

“The musicians”

Short film

Characters

The singing businessman- (late forties)

Doctor-(mid-forties)

Friend-(late forties)

Scene 1

(We see a smartly dressed businessman, briefcase in hand, hurrying down a busy London street. He pauses briefly at a kiosk to purchase coffee, and then moves onwards through the bustling crowds. Suddenly, in mid-step, the briefcase falls open and innumerable pieces of paper scatter in all directions. Classic reversion into slow-mo, as the coffee-cup roll from his grasp. He begins to shake uncontrollably, growing pale; flings both arms towards the Heavens, inhales deeply and with the look of a man who wishes to be swallowed to the very depths of the earth, launches soulfully into a rendition of Frank Sinatra’s ‘Let’s Fly away’. The street is suddenly silent except for the man’s reverberating tenor voice, every note in perfect key. Shoppers and ambiguous be-suited figures turn to stare in amusement)

Businessman: *(miserably)*...IF YOU COULD USE SOME EXOTIC BOOZE, THERE’S A BAR IN FAR BOM-BAY-HAY...

(He brings the song to a heart-stopping climax. Absolute silence ensues. Everyone turns to look at one other. Suddenly, as though having silently come to a unanimous decision, they break into a dream-like mixture of laughter and applause. He scrabbles on the ground for his papers, panting and falling into a Gollum-like half-bow, then staggers towards the sanctuary of his glass office block. Having reached safety, the man clamps both hands over his mouth and leans against the wall. His eyes are wild and staring- he is afraid of what he might involuntarily do next)

Scene 2

(We see the same man sitting in a doctor’s surgery. He seems to have aged visibly, and his fingers work manically, compulsively smoothing a crease in his trousers)

Businessman: Thrice. Three times. In one week. *Doc*, I’m sorry to burst in on you like this, I really am, and I’m not the type to cause, as you might say, *unnecessary* disruption to public service. But I reckon I might actually be *(takes a deep breath)*, having a nervous breakdown. *(He appears to believe that even mentioning these words could destroy the sanity of everyone within*

a 3000 mile radius.) Three times, you see, three different songs...its absolutely uncontrollable, like hiccups almost...entire renditions of songs- all types of songs. Yesterday in the supermarket, it was, 'Yesterday'...

(The Doctor glances up from his notes)

Businessman: The 'Beatles' version, Doc. And before that, 'Bah Bah Black sheep'. In the office. During a consultation, with a *client*. *(His voice choked with emotion)* I mean...they all think I'm mad...
(Doctor raises a hand to silence him)

Doctor: *(With obvious relish he reclines in his chair, twiddling a pencil between thumb and forefinger.)* Ah yes...the NERVOUS BREAK DOWN; feared by overworked professionals everywhere *(the businessman flinches)*. Well, friend, you may well be having a NERVOUS BREAKDOWN. Aren't we all though- it's difficult for professionals to balance their working lives, particularly when forced to come into contact with PEOPLE LIKE YOU on a regular basis. *(He laughs. The businessman performs a double take, used to being treated with nothing less than absolute respect. The Doctor appears able to read his mind.)* As someone who is potentially suffering from a NERVOUS BREAKDOWN, you'll have to become accustomed to people speaking to you in this way. *(Pause. The doctor grins)*. Joking, of course. *(Both men laugh uncertainly)*

(There is a rustling of papers as the doctor arranges himself in a businesslike and mildly pompous manner.)

Doctor: Now, have you experienced mental health problems in the past? Has anyone *previously* threatened to, ha ha, lock you up and throw away the key, so to speak? *(Businessman shakes his head, still unsure as to whether he is being blatantly mocked, but unwilling to appear completely humourless)*

Doctor: Is there a history of mental illness in the family? Alcoholism?

(Thoughtful silence)

Businessman: Well, Mother used to comment, um, fairly frequently that my Uncle Clarence was overtly fond of a drink...

Doctor: And yourself? On a scale of one to ten, how much of an alcoholic would you say you were?

Businessman: *(Startled)* Well *that's* jumping to conclusions a bit is it not? I hardly ever drink! Well...never say *never* I suppose; in the evenings maybe a beer or two. A glass of wine. Well, two. And spirits after dinner; only on Mondays and Wednesdays though *(gesturing apologetically)*...hard day at the office and all that. But you can't beat the odd G and T...

(The doctor looks pleased)

Businessman: *(Suddenly angry)* Look! This has NOTHING to do with the problem in hand! I am BY NO MEANS an excessive drinker!

(Doctor nods patronisingly, busily scribbling. The camera pans in on what he is writing- we see the words, 'alcoholic' and 'possible schizophrenic' scrawled in large letters).

Doctor: Well you'll need to make an appointment for next week, so I can run some tests. Get plenty of rest, cut out the drink completely and,
(continuing his theme of the unexpected, attempts the traditional and clichéd 'Rastafarian' impression, shoulders brought up in a laid back shrug)...you know, man, chill out, yeah?

Businessman: *(Stares blankly.)* Right. Thanks then.

