

INDEPENDENCE EVE
An American Opera in Three Scenes

Libretto By

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In collaboration with composer Sidney Marquez Boquiren

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September 2015

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Cast of Characters

<u>LOUIS</u> :	A Negro Man, Hotel Porter, 47 years old (baritone)
<u>SAM</u> :	A Caucasian Man, Policeman, 47 years old (tenor)
<u>SEAN</u> :	A Black Male, Investment Banker, 27 years old (baritone)
<u>JOE</u> :	A White Male, Investment Banker, 27 years old (tenor)
<u>MAX</u> :	An Anglo-Caucasian boy, 10 years old (tenor)
<u>PHILLIP</u> :	A Boy of Mixed Race, 10 years old (baritone)

Scene

A bench in the park or street of three American cities.

Time

Afternoons of July 3, 1963; July 3, 2013; and July 3, 2063

SCENE 1 - SEVENTH INNING STRETCH

Lights up on a park bench in an American city on the afternoon of July 3, 1963. At the conclusion of the Prelude, we hear sounds of a baseball game. Louis, a black hotel porter, is finishing his sack lunch as he listens to the baseball game on a small transistor radio, which is situated next to him on the bench. Sam, a policeman, enters and regards Louis with suspicion. He swings a billy club and has a white bandage taped to the bridge of his nose. He slowly approaches him from upstage, and when he is close enough for Louis to notice him, the music begins.

Radio fades out.

SAM
(suspiciously)
Who's playin'?

LOUIS
Braves and the Giants.

SAM
Our boys must be off today.

LOUIS
Yes, sir, they're up tomorrow.

SAM
Score?

LOUIS
Six to Five. Milwaukee leads, top of the seventh.

SAM
Quite a game last night between those two, so I read in the paper.

LOUIS
Yes sir. Willie Mays broke the tie with a home run in the sixteenth inning.

(exuberant)
How 'bout that? When I stop to think about it, I can practically hear the crack of that bat.

SAM

(sardonic, punched)

Jackie Robinson, Satchel Paige, Ernie Banks, Willie Mays:
more and more ev'ry day. All worth their salt so I hear.

(patronizing)

Hope it's worth all the trouble.

(beat)

Lunch break?

LOUIS

Yes sir, for about ten more minutes.

SAM

You work around here?

LOUIS

Yes sir, I'm a Porter at the Excelsior Hotel.

SAM

Good honest hard work. How long you have you held that
particular job?

LOUIS

Been at The Excelsior for nearly twenty-two years. Started
out as a dishwasher. Worked my way up. You must be new on
the beat. I have lunch on this spot just about every day.

SAM

Precinct switched us 'round a bit.

LOUIS

What happened to your nose?

SAM

(gingerly touches nose)

Damn riots. Made contact with a bottle of some sort. My
partner wasn't so lucky. Busted arm in two places.

LOUIS

Sorry to hear that. Crazy times.

SAM

My guess is it'll get crazier before it gets better.

Radio is heard.

LOUIS

Are you a church-going man, Officer?

SAM

(coldly)

Who wants to know?

LOUIS

Just curious, that's all. First Abyssinian Baptist here.

SAM

Down on Forsythe.

LOUIS

That's the one.

(playfully, jovial)

Last Sunday I prayed to Sweet Jesus we'd win the pennant this year. Course, I didn't let on to the wife. She would have boxed my ears. Still, I figured we can use all the help we can get. Never hurts to hope.

SAM

An optimist - glass always half full, right?

LOUIS

Well, sure, since you put it that way. There's a lot to be optimistic about with President Kennedy and a new civil rights bill and Dr. King's march on the nations capital next month. That ought to do some good.

SAM

If he can stop from getting arrested. Nothing particularly good seems to be happening down there in Birmingham. You live down there near Forsythe?

LOUIS

No, my wife and I live over on Sycamore now.

SAM

(with surprise and suspicion)

Sycamore. That's a long way from your church. How'd you end up over in that part of town?

LOUIS

The Excelsior's been mighty good to me. Saved our pennies over the past twenty years and decided to move up in the world, guess you could say. My wife's is a custodian over at First General. Works the night shift. She likes to sneak over to the maternity ward and peak at the babies. Just moved in May. Lovely part of town. Quiet street, Sycamore. Big trees. Nice big yard.

