

AN AMERICAN EDUCATION

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COLD OPEN

FADE IN:

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - MORNING

Youthful English teacher ALFIE WICKERS enters Gerald R. Ford High School's yard, wearing a hoodie and a backpack, shielding his eyes from the San Diego sunshine. He navigates his way through STUDENTS, as they all file into school. He is shoved and pushed aside, like another student.

INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Alfie walks down the almost empty hall. The bell rings, he breaks into a run, then veers suddenly into the boys' bathroom, where he vomits into a wastebasket. He pops up, and sees a JANITOR changing a paper towel spool, glaring disapprovingly at him. Alfie grins sheepishly.

JANITOR

What grade are you in, son?

ALFIE

I'm a teacher.

INT. ALFIE'S CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Alfie's head is on his desk. On the blackboard behind him is scrawled: "AP Hangover" in kid's writing with an arrow pointing to Alfie. Some of the kids are asleep on desks as well, playing with iPhones, etc. Hard-assed vice principal RITA GOMEZ bursts into the class without knocking.

GOMEZ

Mr. Wickers!

ALFIE

(snapping awake)

And that is how quiet Anne Frank and her family had to be, day in day out, as the Nazis came stomping in...

(re: her shoes)

...in their black leather Ann Taylor boots... yes, Vice Principal Gomez?

She starts distributing print-outs.

GOMEZ

Starting next week, fifth period will no longer be a free period. It will now be a mandatory test prep class.

Amidst the groans, one student, RODNEY (socially challenged, a bit overweight), tentatively raises his hand.

RODNEY

Um, I'm sorry, Ms. Gomez, but what about music class? Fifth period is when I take music... sorry. Never mind. Whatever.

GOMEZ

Due to budget constraints, we will no longer be offering music instruction.

ALFIE

And we're offering up practice test detention instead? Who's the poor bastard stuck doing...

(off her smirk)

Oh, come on. I adamantly refuse. Unless there's extra pay. Is there?

GOMEZ

Wickers, my dad used to have a saying about weak people like you: "All fart and no crap." Well, when Rita Gomez farts, she follows through.

ALFIE

You must spend a fortune on underwear.

Gomez exits. Alfie puts his head back down on the desk.

END COLD OPEN

ACT ONE

INT. ALFIE'S CLASSROOM - CONTINUOUS

Alfie ponders his fate with his students: Rodney, ARIEL (white trashy), LISA (Asian posh girl), LANCE (contrarian, openly gay), JIMMY (African American, in a wheelchair) and CARLOS (Latino, Jimmy's inseparable companion).

ALFIE

Look, Rodney, if it's any consolation, music instruction is a complete waste of time. If anything, you should learn how to DJ. The top DJ's make a hundred million dollars a year playing other people's music. They make more money than real musicians.

RODNEY

(hiding his hurt)
It's fine. Whatever. I'm not, like, upset or something.

LANCE

You should be, losing a free period to this test tutoring insanity. Grooming us to be mindless drones in the post-collegiate service industry job swamp.

CARLOS

You going to be teaching spells and quidditch?

ALFIE

Carlos, I'm not sure how to make this any clearer: Hogwarts is not a real school in England, and if it were, I would not be employed there, as I don't speak Latin.

ARIEL

Well, I think you're pretty magical. If you're teaching test prep, I could use some help with math. Mr. Clayton says 25 won't go into 16.

(winks)

We could prove him wrong.

ALFIE

Take it up with Mr. Clayton. I'm no good at math either.

JIMMY

(to Rodney)

What are you playing timpani drums for, anyway? You want to be in a marching band, with one of them feathered hats like you're some sort of nutcracker?

The class laughs at Rodney's expense.

RODNEY

Yeah, well, our school doesn't have a marching band. So, like, it's impossible for me to be in one.

LISA

It's super weird that you would spend a free period playing that drum instead of doing... literally anything else. Or nothing.

ALFIE

Maybe Rodney should be devoting his free period to sneaking cigarettes out behind the bleachers?

LISA

Well, where else are we supposed to smoke? And meet boys who smoke?

INT. HALLWAY - LATER

Rodney stays behind to talk to Alfie.

