

ON BLACK. RHYTHMIC FINGER CLICKING. 1 AND 2 AND 3 AND 4...

FADE IN:

INT. NIGHTCLUB - NIGHT

... from behind SATIN CURTAINS on a darkened, raised stage. The hypnotic beat stills the low chatter of an expectant AUDIENCE seated in the shadows. The clicks are now joined by -

- an AUDIENCE HAND, snapping in perfect time. The hand of -

JOE. Unkempt dark hair, his fresh face near angelic, save for his eyes, locked on the stage with a devilish intensity that belies his sixteen years. Not one muscle moves, except his right hand, firing out that staccato beat.

Behind the curtain, the finger clicks merge effortlessly with a BASS GUITAR, lending the rhythm a supple swing, as...

...a DRUMMER'S HI-HAT adds the tsk-tk-tsk-tk-tsk fills...

...and a RHYTHM GUITAR circles a chiming four-beat riff...

...and the folds of crimson satin glide apart to reveal:

a BAND IN SILHOUETTE. Three men - BASSIST, DRUMMER, GUITARIST - flank a YOUNG WOMAN, hourglass curves, head bowed, her slim, snapping left hand aloft. The clicking - and the music - suddenly STOPS. Her arm remains raised, a starting gun ready -

Joe's fingers freeze mid-click. He strains forward in awe...

- and the woman's arm shoots forward, as if triggering the SPOTLIGHT that lights up the stage and the band's own groove, at once sultry and sunny, defying you to sit still.

She slinks forward panther-like, full ruby lips parted, azure gown caressing her voluptuous black skin, kohl-lined lashes framing eyes playing peekaboo behind ebony tresses. She radiates an aura more incandescent than any spotlight.

Then MONA LE ROY starts to sing. And really comes to life.

MONA LE ROY

You got a smile so bright / You know
you could have been a candle...

And at once, her voice a silken, honeyed purr, clear as fine crystal, owns the stage, the room and everyone in it.

MONA LE ROY (CONT'D)

I'm holding you so tight / You know
you could've been a handle...

Her fingers playfully stroke the microphone stand. Joe gapes in wonder, pulled to his feet by forces beyond his control.

MONA LE ROY (CONT'D)

The way you swept me off my feet /
You know you could've been a broom
/ The way you smell so sweet / You
know you could've been some
perfume...

Mona spies Joe. Beckons him with a single hooked finger. He steps forward, trance-like, into the spotlight glare and...

MONA LE ROY (CONT'D)

Well, you could've been anything
that you want to / And I can tell...

... THE AUDIENCE LAUGH WILDLY. Joe looks round bewildered. Then down at himself. At his PYJAMAS. Striped. Navy & white.

MONA LE ROY (CONT'D)

The way you do the things you do...

The music's bouncy groove plays on but suddenly with a TINNY RADIO SOUND laced with STATIC. Joe stumbles back, unsure but Mona stalks off the stage, straight at him. The music returns to its full-bodied live sound without missing a beat.

MONA LE ROY (CONT'D)

As pretty as you are / You know you
could've been a flower / If good
looks was a minute / You know you
could've been an hour...

Mona leans close, Joe back under her spell. Then she looks down, surprised. Joe, er, stiffens. Blushes.

Mona grins mischievously at him. From the audience, A MOB OF MOP-TOP TEENAGERS wolf-whistle, jeer at his lack of control.

MONA LE ROY (CONT'D)

Well you could've been anything that
you wanted to / And I can tell...

Mona's smooth cafe-au-lait hands, scarlet nails caress Joe's eyes closed. He whispers the lyrics, a hushed ecstatic echo.

MONA LE ROY (CONT'D)

JOE

The way you do the things you do... The way you do the things you do...

Mona's voice suddenly distant, fuzzy. The hands on Joe's face - now calloused, nails bitten and white - SLAP HIM. HARD.

Joe jerks back, his eyes shoot open. His brother, TOMMY, 21, heavysset, face reddened with booze and rage, glares down.

INT. JOE'S BEDROOM, 21 CHANTRY CLOSE - NIGHT (1965)

Joe scrabbles his single bed's sheets round him. Beside him, a GREEN PHILIPS TRANSISTOR RADIO, still plays Mona's voice.

Tommy grabs the radio, clumsy hands checking it for damage, knocks a LEATHER-BOUND A5 NOTEBOOK, pages open on stuck-in black-and-white photos of Mona, off the bed to the floor.

TOMMY

You little git! Steal my radio and-

JOE

It's not stealing if I return it, genius. Besides, you owe me for breaking mine.

TOMMY

Owe you? Here's what I owe you...

Tommy SWIPES at Joe. Joe ducks, FALLS OFF THE BED in a heap. A VOICE - firm, clear, slightly Germanic - stops them dead.

FRED (O.S.)

