbled path. David stops to look at some goldfish in a large pond. Peter bustles him along to the frontdoor of the house. RAIN threatens. Peter rings the bell. David smiles and goes to do the same but Peter stops him with a look.

The door is opened by Rosen.

Peter

I have decided I would like you to teach David.

(Hands him some music.)

This!

Rosen

Rachmaninov? Don't be ridiculous.

Peter

He can play it already.

Rosen

He's just a boy. How can he express that sort of passion?

Peter

You are a passionate man, Mr. Rosen. You will teach him, no?

Rosen

No. I'll teach him what I think is best.

David is entranced by some chimes hanging over his head.

Peter

Rachmaninov is best.

(No response.)

But you are his teacher; I let you decide.

Rosen

(dry)

Thank you. We'll start with Mozart.

He lets David in and Peter goes to follow but the door is already closing on him.

Peter  
I can't afford to pay.

The door shuts, leaving Peter stranded. It starts to rain.  
The sound of scales issues from inside.

INT. ROSEN'S HOUSE - DAY  
David plays the scales. Rosen spots Peter at the side  
window, peering in. Rosen shuts the blind on him.

EXT. ROSEN'S SIDEWAY - DAY  
Peter, in the rain, presses his ear to the window. The sound  
of thunder advanced from:

EXT. LODGE. NIGHT. - THE PRESENT  
Heavy rain. Sylvia's car pulls up. She jumps out and opens  
the back door.

Sylvia  
Come on David, Sylvia's getting wet.

She drags him out.

David  
Wet Sylvia, sorry Sylvia, such a wet.

They run past a sign clanging on a chain: 'Eden Lodge'.

INT. DAVID'S ROOM AT EDEN LODGE - NIGHT  
Sylvia is appalled by what she sees. The room is littered  
with sheet music, rubbish, cigarette butts.

Sylvia  
Is this your room, David?

David  
It's a room, it's a room, home sweet home.

She looks at the piano - a battered honky-tonk, chipped keys  
all burnt by cigarettes.

Sylvia  
You can play?

David  
Kind of, kind of play kind of sweet kind Sylvia.  
(Picks up sheet music.)  
Chopin, Sylvia, Chopinzee! The Pole-popolski. Like Daddy  
and his family before they were concentrated.

He brushes a Rachmaninov score aside.

Sylvia  
How long have you been here?

David  
Golly, I don't know. Aeons I think, a few years, a few.  
And Schubert, nothing wrong with Schubert except syphilis,  
was it syphilis? I think it was. Then he got typhoid on  
top of it and that was the end of him wasn't it? We lost  
him -

Shenotices a row of tablet bottles by the bed.

David  
That was a bit careless wasn't it Sylvia - Whooah we lost  
him, we lost him, didn't live to swim another day.

MINOGUE enters; late fifties, he has a thick Scottish accent  
and a suspicious look in his eye.

David  
Him. I was a naughty boy wasn't I? Was I a naughty boy?  
Chop chop, off with the head.

Minogue  
I was about to send out a search party. He shuts the window.

David  
Whooahhh, a search party Jim, a party! I won't be invited  
again, will I Sylvia?

Sylvia  
He showed up at my restaurant, seemed a bit lost.

David  
How's that Sylvia, how's that? A party! A celebration. A  
fiesta - !

Minogue  
He's good at that. Thank you for bringing him back.

He ushers her out.

David  
Time for a wine and a very fine time. A mardi gras and a  
nice long cigar - Whoooah Jim Jim Jim, a party.

He realizes he's on his own. He stares blankly at the rain hitting the window, getting louder until it becomes the sound of applause, from:

INT. CONCERT HALL. DAY - THE PAST  
Rows of enthusiastic clapping hands.

PRESENTER - (V.O.)  
The winner and State champion, David Helfgott.

As the wild applause continues, we end on a big close-up of David as he comes up from a bow, now a young adolescent. Several years have passed.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. - DAY  
SUZIE  
He won! David won!

Margaret  
I can hear that. I'm not deaf.

RACHEL nurses baby LOUISE.

RACHEL  
That's your clever brother.

INT. BACKSTAGE OF HALL - DAY  
Peter bursts through the door, rushes up to Rosen and kisses him on both cheeks.

Peter  
We won. We won.

Rosen  
Thanks to Mozart.

Peter  
Now he can play Rachmaninov.

Rosen sighs. David takes centre stage. Peter watches from the wings with Rosen and the other contestants.

PRESENTER  
And now to present David with the prize money, our very special guest from America, ladies and gentlemen, currently on tour in Australia - Isaac Stern.

STERN shakes hands with David. Peter applauds vigorously, overwhelmed with excitement.

Peter  
He's my son!

STERN  
(to David)  
You have a very special talent, David.

David  
Thank you, thank you Mr. Stern. So do you.

Laughter.

STERN  
How much are you prepared to give to your music, David?

David  
How much?

Peter  
(from the wings)  
Everything.

Rosen settles Peter.

David  
Everything. But I do like tennis - and chemistry too.

Laughter. Peter laughs too.

STERN  
Do you play tennis as well as you play Mozart?

David  
Only against the wall at home, I bounce the ball against the wall mainly.

STERN  
How would you like to come to a special school in the States where music bounces off the walls?

David's imagination is captured.

David  
America?

STERN  
Land of the Free. Home of the Brave! You know?

Peter's expression falters.

PRESENTER

Ladies and gentlemen, what an honour for our young state champion to be invited to study in America.

