

THE SOUND OF MU...RDER

By ANDY HAWKES

IT IS THE EVENING OF A PARTY FOR THE LOCAL VICTIM SUPPORT GROUP AND THEY ARE ALL GATHERED IN THE HALL. UNFORTUNATELY THE HALL HAS BEEN DOUBLE-BOOKED AND THERE IS ALSO DUE TO BE A REHEARSAL OF THE LOCAL AM-DRAM GROUP WHO ARE PUTTING ON 'THE SOUND OF MUSIC'.

ALL INITIAL ENTRANCES ARE FROM THE BACK OF THE HALL – THROUGH THE AUDIENCE. EACH AM-DRAM MEMBER IS CARRYING A BOTTLE – WATER, ORANGE JUICE, GIN, WHATEVER.

ENTER STEPHANIE (REAR OF HALL).

STEPHANIE Alright, everyone, let's get started. Not long to go now before we do it for real. Gather... What the...? (*Addressing the audience.*) Who the heck are you lot? What ever are you doing here? Would you mind leaving please? We have a rehearsal to get through. (*When, presumably, there is no response*) Very well, I'll just have to sort this out for myself. (*Shouts*) Mrs Snoop? Mrs Snoop?

ENTER SARAH SNOOP FROM ANYWHERE SHE LIKES. SHE HAS A VACUUM FLASK IN HER HAND OR POCKET OR ON HER TROLLEY.

SARAH What d'ya want!

STEPHANIE Mrs Snoop, what are all these people doing here? You know very well that we always have the hall on a Saturday night for our rehearsals. I'll thank you to get rid of them. (*She turns to go.*)

SARAH Not my job.

STEPHANIE You're the caretaker here, aren't you?

SARAH I am. But that's all I am.

STEPHANIE What do you mean?

SARAH I don't make the bookings. Take it up with the Social Secretary.

EXIT SARAH.

STEPHANIE We'll see about this – I'm going to call her right now. Can I use your phone?

SARAH (*Off stage.*) Use your own.

ENTER AGGIE AND EADIE. (MAYBE IN FULL NUN COSTUME – AT LEAST IN WIMPLES. EACH HAS A PINT IN THEIR HAND – MAYBE A FAG AS WELL.)

AGGIE Here we go again, Eadie. Another night of unbridled joy.

EADIE I don't know why you come, Aggie, you always seem to moan about it.

AGGIE Me moan? I'm the eternal optimist, me.

EADIE You could have fooled me.

AGGIE It's true! One day that Julie Anders is going to fall flat on her face and when that day comes I want to be here to see it.

EADIE You're very unforgiving of your sister, aren't you.

AGGIE Hah!

FROM OUTSIDE THE HALL COMES THE SOUND OF A VERY OVER-OPERATIC VOICE SINGING 'THE HILLS ARE ALIVE...'

EADIE Hush now, she's here.

AGGIE Is she now? Do I care?

ENTER JULIE.

JULIE *(Musically.)* He-llo!

AGGIE *(Mimicking.)* He-llo.

EADIE Hi, Julie.

JULIE Who are all these people? We've never had an open rehearsal before, have we?

AGGIE Every performance we've ever done has been like an open rehearsal.

JULIE I don't think that that comment can be applied to us all, Aggie.

EADIE She's only joking, Julie.

AGGIE You reckon?

JULIE *(Laughing.)* Oh, I know our little Aggie. Wonderful sense of humour. Where would our little group be without her?

AGGIE *(Under her voice.)* Ha-bloomin'-ha.

ENTER ANDREA AND MARTHA.

ANDREA And when you get to that top C I want you to...

MARTHA What the heck?

JULIE We seem to have an audience.

MARTHA Not bloody likely we haven't. I don't sing in public until I'm fully prepared.

JULIE Oh dear, Martha, I didn't know you were going to give up performing.

AGGIE Ooooh!

MARTHA Very funny, Julie, very funny. Ever thought of becoming a comedienne? You couldn't be any worse on stage.

JULIE You should give them a song – it might be your only chance to play the lead.

MARTHA My time will come – don't worry.

JULIE Oh yes. Did you hear that while worshipping at your shrine? So sad.

EXIT JULIE.

MARTHA Oh, that woman!

