

"THE NUTCRACKERS"

Written by:
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FADE IN:

EXT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S HOUSE, KANSAS CITY, MO - DAY

This is a modest split-level house in Kansas City's Midtown Westport area...south of Penn Valley Park.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

A cozy, busy-looking space...in fact, this living room looks like a dead ringer for the one from "The Odd Couple."

CONCETTA FERDINANDINA "CONNY" PINAUD (27, clever, assertive; fragile-sounding Toronto accent) sits at a poker table, where she reads "Nutrition for the Dancer" or a similar book.

With a nod, Conny closes the book and sets it on the table...then grabs a large slice of thick-crust pizza from a carryout box.

CONNY

(taking a bite)

Oh, man...this is the food of the gods.

SYDNEY HENDERSON (27, witty, confident, Black; squeaky New York brogue) bursts from the kitchen with two twenty-ounce bottles of pop/tea/water while she watches Conny chow down.

Sydney sets the bottles down on the table.

SYDNEY

Hey, Conny, save some for me!

CONNY

(points to pizza box)

Sydney, there's a whole half a box left in here.

(taking another bite)

And a whole frozen pizza in the freezer just in case we both are still hungry.

Sydney opens her bottle.

SYDNEY

Have another bottle.

CONNY

Don't mind if I do!

Conny grips the other bottle and opens it while Sydney takes a slice of pizza from the box.

SYDNEY
Well, here it is.
(takes a bite)
The Kansas City Ballet's off and
running into a new season.

CONNY
Yeah.

Sydney and Conny sip from their bottles.

CONNY (CONT'D)
Aren't you excited about this
year's edition of "New Moves?"

SYDNEY
Yeah...I can feel it.
(between bites)
If this year's "New Moves" aren't
better than last year's "New
Moves," it looks like we'll have to
move outa this house.

CONNY
No way that's gonna happen...what
with that dynamic new choreography
Carlos Ramirez has worked out.

SYDNEY
I like how you think!

The two housemates hoist their bottles.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
To us...all thirty of us.

CONNY
To another great season.

SYDNEY
"New Moves" and all.

Conny and Sydney click their bottles together before taking
some more sips.

CONNY
To tell you the truth, I've been
thinking.

Sydney nods.

CONNY (CONT'D)
What if we couldn't dance anymore?

SYDNEY

That's like Patrick Mahomes asking himself: "What if I can't throw that football anymore?"

CONNY

No, Sydney! That's worse than us asking: "What if we couldn't dance anymore?"

Sydney takes another bite of her pizza slice.

CONNY (CONT'D)

But, really...what would happen if we found out we couldn't trip the light fantastic anymore?

MAIN TITLES APPEAR OVER ACTION.

Sydney stares into space while she takes one more bite.

SYDNEY

Well...I went to the School of American Ballet back home in New York City.

Conny nods.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

(eyeballing Conny)

And I couldn't believe it when I found out they still had that old, beat-up piano Vanessa Carlton played and wrote her songs on.

CONNY

When she went there?

SYDNEY

When she went there.

Conny listens as she finishes her pizza slice.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I started trying to write songs when I was still in grade school...but I had to put it away when they told me I was much better at dancing.

CONNY
 You're kidding.
 (takes a sip)
 What did you write?

SYDNEY
 Oh...I tried to write stuff that
 Usher or Beyonce or Jennifer Lopez
 might've wanted to sing.

Now Conny looks excited.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
 But when I was fourteen, I enrolled
 at the School of American Ballet.
 Same age as Vanessa Carlton.

CONNY
 Wow.

SYDNEY
 And one day, I stumbled upon that
 old, beat-up piano there...and it
 had a...let's face it. It was badly
 out-of-tune.
 (through bites)
 So I started writing stuff B.B.
 King or Robert Cray might've wanted
 to sing.

CONNY
 Sydney, that's really cool. But
 what did your classmates think?

SYDNEY
 Well, Conny, one of 'em told me:
 "Sydney Marie Henderson, get off
 that old, beat-up piano and stick
 to ballet!"

Conny's mouth flies open.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
 And one of the teachers told me:
 "Sydney, I heard Vanessa Carlton
 play before she hit it big...and
 believe me, you're no Vanessa
 Carlton!"

Sydney rests her fists on her chin.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
 Okay, Concetta...your turn.

CONNY

Well...when I did community theater back home in the Toronto area, I was Amaryllis in "The Music Man."

SYDNEY

Did you get to actually play a real piano...or did you fake it while somebody in the orchestra pit did the real playing?

CONNY

Nope. That was actually me playing a real piano. An old-fashioned upright.

Conny breaks out her cell phone; she scrolls through the saved pictures until...she comes across a photo of her younger self in an Amaryllis costume.

SYDNEY

(looking at photo)

Ho...ly cow!

Sydney and Conny high-five each other.

CONNY

I ended up finding out I was the first to ever play the role of Amaryllis while wearing glasses.

SYDNEY

Man, you looked distinguished!

CONNY

And extinguished.

Sydney looks dumbfounded.

CONNY (CONT'D)

I was nine going on ten...and I was already taking up ballet. They made me switch over to contact lenses.

SYDNEY

At nine going on ten? God--

CONNY

Well, every optometrist back home in Brampton, Ontario told me they'd never seen a bespectacled ballerina before.

SYDNEY
That's all effed up! You could've
been a trailblazer!

CONNY
Yeah...but they told me I would've
stuck out like a sore middle
finger.

A peeved Sydney takes another swig.

SYDNEY
Let's say we give all those
naysayers the middle finger and get
into music once our ballet careers
are over.

Conny and Sydney raise their bottles.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Oh, by the way...do you like the
blues?

CONNY
Does pizza taste great?

The two women click their bottles.

CONNY (CONT'D)
You remember when they had street
pianos all over the Kansas City
area, don't you?

Sydney nods.

CONNY (CONT'D)
We found this old upright at
Country Club Plaza...and you and I
banged out a bunch of blues songs.

SYDNEY
Yeah...we drew a crowd, didn't we?

Conny nods enthusiastically while she and Sydney click their
bottles again.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
To our second career as blues
musicians.

CONNY
To us...just the two of us.

The twosome click their bottles one more time before each woman takes an additional sip.

EXT. TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

This downtown brown-brick building is the old Union Station Power House turned into the home of, as the sign says, "KANSAS CITY BALLET."

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

In this ample space that features a Plexiglas wall, THE KANSAS CITY BALLET (Conny, Sydney, and twenty-eight other dancers...fifteen are male) works out choreography while a laptop BLARES OUT Isaac Hayes' "Do Your Thing" or a similar 1970s R&B tune.

Artistic director STEPHEN SKINNER (32, a worrier) and choreographer CARLOS RAMIREZ (25, laid-back) watch the fifteen women and fifteen men bust those "New Moves."

PIERRE LAFITTE (30, a French Canadian) sits behind an electronic keyboard as he watches the troupe of thirty move as one...then as thirty individuals doing their own thing.

Now the tune ENDS...Pierre claps...the dancers eyeball Carlos and Stephen.

Stephen lets out a sigh of relief while Carlos smiles.

STEPHEN

You know, Carlos...this is the most ambitious thing you've given us.

CARLOS

(shuts laptop OFF)

Actually...this is the very first thing you've allowed me to give to the Kansas City Ballet.

Some dancers laugh while an embarrassed Stephen nods.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Just wait, Stephen. When we put this on Friday night as part of "New Moves," you'll be breakdancing in the aisles.

Dancer DARIN ARCHER (25, a stud) moves toward Carlos.

DARIN

You really wanna see Stephen breakdancing in the aisles?

A few hoofers laugh.

STEPHEN
Well, Darin, I can breakdance!

Conny and Sydney nod at each other, then at Stephen.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
All right...who's next?

KCB dancer SVETLANA TERESHKOVA (26, a thinker; a native of Ukraine) limbers up before she raises her hand.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
(with a sly grin)
Svetlana!

Svetlana moves toward Stephen and Carlos.

SVETLANA
My "New Moves" ballet is based on
the music of Cecile Chaminade.

Sydney's and Conny's heads nod...and Carlos' mouth drops.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
Carlos...she was the first woman to
have major success as a classical
composer.

CARLOS
Oh...

SVETLANA
My ballet for "New Moves" is built
around Chaminade's three most
famous pieces: "Scarf Dance," "The
Flatterer," and "Concertstuck."

Svetlana gestures KCB's other fourteen female dancers into
gathering around her, then eyeballs Pierre.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
Music, please.

PIERRE
Music...coming up!

Pierre bangs out "Scarf Dance" while Kansas City Ballet's
women dancers move in a light, airy way.

Stephen, Carlos, and the troupe's men dancers watch Svetlana's creation...but a few moments later, Stephen looks some kind of worried.

STEPHEN
If this is "Scarf Dance," why
aren't they using scarves?

JAQUAN MURPHY (27, jovial; KCB's only other Black dancer)
turns to Stephen.

JAQUAN
Don't worry, Stephen. They'll be
using scarves this Friday.

Stephen's is a slow nod.

Now clinkers from Pierre enter "Scarf Dance..." and bring worried looks to Sydney and Conny.

CONNY
(to dancers nearest her)
I can play this piece in--

Svetlana gestures Conny into quiet.

EXT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S HOUSE - NIGHT

A car passes by.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

It looks cluttered...yet still sports a lived-in atmosphere.

Conny watches while Sydney hauls out the components of the latter's old drum set.

CONNY
Here...let me help you with that.

SYDNEY
Okay.

Sydney and Conny team up to put that drum set together.

CONNY
I still can't believe Pierre messed
up so badly on "Scarf Dance."

SYDNEY
Same here.

CONNY

Hell, I can play that in my sleep!

Conny gravitates toward a pile of boxes and instrument cases. She wrestles a guitar case from the pile, then opens the case to reveal...a V-neck electric guitar.

SYDNEY

On that guitar?

CONNY

That'll be the day.

Now Conny removes the guitar from its case. She fondly fondles its fretboard, then goes back to the case to pull out a pick.

CONNY (CONT'D)

Mom and I were watching an old video of Kiss on TV...and the next morning, I asked her if I could get one of those V-neck guitars. Just like the ones Kiss played.

SYDNEY

And she got you that guitar you're holding.

CONNY

Nope. She told me I'd have to paint my face first...and then get one of those outrageous costumes.

Sydney grabs a rather long instrument case from the pile; immediately, Conny rushes over to help Sydney with it.

The two dancers set the case on an open spot on the floor, then open the case...which houses an electronic keyboard.

SYDNEY

I haven't played this thing since college.

CONNY

Same here.

SYDNEY

Now...if only I hadn't given the keyboard stand away...

CONNYP

Yeah. That keyboard stand made one hell of a lemonade stand for those two neighborhood kids.

Conny moves back to the pile. Along the way:

CONNYP (CONT'D)

Sydney, I've got an idea.

Conny grabs a smaller case; she sets it down, opens it, and...dredges up an accordion.

SYDNEY

Don't tell me you can play "Scarf Dance" on that accordion.

CONNYP

(straps accordion on)

Nope.

Sydney watches Conny squeeze out some chords.

CONNYP (CONT'D)

I'm trying to remember the last song I played on this accordion.

SYDNEY

Conny...maybe you need a beat.

Sydney scrounges around and finds a pair of drumsticks. On the way to the drum set, she twirls those sticks.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Here...try this.

Conny nods while Sydney puts over a drum roll before the latter settles into a medium beat.

And then...Conny comes up with something akin to a series of twelve-bar blues riffs.

The twosome's effort morphs into a blues song.

When the tune ends with a bang, Sydney and Conny high-five each other.

CONNYP

I can't believe it's been eleven years since I last played this accordion...any accordion.

SYDNEY
What happened?

CONNY
Well, back in high school, one of my fellow dance students told me: "Concetta Pinaud, if you bring that squeeze box to school ever again, we're gonna break your legs!"

Sydney groans.

CONNY (CONT'D)
They didn't like me playing Flo Rida on an accordion.

Conny looks around the basement...and erupts in a smile.

CONNY (CONT'D)
Soon as you and I get these boxes out of here, you know what we oughta put in?

SYDNEY
An amp for your guitar?

Conny shakes her head sideways.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
A new keyboard stand would be cool.

CONNY
How about an old-fashioned upright piano?

A big smile crosses Sydney's face.

EXT. ANTIQUES MALL - DAY

Sydney and Conny stroll toward a five-story brick building in the West Bottoms section of town.

CONNY
One thing about it, Syd: The way I play "Scarf Dance," it works out better on an old piano than it would on an electronic keyboard.

SYDNEY
You're right about that. You can't reach inside an electronic keyboard and stroke a bunch of strings with your bare hands.

Conny opens the door; she and Sydney saunter inside.

INT. USED PIANO STORE AT ANTIQUES MALL - DAY

This third-floor space bursts with pianos.

Grands grace one side, studios and spinets dominate the middle, and pre-1929 uprights line the opposite side.

The two Kansas City Ballet dancers hurry to the old uprights when CRYSTAL and BERNARD (both late 40s), the store's husband-and-wife owners, approach the two younger women.

CRYSTAL

So...you're Conny Pinaud and Sydney Henderson. From the Kansas City Ballet.

SYDNEY

Yep. That's us.

BERNARD

Glad you could make it here.

Bernard and Crystal shake hands with Conny and Sydney.

CONNY

We would've been here sooner...but dance rehearsal ran overtime.

The store owners nod.

CONNY (CONT'D)

Anyway...we'd like to buy an old-fashioned upright piano.

SYDNEY

Each.

Crystal's mouth flies open.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Hey, if Billy Joel and Elton John came in here wanting to buy a piano each, you'd sell 'em a piano each.

BERNARD

Crystal...Sydney's got a point.

CRYSTAL

(nodding at Conny)

Have you found a piano you're interested in?

CONNYP

I sure have.

Bernard, Conny, Crystal, and Sydney walk toward an 1890s upright piano. Conny removes the piano's music rack and sets the rack off to the side.

A nodding Sydney goes over to a 1900-1909 upright.

SYDNEY

Here's mine!

Sydney wrestles the music rack from the early-Twentieth-Century piano and places the rack out of harm's way.

The two ballerinas take seats at their respective pianos, then eyeball each other.

CONNYP

Whaddya say we give 'em our best?

SYDNEY

Okay!

Sydney's expression changes.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

You first, Conny.

At the 1890s piano, Conny bangs out the first eight bars of the march (theme) from "The Nutcracker Suite."

She gestures Sydney into playing...and, at the 1900s piano, Sydney tickles out the next eight bars.

Sydney and Conny eye each other, deliver a glissando each, and turn the whole thing into "Nut Rocker."

Crystal and Bernard look amused while they watch the two dancers pound those keys.

Halfway through "Nut Rocker," Sydney leaves the 1900s piano.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Keep playing, Conny!

Sydney seats herself at the older upright, where she bangs its ivories.

CONNYP

Okay...I've got it!

And Conny moves over to the 1900s upright to resume the duet.

SYDNEY

We've gotta put thumb tacks in one of these.

BERNARD

Say what?

CONNY

Don't worry, Bernard. We'll take 'em out when we're done.

Conny and Sydney bring "Nut Rocker" to an end...and move Bernard and Crystal to applause.

SYDNEY

We'll take 'em both!

Conny nods at Sydney, then at Crystal and Bernard.

EXT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Sydney and Conny team up with TWO MOVERS (two men in their 40s) to haul the 1900s upright toward the garage door.

MOVER #1

You know, you two ladies don't have to help us move these old pianos.

CONNY

It's all good. It's the least we can do since we're putting two old pianos in the same house.

SYDNEY

As long as you two men don't belong to a union.

The two men eyeball each other, then Sydney.

MOVER #2

Don't worry. We're not union.

Conny breaks out a remote to open the garage door. She watches Sydney and the movers push the piano inside.

EXT. GEOFF'S AND KATHI'S HOUSE - DAY

Across the street, neighbors GEOFF and KATHI WHISENANT (both 40s) tend to their front yard...only to stop to watch the two dancers and the two movers haul the 1890s piano out of a U-Haul truck.

Kathi and Geoff flip their garden tools aside and head across the street...but go back and retrieve their tools.

EXT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S HOUSE - DAY

Implements back in their hands, Geoff and Kathi stroll toward Sydney's and Conny's house as the movers and the KCB members wrestle the older upright to the driveway.

KATHI

(to Conny and Sydney)
Aren't you two dancing anymore?

SYDNEY

Oh, hi, Kathi and Geoff.

CONNY

Well, actually, we're just
branching out.

Conny, Mover #1, Mover #2, and Sydney caress the Nineteenth-Century piano toward the still-open garage door.

Kathi and Geoff follow along.

GEOFF

Yeah, but...do you really need two
pianos?

Sydney nods.

CONNY

Same reason Elton John and Billy
Joel need two pianos.

SYDNEY

And besides...when Alicia Keys and
Lady Gaga get together, one piano
won't cut it.

The two neighbors watch the moving process continue...and eyeball each other.

GEOFF

I know Billy Joel and Elton John
tour together.

KATHI

Yeah, Geoff. We saw 'em at the
Sprint Center.

GEOFF

I remember that.

Geoff and Kathi stroll toward their own house.

GEOFF (CONT'D)

I just don't remember Alicia Keys
and Lady Gaga touring together.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Sydney's and Conny's two old uprights stand next to each other, music racks off, against a wall.

If needed, sheet music is taped to the frame of the action of each old piano.

Conny (at the 1890s piano) and Sydney (playing the 1900s one) do "Scarf Dance..." and nail it.

The two piano-playing ballerinas trade high fives.

CONNY

Well, that's it. We should be ready
for tomorrow.