The audience applauds. People congratulate Peter.

Rosen

That's fantastic, Peter.

Peter applauds enthusiastically despite the uncomfortable feeling he is yet to fully understand. David beams into the audience, soaking up that winning feeling.

Fade to white:

SUZIE'S VOICE: 'And now, all the way from America, David Helfgott.'

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. BACKYARD - DAY

David steps out from behind the bright white sheets hanging on the line and bows repeatedly to an imaginary audience.

Margaret

He's not from America.

She takes the washing off the line. The yard is crammed with empty bottles and scrap metal.

SUZIE

He's going to America and when he comes back he'll be coming from there, won't you David?

David bows still, until Margaret unpegs the sheet.

SUZIE

Aren't you going to miss him?

Margaret

Yes.

David smiles as he realizes she means it.

David

Me too.

Youth's voice

Margaret.

Margaret puts the washing down and exits the back gate.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. KITCHEN - DAY

Peter

I have no money to send David to America.

Rosen

We'll raise it.

Peter scoffs. RACHEL looks over from the sink where she's scraping marrow from bones into a pot.

Rosen

Bar mitzvah.

Peter

What?

Rosen

David hasn't had his bar mitzvah.

Peter looks out the window.

Peter

Religion is nonsense.

Rosen

It's also a goldmine if you know where to dig.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. BACKYARD - DAY

David

One day I'll play with an orchestra.

SUZIE

Can I come when you do?

David

You can ride with me in my cadillac.

SUZIE

Where are you going to live in America?

Behind them, Peter steps out of the kitchen.

David

With a nice Jewish family they said.

Peter

And this is not a nice family?

David

Oh yes, very nice, very -

Peter

You are very lucky to have a family!

He stabs a look at the abandoned laundry basket - no sign of Margaret.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. REAR LANEWAY - DAY

Peter's face appears over the rear corrugated iron fence which has a strand of barbed wire running across the top. In the laneway Margaret is talking to a GANGLY YOUTH. Seeing Peter she pales.

Margaret

I have to go.

She hurries to the gate. When she opens it, Peter is there. She squashes past him, his eyes burning through her.

INT. HELFGOTT KITCHEN - DAY

Rosen

It's one of the finest music schools in the world.

RACHEL

It is for his father to decide.

Rosen

David will be well looked after, I assure you.

RACHEL nods politely, unconvinced.

Pause.

Rosen

(Perplexed, steps closer)

Rachel, David could well be one of the truly great pianists.

RACHEL

He is just a boy, Mr. Rosen. He still wets the bed.

Rosen absorbs this. Margaret fumes past.

EXT. STREET - DAY

A rickety pram wheel wobbles along. Widen to reveal Peter pushing the dilapidated old pram down the ordinary suburban street, flanked by David and SUZIE wearing grubby school

uniforms.

Several kids playing hopscotch stop as they see them approaching, then clear a path for the odd trio to pass. SUZIE looks down her nose at them. David performs the hopscotch without missing a beat as the trio continues on its way. The kids watch after them, like they were from another planet.

Wide shot. David and SUZIE collect several bottles which have been left on the sidewalk, put them in the pram and walk on with Peter.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. BACKYARD - DAY

Peter straddles a large piece of scrap metal - the head of a truck engine - and heaves it off the pram with a great sense of satisfaction. It joins a pile of metal and a stack of empty bottles in the corner of the yard.

Peter

You see how fit I am, you see how strong?

SUZIE

Show me Daddy, show me where the lion scratched you when you worked at the circus.

Peter extends his hand with a sense of theatricality to reveal a long, jagged scar.

Peter

That's what happens when you get too close to the bars.

He stands in a body-builder pose, barrel-chested.

Peter

Come on David, hit me.

Suzie

Me!

Peter

David, as hard as you can.

David

Okay. Here comes. Ready.

David's punch bounces off Peter's stomach.

SUZIE

My turn Daddy.

Peter  
Harder. Come on!  
(David punches again.)  
You see. A man of steel.

David  
Steel alright.  
(Rubbing his fist.)

Peter  
No one can hurt me! Because in this world only the fit survive.

RACHEL watches from the laundry, sweating over the hot copper; she sees another side to the fun and games.

Peter  
The weak get crushed like insects. Believe me, if you want to survive in America you have to be fit and strong, like me.

INT. SYNAGOGUE. OFFICE CORRIDOR - DAY  
An elderly receptionist types with one finger on an antiquated typewriter. Peter sits in the narrow corridor, arms folded tightly. He would rather be somewhere else. On the wall opposite him a long line of faces - the portraits of past rabbis of the synagogue stare down.

Peter glances at the folded newspaper on the seat next to him: The Maccabean. On the front page - a photo of David seated at the piano with a smiling Peter, pointing at a score as if taking David through a lesson.

The elderly typist removes the sheet from the typewriter and smiles at Peter. He nods politely, then resumes his steely composure. The door to the RABBI's office opens. Peter stands.

RABBI  
(exits the office with David)  
See you next week David, and don't forget to study.  
(He hands him the 'soncino chumash'.)  
We'll see you in Schul, Elias.

Peter feigns a polite smile.

David

Thank you Rabbi.

They walk off. David takes The Maccabean from him, noting tstand displaying more copies of this latest issue. Peter puts his arm on David's shoulder, draws him in, as if protecting him from an invisible foe. The RABBI considers it, then goes back into his office.

