

The Listening Jar -- Synopsis

The Listening Jar is a collaborative, multi-disciplinary theatre piece that weaves movement, dance, puppetry, live music and shadow play together to explore sound and listening as a metaphor for social change. The piece is set in a world of fear – a world that has gone to great lengths to banish music, for fear of the power it holds over people. The story explores what happens when song returns to a soundless world.

Act 1

We are introduced to the world of *The Listening Jar*. A dream-like *vocalise* ushers the audience into the delights of song, but the beautiful and mysterious singer is torn apart as a loud Drone sweeps through the theatre. Next we meet the Recluse, a gifted if strange scientist, who has holed himself up in his laboratory, having developed a process to preserve sound in the myriad of mason jars that line his walls. As he tinkers he tells us the story of how the Drone was created to block sound and music out of the land. As he finishes, the lights come up on the Seeker, a young woman, who awakes in her bed with a song in her head, the very same song we have just heard in the opening *vocalise*. She wanders down to the river, where she is led by two Crows – our tricksters of light and shadow, to find a jar in the river. She is stunned to find that this jar holds the tune from her dream. Having never heard a song before, she sets out on a journey up river, to the Big City to eager to seek the source of the jars.

Act 2

As the Seeker journeys towards the Big City, she first encounters a town built up in the refuse that gathers at the outskirts of the city. Driven by music on her journey, the Seeker inadvertently begins a rhythmic dance with the trash that lives in this land. The result is a rollicking rhythmic dance number, that spawns the leader of the junk-people, a giant puppet who demands that the music be stopped for fear of what the Big City dwellers do to those who make music. The junk pile topples over on our heroine, who is trapped in the refuse, until the Crows return to free her and give her a lesson on some of the dangers of creating music in a soundless world.

Act 3

The Seeker encounters the Rogue, the leader of a band of Revolutionaries. This striking and beautiful woman entices the Seeker with tales of the musical Revolution she is leading to free citizens from the tyranny of the Drone. She leads the Seeker to her camp, where we see that all is not as free and easy as advertised. While music is indeed made here, we see that the Rogue runs a tight ship, and that any show of personal expression in music or dance is met with a heavy penalty.

The Seeker leaves the camp, and a number of the Revolutionaries mutiny and join her on her journey towards the Big City – lured by the beautiful song she sings.

Act 4

The Seeker and her followers arrive in the Big City, a land of conformity, where the Drone has taken hold. The Seeker, seeing her opportunity, steps up to the forefront and begins to sing her song. The Cityfolk are mesmerized by the sounds she makes, and gather around her until the sonic uprising is halted by the shadowy figure of the Fetchers – the acoustic police of the land. They take the Seeker away, and in a horrifying scene, strip her of her voice as punishment for her crimes.

The Seeker is left to wander through the land, she tries to connect with people in the city, but without her voice, or her song, is powerless to get their attention.

Act 5

In her despair, the Crows return to the Seeker, and lead her further into the heart of the city. They lead her to the Studio of the Recluse, who continues to work in isolation on his jars, more afraid than ever of losing his sounds. So terrified is he in fact, that he hardly listens to them at all, for fear they should escape and be lost for ever. The Seeker is mesmerized and appalled by what she sees – so much sound held captive, all trapped in jars.

The Recluse leaves into the back room, the Seeker begins to rifle through the jars, in search of the song that began her journey. She creates a commotion, drawing the Recluse. The two of them scuffle, breaking jars, and releasing sounds. The ensuing chaos draws a whole flock of Crows to the window. The cacophony of the Jars also draws the attention of the Fetchers, who arrive to break down the door and restore sonic order. Seeing that all the sounds will be lost if left for the Fetchers, the Seeker and Recluse realize that they must release the sounds into the world or lose them for ever....

The performance culminates as each sound escaping from the jars finds a place in the voices and hearts of the city folk. The final number is a musical piece the builds slowly from the escaping sounds into a mesmerizing and powerful choreographed choral number.