Sydney shakes her head "yes."

CONNY (CONT'D)

What do you think we should do
next?

SYDNEY

You first.

CONNY

I'm good with whatever you wanna
try.

Sydney jumps off the 1900s piano's bench, grabs a folder from a storage bin, and yanks out two pages of handwritten sheet music. She hands the pages to Conny.

In handwriting, the title page says: "BALLERINA BLUES."

CONNY (CONT'D)

(accepts sheet music)
Oh, man. You wrote this?

SYDNEY

If I didn't, then Maria Tallchief
and Misty Copeland never danced a
lick in their lives.

Conny examines Sydney's sheet music...and looks impressed.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Go ahead, Conny. Give it a shot.

A nodding Conny rises from her seat at the 1890s piano and removes a roll of tape from inside the bench. She tapes Sydney's composition to the 1890s upright's action's frame.

Conny sits back down at the older upright.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

I wrote that after a tough day of classes not long after I enrolled at the School of American Ballet.

In Conny's hands, "Ballerina Blues" is a chugging twelve-bar workout...that comes out a bit sluggish.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

Step it up just a little bit.

Conny plays at a slightly-faster beat, then nods Sydney into a seat at the Early-Twentieth-Century upright...where Sydney pounds out some B.B. King-style riffs.

About twenty-four bars into the tune:

CONNY

Take it, Sydney!

While Sydney pounds away, Conny leaves the older piano.

SYDNEY

Wait a minute! Where're you going?

CONNY

Just gonna grab my guitar!

SYDNEY

You don't have an amp for it!

And Conny returns to the older piano.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

Kansas City Ballet's fifteen women dancers rehearse Svetlana's "New Moves" contribution.

Stephen, Carlos, and the troupe's fifteen men hoofers watch the women dance in a light, airy way while Pierre accompanies on electronic keyboard.

No scarves, though.

Pierre shows he still can't play a perfect "Scarf Dance."

STEPHEN

I still wish they'd dance with
scarves.

Troupe member ROBERT SLOTKY (20, awestruck) turns to Stephen.

ROBERT

Don't worry, Stephen. They will.

In that light, airy way, Sydney and Conny break away and dance toward a still-errant Pierre.

The two women gesture Pierre off the keyboard's bench, sit at the bench, and execute what he can't get right.

Nobody busts a dance move.

Carlos looks amused...Robert looks surprised...Stephen, Svetlana, and Darin look fit to be tied.

Pierre looks sheepish.

LUCINDA HUANG (30, a real killjoy), a KCB dancer, rushes over to the keyboard; hands on hips, she stares Conny and Sydney down while the twosome continue to play.

LUCINDA

What the hell do you two think
you're doing?

SYDNEY

Well, Lucinda, I heard Vanessa
Carlton used to do this at
rehearsals...play for the other
dancers.

Lucinda shakes her head sideways as the music stops.

CONNY

Uh...why don't we all take it from
the top?

Thirteen stunned women surround Sydney and Conny.

INT. STEPHEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Conny, Stephen, and Sydney stand not too far from Stephen's desk in an ample, somewhat-plush space.

STEPHEN

You two do realize, don't you, that the accompanists who work with our Kansas City Ballet are some of the best pianists in town?

CONNY

Of course.

STEPHEN

Sydney?

SYDNEY

As clear as a heart attack.

STEPHEN

Speaking of heart attack...Pierre just about had one after he heard both of you play "Scarf Dance" while the other thirteen women in our ballet tried to dance.

SYDNEY

Well, Stephen...Carlos tried to talk Pierre into filling in for us in the dance...but...

Stephen stomps his way to his seat behind the desk.

STEPHEN

What were you two thinking?

Sydney and Conny eyeball each other, then Stephen.

SYDNEY

Maybe Pierre's got some painful memories behind trying to learn "Scarf Dance."

Stephen catches Conny's slow, toothy nod.

STEPHEN

Well?

CONNY

Pierre confessed that he just doesn't look good in tights.

Sydney shrugs...and Stephen buries his head on his desk.

EXT. KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS - NIGHT

This impressive, high-tech structure in downtown Kansas City looks almost like two sea shells joined at their tails.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER - NIGHT

With a CAPACITY CROWD abuzz, it's opening night for the season opener... "New Moves!"

SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

Kansas City Ballet's thirty dancers execute Carlos' "Do Your Thing" masterpiece.

In a "Romeo and Juliet" takeoff, Sydney and Darin square off against Jaquan and Conny...with Robert and fellow hooper SAVANNAH KIELY-DALTON (19, self-deprecating) as the two young lovers.

Now the fifteen women in the troupe dance Svetlana's tribute to Cecile Chaminade...scarves and all (but A RECORDING replaces Pierre's accompaniment).

Svetlana herself and Lucinda engage in a balletic tug-of-war.

KCB's fifteen men get the stage to themselves...in a salute to Joe Turner.

Darin and another KCB dancer, JUAN AVILES (28, serious), stage their own tug-of-war.

Conny and Sydney launch a hip-hop-influenced finale that draws Jaquan and Juan...followed by, in twos, the company's other hoofers.

The end result of "New Moves:" Hearty applause.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The KCB Thirty whoop it up...only to make way for Stephen, who breakdances his way backstage as Carlos walks behind him.

Stephen shakes himself off, then points to Carlos and Darin.

STEPHEN

See? I told you I can breakdance!

Applause breaks out around the three men.

A beaming Stephen addresses the whole gang.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Great job, everybody! You've gotten
this season off to a great start!

Stephen's dancers whoop it up.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
You embody what it says on the back
line of the end zone at Arrowhead
Stadium: "It Takes All of Us."

JUAN
Tell the truth, Stephen!

More applause...more cheering.

Savannah and fellow KCB dancer TIFFANY CASE (24, bubbly;
sweet Arkansas twang) stride over to Sydney and Conny.

TIFFANY
Ah've been thanking it over, and...
(hugs Conny and Sydney)
Ah just wanna tail you two that if
you hadn't stepped in for Pierre
and played for the rest of us
womenfolk...

Tiffany watches Lucinda's and Stephen's mouths drop open.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)
Wail, it's true!

SAVANNAH
Conny and Sydney saved our bacon.

Some dancers nod.

Sydney, Tiffany, and Conny make it a group hug when Svetlana
joins in to turn it into a foursome.

SVETLANA
Thank you both so very much.

Jaquan turns to the rest of the troupe as Conny, Sydney,
Svetlana, and Tiffany break their hug.

JAQUAN
Hey, whaddya say we go out and
PARTY?

Most of the Kansas City Ballet cheers Jaquan's request...but Lucinda and KCB dancer BEATA ESPARRAGOSA (30, motherly; native of the Dominican Republic) shake their heads "no."

LUCINDA

Sorry, Jaquan. I've gotta get ready for tomorrow night.

BEATA

And I must get my rest.

A few dancers shrug as Beata and Lucinda exit.

ROBERT

Jaquan's right...let's PAR-TAY!

The cheering kicks back in.

CONNY

You guys...I know a place where they play great jazz and blues...

Conny gestures the rest of the company to her side.

EXT. VICTORIA'S BAR AND GRILL, LIBERTY, MO - NIGHT

Carlos, Conny, Darin, Jaquan, Juan, Robert, Savannah, Svetlana, Sydney, and Tiffany stroll toward a suburban restaurant that shares a modern building with a movieplex.

The dancers now wear casual clothes.

SAVANNAH

Conny...is this the place where, when you order a sandwich, the chef puts his thumbprint on the top piece of bread?

Two or three hoofers shake their heads sideways.

CONNY

Nope. That's back in Kansas City.

SYDNEY

Savannah, we're going to a place where, when you order a sandwich, they take a squeezable bottle of mustard and write out the restaurant's name.

CONNY

And they write it out on the bottom of the crown of the bun!

Savannah looks awestruck.

CARLOS

That's it! Let me in there!

Carlos sprints ahead of the rest of the entourage. He grabs the front door to hold it for his nine colleagues.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

Lounge chairs and a sofa surround a table...and they unite to hug a smallish stage that features a 1900-19 upright piano that doesn't ring out tonight. Yet.

The bar itself and a series of small tables for foursomes complete the space.

Half the seats have CUSTOMERS in them when the ten from the Kansas City Ballet enter the barroom and take seats.

Savannah and Robert look impressed.

BILL WILLIAMSON (80s, Black, levelheaded) and wife VALERIE WILLIAMSON (80s, Black, still a live wire), the couple who run Victoria's, leave their stage-side seats and stroll over to Sydney's and Conny's entourage.

BILL

Hey, Conny! Hey, Sydney! Glad you could make it back here!

SYDNEY

Hey, thanks, Bill and Valerie!

VALERIE

And it's about time you two brought an entourage instead of coming by your lonesomes.

CONNY

Well...it's just that Sydney and I were starting to run out of angles.

Onstage, THE FREDDIE JOHNSON BAND brings the sound of blues to Victoria's with a shufflin' version of Fats Domino's "Going to the River."

DARIN

(to Conny)

So...this is the place you've been raving about.

The customers watch and/or just listen as FREDDIE JOHNSON (67, cool, Black) rips into a searing guitar solo.

Freddie's son WILLIE RAY JOHNSON (45) keeps the shuffle beat alive on drums, and FLOYD YOEST (48, White), on bass guitar, adds choppy two-or-three-note patterns.

The solo ends, and Freddie leans over to a mike on its stand.

FREDDIE

(singing)

*Well, if you see my mother,/Tell
her "goodbye" for me./Said if you
see my mama,/Tell her, tell her
"goodbye" for me.*

WILLIE RAY

Tell 'em why!

FREDDIE

*You know, I'm tired of
livin',/Livin' in misery.*

FLOYD

Say it again, Freddie!

Freddie nods at Floyd, then turns back to the audience.

FREDDIE

*I said I'm tired of livin',/Livin'
in misery.*

At the bar itself, ANTOINE GREEN (40s, Black) and his wife, AISHA GREEN (40s, Black), sit and listen as "Going to the River" reaches its final two bars and triggers applause.

Aisha nurses a glass of water...and an almost-inebriated Antoine gulps another shot of whiskey.

ANTOINE

(shouting toward stage)

WELL, WHY DON'T YOU MOVE TO IOWA?

Some people around the Greens laugh.

And Conny receives a "what next?" look from Darin.

AISHA

Antoine, honey, you gotta chill.

On the bandstand, Freddie, Floyd, and Willie Ray soak up the continuing applause.

FREDDIE

Thanks, everybody! Glad you liked us! We'll see you next time!

Valerie and Bill saunter to the stage, where Freddie hands his mike to Valerie.

VALERIE

(into mike)

C'mon, everybody! Let's hear it one more time for the Freddie Johnson Band!

The applause picks back up...and a grateful Valerie gives the mike to Bill.

BILL

(into mike)

Yeah! That's the way to make 'em feel welcome!

When the clapping dies and Freddie's band packs up its equipment, Conny and Sydney leave their seats to approach Bill and Valerie, who head back to their own seats.

SYDNEY

Valerie...Bill...would it be okay for Conny and me to play the piano here?

VALERIE

That out-of-tune thing over there?

CONNY

That's the best kind!

BILL

(gesturing)

Go ahead, you two! Make it rock!

SYDNEY

Thanks! We will!

The two piano-playing ballerinas head for the stage.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

Sydney and Conny wrestle the music rack from the old upright and put the rack out of harm's way.

The two women find a mike and its stand next to the piano. They adjust the mike and its stand before sitting down at the piano's bench to address a slowly-thinning crowd.

Those seated in front of the stage look shocked to see the piano's hammers exposed.

CONNY
 (into mike)
 Ever since I started coming here,
 I've wanted to play this old piano.

SYDNEY
 (into mike)
 Me, too...oh, by the way, Conny and
 I love playing with the hammers
 exposed.

Conny and Sydney eyeball each other, shrug, and...pound out "The Old Piano Roll Blues."

The piano's tinny, out-of-tune sound doesn't upset the listening customers.

Most of the twosome's KCB buddies look pleased and amused...and they turn their attention to Darin.

JAQUAN
 Darin, they didn't wanna mess up
 the blues vibe.

Darin slowly nods.

Antoine staggers off his bar seat; Aisha helps him off...and the couple walk toward the lounge chairs and the sofa.

While Aisha and Antoine slip onto the sofa, he looks shocked to find Conny and Sydney tickling those ancient ivories.

ANTOINE
 Ai...Aisha...I hope them chicks can
 sh...sing.

AISHA
 Well, if they can sing, I hope they
 don't know "Going to the River."

Halfway through "The Old Piano Roll Blues," Sydney and Conny trade places on the bench...and captivate the attendees in front of the stage.

Savannah turns to the dancer nearest her while some of their colleagues nurse drinks.

SAVANNAH
 I couldn't get up there and do what
 Sydney and Conny are doing.

Savannah receives a nod.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)
But then...I can't play a single
note on the piano.

SVETLANA
(pointing to Savannah)
I sit in this seat tonight because
when my brother Igor and I were
growing up in Kyiv, our parents sat
us down and gave us a choice: Study
ballet or study piano.

Now it's Savannah's turn to shake her head up and down.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
Because he chose piano, I was left
with studying ballet.

Juan shoots Svetlana a look of shock.

SVETLANA (CONT'D)
Don't worry, Juan. Ballet has been
very good to me.

CARLOS
Svetlana, is Igor still playing the
piano?

ROBERT
He must be a famous concert
pianist...touring the world.

SVETLANA
(shaking her head "no")
Igor now teaches rocket science in
Texas.

While some dancers' mouths fly open, Conny's and Sydney's
version of "The Old Piano Roll Blues" heats up.

Tiffany leaves her seat for a closer look at her two piano-
pounding buddies...who receive a "thumbs up" from her.

The two housemates end their tune with a bang...and gain
heartfelt applause.

Sydney and Conny look up from the old keys and cast shocked
looks at the audience.

CONNY
 (into mike)
 Thank you!

Antoine immediately stands up to address the twosome.

ANTOINE
 Why don't...why don't you two
 sh...sing?

SYDNEY
 We were getting ready to do that!

Aisha guides her husband back into a seated position.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
 (into mike)
 Clap your hands, everybody, if you
 remember when they had street
 pianos all over Kansas City.

Half the throng applauds.

Floyd, Freddie, and Willie Ray reenter the barroom...and find
 seats close to that smallish stage.

The three men soak up the applause...although it wasn't meant
 for them.

CONNY
 (into mike)
 Sydney and I got a lot of mileage
 with this number. We played it on
 every street piano we found.

When Conny and Sydney bang out the opening bars to Eddie
 Boyd's "Five Long Years," Bill and Valerie eyeball each other
 in joyous anticipation. And Tiffany returns to her seat.

CONNY, SYDNEY
 (singing, too)
*Have you ever been mistreated? You
 know just what I'm talking
 about./Have you ever been
 mistreated? You know just what I'm
 talking about.*

Freddie and his bandmates register shock over Sydney's
 squeaky voice and over Conny's fragile-sounding voice.

CONNY, SYDNEY (CONT'D)
*I worked five long years for one
 man, and he had the nerve to put me
 out.*

A hush falls among the patrons while the two blues-playing
 ballerinas continue to groove.

CONNY
*I was working in a dance studio,
 doing pointes just like a slave.*

Jaquan, Tiffany, and Carlos chuckle...some fellow hoofers
 look stupefied...Floyd shakes his head "no."

CONNY (CONT'D)
*Five long years, every Friday, I'd
 come straight home with all my
 pay./If you've ever been
 mistreated, you know just what I'm
 talking about./I worked five long
 years for one man. He had the nerve
 to put me out.*

Conny and Sydney wallop out a forty-eight-bar instrumental
 break...basically, the chorus times four.

When the singing gives way to playing, Antoine eyes his wife.

AISHA
 You've gotta admit...they've got
 some sweetish voices.

ANTOINE
 Sh...Swedish? I thought they were
 Americans!

Floyd looks livid as he addresses his band buddies.

FLOYD
 They got it all wrong! It's "I got
 a job in a steel mill, shucking
 steel like a slave!"

Willie Ray looks amused.

FLOYD (CONT'D)
 I heard Eric Clapton do this song,
 and--

WILLIE RAY
 Floyd...Eddie Boyd did this song
 first. Back in 1952. He wrote it!

WILLIE RAY (CONT'D)

(turning to Freddie)
Ain't that right, Dad?

FREDDIE

You got that right, Willie Ray.

Halfway through their instrumental, Sydney and Conny switch places at the piano bench.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)

I'm still tryin' to picture Eric
Clapton workin' in a steel mill.

Those within eyesight of the two musical ballerinas eat up all the showmanship.

DARIN

(to dancers nearest him)
I don't get it! Those two are
hatin' on dance! Their bread and
butter!

JUAN

Darin, you gotta chill.

TIFFANY

One thang about the blues: You
gotta tail it like it is. You
cain't half-step it.

JAQUAN

Yeah, Darin. Conny and Sydney are
just being true to their thing.

Now "Five Long Years" vocal kicks back in.

SYDNEY

*I finally learned my lesson. I
should've a long time ago:/The next
man that I marry, he's gotta work
and bring me some dough./So if
you've ever been mistreated, you
know just what I'm talking about.*

Some customers clap to the beat.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

*I worked five long years for one
man, and he had the nerve to throw
me out.*

Conny and Sydney go instrumental for twelve more bars.

JAQUAN

Darin...I can just imagine Sydney
and Conny working in a steel mill.

SVETLANA

I can, too, Jaquan. They seem
strong enough to pull it off.

Jaquan watches Darin cringe.

JAQUAN

You ever heard the original lyrics
to this song? They talk about a
steel mill.