RODNEY

It started as my ace in the hole for a college scholarship. A million people play violin -- no one plays timpani. But now... I've actually started to like it. So of course they're taking it away.

ALFIE

The fact you're gaming the system means you're going to be just fine. In the meantime, savor your passing youth. Hang out with your mates, chat up the ladies--

RODNEY

Are you joking? What mates? What ladies? I want to fly under the radar for the next three years, go to college, get a radiology technician job, an apartment with a seventy-five inch TV and gaming chair, and maybe then I'll be ready to have a social life.

Rodney trudges away. Alfie looks at him, concerned.

ALFIE

Consider the DJ thing!

INT. SARAH'S CLASS - A LITTLE LATER

Oddball history teacher JEFF GELMAN is at a blackboard covered in a paranoid scrawl, illustrating the Kennedy assassination. The words WAR MACHINE, WALL STREET, VIETNAM, IRAQ, and MASS MEDIA are all underlined and interconnected.

GELMAN

Is it a coincidence that this coup d'etat happened in the home state of the man who benefitted the most from Kennedy's assassination? Is it a coincidence that Lyndon Johnson's backers were Kellogg, Brown, and Root, who later became Halliburton? Questions!

Reveal he is in a chemistry lab. The students are all in goggles and holding beakers.

LISA

Um, aren't you on academic suspension?

GELMAN

Questioning authority! I LOVE it!

Earnest, book-smart new chemistry teacher SARAH McINTYRE enters in a lab coat with safety goggles on her head.

SARAH

How's that silver nitrate coming, people?

(Gelman dives under the desk)

Hey! What are you doing?

GELMAN

God, I thought you were Gomez.
Sorry, I was pacing the halls,
thought I smelled chemicals--

SARAH

It's a chemistry class. We're
making test tube mirrors. I was in
the bathroom. Who are you?

GELMAN

Jeff Gelman. History Teacher in
the Zinn/Chomsky mold.
(to the class)
Think for yourselves, or they'll
think for you. *Exeunt* Gelman!

INT. TEACHERS'S LOUNGE - A LITTLE LATER

Alfie is raiding the fridge. Sarah approaches.

SARAH

Excuse me, you're Alfie Wickers,
the English teacher, right?

ALFIE

(overly perky)
Sarah McIntyre, chemistry, yes?
May I offer you a yogurt? They're
not mine, so if you want one, you
have to eat it quickly.

She looks at Gelman, grooving to music on his oversized
headphones, reading through a pile of books.

SARAH

Can I ask you: what's the deal with
that guy?

ALFIE

Gelman? He's all right. A bit
over-enthusiastic. Last year, he
celebrated black history month by
coming in as Malcolm X in
blackface. He honestly thought he
was championing racial harmony.

SARAH

Wow. The school I just came from
in South Central LA, something like
that could have started riots.

ALFIE

Because of the teachers' union, Gelman can't be fired, so Gomez stripped him of his teaching duties. He drives in from El Cajon every day to do literally nothing. He's like a neutered stray.

SARAH

How did you get here?

ALFIE

Well, second year at university I saw an old *Baywatch* rerun, thought, 'I could do with a bit of sun and fun,' took a semester at UCSD, and Hello, Mr. Chips.

SARAH

Actually, I meant your commute, but thanks for sharing. I took the bus, but I'm contemplating a Vespa.

ALFIE

Ah. Right. I've got a car. If you ever need a lift, I'm 'uber' up for it. I usually give a ride to one of my students, Rodney. Poor lad's down in the dumps over this music program shutdown.

SARAH

My class just told me about it. They seemed so sad. Isn't there anything we can do? Petition? Protest? Candle-light vigil?

ALFIE

Burn our bras?
(off her glare)
Just a joke. Look, as a veteran of three years, here's a friendly word of advice: pick your battles. This test prep thing has Rita Gomez's fingerprints all over it, and you don't want to cross her. Once I suggested that the cafeteria serve Red Bull, she made me do a week of drug education training.

SARAH

The more you say we shouldn't try to save the music program, the more I want to try. My boyfriend--

ALFIE
How serious?

SARAH
I'm sorry?

ALFIE
How serious... are you about saving
the music program?

SARAH
Very serious.

ALFIE
And the boyfriend?