Radio is heard.

SAM

Hot one today.

LOUIS

Yes sir, it sure is.

SAM
(with insinuation)
Where do you hail from?

LOUIS
I'm from right here, Officer.

SAM
I mean, your people. The south, I reckon?

LOUIS
Well, yes sir, born in Georgia. Moved up here shortly after I turned ten.

SAM
Your Daddy get a job up here in a factory?

LOUIS
No, we moved after a bit of trouble, I guess you could say.

SAM
What kind of trouble?

LOUIS
I was just a little boy back then...We lived near a spring training camp. That's how I got to love baseball so much. Momma used to find work doing wash for ballplayers. That winter it was the Tigers managed by the great Ty Cobb. One day I saw him walk into the Five-and-Dime. I followed him...not sure what I was going to do when I caught up. Get an autograph, I 'spose. I had no business being in that store. I knew better. Guess I was...feeling my oats. It wasn't long before I saw the candy aisle, and there in front of me was a giant barrel full of peppermints. I had never seen so many in one place. Next thing I knew the owner grabbed me by the ear, convinced that I was ready to steal from him. He dragged into the street, and when I stumbled and fell, he didn't let go, but kept dragging me by the ear in front of everyone. I felt something pop as he threw me onto the railroad tracks by the depot. I looked up at his angry face, cursing me out, but all I heard was ringing. I've been deaf in that ear ever since. That night, momma packed without saying a word. We snuck onto an empty rail car going north. "Too dangerous to stay", she said. That was February, 1926.

Radio is heard.

SAM
I used to live over there on Sycamore.

LOUIS

Officer?

SAM

My family...we just moved away from Sycamore Street this past April. Out to the suburbs.

LOUIS

No kidding? Well, ain't that something?! We live on Sycamore Street. It just goes to show - you just never know who you're going to meet. Ain't that a coincidence!

SAM

Were you planning on taking a peppermint from that barrel?

LOUIS

Officer?

SAM

(fiery)

You were planning on stealing a candy from that store.

LOUIS

Honestly, Officer, I'm not sure what was going through my mind. Just being a kid, I guess. That was a long time ago.

SAM

But if the store owner hadn't caught you, would you have tried to steal one?

LOUIS

Well now, can you beat that? You, carryin' on like it happened yesterday.

SAM

(with anger)

It's a tough pill to swallow for guys like me. Growing up accustomed to things done one way, only to watch it turn upside down. This town was a great place to live, till changes came our way. I watch and see the proof of what I already know: oil and water just don't mix. Businessmen walk more briskly to unlock their cars. Women clutch their handbags more closely to their side. Children leave the playground when Negro kids come along. How far is the branch supposed to bend?

(with derision)

Do you hear what I'm sayin, boy, out of that one good ear? You and I just don't mix!

(still heated, but with measured delivery)

I, too, am a church going man. I ask God every night to tell me what it all means. The anger, fear, confusion...it's...a tough pill to swallow, don't you see?

Radio is heard.

LOUIS

Seventh inning stretch.

(nervous, trying to break tension)

Did you ever play, Officer?

SAM

What, ball? Yeah sure, when I was a kid.

LOUIS

I remember the day my Daddy taught me to catch a grounder... "run up on it and scoop it up", "run up on it and scoop it up"...

(chuckles)

SAM

Got a catcher's mitt one year for my birthday...that thing was bigger than my head.

LOUIS

We used to play in a grassy area, out behind our barn, every damn evenin'.

SAM

We had a sandlot. We used old license plates for bases...an old steering wheel for home plate.

(beat)

An outburst.

LOUIS

Officer?

SAM

What I was saying earlier. An outburst, that's all.

LOUIS

Sycamore Street. It's a shock...Like getting hit over the nose with a bottle.

LOUIS (cont'd)

Like getting caught with your hand in the candy bin.

(beat)

Well, I better get back, those bags aren't going to carry themselves.

Turns off radio.

SAM

Don't you want to know how the game ends?

LOUIS

I'll read about it in tomorrow's paper. That's what's great about baseball in early July - you never know how things are going to turn out.

SAM

Have yourself a good day.

LOUIS

You too, Officer.