ANDREA Calm down, Martha, you know you're just as good as her.

MARTHA Better, I hope.

ANDREA Of course you're better – that's what I meant to say.

MARTHA Thank you. You're very good for me, Andrea.

AGGIE Seems to be rubbing a lot of people up the wrong way today, does our Julie.

ANDREA I can't believe you two are sisters – you're so different.

EADIE They are, aren't they – thank heavens.

AGGIE You can't choose your relatives – but you can choose if you want to keep them; it just takes a little bit of effort.

EADIE Oh, Aggie. That was all a very long time ago.

AGGIE You don't forget something like that – ever!

ENTER STEPHANIE.

STEPHANIE Ladies and Gentlemen – your attention please? Thanks you. I’m Stephanie Spielberg, the director of our little troupe. I’ve been on the phone to the Social Secretary of this place and it seems that there is absolutely nothing that can be done. You, I’m sure, intend to stay here and have your little party and I know I can speak for all of us when I say that we intend to have our rehearsal – so we’ll all have to get on with it.

ENTER SARAH AT A RUN.

SARAH Oy, you!

STEPHANIE Are you talking to me?

SARAH I am. What have you been saying to my boss?

STEPHANIE Just trying to sort out this little problem.

SARAH And bad-mouthing me as usual I suppose.

STEPHANIE I have never “bad-mouthed” you, Mrs Snoop.

SARAH Oh yeah?

STEPHANIE Oh Yeah! I mean – honestly I haven’t. I know how important this job is to you and your little...

SARAH Well someone has been. I’m already THIS close to losing my job thanks to some mean spirited sneak – and it’s not my fault.

EADIE I’m sure it isn’t, Mrs Snoop, Come with me – we’ll find you a cup of tea.

SARAH *(Being led off by Eadie)* If I lose this job, I don’t know what we’ll do – I’ll do anything to keep it.

EXIT EADIE AND SARAH.

STEPHANIE Now, come along everyone – we must try and salvage something from this debacle.

AGGIE Ooooooh! Debacle! What the hell is that?

ANDREA It’s a mess – a farce.

AGGIE Hah! *The Sound of Music* performed as a farce – that I must see. Will the vicar lose his trousers do you think?

STEPHANIE Haven't you got some props to make, Aggie?

AGGIE OK. I can take a hint.

EXIT AGGIE.

ENTER JULIE.

JULIE What was Eadie doing with that dreadful woman?

STEPHANIE Who do you mean?

JULIE Sarah Snoop.

STEPHANIE Mrs Snoop was very upset because she thinks she may lose her job.

JULIE At last! Maybe we'll get someone in who can do the job properly.

ANDREA Julie! That's not very nice.

JULIE Well, neither is she. Miserable old sod.

STEPHANIE She has a lot of problems at home, you know.

JULIE Well she should leave them there then, shouldn't she. Look
(*Indicates her drinks bottle.*) She hasn't even got the geyser working yet, has she.

STEPHANIE Never been very understanding, have you, Julie?

JULIE People should look out for themselves, that's what I say.

ANDREA You're certainly good at that.

HAMMERING NOISES OFF STAGE.

JULIE What on earth...?

STEPHANIE That's just Aggie working on the scenery. She's building an alp.

JULIE Does she have to do it now?

STEPHANIE When else can she do it?

JULIE I don't know – come in on Sundays I suppose. It's very distracting.

ENTER MARTHA.

MARTHA You should see Aggie back there – hammering nails like she had someone's head under her hammer.

STEPHANIE I'll go and see if there's anything quieter she can do.

ANDREA I have my music to get ready.

EXIT STEPHANIE AND ANDREA.

JULIE Selfish cow.

MARTHA I beg your pardon?

JULIE Aggie. Only ever thinks about herself.

MARTHA She's working very hard for the good of us all. I don't see you getting your hands dirty.

JULIE Martha – I thought you of all people would understand.

MARTHA You're not going to tell me that you can't help out backstage because you're the star?

JULIE Well, I am. What if I got injured?

MARTHA Then I would take over the role.

JULIE Oh, you'd like that, wouldn't you.

MARTHA Of course I would.

JULIE Well, tough luck. As long as I'm around you'll have to whistle. Thinking about it – you may sound better whistling than you do singing.

