

"FINE TOOTH COMB"

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FADE IN:

EXT. HAYESES' HOUSE - NIGHT

SUPER: DAVENPORT, IA, 10-29-1994

Few stars dot the sky on this Saturday evening in this neighborhood of quiet character.

INT. SHAUNDRA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

This room is neither frilly nor butch, but it tries to combine the best of both worlds.

SHAUNDRA HAYES (15, Black, tactful; New Orleans native) sits on her bed and watches TV.

What's on: A VCR TAPING of the local annual Dixieland jubilee, the Bix Beiderbecke Jazz Festival.

Shaundra's feet tap to the MUSIC.

THE BAND on the tape consists of seven middle-aged men in matching sport shirts and slacks...men into the time of their middle-aged lives.

As soon as the tune ENDS, Shaundra reaches across the bed for her trumpet case...and pulls out her horn.

MAIN TITLES APPEAR OVER ACTION.

Shaundra's in good fortune: THE NEXT TUNE is familiar to her.

When she plays to the music, her parents, MARSHALL (late 40s, quiet, thoughtful) and DARLENE (late 40s, extroverted), walk into Shaundra's bedroom.

Darlene and Marshall look tickled to death as they get seated next to Shaundra on the bed.

As the music heats up, Shaundra tries to outplay the band on the VCR tape...and shows tremendous poise and real polish.

Now the song ENDS, Shaundra's solo ends, and Marshall and Darlene applaud.

SHAUNDRA

Thanks.

Darlene and Shaundra trade high fives before the former notices a bookcase full of videocassettes. Most of them are labeled: "BIX FESTIVAL."

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

That's mah favorite tape...when the Spartans from DEE-troit came to town in '92 and toe up the festival.

DARLENE

Most of the kids Ah know tape offa MTV. You're the only one who's got five years' worth of Bix Festival tapes.

SHAUNDRA

Would've been six if it weren't for the Flood of '93.

Marshall nods.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

Y'know, Ah'd like to git up on that stage at LeClaire Park and play like that.

Marshall nods again as he holds Shaundra's hands; Darlene pats Shaundra on the shoulder.

DARLENE

What's stoppin' you?

A surprised Shaundra gives Darlene a small smile.

EXT. CORK HILL AME CHURCH - DAY

Cork Hill African Methodist Episcopal Church is a small building whose white siding sure could use a repainting.

INT. CORK HILL AME SANCTUARY - DAY

The interior is better kept; it's as well-appointed as the church's small budget will allow.

Most of the pews teem with PEOPLE...many of retirement age, some in their 20s or 30s, and others, of course, children.

Shaundra, Marshall, and Darlene sit in mid-sanctuary.

Today's service is down to the sermon...where Cork Hill's pastor, LARRY LITTLEFIELD (50s, Black, paternalistic; dresses as loudly as church bylaws allow), lets it all out.

LARRY
 You know, we like to call ourselves
 "God's Country." But we're not
 "God's Country."
 (bangs fist on pulpit)
 We're not good enough!

Some churchmembers AD LIB their agreement.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 Any country that worries more about
 a feud between two figure skaters
 than feeding the hungry can't be
 good enough!

Larry leaves the pulpit and walks back and forth.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 Any country that lets a hundred and
 fifty thousand kids carry guns to
 school can't be good enough!

Some of the churchgoers clap.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 I'll bet you we've got one of those
 gun-toting kids right here in the
 Quad Cities!

Larry receives AD LIBBED agreement from his congregation.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 Speaking of Quad Cities...I don't
 know about a city that gets flooded
 out one year, has a chance to build
 a levee...and votes it down!

Now Larry receives some jeers.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 I wasn't here in Davenport during
 the '65 flood. I was still in
 Cleveland.
 (takes his collar off)
 We settle for less in this country!
 We know what's best for us...but we
 just won't do it!

Larry continues to walk back and forth...and the Cork Hill
 faithful eat it all up.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 Read the first two chapters of the
 Book of Romans...well, I don't have
 to tell you that! It'll tell you
 how we can get good enough!

The congregation cheers.

LARRY (CONT'D)
Good enough!

AD LIBBED encouragement comes from the flock.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 GOOD enough!

CONGREGATION
 Good enough!

LARRY
 We wanna get good enough...so we
 can move up a little higher!

Larry stops right in front of the congregation.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 (drops to his knees)
 You wanna get higher?

CONGREGATION
 YEAH!

LARRY
 You wanna get higher?

CONGREGATION
 YEAH!!

LARRY
 LET ME HEAR IT!

CONGREGATION
 YEAH!!!

Larry rises and turns to the CHOIR (fifteen members in
 matching red robes) and the CHURCH BAND.

LARRY
 TAKE US HIGHER!

Drummer KELTON SYLVESTER (40s), organist DEBBIE CLEAMONS (40s), guitarist JAMAL FLOYD (20s), and Larry's daughter MICHELLE LITTLEFIELD (16, bashful; she plays piano) launch an eight-bar jump intro.

The choir moves to the beat as one to the strains of "I Will Move On Up a Little Higher."

After the eight bars, choir director CAROLYN COOPER (50s) gives the singers their cue.

CHOIR

*Soon as my feet strike Zion,/Gonna
lay down my heavy burden./Put on my
robe in glory,/Goin' home one day,
tell my story.*

The congregation grooves to the music.

CHOIR (CONT'D)

*I've been coming up the hills and
mountains./Gonna drink from the
Christian fountain./You know, all
of God's sons and daughters/That
morning will drink that ol' healin'
water.*

Marshall, Darlene, and Shaundra try to sing that song while the whole church rocks.

EXT. CORK HILL AME CHURCH - DAY

The service is over, and Shaundra and Michelle walk toward the parking lot.

SHAUNDRA

Michelle...you were really cookin'
this morning. Like always.

MICHELLE

Oh, well...

SHAUNDRA

Now you know it and Ah know it: You
really know how to whoop upon a
pianner.

MICHELLE

You wouldn't want to tell that to
Dad. He'll chew me out for that
clinker on the first song we did.

SHAUNDRA
We didn't hear no clinker.

MICHELLE
You were in the congregation,
that's why.

Darlene and Marshall approach Shaundra and Michelle.

SHAUNDRA
Ah was watching some videotapes of
the Bix Festival Ah made on my VCR,
and--

Darlene taps Shaundra on the shoulder.

DARLENE
We gotta git on home.

The Hayeses head for their 1985 Olds Cutlass. Marshall climbs in on the driver's side, Darlene enters on the passenger's side, and Shaundra takes the back seat.

On the way in, Shaundra waves at Michelle.

INT. HAYESES' OLDS CUTLASS - DAY

The Hayes family fastens seat belts.

SHAUNDRA
Mom...Dad...can Michelle ride with
us?

Marshall and Darlene eyeball each other.

MARSHALL
Ah don't see why we cain't,
Darlene.

Shaundra signals Michelle into coming toward the Cutlass.

Michelle stops short at the left front door.

SHAUNDRA
Wanna catch a ride with us,
Michelle?

Michelle's all smiles.

MICHELLE
Sure.

But now, Michelle's mouth drops.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
I'd better ask my dad first.

EXT. HAYESES' HOUSE - DAY

The '85 Cutlass rests in the driveway.

INT. HAYESES' KITCHEN - DAY

Shaundra, Marshall, Michelle, and Darlene prepare Sunday dinner in this modest-yet-effective space...which also has a portable TV that's tuned to A FOOTBALL GAME.

It's a four-ply case of split brains: Half the attention goes to what cooks, the other half to the ACTION on the tube.

Now A COMMERCIAL comes on.

SHAUNDRA
Mom, Dad, you both were right.
Ain't nothing gonna stop me from
starting me a Dixieland band if Ah
want to.
(to Michelle)
And Ah'd like you to be our first
member.

Michelle's mouth flies open.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
Michelle...we've always done thangs
together...especially in music.

Michelle still looks confounded.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
At least in the five years Ah've
known you.

MICHELLE
Not quite, Shaundra. I've never
seen you bring your horn to church.

SHAUNDRA
Nobody asked me.

Shaundra empties a pan of corn into a casserole dish while Michelle empties a pan of mashed potatoes into another ceramic receptacle.

DARLENE
(to Michelle and Shaundra)
Be careful, you two.

Marshall removes a roast (or a chicken or a turkey) from the oven. Darlene turns her attention to him.

DARLENE (CONT'D)

You three.

Darlene's helpers acknowledge their understanding.

MARSHALL

Don't worry 'bout it. We're all ol' pros...speaking of pros, Ah wonder how the...Vikings're doing.

DARLENE

They play later today.

Marshall nods.

DARLENE (CONT'D)

The Saints play next Sunday.

Marshall shakes his head "yes" again.

SHAUNDRA

Anyway, Michelle, it'd be an honor to have you in that band with me.

MICHELLE

You bet I'll do it.

Michelle goes to the refrigerator to grab a butter dish.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

But I just hope nobody breaks my hands after hearing me play Dixieland.

On the kitchen TV, the football game PICKS UP AGAIN.

EXT. NORTH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

This one-story 1980s structure sprawls across the lot.

INT. NORTH HIGH HALLWAY - DAY

Michelle totes a notebook of mimeographed sheets while she walks down a corridor that's not quite full of STUDENTS yet.

At the first bulletin board she finds, Michelle pulls out one of those mimeographed sheets.

Each sheet reads: "DO YOU DIG DIXIELAND?" In smaller letters: "TRY OUT FOR OUR NEW BAND!"

Michelle hangs a sheet on the bulletin board when KELLEY WAKELEY (16, folksy, cute) approaches her.

KELLEY
Hey, how you doing, Littlefield?

MICHELLE
Doing all right, Wakeley.

Kelley watches Michelle hang that ad up; the two girls walk down the hallway together.

The hallway fills up with MORE STUDENTS...many dressed in that hip-hop look or that "Beverly Hills, 90210" look.

Another bulletin board interrupts Michelle's and Kelley's excursion. Michelle pulls out another copy of the ad, hangs the ad up, and goes down the hall alongside Kelley.

KELLEY
How come you're hanging up all those flyers?

MICHELLE
Well...Kelley...

Michelle and Kelley come to a halt.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Promise you won't laugh.

KELLEY
Come on, Michelle. You know me better than that.

MICHELLE
Me and this friend of mine who goes to West are starting a band.

A look of elation crosses Kelley's face.

KELLEY
That's great you wanna be the Quad Cities' answer to Tony! Toni! Tone!

MICHELLE
Well...we didn't quite have that in mind.

KELLEY
Guns 'n' Roses?

Michelle shakes her head "no" as she and Kelley resume their excursion.

KELLEY (CONT'D)

Pearl Jam?

MICHELLE

No.

Kelley shrugs.

KELLEY

Stone Temple Pilots? Nirvana? FOUR
NON BLONDES?

Michelle shakes her head sideways again.

KELLEY (CONT'D)

There isn't much left, is there?

MICHELLE

We're gonna play Dixieland.

KELLEY

See you in English Lit,
Littlefield.

Kelley heads down the hallway as if a fire erupted.

EXT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

This early Space Age structure features, at the front entrance, "HOME OF THE FALCONS" arched above the school's stylized logo.

INT. WEST HIGH FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

This hallway fills with STUDENTS, many of whom have on what their favorite teenage performers like to wear.

Shaundra is one of those students; she carries a stack of "DO YOU DIG DIXIELAND?" sheets down the corridor.

Her excursion stops at her locker, where she sets the sheets on the floor before she opens her locker to take out her notebook and textbook(s).

While Shaundra grabs her textbook(s) and notebook, NOAH ALLMENDINGER (15) bends over to pick up one of the mimeographed sheets.

NOAH
 (reading the sheet)
 "Do you dig Dixieland? Try out for
 our new band!"
 (to Shaundra)
 Get real.

A snickering Noah walks down the hallway, flyer in hand. He crumples the flyer and tosses it toward Shaundra.

An unfazed Shaundra closes her locker and heads for a bulletin board.

INT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

It's several minutes before the school day begins.

Shaundra walks into her home room, where CLASSMATES sit at desks arranged in a semicircle that faces the teacher's desk.

The other students engage in AD LIBBED conversations that change focus when Shaundra sits down...and receives a stare from RAQUEL MELENDEZ (15, full of wisecracks).

RAQUEL
 Nah. Don't tell me. Don't tell me
 that's your name on the flyer.

SHAUNDRA
 Wail, it ain't exactly Hillary
 Clinton's name.

Some of the students engage in goodnatured laughter.

Raquel turns to her other fellow classmates.

RAQUEL
 She's gonna pass up a chance to be
 on MTV. She's gonna play old folks'
 music.

The class laughter becomes louder...and derisive.

One of the laughing students, JEFF KIMICHIK (15), stands up.

JEFF
 Old folks' music!

SEAN SCHILLER (14) jumps out of his seat and tries to dance a la Pee Wee Herman.

SEAN
 (tries to sing, too)
*One, two, three o'clock, four
 o'clock, rock!/Five--*

Jeff joins Sean in singing and hoofing it.

JEFF, SEAN
*--Six, seven o'clock, eight
 o'clock, rock!/Nine--*

RAQUEL
 Wait a minute!

Shaundra doesn't look fazed.

RAQUEL (CONT'D)
 We're talkin' older than old!

Sean and Jeff show mock indignation and sit back down.

SHAUNDRA
 Just thank: When y'all's folks were
 in high school, they were saying:
 "You gotta do your own thang."
 'Member?

Shaundra's classmates sit there in silence.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 That's all Ah'm doing.

TANISHA COLLINS (15, Black) walks over to Shaundra's desk and
 rests a hand on one of Shaundra's shoulders.

TANISHA
 That's a new one on me, Shaundra.

Laughter erupts once more in Shaundra's home room...but a
 still-unfazed Shaundra doesn't laugh.

SHAUNDRA
 Trying to talk to you guys is like
 Joycelyn Elders trying to tell the
 tobacco companies that cigarettes
 are addictive.

The laughter gets louder...

TANISHA
 She doesn't go to this school!

...and louder.

SHAUNDRA

That's awraht, you guys! At least mah band ain't gonna punch out any of our fans...like Guns 'n' Roses did!

All around Shaundra, the laughter continues...but now it includes some AD LIBBED chatter.

INT. HAYESES' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Hayes family's living room is modest, cozy...except when it comes to the TV set (it's ON). The furniture leans on the modern side, and the walls are papered.

Marshall and Darlene sit at the sofa; both watch THE FOOTBALL GAME (Green Bay at Chicago) on this Monday night, Halloween.

Shaundra comes into the room and sits next to her parents.

DARLENE

Homework done already, Shaundra?

SHAUNDRA

You better believe it, Mom.

Marshall gives Darlene a look of pride.

MARSHALL

You know our baby doesn't mess around.

SHAUNDRA

Thanks, Dad.

(shrugging)

Ah guess Ah've got me some more homework after all.

Darlene shrugs while Marshall's expression changes.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

Not the textbook kind, though. Ah took mah Dixieland band idea to school...and it was...let's face it, they laughed it down.

Marshall puts his arms around Shaundra; a second later, Darlene joins them.

DARLENE

(to Marshall)

Save some for me, too.

Shaundra puts an arm around each of her parents.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
Main thang is, Shaundra: Are you
still as fired up 'bout playin'
Dixieland as you were a coupla
nights ago?

SHAUNDRA
Can you git oil from a peanut?

Marshall and Darlene burst into laughter; then the latter and Shaundra exchange high fives.

MARSHALL
(to Shaundra)
Have you ever thought about puttin'
an ad in the paper?

Shaundra's face shows pleasant surprise.

DARLENE
Why don'tcha try this?

Darlene rests a hand on one of Shaundra's legs.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
There's two other high schools here
in town. Maybe they got some people
who'd like to play in your band.

Shaundra's all teeth.

MARSHALL
Then you can have the last laugh on
West High.

Darlene and Marshall watch Shaundra, who jumps off the sofa.

DARLENE
Shaundra...you shore you did your
homework?

Shaundra heads for her own bedroom.

SHAUNDRA
Mom, Ah'm just going in the bedroom
to write a stronger ad!

Marshall and Darlene turn their attention to the TV again.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

EXT. CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Shaundra takes her red jacket off before she enters this reddish-brown ragtime-era landmark.

She quickly stuffs her jacket into her bag in an effort to foil STUDENTS milling around outside the building.

INT. CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - DAY

Shaundra hands the SECRETARY some copies of the new ad...and receives a doubletake in return.

EXT. ASSUMPTION HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Shaundra walks toward a sprawling early Space Age-era building.