They exit in opposite directions.

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2 - FULL COUNT

Lights up on a park bench in an American city during lunchtime on July 3, 2013. Sean paces nervously, his lunch from an expensive downtown eatery on the bench. he is anxious and nervous.

SEAN

(pulls cell phone out from his pocket and makes a call)

Hi, Fran? Sean.....Yes, I got your message...That date sounds fine....Will the cops be there?...I see...How am I doing?...I'm nervous as hell...not sleeping....anxious...Yes, I'm committed to move forward. Anything else I can to do prepare? Okay, keep me posted, and thank you....Happy Fourth to you, too.

Joe makes an energetic entrance, brown bag lunch in hand. he immediately heads to the bench and sits. The location should have a feeling of familiarity for both Sean and Joe, as if to suggest it is a regular meeting place for lunch when the weather allows.

JOE

Hey buddy, sorry I'm late. Had to finish that expense report for Murdoch and re-open the CFG file for tomorrow's conference call. What do you got there - prosciutto and arugula, or some such shit? Such a foodie. The chef with the expensive palate. You treat yourself well, I dig that.

Man what a game last night - I can't believe you missed it! Tied up in the bottom of the 9th - Jennings on Third, Owens hits a single, then I got up to bat. One strike, two balls, then SMACK - cracked it right over the right field wall into the parking lot! Third of the season, baby. Damn that felt good. Afterward we hit McCoy's and guess what? Got me some digits. That redhead that usually works weekends? We started talking about this and that and before you know it - BOOM! Buddy, it was indeed an exceptional night. Brought back memories of you and I at Regional Playoffs our Junior year. You and I scoring the game-winning runs. Co-MVP's that year, remember? You up to bat, me on deck. The 'Dynamic Duo'. Those were the days!

(with a tinge of nostalgia)

Buddy? Sean? Hey man, you ok?

SEAN

Sorry I missed the game. Just a lot on my mind.

JOE

Like what? Holiday weekend coming up. World's our oyster.

SEAN

I'm suing the city.

JOE

Joe sits, realizing he has been oblivious to Sean's withdrawn nature.

You're what?

SEAN

Suing. Those cops. For what they did.

JOE

Wow, man. Just...wow. Why? I mean, how? You're seriously doing this?

SEAN

I hired a lawyer, a friend of my brothers. And I'm doing the right thing. I'm getting answers.

JOE

Look, no disrespect, but are you sure that's a good idea? For one thing, isn't it expensive as hell?

SEAN

This is bigger than money.

JOE

Yeah, but seriously, buddy, I think you've obsessed with this thing long enough. Maybe you ought to let it go.

SEAN

Let it go?

JOE

Like last night, you should have played with us, get your mind off it. Shake it off - Holiday weekend upon us. McCoy's. Watch the game. Get some wings. Have some beers.

SEAN

I know you're trying to cheer me up, Joe, but you can't understand how this feels. Treated like a criminal in front of my neighbors. Do you know what that does to a soul? That night I experienced a whole different world and I'm not sure I can ever come back.

(MORE)

SEAN (cont'd)

I came home from work dressed in a suit. Walked past three cops in the lobby. They saw me and nodded - one even said "Hi". Got my mail and took the elevator. I was in my apartment, ten minutes tops. Long enough to change into sweats, "I'll shoot some hoops at the gym", I thought. Grabbed my keys, my wallet and left. When I got to the lobby those very same cops grabbed me and asked who I was. They had a "reasonable suspicion", they said, and told me they knew I had drugs. They searched all my pockets, and when I said "stop" they slammed me against the brick wall. Yanked my sweats and trunks down to the ground, searched my crotch and spread my bare ass. And when they found nothing, they said not a word, just left through the gathering crowd.

I know we've always been best friends, but there are two worlds here - yours and mine; I was stripped and searched because of my skin. One more marginalized, and for what? I see it all clearly now, the veil has been raised. It's suddenly all black and white.

JOE

Look, what happened to you is terrible. It sucks. I can't imagine what it must have been like.

SEAN

No, you can't imagine. Interrogated in the lobby of my home.

JOE

Don't take this the wrong way, did you do anything strange? I mean, were you acting normal? Maybe you did something to set them off.

