

2.SHINY SHIRT

CHICK SINGER

(Chick Singer--- She is mid twenties and has an urban vibe that is half-heartedly fashionable. She does not wear a shiny shirt.)

Fuck you.

I mean.... I mean, I get it. I'm the girl.

I mean, "Why was the chick singer standing outside the house?"

Because she couldn't find the right key and didn't know when to come in.

I totally get it.

Except, you know, I am not a chick singer. I'm a piano player. Which, you know (sighs). Everybody's got their assumptions. And I realize. Name a girl who doesn't sing. Diana Krall who is a pretty good keyboard player, sings. And probably you think of Norah Jones who is Norah Jones. And maybe, maybe you think of Marion McPartland, who doesn't, but you know, she's like, dead, and let's be honest you probably didn't even think of her. And I don't mean to complain, because, well, it's just that honestly, sometimes it's a real bitch. And there's all this bullshit as it is, trying to get a gig, trying to get a group, trying to keep a group together. Because me, I'm pretty straight up. Simple. I'm not real interested in all this macho altered shit. Even though I can play it. I can play out if I want to. It's just not where I want to go. I don't find it particularly interesting.

It's hard enough. Finding people. And even when you do. It's like Combo class. Always some asshole who thinks if there's a girl playing it's not jazz. And I don't want to sound. Not all jazzers are that way. Most of em are pretty cool. Except sometimes. Sometimes. Like usually there's that other guy, who thinks it's so cool and he's really into it because he thinks it's hot. He sucks just as bad as the asshole. Other guys, they're cool. Only I think musicians, I don't know, maybe they just have trouble relating, in general. Anyway, I play solo most of the time anyway.

It's cheaper that way. To get booked. They only have to pay one person. So..that's usually what I do. And getting booked. That can be kind of a struggle too, because, well, the first thing an owner wants to know is, Can you sing? And really it's not that I can't because, I sang in church choir and stuff, growing up, but really it's just, not who I am. It took me a while to get something steady. Because I didn't want to wind up waiting tables in a club with all the chick singers. I actually, I was kinda on the brink of going home. Cause I couldn't afford anything, and I was spending all my time in my apartment, which I don't know, saying it was small is kind of an understatement. The lease was coming up anyway. And all I could afford was beans and cat food. Yeah. I'm single. I'm a girl. I have a cat. Deal with it. Anyway, I was almost ready to go home, but then I knew this guy who was going on a cruise and leaving his Sunday brunch gig. And I knew if I could get it, things would be better, because I'd have my own gig. So I went out and I bought the shiny shirt.

(She makes a low cut v gesture on herself)

You know, sequins and shit. Because it was that kind of place. Candles on the tables at 10am. I did my hair. Wore makeup. The whole nine yards.

Charlie, the owner. He's the kind of owner that's got three strands of hair greased straight back. It's not technically a comb over, but it's not, like, hair. He's a cologne guy. All he says is, "Can you sing?" But I get it anyway. They were kind of in a pinch.

And I renew my lease. And for a while things are better. I go to some jam sessions. I date this drummer for a little bit. But my rent goes up. And the jam sessions aren't really any different than when I was in college. And the drummer, not so much. So Mr. Magic and I -my cat- are poor again. And the brunch gig gets kinda depressing. A lot of Autumn Leaves and polka dots and moon beams. And one day, when nothing is happening. Not the brunch. The brunch is popular. They have killer French toast. But the music. Well, it just wasn't happening. That day this couple from, crap. I can't remember where they were from. Someplace with a lot of a's. Tourists—the kind that go to a jazz brunch. They come up to the piano to make a request. She's kinda blousy, heavy, really big boobs, hips. Made up, but not trashy, just like somebody from someplace with a lots of a's in its name. And she smiles so big at me and says it's their anniversary and do I know the words to 'People' by Barbara Streisand. Now normally, I just say, oh, I'm sorry, I don't sing. But she didn't ask me if I sang. She asked me if I knew the words. And the thing is I do.

My grandma Lorraine isn't exactly super musical. Growing up, I spent a lot of time at her place, but she really only had these two cds, Christmas carols sung by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the Essential Barbara Streisand. I know, right? But every time I came over, and it wasn't November or December or sometimes even January, Barbara Streisand was what I listened to. Yes, I know all the words to People. And that morning, when the lady asked me that, all I could think of was Grandma Lorraine, who totally doesn't get this, this life I'm living. I mean, she's not critical or anything. It's just I don't know, how can she help but wonder? At my age she'd already had my uncle and a house and everything. Not that she wants that for me, but, like I know she'd basically have a heart attack and die if she saw my apartment or the stop where I get off the train at night. My grandma Lorraine, who every time I come home to visit just pats me on the arm and says clueless, but real understanding, "You work so hard, dear, at your music."

And the thing is, I do. I really do work hard.