Instead of breaking things, I suggest we fix them, neh?

In the doorway their father, FRED. Mid-50s, martinet stance, trim under a starched dressing gown. Tommy steps back, livid.

TOMMY

Put it back in my room. Now.
(Joe doesn't move)
You better be upstanding, sunshine, quick smart! Dad, tell him!

Joe's hands cover his lap. He is "upstanding". He stares dolefully at Fred. Fred sighs. Takes the radio, turns it off.

FRED

Enough. We'll deal with this when...
(glances at Joe's crotch)
...things settle down. Neh?

Tommy fumes, sensing their collusion. Kicks at TWO EPs on the floor: MONA LE ROY, 'NOW'S THE TIME' and THE MIRACLES, 'SHOP AROUND', photo sleeves of young, stylish black artists.

TOMMY

Whole house is bollocks-deep in this muck. Thank God I'm out of here.

Tommy staggers out. Joe scrambles gratefully back on his bed.

JOE

Thanks, Dad. You know it's because I-

FRED

Please, I cannot hear it again.
(jabs at Joe, his records)
This is not "love". This is infatuation. For children...
Be at the shop at seven tomorrow.

Fred turns the bedside light off, leaves, firmly shutting the door behind him. Joe glowers in the moonlight.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

When I was sixteen, I knew two things for certain. One: I was trapped in someone else's life. Obviously switched at birth. No way could these drab London suburbs be my world.

Joe lovingly rights his EPs. Studies them, deep in thought.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

Two: the music I loved was my only means of escape. Not a real way out, of course, but at least a dream of a future not usually granted to moody teenagers in Hounslow. If my fantasies betrayed me, the music never did.

Joe rips off his pyjama top. Rubs his stinging, slapped face.

He grabs a pencil and his Notebook, writing furiously: "*You say it's not love, just infatuation / I say it's just your lack of imagination.*" Joe's fingers start clicking, head nodding, mouthing the words to a melody forming in his head.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

Before I sound too self-pitying, let me be clear: I knew even then, if you want out, you need to figure out where you're going. And no matter how hard you wish for it, no one - or song - can tell you the answer to that. Right?

An orchestra swells as the STRAP: 'HOUNSLOW, LONDON, JANUARY 1965' reels back the years until the date reads '1949', VERA LYNN croons 'IT'S A LOVELY DAY, TOMORROW' as a BABY WAILS...

EXT. BACK GARDEN, 21 CHANTRY CLOSE - DAY (1949)

Winter. Fred, early-40s, still dapper, rocks a pram in vain, shivering in his narrow, concrete terraced house back garden. Tommy, a five-year-old cowboy, runs about shooting imaginary Indians. Fred COOTCHIE-COOS. Baby Joe remains inconsolable.

ROSE, Fred's young, homely wife comes over, hands him her cigarette, leans over the pram. Softly sings along with Vera on the RADIOGRAM, her own voice soothing, pure. Baby Joe immediately quietens. Gurgles a smile. She winks at Fred.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

From the start, though, music could work magic on me. I knew what I liked -

Emboldened, Fred joins in with Rose and Vera. Badly. Baby Joe listens. Starts CRYING again. Rose laughs happily.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)
 - and what I didn't. Fortunately my
 parents harmonized in other ways.

A PIANO SWELLS, MOZART'S unfinished opera, ZAIDE, played by -

INT. FRONT ROOM, 21 CHANTRY CLOSE - NIGHT (1953)

- Fred, the elegant mahogany EVERETT PIANO an anomaly in the
 modest room. Rose sits beside him, learning and beautifully
 singing Zaide's aria 'RUHE SANFT' to a rapt Joe, aged three.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)
 Music was what truly bonded the
 daughter of West Country farmers with
 a Viennese academic ten years her
 senior. Friedrich Weisskreuz, a
 Jewish refugee, escaped Austria - and
 certain death - just before the war.
 His family weren't so lucky. Once in
 Britain, he literally married an
 English Rose, changed his name to
 Fred Whitecross and began anew. What
 he kept, and shared, of himself was
 his love of Strauss, Haydn, Mozart.

Rose winks happily at Joe. Then suddenly doubles up, COUGHING
 VIOLENTLY. She stumbles out of the room.

Fred leaps after her, the music cut off abruptly. Joe sits,
 confused. The sound of terrible coughing echoes from outside.

'Ruhe Sanft' is picked up and played by a CHURCH ORGAN at...

INT. ST. MICHAEL CHURCH, HOUNSLOW - DAY (1953)

... the end of Rose's funeral service. Mourners troop out
 solemnly. In the front pew, all in black stand Fred, distant,
 Tommy aged eight, whimpering, Joe aged three, distracted.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)
 The pneumonia was sudden. Quick.

Joe stares at the organ, entranced. Starts to hum the melody.
 Tommy shoves him roughly out. Fred barely seems to notice.