SEAN

Normal? Was I acting normal? You mean white, right? Was I acting white?

JOE

Hey man, don't take it out on me. I didn't do anything.

SEAN

You're hearing me, but you're not listening.

JOE

Jesus, man, you're really losing it. Maybe you should save the money you're going to give that lawyer and go see a shrink instead.

SEAN

Yep, you're right. I have changed. Now leave me the hell alone.

JOE

Sean, hey it's me. I don't want to fight with you. I just don't know what to say. Hey, remember that day in seventh grade when we skipped school and went to the ballpark? Rain delay in the sixth inning. You winked at the girl selling beer down on the mezzanine and we got drunk for free?

SEAN

Of course I remember. She was white. Do you remember that?

JOE

Yeah, I remember that. So what?

SEAN

Don't you remember all those frat parties in college where I was the only black guy in the room? Or when we ran track? Or All-State? Or debate team? Did you even notice?

JOE

No, I didn't notice. So what?

SEAN

Well, I see it now. I wonder if you have. Maybe you think I've always been the token tagging along for the ride. If I grew up in the projects, and was out here scraping gum off the pavement, would you even give a shit about me?

JOE

And would you give a shit about me? A rich white guy who grew up in the suburbs? It's not my fault your family lived in a rich white 'hood. I'm not diminishing what happened to you. And if you want to move ahead with this legal stuff, I will support you. Just don't shut me out. At some point, you're going to have to move on.

SEAN

We grew-up in a fantasy world.

JOE

Blinded.

SEAN

Where kids become friends, in spite of their skin.

JOE

Late summer nights of kick-the-can

SEAN

Lightning bugs

JOE

Riding bikes

SEAN
Until we were called-in by our moms.

JOE
We lived in a fantasy world.

SEAN
Brainwashed.

JOE
With Civil Rights taught in a History class

SEAN
Everyone's equal in this day-and-age

JOE
Baseball teams

SEAN
Fraternity row

JOE
And now we've arrived at the truth

SEAN AND JOE:
Neck deep in a fantasy world.
Where hate lives on, with the shade of doubt.
In a three piece suit.
At City Hall.
In a judge's robe.
First a bill, then a law.
With a smile. With a laugh.
In a round of drinks.
At the gym. Playing golf.
In the boardroom.
On the train.
On the trading floor.
Every day.
With a slap on a back.

(MORE)

SEAN AND JOE: (cont'd)

Neck deep in a fantasy world.

With a smile. At the gym.

With a laugh. On the trading floor.

Where hate lives on. On the train. At the gym.

A fantasy world.

Sean collects his things and turns
to leave.

JOE

Call me, ok?

SEAN

(dismissive)

Later.

Again, Sean starts to leave.

JOE

Sean, wait...what day is the hearing?

SEAN

July 29. It's a Monday. Eleven a.m.

JOE

I'll be there.

Beat. Sean tries several times to
find words to answer.

JOE (cont'd)

I'm with you.

SEAN

I know.

End of Scene 2

SCENE 3 - BENCHED

Lights up on a bench in an American park on the afternoon of July 3, 2063. Max is seated on the bench in a little league uniform. The dirt and grass stains indicate he has just finished a game. On one of his knees is a shiny silver apparatus that looks as if it is some kind of a futuristic bandage. He gingerly touches it and adjusts the bandage so it fits tightly. At his side on the ground is a baseball mitt with ball. He looks expectantly to the horizon, house right, as if he is waiting for someone.

As Phillip enters, the music begins. He has also just finished a little league game, playing on the other team opposite Max. He is confident, gregarious. He crosses down to the bench and also looks to the horizon as if waiting for someone.

PHILLIP

What happened to your leg?

MAX

You hit me with one of your sliders. Sixth inning.

PHILLIP

Oh, that was you? Sorry about that. I'm Phillip.

MAX

Max. Great game.

PHILLIP

Thanks. Waiting for a ride?

MAX

Yeah, my dad...he's coming from work....

PHILLIP

I'm waiting for my Dad too, he's taking my brothers and me to the game.

MAX

Wow, double-header - you're so lucky. How'd you get tickets? Those sell out fast.

PHILLIP
We have season tickets.

MAX
Wow, you must be rich.