I sing the song. Because I'm broken. Because I'm tired of me and the keyboard, and ramen noodles and assholes. I sing the song cause if I'm so fucking miserable anyway why shouldn't this lady from Tallahassee or wherever be happy. The chords and the voicings are already in my hands, I sing the words and all I hear is everything falling apart. When I'm done I look up to see these spidery mascara tears coming down the woman's cheek. Total silence at the all you can eat buffet.

It fucking killed.

Applause. The Standing Jazz Brunch Ovation. Even Charlie's clapping. I am so screwed. No way to get out of it now. Fucking Norah Jones.

Charlie doubles my pay. A couple weeks later, I've gotten at least six phone calls from guys I went to school with. "I didn't know you could sing." Thursday nights fill up. I'm in demand. But when I'm not at a gig, singing and playing, I pretty much don't leave the apartment. And after a couple months or so, of me not leaving the apartment even Mr. Magic is like What the Fuck? I need my space. I'm pretty successful. I have at least five shiny shirts. A pretty favorable write up in the reader calling me a 'distinctive new voice.' I could probably even afford a one bedroom, but all I can do is lie on my futon watching t.v. I'll watch anything, infomercials, reality shows, Frontline, you name it. I don't care.

Then one afternoon, when it's golf and xsports, I catch the beginning of Cat Ballou. Trippy looking flick--I mean trippy even for Jane Fonda in the 60's western comedy. I don't make it past the credits because it opens with Nat King Cole and some tubby white guy playing banjo and singing the Ballad of Cat Ballou. Yeah. Nat King Cole. Banjo. He's even, he's wearing this fringed jacket. Surreal. Nat King Cole. Nat King Cole didn't get a lot of play in college. Just wasn't cool enough I guess. And seeing that fringed jacket, I guess I understand. But I always liked those trio recordings. Where he doesn't sing, but he gets the voicings just right. The way he plays on those recordings, feels like he's looking you straight in the eye. You know he never sang 'til he moved to L.A. He toured the whole country before the contracts. Playing wherever he could. Guarantee you a lot harder for him than Sinatra or Bennett. Something happened to me, lying there watching t.v. I could feel Nat King Cole staring at me, still singing and strumming, but he was staring straight at me. I knew just what he was saying. He was saying, "I play piano."

That was the day I got up off the couch. Two weeks later I moved out of that apartment. I signed with a booking agency. When I have time, I still play at Charlie's Sunday brunch. It's good to have a place to come home to. And yes, I usually sing a number or two. But under no circumstance will I wear your shiny shirt.

(Band will play a tune)

4. SET BREAK

A guitar player and bass player sit in the corner of a purportedly, but not very upscale restaurant for a gig. They are set up. Ambient noise.

BASS PLAYER (*checks his watch*)

Let's take a break.

Both Guitar Player and Bass Player go through the motions of putting their gear down for a set break.

GUITAR PLAYER

Hey, um, you notice we weren't in the Guide this week?

BASS PLAYER

Nah. (continues putting away gear) Are we usually?

GUITAR PLAYER

Yeah.

BASS PLAYER

Oh.

GUITAR PLAYER

So, like did your cousin usually put us in the Guide? Because maybe..

BASS PLAYER

Nah man, Jay just took care of the bar.

GUITAR PLAYER

I just wondered since now he's at Vinzi's, maybe. The gig might not..

BASS PLAYER

Nah. We're cool. Why shouldn't we be cool?

GUITAR PLAYER

I don't know. I just thought maybe since Jay wasn't here

BASS PLAYER

Nah. Martin loved us last time he was here. It's his place, you know, he's the owner, so what he says... We're cool.

GUITAR PLAYER

Cool. When was he here?

BASS PLAYER

Last time? I dunno. Maybe that time Dan sat in.

GUITAR PLAYER

Yeah, Dan. What's he up to?

BASS PLAYER

Same old shit.

GUITAR PLAYER

Seemed like things were kinda picking up for that group of his.

BASS PLAYER

Maybe. The last time I saw him he was talking about their fucking 'following'. (*makes a low key masturbating gesture*) You heard 'em?

GUITAR PLAYER

Yeah they're not bad. I mean, if that's what you're into.

BASS PLAYER

Same old shit-mickey mouse- whatever he's listening to on the radio with three more chords so he can call it jazz.

GUITAR PLAYER

(chuckles and nods head)

Same old shit.

BASS PLAYER

He's talking about touring—getting signed (rolls his eyes). I don't see it. I know a guy at the place he's talking about and I don't really think they're on his radar.

GUITAR PLAYER

That's kinda too bad.

BASS PLAYER

How?

GUITAR PLAYER

Well, you know, like if they did tour...I'm just sayin'... it'd free up a gig, you know, in case
(nods his head to the bar)

BASS PLAYER

Nah, like I said, we're cool. Martin's a good guy. Jay let me tag along to a party at his house one time. He's cool.

(BASS PLAYER stands up)

Still, maybe we should try something new tonight?

