

THE RED TAP SHOES

A Jazz Musical Burlesque

Book, Music & Lyrics by

Vance Holmes

Inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes*

CONTACT: Vance Holmes
2911 Polk Street NE
Minneapolis, MN 55418
vanceholmes@gmail.com
612/872-2348

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

The Red Tap Shoes draws from a collide-o-scope of folk tales, myths, and literary fragments from both the African diaspora and the Western canon.

This jazz-age landscape is built from the ruins of the Oedipus myth and the legend of the Flying Africans; the Faustian bargain and the poetry of T.S. Eliot and Paul Laurence Dunbar; and the deep-well tradition of spirituals and the Blues.

These sources are employed in the spirit of transformation, homage, and theatrical signifying.

CHARACTERS

OVERCOAT SAM - Baritenor

The Ensemble

PETER WHEATSTRAW - Baritone (Ensemble Member #1)

MADAME TYRESIA - Mezzo-Soprano (Ensemble Member #2)

SISTER SARAH JANE - Soprano (Ensemble Member #3)

SHINE BO BANJO - Tenor (Ensemble Member #4)

DESIREE - Mezzo-Soprano (Ensemble Member #5)

SYLVESTER - Baritone (Ensemble Member #6)

RED ROSE/WAITRESS - Alto (Ensemble Member #7)

RUBY RED/WAITRESS - Alto (Ensemble Member #8)

COP/DEACON/SHANGO - Bass (Ensemble Member #9)

SETTING

Pittsburgh, PA

TIME

The Jazz Age

The Red Tap Shoes is conceived for an ensemble of five men and five women; however, with doubling, masks, and theater magic, it may be produced with a substantially smaller cast.

This musical burlesque is rooted in the Black American experience and serves as a celebration of the evolution of African American musical traditions. To maintain the cultural and historical integrity of the piece, all characters should be cast as African American.

Musical Numbers

ACT ONE

Prologue

SONG: "We Wear the Mask" ENSEMBLE

Scene One

SONG: "Brick Alley" SAM, SARAH JANE, TYRESIA, BANJO

SONG: "Unreal City" WHEATSTRAW

SONG: "Always Have the Blues" SAM

Scene Two

SONG: "Standing at the Crossroad" ... TYRESIA, SAM, ENSEMBLE

Scene Three

SONG: "Rise Up Home" SARAH JANE, ENSEMBLE

SONG: "All God's Children" SARAH JANE

Scene Four

SONG: "Unreal City: Reprise" WHEATSTRAW, ENSEMBLE

SONG: "Dancing Shoes" ENSEMBLE

SONG: "Tacky Annie" SAM

Scene Five

SONG: "Crossing Your Feet" SARAH JANE, ENSEMBLE

Scene Six

SONG: "Why Put off Till Tomorrow" DESIREE

SONG: "My Two and Only You" SAM, ENSEMBLE

ACT TWO

Scene One

SONG: "Always Swing the Blues" SAM

SONG: "Some Things" DESIREE, WHEATSTRAW

Scene Two

BAND: "Procession" BAND

Scene Three

SONG: "Chitlin Circuit" SAM

SONG: "Magic Rhythm" SAM

BAND: "Smoketown Lounge Clowns" BAND

SONG: "I Believe" SAM, ENSEMBLE

SONG: "One Step Ahead/Ezekiel" SAM, ENSEMBLE

SONG: "Goodbye" SAM

Scene Four

SONG: "Shango" TYRESIA, ENSEMBLE

Scene Five

SONG: "All God's Children" ENSEMBLE

Musical Score Index

ACT ONE

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SONG: No. 4 - "Unreal City"
MUSIC: No. 5 - "Knockabout: Stealers"
SONG: No. 6 - "Always Have the Blues"
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MUSIC: No. 8 - "Throwing Bones"
SONG: No. 9 - "Standing at the Crossroad"
MUSIC: No. 10 - "Shine"
SONG: No. 11 - "Rise Up Home"
SONG: No. 12 - "All God's Children"
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MUSIC: No. 17 - "Shine II"
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MUSIC: No. 20 - "Copacetic II"
SONG: No. 21 - "Crossing Your Feet"
MUSIC: No. 22 - "Shake Dancer"
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MUSIC: No. 24 - "Rose & Ruby III"
SONG: No. 25 - "My Two and Only You"

ACT TWO

MUSIC: No. 26 - "Entr'acte"
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SONG: No. 39 - "Shango"
SONG: No. 40 - "All God's Children: Finale"

ACT I
Prologue

SCENE: Open stage.

(ENSEMBLE MEMBERS #7 and #9 wheel on a DJ cart.
They don headphones and drop a beat.)

[SONG: No. 1 - "WE WEAR THE MASK"]

(ENSEMBLE enters playing percussion instruments.)

ENSEMBLE

WE WEAR THE MASK THAT GRINS AND LIES
IT HIDES OUR CHEEKS AND SHADES OUR EYES
WE SING THE LYRIC, WE DO THE STEPS TO OUR DANCE
WITH BLEEDING HEARTS BENEATH THE SMILE
WE WEAR THE MASK

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #7

SOMEBODY NOTED ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE
YOU CAN'T DENY THE FACT
AND ALL THE MEN AND ALL THE WOMEN
MERELY PLAYERS IN THE CAST
PLACES, TIME TO START THE SHOW
TIME TO RISE, HIDE YOUR EYES, FIND THE LIGHT
FOR YOUR SOLO, THE PRICE PAID FOR BEING A LIAR
ELIMINATING FACES OF DESIRE
LONG IS THE MILE, IF YOU ASK, WE SMILE
THE CLAY BENEATH OUR FEET IS VILE

ENSEMBLE

WE WEAR THE MASK THAT HIDES OUR HEART
WE BEAR THE BURDEN, WE PLAY THE PART
WE HOLD THE FUTURE BENEATH THE FEAR OF OUR PAST
WE SING THE SONG, WE DANCE THE DANCE
WE WEAR THE MASK

IT'S SHOWTIME, GET READY TO GO
DON'T LET THEM SEE WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW
SHOWTIME, GO, GO WITH IT
SHOES TIED, RED-LACE, TIGHT OUTFITTED
IT'S SHOWTIME, GET READY TO GO
DON'T LET THEM SEE WHAT THEY DON'T KNOW
SHOWTIME, GO, GO WITH IT

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #9

CHECK YOUR ATTITUDE
 FLAT BROKE, FEELIN' LITTLE IN THE BIG CITY
 BAREFOOT, WINDOW SHOPPIN' FULL OF SELF PITY
 CURSE YOUR FATE 'CAUSE YOU GOT NO SHOES
 MEET A MAN WHO GOT NO FEET THO' BRO
 KEEP YOUR TEARS TO YOURSELF, GET A COSTUME DUDE
 DO YOU, BUT DO YOUR VOODOO IN A SOUNDPROOF ROOM
 WE WERE BORN TO PERFORM NOW IT'S TIME TO ACT
 YOU GOT TO SELL IT TO THE SEATS IN THE BACK

ENSEMBLE

WE WEAR THE MASK, WE WEAR THE MASK

NOAH ASKED WHO'S TAPPIN' AT THE DOOR
 CAN'T COME OUT ON THE SABBATH LORD
 NEVER MIND WHO'S KNOCKIN' AT THE DOOR
 CAN'T COME OUT ON A SUNDAY SAID THE LORD

WE WEAR THE MASK THAT GRINS AND LIES
 UNSPOKEN ANGUISH AND SILENT CRIES
 WE HOLD THE FUTURE BENEATH THE FEAR OF OUR PAST
 WE SING THE SONG, WE DANCE THE DANCE
 WE DO THE TASK

WE WEAR THE MASK THAT GRINS AND LIES
 IT HIDES OUR CHEEKS AND SHADES OUR EYES
 WE HOLD THE FUTURE BENEATH THE FEAR OF OUR PAST
 WE SING THE SONG, WE DANCE THE DANCE
 WE DO THE TASK

WE WEAR THE MASK THAT GRINS AND LIES
 IT HIDES OUR CHEEKS AND SHADES OUR EYES
 WE WEAR THE MASK, WE SAY THE LINE
 WE ACT THE SCENE, WE HIDE THE PAIN
 WE PACE THE RAGE, WE HEAR THE CUE
 WE TAKE THE STAGE

WE WEAR THE MASK

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #1 gives each player a mask –
 and takes the player's instrument. ENSEMBLE
 MEMBER #9 refuses and drums on. ENSEMBLE MEMBER
 #1 produces an axe – severs the drummer's hands.
 Lightning. Thunder. Sound of tap dancing.
 ENSEMBLE withdraws.)

ACT I
Scene One

SCENE: An alleyway between a nightclub and a church. A bench. Garbage cans. A wooden telephone kiosk. Crates and clutter. A large pile of overcoats.

[SONG: No. 2 - "BRICK ALLEY"]

(SYLVESTER appears, tap dancing in red shoes near the nightclub. ENSEMBLE MEMBER #1 emerges.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #1

The abstract and absolutely true odyssey of Overcoat Sam – a shingle dancer with no place to call home – bucking on a box for copper and crusts in the streets of old Pittsburgh.

BANJO (from off)

SHOE SHINE, SHOE SHINE

(MADAME TYRESIA emerges.)

TYRESIA

Step close, weary wanderer. Step close and behold. Come see Madame Tyresia. Have your fortune told.

BANJO (from off)

SHOE SHINE, GET A SHOE SHINE

(SYLVESTER exits. PASSERSBY cross, umbrellas up.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #1

Act One begins in Brick Alley, a crooked vein that snakes between the back of a speakeasy – operating under the respectable title of the Copacetic Social Club and Literary Society – and the rear entrance of Rising Star Baptist Tabernacle.

(SHINE BO BANJO enters, banjo slung over his shoulder.)

BANJO

SHOE SHINE

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #1

A distant Saturday morning. April holds her breath. Old Brick Alley hiding in the hush before a rain – empty, save for the ghosts, unseen and unheard, who are even now milling about, angling for the best seats. Time loosens.

(OVERCOAT SAM emerges from beneath the pile of coats. He wears several overcoats and a hat.)

Ladies and gentlemen, The Red Tap Shoes.

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #1 exits. Voices overlap.)

BANJO

SHOE SHINE, SHOE SHINE
SHOE SHINE
GET A SHOE SHINE, SHOE SHINE

TYRESIA

Step close, now. Don't be shy . . . Who dares ask? Who dares know the paths you'll walk – the places you'll go? She has the power to unmask life's hidden design.

SARAH JANE (from off)

STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY
STEAL AWAY TO JESUS

BANJO

GET A SHOE SHINE, SHOE SHINE
GET YOUR SHOE SHINE

TYRESIA

Step close, now . . . Come see Madame Tyresia . . . mystic divine.

(SISTER SARAH JANE enters with a broom, sweeping near the church.)

SARAH JANE

STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY
STEAL AWAY HOME
I AIN'T GOT LONG TO STAY HERE

BANJO

GET YOUR, GET YOUR SHOE SHINE

TYRESIA

Step close, now. Don't be shy.

SAM

OUR FATHER, WHO ART IN HEAVEN
MISTER CHARLIE GAVE ME SEVEN, BUT OWED ME ELEVEN
HALLOWED BE THY NAME, THY KINGDOM COME
IF I HADN'T TOOK THAT I WOULDN'T HAVE HAD NONE
LORD, LET THY WILL BE DONE
DOWN HERE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN

(SAM limps to his crate — positions his tip hat.)