PHILLIP
My mom and dad work for The Federation.

MAX
I hear we're tied with the White Sox for first place, now that Osaka is out of it.

PHILLIP
Yeah, but Toronto is not far behind, and San Juan is looking good, too. How old are you?

MAX
Ten. I look younger 'cause I'm short.

PHILLIP
I'm ten, too! What Level are you on?

MAX
Just finished Forty-two.

PHILLIP
Only forty-two?! You have to finish reading Level Forty-five before the November Exam!

MAX
Yeah I know...I have a tutor.

PHILLIP
I'm clear through Level Forty-four...finished that back in March. Maybe I can quiz you on some stuff?

MAX
(hesitant)
Now?

PHILLIP
Come on, it'll be fun.

MAX
(shrugs)
Ok.

PHILLIP
So, let's see...square root of sixteen?

Four.

MAX

PHILLIP
Location of the United Nations?

MAX
Barcelona.

PHILLIP
Capital of the World Bank?

MAX
Shanghai.

PHILLIP
The first female Supreme Court Justice?

MAX
Sandra Day O'Connor

PHILLIP
Geneva is the capital of?

MAX
The Federation.

PHILLIP
Washington DC is the capital of?

MAX
United States of America

PHILLIP
Atlanta is the capital of?

MAX
Confederate Republic of America - hey, this is all too easy.
I covered all of this on Level Forty.

PHILLIP
Yeah you're right. Okay...got it...first man to walk on the
moon?

MAX
Neil Armstrong.

PHILLIP
Who wrote, "I Have a Dream"?

MAX
The Reverend Martin Luther King Junior.

PHILLIP

Former name of the Bio-Resource Province?

MAX

Antarctica.

PHILLIP

And Lake Polaris used to be known as?

MAX

The North Pole.

PHILLIP

Okay. Here's a good one: the five Mars habitation stations?

MAX

Genesis, Appomattox, Einstein, Monticello and...um...

PHILLIP

Alamo!

MAX

Yeah...I always forget Alamo.

PHILLIP

What about the Thirty-Second Amendment?

MAX

Is that the Global Immigration Doctrine?

PHILLIP

Right!

MAX

I know the name, but not sure what it is.

PHILLIP

Don't worry, you'll cover that in Level Forty-three. You look a little familiar to me...when did you do National Service?

MAX

This past March.

PHILLIP

Me too...where?

MAX

Camp Poseidon.

PHILLIP

Same....I thought I recognized you!

MAX

That's amazing, there must have been over one thousand cadets.

PHILLIP

I have great recall...photographic memory. What was your final history project?

MAX

Glaciers.

PHILLIP

Oh yeah, the ice mountains that move, right?

MAX

Something like that....what was yours?

PHILLIP

Some disease called AIDS. Are you swabbed and chipped yet?

MAX

Yeah, the swab was easy... but the chip hurt like a bitch.

PHILLIP

(laughs)

Truth. So, what are your results?

MAX

Anglo-Caucasian. One-hundred percent. You?

PHILLIP

Forty-five percent Anglo-Black American, Twenty-five percent Continental-African, Twenty percent Haitian and Ten percent Asiatic. Wow, you're One-hundred percent?

MAX

Traced back to Western Europe...and the UK...

PHILLIP

Wow, you're totally white. REALLY white...

MAX

I prefer Anglo-Caucasian.

PHILLIP

Whatever. My Dad says ev'ryone used to say "white."

MAX

Not anymore.

PHILLIP

Hey, there used to be all sorts of names for what I am. "Colored", "black", "African-American", "Negro"...

MAX

"Negro"? What's that?

PHILLIP

Like me, dummy, with dark-skin.

MAX

I'm not a dummy. I just never heard of it.

PHILLIP

There are a few white kids in my neighborhood...and one of our maids is white. The other is Asian.

MAX

Asiatic.

PHILLIP

Same thing. I'm ten percent Asiatic... Asian...whatever.

MAX

Yeah I know, you told me.

PHILLIP

So, what does your mom and dad do?

MAX

My dad works at a hospital.

PHILLIP

What kind of doctor is he?

MAX

He's not a doctor...he cleans.