It's Vocals Time again for the two musical hoofers.

CONNY, SYDNEY

*I worked five long years for one
man, and he had the nerve--*

CONNY

This man had the nerve--

SYDNEY

*The dirty, rotten, filthy,
expletive son of a "C" cup had the
nerve--*

Sydney and Conny playfully eyeball each other a few seconds
while the crowd erupts in laughter.

CONNY, SYDNEY

He had the nerve to put me out.

Conny and Sydney bang out six closing bars...and set off
wild, boisterous applause.

During the applause, Sydney and Conny leave the piano. One
sets the mike and its stand off to the side; the other hands
the mike to Valerie, who arrives at the stage.

A few steps behind her, Bill comes to the stage.

VALERIE

(into mike)

Let's hear it one more time for
Sydney Henderson and Conny Pinaud!

The cheering continues as Valerie turns to Conny and Sydney.

VALERIE (CONT'D)
 You both sound like that...and
 you're still in the Kansas City
 Ballet!

A few customers look dumbfounded.

SYDNEY
 That's us, all right!

Valerie hands the mike to Bill.

BILL
 (into mike)
 Just goes to show you...you don't
 have to sound like you smoke ten
 packs a day just to be able to sing
 the blues!

VALERIE
 If you smoked ten packs a day, you
 wouldn't live long enough to be
 able to qualify for Medicare.

BILL
 Good one, Val.

Valerie smiles as Bill turns to Sydney and Conny.

BILL (CONT'D)
 Conny and Sydney...how'd you like
 to come back on the first Monday
 night next month...our "New Talent
 Night" here at Victoria's?

CONNY
 We'd be delighted!

Sydney nods sharply as the applause kicks back in.

SYDNEY
 And next time...you'll get to hear
 both of us play drums.

Valerie and Bill look at each other in surprise.

EXT. KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, KANSAS CITY, MO
 - NIGHT

PEOPLE head inside this unusual structure.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

The Kansas City Ballet prepares for another night of "New Moves" when Beata and Lucinda approach Conny and Sydney.

LUCINDA

So you two went on and did it.

BEATA

You two went over to Victoria's Bar and Grill and showed off.

CONNYP

Beata...Lucinda...all we were doing was showing off our future.

SYDNEY

And, to tell you the truth, another side of our present.

LUCINDA

You're dancers, not musicians! It's just like Stephen says: "Dancing comes first."

SYDNEY

(pointing at Lucinda)

Don't you remember when Declan McMillan was one of our dancers? And did standup comedy on the side?

Tiffany joins the bickering foursome.

CONNYP

Yeah! Declan was so funny he would've had Ebenezer Scrooge doubled up and rolling on the floor!

BEATA

You know what I say, Conny?

Sydney and Conny eyeball each other in anticipation.

BEATA (CONT'D)

Where's your commitment to the Kansas City Ballet?

CONNYP

Our commitment is strong!

SYDNEY
 (drapes arm around Conny)
 Stronger than a good ninety-six-
 hour antiperspirant.

LUCINDA
 Well, you better act like it!
 Stephen keeps saying you're two of
 the best dancers in this company!

Tiffany puts her arms around Lucinda and Beata.

TIFFANY
 Why don't y'all leave Conny and
 Sydney alone?

Lucinda wags a finger at the two blues-playing hoofers.

LUCINDA
 What the hell kind of example are
 you two setting--

TIFFANY
 Leave 'em alone!

Beata and Lucinda shrug their way out of Tiffany's grasp as
 Conny and Sydney go their own separate way.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)
 (to Beata)
 Ah'm surprised you didn't tail 'em
 "Bah, humbug!"

As Beata walks away, she stares in anger at Tiffany.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

Sydney and Conny prove Lucinda and Beata wrong by nailing the
 "Romeo and Juliet" segment of "New Moves."

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - DAY

Sydney (at the 1890s upright) and Conny (at the 1900s
 upright) work on blues riffs.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

The troupe puts in extra work to tighten "New Moves..." and
 Conny and Sydney are the last to leave.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - DAY

Conny tickles the 1890s piano's ivories while Sydney bangs the drums.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

"New Moves'" hip-hop-yoked finale blows THE AUDIENCE away.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - DAY

Kathi and Geoff look blown away as they watch Conny bang those drums and Sydney pound the 1900s upright's keys.

END MONTAGE

EXT. VICTORIA'S BAR AND GRILL, LIBERTY, MO - NIGHT

A COUPLE OF FAMILIES stroll toward the building.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

THE PLACE IS FULL OF CUSTOMERS on this "New Talent Night."

Aisha, Antoine, Geoff, Jaquan, Kathi, Robert, Savannah, and Tiffany sit in the lounge-chairs-and-sofa setup.

They enjoy a point-blank view of Conny (on that 1900-19 upright piano) and Sydney (on drums), who play Meade Lux Lewis' "Honky Tonk Train Blues."

Geoff and Kathi eyeball Antoine and Aisha.

GEOFF

Kathi and I are Sydney's and Conny's neighbors from across the street.

ANTOINE

Get outa here!

KATHI

No, Antoine. We really are.

Valerie and Bill sit at one of the tables along the wall; the two owners look impressed.

Svetlana and AVA FERNANDEZ (30, friendly, straightforward; sexy) watch Sydney and Conny from another wall-side table.

SVETLANA

Ava, you were one of Conny's and Sydney's instructors at UMKC?

AVA

I sure was...in fact, I taught 'em
how to belly dance.

Svetlana looks stupefied.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

In Amos Milburn's "Down the Road Apiece," Conny pounds the
drums and Sydney tickles the ivories.

Tiffany turns to Jaquan.

TIFFANY

If Beata and Lucinda could come
over here and see 'em now.

JAQUAN

Yeah...but that's just like trying
to put out a fire with gasoline.

Now the New Yorker and the Bramptonian bring "Down the Road
Apiece" to a rousing end...and earn audience applause.

Bill and Valerie amble to the stage, where they immediately
high-five Sydney and Conny.

BILL

Great job, you two!

SYDNEY

Thanks, Bill!
(to the audience)
Thanks a bunch, everybody!

Valerie grabs a mike and addresses the audience.

VALERIE

Y'all hear that? Now that's what a
"New Talent Night" at Victoria's
Bar and Grill sounds like!

The applause grows louder as Conny and Sydney bow.

SAME SCENE - MINUTES LATER

The two blues-playing dancers nurse nonalcoholic drinks when
Ava reaches the twosome's table (a smaller one).

AVA

Way to jam, you two!

CONNY

Thanks, Ms. Fernandez!

SYDNEY

(gesturing to Ava)

Pull up a chair and come join us!

Ava finds a nearby empty chair, places it next to Sydney's and Conny's table, and sits down.

AVA

Thanks a bunch...I just wanna cut to the chase: I'd just love to join your act.

Conny and Sydney eye each other in confusion.

AVA (CONT'D)

We'd be a good fit together...I can sing. I know you both sing beautifully. You both play beautifully, too.

Ava watches Conny grin.

SYDNEY

Do you play any instruments, Ms. Fernandez?

AVA

Well...I can play bass. And when I was a teenager, I played piano and violin.

Sydney's face forms a big smile.

AVA (CONT'D)

But I think I can pick both of 'em back up.

SYDNEY

Ms. Fernandez, consider yourself in!

CONNY

Fist bumps!

The teacher and the two dancers bump fists.

AVA

Thanks a million...but now that we're a threesome, and you graduated from UMKC a long time ago...feel free to call me by my first name.

Ava, Conny, and Sydney fist-bump it again.

EXT. TODD BOLENDER CENTER, KANSAS CITY, MO - DAY

SOME JOGGERS run by the building.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Carlos, Stephen, and Kansas City Ballet's thirty dancers somehow make do in a somewhat-adequate space.

Those not fortunate enough to sit in chairs around a table or along a wall or two stand.

STEPHEN

Just remember: Ten nights from now, we open "Dracula" at the Kauffman Center.

Carlos shoots Stephen a "you're being redundant" look, then turns to the dancers.

CARLOS

Great job, everybody, on "New Moves." Great start to the season...so, let's carry that energy over to "Dracula."

Conny, Darin, Jaquan, Sydney, and Co. whoop it up.

CARLOS (CONT'D)

Doggone right we can do it!

STEPHEN

Don't ever forget our motto!
(pointing to Savannah)
What's our motto?

SAVANNAH

Our motto? "It Takes All of Us!"

AD LIBBED agreement from other dancers ensues.

STEPHEN

Right! Now...any questions before we wrap up the meeting?

Hoofers look at each other in silence...until:

SYDNEY

Just wanted to let you know there's
gonna be a Battle of the Blues
Bands at Victoria's Bar and Grill.

Beata, Darin, and Lucinda groan.

Stephen looks fit to be tied.

STEPHEN

When is it?

ROBERT

(to Sydney)

Are you and Conny gonna be in it?

While Conny and Sydney nod, Beata stares Robert down.

BEATA

Didn't you just get through hearing
Savannah say it takes all of us?

ROBERT

Yes, I did, Beata!

LUCINDA

Just remember, Robert Slotky: "It
Takes All of Us" is a way of
life...not just a slogan.

Lucinda wags a finger at Sydney and Conny.

LUCINDA (CONT'D)

And as for you two, get one thing
straight--

CONNY

Lucinda, Lucinda,
Lucinda...chillax. It's all good.
It's not until May sixteenth.

Lucinda does a doubletake.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

While KCB's two blues-playing dancers stuff a thumb tack into each of the Nineteenth-Century upright's hammers, Ava plugs an amp into a wall socket.

Ava grabs her bass guitar to plug in into the amp, then stares at Sydney and Conny.

AVA
 Won't those thumb tacks ruin the piano?

SYDNEY
 Not as long as Conny and I take the thumb tacks out when we're done rehearsing.

Conny shakes her head "yes."

CONNY
 Sydney and I were just looking for that tinny, rinky-tinky piano sound...like on Peppermint Harris' "Raining in My Heart."

AVA
 Wait a minute...I thought that was Slim Harpo's song.

SYDNEY
 Actually, Ava, Slim Harpo's song was "Rainin' in My Heart." No "G" in that song's title.

Conny and Sydney hit several chords on the 1890s upright...and the two buddies look satisfied.

Conny grins at Ava.

CONNY
 And Slim Harpo's "Rainin' in My Heart" had no rinky-tinky piano.

Ava tunes her bass when Conny pulls a pair of dice from her jeans pocket.

CONNY (CONT'D)
 Keep warming up, Ava. Sydney and I are gonna roll the dice to see which one of us'll play drums on "Raining in My Heart."

SYDNEY
 The one by Peppermint Harris.

Conny hands the dice to Sydney.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

VISITORS OF ALMOST ALL AGES watch as the Kansas City Ballet rehearses its next production.

Darin, red cloak and all, relishes his role as Dracula as he and Conny (as Mina) dance around a brass bed.

Pierre's back at electronic keyboard...and this time, he nails the rehearsal accompaniment.

Svetlana watches as Lucinda turns to Beata.

LUCINDA
(in a near whisper)
I wish he'd bite her. For real.

Beata tries to stifle a laugh.

SVETLANA
(whispering to Lucinda)
Be careful what you wish for.

Carlos and Stephen look on in admiration as Conny and Darin dance their roles to perfection.

BEATA
(near whisper)
Lucinda...who do you have in mind
to replace Conny?

Lucinda stares in space.

EXT. VICTORIA'S BAR AND GRILL, LIBERTY, MO - NIGHT

Ava's 2005 Ford Explorer rests at the front end of Victoria's parking lot.

Ava herself climbs out of the SUV to stretch out when a 2010 Chevy pickup pulls into the lot.

Driver Sydney and passenger Conny jump out of the Chevy truck; they remove the former's drum set from the truck.

Ava spots Conny and Sydney and waves at them as the housemates lug the drum set toward the Ford Explorer.

SYDNEY
We're sorry about not getting here
sooner, Ava.

AVA
It's all right. Just glad you're
here.

CONNY

It's just that the rehearsal for our next KCB production, "Dracula," ran overtime.

Ava shakes her head "yes."

SYDNEY

And...we thought some very special props for tonight's show here at Victoria's would be cool.

Sydney and Conny set the pieces of the drum kit down and pull out...two packages of thumb tacks apiece.

And Ava's jaw drops.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

Ava, Conny, and Sydney play in front of A PACKED HOUSE.

The three women spring Peppermint Harris' "Raining in My Heart" on the audience...with Sydney on drums, Ava playing bass fiddle, and Conny pounding the keys of that 1900-19 upright piano...which now features tacks in the hammers.

At the sofa, Valerie casts a confused look at Bill.

VALERIE

That old piano sure sounds funny tonight.

BILL

It's all right, Val. We let Sydney and Conny and Ava stick thumb tacks in the old piano tonight.

Now Valerie watches Conny bang those ivories in a twenty-four-bar solo...three times the original solo's length.

BILL (CONT'D)

They wanted to get that tinny, funky, lowdown, rinky-tinky sound.

VALERIE

Wait a minute, Bill--

BILL

Don't worry. They said they'll take those thumb tacks out when they're done tonight.

Valerie breathes a sigh of relief.

KATHLEEN MCELHENNY (30, playful), LYNDIA SUE AQUINO (27, levelheaded; slight Texas accent), and TITO MANALO (29, jovial; Lynda Sue's NFL-sized husband) study Ava, Conny, and Sydney from a table not far from the stage.

Kathleen points to her tablemates.

KATHLEEN
That song needs a guitar.

Lynda Sue shakes her head "no."

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
Badly.

Conny's instrumental solo gives way to her singing.

CONNIE
(into mike)
*When you wake up in the end,/Baby,
please remember me./When you wake
up in the end,/Baby, please
remember me./Well, think about our
love/And how close we used to be.*

Conny, Sydney, and Ava end "Raining in My Heart" in twelve percussive bars.

Tiffany, Jaquan, Robert, Svetlana, Savannah, Bill, Tito, and Lynda Sue lead the throng in strong applause.

TITO
Hey, Kathleen, that sounded pretty
good to me.

LYNDIA SUE
(nodding)
It works! Why, Ah remember a three-
woman blues band called
Saffire...they had a pianist, a
drummer, and the other woman played
a standup bass.

A change of expression grips Lynda Sue's face.

LYNDIA SUE (CONT'D)
Come to thank of it...they had a
guitarist instead of a drummer.

KATHLEEN
Lynda Sue...I told you those three
up there need a guitarist.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

This time, Ava plays bass guitar, Conny pounds the drums, and Sydney takes over at the old upright.

Each woman now has a mike to work with.

Sydney's arpeggio launches "The Dark End of the Street," in the manner of Joe Tex.

Conny's drumming is a slower version of the almost-military pattern in Paul Simon's "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover."

AVA, CONNY, SYDNEY

(singing)

*At...the...dark end of the
street./That's where we always
meet,/Hiding in shadows where we
don't belong,/Living in darkness to
hide our wrongs.*

At the bar, Aisha and Antoine look impressed.

AVA, CONNY, SYDNEY (CONT'D)

*You and me,/At the dark end/Of the
street./You and me.*

AVA

*I know time is gonna take its
toll./We've got to pay for this
love we stole./It's a sin and we
know it's wrong,/But our love keeps
coming on strong.*

AVA, CONNY, SYDNEY

Steal away--

AVA

*To the dark end/Of the street./You
and me.*

CONNY

*They're gonna find us./They're
gonna find us./They're gonna find
us someday. Just keep looking.*

AVA, CONNY, SYDNEY

You and me--

CONNY

*At the dark end/Of the street./You
and me.*

"The Dark End of the Street" changes keys.

SYDNEY

*And when the daylight comes
around,/And by chance we're both
downtown,/If we should meet, just
walk on by./And promise me,
darling, that you won't cry.*

AVA, CONNY, SYDNEY

Tonight, we'll meet--

SYDNEY

*At the dark end/Of the street./You
and me.*

Sydney's piano work fills the next twelve bars.

During the solo, Svetlana turns to her KCB tablemates.

SVETLANA

*That's it. I must pay that
childhood debt and study piano.*

Jaquan's and Tiffany's eyes light up.

TIFFANY

Just don't tail Beata and Lucinda.

JAQUAN

*And don't let 'em see you touch a
key.*

When Sydney's instrumental break ends:

AVA, CONNY, SYDNEY

Tonight, we'll meet--

SYDNEY

*And I promise on a stack of old
Kansas City Chiefs programs!*

The audience cracks up in strong laughter.

AVA, CONNY, SYDNEY

*At the dark end/Of the street./You
and me.*

A final arpeggio from Sydney, in conjunction with both a single note from Ava's bass and some hi-hatting from Conny, ends the tune...and brings on the applause.

ANTOINE

Aisha...is that chick on bass gonna
be part of the act? From now on?

AISHA

I hope so.
(wags finger at Antoine)
And her name is Ava.

Antoine shrugs.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

Sydney, Conny, and Ava congregate at Tito's, Lynda Sue's, and
Kathleen's table.

AVA

(to Conny and Sydney)
You remember my old college
roommate Kathleen McElhenny?

SYDNEY

Are you kidding?
(to Kathleen)
We had a couple of classes together
at UMKC.

CONNIE

And Kathleen, I remember you from
all those open-mike sessions at
that coffeehouse in the West
Bottoms district.

Kathleen's eyes light up.

KATHLEEN

Yeah...those were fun.

SYDNEY

You used to write your own songs
and perform 'em at the
coffeehouse...and you used to have
the people weeping their eyes out.

Now Kathleen's mouth flies open.

LYNDA SUE

You did, Kathleen. Matter of fact,
people had to learn to brang
tissues every time you did a
concert.