TYRESIA

Don't you long to know what lies beyond the gate? Come close!
Get a glimpse into your fate. She possesses gifts profound.
Madame Tyresia — conjure woman of great renown.

BANJO

SHOE SHINE, LOOKIN' TOO FINE

SAM

GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD
MISTER CHARLIE PROMISED TWELVE
BUT PAID ME SIX INSTEAD
FORGIVE US OUR TRESPASSES LIKE WE FORGIVE OTHER FOLK
IF I HADN'T TOOK THAT I'D BE FLAT BUSTED BROKE
FORGIVE THE EVIL THINGS WE'VE DONE AND SAID

How long, oh Lord? How long you gonna do me like this? Rain
beatin' on me like a drum. I can't make money in the rain. No
people . . .

BANJO

What are you grumblin' about Sam?

SAM

. . . just pigeons. Boy, I ain't grumblin'. I'm prayin'.

SARAH JANE

Sounded like grumblin' — but we need the rain.

SAM

How long, oh Lord?

SARAH JANE

MY LORD, HE CALLS ME
HE CALLS ME BY THE THUNDER
THE TRUMPET SOUNDS, IT SOUNDS WITHIN MY SOUL
I AIN'T GOT LONG TO STAY HERE

TYRESIA

For a coin or a crumb she will conjure the thread that ties you
to dreams and voices long dead. Past the alleyways of reason,
through fog thick as sin, she can open the door. Do you dare to
step in?

BANJO

SHOE SHINE
GET YOUR SHOE SHINE
GET YOUR, GET YOUR
SHOE SHINE, SHOE SHINE
SHOE SHINE, SHOO

SARAH JANE

STEAL AWAY
STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY
STEAL AWAY TO JESUS
I AIN'T GOT LONG TO STAY HERE

SAM

LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, DELIVER US FROM SIN
MISTER CHARLIE OWED ME TWENTY, BUT ONLY GAVE ME TEN
HEAVENLY FATHER KEEP THE DEVIL 'WAY FROM ME
IF I HADN'T SETTLED FOR THAT I'D BE SWINGING FROM A TREE
FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER
AND THE GLORY FOREVER, AMEN

TYRESIA

Step close, now. Come Close! Come closer . . . Closer. Come see
Madame Tyresia — mystic divine.

BANJO

GET YOUR, GET YOUR SHOE SHINE, SHOE SHINE

SARAH JANE

STEAL AWAY, STEAL AWAY

(TYRESIA withdraws. SAM retires to his pile of
coats.)

[MUSIC: No. 3 - "SHINGLE DANCER"]

BANJO

Shoe Shine . . . Shoe shine . . .

(BANJO exits.)

SARAH JANE

The Lord helps those who help themselves.

SAM

Yeah.

(SARAH JANE exits. SAM steps onto his crate and drifts into a half-hearted shuffle. A few PASSERSBY cross. SAM gives up, retreats to his coats. WHEATSTRAW emerges. SAM falls asleep.)

[SONG: No. 4 - "UNREAL CITY"]

WHEATSTRAW

UNREAL CITY
CITY FULL OF DREAMS
WHERE GHOSTS IN BROAD DAYLIGHT
CLING TO PASSERSBY

BEG, BORROW, STEAL CITY
THE PITIFUL SCHEMES
THE DESPERATE STRATEGIZE
UNDER A SUNLESS SKY

UNREAL CITY, UNREAL CITY

(WHEATSTRAW withdraws.)

[MUSIC: No. 5 - "KNOCKABOUT: STEALERS"]

(A HOOD enters and rifles through SAM's things. SAM wakes. They wrestle. The HOOD grabs SAM's hat - wrenches coats off SAM's back, then tears the shoes from his feet. Hood exits.)

SAM

Robbed! I been robbed!

(BANJO, TYRESIA and SARAH JANE enter.)

SARAH JANE

Sam? What in the world?

SAM

Some rat snuck up on me and robbed me.

BANJO

Of what?

SAM

Everything! Hat. Shoes.

BANJO

Aw, dang. Stole your shoes?

SAM

My stompers. And I had all my caps nailed into those. I'm just gonna have to find the jagoff that took 'em.

TYRESIA

Don't go chasin' trouble.

SARAH JANE

Get back on your box. You'll make some nickels.

SAM

Sister Sarah Jane, can't you hear? I'm done. I'm outta scratch and outta the only way I know to get it.

(COP enters.)

BANJO

Dry up. Snooper.

COP

Hey! What's the trouble there? I told you people, no loitering, no panhandling. And no dancing. City ordinance — no dancing in Pittsburgh, so . . . twenty-three skedaddle.

(COP, TYRESIA and SARAH JANE exit. SAM limps to his crate and climbs onto it.)

[SONG: No. 6 - "ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES"]

SAM

Ladies and gents, pigeons, step on over. Take a look at the saddest sap this side of the Mon. No shoes, no scratch, no chance. I'm done. You happy now, Lord? I finally — I'm done.

(COP enters. SAM sits.)

COP

Overcoat Sam's shoes blues. (to SAM) I'm watching you.

(COP exits.)

SAM

I hate this stinkin' town. They call the Hill the crossroads of the world. Yinz wanna know why? . . . 'cause it's a melting pot. Folks come from everywhere — and watch their dreams melt down to nothin'.

THIEVES LEFT ME HIGH AND DRY
THEY EVEN STOLE MY SHOES
ALLS THEY LEFT ME WITH
WAS THESE LOW DOWN BLUES
I'LL ALWAYS, ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

(BANJO strums.)

I ain't from here. Nobody's from Pittsburgh — that'll admit to it.

I AIN'T GOT NOTHIN'
DON'T OWN A SINGLE THING
ALLS I GOT
IS THIS SAD, SAD SONG I SING
I'LL ALWAYS, ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

Iron City's got three rivers, so pretty much any direction you're lookin' — you can watch your dreams float away.

I'LL ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

DID YOU EVER SEE A SHINE BO
WHO PLAYED BANJO SO FINE?
SAID DID YOU EVER SEE A SHINE BO
WHO PLAYED BANJO SO FINE?
CAN'T SHINE YOUR SHOES
IF YOU AIN'T GOT SHOES TO SHINE

SAM (cont.)

ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

Hell with da lid off! Only thing I can say for Pittsburgh? It ain't Cleveland.

I'LL ALWAYS, ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

(SAM steps onto his crate. Sound of tap dancing.)

[MUSIC: No. 7 - "COPACETIC"]

(SYLVESTER appears near the club, tapping in red shoes. SAM watches, transfixed. WHEATSTRAW enters with two WAITRESSES who circle SYLVESTER, fawning. They exit.)

ACT I
Scene Two

BANJO

Act Two. Overcoat Sam's encounter with conjure woman, Madame Tyresia.

[MUSIC: No. 8 - "THROWING BONES"]

(TYRESIA appears. BANJO exits.)

TYRESIA

Madame Tyresia, famous clairvoyant. Come have your fortune told. Know today how tomorrow will unfold.

SAM

No, thank you. I don't believe in that hoodoo hokum.

TYRESIA

Don't you long to know what lies beyond the gate?

SAM

And I have no money so . . .

TYRESIA

You can cut the act, Sam. You want to figure out if those visions you're having are real or if you're just losing your mind.

SAM

How'd you know?

TYRESIA

The bones know. Come closer. Don't be afraid.

SAM

I'm not afraid. I just - don't believe in all this -

TYRESIA

Closer - so I can feel your energy.

(TYRESIA spreads a scarf. Holds out her bag.)

I must have a personal concern to tie you to the work. Give me a button off one of those coats.

TYRESIA (cont.)

Put it right here in my conjure bag so the bones don't go lying to us.

(SAM puts a button in the bag.)

I summon the ancestors who travel the strands of time. Let the bones jangle free. Bones speak what eyes can't see.

(TYRESIA casts the bones.)

SAM

. . . Well?

TYRESIA

Hush up. I'm getting bits and pieces . . . You, standing in a place between places . . .

SAM

Yes. There's this dream I keep dreamin'.

TYRESIA

The crossroad.

[SONG: No. 9 - "STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD"]

SAM

The crossroad. But how -?

TYRESIA

Just seeing fragments. Broken images . . . Triumph, tragedy. Fame, famine. Joy, heartache. Sciatica. Two paths, one high, one low. You, standing - between -

SAM

That's enough.

TYRESIA

The bones have spoken.

SAM

STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD
I DON'T KNOW WHICH PATH TO CHOOSE
STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD
I DON'T KNOW WHICH PATH TO CHOOSE
I'M STRANDED AT THE CROSSROAD
ALL ALONE AND SINGING THE BLUES

TYRESIA

WE ARE NOT FREE TO CHANGE TOMORROW
CAN'T CHANGE OUR DESTINY
THE FUTURE WAS WRITTEN LONG AGO
WHAT WILL BE WILL SURELY BE
ACCEPT THE THINGS FATE BRINGS YOU
WITH GRACE AND HUMILITY

ANCESTORS (from off)

OO OO OH

SAM & TYRESIA

STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD

ALL

CAUGHT BETWEEN DAY AND NIGHT
STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD
CAUGHT BETWEEN DAY AND NIGHT

SAM

THERE WILL SURELY BE HELL TO PAY
IF MY CHOOSING ISN'T RIGHT

TYRESIA

ASHES RETURN TO ASHES, WE ALL FALL DOWN
EVERYONE WILL END UP IN THE DUSTY GROUND
THERE'S NO PLACE YOU'LL FIND YOU HAVEN'T ALREADY BEEN
DON'T WASTE PRECIOUS TIME CHASIN' AFTER THE WIND
ONCE YOU GO ASTRAY YOU MAY NOT
FIND YOUR WAY BACK AGAIN

SAM

THE WIND DON'T KNOW WHERE IT'S GOIN'
IT JUST BLOWS AND BREAKS ON THROUGH
THE SAME IS TRUE OF ME AND MINE
WE MOVE LIKE MUSIC DO
NO MAP, NO FATE, JUST RHYTHM
AND ROOM TO DANCE ON THROUGH

TYRESIA

WHAT HAS BEEN IS WHAT WILL BE
IT'S ALL BEEN SAID AND DONE

SAM

I WON'T BE BOUND BY OLD TOMORROWS
I WALK WHERE I CHOOSE TO BE

TYRESIA

WHAT HAS BEEN IS WHAT WILL BE
IT'S ALL BEEN SAID AND DONE

SAM

THE FUTURE AIN'T FINISHED
MY PATH IS MINE TO SEE

TYRESIA

THERE AIN'T NOTHIN' NEW
AIN'T NOTHIN' NEW UNDER THE SUN

SAM

I SHAPE MY OWN DESTINY

TYRESIA

SOME ROADS ARE LAID IN IRON
NO MAN CAN TURN THEIR AIM

SAM

I WALK WHERE I DECIDE TO WALK
I SIGN MY OWN NAME

TYRESIA

YOUR FATE'S ALREADY WRITTEN
IT'S FOOLISH TO TRY AND FIGHT

SAM

I GOT EYES, DON'T NEED NO SIGNS
TO FIND THE LIGHT

TYRESIA

ONCE YOU GO WRONG, YOU MAY NOT
EVER KNOW WHAT'S RIGHT

ALL

STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD
I DON'T KNOW WHICH PATH TO CHOOSE
STANDING AT THE CROSSROAD
I DON'T KNOW WHICH PATH TO CHOOSE

SAM

I'M STRANDED AT THE CROSSROAD
ALL ALONE AND SINGING THE BLUES

(TYRESIA collects her items and exits.)