SARAH
Philip and I met during Teach for
America. He's the kindest, most
giving person I've ever met.

ALFIE
Let me know if you want the rest of
this soda, happy to share.

SARAH
Philip always says, the best of
intentions are meaningless without
action. He's off to The Gambia to
teach English with the Peace Corp.

ALFIE
The Gambia? Not just any old
Gambia anymore, it's The Gambia.
Aren't we a posh little West
African republic? Call me 'The
Alfie.' I mean, really.

SARAH
How is it different from 'The US'
or 'The UK?'

ALFIE
Yes... well... Africa, though. Bit
dicey. Hope he uses protection.

SARAH
Protection? From what?

ALFIE
Malaria...? Mosquito nets?

INT. PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE - A LITTLE LATER

Alfie pounds his hand on the desk of principal EUGENE BOOKER, an eccentric, super-fit African American 1st Gulf War vet, who is not at his desk -- he's walking on a treadmill.

ALFIE

Principal Booker, We've got to save the music program! This obsession with testing the students is madness. If they can teach English in The Gambia, we can teach music in San Diego!

BOOKER

(dismounts treadmill)

Alfie, what's gotten into you? You sound constipated. How often are you evacuating?

ALFIE

What, like earthquake drills?

BOOKER

You look sickly, even for a Brit. I can see cholesterol deposits in your eye capillaries.

He leans in close to Alfie, fixing him with a long uncomfortable stare.

ALFIE

Is this a staring contest? If so, I already lost, as I'm a compulsive blinker. I do it every few seconds or so. About the music program--

BOOKER

Gomez did an end run around me with the school board. I'm boxed in. I can't go to them and say, "our scores suck, but chillax, the dummies are learning clarinet." She's got a point. We gotta keep up with the Red Chinese.

ALFIE

The Chinese aren't diving out of factory windows because they're happy! Trust me, Britain used to be just like the US - consumed with British exceptionalism, obsessed with being the world's top military and economic power.

(MORE)

ALFIE (CONT'D)

Well, now we're number four, and it's fine. I mean, our main export is Piers Morgan. Thanks for taking him off our hands, by the way.

BOOKER

(sighs)

I'm not an administrator at heart, Wickers, I'm an innovator. Remember my idea for reverse ESL classes? We'd do class in Spanish so the kids could see what it's like for all the immigrant kids?

ALFIE

Whatever happened with that?

BOOKER

None of our teachers speak Spanish. Hell, Señor Martinez is conversational at best. Here's the thing: we just don't have the money for music.

ALFIE

Unless... we came up with it ourselves?

BOOKER

I like where you're going. Let's do some squats and think on it. Get the blood circulating.

ALFIE

I just ate.

BOOKER

Squats! Down and up!

ALFIE

(squatting)

We could put on a fund-raiser. Raise money. Raise awareness. People claim to love awareness.

BOOKER

That's a genius idea! Grass roots!

ALFIE

Exactly! Community action! Me and the new chemistry teacher fighting side-by-side to save a beloved program. I'm going to stop squatting now.

BOOKER

See, Wickers, you and me, we're old school. This is what we got into education for. It's going to be a buttload of work.

ALFIE

Define buttload--

BOOKER

Well, you'd single-handedly have to organize an event that would raise fifteen thousand dollars.

(Alfie coughs, shocked)

Or find some other way to change Gomez' mind.

ALFIE

Like what?

BOOKER

Like, she's a woman. You're a man. A very handsome man. With an accent like... like...

ALFIE

James Bond.

BOOKER

I was going to say Elton John.

INT. GOMEZ' OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

Gomez is doing paperwork. She hears a throat clear, and looks up to see Alfie doing his best seductive pose in her doorway. Unbuttoning a few buttons on his shirt, he plays sexy Barry White music on his iPhone.

ALFIE

Lovely Rita... teacher maid.

GOMEZ

Vice principal to you, Wickers.

ALFIE

(slaps wrist)

My bad. And what is your... vice? Mine are all NSFW.

GOMEZ

It's NSFW. What do you want?

ALFIE

Oh, just thought, a pity to stop
the music program before you and I
have even had a chance to dance.

He seductively dances/hip thrusts his way towards her desk.

