

OPENING SONG

CHORUS

*Welcome friends both old and new!
The play we're going to act for you
Is all about Shakespeare and his mates.
The year in question? Fifteen ninety eight.*

*There's laughter, danger, thrills galore
That's just Act one –Act Two's got more
In fact our show is quite stupen-dous
Better even than last night's Eastenders*

*We've heroes, clowns and villains too
Brought to life right in front of you
So boo the baddies, give the heroes cheers
And sit back, enjoy - lend us your ears.
Lend us your ears.*

(SPOKEN) *Lend us your ears.*

CD TRACK – underscore to cover scene change and under EDMUND and JOHN playing.

SCENE 1: THE VILLAGE GREEN, BURCOTE, OXFORDSHIRE

EDMUND and JOHN are playing cards or dice. They are laughing. An empty log basket is nearby.

MOTHER charges onto the stage.

EDMUND and JOHN jump up. They are obviously terrified of her.

MOTHER

Edmund! John! You lazy good for nothings! What are you doing?

EDMUND

Just playing, mother.

MOTHER

Playing? You've got work to do. Picking up sticks. Or are we to go without a fire?

JOHN

But mother, it's hard work!

MOTHER

No buts, John. Sticks! For the fire!

MOTHER comes up close to JOHN and thrusts the log basket at him. He almost topples over.

EDMUND

Sticks for beating us with, more like.

MOTHER goes to clout EDMUND. But EDMUND ducks out of the way.

MOTHER goes.

MOTHER

(CALLS AFTER THE BOYS) A week's worth, mind you!

EDMUND and JOHN bend over, pick up sticks and put them into the basket.

MOTHER exits. Then from the opposite side of the stage ANNE and KATE run on.

EDMUND

Kate? Anne? What's the matter?

KATE

(BREATHLESS) Guess what? There are players on the village green!

EDMUND

Is it Lorenzo and his dancing bear?

ANNE

No!

JOHN

Not Dribbling Dan and his pig's bladder?

KATE

No, I've not seen this lot before. They're doing a *play*!

...Edmund and John are thrilled by the play on the green. One of the players, Thomas Kempe, reveals he is on his way down to London, to join the greatest playwright of them all, William Shakespeare...

With encouragement from their friends Kate and Anne, Edmund and John set out on the long journey to London: their plan to find William Shakespeare and

become players in his Company. Everyone wishes them well in the song: 'The Hunt for William Shakespeare'

When Edmund and John arrive they find it a tarrying place. Two street urchins, Sal and Maria seize them...

SAL

You should be careful; we might have slit your throats!

MARIA

There are spies and knifers everywhere. No boy is safe in London.

The rest of the LONDONERS come to life and silently and gradually exit.

SAL looks EDMUND and JOHN up and down and turns her nose up at what she sees.

SAL

Especially country boys.

EDMUND

(OFFENDED) Who said we were country boys?

SAL

(LAUGHS) A city boy would rather die than be seen wearing *brown*¹ breeches.

MARIA

Let alone a shirt with no collar. Hardly the style now, is it?

¹ Or any colour!

EDMUND

Isn't it?

SAL shakes his head in despair at EDMUND.

MARIA

Don't you know anything about fashion? Brown breeches are just so last year.

SAL

You two got names?

EDMUND

Course we've got names. I'm Edmund Tozer. And this is my younger brother-

JOHN

John. And who are you?

SAL

Sal.

MARIA

Maria.

SAL

So what have you done wrong?

JOHN

(PUZZLED) We haven't done anything wrong!

SAL

You must have. That's the only reason people come to London. 'Cos they're on the run.

SAL LOOKS EDMUND UP AND DOWN.

SAL

I bet you've been hunting the King's deer!

EDMUND

No we haven't!

SAL

(DRAMATIC) You've killed a fellow, then? Strangled him with your bare hands!

EDMUND

No!

SAL

(DISAPPOINTED) Oh. Shame.

JOHN

(IMPORTANTLY) We've come to London to find Master William Shakespeare.

MARIA

(SARCASTIC) Oooo... Have you now?