BANJO (from off)
Shoe shine . . . shoe shine . . .

[MUSIC: No. 10 - "SHINE"]

(BANJO enters holding a shine cloth shammy. PASSERSBY cross, including a SANDWICH BOARD MAN: "WATCH AND PRAY"/"EAT AT JOE'S." WHEATSTRAW and SYLVESTER emerge from the club. SAM freezes, transfixed by SYLVESTER's red shoes.)

BANJO
Good afternoon, gentlemen. You need a shine today? I got the shammy. Oo, oo, oo! Would you look at them red shoes. Red as trouble. Ain't never seen nothin' like 'em. Mister, step on over here. Lemme shine those beauties. Shoes like that ain't every day. Lookin' like they come straight out the Bessemer - pure heat and gold.

(SAM limps to his coats and disappears beneath.)

A man's shoes speak louder than his words. You can tell where he's been - what he's still chasin'. I been walkin' hard roads all my life. Dust roads, broke roads, nowhere roads. Those red, red shoes - those is walkin' somewhere else. If I had shoes like that, people would stop, turn, listen. I wouldn't just walk, I'd arrive, glide, stride! I'd play the street like a piano under my feet. Whole world ringin', every step singin' out - this man is somebody. C'mon, mister. Let me shine those Shebas. I got the shammy!

(SYLVESTER declines the shine and exits with WHEATSTRAW. BANJO withdraws. ENSEMBLE MEMBER #6 escorts SARAH JANE onstage.)

ACT I
Scene Three

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #6

Act Three. A visit from the church cleaning lady . . .

[SONG: No. 11 - "RISE UP HOME"]

SARAH JANE

Sam? Sam, come sit down over here a minute.

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #6

. . . Sister Sarah Jane.

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #6 withdraws.)

SARAH JANE

I SEE YOU STRUGGLE, I HEAR YOU CRY
WANNA SAY SOMETHIN' HEAVY ON MY MIND
SOMETHIN' MY GRANDMA, SHE TOLD ME TRUE
'BOUT OUR ANCESTORS AND WHAT THEY KNEW

(SAM rises. ALLEY FOLK enter.)

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK

RISE, RISE UP HOME
RISE, RISE UP HOME

SARAH JANE

GRANDMA TOLD ME 'BOUT THE ONES BEFORE
HOW THEY ROSE UP MIGHTY ABOVE THE STORM
CHAINS COULD NOT KEEP THEM BOUND TO ONE PLACE
OUR PEOPLE COULD FLY ON WINDS OF GRACE

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK

RISE, RISE UP HOME
RISE, RISE UP HOME

SARAH JANE

LISTEN CLOSE NOW, LEMME BREAK IT DOWN
YOUR SOUL GOT POWER THAT CAN'T BE BOUND
OUR PEOPLE KNEW IT WAY BACK WHEN
THROUGH THE HARDEST TIMES AGAIN AND AGAIN

SARAH JANE (cont.)

THEY FOUND A WAY WHEN THERE WASN'T NO WAY
THROUGH THE STORM CLOUDS, YES THEY FOUND A WAY
SO WHEN SKIES ARE DARK AND GRAY
SPREAD YOUR WINGS AND FLY

ALLEY FOLK

FLY, AH
FLY, AH

SARAH JANE

FLY, FLY TO FREEDOM
FLY TO FREEDOM

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK

RISE, RISE UP HOME
RISE, RISE UP HOME

RISE, RISE UP HOME
RISE, RISE UP HOME
RISE, RISE UP HOME
RISE UP, RISE UP
RISE UP HOME

(ALLEY FOLK drift off.)

SAM

Sister, I should get back to my beat.

SARAH JANE

Hold your horses, now. I ain't done yet. Got a special surprise
for ya'.

(SARAH JANE produces a pair of homemade shoes.)

SAM

What in the name of —

SARAH JANE

Made you some shoes!

SAM

Oh . . . how'd you . . . ?

SARAH JANE

Bottle caps, cardboard and bread bags.

SAM

Would've rather had the bread.

SARAH JANE

Huh?

SAM

Nothin'.

SARAH JANE

Slip these on . . . and yeah, twine around your ankle. There you go. The Lord provides. Now Mister Overcoat Sam — stay humble. Stay hopeful and trust in God. One day soon the door to opportunity will appear and when it does you have to be right and ready to fling it open. You hear me?

SAM

Yep, yep. Hey, I really need to go.

SARAH JANE

And Sam — all God's children got shoes . . . sit down.

[SONG: No. 12 - "ALL GOD'S CHILDREN"]

I GOT SHOES, YOU GOT SHOES
ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT SHOES
WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN
GONNA PUT ON MY SHOES
GONNA DANCE ALL OVER GOD'S HEAVEN —

SAM

I hear you. I hear you! . . . Sister.

(SARAH JANE exits. WHEATSTRAW enters.)

ACT I
Scene Four

[SONG: No. 13 - "UNREAL CITY: REPRISE"]

(SAM dances on his crate. Gives up. Removes the makeshift shoes.)

WHEATSTRAW

UNREAL CITY
CITY FULL OF GREED
WHERE GHOSTS IN BROAD DAYLIGHT
TAKE WHATEVER THEY NEED

DO WHAT YOU FEEL CITY
FAR FROM WHAT YOU'VE KNOWN
SO STRANGE AND SO DISTANT
AND SO CLOSE TO HOME
UNREAL CITY, UNREAL CITY

ENSEMBLE (from off)

UNREAL CITY

WHEATSTRAW

Act Four . . . an act of desperation.

[MUSIC: No. 14 - "KNOCKABOUT: PIRATES"]

(WHEATSTRAW withdraws. Thunder. SYLVESTER enters in red shoes. SAM ambushes. They wrestle. SAM strikes him. SYLVESTER collapses on a bench. SAM steals the red shoes — hides them in a trash can. ALLEY FOLK enter. COP enters. WHEATSTRAW reenters and points to SYLVESTER's bare feet, then points to SAM — accusing. SAM bolts off. COP pursues. ALLEY FOLK exit carrying SYLVESTER.)

[SONG: No. 15 - "DANCING SHOES"]

(SAM reenters, opens the trash can. ROSE & RUBY emerge. They entice SAM into a soft shoe. WHEATSTRAW appears, watches at a distance — withdraws. SAM hustles ROSE & RUBY back into the trash can — slams the lid just as the COP reenters.)

COP

And now folks, we present the scene where the hobo is arrested and carted off to jail. You! Don't take another step.

(SAM freezes. COP closes in. WHEATSTRAW emerges.)

WHEATSTRAW

Thank you, officer, but there's no problem here. I was wrong to accuse this gentleman.

COP

You said he stole the shoes. Made quite a show of it. Had the whole street thinking he's guilty. Sure looks guilty. I bet he's hiding the evidence.

(COP pushes past SAM, lifts trash can lid – searches. WHEATSTRAW produces the red shoes.)

WHEATSTRAW

My mistake. I have the shoes. Had them all along.

COP

I'm watching you.

(COP exits.)

WHEATSTRAW

You were dancin' up a storm out here. Got a name?

SAM

Not one that matters.

WHEATSTRAW

Everyone has a handle. Joe? Jeb? Sam?

SAM

Sam.

WHEATSTRAW (Produces a card)

Sam, my card.

SAM

Those shoes –

WHEATSTRAW

Peter Wheatstraw. Talent buyer. I book the Copacetic and it seems I've lost one of my dancers, Sam.

SAM

Those red . . .

WHEATSTRAW

Special, aren't they? One of a kind. Belong to the club manager. But you know, it looks like I need a replacement. I might be able to make some mutually beneficial contractual arrangements.

SAM

You want me?

WHEATSTRAW

Just for one night. You get to wear the shoes. I get a dancer. Win-win.

SAM

On stage?

WHEATSTRAW

Same steps, better floor. You'll be fine. You wear the shoes, get a hot meal and an audition. Wait here. I gotta clear it with the manager.

[MUSIC: No. 16 - "ROSE & RUBY"]

(WHEATSTRAW places the shoes before SAM and exits. ROSE & RUBY appear, dancing around SAM. WHEATSTRAW returns.)

Manager's agreed. Just one small thing first – the paperwork.

SAM

Oo, red shoes, so fine! So fine.

(WHEATSTRAW produces an oversized contract.)

WHEATSTRAW

Standard stuff. (Reading) "Talent grants manager full ownership of all components of the act: steps, tricks, combos, rhythms" –

SAM

Most of my moves are swiped anyway. You can have 'em.

WHEATSTRAW

And in exchange, you get dinner.

SAM

Music to my ears.

WHEATSTRAW

Excellent, brother. Sign here.

(SAM signs the contract.)

So . . . just Sam?

SAM

Just Sam.

WHEATSTRAW

Initial here, and here, and here. That's it! I'll teach you the song and you'll be on stage this evening, red shoes and all.

SAM

I gotta dance to your tune?

WHEATSTRAW

Sing a little too. You'll catch on. Maybe this is the beginning.

(WHEATSTRAW exits. ROSE & RUBY disappear.)

SAM

The beginning . . .

(SAM puts on the shoes. BANJO enters with shammy
— prepares to shine SAM's shoes.)

[MUSIC: No. 17 - "SHINE II"]

BANJO

Oo, red shoes. So fine, so fine. Come over here, let me give you a shine! The more I look at you, the more beautiful you become. Every shade of red at once. The idea of red. Redness. Fire. Blood. Want. The redness of redness.

WHEATSTRAW VOICE-OVER

Ladies and gentlemen of the literary society . . .

BANJO

Miss Red Rose and Miss Ruby Red.

WHEATSTRAW VO

Here for the first time, a debut in our revue . . .

BANJO

I feel it. They ain't just shinin' . . .

WHEATSTRAW VO

Please welcome to the Copacetic stage . . .

BANJO

They wakin' up . . .

WHEATSTRAW VO

Overcoat Sammy!

[SONG: No. 18 - "TACKY ANNIE"]

(BANJO snaps his shammy and shines. The red shoes glow. SAM dances. BANJO strums.)

SAM

TACKY ANNIE, YOU'RE JUST NOT RIGHT
 DRINKIN' AND DANCIN' ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT
 I WANT YOU WALKIN' WITH ME DOWN THE AISLE
 BUT YOU'RE OUT FOX TROTTIN' AND RUNNIN' WILD
 BE UNDERSTANDING, STOP ALL THIS VAMPIN' AROUND
 TACKY ANNIE, SETTLE DOWN

TACKY ANNIE, TRIM YOUR LAMP
 ON MY HEART YOU TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP

TACKY ANNIE, YOU DECIDE
 BE A B-I-M-B-O OR BE MY BRIDE
 YOU ALWAYS SAY I'M THE ONE YOU CRAVE
 BUT I'M MISTER LONELY WHEN YOU MISBEHAVE
 ACTING WACKY, JAZZIN' AROUND WITH THE BOYS
 TACKY ANNIE, QUIT THAT NOISE

(BANJO vanishes. SAM steps out of the shoes.
 WHEATSTRAW enters.)