EXT. BEN Rosen'S HOUSE - DAY

The POSTMAN rides along the street, past David waiting expectantly at his front gate. No mail today. David watches after him, sighs.

INT. BOKSER MANSION - NIGHT

A chandelier glistens above the entry. David and Peter enter tentatively. The foyer is dripping with dignity and provincial social elite. David and Peter are immediately set on by the hostess, MRS. BOKSER, a busy socialite.

MRS. BOKSER

Mr. Helfott, it's exciting isn't it? David, the Lord Mayor's dying to meet you.

She takes David by the hand, dragging him away. A WAITER offers Peter a drink from a try but Peter's attention is on

David being whisked away.

Cut to a short while later. Faces glowing with appreciation and sparkling jewellery surround David.

MRS. Bokser

And I would like to thank our wonderful Lord Mayor for establishing this fund for David to go to America.

(Applause.)

And now to play for us, our very own David Helfgott.

Rosen notes Peter's embittered look around the room as the gathering smothers David with affection on his way to the piano - a shake of the hand, a kiss, etc.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter's voice can be heard raging inside.

Peter - (V.o)

These people are a disgrace!

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. GIRL'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

SUZIE nestles up to Margaret and baby LOUISE, frightened by the yelling.

Peter - (V.O.)  
A disgrace.  
(A loud thump.)  
They think they are so important.  
(Curses in Yiddish.)

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. LOUNGE - NIGHT  
Peter paces, like a caged lion, bursting with anger.

Peter  
What do they know with their furs and their diamonds? It  
makes me sick to the stomach.

RACHEL is on the receiving end.

Peter  
And Rosen. Pah!

INT. David'S ROOM. NIGHT - NIGHT  
David lies in bed listening.

Peter - (V.O.)  
What kind of man is he? He has no children. He's not  
married, I know! Don't talk to me about Rosen.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE. LOUNGE - NIGHT  
Peter curses again in Yiddish.

Rachel  
He only wants for David the same as you have always wanted.

Peter  
Don't ever compare me to him. What has he suffered? Not a  
day in his life! What does he know about families? Do you  
forget how your sisters died?

He thumps the wall by he photograph o RACHEL and her  
sisters.

Peter  
And my mother and father.  
(Yiddish.)  
Stupid woman. Stupid!

Cut to later. Peter sits in near darkness, just staring it  
seems. We realize he is looking at a scrapbook, articles  
and photos of David throughout his brief but stunning  
career, including a photo with Isaac Stern.

Peter stares, his mind turning the same thing over and over.

INT. David'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

David is asleep. A shadow falls across him. It's Peter. He comes over and stands there, burdened, watching over his sleeping son. He kisses David lovingly on the forehead.

INT. AUSTRALIA-SOVIET SOCIETY. MEETING ROOM - NIGHT

David bows to warm applause.

SECRETARY

Thank you Comrade Helfgott; your son is a credit to you.

Peter proudly puts his hand on David's shoulder. On the wall there's a communist flag and a Stalin portrait. The gathering consists of 25 people, members of the society. One woman, in her mid-seventies, warmly applauds her appreciation of David's talent.

Cut to later. Cocktails are being served. Peter is involved in a discussion. He looks around for David. No sign.

INT. THE SOCIETY READING ROOM - NIGHT

David takes a book from the shelf - it's on Russia. A GIRL, about 17, stares at him through the shelves.

GIRL

You play beautifully.

David

Thank you.

GIRL

My name is Sonia.

David

I'm David.

SONIA

I know who you are.

She laughs; so does David. He's quite taken.

SONIA

You have the most wonderful hands.

He looks at his hands, like he'd never noticed. Then looks at hers.

David  
So do you.

She smiles warmly.

SONIA  
You're going to America?

David  
That's right.

Sonia  
Perhaps one day you will go to Russia too.

David  
Yes. Why not?

Peter - (O/s)  
David.

David puts his hands in his pockets.

David  
Right here.

Peter gives SONIA a charming smile.

Peter  
Excuse us. There is someone important who wants to meet  
you, David.

INT. THE SOCIETY READING ROOM - NIGHT  
We recognize the woman from above - KATHERINE SUSANNAH  
PRICHARD. Her face reflects a sharp intelligence and strong  
humanity.

Katherine  
I've never met anyone who plays the piano as beautifully as  
you, David.

David  
And I've never met a writer before, Mrs. Prichard.

KATHERINE  
You must be very proud of him.

Peter  
As proud as a father can be.

KATHERINE smiles.

KATHERINE

I have a long-suffering old piano at home.

Peter

A suffering piano?

Katherine

From neglect. Perhaps you'd come and play it for me, David?

Peter goes to speak, but David interrupts.

David

Oh yes, anything to help.

Katherine

I'd like that very much.

David

Me too.

SECRETARY - (O/S)

Your attention Comrades. I wish to propose a toast to our founder -

Katherine

That's my cue. Excuse me.

SECRETARY

- and very special guest this evening, Katherine Susannah Prichard.

Peter applauds along with everyone else.

Peter

You will learn much from this old woman, David. She has been to Soviet Union.

As KATHERINE joins the SECRETARY up front, she smiles at David.

Peter

(Nudges David)

Smile. Look happy.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - DAY

David hurries out the front door excitedly at the sound of

the POSTMAN's whistle. The POSTMAN finds a letter for David in his satchel and holds it away before playfully dropping it into the letter box. David grabs it and registers where it's come from.