GOMEZ

Wickers, our school is underfunded
as it is. We need state money to
keep class size down, and the only
way we're going to get it is to
raise our scores. End of story.

ALFIE

Fascinating.
(drops pen)
Clumsy me...

He bends over to pick it up, grunts under the strain, and
sticks his protruding boxers in her view.

GOMEZ

Here's why it'll never happen
between us, Wickers. I'm not a
lesbian, and if I were, you still
wouldn't be butch enough.

ALFIE

Just for that crack, Ms. McIntyre
and I are going to mount a fund
raiser to save the music program.
You brought this upon yourself.

GOMEZ

FYI, Sarah's boyfriend played water
polo for Stanford. I saw a photo.
You could grate carrots on his abs.
So if you're thinking of mounting
her, no chance.

ALFIE

Yes, well, we'll see who mounts
what and/or whom, won't we?

Alfie marches out of the room, checks his abs and sighs.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

INT. ALFIE'S CLASSROOM - LATER

Alfie sits on the edge of his desk, fiddling with a Smart Board Facebook page with Huckleberry Finn's picture.

LISA

I don't get it. Why would Huckleberry Finn have a Facebook page? He's, like, fictional.

ARIEL

How come you never accept my friend requests? I've tried poking you. You ever think about poking me?

ALFIE

Anything you need to tell me Ariel, you can say here. With witnesses.

CARLOS

What about the N-word? Are we supposed to use the N-word?

ALFIE

We shall not be as liberal with the N-word as Mr. Twain. Look, do you want creative English assignments -- or more analogy quizzes, so we can keep up with the Chinese?

LISA

Don't look at me. My parents put all their money into private school for my nerd brother because he's a dude. They think I'm busting my ass, think again. I'm going to be an Asian Kardashian.

ALFIE

Fine. Table this and help me figure out a fund-raiser to save the music program.

RODNEY

Just don't make us participate in some lame talent show.

ALFIE

Brilliant! A talent show. Maybe throw in an auction? Done. Ten points to Gryffindor.

CARLOS

I knew it!

RODNEY

Wait. I wasn't using reverse psychology. I really don't want to do a talent show.

ALFIE

You could all get up and do one of those inspiring musical numbers like in *Glee*. Kids love to sing these days, don't you? Burst into song whenever you feel an emotion?

ALL

Not really/no/kind of embarrassing.

ALFIE

Wait, don't you all love music?

LISA

To listen to, not perform in front of people.

ALFIE

Oh, hell... Well, too bad. You're putting on a talent show, whether you like it or not. Lance, you'll organize the a *cappella* performance.

LANCE

Great, make the gay student organize a sing-along. Why don't we have Jimmy tap dance or Lisa do a math demonstration--

ALFIE

Or a demolition derby, am I right?
(off her glare)
I'm just riffing on horribly inaccurate stereotypes.

LANCE

I'm just saying, why do gay people get stuck with all the worst genres of Western Culture? How did we end up with musical theater and a *cappella*? You know what gay people should co-opt? Formula One racing. It's thin European guys racing expensive convertibles. Sold.

ALFIE

Look, who's going to come to a fundraiser to save a free period? But if we save the music program...

(no response)

Then we can't have mandatory school-wide testing, and ergo....

(nothing)

The free period stays.

A beat as his plan dawns on them.

ALL

Totally!/of course/free period/why didn't you say so/let's do it!

LISA

I could tweet about it. I have over ten thousand followers.

ALFIE

How do you even fill a hundred and forty characters?

LISA

I mostly take pictures of my--

ALFIE

Scratch that-- don't want to know.

LISA

I was going to say 'food.'

CARLOS

Jimmy and I kick ass at guitar. We could shred up on stage.

JIMMY

Bring down the house.

ALFIE

Guitar. Fantastic. Word to the wise, though, I learned almost three chords to a Mumford and Sons song, got me laid not once.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - LATER

Janitors are packing up the instruments. Gelman and Sarah watch, saddened. Gelman holds a guitar and plays a soulful flamenco flourish.

SARAH

That is amazing. I'm so impressed with anyone who can play music.

GELMAN

That's one upside to academic suspension. I've had like five hours a day to hone my chops.