PHILLIP

Well, that's okay. I mean, someone's got to clean, right? You should just go ahead and say your dad's a janitor. No shame in that. The world would be a total mess without civil servants. My Dad always says "it takes all kind of people to keep the world turning." Know what I mean? All sorts of people to grease the wheels, prune the trees, change the sheets, clean the hospitals, carry the bags, build the bridges, row the ship...to pick up the slack. Like in baseball...not everyone can play ball. Some guys are umpires, or scorekeepers, or groundskeepers. It takes all sort of people to row the ship.

MAX

Row the ship?

PHILLIP

Yeah, you know, like men in the bottom of an old boat, or something. What about your mom, what does she do?

MAX

She's just my mom. She stays home. She's deaf.

PHILLIP

Oh...sorry.

MAX

(shrugs)

's ok. Happened before I was born.

PHILLIP

Why doesn't she just get an implant?

MAX

Too expensive.

PHILLIP

So, if she was deaf before you were born...she's never heard your voice, right?

MAX

My mom says... That when I was a baby she would cradle me close to her chest and feel the beat of my heart, the rhythm of my breathing and the vibration of my voice. To me, she was never deaf...she has always heard me. Last Thanksgiving, before dinner, she spoke for very the first time. She said grace. It was the first time any of us had ever heard her speak. Ev'ryone cried. My father picked her up and twirled her around the air!

PHILLIP

Grace? What's that?

MAX

You know...prayer...at the dinner table...of thanks, or whatever...to God.

PHILLIP

My Dad says God doesn't exist. That's just a crutch for people so they can deal with fear.

MAX

What does your dad do when he's afraid?

PHILLIP

He's not afraid of anything. He finished first in his Sector during National Service...holds all sorts of records in Outbound Survival. He's in The Federation.

MAX

The Federation - yeah I know, you told me. I don't think my exam scores will be high enough to get in. Besides, my dad says it's all a waste of time...they've been tracking our activities and know which way we'll go.

PHILLIP

Yeah, but the exam is still important...they have to figure out where you will fit in: leadership or civil service. Don't forget: you're a minority. They'll take that into account, too.

MAX

I just wish I didn't have to take it. Being ten sucks.

PHILLIP

Truth. It's all part of growing up.

MAX

Everything changes when you're ten.

PHILLIP

Mistakes are a much bigger deal.

MAX

Hitting four out of ten is great in baseball. But Forty percent on the Exam...

PHILLIP

Got to hit ten out of ten, when you're ten.

MAX

If I could only play ball through an endless summer...

PHILLIP

Instead of forms and levels, an endless list of facts...

MAX

To hit all your curve balls and sliders...

PHILLIP

To beat the curve and please my father...

MAX

Running all the bases...

PHILLIP

Cov'ring all the bases....

MAX

Stats...

PHILLIP

And scores...

MAX

Standings...

Deadlines... PHILLIP

Rounding home. MAX

Coming home. PHILLIP

To high fives and fist bumps and a smile from the coach... MAX

To studying and flashcards and bed without dinner... PHILLIP

When you tag home. MAX

When you come home. PHILLIP

The best of all worlds. MAX

The weight of the world. PHILLIP

Is home. When you're ten. BOTH

Phillip snaps out of his daydream
and notices his Dad is arriving.

Hey! There's my Dad! Gotta go. PHILLIP

Okay. MAX

Sorry about your leg. And good luck on the Exam. PHILLIP

Thanks. We should exchange DAT-IM... MAX
(pronounced 'DAY-tum')

Sure, why not... PHILLIP

They each hold up their right forearms, and in one slick movement, rub arms from mid-forearm through wrists, palms and fingertips, thereby exchanging information from chip to chip.

MAX

See ya.

PHILLIP

Later...hey,wait...Come with us, to the game! I'm sure my Dad can get another ticket. He's in the Fed -

MAX

The Federation, yeah, I know, you told me a million times. But I can't, I'm waiting for my Dad...

PHILLIP

Have him bring you to the ballpark...Gate A. We'll wait for you. Come on, it will be fun.

MAX

Well, if you're sure it's okay.

PHILLIP

Of course it is...wait...what's your name?

MAX

Max.

PHILLIP

I'm -

MAX

Phillip, yeah I know you told me.

Phillip runs off stage, leaving Max by himself.

END OF OPERA