Lynda Sue extends a hand each to Conny and Sydney.

LYNDA SUE (CONT'D)
 Ah'm Lynda Sue Aquino. Ah play in
 the same praise band at church that
 Kathleen does.

Sydney and Conny shake hands with Lynda Sue.

LYNDA SUE (CONT'D)
 And Ah'd like you to meet mah
 husband, Tito Manalo.

Tito shakes hands with the two musical ballerinas.

TITO
 Nice to meet you two.

CONNYP
 Tito...your name sounds pretty
 familiar.

LYNDA SUE
 Ah met him at our church.

CONNYP
 (to Tito)
 Didn't you get drafted by the
 Chiefs? Seven years ago?

TITO
 Actually...I was an undrafted free
 agent. Almost made the team.

Conny, Lynda Sue, and Sydney nod.

TITO (CONT'D)
 Just couldn't push Eric Fisher off
 the roster.

KATHLEEN
 Speaking of playing...

Kathleen points to Conny and Sydney.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
 You need a full-time guitarist.

SYDNEY
 Who've you got in mind?

KATHLEEN
 Me.

Sydney looks shocked.

SYDNEY

Aren't you into country music?

KATHLEEN

Hey, I figured: "If Taylor Swift can switch from country music to rock music, I can switch from country to blues."

LYNDA SUE

And Ah can help out on organ. And piano.

(gestures at Kathleen)

And she's trying to git me to play the guitar, too.

Ava studies Sydney and Conny.

AVA

Kathleen and Lynda Sue make some compelling arguments.

The two blues-playing Kansas City Ballet members gaze at the stage...then eyeball Ava.

LYNDA SUE

Don't y'all worry. There's enough room for all five of us...even if two of us have to stand just outside the stage.

Conny and Sydney gaze at each other for a few seconds.

CONNY

Lynda Sue...Kathleen...welcome to the band.

SYDNEY

Ditto!

The five women and the lone man shake hands in jubilation before Sydney, Ava, and Conny head for the piano.

AVA

(to Lynda Sue)

It's all good. It's just that we promised Bill and Valerie we'd take the thumb tacks out of the piano.

While the tack removal begins, Tiffany, Svetlana, Savannah, Robert, and Jaquan watch the removal on their way out.

SAVANNAH

Conny...Sydney...Ava...we really love that old-fashioned, tinny piano sound.

ROBERT

Yeah! Sounds kinda funky!

Ava and her two former students turn around.

Sydney smiles, Ava looks puzzled, and Conny shrugs.

EXT. AVA'S AND KATHLEEN'S HOUSE, KANSAS CITY, MO - NIGHT

Here's a nice-looking ranch house.

INT. AVA'S AND KATHLEEN'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

This basement is actually a plush-looking recording studio.

Ava, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, and Sydney congregate around Conny, who shows off her V-neck guitar.

CONNY

Oh, man...I just love this guitar.

KATHLEEN

Play something on it.

Sydney, Ava, and Lynda Sue AD LIB their own exhortations...and with a nod, Conny plugs her guitar into a nearby amp.

Lynda Sue, Sydney, and Ava look delighted as Conny strums out something bluesy.

After several bars, Kathleen looks annoyed.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

Conny! Wait a minute!

A shocked Conny ends her musical demonstration.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

That's a V-neck guitar you're playing.

CONNY

Well...yeah.

KATHLEEN

You're holding in your hands a guitar Kiss made famous...a guitar Albert King used to play...and that's the best you can do on that thing?

CONNIE

Well, mainly...I'm a pianist. When I'm not dancing.

KATHLEEN

Here! Gimme that thing!

Conny hands her guitar to Kathleen, who lifts a pick from her own jeans pocket.

AVA

Kathleen...

KATHLEEN

(points to Conny)

If you're gonna own a V-neck guitar, you've gotta play it like a stud!

Kathleen fires off some B.B. King-Albert King riffs; within seconds, she walks around the studio while she continues to put on a show with that V-neck.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

You've gotta own it!

Conny shakes her head "yes" as Kathleen's riffs evolve into something slow and bluesy.

LYNDA SUE

Here, y'all! Ah've got something that oughta go good with that!

Lynda Sue gravitates to an electric organ. She turns the organ on and eyeballs a still-strutting Kathleen.

LYNDA SUE (CONT'D)

Keep on playing!

KATHLEEN

Okay, Lynda Sue!

After the organ warms up, Lynda Sue chords away under Kathleen's guitar riffs.

Sydney and Conny eyeball each other.

SYDNEY

How do you feel about playing
drums?

CONNY

Well, Sydney, I--

Sydney pulls a harmonica from her own pants pocket.

CONNY (CONT'D)

I'm on it!

Conny walks over to a drum set, Sydney saunters to a mike and its stand, and...Ava reaches a 1900-19 upright piano whose hammers are exposed.

AVA

You guys...before we all get to
cookin', I've got some lyrics I've
been working on that just might
fit.

SYDNEY

Go for it!

AVA

My pleasure!

Ava yanks a piece of notebook paper from her jeans pocket, sits down at the piano, and sets the paper above the fallboard (or tapes it to the action).

She pounds out bell-like chords in a timekeeping way.

Conny uses the chords to hi-hat her way into the evolving tune...while Sydney toots her way in and Ava adds vocals.

AVA (CONT'D)

(into piano mike)

*Sing a song of sixpence,/A
pocketful of rye;/Four-and-twenty
blackbirds/Baked into a pie--*

Kathleen rushes over to Ava.

All the music stops.

KATHLEEN

Ava, that isn't a blues song!

AVA

It's a blues song if you're one of
the four-and-twenty blackbirds
about to get baked into that pie.

Conny, Lynda Sue, and Sydney crack up as Ava observes Kathleen's dumbfounded look.

EXT. KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS - NIGHT

PEOPLE stroll into the building.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER - NIGHT

A PACKED HOUSE prepares to watch the Kansas City Ballet perform its second show of the season: "Dracula."

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

The thirty dancers line up in a man-woman-man-woman arrangement...where Sydney and Conny flank the production's top banana, Darin.

DARIN

Look, you two: Stay up here with
the rest of us. Don't go down to
the orchestra pit and try to jam.

The two blues-playing buddies nod at Darin, then gaze at the orchestra pit...where THE KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY readies itself to accompany the dancers.

A FEW ORCHESTRA MEMBERS wave at Conny and Sydney...who wave back in surprise.

SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

While troupe members sway around her, a kneeling Conny receives a stake.

Jaquan and Juan leap across the stage as their fellow dancers twirl around them.

Red-caped Darin leaps and twirls his way to the floor.

NATHAN AITCHISON (33) lifts fellow KCB dancer Robert off the floor in a later scene.

Sydney and Svetlana flank Beata, who's dressed as a police officer, as the three women leap and twirl across the stage.

Tiffany and another KCB member, KYLE HUNT (25), sway around the bed. Before long, Kyle lifts Tiffany.

Savannah and Lucinda take center stage to lead ten other darkly-clad KCB troupers.

Conny and Darin stand, hand in hand; twelve other dancers crawl out to reach the duo.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. VICTORIA'S BAR AND GRILL, LIBERTY, MO - NIGHT

Juan, Tiffany, Savannah, Jaquan, Robert, and Svetlana stroll toward the eatery-watering hole in total joy.

ROBERT
Hey, we killed!

Tiffany and Jaquan nod, Savannah and Svetlana smile, and Juan looks surprised.

JAQUAN
(to Juan)
You know...Robert's got a point.

JUAN
(with a slow nod)
Okay, Robert. I'll give you that.

Kyle and Nathan run to catch up to their six fellow Kansas City Ballet members.

KYLE
Hey, I heard this was the place.

TIFFANY
Y'all heard right...great job this week, Kyle and Nathan.

Tiffany, Nathan, and Kyle trade high fives.

SVETLANA
Nathan, if you and Beata had not switched roles, our "Dracula" would've been a disaster.

Nathan and Svetlana fist-bump each other.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

CUSTOMERS occupy two out of every three seats in the place.

Forget about the seats in front of the stage...every spot there has a body in it.

The eight hoofers sit at the tables by the bar and watch fellow dancers Sydney and Conny (and bandmates Lynda Sue, Kathleen, and Ava) at work.

NATHAN

(to dancers around him)
Now I see why this is KCB's new hangout.

SAVANNAH

Conny hipped us to the place...wait 'til you try one of their sandwiches.

Onstage, Conny herself addresses the crowd from her seat at the drums.

CONNY

(into drumside mike)
In case you've just joined us, our act officially now has a name.

Sydney sits at the old upright piano...and Lynda Sue sits at an electric organ (maybe a Hammond B-3).

SYDNEY

(into piano mike)
That's right...we're now called the Nutcrackers.

Kathleen (guitar in hands) and Ava (bass guitar in her grip) stand just in front of the stage and at their own mikes.

AVA

(into her mike)
It was Lynda Sue's idea.

Lynda Sue nods at the audience.

KATHLEEN

She was thinking about the Kansas City Ballet's next production.

Some patrons clap.

LYNDA SUE

Wail, y'all...if our band were
named Pinaud, Henderson, Fernandez,
McElhenny, and Aquino, our show
would be over by the time we got
introduced.

The audience erupts in laughter...and at the sofa, Valerie
and Bill point to each other.

VALERIE

Good one!

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

The Nutcrackers work their way through a "So Far Away" that
features a harder edge than what Carole King intended.

Conny's drumming, Ava's thumping bass, and Kathleen's guitar
work make the difference...and Lynda Sue's organ work
provides a harmonic continuum.

Sydney pounds the piano's ivories while she wears a harmonica
holder around her neck.

No thumb tacks in the hammers this time.

SYDNEY

(singing, too)

*But you're so far away./Doesn't
anybody stay in one place
anymore?/It would be so cool to see
your face at my door./And it just
doesn't help to know/That you're so
far away.*

Aisha, Antoine, Geoff, and Kathi sit in front of the stage.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

*Yeahhh, you're so far away./Hey,
you're so far away./Hey, hey, hey,
hey, hey, hey./You're so far away.*

Sydney continues to play the piano...and now, she adds her
own harmonica work to the mix.

KATHI

Hey, Geoff...wasn't that part
Sydney's playing played on a flute?

Geoff nods.

AISHA

If you brought a flute to a blues club, somebody'd shove that flute down your throat.

Antoine laughs his head off as Geoff winces.

ANTOINE

I didn't know that was a blues song!

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

NOLAN FLASTER (20) and GIANNA PERTUIT (21) meet with Ava, Conny, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, Sydney, and Tito at the tables by the bar.

NOLAN

Hey, great show, everybody!

Nolan bumps fists with the band.

GIANNA

Yeah! I didn't know you could make a blues song out of a Carole King song!

LYNDA SUE

Wail...it wasn't easy.

TITO

(pointing to Lynda Sue)
But you Nutcrackers did it. And it was...beautiful.

LYNDA SUE

Thanks.

Tito and Lynda Sue bump each other's fists.

NOLAN

I'm Nolan, and she's Gianna.

GIANNA

Nolan and I are with UMKC's Union Programming Board.

Sydney, Conny, and Ava turn attentive.

NOLAN

How do you feel about bringing your band on campus?

GIANNA
Specifically, the University of
Missouri-Kansas City's Olson
Performing Arts Center.

Six sets of eyes light up.

KATHLEEN
Let's do it!

Tito, Nolan, Gianna, and the Nutcrackers cheer away.

SYDNEY
But not in December.

Gianna's and Nolan's mouths drop.

CONNY
KCB's spending the whole month
dancing "The Nutcracker."

Ava eyeballs the two UMKC students.

AVA
Makes sense to me.

Bill and Valerie pass by as they watch the six women and the
two men cheer themselves hoarse.

EXT. OLSON PERFORMING ARTS CENTER AT UMKC - NIGHT

This is a modern, low-lying building.

INT. WHITE RECITAL HALL AT OLSON PAC - NIGHT

This smallish auditorium teems with PEOPLE.

Gianna and Nolan sit someplace in the middle; Jaquan,
Tiffany, Kyle, Savannah, Robert, Svetlana, Nathan, Juan, and
Darin occupy seats closer to the front.

Tito, Geoff, Antoine, Kathi, and Aisha sit even closer.

Toward the back: Stephen and wife KELSEE SKINNER (34).

Stephen's some kind of nervous.

KELSEE
Stephen...come on. Relax. Conny and
Sydney are just branching out.

STEPHEN
I'll try, Kelsee.

Kelsee shows her husband a wide smile.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

I'm just afraid of the branch those
two are sitting on.

Onstage, Sydney, Conny, Lynda Sue, Ava, and Kathleen wear nonmatching men's suits. (Conny's outfit is actually a tuxedo and Kathleen's is...a Davy Crockett-style suit!)

With Conny, Kathleen, and Lynda Sue all on guitars, Sydney on drums, and Ava on bass, it's a rollicking rendition of Muddy Waters' "Got My Mojo Working."

Conny plays lead guitar during the song's opening twelve bars; in the intro, she gives Kathleen an I've-got-this kind of look.

CONNIE

(singing)

*Got my mojo working, but it just
won't work on you./Got my mojo
working, but it just won't work on
you./I wanna love you so bad 'til I
don't know what to do.*

Nolan and Gianna trade high fives.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

*I'm going down to Louisiana to get
me a mojo hand./Going down to
Louisiana to get me a mojo
hand./I'm gonna have all you men
right here at my command.*

Between guitar strokes, Conny manages a "thumbs up" for Tito...who waves back.

CONNIE (CONT'D)

Got my mojo working.

AVA, KATHLEEN, LYNDA SUE, SYDNEY
Mojo working!

CONNIE

Got my mojo working.

AVA, KATHLEEN, LYNDA SUE, SYDNEY
Mojo working!

CONNIE

I've got my mojo working.

AVA, KATHLEEN, LYNDA SUE, SYDNEY
Mojo working!

CONNY
You know my mojo's working.

AVA, KATHLEEN, LYNDA SUE, SYDNEY
Mojo working!

CONNY
*I've got my mojo working, but it
 just ain't working on you.*

Conny and her V-neck guitar take a stroll of sorts across the stage while the Toronto Metro native plucks out a twenty-four-bar solo.

ANTOINE
 THAT'S RIGHT! PLAY THE BLUES!

Antoine receives stares from those around him...and Conny flashes a smile.

As Conny's solo heats up, Jaquan grooves along to the music...while Robert, Savannah, and Tiffany look ecstatic.

Darin turns to Svetlana and Juan, who flank him.

DARIN
 Why are they dressed up like that?
 They trying to hide from somebody?
 Is Stephen here?

SVETLANA
 He is.

Svetlana and Darin gaze behind them...and the latter nods.

JUAN
 Anyway, Darin, Sydney said they
 wanted to pay tribute to a local
 entertainer.

DARIN
 Let's see...Ed Asner...Lyle
 Waggoner...Joe Turner...Charlie
 Parker...Columbus Short...

Juan and Svetlana shake their heads sideways.

SVETLANA
 Darin...they wanted to pay tribute
 to Janelle Monae.

Darin's mouth hangs open.

Now Conny's impressive solo ends, and she and her fellow Nutcrackers barrel into the last verse.

CONNY

*I've got a gypsy woman giving me
advice./I've got a gypsy woman
giving me advice./She gave me a
whole lotta tricks, and I'm keeping
them on ice.*

Conny turns to Kathleen.

CONNY (CONT'D)

How do you feel about taking the
next twenty-four bars?

Kathleen shows a deer-in-the-headlights look...a look that the crowd's boisterous applause ends.

KATHLEEN

Okay! You've got it!

And Kathleen steps out to strut during her own twenty-four-bar guitar solo.

Geoff gazes at Kathleen, then at Kathi.

GEOFF

They're pretty darn good.

KATHI

You can say that again.

GEOFF

But, somehow...I think those women
up there are too pretty to sing the
blues.

KATHI

Geoff...don't tell me you've
forgotten about all those women who
were sexually abused by Harvey
Weinstein.

GEOFF

Well...uh...Kathi...

KATHI

They've got every right to sing the
blues, too.

Kathi watches Geoff slowly nod while Kathleen's guitar playing furnishes its own brand of fire.

An ecstatic Kelsee eyeballs Stephen.

KELSEE

At least Conny got a chance to
dance tonight.

Stephen provides his own slow nod.

INT. AVA'S AND KATHLEEN'S KITCHEN - NIGHT

Kathleen presides over the microwave oven in this well-furnished, state-of-the-art kitchen.

Lynda Sue, Sydney, Ava, Tito, and Conny sit and chow down at a table enlarged by a leaf.

Everybody's festive!

The microwave BEEPS...and Kathleen lifts a plate of burgers from the device.

KATHLEEN

(sets plate on table)
Dig right in! There's more where
this came from!

Tito and the five blues musicians build their own burgers and fill out their plates with fries and other fixin's.

SYDNEY

You talk about owning it! Great job
with that axe, Conny!

Conny and Sydney fist-bump each other.

CONNY

Well, actually...great job,
everybody!

It's fist bumps all around for Ava, Kathleen, and guests.

LYNDA SUE

Thanks...even if Ah'm not ready yet
to far off a guitar solo like that.
(takes a bite)
But Ah'll git there.

AVA

You'll get there, Lynda Sue. It's
just a question of time.

Lynda Sue shakes her head "yes."

TITO
You know what? Let's drink a toast!

The five women AD LIB their agreement with the lone man.

TITO (CONT'D)
To all three of us couples.

Tito, Lynda Sue, Sydney, Conny, Kathleen, and Ava raise their glasses (or bottles or cans) of pop/juice/tea/water.

TITO (CONT'D)
To Conny and Sydney.

Six bottles/cans/glasses tap together.

