

FADE IN:

INT. LONDON - LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS THEATRE - DAY (1733)

Pre-teen RICHARD sings soprano lead in the lively aria "Rise  
Glory Rise" while late-teens SUSANNAH sings an alto descant.

From the wings, PAPA ARNE spots the unmistakable wigged  
silhouette of GEORGE FRIDERIC HANDEL in a darkened box.

EXT. COVENT GARDEN - TWO CROWNS & CUSHIONS - DAY

From the 2nd-story window, Susannah watches Handel tip his  
hat to Arne Sr.

Handel climbs into a waiting sedan chair lifted by very  
sturdy dark-skinned men who carry the hefty maestro off in a  
coordinated trot.

Arne Sr. watches him go, then looks up at the window. His  
grin says it all.

Susannah jumps with excitement.

EXT. MAYFAIR - HANDEL'S HOUSE - DAY

Handel's maid opens the door to eager Susannah.

INT. HANDEL'S DINING ROOM - DAY

Susannah follows the maid into the room where the dining  
table is shoved aside to make room for a closed harpsichord.  
Several empty dining chairs face music stands.

Handel enters and greets Susannah warmly in his thick  
Germanic accent.

HANDEL

Miss Arne, you are well looking.  
You are to make ready for the  
learning of your part?

Susannah nods shyly.

HANDEL

I'm told you read well, yes?

Susannah shrugs.

HANDEL

And yet, you care not to use this  
skill taught you by fine  
instructors?

Susannah bites her lip. Shrugs again.

HANDEL

You know my divas upon sighting the page can sing the notes without the slightest hesitation?

SUSANNAH

Yes, Mr. Handel. They are all gifted beyond me. I fear I've little to offer.

HANDEL

This is true. Your voice is...thin. Between a whisper and a sigh. It is not like what I find on the Continent.

Wide-eyed Susannah's lip quivers, more unsure than ever.

Handel lays music transcripts out on the harpsichord.

HANDEL

Sing what you can from this...

From aside the harpsichord, he reaches over and plucks a starting note several times...hums it.

Susannah hums it... She looks at the music black with notes.

SUSANNAH

If you play it once, I should do well to mimic it I think.

Handel squints at her.

HANDEL

No. Sing...from the page. Ignore the words. Just the notes.

Susannah picks up the page and hums the first note. In a shaking, uncertain voice, she slowly sounds out the melody.

Handel studies her as she picks up confidence and the notes begin to make sense to her.

HANDEL

Enough. Now, speak the words.

Susannah reads, growing emotional with each word.

SUSANNAH

To joy he brightens my despair,  
No rising pangs my peace control...

Handel nods and goes to a tray to pour a glass of water.

SUSANNAH

He guards me with a father's care  
And pours his mercy on my soul.

HANDEL

Now...we put it all together.

He gives her the water then walks around to the keyboard.

She takes a desperate drink while he plays a bright intro.

HANDEL

From your first measure...  
(points on her page)  
...here.

Handel nods a downbeat and Susannah sings her part at half the speed. He stops.

HANDEL

You know what means "*joi de vivre*"?

Susannah nods.

HANDEL

Again...with the *joi*.

Susannah smiles and starts again at a faster pace.

Handel plucks the cheerful melody mid octave with his left hand, playing the chords higher with his right, creating a soulful, pleasing sound that makes them both smile.

HANDEL

(without stopping)  
You lack in all ways what the  
Italiani possess from experience  
and training.

Susannah's voice fades, but he plunks it for her to continue.

HANDEL

But what you possess in the art of  
expression and heart, they will  
never have.

He gives a fatherly wink, which infuses strength and momentum into her voice as they continue on.

INT. ITALIAN OPERA HOUSE - NIGHT

Handel leads his orchestra from the harpsichord before a full crowd of mesmerized wealthy opera patrons.

Center stage, Susannah, in resplendent Italian costume as Jael, sings her solo, confident.

SUSANNAH

*All his mercies I review  
Gladly with a grateful heart  
And I trust he will renew  
Blessings he did once impart.*

The magical, triumphant moment underscores and INTERCUTS:

EXT. DRURY LANE - DAY

THEO, 30s, short, balding, egotistical, whistles a happy counter melody and twirls a cane as he walks. He nods to those he passes, some of whom greet him...

PASSERSBY (AD LIB)

- Good day, Mr. Cibber...  
- If it ain't Ancient Pistol  
hissself...  
- Good morning, Theophilus...

Theo heads to the

ROYAL THEATRE STAGE ENTRANCE

and collides with the closed door when the turned knob fails to open it.

THEO

What the devil?

A window above the entrance opens and foppish JOHN HIGHMORE, pompous twit, sticks his head out.

HIGHMORE

You're done, Cibber! I've bought  
your father's share!

Highmore drops a comically large military hat that lands at Theo's feet.

HIGHMORE

You'll never play Drury Lane again!  
(to onlookers)  
You can all thank me at tonight's  
show with quality performers.

The window slams shut and leaves Theo stunned.

He looks around, humiliated to find several people staring. A deep anger wells and Theo sweeps up the hat. Bows to gawkers.

THEO

Ancient Pistol rises to heights  
when kicked by a laughing ass.

(to the window above)

You misjudge the strength of your  
cloven hoof, Mr. Highmore!

He places the big hat on his head and marches off in angry, exaggerated strides.

All laugh. Some applaud.

SUSANNAH (V.O.)

*Tyrant, now no more we dread thee,  
All thy insolence is o'er;  
Justice to thy ruin led thee,  
Thou art fall'n to rise no more.*

The mock applause of onlookers blends with sincere ovation for Susannah.

FADE OUT.