INT. FRED'S BEDROOM, 21 CHANTRY CLOSE - NIGHT (1953)

Fred kneels, packs a shabby CARDBOARD BOX full of CLASSICAL
 RECORDS, OLD PHOTOS, LETTERS in German into his cupboard.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)
 But my mother's "passing", as they
 called it, was as the word sounds -
 active, ongoing. Unfinished.
 (MORE)

OLDER JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 Once he married, my father never
 spoke a word of German in our house.
 From the day she died, he stopped
 playing his beloved music too. I
 guess he considered it... unfaithful.

INT. FRONT ROOM, 21 CHANTRY CLOSE - DAY (1956)

Joe, aged six, wanders in, trying to hum 'HEARTBREAK HOTEL's melody. Joe opens the piano lid. Gently presses a key. Then another. As he delightedly finds the tune with one finger -

- Fred rushes in, slams the lid shut, CUFFS Joe's ear. Joe yelps, runs out. A tableau: Fred bowed at the piano FADES to -

- the room empty, PIANO TURNED TO THE WALL, draped in lace, an extra sideboard, Fred & Rose's faded wedding photo on top.

INT. SKY HIGH MILK BAR, HOUNSLOW - DAY (1958)

A US-style diner, gleaming chrome JUKEBOX centre stage, pockets of HIP TEENAGERS dot Formica tables, share milkshake and gossip. In a corner booth, Joe, aged nine, sits idly.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)
 If we couldn't play music, he wasn't
 foolish enough to ban it outright. As
 witnessed at my mother's funeral, my
 visceral reaction to songs that
 touched me was nothing I could
 control. And nor could anyone else.

LITTLE RICHARD (JUKEBOX)
A-wop-bop-a-loo-bop-a-lop-bam-boom!

As TUTTI FRUTTI'S pounding keyboard beat and manic vocal rise, so does Joe. Transfixed, his body start to jerk, his spindly legs shuffle. Joe grins maniacally. Littler Richard.

A TEDDY BOY points, laughing. Tommy, fourteen, rushes up, mortified. Tries to smother Joe. They collapse in a ruck. Fred slams down his loaded tray, drags them up and out the exit door, both boys wailing, Joe still gyrating.

TOMMY
 He looks like he's having a fit!

INT. SITTING ROOM, 21 CHANTRY CLOSE - DAY (1959)

Tommy, aged fifteen, tunes the sideboard BAKERLITE RADIO like a safecracker, gleefully tunes in ADAM FAITH'S light, poppy WHAT DO YOU WANT?'. Joe and cute blonde best pal MICK, both ten, SWORDFIGHT round the table. Tommy nudges Joe to listen.

Joe assesses the song. Sneers. Tommy is dejected, offended.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

Tommy and I disagreed on everything but especially on music. The songs that my best mate Mick and I loved, you didn't hear on the radio.

MICK

Don't like it either. Too girly.

TOMMY

We say the same about you, Zorro.

Tommy nicks Mick's toy sword, smacks him, then Joe with it.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

Anything English was dull, safe. Fake. All those Elvis copycats with made-up 'dangerous' surnames - Wilde, Steele, Fury - were as edgy as a wet sponge.

INT. HOUNSLOW ODEON CINEMA - DAY (1961)

Tommy, Joe and Mick watch CLIFF RICHARD onscreen, serenading a young lady in the park with the title track of THE YOUNG ONES. Joe and Mick mimic Cliff with gimp-faced expressions.

TOMMY

Oi! Show some respect for Cliff.

JOE

I'd rather jump off one, thanks.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

America was real, alive, pulsing with imagination and attitude. Just like us. And we wanted music that had the same.

Cliff is faded out by Dion 'THE WANDERER's slinky doo-wop...

INT. LISTENING BOOTH, MEMORY DISCS, HOUNSLOW (1962)

... from the turntable in the record shop's glass-fronted listening booth. Joe and Mick, 12, check the VENDOR outside is distracted. Mick slips 45s out from inside his jacket. Joe almost RETCHES with nerves. Mick jumps back in disgust.

MICK

Not again! Took me an hour to clean my Clarks last time you got spooked!

JOE

Serves you right for wearing those clodhoppers. I'm fine. What you got?

MICK

Dion... New Del Shannon 'Hey Little Girl'-

JOE

No. Bad 'Runaway' rip-off. And that?

MICK

Helen Shapiro, 'Tell Me What He Said'.
(coy, off Joe's disgust)
I like it. Now can we get on with it?

Joe opens a PENKNIFE, CUTS AWAY THE PLASTIC NUBS around the centre of the vinyl, making WIDER CENTRAL HOLES. They undo their trousers. shove a 45 down their pants, FIT THEIR DICKS THROUGH THE HOLES, lay the 45s flat against their bellies.