INT. ASSUMPTION HIGH HALLWAY - DAY

Shaundra hangs one of those flyers on a bulletin board.

INT. HAYESES' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shaundra checks the want ads in today's "Quad-City Times."

She's surprised to find her own ad among the classifieds.

INT. WEST HIGH FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Shaundra opens her locker between classes...only to find a note that says: "HEY, HAYES, DID YOU KNOW YOU'RE A TEENAGER?"

END MONTAGE

EXT. NORTHWOOD MALL - DAY

A steady stream of late-afternoon traffic parades down Kimberly Road, the city's main east-west thoroughfare, in front of this large, busy shopping mall.

INT. NORTHWOOD MALL MUSIC STORE - DAY

This average-sized music store is cram full of instruments: Guitars dominate one wall while other walls house sheet music and amplifiers. New pianos, organs, and electronic keyboards take up much of the floor.

A 1900-29 upright piano stands in one corner; Michelle, sheet music in one hand, fondles that piano's keys when Shaundra enters the store.

MICHELLE

Hey, Shaundra...how's it going?

SHAUNDRA

Not too bad.

MICHELLE

I like that ad you put in the paper a few days ago.

(sets music on piano)

You didn't horse around. Bottom line said: "Serious inquiries only!"

Shaundra walks toward Michelle.

SHAUNDRA

Wail, after half the student body stuck notes in mah locker telling me to act mah age, Ah had to do something.

While Shaundra and Michelle take seats at that used piano, a sales clerk named STEPHANIE (30s) walks over to the duo.

Stephanie crouches as if to sit next to the two teenagers...but leans on the old upright instead.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

But what took the cake was when Ah found a cane in mah locker, too!

Stephanie listens intently.

MICHELLE

Ever since I started putting up flyers at school about the band, the cooks in the cafeteria quit giving me the same dessert as the rest of the students.

Michelle plays something jazzy.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

They give me prunes every day.

STEPHANIE

Well, you've gotta admit: There aren't that many young folks into Dixieland.

SHAUNDRA

(points to Stephanie)

At least somebody's trying to preserve it. Otherwise, if enough of us don't try to preserve it, it's gonna go the way of the Ford Pinto.

Stephanie shudders.

STEPHANIE

I once had a Ford Pinto.

Now Michelle stops playing.

STEPHANIE (CONT'D)

If my bathtub had a steering wheel and steel-belted radials, I'd've been safer driving that...well, if you both need some help, let me know.

MICHELLE

Shaundra...how do you feel about us using my house for tryouts?

Stephanie leaves the salesfloor.

SHAUNDRA

That's cool!

Shaundra looks worried.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

As long as it's awraht with your dad.

EXT. LITTLEFIELDS' HOUSE - NIGHT

It's a nice-looking-but-generic house in northwest Davenport.

INT. LITTLEFIELDS' BASEMENT - REC ROOM - NIGHT

The Littlefields' rec room is nice, spacious, somewhat loudly-appointed; it features some of Michelle's artwork...and a 1900-19 upright piano that's painted fire-engine red.

The family TV also rests in this room...but it's not on. Even so, Michelle and Larry sit at a sofa in front of the TV.

MICHELLE

Dad...Shaundra and I are holding tryouts for our Dixieland band next Saturday...and we'd like to come down here and use the rec room.

Larry's face shows a blank look.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

Not this Saturday...the next one.

Now Larry looks mortified.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

I guess...that...that's a "no."

Larry grins.

EXT. HAYESES' HOUSE - DAY

Lots of parked vehicles surround this house on this mid-November Saturday.

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - DAY

The Hayeses' basement isn't as gaudy as the Littlefields' one, but it does its job well. And the dark paneling makes the space rather cozy.

Shaundra (trumpet in hand) and Michelle sit at the Hayes family's spinet piano.

SHAUNDRA

All Ah know is, Ah'm ready to git on with it.

MICHELLE

Me, too...we just need somebody to try out!

Michelle notices a boombox on top of the piano, then eyeballs Shaundra in worry.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)

How are the batteries in the boombox?

SHAUNDRA

Changed 'em this morning.

Shaundra rests her free hand on Michelle's shoulder.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
We're gonna be awraht, Michelle.

Down the stairs comes TUCKER GRIFFIN (16, scraggly), who totes an electric guitar and a small amp.

TUCKER
Are you the ones who've been
putting up the flyers all over
town?

SHAUNDRA
You've come to the right place.

Tucker sets his amp down and plugs his guitar into the amp. Meanwhile, Michelle whispers into Shaundra's ear.

MICHELLE
He doesn't look like he knows a
note of Dixieland to me.

Shaundra shrugs; she turns the boombox on and hits "RECORD."

SHAUNDRA
We've been down here for an hour
and a half. Let him try out.
(to Tucker)
Let me hear whatcha got, y'hear?

TUCKER
Yeah!

A grateful Tucker kicks into some...heavy-metal rock.

Michelle and Shaundra look mortified...and after twelve bars or so, Shaundra walks over to Tucker.

SHAUNDRA
Thank you very much. We'll, uh,
call you.

Shaundra gently escorts Tucker out of the basement.

SAME SCENE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Shaundra and Michelle provide the accompaniment for SHAYLA MCKIBBEN (18), who plays "Sweet Georgia Brown" on her tuba.

Michelle proves to be just as at home with Dixieland piano as with Gospel playing, Shaundra cooks on trumpet, and...Shayla struggles to keep up with her accompanists.

SAME SCENE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

JONAH UNDERDONK (15, bespectacled) strolls in with an accordion against his stomach.

That he wears a Chicago Bulls T-shirt keeps him from looking like The Classic Nerd.

MICHELLE

(to Jonah)

I sure hope you know Dixieland.

JONAH

Well...I've heard "Beer Barrel Polka" done Dixieland style.

SHAUNDRA

Let's go with it.

Jonah nods.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

You start it out and Michelle and Ah will do the rest.

It's Jonah's playing for sixteen initial bars before Michelle's piano and Shaundra's trumpet enter the tune for that Dixieland touch.

Thirty-two bars into "Beer Barrel Polka," Jonah dances around while he continues to work his squeeze box.

Eight bars later, Shaundra doubles as a dancer...and tries her best to match steps with Jonah.

On the sixty-fourth bar, the song changes keys.

MICHELLE

I wish I could clap to the beat.

SHAUNDRA

Use your left foot!

Michelle's, Shaundra's, and Jonah's left feet pound out the beat for the song's final sixty-four bars (the famous "Roll Out the Barrel" chorus).

The three musicians have the time of their lives as they wrap up "Beer Barrel Polka."

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

(to Jonah)

That's great! You know anythang else?

Jonah shrugs.

JONAH

The only other songs I know are by
"Weird Al" Yankovic.

Now Michelle and Shaundra shrug.

SAME SCENE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

ROSS DICKINSON (16; got that "90210" look) attempts his own
version of "Sweet Georgia Brown" on his trombone...but
Shaundra and Michelle more than clearly outplay him.

SAME SCENE - THIRTY MINUTES LATER

Michelle and Shaundra watch as MINDY ALLENSON (17; dressed
like Madonna) walks in with her banjo.

Mindy points to Shaundra and Michelle.

MINDY

You're the ones starting a
Dixieland band?

MICHELLE

Just don't swear at us!

Shaundra's eyes light up as she eyes Mindy.

SHAUNDRA

Can you do "Sweet Georgia Brown?"

MINDY

Well...no.

SHAUNDRA

Can you do "Tiger Rag?"

MINDY

Nope. Don't know that one. But I do
know "Like a Virgin."
(with a grin)
I do a Dixieland version of that
one.

Michelle and Shaundra shrug as they eyeball each other.

MICHELLE

Shaundra...what could it hurt?

SHAUNDRA
 (nodding at Mindy)
 Hey, let's hear whatcha got.

Mindy tunes up.

MINDY
 Either one of you know "Like a
 Virgin?"

MICHELLE
 My dad won't let me listen to
 Madonna.

SHAUNDRA
 Let me see what Ah can do.

Shaundra sets her trumpet atop the piano, Michelle moves off the bench, and Shaundra moves to the middle of the bench to pound out a four-bar, Dixielandish intro to "Like a Virgin."

After the intro, Shaundra nods Mindy into playing.

Mindy keeps up with Shaundra...but plays clinkers galore.

Twenty-four bars or so into the song, Mindy gets her playing together...for a while.

Six bars later, she drops to her knees, then bends so that her back hits the floor...all the while still playing.

Result: Michelle shakes her head sideways.

SAME SCENE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

ASHLEE DOKTERMANN (15) toots out a Benny Goodman tune on her clarinet. Meanwhile, Shaundra's back on trumpet and Michelle's back on piano.

The threesome have what seems to be a good groove going...until the song reaches a passage that proves too difficult for Ashlee.

ASHLEE
 Sorreee...

A frightened Ashlee sprints out of the basement.

SAME SCENE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

ANTONIO JOHNSON (17, Black) holds sheet music (or a piece of notebook paper instead if sheet music isn't available).

With an eight-bar intro, Michelle and Shaundra accompany this new hopeful as he sings:

ANTONIO

*Do you know what it means/To miss
New Orleans,/And miss it each night
and day?*

Shaundra and Michelle put over a slow, bluesy, driving beat for Antonio to work with.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

*I know I'm not wrong./The feeling's
getting stronger/The longer I stay
away.*

Antonio hasn't got the chops to sing "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans."

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

*I miss the moss-colored vines/And
the tall sugar pines/Where
mockingbirds used to sing./And I'd
love to see that
noisy/Mississippi/A-hurrying into
spring.*

Shaundra does a doubletake.

Nonetheless, she, Michelle, and Antonio plow on.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

*Oh, the Mardi Gras and the
memories/Of Creole tunes that fill
the air./I dream of old magnolias
in June./Soon I'm wishing that I
was there./Do you know what it
means--*

Michelle winces as Antonio continues to strain for (yet miss) those high notes.

ANTONIO (CONT'D)

*To miss New Orleans,/When that's
where you left your heart?/And
there's something more:/I miss the
one I care for/More than I miss New
Orleans.*

Once the vocal ends, Antonio, Michelle, and Shaundra breathe sighs of relief.

SAME SCENE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

KARA MARIE KIRSCHBAUM (15, cute) sits behind her drum set while Shaundra looks at her.

SHAUNDRA

Let me hear you start out "Bill Bailey."

KARA MARIE

Oh...kay!

Kara Marie comes up with an eight-bar intro that sounds more like a marching-band version of "Bill Bailey" than like a Dixieland rendition.

Even this is a struggle for her.

SAME SCENE - A FEW MINUTES LATER

Shaundra and Michelle sit at the piano, where Shayla, Jonah, Ross, Mindy, Ashlee, Antonio, and Kara Marie surround them in anticipation of The Answer.

Some of the hopefuls clutch their instruments.

MICHELLE

Shayla, Jonah, Ross, Mindy, Ashlee, Antonio, Kara Marie...we want to thank you for trying out...it took a lot of guts for you to do this.

Ross and Kara Marie giggle.

SHAUNDRA

Tail y'all what: If we need you, we'll call you.

ROSS

Thanks.

SHAYLA

Yeah!

The seven candidates trudge up the stairs.

Once Michelle and Shaundra become the lone basement inhabitants, they both throw up their hands.

SHAUNDRA

Next week, we oughta try Rock Island and MO-line for talent.
(hugging Michelle)
Why don't we run through some thangs ourselves?

MICHELLE
 (with a nod)
 What could it hurt?

Shaundra nods.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
 I've been working on a version of
 "Who's Sorry Now." And it's got the
 original verses in it.

SHAUNDRA
 Ah'm all ears.

With the same slow, bluesy, driving beat as in "Do You Know
 What It Means to Miss New Orleans," Michelle beats out a four-
 bar introduction on piano.

For the next sixteen bars (a verse), Michelle rags it up;
 when it's time for the more-familiar chorus (it's thirty-two
 bars long), Shaundra and her trumpet enter the song.

During the chorus, CYNTHIANNA ROSE "CYNDY" VAN ALSTYNE (15,
 wishy-washy, sarcastic) and LYNNE PASQUARIELLO (14, an
 adventurous girl with a slight Missouri twang; say "PASS car
 ELL o") enter the Hayes basement.

Cyndy takes a banjo out of her case and Lynne removes a
 trombone from her case.

When the chorus ends:

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Take it again, Michelle!

For the next sixteen bars, Michelle tries a more brittle
 style. During that solo, Shaundra stares at Lynne and Cyndy.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 You're both late.

LYNNE
 Ah think we're on time myself.

Michelle chuckles.

CYNDY
 And my brother had a flat tire on
 the way here. Deliberately.

MICHELLE
 (to Shaundra)
 Let 'em try out. We haven't found
 anybody yet.

Shaundra nods at Michelle, then turns to Cyndy and Lynne.

SHAUNDRA
 Awraht, if you know "Who's Sorry
 Now," jump right in.

Once Michelle finishes her solo, Shaundra toots the other three musicians into the chorus.

The two latecomers prove they can effectively keep up with Shaundra and Michelle. What's more, Lynne and Cyndy show more of a feel for Dixieland than the other hopefuls ever could.

Michelle and Shaundra look impressed.

When the refrain ends, Michelle gestures Lynne, Shaundra, and Cyndy into abruptly stopping the music.

MICHELLE
 Why don't we take the chorus and
 speed it up?

Cyndy, Lynne, and Shaundra nod in agreement.

With a quick glissando from Michelle, the foursome slam into a sped-up version of the "Who's Sorry Now" chorus. Thirty-two bars into this new mode, Shaundra turns to Cyndy.

SHAUNDRA
 Take it!

Cyndy gets her own thirty-two bars...and she makes the most of her turn to shine on her banjo.

When done with her solo, Cyndy nods Lynne into her own turn on trombone.

Lynne's own thirty-two bars feature a lot of long, drawn-out notes...but they work beautifully.

Shaundra, Michelle, Lynne, and Cyndy work the chorus one last time; it's raucous until the four reach the final eight bars.

The quartet stretch those bars and slide into an ending.

The four teenagers congratulate each other.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Cyndy...Ah didn't know you could do
 that. That's really cool.

CYNDY
 Well, I've been playing guitar
 since I was nine and banjo since I
 was ten. My late granddad taught
 me...but only if I'd rub his back.

Michelle turns to Lynne.

MICHELLE
 My name's Michelle Littlefield.
 What's yours?

LYNNE
 Lynnie June Pasquariello.

Lynne and Michelle shake hands.

LYNNE (CONT'D)
 That's mah real name, but Ah like
 Lynne better.

Cyndy does a doubletake as she gazes at Lynne.

CYNDY
 I played against you in Little
 League! I hit into that unassisted
 triple play you pulled--

SHAUNDRA
 Cyndy, Ah hope you go back out for
 basketball. You were great last
 year!

Cyndy and Lynne put their instruments back into their cases.

CYNDY
 My defense needs work.

SHAUNDRA
 You show a lot of guts every time
 you handle the ball. Like the time
 you drove on that six-six center
 from Pleasant Vall--

Michelle pats Lynne on the shoulder as Shaundra puts her own
 horn away.

MICHELLE

Lynne...can you and Cyndy come back
next week?

While Cyndy nods, Lynne grins.

EXT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Frost forms on the ground and on the school windows.

INT. WEST HIGH CAFETERIA - DAY

Shaundra (with a hot lunch) and Cyndy (she eats a sack lunch)
sit and eat together in the middle of the space.

SHAUNDRA

You mean to tell me this was your
grandma's idea?

CYNDY

(with a nod)

She saw your ad in the paper a
couple of weeks ago.

(taking a bite)

Grandma showed it to me and said:
"Cynthianna, I know how much you
love making music. Here's something
you ought to go for."

Raquel finds an empty seat (one of two at the table) next to
Cyndy and Shaundra; tray in hands, she joins the twosome.

CYNDY (CONT'D)

We argued about it, but Grandma
won. She told me I've gotta come
out sooner or later and show my
talents.

(mimics elderly woman)

"How else you gonna make any
friends, dear?"

Raquel picks up her milk carton while she stares at Shaundra
and Cyndy.

RAQUEL

(pointing to Cyndy)

Shaundra...is she in your...group?

CYNDY

Yes, I am, Raquel.

Tanisha (tray and all) moves into the last empty seat.

CYNDY (CONT'D)

In fact, I'm playing banjo. You
wanna report me to the FBI?

Raquel spills her milk...and Tanisha drops her own tray to
the table in shock.

RAQUEL

(picks up her milk carton)
This is one the whole school's
gonna hear a--

SHAUNDRA

Ah don't care if you tail CNN about
it! Ain't nothing changed!