INT. HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS/INTERCUT

Alfie is eavesdropping.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - CONTINUOUS

SARAH

My boyfriend took just two things to The Gambia. A duffel bag full of clothes and his guitar. That's how we met. I saw Philip playing in a coffee shop, and that was it. In another life, I could have been a groupie for a band.

GELMAN

I actually was a groupie for a while. For the Indigo Girls. Wild times. Thank God for Valtrex.

Alfie enters.

ALFIE

(to the janitors)

Stop what you're doing! We are having a fund-raising charity auction-slash-talent show to save the music program!

(they ignore him)

Union rules. I get it. Solidarity, comrades!

SARAH

Alfie, that's fantastic!

ALFIE

I decided to pick this battle. I mean, after all, if I were a plant, music would be my carbon monoxide.

GELMAN

That's actually a poison.

SARAH

Plants breathe carbon dioxide.
You're musical?

ALFIE

Oh, you know, I did a few years at
a conservatory. Not to boast, but
the word 'virtuoso' was bandied
about. Not by me. By those in the
know.

Gomez enters.

GOMEZ

Booker told me about the fund-
raiser. You need legal waivers and
fire department approval.

ALFIE

Of course, of course. I'll get the
kids right on it.

GOMEZ

You think this is cute, don't you?
Be the big hero saving the music
program while the school's scores
stink up the restroom? Don't think
you're screwing me over with this
half-assed bake sale or whatever it
is. You're screwing the school.
My school. The kids can do music
in their free time.

SARAH

Um, did you see that TED talk on
education, how we're failing our
children with this obsession with
testing at the expense of the arts?
Are you up on TED?

ALFIE

What's not to love about a bear
doing bong hits?

GELMAN

The TED talks. On the internet.

GOMEZ

The thing you use to steal movies
and watch porn.

(Gelman guffaws)

Don't you have a corner to be
sitting in, Walking Dead?

ALFIE

Right! That TED. Yes, although I strongly feel Mark Wahlberg needs to do more comedy. And rap. I miss the Funky Bunch.

GOMEZ

Ms. McIntyre, you're new, so I'll tell you this once. Don't follow his lead, because he's not going to be here in five years if I have anything to say about it.

ALFIE

Are we done, Ms. Gomez? We'd like to get back to saving the music program, if you don't mind.

SARAH

Alfie was just telling us about his years at a conservatory.

GOMEZ

You?! You read and play music? Really. What instrument?

Alfie desperately scans the room.

ALFIE

What instrument? What instrument... indeed... you ask... What do we have... and what don't we have... I play... the harp.

SARAH

How magical -- and surprising! I would love, love, love to hear you play the harp.

ALFIE

And I would love, love, love to play it for you, but, alas, we don't have one.

GOMEZ

Funny, the one instrument you claim to play is the one we don't have.

ALFIE

And my old axe is still in London, I'm afraid. With my gran. She's ailing. A bit much to ask of her to mail it. God, I miss it so. Staying up all hours, plucking her.

(MORE)

ALFIE (CONT'D)
 (bizzare plucking motion)
 The harp, mind you, not my gran.

GOMEZ
 (flawless technique)
 Isn't a harp played like this?

ALFIE
 Yeah. If you were playing just one. I was a bit of a showman. Two-harp Alfie, they called me.

GOMEZ
 Best of luck with your bake sale, Mr. Wickers. Test prep begins on Monday.

Rita exits.

SARAH
 Alfie, what can I do to help?

ALFIE
 Where do I start? There's so much for us to do... together. How about I start you off on legal waivers and fire department approval?

GELMAN
 (shivers)
 Every time she leaves the room it takes a minute for my testicles to descend. Can I get in on this talent show? I could emcee, I've got fifteen minutes of comic gold.

ALFIE
 No F-bombs, no sexual areas, no race humor, no props.

GELMAN
 Three to four minutes.

EXT. ALFIE'S STREET - MORNING, THAT FRIDAY

Alfie gets into his car, a hatchback, and starts driving. He passes Rodney, who's standing at the end of his driveway with a giant wheeled timpani drum. Alfie pulls over.

RODNEY

Can you give me a ride today? My mom had to go to some meeting and she forgot I had the drum.