WHEATSTRAW

Sammy the tap dancin' man! You tore it up last night. Crowd was wild for ya'.

SAM

In these shoes, my feet just know. Let me wear 'em one more night. I'll do whatever you want.

WHEATSTRAW

Funny you should ask. Manager's impressed and uh, we're short an act. My lead dancer's gone.

SAM

Gone, like . . . ?

WHEATSTRAW

Gone on — ain't comin' back — not this side of things. But you knew that.

SAM

Hmm? No, I —

WHEATSTRAW

So we need a stand-in. Lose the coats, clean up, learn a few new tunes — and I book you for the week.

SAM

Wearin' the shoes? That's the deal?

WHEATSTRAW

That's the deal. Wait here. I'll clear it with the manager.

[MUSIC: No. 19 - "ROSE & RUBY II"]

(ROSE & RUBY appear and dance with SAM.
WHEATSTRAW returns with a one-page contract.)

Success! You'll start tonight and go Sunday to Sunday. Two shows a day. It's all right here.

SAM

No need to look. I'll do whatever it takes.

WHEATSTRAW

As a talent buyer I'm obligated to point out this exclusivity clause. Manager provides a room and dinner. In return, you perform only for the manager.

SAM

Yeah, yeah. Give it here!

(TYRESIA enters.)

BANJO (from off)

Shoe shine . . . Get a shoe shine . . .

WHEATSTRAW

You okay ditching the coats?

SAM

I'll lose some. I ain't wearin' no fancy costume.

WHEATSTRAW

Fair enough. Sign here, Sammy.

SAM

Just Sam.

WHEATSTRAW

Sammy's got a better ring. Sammy sells. Sign.

(SAM signs the contract. ROSE & RUBY disappear.)

TYRESIA

Don't you long to know what lies beyond the gate? Get a glimpse into your fate. She possesses gifts profound. Come see Madame Tyresia, conjure woman of great renown.

SAM

I keep wearin' the shoes, right?

WHEATSTRAW

For the week, then they go back to the manager.

SAM

Heh — thanks, Wheatstraw.

WHEATSTRAW

Don't mention it.

(WHEATSTRAW exits. SAM puts on the shoes — dances. BANJO enters, plays.)

ACT I
Scene Five

[MUSIC: No. 20 - "COPACETIC II"]

SAM (riffing)

Watch yourself! . . . If you have tap shoes, you're in! . . .
This is easier than it looks . . . Can't make pot roast, can't
make rent. Tryin' a-make a dollar outta fifteen cent . . . Don't
just stand there, watch for cops . . . If you have tap shoes,
you're in! . . .

(Two WAITRESSES emerge from the club — fawn over
SAM. They dance. SARAH JANE enters, sweeping.)

TYRESIA

Sarah Jane. Get a look at this. It's shocking.

SARAH JANE

And shameless. Floozies flapping around half naked —

TYRESIA

Not them — Sam! Look at how he's dancing.

(WHEATSTRAW enters.)

WHEATSTRAW

Whoa! No more busking. You're under contract now. Here, let's go
over this tune.

SARAH JANE

Sam, I need to talk to you.

SAM

Give me a minute, Sister. I'll be right back.

(SAM, WHEATSTRAW and WAITRESSES exit into the
club. The SANDWICH BOARD MAN crosses: "FAITH IN
FOOTWEAR"/"BEN'S SHOE & CLOTHING.")

SARAH JANE

What did he say?

TYRESIA

Said he'll be back. I have a hinky feeling, Sarah Jane.

SARAH JANE

Somethin' strange goin' on.

TYRESIA

More than strange. How's he suddenly dancin' like that? Sam's always had a limp — now he's hoofin' like a vaudeville star? That kinda change ain't natural, and it ain't free.

(TYRESIA exits. SAM enters.)

SARAH JANE

Sam, come sit with me.

SAM

I ain't got much time.

SARAH JANE

Neither do I. Now sit and listen.

SAM

I'm listenin'.

SARAH JANE

Something's going on. Somethin' about you is changed. You need to stay humble and you need to stay out of that juice joint.

SAM

It's just a dance hall . . . and a book club.

SARAH JANE

They bootleggin', Sam. Ain't nobody readin' in the dark.

SAM

I get meals. I get a room for the week.

SARAH JANE

I was hoping you'd come stay with me in my final days.

SAM

But you told me — fling open the door to opportunity.

SARAH JANE

What's that?

SAM

You said fling it open. I gotta go. I got a show to do.

SARAH JANE

Today? You can't be in there dancin' for the Devil on the Lord's Day. No sir. You sit yourself down. I'm gonna sing you an old song. Might save your soul if you listen close. Dancin' in that shimmy shack is one thing, but dancin' on the Sabbath is a sin.

[SONG: No. 21 - "CROSSING YOUR FEET"]

SAM

I gotta go.

SARAH JANE

DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD
DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD
HEED THE WORD, LISTEN WELL
OR WHEN YOU DIE YOU'LL GO TO HELL

(SAM attempts to stop his shoes from tapping.
ALLEY FOLK enter.)

SAM

Sorry, Sister. I'm listenin'.

ALLEY FOLK

DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

SARAH JANE

DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK

DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

SARAH JANE

YOU CAN SHAKE YOUR SHOES ON A SATURDAY
DANCE ALL NIGHT AT THE CABARET, BUT

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK

DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

SARAH JANE

I WALK THROUGH THIS WORLD
WITH PURPOSE IN MY STRIDE
THE WEEK HAS BEEN LONG
BUT I'M SANCTIFIED INSIDE

SARAH JANE (cont.)

SIX DAYS OF LABOR
 NOW COMES THE DAY OF REST
 LORD, HELP ME HONOR
 WHAT YOU'VE BLESSED

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK

DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD
 DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

SARAH JANE

YOU CAN CUT A RUG TILL YOUR HEELS WEAR THIN
 BUT DANCIN' ON A SUNDAY IS A SIN

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK

DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

SARAH JANE

I GOT SHOES, YOU GOT SHOES
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT SHOES
 WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN GONNA PUT ON MY SHOES
 I'M GONNA DANCE ALL OVER GOD'S HEAVEN
 HEAVEN, HEAVEN
 EV'RYBODY TALKIN 'BOUT HEAVEN AIN'T A-GOIN' THERE
 HEAVEN, HEAVEN
 GONNA DANCE ALL OVER GOD'S HEAVEN

ALL WEEK YOU HEAR TEMPTATION
 CALLING OUT YOUR NAME
 THE WORLD KEEPS ON SPINNING
 DON'T PLAY THEIR SINFUL GAME
 THOUGH YOUR FEET WANT TO STRAY
 CHOOSE REVERENCE ON THIS SACRED DAY

BE STRONG, RESIST THE DEVIL
 WHEN THE MUSIC COMES TO GROOVE
 WHEN THE RHYTHM ROCKS YOU
 MAKES YOUR BODY WANT TO MOVE
 REMEMBER WHAT I SAID
 CHOOSE THE RIGHTEOUS PATH INSTEAD

YOU HEAR ME TALKING TO YOU

(SAM fights to stop his feet. He removes his shoes.)

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK
DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD
DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

SARAH JANE
YOU CAN BOOGIE WOOGIE TILL THE BROAD DAYLIGHT
BUT DANCIN' ON THE SABBATH JUST AIN'T RIGHT

ALLEY FOLK
DON'T CROSS YOUR FEET — NO CROSSING YOUR FEET
DON'T CROSS YOUR FEET — NO CROSSING YOUR FEET

SARAH JANE (ad-lib)
DON'T CROSS YOUR FEET . . . DON'T BE CROSSING
DON'T CROSS . . . YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD
YOU GOT A WARNING COME SUNDAY MORNING
YOU BETTER PUT THOSE DANCING SHOES AWAY

SARAH JANE & ALLEY FOLK
DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD
DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD
HEED THE WORD, LISTEN WELL
OR WHEN YOU DIE YOU'LL GO TO HELL
DON'T BE CROSSING YOUR FEET AGAINST THE LORD

(SARAH JANE, BANJO and ALLEY FOLK exit.
WHEATSTRAW enters.)

ACT I
Scene Six

WHEATSTRAW

Ready to set the place on fire?

SAM

I've changed my mind. I can't dance in your — book club.

WHEATSTRAW

That's not how this works, Sammy. You signed a contract. We made a deal.

SAM

Deal's off.

WHEATSTRAW

The deal is off?

SAM

Yeah. Sorry for ruining your show.

WHEATSTRAW

I'll need them shoes.

(WHEATSTRAW exits with shoes. DESIREE enters.)

DESIREE

Act Five, in which Overcoat Sam meets the lovely, the talented, Miss Desiree Cartier!

[MUSIC: No. 22 - "SHAKE DANCER"]

Well, hi there, handsome. You're the tap dancing clown, right? Saw your act. Terrific stuff. I'm Desiree Cartier.

SAM

I, uh, I —

DESIREE

You're adorable. Cartier's not my real name. It's Carter, but Cartier just sparkles, don't you think?

SAM

Haven't uh, seen you around.

DESIREE

I'm new at the Copacetic. And your name is . . . Sammy, right?

SAM

Sammy. Yeah. It has a ring to it.

DESIREE

I like rings. Oo, your act is so good. You're a guy who knows how to move, huh? I'm a dancer, too. Shake dancer — but legit. I mix picture dance with a little exotic technique. Exotic picture dancing. Brand new and all mine. Wanna see?

(Drums. DESIREE dances.)

Every shake a pretty picture! . . . Sammy, what if we teamed up?

SAM

You and —?

DESIREE

You and me, sugar. A whole new kind of act. Tap meets exotic picture dance. No more clowning around.

(DESIREE coaxes SAM out of one of his overcoats.)

SAM

But I've never — I don't . . .

DESIREE

You don't like the idea?

SAM

I like it, I do, but — exotic . . .

DESIREE

Don't you worry, Sammy. I'll handle the exotic stuff. Just show me some tap . . . Well? Show me a few steps.

SAM

Oh, I can't do that.

DESIREE

I showed you mine. You show me yours.

[SONG: No. 23 - "WHY PUT OFF TILL TOMORROW"]

SAM

Later on, for sure, but right now, no, I don't want to.

DESIREE

Why not, baby? Why the hesitation? What ain't I got that you need?

SAM

Oh no, Desiree it's just — my shoes. My feet were killin' me.

DESIREE

Honey, that's just an excuse.

SAM

No, so I took them off. I don't have them with me. I can't dance right now.

DESIREE

TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO GUY
SO LET'S ADVANCE THE PLOT
IT'S BEST TO JUMP IN TO THE TASK AT HAND
PUT ON THE STEAM WHILE THE IRON IS HOT

YOU AND ME OUGHT TO GET BUSY
A HEAD START HELPS AND HOW
WHY PUT OFF TILL TOMORROW WHAT WE COULD DO RIGHT NOW?

THE EARLY BIRD ALWAYS CATCHES
LOTS OF WORMS, OR SO I'VE BEEN TOLD
THERE'S NO BETTER CLIME THAN THE PRESENT TIME
NEW TRICKS ARE HARD ONCE THE DOG GETS OLD

IT'S PLEASING SEIZING THE MOMENT
I GUESS, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN WAS RIGHT
WHY PUT OFF TILL TOMORROW WHAT WE COULD DO TONIGHT?

