

Episode 68

**The Nostrum Musical Players
Proudly Present
The Round Robinskis
in
"On The Town"**

*New York, New York, a four and six town
Bronx Sci is up and old Stuyvesant's down
The Reej-eyes pray to the saints that abound
New York, New York --
It's a four and six town!*

Twelve Round Robinskis, in sailor suits, fly out of the wings, dancing fancy free to choreography by Jerome Robbins (a Robbinski of a different stripe altogether). Lots of Bernstein music, lyrics by Comden and Green, you can feel the pulse of the city flooding down from the stage.

*The famous places to visit are so many,
Before Vaganza day.
I promised my teammates I wouldn't miss on any,
And we have just one day.
Gotta see the whole town
From the Lodestone on down
To the bay
In just one day.*

Accompanying the Robinskis are Miss Kalima Malik and two of the debate gods who have traveled to New York with their mortal favorites. Kalima is acting as host, representing Manhattan Lodestone, while the two gods are providing the necessary adult chaperonage, and getting a free tour of Manhattan along the way, paid for by their respective home schools.

*New York, New York, a four and six town
Bronx Sci is up and old Stuyvesant's down
The "Great White" coach likes to knock brewskis down
New York, New York --
It's a four and six town!*

"We have to go to the Metropolitan Museum," Kalima says. She is following the itinerary provided by Mr. Lo Pat. He has been arranging the Wednesday city tour for the Round Robinskis as long as there has been a Round Robin at the OriginalVaganza. It is considered by the visiting debate gods as one of the great treats of forensic life.

It is hard to ascertain what the Round Robinskis consider it.

*The Met Museum is always packed with tourists,
Clogging the entryway.
Get past the mimes and the pretzels and homeless,
Then we'll see art today.
Wanna go on a spree
From Dendur to Hockney
And Monet
In just one day.*

The Robinskis conga through the vast chambers of the Metropolitan Museum, trying to absorb the entire place in the allotted space of two hours. They have a busy itinerary today, and Kalima must make sure she follows to the letter the timetable she has been given by Mr. Lo Pat. The bionic coach's idea of soaking up the Met requires that they start at the temple of Dendur, make their way to Rembrandt exactly forty-five minutes later, easing out of the American wing by exactly eleven-thirty.

Kalima leads the way, her notes from Mr. Lo Pat in her hand. Behind her is the conga line of the Round Robinskis, with the marching debate gods pulling up the rear. Kalima is not finding it easy to warm up to the Robinskis. She is starting to think of them as teenagers from Mars. So far not one of them has responded to anything she has said. They don't seem to listen to the same music as she does, or see the same movies, or watch the same TV shows, or read the same books. The closest they can come, outside of discussing the current LD topic, is comparing notes on their AP courses.

Whoa! Is this exciting or what?

"That reminds me," one of the two debate gods says as they stare at the Rembrandt painting that Mr. Lo Pat thought the Round Robinski's would especially enjoy -- Aristotle Contemplating the Bust of Homer.

"Of what?" the other d.g. asks. They are both women of a certain age. Aside from talking to each other, they have said nothing to anyone all day.

"Aristotle Onassis wanted to buy a house in Hollywood once. The real estate agent took him all over the city, showing him various houses that were for sale at the time, but also trying to protect his privacy while they were doing it. Unfortunately, the press caught up with them when Onassis was standing outside the mansion that had once belonged to Buster Keaton. A photographer managed to snap a picture of him before he angrily scurried on back into his limousine to escape."

"Oh?"

"Oh, yes. They published the picture in the paper the next day."

"Do tell."

"They captioned it, 'Aristotle Contemplating the Home of Buster.'"

"Ah!"

On the other hand, maybe it's better that debate gods can't bring teenagers up on their radar, unless the teenagers are paying their institute bills. The resulting conversations would be simply too painful to record.

*New York, New York, a four and six town
Bronx Sci is up and old Stuyvesant's down
Collegiate's star's science project astounds
New York, New York --
It's a four and six town!*

The itinerary next calls for a public bus ride down Fifth Avenue, and the Robinskis conga onto the bus like chain gang prisoners being led out for another day at the rock pile. Kalima cannot

believe how unresponsive they are. By now she has given up trying to talk to any of them, and has taken on the job of merely observing them, like an anthropologist coming up against the latest release of Tobriand islanders.