SYDNEY
To Ava and Kathleen.

Tap!

AVA
And to Lynda Sue and Tito.

One more tap before the revelers swig away.

SYDNEY
You know...I couldn't have done this if my ex-husband and I were still together.

Conny nods.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
You know..."Mr. It's Me or Ballet, Baby!"

CONNIE
I heard that!

SYDNEY
You guys...ever since Conny and I got back together and became roommates again, I've learned to love poutine.

CONNIE
And I've learned to love black-eyed peas.

Conny and Sydney bump their fists to the tune of their tablemates' goodnatured laughter.

EXT. TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

Vehicles crawl along the street.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

As Pierre plays in the background, Kansas City Ballet dancers do individual warmups in an effort to gear up for The Big One: "The Nutcracker."

Now the laptop from the "New Moves" rehearsals becomes the accompanist...and the thirty dancers bone up as one.

A SMALL GROUP OF FOLKS, people from all walks of life, checks out the rehearsal.

Freddie, Willie Ray, and Floyd join the spectators.

Floyd flashes a look of confusion while he watches Conny and Sydney rehearse.

He turns to Willie Ray and Freddie.

FLOYD

So...they're our Battle of the Blues Bands competition over at Victoria's?

WILLIE RAY

Yes, they are, Floyd.

Floyd slowly nods.

WILLIE RAY (CONT'D)

Don't you remember when we saw 'em at Victoria's?

FLOYD

Can Patrick Mahomes win a Super Bowl?

WILLIE RAY

Then you know that Sydney and Conny are some kinda real.

Freddie watches the two blues-playing KCB members before he eyeballs Floyd.

FREDDIE

Just remember: They want that week-long engagement at Victoria's just as bad as we do.

FLOYD

Yeah, but--

FREDDIE

Those two women ain't half-steppin' out there on that floor...so you know they ain't gonna half-step it when they jam at Victoria's.

WILLIE RAY

(wags finger at Floyd)

It's just like Dad says:

(tries to mimic Freddie)

"You ain't gonna make it through life by half-steppin' it."

Freddie looks flattered.

WILLIE RAY (CONT'D)

(arm around Floyd)

When you half-step it, you're gonna get caught.

The patrons watch Stephen gesture the KCB Thirty into a huddle around him.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S LIVING ROOM - DAY

Ava, Conny, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, and Sydney sit on a sofa and/or around the poker table while they munch birthday cake and drink pop/juice/tea/water.

KATHLEEN

(takes a bite)

Sydney...Conny...this cake tastes so good I'd like to sneak over to the bakery where it came from.

(another bite)

And steal their recipe.

CONNY

Thanks, Kathleen.

SYDNEY

(taking a bite)

If you go to that bakery...you'd better disguise yourself as Jamie Oliver.

Conny, Ava, and Lynda Sue laugh.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

'Cause if you try to go in there dressed like Paula Deen, they might not let you in...it's over in the northeast part of town. And they don't forget.

Kathleen's mouth flies open as her fellow Nutcrackers laugh.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

(sets her plate aside)

Stay right there, everybody. I'll be right back.

Sydney skips off toward her bedroom...and comes back with four giftwrapped, medium-sized packages.

Sydney's fellow Nutcrackers set their plates aside.

Lynda Sue and Kathleen look shocked while Sydney hands her bandmates a package each.

Ava looks flattered...and Conny looks gleeful.

KATHLEEN

(to Sydney)

I thought this was your birthday.

SYDNEY

It is!

KATHLEEN

But you're giving us presents!

Lynda Sue and Ava unwrap their packages.

CONNY

(opening her package)

Well, Kathleen...that's how Sydney rolls.

Conny's, Ava's, and Lynda Sue's mouths open wide when the three women find they now own...a set of harmonicas each!

AVA

(eyeballing Kathleen)

Aren't you gonna open your present?

Kathleen shrugs, then opens her package while Lynda Sue tries out one of her own mouth harps.

LYNDA SUE
Thanks a bunch!

SYDNEY
You're welcome, Lynda Sue!

AVA
Sydney...it was really sweet of you
to do this for us.

Ava and Sydney reach for each other...and hug.

AVA (CONT'D)
Thanks.

SYDNEY
Ava, you're welcome!

Kathleen examines one of her own harmonicas.

KATHLEEN
I've never tried to play a mouth
instrument before.

Conny and Ava toot away in this get-to-know-your-harmonica
moment while Lynda Sue gives Kathleen an encouraging look.

LYNDA SUE
Once you git used to it, it's all
kinds of fun!

SYDNEY
Kathleen, you can do it!

Sydney watches Kathleen audition a mouth organ.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
It's an instrument I thought we
could learn together...and I
figured: "What's a blues band
without a harmonica in it?"

KATHLEEN
It's a good thing I don't wear
braces anymore.

Kathleen tries out another of her harmonicas...and Ava, Lynda
Sue, and Conny add to the noise with their own harmonicas.

INT. AVA'S AND KATHLEEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

The Nutcrackers work out Slim Harpo's "Baby, Scratch My Back." In this version, Sydney plays drums, Ava's on bass guitar, and Conny and Kathleen shred on their guitars.

And Lynda Sue exudes joy while she plays harmonica.

A seated Tito watches the five blueswomen whoop it up when the song ends.

TITO

See, Lynda Sue? You did it!

LYNDA SUE

And all Ah had to do was follow the li'l' instruction booklet that came with the harmonica.

Kathleen puts an arm on Lynda Sue's shoulder.

KATHLEEN

Now...when you're doing the recitation on this song, you've gotta be sexy about it.

Sydney, Conny, and Ava AD LIB their reactions while Lynda Sue shoots Kathleen a playfully-scornful look.

LYNDA SUE

Now, see here: There's only one man Ah'm willing to be sexy around...and he's sitting in that chair over there.

Lynda Sue waves at Tito, who waves back.

LYNDA SUE (CONT'D)

And he and Ah aren't gonna be sexy around each other 'til he and Ah are all by our lonesomes.

AVA

Kathleen...Lynda Sue's got a point.

And Kathleen shrugs.

EXT. KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS - NIGHT

A LINE OF PEOPLE forms in front of the building on this cold December evening.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER - NIGHT

Kathi and Geoff accompany neighbors HANS and GRETA PFLAUM (both 70s) as the foursome reach empty seats in the middle of the theater.

GRETA

(to Geoff and Kathi)

I can't believe you two haven't come here to see "The Nutcracker" before.

The Whisenants nod at the Pflaums.

HANS

After all, Sydney Henderson and Conny Pinaud are our next-door neighbors, and you live across the street from them.

Geoff, Greta, Hans, and Kathi sit down.

GEOFF

Well, Hans, the company Kathi and I work at finally broke down and gave us free tickets.

Several rows from the back, Ava, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, and Tito sit together...in an arrangement where Kathleen and Tito flank Lynda Sue.

AVA

I've gotta admit: This is the first time I've seen the Kansas City Ballet do "The Nutcracker." In person.

LYNDA SUE

This is mah first time ever seeing a ballet of any kind in person.

Kathleen eyeballs Lynda Sue.

KATHLEEN

KCB putting on "The Nutcracker" used to be the biggest annual local social event...until the Chiefs started playing in Super Bowls again.

Tito flashes Kathleen an almost intimidating look.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
Which is a good thing...a great
thing...

Tito's nod is enthusiastic.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
They're both great things.

Lynda Sue breathes a heavy sigh of relief.

SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

In the opening act, ten KCB dancers (five male, five female) lead SIXTEEN CHILDREN (eight girls and eight boys) through "The Party."

In the audience, Lynda Sue cringes when all the boys receive trumpets and all the girls get dolls.

Nathan and Svetlana guide the adults through the ensuing dance scene while the onstage children watch.

Patch over one of his eyes, Juan brandishes a magic wand.

Now Juan breaks out the nutcracker doll...and hands it to one of the girls, the show's Clara.

On an otherwise newly-darkened stage where the Christmas tree still glows, Darin and Beata move across the stage.

The nutcracker doll comes to life...in the person of Kyle!

"The Palace of Snow" sees KCB's fifteen women dancers grace the stage.

Now Conny and Jaquan have the stage to themselves.

The next segment, "The Palace of the Sweets," begins with Sydney twirling across the stage.

"The Nutcracker" reaches the end...and the dancers soak up the ensuing applause.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER - NIGHT

The audience gives the hoofers a standing ovation.

Through it, Kathi turns to Greta.

KATHI
Greta, wait 'til you see Conny and
Sydney play the blues.

Greta shudders.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Stephen, Carlos, and the thirty KCB dancers whoop it up.

CARLOS
That's it, everybody! That's the
way to crack those nuts!

While most troupe members laugh, Stephen does a doubletake.

TIFFANY
Stephen...Carlos is right.

KCB's artistic director oh-so-slowly nods.

STEPHEN
Okay...Carlos, I'll give you that.

More cheering from the gang.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
Main thing is, everybody...you got
this year's production of "The
Nutcracker" off to an exciting
start.

Some dancers shake their heads "yes."

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
You make us proud...you make the
Kansas City area proud...you make
dance proud.

CARLOS
It's like Stephen likes to say...

STEPHEN
(pointing to Kyle)
What's our slogan?

KYLE
No problem: "It Takes All of Us!"

Kyle's answer produces applause from his dancemates.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

Robert (he holds his cell phone) and Savannah have changed into their street clothes.

Both young dancers sit and sob their eyes out when Conny and Sydney (now in their civilian duds) spot them.

The two blues-playing dancers sit alongside the two distraught colleagues.

SAVANNAH
(to Conny)
I hate my body!

Conny and Savannah hug.

CONNY
Savannah...if you've got a few minutes, I'd like to show you something.

SAVANNAH
(still in tears)
Oh...kay.

CONNY
But not here.

Savannah and Conny break their embrace, rise up, and leave for the women's restroom.

Sydney drapes her arm around the still-tearful Robert.

SYDNEY
Robert...you look really down. What can I do for you?

ROBERT
Mom texted me...she's still uptight...about my...

Robert buries his head in Sydney's embrace and sobs away.

A few moments later:

SYDNEY
What'd she say?

Robert shows Sydney the text message...and the latter shakes her head "no."

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
I...I can't read that.

Robert breathes hard before he eyeballs his phone to read the offending message.

ROBERT

She wrote: "Give up dancing. Be a man. Real men don't dance ballet!"

He puts the phone away, then buries his head back in Sydney's embrace...where he breaks down in heavier tears.

SYDNEY

That's all flunked up! Your mom would've had a problem with Rudolf Nureyev and Edward Villella!

ROBERT

She did!

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER WOMEN'S RESTROOM - NIGHT

Conny and Savannah stand in front of the mirror above a row of sinks. Both women hold each other's hands.

SAVANNAH

Every time I get onstage since I joined the Kansas City Ballet, I feel like my old teachers back home in Wichita are still watching me.

Conny nods.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)

And they're still telling me to stay away from the Whoppers and Big Macs.

CONNY

You know what? They don't see what I see: A very beautiful, very dedicated, very enthusiastic dancer. A very beautiful person.

Lucinda emerges from one of the stalls and goes to a sink.

CONNY (CONT'D)

And, Savannah, I'm talking about you.

Lucinda washes up, eyeballs Savannah and Conny, and runs from the restroom in screams.

SAVANNAH
 Has Lucinda ever seen friendship in
 action?

Savannah flashes a huge smile at Conny as the two women hug.

SAVANNAH (CONT'D)
 I have...and I'm glad you and
 Sydney are showing me...thanks.

As they strengthen their embrace, Conny and Savannah rub each
 other's backs.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Sydney continues to embrace Robert, who now wipes his eyes.

ROBERT
 Syd, all five of my brothers and
 all three of my sisters are jocks.

Robert catches Sydney's nod.

ROBERT (CONT'D)
 I went out for football in high
 school...but I wasn't as good as my
 brothers. And my oldest sister's a
 better football player than I ever
 was.

SYDNEY
 You found something you're really
 passionate about. And we're glad
 you're here with us.

ROBERT
 I went ahead and decided to make
 dancing my thing.
 (with a slight grin)
 That's my story, and I'm sticking
 with it.

SYDNEY
 Speaking of story...you know about
 Lynn Swann?

ROBERT
 Yeah! Pro Football Hall of Famer.
 Helped his Pittsburgh Steelers win
 four Super Bowls...then he went up
 to the broadcast booth.

SYDNEY

That's the truth! You remember how he used to make all those great, leaping catches...and how he used to slither away from all those defenders and get in the end zone?

Now Robert's all smiles.

ROBERT

He studied dance from age four until age eighteen. That's how...everything from tap to ballet.

SYDNEY

And he eventually found a way to use all those dance moves of his on the football field.

ROBERT

And those moves made him one of the best wide receivers ever.

SYDNEY

You know it!

Darin walks into the area...and watches Sydney and Robert trade high fives.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

So don't let anybody tell you there's no athleticism in ballet.

Robert and Sydney high-five it again.

DARIN

Hell, I knew that.

SYDNEY

Okay...Darin, here's something else I'd like you to know.

DARIN

What's that?

SYDNEY

How'd you and Robert and Savannah and anybody else who wants to come like to come to our band rehearsal on the twenty-seventh?

Robert's eyes light up...Darin's eyes show puzzlement.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - NIGHT

Darin looks puzzled here, too.

He and fellow guests Geoff, Greta, Hans, Jaquan, Kathi, Robert, Savannah, Svetlana, Tiffany, and Tito sit (or stand) and enjoy holiday-themed refreshments while the Nutcrackers rehearse Howlin' Wolf's "Sitting on Top of the World."

It's high fives for Savannah and Robert.

Ava toots harmonica (thanks to a holder around her neck) and plays the 1890s piano, Conny and Kathleen strum their electric guitars, and Sydney bangs the drums.

And Lynda Sue pounds out chords on both the 1900s piano and an electronic keyboard that's finally got a stand again.

AVA

(singing song's last line)

Sitting on top of the world.

Two bars from the five women end the song...and bring on applause from all the guests except earplug-wearing Greta.

Hans turns to his wife.

HANS

Honey...you can take your earplugs out now.

GRETA

Oh, all right.

Greta yanks the plugs from her ears and shows the plugs to her husband. He hands her a clean napkin for the earplugs.

SYDNEY

(to the guests)

Glad you all liked that one.

KATHLEEN

Yeah. We were thinking about replacing one of the guitars with a bass.

TIFFANY

(gesturing)

Nah, Kathleen. It's fine just like it is.

Some of Tiffany's fellow guests AD LIB their agreement.

CONNY

Anyway, everybody, we're glad
you're here.

Conny sets her guitar down...

CONNY (CONT'D)

This is a chance to show that
Stephen Skinner isn't the only one
who gets to show people how sausage
is made.

...and picks up her laptop.

Darin gives those around him a puzzled look.

DARIN

When'd Stephen start making
sausage?

SVETLANA

No, no, no, no. Conny was just
using a metaphor.

JAQUAN

But hey...what if Stephen and
Kelsee made their own sausage?

Conny turns her laptop on.

LYNDA SUE

Wail, anyway, we just wanted y'all
to see another way we pick out
material for when we play at
Victoria's.

SYDNEY

Conny and I were surfing the
Internet...and we found this very
interesting song from late 1951-
early 1952.

AVA

Would you believe this is the song
that led Sydney to take up the
trombone?

Some heads nod while Conny uses a few mouse clicks to fire
up...the Griffin Brothers' smash, "Weepin' and Cryin'."

Quite a few mouths drop once the SOUND of a man crying on the
record fills the basement.

GEOFF

What the...

TITO

Well, Geoff, I saw the 1981 version of "The Postman Always Rings Twice," and toward the end, Jack Nicholson turned on the waterworks.

KATHI

Tito...you've gotta be some kind of strong to watch that movie.

Lynda Sue eyes her bandmates.

LYNDA SUE

Which one of us is gonna have to cry like that when we do the song?

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

No Nutcrackers shed any tears on the bandstand in this version of "Weepin' and Cryin'."

The heavy, heavy tears come from Antoine, who sits alongside Aisha, Greta, Hans, Kathi, and Geoff right in front of Victoria's stage.

Conny's on drums, Lynda Sue plays that old piano, Kathleen does guitar, and Sydney blows trombone...while Ava tugs her bass fiddle's strings.

Seated off to the side of the stage, Bill and Valerie shoot each other nostalgic looks during the song's four-bar intro.

AVA

(singing, too)

Well, when I woke up this morning,/I was in my bed alone./Well, when I woke up this morning,/I was in my bed alone./When I woke up this morning,/My man had sneaked out and gone.

Aisha tries her best to comfort Antoine...but his tears continue to tumble down.

AVA (CONT'D)

*Well, I threw out my breakfast,
Lord,/And poured coffee in my
hair./Well, I threw out my
breakfast, Lord,/And poured coffee
in my hair.*

At the tables by the bar, A CUSTOMER laughs...only to gain withering stares from Nathan, Juan, Tiffany, Savannah, Kyle, Jaquan, Robert, Svetlana, and...Darin.

Greta casts an annoyed look at the Greens.

AVA (CONT'D)

*When I reached out in the bed
beside me,/Lord, my man just wasn't
there./Well, well, well, well,
well.*

Antoine's already-heavy sobs intensify during Sydney's twelve-bar trombone solo...when Greta turns to Aisha.

GRETA

Would you please get him out of here? We're trying to--

AISHA

Lady, my husband's dad...my father-in-law...was killed by the police yesterday.

Greta looks smug.

AISHA (CONT'D)

They and some vigilantes chased him all over Swope Park because they thought he looked like a robber they'd been looking for.