WE'RE JUST SITTIN' PIDDLIN'
AND TWIDDLIN' OUR THUMBS
JAZZ WITH NO REASON OR RHYME
IF WE START IN NOW GET OUR JUICES TO FLOW
WE CAN GO, NICE AND SLOW, AND TAKE OUR TIME

MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES
NOW ONWARD WE MUST PLOW
WHY PUT OFF TILL TOMORROW
BABY, WHAT WE COULD BE DOING RIGHT NOW?

DESIREE (cont.)

Shakin' pretty pictures!

(DESIREE coaxes SAM out of one coat after another until he has stripped off several overcoats.)

SITTING ON THE SIDELINES WE'RE WASTING OUR TIME
LET'S TAKE A ROLL OF THE DICE
IF WE JUMP RIGHT IN, GET THE SHOW ON THE ROAD
WE CAN GO, NICE AND SLOW OR MAYBE DO IT TWICE

I SAY, MAKE HAY WHILE THE SUN SHINES
YES, ONWARD WE MUST PLOW

WHY PROCRASTINATE? WHY WAIT AND WALLOW?
WHO'S TO SAY WE GOT THE TIME TO BORROW?
WHY WOULD WE PUSH, PUSH, PUSH OFF TILL TOMORROW
BABY, WHAT WE COULD BE DOING RIGHT NOW?

(WHEATSTRAW enters.)

WHEATSTRAW

There you are, Desiree. Let's go. Let's get you dressed and ready.

DESIREE

Thank you, Mr. Wheatstraw! Sammy, come on. Show time.

SAM

I just need a word with him.

DESIREE

I'll see you in the club then?

WHEATSTRAW

Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Desiree Carter.

DESIREE

Cartier!

WHEATSTRAW

Whatever. Let's go.

(Drums. DESIREE exits with a flourish.)

SAM

Wait! Wheatstraw! Wait! I need to get back in the show.

WHEATSTRAW

Look who's come crawling.

SAM

I was wrong. I'll sign anything. Just give me another shot.

WHEATSTRAW

You had your shot, Sammy. You had the chance to dance in the finest shoes this side of paradise and you walked out. Left us stuck without a dancer. That ain't good business.

SAM

I won't back out again. I swear. I'll do anything, make any deal, pay any price. I need to dance in those shoes. I'm beggin' you. Put me back in the show.

WHEATSTRAW

No promises, but I'll see what I can do. This may take a while.

SAM

All right.

[MUSIC: No. 24 - "ROSE & RUBY III"]

(ROSE & RUBY appear. WHEATSTRAW exits – immediately reenters holding the red shoes and a cocktail napkin.)

WHEATSTRAW

Well, Sammy . . .

SAM

That was quick.

WHEATSTRAW

The manager's willing to put you back in – under certain extraordinary, but industry-standard contractual stipulations.

SAM

Anything.

WHEATSTRAW

This one's ironclad. No backing out, no changing your mind. The contract only ends if both parties agree to end it.

SAM

So I'm back for the week?

WHEATSTRAW

It's open-ended – could be a week, could be ten years, could be forever.

SAM

Forever's a long time.

WHEATSTRAW

Forever, or until you both agree to end the contract. The manager doesn't trust you anymore, my brother, so it's this deal or no deal.

SAM

One question – where can a guy get a decent overcoat?

(WHEATSTRAW produces an ostentatious overcoat.)

WHEATSTRAW

How 'bout this killer orchestration?

SAM

Deal!

[SONG: No. 25 - "MY TWO AND ONLY YOU"]

WHEATSTRAW

Welcome home. Welcome back.

(SAM signs the napkin contract. WHEATSTRAW drapes the coat over SAM's shoulders and places the shoes before him.)

Back! He's back by popular demand. He's . . . Sammy the tap dancin' man!

(WHEATSTRAW exits. Rose & Ruby dance.)

SAM

I FIN'LLY FOUND MY SOULMATE
 YOU'RE SO MUCH MORE THAN I WAS DREAMING OF
 INSTEAD OF FALLING FOR ONE SO FAIR
 IT'S A PAIR THAT I LOVE
 I FIND YOU BOTH TO BE FIRST RATE
 SO I REFUSE TO CHOOSE
 BETWEEN EITHER ONE
 OF MY WONDERFUL SHOES

(CLUB HOOFERS enter.)

SAM (cont.)

NOBODY CAN COMPARE
YOU'RE MY ALL AND ALL
WHEN WE'RE DANCIN'
I'M FEELIN' GRAND AND STANDIN' TALL

ALL

ONE PLUS ONE PLUS ONE
LET'S TWENTY-THREE SKIDOO
A PAIR SO RARE AND LOVELY
MY TWO AND ONLY YOU

SAM

I SEEN LOTS OF LADIES
ACT LIKE THEY DO THE BLACK BOTTOM
THEY GALLIVANT AND PRANCE
BUT HAVEN'T GOT A CHANCE
WHEN MY GIRLS TIP AND TOE
FOLKS SHOULD KNOW
THEY'LL NEVER OUT FOX TROT 'EM
THERE'S OTHER HOOFERS ON THE DANCE FLOOR
BUT MY GIRLS STEAL THE SHOW

ALL

I'M SWINGIN' LIKE A KING
STRUTTIN' UP THE STREET
BUCK AND WINGIN'

SAM

YOU'RE SWEEPIN' ME RIGHT OFF MY FEET

CLUB HOOFERS

CLASSIC SENSE OF STYLE

SAM

MY FAVORITE PAS DE DEUX
YOU MAKE MY HEART START DANCIN'

ALL

MY TWO AND ONLY YOU, MY TWO AND ONLY YOU
MY TWO
AND ONLY YOU

(SAM puts on the red tap shoes. Rose & Ruby
disappear.)

CLUB HOOFERS
YOU'LL SEE PACKS OF FLAPPERS

SAM
FAKE LIKE THEY SCRATCHIN' THE GRAVEL
THE HENS CANNOT COMPARE
THEY HAVEN'T GOT A PRAYER
WHEN MY PEARLS SHIMMY SHAKE

ALL
PEEP THESE SWEET SUGAR BABIES TRAVEL

SAM
THERE'S OTHER THRILLER KILLER DILLERS
BUT MY GIRLS TAKE THE CAKE

ALL
NOBODY CAN COMPARE
YOU'RE MY ALL AND ALL
FINE AND FANCY, RED HOT TO TROT
YOU GOT IT ALL
ONE PLUS ONE PLUS ONE
LET'S TWENTY-THREE SKIDOO
A PAIR SO RARE AND LOVELY
MY TWO AND ONLY YOU, MY TWO AND ONLY YOU

MY TWO
AND ONLY YOU
AND ONLY YOU
AND ONLY YOU
MY TWO AND ONLY YOU

(CLUB HOOFERS exit. SAM can't stop tapping.
WHEATSTRAW enters — sweeps SAM away.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT II
Scene One

(WHEATSTRAW enters – conducts the band.)

[MUSIC: No. 26 – "ENTR'ACTE"]

[SONG: No. 27 – "ALWAYS SWING THE BLUES"]

(BANJO enters, strums. SAM, ROSE & RUBY enter.)

SAM

EMPTY POCKETS, NO SUNSHINE IN SIGHT
SHADOWBOXING IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT
GOT NO FRIENDS, NO PLACE TO CALL HOME
BUT I KNOW I'LL NEVER BE ALONE

ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES
I'LL ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES
ONE THING I'LL NEVER LOSE
I'LL ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

A VELVET NIGHT, A SATIN MOON
DON'T NEED MONEY JUST A JUMPIN' TUNE
CONSIDER THE LILIES, PONDER THEIR CLUES
WHEN YOU AIN'T GOT NOTHIN'
YOU GOT NOTHIN' TO LOSE

IMPROVISING RHYTHM, ONE STEP AT A TIME
DON'T KNOW WHAT'S 'ROUND THE CORNER
BUT I KNOW I'LL BE JUST FINE

(SAM puts on the red shoes. ROSE & RUBY
disappear. BANJO exits.)

Go to tap class – Go to tap class!

JAZZ NOTES FLOATIN' OVER FULLERTON STREET
CAR HORNS BLAST A BOMBASTIC BEAT
HEAR A SIREN WAIL, A MILL WHISTLE BLOW
CITY RHYTHM GETS ME HIGH WHEN I'M LOW

SWINGING WITH THE BLUES
SWINGING WITH THE BLUES
FROM MY HEAD DOWN TO MY RED SHOES
I'M SWINGING WITH THE BLUES

SAM (cont.)

I WAS LOST AND FEELIN' OLD
THOUGHT I'D HAVE MY FORTUNE TOLD
BUT WHO NEED SILVER, WHO NEED GOLD?
I GOT WHAT I NEED — DEEP IN MY SOUL

ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES
ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES
ONE THING I'LL NEVER EVER LOSE
I'LL ALWAYS HAVE THE BLUES

(SARAH JANE enters.)

SARAH JANE

Sam! There you are. I'm lookin' to speak with you.

SAM

Sister Sarah Jane, everything all right?

SARAH JANE

No, things ain't right. There's a song I want you to hear. Sit down. It's long, but it's important.

WHEATSTRAW

Act Six. The devastating disappearing act of Miss Desiree —

DESIREE (from off)

Cartier!

WHEATSTRAW

Carter.

[MUSIC: No. 28 - "SHAKE DANCER II"]

(DESIREE enters with a flourish, followed by SYLVESTER. WHEATSTRAW exits.)

SAM

Desiree? Desiree, where've you been? I was lookin' for you.

DESIREE

Yeah, trying to avoid a scene. I'm leavin' town.

SAM

Leavin'? No, hold up.

SYLVESTER

Back off, buddy.

SAM

Hey, it's you. I recognize you.

DESIREE

He's in the show. You know, the magical act.

SYLVESTER

The Great Sylvestro.

SAM

I thought you were dead.

SYLVESTER

Your act wasn't exactly riveting.

SARAH JANE

Sam, I really need to sit with you. This is important.

DESIREE

Well, he used to be in the show — but me and the Great Sylvestro are quittin' this gig. We're teaming up for a new act.

SAM

What? When?

SARAH JANE

You're busy, busy, busy. I see that . . .

SAM

Sister, gimme a minute. Why don't you go take a rest over there by the church? Just gimme a minute.

SARAH JANE

Sam, remember me.

SAM

Wait! Desiree, you said we were gonna be a team.

(SARAH JANE withdraws.)

[SONG: No. 29 - "SOME THINGS"]

DESIREE

Oh, don't make a big production out of it.

SAM

Yeah, but . . .

DESIREE

THE FIRST TIME WE MET
I DIDN'T HAVE NO DOUBT
THOUGHT YOU WERE THE KIELBASY
FOR MY SAUERKRAUT, WELL IT
DID NOT WORK OUT BUT THAT'S OKAY WITH ME
SOME THINGS JUST AIN'T MEANT TO BE

(SYLVESTER exits and returns with a curtain. He
whisks it before DESIREE. When it drops, she's in
a new costume. SYLVESTER withdraws.)