(The Doctor rolls his eyes to communicate that his wealth of comedic talent is wasted on the likes of our businessman.)

Businessman: See you...next week.

(The businessman heads for the door. He pauses and a familiar look of fear and restraint crosses his face. He quickly sidles out and half runs down the corridor. Once a suitable distance away, he quietly but soulfully begins to sing, "Do, Do, Do, The Funky Gibbon", whilst clutching the wall and looking horrified).

Scene 3

(Several days later. The businessman and an associate sit opposite one another in an upmarket café. They are uncannily similar in both their clothes and features, but our businessman looks more perplexed and sad than manic this time, evoking sympathy)

Friend: Gin and Tonic?

Businessman: Can't- *(Sarcastically)* according to the Doc, I'm an *alco-hol-ic*.
(He mimics the 'quote, unquote' sign with his fingers, causing his friend to flinch visibly. The businessman's Americanisms make the majority of people with whom he comes into contact want to claw out their own eyeballs, but he consistently fails to notice. Stirs his coffee moodily)

Friend: Ah well, I should probably cut down too...*(takes a long drink).*

Businessman: *(Darkly)* It happened again this morning.

Friend: Eh? *(He is attempting to simultaneously skewer the lemon, lime and ice-cubes from his 'G+T' on the end of a straw)* What?

Businessman: (*Exasperated*) You know...the *thing*. The *singing* thing. (*He leans in, lowering his voice to a whisper*) I started singing "God save the queen" to the paperboy.

Friend: (*Laughs*)

Businessman: Thanks. Thanks very much. I may actually be on the verge of (*lowering his voice to a whisper*) a nervous breakdown here. I might be *put away*. And you're laughing.

Friend: (*Is almost knocked backwards by the sheer force of his painful, spluttering laughter*)

Businessman: Rot in Hell.

Friend: (*Wiping his eyes*) harsh words. Mate.

Businessman: Well! It's not *actually* even *remotely* funny, despite what you might think. If things don't improve, they'll fire me, I just know it. (*He hunches over his cup, frowning*)

Friend: Well it sounds ridiculous to me.

Businessman: That's the problem with people like you; you've got absolutely no concept whatsoever of what it's like to be faced with a real crises. You think everyone else's problems are 'ridiculous'- well, you would, eh? You've got absolutely nothing to compare it...

Friend: (*Quietly interjecting*) What about...say...your wife *leaving you* for another man. Doesn't that constitute a crisis? Coming home every single night to an empty bed and knowing that the one you love is shackled up in a camper van somewhere with some *hillbilly*?

Businessman: (*Mumbling*) Yeah well, sorry, didn't realise (*Reaches over for a swig of his friend's gin and tonic, and clumsily pats him on the shoulder*) What do you reckon I should do then? Don't spread this around, by the way. Wouldn't want my colleagues to know I was teetering on the brink. Obviously.

Friend: Dunno. (*Sniffs*). Maybe you should try Karaoke. Exorcise the demon, as it were.

Businessman: The doctor reckons group therapy's the only way.

Friend: (*Genuinely trying not to laugh*). As in, 'My name's Joe Bloggs and I'm an alcoholic'?

(*The businessman nods miserably*)

Friend: Well I'd steer clear of that if I were you. Never know who you might mee-heeeeeet. *(He coughs)*. Meee-heeeeeeeeeet.

(Dutifully, the businessman pats him on the pack)

Friend: Meeeee-heeeee-heeeee-heeeeeeeee (he has turned red with effort, his entire body shaking)

(The businessman leans forward in anticipation; his friend's 'cough' sounds strangely tuneful)

Friend: *(pushes back the table and tries to haul himself upwards. He is unable to contain the strange musical stirrings within him for any length of time, however, and finally emits a single, long, low note)* Ohhhhhhhhhh...I'VE GOT YOU, YEAH, UNDER MY SKIN, DUM-DUM-DA-DA-DUM, YEAH...

(The businessman looks upwards in amusement, tapping his feet in time. He shrugs as his friend looks round, agonised and tuneful, hips reluctantly jiggling in time to the music. However, as other people abandon their mochas and lattes to join in, inhibitions entirely forgotten in favour of something far more entertaining, the man realises that he is actually beginning to enjoy himself)

Friend: I'VE GOT YOU, YEAH, YOU (he gestures in the direction of a pretty woman) UNDER MY...SSSSSSSKIN...

(The businessman moves through the crowd, singing along, heading towards the door. People are congregating in the street outside, attracted to the light like moths, clapping in time to the music. The ambiguous suits, the professional London nobodies, smile at one another, humming along. The businessman loiters by the door, touched by the realisation that he is part of something new and fantastic; a musical epidemic. The camera pans out to reveal an aerial view of several camera crews, rushing to assemble themselves in the street. All around, people are spontaneously bursting into song like flowers into bloom, the cast of a hastily thrown together and disjointed musical. Clichéd rays of sunlight brighten the street as our businessman meanders out of view, murmuring strains of 'I'd like to teach the world to sing'.)