Hans, Kathi, and Geoff listen in, and come away shocked...while Antoine continues to cry.

AISHA (CONT'D)

Sound familiar to you?

Greta's too stunned to react.

Aisha continues to try her best to console Antoine.

AVA

Well, I fell down on my knees,/Lord, and I began to pray./Well, I fell down on my knees,/Lord, and I began to pray./I said: "Lord, have mercy. I can't go on this way./I can't go on this way."

After two bars, "Weepin' and Cryin'" ends.

While the Nutcrackers earn hearty applause, Aisha hugs the still-tearful Antoine.

Ava, Conny, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, and Sydney walk away from (or put down) their instruments. When Sydney grabs a mike, her bandmates gather around her.

SYDNEY

(into mike)

Thank you so much, everybody. We really appreciate that.

Sydney hands the mike to Ava.

AVA

(into mike)

Antoine...Sydney and Conny and Lynda Sue and Kathleen and I understand that that was your dad's favorite song.

Antoine wipes his eyes while he nods...and Ava gives the mike to Kathleen.

KATHLEEN

(into mike)

We're very, very sorry for your loss.

Kathleen chokes up before she passes the mike to Lynda Sue.

LYNDA SUE

(into mike)

It just didn't have to happen this way...and this crap has just got to stop.

Lynda Sue's message draws AD LIBBED agreement from the crowd.

LYNDA SUE (CONT'D)
 It shoulda stopped decades
 ago...centuries ago...millennia
 ago.

VALERIE
 AMEN!

The audience erupts in stronger AD LIBBED agreement while
 Lynda Sue turns the mike over to Conny.

CONNY
 (into mike)
 Antoine...Aisha...if there's
 anything we can do to
 help...please...please let us know.

Antoine's bitter tears begin anew...and now, tears rain down
 Aisha's face.

EXT. TODD BOLENDER CENTER, KANSAS CITY, MO - DAY

January has kicked in...and along with it, colder temps.

Tiffany, Sydney, Savannah, Robert, and Conny (all five wear
 heavier coats) stroll toward the front entrance.

SAVANNAH
 Conny and Sydney, it was really
 cool of you and Ava and Kathleen
 and Lynda Sue to take up a
 collection to help Antoine and
 Aisha with funeral expenses for
 Jack.

CONNY
 Thanks.

SYDNEY
 It was the least we could think of
 to do.

ROBERT
 I didn't know Antoine's dad was
 named after Jackie Robinson.

TIFFANY
 Jack Roosevelt Green...he didn't
 sound like someone who'd hurt a
 fly, let alone rob a bunch of
 people.

CONNY

You can say that again, Tiffany.

TIFFANY

Ah mean, if you're a cop and you're lookin' for a suspect and you've got a gun, you better make darn shore you've got the right varmint.

The five dancers reach the front door; Sydney grabs it, then eyeballs her colleagues.

SYDNEY

Jack Green was born on April fifteenth, 1947...the same day Jack Roosevelt Robinson played his first regular-season major league--

The KCB quintet enter the building...

INT. TODD BOLENDER CENTER FIRST FLOOR LOBBY - DAY

...only to find Stephen a few feet away.

SYDNEY

Hi, Stephen! Happy New Year to you!

STEPHEN

Hi, dancers!

Conny, Robert, Savannah, Sydney, and Tiffany wave.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Sydney and Conny...I'd like to see you two in my office.

CONNY

Oh, boy...

Sydney's mouth flies open while Tiffany, Savannah, and Robert walk further and wave at their two musical cohorts.

INT. STEPHEN'S OFFICE - DAY

KCB's artistic director gestures Conny and Sydney into chairs. All three take their seats.

STEPHEN

So...I heard it through the grapevine that you're both hanging up your slippers.

Sydney and Conny shake their heads "no."

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

But you're spending more and more time working on playing the blues and getting ready to do Victoria's Battle of the Blues Bands.

CONNY

Well...that's music for you. If you don't rehearse, you embarrass yourself.

STEPHEN

And if you don't rehearse your dance moves, you embarrass yourself.

SYDNEY

But you get a little more leeway when it comes to dance.

Stephen snickers.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

If you bust a wrong move, you just might be able to pass it off as the right kind of move.

Conny smiles at her fellow Nutcracker.

CONNY

But Stephen, Sydney and I got to thinking about Andrew Luck, Vanessa Carlton, and Declan McMillan...not necessarily in that order.

STEPHEN

Andrew Luck didn't dance ballet!

SYDNEY

Maybe he should've...he played just seven seasons in the NFL.

(shakes her head "no")

All those concussions he suffered.

Sydney stretches in her seat.

CONNY

(gestures toward Stephen)

You remember Declan McMillan...one of the best dancers in Kansas City Ballet history.

Stephen's eyes light up.

CONNLY (CONT'D)

You let him do standup comedy on the side.

SYDNEY

Declan was so funny he would've made Superman laugh his cape off.

STEPHEN

(with a nod)

Declan was good...but when he auditioned for "America's Got Talent," he went too far.

SYDNEY

Conny and I were just thinking about our future...you know, life after ballet.

Now Stephen's mouth drops open.

CONNLY

You see, Stephen, you can play music years longer than you can dance--

STEPHEN

Conny, you're twenty seven! And Sydney, you've just turned twenty eight!

Conny and Sydney flash big smiles.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

You've both got a lot of dancing years left!

SYDNEY

Yeah, but--

STEPHEN

Don't you two remember that Maria Tallchief danced professionally until she was forty one?

CONNLY

By the way...Maria Tallchief also played a mean piano.

The two piano-playing ballerinas trade high fives.

STEPHEN

All right...all right...I'll strike
a deal with you two.

Sydney and Conny perk up.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Win the battle of the bands...you
can both retire. If you lose,
you've gotta keep dancing.

CONNYP

Fair enough.

SYDNEY

Works for me, Stephen.

Stephen and the two blues-playing dancers rise up.

STEPHEN

By the way...since you mentioned
Vanessa Carlton, remember: After
she left ballet, she went on to--

CONNYP, SYDNEY

Earn three Grammy nominations.

STEPHEN

Uh...you're right.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

The thirty KCB dancers prepare for the company's next
production, "Cinderella."

Carlos and Stephen look on...and they like what they see.

CARLOS

That's it, everybody! Great job!
Take a break!

Stephen shoots Carlos a dirty look as the dancers cool off.

STEPHEN

Carlos...you stole my line.

CARLOS

Well, it's true! They've been doing
a great job working on
"Cinderella."

While KCB's artistic director shrugs, Beata and Lucinda
stride over to Conny and Sydney.

BEATA

I understand Stephen had a talk
with you two blues musicians.

Darin and Robert rush right over to the foursome.

LUCINDA

(pointing at Sydney)
What the hell did he tell you? Did
he talk some sense into you--

SYDNEY

Listen, Lucinda, it's all under
control.

CONNY

(arm around Sydney)
Yeah. The bottom line is: We're
still very much in the Kansas City
Ballet.

SYDNEY

And our commitment is still
stronger than a good ninety-six-
hour antiperspirant.

Robert flashes an I-told-you-so look as Darin eyeballs
Lucinda and Beata.

DARIN

You know...Sydney and Conny are
always the last to leave.

Lucinda looks smug.

DARIN (CONT'D)

Right here. The Todd Bolender
Center.

SYDNEY

And another thing, Lucinda...and
Beata: We're gonna win that Battle
of the Blues Bands over at
Victoria's.

Conny gives Beata a cross look.

CONNY

Until then...we're gonna nail
"Cinderella."

Robert turns to a still-skeptical Beata.

ROBERT
Good enough for me.

INT. AVA'S AND KATHLEEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

Ava sits at the old upright, where she continues to work on her "Sing a Song of Sixpence" blues tune.

Sydney does some drum fills, and Conny and Lynda Sue receive guitar pointers from Kathleen.

KATHLEEN
Good job, you two!

LYNDA SUE
Wail, thank you kindly.

Conny nods.

KATHLEEN
Keep it up, and you two'll be able to give your guitars first names...just like B.B. King did with his guitar.

LYNDA SUE
Conny...what'd Stephen tail you and Sydney over at the Bolender Center?

CONNY
Bottom line is: If we win the battle of the bands, we get to quit dancing. If not, we've gotta keep dancing.

Kathleen and Lynda Sue AD LIB their understanding.

CONNY (CONT'D)
Don't worry, you two! Sydney and I are still gonna give the same all-out effort as Nutcrackers as we give in the KCB.

Lynda Sue and Kathleen applaud...and draw attention from Sydney and Ava, who stop the music.

SYDNEY
Who won the Missouri Lottery?

CONNRY

Nobody I know of, Sydney. I was just telling Lynda Sue and Kathleen that you and I are still all in as Nutcrackers...and still all in as dancers.

Now Ava and Sydney clap.

AVA

(to Sydney)

I was gonna ask you about that.

SYDNEY

Ava, you know we'd like to do both...but Stephen gave us this ultimatum. He thinks we've become distractions.

Conny gestures her disagreement with Stephen's notion.

AVA

Hey, everybody...whaddya think about this for a second verse?

Ava sings and plays her song's second verse:

AVA (CONT'D)

Georgie Porgie, / Pudding and pie, / Kissed the boys and / Made 'em cry--

KATHLEEN

Wait a minute!

Now Ava stops her own music.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

Georgie Porgie was a boy. Remember?

SYDNEY

Kathleen, haven't you heard of Georgie Henley?

Kathleen looks dumbfounded.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

She's an actor...a female actor from England.

LYNDA SUE

(snapping her fingers)

Yeah! Ah saw her in a Disney movie.

Sydney, Conny, Ava, and Kathleen nod.

LYNDA SUE (CONT'D)

Georgie Henley was so good with a bow and arrow...in fact, she was so good with a bow and arrow that mah husband's private parts stood up and took notice.

Kathleen's mouth flies open.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

Kansas City Ballet's thirty dancers, Stephen, and troupe executive director RUSSELL CHANDLER (70s) sit in chairs across from TWENTY (OR SO) MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS.

The students and A TEACHER sit in chairs, too. In fact, the two groups might form a circle or an ellipse.

Russell holds a cordless mike.

RUSSELL

(into mike)

So if everything does work out, our dancers will dance on the top of the dugouts at Kauffman Stadium later this year.

Cordless mike in her hands, KASSIDEE CHAMBERLAIN (13) beams in her seat.

KASSIDEE

(into mike)

During the seventh-inning stretch at a Royals game?

RUSSELL

During the seventh-inning stretch at a Royals game...and before the first pitch, too.

(with a huge smile)

Great question, Kassidee!

KASSIDEE

Thanks, Mr. Chand...I mean Russell!

The place erupts in applause.

STEPHEN

(into his own mike)

Any of you students got any other questions?

FAIRUZA LANE (14) raises her hand...and Kassidee hands her the mike.

FAIRUZA
Fairuza Lane...I'm fourteen. This question is for Conny...and Sydney.

Sydney and Conny field stares from everyone else in the room.

Russell gives his mike to Sydney...Stephen passes his own mike to Conny.

FAIRUZA (CONT'D)
Is it true that you're thinking about quitting the Kansas City Ballet?

Fairuza's question draws AD LIBBED buzz.

CONNY
(into mike)
Hoo boy...that one.

SYDNEY
(into own mike)
Actually, we're not quitting the Kansas City Ballet.

Savannah and Robert high-five each other while some in the two groups breathe out relief.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
Conny and I branched out and formed a blues band...we just wanted to be able to have something to fall back on when we can't dance professionally anymore.

CONNY
Fairuza, I remember reading about a dancer who'd retired from her ballet company.

Some heads nod.

CONNY (CONT'D)
She was famous for her role in "Swan Lake." Well, she went back to see her old company dance "Swan Lake."

SYDNEY

And when she saw her replacement dance that same role in "Swan Lake," she broke down and cried. In the audience.

Conny nods at Sydney, then turns to Fairuza.

CONNYP

Sydney and I just didn't wanna be the ex-dancer who broke down and cried watching her replacement.

SYDNEY

That ex-dancer had nothing to fall back on.

FAIRUZA

Thanks! Works for me!

All the students clap...and most of the adults applaud.
(Beata and Lucinda cast looks of doubt.)

LADY HOLMAN (13, Black) raises her hand...and receives the mike from Fairuza.

LADY

(to Fairuza)

Thanks.

(into mike)

My name's Lady Holman...and I'm thirteen. And Sydney...I've got a question for you.

SYDNEY

Okay!

LADY

If you didn't write in a blog that you were quitting the Kansas City Ballet, who did?

With the studio abuzz, Sydney shrugs at Lady while Conny eyeballs Lucinda and Beata.

LADY (CONT'D)

Sydney...I saw you dancing on TV...ballet, not hip-hop...I looked up to you!

Sydney blows an imaginary bubble.

EXT. VICTORIA'S BAR AND GRILL, LIBERTY, MO - NIGHT

Pierre and wife SYLVIE LAFITTE (30s) stroll toward the place.

PIERRE

Sylvie, hon, you'll really love
this restaurant. It's where the
Nutcrackers have been playing
lately.

SYLVIE

Don't you mean "The Nutcracker?"
And didn't they just have it at the
Kauffman Center?

PIERRE

No! This is a blues band two of our
KCB dancers formed. They'll play
your socks off, I'll tell you that.
I'm a first-hand witness.

When the Lafittes reach the front entrance, Pierre holds the door for Sylvie...and in seconds, Lady, Kassidee, Fairuza, and THEIR PARENTS hurry through the open door.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

That funny, rinky-tinky, honky-tonky piano sound is back!

A PACKED HOUSE watches the Nutcrackers pull a gender switch on Muddy Waters' "I'm Your Hoochie Coochie Man."

In this version, Sydney plays Victoria's tacked-up-again upright, Ava's on bass guitar, Conny bangs drums, and Lynda Sue strums rhythm guitar.

Plus: Kathleen (neckworn harmonica holder and all) does triple duty on lead guitar, mouth harp, and vocals.

KATHLEEN

*Don't you know I'm here?/Everybody
knows I'm here./Well, you know I'm
the hoochie coochie
woman./Everybody knows I'm here.*

In the seating by the bar, Pierre looks ecstatic...but Sylvie looks shocked.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)

*In the seventh hour,/On the seventh
day,/On the seventh month,/The
seventh doctor say:/"She was born
for good luck,/And that you see."*

Right in front of the stage, Antoine and Aisha clap to the beat...and Kathi, Geoff, Crystal, and Bernard follow suit.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
*I've got seven thousand
dollars./Don't you mess with me.*

While Valerie's mouth flies open, Bill smiles as the Williamsons watch in front of the stage.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
*But you know I'm here./Everybody
knows I'm here./Well, you know I'm
your hoochie coochie
woman./Everybody knows I'm here.*

Two driving bars from the band end the song and bring on the audience's applause.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
(to the audience)
Thanks so much, everybody!

Valerie points to her husband.

VALERIE
Bill...she said "seven thousand
dollars!" It's supposed to be
"seven hundred--"

BILL
Relax, Val. Kathleen was just
adjusting for inflation.

Bill observes his wife's dumbfounded expression.

Onstage, Ava sets her bass guitar aside and pulls a violin and bow from their case. Conny leaves the drums and straps on her V-neck guitar.

Kathleen puts her own guitar aside to grab a bass fiddle, then takes her harmonica holder off.

Sydney addresses the crowd from the piano-side mike...

SYDNEY
Our next one's gonna feature Ava on
an instrument she played when she
was in her teens.

...then leaves the piano for a seat at the drums.

Lynda Sue, who sets her own guitar aside, completes the shift by going to the piano.

LYNDA SUE
 (into piano mike)
 Hey, everybody...how'd y'all like
 to hear some Clarence "Gatemouth"
 Brown?

Led by Aisha, Antoine, Bill, Jaquan, Tiffany, and Valerie, half the crowd claps.

At the bar itself, Russell applauds, Kelsee nods, and...Stephen looks dumbfounded.

KELSEE
 Russell...you really like the
 blues, don't you?

When Ava slides her bow across her violin's strings, the Nutcrackers take off on "Just Before Dawn."

RUSSELL
 You bet. And I remember when
 "Gatemouth" Brown played alongside
 Roy Clark.

STEPHEN
 He...did?

What unfolds onstage is a bouncing, loping sixty-bar showcase for Ava. Underneath Ava's playing, Sydney's drums and Kathleen's bass fiddle keep it right dead on the beat.

Conny just strums away.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)
 Roy Clark...from "Hee Haw?"

Russell nods at his company's artistic director.

Elsewhere in the seating by the bar, Fairuza, Kassidee, and Lady watch the Nutcrackers closely...and try to eat at the same time.

During the tune's first twenty-four bars, Lynda Sue's piano playing stays in the background...but afterwards, her ivory tickling becomes more prominent.

Sylvie turns to Pierre.

SYLVIE

Those are thumb tacks in the piano.
Didn't you say they'd ruin the
hammers on the piano?

PIERRE

Not as long as Sydney and Conny and
Ava and Lynda Sue and Kathleen take
'em out at the end of the show.

SYLVIE

How are all five going to do that?

PIERRE

They will.

While violin stays in "Just Before Dawn's" foreground, piano
fights its way into second place.

In seats by the stage, Gianna and Nolan look captivated.

Twelve bars from the end, most of the folks clap to the beat.

The Nutcrackers slow the tune's final two bars down...and set
off grateful applause.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

The show's over, and as many Nutcrackers as possible remove
the thumb tacks from the old piano's hammers.

Bernard, Bill, Crystal, and Valerie watch.

BILL

(to the Nutcrackers)
Great job tonight!

AVA

Thanks, Bill!