The most remarkable thing about them, or at least one remarkable thing -- Kalima is having difficulty sorting out which wierdness among the many should take precedence -- is that seven of the twelve brought attache cases with them on this field trip. Four of them are wearing their debate outfits, right down the the shiny shoes. Three of them are now working on their cases, spinning their pens as they sit on the jostling bus, staring at their printouts, moving stickies from one place to another. Only one, a Robinski from Texas, appears even remotely normal, in a sweat-shirt, baseball cap, backpack and Nikes, except that he's four feet two inches tall, a twelve-year-old prodigy half a decade younger than all the rest, and he looks about as comfortable as an Amish stock-car driver.

These are my soulmates, Kalima thinks. These are the people most like me from around the country, the other debaters, the smartest kids in their schools, the ones with ambition and dedication.

Welcome to the Bahamas.

*The theme cafes here are sprinkled out like mousetraps
On Fifty-Seventh Street.
The lines are endless, and all you get is pop kitsch,
Tee shirts, and crap to eat.
Dig the Hard Rock, P.H.,
Motown, Harley (and the
Russian Tea
Room reopens soon!)*

"We're going to eat at the Hard Rock," Kalima says, leading the conga line up the wide sidewalk of Fifty-seventh street.

"Yuuch!" remarks the Robinski directly behind her.

"You don't like the Hard Rock?"

"Too noisy."

"We could go to Planet Hollywood. It's right across the street, and they pretty much have the same hamburgers."

"Most of us don't eat meat," the Robinksi says.

"Vegans?"

The Robinski nods. "Except for the Precocious Robinksi." She indicates the twelve-year-old in the sweatshirt and baseball cap. "He'll eat anything. He's a savage."

Kalima nods. "Yeah. He really looks it. I had him pinned as the Robinski closest to the state of nature."

"Is there some place where we can get just vegetables?"

"There's an A.B.P. up there on the corner."

"Au Bon Pain? That'll do. Some of us just live on bread and latte anyhow."

"A.B.P. it is," Kalima says.

And she was so looking forward to a hamburger and french fries.

*New York, New York, a four and six town
Bronx Sci is up and old Stuyvesant's down
"Please close that door!" cries R. B. Sodikow
New York, New York --
It's a four and six town!*

*The Broadway theaters are bright and gay and cheery
Along the Great White Way.
For eighty dollars there's Rent, Les Mis or Ragtime,
Or Disney's T. L. K.
Want to go to a show
Watch 'em dance,
Watch 'em crow,
See a play --
Maybe a matinee?*

"Cats"?

They could have seen "Rent," which every person Kalima knows says is the best play ever written. Or "Les Mis," which may be a little long in the tooth, but it's got spectacle and people killing each other and it is a little raunchy and really a great love story. Or even "Phantom," with that corny chandelier, except even Kalima's already seen that, the one Broadway play she's put under her belt thanks to a field trip with the Lodestone Speechies.

But oh, no. Mr. Lo Pat's idea of the perfect entertainment for Round Robinskis is "Cats."
And the sad thing is, he's right.

The fifteen of them -- twelve Robinskis, two chaperones and Kalima -- arrive in the theater, and the first thing that greets them is a snowstorm of white slips of paper falling out of their Playbills, telling them that every cat from Old Deuteronomy to the runt of the litter is being played by someone else this afternoon. And as the show transpires, it is someone else who can neither sing nor dance nor hit their cues correctly. The performance, as far as Kalima is concerned, is execrable. It is time to scoop up the poop from the litter of this play and toss it down the porcelain exit ramp.

Except for one thing: the Round Robinskis love it. Even the two debate gods shut up their endless yammering to appreciate the poetry of T. S. Eliot come to life before them.
Talk about your hollow men! Or women. Or whatever.

*New York, New York, a four and six town
Bronx Sci is up and old Stuyvesant's down
Extempers draw to the beat of Raimonde
New York, New York --
It's a four and six town!*

Finally they are back on the sidewalk, heading across town to the Lodestone. After a quick dinner provided by the school cafeteria, it will be on to the next night of the Round Robin. And in two more days, the Vaganza itself will begin.

If Kalima survives it, it will be a miracle.

*The magnet schools here are tough and big and many
But you don't have to pay.
Just test like crazy and maybe be an Indian,
Kore'n or Japonnais.
The kids here all debate,
Speechify,
Congress-ate,*

*And get A's,
The magnet way.*

*New York, New York, a four and six town
Bronx Sci is up and old Stuyvesant's down
The Nostrumite loves to write it all down
New York, New York --
It's a four and six town!*

Will Nostrum start doing musicals every week?

Will all the Robinskis buy the cast album of "Cats?"

Will Kalima survive the Vaganza with her sanity intact?

Will Nostrum receive any nasty letters from the people referred to in this episode?

Find out how to use muffins as brigadiers in our next episode: "Wheaties: The breakfast food that no one sat around very long trying to come up with a name for."