David  
America!

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT  
David excitedly reads a letter from 'The Michleburg family - New Jersey'.

David  
'◆we have been informed of your exceptional talent and can only say how privileged we feel to have you come and stay with us'.

Peter listens as he chops vegetables on a board, alongside several marrow bones.

David  
'You will be pleased to know that we are having the Bosendorfer tuned especially for you.'

Peter scoops the vegetables into a steaming pot.

David  
'We eagerly await your innement -'

Margaret  
Imminent, fool.

SUZIE  
I wonder if they've got a cadillac?

David  
'Imminent arrival◆ And look forward to hearing you play for us. Kindest wishes, Simon and Basha Mickleburg.'

Peter chops more vegetables - the simple words are like daggers. RACHEL is mindful of his brooding silence.

SUZIE  
Read it again.

Margaret  
Not again!

She turns the radio up.

David  
You're just jealous.

Peter simmers.

SUZIE  
Just the bit about the parakeet and the dog and the two  
cats.

Margaret puts her hands over her ears.

David  
'◆ you'll enjoy the company of our parakeet and our poodle  
called Margaret'.

Margaret  
Pig! It is not!

She grabs the letter and David tries to get it; all yelling,  
playing 'keepings off' around the room.

David  
Jealous, jealous, give it!

Margaret  
Pig! Pig!

Peter  
ENOUGH!

He sweeps a bottle of milk off the bench; it explodes at  
SUZIE's feet.

Peter  
Enough of this nonsense!

David pales as Peter tears the letter up. SUZIE cries.

David  
Daddy?

Peter  
Forget it! You are not going. David is not going anywhere.  
(Silence.)  
What are you looking at, you fools? He is not going to  
America! I won't let anyone destroy this family!

David

Daddy, but Daddy please -

Peter

I know what is best, David. I know because I am your father and this is your family.

Stunned silence. David runs out of the house.

Peter

David! David come back -

The door slams.

RACHEL

(in Yiddish)

Why now!? Why!?

Peter slaps her.

EXT. BEN ROSEN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

The house is in darkness. David knocks. He's been running, in a sweat.

David

Mr. Rosen?

No answer.

David

Mr. Rosen. It's David.

(He bangs at the door.)

Please Mr. Rosen. Please.

There's nobody home. David slides down the door, clutching his knees, bewildered.

Cut to water rippling in the moonlight. David's reflection appears in the pond. He watches the distortion of his face in the water, then slaps the surface and after a moment the image settles again. He puts his head under, right up to his shoulders.

Cut to underwater, David's face, as bubbles escape from his mouth. In fact we are :

INT. HELFOTT BATHROOM - NIGHT

We realize David's face is underwater in the bath. He surfaces, for air and just stares, breathing awkwardly. Peter enters in a dressing gown.

Peter

Come on David, you have been long enough. Are you feeling better now? Silly boy, all this nonsense. This is your home, this is where you belong❖

David's POV: Peter peeling off his dressing gown singlet, talking but there is no sound - it's like a dream. Peter goes to get in but stops as he sees something in the bath that horrifies him.

Peter

David!

(He slaps David's head.)

You animal. You disgusting animal.

He slashes at David with a white singlet, splashing water everywhere.

Peter

To shit in the bath. To do this to me. You callous boy.

To shit like an animal.

David barely reacts as the attack with the wet singlet continues, across his bare back, his head❖ water arcs across the small bathroom with each blow.

Just as suddenly as it started, it's over. Peter is gone. Water runs down the walls like blood. A drop forms on the flickering light globe, then falls. David just stares❖ in shock. Silence.

INT. SYNAGOGUE - DAY

RACHEL is huddled with SUZIE, Margaret and LOUISE in the upper balcony. The Jewish community watches as David sings from the Torah, taking his bar mitzvah, head bowed, almost cowering.

Rosen senses something is wrong. He looks across at Peter whose stern unwavering expression gives nothing away.

Close-up: Peter, a man of steel.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT

Wide shot. The house is in near darkness. Rosen walks up purposefully and scrapes the front gate open. He knocks at the door. No answer.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT

In the hallway - Rosen's silhouette through the opawue glass. He knocks again.

Reveal Peter, in the shadowy darkness, the outside world completely shut out.

INT. THE LOUNGEROOM - NIGHT

The air is thick with tension. RACHEL amuses little LOUISE.

SUZIE flips through the scrapbook. Margaret fingers the same note on the piano. All stop as the knocking echoes again through the solemn quiet, like a knell. Silence.

Margaret

This house is like a concentration camp.

She lets the piano lid drop shut. In the hallway Rosen's shadow waits at the door.

Rosen - (V.O.)

Peter? I know you can hear me. Don't do this to David. You mustn't.

Peter's eyes glow with anger in the darkness.

Silence.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT

Rosen

Peter!

Rosen give up, turns to go, but then as an afterthought:

Rosen

Whatever you do, don't inflict bloody Rachmaninov on him. He's not ready!

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT

In the hallway - Rosen's shadow disappears. The gate is heard scraping open as he leaves.

Peter just stands there. The sound of Rosen's car is heard driving away, the headlights flicker across Peter's face.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT

Peter stands over the bed where David lies, facing away.

Peter

David.

(No reply.)

David. My boy? Still you don't speak to me?

Pause.

Peter

It's a terrible thing to hate, to hate your fatehr.

Silence. He sits on the bed.