Tanisha gives Cyndy a look of puzzlement.

TANISHA

Cyndy...about those behind-the-back
passes you always make...and those
other moves...were they your
grandma's idea?

Cyndy shakes her head "no."

RAQUEL

(to Tanisha)
Granny put her up to playing old
folks' music.

TANISHA

(to Cyndy)
Did your grandma make you go out
for basketball, too?

A steamed Cyndy rises and shoves Raquel's dessert in the
latter's face, then pours Tanisha's milk in that student's
hair.

Raquel and Tanisha rise up to go after Cyndy, but Cyndy grabs
Tanisha's tray and Shaundra seizes Raquel's tray.

Shaundra and Cyndy run to the nearest two empty seats they
can find. Both girls hurriedly sit down.

CYNDY

Dig in, Shaundra.

SHAUNDRA

Nah.

Shaundra pushes her newly-appropriated tray toward Cyndy.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

You go 'head. You're in training.

And Shaundra watches Cyndy eat...and Raquel and Tanisha give up trying to chase Cyndy and Shaundra.

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - DAY

In this new tryout session, Lynne and Cyndy join Shaundra and Michelle in accompanying BOBBY GUTIERREZ (16), a drummer whose T-shirt reads: "ROCK ISLAND ROCKS."

Bobby misses too many beats during this version of "Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie."

Finally, the tune comes to an end.

SHAUNDRA

Bobby, thank you kindly for tryin' out...anythang happens, we'll let you know.

BOBBY

Okay, Shaundra.

Shaundra, Michelle, Lynne, and Cyndy help Bobby pack up his equipment. But as soon as Bobby leaves with part of his drum set, Michelle turns to Shaundra.

MICHELLE

He was cute.

SHAUNDRA

Yeah, but he wasn't quite what we were looking for.

Lynne and Michelle shrug.

LYNNE

Shaundra...whatcha gonna do? We're like a car that's got a motor and a tranny...but we ain't got no brakes or no battery.

Cyndy and Lynne pack up their own instruments and head upstairs...but stop short at the door.

Shaundra runs after them.

SHAUNDRA

Wail, Ah could talk to Ashlee, that clarinet player who ran off last--

CYNDY

You do that, Shaundra...call me
back when you get some more people.

Michelle runs up to Shaundra; both girls look worried.

EXT. SUPERMARKET - DAY

PEOPLE file into an enormous store on this not-too-nice late
November afternoon that sees some younger customers dressed
as if it's August.

INT. FROZEN FOOD SECTION - DAY

Shaundra, Marshall, and Darlene (still in their winter
clothes) shop for groceries; Marshall pushes the cart.

DARLENE

Ah wonder how those Raiders are
doin' right now.

MARSHALL

That's why we're gittin' the game
on tape.

Darlene opens a freezer door and pulls out a bag of frozen
waffles, closes the door, and puts the bag into the cart.

SHAUNDRA

Right, Dad.
(to Darlene)
And Ah'm tapin' the other NFL game
on mah VCR.

The Hayeses move down the aisle.

DARLENE

How'd y'all like some burritos this
week?

MARSHALL

Long as it's cool with you, it's
cool with me.

Shaundra nods in agreement as Marshall plants a kiss on
Darlene's lips.

The kiss ends when Darlene opens another freezer door and
takes out a couple of packages of burritos (six burritos in
each pack).

SHAUNDRA

The woman at the music store over
at the mall was right: Ain't too
many teenagers into Dixieland.

Shaundra opens a different freezer door.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

We did well enough gittin' Cyndy
and Lynnle June.

Shaundra grabs a gallon of ice cream and puts the item into
the cart, then nudges the freezer door shut.

DARLENE

(to Shaundra)

Why don'tcha put that there
underneath?

Shaundra shrugs and puts the gallon underneath the basket.

MARSHALL

(arm around Shaundra)

Least you tried.

Shaundra nods as she, Darlene, and Marshall stroll their way
out of the frozen food section.

DARLENE

Shaundra...Ah know you aren't ready
to quit now.

SHAUNDRA

Darn right Ah'm not ready to quit.

DARLENE

Then how 'bout hooking up with
younger musicians?

Shaundra's face freezes.

DARLENE (CONT'D)

Hey, it worked for the Jacksons,
huh?

SHAUNDRA

Yeah, but they're fam'ly.

DARLENE

Yeah...but a fam'ly don't always
have to live in the same house.

Shaundra slowly nods as Darlene drapes an arm around her.

DARLENE (CONT'D)
 And a fam'ly don't always have to
 have the same last name.

Shaundra slowly grins.

EXT. DAVENPORT PUBLIC LIBRARY - DAY

A FEW PEOPLE walk out of a structure next door to City Hall
 in the heart of the downtown area.

INT. LIBRARY FIRST FLOOR LOBBY - DAY

Shaundra's at a pay phone, where she talks in a near whisper.

SHAUNDRA
 (into phone)
 Michelle, we ain't dead yet...Ah'm
 not calling up any of those others
 who tried out before...

Shaundra opens up her notebook.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Wail, Mom had a great idea: We're
 gonna try out younger people...Ah
 tole the music teachers at the
 junior highs in town, and they were
 really excited...

Now Shaundra skims a page of her handwritten notes while she
 continues the phone conversation.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Ah know they tole me not to hold
 mah breath...what can it hurt? Just
 be over at the house Saturday after
 Saturday next. It'll work!

Shaundra closes the notebook.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 No, you won't have to go out and
 buy a bunch of disposable diapers
 for the kids...take care, Michelle.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - NIGHT

Shaundra and Michelle work on sixth-through-eighth-grade-
 level musical arrangements.

INT. NORTHWOOD MALL MUSIC STORE - DAY

Shaundra shows a copy of that "DO YOU DIG DIXIELAND?" flyer to Stephanie...who scratches her head.

EXT. CORK HILL AME CHURCH - DAY

Michelle's in the parking lot, where she places copies of that exact same flyer on the windshields of vehicles.

INT. CORK HILL AME FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

At a post-service dinner, she and Shaundra talk up their Dixieland band.

Their audience: SEVERAL CHILDREN seated at a folding table.

Regardless of what's left on their plates, the children all get up and run from the table...and Larry just shrugs.

INT. NORTH HIGH CAFETERIA - DAY

Michelle continues to find prunes with the rest of her lunch.

INT. WEST HIGH FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Between classes, Shaundra goes to her locker to change books...only to find a...child's car safety seat!

END MONTAGE

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - DAY

Shaundra and Michelle sit at the piano, where the former clutches her trumpet case.

Shaundra checks her watch, then turns to Michelle.

SHAUNDRA

It's three thirty. Two hours since audition time began. Ah cain't believe nobody's come down these stairs to audition.

MICHELLE

Maybe we hit 'em too hard.

SHAUNDRA

Wail, Ah don't know if promising anybody who tried out you'd take 'em to they favorite fast-food place to pig out all night was such a good idea.

MICHELLE
I had to think of--

Shaundra and Michelle HEAR a rumble that heads downstairs.

It's the movement of instruments.

The movers: POLLYANNA CONLEY (13, Black, analytical), who totes some pieces of her drum set; and SUSAN DAWKINS (13, Black, friendly-yet-competitive), who lugs an acoustic bass.

Michelle and Shaundra jump off the piano bench in elation; the former runs over to Pollyanna.

MICHELLE (CONT'D)
Where's the rest of your kit?

POLLYANNA
It's upstairs in the living room.

SUSAN
Let's go get it, Polly.

Susan sets her acoustic bass down and joins Pollyanna on the way to the remainder of the latter's drum set...only to see Michelle and Shaundra join them.

INT. HAYESES' LIVING ROOM - DAY

While Shaundra, Susan, Pollyanna, and Michelle gather up the remainder of that drum set, Marshall and Darlene come into the room.

Darlene totes a couple of pizza boxes with her while Marshall carries a couple of six-packs of pop.

MARSHALL
Thought y'all might like something special.

SHAUNDRA
Thanks, Mom and Dad.

Each of the four teenagers grabs a pizza box or a six-pack of pop. And this depends on what's left of the drum set.

MICHELLE
Mr. and Mrs. Hayes...why don't you come down and watch...

DARLENE

Pardon us for being rude...Shaundra
and Michelle, meet Susan Dawkins
and Pollyanna Conley.

Shaundra, Michelle, Pollyanna, and Susan trade high fives;
the foursome and Darlene and Marshall head downstairs.

POLLYANNA

(to Darlene and Marshall)
You can call me Polly if you like.

Marshall and Darlene help the four teenagers with the other
parts of Pollyanna's drum kit.

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - DAY

Darlene, Marshall, Michelle, Pollyanna, Shaundra, and Susan
(all eat pizza and drink pop) sit or stand where they can.

MICHELLE

This Cajun-style pizza is...well,
you can't beat it!

DARLENE

Glad y'all like it. There's this
pizza place on Brady Street, and
they're the only ones that have
that Cajun-style pizza.

Susan's eyes light up as she takes a bite.

SUSAN

Yeah. Good Times Pizza.
(takes a swig of pop)
As Justin Wilson would say:
(tries a Cajun accent)
"It's wondermous, Ah guar-on-tee!"

Most of the gang cracks up in laughter.

MARSHALL

Susan, Ah didn't know you were into
Justin Wilson.

SUSAN

He used to do potato chip
commercials on TV.

Pollyanna comes up with an all-knowing nod.

SHAUNDRA

We're just delighted you could come over here.

(takes a bite of pizza)

Ah just wish you could've come at one thirty.

POLLYANNA

Mom and I had an argument...again. She was too drunk to take me over here.

SUSAN

So my granddad took me and Polly.

Shaundra's mouth flies open.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

We had no other choice. My folks's car's still in the repair--

MICHELLE

We've been having so much trouble finding young musicians for our band. Can you both really play?

Pollyanna and Susan nod sharply.

SUSAN

If we're lying, then Oprah doesn't have a talk show.

MICHELLE

Which one of you wants to go first?

POLLYANNA, SUSAN

Me!

Susan finishes her slice of pizza, then wipes her hands. She grabs her acoustic bass and moves it close to Pollyanna's drum set...while Pollyanna herself takes a seat behind the drum set.

SUSAN

Polly and I came as a package deal. Just like Little Caesars pizza.

(to Pollyanna)

Let's get busy!

Pollyanna and Susan kick into "Big Noise from Winnetka."

It starts out with Pollyanna's two-bar, hi-hat-driven intro; she keeps the beat going when Susan comes in on the song's third bar...for forty-two bars of choppy bass lines.

Two bars after Susan comes in, Pollyanna whistles (or hums) the melody line. This melody line lasts eight bars.

The whistling (or humming) gives way to drums and bass for eight bars; at this point, Pollyanna incorporates snare and trap drums into the mix.

The next eight bars, though, belong to Susan's bass and Pollyanna's hi-hat.

Shaundra and Michelle like what they hear.

In the next eight bars, trap and snare drums come back in; an additional eight bars incorporate Pollyanna's whistling or humming...as well as Shaundra's trumpeting and Michelle's piano playing.

As "Big Noise from Winnetka" sizzles, Michelle and Shaundra leave the playing to Susan and Pollyanna for the next twenty-one bars. In this segment, Pollyanna goes back to hi-hatting.

And Susan's bass work becomes choppier, more complex.

Darlene and Marshall continue to munch pizza and drink pop...and they dig the music.

Once the twenty-one-bar spree ends, Susan goes to a more orthodox, four-to-the-bar approach for the tune's remainder.

Here, Pollyanna uses the full drum set (this for the duration, too). As a cue, Michelle uses a single piano note to end each of the first two bars.

Pollyanna whistles/hums the melody line while Michelle and Shaundra play along.

After this eight-bar passage, Susan, Shaundra, Pollyanna, and Michelle reprise the last one-fourth of the melody line three times and slow their way to an ending.

Result: Darlene and Marshall applaud like crazy.

Pollyanna and Susan turn to Shaundra in joyful hope.

SHAUNDRA

Susan...Polly...we wantcha to come
back!

SUSAN
You bet we will!

Pollyanna nods enthusiastically.

Jubilation fills the basement...while Susan tries to give the "AYYYY!" signal a la Fonzie from "Happy Days."

INT. HAYESES' KITCHEN - DAY

Darlene, Marshall, Michelle, and Shaundra engage in another joint effort to fix Sunday dinner. This time, they've got extra colleagues: Susan and Pollyanna.

Meanwhile, THE FOOTBALL GAME'S on the kitchen TV.

Pollyanna works with a roasting pan (full of chicken parts) in front of her.

One chicken breast isn't completely floured, so she dips that part in the flour; when satisfied, she puts that piece back in the pan.

POLLYANNA
Mr. and Mrs. Hayes...do you happen
to have a can of cinnamon in the
cabinet?

Marshall reaches into a cabinet and pulls out a can of nutmeg rather than a can of cinnamon.

He hands the can of nutmeg to Pollyanna.

MARSHALL
Will this work?

POLLYANNA
(grabbing can)
I'll try it.

Darlene tosses a salad and watches Pollyanna sprinkle nutmeg on that chicken. A bit later, Susan watches her buddy, too.

SUSAN
This reminds me of this one episode
of "Little House on the Prairie."

Susan moves in closer to Pollyanna.

SUSAN (CONT'D)
Nellie wanted to get it on with
Almanzo, who was Laura's lover.

Pollyanna examines the chicken pieces...and continues to coat them with nutmeg.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

Anyway, Nellie and Almanzo met at the restaurant...but Nellie couldn't cook worth a heck, and Almanzo liked cinnamon chicken.

DARLENE

Susan...wanna grab that package of grated cheese outa the fridge?

SUSAN

Yeah!

Susan gabs on as she goes to the refrigerator, grabs a package of grated cheese from it, closes the door, and hands the package to Darlene, who puts some or all of the cheese into the salad.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

So, doing Nellie a favor, Laura made them cinnamon chicken...only Laura didn't put cinnamon in there. Instead, she--

Michelle peels sweet potatoes while she listens to Susan.

MICHELLE

So...Polly...I didn't know you could cook.

POLLYANNA

Yes, I can. Got to. Most of the time, Mom's too tired or drunk to cook. So I've got to do it. Usually, Mom's too tired to eat--

DARLENE

Polly, you've got yourse'f such a beautiful name.

POLLYANNA

Grandma gave it to me. When she was in school during World War 2, she had to read this book called "Pollyanna."

Pollyanna examines the chicken once more.

POLLYANNA (CONT'D)
 If she'd had another daughter,
 Grandma would've named her after
 the book...actually, the lead
 character.

Pollyanna finishes sprinkling nutmeg.

POLLYANNA (CONT'D)
 But she just had Mom. Anyway--

Shaundra pours two packages of instant soft-drink mix into a
 gallon pitcher or jug.

SHAUNDRA
 Mom...thank you for bringing Polly
 and Susan to us.

DARLENE
 Nah. Polly and Susan did it all.

With the salad done, Darlene opens the oven door for
 Pollyanna, who puts the pan of nutmeg chicken into the oven.

EXT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

A rather humongous snowman stands in front of the building.

INT. WEST HIGH GYM - DAY

It's girls' gym class; at one end of the floor, Cyndy,
 Shaundra, and EIGHT OTHER GIRLS play basketball.

Shaundra and Cyndy aren't teammates in this game. Right now,
 Cyndy dribbles the ball while Shaundra guards her.

Shaundra does such a great job on Cyndy that the latter can't
 find anyone to pass to...so Cyndy drives to the basket.

Whatever happens to Cyndy's shot, KALENE ALTENBERGER (50s),
 West High's girls' gym teacher, blows her whistle.

KALENE
 EVERYBODY! TAKE TWO LAPS AROUND THE
 GYM!

THE ENTIRE CLASS stops all prior activities to run around the
 gym. Kalene gravitates to the middle of the floor to oversee
 the running.

Cyndy and Shaundra run alongside each other.

CYNDY

Why aren't you out for basketball?
You were on me like the media on--

SHAUNDRA

Ah'm a bricklayer, that's why.

Cyndy nods.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

You tole me to call back, but Ah'm
doing it live: We got us some more
people.

CYNDY

Did you call back that girl who
played clarinet? The one that ran
off?

SHAUNDRA

Just c'm'over, Cyndy. We got
somebody better.

Kalene catches wind of Shaundra's and Cyndy's conversation
and blows her whistle.

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - DAY

Shaundra, Michelle, Cyndy, Lynne, Susan, and Pollyanna gather
here as another audition session gets under way.

LYNNE

Ah ain't never seen either one of
you before.