MARTHA PULLS BACK HER HAND TO SLAP JULIE BUT IS INTERRUPTED BY...

ENTER AGGIE.

AGGIE Hey! Julie!

MARTHA You've been saved by the bell, I think.

JULIE In your dreams, Martha.

EXIT MARTHA.

AGGIE Did you hear me?

JULIE I presume you are wishing to attract my attention?

AGGIE If you've got a grouse against me, come and tell me yourself. Don't send one of your lackeys to do the job.

JULIE You know what they say?

AGGIE What's that?

JULIE No point having a dog and barking yourself.

AGGIE You think the world is made up of your dogs, don't you?

JULIE Is it my fault if people seem to want to help me?

AGGIE You've got something on most of them I would imagine.

JULIE That's not true, and you know it.

AGGIE But if I don't cow-tow to you you'll never tell me what I want to know, will you?

JULIE Don't let's go into all that again.

AGGIE Why? Does it trouble your conscience?

JULIE I did what was best.

AGGIE Hah! Best for who?

JULIE It was all many years ago.

AGGIE Eighteen, to be precise.

JULIE All right – if it makes you feel better – eighteen. What of it?

AGGIE It means I don't need you any more.

JULIE What?

AGGIE Think about it.

EXIT AGGIE.

ENTER EADIE.

EADIE Was that Aggie?

JULIE It was.

EADIE I was looking for her. Something I need to tell her. **JULIE**
What about?

EADIE Nothing to do with you, Julie.

JULIE I *am* her sister, you know.

EADIE So? If you were a proper sister you'd love her; but you're incapable of loving her half as much as I...

EADIE STOPS AS SHE REALISES THAT SHE IS ABOUT TO SAY TOO MUCH.

JULIE Half as much as you? What? As you love her?

EADIE I never said that.

JULIE No, but you were going to, weren't you?

EADIE No.

JULIE Yes, you were. Well, I never. I didn't know you had it in you, Eadie. Quite the dark horse I must say.

EADIE Please don't say anything to Aggie. Please!

JULIE Why not? I'm sure she'd love to know she's got an admirer.

EADIE I value her friendship more than anything in the world and if she thought I... well, you know... well, she might not want me as a friend anymore.

JULIE Well, well, well.

EADIE Please!

JULIE We'll have to see, won't we.

EXIT JULIE.

ENTER ANDREA. EADIE IS IN TEARS.

ANDREA Eadie! Eadie, love - whatever's the matter?

EADIE Nothing, I'm all right.

ANDREA It was Julie, wasn't it? She's upset you.

EADIE A bit – but it's nothing. Really.

ANDREA Damn that woman – she's never happier than when she's spreading misery.

EADIE Why do you say... Oh, I'm sorry – I forgot about...

ANDREA Most people have, but I haven't.

EADIE It was awful at the time, wasn't it.

ANDREA It's still awful. *(Pause.)* How's Mrs Snoop?

EADIE Oh, she's all right. Just furious that someone's been complaining all the time to her bosses about her work.

ANDREA Well, she's not very good, is she?

EADIE She's not that bad – we could do a lot worse. And if she loses this job she'll never get another that suits her so well – you know, hours and all that.

ANDREA It can't be easy for her.

EADIE It isn't. If only people would think a little before they go blabbing their mouths off.

ANDREA I think you've just described Julie.

EADIE I know I have and I'm afraid Mrs Snoop has come to the same conclusion. She's livid.

ANDREA Doesn't take much to make her angry – quite an uncontrollable temper that one's got.

ENTER STEPHANIE.

STEPHANIE Can we never have an uneventful night? With any luck we may get some rehearsing done tonight. Where is everyone now?

EADIE They can't be far away.

STEPHANIE Be a love, Eadie, and try to round them up for me, will you?

EADIE No problem.

EXIT EADIE.

ANDREA Want to discuss the music while we're waiting?

STEPHANIE No, Andrea, the music's one department I can ignore – knowing it's in safe hands.

THERE IS AN EMBARRASSED SILENCE.

ANDREA Are you still applying for jobs?

STEPHANIE What? Oh, no. Gave up on that years ago.

ANDREA Really? Why did you do that? You're the best director I know – and I know a lot, both amateur and professional.