JOHN

We're going to become players in his company. We can sing, we can dance and we can read.

EDMUND gives JOHN a warning look. He thinks JOHN is giving too much away.

SAL

(A SLY GRIN) Is that so?

EDMUND

Yes.

SAL

Well, Edmund and John, you keep with us and you'll be safe enough.

SAL and MARIA move away, with a snigger.

EDMUND and JOHN are reluctant to follow.

MARIA

Come on!

EDMUND

Where are we going?

MARIA

You want to find Will Shakespeare, don't you?

JOHN

(AMAZED) You know Will Shakespeare?

SAL

Shakespeare, Cake-speare, Belly-ache-speare, we know 'em all, don't we Maria!

MARIA

Sure.

...Lost and frightened, Edmund and John have no choice but to follow Sal and Maria. They arrive at a smart lodgings, which John believes must be the house of William Shakespeare...

SAL

Wait here. I'll go and find out if he'll see you.

SAL exits.

MARIA

Now, smarten yourselves up...

In motherly fashion, MARIA tidies EDMUND and JOHN's jacket and hair. Then she goes to stand beside EDMUND.

NATHANIEL GILES appears with SAL. He is an imposing, sinister figure in black cloak and hat. He stands in front of EDMUND and JOHN inspecting them. Then he takes a step back.

MARIA nudges EDMUND.

MARIA

(STAGE WHISPER. TO EDMUND. SHARP) Speak to the gentleman!

EDMUND

(NERVOUS. TO GILES.) Sir. My name is Edmund Tozer.

JOHN

And I'm his brother, John.

SAL

They're from the country.

GILES

(SNEERS) I can see that!

GILES looks EDMUND and JOHN over as if they were cattle at market.

GILES

And you want to become players?

SAL

That's what they told us. Sir.

GILES

And they can sing?

SAL

That's what they said. Sir.

GILES

And read?

SAL

So they said. Sir.

JOHN

And dance-

GILES

(SHOUTS) I am not interested in dancing!

JOHN steps back in alarm.

GILES

(EVIL SMILE. TO EDMUND AND JOHN) Well, your friends have brought you to the right place.

GILES takes out a purse. He counts out some coins and gives them to SAL and MARIA.

SAL smiles.

EDMUND

(UNEASY) Sal? Maria?

SAL

We warned you. London's a dangerous place for country boys.

With a wave to EDMUND and JOHN, SAL and MARIA run off.

EDMUND

(CALLS) Sal...!

But SAL has gone.

JOHN

(ANXIOUS) Are you Will Shakespeare, sir?

GILES

(LAUGHS CRUELLY) I am most certainly not!

EDMUND

(FRIGHTENED) Then who are you?

GILES

I am Doctor Nathaniel Giles, Master of the Boys of the Chapel Royal.

(PAUSE) And I am *your* Master now.

...Edmund and John are given parts of 'Ignorance' and 'Laziness' to learn in a religious play. Weary and frightened, they make friends with Rufus, one of the boys of the Chapel Royal and in a lullaby, look forward to sleep and to finding a means of escape.

John has an idea, to pretend to sing badly and off-key. It works. They are thrown out onto the street, where Dr Nathaniel Giles predicts they'll have 'their throats cut by midnight.'

Having found out from Rufus that Shakespeare's Theatre is at Shoreditch, they make their way there.

A trunk –or two- various props, costumes ready for packing up (e.g. a skull(!), stage swords, tambourine, recorder, witches costumes, props for the play to be seen in Scene 8.)

EDMUND and JOHN enter, nervous, curious.

JOHN

Are you sure this is the place, Edmund?

EDMUND

You saw the sign outside. 'The Theatre'. And look!

EDMUND and JOHN look around at the props. They decide it's time to act –they put on witches' hats (or whatever)

EDMUND

When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Unseen by EDMUND and JOHN, SHAKESPEARE enters.

JOHN

When the hurlyburly's done

When the battles lost and won

SHAKESPEARE

That will be ere the set of sun.

EDMUND and JOHN spin round.

SHAKESPEARE

(SUSPICIOUS) Who pray, are you?