Peter

Life is cruel, but music, it will always be your friend.  
Everything else will let you down in the end. Everything.  
Believe me.

(Pause.)

Please don't hate me David.

He begins to cry. He sobs.

David looks at his father crying, full of confusion. Their eyes meet and Peter pulls David up and hugs him. David throws his arms around his neck.

Peter

(in Yiddish)

Don't hate me.

Peter kisses David repeatedly on the side of the face, all the while stuttering:

Peter

It's tough, life can be tough but you have to survive, say it. You have to.

David

Survive, Daddy.

Peter

That's right, David. No one will love you like me. You can't trust anyone but I will always be there - always be with you, forever. Do you understand?

David

Yes, Daddy, forever.

They hug as we begin to pull back looking down on them.

Peter

Forever and ever.

Peter AND David  
Forever and ever.

INT. David'S ROOM. EDEN LODGE - NIGHT  
ADULT David sits on the floor in the middle of the room,  
scrounging for a match amidst the mess of paper and music  
spread around him. He picks up something.

It's a crumpled old letter with distinctive letterhead:  
Royal College of Music. David peers myopically at it - we  
only glimpse a few words: 'Dear Mr. Helfgott, we are pleased  
to inform you.'

Fade up - music, from the past - 'Sospiro' by Liszt. It  
continues over:

INT. TRAIN TUNNEL. DAY. THE PAST.  
The train exits a tunnel into bright strobing light.  
EXT. OVERGROWN DRIVEWAY OF KATHERINE'S HOUSE - AFTERNOON  
Bright light pours through a jungle of trees and exotic  
plants. David makes his way down the long overgrown drive.  
Finally, a small weatherboard cottage comes into view, its  
verandah wreathed in wisteria, jasmine and honeysuckle.

EXT. KATHERINE'S HOUSE. VERANDAH - NIGHT  
A photograph of David is removed from a paper bag. It's  
David at his best, supremely confident.

KATHERINE  
Perfect; I'll treasure it until the day I die.

David has finished eating dinner.

KATHERINE  
Are you full?

David  
Full as a goog, Katherine; full as a goog.

INT. KATHERINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT  
David plays the final bars of the Appassionata. When he  
finishes, he looks to KATHERINE in front of several photos  
on the mantel, lost in the past, moved by his palying.

KATHERINE  
Each time you play 'Sospiro' it expresses so completely the  
inexpressible.

David  
Is that good?

KATHERINE  
(sits next to him)  
It's divine.

David  
Inexpressibly divine.

Katherine  
Quite!

He starts playing again.

David  
Tell me a story, Katherine. What story is it today?

David watches her - eyes closed, head swaying.

KATHERINE  
A new story - drops of water.

David  
Raindrops?

KATHERINE  
Yes, raindrops.

David's head sways as he plays the passage.

KATHERINE  
Listen. It's the wind.

Cut to the verandah. Moonlight filters through.

David - (V.O.)  
The wind!

Leaves flutter across the ground❖ Branches sway❖

David - (V.O.)  
The stream.

Katherine - (V.O.)  
The river.

David - (V.O.)  
The ocean, Katherine!

INT. KATHERINE'S HOUSE - DAY

The photograph of David, now framed, is on the mantel.

KATHERINE'S VOICE

◆ You are Krishna, Christ and Dionysus. In your beauty,  
tenderness and strength ◆

The camera moves towards the piano, where David is stooped over. We just see the top of his head until he looks up and, we realize, years have passed.

David is now a young adult. He scribbles the words of the poem onto a score, awed by their beauty as she continues to read.

KATHERINE

To you, all these wild weeds and wind flowers of my life.  
I bring my lord and lay them at your feet.'

EXT. KATHERINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Wide shot. Lights burn warmly in the windows of the old home.

CUT TO:

the front door opens and KATHERINE sees David out.

David

Good night, Katherine.

She kisses him warmly. He ambles off, awkward as a puppy, into the night.

Katherine

Good luck, David.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT

Stagehands carefully position the grand piano onstage. Lights and curtains are being set for a performance. Cut to backstage, hands soak in a steaming bowl of water, next to it is a score of Rachmaninov's Third. David warms his hands in the water, the poise and confidence of his younger years gone, replaced by a shambling insecurity. He throws a nervous look around at the other contestants:

A CELLIST warms up, a VIOLINIST paces, a CONTESTANT goes over her score while another pianist, ROGER, 25, warms up on an old upright piano in the corner.

Cut to the foyer. The audience assembles, waiting to go in.

A poster tells us the occasion is the 'ABC - NATIONAL CONCERTO COMPETITION'.

Arriving amidst the furs and jewellery, Peter is just another face in the crowd. Something draws his attention: BEN Rosen on the stair. He catches Peter looking. Neither hides their contempt. Rosen comments to his companion:

Rosen  
Poor man's Leopold Mozart.

CUT TO:  
Onstage. A piano cover is removed revealing gold letters : 'BOSENDORFER'. David is drawn towards the grand piano, mesmerized by its magnificence. He circles it, oblivious to everything else. The sound of applause fades up❖

ANNOUNCER - (V.O.)  
That was out final contestant -

INT. KATHERINE'S HOUSE - NIGHT  
ANNOUNCER - (radio v.o., continued)  
David Helfgott, who gave a stirring performof Rachmaninov's Third Concerto for Piano in D Minor❖

KATHERINE looks at the framed photo of adolescent David

KATHERINE  
Bravo, David.