STEPHANIE It's a funny business, Andrea. You think you're doing well, the interviews go swimmingly, you're about to sign on the dotted line and suddenly the producer gets a phone call alleging you're difficult to work with and bingo --- No one wants to know any more.

ANDREA And that was happening to you?

STEPHANIE As regular as clockwork. I seem to be allowed to get little local jobs, but as for getting into the big time – forget it.

ANDREA What can you do about it?

STEPHANIE Not a lot, really – not unless you're willing to kill the one you think is doing it.

ANDREA A bit extreme, I suppose.

STEPHANIE Believe me, there are times when I'm very tempted.

ENTER JULIE.

JULIE Are we ever going to get started tonight, Stephanie? Really! As someone who considers herself to be a professional director you don't seem to have a very firm grip on things this evening.

ANDREA I'll go and help Eadie corral the sheep.

EXIT ANDREA.

STEPHANIE You could do a better job, I suppose.

JULIE Of course not, Stephanie. You're a wonderful director. I'm sure I would not be the success I am without your wonderful hand on the tiller. No – you are definitely worth keeping around.

STEPHANIE I thought so.

JULIE You thought what?

STEPHANIE I thought it was you.

JULIE I have no idea what you're talking about.

STEPHANIE Don't you? You know nothing about phone calls to producers?

JULIE *(Smiling.)* Should I know something about them?

STEPHANIE I don't know why I keep working with you.

JULIE Because I have all the connections – and the money.

ENTER MARTHA.

MARTHA Mrs Snoop is looking for you, Stephanie.

STEPHANIE Oh God – what now?

EXIT STEPHANIE.

JULIE We might as well go home.

MARTHA What?

JULIE Well, it's obvious - we're not going to get any rehearsing done tonight, are we?

MARTHA There's plenty of time yet.

JULIE Yes, there's time – but I feel the motivation is lacking.

MARTHA There's no problem with my motivation.

JULIE Pity it doesn't show on stage.

MARTHA Julie! I've just about had enough of you and your constant carping and belittling and...

JULIE Forgotten your words again, Martha?

MARTHA Why you...

MARTHA RUSHES OUT WHILE JULIE LAUGHS AT HER RETREATING BACK.

ENTER ANDREA.

ANDREA No luck.

JULIE Can't find anyone?

ANDREA It's ridiculous – I think we're all chasing each other round in circles.

JULIE Talking of chasing around – seen your husband recently?

ANDREA You know I haven't.

JULIE I think you were very brave.

ANDREA Brave?

JULIE Yes – to come back into the group when you had been so... humiliated.

ANDREA I was humiliated, yes. And it was you who humiliated me, wasn't it?

JULIE Me? I don't think so.

ANDREA If it hadn't been for you he would never have left me.

JULIE I didn't ask him to leave you.

ANDREA You suggested that things could only get better for him if he did.

JULIE Perhaps I didn't mean better with me – perhaps I meant better away from you.

ANDREA BURSTS INTO TEARS.

ENTER SARAH.

SARAH So it has been you!

JULIE I beg your pardon?

SARAH You – telling lies about me to my boss.

JULIE Lies? Me? Why should I do that?

ANDREA You do it to everyone – you're like a little God – controlling your Universe.

JULIE Oh really – you lot kill me.

EXIT JULIE.

ENTER STEPHANIE, AGGIE, EADIE AND MARTHA.

STEPHANIE At last – we all seem to be together. Oh no, where's Julie?

ANDREA Who cares?

AGGIE Are you all right, Andrea?

EADIE You've been crying.

MARTHA Don't tell me...

ALL TOGETHER Julie!

STEPHANIE Go and find her, someone.

EXIT AGGIE, MRS SNOOP AND MARTHA.

STEPHANIE Perhaps Andrea could play *Edelweiss* and you, Eadie, would like to rehearse your song.

EADIE I don't think I'm up to it tonight, Stephanie... it's all been a bit fraught.

ANDREA It's always a bit fraught when Julie's around. Why do we put up with her?

STEPHANIE You know why, Andrea.

EADIE I suppose we'll wait for Julie and rehearse around her as usual.

THEY STAND AROUND IN SILENCE FOR A SHORT WHILE.

STEPHANIE Oh this is ridiculous.

ENTER MRS SNOOP.

SARAH I'm delighted to say I haven't found her.

