

George's Song

by

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OPEN TO BLACK

The STACCATO SYNCOPATION of a hot jazz piano reminiscent of the '40s Big Band dance era.

FADE IN:

INT. THE DERBY CLUB, LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

On the bandstand, GEORGE OWENS, 39, ambitious, talented, but with much to prove, plays virtuoso shtick on piano and leads his band, an eclectic group, in a roaring rendition of Count Basie's "Basie Boogie."

George's passion inspires those on the packed dance floor.

Some dancers wear 30s-40s vintage outfits, others wear contemporary clothes.

MIGUEL GARCIA, 33, a Latin Fred Astaire, tries with little success to lead a WOMAN, 45, with no sense of rhythm.

MIGUEL
(with a twinkle)
Bet you've been dancing for years.

The Woman smiles demurely, as skirts flare, hips swivel, and feet kick to the scorching music.

George wraps up with a show-stopping riff and the dancers go wild with their thunderous applause.

George, limber and energetic, hops up to the microphone.

GEORGE
You guys are great!

LEONARD LITTLE, 38, Master of Ceremonies and carnival barker at heart, breaks in at the microphone.

LEONARD
Hey, everyone, your official winner of this week's band competition! These guys have just qualified for the National Big Band championships next week at The Greek Theater!

Wild applause, as Leonard sticks a small trophy in George's hand.

George's band goes wild, high-fives, thumps each other on the back.

GEORGE
Great! Thank you, everyone!
(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Don't forget to come out and support
us next week at the Greek!

CROWD VOICES

Go, George, Go! Go, George, Go!

George looks down. There is a row of females staring up at him, definitely interested. Uncomfortable with the attention, George skips off stage.

BACKSTAGE HALLWAY

George carries the small trophy they just won.

EDDIE MARTINEZ, 39, the good-humored trumpeter, slaps George on the back and the jubilant band follows.

EDDIE

George, they love us.

Suddenly, George grimaces and flexes his right hand in pain. Eddie notices, but says nothing.

GEORGE

(on edge)

What happened back on sixteen?

EDDIE

We're going to the finals, man.
We're fine.

GEORGE

The syncopation was sloppy.

WALTER, 36, the near-sighted guitar chimes in.

WALTER

Georgie, smell the roses, man. It's
all good.

GEORGE

But it's not over. I don't hear the
fat lady singing.

FRED, 40, the lanky, deep-throated bass player, breaks in.

FRED

No worries, my friend. Let's go.
Señor Corona is calling us.

The band heads off to celebrate. Eddie and TERRY, 42, a quiet, reflective African-American, holds his clarinet, stays back.

GEORGE
No one gets it. Competition just
gets tougher from here.

EDDIE
Easy, big fella.

GEORGE
Don't "easy" me. You've been with
me long enough to know what this is
all about.

EDDIE
Just can't stop dueling your ol'
man's ghost.

GEORGE
We've worked our asses off to get
here! I'll dance on his grave.

Terry turns to go, looks back.

TERRY
We'll sharpen up that syncopation.

Terry's off.

EDDIE
Funny, isn't it, how ambition can
get in the way of good sense.

George looks at Eddie.

INT. THE DERBY CLUB ENTRY - NIGHT

MARIE, 35, brassy in her tight skirt, a cigarette girl-type,
hawks "George Owens Orchestra" CDs to departing club-goers.

Marie sees George and Eddie approach.

GEORGE
Marie, you little minx, how'd we do
tonight?

MARIE
Looks like you guys can still pay
your rent.

GEORGE
You know if that guy from Capitol
Records picked up his comp pass?

MARIE

Georgie, the joint's been a mad house.
Say, we on tonight?

GEORGE

Not tonight, kinda tired.

George and Eddie walk off.

EDDIE

Once was enough, huh?

GEORGE

Man, you know. They get needy.

EDDIE

That record deal with Capitol getting
anywhere?

GEORGE

Still trying to side step the guard
dog at the front desk.

EXT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT BUILDING - NIGHT

In the Los Feliz district. It's a modest Spanish-style, cozy, with lots of personality. George pulls up in his old car. It looks a bit odd next to the neighbors' BMWs and Mercedes'.

INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

George enters. Catches his foot on the threshold. Almost falls, but catches himself. The place is bachelor apartment messy, except for a magnificent baby grand piano near the front window.

Exhausted, George takes off his jacket. He plops down at the piano and noodles the syncopation from sixteen for "Basie Boogie."

EXT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

George continues at the piano.

INT. BANK - DAY

Nameplate on a desk: George Owens, loan officer. George, behind the desk, shakes the hand of MR. ROBERTS, 40, construction worker.

GEORGE

Mr. Roberts, I assure you we'll do everything we can to get that loan for you.

MR. ROBERTS

This is great.

GEORGE

I understand. You got a family. You got a dream, do the best you can. I'm gonna sweat blood for you. Promise.

Mr. Roberts leaves. George sits at his desk. His fingers "play." George checks his watch. Picks up the phone.

GEORGE

Mr. Harral. Mind if I slip out a few minutes early for lunch?

MR. HARRAL (V.O.)

What? To see the umpteenth record producer in the last ten years?

GEORGE

You know how it is. Be back fifteen minutes early. You know I love my job here.

George hangs up and races out.

EXT. CAPITOL RECORDS BUILDING - DAY

The tall cylindrical landmark is awash in sunlight. Fall colors paint the sidewalk trees.

INT. CAPITOL RECORDS BUILDING, OFFICE - DAY

The sign on the door reads "Recording Agent."

George stands before BRIDGET, 45, guard-dog snarly. Notices her name tag "BRIDGET."

GEORGE
Come on, "Bridget." Work with me.
I've had this appointment for a month.

Bridget hands George back a CD.

BRIAN FOLSOM, 45, nerdy, shuffles by with a Britney Spears-type on his arm.

Bridget gives him a private glance. Brian signals "not now" and walks toward a back office.

George notices their interchange.

BRIDGET
Mr. Folsom said to tell you we aren't
looking for retro music.

GEORGE
Was that him?

Bridget won't say.

GEORGE
Just between us, did he even listen
to my demo? You know. Slip it into
the ol' car CD on the way home?

Bridget shoots George a "get real" look.

GEORGE
Say, how about if we do lunch. Maybe
you could, you know put in a good--

BRIDGET
Now you're really scraping the bottom.

George flashes Bridget a smile that could melt the polar ice cap.

BRIDGET
Look. Maybe your music is great,
but we're all looking for the next
Jordin Sparks. Sorry.

George hands the CD back to Bridget, but she won't take it. George sets it down in front of her.

GEORGE
(teasing)
I'm gonna call you.

George leaves.

EXT. CAPITOL RECORDS BUILDING - DAY

On the way out, George suddenly trips on the step and falls to his knees.

GEORGE

Shit.

George struggles to his feet. Notices his hand shaking.

Just then, Eddie drives up. Calls out through his rolled down window.

EDDIE

Hey, that was cute. How'd it go in there?

GEORGE

All I can say is we better kick butt at the Greek.

INT. SAMMY'S BARBER SHOP - DAY

It's wallpapered with autographed pictures of celebs. Among them, a picture of George and his orchestra takes a prominent place.

A poster announcing the National Battle of the Bands Contest hangs over the sink.

SAMMY ROBINSON, 68, African-American barber, jaunty, bow-tie dapper, pours a cup of coffee.

George enters. Looks like he just rolled out of bed. He plops into a barber chair. Sammy hands George the coffee.

SAMMY

My favorite regular. Congrats. You goin' to the Greek. Say, who's your competition?

GEORGE

The New Jersey Wailers.

SAMMY

Damn, them guys is always in the finals. Any special prize this time?

GEORGE

They're talking about a recording contract.

SAMMY

Works for me. Just do like your
mama did. My, could she tickle the
ivories. When she played, everybody
listened.

In the next chair, AL JONES, 75, African-American, sparkling
eyes on a bloodhound face, just hanging out, reads a sports
article about the UCLA/USC football game.

AL

(picks up on the
conversation)
Unlike his old man.

SAMMY

(glances at George)
About all he did was tell everyone
why they couldn't do something.