ANNOUNCER - (radio v.o.)  
The judges will now confer.

INT. CONCERT HALL - NIGHT  
In the audience, Peter is anxious as the jury confers. Rosen observes him. Backstage, THE CONTESTANTS assemble in readiness, wishing each other luck.

An evnelope is handed to the ANNOUNCER who adjusts his bow-tie then steps onto the stage. David shuffles nervously on the spot, standing next to ROGER, whose focus is on the stage.

David  
It's a tough game isn't it, Roger?

Roger  
A bloodsport.

Announcer  
Ladies and gentlemen.

Peter leans forward in anticipation.

Announcer  
I am pleased to announce the winner of this year's ABC  
National Concerto Competition is - Roger Woodward.

Applause. Peter's face turns to stone.

David  
Well done, well done, Roger.

The other contestants congratulate ROGER then he walks out  
onto the stage to a loud ovation.

David watches from the wings as ROGER takes his bows in the  
bright spotlight.

INT. KATHERINE'S HOUSE - DAY  
A framed photo of KATHERINE's father is on the mantel,  
amidst others including the one of David as a bright  
adolescent.

David  
What was he like, Katherine?

She looks up from her book.

David  
Your father.

She puts the book aside.

KATHERINE  
He was forever busy in his study. 'Go away, Kattie, I'm  
writing,' he'd always say. One day, I was very young, I got  
so annoyed I emptied the inkpots all over his desk and I  
scrawled on his work, pages of it. When he saw it he stood  
there seething with anger; I could feel it.

David fills with dread.

Katherine  
'What are you doing?' he shouted.

It startles David, feeding his own fears.

KATHERINE

There was this terrible silence. I just stared at him and said, 'Go away, daddy, I'm writing.'

David is suspended.

KATHERINE

He ran at me and picked me up, and cuddled me breathless. My first literary effort he always called it.

Silence. KATHERINE sees there's something troubling David.

KATHERINE

What is it?

(No reply.)

David?

He extracts a letter from his pocket. She takes it and reads it.

KATHERINE

The Royal College of Music. A scholarship. David that's marvelous!

David

Won't cuddle me Katherine, oh no.

He wrings his hands full of anxiety.

KATHERINE

He can't stop you, David.

David

Such an angry lion.

Katherine

Nonsense, he's a pussycat.

She holds him comfortingly and looks into his uncertain eyes to give him strength.

KATHERINE

I'll miss you.

INT. KATHERINE'S HOUSE - DAY

Close-up - a small box which KATHERINE takes from the sideboard.

KATHERINE

These were for my son but he left home before I could give them to him.

David opens it and takes out an exquisite pair of red fur-lined kid gloves.

KATHERINE

You'll need them. It gets very, very cold in London.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - DUSK

A fiery red sky. David walks along, churning with anxiety. He stops and takes the gloves out of the gladstone bag he's carrying. He draws them on, then walks off leaving the bag behind.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT

David enters quietly, makes his way through the darkness.

Peter's VOICE

Where have you been?

A table lamp is switched on to reveal Peter sitting there.

David

I missed the train.

Peter's eyes glow with hostility.

Peter

That Prichard woman!

David goes to move away.

Peter

What is this?

The gloves David's wearing. He takes a backward step.

Peter

What?

(Stands.)

Look at me. Look at me!

David has no choice. Peter's eyes burn through him.

Peter

David?

David slowly extracts the letter, backs away as Peter reads.

Peter

You think you can just do as you please? Huh?

David

I... I want to go; I'm going. You can't stop me.

A terrible silence. Then Peter comes at David like a lumbering bear.

Peter

I am your father. Your father! Who has done everything for you; you cruel, callous boy!

David tries uselessly to fend him off.

David

Daddy -

Peter

I am your father!

He slaps David around the head, knocking his glasses off.

David

Please Daddy -

Peter

Stupid boy!

SUZIE runs in and tries to pull Peter away.

SUZIE

No -

Peter gives SUZIE a backhand.

David

It's not Suzie's fault.

David charges forward, crashing Peter into the wall.

RACHEL

(racing in)

Stop it! Stop it!

Peter throws David across the room. Margaret intervenes.

Peter  
Get out of the way!

He picks up a chair and throws it against the wall.

EXT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT  
RACHEL - (V.O.)  
(screams)  
No!

Dogs bark. Neighbours' lights go on.

INT. HELFGOTT HOUSE - NIGHT  
You want to go? Go! Go on!

He has David in a headlock, choking him. They bang into the walls, locked together in a fierce struggle. The photo of the rabbi crashes to the ground. Furniture is skittled - chess pieces scattered.

Rachel  
(screams, in Yiddish)  
No! Stop! Stop!

She bashes his arms with her fists trying to get him to let go of David who can't breathe. Margaret tries to pull Peter away.

Margaret  
I'll get the police!

Finally, Peter lets go of David who slumps to the floor.

Peter  
He's alright, leave him.

Catching his breath, he sees his terrified family, only now registering the horror of what has happened. Silence. David fumbles for his glasses. He picks up the crumpled letter.

Peter  
David, are you alright? Are you?

Peter approaches, with remorse.

Peter  
Come on, David.

David  
I'm old enough to make up my own mind.

He backs away, into the corridor.

Peter  
(laughs)  
He thinks he's going to London.

David  
I've been accepted by the Royal College of Music.

David is full of confusion.

Peter  
What do you think is going to happen to you in London?