SUSAN

That's because we're in junior
high. But stay tuned...won't be
long before all three of us will be
going to Central.

Lynne nods.

MICHELLE

Lynne and Cyndy...meet Polly Conley
and Susan Dawkins. Polly and Susan,
meet Lynne Pasquariello and Cyndy
Van Alstyne.

Pollyanna and Susan shake hands with Lynne and Cyndy, then
Lynne turns to Shaundra.

LYNNE
That was purty sneaky.

Lynne trades high fives with Shaundra.

LYNNE (CONT'D)
Right on.

MICHELLE
(to Lynne)
By the way...Polly plays drums and
Susan plays bass fiddle.

Lynne nods while Cyndy looks at Shaundra.

CYNDY
You said this was gonna be a
Dixieland band, not the...Jacksons!

SHAUNDRA
Chill out, Cyndy. You won't have to
moonwalk.

Most of the gang breaks out in goodnatured laughter.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
We couldn't find us enough good,
decent musicians in the high
schools, so we had to go to the
junior highs.

MICHELLE
Yeah, Cyndy. And besides, the peer
pressure isn't as strong in the
junior highs as it is in the senior
highs.

CYNDY
(nodding in earnest)
Tell me.

MICHELLE
You should hear Susan and Polly.
Not only do they sound--

HEIDI NEUHAUS (10, studious, people-loving; wears glasses)
totes a saxophone case as she rumbles down the stairs and
into the basement.

Result: Six doubletakes.

CYNDY
 (moving toward Heidi)
 How old are you?

HEIDI
 Ten. But I can play.

POLLYANNA
 How'd you hear about us?

HEIDI
 The music teacher over at Wilson School clipped out a copy of the ad in the "Quad-City Times" and made it bigger than it was in the paper...and she hung it up on the bulletin board.

Several heads nod.

HEIDI (CONT'D)
 And then she wrote a note underneath it that said: "You don't have to rap to make music!"

CYNDY
 Somebody ripped the ad down, I assume.

Heidi nods at Cyndy while the former pulls an alto sax out of her case.

HEIDI
 Go ahead, everybody. Name your poison.

Cyndy, Lynne, Michelle, Pollyanna, Shaundra, and Susan form a huddle someplace else in the basement.

After some AD LIBBED discussion, the huddle breaks up and the other six musicians turn to Heidi.

SHAUNDRA
 Do you know "Muskrat Ramble?"

HEIDI
 I practiced it all night long last night.

Cyndy and Susan gasp...but they recover long enough to grab a banjo and a bass fiddle, respectively.

Shaundra grabs her trumpet, Lynne puts her trombone together, Pollyanna goes to her drums, and Michelle walks over to the Hayeses' spinet.

Once the young Dixielanders look ready, Shaundra gives the downbeat, and they're off and running on "Muskrat Ramble."

All seven girls, led by Shaundra on trumpet, offer some hard-kicking Dixieland for the first thirty-two bars.

In these opening bars, Michelle's left hand plays boogie woogie and her right hand plunks out ragtime...but in the next thirty-two bars, it's strictly Dixieland for her.

Cyndy takes the next solo: Sixteen bars...eight picking and eight strumming.

At the solo's end:

CYNDY

Take it, uh...saxophone player!

Heidi plays solo during the next sixteen bars. In this turn, she impresses her accompanists (especially Shaundra, Michelle, and Susan).

Now Michelle solos for thirty-two bars. This time, she cites "Maple Leaf Rag."

Some bandmates groan.

Shaundra turns in a thirty-two-bar solo of her own, with staccato (albeit exuberant) playing.

The entire outfit takes a swing at the next thirty-two bars, with Shaundra leading the way again.

SHAUNDRA

Hit it, Lynne!

Lynne goes bluesy during her own thirty-two-bar solo.

Susan gets the nod for sixteen bars. Given a chance to shine in this tune, she lets her hands fly all over the strings.

Pollyanna's drum solo covers the next sixteen bars. During it, her fellow musicians stop to watch her pound away like nobody's business.

Toward the end of Pollyanna's solo:

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

Who wants to do the last solo?

Everyone else but Heidi AD LIBS an answer.

Heidi merely comes up with a honking, shrieking thirty-two-bar effort.

The seven young musicians turn "Muskrat Ramble's" last thirty-two-bar stretch into a raucous, highly-improvised affair.

Eight bars from the end, the instrumentation thins down to trombone, bass, and drums. The tempo slows down...and, on one final all-band note, the tune ends.

Shaundra and Co. cheer each other hoarse.

MICHELLE

That's more like it, you guys!

POLLYANNA

Thanks...except we don't have a clarinet in the band, but what the heck?

Shaundra turns to Heidi.

SHAUNDRA

Welcome to the band...we don't even know your name. Mine's Shaundra Hayes.

HEIDI

Heidi.
(shakes Shaundra's hand)
Heidi Jeanne Neuhaus.

SUSAN

(shaking Heidi's hand)
I'm Susan Dawkins. I play bass.
Pollyanna Conley's our drummer,
Michelle Littlefield plays piano.

The rest of the band crowds around Heidi.

CYNDY

Heidi, I'm Cyndy Van Alstyne. I play banjo. Lynne Pasquariello's our trombone player.

HEIDI

Nice to meet you, everybody.

Some bandmembers nod.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

By the way, I also sing and play
the piano.

(to Pollyanna)

And if I can get hold of a
clarinet, I'm gonna try and learn
that, too.

Joy grabs the room as Heidi receives congratulations from her
fellow bandmembers.

EXT. HAYESES' HOUSE - DAY

MISSY WAITES (12, self-absorbed, cocky, brassy), in her
heaviest winter clothes, walks around the Hayeses' driveway.

A few seconds later, the Hayeses' Olds pulls into the
driveway; Missy moves out of the way.

Darlene (the driver), Marshall, and Shaundra jump out once
the car stops. All three are bundled up, too, this Sunday.

MARSHALL

(to Missy)

Can we he'p you?

MISSY

You bet, Mr. Hayes. I understand
your daughter has started a
Dixieland band.

SHAUNDRA

(moving toward Missy)

You bet. Ah shore did.

MISSY

I want to join your Dixieland band.

Missy and Shaundra shake hands. All of a sudden, Shaundra's
face shows worry.

SHAUNDRA

Ah'm terribly sorry...but Ah regret
to tail you all our slots are
filled.

A surprised Missy breaks the handshake...and drops to her
knees. She folds her hands as if to pray.

MISSY

Please...pretty please?

Shaundra casts a surprised look.

MISSY (CONT'D)

You sure you haven't got anything left?

SHAUNDRA

Ah'd like to he'p you, but...we ain't got anythang left in--

DARLENE

IN! Why don't we all go on in?

Marshall leads the way as the Hayeses go inside the house; Darlene gestures Missy into joining them...and Missy gladly gets off her knees and walks in.

INT. HAYESES' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Missy shuts the door behind her.

MISSY

You got a piano player? Drummer?
Banjo player? Trombone player? Bass
player? Saxophone player?

With every question from Missy, Shaundra nods.

MISSY (CONT'D)

You got a trum...wait a minute,
you're the trumpet player.

MARSHALL

Uh, Miss...sounds like you're real talented.

The foursome take their winter coats off; each person goes to the closet, where they hang those coats while the conversation continues.

DARLENE

(to Missy)

Do you live around here?

Shaundra, Darlene, Marshall, and Missy all take seats.

MISSY

Act...ually, I live in north Davenport, over by North High. And I play twenty-five instruments...and my folks can get us the Capitol Theater.

MARSHALL

Are they on the board of directors?

MISSY

No...but they run the local chapter
of the American Theatre Organ
Society.

Shaundra and her parents look surprised.

MISSY (CONT'D)

They used to use pipe organs for
musical backgrounds for movies
before talkies came in. Then they
used to use them for background
music on those old radio shows.

Missy's enthusiasm heats up.

MISSY (CONT'D)

That way, the people who played for
silent movies could keep working.
Then television came in, and...

Missy gets up and approaches Shaundra.

MISSY (CONT'D)

Allow me to introduce myself. I'm
Melissa Gilbert Anderson Waites.

Missy offers her hand to Shaundra again; Shaundra rises.

MISSY (CONT'D)

But my friends call me Missy.

Shaundra's and Missy's handshake is much stronger than their
first one.

MARSHALL

So, Missy, y'all're trying to save
those old pipe organs they used to
use in theaters, huh?

Missy nods enthusiastically.

MARSHALL (CONT'D)

Kinda like what Shaundra's doing:
She's trying to he'p save
Dixieland.

Missy and Shaundra nod.

SHAUNDRA

Missy...why don'tcha come back and
brang your clarinet?

MISSY
Uh...right on!

Missy heads out...but comes back to grab her coat.

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - DAY

Michelle, Missy, and Shaundra all sit at the Hayeses' piano.
(Shaundra holds her trumpet and Missy holds her clarinet.)

MICHELLE
So you're Melissa Gilbert Anderson
Waites...I read about you in the
paper. Wait 'til our bass player
meets you!

SHAUNDRA
Our bass player's a TV addict.

Missy and Michelle shrug.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
At least she doesn't have to worry
'bout the police going to her house
to make a bust.

Michelle turns to a grinning Missy.

MICHELLE
Didn't you play the organ at the
Capitol Theater earlier this year?

MISSY
And the year before and the year
before that and the year before
that and the year before THAT.

Michelle looks awestruck.

MISSY (CONT'D)
Knocked 'em dead each time.

SHAUNDRA
Missy, let's hear how you do on
that stick...not yet. How'd you
hear about us?

As Missy explains, she fiddles with the reed in her clarinet.

MISSY
Well, it's like this: I've got a
cousin who goes to Assumption.
(MORE)

MISSY (CONT'D)
 (points to Shaundra)
 And she saw your ad.

Missy takes out the old reed...

MISSY (CONT'D)
 So she called me up and said: "Hey,
 Missy, somebody's been putting up
 these flyers all over town about
 a...Dixieland band. They'll never
 get on MTV."

...and puts in a new reed.

MISSY (CONT'D)
 And then she says: "Maybe you
 oughta go out for it. You like that
 old folks' music." So here I am!

MICHELLE
 I'm getting interested in hearing
 you, Missy.

Missy plays scales on her clarinet; when done, she raises the
 instrument in jubilation.

MISSY
 Okay...but I want to warn you: This
 is my worst instrument.

Shaundra shrugs and Michelle groans.

SHAUNDRA
 Why don't the three of us work out
 on "Way Down Yonder in Nyalins."

Michelle and Missy nod.

Shaundra and Missy jump off the piano bench; they stand up
 and surround Michelle, who gives the downbeat.

MICHELLE
 One...two...three...four!

This "Way Down Yonder in New Orleans" is Freddy Cannon's
 version with a bouncy Dixieland beat.

Michelle leads the way with a sixteen-bar piano intro...the
 first eight bars done up twice.

Michelle nods Missy and Shaundra into the tune. As Michelle
 provides some dead-on four-bar rhythm, Shaundra and Missy
 toot out twenty-eight bars of strong, unison melody.

SHAUNDRA
Take it, Missy!

With total (almost ridiculous) ease, Missy and her fingers fly through a twenty-eight-bar clarinet solo.

Shaundra shows pleasant surprise as she watches Missy tear through the music.

Michelle turns around (she continues to play) and watches Missy toot that licorice stick. The former looks amused.

The threesome turn in a rowdier version of the introductory sixteen bars; here, Michelle varies her left-hand work.

When the sixteen bars end, Missy gets seated at the piano.

She puts her clarinet on top of the piano and...joins a surprised Michelle for a rollicking twenty-eight-bar duet on the ivories.

Michelle does some two-handed experimenting with the tune's bass clef.

Missy handles the upper register like an old pro. During the passage, she (if possible) pokes her left hand into the lower register.

Michelle and Missy end their duet with a bang.

Missy grabs her clarinet and goes back to standing next to Shaundra as they and Michelle knock out that sixteen-bar opening riff three more times, each riff more raucous.

Shaundra, Michelle, and Missy drag out the last two bars of the final go-'round; once the three musicians end their number, they engage in high fives.

EXT. LITTLEFIELDS' HOUSE - NIGHT

Snow marches through Davenport.

INT. LITTLEFIELDS' BASEMENT - REC ROOM - NIGHT

Shaundra, Michelle, Cyndy, Lynne, Pollyanna, Susan, Heidi, and Missy shake hands in this loudly-appointed room with the fire-engine-red upright piano.

After they break the handshakes, Shaundra and her fellow musicians take seats wherever they can.

SHAUNDRA

Remember, y'all, we've got us seven months before the 1995 Bix Festival. That's enough time for us to git sharp enough to play there.

Several heads nod.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

For now, we're just trying to git used to playing together, feel each other out, seeing where we're strong, trying to improve on where we're weak.

MISSY

Weak? US?

CYNDY

That's why we've gotta rehearse, Missy.

SHAUNDRA

Right!

(standing up)

Ah actually thank we've got what it takes to impress the Bix Beiderbecke Memorial Society. We can actually play this stuff!

(with a shrug)

It's just a matter of doing your own thang.

Michelle goes into a notebook on an end table and pulls out eight copies of ten mimeographed songs.

MICHELLE

That's why Shaundra and I worked on ten good songs that we need to have down by next July.

Michelle hands the eight copies to Shaundra, who gives one set to Michelle, keeps one for herself, and gives a set each to the other musicians.

Heidi skims through her own packet.

HEIDI

Just ten?

SHAUNDRA

We can always change it around, Heidi. Even add more.

LYNNE

That's like starvin' a hungry dog.

SHAUNDRA

Ten's the most we can do in a half an hour.

Some musicians nod.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

If we can git the committee on our side, we might even git to play on TV.

Six sets of eyes light up. (The exceptions belong to Michelle and Shaundra.)

SUSAN

Hey, everybody, let's get started so we can out-Madonna Madonna!

Pollyanna takes a seat at her drum set, Michelle goes to the piano, Susan stands her acoustic bass up, and Cyndy straps on her banjo.

And Lynne, Heidi, Missy, and Shaundra grab their respective brass/reed instruments.

CYNDY

(to Susan)

If you wanna strip down to your underwear, suit yourself.

A mass tuning of instruments develops. In Pollyanna's case, it's a series of drum fills.

When her colleagues look ready, Shaundra addresses them.

SHAUNDRA

Why don't we see how we all do on "Bill Bailey." We'll all do a chorus together, then Ah'll take the first solo, and then if any of you other horn players feel like you're ready, wail--

MISSY

Piece of cake!

Shaundra snaps her fingers for the downbeat, and she and her fellow Dixielanders take off on "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey."

Their version is a series of thirty-two-bar units (the length of a chorus). The first thirty-two bars sound sluggish for now, even if Shaundra, Michelle, and Missy play all out.

Shaundra takes the first solo, which features some Louis Armstrong-Al Hirt riffing.

Sixteen bars later, Shaundra gives Missy a sly look.

SHAUNDRA
Here's your piece of cake!

With a nod, Missy takes the next sixteen bars.

At the end of her solo, Missy gives Lynne a look that's just as sly as Shaundra's.

Lynne gets the message and launches into sixteen bars of lazy, loping, stretched-out trombone playing.

POLLYANNA
Michelle...too bad your dad isn't
here to hear us.

Just as Lynne's solo ends, casually-dressed Larry enters with four large boxes of pizza.

Larry watches as Cyndy and Susan team up to duet the next sixteen bars...bars where the banjoist and the bassist work hard to get used to each other.

LARRY
Hey, everybody, I got you some
pizza...maybe it'll help you play
better.

Several bandmembers' heads nod.

EXT. WAITESSES' HOUSE - DAY

This is a brightly-painted ranch-style house in, true to Missy's word, north Davenport.

INT. WAITESSES' BASEMENT - MUSIC ROOM - DAY

This greatly-subdued version of the Littlefields' rec room is big enough to be a mini-concert hall.

The Waiteses' music room features, at the front end of the space, a 1910-29 upright piano (its hammers are exposed) and a three-manual theater pipe organ.

In the back, some folding chairs make a row of seats.

Right now, Shaundra and her fellow Dixielanders pick up the tempo on "Won't You Come Home, Bill Bailey."

Susan and Cyndy finish their much-improved sixteen-bar spree and give way to Shaundra and her trumpet.

While Shaundra toots out sixteen even-more-exuberant bars, Missy's parents, ALLEN (39, thoughtful, reasonable) and DONNA (39, self-absorbed), sit in that portable section and listen with rapt attention.

Shaundra nods Heidi into taking her own sixteen-bar solo...but it's more like a romp.

