

PROLOGUE - The theatre is dark.

MAN

I hate theatre. Well, it's so disappointing, isn't it? You know what I do when I'm sitting in a darkened theatre waiting for the show to begin? I pray. Oh, dear God, please let it be a good show. And let it be short, oh Lord in heaven, please. Two hours is fine, three hours is too much.

And keep the actors out of the audience, God. I didn't pay good money to have the fourth wall come crashing down around my ears. I just want a story, and a few good songs that will take me away. I just want to be entertained. I mean, isn't that the point? Amen.

(pause)

You know there was a time when people sat in darkened theatres and thought to themselves, "what have George and Ira got for me tonight?" Or "Can Cole Porter pull it off again?" Can you imagine? Now it's, "Please, Elton John, must we continue this charade?" It used to be, sitting there in the dark, you knew that when the lights came up you would be taken to another world, a world full of color and music and glamour. And you thought to yourself, "My God when are they going to bring up the lights?"

(lights up)

MAN

Oh, how things have changed. Hello. How are we today? I'm feeling a little blue myself. You know, a little anxious for no particular reason, a little sad that I should feel anxious at this age, you know, a little self-conscious anxiety resulting in non-specific sadness: a state that I call "blue". Anyway, whenever I'm feeling this way, blue, I like to listen to my music. So, I was going through my records this morning - yes, records - and I was about to put on the sound track recording of Meredith Willson's THE MUSIC MAN. I had a craving for a young Ronny Howard. But then I said "No! Let's have a treat! Let's disappear for a while into the decadent world of the 1920's. When the champagne flowed while the caviar chilled and all the world was a party" - for the wealthy anyway. So, I dug about and what did I find -

(extracting a record)

- but one of my favorite shows Gable and Stein's "The Drowsy Chaperone;" Remember? Music by Julie Gable, lyrics by Sidney Stein. It's a two record set, re-mastered from the original recording made in 1928. It's the full show with the original cast including Beatrice Stockwell as the Chaperone. Isn't she elegant? And this is a full 15 years before she became Dame Beatrice Stockwell. Can you believe it? Let me read to you what it says on the back - it says "Mix-ups, mayhem and a gay wedding!" Of course the phrase 'gay wedding' has a different meaning now, but back then it just meant fun. And that's just what the show is - fun. So...would you...indulge me? Would you let me play the record for you now? I was hoping you would say yes.

(He puts the record on the record player. He places the needle.)

MAN (CONT'D)

You hear that static? I love that sound. To me, it's the sound of a time machine starting up.

(The recorded overture begins.)

Alright now, let's visualize. Imagine if you will, it's November 1928. You've just arrived at the doors of the Morosco Theatre in New York. It's very cold - remember when it used to be cold in November? Not anymore. November is the new August now. It's global warming - we're all doomed - anyway... It's very cold and a heavy grey sleet is falling from the sky but you don't care because you're going to see a Broadway show! Listen!

(He settles back and listens for a moment)

Isn't this wonderful?

(He listens)

It helps if you close your eyes.

(He listens. A kettle on the stove begins to whistle. MAN runs over to the stove and dances while he makes himself a cup of tea.)

Overtures. Overtures are out of style now. I miss them. It's the show's way of welcoming you. "Hello, welcome. The meal will be served shortly, but in the meantime, would you like an appetizer?" That's what an overture is, a musical appetizer. A Pu-pu platter of tunes, if you will.

(He listens)

Oh! Something new! What could it be? Sounds like a dance number. Kind of rollicking. Maybe involving pirates! Don't worry. There are no pirates.

(He runs back to his chair as the music segues from a mono recording to a live orchestra.)

Now. Here it comes. The moment when the music starts to build and you know you're only seconds away from being transported.

(The overture builds to its conclusion.)

The curtain is going up. I can't wait!