George looks uncomfortable, doesn't join in the discussion.

AL

Sure never got many hurrahs, did he?
'Course he never gave out many either.

SAMMY

Givin' and gettin'. Now there's a
question. What would you rather
have? Love or respect?

Al puts down his paper.

AL

If you ask me, depends on what time
of day it is. Two in the P-M,
respect. But two in the A-M? Now
that's another matter.

GEORGE

Sammy, what time is it?

They all laugh. George takes a sip of coffee. Suddenly,
bobbles his cup. Catches it.

SAMMY

Oh, oh. Someone's checkin' his watch.

They all laugh. George looks at his hand, surprised but not
concerned.

GEORGE

What the hell you put in that coffee,
Sammy?

They all laugh.

INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT, LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Stacks of musical scores surround the piano. A photo of George, 12, and Count Basie sits on the piano.

Eddie looks on while George, in his tux, pounds out a few bars of a hot '40s boogie-woogie.

Satisfied, George gets up. Looks at the photo.

GEORGE
Tonight's the night.
(to Eddie)
Want a sandwich?

INT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT, KITCHEN - NIGHT

George makes a sandwich. Fumbles with the knife. Jam spills onto his lapel.

GEORGE
Damn.

George reaches for a dishrag.

Eddie enters. Takes the sandwich.

EDDIE
You okay?

GEORGE
Sure.

EDDIE
Ah, you're nervous. It'll be great.

EXT. GEORGE'S APARTMENT, HALLWAY - NIGHT

Eddie and George exit. Al, from the barbershop, approaches.

AL
Young man, make Mr. Basie proud at
that contest tonight.

GEORGE
It's in the bag.

Down the hall, DORIS, 75, African-American, Al's sledgehammer abrupt wife, pokes her head out of their apartment.

DORIS

Georgie, show 'em who's boss. Your
mama would sure be proud.

George smiles. Doris gestures to Al.

DORIS

Get in here, you ol' fart.

AL

(henpecked)

Love calls.

GEORGE

At least you're gettin' some, man.

EDDIE

Love, nothing better.

INT. THE GREEK THEATER, LOS ANGELES - NIGHT

On stage, the New Jersey Wailers, dapper in their purple
satin jackets, wrap up a rousing rendition of "Honeysuckle
Rose" to thunderous applause.

Leonard is at the mic, as George and his band wait for Wailers
to clear the bandstand. SPEEDY WHITE, 43, the Wailers' piano
and leader, brash, irritatingly confident, passes George.

SPEEDY

You're playing for second place.

GEORGE

Kiss mine.

George's men take their places.

LEONARD

(into the microphone)

Ladies and gentlemen! Are you ready?!
I'm Leonard Little, once again
reminding you that we're at the finals
of the Battle of National Jitterbug
Bands at the Greek Theater. The
prize is a recording contract!

George leans into the band.

GEORGE

You guys feelin' it?

EDDIE

(in Spanish)

On fire.

GEORGE

This could put us over the top.

George turns to Leonard.

LEONARD

(into the microphone)

Last up tonight is a group from right here in the Los Feliz district of Los Angeles, the George Owens Orchestra. Led by their incomparable impresario, playing virtuoso piano, Mr. George Owens!

At the piano, George mugs a silly happy face to his men. Signals the downbeat.

GEORGE

Okay, boys. Let's let 'em know we're here. A one, two, one two three four.

The hammers at first dance up and down on the strings inside the piano.

George's foot beats out a toe-tapping introduction of a classic '40s tune.

George's hands work the keys.

The band feels it. The syncopation is "on."

The audience senses a great performance and edges closer to the bandstand.

Suddenly, a look of desperation invades George's face.

The piano hammers dance at random, out of sync. DISTURBING DISSONANT SOUNDS.

George's fingers strike the piano keys like blocks of wood.

Eddie looks up. What the hell is going on? The band looks on in alarm, but keeps playing.

The crowd near the bandstand look at one another in surprise.

George, trying to keep his anxiety under control, stops playing. Gestures his men to cover for him and take over.

IN THE WINGS

LEONARD

Gawd, what a train wreck.

(to an assistant)

George is blowing it big time.