GUITAR PLAYER

Call some new tunes? (*nodding his head up and down*)

BASS PLAYER

Not entirely. Maybe have a set list.

GUITAR PLAYER

But the usual tunes?

BASS PLAYER

Only from the list. Keep it brisk. Not so much space you know.

GUITAR PLAYER

But the usual tunes?

Sure. BASS PLAYER

That's okay. Let's just feel it out. GUITAR PLAYER

Feel it out. BASS PLAYER

Yeah. GUITAR PLAYER

Okay. I'm gonna get a beer. BASS PLAYER

You sure? GUITAR PLAYER

What? BASS PLAYER

Just maybe. You know, it's kinda spare in here tonight. GUITAR PLAYER

Yeah? BASS PLAYER

So maybe tonight's no good. Bartender's probably already pissed about it. GUITAR PLAYER

I always get a beer. BASS PLAYER

Yeah. So maybe that's the problem. GUITAR PLAYER

That's not the problem. My beer is not the problem, believe me. The problem... BASS PLAYER

What? GUITAR PLAYER

Nothing BASS PLAYER

GUITAR PLAYER

What

BASS PLAYER

Nothing. I'm all for experimentation.

GUITAR PLAYER

What's that supposed to mean?

BASS PLAYER

Nothing, man.

GUITAR PLAYER

You got a problem with the way I play?

BASS PLAYER

Nah. You wanna play out, all the time. Fuck it. Play jazz. Be free, man.

GUITAR PLAYER

So what? You're saying I should just sit here and play senior citizen center Stella by Starlight so you can get a free beer?

BASS PLAYER

I'm just saying you're pissing hands free. A little structure might be refreshing.

GUITAR PLAYER

As refreshing as a free beer? I'm not the one out of bounds, man. You think you know.

BASS PLAYER

What? What do I know?

GUITAR PLAYER

Oh, I don't know what you know man. I know what you think you know.

BASS PLAYER

And what do I think I know?

GUITAR PLAYER

Nothing.

BASS PLAYER

No, what do I know?

GUITAR PLAYER

Think you know.

BASS PLAYER

Okay smartass, what do you think I think I know?

GUITAR PLAYER

A guy. You think you know a guy. But it's never *the* guy. You never know the guy. You know the other guy who knows the guy who knows. I guarantee you that A&R guy you know is not the guy who knows.

BASS PLAYER

You don't know anything.

GUITAR PLAYER

Right. But, I know he's not the guy. Because I know you and I know you don't know shit. And that guy only knows you because you're Mr. R&R. Mr. Restaurant and Retail. Somebody's cousin, some nobody's cousin, hangin' out, drinking free beer. Knows a lotta guys. Thinks he knows a lot of guys.

BASS PLAYER

So that's what you think.

GUITAR PLAYER

Hey man, look, things are getting a little heated and--

BASS PLAYER

No, you don't need to apologize. Everybody's got thoughts. It surprises me a little, what you think.

GUITAR PLAYER

You know, I..

BASS PLAYER

Mostly it surprises me you having thoughts about other people at all. Because the way you play. I mean look around, man. I think we can both agree. I mean the special tonight, the special tonight is fucking chicken cacciatore. These people you see if you ever look up from that Real Book are here tonight to eat fucking chicken cacciatore. That's it. The only fucking reason all twelve of them came in. And two bars of Trane changes doesn't change where you are.

This isn't the Village Vanguard, asshole. And your spotted dick ain't on the menu.

GUITAR PLAYER

But I bet you know a guy who can suck it for me.

BASS PLAYER

So that's your problem. Sexually frustrated. That's why you're wanking off here for two hours every Tuesday night.

GUITAR PLAYER

Fuck you man.

BASS PLAYER

Fuck you.

GUITAR PLAYER

You know what? \$50 a night plus the jar isn't enough to keep me playing your aunties panties jazz.

BASS PLAYER

Aunties Panties?

GUITAR PLAYER

All white and smells like ass.

BASS PLAYER

Yeah, it's not enough.

(leans over picks up his bass)

GUITAR PLAYER

What are you doing?

BASS PLAYER

Tuning up.

GUITAR PLAYER

Why?

BASS PLAYER

Because I'm a fucking professional, asshole.

GUITAR PLAYER

(GUITAR PLAYER hesitates. Picks up his guitar. Hesitates. Starts tuning guitar)

A fucking professional asshole.

(Once the musicians start tuning up, the BARTENDER approaches.)

BARTENDER

Hey you guys sound great tonight.

BASS PLAYER

Thanks

GUITAR PLAYER

Thanks man.

BARTENDER

Hey, do you think you guys think you could pick up Thursday nights?

(pause)

I know it isn't a whole lot of cash, but you know, bar's free.

BASS PLAYER

Definitely, definitely

We can swing it.

GUITAR PLAYER

Yeah, totally man, we love

Playing here.