STEPHANIE What about the others?

SARAH No idea. Let's all split up. See if we have any more success.

EXIT STEPHANIE, ANDREA AND EADIE. MRS SNOOP STARTS TO SWEEP THE FLOOR SINGING 'DO-RE-MI' VERY BADLY.

ENTER AGGIE.

AGGIE Oh, Mrs Snoop. You'll get a part in the show if you carry on like that.

SARAH Wouldn't catch me on a stage. Got more sense, me.

AGGIE I think you may have a point there.

ENTER MARTHA.

MARTHA Oh God – there're fewer here now than when I left.

AGGIE Give Martha a song, Mrs Snoop.

SARAH Now you're just taking the pee.

AGGIE I wouldn't do that.

MARTHA You can sing, Mrs Snoop.

SARAH Stop it – both of you.

ENTER ANDREA.

ANDREA Any joy? Oh, obviously not.

MARTHA I think it's best if we just stay put.

ENTER STEPHANIE.

AGGIE Come and join us, Stephanie, we're keeping this lot (*indicating audience*) amused if nothing else.

STEPHANIE Probably the best entertainment we've ever given an audience.

SARAH What time do you plan finishing? I've got to lock up, you know.

STEPHANIE I think we'll be going very soon, Mrs Snoop. Somehow I'm losing the will to carry on.

EADIE SCREAMS OFF-STAGE.

AGGIE Eadie?

AGGIE RUSHES OFF AND RETURNS ALMOST IMMEDIATELY WITH A DISTRAUGHT EADIE.

AGGIE Give her a seat, someone.

STEPHANIE What is it? Tell us, Eadie.

EADIE Julie... Julie...

MARTHA Say no more – Julie's upset her.

EADIE No... no...

ANDREA Julie's not started reverting to violence has she?

EADIE No... Julie... Julie...

SARAH Slap her face, someone.

AGGIE What?

SARAH It's what they do on the telly.

EADIE Julie's dead!

ALL What?

EADIE Julie's dead!

ENTER FOOT.

FOOT Did I hear right?

STEPHANIE And who are you?

FOOT I'm Inspector Foot of the Yard.

AGGIE How did you know...

FOOT Just happened to be passing – heard the commotion – thought I’d look in.

MARTHA Good job you did, Inspector! We’ve had a death.

ANDREA We’ve never had a death in a rehearsal before.

AGGIE No – but we’ve died on stage many times.

FOOT I beg your pardon?

STEPHANIE A theatrical jest, Inspector.

FOOT Very amusing, I’m sure. Now, will someone please show me the body?

MARTHA Where is it – er, she – Eadie?

EADIE The cellar, near the boiler.

SARAH I’ll show you, Inspector – it’s my domain that is.

EXIT SARAH AND FOOT.

AGGIE Julie – dead. Well, I never. I know I didn’t like her, but...

MARTHA I’ll miss her.

STEPHANIE What?

MARTHA I’ll miss her like a broken leg.

STEPHANIE We all will. Why DID we keep her in the company?

ANDREA The money.

EADIE Serves us right for being greedy.

ENTER FOOT AND SARAH.

FOOT Ladies – I have some bad news for you.

SARAH She’s been murdered.

ALL What?

SARAH Murdered – and in my boiler room.

FOOT Er, sorry about that, ladies – we in the police force are trained to break bad news with a little more tact than that.

STEPHANIE Who could have done it, Inspector?

FOOT Far too early to say, Madam, but I have a little more bad news.

SARAH You're all suspects.

ALL What – again?

FOOT 'Fraid so, ladies. You're all suspects.

SARAH Told you so.

FOOT And you as well, Madam.

SARAH Me? Don't be stupid!

ALL [*General outcry of protest.*]

FOOT Enough! Enough!

AGGIE But what about this lot? (*Indicates audience.*)

FOOT (*Peering at audience.*) Noooo! Not a brain between them. No, ladies, it has to be one of you who is the murderer.

ANDREA Murderess.

FOOT I beg yours?

ANDREA Murderess – not murderer.

FOOT Right – OK – Now, I don't usually have so many witnesses to a crime scene as we have here, so you lot will have to help me. We'll have a little bite to eat and then you can all help me question these suspects. See you later.

EXIT ALL.