ALFIE

I can give you a ride. Will I? Depends. Are you going to play at the talent show?

RODNEY

In second grade we did *Into the Woods*, and I split my pants while singing "A Very Nice Prince." I swore I'd never walk on stage again.

Alfie gets out and helps Rodney load the drum into his hatchback.

ALFIE

All right, look. I fancy the new chemistry teacher, and I told her the students are all mad for music. Now it's your responsibility to make my white lie become truth.

RODNEY

So I have to look like an idiot in front of the whole school so you can impress a girl? I've got enough trouble with girls as it is.

ALFIE

That's where you've got it all wrong. Women smell fear, like dogs and club bouncers. But if they see you're not afraid to make an idiot out of yourself, it's like catnip. Look at Bam Margera. Married and divorced two models. Q.E.D.

RODNEY

Fine! I'll think about it. And if you wouldn't mind...

ALFIE

Yes, Rodney. I'll drop you off a block away.

MONTAGE

-- Alfie and Sarah posting "Talent Show" flyers. Sarah tapes up a flyer and turns to see Alfie who's taped his nose to his forehead. She laughs.

-- Alfie and Sarah hosting auditions in the gym. A line of kids wait their turn. Gelman, wearing a headset, acts as stage manager, as Alfie and Sarah sit behind a table, watching a group of boys and girls wearing matching outfits do a clumsy but attitude-heavy dance routine. Alfie fights laughing, Sarah hits him, then fights laughing herself. When the group ends on a freeze, Alfie and Sarah both give big phony smiles and thumbs-up.

-- Alfie and Sarah hang a TALENT SHOW TONIGHT banner. Alfie tries to hold Sarah up in the air, but is staggering. Gelman walks over to try to help hold her and Alfie pulls her away possessively, ripping down the banner.

INT. AUDITORIUM - THAT NIGHT

Booker and Alfie watch people file in. It's a packed house. Four glowering SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS approach.

BOOKER

Not to put any undue pressure on this evening, but I invited the school board power-players. Get ready to glad-hand and ass-kiss.

(to the board members)

Regina! Jim! Carlos! Ming! This is the go-getter educator that spearheaded this wonderful event, Alfie Wickers.

ALFIE

(off their icy stares)

It's going to be quite the concert, full of laughter, song, and dance -- hope you brought your cigarette lighters and panties to toss.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

Why would we have lighters?
There's no smoking on school grounds.

ALFIE

Panties then?

ON STAGE

Gelman holds the mike, wearing a piano key tie.

GELMAN

And the father says, this is the last time I fly with a Mexican pilot!

(crickets, murmurs)

Oh, come on. The joke was on the father. Lighten up. I dated a Mexican girl, OK? She might have been Venezuelan. Wow, dead room. Moving on, our first auction of the night, our own Alfie Wickers will join you for a... bike ride!

Alfie rides a bicycle on stage.

GELMAN (CONT'D)

Start the bidding at ten dollars. Any takers?

ARIEL (O.S.)

Ten dollars!

Offstage, Ariel waves at Alfie, who tries to wave her off.

GELMAN

Ten dollars, do I hear fifteen?

ARIEL'S MOM (O.S.)

Twenty dollars!

ARIEL

Mom!

(to Gelman)

Forty!

GELMAN

Folks, we've got ourselves a bidding war! Do I hear fiddy?

ALFIE

Anyone? Anyone else? Please? Even a teacher? Sarah?

ARIEL'S MOM sits next to ARIEL'S DAD, the mousiest man ever.

ARIEL'S MOM

Sixty! And I want him in bike shorts!

BACKSTAGE

Alfie and his class watch a JAZZ COMBO perform some very mediocre jazz -- a sour saxophone note makes everyone cringe.

ALFIE

Jimmy, Carlos! We're losing the crowd. You lads really need to kick this thing up a few notches.

Jimmy and Carlos roll a TV on a cart and a Wii system over.

CARLOS

Let's do this, Low Ridah.

SARAH

Where are your instruments?

JIMMY

Right here, pretty lady.

Jimmy pulls a Guitar Hero guitar from his wheelchair.

ALFIE

Oh, no, no, no. You said you could play! For real!