While Heidi wails on alto sax, Missy goes to organ and joins an already-stomping rhythm section.

In pleasant surprise, Michelle gazes at Missy, who turns the former's piano solo into a keyboard contest...where one musician makes the other work harder.

Donna and Allen enjoy Missy's and Michelle's keyboard work.

With one long note, Lynne ends Michelle's and Missy's sixteen-bar duet (feud?). Lynne's own sixteen bars demonstrate her growth as a trombonist.

Now with Missy back on clarinet, the whole band weighs in with sixty-four final bars that stomp, romp, wail, groove.

Once the tune ends, Allen and Donna clap in pride...while Shaundra and Co. whoop it up.

DONNA

Great!

(walks toward Michelle)

I've never seen hammers fly like that since I played "Twelfth Street Rag."

ALLEN

Donna, you don't like playing the piano. You said it wasn't as expressive as--

DONNA

You were asleep, Allen.

Michelle stands up as she addresses Donna.

MICHELLE

We were rustier than this two weeks ago, when we first got together...wait 'til we get some more practice in.

SHAUNDRA

Speaking of practice, you guys...why don't we work on "Midnight in Moscow?"

Some of Shaundra's bandmates nod.

MISSY

I'll go grab some music stands.
(to Allen and Donna)
They're still in the garage, aren't they?

Missy makes her way to the garage when her brother JESSE (9 and swaggering!) lumbers down the stairs.

Jesse looks at Shaundra and her bandmates in confusion.

JESSE

What's up?

SHAUNDRA

Wail, we're trying to git good enough to play this show they have in LeClaire Park every July.

CYNDY

As long as the Mississippi stays in its banks.

MISSY

Shaundra...meet my brother, Jesse.

Jesse walks over to Shaundra and sticks his hand out toward the young trumpeter.

JESSE

Play something by Guns 'n' Roses.

Ten mouths hang open as a result of Jesse's request.

INT. HAYESES' KITCHEN - DAY

Shaundra, Pollyanna, Missy, Lynne, Susan, Michelle, Cyndy, and Heidi prepare snacks. (Cyndy's and Lynne's don't fit the traditional in junk food.)

CYNDY

I can't believe it. Still can't believe it.

(zeroes in on Missy)

"Play something by Guns 'n' Roses," your little brother said.

POLLYANNA

Look, Cyndy: Jesse is nine.

CYNDY

Yeah, but he's got a sister who uses their album covers and CD inserts for dart boards!

Missy looks some kind of proud.

MISSY

And soon as Jesse wears out that Ozzy Osbourne album he was looking for, I'll use that cover for a dart board, too.

Michelle pours kernels into a hot-air popcorn popper.

MICHELLE

We've definitely got a problem. Nobody understands that we--

LYNNE

Maybe we oughta...play rock.

Shaundra catches the sneaky look on Lynne's face.

SHAUNDRA

Lynnie June Pasquariello, this is a DIXIELAND band!

LYNNE

Ah know that! But that don't mean we cain't adapt some rock songs and do 'em as Dixieland!

Several sets of eyes light up.

Some of the musicians chow down at last during all the talk.

LYNNE (CONT'D)

Ah'm just tryin' to brang us a little bit closer to our peers. We already got the elders sewed up...sort of.

MICHELLE
 (turns popper on)
 Lynne...we haven't even been
 onstage yet!

LYNNE
 Ah know--

HEIDI
 (to Lynne)
 And besides, we've got to be
 careful about what to adapt. I know
 for sure they'll run us out of town
 if we try "Paradise City."

CYNDY
 I know my grandma would.

HEIDI
 I'm talking about the students we
 go to school with.

SHAUNDRA
 (nodding)
 Awraht. We'll add some more songs.
 If you catch those golden-oldies
 shows on the radio and find
 something we can do, let us know.

Darlene walks into the kitchen.

SUSAN
 (to Shaundra)
 How about "Sweatin' to the Oldies?"

Shaundra nods at Susan, then turns to Darlene.

SHAUNDRA
 Mom...any problems with us going
 downstairs?

DARLENE
 Fine. Just don't git crumbs all
 over the carpet.

Shaundra has a wide grin on her face.

INT. HAYESES' BASEMENT - DAY

Some bandmates sit at the piano, some sit in chairs, and the
 rest relax on the floor. But all eight Dixielanders continue
 to eat snacks and/or drink pop.

SHAUNDRA
Any other questions?

LYNNE
How do you feel 'bout me playing
mah harmonica...in the band?

SHAUNDRA
That'll work, Lynne. Ah know of one
other group that used a mouth harp,
and that was the Firehouse Five
Plus Two.

Lynne gestures her satisfaction at Shaundra's answer.

HEIDI
Are we gonna do any vocals?

SHAUNDRA
We will...in fact, Heidi, why
don'tcha thank of some songs some
of us can sang and come back with
something next time?

Heidi nods.

POLLYANNA
You guys...if we're gonna do the
Bix Festival five months from now,
we need a name.

Silence takes over the room.

SHAUNDRA
Nice point, Polly. Tail you the
truth, Ah never really thought of
it.

A few Dixielanders nod.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
Any questions?

MISSY
Sure. How about The World's Sexiest
Jazz Band?

Several of Shaundra's colleagues AD LIB their displeasure.

CYNDY
Missy, we're trying to play the Bix
Beiderbecke Jazz Festival, not the
Playboy Club.

MISSY
 (pointing at Cyndy)
 All right, have you got a better
 idea?

Cyndy flashes that backed-into-a-wall look.

CYNDY
 Well...my grandma thinks Darlings
 of Dixieland would be nice.

Michelle, Heidi, Lynne, and Missy frown; Shaundra shrugs.

MISSY
 I'm trying to get my parents to let
 us play at next month's theater
 organ society meeting. We'd like to
 think we've got a fair chance. That
 name'll kill it!

HEIDI
 Yeah, Cyndy. I don't need another
 reason to get laughed at. They
 already think I'm a nerd.

POLLYANNA
 What do you think of this: Fine
 Tooth Comb?

Pollyanna receives six blank stares (none from Shaundra).

POLLYANNA (CONT'D)
 You remember that line from "Bill
 Bailey:" "Remember that rainy
 evening I threw you out with
 nothing but a fine tooth comb."

Pollyanna stands up.

POLLYANNA (CONT'D)
 And that's also how we're trying to
 work...we're trying to go over
 everything with a fine tooth
 comb...we're trying to get it
 right.

Heidi nods in understanding.

LYNNE
 Ah see your point, Polly. We've
 gotta git it right all the way...or
 else people gonna say:
 (mimics elderly person)
 (MORE)

LYNNE (CONT'D)

"Wail, they're cute. Too bad they
cain't play."

SHAUNDRA

Sounds good to me, Polly...but Ah
wanna know if the rest of y'all
feel that way.

General agreement greets Pollyanna's suggestion.

SUSAN

Hey, I can dig that.
(clears her throat)
Fine Tooth Comb: "The Relentless
Pursuit of Perfection."

Most of the band claps wildly.

SHAUNDRA

Awraht. Fine Tooth Comb it is...any
other suggestions before we wrap up
this meeting?

MICHELLE

We've got to get an audition tape
ready to submit to the Bix
Beiderbecke Memorial Society.

Michelle's idea receives strong, AD LIBBED support.

SUSAN

Audio or video?

Susan receives seven blank stares.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

EXT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY

Fine Tooth Comb's eight members file into this business on
the west part of town...

INT. PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIO - DAY

...to pose for group photos. But the band rejects THE
PHOTOGRAPHER'S call for a sexier pose.

INT. LITTLEFIELDS' BASEMENT - REC ROOM - DAY

Cyndy, Heidi, Lynne, Michelle, Missy, Pollyanna, Shaundra,
and Susan strike a pose for the CAMERA...this time, with
their instruments.

That's the pose that makes it onto...

INT. WAITESSES' BASEMENT - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

...the poster Missy shows Allen and Donna. (The result breaks up Donna's and Allen's organ duet.)

EXT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA - NIGHT

This is a rather large, colorful building on Brady Street.

INT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Michelle and Shaundra polish off the pizza they share in a space that resembles a 1920s speakeasy...right down to a bandstand.

They rise up and head for...

INT. MANAGER'S OFFICE - NIGHT

...where they talk to RALPH WALKER (30s), who runs the restaurant. He eyeballs the band's poster and business card.

EXT. NORTH HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

After school, Michelle shows a copy of that poster to Kelley...who draws mustaches on the faces of Fine Tooth Comb's members.

INT. WEST HIGH GYM - NIGHT

The action on the basketball court is fast and furious when WEST'S GIRLS' BASKETBALL TEAM (Cyndy and Tanisha are two of its five starters) takes on CENTRAL'S TEAM.

Cyndy makes a three-pointer and draws a foul.

In the stands, Shaundra stands up to cheer; out pops a business card. Raquel picks up the card and laughs.

END MONTAGE

EXT. CONLEYS' HOUSE - NIGHT

This two-story, turn-of-the-Twentieth-Century house sure needs a paint job.

INT. CONLEYS' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

This room features a reasonable eclectic mix and walls of a subdued pastel color.

Pollyanna, Susan, Shaundra, Michelle, Cyndy, Missy, Lynne, and Heidi sit on the floor, on the sofa, or on lounge chairs.

And the young Dixielanders watch A VCR TAPING of Bix Jazz Festival highlights.

Heidi takes notes while Lynne turns to Shaundra.

LYNNE

Every group on this tape's wearin'
matching clothes...do we have to,
too?

Most of the bandmembers AD LIB their agreement with Lynne.

SHAUNDRA

Awraht...we won't wear matching
clothes.

Shaundra's bandmates cheer themselves hoarse.

Result: Pollyanna's mother, MARIAN CONLEY (40s, insecure), strides into the room, beer can in hand.

MARIAN

Pollyanna Marie Conley, what are
you showing your friends?

POLLYANNA

Don't worry, Mom, we're all right.
It's just a tape of a recent Bix
Beiderbecke Jazz Festival.

MARIAN

Bix Butterwho?

HEIDI

One of the early legends of jazz.
He played a mean cornet...and he
was born right here in town. But he
only lived from 1903 to 1931.

LYNNE

Anyway, Mrs. Conley, we're playin'
the same kinda music Bix Beider--

MARIAN

Stick to rock.
(taking a sip)
You'll make more money.
(takes another sip)
You'll make even more money if you
start rappin'.

Susan pulls a videocassette out of her own backpack, yanks the existing tape out of the Conleys' VCR, and pops her own videocassette into the VCR.

MICHELLE

Susan...we were looking at that.

While Susan hands the other tape to Shaundra, the TV screen shows...A ROCK VIDEO.

Cyndy gives Susan a dumbfounded look.

CYNDY

Wait a minute, Susan: How's looking at Paula Abdul dance with a cartoon cat gonna help us?

Several Fine Tooth Comb members look perplexed themselves. So does Marian, who strides out of the living room.

Heidi doesn't look confused, though.

HEIDI

Choreography!

Heidi receives blank stares from Michelle and Pollyanna.

HEIDI (CONT'D)

You guys, I joined a band. I didn't exactly infiltrate it.

Michelle nods.

SHAUNDRA

Susan...Heidi...Ah see your point. Maybe we horn players can dance onstage.

Missy, Lynne, and Heidi nod in agreement.

A proud Susan walks over to Heidi and pats her on the back.

SUSAN

You said that just like Oliver North.

Heidi frowns.

EXT. CAPITOL THEATER - DAY

Frost covers up the windows of this 1920s landmark.

INT. CAPITOL STAGE - DAY

The Capitol's enormous...and is as elegant as they come.

Onstage, Heidi, Missy, Susan, Pollyanna, Lynne, Shaundra, Michelle, and Cyndy hold or sit at their instruments.

The young Dixielanders wear their school duds...but emcee Donna is in a pinstripe suit-bow tie-straw hat getup.

INT. CAPITOL LOWER LEVEL - DAY

Allen (camcorder in hands) and OTHER MEMBERS of the local chapter of the American Theatre Organ Society peer at the nine females.

INT. CAPITOL STAGE - DAY

Mike in hand, Donna addresses the crowd.

DONNA

I know some of you wanted to watch
the Iowa game...especially you,
Evan.

INT. CAPITOL LOWER LEVEL - DAY

In the audience, as many heads as possible turn to EVAN KETELAAR (60s; wears a University of Iowa T-shirt).

DONNA (O.S.)

I hope you taped it. You've got
seven VCRs.

Goodnatured laughter erupts from the crowd.

EVAN

That's it. I'm busted.

The audience laughter escalates.

INT. CAPITOL STAGE - DAY

Donna waits for the laughter to die.

DONNA

We hope you like our special
guests. This is the first time
they've performed together for a
crowd of any size. I know they'll
blow your socks off. Ladies and
gentlemen...

(MORE)

DONNA (CONT'D)

(takes hat off)

Fine Tooth Comb!

During the applause, Donna leaves the stage to join the audience; when the applause dies down, Fine Tooth Comb gets going on "South."

This rendition is a bouncy, lyrical one; Shaundra, Lynne, Heidi, and Missy lead the way on trumpet, trombone, alto sax, and clarinet, respectively.

Meanwhile, Michelle, Pollyanna, Cyndy, and Susan push the rhythm along (on piano, drums, banjo, and bass).

After thirty-two bars, Missy takes the first solo...a sixteen-bar affair in which her playing jumps in and out of the upper register.

A pattern forms here: The rhythm section drops out for two bars during the middle of this and every solo in "South."

So far, the crowd loves it.

The next solo belongs to Lynne, whose playing takes on a harder edge than Missy's...and forces the rhythm section to work harder.

Michelle follows with her own sixteen bars. In these, she tries a hornlike approach.

Shaundra, the new soloist, brings her trademark exuberance to the next sixteen bars.

Pollyanna and Susan get the next sixteen bars to themselves. It's not really a bass solo for Susan, thanks to Pollyanna's lowkey drumming.

Still, Susan's and Pollyanna's joint effort impresses.

In the middle of those sixteen bars, Missy puts down her clarinet and tiptoes over to the theater's three-manual pipe organ, where she selects her stops.

Now Lynne, Cyndy, Heidi, Susan, Shaundra, Michelle, Pollyanna, and organ-playing Missy weigh in with thirty-two bars that resembles "South's" first thirty-two bars.

Only this time, the playing's more raucous.

For an ending, Fine Tooth Comb tacks on four more bars.

INT. CAPITOL LOWER LEVEL - DAY

The audience tacks on plenty of grateful applause. During it, Allen and Donna take a break from clapping to hug each other.

EXT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA - NIGHT

On this not-so-cold March day, every stall in the restaurant's parking lot is full.

INT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Fine Tooth Comb's on the bandstand, which now has a white fence around it. The band's members wear a variety of clothes ranging from a T-shirt-and-jeans outfit to a choir robe.

Michelle plays a pre-1929 upright piano whose hammers and strings are exposed.

THE CROWD'S made up of families and of groups of teenagers; they watch the band tear through the Dixiebelles' "(Down at Papa Joe's."

Right now, Michelle ends her tinkly sixteen-bar solo.

HEIDI, LYNNE, MISSY, SHAUNDRA
(singing into mikes)
*Well, a waitress wants to sit you
down./She's got the best frog legs
in town./There's a "Welcome" sign
hangin' on the door,/So don't you
be afraid to ask for more.*

Among the eaters: Jeff, Raquel, Sean, and Tanisha.

Of the foursome, Tanisha's the only member who doesn't smirk.

HEIDI, LYNNE, MISSY, SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
*Now, we all get happy 'til close at
night,/When the police comes and
turns out the lights.*

At another table, Donna makes an audio tape of the gig, Allen makes a videotape, and Jesse makes faces.

LYNNE, SHAUNDRA
They git a little mad--

HEIDI, MISSY
--but they don't fight--

HEIDI, LYNNE, MISSY, SHAUNDRA
Down at Papa Joe's!

Shaundra, Lynne, Heidi, and Missy become instrumentalists for eight bars; their brass/reed work adds to the raucousness put forth by Cyndy (on banjo), Pollyanna (on drums), and Susan (on electric bass)...to say nothing of Michelle.

At their table, Tanisha feels Jeff's forehead.

TANISHA
You're awful quiet tonight.

JEFF
Tanisha...the manager did say he was gonna kick us out if we heckled the band.

While they watch Fine Tooth Comb jam, Tanisha nods, Sean grins, and Raquel shrugs.

INT. HAYESES' KITCHEN - DAY

It's after school, and Darlene, Marshall, and Shaundra team up to fix dinner.