WE'RE AN EGG SOUFFLE
THAT JUST DIDN'T RISE
WE'RE A PICNIC PARTY
POSTPONED BY CLOUDY SKIES
CHOCK IT ALL UP TO LIFE'S GREAT MYSTERY
SOME THINGS JUST AIN'T MEANT TO BE

OUR AFFAIR WAS SLATED
TO LAST FOREVERMORE
BUT DEAR NOW THAT WE'VE DATED
I'M HEADED FOR THE DOOR

WE'RE A GERSHWIN SONG
PLAYED IN THE WRONG KEY
THE S.S. TITANIC HEADED OUT TO SEA
BEFORE WE WRECK I'M CHECKIN' OUT GOM-BYE
SOME FLINGS JUST WERE NOT MEANT TO FLY

(SYLVESTER wheels on a cabinet shadow box.)

WE'RE A TEAPOT DOME DEAL
THAT LOST THE PUBLIC TRUST
WE'RE THE WALL STREET BOOM
RIGHT BEFORE THE BUST
NOT EVERY SHOW WILL GO TO BROADWAY, YOU SEE
WE'RE THE HINDENBURG, BABY, FLYIN' HIGH AND FREE
WE'RE THE WINNIN' WHITE SOX IN 1919
IT SIMPLY WASN'T IN THE CARDS FOR YOU AND ME
SOME THINGS JUST AIN'T MEANT TO BE, AW GEE
SOME THINGS JUST AIN'T MEANT TO BE

(SYLVESTER conceals DESIREE in the box — opens the door — she has vanished. SYLVESTER exits. WHEATSTRAW enters.)

SAM

Desiree? Come back!

WHEATSTRAW

Sammy? What's got you mopin'?

SAM

Desiree quit the show. She left me like I was nothin'.

WHEATSTRAW

Shake it off. You got what she don't — the spotlight. It melts hearts, Sammy. The girlies love a star.

SAM

I just wanted to be somebody.

WHEATSTRAW

You are somebody! Look it — people said you wouldn't amount to a hill of beans. People were wrong. You've already gone further than they thought you could and this is just the start. You're gonna have crowds beggin' for encores and dolls screamin' your name — dazzling dolls, like this lovely lady! Now entering your cravings, Miss Candy! Ain't she sweet? Cavities be damned.

(WHEATSTRAW opens the box — DESIREE, as "Candy" is revealed. She dances for SAM, then vanishes.)

May I present, Miss Ginger! Boom! Ginger's got a kick. That spicy number'll make ya' sweat.

(WHEATSTRAW reveals DESIREE, as "Ginger." She dances — vanishes.)

Introducing the winsome, Miss Willow! Just a wisp of a thing. She bends, she sways . . . in amazing ways.

(WHEATSTRAW reveals DESIREE, as "Willow." She dances — vanishes.)

Pay attention. Here comes pretty Penny! Heads or tails, you're already in luck with this one.

(WHEATSTRAW reveals DESIREE, as "Penny." She dances – vanishes.)

WHEATSTRAW (cont.)

I SEE THAT LONG TALL SALLY
 DONE GOT YOU SHOOK
 YOUR POOR HEART IS BROKEN
 BUT HEY, YOU'RE OFF THE HOOK
 YOUR PALLY TOOK A POWDER
 DON'T PANIC AND POUT
 SOME THINGS JUST DON'T PAN OUT

(WHEATSTRAW produces a flute – plays. A group of dancing BALLET DOLL PUPPETS enter.)

YES, YOUR GIRLIE'S GONE
 BUT NOW YOUR DANCE CARD'S FREE
 THERE'S SO MANY EXQUISITE
 FISH IN THE SEA, BROTHER
 THE SPICE OF LIFE IS VARIETY
 SOME SURE BETS DON'T COME TO BE

YOU'RE SWIMMING IN OPTIONS
 WHO KNOWS WHAT YOU MIGHT FIND
 LIFE IS FULL OF SURPRISES
 JUMP IN, THE WATER'S FINE

DON'T LET LOW EXPECTATIONS
 CHANGE YOUR GOAL
 YOU'RE MASTER OF YOUR FATE
 AND CAPTAIN OF YOUR SOUL
 TELL THE PROPHETS OF DOOM
 YOU AIN'T GOT TIME TO LOSE
 SOME PREDICTIONS JUST DON'T COME TRUE

(WHEATSTRAW exits into the shadow box.)

WHEATSTRAW VOICE-OVER

Now you see it . . . now you don't!

(BALLET DOLL PUPPETS vanish.)

ACT II
Scene Two

(DEACON enters.)

DEACON

Act Seven, friends — the funeral of Sister Sarah Jane.

SAM

Funeral? Sarah Jane? No, she's not dead.

[MUSIC: No. 30 - "PROCESSION"]

(MOURNERS enter carrying a coffin.)

What? I just seen her . . .

DEACON

The service is long over. Step aside. We take her to her rest.

SAM

Wait, reverend —

DEACON

It's Deacon. Deacon Hightower.

SAM

Deacon . . . please, I need to say a word. Pay my respects.
Sister Sarah Jane is the only one who ever cared about me.

DEACON

Speak, then. But, keep it holy. Sister Sarah was much loved —

(SAM's shoes begin tapping.)

SAM

She was a great woman, yes, Lord. I know I wasn't around like I should've been, but she was always there for me, for all of us. She looked after the ones nobody else cared about . . . Shine Bo Banjo, Toothless Earl, Jellyroll Jane . . .

DEACON

What's that you're doing, sir? Please stop.

SAM

. . . Tommy the Moocher and Scrap Metal Mary . . .

DEACON

Stop dancing! This is not permitted here.

SAM

I'm not dancin'. I'm grievin'.

(The shoes dance SAM up onto the coffin.)

DEACON

Come down from there, you heathen. What disgrace.

SAM

I can't stop! Well, at least she's dead. She'll never know.

DEACON

Step down at once. Disgrace! Disgrace!

(Sound of disapproving crowd jeers. DEACON and MOURNERS exit with coffin. BANJO appears.)

[MUSIC: No. 31 - "SHINE III"]

BANJO

Man, I knew shoes could shine bright — but I ain't never seen shoes burn fire like that. Ain't no light in 'em, just fire. Hot, ugly, and cruel. They ain't for dancin' no more. They stomp on what's holy. Those red shoes are dipped in sin. Or maybe it ain't even the shoes, maybe it's you. Only someone with a heart turned black would let his feet carry him right over that woman's final restin' place — a woman who prayed for you, who wanted better for you, and look at how you repaid her. A man who'd wear those shoes and dance on Sister Sarah Jane's coffin . . . ? He's either possessed by the Devil or he is the Devil — 'cause those sure are the Devil's shoes.

(BANJO vanishes. WHEATSTRAW enters with a large suitcase.)

WHEATSTRAW

Sammy. Come here. We need to talk. Given the gossip and the noise, the manager thinks it's time to move your act.

SAM

I'm fired.

WHEATSTRAW

No, no. You're expanding. You're going on tour.

SAM

I'm not leavin' town.

WHEATSTRAW

You already did — on paper. You signed the contract, Sam. Besides, after that funeral stunt? You ain't the hottest ticket in Pittsburgh.

SAM

I wanna talk to the manager.

WHEATSTRAW (produces a card)

In an emergency, here's the number. But don't mess with him.

SAM

I'm callin' him right now.

(They cross to a phone kiosk.)

MANAGER VOICE-OVER

This had better be important.

SAM (on phone)

Sir — hello. This is —

MANAGER VO

Sammy. You backing out again?

SAM

No, sir. I just didn't know the contract meant leavin' town.

MANAGER VO

It means you're a talent. We're putting you on the circuit. Midwest, South. Let them see you.

SAM

For how long?

MANAGER VO

Six months, maybe a year. Sharpen the act. You're gonna be a big star, Sammy.

SAM

Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

(WHEATSTRAW takes the phone — hands SAM the suitcase.)

WHEATSTRAW

Car's around the corner.

SAM

Where are we goin'?

WHEATSTRAW

Heading out on the TOBA circuit. First stop . . . Cleveland.

(WHEATSTRAW exits. SAM places the suitcase flat on the floor.)

ACT II
Scene Three

[SONG: No. 32 - "CHITLIN CIRCUIT"]

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #7 enters.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #7

Act Eight. Chitlin Circuit montage – Sam spends a year on the road, traveling the storied venues of the Theatre Owners Booking Association – otherwise known as T-O-B-A. Tough on Black asses.

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #7 exits. SAM tap dances atop the suitcase.)

ANNOUNCER VOICE-OVER

The Chicken Shack presents Sammy the tap dancin' man.

SAM

TACKY ANNIE, TRIM YOUR LAMP
ON MY HEART YOU TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP

ANNOUNCER VO

Coming to the floor of the Red Bird, Sammy the tap dancin' man.

ANNOUNCER VO

It's showtime at the Shady Rest. Here's Sammy!

SAM

TACKY ANNIE, YOU'RE JUST NOT RIGHT
DRINKIN' AND DANCIN' ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT

ANNOUNCER VO

Out here at the Bucket of Blood, we found a new guy for ya' – Sammy someone.

ANNOUNCER VO

Put your hands together for the tap dancin' man.

(WHEATSTRAW enters.)

WHEATSTRAW

What's buzzin' cousin?

SAM

That's my last show. Why yinz keep bookin' these rinky-dink joints? I can't do this.

WHEATSTRAW

Hang in there. Some of these barrelhouses are rough, but – gotta start somewhere.

ANNOUNCER VO

Y'all ready? Holloway's brings you, Sammy the tap dancin' man.

SAM

TACKY ANNIE

(WHEATSTRAW exits. ENSEMBLE MEMBER #8 enters.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #2

One year becomes two, then two and three are gone. Time rushes by, but the red shoes go on.

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #2 exits.)

SAM

TACKY ANNIE

ANNOUNCER VO

Quiet! The Skylark presents Sammy the, shut up – dancin' man.

SAM

TACKY ANNIE, SETTLE DOWN

ANNOUNCER VO

Coming to you from the Mystery Ship, Sarasota . . . let's see what this Sammy guy's got.

ANNOUNCER VO

It's a new act to the Dew Drop Inn, Danny the dancer.

SAM

TACKY ANNIE, TRIM YOUR LAMP
ON MY HEART YOU TRAMP, TRAMP, TRAMP

(SYLVESTER enters.)

SYLVESTER

After five years on the road, Sam's had enough and decides he's done with show biz.

SAM

TACKY ANNIE

(SYLVESTER exits with suitcase. The SANDWICH BOARD MAN crosses: "CHITLIN CIRCUIT"/"5 YEARS."
SAM appears at phone kiosk.)

MANAGER VO

Yes, Sammy. What is it?

SAM (on phone)

I quit. Year after year of beer gardens and sawdust floors. I don't sleep. The shoes won't let me. Tear up the contract.

MANAGER VO

You're just getting a name. The crowds love you.

SAM

What crowds? I'm playin' to half-empty rooms — and nobody's lovin' that music. Folks want somethin' new. Those old rags are straight off the cob. No, I quit.

MANAGER VO

Stars don't quit, Sammy, they burn. You just need a little help . . . something for the nerves, to rock you to sleep.

SAM

What kinda help?

MANAGER VO

Wheatstraw will handle it. And I'll sweeten the deal . . . Change the music. Do whatever tunes you like, as long as you keep dancing.

SAM

You'll let me change the set?

MANAGER VO

You lay the iron, I'll take care of the rest.

[SONG: No. 33 - "MAGIC RHYTHM"]

ANNOUNCER VO

Kittens and cats, hang onto your hats. This afternoon, the Calderon Ballroom's booked a crackerjack, Sammy the tap dancin' man!