CARLOS

And we can. For real. We're the Lannisters of Guitar Hero.

ON STAGE

Carlos and Jimmy shred their faux guitars as the baffled audience stares on. Board members share concerned looks.

BACKSTAGE

Booker is upbraiding Alfie in front of Sarah as the dance troupe from the auditions does their routine. One BOY trips and falls, but bounces up triumphantly.

BOOKER

What the hell is this, Wickers? We need to win hearts and minds. We need Queen-at-Live-Aid good! This isn't even Justin Guarini at a water park good! This is how you do me? Come on, man! Come on!

ALFIE

Fear not. We have a timpani genius waiting in the wings.

Rodney approaches.

RODNEY

Alf-- sorry, Mr. Wickers, I've decided I'm not going on.

ALFIE

Et tu, Rodney.

RODNEY

I just can't. I'm having Sondheim flashbacks. I don't care if I don't get a college scholarship. I don't care if they take away the music program. I'm not going out there. I'm sorry if I let you down.

Alfie looks at Sarah and Booker, and then back at Rodney. This is Alfie's big mentor moment.

ALFIE

Look, Rodney. It's okay to be afraid. But take it from someone who's been around the block a few times. The only time you ever lose face is when you lose faith in yourself. Trust me, Rodney. If you go out there, you will not regret it. Do you trust me?

Rodney is in torment -- he knows he should but can't.

GOMEZ (O.S.)

Good news!

Alfie, Rodney, and Sarah turn to see Gomez standing next to a large object covered by a black sheet.

GOMEZ (CONT'D)

I made some calls, pulled some strings, so to speak, and have I got a surprise for you...

As Gomez pulls away the sheet, Alfie's smile turns to a death mask of utter horror. Sarah gasps.

SARAH

How wonderful!

ALFIE

Oh... Good... God...

It's a giant gold-colored harp. Alfie gawks helplessly.

GOMEZ

I'm sure the school would love to
hear you play. I know I would.

SARAH

It's gorgeous. I can't wait to
hear what you can do with it.

ALFIE

Me either...

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

INT. AUDITORIUM - MOMENTS LATER

After the dance troupe bounds offstage, the only sound we hear is the squeaking of the harp's wheels, as Alfie sheepishly wheels the massive instrument on stage.

ALFIE

'Evening. So. Been a while, so, apologies if I'm a bit rusty... might need a tuning...

(plucks a string)

Bit flat...

(cracks knuckles)

Must limber up...

GELMAN

Freebird!

ALFIE

Hilarious.

(sees Sarah offstage)

But what isn't hilarious is the thought of our children being deprived of the gift of music--

GOMEZ (O.S.)

Play it already!

ALFIE

Right. Yes. So, the piece I'm about to play might be a bit over most people's heads. It's an atonal composition by the obscure Austrian composer Hans Gruber.

BACKSTAGE

Alfie's students look on, concerned.

LANCE

Who plays the harp? That's hilarious.

RODNEY

He doesn't know how. I think he told Ms. McIntyre he could play.

ARIEL

He likes her? Now I hate her.

CARLOS

Are we supposed to do something?

JIMMY

(pulls out phone)

Yeah. Get this gold on YouTube.

LANCE

Just so you know, if this doesn't work, we're all going to lose a free period and have to take that crappy test prep course.

LISA

Maybe we could do an a cappella performance. Like Glee.

RODNEY

Without rehearsal?

LANCE

And what song?

LISA

What about Ghetto Symphony?

ARIEL

What, like, from last year?

LISA

Classic Britney?

LANCE

Retro, but not retro enough.

ON STAGE

ALFIE

It's got some unusual time changes and avant-garde phrasing, so while it may not sound classically musical, I assure you it is quite cutting edge. In Wee-enna.

Alfie clears his throat and begins to vamp the worst, most pretentious atonal harp music the world has ever heard.

BACKSTAGE

CARLOS

Beyonce, bitches. Everybody likes Beyonce.

LANCE

I don't.

LISA

Why not?

LANCE

Because everyone likes her.

RODNEY

Guys we've got to agree on something. He's dying out there.

ON STAGE

The audience sits in awkward silence. Alfie keeps a brave face as he makes eye contact with a confused Sarah. He then locks eyes with Gomez, who is loving every second of it. Rodney looks at Alfie, and they share a look of sympathetic understanding.