The phone RINGS O.S.; Shaundra runs to answer it.

SHAUNDRA
(on the run)
Ah thank it's the Bix Beiderbecke Memorial Society!

Darlene crosses her fingers and gestures Marshall into doing the same thing.

INT. HAYESES' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Shaundra's on the phone; a giant smile crosses her face.

SHAUNDRA
Ah've been looking forward to this call for five months...thanks!

Now the smile leaves Shaundra's face.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
Ah...understand...Ah'll let the rest of the band know. Maybe we'll git 'em next year.

Marshall walks into the living room while Shaundra wraps up the call.

When Shaundra hangs the phone up, she and Marshall hug.

EXT. NEUHAUSES' HOUSE - NIGHT

This one's a smallish, cheery-looking house.

INT. NEUHAUSES' LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

The Neuhauses' living room exudes coziness. The furniture is modest, and this space features a 1900-29 upright piano full of white keys that lack their tops.

Experimentation is the norm at this rehearsal: Michelle tries her luck on accordion, Missy plays alto saxophone, and Heidi tickles the keys of that old, beat-up piano.

Susan, Shaundra, Pollyanna, Lynne, and Cyndy play bass fiddle, trumpet, drums, trombone, and banjo, respectively.

Fine Tooth Comb reworks "Beer Barrel Polka," and right now, the band changes keys on the song's sixty-fourth bar.

This "Beer Barrel Polka" sounds much better with eight pieces than with three...and Shaundra's and Michelle's expressions tell the story.

During the song's final sixty-four bars, Shaundra, Lynne, and Missy add choreography to their playing. It's not the polka, but the fun's still front and center.

Michelle (accordion and all) moves toward Heidi, who gives those ancient piano keys a real workout.

Shaundra's band makes the song's final eight bars as rowdy and as spirited as possible, with the last note long and drawn out.

Pollyanna bangs the cymbals of her drum set to bring it all to an end.

Shaundra and Co. cheer themselves hoarse.

SUSAN

Shaundra...did the Bix Beiderbecke Memorial Society call yet?

Shaundra nods as if her head has a lead weight on it.

MISSY

Shaundra knows we made it.

SHAUNDRA

Not...quite. Not quite, y'all. They said we just missed out.

Cyndy, Lynne, Michelle, and Missy look mortified; Pollyanna looks sad; and Heidi and Susan just shrug.

Susan, Missy, and Lynne put their instruments down. Meanwhile, Missy's look changes into one of disbelief and Cyndy's becomes an angry look.

Cyndy packs up her banjo and heads out of the house. Heidi watches her storm out.

HEIDI

Cyndy, don't leave...maybe you can pretend this is the West High gym.

CYNDY

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT--

Shaundra moves toward Cyndy and gestures her into staying put. (Shaundra's effort works.)

SHAUNDRA

You guys...it all came down to experience.

POLLYANNA

Yeah, but, Shaundra...how could they turn down a local act?

Several bandmembers nod.

SHAUNDRA

They said we'd gotten off to a good start...but that we need more experience. And a bit more polish.

LYNNE

(walking toward Shaundra)
They just didn't wanna tail you it's because we're girls.

SHAUNDRA

Maybe. Ah don't know. But they insisted it wasn't that.

While Shaundra explains, Susan hugs Cyndy.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

So we didn't make it this year. Maybe we can make it next year...meanwhile, we've gotta git sharp so we can git 'em to want us in '96.

Cyndy and Susan break their embrace.

SUSAN

Shaundra...I smell a cover-up.

Some of Fine Tooth Comb's members laugh away at Susan's statement...but Susan wheels around and points at those members who laugh.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

I wouldn't laugh if I were you.
Some of you act like you wanna
quit!

MISSY

Who's talking about quitting?

SUSAN

You know who you are!

(to Cyndy)

No offense, but if walking out on a
practice like you're having a cow
isn't a good example of quitting,
then Shaquille O'Neal doesn't drink
Pepsi.

SHAUNDRA

Susan's right.

An embarrassed Cyndy sits down in the nearest chair to her.

SUSAN

And Shaundra's right about us
having a chance to play that Bix
Festival next year.

Susan walks toward Michelle, Lynne, Pollyanna, Heidi, Missy,
and Cyndy while she continues her speech.

SUSAN (CONT'D)

So here's what you guys gotta do:
Find us some gigs between now and
next July.

Cyndy's and Pollyanna's mouths fly open.

MICHELLE

But, Susan--

SUSAN

Talk to some of the elders at
church. Maybe they'll let us play
there.

Michelle's face shows a blank expression.

SHAUNDRA
You guys, it'll he'p us sixteen
months from now.

Most of the musicians nod in understanding.

LYNNE
(walking toward Shaundra)
Awraht, Ah'll take Susan's advice
and he'p us find some mo' places to
play.

Lynne puts a hand on one of Shaundra's shoulders.

LYNNE (CONT'D)
But you're goin' to the festival
all by your lonesome. This year's.

SHAUNDRA
Lynne, don'tcha wanna see--

LYNNE
Ah'd only git jealous.

Lynne shrugs.

EXT. LITTLEFIELDS' HOUSE - DAY

Greenery moves in to replace Davenport's snow cover.

INT. LITTLEFIELDS' KITCHEN - DAY

Larry (in his casual clothes) and Michelle (in her school
duds) sit at the kitchen table, where they eat
breakfast...and where Michelle's books rest.

Larry's is a skimpy breakfast.

MICHELLE
Dad...are you sure that's all you
want for breakfast?

LARRY
I'll be all right, Michelle.
(takes a sip of coffee)
Me and the fundraiser committee
have to get going on the jubilee
Sunday after next.

MICHELLE

That's what I wanted to talk to you about.

Michelle goes back to eating.

LARRY

And besides, Mrs. Craig's bringing donuts.

(getting up from table)

You gonna be much longer?

Michelle finishes her toast in two or three bites.

MICHELLE

I don't know if it's too late to talk about it, but...what do you think of Fine Tooth Comb playing the Cork Hill Jubilee?

In a playful way, Larry gestures Michelle out of her seat.

LARRY

Mickey Mouse is gonna be late for school.

MICHELLE

(getting up)

Could you at least mention it to the committee?

EXT. YOUNG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

This is a venerable-looking, pre-Great Depression structure.

INT. YOUNG JUNIOR HIGH MUSIC ROOM - DAY

In a rehearsal, drummer Pollyanna and acoustic bassist Susan shine (musically, that is) while THE REST OF YOUNG'S CONCERT BAND struggles through a classical piece.

Band director MARILYNN SANDQUIST (40s; still a knockout) conducts and...looks worried.

Once the piece ends, Marilyn breathes a sigh of relief.

MARILYNN

Class...work on that one some more!

The entire concert band looks embarrassed.

MARILYNN (CONT'D)

Work on it here...do it at home...I don't care if you have to go to the mall...just work on it!

The school bell RINGS. The school band scurries to leave the room...well, all except Susan and Pollyanna, who walk up to the band director.

MARILYNN (CONT'D)

Yes?

POLLYANNA

Don't worry. We'll work on it again, Ms. Sandquist.

SUSAN

(to Marilynn)

It's just that we were wondering...is there any way that this Dixieland band Polly and I are in can play in front of the whole school?

Marilynn strokes her own chin.

MARILYNN

Fine Tooth Comb...my teenage son saw you play at Good Times Pizza the other night.

(nodding)

Yeah...that's a great idea. Let me talk it over with the principal and see what she says.

Pollyanna and Susan trade high fives.

MARILYNN (CONT'D)

Make sure you disguise yourselves as a heavy-metal band first.

Susan and Pollyanna look at each other in confusion, then cast Marilynn the same kind of look.

EXT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

The snowman in front of the school is a fraction of itself.

INT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL SECOND FLOOR CLASSROOM - DAY

Shaundra and Cyndy sit next to each other in this late-afternoon math class.

They and THEIR CLASSMATES watch the teacher, DENNIS MACDONNELL (50s), stand at his desk, note in hand.

DENNIS

Stay right there. I've gotta go in the next room...one of the students in home ec has a gun.

As Dennis heads out, some students panic; a few leave their seats...only to receive an AD LIBBED admonition from Dennis.

Despite all the commotion, Shaundra and Cyndy remain in their seats. The two Dixielanders eyeball each other.

SHAUNDRA

Havin' any luck finding any gigs?

CYNDY

No.

SHAUNDRA

Maybe you oughta talk to your grandma. She might--

CYNDY

Maybe you oughta talk to that girl who tried out back in November...the one who dresses like Madonna--

SHAUNDRA

There's a whole school full of girls dressing like Madonna. Only they cain't do it during school hours--

Cyndy opens her math textbook.

CYNDY

Shaundra Lugene Hayes, I'm trying to get a basketball scholarship from any NCAA Division 1 women's program that can use a good--

SHAUNDRA

They haven't got an NBA for women!

Shaundra puts a hand over the page Cyndy reads.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

Ah wish they did...but they don't.

Cyndy removes Shaundra's hand from the former's textbook.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Ah'd hate to see you quit the band.
 You pick that ol' banjo
 beautifully...as beautifully as you
 play hoops.

CYNDY
 You're just saying that.

Shaundra shakes her head sideways.

CYNDY (CONT'D)
 Before the courts took me away from
 my parents, my parents...used to
 say nice things about me.

Cyndy closes her textbook.

CYNDY (CONT'D)
 One percent of the time. The other
 ninety-nine percent, they used to
 beat me down and--

SHAUNDRA
 You won't git a beating from me!
 (stands up)
 Cain't you see Ah'm in your corner?

Shaundra puts an arm around Cyndy.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Ah used to quit at the drop of a
 Nyalins Saints helmet. One day,
 before we moved out here, Ah tole
 Mom Ah was quitting band...the
 teacher didn't like what Ah was
 doing.

Now Shaundra rests her arms on Cyndy's desk.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 She sat me down and tole me...wail,
 it was a speech!

CYNDY
 Is this gonna take long?

SHAUNDRA
 Point is: If people like Rosa Parks
 and Oliver Brown gave up...we
 wouldn't even have this little ol'
 talk.

(MORE)

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

Tanisha would be blocking one of your shots, 'cause she'd be playing for Central High.

Shaundra sits back down.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

Matter of fact, if those girls hadn't brought out that lawsuit against the Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union, you'd have to move to West Liberty or West Branch just to play.

Cyndy sits in stunned silence.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

And what would your grandma thank if you tole her you were quitting Fine Tooth Comb?

Cyndy and Shaundra hold hands.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

And Missy's looking to you to show her those banjo pointers.

Shaundra and Cyndy break the embrace; the latter snaps her fingers in defeat.

CYNDY

Shaundra...you just don't quit, do you?

SHAUNDRA

Quitters don't win...'member?

Shaundra gestures Cyndy into a high five.

EXT. NORTHWOOD MALL - DAY

Michelle totes a ream of flyers touting..."THE TWENTY-SIXTH ANNUAL CORK HILL JUBILEE," just as it says, among other things, on each flyer.

In smaller letters: "MUSIC- FOOD- FUN."

As Michelle puts each flyer on the windshield of every vehicle she sees, she finds...unexpected help from Cyndy.

EXT. LOCUST PLAZA - DAY

A modern, boxy-looking office building in west Davenport.

INT. INSURANCE AGENCY OFFICE AT LOCUST PLAZA - DAY

Husband-and-wife agents Marshall and Darlene go over the paperwork on a new policy issued to A YOUNG COUPLE seated across the desk from the Hayes couple.

The young couple look surprised to see a copy of the Cork Hill flyer stapled onto the policy.

INT. WILSON SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

THE STUDENTS in Heidi's fifth-grade class almost knock each other down to leave the room once the bell RINGS...an act that makes THE TEACHER shrug.

Well, not everybody leaves: Heidi stays...to put a copy of the church's flyer on the class bulletin board.

EXT. LOCUST STREET CONSOLIDATED FOOD STORE - NIGHT

Lynne walks into a medium-sized supermarket...

INT. CUSTOMER SERVICE AREA - NIGHT

...to hang her copy of that flyer on the bulletin board.

INT. CAPITOL STAGE - DAY

Fine Tooth Comb performs here again; this time, the audience consists of Allen, Donna, Darlene, Marshall, Larry, Marilyn, and Jesse.

INT. CONLEYS' LIVING ROOM - DAY

Susan, Pollyanna, and Marian watch the public access channel on TV.

A few seconds later, they see A COMMERCIAL in which Pollyanna, Shaundra, Missy, and Susan plug that jubilee.

Marian drops her drink in surprise.

EXT. CORK HILL AME CHURCH - DAY

The area around the building's so full of vehicles that room to walk around is scarce.

By the way...the church exterior's paint job is under way.

INT. CORK HILL AME SANCTUARY - DAY

IT'S STANDING ROOM ONLY! Many in today's congregation look as if they'd never be caught dead in Davenport's inner city.

Shaundra, Darlene, and Marshall sit in front; alongside them: Susan and her parents, NATE and KATHERINE DAWKINS (both 40s).

A row or so away: Pollyanna and Marian; Lynne and her mom and dad, Texan CARLOTTA (40s) and LUIGI PASQUARIELLO (70s); and Cyndy and her grandmother, ERMA VAN ALSTYNE (60s).

Seated not far away from that group: Missy, Donna, Allen, Jesse, Heidi, and JEFFREY and TERESA NEUHAUS (both 30s; Heidi's parents).

Everybody digs Larry's sermon.

LARRY

I still can't get over it. I've never seen this many people in here since the networks sent their news crews here to check out the Flood of '93.

Some of the churchgoers react in goodnatured laughter.

Larry goes to one side of the pulpit...to lean on it.

LARRY (CONT'D)

So...those of you here today for the first time...take this back to your neighborhoods:

(with a grin)

It's no different here than anywhere else.

Now Larry walks back and forth.

LARRY (CONT'D)

It's not always like they say on TV! That same TV set that tells you it's not safe to come in this part of town is showing your kids how to lie...how to steal...how to kill and how to get away with it...

Some in the congregation eyeball each other.

LARRY (CONT'D)

Even how to beat up the pitcher if one of his pitches hits you in a baseball game!

Lynne's got a look of surprise.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 They don't always tell the truth on
 TV! Most of the time, they'll only
 tell you what's convenient! WHAT
 SELLS!

Larry's remarks earn him a mixed set of reactions.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 That's why you've gotta guard the
 door to your own mind!

Larry continues to walk back and forth, and the Cork Hill
 followers eat it up.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 Don't let false gods get in your
 mind! Don't let false images in
 your mind! And don't let murder in
 your mind!

AD LIBBED encouragement rings out from the congregation.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 Don't let adultery get in your
 mind! Don't let greed get in your
 mind!

The pastor stops right in front of a congregation that
 continues to dig his sermon.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 And...last, but not least...don't
 let LIES in your mind!

Several heads nod at Larry.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 If they're in there already...get
 'em out! The media's gonna show you
 all those things! I don't have to
 tell you that!

CONGREGATION
 YEAH!

LARRY
 (dropping to his knees)
 Brothers and sisters...don't you
 wanna guard the door?

CONGREGATION
 YEAH!

LARRY

You can say it better than that!
Don't you wanna guard the door?

CONGREGATION

YEAH!!

THOSE MEMBERS closest to the exits look too limp to leave...and too scared to be the first to leave the church.

LARRY

SAY IT LOUDER!

CONGREGATION

YEAH!!!

A satisfied Larry signals Michelle and the rest of the church band, as well as the choir, into knocking out a lively tune.

INT. CORK HILL AME CHURCH BASEMENT - DAY

Carolyn, Larry, Kelton, and JOSEPHINE CRAIG (60s) stand at the foot of the stairs.

The aroma of soul food dominates the room; meanwhile, Larry eats some of that soul food from a paper plate.

KELTON

Rev...I hear you ain't gonna catch the jubilee.

Larry and Josephine nod...but hers is heavy.

CAROLYN

Larry, you really don't know what you're missing.

JOSEPHINE

You're gonna miss that fine new Dixieland band.

KELTON

Hell...heck, we've been past that.

Donna and Allen move toward Josephine, Kelton, Carolyn, and Larry as the conversation continues.

KELTON (CONT'D)

That was yesterday's news. That stuff went out when be-bop came in. In the Forties!

ALLEN
 (to Kelton)
 That'll be a real surprise to our
 daughter. She and the rest of the
 band are setting up.

Donna watches Larry eat.

LARRY
 That's okay.
 (taking a bite)
 Soon as I'm done eating, I'm going
 home.

Allen's, Donna's, and Josephine's mouths drop.