JOE

It won't go on! The hole's too small.

MICK

In your dreams! I bet you didn't even need to cut a bigger hole!

The commotion brings the Vendor to the booth. Joe takes the decoy Dion single off the turntable, hands it back to him.

MICK (CONT'D)

Thanks. Not quite the right fit.

They hurry out, walking slightly askew, stifling laughter.

EXT. ALLEYWAY, HOUNSLOW - DAY (1962)

Joe, hands down his pants, struggles to get free of his 45.

MICK

Dion's not much of a wanderer after all, eh? Prefers to sit tight!

JOE

At least I haven't got a fourteen-year-old girl wedged on my todger.

MICK

Neither have I.

Mick triumphantly holds up his freed Helen Shapiro 45 - and a SMALL TUBE OF BRYLCREEM, which has obviously aided his cause.

EXT. INWOOD ROAD, HOUNSLOW - DAY (1962)

Joe in drab grey BULSTRODE SECONDARY MODERN SHIRT/JUMPER combo, Mick in smart green SPRING GROVE GRAMMAR BLAZER/TIE look. Casual nods goodbye, head off in opposite directions.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

From early on though, I saw how Mick always managed to slip out of trouble.
(MORE)

OLDER JOE (V.O.) (CONT'D)
 So, while I screwed up my eleven-plus,
 he'd scraped through to Grammar School.

INT. CLASSROOM, BULSTRODE SECONDARY MODERN - DAY (1962)

A MATHS TEACHER scrawls algebra on a blackboard. A SOGGY TISSUE PELLET splats beside her. The class laugh. She glares round. Joe, showily chewing a tissue wad, feigns innocence.

INT. WHITECROSS CHEMIST, SOUTHALL - DAY (1962)

Fred reads Joe's SCHOOL REPORT, face darkening. Joe dangles his legs off the counter, sullenly prods MEDICAL SUPPLIES.

FRED

I do not understand. You are not a stupid boy, so why this? No matter. When you start here full time, I will teach you. Then you will learn fast. Neh?

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

My father worked like a dog to make his little chemist's work and still barely made ends meet. Tommy was a write-off, so my future was already decided - 'Whitecross & Son' it was. Besides, it's not like I had any better ideas.

EXT. CLASSIC CARS, GREAT WEST ROAD, LONDON - DAY (1962)

Joe marvels at a gleaming VINTAGE CARS lot. Hops into a sleek 1952 CADILLAC COUPE DE VILLE. Mick quickly hoists him out.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

Meanwhile, Mick's mother married the owner of Classic Cars on the Great West Road. He moved them into his big detached house in Isleworth. For a while we carried on as normal. After all, we were still "Rockers"...

INT. TOILETS, SKY HIGH MILK BAR - NIGHT (1962)

At the mirror Joe and Mick style their hair into QUIFFS. Joe adjusts his boot's worn CUBAN HEEL, eyes Mick's new LEATHER JACKET, WINKLEPICKER SHOES, DRAINPIPE JEANS with envy.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

... and enough people still seemed to appreciate our style.

EXT. SKY HIGH MILK BAR, HOUNSLOW - NIGHT (1962)

Joe and Mick each snog a TEENAGE GIRL. Joe's girl grabs his quiff passionately. He pushes her hand away, straightens it.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

But I felt lost. Maybe that's what made me try to find something new.

INT. LISTENING BOOTH, MEMORY DISCS, HOUNSLOW - DAY (1962)

The top 45 on Joe's pile falls. Joe crouches to retrieve it. Under the decks, almost hidden, A LONE 45. Joe fishes out a dusty, handsome black on silver disc. What the hell. Cues it up. A rolling piano riff, tambourine, chugging beat fade in:

BARRETT STRONG (RECORD)

*The best things in life are free /
But you can give 'em to the birds
and bees...*

BARRETT STRONG, 'MONEY'. Joe utterly transfixed. Mick hustles into the booth, checks for the vendor. Joe gestures at the record as if he's struck oil. Mick cocks an ear, unimpressed.

JOE

It was just lying under the decks.

MICK

For years, by the sound of it.

JOE

(snapping)

Why don't you just go? I've got this one. And you obviously don't.

MICK

Look, they're onto our scam by now. Why don't I just buy it? No big deal. It's only 'Money'! Get it?

Joe defiantly undoes his belt buckle. Mick shrugs. Leaves him to it. Joe slowly sits, luxuriating in this joyous discovery.

OLDER JOE (V.O.)

The music surged through me like pure energy, jolting parts of me I wasn't sure even existed to life. It opened a mainline from my ears, bypassing my brain, straight to my heart. Or somewhere even deeper... Why had I not heard this kind of music before? And how could I get more of it, all of it, right now?

The record spins hypnotically, rotating the song's full title, "(That's What I Want)". Joe's new motto.