RODNEY (CONT'D)

Screw it. I'm going in.

Rodney pushes his timpani drum out onstage to polite applause.

ALFIE

(sotto)

You don't have to do this.

Rodney looks out at the crowd, up at Alfie, and then starts hammering away at his drum -- he's not bad, but as Alfie tries to fake a jam, the cacophony is even worse.

ALFIE (CONT'D)

Shall we wrap this up?

Rodney nods, plays a crescendo, Alfie plays a flourish, and they stop. They both bow to a vague smattering of applause.

ALFIE (CONT'D)

Hans... Gruber...

EXT. SCHOOL YARD - LATER

The parents and students are all exiting. A few parents have cornered Booker and members of the board, gesturing angrily. Alfie, looking shaken, exits with Sarah and the kids.

ALFIE

So. That fell a bit short of expectations.

SARAH
Still, aren't you glad we tried?

ALFIE
You weren't the one playing harp.

SARAH
You can't play a note of music, can you.

ALFIE
You're only betraying your own cultural ignorance right now.

SARAH
Hans Gruber is the villain in *Die Hard*.

ALFIE
Amazing that the writer of *Die Hard* named a character after an obscure Austrian composer. Must be a fellow fan.

ON LISA, RODNEY, ARIEL, AND LANCE

RODNEY
Do you really think we lost the music program?

LISA
(to Rodney)
Bummer for you.

ARIEL
I mean, that music you and Mr. Wickers played sucked ass, but it's cool you got out there.

LANCE
That took major balls.

RODNEY
(touched)
Thanks, guys.

LISA
No sweat. Mañana.

ON GELMAN, JIMMY AND CARLOS

GELMAN
Hey. You give lessons?

JIMMY

We do. But they're not cheap.

ON ALFIE, SARAH, and RODNEY

RODNEY

You were right. I'm glad I got out there. Thank you.

ALFIE

No, thank you. Really.

RODNEY

By the way, can I have a ride home? My mom had a date, so she had to leave early.

ALFIE

Of course. Don't forget your drum.

Rodney runs off.

ALFIE (CONT'D)

It's not exactly teaching in Africa, is it. But if all we did was convince one kid that it's all right to bang his drum in public, I guess that's a win.

SARAH

I say that anyone willing to humiliate himself for the greater good is a very special teacher.

ALFIE

Special as in 'amazing' or as in 'cognitively challenged?'

SARAH

What do you think?

ALFIE

Bit of both?

As they share a sweet moment, Gomez wheels the harp by.

GOMEZ

Best two hundred bucks I ever spent.

INT. ALFIE'S CLASSROOM - MONDAY MORNING

The class watches Alfie's fiasco on YouTube on the Smart Board. The video is entitled: "Deaf Man Plays Harp."

ALFIE

Laugh all you want.
 (they laugh, mock)
 Right. Enough.
 (more laughing)
 Now you're just being rude.

Eugene Booker and Rita Gomez enter and instantly the class silences. The Smart Board is turned off in a flash.

GOMEZ

Wickers, Friday night was a catastrophe. A Fukushima-scale disaster. You needed to raise fifteen thousand, you raised seven hundred and fifty.

BOOKER

But the good news is, the performances were so painful for the parents to watch, that they cornered the board members and long story short, there will be a school music program thanks to you.
 (tepid response)
 And no test tutoring.

ALFIE

And a free period!

The class cheers! Gomez storms out. Booker smiles at Alfie and follows her out.

INT. MUSIC ROOM - AFTERNOON, A WEEK LATER

A MUSIC TEACHER stands, holding a baton.

MUSIC TEACHER

Ready? And begin...

There's a thunder of bass -- the kids all have turntables and headphones. Alfie and Sarah stand in the doorway.

ALFIE

Now this is music.

END OF ACT THREE

TAG

EXT. SAN DIEGO STREET - WEEKEND DAY

Ariel and her mom ride bikes in bike shorts. They're yelling at Alfie to pedal faster, as they stick their butts out, to his discomfort. Reveal Alfie is on a tandem bike with Ariel's dad on the back.

END OF SHOW