EDMUND

Sir, my name is Edmund Tozer. And this is my younger brother-

JOHN

John.

SHAKESPEARE

(SUSPICIOUS) The names mean nothing to me. (STILL SUSPICIOUS)

Why have you come here?

EDMUND

(IMPORTANTLY) We are looking for Master William Shakespeare.

SHAKESPEARE

(THREATENING) You are, are you?

SHAKESPEARE takes out a knife (or stick)

SHAKESPEARE

(CALLS. URGENTLY) Will! Richard! Cuthbert!

RICHARD BURBAGE, CUTHBERT BURBAGE and WILL KEMPE enter. They too, brandish knives (or sticks)

RICHARD grabs EDMUND round the throat, while KEMPE frisks him for weapons.

CUTHBERT grabs JOHN round the throat, while SHAKESPEARE frisks him for weapons.

SHAKESPEARE

Now. It's three on two.

RICHARD

(THREAT) And what do you want with William Shakespeare?

EDMUND

(STRUGGLING) We mean no harm!

KEMPE

(RE: EDMUND) He has no knife.

CUTHBERT

(RE: JOHN) He neither.

KEMPE

A moment! I know this boy.

EDMUND tries to talk, but he can't: RICHARD'S hand is round his throat.

SHAKESPEARE

Is he a spy?

KEMPE

(FROWNS) No... no... I don't think so. I'm trying to place him...

RICHARD loosens his grip and EDMUND can speak.

EDMUND

The Village Green at Burcote, sir?

JOHN

Words tumbled from your mouth as fresh as a mountain spring.

EDMUND shoots JOHN a warning look.

SHAKESPEARE

(LAUGHS. TO KEMPE) Did they now?

KEMPE

(LAUGHS) Of course! The boy who wanted to become a player! And his young brother, no less!

SHAKESPEARE

Two brothers who would be players, eh? You vouch for them, Will Kempe?

KEMPE

Oh yes!

SHAKESPEARE

They're not spies or dangerous cutthroats?

KEMPE

Do they look like dangerous cutthroats?

SHAKESPEARE, KEMPE, RICHARD and CUTHBERT laugh. They put their knives away.

SHAKESPEARE

Richard, Cuthbert, fetch bread and ale.

RICHARD, CUTHBERT exit.

KEMPE sits with SHAKESPEARE.

SHAKESPEARE

Sit down, gentlemen.

Still unsure of the stranger, EDMUND and JOHN sit down.

JOHN

(FEARFUL) Pray sir, who are you?

SHAKESPEARE and KEMPE have a wink and a chuckle.

The stranger, Kempe and the others sing a jazzy 'riddle' song, 'Have You Worked It Out?' to reveal that the stranger is none other than Shakespeare.

Shakespeare explains that their landlord, who owns the ground on which the Theatre stands, is refusing to let them stage any more plays. John, a carpenter's son, has a crazy idea –why not move the theatre?

John's idea is seized on, but the players are a disorganised lot. It takes Mrs Burbage, Richard and Cuthbert's mum, to sort them out. Eventually, at Christmas, the Theatre is moved. Everyone sings 'Building the Theatre' to keep themselves warm.

Now The Globe is built. As the company, including by now Edmund and John, prepare for their first play, Kate and Anne turn up. They're servants in the household of a rich City merchant, now.

EDMUND and JOHN stand on the stage, taking it all in.

JOHN
Edmund?

EDMUND
Yes, John?

JOHN
I was thinking. We hunted for Will Shakespeare and we found him.

EDMUND
We've found a home too: a home among the players of The Lord Chamberlain's Men.

JOHN
(QUIET) Thank you for taking me on your journey with you.

EDMUND
I'm glad I did. Or else I'd still be learning the part of Laziness with the children of the Chapel Royal!

EDMUND and JOHN come upstage.

Edmund and John, and eventually everyone, sings 'Now is My Time'.

The Lord Chamberlain's men perform and extract from a Shakespeare play (of your school's choice), is performed by the company, after which 'The Hunt for William Shakespeare' and 'Now is My Time' are reprised in a medley.