KELTON
 (to Allen and Donna)
 Sorry about being rude. My name's
 Kelton Sylvester, and--

LARRY
 I just don't think our
 congregation's into that kind of
 music.

Debbie comes down the stairs and joins the conversation.

LARRY (CONT'D)
 And besides, I was the only one who
 voted against letting Fine Tooth--

JOSEPHINE
 Guess what, Debbie? Our beloved
 leader's not gonna stay for the
 jubilee.

Debbie eyeballs Larry in bewilderment.

DEBBIE
 It's for a good cause!

DONNA
 Kelton, nice to meet you. I'm Donna
 Waites, and this is Allen, my
 husband.

While Kelton, Donna, and Allen shake hands, Larry heads up
 the stairs with his paper plate.

JOSEPHINE
 Reverend Lawrence John Littlefield!
 You stay--

Josephine chases Larry while Donna, Debbie, and Allen gab.

DEBBIE

Donna and Allen, I watched you and
your daughter go to town on that
organ in the Capitol--

ALLEN

Debbie, I really like how you can
tear up that B-3. You're great! I
can never, ever get the same--

A VOICE comes over the P.A. system.

JAMAL (O.S.)

Brothers and sisters...welcome to
the 1995 Cork Hill Jubilee.

On the stairs, Josephine points to Larry.

JOSEPHINE

Go stay and see your daughter and
her friends cut loose...or you
don't get no more donuts!

A sheepish-looking Larry comes back down the stairs.

LARRY

You win, Mrs. Craig.

DONNA

(pointing to Larry)
What if they were rappers?

Larry looks down at his plate.

INT. CORK HILL AME FELLOWSHIP HALL - DAY

In walk Larry, Allen, Donna, Josephine, Kelton, Carolyn, and
Debbie...who join the AUDIENCE and find that the Fellowship
Hall, too, is standing room only.

Jesse also finds this out as he arrives inside the hall,
where most of the patrons eat soul food.

Jamal stands at a center mike at a makeshift stage.

In back of him, Michelle, Susan, Pollyanna, Lynne, Shaundra,
Heidi, Missy, and Cyndy sit at or hold their instruments.
(One of them is a battered pre-1929 upright piano.)

JAMAL

(addressing the audience)

I know they're itchin' to throw
down, and I know you're itchin' to
hear 'em, so here they are...Fine
Tooth Comb!

Fine Tooth Comb receives tremendous applause from the crowd.

Once the applause dies down, Marian, full plate of food in
hands, turns to tablemates Teresa and Jeffrey.

MARIAN

Mr. and Mrs., uh, Neuhaus...you
want these chitlins?

JEFFREY

Nah. That's okay.

TERESA

Aw, what the heck, Mrs. Conley?

Marian hands Teresa the plate...but almost drops it when
Pollyanna kicks in with her eight-bar military-style drum
intro to "South Rampart Street Parade."

Pollyanna keeps it going for four more bars while Lynne,
Shaundra, Heidi, and Missy add some rousing horn riffs to
finish the intro.

Michelle, Cyndy, and Susan jump in to help the other five
Dixielanders put over the tune's basic melody. While these
ensuing eight bars have a nice flow, the next eight sound
more jagged...thanks to Pollyanna's cymbal work.

Missy launches the number's first solo. In it, she maintains
a nice, lyrical flow while Shaundra, Lynne, and Heidi (to say
nothing of Cyndy) provide strong musical support.

Oh, yes: The song changes keys here.

Sixteen bars later, Pollyanna (for one bar) leads the band
into an eight-bar bridge, in which Lynne serves as the
principal instrumentalist.

The bridge is in a different key; in fact, it modulates. And
Lynne has a ball with her bouncy playing.

"South Rampart Street Parade's" bridge leads the song into
its previous key...and into Shaundra's turn.

For the next sixteen bars, Shaundra's trumpet playing takes
on some (or all) of the brittleness of Pollyanna's drumming.

Eight bars into Shaundra's solo, the music thins down to trumpet and drums in a rousing call-and-response game, with Shaundra's horn "calling" and Pollyanna's drums "responding."

All this music spellbinds the audience...and strikes Larry dumb!

Cyndy, Heidi, Lynne, Michelle, Missy, Pollyanna, Shaundra, and Susan play the song's final twenty bars...sixteen of which recall Missy's solo. At this point, Shaundra, Missy, Lynne, and Heidi engage in choreography.

The throng applauds the horn players' dancing.

The song's next-to-last bar belongs to Pollyanna and her drums; her work rouses her bandmates into an ending.

Fine Tooth Comb receives stronger applause from the crowd.

While some audience members give the band a standing ovation, Shaundra and her fellow Dixielanders look jubilant.

EXT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA - NIGHT

A YOUNG FAMILY files into the pizzeria on this nippy April 1995 Saturday.

INT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA DINING ROOM - NIGHT

PEOPLE OF ALL AGES occupy every table.

At a table or two, Shaundra, Cyndy, Michelle, Heidi, Susan, Missy, Pollyanna, and Lynne eat pizza and drink pop.

SHAUNDRA

(to her tablemates)

Now you're really gonna hear some Dixieland...those Spartans shore know how to put it over!

HEIDI

Shaundra, I researched them and found out they've played at every single Bix Jazz Festival since the first one in 1972...but then, the 1993 festival was rained out.

Cyndy checks her watch.

CYNDY

They should've been onstage twenty minutes ago.

MISSY

That's what I like about the Spartans: They sure know how to make a scene.

SHAUNDRA

That's not like them.
(taking a bite)
Every time Ah've seen 'em, they've come on time.

POLLYANNA

(through her food)
Maybe...

Seven sets of eyes look at Pollyanna, who finishes her bite.

POLLYANNA (CONT'D)

Maybe they...nah, it couldn't be car trouble.

Ralph Walker steps onto the bandstand and grabs a mike.

Man, he looks stricken!

RALPH

Ladies and gentlemen...may I have your attention, please?

At the table(s), seven Fine Tooth Combers pay close attention...but Susan leans over to talk to her tablemates.

SUSAN

Maybe they were kidnaped. I was watching this TV-movie a--

Susan's tablemates gesture her into silence.

RALPH

The Spartans...won't be able to perform for you tonight...they died.

SUSAN

Of AIDS?

LYNNE

Susan Dawkins, would you like a real frog in your throat?

Those around Lynne and Susan gesture them into silence.

RALPH

The plane they were on en route from Detroit crashed just short of a runway at O'Hare.

Some of the eaters nod.

RALPH (CONT'D)

They never got a chance to change planes in Chicago to come here.

In stunned silence, all eight Fine Tooth Comb members gaze at the stage.

RALPH (CONT'D)

We apologize for not being able to deliver you a show.

Eight sullen young Dixielanders eyeball each other.

MICHELLE

Cyndy and I will take you home as soon as we...

Those around Shaundra give her affectionate pats on her back.

EXT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA - NIGHT

In the parking lot, Michelle, Shaundra, Missy, and Heidi pile into the Littlefields' 1985 Toyota Corolla while Cyndy, Pollyanna, Susan, and Lynne head for Cyndy's 1972 Ford LTD.

INT. LITTLEFIELDS' COROLLA - NIGHT

Michelle straps her seat belt on and Shaundra fastens her own belt when:

MISSY

WAIT A MINUTE!

Missy rolls down the window on her side; in the process, she eyeballs Cyndy, Lynne, Pollyanna, and Susan, still about to pile into Cyndy's car.

MISSY (CONT'D)

(through the window)

WAIT! DON'T LEAVE YET!

HEIDI

Missy, you'd just gone to the restroom.

MISSY
 (rolls car window up)
 Yeah, but while I was there, I got
 an idea.

EXT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA - NIGHT

Heidi, Michelle, Missy, and Shaundra leave the Corolla and meet Cyndy, Lynne, Pollyanna, and Susan at the LTD. They form a huddle.

MISSY
 Shaundra, you're originally from
 New Orleans. Right?

SHAUNDRA
 Right...whatcha hatchin'?

Missy gestures her fellow musicians into a tighter huddle.

MISSY
 In the Big Easy, when somebody
 dies, they have a funeral march,
 and they have a brass band playing.
 And the music's not always dull or
 dry or dead or sad.

SHAUNDRA
 Ah don't thank it's right for us at
 a time like this.

POLLYANNA
 One, it's too cold to march. Two,
 it's too short notice.

CYNDY
 Missy, are you April fooling? I
 know this is April Fool's Day, but--

Missy shakes her head "no."

HEIDI
 And besides, Missy, since the
 Spartans were from Detroit,
 wouldn't you...well, it'd stand to
 reason that their loved ones would
 want the bodies buried in Detroit.

LYNNE
 (to Shaundra)
 What Missy means is we play the
 show the Spartans were gonna do
 tonight. Indoors.

Susan and Michelle perk up while Missy shows a wide smile.

SUSAN

Just like when Bobby Vee filled in for the three stars whose plane crashed near Clear Lake back in 1959.

LYNNE

He was one tired man, too, Susan.

SHAUNDRA

You guys, Ah don't know.

CYNDY

(pointing at Shaundra)
Didn't you tell us to go find gigs?

SUSAN

I DID!

Cyndy points toward Shaundra again.

CYNDY

Well, Shaundra, you told me not to quit!

HEIDI

(to Shaundra)
Cyndy's right. We have a chance to show what we can do on the spot.

POLLYANNA

(points toward restaurant)
And they really are familiar with our material.

MICHELLE

Shaundra...it may not be the Bix Jazz Festival...but it is one more chance to play in front of a crowd.

Shaundra nods.

LYNNE

(to Shaundra)
And you did say it'll he'p us next July.

SHAUNDRA

Awraht. We'll try it.

Shaundra's bandmates cheer until they're almost hoarse.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

But we've gotta talk Ralph the manager into it. And we've gotta call our folks and see if they like the idea.

MISSY

Piece of cake!

INT. GOOD TIMES PIZZA DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Fine Tooth Comb now wears a range of clothes from Susan's track-and-field warmup suit to Cyndy's granny gown.

The band's about to play for A NEW, SMALLER CROWD...whose members look surprised.

Still, the throng includes the bandmembers' parents, Erma, and Jesse.

Onstage, a surprised Ralph addresses the crowd.

RALPH

We're gonna have a show for you tonight!

Some of the audience members applaud.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Some of you were expecting the Spartans...but they couldn't come tonight...but our local band volunteered to play for you.

Shaundra, Michelle, Lynne, Cyndy, Pollyanna, Susan, Heidi, and Missy grab or get seated at their respective instruments.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen, let's give a warm welcome to Fine Tooth Comb!

The crowd gives Fine Tooth Comb that warm welcome.

As Ralph walks off the stage and into the audience, Missy puts down her clarinet and walks over to Cyndy.

Missy whispers AN AD LIB in Cyndy's ear while Shaundra talks to the audience.

SHAUNDRA

The Spartans were supposed to be here tonight, but they got keeled in a plane crash...we offer our condolences.

Cyndy gives her banjo to Missy and then grabs an electric guitar, which Cyndy plugs into a small amp.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

We're gonna play our best for you.

Heidi puts her sax down and grabs Missy's clarinet, and the band takes off on its version of..."The Happening," a 1967 hit for the Supremes.

It starts with a blaring eight-bar intro led by Shaundra's trumpet, Lynne's trombone, and Heidi's clarinet. Meanwhile, Cyndy, Missy, Susan, Pollyanna, and Michelle put across a chugging kind of rhythm.

Shaundra takes the first solo: Twenty-two bars where she sticks as closely to the song's original lyrics as possible.

A pattern emerges: Cyndy plays a Motown-style lead guitar, while Missy's banjo work resembles a rhythm guitarist's.

Cyndy shows her stuff during a twelve-bar bridge.

Out in the audience, the eaters' surprise becomes pleasant.

Onstage, Lynne does the next twenty-two-bar passage; in it, she brings "The Happening" into a more free-wheeling, more improvisational direction.

Michelle's the lead musician during the next twelve bars. In her piano solo, she takes a ragtime approach.

Shaundra and Co. go back to the number's first eight bars, then change keys...with the first eight bars in the new key serving as another reprise of the intro.

When the band reaches Heidi's solo, it treats the "verses" a bit differently: They're now twenty bars long.

Heidi's own clarinet solo keeps the improvisational theme going, but she takes a mellower approach than Shaundra.

Now the music thins down to Pollyanna's drums and Susan's bass for twenty bars. Susan supplies rigid, four-to-the-bar thumping...and Pollyanna's drumming becomes complex.

While time permits, Missy, Lynne, Heidi, Cyndy, Shaundra, and Michelle watch the two inseparables jam.

Missy takes over as the soloist; she turns the operation into a three-person affair for now.

She still plays rhythm guitar riffs on banjo, but now, Missy's twenty bars feature a more complex approach.

Michelle's piano reenters the song; eight bars later, Cyndy's guitar comes back in...joined twelve bars later by the horn section of Shaundra, Heidi, and Lynne.

As the full band cooks, it's twenty-two bars of all-out playing as Fine Tooth Comb edges toward the end of the song.

Now every bandmember not on drums turns to Pollyanna, who kicks in with eight bars of hot pounding...before a blaring four-bar riff by the band brings "The Happening" to an end.

The crowd's applause is tremendous.

Result: Missy, Shaundra, and Michelle trade high fives.

EXT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Greenery returns to replace the snowman.

INT. WEST HIGH SECOND FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Shaundra leaves one class to go to another; along the way, she blends into the traffic better known as OTHER STUDENTS.

She passes by Dennis' classroom. He watches her go by.

DENNIS

Shaundra...may I have a word with you?

A surprised Shaundra wheels around, dodges MORE STUDENTS, and walks toward the math classroom.

INT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL SECOND FLOOR CLASSROOM - DAY

Dennis and Shaundra stand next to his desk as a few STUDENTS enter the room.

SHAUNDRA

It's not mah grades, is it, Mr. MacDonnell?

DENNIS

No! You're doing fine!

Shaundra breathes a sigh of relief.

DENNIS (CONT'D)

Couple of weeks from this Friday,
there's gonna be an assembly during
sixth period.

SHAUNDRA

Hayden Fry coming here in search of
RE-cruits?

DENNIS

No, it's not about football. One of
the teachers went to the Cork Hill
Jubilee over a week ago...and raved
about your Dixieland band.

SHAUNDRA

You want us to play in front of the
whole school?

Raquel comes into the room and stares at Shaundra and Dennis.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

The whole school?

Dennis flashes that hopeful look.

INT. HAYESES' KITCHEN - NIGHT

Shaundra, Marshall, and Darlene fix dinner; tonight, the menu
is predominantly Cajun.

SHAUNDRA

So they're gonna let us play in
front of the whole West High
student body.

Darlene and Marshall trade high fives with Shaundra.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

It may not be Bix...but it's fine
with me.

Now Darlene opens a cabinet and grabs a can or two of Cajun-
style seasoning.

DARLENE

Shaundra...ever thought about how
the other six members're gonna git
outa classes at their schools?

Darlene closes the cabinet. She sprinkles seasoning all over the meat in the frying pan in front of her on the range.

DARLENE (CONT'D)

Ah mean, it's just you and Cyndy over at West...and Lynne goes to Central--

MARSHALL

And West and Central hate each other. Ah thank.

DARLENE

And don't forgit that Michelle goes to North...and that's just the high schools.

SHAUNDRA

It's cool. We'll figure it all out.

EXT. WAITESES' HOUSE - NIGHT

The LTD and the Corolla rest along the street.

INT. WAITESES' BASEMENT - MUSIC ROOM - NIGHT

Before they rehearse, Pollyanna, Shaundra, Susan, Michelle, Heidi, Lynne, Cyndy, and Missy sit or kneel in a circle.

Shaundra's face shows an enormous smile.

LYNNE

And Ah'm talkin' to the Quad-City River Bandits 'bout playin' at one of their baseball games.

MISSY

Piece of cake!

HEIDI

For you, Missy, it might be, since you're an organist.

MISSY

Well, I can play more than "CHARGE!"

Some goodnatured laughter fills the music room.

SHAUNDRA

Wail, you guys, Ah've got one for you.

Nobody laughs now.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 On April twenty-first...two weeks
 from this Friday...we're gonna play
 at an assembly at West High!

Seven mouths fly open.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 If you guys can talk your teachers
 and principals into letting you
 leave school early to come to West.

Michelle, Cyndy, Lynne, Susan, and Pollyanna look shocked.

Shaundra pulls out six slips of paper from a notebook and
 passes a slip each to every remaining member but Cyndy.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Now, Ah want y'all to--

MICHELLE
 Whatever you do, you guys...don't
 wear your school colors.