BILL

You know, Valerie, seven hundred
dollars don't buy as much today as
it did in 1954...when Muddy Waters
came out with "Hoochie Coochie
Man."

Valerie nods while customers stroll toward the exits.

Russell, Stephen, and Kelsee walk away, arm in arm.

RUSSELL

You know, Stephen...maybe you shouldn't have told Sydney and Conny they'd have to quit the Kansas City Ballet if they won the battle of the bands here.

KELSEE

(nods at Russell)

That's what I've been trying to tell Stephen! I mean, those two women keep proving they can handle both worlds.

Stephen draws a blank look.

KELSEE (CONT'D)

Would you tell Kevin Bacon and Kevin Costner to stick to their day jobs and give up music?

STEPHEN

Kelsee...don't go there...

KELSEE

Speak for yourself, dear.

The five blueswomen finish removing the tacks from the piano.

KATHLEEN

There...the piano gods can rest again.

Sydney and Crystal laugh.

BERNARD

You know, Sydney...I see what you mean about using thumb tacks.

SYDNEY

You know Conny and me.

(drapes arm around Conny)

We just love that dirty, funky, tinny, honky-tonky sound.

Conny shakes her head "yes."

CRYSTAL

Next time you two stop by the store, we've got a mandolin rail for you.

Sydney's and Conny's eyes light up.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)
So you can stick it inside the
piano here at Victoria's.

BERNARD
And you can shove paper clips into
the mandolin rail.

CONNY
(to Crystal)
If you've got three mandolin rails,
you've got a deal.

Kathleen points to Crystal, Conny, and Bernard.

KATHLEEN
Do you have to call it a mandolin
rail? I play the mandolin, you
know.

Lynda Sue drapes her arm around Kathleen.

EXT. KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, KANSAS CITY, MO
- NIGHT

PEOPLE file into the building on this March night.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER - NIGHT

Toward the front, Fairuza, Kassidee, Lady, and their folks
sit in anticipation of "Cinderella."

LADY
(to her two buddies)
I think what Sydney and Conny are
doing is totally all that.

KASSIDEE
Huh?

FAIRUZA
Kassidee...how many ballerinas
you've heard of can sing up a storm
and play piano like a boss?

Kassidee smirks.

LADY
Like a blues boss, at that?

In the back, Freddie and Willie Ray try to reassure Floyd.

FLOYD
 (points toward stage)
 I'd feel better about this if we
 were spying on those two dancers.

WILLIE RAY
 Floyd, man, dig yourself.

FREDDIE
 (pointing to Floyd)
 Now you know Conny and Sydney got a
 whole other thing besides throwin'
 down the blues.

Freddie catches Floyd's frown.

FREDDIE (CONT'D)
 Their whole other thing put 'em on
 the map in the first place...and
 there ain't nothin' wrong with
 supportin' that.

Willie Ray nods at his dad, then turns to Floyd.

WILLIE RAY
 See that? It's all good...so let's
 just all sit back and give 'em
 their props.

Floyd's nod is a slow one.

SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

Nathan and Kyle carry a coffin as they lead a procession of
 at least half the KCB troupe.

Savannah plays the title character...who grieves in front of
 a tombstone labeled "FATHER."

Svetlana dances as Cinderella's stepmom while Beata and
 Lucinda portray the two stepsisters.

Darin, Beata, Jaquan, Lucinda, Juan, and Svetlana twirl away.

Now Svetlana hands Savannah a broom.

Savannah twirls herself to the floor.

KCB's youngest hooper meets her fairy godmother...Sydney.

No longer in rags, Savannah dances like...a boss!

With Tiffany out front, nine of the company's fifteen female dancers step lively.

It's Act Two...and Robert emerges as Prince Charming.

He and Savannah cut a rug at the ball.

Yep...Savannah loses her glass slipper.

In a pants role, Conny joins Robert in examining the shoe.

Nope...it doesn't fit Lucinda or Beata...or Svetlana.

Everybody finds that the shoe sure fits Savannah.

The two youngest KCB dancers hook up once more...in triumph.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER - NIGHT

The crowd gives the Kansas City Ballet lusty, heartfelt applause that evolves into...a standing ovation.

Willie Ray and Freddie rise up...eventually, Floyd does, too.

ROBERT'S DAD, FIVE BROTHERS, AND THREE SISTERS join in the ovation. What's more, they even trade high fives.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER BACKSTAGE - NIGHT

Carlos, Russell, and Stephen look ecstatic as they eyeball the thirty celebrating dancers.

RUSSELL

That's it, everybody! Way to go!

CARLOS

You dancers took "Cinderella's" ten-night run out in style! Give yourselves a hand!

Savannah, Robert, and Co. congratulate each other.

STEPHEN

It's like we keep saying: "It Takes All of Us!" And you proved it out there tonight!

More whooping and hollering from the throng...but when it all dies down:

SYDNEY

Everybody...let's hear it for our two leads: Savannah Kiely-Dalton as Cinderella...and Robert Slotky as Prince Charming!

The applause kicks back in.

CONNY

As long as Robert and Savannah keep dancing like that...and they will...you're gonna keep hearing their names for years to come!

Savannah and Robert blush as the kudos continue...and as Sydney and Conny approach the two young dancers.

But Conny's knees buckle...she falls to the floor.

Sydney, a few feet short of Robert and Savannah, sprains an ankle...and descends to the floor.

A hush falls over the Kauffman backstage...for a few seconds.

Jaquan, Robert, Savannah, and Tiffany rush over to the prone twosome to offer help.

Beata and Lucinda rush over to the six hoofers. The latter points at Conny and Sydney.

LUCINDA

See? That's what you get for moonlighting--

BEATA

This didn't have to happen.

Jaquan glares at Lucinda and Beata.

JAQUAN

This isn't the time.

LUCINDA

You can say that again, Jaquan.

Tiffany tries to gesture Beata and her killjoy friend away.

TIFFANY

Why don't y'all just back off?

While Lucinda and Beata stand rigid, Stephen shrugs wildly as he paces the floor.

TIFFANY (CONT'D)
 Way off...like all the way to Dodge
 City!

Beata and Lucinda back off...and Carlos and Russell try to
 calm Stephen down.

It's a losing fight for Russell and Carlos.

JUAN
 (rushing to Stephen)
 May I use your phone?

STEPHEN
 (still pacing the floor)
 Where's yours, Juan?

JUAN
 It's in my bag in my locker.

Russell hands his own cell phone to Juan.

JUAN (CONT'D)
 Thanks, Russell.

As Juan punches 9-1-1, Russell nods.

JUAN (CONT'D)
 (into phone)
 Please send paramedics to the
 Kauffman Center...no, not Kauffman
 Stadium. The Kauffman Center for
 the Performing Arts...two Kansas
 City Ballet dancers are injured
 backstage and need help...

Some dancers crowd around Juan.

JUAN (CONT'D)
 Yes...I know Kauffman's a huge name
 here in Kansas City...

Tiffany, Savannah, Robert, and Jaquan continue to look after
 Sydney and Conny. Now Darin and Svetlana join the group.

EXT. SAINT LUKE'S HOSPITAL OF KANSAS CITY - DAY

This is a modern, medium-rise facility in Kansas City's
 Midtown Westport area.

INT. SAINT LUKE'S EXAM ROOM - DAY

Conny and Sydney (both in gowns) sit up on the same gurney while their doctor, LAUREEN KUMAGAI (50s), briefs them.

LAUREEN

So...you two play in a blues band at Victoria's Bar and Grill out in Liberty when you're not dancing.

SYDNEY

We sure do, Dr. Kumagai. The place was named after a woman who accompanied silent movies back in the 1920s.

Laureen shakes her head "yes."

CONNY

They've even got the piano she played on at the theater she worked at...anyway, our band's called the Nutcrackers.

LAUREEN

I want to go over there one of these days and check out your band.

The two blues-playing dancers smile as Laureen checks her clipboard.

Laureen turns to Sydney and Conny.

LAUREEN (CONT'D)

First of all, we've got to get you two healed up.

SYDNEY

That's for sure. Why should Conny and I let two groups down?

LAUREEN

(chuckling)

Sydney...ankle sprains are common among ballet dancers, especially female ones. But you can treat your sprain at home.

SYDNEY

Good!

LAUREEN

Soon as you get home, apply ice to the sprain every twenty to thirty minutes, three or four times a day. Then for the next few days, apply ice every three to four hours.

Sydney nods.

LAUREEN (CONT'D)

And stay off the ankle until the pain subsides.

The two housemates bump fists.

LAUREEN (CONT'D)

Conny...when you fell last night, both of your knees twisted themselves out of position.

CONNY

I hate when that happens.

LAUREEN

Sit on a high-enough surface and swing your legs. That's how you can handle a minor meniscal tear.

CONNY

That's it, Dr. Kumagai! I'm gonna buy an old-fashioned swivel-top piano stool!

LAUREEN

That'll work! It'll help you reboot both knees!

Fist bumps again for Conny and Sydney.

LAUREEN (CONT'D)

Sydney and Conny, you both lucked out.

The woman from New York City smiles at the one from Brampton.

LAUREEN (CONT'D)

Just be careful, you two. Take it easy and let your injuries heal. You're both lucky you didn't break any bones.

Laureen helps Conny climb off the gurney.

CONNY
Thanks...we'll be careful.

Now Lauren aids Sydney as the latter tries to stand up.

SYDNEY
(eyeballing Lauren)
Did you hear about how Bill and
Valerie Williamson got involved
with owning Victoria's?

A big smile fills Lauren's face.

INT. HALLWAY OUTSIDE SAINT LUKE'S EXAM ROOM - DAY

Greta and Hans help Sydney and Conny (now in their street
clothes) get around.

CONNY
Thanks so much, Hans and Greta, for
doing this.

HANS
Hey...what are neighbors for?

SYDNEY
Anyway, while Conny and I were in
the exam room, I did a lot of
thinking.

GRETA
Sydney, I can understand.

SYDNEY
I got to thinking: "How much would
this hospital visit cost if we had
Canada's health-care system instead
of the one we've got here in the
United States?"

Greta's mouth flies open...Hans and Conny offer knowing nods.

CONNY
(pointing to Sydney)
You know...I'll bet Alex Trebek
wondered that, too.

Greta points to Conny as the three women and one man walk on.

CONNY (CONT'D)
And John Candy. And Peter Jennings.
And Morley Safer. And Art
Linkletter. And Margot Kidder.

CONNY (CONT'D)

And Lorne Greene. And Jay
Silverheels. And Glenn Ford. And
Paul Winchell. And Yvonne De Carlo.

Hans and Sydney laugh.

CONNY (CONT'D)

And don't forget Raymond Burr and
Gisele MacKenzie, for crying out
loud.

GRETA

Stop! You're talking about all the
stars I loved watching on TV when I
was growing up!

Now all four break out in laughter.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

Carlos and Stephen find it tough to bone up for the season's
final Kansas City Ballet production with just a twenty-eight-
member company.

CARLOS

Everybody...I think we're still
gonna have a ball with this
one...George Balanchine's "Jewels."

STEPHEN

Well, Carlos, I figured you'd say
that. Your choreography for
"Jewels" won out over mine.

Some dancers laugh.

CARLOS

It'd work out much better if Conny
and Sydney were here.

Nathan nods as he eyeballs Carlos.

NATHAN

When are they coming back?

Nathan's question triggers AD LIBS from his fellow hoofers.

SVETLANA

They'll be back in due time,
Nathan. Their injuries must heal
first.

NATHAN

That's good enough for me,
Svetlana.

Kyle walks over to Nathan's side.

KYLE

In the meantime, it's next man
up...I mean next woman up...I mean
next dancer up.

Stephen snaps his fingers, then spots Pierre...who sits
behind the electronic keyboard.

STEPHEN

Hey...if Carlos fills in for
Sydney, would you like to fill in
for Conny?

Pierre gives Stephen a dumbfounded look.

PIERRE

I told you guys I just don't look
good in tights!

As most of the hoofers laugh, Stephen shrugs.

EXT. LYNDA SUE'S AND TITO'S HOUSE - DAY

It's a modest-looking house not far from Swope Park.

INT. LYNDA SUE'S AND TITO'S BASEMENT - DAY

Ava tries out some drum fills in this cozy, well-lived-in
spot. Kathleen and Lynda Sue watch from the bench of a 1900-
29 upright piano. Tito gazes from a lounge chair.

Right now, Kathleen's the only dumbfounded one of the bunch.

TITO

Ava, you never cease to amaze.

AVA

Well...thanks, Tito.

Ava ends her exhibition with a few cymbal crashes.

TITO

You're one of the best dance
instructors in UMKC history...and
you still find time to jam like a
one-woman band. How do you do it?

KATHLEEN
Never mind that.

Kathleen points to the drums, then to Ava.

KATHLEEN (CONT'D)
How'd you get that drum set of
yours into this cozy little
basement?

LYNDA SUE
Just be glad she did it, Kathleen.

Lynda Sue, Tito, and Ava catch Kathleen's slow nod.

AVA
Well, I've always figured I could
fall back on music if I couldn't
dance or teach others to dance
anymore.

TITO
That makes all kinds of sense.

AVA
I remember my parents and me moving
from my birth city of Detroit to
Chicago when I was ten so that my
dad could get more jazz gigs...he
played tenor sax.

LYNDA SUE
Ava...aren't you gonna talk about
the idea you had when you brought
your drums down here?

AVA
(with a grin)
I figured we could go into the
Battle of the Blues Bands as a trio
if Sydney and Conny couldn't
recover from their injuries.

Ava receives three stunned looks.

AVA (CONT'D)
We could do it. Kathleen, you can
play bass...and Lynda Sue, your
guitar playing's coming along
great.

KATHLEEN

Ava...you know, I know, we all know...we sound better with Sydney and Conny in there than without 'em.

AVA

Oh, boy...that's right.

LYNDA SUE

(snaps her fingers)

Wail...there goes our chance to be a tribute band for Saffire, the Uppity Blues Women.

MONTAGE SEQUENCE

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S BASEMENT - DAY

Sydney applies ice to her sprained ankle...while Conny swivels on a newly-purchased old-fashioned piano stool, where she crosses her legs.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

Stephen swallows hard as he tries to dance Conny's part in "Jewels;" Carlos substitutes for Sydney...all to give the troupe thirty hoofers.

INT. AVA'S AND KATHLEEN'S BASEMENT - DAY

Kathleen uses MIDI technology to make an electronic keyboard fill in for Conny and Sydney...so that she, Ava, and Lynda Sue can play in a five-instrument situation again.

INT. CONNY'S AND SYDNEY'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Conny whittles blocks of wood into cute shapes while flexing her knees...Sydney exercises legs that regain strength.

EXT. SWOPE PARK - DAY

KCB's two blues-playing members jog through the park.

At the end of the run, they high-five it.

INT. SAINT LUKE'S EXAM ROOM - DAY

Sydney and Conny check back with Laureen in triumph.

INT. STUDIO #1 AT TODD BOLENDER CENTER - DAY

Conny and Sydney stroll into the studio and set off cheers from all but one of the remaining dancers.

While Lucinda stands off to the side in a "so what?" stance, Beata...not only is the first to greet the twosome, she...hugs them!

END MONTAGE

EXT. AMERICAN JAZZ MUSEUM - DAY

A modern, colorful-looking structure in Kaycee's historic 18th and Vine Jazz District.

INT. AMERICAN JAZZ MUSEUM BLUE ROOM - DAY

Instruments by their side, Ava, Conny, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, and Sydney look awestruck as they stand onstage in this intimate, track-lighted space that features a mural.

SYDNEY

Ava...way to go! Thanks for scoring the Blue Room for us!

AVA

You're welcome...as long as we're out of here by six thirty tonight, we can rehearse here.

KATHLEEN

Even though we're a blues band...here in the American Jazz Museum.

CONNY

(looking at her watch)
It's twelve o'clock noon...we just ate, so we've got plenty of time to practice.

LYNDA SUE

And we're gonna need every sangle second of it.

Lynda Sue's colleagues laugh.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

Conny sits behind the drums, Ava takes a seat at a grand piano, and Sydney stands out front with her harmonica.

Kathleen grabs her guitar and Lynda Sue goes to an organ.

They've got a small audience...in Fairuza, Gianna, Kassidee, Lady, Nolan, and Tito.

CONNRY

(to the audience)

Thanks so much for coming!

NOLAN

You're welcome, Conny!

SYDNEY

You folks in the seats get to see us make sausage...and if it's edible, we'll be serving it up on May sixteenth at Victoria's.

Kassidee eyeballs Lady and Fairuza.

KASSIDEE

They make sausage, too?

FAIRUZA

Figure of speech.

LADY

Yeah.

LYNDA SUE

(to the crowd)

Tito, Ah know you know this...but for the rest of you, we've been working on this next song since last October.

Ava, Kathleen, Conny, and Sydney nod.

AVA

Hit it, Kathleen!

KATHLEEN

Okay! Here's "She Had to Die!"

Kathleen fires off her B.B. King-Albert King riffs; four slow, bluesy bars later, Lynda Sue chords away on organ. Ava's bell-like piano chords follow a few bars later.

Two more bars later, Conny hi-hats her way into the song...and Sydney's harmonica takes the lead for two bars.

AVA
 (singing)
*Sing a song of sixpence,/A
 pocketful of rye;/Four-and-twenty
 blackbirds/Baked into a pie./She's
 been seeing my man/With no good
 reason why./That no-good, lying,
 cheating/Woman had to die.*

Gianna turns to Nolan.

GIANNA
 They don't mess around.

A grinning Nolan nods.

EXT. KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS - NIGHT

At last, it looks like spring...as PEOPLE in lighter jackets file inside the place.