David wipes his bloody nose, edges down the corridor.

Peter  
David, listen to me. If you go, you will never be anybody's son, the girls will lose a brother. Is that what you want? You want to destroy this family.

David  
I'm sorry, sorry -

He opens the door. RACHEL holds the girls, all crying.

Peter  
If you love me you will stop this nonsense; you will not step outside that door. Don't make me do it!

David  
Sorry.

Peter  
David!

David steps over the threshold.

Peter  
You will be punished for the rest of your life!!

SUZIE  
David!

The door slams shut.

EXT. COUNTRY ROAD - NIGHT

David runs, in a sweat, on the road to KATHERINE's. The headlights of a car bear straight down on him. It blasts its horn as it swerves around him.

Cut to a blazing fire in:

EXT. HELFGOTT BACKYARD - NIGHT

Music scores burn, school books, David's clothes? Peter throws another pile on, stokes the flames.

Burning in the fire is the scrapbook - images of YOUNG David surrender to the flames.

EXT. LONDON - DAY

'The Royal College of Music' - gold letters carved in stone above the entrance. ADULT David looks up: we are back in the present. He absorbs the imposing building as he shuffles up the steps. Behind him, the magnificent dome of the Albert Hall.

On the curb, GILLIAN is getting out of a taxi. When she looks around, there's no sign of David.

INT. RCOM CORRIDOR. DAY - The present

David shuffles along, past the practice rooms from where different instruments sound, merging into one another as David continues on his journey, his face full of childish wonder. He hears something distinct? a piano. He goes to the source, a practice room at the end of the corridor. He peers through the narrow glass panel, into:

INT. PRACTICE ROOM. DAY - the present

There's a female student practicing with her teacher. She notices the face at the door a moment before it ducks out of sight.

David sneaks another impish look in? the quickly retreats. Again, his face slides into frame and retreats. As if by magic, when the face appears again, it's no longer ADULT David, but the YOUNGER David, longer hair falling in ringlets around his face.

INT. PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

We are back in the past and there's an elderly teacher in the practice room who looks at his watch impatiently to make a point.

PARKES

Bravo, David. Now remind me why I'm here.

David

(enters)

Sorry, Mr. Parkes, sorry.

PROFESSOR CECIL PARKES is in his sixties. His left arm hangs limply by his side, crippled by a stroke.

PARKES

It's fortunate I'm a deeply forgiving human being.

David's VOICE

Liszt was like that, wasn't he, a great humanitarian - not that I ever met him, knew him personally or anything but he had a respect for every living breathing creature; so that was nice of him, wasn't it? Or so I read.

(Plonks a book down.)

Very improvisatorial, very sensual, Mr. Parkes. Virtuosoic.

PARKES

Bacchanalian! Boldness of attack!

He bashes out chords with his one good arm.

PARKES

Diablerie! The Devil, David!

David

Whooaah, mustn't break the piano.

PARKES

Liszt broke plenty!

David

Right!

Swept up, David bashes out some chords - PARKES stops him.

PARKES

(quietly)

But you must play what's on the page; you're not Liszt, remember.

David

Not even slightly Mozart.

PARKES plays (with his good hand) to demonstrate.

PARKES

Come on, fill in for this useless arm of mine.

David plays the 'other hand'.

PARKES

The notes first, your interpretation comes on top of them.

David

On top, yes.

PARKES enjoys their playing together. He likes David.

PARKES

You agree, do you?

David

Oh yes, I always agree.

PARKES

Is that wise?

David

I don't know. Is it?

They play on. David works the pedals; he's wearing odd shoes, a black one and a brown one.

PARKES

Don't forget, it's on the page.

David

Well yes, the notes are, but not the feeling, the emotions which is what I feel.

PARKES

You mustn't sacrifice everything to emotion. It's a question of balance.

David

Is that the question, Professor?

PARKES

Precisely.

David

I thought so.

INT. RCOM FOYER - DAY

A throng of students is going up the stairs. David is coming down the other way, bumping into everyone.

David  
Sorry sorry, oops, beg pardon. You look lovely today, Sarah, simply beautiful.

SARAH  
Thank you, David.

David  
You too, Muriel.

Male student  
Ease up, Helfgott.

Laughter; David's popular with them.

REGISTRAR  
Mr. Helfgott. Your allowance cheque.

Two students - ASHLEY and ROBERT - look on.

ROBERT  
(to ASHLEY)  
Pay day. David!

They flank David as he heads through the foyer.

ROBERT  
You missed the bank. Pity! You'll have to wait until tomorrow.

David  
Can't bank on the bank.

Ashley  
We know someone who'll cash it, David.

David  
Do we Ashley? Do we really?

Robert  
What are friends for?

As they exit to:  
EXT. RCOM - DAY

David  
'All you need is friends', whoahhh. It's what the Beatles say.

ASHLEY

'Love' dear David.

David

Yes, Ashley darling?

Robert

Taxi!

INT. SOHO STRIP CLUB - NIGHT

David crosses to ASHLEY and ROBERT with a tray full of drinks, while a stripper bums and grinds. They drink at David's expense and puff on cigars, including David.

EXT. SOHO - NIGHT

David walks along stuffing his mouth with chocolate and Coke, taking in the sights. A transvestite with bright red-dyed hair and make-up steps out of a doorway - RAY.

RAY

Got a cigarette, love?

David

A cigarette love - love a cigarette.

He offers the packet.

RAY

I'm Ray.