SAM

WHEN I WAS SOLO MY LIFE WAS SO SLOW
ALONE AT HOME WITH MY METRONOME CLICK
BUT WHEN I MET YOU
MY TEMPO WENT FROM WALTZ TO QUICK
YOU TICKLED MY PULSE AND GAVE MY METRONOME
A GOOD SWIFT KICK

ANNOUNCER VO

Kentucky's famous Club Cherry presents Sammy the tap dancin' man.

SAM

NOW THAT YOU FOUND ME I HEAR AROUND ME
A NEW ENCHANTED TATTOO IN THE AIR
YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN
YOU MAKE MY TOOTSIES TINGLE TO TAP
AND I'M SUDDENLY F-LAP BALL CHANGING
LIKE BOJANGLES ON A STAIR

ANNOUNCER VO

Tap dancin' Sammy at Abe's 506 Club in beautiful Pensacola!

SAM

AND WHEN WE SMOOCH IN THE MORNING
I BEGIN TO SWAY
YOUR MYSTIC SONG KEEPS ME CLICKING
THROUGH THE LIVE LONG DAY
WE KISS GOOD NIGHT BUT THE BEAT
IS DEEP WITHIN ME IT SEEMS
I SEE A VISION OF THE RHYTHM IN MY DREAMS

ANNOUNCER VO

Yes sirree, Bob, the show continues here at Club Handy, the hottest spot in Memphis, with Sammy the tap dancin' man.

SAM

YOUR RHYTHMIC TREASURE HAS HIDDEN PLEASURE
WITH EV'RY MEASURE I FIND A NEW START
ABRACADABRA, THE BEAT WILL GRAB YA'
THAT MAGIC BEAT YOU SET FREE IN MY HEART

ANNOUNCER VO

He's touring through Alabama and we're glad to have him in Prichard for the third time at the Harlem Duke Social Club — it's Sammy the tap dancin' man!

SAM

THE HYPNOTISM WITHIN YOUR RHYTHM
TRIPS SOME FANTASTIC LIGHT DANCER IN ME
IT'S MESMERIZING, I'M SO SURPRISINGLY FREE
I THINK IT'S SWELL
YOU CAST A SPELL UPON A FELLA LIKE ME
THIS INCANTATION OF SYNCOPATION
THIS NEW SENSATION THAT'S CRAVING ROMANCE
YOU MAKE IT HAPPEN
YOUR BEAUTY PUTS ME DEEP IN A TRANCE
THEN A MYSTICAL RHYTHM TAKES OVER
AND MY FEET BEGIN TO DANCE

(SANDWICH BOARD MAN crosses: "CHITLIN
CIRCUIT"/"10 YEARS." SAM appears at phone kiosk.)

MANAGER VO

Sammy! Reporting good houses?

SAM (on phone)

Ten years. I'm fallin' apart. These shoes are killin' me. I need to end the contract.

MANAGER VO

Not this again. You're the king out there.

SAM

I'm in pain. I can't barely move. Ain't worth it if I'm dead on my feet. I need freedom.

MANAGER VO

A little pain comes with the profession, you know that. What's the problem?

SAM

Sciatica! I need out.

MANAGER VO

You just maybe need a little help. I'll send you something to keep the pep in your step.

SAM

No, listen, I'm beat to my socks -

MANAGER VO

Go knock 'em flat, Sammy.

[MUSIC: No. 34 - "SMOKETOWN LOUNGE CLOWNS"]

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #4 enters. SAM exits.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #4

Montage — in which Sam spends ten more years on the road.

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #4 exits. SAM reenters followed by a dance ensemble of HEP CAT LOUNGE CLOWNS. They dance an acrobatic tap challenge.)

ANNOUNCER VO

He's tap danced his way across the country, now he's gonna light up the Royal Peacock, Sammy the tap dancin' man.

ANNOUNCER VO

You ready Little Rock? Our featured act, Sammy the tap dancin' man — at the Dreamland Ballroom.

ANNOUNCER VO

Continuing at the Raven, we've got a real humdinger for ya', Sammy the tap dancin' man.

ANNOUNCER VO

Robert's Show Lounge is happy to announce tonight's headliner, the amazing rhythm stylings of Sammy the tap dancin' man.

(SANDWICH BOARD MAN crosses: "CHITLIN CIRCUIT"/"20 YEARS." SAM appears at phone kiosk.)

SAM (on phone)

Twenty years. Biloxi to Baltimore . . . My sciatica's screamin'. I can't do it no more.

MANAGER VO

You'll manage.

SAM

I need to end the contract. I can't dance.

MANAGER VO

What you need is a costume change. Lose the coats. We'll find Sammy something sharp.

[SONG: No. 35 - "I BELIEVE"]

SAM

That won't fix my legs!

MANAGER VO

And I'll throw in those backup dancers you been begging for.

SAM

Backup dancers?

MANAGER VO

Sure. That'll take the heat off you.

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #4 enters.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #4

Montage. Sam does another decade on the circuit.

SAM

The pain shoots right down my legs. Paralyzes me —

MANAGER VO

Sammy, Sammy, Sammy . . . It's showtime.

(SAM and ENSEMBLE MEMBER #4 exit. The top hats and tails of a tiller of precision SHOW GHOSTS appear. SAM reenters dancing.)

ANNOUNCER VO

Live from the Paradise Theatre in downtown Detroit, here's the tap dancin' man, Sammy Williams!

SAM

ONCE I WAS DOWN AND BROKEN-HEARTED
YOU CAME AND GOT MY MOJO STARTED
YOUR POWERS I CAN'T CONCEIVE
BABY, I BELIEVE

SOMEHOW DESPITE THIS DOUBTING THOMAS
FLASH! POW! YOU MADE GOOD ON YOUR PROMISE
WHAT WONDERS LOVE CAN ACHIEVE
BABY, I BELIEVE

ANNOUNCER VO

Chicago's one and only, Club DeLisa, proudly presents the tap dancin' man, Sammy Williams!

SAM

USED TO BE MISTER LONELY
MY SHADOW WAS MY ONLY FRIEND
BUT THEN YOU CAME ALONG
WITH YOUR MYSTIC SONG
NOW EVERY DAY I'M OUT SINGING 'BOUT
I DON'T HAVE TO GO WITHOUT

YOU DO A TRICK SO SPOOKY TO ME
VOODOO IT SENDS A THRILL RIGHT THROUGH ME
AND ALL WITH NOTHING UP YOUR SLEEVE
LADY, ONCE MY LIFE WAS TRAGIC
THEN YOU CAST YOUR MAGIC
SPELL ON ME, NOW I BELIEVE

ANNOUNCER VO

Next, right here on the stage of the world famous Apollo, tap dancin' man, Sammy Williams!

SAM

I THOUGHT I WASN'T FATED
TO FIND A TRUE SOULMATE TO LOVE
I DIDN'T HAVE A PRAYER
AND THEN I SAW YOU THERE
NOW I AM SO DEVOUT SINGING 'BOUT
I DON'T HAVE TO GO WITHOUT

EVEN A THOUGHT OF HESITATION
YOU BROUGHT YOUR PRESTIDIGITATION
YOUR LOVE HAS SET ME FREE
DARLING, WHEN I'M IN YOUR ARMS
ENTRANCED WITH-IN THE CHARMING
SPELL YOU WEAVE, WELL I BELIEVE
I BELIEVE

ANNOUNCER VO

One night only here at the Howard Theatre . . . a big round of applause for the tap dancin' man, Sammy Williams!

(SHOW GHOSTS disappear. SANDWICH BOARD MAN crosses: "CHITLIN CIRCUIT"/"30 YEARS." SAM appears at phone kiosk.)

SAM (on phone)

Thirty years on the road. Ain't got nothin' left. You hear? I'm breaking the contract.

MANAGER VO

That's not possible.

SAM

Show yourself. I wanna see who owns me.

(SAM hangs up the phone. WHEATSTRAW enters.)

WHEATSTRAW

Evening, Sam.

SAM

Wheatstraw? You're the manager?

WHEATSTRAW

Always was.

SAM

Don't gimme that bunk. You been runnin' cons since the day I met you. You ain't no manager.

(SYLVESTER enters wearing SAM's shingle shoes.)

SYLVESTER

I am.

SAM

You? You're not the — my shoes! Hey! Those are my shoes!

SYLVESTER

What are you talking about?

SAM

You stole 'em. It was you. This whole thing's a set-up!

(DESIREE enters.)

DESIREE

Sammy, the truth is . . . I'm the manager.

SAM

Desiree. Nah, you're a heartbreaker, not a manager — and you're a liar. Ain't a word outta your mouth I'd believe. Yinz are all liars.

DESIREE

Oh, sugar, it don't matter what you believe.

WHEATSTRAW

You signed the contract.

SYLVESTER

It's forever.

DESIREE

No way out.

SAM

We'll see about that!

(Drums. SAM struggles to remove his shoes – first annoyed, then frantic – a burst of hopping, twisting, yanking, but the shoes won't budge.)

SAM

They're stuck! You rats – a pack of filthy rats! What've yinz done?

(WHEATSTRAW, SYLVESTER and DESIREE exit.)

MANAGER VO

The tour ends in two weeks, but your contract endures. Upon return to the Copacetic, you shall dance as never before. Dance you shall. Dance until the music breaks. Dance in your red shingle shoes.

[SONG: No. 36 - "ONE STEP AHEAD/EZEKIEL"]

(SAM exits and reenters with a CHAIN GANG dance ensemble – shackled at the ankles.)

ANNOUNCER VO

Ladies and gents, he needs no introduction here in Hopkinsville. The Chesterfield presents, Sammy the tap dancin' man.

SAM & ENSEMBLE

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF BEELZEBUB
YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF BEELZEBUB

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES
YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES

SAM & ENSEMBLE (cont.)

EZEKIEL WAS A MAN, EZEKIEL WAS A MAN
EZEKIEL WAS A MAN, EZEKIEL WAS A MAN

EZEKIEL WAS A MAN
AND HE WRESTLED WITH SIN
EZEKIEL WAS A MAN
HE WRESTLED WITH SIN
HEAVEN'S GATE OPENED AND HE ROLLED RIGHT IN
IT OPENED AND HE ROLLED RIGHT IN

ANNOUNCER VO

Quite a night at the Blue Note, tap dancin' man, Sammy Williams!

ALL

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF BEELZEBUB
YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF BEELZEBUB

SAM

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF ASH-SHAYTĀN

ENSEMBLE

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF ASH-SHAYTĀN

ALL

THE GOOD BOOK SAYS
AND THE BOOK DON'T LIE
THAT GOD TOLD EZEKIEL TO PROPHESIZE
AND MY GOD SPOKE IN ZEKIEL'S MIND
HE RAISED HIS VOICE AND BEGAN TO CRY

HE CRIED
OLD BONES, OLD BONES ARE WALKIN'
GREAT GOD A-MIGHTY THE OLD BONES ARE TALKIN'
OLD BONES, WON'T, WON'T YOU HEAR ME NOW
OLD BONES, YOU HEAR THE WORD OF GOD

ANNOUNCER VO

Members and guests, the One Hundred Men D.B.A. Hall has a legend
for you this evening . . . the tap dancin' man, Sammy Williams!