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER - NIGHT

A CAPACITY CROWD anticipates the KCB version of "Jewels."

SERIES OF SHOTS

INT. MURIEL KAUFFMAN THEATER STAGE - NIGHT

The first segment, "Emeralds," features Sydney and Darin out front, KCB's other fourteen female dancers behind them, and a green background.

Darin leaves the stage for a few moments...and the women have the planks to themselves.

When he comes back, he chases Sydney through the circle the other women have formed.

Now the segment thins down to Kyle, Svetlana, and Tiffany...who leap and twirl away.

It's Jaquan's and Conny's turn to twirl, sway, and leap.

Lucinda and Nathan make a third mixed team; they dance out front alongside the twosomes of Kyle and Tiffany and of Darin and Sydney.

In the second segment, "Rubies," Savannah and Robert bring back their "Cinderella" magic as the stage changes to red.

He's got the floor to himself...then she takes the solo spot.

Now it's "Diamonds," the final segment...and with a white background, Beata and Juan dance front and center as the rest of the company performs behind them.

END SERIES OF SHOTS

EXT. VICTORIA'S BAR AND GRILL, LIBERTY, MO - NIGHT

The parking lot slowly fills up.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

The Battle of the Blues Bands is just under way...and CUSTOMERS OF ALMOST ALL AGES occupy half the seats.

Valerie and Bill sit at the tables alongside the stage, where Freddie and his guitar wring out a slow, powerful instrumental while drummer Willie Ray and bassist Floyd keep the beat pulsing.

BILL

Freddie's still got it.

Bill looks excited...Valerie looks disappointed.

VALERIE

Bill, I was hoping more bands would show up tonight...maybe it was the size of our stage that turned 'em off.

BILL

I don't know about that, Val. I mean, the Nutcrackers make it work.

VALERIE

I just hope the Nutcrackers use a good, strong ninety-six-hour antiperspirant.

As he continues to play, Freddie inches closer to an audience that includes Antoine and an equally-appreciative Aisha.

At the tables by the bar, Tito, Lynda Sue, Ava, and Kathleen watch the Freddie Johnson Band...and wait for Sydney and Conny to show up.

KATHLEEN

Do you think they had a flat tire?

TITO

Kathleen...Sydney and Conny are two of the most meticulous people any of us have ever met.

Lynda Sue and Ava AD LIB their agreement with Tito.

EXT. KAUFFMAN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS, KANSAS CITY, MO
- NIGHT

Gym bags and all, Conny and Sydney (still in their "Jewels" costumes) sprint away from the building and toward the parking lot.

Stephen sprints after them.

STEPHEN

Wait a minute! Was it something I said?

CONNY

No, Stephen! It's all good!

SYDNEY

We've gotta be at Victoria's! Right now!

It's an "ah-hah" moment for Stephen, who walks back to the Kauffman Center.

Sydney and Conny reach the latter's 2015 Kia Sedona minivan...a vehicle that's already loaded down with a drum set, Sydney's trombone case, and Conny's guitar case.

KCB's two blueswomen throw their bags in the minivan, then jump in...Conny behind the wheel and Sydney riding shotgun.

INT. KIA VAN - NIGHT

Sydney and Conny fasten their seat belts. The two women eyeball each other.

SYDNEY

We don't smoke, so that shoots down the "we've got a half a pack of cigarettes" concept.

CONNY

But we've got a full tank of gas.
(starts van)
Let's roll!

Conny's minivan barrels out of the parking lot.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

Freddie's, Floyd's, and Willie Ray's set nears its end...and Valerie and Bill approach Lynda Sue, Kathleen, and Ava.

VALERIE

Where's Conny and Sydney?

AVA

Don't worry, Valerie. I'll call 'em. I'm sure they're on their way.

VALERIE

You do that, Ava. 'Cause if they don't show up in fifteen minutes...you forfeit.

Kathleen's and Lynda Sue's mouths fly open.

So does Bill's!

EXT. INTERSTATES 29 AND 35, KANSAS CITY, MO - NIGHT

Conny's Kia Sedona passes vehicle after vehicle after vehicle as the two remaining Nutcrackers fight to reach Liberty.

INT. KIA VAN - NIGHT

Sydney pulls out her cell phone.

SYDNEY

Conny, I'm gonna text Bill...he's got a calmer mind than Valerie.

CONNIE

Good point, Sydney.

SYDNEY

Good thing you're driving...because if I were behind the wheel tonight and had to speed to reach this deadline, they'd put me in jail faster than you can say "Andy Reid won a Super Bowl."

Sydney punches in Bill's phone number to text him.

INT. VICTORIA'S BARROOM - NIGHT

No music rings out in this space that adds MORE CUSTOMERS.

As Freddie's band packs up, Lauren gabs with Ava, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, and Tito at the tables by the bar.

LAUREEN

You're a couple of very fascinating couples.

Kathleen and Ava lock arms and flash grins.

LYNDA SUE

It's just like Ah keep tailing people, Laureen: Ah'm a lineperson for Every...and Tito's the office manager at our church.

KATHLEEN

Not the other way around.

LYNDA SUE

Ever since Ah was little back home in Frisco, Texas, Ah've always loved climbing trees.

Bill and Valerie hurry toward the five-person group.

VALERIE

Five minutes.

While Bill grins, Conny and Sydney (instrument cases and all) sprint into the barroom and spot their bandmates.

Valerie breathes relief...and Bill's grin becomes a smile.

Kathleen notices Sydney's and Conny's "Jewels" costumes.

SYDNEY

Sorry about that. We didn't have time to change from classy to sassy.

CONNY

And besides, George Balanchine's "Jewels" ran overtime tonight.

BILL

It's all right! We're just glad you made it!

Willie Ray spots the group at the bar tables, then turns to Freddie and Floyd.

WILLIE RAY

You guys, I'm putting my drum set back together.

FLOYD
Willie Ray--

FREDDIE
Everything's runnin' late, Floyd.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

Kathleen (with her guitar) and Ava (with her bass guitar) stand out front...Sydney (harmonica holder around her neck) sits at the B-3 organ from earlier.

While Conny sits at Willie Ray's drum set, Lynda Sue sits at the old upright...whose hammers stand exposed and don't feature thumb tacks.

SYDNEY
One! One! A-one, two, three, four!

The Nutcrackers fire off a harmonica-driven eight-bar intro to a barnburner, Koko Taylor's "Fire."

Now the vocals kick in:

AVA, CONNY, KATHLEEN, LYNDA SUE,
SYDNEY
Fire!/Fire!

SYDNEY
*Fire in my baby's heart./It has set
my soul aflame.*

Aisha, Antoine, Geoff, Greta, Hans, Kathi, Lauren, and Tito sit in front of the stage...and all sixteen eyes light up.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)
*A-when he holds my hand,/My heart
can't beat./A-when I open my
mouth,/You know my lips can't
speak./Every time he looks me in my
eyes,/My heart, it melts because my
soul's on fire.*

Nolan and Gianna high-five each other...and Bernard and Crystal clap to the torrid beat.

AVA, CONNY, KATHLEEN, LYNDA SUE,
SYDNEY
Fire!/Fire!

SYDNEY
*Fire in my baby's heart./You know
it's set my soul aflame.*

Valerie looks fired up again as she and Bill sit at one of the tables by the stage.

SYDNEY (CONT'D)

He makes my liver quiver./He makes my head go dead./He makes my body shiver./He makes my eyes turn red./His love for me is much too strong./It freezes the marrow in my bones.

ANTOINE

WHOA!!

As many spectator eyes as possible turn to Antoine.

AVA, CONNY, KATHLEEN, LYNDA SUE,
SYDNEY

Fire!/Fire!

SYDNEY

Fire in my baby's heart./It done set my soul aflame.

While she chords away on organ, Sydney launches a sixteen-bar harmonica solo in this stormin', kickin' number.

Both Bill and Valerie flash wide smiles.

BILL

I told you so! I told you they'd make it!

Bill shows Sydney's text message to an openmouthed Valerie.

SAME SCENE - A BIT LATER

The Nutcrackers bring their set's last number, a tweaked, better-delineated "She Had to Die," to an end.

This time, Sydney plays both drums and harmonica while Conny now handles rhythm guitar...and turns Kathleen into the song's lead guitarist.

Ava still plays piano and Lynda Sue stays on organ...where the latter's pedaling does what a bass would've handled.

Victoria's customers look spellbound.

Those customers now include Tiffany, Svetlana, Savannah, Robert, Nathan, Kyle, Juan, Jaquan, Darin, and...Beata.

Sylvie, Russell, Pierre, Kelsee, and Carlos sit among the other spectators, too.

So do Lady, Kassidee, Fairuza, and their parents.

AVA

(singing)

All the king's horses/And all the king's men/Couldn't put our love/Back together again./I caught him with another./He up and made me cry./Since he did that to me,/He sure 'nough had to die.

Some spectators clap to the beat of this slow, pulsing, pounding confession.

AVA (CONT'D)

I didn't want nothing, nothing/To come between us./I just wanted a man, a man/To share his and my stuff./You mess with my man, you know/You're gonna have to die./And if you mess with our thing,/It's bye, bye, bye.

Two more pounding, pulsing bars...then the instrumentation drops out, leaving Ava to sing a cappella:

AVA (CONT'D)

Sing a song of sixpence,/A pocketful of rye;/Four-and-twenty blackbirds/Baked into a pie.

The barroom explodes in heartfelt applause.

During it, Stephen sprints into the barroom.

STEPHEN

WHO WON?

Bill and Valerie head for the stage; they eyeball Stephen.

BILL

We're getting ready to tell you, Stephen!

Stephen nods as he heads for a seat next to Kelsee.

The venue's owners grab a mike each and talk to the crowd.

VALERIE

Let's hear it for the Nutcrackers!

The clapping kicks back in...but when it dies:

BILL

All right, everybody...this is it.
You folks out in the audience are
the people who're gonna decide
which of these two bands gets to
have a one-week-long gig here.

VALERIE

That's August twenty-second to
August twenty-eighth.

The Nutcrackers wave to the crowd before heading for the
tables by the barroom...where the Freddie Johnson Band waits.

BILL

So...tonight, we're gonna bring one
of our bartenders up to measure how
loud you're applauding.
(toward the bar)
Damian...you ready?

DAMIAN (20s) grabs a handheld digital sound meter, leaves his
place behind the bar, and...

DAMIAN

Bill, I'm coming!

...joins Valerie and Bill onstage.

VALERIE

Thanks, Damian.

Damian shakes his head "yes" as he turns the sound meter on.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

All right, audience...let's hear it
for...the Freddie Johnson Band!

Tremendous applause erupts as Damian measures it...but the
Chamberlains, Holmans, and Lanes look confused.

KASSIDEE

Who?

FAIRUZA

We missed 'em, Kass.

LADY

Yeah, Fairuza. The Freddie Johnson
Band.

Bill and Valerie eye Damian, who checks the sound meter.

DAMIAN
 (into Valerie's mike)
 Seventy eight point three decibels.

Floyd, Willie Ray, and Freddie nod.

BILL
 Okay, you folks out there...let's
 hear it for...the Nutcrackers!

That tremendous applause kicks back in...and Fairuza, Kassidee, and Lady whoop, holler, and scream away while Damian takes a noise measurement.

Damian looks at the meter, then turns to Bill.

DAMIAN
 (into Bill's mike)
 Seventy...eight...point...

Mouths open all over Victoria's barroom (especially those of the five blueswomen).

DAMIAN (CONT'D)
 Five decibels.

The applause kicks back in...even stronger.

Sydney, Conny, Lynda Sue, Kathleen, and Ava cheer themselves hoarse when Freddie, Willie Ray, and Floyd approach them.

VALERIE
 C'mon up, Nutcrackers!

LYNDA SUE
 We will, Valerie! Hang on!

The Freddie Johnson Band and the Nutcrackers high-five it.

FREDDIE
 (to the winners)
 Congratulations. Y'all lit up the
 place!

AVA
 Thanks, Freddie.

FREDDIE
 You five women got what ain't
 nobody else got in this whole wide
 world.

WILLIE RAY

Don't let 'em take it away from
you.

Floyd nods at the five women.

FLOYD

They're right...keep it real.

SYDNEY

We will!

Ava, Conny, Kathleen, Lynda Sue, and Sydney jog to the stage
to meet Valerie and Bill.

VALERIE

You Nutcrackers did it! You've just
earned yourselves the whole last
full week of August!
Congratulations!

Valerie points her mike at Sydney, who speaks into it.

SYDNEY

Thanks! It's an honor and a
privilege to be able to play
here...and we always look forward
to coming here to jam!

While the audience erupts in applause, Bill hands his mike to
Conny...and Damian leaves to put the sound meter away.

CONNY

(into mike)

We've learned a lot from all those
blues greats out there...especially
the Freddie Johnson Band. After
all, they've shown how the blues
really sounds here at Victoria's.

Conny gestures the crowd into clapping for Willie Ray,
Freddie, and Floyd. Her wish comes true.

Damian returns to the stage; this time, he holds a plastic
bubble mailer that bulges at the bottom.

KATHLEEN

(into Sydney's mike)

And...like they say...it always
helps when we try to be ourselves.

Conny points her mike at Damian. He talks into it.

DAMIAN

Our customers took up a free-will offering to give to the winning band.

Ava, Lynda Sue, and Kathleen look surprised.

DAMIAN (CONT'D)

Conny, Sydney, Ava, Kathleen, and Lynda Sue...you're five hundred dollars and eighteen cents richer tonight!

The audience explodes in applause as Damian hands the mailer to Conny...who grabs the mailer with her free hand.

CONNY

Thanks, Damian...thanks, audience.

Conny hands the mailer to Ava.

CONNY (CONT'D)

Ten of Sydney's and my fellow Kansas City Ballet dancers came here tonight...and Russell Chandler, the executive director, came here, too.

Valerie hands her mike to Sydney, who talks to the crowd.

SYDNEY

Stephen Skinner's here, too. He's KCB's artistic director...and we're grateful that you came here tonight.

CONNY

Sydney and I joined the Kansas City Ballet seven years ago...fresh out of UMKC.

SYDNEY

We've been through a lot these last seven years...most of it good. Darn good. Effing good.

Jaquan, Robert, Savannah, and Tiffany applaud.

CONNY

But back in January, Stephen called us into his office and told us: "Win the battle of the bands--"

A frantic Stephen waves his arms as he swerves, weaves, and dodges his way to the stage.

SYDNEY

Well...here's Stephen to tell us
what really went down!

Sydney and Conny pass their mikes to Stephen...who takes both mikes and speaks into them!

STEPHEN

Yes...they're right...I told Sydney
and Conny they both could retire
from ballet if the Nutcrackers won
tonight.

Some customers stare at each other in shock.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

Weren't they great?

Spectator shock becomes spectator applause.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

I also told Conny and Sydney they'd
have to stay in the Kansas City
Ballet if the Nutcrackers lost.

Beata nods.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

But they wanted to do both
things...play the blues and dance
ballet...and besides, Russell and
my wife Kelsee kept telling me the
ultimatum was a bad idea.

Tiffany, Robert, Savannah, and Jaquan shake their heads "yes"
in real enthusiasm.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

After all, would you tell Kevin
Bacon and Kevin Costner to give up
music and stick to acting?

Most spectators AD LIB their answer to Stephen's question.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

And another thing: Conny and Sydney
have been working with our two
youngest dancers...Savannah Kiely-
Dalton and Robert Slotky.

Some KCB eyeballs turn to Robert and Savannah.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

If you went to the Kauffman Center
a couple of months ago to see
"Cinderella," you saw Robert and
Savannah knock it out of the park!

About half the crowd cheers...and Savannah and Robert receive
high fives or fist bumps from fellow hoofers.

STEPHEN (CONT'D)

So...with all that rolling around
in my head...I've got no choice
except to say...the ultimatum is
canceled!

Cheers...hugs...high fives...fist bumps...Victoria's Bar and
Grill breaks out in pandemonium!

Stephen seeks out Bill and Valerie. He gives both microphones
back to the couple.

BILL

Let's hear it one more time for the
Nutcrackers, everybody!

Applause erupts again...and Aisha, Antoine, Hans, and Greta
hug each other.

GRETA

Antoine...Aisha...I hope they throw
the book at the men who killed
Jack.

ANTOINE

I hope they never, ever, EVER get
out of jail, Greta.

AISHA

Thanks...thank you so very much.

HANS

Hey...what in the world are
neighbors for?

It's a group hug for the Greens and the Pflaums.

Sydney and Conny leave the stage and spot Svetlana and
Savannah as some patrons head for the exits.

CONNY
Svetlana...you still wanna learn
how to play the piano?

SVETLANA
(with a slow nod)
Of course.

SYDNEY
Savannah, are you game?

Savannah looks out at Darin, Beata, and Robert.

BEATA
Why not?

ROBERT
Yeah, Savannah! Go for it!

Darin nods several times.

Lynda Sue, Kathleen, and Ava cast surprised looks as Sydney, Svetlana, Savannah, and Conny walk over to the piano.

CONNY
(gesturing)
Savannah...Svetlana...have a seat.

The woman from Wichita and the woman from Kyiv sit down at the old upright's bench.

SVETLANA
I can find middle C...and only
because I sat in on one of Igor's
lessons.

Sydney shakes her head "yes" while Svetlana hits middle C.

SYDNEY
Perfect!

Savannah finds (and hits) middle C...and then:

SAVANNAH
What happened to the thumb tacks?

AVA
Look inside the bench, Savannah!

Savannah and Svetlana rise up from the bench.

FREEZE FRAME when the twosome find...three packages of thumb tacks inside the piano's bench!

FADE OUT.

THE END