David

Ray? Ray! Raylene! Whooh, pleased to meet you. I'm David, David Helfgott. Ridiculous!

RAY lights up the cigarette, then puts an arm around David.

RAY

You're very friendly, aren't you David?

David

Friendly? Do you think so? That's very important isn't it?

Ray

If you say so, sweetheart.

He steers innocent David into an alleyway.

EXT. TRAFALGAR SQUARE - SUNRISE

Close-up: the bobbing face of a pigeon. It coos. David's eyes blink open. He sees the pigeon and coos back. His face has traces of make-up on it. Under his jacket he's now wearing the lurex vest we say o on RAY.

New angle. David is curled up under a massive statue of a lion (which guards Nelson's column). Nearby a MAN hoses away bird shit.

Wide shot. David shuffles off in the early morning light, across the empty square.

INT/EXT. UPPER WINDOW. RCOM - DAY  
PARKES and another teacher, GORDON VINEY, 50, sip tea as they look out the window onto the street below.

PARKES  
He has the most fantastic hands.

viney  
Not connected to anything above the sholders.

Their POV.

David hurrying up some steps in the College grounds. He drops music everywhere.

PARKES  
He's a little fragile.

viney  
A chopinzee!

PARKES isn't amused.

PARKES  
I've seen enough to suggest he can make the finals of the concerto trials.

VINEY  
And what have you seen, Cecil?

A gleam in PARKES' eye.

PARKES  
Moments of genius.

Viney  
(laugh, bemused)

Genius. Oh really!

POV below - David scrambles chaotically after his music.

INT. RCOM - DAY  
David hurries down the corridor.

VOICE  
David!

He spins around to be met by GILLIAN walking towards him - we are back in the present. ADULT David looks completely baffled.

ADULT David  
Gillian, what are you doing here?

INT. DIRECTOR'S OFFICE. DAY - Present  
RONALD IRWIN - the Director of the College - is a distinguished-looking forty. He pours tea for GILLIAN while David looks at framed photos and various certificates on the wall, shuffling from one frame to another.

IRWIN  
Is he aware of what happened? Does he remember?

Gillian  
Ask him.

IRWIN  
Do you remember much from your student days, David?

David  
Oh yes, yes absolutely. Everything. Well kind of, kind of; or is it a bit of a blank, a bit of a scrabble, the pieces missing - is that it?

gillian  
You're the only one that knows that.

David  
That's right darling, the only one -

gillian  
You were here.

David  
I was, I was here, that's right I was; it seems to be true. Is it true? Or is that just the way it is?

Gillian  
The way what is, David?

David  
Scrabble, darling.  
(To Irwin.)  
It's a tough game, isn't it? A bloodsport.

gillian  
Not quite.

He mumbles on as he turns back to the photos.

Gillian  
Filling in the blanks is what it's all about, as you can see.

IRWIN takes in the mumbling, stooping figure of David, finding it hard to believe.

IRWIN  
That performance he gave for the concerto finals, Rachmaninov's Third. I'll never forget it; I doubt anyone could.

David  
Whooaah Professor!

It's a photo of PARKES - now Sir Cecil Parkes.

INT. RCOM CORRIDOR - DAY  
Doors burst open and YOUNG David tears down the corridor. We are back in the past. He slides to a stop in front of a notice: 'CONCERTO MEDAL FINALISTS (Patron: H.M. The Queen Mother)'.  
'David Helfgott' is on the list of six pinned on the notice board.

ROBERT  
How on earth did we manage to make the finals, dear David?

David - out of breath - can't believe it.

ASHLEY  
You're a conductor's nightmare.

David pulls a 'nightmare' face as he registers his name on

the list.

David  
It's true, it's true.

ROBERT  
What are we going to do?

David  
We're going to win, Ashley-Robert. We're going to win!

INT. PRACTICE ROOM - DAY

PARKES  
Are you sure?

He takes the Rachmaninov Concerto score from David.

David  
I'm never sure about anything, Mr. Parkes.

PARKES  
The Bach' 3? It's monumental.

David  
A mountain! The hardest piece you could everest play.

A moment. PARKES dares to even consider it.

PARKES  
No one's ever been mad enough to attempt the Rach' 3.

David  
Am I mad enough Professor? Am I?

INT. RCOM CORRIDOR. DAY - The present  
STUDENTS mill past ADULT David, GILLIAN and the College  
DIRECTOR walking in the opposite direction.

David's voice  
'The point is, I didn't come to London to enjoy myself, got  
to concentrate' ◆

INT. RCOM. SAME CORRIDOR. DAY - The past  
STUDENTS clear a path for YOUNG David, bumping past them, in  
a flap.

David's voice  
'Got to practice, Katherine; there's three important things  
Mr. Parkes says: "Work, work, work" ◆

David hurries from one door to the next, looking into the practice rooms which are all occupied by students practicing on the pianos room after room.

David's voice

'You see, I am to play in a very special competition and the winner gets to play at the Albert Hall before her Highest Royalness the Queen Mum'

He arrives at a practice room door, the glass obscured by a jacket hanging on the inside. He opens the door and is back by the sight of TWO STUDENTS in an embrace.

David

Whoohh, a duet! Sorry.

He shuts the door, sits in the corridor and proceeds to practice in his head.

INT/EXT. PIANO STORE - DAY

David's voice

'So I bought a piano, how's that Katherine?'

David presses his face against the window, looking in at the exquisite range of grand and concert pianos.

THE END