ALL

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES
YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES

SAM

EZEKIEL SAW THE WHEEL A-ROLLIN'
THE GREAT BIG WHEEL A-TURNIN' OVER

ENSEMBLE

EZEKIEL SAW THE WHEEL A-ROLLIN'

SAM

WAY IN THE MIDDLE OF THE AIR

ALL

HE CRIED
OLD BONES, OLD BONES A-JANGLE
GREAT GOD A-MIGHTY THE OLD BONES A-JANGLE
OLD BONES, WON'T, WON'T YOU HEAR ME NOW
OLD BONES, YOU HEAR THE WORD OF GOD

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES
YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES

YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES
YOU GOTTA STAY ONE STEP AHEAD OF THE DEVIL
AHEAD OF MEPHISTOPHELES, YEAH!

(SAM and ENSEMBLE exit. SAM reenters — appears at
phone kiosk.)

SAM (on phone)

Hello? Hello?

TYRESIA RECORDING VOICE-OVER

Madame Tyresia's Psychic Hotline . . .

SAM

Hello? It's Sam. Remember me? Been a while —

TYRESIA RECORDING VO

She has the power to reveal life's hidden design.

SAM

Listen, Tyresia, I'm in a jam. I'm thinkin' maybe you could help. I don't know where else to turn -

TYRESIA RECORDING VO

Only five dollars a minute. Toll charges may apply. Have your credit card ready. Operators, standing by.

[SONG: No. 37 - "GOODBYE"]

ANNOUNCER VO

The Manhattan Casino's favorite tap dancin' man, Sammy Williams!

SAM

Folks, this being our last show on the road, I want to slow things down a little, do a new song for you. This is . . .
Goodbye.

(ROSE & RUBY appear and float in the distance.)

I REMEMBER ONCE UPON A TIME
WHEN LIFE WAS SUNNY
YOU SAID YOU LOVED ME
AND I ASSURED YOU
I FELT THE SAME WAY TOO
SUDDENLY YOU JUST DECLARED
OUR LOVE AFFAIR WAS THROUGH
YOU FOUND SOMEBODY NEW
I WAS LOST FOR WHAT TO SAY OR DO

I WAS SURE OUR LOVE WOULD ALWAYS LAST
ENDURING OATHS WERE ALL I HEARD
YOU SWORE THE SPELL WOULD NEVER DIE
I COULDN'T TELL, I NEVER HAD A CLUE
YOUR WORDS WERE SO UNTRUE, I FELL HEAD OVER HEELS
IN LOVE WITH A LIE, AND SO THIS IS . . .

(ROSE & RUBY dance. SAM appears at phone kiosk.)

TYRESIA VOICE-OVER

Madame Tyresia's Psychic Hotline . . .

SAM (on phone)

It's Sam. Did you hear my message? Can you do anything to help me outta this trouble?

TYRESIA VO

Somebody hoodoo'd you bad, Sam. Your situation will require more power than this old conjure woman has.

SAM

I'll be back in the city soon. Can you help me or not?

TYRESIA VO

I'm willing to try. I got the potions, the powders, and the plan, but you're dealin' with somethin' extraordinary here. You'd better be ready. Once we start unravelin' magic there ain't no tidy endings.

SAM

I don't care about tidy. I just care about bein' free.

TYRESIA VO

Then you best come prepared to dance your way through thunder and fire.

(ROSE & RUBY circle SAM — then disappear.)

SAM

FOR THE LONGEST TIME I'D MOPE AND SIGH
BUT I WON'T BE MOONING ANY MORE
A MAN CAN ONLY FEEL SO BLUE
I WILL NOT CRY ONE MORE TEAR OVER YOU
MY LONELY NIGHTS ARE THROUGH
I CROSS MY BROKEN HEART AND HOPE TO DIE
THIS IS GOODBYE
GOODBYE

(SAM exits.)

ACT II
Scene Four

(SANDWICH BOARD MAN crosses: "BACK TO THE BURGH"/"THE END IS NIGH." ENSEMBLE MEMBER #9 enters.)

ENSEMBLE MEMBER #9

Act Nine. Back to the Burgh.

[MUSIC: No. 38 - "BACK TO THE BURGH"]

(ENSEMBLE MEMBER #9 exits. WHEATSTRAW enters. SAM enters with suitcase — tap dancing.)

WHEATSTRAW

Back in style, Sammy. Full house at the Copacetic. All rested up for your return engagement?

SAM

I'm planning somethin' special.

WHEATSTRAW

Beautiful, brother. Break a leg.

(WHEATSTRAW takes the suitcase and withdraws.
TYRESIA emerges.)

TYRESIA

Sam? You sure about this?

SAM

I ain't got no choice, Tyresia.

TYRESIA

There's always a choice, just some are uglier than others. This one is dangerous, maybe even deadly.

SAM

It's the only way.

TYRESIA

Then you gonna need more than guts and grit. You gonna need help from the other side, forces that don't play by man's rules. And you understand you'll never dance again? You ready for that?

SAM

I was always ready.

[SONG: No. 39 - "SHANGO"]

(WHEATSTRAW appears. ENSEMBLE DRUMMERS enter.)

WHEATSTRAW

Good evening to you, ladies and gentlemen.

TYRESIA

Ancestors. Spirits of old. Come! Come now. Come walk among us, bold.

WHEATSTRAW

Welcome back to the legendary Club Copacetic, back to where the magic all began.

TYRESIA

From clay and ash, from blood and flame. In this place, we call your name.

(SAM's feet awaken in a tremor of nerve taps — shoes glow red.)

WHEATSTRAW

Tonight, we celebrate the return of our own, Sammy the tap dancin' man.

TYRESIA

Tonight, through the grace of the ancestors, we call . . . Shango!

ENSEMBLE

SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO
SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO

WHEATSTRAW

What are you up to? What are you doing?

TYRESIA

Shango! Shango! Shango! God of thunder, lightning, fire and divine justice. We call on Shango with our drums. We call on Shango and Shango comes.

WHEATSTRAW

Stop it.

ENSEMBLE

SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO

SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO

TYRESIA

He is here. Shango is in this place.

ENSEMBLE

OH! OH! SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO

SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO

(SHANGO materializes, wielding a large axe.
SHANGO dances SAM into a trance.)

TYRESIA

We call on the three spirit rivers. Three divine powers. Hear us. Be near us in this place. Come now! The three wives of Shango.

WHEATSTRAW

What do you think you're doing? You don't have permission.

TYRESIA

They don't ask permission. They take!

ENSEMBLE

OH!

(The THREE WIVES OF SHANGO materialize and dance.)

TYRESIA

The three wives of Shango are here with us now. Oya! Storm made flesh.

ENSEMBLE

OYA!

TYRESIA

Oba! Unyielding eye.

ENSEMBLE

OBA!

TYRESIA

Oshun! Sweet river, deep and wide.

ENSEMBLE

OSHUN!

TYRESIA

Free this man!

WHEATSTRAW

I said stop!

(WHEATSTRAW withdraws. SAM is catatonic. TYRESIA arranges his feet. Lightning. Thunder. SHANGO raises his axe — severs SAM's feet with a single blow. The red tap shoes drop.)

ENSEMBLE

OH! SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO OH!

TYRESIA

SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO
SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO

ENSEMBLE

OH! SHANGO, SHANGO, SHANGO

(In silence, the ENSEMBLE shrouds SAM in overcoats. TYRESIA and ENSEMBLE exit. The shoes stir — begin to tap, then dance themselves offstage. Sound of tapping continues.)

ACT II
Scene Five

(SAM tries to sit up, but collapses into his
mountain of overcoats. WHEATSTRAW enters.)

WHEATSTRAW

And this is how it ends. The grand finale.

SAM

Mister, you got any spare change? Hey, man, spare change? Oh,
it's you.

WHEATSTRAW

Look at this. Pathetic. You had the world at your feet, but you
had to go and be a damn fool.

SAM

I'm free.

WHEATSTRAW

How does freedom feel, huh? Was it worth it? Coming back to
this wasteland?

SAM

I ended it. I beat you —

(ROSE & RUBY appear briefly, then vanish. Tap
sounds fade.)

WHEATSTRAW

I'm just a middleman. You didn't beat me. You beat yourself.
Shoes still haunting you. They're not going away.

SAM

Everything goes away.

WHEATSTRAW

Maybe fade from view, but those red tap shoes — that rhythm —
gonna cling to you till your dying breath, which, from the looks
of it, ain't far off. Sammy? Can you hear me?

SAM

Hey, man, got any spare change?

(SAM covers his head with coats. WHEATSTRAW exits. SAM hears the voice of SISTER SARAH JANE.)

[SONG: No. 40 - "ALL GOD'S CHILDREN: FINALE"]

SARAH JANE (from off)
 HEAR ME WHEN I TELL YOU 'BOUT THE ONES BEFORE
 HOW THEY ROSE UP MIGHTY ABOVE THE STORM
 TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS ARE THE GOOD LORD'S EYES
 AND HIS EARS TOWARD HEARING THEIR RIGHTEOUS CRIES

(SARAH JANE appears — wearing a
 glistening white robe.)

SAM
 Sarah Jane? Sister Sarah Jane?

SARAH JANE & ENSEMBLE
 RISE, RISE UP HOME
 RISE, RISE UP HOME

(The ENSEMBLE enters.)

ENSEMBLE
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT WINGS
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT WINGS

(SAM rises from the pile of coats wearing red tap shoes. SARAH JANE embraces him, draping a robe over his shoulders. SAM dances.)

SARAH JANE
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT WINGS
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT WINGS

ENSEMBLE
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT WINGS
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT WINGS

SARAH JANE & ENSEMBLE
 ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT WINGS

SARAH JANE
 WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN
 GONNA PUT MY FANCY WINGS ON
 GONNA FLY ALL OVER GOD'S GREAT HEAVEN

SARAH JANE & ENSEMBLE

HEAVEN, HEAVEN

GONNA FLY ALL OVER GOD'S GREAT HEAVEN

SAM

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT ROBES

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT ROBES

ENSEMBLE

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT ROBES

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT ROBES

SAM & ENSEMBLE

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT ROBES

SAM & SARAH JANE

OH, WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN GONNA PUT MY FANCY ROBE ON

GONNA SING ALL OVER GOD'S GREAT HEAVEN

ENSEMBLE

HEAVEN, HEAVEN

SAM

EVERYBODY TALKIN' 'BOUT

HEAVEN AIN'T GOIN' THERE

SAM & ENSEMBLE

HEAVEN, HEAVEN

GONNA SING ALL OVER GOD'S GREAT HEAVEN

SAM & SARAH JANE

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT SHOES

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT SHOES

ENSEMBLE

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT SHOES

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, ALL GOD'S CHILDREN GOT SHOES

ALL

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

WE GOT SHOES

WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN

GONNA PUT MY DANCING SHOES ON

(SAM floats.)

ENSEMBLE

WHEN I GET TO HEAVEN
GONNA PUT MY DANCING SHOES ON
GONNA DANCE ALL OVER GOD'S GREAT
HEAVEN, HEAVEN, HEAVEN

SARAH JANE

EVERYBODY TALKIN' 'BOUT
HEAVEN AIN'T GOIN' THERE

ENSEMBLE

HEAVEN, HEAVEN, HEAVEN
GONNA SING ALL OVER

SARAH JANE

GONNA DANCE ALL OVER GOD'S GREAT HEAVEN

ENSEMBLE

ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT SHOES
ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT SHOES
ALL GOD'S CHILDREN, WE GOT SHOES
ALL GOD'S CHILDREN

END OF SHOW