An air of surprise grips most bandmembers.

EXT. YOUNG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Susan runs around the school grounds before classes begin. As
 Susan passes by an entrance, Pollyanna comes out of the
 building and watches her best buddy.

Result: Susan runs in place.

SUSAN
 Want to join me, Polly?

POLLYANNA
 Well, I could use the exercise.

Now both teenagers run in place.

SUSAN
 Looks like Bix is gonna live for me
 after all.

POLLYANNA
 You're going to the festival?

SUSAN

Nope. Gonna take part in the seven-mile run. Talked Lynne into going, too.

POLLYANNA

And I've got some news for you, too.

SUSAN

You gonna run, too?

POLLYANNA

Nope. But we are gonna play here. Last week of the school year.

STUDENTS who head for the school watch Pollyanna and Susan run...only to stare at the two inseparables.

Susan and Pollyanna trade high fives.

POLLYANNA (CONT'D)

There's a "but" to it, though.

SUSAN

Uh oh...

Pollyanna stops running.

POLLYANNA

They vetoed your request to bring in the cast of "In Living Color."

Susan's smile falls off her face.

POLLYANNA (CONT'D)

Principal don't play that.

Pollyanna gestures Susan into running inside with her.

EXT. WEST HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

THINLY-CLAD JOGGERS run on a sidewalk outside the school on this balmy Friday in late April.

INT. WEST HIGH FIRST FLOOR HALLWAY - DAY

Fine Tooth Comb stands outside the school auditorium; the eight members show eight separate looks...modeled after each musician's favorite TV characters.

Everyone looks nervous...even Missy.

MISSY

Shaundra...we're gonna play in
front of your classmates?

SHAUNDRA

Yes and for true.

MISSY

If we want to live, we'd better try
the stuff they're used to first.

Most members AD LIB their agreement with Missy.

SHAUNDRA

Awraht.

(looking at her watch)

Ah thank it's time to git in.

Shaundra and her colleagues open the door that leads to the
back of the auditorium. At that moment, AN O.S. VOICE puts
over an introduction.

INT. WEST HIGH AUDITORIUM - DAY

The person behind the voice, West High principal IKE FOWLER (50s), stands onstage as he speaks to...well, a packed house.

IKE
 (into mike)
 And if they keep fulfilling the
 great things being said about them,
 this band will be playing at
 LeClaire Park one July.

SOME STUDENTS give AD LIBBED remarks (mostly negative).

IKE (CONT'D)
 So, without further ado, let's
 bring 'em out.

The teenage AD LIBS grow stronger.

IKE (CONT'D)
 Ladies and gentlemen...Fine Tooth
 Comb!

Shaundra, Michelle, Lynne, Cyndy, Susan, Pollyanna, Heidi,
 and Missy jog from the wings to the stage to the tune of
 somewhat perfunctory applause.

Audience surprise takes over as the eight young Dixielanders
 grab or get seated at their regular instruments (in
 Michelle's case, a garden-variety school-model studio piano).

And the AD LIBS continue...although subdued.

SHAUNDRA
 (into mike)
 Thank you!

The crowd quiets down at last.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Any of you remember a song that
 Taco did back in 1983?

One out of every five or so audience members nods.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Wail...we'd like to start out with
our version.

Fine Tooth Comb launches into "Puttin' on the Ritz." This
 version's a lot faster and much livelier than Taco's famous
 Top Five rendition.

The torrid pace causes some crowd members to gasp.

While Cyndy, Michelle, Pollyanna, and Susan handle a strong rhythm all the way, Shaundra, Heidi, Missy, and Lynne play the melody. Only Shaundra's trumpet work and Missy's clarinet work resemble anything lyrical.

Thirty-two bars into the song, Missy and Shaundra go improvisational, too, as they lead the band through another thirty-two bars.

In the audience, Noah turns to Tanisha and Raquel; both girls sit alongside him.

NOAH

Somebody's gotta tell them this is
the Nineties.

RAQUEL

Shut up, Noah! You're talkin' about
my friends up there!

Noah looks stunned.

TANISHA

(pointing at Noah)
Yeah. At least they're doing their
own thing.

Noah sits there and fumes.

Onstage, Heidi's the song's first soloist. Her thirty-two bars are a racehorse saxophone spree that tempts Cyndy into trying to keep up with her.

Shaundra's got the next solo. In these thirty-two bars, she goes at first for the high notes in a choppy way, but shifts into a racehorse style halfway through the solo.

Now it's Missy's turn to solo. She musically wanders toward the tune's original melody line while Heidi, Lynne, and Shaundra add to the strong rhythm with their horn lines.

Thirty-two bars later, it's Pollyanna and her drums.

During Pollyanna's four-bar exhibition, Sean gets out of his seat in the audience...to dance.

Jeff looks on in shock.

JEFF

Sean...you're gonna get in troub--

SEAN

So what? School year's almost over!

Onstage, Lynne takes over for the next thirty-two bars...and this time, the song changes keys. And while the other brass/reed players do the original melody line, Lynne shows her improvisational skills.

Now the whole band improvises as it takes the music around for one last set of thirty-two highly-intense bars.

The end comes when Fine Tooth Comb tacks on two more bars, which end with a cymbal crash from Pollyanna.

"Puttin' on the Ritz" earns warm applause from the students...and stronger kudos from THE FACULTY.

EXT. LECLAIRE PARK - DAY

It's a partly-cloudy, not-so-humid Friday in early July...and the Bix Beiderbecke Jazz Festival begins.

PEOPLE OF ALL AGES fill this five-block-long finger of greenery that overlooks the Mississippi River.

People fill up row after row after row after row of benches and lounge chairs; other folks use picnic coolers for seats.

Other audience members recline on the ground, others stand up, and still other music lovers dance the time away.

They all dig the music of THE RUNNING BOARDS, a Dixieland band made up of seven middle-aged men in matching sport shirts and slacks.

In the crowd (and close to the bandstand), Shaundra, Marshall, and Darlene sit on lounge chairs.

All three Hayeses enjoy the music...as do Evan, Marilyn, and Stephanie, who sit a row or two behind the Family Hayes.

EXT. CENTENNIAL BRIDGE - DAY

Immediately west of LeClaire Park, RUNNERS OF BOTH GENDERS crowd the Iowa side of this bridge as they stand ready to compete in the Bix Seven-Mile Run.

Most runners wear T-shirts and shorts; some wear track warmup suits. But all wear large cards that each feature a three-digit number.

Susan and Lynne stand in the middle of the pack; like many other runners on the bridge, the two Dixielanders bounce in place in anticipation of the starting gun.

At last, THE GUN GOES OFF...and the runners take off!

In the early going, Lynne and Susan manage to keep up.

EXT. LECLAIRE PARK - BANDSHELL - DAY

The bandshell's mural, a painting of Bix Beiderbecke and four other early jazz performers with the caption "BIX LIVES," serves as an all-knowing setting for THE SAND BURR SIX, six casually-dressed middle-aged musicians who give out with their own lively brand of Dixieland.

EXT. LECLAIRE PARK - AUDIENCE - DAY

The Hayeses watch and groove to the music when Marilyn and Evan somehow worm their way to the threesome.

MARILYNN

Shaundra, thanks for bringing your band to Young Junior High last month.

SHAUNDRA

Uh...thanks, Ms. Sandquist.

EVAN

(to Shaundra)

Yeah. You guys were such a hoot...especially when you came out in your Kiss costumes.

SHAUNDRA

(to Marilyn)

Thanks for the idea!

Shaundra, Marshall, Darlene, Marilyn, and Evan wave at each other as Evan and Marilyn return to their seats...and VANCE KESTENBAUM (40s) approaches the Hayeses.

MARSHALL

(to Vance)

You need us to move?

VANCE

Nah, you're fine. I'm Vance Kestenbaum from the Bix Beiderbecke Memorial Society, and...which one of you is Shaundra Hayes?

Shaundra raises her hand in surprise.

SHAUNDRA
 (to Darlene and Marshall)
 He called me on the phone four
 months ago.

Darlene stands up as if to hit Vance, but Marshall gestures her away from the act.

VANCE
 We've been having tremendous
 difficulty replacing the Spartans
 in this year's festival, and--

SHAUNDRA
 Ah know we were looking forward to
 seeing 'em.

Vance and Marshall nod.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
 Air travel ain't been the same
 since Reagan fired all those air
 traffic controllers.

DARLENE
 Yeah, but didn't Clinton bring 'em
 back, Shaundra?

VANCE
 Shaundra...we'd be honored if your
 band would perform at this year's
 festival. In fact, tonight.

SHAUNDRA
 Real...ly? For...true?

Vance nods.

DARLENE
 (to Vance)
 This better not be a scam on us.

VANCE
 By all means, Mrs. Hayes, this
 isn't a scam.
 (drops to one knee)
 In fact, Fine Tooth Comb came
 within a hair of making the
 festival this year in its own
 right.

Shaundra's mouth flies open.

VANCE (CONT'D)
Shaundra...we'd really be
delighted.

SHAUNDRA
Wail...

DARLENE
What's stoppin' you?

SHAUNDRA
Wail, Mr. Kestenbaum...two of our
members're in the seven-mile run
right now.
(getting up)
Let me round up the rest of the
band and give 'em the good
news...Ah'm heading for the phone
right now.

As Shaundra leaves, Darlene eyeballs Vance in suspicion.

DARLENE
Can Ah see your ah-dee?

MARSHALL
Darlene...take his word for it.

A satisfied Vance gets back up.

EXT. RIVER STREET - DAY

The field thins down as the Bix Seven-Mile Run goes into its
final leg...and Lynne and Susan remain in the field.

They might be among the back of the pack, but Susan and Lynne
still hold their own.

Among the CROWD along River Street, Nate and Katherine watch
for Susan; Luigi, Carlotta, Erma, and Cyndy watch for Lynne
as they stand next to the elder Dawkinses.

When Lynne passes by, Carlotta pulls out...a cigar.

LUIGI
Carlotta...Lynne no can win.

CARLOTTA
Ah know, Luigi. Least she's gonna
finish!

Erma also pulls out a cigar; she and Carlotta break out their lighters at the same time...but:

ERMA
(to Carlotta)
Allow me.

At the same time, Carlotta and Erma fire up their cigars...with the latter's lighter.

Katherine taps Carlotta on the shoulder.

KATHERINE
You two did that just like Jack
Albertson and Freddie Prinze on
"Chico and the Man."

Cyndy cringes while Erma and Katherine grin...and Carlotta feigns confusion.

NATE
Katherine...when was that on?

KATHERINE
Stay tuned for the answer, Nate.
And now...heeeere's Susan!

Susan passes by; as soon as she approaches, she waves to Katherine, Nate, Cyndy, Erma, Carlotta, and Luigi.

EXT. LECLAIRE PARK - PAVILION - DAY

Shaundra's at a pay phone.

SHAUNDRA
(into phone)
Hey, Michelle, how's it
going?...Same here. Ah've got some
news that's gonna blow your
mind...wail, anyway, the Bix
Beiderbecke Memorial Society wants
us to perform here. Tonight.

SEVERAL PEOPLE line up to use the pay phone.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)
That's right: Tonight...meet me at
the bandshell by five forty-
five...we're going on at six...wear
anythang your little ol' heart
desires...yes, you may...a bikini?

EXT. LECLAIRE PARK - BANDSHELL - DAY

Michelle (who's in her bikini, all right) meets Shaundra in back of the bandshell; the former totes a giftwrapped package while the latter now has her trumpet case with her.

Kelley runs up to Michelle.

MICHELLE

Kelley...I thought you didn't like Dixieland.

KELLEY

Well, I can learn.

Kelley puts a hand on Michelle's shoulder.

KELLEY (CONT'D)

Most of all...I like you. And I'm sorry I drew mustaches on your poster.

MICHELLE

Oh, that's all right. My dad would've drawn Devil's horns on our heads.

(hands gift to Kelley)

I came in peace, too.

While Kelley opens the package, Susan, Pollyanna, Missy, Heidi, Lynne, and Cyndy stroll toward the bandshell.

The remaining six Fine Tooth Combers carry their instruments along (some members help Pollyanna with her drum set).

This sextet's choice of clothing runs the gamut...from Pollyanna's T-shirt and jeans (the T-shirt reads: "DIXIELAND IS HERE TO STAY") to Missy's tuxedo.

Kelley finds she now owns...a Groucho Marx disguise!

LYNNE

Wait'll mah dad's ex-wife hears this: Ah finished a seven-mile race and then played in a Dixieland festival that night.

SUSAN

Which one, Lynne?

HEIDI

(to Susan)

The one who still lives in
Missouri.

LYNNE

The one who's divorced...not the
one who's dead.

Kelley smirks at her present when Pollyanna turns to her.

POLLYANNA

Put it on!

Kelley puts on the Groucho disguise and receives gales of
laughter from Shaundra and her fellow Dixielanders.

MISSY

(to Kelley)

You need to pick out a secret word.

Now it's Kelley's turn to laugh.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

Vance, at center mike, addresses the AUDIENCE...a bigger one
than earlier in the day.

VANCE

We think you'll get a kick out of
our next act. The average age of
its members is thirteen and a
half...but, believe me, they play
like seasoned veterans!

Some crowd members gasp.

VANCE (CONT'D)

This is the band's very first Bix
Beiderbecke Jazz Festival, so we
hope you'll make 'em feel welcome.

Dennis, Evan, Marilyn, and Stephanie already applaud...as do
the bandmembers' parents and Erma.

VANCE (CONT'D)

Ladies and gentlemen...Davenport's
very own...Fine Tooth Comb!

As Cyndy, Heidi, Lynne, Michelle, Missy, Pollyanna, Shaundra,
and Susan sprint to the bandstand and sit down at or grab
their usual instruments, some more audience members gasp.

By contrast, Erma, Dennis, Stephanie, Evan, Marilyn, Jesse, and the bandmembers' moms and dads cheer enthusiastically.

When Donna and Allen catch Larry cheering with that kind of gusto, the elder Waiteses look pleasantly surprised.

Onstage, Shaundra moves to center mike...while her fellow musicians move over to the bandshell's spinet piano once they put their own instruments down.

SHAUNDRA

Thank you very much! We're just so glad to be here!

While Shaundra addresses the crowd, her bandmates turn the piano 180 degrees...and readjust the piano's own microphone to reflect the instrument's new orientation.

The audience lets out a collective gasp.

SHAUNDRA (CONT'D)

Wail, it's just like they say:
There'll be a hot time in the old town tonight.

Michelle takes a seat at the piano, Pollyanna goes to her drum set, Susan stands her bass fiddle up, Shaundra's got her trumpet in hand, and Cyndy, Missy, Heidi, and Lynne grab their own instruments again.

When Pollyanna hits her cymbal eight times for timekeeping, Fine Tooth Comb kicks into "A Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight." For the first eight bars, the whole band tears through the song's familiar melody.

A four-bar vamp takes place; in it, Cyndy's banjo and Susan's bass provide the music. What's more, the tune's key changes.

On top of all that, Lynne sets her trombone down during the vamp...and picks up a harmonica.

Lynne toots out eight torrid bars.

Most of the crowd (led by Luigi and Carlotta) gets a kick out of Lynne's harmonica solo.

Shaundra owns the next eight-bar solo. In it, she plays a muted trumpet while Pollyanna's drums reenter the song.

The next soloist: Missy...who turns in eight fluid bars in a clarinet solo where Michelle's piano grows prominent.

Now it's Heidi's turn; in her alto sax solo, she keeps the fluidity going...while Lynne goes back to playing trombone.

Cyndy works the next eight bars...bars of lazy, loping banjo.

But then, Cyndy turns her own intensity up when her bandmates kick in for eight rousing bars that recall the song's first eight bars.

Then...as many Fine Tooth Combers as possible whistle for one bar (and take "Hot Time" into a new key).

Michelle takes the next sixteen bars and slows the music down. In addition, during the last eight bars of her solo, Michelle's the lone musician.

As the crowd cheers wildly, the band kicks in for a raucous seventeen-bar spree; the odd bar serves as the ending.

The bandmembers' parents and grandparent cheer themselves hoarse (some even give a standing ovation); seconds later, Jesse and more of his fellow audience members do likewise.

Shaundra, Michelle, and Lynne engage in high fives.

Pollyanna watches the threesome high-five it.

POLLYANNA

Hey, you guys, save some energy for the rest of the show!

SHAUNDRA

Don't worry, Polly! We will!

LYNNE

But first...

FREEZE FRAME as all eight musicians high-five each other.

FADE OUT.

THE END